

APPROVED BY:
Traci Floyd
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**TCC Crab Subcommittee
MINUTES – 55th Annual Spring Meeting
Monday, March 14, 2005
Point Clear, Alabama**

Chairman Traci Floyd called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. The following attended:

Members Present

Traci Floyd, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Vince Guillory, LDWF, Bourg, LA
Leslie Hartman, AMRD, Dauphin Island, AL
Anne McMillen-Jackson, FWC/FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Harriet Perry, USM/GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Tom Wagner, TPWD, Rockport, TX

Staff

Steve VanderKooy, IJF Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Cindy Yocom, Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS

Others

Butch Gautreaux, *GSMFC Commissioner*, Louisiana Senate, Morgan City, LA
Ronnie Luster, CCA, Houston, TX
D.H. Nelson, USA, Mobile, AL
Gilmore “Butch” Pellegrin, NOAA/NMFS, Pascagoula, MS
Ralf Riedel, USM/GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Virginia Vail, *GSMFC Commissioner*, FWC, Tallahassee, FL

Adoption of Agenda

T. Wagner moved to adopt the agenda as presented. **L. Hartman** seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Approval of Minutes

The Subcommittee reviewed the minutes of the meeting held October 11, 2004, in Biloxi, Mississippi. **V. Guillory** moved to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded by **H. Perry** and approved.

Gulf Regional Terrapin Working Group

D.H. Nelson gave the presentation “Activity of the Mississippi Diamondback Terrapin (*Malaclemys terrapin pileata*) along the Alabama Coast.” Objectives of the study were to determine terrapin abundance along coastal Alabama, survey potential terrapin nesting areas for activity, and locate sizeable populations of terrapins for future studies. The area of study

consisted of the coastal waters of Grand Bay east of the Alabama/Mississippi border to the West Fowl River, Barton Island, Bayou La Fourche, Grand Batture, and Point aux Pines. Individual terrapins were marked by uniquely notching marginal scutes. Straight line measurements using Haglof Mantax tree calipers were taken of carapace length, carapace width, plastron length, shell height, tail length, and head width. Females were palpated for eggs. Anomalies such as barnacle/oyster fouling, prop scars, and predation were recorded. Nesting activity was monitored at Barton Island (shell midden), Point aux Pines (sand beach), and the southeast end of the Grand Battures (sand beach). Activity was determined by counting depredations between field excursions. Nests were counted only if egg shells were present; egg shells were removed each time to prevent duplicate data. The trapping technique used on Barton Island and Point aux Pines was a pitfall with self-righting lid set in a drift fence. Another technique used was a modified crab trap using a 1.3 m tall PVC framework and one to two inch nylon mesh to prevent drowning. The traps were arrayed in four groups of six and placed in water ranging from 40 to 100 cm deep. Systematic sampling occurred from June through August. Traps were baited with frozen menhaden and left at respective locations no less than seven and no more than 26 days. A hoop trap (4' x 40' lead net with two 4'x15' trammel nets) was used at Little River. One female was recaptured 40 days from initial capture. The female was gravid on both occasions. A total of 64 nests were depredated during the sampling period. The mean number of eggs was 7.087 with a minimum of two and a maximum of 17. Recommendations from the study include: closer monitoring of commercial/recreational crab traps, removal of derelict crab traps, and potential creation of new nesting areas while maintaining current beaches and shell middens.

Blue Crab Aging Project/Biochemical Lipofuscin

Anne McMillen-Jackson reported that the project is actually more feasible because necessary equipment is generally found within a laboratory. Laboratory equipment and grow out facilities exist within several Gulf states. Age calibration for the region would be necessary. **H. Perry** noted that Mississippi has been successful in larval rearing up to C6-C7. **A. McMillen-Jackson** will continue to seek out funding sources for the project, which would provide an excellent component to stock assessment.

Predictive Length-Based Yield Per Recruit Models

T. Wagner presented information on a bay shrimp trawl bycatch study used in length-based modeling for blue crab populations. Objectives of the study were to establish the status of the population, estimate appropriate levels of fishing effort, analyze gear interactions, estimate population biomass, and predict yields given recruitment and effort levels. Length measurements were taken concurrently from each sector in the fishery over one year or several years with numbers averaged over size classes. Landings data (weight) were taken over the same period, and biological parameters (growth and natural mortality) were examined. In a 1993-1995 shrimp bycatch study, data were collected on catch-at-length and percentage of crabs caught in bycatch (n=1,909 crabs measured). This averaged to approximately 3% by number. The study estimated 2 billion organisms of all species were caught by bay shrimp trawls annually in Texas. Approximately 3% or 60 million blue crabs were caught. An estimate of 20% mortality was used to get numbers per size class which were effectively removed from the population. From their creel survey program, blue crab length data were obtained from 17 commercial blue crab

fishermen during the same time period. Approximately 2,601 crabs were measured. This subsample was converted to weight and extrapolated to total pounds landed from the trap fishery. Biological parameters included $CW_{inf} = 276$ mm; $K = 0.663$; $t_0 = 0.169$; $CW_r = 60$ mm; $M = 0.3$; $Q = 0.0003$; and $T = 2.62$. Measurements were combined into one total catch-at-length estimate for the fishery. Catch-at-length estimates were input into a length-based VPA to establish F-Mortality (F) by size class. Using F estimates from VPA as input into a length-based yield per recruit model using techniques and equations from FAO's Tropical Assessment Manual. Basing on an equilibrium assumption (constant recruitment and fishing pressure) was identified as a limitation. A relatively consistent recruitment pattern exists from 1993-1995, although declining slightly in magnitude. Commercial landings and effort were stable and averaged 6.41 million lbs (1993-1995). Highs and lows were within 33% of this amount. Crab fishermen numbered 269, 345, and 327, respectively, during these years. The number of days fished by shrimp trawls in 1993-1995 was estimated at 37,711; 46,399; and 33,779. Once aging techniques and data are available, results will be comparable from both age based and length based models. Verified results will allow a simple backup method when lipofuscin data are available.

Gulf Stock Assessment Data Set Progress

B. Pellegrin reported that all data have been received for each state. He is looking forward to working with G. Sutton (Texas) and R. Riedel (Mississippi). A work session was discussed for late summer to look at the compiled data. **S. VanderKooy** stated a late summer or August work session was feasible.

Derelict Trap Guidelines Document Revision/Crab Trap Category

S. VanderKooy requested all updates from the 2004/2005 cleanups. He also apprised the group of the category status of the fishery and noted that a total turnover in personnel had occurred with the NOAA Marine Mammals Office. **H. Perry** requested he write a short synopsis of the situation and provide to the group via email.

Derelict Trap Cleanups

Louisiana - **V. Guillory** reported on the following closure areas and disposal sites:

- ♦ A portion of Sabine Lake over a ten-day period from 6:00 a.m. on February 18 through 6:00 a.m. February 27. Disposal site was the public launch at Louisiana Highway 82.
- ♦ A portion of Terrebonne Bay Estuary over a 16-day period from 6:00 a.m. on March 5 through 6:00 a.m. on March 20. The disposal sites were at LUMCON on Louisiana Highway 56 in Cocodrie and Boudreaux's Marina at the end of Four Point Road south of Dulac.
- ♦ A portion of Breton Sound Estuary over a 16-day period from 6:00 a.m. on February 26 through 6:00 a.m. on March 13. The disposal sites were at End of the World Marina on Louisiana Highway 300 in Delacroix and Pointe a la Hache Marina on Louisiana Highway 39 in Point a la Hache.
- ♦ A portion of Vermilion Bay/West Cote Blanche Bay over a nine-day period beginning at 6:00 a.m. on the opening day of the spring inshore shrimp season. The disposal sites were at Quintana Canal public boat launch approximately 2.5 miles before the end of Louisiana Highway 319 at Cyrpemort Point and the Marsh Island Refuge Headquarters.

Crab traps remaining in the closure area were considered abandoned, and volunteers were allowed to retrieve those traps, subject to the following regulations:

1. Traps may be removed only from between one-half hour before sunrise to one-half hour after sunset.
2. Crabs and bycatch in the derelict crab traps must be released.
3. Traps may not be possessed outside the closure area and must be brought to designated disposal sites.

Volunteer days were emphasized for each winter closure. Volunteer days were on the first two Saturdays of each closure period: Sabine Lake on February 19 and 26, Terrebonne Bay Estuary on March 5 and 12, and Breton Sound Estuary on February 26 and March 5. LDWF personnel were present at each disposal site on the designated volunteer days beginning at 7:00 a.m. and remained until approximately 4:00 p.m. to distribute instructions, maps, and supplies (tarps, grappling hooks, garbage bags, and gloves) to volunteers and assist in unloading of derelict traps.

In Sabine Lake, four traps were collected during two commercial crab fishermen boat days. In Breton Sound, 1,824 traps were collected during three commercial crab boat days, seven recreational fishermen boat-days, and six agency/university boat days. In Terrebonne Bay, 2,225 traps were collected during three commercial crab fishermen boat days, 14 recreational fishermen boat days, and 19 agency/university boat days. A total of 4,053 traps were collected in 11 commercial crab fishermen boat days, 22 recreational fishermen boat days, and 25 agency/university boat days, and four trucks.

Guillory noted that Legislation is being considered for a portion of fees to be designated toward crab trap cleanup. Funding may be a problem if the legislation fails.

Mississippi - **T. Floyd** reported that Mississippi did not hold a closure and volunteer cleanup during the year; however, MDMR and GCRL staff continued the effort. An additional 500 traps were collected. A group from Mississippi participated in the Louisiana cleanup in Cocodrie. Josh Bragg from the Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College will come to the MDMR as an intern to help with trap cleanup efforts a few hours per week. A decision to hold cleanups in 2006 has not been made at this time.

Alabama - **L. Hartman** reported that Alabama did not hold a closure and volunteer cleanup during the year. Hurricane Ivan revealed a number of traps, and a cleanup in 2006 is under consideration. However, the agency has limited funding and staff for the effort.

Florida - **A. McMillen-Jackson** reported that trap cleanup programs were previously restricted to stone crab and lobster traps in the Keys. In 2004, the Stone Crab Advisory Board recommended and the legislature approved to supplement the program using funds derived from stone crab endorsement fees (a portion of each endorsement fee is specified for trap retrieval). As a result, this year the program will expand and a request for proposals for statewide trap retrieval projects will be posted as follows.

An equal opportunity to all that may be qualified and interested in conducting trap retrieval, a request for proposal for seven (7) trap retrieval zones will be posted by the Florida Fish and

Wildlife Commission in spring 2005. Trap retrieval may be conducted during a period of time in which more than one fishery is targeted. Trap retrieval programs are conducted after the trap season closes, after the FWC approved trap pulling extension period, and prior to the trap “soak” period, and the opening of trapping season. Illegal traps may be retrieved as follows:

- ♦ Crawfish trap retrieval programs may be conducted between April 16 and July 31.
- ♦ Stone crab trap retrieval programs may be conducted between June 1 and October 4.
- ♦ Blue crab trap retrieval programs may be conducted between September 20 and October 4 (Rule 68B-55, F.A.C. established a blue crab trap closure in all state waters of the Gulf of Mexico seaward of three nautical miles from shore).

Commission employees (or other persons authorized as observers) will log trap data from traps (including V#, C#, or X#) retrieved and disabled by each vessel and provide such data to the contractor for accurate and timely payments to project participants. Disabled wooden traps and concrete are to be disposed of at a landfill or in approved specified trap drop areas authorized for use by the Commission. All plastic and/or wire traps, plastic throats, line and buoys are to be returned to shore for proper upland disposal in a legally-authorized waste management facility.

The Derelict Crab Trap Steering Committee reported that 226 traps were collected by 71 volunteers using 17 skiffs and canoes and 11 airboats. These traps were collected during two marking events and four pulling events. One pulling event was community-based where 39 of the volunteers participated. Traps were pulled from the Alafia I-75 bridge west to Hillsborough Bay then north to Pendola Point east of the spoil area. Blue, mud, spider, and stone crabs were pulled from the traps, as well as goliath grouper, pinfish, spadefish, sheepshead, mullet, and mangrove snapper. During an Ocean Conservancy crab trap cleanup in Biscayne Bay in February, canoes recovered about 40 traps. In initial cleanups at Merritt Island NWR/Mosquito Lagoon, 105 traps were pulled.

The annual stone crab/lobster trap cleanup is scheduled for June 1-15 in the Keys.

Texas - **T. Wagner** reported less traps are being picked up because previous cleanups have been so successful. Volunteers continued to be interested and participate, and fishermen appear to be more conscientious in getting their usable traps out of the water. Several groups help to fund the cleanup effort in Texas including the Coastal Conservation Association, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and the Anheuser Busch Foundation. Dozens of smaller sponsors donate necessary goods and services including landfill space, groceries, barges, tarps, gloves, and grapple hooks. Preliminary data for the 2005 cleanup is as follows:

CLEANUP AREA	NUMBER TRAPS	NUMBER VOLUNTEERS	NUMBER VESSELS
Sabine Lake	140	24	13
Galveston Bay	1,159	103	27
Matagorda Bay	100	6	2
San Antonio Bay	629	81	25
Aransas Bay	255	6	5
Corpus Christi Bay	47	13	5
Upper Laguna Madre	55	1	1

Lower Laguna Madre	73	0	0
Preliminary Totals	2,458	234	78

Cumulative data to date (2002-2005) is as follows:

CLEANUP AREA	NUMBER TRAPS	NUMBER VOLUNTEERS	NUMBER VESSELS
Sabine Lake	972	53	24
Galveston Bay	6,728	585	197
Matagorda Bay	1,600	78	32
San Antonio Bay	5,855	472	142
Aransas/Corpus Christi Bays	2,287	285	117
Upper Laguna Madre	345	19	8
Lower Laguna Madre	170	101	41
Coastwide Totals	17,957	1,593	561

State Reports

Florida - **A. McMillen-Jackson** reported total blue crab preliminary landings in 2004 were up 11% over 2003 landings. In 2004, west coast landings decreased while east coast landings increased. Soft-shell and peeler landings increased drastically on the west coast and moderately on the east coast. Overall, the 2004 landings data to date show soft-shell/peeler landings comprised about 2.4% of the total blue crab harvest, a record in Florida. Preliminary blue crab Florida landings derived from trip tickets are shown below. The data include trip tickets received as of January 7, 2005, and are subject to change. Numbers in parentheses are changes over 2003 landings.

	HARD SHELL		SOFT-SHELL/PEELERS	
	Pounds	Trips	Pounds	Trips
Inland	20,719 (no 2003 data)	59	0	0
East Coast	3,365,752 (+70%)	11,247	53,506 (+11%)	796
West Coast	6,619,438 (-7%)	21,263	188,768 (+129%)	2,317
Total	10,005,909 (+10%)	32,569	242,274 (+85)	3,113

Statewide, landings are still well below historic highs, although early landings (before 1987) may not have been consistently reported. The most reliable landings data dates from the institution of the Florida trip ticket program for collecting data on commercial fishery landings in 1986. Using only these data, recent landings are still below average, but seem to be recovering from the record lows that coincided with the drought.

Three years of data have been collected in the Tampa Bay Blue Crab Trapping Study and will continue through January 2008 as part of the NOAA Interjurisdictional Fisheries grant. Trends will be determined and provide a better database to compare with fishery-independent monitoring data obtained using seines and trawls, commercial landings data, and a previous study conducted by Steele and Bert in the 1980s. In November, a large influx of juveniles occurred and catch numbers slowly began increasing, which is not surprising since sampling began during the drought summer of 2002 when landings were at near-record lows.

The FWRI Aquatic Health group responds to fish kills and other marine health issues around the state but had no specific protocol for crustacean health. During summer 2002, calls were received from blue crab fishermen in Tampa Bay with regard to a high proportion of lethargic crabs that died soon after harvest. Crabs were collected and analyzed. They were infected by microsporidian (*Ameson michaelis*). Collection continued and Aquatic Health are using the crabs to learn appropriate testing and are developing a protocol to provide a proper response to future blue crab health issues reported by the public, fishermen, or research staff. Grants will be sought to expand analyses to include seasonal and spatial distributions of blue crab disease factors in Tampa Bay and throughout the state.

During summer 2003, Florida's Blue Crab Advisory Board was assembled. The group is composed of 15 harvesters and dealers and an FWC representative. During fall and winter meetings, the board developed two proposals for an effort management program. One proposal capped the number of fishermen in the fishery and the other capped the number of traps in the fishery. The board presented the limited entry plan to the FWC at their June meeting. The FWC preferred a trap certificate program. The board reconsidered but stood with a limited entry plan. The FWC subsequently approved the limited entry plan with some modifications. Public workshops were held at six locations throughout the state in February.

The southwest Florida stone crab fishery-independent monitoring program began in 2005. Funding comes from trap certificate fees paid by stone crab fishermen. New personnel were hired and trained in St. Petersburg before moving to the permanent work site at the South Florida Regional Laboratory in Marathon. Objectives for the monitoring program were to sample areas where the principal fisheries are located and structure sampling protocol to compare data with historical databases. Every two weeks, traps are serviced, crabs and bycatch are removed, and traps are baited and returned to the water. Every four weeks, traps are scraped of fouling organisms, and juveniles are collected. Station data collected include water temperature, salinity, degree of trap fouling, fouling organisms, and number of traps in sight. Trap data include trap condition, bycatch, and number of juveniles. Crab data include sex, molt condition, reproductive state, claw types, injuries, fouling, gonad color, and crab coloration. Data will be used for stock assessment, as well as manuscripts on stone crab population dynamics and fishery biology. The Stone Crab Advisory Board recommended additional funds be appropriated to initiate a similar program in northwest Florida.

Alabama - **L. Hartman** reported Alabama fishermen had an excellent spring and summer season which began to decline in December. A small spike subsequently occurred in January. During 2004, value rose from April through August and then declined through November. There are 169 resident, licensed blue crab fishermen in Alabama. Four nonresident licenses were sold in

2004. No legislation is proposed for the blue crab fishery in Alabama at this time. Fishermen are complaining about Venezuelan imports. Through their Crab Watch program, NEP volunteers partnered with AMRD to identify crab species and will provide invasive and bycatch information. An experimental oyster dredging project will be allowed on the newly established New Reef and Hard Reef in Portersville Bay. Dredging activity will be strictly regulated and closely monitored by enforcement and biological personnel. The reefs will be closed when biological surveys and landings data indicate that oyster resources would be best served by closure of the two reefs. Participants on the program must have a valid oyster license, a valid dredge license, a special dredge permit for the areas, and may possess only one dredge upon the permitted vessel. A self-dumping basket must be used, and dredges must be inspected and tagged. Fishermen must also have a rope no shorter than 10' with a floating buoy no less than 6" in diameter bearing the operator's permit number permanently affixed to the dredge at all times. Oysters may only be taken Monday through Friday between 8:00 a.m. and 12:00 noon, and fishermen are limited to 16 sacks of oysters per boat per day. Fishermen must use the established check station located at the boat ramp at the mouth of Bayou La Batre Bayou and must purchase special oyster tags at the station. The two experimental reefs will be closed to the taking of oysters by any means when closed to dredging.

Mississippi - **T. Floyd** reported 2004 preliminary landings were down slightly at 815,089 lbs from 2003 at almost 900,000 lbs. Value remained about the same (\$660,000), which may be due to imports. In Mississippi, there are about 180 licensed crab trap fishermen, and 60 fishermen are licensed to operate crab trawls. Most trawl licenses are sold to shrimp fishermen so that they may market their crab harvest. However, 20 boats were identified that exclusively trawl for crab this time of year. Approximately 600 recreational crab licenses were sold this year. In January, a small change to the crab trap tag requirement was implemented. It allows for the use of all corrosion-resistant metals in addition to plastic. It also eliminated the "raised letter" requirement. Mississippi has 15 licensed and permitted crab dealers. Of those, about half actively process blue crab. T. Floyd inquired whether B. Tehan could provide an overview of Florida's limited entry and trap certificate programs to state crab task forces. Since Florida and Louisiana have pending legislation, the invitation will be extended after legislative sessions close. A Tidelands Trust Fund proposal was submitted to locate deeper water derelict traps. This would include piles of traps deposited by shrimp fishermen at navigational beacons. To date, no funding was received. In cooperation with H. Perry at GCRL, two projects are ongoing and include the Mississippi Winter Crab Trawl Fishery and Mississippi Crab CPUE. H. Perry accepted the 2004 Gulf Guardian Award on behalf of GSMFC in New Orleans on December 1, 2004.

Louisiana - **V. Guillory** reported Louisiana's legislation is considering amending and reenacting R.S. 56:305.6 (commercial crab license limitation program) to institute limited entry for commercial crab trap gear license holders beginning in 2006. If enacted for commercial license year 2005, no person shall be issued a commercial crab trap gear license unless that person possessed a valid commercial crab trap gear license during any one of the years 2002, 2003, or that portion of 2004 prior to November 15, 2004. The program would be implemented November 15, 2005. Provisions would not apply to senior commercial license holders. Qualifying criteria must be met to purchase a commercial crab trap gear license. For license year 2006, an applicant must have held a commercial crab trap gear license and reported crab ticket

sales in one of the three previous years (2002, 2003, or 2004). For license year 2007, an applicant must have held a commercial crab trap gear license and reported crab trip ticket sales in one of the three previous years (2003, 2004, or 2005). For license year 2008 and thereafter, a fisherman must either be a certified commercial fisherman or have 25% of earned income (excludes investment income, retirement benefits, social security benefits, inheritance, or capital gains income) from legal capture and first sale of commercial fisheries species for the most recent filing year. A notarized statement from a CPA shall be used to validate the 25% income criteria from commercial fishing activities. No person shall hold, use, or possess more than three crab trap gear licenses, only one of which can be purchased from the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. Any valid crab trap gear license purchased from another individual must be renewed by the Department if eligibility criteria are met. No additional crab trap licenses shall be issued to corporations. A crab trap gear license shall be fully transferable by lease, sale, or inheritance. A lottery system will be established to issue new commercial crab trap gear licenses to equal 50% of the number of current crab trap gear licenses not reissued by the Department. Individuals who provide proof of with a minimum of 25% of their gross income derived from the capture and first sale of commercial fisheries species shall be given priority over other lottery applicants. The Crab Task Force shall review the crab license limitation program annually and make recommendations to the Department and the legislature on all administrative aspects of the program, including suggested modifications. A Hardship Review Panel will review written appeals from applicants who feel they were unreasonably denied a license. The panel's recommendation on each appeal shall be forwarded to the Department secretary who will make the final decision. The Hardship Review Panel will be comprised of seven voting members appointed by the Department secretary and confirmed by the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission. All seven voting members shall serve staggered three-year terms, and shall be selected from the following: one crab trap gear license holder residing east of the Mississippi River, two crab trap gear license holders residing west of the Atchafalaya River, one crab trap gear license holder selected at-large, and two Louisiana non-fishermen who represent crab processors, dealers, transporters, or full time shedders. One shall be an at-large representative, and the other shall represent one of the three zones established above. V. Guillory reported fishermen are receiving low prices for their product; they blame imports.

Texas - **T. Wagner** reported that Texas commercial landings reports are now from trip tickets received by dealers. Implementation of the program has begun, and full implementation of the trip ticket system should be achieved in 2006. Landings of blue crab continue to fall in Texas. He distributed a thesis printed from the web site www.csapidus.com and suggested the group take a look.

Other Business

H. Perry previewed a presentation she will be giving to the Technical Coordinating Committee. The group provided suggestions.

There being no further business, T. Wagner moved to adjourn the meeting. The meeting was adjourned via consensus at 12:25 pm.

APPROVED BY:

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COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**TCC DATA MANAGEMENT SUBCOMMITTEE
MINUTES—55th Annual Spring Meeting
Monday, March 14, 2005
Point Clear, Alabama**

Chairman Page Campbell called the meeting to order at 8:30 am. The following members and others were present:

Members

Joe O'Hop, FMRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Page Campbell, TPWD, Rockport, TX
Vicki Swann, TPWD, Austin, TX
Guy Davenport, NMFS, Miami, FL
Michelle Kasprzak, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA (*Proxy for J. Shepard*)
Kevin Anson, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL
Chris Denson, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL
Kerwin Cuevas, MDMR, Biloxi, MS (*Proxy for T. Van Devender*)
Steven Atran, GMFMC, Tampa, FL

Staff

David Donaldson, FIN Data Program Manager, Ocean Springs, MS
Madeleine Travis, Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS
Larry B. Simpson, Executive Director, Ocean Springs, MS
Mike Sestak, FIN Database Manager, Ocean Springs, MS
Doug Snyder, RecFIN Survey Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Donna Bellais, ComFIN Survey Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Gregg Bray, RecFIN Programmer/Analyst, Ocean Springs, MS

Others

Jason Duet, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
John Rawlings, GSMFC, Matagorda, TX
Terry Cody, Rockport, TX

Adoption of Agenda

The agenda was approved as written.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes for the meeting held on October 11, 2004 in Biloxi, Mississippi were approved as written.

Status of Biological Sampling Activities

D. Donaldson distributed a summary of otolith collections for the recreational and commercial fisheries in 2004. The summary presents the number of otoliths that have been collected as well as the targets, by species, mode, and state. **D. Donaldson** noted that overall, the collection of otoliths and reaching the targets were fairly successful. It was difficult to obtain samples in the eastern Gulf of Mexico later in the year because of the tropical storms and hurricanes in that area. Beginning in 2005, there are federal targets for biological samples. These targets were developed based on number of otoliths collected in the past. Both the state and federal targets were distributed to the group. **D. Donaldson** noted that states should use the targets described in sub grants, not the ones outlined in the FIN Data Collection Plan since the ones in the sub grants take into account the federal targets. **D. Donaldson** reviewed the status of the analysis of the otoliths. It was noted that ageing data (2002-2003) from all states has been received and loaded into the FIN DMS with the exception of Florida. **J. O'Hop** noted that the otoliths have been aged but the analysis data has not be reconciled with collection data. His staff is working on this issue and should send the data in the near future. **D. Donaldson** stated that delivery of these data is part of the cooperative agreement and if the data are not loaded soon, it could potentially cause problems with future funding. **D. Donaldson** received a request from Debra Murie from the University of Florida regarding greater amberjack otoliths. She asked that the states send any greater amberjack otoliths (processed and unprocessed) to her since she is working on a project to explore alternative methods for processing these structures. Preliminary results show that if processed correctly, otoliths can be used to accurately determine the age of these fish. The group then discussed the possibility of creating a web-based data entry program for biological sampling. **D. Donaldson** stated that there are pros and cons to utilizing such a system. It would allow for cleaner entry of data since error checks could be built into the program. Also, it would standardize the data elements that everyone uses as well as allow for easier update to the program. Some of the drawbacks of using a web-based program include training and learning curves issues, desire of state partners to change, limitations on customization of the program to meet unique needs of partners and speed of the entry of the data. **M. Sestak** pointed out that the program could be modified to meet the individual needs of each state. After some discussion, the group decided that staff would further explore this issue and begin the development of a web-based program for consideration. The last topic discussed by the group was modification of the current data entry program to accommodate trip ticket numbers. **C. Denson** stated that because of multi-day trip tickets in Alabama, the current size for TRIP TICKET NUMBER variable is not large enough to accommodate Alabama's number. These multi-day tickets allows for multiple gears and area fished between trips, which need to be captured so it can be related to the biological samples. **M. Kasprzak** stated that the program could be modified to accommodate the larger trip ticket number. **M. Sestak** pointed out that if the group decides to go with the larger trip ticket number, all states would have to use this number. After some discussion, the group decided to modify the data entry program to accommodate the larger trip ticket number (with decimal places). **M. Kasprzak** asked each of the states using the program to provide her with the database to ensure that the previous changes are captured.

Status of Compilation of Vessel Information for Registration Tracking Module

D. Donaldson noted that at the last meeting, the group finalized the data structure for the commercial vessel information and a request to compile this information was made to each of the program partners. This was the first step in populating registration tracking module. **D. Bellais** reported that all the common data elements have been compiled and outlined in a spreadsheet, which has been distributed to the states. To date, no vessel information has been received from the states. **J. O'Hop** stated that Florida has received vessel information from their Department of Highway Safety and these data have been provided to NMFS and ACCSP. It should just be a matter of accessing the data from ACCSP to populate the FIN system. **D. Donaldson** stated that it is very important that the states provide this information. It is necessary to test the registration tracking module and without it, FIN cannot proceed with this task.

Status of Compilation of Recreational Fishing Licenses

D. Donaldson stated that the group also discussed compiling recreational fishing licenses at the last meeting. This is the first step in using these licenses as a sampling frame for getting more precise effort estimates of recreational fishing for the private/rental and shore modes. **D. Bellais** reported that data elements for recreational fishing licenses have been received from Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. **D. Bellais** noted that once she has received all the data elements from each of the states, she would create a common data format and provide it to the states for review. **J. O'Hop** stated that last week he got access to the Florida data tables and actual data. He is currently checking the database for problems but should be sending the data to FIN in the near future.

Update on Monitoring of Changes in Scientific Names

D. Donaldson stated that at the last meeting the group discussed monitoring the changes in scientific names. The group tasked staff to look into identifying and/or establishing some type of notification system. **D. Donaldson** reported that he examined this issue and unfortunately there is no existing system where changes in scientific names are routinely monitoring and to establish such a system would be problematic. So, it was recommended that each partner routine monitor changes and they would be responsible for providing updates as they become aware of any changes.

Discussion of Recreational Outreach

D. Donaldson stated that he attended an ACCSP outreach meeting in January 2005 and the meeting summary is in the packet. At that meeting, the group discussed outreach activities regarding recreational data collection (MRFSS). It was noted that ACCSP has conducted a baseline survey regarding the perceptions about MRFSS and they are exploring the possibilities of conducting another survey to compliment the previous one. The group asked if FIN would be interested in participating in this survey. **D. Donaldson** posed that question to the Data Management Subcommittee. It was believed that having the states involved in the collection of recreational data (MRFSS) has led to more credibility of the survey in the Gulf of Mexico. However, there has never been any hard data to verify that claim. By participating in the

baseline survey, data can be collected to support the claim. The group believed this was a worthwhile exercise and directed to stay involved in the process and provide more information (detailed description of survey, cost of survey, etc.) to the FIN Committee at their June meeting.

Discussion and Review of Confidential Forms Portal

D. Donaldson stated M. Sestak has set up a confidential forms portal on the GSMFC web site. The purpose of this portal is to establish a centralized system for confidentiality forms, which will allow access (to authorized personnel) to all signed forms (FIN, NMFS, ACCSP, etc.) This will allow the managers of the different systems to easily verify that an individual has access to a particular system without having to tracking down all of the required forms. **M. Sestak** presented a brief overview of the system including how to log on, accessing an individual, checking the forms an individual has signed and actually viewing a digital copy of the forms. The group asked staff to continue developing the system and provide an update at the FIN meeting.

The last item discussed regarding confidentiality was about public access to the commercial data. **D. Donaldson** stated that the FIN Data Management System is now utilizing Oracle Discoverer as its query tool. However, for public end-user layers (EUL), there is not an option to set up a user name and password. If the ERL is public, anyone can access the database. With the old query tool, staff has theoretically been able to limit access to the public databases by requiring a user name and password. Since this was a change from the established operating procedures, **D. Donaldson** wanted to make sure that allowing access without knowing the individual would be okay. After some discussion, the group agreed that not knowing the individual identify of the person accessing the data was fine. The group asked staff to explore the possibilities of putting some type of counter on the public EULs to keep tracking of the number of unique IP addresses that access the site.

Review of White Paper regarding Changes in TIP since Implementation of Trip Ticket Programs

D. Donaldson stated that at the August 2004 State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee meeting, the group asked that FIN develop a white paper regarding the changes in TIP since the implementation of trip tickets. Staff has polled the group and developed a draft paper, which was distributed. The group reviewed the document and agreed that it should be presented to the S/FFMC for their consideration. **K. Anson** asked if more detail (number of trips interviewed, funding levels, etc.) should be included in the document. **D. Donaldson** stated that before more detail is provided in the document, the group should wait for the comments from the S/FFMC members.

Discussion of Collecting Area Fished and Sizes for Shrimp on Trip Tickets

D. Donaldson stated that he had a conversation with Jim Nance (NMFS-Galveston) regarding the collection of area fished and sizes for shrimp (market codes) via the trip ticket programs. Donaldson stated that Nance mentioned that these data are not routinely collected via trip tickets and was wondering if there were mechanisms in place to ensure that these fields are completed.

Donaldson asked the group if there was difficulty with collecting these data. The group discussed area fished and it was noted that on the trip tickets, this is primary area fished. **Donaldson** stated that although multiple areas fished is ultimately what Jim Nance wants; the primary area fished still provides useful information. **G. Davenport** mentioned that Jim Nance is also interested in getting depth as well. It was pointed out that both multiple areas fished and depth will be collected via the Detailed Effort module under FIN. As a first step, the states can examine these variables to determine the completeness of them. It was suggested that this issue be added to the FIN meeting agenda so this issue can be further discussed.

Discussion of FIN Social/Economic Data Collection Plan

D. Donaldson stated that the FIN Social/Economic Work Group met in February to discuss the status of the FIN Social/Economic Data Collection Plan. There has been very little work done on the plan and one of the reasons is that it is difficult to identify the state needs for social and economic data. After some discussion, the work group developed 3 options to determine states' needs for these data. The options were:

- 1) Hire a contractor to contact the states and compile the states' needs for social and economic data;
- 2) Convene a panel of experts to examine the issue of states' needs for social and economic data and task this panel to develop a list of needs; and
- 3) The Gulf Commission hire an economist to address this issue.

The Subcommittee considered these options and after some discussion decided that option 1 (hiring a contractor to compile the state needs) was the best option. **D. Donaldson** stated that he would brief the S/FFMC regarding this issue and provide this recommendation to the Committee later this week.

D. Donaldson stated that he talked with Brad Gentner regarding the economic add-on to the recreational survey and he mentioned that the start of the survey could be pushed back to wave 6, 2005 or wave 1, 2006. Also, it was pointed out that there are some funds available for the conduct of this activity. Therefore, each state needs to develop budget for collecting these data.

D. Donaldson cautioned that the budgets should be reasonable and only cover the costs of getting the add-on questions for anglers. It was decided that the states would provide budgets to staff **no later than April 4, 2005**. It was also noted that Brad Gentner would be giving a uses of social and economic data presentation at FIN meeting in June.

State/Federal Reports

Florida - **J. O'Hop** reported that researchers from all of the former divisions and institutes within the FWC, including the Florida Marine Research Institute, were combined into the new Fish and Wildlife Research Institute. The intent is to separate the research and management functions within the Commission, and to facilitate communication and cooperation to promote greater opportunities for linkages between upland habitat, wildlife, freshwater, and marine research programs. The Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) held a "Survey and Monitoring Colloquium" on March 9-10, 2005 to bring together researchers within the Fish and Wildlife Research Institute and showcase surveys and monitoring projects currently underway

within the Institute. The collection and processing of marine fisheries trip tickets is operating normally. Florida staff is currently editing trip tickets that were received during January of 2005. Currently, staff has processed and edited about 200,000 trip tickets submitted by seafood dealers during 2004, and at last count there were still about 50,000 trip tickets remaining from 2004 to be processed. The Division of Marine Fisheries Management conducted several audits of seafood dealers in 2004 because of irregularities in reporting of trip tickets discovered during the shrimp disaster relief and Trade Adjustment Assistance programs, and some administrative penalties (fines and license suspensions) were levied against dealers as a result. Some of the penalties are still in the appeals stage. Angler catch and effort data collected by staff for the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS) and Project Tampa Bay (monitoring releases of hatchery-reared red drum) were proceeding normally through February of 2005. Although Florida has exceeded quota targets in all modes of all waves during 2005, the hurricanes and the change in sample assignment draws have reduced the overall amounts of interviews by almost 8% to just over 46,000 interviews. Florida has begun to hire and train the head boat at-sea samplers, and has begun to take at-sea trips on head boats and collect information on kept and released fish. The current MRFSS forms have become a major time sink because the time it takes to properly prepare these forms for scanning is taking about 3 times as long as the previous forms, especially for the at-sea trips where many released fish are observed and measured. This is the first year of this project, and the sampling targets that were set up for the project may have been optimistic and the sampling costs may have been underestimated. There is also an internal problem with payment for the sampling trips when the head boat operator does not accept the state credit card. Commercial catch and effort data collected for the Trip Interview Program (TIP) by state port samplers has slowed in August and September due to hurricanes and office closures. The port samplers are also engaged in a project (to be completed in June 2005) to characterize the use of fishing gear in nearshore areas of Florida. The scheduled training session for field staff was held on March 6-8, 2005 in St. Petersburg, Florida. Nearly all of the MRFSS, Tampa Bay Red Drum Angler Survey, TIP port samplers, and Head Boat Survey biologists were able to attend this training in fish identification and to discuss operational details of the sampling programs in which they participate. Some planning is proceeding on the conversion of the Oracle application from version 9.1 to 10g, and converting the current forms (in Oracle Forms 6) to web-based forms. Also, Florida is exploring ways (and funding) to serve the FWC commercial data through Oracle Portal using Discoverer.

Alabama - **K. Anson** reported Hurricane Ivan had a direct negative impact on data collection efforts in Alabama for Waves 5 and 6 2004. Quotas for shore and charter modes were not met in those waves. A significant proportion of interviewing sites were damaged either partially or totally due to Ivan and tourism was down immediately after the hurricane. Intercept collections in Wave 1 of 2005 were slightly better as quota in shore and private/rental modes were exceeded, however, 1X quota in charter mode was missed by one intercept. Semi-annual training and testing for MRFSS staff will be held by the end of March. The impacts to the coastal infrastructure and disruption of fishing patterns from Hurricane Ivan also negatively affected collection of data related to the Biological Sampling Program. In addition, a shortage of staff in MRD's Dauphin Island office has hindered Alabama's ability to effectively sample its coastline. Interviews to fill a biological aide position in Dauphin Island have been held recently and the position should be filled soon. A Hillquist otolith-grinding machine was acquired late in 2004. This machine has been set up in Gulf Shores in order to help streamline otolith processing. The

collection of paper tickets and electronically submitted data for all appropriate commercially landed seafood continues. A new licensing system continues to hamper timely processing of trip tickets as the license program has programming glitches. This issue should be resolved in the next 2-3 months. The data collected from the 30 head boat trips sampled in 2004 will be analyzed and reviewed during the FIN Committee's annual meeting. Information will be shared with the head boat captains in Alabama shortly. Training of the head boat samplers will be completed shortly. Alabama continues an ongoing data collection activity, which collects water quality and catch information from various sampling stations throughout coastal Alabama on a monthly basis. The data is from 1981 to present. Federal disaster grants totaling \$ 4.3 million was awarded to Alabama in February to assist in rebuilding efforts of area commercially important oyster reefs. Oyster shell collection will begin shortly and the first deployment of shell should be completed by summer. A few bills are currently in the Alabama legislature, which, if passed, would require recreational saltwater fishing licenses to be purchased for those individuals fishing with a cast net or gig. Licenses are currently not required for these gears and a license would help to quantify nearly all of the recreational saltwater finfish anglers in Alabama. Another bill introduced in the legislature would require all passengers on a vessel with fishing gear to have a fishing license.

Mississippi - **K. Cuevas** reported that on December 31, 2004, Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (DMR) closed Mississippi waters north of the Intracoastal Waterway to shrimping. Shrimp sampling will begin this month for the 2005 season. The DMR's Real-time Hydrological Monitoring Program has joined the Gulf Coastal Ocean Observing System (GCOOS). This partnership unites the DMR's program with all other Gulf monitoring systems to be included in the International Ocean Observing System (IOOS) endorsed by President Bush resulting from the US Oceans Commission Report. DMR currently has seven monitoring stations on the Gulf Coast. The Mississippi Commission on Marine Resources adopted changes to the Crab Ordinance 4.009 to allow for expanded material uses (a corrosion resistant metal or plastic tag must be attached to the trap) for the crab trap tag requirement, effective March 1, 2005. The Rigs to Reef Program is working with companies on two platforms in to be donated to Mississippi for Rigs to Reef Program. The Commission is also considering the adoption of Special Management Zones for artificial reefs in Mississippi's waters. This ordinance change will allow no more than three hooks per line or to use spear fishing gear equipped with power heads. A new record for Sheepshead (using a fly rod) was set recently. The old record of 6 lbs. 14.56 oz. was replaced by a 7 lbs. 12.00 oz. sheepshead. Mississippi's Seafood Technology Bureau has printed an Oyster Cookbook - Volume 1, which is available at the meeting registration desk. As part of the Tidelands' Research Grant, Vibrio Education and other Seafood Foodborne Illnesses, an awareness survey was conducted at the Business Expo 2005 at Jackson, Mississippi in January 2005. DMR also conducted a public outreach seafood health promotion and education seminar on the exposure of *Vibrio*. **K. Cuevas** stated that for the 2004/2005 oyster season, there has been a total of 255,317 sacks harvested, to date. DMR will also be conducting spring cultch plant of approximately 150 acres. Mississippi received \$1.545 million from the Hurricane Ivan Disaster Grant. With these monies, DMR will conduct several projects including surveying, mapping and marking of public oyster reefs and potential cultivation and cultch planting sites; cultivating oyster reefs and relaying oysters; depositing cultch material; oyster stewardship project; and meteorological monitoring station repair, upgrade and maintenance. Lastly, DMR's Public Affairs Office has published the 2005 DMR calendar, which is available for the public.

Louisiana - **M. Kasprzak** reported Louisiana collected a total of 6,310 MRFSWS intercepts in 2004. The quota was met across all waves and modes except for shore mode in wave 1 2004 (6 interview short) and wave 6 2004 charter mode (2 interviews short). Louisiana continues to collect biological samples for a variety of species. For greater amberjack, a total of 27 otoliths were collected in 2004. The quota was met for private and head boat collection, however, quota was not reached for charter boat and commercial collection. All of otoliths for this species have not been processed since the processing method is still to be determined. For southern flounder, a total of 1,718 otoliths were collected in 2004. The quota was not met in any of the target modes. Almost all of the otoliths (1,708) collected have been processed and entered into the database. The other otoliths were too damaged to be processed. For king mackerel, a total of 221 otoliths were collected in 2004. The quota was met for commercial collection, however, quota was not reached for charter boat, head boat and private target modes. All of the otoliths collected have been processed and entered into the database. For red snapper, a total of 1,031 otoliths were collected in 2004. The quota was met for charter and head boat collection, however, quota was not reached for commercial and private modes. Almost all of the otoliths (1,026) collected have been processed and entered into the database. Andy Fischer at LSU is working with Louisiana personnel on the southern flounder reference set. He is currently burning the images to CDs and once that is complete, he will provide them to Louisiana personnel for distribution. This reference set will also be discussed at the upcoming otolith processors training workshop. Lastly, a total of over 200,000 trip tickets were processed from over 1,100 licensed dealers. Electronic trip tickets represented 38% of the total trip tickets processed. There are currently 77 Louisiana dealers utilizing the electronic program. Trip ticket data collected from January to October 2004 have been transferred to the FIN Data Management System. Louisiana is currently working on completing the edits on 2004 data and transferring that data to the FIN system.

Texas - **P. Campbell** reported that Coastal Fisheries is continuing the Gulf Charter Boat Survey through December 2005. After some analysis of the on-site interviews, it was decided to increase efforts in Waves 3, 4, and 5 to obtain more Gulf charter boat interviews. It is hoped this will help Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) in deciding whether to permanently implement this sampling scheme or a modified version of it. TPWD has begun transitioning to a trip ticket program. Approximately 15% of the current seafood dealers have agreed to participate in the transition program. After initial implementation, these dealers will provide feedback in order to tweak and improve this program. It is anticipated that a complete transition from monthly reports to daily trip tickets will occur in 2006. TPWD is continuing to collect and process biological samples through 2005. Over 3,900 otoliths were collected in 2004. All of 2003 data have been processed and readers are making good progress with 2004. Water samples taken in Baffin Bay showed a bloom of "brown tide". This phytoplankton is known to bloom for prolonged periods in the Laguna Madre (almost continuously from 1990 through the mid-1990s). One of the major concerns about brown tide is that it can form dense blooms that shade and kill seagrasses. The Texas Department of Health Services issued a consumption advisory for spotted seatrout for a 33 square mile area below the Houston ship channel. The advisory was issued after DSHS laboratory tests detected elevated levels of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in the sampled fish. A 1990 advisory is still in effect that applies to the catfish and blue crabs from the same area. The coastal fisheries resources dodged the impacts of the Christmas 2004 coastal

freeze and accompanying snow that was restricted to the lower to mid-coast areas. Loss of fish was minimal, with most impacts occurring in the lower reach of the Laguna Madre. Total number of fish lost was around 40,000. Most hard-hit were Gray snapper (15,000-plus). Texas Parks and Wildlife Game Wardens, along with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Office for Law Enforcement's special agents seized 8,851 pounds of reef fish (mostly red snapper) from a Texas-based commercial fishing vessel holding a federal fishing permit. Upon inspection of the vessel's catch and contents, a hidden compartment containing 5,641 pounds of the red snapper was discovered and seized. Several bills that have been introduced into the legislature include one that would overhaul the current inshore commercial shrimp license system, replacing the current "bay" and "bait" licenses with a single commercial bay shrimp boat license. A second bill would authorize issuance of as much as \$10 million in revenue bonds with the money dedicated to purchasing and permanently retiring commercial shrimp, finfish and crab licenses. The bill would set \$7,500 as the maximum to be paid for buying any one of these commercial licenses. The bill mandates the bonds be repaid using money generated from the sale of Texas' saltwater sportfishing stamp. A third bill would create a Gulf shrimp license management program. Also, at this time, bills have been filed in both the State Senate (SB 272) and House (HB 884) that would create a license moratorium for the commercial oyster fishery in Texas. Original language in these bills set the control date at August 31, 2005. There is no buy-back component to these bills. Working with members of the oyster industry, TPWD is evaluating a request, by the oyster industry, to reduce the daily sack limit from 150 per day to 90 per day. Contingent on this reduction is the development of a standardized sack weight that is enforceable. A legal definition exists for a box (e.g. sack), but this is based on a volumetric measure. Based on this measure, a sack should weigh 110 pounds. Codifying this weight into law is necessary to adequately enforce the sack limit. And the license buyback for shrimp through Round 15: 1,259 total shrimp licenses have been bought (39% of the original licenses starting in 2000); 612 were bait shrimp licenses and 647 were bay shrimp licenses. This has been at a total cost of \$7.8 Million. License buyback for crab licenses: 24 licenses purchased for a total of \$112,749. This represents 8% of the total licenses. Finfish buybacks through round 5: 120 licenses purchased for a total cost of \$563,320. This is 22% of original total.

GMFMC - **S. Atran** reported that the Gulf Council is relocating in May. The office will be in the west shore district of Tampa. The Council has been working on red grouper and implemented a red grouper rebuilding plan in July 2004. The plan implemented a reduction of the quotas for both shallow-water and deep-water grouper. The deep-water grouper fishery closed immediately and the shallow-water grouper quota was met in November 2004. These closures caused some industry concerns and in response to their worries, a series of trip levels were implemented in March 2005. The recreational harvest of red grouper exceeded its quota as well and the landings in 2004 showed a large increase in harvest of these fish. There are concerns about this increase and NMFS is currently reviewing these numbers. Because of these increases, the Council is looking at methods for limiting the recreational harvest of red grouper to ensure the quota is not exceeded. The Council has hired a new economist to address the social and economic needs of the Council. The Council is beginning to address the ecosystem management initiative and plans to conduct a series of stakeholder meetings this summer.

NMFS - **G. Davenport** reported the NMFS is working with GSMFC and LDWF to rectify some problems with water body codes. There have been some problems in mapping the NMFS codes to the FIN and LDWF codes and vice versa. NMFS is developing an on-line quota monitoring system. The system will be used to monitor the shallow- and deep-water grouper quotas. This on-line system is just another option for fishermen. The fishermen do not have to use the system but NMFS is suggesting that they use this option. The fishermen log onto the system and simply enter the data. The system will keep track of when the data are entered. In addition, the NMFS port agents are able to enter the data as well. There are cases where the port agents collect the data from the fishermen and the agents can then enter the data into the system. To enable the port agent to enter the data, they have to have a data sheet with the data from the fishermen before the data can be entered. The NMFS Southeast Regional Office is relocating this month. The offices will be near the Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute in St. Petersburg. NMFS continues to work with Louisiana, Alabama and Florida regarding reconciling the trip ticket data.

GSMFC - **D. Donaldson** reported that the recreational activities continue to run smoothly and although the fishing started out slow, it is starting to pick up and the states are increasing their samples. Last year, the states exceeded quota by approximately 35 percent. The commercial aspects (trip tickets) also continue to run smoothly. Currently there are almost 300 dealers, which constitute about 25% of landings utilizing the electronic trip ticket reporting option. Regarding the FIN Data Management System, D. Donaldson stated that FIN migrated to Oracle Discoverer as the query tool. There have been some initial start up problems, however, this software is much more powerful and will allow the users to do more analysis of the data. There might be a need for some training. After some discussion, the group decided to convene a training session in conjunction with the FIN meeting in June. **M. Kasprzak** stated that Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries has a computer lab that could handle the training session and will reserve the room. Lastly, NMFS has requested names and addresses of shrimp fishermen so they can send out a notification of shrimp regulations. FIN has provided this type of information to NMFS in the past and **D. Donaldson** wanted to make sure it was still okay to distribute these data. The group did not have a problem with providing these data to NMFS.

Being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:45 am.

**TCC HABITAT SUBCOMMITTEE
MINUTES - 55th Annual Spring Meeting
Monday, March 14, 2005
Point Clear, Alabama**

APPROVED BY:

COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

Vice-Chairman Doug Frugé called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. and asked members and guests to introduce themselves. The following members and others were present:

Members

Frank Courtney, FFWCC, Port Manatee, FL
Kevin Madley, FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Steve Heath, ADCNR, Dauphin Island, AL
Leslie Turney, ADEM, Mobile, AL
Bob Spain, TPWD, Austin, TX
Robert Adami, TPWD, Corpus Christi, TX
Heather Finley, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Paul Cook, LDWF, New Iberia, LA
Doug Frugé, USFWS, Ocean Springs, MS
Mark Thompson, NMFS, Panama City, FL

Staff

Jeff Rester, Habitat/SEAMAP Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Cheryl Noble, Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS
Larry Simpson, Executive Director, Ocean Springs, MS

Others

Mark Kulp, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA
Anne Lange, NMFS, Silver Spring, MD
Michael Bailey, NMFS, St. Petersburg, FL
Paul Choucair, TPWD, Rockport, TX
Jim Hanifen, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Tom Herrington, Gulf of Mexico Program, Stennis, MS
Ralph Rayburn, *GSMFC Commissioner*, Texas Sea Grant, College Station, Texas

Adoption of Agenda

The agenda was adopted without changes.

Adoption of Minutes

The minutes of the October 11, 2004 meeting were adopted as written.

Administrative Report

J. Rester stated that he presented the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council's draft Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Amendment at a public hearing in Florida in January. The Council approved the Amendment the following week at their meeting. The Amendment enacted the measures from the EFH EIS. The Council identified EFH for each managed species, designated habitat areas of particular concern, and enacted measures to protect habitat from fishing impacts. HAPCs included the Florida Middle Grounds, Madison-Swanson Marine Reserve, Tortugas North and South Ecological Reserves, East and West Flower Garden Banks, Stetson Bank, Sonnier Bank, McNeil Bank, Rankin Bright Bank, Geyer Bank, McGrail Bank, Bouma Bank, Rezak Sidner Bank, Alderice Bank, Jakkula Bank, and Pulley's Ridge. **J. Rester** reported that actions to protect habitat from fishing impacts included prohibiting bottom anchoring over coral reefs in HAPC, prohibiting trawling gear, bottom longlines, buoy gear, and all traps/pots on coral reefs throughout the EEZ, and requiring a weak link in the tickler chain of bottom trawls on all habitats throughout the Gulf of Mexico. **J. Rester** reported that the Commission received word that the MARFIN bottom-mapping proposal was selected for funding. **J. Rester** reported that he attended the first National Fish Habitat Initiative meeting in February, but he would discuss this item further under another agenda item.

J. Rester stated that the Final EIS (FEIS) for the Gulf Landing liquefied natural gas (LNG) facility was released in December. He stated that the initial report was that up to 1 million pounds of red drum could be lost each year due to entrainment and impingement impacts. This equated to 8.5% of the total Gulf red drum landings in 2002. An errata sheet was released a week before the record of decision was delivered in February stating that the FEIS was in error and the impacts to red drum could be up to 489,000 pounds or 3.8% of the total Gulf red drum landings in 2002. The most likely impact would be about 100,000 pounds per year. The license was granted for the facility to use an open rack vaporizer (ORV). **J. Rester** reported that the draft EIS (DEIS) for the Compass Port LNG facility located 11 miles south of Dauphin Island, Alabama was released in late February. The preferred alternative was an ORV. The DEIS stated that 183,000 pounds of red drum or 1.4% of the total Gulf landings could be lost each year. The 183,000 pounds equated to 14.9% of the 2002 red drum landings for Mississippi and Alabama.

The Subcommittee next discussed the problems they had faced in dealing with LNG issues. In an effort for the states to have their voices heard in the federal permitting of these facilities, the Subcommittee passed a **motion to form a group composed of the Habitat Subcommittee and additional ad hoc members as needed to review the monitoring design and mitigation plans for open loop LNG facilities in the Gulf of Mexico with the objective of developing recommendations for use by the Coast Guard and the participating states.** This was in an effort to standardize what types of information the monitoring plans would include and how the information would be collected. The Habitat Subcommittee also passed a **motion to investigate the avenues to further pursue the resolution of concerns regarding open loop systems in LNG facilities in the Gulf of Mexico post licensing.** This was in an effort to learn of any additional ways that the states could comment on the licensing of LNG facilities.

DbSEABED, An Information Processing System for Marine Substrates

M. Kulp stated that dbSEABED integrates the data from multitudes of seafloor surveys into single, unified mapping of the materials composing the ocean floor. The goal was to bring decades of seabed research data from marine geology, biology, engineering and survey into one seabed mapping that can fulfill the community needs for ocean-bottom information on many spatial scales. **M. Kulp** stated that the data structure was point-based. Gridded and vector mappings of the seafloor materials were computed from the point-data coverages. **M. Kulp** also discussed another related project detailing sand deposits off the Louisiana coast.

Bottom Mapping Project

J. Rester stated that the Commission had received funding for the 2.5-year bottom mapping project that would create and distribute a digital spatial database of bottom habitats on the continental shelf and slope from the Texas/Mexico border to the southern tip of Florida. The database would be created from the recovery, interpretation, and integration of existing data for this region. The data would be organized spatially in ArcGIS format and would be available via printed document, CD-ROM, and on the web. He stated that he was currently trying to solicit members for the Bottom Mapping Work Group that would be responsible for developing protocols to define whether a data record provides clear evidence of reef habitat or no evidence of reef habitat being present. The Work Group would also help identify potential data sources in order to conduct an extensive search of existing databases to identify records that could be used to classify where hardbottom habitats were present in the Gulf of Mexico. **J. Rester** stated that the project had an April 1 start date and he would like to hold the first Work Group meeting in May. He stated that he had distributed a list of potential Work Group candidates to the Subcommittee. He asked the Subcommittee for additional potential members. Finally, he stated that he looked forward to working on this project.

National Fish Habitat Initiative

J. Rester stated that the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies was sponsoring the National Fish Habitat Initiative. The Initiative was formed in the hopes of stemming the tide of aquatic habitat loss and habitat degradation throughout the country. The Initiative was hoping to model itself after the North American Waterfowl Plan. **J. Rester** reported that the Initiative held their first meeting in February. At this meeting, the group developed goals and objectives for the Initiative and discussed other regional groups working on aquatic habitat throughout the country. **J. Rester** stated that the group hoped to have a final, nationwide habitat plan ready by early next year.

Habitat Video Discussion

J. Rester stated that he had not put as much time into the video as he would have liked. He stated that the group formed to fill out the video production questionnaire had done so. He stated that Mark LaSalle was not able to attend the meeting, but he wanted to start work on producing a draft script before the next meeting. **J. Rester** felt it was also important to look for possible funding sources for the video. He stated he would be working with the video group to see about

possibly producing a draft script. He encouraged everyone to let him know about possible funding sources when they learned about them.

Habitat Web Site Discussion

J. Rester stated he had only received information for the web site from Texas. He stated that in order for the web site to be a success, everyone on the Subcommittee needed to participate. **P. Cook** stated that he had some information for Louisiana. **J. Rester** requested that the remaining states please send him information so he could develop a draft site for review before the next meeting.

Habitat Issues of Interest From Each State

Texas – **R. Adami** stated that the TPWD program stocked 20 million red drum and 830,000 spotted sea trout last year. **R. Adami** reported that 7.9 million pounds of aquaculture shrimp were produced last year. Texas held their fourth crab trap clean up and they collected 2,458 traps. This brought the total to 17,957 traps for the life of the program. **R. Adami** stated that TPWD was collecting concrete rubble and culverts for artificial reef sites near Port Mansfield and in Galveston Bay.

Louisiana – **H. Finley** stated that a recent platforms for mariculture report recommended additional studies to investigate the possibility of using retired oil and gas platforms for mariculture purposes. One of the key issues concerning leaving the structures in place was the transfer of liability. **H. Finley** stated that possible legislation on this issue might be forthcoming. **H. Finley** stated that the Louisiana Supreme Court upheld the hold harmless clause in oyster leases and overturned the lower court verdicts in oyster lawsuits over the Caernarvon freshwater diversion project. **P. Cook** stated that the second derelict trap clean up took place in Breton Sound and Terrebonne Bay. He reported that volunteer effort was down this year, but 4,000 traps were recovered. **P. Cook** stated that bathymetry off the central Louisiana coast was being updated. He reported that the 12-foot bathymetry line had moved 4 miles south and the 18-foot contour had moved 3 miles south since the 1930s survey.

Alabama–**S. Heath** stated that they were involved in several Hurricane Ivan recovery projects. He reported that they were planting oyster shell in several areas and were moving into shallower water. Alabama was also creating more inshore fishing reefs. **S. Heath** reported that Orange Beach has already started the process for a beach renourishment project. **S. Heath** stated that they were also involved in cleaning up Little Lagoon from hurricane damage.

Florida – **K. Madley** stated that a natural gas pipeline in southeast Florida was causing some concerns over potential impacts to coral reefs. The pipeline would be importing natural gas from the Bahamas. The company has now agreed that starting 3 miles offshore, the pipeline would be directionally drilled under the coral reefs. Florida recently held a clean up of fishing gear in Boca Grande Pass. As a result of the clean up, a new fishing regulation was passed for Boca Grande Pass that would prohibit breakaway jigs.

USFWS – **D. Frugé** reported that a Federal Register notice was recently released on the Endangered Species Act 5-year review of the Florida manatee. He stated that the Ecological Services Office was conducting an instream flow study on the Sabine River. Currently, there was an effort to divert water from the Sabine River to the Dallas area.

Other Business ✓ @ Lafayette, LA

With no other business, the meeting adjourned at 12:05 p.m.

APPROVED BY
[Signature]
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**TCC SEAMAP SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING
MINUTES - 55th Annual Spring Meeting
Monday, March 14, 2005
Point Clear, Alabama**

Chairman Jim Hanifen called the meeting to order at 1:05 pm. The following members and others were present:

Members

Jim Hanifen, *Chairman*, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Richard Waller, USM/CMS/GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Paul Choucair, TPWD, Rockport, TX
Steve Heath, ADCNR/MRD, Gulf Shores, AL
Butch Pellegrin, NOAA Fisheries, Pascagoula, MS
Mark Leiby, FWC/FWRI, St. Petersburg, MS
Steven Atran, GMFMC, Tampa, FL (*Proxy for Richard Leard*)

Others

Mark McDuff, NOAA Fisheries, Pascagoula, MS
Ann Lange, NOAA Fisheries, Silver Spring, MD
Page Campbell, TPWD, Rockport, TX
Terry Cody, Rockport, TX

Staff

Larry Simpson, Executive Director, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Dave Donaldson, Data Program Manager, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Jeff Rester, SEAMAP/Habitat Program Coordinator, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Cheryl Noble, Staff Assistant, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Adoption of Agenda

R. Waller moved to adopt the agenda. M. Leiby seconded and the motion passed.

Approval of Minutes

M. Leiby moved to approve the October 11, 2004 minutes as submitted. D. Waller seconded the motion and it passed.

Administrative Report

J. Rester reported a Shrimp/Groundfish Work Group meeting is scheduled for April 12th at the NMFS Lab in Pascagoula. He said everyone should have received their cooperative agreements and funding for this year. L. Simpson will be visiting Congress next week and he is taking the revised 2-page SEAMAP fact sheet with him.

Data Tracking and Quality Control

P. Choucair reported that at the data meeting in December, it was decided to develop a data tracking system. He reviewed the proposal for *Improved Database Management and Dissemination* (handout). The Subcommittee then discussed each section of the proposal. **J. Rester** asked the Subcommittee to send M. McDuff all information and documentation on their survey designs so he can incorporate this with the data. He also asked the Subcommittee to submit all data to M. McDuff in a timely manner after each survey. After extensive discussion, **J. Hanifen** asked P. Choucair, M. McDuff and J. Rester to finalize this working document within the next 6 weeks and submit it to the Subcommittee for approval by email. He also asked the Subcommittee to send M. McDuff the documentation he has been asking for on the survey designs and major changes in the designs through the years so he will have that for the metadata. **P. Choucair** and **J. Rester** will also incorporate comments on the data tracking and management section for the Subcommittee's review in the near future.

Fishery Independent Database Discussion

D. Donaldson reported he is still incorporating comments into the protocols and plans to have the final presentation at the August joint meeting. He said \$30,000 is available from the National Biological Information Infrastructure (NBII) to develop a data management system. He asked that all the states send in a year's worth of data so the data structure can be developed. He will contact the appropriate people in each state to receive this information.

New Real-Time Data Display

J. Rester presented color maps of real time data that were developed through ArcGIS and asked the Subcommittee if this is how they want to present the real time data this summer. He gave the Subcommittee several options on how to present and what to present. The Subcommittee was pleased with the displays and asked J. Rester to use the maps for the real time data this summer.

There was then extensive discussion on developing a new way to present the SEAMAP Biological and Environmental Atlas. There was disagreement on which method to use: a weighted mean versus an unweighted mean to derive the catch per unit effort. **M. Leiby moved to have the data summarized both ways and to include an explanation on how they were calculated. B. Pellegrin seconded the motion.** After more discussion, **the motion was tabled** and the Subcommittee asked J. Rester to research which would be the preferred method. It was suggested he discuss the issue with a statistician(s) and then report back to the Subcommittee.

New SEAMAP Database Demonstration

M. McDuff said that if anybody wishes to use the new SCS or FISCUS systems this summer, they should schedule with him on when to install the systems. He will have a training session on April 13th at the Pascagoula Lab after the Shrimp/Groundfish meeting on April 12th. He then gave a presentation on the new SEAMAP database and a copy of the complete presentation can

be obtained through the GSMFC office. He asked the Subcommittee to review the new database and send him comments or suggestions as soon as possible.

