Coast Guard Sets New Record for Illegal Fishing Vessel Interdictions



A Mexican lancha sits moored at Station South Padre Island in South Padre Island, Texas, after Coast Guard law enforcement crews detected and interdicted three Mexican lancha boat crews illegally fishing off southern Texas in February. U.S. Coast Guard/Station South Padre Island

CORPUS CHRISTI, Texas – U.S. Coast Guard law enforcement crews interdicted a record-breaking number of lanchas throughout the Gulf of Mexico for fiscal year 2019, according to a Coast Guard 8th District release.

Since October 2018, Coast Guard assets and personnel have detected a total of 175 lanchas, intercepted 138 and interdicted 74. Since the first recorded lancha interdiction in the late 1980s, the Coast Guard has seen a significant uptick in detection of the vessels, particularly in the past two years, recording 61 lancha interdictions in the previous fiscal year.

The Coast Guard utilizes a layered approach for interdiction through aircraft, small boats and cutters as well as improved technology on those assets, resulting in the drastic increase in lancha interdictions.

“Working with our ReCoM partners, we will continue to apply maximum pressure along the Maritime Boundary Line in order to deter this illicit activity, preserve our natural resources and uphold U.S. sovereignty,” said Lt. Kurtis Mees, Coast Guard Station South Padre Island commanding officer.

“I couldn’t be prouder of my crew’s efforts and their steadfast dedication towards this mission. This problem has

persisted now in South Texas for 30-plus years, and we are committed to seeing an end to it.”

A lancha is a fishing boat used by Mexican fishermen that is about 20 to 30 feet long with a slender profile. They typically have one outboard motor and are capable of traveling at speeds in excess of 30 mph. Lanchas pose a major threat, usually entering the United States’ Exclusive Economic Zone near the U.S.-Mexico border in the Gulf of Mexico with the intent to smuggle people, drugs or poach the United States’ natural resources.