

APPROVED BY:

COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**COMMISSION BUSINESS MEETING
MINUTES
Wednesday, October 19, 2022
San Antonio, TX**

Call to Order

Chairman Doug Boyd called the meeting to order at 11:00 a.m. The following Commissioners and/or Proxies were present:

Doug Boyd, *Chairman, Citizen Representative from Texas, Boerne, TX*
Christopher Mace, TPWD, Corpus Christi, TX (*Proxy for Carter Smith*)
Dan Ellinor, FWC, Tallahassee, FL (*Proxy for Eric Sutton*)
Jim Brown, *Citizen Representative from Florida, Apalachicola, FL*
Scott Bannon, ADCNR/MRD, Gulf Shores, AL (*Proxy for Chris Blankenship*)
Chris Nelson, *Citizen Representative from Alabama, Bon Secour Fisheries, Bon Secour, AL*
Rick Burris, MSDMR, Biloxi, MS (*Proxy for Joe Spraggins*)
Read Hendon, *Citizen Representative from Mississippi, Ocean Springs, MS*
Jason Froeba, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA (*Proxy for Jack Montoucet*)
John Roussel, *Citizen Representative from Louisiana, Zachary, LA*

Staff

Dave Donaldson, *Executive Director, Ocean Springs, MS*
Nancy Marcellus, *Administrative Officer, Ocean Springs, MS*
Chery Noble, *Administrative Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS*
Steve VanderKooy, *IJF Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS*
Jeff Rester, *SEAMAP/Habitat Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS*
Gregg Bray, *FIN Program Manager, Ocean Springs, MS*
Joe Ferrer, *Systems Administrator, Ocean Springs, MS*
James Ballard, *Sport Fish Restoration/Aquatic Invasives Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS*
Donna Bellais, *ComFIN Programmer, Ocean Springs, MS*
Angie Rabideau, *Senior Accountant, Ocean Springs, MS*
Deanna Valentine, *Scanning Specialist, Ocean Springs, MS*
Debbie McIntyre, *Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS*
Ali Wilhelm, *Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS*
Charlie Robertson, *Fisheries Restoration Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS*

Others

Allan Brown, USFWS, Atlanta, GA
Jack McGovern, NOAA Fisheries, St. Petersburg, FL
Trevor Moncrief, MSDMR, Biloxi, MS
Dean Aucoin, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Darin Topping, TPWD, Rockport, TX
Laura Picariello, TXSG, Galveston, TX
Alexis Sabine, Texas Sea Grant, Corpus, Christi, TX
Tim Sartwell, NOAA Fisheries, Silver Spring, MD
Duane Smith, NOAA/OGC/Enforcement Section, St. Petersburg, FL

Kristian Rogers, DNV, Pflugerville, TX
Jill Hendon, GCRL/USM, Ocean Springs, MS
Tony Reisinger, TXSG, San Benito, TX

Virtual:

Brian Pawlak, NOAA Fisheries, Silver Spring, MD
Rebecca Hazelkorn, NOAA Southeast Regional Office, St. Petersburg, L
Jamie Schubert, NOAA Restoration Center, Silver Spring, MD
Sara Wissmann, NOAA Office of Protect Resources, Silver Spring, MD

D. Donaldson gave a brief overview of the Commission's voting procedures and stated there was a quorum.

Adoption of Agenda

S. Bannon moved to adopt the agenda as submitted. D. Ellinor seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Approval of Minutes (March 17, 2022)

R. Hendon moved to approve the March 17, 2022 minutes as submitted. S. Bannon seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission Standing Committee Reports

Law Enforcement Committee (LEC)

D. Aucoin reported the LEC/LETC met Tuesday resulting in one action item. He said they discussed discontinuing updating and distributing the Strategic and Operations Plans. He explained that these documents were very instrumental years ago with reference to JEAs and other projects, but the utility of these documents has changed over time. If the LEC/LETC stops producing the Strategic Plan, it will remain in place as general guiding principles with vision and mission statement, until it is determined a change is needed. The Ops Plan will be discontinued.

MOTION: the LEC requests the Commission's approval to allow the Operations and Strategic Plans to expire and only be updated as needed in the future.

The Commission approved the motion unanimously.

D. Aucoin reported the Committee discussed the use of Fish Attracting Devices (FADs) in recent years and if there were any problems that might need to be considered related to user group conflicts and the deployment of FADs. After much discussion, it was determined there is not an urgent need for any action. The Red Drum Technical Task Force (TTF) has completed the Profile and presented it to the TCC. The new Mangrove Snapper TTF membership is full and work is expected to begin after the first of the year. The annual *License and Fees* publication for 2021 was completed and copies were distributed to the LEC and the Commissioners and Proxies. The states were asked for their rules and regulations for inclusion in the *Law Summary* (AKA the Red Book) for 2022 in March of 2023. Both the *License and Fees* and the *Law Summary* publications serve as historical references and a way to track license sales and regulatory changes over time. All Commission publications are available on the Commission website. Written reports were provided

by most of the individual states/agencies in advance and are available upon request from the Commission office.

Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC)

D. Topping reported that the first half of the meeting was a general session on the advanced technologies in marine fisheries, and it focused on the technologies used in the Gulf and other parts of the U.S. that could be used to collect data to inform and enhance fisheries management. The TCC heard presentations on Sairdron's capabilities to collect data using Uncrewed Surface Vehicles (USV's); the advances in marine animal telemetry technology, analyses, and the future of that field; innovative approaches to using Artificial Intelligence (AI)/machine learning to monitor oyster restoration areas in Chesapeake Bay; an oyster presentation that discussed using off-the-shelf (recreational) side scan and echo-sounding technology to identify and map oyster reefs in TX; and FL provided a presentation using camera-based video with AI to monitor recreational reef fisheries effort.

D. Topping reported Dr. Eric Saillant gave an update on a study aiming to develop genomic resources to survey wild populations of tripletail in the U.S. and abroad to assess stock structures and connectivity of populations across the globe. Genetic analysis of tripletail from Peru, Brazil, Australia, and parts of the U.S. produced results indicating the level of genetic distance between distinct populations. Gary Decossas provided an overview of the shrimp observer program and attempted to respond to questions sent to the SEFSC by the TCC after the March 2022 meeting. The original questions asked by the TCC were to better understand characterization of fish in the shrimp bycatch, and questions involving the bycatch of spotted seatrout. This information would be important to be included in future assessments; however, some answers to questions are still pending. Brett Falterman updated the TCC on the Deepwater Horizon (DWH) hotspot mapping initiative and requested input on most effective ways to engage with stakeholders to get feedback from them to help identify bycatch hotspots for various fisheries. Steve VanderKoooy provided a brief summary of the funding for SuRF projects by state for the upcoming fiscal year. John Mareska briefly discussed the progress that has been made on the Red Drum Profile, which they hope to have finalized in the coming months. Charlie Robertson provided suggestions to the TCC on materials to be provided for new members. Guidance was given for staff to provide onboarding materials to new members in the future.

Subcommittee Reports

Artificial Reef – **D. Topping** reported the Artificial Reef Subcommittee will meet next month.

Data Management – **D. Topping** reported the Subcommittee was provided an update on VESL development for commercial trip ticket data collections, which the states expressed frustration in the speed of the development progress. The Subcommittee directed FIN staff to organize a coordinated monthly call between Bluefin, state, and federal partners to improve the development process and understanding of partner's needs. They also discussed progress on reef fish conversion factor research, warehousing state recreational survey data, transitioning GulfFIN databases to a cloud service, and reviewed commercial landings data.

Molluscan – **D. Topping** reported the Subcommittee members provided oyster resource updates across the Gulf including trends in landings, aquaculture developments, restoration efforts, and

closing/opening procedures for reefs. They also heard presentations regarding an oyster genetics consortium project and a summary of the Gulf of Mexico Alliance's (GOMA) Oyster Community of Practice. They will prioritize coordinating more with GOMA in the future.

SEAMAP – D. Topping reported the Subcommittee members discussed concerns with the Vertical Line Survey data. They decided to discontinue this survey in 2023 and to use unobligated funds for state participation in reef fish sampling and habitat mapping. They also discussed issues related to mud trawls and distribution of SEAMAP data to researchers and the public. The Subcommittee approved a resolution for Tommy Van Devender and moved it to the TCC for their approval.

Motion: TCC recommends to approve the resolution for Tommy Van Devender and move it to the Full Commission for their approval.

The Commission approved the motion unanimously.

Crab – D. Topping reported the state representatives discussed projects where SuRF funds were used for crab related data. The Subcommittee also discussed the status of the crab fishery, the effectiveness of current approaches to management, and current crab trap license and bycatch reduction requirements.

State/Federal Highlights

D. Topping reported state representatives provided an overview of the highlights from their programs since the last TCC meeting. The full reports are in the Briefing Book.

Discussion of Election of Officers

D. Topping reported the TCC discussed the election of officers and decided to move in the direction of a two-year rotating chair and vice-chair.

Motion: That election of chair and vice-chair for the TCC be elected on a two-year term and rotate East to West around the Gulf.

Motion: Beverly Sauls serve as Chair of the TCC and Nicole Beckman serve as Vice-Chair.

The Commission approved both motions unanimously.

State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee (S/FFMC)

S. Bannon reported the Committee met this morning and they have four motions to present for approval.

GulfFIN Priorities

S. Bannon stated Gregg Bray outlined the status of 2023 GulfFIN funding for data collection and management activities. Preliminary 2023 funding amounts for GulfFIN and RecFIN line items are based on the likelihood of operating under a continuing resolution and receiving level funding. The proposed amount available for FIN funding in 2023 totals \$6.92M. The total proposed spending for 2023 for all the high priority GulfFIN jobs is \$6.78M, which would result in a potential surplus of \$145k. After discussion the committee made the following motion:

Motion: The State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee moved to accept the proposed funding for the following GulfFIN activities for 2023 (Coordination and Administration of FIN Activities; Collecting, Managing, and Disseminating Marine Recreational Fisheries Data; Operation of FIN Data Management System; and Trip Ticket Program Operations) for a total budget of \$6.78M and to forward this onto the full Commission for their approval. The motion passed unanimously.

The Commission approved the motion unanimously.

S. Bannon reported this funding scenario would result in a potential surplus of \$145K. The committee discussed options for obligating and spending the surplus in 2023. Until definitive funding amounts for 2023 are provided by NOAA Fisheries it is difficult to determine how to prioritize surplus spending. G. Bray stated he would work with the GulfFIN Committee and bring their recommendation back to S/FFMC for their consideration once definitive funding amounts are provided for 2023.