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 5:00 pm.

APPROVED BY:

COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

LAW ENFORCEMENT COMMITTEE
Minutes – 55th Annual Spring Meeting
Tuesday, March 15, 2005
Point Clear, Alabama

Vice Chairman J.T. Jenkins (Alabama) called the meeting to order at 8:26 am. The following attended the meeting:

Members

Bruce Buckson, FWC, Tallahassee, FL
Walter Chatagner, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Stephen Clark, USFWS, Slidell, LA (*Proxy for J. Gale*)
John Thomas Jenkins, ADCNR/MRD, Dauphin Island, AL
Jeff Mayne, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Don Montoro, USCG 8th District, New Orleans, LA (*Proxy for J. Sherlock*)
Karen Raine, NOAA/GCEL/SE, St. Petersburg, FL
Hal Robbins, NOAA OLE, St. Petersburg, FL
G.W. "Bill" Robinson, TPWD, Austin, TX

Staff

Cindy Yocom, Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS

Others

Donald Armes, Jr., MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Rob Beaton, FWC, Tallahassee, FL
Ron Dearmin, NOAA OLE, Stennis Space Center, MS
Terry Godwin, Consolidated Technology Solutions, Pensacola, FL
Steve Heath, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL
Tom Herrington, FDA, Ocean Springs, MS
Bill Hogarth, NOAA, Silver Spring, MD
Richard Leard, GMFMC, Tampa, FL
Ronnie Luster, CCA, Houston, TX
Dave McKinney, NOAA OLE, Austin, TX
Joe O'Hop, FWC/FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Robert Oliveri, USFWS, Jackson, MS
Charley Vlcek, Consolidated Technology Solutions, Pensacola, FL
Bobbi Walker, GMFMC, Orange Beach, AL
Bob Zales, II, C-RFAP, Panama City, FL

Adoption of Agenda

J. Mayne moved to approve the agenda as presented. B. Buckson seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Approval of Minutes

The Committee reviewed the minutes of the October 12, 2004 meeting held in Biloxi, Mississippi. **W. Chatagner moved to approve the minutes as written; B. Buckson seconded the motion which passed by consensus.**

Welcome—Harold M. Robbins, Jr. , Special Agent-in-Charge, NOAA OLE SE Region

J.T. Jenkins welcomed the new SAC for the Southeast Region, H. Robbins, who accepted the position in June. The LEC is very pleased that he was able to attend their meeting; they look forward to working with him. In his introduction, **D. McKinney** noted that Hal began his law enforcement career in St. Petersburg and worked his way up the chain of command. He has a vast amount of experience both on the street and as an investigator. He moved from St. Petersburg as deputy chief to accept the position of chief for the Annapolis Police Department. After a number of years serving Annapolis, he returned to Florida as the executive director of the Florida Chiefs' Police Association in Tallahassee. He re-entered enforcement, and the Southeast Region is fortunate to have his leadership and experience.

H. Robbins thanked the group for his welcome and advised the group that NOAA OLE personnel are spread very thin throughout the region. Each special agent carries a large area of responsibility. NOAA OLE has 31 authorized special agents who serve from North Carolina down to Puerto Rico to the Virgin Islands and up into the Gulf down to Brownsville, Texas, at the Mexican border. The agency is challenged in terms of number of personnel and also that it has lost personnel in Puerto Rico. Another officer was lost after accepting a promotion. One special agent is serving in Iraq which left a void in the Baton Rouge office, and the remaining officer is working out of the Stennis office. One individual should report for duty in Guam next month. Unfortunately, the agency has the responsibility of paying for permanent changes in duty stations, which averages about \$100,000 each. Ron Dearmin will retire in several months, and this group is especially interested in that position. His position will be filled via promotion and will remain in the Gulf.

There is a disparity in terms of the work load of the three ASACs. One has a substantially larger number of personnel assigned; this will be equalized. The Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico present logistical and language challenges. A fairly young agent is on duty in Puerto Rico; we prefer a more experienced agent. The federal government recently passed legislation wherein payment could be made of up to one year's salary in quarters over four years as an incentive for hard to fill duty stations. Puerto Rico may fit into that scenario, and we hope to encourage senior personnel to relocate there. These agents must speak Spanish fluently, and even so Puerto Rico presents unique difficulties. We are not pleased with other stations and are investigating whether we need to be more productive in different areas. This may free those agents for other locations. Two or three new agents are being hired, but it takes a year to get them out of school and assigned. These rookie agents must be paired with a seasoned investigator for further training and on-the-job experience.

NOAA also moved the southeast regional office, and the agency picked up square footage. However this was not budgeted.

H. Robbins hoped that the states would receive a letter from the chief outlining new requirements to fund JEAs. The letter should be complete and to the state agencies within the next week. The agency hopes to standardize the way in which each of the state partners apply for funds. The states will need to indicate what is being accomplished with the funding. This policy goes part and parcel with the reporting requirements at the federal level, especially with the Department of Commerce in program budgeting. It is very likely the next juncture will be a performance-based reporting system where funding the following year would be based on accomplishments that support NOAA goals and objectives from the prior year.

Two states have volunteered to test the new JEA software. Washington will be sending a disk to provide access to the software so that field testing can begin. We should determine how suited the software is to collect the data and whether or not fine-tuning is needed. The software has been too long in coming at five to six years. It has been finished and actually exists. Magda Hodge and Beth Landry have access to the software and will act as your support contacts. Testing should tell whether or not it will meet your needs, as well as ours. It will provide you the opportunity to collect data that will be comparable with other states. It can also act as a mechanism to load data into state systems. Data collection and handling need not be redundant. Through testing, we should be able to determine if additional software is needed. The software is ad hoc windows based. There will be pre-packaged reports, but you will also be able to assemble reports as needed through a query system. It is a relational data base in that if you need to determine whether two or three individuals are related in some way to a piece of information such as a telephone number, address, or vessel identification, the system will access that information. Keep in mind, however, that this is a pilot program for the software. In several months, we should be able to see how well the software was developed.

J.T. Jenkins asked if the data could be entered via the web, for example, from a wireless connection. If you configured a laptop with this software and had access to a wireless connection, he hopes you would be able to do so. Another objective is to find a way in which data could be entered in the field through a PDA. Otherwise, entry will be redundant from paper entry in the field to data entry in an office. However, the program needs to be evaluated first. Many PDAs have a limited amount of memory. Clearly, the program should be finalized before PDAs are equipped. If the software does not meet the needs of the program, we will have to ascertain how long it will take to resolve the problem.

W. Chatagner went on the record in stating that the loss of Ron Dearmin is going to be a great loss, especially for the state of Mississippi since he worked out of Stennis. The Gulf States does a lion's share of the JEA work, and an SAC is vital in the northern Gulf. **H. Robbins** replied that he is certain that the supervisory position will be in the Gulf, just not sure where exactly. A meeting will occur next month in St. Petersburg where the ASACs and DSACs will determine the best possible solution. On behalf of the state of Louisiana, **J. Mayne** stated that if scrutinized geographically, having that position in the north central Gulf of Mexico is an asset to the program. From Alabama's standpoint, **J.T. Jenkins** also emphasized the importance in keeping the position within the northern Gulf.

J.T. Jenkins asked in regard to the new standardization process, are the states about to go through the entire application process again? **H. Robins** replied yes. All applications will be

structured the same way. The letter that will go out next week will give you the format. We will work with you on it. Actually, the Gulf States are great; no problem getting your paperwork in. The Gulf States put forth a lot of effort for the funds.

J.T. Jenkins followed up by asking if the agency had a handle on the budget. **Robbins** replied that he could give an example of their situation. The VMS Program is an effective management tool, and the agency is mandated to implement. However, the budget for that program alone was cut \$1 million. The agency is also faced with the added expectation in some of the fisheries that the agency will provide the units and pay their monthly charges.

J. Mayne asked if the letter would provide an indication on when funding would occur. **H. Robbins** replied that the initial letter would contain the format only. It will give a list of requirements, application timetable, and requirements to apply. It is his intention that each application is successful; he reiterated that if there are problems, the agency will assist in working through those problems. His office will serve as the point of contact. He does not foresee funding being cut. The application process will just be more structured. **J.T. Jenkins** expressed his frustration that NOAA does not have a set timeline for this process. **H. Robbins** noted that in restructuring the application process, a definitive timeline should develop. A time to request your budget, a deadline to submit, a notification time, and whether additional justification might be required. Several staff people have been hired at headquarters to assist with budgetary work. **J.T. Jenkins** summarized by saying that basically nothing has moved forward on the next cycle of JEAs. **H. Robbins** noted that they have a broader knowledge base and a good estimate of the total budget. The Department of Commerce is requiring more structure for programs.

NCIC Update

J. Mayne followed up with Executive Director of Nlets, Steve Coreil, who put him in touch with their Director of Operations, Frank Minice. He was very receptive to what the committee wanted to accomplish (access to enforcement databases, NCIC). Minice indicated that Nlets could set up the states and provide linkage at no cost. Access to databases is dependent on the database owner. For example, permission must be received so that the states could access NOAA's vessel permitting database, and the states must permit one another access. State officers would need to receive NCIC certification. It was a very positive conversation. Nlets is a non-government agency that has existing contracts with the states. Those contracts provide the funding for these types of programs. Nlets can also provide case management applications. **D. McKinney** asked about firewalls and other security measures. **J. Mayne** indicated that Nlets currently has the capability to make those connections and route the data as permitted. **D. McKinney** volunteered to contact Minice in regard to linking into NOAA's database. **J. Mayne** also suggested Minice be invited to participate on the next conference call.

Litter Violations—Magnuson Reauthorization

J. Mayne reported that the letters sent to Congress requesting the authority to enforce offshore litter violations received positive feedback. The reauthorization schedule is unknown and currently stands at a grass roots campaign.

Enforcement Strategic Plan/Operations Plan

B. Buckson moved to request a work session to review progress on ongoing tasks and to discuss new tasks and assignments with staff assistance from **C. Yocom**. The work sessions held previously have been extremely positive for cooperation between agencies, joint investigations, and information exchange. **W. Chatagner** seconded the motion which passed unanimously. All agreed to a north-central Gulf location, perhaps Baton Rouge. Based on approval, the meeting was tentatively scheduled for July.

Presentation of Appreciation

J.T. Jenkins presented R. Dearmin (pending retirement) with a letter of appreciation from the Commission Chairman, John Roussel, which read:

In deepest appreciation and gratitude, the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission recognizes Ron Dearmin, Assistant Special Agent-in-Charge, National Marine Fisheries Service, Office of Law Enforcement, for your valuable contributions. Over the years, your work with the state marine law enforcement agencies throughout the Gulf of Mexico contributed greatly to the protection and conservation of marine resources and supporting ecosystems that are vital to our coastal communities and state economies.

Your commitment to training and assisting state officers was instrumental in the successful implementation of the federal Joint Enforcement Agreement program and helped make it a model for the nation to emulate. Your dedication and professionalism not only reflected favorably upon you personally, but also reflected upon the cooperative relationship between the Gulf States and the National Marine Fisheries Service.

Although we congratulate you on your pending retirement, we will sorely miss your service to the Gulf of Mexico. On behalf of the Law Enforcement Committee and the entire Commission, you have our best wishes.

Several committee members seconded the kind words and told Ron that he will certainly be missed.

SmartCOP/Consolidated Technology Systems

Charlie Vlcek and **Terry Godwin** presented information on their integrated suites of software for enforcement. The heart of the software is live CAD on mobile computers that allow officers to see calls as the information is entered into the system. Live updates are automatically delivered to the officer without user interaction. The software can alert officers of potential dangers by providing instant information about the location and possible presence of weapons. CTS presented a possible scenario for the Gulf States in two phases. Phase I includes implementation an electronic form to track activity which can be electronically submitted to a sure database. The database can be used to create customized reports based on officer, unit, or

activity. In Phase II, data exchange would be implemented between GSMFC agencies and other participating CTS America customers for person, vehicle, vessel, and place information. Florida has begun a pilot program with the company to integrate mobile computer terminals in officers' vehicles to determine the applicability and effectiveness for officers in the field.

Fish Imports & Product Labeling

D. McKinney reported the public health concerns of mislabeling seafood including foreign use of chemicals and antibiotics in their products. Foreign products compete with domestic products and may persuade domestic fishermen to use any means to make ends meet. Numerous reasons exist of mislabeling seafood including enhanced profits, avoiding tariffs, and avoiding FDA and other safe handling practices. Truth in labeling is also needed to identify wild-caught or aquaculture products. Investigators must be educated about the problem.

B. Buckson reported that Florida is cracking down on illegal fish sales to protect markets for commercial fishermen and consumers. Operation No More Back Door began in February and focuses on recreational anglers who sell catch illegally to fish houses or restaurants. Investigators may pose as recreational fishermen; perform DNA tests to identify species; and visit supermarkets, fish stores, and other retail establishments to check delivery boxes for accurate labeling.

Forensics laboratories would aid enforcement in identifying species, and **B. Buckson** volunteered to compile a list of forensic laboratory contacts throughout the region to aid with this Gulf wide problem.

IJF Program Activity

J.T. Jenkins reported that the Striped Bass FMP is the final stages of development. **J. Mayne** reported that the Sheepshead Profile is being presented to the State-Federal Fisheries Management Committee this week for their consideration whether to proceed into full FMP development.

Other Business

C. Yocom reminded the group that the next regularly-scheduled conference call is Monday, April 4.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 11:35am.

J. Smith 10-18-05
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**S-FFMC MENHADEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MINUTES—55th Annual Spring Meeting
Tuesday, March 15, 2005
Point Clear, Alabama**

J. Smith, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 8:30 am, with the following in attendance:

Members

Rick Schillaci, Omega Protein, Inc., Moss Point, MS
Borden Wallace, Daybrook Fisheries, Inc., Empire, LA
Steve Heath, AMRD/ADCNR, Gulf Shores, AL (*Proxy for Vernon Minton*)
Joseph Smith, NMFS, Beaufort, NC
Corky Perret, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Jerry Mambretti, TPWD, Port Arthur, TX
Vince Guillory, LDWF, Bourg, LA

Others

Anne Lange, NMFS, Silver Spring, MD
Wilson "Doc" Gaidry, *GSMFC Commissioner*, Houma, LA
John Roussel, *GSMFC Commissioner*, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Roy Crabtree, NMFS/SERO, St. Petersburg, FL

Staff

Larry Simpson, Executive Director, Ocean Springs, MS
Steve VanderKooy, IJF Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Jeff Rester, SEAMAP/Habitat Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Dave Donaldson, FIN Data Program Manager, Ocean Springs, MS

Introductions and Membership Review

J. Smith led the introductions of the MAC and the audience.

Adoption of Agenda

The agenda was approved by consensus as written.

Approval of Minutes (October 12, 2004)

The minutes from the last meeting were reviewed. B. Wallace moved to accept the minutes as written, V. Guillory seconded and the minutes were approved.

Status of 2004 Gulf of Mexico Menhaden Fishing Season

J. Smith presented an overview of the 2004 Gulf menhaden fishing season. The total Gulf menhaden landed for reduction in 2004 was 468,736 mt which was down from the 2003 landings by 9% (19% for the previous 5 year average). **Smith** reported that fishing was slow in April and landings were the lowest since 1975 as was May and June due to weather and wind. July landings improved under fair skies while August saw the first hurricane of the 2004 season, Charley. Hurricane Ivan rolled through in mid-September and again in late September virtually eliminating fishing during that month. October was windy and the extended season helped the industry out with improved landings. A total of 41 vessels operated out of 4 plants in 2004, 38 regular steamers, 2 run boats, and 1 bait boat. While the landings were down in 2004, the effort appears to be up although **Smith** believes that fewer sets were made overall.

The age distribution of the Gulf landings showed the 2003 year class remains strong with a large number of age-1s dominating the catch at Cameron and Empire. Age-2s showed up in high numbers in Abbeville and Moss Point mixed with a number of age-3s at the Abbeville plant. The NOAA 2005 forecast suggests that 4 plants with 41 boats will likely land 467,000mt of Gulf menhaden this coming season. This number may be artificially low due to this past season and the fact that there will still be a good number of age-2s in the catch.

Smith reported that new CDFR forms had been field tested last year on a few boats in the Gulf and the new forms were going to be distributed fleet-wide in the next few weeks for 2005. The new form has GPS location information and streamlined fields which should be more useful to state and federal fishery managers.

Update on Atlantic Menhaden

Smith also reported on the season and management changes on the Atlantic. The 2004 landings were around 184,000mt which was up 11% from 2003. **Smith** reported that 10 vessels operated out of Reedville and 3 boats (1 Atlantic and 2 Gulf) operated during the fall season out of Beaufort, North Carolina.

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's Atlantic Menhaden Management Board met in November 2004 and tabled a motion to place a cap on the Chesapeake Bay catch of Atlantic menhaden. The board wanted the Technical Committee to examine the status of Atlantic menhaden with regard to its ecological role as well as several other items that include poor menhaden recruitment, the stock assessment, the reference points, and local depletions. Primarily, the board wanted the Technical Committee to evaluate seasonal and area closures in Chesapeake Bay and determine the best way to monitor and assess such management measures. At the February 2005 meeting of the board, a limit was approved capping the total catch of Atlantic menhaden for reduction in Chesapeake Bay at 110,000 mt for the 2006 and 2007 fishing seasons. It is unclear at this time who will monitor and enforce the cap for the board however.

Louisiana Forecast

V. Guillory provided the LDWF review and forecast for the 2005 fishing season off Louisiana. **Guillory** primarily uses environmental measures and juvenile abundances to make predictions on the coming season. Generally cold dry winters lead to good menhaden recruitment. The January 2004 water temps were well above the long-term mean, likewise the March 2004 Mississippi River discharge was below, and the January rainfall was also low. Juvenile indexes were high in 2004 at 17.6% above the long-term mean. **Guillory** predicts that the Louisiana landings for 2005 should be between 320,000 and 460,000 mt depending on the variables used. **Guillory** did mention that the Mississippi River discharge has been high this spring suggesting that oil yields should be high as well in 2005.

Update on Gulf Menhaden Stock Assessment

Smith provided a very brief update on the status of the Gulf menhaden stock assessment. Doug Vaughan and the Beaufort science staff had been tasked with additional assessments by the Miami Science Center last year and considering how far into 2004 they already were, it was decided that they would wait to complete the assessment and include the 2004 data as well. It is anticipated that Vaughan will attend the October meeting to present the final assessment.

LNG Facilities in the Gulf

J. Rester made a presentation on the Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) situation in the Gulf. **Rester** had previously informed the group of the seven LNG facilities using open loop systems which have been approved or proposed in the Gulf region. The problem with the "open loop" system is the potential for > 1 billion gallons of water per day being passed through the system. The estimated temperature change of -13.5°F to -30°F at outfall, with anti-biofouling agents (bleach) are dumped directly back into the Gulf. In addition, billions of fish eggs, larvae, and other zooplankton will be destroyed each year through impingement or entrainment. **Rester** reported that operating costs for the LNG companies seem to be the motivating factor for choosing an open loop system. The environmental costs of using open loop systems have not been quantified and no monetary figure has been put on the cost of killing fish. Fifteen onshore LNG facilities currently built, under construction, or proposed in the Gulf of Mexico which are using the closed loop systems. **Rester** pointed out that additional closed loop LNG plants are already in production or proposed in other regions of the US with economic success. The potential impact of seven plants using closed loop is alarming and **Rester** and the GSMFC are attempting to address these issues and ensure monitoring of these facilities in the future.

Pearl River Reservoir Status

Rester also updated the group on the Pearl River reservoir status and would inform the committee when the draft EIS was available for comment.

Other Business

Smith indicated that he had provided S. VanderKooy with a Gulf menhaden ageing section for inclusion in the Otolith Manual revision currently being worked on by the IJF program.

Smith reported that with the key-entry of the historic CDFRs completed, he had been proofing the data for errors. A clean, complete dataset would be made available to the GSMFC shortly.

Finally, **Smith** thanked the LDWF for the assistance with processing close to 2000 menhaden at the Empire and Cameron plants in 2004.

With no further business, the MAC adjourned at 10:46 am.

APPROVED BY:
CSP
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN
10/18/05

**TECHNICAL COORDINATING COMMITTEE
MINUTES—55th Annual Spring Meeting
Tuesday, March 15, 2005
Point Clear, Alabama**

Chairman Corky Perret called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. The following members and others were present:

Members

Steve Heath, ADCNR, Gulf Shores, AL
Jerry Mambretti, TPWD, Port Arthur, TX
Virginia Vail, *GSMFC Commissioner*, FWC, Tallahassee, FL
Joe O'Hop, FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Corky Perret, *GSMFC Commissioner*, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Kerwin Cuevas, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
John Roussel, *GSMFC Commissioner*, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Vince Guillory, LDWF, Bourg, LA
Doug Frugé, USFWS, Ocean Springs, MS
Michael Bailey, NMFS, St. Petersburg, FL

Staff

Jeff Rester, Habitat/SEAMAP Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Madeleine Travis, Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS
Larry Simpson, Executive Director, Ocean Springs, MS
Steve VanderKooy, IJF Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Dave Donaldson, Data Program Manager, Ocean Springs, MS

Others

Mike Ray, *GSMFC Commissioner*, Austin, TX
Anne Lange, NMFS, Silver Spring, MD
Norm Heil, USFWS, Warm Springs, GA
Terry Cody, Rockport, TX
Page Campbell, TPWD, Rockport, TX
Traci Floyd, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Joseph Smith, NMFS, Beaufort, NC
Ralf Riedel, GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Jim Hanifen, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Roy Crabtree, NMFS, St. Petersburg, FL
Bill Hogarth, NMFS, Silver Spring, MD
Joe Gill, *GSMFC Commissioner*, Ocean Springs, MS
Mike Buchanan, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Vernon Asper, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
William Walker *GSMFC Commissioner*, Biloxi, MS
Wilson Gaidry, *GSMFC Commissioner*, Houma, LA
Hayden Dempsey, *GSMFC Commissioner*, Tallahassee, FL

Harriet Perry, GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Tom McIlwain, GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS

Adoption of Agenda

The agenda was adopted as written with discussion of the draft striped bass fishery management plan (FMP) added under other business.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes for the meeting held on October 12, 2005 were approved as written.

State/Federal Reports

Florida - **V. Vail** stated that the Commission has a bill in the Florida Legislature for a 50% reduction in stone crab trap transfer fees. Another bill would allow a two inch stretched mesh in nets no greater than 500 square feet. A proposed bill would remove FWC from the Florida constitution and place FWC under legislative control. **V. Vail** stated that two effort management programs were starting. The first dealt with marine life and a three tiered license program with eligibility being determined by prior production. The second dealt with the blue crab fishery, and it provided separate permits for the harvest of hard shell and soft shell blue crabs. Both blue crab permits would be based on prior production. **V. Vail** stated that the Division of Marine Fisheries conducted a marine fisheries summit with representatives from the recreational and commercial fishing industry as well as environmental and scientific representatives. Topics discussed included proactive management, habitat issues, and continued access to the water. **V. Vail** stated that the Artificial Reef Program began a gag grouper project to place 40 artificial patch reefs in 60 feet of water in the Big Bend area of Florida. The objective would be to gather numbers of juvenile fish that occupy the reef. The project would also use side scan sonar to map existing hardbottom areas within the area. **J. O'Hop** stated that recent events in Florida's marine environments were a red tide stretching from Captiva Island to Venice, Florida. The first reported fish kill this year associated with this red tide event was on January 27th. He reported that as of March 11th, the red tide was linked to the death of 21 manatees in the area. **J. O'Hop** reported that the hurricanes of 2004 caused extensive beach erosion on both coasts of Florida, and destroyed many nests of loggerhead and green turtles. Though many loggerhead nests were lost, emergence success was about average for the nesting season. However, since green turtles nest later in the season, the loss of active nests was great and emergence success was near zero this year. **J. O'Hop** stated that some current and new marine fisheries and habitat research and monitoring studies at FWRI were minimum flow levels in several rivers, stone crab population monitoring, reef fish monitoring and food habits, marine protected area monitoring related to conch, spiny lobster, and reef fish populations, monitoring of corals, and a completion of the Boca Grande tarpon mortality study.

Alabama - **S. Heath** reported that Hurricane Ivan recovery efforts were still underway. The mariculture facility was rebuilt, but the intake pipe would not be rebuilt for at least two years. **S. Heath** stated that two types of gill net licenses were available. One type was a 205 license that

could be transferred, but 50% of your income must be derived from selling fishery resources. The other type was a 505 license with no income requirement, but nontransferable. **S. Heath** reported that problems have been encountered since some fishermen were nearing retirement age and were not deriving 50% of their income from commercial fishing. A new change would allow them to hold a 205 license, but would not allow them to transfer it after they quit fishing. **S. Heath** stated that ADCNR was placing rocks around natural gas platforms creating habitat. Funding was secured to place rocks around five platforms. Additionally five more inshore artificial reefs have been added. The Orange Beach Fishermen's Association donated \$50,000 for artificial reef creation offshore in conjunction with their upcoming fishing tournament. **S. Heath** stated that the reefs would be deployed, but their locations would not be publicized until right before the tournament.

Mississippi - **K. Cuevas** stated that on December 31, 2004 MDMR closed Mississippi waters north of the Intracoastal Waterway to shrimping. He reported that shrimp sampling would begin this month for the 2005 season. **K. Cuevas** reported that the MDMR's Real-time Hydrological Monitoring Program has joined the Gulf Coastal Ocean Observing System (GCOOS). This partnership unites the MDMR's program with all other Gulf monitoring systems to be included in the International Ocean Observing System (IOOS) endorsed by President Bush in the US Oceans Commission Report. MDMR currently has seven monitoring stations on the Gulf Coast. The Commission on Marine Resources adopted changes to Crab Ordinance 4.009 to allow for expanded material uses (a corrosion resistant metal or plastic tag must be attached to the trap) for the crab trap tag requirement, effective March 1, 2005. **K. Cuevas** stated that the Rigs to Reef Program was working with companies on two platforms in to be donated to Mississippi as artificial reefs. **K. Cuevas** stated that Mississippi was considering the adoption of Special Management Zones for artificial reefs in Mississippi's waters. This ordinance change would allow no more than three hooks per line and no use of spear fishing gear equipped with power heads. **K. Cuevas** reported that MDMR conducted a public outreach on seafood health promotion and education. The 2004 to 2005 oyster season total to date was 255,317 sacks. He reported that MDMR would be planting approximately 150 acres of oyster cultch material this spring. Finally, **K. Cuevas** stated that the MDMR public affairs office produced a 2005 MDMR calendar that was available for the public.

Louisiana - **V. Guillory** stated that 2004 blue crab landings totaled 43.45 million pounds worth 29.42 million dollars dockside. **V. Guillory** stated that the Derelict Crab Trap Removal Program held three crab trap sweeps in Sabine Lake from February 18-28, in Breton Sound from February 26 through March 12, and in Terrebonne Bay from March 5-19. **V. Guillory** stated that the number of traps collected to date was 4 in Sabine Lake, one thousand eight hundred twenty-four in Breton Sound, and one thousand eight hundred fifty-three in Terrebonne Bay. The grand total was 3,681 traps. **V. Guillory** stated that a deep-water closure would take place in a portion of Vermilion Bay for 10 days in conjunction with the opening of the spring inshore shrimp season. **V. Guillory** stated that two bills were introduced in the 2005 legislative session concerning crabs. These include a limited entry bill for the commercial blue crab fishery and a gear fee increase for both commercial and recreational crab trap gear licenses. A five dollar increase per license would be dedicated to the derelict crab trap removal program and an additional five dollar increase on commercial licenses would be dedicated to the seafood marketing and promotion board. **V. Guillory** stated that the commercial black drum fishery has been increasing

in recent years. Gear in use in the fishery has changed from primarily a gill net, haul seine, or trawl fishery in the 1980s to a trotline or trawl fishery in recent years with the majority of the harvest coming from trotlines. **V. Guillory** reported that during the 2004 to 2005 oyster season, nearly 427,000 sacks of market oysters and over 166,000 barrels of seed oysters were landed as of January 31, 2005. **V. Guillory** reported that preliminary Louisiana shrimp landings for 2004 totaled 82.9 million pounds (all species combined/heads-off weight). This figure represents the third highest shrimp landings year on record and comprised 56.5% of total Gulf of Mexico shrimp landings. **V. Guillory** stated that Louisiana collected a total of 6,310 MRFSS intercepts for the year 2004. Quota was met across all waves and modes except for two modes. A total of 27 greater amberjack, 1,718 southern flounder, 221 king mackerel, and 1,031 red snapper otoliths were collected for 2004 biological sampling. A total of 200,107 trip tickets were processed from 1,128 licensed dealers. Electronic trip tickets represented 38% (75,691) of the total trip tickets processed.

Texas - **J. Mambretti** stated that TPWD received high marks from the American Fisheries Society's report on Coastal Fisheries' science practices and methodologies that were used in making fishery management decisions. **J. Mambretti** stated that this year, Coastal Fisheries was developing a strategic-planning process that would conclude with a comprehensive Division Operating Plan. Ultimately, this plan would link Coastal Fisheries functions to TPWD's goals and objectives and set Coastal Fisheries vision for the next 4 to 6 years. **J. Mambretti** stated that creel surveys indicated fishing along the Texas coast was getting better and more anglers were taking advantage of it. **J. Mambretti** stated that Coastal Fisheries continued its comprehensive biological and water quality study of tidal streams and continued its work with regional water planning groups. Coastal Fisheries continued working on a Cooling Water Intake Structures rule, focusing on Texas power plants to determine the biological effects of these facilities. TPWD continues to explore potential impacts of proposed LNG facilities and their associated environmental issues. **J. Mambretti** stated that currently there were 2 legislative bills aimed at restructuring Texas' artificial reef program. One bill would grant TPWD the authority to allow private individuals, groups, and/or associations to deploy artificial reef material under guidelines and rules established by the TPWD Commission. The second bill would allow law enforcement agencies that have confiscated derelict or abandoned vessels the option to transfer it to the TPWD Artificial Reef Program. A marine engineering firm was contracted to develop a preliminary sinking plan for the Texas Clipper. An effort was being made to acquire material from the soon-to-be-demolished Galveston Causeway for artificial reef purposes. The Texas Department of Transportation worked with their contractor to donate the entire Humble Channel Bridge in Corpus Christi to the Artificial Reef Program. **J. Mambretti** stated that during round 15 of the shrimp buyback program a total of 72 (35 Bay and 37 Bait) licenses were purchased with a total purchase price of \$683,000. During round 5 of the crab license buyback, one license was accepted for a total cost of \$6,500. During round 6 of the commercial finfish buyback, 11 licenses were purchased for \$58,860. The TPWD Commission adopted rules to suspend coastal fishing during freeze periods. The goal was to protect fish during the few days when they are vulnerable to capture to help shorten the time period for their overall recovery. Because of concerns about vulnerability to over-harvest of certain live mollusks and other inter-tidal species along the Texas coast, TPWD has proposed a closed season along a small area of South Padre Island from November 1 through April 30. This closure would protect species such as hermit crabs, starfish, sea urchins and periwinkles. **J. Mambretti** stated that during the 2005

Abandoned Crab Trap Removal Program, 234 volunteers helped remove 2,458 lost or abandoned traps. That is about half of the traps picked up during previous closures. In the last 4 years, approximately 18,000 crab traps were removed from Texas waters. **J. Mambretti** stated that a brown tide has been found in Baffin Bay. Water samples taken in Baffin Bay showed a bloom of *Aureoumbra lagunensis*. This phytoplankton has been known to bloom for prolonged periods in the Laguna Madre. One of the major concerns about brown tide was that it could form dense blooms that shade and kill seagrasses.

NMFS – **M. Bailey** stated that the Southeast Regional Office would be moving later this week. The new building would be located closer to the USGS, FWRI, and the University of South Florida. **M. Bailey** reported that the national state director's meeting would be held in Tampa in April. **M. Bailey** stated that the National Artificial Reef Plan would be released soon. **B. Hogarth** stated that the National Research Council would be reviewing the way NMFS collects recreational fisheries data. **B. Hogarth** reported that the National Academy of Science would be conducting a study of mercury in fish. The study should be completed in 15 months. **B. Hogarth** stated that the Senate recently passed a marine debris bill. The bill would help identify, determine sources of, assess, reduce, and prevent marine debris and its adverse impacts on the marine environment. **B. Hogarth** reported that national data workshop was being organized to examine a universal way of collecting commercial fisheries data.

USFWS – **D. Frugé** stated that the FWS Director Steve Williams was resigning effective March 20. His new position would be as President of the Wildlife Management Institute. An Acting FWS Director to take Steve's place has not yet been named. **D. Frugé** stated that in another personnel change, the FWS Southeast Region has a new Assistant Regional Director for Ecological Services. Noreen Walsh entered that position on March 6 replacing Cindy Dohner, who had earlier moved into the Deputy Regional Director position in the Southeast. The FWS continued to be an active participant in and coordinating the Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership (SARP). On February 17, the FWS submitted a final proposal for a matching grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to supplement participant agency commitments of non-federal funding to support a full-time coordinator position. **D. Frugé** stated that the SARP Chair and Vice-Chair would be meeting with personnel of the FWS and NOAA-Fisheries on March 28 in Atlanta, Georgia to discuss ways that the SARP can assist in implementing NOAA's ecosystem management approach to managing fisheries. The FWS Southeast Region was preparing a Federal Register notice for a five-year review of the Florida manatee. **D. Frugé** stated that a five-year review was a periodic process conducted to ensure that the listing classification of a species is accurate. **D. Frugé** reported that the FWS Southwest Region's Endangered Species Program has committed to providing \$200,000 this year for the Rancho Nuevo sea turtle nesting project in Mexico.

State Oyster Plans for Disaster Relief Money

Florida – **V. Vail** stated that the Florida Department of Agriculture was the lead agency in charge of the disaster relief money. **V. Vail** reported that Mark Berigan was the contact person at the Florida Department of Agriculture. She stated that their main project would be obtaining oyster shell or limestone for cultch material. **V. Vail** stated that the Florida Department of Agriculture

would be planting oyster reefs themselves. **V. Vail** reported that the Florida Department of Agriculture would soon start to identify areas for restoration.

Alabama – **S. Heath** reported that they received funding for a four-year project that would plant cultch materials. In water depths greater than five feet, 20,000 cubic yards of material would be planted every year for four years. In shallow water, 10,000 cubic yards would be planted every year. Money would also be used to purchase a barge to deploy cultch material in shallow water. **S. Heath** stated that the first shallow water planting would take place in the fall of 2005.

Mississippi – **C. Perret** stated that mapping of public oyster reefs would be done using side-scan sonar. **C. Perret** stated that bottom type would be verified using poles, and total reef acreage estimates would be calculated. Also, MDMR personnel would use poles, dredges and side-scan sonar to determine which areas need additional cultch material or areas that would be suitable for new oyster reef development. He also stated that MDMR would be cultivating oyster reefs and depositing cultch material. Also with the funding the MDMR would develop and implement an oyster stewardship project to better educate and promote the active involvement of oyster harvesters and the industry in harvest practices and other techniques that can be used to assist resource managers in the judicious utilization of oyster resources of the state. **C. Perret** stated that MDMR personnel would inspect and calibrate existing MDMR meteorological stations. Upgrades to existing meteorological stations and software would be performed where practical to enhance reliability and usability.

Louisiana – **V. Guillory** stated that six new oyster reefs were planted with cultch in the summer of 2004 covering nearly 250 acres. Four of the six locations showed high survival and growth of oysters that recruited to the cultch material. **V. Guillory** stated that the Coastal Impact Assistance Program and the Oyster Rehabilitation and Promotion Project funded cultch-planting efforts. **V. Guillory** stated that oyster sampling on public oyster grounds east of the Mississippi River following the passage of Hurricane Ivan showed little sediment and vegetative overburden on reefs. Increases in overall oyster mortality was noted at nearly 11%, with one reef near the Louisiana/Mississippi border showing an increase in seed oyster (< 3") mortality of nearly 30% following the hurricane. **V. Guillory** reported that a \$1.4 million grant was secured by LDWF to improve oyster resources impacted by Hurricane Ivan. The bulk of the funds for the Louisiana Oyster Resource Improvement Project were earmarked for two tasks. One was to use side-scan sonar to map existing reefs and suitable firm bottoms for cultch planting activities, and the other was to plant cultch material to develop new reefs in the hurricane impacted area. **V. Guillory** stated that this grant began on March 1, 2005 and would continue for three years.

USFWS Fish Health Center Nationwide Survey of Wild Fish Diseases

N. Heil discussed the USFWS Warm Springs Fish Health Center located in Georgia, and its role in fish disease diagnosis and fish health certification. The goal of the Fish Health Center was to provide service, expertise and information that contribute to the health, survival, enhancement, restoration, and recovery of fish and other aquatic species in support of national and regional priorities. **N. Heil** stated that the Fish Health Center was conducting a national wild fish health survey (NWFHS) for both freshwater and marine fish. The NWFHS examines free ranging fish and determines the distribution of fish pathogens. **N. Heil** stated that a database to store, compile

and permit queries of fish examination information was built in an effort to support the survey. **N. Heil** reported that the database could be accessed at wildfishsurvey.fws.gov. **N. Heil** then proceeded to show the TCC how you could access and query the NWFHS database online.

Population Trends in Estuarine Dependent Fish and Invertebrates from Fishery Independent Monitoring

H. Perry stated that her presentation examined changes in water quality and biota between 1969 and 2001 in Mississippi. She stated that the 1969 study was part of the Gulf of Mexico Estuarine Inventory and Study (GMEI) and the recent data was collected to study changes since the original study. Protocols and sampling sites from the original study were used in the follow up study. **H. Perry** reported that rainfall was significantly higher in 2001 than 1969 and this may have affected the captured biota at some of the sampling sites. Comparisons between the two studies showed that community structure and biodiversity were not significantly different, but species abundances were lower. **H. Perry** stated that researchers working on the study were concerned by these lower abundances. She stated that it was unclear whether the differences were based on fixed stations sampled in years with different rainfalls or whether it was merely a down cycle in species abundance. If the declines were real declines, researchers questioned whether it was due to habitat loss, disease, or recruitment problems. **H. Perry** stated that researchers examined blue crab catch per unit efforts from all five Gulf states. She reported that data from Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas showed a clear decline in the abundance of juvenile blue crabs while data from Alabama and Florida were inconclusive. **H. Perry** stated that she would like to begin dialog among the Gulf states to examine the feasibility of establishing a data analysis subcommittee to examine long-term trends in species abundance. The group would recommend standardized data analysis techniques and review the feasibility of repeating the GMEI on a Gulf-wide basis.

C. Perret stated that he would like for the group to come up with an estimate for the cost of repeating the GMEI study. **H. Perry** stated that she was not sure if all the states had entered their biological data from the original studies. **L. Simpson** stated that the FIN program might be the entity that could examine the long-term trends in species abundance. **J. Roussel** stated that he felt it would be best to inventory the current historical state fishery-independent databases. He stated that this data could be used for ecosystem management purposes. **H. Perry** stated that she would like to examine more species and report back at the next meeting.

Subcommittee Reports

Crab – **T. Floyd** stated that the Subcommittee heard a report from David Nelson of the Gulf Regional Diamondback Terrapin Working Group. The group was investigating the presence of terrapins in the Gulf region. Terrapins were harvested heavily during the 1950s and 1960s. Despite significant areas of habitat, very low numbers of the turtles were found in Alabama. There was interest in turtle excluder devices for crab traps, and the Subcommittee concluded that further study was warranted. The Subcommittee continued to discuss a Gulf lipofuscin aging project for blue crabs. The project would be an excellent component for stock assessments. Laboratory equipment and grow out facilities already exist within several states. Larval rearing has been successful in Mississippi. The Subcommittee has continued stock assessment efforts.

Texas presented information from a bay shrimp trawl bycatch study and requested input on the methods used for predictive length-based yield per recruit models. Data continue to be updated for the next regional assessment. **T. Floyd** stated that derelict crab trap programs continued in the Gulf. Based on recent results, the Subcommittee plans to update the Derelict Trap Guidelines document. The Subcommittee continued to monitor the marine mammal crab trap interaction issue, which has the potential to raise the crab trap fishery from a category III to a category II.

SEAMAP – **J. Hanifen** reported that SEAMAP received reduced funding for 2005. After an increase in funding in 2004, funding was cut \$375,000 in 2005. **J. Hanifen** reported that this cut would impact sampling levels in 2005. The Subcommittee reviewed new data tracking and quality control techniques. The Subcommittee would also be changing the way real time shrimp data was presented this summer during the Summer Shrimp/Groundfish Survey. **J. Hanifen** also reported that the SEAMAP database was currently being converted to an Oracle database structure and the conversion should be completed shortly. This would enable the Subcommittee to move forward with several new activities.

Data Management – **P. Campbell** reported that the Subcommittee reviewed biological sampling for 2004. The states collected 24,000 otoliths last year. The Subcommittee discussed a web-based data entry program and Commission staff will look into developing this program. The Subcommittee reviewed the need for the states to provide vessel registration information. Also discussed was the need for a confidential forms portal so that each state could access confidential data. Along these lines, the Subcommittee discussed coordinating with NMFS so that members would only have to fill out one form for NMFS and FIN to gain access to confidential data. The Subcommittee discussed gathering count size and area fished on trip tickets. Most of the states were collecting count size now, but getting area fished on a trip ticket could prove to be a problem. The Subcommittee reviewed the FIN social economic data collection plan. After some discussion about what the states need in terms of social and economic data, the Subcommittee agreed that to do this FIN should hire a contractor to compile a list for the states' needs. Finally, the Subcommittee reviewed a white paper about changes in the TIP program since trip tickets began. It was agreed that the paper should be presented to the State-Federal Fisheries Management Committee to see if it addressed the issue concerning changes.

Artificial Reef – **J. Rester** reported that the Artificial Reef Subcommittee has not met since the October Commission meeting. He stated that the Subcommittee's major topic of work at present was developing a joint GSMFC/ASMFC program with MARAD and the Navy to establish a system of equitable distribution of ships in the MARAD fleet and being retired by the Navy. The Subcommittee's two primary prerequisites for establishing such a program are that the federal government bears all costs to prepare the vessels for sinking, tows the vessel to the deployments site, and places the vessel on the location provided by the state artificial reef program and that the federal government continues to assume all liability for the vessel until it is placed on the bottom on the location provided by the state artificial reef program. He reported that the coordinator for the ASMFC Artificial Reef Subcommittee has taken another job, and the new coordinator has no experience with the ship issue or artificial reefs in general. He also stated that the Artificial Reef Subcommittee has been asked to serve on the Gulf Council's Special Management Zone Monitoring Team to review and provide recommendations regarding requests

for Special Management Zone status for artificial reefs off Mississippi and Alabama. **J. Rester** reported that Ron Lukens would be serving as Chairman of that group.

Habitat – **D. Frugé** reported that the Subcommittee discussed dbSEABED, an information processing system for marine substrates. The project has gathered extensive core and grab sample data on the surface and subsurface sediment types in the northern Gulf of Mexico and compiled these into a large database that can be queried. The database may be possibly used to help further the Habitat Subcommittee’s bottom mapping effort. The Subcommittee discussed the status of the Subcommittee’s bottom mapping project and the National Fish Habitat Initiative. Finally, the Subcommittee discussed liquefied natural gas facilities throughout the Gulf of Mexico and their possible impacts on marine fish. **D. Frugé** stated that the Subcommittee passed two motions. The first motion was that the Commission investigates the avenues to further pursue the resolution of concerns regarding open loop systems in LNG facilities in the Gulf of Mexico post licensing. The second motion was that the Habitat Subcommittee and additional ad hoc members as needed review the monitoring design and mitigation plans for open loop LNG facilities in the Gulf of Mexico with the objective of developing recommendations for use by the Coast Guard and the participating states. **D. Frugé** reported that this motion was an effort to agree upon the sound principles needed for a monitoring plan for any permitted open loop LNG facility. The TCC unanimously accepted both motions.

Other Business

S. VanderKooy stated that he would be mailing the draft Striped Bass FMP next week. He stated that the technical task force did a wonderful job on the development of the FMP. **S. VanderKooy** stated that the FMP changed substantially from the previous version. **J. Roussel** requested that a one to two page document be developed that quickly lists the changes to the document in order to facilitate their review of the document.

With no other business the meeting adjourned at 5:10 p.m.



**COMMISSION BUSINESS MEETING
MINUTES - 55th Annual Spring Meeting
Wednesday, March 16, 2005
Point Clear, Alabama**

Chairman John Roussel called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. **J. Roussel** introduced the new Commissioners. **L. Simpson** noted that a quorum was present and reviewed pertinent rules and regulations regarding voting procedures.

The following Commissioners and/or proxies were present:

Commissioners

R. Vernon Minton, ADCNR/MRD, Gulf Shores, AL (*Proxy for Barnett Lawley*)
Chris Nelson, Bon Secour Fisheries, Bon Secour, AL
Hayden Dempsey, Tallahassee, FL
Virginia Vail, FWC, Tallahassee, FL (*Proxy for Ken Haddad*)
Wilson Gaidry, Houma, LA
Butch Gautreaux, Louisiana Senate, Morgan City, LA
John Roussel, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA (*Proxy for Dwight Landreneau*)
Mike Ray, TPWD, Austin, TX (*Proxy for Robert L. Cook*)
Ralph Rayburn, College Station, TX
Corky Perret, MDMF, Biloxi, MS (*Proxy for William Walker*)
Joe Gill, Jr., Ocean Springs, MS

Staff

Larry Simpson, Executive Director, Ocean Springs, MS
Ron Lukens, Assistant Director, Ocean Springs, MS
Ginny Herring, Administrative Officer, Ocean Springs, MS
Nancy Marcellus, Administrative Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS
Dave Donaldson, Data Program Manager, Ocean Springs, MS
Steve VanderKooy, IJF Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Jeff Rester, SEAMAP/Habitat Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Gayle Jones, Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS

Others

Doug Frugé, USFWS, Ocean Springs, MS
Michael Bailey, NMFS, St. Petersburg, FL
Anne Lange, NMFS, Silver Spring, MD
Karyl Brewster-Geisz, NMFS/HMS, Silver Spring, MD
J. T. Jenkins, AMRD, Dauphin Island, AL
Rick Pearson, NMFS/HMS, St. Petersburg, FL

Adoption of Agenda

The agenda was adopted with the following changes: Items 14 and Item 17 will follow Item 4.a, and a discussion of a Resolution honoring Leroy Wieting was placed under "Other Business".

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held October 11-14, 2004 were reviewed. **C. Perret moved to approve the minutes. R. Rayburn seconded. The minutes were approved as presented**

GSMFC Standing Committee Reports

Law Enforcement Committee (LEC) – **J. T. Jenkins, AMRD**, reported that the LEC met on Tuesday, March 15, 2005. All agencies and their federal partners were represented.

Among topics discussed was the role of NOAA's Office of Law Enforcement; status, problems and future of Joint Enforcement Agreements; a presentation from Consolidated Technology Systems; and discussions regarding mislabeling of seafood products, both domestic and foreign.

The LEC reviewed their *Operations Plan for 2005-2006*. They requested the Commission's approval for a two day work session to review and update this document. Expenses for this work session is expected to be shared by the Commission and Council. **V. Minton moved to approve the request. M. Ray seconded. The request was approved.**

C. Perret moved to approve the report. M. Ray seconded. The motion was approved.

Status Report on U. S. Commission on Ocean Policy

L. Simpson stated that this Commission began work in September 2001, pursuant to legislative mandate and has completed its expansive report, "*An Ocean Blueprint for the 21st Century*". The Commission gathered information from around the U.S., including the Gulf States and should be commended for their in-depth work.

L. Simpson referred to the *U. S. Ocean Action Plan* dated December 17, 2004. He pointed out that the Administration strongly values the importance of local involvement and the partnerships they represent are essential in managing and protecting our ocean, coastal, and Great Lake resources. He reviewed some of the immediate and long-term action highlights, that included the establishment of a new cabinet-level Committee on Ocean Policy that will convene its first meeting in early 2005.

He discussed the involvement of a regional partnership in the Gulf of Mexico. He anticipates that the Commission office will be contacted in identifying key priorities for the Gulf of Mexico region. He referred to advanced regional fisheries management efforts such as the Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership (SARP) that includes a Memorandum of Understanding between 12 southeastern states, USDOJ, NOAA, ASMFC, GSMFC and SAFMC. The report also calls

for expanding the NOAA Fleet. He briefed the Commissioners on various areas that were of interest to the Gulf of Mexico region.

He pointed out that the trust funds are not in this plan. A trust fund would be funded from oil and gas revenues. These funds could be used for issues that no single state or agency can effectively handle such as large scale habitat issues, freshwater inflow issues, hypoxia and coastal erosion concerns and non-point source pollution. **L. Simpson** stated that this was disappointing.

The Commissioners requested that L. Simpson keep them advised as to the progress of this plan and the activities that result from it.

LNG Facilities in the Gulf of Mexico

J. Rester made a presentation on the Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) situation in the Gulf. **Rester** had previously informed the group of the seven LNG facilities using open loop systems which have been approved or proposed in the Gulf region. The problem with the "open loop" system is the potential for > 150 million gallons per day being passed through the system. The estimated temperature change of -13.5°F to -30°F at outfall, with anti-biofouling agents (bleach) are dumped directly back into the Gulf. In addition, billions of fish eggs, larvae, and other zooplankton will be destroyed each year through impingement or entrainment.

J. Rester reported that operating costs for the LNG companies seem to be the motivating factor for choosing an open loop system. The environmental costs of using open loop systems have not been quantified and no monetary figure has been put on the cost of killing fish. There are fifteen onshore LNG facilities currently built, under construction, or proposed in the Gulf of Mexico which are using the closed loop systems. **Rester** pointed out that additional closed loop LNG plants are already in production or proposed in other regions of the U.S. with economic success. The potential impact of seven plants using open loop systems is alarming. **J. Rester** and the GSMFC are attempting to address these issues and ensure monitoring of these facilities in the future.

J. Rester distributed a draft letter to the Docket Management Facility of the U. S. Department of Transportation for the Commissioners consideration. The letter commented on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Compass Port LLC Liquefied Natural Gas Deepwater Port License Application, DOT Docket Number USCTG-2004-17659. There was considerable discussion regarding the draft letter and the impact of the LNG facilities in the Gulf that included the need to have an official policy statement in place and the need to make our concerns heard. **J. Roussel** stated that the Commission should draft two letters – one commenting on the DEIS, and the other requesting additional information and an invitation to have an expert speak to us at our next meeting.

B. Gautreaux moved to send revisions and comments on the draft letter commenting on the DEIS to **J. Rester** no later than March 23, so that the letter could be in the mail by March 24. He also requested that a second letter be drafted and sent out to the Commissioners for approval, regarding the need for additional information regarding LNGs. (The second

letter was not as time sensitive.) Both letters should be copied to all appropriate state and federal agencies. J. Gill seconded. The motion was approved.

J. Rester reviewed the Technical Coordinating Committee's recommendation that the Commission send the letter regarding their concerns on the DEIS for the Compass Port LLC Liquefied Natural Gas Deepwater Port License Application, DOT Docket Number USCTG-2004-17659 to the Docket Management Facility of the DOT. The above motion essentially covered the request.

GSMFC Standing Committee Reports

State-Federal Fisheries Management Committee (S-FFMC) Report – L. Simpson reported that the S-FFMC met earlier in the day. The Committee received reports from the Menhaden Advisory Committee (MAC); Commercial/Recreational Fishery Advisory Panel (CRFAP); and updates on the Interjurisdictional Fisheries Program, Fisheries Information Network Programs, and Habitat Programs.

Other topics discussed included a presentation on the LNG situation in the Gulf and a report from Fred Kofler regarding the results of the joint effort by the Gulf of Mexico Program and the GSMFC in developing recommendations for consumption advisories, as needed, for mercury in marine fish from the Gulf of Mexico that are consistent in all five Gulf states. He presented the following recommended language for advisories:

For women and children* - do not consume king mackerel
For men – 2 meals**/month of king mackerel within the 24-31 inch fork length size class; no consumption of fish above 31 inches for length.

*Children are defined as up to and including 15 years olds

**Meals are 8 ounce raw fish

On behalf of the S-FFMC, L. Simpson requested that the Commission accept the uniform state advisory developed by Gulf of Mexico Program's joint effort and provide that advisory to the appropriate state and federal health agencies. B. Gautreaux so moved. V. Minton seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

V. Minton moved to accept the report. V. Vail seconded. The report was approved.

Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) Report - C. Perret reported that the TCC met on Tuesday, March 13, 2005. The TCC received status reports from the various states, NMFS and FWS. The following subcommittees reported to the TCC: Crab; SEAMAP; Data Management; Artificial Reef; and, Habitat. He briefed the Commissioner's on their activities.

The Habitat Subcommittee requested that the Commission investigate the avenues to further pursue the resolution of concerns regarding open loop systems in the LNG facilities in the Gulf of Mexico post licensing. These concerns were addressed earlier in the Commission Business Session.

Other presentations to the TCC included reports from the various states; a discussion regarding oyster plans for disaster relief funds, a report on FWS Fish Health Center Nationwide Survey of Wild Fish Disease; and a report on population trends in estuarine dependent Fish and Invertebrates from fishery independent monitoring.

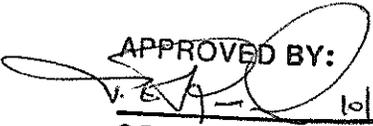
J. Gill moved to accept the report. W. Gaidry seconded. The report was approved.

Highly Migratory Species FMP Amendment 2

Rick Pearson, NMFS/HMS presented a pre-draft of the consolidated Atlantic highly migratory species management plan. Historically, NMFS issues two FMPs – Billfish and Atlantic Tunas, Swordfish and Sharks. He discussed several reasons for consolidation. Significant overlap occurs for these fisheries on the water, in the management process, and in the regulations. The separation of these FMP's has caused redundancy, administrative difficulty and inefficiency and it is difficult for public understanding and participation in the management process.

Scoping summary and pre-draft information are available at <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/>. Comments on the predraft are due March 31, 2005. A draft FMP and proposed rules will be expected the summer of 2005. The final FMP and final rule should be available in late 2005.

The meeting adjourned for the evening at 5:10 pm.

APPROVED BY:

10/19/05
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

STATE-FEDERAL FISHERIES MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
MINUTES—55th Annual Spring Meeting
Wednesday, March 16, 2005
Point Clear, Alabama

Chairman John Roussel called the meeting to order at 8:30 am. Facilitator Larry Simpson conducted the meeting. The following members and others were present:

Members

Roy Crabtree, NOAA Fisheries, St. Petersburg, FL
Doug Frugé, USFWS, Ocean Springs, MS (*Proxy for C. Brown*)
Vernon Minton, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL
Corky Perret, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Mike Ray, TPWD, Austin, TX
John Roussel, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Larry Simpson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Virginia Vail, FFWCC, Tallahassee, FL

Staff

Dave Donaldson, Data Program Manager, Ocean Springs, MS
Jeff Rester, SEAMAP/Habitat Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Madeleine Travis, Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS
Steve VanderKooy, IJF Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS

Others

Chuck Adams, University of Florida Sea Grant, Gainesville, FL
Michael Bailey, NOAA Fisheries, St. Petersburg, FL
Terry Cody, Rockport, TX
Hayden Dempsey, *GSMFC Commissioner*, FL
Wilson Gaidry, *GSMFC Commissioner*, LA
Butch Gautreaux, *GSMFC Commissioner*, LA
Joe Gill, *GSMFC Commissioner*, MS
Tom Herrington, FDA, Ocean Springs, MS
Fred Kopfler, EPA, Stennis Space Center, MS
Anne Lange, NOAA Fisheries, Silver Spring, MD

Adoption of Agenda

The agenda was adopted as presented.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on October 13, 2004 in Biloxi, Mississippi were approved as presented. The minutes of the meeting held on August 24, 2004 in New Orleans, Louisiana were approved as presented.

J. Roussel requested that a written summary be prepared of the meeting/discussion regarding modifying FIN funding to the states. **L. Simpson** stated that this summary will be prepared by staff and distributed to S/FFMC members.

Menhaden Advisory Committee Report

J. Smith of NOAA Fisheries Beaufort Lab gave an overview of the 2004 Gulf menhaden fishing season. Total menhaden landed in 2004 was 468,736 mt down by 9% from 2003, and down about 19% from the previous 5 year average. Major weather events were responsible for some of the decline. Four factories operated in 2004: Moss Point, Abbeville, Empire and Cameron. 38 steamers, 2 run boats, and 1 bait boat operated in 2004. **Smith** reported that the NOAA 2005 forecast suggests that 4 plants with 41 boats will land approximately 467,000 mt.

Smith also reported on the Atlantic menhaden season noting that landings were around 184,000 mt. The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) Atlantic menhaden management board wants the Technical Committee to evaluate seasonal and area closures in Chesapeake Bay and coastwide to determine the best way to monitor and assess management measures. The board passed a motion limiting the total catch in Chesapeake Bay to 110,000 mt annually.

Smith reported that V. Guillory of Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) provided the Louisiana review and forecast. Guillory predicted that the Louisiana landings for 2005 should be between 320,000 and 460,000 mt. Guillory mentioned that the Mississippi River discharge has been high this year suggesting that menhaden oil yields should be high as well in 2005.

Smith provided a brief update on the status of the Gulf menhaden stock assessment. D. Vaughan will attend the October 2005 meeting to present the final menhaden assessment.

Smith reported that J. Rester gave a presentation on the Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) situation in the Gulf of Mexico. Rester also updated the Committee on the status of the Pearl River reservoir. Rester will inform the Committee when the draft EIS is available for comment.

V. Vail moved to accept the Menhaden Advisory Committee Report. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

Commercial/Recreational Fisheries Advisory Panel Report

S. VanderKooy reported that T. Warren of the Gulf Coast Research Lab (GCRL) and B. Buchanan of the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (MDMR) gave a presentation on

the biology and history behind Mississippi's current spotted seatrout size and bag limits. Buchanan gave an overview of the fishery-independent and dependent data that the MDMR has collected. Warren provided statistical and biological reasons for maintaining a 14 inch minimum size limit in Mississippi.

VanderKooy reported that G. Diaz and S. Turner of NOAA Fisheries in Miami discussed the conversion factors for calibrating MRFSS landings and effort estimates for red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico. Using the For-Hire Survey or charter boat directory, NOAA was able to calibrate the survey and found that they had been over and underestimating certain areas for red snapper during certain waves. As a result, the current estimates using the new technique appear to be more accurate representations of the for-hire fishery in the Gulf of Mexico.

B. Jones of the Southeast Fisheries Association (SFA) provided information for presentation on the reciprocal license situation in Florida for non-residents. **S. VanderKooy** reported that the SFA would like to see language similar to Alabama's in the Florida statutes. Jones also provided a presentation on the seafood mislabeling problem as it exists in Florida. Several media stories have dealt with substitution of seafood products by retailers and wholesalers. The C/RFAP agreed that there were cases of seafood fraud routinely in the industry but that there was no clear answer of how to address the problem.

VanderKooy reported that D. Donaldson provided the Panel with an update on Fisheries Information Network (FIN) activities. Donaldson reported on at-sea headboat sampling and the use of the recreational license frame to improve the efficiency of the telephone survey.

VanderKooy reported that J. Rester gave a presentation on the status of the Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) facilities proposed for the Gulf and addressed some of the differences in the open and closed loop systems. The C/RFAP agreed that they would like to invite someone from the LNG industry to the October meeting to present the other side of the open/closed loop controversy.

V. Minton moved to approve the Commercial/Recreational Fisheries Advisory Panel report. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

Uniform State Advisories for Mercury in King Mackerel

F. Kopfler of the EPA at Stennis Space Center presented the results of a joint effort by the Gulf of Mexico Program and the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (GSMFC). The Gulf of Mexico Program was tasked with developing recommendations for consumption advisories for mercury in marine fish for all five states bordering the Gulf of Mexico.

Kopfler addressed the history leading up to this task and the problems associated with the FDA and EPA's current advisories. Several recommendations were made including that women and children (up to and including 15 years) not consume king mackerel, and men consume no more than two meals of king mackerel per month. These king mackerel should be within the 24 to 31 inch size range.

Kopfler reported that the Gulf of Mexico Program is requesting the GSMFC's assistance in developing a strategy for implementing the uniform mercury advisory in the five Gulf states. Following Committee discussion, **V. Minton moved to have the Commission accept the uniform state advisory developed by the Gulf of Mexico Program and GSMFC staff and distribute that advisory to the appropriate state and federal agencies. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.**

Status of IJF Fishery Management Plans and Other IJF Activities

S. VanderKooy and D. Frugé gave a presentation summarizing the Revision to the Striped Bass FMP. **VanderKooy** reported that the Revision to the Striped Bass FMP is currently being reviewed by the Technical Task Force (TTF) and when that review is complete the document will be forwarded to the Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) for their review. One of the recommendations of the TTF was to maintain the GSMFC Anadromous Fish Subcommittee. It was suggested that a summary of the management activities be included with the document and any conflicts be resolved by the Anadromous Fish Subcommittee.

V. Minton moved that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service should review the Striped Bass FMP Revision concurrently with the TCC since they were directly involved with the development of the striped bass program as well as the FMP Revision. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

C. Adams, Chairman of the Sheepshead Technical Task Force, presented an overview of the draft Sheepshead profile including biology and habitat. **C. Perret moved to use pounds as the unit of measure for the weight of fish in the Sheepshead profile tables. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.**

VanderKooy asked the S/FFMC for direction regarding further development of the Sheepshead profile. It was the consensus of the S/FFMC that sheepshead is not currently a priority species with immediate concerns. Since the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries conducts a stock assessment every year for sheepshead and shares this information with the other Gulf states, the S/FFMC agreed not to go ahead with an FMP at this time but to keep an eye on the fishery.

V. Minton moved to have the Sheepshead TTF complete the profile, make corrections, expand the fishery section, and send it back to the TTC for review. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

FIN Data Program Update

D. Donaldson reported to the Committee on the status of the FIN Program. **Donaldson** noted that a summary of the discussion regarding changes made in FIN funding to the states will be distributed to Committee members for their approval. This discussion took place during a Billfish meeting in New Orleans.

Donaldson reported that the FIN Cooperative Agreement for 2005 had been submitted for \$4.9 million. Many activities are being continued such as, recreational data collection, headboat sampling, menhaden, development of the data management system, trip tickets, and biological sampling. New activities include at-sea sampling in Alabama, as well as implementation of trip tickets in Texas.

Donaldson reported that a Social/Economic data collection plan had previously been discussed by the Work Group and S/FFMC members were provided with a summary of that conference call. **Donaldson** noted that the Work Group expressed concern that there was not a clearly defined need for social economic data by the state partners and it is difficult to develop a data collection plan. The Work Group developed several options which were presented to the Data Management Subcommittee (FIN Gulf of Mexico Geographic Subcommittee). The Data Management Subcommittee recommended that a contractor be hired to contact the states and compile the states' needs for social and economic data. **Donaldson** requested guidance from the S/FFMC. The Committee discussed the problems with social/economic data collection at the state level and noted that most of the Gulf states do not have sociologists or economists on staff. **Donaldson** stated that the FIN program has listed the elements for social/economic data collection however the desire to collect these data is not there. After continued discussion, it was agreed that Donaldson would send the federal social/economic data collection plan and activities to the state directors. In addition this issue will be discussed at the upcoming FIN meeting in June 2005.

