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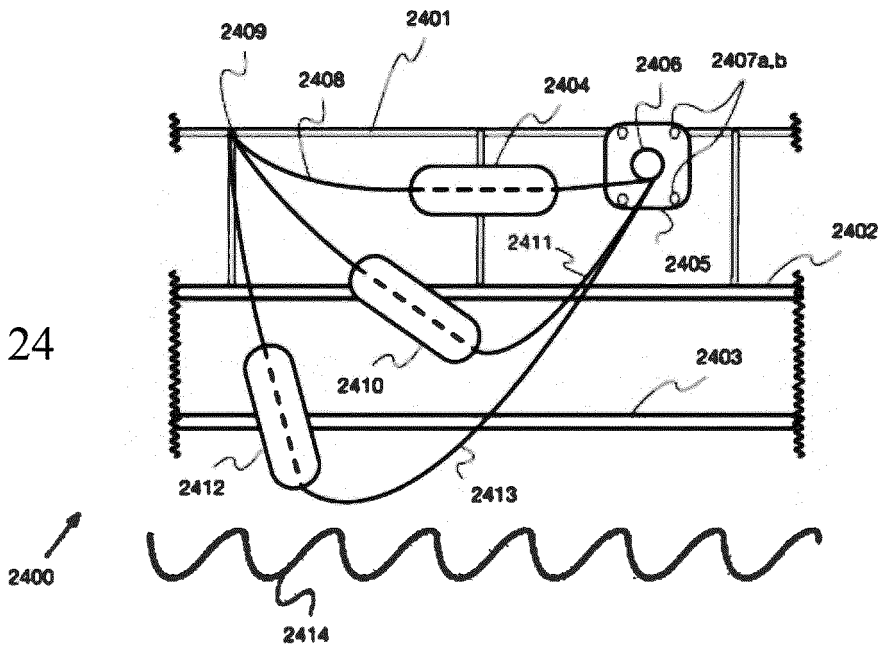
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(54) REDUCED-COMPLEXITY BOAT FENDER SYSTEM AND METHOD

(57) A boat fender system, for mounting upon a motorized boat or sail boat having a hull and one or more attachment points, that enables a boat operator to safely and conveniently deploy boat fenders when needed at reduced cost, comprising a boat fender, one or two motors each mountable to an attachment point of the one or more attachment points, and lines connecting the boat, fender, and motor(s). The system, once mounted to the one or more attachment points in an operational state upon a boat operation of the motor in a first direction causes the length of line to be reeled in hereby the depending boat fender to be raised by sliding along the line; and, wherein when the line is let out, the boat fender is lowered by gravity, whereby to position the depending fender such that it can operably protect the hull of said boat.

Fig. 24



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Description

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0001] The disclosure relates to the field of boating, and more particularly to the field of deploying and retrieving boat fenders for use in docking a boat.

DISCUSSION OF THE STATE OF THE ART

[0002] Boating, in a motorized or sail-powered craft, is both a popular recreational activity and the foundation of the seafood industry. The operator of the craft must be able to navigate it safely and also to dock it safely; whether at a stationary, land-based dock, next to another boat, or at some other, similar large adjacent object (any and all of which are hereinafter referred to as a "dock"). Because fenders are located on the outer edge of the boat, manual deployment of fenders may involve some risk. Boaters may need to lean over the railing to deploy the fenders. A primary risk of personal injury is from slip and fall accidents including falling onto the deck, falling into the water, falling onto a dock, slipping on the boat hull, or falling between the boat and the dock. There is risk of damage to the boat, as well, if the fenders are deployed improperly. These risks are exacerbated in cases of stormy weather or large waves, where deploying and positioning the protective boat fenders to keep the boat from violently hitting a dock can be especially tricky and dangerous. Currently available motorized deployment systems are relatively complicated and expensive.

[0003] What is needed is a motorized fender positioning system that enables a boat operator to safely and conveniently deploy and retract boat fenders when needed at reduced cost and increased reliability. We may refer to the system as deployment, retrieval, reeling, lifting, positioning or similar terms, they are all referring to the same system.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0004] Accordingly, the inventor has conceived and reduced to practice, a fender positioning system, and method therefor, that enables a boat operator to safely and conveniently deploy and retract boat fenders when needed at reduced cost.

[0005] According to a preferred embodiment, a system for positioning boat fenders is disclosed, comprising: a motor mounted to an attachment point on a boat, and having a motor shaft configured to reel in a line; a line, having a first end connected to the motor shaft directly or through attachments affixed to the motor, an intermediate portion of the line running through one or more openings in a boat fender or through one or more attachments affixed to the boat fender, and a second end of the line being attached to an attachment point on the boat; and wherein operation of the motor in a first direction causes the boat fender to be raised by sliding along the line.

[0006] According to another preferred embodiment, a method for positioning boat fenders is disclosed, comprising the steps of: mounting a motor to an attachment point on a boat, the motor having a motor shaft configured to reel in a line; connecting a first end of a line to the motor shaft directly or through attachments affixed to the motor, running an intermediate portion of the line through one or more openings in a boat fender or through one or more attachments affixed to the boat fender, and attaching a second end of the line to an attachment point on the boat; and operating the motor in a first direction, causing the boat fender to be raised by sliding along the line.

[0007] According to another preferred embodiment, a system for positioning boat fenders is disclosed, comprising: one or more motors, each mounted to an attachment point on a boat, each having a motor shaft with one more spools attached to the shaft, the spools configured to reel in or let out a line; a first line, having a first end connected to a first spool on a first motor of the one or more motors, and a second end connected to a first end of the boat fender; a second line having a first end connected to a second end of the boat fender, and having a second end connected either to a second spool on the first motor or to a first spool on a second motor; wherein operation of the one or more motors causes the boat fender to be raised and lowered by sliding along the line.

[0008] According to another preferred embodiment, a system for positioning boat fenders is disclosed, comprising: one or more motors, each mounted to an attachment point on a boat, each having a motor shaft with one more spools attached to the shaft, the spools configured to reel in or let out a line; a line, having a first end connected to a first spool of a first motor of the one or more motors, an intermediate portion of the line running through one or more openings in a boat fender or through one or more attachments affixed to the boat fender, and a second end of the line being attached either to a second spool on the first motor or to a first spool on a second motor; and wherein operation of the one or more motors causes the boat fender to be raised and lowered by sliding along the line.

[0009] According to an aspect of an embodiment, the system and method further comprises a release mechanism which, when operated, causes the line to be let out and the boat fender lowered by gravity.

[0010] According to an aspect of an embodiment, the motor is a reversible motor and wherein the operation of the motor in the reverse direction causes the line to be let out, causing the boat fender to be lowered by sliding along the line.

[0011] According to an aspect of an embodiment, the opening in the fender through which the line runs is a longitudinal opening running the length of the boat fender.

[0012] According to an aspect of an embodiment, the intermediate portion of the line runs through a plurality of openings in the boat fender or through a plurality of

attachments affixed to the boat fender.

[0013] According to an aspect of an embodiment, the system and method further comprises a safety release added to the line, wherein if the force on the line is higher than a preset value, the safety release disconnects the line.

[0014] According to an aspect of an embodiment, the system and method further comprises a controller configured to perform one or more actions from the following list: receive commands from a computing device, and control the motor in accordance with the commands; and detect changes in motor current, and change the motor's operation if an overcurrent or change in current state is detected by either slowing the motor, stopping the motor, or reversing the direction of the motor.

[0015] According to an aspect of an embodiment, the controller is configured to allow a user to select a deployment height, and the system deploys to the selected height when activated.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWING FIGURES

[0016] The accompanying drawings illustrate several embodiments of the invention and, together with the description, serve to explain the principles of the invention according to the embodiments. One skilled in the art will recognize that the particular embodiments illustrated in the drawings are merely exemplary, and are not intended to limit the scope of the present invention.

Fig. 1 (PRIOR ART) is an illustration of a typical pleasure boat, illustrating how fenders are normally hung on a boat's railings.

Fig. 2 shows an exemplary representation of an installation of manually-deployed boat fenders, according to a preferred embodiment of the invention.

Fig. 3 shows an exemplary representation of a fender stowage retention device according to a preferred embodiment of the invention.

Fig. 4 shows an exemplary representation of a pulley and remote cleat mechanism for the safe and convenient stowage and deployment of boat fenders according to a preferred embodiment of the invention.

Fig. 5 shows an exemplary representation of a user reminder app for boat fender deployment according to a preferred embodiment of the invention.

Fig. 6 shows an exemplary representation of the connection of four retention device and fender mechanisms connected by wires to a solar panel according to a preferred embodiment of the invention.

Fig. 7 is a diagram of an exemplary solar panel assembly connected to a retention device and fender mechanism according to a preferred embodiment of the invention.

Fig. 8 is a diagram of an exemplary controller for the deployment and retraction of fenders according to a preferred embodiment of the invention.

Fig. 9 is an exemplary diagram of a computer system as may be used in the system and methods disclosed herein.

Fig. 10 is an exemplary diagram of a wireless control system for deployment an retraction of boat fenders as per a preferred embodiment of the invention.

Fig. 11 shows a representation of an exemplary system application screen depicting a boat approaching a dock in a harbor, according to a preferred embodiment of the invention.

Fig. 12 shows an application screen that is exemplary of additional application functionality according to a preferred embodiment of the invention.

Fig. 13 shows an exemplary application screen that may open when a user has deployed boat fenders according to a preferred embodiment of the invention.

Fig. 14 shows an exemplary representation of a boat prow where the retention device is mounted on one or more hinges according to a preferred embodiment of the invention.

Fig. 15 shows an exemplary cross section of a boat with a representative retention device secured by mounting hinges and a chute that aids in deployment according to a preferred embodiment of the invention.

Fig. 16 shows a diagram of an alternative method to recess the retention device according to a preferred embodiment of the invention.

Fig. 17 shows an exemplary representation of an enhanced boat fender retention device according to a preferred embodiment of the invention.

Fig. 18 shows an exemplary fender deployment reminder pop-up screen according to a preferred embodiment of the invention.

Fig. 19 shows a screenshot in which the system prompts the user whether to remember the decision.

Fig. 20 shows an exemplary representation of two alternative methods for protecting a boat motor and electronic circuitry from overload due to problems with raising a boat fender.

Fig. 21 shows an exemplary representation of an approach for viewing entanglements or other problems preventing a boat fender from being fully raised.

Fig. 22 shows a process for resolving problems with raising a fender.

Fig. 23 shows a pair of embodiments with elastic members to mitigate forces transmitted from a fender to a mechanism of the invention.

Fig. 24 shows an exemplary embodiment of a reduced-complexity fender positioning system with a single motor unit mechanism of the invention.

Fig. 25 shows an exemplary embodiment of a reduced-complexity fender positioning system with a dual motor units mechanism of the invention.

Fig. 26 shows an exemplary method for a reduced-complexity fender positioning system.

Fig. 27 shows additional exemplary configurations of the system.

Fig. 28 shows an exemplary embodiment of a reduced-complexity fender positioning system with an alternate arrangement of fenders and lines.

Fig. 29 shows an exemplary embodiment of a reduced-complexity fender positioning system with a single line and extenders attached to openings on the fender.

Fig. 30 shows an exemplary embodiment of a reduced-complexity fender positioning system with a single line running through an opening at one end of a boat fender.

Fig. 31 shows an exemplary embodiment of a reduced-complexity fender positioning system with a single line running through an extender attached to an opening at one end of a boat fender.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0017] The inventor has conceived, and reduced to practice, a reduced-complexity fender positioning system that enables a boat operator to safely and conveniently deploy boat fenders when needed at reduced cost.

[0018] Further, for one or more of the inventions described herein, numerous alternative embodiments may be described; it should be understood that these are presented for illustrative purposes only. The described embodiments are not intended to be limiting in any sense. One or more of the inventions may be widely applicable to numerous embodiments, as is readily apparent from the disclosure. In general, embodiments are described in sufficient detail to enable those skilled in the art to practice one or more of the inventions, and it is to be understood that other embodiments may be utilized and that structural, logical, software, electrical and other changes may be made without departing from the scope of the particular inventions. Accordingly, those skilled in the art will recognize that one or more of the inventions may be practiced with various modifications and alterations. Particular features of one or more of the inventions may be described with reference to one or more particular embodiments or figures that form a part of the present disclosure, and in which are shown, by way of illustration, specific embodiments of one or more of the inventions. It should be understood, however, that such features are not limited to usage in the one or more particular embodiments or figures with reference to which they are described.

[0019] Devices that are in connection with each other need not be continuously connected with each other, unless expressly specified otherwise. In addition, devices that are in connection with each other may connect directly or indirectly through one or more intermediaries, logical or physical.

[0020] A description of an embodiment with several components in connection with each other does not imply that all such components are required. To the contrary, a variety of optional components may be described to illustrate a wide variety of possible embodiments of one or more of the inventions and in order to more fully illustrate one or more aspects of the inventions. Similarly, although process steps, method steps, algorithms or the like may be described in a sequential order, such processes, methods and algorithms may generally also work in alternate orders, unless specifically stated to the contrary. In other words, any sequence or order of steps that may be described in this patent application does not, in and of itself, indicate a requirement that the steps be performed in that order. The steps of described processes may be performed in any order practical. Further, some steps may be performed simultaneously despite being described or implied as occurring sequentially (e.g., because one step is described after the other step). Moreover, the illustration of a process by its depiction in a drawing does not imply that the illustrated process is exclusive of other variations and modifications thereto, does not imply that the illustrated process or any of its steps are necessary to one or more of the invention(s), and does not imply that the illustrated process is preferred. Also, steps are generally described once per embodiment, but this does not mean they must occur once, or that they may only occur once each time a process, method, or algorithm is carried out or executed. Some steps may be omitted in some embodiments or some occurrences, or some steps may be executed more than once in a given embodiment or occurrence.

[0021] When a single device or article is described, it will be readily apparent that more than one device or article may be used in place of a single device or article. Similarly, where more than one device or article is described, it will be readily apparent that a single device or article may be used in place of the more than one device or article.

[0022] The functionality or the features of a device may be alternatively embodied by one or more other devices that are not explicitly described as having such functionality or features. Thus, other embodiments of one or more of the inventions need not include the device itself.

[0023] Techniques and mechanisms described or referenced herein will sometimes be described in singular form for clarity. However, it should be noted that particular embodiments include multiple iterations of a technique or multiple manifestations of a mechanism unless noted otherwise. Process descriptions for computing equipment or such blocks in figures should be understood as representing modules, segments, or portions of code which include one or more executable instructions for implementing specific logical functions or steps in the process. Alternate implementations are included within the scope of embodiments of the present invention in which, for example, functions may be executed out of order from that shown or discussed, including substantially concurrently or in reverse order, depending on the functionality involved, as would be understood by those having ordinary skill in the art.

Detailed Description of Exemplary Embodiments

[0024] In one embodiment, the system uses a lift and deploy system for fenders, with retention devices providing secure stowage for fenders when not in use. Additionally, an application on a mobile device may remind the crew to lower the fenders when approaching a dock and possibly, based on previous dockings, a reminder for a mark on the line where to cleat or fast cleat the line, so the fender has the appropriate height for that dock. In some cases the application may provide a reminder or in other cases the application may actually perform the fender deployment or retrieval operation (as the retention devices are motorized in those cases). In most cases the fender is positioned at the same height while docking, but in some situations different heights may be necessary.

