

Mississippi Department of Marine Resources

**Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
Mississippi State Report
October – December**



The Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (MDMR) is responsible for enhancing, protecting and conserving marine interests of the state. The Office of Marine Fisheries is directly responsible for managing commercial, recreational, educational and economic uses of these resources.

ADMINISTRATIVE ACTIONS

Effective December 1, 2014 the Mississippi Commission on Marine Resources (CMR) adopted a regulatory modification to Title 22 Part 2 *Rules and Regulations for Shrimping in the State of Mississippi*. The modification removed the word “wash” and phrase “on top of the water” from Section 106, essentially allowing shrimp fishermen to wash their nets in closed waters. The modification reads as follows:

Title 22 Part 2 Chapter 5 Section 106

It shall be unlawful for any person, firm, or corporation to drag, or pull a trawl or try net under the water with the bag tied or untied in any area of the territorial waters of the State of Mississippi which are closed to shrimping.

Further, it shall be unlawful for any person, firm, or corporation to drag, or pull double or multiple rigs under the water with the bags tied or untied in any area of the territorial waters of the State of Mississippi which are closed to the use of double rigs, or in waters which are closed to the use of that size, type or number of rigs.

Effective December 1, 2014 the CMR adopted a regulatory modification to Title 22 Part 9 *Statistical Reporting and Confidentiality of Statistical Data for Marine Fisheries in the State of Mississippi*. The modification reads as follows:

Title 22 Part 9 Chapter 11 Section 100

Persons engaged in recreational fishing in waters under the jurisdiction of the MDMR or landing fish in Mississippi shall be required to furnish information, including a harvest report, pertaining to such fishing to an information confidentiality officer. The owner or captain of any vessel recreationally harvesting red snapper is hereby required to complete a harvest report by the MDMR.

Charter boat or head boat captains operating in Mississippi waters shall be required to complete questionnaires furnished by the MDMR for each trip. Completed questionnaires will be furnished to an information confidentiality officer upon request.

ARTIFICIAL REEF BUREAU

The Artificial Reef Bureau continued to monitor fish assemblages and physiochemical parameters in Hancock, Harrison, and Jackson counties (one site in each county per month). These sites are monitored as part of an ongoing sampling effort to gather fisheries independent data around inshore artificial reefs. These data will be used to assess species diversity and usage of inshore artificial reefs. In addition, having an ongoing monitoring program with historical data may help detect changes due to environmental catastrophes. Artificial Reef staff also visited offshore reef sites to check reef sustainability and subsidence rates. Monitoring the durability of these reefs will allow the bureau to make suggestions about the type of material used when building reefs.

In addition to monitoring artificial reefs, the Artificial Reef Bureau worked on securing and deploying more structure. Artificial Reef personnel collaborated with Omega Protein in Moss Point, MS to secure a 165 foot steel hull vessel to deploy in Fish Haven 13. Deployment of this vessel will create important habitat for offshore species and local fishing and diving opportunities. Staff also coordinated with the oil and gas industry on acquiring structures for the Rigs to Reef Program. This creates a way to disassemble the rig while creating more habitat in Mississippi waters. Staff also continued to stockpile reef material at the Gulfport staging site for future offshore reef deployments.

Staff used side-scan sonar to determine coverage of oyster reefs planted as part of a National Resource Damage Assessment and The Nature Conservancy projects. The images produced by the side scan were used to compare oyster reef coverage before and after cultch placement. Side-scan sonar was also used to determine coverage of oyster reefs in both Hancock and Jackson Counties. These images are used to assess the state of the oyster reefs in these counties and whether they can be opened for harvesting.

Artificial Reef Bureau staff members attended a ROV Monitoring Workshop in Gulfport, MS to learn about fisheries sampling methods in the northern Gulf of Mexico. In addition, staff members went to an Alternative Shoreline Management Expo in Biloxi, MS to assess different types of materials used for shoreline management and creating artificial habitat.

