

## WHAT ARE TRAP NETS?

Trap nets are large commercial fishing nets used by licensed commercial fisherman to catch fish in the Great Lakes. 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.



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

These leads are visible to schooling fish 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 fisherman raise only the pot. Fish are dipped out with a long-hand net. 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. These nets seldom trap sportfish, such as salmon and trout. As a result, state authorities prefer to see this type of gear in waters where sport and commercial fisheries overlap.

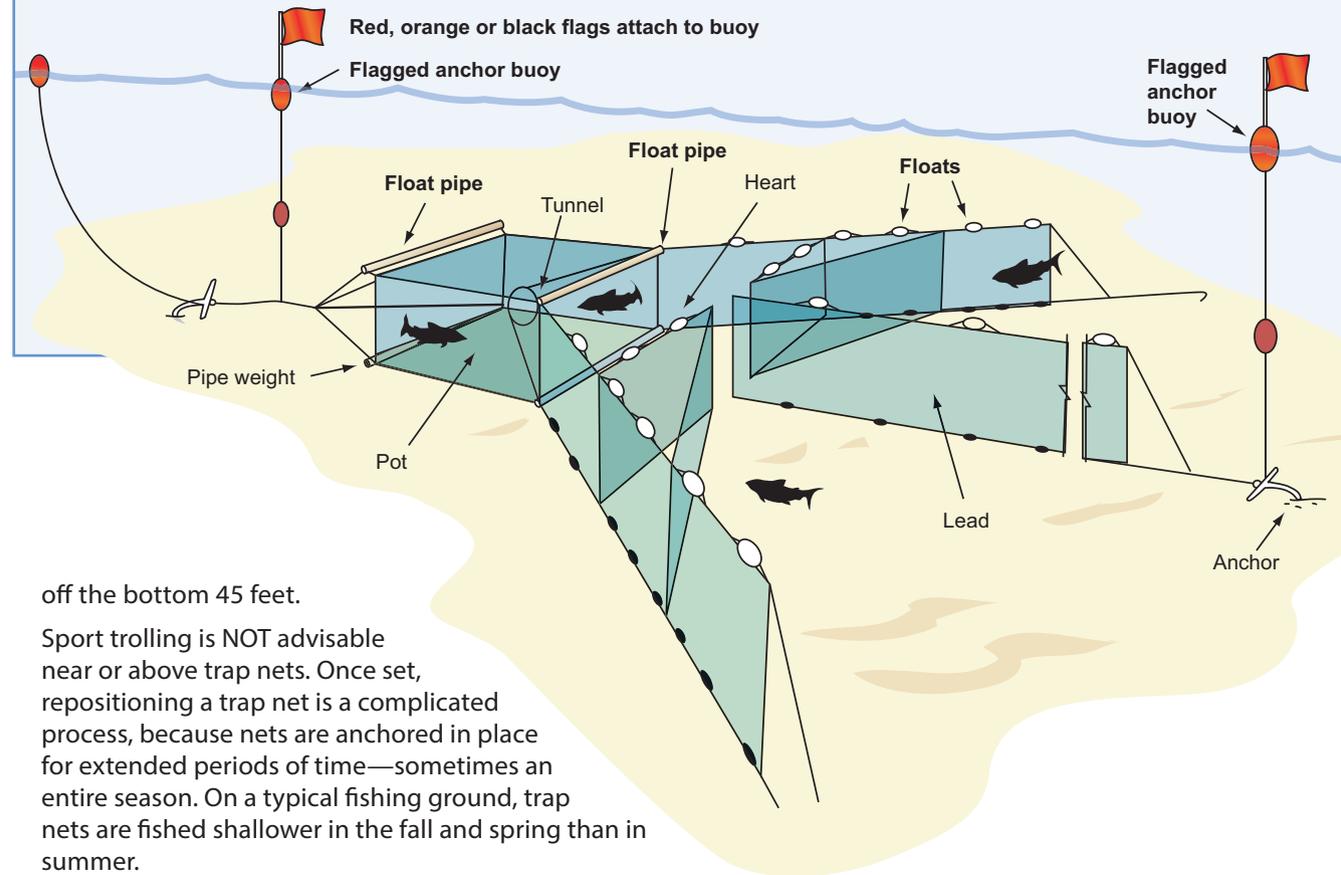
Though there is no depth restriction, trap nets are typically fished in depths no greater than 100 feet. Leads on shallow water trap nets are generally set in water 15 feet deep or less and may extend to the surface. For deep water trap nets, leads may extend

## 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).
- Red, orange or black flags attached to a staff buoy at the pot must be at least 4 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 types of floats you may see vary according to the fishing operation.



