

# **2014 Crab Gear Retrieval Program Final Report**

**Submitted to the Dungeness Crab Task Force Executive Committee  
by Jennifer Renzullo, Sea Doc Society**

## **Summary of Accomplishments**

The goal of this project was to establish a port community-based, fishermen-led lost commercial fishing gear recovery and recycling effort on the Northern-Central California coast. Working in close collaboration with participating members of the Humboldt Fishermen's Marketing Association (HFMA; Eureka, CA), we conducted 4 weeks (20 days) of derelict crab gear recovery between July – October 2014 out of ports in Crescent City, Trinidad and Eureka, CA. We recovered 666 derelict Dungeness crab traps. Fishermen who performed the recovery work "sold" the gear to the HFMA, earning a total of \$41,675; the HFMA then sold the recovered gear to original owners at a fleet-agreed per trap price, depositing \$25,805 in proceeds into an escrow account to support derelict gear recovery work in future seasons. Additionally, we worked with five ports to confirm their support for the placement of fishing gear recycling bins: as a pilot effort, one bin was stationed in Crescent City and was filled to capacity within 1 week.

## **Project Activities**

***Gear Recovery*** – Nine (9) representatives of the Humboldt Fishermen's Marketing Association (three boats, each with a captain and 2 deck hands) conducted a total of 20 days of derelict Dungeness crab fishing gear recovery work in the field from July 20-October 5, 2014 out of Crescent City (10 days), Trinidad (6 days), and Eureka (4 days). In total, 666 Dungeness crab traps were recovered from the coast of Del Norte and Humboldt Counties: 364 Dungeness crab traps were recovered out of Crescent City, 193 out of Trinidad, and 109 out of Eureka. Of the 666 traps recovered, 323 were removed by attaching the buoy line of each trap to a winch and hauling the trap aboard the vessel. The other 343 traps were partially buried in the seafloor sand, requiring the crew to attach a specialized nozzle to the trap line that was connected to a fire hose and pump, which forced seawater through the nozzle blowing the sand out of the trap to unbury it from the substrate. Based on permit numbers visible on buoys and identification tags located inside the construction design of the traps, we determined that recovered gear represented losses from 65 different fishing vessels.

***Gear Buyback and Sales*** –The HFMA utilized its subaward from UC Davis to subsidize gear recovery and buy-back, spending a total of \$48,105 as follows (and as detailed in the following table): \$14,500 to purchase pulled traps, \$25,725 to purchase pumped traps, \$1,540 to purchase miscellaneous ropes and buoys, \$2,597 on gear off-loading, storage and disposal, \$2,342 on reimbursables to participating fishermen, and \$1,400 on administration. The 9 fishermen who recovered derelict Dungeness traps were paid \$50 per pulled trap and \$75 per pumped trap, thereby earning more than \$41,000 (not including reimbursements received from HFMA to cover fuel costs). Data are summarized in the following table:

Payables	Items	Expenses
Recovered traps – pulled	N=290	\$14,500.00
Recovered traps – pulled	N=33	\$0*
Recovered traps – pumped	N=343	\$25,725.00
Recovered misc. gear	Buoys/Lines	\$1,540.00
Fuel reimbursement	To Craig Goucher	\$488.29
Fuel reimbursement	To John Beardon	\$1,218.91
Fuel reimbursement	To Kevin Pinto	\$635.18
Storage/hoist	In Crescent City	\$1,720.00
Storage/hoist	In Eureka	\$575.25
Disposal/transport	To Bob Borck	\$302.00
Administration	HFMA Bookkeeping	\$1,200.75
Incidentals	Food	\$87.19
Bank Fees	Bank Fees	\$112.00
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$48,104.57</b>

\* Participating fishermen elected not to charge one fisherman (serious illness)