Donaldson distributed the marine recreational fishing license matrix to Committee members. This matrix lists the elements needed to use fishing licenses as a sampling frame and identifies which states are collecting this information. **Donaldson** noted that legislative action is required in some instances in order to make changes.

Donaldson provided copies of a white paper, *Changes in the Cooperative Statistics Program following the Implementation of the Trip Ticket Program*. With the implementation of trip tickets in Louisiana, Florida, and Alabama there have been some changes in the TIP program for both the states as well as the National Marine Fisheries Service. These changes are listed in the white paper and after reviewing this document the S/FFMC requested more detail. **Donaldson** will add allocation of funds and personnel and other details to this paper and will present this at the S/FFMC meeting in August 2005.

V. Minton made a motion to accept the FIN Program report. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

Habitat Program Report

J. Rester reported that in January he presented the GMFMC draft Essential Fish Habitat Amendment at public hearings in Florida. The Council approved the Amendment the following week. The Amendment enacted the measures from the EFH EIS. The Council identified EFH for each managed species, designated habitat areas of particular concern, and enacted measures to protect habitat from fishing impacts.

Rester reported that the GSMFC received word that the MARFIN bottom-mapping proposal was selected for funding. This 2-1/2 year project will create and distribute a digital spatial database of bottom habitats on the continental shelf and slope from the Texas/Mexico border to the southern tip of Florida. The database will be created from the recovery, interpretation, and integration of existing data for this region. The start date for this project is April 1, 2005.

Rester attended the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies National Fish Habitat Initiative meeting in February. This Initiative was formed in the hopes of stemming the tide of aquatic habitat loss and habitat degradation throughout the country. The group developed goals and objectives for the Initiative.

Other Business

L. Simpson noted that Committee members were provided with the GSMFC publication *Licenses and Fees*. **C. Perret** requested that the actual number of licenses sold annually be broken down by category i.e., recreational, charter boat, oyster, blue crab, shrimp, etc.

Simpson also discussed increases in Interjurisdictional Fisheries (IJF) funding. **A. Lange** of NOAA Fisheries in Silver Spring noted that at the State Directors' meeting being held in April, grant programs will be discussed and input from the states will be welcomed.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:45 am.

**COMMISSION BUSINESS MEETING
MINUTES - 55th Annual Spring Meeting
Thursday, March 17, 2005
Point Clear, Alabama**



Chairman John Roussel called the meeting to order at 8:30 am.

The following Commissioners and/or proxies were present:

Commissioners

R. Vernon Minton, ADCNR/MRD, Gulf Shores, AL (*Proxy for Barnett Lawley*)
Chris Nelson, Bon Secour Fisheries, Bon Secour, AL
Virginia Vail, FWC, Tallahassee, FL (*Proxy for Ken Haddad*)
Wilson Gaidry, Houma, LA
Butch Gautreaux, Louisiana Senate, Morgan City, LA
John Roussel, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA (*Proxy for Dwight Landreneau*)
Mike Ray, TPWD, Austin, TX (*Proxy for Robert L. Cook*)
Ralph Rayburn, College Station, TX
Corky Perret, MDMF, Biloxi, MS (*Proxy for William Walker*)
Joe Gill, Jr., Ocean Springs, MS 39566

Staff

Larry Simpson, Executive Director, Ocean Springs, MS
Ron Lukens, Assistant Director, Ocean Springs, MS
Ginny Herring, Administrative Officer, Ocean Springs, MS
Nancy Marcellus, Administrative Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS
Dave Donaldson, Data Program Manager, Ocean Springs, MS
Steve VanderKooy, IJF Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Jeff Rester, SEAMAP/Habitat Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Gayle Jones, Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS

Others

Doug Frugé, USFWS, Ocean Springs, MS
Michael Bailey, NMFS, St. Petersburg, FL
Anne Lange, NMFS, Silver Spring, MD

NMFS Southeast Regional Office (NMFS/SERO) Report

M. Bailey reported on behalf of the NMFS/SERO. He extended regards on behalf of Roy Crabtree who attended earlier in the week but was called back to the office.

He updated the Commissioners on various amendments to the Reef Fish FMP. Amendment 22, which is the red snapper rebuilding plan has been approved by NOAA Fisheries on October 29, 2004 and is now awaiting transmission to NMFS Headquarters. Amendment 23, which is the

vermillion rebuilding plan was published March 4, 2005, and Amendment 24, which limits access is currently being developed by NMFS/SERO staff.

Amendment 15 to the Coastal Migratory Pelagic FMP, dealing with limited access was published March 7, and the comment period ends May 6, 2005. The grouper trip limit emergency rule was published in the *Federal Register* on February 17, and is effective March 3, 2005. The emergency rule re-opening the application period for the charter headboat permit moratorium has been forwarded to headquarters on March 4, 2005. The red snapper spring commercial season opened February 1, 2005 with 3.10 million pounds available in the quota.

He stated that the Southeast Regional Office was moving today and would re-open at the new building on Tuesday, March 22, 2005.

The Recreational Strategic Plan has been completed and will move on to an implementation team for enactment within the next several months. There will be a Recreational Fish Constituents meeting May 13-14, 2005. The National Artificial Reef Plan will be released soon. And, finally he reported that Carlos M.Gutierrez is the new Secretary of Commerce.

USFWS (FWS) Region 4 Office Report

Doug Frugé reported on behalf of FWS Region 4. He reported that FWS Director Steve Williams is resigning to take a new position as President of the Wildlife Management Institute. Another personnel change, the FWS Southeast Region has a new Assistant Regional Director for Ecological Services, Noreen Walsh.

The FWS continues to be an active participant in coordinating the Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership (SARP). On February 6 the SARP sent out an advertisement for a full-time coordinator position. The open period for accepting applications ends March 31, 2005.

The FWS Southeast Region is preparing a *Federal Register* notice for a five-year review of the Florida manatee. Since the review is based on the best scientific and commercial data available, the FWS is requesting submission of any updated information on the status of the Florida manatee since its original listing as an endangered species in 1967.

A Notice of Availability was published in the *Federal Register* on February 4, announcing the availability for public review of the Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan for the Bon Secour National Refuge in coastal Alabama.

The FWS Southwest Region's Endangered Species Program has committed to providing funding this year for the Rancho Nuevo sea turtle nesting project in Mexico. The funding will be at the same level provided in recent years, \$200,000.

FY 2005 NMFS Budget

L. Simpson provided the Commissioners with the President's FY2006 budget for NOAA Fisheries. The President's recommendation for NOAA Fisheries is \$3.94 billion, \$239 million

above the requested amount. He pointed out several items of interest to the Commission. Cooperative enforcement funds will remain in effect through September 2007. Funding in the amount of \$9 million will be available out of Operations, Research and Facilities to the States of Alabama, Florida, Louisiana and Texas for reseeded, rehabilitation and restoration of oyster reefs.

Other items pointed out included the Limited Access System Fund; \$5 million to National Marine Sanctuaries Foundation; a fishing capacity reduction program for the Federal Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Management Plan; GMFMC authorization to develop and implement a limited access program for the Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Management Plan; and, modernization of NOAA vessels - none of the funding may be used outside of U.S. shipyards.

He pointed out that Mississippi State University was recommended for \$2 million for industrial outreach programs, and Alcorn State was recommended to receive \$600,000 for the Mississippi Technology Alliance.

He will continue to keep the Commissioners informed on budget issues.

FY 2006 USFWS Budget.

Doug Frugé reported that the President's budget request for FWS FY2006 is \$30.9 million dollars above last year's budget. The budget also includes \$710.0 million available for permanent appropriations, most of which will be provided directly to states for fish and wildlife restoration and conservation, \$17 million above 2005.

Of the \$30.9 million dollar increase, \$22.6 is appropriated for resource management which is the operational dollars for FWS. He pointed out that construction appropriations have decreased by \$32.9 million.

Of interest to the Commission was the line item for Marine Sea Turtles under the Multinational Species Conservation Fund. The 2006 request is \$300 million which may provide a major source of funding for the Rancho Nuevo Turtle Program.

He pointed out items of interest to the Commission including a \$22.5 million increase in the Sport Fish Restoration Account; a \$5.6 million reduction to the endangered species recovery program; the largest line item increase was \$9.35 million for wildlife and habitat refuge systems; and, the largest decrease was \$6.73 million for Fish and Wildlife Assistance with an overall decrease of \$7.5 million for Fisheries.

He provided detailed information in a presentation provided by Columbus Brown. C. Brown was not able to attend this meeting due to family concerns.

Selection of Charles H. Lyles Award Recipient for Presentation at the October Meeting

J. Roussel opened the floor to nominations for the 2005 Charles H. Lyles Award. **C. Perret** nominated **Leroy T. Kiffe**. **R. Rayburn** seconded. **C. Perret** spoke on behalf of Mr. Kiffe's

service to Louisiana and to the Gulf States. Leroy T. Kiffe was nominated by acclamation. The Commission staff was instructed to invite two members of Mr. Kiffe's family to the October 2005 meeting to accept the award.

Invasive Species Program and Status of Billfish Project

R. Lukens was not able to attend this meeting due to a family emergency. He submitted information in the briefing material for both of these topics. There was no discussion.

Status Report of Commission's Cooperative Data Collection Program

D. Donaldson reviewed 2005 activities. He provided a summarized report in the briefing material. He gave an overview of all ongoing activities.

Interjurisdictional Fisheries Program Update

S. VanderKooy provided a written report on FY2005 Interjurisdictional Fisheries activities in the briefing material. In addition to the regular maintenance and scanning of reprints housed in the GSMFC office, the IJF staff utilized the availability of a temporary employee to scan the entire collection of GSMFC publications to PDF files. In addition all fishery impacts bibliographic database, the entire artificial reef reprint collection, and, GSMFC minutes dating back to November 1949 are now available in PDF format. All of these files are available through the Commission office.

State Directors' Reports

Florida - V. Vail reported on behalf of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC). The Florida Legislature went into session on March 8. The FWC has one fisheries bill to be considered that would call for a 50% reduction in the stone crab trap transfer fees. Another very controversial bill would allow a two inch stretched mesh in nets no greater than 500 square feet. A proposed Ocean and Coastal Conservation Act that is essentially an implementation of President Bush's Executive Order is also being considered. It refers to coordination, cooperation, participation, scientific progress and understanding of the ocean and coastal environment.

A third bill proposes to put a constitutional amendment on the ballot next November that would remove FWC from the constitutional authority it now has and place the FWC under the authority of the Legislature or the Governor and Cabinet.

She reported that in the first 10 days of March, twenty-nine manatees have been found dead due to red tide. This is reminiscent of 1996, when 149 manatees died due to red tide.

The FWC is in the process of implementing two effort management programs that deal with marine life and blue crabs. The plan establishes a set number of participants in the fishery and different levels of continued participation in that fishery. There is a three tiered license program with marine life with eligibility determined by prior production. With the blue crab fishery it

provides for separate permits for the harvest of hard shell and soft crabs. Both crab permits would be based on prior production. There was a trap retrieval in 2004. A total of 2,910 traps were retrieved, the majority were commercial traps. Of those retrieved, 1,700 were eligible to be assessed a \$10.00 trap retrieval fee.

The FWC has conducted meetings with representatives from the recreational and commercial fishing industry, scientists, and environmental specialists. The major emphasis of these meetings has been to discuss habitat issues, a proactive approach to management and continued access to water. These meetings will continue and eventually produce a summit report.

She reported that an artificial reef project is underway to place 40 patch reefs in the Big Bend area of Florida. The main objective is to collect data on gag grouper but the project will monitor all fish that occupy the reef.

Alabama – **V. Minton** reported on behalf of Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR). He stated that since Hurricane Ivan the price of land in the Gulf Shores and Orange Beach areas has tripled. Four major marinas have been sold to condominium developers. The City of Orange Beach has spent \$10 million to purchase a marina to house the charter boat industry. Without a marina the industry would surely fold.

In terms of recovery from Hurricane Ivan, the Department has been remarking inshore reefs and replacing pilings. An offshore survey of reefs showed that all but one pyramid reef has stayed in place and are stable. Prior to the storm, work had been completed on the intake pipeline structure that was connected to the mariculture facility. The cost of the project was \$1.4 million for the 4 ½ mile pipeline. The storm completely destroyed the intake pipeline and **V. Minton** stated that it will be at least two years before it is rebuilt.

Surveys of the oyster reefs showed an 80% loss of the main reefs due to Hurricane Ivan. Thanks to speedy relief funds, the industry will receive \$3.41 million to rebuild the reefs. This may take three years to completely rebuild. However, oystermen have found oysters on the outer edge of the western part of the reef.

The Department has received \$50k from the Red Snapper World Championship Tournament, which will be used to match a Sport Fish Program grant of \$150k. This will allow ADCNR to build approximately 230 reefs. The ADCNR has been permitted and funded to place 5 new inshore reefs in Baldwin County.

V. Minton reported on current legislation in the State. A jurisdiction bill would allow law enforcement officers to make a case in federal waters and prosecute the case in District Court. Another bill would change a law that states you must have a license if you possess a rod and reel to you must have a license if you possess fish. Other proposed legislation deals with a change in fine schedules. Currently non specific fines are \$25 - \$100. This proposal would change that range from \$00 - \$500. There is also a proposal that would provide a license for commercial gig and cast net fishermen who want to sell their fish.

Mississippi - **C. Perret** reported on behalf of the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (MDMR). He reported the Mississippi Commission on Marine Resources adopted changes to the Crab Ordinance 4.009 to allow for expanded material uses (a corrosion resistant metal or plastic tag must be attached to the trap) for crab trap tag requirement, effective March 1, 2005.

The MDMR Commission examined lowering the minimum size of spotted seatrout from 14 to 12 inches. Public testimony was received and the Commission will make the decision to not lower the minimum size.

C. Perret reported that the 2004-2005 oyster season has been good and to date a total 255,317 sacks have been landed. The season ends the end of April. The State of Mississippi received \$1.545 million dollars from the Hurricane Ivan Disaster Grant. The bulk of the funds will go to cultch planting for new reefs. Mapping of public oyster reefs will be done using side-scan sonar. This will help DMR personnel to determine which areas need additional cultch material or areas that would be suitable for new oyster reef development. There are 7 hydrological monitoring stations in the sound. Several are located near main oyster areas. A small portion of the disaster funds will be used to repair and update those monitoring stations.

C. Perret also reported that some of the disaster funds would be used to develop an Oyster Stewardship Project to better educate and promote the active involvement of oyster harvesters and the industry in harvest practices and other techniques that can be used to assist resource managers in the judicious utilization of oyster resources in the state. He hopes to come up with an incentive to encourage input.

He discussed a serious problem that is currently taking place on the Mississippi coast. NMFS has designated all of the Mississippi Sound as critical Gulf sturgeon habitat. This has stopped all ongoing projects. DMR submitted documents to NMFS Southeast Region to get approval to plant cultch material in the sound. To date they have not received approval. DMR personnel met with NMFS headquarter officials to discuss this situation and hope to have a resolution soon.

The DMR's Real-Time Hydrological Monitoring Program has joined the Gulf Coastal Ocean Observing System (GCOOS). This partnership unites the DMR's program with all other Gulf monitoring systems to be included in the International Ocean Observing System (IOOS) endorsed by President Bush resulting from the U.S. Ocean Commission Report.

DMR was advised that the State's Natural Heritage Program has been approved by the President, which means that the MDMR will be the recipient of \$1 million per year for the next 10 ten years. That money will be spent in the six coastal counties of Mississippi.

Texas - **M. Ray** reported on behalf of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD). He reported that Coastal Fisheries received high marks from the American Fisheries Society's report on the Division's science practices and methodologies used in collecting and analyzing scientific information as related to making fishery management decisions.

Coastal Fisheries is undertaking a strategic-planning process that will conclude with a comprehensive Division Operating Plan in November 2005. This plan will insure all Coastal

Fisheries functions link to agency goals and objectives. The agency is moving towards an ecosystem-based management approach that would coordinate agency activities within major river drainage systems.

TPWD creel surveys indicate fishing along the Texas coast is getting better and more anglers are taking advantage of it. Fishing pressure increased 3% and landing numbers for all species combined increased 6%. Approximately 2,000 new saltwater anglers are recruited each month.

In regards to Habitat, **M. Ray** reported that TPWD continues to explore potential impacts of several proposed LNG facilities in the state. Only permits for closed loop systems will be considered in Texas. U.S. Department of Interior officials announced TPWD and its partners will receive a \$1 million grant towards a \$1.5 million project that will acquire 1,500 acres in the West Bay Conservation Corridor in Galveston County.

Genetic variation research continues on menhaden, sheepshead, and spotted seatrout. Proposals to investigate genetic variation of southern flounder and sand seatrout in Texas waters using micro satellite markers and DNA sequencing are under consideration.

Final reports for the Atlantic croaker reproductive biology and spotted seatrout hydrophone studies are near completion. An investigation of the salinity tolerance of Black Salty (*Carassius auratus*) baitfish was initiated and completed. None of the baitfish survived 96 hour exposure to salinities of 15 ppt and greater.

M. Ray reported updated the Commissioners on Texas's License Management Programs as follows:

Shrimp License Buyback through Round 15:

- 1,259 total shrimp licenses have been bought (39%); 612 bait and 647 bay.
- At a total cost of \$7.8 Million.
- Avg. price paid during round 15 - \$7800

Crab License Buyback through Round 5:

- 24 licenses purchased (8%)
- \$112,749 total dollars spent
- Average price over all rounds = \$4,698

Commercial Finfish License Buyback through Round 6:

- 120 licenses purchased (22%)
- Total cost of \$563,320
- Avg. price paid - \$4694

In regards to the Oyster Lease Management Program, he reported that working with members of the oyster industry, TPWD is evaluating a request to reduce the daily sack limit from 150 per day to 90 per day. Contingent on this reduction is the development of a standardized sack weight that is enforceable. TPWD continues to work toward developing a voluntary shell recovery program. USCOE and General Land Office permits are required for a new reef building area, and paperwork is being compiled to request these permits.

During the 2005 ACTRP, 234 volunteers helped remove 2,458 lost or abandoned traps. That is about half of the traps picked up during previous closures, but we consider that GOOD news, since it means there are not as many traps to be picked up.

The Texas Trip Ticket Program was initiated in January 2005. Approximately 15% of our current seafood dealers have agreed to participate in the transition program during the programs first year. We anticipate a complete transition from monthly reports to daily trip tickets in 2006.

An extension portion of the Lower Laguna Madre around Port Mansfield is currently experiencing a brown tide bloom. A primary concern is the shading effect brown tide has on sea grasses.

The Texas Department of Health Services issued a consumption advisory for spotted seatrout for a 33 square mile area below the Houston ship channel. The advisory was issued after laboratory tests detected elevated levels PCBs in the sampled fish.

Because of concerns about vulnerability to over-harvest of certain live mollusks and other intertidal species along the Texas coast, TPWD has proposed a closed season along a small area of South Padre Island from November 1 through April 30. This closure would protect species such as hermit crabs, starfish, lightening whelk, sea urchins and periwinkles. The TPWD Commission will make a decision on this proposal in April 2005.

TPWD Commission adopted rules to protect game fish in coastal waters in the event of a freeze by adopting a process to suspend coastal fishing during freeze periods. The goal is to protect surviving fish during the few days when they are especially vulnerable to capture to help shorten the time period for overall recovery of coastal species, especially spotted sea trout. This action authorizes the TPWD executive director to close areas affected by freeze events until the freeze event is over. These closures would be limited to areas where fish are known to congregate during freeze periods, and the closures would end as soon as possible.

Under proposed legislation **M. Ray** reported the following:

HB 883/ SB 455 (Seaman) would grant TPWD the authority to allow private individuals, groups, and/or associations to deploy artificial reef material under guidelines and rules established by the commission.

HB 882/SB 453 (Seaman) would allow law enforcement agencies that have confiscated derelict or abandoned vessels the option to either auction the abandoned watercraft or to transfer it to TPWD Artificial Reef Program.

SB 272/HB 884 (Seaman) would create a license moratorium for the commercial oyster fishery in Texas. Original language in these bills set the control date at August 31, 2005.

SB 380/HB 2029 would overhaul the current inshore commercial shrimping license system, replacing the current "bay" and "bait" licenses with a single commercial bay shrimping boat license. It would require a person applying for one of the new licenses to sign an affidavit

stating the applicant intends to derive the majority of their livelihood from the commercial fishery. The bill would take effect September 1, 2007 or September 1, 2005.

SB 379/HB 1291 would authorize issuance of as much as \$10 million in revenue bonds with the money dedicated to purchasing and permanently retiring commercial shrimping, finfishing and crabbing licenses. The bill would set \$7,500 as the maximum to be paid for buying a commercial shrimping, crabbing or finfishing license. The bill mandates the bonds be repaid using money generated from the sale of Texas' saltwater sport fishing stamp.

HB 886/SB 454 (Seaman) would create a Gulf shrimp license management program for those in the fishery on August 31, 2005.

Louisiana - **J. Roussel** reported on behalf of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF). He reported that the LDWF is in the second year of the derelict crab trap removal program. There has been three closures and trap retrievals in the winter. Although volunteer effort is down from last year, over 4,053 traps were removed. A spring closure is scheduled for a portion of Vermillion Bay to coincide with the first 10 days of the spring inshore shrimp season.

The Crab Task Force continues to meet. They have endorsed two legislative proposals that may be filed this session. One is a gear fee increase which would increase the commercial and recreational license by \$5.00 and would dedicate those funds to the derelict crab trap removal program. The other would be a \$5.00 increase to the commercial license which would be dedicated to marketing and promotion of Louisiana crabs. They also endorsed a limited entry proposal. The task force has also looked into investigating the feasibility of pursuing the filing of an anti-dumping petition.

J. Roussel reported that the Department has 6 new oyster cultch plantings covering 250 areas. Four of the 6 look very promising with survival and growth very high. These plantings were made with Coastal Impact Assistance Funds and a special appropriation by Congress for hurricane impact funds for a storm two years ago. The LDWF is in the planning stages to utilize the \$1.4 million available as a result of a Congressional appropriation in response to the damages from Hurricane Ivan.

The moratorium of oyster leasing is still in place, however there has been some developments with respect to a Louisiana Supreme Court judgment in favor of leaseholders. There are numerous cases to still be heard.

The 2005 shrimp season was the third highest landing on record (83 million pounds heads off). Louisiana's landings equaled 56% of the total Gulf landings, despite the fact that it was the shortest season on record, 32 days and the earliest fall season on record.

The industry is still in economic distress. The Legislature passed a bill increasing fees. These fees were used to set-up a Trade Petition Account. **J. Roussel**, along with a representative from the Louisiana Attorney General, appeared before the International Trade Commission (ITC) in early December and testified on behalf of the shrimp industry. The ITC considered assistance for two countries that were impacted by the recent tsunamis. The Louisiana Governor requested

that they not do that. That the U.S. Government certainly should try to assist those countries but that assistance should not be on the back of an industry that is already hurt by unfair trade practices.

He reported that the Governor also established a "Louisiana Wild Caught Shrimp Trade Action Advisory Council", by Executive Order. The main purpose is to support and assist trade action. The Seafood Marketing Board has increased its efforts to increase the marketing and promotion of the shrimp industry. These efforts include billboards, advertising with seafood trade publications, direct mailing, consumer and buyer focus research, and, partnering with state tourism. They are providing funds to LSU to develop a quality assurance program for Louisiana that is going to complement the "Louisiana Wild Caught Shrimp Program". Some aspects will include Chef Emeril Lagassi developing a retail packet of Louisiana shrimp with his name on it.

He briefly reported on several other activities in the states. Louisiana has qualified for Trade Adjustment Assistance for the first time. A Constitutional Amendment was passed that provides a right to hunt and fish for all citizens. A Mariculture Task Force was created by legislative resolution and they have met several times and have developed a report for the potential of mariculture uses on offshore gas platforms. Louisiana is also dealing with a lot of LNG issues.

Future Meetings

G. Herring reported the October 17–20, 2005 meeting will be held at the Grosvenor Resort in Walt Disney World, Florida.

A Texas location for the March 13-16, 2006 has not been determined.

Publication List

A current list was provided for information purposes.

Other Business

L. Simpson provided a report on *Managing our Nation's Fisheries II – Focus on the Future*. He will be presenting this report in Washington, D. C. next week.

R. Rayburn moved to direct staff to work on a memorial Resolution for past Commissioner Leroy Wieting. **C. Perret** seconded. **The motion was approved unanimously.**

V. Minton stated that Representative Stephen McMillan was in legislative session but plans on attending the October meeting. **J. Gill** stated that Senator Tommy Gollott was also in session in Jackson but he would join us in October.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 11:20 am.

**GULF & SOUTH ATLANTIC REGIONAL PANEL
ON AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES
MINUTES
Thursday and Friday, May 12-13, 2005
Key West, Florida**

APPROVED BY: 
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

Ron Lukens called the meeting to order at 9:00 am. The meeting began with introductions of the Panel members and guests. The following were in attendance:

Members

Phil Bass, Mississippi DEQ, Jackson, MS
Harry Blanchet, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Paul Carangelo, Port of Corpus Christi Authority, Corpus Christi, TX
Earl Chilton, TPWD, Austin, TX
Steven de Kozlowski, SCDNR, Columbia, SC
Dale Diaz, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Pam Fuller, U.S. Geological Survey, Gainesville, FL
Scott Hardin, FFWCC, Tallahassee, FL
Leslie Hartman, AL Marine Resources Division, Dauphin Island, AL
Ted Hendrickx, Georgia DNR, Social Circle, GA
Tom Herrington, FDA, Stennis Space Center, MS
Tom Jackson, NOAA-NMFS-SEFSC, Miami, FL
Herb Kumpf, Member at Large, Panama City, FL
Jim Lester, HARC, The Woodlands, TX
Jim Long, National Park Service, Atlanta, GA
Ronald R. Lukens, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Roberto Mendoza, Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo Leon, Mexico
John E. Meyers, US Coast Guard, New Orleans, LA
Steve Rider, AL Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries, Montgomery, AL
Don Schmitz, FDEP, Tallahassee, FL
John Teem, FL Dept. of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Tallahassee, FL
Bruce Thompson, LSU Coastal Fisheries Institute, Baton Rouge, LA
Jay Troxel, USFWS, Atlanta, GA
David Yeager, Mobile Bay National Estuary Program, Mobile, AL

Staff

Nancy K. Marcellus, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Others

Jim Burney, FLEPPC, Riviera Beach, FL
Chris Furqueron, National Park Service, Atlanta, GA
Jeff Kline, Everglades National Park, Homestead, FL
William Loftus, USGS, Homestead, FL
Donald R. MacLean, USFWS, Arlington, VA
Jonathan Moczygamba, Texas A&M University, Kingston, TX

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Glenn Rhett, Corps of Engineers, Vicksburg, MS
Stephanie Robbins, Naval Research Laboratory, Key West, FL
Michele Tremblay, Northeast Aquatic Nuisance Species Panel, Boscawen, NH
Bill Zattau, Jacksonville, FL

Public Comment

Lukens provided the opportunity for public comment. No public comments were received.

Review and Adoption of Agenda

Jay Troxel mentioned that he would provide an HACCP update since Bob Pitman was unable to attend the Panel meeting. A brown tree snake update was added to the agenda to be presented by Jonathan Moczygemba. Herb Kumpf asked that the discussion regarding the invasive species symposium be moved up on the agenda to accommodate early departures. Lukens indicated that the ANSTF update would be provided by Don MacLean, ANSTF staff. Revising state ANS management plans was suggested as another agenda item. **A motion was made by Bruce Thompson to adopt the agenda with the additions/changes noted. Paul Carangelo seconded the motion and the agenda was adopted without objection.**

Review and Approval of Minutes (November 8-10, 2004, Biloxi, MS)

Steve de Kozlowski emailed Lukens corrections to minutes. Lukens indicated that those minor corrections would be made to the final minutes. Troxel mentioned that Pat Carter should be removed from the members attending list. **With those changes noted, Jim Lester made a motion to approve the Minutes of the November 8-10, 2004 meeting held in Biloxi, Mississippi. Leslie Hartman seconded the motion, and without objection the minutes were approved.**

Exotic Pest Plant Council Overview

Jim Burney, Chairman of the Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council (FLEPPC) provided an overview of the Council and its mission. FLEPPC is a non-profit organization founded in 1985 comprised of dedicated volunteers whose objectives are to:

- facilitate communication and exchange of information regarding all aspects of exotic pest plant biology, distribution, control and management;
- provide a forum where all interested parties may participate in meetings and share in the benefits from the information generated;
- promote an understanding regarding exotic pest plants and their control;
- serve as an advisory council for the continued needs for funding, research, management and control of exotic pest plants;

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- provide expert advice for various interests concerned with exotic pest plants; review exotic pest plant management problems and activities; and provide updated information for specific management needs.

FLEPPC is not regulatory. One of the most important objectives of FLEPPC is education. Grants are awarded each year to students conducting research on the biology or control of exotic pest plants, and to individuals or organizations for public education and outreach projects.

FLEPPC:

- compiles invasive species lists that are revised every two years. Invasive exotics that are altering native plant communities by displacing native species, changing community structures or ecological functions, or hybridizing with natives are termed Category I invasives. Category II invasive exotics have increased in abundance or frequency but have not yet altered Florida plant communities to the extent shown by Category I species. Professional botanists and others perform exhaustive studies to determine invasive exotic plants that should be placed on the lists.
- funds research and education efforts through grant opportunities.
- develops exotic pest plant management plans.
- presents an annual symposium for the exchange of information and ideas.
- publishes *Wildland Weeds*, a quarterly magazine containing articles and news on all aspects of exotic pest plants and their management.
- maintains a state exotic pest plant sight-record database at the FLEPPC website: www.fleppc.org.

Burney also distributed a brochure "Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council's 2005 List of Invasive Species." The purpose of the list is to focus attention on 1) the adverse effects exotic pest plants currently have on Florida's native biodiversity and the functioning of native plant communities, 2) the habitat losses from exotic pest plant infestations, 3) the impacts on endangered species via habitat loss and alteration, 4) the need to prevent habitat losses through pest-plant management, 5) the socio-economic impacts of these plants (e.g., increased wildfires in certain infested areas), 6) changes in the seriousness of different pest plants over time, and 7) the need to provide information that helps natural area managers set priorities for control programs.

Ratify E-mail Votes

Lukens indicated that this agenda item was to ratify votes conducted via email. The first vote was to endorse the Habitattitude outreach campaign. Harry Blanchet explained that due to his interpretation of agency procedure, he was unable to cast votes by email. It was his understanding that LDWF representatives could only cast votes in an open meeting. He was later informed that this was not the case. He asked that the record reflect that Harry Blanchet changed his vote from "no" to "yes" and provided an explanation. John Teem and Roberto Mendoza also indicated that they had

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provided "yes" votes by email. **Without objection the email vote endorsing the Habitattitude outreach campaign was ratified.**

The second vote to ratify was to accept South Carolina membership to the Panel. John Teem indicated that he had provided a "yes" vote by email. Herb Kumpf, Earl Chilton, and Ted Hendrickx also cast "yes" votes. **Without objection the email vote to accept South Carolina's membership to the Panel was ratified.**

Status of State Plans

Florida - Don Schmitz reported that Florida has been conducting a survey on how much money the state agencies spend on invasive species. For FY 2003-2004, Florida spent \$89.7 million dollars.

Scott Hardin added that of 18 action items in their plan, 7 have been completed and 5 are actively in progress. That leaves 6 items to accomplish. They are now catching up to the original time line for the plan.

Alabama - Steve Rider reported that they had received a verbal "yes" from Governor to proceed with the ANS plan, but they have been unable to get other state agencies on board. They hope to have an official declaration from the Governor by June 1.

Mississippi - Phil Bass reported that according to the contractor (Tulane), they are making progress. They are using Louisiana's plan and adapting it for Mississippi. They have held 3 meetings, and the contractors indicate it will be completed in 5 meetings.

Louisiana - Harry Blanchet indicated that there has not been a lot of progress since the last meeting. A meeting of the state task force was held and the plan was distributed to state task force members for review. Last year they received a request to import non-native sea worms to be used for fishing bait. "A permit from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service allows import or export of wildlife or wildlife products for commercial purposes. "Commercial purposes" includes such purposes as resale, processing, etc., but specifically does not allow release of wildlife or wildlife products into the wild. In the case of Louisiana, it was determined that selling worms as fish bait would result in release of living worms into the environment. The Fish and Wildlife Service permit does not preempt the authority of State fish and game agencies maintain the authority over release of non-native wildlife into their states. As a result, the Secretary of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries did not issue a permit to allow importation of live sea worms. He noted that if a scientifically sound risk assessment would be provided for this introduction, and concurrence with that assessment is provided through appropriate procedures, he would re-consider that request. Information was gathered and a decision was made to reject that request.

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Texas - Earl Chilton reported that there has been a drastic increase of giant salvinia in Toledo Bend, too much to treat with herbicides. They are in the process of developing an Invasive Species Council for Texas. The TPWD Executive Director gave approval for TPWD to take the lead in this activity. They recently found apple snails in Texas. Apparently they have a number of species of apple snails so they are sending the specimen out for analysis. Texas has new legislation pending this year regarding the transport of illegal plants. There is also new regulation to allow permits to be issued to grow water spinach. A public hearing on this regulation will be held in the Houston area in June. They are also producing a brochure called "The Dirty Dozen".

Georgia - Ted Hendrickx reported that Georgia is interested in developing an ANS plan. They are currently talking to stakeholders and agency cooperators. Georgia has had its 5th case of giant salvinia. They have also received 3 separate reports of channel apple snails, but they are not sure of the exact species.

South Carolina - Steve de Kozlowski reported that South Carolina was selected as pilot state for IAFWA's communications project. This is a three year project. Hydrilla is still the number one concern for South Carolina. Water hyacinth is also a big problem in South Carolina.

Jim Long distributed a sticker "Don't Let it Loose! Be a Responsible Pet Owner." It was recommended that the creator of the sticker attend a Panel meeting and report on problems in the Everglades.

5-Year Strategic Plan Discussion

Ron Lukens noted that the references throughout the document do not reflect the panel name change and membership. He stressed that the 5-year plan is just a guideline or a tool to indicate where the Panel is headed and to inform the Task Force as to what issues the Panel will be addressing. This will not limit any activities by the Panel. There was no objection to using this document as guidance for the Panel.

CEC Meeting in Mexico

Roberto Mendoza provided a PowerPoint presentation highlighting Suckermouth Catfish.

CEC's Trilateral Meeting on Aquatic Invasive Species Risk Analysis was held February 22, 2005, Arlington, Virginia (Canada, Mexico and the United States)

1. Workshop in Mexico City
2. Meeting in Arlington
3. Future Meeting ?

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Conclusions:

- The three countries agreed to have regional standards for risk analysis
 - Regional proposal for Risk Analysis considering the original proposal of USA
- Mexico considers a priority the issue of invasive species
 - Effects on biodiversity and commerce
 - Will take the advice of experts, but decisions are reserved to the government

Future Agreements:

- Several federal agencies (CONABIO, SCT, SRE, SHCP, SEMAR, etc.) Under the leadership of SEMARNAT analyze internal procedures to sign an agreement on Ballast Water with the International Maritime Organization
- ASPAN - SPPNA (Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America)

Introduced Fish Research in South Florida Natural Areas

William F. Loftus, USGS Florida Integrated Science Center, Everglades National Park Field Station in Homestead, Florida provided a presentation entitled "Introduced-Fish Studies in Southern Florida Natural Areas."

Collaborators

NPS - Jeff Kline - Everglades N.P.

University - Joel Trexler; Tim Collins - FIU

NGO - Jerry Lorenz; Jenn Rehage; Krissy Dunker - National Audubon Society

USGS - Leo Nico; Shawn Smith - Florida Integrated Science Center

Funding: NPS, USGS, USFWS, ACOE

ISSUE: Dozens of Tropical Freshwater Fishes Have Been Introduced into South Florida

What are they? How did they arrive here? What are their effects? Why are they successful here? Can anything be done about them?

Introduced Fishes in South Florida

- 31 introduced species reproducing in Florida's waters (Shafland 2002); most are freshwater.
- Most are from tropical Asia, South America, and Africa
- Native freshwater fishes originate from temperate North America (35 spp.)
- 15 introduced species in South Florida natural areas; most in family *Cichlidae*.

Major Sources of Introductions

- Planned Introductions
- Food-fish Introductions
- Illegal or Accidental Introductions

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- Unknown Source

Sampling Methods

- Throw Trap
- Minnow Trap
- Electrofishing
- Visual

Temporal Colonizations of the Everglades Region

1960s: Black acara

1970s: Oscar, walking catfish, spotted tilapia, blue tilapia

Mid-1980s: Mayan cichlid, pike killifish, peacock bass, Mozambique tilapia

Late 90s-00s: Jewel cichlid, jaguar cichlid, brown hoplo, banded cichlid, spotfinned spiny eel.

Canal Inhabitants That Are Potential Future Colonizers of the Everglades

- C. salvini
- C. marulius
- O. mossambicus
- C. citrinellum

Risk Assessment

(Preventing future introductions rests in identifying potential problems in advance)

- Perform taxonomic/life-history/ecology research to understand risks and vulnerabilities
- Model biology of existing pests to screen future introductions
- Identify new introduction vectors

Community Effects

- Problem: Difficult to demonstrate effects in field with highly variable native fish populations. Effects may be lost in system "noise".
- Field and mesocosm experiments will help understand mechanisms that give rise to patterns seen in field collections.

Introduced Fishes in Short-hydroperiod Wetlands: Evaluation of Sampling, Status, and Potential Effects

- Use field studies and mesocosm experiments to test the effects of introduced fishes on native fauna
- Tests for predation, nesting disturbance, and indirect effects of introduced species in disrupting native fish behavior.

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Control

- Existing control methods are ineffective in the open Everglades wetlands with connections to “reservoirs” of colonists.
- Eradication is presently impossible except in isolated water bodies.

Research on innovative control methods is needed!

Pro-active Measures

- Educate public to discourage releases.
- Fund effective, coordinated monitoring.
- Engineer delivery structures that impede access to wetlands.
- Research innovative control methods, as with plants/insects.
- Understand biotic interactions and ecology by experimentation.
- Model existing pests to screen future introductions.

Northeast Aquatic Nuisance Species Panel

Michele L. Tremblay, Program Manager for the Northeast Aquatic Nuisance Species Panel gave an overview of the Northeast Panel.

The Panel’s Geographic Scope

7 states (New York, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island and Maine) and the Provinces of Quebec and Nova Scotia.

The Panel’s Geographic Participation

- Hosted by the Gulf of Maine Council on the Marine Environment
- Panel Co-Chairs: John McPhedran, ME Department of Environmental Protection and Judith Pederson, MIT Sea Grant
- Northeast Provinces and States: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Brunswick New Hampshire, New York, Nova Scotia, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Quebec
- Plans for Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland

The Panel’s Mission and Goals

- Mission Statement - “To protect the marine and freshwater resources of the Northeast from aquatic nuisance species through commitment and coordinated action.”
- Goals
 - Prevent introduction, establishment, and dispersal of aquatic nuisance species in the Northeast
 - Control the spread of aquatic nuisance species already introduced into the Northeast

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- Mitigate the harmful ecological, economic, social, and public health impacts associated with the introduction, establishment, or spread of aquatic nuisance species in the Northeast
- Bylaws adopted May 17,2004

The Panel's Operational Framework

Objectives

- Regional coordination and leadership for programs
- Regional support for aquatic nuisance species policies
- Regional support for regulatory and legislative actions
- Increase public awareness on importance of prevention
- Support and foster basic and applied research
- Regional clearinghouse for information sharing

The Panel's Membership

- Government (federal, state, regional, tribal, provincial)
- Military
- Research and university
- Nonprofit and non-governmental organizations
- Private industry (with strategies)

The Panels's Committees and Staff

Committees

- Ballast Water
Mihai (Mike) Balaban, Transport Canada
Erik Beck, USEPA
- Communication, Education, and Outreach
Mike Hauser, VT Department of Environmental Conservation
Chuck O'Neill, NY Sea Grant
Amy Smagula, NH Department of Environmental Services
- Policy and Legislation
Anne Monnelly, MA Department of Environmental Protection
Susannah King, NE Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission
- Science and Technology
Jason Bake, MA Office of Coastal Zone Management
Jim Straub, MA Department of Environmental Protection

Contracted Staff

- Michele L. Tremblay, Naturesource Communications

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Selected Panel Accomplishments

- Semi-annual meetings with “Spotlight on Species” and professional development features including legislation, media relations, and volunteer management
- *NEANS Panel Resource Digest*
- Fact sheet (under revision)
- Two traveling displays
- Website: *northeastans.org* with sub-sites
- Listserv: *panel-subscribe@northeastans.org*
- Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers floating key ring and companion website (second production run)
- Water Chestnut hand-pulling brochure with companion website
- Peer-to-peer coordination on state plan development/revision (MA, NY, ME, VT, & RI)
- Priority species list with control strategies and protocols
- May 2005 Early Detection Rapid Response workshop in Portsmouth, NH (follow-up from Bar Harbor, ME workshop in May 2003)
- Marine ID.org

Planned Panel Activities

- Development strategy
- NEANS Panel website revision with GOMC grant
- Regional ballast water initiative
- Outreach program for non-English speaking communities
- Distribute new order of floating key chains with companion website
- Revised ANS Legislative matrix
- Regional Early Detection - Rapid Response
- Fact sheet revision

Opportunities for Communication, Cooperation, and Collaboration

- Use our listserv: *anspanels@northeastans.org* to inform others of your meetings and workshops
- Reciprocal website links
- Consider reserving time on your agenda for other Panels
- Work together on regional initiatives such as rapid response and early detection or outreach tools
- Schedule time at ANS Task Force meetings for regional panel gatherings

Northeast ANS Sightings

- Eurasian Milfoil in ME
- *Hydrilla* found - and treated for the last two years in Limerick, ME
- Four tunicates found in Prince Edward Island
- MSX in Bras D’or Lakes, NS and PE
- Water Chestnut in MA and NH

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- *Corbicula* in the Charles River, MA
- Lone cane toad in Augusta, ME

Michele L. Tremblay, Program Manager
Northeast Aquatic Nuisance Species Panel
P.O. Box 3019
Boscawen, NH 03303
(603) 796-2615
mlt@naturesource.net

www.northeastana.org
info@northeastans.org

Risk Assessment Training Discussion

One activity included in the current year's work plan is risk assessment training. At a previous meeting, Pam Fuller volunteered to begin work on that activity. Fuller outlined different risk assessments and made contacts with persons to conduct the training. A preliminary date of August 23-26, 2005 and the location of Pensacola, Florida, was selected for the training session. Fuller emphasized that the session would be hands-on and interactive. The Mississippi River Basin Panel indicated that they were also interested in conducting risk assessment training, so some of their members were invited to attend the training session. The strategy is to run concurrent training sessions, with about 40 participants.

Lukens proposed next steps regarding risk assessments:

- Hold additional training opportunities, as necessary
- Panel establish Risk Assessment Work Group
- Panel charge appropriate work group to develop a prioritized list of species and pathways for which risk assessments are needed
- Panel consider work group product and approve as appropriate
- Panel charge Risk Assessment Work Group to develop a plan to conduct risk assessments

After substantial discussion regarding the next steps, it was decided to go forward with the workshop. A report from the workshop will be given at the next Panel meeting. At that time the Panel will decide on next steps, including establishing a risk assessment work group.

Public Comment

No public comments were received at this time.

Meeting recessed at 5:10 pm.

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Friday, May 13, 2005

Meeting reconvened at 9:00 am.

Earl Chilton responded to the question regarding a ban on imported live oysters that are not native to Texas. There was no new legislation passed in Texas regarding oysters; it was a regulation change. It has nothing to do with retaliation to California banning Texas oysters. The only oyster that was banned previously was Pacific oysters. White list - eastern oyster and horse oyster - only ones legal to bring in live. No provisions for permits. Shucked oysters of other species can be imported.

Public Comment

No public comments were received.

Gulf Invasive Species Symposium

Herb Kumpf brought up 3 things to address:

1. What is the purpose of the symposium?
2. Do we have this as a separate venue or associate it with another symposium?
3. How do we bring this all about?

This activity is both in the strategic plan and the work plan. The symposium would be held to elevate the importance of the issue in the Gulf of Mexico.

After several Panel members questioned the timing of holding a symposium and whether the Panel was ready to move forward, Kumpf suggested that the Panel table the issue until there was more support within the Panel to proceed.

2005 Operations Plan and Work Group Assignments

The Gulf and South Atlantic Regional Panel on Aquatic Invasive Species develops plans to guide the work of the Panel and its established work groups on an annual basis, based on the Five-year Strategic Plan developed by the Panel in 2004. A list of tasks were planned for 2005, and Lukens requested input from Panel members on these tasks.

It was agreed to schedule a work group meeting for the Research and Development Work Group, and to hold a conference call for the Education and Outreach Work Group.

A motion was made by Harry Blanchet to accept the 2005 Work Plan. The motion was seconded by Paul Carangelo, and with no objection the motion passed.

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There was also a request to put the work group membership on the website.

Administrative Report

Legislative Update - The Panel was provided lists of Invasive Species Legislation, both federal and state, introduced during the 2005-2006 session. These lists were compiled by Marshall Meyers, Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council.

Jonathan Champion, Northeast Midwest Institute, provided the following aquatic invasive species legislation update. The first bill to be introduced this session was S. 363, the Ballast Water Management Act Of 2005. This bill was introduced by Senators Inouye and Stevens on February 10. It only addresses ballast water, and mirrors the provisions of the IMO Convention pretty closely. The deadlines and timelines are the same as IMO. The bill's ballast water standard is actually more stringent than IMO. However, the bill also calls for a review of available ballast technologies prior to any standard going into effect; if no technology can meet the standard based on the outcome of that review, the ballast management program can be revised - i.e., the standard can be relaxed, the deadlines can be pushed back, etc. So there is a chance the bill's very stringent ballast standard may actually end up delaying any meaningful action. No hearings on the bill have been scheduled to date, and there is no House companion bill at this time.

The next item of note is the NAISA legislation. These bills were reintroduced on April 13. The Senate bill is S. 770, introduced by Senators Levin and Collins. The House version is again split into two bills - H.R. 1591 is the "Management" bill sponsored by Representative Gilchrest, and H.R. 1592 is the "Research" bill sponsored by Representative Ehlers. Overall, this is basically the same legislation that was introduced in 2003. Some technical edits were made throughout the bill in response to comments and feedback (changes to the bill's findings, definitions, screening provisions, rapid response provisions, etc.). Some more substantial changes were made to the bill's ballast water section. These were made in response to federal agency comments; they mostly sought to change the structure and mechanics of the ballast water program, but not its overall intent. The changes actually ended up making the ballast provisions more protective. No hearings are scheduled for NAISA at this point in any of the relevant committees.

It is thought that the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee is planning to introduce a ballast water management bill. But apparently the majority and minority have not come to any sort of agreement on the approach the bill would take, how to draft it, etc. It is unclear when that legislation will be coming from them.

Committee staff informed them earlier in the year about the outlook for invasive species legislation this session. From what they said, both chambers would like to move an aquatic invasives bill this session. It is possible that would be in the form of a ballast water-only bill, especially in the House. Efforts are still going to be working to push a more comprehensive bill. The best hope for that is

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to try to move NAISA through the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee. If a comprehensive NAISA bill can get through EPW and the Senate, and the House moves a ballast water bill, it might be possible to include all the other provisions - screening, rapid response, etc. - via the conference committee process.

NISC/ISAC Update - Provided by Anna Cherry, Public Relations for NISC

NISC / ISAC FACA-Chartered Task Teams/Subcommittees:

1. Leadership and Coordination
2. Communications, Education and Outreach
3. Control, Management and Restoration
4. Early Detection and Rapid Response
5. Information Management
6. International Cooperation
7. Research
8. Definitions
9. Prevention (Joint with ANSTF)
 - 1) Pathways
 - 2) Screening
 - 3) Risk Analysis

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS:

1. To date, NISC staff has had some contact with more than 2000 individuals that are engaged on the issue.
2. About 300 federal/state/private programs, 140 groups & 170 organizations have at least some involvement with invasive species.
3. Approximately 35 federal agencies & 24 federal laws have some role/impact in invasive species.

NISC AND ISAC 2005 ACTIVITIES HIGHLIGHTS:

1. Revision of the National Invasive Species Management Plan (NISC Plan)
 - Starting Points established with input from NISC, ISAC, Government Accountability Office (GAO) and Office of Management and Budget (OMB)
 - Current plan should be retained as core document
 - Include discussion and clarification of “invasive species” definition
 - Plan should be more prioritized, streamlined and focused
 - Plan should be linked to Invasive Species Performance Based Crosscut Budget
 - Include measurable goals and set out “game plan” for action over next three (3) years

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- Emphasize leadership & coordination issues
 - Stress economic impact data and highlight outreach efforts
2. 5-Year Review Report of Executive Order 13112
 - As required in the Executive Order, a review of the effectiveness of the Executive Order that created NISC and ISAC will be prepared and submitted to OMB.
 3. Invasive Species Definitions Review and White Paper
 - ISAC subcommittee is working on a document to offer clarification on the issues surrounding the term invasive species and related terms, which is a priority due to increased concern, by certain constituencies that invasive species issues will lead to loss of property rights and incurred costs for landowners. The white paper seeks to clarify confusion regarding the use of terms which leads to misunderstanding or misrepresentation of the science and terminology.
 4. Federal Invasive Species Legal & Regulatory Analysis
 - Complete outline for analysis, review and seek resources for completion of report.
 5. Economic Analysis of Tamarisk
 - Multi-agency team working to produce a model economic analysis that can be used on other invasive species of concern.
 6. Review of Draft NEPA Guidance
 - As called for in the Executive Order on Invasive Species and NISC Plan, a draft guidance document is being developed and reviewed in conjunction with CEQ.
 7. Formalize subcommittee memberships and processes and continue their various projects
 - Develop operating guidelines and mileposts for subcommittees to ensure good use of time and resources in these endeavors. Subcommittees will provide critical input for NISC plan revision.

ANSTF Update - Don MacLean, USFWS, provided an ANSTF update. The ANSTF 2005 Spring Meeting will occur on May 24-26, in Monterrey, California. The meeting will be two and a half days in length and will include reports from the ANSTF ex-officio members on their ANS activities as well as the usual business such as: Regional Panel reports, Committee reports, Working Group reports, and ballast water updates. A special western regional panel session will be held on the second day and will include a presentation on Undaria (an invasive algae) in Monterey Bay Sanctuary as well as a field trip to the National Estuarine Research Reserve at Elkhorn slough. The meeting is open to the public and all are welcome to attend.

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The announcement for the position of Executive Secretary of the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force closed on April 18th. The ANSTF Executive Secretary, a USFWS employee, serves the ANSTF co-chairs and other ANSTF members in implementing the ANSTF Strategic Plan, provides technical support and policy analysis to implement provisions of the Nonindigenous Aquatic Nuisance Prevention and Control Act, and provides analysis and recommendations on current and emerging aquatic invasive species issues. Unfortunately, after the position closed, a hiring freeze was placed on the USFWS. They are currently requesting an exemption from the hiring freeze to allow them to fill the position.

The ANSTF was recently asked to develop a revision process for state/interstate groups that already have an approved ANS management plan, but wish to update their plan. A draft process has been developed and should be presented for approval at the next ANSTF meeting.

ANS Grant - Lukens reported that the 2005 grant is in place. The prior grants, including 2005, were actually previous year money, therefore it is possible to have 2 grants at the same time.

2004 Annual Report - The Panel was provided with a copy of the 2004 Annual Report of the Gulf of Mexico Regional Panel on Aquatic Invasive Species. Only state agency information is contained in the report; no non-state or federal member information was included. Lukens hopes to receive better guidance from the Task Force on future annual report submissions.

Discussion of Regional Panel Logo

Don Schmitz contracted with Rob Gelhart to develop logos for the regional panel. Three logos were submitted to the Panel for consideration. Each member was asked to vote on the logo of their choice and submit that vote to Lukens. Lukens will contact the Panel regarding the final decision.

Evaluating Ballast Water Treatment Systems

A presentation entitled "Overview of NRL Ballast Water Test Facility" was provided by Stephanie Robbins, Research Biologist at the Center for Corrosion Science & Engineering, Naval Research Laboratory in Key West, Florida. (elemieux@ccs.nrl.navy.mil)

Overview

1. NRL Background
 - NRL Role in Ballast Water Treatment
 - Ballast Water Treatment Test Facility
 - testing approach
 - supporting experimentation
 - vendor requirements
 - other relevant programs

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- things to consider

NRL Mission

2. Perform RDT&E in direct support of current and future fleet concerns for condition based maintenance and engineering programs
3. Provide long term engineering solutions and evaluation of materials for improved performance, cost savings and life cycle management
4. Provide corrosion expertise in areas of seawater cathodic protection, materials
5. Provide in-house expertise

Objectives for Ballast Water Treatment

6. Engineer, design & construct a ETV Test Facility capable of testing candidate technologies for ballast water treatment
7. Conduct scientific experiments and engineering design, test and evaluation to support validation of the ETV protocol
8. Perform a beta-test of the ETV protocol and process
9. Test facility to play the role, strictly of 3rd part test facility, not a technology certification, but to provide the objective data others will require to certify or authorize

NRL Facility Design for ETV Protocol Testing

- conformance to ETC DRAFT protocol for
- candidate treatment locations
 - during ballasting treatment
 - in tank ballast treatment
 - discharge treatment
- fluid storage
 - pre/post treatment tank
 - test tank
 - control test tank
- fluid handling
 - SW Supply: four 4" x 3", 30 hp pumps
 - Ballast Pumps: Two 6" x 4", 60 hp pumps
 - Pump supply to technology: 8" Nom , Sch 40 PVC piping

ETV Test Approach - Duration and Reliability (Current Protocol)

- modified approach for test duration and reliability
- six biological efficiency tests required to measure treatment effectiveness
- proxy measurements (e.g. Chl, turbidity, particle size, etc.) may be used during non-biological efficiency test cycles

ETV Test Approach - Duration and Reliability (NRL Proposal)

- test plan approved and technology received at test facility

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- identification and qualification of equipment as acceptable for testing by the test facility
- cooperative installation of the equipment by the Vendor and Test Facility
- start up of equipment
- certification of proper installation and operation by the vendor
- biological verification cycle

Diagnostic cycles

- biological verification
- diagnostic cycles of 600 m3/cycle
- biological verification cycle
- maintenance overhaul of ballast equipment

Diagnostic cycles

- biological verification cycle

Instrumentation

- System wide there are over 100 instrumented sensor for monitoring physiochemical properties at various locations
- System-wide there are also 96 manual, pneumatic and electrically actuated valves for various purposes
- Samples will also be acquired for the analysis of Chlorophyll, POC, DOC, and Nutrient Load

Operator Control Sequence to Fill Discharge Tank

- Operator selects system fill conditions
- System continually checks and displays configuration status required for next step in sequence. system also monitors previously established conditions to ensure nothing has changed.
- Operator must initiate each step of sequence once indicated conditions are met

NRLKW Seawater Chemistry Properties

Local Marine Environment

- TSS
- TOC and Chl_a
- Bacteria
- Phytoplankton

“Solving for the Pieces of the Pie” Associated Problems

Validation & verification or qualification testing has not been done anywhere in the world at full scale, in a standardized format and with statistical rigor. Therefore, there are fundamental questions regarding “how to” perform the testing.

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On-going efforts: validations & baseline

Completed

- development and approval of ETV test plan to conform to the ETV
- formulations of QA/QC procedures and compliance with ETV requirements
- characterization of local waters via optical and microbiological methods for indigenous species
- determine baseline operating and performance facility properties
- tank holding time effects (1-5 days)

Ongoing

- sparse sample, sampling volume representativeness
- tank size effects
- tank mixing, organism recovery & population characteristics
- flow effects

Sampling Techniques

Zooplankton sampling

- maximize volume sampled and minimize organism loss
- reduce sample size from pipe and time averaged sampling

Pipeline Sampling

Vendor requirements and tech data package request

Requirements

- general requirements
- installation requirements
- operating and maintenance requirements
- system performance requirements

Selection criteria

- performance
- system availability
- installation requirements
- resources funding/cost sharing
- suitability for evaluation per the ETV Protocol

Next Steps

- select beta test vendor
- test “in-house” technologies
- formulate beta test plan
- conduct beta test
- mobile lab for shipboard verifications
- finish the “solving the pieces of the pie”
- re-evaluate and rewrite the test protocol

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Things to Consider

- analytical biological tools are paramount to economically feasible evaluations of treatment technologies
- surrogate identification and optimization work will require subsequent effort to scale-up and integrate
- mirror or comparable test sites are desirable and likely necessary for reliable and consistent testing in the future
- the testing consider here is geared to validation work and approval testing. Thus results must be
 - rigorous
 - perhaps legally defensible
 - comparable to some DISCHARGE standard

Species Report Update

Pam Fuller gave a PowerPoint presentation entitled “Species Report Update.”

New Crab Records

- Charybdis helleri
 - Sarasota Bay, Florida
 - Jacksonville, Florida
- Callinectes bocourti
 - Collier Co. (SW) Florida

New Frog Records

- Cuban Tree Frog
 - Gadsden County, Florida
- Greenhouse Frog
 - Oktibbeha County, Mississippi
 - Harrison County, Mississippi

Singletons

- Oscar
 - Edisto Drainage, South Carolina
- Pacu
 - Chattahoochee Drainage, Georgia
- Peacock hind
 - Palm Beach County, Florida
- Redtail catfish
 - Galveston Bay

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Isolated Populations

- Spotfinned spiny eel
 - Everglades Drainage, Florida
- Nile tilapia
 - Pascagoula River, Mississippi

St. Tammany Parish, Louisiana

- Rosy reds (fathead minnow)
- Jaguar Guapote
- Southern Platyfish
- Convinct Cichlid
- Green Spotted Pufferfish
- Black Tetra
- Unidentified Tetra
- Green Swordtail
- Oriental Weatherfish

Other Records of Interest

- Suminoe Oyster
 - Albemarle Sound, North Carolina
- *Tilapia buttikoferi*
 - Ann Arbor, Michigan
- *Sorubimichthys planiceps* (Firewood (shovelnose) catfish)
 - San Francisco, California

HACCP Update

Jay Troxel, USFWS, gave an HACCP Update.

HACCP Planning

- Provides readily comparable MP's for similar management actions
- Documents the process for easy review and comparison
- Has the important "sign here" line
- The HACCP tool strategically guides planners to ask the right questions and formulate comprehensive preventative actions

Support Available

- Fish & Wildlife Service's training academy, NCTC offers a course
- Regional training workshops available from Sea Grant & the Service
- Dedicated website support: *HACCP-NRM.org*

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Building a reference library of BMP's to remove non-targets from pathways...Why? Both ends of the pathway benefit.

- At the shipping end
 - Proactively prevents unintended species movements
 - Protects agency and stations by documenting efforts to prevent spread
- At the receiving end
 - Risks and prevention BMP's can be reviewed and evaluated BEFORE delivery and release. High risk pathways can be blocked.

Resource Allocation

- HACCP planning is an excellent prioritization tool
- Helps managers manage funding and justify decisions.

Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) planning is a management tool that provides a structured method to identify risks and focus procedures in natural resource pathway activities. Evaluating pathways and developing plans to reduce non-target species and prevent biological contamination is necessary to avoid unintended spread of non-native species and biological invasions. The website HACCP-NRM.org is intended to help natural resource managers create and implement HACCP plans. Everything you need to get started is available online.

Brown Tree Snake Update

Jonathan Moczygema, a graduate student from Texas A&M, Kingston, gave a presentation on the North America Brown Tree Snake Control Team.

Why Be Concerned About Brown Tree Snakes?

- Ecological - poses a threat to native wildlife due to biology and generalist diet
- Economic - on Guam causes power outages, but the costs associated with control run into the millions
- Human Health - limited to allergic reactions from bites, but certain individuals could have greater reactions

Injurious Wildlife List (Within the Lacey Act Amendments of 1981)

- Illegal to acquire, receive, transport, or possess brown tree snakes in the United States

NABTSCT Formed (2002)

- Compliment group of Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force
- Formed to inspire and facilitate communication, cooperation, and understanding within and between agencies and organizations and to provide coordination of efforts between agencies concerning brown tree snake issues

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Mission

“To prevent the invasion of brown tree snakes into continental North America through education and awareness and through rapid response assessments of potential sightings via a partnership of stakeholders”

Membership

- Concerned individuals from numerous agencies
- Not official representatives of respective agencies

Membership Needed

- Gulf Coast Regional Panel - ANS Task Force
- Western Regional Panel - ANS Task Force
- Zoos
- Herpetological Organizations
- NGO's; Ex: The Nature Conservancy
- Wildlife Control Organizations
- Professional Societies; Ex. The Wildlife Society
- Commercial Airlines
 - Continental
 - Northwest

What Does NABTSCT Do?

- Maintains a coordinating website
- Develops educational material that can be downloaded from website
- Conducts rapid response to investigate potential brown tree snake sightings
- Represents NABTSCT at scientific meetings
- Provides a forum to share information between agencies, cooperators, and organizations

How to Become a NABTSCT Member

- Website: www.NABTSCT.org
- Give business card to Jonathan.

Rapid Response Plan

The Panel was provided a copy of the Rapid Response Plan for the Gulf of Mexico Region prepared for the National Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force. This is the final document which was submitted to Sea Grant per the agreement with them. This document will require continuous updates. An MOU would need to be implemented among the states. A Work Group could develop an MOU and include language regarding the rapid response plan. Any suggestions to streamline the document should be sent to Lukens.

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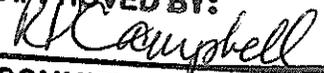
Next Meeting Time and Place

The last week of October or the month of November 2005 was selected as a time frame for the next Panel meeting. A location of Corpus Christi, Texas was selected, and a location of Charleston, South Carolina was suggested for the next spring meeting.

Public Comment

Lukens again provided the opportunity for public comment. No comments were received.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 12:50 pm.

