

**TCC ANADROMOUS FISH SUBCOMMITTEE
MINUTES**

Thursday, February 14, 2008
Apalachicola, FL

draft

Chairman D. Frugé called the meeting of the Anadromous Fish Subcommittee to order at 1:13 p.m. The following members and others were in attendance:

Members

Doug Frugé, USFWS, Ocean Springs, MS
Larry Nicholson, GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Ricky Yeldell, LDWF, Anacoco, LA
John Mareska, DCNR, Dauphin Island, AL
Rick Long, FFWCC, Midway, FL
Michael Bailey, NOAA SERO, St. Petersburg, FL

Others

Karen Herrington, USFWS, Panama City, FL
Rob Weller, GDNR, Albany, GA
Fred Cross, FFWCC, Panama City, FL
Jeff Isely, USGS, Clemson, SC
Linda Kelsey, USFWS, Atlanta, GA
Terry McCall, USFWS, Panama City, FL

Staff

Steven VanderKooy, IJF Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS

Adoption of Agenda

M. Bailey made a motion to accept the agenda. The motion was seconded by L. Nicholson and approved.

Approval of Minutes (October 23, 2006)

L. Nicholson made a motion to accept the minutes as written. The motion was seconded by J. Mareska and approved.

Agency Reports

AMRD – J. Mareska reported that the Geological Survey of Alabama is in their final year trying to capture, tag, and track Gulf sturgeon from Mobile Bay up coastal rivers. No success in 2007, but are working again in the Northeast quadrant of Mobile Bay. They are capturing Alabama shad up the rivers by netting and electrofishing. One sturgeon was captured this past summer below the Claiborne L&D, but Steve Ryder was targeting paddlefish and not sturgeon. Striped bass stocking continues, but is handled by the Freshwater Division.

FWC – R. Long reported that the Corps of Engineers was going to continue dredging creeks on the ACF, but were unable to get a permit for on-bank disposal of dredge material, and therefore have been essentially shut down. As a result, most of these areas are slowly returning to a natural state since the bulk of the previously dredged areas are silting back in. Stocking striped bass continues in each of the river systems identified in the FMP. The FWC continues marking fish going into the systems with oxytetracycline (OTC) to look at natural reproduction. They are continuing to work on Alabama shad and striped bass movement through the Jim Woodruff Lock and Dam (JWLD) on the Apalachicola River with **Dr. Jeff Isely**. The University of Florida is continuing to work with Gulf sturgeon and **Dr. Isely** will be discussing it in more detail later in his presentation. The University of Florida was contracted to look at fish movement between the main channel areas and backwaters using telemetry during the spawning season. Many of the target species FWC was looking at were making this move annually, so the study will reinforce the need to protect these areas in the ACF during periods of low water flow. There is still discussion of regulation changes in the Florida panhandle region related to a mixed bag limit for *Morone* species rather than specifically identifying striped bass.

GDNR – R. Weller provided information on their five-year ACF plan to work on striped bass. Georgia would like to see movement of Gulf sturgeon above the JWLD and develop a state management plan for Gulf sturgeon. Georgia has a grant submitted to NOAA for Alabama shad, which didn't get funded last year. They have resubmitted it and have included genetics and fish passage in the proposal.

LDWF – R. Yeldell reported that 4,800 striped bass were stocked in Toledo Bend Reservoir last year, but no Phase II fish for the rivers in the Florida Parishes. Tim Ruth had provided **Yeldell** with a report on Gulf sturgeon activities. As of last fall, 8 adult Gulf sturgeon were tagged and will be tracked using USFWS equipment to monitor those fish. They plan to place radio receivers above the sills in the Pearl and Bogue Chitto rivers to look at fish passage. They will use underwater acoustic receivers in the Lower Pearl to monitor sturgeon egress this coming spawning season. This work remains unfunded and will be limited as a result. The LDWF will only be able to dedicate about 8 hours per month to the telemetry work, but hopes that the coordinated efforts with the USFWS, LSU, and the COE will provide additional help examining fish passage in those river systems. The USFWS offices at Baton Rouge and Lafayette have helped with some of the funding for telemetry.

GCRL – L. Nicholson noted that 90,000 fish were stocked into two lined ponds at the Lyman Fish Hatchery site. Apparently, **Nicholson** had a huge crop of aquatic insects this past year and the input of surface water from the Little Biloxi River had accidentally introduced one largemouth bass and several blacktailed red horse suckers, into the ponds which wiped out the stripers. As a result, they lost most of the 90,000 fish. The GCRL is beginning to build an intensive tank culture facility to grow out Phase Is in the ponds and Phase IIs in the tanks. **Nicholson** reported that a Masters Degree student is working on tracking of striped bass and delineating preferred habitats on a diel basis. He will also be putting out receivers to follow striped bass migrations. They plan to look at length-weight relationships and GIS information for use in the future. All the striped bass work is currently housed at the MDMR's Lyman Fish Hatchery, rather than at the GCRL's Cedar Point property. **Nicholson** reported that the Pascagoula River is getting a lot of fishing pressure, but very few reports from anglers. Most of the reports are coming from Fort Bayou and Biloxi's Back Bay, and the cool water refugia are

mapped well in those areas. The Pascagoula River has a lot of refuge areas, but the competition for habitat is strong, and the GCRL has not been stocking fish there recently. No fish have been reported in the Pearl River either, in the last couple years.

NMFS – M. Bailey deferred until the next agenda item as Gulf sturgeon would be discussed in greater detail.

USFWS – K. Herrington reported that the USFWS is still producing striped bass and continues their evaluation of Phase IIs below JWLD on the ACF for contribution to the broodfish population. The brochure on 25 years of Gulf striped bass is out now and available through the Panama City office.

Water Wars – The states are still meeting to agree on a short-term plan to deal with drought. It is anticipated that a new proposed plan will be completed by tomorrow for how the COE will operate the dam flow on the Chattahoochee River for the short term. In the long term, the COE is adapting other water control plans as well.

Florida is looking at water flow requirements in terms of sportfish as well as mussels and not the ESA designees (sturgeon). At current flow levels, sturgeon do not appear to be in jeopardy as there are a couple areas still open and available to the fish. In the bays, there is less data on effects of salinity and lack of flushing due to reduced flows.

D. Frugé reported that the Baton Rouge office of the USFWS is providing help to the LDWF in Gulf sturgeon recovery on the Pearl River and in Lake Pontchartrain. The LDWF has had to cut their time dedicated to Gulf sturgeon so the USFWS is picking up the slack with the Baton Rouge and Lafayette staff. In 2006, the USFWS provided the LDWF with funds to assess habitat and purchase radio tracking gear and tags. In addition, the USFWS gave LSU money to begin to look at Gulf sturgeon habitat as well. The Baton Rouge office is providing coordination between the COE, USFWS, LDWF, and NGOs for Gulf sturgeon recovery in Louisiana.

Gulf Sturgeon Status Reports

Louisiana - R. Yeldell noted that Tim Ruth is the sturgeon biologist for Louisiana and in the future he might need to attend Subcommittee meetings to discuss Louisiana's activities. The Subcommittee may need to invite him in order to allow him to travel and participate in the Anadromous Subcommittee Gulf sturgeon work.

Mississippi – L. Nicholson provided a written copy of the report from Dr. Todd Slack who is handling most of the sturgeon work in Mississippi.

Summary of Gulf Sturgeon Research Activities in Mississippi: 1997-Present

This project began in 1997, and is based primarily on the collaborative efforts between Dr. Stephen T. Ross (USM), his students (Ryan J. Heise, M. A. Dugo), Dr. Brian R. Kreiser (USM), and Dr. Todd Slack (MMNS-MDWFP). Our objectives were to capture and tag (radio and sonic) sub-adult, and adult Gulf sturgeon from the Pascagoula drainage, and to assess movement patterns and

habitat use of tagged individuals, during their freshwater (eg., Leaf, Chickasawhay, Pascagoula River system), and saltwater (eg., Pascagoula Bay, Mississippi Sound) residency periods. In addition, we utilized these data to address questions regarding life history attributes, demography, spawning habitat and frequency, genetic structure and population density. Population status and life history attributes of this species have been determined in other states but little was known about populations occurring in Mississippi, particularly the Pascagoula drainage, prior to the initiation of this project.

During the project period (1997-2003), the total number of unique Gulf sturgeon captured, processed and tagged in the Pascagoula drainage was 201. A total of 289 individuals were processed, when all recaptures were included, the majority of which were adults. Size structure did not change over the period of study, suggesting that demographics of the Pascagoula Gulf sturgeon population have not varied.

Based on telemetry and capture data, Gulf sturgeon show spawning site fidelity in the Bouie River. From 1998 to 2003, we documented seven fish at the Bouie River spawning site that were initially tagged at the same location. During the 1997-2003 project periods, 44 Gulf sturgeon (including multiple captures) were captured or located through telemetry in the Bouie River, representing 32 unique individuals. Through analysis of blood vitellogenin and through visual observations, 69% of the fish have been males. Thus, for the 32 unique fish found in the Bouie River spawning site from 1997 to 2003, we estimate that 22 were males and 10 were females.

Gulf sturgeon begin their spring migration into the Pascagoula River as early as February 21. Water temperatures during times of Gulf sturgeon capture at the mouth of the West Pascagoula River have ranged from 11-21 C. Gulf sturgeon moving into the Pascagoula River follow three general migratory patterns. Some fish move only as far as the summer holding area on the lower Pascagoula River (RKM 40-68), another group continues migrating up the Leaf and Bouie Rivers, and a third group migrates up the Chickasawhay River. The Bouie River is a documented spawning site of Gulf sturgeon. Apparently suitable spawning habitat occurs in the Chickasawhay River and, given that six tagged Gulf sturgeon during the 2000-2003 field seasons moved into the Chickasawhay River during the spring migration, is likely that Gulf sturgeon also spawn (or have spawned in the past) in this river.

Seaward movement patterns of Gulf sturgeon in the Pascagoula River are similar to movement shown by Florida populations of Gulf sturgeon with most fish leaving the freshwater system during late September-November. The initiation of fall migration is determined by a number of factors, including a shortening day length, lower water temperatures and increases in river discharge.

Based on our research efforts and a concurrent study by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, we report marine habitat use of Gulf sturgeon natal to

the Pascagoula and Pearl Rivers. From 1999 - 2004, using primarily sonic telemetry, we located 72 different Gulf sturgeon in the estuarine or marine environments off of the Louisiana and Mississippi coasts. Many fish were located multiple times. Adult fish were found primarily around the barrier islands that separate Mississippi Sound from the open Gulf of Mexico, but rarely within the main body of Mississippi Sound and never in open Gulf waters south of the barrier islands. In particular, fish were congregated in the barrier island passes which are characterized by relative shallow depths (≤ 7 m) and clean sand substrata. Benthic samples taken at Gulf sturgeon telemetry sites were dominated in terms of percent occurrence by Florida lancelets, sand dollars, annelids, haustoriid amphipods, and mollusks- all documented prey of Gulf sturgeon. Gulf sturgeon were located in the marine environment from October through March, with the majority being found from November through March.

Current Research Activities on Gulf Sturgeon in Mississippi

The premise of our research has been to understand the key elements of the biology of Gulf sturgeon in the Pascagoula watershed, and to use this information to promote the recovery of this species. However, in the past, these efforts have been directed primarily at sub-adult and adult life history stages (>100 cm TL), in part, due to logistical constraints (e.g., gear selective for larger individuals, telemetry tags for larger individuals). Consequently, little information is known on the habitat, feeding and movement of juvenile Gulf sturgeon (<100 cm TL) within the Pascagoula drainage. Life history aspects differ from that of sub-adult and adult stages, as juveniles may remain several years in inland waters and coastal estuaries before initiating the migratory pattern that typifies the adult stage.

The next phase of our research with Gulf sturgeons begins during Spring 2008, as a collaborative research project between Dr. Mark Peterson (USM-GCRL), his students (Jeanne-Marie Havrylkoff) and Dr. Todd Slack (MMNS-MDWFP). The primary objective of this project is to address movement patterns and habitat use by juvenile Gulf sturgeon in the Pascagoula watershed, through the use of telemetry. The main focal area will be the lower Pascagoula River and its associated estuary. Targeting juvenile Gulf sturgeon will not only establish a baseline assessment for future work, which will allow subsequent researchers to follow individuals through time (i.e., specific cohorts on length-frequency histogram), but it will also assist in assessing the potential impact of large-scale storm events, such as Hurricane Katrina, on local Gulf sturgeon populations by assessing habitat availability and use.

Alabama – **J. Mareska** reported that Gulf sturgeon in Alabama are rare, but do occasionally occur. They are sometimes encountered as they move from the Pascagoula River and Perdido Bay through Mobile Bay. There are no spawning sturgeon in the Mobile River system.

Florida – **K. Herrington** reported that the USFWS reviews the Threatened/Endangered species every five years. They are working toward completing the review for Gulf sturgeon as a result of

a lawsuit in Florida and will have it by October 2009, and request any state data on Gulf sturgeon be provided to Frank prior to that time.

Herrington reported that the Choctawhatchee River population estimate for Gulf sturgeon in 2001, was around 2,800 total fish. In 2007, far fewer fish (170) were tagged and very few were recaptured, partly due to the drought, but lots of the untagged fish were encountered that were outgoing juveniles. In the current evaluation, they are only considering adult and subadult fish, not juveniles. The estimate was at 2,800 fish but, this number does not include a higher number of young fish. Only about 16% of all the fish tagged were recaptured, but one fish was turned in with a tag that was 16 years old.

As far as sturgeon in the marine waters, in 2006-2007, the same areas or habitats were used by Gulf sturgeon between Mexico Beach and Panama Beach, as in previous years, with most occurring 0.25 – 2.0 miles offshore in 15-30 feet of water. The majority of the radio tags have now expired.

NOAA Fisheries has tagged 58 fish and is using 50 receivers to look at residency period in the upper Pensacola Bay and Choctawhatchee Bay during the summer months. This work was funded by some of the disaster money from Hurricane Ivan, as there had been some concern regarding fish kills in the upper bays. Fish are located much higher in the bays than they had originally thought in the summers.

Regarding threats to spawning areas, on the Choctawhatchee River, the USFWS is working with land owners on bank stabilization to protect spawning areas in the river.

The 9th Annual Gulf Sturgeon Workshop took place in October 2007. The workshop provides a forum for federal, state, and university researchers to share information on Gulf sturgeon activities.

R. Long reported that FWC biologists came up with a large concentration of YOY sturgeon in the Suwanee River basin this past year. The FWC is looking for additional habitats in that system. Florida is also working on a tagging relational-database that will be web-based and interactive with Bill Pine's graduate student, allowing anyone to enter a recovered tag number and determine the information on that particular Gulf sturgeon.

Gulf Striped Bass Production and Distribution, 2007

Since most of the meeting participants had also attended the *Morone* Workshop the day before, this portion of the agenda was dispensed with.

Alabama Shad FMP for the ACF Update

R. Long reported that the FMP is nearly complete. There were some issues with the genetics section and how the stocking section would be influenced by the genetics. It is in review at this time and they are hopeful that it will be completed within the next two weeks. The comprehensive plan describes the population, looks at fish passage effects, and the next upstream barriers. Alabama shad stocking efforts may provide a jumpstart to the population on the

Chattahoochee and the Flint rivers and enhanced fish passage may boost the population significantly. **Dr. Greg Moyer** is one of the geneticists working on the project. The stocking plan seems to be the biggest issue/hurdle, at this time, at least until the genetics of Alabama shad is better understood.

Update on JWLD Alabama Shad Fish Passage Study

Dr. Jeff Isely provided a presentation on several on-going projects with his graduate students related to anadromous fish and fish passage. First Isely summarized a study looking at potential differences in the timing of spawning between Gulf and Atlantic striped bass. They found no differences in mean spawning date or mean temperature between Atlantic (introduced) and Gulf (native) strains and suggested that introgression of Atlantic alleles has likely nullified any spawning chronology differences that may have existed in the past. Isely next reported on fish passage using advanced 3D imaging software and mapping out the behaviors of striped bass and Alabama shad released below and into the locks at the JWLD. Generally, most of the striped bass passed through the lock provided they weren't captured by anglers first. His data indicated that a relatively high percentage of tagged striped bass are captured by anglers in the vicinity of the dam.

The Alabama shad passage study focused specifically on Alabama shad populations below the JWLD. They examined abundance, passage through the lock, age structure, and sex-specific growth. Shad abundance estimates varied widely based on the prevailing climatologic conditions (drought vs flood). Acoustic hydrophones were placed in the lock at JWLD and sonic tagged shad were released. In 2005 they found a 64% efficiency rate of passage. In 2007, they added a flow attractor at either end of the lock and found similar results. They have hope that the attractors will help move the fish to the proper end of the lock with continued use. In conclusion, they estimated 100,000-500,000 American shad pass through the locks on the Santee-Cooper but need to open or use the locks much more frequently. In the 'old days' of the JWLD, river traffic was much higher than now, with gravel barges passing through the locks daily. Increased scheduled openings should allow more natural movement and higher rates of passage for Alabama shad reaching areas above the JWLD.

Alabama Shad Status Review

D. Frugé recapped how the NOAA Fisheries Endangered Species Act "candidate" definition changed a few years ago, and Alabama shad came off the list. About 15 years ago the USFWS began a range-wide status review, but then it was never completed. Picking up where they left off in the late 1990s might be something for the Anadromous Fish Subcommittee to review and perhaps continue on behalf of the NOAA Office of Protected Resources and produce a final status review. **Bailey** indicated he didn't think that NOAA would have a problem with the subcommittee basically completing the ESA review outside the confines of the ESA. This would be essentially the same as a range-wide review that NOAA Fisheries would need to complete if the species was petitioned for listing. This type of effort would involve several non-coastal states, as well as the Gulf States. One of the problems is that most states don't identify shad by species, but lump them with gizzardards, Americans, and other clupeids.

Therefore, **M. Bailey** moved to ask the TCC for guidance and/or permission to pursue the development of a status review for the Alabama shad as a precursor to any ESA review or an IJF management plan. **J. Mareska** seconded and the motion passed and would be brought to the TCC by **Chairman Frugé** in his report in March.

Status of Striped Bass FMP Implementation

D. Frugé passed out a matrix he had developed with **S. VanderKooy**, related to the Striped Bass FMP recommendations that are not normally reviewed by the GSMFC's State-Federal Fisheries Management Committee (SFFMC), due to the more technical rather than regulatory nature of those recommendations. It was suggested to the GSMFC's Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC), at their last meeting, that the Subcommittee might bring them something to review for future meetings. **Frugé** handed out the matrix (attachment 1) for the Subcommittee's review and discussion. **VanderKooy** explained how the SFFMC scorecard works for regulatory related recommendations and thought the idea would carry over well to the TCC for other management plans. There was also discussion of structural changes that should be made to the SFFMC scorecard for the Striped Bass FMP as well as appropriateness of some of the "scores" currently on the scorecard. Following these discussions,

***D. Frugé** moved to remove the last three items from the SFFMC's scorecard for striped bass to the Global scorecard being proposed by the Anadromous Subcommittee to go to the TCC for their future review. **M. Bailey** seconded and the motion passed.*

Frugé would bring the TCC matrix to them as part of his Subcommittee report at the March meeting in Galveston.

***D. Frugé** also moved to propose to the SFFMC the addition of recommendation 8.3.6 Enforcement to the SFFMC's scorecard for their review in the future. **R. Long** seconded and the motion passed.*

Frugé would bring the recommended changes to the SFFMC's matrix as part of his USFWS report at the March meeting in Galveston. It was noted that in review/revision of the scores on this and the proposed TCC scorecard for the 2008 fall meeting, the State Directors should consult their Anadromous Fish Subcommittee members.

Update on Southeast Aquatic Habitat Plan

D. Frugé reported that the habitat plan was still under development, but was nearly complete. **Frugé** would send this out to the Subcommittee as FYI. This plan is being developed by the Southeast Aquatic Resource Partnership (SARP).

Development of Project Proposals

Dr. Jeff Isely was attempting to identify potential funding sources for his continuing work on striped bass, Gulf sturgeon, and Alabama shad in the ACF. There was some discussion of a

possible GSMFC endorsement of Dr. Isely's proposal for a NOAA Fisheries grant, but this was determined to not be appropriate since the proposal has already been submitted and the review process begun. It was suggested that there might be some small pots of money available from the USFWS, but nothing specific was offered, and if anyone had any ideas they should get in touch with Dr. Isely.

Other Business

D. Frugé was unanimously elected chair once again and **L. Nicholson**, vice chair.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 5:00 p.m.

**COMMERCIAL/RECREATIONAL FISHERIES ADVISORY PANEL
MEETING SUMMARY – 58th Annual Spring Meeting
Monday, March 10, 2008
Galveston, Texas**

APPROVED BY:

COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

P. Horn called the meeting to order at 1:05 p.m. with a quorum. The following were in attendance:

Members

Philip Horn, Clark Seafood, Pascagoula, MS
Bob Zales II, Panama City, FL
John Rawlings, Colorado River Seafood, Matagorda, TX
Ronnie Luster, Texas CCA, Houston, TX
Darren Angelo, Delta Marine in Empire, Belle Chasse, LA
Pete Barber, Alabama Seafood Association, Coden, AL

Others

Virginia Vail, *GSMFC Commissioner*, FWC, Tallahassee, FL
Kevin Anson, AMRD, Dauphin Island, AL
Richard Cody, FWC-FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Page Campbell, TPWD, Rockport, TX
Terry Cody, GSMFC/TPWD, Rockport, TX
Dale Diaz, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Kerwin Cuevas, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Steve Heath, AMRD, Dauphin Island, AL
Jon Dodrill, FFWCC, Tallahassee, FL
Billy Causey, NOAA, Key West, FL
Rhonda Cummins, TX SeaGrant, Port Lavaca, TX
Jason Duet, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Bill Kiene, NOAA/National Marine Sanctuary Program, Galveston, TX
Shane Bonnot, TPWD, Lake Jackson, TX
Ed Swindell, Marine Process Service, Hammond, LA
Judy Jamison, G&SAFF, Tampa, FL
Cherie O'Brien, TPWD, Dickinson, TX
Jerry Mambretti, TPWD, Port Arthur, TX

Staff

Larry B. Simpson, Executive Director, Ocean Springs, MS
David Donaldson, Assistant Director, Ocean Springs, MS
Steve VanderKooy, Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Ralph Hode, Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Donna Bellais, ComFIN Programmer/Analyst, Ocean Springs, MS
Teri Freitas, Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS
Gregg Bray, MRFSS Analyst, Ocean Springs, MS

Introductions

P. Horn welcomed everyone and started the introductions.

Adoption of Agenda

VanderKooy reported that due to complications in the model, Agenda Item #5 would be omitted for this meeting, but that NOAA planned to attend in the fall when they had more to present on the expenditure survey. **B. Zales** moved to accept the agenda with the correction, **P. Barber** seconded and the agenda was adopted.

Approval of Minutes (October 15, 2007)

Barber moved to accept the minutes as written, **Zales** seconded and the minutes were approved.

Marine Recreational Information Program Overview

Donaldson provided an overview of the Marine Recreational Information Program. He covered a little of the program background, current activities, and anticipated research projects. These included projects in the areas of survey design and analysis, data management and standards, the for-hire sector, and HMS.

GSMFC Economic Data Collection Program

Donaldson also provided a brief synopsis of the planned economic data collection to be conducted through the GSMFC. An economist has been hired by the Commission and will be addressing state and federal economics needs for the Southeast Region. That person will coordinate the Gulf of Mexico state and federal commercial and recreational fishing economic activities, develop and implement an information collection on public attitudes, knowledge and use patterns of coastal and marine ecosystems, and develop and implement a marine angler expenditure survey for the Gulf. They will also develop and implement an economic survey of Gulf inshore shrimp fleet and an economic survey of fishing-related businesses in Gulf.

Islands in the Stream

Billy Causey, NOAA's Marine Sanctuary Program, provided a very broad overview of the "Islands in the Stream" concept in addressing Marine Protected Areas, which he pointed out, are not Marine Reserves and have no expectation of area closures or "no-take-zones". **Causey** explained the concept of the islands as identified areas that are within the influence of the loop current or other prevailing currents that are essentially fed and influenced by areas down-stream. This results in a very international approach to protection, since Mexico and Belize are the first entities in the stream. **Causey** pointed out that while there were initially some concerns regarding Presidential Orders under the Antiquities Act; the Administration has still not taken a formal position on the initiative; rather, it is considering the merits of this initiative, along with other possibilities. In addition, NOAA has not taken any action on the concept and would not

support the designation without a thorough public discussion of all the relevant issues. Many of the areas identified in conceptual framework have already been set aside for some level of protection through MMS or Fisheries processes and would still be assessed through a comprehensive stakeholder process.

Large Area Artificial Reef Site (LAARS) Discussion

Jon Dodrill, FWC, presented an overview of the artificial reef programmatic management issues in Northwest Florida. In last five years FWC spent \$1,097,411 in NW FL in support of construction of 170 new public reef sites. **Dodrill** pointed out that FWC supports the concept of unpublished reefs for both public and privately funded deployments, in an effort to reduce fishing pressure in certain areas and increase finfish biomass. **Dodrill** described the Large Area Artificial Reef Sites (LAARS) as they were originally intended. Seven LAARS have been developed in the federal waters off the three Florida panhandle counties (Escambia 2, Okaloosa 3, and Bay County 2). Permits for the LAARS are issued and renewed by the ACOE Regulatory Office in Jacksonville and Mobile. The benefits of the LAARS are that they spread out fishing effort over a larger area, reducing fishing/diving pressure at public reef sites. They may provide locations for snapper/grouper to orient to, that are fished with a lower level of intensity and frequency and they have benefited the public reef programs in partnership with the state, when effective oversight has been provided.

