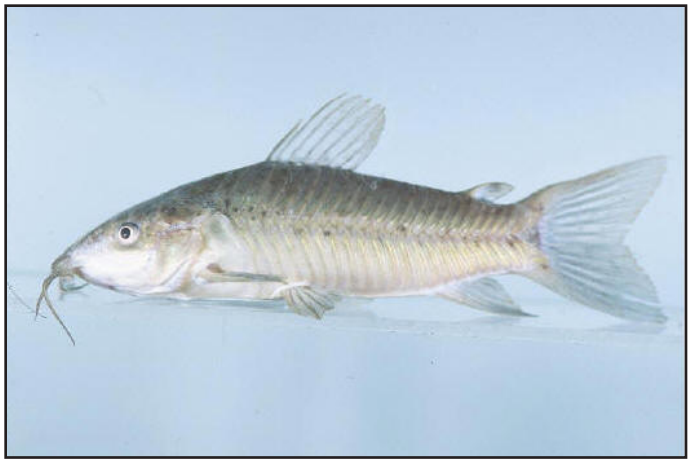
Lagniappe

May 2012 Volume 36, No. 5

Who Knew Catfish Wore Armor?

An armored invader, the plated catfish, has shown up in Gulf waters. The fish is a member of the family *Callichthyids*, which is native to South America. The catfish are typically found in freshwater in their native ranges but also inhabit brackish environments, especially in their invaded range. The fish is nicknamed the “armored catfish” due to the two rows of boney scales running the length of the body that resemble plate-like armor. One species of *Callichthyids*, the brown hoplo, showed up in Florida more than 15 years ago.



Brown Hoplo. Photo credit: Jelks USGS

The brown hoplo (*Hoplosternum littorale)* was first reported as an introduced species in Florida in 1995. It ranges in color from dark brown to black. The fish was first collected in the Indian River Lagoon drainage ditch in Brevard County, centrally located on the east coast of Florida. Currently the hoplo can be found in drainage ditches in central and south Florida and is expanding its range. However, the fish are unable to tolerate low temperatures which may limit its ability to expand to cooler, northern waters. The hoplo is a popular food fish in South America and is gaining popularity in Florida when prepared as an ethnic dish. Fishing for the hoplo is exclusively by cast net. Hook and line is not an effective method for capture as the fish feed exclusively on detritus and bottom dwelling invertebrates. In Florida there are not harvest regulations since the fish is an introduced species.

The hoplo is easily confused on the Gulf coast with another introduced species of armored catfish, *Callichthys callichthys*, which have been reported in Louisiana but no known established population currently exists. There are many similarities between the two catfish. Both fish are native to South America, can reach 20 centimeters in length and have rows of plate-like armor on their sides. Both fish species can breathe air which allows them to tolerate low oxygen environments. Detritus and small bottom dwelling invertebrates are the preferred food source of both fish which typically feed at night. Another similarity between the catfish is the bubble nest built by males. Males build a bubble nest in shallow water among aquatic vegetation. After the nest is constructed, the males cover the nest with leaf litter and vegetation. The female lays her eggs, which the males guard until the eggs hatch. Female brown hoplos can spawn more than one dozen times in a single season and produce

more than 5,000 eggs per spawn. The major identifiable difference between the two species is the hoplo have teeth on the upper and lower jaw whereas *C. callichthys* only have teeth on the lower jar.

Armored catfish have many traits that make it likely they would be able to establish and thrive in the waters of the northern Gulf of Mexico. Their ability to live in a wide range of environmental conditions, freshwater to brackish, and preference for warm temperatures make the south Louisiana coast an ideal place for the species. In addition, *Callichthyids* ability to produce a large number of young in a short time period increases the potential survivability of young. Finally, the dietary requirements of this family of fish can easily be provided by the muddy bottoms of the south Louisiana coastline.

If you find any armored catfish, report them! If you come across these fish in local waterways, you are encouraged to save the specimen (ice or refrigerate), record the location and contact a Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries biologist at 225/765-2949. You can also report them to the United States Geological Survey at http://nas.er.usgs.gov/sightingreport.aspx, or call 800-STOP-ANS.

- Nikki Anderson

Ad Hoc Private Recreational Data Collection Advisory Panel

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council will convene its Ad Hoc Private Recreational Data Collection Advisory Panel on May 17 from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Gulf Council Office, 2203 N. Lois Avenue, Suite 1100, Tampa, Fla.

Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council Update

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council met in Corpus Christi, Texas, April 16-19, to discuss a number of fishery issues, including Reef Fish Amendment 35 for Greater Amberjack, a draft Options Paper for Reef Fish Amendment 37 for Gray Triggerfish and a Scoping Document for Red Snapper Overage Adjustments. During the weeklong meeting, the council took the following actions:

Commercial Reef Fish Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) Program - Reef Fish Amendment 33: The scoping document for this proposed amendment has been put on hold until the June meeting.

In August 2011, the council initiated a plan amendment to establish a reef fish IFQ program for red porgy, vermilion snapper, greater amberjack, gray triggerfish, lesser amberjack, almaco jack and banded rudderfish. This action was based on a recommendation from the council's Commercial Reef Fish IFQ Advisory Panel. Before moving forward, the council is requesting additional comments on the merits or adverse effects of a potential IFQ program for these species.

If you have comments regarding the merits of a reef fish catch share program for the species noted above, visit gulfcouncil.org/council_meetings/comment_forms/RF%20Amendment%2033%20-%20LAPP.php.

2012 Youth Outdoor Journalism Contest Accepting Entries

The Louisiana Outdoor Writers Association (LOWA) is accepting entries for this year's Youth Outdoor Journalism Contest sponsored by LOWA and the Louisiana Chapter of Safari Club International (SCI) with support from the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF).

The contest includes both essay and photography categories that will be judged based on presentation of Louisiana outdoor themes that include hunting, fishing, boating, hiking, camping or other related outdoor experiences. All entries are judged by professional educators and outdoor communicators.

The essay contest is broken into two age divisions: senior (ages 14-18) and junior (13 years of age and younger). Essays must be about personal experiences related to the outdoors and between 300 and 1,000 words in length. Essays submitted must be typed, double-spaced and only on one side of each page submitted as part of an entry.

The photography category is open to all students 18 years of age and younger. Only original, unpublished photos in color or black and white in a 4x6 inch, 5x7 inch or 8x10 inch print format, center-mounted on 8x10 inch poster or mounting board, will be accepted.

First place prize winners will receive $150 cash prize. Second place will receive $100, third place winners get $50 and honorable mentions receive $25. All of the winning applicants will receive an LOWA award certificate. The cash prizes are donated by the Louisiana Chapter of SCI and will be presented at the annual LOWA Conference in August. Winning entries will also have their work published in various media outlets and web sites.

All entries must be postmarked no later than May 11, 2012, and sent to: The Advocate Educational Services/LOWA, P.O. Box 588, Baton Rouge, LA 70821. The entries must also include the contestant's name, age, school, home address and telephone number at the top of the first page of the essay or attached to the back of the mounting board of the photos. Participants who want his or her entry returned must include a self addressed stamped envelope. Winners will be notified by mail.

Annual Drawdown at Catahoula Lake Scheduled to Begin May 1

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) plans to begin de-watering Catahoula Lake starting May 1 with a target date of June 30 for reaching drawdown pool stage. That is one month earlier than the traditional June-July drawdown dates.

"We've worked to complete an earlier drawdown since we began experimentally changing the drawdown dates two years ago," said Larry Reynolds, LDWF waterfowl study leader. "But late spring rainfall and flooding have not allowed it."

Lagniappe Fisheries Newsletter

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Web coordinator: Melissa Castleberry
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The water level at Catahoula Lake is currently between 34 and 35 feet MSL and will be lowered to approximately 31 feet by May 31 and to 27.5 feet by June 30, rainfall and runoff permitting.

Catahoula Lake provides important wetland habitat for migrating waterfowl, shorebirds and other wetland birds in Louisiana, especially during the late summer and early-fall when shallow-flooded habitat is generally limited across the state. Lowering water levels in summer exposes mudflats, which are used extensively by migrating shorebirds of many species, and stimulates germination and growth of annual plants that produce seeds and tubers that provide excellent foods for migrating and wintering waterfowl.

LDWF has partnered with researchers at LSU's School of Renewable Natural Resources to expand ecological knowledge of water elm, relate the encroachment of woody species to past environmental conditions and evaluate vegetation responses to recent management actions in hopes of developing a more comprehensive plan for managing the lake to maintain or improve habitat conditions for migratory waterfowl.