[0025] In some embodiments, a retention device for stowing a fender is used, that is sometimes attached to a part of a vessel or boat, and the retention device has an opening for threading through a line (in some cases with a pulley), the line attached to a fender, the line operable by a user to pull up the fender into the retention device through a second opening at the bottom of the retention device. Typically, the retention device has at least one moveable, hinged section, the section formed in such a manner, that when pulling up the fender to the top, the movable section is clamping in on the fender and securing it. In some cases the retention device and the moveable section can be made of a rigid material such as a metal, suitable for marine use. In other cases a majority of the parts are made from a soft plastic material suitable for molding. In yet other cases, the parts of the retention device are made of a combination of rigid metal parts and soft plastic materials. Additionally, in some cases a fast cleat is provided to secure the line in at least two positions, one of which has the fender full retracted and at least one other having the fender deployed, and wherein the fast cleat may be mounted in an easy to reach location on the vessel. Further, an application for use on smart phone can be provided, and the application has access to a third party map system. The application has also access to the GPS system of the smartphone. When approaching a docking site the application can be used by a user to add locations used by the vessel for landing, and the user can enter a mark representing the height of the fenders deployed. In some cases, the application will display and or make heard a reminder to deploy at least one fender, and that display will include the previously stored height mark for deploying the fender. In yet other cases, the retention device for stowing a fender will have a cleat or auto cleat to allow the line to be secured at any position. In some of these cases the cleat is attached to or near the retention device. Furthermore, in some cases the cleat can be released with a controlled jerking of the line. In some cases the line may be routed inside the retention device and exit from the same opening as the fender.

[0026] In additional cases, the system and method disclosed herein uses wired or wireless communication, such as, for example, Bluetooth, to control motorized deployment and retraction of boat fenders. The mechanism can be powered by solar or the boat DC.

[0027] In some other cases, a system may comprise a retention device for lowering one or multiple boat fenders, with the fender attached to a line that is coupled to a winch that is coupled to a motor, with the motor controlled by a controller that may be activated via wireless control signals. Power for the motor may be drawn from a battery, which may be the onboard power supply or, alternatively, may be separately charged from a solar panel. Alternatively, each retention device may have an individual controller, battery, and solar panel, not requiring any wiring between the units.

[0028] In some cases, the system and its methods enable these fenders to be controlled from a mobile computing device, such as a smartphone or tablet, both of which should be considered equivalent for all purposes here. Additionally, in some cases, based on repeated visits, the fenders can deploy automatically based on the GPS location of the boat and the fact that its trajectory leads the boat to a landing slip, berth, dock etc.

[0029] In further cases, a smartphone with an app may be used to control one or more of the retention device controllers and a multitude of motorized retention devices. The app can also control retention devices based on previous programming, without requiring user interaction, and, additionally, based on distance to a landing site derived from GPS data and map data, can prompt the user for an action and can memorize that action for future use. This app may include a dedicated control panel to wirelessly control one or more controllers of retention devices, using Bluetooth or Wi-Fi etc. as a wireless protocol.

[0030] In some cases, rather than a smart phone or tablet, an onboard navigation system or some other computerized boat system may be upgraded or extended to add the control functionality. This could be done via wired or wireless control of motorized buckets. For purposes, here, they all should be considered equivalent and a may have a GPS enabled computing device.

[0031] In some cases, rather than mounting a retention device to the railing, a retention device type tube could be integrated into the hull of a boat, similar to a torpedo tube and with or without an outer door protecting the fender when not in use. It may be designed outside the displacement section of the boat hull, thus eliminating complicated locks on the inside, and additionally not requiring waterproofing of the interfaces. For purposes herein, it would be considered essentially equivalent.

[0032] In additional cases, in a system with one or more retention devices for lowering one or more fenders attached to a line, each retention device may be mounted with one or more hinges so the retention device can swing out from the boat's outline, for easy deployment of a fender. Further, each retention device may be controlled for the swing-out with a lever attached to the boat and used

to initiate and stop or reverse the swing-out action of the retention device. This lever may be a hinged arm and may be operated manually or by a motor. In some cases, the retention device may be mounted substantially within the boat's outline and angled so the fender may be lowered through an opening in the railing over the edge of the boat's board. The retention device, in such cases, may also have an additional slide extension at the bottom opening to extension guide the fender over the edge of the boat. The retention device may, in such cases, extend out through an opening in the railing to facilitate easier deployment of the fender, which deployment may be accomplished either manually or with the help of a motor, and the swing-out may be achieved with the help of an additional motor.

[0033] In some cases, the winch may feed the unused line into a small retention device or storage compartment that will hold the unused section. In yet other cases, a spool maybe used to wind on and store unused sections. In yet other cases, rather than normal line or rope, chains made of metal and or plastic material may be used, and the winch may have matching grooves that grab or engage with the chain links.

[0034] In additional cases, the retention device for lowering fenders has a moveable bar across the opening; this bar, which can move along the cylindrical axis of the retention device and is pulled up alongside the fender into the retention device, has a small opening for guiding the line, as well as additional openings or features for guiding itself up and down the retention device. Further, an external force can make the retention device swing back into the hull line, counteracting at least a spring, connected to the hinge, that moves the retention device outside the hull line for normal operations. In some cases, the line may be coupled to a motor-driven winch, with the motor controlled by wired or wireless signals.

[0035] In some cases, in a system with a retention device and a mechanism for stowing a boat fender, upon retracting the fender, the system shuts off the motor if an over-current arises due to a tangle in the line or a catch of the fender below the retention device. Upon such a shutdown of the motor, the system engages in a limited number of small reversals in an attempt to detangle the line and/or the fender and achieve a full retraction. Additionally, a camera and visual recognition software may be used to detect a tangle or other problem with the line or the fender, in addition to the current sensing. Further, upon attempting to retract the fender, the motor shuts off if a disturbance in the retraction motion is recognized by the visual recognition software due to a tangle in the line or a catch of the fender below the retention device. In such cases, the system engages in a limited number of small reversals to attempt to detangle the line and or the fender and achieve a full retraction. Moreover, the current control may be used to aid the detangling control of the reversal of the line motion in addition to the camera. Additionally, if after several small reversals retraction of a fender is impossible, in some embodiments a user may be notified of the problem, and of the fact that a fender has not been fully retracted, thus alerting the user to a possible need for manual intervention.

[0036] In one example, a system for lifting and deploying a boat fender, an open channel is used for passing through a rope or line. The line is attached at one end to a fixed location of the boat (for example the railing), the other end of the line connected to a motor unit (for example also attached to the railing). That motor is operable to pull up the fender into top resting position, where upon while retracting the fender, the motor is configured to detect changes in current, and is configured to change its operation if an overcurrent or change in current state is detected. Further, in some cases the overcurrent state detection is based at least in part on a configured current limit. Also, in some other cases the overcurrent or change in current state is caused by a tangle in the line. Furthermore, in yet other cases, upon the current change detection, the system attempts to achieve a full retraction to the rest position by reversals of line movement. In yet other cases, a camera with visual recognition software is used instead of or in addition to current sensing. In some cases, if fender retraction fails after the number of reversals, an alert is provided to an operator. In several of the herein described cases, after the user selects a height, the time to reach said height is changed based on the voltage of the batteries, to compensate for the actual speed of the motor unit(s). Further, in some cases, the system deploys to a previously determined height upon approaching a previously set area for docking. Furthermore, in some of the described cases two or several motor units are used in conjunction to move the fender into the desired position. In some aspects, if the fender retraction fails after a preset number of reversals, an alert is provided to an operator. In yet other aspects the system deploys to a previously determined line length upon approaching a previously set area for docking or a default line length for example dock level and rub rail level. In some aspects the attachment to the fixed location of the boat is made thru a clamp, spring, screw or any other suitable device. Further in some aspects a safety release is added to the line, allowing removal of the fixed attachment of the line to the boat, to release the line if the force on the line is higher than a set value in order to prevent damage or safety risk. In some cases several motor units are used in conjunction to move the fender into a desired position using a fender with center hole or without a center hole. In yet other cases, more than one motor is used and the measures described above are reused for the additional motors.

[0037] **Fig. 1** is an illustration of a typical pleasure boat **100,** illustrating how fenders are normally hung on a boat's railings according to the prior art. Two fenders **107a** and **107b** hang down from the railing, positioned with lines **108a-b** held in place with knots **109a-b** on railing 102 to protect the boat hull **101** from damage when the boat makes contact with the dock. During a cruise, the fenders need to be lifted up and securely stowed, as

otherwise the wave action could easily rip them off or cause them to damage the boat. Access to the railing for purposes of deploying and positioning fenders from the top of the boat may be difficult and hazardous (particularly in rough seas or inclement weather), because in many cases access is available only from a narrow ledge **106** via a step **110** or from the top of the boat prow **103** using window gate **105** in windshield **104,** that window gate being heavy and difficult to open. Boat prow **103** is often of a slick material such as fiberglass coated, in some cases, with marine paint. Further, the surface may in many cases be wet with, in some cases, dust mixed in, and/or the boat may be rocking and jerking in wind and waves, making it even more slippery and more hazardous. From the railing a person must then lean over to deploy and position the fenders.

[0038] **Fig. 2** shows an exemplary representation of a system **200** of manually deployed boat fenders, with stowage retention devices **204,** according to a preferred embodiment of the invention. Windshield **202** has a center partition that can be folded away to reach the boat prow. Attached to railing **201** is fender retention device 204, which holds fender 203 when the fender 203 is not in use (only one fender 203 and retention device 204 are shown, for purposes of clarity and simplicity; however, typically, multiple fenders are used). A rope, cable, or similar flexible line 205 (for purposes of this system, rope, cable, and line all shall be considered equivalent, irrespective of constituent material(s)), runs from a position above retention device **204,** across pulley **206,** to cleat **207,** which cleat **207** is used by an operator to secure line **205** in position, which position is often predetermined and marked on line **205.** Thus fender **203** may be hauled up into retention device **204** when the boat is undocked and taken out on the water, and fender **203** may be deployed (lowered) when the boat approaches a dock.

[0039] **Fig. 3** shows an exemplary representation of a fender stowage retention device **300** as shown on **Fig. 2** according to a preferred embodiment of the invention. Attached by clamp **303** to railing **301** is a holder **310a** that holds ring **304,** which in turn holds retention device **204,** plus a pulley (or ring) **302,** via holder **310b,** the pulley **302** used to redirect line **306** when it comes up. In this example two sections (or segments) **305a,b** are hinged at the top with, respectively, hinges **309c,d** and **309a,b.** Hinges **305a,b** are attached to ring **304.** When fender **307** is pulled up on line 306 across pulley **302,** the tips of hooks **308a,b** cause the extensions at the bottoms of sections **305a,b** to clamp the fender **307** in place, as the hinge lever action causes the bottom ends of sections **305a,b** to pull in. In some cases, retention device extension **305a,b** may be made of plastic; in other cases, they may be made of some suitable material resistant to corrosion, such as, for example, chrome-plated wire. In yet other cases, the bottom end maybe be flaring (not depicted), allowing for an easier insertion of fender **307;** in other cases it may be hooked inward (not depicted), providing additional securing of fender **307** when stowed. Also, in additional cases, rather than two sections, three, four or more sections maybe used. Also, in additional cases, a single ring with lever maybe used.

[0040] **Fig. 4** shows an exemplary representation of a pulley and remote cleat mechanism **400** for the safe and convenient stowage and deployment of boat fenders **400** according to a preferred embodiment of the invention. Line **402** comes in from the retention device **406** on railing **401** and goes through pulley wheel **404,** which is attached to pulley block **403.** At the pulley, line **402** is redirected to cleat **405.** In some cases, double or triple pulleys maybe used as often more than one fender is used. Also, instead of regular cleats, fast cleats and multi-line fast cleats maybe used for easier use.

[0041] **Fig. 5** shows an exemplary representation of a user reminder application **500** for boat fender deployment according to a preferred embodiment of the invention. It uses high-accuracy marine maps such as, for example, NAVIONICS™, to determine whether the boat is about to dock, and notifies the user with message **501** (and in some cases an acoustic alert) of the position to which the lines need to be lowered. Also shown are buttons to add new positions "+" 503 based on current GPS location, to set the height, and to "edit" 502 for modifying an existing height, for example, or delete a previously stored location. Further, an OK button 504 enables the operator to confirm and/or close the alert and mute an acoustic signal.

[0042] **Fig. 6** shows an exemplary representation of a system **600** where the connection of four retention device and fender mechanisms connected by wires to a solar panel **604** according to a preferred embodiment of the invention. Four retention devices **602a-d** are attached to railing **601.** Wires **605a-d** connect the retention devices to solar panel **604,** which is also attached to railing **601.** Beneath solar panel **604,** and connected to it, are a controller and a battery (not shown here). Fender **603d** (only one fender shown here, for clarity and simplicity) is shown as it may be deployed, with multiple dotted lines to indicate that the fender may be deployed at any of multiple heights. It is clear that a boat may carry more than four retention device-fender units, and they are typically deployed all along an engaged side of the boat, from prow to stern; however, for clarity and simplicity, only four are shown as positioned here.

[0043] **Fig. 7** is a diagram of a system **700** with a solar panel assembly connected to a retention device and fender mechanism (as shown in **604)** according to a preferred embodiment of the invention. Panel **701** connects to charge control unit **702.** Unit **702** is an existing commercial product that is readily available. Often unit **702** may be integrated into a junction box at the rear of panel **701.** Battery **703** may be any of various types of battery known in the art, such as, for example, lead-acid, lead-acid gel, lithium, lithium ion, LiFePO4, NiCd, NiMh, or any other suitable type, depending on which is best and most suitable for its situation. System controller **704** has an antenna **714** and wires **705a-n** leading to the retention

devices. Exemplary retention device **706,** connected to box **704** via wire **705a-n,** contains fender **713,** shown in a dotted line to indicate that it is not externally visible. Line **712** goes over two pulleys **710a, b** to winch **709** that is attached to motor **708.** Casing **707** protects assembly elements, including **707, 709, 710a,b, 711,** and **712** against water, collision, injury of persons nearby, etc. When fender **713** is retracted, switch **711** signals to controller **704** when the fender is fully retracted. In some cases, a smaller solar cell and smaller controller may be mounted on the top of the retention device, omitting the need for wires such as wire **705a-n.** Typically wire **705a-n** uses a four-lead wire, that is, two for the motor and two for the switch. In other cases, instead of using a solar panel to power the system, controller **704** may be powered from the boat's power supply. In yet other cases, the assembly contained in case **707** may be installed centrally and the line may be pulled as shown in Figure 2 to a location with multiple motorized winches. Also, in lieu of using a mechanical switch **711,** optical means, both transmissive and reflective, may be used, or simply a change in current of the motor that the controller can detect and use as an indicator of too much resistance, either at the end or if fender is caught somehow. All these exemplary variations, and other, similar variations, shall not depart from the spirit of the system and method disclosed herein.

[0044] **Fig. 8** is a diagram of an exemplary controller for the deployment and retraction of fenders **800,** also shown in **704,** according to a preferred embodiment of the invention. Power supply input **802** may come from a local battery, a shipboard battery, or some other power source. Controller **801** has a microprocessor **806,** typically a system on a chip with memory **807** and nonvolatile memory **808,** which nonvolatile memory contains software **809a-n,** including an operating system as well as actual commands for the system. Input/output unit **810** may pair the radio **811** with a smart phone. Radio **811** connects to microcontroller 806 as well as to antenna **812.** The connection between radio **811** and a smart phone may be via, for example, Bluetooth, Wi-Fi, or both, as needed. Power switch unit **803** distributes power to all these devices, as well as controlling output power through switches **804a-n,** thus enabling the winches to extend lines **805a-n** to extend or retract the fenders. Switch unit **803** also has the input sensors for the switches in the retention devices, such as, for example, switch **711** inside casing **707,** described above in the discussion of Figure 7, for extending or retracting the fenders.