Dodrill did indicate that there are some 'weaknesses' to management of the LAARS which need to be addressed and have been identified by numerous other groups including the FWC and the ACOE. These include an absence of oversight once a private vessel leaves the dock (there is no way of knowing if material makes it to permit site or even stays there in a storm event). There is a lack of follow up monitoring by the permit holder and limited resources to do so. There is a lack of state and federal resources to properly police the LAARS private reef building program for compliance with permit conditions. Illegal deployments or inadequate anchoring can lead to user conflicts with commercial trawling operations and there has been historically poor record keeping by some permit holders. There is a perception by some in the commercial trawl fishery that the whole LAARS private program is a façade, enabling fishers to literally go anywhere, but into the permitted areas and the same individuals who deployed illegally without the program, now have some cover to continue non compliance. There is a perception that there are relatively high levels of program administration to benefit a relatively few individuals and that the original concept of program was to help the charter industry, not help recreational anglers, who did not rely on the reefs for their income. In summary, the lack of performance and compliance monitoring of the LAARS program coupled with concerns over materials has resulted in increased scrutiny and special condition requirements that the ACOE and other agencies are currently applying to this program in the permit review and reauthorization process.

Dodrill's presentation led to considerable discussion primarily related to the concern over the permit requirements. A number of comments have already been sent to the ACOEs through the Department of Environmental Protection's Coastal Zone Management Consistency Review Process addressing the proposed 10-fold expansion of the Escambia County West LAARS. As noted in Dodrill's presentation, there are a number of issues (material appropriateness, compliance monitoring, post deployment performance monitoring (even excluding the area

expansion issue) relate to general state agency concerns regarding private reef program LAARS program management which need to be addressed before the ACOE makes their final decisions. They are currently reviewing the comments that had been received and were waiting on some additional information from Escambia County officials, who are the permit holder. Considering the short timeframe for the permit to be finalized, the following motion was made by **Zales**: *The CRFAP moves to request the GSMFC convene and support a meeting of the ACOE from Jacksonville and Mobile, the Artificial Reef Subcommittee, and other commercial and recreational stakeholders to address the current LAARS program and address the weaknesses identified in the recent comments presented by the FWC's Jon Dodrill and the ACOE. This would include addressing the use of chicken transport devices, or CTDs, and determining acceptable monitoring requirements for private reef builders within the approved LAARS.* **Horn** seconded and the motion passed.

Emergency Disaster Relief Program (EDRP)

R. Hode provided a broad overview of the proposed and on-going disaster relief activities. The first Congressional supplemental appropriation to the Gulf States for fisheries assistance following Hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma in 2005 (EDRP I) was directed towards the repair and restoration of fisheries resources. Emphasis was placed on oyster restoration, habitat restoration, and cooperative research aimed at defining post-event fisheries stocks and developing improved methods of expediting recovery and protecting habitat. Since the inception of the Disaster Recovery program, in September 2006, total expenditures through February, 2008 have amounted to approximately \$33,562,535.08. Efforts to restore damaged or destroyed oyster reefs began almost immediately, following approval of the first supplemental. **Hode** reported that current estimates indicate that nearly 123,000 cubic yards of cultch materials have been installed over approximately 1366 acres of public reefs in the three upper Gulf States. Habitat restoration programs to date, have primarily involved removal of debris from fishing grounds and restoration of both inshore and off-shore artificial fishing reefs.

The Cooperative Research program involves stock assessment and CPUE analysis in both shellfish and finfish programs. These programs offer vital financial incentives to participating commercial and/or for-hire fishery fleets and is aiding in the stabilization of the industry as it recovers from post event losses. **Hode** noted that additional cooperative research efforts are underway in the form of an oyster larvae dispersal study and model being conducted in the Pensacola Bay area by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute; and through a finfish larvae dispersal and impact study being conducted through the Alabama Department of Natural Resources by the Dauphin Island Sea Lab.

The second Congressional supplemental appropriation (EDRP II) to the Gulf States for fisheries assistance following Hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma in 2005 was approved in the amount of \$84,915,000. It is directed towards providing assistance to the Gulf States fishing industry in an effort to restore and further stabilize the industry during the recovery period. **Hode** reported that the level and type of assistance is at the discretion of each state and may be in the form of direct financial assistance where applicants meet state defined conditions; or, in the form of infrastructure improvements designed to improve access to fishing grounds, improve habitat, or other improvements that will provide long term benefit to the industry.

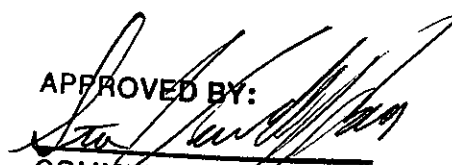
IJF Activities Update

S. VanderKooy provided a short summary of the IJF program activities since the last meeting of the panel. The Oyster TTF met in November 2007 to work on editing several draft sections. The group is utilizing a website through the GSMFC to submit drafts, materials, and recommended edits. The TTF will meet again at the end of March in Ocean Springs. The development of a Profile/FMP for *Cynoscion arenarius*, commonly referred to as white trout or sand seatrout, has been started. Several assignments were handed out and the drafting has begun. The Crab Subcommittee completed the revisions to the Derelict Trap Guidelines document and plans to have the GSMFC's final approval at the Business Session. The IJF Staff is pleased to provide the 2005 GSMFC Annual Report and expects the 2006 to go out for bid shortly. **VanderKooy** reported that all the GSMFC pubs are available on-line at the Commission website, or can be reprinted and distributed from the Commission office.

Other Business

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:56 p.m.

**TCC Crab Subcommittee
Minutes – 58th Spring Meeting
Monday, March 10, 2008
Galveston, Texas**

APPROVED BY:

COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN
Facilitator

Chairman L. Hartman called the meeting to order at 8:36 a.m. with the following members and others were in attendance:

Members

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

Others

Gilmore "Butch" Pellegrin, NOAA/NMFS, Pascagoula, MS
Virginia Vail, *GSMFC Commissioner*, FWC, Tallahassee, FL
Ronnie Luster, CCA, Houston, TX
Dale Diaz, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Rick Leard, GMFMC, St. Petersburg, FL
Shane Bonnet, TPWD, Lake Jackson, TX

Staff

Steve VanderKooy, IJF Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Teri Freitas, Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS
Larry Simpson, Executive Director, Ocean Springs, MS

Adoption of Agenda

Guillory moved to accept the agenda with changes and the motion was seconded by **Floyd**.

Approval of Minutes

Wagner moved to accept both sets of minutes and the motion was seconded by **Guillory**.

Blue Crab Aging Project – Biochemical Lipofuscin

VanderKooy reported that the Crab Ageing proposal, which had been submitted to the NOAA Cooperative Research Program, was rejected a second time. The overall reviews were good, but the transfer of technology and fishermen involvement was not strong enough. There were also some budget concerns as well. There is a good chance it might be accepted in another funded program, the Subcommittee will look at options and see if they want to submit it elsewhere.

VanderKooy suggested that MARFIN may be another grant option and he will look to see if we can make it a fit and have a conference call in late spring to discuss his findings. Florida is going forward with their lipofuscin project and is hoping for assistance from Mississippi on rearing crabs (grow-out) and **Perry** reported that GCRL tagged 900 crabs last year.

Gulf Stock Assessment Data Set Progress

Pellegrin updated the subcommittee on the Gulf stock assessment data and provided some examples and preliminary results using the Collie-Sissenwine or catch survey analysis approach that works well in data poor environments. **Pellegrin** reported that he used Louisiana's data for the first pass. The model uses both fishery independent data and fishery dependent data; estimates natural mortality, early and full recruits, and populates the landings by year and estimates harvest rates. **Pellegrin** also reported that Hoyt Childers is looking for an update on numbers to write an article for the National Fisherman.

Derelict Trap Guidelines Document Revision

VanderKooy reported that revision to the Derelict Trap Guidelines Document had been sent to the full Commission for their review and action on Wednesday. There were some minor comments from TCC and State-Federal Fisheries Management Committees. The document has been distributed widely in various meetings and has been very well received. Future updates will be completed when changes to the state programs are substantial.

CPUE Studies on Traps With and Without TED's

Perry presented preliminary data on catch-per-unit-effort for traps with and without TEDs. The GCRL is still conducting their surveys and they are seeing no significant change in catch after implementing TEDs in roughly 10% of the commercial traps. Mississippi is using stainless steel TEDs in their study. The study will extend over a three year period, with CPUE determined in standard and TED traps. **Floyd** will email the Crab Committee members a picture of the new TEDs crab traps.

Regional Blue Crab Tagging Program

Perry suggested that the Subcommittee look at a regional blue crab tagging program. **Perry** suggested that this would be an excellent program for the Gulf and was looking for input from the rest of Crab Committee members. The committee discussed funding issues and suggested that **VanderKooy** watch for funding opportunities.

Derelict Trap Cleanups

Louisiana – Guillory reported that Terrabonne Bay had a trap clean up February 23-March 2, 2008. Volunteer participation is way down; they retrieved 1,234 traps in 3 days. Louisiana may look at using disaster money in future clean-ups. **Guillory** thanked Mississippi for their participation in their trap clean up.

Mississippi – **Floyd** reported that the Mississippi cleanup last year was their best year ever, using EDRP money. This year they will be paying \$10 per trap, with a 40 trap maximum and no participation bonus. This week they will be picking up their traps and the clean-up will be next week. Diamond back terrapin are a species on concern. Bill Richardson attended a southeast conference on Derelict Traps and they were very interested in our Derelict Trap Program. **Floyd** will email Crab TCC members a copy of the contract they used with the fishermen.

Alabama – **Hartman** reported that Alabama collected 356 traps in March 2008. The program is changing at CCA's request, although last year they only had 23 volunteers. **Hartman** is suggesting that Alabama have a full-system clean up in 2009-2010.

Florida – **McMillen-Jackson** reported that Florida is requiring trap tags and a portion of the endorsement fees will go towards crab trap clean up. Most of the blue crab trap clean ups are local and done with volunteers. Florida does not currently have a closed season, which makes their clean up efforts a little different; they will be having some discussions about having a closure to do a derelict trap clean up. There were 478 traps retrieved in bay waters since 2004.

Texas – **Wagner** reported that the 2008 Texas clean up was scheduled for February 15-24, 2008. The dates are mandated by the TPWD Commission. The first day was very windy and pretty much a wash out. The total number of traps retrieved were; 1,301, with 63 volunteers, using 25 vessels. Data collection has been discontinued.

State Reports

Florida – **McMillen-Jackson** reported that Florida's 2006 calendar year blue crab landings were slightly higher than the 2005 landings. Hard shell blue crab landings were up 17% from the previous years, on the Gulf coast and down nearly 24% on the Atlantic coast. Peeler/soft-shell landings were also down, compared with 2005, by about 22% and 27% on the Gulf and Atlantic coasts, respectively. There is an ongoing drought in south and southwest Florida and that accounts for some of the drop in landings. The Florida Diamondback Terrapin Group has suggested that diamondback terrapin turtle mortality is a concern and their data shows that the BRD's worked to exclude terrapin mortality, while maintaining captured blue crab abundance and size. They estimated 73% of the captured terrapin would have been excluded by the presence of functional BRD's in the unmodified traps; based on this data, they recommended that the FWC devise and adopt regulations requiring the use of terrapin TED's in all commercial and recreational blue crab traps. **Mc-Millen-Jackson** stated that she is interested in receiving any TED's information from Crab Committee members.

Alabama – **Hartman** reported that Alabama crab licenses dropped to 120 in 2006 and has climbed back up to 148 in 2007. 2007 landings spiked in June/July. Individual landings are up and continue to be steady. **Hartman** presented slides from fishery independent samples that showed blue crab abundance changed possibly as a result of building seawalls (or armoring) on the Alabama Coast over a 25 year period. Salinity has been higher, due to drought conditions and may be moving crabs higher up the bay. **Hartman** also reported that she attended the Terrapin Workshop in Spanish Fort, Alabama.

Mississippi – **Floyd** reported that licenses are up from 128 to 133 for 2007-08, and recreational license sales are up as well, 427 to 585 for 2007-08. Landings are down slightly, 788,125 lbs. compared to 1,126,806 lbs. in 2006-07, and they have one active crab processor. EDRP has two programs focusing on the crab industry 1) Fishery Recovery Monitoring Reports and 2) Derelict Trap Cleanup. EDRP II has the same two programs, with changes being made in the derelict trap bounty program. This year fishermen will receive \$10 per trap with a 40 trap payment limit. **Floyd** reported that she also attended Diamondback Terrapin Working Group in Spanish Fort, AL.

Louisiana – **Guillory** reported that Louisiana landings were up from 2005, so were commercial and recreational trap license sales. EDRP I funds were allocated for oysters, habitat and cooperative research. EDRP II has several projects that will aide the crab fishery. The Louisiana Crab Task force is still active and meets 2-3 times per year. Due to all the new members of the Louisiana Legislature, the task force gave members a tour of a crab processor and went out on a crab boat. Approximately \$100 out of the state tagging fee will go to promote the seafood industry.

Texas – **Wagner** gave a brief overview of the Texas blue crab stock assessment done by Wagner and Sutton in 2007, giving the pros and cons of management options to reduce commercial crab fishing effort in Texas. There were seven (7) options; Wagner and Sutton recommend option 3, which is to reduce trap limits from 200 to 150 per person. Management is using option 1, which is to maintain the status quo (i.e. Allow limited entry, buybacks at current rate, and attrition to reduce effort). Preliminary 2007 commercial hard crab landings were 3.3 million lbs., worth \$2.66 million. This represents 68% increase in landings, and 82% increase in value from 2007, this increase was expected with better than average rainfall throughout the Texas coast during early 2007. Round 8 of the crab license buybacks concluded in the fall of 2007, with 13 applications received, 8 buybacks accepted, at an average of \$6875 (range of \$6,000-\$7,000). Since 2000, 45 crab licenses have been retired, or 15.8% of the 287 license being held at that time. A preliminary look at 2007 trip ticket data for the blue crab fishery revealed over 10,000 tickets were submitted, 8,300 of which had effort data included. 60% of trips were 7-8 hours long, and modal fishing time reported was 24 hours. Nearly half of the tickets appear to be confusing fishing time with trip time. No crab regulatory measures are before the Commission or Legislature at this time. The only other coastal fisheries proposal before the Commission this year is to adopt a Total Allowance Catch for the menhaden fishery in state waters, currently proposed at 31.5 million pounds. Fisheries of interest for the 2009-2010 season will include: sharks, flounder, and mangrove snapper.

Other Business

VanderKooy discussed presenting the TCC a scorecard on blue crab and other species. He also reported that in mid-January, in conjunction with GCRL, a Press Release on the regional derelict trap cleanup went out.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 12:07 p.m.

APPROVED BY:


COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**TCC HABITAT SUBCOMMITTEE
MINUTES – 58th Annual Spring Meeting
Monday, March 10, 2008
Galveston, Texas**

Chairman Heather Warner-Finley 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, FWC, St. Petersburg, FL
Ron Mezich, FWC, Tallahassee, FL
Cherie O'Brien, TPWD, Dickinson, TX
Robert Adami, TPWD, Corpus Christi, TX
Paul Cook, LDWF, New Iberia, LA
Heather Warner-Finley, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Doug Frugé, USFWS, Ocean Springs, MS
Rusty Swafford, NMFS, Galveston, TX
Steve Heath, ADCNR MRD, Gulf Shores, AL
Jeff Clark, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Jan Boyd, MDMR, Biloxi, MS

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

Gary Peterson, LSU, Baton Rouge, LA
Todd Neahr, TPWD, Corpus Christi, TX
Brian Lezina, LDWF, Lacombe, LA
Leslie Williams, TPWD, Dickinson, TX
Jerry Mambretti, TPWD, Port Arthur, TX
Ed Swindell, Menhaden Advisory Council, Hammond, LA
Rick Hart, NOAA Fisheries, Galveston, TX
Roger Zimmerman, NOAA Fisheries, Galveston, TX

Adoption of Agenda

The agenda was adopted without changes.

Adoption of Minutes

The minutes of the October 15, 2007 meeting were adopted without changes.

Administrative Report

J. Rester stated that the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council's Louisiana/Mississippi Habitat Protection Advisory Panel met on October 25, 2007. **J. Rester** reported that the Commission reviewed the Mississippi River/Gulf of Mexico Watershed Nutrient Task Force's (Task Force) draft "Gulf Hypoxia Action Plan 2008" in December and sent a letter to the Task Force urging the Task Force not to weaken the Action Plan and do whatever necessary to reduce the nutrient loads entering the Gulf of Mexico. He reported that work continued on the Commission's aquaculture grant from NOAA Fisheries. Most of the work was being performed by the University of Southern Mississippi's Gulf Coast Research Laboratory (GCRL). **J. Rester** stated that GCRL was constructing a copepod culture system that would meet the immediate needs of a nascent red snapper culture system and facilitate the development that would meet the long-term needs of a large-scale production and/or red snapper stock enhancement program. A contractor under GCRL was developing a planning exercise that would lead to the development of a full scale offshore aquaculture demonstration project in the northern Gulf of Mexico. **J. Rester** reported that the Commission was developing a geographic information system (GIS) model for aquaculture site selection in the Gulf of Mexico. **J. Rester** stated that work on the Commission's Bottom Mapping Project had come to a stand still. The contractor from the University of Colorado responsible for the data gathering portion of the contract was going through family problems and had not fulfilled his obligations under the contract. The final report and final products were officially due from the contractor at the end of January, but had been promised at the end of October at the end of his no cost extension. The contractor has provided a timeline for completion and has stated that all final products will be delivered by the end of March.

A Review of Fish Research in the Atchafalaya River Deltas: Are We Creating Good Fish Habitat?

G. Peterson stated that the Wax Lake and Atchafalaya River Deltas were the only areas in Louisiana that were currently building land. Most of the land was built around these deltas since the 1970s. He stated that over the past 25 years he had been involved in studying the differences between the created and natural habitats associated with the deltas. He stated that researchers postulated that the main differences between the created and natural habitats were due to limited fishery access to the created habitats. **G. Peterson** reported that a recent project was examining ways to improve fish access to created habitats through the cutting of access channels through the containment levees for the created areas. He stated that results showed that the cuts improved fishery access to created habitats, and the created and natural habitats showed similar diversities after the access channels were cut. Recommendations from the study were that spoil from channel maintenance dredging should continue to be used for creation of wetland habitats, construction designs should maximize intertidal wetland elevations and attempt to mimic natural delta islands, and if retainment levees were used they should be removed or have multiple gaps soon after settlement to allow natural drainage channels to develop to provide fish access to interior wetlands.

Status of Freshwater Inflow Issues in Florida

R. Mezich provided an overview of the current freshwater inflow issues related to the Apalachicola, Chattahoochee, and Flint (ACF) Rivers. **R. Mezich** provided a historical overview of the water issues related to Lake Lanier in Georgia. He stated that Georgia and Alabama were currently in a drought and that Georgia did not want to release the previously agreed upon amount of freshwater out of Lake Lanier, the Atlanta area's main water source. In February 2008, Florida, Georgia, and Alabama met to develop a new drought protocol. In March 2008, Florida, Georgia, and Alabama failed to reach an agreement on a new drought protocol for all three states. **R. Mezich** stated that Federal agencies would develop revised drought protocols and operational plans for the ACF. **R. Mezich** detailed the current effects of the drought on estuarine species in Apalachicola Bay. He stated that oysters were severely damaged by increased salinity in the estuary. He reported that fishery landings were low the last two years due to the drought. He stated that white shrimp were in severe decline. Brown shrimp harvest was the lowest in 20 years, and that pink shrimp landings may be low in 2008 due to loss of nursery habitat. **R. Mezich** reported that the Corps of Engineers was currently developing a new water control plan for the ACF.

Review of the Draft Final Freshwater Inflow Brochure

J. Rester stated that after the last meeting, he sent the brochure text to Judy Toppins at the USFWS for her to help in laying out the brochure. **J. Rester** stated that he would send the brochure out to everyone again for their final review before forwarding the brochure to the Technical Coordinating Committee for their approval.

Status of the SARP Habitat Plan

D. Frugé reported that the Southeast Aquatic Resource Partnership (SARP) had recently released their Southeast Aquatic Habitat Plan (SAHP). The SAHP steps down the National Fish Habitat Action Plan for the southeastern United States. **D. Frugé** reported that the vision of the SAHP was the cooperative conservation of southeastern streams, rivers, lakes and reservoirs, estuaries, and coastal marine habitats to support fish and aquatic resources and sustainable public use. **D. Frugé** stated that the guiding principles for the SAHP were to communicate the value of southeastern aquatic habitats and the imperative for conserving them, provide regional aquatic conservation planning based on sound science, rigorous research, open and inclusive planning processes, and input from a broad and diverse group of stakeholders, establish regional aquatic conservation priorities, support existing partnerships and facilitate new ones, to effectively conserve southeastern aquatic systems, and integrate conservation strategies and measures within identified watersheds and across scales from watershed to region to national plans. Eight objectives were included in the plan. These were to establish, improve and maintain riparian zones, improve or maintain water quality, improve or maintain watershed connectivity, improve or maintain appropriate hydrologic conditions for the support of biota in aquatic systems, establish, improve or maintain appropriate sediment flows, maintain and restore physical habitat in freshwater systems, restore or improve the ecological balance in habitats negatively affected by non-indigenous or problem species, and conserve, restore and create coastal estuarine and marine habitats.

Habitat Issues of Interest From Each State

Florida – **R. Mezich** stated that the 2008 legislative session started on March 1. He stated that Florida was still in the process of reviewing the proposed expansion of the large area artificial reef sites off of Pensacola. **F. Courtney** stated that he recently attended a National Fish Habitat Board meeting where they were very complimentary of SARP. He stated that the National Fish Habitat Board was using SARP as an example of what they wanted the fish habitat partnerships to resemble.

Alabama – **S. Heath** stated that Alabama was collecting data from fishermen as part of their disaster relief program. Alabama was also planting more oyster cultch. He reported that Alabama Power had made a request to hold back more water and this had lead to an expansion of brackish species in Mobile Bay. **S. Heath** stated that due to a cut in Dauphin Island formed by Hurricane Katrina, oyster drills were rampant. He reported that Alabama was trying to fill in the cut, but had run into problems due to spending Federal money on private property.

Mississippi – **J. Clark** stated that Mississippi was currently mapping *Salvinia* on the Pascagoula and Pearl Rivers. He reported that Mississippi was removing hurricane related debris from marshes surrounding St. Louis Bay. **J. Clark** stated that the Deer Island breakwater project was almost finished. He stated that the old Highway 90 fishing bridge was being removed and placed offshore as an artificial reef. He reported that Mississippi had planted approximately 1,000 acres of oyster cultch since 2005. **J. Clark** also stated that Mississippi was reviewing the Richton Salt Dome project.

Louisiana – **P. Cook** stated that participation in Louisiana's crab trap removal program has steadily decreased. A public removal day was held on February 23 and approximately 1,200 traps were removed. Since 2004, over 17,000 traps have been removed. **P. Cook** discussed the cleaning of hurricane debris from water bottoms in Calcasieu Lake.

Texas – **R. Adami** stated that Texas held a derelict crab trap removal from February 15-24. Around 1,300 traps were removed with almost 24,000 removed to date. **R. Adami** stated that the Texas clipper was finally sunk as an artificial reef. He reported that Texas was storing materials for their public reefing initiative. He stated that the Texas Great Barrier Reef Project was not currently active. The project would require an environmental impact statement and no money was available to complete the statement. **C. O'Brien** stated that Texas was involved in a revised oyster impact assessment model for deepening of the Matagorda Ship Channel. She stated that they were also involved with a project that would develop the last large area of undisturbed land on Galveston Island. She reported that three bay systems were closed for oyster harvesting due to a toxic algal bloom.

USFWS – **D. Frugé** stated that the final numbers for Kemps ridley sea turtle nesting on the Mexican beaches in 2007 were 15,032 registered nests and 1,023,675 hatchlings released. In 2006 the number of recorded nests was 12,143. He reported that NOAA Fisheries and USFWS were petitioned November 15, 2007 to change the listing of the western North Atlantic loggerhead sea turtle population from threatened to endangered status under the Endangered Species Act. The drought in the Southeast has affected the Alabama-Coosa-Tallapoosa (ACT)

river basin in Alabama and Georgia similarly to the ACF. The FWS has been monitoring the effects of drought and reduced flows on the species that were being affected and have been in close consultation with Alabama Power, who operates dams on the river.

Other Business

H. Warner-Finley stated that Louisiana had some concerns over offshore aquaculture facilities. She asked if other states had these concerns and how their agencies were dealing with offshore aquaculture related issues. **R. Adami** stated that Texas was closely following the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council's Aquaculture Amendment. He stated that Texas was also dealing with the proposed offshore facility off Port O'Conner.

With no other business, the meeting adjourned at 11:21 a.m.

