

**MOLLUSCAN SHELLFISH SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING  
MINUTES**

**Tuesday, October 15, 2024  
Gulf Shores, AL**

**APPROVED BY:**

*Portia Sapp*  
**COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN**

On Tuesday, October 15, 2023, the Subcommittee Chair, **Portia Sapp**, called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. The following were in attendance:

**Members**

Christine Jensen, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD), Dickinson, TX  
Denise Kinsey, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF), Bourg, LA  
Erik Broussard, Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (MDMR), Biloxi, MS  
Jason Herrmann, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources / Marine Resources Division, Dauphin Island, AL  
Jason Rider, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Nan Steedly, Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH), Montgomery, AL  
Portia Sapp, Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS), Tallahassee, FL  
Robert Caballero, LDWF, New Orleans, LA

**Staff**

Ali Wilhelm, Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (GSMFC), Ocean Springs, MS  
Charlie Robertson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS  
Dave Donaldson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

**Others**

Amy Hunter, ADCNR, Dauphin Island, AL  
Chris Mace, TPWD, Corpus Christi, TX  
Ellen Coffin, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Jessica Marchant, ADCNR / MRD, Theodore, AL  
Joshua Hopper, ADPH, Montgomery, AL  
Rita Peachey, ADCNR, Dauphin Island, AL  
Rusty Grice, Auburn University, Dauphin Island, AL  
Tony Reisinger, TX Sea Grant, Palacios, TX  
Zachary Olsen, TPWD, Corpus Christi, TX

**Adoption of Agenda**

**Robert Caballero moved and it was seconded by Jason Rider to adopt the agenda. Motion carried unanimously.**

**Approval of Minutes**

**Erik Broussard moved and it was seconded by Robert Caballero to approve the minutes as written for the October 17, 2023 meeting. Motion carried unanimously.**

**State Oyster Updates**

The meeting began with updates from each state focusing on the status of the oyster resource, on- and off-bottom harvest, and oyster restoration efforts. Each state participated in this session.

### Texas

**Christine Jensen**, from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD), provided an update on Texas' oyster resource management and commercial harvest. The presentation covered several aspects of oyster management, including the status of commercial landings, oyster-producing bays in Texas, and the length of the harvesting season. Specific attention was given to the closure history of Galveston Bay and the results of pre-season sampling conducted in 2024. It was noted that there is a downward trend in active commercial licenses, attributed to declining resource availability and limited success with the license buyback program.

Jensen also discussed Certificates of Location (COL), which function as leases for oyster restoration. The legislative authority to create restoration COLs could potentially be expanded to other bay systems, with a framework for rulemaking expected to be presented to the commission in November 2024, with adoption targeted for January 2025. The ability to fully implement these changes will depend on coordination with other agencies.

Cultivated Oyster Mariculture (COM) was another key focus, with updates on the progress of the program, including the establishment of grow-out sites, hatcheries, and nurseries. There are currently 11 grow-out sites, with 10 in conditional status, and over 1.5 million oysters have been harvested since 2022. Proposed revisions to the COM program regulations were highlighted, including clarifications on program rules, amendments to allow permit transfers, and changes to harvest size limits for oysters. A sunset provision was proposed to extend until December 31, 2024, with changes to the use of non-Texas tetraploid lines and out-of-state hatcheries.

Restoration efforts were also highlighted, with recent projects in North Dollar and East Redfish (Galveston Bay) and Carlos Reef (Carlos Bay), funded by various sources including CARES Act funding and Hurricane Harvey Disaster Relief Funding. Upcoming restoration projects, including NRDA-funded restorations in Trinity Bay and East Galveston Bay, were discussed, with a focus on stakeholder engagement in site selection and project planning. Jensen also mentioned the creation of a network of broodstock reefs in the Aransas Bay system, funded by a NOAA Transformational Habitat Restoration Grant, to establish sanctuary reefs closed to harvesting.

She concluded with updates on the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's Oyster Shell Recovery Program, which requires dealers to return a portion of harvested oysters to public reefs or pay an equivalent fee. Mapping efforts using sonar and aerial imagery to monitor oyster habitats were also detailed, with current and planned surveys aimed at providing comprehensive habitat maps. Additionally, the newly established Oyster Advisory Committee, which held its first two meetings in September and October 2024, was introduced as a complement to the Coastal Resources Advisory Committee.