APPROVED BY:

COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**FISHERIES INFORMATION NETWORK (FIN)
MINUTES
June 7 and 8, 2005
Baton Rouge, Louisiana**

Chairman Page Campbell called the meeting to order on June 7, 2005 at 9:00 a.m. The following members, staff, and others were present:

Members

Kevin Anson, ADCNR, Gulf Shores, AL
Chris Denson, ADCNR, Gulf Shores, AL
Assane Diagne, GMFMC, Tampa, FL (*Proxy for S. Atran*)
Page Campbell, TPWD, Rockport, TX
Kerwin Cuevas, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Guy Davenport, NOAA Fisheries, Miami, FL
Bob Dixon, NOAA Fisheries, Beaufort, NC
John Forester, USFWS, Baton Rouge, LA (*proxy for D. Frugé*)
Stephen Holiman, NOAA Fisheries, St. Petersburg, FL
Christine Johnson, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Michelle Kasprzak, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Craig Lilyestrom, PRDNER, San Juan, PR
Ron Lukens, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Daniel Matos, PRDNER, Mayaguez, PR
Joe O'Hop, FFWCC, St. Petersburg, FL
Tom Sminkey, NOAA Fisheries, Silver Spring, MD
Vicki Swann, TPWD, Austin, TX
Roger Uwate, USVIDFW, St. Thomas, VI

Staff

Donna Bellais, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Dave Donaldson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Mike Sestak, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Madeleine Travis, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Others

Harry Blanchet, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Claude Boudreaux, Lafayette, LA
Ken Brennan, NOAA Fisheries, Beaufort, NC
Mike Cahall, ACCSP, Washington, DC
Yeong Nain Chi, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Terry Cody, TPWD, Rockport, TX
Jason Duet, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Aimee Eschete, LDWF, Grand Isle, LA
Brad Gentner, NOAA Fisheries, Silver Spring, MD
David Lavergne, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA

Approval of Agenda

The agenda was approved as presented.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the Fisheries Information Network (FIN) meeting held on June 3 and June 4, 2004 in Fajardo, Puerto Rico were approved as presented.

Status of Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP)

M. Cahall reported on recent activities of the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP). Cahall reported that Congressional rescission cut over \$50,000 out of their budget in 2005. However, the Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) funded a biological sampling project which helped to cover the shortfall. The ACCSP also purchased a new warehouse server and will transition from Business Objects to Oracle Discoverer in 2005. An RFP for the contract to make this transition was issued on May 2 and can be viewed on the ACCSP website.

Cahall reported on the Standard Atlantic Fisheries Information System (SAFIS) and explained that it is a web based electronic reporting system that was developed in cooperation with the NMFS Northeast Regional Office. Currently 671 dealers are reporting in to the system and there are over 700,000 individual species records. Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New Hampshire are on-line and entering data and Maine, Rhode Island, and Maryland will follow shortly.

Cahall reported on the status of the ACCSP data warehouse. Commercial catch and effort data from Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, and NMFS Northeast is housed, with South Carolina data feed expected this summer. The data warehouse also stores biological data on lobster from the 1980's to 2003. The ACCSP is also warehousing recreational data in the form of catch and effort estimates, as well as collaborating with NMFS MRFSS personnel to validate contract work. The ACCSP also hosts the NEAMAP, SEAMAP, and ASMFC websites.

FIN Data Management System (DMS) Issues

Review of List of Personnel with Access to Confidential Data

Committee members were provided with a list of personnel with access to confidential data for the FIN data management system (DMS) as well as the NMFS system. D. Donaldson and G. Davenport requested that Committee members review the lists and provide any corrections, additions, or deletions.

Status of FIN Data Management System

M. Sestak distributed a data collection and program status report to Committee members. Sestak reported that the data access program has been changed from Business Objects to Oracle Discoverer. Public connections have been created to allow direct access to public data without the need for a password. Sestak noted that the "Rule of Three" program for public usage has been modified to display "confidential data" whenever the rule of three is violated. Sestak also reported that Puerto Rico commercial data has been added. Several years of biological data have been added for Alabama, Mississippi, Texas and Florida, and a web based data entry form is being created for the states to enter biological data. Sestak reported that MRFSS catch estimates for the five Gulf states and Puerto Rico have been loaded, as well as menhaden data, SEAMAP data, Artificial Reef Program data, and Rapid Assessment Program data.

Status of Caribbean Access to FIN DMS

D. Donaldson reported that in the past, MOAs for data confidentiality had been developed. However, the GSMFC sub-contract with each of the Gulf states' has a clause that includes language protecting data confidentiality, therefore an MOA is no longer necessary. In order to load and access Caribbean data into the system, a similar vehicle has to be developed for Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands. Puerto Rico has reviewed and signed an agreement which allows them to load and access their commercial data from the FIN DMS. Donaldson will work with the US Virgin Islands to establish a similar agreement with them.

Review of Draft Universal Confidentiality User Form

D. Donaldson distributed copies of a draft confidentiality user form which had been e-mailed to partners for their consideration. M. Sestak noted that at this time there are different versions of non-disclosure forms being used by various agencies. Using a universal form would simplify releasing data and all forms would be available in one place. G. Davenport will check into the feasibility of NMFS using this form and will let Donaldson know the results.

M. Sestak reported to the Committee that he had been contacted by the US Army Corps of Engineers asking for total commercial landings by ZIP Code for all species landed. Since there is not a confidentiality problem, Committee members agreed to release this information. M. Cahall of ACCSP stated that they had also been contacted for this information. Sestak and Cahall will discuss releasing this information.

Presentation of Alabama Head Boat Data Collection Activities

K. Anson gave a presentation on the 2004 pilot at-sea head boat study conducted in Alabama. Anson reported that this study incorporated standard MRFSS sampling of individual anglers on randomly selected boats. Standard intercept questions were asked, as well as information on discards. Anson stated that for effort analysis the head boats were incorporated into the For-Hire Telephone Survey, all trips were considered head boat trips for final estimates, and no correction factors were used in the analysis. The goal was to sample 10% of all head boat trips in Alabama for each wave. Anson provided the data for each wave, including species, catch, variance, and landings, as well as information on other factors such as hurricanes and tropical storms.

Presentation of Recreational Social/Economic Data

B. Gentner of NOAA Fisheries in Silver Spring, Maryland gave a presentation on social and economic data collection in the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico. Gentner noted that all the data presented are preliminary data.

Gentner described the economic add-on conducted in Puerto Rico noting that anglers used maps divided into quadrants to show where they hooked the most fish and where they spent the most time fishing. The data were collected from November 2003 to October 2004 and the top species were dolphin, billfish, tarpon and snook. So far the data for Puerto Rico trip expenditures is not completed but should be done shortly.

Gentner explained that a conjoint survey is used to determine damage assessment, effects of closures, and to get regional or national total value estimates. Gentner illustrated various simulations to demonstrate welfare effects and economic impacts. Focus groups of recreational fishermen were used for these surveys.

Gentner reported that in the Recreational Strategic Plan, the method of collecting data is going to change. The expenditure survey will be conducted every five years and the evaluation survey will be done when money allows. The next expenditure survey will be done in 2006 and it will be done nationally. Gentner stressed the need for support from the states and noted that he would be happy to hold interviewer trainer sessions.

Discussion of Collection of Latitude/Longitude for Recreational Fishing Access Sites

D. Donaldson distributed maps of sampling locations in Florida, Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana, as well as a SAS table showing the percentage of intercept sites with latitude/longitude information. There is no lat/long information in the database for Texas since they do not participate in the MRFSS. P. Campbell stated that Texas does have lat/long and she will provide this information. Donaldson requested that the states review these data for accuracy and provide lat/long for those sites that do not have this information. This information will be used for outreach purposes, etc. The Committee discussed standardizing the reporting of lat/long. T. Sminkey noted that the standard is degrees, minutes, seconds, however GIS uses degrees and decimal minutes. Sminkey will verify this and inform Donaldson.

Discussion of Data Collection Concerns from Recreational Fishermen

D. Donaldson reported that S. Atran of the GMFMC had forwarded a letter from a Capt. R. Bryant of St. Petersburg, Florida expressing concern with the collection methodology of recreational fishing effort and harvest data. Capt. Bryant also included suggestions for recreational angling statistic gathering. Atran wanted to know if this is an issue for FIN to discuss. Donaldson checked and found that T. Sminkey of NMFS is handling this particular situation, however he stated these are the types of issues that the FIN Committee should address.

T. Sminkey stated that the basic problem in this case is recreational and commercial red grouper landings for 2004 were high. Emergency closures were implemented by NMFS at that time. MRFSS staff was requested by the GMFMC and the Regional administrator to do a full review of the red grouper estimates. Some minor corrections were made, but no substantial changes were made to the estimates. Sminkey noted that NMFS will try to develop a pilot survey to shorten the recall period on the telephone survey in order to get better date information. Sminkey stated that in the future NMFS would like to use a recreational fishing license sampling frame survey rather than Random Digit Dialing; however not all the states meet the criteria to use this methodology at this time. This year at the Constituent Review Workshop, preliminary estimates for red grouper were reviewed, and no unusual conditions in the data were identified. A conference call with Sminkey, R. Crabtree, and several recreational fishermen will be held to review this situation.

R. Lukens noted that since the CCA is pleased with the MRFSS, the FIN should try to work more closely with this group by providing information in the form of pamphlets or brochures. Lukens recommended forwarding this issue to the TCC Data Management Subcommittee for their next meeting which will be held in October. The FIN Committee agreed with this recommendation.

Review of SEDAR Recommendations Document

Committee members were provided with copies of the SouthEast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) Workshop Recommendations and were asked to review this document. D. Donaldson asked the Committee when reviewing these recommendations to see if there were subjects for FIN to address, and check to see if any modifications to collecting data would be

appropriate. After discussing the SEDAR document, the FIN Committee agreed that it was too complex for an in depth review at this time, and an Ad Hoc Work Group should be formed and tasked to review the SEDAR document and identify items relevant to FIN. Members of the Ad hoc Work Group will be K. Anson, R. Lukens, D. Matos, P. Campbell, T. Sminkey, J. O'Hop, and G. Davenport. The Work Group will address this issue in the near future and will forward their findings to the FIN Committee for review and approval.

Discussion of Collection of Area Fished and Size Information for Shrimp via Trip Tickets

D. Donaldson reported that this issue was suggested by J. Nance and discussed at the Geographic Subcommittee meeting in October. Area fished and size are not always routinely collected on trip tickets. Donaldson suggested that the states that have trip tickets review their data on size and area fished for completeness. Donaldson suggested that this may be an educational issue for dealers and fishermen. After discussion, the Committee agreed that it is easier to collect this information during an interview rather than on a trip ticket. Donaldson noted that if money becomes available in the future for implementation of a detailed effort module this information will be readily available.

Discussion of Conducting FIN Program Review in 2006

D. Donaldson noted that the last external FIN program review was conducted in 2001 and possibly because of misinterpretation of instructions, the review did not meet expectations. The Administrative Subcommittee has been tasked with developing another review process. ACCSP is currently in the process of conducting a program review and they are working with a contractor. J. O'Hop explained the process ACCSP is using to develop their program review. R. Lukens suggested conducting the review by using staff to organize and facilitate with a contractor, and the contractor would be charged with choosing a review panel and providing a final report. The Committee agreed on this procedure.

Review and Approval of 2004 FIN Annual Report

The Committee had been provided with copies of the draft 2004 FIN Annual Report previously. Committee members were asked to review this report and give any editorial comments to D. Donaldson by June 20, 2005. **R. Lukens moved to approve the 2004 FIN Annual Report. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.**

Subcommittee and Work Group Reports

Members of the FIN Committee were provided with copies of the Subcommittee and Work Group reports.

Commercial Port Sampler Meetings (Attachment A)

D. Donaldson reported that the Caribbean Port Samplers met in September 2004 in Galveston, Texas. Various presentations were given including, the Gulf Shrimp Program by J. Nance of NMFS Galveston, the NMFS SEDAR process in the Caribbean by G. Davenport, overviews of several fisheries in Puerto Rico by D. Matos, and in the Virgin Islands by J. Vasques. The port samplers also spent time visiting shrimp operations in the Galveston area.

The Gulf Port Samplers met in November 2004 in Panama City, Florida. Several issues were

discussed including the status of ComFIN, otoliths, hurricane impacts on commercial fishing, and the TIP online data entry program.

R. Lukens moved to accept the Commercial Port Sampler Meetings reports. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

Gulf of Mexico Geographic Subcommittee (Attachment B)

The GOM Geographic Subcommittee (TCC Data Management Subcommittee) met in October 2004 in Biloxi, Mississippi and in March 2005 in Point Clear, Alabama. D. Donaldson reported at the October 2004 meeting of the Subcommittee P. Campbell of Texas was elected Chairman and K. Anson of Alabama was elected Vice Chairman.

D. Donaldson reported that as a result of the March meeting the subject of recreational outreach needs to be discussed by the FIN Committee. Donaldson attended an ACCSP outreach meeting in January where outreach activities for MRFSS were discussed. ACCSP conducted a baseline survey to determine perceptions about MRFSS and they are considering conducting another survey in 2006 and asked if FIN would be interested in participating. Donaldson reported that a conference call with the ACCSP will be held next week to discuss funding and he asked the Committee for their input. After Committee discussion, **R. Lukens made a motion for the FIN to cooperate with the ACCSP in developing a survey questionnaire if money is available and engage in a cooperative program. The motion was seconded and passed.**

R. Lukens moved to accept the Gulf of Mexico Geographic Subcommittee report. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

Otolith Processors Training Workshop (Attachment C)

D. Donaldson reported that an otolith processors workshop was recently held in St. Petersburg, Florida. These workshops are held as part of FIN quality assurance/quality control activities and this was the third year for this workshop. Otolith readers from various state and federal agencies have attended these workshops where various topics of interest are discussed as well as actual otolith reading and other activities. **M. Kasprzak moved to accept the Otolith Processors Training Workshop report. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.**

Biological/Environmental Work Group (Attachment D)

HMS sampling protocols/HMS study – D. Donaldson reported that a request from the GMFMC resulted in the B/EWG being tasked with looking at methodologies for collecting information on HMS species. The Work Group examined the Large Pelagic Survey (LPS) which is a telephone survey to collect effort, as well as a dockside sampling program for catch information. North Carolina is using a catch card to survey anglers. The B/EWG has recommended implementing a combination of both surveys. Catch information would be collected using a catch card as North Carolina does, and a dockside component where the catch card would be validated, as well as collection of biological information. The Committee agreed to send this task back to the B/EWG for further details and development. D. Donaldson will report to the GMFMC on the results.

D. Donaldson explained that included in the B/EWG report was a proposal from D. Stone seeking to improve the accuracy of catch and effort information for the recreational HMS fishery in the Gulf of Mexico. Stone requested feedback from FIN and wanted to know if this seems like a viable methodology for collecting catch and effort information. Several members of the Committee felt that this particular methodology contained questionable procedures and would not improve catch

and effort information for the recreational HMS fishery in the Gulf. D. Donaldson will discuss this issue with D. Stone.

D. Donaldson reported the B/EWG had recommended that bycatch for private boat, shore, and charter boats continue to be collected via the MRFSS and that the at-sea sampling methodology be used to collect bycatch for the head boat fishery. The B/EWG also recommended that FIN examine the possibility of conducting a pilot study comparing discards reported between the MRFSS and the captains and mates of charter boats. Apparently a comparison study has already been conducted and the Committee agreed to get more information on this study before proceeding.

D. Donaldson reported that the B/EWG discussed adding questions to the Random Digit Dialing (RDD) survey for the collection of private access site fishing data. The Work Group recommended that a pilot study utilizing a panel study methodology be implemented in the Gulf. The phone contractor is currently compiling a panel of anglers willing to participate in future surveys. The cost would include mailing and printing, as well as funds to purchase incentives to help insure participation. **M. Kasprzak moved to place the RDD add-on questions for private access site fishing data on the list of 2006 FIN priorities for funding. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.**

D. Donaldson reported that last year the B/EWG recommended developing a pilot study for using catch cards for tournaments to be filled out by anglers. This project was undertaken by Mississippi Department of Marine Resources. Of the 400 cards distributed to anglers, only four were returned. The B/EWG recommended that Mississippi conduct the pilot survey again with the inclusion of some type of incentive. The Work Group also recommended that FIN readdress the need for tournament sampling. **S. Holiman moved that the FIN partners should continue with tournament sampling on their own and FIN should cease attempting to establish any standardized protocol for sampling tournaments. The motion was seconded and passed.** D. Donaldson reported that the B/EWG recommended that a pilot study to collect catch and effort data regarding recreational shrimp activity be conducted in 2006 with the location of this study to be determined by FIN. Donaldson noted that if this activity gets approved to go forward, it will need to be conducted in a state that requires a recreational shrimping license in order to use it as a sampling frame. After Committee discussion, **R. Lukens moved to keep this item on a list for future consideration, but not forward it to the 2006 FIN priority list at this time. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.**

D. Donaldson reported that the B/EWG was tasked with determining the extent of non-consumptive marine activities. The Work Group could not identify any benefit for having these data and asked FIN to provide some direction on this issue. S. Holiman noted that in Florida non-consumptive activities are very popular and millions of dollars are spent annually however, after a discussion, the Committee agreed that this type of data collection would be premature at this time and the issue was tabled.

The meeting recessed at 5:15 p.m. and reconvened at 8:00 a.m. on June 8, 2005.

Data Collection Work Group (Attachment E)

D. Donaldson reported that the Data Collection Work Group met via conference call in February and May of 2005. The purpose of the February meeting was to identify and prioritize fisheries for their potential for bycatch. Donaldson requested that the Committee discuss the definition of "bycatch" and noted that the ACCSP had recently developed a definition. The

Committee reviewed this definition and agreed on the following: *"The discarded catch of any living marine resource plus catch not otherwise accounted for as landed."* **S. Holiman moved to accept the Data Collection Work Group report. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.** Donaldson provided a spreadsheet for the Committee developed from input from program partners. Since NMFS covers offshore shrimp trawls, the Data Collection Work Group recommended that FIN focus on shrimp and skimmer trawl fisheries inshore and develop a pilot study to test the FIN bycatch sampling protocols using at-sea sampling and alternate methods as necessary. Several suggestions were made to monitor bycatch, including video monitoring. **S. Holiman moved to approve the Data Collection Work Group report. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.**

Data Collection Plan Work Group (Attachment F)

D. Donaldson reported that the Data Collection Plan Work Group met in May 2005 where G. Fitzhugh of NMFS Panama City Lab gave a presentation on an alternative method for developing sampling targets. Included in the presentation was a table listing species, gears, regions, otoliths, and responsible partner. The Work Group recommended that FIN develop an RFP to identify the key strata needed for each priority species. The RFP should outline the process and identify the desired products for the various species. This new process will not be functional until 2007; therefore the Work Group also recommended that FIN use the existing targets for the priority species for sampling in 2006. R. Lukens suggested that a letter should be written to the appropriate NMFS SEDAR authority and make the evaluation of the data a mandatory part of the SEDAR report. Lukens also stressed the importance of getting feedback on this method of handling otolith collection. **D. Matos made a motion to accept the Data Collection Plan Work Group report. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.**

Recommendations Work Group (Attachment G)

D. Donaldson reported that at the last FIN meeting a facilitated session was held to guide FIN into the future. As a result of that session the FIN Committee tasked an Ad Hoc Work Group with developing recommendations and tasks. The FIN Committee was provided with a list of recommendations and tasks developed as a result. The Committee reviewed this recommendations document and made several changes. Donaldson will make the changes in the document and develop a timeline from 2006 through 2010 and send to FIN Committee members.

Social/Economic Work Group (Attachment H)

D. Donaldson reported that the Social/Economic Work Group met via conference call in February to discuss the development of the FIN social/economic data collection plan. The Work Group expressed concern that there was not a clearly defined need for these data by state partners which makes it difficult to develop a data collection plan. Donaldson reported that this issue had been discussed at the Gulf of Mexico Geographic Subcommittee and the State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee in March. The Committee discussed the fact that FIN had created the modules, identified data elements, knows the products that can be derived from survey data, and no one is asking for information. Donaldson noted that perhaps the work being done on the Federal side is enough and there is not a need for more data. The FIN Committee agreed that the module has been developed and is ready to use when the time is right and do nothing further at this time.

Operations Plan

The FIN Committee was provided with a handout listing the status of all activities for 2005. Donaldson reported that the development of a metadata database needed to be discussed by the Committee. Donaldson explained that at a recent Fishery Information System (FIS) meeting he learned that ACCSP is hiring a contractor to go to each state partner to determine the procedures and protocols used for data collection. The contractor will then enter this information into the Inport system. Donaldson felt that it would be less costly if FIN worked in conjunction with ACCSP and the contractor. This also would aid with compliance of the Data Quality Act. M. Cahall noted that this would be the beginning of a national repository for metadata. The Committee agreed to proceed.

The FIN Committee was provided with a copy of the Draft 2006 FIN Operations Plan. The Committee reviewed the Plan and made some changes based on actions during this meeting. The Committee will get any editorial changes to D. Donaldson by June 20, 2005. **R. Lukens moved to adopt the 2006 FIN Operations Plan with the appropriate updates. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.** After the State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee meeting in August, Donaldson will provide a finalized Operations Plan for 2006.

The Committee also agreed that an electronic copy of the Operations Plan and Annual Report on the GSMFC website is sufficient and it is no longer necessary to mail hard copies of these documents to Committee members.

Review of FIN Subcommittees and Work Groups

The FIN Committee was provided with copies of membership lists of Subcommittees and Work Groups. The Committee reviewed the lists and made corrections, deletions and additions. Some members will e-mail changes to D. Donaldson who will compile changes and create new membership lists.

Discussion of 2006 FIN Priorities

Committee members were provided with guidelines on the decision process for FIN and a list of items for consideration in 2006. D. Donaldson reported that the list was generated from activities conducted last year as well as discussions in work group meetings. Donaldson also mentioned that the FIN Committee will have to decide whether to develop a MARFIN project. Donaldson noted that there are four additional items added to Coordination and Administration of FIN Activities as a result of discussion the past two days. The Committee originally placed Pilot Study for Catch and Effort Data for Highly Migratory Species on the High Priority list, however after Committee discussion, it was agreed to include it on the Medium Priority list. The final prioritized list will be forwarded to the State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee (S/FFMC) in August 2005 and they will decide which items will be included in the 2006 FIN cooperative agreement. Donaldson noted that any new items are contingent on additional funding.

The Committee agreed to list as high priority all ongoing activities. The prioritized list of activities in 2006 is as follows:

High Priority

Coordination and Administration of FIN Activities

Biological Sampling RFP

ACCSP Outreach Project

Program Review Contract
Metadata Contract
Collecting, Managing and Disseminating Marine Recreational Fisheries Data
Charter Boat Survey Offshore Texas
Head Boat Port Sampling in Texas and Florida
Gulf Menhaden Port Sampling
Development and Implementation of FIN Data Management System
Trip Ticket Program Implementation and Operations in Mississippi
Trip Ticket Program Operations in Alabama
Trip Ticket Program Operations in Louisiana
Trip Ticket Program Implementation and Operations in Texas
Recreational/Commercial Biological Sampling
Implementation of For-Hire Telephone Survey (effort) and At-sea Sampling (catch) for Head Boats –
Continuation for Alabama and Florida
Implementation of For-Hire Telephone Survey (effort) and At-sea Sampling (catch) for Head Boats –
Implementation for Louisiana
Collection of Detailed Effort for Blue Crab Fishery in Louisiana

Medium Priority

Pilot Study for Collection of Catch (catch cards/dock-side) and Effort (telephone survey) Data
for Highly Migratory Species

Low Priority

Implementation of For-Hire Telephone Survey (effort) and At-sea Sampling (catch) for Head Boats –
Implementation for Texas
Biological Sampling for Additional Species
Pilot Study for Recreational Fishing Effort using Fishing Licenses as Sampling Frame

Donaldson stated that all new activities listed as High Priority will need statements of work and budgets, and all activities listed as High Priority and are ongoing will need updated budgets by July 5, 2005.

Time Schedule and Location of Next Meeting

The Committee agreed to hold the FIN 2006 meeting in San Antonio, Texas or as second choice, Sanibel Island, Florida during the first full week in June.

Election of Officers

Page Campbell of Texas moves to Chairmanship, and Kevin Anson of Alabama was elected Vice Chairman.

Other Business

The Committee agreed to have staff draft a thank you letter to Joey and Lisa Shepard for their hospitality. R. Lukens suggested that a letter be sent the Secretary of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries commending Rose Higginbotham and her staff for their assistance.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:15 a.m.

Attachment A

**Port Sampler Meeting
Meeting Summary
November 18 and 19, 2004
Panama City, Florida**

David Donaldson of the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission called the Port Sampler meeting to order on November 18, 2004 at 9:00 a.m. The following were present:

Pete Antosh, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL
Chuck Armstrong, NOAA Fisheries, Pascagoula, MS
Debbie Batiste, NOAA Fisheries, New Orleans, LA
Josh Bennett, NOAA Fisheries, Miami, FL
Jay Boulet, NOAA Fisheries, New Orleans, LA
Steve Brown, FFWRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Lew Bullock, FFWRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Terry Cody, TPWD, Rockport, TX
Graham Cole, FFWRI, Jacksonville, FL
Guy Davenport, NOAA Fisheries, Miami, FL
Claudia Dennis, NOAA Fisheries, New Smyrna Beach, FL
Chris Denson, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL
Kit Doncaster, NOAA Fisheries, Brownsville, TX
Aimee Eschete, LDWF, Grand Isle, LA
Justin Esslinger, TPWD, Rockport, TX
Pamela Eyo, NOAA Fisheries, Miami, FL
Debbie Fable, NOAA Fisheries, Panama City, FL
Gary Fitzhugh, NOAA Fisheries, Panama City, FL
Ted Flowers, NOAA Fisheries, Mobile, AL
Michelle Gamby, NOAA Fisheries, Tequesta, FL
Dave Gluckner, NOAA Fisheries, Beaufort, NC
Linda Guidry, NOAA Fisheries, New Iberia, LA
Gary Haddle, FFWRI, New Smyrna Beach, FL
Lisa Hallock, FFWRI, Port Charlotte, FL
Brett Hano, LDWF, New Orleans, LA
Kathleen Hebert, NOAA Fisheries, Houma, LA
Tom Herbert, NOAA Fisheries, Fort Myers, FL
Jessica Hornbeck, FFWRI, Marathon, FL
Rene Labadens, NOAA Fisheries, Pascagoula, MS
Jude LeDoux, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Albert Lefort, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Linda Lombardi-Carlson, NOAA Fisheries, Panama City, FL
Edie Lopez, NOAA Fisheries, Brownsville, TX
Pamela Machuga, NOAA Fisheries, St. Petersburg, FL
Anthony MacWhinnie, FFWRI, Pensacola, FL
Stephanie McGrath, FFWRI, Panama City Beach, FL
Terri Menzel, FFWRI, Pensacola, FL
Gary Moore, FFWRI, Cedar Key, FL
Lloyd Muccio, NOAA Fisheries, Miami, FL
Michelle Padgett, NOAA Fisheries, Freeport, TX
Chris Palmer, NOAA Fisheries, Panama City, FL
Keith Roberts, NOAA Fisheries, Galveston, TX
Renee Roman, NOAA Fisheries, St. Petersburg, FL
Gary Rousse, NOAA Fisheries, Cut Off, LA
Bill Samuels, FFWRI, Tequesta, FL

Jimmy Sanders, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Charlie Schaefer, NOAA Fisheries, Tequesta, FL
Laura Baird Sebastian, FFWRI, Melbourne, FL
Pete Sheridan, NOAA Fisheries, Panama City, FL
Roy Spears, NOAA Fisheries, Aransas Pass, TX
June Weeks, NOAA Fisheries, Panama City Beach, FL
Joe West, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Maggie Bourgeois Williams, NOAA Fisheries, New Orleans, LA

Staff

Dave Donaldson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Madeleine Travis, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Approval of Agenda

The agenda was approved as amended.

Status of Commercial Fisheries Information Network

D. Donaldson of Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (GSMFC) stated that the Fisheries Information Network (FIN) is a cooperative state-federal program to collect, manage, and disseminate information on recreational and commercial fisheries. Donaldson reported on several FIN activities currently taking place, including collection of recreational data, implementation of trip tickets, biological sampling, and implementation of the data management system. Donaldson reported that Texas would begin implementing a trip ticket program in 2005 with approximately 60 dealers. All the other Gulf states, with the exception of Mississippi, have fully operational trip ticket systems. FIN has been working with dealers across the Gulf introducing electronic trip ticket reporting. Currently there are about 250 dealers on-line and these dealers are responsible for almost one-half of the landings in the Gulf.

Donaldson then reported that over 20,000 otoliths for more than 80 species had been collected from both commercial and recreational sampling. Unfortunately due to Hurricane Ivan biological sampling activities have decreased considerably. Donaldson reported that due to funding shortfalls red snapper would not be targeted in 2005.

Donaldson reported that the FIN Data Management System now houses commercial (trip ticket), recreational, biological, fishery independent, SEAMAP, menhaden, and historical data. The FIN DMS has been online since July 2002.

Donaldson reported on future activities of FIN noting that head boat sampling is an important issue. Bycatch data collection is being tested in Alabama via at-sea sampling. Another future activity to be implemented is detailed effort. These activities are contingent on additional funding.

Discussion of Otolith Issues

Gary Fitzhugh of NMFS Panama City Lab gave an update on the otolith program at the Lab. Fitzhugh reported that the Southeast Data Assessment and Review (SEDAR) is a new process, which includes a data workshop, follow up workshops on assessments, and a review. The SEDAR process takes about a year to complete. Fitzhugh noted that the Magnuson-Stevens Act has new standards

which require definition of overfished and overfishing thresholds. Therefore port samplers are being asked to supply more otoliths. Fitzhugh reported that the species most often aged at the Panama City Lab are the mackerels as well as gag, red grouper, red snapper, and vermilion snapper. Fitzhugh presented a list of priority species requiring aging for federal assessments in the Gulf of Mexico and noted that the need for aging is increasing. In the future it will be necessary to divide the work of aging otoliths among other federal and/or state facilities. Fitzhugh suggested that since there are so many species it would be beneficial to have certain laboratories process particular species and get away from having several laboratories aging the same species.

Fitzhugh noted that with the SEDAR process stock assessments for various species are planned a number of years in advance. This allows managers to begin compiling the necessary data to ensure a successful assessment. Fitzhugh reported that the sources of samples to the Panama City Lab over the last five years are primarily from the TIP program (76%), with others from MRFSS, charterboat, headboat, and scientific surveys. Over 160,000 hard parts from more than 100 species collected from the 1980's to present are archived at the Panama City Lab.

Following Fitzhugh's presentation, there was a question and answer session with the port samplers.

Discussion of Hurricane Impacts on Commercial Fishing

Anthony MacWhinnie of FFWRI in Pensacola gave a photo presentation of impacts to commercial fishing due to hurricanes in the Pensacola area. Mac Whinnie's photographs ranged from residential neighborhoods, transportation issues, and the five major fish houses in Escambia County, Florida. Hurricane Ivan made landfall on September 15 at Gulf Shores, Alabama with winds of 130 mph and affected a large portion of the Gulf coast. MacWhinnie reported that insured losses are estimated at 6 to 12 billion dollars for the four hurricanes that hit Florida in 2004. MacWhinnie's photographs depicted the devastation in the Pensacola area. Photos of homes destroyed, the Interstate-10 bridge washed out, and the seafood houses and commercial fishing piers destroyed. Most of the commercial fishing boats were moved upriver before Hurricane Ivan struck, so most of them survived with little or no damage. However, most of the commercial docks and icehouses were destroyed. The owners of these seafood businesses suffered catastrophic losses to their homes as well, as MacWhinnie's photos graphically illustrated. MacWhinnie also stressed the emotional toll an event like Ivan can take.

Discussion of TIP Online Data Entry Program

Josh Bennett of NOAA Southeast Science Center in Miami gave a presentation on the TIP online data entry program. Bennett introduced Lloyd Muccio who is the head programmer for the TIP online application. Bennett thanked the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission for hosting the meeting, the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program for funding the TIP online development process, and all agency partners in attendance at the meeting. Bennett also specifically thanked the port samplers.

Bennett gave a brief history of the TIP program, the development of TIP online, review of the improvements added so far, and what to expect in the future. Bennett gave live demonstrations of various scenarios of the TIP online program. A question and answer session followed with Bennett and Muccio answering questions from the port samplers. The following comments and suggestions were discussed:

- Update dealer tables and names
- Instruct agents to call if unable to find dealer
- Conflicts between multiple trips and trip dates
- Look at error check for days out and multiple trips
- A range of lat-longs instead of one lat-long
- Make a note in HELP – how to handle Gulf quadrants
- Look into a carry or default for random sample checkbox
- Summary reports
- Edit browser does not keep place when a record is edited and saved. Next record needs to be resorted. Lock the browser in blocks of ten.
- How to enter more than one record at a time.
- Develop a message that goes out automatically for unplanned outages of the server.
- Create a flat file download

Other Business

D. Donaldson asked the port samplers for suggestions on the location of the 2005 meeting. After discussion several suggestions were made including, Key West, New Orleans, Brownsville, or Galveston. The meeting will be held during the first week of November 2005.

The meeting recessed at 5:00 p.m.

The meeting resumed on Friday, November 19, 2004 at 8:30 a.m.

The port agent meeting continued at the NMFS Panama City Laboratory with a tour of the Lab and an otolith training workshop. Each port sampler visited various stations set up at the Lab. These stations covered otolith removal, the age structuring process, reproduction, and otolith analysis.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:00 noon

**Caribbean Port Sampler Meeting
Meeting Summary
September 28 and 29, 2004
Galveston, Texas**

David Donaldson of the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission called the meeting to order on September 28, 2004 at 9:00 a.m. The following were present:

David Camoyan, USVI DPNR, St. Croix, USVI
Milagros Cartagena, PRDNER, Mayaguez, PR
Guy Davenport, NMFS, Miami, FL
Shenell Gordon, USVI DPNR, St. Thomas, USVI
Walter Irizarry, PRDNER, Lajas, PR
Jesus Leon, PRDNER, Fajardo, PR
Hector Lopez Pelet, PRDNER, Barceoneta, PR
Daniel Matos Coraballo, PRDNER, Mayaguez, PR
Jennifer Messineo, USVI DPNR, St. Thomas, USVI
Jim Nance, NMFS, Galveston, TX
Frank Patella, NMFS, Galveston, TX
Noemi Pena Alvarado, PRDNER, San German, PR
Luis Rivera, PRDNER, Boqueron, PR
Keith Roberts, NMFS, Galveston, TX
William Tobias, USVI DPNR, Frederiksted, USVI
Jason Vasques, USVI DPNR, St. Thomas, USVI
Willy Ventura, USVI DPNR, St. Croix, USVI

Staff

Dave Donaldson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Madeleine Travis, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Approval of Agenda

The agenda was approved as presented.

Status of Commercial Fisheries Information Network

D. Donaldson of Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (GSMFC) stated that the Fisheries Information Network (FIN) is a cooperative state-federal program to collect and disseminate information on recreational and commercial fisheries. The ComFIN is the commercial side and the RecFIN is the recreational side. Donaldson reported on recent FIN activities, including the collection of recreational data, implementation of trip tickets in the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean, biological sampling, and operation of the FIN data management system. The trip ticket program is operating in Louisiana, Alabama, and Florida. Beginning in 2005 trip tickets will be implemented in Texas on a limited basis with approximately 60 dealers reporting monthly. Mississippi has trip tickets on a fishery-by-fishery basis. Approximately 250 dealers are currently

using electronic trip ticket reporting on the Gulf coast. Puerto Rico has implemented trip level reporting.

Donaldson reported that the data management system has been online since July of 2002 and includes trip ticket data from Florida, Alabama, Mississippi (oysters), and Louisiana, as well as historical data from NMFS, recreational data, menhaden data, biological data, and SEAMAP data. Donaldson reported that FIN is trying to get access and begin loading data from the Caribbean into the system within the year.

Donaldson reported that there were some new activities to report including headboat sampling for catch and bycatch, effort data, testing at-sea sampling methodology in Alabama on headboats, and collecting detailed effort.

Overview of Gulf Shrimp Program

J. Nance of NMFS Galveston introduced Frank Patella who gave a presentation on the Gulf Shrimp Program. Patella reported that NMFS started the collection of Gulf shrimp data in 1956 in the major ports only. Biological analysis was done and more detailed data was collected as more people began using this information. The states got involved when they began checking on economic impact. The grids were developed for the United States and now go out 200 miles. Some of the depths had to be increased due to the royal red fishery. Patella noted that over the years there have been many changes, including gear, engines, new management strategies, etc. Economic factors have caused a lot of stress in the shrimp fishery with higher costs for insurance and fuel, as well as imports. All these factors have made it necessary to collect more information.

J. Nance gave an overview of the analysis of the Gulf Shrimp Program and explained how the data are used. Nance noted that shrimp effort can be defined by number of hours, number of vessels, number of licenses, and number of trips and CPUE is derived from sampler interviews. Nance explained how the port samplers record the catches when interviewing the captains and noted that some vessels have electronic logbooks. Port samplers are located all along the Gulf coast with 450 to 500 dealers being contacted each month. Nance also noted that observers are needed in headboats and charterboats. Nance mentioned several sources of bias, including unreported catch, mis-assigned locations, sampling bias, days per trip, etc. Nance noted that the stocks of shrimp in the Gulf of Mexico are very healthy, however the problem is with effort and the bycatch associated with the shrimp fishery. The group had a lengthy discussion on the problem of bycatch. Nance discussed technological advances and described an electronic logbook program that has been developed over the last five years. This device will be used to measure position only and will not be used for law enforcement.

Overview of NMFS Caribbean SEDAR Process

G. Davenport of NMFS gave a presentation on the SouthEast Data Assessment and Review (SEDAR) process. Davenport explained that the reason SEDAR came about was because in the past one assessment biologist was responsible for a fishery, which put a lot of pressure on that individual. The SEDAR process utilizes a committee of assessment biologists for specific fisheries. SEDAR is a Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic Fishery Management Council process and includes coordination with NMFS and the Interstate Fishery Commissions. Davenport explained that SEDAR is comprised of three workshops: a data workshop, a stock assessment workshop, and a stock assessment review workshop. Davenport reviewed assessments for various species, both commercial and recreational, in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands and also noted the SEDAR history and future priorities for the Caribbean. In closing, Davenport announced the dates and locations for

workshops in the Caribbean for 2004 and 2005 and listed key NMFS personnel involved in the SEDAR process.

Portrait of the Fishery of the Red Hind in Puerto Rico during 1988-2001

D. Matos of PRDNER reported that the red hind has become the most important species of grouper taken commercially in Puerto Rico. Since this species are known to aggregate for spawning they are very vulnerable to overfishing. Matos reported that since 1995, three spawning sites of red hind have been closed to fishing activities from December 1 to February 28 each year. Matos then reported on landings of red hind from 1988 to 2001 by fish trap, bottom line and SCUBA with bottom line the most efficient gear, followed by fish traps then SCUBA.

Matos then compared the length frequency before and after the 1995 closures and noted that the red hind caught from 1995 to 2001 were larger. This data shows that the regulation establishing a closed season for red hind has helped to improve this fishery.

Portrait of the Fishery of the Mutton Snapper in Puerto Rico during 1988 - 2001

D. Matos reported that the mutton snapper has an average length of 500mm. In Puerto Rico commercial fisherman reported mutton snapper aggregation during the full moon of April, May and June. The main methods to catch mutton snapper are bottom line, fish traps, beach seine, and SCUBA. As with the red hind, data collected from 1988 to 2001 was used to describe the mutton snapper fishery. Matos reported that two types of data were used: landings collected by port samplers from fish houses and commercial fishermen, and biostatistics. These data were entered in computers using the NMFS Trip Interview Program (TIP). Matos reported that 90% of the mutton snapper caught by beach seine have not reach sexual maturity and because of that the PRDNER will prohibit the use of this gear beginning in 2007. The DNER also created a closed season from April 1 to May 31 since this is when the first two spawning aggregations occur. The spawning, which takes place during June, will continue to be open for fishing.

Field Sampling with Gulf Shrimp Port Samplers

The port samplers spent the afternoon visiting shrimp operations in the Galveston area to observe different sampling techniques.

The meeting was recessed at 5:30 p.m.

The meeting resumed on September 29, 2004 at 8:30 a.m.

Portrait of the Fishery of the Spiny Lobster in Puerto Rico during 1988 – 2001

N. Pena of the PRDNER gave a presentation on the spiny lobster fishery in Puerto Rico and noted that the spiny lobster is a very valuable marine crustacean in the Caribbean. In the early 1950's spiny lobster were used as bait in fish traps but since 1970 it has become the most important shellfish by weight and price per pound in Puerto Rico. Since 1980 the Caribbean Fishery Management Council and the PRDNER have regulations in effect to protect the spiny lobster. They must be 3.5-inch minimum length, no egg-bearing females, no gaffs, and they must be landed whole.

Two types of dependent data were used: landings collected by port samplers, fish houses, and fishermen, and biostatistics. Pena reported that data was entered in computers and the NMFS TIP program was used. Gear used were fish and lobster traps and SCUBA. Beginning in 1995 law enforcement became more involved in enforcing regulations and since that time the size of the spiny

lobsters being caught are significantly larger.

Presentation of Licensed Commercial Fishers in the U.S. Virgin Islands from 1973 to 2003

J. Vasques of the USVIDPNR reported that the number of licensed commercial fishermen has changed over the years. A moratorium went into effect in 2001 and only fishermen who held a license in the prior three years were eligible for a commercial license. The sources of information used were from landings summaries, catch report data files, and registration slips. Vasques distributed examples of catch report forms to port samplers and also explained that figures for St. Thomas and St. John are combined, and figures for St. Croix are separate. The data covering the period from 1984 to 2003 shows that the number of licensed commercial fishermen on St. Thomas/St. John have decreased almost 50%, while on St. Croix the numbers have remained stable over this same period of time. Vasques noted that another possible reason for the decline in fishermen on St. Thomas/St. John is that in good economic times, some fishermen work in the tourist industry.

Presentation of U.S. Virgin Islands Fish Prices from 1973 to 2003

J. Vasques gave a presentation on fish prices in the U.S. Virgin Islands over the past 30 years. Fish prices are necessary when estimating the total value of commercial landings for a particular time period. The sources of information used for this project were commercial fisheries landings summary reports, commercial catch report data files, internal files, and fish prices from a small survey of fishermen. Vasques presented graphs demonstrating prices per pound for various species using different types of gear in St. Thomas/St. John and St. Croix. In general, overall ex-vessel prices were similar in St. Thomas/St. John compared with those in St. Croix.

Puerto Rico's Commercial Landings Reported in 2003

D. Matos of PRDNER gave a presentation on Puerto Rico's commercial landings for the last three years. The data is collected from commercial fishermen and fish houses on as many as 42 species. Matos then listed the top 12 most important species landed and also gave a breakdown of the landings by coast and by gear. Matos reviewed the biostatistical data giving the number of interviews per year and the number of fish measured. Between 2001 and 2003 over 62,000 fish were measured and almost 4,000 spiny lobster.

Round Table Discussions

W. Tobias of the USVIDPNR distributed copies of the USVI Commercial and Recreational Fisher's Information Booklet to meeting participants. Tobias noted that this booklet is given to commercial fishermen as they register each year, as well as a booklet of twelve commercial catch report forms (one for each month). Fishermen must sign a form at the time of registration stating that they have been given the above forms and information. Tobias also distributed copies of a Netfishing Overview Paper, and explained that in 2002 the Fishery Advisory Committee recommended that gill and trammel nets be banned on St. Croix. The Fishery Advisory Committees on each island have been tasked with making recommendations on how to distribute a buy-back grant from National Marine Fishery Service for gill and trammel nets. Tobias reported that the Advisory Committee indicated a target date of January 1, 2005 for the net ban regulation and buy-back program.

Other Business

The Caribbean port samplers agreed to meet in 2005 during the first week of October in St. Thomas, USVI. D. Donaldson requested that attendees send him agenda items and subjects of interest for next year's meeting.

At the conclusion of the meeting, port samplers visited the NMFS Galveston Lab Sea Turtle facility.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 12:00 noon.

Gulf of Mexico Geographic Subcommittee (Data Management Subcommittee)

Minutes

Monday, October 11, 2004

Biloxi, Mississippi

Chairman Page Campbell called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. The following members and others were present:

Members

Joe O'Hop, FMRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Page Campbell, TPWD, Rockport, TX
Vicki Swann, TPWD, Austin, TX
Guy Davenport, NMFS, Miami, FL
Jim Hanifen (proxy for J. Shepard), LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Kerwin Cuevas (proxy for T. Van Devender), MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Kevin Anson, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL

Staff

Larry Simpson, Executive Director
Ron Lukens, Assistant Director
David Donaldson, FIN Data Program Manager
Mike Sestak, FIN Data Base Manager
Gregg Bray, RecFIN(SE) Programmer/Analyst
Doug Snyder, RecFIN(SE) Survey Coordinator
Donna Bellais, ComFIN Survey Coordinator
Madeleine Travis, Staff Assistant

Others

Paul Choucair, TPWD, Rockport, TX
Chris Denson, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL
Anne Lange, NMFS, Silver Spring, MD
Terry Cody, Rockport, TX
Jason Duet, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Walter Tatum, Gulf Shores, AL
Wendell Lorio, MSU, Starkville, MS

Adoption of Agenda

The agenda was approved as written.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes, for the meeting held on March 15, 2005 in New Orleans, Louisiana were approved as written.

Status of Biological Sampling Activities

D. Donaldson distributed a summary of otolith collections for the recreational and

commercial fisheries. The summary presents the number of otoliths that have been collected as well as the targets, by species, mode, and state. In addition, a list of otoliths collected from all species (not just the targeted species) was provided to the group. It was noted that there are several species group (fish not identified to species and genus) in the complete list of species sampled. It was pointed out the collecting otoliths from fish not identifies to the species/genus provides no useful data. Due to the various hurricanes, the sampling levels in the eastern Gulf appear to be down (which is understandable). The states need to focus on getting as close to the targets as possible. Again, it was pointed out that these numbers are just targets and if they are not reached, there are no penalties. **D. Donaldson** asked the group if the biological sampling tallies were useful. **K Anson** stated that he using the tallies as a check for his activities and believes the tallies are helpful. The group generally agreed that the tallies were usefully and should be continued.

The group then discussed the analysis aspects of biological sampling. **D. Donaldson** distributed a table, which outlined the status of each state's analysis situation. All states except Florida have provided the ages for the otoliths collected in 2002 and 2003. **J. O'Hop** noted that there had been a problem with reconciling Florida and NMFS biological data but he believed that issue had been resolved. He stated that he would talk with staff and get the data into the system. **D. Donaldson** noted the he had talked with Florida personnel and they mentioned they were working on getting the data into the system but just had not had time to accomplish it. And all these data have been loaded into the FIN Data Management System (DMS) except Texas (as well as Florida). The reason Texas biological data has not been loaded into the system is that FIN does not have access site descriptions and without these descriptions, the data will not load. **P. Campbell** stated that staff are working on compiling these data and will provide it to FIN in the near future.

The last issue discussed by the group concerned the establishment of federal targets. **D. Donaldson** stated that at a recent Data Collection Plan Work Group meeting, this issue was discussed and the work group decided to develop federal targets for each of the priority species. Therefore, FIN staff in conjunction with NMFS, developed some targets, based on historical collections, and these targets were presented to the Subcommittee for their consideration. After some discussion, the group agreed that the establishment of federal targets would useful and would allow for better tracking of the otolith collections. **D. Donaldson** stated that he would use these targets (attached) for tracking beginning in 2005.

Discussion of Status of Registration Tracking Module

D. Donaldson noted at the recent FIN meeting, it was decided to move forward with the implementation of the vessel portion of the registration tracking module. As the module was being populated, there were several issues that arose and after various conference calls, several options were developed to address these issues. These options were presented to the Subcommittee for their consideration. The group discussed the two options and it was pointed out that they are very similar. **M. Sestak** stated that the main difference is that one option will allow for the tracking of all permits throughout time while the other one will only tracking the most recent permits. After some minor modifications, the group decided on a data layout and variable structure (attached). **D. Donaldson** stated that staff will provide the states with the final layout and structure and states need to begin providing these data to the FIN DMS on a routine basis. The next step is this process will to compile information on fishermen and dealers.

Discussion of Using Fishing Licenses as Sampling Frame Methods

D. Donaldson stated at the recent FIN meeting, the Committee decided that FIN should begin compiling a sampling frame, which would include a license data base from each of states. Once this frame is compiled, analysis can be conducted to determine the completeness of the frame and staff can determine the feasibility of using this method for collecting fishing effort. Therefore, **D. Donaldson** wanted to notify the states that a request for their marine recreational fishing license data base would be coming in the near future and to please provide staff with this needed information as quickly as possible.

Discussion of Monitoring of Changes in Scientific Names

D. Donaldson stated that the group discussed issue of monitoring the changes in scientific names. It was noted this responsibility should be addressed by the ITIS group, however, the ITIS does not currently conduct this activity because of an overloaded work schedule. Therefore, the group discussed some alternative methods for accomplishing this task. It was suggested that if there was some type of notification process, FIN needed to tap into this process. Unfortunately, no one was aware of such a process. The group mentioned that AFS does provide updates (every 10 years) and this may be the best available method. After some discussion, the group decided to use the AFS accepted name (which is updated every 10 years) and in the interim, each partner would be responsible for providing updates to the FIN Data Base Manager as they become aware of any change. It was noted that both the old and new names would have to be maintained to ensure that all data associated with a particular species could be accessed. Staff would also talk with Mark Leiby and AFS about establishing some type of notification system and provide an update to the Subcommittee at their next meeting.

Discussion of Head Boat Sampling in the Gulf of Mexico

D. Donaldson stated that the group needed to discuss the collection of catch and effort data for the head boat fishery in the Gulf of Mexico. Regarding effort, based on the FIN recommendation, the for-hire telephone survey (for head boats) would be stopped in January 2005 for all states except Louisiana and Alabama. Regarding catch, at the recent State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee meeting, the Committee decided not to fund the NMFS head boat logbook survey in 2005. It was hoped that NMFS would secure monies to fund this activity. However, if monies are not provided and FIN does not realize the proposed increase in the GulfFIN line item, there will be no head boat sampling in the Gulf of Mexico in 2005. The group asked about the probability of NMFS funding the head boat activities in 2005. **G. Davenport** mentioned that he had talked with Nancy Thompson and NMFS had to make a decision about funding this activity. Therefore, it was suggested that the group develop some contingencies for collecting catch data from the head boat fishery. It was noted that both catch and effort data would be collecting in Louisiana and Alabama in 2005 so the group needed to focus on methods for collecting these data in Texas and Florida. For effort, a continuation of the for-hire survey could easily be continued into 2005 without additional funding. The collection of catch data would be a bit more problematic without more funds. It was suggested that site registers and sampling targets be developed for Texas and Florida and dockside sampling could potentially be conducted in those states. Based on the targets, each state would have to examine the feasibility of conducting dockside sampling. It was understood that the developed sampling targets would just be goals and the states would collect as much data as possible on the existing funds.

Discussion of Changes in TIP since Implementation of Trip Ticket Programs

D. Donaldson stated at the recent State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee meeting, the Committee asked what changes to the Trip Interview Program (TIP) had occurred as state trip ticket programs came online. Staff provided the group with a list of changes and the Committee asked if any of these changes had been documented. It was mentioned that these changes had not been documented and it was suggested that a white paper be developed that outlines the changes to TIP (due to trip ticket implementation) be developed by NMFS and the states. The Subcommittee agreed that such a paper would be useful and decided to provide comments to staff **no later than December 1, 2004**. Staff would then develop a draft white paper and present it to the Subcommittee at the March meeting.

Discussion of Confidentiality Issues regarding the FIN Data Management System

D. Donaldson stated FIN has been attempting to execute a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) regarding confidentiality with Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, and NMFS without much success. It was suggested that another approach might be a better way of addressing this issue. FIN could enter into subgrants (similar to the one with Florida for trip ticket data) with Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands which outlines that confidential data would be protected and the penalties for releasing these data. After some discussion, the group directed staff to develop subgrants with Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands that protected the confidentiality of commercial data and implement these documents.

The group then discussed third party access to confidential data accessed via the FIN DMS. There was concern that if someone who obtained access to confidential data (via the established protocols of completing all the necessary forms) then provides those data to someone else (who had not completed all the necessary forms), the second person could release confidential data (since he/she did not know it was confidential). **G. Davenport** stated that the first person would be responsible for protecting the confidentiality of the data and would have the onus of notifying anyone he/she releases the data to that the data are confidential. After some discussion, the group agreed that third party access did not jeopardize the confidentiality of the data and should be allowed. **M. Sestak** mentioned that it might be useful to create a database (accessible via the Internet) that contained all personnel with access to confidential data. This would allow people to check if a person had access to confidential data. The group agreed that this type of database would be useful and tasked staff with examining the feasibility of establishing such a database.

Election of Chairman

After some discussion, Page Campbell was reelected Chairman and Kevin Anson was reelected Vice Chairman.

Being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 12:05 p.m.

Gulf of Mexico Geographic Subcommittee (Data Management Subcommittee)

Minutes

Monday, March 14, 2005

Point Clear, Alabama

Chairman Page Campbell called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. The following members and others were present:

Members

Joe O'Hop, FMRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Page Campbell, TPWD, Rockport, TX
Vicki Swann, TPWD, Austin, TX
Guy Davenport, NMFS, Miami, FL
Michelle Kasprzak (*proxy for J. Shepard*), LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA

Kevin Anson, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL
Chris Denson, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL
Kerwin Cuevas (*proxy for T. Van Devender*), MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Steven Atran, GMFMC, Tampa, FL

Staff

David Donaldson, FIN Data Program Manager
Madeleine Travis, Staff Assistant
Larry B. Simpson, Executive Director
Mike Sestak, FIN Database Manager
Doug Snyder, RecFIN Survey Coordinator
Donna Bellais, ComFIN Survey Coordinator
Gregg Bray, RecFIN Programmer/Analyst

Others

Jason Duet, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
John Rawlings, GSMFC, Matagorda, TX
Terry Cody, Rockport, TX

Adoption of Agenda

The agenda was approved as written.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes for the meeting held on October 11, 2004 in Biloxi, Mississippi were approved as written.

Status of Biological Sampling Activities

D. Donaldson distributed a summary of otolith collections for the recreational and commercial fisheries in 2004. The summary presents the number of otoliths that have been collected as well as the targets, by species, mode, and state. **D. Donaldson** noted that overall, the collection of

otoliths and reaching the targets were fairly successful. It was difficult to obtain samples in the eastern Gulf of Mexico later in the year because of the tropical storms and hurricanes in that area. Beginning in 2005, there are federal targets for biological samples. These targets were developed based on number of otoliths collected in the past. Both the state and federal targets were distributed to the group. **D. Donaldson** noted that states should use the targets described in sub grants, not the ones outlined in the FIN Data Collection Plan since the ones in the sub grants take into account the federal targets. **D. Donaldson** reviewed the status of the analysis of the otoliths. It was noted that ageing data (2002-2003) from all states has been received and loaded into the FIN DMS with the exception of Florida. **J. O'Hop** noted that the otoliths have been aged but the analysis data has not been reconciled with collection data. His staff is working on this issue and should send the data in the near future. **D. Donaldson** stated that delivery of these data is part of the cooperative agreement and if the data are not loaded soon, it could potentially cause problems with future funding. **D. Donaldson** received a request from Debra Murie from the University of Florida regarding greater amberjack otoliths. She asked that the states send any greater amberjack otoliths (processed and unprocessed) to her since she is working on a project to explore alternative methods for processing these structures. Preliminary results show that if processed correctly, otoliths can be used to accurately determine the age of these fish. The group then discussed the possibility of creating a web-based data entry program for biological sampling. **D. Donaldson** stated that there are pros and cons to utilizing such a system. It would allow for cleaner entry of data since error checks could be built into the program. Also, it would standardize the data elements that everyone uses as well as allow for easier update to the program. Some of the drawbacks of using a web-based program include training and learning curves issues, desire of state partners to change, limitations on customization of the program to meet unique needs of partners and speed of the entry of the data. **M. Sestak** pointed out that the program could be modified to meet the individual needs of each state. After some discussion, the group decided that staff would further explore this issue and begin the development of a web-based program for consideration. The last topic discussed by the group was modification of the current data entry program to accommodate trip ticket numbers. **C. Denson** stated that because of multi-day trip tickets in Alabama, the current size for TRIP TICKET NUMBER variable is not large enough to accommodate Alabama's number. These multi-day tickets allows for multiple gears and area fished between trips, which need to be captured so it can be related to the biological samples. **M. Kasprzak** stated that the program could be modified to accommodate the larger trip ticket number. **M. Sestak** pointed out that if the group decides to go with the larger trip ticket number, all states would have to use this number. After some discussion, the group decided to modify the data entry program to accommodate the larger trip ticket number (with decimal places). **M. Kasprzak** asked each of the states using the program to provide her with the database to ensure that the previous changes are captured.

Status of Compilation of Vessel Information for Registration Tracking Module

D. Donaldson noted that at the last meeting, the group finalized the data structure for the commercial vessel information and a request to compile this information was made to each of the program partners. This was the first step in populating registration tracking module. **D. Bellais** reported that all the common data elements have been compiled and outlined in a spreadsheet, which has been distributed to the states. To date, no vessel information has been received from the states. **J. O'Hop** stated that Florida has received vessel information from their Department of Highway Safety and these data have been provided to NMFS and ACCSP. It should just be a matter of

accessing the data from ACCSP to populate the FIN system. **D. Donaldson** stated that is very important that the states provide this information. It is necessary to test the registration tracking module and without it, FIN cannot proceed with this task.

Status of Compilation of Recreational Fishing Licenses

D. Donaldson stated that the group also discussed compiling recreational fishing licenses at the last meeting. This is the first step in using these licenses as sampling frame for getting more precise effort estimates of recreational fishing for the private/rental and shore modes. **D. Bellais** reported that data elements for recreational fishing licenses have been received from Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. **D. Bellais** noted that once she has received all the data elements from each of the states, she would create a common data format and provide it to the states for review. **J. O'Hop** stated that last week he got access to the Florida data tables and actual data. He is currently checking the database for problems but should be sending the data to FIN in the near future.

Update on Monitoring of Changes in Scientific Names

D. Donaldson stated that at the last meeting the group discussed monitoring the changes in scientific names. The group tasked staff to look into identifying and/or establishing some type of notification system. **D. Donaldson** reported that he examined this issue and unfortunately there is no existing system where changes in scientific names are routinely monitoring and establish such a system would be problematic. So, it was recommended that each partner routine monitor changes and they would be responsible for providing updates as they become aware of any changes.

Discussion of Recreational Outreach

D. Donaldson stated that he attended an ACCSP outreach meeting in January 2005 and the meeting summary is in the packet. At that meeting, the group discussed outreach activities regarding recreational data collection (MRFSS). It was noted that ACCSP has conducted a baseline survey regarding the perceptions about MRFSS and they exploring the possibilities of conducting another survey to compliment previous one. The group asked in FIN would be interested in participating in this survey. **D. Donaldson** posed that question to the Data Management Subcommittee. It was believed that having the states involved in the collection of recreational data (MRFSS) has led to more credibility of the survey in the Gulf of Mexico. However, there has never been any hard data to verify that claim. By participating in the baseline survey, data can be collected to support the claim. The group believed this was a worthwhile exercise and directed to stay involved in the process and provide more information (detailed description of survey, cost of survey, etc.) to the FIN Committee at their June meeting.

Discussion and Review of Confidential Forms Portal

D. Donaldson stated **M. Sestak** has set up a confidential forms portal on the GSMFC web site. The purpose of this portal is to establish a centralized system for confidentiality forms, which will allow access (to authorized personnel) to all signed forms (FIN, NMFS, ACCSP, etc.) This will allow the managers of the different systems to easily verify that an individual has access to a particular system without having to tracking down all of the required forms. **M. Sestak** presented a brief overview of the system including how to log on, accessing an individual, checking the forms an individual has signed and actually viewing a digital copy of the forms. The group asked staff to continue developing the system and provide an update at the FIN meeting.

The last item discussed regarding confidentiality was about public access to the commercial data. **D. Donaldson** stated that the FIN Data Management System is now utilizing Oracle Discoverer as its query tool. However, for public end-user layers (EUL), there is not an option to set up a user name and password. If the ERL is public, anyone can access the database. With the old query tool, staff has theoretically been able to limit access to the public databases by requiring a user name and password. Since this was a change from the established operating procedures, **D. Donaldson** wanted to make sure that allowing access without knowing the individual would be okay. After some discussion, the group agreed that not knowing the individual identify of the person accessing the data was fine. The group asked staff to explore the possibilities of putting some type of counter on the public EULs to keep tracking of the number of unique IP addresses that access the site.

Review of White Paper regarding Changes in TIP since Implementation of Trip Ticket Programs

D. Donaldson stated that at the August 2004 State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee meeting, the group asked that FIN develop a white paper regarding the changes in TIP since the implementation of trip tickets. Staff has polled the group and developed a draft paper, which was distributed. The group reviewed the document and agreed that it should be presented to the S/FFMC for their consideration. **K. Anson** asked if more detailed (number of trips interviewed, funding levels, etc.) should be included in the document. **D. Donaldson** stated that before more detail is provided in the document, the group should wait for the comments from the S/FFMC members.

Discussion of Collecting Area Fished and Sizes for Shrimp on Trip Tickets

D. Donaldson stated that he had a conversation with Jim Nance (NMFS-Galveston) regarding the collection of area fished and sizes for shrimp (market codes) via the trip ticket programs. **D. Donaldson** stated that Nance mentioned that these data are not routinely collected via trip tickets and was wondering if there were mechanisms in place to ensure that these fields are completed. **D. Donaldson** asked the group if there was difficulty with collecting these data. The group discussed area fished and it was noted that on the trip tickets, this is primary area fished. **D. Donaldson** stated that although multiple areas fished is ultimately what Jim Nance wants; the primary area fished still provides useful information. **G. Davenport** mentioned that Jim Nance is also interested in getting depth as well. It was pointed out that both multiple areas fished and depth will be collected via the Detailed Effort module under FIN. As a first step, the states can examine these variables to determine the completeness of them. It was suggested that this issue be added to the FIN meeting agenda so this issue can be further discussed.

Discussion of FIN Social/Economic Data Collection Plan

D. Donaldson stated that the FIN Social/Economic Work Group met in February to discuss the status of the FIN Social/Economic Data Collection Plan. There has been very little work done on the plan and one of the reasons is that it is difficult to identify the state needs for social and economic data. After some discussion, the work group developed 3 options to determine states' needs for these data. The options were:

- 1) Hire a contractor to contact the states and compile the states' needs for social and economic data;

- 2) Convene a panel of experts to examine the issue of states' needs for social and economic data and task this panel to develop a list of needs; and
- 3) The Gulf Commission hires an economist to address this issue.

The Subcommittee considered these options and after some discussion decided that option 1 (hiring a contractor to compile the state needs) was the best option. **D. Donaldson** stated that he would brief the S/FFMC regarding this issue and provide this recommendation to the Committee later this week.

D. Donaldson stated that he talked with Brad Gentner regarding the economic add-on to the recreational survey and he mentioned that the start of the survey could be pushed back to wave 6, 2005 or wave 1, 2006. Also, it was pointed out that there are some funds available for the conduct of this activity. Therefore, each state needs to develop budget for collecting these data. **D. Donaldson** cautioned that the budgets should be reasonable and only cover the costs of getting the add-on questions for anglers. It was decided that the states would provide budgets to staff **no later than April 4, 2005**. And it was noted that Brad Gentner would be giving a uses of social and economic data presentation at FIN meeting in June.

