

## **Chandeleur Sound - GIWW Alternate Route - Best Operating Practices**

**PURPOSE:** These Practices have been developed by the Gulf Intracoastal Canal Association in cooperation with experienced Association mariners and members and other professional maritime associations. They are intended as recommended Practices for navigating the Alternate route through the Mississippi River, Bayou Baptiste Collette and the Chandeleur Sound to and from the eastern reaches of the GIWW near its intersection with the Gulfport Ship Channel. These Practices reflect the unusual nature of tows operating in the more exposed Chandeleur Sound, the lack of recent experience with routine operations in this area and the inherent risks associated with such transits. They should be used during such periods that the IHNC Lock is closed, making normal transits of the GIWW impossible, and when Coast Guard COTPs New Orleans and Mobile have determined that transits through Chandeleur Sound are necessary, and permissible, to ensure that the flow of commerce between western and eastern reaches of the waterway continues.

During the closure of the IHNC lock the following are recommended Chandeleur Sound – GIWW Alternate Route - Best Operating Practices:

**WEATHER** – Clearly, the partial exposure of this route to the open Gulf of Mexico makes safe transit weather dependent. This is also true of locations along the entire length of the GIWW, especially in the eastern reaches through the Mississippi Sound between the barrier islands. Just as prudent mariners carefully consider weather as they transit these gaps between the barrier islands, it will be important to do so on the Alternate Route. It is recommended that transits across the Sound should not be attempted with winds greater than 15 knots and seas greater than 2 feet. Given that transit of the 50-mile-long Alternate Route may take as long as 10 hours, mariners should carefully follow weather forecasts to ensure they have safe conditions for the entire transit.

Captains should use all means possible to monitor weather. NOAA/NWS spot forecasting for the Alternate Route is available at <http://go.usa.gov/chU8G>

Additional Forecasting tools are available from NOAA/NWS at:

**Entire Marine Forecasts for Southeast Louisiana and Coastal Mississippi**

<http://weather.noaa.gov/cgi-bin/fmtbltn.pl?file=raw/fz/fzus54.klix.cwf.lix.txt>

**Breton Sound**

<http://forecast.weather.gov/shmrn.php?mz=gms538&syn=gms500>

**Chandeleur Sound**

<http://forecast.weather.gov/shmrn.php?mz=gms536&syn=gms500>

**Mississippi Sound**

<http://forecast.weather.gov/shmrn.php?mz=gms532&syn=gms500>

All marine warnings are alerted and broadcast on Weather Radio:  
Gulfport 162.400 mhz; New Orleans 162.550 mhz; Buras 162.475 mhz

**Point and Click**

<http://forecast.weather.gov/gridpoint.php?site=lix> (Select your area of interest (Breton Sound, Chandeleur Sound or MS Sound).

Since the Alternate Route will be utilized during the height of hurricane season, very close attention must be focused on Tropical Weather forecasts and advisories. Using the Alternate Route may make transits to safe havens longer than if travelling the GIWW, and should be considered in voyage planning. Anticipate that the RNA will include specific guidance that closes the route to traffic at some point when Tropical Storm activity threatens the northern Gulf of Mexico.

**EXPERIENCE** – While there may be little recent experience transiting this area with towboats and barges, there are, in fact, several Captains with considerable experience operating in the Chandeleur Sound during the BP Oil Spill and during prior IHNC Lock closures. Additionally, Captains who routinely operate in the eastern GIWW have been well seasoned by the conditions and risks associated with transiting across the gaps between the barrier islands. It is recommended that companies initially assign Captains familiar with eastern GIWW transits to the Alternate Route transits. Further, Captains expected to make later Alternate Route transits and who do not have similar experience, should first travel with an experienced Captain on the Alternate Route. As with any unusual waterway situation, experienced crews are important to safe navigation.

**TOW SIZES** – The prudent mariner will always need to adjust tow size (length and width) to account for waterways and barge loading conditions. However, given the anticipated narrow channel and increased exposure of the Alternate Route recommended tow size restrictions are appropriate. For safe transit associated with the expected traffic and conditions on the Alternate Route, barge tow lengths should not exceed 600 feet (plus typically sized pushboat of up to 120 ft. long), and widths should not exceed 108 feet. This translates to a six-pack of standard barges (each 35 feet x 195 feet) or a two 30K barrel tank barge tow (each 54 feet x 300 feet). Some tow operators have indicated they will limit hopper tows to four standard barges. Most Operators will limit tank barge transits to one 30K barrel barge.