### Louisiana

**Robert Caballero**, with Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF), presented a detailed update on Louisiana's oyster resources, aquaculture developments, and restoration initiatives. He reported that Louisiana harvested 938,000 sacks of oysters, reflecting a 15.9% decrease from the previous year. However, public oyster grounds saw an 8% increase in seed oysters and a 31% increase in market-sized oysters compared to 2023. The breakdown of oyster landings for 2023 indicated that 7.3% of oysters were harvested from public grounds, while 92.7% came from private leases. The 2023-2024 public oyster season observed an increase in harvest compared to previous years, and stock assessments were conducted at 100 sampling sites in July 2024, with a total of 516

replicate samples collected.

The state's aquaculture sector is also growing steadily, with the issuance of 13 Alternative Oyster Culture (AOC) permits since 2014. In 2024, there are 10 active permits across 169 acres, involving 17 authorized users. The Grand Isle AOC Park #1 in Caminada Bay encompasses 25 acres divided into eight 2-acre plots; however, leasing is currently on hold due to the depth of the water being unsuitable. There is interest from farmers in utilizing innovative techniques, such as the Shellevator™, to overcome these challenges. Grand Isle AOC Park #2 in Bayou Rigaud has expanded from its original 14 acres to 28 acres, with 16 one-acre plots, of which 8 plots are currently leased. The newly expanded area is awaiting Coastal Use Permit (CUP) and U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) permitting approvals before leasing can begin.

Cameron AOC Park, located in Calcasieu Lake, covers 46 acres with 15 plots, each 2 acres in size, all of which are leased to four farmers. The expansion of AOC parks is facilitated by the Grand Isle and Cameron Port Commissions, who continue to support the leasing and management of these areas.

**Caballero** also discussed restoration efforts in Louisiana, which have focused significantly on developing broodstock reefs to enhance oyster recruitment and habitat restoration. Since 2021, four broodstock reefs have been established, with sites like Lake Machias and Karako Bay showing promising recruitment results. In 2023 and 2024, restoration projects such as the Calcasieu Lake and Morgan Harbor cultch plants have been implemented, aiming to improve oyster recruitment and habitat. The 2023 Calcasieu Lake cultch plant and the 2024 Morgan Harbor cultch plant were pivotal projects in enhancing the availability of suitable substrate for oyster larvae.

Spat-on-shell operations were another key aspect of the restoration efforts, with millions of oyster larvae being deployed across various restoration sites. In 2023, the Grand Isle Oyster Hatchery deployed 122,271,598 oyster larvae to Petit Pass Brood Reef and Independence Island Artificial Reef. In 2024, the hatchery deployed 54,037,666 oyster larvae to four sites, including Lake Machias Brood Reef, Lake Borgne Artificial Reef, West Karako Artificial Reef, and the 2018 Lake Fortuna cultch plant site. These operations also included microcultch, with over 7.2 million oysters deployed using this method in 2024, and the establishment of over 47 cubic yards of reef habitat. The restoration and spat-on-shell initiatives have contributed to increasing the resilience of oyster populations in Louisiana, particularly in areas like Petit Pass, Lake Machias, and Karako Bay.

**Caballero** provided an overview of regulations regarding out-of-state oyster importation. Hatcheries located in Mississippi and Alabama, working exclusively with *Crassostrea virginica* from the Gulf of Mexico, are permitted to import their oyster products into Louisiana waters, subject to stringent health certifications. Florida and Texas hatcheries may qualify as oyster source providers under the condition that their products will not be placed directly into Louisiana waters. The health certificates for imported oysters must indicate that the oysters are free from diseases such as MSX (*Haplosporidium nelsoni*), Bonamiosis (*Bonamia exitiosa*), and must have a Dermo (*Perkinsus marinus*) prevalence of less than 10%. The health certificates are valid for 60 days from the date of testing and are specific to each batch being imported. A total of 14 applications for seed imports have been received for 2024, with 5 Alabama and 3 Mississippi hatcheries included among the approved sources.