APPROVED BY:


COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**TCC DATA MANAGEMENT SUBCOMMITTEE
MINUTES – 58th Annual Spring Meeting
Monday, March 10, 2008
Galveston, Texas**

Vice Chairman Vicki Swann called the meeting to order at 8:39 a.m. The following members and others were present:

Members

Kevin Anson, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL
Richard Cody, FWC/FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Page Campbell, TPWD, Rockport, TX
Kerwin Cuevas, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Jason Duet, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Steven Atran, GMFMC, Tampa, FL
Vicki Swann, TPWD, Austin, TX
Guy Davenport, NMFS, Miami, FL

Staff

David Donaldson, FIN Data Program Manager, Ocean Springs, MS
Larry B. Simpson, GSMFC Executive Director, Ocean Springs, MS
Donna Bellais, ComFIN Survey Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Gregg Bray, RecFIN Programmer/Analyst, Ocean Springs, MS

Others

Cindy Bohannon, Texas Parks and Wildlife, Dickinson, TX
Rhonda Cummins, Texas Sea Grant, Port Lavaca, TX
Terry Cody, Rockport, TX
Bonnie Ponwith, NOAA, Miami, FL

Adoption of Agenda

The agenda was approved as presented.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on October 15, 2007 in Point Clear, Alabama were approved with two typographical changes.

Status of Biological Sampling Activities

Review of targets and collection activities – G. Bray discussed the handouts that summarized the otolith and lengths collected for the thirteen FIN target species for 2007 and 2008. There were some shortfalls for 2007 but many were due to a late sampling start because of early season

funding issues. Some of the shortfalls were also due to lower numbers of certain species like greater amberjack observed dockside by samplers. All states were satisfied with 2007 data collections. Collections for 2008 are off to a slow start but sampling intensity is starting to increase. **D. Donaldson** asked **G. Davenport** if the tables FIN produces that summarize TIPS collections are useful. **Davenport** agreed that they find those tables very useful.

Review of analysis activities – Subcommittee members were provided with a matrix detailing otolith analysis from 2002 to 2006 listing the five Gulf States. **G. Bray** mentioned the states are doing a good job of getting age data on a timely basis. Florida is working to get age data for additional FIN target species besides red snapper for 2005 and 2006. R. Cody mentioned they just received age data for red snapper for 2006 and 2007 from the Panama City Laboratory. We should be getting those data into the data management system in the near future.

Status of web-based data entry program – **D. Bellais** reported the server is up and running and the form is available for testing purposes. She has made some slight modifications to allow for easier editing of data and to allow samplers to easily query specific fish for age data entry. **K. Anson** asked if it might be more useful to enter the biosampling and age data separately and merge them back together later. **Bellias** said that could easily be handled if needed. **Bellias** said she thinks the online program will be ready to run by the end of April. **Donaldson** asked if we could aim for a June 1, 2008 switchover to the new online program. **Bellais** will provide each state a link to the new data entry system and get feedback as to how to improve the form for each state.

Discussion of Commercial QA/QC Meeting

D. Donaldson discussed a meeting held at GSMFC that reviewed commercial trip ticket data to provide an additional measure of quality control and quality assurance. Representatives from Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana were present. A representative from Texas will attend future meetings but the lack of data provided from Texas precluded their attendance at this meeting. The majority of the state data sets matched the data in the FIN Data Management System (DMS) well. The majority of the differences in Florida were due to differences in species coding associated with marine tropical species. Some of the differences were attributed to Florida having a more updated data set than FIN had available at the time of review. Mississippi and Alabama had a few internal species coding issues that they are working to fix. Louisiana had some issues with how they calculated landings for this comparison but those problems have been fixed. **For future meetings D. Bellais will produce a comparison spreadsheet that details the landings from each state database and the FIN DMS. The review group recommended that they would like to meet on an annual basis in conjunction with the GSMFC annual fall meeting, likely in the afternoon after the data management subcommittee meeting.** Meeting in the fall would allow each state to have the prior year's data completed and loaded into the FIN DMS. There is a possibility of collecting state/federal reports electronically prior to the data management subcommittee meeting to allow for the commercial data review. **Cuevas** asked if we could possibly compile and distribute the state/federal reports prior to the meeting for informational purposes. **Donaldson** agreed that would not be a problem. **Donaldson** mentioned at the upcoming October meeting the review panel will be targeting the review 2007 commercial data.

Compilation of Commercial Fishermen, Dealer and Vessel Information

D. Bellais reported we are receiving vessel registration numbers but no additional vessel characteristics. **Donaldson** mentioned that we are still hampered because we can not uniquely identify the number of fishing vessels within a specific state. We are fairly close with being able to identify dealers but identifying unique vessels and fishermen continues to be problematic. **Donaldson** asked if the Louisiana issue was still because of a lack of data entry staff. **J. Duet** mentioned that was part of the problem but **Michelle Kasprzak** is still working on this issue. **K. Anson** mentioned Alabama is having difficulty obtaining these data from their own agencies on a regular basis. **Donaldson** asked everyone to continue to work hard towards getting this information compiled.

Status of License Frame Pilot Survey

D. Donaldson reported in 2007 we started using recreational fishing licenses as a sampling frame to obtain improved fishing effort estimates with the coastal household telephone survey (CHTS). Preliminary results show low percentages of license frame records with complete and accurate telephone numbers for all Gulf States. There have also been difficulties getting updated license frame data from some states during the fishing season. Overall the telephone survey using the fishing license frame obtained an approximate response rate of 30%. The survey coverage using just the fishing license database ranged from 20-90% of the anglers and varied greatly between states and areas. Coverage increased to 75-100% coverage by using the dual frame method (angler license and random digit dial database). Approximately half of the license frame respondents have completed a fishing trip in the previous 2 month sampling period. The phone contractor has started using a reverse lookup procedure to increase the number of useful telephone numbers. They have also started sending pre-contact letters and leaving a toll free call back number on answering machines to hopefully improve response rates. NOAA Fisheries is starting to produce estimates of fishing effort from this dual frame study and preliminary findings should be available later in the year. NOAA Fisheries is pleased that a larger portion of the data is based on direct observations using the license frame database and will hopefully reduce the impact from using correction factors when calculating fishing effort estimates. **S. Atran** asked if the telephone contractor is cataloging the reasons for refusals and if they have started asking about fish caught during the telephone survey. **Donaldson** mentioned they still only collect data for effort estimates on the CHTS and that he was not sure if the contractor collected the reason for refusals.

Status of Metadata Data Entry - **D. Donaldson** mentioned this should continue to be a priority for state personnel. InPort is a useful tool only if the states utilize its full potential. GSMFC and Mississippi are current with their metadata entry. Florida has recently made their metadata website available outside the agency and InPort will direct users to Florida's site. Texas is getting close to publishing their metadata documents. **K. Anson** mentioned Alabama has placed metadata entry lower on their priority list but they still plan to enter those data into the system. **J. Duet** was not sure how Louisiana is progressing but he mentioned they have entered some of their documents. **G. Davenport** mentioned that National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is using InPort but not all of the documents have been completed and published yet. **Donaldson**

mentioned we previously discussed using InPort for cataloging biological data collected from fishery independent sampling and we should continue to pursue that topic.

State/Federal Reports

Florida – **R. Cody** reported a total of 223,342 trip tickets were received in 2007 of which 45% were submitted electronically. Electronic submissions accounted for a little less than 50% (245,538) of the species records. A total of 218,221 trip tickets were processed in 2007, of which a little less than 49% were submitted electronically. Approximately 52.5% of species records were attributed to electronically submitted trip ticket data. On the data management side, both the application (MRIS) forms and the Oracle database of commercial trip ticket data (MFIS) have been converted from Oracle 9i to Oracle 10g. The conversion for application forms was completed in October of 2007 after extensive testing. The database conversion to 10g was completed in January of 2008. The new database name is MFIS. We are still retaining the old database (MRISNT) at this point, although no new data has gone into MRISNT since we started using MFIS in production. All current and old databases are running well. Gail MacAuley, the Oracle/database administrator left FWC but a replacement has been named. In the meantime, Steve Brown has been working with Sara Dugger of FWC-Office of Information Technology to ensure data exports for NMFS and ACCSP continue uninterrupted.

Transfer of recreational saltwater angler license data to GSMFC for the Gulf of Mexico pilot dual frame study is occurring every other month. Joe O'Hop has been attempting to improve address information to increase the effectiveness of "reverse look-ups" by the telephone survey contractor. Currently about 30% of records have telephone information and this can be improved to 60-65% using reverse look-ups. Currently, shoreline exemptions and "alternate" methods to obtain shore angler effort are being discussed with the Florida legislature.

In terms of recreational catch information for 2007, 43,910 angler intercepts were conducted, of which 13,047 were from shore anglers, 8,302 were from charter anglers and the remaining 23,940 were from private boat anglers. A total of 25,060 (~57%) were associated with Gulf of Mexico counties (Escambia-Monroe). All quotas were met for the year. At-Sea sampling of headboat catches has ceased in the Gulf but continues on the Atlantic side. All assignment quotas were obtained for the Gulf in 2007. A review of the At-Sea sampling project relative to the current Beaufort Logbook program currently in place in the Gulf and South Atlantic is expected to be completed this year as part of the MRIP process. For 2007, a total of 5,098 headboat angler intercepts were completed for Gulf of Mexico counties. Samplers obtained information from 13,698 discards from those anglers.

Biological data collected in 2007 included 12,614 otoliths, of which a little more than 60% were commercial samples. Processing of red snapper otoliths for 2006 was completed in February, 2007 and is expected to be entered to the FIN database along with remaining 2005 otoliths by June of this year.

Emergency Disaster Relief Program (EDRP) funding for charter fisheries impacted by the 2005 hurricane season was granted and work has begun on the development of a web-based reporting system for For-Hire trips. The application is being developed with the help of Dr. Ed Mahoney

from Michigan State University. Mahoney helped develop the online Florida Saltwater Fishing Panel survey which is being modified to accept fisheries data from panel members. Currently, the Florida Saltwater Fishing Panel has more than 4,700 recruited participants. Trip information collected in the EDRP logbook survey will include targeted species, trip type and duration, access, trip time and more detailed information on fishing location. In addition to harvested catch numbers, participants will be able to report numbers of discards and sizes associated with harvested and discarded catch. We expect to have the application in place by June of this year.

Briefly, the results of the mutton snapper SEDAR headed up by State of Florida assessment biologists was completed earlier this year and passed the review process. It is available on the SEDAR website for download in pdf. The second of two forums on the Florida grouper fishery (sponsored by the GMFMC, NMFS and FWC) was held in February in St. Petersburg. Although, the theme of the first forum was data collection systems and assessment results, the theme for the second forum was fishery management options and the mandates of the Magnusson Stevens Act of 2006.

Alabama – **K. Anson** reported Alabama met its NMFS MRFSS quotas in all modes for Wave 6 (Nov-Dec). However, Alabama did not meet its add-on quota, in charter mode during Wave 6 do in part to a lack of fishing activity. For the year, Alabama samplers collected 2,567 angler interviews (17 % above the annual quota) and measured and/or weighed nearly 3,900 fish representing 57 species.

The pilot at-sea head boat survey was completed during Dec 2007. This ended a four-year project designed to collect catch and harvest information from head boat anglers through the utilization of MRD at-sea observers. The observers also attempted to collect length and condition of released fish during these trips. For 2007, 494 anglers were interviewed during 22 head boat trips. Initial comparisons between the at-sea pilot survey (AL & FL for 2004-2006) and the NMFS Beaufort Lab logbook survey indicated that the observation data contained more detailed fish information (more accurate numbers of species caught and released by trip and higher numbers of fish lengths and weights collected); however, the method for determining effort within the at-sea survey led to high variability. The consensus among the comparison participants was that a combination of the two surveys would probably be best.

As of December 31, 2007 more than 9,500 (>\$1.9 million) commercial EDRP data sheets have been completed and submitted for payment. In addition, over 4,100 for-hire EDRP data sheets were submitted.

The trip ticket program continues operation. During 2007, a total of 31 seafood dealers reported landings to Alabama using the electronic trip ticket program. These landings represented 68% of the total yearly reported landings and 41% of the total reported commercial trips.

The SEAMAP fall shrimp and groundfish cruise totaled seven day and three night stations taken on October 9, and November 6, 2007. Shrimp were taken at eight of the 10 stations. White shrimp were the most abundant captured (36), followed by pink (30), and brown shrimp (1). Bycatch ranged from 4.1 to 124.8 kilograms. Bycatch was dominated by Atlantic croaker, silver sea trout, Atlantic butterfish and inshore lizardfish. A total of 118 juvenile red snapper were

captured, with 100 captured at two stations just south of Dauphin Island. Red snapper were taken at five of the 10 sample stations.

The Division completed a spotted seatrout assessment this year and it is available upon request.

The MRD enforcement section has been busy checking IFQ red snapper boats landing in Alabama. There were increases in the number of landings during the last quarter of 2007. This was partly due to several of the IFQ red snapper fishermen waiting until the end of the year to fill their quota because they felt that prices would be higher during this time period.

Mississippi - **K. Cuevas** reported in the fall of 2007 Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (MDMR) placed out 22,500 cubic yards of oyster cultch that covered 215 acres. This was the largest cultch plant in MDMR history. Oyster season opened September 6th 2007 and the daily sack limit was 20 sacks per vessel and currently there have been 6,100 sacks harvested. Oyster season will likely close the week of March 13th 2008.

The MDMR had 380 commercial shrimp and crab fishermen participate in the EDRP data collection program. MDMR collected 17,771 reports from shrimp fishermen and 3,330 reports from crab fishermen. All fishermen reports have been scanning electronically and MDMR is working on analyzing those datasets.

The 2008 Mississippi derelict crab trap removal period is set for March 9-21. In 2007, 11,507 derelict traps were removed by 85 commercial crab fishermen. The crab fishermen were compensated using EDRP funding. All bycatch data from those trap removals were collected and MDMR is in the process of analyzing those data.

Mississippi has a new real-time hydrological monitoring system. This is the ninth monitoring station along the Mississippi gulf coast that collects temperature, salinity, and tidal stage at 15 minute intervals.

Mississippi has recently had 3 deployments of steel hulled vessels as part of their artificial reef program. MDMR biologists are currently analyzing different reef materials that were deployed in 2007 as part of a trap study in conjunction with Mississippi State University.

Through January of 2008 MDMR had 56 charter boat participants in the finfish EDRP recovery program. As of January 1st 2008, data from 4,084 charter trips have been reported.

MDMR continues to monitor the success of hatchery reared red snapper that will be released on selected Mississippi reefs. They currently have red snapper in tanks that are growing well and when they reach 4-6 inches in length they will be tagged and released.

In February the Commission for the MDMR voted to reduce the size limit for spotted seatrout from 14 to 13 inches. The bag limit will stay the same.

In wave 5 MDMR collected 344 total MRFSS interviews and met all quotas. In wave 6 they collected 421 total interviews and met all quotas. MDMR collected 127 biological samples

collected in wave 5 and 282 samples in wave 6. The large majority of these samples were obtained from commercial samples from approximately 10 different species.

Louisiana – **J. Duet** reported Louisiana trip ticket landings reports have been accumulated and processed through December 2007. FIN data transfers have been completed from April through November 2007 with December landings scheduled to be transferred into the FIN system next week.

The MRFSS quotas for all modes have been exceeded for Waves 5 and 6 2007, and for Wave 1 of 2008.

TIPS sampling continues to be slow in the New Orleans area, but samplers are collecting shrimp trip interviews in the area. State samplers will soon be undergoing a sampling and data quality control and quality assurance workshop.

Samplers continue to collect all target species for the FIN biological sampling, and otolith processing for 2007 is nearly complete. Gray triggerfish and Vermilion snapper have yet to be processed. Personnel are undergoing furthering training on these species.

NMFS edits have been completed through September 2005. Currently, the October through December 2005 and January, February 2006 returns are being processed.

For the SALT grant a commercial log-book survey was developed for fishermen to report trip level economic information and effort. It went through in house review, and an RFP is being developed. Louisiana is working with the charter boat industry on developing a wet debris reporting website.

Texas – **P. Campbell** reported Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) has collected 32,988 commercial trip tickets from January through December 2007. A total of 273 dealers reported landings with 116 dealers utilizing electronic reporting methods. A large percentage of the electronic tickets were obtained from oyster dealers.

TPWD had scoping meetings in January 2008 to discuss the need for following federal regulations in state waters for red snapper and coastal shark species. After these meetings the Commissioners decided against following the federal regulations for Texas state waters. TPWD is going forward with public meetings to establish a total allowable catch for menhaden in state waters. The TAC will be a 5 year average of 31.5 million pounds per year.

The Texas Clipper was sunk in 134 feet of water in November of 2007 but it unfortunately landed on its side. TPWD is going to explore of the possibility of moving it upright as it possesses a safety risk to beginning scuba divers in its current state.

Shrimp and crab license buy backs are continuing with 73 inshore shrimp, 6 crab, and 35 finfish licenses being purchased in the latest round of buy backs.

Abandoned crab trap removals continue with 1,100 being collected by 63 volunteers and staff during the most recent collection. Over the last 7 years, 23,846 abandoned crab traps have been removed from Texas waters.

TPWD has obtained side scan sonar equipment for mapping the oyster habitat as part of the EDRP. They are currently working in Galveston but will be relocated to Sabine Lake region in the near future.

TPWD staff will begin a survey of commercial oyster dredges this spring because complaints have been received that dredges have been modified and are fishing the substrate too hard and having an adverse affect on oyster habitat. TPWD hopes to get a better idea of the types of dredges being used by the fishing community.

Texas had an orange surf event in mid-January off Padre Island National Seashore that turned out to be Noctaluca. Recently though TPWD staff were informed of high concentrations of Dinophysis in Texas waters. Health officials have closed Aransas Bay, Copano Bay, and Corpus Christi Bay to the harvest of shellfish and shellfish are being recalled that were harvested since March 1, 2008. This is the second time in U.S. history Dinophysis has caused a fishery closure.

TPWD has a new executive director, Carter Smith. Smith was with the Nature Conservancy since 1998 and the Texas state director for the Nature Conservancy since 2004.

Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council – **S. Atran** reported **Reef Fish Amendment 27/Shrimp Amendment 14** has been implemented effective February 28, 2009, except that the requirement for non-stainless steel circle hooks, venting tools and dehooking devices when fishing for reef fish take effect June 1. This amendment implements the following:

- Reduces red snapper TAC to 5 mp (2.55 mp commercial, 2.45 mp recreational)
- Reduces the commercial red snapper minimum size limit to 13 inches total length.
- Ensures that shrimp trawl bycatch of red snapper is reduced by at least 74 percent from the 2001-2003 base, through time-area closures if necessary.
- Sets recreational red snapper bag limit of 2 fish per person, zero bag limit for captain and crew of for-hire vessels,
- Maintains 16 inch recreational minimum size limit,
- Sets recreational red snapper open season at June 1 - September 30,
- Requires the use, effective June 1, 2008, of venting tools, dehooking devices and non-stainless steel circle hooks (when using natural baits) for all reef fish fishery sectors.

Reef Fish Amendment 30A has been submitted to NMFS for review, approval and implementation. This amendment proposes to set accountability measures for greater amberjack that allow NMFS to close either the commercial or recreational fishery when that sector's allocation is reached (or projected to be reached), and to adjust season length or quota in the subsequent year if the current year's allocation is exceeded. The amendment also proposes to increase the recreational minimum size limit for greater amberjack to 30 inches fork length, and eliminate the bag limit for captain and crew. The amendment also proposes to establish a quota

for the commercial greater amberjack fishery; the annual commercial quota under a stepped Foy rebuilding plan TAC for 2008 through 2010 would be 503,000 pounds. For gray triggerfish, the amendment proposes to define status determination criteria that allow NMFS to adjust season length or quota in the subsequent year if the current year's allocation is exceeded. The amendment also proposes to establish a rebuilding plan, and set accountability measures. The amendment also proposes to increase the recreational and commercial size limits to 14 inches fork length and establish a commercial hard quota of 80,000 pounds in 2008, 93,000 pounds in 2009, and, 106,000 pounds in 2010.

Reef Fish Amendment 30B is undergoing public hearings this week and next, with final action scheduled at the April 7-11, 2008 Council meeting. This amendment contains alternatives to set gag thresholds and targets, set gag TAC, increase red grouper TAC, set interim allocations for gag and red grouper, establish interim annual catch limits and accountability measures for gag and red grouper, set a gag commercial quota and adjust the red grouper and shallow-water grouper quotas, adjust recreational gag, red grouper and aggregate grouper bag limits and shallow-water grouper closed season, reduce the commercial red grouper size limit, modify the Madison-Swanson and Steamboat Lumps marine reserves or create a new reserve, set the duration of new reserves and/or extend the duration of the existing reserves, and establish federal regulatory compliance measures for vessels with commercial or for-hire reef fish permits.

Reef Fish Amendment 29 (grouper IFQ system) is continuing to be developed. The Council will review a public hearing draft and schedule public hearings in May.

Work on an **aquaculture amendment** is continuing. Concerns brought up in public testimony at the January Council meeting will be addressed before the Council again considers taking final action. Final action is unlikely to occur until sometime after the June Council meeting.

The Council received presentations at both its October and January meetings from the National Marine Sanctuaries Program on "Islands in the Stream", a concept for establishing a network of marine protected areas in the Gulf of Mexico. The Council has been asked to be kept involved in the process, and has been assured that it would be consulted before any fishing restrictions are implemented under this concept.

Staff Turnovers

Stu Kennedy, who has been a fishery biologist for the Gulf Council since 2003, retired after the January Council meeting. A vacancy announcement for his position has expired, and the Council is expected to select a replacement soon.

Wayne Swingle, who has been the Council's Executive Director since 1977, and the only executive director in the Council's history, has announced that he will retire after the June 2-5 Council meeting. A vacancy announcement has been released. The application deadline is April 30.

National Marine Fisheries Service – **G. Davenport** reported NOAA fisheries held a national workshop January 2008 working on the issue of data confidentiality. The deliverables from this meeting will entail:

- Re-write of NAO 216-100(ongoing target September)
- Establish NMFS Policy(ongoing target summer 2008)
- Establish Rule of three
- Declare observer data as confidential
- Establish Regional Handbooks(October 2008)

NOAA continues to receive trip ticket data to an FTP site on a regular basis. Software support has been completed. NOAA has supplied Florida Wildlife Resources Commission (FWC) with all county, species, and vessel changes made from 1997 - February 2007. The intent is to provide changes on a monthly basis in the future but a program to do so is still in development. NOAA was supplied with a duplicate list which FWC has substantiated and notified FIN of which records were deleted. Record counts are maintained. NOAA has yet to supply FWC with gear and water body changes.

Status of Louisiana Trip Ticket Reviews

Louisiana trip ticket shrimp data are being translated and submitted to NMFS Galveston Lab. Landings are being summarized and updated to the ALS (NMFS commercial landings warehouse). NOAA reviewed the trip tickets unloaded on or before August 2006. A revised validation program has reduced the number of trip tickets to be reviewed down to 50%. It is a validation process where the program will validate the data against a validation table. If the information submitted is all true, the program will automatically submit the tickets as viewed. If the information is not true, the program will highlight the field(s) and the tickets will be reviewed by the port agents. Work continues on updating the validation table.

Status of Alabama Trip Ticket Reviews

In progress data are being edited and coordinated through AMRD.

Status of Texas Trip ticket reviews

NOAA has recently received some Texas trip ticket data and they are establishing protocols, data transfer, and continue with review program development.

Quota Monitoring

Plans to incorporate trip ticket electronic reporting are ongoing with SERO. Any help FIN can provide with encouraging electronic trip ticket reporting will be beneficial to the entire program. More information regarding king mackerel closures can be found at <http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/quotas/mackerel/mackreport.htm>.

SEFSC

Quota online system now incorporates red snapper along with groupers and tilefish that dealers can use for reporting purposes.

Puerto Rico Commercial Landings Data:

NOAA has landings for calendar years 1983 – 2006.

US Virgin Islands Commercial Landings Data.

NOAA has landings for fishing years 1974-75 through 2006-07 for St. Thomas/St. John and 1975-76 through 2006-07 from St. Croix.

SEDAR Activity <http://www.sefsc.noaa.gov/sedar/>

SEDAR 15A – Florida Mutton Snapper Data Workshop 4/17/2007, Assessment Workshop I-8/21/2007, Assessment Workshop II 10/16/2007, Review Workshop-1/28/2008
SEDAR 16 South Atlantic and GOM King Mackerel Data workshop completed February 2008.

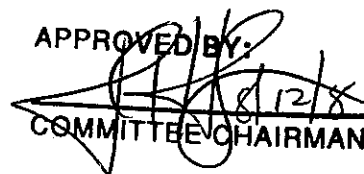
Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission – **D. Donaldson** reported on the recreational side that operations are running smoothly. All states are still exceeding intercept sampling quotas on a routine basis. At-sea head boat sampling has been discontinued for 2008 due to funding shortfalls. Collection of dolphin interaction data in Mississippi and Alabama will not be instituted because the project was not funded

On the commercial side, trip tickets are running smoothly. Texas has fully implemented its trip ticket program but still need data for test loading into FIN DMS. Electronic trip ticket reporting is currently being utilized by 105 Texas dealers, 72 Louisiana dealers, 34 Alabama dealers, and 215 Florida dealers.

Donaldson asked if the states would be interested in redoing the economic survey for the for-hire sector using the for-hire telephone survey as the contact vehicle. **Rita Curtis** was hoping to start some survey outreach early in 2008 with the hope that the survey would start in summer of 2008. That would potentially conflict with a proposed intercept survey economic add-on for 2008. **K. Cuevas** mentioned Mississippi would not like to attempt both economic add-ons within the same sampling season. **R. Cody** was concerned with the burden on the industry specifically for Florida. EDRP is administering a survey of Florida for-hire saltwater anglers and there is also a saltwater fishing panel survey that many anglers will be participating in. **Donaldson** suggested we ask NOAA to defer the survey till at least 2010 with the hopes that we could see some final results from the previous for-hire survey economic add-on.