The HFMA then sold 503 (of the 666) pots back to 47 fishermen who were the original owners of the lost gear, at a suggested price of \$50 for a pulled pot (n=203) and \$75 for a pumped pot (n=300), generating \$25,805 in proceeds for HFMA, which it placed in an escrow account for supporting derelict crab gear recovery in future seasons. While on paper these sales could have generated more revenue for the HFMA (\$32,650), not all fishermen paid the full asking price for their gear, and some fishermen refused to pay anything (36 fishermen paid full asking price, 11 fishermen paid a partial asking price, and four fishermen paid nothing). Laws prohibiting seizure of personal property prohibited the project from confiscating gear for which a fisherman refused to pay full price. With these individuals, we would explain the project and how it benefits them to support it, but we could not require them to pay for their gear

Purchasing a new trap, line, and buoy costs approximately \$200; so the community of fishermen in the fleet who participated in this project realized a sum total savings of approximately \$75,000 in purchasing 503 recovered traps versus 503 new traps. The HFMA returned approximately 125 pots to the four fishermen who were not willing to pay for their recovered gear, and approximately 30 unclaimed traps were recycled at a scrap metal facility.

## Lessons Learned

**Selective recovery of gear according to participation** – Initially, the fishermen conducting gear retrieval work on the water tried to recover gear belonging only to those fellow fishermen who had agreed to participate in the program (i.e. had agreed to purchase their gear if it was recovered). However, our teams encountered lost and abandoned gear in the water belonging to many different fishermen, and buoys had in many cases become overgrown with algae so that their permit numbers and color schemes were not easily read or identified. This made it very difficult to target gear only belonging to participating fishermen and not others, for both logistical and time and effort efficiency reasons. As a result, the fishermen retrieving gear decided to collect all derelict gear encountered on the water, as long as it was safe to do so. With hindsight, this shift in tactic was advantageous, because in the process of contacting all the owners of the gear, we were able to connect one-on-one with more crab fishermen to discuss

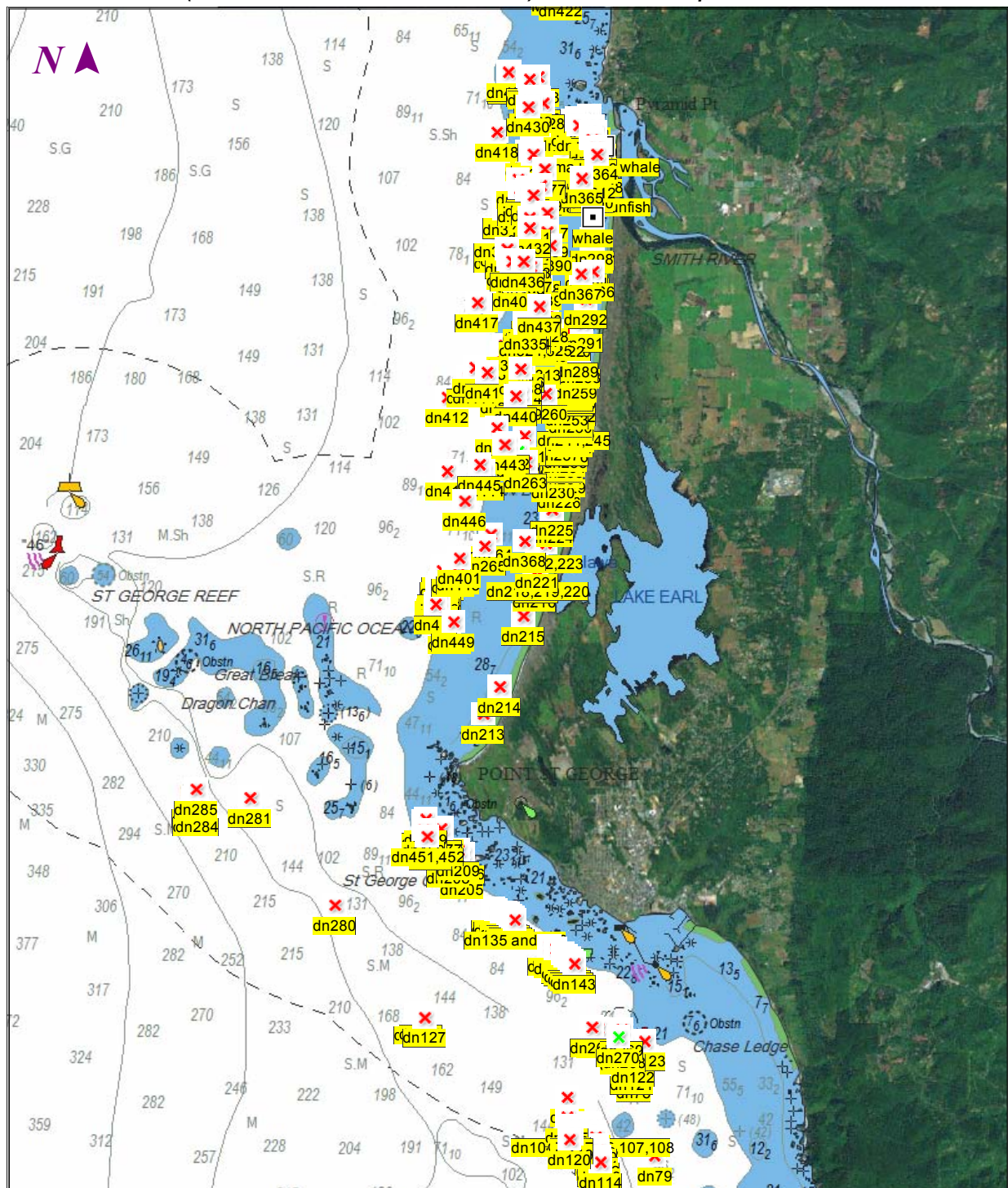
the program in detail and thereby develop a better understanding fleet-wide of the gear loss issue and possible solutions.

