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Exploring the Maritime History of the Hudson River

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The Hudson River has long been an important transport route for pre-European, colonial and United States citizens, and the river plays an important economic, recreational and environmental role today. Significant events along the Hudson River include European investigation of the river by Henry Hudson in 1609, skirmishes between Colonial and British forces during the Revolutionary War in 1770s, westward transport of goods and immigrants and the export of grain and other commodities to Europe and other parts of the world during the 1800s and 1900s. During this time there have been many shipwrecks on the Hudson River. While many shipwrecks have been salvaged, a significant number remains on the river bed today. Since 2004 we have conducted a number of investigations of potential cultural resources on the Hudson River bed with support from the NOAA Office of Exploration (NOAA-OE), the National Park Service (NPS) and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYS DEC).

Multibeam mapping of the Hudson River in water depths deeper than about 5 m was done from the Verrazano Narrows to Troy (about 180 river miles) occurred from 1998 to 2003 using the Simrad EM 3000 multibeam system. This mapping was supported by NYS DEC and undertaken as part of a study of benthic habitat, contaminant distribution patterns and sediment process and to support the NYS DEC role in river management. This systematic multibeam mapping showed the presence of numerous potential shipwrecks on the river bed and resulted in access to the multibeam data set being restricted to protect the river-bed cultural resources. In 2004 we initiated a series of four research cruises that used a ultra-high-resolution multibeam echosounder to more clearly image features identified as potential shipwrecks. In 2004 we used the NOAA Ship RUDE and Reson 8125 for a week in the Hudson River near West Point and we also used the experimental RV CONCAT and EM 3002 for 4 days in the lower Hudson River. In 2005 we used the R/V Seawolf and Reson 8125 for a week in the mid-Hudson River and in 2007 we used the NRT 7 and Reson 8125 for two weeks in New York Harbor and the lower Hudson River. Also, in 2004, 2005 and 2007 a dive team from the Lake Champlain Maritime Museum (LCMM) and others dove on selected targets identified on the multibeam data. Diving in the Hudson

River is difficult and dangerous due to limited visibility (often less than 4 inches), strong currents and often deep water.

To date about 250 shipwrecks have been clearly resolved on ultra-high-resolution multibeam data and about 10 of the features have been visited by divers. Many of the vessels identified are barges, but sloops and other sailing vessels and steam vessels are also present as well as the remains of fortifications built during the Revolutionary War. The results of these detailed investigations are being used to develop long-term plans for management, preservation and protection of this important cultural resource.