[0045] **Fig. 9** is an exemplary diagram of a computer system **900** as may be used in the system and methods disclosed herein, according to various embodiments of the invention. It is exemplary of any computer that may execute code to process data. Various modifications and changes may be made to computer system **900** without departing from the broader spirit and scope of the system and method disclosed herein. CPU **901** is connected to bus **902,** to which bus is also connected memory **903,** nonvolatile memory **904,** display **907,** I/O unit **908,** and network interface card (NIC) **916.** I/O unit **908** may, typically, be connected to keyboard **909,** pointing device **910,** hard disk **912,** and real-time clock **911.** NIC **916** connects to network **914,** which may be the Internet or a local network, which local network may or may not have connections to the Internet. Also shown as part of system **900** is power supply unit **905** connected, in this example, to ac supply **906.** Not shown are batteries that could be present, and many other devices and modifications that are well known but are not applicable to the specific novel functions of the current system and method disclosed herein. Also present, but not shown in detail, as part of I/O unit **908,** for example, will local wireless connections, such as Bluetooth, Wi-Fi, ZigBee etc. Further, in many cases, a GPS receiver is used to provide for location services.

[0046] **Fig. 10** is an exemplary diagram of a wireless control system **1000** for deployment and retraction of boat fenders, according to a preferred embodiment of the invention. Controller **1001,** which is functionally equivalent to controller **704,** described above in the discussion of **Fig. 7,** has an antenna **1002** and also the software and other components required to control fender deployment operations as previously described. Controller **1001** may connect to a dedicated control unit **1003,** which unit may have a set of buttons **1004a-n,** such as, for example, two rows of buttons **1004a-n** as shown here. Each button has a separate assigned function, such as controlling the raising or lowering of one or more fenders. General controls **1005a-n** may, for example, indicate the status of certain system functions, such as, for example, power state and the state of connectivity to wireless network **1006,** which network may use Bluetooth, Wi-Fi, or some other similar connection protocol. Controls **1005a-n** may also control functions such as raising or lowering all fenders or certain combinations of fenders, such as all fenders on one side, for example. As an alternative control unit, system **1000** may use a smart phone, such as, for example, phone **1010,** on whose touch screen **1013** the user can control the functions of specialized software **1011a-n.** Software **1011a-n** is specific to system **1000** and typically may be downloaded from an app store supplying software for the particular model of phone **1010.** Software **1011a-n** can communicate with controller **1001** via connection **1012,** which may be Bluetooth, Wi-Fi, or some other similar connection protocol. Connection **1014** enables phone **1010** to communicate with geo-positioning satellites **1015a-n,** using any of various global positioning systems (GPS) supported by phone **1010** and available currently or in the future.

[0047] **Fig. 11** shows a representation of an exemplary system application screen **1100** depicting a boat approaching a dock in a harbor according to a preferred embodiment of the invention. In this example, a boat **1103** is in water **1101,** approaching dock **1104,** which dock extends from land **1102.** When boat **1103** comes within a certain predetermined distance from dock **1104,** an in-

dicator **1105** appears on application screen **1100.** The boat's position, in this example, is determined by high-accuracy navigational mapping software (not shown here) as mentioned in the description of **Fig. 5.** Indicator **1105** enables a user to open addition application menus with additional functionality.

[0048] **Fig. 12** shows an application screen **1200,** accessed using indicator **1105** that is exemplary of additional application functionality according to a preferred embodiment of the invention. In this example, boat **1201,** viewed from the top, approaches dock **1202.** Screen **1200** shows all boat fenders **1203a-n,** of which in this example there are eight. Those fenders on the side **1204a-n** approaching dock **1202** may be indicated, for example, by halo buttons, that is, buttons showing a halo around the fender indicating a possible user interaction. Screen **1200** may also contain an additional button (not shown here) that enables a user to control multiple fenders, such as, for example, all fenders together, all fenders on the side of the boat approaching the dock, all front fenders, all rear fenders, etc.

[0049] **Fig. 13** shows an exemplary application screen **1300** that may open when a user has deployed boat fenders as described in the discussion of **Fig. 12,** according to a preferred embodiment of the invention. Represented on screen **1300** is one side **1301** of the boat, with fenders **1302a-n.** Above and below fenders **1302a-n** are arrows **1303a-n,** indicating fender movement up or down. Buttons **1304a-n** can give a user control of general functions, such as, for example, deploying all fenders to a default position or saving a manually controlled position as a new default position. Individual fender positions may be manually controlled by pressing any of arrows **1303a-n** to adjust any one fender up or down as desired. When the fenders are all adjusted for a certain dock, the user could then save the fender positioning as a new default for this location, so the next time the user goes to approach this particular dock, the fenders can be deployed automatically to the saved positions when the boat comes within a certain predetermined distance from the dock.

[0050] **Fig. 14** shows an exemplary representation of a boat prow **1400** where a retention device **1402** is mounted on one or more hinges **1403a-b,** according to a preferred embodiment of the invention. This figure shows many structures found at the prow of the boat, including railing **1405,** prow **1401** with cabin windows, and other features. Exemplary retention device **1402** is, in this example, mounted behind railing **1405,** with mounting hinges **1403a-b** on the inside of railing **1405.** Chute **1404** is attached to retention device **1402,** so the fender within retention device **1402** may slide down against the boat side. Deploying and retracting the fender may be done manually, with, for example, a line, or by a motor. In some cases, chute **1404** may have a small lip, so the fender can easily be retracted back up into retention device **1402.** In other cases, chute **1404** may be recessed behind the farthest extension of the outward vertical curve of prow **1400,** thus not protruding into the line of travel (up and down) of the fender.

[0051] **Fig. 15** shows an exemplary cross section **1500** of a boat **1501** with a representative retention device secured by mounting hinges and a chute that aids in deployment, according to a preferred embodiment of the invention. The outlines of boat **1501,** prow section **1507** on top, walkway **1508** behind the railing, and the hull are all, for reasons of clarity and simplicity, very simplified. Retention device **1502,** secured by mounting hinges **1503a,** b, and chute **1504** are slightly behind the outermost part of the hull of boat **1501,** because fender **1505** (inside **1502** and not visible in this drawing) is heavy enough to slip over the edge of boat **1501** when it is deployed. Deploying and retracting fender **1505** may be done manually, with, for example, a line, or by a motor. On the other hand, when fender **1505** (not visible) is retracted, because there is no edge of chute **1504** protruding beyond the hull, fender **1505** (not visible) can easily slip back up chute **1504** and into retention device **1502.** Outline **1506** shows an alternative retention device **1502** position, wherein retention device **1502** may be hinged around the railing so that during deployment and retraction of fender **1505** (not visible), the retention device **1502** bottom tilts slightly outward.

[0052] **Fig. 16** shows a diagram of an alternative arrangement **1600** by which retention device **1603** may be recessed, according to a preferred embodiment of the invention. Shown are walkway **1607,** behind railing **1602,** and prow **1601.** Railing **1602** has a notch or bay **1606** in the inner edge so fender retention device **160a-b** can retract in large part behind the outline of the railing. In this example, hinge **1604** enables retention device **1603a-b** in position **1603a** to swing out into position **1603b.** Arm **1605b,n,** shown in position **1605n** retracted and in position **1605b** extended, may be operated manually, with, for example, a lever or knob, a line, a spring or by a motor, and the like. Deploying and retracting the fender (not shown here) may also be done manually, with, for example, a line, or by a motor, as described earlier herein. Arm **1605b,n,** in extended position **1605b,** pushes retention device **1603a-b** into position **1603b,** so the fender can deploy vertically without hitting the deck or railing. In some cases, such a bay or notch **1606** may be flanked by one or two posts, enabling additional hinges (not shown) to further control the swing of retention device **1603a-b** (not shown). Once the fender is deployed, arm **1605b,n** may retract retention device **1603a-b** to a position behind the boat's outline.

[0053] **Fig. 17** shows an exemplary representation of an enhanced arrangement **1700** of boat fender retention device **1701** according to a preferred embodiment of the invention. Retention device **1701** has a mechanism for winding up line **1710** to retract fender **1711.** The hinge allowing retention device **1701** to swing in behind the hull line is comprised of springs **1702a** and **1702b.** These springs move retention device **1701** outside the hull line for normal operations. Although this example shows two

springs **1702a-b,** it is clear that other arrangements may have more or fewer springs **1702.** These springs **(1702a-b)** hinge between bar **1703,** which attaches typically to a vertical railing post or other suitable fixed object(s) on the boat, and retention device rail **1704** (part of the retention device structure **1700).** Moveable bar **1705** has three openings. These openings **1708a** and **1708b** are at each end, for riding up and down retention device bars **1707** and **1706,** as well as one opening **1709,** which is roughly in the center, for guiding line **1710** to which fender **1711** is attached. In the fully extended position, moveable bar **1705** is stopped at the bottom end of the retention device, across the retention device opening. As the fender **1711** is retracted, it catches moveable bar **1705** when it reaches opening **1709** and pushes bar **1705** up as fender **1711** is fully retracted, bar **1705** being moveable along the cylindrical axis of retention device **1701.** Optionally the boat name **1712,** in alphanumeric characters, may be applied in desired color(s) and finishes. In some cases retention device **1701** may contain a camera (not shown) that provides a close-up view of the pier to the controlling tablet and or smartphone, helping to "fine-maneuver" the boat into the desired docking position.

[0054] **Fig. 18** shows an exemplary fender deployment reminder pop-up screen **1800** according to a preferred embodiment of the invention. When approaching a marked location, such as a previously visited landing place. In this example as boat **1802** enters marina **1801,** the question of whether to deploy or not, if no prior default was set, appears at the top of screen **1800.** The user can then issue the command by clicking either one of the response buttons **1803a-n.** Although this example shows two buttons **1803a-n,** there could be more, such as, for example, more than one deploy button, one for the standard height, and one or more for other options.

[0055] **Fig. 19** shows a screenshot **1900** in which the system prompts the user whether to remember a decision regarding fender deployment. Specifically, the system prompts the user whether to remember the decision from screen **1800** for the next time the vessel approaches the same location, by selecting either one of the response buttons **1901a-b.**

[0056] **Fig. 20** shows a modified version **2000** of **Fig. 7,** according to one aspect of the system and method described herein. Added to controller **704** are two optional extensions. In configuration **2001a** measuring resistor **2002** has been inserted in series with motor **708.** Sensing amplifier **2003** delivers a sensing voltage to point **C.** Once a certain current has been exceeded, the sensing voltage triggers a motor shut-off by notifying the shutoff circuitry in the controller, typically in a way similar to the way shut-off switch **711** is notified. This approach can sense if the motor is over-loaded and can protect the batteries, the motor, and the driving transistors or relays. It can also be used to shut off the motor in the case of an entanglement, such as, for example, a tangle in the line or rope that pulls up the fender, or if the fender is somehow tangled below the retention device and cannot be pulled up. Of course, it will be appreciated by one having ordinary skill in the art that other problems may occur that prevent a fender from being fully retracted; for example, due to boat motion caused by water waves, a fender may fail to properly enter the retention device because of misalignment or rotation of the fender. Thus this approach can protect the line from being torn and the fender lost at sea. Alternative configuration **2001e,** shows, instead of an added resistor **2002,** that the switching transistor **2004** driving motor **708** between contact points **F** and **G** is used as the measuring resistor and the amplifier 2005 drives the voltage H. Also, point I drives the transistor. Both configurations **2001a** and **2001e** are commonly used approaches to measuring currents or protecting motors and/or other circuitry elements from overload and are not novel in and of themselves. However, the use of motor overloads to detect entanglement with respect to the fender, and in particular to aid with untangling, is novel.

[0057] **Fig. 21** shows a modified version of **Fig. 17,** according to one aspect of the system and method described herein. In approach **2100,** camera **2101** is attached by stick **2102.** Wire **2103** connects to controller box **1701,** enabling transmission of images from the camera to show when the fender is lowered. When there is a problem raising the fender, camera view field **2104** can observe the state of the fender, such as, for example, if the fender is stuck on the sea bottom, if the fender line is tangled, etc. It is clear that wire **2103** could be run within stick **2102,** or the camera could be placed in a bulge out of the top of controller **1701,** etc. Various different cameras and viewing angles may be used to provide the best views of a problem. It is not necessary in all cases that the camera explicitly observes a tangle. It can be used, for example, simply to see whether the protection circuitry described above in the discussion of **Fig. 20** has stopped the motor due to difficulty in raising the fender. In some cases, visual recognition software may be embedded in the camera module or in the central controller, so the system can identify either a tangle or a lack of motion of the fender, which, when the motor should be in motion, indicates highly likely a tangle or similar problem.

[0058] **Fig. 22** shows an exemplary process **2200** for resolving problems with raising the fender, employing the two novel approaches disclosed above in the discussions of **Figs. 20** and **21,** according to one aspect of the system and method disclosed herein. In step **2201,** the system receives a command to pull up the fender. In step **2202,** the system sets a maximum time to attempt to pull up the fender, and in step **2203,** the system monitors the time to determine when the current attempt exceeds the preset maximum time. If, in step **2204,** the system determines that the current attempt has exceeded the preset maximum time, in step **2205** the system checks to see if an End switch, such as, for example, switch **711** described in the discussion of **Fig. 7,** is activated, signaling that the fender is fully retracted. The inventor envisions that various switching means may be used as an End

switch **711** according to the invention; for example, conventional contact-based electrical switches, radio frequency identification (RFID) proximity switches, mechanical switches, magnetic switches, or any other similar means of detecting when a fender is fully retracted. Additionally, more than one end switch may be utilized in some arrangements, for example to increase reliability if the fender is retracted at an angle, or to provide redundancy should any single switch fail (for example, due to damage to the receptacle). If the End switch is activated, indicating that the fender or movable bar is fully retracted, in step **2206** the process ends. However, in step **2205,** if the system detects that the End switch is not activated, in step **2207** the system initiates a check for a tangle in the fender line. In step **2210,** the system checks to determine the number of tangle checks, such as, for example, the first occurrence of a tangle check, or any number up to a preset maximum. Typically, only one or two attempts to detangle would occur, to avoid damage to the equipment. If, in step **2210** the detangle attempts do not exceed the preset limit, in step **2211** the system attempts to detangle the line, typically by a little tug or pull on the line, as would be done manually. After each detangle attempt in step **2211,** the system returns to step **2202** to repeat the process. If the maximum current is not exceeded in step **2204,** then in step **2208** the system again checks to see if the maximum time or number of attempts has been exceeded. If the detangle attempts fail repeatedly, in step **2209** the system attempts a visual check of the fender, using the camera as described in the discussion of **Fig. 21.** When the visual check is finished, the system once again attempts a detangle. If all system detangle attempts fail, the system issues a call for operator help in step **2212,** and in step **2213** the process ends. Different strategies for detangling may be used, for example resulting in controlled jerking of the line and or the fender in order to resolve the tangle or jam. There may also time limits for individual sets of detangling and overall attempts in order to protect the components of the system from overload/damage. Further, failure to complete retraction may result in an alert sent to an operator or other predetermined location or person.

[0059] In some cases, in a system with a retention device and a mechanism for stowing a boat fender, upon retracting the fender, the system shuts off the motor if an over-current arises due to a tangle in the line or a catch of the fender below the retention device. Upon such a shutdown of the motor, the system engages in a limited number of small reversals in an attempt to detangle the line and/or the fender and achieve a full retraction. Additionally, a camera and visual recognition software may be used to detect a tangle or other problem with the line or the fender, in addition to the current sensing. Further, upon attempting to retract the fender, the motor shuts off if a disturbance in the retraction motion is recognized by the visual recognition software due to a tangle in the line or a catch of the fender below the retention device. In such cases, the system engages in a limited number of reversals to attempt to detangle the line and or the fender and achieve a full retraction. Moreover, the current control may be used to aid the detangling control of the reversal of the line motion in addition to the camera. Different strategies for detangling may be used. There may also time limits for individual sets of detangling and overall attempts in order to protect the components of the system from overload/damage. Further, failure to complete retraction may result in an alert sent to an operator or other predetermined location or person.