Being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:49 a.m.

**TCC SEAMAP SUBCOMMITTEE
MINUTES – 58th Annual Spring Meeting
Monday, March 10, 2008
Galveston, Texas**

APPROVED BY:

COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

Chairman **J. Hanifen** called the meeting to order at 1:02 p.m. The Subcommittee, staff, and guests in attendance introduced themselves. The following members and others were present:

Members

Jim Hanifen, *Chairman*, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Steve Heath, *Vice Chairman*, ADCNR/MRD, Gulf Shores, AL
Leslie Hartman, ADCNR/MRD, Gulf Shores, AL (*Proxy for S. Heath while attending another meeting*)
Bob McMichael, FWC/FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Fernando Martinez, TPWD, Corpus Christi, TX
Gilmore "Butch" Pellegrin, NOAA Fisheries, Pascagoula, MS
Richard Waller, USM/CMS/GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Richard Leard, GMFMC, Tampa, FL

Others

Ellie Roche, NOAA Fisheries, St. Petersburg, FL
Terry Henwood, *SEAMAP Program Manager*, NOAA Fisheries, Pascagoula, MS
Karen Mitchell, *SEAMAP Technical Monitor*, NOAA Fisheries, Pascagoula, MS
Kim Williams, FWC/FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Cindy Bohannon, TPWD, Dickinson, TX
Leslie Williams, TPWD, Dickinson, TX
Todd Neahr, TPWD, Corpus Christi, TX
Brian Lezina, LDWF, Lacombe, LA
Tim Birdsong, TPWD, Austin, TX
Roger Zimmerman, NOAA Fisheries, Galveston, TX
Bonnie Ponwith, NOAA Fisheries, Miami, FL
Terry Cody, Rockport, TX

Staff

Jeff Rester, *SEAMAP/Habitat Program Coordinator*, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Cheryl Noble, *Staff Assistant*, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Larry Simpson, *Executive Director*, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Ginny Herring, *Administrative Officer*, Ocean Springs, MS
Wendy Garner, *Accountant*, Ocean Springs, MS

Adoption of Agenda

R. Waller moved to adopt the agenda as submitted. B. McMichael seconded and the motion passed.

Approval of Minutes

R. Waller moved to approve the October 15, 2007 minutes as submitted. **B. McMichael** seconded and the motion passed.

Administrative Report

J. Rester stated that he received an email late Friday afternoon from a researcher asking for pipefish and seahorse samples. He has the contact information and asked the Subcommittee that if they collect these samples, to contact the researcher. **J. Rester** reported the Winter Plankton Survey started on February 7, 2008 and will continue until March 17, 2008. For the first time, the survey will cover the entire Gulf of Mexico this year. They were able to start the first leg of the western gulf. He said he still needs some cruise reports for 2007. He reminded the Subcommittee that if SEAMAP funds are used for a survey, a cruise report needs to be submitted. The President's proposed FY2009 budget has SEAMAP funded at zero dollars. A new funding document was prepared and L. Simpson has had discussions with key representatives from the Gulf of Mexico Congressional delegation. The South Atlantic and Caribbean were made aware of the situation and has been encouraged to contact their Congressional delegation also. **J. Rester** said the deadline for cooperative agreements for 2008 is Friday, March 14, 2008. He asked the Subcommittee to please submit the cooperative agreements if they have not already done so. **J. Rester** said that at the last SEAMAP meeting in October 2007, the Subcommittee agreed to put a cap on overhead that agencies can charge SEAMAP. He said that after discussions with GCRL, it has been decided not to implement this because SEAMAP is not charged indirect costs on ship time, so there would be no major difference in capping the funds. The Subcommittee asked **Dr. Bonnie Ponwith**, Deputy Director, Acting Director SEFSC, if she can contribute anything on why the President's budget has SEAMAP funded at \$0 for FY2009. She said first of all, she is a strong advocate of the SEAMAP program because she knows first hand the contribution the program makes in helping to make management policy decisions. She says she does not think SEAMAP is zero funded, that SEAMAP was moved under Coastal Research. She left to research this. When she came back she said the name of the line item that will be in the NOAA Blue Book for FY09 is Regional Studies. In the blue book, Regional Studies is funded at \$7.124 million. There are two components under regional studies but it is not seen in the blue book. In the detailed budget there are two lines under Regional Studies and one is Chesapeake Bay and the other is SEAMAP. SEAMAP is funded at \$5.098 and the remainder of the funds will go to Chesapeake Bay.

The Florida Trawl Survey

B. McMichael gave a presentation on the new Florida Trawl Survey. He said Florida has recognized the need for fisheries-independent data on managed reef fishes and macro invertebrates. The high priority species will be gag, red grouper, and red snapper. The other species of interest are gray snapper, lane snapper, vermilion snapper, red porgy, gray triggerfish, and hogfish. He said FWC received funding to implement a cooperative reef-fish initiative on the west Florida shelf in 2008. He said the goal was to implement new surveys and integrate with existing NMFS and SEAMAP reef fish surveys and FWC inshore monitoring surveys, into

a regional monitoring framework. He said FWC just received a cooperative grant for one million dollars to start the survey and they are designing it to incorporate as much as the Florida Shelf as possible. He said they want it to be spatially-explicit from the northern part of the state down to the southern part, and from inshore to offshore, encompassing a wide range of sizes. The initial goals were to work with existing programs, find out where there were gaps, and then use new funding to support and fill in those gaps. The west Florida shelf is huge and they have not finalized the exact lines and points, it is still in the exploratory stage. He showed a map of the sampling zones and said instead of doing the whole shelf they will sample those four large rectangular areas (shown on map) using several different gears. He then showed maps displaying where SEAMAP now samples and then maps of where the new Florida program will sample. The new survey will follow all SEAMAP protocols and they will have two cruises this year.

Proposed 2008 SEAMAP Surveys

J. Rester asked the Subcommittee to report by partner how they plan to spend SEAMAP FY2008 funds and the time period for each item. He said this will help him in planning and requesting cruise reports.

B. McMichael said Florida will be doing two trawl surveys. One will be in August and the other October.

L. Hartman said Alabama will have the standard shrimp/groundfish cruise in June; the fall shrimp/groundfish cruise, the September ichthyoplankton cruise, and inshore sampling in February, May, July, and October. They plan to do a new winter shrimp/groundfish cruise in January 2009. **J. Rester** asked that she submit the February cruise report.

D. Waller said Mississippi will do the spring and fall plankton surveys plus the new winter plankton survey. The spring survey will be in late April or early May. He said they were not able to do the winter plankton this year because the *Tommy Munro* is out of service. He said they will attempt a cruise for spring. They will do the first leg of the summer shrimp/groundfish in June, and they will do the 2-5 fathoms off Louisiana in July, which will be the second leg of that trip. They will do the fall plankton cruise in September and the fall shrimp/groundfish survey in October. They plan to do the winter plankton cruise next winter (weather permitting) whenever a 3-4 day stretch becomes available. Also, the new shark survey should start in the next couple of weeks and continue through October. The Shark survey will consist of four general survey areas with stations selected randomly from each spot - the northern part of Chandeleur, Cat Island, between Ship and Horn, and down to west Petit Bois. They will be using longlines but there might be some opportunistic hooking. The gear is already onboard and personnel have been trained. **J. Rester** asked **D. Waller** if Mississippi has received their endangered species permit. **D. Waller** said they have applied but have not received it. He said that as long as they have NMFS personnel onboard, they can operate under the NMFS permit. He said they are also in the process of obtaining a permit from Gulf Islands National Seashore.

J. Hanifen stated Louisiana will continue the summer and fall shrimp/groundfish cruises in July and September/October, under base funding. He said they will also do a spring and winter

shrimp/groundfish cruise in April and December/January using the supplemental funds. They are in the process of initiating the inshore/nearshore 20 ft. trawl surveys and they will be focused in the late fall and winter. They will do these anywhere from twice a month to every other month, depending on the time and location. He said they hope to initiate a side scan sonar survey in Breton and Chandeleur Sounds before the survey starts, to identify where the can and cannot trawl. They will also do plankton in conjunction with the four seasonal cruises off the *Pelican*.

F. Martinez said Texas will start longlining from March through May. They will set 8 longlines for red drum, which has been done since 1992. They will use the *R/V Corpus Christi* for this project. They will also continue the summer and fall shrimp/groundfish cruises in June and November. They will start red snapper/shark longlining this summer. They plan to do 20 sets coast wide for each station from the Louisiana border to the Mexico border. They also plan to start a 2009 winter shrimp/groundfish survey in February 2009.

B. Pellegrin said NMFS will do two types of plankton surveys in the spring, fall and winter. They will do the shrimp/bottom fish survey in the summer and fall. They will also do reef fish in April-July and August.

Accounting of SEAMAP Funds

T. Henwood said NMFS is now in the process of allocating SEAMAP funds but they have no proposals or priorities from this group. He does not feel comfortable distributing funds before receiving any proposals. He said the easy fix to this, not for this year but next, would have the components discuss priorities and funding distribution at the joint meeting, and then submit the proposals after that meeting or in October. Submitting the proposals should not be a problem. Each component could use 2008 proposals and make any budget or project changes. He feels that funding should be distributed on merit, not pre-decided percentages between the components. **L. Simpson** said SEAMAP is not competitive. It is a cooperative program and the same percentages have been used historically. **S. Heath** said there has always been a tremendous amount of discussion then agreement, before the funds were distributed. **J. Hanifen** stated that at previous joint meetings, the components would have lengthy discussions on budget priorities, but SEAMAP has been leveled funded for so many years that the Gulf, Caribbean and South Atlantic agreed to keep the same funding as the previous year. **T. Henwood** said even though the components agreed on amounts, he does not have written proposals and feels funds should not be allocated without receiving proposals first. They need to go through the review process and if K. Mitchell or any other NMFS personnel have questions, they will have time to get answers before the funding is distributed. **T. Henwood** asked K. Mitchell if she has received any proposals for 2008 funding. She said no, but the deadline is March 14th. **K. Williams** said J. Rester usually generates a spreadsheet with the figures agreed upon and the amounts and explanations for each project. The Subcommittee is in agreement before the proposals are submitted to NMFS. **T. Henwood** said that is fine but he still has nothing in writing. He said using the previous proposals would be acceptable. **E. Roche** said this is the third year of a 5-year program so basically, NMFS has the proposals, but the budgets will have to be changed because of the increased funding. She said they also asked for complete statements of work for the additional funding. **K. Mitchell** said they realize SEAMAP has always

submitted proposals afterwards, but for future funding they wish to receive proposals before the funding is actually allocated.

J. Hanifen asked J. Rester to add an agenda item for the August Gulf meeting for each state and NMFS to submit a work plan for the next year. They will then combine the plans, prioritize, and decide funding for each item. He asked each component to provide detailed justification for any changes from the previous year. The final work plan will be submitted to NMFS after the fall meeting.

E. Roche asked the Subcommittee, that in order to avoid a situation like last year, to please state percentages agreed upon between the components at the joint meeting with a very clear motion, then call for a vote. The Subcommittee agreed.

Other Business

J. Rester reminded the Subcommittee that the SEAMAP Shark and Shrimp/Groundfish Work Groups will meet at the GSMFC office on April 21st and 22nd. He said the Shark Work Group will use the NMFS Shark Operations Manual as a guide to develop the protocols for the new SEAMAP Shark surveys. The Shrimp/Groundfish Work Group will review the operations manual and confirm everyone is using the standardized operating procedures and will discuss the new Florida trawl survey and incorporate it into the Operating Procedures. He asked the Subcommittee if they wish to add more agenda items for either work group meeting. He will email the Subcommittee and Work Group the NMFS Shark Manual to be reviewed, and asked everyone to be prepared for the meetings.

K. Williams said the Polish Sorting Center (PSC) may ask for more funding next year to process the plankton samples. Joanne Shultz has been in contact with the PSC and they are planning an Advisory Committee meeting for the end of April or beginning of May. She said the PSC has proposed an increase of \$45,000 for next year and the ultimate extreme would be closing the PSC if they do not receive more funding. She said the PSC will process all of the 2008 samples, but they only have a one year agreement. She said Joanne Shultz is positive at this point and will continue collecting samples even though they may not get sorted right away. **J. Hanifen** asked how much it costs for each SEAMAP sample to be processed and she said she does not know. He said he discussed with Benny Galloway a possibility of an industry/government cooperative to develop the capability here. **K. Williams** said Joanne Shultz feels they have spent years developing the expertise at the PSC and would like to keep it there, and it probably would be cost prohibitive to have it done in the United States. She said the state of Florida tried this before but it was very expensive. She said it may be possible now with the development of new technology. Joanne Shultz will keep the Subcommittee informed. **J. Hanifen** suggested the Plankton Work Group meet to discuss this but **K. Williams** suggested waiting for the outcome of the Advisory Committee meeting.

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 2:58 p.m.

LAW ENFORCEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING
Minutes – 58th Spring Meeting
Tuesday, March 11, 2008
Galveston, Texas

APPROVED BY:


COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

Chairman, W. Chataginer called the meeting to order at 8:36 a.m. The following members and others were present:

Members

John Thomas Jenkins, ADCNR/MRD, Dauphin Island, AL
Peter Flores, TPWD, Austin, TX
Walter Chataginer, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Jeff Mayne, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Karen Raine, NOAA General Counsel, St. Petersburg, FL
Elizabeth Keister, U.S. Coast Guard, New Orleans, LA
Bruce Buckson, FWC, Tallahassee, FL
Hal Robbins, NOAA/OLE, St. Petersburg, FL

Others

Richard Leard, GMFMC, Tampa, FL
Cliff Beard, U.S. Coast Guard, New Orleans, LA
Bob Zales, Panama City, FL
Donald Armes, Jr., MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Bobbi Walker, GMFMC, Commissioner, Orange Beach, AL
Brett Norton, FWC, West Palm Beach, FL
Charlotte Schiaffo, GMFMC, Tampa, FL
Kris Bishop, TPWD, Austin, TX
Larry Young, TPWD, Corpus Christi, TX
William Skeen, TPWD, Houston, TX
David Sinclair, TPWD, Austin, TX
Ted Tolle, TPWD, Houston, TX
Tracy Dunn, NOAA/OLE, St. Petersburg, FL
Bill Causey, NOAA, Key West, FL

Staff

Steve VanderKooy, GSMFC, IJF Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Teri Freitas, GSMFC, Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS

Adoption of Agenda

Buckson added **Bill Causey** of NOAA to the agenda, he was scheduled to present his “Islands in the Stream” PowerPoint presentation to the LEAP this afternoon, but due to a travel conflict, requested that he present this morning. **Buckson then moved to accept the agenda with the changes. The motion was seconded by Mayne and passed unanimously.**

Approval of Minutes

The Committee reviewed the minutes of the October 16, 2007 meeting held in Point Clear, Alabama. **Robbins moved to approve the minutes as written. The motion was seconded by Mayne and passed unanimously.**

Joint Enforcement Agreements

Robbins introduced **Tracy Dunn**, the BSAC who will be covering the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean; he then discussed other NOAA/OLE organizational changes. Due to a recent issue, **Robbins** reminded LEC members that when NOAA gives a State a vessel, that NOAA is still responsible for the 3 year survey and yearly safety inspections.

Buckson reported that Florida had nothing in particular to report on JEA cases, but overall, they are working on keeping their large vessel fleet operational. Most recently, Florida put a Fleeer into operation on one of their aircraft. There has been a big push for red snapper IFQ's. In calendar year 2007, they recorded over 800 landings and of the 30% boarded, less than 10% had a violation of some sort.

Raines reported that she had emailed her report to the LEC members.

Mayne reported that Louisiana made a few live bait cases and the normal reef fish cases, but have been mainly concentrating on IFQ landings. Louisiana is obtaining 5 new vessels, 2 Fleers for their offshore boats and satellite radios.

Flores reported that Texas is acquiring 8 boats for the coast; the 65 footers are the cornerstone of their fleet, for tracking product from the boat to market. Texas' strategy is to identify and make cases from repeat offenders; it takes time effort and collaboration. **Dave Sinclair** and **Kris Bishop** are the fisheries experts in Texas.

Jenkins reported that Alabama has been targeting red snapper, reef fish, live bait, and sharks. There has been an increase in red snapper landings and the IFQ notification system is working very well. The new boat that exploded last year, is being replaced thanks to NOAA, and should be delivered in the next couple of weeks. **Jenkins** also noted that it could have taken years to replace with insurance monies; the explosion was caused due to failed valve. On February 9, 2008, AMRD officers on JEA patrol came across a boat offshore in Federal waters (EEZ), they boarded the vessel and found four red drum gutted and lying on ice, also there was a red mesh sack containing 40 or so red snapper fillets. They advised the captain they would be filling out a federal case packet and it will be forwarded to the National Marine Fisheries Service.

Dunn provided a hard copy of the NOAA/NMFS Southeast Division Office of Law Enforcement First Quarter Report for 2008.

Robbins reported that they are still hiring; they currently have one remaining vacancy in Slidell, LA and plan on backfilling a position in the southeast. The sentiment in Congress is that JEA's are the way to go and it is a worthwhile program that will continue to grow. **Robbins** also

indicated that they may see some additional funding for the JEA program. The JEA Audits are going well in the various states; **Robbins** commended **Mayne** on outstanding job reporting and collecting data.

Keister reported that the Coast Guard is still fighting for resources; they have been taking advantage of the FWS and going out on cutters offshore. They have had a couple of live bait issues off shore.

Armes reported that last week Mississippi had several red snapper cases, as well as shark and a spear fishing red drum case. Legislation introduced a bill to take all cases in the EEZ into our administrative court; it has passed the Senate and is now waiting for the Governor's signature. **Armes** also reported that the landing law issue did not go very far.

IJF Program Activity

Oyster FMP – VanderKooy discussed the enforcement section of the Oyster FMP, due to the many agencies involved in this revision, a table was done to show each state and agency involved in the oyster fishery; we need help identifying the contacts for each state. **VanderKooy** will email this request to the LEC members as a reminder to get their state agency contacts.

Arenarius Profile – Chatagner reported he had emailed the LEC members asking for their state information on the white trout, he did receive several responses and it was indicated that white trout is not a monitored species, according to law enforcement, and there was not much information available. The next Arenarius TTF will be meeting in mid April in Apalachicola, FL.

EDRP TED/BRD Non-Resident Compliance

VanderKooy reported that the states and NOAA provided their TED's/BRD's compliance information and he forwarded it to each of the State Directors. 2% of the EDRP II monies are to be paid to shrimpers that are compliant with TED's/BRD's. LEC members should contact their State Director for any additional information on this program.

Islands in the Stream

Billy Causey, of the NOAA's Marine Sanctuary Program, provided a very broad overview of the "Islands in the Stream" concept in addressing Marine Protected Areas, which he pointed out, are not Marine Reserves and have no expectation of area closures or "no-take-zones". **Causey** explained the concept of the islands as identified areas that are within the influence of the loop current or other prevailing currents that are essentially fed and influenced by areas down-stream. This results in a very international approach to protection, since Mexico and Belize are the first entities in the stream. **Causey** pointed out that while there were initially some concerns regarding Presidential Orders under the Antiquities Act; the Administration has still not taken a formal position on the initiative; rather, it is considering the merits of this initiative, along with other possibilities. In addition, NOAA has not taken any action on the concept and would not support the designation without a thorough public discussion of all the relevant issues. Many of

the areas identified in conceptual framework have already been set aside for some level of protection through MMS or Fisheries processes and would still be assessed through a comprehensive stakeholder process. A discussion followed, stressing the importance of Law Enforcement being on board from the beginning of program, for it to run smoothly.

State/Federal Reports

Florida - Norton reported that there is a new FWC rule effective June 1, 2008, requiring all commercial and recreational anglers fishing for any Gulf reef fish species use circle hooks, de-hooking devices and venting tools. The new red snapper rules take effect on April 1, 2008, reducing the size for commercially harvested red snapper from 15 to 13 inches total length and reduce the commercial bag and trip limit in Gulf state waters off Florida, from four fish to two fish daily per person. The FWC is going through the legislatively mandated Sunset Review, in which the panel asks many questions about operational effectiveness and any duplication of efforts with other state agencies. The Division of Law Enforcement is creating an Internet Investigation Program to detect potential resource crimes being perpetrated through the Internet; the program will consist of two sworn investigators tasked to perform these investigations. Due to low recruitment numbers, they will not hold an FWC Academy this coming year. Approximately 60 new vehicles have arrived at the Tallahassee maintenance shop for distribution to the region. FWC continues to install rifle racks when Officers qualify with the new M-16 rifles. The first round of Nextel Rebanding radio reprogramming is done and they are seeking reimbursement of approximately \$500K in agency costs. There are two primary legislative proposals for boating safety this year. One is the expansion of mandatory boater education to all age groups, to be phased in over a ten-year period. The other is the change in the state's minimum age requirement for wearing a PFD from under 6 years of age, to under 13 years of age, to match the federal requirement.

Alabama – Jenkins reported that Alabama's Enforcement section's public outreach efforts have continued with participation at the Mobile Boat Show, a meeting with the Fowler River Civic Association and numerous meeting with commercial and recreational fishermen. Enforcement has stayed busy monitoring the gill net striped mullet roe fishery during November and December 2007. Catches were above normal, but prices remained lower than past peak years. In legislation this year another gill net ban bill was introduced. The Advisory Board has recommended approval of a regulation that would enhance the current "Marine Turtle and Marine Mammals" regulation so mammalian dolphins (porpoises) manatees, and marine turtle are effectively protected. The Advisory board has recommended the approval of a regulation that would bring our current saltwater fish, creel, bag, possession and size limits in line with federal regulations concerning the bag limit for red snapper and the size limit for gray triggerfish. The change would make Alabama's regulations compatible with the Federal regulations. The enforcement section is in the process of requesting registers, conducting interviews and filing two new enforcement officer positions, one in Mobile County and one in Baldwin County. The enforcement section assisted in the recovery efforts of four young children, allegedly murdered by their father. The operation started on January 8, 2008 and concluded on January 20, 2008, with the recovery of the fourth body. Enforcement also participated in three homeland security exercises.

Mississippi – Chatagner reported that since the meeting in October 2007 Mississippi has conducted patrols in the EEZ that have resulted in 1594 man hours, which led to 561 contacts. These patrols produced 12 state violations and 3 enforcement action reports. They are in the process of having our new 48' offshore built and should be finished by this summer. They have purchased a new radio communications system and are using the 700 MHz Motorola radios with cross over capabilities. Each patrol truck and vessel has mobile unit, our dispatch has a base station and each officer has a portable unit. They are the first state agency in Mississippi to switch over to this new system. Once the tower is up and running, they will be able to communicate statewide. MDMR also purchased the ICOM single sideband radios for their larger offshore vessels that are used in the EEZ. A base station will be used so that they can talk to the officers when they are on their JEA patrols in the Federal waters well offshore. The Mississippi Legislature has been in session since the first week January and there are several bills that they are trying to get passed. One bill will create administrative penalties for the EEZ pursuant to agreement with Federal agencies. The second bill is a change in statute law dealing with non resident saltwater fishing licenses. They are sponsoring a bill which will reduce the fee for non-residents age 65 or older, if the state they reside in provides the same exemption for Mississippi residents. The third bill creates a license for the catching or transporting of saltwater minnows.

Louisiana – Mayne reported that Louisiana has a lot of new Legislators, including a new Governor and Robert Barham, the new LDWF Secretary. The Louisiana's Legislative sessions starts on March 31, 2008 and they will be requesting stable funding source, additional funding for the aquatic weed problems, aquaculture regulation and tiller operated boat regulations. The LDWF Academy graduated 24 agents in FY 2006-07 and is requesting 29 new enforcement agent positions. In 2007, the Louisiana Police Officers Standards and Training (POST) Council granted the LWDF/LED approval to offer the Maritime Search and Rescue Course (MSARC) to qualified POST certified peace officers.

Texas – Sinclair reported that the TPWD has new executive director, Carter Smith. The game warden academy will be graduating a new class of 36 cadets and the next Academy class will use a new 220 acre facility in Hamilton, Texas; classes will start in November 2008. All game wardens have been issued M4 bushmaster rifles and most have completed transition training. Physical fitness standards are now required for all game wardens. A Texas fishing license is required for fish caught in Federal waters and landed in Texas. The Justin Hurst Wildlife Management area was named for Warden Hurst, who was shot and killed in the line of duty on March 17, 2007. Also, patrol vessel David Heard was named for Warden Heard, who died from cancer in 2007. Lastly, he reported that Texas oysters are inherently unsafe and oysters are to be marketed as "Inherently Unsafe for Consumption".

USFWS – There was no representative from USFWS.

NOAA General Counsel – Raines' report was emailed to all LEC members.

NOAA Office of Law Enforcement - Robbins wanted to thank Manny Antennarius for his help on all the VMS issues.

USCG – had nothing to report.

Other Business

The LEC members briefly discussed having a Workshop this year and agreed to discuss it in greater length at their LEAP meeting this afternoon. The next LEC conference call is scheduled for Tuesday, April 8, 2008 at 3:00 p.m.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:46 a.m.

APPROVED BY:
Ralph E. Hode
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**EMERGENCY DISASTER RECOVERY PROGRAM (EDRP)
MINUTES – 58th Annual Spring Meeting
Tuesday, March 11, 2008
Galveston, Texas**

Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission Fisheries Disaster Recovery Coordinator **Ralph Hode**, called the meeting to order. The following state representatives, staff and other attendees were present.

