

# Mississippi Gulf Fishing Banks, Inc.

## Partial Activity Report for the Period September 10, 2004 thru June 9, 2005

### Summary

During this period, there were 6 Reef Monitoring Trips and another trip on February 10 to check Piling Light "B" off Round Island, which was found to be functional. On October 2, a trip was made to the DISH (Deer Island South Hampton) and the Abstract Barge. Another trip was made to the Abstract Barge on November 7. Trips were made to the Gwen Tide in FH-13 on March 5, April 3, and May 15. The Casino Magic Barge and the FH-1 A-Barge was visited on May 15. On May 19, dives were conducted on the Jackson County Barge, the 021108 Rubble, and searches were made for APCs in FH-2, but were negative. A dive was made on May 19 in FH-1 on what was thought to be an APC, but turned out to be a piece of Barge material. Spotter operations may be covered by the DMR (Department of Marine Resources) under a different report.

### Details

Hurricane Ivan made landfall just east of Mobile, AL on September 16 and it was desired to assess any damage to the reefs. The trip made on October 2 was somewhat fruitless for video and diving observations due to very poor water visibility, but it did reveal that the Abstract Barge, sunk on July 8, 2003 in 60 feet of water, was substantially affected. Soundings indicated the Barge was moved several hundred feet to the southwest and waddled into a deep depression into the bottom. Most of the enhanced reef structures welded to the deck were destroyed. Whereas before the storm, this reef was closely monitored and showed to be the most productive reef to date, but now showed little concentration of fish. However, effects to the DISH reef appeared minimal. The 2 year old Gwen Tide (a 180 foot supply boat at 29/59.560'N / 88/31.870'W) was pivoted around on the bottom and had its wheel house stripped off the upper deck. Otherwise she fared well thru the storm. Sunk in 84 feet of water, this reef's minimum depth reading went from 44 feet when deployed to a current depth of 62 feet, mostly due to the now missing wheel house, but some subsidence into the bottom was also evident. Several trips were made to the Gwen Tide in an effort to get good visibility to assess the changes, but visibility was never better than about 5 feet. Fish population changes were negligible on both the DISH and the Gwen Tide, but were substantially declined on the shallower Abstract Barge. Concrete Rubble reefs suffer the least impact to bad weather. Vessels, especially barges, tend to rock, shift, and wallow themselves into the bottom, or even move substantial distances.

An exception to this trend has been the A-Barge in FH-1. This 180' X 70' X 12' Barge was sunk in the Summer of 1984 at 30/03.605'N/88/36.636'W. Despite its age, the overall structure, including the deck, has held up very well. It has showed very little scouring or deterioration for unknown reasons. On November 8, 2001, a load of concrete rubble was deployed on top of and around the barge. This enhancement to the barge deck has proved to be very beneficial to its productivity and has provided habitat for Angels, Soapfish, Damsels, Arrow Crabs, Urchins, and other smaller marine life that otherwise would have to seek other habitat. On May 15, 2005, the dive observations show the 21 year old reef to still be in good shape. Fish observations included red snapper (30-40/1-3lbs.), Triggerfish (8-12/1-2lbs.), Spadefish (20-25), Tomtates (25-30), Sheepshead (10-15/1-4lbs.), Gag Grouper (2/3-6lbs.), and 2 blue Angels. Soft corals were prevalent across the deck of the barge.

The Casino Magic Barge was donated and sunk on November 19, 2002 in FH-1 at 30/03.147'N / 88/36.448'W. This large 250' X 50' X 20' barge was used to carry out the first load of 60 APCs (Armored Personnel Carriers) and then was deployed herself with 2 APCs still on deck. The barge has a unique wave attenuating structure running down her port side that has provided excellent fish habitat. The May 15, 2005 visit showed decent concentrations of fish despite a muck layer that started right about at the wave attenuator height and extending to the bottom. Fish counts included red snapper (40-50/1-6lbs.), Grouper (2/3-6 lbs.), Sheepshead (10-15/1-5lbs.), Triggerfish (6-10/1-3lbs.), Spadefish (75-100), mangrove snapper (6-8/1-2lbs.), redfish (3/3-9lbs.), and an Angel fish.

On May 19, efforts were made to obtain video footage of an APC. The first dive was in FH-1 just west of the Casino Magic Barge at 30/03.682'N/88/36.649'W. There were 3 markings here that were close to each other and this was the largest. It turned out that the mark was not an APC, but a piece of Barge Metal with an estimated size of 30' X30' X 8'. Fish observations included about a dozen red snapper, a trigger, and a sheepshead. Growth on the reef was limited, but a few urchins were also noted. Since visibility was poor at the bottom, efforts were shifted to APCs in FH-2. However, locating one was unsuccessful. One hit turned out to be a small piece of concrete, and 2 other dives found nothing but sand. Even the non-disclosed control reefs were not found. It is unknown at this time what has happened to them.

A dive was made on the Jackson County Barge (30/05.47'N/88/34.81'W) in FH-2 on May 19. The barge deck is showing some significant deterioration, but fish populations were still decent and included Red Snapper (15-20/1-8lbs.), Sheepshead (10-15/ 1-5lbs.), Triggerfish (5-8/1-2lbs.), Spadefish (75-100), and Mangrove Snapper (4-6/1-3lbs.). Soft corals were prevalent on what barge deck was left. Small sand bass were observed, but no damsels or arrow crabs.

One of the Corps Barge satellite rubble reefs was also visited on May 19. The 021108 Rubble at 30/04.745'N / 88/34.525'W showed a good concentration of Red Snapper (75-100/1-8lbs.) as well as a Flounder, Triggerfish (20-25/1-2lbs.), Mangrove Snapper (6-8/1-3lbs.), and warsaw grouper (3/2-6lbs.). An Angel and Soapfish pair provided some entertaining video. Marine fouling was taking place well and over a dozen urchins were noted.