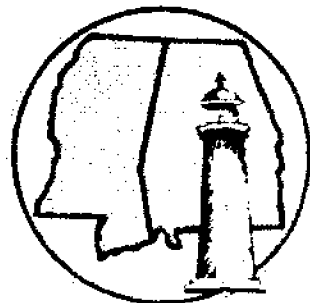


CHARTER BOAT FISHING ON THE MISSISSIPPI GULF COAST

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MASOP-77-021



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Designed by students in
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PREFACE

This report is based on a project undertaken jointly by the Mississippi Sea Grant Advisory Services and the University of Southern Mississippi's Bureau of Business Research. The study was sponsored by the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium and was an effort to gain needed information on Charter Boat fishing in the Gulf waters of Mississippi.

Many people contributed to the completion of this study. The gathering of the preliminary data from the Charter Boat captains was performed by and through the Mississippi Sea Grant Advisory Services. Questionnaires to the Charter Boat customers were processed by the Bureau of Business Research, as were the data compilation, analysis, and report writing. Acknowledgement is given to the Charter Boat Captains and their customers who participated in and contributed to the study.

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INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

Mississippi has some of the finest salt water fishing found anywhere. Charter boats frequently take large catches of king mackerel, snapper, dolphin, Spanish mackerel, grouper, lemon fish, speckled trout, red fish and other commonly caught sports fish, both by trolling and bottom fishing. The basic purpose of this study was to collect some market and economic data in order to have a baseline for recommending ways and means of improving the effectiveness of the Mississippi charter boat industry.

One objective was to develop a profile of the charter boat customer, including where he lived, which should aid in future advertising. Another objective was to identify the spending habits of the customer in fishing related activities while he was on the Coast.

Methodology

It was determined to obtain data on the charter boat industry with two separate type inputs. Booklets were placed on board each participating boat, and the Captain was asked to obtain names and mailing addresses of all customers. He was also requested to record the types of fish caught, the number of each type, and their average sizes. In addition, the length of trip, type of fishing, and prime reason for being on the Gulf Coast were recorded.

A questionnaire with a self-addressed stamped envelope was mailed to each person, requesting information about himself, why he charter boat fished, and some fishing related expenditure data.

The method of data collection with the booklet was not consistent, and young men and women were commissioned to meet the boats on their return trips to collect the initial information.

Although a number of the boat captains participated in the study, all were not willing to; neither were all boats met. The data obtained were not of a random sample; thus the reader is cautioned to treat the data with care and not attempt to draw broad generalizations.

Data were mainly collected during the spring and summer months of 1977 from boats berthed in Biloxi, which represent over three-fourths of the industry.

Some 674 questionnaires were mailed out, with 29 being returned unopened. Of the remaining 645, 257 were completed and returned for compilation and analysis. This represents a 40 percent return of questionnaires mailed and delivered.

Limitations

The study was designed to obtain some data in order to identify and better describe the charter boat customer, including some of his expenditures. It was not designed to obtain the total economic impact of the charter boat industry on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, nor was any attempt made to determine the economic return to the industry.

OVERVIEW OF THE CHARTER BOAT INDUSTRY

The Mississippi Gulf Coast Charter Boat Industry is composed of some 36 boats, located in Ocean Springs, Biloxi, and Gulfport. Over three-fourths of them are berthed at Biloxi, and most captains charter customers year round; however, activity is greatest from around April to October.

Table 1 enumerates the availability of the charter boats by marina location, and Figure 1 depicts their physical relationship to each other.

