

2026 Derelict Gear Retrieval Program Overview and Participation Guide

Deadline for Submission: November 28, 2025

The Oyster Recovery Partnership (ORP) is implementing a derelict fishing gear removal project in multiple areas throughout the Upper and Middle Chesapeake Bay regions. The goal of the project is to identify, document, remove, and permanently dispose of derelict crab pots to reduce accidental harvests from derelict traps and improve commercial crabbing operations.

The program is intended to support active, commercial watermen working and residing in Baltimore, Harford, Anne Arundel, Kent, and Queen Anne's counties. The amount of work available will depend on the number of watermen who apply. ORP cannot guarantee a specific number of workdays. We anticipate a large response and will not be able to determine who is selected or for how long until all applications have been submitted. Those selected will be notified by ORP via phone call and/or email.

Weather permitting, we anticipate the work period to begin the first week of February and last through the middle of March 2026.

Derelict Gear Retrieval Project Overview:

The project has proposed removal areas that may include: near Hart Miller Island, at the mouth of the Patapsco River, at the mouth of the Magothy River, and at the mouth of the South and Rhode Rivers covering a total of approximately 11,300 acres. Derelict gear would be collected using a long line with grappling hooks.

Participants in this program will be required to attend a one-hour training session before work begins. The date, time, and location of training will be sent to those that are accepted into the program. Captains will receive **\$700** per day and may keep all hardware collected (wire pots, zinc, rebar, and cull rings). Each Captain is authorized to have one crew member (or mate), who will be paid **\$200** per day. For the purposes of this program, a Captain refers to the individual in charge of the vessel. A U.S. Coast Guard captain's license is not required to participate. Captains and crew members will be required to sign individual participation contracts, acknowledging their roles as individual contractors.

Who is Eligible to Participate:

- To be considered, Boat Captains must have a current Maryland Tidal Fish License (TFL) or Limited Crab Catcher (LCC) commercial fishing license and reported harvest to DNR in 2025.
- Captain and crew must be able-bodied to haul lines and participate in physically demanding work.
- Participating vessels must be a minimum of 24' in length. Preference will be given to vessels 32' in length or greater with a cabin due to vessel capacity and weather conditions for the time of year the work is conducted.
- Vessels must be equipped with a GPS to input zone coordinates for daily retrieval efforts and a radio to communicate with the lead Captain.

Selection Process:

- Boat Captains will NOT be eligible to participate in this program if they have any commercial or aquaculture privileges revoked. Additionally, Boat Captains will not be eligible to participate if in the past five years (starting January 1, 2021, to present) they have the following violations. (Note: Pending violations need to be satisfied with a not guilty verdict or PBJ before you will be considered for participation. These violation criteria are consistent with those established by the Department for eligibility to participate in any commercial industry advisory commission or committee.)
 - One (1) violation pertaining to crabbing on mandatory days off, exceeding mature female crab bushel limit by 10 or more bushels, or crabbing during closed season.
 - Two (2) violations pertaining to: possession of undersize crabs, possessing more than 8 female crabs per bushel when the season is closed to females, setting pots in restricted areas, and exceeding the time limit for crabbing by more than 60 minutes.
 - One (1) violation conviction pertaining to working over an oyster line by more than 150 feet, a time violation for taking oysters more than 2 hours after sunset, and or any time before sunrise, or a cull violation of more than 15% while harvesting oysters, exceeding a catch limit, or operating without a required DNR or MDH license or certification.
 - Two (2) violations convictions pertaining to: working over an oyster line by less than 150 feet, or a cull violation of 10% to 15% while harvesting oysters.
 - Received 10 or more points on their commercial license through the DNR commercial penalty point system.
 - Received four (4) or more PBJ pertaining to any seafood harvesting violations.
- Please include copies of citation to document that they were issued for a violation at a level that permits participation in the program (example, include copies of citation for a cull violation **less** than 15%, or exceeding the mature female crab bushel limit by **less** than 10 bushels). Please email (jwalters@oysterrecovery.org) or deliver copies of these documents to ORP (1805 Virginia St, Annapolis, MD 21401) after you submit your online application.
- If more boats apply than are needed for this project, watermen will be selected via random selection with initial preference given to those Captains who reported (to DNR) fifty (50) or more days of crabbing for the time period April 1, 2025, to August 30, 2025.
- While there are no eligibility requirements for crewmen, priority will be given to applicants who hold a commercial license. If crewman has a license, please indicate that on the application. All crewmen will be held to the same violation criteria as boat captains.

