Identifying Sensitive, Hardbottom Habitat in Shallow Federal Waters of the Gulf of Mexico

Eddie Hughes[1,2]
Dr. Stanley Locker[2]

[1]CSA Ocean Sciences, Inc., Stuart, FL 34997
[2]University of South Florida, College of Marine Science, St. Petersburg, FL 33701

September 14, 2022

Abstract

The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) contracted CSA Ocean Sciences Inc. to provide support to BOEM's Office of Environment to identify and document the location of potential sensitive biological features (PSBF) in shallow Gulf of Mexico (GOM) Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) waters by reviewing proprietary geophysical reports. PSBF is a hardbottom habitat type that BOEM has identified as requiring improved documentation of location and extent to avoid or better mitigate potential impacts to as part of BOEM-regulated activities. The primary project deliverable was an annotated inventory of identified hardbottom habitat features within selected OCS blocks (hardbottom was present or potentially present in over 50% of the OCS blocks reviewed). This presentation gives an overview of the process and methods involved in the review of 232 surveys and the development of the annotated inventory. Of the 232 surveys reviewed, 105 had hard bottom present or potentially present. At the finer scale of individual OCS blocks, those 105 surveys covered several hundred blocks or portions thereof (noting some of those blocks were examined more than once due to surveys overlapping the same block making an exclusive sum of blocks examined problematic). Of the blocks examined, 245 blocks had hardbottom either present or potentially present. Overall, the review resulted in an improved understanding in the distribution and extent of hardbottom habitats to be considered as PSBF.