

Explosive Removal of Structures: Fisheries Impact Assessment

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In 2016, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM), perceived a need for an updated estimate of potential impacts to Gulf of Mexico Fisheries due to OCS explosive decommissioning of offshore oil and gas platforms. On June 15, 2016, the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE) on behalf of BOEM, issued a contract to LGL Ecological Research Associates, Inc. to address this need. The general objectives of this study are to characterize the abundance and distribution of federally-managed fish stocks within the lethal blast radius of explosive severance charges used during decommissioning of fixed OCS platforms. A model is then used to estimate species-specific mortality of the target species and evaluate the significance of these losses to the overall stocks. Year one of a two year sampling program is near completion. Hydroacoustic surveys of fish abundance and distribution have been completed at 30 randomly-selected sites, supplemented by submersible rotating camera videos taken to document the identity of species present. Likewise, age and growth samples have been taken at 26 of the 30 sites. Mark-recapture samples have been obtained at 7 of the 10 sites chosen for this purpose. Site fidelity studies are being conducted at a subset of 3 study sites. Preliminary modeling of mortality associated with explosive decommissioning at shallow platforms suggest a high level of mortality occurs.