S. Bannon reported the committee also discussed funding for NOAA Fisheries SEFHIER program. The states and GSMFC staff have been assisting by implementing the dockside validation survey component. GSMFC staff have determined that approximately \$500K exists to support the validation survey in 2023. The proposed cost for continuing the validation survey at current sampling levels in 2023 is approximately \$1M. NOAA Fisheries SERO stated they are operating at a funding shortfall and no additional funds are currently available. The committee asked that Gulf States staff to work with NOAA Fisheries and state scientific staff to have a technical meeting soon to discuss whether to continue the validation survey under a funding shortfall and how it would be implemented.

S. Bannon reported the committee also discussed continuation of the GulfFIN Biological Sampling program. This program collects age structures and additional biological measurements from the recreational sector for a large number of federal and state managed species. Current proposed budgets put the project cost at nearly \$1.4M for 2023 but only \$1M exists in available funding. After discussion, the committee made the following motion:

Motion: The State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee moved to accept the proposed funding for the GulfFIN Biological Sampling program for 2023 for a total budget of \$1M and to forward this onto the full Commission for their approval. The motion passed unanimously.

The Commission approved the motion unanimously.

S. Bannon reported this represents a funding shortfall of \$318K. G. Bray will work with state program managers to obtain revised budgets and statements of work for 2023 under the funding shortfall.

S. Bannon stated that in reference to the SEFHIER program, all of the states and the federal members were supportive in trying to continue the survey. Everyone will be working diligently to try to continue that program.

SEAMAP Priorities

S. Bannon reported Jeff Rester provided background on the SEAMAP budget and surveys for the Gulf of Mexico. The FY2022 SEAMAP appropriation was \$5.125M and J. Rester stated that SEAMAP received approximately \$4.78M for fishery independent sampling for all three SEAMAP components. Each SEAMAP component based their FY2023 budget planning on level funding of \$5.125M. The total budget amount proposed for the Gulf was \$2.10M.

S. Bannon reported the State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee reviewed the various SEAMAP surveys along with their associated costs. For FY2023, SEAMAP will continue the current SEAMAP survey work and sampling effort and hope that level funding or additional funding will be appropriated. After discussion, the committee made the following motion:

Motion: The State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee moved to accept the proposed funding for SEAMAP surveys for 2023 for a total budget of \$2.10M and to forward this onto the full Commission for their approval. The motion passed unanimously.

The Commission approved the motion unanimously.

IJF Priorities

S. Bannon reported the committee received an update from **Steve VanderKooy** on the Interjurisdictional Fisheries State Research funding program. The full update will be provided by S. VanderKooy under Agenda Item 13A.

Menhaden Advisory Committee Report (MAC)

S. Bannon reported **Ray Mroch** (NOAA Fisheries) presented a review of the 2022 fishing season. There were very few weather days to keep the fleet off the water in 2022. The final expected landings will be around 487,000 metric tons. **Carey Gelpi** (TPWD) reported that a total of 1.9M lbs had been landed against the 34M lbs Texas cap in 2022 which was 6% of the available catch. **Dr. Kim De Mutsert** (USM) gave an overview of the two ecosystem-based models that have been developed in the Gulf related to menhaden. Critical to both models is the need for expanded diet data for a number of potential predators. R. Mroch stated that an annual forecast of projected landings has been provided for the past 50 years. He explained the model is simple using the previous year's catch and effort to predict subsequent seasons catches. R. Mroch will continue to provide the committee with forecasts prior to the beginning of each season even though the MAC may not formally meet in March. **Dr. Robert Leaf** (USM) and his graduate student, updated the Committee on the Harvest Control Rule (HRC) and Annual Abundance Indices. The Harvest Control Rule is a potential tool to restrict the fishery when there are detectable shifts in menhaden abundances in the Gulf which the industry can use in their MSC certification to adjust harvest levels based on the indices.

S. Bannon reported the MAC discussed the suite of reference points which were provided as part of the assessment results in SEDAR63 and GDAR03. Currently, the limit and thresholds are based

on a historical average that is not expected to be exceeded. The Commission hosted two workshops in 2019 to discuss options for managers then everything was closed due to COVID so no progress has taken place

The MAC provided the following motion:

Motion: The State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee moved to approve the MAC holding an additional facilitated workshop to develop the biological reference points for management to define overfishing and overfished status for the Gulf Menhaden stock.

The Commission approved the motion unanimously.

The MAC chair rotated to the Federal seat so until a replacement is trained, Ray Mroch was elected as the MAC chair.

S. Bannon reported Russ Dunn provided a presentation on the update to the National Saltwater Recreational Fishing Policy. The policy provides the public insight into NOAA Fisheries decision making on recreational fishing issues. The policy was updated based on findings from the 2022 Recreational Fisheries Summit. The policy is focused on supporting diverse healthy ecosystems, promoting broad public access to fisheries resources, maintaining strong partnerships between state and federal management entities, advancing innovative approaches and solutions to evolving science and management challenges, providing world class science to inform decision making, and continued improvement of communication with the public. NOAA Fisheries is still receiving comments through partner discussions and public webinars. The goal is to have an updated policy in June 2023.

Motion: Jason Froeba was nominated for chairman and Luiz Barberi was nominated for vice-chairman. The nominations were closed and a motion was passed to approve both nominations.

The Commission approved the motions unanimously.