States

Virginia Vail, FWC, *GSMFC Commissioner*, Tallahassee, FL
Alton Waldrep, ADCNR, Gulf Shores, AL
Kevin Anson, ADCNR/AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL
Dale Diaz, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Jim Hanifen, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Lance Robinson, TPWD, Dickinson, TX
Kerwin Cuevas, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Steve Heath, ADCNR, Gulf Shores, AL
Mike Brainard, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Ewell Smith, LA Seafood Promotions and Marketing Board, Baton Rouge, LA
Richard Cody, FWC-FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL

Others

Ellie Roche, NOAA-NMFS, St. Petersburg, FL
Brian Lezina, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Jason Duet, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Darren Angelo, Delta Marina, Pt. Sulphur, LA
Roy Crabtree, NMFS, St. Petersburg, FL

Staff

Wendy Garner, Accountant, Ocean Springs, MS
Ginny Herring, Administrative Officer, Ocean Springs, MS
Ralph Hode, EDRP Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Donna Bellais, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Opening Comments

R. Hode made opening comments thanking the states, NOAA-NMFS representatives, and the GSMFC staff for their attendance. Introduction of participants and visitors was made.

Agenda

R. Hode then opened the meeting and called for approval and/or amendments to the agenda. **There being no changes, a motion was made and seconded and the agenda was approved as submitted.**

Approval of the Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of October 16, 2007 held in Pt Clear, Alabama were presented for approval. **There being no changes, a motion was made and seconded and the minutes were approved as submitted.**

Introduction and Purpose

Special recognition was given to **E. Roche** who spoke briefly on the importance of Quarterly Reports noting that all the states were doing a good job in getting them submitted on time. **R. Hode** seconded E. Roche's comments and referenced a Project Summary Sheet matrix which he asked the states to incorporate into their quarterly reports. The purpose of the summary sheet is to maintain more consistent records of measurable accomplishments so that quick and accurate responses could be made to requests for data from NMFS or to others as necessary.

R. Hode gave an overview of the Emergency Disaster Recovery Program as follows:

Measurable Accomplishments Gulf-wide Through September 2007

EDRP I

Oyster Rehabilitation and Restoration Efforts:

- 1,385 acres of public reefs rebuilt
- 123,000 cubic yards of cultch material in place
- 94,600 sacks of seed oysters in place (*both public sites and lease sites*)
- \$15,695,888 reimbursements to date

Habitat Rehabilitation and Restoration – Shrimp, Crab, and Other Fishing Grounds

Debris Removal:

- 240 square miles cleaned of small debris primarily in Lake Borgne, Lake Catherine, and Lake Pontchartrain in Louisiana
- 11,500 abandoned crab taps removed.

Artificial Reef Restoration:

- 240 limestone offshore reefs installed
- 7 barge loads of concrete rubble on offshore reefs
- 6 steel hull vessels installed
- 290 acres (10,500 cubic yards of limestone and concrete rubble) of low profile nearshore reefs in place
- \$7,886,259 (debris removal and reef restoration) reimbursements to date

Cooperative Research Efforts

Stock Recovery Assessment:

- 43,870 Stock Recovery Assessment Reports Completed
- Research Projects in Pensacola Bay by FLA WRI; and by ALA DISL on schedule
- \$9,699,570 reimbursements to date

TOTAL TO DATE: \$33,826,017

EDRP II

R. Hode provided a brief report on the status of the second supplemental funding, EDRP II, noting that sub awards had been finalized with all five states. It was noted that the required two percent set aside for additional assistance for TED – BRD compliant fishermen had been met in the statements of work for each state. Additionally, a summary of annual activities by state was provided wherein it was noted that work efforts across the Gulf were programmed to primarily address assistance to business and industry, personal assistance to commercial fishermen, and domestic marketing and seafood testing.

Hode indicated that the sub award agreements were signed in January 2008 and that they covered a period of five years beginning December 1, 2007. It was also pointed out the EDRP II program would function exactly as the EDRP I program in terms of reporting, invoicing, and quarterly reporting. A timeline for quarterly reports was provided to participating principal investigators and coordinators.

Overview of Projects

MISSISSIPPI

Dale Diaz, Manager of the MS DMR marine fisheries program, gave a report on programs and plans for both EDRP I and II noting as follows:

EDRP I - Mississippi

The Oyster Rehabilitation section of the state's shellfish program involved approximately 82 fishermen harvesting nearly 75,000 sacks of seed oysters for relaying to newly planted cultch sites. An estimated 1000 acres of existing or expanded reefs have been restored utilizing approximately 93,000 cubic yards of limestone material. The state is also promoting an Oyster Stewardship program to encourage voluntary bagless dredging by area fishermen so as to refurbish existing reefs and to foster a concept of resource ownership by the oystermen.

The Habitat Restoration Program's Artificial Reef Project saw 240 pyramid reefs installed off of the Mississippi Coast in permitted areas, 29 inshore limestone and concrete rubble reefs re-established, and the establishment of a reef rubble staging area to receive concrete donated by area entities. These materials will be used to further restore damaged artificial reefs.

Concurrently, under this program some 11,500 derelict crab traps have been removed from the fishing grounds utilizing approximately 85 displaced or impacted crab and shrimp fishermen.

Under the Cooperative Research effort, **Diaz** reported that the finfish program received a total of 8,871 stock assessment tickets from both commercial and recreational (charter) fishermen. The commercial monitoring program has concluded; however, it was pointed out that because the recreational component is seasonal, funds programmed for it will allow continued monitoring into the 2008 year. Also, the finfish program includes a segment for raising red snapper to be released into the wild. This is a thirty month program that is currently continuing to monitor its feed processes with plans to release stock when a 3" to 6" growth has been achieved.

The Shrimp and Crab component of the program saw approximately 400 boats contributing some 21,000 trip tickets. This data is being examined by the Department staff and plans are to present some of the findings and conclusions at future meetings of the disaster committees. **Diaz** indicated that the program has already been beneficial in that it is providing data on the shrimp and crab industry that did not exist in prior years.

EDRP II - Mississippi

Diaz briefed the participants on plans for providing assistance to area fishermen by continuing a number of stock assessment monitoring programs started under the EDRP I program. It was noted that continued monitoring would not only provide the assistance for which the second supplement was designed, but it would also continue to provide much needed data that is essential for management decisions. Specifically, plans expected to be implemented in the immediate future under the EDRP II program include:

A second oyster relay project will begin March 17.

A second derelict crab trap recovery/recycling program for the period March 9 - 21. It was noted that the second clean up project funded under the disaster program would have a lower bounty for abandoned/derelict traps turned in by area fishermen and that participating fishermen would only be paid for up to 40 traps even if more were turned in. It was also expected that the response would be lower as would be the number of traps turned in.

A crab monitoring project is expected to start April 16, a finfish monitoring program expected to start March 15, and a shrimp monitoring program expected to begin with the opening of shrimp season in June. All three programs will limit the number of tickets that can be turned in by each participant and will contain fixed times in which to participate.

May 1, 2008 has been established as the deadline for applying for additional assistance under the TED-BRD segment of the assistance program. The state will examine applications for qualifications and compliance and will divide the programmed funding among those determined to be eligible.

Funds are also being set aside under the second supplement to assist local entities in re-establishing dock space, and related infrastructure in an effort to assist fisheries related

businesses and industry. Finally it was reported that the state will establish a marketing and seafood testing program for state resources; and expects to create a recreational outreach program – including possible youth fishing rodeos – to further promote opportunities in the Mississippi Gulf region.

LOUISIANA

Jim Hanifen provided an overview of activities under the Disaster Recovery program for the State of Louisiana.

EDRP I - Louisiana

Under the state's Oyster Rehabilitation effort, approximately 650 leaseholders have signed up to participate in Private Oyster Lease Restoration (POLR) program where incentives in the form of reimbursements for work performed are made available to leaseholders for removal of debris and sediment overburden, to make cultch plants, relay seed oysters under the supervision and approval of the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals, and to resurvey and mark historical leases. Work thus far has primarily been in debris removal, bed cultivation, and cultch plants.

Two public reef sites in the Black Bay area and in the Mississippi Sound area east of the Mississippi River have been restored to date; each containing approximately 200 acres and utilizing a combined 60,000 cu yards of cultch material. The state is preparing for additional cultch plants early in 2008 in the Barataria Bay area and associated relays of seed oysters.

Hanifen indicated that approximately \$6,000,000 has been reimbursed through the state to POLR participants since the program began.

Habitat Restoration efforts in the state continue through a contract with Crowder Gulf, Inc., for the removal of debris in shallow water near shore areas covering nearly 400 square miles of the state. To date approximately 260 square miles of water bottom have been cleaned of small debris – primarily in Lake Borgne, Lake Catherine, and Lake Pontchartrain areas; while large debris continues to be identified and is being evaluated, prioritized, and scheduled for removal utilizing heavy equipment. Pre-surveying is currently being performed in the Vermillion Bay area for debris removal in the near future.

Hanifen indicated that a contract option is in place that would allow the contractor to survey and clean an additional 400 square miles. However, the state continues to work with FEMA in an effort to have the remaining work performed under federal contract programs similar to those used in other Gulf states. Additionally, a debris location website has been developed by the Louisiana Natural Resources Division that allows fishermen to report debris findings to the state.

Within the Habitat Program and in accordance with Section 106 of the Historical Preservation Act, the Department continues to work with the state historical/archaeological group and qualified contractors to map potential archaeological sites for protection and further evaluation in the debris removal process.

Additionally, the state is working to develop projects that would work in conjunction with other state agencies in shoreline stabilization projects and other habitat enhancement projects to address coastal restoration issues exacerbated by the storms of 2005.

Hanifen indicated that under the Cooperative Research portion of the EDRP program, efforts have begun to develop an independent trip level monitoring project in the crab fishery of Lake Pontchartrain. The state is attempting to correlate independent data with dependent data and continues to work towards the development of a survey instrument that will address this objective.

EDRP II - Louisiana

Hanifen reported that the state is moving forward in getting assistance funding in the hands of impacted commercial fishermen, businesses and industry. The state is utilizing trip ticket data turned in prior to the storms of 2005 to identify fishermen, related industry, and processors who may be eligible for assistance. Additionally, the state is using contractual agents to assist in qualifying commercial fishermen and a contractual fiscal agent to determine the level of assistance and to process payments. Notices are being sent out to eligible participants in March along with information packages for application for assistance. **Hanifen** indicated that the same contract agents will be utilized in making additional payments to qualified fishermen found to be compliant with TED-BRD regulations.

It was reported that the state is proposing to make waterfront access enhancements and upgrades to provide long term assistance to the recreational fishing industry (charter boat and guide businesses). It is expected that the state will work with other state programs to address enhancements and restoration opportunities that will improve public waterfront access. Emphasis is being placed on public ownership and mitigation to assure more storm resistant facilities and to make future damages eligible for federal assistance. Work under this program will address both fresh and salt water areas or projects in lower Louisiana since both sectors were impacted by the storms of 2005 and both have commercial access needs.

Ewell Smith, principal investigator for the Louisiana Seafood Marketing Board gave a brief report on the state's plan for continuing and enhancing the ongoing campaign to market and promote Louisiana caught and processed seafood products and opportunities. Emphasis will be placed on marketing techniques that allow state fishermen and industries to compete with foreign markets and on the quality of Louisiana produced seafood.

ALABAMA

Kevin Anson presented a Power Point presentation on progress to date under the Disaster Recovery Program for the State of Alabama. The report is summarized as follows:

ADCNR, under the Oyster Rehabilitation program has entered into contractual agreements with the Organized Seafood Association of Alabama to oversee hiring, paying and directing work in the restoration effort. **Anson** indicated that to date approximately 8,500 cy limestone, covering

approximately 173 acres of water bottom, have been placed in the shallows of Heron Bay under the recovery program. It was also noted that the project to remove oversized rocks (softball size) from an area in Mobile Bay has been completed. The rocks, nearly 21,000 sacks, have been stock piled and will be re-cycled as cultch for additional reef restoration. Both projects relied on area fishermen who were impacted by the storms of 2005 to assist in the restoration effort. Additional shallow water cultch plants are planned for the spring of 2008.

The Cooperative Research program has received 15,722 trip tickets to date from area fishermen in its assessment of stock recovery. This data, along with both independent and dependent sampling, will be used to determine the impact of the storms of 2005 on the area fishery. Tickets continue to be received from a broad cross section of the industry including shrimp, oyster, crab, net, hook and line, live bait, and the for-hire group.

Additionally, egg and larval distribution and mortality studies continue as part of a long-term monitoring program to test for tolerance to temperature change, turbulence and escapement. Plans for 2008 include installation of data loggers to record water quality at select locations, continued larval fish and egg sampling and the collection, spawning, and rearing of marine species at the MRD's mariculture center for use in larval mesocosm research.

Habitat Rehabilitation

AMDR continues to work with the State Lands Division to develop agreements aimed at development of wave attenuators to reduce erosion and in replanting grass beds in highly sensitive areas. A site along the Little River Bay peninsula has been selected for restoration; an engineering design, final drawings, and construction contracts are expected to be completed in 2008. Actual construction is also expected to begin in 2008.

In other habitat restoration plans, **Anson** indicated that the burden on staff and the proliferation of habitat mapping has caused the MRD to rethink the project. As a result, the Department is investigating the possibility of reprogramming monies in this project to fishermen assistance through additional resource restoration efforts.

EDRP II - Alabama

Anson reported that the Department continues to work on details for use of the second supplemental funds. Preliminary plans call for a continuation of the assistance programs implemented under EDRP I where fishermen are reimbursed for work performed and for additional assistance to TED-BRD compliant fishermen.

AMDR is also attempting to develop methods of assisting impacted business and industry for non-reimbursed losses and hopes to have the details completed for this element shortly. Concurrently, the Department plans to make funding assistance available to the Alabama Marketing Association for re-establishment of the cooperative seafood by-product recycling-recovery program.

Additionally, funds from the new program are expected to be used in part for the equipping of the damaged Claude Peteet Mariculture Center.

FLORIDA

Commissioner Virginia Vail provided a report on progress to date under the Disaster Recovery Program for the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services/Division of Aquaculture.

EDRP I - Florida

Vail indicated the Department's Oyster Rehabilitation program began to show measurable progress on public reefs during the latter part of 2007. A total of 6 cultch plants have been completed utilizing fossil shell in the Apalachicola Bay area. It was noted that most of the work has been focused in this area because this is the only area in the Florida Panhandle that the state currently has for storage and staging for loading barges.

It was also indicated that material availability is now good and that a new bid was recently accepted by the state. Current prices for materials in place on the reef are running between \$38.00 and \$40.00 per ton depending on the distance to the reef.

Vail reported that bid prices had been received on the planned acquisition of a new deck barge. The cost to purchase a new barge built to Department specifications was significantly lower than the cost to lease similarly outfitted equipment over a five year period. The barge is being programmed for cultch plants and re-seeding efforts in both public and private leases.

Vail also indicated that payments for private lease restoration in the Apalachicola area are also beginning to be processed.

Additionally it was noted that the Cooperative Research project under the direction of Dr. Bill Arnold was continuing on schedule.

EDRP II - Florida

Commissioner Vail reported that the EDRP II TED/BRD additional assistance program was well under way. A total of \$40,000 is scheduled to be distributed to an estimated 550 licensed commercial shrimpers working in the Florida Gulf Coast. Staff is currently reviewing NMFS and state violation lists to eliminate those fishermen found to be in violation of TED/BRD regulations in both state and/or federal waters. **Vail** reported that preliminary findings revealed that many times where violations are found, those found in violation were operators rather than licensed boat owners.

Richard Cody reported on the for-hire program funded under EDRP II. Plans are to implement an electronic log-book reporting system to report CPUE data. The web page is being designed at this time and tests are to be conducted utilizing participating fishermen in May. The program is expected to be operational in June 2008.

TEXAS

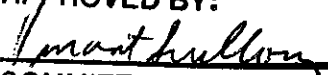
L. Robinson gave a report on recovery activities to date for the State of Texas. In summary:

As part of the Oyster Rehabilitation and Habitat Restoration programs, planned staff, a survey vessel, and related equipment are now in place and bathymetry surveying is being conducted in the Galveston Bay area. **Robinson** indicated that the Department had tentatively identified a reef in the East Galveston area that had severe sediment overburden but was sufficiently shallow to justify possible restoration. The area is approximately 200 acres in size and is part of an estimated 1000 acre reef. Information developed through sub-bottom profiling work performed by Texas A & M University is being examined at this time for final determination.

The Department has been successful in co-venturing with Jefferson County in the removal of much of the storm related debris from area channels and sensitive habitat in the Sabine area. Continued evaluation is expected and follow up debris removal will be performed where necessary.

There being no further discussion or business the meeting was adjourned until October, 2008 - time and location to be announced.

**S-FFMC MENHADEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MINUTES – 58th Annual Spring Meeting
Tuesday, March 11, 2008
Galveston, Texas**

APPROVED BY:

COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

V. Guillory called the meeting to order at 8:38 a.m. with the following in attendance:

Members

Vince Guillory, LDWF, Bourg, LA
Corky Perret, *GSMFC Commissioner*, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Jerry Mambretti, TPWD, Port Arthur, TX
Joe Smith, NMFS, Beaufort, NC
Toby Gascon, Omega Protein, Inc., Baton Rouge, LA
Borden Wallace, Daybrook Fisheries, Inc., Empire, LA
Rick Schillaci, Omega Protein, Inc., Moss Point, MS
Ed Swindell, Menhaden Advisory Council, Hammond, LA

Others

Joe Gill, *GSMFC Commissioner*, Ocean Springs, MS
Terry Cody, TPWD, Rockport, TX
Lance Robinson, TPWD, Dickinson Island, TX
Ben Landry, Omega Protein, Inc., Baton Rouge, LA
Kimberly Thibodeaux, Omega Protein, Inc., Baton Rouge, LA
Roy Crabtree, NOAA/SERO, St Petersburg, FL
Bonnie Ponwith, NMFS, Miami, FL
Bill Balboa, TPWD, Dickinson, TX
Matthew Cieri, Maine DMR, West Boothbay Harbor, ME
Shane Bonnot, TPWD, Lake Jackson, TX
Todd Neahr, TPWD, Corpus Christi, TX
Cherie O'Brien, TPWD, Dickinson, TX
Page Campbell, TPWD, Rockport, TX
Shane Gehan, Washington DC
Mindy Ellner, Omega Protein Inc, Houston, TX
Cindy Bohannon, TPWD, Dickinson, TX
Vicki Swann, TPWD, Austin, TX
Leslie Williams, TPWD, Dickinson, TX

Staff

Larry Simpson, Executive Director, Ocean Springs, MS
Steve VanderKooy, Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Jeff Rester, Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Gregg Bray, MRFSS Analyst, Ocean Springs, MS
Dave Donaldson, Assistant Director, Ocean Springs, MS

Introductions

Chairman Guillory led the introductions of the MAC.

Adoption of Agenda

The agenda was reviewed and Guillory asked to add his Louisiana Forecast immediately after Smith's presentations. Perret asked to add the book by H. Bruce Franklin for discussion under other business. Perret moved to approve the agenda seconded by Wallace and the agenda was approved as modified.

Approval of Minutes (10/16/07)

The minutes from the October meeting were reviewed. Wallace moved to approve the minutes as written, Mambretti seconded and the minutes were accepted.

Review of 2007 Gulf Menhaden Season and Forecast for 2008

Smith provided the NOAA review of the 2007 season and the forecast for 2008. Final landings for Gulf menhaden was 453,832 metric tons (MT) which was down 2% from 2006 and 8% from the 5-year mean. The season opened with 4 factories and 41 vessels (38 regular boats, 2 run boats, and 1 bait boat). Weather for April-June was cool and windy and fish had low oil yields. In addition, several factories had trouble finding crews for the fleet. In mid-June the weather improved as did oil yield. Peak landings were in July and at the end of August several minor tropical systems passed through the Gulf hampering fishing the rest of the season. Effort in 2007 was estimated at 369,200 vessel-ton-weeks. Actual final landings were 4% less than the NOAA forecast prior to the season opening last March. Smith reported that based on the 2007 effort and expecting 40 boats in 2008, the landings may be around 460,000 MT.

Update on the Atlantic Menhaden Fishery

Smith also provided an update on the Atlantic menhaden fishery for 2007 and the forecast. Final landings were around 174,455 MT which was up 6% over 2006. Only one plant operated on the Atlantic at Reedville, VA with 10 boats and 3 small bait boats. It was noted that for the third year in a row, large adult menhaden were abundant in the nearshore waters of southern New England and there were some bait landings as far north as southern Maine. There were a larger percentage of age-2s in the 2007 catch confirming the strong year class from 2005, which means there should be a fair number of age-3s available in 2008. The forecast for 2008 Atlantic menhaden landings are expected to be around 185,000 MT.

Notable activities in the management arena on the Atlantic include the continuation of the Chesapeake's Compromise Cap of 109,000MT. In 2006, the fishery landed fewer than the cap and therefore got a credit in 2007 and still did not harvest to the cap resulting another credit for 2008. The credit adds a small amount to the possible harvest not to exceed 122,000 MT. There are several on-going attempts on the Atlantic to further reduce the reduction fishery and the main method is using the argument of menhaden as a critical filter feeder. One other issue is in the

state of Rhode Island where a second bait vessel from Massachusetts began fishing in Narragansett Bay in July. The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management responded by limiting daily catch by individual bait vessels to 75,000 lbs. The department is attempting to estimate the Atlantic menhaden standing stock in Narragansett Bay, then limit total removals for bait to half standing stock.

Alternate Measures of Nominal Fishing Effort

Smith had been asked last year to look at alternatives for estimating effort in the reduction fishery other than vessel-ton-weeks. He provided a couple of options that looked promising and accounted for more real fishing days than the old method. The best estimate thus far, appears to be the proportion of actual days with at least one set to the total possible fishing days. On average, most years hover around 73% and effort below the long-term mean suggest poor weather conditions and loss of substantial fishing time. Effort estimates higher than the long-term mean suggest good weather conditions and more time on fishing grounds. He would examine this further and report in the fall.

Louisiana's Gulf Menhaden Forecast for 2008

Guillory provided the Louisiana forecast which uses several parameters including water temperature off Grand Isle, salinity, Mississippi River discharge, Southeast LA rainfall, LDWF juvenile menhaden catch in fishery independent trawls, and expected fishery effort. Generally, cold and dry winters are favorable for menhaden recruitment while warm and wet winters are less favorable. Based on the prevailing conditions, 2008 so far has been warm and dry. **Guillory** noted that east of the Mississippi River; the juvenile indices are higher than the long-term mean for the last several years, likely in response to the Carnarvon water diversion. He also showed that juvenile indices across LA were higher than the mean in 2008. **Guillory** estimates that the LA harvest should be around 365,000-440,000 MT in 2008.

Ecological Approach to Menhaden Management

Matthew Cieri, Maine Department of Natural Resources, provided an excellent presentation on an expanded Multi-Species VPA looking at the interactions between Atlantic menhaden and its predators. The model incorporated numerous interactions and addressed diet composition, prey availability, and growth of three top predators (bluefish, striped bass, and weakfish) on Atlantic menhaden. This approach includes the additional biomass and size structure of "other prey" such as bay anchovy, other clupeids (Atlantic and Threadfin herring, sardine & scads), squid, Butterfish, other Sciaenids, lobsters, crabs, benthic invertebrates, and macrozooplankton such as shrimps & mysids. What he showed was that based on the available diet information, menhaden don't play as large a role in the predators of concern and in fact are frequently replaced by several other prey both seasonally and ontogenetically. Finally, **Cieri** pointed out that if managers plan to rebuild certain commercial and recreationally important species of predators, they need to plan on the potential for downward trends in certain prey items. He also indicated that some of the management strategies for predator rebuilding could impact other predators (i.e. adult bluefish consuming young weakfish).

TPWD's Menhaden Purse Seine Fishery and Proposed Changes

Mambretti reported on several management actions which are being considered in Texas. In January, the TPWD conducted a series of scoping meetings in four coastal locations in advance of the 2008 state-wide proclamation process. Coastal Fisheries was tasked to examine possible changes in the current red snapper and shark regulations to have greater consistency with federal regulations. In addition, a possible closure of state waters to menhaden fishing was proposed and scoped. A number of comments were received in this process leading to the recommendation to not make changes to red snapper and shark regulations in state waters. Several NGOs spoke out to close menhaden fishing in the Texas Territorial Sea. Omega Protein participated and tried to address attendees' questions regarding the fishery. In the January 23 Texas Parks & Wildlife Commission (TPWC) meeting, the Commission agreed to take a precautionary approach to the menhaden in Texas waters and proposed a Total Allowable Catch or TAC based on the last 5-year mean of 31.5 Million pounds annually. A total of 22 public hearings will be held to take comments on the proposed actions. The TPWC will hold a final public hearing and take action on all the hunting and fishing proclamations in Austin March 27.

After considerable discussion by the MAC, *Perret moved to ask the SFFMC to have the GSMFC send a letter to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department indicating the concern of the Menhaden Advisory Committee in proposing a TAC for the reduction fishery and request additional information on how the TAC will be administered and enforced. Wallace seconded and the motion passed with Smith abstaining and Mambretti opposing.* Staff was directed to draft language for the SFFMC to consider reflecting the MAC discussion.

