

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?

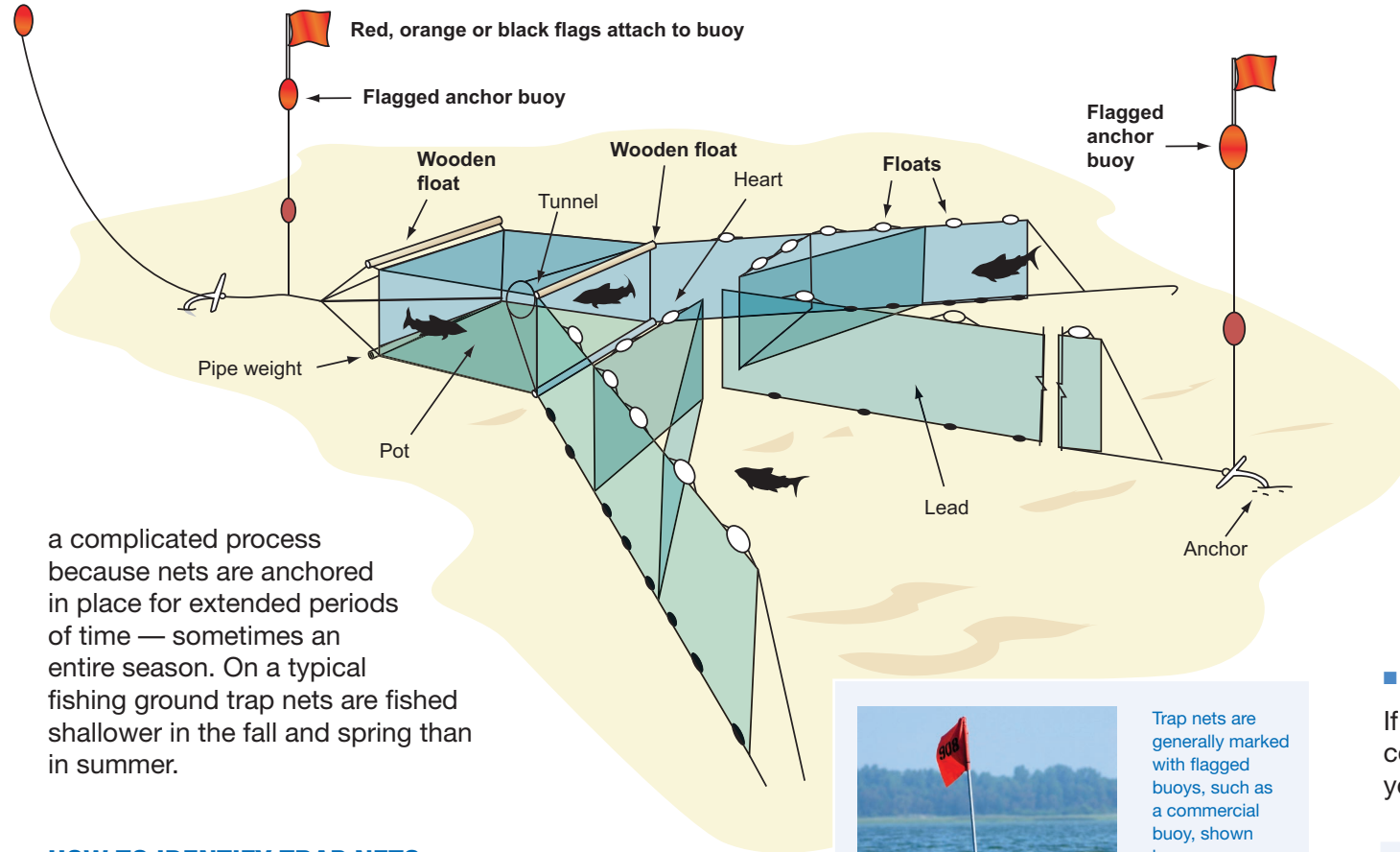
Trap nets sit on the bottom of the lake. They have long leads or sections of net made up of thick 14-inch mesh that can be as long as 1,250 feet. These leads are visible to schooling whitefish and divert the fish into an enclosure called the heart. The heart has wings or net sections that form a v-shape 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.



