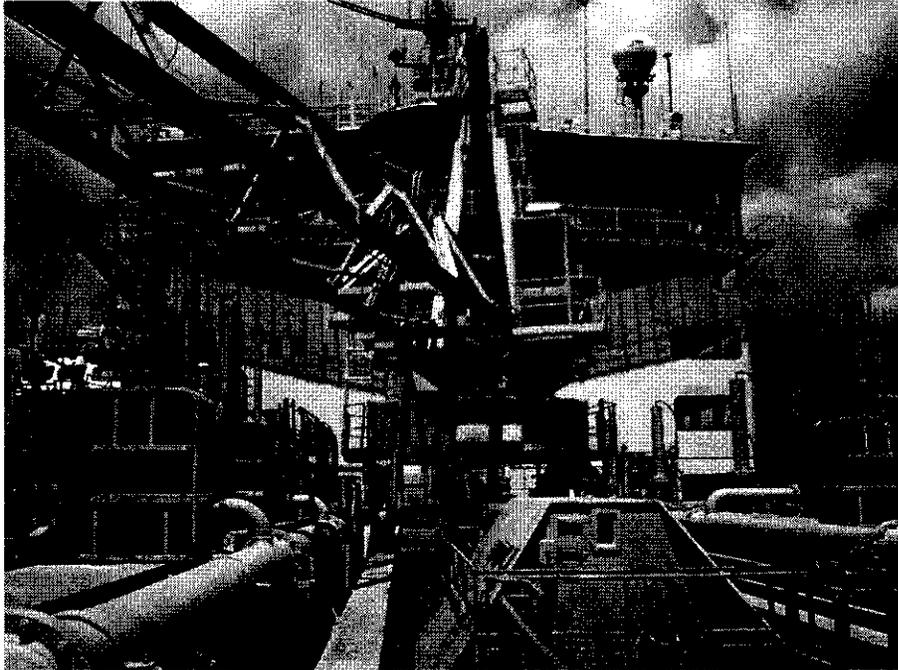


FINAL REPORT

Marine Endangered Species Monitoring Program
Weeks Marine, Inc.
Galveston District

Maintenance Project
Mississippi River Gulf Outlet

Dates: 09 September – 14 September 2003



Submitted by:

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ABSTRACT

A twenty-four hour per day marine endangered species monitoring program was conducted onboard hopper dredge *Wheeler* (09 September through 14 September 2003) during the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet maintenance project. Endangered and threatened sea turtles *Caretta caretta* (loggerhead), *Chelonia mydas* (green), *Lepidochelys kempii* (Kemp's ridley), *Dermochelys coriacea* (leatherback) and *Eretmochelys imbricata* (hawksbill) were the species targeted. Two takes were recorded with four incidents. Both takes was reported as a *Caretta caretta* (loggerheads).

INTRODUCTION

The REMSA Inc. Marine Endangered Species Observer Division was subcontracted by the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers (ACOE) in the New Orleans District to monitor the impact of dredging on endangered sea turtle species in the area of the dredge operation. Pursuant to agreements with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), two certified observers were required onboard during the months of prime sea turtle activity for that area to document any detected incidents involving target species.

SCOPE OF WORK

REMSA provided the necessary trained personnel and equipment to clean and monitor inflow screens onboard the hopper dredge *Wheeler* for the necessary reports. Monitoring was performed 24 hours each day starting 09 September through project completion 14 September 2003. Observers inspected and cleaned all inflow and overflow screens, and inspected (both) dragheads each time they were brought on deck for cleaning and maintenance. Any death or injury involving target species, the loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta*), green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*), Kemp's ridley turtle (*Lepidochelys kempii*), leatherback turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*), and hawksbill turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) were to be identified, logged, measured, and photographed. Disposal of any animals recovered was the responsibility of the observer and dredge personnel. A load sheet was completed for each load whether or not turtle parts were found. In the case of an incident or take involving a sea turtle, incident report forms were to be completed and the observers are to contact NMFS and the COE within twenty-four hours of the incident. Daylight bridge watch was conducted during periods when the observer was not occupied with screen cleaning duties. Observers ensured that dredge crew personnel were aware of the need to avoid incidents involving any endangered animal, and that civil and criminal penalties are possible for harming or harassing endangered species.

METHODS

Dredge coverage began when the observers arrived onboard the Dredge *Wheeler* (09 September through 14 September 2003) in Mississippi River Gulf Outlet. Two certified observers were present during prime sea turtle activity working 12 hour shifts.

The dredge *Wheeler* functioned with 100% inflow screening with sea turtle draghead deflectors being used. The screening baskets were fitted with 4" x 4" screening material to insure that parts of targeted species would not be allowed to flow through into the hopper. All dragheads and screening baskets were checked after each load of the observers 12-hour shift. The appropriate forms were filled out, noting any incidents

regarding targeted species as well as the marine life present in the inflow and overflow boxes.

