

Mississippi Department of Marine Resources

**Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
Mississippi State Report
January – February**



The Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (MDMR) is responsible for enhancing, protecting and conserving marine interests of the state. The Office of Marine Fisheries is directly responsible for managing commercial, recreational, educational and economic uses of these resources.

ADMINISTRATIVE ACTIONS

Effective February 24, 2015 the Mississippi Commission on Marine Resources (CMR) approved a Notice of Intent to modify sections of Title 22 Part 7 *Regulations to Provide Size Limits and Bag Limits on Certain Fish Species and to Prevent Sale of Seafood by Recreational Fishermen*. The proposed modification pertains to allowing for-hire vessels to obtain a two-day bag limit endorsement of spotted seatrout, red drum and southern flounder for \$100.00 per year. If seeking the two-day bag limit endorsement, the vessel must obtain a float plan from the MDMR prior to each trip.

ARTIFICIAL REEF BUREAU

The Artificial Reef Bureau monitored fish assemblages and physiochemical parameters in Hancock, Harrison, and Jackson counties (one site in each county per month). These sites are monitored as part of an ongoing sampling effort to gather fisheries independent data around inshore artificial reefs. These data can be used to assess species diversity and use of inshore artificial reefs. Knowledge of the fish communities that utilize these reefs will help the bureau with management decisions.

In addition to monitoring habitat, the Artificial Reef Bureau worked on securing and deploying more structure. Staff members progressed with organizing the deployment of a 165 foot pogy boat in Fish Haven 13. In addition, personnel continued to coordinate the deployment of concrete culverts in Fish Haven 13. The deployment of these structures will create valuable habitat for recreationally and commercially important species and local fishing opportunities.

Artificial Reef Bureau members attended four meetings with Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (GSMFC). At these meetings, preparations and protocols for the Gulf Artificial Reef Monitoring and Assessment Program (GARMAP) were discussed. This project will lead to a standardized method to collect fisheries independent data in the Gulf of Mexico.

The Artificial Reef Bureau also attended several other events and meetings. On January 12th and 13th, staff participated in and presented at the joint GSMFC & ASMC meeting in Clearwater Beach, FL. On January 26th and 27th, Artificial Reef Bureau members attended the Gulf Council meeting in Fairhope, AL. These meetings provided personnel the opportunity to learn about updates on artificial habitat and important fisheries species.

FINFISH BUREAU

The Finfish Bureau continued to oversee the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP). All assignments in January and February were completed and surveys obtained were reviewed and processed before being sent to the GSMFC office for processing. In the first two months of 2015, there were a total of 52 ramp surveys and 15 shore surveys in Jackson, Harrison and Hancock Counties. Survey site validations to update the site registry for 2015 and state-wide site effort estimates continued to be refined in an effort to improve the accuracy of the survey. The for-hire vessel frame was evaluated and edited to better reflect our most recent and updated state license file. This will allow MDMR employees to develop a more comprehensive and accurate active vessel frame to more precisely estimate for-hire effort.

A total of 41 otoliths were collected in January and February. Samples were collected from six different species: Atlantic Croaker, Black Drum, Sheepshead, Red Drum, Spotted Seatrout and Striped Mullet. Samples are processed as part of the MDMR biological sampling program. The data collected through this process will aid in management decisions for our state and are submitted to the GSMFC in addition to the FIN Data Management System for use in upcoming stock assessments.

Finfish staff continued to target Red Drum in Mississippi coastal waters as part of an ongoing research-oriented project aimed at filling in age and size information gaps of Red Drum in Mississippi waters. The Red Drum project began in February of 2014 to target fish of size 20-30 inches. Red Drum within this size range have been missing from past and current monitoring projects. The project utilizes four 300 foot gill nets of various mesh sizes (5.5, 6.0, 6.5, and 7.0 inches) at several inshore locations, as well as an 800 foot strike net with four continuous sections of the same size mesh that is employed only during select months in fall and spring. In addition, samples have been collected on a voluntary basis from recreational fishermen. These samples will be used to enhance existing data sets in order to complete a Red Drum stock assessment currently underway.

At the September CMR meeting, the decision was made to require mandatory reporting of Red Snapper harvest and effort information for any future Red Snapper fishing seasons. MDMR has contracted with an information technology consulting organization to develop a mobile application and corresponding website that will allow MDMR to electronically track and record all recreational Red Snapper landings in Mississippi. This application will provide recreational

anglers with an easily accessible and simple way to report their Red Snapper catch information in addition to supplying the MDMR Office of Marine Fisheries with a large amount of valuable harvest and effort data. Finfish Bureau members attended monthly meetings of local recreational fishing clubs for outreach purposes to inform the public of the mandated reporting and will continue to update local anglers on the progress of the mobile application.

SHRIMP AND CRAB BUREAU

Mississippi Territorial Waters North of the Intracoastal Waterway (ICW) closed to shrimping at 12:00 a.m. on January 1st, 2015. Shrimping remains open south of the ICW until April 30th, 2015. These seasonal area closures occur annually to protect the incoming season's shrimp crop.

The Shrimp and Crab Bureau continued monthly monitoring of shrimp populations in the Mississippi Sound through trawl sampling at historical stations as well as collection of monthly landings data. Long term fishery independent trawl sampling was also conducted in conjunction with the NOAA Project "Monitoring and Assessment of Mississippi's Interjurisdictional Marine Resources." Cooperation continued with the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory on commercial and recreational Blue Crab Catch per Unit Effort projects.

