

## **MISSISSIPPI OYSTER RESTORATION EFFORTS POST HURRICANE KATRINA**

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Keywords: oyster beds, cultch plants, Hurricane Katrina, restoration

On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina made its final landfall on the Mississippi and Louisiana state line as a Category 3 Hurricane. The powerful east side of the hurricane passed over the southwest and central Mississippi coastline with a 27 foot storm surge. The surge spread six (6) miles inland and twelve (12) miles within some bay and river areas. Katrina produced the highest documented storm surge in the history of the United States. Sustained winds reached up to 120 mph.

Prior to the storm, there were roughly 12,000 acres of oyster beds along the Mississippi Gulf Coast. The majority of these were located south and east of the coastal region of Hancock County, directly in the path of Hurricane Katrina. Nearly 95 percent of these oyster beds were destroyed or damaged by Hurricane Katrina leaving the oyster industry completely devastated. The year prior to the hurricane, over 200,000 sacks of oysters were harvested and 240 resident dredging and tonging licenses were sold. Because of the devastation caused by hurricane Katrina, these oystermen were put out of business.

The Mississippi Department of Marine Resources Shellfish Bureau began considerable efforts to rebuild the oyster beds by conducting cultch plants. Material such as oyster shells or crushed concrete were loaded onto barges and carried out to the damaged oyster beds. The material was distributed evenly throughout each bed using high pressure water hoses. The cultch material provided for a clean surface where oyster larvae were able to attach and grow. Since Hurricane Katrina, there have been five major cultch plants. Over 142,370 cubic yards of cultch material have been distributed on top of the previous oyster bed areas. As of today, 2,504 acres of oyster beds have been replanted.

Since the cultch plantings have taken place, the number of licenses sold for dredging and tonging have increased to pre-hurricane levels. With just a few months into the 2009 oyster season, Mississippi has already surpassed the amount of sacks harvested for the entire 07-08 oyster season. The cultch plantings have shown to be an enormous success and allowed the oystermen to return to their chosen profession.

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