

Mississippi Gulf Fishing Banks, Inc.

Activity Report for the Period June 14 - August 9, 2012

Activity Summary

During this period there were 4 Reef Monitoring Trips. On July 4, a dive monitoring trip was made to the Great Wicomico Pogey Boat (091124/517F13) and the Gerald Corcoran Tug Boat (060624/435F13) in FH-13. On July 14, a dive monitoring trip was made to the Fireboat (070308/468F2), the Reef Balls (081002b/489F2), the Captain Kevin (060424/433F2), and the St. Elmo (081011b/491F2) in FH-2. On July 16, video was taken of the NASA BRT (111026/545F13) in FH-13. On August 5, a dive monitoring trip was made to Barge-A (840701/21F1), the Ole Faithful Shrimp Boat (100428/534F1), and the Casino Magic Barge (021119/324F1) in FH-1.

Dive Summaries

Equipment failure on June 30 resulted in the flooding of the T1i Camera that was being used to video the reefs. A lower cost alternative GoPro camera was purchased and this July 4 trip was the first test of it. The results were somewhat disappointing with a blurry image underwater. It was later learned that a flat lens retrofit kit or the GoPro Dive Housing was needed to remedy the problem. Even still it appears that you "get what you pay for" so some future options may be discussed at the next meeting.

The dive observations on the Great Wicomico (29°59.527'N / 88°30.610'W) and the Gerald Corcoran (29°59.527'N / 88°30.610'W) were consistent with previous trips, but the population of larger red snapper were diminished probably due to the recreational season opening on June 1. The trip to FH-2 on July 14 was met with more favorable conditions for a change. Visibility on bottom was over 20 feet, however, the Stock GoPro housing was still being used so the video came out blurry. The Fireboat Vessel (30°05.360N 88°32.957W) is subsiding considerably into the bottom yielding the gunnels almost level with the surrounding bottom. The Stern is showing a couple feet of relief and the bow about 4 feet. Fish observations were still good with several larger Gag Grouper and Red Snapper in the 10-20 pound class seen. Spadefish and Sheepshead were also sighted. Baitfish schools thrived throughout the reef. The Reef Balls (30°05.216'N / 88°33.280'W) are doing very well also. Quite a few baitfish and juvenile Red Snapper abound throughout the Reef. The Captain Kevin Shrimp Boat (30°05.099'N / 88°33.490'W) is producing well and collecting several anchors within her rigging. Larger Red Snapper were also seen probably due to the rigging causing break offs. The rigging also seemed to attract more baitfish like cigar and glass minnows. Arrow Crabs and Cocoa Damsels were also sighted. This Vessel too is subsiding into the bottom with about 5 feet of relief showing at the Stern. The St. Elmo Shrimp Boat (30°04.820'N / 88°33.278'W) has less rigging to sport but still had a good population of baitfish. Several descent game fish including Scamp and Gag Grouper were seen. In the hold of the vessel, there was a very healthy population of Mangrove and Red Snapper in the 8-20 pound class. Sightings also included Cocoa Damsels and a Blue Angel. This vessel did not show as much subsidence into the bottom as the other vessels. Despite being sunk on October 11, 2008, this Vessel shows a good deal of growth encrustation and large soft corals.

On July 16, a short video was made of the BRT for comparison with past and future footage of this relatively new reef that was deployed in October 2011. The reef is not producing many gamefish yet, but is sporting many baitfish like cigar minnows. Spadefish and juvenile Red Snapper abound as do Spiny Sea Urchins. Barnacle encrustation is evident only on the upper part of the reef.

On August 5, a trip was conducted to FH-1 with the first visit to Barge-A (30°03.605'N / 88°36.636'W 68' Depth). This 180' X 70' X 12' Barge was sunk in the Summer of 1984. Despite its age, the overall structure, including the deck, has held up very well. It has showed very little scouring or deterioration. On November 8, 2001 the reef was augmented by concrete rubble, some of which landed on top of the barge. Due to its success, Reef Balls were deployed on top of the Deck as well as the surrounding north area on October 6, 2009. This mature reef sports a forest of soft corals across her deck as well as scattered pieces of hard corals. Vegetation, including sea lettuce, is much more pronounced in FH-1 (and FH-12) when compared to FH-13 and FH-2. Some scouring at the bow is evident and a max depth reading of 71 feet was taken there. The Barge lip at this location was 60' showing little subsidence over the years. Most of the concrete and reef balls on the deck show a depth of about 56 feet with fads reaching upward of 46 feet of relief. Red Snapper, Sheepshead, and Spadefish abound. There is also a healthy population of juvenile Red Snapper. The Ole Faithful Shrimp Boat (30°03.276'N / 88°36.488'W 68' Depth) was deployed on April 28, 2010. It is showing a good population of baitfish and Spades but not many gamefish. The Minimum depth reading was 45 feet on the mast. The bow had a depth reading of 50 feet, the Starboard Stern 62 feet and the Port Stern Bottom was measuring 70 feet. The Casino Magic Barge (30°03.147'N / 88°36.448'W) is 250' long and was deployed in FH-1 on November 19, 2002 along with 60 Armored Personnel Carriers (APCs). Two APCs were left on the Deck of the Barge near the Stern, but have since disappeared. The vegetation seems especially thick on this Barge and the populations of fish diminished. Triggerfish were sighted, however, whereas none were seen on Barge-A or the Faithful. On March 25, 2011, this reef was augmented with Culverts on the north end (30°03.158'N / 88°36.442'W 72' Depth).