TECHNICAL COORDINATING COMMITTEE
MINUTES
Wednesday October 20, 2021
Webinar

Chairman Darin Topping called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. The following members, staff, and others were present:

Members
Jason Froeba, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Dan Ellinor, FWC, Tallahassee, FL
Rick Burris, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Matt Hill, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Christopher Mace, TPWD, Rockport, TX
John Mareska, ADCNR/MRD, Dauphin Island, AL
Darin Topping, TPWD, Rockport, TX
Nicole Beckham, ADCNR/MRD, Gulf Shores, AL

Staff
Charlie Robertson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
James Ballard, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Donna Bellais, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Joe Ferrer, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Ali Wilhelm, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Jeff Rester, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Dave Donaldson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Steve VanderKooy, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Gregg Bray, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Debbie McIntyre, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Deanna Valentine, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Doug Snyder, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Others
Tershara Matthews, BOEM, New Orleans, LA
Mike Celata, BOEM, New Orleans, LA
Scott Bannon, ADCNR/MRD, Dauphin Island, AL
Ivonne Blandon, TPWD, Austin, TX
Michelle Bromschwig, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Erik Lang, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Megan Fleming, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Read Hendon, USM/GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Carey Gelpi, TPWD, Austin, TX
Michelle Daigle, BOEM, New Orleans, LA
Traci Floyd, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
John Filostrat, BOEM, Denver, CO
Andrew Peterson, Bluefin Data, Baton Rouge, LA
Adam Rettig, NOAA, Silver Spring, MD

Ruth Perry, Shell, Houston, TX
Lissa Lyncker, BOEM, New Orleans, LA
Kevin Anson, ADCNR/MRD,
Jeremy Timbs, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Andy Fischer, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Carolina Bourque, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Catherine Krikstan, NOAA, Silver Spring, MD
Joel Anderson, TPWD, Austin, TX
Tiffanie Cross, FWC, Tallahassee, FL
Mariana Steen, BOEM, New Orleans, LA
Steve Brown, FWC, Tallahassee FL
Rich Malinowski, NOAA, St. Petersburg, FL

Adoption of Agenda

Rick Burris moved and it was seconded by John Mareska to adopt the agenda. Motion carried unanimously.

Approval of Minutes

Jason Froeba moved and it was seconded by Chris Mace to approve the minutes as written for the March 17, 2021 meeting. Motion carried unanimously.

BOEM Wind Energy Status

Mike Celata, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM), presented general information on the current status of renewable wind energy in the Gulf of Mexico (GOM). He explained that BOEM published two studies in 2020 that were sponsored by the National Renewable Energy Lab (NREL) indicating offshore waters of Texas and Louisiana had highest average wind speeds, thus greatest wind energy potential. When considering technical and commercial energy potential in the GOM, wind energy ranks high. Proximity to oil and gas supply change to leverage existing capabilities is one advantage, while frequent effects from hurricanes is one disadvantage in the GOM. Some of the structures that may be used for offshore wind turbines are: monopiles, jackets, or floating structures in depths greater than 60 meters. These structures may be connected to onshore substations through transmission lines on the seafloor.

A Task Force (TF) was developed under the request of Louisiana Governor Edwards and the TF held a meeting on June 15, 2021. A Request for Interest (RFI) was published and followed by a 45-day public comment period. Part of the RFI process was to develop a map of the RFI area and overlay potential areas of conflict to consider, which was already done with white shrimp gulf data and distribution of birds.

Next steps are a Call for Information will be publicized, an environmental assessment started, wind energy areas analyzed, draft area identification memo to determine WEAs, and identify lease areas. In December of 2022 or early 2023, BOEM plans to hold an auction for lease sales. They hope to host a stakeholder workshop in December of 2021 to discuss the future of wind energy in the Gulf.

IJ State Research Funding (SuRF) Program Presentations

Steve Brown and **Tiffanie Cross** discussed increases to biological sampling for IJF species (Task 1)

and testing survey methods to monitor the recreational scallop fishery (Task 2). FWC overcame staff shortages to collect more than 50% of interviews, fish measured, and hard parts through IJ projects. The pilot study to survey the recreational scallop fishery has provided valuable information for management. During the 2021 bay scallop season, catch per unit effort was measured through field intercept surveys from June through September. Survey sites were sampled proportional to size and trip- and catch-level data were collected for each survey. This data was used to supplement data collected through the state's mail survey. They are planning improvements for future iterations of the survey, such as using a stand-alone survey and increasing sampling effort.