Figure 1

Location of Charter Boat Harbors

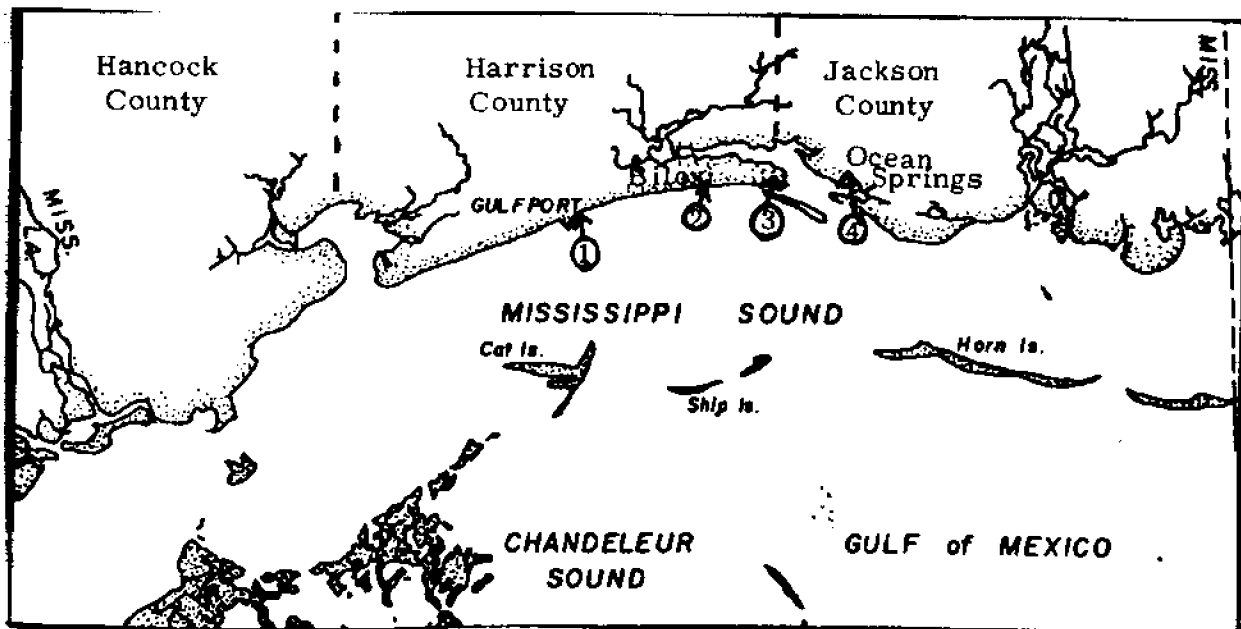


Table 1

Availability of Charter Boats

Town	Marina	Location	Number of Boats
Gulfport	Small Craft Harbor	1	6
Biloxi	Broadwater Beach	2	10
Biloxi	Small Craft Harbor	3	18
Ocean Springs - Gautier	Ocean Springs Harbor	4	2
	Total		36

Charter boat captains are required to have a captain's license authorized by the U.S. Coast Guard and to meet all rules and regulations thereto. They are also subject to the rules and regulations of boat requirements by the Mississippi Boat and Water Safety Commission.

A fishing day begins around 6 or 7 a. m. and lasts from some 7 to 10 hours. Fishing duration can also be a half day, morning or afternoon, as well as overnight and over the weekend. Charter boat fishing can range from several miles offshore to 50 miles or more out in the Gulf of Mexico.

Generally, charter boat fees range from \$100 for a half day to around \$500 for an extended weekend. Fishing capacity ranges from 4 to 49 people, and sleeping capacity ranges from 2 to 20 people.

There is an active Charter Boat Captain's Association, which began in the 1950's, although it has not been continuously active during this entire time frame.

SURVEY FINDINGS

The findings of the survey of the Mississippi Gulf Coast Charter boat fishermen revealed pertinent data on the charter boat fishing industry along the Coast. Although most charter boat captains had some idea of the types of customers they usually served and the characteristics of their fishing trips, data were not available to identify the types of customers served by the charter boat fishing industry, the market area from which customers came, certain trip characteristics and fishing related spending. The results of the survey provided the needed data for developing a profile of the charter boat customer and the fishing trip which can aid in the promotion and development of the industry and the Gulf Coast.

Trip Characteristics

With Mississippi charter boats listing capacity loads of 4 to 49, the average group size, according to the survey results, was seven. However, fishing groups of four, five or six fishermen were most common. A first time fishing trip was listed by 33 percent of the questionnaire respondents. The remaining two thirds were repeat trips, with 30 percent indicating a once a year trip and eighteen percent twice a year (Table 2).

