

Diver removes discarded fishing line.

It may be an urban myth, but in 2000, Larry Maxwell of Fellsmere suited up along the south shore of Sebastian Inlet State Park; he was preparing to go scuba diving along the fishing catwalk. He had heard that there were lots of lobsters there, and he was going to take his chances with the current.

Following diving protocol, he walked backwards into the waters, clearing his mask, and securing his mouth piece. He spun around to put on his fins. There was a strong current, so he turned around again... walking backwards can be easier. Now, waist deep, he turned back again, facing the inlet and dove in.

When next we saw Larry, he was dead; he had died of a heart attack. He had the attack while trying to free himself from a mass of monofilament fishing line that, while securing his fins and walking backwards, he had unknowingly wrapped around his legs and mid-section. His wet suit had masked the problem, and until he dove in, he must have been sure all was fine.

Florida, a fisherman's paradise, is being threatened with an old enemy...litter. There are three types of marine litter: fishing line, casting nets, hooks and weights, and other types of accumulated derelict fishing gear. There are the tires, batteries, pallets, bottles and cans, typically re-occurring debris, and then there are the anchors, rope, and chain types of marine debris.

Marine Cleanup Initiative, Inc. uses scuba divers and specialized boom cranes to remove thousands of pounds of materials such as: monofilament fishing line, casting nets, hooks, lures, derelict fishing equipment, that all result from fishing, but the problem is that we also collect thousands of pounds of cans, bottles, pallets, steel I-beams, tires, batteries, cell phones, lawn chairs, coolers and other miscellaneous marine debris, during our an-

DIVING IN TO CLEAN UP

By Captain Donald A. Voss

nual cleanup dives into the Ft. Pierce and Sebastian Inlets. All of these materials are harmful to the aquatic life that makes Florida fishing so wonderful. While some sections of governmental agencies suggest fishing moratoriums, or reducing fishing areas to allow the areas to replenish, as a scuba diver, I get a unique view of our waterways and inlets. We would get better results by removing the obstacles, debris, and litter that rolls around our waterway basins, and free the animals trapped there.

Plastics and other materials enter the aquatic food chain, and poison these animals, tainting our food supply. I am sure, if fishing, boating and tanning enthusiasts understood that dumping into our waterways does not do away with the debris, they would work hard to modify their habits. There are consequences to littering. In our tri-county area we are fortunate to have the Marine Industry Association of the Treasure Coast. They have established the Waterway Cleanup Committee that cleans beaches, spoil islands, mangroves and shorelines, while our Marine Cleanup Initiative cleans the inlets and underwater habitat.

It is important to understand that just because the beach and shoreline is clean, this does not mean that just under the surface debris is not choking the life out of the critters. Last July, 7 divers plunged into the Sebastian Inlet near the L dock and south side fishing catwalk. The slack tide

is just 23 minutes there, yet these divers brought up 4000 pounds of anchors, chain, rope, casting nets, cargo nets, and fishing line. However, 800 pounds were bottles and cans. People that use our waterways, shoreline and beaches need to understand they must pack their trash out or dispose of it properly, so that it does not clog our ecosystem. By increasing awareness, increasing the number of trash or recycling receptacles, keeping those receptacles emptied, offering monofilament recycling tubes and reducing the tires, batteries and other debris, cleanup efforts can be directed to the obstacles that snare hooks and anchors, not personal trash.

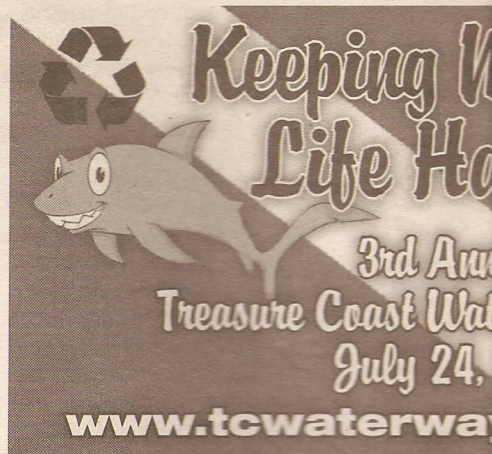
All of us can put a stop to it just as easily. Ball up your fishing line, and dispose of it in a recycling tube at your ramp or marina. If you lose a casting net, write down the GPS coordinates, and report them to a ranger, FWC employee, or call the Marine Industry hotline. Pack your trash, bottles, cans and other litter, and take it home for disposal. If you lose an anchor, ping it with your GPS and report it. If you spot a derelict or abandoned crab trap, ping it with your GPS and report it, because Ghost Fishing (abandoned traps and nets) kills thousands of fish every year. If you see someone littering, report them. Our divers can clean the waterways all summer long, but if water enthusiasts do not assist us, the problem will get out of hand.

Reduce, Reuse and Recycle.



Fishing tackle litters the inlet bottom.

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Keeping Water Life Healthy
3rd Annual
Treasure Coast Waterway Cleanup
July 24,
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