Louisiana has also focused on providing funding to support AOC efforts. From 2021 to 2023, LDWF awarded a three-year contract to Louisiana Sea Grant to implement programs aimed at sustaining, enhancing, and expanding the AOC fishery through oyster seed production grants. Funding

allocations included \$285,000 in February 2022 for nursery and grow-out farms, \$390,000 in November 2022 for additional nursery and grow-out farms, and \$180,000 in March 2023 for grow-out farms, totaling \$1,380,000 in grants. In 2024, unused funds amounting to \$386,582 were rolled over into extension and outreach efforts, which will be utilized over a two-year contract ending in December 2025 to supply the AOC industry with education and training.

The state's economic analysis of AOC operations indicated that the initial investment for a single line of floating bags could range from approximately \$60,000 to over \$200,000 for twenty-four lines. Total annual costs are estimated to range between \$50,000 and \$250,000. The break-even price for production levels at or below 120,000 oysters planted exceeds \$1 per oyster. However, many Louisiana AOC growers have disputed these estimates, indicating that small-scale operations, such as farming one-acre plots, can be profitable.

In addition to AOC and restoration updates, the 2024 statewide oyster stock assessment highlighted the availability of oyster resources in several coastal study areas (CSAs), with notable increases and decreases in availability across different regions. For example, CSA 1 (North) covering Lake Borgne and the Mississippi Sound area, and CSA 6 covering Vermilion-Atchafalaya Bay, were among the areas assessed for changes in oyster stock. The LDWF also emphasized the oyster harvest closure criteria, which include factors such as recent successful spat set, harvest fraction limits, and enforcement issues.

The electronic reporting requirements for oyster harvesters were also discussed. All vessels harvesting oysters from public areas are required to report harvest information to the LDWF by 9 p.m. each day fished, using the Shellcatch app. Harvesters must provide details such as captain's name, oyster harvester number, vessel number, total sacks harvested, barrels of seed removed, and the public oyster area fished. This electronic reporting system aims to enhance monitoring and compliance for sustainable oyster harvest management.

Lastly, **Caballero** addressed the extension of funding opportunities for large-scale AOC operations through a grant provided by the Louisiana Legislature via the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA). The program is intended to support projects capable of producing two million oysters per year using AOC techniques, with an application deadline of August 31, 2024. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has also introduced insurance options for the AOC industry, including crop mortality, liability, property, auto, commercial boat, and workers' compensation.

**Denise Kinsey**, also representing the LDWF, provided an update on the 2024 extension and outreach efforts for the AOC program. The program aimed to supply the Louisiana AOC industry, state agencies, and the public with the necessary education and training to make informed decisions related to AOC. Funds available totaled \$386,582, which were rolled over from the 2021-2023 grant program, with a two-year contract through December 2025. Initial investment estimates range from approximately \$60,000 for a single line of floating bags to over \$200,000 for twenty-four lines, with total annual costs estimated to range between \$50,000 and \$250,000. The break-even price exceeds \$1 per oyster for production levels at or below 120,000 oysters planted. Small-scale operations are not expected to be profitable, and it is necessary to operate at or above levels of 720,000 oysters planted on three acres to realize positive average annual profit. However, some Louisiana AOC growers have disputed these values, claiming profitability with one-acre plots.

She also highlighted the regulations surrounding the out-of-state importation of oyster seed, which requires health certificates ensuring the absence of major diseases like MSX, Bonamiosis, and Dermo.

A total of 14 applications for seed imports have been received in 2024, with a focus on maintaining biosecurity and quality. The state also updated on the electronic reporting requirements for oyster harvesters, emphasizing the use of the Shellcatch app for daily harvest reporting. Additionally, funding for AOC efforts, including grants to sustain and expand the AOC fishery, was discussed, with \$386,582 rolled over into 2024 outreach and extension activities.

### Mississippi

**Jason Rider**, the Shellfish Bureau Director from the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (MDMR), provided an in-depth update on Mississippi's oyster resources, aquaculture, and restoration initiatives.

In 2024, Mississippi's oyster reef assessment revealed significant challenges due to extreme water conditions, including high temperatures and low salinity, which adversely affected spawning and larval survival. These conditions led to low spat recruitment on many state-owned reefs. MDMR completed 120 one-minute dredge tows and 288 square meter samples, totaling 576 samples as part of the 2024 assessment. **Rider** noted that early high water temperatures and low salinity had compounded effects, leading to delayed spawning and limited larval survival, ultimately resulting in a low spat set for 2024.

