

San Antonio Bay Partnership

Community Engagement to Reduce Crab Trap Abandonment- Contract 52

December 2025 Status Report

Bejat continues to progress in establishing personal working relationships with a significant segment of the Seadrift crabbing community - see her report below. It describes insights about their business operations.

In November 2025, the Dockside crabbing group asked for assistance in disposing of a pile of retired traps. We mobilized in early December to transport 107 retired traps that the crabbers had crushed.

We plan a second annual trap retirement event in March 2026. Communications to the crabbers will be conducted in conjunction with our "Pack your Traps" mailout prior to 2026 Closure in February 2026.

Also of note, 3 crabbers have advised that they want to participate in the Abandoned Crab Trap Removal Program in 2026. (One of the three participated last year and wants to bring his coworkers.) They will be assigned to an airboat on the main Saturday event.

Crabber Engagement and Documentation Field Report

Date: December 26, 2025

Prepared by: Bejat McCracken

Project: Commercial Crabber Engagement and Documentation (San Antonio Bay System)

SUMMARY of ACTIVITIES

Captured over 1,400 photos and videos of crabbers' daily operations - departures, returns, catch sorting, trap building, soft shell crab harvesting, stone crabs, and informal interviews. Media were culled, organized, catalogued, uploaded to an online SmugMug account [gallery](#), and later used to develop social media posts and partner engagement materials. Crabber Engagement Photos have been made available for the crabbing community.



Partner Coordination -

Built relationship with Chris Sibley, Dockside Manager, to initially engage crabbers for the day. Met in person with The Nguyen's wife, Lisa, who runs Dockside Bait and Tackle in Seadrift. We discussed the possibility of accompanying a crabber on the water for in-depth documentation. Shared examples of recent photos, videos, and social-media posts to demonstrate outreach value. Obtained Lisa's direct contact information and communicated later that day via text to coordinate logistics. Contacted and met with Chris Sibley to identify a crabber willing to host Bejat on an outing for continued documentation, interviews, and updates.

Crabber Operations Overview

Crabbers observed were operating under The Nguyen's commercial license in a cooperative arrangement, sharing expenses for bait, fuel, and dock management (Chris Sibley). Each license allows up to 200 traps per year.

Trap builders, Joe Beaver and Chris Sibley, produce 20–25 traps per day, with each roll of wire yielding 12 traps. They pressure wash the crab traps, removing barnacles and sea squirts, improving catch efficiency. Trap design includes escape hatches (2 3/8 in. in diameter) per TPWD regulation, but the bay system could benefit from incorporating turtle excluders in these traps.

Traps are typically set on Mondays and contents are retrieved on Fridays and

re-baited. Bait consists of two chicken legs per trap, lasting about two days. Trap markers range from 6–7.5 inches, some weighted to prevent drift. Some traps are tracked by GPS, by tracking the float lines; lost traps are replaced rather than recovered. Since engaging with The Nguyen’s crabbers a total of 4 crabbers have quit or been fired.

Crabber Profiles & Interviews:

Thao “The” Nguyen – Arrived from Vietnam in 1978; began crabbing in 1979. Owns two boats, a dock, and a hauling trailer; also sells bait and builds traps.

Joe Beaver – Former Navy and Formosa Plastics employee; full-time trap builder. Chris Sibley – Dock manager and crab-trap builder.

Tommy Gary & Victor Salazar – Active crabbers using GPS for trap placement.

Bernardo “Benny” Aldana – Over 30 years of blue-crab experience. Thao, younger - middle aged crabber from Vietnam

Bobbie - Anglo crabber from Louisiana - fired

Catch and Production

Daily haul: ~1,100 lbs of blue crabs (typical days can reach 5× that). Stone crab claws: 34 lbs caught by Hin; another haul totaled 275 lbs. Crabs sorted by size—large (~1 lb each), medium, and small—and boxed in 25 lb or 50 lb crates. Product shipped to a Houston buyer and redistributed to other markets. Soft shell operations hold molting crabs in tanks and sell for ~\$65 per dozen. Since engaging with crabbers over the past 5 months there has been marked decline in hauls and November was told crabbers have left because catches have gone down by 50%.



Environmental and Economic Context:

The crabbers believe declining catch rates are likely linked to reduced freshwater inflows, increasing bay salinity, and heavy bio-fouling from barnacles and sea squirts. Fouled traps become heavy and abandoned because they become impossible to pull up and get lost in the bay substrate. Crabbers try to retrieve them, but typically the lines snap and the

traps are impossible to find. Crab catch rates are low and the crabbers are setting their traps less often. Warming waters, flooding events, and unknown conditions have made crabbing difficult. Economic pressures persist: fuel and equipment costs have risen, while other commercial catches in the harbor, like shrimp prices remain at 1980s levels; crabbers maintain slightly better returns but face lower volumes.



Conclusions -

This engagement provides detailed insight into current crabbing practices and challenges faced by working crabbers in the San Antonio Bay system. Meeting with Lisa Nguyen and coordinating with Chris Sibley established valuable local contacts for future field trips and expanded documentation opportunities. The collected media and interview notes will contribute to outreach, education, and future reporting on sustainable fishery management, derelict trap removal, and the socioeconomic realities of Texas's coastal commercial crabbers.