[0060] **Fig. 23** shows exemplary embodiments of the invention adapted to provide protection for boat fender system **2300.** During the course of boat use, storms or other disturbances may occur that result in the production of heavy swells or waves. These swells can possess enough energy to damage the machinery of either manually operated or motor operated fender systems, particularly when sudden movement of a vessel causes substantial tension to be applied suddenly to any cable holding a fender in place, thereby placing large and sudden stresses on the machinery of fender systems. Such tension may happen even in calm days but when the boat doesn't stop immediately when arriving at the dock or in a case the boat is arriving at higher speed than in normal docking operation. The effects of heavy swells may operate both while the fenders are retracted-where the confines of the retention device can serve to exacerbate the strength of the swell-and while the boat is docked-where the swells can exert significant tugging pressure or the fender can get caught between the dock and hull of the boat moving independently of each other, again tugging at the fender with significant force. According to the embodiments shown in **Fig. 23,** mechanisms that use elastic members situated between a fender **2301** and a line **2302** act to mitigate these forces before damage occurs to the rest of the system. In a preferred embodiment, boat fender **2301** is attached to a spring **2303,** and the other end of the spring attached to line **2302,** which goes to the rest of the system. Spring **2303** acts as a buffer between fender **2301** and the rest of the system. While a spring is shown and described, one knowledgeable in the art will realize that other elastic members (such as, but not limited to, bungee cords or bungee cables) could be used for the purpose of swell mitigation. In a second preferred embodiment of the invention, fender **2304** is equipped with a detached top **2307** which can move freely from the rest of fender **2304.** Detached top **2307** is attached to the rest of fender **2304** by a spring **2306** internal to fender **2304;** spring **2306** has a point of attachment to fender **2304** at its lower end, in the interior of fender **2304.** In times of heavy force upon fender **2304** by a swell, spring **2304** serves to buffer the forces by allowing the top of the fender to partially separate temporarily until the stress is relieved. Detached fender top **2307** is then attached to a line **2305** that goes to the rest of the system. Alternatively, an internal spring **2306** may be used without detached top **2307,** in which case spring **2306** may be connected directly to line **2305.** It should be clear that

the examples depicted in these figures are relatively simple configurations practical to clearly show the functional aspects of the system; other structures and parts such as but not limited to protective encasements, retainers, correct mounting hardware, drains, and guides are not depicted. Relative lengths or sizes of the parts are not meant to be to scale for operation.

[0061] In some embodiments, the rate of raising fender **1711** may be slowed when fender **1711** approaches an intermediate position; that is, intermediate between a deployed position and a stowed position. In a preferred embodiment, as fender **1711** just begins to enter the retention device (e.g., retention device **1701),** the rate of raising fender **1711** is reduced, to reduce the likelihood of fouling and to potentially reduce the impact resulting from any misalignment, fouling, or other problem. It will be recognized by one having ordinary skill in the art that various means of detecting when to change (e.g., reduce) the rate of raising of fender **1711** may be used according to the invention. For example, a time duration of raising may be used or, if a stepper motor is used, a count of the number of steps during the raising of fender **1711** may be used. Additionally, various switches, such as electromagnetic proximity switches of mechanical switches, may be placed so that they send a signal to the control system as fender **1711** passes, for example, the lower end of retention device **1701** while being raised. In some embodiments, retention device **1701** may be partially open, with a lower circumferential ring at its lowest opening, a partially closed cylindrical portion above this lower circumferential ring, and a fully closed upper portion. In such embodiments, lowering of the rate of raising of fender **1711** into retention device **1701** would typically occur as the top of fender **1711** enters the lower ring of retention device **1701.** Other variations are clearly possible, according to the invention, as will be appreciated by one having ordinary skill in the art.

[0062] **Fig. 24** shows an exemplary embodiment of a reduced-complexity fender positioning system with a single motor mechanism. **Fig. 24** shows an overview **2400** with a railing **2401,** a deck side **2402,** and a rub edge **2403** of a boat above the waterline **2414** (all partial view cutouts). Further, a fender **2404** in retracted position (with a dotted line indicating the center hole) is shown, and a line **2408** that passes through the fender's center hole. Line **2408** is attached at one end to a fixed location of the boat, for example the railing **2409.** That fix location may be the boat cleat, the stanchion or any other boat part. In some cases one may connect that fix location directly to the boat using a screw, a glue, a vacuum or some other mechanism. The other end of line **2408** may be connected to a spool or winding drum or some other mechanism **2406** attached to a motor unit **2405** which may be attached to the boat railings **2401** with screws or bolts or zip ties or some other attaching mechanism **2407a,b.** The motor **2405** in the unit may be operable with a switch or a controller for example using battery, solar charger, wireless control etc. as described herein, to pull up the fender **2404** into a top resting position whereupon, while retracting fender **2404,** the motor **2405** may be configured to detect changes in current or other means such as a switch, and is configured to change its operation if change in state is detected for example an overcurrent or change in current state is detected. Fender **2404** is also shown in lower positions, such as **2410** and **2412.** These are not additional fenders to fender **2404,** but one and the same, in different positions based on line loop extensions as indicated by longer lines loops **2411** and **2413** respectively. The line comes out of the spool or winding drum or another winding mechanism **2406** on motor unit **2405.** Further, in some cases state detection (current, switch or other) is based at least in part on a configured current limit. Also, in some other cases an overcurrent condition or change in current state may be caused by a tangle in the line **2408.** Furthermore, in yet other cases, upon current change detection, the system attempts to achieve a full retraction to the rest position by reversals of line **2408** movement. In yet other cases, a camera (not shown) with visual recognition software is used instead of or in addition to current sensing. In some cases, if fender **2404** retraction fails after the number of reversals, an alert is provided to an operator. In several of the herein described cases, after the user selects a height, the time to reach said height is changed based on the voltage of the batteries, to compensate for the actual speed of the motor **2405.** Further, in some cases, the system deploys to a previously determined height upon approaching a previously set area for docking. Positioning in this section mostly is relying on gravity and may be relying on friction. In some aspects flexible tubing (not shown) may be added to the inside of the fender **2404** or around the line **2408** to better control friction. In some cases end pieces may be added with a funnel shape (not shown) to control friction and/or to improve longevity of fender **2404.** In yet other cases, the line **2408** may have a special coating to control friction.

[0063] **Fig. 25** shows an exemplary embodiment of a reduced-complexity fender positioning system with a dual motor mechanism **2500. Fig. 25** shows a similar configuration to **Fig. 24,** but has an additional motor unit **2505,** and fender **2404** is now suspended between two motor units **2505** and **2405.** This allows for more positioning control of the fender, but may be more expensive because of the second motor **2505.** The rest remains by and large the same. The two motor units are used in conjunction to move the fender into the desired position. In **Fig. 25** it is further shown that, using the two motors **2505** and **2405,** fender **2404** may be maneuvered into a more vertical position **2512.** Also, additional knots or bump devised in the line (not shown) can be used to securely position the fender along the line when manipulating from both sides rather than just relying on friction and gravity for positioning as in **Fig. 24.**

[0064] **Fig. 26** shows an exemplary method for a reduced-complexity fender positioning system **2600,** comprising the steps of (a) attaching a line to a motor, a boat

fender, and either a point on a boat or a second motor **2601,** and (b) operating the motor or motors in a manner that causes at least one end of the fender to be raised or lowered **2602.**

[0065] **Fig. 27** shows additional exemplary configurations **2700** of the system. In configuration **2710,** a single line **2713** is attached at a first end to a motor **2711,** runs through a longitudinal hole in a boat fender **2712,** and is attached at a second end to a point on the boat **2714.** In configuration **2720,** there are two motors, with a first motor **2721** (visible in this view) and a second motor **2726** (in same enclosure as the first motor and not visible in this view). A first line single line **2725** is attached at a first end to the first motor **2721,** and attached at a second end to one end of a boat fender **2722.** A second line **2723** is attached at as first end to the second motor **2726,** runs through a ring, pulley, or other attachment point on the boat **2724** (or simply to the railing, the stanchion or the junction of the railing with the stanchion), and is attached at its second end to the second end of the boat fender. **2722.** In configuration **2730,** a single line **2733** is attached at a first end to a motor **2731,** runs through a plurality of attachment points **2735** around the exterior of a boat fender **2732,** and is attached at a second end to a point on the boat **2734.** In configuration **2740,** a single line **2743** is attached at a first end to a motor **2741,** runs through a longitudinal hole in a boat fender **2742,** and is attached at a second end to a second motor **2744.** In that case one may want to prevent the fender from moving along the line. **2745** represents an optional receptacle or support that may or may not be added to this configuration and to all other configurations. That receptacle may add to the stability of the fender while cruising and/or improve looks. In all configurations the fender may be received all the way to that receptacle or directly to the railing for improved stability. In configuration **2750,** a first line **2755** is attached at a first end to a motor **2751,** and is attached at a second end to a boat fender **2752.** A second line **2753** is attached at a first end to the second end of the boat fender, and attached at a second end to a second motor **2754.** In configuration **2760,** a single line **2763** is attached at a first end to a motor **2761,** runs through a plurality of attachment points **2765** around the exterior of a boat fender **2762,** and is attached at a second end to a point on the boat **2764.** In some cases multiple fenders may be connected in any of the above configurations. **2745** represents an optional receptacle that may or may not be added to this configuration and to all other configurations. That receptible may add to the stability of the fender while cruising an improve looks. In all configurations the fender may be received all the way to that receptacle or the railing for improved stability. In all configurations, the motor or motors may be located proximally to the fender or at a different location or locations on the boat.

[0066] **Fig. 28** shows an exemplary embodiment of a reduced-complexity fender positioning system with an alternate arrangement of fenders and lines. **Fig. 28** shows an overview **2800** with a railing **2801,** a deck side **2802,** and a rub edge **2803** of a boat above the waterline **2808** (all partial view cutouts). Further, a fender or fenders (depending on configuration) **2404** in retracted position (with a dotted line indicating the center hole) is shown, and a line or series of lines **2807** that either passes through the fender's **2804** center hole, or is attached to the ends of the fender(s) **2804.** Line **2807** is either a single line run through or around fenders **2804** and attached to a fixed ring **2806** or cleats, or is a series of lines attached to rings **2806** or cleats (not shown) and the ends of fenders **2804.** The line or line(s) **2807** may be run to a motor housing **2805** containing motors (not shown).

[0067] The skilled person will be aware of a range of possible modifications of the various embodiments described above. Accordingly, the present invention is defined by the claims and their equivalents.

[0068] **Fig. 29** shows an exemplary embodiment **2900** of a reduced-complexity fender positioning system with a single line **3104** and extenders **2906** attached to openings **2903** on the fender **2902.** In this embodiment, a single line **2904** is attached at a first end to a motor **2901,** runs through a plurality of extenders **2906** attached to openings **2903** in the boat fender **2902,** and is attached at a second end to an attachment point on the boat **2905.** While the extenders **2906** are shown as rings in this example, they may be made of any material and shape, provided that can be attached to an end of a boat fender and allow a line to pass through. As the motor **2901** operated, the boat fender **2903** is raised and lowered as the extenders **2906** slide along the line **2904.**

[0069] **Fig. 30** shows an exemplary embodiment of a reduced-complexity fender positioning system with a single line **3004** running through an opening **3003** at one end of a boat fender **3002.** In this embodiment, a single line **3004** is attached at a first end to a motor **3001,** runs through an opening **3003** in the boat fender **3002,** and is attached at a second end to an attachment point **3005** on the boat. As the motor **3001** operated, the boat fender **3002** is raised and lowered by sliding along the line **3004.**

[0070] **Fig. 31** shows an exemplary embodiment of a reduced-complexity fender positioning system with a single line **3004** running through an extender **3106** attached to an opening **3103** at one end of a boat fender **3103.** In this embodiment, a single line **3104** is attached at a first end to a motor **3101,** runs through an extender **3106** attached to openings **3103** in the boat fender **3102,** and is attached at a second end to an attachment point **3105** on the boat. While the extender **3106** is shown as a ring in this example, it may be made of any material and shape, provided that it can be attached to an end of a boat fender and allow a line to pass through. As the motor **3101** operated, the boat fender **3102** is raised and lowered as the extender **3106** slides along the line **3104.**

[0071] In accordance with another aspect of the invention, there is provided a system for positioning boat fenders, comprising: a motor mounted to an attachment point on a boat, and having a motor shaft configured to reel in

a line; a line, having a first end connected to the motor shaft directly or through attachments affixed to the motor, an intermediate portion of the line running through one or more openings in a boat fender or through one or more attachments affixed to the boat fender, and a second end of the line being attached to an attachment point on the boat; and wherein operation of the motor in a first direction causes the boat fender to be raised by sliding along the line. The system conveniently further comprises a release mechanism which, when operated, causes the line to be let out and the boat fender lowered by gravity. Conveniently, the motor is a reversible motor and wherein the operation of the motor in the reverse direction causes the line to be let out, causing the boat fender to be lowered by sliding along the line. The opening in the fender through which the line runs can be a longitudinal opening running the length of the boat fender. The intermediate portion of the line can run through a plurality of openings in the boat fender or through a plurality of attachments affixed to the boat fender. Preferably, the system further comprises a safety release added to the line, wherein if the force on the line is higher than a preset value, the safety release disconnects the line.

[0072] Conveniently, a controller can be configured to perform one or more actions from the following list: receive commands from a computing device, and control the motor in accordance with the commands; and detect changes in motor current, and change the motor's operation if an overcurrent or change in current state is detected by either slowing the motor, stopping the motor, or reversing the direction of the motor. The controller can be configured to allow a user to select a deployment height, and the system deploys to the selected height when activated.

[0073] The invention also provides a method for positioning boat fenders, comprising the steps of mounting a motor to an attachment point on a boat, the motor having a motor shaft configured to reel in a line; connecting a first end of a line to the motor shaft directly or through attachments affixed to the motor, running an intermediate portion of the line through one or more openings in a boat fender or through one or more attachments affixed to the boat fender, and attaching a second end of the line to an attachment point on the boat; and operating the motor in a first direction, causing the boat fender to be raised by sliding along the line. Conveniently, the method further comprises the step of operating a release mechanism which causes the line to be let out and the boat fender lowered by gravity. The motor can be reversible whereby operation of the motor in the reverse direction causes the line to be let out, causing the boat fender to be lowered by sliding along the line. The opening in the fender through which the line runs can be a longitudinal opening running the length of the boat fender. The method can also be implemented when the intermediate portion of the line runs through a plurality of openings in the boat fender or through a plurality of attachments affixed to the boat fender. The method can also be adapted, when a safety release mechanism is provided to the line, such that when the force on the line is higher than a preset value, the safety release activates and disconnects the line. A controller can be provided which is configured to perform one or more actions from the following list: receive commands from a computing device, and control the motor in accordance with the commands; and detect changes in motor current, and change the motor's operation if an overcurrent or change in current state is detected by either slowing the motor, stopping the motor, or reversing the direction of the motor.

Claims

1. A boat fender system (200), for mounting upon a motorized or sail-powered craft (100) having a hull (101) and one or more attachment points, the boat fender system (200) comprising:

   a motor (708) mountable to an attachment point of the one or more attachment points, and having a motor shaft configured to reel in a line;
   a line (205), having a first end connected to the motor shaft directly or to a winch, spool, winding drum, or other winding mechanism driven by the motor, an intermediate portion of the line running through one or more openings in a boat fender (203) or through one or more attachments affixed to the boat fender, and a second end of the line being attachable to a second attachment point of the one or more attachment points; and
   wherein, once mounted to the one or more attachment points in an operational state upon a craft operation of the motor in a first direction causes the length of line to be reeled in whereby the lowered boat fender to be raised by sliding along the line; and,
   wherein when the line is let out, the boat fender is lowered by gravity, whereby to position the fender such that it can operably protect the hull of said craft.