Bureau personnel also coordinated and administered U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Sport Fish Restoration Projects, Issued Scientific Collection Permits per Title 22 Part 18, and inspected and licensed Live Bait Catcher Boats per Title 22 Part 6. The Shrimp and Crab Bureau represented the Mississippi Blue Crab Fishery at the Gulf Coast Diamondback Terrapin Working Group and GSMFC TCC Crab Subcommittee Meetings in Lafayette, LA.

SEAFOOD TECHNOLOGY BUREAU

To ensure Federal Drug Administration (FDA) compliance, in January, Seafood Technology Bureau (STB) staff initiated mandatory yearly recertification of all 56 permitted processors. These recertifications as well as initial certifications must meet regulations mandated in the National Shellfish Sanitation Program (NSSP) Guide for the Control of Molluscan Shellfish as well as state statutes. In addition to recertifications Seafood Officers issued two new certifications.

In order to provide members of the seafood industry with the most qualified service, staff completed training in CPR, and attended an aquaponic webinar.

Technical assistance was provided in relation to proper labeling of shellfish products, an inoperable marine sanitation device, and time/temperature shellfish shipping regulations. Staff collected several water samples in response to relocation of several shellfish shippers in the newly constructed Pass Christian harbor. Staff assisted the office of Marine Fisheries in hosting the FD242 Sanitary Surveys of Shellfish Growing Areas February 24-26 facilitating training of

new regional and international regulators. The purpose of the course was to introduce methods of shoreline survey, basic concepts of sanitation for shellfish growing and harvest areas, and identifying diseases associated with shellfish.

Staff attended a Food Safety Task force meeting hosted by the Mississippi Department of Health in Jackson, MS. The goal of the meeting was to increase awareness and encourage partnerships among state agencies to ensure public safety.

SHELLFISH BUREAU

The limited 2014 - 2015 Mississippi Oyster Season opened for the harvest of oysters on November 14, 2014 for tonging and dredging in the western Mississippi sound. During January and February, the oyster season was open for a total of 24 out of the possible 50 days. Many harvesting areas were forced to shut down during this time due to rainfall totals and river stages exceeding management plan criteria and bacteriological water samples exceeding safe shellfish consumption criteria. As of February 28th, season totals were: 3,336 harvesting trips and 26,007 sacks harvested from oyster reefs in the western Mississippi Sound.

Shellfish staff continued monthly analysis of oyster beds by performing weekly water samples, quantitative measurements of existing stocks using one-minute oyster dredge tows, and twice monthly phytoplankton tows. A total of 108 bacteriological water samples were collected throughout these two months.

Shellfish Staff conducted oyster sanitation seminars for oyster harvesters where participants learn important information regarding basic handling techniques, hygiene, and regulations regarding safe harvest of oysters from Mississippi's public oyster reefs. A total of 427 oyster harvesters have successfully completed this training session since April, 2014. Harvesters are required to renew this training every two years in order to purchase a Mississippi oyster harvesters license.

The Shellfish Bureau received \$60,829.29 from the Fish America Foundation for successfully completing the Deer Island Oyster Restoration Project. The Bureau also received an additional \$19,487.79 from The Nature Conservancy totaling \$80,317.08 in grant reimbursement funds that were applied to the Shell Retention Fee account.

Shellfish Staff hosted 40 college level volunteers and chaperones from Ohio State University and California Lutheran University who deployed approximately 200 shell bags and 200 buckets of shell on the north side of Deer Island. During their visit, the volunteers also assisted in the clearing of Coastal Preserve's public trails on Deer Island.

Training for the Shellfish staff during this time included: FDA Shellfish Sanitation Class conducted by FDA, Boaters' Safety Course conducted by MDMR and Heart-Saver and AED certification.

In January, the Shellfish Bureau held a public hearing regarding the use of basket dredges for harvesting oysters on Mississippi reefs. Attendees were encouraged to speak to the group on their concerns about basket dredges and were asked to complete a survey regarding common dredging practices. Public comments were reported to the Commission on Marine Resources for review and consideration.

OFFICE OF MARINE PATROL

For the months of January and February 2015, officers made 2282 stops. These stops resulted in 42 state citations for various seafood and boat and water safety violations.

For the months of January and February 2015, officers conducted 13 Joint Enforcement Agreement patrols resulting in 484 man hours with 300 at sea hours. These patrols made 169 contacts and there were 10 state citations issued. There were no Enforcement Action Reports issued during this time period. On January 15, 2015, MDMR Officers worked a Joint Detail with Alabama Marine Resources, LA Wildlife and Fisheries, NOAA and MS DOT, at the I-10 East bound Weigh Scales in Hancock County, MS and the I-10 West bound Weigh Scales in Jackson County, MS.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

On January 27 and 28, Artificial Reef staff attended Capitol Day in Jackson, MS. On the 6th through the 8th of February the Artificial Reef Bureau volunteered at the Biloxi Boat and R.V. Show in Biloxi, MS. These events gave personnel the opportunity to speak with the public and discuss the artificial reef program.

In February, staff conducted a seafood safety presentation for students at the Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College (MGCCC) Jefferson Davis Campus in Gulfport, MS.

MDMR Marine Patrol officers taught three Boat and Water Safety Classes which resulted in 55 students being certified. Officers participated in two outreach programs in January and February.