Mississippi has 466 acres currently permitted for commercial aquaculture, with 70 acres leased by 40 farmers for off-bottom cage culture. **Rider** also highlighted the Off-Bottom Oyster Aquaculture Training Program, with 85 farmers having graduated from the program and over 1.3 million oysters harvested from off-bottom aquaculture operations. In addition, Mississippi opened a new application window for private on-bottom molluscan shellfish leases, running from October 1, 2024, to December 2, 2024. The goal of these leases is to promote the prosperity of coastal communities by fostering a sustainable shellfish industry, encouraging private individuals or businesses to develop previously inaccessible water bottoms, and ensuring compliance with environmental and conservation requirements.

Restoration efforts included the deployment of 30 acres of experimental oyster cultch in 2024 by MDMR in collaboration with the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ). This project aimed to compare material types and relief heights to assess the optimal conditions for reef productivity. Different cultch materials, including #57 limestone and 1" x 4" stone, were used with reef heights of 3, 6, and 16 inches. Monitoring efforts were ongoing, including the deployment of 660 settlement tiles and 7,920 oyster shells to track spat settlement on historical reefs.

**Rider** also discussed the state-owned reefs, providing details on the status and restoration recommendations for several key reefs. The Pass Christian State-Owned Reef covers approximately 1,974 acres, with a focus on expanding the footprint of productive cultch plants. Of the available oysters, 89% of market-sized oysters were found on cultch plants covering only 341 acres. The reef has low predator presence, with 0.8 oyster drills per sample, and a total of 36,277 sacks were available for harvest. The Henderson Point State-Owned Reef spans approximately 563 acres, with 86% of market-sized oysters found on cultch plants within 199 acres. Limited suitable bottom is available for reef expansion, and predator levels are low. Restoration efforts are in a long-term recovery mode, with cultch planting recommended to combat moderate mud. A total of 13,733 sacks were available for harvest.

The Pass Marianne State-Owned Reef, covering 1,626 acres, has extremely limited material for

recruitment and a low abundance of oysters. All market-sized oysters were found on cultch plants within 46 acres. Restoration recommendations include further cultch planting, with the area identified as a high priority for restoration based on spat tile project results. A total of 51 sacks were available for harvest. The Biloxi Bay State-Owned Reef covers approximately 212 acres, with spawning activity occurring late in September, suggesting a very late spat set in the area. Restoration recommendations include cultivating and monitoring for reef development, with no harvest allowed during October to prevent disruption of the vulnerable late spat set. A total of 6,820 sacks were available for harvest.

Harvest recommendations for 2024 included recreational and commercial harvests with specific limitations. The recreational harvest is limited to Biloxi Bay with a "Red Tag"/Personal Use designation, allowing tonging only to avoid disrupting late season spat settlement. The season will be approximately 14 days or until 1,000 sacks are harvested, whichever comes first. Each person is limited to 2 sacks per day, and the first day will be exclusively for first-time tongers. The commercial harvest is limited to the Pass Christian State-Owned Reef, where dredging or tonging will be allowed. The season will be approximately 14 days or until 20% of the available sacks are harvested, with a limit of 20 sacks per license per day. Only market-sized oysters are to be harvested, with no seed oysters included.

#### Alabama

**Jason Herrmann**, with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Marine Resources Division (ADCNR/MRD), provided a detailed update on its oyster resources, including recent harvest data, restoration initiatives, and ongoing studies to enhance oyster reef productivity.

In October 2024, Alabama opened its public oyster reefs for harvest. Within the first four working days, a total of 788 sacks were collected, averaging 197 sacks per day, with 33.25 harvesters participating daily. The ADCNR/MRD continues to use the oyster reef grid system to manage harvesting across individual reef grids of 500m x 500m. The system ensures even distribution of harvest across the reefs, and maintains broodstock for reef building. Each day, harvesters can use a web link on their smartphones to monitor which grids are open and track their positions. Additionally, the public can access an oyster harvest dashboard with daily updates about sacks harvested, fishing pressure, and other relevant information.