John Mareska presented Alabama's (AL) work on culture and stocking, cryogenic technology, and movements and habitats of southern flounder. In 2020, over 34K one-inch southern flounder were reared and released in AL waters, which is an increase from previous year. They are also evaluating the effects of different cryogenic techniques on survival and hatching success, with initial results indicating the two most effective treatments were: 1) DMSO + 0.5% Lactose + egg yolk, and 2) Propylene glycol + Trehalose 200 micromoles. They have also been focusing on tagging flounder with conventional and acoustic tags to track movements and trends in habitat use in Mobile Bay. Between 2019 and 2021, southern flounder tagged per year ranged from 55 to 71 individuals and between 21-30% of those tagged flounder migrated offshore. They hope to continue investigating flounder residency in Mobile Bay and better understand habitat use and homing, which may have implications for releasing hatchery-raised juveniles.

Jason Saucier outlined MDMR's IJ related efforts towards testing sampling methods and monitoring movements and habitat use of southern flounder in Mississippi (MS) waters. MDMR is testing alternative gear for sampling inshore fish and crustaceans to assess catch efficiency using various sized trawls and seines. MDMR is also using fyke nets across different bays to compare catch efficiency of various methods for southern flounder and conduct concurrent tagging projects. Acoustically tagged southern flounder are being monitored using acoustic arrays to assess spatial and temporal movement patterns and habitat use of fish in the lower Pascagoula River. Managers are also evaluating oyster recruitment and settlement patterns to identify peak seasons and locations for spat settlement at ten historic reef locations in the Mississippi Sound. Lastly, they are working to develop an MDMR-centered data management system to integrate field data across projects.

Erik Lang and **Michelle Bromschwig** reported on LDWF's fishery-independent flounder survey and commercial blue crab sampling projects. Very few flounder were caught during the first year of the flounder survey but improvements were made and catch rates have already showed signs of improving. Fyke net configuration was modified and the sampling area reduced (number of sites remained the same) to attempt to improve catch rates. LDWF continues collecting biological information on crabs in CSA's and from dealers to better characterize the size, sex, and maturity composition of commercially landed blue crabs to inform management and future stock assessments. Comparing mean carapace width to how dealers grade/report yielded some interesting results and highlighted differences in how individual dealers report.

Joel Anderson described several IJ projects going on in Texas (TX) and started by giving an overview of a project focusing on sex determination of hatchery-reared southern flounder juveniles and how water temperature may impact sex ratios. He explained they are also using eDNA techniques to test for presence/abundance of marine finfish in coastal waters. They utilized Red Drum to test proof-of-concept for this project in a phased analysis approach and created a western Gulf eDNA "reference file" of over 700 common finfish and invertebrates. They hope to supplement this with

future work to assess efficacy of eDNA metabarcoding for multi-species presence/abundance. Additionally, TX has deployed the Sabine Lake System Acoustic Array (SALSAA), which is a high-resolution acoustic array to supplement regional monitoring efforts and the Gulf-wide iTAG network. They plan to place 100 tags in southern flounder and spotted sea trout by early 2022 to track habitat use and movement patterns. In the future, they hope to include red drum, black drum, alligator gar, and bull shark.

Steve VanderKooy presented a list of each of the projects proposed for FY2022 by state and explained most of them are continuations. States can expect to start new awards in January of 2022 with $194,960 available for each state. Florida will have a larger amount because they have extended their unused funds into the upcoming fiscal year. The total IJ SuRF funds available for FY2022 is $974,800.

GSMFC is still planning to hold a 2-day flounder symposium in late March or early April 2022 in Louisiana to get input and gather information from experts from the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico regions.

CARES Act Program Update

Jeff Rester gave an over on the CARES Act Program and summarized the allocations by state, which totaled $28,857,402. In Louisiana, 991 applicants were paid $14,397,430. In Alabama, 74 applicants were paid $3,254,064. In Mississippi, 223 applicants were paid $1,414,684. In Texas, 134 applicants were paid $8,968,804. Under the first phase of the CARES Act Program, GSMFC paid 1,589 applicants $28,057,705.

CARES Act 2.0 was signed in December of 2020 and will provide an additional $300 million for fisheries disaster assistance. Several states have submitted spend plans for this funding and the process is underway.

Subcommittee Reports

SEAMAP

Jeff Rester stated the SEAMAP subcommittee discussed FY2022 SEAMAP budget based on level funding of $5.125 million.

The subcommittee also discussed the SEAMAP Trawl Shrimp Data and Index Estimation Work Group Report, which developed best practices for Gulf shrimp species abundance indices as well as verified the spatio-temporal alignment of the SEAMAP survey and where the fishery is operating in the Gulf during the summer and fall months.

The subcommittee considered cost effective ways to provide better habitat information to meet the needs of stock assessment and ecosystem modelers, such as attaching cameras to the CTD to photograph bottom habitat at SEAMAP stations during sampling.

