

Mississippi Gulf Fishing Banks, Inc.

Activity Report for the Period July 14 - August 11, 2011

Activity Summary

During this period there was 1 Reef Monitoring Trip. On August 6, a trip was made to visit the Gerald Corcoran (Linda Susan), the Great Wicomico Pogey Boat, and the Tiger Shark in FH-13. In addition, Rig VK68, the V-Rig Air Force Tower, and the Fox Tug were visited to the South and East of FH-13 to compare water quality and reef life with FH-13. There has been talk of acquiring a permitted Reef Site in this direction.

Dive Summaries

The first dive was made on the Gerald Corcoran Reef (435F13), also known as the Linda Susan (Vessel Name). This 145' River Tug Boat was deployed on June 24, 2006 and is sitting upright in about 86' of water at the South End of FH-13 (29°59.794'N / 88°29.892'W). The water was somewhat milky but did provide 20-30 feet of visibility at the Wheel House. It dropped significantly below the Deck. A minimum depth reading of 52 feet was recorded and 57 feet at the port rail on top of the Wheel House. Fish observations included Red Snapper (10-15/2-15lbs.), Gag Grouper (8-10/6-15lbs.), Mangrove Snapper (3-6/1-4lbs.), Triggerfish (3-6/1-2lbs.), Sheepshead (1), Scamp (1). There were no tropicals observed at all and the general fish population appeared to be significantly declined when compared to the last visit. While some urchins were observed, some of them appeared distressed, an indication of poor water conditions.

The next dive was made on the Great Wicomico Pogey Boat (517F13). This 175' Pogey Boat was donated by Omega Protein and deployed in 86' of water on November 24, 2009 at the South End of FH-13 (29°59.527'N / 88°30.610'W). The fish population was much more pronounced on this reef and included Red Snapper (75-100/2-20lbs.), Gag Grouper (8-12/6-15lbs.), Mangrove Snapper (25-30/2-6lbs.), Triggerfish (6-8), Sheepshead (1), Scamp (1) as well as Tomtates and other bait fish. Depth readings included a minimum reading of 54' at one of the few remaining Fads, 62' at the top of the light masts, 66' on the Deck Rails, 69' on the Deck, 72' on the Starboard Rail outside the Wheel House Doorway, and 66' on the top of the Smoke Stack. One of the Gag Grouper had a significant gash on the top of his head and could be used to identify this fish on a revisit.

The next dive was made on the Tiger Shark Shrimp Boat (495F13). This large Shrimp Boat was rescued from the beach in Biloxi and deployed in 88 feet of water on September 7, 2009 at the Southeast end of FH-13 (30°00.291'N / 88°29.700'W). Unfortunately, as the Vessel sank, the Starboard Boom swung in toward the bow and the imbalance of weight caused the Vessel to list badly. She sunk bow down hard into the bottom and then listed over onto her port side. A minimum depth reading of 51 feet was recorded during her deployment, but a reading of 62' was taken on this visit at the top of the mast and ladder. Other depth readings were 78' Starboard Gunwale, 74' starboard wheelhouse, 81' port stern wheelhouse, and 70' booms. The fish observations were extremely weak yielding only some schools of small menhaden and a half dozen red snapper of less than 1 pound size. This reef is physically not far away from the other 2 reefs and it is unknown why there is such a difference in the performance of this reef.

Following the visit to these three FH-13 reefs, we ventured first South to Oil Rig VK68 (29°54.191'N / 88°29.094'W) and then East to the V-Rig Air Force Tower (29°52.649'N / 88°18.986'W) and the Fox Tug Wreck (29°54'N / 88°16'W). It was desired to compare the reefs in these areas since the group was discussing obtaining an additional permitted site in this direction. The VK68 Rig seemed to have similar water conditions as FH-13, but the other two sites were significantly better. The top water was not so milky and the bottom visibility was much better. Even the water color had more blue on those two sites when compared to FH-13. Also the fish populations were thriving. Fish Observations on the Fox Tug included Red Snapper (150-175/2-20lbs.), Gag Grouper (6-8/6-15lbs.), Warsaw Grouper (1/8-10lbs.), Sheepshead (1), Drum (6-8), and Vermillion Snapper (50-75/1-3lbs.). Spadefish and Blue Runner were also seen. Also sighted were Tropical fish such as Blue Angels and Cocoa Damsels whereas none of these species were sighted on FH-13 this year as they were last year. It is unknown whether the BP Oil Spill has contributed to these changes or if some other events such as Fertilizer runoff, or the heavy fresh water spring flooding, or something else is causing them, but there is definitely some change going on. This FH-13 area is more impacted by the Pascagoula River and Back Bay Biloxi River Systems than the Mississippi River and they did not experience flooding this year. However, Spillways were opened to Lake Pontchartrain and that would affect this area. Scientific data collection and analysis are needed to investigate this water quality problem. As far as the interest in an additional site to the East and South of FH-13, it is recommended to pursue this as it would produce more efficient and higher quality fishing and diving reefs.

See the Pictures and Video Links at http://gallery.primofish.com/2011/Fishing_Diving/MGFB/110806_FH-13-East/

The Youtube Videos can also be found on my YouTube Channel at <http://youtube.com/markprimo>