Update on LNG Facilities in the Gulf

Rester provided a short update on the LNG activities in the Gulf. There are only three facilities at this time worthy of noting. The Energy Bridge is the only of-shore facility operating in the US. It's about 100 miles south of Louisiana and shouldn't affect menhaden. They completed a 2005 monitoring report last year and just finished the 2006 report. That would be the first complete year of monitoring for that facility.

Bienville Offshore Energy Terminal is 63 miles off Alabama and 60 miles east of the Mississippi River mouth in 425 feet of water. They have completed the draft EIS but the regulatory clock was stopped last year so there isn't much to report at this time.

The last facility to report on is a closed-loop system which is 28 miles west of Tampa in 100 ft of water. It should have minimal impact on fish species. The FWC and NOAA are concerned about the water intake to cool the discharging vessels once on site and offloading. There will not be a water draw for regasification at this facility. A draft EIS should be out in the next few weeks.

Other Business

The book written by H. Bruce Franklin entitled "The Most Important Fish in the Sea" was discussed specifically whether the GSMFC should respond in some way to the author. The book recounts the history of the reduction fishery along the Atlantic and Gulf and attempts to use pseudo-science to show the fishery as overfished and the industry and fisheries managers as reckless and irresponsible. In the book, Bruce makes strong accusations against the industry, NOAA, and the two Interstate Marine Fisheries Commissions.

This book has become the platform that most of the environmental groups and other NGOs are using to try to shut down the reduction fishery throughout the United States. The question was raised if perhaps the GSMFC should respond in some way to the author or the publisher. **Matthew Cieri** indicated that the ASMFC choose to take no action against the author because it just wasn't worth it. The MAC and others in the audience agreed that the book should be sold as a book of fiction and generally disregarded but that the minutes should reflect this concern and be brought to the attention of the Commissioners.

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 11:57 am.

**TECHNICAL COORDINATING COMMITTEE
MINUTES – 58th Annual Spring Meeting
Tuesday, March 11, 2008
Galveston, Texas**

APPROVED BY:

COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

10/24/08

Chairman Corky Perret called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. The following members and others were present:

Members

Jerry Mambretti, TPWD, Port Arthur, TX
Bill Balboa, TPWD, Palacios, TX
Virginia Vail, FWC, *GSMFC Commissioner*, Tallahassee, FL
Richard Cody, FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Corky Perret, MDMR, *GSMFC Commissioner*, Biloxi, MS
Kerwin Cuevas, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Brian Lezina, LDWF, Lacombe, LA
Vince Guillory, LDWF, Bourg, LA
Steve Heath, ADCNR, Gulf Shores, AL
Doug Frugé, USFWS, Ocean Springs, MS
Roy Crabtree, NMFS, St. Petersburg, FL

Staff

Jeff Rester, Habitat/SEAMAP Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Larry Simpson, Executive Director, Ocean Springs, MS
Steve VanderKooy, IJF Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Dave Donaldson, Assistant Director, Ocean Springs, MS
Gregg Bray, RecFIN Programmer/Analyst, Ocean Springs, MS
Ralph Hode, EDRP Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Joe Ferrer, Systems Administrator, Ocean Springs, MS

Others

Shane Bonnot, TPWD, Lake Jackson, TX
Mike Ray, TPWD, *GSMFC Commissioner*, Austin, TX
Joseph Smith, NMFS, Beaufort, NC
Jim Franks, GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
John Embesi, TPWD
Todd Neahr, TPWD
Fernando Martinez-Andrade, TPWD, Corpus Christi, TX
Page Campbell, TPWD, Rockport, TX
Vicki Swann, TPWD, Austin, TX
Mike Brainard, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Lance Robinson, TPWD
Cindy Bohannon, TPWD
Leslie Williams, TPWD
Dale Diaz, MDMR, Biloxi, MS

Joe Gill, *GSMFC Commissioner*, Ocean Springs, MS
Harriet Perry, GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS

Adoption of Agenda

The TCC decided to move other business to the beginning of the meeting. With no further modifications, the agenda was adopted.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes for the meeting held on October 16, 2007 were approved as written.

State Federal Reports:

Due to the abbreviated nature of the meeting, all State/Federal Reports were turned in before the meeting. The reports are attached to the minutes.

Other Business

K. Cuevas stated that he would like a presentation from each state at the next TCC meeting on what type of acoustic monitoring they were currently conducting. He stated that all states were doing some type of acoustic monitoring and he felt it would be worthwhile to look at the data collection techniques from each state.

Subcommittee Reports

Crab – L. Hartman stated that the Crab Ageing proposal which had been submitted to the NOAA Cooperative Research Program was rejected a second time. The overall reviews were good, but the transfer of technology and fishermen involvement was not strong enough. She stated that the Subcommittee received an update on the Gulf stock assessment data. She reported that most of the meeting was devoted to the state's recent derelict trap clean ups.

SEAMAP – J. Rester stated that SEAMAP discussed the new Florida trawl survey that will provide much needed information on fish and invertebrate abundances on the west Florida Shelf. The Subcommittee also discussed increased 2008 SEAMAP funds and new survey work for 2008. He reported that in FY2008 the SEAMAP program finally received a budget increase. The FY2008 funding amount was \$4.387 million.

Data Management – V. Swann reported that the Subcommittee reviewed the collection and analysis of biological sampling activities, the status of the web based data entry program, and discussion of the status of the license frame pilot survey. Also, each state reported on their data collection activities.

Habitat – J. Rester reported that the Subcommittee heard a presentation on fishery utilization of created and natural habitats at the Atchafalaya River delta that have formed over the last 40 years. The delta at the mouth of the Atchafalaya River has been modified due to maintenance

dredging for the Federal navigation channel. J. Rester stated that the Wax Lake Outlet delta was a natural delta. Results from many years of study show that fish diversity and fish abundance were similar at both the created and natural habitats. The Subcommittee also discussed the status of freshwater inflow issues, both biological and legal, related to the Apalachicola River in Florida. The Subcommittee reviewed a freshwater inflow brochure targeting water managers that will soon be sent to the TCC for their approval. Finally, the Subcommittee discussed the Southeast Resource Partnership's recently released Habitat Plan.

Anadromous – **D. Frugé** reported that the Subcommittee met in February, and he provided a written Subcommittee report. Three action items were presented to the TCC. The Subcommittee passed a motion asking the TCC for guidance and/or permission to pursue the development of a status review for the Alabama shad as a precursor to any Endangered Species Act review or an IJF management plan. The Subcommittee discussed two matrix scorecards related to implementation of the Striped Bass FMP recommendations. One of these deals with recommendations that are not normally reviewed by the State-Federal Fisheries Management Committee, due to the technical rather than regulatory nature of those recommendations. Development of this scorecard was proposed to and approved by the TCC at the fall 2006 meeting. That scorecard was presented to the TCC for consideration and use in monitoring implementation of the technical recommendations in the FMP. The Subcommittee also discussed structural changes that should be made to the State-Federal Fisheries Management Committee scorecard for the Striped Bass FMP as well as the appropriateness of some of the scores currently on the scorecard. The Subcommittee then passed two motions addressing the structural changes for consideration by the SFFMC. Those motions were to remove the last three items from the State-Federal Fisheries Management Committee's scorecard for striped bass to the Global scorecard being proposed by the Anadromous Subcommittee to go to the TCC for their future review and to propose to the State-Federal Fisheries Management Committee the addition of recommendation 8.3.6 Enforcement to the State-Federal Fisheries Management Committee's scorecard for their review in the future. All motions were accepted by the TCC.

With no other business the meeting was adjourned at 1:36 p.m.

Florida TCC Report

Preparation of the *Hoyt Vandenberg*, a 500 foot former missile tracking ship, for deployment off Key West is nearly complete. A walk through inspection of the vessel was conducted on February 14 by staff of the FWC, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Coast Guard, and Reef Makers. PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) were of particular concern during the clean-up process; approximately 810,000 linear feet of electrical wire plus other electrical equipment and paint possibly containing PCBs had been removed before the walk through. The U.S. Army will soon move the ship to Key West for final preparation and deployment on May 15. Total cost for preparation and deployment is estimated to be approximately \$8.5 million.

A bill to establish a Ships-2-Reefs program has been introduced for consideration by the 2008 Legislature, which convened on 4 March 2008. The program is a matching grant program to provide funding to assist local governments to obtain and prepare decommissioned vessels for deployment as artificial reefs. A similar bill was introduced last year but, due to time constraints, was not passed.

At their February 2008 meeting, the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission considered proposals that would make Florida's regulations for red snapper consistent with recently enacted federal regulations. The Commission approved a reduction of the recreational bag limit to two fish per person per day, a reduction of the commercial bag and trip limit to two fish per day, a reduction of the commercial size limit to 13 inches, and a prohibition on possession of the recreational bag limit by captain and crew of for-hire vessels. The Commission, considering the broader impact of the regulations on the fishery and the fishing communities, did not approve a reduction of the recreational season in state waters, which will remain open from 15 April – 31 October. In addition, the Commission approved requiring the use of non-stainless steel circle hooks when fishing for any reef fish species using natural bait and the use of venting tools and dehooking devices when releasing any of the reef fish species. The new state regulations will take effect April 1, 2008. The Commission also accepted the Staff recommendation to support qualifying fishery disaster relief requests to the U.S. Department of Commerce, and each request should be reviewed on a case by case basis for eligibility under federal criteria, number of potentially eligible fishers, and whether or not matching funds would be required.

Commission staff oversaw removal of 3,130 stone crab and spiny lobster traps remaining in the water after close of the fishing season in this fiscal year's Trap Retrieval efforts. Trap owners are assessed a \$10/trap retrieval fee if more than five of their traps are retrieved. A portion (\$25) of the \$125 fee for the commercial stone crab endorsement and the commercial spiny lobster endorsement is dedicated to supporting trap retrieval, and allows the retrieval fee to be waived for the first five traps retrieved. If a fisher holds both endorsements, the retrieval fee is not assessed unless more than 10 traps are retrieved. Removal of trap debris from coastal water is conducted by local organizations with approval from the Commission. Five clean up events have been approved so far this year and another is scheduled for April. With three of the five event reports submitted, citizen efforts have removed nearly 500 traps from coastal waters.

The stone crab monitoring project is in its third year in southwest Florida and second year in northwest Florida. Recruitment appeared to be down in the Keys area but up in the Tampa Bay/Cedar Key areas. One objective of the project is to determine if there's a predictable relationship between one year's recruitment and adult abundance a few years later.

As far as commercial fisheries data are concerned, both the application (MRIS) forms and the Oracle database of commercial trip ticket data (MFIS) have been converted from Oracle 9i to Oracle 10g. The conversion for application forms was completed in October of 2007 after extensive testing. The database conversion to 10g was completed in January of 2008. The new database name is MFIS. We are still retaining the old database (MRISNT) at this point, although no new data has gone into MRISNT since we started using MFIS in production. All are running well. Gail MacAuley, our Oracle/database administrator left FWC but a replacement has been named. In the meantime, Steve Brown has been working with Sara Dugger of FWC-Office of Information Technology to ensure data exports for NMFS and ACCSP continue uninterrupted. A total of 223,342 trip tickets were received in 2007 of which 45% were submitted electronically. Electronic submissions accounted for a little less than 50% (245,538) species records. A total of 218,221 trip tickets were processed in 2007, of which a little less than 49% were submitted electronically. Approximately 52.5% of species records were attributed to electronically submitted trip ticket data.

Transfer of recreational saltwater angler license data to GSMFC for the Gulf of Mexico pilot dual frame study is occurring every other month. Joe O'Hop has been attempting to improve address information to increase the effectiveness of "reverse look-ups" by the telephone survey contractor. Currently about 30% of records have telephone information and this can be improved to 60-65% using reverse look-ups.

In terms of recreational catch information for 2007, 43,910 angler intercepts were conducted, of which 13,047 were from shore anglers, 8,302 were from charter anglers and the remaining 23,940 were from private boat anglers. A total of 25,060 (~57%) were associated with Gulf of Mexico counties (Escambia-Monroe). All quotas were met for the year. At-Sea sampling of headboat catches has ceased in the Gulf but continues on the Atlantic side. All assignment quotas were obtained for the Gulf in 2007. A review of the At-Sea sampling project relative to the current Beaufort Logbook program currently in place in the Gulf and South Atlantic is expected to be completed this year as part of the MRIP process.

Biological data collected in 2007 included 12,614 otoliths. Processing of red snapper otoliths for 2006 was completed in February, 2007 and is expected to be entered to the FIN database along with 2005 otoliths by June, 2008.

EDRP funding for charter fisheries impacted by the 2005 hurricane season was granted and work has begun on the development of a web-based reporting system for For-Hire trips. Trip information collected will include targeted species, trip type and duration, and more detailed information on fishing location. In addition to harvested catch numbers, participants will be able to report numbers of discards and sizes associated with harvested and discarded catch.

Alabama TCC Report

Alabama met its NMFS MRFSS quotas in all modes for Wave 6 (Nov -Dec). However, Alabama did not meet its add-on quota, in charter mode during Wave 6 do in part to a lack of fishing activity. For the year, Alabama samplers collected 2,567 angler interviews (17 % above the annual quota) and measured and/or weighed nearly 3,900 fish representing 57 species of fish.

Pilot at-sea head boat survey was completed Dec 2007. This ended a four year project designed to collect catch and harvest information from head boat anglers using MRD observers who accompanied anglers on fishing trips. The observers also attempted to collect length and release condition of released fish during these trips. For 2007, 494 anglers were interviewed during 22 head boat trips. Initial comparisons between the at-sea pilot survey (AL & FL for 2004-2006) and Beaufort logbook survey indicated that observed data had more detailed fish information (more accurate numbers of species and fish caught and released by trip and larger numbers of fish lengths and weights collected) but the method for determining effort within the at-sea survey led to high variability. The consensus among the comparison participants was that a combination of the two surveys would probably be best.

As of December 31, 2007, nearly 10,000 (~ \$2.0 million) commercial EDRP I forms collecting detailed fishing effort data have been completed and submitted for payment. In addition, over 3,200 for-hire EDRP I forms have been submitted and most of the data reported has been stored electronically and is undergoing QA/QC procedures. MRD has begun the initial phases of developing programs to assist the recovery efforts of Alabama seafood dealers and seafood related businesses which sustained economic losses from the storms of 2005. This program is the first of its kind to be implemented in Alabama. A total of \$8.4 million from EDRP II monies has been reserved for this program; \$2 million of this amount has been reserved for the development of a seafood waste recycling center in Bayou La Batre. The trip ticket program continues operation. Currently, there are 31 dealers actively reporting landings using the electronic program. These landings represent around 50% of the total commercial trips reported and over 60% of the total reported landings.

The fall shrimp and groundfish cruise totaled seven day and three night stations taken on October 9, and November 6, 2007. Shrimp were taken at eight of the 10 stations. White shrimp were the most abundant captured (36), followed by pink (30), and brown shrimp (1). Bycatch ranged from 4.1 to 124.8 kilograms. Bycatch was dominated by Atlantic croaker, silver sea trout (*Cynoscion nothus*) Atlantic butterfish (*Peprilus burti*) and inshore lizardfish. A total of 118 juvenile red snapper was captured; with 100 captured at two stations just south of Dauphin Island. Red snapper were taken at five of the 10 sample stations.

The Division completed a spotted seatrout assessment this year and it is available upon request.

The Enforcement section has been busy checking IFQ Red Snapper Boats landing in Alabama. There were increases in the number of landings during the last quarter of 2007. This was partly due to several of the IFQ Red Snapper Fishermen waiting until the end of the year to fill their quota because they felt that prices would be higher during this time period.

The enforcement section stayed busy monitoring the gill net striped mullet roe fishery during November and December 2007. Catches were above normal but prices remained lower than past peak years.

The enforcement section assisted in the recovery efforts for the four young children, ages 4 months, one year, two years, and three years old, allegedly murdered by their father, Lam Luong. The recovery operation for the four children Hannah Luong, Danny Luong, Lindsey Luong and Ryan Pham was concluded with the recovery of the fourth body. The operation started on January 8, 2008 and concluded on January 20, 2008, a period of thirteen days. The Marine Resources Enforcement Section was the first waterborne asset notified by the Bayou La Batre Police Department and was the first assets on the scene.

Furthermore, during the recovery operation the Marine Resources Enforcement Section assisted with the rescue of two duck hunters whose boat had sank. The two hunters were rescued in a fairly short timeframe since officers were in the area for the recovery operation, but still both of the hunters had to be admitted to the hospital. One was treated for severe hypothermia and probably would not have survived because of the cold temperatures if officers had not been close.

Again, our officers have proven to be an asset during a crisis situation. The caring, dedication, and training of our officers came to the forefront. Past equipment purchases, planning, and training provided our officers with the needed tools to effectively assist during this operation. The community and other agencies have repeatedly complemented our officers and their work efforts.

Lt Bob Hasting retired effective February 1, 2008 and we are in process of establishing register to fill this position. Lt Scott Bannon returned from military leave with the US Coast Guard. He served eight months at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba. He was selected as the Senior Enlisted Trooper of the Year by the Joint Task Force Guantanamo Community while serving in Cuba.

The enforcement section was recently involved in the following case involving the F/V Slick as Glass, Marcus Murphy III. On Saturday, 2/09/2008, CEO Edward Willis and Lt. Scott Bannon were on an offshore JEA patrol in the Federal waters (EEZ) south of Alabama and Mississippi in MR-22 a 10m state patrol boat. The officers boarded the f/v Slick as Glass and advised them there were there to inspect their fish. The captain stated they were just out catching a "few redfish". The ice chest on the back deck of the boat was inspected and the officers saw four red drum that had been gutted, lying on the ice. Also, there was red mesh sack containing fish fillets. The officers advised the captain that it was illegal to posses red drum in federal waters and asked him what kind of fillets they were. He stated there were about forty or so red snapper in the bag. They then advised him they would be filling out a federal case packet to be forwarded to the National Marine Fisheries Service. He was very cooperative and presented all of his information. They took digital photos of the boat, crew, fish in the ice chest, and electronics. The vessel had no registration numbers or documentation and there was no paperwork onboard. There was a sticker were the boat had been registered in Mississippi in 2007. He stated the paperwork was with the co-owner so that he could purchase the new registration. As the officers departed, they asked if he was commercially fishing and he said he

was going to buy a commercial hook and line license when the season opened. There were 110 fillets (55 fish) that had the skin on them and all appeared to be red snapper.

Mississippi TCC Report

This past fall 22,594 cubic yards of cultch material (limestone) were planted on two Mississippi oyster reefs, Henderson Point and Telegraph reefs. Between the two, a total of 215 acres were planted.

Mississippi's oyster season began on September 6th. The daily sack limit is 20 per vessel. To date there have been over 61,000 sacks harvested. Oyster season is scheduled to end March 13, 2008.

The Shellfish Bureau held an Oyster Stewardship Program Meeting Tuesday October 2, 2007. Sixty-three harvesters and industry representatives attended the meeting which was held to receive input on management strategies needed for the rebuilding of the oyster industry in Mississippi.

In February a meeting was held with oyster harvesters for the purpose of contracting with them for the spring 2008 EDRP II oyster relay. Plans are also underway for a spring 2008 cultch plant.

Total EDRP I program participation to date included 380 shrimp and crab fishermen. Shrimp fishermen submitted 17,771 individual fisheries monitoring reports and crab fishermen submitted 3,930 (21,701 tickets program total). All of the fishing trip data information sheets have been scanned. Work has begun on analyzing the data.

The Mississippi Crab Task Force met December 11, 2007 to discuss EDRP I commercial crab data results and EDRP II plans. The 2008 MS Derelict Crab Trap Cleanup is set for March 9 - 21.

In 2007, 11,500 derelict crab traps were removed by 85 contracted commercial crab and shrimp fishermen. Traps and associated data sheets were collected by DMR and GCRL staff. All traps were recycled by a scrap metal facility. Excellent cooperation was provided by commercial fishermen.

Distribution of crab traps (50 to each qualified commercial crab fisherman) equipped with escape rings and Terrapin Excluder Devices (TEDs) continues. To date, 500 new traps have been distributed to Mississippi fishermen. Additional traps will be distributed upon receipt from the trap fabricators.

Public meetings were held with shrimp and crab fishermen in February 2008 to share EDRP results and get their input on EDRP II plans. Contracts are currently being signed by eligible fishermen to participate in EDRP II programs.

A new site (Popp's Ferry Bridge in Biloxi Bay) has been added to the MS Real-Time Hydrological Monitoring Program. This is the 9th monitoring station installed since all were lost in Hurricane Katrina. Data on water temperature, salinity and tidal stage are updated every 15 minutes and are available from the DMR webpage (www.dmr.state.ms.us).

The Mississippi Artificial Reef Rigs to Reef Program is currently working with petroleum industry representatives on 2 projects in the main pass area south of Mississippi. Reef permits were obtained and deployments should begin in early summer.

There were three steel hull vessels deployed during this time frame in reef sites south of Horn Island. These vessels were donated by the U.S. Coast Guard. A local Contractor was hired to clean and deploy the vessels.

Site plans for inshore and offshore reef construction are currently being made for this year's upcoming deployment. Biological assessments are beginning this month on the Florida Limestone Pyramids that were deployed last year. This is a coordinated effort between DMR and Mississippi State University.

There are 56 charter boats participating in the finfish recovery program. As of January 31, 2008, 4,084 charter trips have been reported. The charter vessel fisheries recovery report program is ongoing.

In February, the Finfish Bureau held a public meeting for eligible Commercial finfish license holders to provide information on contract work which requires data collection by fishermen. That program is scheduled to begin March 15, 2008 and continue until March 14, 2009.

A program for the release and monitoring of hatchery raised red snapper on Mississippi's offshore artificial reef sites began March 1, 2007 and will continue for the next 30 months. Currently red snapper larvae have been reared under experimental conditions and optimal feeding rates have been tested. Wild stock will be caught in the spring of 2008 and strip spawned. These fish will be reared to three to five inches then released on Mississippi's offshore reefs.

In February the Commission of Marine Resources voted to reduce the minimum length of spotted seatrout from 14 inches to 13 inches. There were 3 public hearing, one in each of the coastal counties of Mississippi for public input.

There were 2 new state record fish caught using conventional tackle
Snowy Grouper (*Epinephelus niveatus*) – 16 lbs. 7 oz.
Goldface Tilefish (*Caulolatilus chrysops*) – 2 lbs. 15 oz.

And one using fly fishing tackle
Sand Seatrout (*Cynoscion arenarius*) – 1 lb. 0.96 oz.

Louisiana TCC Report

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita had significant impacts not only on fisheries infrastructure but also on Marine Fisheries coastal facilities. Coastal facilities for CSA 1 (Slidell) and CSA 2 (New Orleans) were either destroyed or closed, but these employees have been reestablished in other state facilities. Boat-houses or camps were destroyed or damaged in CSAs V (Houma), VI (New Iberia), and VII (Lake Charles), and the office for the later was damaged.

The status of field offices and staff follows:

- Site preparation work for a new Marine Lab on Grand Isle was completed in summer 2007 and facility construction began during summer 2007. Estimated completion date is fall 2008. Current funding is from federal Sport Fish Restoration and state Artificial Reef funds.
- Slidell field office staff has set up a temporary office at the Department's Lacombe Fish Hatchery while seeking a replacement site near the Rigolettes.
- The Oyster Lease Survey Section currently is currently housed at the University of New Orleans campus; CSA2 staff are scheduled to move from their temporary Baton Rouge office to the UNO location in March 2008.
- The CSA V field substation at Sister Lake was heavily damaged and repairs to the camp building were completed, then subsequently the camp building was destroyed by fire in March, 2007. Plans to replace the facility are under development.
- The CSA VI field substation at Cypremort Point was damaged by storm surge, and plans to repair the facility are under development.
- Replacement of the CSA VII boathouse is pending.

Coastal fisheries infrastructure has improved, but numerous facilities remain closed. As of the end of mid-January 2008, 114 of 156 recreational facilities and 110 of 136 commercial facilities were fully operational. The closed and partially operational facilities occur primarily in southwest and southeast LA coast.

Hurricane Disaster Relief

Work continues with the first Congressional appropriation for Hurricane Katrina and Rita disaster relief of 53 million dollars. Contracts were signed with Postlethwaite and Netterville, a professional accounting corporation, and South Central Planning and Development Commission to deal with the fiscal aspects of the program. Three different jobs were included.

Job 1 (reseeding, rehabilitating, and restoring private and public oyster reefs) includes 22.9 million dollars, with 60% for private leases and 40% for public grounds.

The Private Oyster Lease Rehabilitation, or POLR, program provides reimbursement assistance to private oyster leaseholders who perform documented eligible rehabilitation activities (ie., sediment/debris removal, cultch planting, transplanting oyster from polluted to clean waters, bedding of oysters, resurveying/remarking leases, and replacement of lost/damaged lease records).

Approximately 580 leaseholders accounting for approximately 255,000 acres of leased water bottoms are under contract with the Department for the POLR program. Approximately \$3.5 million in rehabilitation work by leaseholders has been reimbursed to-date. There is a \$200K cap on reimbursements paid to any one single person. The POLR program will be completed in July 2009.

Two 2.0 million, 150-acre public reef rehabilitation projects in Mississippi Sound and Black Bay, both public oyster areas east of the Mississippi River, have been completed. Additional cultch plants may be made in 2008.

A Request For Proposal (RFP) has been released to digitize all of the historical oyster lease location data.