LOUISIANA REGULATIONS

Shrimp Season

The shrimp season in the portion of Louisiana offshore territorial waters south of the Inside/Outside Shrimp Line, from the U.S. Coast Guard navigational light off the northwest shore of Caillou Boca at 29 degrees 03 minutes 10 seconds north latitude and 90 degrees 50 minutes 27 seconds west longitude westward to the eastern shore of the Atchafalaya River Ship Channel at Eugene Island as delineated by the channel red buoy line, reopened to shrimping at 6 a.m. on Saturday, April 14.

See http://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/document/35362-shrimp-map/shrimp_map.pdf for a map detailing this opening.

According to the most recent trawl samples taken by LDWF biologists, small white shrimp which previously occupied portions of state outside waters from December through mid-April have reached marketable sizes and the closure is no longer necessary.

Because significant numbers of juvenile white shrimp remain in state outside waters west of the Atchafalaya River Ship Channel to the western shore of Freshwater Bayou Canal, this area will remain closed until further notice.

The opening dates for the 2012 spring inshore shrimp season will be considered by the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission at the May 3, meeting to be held at LDWF headquarters.

For more information please contact Marty Bourgeois at mbourgeios@wlf.la.gov or 225/765-2401 or Laura Wooderson at lwooderson@wlf.la.gov or 225/610-2363.

Greater Amberjack Commercial Season

The 2012 commercial fishing season for greater amberjack will remain closed in state waters following the annual closed season (March 1 to June 1) until Jan. 1, 2013 at 12:01 a.m., when it is scheduled to re-open.

Following a review of current landings, data indicates the 2012 quota of 237,000 pounds has been met. Louisiana commercial landings of greater amberjack average 100,000 pounds annually.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration announced that federal waters will also remain closed to commercial amberjack fishing for the remainder of 2012.

Greater amberjack are found throughout the Gulf of Mexico as well as in the temperate and tropical Atlantic Ocean. Greater amberjack usually live in nearshore waters out to 300 feet deep. This species is often found near offshore platforms, wrecks and artificial reefs. Greater amberjack can reach sizes of six feet in length and weights of 120 pounds in the Gulf of Mexico.

For more information contact Jason Adriance at 504/284-2032 or jadriance@wlf.la.gov.

Action to Modify Reef Fish Rules

The Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission considered actions to amend rules for the harvest of reef fish, specifically the recreational seasons, bag limits and commercial size limits for grouper.

Following the commission's action to move forward with the proposed changes, there will be a public comment period through July 5, 2012.

The proposed changes include:

- Change recreational bag limits for shallow and deep water groupers (red hind, rock hind, speckled hind, black grouper, misty grouper, red grouper, snowy grouper, yellowedge grouper, yellowfin grouper, yellowmouth grouper, Warsaw grouper, gag grouper and scamp) from an aggregate bag limit of five fish with no more than five gag grouper and two red grouper to an aggregate bag limit of four fish per day with no more than two gag grouper or four red grouper.
- The commercial size limit for gag grouper would be reduced from 24 inches total length to 22 inches total length. This size limit change is intended to reduce regulatory discard mortality in the commercial sector.
- Establish a closed season for the recreational harvest of gag grouper from Nov. 1 through May 31 (of the following year), and a closed season for the recreational harvest of greater amberjack from June 1 through July 31, of each year.
- Change the closed season for recreational harvest of black, red, yellowfin and yellowmouth groupers as well as rock hind, red hind and scamp to Feb. 1 through March 31, of each year. Currently only black and red grouper are closed from February 15 through March 14.
- Change the definition of crew size on a vessel, when operating commercially, which holds a

Federal Charterboat/Headboat Reef Fish Permit and a Federal Commercial Reef Fish Permit, to be no more than four persons, including the operator and crew.

In a separate action, the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission also took measures to create an emergency rule that modifies the aggregate bag limit for groupers from five fish to four fish per person, per day with no more than one speckled hind and one Warsaw grouper per vessel and not more than four red grouper and two gag grouper per person per day.

Previously, the limit on gag grouper was the same as the aggregate grouper limit.

The emergency rule also establishes a gag grouper season from June 1 through Oct. 31.

The gag grouper season is currently closed.

Interested persons may submit comments relative to the proposed rule to: Jason Adriance, Fisheries Division, Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, Box 98000, Baton Rouge, LA 708989000, or via e-mail to: jadriance@wlf.la.gov prior to Thursday, July 5, 2012.

