RCMSAR 20 Pender Island Boat Incident

1430 hours, March 22, 2014 Location: Boat Pass

On March 22, 2014, at 1322 hrs, X departed base on Pender Island for navigational training in the Plumper Sound area. All three crew had completed SARnav2 (or the equivalent) and were practicing closed communication skills while boating (Two crew members were trained at RHIOT).

Firstly, I would like to say that no one on crew was injured in this incident.

The objective for this training run was to complete training assignments for X using cross reference fixes on prominent land features by using the chart plotter and the radar. For the first part of the training run, X was on navigation, X was on helm and I was acting as Cox and monitoring what X was doing on the rear display.

As we left base, the usual chart plotter and radar set up was completed (also tide table check and HDOP). We exited Port Browning and turned north up Plumper Sound towards Mayne and Lizard Island. X was becoming more and more comfortable with land feature cross reference checks and we proceeded up between Lizard Island on the port side and Samuel Island on the starboard side. We continued up this channel to the NE end of Georgeson Island and traversed the narrow channel between Georgeson Island and Campbell Point on Mayne Island.

Once out in safe water, we changed helm X and navigation X. At this point we rechecked the chart plotter for accuracy and found we had an HDOP of "1". We continued south with Samuel Island on our starboard side and the Belle Chain Islets on our port side until we had just passed Anniversary Island, also on our port side. The sea conditions were: some chop with 1' seas, and a 10 knot SE wind. At this point we turned to starboard to start our entry into Boat Pass (tide was falling and would be at low tide in about two hours' time, the sea outside of Boat Pass was relatively calm being protected by Anniversary Island and the Belle Isle Chain). It is worth noting, that this is a very familiar area that we often travel through on training runs – Boat Pass and the hazards it presents are very familiar to our crews.

We traversed past the first rock on our port side (on an approximate bearing of 260 degrees true, towards Boat Pass. The first rock that we just passed was approximately .3 nautical miles from Boat Pass entrance. This is our normal entry procedure as it brings us to the south of the two rocks immediately outside of Boat Pass. We were just to the south of the closest rock (the chart shows 2 rocks) with our GPS showing we were in safe water to the south, with the boat lining up for transiting Boat Pass, travelling at approximately 5 knots. The tide was falling, two hours away from low tide, and there appeared to be little or no current.

We were just outside of Boat Pass, with the chart plotter showing that the nearest of the two rocks outside of Boat Pass was a safe distance to our port side. At this point (1430 hrs) we struck something hard. I was at the rear of the boat and immediately looked at the rear chart plotter display and it clearly showed that we were well south of the charted rock in safe water. Both engines were quickly placed in neutral (at this time we did not know that the starboard engine was locked in forward gear) then shut off so they could be raised for a quick visual inspection. With both engines up we realized that the starboard engine was locked in forward gear and we could see no other quick visuals about damage, other than the port engine. The port engine had lost the bottom portion of the skeg, but was still operational. In order to get us out of more possible danger, we started up the port engine and quickly made our way through Boat Pass to safe water for a more detailed inspection. Regretfully, we did not take a fix (lat/long) on our position when we hit the rock. Our major concern was to get the boat into safe water as the wind was blowing from the SE and we wanted to get away from the rocks to the NW of our position.

Once we were in safe water in Winter Cove, we then made a more detailed inspection of the engines. The port engine seemed to only have the lower portion of the skeg missing but seemed otherwise in working order, while the starboard engine was locked in gear and we could now see that the lower leg cowling was visually dislodged (the engine cowling was slightly dislodged). We proceeded to our base in Port Browning at slow speed and arrived at 1527 hrs. MCTS was called that we were all fast base, but we would have to go offline as one engine had suffered some damage in the training.

Sunday morning (March 23, 2014), crew from other shifts arrived at the station to view firsthand the damage that had been done and to come up with an action plan. The overwhelming feeling was that we should not try and drive the boat over to Sidney (Forsche Marine) with the remaining engine. It was clearly felt that there may be more damage to the port engine that could be seen – there were marks further up the legs of both engines showing that the possibility for unforeseen damage was possible. Our plan is to borrow the RCMP boat trailer (already approved) and tow the boat and trailer over to Sidney (Forsche Marine), Monday, March 24, 2014, on the 1500 ferry out of Pender Island.