

PUMPED UP FOR PUMPING OUT: Free marine waste removal service 'just about a reality'

[Andrew Metz, The Destin Log](#)

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After years of returning to the drawing board, Capt. Donnie Brown and his associates are on the verge of providing free pump out service to Destin area boaters.

Brown owns and operates PumpOut USA, which was founded in direct response to the growing concerns about the environmental and ecological impacts of inter-coastal vessel sewage dumping. The company has expanded to service responsible boaters around the country and in Canada.

Now, Brown is a part of a team that has come together from around the southeast to form National Marine Waste Foundation, Inc. (NMWF). This new organization has set out to make waste removal services free to boaters through funding from local business sponsors and grants through the state of Florida, something that he has been attempting to create for years.

"[NMWF] was organized for charity, education and science," said Elaine Tucker, NMWF board secretary/treasurer. "The mission is to provide free marine disposal to the general public in order to enhance and benefit our water."

The creation of NMWF has been 15 years in the making. As far back as 1995, while owning the Kokomo Hotel and Marina in Destin, Brown recognized the problem. In those days, a majority of boaters from the area simply released their waste in the waters surrounding Destin.

"The law technically prevented the boaters from doing this," said Brown. "But no one enforced it."

Between paying for removal services and paying a fine, many boaters opt to skirt the law and flush their waste. But he believes that free services could completely change things.

"The fine for dumping is only \$50," said Brown. "It costs about \$35 for our services. A lot of boaters are willing to take that risk."

In 2008, Brown had begun to plan with the city of Destin to provide the free service through the application of grants. The City Council unanimously voted to have city staffers draft a plan, but this was interrupted when Joe Petrelli, who runs a similar service, claimed that the deal with the city would put competitors out of business.

"The city didn't want to get in the middle of a controversy," said Brown. "So that fell through."

But this time around, the free waste removal service initiative is moving forward and doesn't need the backing of the city for funding.

The newly formed NMWF had a board meeting in Destin on Saturday, April 17 to outline the steps that still need to be taken to finalize the service.

The NMWF team consists of board Director David Stevens of Birmingham, Ala., board Vice President Michael Woodham of Destin, board secretary/treasurer Elaine Tucker of Fort Walton Beach, Executive Director Dan

Martin of Destin, board member Daniel Paul Horan of Key West and Capt. Donnie Brown.

The organization is in the process of applying for 501(c)(3) non-profit status and securing funding from the Boating Improvement Trust Fund and Florida Boating Improvement Program grants.

Sponsors include A.J.'s Seafood & Oyster Bar, HarborWalk Marina, Boogie's Watersports, Copy Systems Business Center and PumpOut USA.

"It's all really exciting," said Brown. "We've been working so hard on this for so long, and it's just about a reality."

For more information, visit nm-wf.org or pumpoutusa.com.

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