Ted Switzer was elected to serve as chair and **Jill Hendon** was elected as vice-chair.

Dan Ellinor moved and it was seconded by Jason Froeba to approve the SEAMAP subcommittee report. Motion carried unanimously.

GulfFIN

Gregg Bray reported GulfFIN met on July 13-14, 2021 virtually and discussed the needs for migrating GSMFC towards Oracles Autonomous cloud service due to projects utilizing mobile electronic devices and to overcome issues of local server outages. This would also provide an increased level of security and data protection for non-confidential and confidential data including, MRIP, SEFHIER, GulfFIN Public Data Warehouse and GulfFIN Biological Data.

The states and commission are working to implement SEFHIER. AL and Florida (FL) have received training from GSMFC and NOAA staff and have already begun field sampling. It is anticipated every state will be trained and in the field by November.

According to NOAA, the SEAS economic survey will be administered again in 2022 as an add-on to the MRIP APAIS and will be tested in Fall 2021 prior to the implementation date of January 1, 2022. Bray also stated GulfFIN has successfully transitioned to electronic tablets for the MRIP APAIS data, which allows for data to be provided to NOAA 4-5 days sooner than previously.

The committee discussed funding issues related to GulfFIN supported projects and projected biological sampling and SEFHIER dockside validation to have funding in place through December 2022. They also determined all ongoing activities as high priority for 2022 FIN funding and to increase funding for biological sampling.

Beverly Sauls (FL) was elected to serve as chair and **Nicole Beckham** (AL) as vice-chair.

Nicole Beckham moved and it was seconded by Dan Ellinor to approve the GulfFIN subcommittee report. Motion carried unanimously.

Molluscan Shellfish

Carolina Bourque mentioned the subcommittee listened to presentations regarding NRDA's Final Restoration/Environmental Assessment describing preferred alternatives for oysters, the results of a Gulf-wide oyster stock assessment model based on the concept of the shell budget theory, and an overview of literature on oyster reef connectivity in the U.S.

During the section on state oyster highlights, only TX reported an increase in on-bottom oyster landings. FL, AL, and Louisiana (LA) all reported decreases in stock assessments and landings, while all MS waters and most of FL waters remain closed to harvest. Off-bottom aquaculture operations continue in AL, MS, and recently in TX, while Hurricane Ida caused almost a total loss in LA. Oyster restoration activities are occurring in all of the states supported by various funding streams such as, NRDA, NFWF, and in TX by fees collected from harvesting. AL and MS are working on planning for construction of relatively large-scale hatchery facilities

The subcommittee elected **Evan Pettis** (TX) to serve as chair and **Portia Sapp** (FL) as vice-chair.

Chris Mace moved and it was seconded by John Mareska to approve the Molluscan Shellfish subcommittee report. Motion carried unanimously.

Artificial Reef

James Ballard updated the group that the AR subcommittee met and decided to postpone the next joint meeting with the Atlantic states until early 2022 in hopes of being in-person. A few of the topics

they're considering are updates on wind farms, socioeconomic benefits of artificial reefs, sea turtle entrapment issues, post-hurricane findings, and decommissioning issues due to bankruptcies.

John Mareska moved and it was seconded by Dan Ellinor to approve the Artificial Reef subcommittee report. Motion carried unanimously.

State/Federal Reports

Darin Topping stated all state reports have been received and everyone should have received them in their pre-meeting materials.

Rick Burris moved and it was seconded by Jason Froeba to approve state and federal reports as written. Motion carried unanimously.

Discussion of Election of Officers

Darin Topping presented the option of keeping the status quo or accepting nominations for new officers. **Chris Mace** stated he would like to discuss instituting a rotational chairmanship similar to the Commission Business committee. The group discussed a few different options to consider for election of officers before a motion was made.

John Mareska moved and it was seconded by Dan Ellinor for Darin Topping to remain as chair and to discuss the options for a rotating chairmanship at the next in-person TCC meeting. Motion carried unanimously.

John Mareska moved and it was seconded by Nicole Beckham for Beverly Sauls to remain as vice-chair. Motion carried unanimously.

Other Business

Darin Topping mentioned in other business that **Nicole Beckham** has recently been appointed to the TCC as one of the representatives from Alabama and welcomed her to the Committee.

Matt Hill explained some of the difficulties with the Trip Ticket program going to VESSL and understanding the contents of the global contract between GSMFC and Bluefin Data. He'd like an opportunity to discuss these issues and explore options within the contract. **Gregg Bray** he would be happy to discuss this issue further but it should probably be brought up at the commercial tech group. Staff will set up a meeting and notify the appropriate participants to be involved.

With no other business to discuss, Jason Froeba moved and it was seconded by John Mareska to adjourn the meeting at 12:02 p.m. Motion carried unanimously.