

BOEM ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES PROGRAM: ONGOING STUDIES

BOEM OCS Region: [Gulf of Mexico](#)

Title: Subsistence In Coastal Louisiana: An exploratory study
(GM-09-01-09)

Planning Areas: Central

Total Cost: \$140,309

Period of Performance: FY 2011-2013

Conducting Organization: LSU Department of Geography and Anthropology

BOEM Contact: [Dr. Harry Luton](#)

Description:

Background: Wild foods-most notably, shrimp, fish and oysters-are unusually important people's diets in coastal Louisiana. Much of this is purchased. However, many coastal Louisiana households harvest much of the wild foods that they consume and many of these households distribute and receive these wild foods in ways other than by buying and selling. These facts are widely known but are poorly documented. Everyone knows that coastal Louisiana households consume large quantities of shrimp, fish and oysters, but no one is clear about how much is typically consumed, or how much a household typically harvests for its own consumption and how much it gets from elsewhere, or how much is purchased and how much comes from other sources.

In coastal Louisiana and other places with relatively low incomes, access to wild resources provides high quality foods that would otherwise be unavailable. For some households, such resources are an indispensable part of the family budget, a substitute for adequate income. Subsistence foods are also preferred foods and their contribution to the overall quality of life of coastal residents is great although, again, not well documented or understood.

The importance these foods to coastal Louisiana and the lack of information concerning their acquisition and use were underscored by the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill (DWH). For example, people claimed damages for the loss of wild foods due to impacts on their ability to harvest for their own domestic use. Claims were also made due to the loss of wild foods normally received from others. The spill also raised concerns about seafood contaminant levels deemed "safe" by the EPA since consumption levels of seafood in coastal Louisiana are substantially higher than the "normal" amounts upon which EPA determinations are based.

Objectives: This study has four objectives:

- explore the full range of subsistence activities related to production, exchange and use of wild resources, including such activities as sharing, gift exchange, barter, and small-scale informal sales from the harvest;

- identify key dynamics in the overlapping activities of commercial harvesting, household consumption, gift exchange, barter, and small-scale informal sales from the harvest;
- field test and develop research methods that can produce valid, reliable, and quantifiable data on subsistence in coastal Louisiana; and
- produce preliminary data about subsistence harvesting, exchange, and consumption.

Methods: To accomplish the study goals, the research team will conduct an extensive literature review and synthesis of published works, grey literature and government reports to refine the study area and methods and to provide documentation of coastal subsistence uses. The team will collect and synthesize formal expertise on Gulf subsistence from such sources as city, parish and state officials (including, for example, field and area officials with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, and the local sheriffs' offices who enforce limits on wild harvesting), regional ethnographers working on National Park Service-funded projects, and researchers in other fields whose work touches on wild harvesting, including biologists working at Sea Grant, LUMCON and at Nicholls State University. This synthesis will be used to more clearly define the characteristics of Gulf subsistence and to refining research questions. The team will collect subsistence information from coastal residents using a community partnership approach. As part of this approach it will use such methods as focus groups and participant observation as well as more formal ones such as collecting food diaries, freezer and pantry inventories, and hunting/fishing journals. Organized community outreach will involve a wide sector of the many communities of Terrebonne and Lafourche Parishes

Products: Informational flyer; database and maps; annotated bibliography; transcribed discussions; interim and final study reports

Importance to BOEM: The information and analyses provided by this research will support BOEM assessment and decisionmaking. The collection of information on subsistence behavior in coastal Louisiana is highly relevant to the agency's mission, particularly in the aftermath of the DWH. The commercial and domestic use of wild resources is a significant aspect of the area's economy and social system, and the interaction between subsistence activities and the petroleum industry's use of this environment has long been seen as unique and mostly positive. Very little is known about the subsistence portion of wild resource use on the Gulf Coast and documenting it will substantially improve BOEM's baseline descriptions and analyses. The aftermath of the DWH accident has underscored the importance of subsistence to BOEM assessments of socioeconomic impacts and of environmental justice.

Current Status: Study startup occurred as scheduled. All research components-literature review, synthesis of expertise, and fieldwork are underway. Because of the exploratory nature of this research, plans include multiple meetings are planned the study and BOEM staff members to resolve technical questions. Two such meetings have occurred. Although establishing community partners has been slower than anticipated, this has not affected overall study progress. The study is progressing as planned. The

final report is expected June 30, 2013.

Final Report Due: July 2013

Publications: None

Affiliated WWW Sites: None

Revised date: January 2012

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