Natural and Artificial Reef Fisheries, Research, and Conservation

Conservación, Investigación y Pesca Arrecifes Naturales y Artificiales

Conservation, Recherche et la Pêche de Récifs Naturels et Artificiels

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi was very pleased and honored to host the 66th Annual Meeting of the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute in Corpus Christi, Texas, during 4 - 8 November 2013 at the Omni Bayfront Corpus Christi Hotel. The selected theme of the conference was "Natural and Artificial Reef Fisheries, Research, and Conservation". The focus on natural and artificial reefs at GCFI drew attention to the importance of this segment of fisheries, research, and conservation in the Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean. Natural reefs have provided hotspots of biodiversity and productivity for centuries in this region, and now artificial reefs are very important in some areas. However, there is not clear agreement on function and use of artificial reefs in fisheries management, and there are now heated issues on the role and function of some artificial habitats, such as oil and gas platforms. Addressing the issues of connectivity, fisheries management, conservation, and related issues at the GCFI conference provided the current state of knowledge and aided in the debate of these critical issues at this time facing both our natural and artificial reefs.

The opening address of the meeting was presented by Dr. Larry D. McKinney Executive Director of the Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies (HRI). The title of his presentation was: "The Balance of Nature – Steel Reefs and Coral Reefs, *Compatible or Contradictory*?" Dr. McKinney leads an interdisciplinary team of scientists at HRI that integrate science, policy, and socio-economic expertise to assure an economically and environmentally sustainable Gulf. He has recently chaired the Gulf University Research Collaborative, an organization that includes 78 leading marine research universities and institutions around the Gulf, the Ecosystem Assessment and Integration Team of the Gulf of Mexico Alliance, the Flower Gardens National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Committee, and the Texas Sea Grant Science Advisory Committee. Dr. McKinney is also a member of NASA's SSC Applied Sciences Steering Committee and board member and past president of the Texas Academy of Sciences.

The Harte Research Institute sponsored the thematic session "Natural and Artificial Reef Fisheries, Research, and Conservation" held on Monday morning at the conference, and **c**ontributions to this session were made by leaders in the field on the following topics:

i) Role of natural and artificial reefs in fisheries management,
ii) Biological connectivity between natural and artificial reefs,
iii) New methodologies for assessing natural and artificial reef populations, and
iv) Socio-economic, policy, and sustainability issues related to natural and artificial reef fisheries.

There was such great interest in this topic that we had to add a second session on Wednesday to cover other presentations on the selected topic. Much very important information was presented orally and on posters related to the theme of the meeting and special session. Numerous colleagues from around the Gulf of Mexico, who do not usually attend GCFI meetings, were present and greatly enjoyed the science and camaraderie of GCFI members and will likely return to future meetings. It was all a great success!