***“Fair-market” value of recovered traps*** – While the Humboldt Fishermen’s Marketing Association as a whole agreed that \$50-75/pot was a fair price to charge for recovered traps, some fishermen thought the price was too high and therefore only paid a portion of the agreed-upon price, or in some cases paid nothing. This was a difficult situation to navigate, because those who paid full price were paying more for the same benefit as was afforded to those who paid less, and were also making a greater investment in the success of the program overall. This concern was discussed by the HFMA and project staff, and presented to the Dungeness Crab Task Force (DCTF) and further discussed with the DCTF Executive Committee. The DCTF and the DCTF Executive Committee felt that the project as a whole was successful and necessary. They decided to form a working group led by a California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) Marine Region Enforcement Officer to develop a proposal for implementing a completely self-sustaining gear retrieval program that takes personal property laws in account.

## **Maps showing locations of derelict Dungeness crab pot recovery off the Del Norte and Humboldt County coasts, California:**

Map 1. Locations for derelict Dungeness crab traps recovered between the Oregon Border and Crescent City by the F/V Stormy II (Capt. John Beardon and crew).

**TRINIDAD HEAD TO CAPE BLANCO - 1 : 128,000**  
**(MAX Pro World Charts - vector format) Chart #18600 - Depth Units: Feet**