Being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:45 a.m.

**Otolith Processors Training Meeting
Meeting Summary
May 10-11, 2005
St. Petersburg, Florida**

The meeting was called to order at 9:10 a.m. and the following people were present:

Janet Tunnell, FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL
David Westmark, FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Laura Crabtree, FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Ryan Longhurst, FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Jamie Miller, AMRD, Dauphin Island, AL
Jerome Little AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL
Jude LeDoux, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Mike Rigdon, MDMR, Biloxi,
Ken Edds, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Isis Longo, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Prince Robinson, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Tonie Saylor, TPWD, Palacios, TX
Terry Cody, TPWD, Rockport, TX
Bob Allman, NMFS, Panama City, FL
Chris Palmer, NMFS, Panama City, FL
Andrew Fischer, LSU, Baton Rouge, LA
Teresa DeBruler, MML, Sarasota, FL
Eddie Leonard, UF, Gainesville, FL
Dave Donaldson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Steve VanderKooy, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Conducting Otolith Reading Activities for Red Snapper, King Mackerel, Flounders and Greater Amberjack

The first part of the meeting consisted of a reading exercise where the groups read otoliths. The group split into three sections and conducted readings of 15 sets of otoliths for red snapper, king mackerel, gulf and southern flounder and greater amberjack. Each group read the otoliths, counted annuli, and determined edge type for each fish. This information was recorded and provided to the moderator for compilation.

Discussion of Red Snapper Reference Set

The group discussed the reference set which contains 500 otoliths taken from all months as well as 100 annotated otolith images and an excel file with ring counts and edge types. The otoliths were from the NMFS collections as well as 50 otoliths from each state with the exception of Texas. **T. Saylor** stated that she would send **B. Allman 50 otoliths as soon as possible**. This set is utilized to test reader precision among all the personnel reading red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico. **B. Allman** stated that the reference set was not distributed this year. The group reviewed the distribution and time frame of the reference set. It was pointed out that the set will be distributed to NMFS, state agencies (Texas-Florida) as well as Mote Marine Laboratory, starting in the east and moving to the west. The primary point of contact for the set is Bob Allman at NMFS-Panama City.

Each agency will have a one (1) month time frame for reading and analyzing the set. It has also been agreed that conducting reading exercises with the set should be done on an annual basis. For established readers, they would read a subset of the otoliths just to refresh their memory but for new readers, they should conduct the reading of all the otoliths in the reference set every year for the first couple of years. **The group agreed that once all of the agencies have read the set, the primary contact would compile the ages and calculate an APE among the agencies. This information would be presented at the annual otolith processors training workshop.**

Discussion of Flounder Reference Set

A. Fischer stated that he and I. Longo developed the flounder reference set which contains only 100 otoliths. The reason for the small number of otoliths is that flounders are a fairly short-lived species and there is not much variability. It was suggested that otoliths from the other states could be included in this reference set and **it was decided that Texas, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida would provide 25 flounder otoliths to I. Longo as soon as possible.** As with the other reference sets, this set is utilized to test reader precision among all the personnel reading flounder in the Gulf of Mexico. As with the red snapper set, the group reviewed the distribution and time frame of this reference set. It was stated that the set will be distributed to NMFS and the state agencies (Texas-Florida), starting in the east and moving to the west. The primary point of contact for the set is Isis Longo at Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. Each agency will have a one (1) month time frame for reading and analyzing the set. It has also been agreed that conducting reading exercises with the set should be done on an annual basis. For established readers, they would read a subset of the otoliths just to refresh their memory but for new readers, they should conduct the reading of all the otoliths in the reference set every year for the first couple of years. **The group agreed that once all of the agencies have read the set, the primary contact would compile the ages and calculate an APE among the agencies. This information would be presented at the annual otolith processors training workshop.**

Discussion of King Mackerel Reference Set

C. Palmer stated that he and Doug Devries developed the king mackerel set which contains a fixed file of 100 whole and 100 sectioned otoliths. It also includes a PowerPoint presentation that provides the ages of all the otoliths. It was pointed out the processors should read the slides first and then look at the presentation. As with the other reference sets, this set is utilized to test reader precision among all the personnel reading flounder in the Gulf of Mexico. As with the red snapper set, the group reviewed the distribution and time frame of this reference set. It was stated that the set will be distributed to NMFS and the state agencies (Texas-Alabama), starting in the west and moving to the east. The primary point of contact for the set is Chris Palmer/Doug Devries at NMFS-Panama City. Each agency will have a one (1) month time frame for reading and analyzing the set. It has also been agreed that conducting reading exercises with the set should be done on an annual basis. For established readers, they would read a subset of the otoliths just to refresh their memory but for new readers, they should conduct the reading of all the otoliths in the reference set every year for the first couple of years. **The group agreed that once all of the agencies have read the set, the primary contact would compile the ages and calculate an APE among the agencies. This information would be presented at the annual otolith processors training workshop.**

Discussion of Establishing a Regional Otolith Processing Center

D. Donaldson stated that there is concern that if FIN increases the number of species under the biological sampling task, the partners will not be able to handle the increased processing and analysis load. Therefore, the group needs to talk about setting up a regional center. Although FIN is not at this point yet, the group needs to discuss this issue and identify any issues or problems before the need arises. The concept of a regional processing center would be that this center would handle the increased processing and aging needs that cannot be conducted by the program partners. So, the group discussed their current processing and analysis capabilities. Although NMFS is fairly close to their processing and aging capacity, all of the states could handle some level of increase. The premise that all program partners are close to full capacity may have been untrue and therefore, it might be premature to begin the discussions about a regional center. S. VanderKooy noted that his concept of the regional center would be that it would handle only the processing tasks. The aging capabilities (which take years of experience and expertise to develop) would still stay within the partner agencies. The group agreed the establishing a center to just tackle the processing would be the logical approach. S. VanderKooy also pointed out that the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission has established a regional processing center and there are plans to visit this center later this year. The group decided that while it might not be needed in the Gulf at this time, the issue should be routinely discussed and staff should monitor the regional center on the Pacific coast to learn from their experiences and keep the group informed about this issue.

Presentation of Greater Amberjack Processing and Analysis Issues

E. Leonard stated that he is working with Debra Murie of the University of Florida (UF) on a project to determine the age, growth, and sexual maturity of greater amberjack in the Gulf of Mexico. There are a variety of gaps for the assessment of greater amberjack. The assessment method is a VPA, which assumes catch at age is known exactly. For greater amberjack, the age composition is inferred from the length composition using a growth curve (age slicing) but the length composition data may not be sufficient to characterize variability in length at age. Concerning age and growth, the variability in growth by region and gear is not known. Also, age-length keys by region and gear have not been developed and there is no routine sampling by region and gear over all sizes classes for this species. The fecundity of this animal is still unknown. Currently, fecundity is based on weight proxy (from studies conducted in the Florida Keys only). And the age/size of sexual maturity is not known and is currently estimated for the Gulf of Mexico. He reviewed several of the previous aging studies for greater amberjack and identified some of the potential biases of the current data. Because of these potential biases, Debra Murie and her team have taken on the task of determining the age and growth, and age and size of sexual maturity, of greater amberjack in the Gulf of Mexico. So far, UF has received commercial and recreational otolith samples from National Marine Fisheries Service - Panama City Lab, the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission as well as via research sampling. The primary method for aging this species is to read a thin, cross-section of sagittal otolith. Some of the problems associated with aging this species include that the otoliths are thin and fragile, the annuli not very distinct, high rate of unreadable otoliths ($\geq 15\%$), the edge is difficult to distinguish and between-reader precision low for a relatively short-lived fish species. Some potential ways of improving the readability of the otoliths include embedding the otoliths with several different materials, staining the otolith (with Sanderson's rapid bone stain) and sanding and polishing the otoliths (both with and without staining). Another possible aging method for greater amberjack is to collect fin rays and spines as an alternative structure. If the specific fin looks good, then they are collected for analysis (if /when possible). This is preliminary work and P. Leonard will keep the

group apprised of the conclusions. Because of the uncertainty regarding reading as well as the appropriate structure to analyze, the group decided to not to analyze any greater amberjack otoliths but instead send them to UF some Debra Murie and her staff can continue their work.

Status of Otolith Manual Revision

S. VanderKooy stated that the plan was to conduct a revision to the manual; however, due to other obligations that activity has not occurred yet. There was a meeting in November 2004 to discuss the revision process and at that meeting, the group discussed ways to improve the manual. Currently, the manual is a good reference source for otolith processing, however, it does not contain much information about validation – once the otolith has been read, how to read and analyze the otoliths. In this upcoming revision, he would like to include the reference and training sets, etc. into the manual and provide more “how to” information about analyzing otoliths. The Atlantic states have expressed an interested in becoming involved in this process and Georgia has actually developed some training guides for inshore species. S. VanderKooy stated that he would distribute these guides to the group. The work on the revision should begin in the next several months and the appropriate personnel will be contacted for input and participation.

Processing Status of Otoliths Collected in 2003 and 2004

D. Donaldson stated that the group needed to discuss the status of the otolith processing. In Florida, J. Tunnell stated that the red snapper otoliths collected in 2003 have been processed and read. The red snapper otoliths for 2004 have been processed and are ready to be analyzed. She did not know the status of data being sent to the FIN Data Management System (DMS). For Alabama, J. Little stated that the otoliths for all species collected in 2003 and 2004 have been processed, read and send to the FIN DMS. J. LeDoux noted that Mississippi has processed and read the otoliths for all species collected in 2003 and 2004 but have not send the data to the FIN DMS. For Louisiana, K. Edds stated that all otoliths for the priority species collected in 2003 and 2004 have been processed, read and send to the FIN DMS. And T. Saylor noted that for 2003, the otoliths for all species have been processed, read and send to the FIN DMS. The otoliths for all species collected in 2004 (except 500 flounder) have been processed and aged.

Discussion of Future Training Meeting

The group decided that the next meeting should be held at Florida Marine Research Institute (FMRI) during May 2006. D. Donaldson then asked the group for input regarding the new format of the meeting. The extended period of time as well as breaking up the reading and review appears to be successful. One suggestion was that when the review of the reading exercise is conducted, that people sit with their groups to allow discussion among the group about their determination of age. It was also suggested that D. Donaldson provide an update about the Fisheries Information Network (FIN) regarding biological sampling issues. Also, by having more time, there are more opportunities to discuss a variety of issues that have not been addressed in the past. D. Donaldson stated that he would develop a draft agenda prior to the meeting and distribute it to everyone for comment.

The meeting was recessed at 3:00 p.m.

May 11, 2005

The meeting was reconvened at 8:30 a.m.

Review and Comparison of Reading Exercise by Groups

After each group determined the age of the various fish, the information was entered into a spreadsheet and J. Tunnell calculated APE's for all species except red snapper were based on annuli count. For the flounders, the overall APE was 9.5%; for red snapper, the overall APE was 5.6%; for king mackerel, the overall APE was 13.6%; and for greater amberjack, the overall APE was 16.7%. For the flounders and red snapper, the APEs were just above the standard 5%. Since this was the first time reading king mackerel, the APE was not too far off from the standard. And although the APE for greater amberjack was high, this is a very difficult fish to age and this was the first attempt by the group to age this particular species. It should be noted that the differences in age among the groups for all species was usually only off by one year.

After the comparison exercise, several otoliths were selected where there were differences among the groups and everyone examined these otoliths (as a group) to determine where each group had differed. The group believed this was a useful activity and helped everyone identify where errors can (and were) made while reading the otoliths.

Being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:00 a.m.

**RecFIN(SE) Biological/Environmental Work Group
Meeting Summary
May 4, 2005**

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. The following people were present:

Bob Dixon, NMFS, Beaufort, NC
Rob Andrews, NMFS, Silver Spring, MD
Kerwin Cuevas, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
David Donaldson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Development of Sampling Protocols for Highly Migratory Species

D. Donaldson stated that the Gulf Council requested that FIN explore the issue of collection of data from high migratory species (HMS). FIN tasked this group to develop sampling protocols for these species. There are currently two methodologies used to collect data for HMS on the Atlantic coast. The Large Pelagic Survey (LPS) collects catch data via dock-side samples and effort data via the telephone directory survey. The directory is created from HMS permit holders. The other survey is a catch card program (utilized in North Carolina) where anglers complete a form that includes vessel name, trip type, if angler was fishing in a tournament, tag number, species, and length and weight of fish. After some discussion, **the group recommended that FIN implement a combination of both surveys. For effort information, the plan is to utilize the existing for-hire telephone survey methodology for collecting these data. Effort for the charter boat fishery will be collected via a modification of the existing survey while data for the private boat fishery will be collected through a separate survey. It was noted that approximately \$115K is spend to operate the effort survey for HMS on the Atlantic coast. For catch information, the primary method of collection will be via the catch card program. Since there are limited sites where HMS are landed, this method should be very effective. The dock-side sampling will be used to validate the catch card data as well as collect biological data (length, weight, otoliths, etc.)** There was a question about the magnitude of HMS catches in Texas. (Attachment A – catch card, catch and effort, for-hire, private, HMS permits; Attachment B - Rec. bycatch prioritization list; Attachment C – Rec. shrimp catch card.) **The group asked FIN to discuss this issue at the June meeting.**

Prioritization of Recreational Fisheries for the FIN Bycatch Module

D. Donaldson stated that FIN asked the group to prioritize the various fisheries regarding the need for bycatch monitoring. A table was developed and all modes of recreational fishing ranked fairly high on the priority list. The prioritization table is attached (Attachment B). After some discussion, **the group recommended that bycatch for private boat, shore and charter boats continue to be collected via the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS) and the at-sea sampling methodology be used to collect bycatch for the head boat fishery.** B. Dixon asked about the differences between bycatch reported by the captain and mate of a charter boat vs. that reported by anglers (via the MRFSS). R. Andrews stated that there was a comparison study done between the MRFSS and captains/mates reporting and the study showed catch data were fairly comparable, however, the captain/mates tended to underreport the discards data. After some discussion, **the group recommended that FIN examine the possibility of conducting a pilot study to compare discards reporting between the MRFSS and captains/mates.**

Discussion of RDD Add-on Questions for Collection of Private Access Site Fishing Data

D. Donaldson stated that this issue has been discussed by FIN for a number of years and it is a very difficult issue. The first question that needs to be answered is there a significant presence of this activity occurring in the states. According to the random digit dialing (RDD) telephone data, the percent of trips that depart from private access sites range from about 15-35% throughout the Gulf of Mexico. Based on these data, it appears that there is enough activity occurring from private access sites that FIN needs to further explore this issue. The group decided that there were several methods for capturing this type of data. The first method was to conduct an add-on to the RDD and poll a sub-sample of anglers using public and private access sites to determine species composition, avidity, etc. for each group and determine if there were significant differences between the groups. Another method was to conduct a panel study where selected anglers would report their catches (from both public and private access sites) via a diary or log form. This method would be very similar to the catch card methods proposed for HMS. And the last method was to collect the necessary data via a mail survey. After some discussion, **the group recommended that a pilot study utilizing a panel study methodology be implemented in the Gulf. The NMFS telephone contractor is currently compiling a panel of anglers willing to participate in future surveys. There would not be a need to add questions onto the existing RDD survey. The cost for this type of survey would include mailing and printing costs as well as funds to purchase incentives (hats, huggies, raffle, etc.) to help ensure participation in the survey.**

Tournament Sampling Issues

Presentation of Pilot Tournament Sampling Activities in Mississippi

D. Donaldson stated that this group had been charged with the development of a sampling program for fishing tournaments. FIN has developed a pilot study to collect these data and it was implemented in Mississippi in 2004. K. Cuevas stated that personnel focused on tournaments with one or two target species. Department of Marine Resources (DMR) personnel sampled 10 of the selected 11 tournaments (approximately 400-500 anglers). They received only 15 responses from those tournaments. DMR personnel met with the anglers to explain the need for these data. They provided catch cards to each angler as well as self-addressed stamped envelopes to return the cards and asked them to please complete and return to DMR. The anglers could either mail the cards to DMR or turn the card into DMR staff who were working at the tournament. The group was disappointed with the response, however, they believed if some type of incentive program (raffle, hats, huggies, etc.) was implemented, the success rate might be higher. K. Cuevas stated that DMR staff will probably continue to attend captains' meeting and attempt to collect these data. Therefore, **the group recommended that Mississippi conduct the pilot survey again with the inclusion of some type of incentive program.** The group then discussed the need for the collection of tournament sampling. This issue has been discussed for a number of years by FIN without any definitive solutions. It might be time for FIN to reexamine the tournament sampling issue. Therefore, **the group recommended that FIN readdress the need for tournament sampling.**

Further Development of Pilot Recreational Shrimping and Crabbing Mail Survey

D. Donaldson stated that this group has also been charged with developing sampling protocols for non rod-and-reel recreational fisheries. Last year, the group recommended that a pilot survey for recreational shrimp and crabbing be developed. The group discussed this issue and decided to focus on recreational shrimping only since most of the Gulf States have recreational

shrimp licenses. It was noted that this pilot would need to be conducted in a state that has such a license since the license data base would serve as the sampling frame. The survey would be administered on a monthly basis for a total of one year. The monthly draw would be randomly selected and be an independent draw between months. The state agency would be the lead agency with the GSMFC assisting (running draws, etc.) An example of a catch card is attached (Attachment C). **The group recommended that a pilot study to collect catch and effort data regarding recreational shrimp activity be conducted in 2006. The state where the survey would be conducted needs be decided by FIN.**

D. Donaldson noted that information on various non rod-and-reel projects have been compiled and distributed to the group. The first step in this process is to identify the major fisheries that used non rod-and-reel gears. B. Dixon asked what the purpose of collecting these data was since this portion of the fishery may account for a very small portion of the overall landings. It was noted that unfortunately, there are no data to answer that question and that is why the FIN is examining this issue. The group discussed what fisheries data should be collected on and it was noted that efforts should probably be focused on fisheries that require some type of additional license or permit in addition to the standard recreational fishing license. This would allow for identification of the sampling universe and make conducting some type of survey more efficient. It was mentioned that many of the finfish gears could potentially be collected via the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS). R. Andrews provided some distribution number regarding the use of various gears and that information is attached. It was suggested that potentially, estimates for these gears could be generated from the recreational data although the percent standard errors (PSEs) could be extremely large. The group talked about the major shellfish fisheries that utilize non rod-and-reel gear and agreed that shrimp and crab were probably the biggest fisheries and efforts should focus on these species. After some discussion, **the group developed two recommendations. The first recommendation was to develop a pilot survey for recreational shrimp and crabbing, utilizing a mail survey methodology. Information to be collected would include species catch, number of trips, location, gear(s) used, etc. The cost of this type of survey would be approximately \$5,000 to \$10,000. The other recommendation was to require fishermen (for fisheries that require an additional license) to provide catch and effort data to the state fishery management agency. A catch log would be provided when a fisherman purchased a license and that fisherman would be responsible for provided the needed data. If that fisherman did not provide the data, he/she would not be able to renew their license in subsequent years. It was noted that this method would greatly increase the administrative requirements for the agency implementing this method. Although the group did not estimate a cost for this activity, it would be much higher than the pilot survey recommendation.**

Discussion of Determination of Extent for Non-consumptive Activities

D. Donaldson stated that FIN has tasked this group with determining the extent of non-consumptive marine activities. The group discussed the purpose of compiling this type of information and could not identify any great benefit for having these data (other than to know they exist). After some discussion, **the work group asked FIN to provide some direction (goals of collecting these data, purpose, needs, etc.) regarding this issue.**

Other Business

D. Donaldson stated that the Gulf Council is exploring the feasibility of implementing a federal recreational fishing permit. This group has been asked to determine the benefits of such a permit from a data collection perspective. In terms of data collection, the only benefit would be to identify those anglers that fish (at some point) in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). This identification would allow for easier surveying of EEZ fishermen. Other than that issue, there does not appear to be any benefit for data collection activities. If implemented, the federal permit would have to be issued via the state licensing systems to be effective.

R. Andrews stated that NMFS is interested in conducting a pilot telephone survey using 1-month recall (vs. the 2-month recall currently being utilized). This survey will be conducted on the Atlantic coast and NMFS is interested in conducting in the Gulf as well. The pilot survey would use the established protocols of the random-digit dialing (RDD) telephone survey and would require an increase in dock-side sampling (SH and P/R only) as well. Louisiana would be the ideal state to conduct this pilot and the group recommended that Louisiana consider conducting this survey.

Being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 2:10 p.m.



Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission Highly Migratory Species Catch Card



Date

Year	Month	Day
04-05		

Reporting Station _____

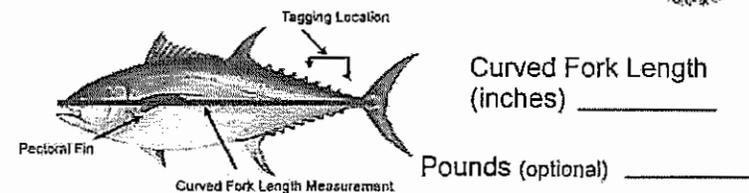
Atlantic Tuna/Billfish
Permit Number _____

Vessel Name _____

Trip Type Charter
(check one) Private
 Headboat

Tournament Yes
 No

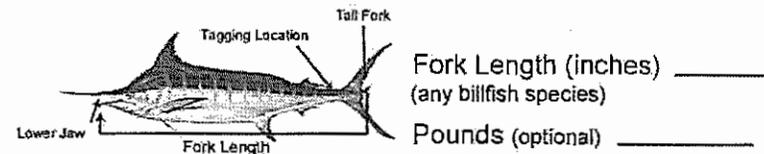
Tag Number _____
(obtained at reporting station)



Curved Fork Length
(inches) _____

Pounds (optional) _____

Bluefin tuna should be measured from the tip of upper jaw, over the top side of the pectoral fin to the fork of the tail.



Fork Length (inches) _____
(any billfish species)

Pounds (optional) _____

Billfishes should be measured from the tip of the lower jaw to middle of the fork of the caudal (tail) fin.

Check Billfish Species Landed



Blue Marlin



White Marlin



Sailfish



Swordfish

All the above Highly Migratory Species (HMS) landed in North Carolina must have a Landing Tag affixed before removal from the vessel. Tags are available at all HMS Reporting Stations. To obtain a Landing Tag, Captains or operators of permitted vessel must complete and submit a catch card for every HMS landed. This information collection is approved under OMB Control #0328 (expires 09/30/2006).

Fishery	Gear	Level	Sea Days or Trips	Cost	Vulnerability to Non-Marine Mammal, ESA Bycatch and Seabirds	Vulnerability Fish Bycatch	Vulnerability Marine Mammal Bycatch
Recreational Charterboat	Hook and Line, Speargun	None	1,121- 2,242 trips		1.0	2.0	0.8
Recreational Private Boat	Hook and Line, Speargun, Castnet, etc.	None	177,325- 354,650 trips		1.0	2.0	0.8
Recreational Headboat	Hook and Line, Speargun	Baseline	260-500 trips	\$624,000	1.0	1.8	0.8

**ComFIN Data Collection Work Group
Conference Call Summary
February 3, 2005**

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. and the following people were present:

Guy Davenport, NMFS, Miami, FL
Page Campbell, TPWD, Rockport, TX
Chris Denson, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL
Roger Uwate, VIDFW, St. Thomas, USVI
Blake Price, NCDMF, Morehead City, NC
Michelle Kasprzak, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Dave Donaldson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Purpose of the Meeting

D. Donaldson stated that the purpose of the meeting was to ensure that all fisheries were identified and then prioritize them regarding the potential impact they can have concerning bycatch. It was noted that at the last FIN meeting, the Committee tasked this group with prioritizing the commercial fisheries identified in the NMFS Bycatch Priorities and Implementation Plan.

Prioritization of Fisheries for Bycatch

D. Donaldson stated that NMFS has developed a fairly comprehensive list of fisheries regarding their bycatch potential. The first step is to ensure that all fisheries have been adequately identified. It was noted that although most fisheries can produce some bycatch, the group needs to focus on fisheries that produce "significant" bycatch that can have major impacts on other fisheries. After some discussion, the group decided to add the trammel net fishery in the U.S. Virgin Islands and the fish trap fishery in both the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico. The next step was to prioritize these fisheries in regards to their potential for producing bycatch. G. Davenport asked if FIN had developed a definition for bycatch. B. Price stated that ACCSP had just developed a definition and it was distributed to the group. The definition was as follows:

"The discarded catch of any living marine resource *plus* catch not otherwise accounted for as landed."

Catch is defined as physically removing the organism from the water with any type of gear. This definition includes recreational fishing.

This definition is not meant to include reported retained incidental catch such as that allowed in a management plan or regulation.

The Committee recommends that the term "bycatch" not be used to mean incidental catch that is accounted for as landed.

The group discussed the definition but did not come to consensus. The group needed additional time to address the definition and will take up action on this issue at the next meeting.

The group then began attempting to prioritize the list. During the discussions, it became apparent that the priorities for the federal partners was very clearly defined, however, it was not

readily apparent for the state partners. There was concern that without a clearly defined need by state partners, this task might not be possible to accomplish. Therefore after some discussion, **the group recommended that staff poll the various state partners (utilizing the bycatch table) regarding their priorities concerning bycatch. The partners should rate each identified fisheries (both commercial and recreational) regarding its bycatch potential (3 = high potential 2=medium potential 1=low potential) of fishery to non-marine mammal, ESA, and seabird bycatch, potential of fishery to fish bycatch, and potential of fishery to marine mammal bycatch. The partners should primarily focus of bycatch potential of fishery to fish bycatch although also rate the other two categories.** Once all the state partners have provided their priorities, the Work Group will get together and discuss all the priorities (both state and federal) and develop bycatch priorities for commercial and recreational fisheries.

Being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:55 a.m.

**ComFIN Data Collection Work Group
Conference Call Summary
May 17, 2005**

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. and the following people were present:

Guy Davenport, NMFS, Miami, FL
Page Campbell, TPWD, Rockport, TX
Chris Denson, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL
Michelle Kasprzak, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Dave Donaldson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Purpose of the Meeting

D. Donaldson stated that the purpose of the meeting was to review the bycatch priorities for the listed commercial fisheries and develop recommendations to FIN regarding bycatch monitoring.

Review of FIN Bycatch Priorities

D. Donaldson stated that the spreadsheet distributed to the group was a compilation of bycatch priorities from the various FIN partners. Based on the spreadsheet, it appears that the top three fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico are the shrimp trawl fishery, reef fish fishery and skimmer trawl fishery. It was noted that although the spreadsheet includes recreational fisheries, this group needs to focus on commercial fisheries. Also, the shrimp trawl fishery should include the inshore component as well as the offshore activities. **After some discussion, the work group recommended that FIN focus on shrimp and skimmer trawl fisheries for developing a pilot survey to test the FIN bycatch sampling protocols. It was pointed out that although the established protocols for bycatch collection are at-sea sampling, alternative methods may need to be employed for sampling the inshore trawl fisheries due to the small size of the fishing vessels.** The bycatch prioritization spreadsheet for commercial fisheries is attached.

Being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:20 a.m.

Fishery	Gear	Level	Sea Days or Trips	Cost	Vulnerability to Non-Marine Mammal, ESA Bycatch and Seabirds	Vulnerability Fish Bycatch	Vulnerability Marine Mammal Bycatch
Gulf of Mexico Shrimp Trawl (including inshore)	Trawl	Pilot	8,000 days	\$8,000,000	1.6	2.2	0.8
Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish	Hook and Line	Baseline	60-120 trips	\$2,016,000	0.8	1.8	0.8
Gulf of Mexico Skimmer Trawl	Skimmer Trawl	None	219-438 trips	\$526,000	1.2	1.8	0.8
Pelagic Longline	Surface Longline	Developing	2 days for each set	\$3,000,000	1.6	1.7	1.2
Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish	Bottom Longline	Baseline	17-35 trips	\$588,000	0.8	1.5	0.8
Gulf of Mexico Butterfly Nets	Butterfly net	None	25-51 trips	\$61,000	1.2	1.5	0.8
Inshore Gillnet	Gillnet	Pilot	820 trips		0.8	1.3	0.8
Gulf Menhaden Purse Seine	Purse Seine	Baseline	226-451 sets	\$271,000	0.8	1.3	0.8
Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish	Trap	Baseline	Fishery Being Phased Out		0.6	1.2	0.6
Crab Trap/Pot (Blue Crabs) - Gulf of Mexico	Pot	None	1,250- 2,500 trips	\$3,000,000	1.0	1.2	0.8
Directed Shark Gillnet	Drift Gillnet	Mature	100% Coverage		1.0	1.0	0.8
Migratory Coastal Pelagic - Gulf of Mexico	Trolling	None	6-12 trips	\$202,000	1.2	1.0	0.8
Fish Trawl (Paired/Single)	Trawl	None	50 days	\$60,000	1.0	1.0	0.6
Gulf of Mexico Cast Net	Cast Net	None	0 days		0.8	0.8	0.8
Surface Trawl (Jellyfish)	Trawl	None	1 trip	\$8,000	0.6	0.7	0.6
Crab Trap/Pot (Stone Crab)	Pot	None	175-350 trips	\$420,000	0.2	0.5	0.2
Fishery	Gear	Level	Sea Days or Trips	Cost	Vulnerability to Non-Marine	Vulnerability Fish Bycatch	Vulnerability Marine

					Mammal, ESA Bycatch and Seabirds		Mammal Bycatch
USVI/Puerto Rico Traps	Fish traps	None	Unk	Unk	0.5	0.5	0.5
Crab Trap/Pot - Golden Crab	Pot	None	1-2 Trips	\$17,000	0.0	0.2	0.0
Lobster Trap	Pot	None	115-230 trips	\$276,000	0.0	0.2	0.0
USVI Trammel Nets	Trammel net	None	Unk	Unk	0.0	0.0	0.0
<i>GOM inshore / nearshore commercial finfish</i>	<i>horizontal gear: trotline</i>	<i>none</i>			1.0	2.0	1.0
<i>GOM inshore / nearshore commercial finfish</i>	<i>vertical gear: handline, rod and reel</i>	<i>none</i>			1.0	2.0	1.0
<i>Gulf of Mexico Inshore Shrimp Trawl</i>	<i>< 25' Trawl</i>				2.0	3.0	1.0
<i>Recreational Trap/Pot - Inshore Gulf</i>	<i>Pot</i>				2.0	1.0	1.0
<i>Inshore Minnow Trap</i>	<i>Trap</i>				1.0	1.0	1.0
<i>Oyster Dredge</i>	<i>Dredge</i>				1.0	1.0	1.0

**FIN Data Collection Plan Work Group
Meeting Summary
May 3, 2005**

The meeting was called to order at 9:05 a.m. The following people were present:

Bob Muller, FMRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Richard Cody, FMRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Behzad Mahmoudi, FMRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Mike Murphy, FMRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Britt Bumgardner, TPWD, Palacios, TX
James "Tut" Warren, GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Guy Davenport, NMFS, Miami, FL
Gary Fitzhugh, NMFS, Panama City, FL
Dave Donaldson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Review of 2004 and 2005 Otolith and Length Data Collection Activities

D. Donaldson noted that the group needed to review the status of the data collection for biological data. The group reviewed the 2004 (Jan-Dec) and 2005 (Jan-Mar) biological sampling activities, by state. For the most part, the state and federal samplers are collecting the necessary number of otoliths by the established cells. The group discussed the targets for each of the priority species. There are overall targets for each priority species that were developed based on 0.5% of the landings (a 3-year average) and this provided a total number of otoliths needed for each species. This total was distributed about the various cells (based on percentage of landings) and the otolith targets were established. Then, NMFS provided the number of otoliths they have been collecting for these species and that number was subtracted from total number of otoliths so you have a FIN and NMFS total target by species. During this exercise, it was noted that some of the counts for otoliths did not add up among the various tally sheets. D. Donaldson stated that he would work with staff to identify the problem and ensure that the totals from all sheets add correctly.

The group then looked at the document that compared the percent landing vs. percent otoliths collected. This document compares the landing with the otolith collected to ensure that the otolith collections were representative of the landings. For the recreational side, the sampling appeared to be fairly representative; however, for the commercial side, the sampling did not reflect the landings. It was noted that this could be indicative of a problem or it might just be a strange year. There were several hurricanes in the Gulf and this could have caused some problems. The group agreed that this issue needs to be closely monitored and appropriate action implemented to ensure representative sampling.

Recommendations for Necessary Lengths and Otoliths for FIN Priority Species

G. Fitzhugh provided a presentation regarding an alternative method for developing sampling targets. He stated that the problem is that for many fish in the Southeast, there is a lot of variation in size at age. The two-phase sampling for age-length keys does not work very well with high variation, which means a random sampling plan for age structure is needed. This is the approach that FIN has taken regarding biological sampling. Looking at the recent red snapper assessment, it appears that NMFS and FIN have the capacity to oversample red snapper. Based on the assessment

review, there were sufficient number of ages in recent years, but there were some gaps in the past. It appears that about 3500-4000 otoliths/year seems sufficient to conduct an assessment. Another approach to setting otolith sampling goals would be rather than extrapolating up from the smallest stratification level, focus on age proportions (i.e. multinomial distribution) derived from random samples. A conservative and sufficient sample size of 500 otoliths per **key** strata is needed to accurately determine the age structure for a particular species. This level would allow for sampling such that all age proportions are going to be within 0.05 of the population proportions (with 95% confidence). Key strata are those groupings that are internally homogeneous but between which you expect notable differences in age structure. So, that begs the question, “what are the key strata and how many do we need?” Key strata would include years, (recruitment can vary year-to-year), principal gear types (selectivity can vary among gears as well as between commercial and recreational sectors) and region (can have different age structure in eastern and western Gulf for example). There are other strata but they are arbitrary, however, they are important as administrative guidelines. The administrative cells (such as waves, spring/fall openings, specific fishery modes, states, ports, etc.) can be used to break that overall target down and insure representative sampling. This method is not explicitly based on landings (unlike the current method being used to determine sampling targets). This key strata approach, not being based on landings, allows simpler accounting of targets and insures that adequate targets are maintained when landings fluctuate or when important but rare species are added. Consider existing resources and practical processing capacity; about 10,000 otoliths can be collected and processed through FIN and an additional 10,000 otoliths can be collected via TIP and processing at Panama City. Using the proposed alternative method, the following table, presented as an example, represents the number of otoliths (by species) that could be collected. It represents a doubling of the number of species that could be sampled.

Species	# Gears	# Regions	# Otoliths	Responsible Partner
K. mackerel	2	4	4000	Share
R. snapper	3	3	4500	Share?
So. Flounder	1	2	1000	FIN
G. Flounder	1	1	500	FIN
Gag	3	1	1500	Fed
R. Grouper	3	1	1500	Fed
V. snapper	2	2	2000	Fed?
G. Amberjack	2	2	2000	FIN, UF

Some of the caveats about this method are that one needs to recognize that various states, universities and federal labs are still collecting and processing otoliths for other priorities. This is an attempt to better coordinate and share load for species needing annual collections and are frequently assessed

through SEDAR process. And this process addresses species for which routine aging is feasible and QA/QC procedures are being developed.

The group believed this alternative method showed promise. In order to utilize this method however, there needs to be an analysis of the key strata for the various species to ensure that the appropriate number of strata has been identified. Ultimately, these questions should be addressed by the SEDAR and as this process is being conducted, these questions will be addressed and the answers will be provided in the final report. However, in the meantime, FIN needs to task someone to look at these questions but the question is, "who?" The group discussed the possibility of contracting this activity out to interested parties. It was noted that interested parties could include universities, environmental consultants, etc. The potential contractor should have some statistical knowledge and be able to evaluate multinomial proportional methods to ensure that the methods are statistically valid. The contractor should examine each species and break down the catch by cell and determine the appropriate number of key strata. It was suggested that the selected contractor talk with the appropriate biologists and stock assessment personnel for the various species. After some discussion, **the group recommended that FIN develop an RFP to identify the key strata needed for each priority species. The RFP should outline the process and identify the desired products for the various species.**

The group then discussed the necessary lengths and otoliths for FIN priority species in 2006. Although the outlined process will provide guidance regarding the needed number of lengths and otoliths, the process will not be functional until 2007. Therefore, **the group recommended that FIN use the existing targets for the priority species for sampling activities in 2006. It was suggested that the partners review the targets to make sure they reflect the current situation (changes in quotas, etc.)**

Development of 2006 FIN Data Collection Plan Document

D. Donaldson stated that he would update the 2005 document and distribute the document to the group for review. It was suggested that the updated spreadsheet containing FIN and NMFS targets be added to the document. It was also noted that more detailed criteria about the procedures for determining the current sampling targets should be included in the document. It might be helpful to include some examples. Once the document was reviewed and approved, FIN staff will print and distribute it to the appropriate FIN committees, subcommittees, work groups and other interested parties.

Being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 2:05 p.m.

**LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS DEVELOPED
BY THE FIN COMMITTEE FROM THE FACILITATED SESSION ON JUNE 2, 2004 IN
FAJARDO, PUERTO RICO**

FIN Recommendations Work Group

February 2005

CATCH

- Recommendation 1:** **Full implementation of a trip ticket system in Texas and Mississippi (2006 – 2007)**
- Recommendation 2:** **Assess the need for trip-level commercial data collection for US Virgin Islands (2006)**
- Recommendation 3:** **Improve data quality by validating conversion factors**
- Task 1: Identify species where conversion factors are used and compile the various factors used by each partner (2006)
- Task 2: Identify any issues and problems associated with each species/conversion factor and develop methods for validating these factors (2006)
- Task 3: Implement methods for validations of conversion factors (2007)
- Recommendation 4:** **Investigate data collection for ornamentals (live market)**
- Task 1: Determine partners where live market activities occur (2010)
- Task 2: Evaluate state licenses to determine if appropriate licenses are in place to ensure accurate reporting (2010)
- Recommendation 5:** **Evaluate suitability of new data sources and integrate data FIN system**
- Task 1: Task work group to evaluate each survey regarding scope, content, and compatibility with existing FIN protocols (2008)
- Recommendation 6:** **Develop sampling protocols for private access and non-hook and line**
- Task 1: Task Biological/Environmental Work Group with continuing to develop sampling protocol for private access and non-hook and line fisheries (2006)
- Recommendation 7:** **Develop protocols for angler based head boat reporting**
- Task 1: To implement for-hire telephone survey for effort data and at-sea sampling protocols for catch and bycatch data (2006)
- Recommendation 8:** **Develop species- specific surveys for recreational catch and effort**
- Task 1: FIN Committee needs to identify species that should be targets for specific surveys (2008)
- Task 2: Implement surveys based on geographic and spatial range for the identified species, based on available funds (2009)

Recommendation 9: Investigate methods for improving sampling coverage of fishing activities in inshore tidal areas

Task 1: Task FIN partners (via wave meeting) to evaluate the need to adding these areas in the recreational site register (2008)

EFFORT

Recommendation 10: Implement detailed effort module

Task 1: Implement detailed effort pilot study to test design and protocols for module (2007)

Task 2: Implement detailed effort module (with modifications learned from pilot survey) Gulf-wide (2008)

Recommendation 11: Refine area fished by providing more detail about where fishing is occurring

Task 1: FIN Committee needs to explore the possibility of developing more detailed area fished codes or explore feasibility of implementing vessel-monitoring systems (VMS) for fisheries where more specific areas are needed (2008)

Recommendation 12: Implement effort survey using marine recreational fishing licenses as sampling frame

Task 1: Identify the various state structures for recreational fishing licenses (2006)

Task 2: Ensure Gulf States are collecting all of the critical data elements (2007)

Recommendation 13: Support for development of marine recreational fishing licenses in Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands

Task 1: FIN needs to send letter to appropriate personnel stating their support of implementation of recreational fishing licenses in the Caribbean (2006)

Recommendation 14: Establish and maintain recreational fishing sampling in the Caribbean

Task 1: Continue recreational sampling for the shore, private and for-hire modes in Puerto Rico (2006)

Task 2: Implement recreational sampling for the shore, private and for-hire modes in the U.S. Virgin Islands (2006)

Recommendation 15: Refine protocols for sampling smaller geographic regions

Task 1: Identify geographic regions of interest (2007)

Task 2: Investigate feasibility of sampling these identified regions (2008)

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC

Recommendation 16: Implement the FIN Social and Economic module

Task 1: Implement FIN Social and Economic module by developing fisheries-specific studies. Issues to consider include:

- Separate social and economic data collection activities from the catch and effort activities, if possible
- Where data collections must be combined, negotiate questions to be asked to minimize impacts on catch and effort data quality
- Outreach needed to explain why data needed and how it will be used (2006-2010)

BIOLOGICAL SAMPLING

Recommendation 17: Increase number of species sampled under FIN biological module

Task 1: Data Collection Plan Work Group should continue to discuss prioritizing additional species for sampling (2006-2010)

Recommendation 18: Establish regional otolith processing center to assure adequate capacity for otolith processing

Task 1: Task Otolith Processors Training Group to evaluate current otolith processing vs. collection activities and determine if increased capacity is needed. Group should look at increasing state/federal capacity vs. establishing a regional facility (2007)

Recommendation 19: Establish targets for stomach, tissue and gonads and develop sampling protocols

Task 1: Charge Data Collection Work Group to evaluate existing procedures for collecting gonads, stomachs, and tissue samples and develop standard protocols for the FIN (2010)

Recommendation 20: Refine approach for otolith and length sampling

Task 1: Charge Data Collection Plan Work Group to coordinate with stock assessment scientists to determine appropriate level of sampling for otoliths and lengths (2006)

Task 2: Explore possibilities of getting feedback regarding this issue from the SEDAR process (2007)

OUTREACH

Recommendation 21: Evaluate and improve current industry outreach program

Task 1: FIN Committee needs to explore ways to further involve SEA GRANT in outreach process (2006)

Recommendation 22: Evaluate and increase targeted outreach activities (electronic logbook)

Task 1: FIN partners need to notify dealers about electronic reporting option (2007)

Recommendation 23: Improve support to dealers regarding collection of commercial data

Task 1: FIN needs to survey dealers for input on best methods for facilitating dealer reporting (2007)

Recommendation 24: Develop outreach materials (annual brochures, video, etc.) and coordinate with agency contacts

Task 1: Coordinate with ACCSP and NMFS to develop outreach/education materials: (2006-2010)

- Annual brochures by coast or by state
- Include species-specific information
- Updated video for distribution
- Explanations of surveys in laymen's terms

METADATA

Recommendation 25: Implement metadata module in FIN by determining methods for collection and entry

Task 1: FIN needs to establish metadata workgroup. This group needs to examine a variety issues including: (2006)

Documentation of current methods

- Data collection methods
- Sampling and estimation methods
- QC/QA methods

Documentation of historical methods

Integrate fishery-independent data from other sources (weather, tides/blooms, other environmental data)

Integrate fishery-dependent data not currently included (fishing regulations, tournaments, etc.)

BYCATCH

Recommendation 26: Improve bycatch reporting

Task 1: FIN Committee needs to review priority species list developed by work groups (2006)

Task 2: Charge Data Collection Work Group to evaluate bycatch module against current needs and national observer program (2008)

Task 3: Implement the bycatch data collection module (2009)

Recommendation 27: Develop methods to evaluate self-reported discards data

- Task 1: Task Biological/Environmental Work Group with determining appropriate method for validating discards information obtained from dockside interviews (2007)

QUOTA MONITORING**Recommendation 28: Discuss strategy for implementation of in-season quota monitoring**

- Task 1: FIN needs to coordinate with managers to assess methods appropriate for support of in-season, real-time monitoring of quotas (2007)

Recommendation 29: Review opportunity to improve timeliness of data to support quota monitoring

- Task 1: Outline methods and costs for implementing quota monitoring and identify possible problems with implementation (2008)
- Task 2: Improve timeliness for data by deploying technology improvements (2009)
- Task 3: FIN needs to review existing data collection activities and determine where electronic reporting can eliminate duplicative reporting (2010)

DATA MANAGEMENT**Recommendation 30: Integrate use of GIS and evaluate need for standardized reports (graphical representation) (2008)****Recommendation 31: Evaluate tech infrastructure's ability to support evolving needs (2006-2010)****Recommendation 32: Fully implement registration-tracking module (2006)****Recommendation 33: Get recreational fishing effort information into FIN Data Management System**

- Task 1: Task FIN, ACCSP and NMFS staff to incorporate effort data into systems
- Task 2: Custom query tool (2006)

Recommendation 34: Improve data entry of recreational data, field data entry, and data entry software

- Task 1: FIN needs to test electronic field data entry (2008)

Recommendation 35: Develop ability to post-stratify data

- Task 1: Identify how partners want data to be post-stratified (2007)

Task 2: Update existing methods to allow for this type of stratification (2007)

Recommendation 36: Investigate digital archive of files

Task 1: Task FIN staff to assess benefits of digital archiving of data forms (2006)

Recommendation 37: Improve estimates of uncertainty

Task 1: FIN needs to evaluate variance estimation methods and improve if needed (2009)

MANAGEMENT

Recommendation 38: Develop sampling strategy for high priority management species

Task 1: To increase sampling levels overall (2007)

Task 2: Optimize sampling allocations improving precision of estimates for key species (2008)

Recommendation 39: Continue FIN participation in national FIS (2006-2010)

Recommendation 40: Evaluate need to develop an eco-system data module (2010)

**FIN Social/Economic Work Group
Conference Call Summary
February 2, 2005**

The meeting was called to order at 9:05 a.m. and the following people were present:

Mike Travis, NMFS, St. Petersburg, FL
Rita Curtis, NMFS, Silver Spring, MD
Walter Keithly, LSU, Baton Rouge, LA
Stephen Holiman, NMFS, St. Petersburg, FL
David Carter, NMFS, St. Petersburg, FL
Larry Perruso, NMFS, Miami, FL
Brad Gentner, NMFS, Silver Spring, MD
Jim Waters, NMFS, Beaufort, NC
Dave Donaldson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Purpose of the Meeting/Overview of FIN

D. Donaldson stated that the main purpose of the conference call was to discuss the next steps in the development of the FIN social/economic data collection plan. This plan will help FIN develop social/economic data collection projects.

Further Development of FIN Social/Economic Data Collection Plan

D. Donaldson stated that the outline of the plan has been developed and approved by the FIN Committee and now the group needs to develop verbiage for each of the identified sections. It was pointed out that there have been several requests regarding updates to the appendices made to the FIN partners but no comments have been received to date. The group expressed concern that there was not a clearly defined need for these data by the state partners. It was pointed out that because the need is not clearly identified, it is difficult to further develop the data collection plan. It was suggested that FIN needed to get a better handle on the states' needs for social and economic data. After some discussion, the group came up with three options for compiling this information.

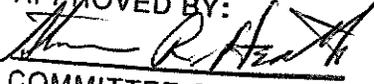
- 1) Hire a contractor to contact the states and compile the states' needs for social and economic data;
- 2) Convene a panel of experts to examine the issue of states' needs for social and economic data and task this panel to develop a list of needs; and
- 3) The Gulf Commission hires an economist to address this issue.

The first two options are short-term solutions to this issue and probably can be addressed this year. The last option is more long-term and needs to be addressed by the FIN Committee as well as the Commission. D. Donaldson stated that the FIN Gulf of Mexico Geographic Subcommittee will be meeting in March and these options can be presented to the group at

that time. Based on the discussed by the Subcommittee, the Work Group will take the necessary actions after the March meeting. J. Waters stated that he would provide the federal social/economic data collection plan to D. Donaldson for inclusion in the meeting materials packet for the FIN Gulf of Mexico Geographic Subcommittee.

Being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:55 a.m.

SEAMAP Subcommittee Meeting
MINUTES
Biloxi, MS
August 3, 2005

APPROVED BY:

COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

Call to Order

Chairman Jim Hanifen called the meeting to order at 8:32 a.m. The following members and others were present:

Members:

Jim Hanifen, *Chairman*, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Richard Waller, USM/CMS/GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Paul Choucair, TPWD, Rockport, TX
Steve Heath, ADCNR/MRD, Gulf Shores, AL
Rick Leard, GMFMC, Tampa, FL
Mark Leiby, FWC/FMRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Gilmore "Butch" Pellegrin, NOAA Fisheries, Pascagoula, MS

Others:

Karen Mitchell, NOAA Fisheries, Pascagoula, MS
Mark McDuff, NOAA Fisheries, Pascagoula, MS
Doug Beard, USGS, Reston, VA
Edgardo Ojeda, UPR Sea Grant, Mayaguez, PR

Staff:

Larry Simpson, *Executive Director*, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Dave Donaldson, *Data Program Manager*, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Jeff Rester, *SEAMAP/Habitat Program Coordinator*, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Cheryl Noble, *Staff Assistant*, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Adoption of Agenda

The agenda was adopted as submitted.

Approval of Minutes

R. Waller moved to approve the March 14, 2005 minutes as submitted. P. Choucair seconded and the motion passed.

Administrative Report

J. Rester reported the Spring Plankton Survey took place in May. The Summer Shrimp/Groundfish Survey started on June 1st and continued through July 31st. This was the 24th year for the survey. R. Waller stated they had to evacuate due to Tropical Storm Cindy thus putting the survey off for several days. This backed up the summer cruise and two other contracted cruises. They also had some mechanical and hardware problems, but NMFS was able to do most of the stations off Louisiana. He said even with all these problems, they were able to complete the survey.

J. Rester said real time shrimp data were again produced and distributed for seven weeks this summer and an end of cruise report was also distributed. He will discuss this further under agenda item 11.

J. Rester distributed a summary report of the Shrimp/Groundfish Work Group meeting in April. He said the main topic discussed was the operations manual and how each state and NMFS either did or did not follow the manual. The only real action item was the Work Group felt that several questions needed to be answered by the Environmental Data Work Group. This included whether salinity needed to be measured down to the thousandths decimal place and they also questioned the utility of some of the information collected regarding water color, Beaufort sea state, cloud cover, and other items that required a subjective judgment from the observer. He asked for the Subcommittee's permission to correspond with the Environmental Data Work Group and ask them their opinions on this. D. Donaldson stated that at a previous SEAMAP Subcommittee meeting it was decided not to take the readings that are so subjective because no one uses them. The Subcommittee asked J. Rester to review all work group reports and SEAMAP minutes to see if this has already been done. If it has, it needs to be changed in the Operations Manual. J. Rester will contact Karen Mitchell, who is in charge of the operations manual, to ask her to make the changes if they have already been approved.

Status of FY2006 Budget

J. Rester reported the house budget does not have specific information on SEAMAP. The Senate mark has SEAMAP at level funding of \$1.385 million for 2006. D. Donaldson stated that they usually go with the Senate mark and he talked to E. Roche and she thinks the budget will be out soon.

J. Hanifen said that in the past, Larry Simpson takes the SEAMAP fact sheet to Congress explaining how important the program is to try to get more funding. L. Simpson suggested that the state directors and officials in the Caribbean write a letter explaining how important SEAMAP is and the consequences of what will happen if they stay level funded. The letter should emphasize the importance of the SEAMAP data and identify the users for this data. It should also state when SEAMAP data has not been used because it has not been updated, compatible, or for whatever the reason was due to lack of funding. The Subcommittee discussed how ecosystems-based management seems to be what the future holds and decided they should investigate how SEAMAP can adapt to the changes and data demands for this management approach. They need to incorporate

the right “buzz” words into the SEAMAP documents instead of using the same language that has been used since the program’s inception.

S. Heath informed the Subcommittee that Alabama’s reef fish video data were not used for the SEDAR red snapper assessment. The reason given was artificial habitat is not used for the assessments because the data is not comparable to the natural habitat. He said if the data does not start being used, Alabama may discontinue this survey. He suggested NMFS do comparable surveys like they did for the trawls years ago, to see if it is compatible. He said if Congress hears that SEAMAP data is not being used, they will have no reason to give more funding. The Subcommittee agreed to investigate this further. S. Heath will report on this at the October meeting.

P. Choucair brought to the Subcommittee’s attention that the Ocean Report released last year recommended doubling funding for marine or fisheries research. The Harte Research Institute has discussed sponsoring a summit in November to discuss the data in the Gulf of Mexico. Another political group is trying to bring all the governors of the Gulf States together to sign a document stating they agree to work together on fisheries resources. He suggested SEAMAP can approach some of these issues through this symposium. J. Rester stated how frustrating it is that all of these new programs come into existence and receives millions of dollars to do basically what SEAMAP has been doing for 25 years.

The Subcommittee discussed LNG and how managers will need data to decide this issue. It was suggested that SEAMAP approach the oil companies to fund plankton sampling. The Subcommittee also decided this topic should be incorporated into the letters written to Congress. The Governors and state directors need to know that SEAMAP would be the best way to collect this data.

After further discussion on how to receive additional funding for SEAMAP, the Subcommittee charged J. Rester to draft a letter and circulate to the Subcommittee for final approval in October. After the final letter is approved, each Subcommittee member will decide which key personnel in their state needs to sign the letter and then it will be mailed to Congress.

Activities and Budget Needs for FY2006

Florida - M. Leiby stated Florida will try to continue doing the same work as previous years with level funding. He stated they are only managing the archiving center, they have not sampled in quite a few years.

Alabama - S. Heath stated Alabama will continue doing the same work unless the decision is made to stop the trap video portion. If so, that money will go into sampling. He said if more money is made available, they can use it.

Mississippi - R. Waller stated Mississippi will continue also, but they will eventually need more funding to cover the higher fuel costs.

Louisiana - J. Hanifen said they will continue too, but they did have to decrease some field work when they lost the temporary increase. He said due to high fuel costs they had to drop one survey so

they are only doing the summer and fall shrimp/groundfish and plankton associated with those because they cannot afford to go offshore.

Texas - P. Choucair said Texas will continue and should be okay for the next two years but it has been mentioned to drop offshore sampling in Texas as an option for reducing operating costs.

GSMFC - J. Rester stated the Commission will also continue at level funding. He did ask when the effort becomes an effort of diminishing returns. When will SEAMAP get to the point that they are not collecting enough data to be worth anything? If there are only five samples collected and statistically there should be ten samples to do something with, what is the point?

NMFS - B. Pellegrin said NMFS will continue at level funding and they hope the *OREGON II* will last a few more years. They plan to have a new research vessel in two to three years.

The Subcommittee discussed having an external review of SEAMAP. Having others review SEAMAP and give guidance and recommendations on what to focus on in the future may help the program receive more funding. They will discuss this at the joint meeting under the management plan agenda item.

Metadata Production and Possible USGS Help

D. Beard gave an overview of the USGS Aquatic Information Program and explained how this can be useful for SEAMAP data. A complete copy of his presentation can be obtained from the GSMFC.

SEAMAP - Gulf Priorities and Costs for 2006-2010

J. Rester emailed the Subcommittee with a list of priorities for the future. He asked for more recommendations. The Subcommittee agreed that restoring existing programs should be the top priority. They felt everything on the list is a priority and they will send J. Rester breakdown amounts for each item by September 1st to incorporate into the new management plan. The Subcommittee asked J. Rester to re-send the list along with other items discussed today and they will send it back to him with the appropriate figures from each state. P. Choucair stated that if SEAMAP decides to have an external review, the cost would be at least \$50,000, so that amount also has to be considered.

Review of New SEAMAP Atlas Format

J. Rester said he and P. Choucair have been working on a new atlas format and P. Choucair developed an interactive form to be used with the SEAMAP data. The user would receive a disk with the SEAMAP data on it and the data can be queried to receive different information such as trend data, species data, etc. The disk would also contain the preface material stating how many trawls were made for each survey, how many stations, dates, times, etc. He asked for suggestions from the Subcommittee and asked if they still wanted to produce an atlas or try to have something interactive online. The Subcommittee wishes to continue doing an atlas in this CD-ROM format and when the online capability is available, they will consider discontinuing the atlas. J. Rester said he should have more information to present at the October meeting on the ArcIMS website.

Discussion of Coordinated Fishery Independent Activities

D. Donaldson said the latest protocol is in the folders and he will review this at the joint meeting instead of doing it for both meetings. He said they hope to have a data structure by the end of the year.

2005 Real Time Data

J. Rester said the real time data were distributed by email to approximately 65 people and mailed to about 200 people. He said he has to work on how to do the length frequencies and work out some other kinks for next year's mailings. He asked for suggestions and the Subcommittee stated they liked the new format. He said he and P. Choucair will continue working on this and incorporating new ideas that they did not have time to implement for this year's mailings.

Preparation of Cooperative Agreements

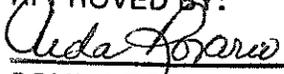
J. Rester said this is the end of a three year cycle and C. Binkley will discuss a new process for the cooperative agreements in the Joint Meeting. He said that after C. Binkley gives her presentation and the group asks questions, he will make the modifications to the cooperative agreement and send to the Subcommittee. The members can then make their changes and send the cooperative agreements to C. Binkley.

Other Business

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 11:47 a.m.

**SEAMAP - GULF, SOUTH ATLANTIC
AND CARIBBEAN SUBCOMMITTEES
JOINT MINUTES**

Biloxi, MS
August 3, 2005

APPROVED BY:

COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

Chairman J. Hanifen called the meeting to order at 1:10 p.m. The following members and others were present:

Members:

James Hanifen, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Paul Choucair, TPWD, Rockport, TX
Steve Heath, ADCNR/MRD, Gulf Shores, AL
Richard Waller, USM/CMS/GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Richard Leard, GMFMC, Tampa, FL
Butch Pellegrin, NOAA Fisheries, Pascagoula, MS
Mark Leiby, FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Henry Ansley, GADNR, Brunswick, GA
Katy West, NCDMF, Washington, NC
Roger Uwate, USVIDFW, St. Thomas, USVI
John Merriner, NMFS/SEFSC, Beaufort, NC
Dale Theiling, SCDNR, Charleston, SC
Roger Pugliese, SAFMC, Charleston, SC

Others:

Ellie F. Roche, NOAA Fisheries, St. Petersburg, FL
Tina Udouj, FWC/FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Larry DeLancey, SCDNR, Charleston, SC

Staff:

Scott Nichols, NMFS, Pascagoula, MS
Cynthia Binkley, NOAA Fisheries, St. Petersburg, FL
Karen Mitchell, NMFS, Pascagoula, MS
Mark McDuff, NMFS, Pascagoula, MS
Larry Simpson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Dave Donaldson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Elizabeth Griffen, ASMFC, Washington, DC
Edgardo Ojeda, UPR Sea Grant, Mayaguez, PR
Jeff Rester, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Cheryl Noble, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Adoption of Agenda

The agenda was adopted as submitted.

Approval of Minutes

R. Pugliese said to change ESDEM to ESDIM on page 3, and to change 23rd year of the program to the 16th year; J. Hanifen said to add "million" after 1.4., 1.62 and 1.75 on page 5 under status of FY 2005 funds; and R. Uwate said on page 2, first paragraph, change "She said they are" to "She said the Virgin Islands are." The August 4, 2004 minutes were approved with these changes.

Overview of SEAMAP-Caribbean

R. Uwate reported the Virgin Islands DFW will purchase a new 30' research vessel with partial funding from SEAMAP in the amount of \$41,868 and additional funding from USFWS Sports Fish Restoration funds in the amount of \$80,000. All approvals have been made and when the local accounts are opened, they will proceed with the purchase. The Reef Fish Survey, which is trap and hook and line, is on hold until they purchase the new vessel. The missing 60% of the historic USVI trap and hook & line data were identified and entered into the database and completed in January 2005. An independent consultant completed an initial analysis of the entire database and the report is now available upon request. The St. Croix embayment historic conch data were collected and the data entry was completed. The analysis of the data should be completed shortly. Historically, St. Croix and Puerto Rico have done drift hook & line fishing while St. Thomas/St. John have done anchor fishing. An index between drift and anchor hook & line fishing is needed so that results can be compared. This must be done concurrently with the St. Thomas/St. John drift fishing that is on hold for the new vessel.

The Puerto Rico DNER completed the final report on the whelk, *Cittarium pica*, population surveys. Field work for this study was completed in 2004 and a final report was finalized in March 2005. The Puerto Rico DNER began a fisheries independent trap and hook and line fishing survey in April 2005. To date about 40 trips have been completed and the DNER staff is averaging two to three trips per week. DNER is using supplemental funds to support staff salaries for additional fisheries independent trap and hook and line trips.

Overview of SEAMAP-Gulf

J. Hanifen reported the Fall Plankton cruise was completed in September 2004. Alabama, NMFS, Mississippi, and Louisiana sampled waters on the west Florida shelf and northern Gulf of Mexico. The objective of this survey was to collect ichthyoplankton samples with bongo and neuston gear for the purpose of estimating abundance and defining the distribution of eggs, larvae, and small juveniles of Gulf of Mexico fishes, particularly king and Spanish mackerel, lutjanids and sciaenids.

The Fall Shrimp/Groundfish Survey was conducted last fall from off Mobile, Alabama to the U.S.-Mexican border. Vessels sampled waters out to 60 fm with trawls and plankton nets in addition to environmental sampling. The objectives of the survey were to sample the northern Gulf of Mexico to determine abundance and distribution of demersal organisms from inshore waters to 60 fm, obtain

length-frequency measurements for major finfish and shrimp species to determine population size structures, collect environmental data to investigate potential relationships between abundance and distribution of organisms and environmental parameters, and collect ichthyoplankton samples to determine relative abundance and distribution of eggs and larvae of commercially and recreationally important fish species.

The Spring Plankton Survey took place this year in May. Gulf waters were sampled from the west Florida shelf to the Louisiana/Texas border. This was the twenty-fourth year for the survey. The objectives of the survey were to collect ichthyoplankton samples for estimates of the abundance and distribution of Atlantic bluefin tuna larvae and collect environmental data at all ichthyoplankton stations.

The Summer Shrimp/Groundfish Survey took place this summer. This was the twenty-fourth year for the survey. Objectives of the survey were to monitor size and distribution of penaeid shrimp during or prior to migration of brown shrimp from bays to the open Gulf, aid in evaluating the "Texas Closure" management measure of the Gulf Council's Shrimp Fishery Management Plan, and provide information on shrimp and groundfish stocks across the northern Gulf of Mexico from inshore waters to 50 fm. The overall sampling strategy was to work from the eastern Gulf to the Texas/Mexico border, in order to sample during or prior to migration of brown shrimp from bays to the open Gulf area. Real-time shrimp data were again produced from the survey. Catches of shrimp and finfish were reported weekly from the survey and plots and catch rates were distributed to interested individuals.

J. Hanifen reported that another major issue in the Gulf that has touched SEAMAP has been LNG ports. There are seven offshore LNG facilities that have been proposed for the Gulf of Mexico from Alabama to south Texas. These are for importation of liquefied natural gas using ambient seawater to bring the liquefied gas back into a gaseous state where it can be put into a pipeline and distributed onshore. These plants will use up to 200 million gallons of seawater a day to warm the gas, affecting the water temperature by as much as 10°C in addition to being chlorinated. SEAMAP data has been used during the process of evaluating the impact of these plants on the Gulf of Mexico fisheries. All of the affected Gulf States and the Commission have been working with industry, states and NMFS to attempt to evaluate what the impacts are going to be. One of the major problems with the SEAMAP data is that it is only summer and fall data but it is predicting year-round impacts to the ichthyoplankton. The Gulf Subcommittee believes the LNG issue really illustrates the need to expand SEAMAP fishery independent sampling in the Gulf. J. Rester then showed a map of the locations of all of the proposed LNG facilities and the Committee discussed the negative impacts. R. Pugliese informed the Committee that because of the LNG issue and the big rush for alternative fuel activities, the South Atlantic Council passed a revised energy policy. This was done in anticipation of a vast array of different types of technology to be used in the future that will affect fisheries management and habitat. He will send the Committee a copy of the policy document.