FINFISH BUREAU

The Finfish Bureau continued to oversee the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP). All assignments from October through December were completed and surveys obtained were reviewed and processed before being sent to the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (GSMFC) office for processing. During the final three months of 2014, there were a total of 258 ramp surveys in Jackson, Harrison and Hancock Counties and a total of 49 shore surveys in Jackson and Harrison Counties. Survey site validations to update the site registry for 2015 and state-wide site effort estimates continued to be refined in an effort to improve the accuracy of the

survey. The for-hire vessel frame was evaluated and edited to better reflect our most recent and updated state license file. This will allow MDMR employees to develop a more comprehensive and accurate active vessel frame to more precisely estimate for-hire effort.

A total of 151 otoliths were collected in October, November and December. Samples were collected from nine different species: Atlantic Croaker, Black Drum, Gray Snapper, Sheepshead, Red Drum, Red Snapper, Spanish Mackerel, Spotted Seatrout and Striped Mullet. Samples are processed as part of the MDMR biological sampling program. The data collected through this process will aid in management decisions for our state and are submitted to the GSMFC in addition to the FIN Data Management System for use in upcoming stock assessments.

Finfish staff continued to target Red Drum in Mississippi coastal waters as part of an ongoing research-oriented project aimed at filling in age and size information gaps of Red Drum in Mississippi waters. The Red Drum project began in February of 2014 to target fish of size 20-30 inches. Red Drum within this size range have been missing from past and current monitoring projects. The project utilizes four 300 foot gill nets of various mesh sizes (5.5, 6.0, 6.5, and 7.0 inches) at several inshore locations, as well as an 800 foot strike net with four continuous sections of the same size mesh that is employed only during select months in fall and spring. In addition, samples have been collected on a voluntary basis from recreational fishermen. The project has collected 106 samples, 94 of which have been aged, with 77 of the samples within the targeted size range and 61 within the desired 3-5 year old age group. These samples will be used to enhance existing data sets in order to complete a Red Drum stock assessment currently underway.

Recreational Red Snapper season was reopened each weekend in October including the first weekend in November. Anglers targeting Red Snapper were asked to report trip details via a voluntary reporting program through the MDMR website or by filling out an information card available at local bait shops. Aerial and vessel surveys were conducted in areas where Red Snapper fishing was likely to occur in order to measure effort and validate information received through the voluntary angler reporting program. Surveyors were also placed at selected boat ramps and harbors to collect lengths and weights of Red Snapper being landed. At the September CMR meeting, the decision was made to require mandatory reporting of Red Snapper harvest and effort information for any future Red Snapper fishing seasons. MDMR has contracted with an information technology consulting organization to develop a mobile application and corresponding website that will allow MDMR to electronically track and record all recreational Red Snapper landings in Mississippi. This application will provide recreational anglers with an easily accessible and simple way to report their Red Snapper catch information in addition to supplying the MDMR Office of Marine Fisheries with a large amount of valuable harvest and effort data.

Several members of the Finfish Bureau along with other Marine Fisheries personnel attended the annual Bays and Bayous Symposium in Mobile, AL to coordinate with other state and academic organizations and present a poster on Striped Bass telemetry research focused on tagging and tracking adult Striped Bass.

SHRIMP AND CRAB BUREAU

The Shrimp and Crab Bureau continued monthly monitoring of shrimp populations in the Mississippi Sound through trawl sampling at historical stations as well as collection of monthly landings data. Long term fishery independent trawl sampling was also conducted in conjunction with the NOAA Project “Monitoring and Assessment of Mississippi’s Interjurisdictional Marine Resources.” Cooperation continued with the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory on commercial and recreational Blue Crab Catch per Unit Effort projects.

Bureau personnel also coordinated and administered U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Sport Fish Restoration Projects, Issued Scientific Collection Permits per Title 22 Part 18, and inspected and licensed Live Bait Catcher Boats per Title 22 Part 6. The Shrimp and Crab Bureau represented the MDMR at the Gulf of Mexico Fisheries Management Council Penaeid Shrimp Workshop in New Orleans, LA, the Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) Data and TCC Crab subcommittees at the GSMFC Meeting in Gulfport, MS, and the Southeastern Aquatic Resource Partnership/Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies meeting in Destin, FL.

