



# Coast Guard finds sunken fishing vessel Lady Cecilia on which four died

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WILLAPAY, Wash. — The U.S. Coast Guard and a maritime salvage company located the sunken fishing vessel Lady Cecilia Sunday, approximately 20 miles off Leadbetter Point near Willapa Bay.

The Lady Cecilia and its crew of four were lost in March after no distress signals or mayday calls were made.

“Our investigation had come to a standstill until the vessel was found,” said Capt. Bruce Jones, commander of Sector Columbia River. “That’s what we’ve been working on the last few months.

“The Coast Guard remains committed to ascertaining, as definitively as possible, the cause of Lady Cecilia’s loss, in order to identify lessons learned to prevent similar tragedies in the future.”

The Coast Guard contracted with the salvage company FDS Marine International, LLC to locate and examine the wreck of the Lady Cecilia using a remote operating vehicle (ROV), which discovered it in approximately 460 feet of water.

The port side of the vessel was surveyed on Sunday and the starboard side will be examined Monday. The vessel is more or less upright on the bottom, and is intact. There are a number of lines coming off the side, according to a briefing provided to a family member of one of the fishermen. There are no plans at this time to try to recover the vessel or the victims of the sinking.

Jones said the ROV gathered about 1 1/2 hours of footage, including a 360-degree view of the vessel, although it was unable to approach the vessel to closely because of fishing lines and other equipment surrounding the vessel. The ROV's underwater footage will be closely analyzed by investigators over the next several weeks, and the findings will be presented at a future Formal Board of Investigation public hearing in Astoria, which Jones said will most likely occur in October.

"A preliminary external look shows no obvious sign of collision or structural failure," said Jones. "If closer examination of the video confirms this preliminary assessment, then the focus of the investigation will shift to what other factors may have caused the loss of stability which led to the vessel's rapid capsizing."

The ROV operations, which were conducted off the Coast Guard Cutter Fir, a 225-foot buoy tender homeported at Tongue Point, were performed to assist Coast Guard Investigators to determine the cause of the sinking.

A formal Board of Investigation into the cause of the accident, mostly a fact-finding mission, happened in April. Coast Guard investigators and personal attorneys questioned family members and friends of the deceased fisherman and federal observer, co-owners of the Lady Cecelia Tom and Dale Kent, captains of other boats in the vicinity of the sinking, deckhands and Coast Guard inspectors.

The Lady Cecelia sank March 10, in the Pacific off Washington, taking with it skipper Dave Nichols, 43, Jason Bjaranson, 38, junior deckhand Luke Jensen, 22, and fisheries observer Christopher Langel, 25.

A signal from the crew's Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon came in around 3:37 a.m. that day, sending Sector Columbia River's personnel 17 miles west of Leadbetter Point near Willapa Bay at the northern tip of the Long Beach Peninsula.

The Coast Guard's search started with an MH-60 Jayhawk crew from Air Station Astoria and two 47-foot motor lifeboats from Station Grays Harbor, Wash., and Station Cape Disappointment, Wash. When they arrived, guardsmen found an empty lifeboat, an oil sheen, some crab pots and other debris, but no pieces of the Lady Cecelia.

The Coast Guard searched a 640-square mile area of the ocean, eventually expanding the search area to more than 1,300 square miles.

The search employed both the MH-60 Jayhawk helicopters from Air Station Astoria, the motor lifeboat crews from stations Cape Disappointment and Grays Harbor, an HH-65 Jayhawk helicopter from Port Angeles, Wash., and a C-130 Hercules search plane from Air Station Sacramento, Calif. The Coast Guard called off the search the morning of March 11.

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