Sea Grant Fisheries Extension Advisory Panel Meeting Report

Laura Picariello reported it has been a busy year for the Sea Grant Programs. She said Sea Grant met yesterday afternoon and each state gave an update on current projects. As everyone knows, Florida is dealing with the aftermath of *Hurricane Ian*. Florida Sea Grant is conducting an economic analysis, particularly for fisheries, associated with the Hurricane. They have a weekly webinar and a website page that provides resources to coastal communities looking for any recovery or relief programs. The preliminary estimate of loss is \$1.5B. In Fort Myers, most of the shrimp fleet and a significant portion of the for-hire vessels are on land. There has been a lot of concern about long-term loss of impacts since they do not expect recovery of tourism in that area for a very long time. They are trying to organize programs such as clean up and water quality monitoring that will hire industry workers to provide them income. She stated presentations were also given on Sea Grant Regional Projects and they had guest presentations on other collaborations. Detailed information on the Sea Grant meeting is in the Sea Grant section of these minutes.

NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office Comments

Jack McGovern gave an update on NOAA/SERO activities. He stated the Gulf Red Snapper season for federally permitted for-hire vessels began on June 1st and closed on August 19th. They are waiting for Wave 4 MRIP landings to determine the for-hire quota and if the quota has not been met, the harvest can be reopened. He said NOAA developed a final rule to implement two framework actions to address Gulf Red Snapper. The first calibrates the Red Snapper state surveys and the other increases the catch limits for Red Snapper consistent with catch level recommendations from the Gulf Council's SSC. The proposed rule has been published and the final rule should publish sometime in November and be effective at the beginning of 2023. This final rule is being followed by another framework action that would further increase the Red Snapper catch levels based on revised *Great Red Snapper Count* estimates and recommendations from the SSC. The Gulf Council has approved a framework action to increase catch levels and it should be approved and implemented in the spring of 2023.

There have been two rules published for Gulf Red Grouper. Amendment 53 was approved by the Gulf Council last year. Gulf Red Grouper is not overfished but below target levels. A final rule that revised the catch levels and sector allocations was published on May 22 and was effective in June. There is a subsequent Red Grouper framework amendment that was approved by the Gulf Council that proposed an increase to the catch levels based on an interim analysis from the Science Center that showed increasing trends of Red Grouper abundance. That final rule published in July was effective in early August.

An amendment for Gulf Cobia was approved by both the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils to end overfishing of Gulf Cobia. It modifies the size limit, catch limits and possession limits. The proposed rule was published in July and a final rule is expected to be published soon.

There is a completed framework amendment for King Mackerel that would increase the catch levels based on a stock assessment that indicates the stock is healthy. This was submitted to NOAA in August and the proposed rule published early this month. The Gulf Council is also working on another amendment for King Mackerel that would change the sector allocations and this will be discussed next week at their meeting. NOAA is also working on a proposed rule for Vermillion Snapper. The Gulf Council has completed a framework amendment that would increase the catch levels based on the stock assessment.

An emergency rule was published in July to stop overfishing for Greater Amberjack. The fishing season will only be open during the months of September and October. The Gulf Council is scheduled to approve an amendment to end overfishing of Greater Amberjack to rebuild the stock. The Gulf Council is also working on an amendment to end overfishing of Gag Grouper and the interim rule is expected to be effective for the 2023 season. **J. McGovern** stated the Gulf Council is also working on the electronic logbook devices used to collect shrimp effort data. He said NOAA authorized delayed reporting for federal dealers and federally permitted for-hire fishermen who report electronically in counties that experienced catastrophic conditions due to *Hurricane Ian*. Lastly, the spend plans from Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi for the Bonnet Carré Spillway funds have been received and grants personnel are working to disburse the funding.

USFWS Region 4 Office Comments

A. Brown stated they focus on Fish and Aquatic Conservation (FAC) mainly in freshwater but what happens inland can affect marine resources. He feels it is important to keep the lines of communication open and the cooperative efforts with the Commission are very important. He said at this time they are still operating on a Continuing Resolution but the proposed budget for the FAC in fiscal year 2023 for the President is \$260M, the House is \$235M and the Senate is \$246M. He said all three branches had significant increases for fisheries. He said certain programs are being discussed for more funding such as invasive carp and maintenance/updating FWS facilities. The 2021 Annual Reports for the FAC program is online and the FWS homepage has information on all of the FWS conservation efforts. He again thanked the Commission, specifically J. Ballard for the cooperative effort of the ANS Small Grants program.

NOAA Fisheries Budget Update

D. Donaldson said the detailed NOAA Fisheries Budget is under Tabs B & C of the Briefing Book. He said the Senate has passed the funding bill for next year but as mentioned previously, they are still under a CR. The House recommended just under \$1.1B for NOAA Fisheries which is \$84M above last year. The fisheries data collection survey and assessment is at \$213.8M which is about \$26M above last year. That particular line item includes the FINs which is at \$24M and data collection for recreational fisheries that allocates up to \$3.5M for the implementation of the modernizing of collecting fisheries data. There is also a new Gulf of Mexico fisheries research item for \$5M to NMFS and the Commissions on collaboration of no fewer than 5 grants to fishery independent research for IJF species. Then there is \$5M to NMFS and the Gulf States for collaboration to insure the implementation of state management of Red Snapper. Under the Fisheries Management Programs and Services, there is \$141M for the electronic for-hire monitoring (SEFHIER), \$4M to support continuing implementation of SEFHIER, \$18M for Aquaculture, \$44.5M for the regional Councils and Commissions, \$3.5M for the IJF and \$80M for enforcement.