Application Process:

When submitting your online application, please read the directions and criteria carefully.

Both Captains and crew members must complete their own applications, and each should list the other's name in the form.

To participate in the program, Boat Captains must agree to undergo testing for illegal drugs if randomly selected. Once accepted into the program, you may be instructed to complete a drug test at an approved laboratory, free of charge, and must pass this test before beginning work. If you hold a Coast Guard Captain's license and are enrolled in a random drug program, you may submit your Coast Guard license and recent drug test results instead.

By applying for this program, you agree to the terms and conditions established by the Oyster Recovery Partnership (ORP). If accepted into the program, you will be acting as an independent contractor and not as an employee of ORP. ORP will not be held liable for any incidents or accidents that occur during your participation in the program. Contractors are strongly advised to maintain vessel and/or personal liability insurance throughout the duration of the program, are encouraged to list ORP as an additional insured on all applicable policies, and must provide a copy of their Certificate of Insurance (COI) reflecting this. All contractors will be required to sign a waiver releasing ORP from all liability before commencing work. ORP staff and Natural Resource Police officers may be present on-site and have the authority to board and inspect your vessel to ensure adherence to program rules.

NO OYSTERS, CRABS OR ANY OTHER SEAFOOD MAY BE REMOVED FROM THE WORK AREA OR TAKEN ASHORE BY ANY INDIVIDUAL. VIOLATIONS WILL RESULT IN DISQUALIFICATION FROM THIS AND FUTURE MITIGATION PROGRAMS.

When completing the online application, the Captain will be prompted to enter their commercial fishing license (TFL or LCC) number and indicate whether they can provide proof of vessel and/or personal liability insurance, if applicable. If crew members also hold a commercial fishing license, they should enter that number, but it is not required. If selected to participate, all required documentation must be provided before work begins.

Terms and Requirements:

To participate in the program, the Captain and crewman agree to the following:

- Captain and crew must be able-bodied to haul lines and other physical labor. **A crew member is required.**
- Captain and crewman, if accepted into the program, must always remain onboard the vessel during the work.
- If the Captain or crewman is found to have misrepresented themselves in any way, they will be removed from the program and forfeit compensation.
- Captains will be compensated \$700 per 8-hour workday, which includes the use of the vessel, fuel, slip rental, and boat gear. The rate for a mate on each vessel will be compensated \$200 per day.
- Captains and crew will be hired and compensated as independent contractors. Contractors must submit an invoice detailing workdays, tasks completed, and total compensation requested at the end of the program. ORP will process invoices within 30-45 days of receipt, provided all conditions are met.
- If a contractor cannot complete the full 8-hour workday, compensation will be prorated based on hours worked (e.g., 6 hours of work will result in 75% of the daily rate). This applies to both captains and crew.
- The total number of workdays will depend on the number of vessels participating.
- Captains and crew will act as independent contractors. ORP is not liable for any incidents or accidents during participation. Contractors must carry copies of personal and vessel liability insurance certificates, which may be requested.
- Captains and crew must sign a waiver releasing ORP from liability. The signed waiver must be carried onboard and may be requested during the program.
- Any violations, tickets paid, or convictions incurred since January 1, 2021, must be disclosed with details provided. Failure to disclose this information may result in the cancellation of the application or contract.
- All Captains and crew are required to attend a training session led by ORP before beginning work.
- Deliverables required by ORP's contract with the funding agency:
 - Captains must document all recovered crab pots, debris, and any bycatch using the method specified by ORP (e.g., paper datasheets or smartphone app). Daily records must be maintained and submitted to ORP representatives on the final workday. Failure to submit complete records may result in withheld compensation.
 - Recovered crab pots, debris, and any bycatch must be documented with photographs.