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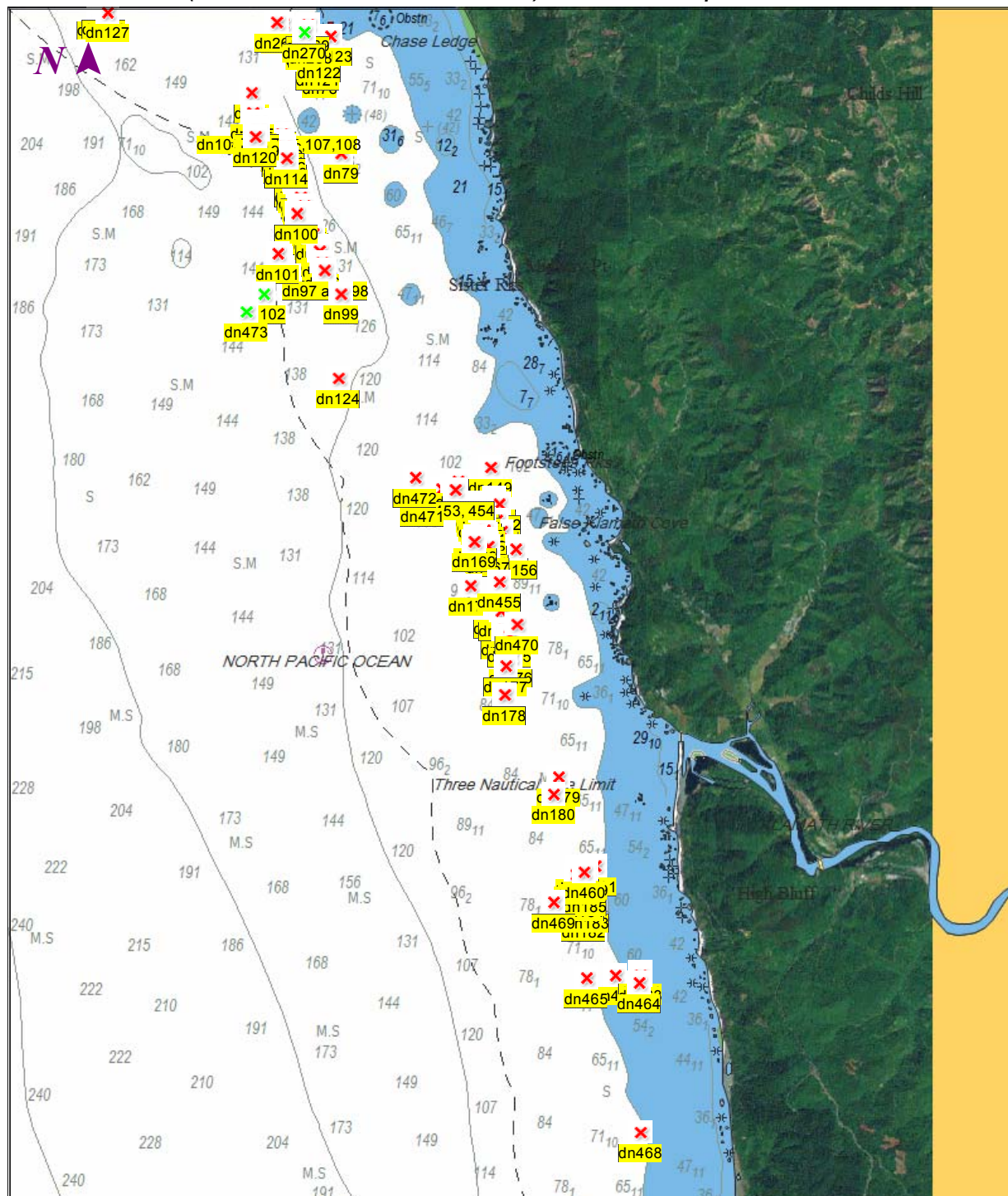


Map 2. Locations for derelict Dungeness crab traps recovered between Crescent City and the Klamath River by the F/V Stormy II (Capt. John Beardon and crew).