On the Senate side they recommended \$1.1B for NOAA Fisheries which is again an increase, the fisheries data collection and resource assessment is about the same as in the House \$213M. The fisheries surveys is \$6M above FY22 to ensure historical levels of survey coverage. They specifically mention SEAMAP and the bottom longlining and fall trawl surveys that feed into the Red Snapper assessment and other reef fish assessments. There is data collection for recreational fisheries which was level funded and there is language about a NMFS/Commission collaboration to do a fishing effort pilot to determine the best way to collect and support management decisions. FINs are \$1M above last year and there is language that directs money to GulfFIN to collect bio samples. The funding will run out next year without this. The Gulf of Mexico research fisheries initiative that was in the house as well, is at \$5M and then the state management for red snapper as well and a little less for the fisheries management program and services. SEFHIER is at \$139M and there is \$22M for Aquaculture which is an increase from last year and includes the IMTA. There is \$46M for the Councils and Commissions, \$3.5M for IJF and \$86M for enforcement, and they specifically allocate money for enforcement of SEFHIER. If the budgets pass that will be an increase in funding for the Commission.

Discussion of Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission's Involvement in NRDA Shrimp Effort Pilot Project

Rebecca Hazelkorn gave a virtual presentation on the *Pilot Implementation of AIS in the Gulf of Mexico State Permitted Shrimp Fishery to Better Understand Nearshore/Inshore Fishing Effort to Reduce Sea Turtle Bycatch (AIS)*. She stated Jamie Schubert and Sara Wissmann are project partners and are also present virtually. She said this is a Deepwater Horizon (DWH) NOAA funded project and a summary of the presentation is in Tab D of the Briefing Book and the full presentation is available upon request. She reviewed the goals and objectives of the AIS and the potential role of the Commission in the project.

The Commissioners agreed to be involved in this project and asked D. Donaldson to keep them updated on the progress.

Discussion of Purchasing Airline Travel Insurance for Commission Travel

D. Donaldson stated purchasing airline travel insurance was discussed at the last meeting and staff was instructed to collect more information on this topic. He stated that since he has been with the Commission, there has been one instance when they had to reimburse for an unused airline ticket. Staff calculated it would cost an extra \$4,500/year to start purchasing the insurance. It was also noted that the airlines have loosened restriction on cancelling/changing tickets since COVID. After discussion, it was decided not to purchase or reimburse travel insurance, but staff should monitor the situation and if anything changes, the Commission will discuss the issue again.

Review and Approve Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission Administrative Manual

D. Donaldson stated that the Commission is finally off of agency review but in response to the GMD Audit, several items were changed/added to the Administrative Manual. He said all changes are in Tab E of the Briefing Book and the Commissioners reviewed the changes. Most of the changes were adding grant related information/sites.

C. Nelson moved to approve the revised Administrative Manual. S. Bannon seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

Selection of 2023 Lyles/Simpson Award Recipient

D. Donaldson stated the Executive Committee discussed the 2023 Award Recipient. **C. Nelson moved** then withdrew a motion to nominate Gary Graham as the 2023 recipient, only if he will be considered for 2024. The Commission discussed the selection of the 2023 and future recipients.

J. Froeba moved to nominate Joey Shephard as the 2023 Lyles/Simpson Award recipient. R. Hendon seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

IJF

S. VanderKooy stated the report is in Tab H of the Briefing Book. He said the Tripletail Genetics work which was started in December of 2015 is completed. The results were presented to the TCC and a publication is anticipated in the near future. The *Red Drum Magement Profile* is complete and will be forwarded to the TCC for approval. The *Mangrove Snapper Management Profile* has been delayed due to COVID but they do have state, habitat and enforcement representation and will meet after the first of the year to get started and they will discuss if they need a sociologist and economist, and they will also seek representation from the commercial and recreational sectors.

S. VanderKooy said they have been working on acoustic tagging of Tripletail throughout the Gulf and are sharing efforts with DMR and GCRL on sampling trips. They also hosted a Flounder Symposium earlier this year to address the current status of the Flounder stocks. He gave a brief overview of the SuRF Program which is also in the Briefing Book. He said a total of \$1.16M was available for the 2023 Program and they have projects on blue crabs, flounder, alligator gar and oysters.

Aquaculture Program

S. VanderKooy said the report is in Tab I of the Briefing Book. He said, as all of you know, they have been running an Aquaculture Small Grants Program cooperatively with NOAA for several years. He reviewed the nine 2022 Pilot Projects and stated the projects are in various stages and they are planning to present on several of the projects at the Aquaculture America Meeting in February 2023. Additional funds were provided for a Integrated Multi-Trophic Aquaculture (IMTA) project to culture native species of finfish, bivalve mollusks, and macroalgae in state waters. The DISL has identified a potential site south of Fort Morgan to place an AquaFort platform. Funds will also be available next year to continue if they meet the criteria for the project this year. He reported on the Gulf Oyster Consortia and stated RFPs have been released for 2023 Pilots

SEAMAP

J. Rester reported the full report is under Tab J of the Briefing Book. He said the *Oregon II* was not available for the Spring Plankton Survey because of repairs so the survey was cancelled. The Summer Shrimp/Groundfish Survey was also impacted. NOAA Fisheries did not sample during their normal sampling period this summer. The Bottom Longline Work Group, Plankton Work Group, and Shrimp/Groundfish Work Group met in April to review their respective operations manuals and review sampling protocols and procedures before beginning 2022 sampling.

