

Reports

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**Floating Hedging**

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The floating hedging project was designed to reduce the high costs associated with net hedgings. Instead of using pine poles to support the hedging, my idea was to support the net using buoys. The buoys would allow the net to rise and fall with the tide protecting the net from the sun, which destroys nylon net over time. At the same time the net is still high enough to prevent fish from passing over the net. Without poles placed every 6-8 feet, the hedging net would not have anything to rub against the entire season, which eventually would destroy fifty percent of the hedging. Instead, only 17 poles would be used in the hedging. Ten of the poles were drove at the offshore end of the hedging to make sure the hedging remained straight and did not interfere with the fish entering the false pound. Seven more poles were placed 75 feet apart to stabilize the rest of the hedging. A total of 364 bullet buoys were needed to support the hedging. These buoys were spaced evenly along the 800 feet of hedging and sewn in place to the top line using #36 twine.

One concern that several people had was that the hedging might break lose from the trap in a high wind creating a hazard to boaters. Taking this into consideration, I purchased eight 25-pound anchors and placed them evenly along the chain line of the hedging. These anchors proved very useful. Within two months, the seven poles which were supposed to hold the hedging in place had all been pushed over by the strain of the hedging and eventually forced out of the bottom of the bay. However, the anchors did their job and secured the hedging in place. This determined that the poles were not necessary, and that the anchors were perfect for securing the hedging.

The floating hedging remained in place perfectly until Labor Day weekend when Tropical Storm "Ernesto" swept through the bay destroying almost every pound net in the Northern Neck area. The storm broke lose three of the anchors which allowed the hedging to swing around to the south, but never completely broke away from the traps location. Out of all the net in my two-pound nets, the floating hedging was the only net that I could retrieve by hand. All of the other net was mangled with poles and to hard to pull by hand. For this reason, a barge and crane were required to get back the remaining net.

Once onshore, the floating hedging was observed to be in excellent condition. It only took about four hours and \$15 worth of net to patch a few holes and reattach small sections of chain that had come untied. My prediction at the beginning of this project was that the net using a floating hedging would last 10 years. Based on my observations, this was a reasonable prediction. In fact, I believe that the net might last even longer

only needing to replace the chain every four to five years. The pole hedging was in pretty bad shape. I counted 57 large holes that would need to be patched. This would require about \$600 worth of patch net and 60 –70 hours of labor to be ready for next years fishing season. This hedging net will probably last two more seasons. However, next year would probably require just as many patches. Also, the top 3-4 feet of net would have to be replaced for the entire length of hedging due to sun damage costing an extra \$1200 to \$1500.

Over all, fish catches varied from day to day. The floating hedging seemed to catch more menhaden than edible fish. Also, the floating hedging did not catch as many crabs. This probably just had to do with the location of the nets. I plan on using floating hedgings on both traps next year, which will give me more data on these two issues. The pole hedgings catch value was \$17,400 versus the floating hedgings \$15,900. The pole hedgings total fish catch in pounds was 63,134 compared to the floating hedgings 72,668 pounds.

Tide and weather conditions did not have any noticeable affect on the floating hedging. This hedging seemed to catch as good in strong tides and high winds as the pole hedging did.

In conclusion, I was very happy with the results of this project. The floating hedging proved itself to be an even more efficient fishing method than what I thought it would be. This method will be the difference in me pound netting for years to come and possibly retiring from the fishing industry.