

Casinos Continue Post-Storm Boom

New Orleans (AP) – Louisiana's state-licensed casinos continued their post-hurricane surge in May as gamblers left behind USD 220.2 million, compared to USD 199.5 million in May 2005 when more gambling halls were in operation.

The boost has been attributed by analysts to a large number of hurricane relief workers in the state with money and Hurricane Katrina's virtual wipeout of the Mississippi Gulf Coast where only three casinos have been able to reopen since the storm.

The 12 operating riverboats won USD 152.1 million last month, up from USD 136.7 million won in May 2005 when 14 boats were open the entire month and a new casino boat opened in Lake Charles, according to state police figures released Tuesday.

Since then, damage from hurricanes Katrina and Rita have shuttered three riverboats – the two Harrah's Entertainment Inc. riverboats in Lake Charles and the Belle of Orleans in New Orleans, owned by Columbia Sussex Corp.

Harrah's New Orleans land casino took in USD 35.7 million – a record month – compared with USD 33 million in May 2005. The three slot-machine casinos at the Louisiana Downs, Evangeline Downs and Delta Downs won USD 32.3 million, up from USD 28.9 million in May 2005.

In the New Orleans market, which has two riverboats owned by Pinnacle Entertainment Inc. and Boyd Gaming Corp. in addition to the land casino, gamblers lost USD 67.1 million last month, compared with USD 58 million in May 2005.

The Lake Charles market, with three riverboats owned by Isle of Capri Casinos and Pinnacle and Boyd Gaming's the Delta Downs casino, won USD 55.1 million in May, compared with USD

49.5 million in May 2005. Pinnacle's L'Auberge Du Lac riverboat resort, which opened in May 2005, has been a major hit with gamblers, again leading the riverboat count with USD 24.9 million in winnings last month.

The Shreveport-Bossier City market, including five riverboats owned by Boyd, Pinnacle, Harrah's, Isle of Capri, El Dorado Resorts LLC and Harrah's Louisiana Downs casino declined a bit last month – USD 67.4 million, compared with USD 67.6 million in May 2005. That market has had increased competition for Dallas-Fort Worth gamblers from Indian reservation casinos in Oklahoma.

The two riverboat casinos in Baton Rouge, which have enjoyed increased winnings following Katrina's population shift, took in USD 21.6 million in May, up from USD 17.4 million in May 2005. Those boats are owned by Penn National Gaming Inc. and Columbia Sussex.

The Evangeline Downs track casino at Opelousas won USD 8.9 million in May, up from USD 7.1 million in May 2005. That facility is owned by Peninsula Gaming LLC.

The figures do not include Louisiana's three Indian reservation casinos, which are not required to report their winnings publicly.