



U.S. Department of the Interior
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Gulf of Mexico OCS Region

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**MMS Contracts with Texas A&M University
to Investigate Deepwater Shipwreck Discovered by ExxonMobil**

The U.S. Department of the Interior's Minerals Management Service announced that it has entered into a cooperative agreement with Texas A&M University (TAMU) to conduct an archaeological investigation of a 200-year-old shipwreck in over 2,600 feet of water in the Gulf of Mexico. The wreck, located last February by ExxonMobil Development Company during pipeline construction for the Mica project, will be investigated next summer from aboard a research submarine.

Scientists from both the Department of Oceanography and the Nautical Archaeology Program at TAMU will join MMS archaeologists in photographing and excavating the wooden-hulled sailing ship by using underwater robots called ROV's (remotely operated vehicles) deployed from both the submersible and surface support ships.

ExxonMobil, which first reported the discovery to the MMS, sponsored a preliminary expedition to photograph the site. ExxonMobil and its venture partner, BP, are providing funding for the upcoming archaeological investigation. This will be the first time in the Gulf of Mexico that a shipwreck this deep has ever been scientifically excavated.

The nearly half-mile deep wreck is located about 30 miles off the mouth of the Mississippi River. The lower part of the shipwreck is almost completely intact and sitting upright on the seafloor. The ship is about 60 feet long and its wooden hull is covered with thin copper sheets, a means used by shipbuilders from the end of the 1700's to the mid-1800's to protect ships from wood-eating marine organisms. Since copper sheathing was quite expensive, it is unusual to find it on small merchant vessels. There also is evidence that the ship burned. Planks recovered from the wreck site last February clearly were charred and have been identified as American white pine, which is native to the Atlantic coast north of Virginia. The name of the vessel or what it was doing off Louisiana is unknown, but scientists hope to solve this mystery next summer with a combination of state-of-the-art technology and old-fashioned research.

"Historic preservation is just one of the MMS's many responsibilities in protecting our offshore environment," explained MMS Regional Director Chris Oynes. "To meet this responsibility, MMS reviews nearly 1,700 planned wells and pipelines every year for their potential effect on archaeological sites on the Outer Continental Shelf. Because of this regulatory requirement, many [historic shipwrecks](#) have been discovered on the floor of the Gulf of Mexico. Several shipwrecks have been investigated by MMS, including the Civil War Union gunboat USS *Hatteras*, the side-wheel steamer *Josephine*, and just this year the World War II German submarine the *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 \$8 billion last year and more than \$110 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's Website Address: <http://www.mms.gov>