Several components in Job 2 (oyster bed and shrimp ground rehabilitation) have been accomplished or proposed:

- Contracts were signed with Crowder Gulf Joint Venture for marine debris cleanup using commercial fishermen and with the Dept of Natural Resources for removal of larger marine debris items that would require specialized equipment. Cleanup activities have been conducted in Lake Borgne, Lake Pontchartrain Middle Grounds, and Calcasieu Lake.
- Transfer of funds to the Dept. Natural Resources Gear Compensation Program to compensate fishermen for interactions with underwater debris and loss of fishing gear.
- Use of underwater debris logbooks by fishermen and other industry personnel.

Several habitat restoration/protection are proposed:

- An upper marsh management project for joint enhancement of waterfowl and marine organisms.
- The use of cultch for shoreline stabilization.

A RFP is being developed for an upgrade to our fishery independent data management program.

Job 3 (cooperative research to monitor recovery) includes various surveys of commercial fishermen, seafood dealers, recreational fishermen, and logbooks for charter boat captains and commercial fishermen.

A second Congressional disaster relief appropriation of 41.273 million dollars was also received, with a 71% commercial and 29% recreational split in funds. Authorized uses of funds include:

- Personal assistance;
- Assistance for small businesses serving the fishing industry;
- Domestic seafood marketing and promotion;
- Seafood testing programs;

- Developing limited entry programs;
- Incentives for TED and BRD use; and
- Voluntary capacity reduction programs for shrimp fisheries

The Department held eight public hearings with representatives from the recreational and commercial fishing sectors from October 4 through October 16 to obtain input on the distribution of these disaster funds.

Resident commercial fishermen and wholesale/retail seafood dealers with trip ticket recorded sales or purchases during the year prior to Hurricane Katrina, commercial fishing vessel owners, and charterboat interests qualify for some level of personal assistance. Two percent (\$825,460) of the available appropriation will be disbursed to fishermen with a demonstrated record of compliance with turtle excluder and bycatch reduction device regulations. Plans to include recreational fishing access enhancement and outreach are being developed.

LDWF is also working in an advisory and support role with the Louisiana Recovery Authority (LRA), LA Planning and Development Districts, LA Seafood Promotion and Marketing Board, LSU AgCenter and LA Fishing Community Recovery Coalition on plans for small firm recovery loan and grant program and for financial and technical assistance to fishermen and small businesses. LRA has earmarked approximately \$19 million in infrastructure funds to assist fishermen and small businesses in their recovery.

In addition to Katrina/Rita disaster relief activities, several other oyster programs were implemented using other disaster monies.

The Oyster Resource Improvement Project is a 1.2 million dollar federal project in response to impacts to those areas from Hurricane Ivan in September 2004. St. Bernard and Plaquemines Parish governments were contracted to hire licensed oyster fishermen to probe the water bottoms and report on water bottom type and condition. Field work was completed in January and February 2006, and the project is due to be completed in Summer 2008.

The Oyster Rehabilitation and Promotion Project was in response to impacts associated with Hurricane Lili in October 2002. A water bottom assessment has been completed via side-scan sonar by LSU in Hackberry Bay and Sister Lake Public Oyster Seed Reservations, and new cultch plants were later made. This project is scheduled to be completed in July 2008.

The Wildlife and Fisheries Commission imposed a moratorium on leasing of previously unleased waterbottoms for oyster cultivation on 07 March 2002 to reduce the state's exposure to potential claims from oyster leaseholders regarding damages from the state's coastal restoration program. A resolution for the Commission to partially lift the moratorium to allow processing of oyster lease applications that were pending as of March 7, 2002 was passed during the 2007 Regular Legislative Session. Department staff are working with the Louisiana Oyster Task Force to develop a plan for lifting the moratorium.

On January 2, 2008 the LDWF mailed the first wave of compensation invoices for coastal use permit projects between July 1, 2003 and June 30, 2005 that impacted the public oyster seed

grounds. Compensation for impacts to the public oyster grounds is required by Louisiana law. The total amount invoiced was \$4,844,606.16; however, this may not reflect the actual amount received due to the possibility that some permitted projects were not initiated. An on-going review is in progress to determine amounts due for projects permitted prior to July 1, 2003 as well as after June 30, 2005.

A LDWF activity related to blue crabs is the removal of derelict crab traps from coastal waters under the Abandoned Crab Trap Removal Program. While a total of 15,950 derelict crab traps have been removed from Louisiana coastal waters during four years of crab trap cleanups, a decline in volunteer participation and traps collected has taken place. One crab trap closure and clean up is proposed for 2008. A 9-day closure is established from 6:00 a.m., February 23 through 6:00 a.m. March 3 within a portion of the Terrebonne Bay estuary between Bayou Pointe au Chenes and Bayou Little Caillou.

The Louisiana Crab Task Force has continued to meet and address issues that confront the industry. The task force is planning to introduce legislation to implement a 'shipment fee' on crabs shipped out of state, with the money dedicated to crab marketing and promotion.

The Maritime Administration (MARAD) has a program to dispose of old government ships. The program was halted in 2006 due to concerns over the practices related to aquatic invasive species and water quality issues. One of the pre-approved contractors is located in Louisiana. Working with the contractor, a plan was developed to allow import of these obsolete vessels from the Beaumont fleet into Louisiana for dismantling after evaluating the ships for their potential to introduce non-native aquatic species into Louisiana and providing measures to minimize the chance of that occurrence. Ships from the James River, VA and San Francisco Bay, CA sites have not been allowed due to concerns over invasive species.

One controversial habitat issue concerns the possible use of concrete mats to cover exposed pipelines in Louisiana inshore waters. Because of eventual land loss, these concrete mats could end up in open water and become hazards to navigation and shrimp fishermen.

The Artificial Reef Coordinator position, long held by Rick Kasprzak, has been filled by Doug Peter. He has substantial experience with the Texas artificial reef program. The Louisiana Artificial Reef program currently has over 100 structural proposals at some stage of development, from initial discussions through near completion. Much of this intensity of development is due to the effects of the 2005 hurricanes on the offshore oil and gas industry, and the planning efforts of the industry to minimize damages through future hurricanes.

Texas TCC Report

During January, Coastal Fisheries held public scoping meetings in Port Arthur, Dickinson, Port Aransas, and Port Isabel to explore four items in advance of the 2008 statewide hunting and fishing proclamation process. In particular, Coastal Fisheries wanted to explore possible changes in the current red snapper and shark regulations to attain greater consistency between current federal regulations and state regulations. Also, the ongoing fishery for menhaden in Texas state waters was reviewed, and the possibility of closing Texas state waters to the commercial harvest of menhaden was scoped. In addition, a voluntary coastal fishing guides program was scoped within the statewide process, although it may not require a regulatory change. This item considers the creation of a Texas Saltwater Certified Guides Program which would establish a certification program by the department, which may include safety, angler ethics and various training to promote the protection of coastal natural resources. The 4 public scoping meetings collectively drew more than 360 attendees with an additional 135 written comments received, an unusually high turnout for so early in the regulations process, which indicated a strong constituency interest in these topics. During 23 January 2008, the TPW Commission met and decided not to change TPWD's current red snapper and shark regulations to become more consistent with federal regulations. Although the Commission was silent on the voluntary coastal fishing guides program, Coastal Fisheries will continue working with the guide community to discuss and develop a program. The Commission did decide to continue with a proposal regarding the menhaden fishery in Texas waters. The proposal takes a precautionary ecosystem-based, predator/prey approach with the management of the menhaden fishery in Texas waters and proposes a Total Allowable Catch limit on gulf menhaden caught in the Texas Territorial Sea but landed commercially in Louisiana, with the TAC set at the 5-year (2002-2006) average of 31.5 million pounds per year. During February and March, TPWD took the TAC proposal to 22 public hearings statewide, including 4 which were held on the coast.

President George W. Bush signed an executive order in October to protect red drum and striped bass. This order prohibits the sale of striped bass and red drum caught in federal waters and encourages periodic federal stock assessments of the species. It also directs federal agencies to work with state officials "to find innovative ways to help conserve striped bass and red drum populations, including the use of the State designation of 'gamefish,' where appropriate, to prohibit commercial sales of the fish." This executive order establishes the same protection for red drum in federal waters that is already established in Texas state waters, but will help protect spawning stocks of red drum in federal waters if harvest of the species is allowed again there.

All ongoing routine life history special studies continued, including the FIN biological sampling program. Coastal Fisheries' Life History Team continued collecting and processing sand seatrout samples for a life history study. They continue collecting red drum otoliths from gill net samples for an age analysis study, and spotted seatrout otoliths, from a sex ratio study, also will be used for an age analysis study.

Coastal Fisheries Genetics Team continued collecting finclip samples from southern flounder and alligator gar for genetic variation studies. Red drum fin clip and otolith collections continue for a DNA project being conducted by Dr. John Gold at Texas A&M University.

The USTS Texas Clipper received national news headlines when it 'went down' in history on Saturday, 17 November 2007 off South Padre Island. After windy weather caused a two-day delay, the Texas Clipper was sunk to create Texas' newest artificial reef. After valves were opened to flood the ship, it took about two hours for the Clipper to start sinking, but she went down fast in the final minutes. The 473-foot, 7,000-ton ship was reefed in about 134 feet of water, 17 nautical miles off the coast. After the Texas Artificial Reef Program staff did a technical dive to visually inspect the ship to make sure it was safe for the public, it was opened to recreational diving. Unfortunately, the Clipper settled on its port side, so the Artificial Reef team is working with the reefing contractor to explore options to erect the ship on the bottom. Although this project cost about \$4 million, it is expected to generate \$10 million-to-\$50 million per year in fishing and diving tourism economic benefits for local communities over the anticipated 50-year life of the reef.

Round #21 of TPWD's inshore shrimp license buyback program closed on 15 October 2007. A total of 69 inshore shrimp licenses (32 bay and 37 bait) were purchased at a cost of \$563,590, with an average of \$8,167 and a range of \$2,500 to \$10,000. An additional 4 licenses (2 bay and 2 bait), held from a previous round pending a law enforcement investigation, were also purchased for \$31,690. Since 1996, 938 bay and 920 bait licenses for a total of 1,859 shrimp licenses have been purchased by this program at a cost of \$11.9 million, representing a 57% reduction in licenses being sold (1,859 buy backs / 3,231 original licenses). Round # 8 of TPWD's crab license buyback program closed on 15 October 2007. A total of 6 licenses were purchased at a cost of \$42,000, with all purchases costing \$7,000. Since December 2001, TPWD has purchased 35 commercial crab licenses at a cost of \$188,849, with an average cost of \$5,396. This represents a 12% reduction in licenses being sold (35 buy backs / 287 original licenses). Round 11 of TPWD's inshore shrimp license buyback program closed on 15 October 2007. A total of 16 finfish licenses were purchased at a cost of \$97,700, with an average of \$6106 and a range of \$4000 to \$7500. Since September 2002, 177 finfish licenses have been purchased at a total cost of \$896,004, with an average of cost of \$5,062. This represents a 32% reduction in licenses being sold (177 buybacks / 549 original licenses).

During mid-February's Texas Abandoned Crab Trap Removal Project, 1,100 crab traps were removed coastwide by 63 volunteers and staff. Most traps came out of Galveston Bay (~43%) and San Antonio Bay (~32%). During the last 7 years, this program has removed 23,846 abandoned traps.

As part of this Commission's Emergency Disaster Relief Program, Texas has acquired high-resolution sidescan sonar and bathymetry equipment and has begun mapping oyster habitat in Galveston Bay and will be relocating equipment to Sabine Lake later this spring. Oyster leaseholders in Galveston Bay will be meeting with TPWD and Department of State Health Services (Seafood and Aquatic Life Group) staff in mid-March to discuss options for implementing part of the Vibrio Management Plan as it relates to *V. parahaemolyticus*. Indications from DSHS are that the time-temperature matrix will be tightened whereby oysters must be under refrigeration within 5 hours of the first oyster hitting the deck of the boat. TPWD staff will begin a survey of commercial oyster dredges this spring to get a better handle on the types of dredges that are currently being used. Complaints have been received from some industry participants that dredges are being modified (but still within the legal definition of the

gear) such that they may be fishing the substrate harder and may subsequently be having an adverse impact on oyster habitat. The Nature Conservancy received notification of approval of an \$800,000 grant to restore oyster habitat at Half-Moon Reef in Matagorda Bay. Also, CCA-TX has contacted TPWD about opportunities to assist in restoration efforts of oyster habitat in Texas estuaries.

In February, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration advised commercial seafood processors not to accept certain kinds of fish from the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary area due to ciguatera toxin, and the Texas Department of State Health Services advised recreational fishermen and other consumers not to eat the fish since cooking does not affect the toxin. The warnings followed several human cases of ciguatera fish poisoning being linked to eating certain fish from the area.

During mid-January, an orange surf event occurred between the 35 and 40-mile markers of Padre Island National Seashore and in the Aransas Pass Channel. The bloom was found to contain a species of Noctiluca, which is nontoxic but routinely turn the water orange as well as bioluminescence.

Carter Smith was named executive director of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department by the TPW Commission on December 5, 2007. Smith has been with The Nature Conservancy of Texas since 1998 and has been the state director since 2004. In mid-February, Coastal Fisheries staff met in Galveston to discuss how various coastal fisheries pieces fit together for ecosystem management. Topics presented included ecosystem modeling, new technologies such as side scan sonar, legislative issues such as water for wildlife, red drum genetics studies, the Red Fish Bay State Scientific Area seagrass protection effort, and various wetland restoration projects. The Coastal Fisheries field station at Port O'Connor is in poor condition and ill-suited for fisheries management operations that are housed on the site. Funding to remove the existing building and construct a new office/lab facility was approved in 2007. The new facility is currently in the design phase and is approximately 25% complete. Under ideal conditions, construction of the new facility could begin in the fall of 2008 and be completed in 2009. The total budget for the project facility is approximately \$2 million.

The Texas Environmental Flows Advisory Group, authorized by SB3, met for the first time this week. The Advisory Group acknowledged that it missed several legislative deadlines due to a delay in appointing all members of the group. November 1, 2007 was the deadline for defining the geographical extent of each river basin and bay system and for appointing basin and bay stakeholder groups for the Sabine/ Neches system and Trinity/San Jacinto system. At its next meeting the Advisory Group is expected to consider for adoption the river basin boundaries used by the Texas Water Development Board. Nominations for the Sabine/Neches and Trinity/San Jacinto basin and bay stakeholder groups are being accepted until March 14.

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's Wildlife Division commissioned the Southwick group to ascertain the economic effect from fish and wildlife-related recreation in Texas. According to their report, the economic effect from Texas hunters, anglers and wildlife watchers was estimated to be \$14.4 billion. The total Texas economic impact from sportfishing accounted for \$4.73 billion (\$2.93 billion from freshwater and \$1.79 billion from saltwater). There were

1.1 million saltwater anglers (residents and nonresidents), fishing a total of 15.1 million days in Texas, the survey indicated. Of the total saltwater anglers in Texas, 1.07 million were state residents and 76,946 were nonresidents. Most fishing effort was directed at redfish.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service TCC Report

A new Assistant Director for Fisheries and Habitat Conservation was appointed in November 2007 following the retirement of Dr. Mamie Parker. The new Assistant Director is Gary Frazer. He has served in a number of positions in the field, the headquarters office, and in the Interior Department. He most recently served for three years as the Fish and Wildlife Service's (FWS) liaison to the US Geological Survey.

The Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) received its Fiscal Year (FY 2008) budget through the Consolidated Appropriations Act for 2008 that the President signed in December 2007. The FWS Resource Management appropriations totaled almost \$1.08 billion, an approximate \$60 million increase over the FY 2007 enacted level. The Fisheries Program's appropriation was \$126.5 million, a \$9.3 million increase. The Aquatic Habitat and Species Conservation Subactivity, which funds FWS fishery management work, received about \$53.7 million, an increase of about \$8.2 million. Allocations within the subactivity and to the regions have not yet been totally completed, although a total of \$2.4 million has been allocated to fund 63 projects in 28 states under the National Fish Habitat Action Plan.

The President's FY 2009 budget request to the Congress for Resource Management was about \$1.07 billion, about \$10 million less than the FY 2008 enacted level. Most of the reductions would be in construction and land acquisition. The request for the Endangered Species Program is \$146.8 million, about \$3.7 million less than for 2008. The request for Fisheries is \$116.6 million, a decrease of \$9.9 million from the 2008 level. Included within that amount is a request for Aquatic Habitat and Species Conservation of \$47.3 million, which is about \$6.4 million less than in 2008, including a major decrease for fish passage of \$5.9 million.

The final numbers for Kemp's ridley sea turtle nesting on the Mexican beaches in 2007 were 15,032 registered nests and 1,023,675 hatchlings released. In 2006 the number of recorded nests was 12,143.

The NOAA Fisheries Service and FWS were petitioned November 15, 2007 to change the listing of the western North Atlantic loggerhead sea turtle population from threatened to endangered status under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The NOAA Fisheries Service has the lead for responding to the petition and issuing the 90-day finding. The draft Atlantic Loggerhead Sea Turtle Recovery Plan is still under agency review.

In the on-going water crisis in the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint (ACF) rivers watershed due to drought conditions in the Southeast, the FWS received an Exceptional Drought Operation (EDO) plan from the US Army Corps of Engineers (CE) in November for reducing water releases from the basin's reservoirs, primarily Lake Lanier in Georgia. The EDO calls for reducing flows into the Apalachicola River incrementally to 4,750, 4,500 and perhaps eventually to 4,150 cubic feet per second (CFS), depending on continuing severity of the drought and any agreements that the states of Georgia and Florida may develop. The FWS conducted a formal Section 7 consultation on the EDO to evaluate potential effects of the plan on the Gulf sturgeon, fat threeridge mussel and the purple bankclimber mussel, which are listed as endangered or threatened under the ESA. The FWS issued a biological opinion (BO) in a compressed

timeframe that the continued existence of the three species would not be jeopardized nor their critical habitat adversely modified by reductions to 4,500 feet prior to June 1, 2008. The FWS was unable to complete the consultation for the 4,150 CFS level in the time frame available. The CE is expected to determine criteria that may call for reducing flow to 4,150 CFS and re-initiate consultation with the FWS by April 15. The FWS will then develop a supplemental BO at that flow level for the three species.

The drought in the Southeast has affected the Alabama-Coosa-Tallapoosa (ACT) river basin in Alabama and Georgia similarly to the ACF. The ACT hosts 27 federally-listed aquatic species. The FWS has been monitoring the effects of drought and reduced flows on the species that are being affected and have been in close consultation with the CE and Alabama Power, which operate dams on the river. The Alabama Power dam operations are subject to licensing provisions of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.

Jim Boggs was selected in December as the new Field Supervisor of the FWS Louisiana Ecological Services Field Office in Lafayette. Mr. Boggs had been serving as Deputy Field Supervisor of the field office for four years.

The FWS added black carp to the list of injurious fish under the Lacey Act on October 18, 2007. The action prohibits import and interstate transport of live black carp or viable eggs and hybrids. The species can potentially cause severe harm to native mussel populations. Black carp were originally imported into the country in 1973 by accident along with other Chinese carp species. In the early 1980s they were deliberately introduced to aquaculture ponds for biological control of fish parasites through predation on mussels in the ponds. The FWS action does not prohibit intrastate movement of the species.

The FWS announced the distribution of Sport Fish Restoration apportionments to the states on February 22. The 2008 total apportionments were \$398 million.

The awards of Boating Infrastructure Grants to the states were announced on February 13. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department received more than \$366,000 to construct 16 slips for visiting boaters in the Port Aransas Municipal Harbor and more than \$660,000 to construct 48 permanent slips for visiting boaters in the Nautical Landings Marina at Port Lavaca.


On February 4 the FWS published a proposal in the Federal Register to remove the remaining protected populations of the brown pelican from protection under the ESA. Some of the protected populations occur along the Gulf coast in Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas. The species had been de-listed in Alabama and Florida in 1985. The FWS is accepting comments on the proposal through April 21 this year. The proposal is available at <http://www.fws.gov/policy/library/E8-2829.html>.

As part of the Living Shoreline Initiative (LSLI), the FWS Coastal Program in the Florida Panhandle assisted the Alabama, Florida and Mississippi Sea Grant Extension offices in sponsoring a workshop for property owners, marine contractors, consultants, coastal managers, and regulators working in these states' coastal areas. About 100 participants attended the event at the Five-Rivers Delta Resource Center in Spanish Fort, Alabama, in November 2007. The

workshop focused on the use of “soft” alternatives instead of seawalls to protect eroding shorelines. The workshop may be followed by others in the future.

**STATE-FEDERAL FISHERIES MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
MINUTES – 58th Annual Spring Meeting
Wednesday, March 12, 2008
Galveston, Texas**

APPROVED BY:


COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

Chairman **J. Roussel** called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. Facilitator **D. Donaldson** conducted the meeting. The following members and others were present:

Members

Doug Frugé, USFWS, Ocean Springs, MS
Steve Heath, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL
Corky Perret, *GSMFC Commissioner*, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Mike Ray, *GSMFC Commissioner*, TPWD, Austin, TX
John Roussel, *GSMFC Commissioner*, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Larry Simpson, (non-voting) GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Roy Crabtree, NMFS, St. Petersburg, FL
Virginia Vail, *GSMFC Commissioner*, FFWCC, Tallahassee, FL

Others

Samuel Rauch, NOAA, Silver Spring, MD
Dale Diaz, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Ellie Roche, NOAA/SERO, St. Petersburg, FL
Joe Gill, *GSMFC Commissioner*, MS
Joe Smith, NMFS, Beaufort, SC
William Walker, *GSMFC Commissioner*, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Borden Wallace, Daybrook Fisheries, Empire, LA
Chris Moore, NOAA, Silver Spring, MD
Richard Cody, FWC/FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Ed Swindell, Marine Process Services, Hammond, LA
Todd Neahr, TPWD, Corpus Christi, TX
Shane Bonnot, TPWD, Houston, TX
Leslie Williams, TPWD, Houston, TX

Staff

Dave Donaldson, Facilitator, Assistant Director, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Gregg Bray, RecFIN(SE) Programmer/Analyst, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Joe Ferrer, Systems Administrator, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Ralph Hode, Disaster Program, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Jeff Rester, SEAMAP/Habitat Coordinator, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Steve VanderKooy, IJF Program Coordinator, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Wendy Garner, Accountant, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Adoption of Agenda

M. Ray moved to accept the agenda and without opposition, the agenda was adopted.

Approval of Minutes

D. Fruge moved to approve the minutes from October 17, 2007 in Point Clear, Alabama. **M. Ray** seconded and the minutes were approved as written.

Menhaden Advisory Committee Report

S. VanderKooy provided the MAC report. **VanderKooy** reported that **Joe Smith** had provided the NOAA review of the 2007 season and the forecast for 2008. Final landings for Gulf menhaden was 453,832 metric tons. **Smith** reported that based on the 2007 effort and expecting 40 boats in 2008, the landings should be around 460,000 MT. **Smith** also provided an update on the Atlantic menhaden fishery for 2007 and the forecast. Final landings were around 174,455MT which was up 6% over 2006. Only one plant operated on the Atlantic at Reedville, VA and 10 boats. The forecast for 2008 Atlantic menhaden landings are expected to be around 185,000MT.

Smith had been asked last year to look at alternatives for estimating effort in the reduction fishery other than vessel-ton-weeks. He provided a couple of options that looked promising and accounted for more real fishing days than the old method. He will examine this further and report in the fall.

Vince Guillory provided the Louisiana forecast which uses several parameters. **Guillory** noted that east of the Mississippi River, the juvenile indices are higher than the long-term mean for the last several years, likely in response to the Canarvon water diversion. **Guillory** estimates that the LA harvest should be around 365,000-440,000MT in 2008.

Matthew Cieri, Maine Department of Natural Resources, provided an excellent presentation on an expanded Multi-Species VPA looking at the interactions between Atlantic menhaden and its predators. This approach includes the additional biomass and size structure of prey other than menhaden such as bay anchovy, other clupeids, benthic invertebrates, and macrozooplankton. Based on the available diet information on the Atlantic, menhaden don't play as large a role in the predators of concern and in fact are frequently replaced by several other prey both seasonally and ontogenetically.

Jerry Mambretti reported on several management actions which are being considered in Texas including a possible closure of state waters to menhaden fishing. **After considerable discussion by the MAC, a motion was made to ask the SFFMC to have the GSMFC send a letter to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department indicating the concern of the Menhaden Advisory Committee in proposing a TAC for the reduction fishery and request additional information on how the TAC will be administered and enforced. The Motion was passed by the MAC with one member abstaining.**

J. Rester provided a short update on the LNG activities in the Gulf and spoke on three facilities at this time; the Energy Bridge, the Bienville Offshore Energy Terminal, and a closed-loop system proposed off Tampa, Florida.

Finally, under other business the MAC discussed the book written by H. Bruce Franklin entitled "The Most Important Fish in the Sea." The author recounts the history of the reduction fishery along the Atlantic and Gulf and attempts to use pseudo-science to show the fishery as overfished and unmanaged. The MAC and other scientists in the audience agreed that the book should be sold as a book of fiction and generally disregarded. *The SFFMC decided that rather than address the book itself, they would take another look at the GSMFC Gulf Menhaden Website and make sure it is accurate, clear, and available as a response to these attacks. Staff would provide the link to the SFFMC for their review and consideration.*

J. Roussel made the motion to adopt the MAC motion to have the GSMFC send a letter to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department as well as the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission. **C. Perret** seconded the motion. **M. Ray** spoke against the GSMFC providing any comment on the Texas issue but noted that the GSMFC is an excellent forum to discuss these types of issues. **Ray** stated that sending any letter especially in its current form, is inflammatory and inappropriate. **Roussel** indicated that accepting the motion would simply recognize that a letter would be drafted but the SFFMC would have time to review and revise a draft letter before it is presented to the full Commission who would have additional editorial license. **Perret** noted that while this is a Texas state issue, this is already being used by groups in the other Gulf States to take actions against the reduction fishery and as such, it is necessary for the GSMFC to provide comment. **Roussel** expressed that the MAC motion stated that a letter simply needs to indicate a concern regarding the action from the MAC and that the GSMFC is looking for some additional information from Texas on this issue. With no further discussion the motion passed with **M. Ray** opposing the motion. Staff was directed to work with **Ray** and the SFFMC and revise the draft letter for the Commission's discussion and consideration at the upcoming Business Session.