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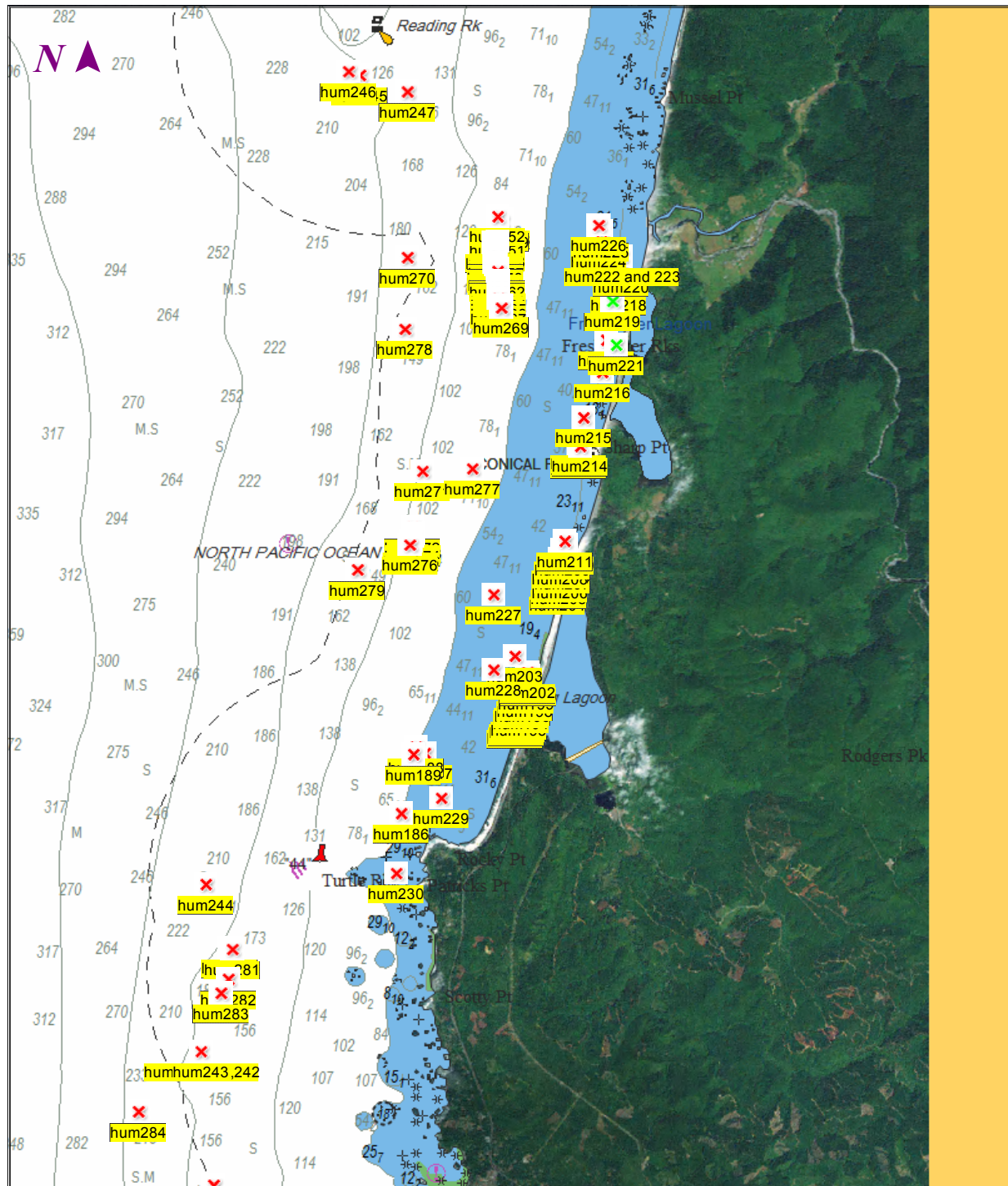
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Map 3. Locations for derelict Dungeness crab traps recovered between Reading Rock and Trinidad by the F/V Second Wind (Capt. Craig Goucher and crew).

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**TRINIDAD HEAD TO CAPE BLANCO - 1 : 128,000**  
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Map 4. Locations for derelict Dungeness crab traps recovered between Trinidad and the Mad River by the F/V Second Wind (Capt. Craig Goucher and crew).

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**POINT ARENA TO TRINIDAD HEAD - 1 : 64,000**  
(MAX Pro World Charts - vector format) Chart #18620A - Depth Units: Feet