GULF OF MEXICO REGULATIONS

New Bycatch Reduction Devices and Shrimp Effort Restrictions Relaxed

NOAA Fisheries Service published a final rule changing shrimp regulations. One action certifies two new bycatch reduction devices (BRDs) for use in the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic region. Another action relaxes a restriction regarding the level of allowable shrimp effort in the Gulf of Mexico. The rule is effective beginning May 11, 2012.

Both new devices are modifications to the Composite Panel BRD, which is provisionally certified through May 24, 2012. These two new devices will be legal for use as of May 11, 2012. One version adds a square mesh panel in the cod-end; the other version adds a “spooker” cone inside the cod-end behind the BRD. To receive information on how to construct and install these BRDs please contact:

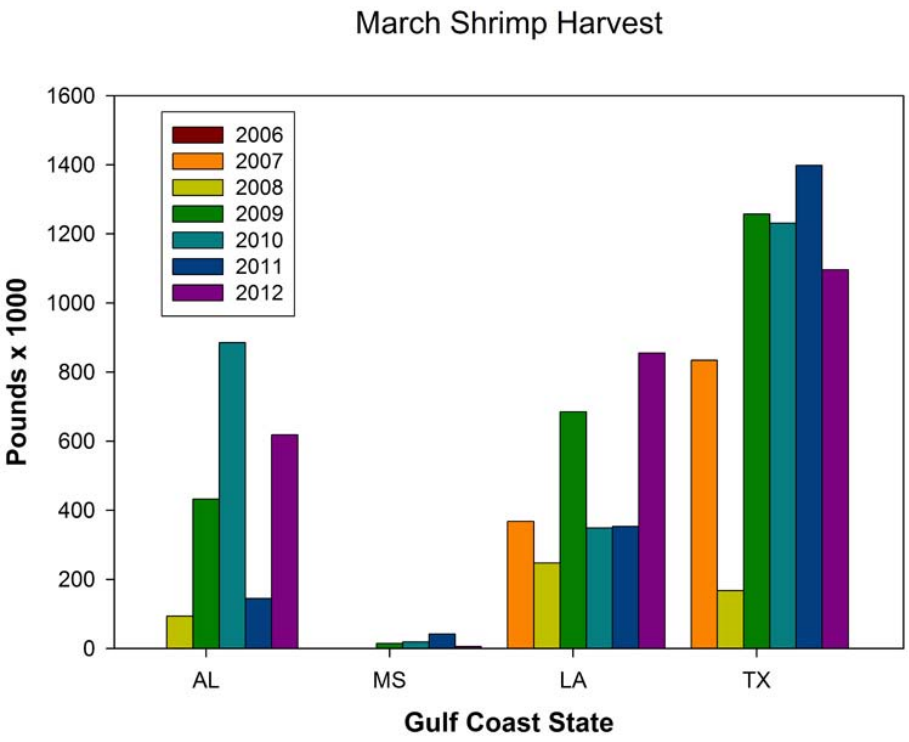
NOAA Fisheries Service, Engineering and Harvesting Branch-Harvesting Systems Unit, Pascagoula Laboratory, P.O. Drawer 1207, Pascagoula, MS 39568, or 228/549-1600.