2. The boat fender system (200) of claim 1, wherein at least one attachment point of the one or more attachment points comprises a deck, surface or railing of the craft.

3. The boat fender system (200) of claim 1 or 2, further comprising a release mechanism which, when operated, causes the line to be let out whereby the boat fender is lowered by sliding along the line by gravity.

4. The boat fender system (200) of claim 1 or 2, wherein the motor is a reversible motor and wherein the operation of the motor in the reverse direction causes the line to be let out, causing the boat fender to be lowered by sliding along the by gravity.

5. The boat fender system (200) according to any one of claims 1 - 3, wherein the opening in the fender through which the line runs is a longitudinal opening running the length of the boat fender.

6. The boat fender system (200) according to any one of claims 1 - 4, wherein the intermediate portion of the line runs through a plurality of openings in the boat fender or through a plurality of attachments affixed to the boat fender.

7. The boat fender system (200) according to any one of claims 1 - 6, further comprising a safety release added to the line, wherein if the force on the line is higher than a preset value, the safety release disconnects the line.

8. The boat fender system(200) according to any one of claims 1 - 7, further comprising a controller (704) configured to perform one or more actions from the following list:

receive commands from a computing device (904), and control the motor in accordance with the commands; and
detect changes in motor current, and change the motor's operation if an overcurrent or change in current state is detected by either slowing the motor, stopping the motor, or reversing the direction of the motor.

9. The boat fender system (200) according to one of claims 1 -8, wherein the controller is configured to allow a user to select a deployment height, and the system deploys to the selected height when activated.

10. A method for positioning boat fenders on a motorized or sail-powered craft (100), said craft comprising: a motor, mounted to an attachment point on the craft, having a motor shaft with one more spools winch or winding drum attached to the shaft, the spools configured to reel in or let out a line; a first line (205), having a first end connected to a first spool on a first motor of the one or more motors, and a second end connected to a first end of the boat fender (203); a second line (205) having a first end connected to a second end of the boat fender (203), and having a second end connected either to a second spool on the first motor or to a first spool on a second motor, the method comprising:
operating the motor in a first direction, causing the length of line to be reeled in whereby the boat fender is raised by sliding along the line.

11. The method of claim 10, further comprising the step of operating a release mechanism which causes the line to be let out and the boat fender lowered by gravity.

12. The method according to claim 10 or 11, wherein the motor is a reversible motor and wherein the operation of the motor in the reverse direction causes the line to be let out, causing the boat fender to be lowered by sliding along the line.

13. The method according to any one of claims 10 - 12, further comprising a safety release added to the line (205), wherein if the force on the line is higher than a preset value, the safety release activates and disconnects the line.

14. The method according to any one of claims 10 - 13, further comprising a controller (704) configured to perform one or more actions from the following list:
receive commands from a computing device (901), and control the motor in accordance with the commands; and
detect changes in motor current, and change the motor's operation if an overcurrent or change in current state is detected by either slowing the motor, stopping the motor, or reversing the direction of the motor.

15. The method according to any one of claims 10 - 14, wherein the controller is configured to allow a user to select a deployment height, and the system deploys to the selected height when activated.

Fig. 1

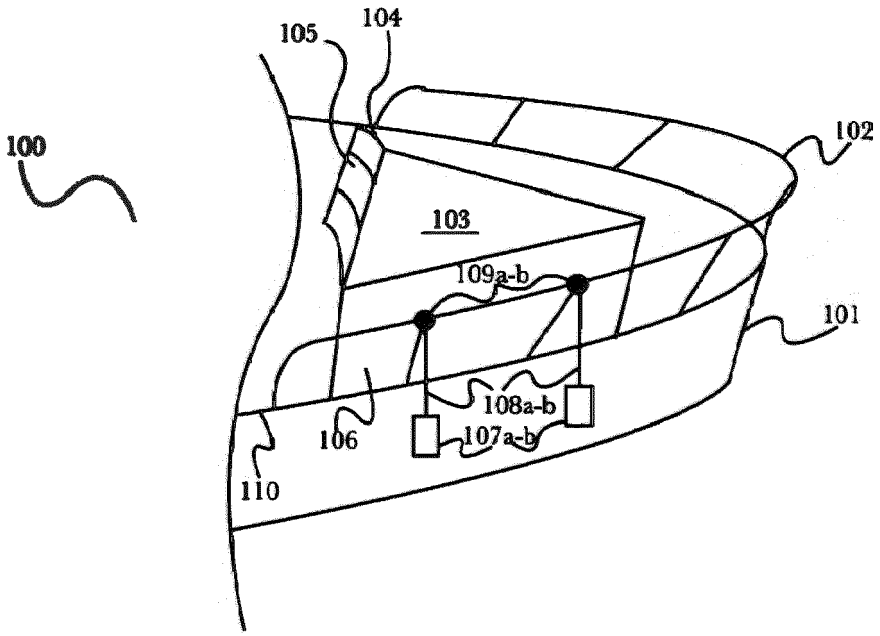
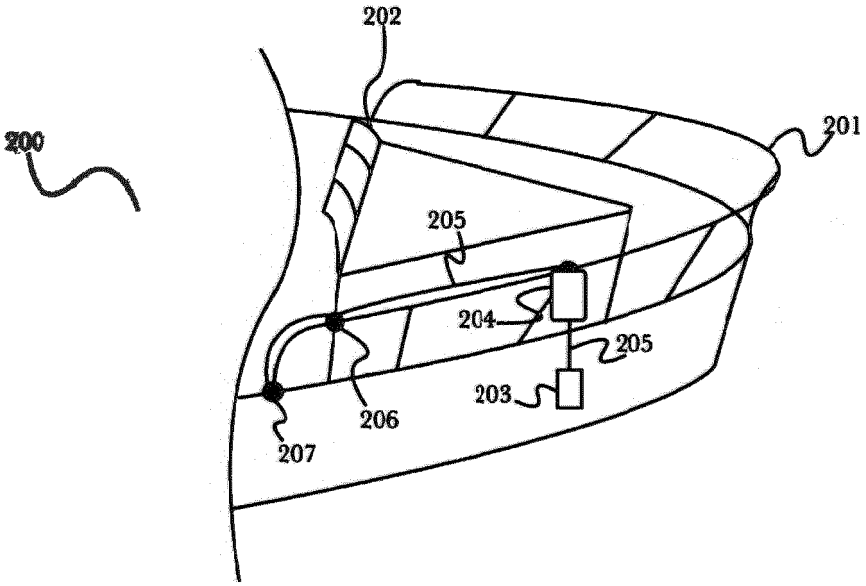

