

Mississippi Gulf Fishing Banks, Inc.

Activity Report for the Period June 13 - July 10, 2003

Summary

During this period, there was 1 Dive Trip conducted. On July 6, a trip was made to Barge 107F2, 920902 in the northeast corner of FH-2. Video and observations were obtained and revealed this 11 year old reef is doing fairly well.

920902 Barge OR-3208, 107F2

Position: 30/05.385°N / 88/33.236°W 12440.5/47044.7/29616.6

Bow: 30/05.373°N / 88/33.231°W Stern: 30/05.401°N / 88/33.241°W

On July 6, a visit was made to this centerpiece of the reef complex constructed in the northeast corner of FH-2 (Bill Walker Site). Visibility was poor at the surface and at the very bottom, but the top 6 feet or so of the structure was in decent water with about 25 feet of visibility. This hopper barge sits upright and the upper gunwales are intact all the way around with the exception of some settling cracks. Some significant deterioration of the lower gunwales was noticed near the north end of the barge but only seems to better serve the reef. Barnacle encrustation and marine fouling as well as soft corals were prevalent. Fish observations revealed satisfactory populations, but not overwhelming. Of unusual notice were 6 or 7 relatively large stingrays that were continuously transecting the barge. Game fish sightings included 3 Cobia (20-35 lbs.) and a single decent red snapper (10-12 lbs.). Several smaller red snapper were sighted (50-75/1-2 lbs.) as well as Mangrove Snapper (50-75/1-4 lbs.), Trigger Fish (4-6/1-2 lbs.), Gag Grouper (6-8/1-8 lbs.), a single small Scamp, Sheepshead (8-12/1-3 lbs.), Spadefish (50-75/small), Blue Runners (50-75/small), and 3 Blue Angels. Many of the red and mangrove snapper were observed in the upper water column. Observation comparisons with a September 2000 trip shows less red snapper, less Spadefish, more mangrove snapper but smaller, more grouper, more cobia and stingrays, and significantly less smaller animals like cocoa damsels, arrow crabs, tomtates, and spotfin butterflies. It is believed that all the reefs in this area are having a significant hard time recovering from the hypoxic conditions that swept the area a couple years back, especially the smaller animals like arrow crabs, sea urchins, sea cucumbers, blennies, hi-tops, damsels, and butterflies that typically live on the structure itself and serve as the food chain base. Some scientific studies are needed to determine the reasons for this ecological imbalance that exists.