The Bottom Longline Survey was recently completed. The SEAMAP Vertical Line Survey is currently being conducted off Alabama and Texas. The survey started about 12 years ago and approximately 90-95% of the catch is red snapper. The vertical line data were submitted to the Red Snapper SEDAR Workshop for evaluation prior to the upcoming Red Snapper Stock Assessment. Although the panelists felt the analyses were sound, they did not feel they were suitable for the assessment. The SEAMAP Subcommittee decided to discontinue this survey at the end of 2022 and to use the funds to participate in the Reef Fish Survey.

The Commission continues to manage SEAMAP data and distribute the data to interested parties. The Commission has fulfilled seven SEAMAP data requests since March. The various SEAMAP databases were download 130 times since March. In the last year SEAMAP data from the Gulf of Mexico has been submitted for use in SEDAR stock assessments for hammerhead sharks, Spanish mackerel, scamp, red snapper and grey snapper.

CARES Act

J. Rester stated the complete report is in Tab K of the Briefing Book. He said the original CARES Act has been concluded and the final report was submitted. He said they are now completing CARES Act 2.0 which provided an additional \$300 million for fisheries disaster assistance. The four Gulf states received a total of over \$26 million to be distributed by September 30, 2021. All

states except for Texas expended their funds on direct payments and have not had any activity since the March Commission meeting.

In January 2022, Texas decided to give applicants who had their original CARES Act application denied, a second chance to qualify for CARES Act 2.0 funds. The Commission sent out 12 payments totaling \$1,569,590.13 effectively paying off all Texas applicants that qualified for funding. Texas had \$5,019,028.26 remaining for projects. Texas proposed to use \$1,591,975 for a seafood marketing campaign designed by the Texas Department of Agriculture. The seafood media campaign would promote, expand, and elevate the consumption of Texas Gulf seafood with the goal to unite, market and create consumer awareness for Lone Star shrimp, blue crab, fish, and oysters. This plan was approved in April 2022. Texas also proposed to use \$1.5M to restore 52.5 acres of oyster reefs and approximately \$2M for the Texas commercial oyster boat license buyback program. The oyster restoration plan was approved in April 2022 also and involves planting cultch material on preapproved restoration sites in Galveston Bay and Matagorda Bay. The buyback program was approved a couple of weeks ago and it will start in the near future.

Sportfish Restoration Fisheries Program

J. Ballard stated the complete report is under Tab L of the Briefing Book. He said they finished the first year of the continuous water quality monitoring effort under the Gulf Artificial Reef Monitoring Assessment Program Pilot Study. He explained how the data is collected and showed slides of the gear and different sites where it was deployed. He said everything is working as they expected. He said they will have a TCC Artificial Reef Subcommittee meeting November 8-9 in Alabama. They continue to work to increase funding for the program so the Commission can help to support and coordinate more Sport Fish Restoration activities across the Gulf of Mexico.

Aquatic Nuisance Species Programs

J. Ballard stated the report is in Tab M of the Briefing book. He said they are still administering the small grants program but unfortunately, for 2022 there was not enough funds to release a RFP. Over the last seven years, the program has funded 43 projects totaling over \$1M. He reviewed the four projects that are currently being funded from 2021. They continue the effort with the invasive species trunk and will be updating the trunks soon. He said he is chairing the ANSTF's Prevention Subcommittee which is tasked with addressing five key outputs of the new ANSTF Strategic Plan. The fall GSARP meeting will be held in New Orleans, LA on November 30 – December 1 and the fall ANSTF meeting will be held in Falls Church, VA on January 11-12, 2023.

Fisheries Information Network

G. Bray stated the complete report is in Tab N of the Briefing Book. He said the programmatic work for this calendar year is going well for collecting both recreational and commercial landings effort data. That information is submitted for stock assessments and biological age and length information. The process is working due to the collaborative partnerships of the program.

He said their highest priorities are working with the states to collect and warehouse state survey data to make it available to the federal partners and one day making it queryable to the public. He said they to push forward in advancements in electronic technology. As mentioned previously, tablets are now available for dockside surveys for MRIP and SEFHIER. He said they recently deployed a web-based computer assisted telephone interview package for the MRIP for-hire

telephone survey. It is working well, they are delivering recreational effort and landings data that was collected a week faster than the old paper reporting methods. He said all oracle databases are moving to a cloud platform which is more reliable, secure and provides faster access to the data. He said they are building an electronic mobile application for Alabama for their snapper check program so they can collect dockside validation data for their state survey electronically and they continue the expansion and development of the VESL program. They are planning an Otolith meeting in 2023 and the 5 Year Cooperative Agreement will start next year.

SEFHIER

G. Bray said this program is summarized in Tab O of the Briefing Book. It is the implementation of mandatory electronic logbook reporting for the for-hire sector in the Gulf of Mexico. The Commission has assisted with the dockside validation survey that will provide data from all five Gulf states to NOAA Fisheries. In 2022, state surveyors completed 1,658 vessel interviews and the Commission is working with NOAA Fisheries to refine the site selection process and improve the efficiency of the survey.