100
105
104
102
103
109a-b
101
108a-b
106
107a-b
110

Fig. 2


200
202
201
205
204
205
203
206
207

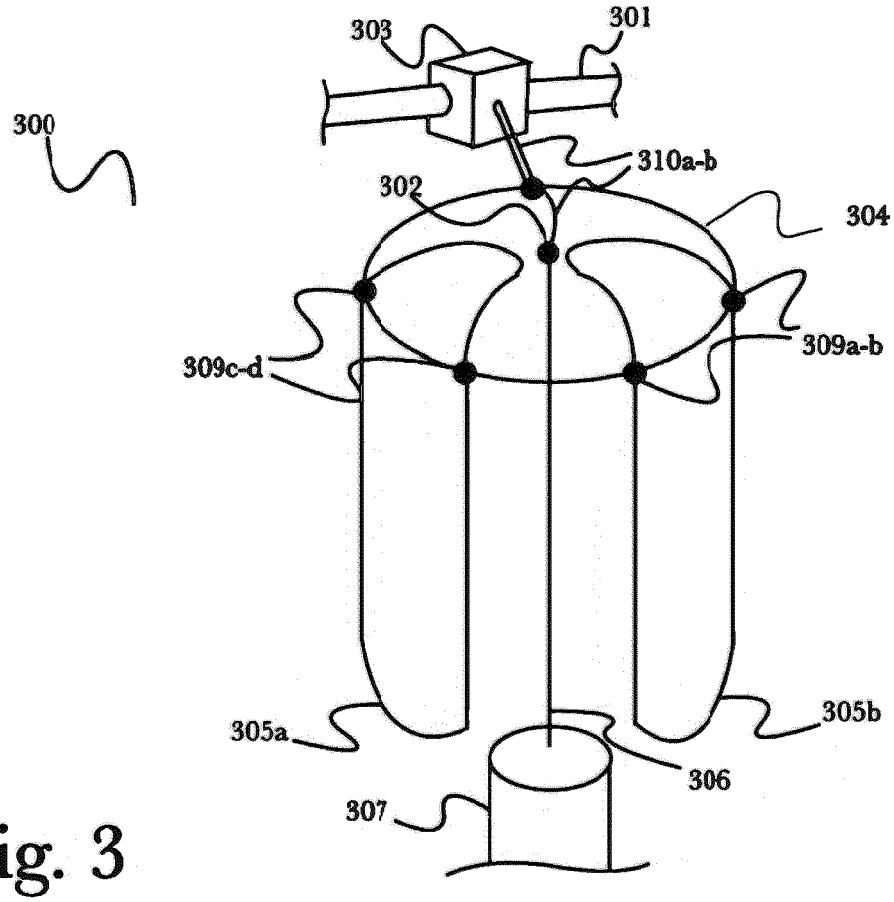

300
303
301
310a-b
302
304
309c-d
309a-b
305a
305b
306
307

Fig. 3

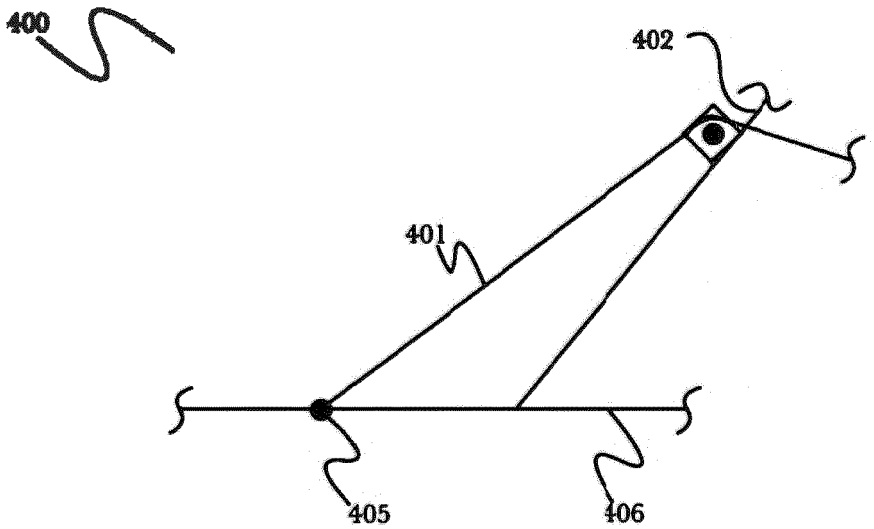

400
402
401
405
406

Fig. 4

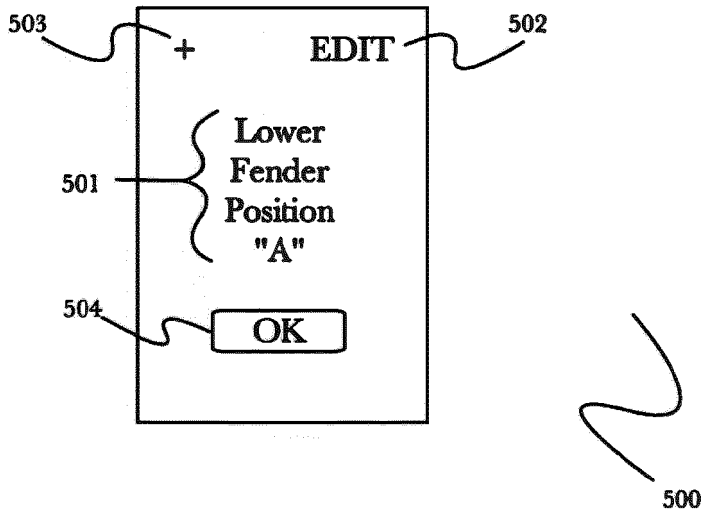

503
+
EDIT
502
Lower
Fender
Position
"A"
501
504
OK
500

Fig. 5

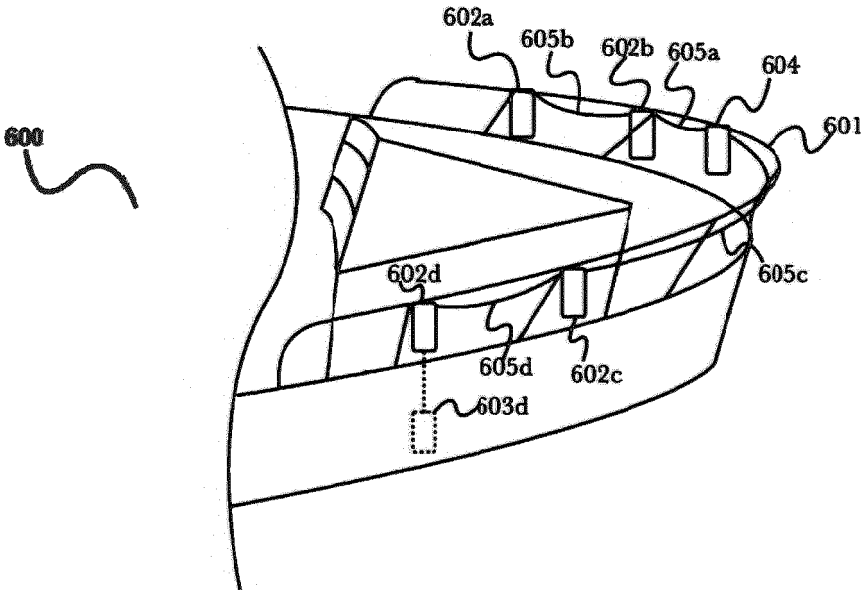

602a
605b
602b
605a
604
601
600
602d
605c
605d
602c
603d

Fig. 6

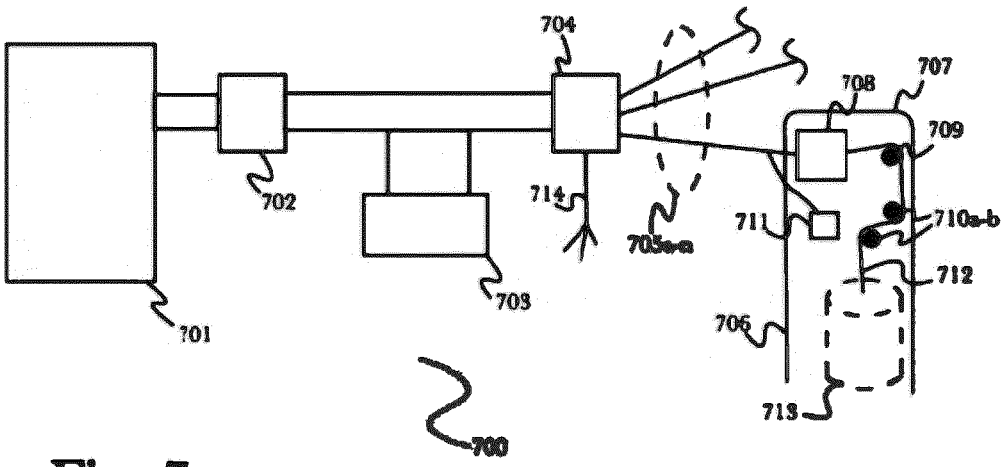


Fig. 7

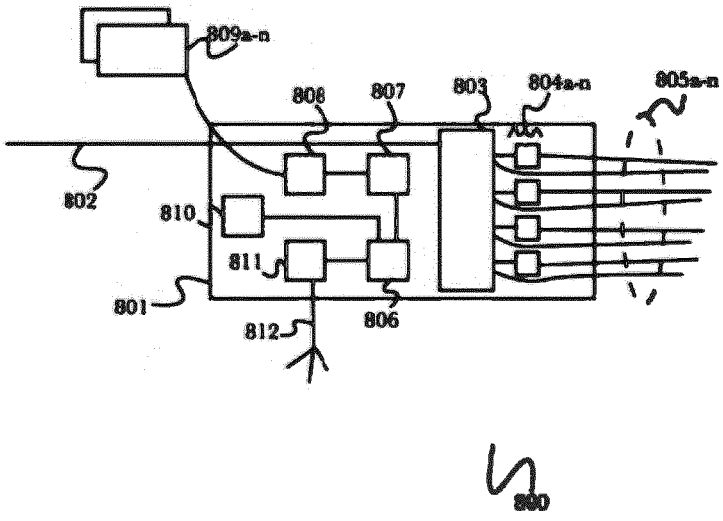


Fig. 8

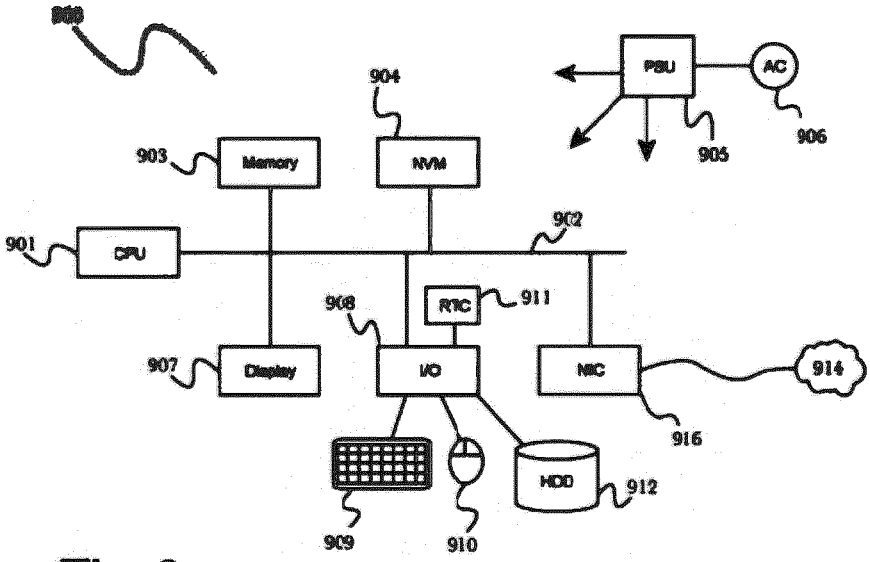


Fig. 9

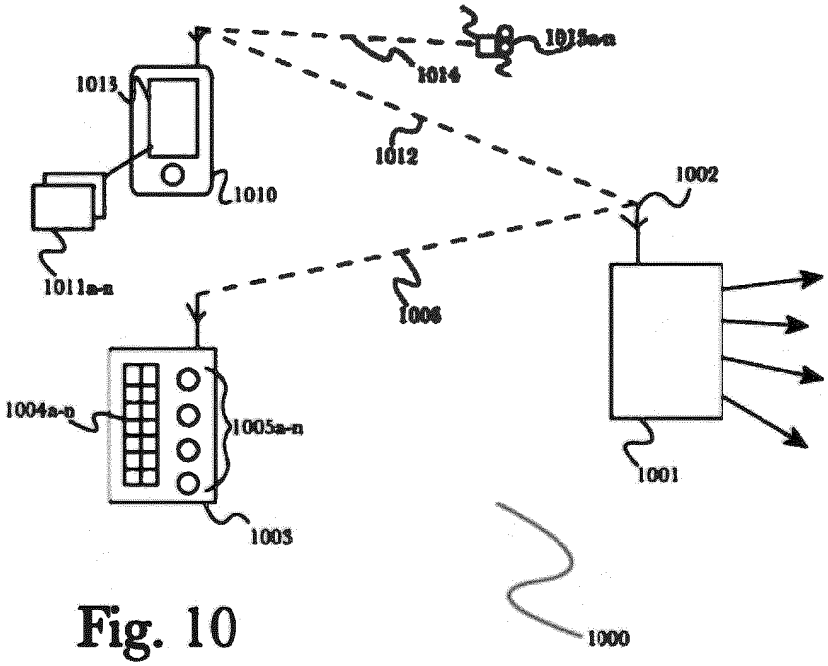


Fig. 10

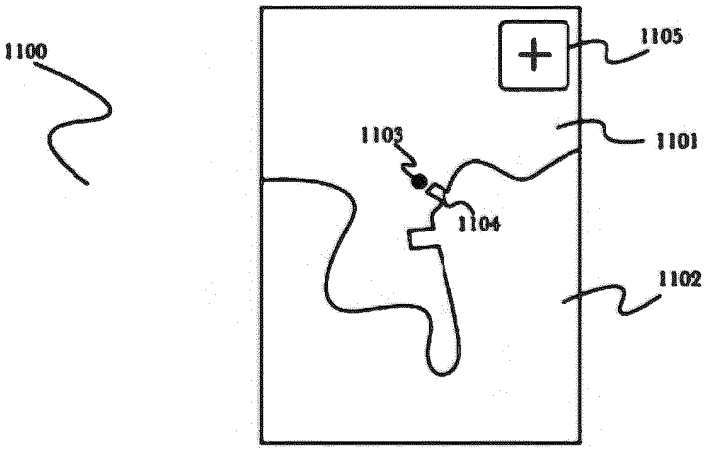


Fig. 11

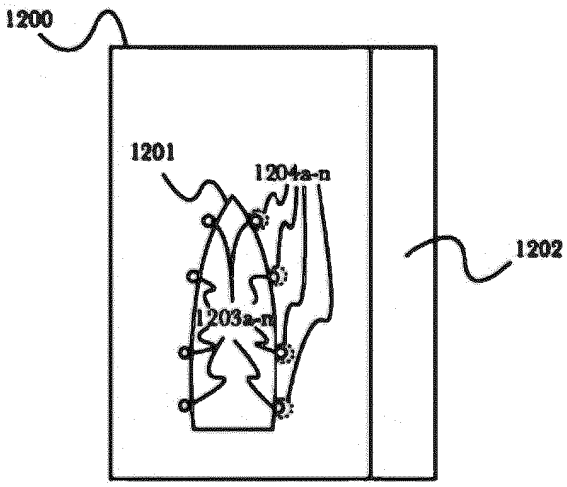


Fig. 12

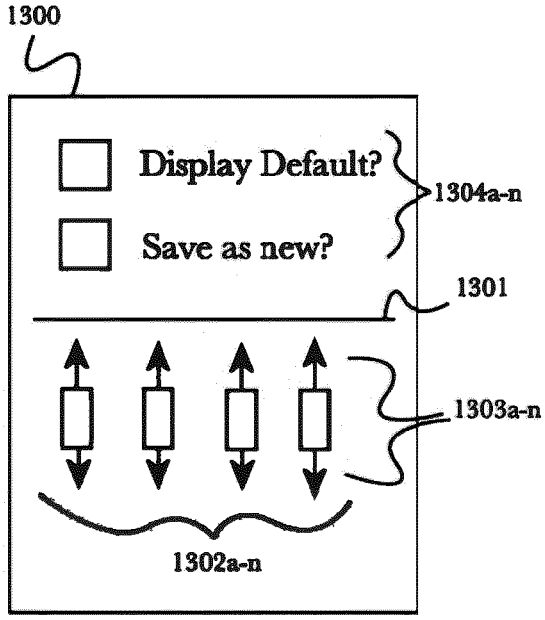


Fig. 13

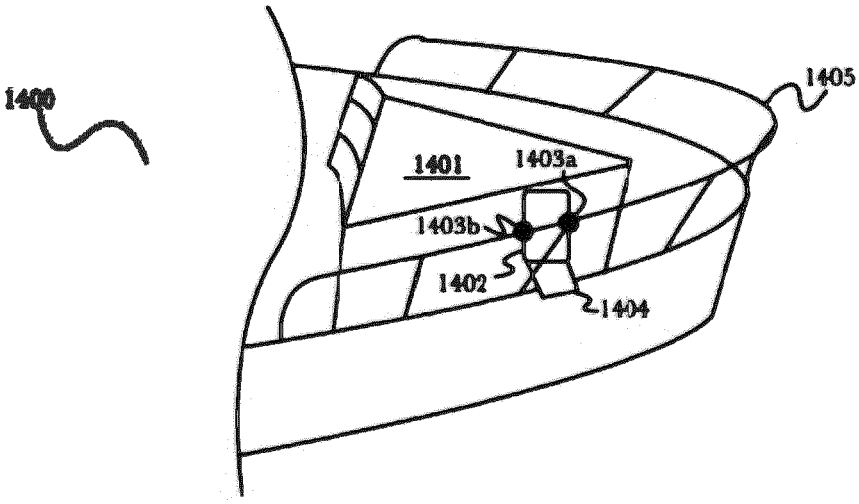


Fig. 14

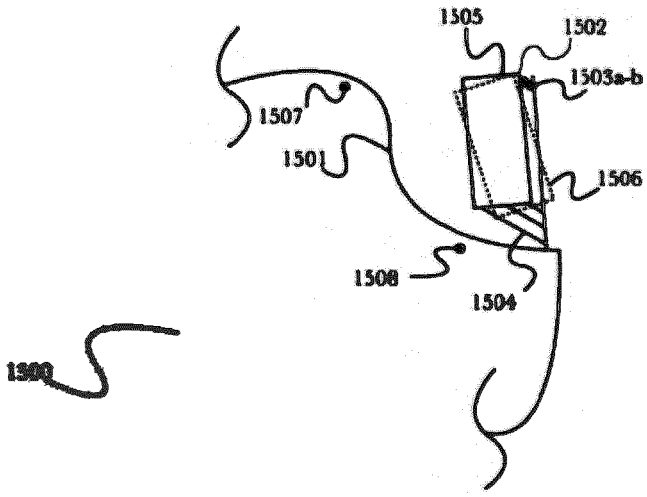


Fig. 15

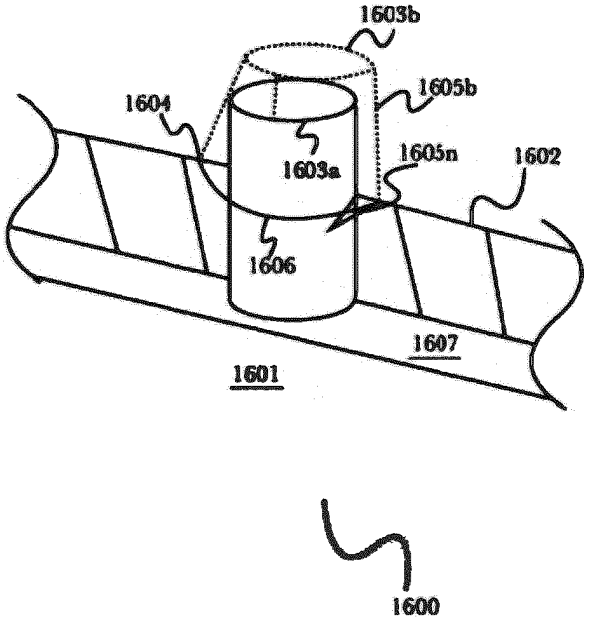

1603b
1605b
1604
1603a
1605n
1602
1606
1607
1601
1600

Fig. 16

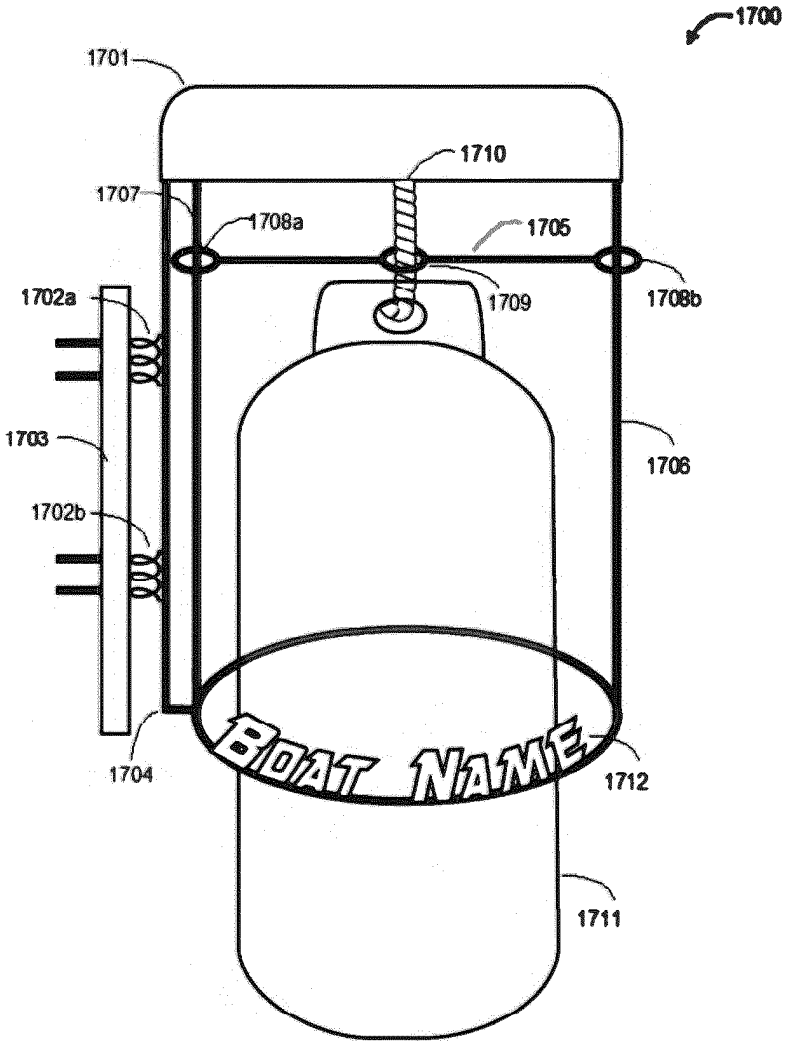

1700
1701
1710
1707
1708a
1705
1709
1708b
1702a
1703
1706
1702b
BOAT NAME
1704
1712
1711

