

GoMMAPPS: Marine Mammal Assessment Research

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August 23, 2017

The Gulf of Mexico Marine Assessment Program for Protected Species (GoMMAPPS) is a multi-agency program improving information on living marine resource abundance, distribution, and habitat use in the Gulf of Mexico. Marine mammal assessment research consists of seasonal broad-scale assessment surveys which will provide data to construct spatially-explicit density maps for cetacean species to inform a wide variety of management decisions. Three vessel surveys of oceanic waters are planned with data collection including visual surveys, passive acoustic sampling, opportunistic biopsy sampling, oceanographic data, plankton sampling, and seabird surveys. Three aerial surveys will occur over continental shelf waters and consist of visual surveys of marine mammals and sea turtles and other species of interest (sharks, Manta rays, etc.). The summer 2017 aerial and vessel surveys are both underway and have progressed as planned. Preliminary data from the aerial survey (through August 4th) includes 226 marine mammal and 606 sea turtle sightings. Preliminary data from the first 2 legs of the vessel survey consist of 218 marine mammal group sightings including 37 sperm whale, 2 Bryde's whale, and 1 killer whale. In addition, 327 acoustic detections were made, 137 of which were sighted by the visual team also. Both the vessel and aerial surveys will conclude at the end of August. In the upcoming months, data derived from these first surveys will be QA'd/QC'd and prepared for analyses; historical data from previous assessment surveys in the Gulf will be assembled and evaluated, and planning will begin for the winter 2018 surveys.