

August 25, 2003

MEMO

TO:

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FROM:

William Burton (Program Manager)
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SUBJECT:

Progress report for Contract No. 1435-01-02-CT-85060 "Environmental Investigation of the Use of Shoals Offshore Delaware and Maryland by Mobile Benthos and Finfish Species"

This is the third progress report of the MMS finfish study that summarizes our accomplishments on this contract since the last report submitted in May 2003. Late spring sampling was conducted during the reporting period from about May 26 to June 12, 2003. All gill net sets, commercial, and experimental trawling was accomplished without any major problems. The spring 2003 survey showed a transition from spiny dogfish to smooth dogfish dominating the catch. Little and winter skate were also present, as were clearnose skate. Two other shark species were collected during this survey, sand bar shark and a large thresher shark. Spotted hake were still present throughout the survey. Scup and striped searobin were also abundant and present at most sites. In addition, Kyle Hartman from the University of West Virginia conducted several days of nighttime bioacoustics surveys off Versar's RV/Integrity. All field data were reviewed and the data were appended to Versar's growing database for the program. During the reporting period Versar was awarded a task order from the USACE Philadelphia district to conduct similar seasonal fish sampling at two inshore borrow sites near Fenwick Island. One of the two sites was recently mined for a beach replenishment project in the State of Delaware. This USACE work will enhance the MMS study by providing addition reference sites to help place the fish community abundance and composition observed in Federal Waters to those observed in water inside the three-mile limit. Initial collections conducted for the Summer 2003 MMS event and USACE event has already indicated large differences in catch composition between inshore and off-shore habitats (inshore much more productive and more diverse).

We are currently conducting the summer 2003 sampling and anticipate that we will have completed one full survey year by the first week of September 2003.

During the reporting period Dr. Robert Diaz, from VIMS completed his analysis of the bottom images collected in the fall of 2002. This entailed going back over the original tapes and filling in the data gaps from the first interim report. The interim report was used to help select appropriate reference sites; the follow on report will be used to correlate fish community composition with bottom type scheduled for later on in the program. These data were summarized in a final draft report that is current being reviewed by Versar staff. Dr. Diaz also submitted an excel database summarizing the various physical and biological categories assigned to each bottom image. We are currently waiting for Dr. Hartman to submit an interim report on his findings from bioacoustics surveys from Fall 2002 and Spring 2003.