SEAFOOD TECHNOLOGY BUREAU

To ensure Federal Drug Administration (FDA) compliance, in October, Seafood Technology Bureau (STB) staff completed review of Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) plans, and follow-up/verification inspections of seven oyster dealers purchasing oysters directly from harvesters. Recall packets for each Mississippi certified dealer underwent a review and update process to increase readiness in response to state and federal mandated recalls. In preparation for the annual FDA *Vibrio* Risk Management Program Element Evaluation, all *Vibrio vulnificus* records dating from 2006 to 2014 were updated and reviewed. Staff received the *Vibrio* Risk Management Program Element Evaluation Report (PEER) in October stating Mississippi is in conformity with FDA regulations.

The FDA provides free internet training programs to state regulators involved with the shellfish industry. During October through December, staff completed 13 of the available program courses. In order to provide members of the seafood industry with the most qualified service, staff completed training in Arc GIS II and Business Writing for Professionals.

In November, technical assistance was provided to a shellfish aquaculture business in relation to storm readiness planning. In response to requests from the Mississippi Department of Labor, wage determination surveys were conducted for entry level shellfish laborers and entry level

shrimp line factory laborers. In preparation to host a training provided by the FDA entitled “FD242 Sanitary Survey of Shellfish Growing Areas,” staff assisted FDA with course dates and student registration.

Staff attended the annual Bays and Bayous Symposium in Mobile, AL and presented a poster entitled “The CIAP Environmental Stewardship Program in Coast Schools Impacted by Hurricane Katrina.”

SHELLFISH BUREAU

Oysters were relayed from the Pascagoula River Causeway to the Pass Christian tonging grounds during the month of October. A total of 8,552 sacks of oysters were transferred during this relay. These oysters were then harvested by tongers at the start of the oyster season.

Oyster harvesting season opened on November 14th with a sack limit of seven sacks per day for dredgers and 10 sacks per day for tongers. During the month of November, there were 676 harvesting trips and 5,228 sacks harvested from oyster reefs in the Pass Christian and Bay St. Louis area. The season was temporarily closed on December 19th due to excessive rainfall. To improve the accuracy and efficiency of the harvester check out procedure during oyster season, an electronic card reader was installed at the Pass Christian check station. The reader has replaced the manual method of collecting data from oyster harvesters on daily catch. Shellfish staff continued monthly analysis of oyster beds by performing weekly water samples, quantitative measurements of existing stocks using one-minute oyster dredge tows, and twice monthly phytoplankton tows.

The Shellfish Bureau conducted several oyster sanitation seminars for oyster harvesters. During this 30-minute seminar, participants learn important information regarding basic handling techniques, hygiene, and regulations regarding safe harvest of oysters from Mississippi’s public oyster reefs. A total of 419 certificates of completion have been issued since March.

OFFICE OF MARINE PATROL

For the months of October through December 2014, Officers with the Marine Patrol spent 2,622 hours patrolling the marine waters of the state. Officers made 4,767 stops during the same time period. During these patrols officers issued 114 state citations for various seafood and boat and water safety violations.

For the months of October through December 2014, officers conducted 26 Joint Enforcement Agreement patrols resulting in 392 man hours with 113 at sea hours. These patrols made 128 contacts and there were 15 state citations issued. There were no Enforcement Action Reports issued during this time period.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

In October, to increase knowledge of marine fisheries, the STB spearheaded the marine fisheries education public outreach at the annual Jackson County Fair by engaging the public in educational activities, providing regulatory and informational resources to the attending public and engaging attendees with interactive displays providing critical information about Mississippi's marine resources.

On December 12th, Finfish Bureau attended the CREATE Career Fair at Jeff Davis Elementary School and mentored students as they presented research projects on various job occupations to their parents and fellow students. MDMR provided students and teachers with educational resources that were used to engage students in activities that showcased science and marine fisheries at the career fair.

Marine Patrol officers taught one Boat and Water Safety Class which resulted in 63 students being certified. Officers attended Career Day at Pass Road Elementary with 200 children attending for one Outreach Program during the months of October through December 2014.