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Here is a website that every coastal boater should visit, whether they're on the water for commercial work or recreational fun:

<http://gulfofmexico.marinedebris.noaa.gov>.

Coastal waters may be calm right now, but there is still a lot of hurricane debris left beneath the waves. When I say debris, I don't mean tires, soda cans and cigarette butts - I mean a/c units, derelict vessels, and even houses.

Recognizing the threat these large debris items pose to commercial and recreational boaters, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Gulf of Mexico Marine Debris Project team conducted hydrographic surveys of the waters of Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana. Their website has downloadable, printable maps and coordinates of these debris items left in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, making it easier to avoid these potentially vessel-damaging objects. A collaborative effort between NOAA's Office of Response and Restoration and Office of Coast Survey, the team is working with federal, state, and local stakeholders to ensure coordination of ongoing recovery efforts in the Gulf of Mexico.

Survey work began in September 2006 using side scan sonar to image the sea floor and locate marine debris. Sounding measurements are also taken to determine the clearance depth of each item. The Office of Coastal Survey uses this data to update nautical charts, providing mariners with more accurate and up-to-date navigation information. The mapping aspect of the project will aid in the identification of debris location, and assist debris removal efforts to restore safe navigation.

For more information on the Gulf of Mexico Marine

Debris Project, feel free to email gomdebris@noaa.gov, and be sure to visit the website <http://gulfofmexico.marinedebris.noaa.gov>.