From July 9 to August 9, 2024, state biologists conducted SCUBA quadrat surveys to monitor oyster densities on Alabama's public oyster reefs. A total of 190 quadrat samples were collected from both cultch-planted reefs (planted between 2014 and 2023) and non-planted reefs. The results indicated that the density of legal oysters decreased from 2023 to 2024 on Cedar Point East (CPE), Cedar Point West (CPW), and Heron Bay (HB) reefs. Sublegal oyster densities also saw notable declines across all three reefs. However, spat abundance showed an increase, providing a positive outlook for future oyster recruitment. The surveys also revealed an alarming rise in the abundance of oyster drills, a key predator of oysters, which is likely linked to lower precipitation and reduced river flow, leading to higher salinities in 2023 and 2024.

ADCNR/MRD has also implemented the sale of recreational harvest tags since 2021, allowing recreational harvesters to collect up to 100 legal-sized oysters per person per day from areas open to commercial harvest. The tags must be attached to the container holding the harvest. The recreational harvest data collected through this system is converted into standardized commercial sacks for reporting purposes. In 2023, 724 recreational tags were sold, equivalent to approximately 434

commercial sacks.

Several restoration projects are underway in Alabama, funded through NOAA Restore, aimed at evaluating different methods of cultch deployment to enhance oyster recruitment, survival, and growth. Cultch relief and reef configuration studies were conducted on experimental sites, deploying both oyster shell and #4 limestone in mounds. These mounds were compared to control plots where cultch was deployed using typical broadcast methods. Historical oyster reefs in Mobile Bay, which often experience hypoxic and anoxic conditions near the bottom, were included in these studies. Cultch relief studies involved constructing mounds to test whether elevation improved oyster survival compared to traditional low-relief broadcast methods. Initial findings from the Denton Reef and Area VI mounds showed variability in spat counts between different cultch types and mound locations (crest versus base). In 2024, limestone mounds had slightly higher spat sets compared to oyster shell mounds, although the overall spat count was lower compared to previous years.

In addition, studies on cultch configuration were conducted to determine if planting cultch in elongate mounds would reduce sedimentation and enhance oyster recruitment in high wave energy areas. These mounds, however, faced challenges due to storm surges and heavy wave activity, which led to sediment overburdening on the mounds, particularly in Area VI. Bathymetric scans conducted after storm events indicated that many of the elongate mounds had been buried under sediment, resulting in little to no spat in subsequent samples.

#### *Florida*

**Portia Sapp**, with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS), provided an overview of Florida's aquaculture programs, focusing on oyster leases, seed movement, and shellfish replanting practices.

As of October 1, 2024, Florida has a total of 795 aquaculture leases covering 2,827.6 acres, which include categories such as bottom leases, water column leases, in-perpetuity leases, and live rock leases. One of the key points highlighted was the movement and replanting of aquaculture oysters in Florida. The Division of Aquaculture has strict guidelines regarding the replanting and resubmergence of aquacultured shellfish. Only aquacultured shellfish are permitted for replanting or resubmergence, and shellfish processors are required to maintain a detailed log of all replant activities. This includes documenting the date of initial removal from the lease site, the lease number, the date of replanting, the replant lease number, the specific location on the lease, and the quantity replanted. All replanted shellfish must be segregated from other shellfish and clearly identified on the lease.

Further details were provided regarding the handling of replanted aquaculture oysters larger than 25mm. If these oysters are removed during routine husbandry practices for more than four hours between April and October, they must be returned to the lease for a minimum of 14 days before they can be harvested and sold to a certified shellfish processing facility. This measure is intended to mitigate health risks associated with *Vibrio* bacteria during warmer months. Routine husbandry practices also include the use of suspended grow-out containers, which may be unsubmerged during natural tidal cycles.

During the meeting, it was noted that the Florida representative from the Fish and Wildlife Research Institute had left the agency, and the position on the Subcommittee remained vacant, meaning that no updates were provided on public oyster resources or restoration efforts beyond those related to aquaculture.

### **Import and Export of Aquaculture Oyster Larvae and Seed**

**Jason Rider** introduced the topic of import and export of aquaculture oyster larvae and seed for discussion. The session focused on developing best practices for introducing shellfish seed across different regions while addressing biosecurity concerns.

A regional Shellfish Seed Biosecurity Program is being formulated to create best practices for importing and exporting larvae and seed between areas, especially between the Gulf and Atlantic coasts. Currently, both regions have embargos on transporting larvae and seed from outside their respective water bodies due to disease risks. **Rider** emphasized the need for proactive discussion to address these issues before any official embargoes are enacted.