Fig. 17

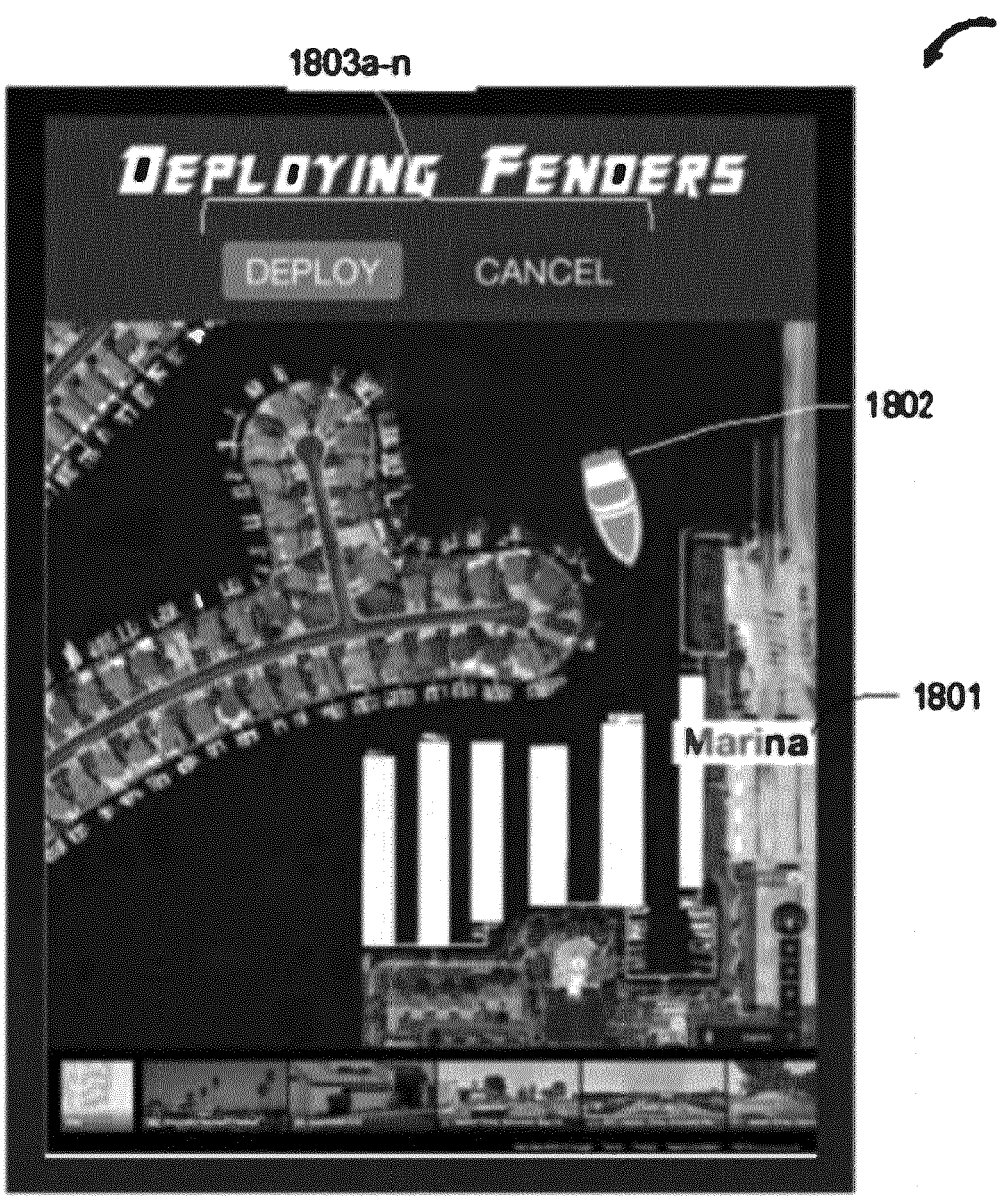

1800
1803a-n
DEPLOYING FENDERS
DEPLOY
CANCEL
1802
1801
Marina

Fig. 18

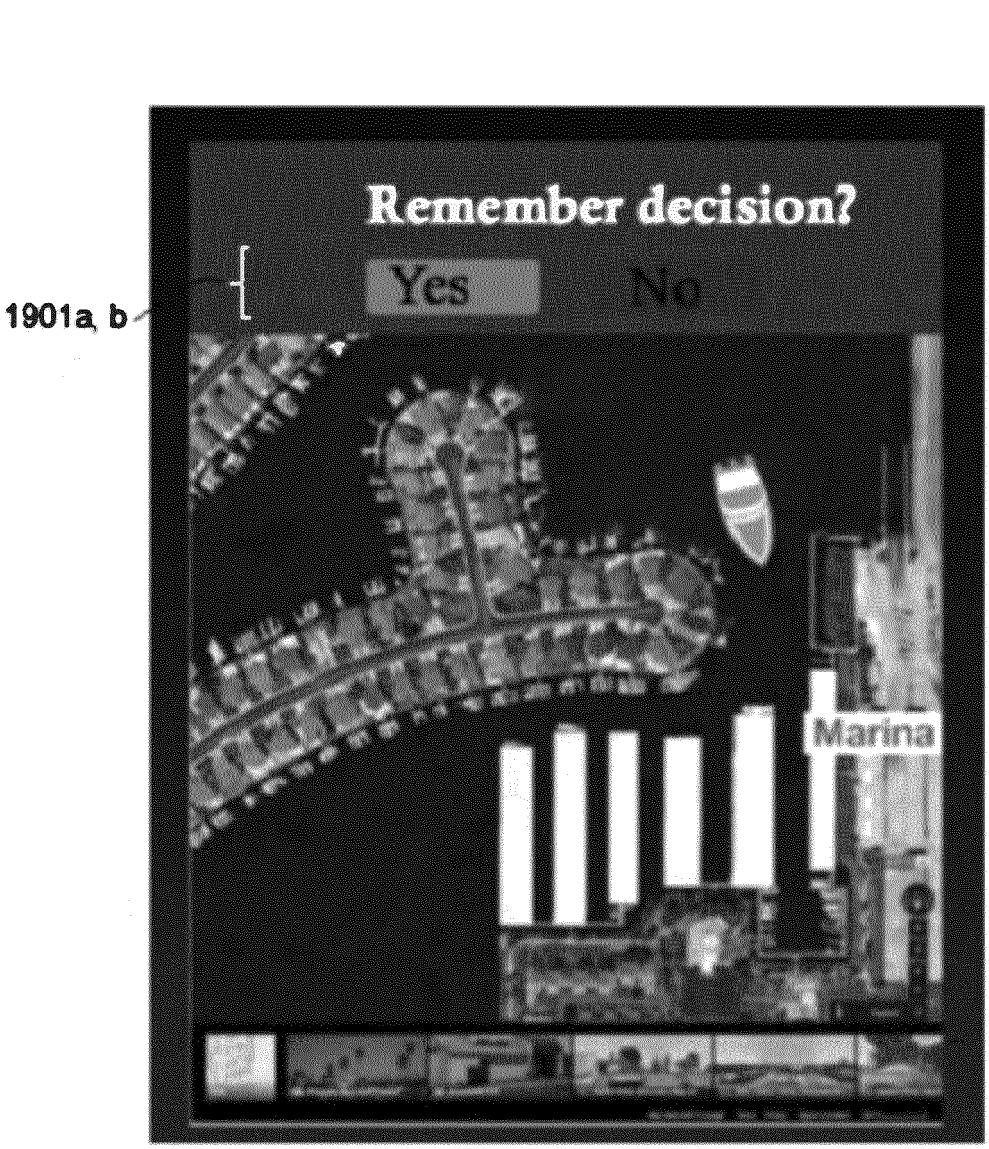

1900
Remember decision?
Yes
No
1901a, b
Marina

Fig. 19

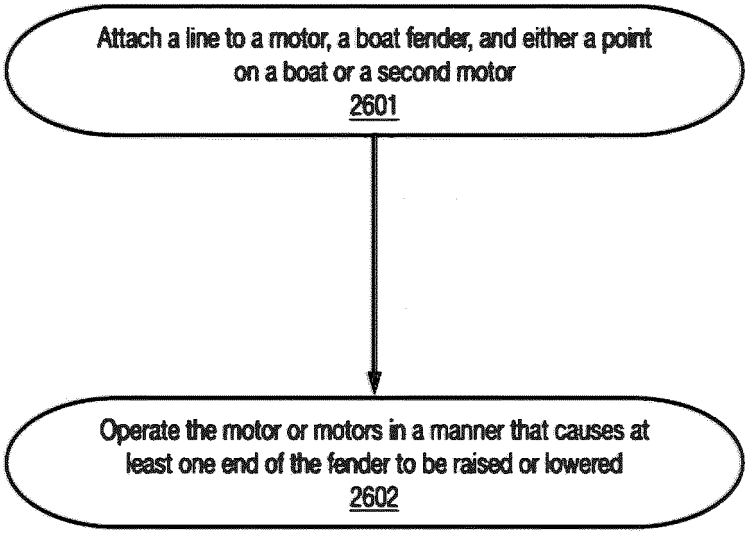

Attach a line to a motor, a boat fender, and either a point on a boat or a second motor
2601
Operate the motor or motors in a manner that causes at least one end of the fender to be raised or lowered
2602

Fig. 26

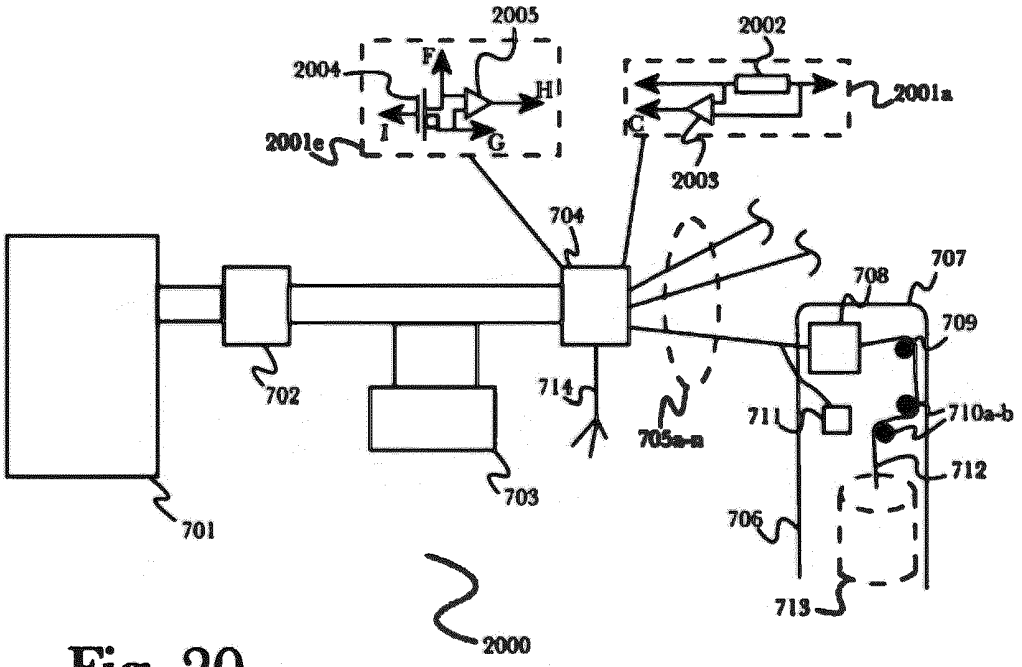

2005
2004
F
H
I
G
2001e
2002
2001a
C
2003
704
707
708
709
702
714
711
710a-b
705a-n
712
703
706
701
713
2000

Fig. 20

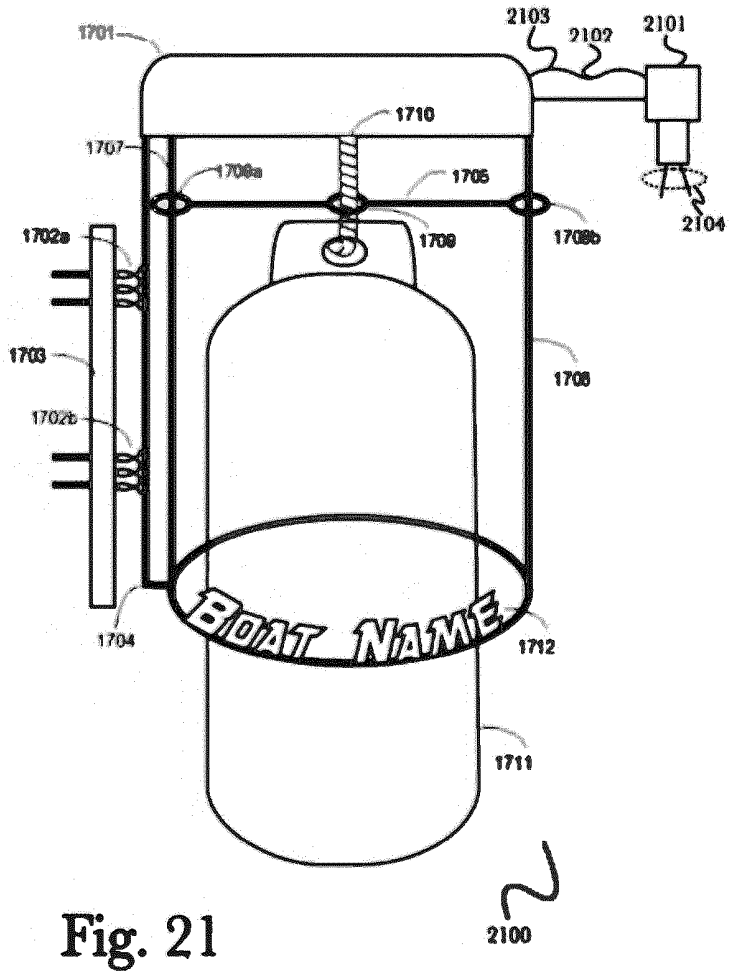

1701
2103
2102
2101
1710
1707
1706a
1705
1706b
2104
1709
1702a
1703
1708
1702b
1704
BOAT NAME
1712
1711
2100

Fig. 21

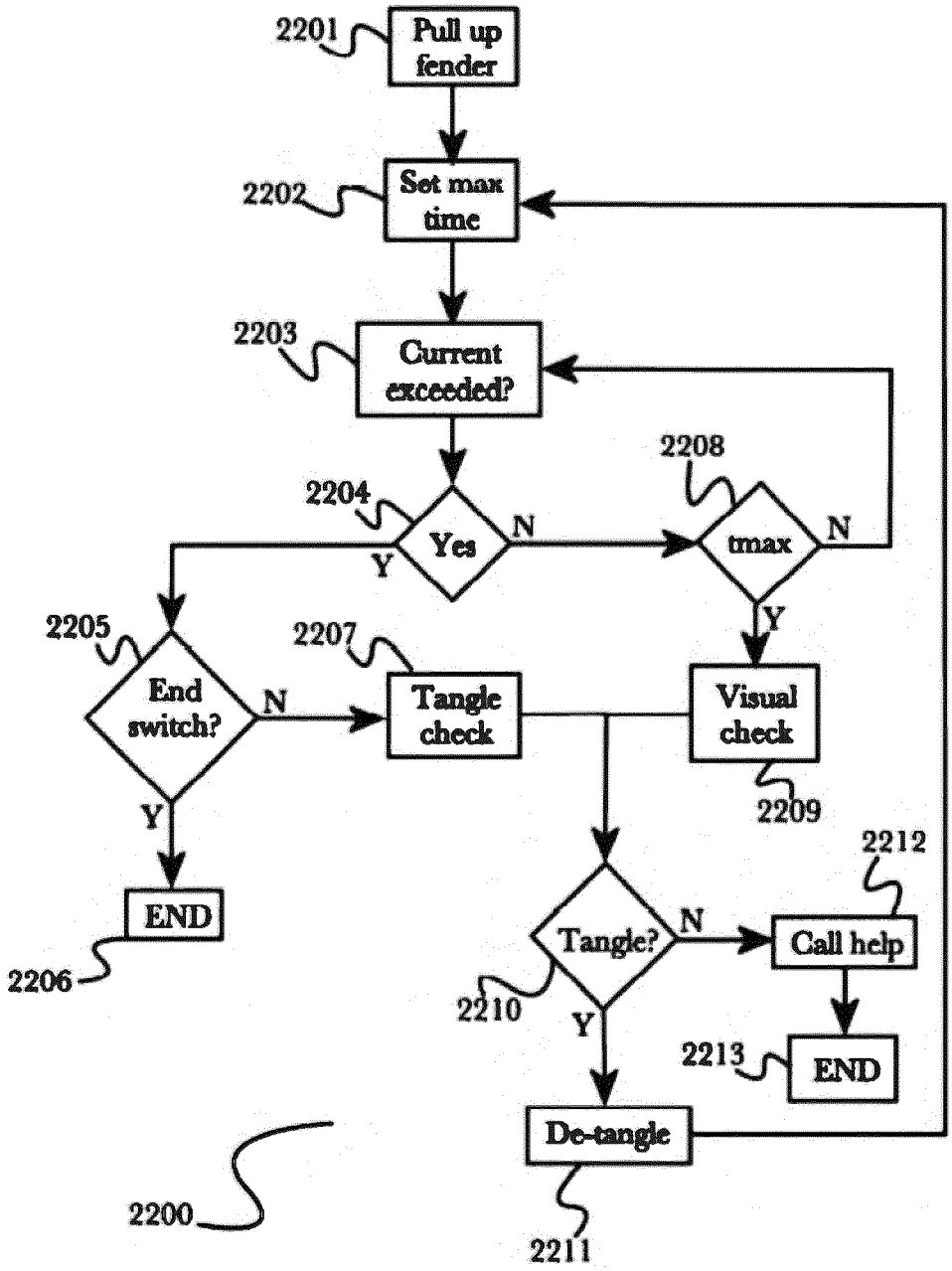

2201
Pull up fender
2202
Set max time
2203
Current exceeded?
2204
Yes
N
Y
2208
tmax
N
Y
2205
End switch?
N
Y
2207
Tangle check
Visual check
2209
END
2206
2212
Tangle?
N
Y
2210
Call help
2213
END
De-tangle
2200
2211