Overview of SEAMAP-South Atlantic

R. Pugliese reported the South Atlantic Seemap activities include the Shallow Water Trawl survey. The objectives of the survey are to collect data on size, abundance, distribution, and seasonality of select species of fish and crustaceans, to record species composition, biomass, abundance, length frequencies, and size, sex and gonadal conditions of white, pink and brown shrimp and other target species. The spring and summer cruises have been completed and the fall cruise will take place in late October or early November of this year. The Shallow Water Trawl Survey is the foundation for the SEAMAP-SA activities. There have been modifications to begin incorporating new life history information into the survey to try to internally expand the value of this survey. There will be activities accessing the capability to better incorporate the survey into species assessments.

The second activity of the SEAMAP-SA is the Bottom Mapping Project. The original Bottom Mapping Project was wholly funded through SEAMAP in joint state efforts to build comprehensive baseline datasets to support identification of critical essential fish habitat in the South Atlantic. The project has moved into a second phase in collaboration with a number of agencies to develop protocols to capture deepwater (200 - 2000m) data on bottom habitats providing a foundation on which to address new information on deep water species. This will be developed in three stages. The project is now currently in the actual collection phase. There will be a more rapid assessment capability of information that may be needed on cruises such as ocean exploration, it can provide some base habitat characterization and benthic map components through the internet mapping server. The project is going well and moving forward, anticipating only good things in the long term.

Other activities of the SEAMAP-SA include the ongoing winter survey for striped bass, the Pamlico Sound Survey and work group meetings and reports in support of all the activities.

Overview of NMFS

B. Pellegrin reported all of the surveys have been covered this past year and will be covered this coming year. He said M. McDuff will give a presentation later on data management issues. He then referred to the SEDAR process that S. Nichols mentioned last year where red snapper data from SEAMAP was used for assessments. He said this year SEAMAP played a prominent role in other SEADAR processes for red grouper, triggerfish, amberjack, and vermilion snapper. There were reports and papers submitted to SEDAR that were derived from SEAMAP data. This reconfirms that more people are aware of SEAMAP and using the data. When S. Nichols arrives, he will give a more detailed report if necessary.

Discussion of Coordinated Fishery Independent Activities

D. Donaldson said the revised sampling protocols for the coordinated fishery independent activities are in the handouts. He said the work group met earlier this year via conference call to make modifications and updates, but there has not been a lot of progress in finalizing the protocols. He stated that at the last meeting very detailed protocols for various gears from various states were

given and they have been working to generalize the protocols. He asked the committee to review the revisions and to provide comments.

D. Donaldson said that he has been working with the National Biological Information Infrastructure (NBII) on a pilot program to develop a standardize database for fishery independent data in the Gulf. NBII is working with contractors at Oregon State to develop the pilot database structure and then incorporate the different gear protocols. He hopes to have something by the end of the year to fit the program's needs and he will keep the committee informed on the progress.

R. Waller asked why it is so difficult to make headway on these protocols. D. Donaldson said that part of the problem is ACCSP and FIN were used as templates and in looking back, the whole concept works well but it is much easier to develop standardized protocols for fishery dependent data than it is for fishery independent data because each state has been using the same protocols for years and it is not going to be easy to convince them to change to different protocols. There may not be a need to do that because once the metadata is gathered, that may not be necessary. Gathering metadata is another component of the project with NBII.

The Committee further discussed the protocols and D. Donaldson asked all members to send their comments to him by August 31st. The work group will then meet or have a conference call to incorporate the comments, and D. Donaldson will keep the Committee informed.

Updating the SEAMAP Management Plan

E. Griffin said she sent all the coordinators a draft copy of the management plan to distribute to their members. She said they need to move forward on the plan quickly. She asked for a compiled list of priorities with dollar amounts from each component so that she will have the total figure. She said there are several items highlighted in the plan that she wants the committee to review. The draft plan does not include any information on the fisheries independent data coordination initiative and she asked if that needed to be included. She said she would like to have the plan finalized by the end of the year so she needs final comments from the components by the end of this month (August). After all of the comments are incorporated, she will distribute it for final approval of the components and their oversight committees.

J. Hanifen said the Gulf component discussed that SEAMAP should have an independent program review because the last review was done in 1987. He asked if anyone knows approximately how much a review would cost. D. Donaldson said it would probably cost around \$10,000. J. Merriner said the NOAA SESC should be responsible for the program review and would probably fund it. The Committee then discussed delaying the management plan until after the review. After discussion, the Committee decided to go forward with the management plan and have one of the goals in the plan to be to have a full professional review with the understanding the plan may be amended from the review recommendations. The Committee asked the coordinators, D. Donaldson, J. Merriner and S. Nichols to guide the review and to contact P. Thompson at NOAA SESC to ask if

his office will coordinate the review and possibly fund it. If SEAMAP has to fund the review, that has to be taken into consideration during the budget discussions.

P. Choucair stated another priority needs to be added in the executive summary dealing with data dissemination capabilities and warehouse capabilities. E. Griffin said that was covered under Goal 5 but P. Choucair believes this should be a priority. After extensive discussion, the Committee asked P. Choucair to draft the language and submit it with his final comments on the management plan.

Status of FY2006 Funds

S. Nichols said SEAMAP will probably again be level funded which would be \$1.385 million minus taxes. He said the Committee used \$1.353 million last year to plan, but actually received \$1.365 million. J. Hanifen suggested using status quo to plan.

Proposed Activities and Budget Needs for FY 2006

Caribbean - R. Uwate stated the Caribbean, along with the other components would like to restore current projects to original sampling effort and expand and start new projects. He said they will try to continue at level funding and stated as everyone knows, fuel, staff, sea days, and prices have been steadily increasing. Level funding for the Caribbean is \$143,132.

Gulf - J. Hanifen said they are also contending with increased operating costs but they will strive to maintain current levels of activities at level funding which is \$612,430.

South Atlantic - R. Pugliese reported the one program that will be funded under SEAMAP, the Shallow Water Trawl Survey conducted by SCDNR will cost \$383,981.40 which is a slight increase from last year. He said they had an additional \$20,000 for the Bottom Mapping Project. E. Griffin said the Bottom Mapping project is over and that will not be in the budget. They will try to continue at level funding which is \$375,387.

NMFS - S. Nichols said NMFS will stand at \$220,000. J. Rester said with these figures it adds up to \$1,359,543 million and last year SEAMAP was allocated \$1,365,134 million so approximately \$5,000-\$6,000 extra should be available, that is assuming the taxes and other deductions are the same. He said \$1,400 is usually taken out for Senator Hollins' scholarship fund and hopefully that will not be deducted this year. E. Roche said to plan on deducting the \$1,400.

J. Hanifen said the Committee should plan on an additional \$5,600 (approximately). **After discussion on the extra funding, D. Theiling moved to use any extra funds to pay for a program review of the SEAMAP program. P. Choucair seconded and the motion passed.**

C. Binkley said she should know the exact amount after she receives the conference mark which usually comes out in November. S. Nichols asked to have the budget breakdowns sent to him as soon as the final amounts are received.

Coordinated Effort to Increase the SEAMAP Budget

J. Rester stated the Gulf discussed different ways to increase the SEAMAP budget. He said L. Simpson suggested the SEAMAP Committee draft a letter explaining the importance of SEAMAP, the history of SEAMAP, and the decreased funding level of SEAMAP. Once the letter is approved, it should be sent to all of the state directors of the different marine resource agencies in the Gulf, Caribbean and South Atlantic for their signatures and then it should be sent to the congressional delegation. This would show a joint effort of the states stating SEAMAP is important and it should receive increased funding. He also suggested sending a letter to NMFS asking for increased funding for SEAMAP stressing the importance of the program and showing how it has been level funded for all of these years.

L. Simpson also suggested utilizing the LNG issue and the ecosystem management issue. L. Simpson asked S. Nichols if there will be any increase in the SEAMAP budget within NMFS. S. Nichols said he does not think so. E. Roche said there have been recommendations for increases in the budget but not specifically for SEAMAP. L. Simpson said SEAMAP is a core program of the agency. It has over 20 years of data in stock assessments and now with an issue as big as LNG, SEAMAP can provide the data needed if they have the funds to sample. There needs to be a coordinated effort within NMFS and the states to go to Congress and ask for increased funding. R. Leard stated another thing that was discussed at the Gulf meeting was, because of the LNG issues particularly in the Gulf, the state people should approach their governors to let them know how SEAMAP can provide the data needed to either say LNG is okay with an open loop system or not. It needs to be emphasized to state politicians that SEAMAP can be a vital part of the LNG issue especially with more funding. This would be taking an approach at both the state and national level. All SEAMAP activities need to be emphasized in the letter along with the program's goals and objectives.

The Committee asked J. Rester to draft the letter and distribute it to all the committees for comments. After those comments are incorporated, J. Rester will finalize the letter to have it approved by each committee's oversight committees. After approval, it will be sent to the state directors for their signatures and then sent to the appropriate Congressional members. L. Simpson said the final letter should be mailed to the Congressional delegation in early January.

Preparation of Multi-Year FY06 Grants

C. Binkley reported that this year NOAA implemented a new grants processing system with grants online. She said several people here have had the opportunity to submit grants through grants.gov in the NOAA system which is called grants online. This year was the first year that both systems were used and there were a few problems with training so a lot of the grants were not awarded as quickly as they have been in the past. Most of these problems were solved and no problems are anticipated for 2006.

The current multi-year grants expire this year so new multi-year grants need to be started for 2006. These can be for three, four or five years or, after listening to previous discussions, the current grant can be extended if there is reasonable expectation that more funds will be received within a year. Regardless of which way the committee chooses, new proposals will still have to be submitted through grants.gov. She also said it has to be consistent, everyone must submit for the same timeframe, three, four or five years. She reminded the committee to always file an extension if all of the work is not done within the specified timeframe instead of losing funds. She said she would like all proposals submitted by October 15th. The Committee decided to submit for the five year grant. C. Binkley said if more funds are received than what the Committee plans for, it can be amended by adding a proposal to the existing grant or start a whole new grant.

Review of the SEAMAP Web Site

E. Griffin reported the SEAMAP logo was finalized and approved. She said she has a CD with the logo or it can be copied from the SEAMAP website, SEAMAP.org. She then showed the committee the website and asked for comments and any other links the committee would like on the website. The Committee agreed that all SEAMAP reports should be available on the website. After each member reviews the website, they will send all comments and suggestions to E. Griffin.

Update on NEAMAP Activities

E. Griffin demonstrated the NEAMAP website: www.neamap.net (the site name "www.neamap.org" was already taken). She said a MOU was signed last year by all of the partners and they decided the first thing they wanted to do was to design a logo and website.

The ASMFC Executive Director lobbied for five different projects and secured 2 million dollars of additional funding via the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act (ACFCMA), 25 thousand dollars of which was allocated to fund a near-shore bottom-trawl survey for the Mid-Atlantic region (for additional information, see www.neamap.net). A pilot study of the trawl survey is currently under development. ASMFC issued a request for proposals and the selected proposal was submitted by the Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS). The survey will start in September 2006 and will last for approximately 30 days. Funding for the pilot survey has been secured for fall 2006. The ASMFC hopes to obtain additional funding to continue the survey for several years, develop the survey into a permanent survey for the mid-Atlantic region, and eventually expand its spatial coverage, currently from Cape Hatteras to Montauk to Maine. She then asked how closely related the Committee wants NEAMAP and SEAMAP to be. She said that it is important to have data that are consistent from the northeast and the southeast along the coast. Some Atlantic coastal states are already involved with both SEAMAP and NEAMAP related activities, and ASMFC staff is also devoted to both programs. She asked if the Committee would like to pursue funding for these fisheries-independent programs as one coordinated effort or to continue to let each program stand on their own. After discussion, the Committee decided to keep the funding efforts separate at this time.

Data Management Issues

M. McDuff reported that metadata documentation is still extremely crucial to all of the programs. Wording needs to be developed that describes all of the SEAMAP survey designs. This documentation would be given with the data to make it more useful and easier to understand. This is critical and everyone has not submitted this to him yet. He asked the members to please get this in as soon as possible.

He said they are trying to get data online as soon as possible. He said in the short term they will put enough information online to describe the datasets, to let the people see what the data looks like, and then they can download sets of data in their entirety. The data will have to be filtered by design and collection so he would not put the South Atlantic and Gulf trawl data together because they have two separate protocols for collecting and the terminology and definitions are different.

M. McDuff then demonstrated examples of using ORACLE Tools and Discover products with SEAMAP data. He showed what each product can do with the SEAMAP data. He said preset reports will be available and that will make it easier to track how the data is being used.

K. West asked if the goal is to have links on the SEAMAP website to access data from each component's surveys. M. McDuff said yes but there will be multiple trials on exactly how the data will be disseminated and what terminology will be used. He said they do not want to have a dataset available that does not have full documentation. He also wants to develop a form that users must fill out before downloading the data so he can track who is using the data and for what purpose and to make sure the original data collector receives credit.

Planning for 2007^U Joint Annual Meeting

The South Atlantic will host the next joint meeting and suggested areas were Orlando, Charleston, Port Canaveral, and Savannah. E. Griffin will investigate costs and send information to the other Coordinators to decide the best place to meet. The Committee decided to keep the meeting timeframe in the first week of August.

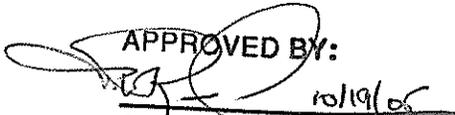
Other Business

K. West asked if anyone has or knows where to obtain a current listing of crustacean common names. It was suggested to contact the Charleston Southeastern Taxonomic Center and/or Harriet Perry.

P. Choucair informed the committee that if SEAMAP would have had a yearly increase of 3% since 1982 on \$1.5 million, the budget would currently be \$2.9 million. He said to keep this in mind when asking for more funding. J. Rester will research the inflation rate since 1985 and also the indirect/direct costs over the years and inform the Committee of the amount. This will be useful information in justifying asking amounts in funding request letters and the management plan

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 5:15 p.m.

APPROVED BY:


10/19/05
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**STATE/FEDERAL FISHERIES MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

Wednesday, August 24, 2005
New Orleans, Louisiana

Facilitator Larry Simpson called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. The following members and staff were present:

Members

Ginny Vail, FFWCC, Tallahassee, FL
Vernon Minton, ADCNR, Gulf Shores, AL
Corky Perret, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
John Roussel, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Mike Ray, TPWD, Austin, TX
Dave Van Voorhees, NMFS, Silver Spring, MD
John Forester (proxy for C. Brown), USFWS, Baton Rouge, LA
Larry Simpson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Staff

David Donaldson, Data Program Manager
Steve VanderKooy, IJF Coordinator
Jeff Rester, Habitat/SEAMAP Coordinator

Adoption of Agenda

The agenda was approved as written.

Discussion and Final Approval of FIN Funding Activities for 2006

L. Simpson believed it would be beneficial for the group to review the funding decision process developed by FIN prior to determining the activities that would be funded. He outlined the various steps in the process and reviewed the criteria for funding. **J. Roussel** asked if this process had been approved by the Committee or if it was just guidance to the Committee. **D. Donaldson** stated that he believed the Committee had approved the process and would research the issue and provide a report to the group in October. **L. Simpson** then provided a brief overview regarding the status of 2006 funding for data collection and management activities. He stated that the preliminary numbers from the Senate show level funding for the GulfFIN and RecFIN line items. There is a very general NMFS budget from the House that shows a slight increase from last year but does not provide any detail for the specific line items. Since there is level funding in the Senate, the group should use level funding as a planning number for 2006. The amount included in the GulfFIN line item (less the tax) is \$4,037,500 and the Gulf's portion of the Recreational Fisheries Harvesting (RecFIN) line item is \$855,000, for a total of \$4,892,500. The group agreed that this number should be the amount utilized for the development of the 2006 FIN cooperative agreement.

D. Donaldson provided an overview of the documents that were distributed to the group. He then discussed the summary of the activities for potential funding in 2006 that was developed by the FIN Committee. The list is attached (Attachment A). The group then discussed the various jobs

identified in the draft statement of work. Job 1 consists of coordination and administration of FIN activities and will provide for the coordination, planning, and administration of FIN activities throughout the year as well as provide recreational and commercial information to the FIN participants and other interested personnel. It was noted that there are two new activities under this task for 2006. The first is a MRFSS Baseline Perception Survey. This survey is an important tool for the measurement of our outreach successes with regard to for-hire constituents and policy makers. The other project is conducting an external review of the FIN to ensure that the program is meeting its outlined goals and objectives. Job 2 pertains to the collection, management and dissemination of marine recreational fisheries data. This job will provide for the conduct of the MRFSS survey in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida for shore, for-hire, and private modes and for-hire field intercepts in Texas. This task will provide for coordination of the survey, field intercept survey of shore, for-hire and private boat anglers to estimate angler catch using the existing MRFSS methodology, and entry of the data. The states will also conduct weekly telephone calls to a 10% random sample of the Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida charter boat captains to obtain estimates of charter boat fishing effort. Job 3.1 refers to head boat port sampling in Texas and Florida and will provide for the sampling of catches, collection of catch reports from head boat personnel, and gathering effort data on head boats along the coasts of Texas and Florida. Job 3.2 refers to the collection of catch and effort data for head boats operating in the Gulf of Mexico. The effort data will be collected via the Telephone For-Hire Survey where the states will conduct weekly telephone calls to a 25% random sample of the Louisiana, Alabama, and Florida head boat captains to obtain estimates of head boat fishing effort. The catch and bycatch data will mainly be collected via at-sea sampling, where the states will conduct an at-sea sampling survey of approximately 10% of the trips made by for-hire vessels, using the protocols established by FIN and tested in Alabama. Job 4 consists of Gulf menhaden port sampling and will provide for sampling of gulf menhaden catches from menhaden purse-seine vessels that operate in Louisiana. Job 5 refers to the operations of the FIN Data Management System (DMS) which will provide for further implementation of the data management system for the FIN including routine loading of Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida commercial catch/effort data, Gulf biological data, Gulf recreational data; and maintenance of the DMS. Job 6 consists of the development and operation of the trip ticket program in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Texas. This task will provide for continued development and implementation of components for a commercial trip ticket system to census the commercial fisheries landings in Mississippi and for all dealers in Texas, using the data elements and standards developed by the ComFIN. It also provides funding for Louisiana and Alabama to operate their trip ticket programs. In addition, it provides funding to contract for implementation and operation of electronic trip ticket reporting. Job 7 refers to the collection of biological data. This job will provide funding for collection of biological data from the recreational and commercial fisheries. Data collection efforts will focus on red snapper, king mackerel, gulf and southern flounder and greater amberjack. And Job 8 refers to the collection of detailed effort (multiple gears/areas fished) from the commercial blue crab fishery in Louisiana. This activity will be used to test the methodology (developed by FIN) for collecting detailed effort from commercial fisheries. Detailed effort is not collected via the trip ticket programs so alternate methods need to be developed to compile this information. As additional funds become available, this activity will be expanded to cover other fisheries and other states.

Based on increases to existing jobs and new jobs for 2006, the total amount needed is approximately \$300,000 over the projected funding level. Therefore, the group needs to reduce the tasks to meet the projected funding level. It was suggested that all of the new projects be removed from the list since there is an overage. **D. Donaldson** noted that although the program review is a new activity, it is integral to the success of the program because it provides feedback to FIN regarding its ability to address the program goals and objectives. He stated that the funding could probably be reduced to \$10K for the review and still be able to accomplish the task. However, after removing those new activities and reducing the program review, there is still an overage of \$82K. After extensive discussion, two scenarios were developed to address the \$82K issue:

- Scenario 1: All agencies (including NMFS) take a 1.65% cut (either across the board or to individual jobs) to address the \$82K overage.
- Scenario 2: The biological sampling task is reduced by \$82K by eliminating the sampling for greater amberjack, gulf flounder, and king mackerel.

The group then discussed these various options. **J. Roussel** pointed out that scenario 2 makes it easier to track what activities are being lost due to the lack of funding. While it is still possible to do that for scenario 1, it is much harder because it is a percentage cut. **V. Vail** stated that Florida has to absorb a large portion of the cut if scenario 2 is utilized since Florida is responsible for most of the greater amberjack and king mackerel samples. If a large portion of the biological sampling monies for Florida are taken, it might possible prevent Florida from sampling the other priority species.

After some discussion, **V. Vail** made a motion to fund all on-going activities at the proposed 2006 level utilizing scenario 1 (1.65% cut); to cut the recreational outreach survey, at-sea head boat sampling in Louisiana and the detailed effort pilot survey projects; and fund a program review of FIN at \$10K. In addition, NMFS will have to reduce their portion of the RecFIN line item by \$4,840 (their share of the 1.65% reduction). It was noted that when assessing the reductions, the activity(s) that will not be conducted due to the cut needed to be outlined. It is important that the activity(s) that cannot be accomplished due to the reduction is clearly documented. If additional funds become available, the group decided the following items would be funded (in order of priority):

1. Restore cuts (1.65%)
2. Detailed effort project
3. At-sea sampling in Louisiana

If there were additional monies available after funding these projects, the Committee would convene to determine the allocation of those additional funds. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously. The final allocation of funds for the 2006 FIN cooperative agreement is attached (Attachment B).

Discussion of CRP Crab Subcommittee Proposal

S. VanderKooy provided an overview of the Crab Subcommittee proposal to the group. He stated that this proposal will be submitted to the Cooperative Research Program (CRP) and has involvement from Mississippi, Texas, Florida and NMFS, GSMFC (administration only) as well as commercial crab fishermen. The proposal will examine an innovative methodology using analysis of lipofuscin for ageing blue crabs. It has successfully been used in the Chesapeake Bay area for ageing crabs and the Subcommittee is interesting in testing the methodology in the Gulf of Mexico and determining its utility in the Gulf. There are several components to the project including rearing blue crab larvae; developing protocols for grow-out of juveniles; developing skills for analytical techniques used to age crabs; ageing crabs of known origin; using data to age blue crabs in natural populations to determine age structure; and developing age-based stock assessment models for the fishery. It will be a two-year project with the funding level for the first year being \$249K and approximately \$237K the second year. The Committee then discussed this proposal. There were concerns about the technical issues within the proposal. The Committee wanted to make sure the Subcommittee had thoroughly identified and addressed all of the technical issues regarding this project. It was pointed out that this issue should have been presented to the Technical Coordinating Committee of the Commission. **S. VanderKooy** realized that the proposal was technical in nature but due to the impending submission deadline, wanted to present it to this group to get some feedback about it. **C. Perret** suggested that a recreational crab fisherman be added to the group and that a report be presented to the TCC at the October meeting regarding this issue. After some discussion, it appeared that there were three options: 1) submit the proposal, as is; 2) make some modification to the proposal and then submit; or 3) task the Subcommittee to address the issues raised by the group and delay the submission until next year. The group discussed the various options and then **C. Perret made a motion to move forward with the proposal. He stated that staff needs to relay the Committee's issues and concerns about the proposal to the Subcommittee and the subcommittee should produce an annual report (to be presented to TCC) that outlines the results of the project.** The motion was seconded and passed unanimously. **V. Vail** noted that staff should inform the Subcommittee that future proposals should be presented to the appropriate groups with more lead time to ensure adequate review and discussion.

Being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 1:55 p.m.

ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION IN 2006

High Priority

Coordination and Administration of FIN Activities (ongoing)

Recreational fishing outreach project (new)

Program review contract (new)

Collecting, Managing and Disseminating Marine Recreational Fisheries Data (including TX)
(ongoing)

Head Boat Port Sampling in Texas and Florida (ongoing)

Gulf Menhaden Port Sampling (ongoing)

Operation of FIN Data Management System (ongoing)

Trip Ticket Program Implementation and Operations in Mississippi (ongoing)

Trip Ticket Program Operations in Alabama (ongoing)

Trip Ticket Program Operations in Louisiana (ongoing)

Trip Ticket Program Implementation and Operations in Texas (ongoing)

Recreational/Commercial Biological Sampling (ongoing)

For-Hire Telephone Survey (effort) and At-sea Sampling (catch) for Head Boats in Alabama and
Florida (ongoing)

For-Hire Telephone Survey (effort) and At-sea Sampling (catch) for Head Boats in Louisiana (new)

Collection of Detailed Effort for Blue Crab Fishery in Louisiana (new)

MEDIUM PRIORITY

Pilot Study for Collection of Catch (catch cards/dock-side) and Effort (telephone survey) Data for
Highly Migratory Species (new)

LOW PRIORITY

For-Hire Telephone Survey (effort) and At-sea Sampling (catch) for Head Boats in Texas (new)

Pilot Study for Recreational Fishing Effort using Fishing Licenses as Sampling Frame (new)

Biological Sampling for Additional Species (new)

Attachment B

ACTIVITY	2006	
HIGH PRIORITY		COST
Admin and coordination of FIN (Job1)		\$414,832
Recreational data collection (Job 2)		
Texas	\$83,999	
Louisiana	\$437,563	
Mississippi	\$205,599	
Alabama	\$150,867	
Florida	\$1,301,544	
GSMFC	\$189,614	
Rec survey subtotal		\$2,369,186
Head boat sampling (Job 3.1)		
Florida	\$109,413	
Contractual - TX sampler	\$36,451	
Head boat subtotal		\$145,864
At-sea sampling (Job 3.2)		
Alabama	\$18,689	
Florida	\$209,702	
At-sea subtotal		\$228,391
Menhaden sampling (Job 4)		\$47,701
FIN DMS (Job 5)		\$206,921
Trip ticket programs (Job 6)		
Texas	\$146,558	
Louisiana	\$441,556	
Mississippi	\$72,780	
Alabama	\$118,127	
Contractual - SCBI	\$81,970	
Trip ticket subtotal		\$860,991
Biological sampling collection (Job 7)		
Contractual - TX samplers	\$98,564	
Texas	\$7,590	
Louisiana	\$186,665	
Mississippi	\$60,032	
Alabama	\$108,317	
Florida	\$162,286	
Biol sampling subtotal		\$623,454
GRAND TOTAL		\$4,897,340

Traci Floyd

**TCC CRAB SUBCOMMITTEE
MINUTES - 56th Annual Meeting
Monday, October 17, 2005
Lake Buena Vista, Florida**

Due to the lack of a quorum, official business could not be conducted. The following were in attendance:

Members

Anne McMillen-Jackson, FWC, St. Petersburg, FL
Harriet Perry, USM/GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Tom Wagner, TPWD, Rockport, TX

Staff

Larry B. Simpson, Executive Director, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Steve VanderKooy, IIF Coordinator, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Cindy Yocom, Staff Assistant, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Others

Ralf Riedel, GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Anne Lange, NMFS, Silver Spring, MD
Virginia Vail, FWC, Tallahassee, FL
Barbara Viskup, MDEQ, Biloxi, MS
Walter Keithly, LSU, Baton Rouge, LA

Agenda items included Hurricanes Katrina and Rita Impacts, Lipofuscion, Derelict Traps, and state activities. The election of chairman will take place at the next meeting.

**TCC DATA MANAGEMENT SUBCOMMITTEE
MINUTES – 56th Annual Meeting
Monday, October 17, 2005
Lake Buena Vista, Florida**

Chairman Page Campbell called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. The following members and others were present:

Members

Joe O'Hop, FMRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Page Campbell, TPWD, Rockport, TX
Vicki Swann, TPWD, Austin, TX
Guy Davenport, NMFS, Miami, FL
Steven Atran, GMFMC, Tampa, FL
Kevin Anson, ADCNR, Gulf Shores, AL

Staff

David Donaldson, FIN Data Program Manager, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Madeleine Travis, FIN Staff Assistant, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Larry B. Simpson, Executive Director, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Ronald Lukens, Assistant Director, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Donna Bellais, ComFIN Survey Coordinator, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Others

Cynthia Binkley, NOAA Fisheries, St. Petersburg, FL
Michael Bailey, NOAA Fisheries, St. Petersburg, FL

Adoption of Agenda

The agenda was adopted with the addition of *Impacts of Hurricanes Rita and Katrina* which will be discussed under Other Business.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on March 14, 2005 in Point Clear, Alabama were approved with one minor editorial change.

Status of Biological Sampling Activities

D. Donaldson distributed a summary of otolith collections from January through July 2005. The summary presents the number of otoliths that have been collected as well as the targets, by species, mode, and state. Donaldson noted that a different method of calculating targets may be implemented by next year.

Donaldson asked the Subcommittee for input on collecting weights as well as lengths and otoliths. Since most commercial catch is gutted and some recreational catch is filleted it will be difficult to get all weights, but after discussion the group agreed to make an effort to collect weight data when possible.

Donaldson reported on the status of the analysis of otoliths and distributed a matrix covering 2002 through 2004. Subcommittee members reviewed this information and missing data will be forthcoming.

Status of Compilation of Vessel Information for Registration Tracking Module

D. Bellais of GSMFC addressed the Subcommittee on the issue of compiling commercial vessel information for the registration tracking module. **J. O'Hop** noted that the Florida vessel information was in the ACCSP database, therefore Bellais can coordinate with M. Cahall and obtain this information from ACCSP. **Bellais** reported that Texas has sent data, but Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alabama have not. **V. Swann** noted the difficulty in obtaining the required information in Texas. **Bellais** noted that all states must send data in the same format. **Donaldson** stated that is very important that the states provide this information. It is necessary to test the registration tracking module and without it, FIN cannot proceed with this task.

Status of Compilation of Recreational Fishing Licenses

The Subcommittee was provided with copies of a draft recreational license format. This information will be used as a sampling frame to get a better estimate of fishing effort. **Bellais** asked members to review this handout and make suggestions for additions or deletions. **Donaldson** noted that this information is needed for all licenses that would allow fin fishing in saltwater. The Subcommittee discussed various issues including license exemptions, fishing in the EEZ, expiration dates, etc.

Discussion of Involving CCA in Outreach for MRFSS

Donaldson reported that the CCA has come out in support of MRFSS. **R. Lukens** suggested that since this is the case FIN should utilize this situation. **S. Atran** noted that there had been an article on MRFSS in the GMFMC newsletter. **P. Campbell** suggested that FIN submit an article for publication in *Gulf Tide*. **R. Lukens** reported that last April at the Recreational Summit Meeting in St. Petersburg, Florida, the CCA representative **D. Brame** stated that they fully support the MRFSS and believe that the fix would be to put more money in the survey to increase sampling. **Lukens** suggested that CCA may be willing to do some educational outreach in their state chapters. **Donaldson** suggested that he and MRFSS staff could contact Brame and try to have an article written for their magazine and ask for input on this matter.

Further Development of White Paper Regarding Changes in TIP

Donaldson stated that at the August 2004 State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee meeting, that group asked FIN to develop a white paper regarding the changes in TIP since the implementation of trip tickets. Staff developed a draft paper which was distributed to FIN and reviewed. The document was presented to the S/FFMC for their consideration and J. Roussel requested more detail. **Donaldson** will contact state partners in order to add number of interviews, number of samplers involved, duties, etc. to the white paper.

Discussion of Multi-year Agreement for FIN

C. Binkley of NOAA Fisheries Grants Office in St. Petersburg, Florida reported that the GulFIN grant is being moved to the Southeast Region and she will be the administrator. **Binkley** discussed having the FIN program under a multi-year agreement beginning in 2007. **Donaldson** explained the current funding process for FIN noting that high priority activities are submitted to the S/FFMC and the final decision is made as to which activities will be included in the cooperative agreement for the following year. **Binkley** explained the advantages of grants being handled on a multi-year basis including a 30 day turnaround for funding. The Subcommittee then discussed the advantages and disadvantages of producing annual, semi-annual, or quarterly reports. **Binkley** noted that if semi-annual reports are used for a three year grant then the sixth report would be considered the final report.

The Subcommittee discussed a three year cooperative agreement and concluded that planning for that period of time should not be a problem. **Donaldson** stated that he will have the list of activities for prioritization for the three year proposal prepared for the Data Management Subcommittee meeting in March 2006. That list will be provided to the S/FFMC for approval at the March meeting and will be finalized at the FIN meeting in June 2006.

Discussion of Granting Access to FIN DMS

Donaldson reported that an issue of access to the FIN DMS arose recently. A contractor with NOAA Fisheries generated a report on the effects of hurricane Katrina on fishing communities along the Gulf Coast. The contractor included commercial landings broken down by species. They used "the rule of three" for the fishing communities but not for fishing communities and species. Therefore there was some confidential data released. The document produced by the contractor will be used in-house only and the public document will include all commercial landings in a particular community assuming there are at least three fishermen in that community.

Donaldson reported that this issue generated discussion on the existing process for granting access and what can be done to assure that this is not repeated. Even though a form must be signed to be granted access, the Subcommittee agreed that this wasn't sufficient. **G. Davenport** stressed the importance of resolving this problem. Penalties

were discussed, as well as notifying the states' or NOAA General Counsel or law enforcement. **K. Anson** suggested that the final document produced by utilizing this confidential data should be reviewed by state partners and GSMFC staff before being released. Discussion followed concerning responsibility for release of data, penalties, notification, etc. **Donaldson** suggested that the confidentiality form include wording requiring the form be submitted to GSMFC. It would then be distributed to the appropriate state personnel. Since FIN has no law enforcement capability **Davenport** will contact NOAA General Counsel and ask advice on what procedure should be followed in this type of case.

State/Federal Reports

Florida – The collection and processing of marine fisheries trip tickets is operating normally. We are currently editing trip tickets that we received during January of 2005. Currently, we have processed and edited trip tickets submitted by July 14, 2005, including nearly all trip tickets for 2004 submitted by seafood dealers. Additional trip tickets for previous years are expected due to the new blue crab trap limitation plan and some reporting problems at a northeast Florida dealer.

Angler catch and effort data collected by our staff for the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS) and Project Tampa Bay (monitoring releases of hatchery-reared red drum) were proceeding normally through September of 2005. We have exceeded our quota targets in all modes of all waves during 2005 (except for the shortfall caused by the re-specification of our quota targets in one mode during Wave 1). Our sampling during Wave 5 is on track to exceed the quota targets despite hurricanes and extensive red tides off the Gulf Coast of Florida. We have hired and trained our head boat at-sea samplers, and we have been able to complete assignments for at-sea trips on head boats and collect information on kept and released fish. We are close to meeting the number of assigned trips each month in each of our regions, though we are still experiencing some problems in taking trips in the Keys and in making multi-day trips in the Keys and the Florida Panhandle. The current MRFSS forms are a major time sink because the time it takes to properly prepare these forms for scanning is roughly 3 times longer than for previous forms, especially for the at-sea trips where many released fish are observed and measured. The preparation time for the at-sea forms has been reduced due programming changes by the GSMFC, and these changes are greatly appreciated by our samplers. This is the first year of this project, and the sampling targets that I set up for the project may have been optimistic and the sampling costs may have been underestimated. We still are having internal problems with payment for the sampling trips when the head boat operator does not accept the state credit card or the vendor identification causes the rejection of the state credit card.

Commercial catch and effort data collected for the Trip Interview Program (TIP) by our state port samplers has slowed in August and September due to hurricanes and office closures. Hurricanes Katrina and Rita caused a rather large disruption to trap fisheries in the Keys, and the general feeling from the commercial fishermen is that the lobster harvest has been greatly reduced due to trap losses. Biological sampling is going

reasonably well, though we are behind on the collection of red snapper otoliths. We've been focusing more effort during September and October to help reduce the shortfalls. All red snapper otoliths sent to our age and growth lab by mid-June 2005 have been cut and read, and have been sent to the Panama City Lab for second reads.

We have scheduled our training session for our field staff on November 8-10, 2005. Nearly all of our MRFSS, Tampa Bay Red Drum Angler Survey, TIP port samplers, and Head Boat Survey biologists were able to attend this training in fish identification and to discuss operational details of the sampling programs in which they participate. Additionally, a portion of the Gulf of Mexico port samplers meeting will be held jointly with our training sessions at FWRI, with concurrent sessions for training specific to each group. The Wave 3 & 4 review meeting will be held on November 10-11, 2005, at FWRI.

Some planning continues on the conversion of our Oracle application from version 9.1 to 10g, and converting our current forms (in Oracle Forms 6) to web-based forms. And, we are exploring ways (and funding) with our FWC Portal Team to serve the FWC commercial data through a data portal.

Alabama – Trip tickets - The Marine Resources Division continues to sign seafood dealers onto the electronic reporting system. Nearly two-thirds of all Alabama landings are being reported through the electronic reporting method. Hurricane Katrina directly impacted many reporting seafood dealers through flooding of shops. MRD is currently working with dealers affected by the storm in an attempt to recover lost landings data. Some paper tickets have been retrieved and copied when necessary.

MRFSS - Through Wave 4, MRD staff have met or exceeded all intercept quotas in all modes. Staff will be given the semi-annual training session in October or November. Hurricane Katrina impacted the Survey in Alabama by destroying or severely damaging five shore sites. When added to sites already closed due to Hurricane Ivan in 2004 one-third of the active shore sites listed by the MRFSS in August 2004 are currently closed to fishermen.

SEAMAP - Cruises were postponed because the vessel previously contracted to perform the work was under repair. Cruises will resume later in the month of October. The trap video portion of the contract will not be collected as the MRD owned vessel which is normally used to conduct this task is no longer operable and will not be repaired as the video is not included in any NMFS stock assessments.

Biological sampling - Partly due to the extremely bad weather experienced during the 2005 fishing season otolith collection by MRD staff has decreased. The March and April time period was the second wettest on record for coastal Alabama and the tropical season started early and was punctuated by many storms for much of the remaining part of the season. These events either restricted fish movement (i.e. flounder migrating to estuaries in the spring) or limited the number of days fishermen were able to fish thus reducing the opportunities for MRD samplers to encounter anglers who caught fish. Otoliths of

the primary species which have been collected are being processed and reading should be completed by the beginning of February 2006.

At-sea head boat sampling - Attempts have been made to sample Alabama's head boat fleet at ten-percent of expected trip levels. Frequent storms in the Gulf have negatively impacted MRD's ability to conduct these trips. To date, 31 trip have been completed which is one trip more than the number completed during all of 2004. Samplers will be given a review and re-training once electronic data is available from GSMFC.

Oysters - Oyster reefs were sampled after Katrina and results indicated minimal damage to reefs. The reefs suffered a great deal of damage due to Ivan and are showing signs good spat recruitment. One load of cultch material has been deployed from federal monies received to mitigate losses due to Katrina. A pilot program allowing dredging of oysters in designated areas will begin under close supervision by MRD staff. This study will investigate the feasibility of future oyster dredging on other reefs in Alabama.

Economic impacts from Hurricane Katrina – The MRD, in cooperation with the University of South Alabama, is currently conducting a survey on damages caused by Katrina among its seafood dealers and processors. This survey will look at the immediate economic impacts caused by the storm such as the value of lost inventory and damaged buildings and equipment, as well as replacement estimates for time and replacement of damaged buildings and whether insurance money will help to recover expenses. Initial losses of product inventory were estimated at \$ 6 million.

A brief survey was conducted in cooperation with the Orange Beach Fishing Association to assess the economic losses caused by the storm among Alabama for-hire owners/operators. The survey asked for the number of lost trips due to cancellations and the value of those trips. Of the respondents participating in the survey who reported losses, the cancellations accounted for nearly 50 percent of trips booked prior to Katrina. When tips and wages earned by deckhands were added to lost trip revenues the initial estimate was nearly \$ 1.6 million in losses. This was another blow to an industry which was experiencing reduced anglers compared to the two most recent years.

Louisiana - Trip Ticket Program

Trip Ticket Type	September			October *		
	2004 Received	2005 Received	% Decrease	2004 Received	2005 Received	% Decrease
600	906	225	75 %	187	0	100%
700	3900	1272	67%	1301	220	83%
800	4475	2384	47%	1015	364	64%
900	5310	2111	60%	1353	141	90%
Electronic	10307	5245	49%	6362	79	99%
Totals	24898	11237	55%	8865	804	91%

*Through the 7th of the month for paper and the first send of the October for electronic.

The Department is reviewing confidentiality requirements of trip ticket data. Some commercial fishermen and dealers have requested copies of their trip ticket records because they lost everything in either Hurricane Katrina or Hurricane Rita.

MRFSS Program - Prior to Hurricane's Katrina and Rita all quotas were met and sampling was proceeding as scheduled.

Hurricane Katrina struck Louisiana on August 29th severely impacting the eastern part of the State. No MRFSS sampling was conducted in St. Tammany, St. Bernard, Orleans, Plaquemines, Lafourche, Terrebonne, and Jefferson parishes for the remainder of August and through September 11th. The remainder of the state continued to collect dockside intercept and telephone data as scheduled. After September 11th sampling resumed in Lafourche and Terrebonne parish.

Hurricane Rita struck the western portion of Louisiana on September 24th. All MRFSS sampling stopped in the state until the following week. MRFSS sampling resumed in Terrebonne and Lafourche parishes the week following Hurricane Rita. It is anticipated that MRFSS sampling may be conducted in Vermilion, St. Mary and Iberia parishes as scheduled. Cameron parish is closed except to residents.

As of October 12, 2005, LDWF had a MRFSS intercept short fall for Wave 5 (September/October) as follows: 108 shore mode, 105 charter mode and 530 private mode intercepts.

MRFSS sites are being evaluated and the site register is being updated to reflect sites that are closed and decreased fishing pressure where sites have been moderately impacted.

No attempt was made to contact charter boat captains in the New Orleans area after Hurricane Katrina. Captains in unaffected parishes were contacted and charter fishing activity was reported for the week of September 5-11 in the Terrebonne/Lafourche area.

We are beginning to contact all charter captains to ascertain the status of their vessel and update contact information where possible.

FIN Biological Sampling - Sampling for FIN otoliths was on track until Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The only area which was problematic prior to the hurricanes was Amberjack otoliths in commercial mode. Since the hurricanes, otolith collection has ceased in the eastern portion of the State and was severely impacted in the remainder of the State. Field personnel are planning on resuming collection activities in upper Plaquemines and Jefferson parishes next week. Sampling has resumed in all other parishes with the exception of Cameron.

Otolith tallies for the August 2005 samples may have to be adjusted. Personnel in the Slidell office lost all otoliths and data sheets in Hurricane Katrina. Personnel in the New Orleans have not been able to access their office to determine the condition of data sheets

and the otoliths collected. Once a complete inventory has been completed data bases will be updated.

Otolith processing is proceeding as normal. No interruption in the processing of FIN otoliths was necessary due to the storms.

FIN Data Management System - Trip ticket data through July 2005 (scan month of August) have been transferred to the FIN system. Final error checks are being run on the August data (scan month of September). Those data should be transferred to the FIN system by early November.

Variables for the vessel tracking system were reviewed. Discussions were held with staff on program development and implementation of data transfer. All activities on the transfer of vessel information have currently been suspended pending analysis of Hurricane Katrina and Rita impacts.

TIP Sampling - Like all other sampling programs TIP was proceeding on schedule until Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Due to impacts to vessels and infrastructure sampling in the Plaquemines, St. Bernard and Cameron areas are not possible at this time. One dealer is planning on bringing in fuel and refrigerated trucks for the upcoming mullet season so sampling will take place at that location. There are reports from the field that the shrimp fleet is active.

NMFS has been contacted about the possibility of LDWF staff conducting shrimp interviews due to the decrease in TIPS sampling.

Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council – Reef Fish Amendment 22 (Red snapper rebuilding plan) was implemented by NMFS to end overfishing by 2010. Bycatch monitoring will be implemented through random observer program for commercial and charter vessels

Reef Fish Amendment 23 (Vermilion snapper rebuilding plan) was implemented by NMFS with size limit raised from 10 to 11 inches TL, bag limit of 10 VS, as part of 20-reef fish aggregate limit and commercial closed season April 22 – May 31

Reef Fish Amendment 24 (limited access system) was implemented by NMFS with permanent license limitation system established for commercial reef fish permits.

Coastal Migratory Pelagics Amendment 15 (limited access system) implemented by NMFS with permanent license limitation system established for commercial mackerel permits.

The July 11-15 Council meeting in Ft. Myers was rescheduled to August 8-12 due to Hurricane Dennis and the September 12-15 Council meeting in New Orleans was changed to October 3-6 in St. Petersburg due to weather.

Reef Fish Amendment 18A and the Red Grouper Commercial Fishing Regulatory Amendment were completed and submitted to NMFS. Red Grouper Recreational Fishing Regulatory Amendment action was deferred until November. Reef Fish Amendment 26 (Red Snapper IFQ) was approved for public hearings. Reef Fish Amendment 25/Coastal Migratory Pelagics Amendment 17 was completed and submitted to NMFS:

The GMFMC has recommended actions to Congress to provide fishing industry relief after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The overall goals are a compassionate relief response to restore fishing infrastructure, address overcapacity and overfishing through voluntary buyouts and gear improvements, employ fishermen in clean-up and research, provide retraining for fishermen leaving the fishery, and add improved management tools to the fishery.

Many Gulf fish stocks depend on northern Gulf coastal habitats. A comprehensive program of habitat restoration, particularly restoration of vegetated wetlands and barrier islands, will be important. In addition, seafood consumers need to be reassured that the majority of Gulf seafood is unaffected by hurricanes Katrina and Rita and has been tested and is safe for consumption.

GSMFC- Recreational operations are running smoothly with the states still exceeding quota on a routine basis. Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana had problems because of hurricanes but head boat data continues to be collected for Alabama and Florida vessels. Problems with the data entry program have been worked out and data is currently being scanned. The economic add-on is scheduled to begin in January 2006. Mississippi and Louisiana may not begin at that time depending on their ability to sample. Commercial operations with trip tickets are running smoothly.

2006 activities have been level funded at \$4.9M. To meet available funding levels a reduction of 1.7% from each agency was required. GSMFC eliminated equipment and some training and travel, Alabama reduced the number of trips to be sampled, Florida eliminated east coast trips, Louisiana reduced the number of flounder samples to be collected and processed, and Texas reduced personnel for FHTS.

Other Business

Donaldson reported that L. Simpson has asked each of the Subcommittees to develop a list of short-term, mid-term, and long-term impacts from the hurricanes. This is being done to prepare for disaster relief money for fishermen. **Donaldson** requested that each Subcommittee member think about impacts to their agencies caused by the hurricanes and assess costs for those impacts. Members will send to Donaldson when complete.

Election of Chairman

C. Denson was elected Chairman and G. Davenport was elected Vice Chairman.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:45 a.m.

**TCC HABITAT SUBCOMMITTEE
MINUTES - 56th Annual Meeting
Monday, October 17, 2005
Lake Buena Vista, Florida**

APPROVED BY:

COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

Chairman Mark LaSalle called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. and asked members and guests to introduce themselves. The following members and others were present:

Members

Frank Courtney, FFWCC, Port Manatee, FL
Steve Heath, ADCNR, Dauphin Island, AL
Cherie O'Brien, TPWD, Dickinson, TX
Robert Adami, TPWD, Corpus Christi, TX
Mark LaSalle, Audubon Mississippi, Moss Point, MS
Doug Frugé, USFWS, Ocean Springs, MS
Miles Croom, NMFS, St. Petersburg, FL
Heather Finley, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA

Staff

Jeff Rester, Habitat/SEAMAP Coordinator, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Cheryl Noble, Staff Assistant, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Ron Lukens, Assistant Director, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Larry Simpson, Executive Director, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Others

Michael Bailey, NMFS, St. Petersburg, FL
Joe Gill, *GSMFC Commissioner*, Ocean Springs, MS
David Medici, Gulf and South Atlantic Fisheries Foundation, Tampa, FL
Steven Atran, GMFMC, Tampa, FL
Bob Gasaway, USFWS, Atlanta, GA

Adoption of Agenda

The agenda was adopted without changes.

Adoption of Minutes

The minutes of the March 14, 2005 meeting were adopted as written.

Administrative Report

J. Rester stated that the National Fish Habitat Initiative, of which he was a member, has released a draft National Fish Habitat Action Plan for public review. The mission of the Action Plan was to protect, restore and enhance the Nation's fish and aquatic

communities through partnerships that foster fish habitat conservation and improve the quality of life for the American people. The goals of the Action Plan were to protect and maintain intact and healthy aquatic systems, prevent further degradation of fish and aquatic habitats that have been adversely affected, reverse declines in the quality of aquatic habitats to improve the overall health of fish and other aquatic organisms, increase the quality and quantity of fish sustained by our Nation's waters, and increase self-sustaining aquatic systems that support a broad natural diversity of fish and other aquatic species. The Plan would proceed through four key approaches: implement fish habitat protection, restoration and enhancement through development of new partnerships and expanded support of existing partnerships, mobilize national and local support for achieving fish habitat conservation goals, measure and communicate the status and needs of aquatic habitats, and provide national leadership and coordination to conserve fish habitats. **J. Rester** stated that the Action Plan could be downloaded at fishhabitat.org.

Gulf of Mexico Alliance

M. Croom stated that the Gulf of Mexico Alliance (GMA) was formed in 2005 in response to the President's Ocean Action Plan. **M. Croom** stated that the five Gulf of Mexico states identified regional focus areas. These focus areas were reductions in nutrient loading, water quality, healthy beaches and shellfish beds, coastal wetland restoration, identification of Gulf habitats for management, and environmental education. The Environmental Protection Agency and NOAA were designated as federal coordinators for the GMA. The GMA had planned a Gulf of Mexico summit for early November to release their action plan, but due to hurricane impacts the summit and action plan release were rescheduled for early 2006.

Strategy to Assess the Impact of Freshwater Reduction in Coastal Environments

R. Lukens stated many years ago, federally sponsored water control structures were erected. At that time, it was recognized that river systems immediately below water control structures were altered, and traditional fisheries associated with those areas were eliminated. Mitigation requirements were established through federal legislation, primarily aimed at the production of fish for stocking to restore recreational fishing opportunities. This narrowly crafted mitigation program fell short of addressing the scope and magnitude of impacts brought about by intentional alteration of our watersheds. **R. Lukens** stated that there were two items he would like the Subcommittee to address. The first was to develop a strategy to assess and evaluate the impact of freshwater reduction in the coastal environments of the Gulf of Mexico region of the U.S. He stated that the second was to develop a strategy to seek mitigation of those impacts. **D. Frugé** stated that one of the focuses of the Southeast Aquatic Resource Partnership (SARP) was on mitigation for fisheries. He stated that initially SARP has focused only on areas immediately downstream.

S. Heath stated that dams in Alabama release large pulses of freshwater, but he did not think that they had any data available that would show negative impacts to downstream estuaries. He stated that it would be hard to prove that changes were due to the

freshwater pulses and not from other land use changes that have impacted the hydrologic flow. **M. LaSalle** discussed the two lakes project near Jackson, Mississippi on the Pearl River. He stated that regulatory agencies when initially proposing the project did not even consider potential downstream impacts. **C. O'Brien** stated Texas had developed 16 regional water boards that developed water plans for each district. Senate Bill 2 in Texas required that all water plans consider the need for environmental flows. **R. Lukens** stated that he would like to involve someone from the Fish and Wildlife Service's Panama City office that had experience in the ACF and ACT water battles in Georgia, Florida and Alabama. **C. O'Brien** stated that a demonstration project was recently completed on the Nueces River. Nueces Bay was actually a reverse estuary because of reduced flow. The upper estuary had higher salinities than the lower estuary. A demonstration project cut a new channel to provide more freshwater at the top of the estuary. The study documented the changes in vegetation that occurred with the input of freshwater.

The Subcommittee decided to investigate the types of data that were available from each state to determine historical flows, determine historical species assemblages, determine historical vegetation patterns, and assess potential impacts of reduce freshwater inflows. The Subcommittee investigation would lead to a data inventory for the five Gulf States.

2005 Hurricane Impacts to Habitat

S. Heath stated that the western end of Dauphin Island was severely eroded by Hurricane Katrina. The western end now has several cuts in it that may or may not close in the coming months. **S. Heath** stated that around Bayou La Batre, shrimp boats were pushed into the marsh and surrounding woods. He was not sure how recovery of these boats would impact habitat.

J. Rester stated that the Mississippi barrier islands were also severely eroded by Hurricane Katrina. He stated that most of East Ship Island was gone and that Horn Island lost sand from its east and west ends. **J. Rester** stated that the marshes in Mississippi seemed to have fared fairly well. **M. LaSalle** stated that a large fish kill was reported in areas around the Pascagoula River.

H. Finley stated that oyster mortalities were as high as 50% in some areas of Louisiana due to Hurricane Katrina. She stated that the Chandeleur Islands were almost now completely gone, but they might reform. She reported that Hurricane Rita damaged the barrier islands along the central Louisiana coast. Hurricane Rita also pushed saltwater over the beach ridges into the marshes. She stated that most of southwest Louisiana was under hydrologic control, and that saltwater would likely damage the marshes unless it was quickly pumped out. **C. O'Brien** stated that Hurricane Rita did not damage Galveston Island as bad as they had feared. She stated that they were worried about impacts to several restoration projects, but the restoration projects fared fairly well.

M. Croom stated that NOAA sampled offshore waters from Alabama to Louisiana. Researchers found that fish and sediments were not contaminated. NOAA also

conducted inshore sampling in Mississippi Sound, but M. Croom did not have any results from this sampling.

Bottom Mapping Project

J. Rester stated that the purpose of the Gulf of Mexico Bottom Mapping Project was to develop a user friendly interactive system that identifies, describes, and displays resources characterizing the seabed habitat of the Gulf of Mexico. He stated that the project started on April 1, 2005. During April, a Bottom Mapping Work Group was formed to help identify potential data sources in order to conduct an extensive search of existing databases to identify records that could be used to classify where hardbottom habitats were present in the Gulf of Mexico and to provide oversight of the project's contractors. The Bottom Mapping Work Group held their first meeting in late May to discuss the project's goals and objectives, develop a bottom type classification, discuss database design, discuss the types of data to include, discuss minimum data standards, identify potential data sources, and review a draft request for proposals (RFP) for the data collecting contractor. **J. Rester** stated that the RFP was released in July, and seven proposals were received to complete the data collection portion of the project. He stated that Hurricane Katrina impacted two potential contractors and Minerals Management Service. Since Minerals Management Service would be a large contributor of data for the project, **J. Rester** stated that a decision was made to move the data collecting contractor start date from October 1, 2005 to January 1, 2005 or later.

Habitat Video Discussion

J. Rester stated he talked with M. LaSalle about the habitat video project and they decided to draft a video outline that a script writer could use to draft a script. He stated that he distributed the outline to everyone before the meeting for their input. He reported that the four main topics were defining habitat, discussing the importance of habitat to wildlife and humans, the key habitat types in the Gulf of Mexico, and ways to protect habitat. Under the habitat types section, he listed the habitat type, where the habitat occurs within the Gulf of Mexico, why the habitat was important, and major species that used that habitat. He stated that he was looking for input on all of the information, but really needed help on soft bottom communities, barrier islands, and maritime forests. The Subcommittee decided to send him input by the end of November. **M. Croom** also suggested that the Subcommittee investigate the opportunity to partner with the education and outreach group of the Gulf of Mexico Alliance.

Habitat Web Site Discussion

J. Rester stated that Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Florida had sent him at least one restoration project for the habitat restoration web site. **J. Rester** reported that he sent the link out to everyone before the meeting for their review. The web site was an attempt to showcase innovative restoration projects within the states that others might find useful. He stated that he wanted more restoration projects before releasing the web site to the public. **D. Frugé** stated that he would send **J. Rester** some projects. **M. Croom** stated

that the National Wetland Research Center also had a listing of all kinds of CWPPRA projects that they might provide. **C. O'Brien** stated that she had developed fact sheets for restoration projects in Texas that she would send. **J. Rester** stated that he would be able to modify the sheets to fit the format on the site. **J. Rester** encouraged everyone to send him additional projects.

Habitat Issues of Interest From Each State

Texas – **R. Adami** stated that 2,509 crab traps were recovered this year as part of their derelict trap recovery program. The total since the program's inception was 18,008. He stated that Texas would be holding a removal during 2006, but it would be scaled back from previous years. **R. Adami** stated that red tide had occurred along the south Texas coast, and it seemed to be increasing. He reported that the hatchery had stocked 11 million red drum and 2 million spotted sea trout. He stated that due to Hurricane Rita, the hatchery at Lake Jackson lost all brood stock. **R. Adami** reported that 11 shrimp farms were currently operating in Texas. He stated that shrimp aquaculture produced 7.9 million pounds of shrimp last year. **R. Adami** stated that TPWD was investigating a private artificial reef initiative that would allow individuals with TPWD oversight to deploy their own artificial reefs. **C. O'Brien** stated that the restoration program was still going strong, but they were still losing marsh in Galveston Bay mainly due to subsidence.

Mississippi – **M. LaSalle** stated that the Department of Marine Resources building was flooded during Hurricane Katrina. Water levels were almost up to the second floor, and unfortunately the DMR staff was located on the first floor. **M. LaSalle** also stated that the Deer Island beneficial use restoration project was planted twice this year and was progressing as expected.

Alabama – **S. Heath** stated that the Orange Beach Fishing Association again donated money for Alabama to construct artificial reefs without publishing the coordinates until they held their red snapper tournament the following year. He reported that Alabama was concentrating on building artificial reefs in Baldwin County. He stated that the reefs were from materials of opportunity, but they were mainly using concrete. He reported that the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program was working with the Coastal Section of the State Lands Division on habitat restoration projects in Mobile Bay.

Florida – **F. Courtney** reported that Florida was examining minimum levels and flows in Florida rivers and streams. He stated that Florida was performing short-term studies in some rivers where they do not have any fishery independent sampling. **F. Courtney** also stated that Florida was performing benthic mapping of inshore areas.

USFWS – **D. Frugé** reported that he was no longer the SARP coordinator. Scott Robinson from Georgia was hired as the new coordinator. He stated that the USFWS was examining endangered species act classification for the American eel.

Election of Chairman

D. Frugé was nominated to serve as chairman with M. LaSalle serving as vice chairman. With no objections, the nominations were unanimously accepted.

Other Business

With no other business, the meeting adjourned at 12:10 p.m.

APPROVED BY:

COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**TCC SEAMAP SUBCOMMITTEE
MINUTES – 56th Annual Meeting
Monday, October 17, 2005
Lake Buena Vista, Florida**

Vice Chairman Steve Heath called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. The following members and others were present:

Members

Jim Hanifen, *Chairman, via teleconference*, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Steve Heath, *Vice Chairman*, ADCNR/MRD, Gulf Shores, AL
Richard Waller, USM/CMS/GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Paul Choucair, TPWD, Rockport, TX
Rick Leard, GMFMC, Tampa, FL
Mark Leiby, FWC/FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL

Others

Kim Williams, FWC/FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Katie Rathmell, FWC/FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Terry Cody, Rockport, TX

Staff

Jeff Rester, SEAMAP/Habitat Coordinator, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Cheryl Noble, Staff Assistant, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Ron Lukens, Assistant Director, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Dave Donaldson, Data Program Manager, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Adoption of Agenda

The agenda was adopted as written.

Approval of Minutes

M. Leiby moved to approve the August 3, 2005 minutes as submitted. R. Waller seconded and the motion passed.

Administrative Report

J. Rester reported the Commission's Fishery Independent Database project with USGS was continuing and should be finished shortly. USGS and the Commission have contracted with the Northwest Alliance for Computational Science and Engineering at

Oregon State to build the structure of the database. Sample datasets from the states and NMFS have been provided to them and the database should be ready in February of next year.

J. Rester said he was still working on normalizing the SEAMAP trawl database for use in the SEAMAP ArcIMS site. The database has been downloaded on several occasions and revisions to the database have been made, but Hurricane Katrina knocked NMFS Pascagoula offline and he cannot get the latest revisions until Pascagoula is back online. The Subcommittee should be able to review the ArcIMS site before or during the March meeting.

The Subcommittee decided to complete the 2002 Atlas in the old format but the Atlas is on hold until NMFS has time to format the data. Hopefully, that will take place shortly. **J. Rester** said he is going to try to do the 2003 and 2004 atlases as soon as possible, probably early next year. **J. Hanifen** asked if any of the SEAMAP data was lost due to the Hurricane and **P. Choucair** and **K. Williams** said no data from the states or NMFS have been lost.

S. Heath stated that he was not able to pursue the reef fish data situation discussed at the August meeting due to Hurricane Katrina, but he will report on this at the next meeting.

Effects of the 2005 Hurricane Season on SEAMAP Sampling

R. Waller reported that the duplicate SEAMAP samples stored at SIPAC were stored in the toxicology building at the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory. The building collapsed as a result of Hurricane Katrina, but some of the samples (about 700 out of 8,800) have been retrieved. When the building is raised, he will let the Subcommittee know if any other samples are located. He said that unfortunately, one of the first email requests they received when they were back online was for samples to be used for the LNG issue. He said they could not go on the Fall Plankton cruise because they are out of money. They probably will not go out at all, but are going to attempt one or two days for the shrimp/groundfish survey. He said he has enough money left to do one. Fuel prices are the reason they are out of money. He said they have gone from an average daily cost of \$5,200 to over \$7,000. He said they have to receive more money or they will have to cut sampling.

J. Rester asked **R. Waller** how much money they will need to complete the Fall Shrimp/Groundfish Survey and **R. Waller** said at least \$21,000. He then asked **R. Waller** if they have discussed the issue with NMFS to help with the survey, and he said he has talked to them but at this point NMFS cannot help either. He said the NMFS Pascagoula Lab is not inhabitable and they are working to help their employees who have lost so much during the Hurricane. **R. Waller** said a short cruise will have to do. He said that in October 1995 they went out seven times and managed to get sixteen stations so they will go out whenever possible. They are going to try to do some of the trawl and fall plankton work on the **GORDON GUNTER**, and the **OREGON II** is getting ready to leave to do

shark longlining, and then try to take up where the **GUNTER** leaves off with the trawl sampling.

J. Rester said he was contacted by a researcher from the University of Louisiana from Lafayette who has been hired by Freeport-McMoRan to use plankton samples to determine potential impacts of LNG facilities. They wanted to analyze potential shrimp impacts at the Main Pass facility east of the Mississippi River. The samples would have had to have been sorted. M. Leiby suggested asking the LNG companies for funds to sort the samples. R. Waller stated that FEMA has funds available to replace scientific samples. He does not know if the money could be used to do actual sampling. GCRL personnel are writing proposals and putting together packets to submit to FEMA for funding. He suggested that maybe the Subcommittee can submit a proposal to the LNG companies for funding because it is what they need and in their best interest because they will need this data now and in the future.

J. Hanifen said the **PELICAN** did fine during the storm and they actually finished their fall cruise last week. He said they were impacted more by Tropical Storm Cindy and Hurricane Dennis during the summer because their cruise was scheduled in between the two storms. They were only able to complete part of the cruise. He said LUMCON had about 5 feet of water in the building on the ground floor.