Some anglers mark the lead end, anchor end or both ends with a double flag. Pennsylvania uses the double flag.



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 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.

## IF TANGLED IN A TRAP NET

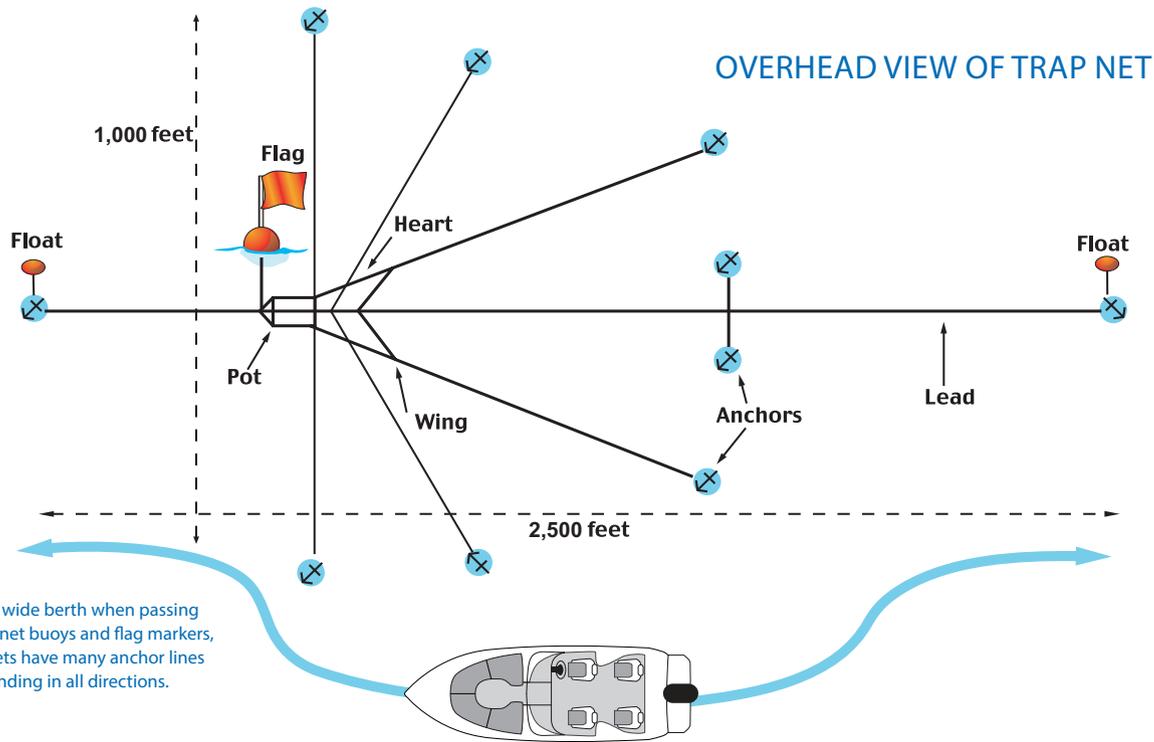
- Always keep bow of boat facing lakeward.
- Shut off the engine if prop becomes tangled.
- Snagged downrigger cables can be dangerous—release any tension on cables and cut.
- Do not enter the water to untangle nets.
- Do not attempt to lift nets.
- Do not fish in the vicinity of nets.
- Do not cut lines or buoys of commercial gear.

## PENNSYLVANIA FISH AND BOAT CODE

- It is a serious violation of the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Code to tamper with commercial fishing nets or markers.



Lake Erie, Erie County



**CONTACT INFORMATION**

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 Commercial Fishing  
 Trap Nets