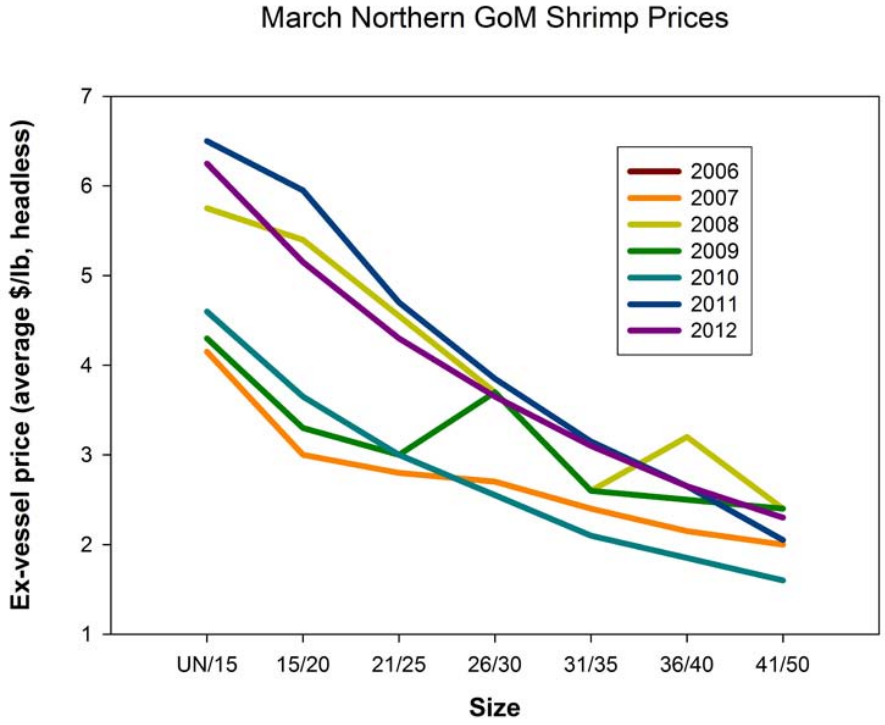
The rule also relaxes a shrimp effort restriction for the Gulf of Mexico shrimp fishery. To reduce red snapper bycatch, shrimp fishing effort between 10-30 fathoms west of Mobile Bay, Ala., has to be at least 74 percent less than effort levels documented in 2001 through 2003. Because the red snapper population is rebuilding, the restriction is being relaxed to a 67 percent reduction in effort in this depth range compared to the baseline years. This will allow shrimpers to fish an additional 5,800 days in this area.

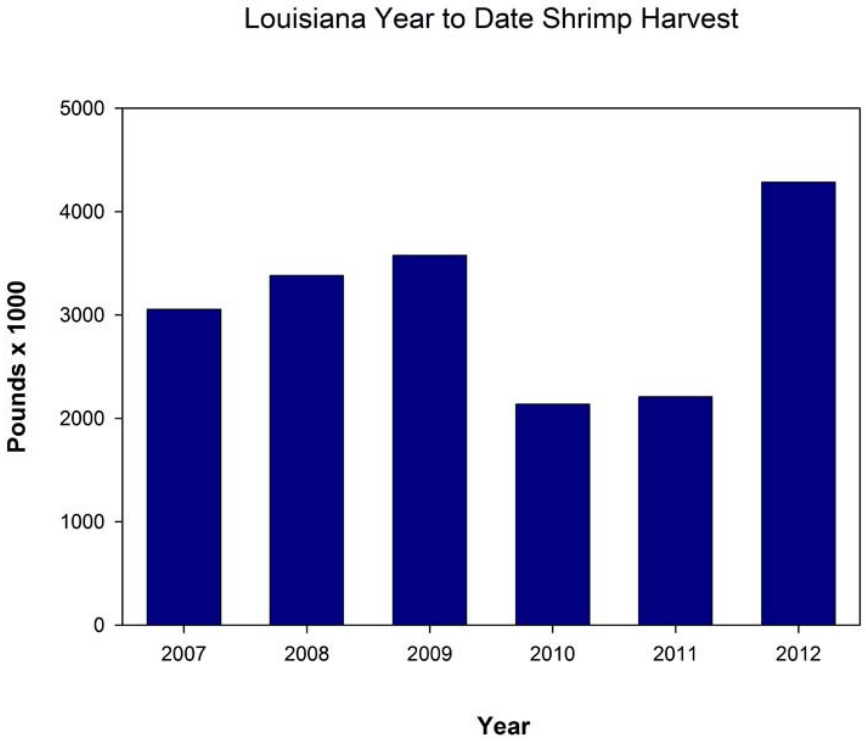
The intended effect of this rule is to: 1) Improve bycatch reduction in the shrimp fishery; 2) provide greater flexibility to the industry; 3) reduce social and economic impacts to fishing communities; and 4) better meet the requirements of National Standard 9 of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act.