R. Waller said GCRL had about 4 feet of water. The main building did fine but the other buildings suffered extensive damage. The **TOMMY MUNRO** was at the Stennis Space Center in the locks during the storm and did not receive any damage. It was a problem getting it back to Biloxi but it is there now in the harbor.

S. Heath said they were not affected by the storm but there has been some confusion on whether they will do fall plankton or not. **J. Rester** said he gave M. Van Hoose stations a couple of weeks ago for the fall groundfish cruise. **S. Heath** said he or someone else will contact J. Rester about the fall plankton cruise.

The Subcommittee then discussed the impacts of the rising fuel costs. **J. Hanifen** said they will have to add approximately \$3,000 - \$4,000 to each cruise cost. He said all of their field offices in the eastern part of the state had substantial damage. The Slidell facility is completely gone, the New Orleans office is not inhabitable and they cannot even get in the building. The Point a La Hache facility was destroyed and the marine lab had substantial damage. Only one of the buildings there made it and the rest will probably be condemned. As a result of all of these facilities having this much damage, LDWF is moving boats from all over the state to the east side. Slidell, New Orleans, Point a La Hache and the marine lab are now operating out of Baton Rouge. So not only are the fuel costs for the cruises costly but transporting the boats will increase.

M. Leiby said the Subcommittee needs to investigate how to receive some of the \$200 billion that is supposed to be available for restoring the Gulf. **J. Rester** said that in relation to this, L. Simpson wants all of the committees to discuss at this meeting the priority needs due to Hurricane impacts. He wants each committee to access the short,

mid and long-term impacts of the storm. SEAMAP needs to focus on fishery independent data collection and the impacts it had on each agency and all of the cruises. Federal disaster relief fund money should be available soon and each agency needs to be prepared to justify how they can use it.

J. Hanifen said the assessments they have been working on are primarily impacts to the fisheries themselves not necessarily toward data collection. The future of fishery independent data collection is probably in substantial jeopardy in Louisiana. As a result of the storm they have been spending a lot of the conservation funds both in search and rescue and in the assessments of the storm's impacts. So that will take away funds in the future from fisheries independent data collection. As those funds dwindle, the conservation funds dwindle, and revenue will not be coming back in because of the impacts to the fisheries. They will probably see a substantial decrease in conservation revenue coming in because of the impacts to the oil and gas industry. This industry is a big source of funding for Louisiana. So in the medium to long term a decrease in effort for fisheries independent data collection will probably occur. **M. Leiby** asked if he means a decrease or cessation and **J. Hanifen** answered a serious decrease to cessation is possible.

R. Waller said fortunately, GCRL did not lose any boats and they have been sampling when they have fuel. DMR's main offices were flooded and the building may be condemned but he is not sure how much independent sampling they did, but he is sure they are not doing any at this point. He said Corky Perret is at this meeting and could give a better report on what is going on with DMR.

R. Waller said they have about a month lapse in their regular monthly sampling but like Louisiana, they do not know what the future holds. He does not know how DMR's budget will be affected since Mississippi has lost the casino revenue which is about \$600,000 a day. The shrimp fleet has been devastated and the bottom is completely littered so nobody knows when fishing will start again on any large scale. The oyster industry will probably be up and running when the reefs return and the charter boat industry is okay, but there are no hotels for customers who may want to book a charter.

K. Williams asked if there has been any determination on what kind of long-term monitoring response is going to be asked of the individual states. **R. Waller** said he does not know for sure but GCRL is putting together proposals now to be ready for when funds are available for monitoring.

P. Choucair said that except for the Sabine Lab, Texas was barely affected by the Hurricanes. The Lab is up and running now so they should be able to do the fall cruise on schedule.

2007 SEAMAP Funding Letter

J. Rester said that at the joint meeting in August the full committee agreed to write a letter requesting additional funding for SEAMAP. SEAMAP-SA has decided not to sign

the letter because they do not want to use political favors to ask for money for the program that they may not receive, even though there is a 20 year plus history of equitably dividing funds. He said this letter is not intended to actively lobby the congressional delegation, but to just explain how important SEAMAP is and why they need more funding.

J. Rester then referred to the letter stating R. Lukens changed the first paragraph to explain the history of GSMFC because it will be mailed on the commission letterhead. **J. Rester** said he had a generic paragraph about SEAMAP but R. Lukens changed it, so that may have been another reason the SEAMAP-SA did not want to sign the letter. He said he told SEAMAP-SA that the letter was a draft and asked for their comments but they did not provide any. He then suggested the letter should have information on all five Gulf States, all components of SEAMAP, and the commission, but just not have a place for the SEAMAP-SA signatures. **R. Waller** suggested focusing on the Gulf States, the LNG issue, and the affects to the Gulf by Hurricane Katrina. The Gulf is a hot topic right now so extra funds should be available and SEAMAP may be able to acquire some of the funding. After discussion, the Subcommittee agreed to redirect the letter to focus on these issues and then on the long-term monitoring SEAMAP does and who uses and benefits from this data collection. Also, the impacts of increased fuel costs need to be addressed in the letter. The letter should be signed by all of the Gulf States' state directors. The Subcommittee asked **J. Rester** to revise the letter to reflect these comments and then email the draft to the Subcommittee for final review. After it is finalized, it will be mailed for all signatures.

Final Approval of SEAMAP Funding Priorities

J. Rester distributed the SEAMAP funding priority sheet and asked the Subcommittee for changes. He said the increase in fuel costs need to be reflected in the changes. Each member updated their entries. **K. Williams** brought to the Subcommittee's attention that the figure for the Polish Sorting Center will probably need to be changed because of the major inflation problems in Poland. She said the Polish Sorting Center only signed a one year agreement instead of three. **J. Rester** said he will contact J. Shultz and then make changes if necessary. **J. Rester** will email the funding priorities with all the changes discussed to the Subcommittee next week for their final approval.

Final Approval of SEAMAP 2006-2010 Management Plan

P. Choucair suggested changing "prepared by" on the first page to "updated by" because Elizabeth Griffen was not the original writer of the document and should not get credit for the entire document. **J. Rester** mentioned most of the SEAMAP documents need to be thoroughly edited and updated. He asked the Subcommittee to review the documents and to update the sections that are germane to them and send the changes to him. He said the data management sections especially need to be rewritten and he will contact M. McDuff to update those.

R. Waller moved to accept the *SEAMAP 2006-2010 Management Plan* as currently written and forward it to the TCC for their approval. M. Leiby seconded and the motion passed.

Election of Chairman

M. Leiby moved to re-elect J. Hanifen as Chairman and S. Heath as Vice Chairman. R. Waller seconded the motion and it passed.

Other Business

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:05 p.m.

APPROVED BY:


COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

LAW ENFORCEMENT COMMITTEE
Minutes – 56th Annual Meeting
Tuesday, October 18, 2005
Lake Buena Vista, Florida

Vice Chairman J.T. Jenkins (Alabama) called the meeting to order at 8:26 am. The following attended the meeting:

Members

Bruce Buckson, FWC, Tallahassee, FL
Walter Chatagner, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
John Thomas Jenkins, ADCNR/MRD, Dauphin Island, AL
Jeff Mayne, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Karen Raine, NOAA/GCEL/SE, St. Petersburg, FL
Dave McKinney, NOAA OLE, Austin, TX (*Proxy for H. Robbins*)
G.W. “Bill” Robinson, TPWD, Austin, TX

Staff

Larry B. Simpson, Executive Director, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Cindy Yocom, Staff Assistant, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Others

Donald Armes, Jr., MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Rob Beaton, FWC, Tallahassee, FL
Richard Leard, GMFMC, Tampa, FL
Dave Medki, G&SAFF, Tampa, FL
Vernon Minton, *GSMFC Commissioner*, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL
John Moran, FWS, St. Petersburg, FL
Mario Sapet, MDMR, Biloxi, MS

Adoption of Agenda

J. Mayne requested that item #5 be presented before item #4. B. Buckson seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Approval of Minutes

The Committee reviewed the minutes of the March 15, 2004, meeting held in Point Clear, Alabama. **W. Chatagner moved to approve the minutes as written; B. Robinson seconded the motion which passed by consensus.**

Seafood Labeling/Forensics Update

B. Buckson introduced Captain John L. Moran, Forensic Liaison for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. **Captain Moran** reported that the Fish and Wildlife Forensic Program was established within the Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute in cooperation with the Division of Law Enforcement. The program oversees fish and wildlife forensic coordination and training. Crime scene investigation training is held in conjunction with Law Enforcement Academy coursework and includes fish and wildlife identification workshops. Methods of species identification include morphological, serology, DNA, and MitRNA for both upland and marine species. Crime labs are available to all state agencies and FWC will assist in forensic support, training, and research.

Upcoming Meetings

J. Mayne moved that the next meeting of the group could be scheduled as follows: Monday afternoon – LEAP meeting; Tuesday morning – LEC meeting; Tuesday afternoon – informal work session. An informal session would allow for opportunistic discussion of current regional enforcement issues. **B. Robinson** seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Further, **J. Mayne** moved that the Commission continue to provide funding and staff assistance via **Cindy Yocom** for summer and winter work sessions to continue strategic planning, implementation, and review of yearly regional enforcement operations. As in the past, funding will be requested from the Council so that expenses are divided equally between the Commission and Council. **B. Robinson** seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Fishery Failure Declaration

J. Mayne moved to request that the state directors include enforcement in their requests to the Governors' for hurricane relief under the Fishery Failure Declaration. Assistance is needed not only for the states most severely impacted and in need of basic infrastructure repair, but also to other states within the region, which will be impacted by the subsequent influx of those able to harvest, load, process, and truck fisheries products. The recent catastrophic events have shown a dire need for a better communication system throughout the region and the nation. Specialized equipment and boats are needed for disaster relief and incident command centers. Heavy-duty rescue vehicles are needed. Propane-operated generators would aid when gasoline is in short supply. When possible, this specialized equipment would multi-task during regular enforcement activity. The JEA program may possibly be a means to distribute additional funds for enforcement. **B. Robinson** seconded the motion. The motion passed by a majority of the membership; **K. Raine** and **D. McKinney** abstained.

NCIC Update

As reported during the March meeting, **J. Mayne** followed up with Executive Director of Nlets, Steve Coreil, who put him in touch with their Director of Operations, Frank Minice. He was very receptive to what the committee wanted to accomplish (access to enforcement databases, NCIC). Minice indicated that Nlets could set up the states and provide linkage at no cost. Access to databases is dependent on the database owner. For example, permission must be received so that the states could access NOAA's vessel permitting database, and the states must permit one another access. State officers would need to receive NCIC certification. It was a very positive conversation. Nlets is a non-government agency that has existing contracts with the states. Those contracts provide the funding for these types of programs. Nlets can also provide case management applications.

Hurricane Katrina & Rita Impacts

Video and PowerPoint presentations were provided by J. Mayne for Louisiana and W. Chatagner for Mississippi. **J. Jenkins** stated the strong need for specialized equipment including 5 ton rescue vehicles during these disasters. He also commented on the strong team from the Gulf States who assisted each other in many ways during and following the hurricanes. **B. Robinson** reported that Texas had major problems from Hurricane Rita. Communication was poor, gasoline was in short supply, and accommodating working teams was difficult. Mobile communications headquarters were set up and manned 24 hours per day using generator power. Several propane generators were purchased along with airboats that were needed to cut trees to provide an inlet for supplies.

Joint Enforcement Agreements

Current JEAs are in hand except for Texas and Florida which are still within review through the Department of Commerce. **D. McKinney** reported that the Chiefs meeting was postponed due to the hurricanes and may be rescheduled in February. Feedback from the letter sent after the summer work session was positive. **J. Jenkins** noted that the software that has been developed is as lacking as **B. Buckson** described in the summer. **B. Buckson** moved to write a letter to Dale Jones thanking him for understanding the need to postpone the Enforcement Chiefs Meeting in the advent of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The letter should inform that the LEC is ready to proceed and would like the meeting rescheduled as soon as possible. Enforcement will encourage that the January timeline remain intact as previously discussed. **J. Mayne** seconded the motion which passed unanimously. **B. Robinson** stressed that the JEA Program is in dire need of a designated point person. **V. Minton** inquired to why the program managed under grants management. **D. McKinney** noted that this is partially due to legal language of the JEA Program versus that of grants.

Election of Officers

B. Buckson moved that the current Vice Chair, J. Jenkins, be elevated to Chairman and nominated W. Chatagner as the committee's next Vice Chair. J. Mayne seconded the motion which passed unanimously. The next regularly-scheduled election will be held October 2007.

There being no further business, B. Robinson moved to adjourn; J. Mayne seconded. The meeting adjourned at 4:44 p.m.

APPROVED BY:

J. W. Smith
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**S-FFMC MENHADEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MINUTES – 56th Annual Meeting
Tuesday, October 18, 2005
Lake Buena Vista, Florida**

J. Smith, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 8:32 a.m., with the following in attendance:

Members

Toby Gascon, Omega Protein, Inc.,
Vernon Minton, AMRD/ADCNR, Gulf Shores, AL
Joseph Smith, NMFS, Beaufort, NC
Corky Perret, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Jerry Mambretti, TPWD, Port Arthur, TX
John Roussel, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA

Others

Anne Lange, NMFS, Silver Spring, MD
John Hocevar, Greenpeace, Austin, TX
Ralf Riedel, GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
David Medici, Gulf & South Atlantic Fisheries Foundation, Tampa, FL
Bob Garaway, FWS Federal Aid, Atlanta, GA
Leroy Kiffe, Lockport, LA
Butch Gautreaux, *GSMFC Commissioner*, Morgan City, LA
Robert Adami, TPWD, Corpus Christi, TX
Joe Gill, Jr., *GSMFC Commissioner*, Ocean Springs, MS

Staff

Larry Simpson, Executive Director, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Steve VanderKooy, IJF Program Coordinator, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Jeff Rester, SM/Habitat Program Coordinator, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Dave Donaldson, FIN Program Manager, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Introductions and Membership Review

J. Smith led the introductions of the MAC and the audience.

Adoption of Agenda

C. Perret moved to accept the agenda as written, J. Mambretti seconded the motion, and with no opposition, the agenda was approved.

Approval of Minutes (March 15, 2005)

The minutes from the last meeting were reviewed. **C. Perret** moved to accept the minutes as written, **J. Mambretti** seconded and the minutes were approved.

Status of 2005 Gulf of Mexico Menhaden Fishing Season

J. Smith of the Beaufort NOAA Laboratory offered a quick overview of the 2005 season to date. The 2005 fishing season had been impacted by a high amount of tropical activity which included TS Arlene and TS Cindy in June, Hurricanes Dennis and Emily in July, Hurricane Katrina in August, and Hurricane Rita in September. Although effort was probably down, the catch prior to Katrina was good with August being a peak month for landings. **Smith** estimates the landings currently around 410,000 MT and with two plants returning to limited operation in October, final landings may reach 423,000 MT which would be down 10% from last year and down 21% from the 5-yr average.

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita devastated the industry this season. Moss Point and Empire were flooded and suffered extensive wind damage, while Cameron and Abbeville both took substantial losses from Rita. A number of boats in the Gulf fleet were damaged or pushed onto land, but many have been refloated and should be able to continue to fish. Plants, however, may not have fair^{ed} as well as the vessels. Moss Point and Abbeville were patched up and back on-line by October 10th. Cameron may be a total loss. Daybrook's plant at Empire sustained severe damage, but the company is striving to be back in operation in 2006. The two operating plants, Moss Point and Abbeville, may not run for long due to the saltwater which inundated all the equipment.

2006 Fishing Season Forecast

J. Smith could not give a forecast for next year, not knowing the number of vessels or plants that might return for the 2006 fishery.

Atlantic Coast Update

J. Smith also updated the committee on the activities in the Atlantic. As of September 30, 115,556 metric tons or 380 million standard fish have been landed on the Atlantic, which is down 8% from 2004, and down 1% from the 5-yr average. **Smith** mentioned a few noteworthy items from the 2005 Atlantic season. Beaufort Fisheries did not operate during 2005 and probably will not fish during '05 fall fishery. This past summer, adult Atlantic menhaden occurred coastally north to Casco Bay, Maine. In addition, this was the first time since summer 1993 that fish were caught in pound nets all the way up to Gloucester, Mass. **Smith** noted good signs of 'peanut' menhaden in Virginia and farther north.

Finally, **Smith** mentioned that Greenpeace helicopters and boats 'buzzed' Virginia menhaden boats prior to Atlantic Menhaden Management Board meeting in August. The Atlantic Menhaden Management Board discussed several options for 'capping' the catch

of menhaden in Chesapeake Bay for reduction. The Board eventually voted to cap removals from the Bay at recent 5-yr mean (~105,800 MT, 2000-04) and passed the proposal 12-2; this would be for reduction catches only, not bait.

Modifications to CDFR Forms

J. Smith reported that the new CDFR forms were used in the Atlantic and Gulf menhaden fisheries this year, and that the captains seemed to be receptive, although there are still a few technical errors which should be eliminated with time. The new forms incorporate GPS locations as well as eliminate some of the less used data fields which were not always reliable. In addition, the forms were structured such that scanning technology may be able to be used in the future, rather than hand key-entry, speeding up the reporting process.

The Gulf Menhaden Stock Assessment

J. Smith briefed the committee on the Beaufort Lab's final assessment for the Gulf menhaden stock. The new assessment uses data through 2004 and proposes biological reference points for management of the stock. This proposed scenario is similar to the current management scheme for Atlantic menhaden using target and limit benchmarks based on per-recruit analysis for gulf menhaden. The model estimates spawner-recruit relationship, fishery selectivities, annual fishing mortality rate, and population fecundity; the assessment produced a base model run assuming best estimates of biological parameters and the Beverton-Holt relationship between eggs and recruits.

The results indicate that fishing mortality rates, F , were highly variable pre-1990. Fishing mortality estimates have been lower and less variable since 1991, possibly due to fleet reductions. Recently, F has increased from 0.45 in 2001 to 0.98 in 2004. Population fecundity has also varied with estimates lowest in the 1960s, relatively stable in 70s and 80s, generally increasing in 1990s, and decreasing since 2000. Recently, the number of recruits has varied around a declining trend: 482 billion in 1998 to 199 billion in 2004. A peak in the number of recruits typically occurs 2 years prior to the peak in estimated ova production. **Smith** reported that the bottom line from the assessment is that the estimated fishing mortality in the terminal year 2004, was between the target and limit, indicating that fishing mortality is high, but not to the point of "overfishing." Similarly, estimated fecundity in the terminal year 2004, was between the target and the limit, indicating that the stock is below healthy levels, but not depleted.

State and Industry Reports on Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and Their Effects on Fishing

The states and industry reported on the status of the agencies and plants/vessels since the hurricanes.

Texas – Hurricane Rita caused some substantial problems in the eastern part of the state. **J. Mambretti** reported that there were fish kills from Galveston to the east due to low

DO which did kill some menhaden. Lots of upland terrestrial habitat was inundated with saltwater and will likely result in vegetation loss and brown kills. The barrier islands and dunes were severely impacted all the way to Matagorda Bay from the surge. Finally, all the local fisheries in the impact area were and will be affected from the storm and include the loss of boat ramps, piers, docks, fish houses, and bait houses.

Louisiana – **J. Roussel** reported that what wasn't damaged or destroyed from Katrina was by Rita, the entire coast of Louisiana was impacted in some way by one or both storms. Katrina hit the coast from Grand Isle to Mississippi, and Rita hit the western coast, but drove water into the central coast. The LDWF had numerous reports of fish kills, but very little confirmation or data on fish numbers due to the extensive damage and difficulty in mobilizing staff at that time. Many of the fish impacted were left on land after the surge went back out making it even more difficult to quantify. In Breton and Chandeleur sounds, all the fishing communities are pretty much gone and debris in the water impacts the ability to fish in those areas. Most of the communities south of New Orleans to Venice are completely gone including Empire and the Daybrook menhaden plant. LDWF anticipates extensive damage to its oyster fishery, as well due to overburden and low DOs. **Roussel** reported that the infrastructure would be the hardest to restore since much of the eastern and western Louisiana coastal communities are virtually gone.

Mississippi – **C. Perret** reported that there were no deaths of MDMR staff from the storms, but that 20% of the staff had lost homes and the MDMR building had water to the second floor. The MDMR lost 20+ vehicles and currently had staff working in some temporary trailers with limited phone service. **Perret** noted that the biggest problem during and after the hurricane was communication and recommended that all the states look into the technology that the military used during the disaster. **Perret** reported that recreational fishing was beginning to pick up, but that many of the natural and artificial reefs would need to be remapped. The oyster reefs in Mississippi appear to have been scoured and may have moved substantially. There were reports of fish kills and will likely be marsh and upland habitat problems due to the inundation of saltwater far up the coast. MDMR staff helped to identify debris in the Mississippi ports using side scan sonar and allowed the Army Corp to reopen those ports after the storm. **Perret** indicated that his biggest concern was getting the information out that Gulf seafood is safe; all the monitoring and testing has indicated no toxicity in seafood products as a result of the storm. He would like to see that information get into the press as quickly as possible. **Perret** reported that Mississippi's governor is soliciting plans for the rebuilding of the coast communities and there have been proposals to develop 'seafood parks' to reestablish the infrastructure for commercial fishing, house processors, and distance them far enough from the impacted coastline to protect them in the event of another disaster. Mississippi would likely be extending the menhaden season an additional two weeks to help the industry following the disaster. **T. Gascon** offered the use of the Moss Point plant and the mothballed Morgan City plant to the states as temporary infrastructure and to keep Omega employees working.

Alabama – **V. Minton** reported that storm surge on Dauphin Island and in the Bayou LaBatre area was around 18 feet. Approximately 200 homes were destroyed on Dauphin Island. The AMRD was able to start removing debris immediately using contractors that were still working from the Hurricane Ivan cleanup of the 2004 season. Bayou LaBatre, formerly the tenth port in the nation in terms of fisheries landings, was heavily damaged by the storm surge. The large processors sustained major damage and most of the small processors were completely wiped out by the storm. **Minton** reported that they had received considerable help from their legislature already. Initially, the oyster reefs were closed to harvest as water quality and tissue testing was going on, but everything has come back negative; Alabama oysters and consequently, Alabama fish is safe to eat. Prices for shucked oysters are currently around \$9/lb or \$75/gallon as a result, unfortunately there are very few shucking houses left, and those that have reopened are having trouble getting laborers since FEMA is paying more right now for recovery efforts. **Minton** reported that while the charter fleet did not suffer major damage, there is no infrastructure for customers coming into the area. AMRD reports good numbers of shrimp, but the debris issue is hindering harvest. **J. Roussel** suggested that there needs to be better coordination between state health officials and the feds to communicate fisheries info and seafood safety to the public since the storm. The public perception is that Gulf fisheries are unsafe.

Omega – **T. Gascon** reported that while Omega suffered no deaths of employees resulting from either Hurricane Katrina or Rita, their plants had suffered extensive damages. Katrina only impacted the Moss Point plant and although they had restored limited operations, the plant was only at 16% of capacity. The few pumps and machinery that are currently working had been inundated with saltwater and would likely fail soon. Rita wiped out all of Cameron which was a total loss and Abbeville was completely flooded. Essentially 76% of the reduction fishery for the country was lost as a result of the two storms. Currently, Omega has 11 functional boats in Abbeville and 4 in Moss Point. When the boats can get out to fish, nets are being damaged due to debris in the water, so fishing for the remainder of the season looks poor at this time. **Gascon** reported that Omega's Morgan City plant had been mothballed several years ago but was undamaged by either storm and had been offered as a temporary location for Daybrook Fisheries although **B. Wallace** had not yet determined what course of action they would take. The Daybrook plant in Empire had been condemned and would have to be rebuilt. Omega was in the process of requesting additional assistance from Congress and NMFS noting that a prolonged absence of the reduction fishery from the market place nationally and internationally could result in a loss of that market share in the future.

LNG Facilities in the Gulf

J. Rester updated the committee on the proposed LNG facilities in the Gulf and where they were in the licensing process. Compass Port, located 11 miles south of Dauphin Island had a public comment period earlier in the year ending on March 27, 2005. On May 9, 2005, the processing of the license application was suspended until more information was received, analyzed, and incorporated into the Final EIS and it is expected that the Final EIS should be out before the end of October 2005. The proposed

Pearl Crossing Deepwater Port would be located 41 miles south of Cameron, Louisiana in 62 feet of water and utilize an open loop system using 195 million gallons of water per day on average. The public comment on the Draft EIS closed on June 7, 2005 and on July 14, 2005, the processing of the license application was suspended until more information is received, analyzed, and incorporated into the Final EIS.

The proposed Main Pass Deepwater Port, located 16 miles southeast of Louisiana had just completed its public comment on the Draft EIS which closed on August 1, 2005. On August 26, 2005, processing of the license application was suspended until more information is received, analyzed, and incorporated into the Final EIS. Finally, the proposed Beacon Port Deepwater Port, located approximately 50 miles east-southeast of Galveston had submitted a request for public scoping comments and closed the comment period on July 11, 2005. On July 14, 2005, processing of the license application was suspended until more information is received, analyzed, and determined to be complete. Draft EIS should be out some time later this year or early next year.

Rester also reported on additional developments with the LNG issue. In the language of the Deepwater Port Act, the governor of the states adjacent to a state which connects a pipeline to a deepwater port must be solicited for approval of LNG deepwater port. In other words, the Governor of an adjacent coastal state has the power to veto a LNG deepwater port. This past summer, the governors of Louisiana, Alabama, and Mississippi sent letters to MARAD stating that they would oppose and veto the licensing of any offshore LNG terminals that would use the open rack vaporizer system. **Rester** promised to keep the committee informed as more information was made available.

Election of Chair

The MAC re-elected J. Smith to serve as chairman in lieu of recent events and the losses to the industry.

Other Business

With no further business, the MAC adjourned at 11:40 a.m.

APPROVED BY:

COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

3/14/06

**TECHNICAL COORDINATING COMMITTEE
MINUTES – 56th Annual Meeting
Tuesday, October 18, 2005
Lake Buena Vista, Florida**

Chairman Corky Perret called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. The following members and others were present:

Members

Steve Heath, ADCNR, Gulf Shores, AL
Jerry Mambretti, TPWD, Port Arthur, TX
Page Campbell, TPWD, Rockport, TX
Virginia Vail, *GSMFC Commissioner*, FWC, Tallahassee, FL
Joe O'Hop, FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Corky Perret, *GSMFC Commissioner*, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
John Roussel, *GSMFC Commissioner*, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Doug Frugé, USFWS, Ocean Springs, MS
Michael Bailey, NMFS, St. Petersburg, FL

Staff

Jeff Rester, Habitat/SEAMAP Coordinator, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Madeleine Travis, Staff Assistant, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Larry Simpson, Executive Director, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Steve VanderKooy, IJF Coordinator, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Dave Donaldson, Data Program Manager, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Joe Ferrer, Systems Administrator, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Donna Bellais, ComFIN Survey Coordinator, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Others

Mike Ray, *GSMFC Commissioner*, Austin, TX
Anne Lange, NMFS, Silver Spring, MD
Terry Cody, Rockport, TX
Joseph Smith, NMFS, Beaufort, NC
Ralf Riedel, GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Roy Crabtree, NMFS, St. Petersburg, FL
Bill Hogarth, NMFS, Silver Spring, MD
Joe Gill, *GSMFC Commissioner*, Ocean Springs, MS
Harriet Perry, GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Bob Gasaway, USFWS, Atlanta, GA
Bill Horn, FWC, Tallahassee, FL
Jan Landsberg, FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Barbara Viskup, MDEQ, Biloxi, MS
Cherie O'Brien, TPWD, Dickinson, TX

Adoption of Agenda

The LNG Update agenda item was cancelled. With no further changes, the agenda was adopted.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes for the meeting held on March 15, 2005 were approved with minor changes.

State/Federal Reports

Florida - **V. Vail** stated that the Florida Keys were hit by both Hurricane Katrina and Rita. The spiny lobster fishery was impacted with 70% of the lobster traps lost. She stated that Florida was trying to secure money for debris clean up to help remove the traps. The charter boat fishery in the Florida panhandle has suffered this year from increased fuel costs and the unavailability of hotel rooms for clients. The oyster fishery in Apalachicola Bay has been closed since late August. Hurricane Dennis impacted the oyster processing houses in this area in July. **V. Vail** stated that water releases from Lake Okeechobee have caused water quality problems in the downstream estuaries with freshwater algal blooms due to high phosphate levels. The Florida blue crab effort management program has begun and in order to qualify fishermen must have landed 500 pounds of blue crab the previous year. Seven hundred of two thousand licensed fishermen qualified. The effort management program separates the hard and soft shell fishery. **V. Vail** stated that 196 fishermen no longer qualify for the marine life endorsement because of the marine life effort management program. **J. O'Hop** stated that Florida's West Coast, from approximately Naples to Tarpon Springs, has been affected by an extensive and persistent red tide since January 2005. Dozens of manatees, sea turtles, and dolphins have been killed during these blooms. Anoxic conditions down to the bottom have been reported in several areas, and divers have noted extensive areas of bottom where fauna were completely wiped out. **J. O'Hop** stated that the monitoring of stone crab populations has been extended to the southwest Florida area starting in February 2005 through funds from the Stone Crab Trap Limitation Program. Florida will soon extend the monitoring program to the northwest Florida area, with monitoring to begin in the next few months. **J. O'Hop** stated that the monitoring of recreational angler catches on head boats began in January 2005 with funding from the Fisheries Information Network. Florida has been gathering data on fish kept and released for use by assessments which need additional data on size of released fish and observations which may help provide estimates of release mortality.

Alabama - **S. Heath** reported that Bayou La Batre was hit hard by Hurricane Katrina. **S. Heath** stated that a socioeconomic survey was underway to assess the damage to the fishing industry and fishing community. Charter boats have been hurt since Hurricane Ivan last year since there were not many hotel rooms available and the tropical activity this past summer. **S. Heath** reported that they were cleaning up submerged debris in Mississippi Sound. Alabama requested an initial TED exemption for 30 days and they will request an additional extension. **S. Heath** stated that Alabama was closely

monitoring oyster dredging in Portersville Bay. Finally, **S. Heath** reported that Alabama marine enforcement agents worked approximately 10,000 hours in hurricane recovery efforts.

Mississippi – **C. Perret** stated the MDMR did not lose any employees during Hurricane Katrina. The MDMR office was submerged and the Fisheries Department was now in a double wide trailer in the parking lot. He reported that 17% of their employees lost their homes. **C. Perret** stated that Governor Haley Barbour has formed a committee to redesign, redirect and rebuild the coast. The committee sees a need for a seafood park for processors. **C. Perret** stressed the need for a link to the water. The Mississippi charter boat fleet has been hurt badly. Hotels were not available even if charter captains did not lose their boats. **C. Perret** stated that there was a real need for reinvestment in the fishing industry infrastructure in south Mississippi.

Louisiana – **J. Roussel** stated that Louisiana was affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. He reported that LDWF staff participated in search and rescue missions in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina. All LDWF facilities were affected by both storms. The Slidell and Pointe a la Hache offices were destroyed, and the Grand Terre Laboratory was heavily damaged. Louisiana has planned a derelict trap clean up for March in Terrebonne Parish. Oysters were not currently being harvested in Louisiana, although some areas would open soon. About \$200 million in oysters were lost due to the storms. The trip ticket program saw a 50-85% decrease in reporting since the storms hit. **J. Roussel** stated that they were reviewing the confidentiality of the trip ticket data since fishermen wanted the information to apply for disaster assistance. He reported that the MRFSS survey work was going well, but the storms destroyed boat docks and ramps. Samplers were now concentrating on the central coast sampling areas. **J. Roussel** stated that the artificial reef program would probably grow since approximately 100 platforms were damaged by the storms. **J. Roussel** stated that Louisiana could lose as much as \$2.2 billion from commercial and recreational fishing being impacted by the storms.

Texas – **J. Mambretti** stated the full damage done by Hurricane Rita may still not be known for weeks, but TPWD employees continue to assess damage and impacts through southeast Texas. Sabine Lake and its extensive wetlands took a direct environmental hit. Beach over washes sent saltwater into intermediate and freshwater marshes. Dune systems along barrier islands suffered damage in areas as far south as Matagorda Island. Almost all of the major rivers and their tributaries in southeast Texas experienced substantial fish kills as a result of Hurricane Rita. **J. Mambretti** stated that Coastal Fisheries plans to conduct a pilot project to field test a handheld PC device in an effort to obtain real-time data acquisition. The 79th session of the Texas Legislature created a private reefing initiative that allows TPWD to accept derelict vessels into the reefing program. The bill granted TPWD the authority to allow private individuals, groups, and/or associations to deploy artificial reef material under guidelines and rules established by the TPWD Commission. **J. Mambretti** stated that the Texas Clipper Project was still on track. The projected sinking date was still set for July 2006. The Texas Legislature also created a license moratorium program for the Texas Gulf shrimp fishery. Only fishermen who held a Commercial Gulf Shrimp Boat License on August

31, 2005 would be able to purchase a license after September 1, 2005. There would be no buyback program associated with this program, but there will be transferability and an elected review board for appeals. **J. Mambretti** stated that because of concerns about vulnerability to over-harvest of certain live mollusks and other inter-tidal species along the Texas coast, the TPWD Commission adopted a closed season for harvesting species such as hermit crabs, starfish, sea urchins and periwinkles along a small area of South Padre Island from Nov. 1 through April 30. Texas has been implementing its pilot trip ticket program. Since January equipment has been purchased, paper tickets ordered and received, electronic ticket program finalized, scanning software has been installed and set up, staff has been hired, office has been set up, and 17 dealers are currently using either the electronic or paper tickets with more dealers being added every day. The goal was to sign up 15-20% of the active seafood dealers. A record 51 Kemp's Ridley nests were located on the Texas coast during 2005. This breaks the previous record of 42 Kemp's ridley nests recorded in Texas during 2004. Two loggerhead nests and three green turtle nests also occurred on Texas beaches in 2005. Red tide continues to be present in areas of Port Mansfield, the Lower Laguna Madre, Brazos-Santiago Pass, and areas of Padre Island National Seashore and the South Padre Island beach. As of late last week and continuing this week, red tide was being reported in Corpus Christi Bay.

NOAA Fisheries – **M. Bailey** stated the Southeast Regional Office has moved their office. The Secretary of Commerce has declared fishery disasters in the Gulf of Mexico due to the hurricanes. **M. Bailey** stated that management of the grouper fishery was proving challenging. The National Research Council has been reviewing how NMFS collects data with a report to be released next year. Due to the hurricanes, the bycatch workshop has been postponed until next year. **M. Bailey** reported that a Gulf recreational fishing team meeting was held in August with all Gulf States participating. NOAA, FWS and other nongovernmental organizations were producing a video on monofilament recycling programs. **M. Bailey** stated that NOAA Fisheries Headquarters would soon begin the process of updating the National Artificial Reef Plan.

USFWS – **D. Frugé** stated that Dale Hall was confirmed by the Senate as the new Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service. The FWS continues to be an active participant in and supporter of the Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership (SARP). Scott Robinson was selected to be the first full-time SARP coordinator during the summer. Scott worked for the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, and he will continue in their employment while serving as SARP coordinator.

The National Fish Habitat Plan has been recently released in draft form for review. The National Plan was an item that was called for in the FWS's Fisheries Program Strategic Plan that was completed a couple of years ago. On November 12, 2004 the FWS and NOAA Fisheries Service received a petition to list the American eel as endangered under the Endangered Species Act. In July the agencies determined, in response to that petition, that substantial biological information existed to warrant a formal status review of the species. Congress has passed and the President signed the Interior Appropriations bill for Fiscal Year 2006. The FWS budget was about \$1.3 billion, excluding the Sport Fish and Wildlife Restoration funds. The Fisheries Program received an approximately

\$3.5 million increase, mostly in fish hatchery operations. **D. Frugé** stated that when Hurricane Katrina struck southeast Louisiana and south Alabama and Mississippi it damaged facilities and habitats at several National Wildlife Refuges. Initial damage assessments to facilities from Katrina exceeded \$92 million. Hurricane Rita also inflicted major damage to refuges in southwest Louisiana, estimated to exceed \$40 million for facilities, levees and dikes. Also, related to hurricane damages from Ivan, Dennis, and now Katrina and Rita, the FWS Panama City Field Office in Florida met in September with officials of Walton County, Florida and recommended they develop a habitat conservation plan (HCP) to address impacts to sea turtles resulting from issuance of emergency coastal armoring permits. Completion of an HCP would allow the county to apply for a Section 10 incidental take permit under the Endangered Species Act.

Florida's Fish Health Program

J. Landsberg stated that the Florida Aquatic Health Program monitors and responds to disease and mortality events of aquatic organisms statewide. The Aquatic Health Program implements a statewide network to collect samples, obtain data, and diagnose causes of mortality and disease events. It also provides timely information to the public, researchers, media, and resource managers about disease and mortality events. **J. Landsberg** stated that the Aquatic Health Program was responsible for monitoring harmful algal blooms. The Aquatic Health Program also supports the Florida stock enhancement research facility through disease management, health policy, and environmental assessments.

2004 Hurricane Impacts on Florida's Artificial Reefs

B. Horn discussed the 2004 impact of Hurricanes Charley, Frances, Jeanne, and Ivan on Florida's artificial reefs. The goals of the project were to develop artificial reef management options and recommendations from examples of hurricane damage or movement of artificial reefs based on various storm parameters and local conditions. The project was not a full study and only included physical damage assessments, not biological. There was limited information due to lack of SCUBA dives since last fall due to winter conditions of cold water, low visibility and high seas. Reefs assessed were not random but rather reefs of concern for possible damage. The study examined reefs composed of concrete modules, large vessels, and steel towers. Unexpected results were found since most movement seemed to be not in the direction of the storm itself, but in the direction of the waves. The study found that swell and wave impacts may be more important than storm surge impacts. **B. Horn** stated that orientation of vessels may be important to stability, and that vessels on their sides may be more prone to hull cracking. **B. Horn** stated that small cargo ships may not be stable reef materials at shallower depths. Small tugboats may need additional anchoring. **B. Horn** reported that speed of the hurricane over water can be a major factor in the impact to artificial reefs.

Population Trends in Estuarine Dependent Fish and Invertebrates from Fishery Independent Monitoring Update

R. Riedel stated that the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory had recently started comparing Mississippi data from 1968's Gulf of Mexico Estuarine Inventory (GMEI) to 2001 data from the same areas. He stated that diversity had not changed since the initial study, but species abundance was lower. In examining other datasets, **R. Riedel** stated that he found strong indication of declines in the abundance of juvenile blue crabs in Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas. He investigated SEAMAP data and other species to determine if other species were showing declines in abundances. Atlantic croaker, sand seatrout, butterfish, and brown shrimp did not show any significant declines in abundance over the last thirty years.

Hurricane Katrina Impacts on Water Quality in Mississippi

B. Viskup stated that Hurricane Katrina did extensive damage to Mississippi's coast. The storm damaged wastewater treatment facilities and thousands of homes with septic systems were destroyed. One of the major concerns after the storm was water quality. The Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality was able to start sampling dissolved oxygen levels approximately 10 days after the storm. Dissolved oxygen was initially low in the Pascagoula and Jourdan Rivers, but was back to normal 5 days after initial sampling. **B. Viskup** stated that bacteria levels were higher than normal, but within EPA guidelines. She reported that several studies examining heavy metals and nutrients were ongoing and should be completed shortly.

Sheepshead Profile Update

S. VanderKooy stated that he would be sending the Sheepshead Profile out for the TCC's review in December. He reported that the task force met in August, but completion of the final draft was delayed due to the hurricanes.

Subcommittee Reports

Crab – **H. Perry** stated that the Crab Subcommittee did not have a quorum, but discussed Hurricanes Katrina and Rita impacts on the crab fishing communities, crab processors, and related infrastructure. **H. Perry** reported that Traci Floyd was again elected chairman.

SEAMAP – **S. Heath** stated that SEAMAP received level funding of \$1.385 million for 2006. He reported that due to rising survey costs and years of level funding, Louisiana would no longer be able to conduct their winter survey. Mississippi also had to cut back on the number of days that they would be able to sample. **S. Heath** stated that rising fuel prices were causing severe problems for all SEAMAP participants. **S. Heath** reported that the 2005 hurricane season impacted SEAMAP in several areas. The SEAMAP Invertebrate Archiving Center at the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory was destroyed. Approximately 700 of 8,800 samples were recovered. The roof to the building that

housed the Archiving Center collapsed and it was hoped that more samples would be recovered when the roof was removed. The Fall Plankton Survey was postponed with NMFS starting sampling this week. The Oregon II was also damaged during Hurricane Katrina. The Fall Shrimp/Groundfish Survey was currently taking place, but Mississippi's portion would be severely reduced due to high fuel prices. **S. Heath** stated that SEAMAP hoped to send out a letter stressing the need for increased SEAMAP funding early next year. The TCC passed a motion to submit a letter stressing the importance of SEAMAP to all state directors to sign before sending it to the Gulf's Congressional delegation. **S. Heath** stated that as part of updating the 2006-2010 SEAMAP Management Plan, the Subcommittee approved funding priorities for this time period. The Subcommittee also approved the SEAMAP 2006-2010 Management Plan. **S. Heath** stated that the Management Plan would be revised slightly and then sent to the TCC for their approval in the next few weeks. Finally, **S. Heath** reported that Jim Hanifen was again elected chairman with S. Heath serving as vice chairman.

Data Management – **P. Campbell** reported that the Subcommittee discussed involving CCA in outreach for the MRFSS survey. The Subcommittee would contact the CCA national directors soon to help in this effort. The Subcommittee also discussed granting access to the FIN data management system and confidential data. The area of concern was reports using confidential data that were not properly reviewed and could release that data. The Subcommittee decided to add a check list on the confidentiality form that outlined the rules of confidentiality and a review requirement for any reports developed from the data. **P. Campbell** reported that Chris Denson was elected chairman with Guy Davenport serving as vice chairman.

Artificial Reef – **R. Lukens** reported that the Subcommittee's first meeting for 2005 was scheduled for next week in conjunction with the ASMFC artificial reef committee. The Gulf session of that meeting was cancelled, but R. Lukens and Chairman Dale Shively would be attending. The Subcommittee continued to work with NOAA Fisheries Headquarters on the National Artificial Reef Plan that the Subcommittee sent to them over six years ago. Alabama and the Mississippi Gulf Fishing Banks petitioned the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council for Special Management Zone designation for artificial reefs in federal waters off those states. Special Management Zone designation would allow the imposition of special gear restrictions while fishing within the zones.

Habitat – **D. Frugé** reported that the Subcommittee discussed the Gulf of Mexico Alliance, LNG facilities, the Commission Bottom Mapping Project, a habitat video and a new habitat web site. He stated that the main agenda item was a strategy to assess the impact of freshwater reduction in coastal environments. The impact of freshwater reduction in coastal environments was an attempt to develop a strategy to assess and evaluate the impact of freshwater reduction in the coastal environments of the Gulf of Mexico and to develop a strategy to seek mitigation of those impacts. In the past, mitigation efforts for reservoir projects only focused on areas immediately below the dam. Downstream impacts in coastal estuaries were not given much thought. **D. Frugé** reported that the Subcommittee would be creating a data inventory of databases and

reports that deal with the downstream impacts of reduced freshwater inflow on estuaries. D. Frugé was elected chairman with Mark LaSalle serving as vice chairman

Election of Chairman

With no opposition, C. Perret was elected Chairman with J. Roussel serving as Vice Chairman.

Other Business

With no other business the meeting adjourned at 5:00 p.m.

STATE-FEDERAL FISHERIES MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
MINUTES – 56th Annual Meeting
Wednesday, October 19, 2005
Lake Buena Vista, Florida

Chairman John Roussel called the meeting to order at 8:45 a.m. Facilitator Larry Simpson conducted the meeting. The following members and others were present:

Members

Roy Crabtree, NOAA Fisheries, St. Petersburg, FL
Doug Frugé, USFWS, Ocean Springs, MS (*Proxy for C. Brown*)
Vernon Minton, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL
Corky Perret, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Mike Ray, TPWD, Austin, TX
John Roussel, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Larry Simpson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Virginia Vail, FFWCC, Tallahassee, FL

Staff

Dave Donaldson, Data Program Manager, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Jeff Rester, SEAMAP/Habitat Coordinator, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Madeleine Travis, FIN Staff Assistant, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Steve VanderKooy, IJF Program Coordinator, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Joe Ferrer, Systems Administrator, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Ron Lukens, Assistant Director, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Donna Bellais, ComFIN Survey Coordinator, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Others

Kim Amendola, NOAA Fisheries, St. Petersburg, FL
Michael Bailey, NOAA Fisheries, St. Petersburg, FL
Bob Gasaway, USFWS, Atlanta, GA
Joe Gill, *GSMFC Commissioner*, MS
William Hogarth, NOAA Fisheries, Silver Spring, MD
Mary Hope Katsouros, Washington, DC
Jonathan Kelsey, NOAA National MPA Center
Leroy Kiffe, Lockport, LA
Anne Lange, NOAA Fisheries, Silver Spring, MD
David Medici, G&SAFF, Tampa, FL
Ralph Rayburn, *GSMFC Commissioner*, Texas Sea Grant, College Station, TX
George Silva, NOAA Fisheries, Silver Spring, MD
Joseph Smith, NOAA Fisheries, Beaufort, NC
Heather Stirratt, NOAA Fisheries, Silver Spring, MD

Adoption of Agenda

The agenda was adopted as presented.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on March 16, 2005 in Point Clear, Alabama were approved as presented. The minutes of the meeting held on August 24, 2005 in New Orleans, Louisiana were approved as presented.

Dr. William Hogarth of NOAA Fisheries updated the Committee from the Federal perspective on hurricanes Katrina and Rita. NOAA is trying to address the economic impacts for the fisheries affected by these hurricanes and requested input from the states regarding the type of assistance needed. **Hogarth** also addressed immediate and long-term goals for rebuilding these fisheries properly. **Hogarth** noted that efficiency and economics will play a large role in disaster spending in Congress. **Hogarth** stated that Council members and Executive Directors would be in Washington, DC for three days beginning October 24, 2005 and their discussions, in part, would focus on the state of fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico.

Dr. Hogarth introduced **Mary Hope Katsouros** who has helped develop a tax exempt, non-profit fund through "Fish for the Future Foundation" to benefit fishermen in the Gulf who have been impacted by the hurricanes. The five Gulf State Directors and Dr. Hogarth will form a committee to review applications for accuracy and checks will be issued. The fund is available online for making contributions.

Menhaden Advisory Committee Report

J. Smith of NOAA Fisheries Beaufort Lab and Chairman of the Menhaden Advisory Committee (MAC) gave the report for that Committee. **Smith** reported that landings for Gulf menhaden through September 30, 2005 were 410,000 metric tons (mt). Effects from hurricane Katrina closed two of the menhaden factories; Omega at Moss Point, Mississippi and Daybrook at Empire, Louisiana. The factories at Abbeville and Cameron, Louisiana sustained damage from hurricane Rita and were also closed temporarily. A number of boats in the menhaden fleet were damaged or pushed onto land. Because of the extensive damage to menhaden facilities and vessels **Smith** was not able to give a forecast for next year.

Smith reported that the Captain's Daily Fishing Reports (CDFR) have been updated utilizing GPS technology. Unfortunately much of the 2005 data from Empire, Louisiana were lost due to flooding from hurricane activity.

Smith then reported on the final assessment for the Gulf menhaden stocks conducted by D. Vaughan. The results indicate that fishing mortality rates were highly variable pre-1990, but lower and less variable since 1991 probably due to fleet reductions and consolidation in the industry. Estimated fishing mortality in the terminal year 2004 was

between the benchmarks indicating that mortality is high, but not to the point of overfishing.

Smith reported that Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama gave reports on the effects of the hurricanes Rita and Katrina. The overall view is that the resource remains but the industry and associated business infrastructure in some areas is gone. There may be a two week extension to the season in Mississippi and Louisiana.

J. Smith was re-elected chairman of the Menhaden Advisory Committee.

Draft Consolidated HMS FMP Presentation

Heather Stirratt off NOAA Fisheries in Silver Spring, Maryland gave a presentation on the Consolidated Atlantic Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Fishery Management Plan (FMP). Since the original FMPs of 1999 a number of issues have required revisions and amendments and this FMP consolidates these issues and changes. Scoping meetings were completed in April 2004, the pre-draft was completed in February 2005, and the draft was released in August 2005 for public comment. Due to the situation in the Gulf, the date for the end of the public period has been changed to March 1, 2006, the final FMP will be adopted in August 2006, and the final rule in September 2006. **Stirratt** reported that several of the public hearings were cancelled due to the hurricanes.

Stirratt reported that issues in the FMP include bycatch reduction, rebuilding and overfishing, management program structures, and others. Workshops will teach fishermen how to handle accidental interactions with sea turtles and marine mammals. Other workshops will be developed to train fishermen on identification of HMS species. Time and area closures are being considered in an attempt to reduce bycatch. Fishing gear is also being addressed as well as regulatory and administrative "housekeeping".

Stirratt requested any input or comments from Committee members and attendees.

National MPA Program

Jonathan Kelsey gave a presentation on the Marine Protected Areas (MPA) National System that is being developed. Their website address is www.mpa.gov. There are nearly 2,000 sites that are managed areas, and include marine protected areas in U.S. waters. This national system is being developed to try to bring standardization to protected areas. **Kelsey** reported that an attempt is being made to integrate and develop a framework for a national marine protected area system which is scientifically based and representative of diverse areas.

Kelsey reported that the Executive Order signed by President Clinton and endorsed by President Bush encourages states to participate in a voluntary way. While a national framework is being established, regional and local priorities should be included. The first step in developing this national system is to identify the existing sites for consideration, then determine if there is a need for new sites.

Kelsey noted that the national system proposes to provide a forum to develop MPA goals and coordinate planning across federal, state and tribal boundaries. A national system could be used to leverage resources and build partnerships, highlight the MPA efforts, and provide data and analysis tools for research. It is critical that state partnerships are developed since most of the fishery resources exist under state jurisdiction and management. Several workshops have taken place to get input from the states.

FIN Data Program Update

D. Donaldson reported on FIN activities scheduled for 2006. Due to funding cuts some activities have been reduced. These include personnel for the Charter Boat Survey, head boat trips in Alabama and Florida, the number of flounder samples collected and processed in Louisiana, etc. **Donaldson** noted that on the positive side, Texas is moving forward with full implementation of Trip Tickets in 2006. **Donaldson** reported that the budget for 2006 is just under \$5 million dollars.

Donaldson reported that during the August 2005 meeting procedures for distribution of funds was discussed. Prioritizing of activities was approved at an earlier S/FFMC meeting.

Donaldson distributed the marine recreational fishing license matrix to Committee members. This matrix lists the elements needed to use fishing licenses as a sampling frame and identifies which states are collecting this information. Currently there is a license exemption for shore fishing in Florida and also for fishing in Alabama the in the EEZ. **Donaldson** noted that legislative action is required in some instances in order to make changes. **Donaldson** reported that the Data Management Subcommittee has discussed compiling databases for fishing licenses.

Donaldson reported that there has been an issue with data confidentiality. Impact Assessment was conducting a project for National Marine Fisheries Service by compiling information on fishing communities and inadvertently released some confidential data. These data were received for the FIN Data Management System. Fortunately this was a preliminary study, not widely distributed. The report will be revised before public distribution. NOAA General Council is checking on this issue. **Donaldson** reported that steps have been taken to prevent this from happening in the future. **Donaldson** and the state partners will review data before it is released.

W. Hogarth of NOAA Fisheries Silver Spring discussed a national data collection system. In the February or March of 2006 **Hogarth** would like to have a meeting with the state directors and some representatives from recreational fishing for input on how recreational data should be handled. **Hogarth** also noted that he would like to see whatever funding NOAA has to go into the system to help make it work.

Recreational Fisheries Implementation Team

M. Bailey of NOAA Fisheries St. Petersburg gave a presentation on the Recreational Fisheries Implementation Team. **Bailey** noted that there is a lack of understanding of fisheries management. There is a lack of trust in the management process and communication is poor. **Bailey** stated that the goals of the Team are to improve service to the recreational community, increase recreational fishing participation, improve stewardship and management of recreational species, and promote recreational fishing access.

Bailey stated that a strategic plan has been developed. In August 2005 the Gulf of Mexico Recreational Fishing group was created and includes most of the stakeholders and agencies in the Gulf region including GSMFC, GMFMC, USFWS, State Directors, fishing tournament organizers, Charter Boat operators, Sea Grant, and NOAA. **Bailey** reported that goals and objectives include an inventory of ongoing sportfishing activities in the Gulf of Mexico, identify what are missing, gaps, and overlaps. **Bailey** distributed material developed at the meeting, including a "wish list" and areas of concern.

Bailey reported that an action plan is being developed based on input from the meetings held in California and in the Gulf of Mexico region. Budgets are also being developed as well as a website.

Status of IJF Fishery Management Plans and other Activities

S. VanderKooy reported to the S/FFMC on the IJF Program. **VanderKooy** noted that several projects have been affected by the hurricanes and will be delayed. The Sheepshead Profile is in final editing and will be completed by the end of the year. The Crab Subcommittee is continuing to work on the derelict trap document.

VanderKooy noted that the Oyster FMP is out of date and may be revised in the near future. The Striped Bass Plan has resided with the S/FFMC since July and has been under review with a September deadline. Because of the storms the deadline was extended to today. No comments have been received from this Committee so **VanderKooy** asked the Committee if the deadline should be extended further. **D. Frugé** noted that USFWS had a comment from the Athens, Georgia office concerning the historic range of rivers above the fall line. **Frugé** proposed revising the Draft FMP based on those comments and explained the nature of the proposed changes. **C. Perret moved to release the Striped Bass FMP for public comment for 90 days. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.** Final action on this FMP will be taken in March.

Habitat Program Report

J. Rester gave a brief report on activities of the Habitat Program and noted that a detailed report will be given at the Commission Business Session. **Rester** reported that a draft National Fish Habitat Action Plan is now out for public review. This plan is available

online at www.fishhabitat.org. Rester reported that the Commission is working on a MARFIN Gulf of Mexico bottom mapping project.

Election of Chairman/Facilitator

J. Roussel was re-elected Chairman and L. Simpson was re-elected Facilitator of the State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:45 a.m.

Virginia Vail

**COMMISSION BUSINESS MEETING
MINUTES - 56th Annual Meeting
Wednesday, October 19, 2005
Lake Buena Vista, Florida**

Chairman John Roussel called the meeting to order at 1:13 p.m. **L. Simpson** noted that a quorum was present and reviewed pertinent rules and regulations regarding voting procedures. **J. Roussel** welcomed everyone and thanked the staff for their efforts in arranging this meeting during a very difficult time (post Hurricane Katrina).

J. Roussel took the opportunity to recognize Anne Lange who will be retiring soon. He recognized her contributions on behalf of the Commission and the various Gulf States. All Commissioner's and guest showed their appreciation with a round of applause.

The following Commissioners and/or proxies were present:

Commissioners

R. Vernon Minton, ADCNR/MRD, Gulf Shores, AL (*Proxy for Barnett Lawley*)
Virginia Vail, FWC, Tallahassee, FL (*Proxy for Ken Haddad*)
Butch Gautreaux, Louisiana Senate, Morgan City, LA
John Roussel, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA (*Proxy for Dwight Landreneau*)
Mike Ray, TPWD, Austin, TX (*Proxy for Robert L. Cook*)
Ralph Rayburn, College Station, TX
Corky Perret, MDMF, Biloxi, MS (*Proxy for William Walker*)
Joe Gill, Jr., Ocean Springs, MS

Staff

Larry Simpson, Executive Director, Ocean Springs, MS
Ron Lukens, Assistant Director, Ocean Springs, MS
Ginny Herring, Administrative Officer, Ocean Springs, MS
Nancy Marcellus, Administrative Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS
Dave Donaldson, Data Program Manager, Ocean Springs, MS
Steve VanderKooy, IJF Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Jeff Rester, SEAMAP/Habitat Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Madeleine Travis, Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS
Gayle Jones, Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS

Others

Doug Frugé, USFWS, Ocean Springs, MS
Michael Bailey, NMFS, St. Petersburg, FL
Anne Lange, NMFS, Silver Spring, MD
Roy Crabtree, NOAA/SERO, St. Petersburg, FL
Mike Rubino, NOAA Fisheries, Silver Spring, MD
Elizabeth Fetherston, The Ocean Conservancy, St. Petersburg, FL
Mary Hope Katsouras, Fish for the Future

David Medici, Gulf & South Atlantic Fisheries Foundation, Tampa, FL
Palma Inglez, NOAA Fisheries, St. Petersburg, FL
Kim Amendola, NOAA Fisheries, St. Petersburg, FL
Bill Hogarth, NOAA Fisheries, Silver Springs, MD

Adoption of Agenda

The agenda was adopted noting that a presentation would be made via telephone at 3:00 pm. **C. Perret moved to adopt agenda. Rayburn seconded. The agenda was adopted.**

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held March 16-17, 2005 were reviewed. **J. Gill moved to approve the minutes. Vail seconded. The minutes were approved as presented**

GSMFC Standing Committee Reports

Law Enforcement Committee (LEC) – **V. Minton**, reported on behalf of the LEC. They met on Tuesday, October 18, 2005.

The LEC (and Council Law Enforcement Advisory Panel) requested additional time during the Commission's annual meeting. They would like to meet on Monday afternoon, Tuesday morning and Tuesday afternoon for an informal meeting. They requested continued funding for their summer and winter work sessions to continue strategic planning, implementation, and review of yearly regional enforcement operations. These expenses would be equally divided between the Council and the Commission.

Minton stated that the LEC requested that the State Directors include enforcement in their requests to the Governor's for hurricane relief under the Fishery Failure Declaration. He discussed the need for this assistance and how it would be used.

The LEC will write a letter to Dale Jones to thank him for understanding the need to postpone the Enforcement Chiefs meeting on JEAs in the advent of Hurricane Katrina and Rita. The LEC is ready to proceed and would like to see the meeting rescheduled.

The LEC elected **J. T. Jenkins** (AL) Chairman, and **Walter Chatagner** (MS) Vice Chairman.

The next election will be held October 2007.

C. Perret presented a resolution commending Gulf of Mexico natural resources law enforcement personnel for Hurricane Katrina and Rita search and rescue efforts. **C. Perret moved to adopt the resolution. Vail seconded.** Commissioners discussed the fact that natural resources personnel other than law enforcement had also been involved

with search and rescue efforts therefore it would be appropriate to include all personnel involved. **D. Donaldson was instructed to gather facts regarding various search and rescue efforts within the various Gulf States and to revise the resolution as appropriate. The motion passed. (Resolution attached.)**

C. Perret moved to approve the LEC report. Vail seconded. The motion passed.

Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) Report - **C. Perret** reported that the TCC met on Tuesday, October 18, 2005. They received status reports from the various states, NMFS and FWS. The following subcommittees reported to the TCC: Crab; SEAMAP; Data Management; Artificial Reef; and, Habitat. He briefed the Commissioner's on their activities. The SEAMAP Subcommittee reported that they had received level funding of \$1.385 million for 2006. Due to rising survey costs and years of level funding, Louisiana will no longer be able to conduct their winter survey. Mississippi has also had to cut back on the number of days that they will be able to sample. Fuel prices are causing severe problems for all SEAMAP participants. **The TCC requested that the Commission draft a letter to be signed by all state directors and the Executive Director, stressing the need for increased SEAMAP funding. The letter is to be sent to the entire Gulf Congressional delegation.**

C. Perret
J. Roussel moved to approve the report and letter to the Gulf Congressional delegation. **V. Minton seconded. The motion was approved.**

State-Federal Fisheries Management Committee (S-FFMC) Report – **L. Simpson** reported that the S-FFMC met earlier in the day. The Committee received reports from the Menhaden Advisory Committee (MAC); and, updates on the Interjurisdictional Fisheries Program, Fisheries Information Network Programs, and Habitat Programs.

Other topics discussed included a presentation by **Heather Stirratt** on the draft of the consolidated Highly Migratory Species (HMS) FMP which takes in the original 1999 FMP and several amendments. **John Kelsey** presented an overview of the National Marine Protected Areas (MPA) Program. He discussed the goals, progress and problems associated with the MPA program. Several workshops will take place to get input from State interests in developing the framework for the MPA program.

The report was approved without opposition.

NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office

R. Crabtree reported that a committee is looking into holding a National Fisheries Data Workshop. The workshop would get the States, Commissions and Federal government together to discuss common data collection and management issues to collaborate so that more efficient priorities for data initiatives can be established. The committee is currently trying to better determine objectives of these issues and hope to schedule the workshop in 2006.

He reported that the National Research Council is conducting three studies. Committees have been formed to look at recreational fisheries data collection programs; the ecosystems effect on fishing; and, a review of the benefits and risk of seafood consumption is being addressed by the Institute of Medicines, Food and Nutrition Board. These studies will be addressed in field hearings and reports are due in the March – July 2006 time frame.

Headquarter staff is working on a summary of the distribution of all of the cooperative research funding among the States and NMFS. They are looking at funding distribution to individual States, multiple States, and NMFS regions. In 2004 there was \$18.7 million distributed for cooperative research nationally.

In regards to the Eastern oyster biological review that is underway, the group has held its second meeting. The final meeting is scheduled for October 20-21, 2005. The agency will then determine whether listing is warranted by January 11, 2006.

Crabtree took the opportunity to discuss various meetings cancellations and rescheduling due to Hurricane Katrina.

He updated the Commissioners on TED exemptions. TED exemptions were originally issue for Alabama, Mississippi and part of Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina. Following Hurricane Rita, a second TED exemption was issued from Western Louisiana down to Galveston, Texas. The agency is now in the process of consolidating both exemptions for the purpose of renewing them. The expiration date was November 11, and will be extended for another 30 days.

Crabtree introduced **Dr. Palma Ingles**, Cultural Anthropologist with NOAA, SERO. **Dr. Ingles** discussed the impact of hurricanes on fishermen. Prior to the hurricane disaster there was a three year project being conducted in all five Gulf States. Fishing communities were identified and a contractor, Impact, Inc., was hired to visit each of these communities. They compiled secondary data, such as licenses data permits, etc. Their report was almost complete when Hurricane Katrina made landfall. Funds were made available to go back into these areas following the storm and to continue the studies and to do a quick assessment of damages. The contractor will attempt to identify infrastructure that is still available and to note what is no longer in business. A final report will include GIS maps and information about who is in business and who is not. **Roussel** stated that LDWF has also been collecting data and his office will provide information to **Palma's** people. **Roussel** emphasized that coordination of effort is important. **Perret** requested a copy of the pre-storm study. **Simpson** discussed establishing a Commission committee to study socio-economic issues that would be governed by the State-Federal Fisheries Management Committee. Discussion of this issue was deferred to agenda Item 15.

Crabtree completed his report by cancelling the MARFIN Panel Meeting scheduled in St. Petersburg, FL for the following day due to Hurricane Wilma. **Hogarth** reported that

the Commission's concerns regarding the Artificial Guidelines would be resolved as soon as possible.