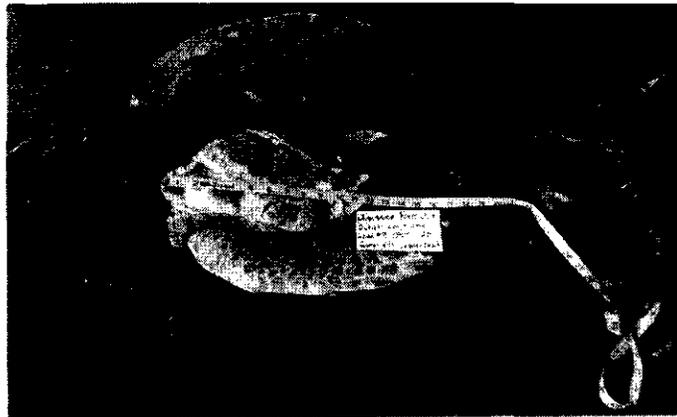
A bridge lookout was maintained during those daylight hours that the observer was not on deck checking screens. Watch was kept for turtles in the dredging area and dump site.

RESULTS

There were four reported incidents during the project period, with two recorded as dredge takes. The takes were identified as loggerhead turtles (*Caretta caretta*). Take #1, (incident #1 and #2) on load #9, two half carapace fragments of a loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta*) were recovered. Take #2, (incident #3) load #41, the carapace and flipper of a loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta*) was recovered. Incident #4 was recorded on load #42. This incident contained a fraction of the same turtle (*Caretta caretta*) counted as take #2, on load #41. All fragments were reported to be fresh, resulting in four incidents and two takes for the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet. Proper incident reports were completed and faxed to NMFS (Appendix 1). Copies of the incident report were turned in to ACOE personnel and to NMFS.

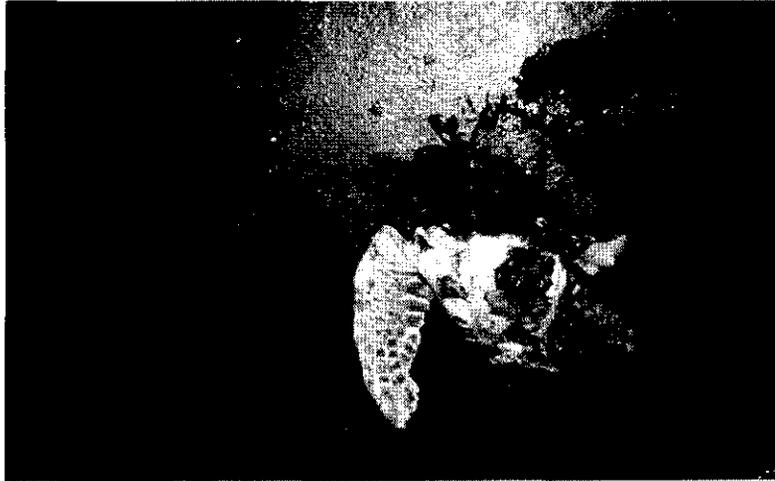
The mean sea temperature during this period averaged twenty-nine 29 ° Celsius with a fluctuation of +/- 2°C. All species found in the discharge boxes were identified and recorded in daily report sheets to provide information for biological by-catch in the surrounding area.

Take #1
Incident #1 and #2
Two halves
Load # 9
Mississippi River Gulf Outlet Louisiana
10 Sept. 2003
Caretta caretta



Take #2

Incident #3
Load #41
Mississippi River Gulf Outlet Louisiana
14 Sept. 2003
Caretta caretta



Incident #4
Load #42
14 Sept. 2003
Mississippi River Gulf Outlet Louisiana
14 Sept. 2003
Caretta caretta



SUMMARY

On 9 September 2003, the hopper dredge *Wheeler* began dredging in Mississippi River Gulf Outlet, Louisiana. Dredging was conducted for a total of five days with a total of 50 loads. On 10 September 2003, incident 1 and 2 was reported. The observer on the dredge *Wheeler* reported two carapace halves of a loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta*) which resulted in take # 1 on load #9. On 14 Sept 2003, take #2 (incident 3) was reported on load #41. The specimen recovered was the left side of a carapace, flipper and head of a loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta*). Incident 4, load #42, a portion of a carapace was retrieved from the discharge boxes and recorded as being part of the loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta*) from take 2, load #41. Information was recorded and copies were made for the ACOE and NMFS.

If there are any questions regarding this report please feel free to contact me at the number below.

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Appendix 1
Sea Turtle Incident Reports