Trap nets are generally marked with flagged buoys, such as a commercial buoy, shown here.

HOW TO AVOID TRAP NETS

- Look for red, orange or black flag markers, buoys and floats marking the nets.
- Give wide berth when passing trap net buoys and flag markers, as nets have many anchor lines extending in all directions.
- Do not pass or troll between trap net buoys, as propeller blades and/or fishing gear may easily snag net lines.



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

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

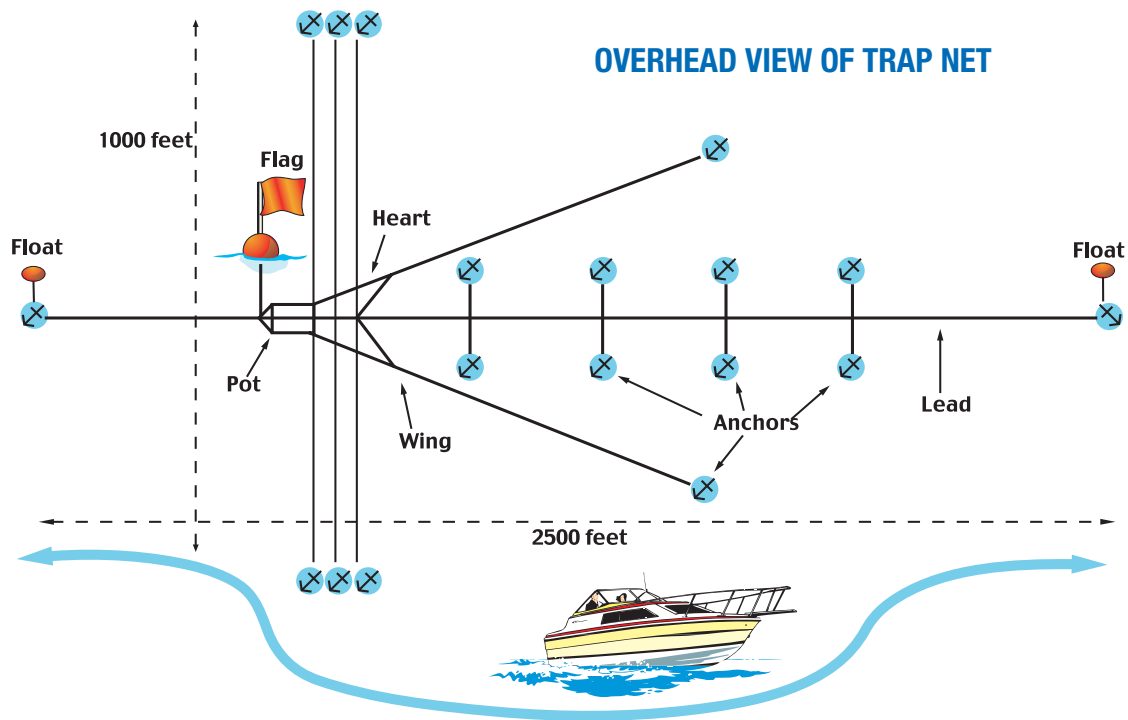
Some organizations provide detailed local information on net locations. Before fishing/boating these waters consult the following websites for net coordinates:

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>



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CONTACT INFORMATION

Southwest Michigan:
Upper Peninsula: (906) 226-3687

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

Other publications and educational materials are available from the Michigan Sea Grant College Program online bookstore:

www.miseagrant.umich.edu
(734) 764-1118
msgpubs@umich.edu

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Little River Band of Ottawa Indians, Ludington Area Charterboat Association, Michigan Boating Industries Association, Michigan Charter Boat Association, Michigan Fish Producers Association and the Michigan Steelhead and Salmon Fishermen's Association.



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What Recreational Anglers and Boaters Should Know About Commercial Fishing Trap Nets