**Jason Heitmann** mentioned an oyster farmer in Alabama raised the idea of using Gulf broodstock transported to an Atlantic state to spawn in a closed indoor system, and then transporting the larvae back to the Gulf for farming. The farmer assured the agency that the larvae would be disease-free before introduction into Gulf waters. However, concerns were raised regarding the potential introduction of diseases such as MSX, despite the fact that the oysters would never be introduced into Atlantic waters where they could acquire diseases. This highlighted the complexities surrounding the safe movement of oyster seed and the need for stringent biosecurity protocols.

**Nancy Steedley** noted that there are no laws in Alabama explicitly prohibiting such practices, but emphasized the need for guidelines and permits for any individual or entity undertaking them. She suggested that all states should review their regulations governing the movement of shellfish seed to determine commonalities and differences, which could help streamline future regulatory frameworks.

**Portia Sapp** also inquired about which aspects of oyster seed movement require permits and which can be done with just a set of guidelines. It was noted that grants will support hatcheries in the Gulf to get certified by the Regional Shellfish Seed Biosecurity Program, with some states, like Louisiana, already accepting oysters transported from certified hatcheries.

**As an action item, the committee decided to update GSMFC Publication 238**, which details regulations related to oyster aquaculture best practices. This document will be revised to reflect any new or consistent regulatory requirements related to the import and export of oyster larvae and seed across different regions.

The discussion underscored the importance of having clear and uniform regulations to facilitate safe and sustainable aquaculture practices while minimizing the risks of disease transmission. The proactive approach towards biosecurity and certification aims to ensure the health of oyster populations across the Gulf and Atlantic regions.

### **Resubmersion Times for Aquacultured Oysters**

**Steedly** introduced the topic of resubmersion times for aquacultured oysters. The discussion centered around the methods and requirements for managing the resubmersion of aquacultured oysters after they are taken out of the water, particularly during warmer months when the risk of Vibrio bacteria is higher.

She initiated the conversation by asking how different states are monitoring the resubmersion of aquacultured oysters. In response, representatives from several states shared their practices. **Sapp** explained that Florida requires resubmersion logs that must be submitted for review. These logs help to enforce compliance through observations made by inspectors when farmers mention that oysters have been taken out of the water and then resubmerged, particularly during months with higher temperatures when Vibrio is a concern.

**Caballero** explained Louisiana has similar protocols managed by their Department of Health and Hospitals. They require a detailed plan for resubmersion that includes logging desiccation times, as well as adherence to a time and temperature matrix for Vibrio control. Texas also employs similar resubmersion logging methods, which are inspected during facility audits to ensure compliance. Mississippi follows comparable procedures as well.

The discussion emphasized the importance of maintaining detailed records of oyster resubmersion to mitigate the risks of Vibrio contamination. States are utilizing logs and inspection processes to ensure compliance with time and temperature requirements, thereby promoting the safety and quality of aquacultured oysters.

#### **Deposition of Oysters Grown from Oyster Garden Sites**

**Steedly** also introduced the deposition of oysters grown from oyster garden sites for discussion, focusing on the various programs and regulations that exist in different states.

**Caballero** and **Kinsey** mentioned that oyster gardening is not allowed in their state. In contrast, **Rider** said Mississippi has an oyster gardening program that is conducted in conjunction with Alabama. In this program, residents deploy oyster cages at their homes, and once the oysters are grown, the agency collects them for deployment at designated restoration sites. This collaborative approach helps enhance oyster populations while involving the community in conservation efforts.

**Sapp** mentioned Florida's oyster gardening activities are regulated by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC). Oyster gardening in Florida is only permitted in prohibited areas, limiting where these activities can take place. This ensures that oyster gardening efforts do not interfere with commercial or public harvesting operations.

**Jensen** was uncertain about the specifics of Texas' oyster gardening regulations but believed that it likely requires a permit. The discussion highlighted the differences in how each state manages oyster gardening and the need for clear regulations to balance community engagement and resource sustainability effectively.

#### **Election of Officers**

**Portia Sapp** moved and was seconded by **Robert Caballero** to elect **Jason Rider** as Vice-chair and **Jason Hermann** as Chair. Motion passed with no opposition.

#### **Other Business**

With no other business to discuss, **Portia Sapp** moved and it was seconded by **Jason Herrmann** to adjourn the meeting at 5:00 p.m. Motion carried with no opposition.