

Mississippi Gulf Fishing Banks, Inc.

Activity Report for the Period April 12 - June 14, 2012

Activity Summary

During this period there were 2 Reef Monitoring Trips. On May 5, a dive monitoring trip was made to the Southern Star (100331a/526F13) in FH-13 and to the Jumbo Barge (860701/125/F7) in FH-7. On May 27, a dive monitoring trip was conducted on the Rowan Crew Quarters (931101/133F7) and Jumbo Barge (860701/125F7) in FH-7. A water quality sampling trip was scheduled for June 9 with the GCRL, but weather conditions caused it to be aborted. A new date is still pending.

Dive Summaries

The Southern Star (100331A/526F13) is an 80' Shrimp Boat that was deployed on March 31, 2010 in the central-northeast area of FH-13 (30°02.082'N / 88°30.916'W 76' Depth). She is sitting upright with the Bow facing at about 130° with a Water Clearance of about 41' due to her 2 rigging masts. On May 5, the visit encountered very murky conditions on the hull itself, but the masts protruded up into some clear water that offered fish observations that included red snapper (75-100/2-20 pounds), sheepshead (5-10), and spadefish (175-200). Some video was taken showing a red snapper being released from the boat and swimming down to the structure. Due to the murky conditions, efforts were abandoned here and the venture was continued much further south to FH-7.

We then visited the Jumbo Barge (860701/125F7 - 30°00.391'N / 88°30.906'W) in FH-7. This large Sea-Going Barge was deployed in 1986, but few details were recorded at the time. It is estimated to be around 400 feet in length with a two story wheel house facing in a north direction. On this visit, there was a heavy murk layer covering the wreck and it was never found for structural observations. Fish sightings above the structure included blue runners (75-100), spadefish (100-125), triggerfish (6-10), red snapper (100-150/2-25lbs.), and an amberjack (20-25 lbs.). The lone Amberjack was significant since the last several visits have shown this structure void of this previously popular species.

On May 27, we made our first dive on the Gerald Corcoran Reef in FH-13, but it was completely covered in the murk layer, so we headed south. This trip was actually a combination work-fun trip as it was Luke's 15th Birthday and he invited some Friends to go diving. We visited the Salt Dome and some shelf rigs before coming back in to FH-7 and conducting our monitoring work. We were delighted on this trip to be blessed with better visibility. Water in the middle approached 200 feet of visibility and even near the bottom it was 20-35 feet. We first visited the Rowan Crew Quarters (931101/133F7 - 29°37.230'N/88°23.863'W). This 120' X 35' X 35' derelict crew quarter structure was deployed by Rowan Drilling Company on November 1, 1993 while the "Perfect Storm" was causing havoc in the Northeast. Sitting in 128-130 feet of water, this structure used to rise to a depth of about 96 feet providing an excellent reef for Amberjack, Grouper, and Snapper. Depth readings on this visit showed the structure rises to only 121 feet compared to 118 feet during a 2009 visit. Hurricane Katrina obviously caused some significant structure loss. There was some railing still evident which also showed a depth reading of 121 feet. Fish sightings were dominated by red snapper (200-250/2-30 lbs.) and several grouper species, Gag (4-6/8-20 lbs.), Scamp (6-10/4-10 lbs.), Red (2-3/6-10lbs.), and Warsaw (1/25-30lbs.). There was also an abundance of soft corals littering this structure. We had a shark encounter as well as an encounter with a healthy pod of dolphins after coming up from this first dive.

Our next visit was to the Jumbo Barge (860701/125F7 - 30°00.391'N / 88°30.906'W). The bow was determined to be about 23.5 feet above the bottom in 1989. Depth measurements on this visit showed 117 feet at the top of the bow eye as well as on the Starboard Bollard, and 138 feet on the bottom at the bow yielding about 21 feet off the bottom. The minimum depth reading was 111 feet. The upper story deck is still intact and open underneath with much decay showing on the sidewalls. Compared to the Rowan, visibility was better on the structure (maybe 25-35 feet), there were more juvenile Red Snapper (200-250/1-4lbs.), Triggerfish (6-10), Mangrove Snapper (6-10/1-4lbs.) and Blue Runners (75-100), and it too was littered with soft corals. In addition, a pair of spotfin butterflies were observed. Fish sightings of Scamp were comparable (6-10/4-10lbs.) but there were less populations of other grouper species. Above the structure, red snapper sightings were similar (150-200/6-25lbs.). No Amberjack sightings in FH-7 on this day. Some reef replenishment efforts may be warranted for these reefs in FH-7 to reestablish the higher profile and hopefully entice a renewed amberjack population.