Table 2
Frequency of Fishing Trips

Frequency	Number of Fishermen/Trip	Percentage of Total Fishermen/trip
First time	87	33
Once a year	78	30
Twice a year	47	18
Three times a year	21	08
Other	32	12

According to the response of the fishermen as they returned from their fishing trip, the majority indicated their reason for being on the Mississippi Coast was to go fishing. Sixty three percent of those contacted on the docks said they were motivated to visit the Coast to go fishing, and this was substantiated in the mail survey returns when 73 percent indicated they were on the Coast for fishing and relaxation. In addition, the mail survey revealed that 19 percent of the charter boat fishermen were on the Coast as a result of conventions or business trips, 17 percent for family vacation, and 10 percent to visit friends and relatives.

A breakdown of the factors that motivated the survey respondents to come to the Mississippi Coast for charter boat fishing is presented in Table 3. It must be noted that several respondents checked more than one reason for being on the Coast; thus the addition of percentages exceed 100.

Table 3

**Factors Motivating Charter Boat Fishermen
To Visit the Mississippi Coast**

Factor	Number Responding	Percentage of Total Responding
To go fishing	127	48
Relaxation	65	25
To meet business associates	51	19
Family vacation	45	17
To visit friends & relatives	26	10
Other	42	16

The choice of a particular charter boat /captain by a fisherman was primarily related to word of mouth. Fifty six percent of the survey respondents indicated they chose the particular boat captain because he was recommended by friends. Approximately 20 percent were influenced by some form of promotion, including advertising, brochures, and yellow pages. A breakdown of the reasons involved in the choice of a boat/captain is presented in Table 4. Several respondents listed more than one reason for choosing a particular captain; thus percentages exceed 100.

Table 4

Reasons For Choice of Boat Captains

Reason	Number Fishing Trips	Percentage of Total Trips
Recommended by Friends	146	56
Personal Acquaintance	33	13
Advertising	21	08
Brochures	19	07
Yellow Pages	14	05
Radio Show	0	--
Newspaper Article	1	--
Television	2	--
Sports Show	1	--
Other	47	18

Fish Caught

Over 20 types of fish were reported caught, with Spanish mackerel, bonita, bullreds, speckled trout, king mackerel, jack crevalle, lemon fish (cobia), and sharks being the major types. No attempt was made to determine catch data quantitatively.

Charter boats specialize in both bottom fishing and trolling as indicated by the above type species. Of those boats reporting, 60 percent of the trips were spent trolling with 40 percent bottom fishing.

Charter Boat Fishermen

A description or profile of the Mississippi Coast charter boat customer will allow a better understanding of the charter fishing market and will enable the charter boat captains to better serve and develop their customers.

Demographic Data

According to survey findings the average age of the charter-boat fisherman was 40. The majority of the charter customers were married (90%) and had an average of two children. Most of the charter boat fishermen ranged in the upper income brackets with 36 percent in the above \$25,000 level. Income levels of charter fishing survey respondents are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Income Levels, Mississippi Coast Charter Boat Customers

Income	Number Fishermen	Percentage of Total Fishermen
Below \$15,000	51	20
\$15 - \$20,000	60	24
\$20 - \$25,000	51	20
Above \$25,000	91	36

The occupations of the fishing customers reflected the income levels previously mentioned. Forty percent of the respondents reported occupations of professionals, managers, or administrators. An additional 25 percent had occupations related to sales, insurance, and real estate. Craftsmen and operatives accounted for 16 percent of the occupations of the fishing customers. The occupations of the charter fishing customers are listed in Table 6.

Table 6
Occupations, Mississippi Coast
Charter Boat Customers

Occupation*	Number of Fishermen	Percentage of Fishermen
Professional, Technical	52	22
Managers and Administrators	42	18
Sales (Insurance, Real Estate, Sales)	60	25
Clerical	05	02
Craftsmen	27	11
Operatives	12	05
Service Workers	17	07
Military	10	04
Retired	03	01
Other	11	05

*Occupation descriptions based on "Employment and Earnings," U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Seventeen percent of the charter boat customers were from the Gulf Coast (counties of Harrison, Hancock, and Jackson) with the remaining 83 percent from other parts of Mississippi and out of state. Including the Coastal counties, 43 percent of the fishing customers were from Mississippi, 31 percent from the adjacent states, 7 percent from the Midwestern

states of Illinois and Missouri, and six percent from Texas. A breakdown of the residence of the charter boat customer is presented in Table 7 and Figure 2.