Additional safety measures being considered by GIWW operators include:

- Transiting the Alternate Route in pairs
- Adding a Chief Engineer to the towboat crew
- Adding an extra towboat to multibarge tows
- Carrying a Satellite Phone for communications

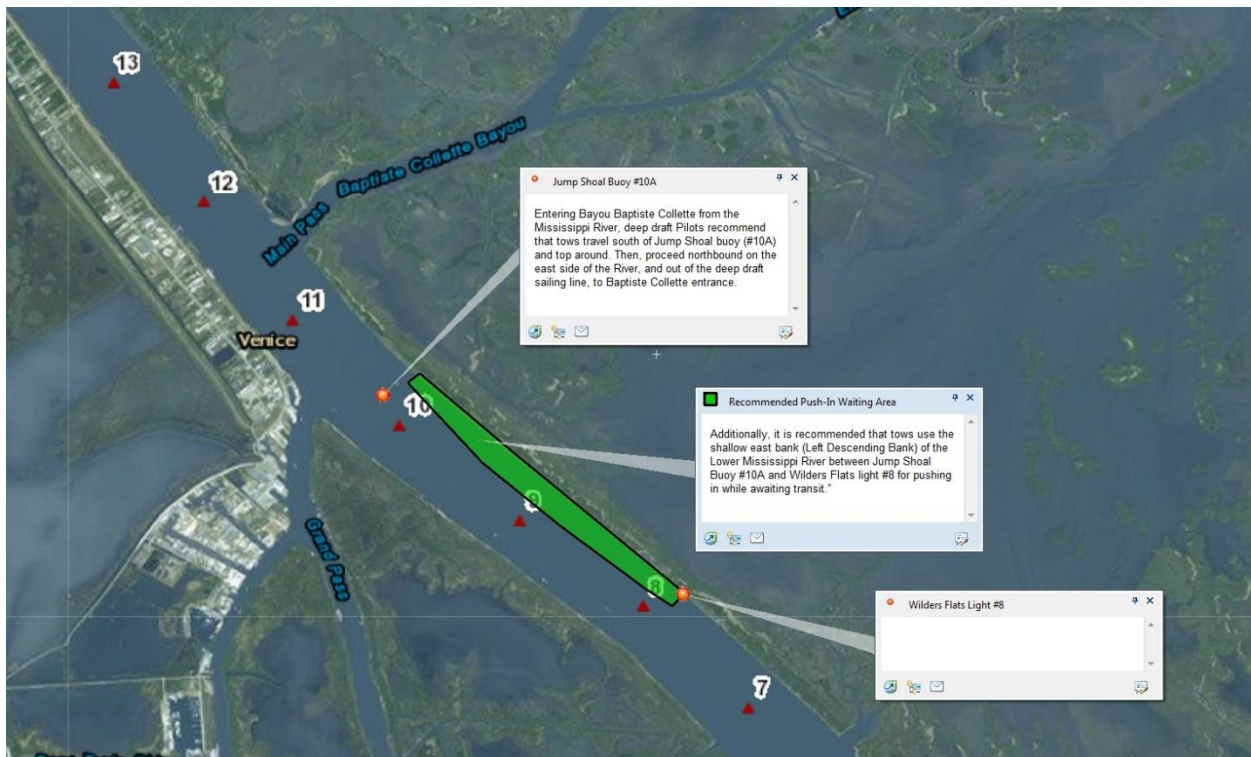
**BARGE TYPES AND CARGOES** – There appears to be no need to limit the types of barges (other than overall tow size restrictions) or the cargoes carried on this route. Through years of experience, carriers presently operating in the eastern GIWW have demonstrated their professional maritime expertise and have safely and successfully transported a wide range of cargoes, including red flag and hazardous

materials, on a routine basis. Carriers new to the area should consult with these experienced tow and barge operators before embarking on Alternate Route transits.

**BARGE LOADING** – Until final USACE and NOAA surveys of the Alternate Route have been completed, barge loading and draft restrictions for safely operating in this area have not been determined. Assuming that sufficient depths are available, we anticipate no loading or draft restrictions. Tows should be made up and secured consistent with a typical eastern GIWW tow, as dictated by company policies and practices. Experience has shown that tows transiting the eastern GIWW have been adequately secured, however additional wires, lines and bridals may be prudent.

**TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT** - One-way traffic at northern portion of Baptiste Collette will be an expected requirement during transit of the Alternate Route. This will mean that tows will have to hold up in the river prior transiting eastbound and westbound tows will have priority since there will be no safe location to hold up in the Sound. To avoid meeting in the narrow portions of Baptiste Collette, mariners should closely monitor AIS, make timely (about 1 hour ahead) radio Securite calls when outbound or inbound at Baptiste Collette, and establish bridge to bridge comms with vessels they may meet.

Entering Bayou Baptiste Collette from the Mississippi River, deep draft Pilots recommend that tows travel south of Jump Shoal buoy (#10A) and top around. Then, proceed northbound on the east side of the River, and out of the deep draft sailing line, to Baptiste Collette entrance. Additionally, it is recommended that tows use the shallow east bank of the River between Jump Shoal Buoy #10A and Wilders Flats light #8 for pushing in while awaiting transit. See chartlet below:



**Facebook Group Page – CHANDELEUR SOUND ALTERNATE ROUTE DISCUSSION - This Group has been established for mariners and GIWW users to discuss navigation issues on the route, provide feedback to government agency partners and alert others to best practices and lessons learned. It is a closed group that you will have to ask to join. When requesting to join, please provide a description of your connection to shallow draft industry interests that may be using this route.**

Link to Facebook Group - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1726090747657975/>