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Reef Fish Assessment for Mississippi Coastal and Nearshore Waters: Restoration through Improved Data Collection and Management – Phases III and IV

RECIPIENT
Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality

AWARD AMOUNT
$5,962,000

PARTNERS
Mississippi Department of Marine Resources

University of Southern Mississippi

LOCATION
Mississippi Gulf Coast

AWARD DATE
March 2019—Phase III
November 2019—Phase IV

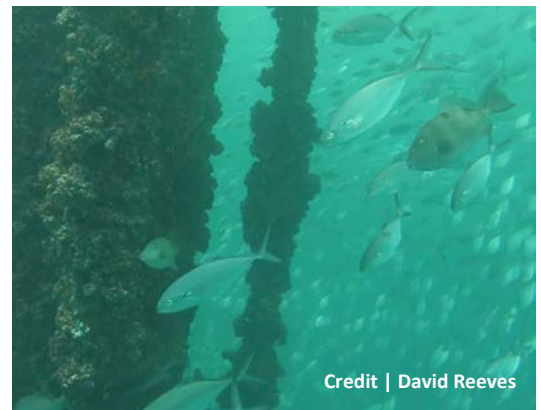**STATUS**
Active—Phase III
Awarded—Phase IV

This project will complete the final phases of data collection efforts to assess reef fish populations in Coastal Mississippi and nearshore Gulf waters. The assessment will provide data necessary for reducing scientific uncertainty of factors influencing red snapper and other reef fish populations. Sampling will continue to inform management to support restoration of these populations. Information produced from the proposed assessment will be comparable to data collected in Alabama and Florida fisheries monitoring efforts, thereby enhancing the program's regional knowledge of red snapper and other reef associated species. Data from this project will continue to allow the State of Mississippi to improve its management of coastal fisheries. The final deliverable of this project is a final report summarizing the overall significance of all four phases.

The State of Mississippi currently manages more than 16,000 acres of permitted offshore artificial reef sites at 15 areas north and south of its barrier islands, and numerous oil and gas platforms that serve as habitat for reef fishes in adjacent Gulf of Mexico waters. Reef habitats off Mississippi lie north of the Deepwater Horizon (DWH) spill site. This proposal represents phases III and IV of Mississippi's effort to address the GEBF funding priorities associated with improving red snapper and reef fish data collection to promote sustainable fisheries through improved management. It will also provide new and vital information on artificial reef ecosystem dynamics in Mississippi and adjacent Gulf waters. Analysis and results from this work are already contributing to the scientific knowledge base, and being shared with colleagues throughout the Gulf and informing management of fisheries.

Credit | David Reeves

Above, Gray Triggerfish, Blue Runner, and Atlantic Bumper around a petroleum platform in Gulf of Mexico waters.