J. McGovern expressed his appreciation for the help from G. Bray and others on making this program successful.

Fisheries Restoration Program

C. Robertson stated the report is in Tab P of the Briefing Book. He said the *Return 'Em Right* program is the only program under this project presently but the AIS Program will also fall under the FRP. The major objective of the program is to provide tools and training to reduce post release mortality of reef fish. He stated the Human Dimension Survey has been completed and they had over 4,200 respondents from recreational reef fish anglers in the Gulf. Some preliminary results show anglers are more aware of venting methods than descending devices; 60% of the anglers only reef fish a few times a season; most anglers fished in 60 feet of water or more; and there are differences in each state so they will be able to tailor the outreach program to each region/state. He said they want anglers to make the best decision on which method to use to help fish survive after they are released and they will do a follow-up survey in 2024. He reviewed the research and monitoring efforts being funded under this project and showed videos of the field work.

Executive Committee Report

The following Executive Committee Report was submitted for review and approval:

Draft Agenda

D. Donaldson presented the draft agenda for the Executive Committee meeting. **S. Bannon** moved to accept the agenda as written. The motion was seconded by **J. Froeba**.

Discussion of GSMFC Audit

D. Donaldson announced that the Commission is no longer under federal agency review status. **A. Rabideau** reviewed the 12/31/21 Single Audit with the Committee. Jason Keenum, CPA performed the audit. An unqualified opinion was received which means that the financial statements were fairly presented in all material aspects and there were no instances of noncompliance found. **A. Rabideau** pointed out that page 36 of the audit

report outlines the summary of the audit results. **J. Spraggins moved to accept the audit report. The motion was seconded by S. Bannon and passed unanimously.**

Financial Report

A. Rabideau noted that the Commissioners receive the financial report every month by email. She discussed the Statement of Cash Flows and explained why the outstanding reimbursable amounts are greater than the cash on hand. The Commission is unable to draw down federal funds at the end of September due to an ASAP shutdown every year to close their fiscal year. She assured the Committee that the funds are not disbursed until a drawdown has been made.

Presentation of 2023 Budget

A. Rabideau said the total projected budget for fiscal year 2023 is **\$14,386,882**. She pointed out a column of contractual balances that consist of obligated funds from prior years that is not included in the projected balance but most likely will be expended in 2023. She also pointed out a column that demonstrates the percent change from the prior year to make it easier to identify material changes. **J. Froeba moved to approve the 2023 budget at \$14,386,882. The motion was seconded by D. Ellinor and passed unanimously.**

Discussion of Travel Guidelines

D. Donaldson addressed the suggestion of raising the airfare limit to greater than \$700 for GSMFC approval due to rising costs. It was pointed out that there haven't been any problems with the current limit. **D. Donaldson** suggested that the Commission will revisit the issue annually as costs continue to fluctuate.

Discussion of Hiring a New Employee

D. Donaldson discussed the need for hiring a GulfFIN IT Specialist, Applications Software to coordinate among the Gulf States in applying specialized software programming knowledge to fisheries data collection, data processing and data management with GSMFC. GSMFC currently uses a contractor to perform the work. If funding becomes available in the future, the discussion will be revisited at that time.

Discussion of 2023 Lyles-Simpson Award Recipient

D. Donaldson discussed candidates for the 2023 Lyles-Simpson Award. Joey Shepherd and Lance Robinson were nominated in a prior year. Gary Graham was also mentioned as a potential candidate. The Commission will have a discussion to determine the 2023 recipient.

Staff Compensation

The Committee discussed 2023 salary increases for GSMFC staff. After some discussion, **J. Froeba moved that a 7% raise for all staff that meet or exceed expectations related to their job performance be put in place for 2023. The motion was seconded by S. Bannon and passed unanimously.**

Other Business

D. Donaldson noted that he recently had discussions with Representative Graves' office about the Commission administering an offshore wind fishermen compensation fund. Congress is considering drafting legislation for this fund and the details still need to be worked out. It is still very early in the process but wanted to make the Committee aware of the situation and will keep the Commission apprised of any developments. He said they are planning on taking the annual Gulf Congressional Delegation trip in early 2023.

R. Hendon *moved to approve the Executive Committee Report. S. Bannon seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.*

State Directors' Reports

D. Boyd stated the full reports were submitted prior to the meeting and discussed during the TCC meeting. The reports are in Tabs S-W in the briefing book and each Director give a brief report on some of the work the states are doing.

Florida – D. Ellinor stated Florida is handling issues related to *Hurricane Ian* but have completed efforts for *Hurricanes Michael and Irma*. FWC is trying to secure funds to assist those impacted from *Hurricane Sally*. He then reviewed the fisheries programs FWC are involved with and stated the information is in Tab S of the Briefing Book.

Alabama – S. Bannon reviewed highlights of their program and stated the complete report is in Tab T of the Briefing Book. He stated they have finished with the CARES programs and are waiting for the funds from the 2019 freshwater flooding. He reviewed their Artificial Reef Program and stated they are creating four new inshore reefs. They continue to use tablets for the APAIS and SEFHIER data collection and are hoping all surveys will use this type reporting in the future. He stated last year's oyster season was 79 days and they harvested approximately 50K sacks. He then explained the new Oyster Management Grid System that they have started using. The new Fort Morgan Pier is now open and has been very popular for anglers.