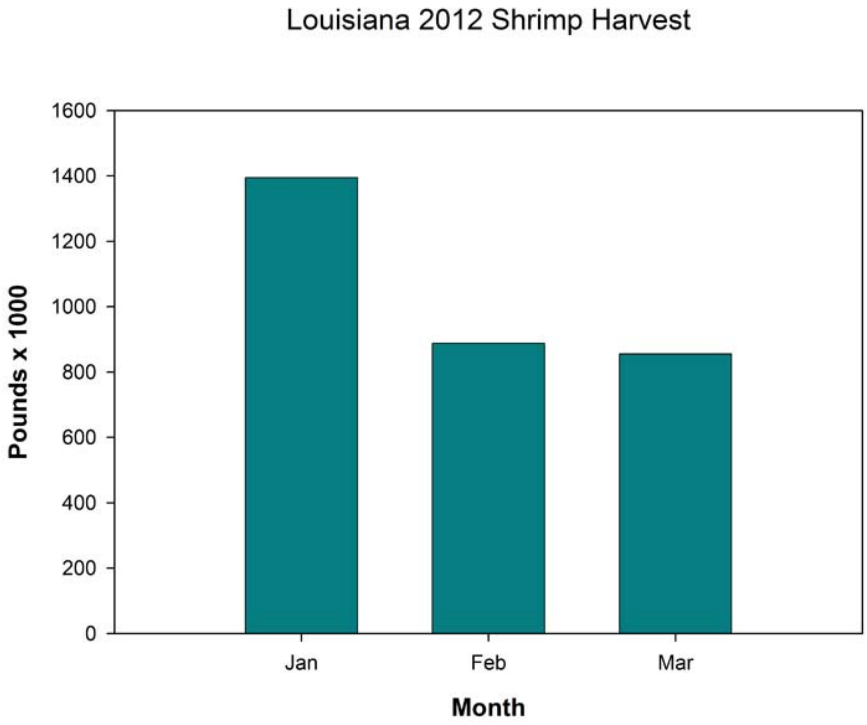
Louisiana Shrimp Watch

Louisiana specific data portrayed in the graphics are selected from preliminary data posted by NOAA on its website. All data portrayed are subject to final revision and approval by NOAA. Shrimp landings are ex-vessel prices, inclusive of all species harvested. Missing, inadequate or withheld reports are portrayed as "zero" in these graphics. Price graphics reflect central Gulf states only (Texas and Florida are reported independently). For more information, please refer to: www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/st1/market_news/index.html.






Louisiana Year to Date Shrimp Harvest
Pounds x 1000
5000
4000
3000
2000
1000
0
2007
2008
2009
2010
2011
2012
Year


Louisiana 2012 Shrimp Harvest
Pounds x 1000
1600
1400
1200
1000
800
600
400
200
0
Jan
Feb
Mar
Month

Fish Gear Coordinates March 2012

In accordance with the provisions of R.S. 56:700.1 et. seq., notice is given that 25 claims in the amount of $104,720.95 were received for payment during the period March 1, 2012 through March 31, 2012.

There were 24 claims paid and 1 claim denied.

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates of reported underwater obstructions are:

2905.147	9034.260	LAFOURCHE
2907.370	9032.640	TERREBONNE
2910.060	9100.879	TERREBONNE
2913.781	9028.434	TERREBONNE
2917.863	8942.271	PLAQUEMINES
2918.730	9147.428	ST. MARY
2924.743	9002.656	JEFFERSON
2926.179	9033.741	TERREBONNE
2935.260	9142.470	ST. MARY
2941.494	8930.450	PLAQUEMINES
2941.720	8949.860	PLAQUEMINES
2948.617	8940.059	ST. BERNARD
2949.680	8916.380	ST. BERNARD
2950.170	8924.450	ST. BERNARD
2954.844	8918.259	ST. BERNARD
2954.869	8918.505	ST. BERNARD
2955.345	8939.168	ST. BERNARD
2957.553	8956.286	PLAQUEMINES
3001.006	8925.520	ST. BERNARD
3001.572	8920.957	ST. BERNARD
3009.285	8951.050	ST. TAMMANY
3010.285	8945.015	ST. TAMMANY

A list of claimants and amounts paid can be obtained from Gwendolyn Thomas, Administrator, Fishermen's Gear Compensation Fund, P.O. Box 44277, Baton Rouge, LA 70804, or call 225/342-9388.

The Gumbo Pot

If you have a favorite seafood recipe that you would like to share, please send it to Julie Anderson janderson@agcenter.lsu.edu for inclusion in future issues.

For more information, contact your local extension agent:

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We would like to hear from you! Please contact us regarding fishery questions, comments or concerns you would like to see covered in the Lagniappe. Anyone interested in submitting information, such as articles, editorials or photographs pertaining to fishing or fisheries management is encouraged to do so.

Please contact Lagniappe editor Julie Anderson at janderson@agcenter.lsu.edu.

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