

# Coast Guard Sets Record for Illegal Fishing Vessel Interdictions



A lancha runs from Coast Guard air and boat crews after being sighted fishing illegally in gulf waters, Texas, in this 2015 photo. Lanchas are Mexican fishing boats that poach thousands of pounds of wildlife from U.S. waters every year. U.S. Coast Guard / Air Station Corpus Christi)

CORPUS CHRISTI, Texas – Coast Guard law enforcement crews interdicted a record-setting number of lanchas throughout the Gulf of Mexico for fiscal year 2020, the Coast Guard 8th District said in an Oct. 20 release.

Since October 2019, Coast Guard assets and personnel detected a total of 326 lanchas and interdicted 136.

Since the first recorded lancha interdiction in the late 1980s, the Coast Guard has seen a significant uptick in the detection of the vessels, particularly in the past two years, recording 74 lancha interdictions in the previous fiscal year.

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

“This past year, we applied an unprecedented level of effort along the Maritime Boundary Line towards countering this threat to our natural resources, and the result speaks for itself,” said Lt. Cmdr. Joseph Prado, Coast Guard Sector/Air Station Corpus Christi enforcement chief.

“However, we will not be content until we see an end to this affront on our maritime sovereignty. We will continue to

leverage all available technology and partnerships to increase our effectiveness. The boating public can play a key role in assisting the Coast Guard. Successful interdictions are oftentimes the result of timely reports from the maritime community. We encourage all boaters to continue to report all suspected illegal fishing.”

A lancha is a fishing boat used by Mexican fishermen that is approximately 20 to 30 feet long, with a slender profile. They typically have one outboard motor and are capable of traveling at speeds exceeding 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.