Mississippi – R. Burris said the complete report is in Tab U of the Briefing Book. He reported on the Artificial Reef Program and stated to date, approximately 8,000 tons of material have been deployed on FH13. They also deployed the research vessel *HERMES* and are working with Omega Protein to deploy two decommissioned pogy boats. They are working with COE on permitting two additional areas near FH13 and FH2 because the two zones are near capacity. The Red Snapper season has been opened for 112 days and so far, 114K lbs has been harvested which is 75% of the ACL. The season will close when ACL is met. The Spotted Sea Trout assessment was completed with data through 2021 and the report should be available next month. They are continuing acoustic tagging of Southern Flounder and they are working on establishing electro fishing protocols. The Shellfish Bureau began training the fifth class of off-bottom aquaculture farming and there are 465 acres available for commercial farming behind Deer Island. MDMR currently has 51 acres leased by 27 active farmers and approximately 3.5-4M oyster seed are being cultured. Approximately 92,000 oysters were harvested from January to June 2022.

Louisiana – J. Froeba stated the report is in Tab U of the Briefing Book. He reported on the NERDA funded reef enhancement project that was finished this past year and there is a 5-year

plan to monitor biological and user information. He said they are in the process of awarding the contract for the first FAD buoy. They are hoping FADs will replace the upper water column habitat once a structure is removed from the water. They have completed an updated Blue Crab Stock Assessment and the stock is not being overfished. They hope to have a stock assessment on Red Drum completed by the end of the year and expects to have to take management action when the results are in. The LA Creel survey continues and they completed 771 of the 775 assignments drawn during the sample period. They have ongoing Spotted Seatrout and Sheepshead life history studies and are doing a Fyke Net Pilot Survey for Southern Flounder. He then reported on Hurricane recovery and Finfish seasons and regulations.

Texas - C. Mace stated the report is in Tab W of the Briefing Book. He reported on regulatory changes and proposals due to the 2021 freeze that caused significant mortality in both game and nongame fish in Texas. TPWD implemented a temporary regulation change for Spotted Sea Trout this year which reduced bag and procession limits and narrower slot size but it will expire on August 31, 2023. Fisheries biologists have noted that data from the spring 2022 gillnet surveys are showing an increase of spotted seatrout catch rates compared to the previous spring. Additionally, the TPWC has proposed to permanently close 3 mid-coast areas for harvesting oysters and meetings are being held for all sector's input on this. The Texas Oyster Mariculture Program has for the first time, harvested oysters in April 2022 for sale and consumption.

The 2021-2022 commercial oyster harvest season ended with 311,554 sacks reported from harvested public reefs. HB51 included a requirement that dealers purchasing oysters harvested from Texas Bays return 30% by volume of the total quantity of oysters harvested during the previous licensed year or pay a sack fee. So far, slightly more than \$1.1M in fees and 43K cubic yards of cultch have been placed in the bays by oyster dealers. Using the shell recovery fees TPWD Staff have restored 24 acres of oyster reef. TPWD staff received an additional 23 appeals from the commercial fishing sector for the second chance round for CARES funding, 12 of which were approved. The estimated CARES Act funds remaining for projects is a little more than \$3.3M. The Artificial Reef program deployed 100 pyramids and 100 low relief plates at the Sabine nearshore reef site which is HI20, and all those materials were deployed by July of this year. Trip ticket staff continue to work with Bluefin Software developers to improve the production version of the VESL web-based trip ticket system. The trip ticket program is also currently applying new conversion factors to their previously submitted shrimp data as well as working on snapper and grouper gut weight to whole weight conversion factors. The current agreement with GSMFC for the bio sampling started in September of 2021 and otoliths have been collected from recreational anglers and aged via independent contractors paid by GSMFC with aging analysis occurring at the Perry R. Bass marine fisheries research station. To date samples have been processed on red drum, spotted sea trout, southern flounder, black drum, sheepshead and several species of snapper. Thirty SEAMAP bottom longline stations and all 60 vertical line stations have been completed. The saltwater enhancement program for FY22 the stocked more than 23M fingerlings in Texas public water. Finally, during this year's commercial license buy back period, 5 commercial shrimping licenses were purchased for an average price of \$8,260 each.

Future Meetings

N. Marcellus stated the next annual meeting will be in Louisiana and asked the Louisiana Commissioners to contact her with any hotel or city preferences. If there are no suggestions, she will reach out to the usual hotel contacts in New Orleans.

Publications List and Web Statistics

D. Donaldson stated Tab X & Y are informational and if anyone has any questions to contact him.

Election of Officers

D. Donaldson referred the Commissioners to Tab Z of the Briefing Book, the history of the rotation of officers, and suggested that since the Commission is moving to one meeting per year the Officers should serve a two-year term.

R. Hendon moved that the Officers be elected on a two-year term and continue rotating on the established schedule. S. Bannon seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

R. Hendon moved to elect Scott Bannon as Chairman. C. Mace seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

J. Roussel moved to elect Jason Froeba Vice-Chairman. D. Ellinor seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

R. Hendon moved to elect Joe Spraggins 2nd Vice-Chairman. S. Bannon seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

Other Business

D. Donaldson presented D. Boyd and S. Bannon (outgoing/incoming chairman) with a polo shirt with the Commission logo. He stated he will be setting up meetings with each state at the beginning of the year to discuss Commission issues and most will probably be virtual.

With there being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:57.