Table 7
Residence of Charter Boat Customers*

State	Number of Fishermen	Percentage of Fishermen
Mississippi	293	43
Three Coastal Counties	113	17
Remaining Counties	180	26
Louisiana	79	12
Arkansas	48	07
Tennessee	50	07
Texas	39	06
Alabama	35	05
Missouri	26	04
Illinois	19	03
Other	89	13

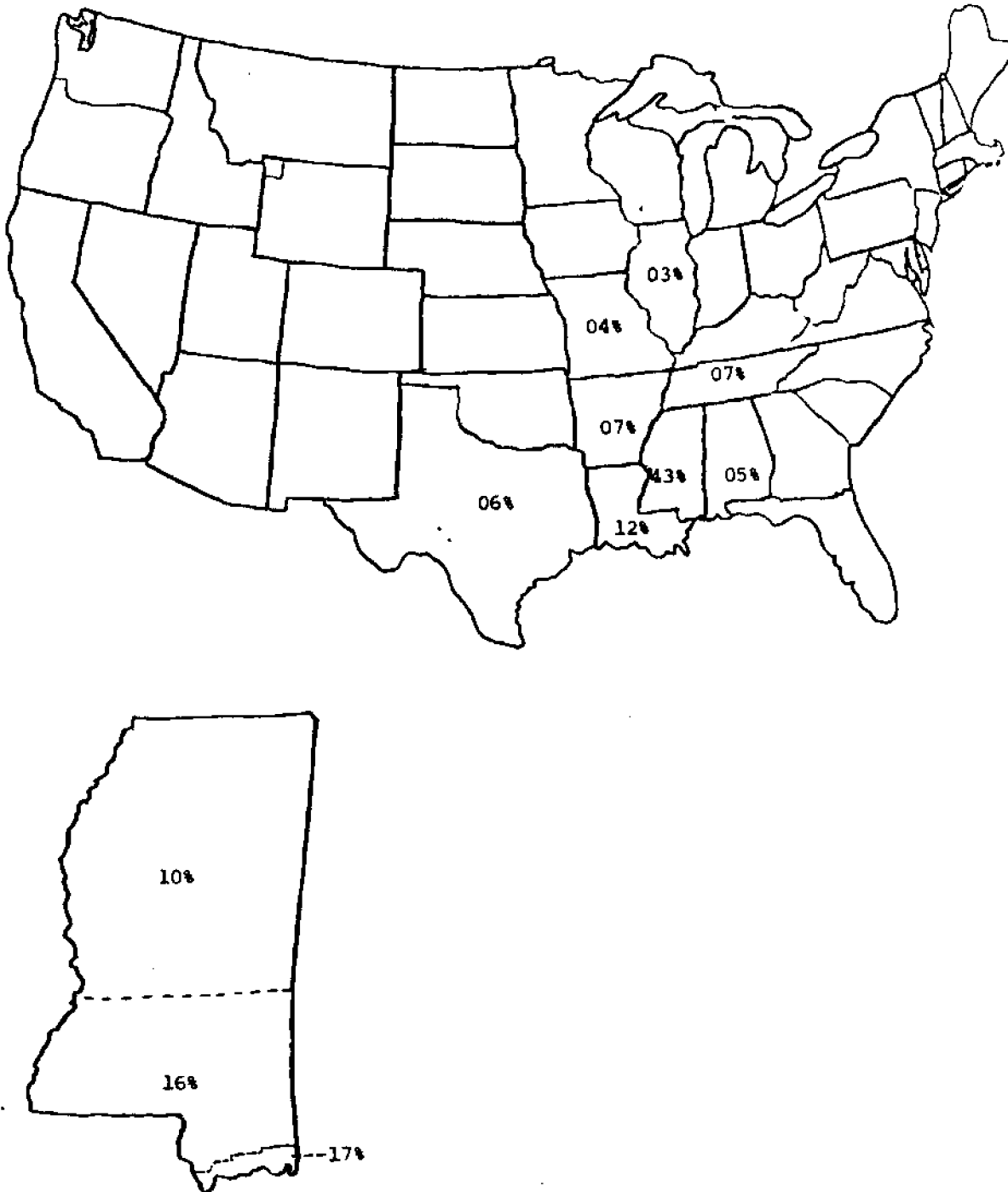
*The residence of Charter Boat customers was determined by the addresses collected from the customers rather than the return of the mail survey.

