WHAT ARE TRAP NETS?
Trap nets are large commercial fishing nets used by state licensed and tribal commercial fishers to catch whitefish in the Great Lakes. Trap nets are increasingly being used in parts of Lakes Michigan, Huron and Superior. With many components, these stationary nets can pose a potential risk to recreational boaters and anglers. The following facts will help anglers and boaters recognize and avoid trap nets on the open water.

HOW DO TRAP NETS WORK?
Trap nets sit on the bottom of the lake. They have long leads or sections of net made up of thick 14-inch mesh that can be as long as 1,250 feet. Leads are visible to schooling whitefish and divert the fish into an enclosure called the heart. The heart has wings or net sections that form a v-shape and are supported by floats and anchors. Once inside the heart, fish swim through a tunnel and become trapped in a box-shaped pot. Submerged pots range in size from 15 to 40 feet. Fish trapped in the pot remain alive. To harvest fish, commercial fishers raise only the pot. Whitefish are dipped out with a long-hand net. Under-sized whitefish and non target species are returned to the water unharmed.

Bottom net placement and fish behavior of many species enables the trap net to be very selective for whitefish. These nets seldom trap sportfish, such as salmon and trout. As a result, State and Tribal management authorities prefer to see this type of gear in waters where sport and commercial fisheries overlap.

There is no depth restriction though they are typically fished in depths no greater than 150 feet. Leads on shallow water trap nets are generally set in water 15 feet deep or less and may extend to the surface. For deep water trap nets, leads may extend off the bottom 45 feet.

Sport trolling is NOT advisable near or above trap nets. Once set, repositioning a trap net is a complicated process because nets are anchored in place for extended periods of time — sometimes an entire season. On a typical fishing ground trap nets are fished shallower in the fall and spring than in summer.

HOW TO IDENTIFY TRAP NETS
- Trap nets are generally fished perpendicular to the shoreline (from shallow to deep water). A flag buoy or float marks the lead end of a trap net (closest to shore) and the main anchor end (lakeward). Some fishers mark the lead end with a double flag to distinguish it from the main anchor end.
- Red, orange or black flags attached to a staff buoy at the pot must be at least four feet above the surface of the water. Flags will be approximately 12 inches square and bear the license number of the commercial fishing operation. Be aware! During rough water or heavy currents these flags can lay down or be obscured by high waves.
- Floats may also mark the ends of the wings and/or each anchor. The floats you might see may vary according to the fishing operation.

IF TANGLED IN A TRAP NET
- Always keep bow of boat facing lakeward
- Shut off engine if prop becomes tangled
- Snagged downrigger cables can be dangerous – release any tension on cables and cut
- Do not enter water to untangle nets
- Radio the U.S. Coast Guard
  If you’ve lost fishing gear, contact the commercial fisher. If possible, they will return your equipment.

RESOURCES
Some organizations provide detailed local information on net locations. Before fishing/boating these waters consult the following websites for net coordinates:

- Waters off Ludington and Pentwater
  www.ludingtoncharterboats.org/netalert.html
- Waters off Arcadia to Ludington
  www.manistee-cvb.com/netinfo.html
- Lake Huron waters off Alpena
  www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,1607,7-153-10364_10951_11244-69487--,00.html
- Lake Michigan waters off Grand Haven and Muskegon
  http://fishdock.net

NOTE: Some regions use this anchor buoy variation with two flags on the lead end of a trap net (closest to shore).

Red, orange or black flags attach to buoy
Flagged anchor buoy
Wooden float
Tunnel
Heart
Floats
Pipe weight
Pot
Lead
Anchor
Wooden float
Flagged anchor buoy
Flagged anchor buoy
Trap nets are generally marked with flagged buoys, such as a commercial buoy, shown here.
What Recreational Anglers and Boaters Should Know About Commercial Fishing Trap Nets

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CONTACT INFORMATION
Southwest Michigan: (906) 226-3887
Upper Peninsula: (906) 226-3887

Nets Information on line:
www.miseagrant.umich.edu/nets

Other publications and educational materials available from the Michigan Sea Grant College Program online bookstore:
www.miseagrant.umich.edu/msgpubs
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OVERHEAD VIEW OF TRAP NET

Get Trapped