Fig. 22

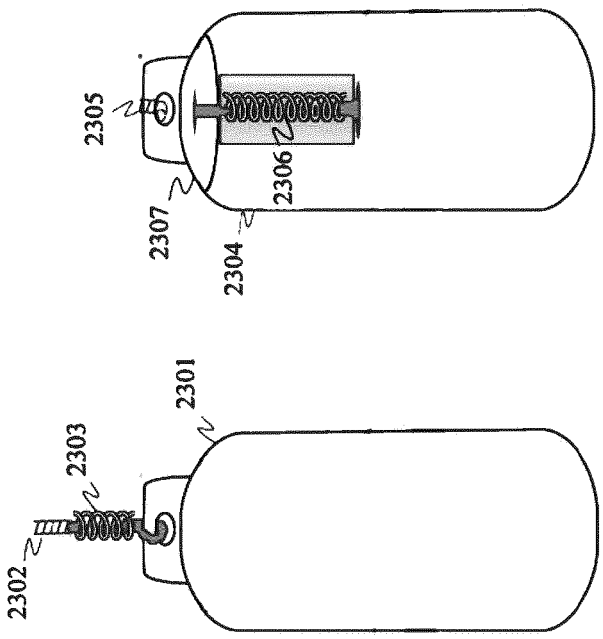


Figure 23

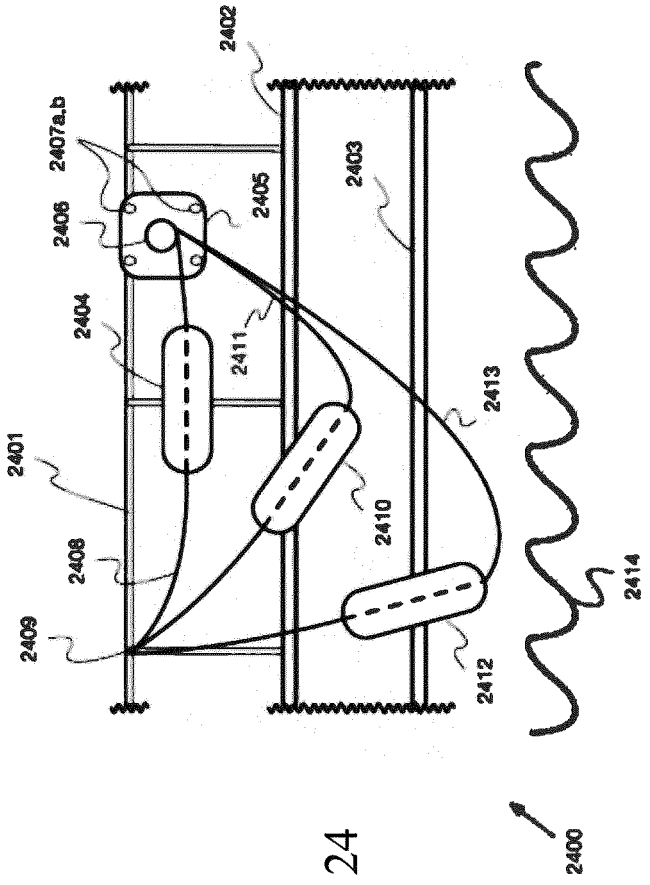


Fig. 24

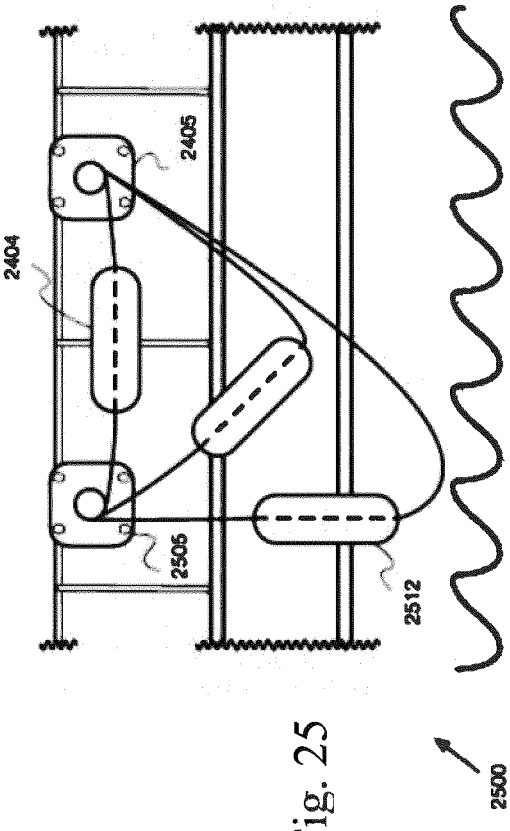


Fig. 25

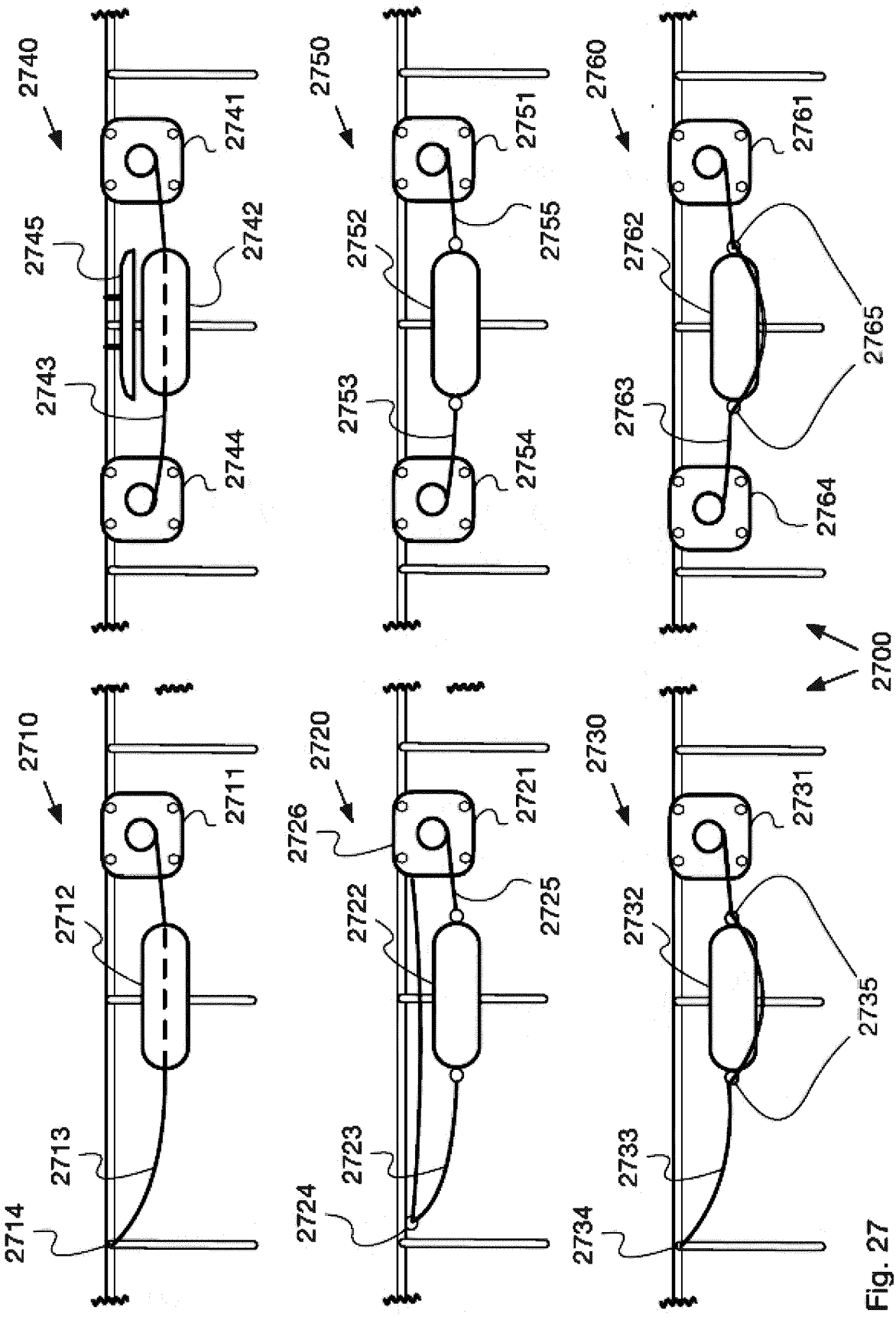

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Fig. 27

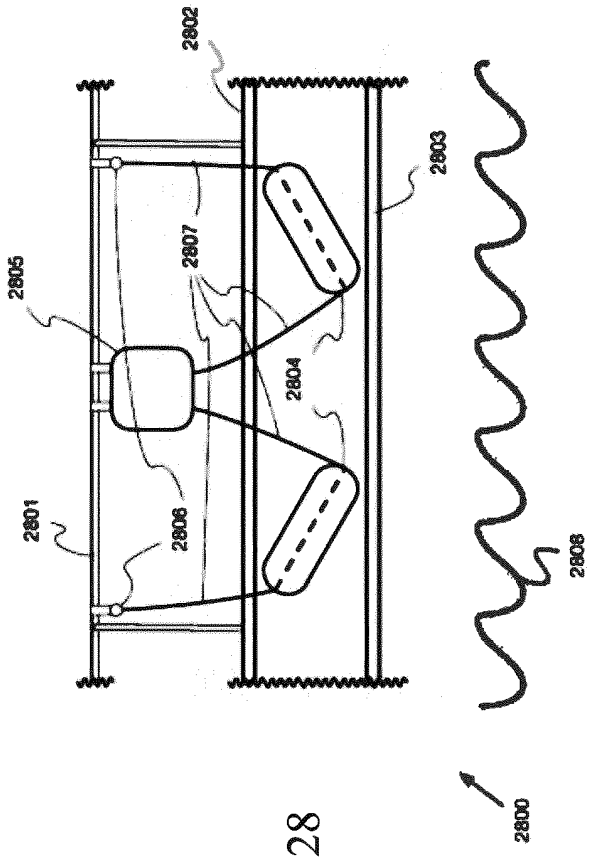


Fig. 28

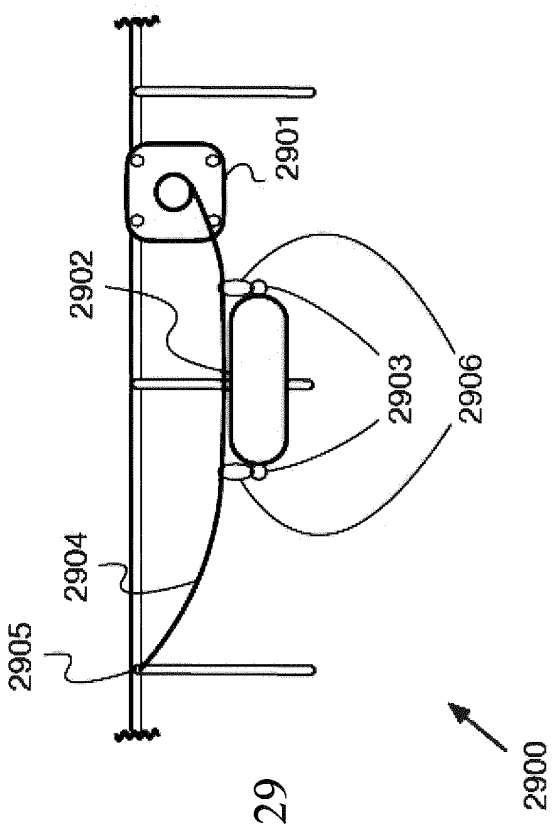


Fig. 29

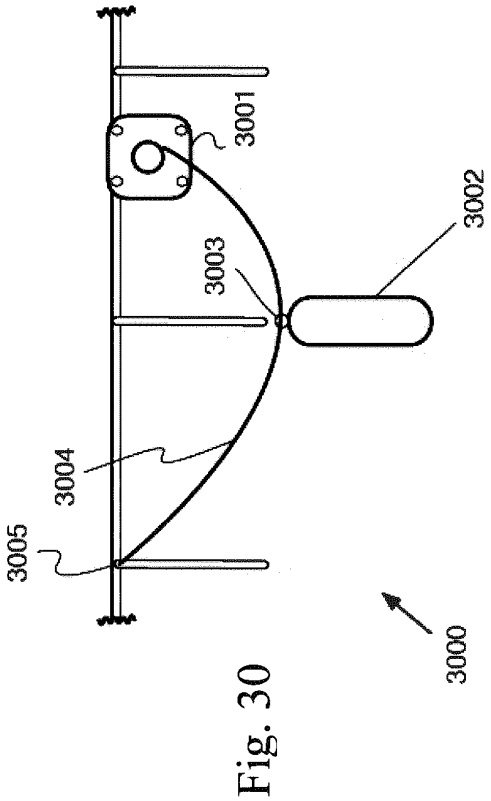


Fig. 30

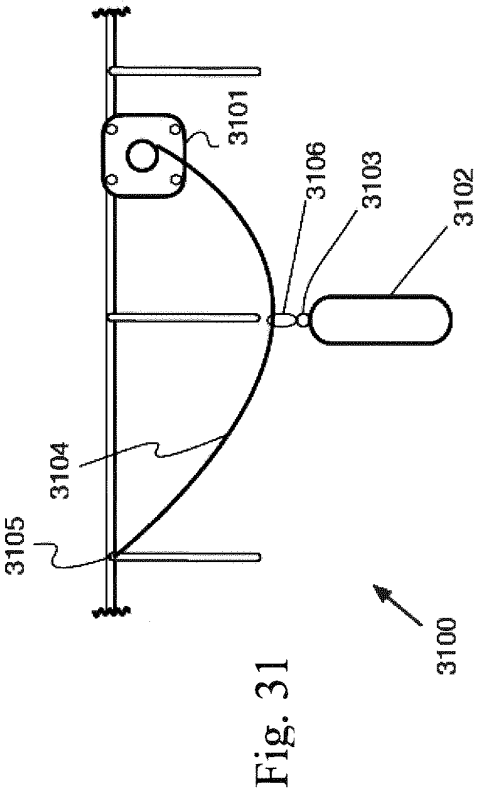


Fig. 31