Fishing Related Spending

While it was not the intent of this study to determine the economic impact of the charter boat industry to the Mississippi Gulf Coast, certain fishing related expenditures were determined. These expenditure data should in no way be used to reflect the economic impact, but rather indicate the spending patterns of the charter boat customers. The local economy is affected by the charter boat industry and other businesses in addition to the charter boats benefit from the customers. As reflected in the survey

Figure 2

Residence of Charter Boat Customers



findings, for every \$1 spent for charter fees an additional \$3 was spent in other businesses. The fishing related expenditures of the charter boat customers averaged \$120 per person. In addition to the charter boats, the businesses primarily affected by charter fishing related spending were hotel-motels, food service businesses, and transportation related businesses. A breakdown of the fishing related spending per individual is presented in Table 8.

Table 8
Charter Fishing Related Spending
Per Fisherman

Expenditure Item	\$	Percentage of Total Spending
Lodging	\$ 26.40	22
Food and Drink	32.40	27
Transportation	15.60	13
Charter Fee	30.00	25
Miscellaneous	15.60	13
Total	<u>\$120.00</u>	<u>100</u>

SUMMARY AND FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

The Mississippi Gulf Coast has an excellent salt water fishing environment at its doorstep. In addition, some 36 charter boats and experienced captains are available to take fishermen into the Gulf to troll and/or bottom fish at strategic locations for a wide variety of game and food fish.

The basic purpose of this study was to collect some market and economic data in order to make recommendations to the Charter Boat Captain Association to enhance more widespread service. One objective was to develop a profile of the charter boat customers, and the other objective was to identify their fishing related spending habits.

The survey findings were discussed in the main body of the report. By summarizing and averaging the data, a "typical" charter boat customer may be depicted as stated below.

He is a 40 year old married male, with two children, and is a professional manager type in technical or sales endeavors, earning over \$20,000 per year. He lives in Mississippi, is not a Gulf Coast resident, and visits the Coast primarily to go fishing. The particular charter boat/captain was recommended by friends, and he goes charter boat fishing annually. He takes an all day trip, mainly trolling, and most likely catches some of the following type fish: bonita, Spanish and king mackerel, jack crevalle, specks, bullreds, and sharks.

On the average, he will spend approximately \$120 for fishing and related activities. The distribution of the \$120 was almost equally divided among four categories - lodging, food and drink, charter fee, and transportation and miscellaneous. Thus, for each dollar expended in charter boat fees, other businesses can expect to receive three dollars in direct income from the fisherman.

Future Considerations

As a result of this study, it is apparent that the charter boat industry not only brings in outside money to the industry but also to other Gulf Coast businesses such as the hotel-motel industry, food and beverage, and the like. It appears that there are some mutual advantages for all those industries to advertise not only for themselves but for each other as well. Hotel-motel package deals which include charter boat trips (similar to golf packages) may be mutually beneficial.

With the opening of the coliseum, and an expected increase in conventions on the Gulf Coast, a charter boat tie-in appears warranted. The results of this study point out that the majority of those that charter fish make their decision to do so prior to arriving on the Coast. Thus, it is important for most of the charter boat advertising to be directed in that manner.

In consort with package deals, it appears that booking agent consolidations could be organized in a more efficient manner.

At some point in time, it may be advantageous to both the charter boat captains and the marine biologists to cooperate in a comprehensive catch data venture.

Last, a detailed economic study of the charter boat industry, including costs and returns, holds promise of being beneficial to the charter boat captain. Comparisons can be made by the individual captain with industry averages, with the intent that economic benefits of the industry may be enhanced.

