



August 7, 2013

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Subject: Clearances over Offshore Reef Sites

Mr. Sanders and Mr. Miller,

I am the cartographer in NOAA's Marine Chart Division who is responsible for conducting research on artificial reefs permitted by the Mobile District USACE.

The purpose of this letter is to inform you that five Mississippi Offshore Reef Sites, FH-4, FH-12, FH-13, FH-14, and Cat Island Reef, are depicted on the NOAA nautical charts with permitted minimum depths that are deeper than deployed materials in each reef. All deployed materials within these reefs should be deeper than the permitted minimum depth.

My discovery of these depth/clearance discrepancies is based on NOAA survey reports and the clearance depths listed in the spreadsheet that is posted to the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources Reef website. I have included a copy of that spreadsheet; the clearances that are shallower than permitted reef depths have been highlighted in yellow. There is no indication in the spreadsheet of the tidal datum for each clearance (MHW, MLW, MLLW, etc.)

FH-4, FH-12, FH-13 and FH-14 were covered during NOAA hydrographic surveys. The surveys were of large extent and encompassed these reefs.

During the survey of FH-4 in 2011, a 22-foot obstruction was discovered within the limits of the reef. A 22-foot wreck symbol was subsequently added to the charts since it is shallower than the permitted clearance of 23 feet. The spreadsheet indicates that the clearances of Ship Island Barges A and B are at 21 feet. The NOAA survey did not detect 21-foot depths in the reef.

During the survey of FH-12 in 2013, a 30-foot obstruction was discovered within the limits of the reef. A 30-foot obstruction symbol was subsequently added to the charts since it is shallower than the permitted clearance of 32 feet. The spreadsheet indicates that the Shrimp Boat "Frank Taylor" is cleared at 20 feet and Matthews Barge is cleared at 27 feet. The full NOAA survey of this area has yet to be submitted, but the Danger to Navigation Report of 2013 does not mention any depths shallower than the 30-foot obstruction.

During the survey of FH-13 in 2013, a 43-foot wreck was discovered within the limits of the reef. A 43-foot wreck symbol was subsequently added to the charts since it is shallower than the charted clearance of 50 feet. The spreadsheet indicates that the Shrimp Boat "Southern Star" is cleared at 50 feet; this clearance matches the charted clearance. The full NOAA survey of this area has yet to be submitted, but the Danger to Navigation Report of 2013 does not mention any depths in the reef shallower than the 43-foot obstruction. The USACE permit from 2001 states



that the minimum clearance is 63 feet. We charted the reef at 63 feet clearance per the USACE permit, but the clearance was changed to 50 feet in 2003 through USCG District 8 LNM 46/03. If you have a copy of a permit that changed the permitted clearance to 50 feet, then please send it. The authorized (permitted) clearance of the reef should not have been revised to 50 feet on the nautical chart without a Corps permit.

Regarding FH-14, the spreadsheet indicates that the Shrimp Boat “My Wife II” is cleared at 19 feet. However, the reef is permitted at 20 feet. A survey of FH-14 was conducted in 2011. I have no estimate of when the survey will be processed and then compiled to the nautical charts.

Regarding Cat Island Reef, I have not located any recent NOAA surveys of the reef. The spreadsheet indicates that the deployments of three sets of concrete culverts are cleared to 6 feet. In addition, a wreck with a reported clearance of 1 foot is located inside the reef boundary. The wreck was charted as far back as the early 1990s. However, the reef is permitted at 8 feet.

Even though NOAA surveys have covered some of these areas, please keep in mind that you should monitor these sites regardless of NOAA’s surveying activity. When NOAA survey vessels or NOAA contract surveyors identify a wreck or other obstruction within a charted fish haven and that wreck is shallower than the authorized (permitted) depth, then our division will follow one of two courses of action:

1. Chart the obstruction symbol and retain it on the charts until a report of its removal or reduction has been received and the new clearance at the lowest tidal datum is verified to be below the authorized (permitted) clearance.
2. Remove the obstruction symbol when the reef is re-permitted by the USACE at a clearance depth that is shallower than the obstruction(s).

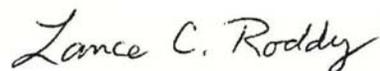
I recommend that you consider the possibility of asking the USACE Mobile District to re-permit the reefs for which deployments are shallower than the permitted depths.

I have included a copy of the Corps permits that authorized the charting of the reefs. Screen captures of these charted reefs are also included.

If you decide to verify the depths within any reefs, then you need to measure the clearances over the structures at Mean Lower Low Water (MLLW) tidal datum.

Please let me know if you have any questions or comments.

Sincerely,



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