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NEWS RELEASE

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**SHIP OF WOOD IN THE DEEP BLUE GULF: FIRST EVER SCIENTIFIC INVESTIGATION OF SHIPWRECK IN
DEEP WATERS OF GULF OF MEXICO**

The first-ever scientific excavation of a deepwater shipwreck in the Gulf of Mexico is about to begin this summer. A 200-year old wreck, found last February by ExxonMobil during pipeline construction, is the subject of an archaeological investigation by the Minerals Management Service and Texas A&M University.

Scientists from the two organizations will photograph and excavate the wooden-hulled sailing ship by using remotely operated vehicles.

The nearly half-mile deep wreck is located about 30 miles off the mouth of the Mississippi River. The lower part of the wreck is nearly intact and is sitting upright on the seafloor. About 60 feet long, the ship's wooden hull is covered with thin copper sheets. Copper was used on ships from the end of the 1700's into the early twentieth century to protect them from wood-eating marine organisms.

Charred planks recovered from the wreck site suggest that the ship may have been burned. The name of the vessel and what it was doing off the coast of Louisiana is unknown. But, scientists hope to solve the mystery this summer with a combination of state-of-the-art technology and old-fashioned research.

ExxonMobil, which first reported the discovery to the agency, sponsored a preliminary expedition to photograph the site. ExxonMobil, and its partner BP, have provided funding for the upcoming archaeological investigation.

Historic preservation is just one of the MMS' many responsibilities in protecting the offshore environment. To meet this responsibility, the agency reviews nearly 1,700 planned wells and pipelines every year for their potential effect on archaeological sites on the outer continental shelf. Because of these reviews, many historic shipwrecks have been discovered on the floor of the Gulf of Mexico.

Several other shipwrecks have been investigated by MMS, including the Civil War Union gunboat USS *Hatteras*, the side-wheel steamer *Josephine*, and in 2001, the World War II German submarine *U-166* and the passenger freighter it sank, the *S.S. Robert E. Lee*.

MMS is the federal agency in the U.S. Department of the Interior that manages the nation's oil, natural gas and other mineral resources on the outer continental shelf in federal offshore waters. The agency also collects, accounts for and disburses mineral revenues from federal and Indian leases. These revenues totaled nearly \$10 billion in 2001 and more than \$120 billion since the agency was created in 1982. Annually, nearly \$1 billion from those revenues go into the Land and Water Conservation Fund for the acquisition and development of state and federal park and recreation lands.

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MMS Internet website address: <http://www.mms.gov>