National Aquaculture Legislation

Dr. Michael Rubino, Manager, NOAA Aquaculture Program gave an overview of aquaculture and aquaculture legislation in the Gulf of Mexico. He discussed U.S. marine aquaculture, shellfish farming; marine stock enhancement; finfish, shrimp and ornamentals; aquatic plants; and feed nutrition, equipment, and investment servicing global production. He indicated that aquaculture can satisfy rising demand, create jobs, and enhance food security and health. The need for enabling regulatory framework; addressing divergent views; the lack of understanding about health and safety; the fear of competition; public relations; the need for marketing and the need for research and development are some of the challenges being faced. **Rubino's** presentation covered current progress and growth and summarized legislation dealing with aquaculture. Legislation will grant NOAA authority to issue offshore permits, provide environmental and other safeguards, and support development of offshore aquaculture. The next steps in dealing with the aquaculture programs will be pilot projects in coastal communities designed with the states and stakeholders. This will deal with reconstructing Gulf seafood and will have to address economic questions, and nutrition and safety.

Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund

Eric Schwaab, International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agency (IAFWA), joined the Commissioners by telephone. The IAFWA was part of a coalition of sport fishing and boating interests that worked extensively on the reauthorization of the Wallop-Breaux Fund (W-B). W-B is funded through various sources that include taxes on small engines, motor boat fuel as well as certain fishing gear. These funds are then distributed back out to the States for the purposes of pursuing fish conservation work and boating safety related activities. A main objective of this coalition was to restructure the Sport Fish Restoration portion of W-B to encompass boating safety. This would insure that boating safety funding would be allocated based on a percentage as is the Sport Fish Restoration Program. Another objective was to recapture the full motor boat fuel tax. There were also funds in the amount of \$87 million sitting in a boating safety trust fund that had not been allocated.

Schwaab reported that a consensus was reached by the coalition and after much hard work with Congress their recommendations were included in the Bill that would reauthorize W-B. Their efforts were successful and the renamed fund is now the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund. The Congress adopted the percentages that the group had put forth for distribution of funds amongst the various interests. Due to the recapture of the 4.8 cent motor boat fuel tax, new money was realized in the amount of \$110 million annually into the trust fund. The trust fund goes into effect January 1, 2006. The percentages are: 57% - Sport Fish Restoration; 18.5 % - Boating Safety; 18.5% - Coastal Wetlands; 2% to boating infrastructure, outreach, and Clean Vessel Act.

USFWS Region 4 Office Comments

D. Frugé reported on behalf of the FWS Region 4. The FWS has a new Director, Dale Hall. Dale is a 27-year career employee of the FWS who previously served as the Southwest Regional Director, the Deputy Regional Director in the Southeast Region, Assistant Regional Director for Ecological Services in the Northwest, the Deputy Assistant Director for Fisheries in the headquarters office and the Field Supervisor of the Houston Ecological Services Field Office in Texas.

The Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) continue to be an active participant and supporter of the Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership (SARP). Scott Robinson was selected to be the first full-time coordinator for the SARP during the summer. Scott works for the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, and he will continue in their employment while serving as SARP coordinator. Funding from SARP partners is being used to support the coordinator position, and the FWS was awarded a \$43,000 grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) in August to also help with that. In addition, the GDNR received an additional \$257,000 grant through the FWS's Multistate Conservation Fund to develop an aquatic habitat plan for the Southeast, which will be a major effort over the next two years. The next SARP meeting is scheduled for November 14-17 in Nashville, Tennessee.

The SARP's Southeast Aquatic Habitat Plan will be written to step down the draft National Fish Habitat Plan, which the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies recently released in draft form for review. The National Plan is an item that was called for in the FWS's Fisheries Program Strategic Plan that was completed a couple of years ago. The draft plan can be found at <http://fishhabitat.org/plan>. Comments on the draft are being accepted through October 31.

On November 12, 2004 the FWS and NOAA Fisheries Service received a petition to list the American eel as endangered under the Endangered Species Act. In July the agencies determined, in response to that petition, that substantial biological information existed to warrant a formal status review of the species. That process should be completed within a year of receiving the petition, and at that time a determination will be made as to whether the species should be proposed for listing. An independent scientific peer review would be conducted on the proposal, if made, and additional public input would be sought prior to making a decision on whether or not the species should be listed. Generally, there is a one-year period between the time a species is proposed and the final decision.

When Hurricane Katrina struck Southeast Louisiana and South Alabama and Mississippi it damaged facilities and habitats at several National Wildlife Refuges, including Delta, Breton, Bayou Sauvage, Big Branch Marsh, Bogue Chitto, Mandalay, Mississippi Sandhill Crane, Grand Bay, and Bon Secour. Initial damage assessments to facilities from Katrina exceeded \$92 million, and numerous FWS employees either lost their homes or were displaced due to extensive damage. The FWS mobilized personnel from across the

country, who along with employees of other natural resource agencies, rescued hundreds of citizens in coastal Louisiana and Mississippi. They also cleared miles of roadways, supported local police and fire departments, established emergency corridors to speed delivery of relief aid, opened access to the Louisiana Heart Hospital, and provided critical help to Red Cross relief workers. A full-service base of operations was established at Lacombe, Louisiana with food services, temporary housing and shower facilities for local law enforcement, other emergency services personnel, and hurricane relief workers. All or portions of several refuges are still temporarily closed to public use.

Hurricane Rita also inflicted major damage to refuges in Southwest Louisiana, estimated to exceed \$40 million for facilities, levees and dikes. Some employees were also displaced due to home damage. Most of the facilities at Sabine NWR were irreparably damaged. There was less damage to structures at Lacassine and Cameron Prairie NWRs, most of which are salvageable. A 30-person response team was deployed to provide support to the damaged refuges, and they also aided local residents by clearing debris from driveways, helped ranchers find, feed and provide water to cattle by helicopter, and took residents to their homes by airboat when possible. The Cameron Prairie refuge headquarters near Bell City was used as a staging site by Cameron Parish Emergency Operations staff, FEMA, the Louisiana National Guard, U.S. Army and other government agencies. The refuges are still closed to public entry until further notice.

As of mid-July over 10,000 Kemp's ridley sea turtle nests had been counted on nesting beaches in Mexico. The total for the entire season in 2004 was 8,323. An update was expected in mid-July, but I don't have those numbers yet. As of mid-July there were 51 nests recorded in Texas, which is the highest number for a nesting season since record keeping began. There were also at least two nests reported in Florida, one in Georgia and one suspected nest in Alabama.

FY 2006 NOAA Fisheries Budget

L. Simpson provided the Commissioner's with both the House and Senate Committee's budget proposals. He pointed out that the House Committee recommendation disagrees with the budget request, which proposes to terminate or significantly reduce nearly \$600 million from programs. The Committee noted that the DOC's continued pursuit of reductions to NOAA's enacted funding levels, and failure to protest when reductions are recommended for budget savings or political leverage. The Committee found that NOAA is not well served by the DOC and questioned whether NOAA would be better able to serve the American people as an independent agency.

Simpson updated the Commissioners on the Ocean Commission initiative. The Ocean Commission budget request was cut by approximately \$162.4 million. The House encouraged NOAA to give more consideration to the Commission endorsed programs in fiscal year 2007.

He reviewed major programs of interest to the Gulf States and Commission. The Rancho Nuevo Sea Turtles program is in the budget for FY2006, after being cut in FY2005. He will continue to keep the Commissioners informed on budget issues of concern to the Gulf of Mexico and the Nations fisheries.

FY 2006 USFWS Budget

Doug Frugé reported that FWS FY2006 is \$1.3 billion, a slight increase over last year. This figure may not be final due to the possibility of a 2 ½ % rescission due to Hurricane Disaster Relief.

He briefed the Commissioners on some of the Highlights of the FY2006. There was a \$500k increase for the Science Excellence Initiative; \$2.3 million decrease for Refuge challenge cost share grants; \$3.4 million increase for Partners for Fish and Wildlife; \$1.5 million increase for the Coastal program; and, a \$3.5 million increase in fisheries. In fisheries resource management there was a net reduction.

He reported that of the four major activities of FWS: resource management; construction; land acquisition; and, grant programs, only land acquisition showed a significant decrease.

He pointed out items of interest to the Commission under resource management. Ecological services; refuge systems; law enforcement; fisheries; and, administration were basically level funded with very moderate increases.

He provided information in a presentation provided by **Colombus Brown**, who was unable to attend.

Hurricane Fisheries Disaster and Related Issues

J. Roussel returned to the discussion regarding socio-economic studies regarding post hurricane disaster and ways to manage information and data. **Hogarth** stated that in early September NOAA Fisheries began to put together information regarding the damage ways to provide funding to rebuild after the disaster. At first they looked at the damage to the agency itself and then they turned to assessments of damage to marine mammals and turtle strandings. This turned out to be less involved than originally thought. Funds were secured for economic surveys. He discussed various disaster impacts, including fuel differential; habitat protection, and, enforcement. He reviewed their results and how they determined what was best to assist the states, the fisheries and the industry – both recreational and commercial.

They determined that direct assistance to the infrastructure was the best way to rebuild. Voluntary buy outs in the shrimp fishery were discussed. Aquaculture and shellfish fisheries were addressed. Even the Commission was looked at as a way to provide disaster assistance. **Hogarth** indicated the need to work with the States to rebuild and provide assistance where it is needed. Other areas that were addressed were seafood inspection in order to assure the public that seafood consumption was safe, and habitat

restoration projects. Funding for these areas of concern has been identified as well as others. Funds were made available for assistance to the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory. He indicated that the next step would be to sit down and set priorities so that when funds do become available they can be earmarked and distributed.

Roussel wants to make sure that groups do not capitalize on this opportunity to fulfill their own agenda. He stated that Louisiana's first priority is addressing the debris, establishing navigational areas, and, remapping the coastline. The second priority is to address infrastructure – if a fishermen can get out, will he have gas, ice and a dock to return to, a dealer to sell to, and a market to sell from. Without infrastructure, his catch has no value. Their third priority is to provide employment to fishery participants within the fishing industry in the area in which the participant lives. If they have not money coming in they may leave the area and the fishery. **Roussel** indicated that if the fishermen are included in the first two priorities, this could provide income and will also provide a resolution to the debris and infrastructure problems. These are immediate needs. He does not see voluntary buy-outs as an immediate need.

Hogarth stated that he would like to get the Commissioners to get together for a conference call or meeting with Congressional delegates to establish immediate needs, to determine how best to proceed and finally to put a dollar amount to it. The Commissioners gave Dr. Hogarth a round of applause for his efforts on behalf of the Gulf States during this current disaster

The meeting adjourned for the evening at 5:30 pm.

Virginia Vail

**COMMISSION BUSINESS MEETING
MINUTES - 56th Annual Meeting
Thursday, October 20, 2005
Lake Buena Vista, Florida**

Chairman John Roussel called the meeting to order at 8:06 p.m.

The following Commissioners and/or proxies were present:

Commissioners

R. Vernon Minton, ADCNR/MRD, Gulf Shores, AL (*Proxy for Barnett Lawley*)
Virginia Vail, FWC, Tallahassee, FL (*Proxy for Ken Haddad*)
Butch Gautreaux, Louisiana Senate, Morgan City, LA
John Roussel, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA (*Proxy for Dwight Landreneau*)
Mike Ray, TPWD, Austin, TX (*Proxy for Robert L. Cook*)
Ralph Rayburn, College Station, TX
Corky Perret, MDMF, Biloxi, MS (*Proxy for William Walker*)
Joe Gill, Jr., Ocean Springs, MS

Staff

Larry Simpson, Executive Director, Ocean Springs, MS
Ron Lukens, Assistant Director, Ocean Springs, MS
Ginny Herring, Administrative Officer, Ocean Springs, MS
Nancy Marcellus, Administrative Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS
Dave Donaldson, Data Program Manager, Ocean Springs, MS
Steve VanderKooy, IJF Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Jeff Rester, SEAMAP/Habitat Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Madeleine Travis, Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS
Gayle Jones, Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS

Others

Doug Frugé, USFWS, Ocean Springs, MS
Michael Bailey, NMFS, St. Petersburg, FL
Anne Lange, NMFS, Silver Spring, MD
Roy Crabtree, NOAA/SERO, St. Petersburg, FL
Bill Hogarth, NOAA Fisheries, Silver Springs, MD

Endangered Species Issues

R. Lukens pointed out that the Commission would have a minimal involvement in the listing of the American eel as endangered. **Roussel** suggested that the Commission coordinate with the States as the process moves forward.

Recreational Fishing License

D. Donaldson stated that recreational fishing licenses helps to identify fishing universes. There are two options for identifying those populations. One is a federal fishing permit and the other is a state fishing permit.

The federal marine fishing license permit as outlined in the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery and Conservation Act Reauthorization requires angler to register in the EEZ for the main purpose to improve fisheries management. The federal permit applies in the EEZ only and would require anglers to obtain a permit if there is no state fishing license. If there is a state license a federal permit is not required, however the states need to collect necessary information. The advantages of the federal permit is that it provides more defined fishing universe; it closes loopholes in state licensing systems; and allows for more efficient sampling methods. The disadvantages is that it only identifies part of the fishing population (EEZ only); potentially difficult to implement; and it would cost more to conduct surveys to complete effort estimates.

The state fishing licenses are required of anglers to catch and land fish within state jurisdiction. All Gulf States have marine recreational fishing licenses. The main purpose is revenue as well as data collection. To use licenses for data collection all fisheries must meet the following criteria: all fishermen must be licensed; exemptions clearly defined; system must be computerized and updated in a timely manner; and names, addresses and telephone numbers must be collected. Most states meet these criteria. The advantages of the state licenses is it provides complete coverage of all angler (state and federal); it is potentially easy to implement; and allows for more efficient sampling methods. The disadvantages are that it is difficult to focus on specific groups of anglers and changes to licenses can be problematic. Legislative changes may be required which could hinder the states ability to implement.

R. Crabtree felt that the Gulf states would not gain anything with a federal permit and he would see the Gulf states getting an exemption.

Habitat Program Report

J. Rester reported on the GSMFC MARFIN Gulf of Mexico Bottom Mapping Project. The purpose of the project is to develop a user friendly interactive system that identifies, describes, and displays resources characterizing the seabed habitat of the Gulf of Mexico. The database will be created from the recovery, interpretation, and integration of existing data. The data will be organized spatially in an arcGIS format. Two contractors will be hired to complete most of the project. The first contractor will gather and compile all pertinent biological and geological data sets. The data collecting contractor will build and maintain a searchable database containing all pertinent data sets. After data collection is completed, a GIS contractor will standardize and convert all collected data and create a GIS database that can be distributed in various formats. Due to Hurricane Katrina the project has been delayed. Contractors will probably start in January.

J. Rester reported that the National Fish Habitat Initiative has released a draft National Fish Habitat Action Plan for public review. The mission of the Action Plan is to protect, restore and enhance the Nation's fish and aquatic communities through partnerships that foster fish habitat conservation and improve the quality of life for the American people. The goals of the Action Plan are to protect and maintain intact and healthy aquatic systems, preventing further degradation of fish and aquatic habitats that have been adversely affected, reverse declines in the quality of aquatic habitats to improve the overall health of fish and other aquatic organisms, increase the quality and quantity of fish sustained by our Nation's waters, and increase self-sustaining aquatic systems that support a broad natural diversity of fish and other aquatic species. The Plan will proceed through four key approaches: Implement fish habitat protection, restoration and enhancement through development of new partnerships and expanded support of existing partnerships; mobilize national and local support for achieving fish habitat conservation goals; measure and communicate the status and needs of aquatic habitats; and, provide national leadership and coordination to conserve fish habitats. The Action Plan can be downloaded at fishhabitat.org.

Rester updated the Commissioners on their concerns regarding open loop systems in LNG facilities in the Gulf of Mexico. In regards to LNG facilities that had already been licensed for ORV use. The Energy Bridge facility off Louisiana commenced operations on March 17, 2005. The Port Pelican facility was the first LNG facility to receive their deepwater port license on November 14, 2003. When developing the EIS for Port Pelican, they did not include impacts from constructing the gravity based structure that would hold LNG. In June of this year, the USCG released a Notice of Intent to prepare an environmental assessment on the fabrication facility for the gravity based structure. Port Pelican stated that they have elected to defer the construction of the offshore LNG terminal. The only remaining currently licensed offshore LNG facility is the Gulf Landing facility that was licensed in February of this year. One of the required permits for operating the Gulf Landing facility is a National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) to operate the ORV system. Although Gulf Landing has been licensed by the Coast Guard and MARAD, Gulf Landing has not obtained their NPDES permit from EPA. Before issuing a permit, EPA has requested more information that has not been provided. EPA is now waiting on that information before making a decision. EPA might also re-release this permit on public notice, which would give agencies and individuals the chance to comment on the use of ORV systems.

On August 17-18, 2005, the Commission sponsored a workshop to review LNG monitoring and mitigation plans. The Coast Guard and MARAD were represented at the meeting. Several recommendations were made to strengthen a NMFS report detailing LNG monitoring plan considerations.

On March 30, 2005, the Commission sent a letter to John Jamian, Acting Maritime Administrator, inviting him to the Commission's October meeting to discuss LNG vaporization technology and its impacts on marine fisheries. He replied in a letter dated May 13, 2005 stating "As to privately convened meetings to discuss ORV technology, MARAD and USCG have concluded that the best and most appropriate meeting venues

are those scheduled in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act. These are open to all members of the interested public and are structured to discuss a full range of issues, not just ORV technology. In this way we can ensure a transparent comment process to fully discuss all issues.” While MARAD refused the Commission’s invitation, MARAD did send a representative to the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council’s August meeting where he discussed the LNG licensing process.

Gulf Council Shrimp Amendment 13

C. Perret reported that Amendment 13 to the Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for the shrimp fishery in the Gulf of Mexico proposes to: (1) Establish an endorsement to the existing federal shrimp vessel permit for vessels harvesting royal red shrimp (Action 1); (2) Define maximum sustainable yield (MSY), optimum yield (OY), the overfishing threshold, and the overfished condition for royal red and penaeid shrimp stocks in the Gulf for stocks that currently lack such definitions (Actions 2 through 7); (3) Establish bycatch reporting methodologies and improve collection of shrimping effort data in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) (Action 8); (4) Require completion of a Gulf Shrimp Vessel and Gear Characterization Form (Action 9); (5) Establish a moratorium on the issuance of commercial shrimp vessel permits (Action 10); and (6) Require reporting and certification of landings during a moratorium (Action 11).

Action 10 would establish a moratorium on the issuance of new commercial shrimp vessel permits, which would be a form of limited access. Section 303 (b) (6) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act requires the Council to consider several factors when establishing a limited access system. These factors are discussed in detail in various sections of this amendment, especially Sections 4.0, 5.0, and 8.0. He briefly summarized these sections for the Commissioners. The Council reviewed and voted on the proposed rules and they will be published in the *Federal Register* very shortly.

Invasive Species Program

R. Lukens reported that the Regional Panel met jointly with the Florida Exotic Plant Council in May 2005. They adopted a 5 year strategic plan and a 2005 Operations Plan. They have finalized the Gulf of Mexico Regional Rapid Response Plan. In August 2005 they sponsored a Risk Assessment Training Workshop with over 60 persons attending. The goal of the training more scientists to conduct risk assessments is to support decision making at the State and local level. The next meeting of the Regional Panel is scheduled for November 30, 2005.

Lukens provided information on legislation regarding invasive species activities. He continues to serve as a non-federal Ex-officio member of the National Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force and as a member of the National Invasive Species Advisory Committee which advises the National Invasive Species Council.

Status of Billfish Project

Lukens reported that the Commission's Billfish Project began in 2004. He provided a list of the recipients of the various awards. Dr. Nancy Thompson, NOAA Fisheries, is the technical monitor of this project. Semi-annual reports have been approved and payments for the first semi-annual reporting period have been distributed.

Status of Commission's Cooperative Data Collection Programs

D. Donaldson updated the Commissioners on current program activity. He reported that during the August 2005 meeting, procedures for distribution of funds was discussed. Prioritizing of activities was approved at an earlier S/FFMC meeting.

He provided information on the Commission's Cooperative Data Collection scheduled for 2006. Due to funding cuts (about 2% across the board) some activities have been reduced. These include personnel for the Charter Boat Survey; head boat trips in Alabama and Florida; and, the number of flounder samples collected and processed in Louisiana. He noted that on the positive side, Texas is moving forward with full implementation of Trip Tickets in 2006. The budget for 2006 is just under \$5 million dollars.

Interjurisdictional Fisheries Program

S. VanderKooy reported on the IJF Program. **VanderKooy** noted that the Commercial/Recreational Fishery Advisory Panel did not meet this week because a number of panel members were impacted by both Hurricane Katrina and Rita. They plan to meet with us in March 2006.

He provided written updates on the Striped Bass FMP; the Sheephead TTF; the Crab Subcommittee; and, the Law Enforcement Committee. He indicated that he hoped to have the Striped Bass FMP to the Commissioners of the beginning of the year for review and action at the March 2006 meeting.

He will keep the Commissioners updated on the Easter oyster and American eel endangered species issues.

Executive Committee Report

J. Roussel reported that the Executive Committee met on Wednesday, October 19. They reviewed and approved a proposed budget for 2006. On behalf of the Executive Committee, **Roussel** presented for approval the FY2004 Audit Report; the FY2006 budget in the amount of \$5,896,440; an across the board increase of %5 (or at least \$1,000) for Commission employees; an additional \$1,000 for Nancy Marcellus due in large part to her efforts assisting the new accountant; and, a one time \$1,000 cash bonus to Steve VanderKooy for his efforts in remodeling one of the Commission's offices. **On behalf of the Committee, Roussel made the motion. M. Ray seconded. The motion was approved without opposition.**

Future Meetings

G. Herring stated that after discussion with the Texas Commissioners she will proceed with making arrangements to hold the March 13-16, 2006 meeting in San Antonio, Texas. Louisiana will host the October 2006 meeting of the Commission.

State Director's Reports

J. Roussel requested that the State Director's submit their reports in writing for inclusion in the minutes.

Florida – **G. Vail** submitted the following report on behalf of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC).

While not receiving the massive storm damages experienced by other Gulf States, Florida's marine fisheries were impacted to varying degrees by several hurricanes this past year. The oyster fishery in Apalachicola Bay was closed after Hurricane Dennis destroyed or severely damaged the Bay's oyster reefs [which had not recovered totally from Hurricane Ivan in 2004] as well as most processing facilities in Apalachicola and Eastpoint. The fishery has remained closed due to red tide, swept into Apalachicola Bay on the winds and waters of Hurricane Katrina. Although most of the processors recovered and opened for business to some degree, they have been unable to obtain their usual oysters from Louisiana and Mississippi or from the local Bay.

In Florida, Hurricanes Katrina and Rita had the greatest impact on the Florida Keys, striking after the start of the spiny lobster season. Although damage to vessels and fish houses appeared to be nominal, it's estimated that approximately 80% (i.e., 400,000) of the lobster traps in the water were initially lost; it's not known how many traps have since been recovered by the owners. The Charter Boat Fishery in the Florida Panhandle has been indirectly affected by Hurricane Katrina; high fuel prices, a scarcity of fuel at the pumps, and a scarcity of hotel rooms after the storm – whether real or perceived – have caused many tourists [i.e., potential customers] to cancel their plans.

FWC Law Enforcement Officers were deployed to provide assistance in the wake of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita; each team worked a two week shift before rotating out. The FWC also established several 6-member teams of non-sworn employees who volunteered for two week assignments to assist in hurricane relief efforts; these teams were on standby but not deployed.

Management of water levels in Lake Okeechobee has raised some concerns. As a result of heavy rainfall, some associated with the hurricanes, water level in Lake Okeechobee has been rising. To prevent downstream flooding of agricultural areas and communities, significant amounts of freshwater are being released from the Lake into the St. Lucie River on the east and the Caloosahatchee River on the west. As a result, the estuarine systems have been diluted and freshwater species [fish, prawns, algae] are being found in previously marine environments; there have been some reports of diseased fish.

Red tide has been a problem again this year, causing fish kills, affecting clam aquaculture operations along the west central and big bend coastal areas. In some areas benthic organisms were also killed. West coast and Panhandle residents have experienced respiratory and eye irritations from air borne red tide toxin.

Invasive species issues have been a priority for the FWC Chairman, Mr. Herky Huffman, this year. At this point the focus is on the identification of invasive freshwater and terrestrial species; 400 have been reported, 125 are known to be established. There's little documentation to serve as an inventory of invasive marine species at this time, although many are known to be present. Two exotics have recently made headlines: the Gambian rat, a six pound rodent, doing well in extreme South Florida, and pythons, which also appear to be well established in the Everglades.

Last year the Fish and Wildlife Research Institute began to monitor stone crab recruitment and juvenile abundance in the Florida Keys and Southwest Florida. This year the project will be expanded to include at least three, if not four, sampling sites along the Big Bend area from Homosassa to St. Marks. The monitoring project is funded by revenues from trap tag fees [approximately 1.4 million traps tags are authorized at fifty cents each].

This past spring the Florida Legislature established the Military Gold Sportsman's License that will allow someone in or retired from military service, including reserve units, to recreationally hunt, freshwater fish and saltwater fish. The annual cost of this license is \$50.

Louisiana – **J. Roussel** submitted the following report on behalf of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF).

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita caused severe disruption throughout the entire state with all of Louisiana's coastal parishes significantly impacted by one or both storms. Katrina's impact on a highly populated area and the extensive flooding required a response from our agency well above anything we had ever been engaged in for prior storms. The department deployed approximately 200 enforcement agents and approximately 200 biologists and technicians in search and rescue missions for an extended period of time working in coordination with the National Guard, Coast Guard, Sheriff Departments, local fire & rescue teams and wildlife and fisheries personnel from 10-12 other states. The department logged over 32,000 overtime hours and our best estimate is that missions we were involved in resulted in the rescue of over 21,000 people from the affected area.

Estimates immediately following the storm indicate there were:

- 1.5 million Residents displaced
- 81 thousand businesses disrupted
- 200 thousand homes to be replaced
- Numerous schools, universities, hospitals and other essential infrastructure to be rebuilt

Governor Blanco has created a Louisiana Recovery Authority to steer the states recovery efforts. The department experienced significant loss of its infrastructure all along the coast with all of its facilities from Grand Isle east to Mississippi and from Vermillion Bay west to Texas either totally destroyed or heavily damaged.

The Marine Fisheries Division at one point had employees scattered across 8 states with 51 employees displaced from their homes. Some of our employees which were displaced by Katrina and were temporarily reassigned to SW Louisiana were displaced a second time by Rita.

Initial estimates of fishery impacts include:

- Direct loss of \$240 million of resource as a result of storm induced mortality (primarily loss of oyster resource and documented fish mortality)
- Potential loss of dockside value over the next 12 months of \$278 million
- Potential loss at the retail level over the next 12 months of \$2.2 billion
- Fishery infrastructure damage was severe with 3 of the top 6 commercial fishing ports in the country completely shut down.
- Data were unavailable to quantify the extent of infrastructure damage however trip ticket submissions were down 55% in September and 91% in October from 2004 levels indicating a significant reduction in commercial fishing activity.

Finfish - The department completed updates of its stock assessment for black drum, mullet, southern flounder and sheepshead.

Shrimp - Through a cooperative endeavor agreement the department distributed \$350,000 in funds to the SSA sponsored anti-dumping suit. Legislation passed in 2005 increased shrimp license fees to fund the SSA sponsored anti-dumping suit and a new agreement with SSA is scheduled to release an additional \$268,000 in 2005/2006.

Crab - Permanent funding for the derelict crab trap removal program was secured with legislation passed in 2005 and a winter crab trap closure and clean up is scheduled for March 4-13, 2006 in a portion of upper Terrebonne Bay.

Artificial Reef - The department added 6 additional platforms to its artificial reef program during the last year. Initial indications from MMS are that as many as 100 platforms were toppled or destroyed off the coast of Louisiana. Pertinent information on these platforms is being compiled to identify which platforms may possibly be incorporated in the program.

Texas – **M. Ray** submitted the following report on behalf of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD).

Data Acquisition Pilot Study - Coastal Fisheries plans to conduct a pilot project to field test a handheld PC device in an effort to obtain real-time data acquisition. Representatives

from ADEA Solutions (the software programmers) have agreed to train staff with using their DAP units. This pilot study will include bag seine and trawl samples for a few months.

Life History Research - Life History Research Team completed final reports for the SFR Atlantic croaker reproductive biology study and the Spotted seatrout hydrophone SFR study. A proposal to study sand seatrout age growth and reproduction was submitted to SFR and accepted, sample collection was initiated.

Genetics Research - Work is continuing on menhaden, sheepshead, and spotted seatrout projects. We are developing sheepshead mitochondrial markers (RFLP or sequence) investigating their utility for examining sheepshead population structure. We are also collecting samples for the study on temporal variation in spotted seatrout. Data analysis of menhaden sequences is nearing completion. Final reports for the menhaden and spotted seatrout projects will be completed for the SFR program shortly.

Artificial Reef Project - Two new legislative laws aim to restructure Texas artificial reefs. FIB 883, relating to the construction of artificial reefs, grants TPWD the authority to allow private individuals, groups, and/or associations to deploy artificial reef material under guidelines and rules established by the commission. 1dB 883 allows governmental entities that confiscate vessels in Texas waters, and who are forced to dispose of them, to donate these vessels to the Texas Artificial Reef Program if they choose. The Artificial Reef Program is not obligated to accept the vessels unless they are appropriate for reefing purposes and we actually have funding to use them. The second part of this bill allows the Program to take on private partners in building reefs under our permits, allows Program control over what can or cannot be used for reefing, and where these materials may be placed.

Shrimp- SB 454 created a license moratorium program for the Texas Gulf Shrimp Fishery. Only fishermen who hold a Commercial Gulf Shrimp Boat License on August 31, 2005 will be able to purchase a license on or after September 1, 2005. There will be no buyback program associated with this, but there will be transferability (without vessel upgrade restrictions) and an elected review board or license denial appeals.

Inshore Shrimp License Management Program

Buyback Round -16

- Application period closed March 25, 2005
- 223 individual bids were received
- Total purchase price was **\$613,800**
- Avg. purchase Price was \$7770 (actual range \$4500 to \$10,000) Overall Shrimp totals thru 16 rounds:
 - 1260 + 79 = **1339 licenses**
 - 687 Bay and 652 Bait licenses
 - 1339/3231 original licenses -41%
 - \$8.3 million spent

Crab License Management Program

(No update .SAME AS PRESENTED IN MARCH)

Crab .Overall Totals

- 24 licenses purchased
- \$112,749 total dollars spent
- Average price over all rounds = \$4,698
- 24/287 original licenses = 8% of original total

Commercial Finfish License Management Program

Round 7

- Application period closed May 6, 2005
- 31 applications received
- 9 licenses purchased
- Total cost \$44,450 at an average of \$4939
- Range \$2950 to \$6000

Finfish .Overall Totals thru 7 Rounds

- 129 licenses purchased for a total cost of \$607,770
- Avg. price paid . \$4711
- 129/549 original licenses = 24%

Oyster Lease Management Program - SB 272 will restructure Texas artificial reefs by creating a license moratorium program for the Texas commercial oyster fishery with a control date set at August 31, 2005. Only fishermen who hold a Commercial Oyster Boat License on August 31, 2005 will be able to purchase a license on or after September 1, 2005. There is no buy-back component to this rule, but there will be transferability (without vessel upgrade restrictions) and an elected review board or license denial appeals.

TPWD Commission approved a regulation that defines an oyster sack as a 110 pound sack and set a daily sack limit at 90, a reduction from 150 per day. TPWD had worked with members of the oyster industry to establish these limits. Codifying this weight into law was necessary to adequately enforce the sack limit. TPWD continues to work toward developing a voluntary shell recovery program.

For the first time that anyone can remember, there are no oysters being harvested from anywhere in the Gulf region. Galveston Bay is currently closed, areas in Louisiana west of the river that were not closed by Katrina have now been closed due to Rita, Mississippi waters are closed due to Katrina and Apalachicola Bay is closed due to red tide. Texas is getting calls from oyster dealers in Mississippi and Louisiana that are planning to relocate to Texas this fall to buy oysters and ship out of state to maintain their customer base, Areas they plan to target are Sargent, Port Lavaca, and around Galveston Bay. Expected landings of market-sized oysters in Galveston will be below the historical average. Production has been better along the mid-coast where many of the out-of-state buyers are planning to set up shop. Record ex-vessel prices are anticipated this year.

Enhancement Program

Red Drum

Aransas Bay	1,248,720
Corpus Christi Bay	190,736
East Matagorda Bay	306,895
Galveston Bay	4,214,714
Lower Laguna Madre	782,677
Matagorda Bay	184,471
Sabine	2,079,205
San Antonio Bay	786,768
Upper Laguna Madre	980,359
Inland Lakes	<u>345,238</u>
Total	11,119,783

Spotted Seatrout

Galveston Bay	2,607,336
Lower Laguna Madre	0
Sabine	84,890
Upper Laguna Madre	<u>50,161</u>
Total	2,742,387

TPWD Regulation Changes - Because of concerns about vulnerability to over-harvest of certain live mollusks and other inter-tidal species along the Texas coast, TPWD Commission adopted a closed season for harvesting species such as hermit crabs, starfish, sea urchins and periwinkles along a small area of South Padre Island from Nov. 1 through April 30. This new regulation also established a daily bag limit of 15 univalve snails in aggregate and no more than two each in the daily bag of lightening whelk, horse conch, Florida fighting conch, pear whelk, banded tulip and Florida rocksnail.

TPWD identified and published potential saltwater areas that could be closed during a significant freeze event.

Texas Trip Ticket Program - Texas is currently implementing its pilot trip ticket program. Since January equipment has been purchased, paper tickets ordered and received, electronic ticket program finalized, scanning software has been installed and set up, staff has been hired, office set up, and 17 dealers are currently using either the electronic or paper tickets with more dealers being added every day. The goal was to sign up 15-20% of the active seafood dealers. After the initial implementation, participating dealers will provide input for possible improvements to the program.

Bilifish Study - TPWD received a grant from NOAA Fisheries for a 2 year bilifish study. Collections so far have resulted in approximately 22 fin clips from live bilifish and collections on 8 landed bilifish which includes fin clips, otoliths, gonads, and tissue samples.

Sea Turtles - A record 51 Kemp's Ridley nests were located on the Texas coast during 2005, including seven on Galveston Island, one on Matagorda Peninsula, three on Matagorda Island, two on Mustang Island, one on North Padre Island north of Padre Island National Seashore, 29 at Padre Island National Seashore, six on South Padre Island, and three on Boca Chica Beach. This breaks the previous record of 42 Kemp's Ridley nests recorded in Texas during 2004. Two loggerhead nests and three green turtle nests also occurred on Texas beaches in 2005.

Over 9,900 Kemp's Ridley nests were protected on the Mexican nesting beaches in 2005. About 2,200 Kemp's Ridley turtles nested near Rancho Nuevo, in the heart of a nesting beach along Mexico's Gulf coast over a two-day period. This is the largest nesting aggregation in decades.

Red Tide - Red tide continues to be present in areas of Port Mansfield, the Lower Laguna Madre, Brazos-Santiago Pass, and areas of Padre Island National Seashore and the South Padre Island beach. Most of the dead fish are menhaden, croaker, and pinfish.

Hurricane Rita - The full damage done of Hurricane Rita may still not be known for weeks, but TPWD employees continue to assess damage and impacts through Southeast and East Texas. Sabine Lake and the extensive wetlands around it took an environmental hit. Reconnaissance flights late last week revealed beach overwashes that sent salty water into mostly freshwater marshes. Dune systems along barrier islands suffered damage in areas as far south as Matagorda Island. The implication of that extensive inundation of saltwater into freshwater wetlands will depend upon the resiliency of those marshes. Almost all of the major rivers and their tributaries in Southeast Texas are experiencing substantial fish kills as a result of Hurricane Rita. This includes most streams east of the Trinity River and several Trinity tributaries in Liberty, Chambers, Hardin, Newton, Jefferson and Orange Counties, where some waters appear black and are anoxic. These fish kills appear to involve low oxygen levels from all the nutrients and debris that washed into the rivers, not from polluting contaminants. Several commercial crabbing and shrimping operations were severely damaged by the storm.

Publications List

A new listing of publications was provided for informational purposes.

Election of Officers

C. Perret nominated Ginny Vail for Chairman. Minton seconded. Without opposition, Vail was named Chairman for FY2005-2006 by acclamation.

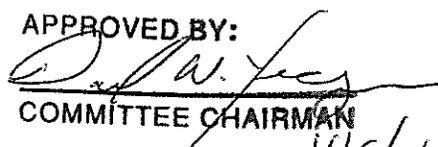
C. Perret nominated V. Minton for 1st Vice Chairman. R. Rayburn seconded. Without opposition, Minton was named 1st Vice Chairman by acclamation.

M. Ray nominated R. Rayburn 2nd Vice Chairman. J. Gill seconded. Without opposition, Rayburn was named 2nd Vice Chairman by acclamation.

G. Vail presented a token of appreciation to outgoing **Chairman John Roussel**. **Roussel** in turn presented **Vail** with a Commission shirt.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 10:03 am.

APPROVED BY:


COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

4/5/06

**GULF AND SOUTH ATLANTIC REGIONAL PANEL
ON AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES
MINUTES**

**Wednesday, November 30 - Thursday, December 1, 2005
Corpus Christi, Texas**

Ron Lukens called the meeting to order at 8:30 am. The meeting began with introductions of the Panel members and guests. The following were in attendance:

Members

Diane Altsman, EPA/GOMP, Stennis Space Center, MS
Marilyn Barrett-O'Leary, Louisiana Sea Grant, Baton Rouge, LA
Paul Carangelo, Port of Corpus Christi Authority, Corpus Christi, TX
Earl Chilton, TPWD, Austin, TX
Steven de Kozlowski, SCDNR, Columbia, SC
Dale Diaz, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Pam Fuller, U.S. Geological Survey, Gainesville, FL
Leslie Hartman, AL Marine Resources Division, Dauphin Island, AL
Ted Hendrickx, Georgia DNR, Social Circle, GA
Tom Herrington, FDA, Stennis Space Center, MS
Jim Kruse, TTI/Texas Sea Grant, Houston, TX
Jim Lester, HARC, The Woodlands, TX
Jim Long, National Park Service, Atlanta, GA
Scott Longman, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Ronald R. Lukens, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Doran Mason, NOAA, Miami, FL
Roberto Mendoza, Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo Leon, Mexico
Harriet Perry, USM/GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Bob Pitman, USFWS, Albuquerque, NM
George Ramseur, The Nature Conservancy, Ocean Springs, MS
Steve Rider, AL Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries, Montgomery, AL
Dennis Riecke, MDWFP, Jackson, MS
Don Schmitz, FDEP, Tallahassee, FL
John Teem, FL Dept. of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Tallahassee, FL
Dale Theiling, SCDNR, Charleston, SC
Bruce Thompson, LSU Coastal Fisheries Institute, Baton Rouge, LA
Jay Troxel, USFWS, Atlanta, GA

Staff

Nancy K. Marcellus, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Others

David Britton, USFWS, Arlington, TX
Nicole Cass, Port of Houston Authority, Houston, TX

**GULF AND SOUTH ATLANTIC REGIONAL PANEL
ON AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES
MINUTES**

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Beau Hardegree, USFWS, Corpus Christi, TX
Dewayne Hollin, Texas Sea Grant, College Station, TX
Jonathan Moczygema, Texas A&M University, Kingston, TX
Scott Newsham, ANSTF/USFWS, Arlington, VA
Pamela J. Schofield, U.S. Geological Survey, Gainesville, FL

Public Comment

Lukens provided the opportunity for public comment. No public comments were received.

Review and Adoption of Agenda

Due to schedules, Lukens recommended changes to the order of agenda items. Lukens also removed the agenda item entitled "Tri-lateral Invasive Species Initiative (Canada, Mexico, and the US)" since Richard Orr was unable to attend the meeting. A handout on that agenda item was distributed to the Panel members. **With those changes noted, Paul Carangelo made a motion to adopt the agenda. The motion was seconded by Bruce Thompson, and the agenda was adopted.**

Review and Approval of Minutes

A motion was made by Steve de Kozlowski to approve the minutes from the May 12-13, 2005 meeting held in Key West, Florida, as written. The motion was seconded by Bruce Thompson. Without objection the minutes were approved.

Pathways Analysis Report

Pam Fuller gave a presentation entitled "Pathway Analysis for the Gulf and South Atlantic States." Fuller explained that all data was based on data entered into the USGS/NAS database as of 7/25/05. A single species could be counted in multiple pathways. The data are based on the best available information and may include educated guesses about a species. The data also include species that did not persist (including single individuals). Details of the presentation can be found in the written report.

Fuller also discussed the AIS Database Summit held in September 2005 in Gibraltar Island, Ohio. The reason for the summit resulted from concerns from Congress about overlap in existing databases.

Goals of the Summit:

- to familiarize participants with the variety of database projects/programs while delineating the mission of each as well as the type of information available through each system

**GULF AND SOUTH ATLANTIC REGIONAL PANEL
ON AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES
MINUTES**

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- to identify both gaps and overlaps among the various databases, systems, and audiences
- to explore the potential for database consolidation via distributed database systems, including outlining technical and political obstacles to integration, and
- to establish or modify interagency agreements among the three agencies covering AIS database coordination, sharing, and management.

Participants of the Summit:

- SERC
 - National Ballast Information Clearinghouse (NBIC)
 - National Exotic Marine & Estuarine Species Information System (NEMESIS)
 - Aquatic Invasions Research Directory (AIRD)
- USGS
 - Nonindigenous Aquatic Species Database (NAS)
- NOAA/Sea Grant
 - National Aquatic Nuisance Species Clearinghouse (Clearinghouse)
 - Sea Grant Nonindigenous Species Site (SGNIS)
 - Projects Inventory (SG)
- NOAA/NOS
 - Aquatic Species National Inventory and Introduced Species Early Warning System (EDIS)
- IJC/CGLRM
 - Great Lakes - St. Lawrence Research Inventory (GLSLRI)
- NISbase (SERC/USGS)

The Summit identified the following 4 categories:

- Project/Researcher Databases
 - AIRD - international, AIS researchers
 - SG - US agency, AIS projects
 - GLSLRI - bi-national Great Lakes, water quality projects
- Reference Databases
 - SGNIS - electronic references
 - Clearinghouse - card catalog to a lending library
- Species Databases
 - NEMESIS - international marine and estuarine
 - NAS - US freshwater
 - GLANSIS - Great Lakes node of NAS
 - EDIS - taxonomic lists of native and non-native species by region
- Ballast Databases
 - NBIC - ship traffic and ballast information

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Conclusions from the Summit:

- Reduce overlap where it exists
- Work together
- Development of a common portal for data access and agree that NISbase should serve as that portal.

Joint Panel Recommendation/Taxonomic Experts Database

Each Regional Panel, under the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force (ANSTF), has spent considerable time addressing regional rapid response plans in the last 2 years. One of the issues that arose from those discussions is the need for access to taxonomic experts to provide species identification services to state and federal agencies for plants and animals that have been sighted and/or reported as being potentially non-native. This is needed for any type of response, whether it is rapid or otherwise, in order to craft an effective response to the sighting or report.

On July 7, 2005, the Pathways and Prevention Work Group of the Gulf and South Atlantic Regional Panel (GSARP) convened a teleconference to discuss Work Plan tasks for 2005. One of the issues contained in that Work Plan is the need for a taxonomic experts database. After some discussion, the Work Group agreed that the GSARP should coordinate with the administrators of the other regional panels to see if it would be possible to provide a joint recommendation to the ANSTF regarding this issue.

Beginning July 18, 2005, the GSARP administrator began contacting the other regional panel administrators asking about the possibility of crafting a joint recommendation regarding the development of a database of taxonomic (and perhaps others) experts. Each administrator, or other regional panel representative, was contacted individually and asked if they would support such a recommendation. By Monday, July 25, 2005, all panel representatives had been contacted, and all agreed to proceed with crafting a joint regional panel recommendation.

On August 18, 2005, the following recommendation was sent to the ANSTF:

By this letter, the Great Lakes, Western, Gulf and South Atlantic, Mississippi River Basin, Mid-Atlantic, and North East Regional Panels recommend that the ANSTF support the development of a database of taxonomic, and possibly other, experts. Since this has been identified by the regional panels as a national need, the ANSTF should encourage all affiliated agencies to explore the possibility of identifying funds as soon as possible to accomplish the development of the database structure. A preliminary approach to this task has already been developed and will jump start the process.

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At this time it appears that funding will be made available for this task. Since this is a work group activity, the Research and Development Work Group will address the topic in the work group breakouts.

Harriet Perry also discussed the need for a photographic database. Lukens advised that he would record this as a need and investigate how to proceed.

Status of State Plans/Programs

Florida - Don Schmitz reported that they intend to send their plan as is to the ANS Task Force. They have been tracking state expenditures to coordinate an educational push in Florida about invasive species. \$104 million has been spent by state agencies on invasive species. Schmitz added that his agency has funded 2 channel apple snail studies since they have recently shown up all over Florida. A workshop is planned for next week to discuss future management aspects.

Alabama - Steve Rider reported that the Alabama ANS task force is online since the Governor signed the Executive Order on June 2. The first steering committee meeting was held August 3, 2005, and a second meeting was held November 8, 2005. Hopes are to have a draft copy of their ANS plan by the summer of 2006.

Mississippi - Dale Diaz reported that no work has been accomplished on their state plan since the last meeting. A meeting is planned in January 2006 in Jackson, Mississippi. Tulane University, the subcontractor for the plan, has also been affected by Hurricane Katrina. Diaz added that Marilyn O'Leary has been very helpful in their development of their state plan.

Giant salvinia was recently found in the lower Pascagoula River. It was widespread by the time it was found, so eradication was not a possibility. Since then, Hurricane Katrina pushed a lot of it onshore, so eradication may be possible now. The range current range is not yet established.

Diaz also reported that AMRAT received a first place Gulf Guardian Award, awarded by the EPA Gulf of Mexico Program. The award was presented January 28 in Corpus Christi, Texas.

Dennis Riecke asked for permission to use the "Aquatic Hitchhiker" logo on all boat registration renewals. They would also like to put logo and text in their outdoor digest containing all hunting and fishing regulations. They are in the process of rewriting legislation to prohibit the use of anything that is nonnative for bait. There have been increasing reports of bighead and silverhead carp being caught. There are also reports of hydrilla in the Ross Barnett Reservoir.

Louisiana - Scott Longman reported that he has replaced Mark McElroy as the ANS Task Force member. Louisiana is currently working on their state plan, and was progressing well before Hurricane Katrina. They are ready to have their management plan approved. Longman also mentioned that Marilyn O'Leary has been very helpful with their plan development.

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Since the Hurricane they have been looking at the formosan termite and the issue of them being in storm debris and mulch made from woody storm debris. Notifications have been issued, along with a quarantine, regarding the potential for unintentional formosan termite distribution.

Texas - Earl Chilton reported that Texas is trying to finish their comprehensive management plan. He also thanked Marilyn O'Leary for her help. It has been submitted for ANS Task Force review, and they are addressing those comments now. Hopes are to have a plan for the Governor to submit in 2006. Texas is also in the process of establishing an invasive species council, a coalition of 6 state agencies. The draft of the bylaws will be finalized in about 2 weeks, as well as a Memorandum of Understanding among the agencies.

In Lake Austin, plans are to use grass carp to remove hydrilla without removing all other vegetation. They plan to use that project as a model on controlling hydrilla in other parts of the state.

Georgia - Ted Hendrickx reported that Georgia has not formed any official groups yet for their ANS management plan, but have done a lot of informal outreach to stakeholders. Like the others, Hendrickx gave thanks to Marilyn O'Leary for her support.

Georgia is currently using channel apple snails as a test case on how to handle an invasive species. They have 3 confirmed areas with established populations and are trying to get a genetic identification. An internal task force has been formed. This might be a case for a rapid response project.

They continue to have pacu reports coming in but do not think they are reproducing. They also have an unverified zebra mussel report. They have also had reports of Asian swamp eels and believe they are a different species than reported in Florida. Georgia now has the largest aquarium in the world, the Georgia Aquarium. The Aquarium is having problems with people flooding them with requests on what to do with their unwanted aquatic pets.

South Carolina - Steve de Kozlowski reported that South Carolina has been working on pilot study for IAFWA's communication project for the past couple of years. That report is anticipated to be complete by the spring. They are waiting on completion of the communications plan to proceed with development of the state plan. Plans are to have a consultant, D. J. Case and Associates, help with development of that state plan. They hope to launch into that process in 2006.

A plant of concern in South Carolina is phragmites. He also mentioned that hydrilla, another plant of concern, is reasonably under control.

2006 Operations Plan and Work Group Assignments

Lukens discussed the 2006 Work Plan for the Gulf and South Atlantic Regional Panel. He indicated that that plan is not exclusive as workgroups can add tasks throughout the year. Steve de Kozlowski

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mentioned a few typographical errors in the Plan. Lukens advised that he would make those changes and then the Plan would be available on the Panel website.

A motion to approve the 2006 Work Plan was made by Bruce Thompson. Leslie Harman seconded the motion, and the 2006 Work Plan was approved.

ANSTF Report

Scott Newsham reported that this is the first time to have a full time position for Executive Secretary of the Task Force. A meeting of the Task Force was held in October. At that meeting a national management plan was approved. A copy of the plan is on the new and improved website of the ANSTF. Newsham indicated that state management plans are a key aspect of his job. The next meeting of the ANSTF will be held May 22 in the northeast.

Lukens added that one change Newsham has made in his short tenure, is that Regional Panels do not have to advertise their meetings in the *Federal Register* since they have to report all activities to the Task Force. He did, however, encourage the Panels to continue to advertise their meetings and invite the general public to attend.

Administrative Report

Legislative Update - A handout of new invasive species bills, prepared by ISAC staff, was included in the Panel's folder. One bill that has generated considerable interest is S. 363, "Ballast Water Management Act of 2005."

NISC/ISAC Update - A handout on recent NISC/ISAC activities was included in the Panel's folder for informational purposes.

Implications of Hurricanes for Aquatic Invasive Species

In light of a very active hurricane season for 2005, this topic was included on the agenda to generate discussion on impacts hurricanes can have on aquatic invasive species.

General thoughts and observations:

- hurricanes are a pathway of moving animals around
- when working with disease and pathogens, this is a problem for all laboratories on the water, and needs to be considered when a hurricane approaches
- follow up on how some of the management plans were affected during Hurricane warning
- get the message out for people to think about this issue
- mechanism to make others aware of the possibility of things being in the debris after a storm
- raise as an issue on a national level on the impact of natural disasters.

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It was also suggested that this would be a good opportunity to do another rapid assessment in the areas already completed - Alabama and Mississippi. It would be a great opportunity to learn what has changed since the hurricane. It is noted that the Panel supports the states of Alabama and Mississippi redoing their assessments in light of the hurricane. Marilyn O'Leary commented on spreading people too thin since she is trying to use these same people to do the rapid assessment for Louisiana. She emphasized that it is a good idea, just wait until next year.

Lukens mentioned that this agenda item was just an exercise to point out things to think about and things that the Panel can do. More discussion needs to take place before any action is taken. Perhaps the research and development work group could come up with items for the whole Panel to discuss.

Risk Assessment Training Discussion

Workshop Report - Pam Fuller reported that a workshop conducted in conjunction with the Mississippi River Basin Panel was held in Tampa, Florida, in August. The purpose of the workshop was to train people on the approaches to risk assessments. She received positive feedback from participants on the format and content of the workshop. The Mississippi River Basin Panel will hold another session in the January-February 2006 time frame.

The Gulf and South Atlantic Panel will hold a Risk Assessment Training Version 2. It would be helpful to do something more specific to the needs of state agencies in their processes.

Risk Assessments - Proposed Next Steps:

- Hold additional training opportunities, as necessary
- Panel establish Risk Assessment Work Group
- Panel charge appropriate work group to develop a prioritized list of species and pathways for which risk assessments are needed
- Panel consider work group product and approve as necessary
- Panel charge Risk Assessment Work Group to develop a plan to conduct risk assessments, including the type of assessment that should be used.

Gulf and South Atlantic Invasive Species Symposium

Lukens reported that at the last meeting Herb Kumpf tried to generate interest within the Panel to sponsor a symposium. There was some hesitancy to organize such a symposium and the issue was tabled.

Subsequent to that meeting an opportunity arose to coordinate a session in conjunction with the International Conference on Aquatic Invasive Species. Conference organizers were seeking monetary support for the conference, and contributors would be able to sponsor a dedicated session

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during the conference. Lukens submitted a contribution on behalf of the Panel and requested a southeast regional session. Lukens sent out notification that the Panel was presentations. The request resulted in a number of presentations and a full day session entitled Invasive Species Plants and Animals in the Southeast Region.

It was suggested that the title of the session be changed to Invasive Species of the Southeast US. It was also suggested that perhaps the session could end with the status of the Regional Panel and what the Panel is working on. Lukens mentioned that he will be the moderator of the session and can make some of those comments.

SARP Update

Marilyn O'Leary included a table in the Panel's folder on where the states are in the process of developing their management plans. All of the Gulf states have started and most of the South Atlantic states are getting there. All are following national guidelines as appropriate. From a management standpoint SARP is making progress with invasive species.

Another SARP project is providing funding for 3 representatives from each state (aquaculture specialist, stocking person, and invasive species SARP person) to train on the HACCP process of keeping invasives out of aquaculture programs. She will be looking for your help in identifying these persons to attend this training.

Election of Officers

David Yeager was elected as Chairman of the Panel.

Earl Chilton, Jim Long, and Don Schmitz were nominated for Vice Chairman. After a paper ballot vote, Earl Chilton was elected as the new Vice Chairman.

Public Comment

Pam Schofield, USGS Gainesville, Florida, informed the Panel members of an outreach meeting in Chicago in January 2006. It is expected to address compiling educational info on aquatic invasives and boating, aquaria, and water gardens as pathways.

Schofield also reported that a paper on Asian swamp eels has been submitted for publication, addressing salinity tolerances. Also, a study on black salty goldfish, sometimes used for bait in estuarine and marine environments, has been completed. The general result of that study is that black saltys are no more salt tolerant than any other goldfish

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Next Meeting Time and Place

Charleston, South Carolina was selected as the location for the next Panel meeting. Lukens indicated that he would proceed with plans for Charleston in April 2006. The second choice location would be Savannah, Georgia.

The meeting recessed at 5:31 pm.

The meeting reconvened at 8:30 am.

Lukens mentioned questions raised regarding the Steering Committee. The Panel's standard operating procedures state that the Steering Committee will be comprised of 3 mandatory seats - the immediate past chairman, the current chairman, and the current vice-chairman. Those 3 will confer with each other and appoint 3 additional members, with no specifications about who those 3 additional members will be. That is how the Steering Committee gets appointed. When Lukens accepted the Chair at the beginning of the Panel's establishment, there was no immediate past chairman or vice-chairman. Panel members were asked to volunteer to sit on the Steering Committee, and Lukens appointed five members. This was done prior to establishing the Standard Operating Procedures. With the Standard Operating Procedures in place, a new Steering Committee needs to be established. Lukens asked for volunteers interested in being on the Steering Committee. He indicated that he would set up a teleconference with the new Chair and Vice Chair to appoint three additional members to serve on the Steering Committee following the current meeting.

Update from the North American Brown Tree Snake Control Team

Jonathan Moczygmba, a graduate student from Texas A&M, Kingston, gave a presentation on the North American Brown Tree Snake Control Team (NABTSCT).

NABTSCT was formed in 2002 to

- Compliment group of Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force
- Inspire and facilitate communication, cooperation, and understanding within and between agencies and organizations and to provide coordination of efforts between agencies concerning brown tree snake issues.

A NABTSCT Working Meeting was held Tuesday, November 29, 2005. Highlights of the meeting include:

- Page by page presentation of *www.NABTSCT.net*
 - Conducted a page by page walk through of the site
 - Site was critiqued by meeting participants
- Rapid Response Plan

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- Watch Card Distribution
 - In service training session in June for FWS wildlife inspectors
 - DOD and wildlife managers on staff at military bases
 - Commercial ports receiving shipments from Guam
 - Personnel handling luggage at airports receiving flights from Hawaii
- Prioritized Potential Pathways
 - Military and commercial cargo
 - Air traffic
 - FEMA
 - Pet trade
 - Mail, UPS, and FED-EX shipping crates
- Discussed Need for Photos
 - Actual photos of the brown tree snake
 - Images of brown tree snake habitat
 - Images of brown tree snake damage
 - Images of search efforts
 - Images of cargo
- Update and Expand Participants List
 - Participants list is out of date and in need of updating
 - Membership is needed to expand the control team and increase rapid response.

Moczygomba ended his presentation by informing the Panel that membership could be obtained by visiting their website www.NABTSCT.net or by giving him a business card.

Species Update

Pam Fuller gave a regional species update from May - November 2005.

- Channeled apple snail - St. Johns, Florida; Central Florida; Satilla, Georgia
- *Charybdis helleri* - Bogue-Core Sounds, North Carolina
- Anaconda - Arkansas
- African jewelfish - Big Cypress Swamp, Florida
- Pacus - galore!
- *Hytissa hyotis* - giant coxcomb oyster
 - 6 nautical miles south of Marathon, Florida
 - collected 2003
 - FMNH 302010

Other Places

- Northern snakehead - Queens, New York
- Zebra mussels, round gobies, bighead carp all expanding
- Miscellaneous aquarium species in miscellaneous places

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- Rough-skinned newt in Alaska
- Alligators in California
- Caiman in Minnesota

Work Group Reports

Education/Outreach Work Group - Marilyn O'Leary reviewed goals of the Education/Outreach Work Group, actions for the coming year, and actions that are already accomplished. The first goal, which is a continuing goal, is the development of an inventory of existing activities, which includes publications, programs, conferences, etc. They started developing this inventory in 2003. They have done considerable work on the inventory of publications and are now working on adding to that the programs that go with the publications and getting that to some searchable place for use. Plans were to put it on the Panel's website, but yesterday they discussed a group on the west coast who had contacted the Panel and are developing the same thing to put on a website. They are offering all the Panels to join in this effort. Chuck Jacoby will continue to investigate that.

In conjunction with this inventory, Dewayne Hollin pointed out that there are some programs or groups that could use the Panel's products or publications if guidance was provided. He is going to work with putting together a recommended packet for the Master Naturalist Program that the cooperative extension uses all over the country to distribute panel products.

The second goal is responsibility for the annual report. Since the Panel will now receive guidelines for format of the annual report, that goal is basically complete.

The third goal is to examine appropriate outreach activities and distributing information. The work group has had an accomplishment of that goal already. Roberto Mendoza had taken some of the publications that are general in nature and translated them into Spanish. This will help with educating individuals in Mexico on invasive species, and also the opportunity to distribute copies in the states with Spanish speaking populations. Plans are to explore finding a similar situation for Vietnamese translation.

The fourth goal is also a distribution goal to identify public outreach opportunities and establish methods to distribute Panel information. One of the things they realized, is that all of the websites that are associated with ANS are not necessarily linked to the Panel's website. Chuck Jacoby did a survey of a first cut of which websites had a link to the Panel. Most of them did. The work group is going to work on approaching each of the organizations that host these websites that connect to the Panel's website and get a stronger connection.

O'Leary mentioned that the Education and Outreach Work Group plans to cooperate and work with Lukens regarding the international meeting in Key Biscayne.

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O'Leary also discussed a program that has been developed identifying teachers as a pathway, because teachers sometimes use live specimens for teaching. In this particular case, there is a curriculum where teachers can order animals and plants from biological supply houses an animal, such as fish or crawfish, or hydrilla. They teach about the food web and about the changes in water quality, etc. When they have completed the curriculum, many are allowing the children to release the specimens into the wild rather than disposing of them permanently. There is documentation that it has resulted in a population of crawfish that is causing a great deal of problems. A teacher education poster has been developed that can be presented at teacher conferences to help teachers understand not to do this and to take advantage of that opportunity to teach the children about invasive species. Through the Panel's website, they plan to advertise that this poster is available for use in the Gulf and South Atlantic states at the teacher conferences and educational events.

O'Leary mentioned that SARP has produced a brochure on invasive species. It is available to all Gulf and South Atlantic states to distribute. This brochure targets anglers, boaters, aquaria, and divers, because those are elements of the public identified to raise the awareness about invasive species.

Pathways/Prevention Work Group - Pam Fuller reported that the Pathways and Prevention Work Group has 2 basic goals: 1) to conduct a regional or state by state pathway analysis; and, 2) to identify regional priorities for pathways and species. Plans are to identify a state contact who is willing to review the existing data. Fuller will query the data base and send them all the data for their state. They can look at all the introductions and their status to determine whether they are established or only collected. They will send that data back with corrections. They will also help identify what percentage of species has been established in each pathway. They will also identify which percent of those that became established, actually became a problem. After this first step, the work group will get back together to discuss which pathway would be a priority and what the categories may be.

The last thing on the work group's list was to conduct an inventory of state or federal "watch lists". There was some discussion about exactly what a "watch list" was, and basically decided that they would compile any existing lists per state, whether they were black lists, white lists, watch lists, etc. and everybody would send those to Nicole in the next month. She will compile those and post them on the Panel's website.

Research/Development Work Group - John Teem indicated that the Research and Development Work Group has not been active this year. A meeting was planned, but changed due to Hurricane Katrina.

The main discussion item at this meeting was regarding the Sea Grant RFA for invasive species. This is a grant program on a 2 year cycle. Dorn Carlson requested text that he could include in the RFP to capture something of each Panel's research and/or outreach priorities. These might not be the Panel's overall priorities, just a priority for something the Panel would want done with a Sea

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Grant project. The priorities need to be NOAA relevant, which generally means relevant to oceans, Great Lakes, or coasts. Dorn would like the priorities by December 15 to allow time to work them into the next Sea Grant RFA, which will come out in the spring. This RFA will be for projects in 2007-08.

The following two priorities were identified:

Outreach priority - Research to determine the most effective means to change the attitudes and procedures of people in regard to practices leading to the release or spread of non-indigenous species.

Research priority - Investigations into methodology for predicting range extensions for known invaders based on basic life history biology with particular relevance to the effects of climate change and hurricanes.

There was a comment to make the research priority statement more general than specific to hurricanes, such as extreme climatic events or natural disasters.

When the Panel was questioned if only one guideline could be submitted, which one would they prefer, the consensus was the research priority.

At the conclusion of the work group reports, Lukens indicated that he would contact each of the work groups to discuss next steps such as conference calls or meetings.

Other Business

Lukens reviewed a possible action for the Panel's Steering Committee. He indicated that he would like to have the new Steering Committee compare the contents of the invasive species portion of the SARP action plan with the Panel's work plan to see how these actions mesh with activities of the Panel.

There was no objection to referring this task to the Panel's Steering Committee.

Public Comment

Lukens again provided the opportunity for public comment. No comments were received.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 9:55 am.