

CONTRA COSTA TIMES

ContraCostaTimes.com

Delta hazards pose problems for boaters, law enforcement

By Jonathan Lockett
CONTRA COSTA TIMES

Posted: 10/10/2009 12:20:39 PM PDT

Updated: 10/12/2009 07:04:20 AM PDT

The Delta is one of the Bay Area's most stunning natural habitats, but hidden among that beauty are some hazards that can spell trouble for boaters.

Boating up Fishermans Cut north of Bethel Island, shipwrecked boats line both sides of the bank. Dilapidated portable classrooms gathering algae lie partially submerged among an old tugboat.

Abandoned and sunken boats are common in the Delta, but boaters often are unaware of them, putting them at risk of collisions. Charts show where the dangers are, but boaters often don't buy the charts because they're not available at many marinas, according to Lt. Will Duke of the Contra Costa County Sheriff's Marine Services Patrol.

"We've had several cases of people striking sunken boats," Duke said. "The problem is, not every boater consults a nautical chart. If you look at the navigational charts — not maps from marinas — they tell you that there are shipwrecks and pilings and to stay out."

This summer the Marine Services Patrol responded to three accidents in the Delta involving boats colliding with shipwrecks or hidden pilings — two in Big Break and one in False River near Fishermans Cut. Two of the accidents resulted in shipwrecks,

but there were no injuries.

Big Break, a popular fishing area near Oakley, contains several pilings and shipwrecks. There are no warning signs about the dangers, but some of the hazards are marked with buoys.

Michael Espinosa, a resident of Arbuckle, Colusa County, hit a piling in broad daylight while fishing with family members in Big Break in August. The boat, which was carrying four children, sank.

Espinosa said the piling wasn't marked and the map he bought from a marina didn't indicate it.

"Being from out of town," Espinosa said, "we rely on the marinas to buy a map, and none of those hazards are on that map."

After the accident, Espinosa wrote letters to several agencies and was told he should have consulted a navigational chart. Espinosa later found a chart at a West Marine nautical supplies store in Pittsburg.

Charts also can be downloaded from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Office of Coast Survey Web site.

Big Break is owned by the East Bay Regional Park District, and Espinosa believes Oakley and county officials should join with the district to better mark hazards in the area.

The park district has removed some pilings that are close to the shoreline, said Diane Althoff, the district's chief of design and construction. Sunken boats and pilings, however, have been left alone along the entrance to the area.

"If the state brought some hazards to our attention, we would have to address that," she said.

Advertisement

total gym AS SEEN ON TV Only have 20 minutes a day to get into shape?

Try Total Gym!

30 Day Trial Only \$49⁹⁵ FREE SHIPPING!

Call now for this special offer: 1.866.734.7282





Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™

CONTRA COSTA TIMES

ContraCostaTimes.com

The county has tried to eliminate some of the hazards.

The sheriff's office has participated in the Department of Boating and Waterways' Abandoned Watercraft and Abatement Program, or AWAP, since its inception in 1997. The program was instituted to enhance safety on the state's waterways.

The county has spent more than \$1 million from AWAP grants to date, including nearly \$100,000 this year to remove 45 shipwrecks. Contra Costa County requests more money than any other county in California, Duke said.

Still, counties could use more money to safeguard waterways.

"What we know is the program is underfunded," Duke said.

A statewide survey conducted by the sheriff's office to learn the extent of the problem estimated the cost of removing derelict boats from state waterways at more than \$1 million, Duke said.

Reach Jonathan Lockett at 925-779-7174.

finding hazards

Nautical charts can be obtained at West Marine, 4645 Century Blvd., Pittsburg. They also are available online from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Office of Coast Survey site at www.nauticalcharts.noaa.gov

Sherry LaVars/Staff

Anglers try their luck near pilings and an abandoned boat Wednesday near Big Break in Oakley. Such hazards have caused accidents.

Sherry LaVars/Staff

Lt. Will Duke of the Contra Costa County Sheriff's Marine Services Patrol on Wednesday points out an abandoned vessel in the Delta.

Advertisement

don't delay
get proven, proactive
identity theft protection
CALL NOW



LifeLock
#1 In Identity Theft Protection™

1-888-896-1878

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™