The MAC report was accepted without objection.

Commercial Recreational Fisheries Advisory Panel Report

S. VanderKooy provided the CRFAP report on behalf of Philip Horn who was unable to stay. The CRFAP met Monday afternoon with a quorum and covered several items. **D. Donaldson** provided an overview of the Marine Recreational Information Program. He also provided a brief synopsis of the planned economic data collection to be conducted through the GSMFC. **Billy Causey** provided a very broad overview of the "Islands in the Stream" concept in addressing Marine Protected Areas.

Jon Dodrill, FWC, presented an overview of the artificial reef programmatic management issues in Northwest Florida specifically addressing the Large Area Artificial Reef Sites (LAARS). The lack of performance and compliance monitoring of the LAARS program, coupled with concerns over materials has resulted in increased scrutiny and special condition requirements that the ACOE and other agencies are currently applying to this program in the permit review and reauthorization process. After considerable discussion, the CRFAP offered the following motion for the SFFMC consideration and action. *The CRFAP moves to request the GSMFC convene and support a meeting of the ACOE from Jacksonville and Mobile, the Artificial Reef Subcommittee, and other commercial and recreational stakeholders to address the current*

LAARS program and address the weaknesses identified in the recent comments presented by the FWC Jon Dodrill and the ACOE. This would include addressing the use of chicken transport devices, or CTDs, and determining acceptable monitoring requirements for private reef builders within the approved LAARS.

R. Hode provided a broad overview of the proposed and on-going EDRP I and II activities and **S. VanderKooy** provided a short summary of the IJF program activities since the last meeting of the Panel.

R. Crabtree seconded the motion presented in the CRFAP report regarding the LAARS. The Escambia County permit up for renewal and there is some debate because of the possibility of sea turtles becoming entrapped in some materials. This site is also proposed for a ten-fold expansion. There is a short time period on this as the ACOE is currently reviewing the comments already submitted for the Escambia permit. **V. Vail** reported that the Bay and Okaloosa Counties permits will be coming up for review in the near future as well and could be affected by this process. The reef permitting in Florida is handled by the Jacksonville ACOE office and the Mobile office is in charge of navigation/waterways in this area as well as Alabama reef sites. Therefore there appears to be overlap issues in the LAARS site. **S. Heath** suggested that perhaps the New Orleans ACOE office needs to be included in any meeting. **Heath** mentioned there have been reports of problems with the CDTs but generally they don't appear to be moving or causing problems on follow-up by the ADCNR office. **Roussel** noted that this issue should have been handled by the Artificial Reef Subcommittee through the TCC. However, it is a significant issue and should be addressed or examined by the New Orleans District as well. **The CRFAP motion was accepted by the SFFMC. Staff was directed to host a meeting with the Artificial Reef Subcommittee and other interested parties on this soon since the permit process will be over in 4-6 weeks.**

The CRFAP report was accepted without objection.

FIN Data Program

D. Donaldson reported on the FIN Program and noted that the 2008 cooperative agreement for FIN has been submitted. The total budget was \$5.3 M with an addition \$500K for the MRIP projects in Florida and Puerto Rico. **Donaldson** reported that the program got \$4.2 M from the Gulf FIN line item and \$650K from the Gulf's portion of RecFIN. Also, NOAA HQ provided an additional \$250K and there was carryover from SERO (administrative) and Miami Lab (headboat sampling) to get to the \$5.3M total. FIN needed to take a 0.6% cut across the board due to a funding shortfall. It was noted that the SERO initially took \$75K to cover their administrative costs but due to funding shortfalls in FIN, **R. Crabtree** agreed to not charge FIN any administrative fees for 2008. The cooperative agreement needs to be reviewed by Grants Management and GSMFC should have subawards ready by April. **Donaldson** mentioned that 2009 will likely be a tough budget period with a new administration coming in and the possibility of Congress passing a Continuing Resolution and looking at a \$500K cut for next year.

Nominations for 2008 NOAA Leadership Awards

S. VanderKooy reported on the submission of the Kemp's Ridley Seaturtle Recovery Project in Rancho Nuevo for a Conservation Partnership Award. This is a national award program that identifies individuals, projects, and partnerships which work toward resource conservation and sustainability in fisheries. The Mississippi Department of Marine Resources provided a letter of support and the nominations are currently in review with the MAFAC panel. Announcements to recipients should occur in April with an awards ceremony in Washington D.C. in June.

NOAA Disaster Criteria

Samuel Rauch, NOAA, provided an overview of some of the issues that NOAA is encountering trying to come up with usable and appropriate criteria to declare a fisheries disaster. Under the reauthorization of Magnuson, there have been a few word changes that may include other criteria when determining disasters. A lot of time was spent identifying what types of disasters might qualify, such as man-made events and activities, which managers might be unable to mitigate and therefore qualify as a fishery disaster. **Rauch** pointed out that this was an on-going process and they anticipate having some draft criteria by June and should have them for public comment by the end of the year.

National Recreational Registration

D. Donaldson reported that there really wasn't much change since the meeting held in October 2007. He highlighted a few items and fielded a few questions. NOAA is still looking at using the recreational fishing licenses as a sampling frame. The GSMFC is conducting a pilot study in the Gulf and we are getting better preliminary data allowing for direct observation rather than correction factors. All Gulf states have recreational fishing licenses however the debate continues over the types of licenses, license exemptions, and required data fields on licenses such as phone numbers that would be usable in the registration system. When phone numbers aren't being provided, there has been a relatively successful effort to do reverse phone number lookups from the addresses provided.

Offshore Aquaculture Issues

J. Rester, proxy for Rick Leard who was unable to stay to present on the aquaculture activities at the Council level. He did provide a PowerPoint presentation that **Rester** presented which identified most of the Council's preferred options in the draft amendment.

IJF Report

S. VanderKooy provided an overview of the activities under the IJF program since the last SFFMC meeting which included the Oyster FMP Revision, the *Arenarius* Profile, Derelict Trap Manual, and the Otolith Manual.

Habitat Report

J. Rester provided a short report on the Habitat program activities. The Gulf Council's LA/MS Habitat Protection AP met in October of last year and discussed several topics including the Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Plan, a summary of LACPR Habitat Evaluation Team, and potential habitat impacts from levee construction for hurricane protection around New Orleans.

The Commission reviewed the Gulf Hypoxia Action Plan 2008 back in December and sent a letter to the Task Force urging the Task Force not to weaken the Action Plan and do whatever necessary to reduce the nutrient loads entering the Gulf of Mexico. A 2008 journal article by Gene Turner and Nancy Rabalais stated that because of the yearly hypoxic zone, the northern Gulf of Mexico has potentially undergone an ecosystem shift. The potential size of the hypoxic zone for a given nitrogen load has increased as a result and has doubled from 1980 to 2000. They state that the Action Plan goal of reducing the size of the hypoxic zone to an average of 5,000 square kilometers by 2015 becomes more difficult to achieve for every year there is no significant reduction in nutrient loading.

Rester reported that work continued on the GSMFC Aquaculture Grant from NOAA Fisheries. The Commission will be developing a geographic information system (GIS) model for aquaculture site selection in the Gulf of Mexico. When completed the GIS information will be used to support the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council's Aquaculture Amendment.

Work on the Bottom Mapping Project has come to a stand still but **Rester** says the contractor has provided a timeline for completion and has stated that all final products will be delivered by the end of March 2008.

In 2005, the Department of Energy proposed to hollow out a salt dome in Richton, Mississippi for long term storage of US oil reserves. As proposed in the Final EIS, 50 million gallons of water per day would be taken from the Leaf River, pumped into the salt dome, and then the 260 ppt brine would be pumped 5 miles south of Horn Island and Mississippi Sound and is expected to increase the salinity by 4 parts per thousand for 0.9 square nautical miles surrounding the brine discharge and 1 parts per thousand for 5.9 nautical miles. **Rester** noted that a large part of the problem is that the public did not become aware of the project in October 2007. Even though they didn't receive much public comment, the Department of Energy plans to release a supplemental EIS some time in the future mainly due to the DOE changing their plans on withdrawing the water from the Pascagoula River rather than the Leaf River, the main tributary of the Pascagoula. **Rester** would keep the Commission updated on this as it progresses.

Other Business

D. Donaldson was commended on his first meeting as the facilitator of the SFFMC. **Simpson** acknowledged the regional and national attention to the Commission's Age and Growth Manual through the MARFIN program which requires the use of the outlined protocols in all MARFIN ageing-type studies. **Perret** recommended an update of some of the numbers in the Derelict Trap Fact sheet which was provided as part of a larger press release on the program.

With no further business, M. Kay moved to adjourn, C. Perret seconded and the meeting was completed at 11:08 a.m.

Joe Gill, Jr.

**COMMISSION BUSINESS MEETING
MINUTES - 58th Annual Spring Meeting
Wednesday, March 12, 2008
Galveston, Texas**

Vice Chairman Joe Gill called the meeting to order at 2:08 p.m.

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

Steve Heath, ADCNR/MRD, Gulf Shores, AL (*Proxy for Barnett Lawley*)
Hayden Dempsey, Tallahassee, FL
Virginia Vail, FWC, Tallahassee, FL (*Proxy for Ken Haddad*)
Butch Gautreaux, Louisiana Legislature, Morgan City, LA
John Roussel, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA (*Proxy for Dwight Landreneau*)
Mike Ray, TPWD, Austin, TX (*Proxy for Robert L. Cook*)
Joe Gill, Jr., Joe Gill Consulting, LLC, Ocean Springs, MS
Dale Diaz, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
William Perret, MDMR, Biloxi, MS

Staff

Larry Simpson, Executive Director, Ocean Springs, MS
Dave Donaldson, Assistant Director, Ocean Springs, MS
Ginny Herring, Administrative Officer, Ocean Springs, MS
Nancy Marcellus, Administrative Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS
Steve VanderKooy, IJF Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Jeff Rester, SEAMAP/Habitat Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Joe Ferrer, System Administrator, Ocean Springs, MS
Ralph Hode, EDRP Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Wendy Garner, Accountant, Ocean Springs, MS
Gregg Bray, RecFIN Programmer/Analyst, Ocean Springs, MS

Others

Roy Crabtree, NOAA/NMFS/SERO, St. Petersburg, FL
Doug Frugé, USFWS, Ocean Springs, MS
Ellie Roche, NOAA/NMFS/SERO, St. Petersburg, FL
Todd Neahr, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
Shane Bonnot, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
Leslie Williams, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
Jason Damen, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
Ed Swindell, Marine Process Service, LLC
Bonnie Ponwith, NMFS/SEFSC, Miami, FL
Chris Moore, NOAA Fisheries, Silver Spring, MD

Election of Officers

C. Perret moved to nominate Joe Gill as Chairman (due to the untimely death of Chairman Ralph Rayburn); John Roussel, Vice Chairman; Virginia Vail, 2nd Vice Chairman; and M. Ray to succeed R. Rayburn as representative on the Executive Committee. Without opposition the motion was approved by acclamation.

Adoption of Agenda

C. Perret moved to adopt the agenda. M. Ray seconded. The agenda was adopted as presented.

Approval of Minutes

C. Perret moved to adopt the minutes. M. Ray seconded. The minutes were adopted as presented.

GSMFC Standing Committee Reports

Law Enforcement Committee (LEC) – W. Chataginer reported that the LEC met on Tuesday, March 11, 2008.

He briefly reviewed several topics discussed by the LEC. The LEC received updates from the states and their federal partners regarding Joint Enforcement Agreements (JEAs). The 2% cut imposed by NOAA has impacted this program and the LEC hopes that Congressional support can alleviate future funding cuts. Other topics discussed were the enforcement section of the IJF Oyster Fishery Management Plan (FMP) and the Arenarius Technical Task Force (TTF).

The LEC received reports from S. VanderKooy who reported that all compliance information for the Emergency Disaster Relief Program (EDRP)/Bycatch Reduction Devices (BRDs) has been provided by the states and NOAA. It has been forwarded to the State Directors.

B. Causey with NOAA's National Marine Sanctuary Program presented "Islands in the Stream". The LEC discussed his Power Point presentation and felt that enforcement needs to be involved in any program regarding Marine Protected Areas (MAPs) from the beginning in order to best provide input.

On behalf of the LEC W. Chataginer recommended that the Commissioners write a letter of commendation for Bill Robinson. B. Robinson was the LEC representative from Texas. He stated that he is now retired but had brought great expertise to the law enforcement community and the LEC. He will be missed.

The LEC also requested that the Commission, along with the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, split the cost of a 2 – 3 day meeting to allow the LEC to review and update their *Strategic Operational Plan*. The plan has not been updated in two years.

J. Roussel moved to accept the report and recommendations. C. Perret seconded. The LEC report was accepted as presented.

Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) Report – C. Perret reported that the TCC met on Tuesday, March 11, 2008. He reported that the TCC held an abbreviated meeting in order to accommodate enough time to hold a symposium on the Commission's Billfish Program. They received written status reports from all of the Gulf states, NMFS and FWS. The following subcommittees reported to the TCC: Crab, SEAMAP, Data Management, Artificial Reef, Habitat, and Anadromous. He briefed the Commissioners on their activities. There was no action items presented.

V. Vail moved to accept the TCC report. S. Heath seconded. The TCC report was accepted as presented.

State-Federal Fisheries Management Committee (S-FFMC) Report – D. Donaldson reported that the S-FFMC met earlier in the day. The S-FFMC received reports from the Menhaden Advisory Committee (MAC) and the Joint Commercial/Recreational Fisheries Advisory Panel (CRFAP). They also heard updates on the Interjurisdictional Fisheries Program, Fisheries Information Network Program, Habitat Program, EDRP I and II. Other topics discussed included NOAA Disaster Criteria, National Recreation Registration, and Offshore Aquaculture Issues.

On behalf of the S-FFMC he recommended that the Commission send a letter to Texas Parks and Wildlife Department indicating the concern of the MAC in proposing a total allowable catch (TAC) for the reduction fishery and requested additional information on how the TAC will be administered and enforced. A draft letter was prepared and will be provided to the Commission prior to distribution if approved.

The MAC also discussed the book written by H. Bruce Franklin entitled *The Most Important Fish in the Sea*. This book contains strong accusations against the menhaden industry, NOAA Fisheries and the two Interstate Commissions. It has become a platform for non-government organizations that are trying to shut down the reduction fishery throughout the U.S. The consensus of the S-FFMC was that they should take a close look at the Commission's Gulf Menhaden website and insure that it is accurate, clear, and available as a response to any concerns that might occur.

J. Gill asked if there were any objections to the S-FFMC recommendations on behalf of the MAC. The recommendations were accepted as presented with one opposing vote.

The CRFAP discussed in detail a report presented by **Jon Dodrill** on artificial reef programmatic management issues in Northwest Florida. He described the Large Area Artificial Reef Sites (LAARS) as they were originally intended. He indicated that there are some "weaknesses" that need to be addressed that have been identified by numerous groups including FWS and the USCOE. Lack of performance and compliance monitoring, coupled with concerns over acceptable material has resulted in increased scrutiny and special condition requirements by the USCOE. On behalf of the S-FFMC he recommended that the Commission convene and support a meeting of the Jacksonville and Mobile USCOE, the TCC Artificial Reef Subcommittee, and

other commercial and recreational stakeholders to address the current LAARS program and to address the weaknesses identified by FWC's Jon Dodrill and the USCOE. This would include addressing the use of chicken transport devices (CTDs) and determining acceptable monitoring requirements for private reef builders within the approved LAARS.

J. Gill asked if there were any objections to the S-FFMC recommendations on behalf of the CRFAP. Without objection the recommendation was accepted as presented.

Other action of the S-FFMC included a nomination for the 2008 NOAA Leadership Awards. This is a national award program that identifies individuals, projects, and partnerships which work toward resource conservation and sustainability in fisheries. The Committee submitted the Kemp's Ridley Sea turtle Recovery Project in Rancho Nuevo for a Conservation Partnership Award.

V. Vail moved to accept the S-FFMC report. C. Perret seconded. The report was accepted as presented.

NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office

R. Crabtree reported on the activities of the SERO. In respect to Gulf fisheries management he updated the Commissioners on several issues.

In regards to the red snapper Individual Fishery Quotas (IFQ) Program which began in January 2007 he reported that they had 734 initial shareholders versus 677 shareholders at the end of the year. Total landings for the year were 2.9 million pounds, which is 96% of the overall quota. The geographic distribution of landings was as follows: Texas (41%); Florida (39%); Louisiana (16%); Mississippi (2%); and Alabama (2%). The average ex-vessel value was \$3.62 per pound. So far in 2008, total landings are 554,089 lbs. of red snapper under the IFQ Program.

He stated that a rule has been published in late February that revised the rebuilding plan for red snapper. It reduced the total allowable catch to 5 million lbs., reduced the commercial minimum size limit, reduced the recreational bag limit and shortened the season. Effective June 1, 2008 it will require reef fish fishermen to use venting tools, circle hooks and de-hookers to reduce release mortality. It also established an adjustable target red snapper bycatch reduction goal for the shrimp fishery that is to be managed with in-season area closures.

They have also published a rule to change the bycatch reduction device (BRD) certification rules. They will modify certification criterion for the western Gulf to match that of the eastern Gulf to 30% reduction in finfish biomass. It will also certify the Modified Jones-Davis BRD for use in the fishery and also provisionally certify the Composite Panel and Extended Funnel BRD. A second proposed rule is in the works and it will specify allowable BRDs, it would restrict the allowable placement of the Fisheye BRD.

The Gulf Council approved Amendment 30A for Secretarial review. That amendment will address the greater amberjack rebuilding and will also put in place a rebuilding plan for gray triggerfish. The Council is also working on an Amendment 30B which addresses regulatory

measures for the grouper fishery. They also continue to work on Amendment 29 which would put together an IFQ Program for the grouper fishery and on a Gulf Aquaculture amendment.

He updated the Commissioners on permit status in the Gulf. He reported that in regards to shrimp moratorium permits, there are now 1,932 permits issued, 1,330 active coastal migratory pelagic charter boat permits, and 1,294 active commercial reef fish charter boat permits. And they now have 889 active commercial reef fish moratorium permits.

Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS) have been required in the last year. He reported that 928 units have been installed in the reef fish fishery, 671 of them are now actively reporting. Other units have been powered off through the power down exemptions. It is estimated that there are 143 reef fish permit holders that have not yet purchased VMS units. They will not be allowed to renew their permits without doing so.

USFWS Region 4 Office Comments

Doug Frugé reported on behalf of USFWS. A new Assistant Director for Fisheries and Habitat Conservation was appointed in November 2007 following the retirement of Dr. Mamie Parker. The new Assistant Director is Gary Frazer. He has served in a number of positions in the field, the headquarters office, and in the Interior Department. He most recently served for three years as the Fish and Wildlife Service's (FWS) liaison to the US Geological Survey.

The final numbers for Kemps Ridley sea turtle nesting on the Mexican beaches in 2007 were 15,032 registered nests and 1,023,675 hatchlings released. In 2006 the number of recorded nests was 12,143.

The NOAA Fisheries Service and FWS were petitioned on November 15, 2007 to change the listing of the western North Atlantic loggerhead sea turtle population from threatened to endangered status under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The NOAA Fisheries Service has the lead for responding to the petition and issuing the 90-day finding. The draft Atlantic Loggerhead Sea Turtle Recovery Plan is still under agency review.

In the on-going water crisis in the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint (ACF) rivers watershed due to drought conditions in the Southeast, the FWS issued a biological opinion (BO) in November under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act on an Exceptional Drought Operation (EDO) Plan prepared by the US Army Corps of Engineers (COE) for reducing water releases from the basin's reservoirs, primarily Lake Lanier in Georgia. At issue were potential effects on Gulf sturgeon, fat three ridge mussel and the purple bank climber mussel populations, which are listed as endangered or threatened. The FWS found that the three species would not be jeopardized nor their critical habitat adversely modified by the proposed reductions to 4,500 cubic feet per second (CFS). However, additional analysis and a supplemental BO will be needed regarding reduction of flow to 4,150 CFS. The FWS is awaiting additional information from the COE on that and a request to re-initiate consultation, which is expected by April 15.

The drought in the Southeast has affected the Alabama-Coosa-Tallapoosa (ACT) river basin in Alabama and Georgia similarly to the ACF. The ACT hosts 27 federally-listed aquatic species.

The FWS has been monitoring the effects of drought and reduced flows on the species that are being affected and have been in close consultation with the COE and Alabama Power, which operate dams on the river. The Alabama Power dam operations are subject to licensing provisions of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.

Jim Boggs was selected in December as the new Field Supervisor of the FWS Louisiana Ecological Services Field Office in Lafayette. Mr. Boggs had been serving as Deputy Field Supervisor of the field office for four years.

The FWS added black carp to the list of injurious fish under the Lacey Act on October 18, 2007. The action prohibits import and interstate transport of live black carp or viable eggs and hybrids. The species can potentially cause severe harm to native mussel populations. Black carp were originally imported into the country in 1973 by accident along with other Chinese carp species. In the early 1980s they were deliberately introduced to aquaculture ponds for biological control of fish parasites through predation on mussels in the ponds. The FWS action does not prohibit intrastate movement of the species.

The FWS announced the distribution of Sport Fish Restoration apportionments to the states on February 22. The 2008 total apportionments were \$398 million.

The awards of Boating Infrastructure Grants to the states were announced on February 13. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department received more than \$366,000 to construct 16 slips for visiting boaters in the Port Aransas Municipal Harbor and more than \$660,000 to construct 48 permanent slips for visiting boaters in the Nautical Landings Marina at Port Lavaca.

On February 4 the FWS published a proposal in the *Federal Register* to remove the remaining protected populations of the brown pelican from protection under the ESA. Some of the protected populations occur along the Gulf coast in Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas. The species had been de-listed in Alabama and Florida in 1985. The FWS is accepting comments on the proposal through April 21 this year. The proposal is available at <http://www.fws.gov/policy/library/E8-2829.html>.

FY 2009 USFWS Budget

Doug Frugé reported on the FWS FY2009 budget. He provided "budget at a glance" information sheet for the Commissioners that represented the President's budget proposal for FWS for 2009.

This budget proposes some significant reductions across the board in FWS resource management accounts. He pointed out discretionary funding changes that have been proposed. Under Endangered Species, listing has been reduced by \$78,000 and recovery has been reduced by \$3,658,000. Under Habitat Conservation, partners for fish and wildlife have been reduced by \$2,646,000, Coastal Programs have been reduced by \$1,026,000 and National Wetlands Inventory has been cut by \$930,000. Under Refuges and Wildlife there has been a reduction of \$930,000. Migratory Bird Management has been increased by \$7,359,000. Reductions were also proposed under Law Enforcement, National Fish Hatchery Operations, Fish Passage

Improvements, and Aquatic Habitat & Species Conservation. Overall reductions for fisheries and aquatic resources amounted to \$11,496,000. The bottom line for resource management is a \$29,708,000 reduction.

He stated that this budget will probably not be acted on by Congress until after the Presidential election and after the new Congress comes into session. This proposal may or may not be what is actually acted on.

He reported on the Sport Fish Restoration Program. Although these funds are not appropriated funds it has been put into the budget based on projections. Total program changes amount to \$24,666,000 in reductions. He provided estimated apportionments for the various Gulf states for 2009. These estimates show a reduction from 2008 apportionments for all Gulf states except Texas.

Federal Budget Update

L. Simpson provided a budget summary on NOAA's FY2009 budget. Also included in the summary were NOAA's mission statement, an organizational chart, and NMFS program change highlights for informational purposes.

He pointed out that this was a proposed budget and probably no decisions will be final until after the Presidential election and when the new Congress is session. There are no large increases with the exception of SEAMAP in 2008. He pointed out that there was a slight decrease for regional councils, and increases for fisheries statistics and fish information networks.

L. Simpson reported that he did get to visit with Congressional delegates this year and provide information on two programs important to the Commission – FIN Program and the Interjurisdictional Fisheries Program.

Disaster Recovery Workshop and Emergency Disaster Recovery Program (EDRP) Update

R. Hode updated the Commissioners on the EDRP I. He gave a brief overview of the program and explained that the Commission is now administering two EDRP projects, hence the terms EDRP I and EDRP II.

He provided a detailed written report that described administrative and sub-award activities. He discussed accomplishments by project and reported on reimbursement by project.

Emergency Disaster Recovery Program II (EDRP) Update

R. Hode reported that State Program Coordinators and Principal Investigators who are responsible for the implementation of the EDRP met for the fourth time on Tuesday, March 11. The purpose of the EDRP bi-annual meeting/workshop is to create an opportunity for participants to report on individual program progress and to generally exchange ideas. Progress reports were given by each state.

Under EDRP I noticeable accomplishment in the oyster rehabilitation and restoration efforts basically remained the same as those reported in October. To date approximately 1,385 acres of public reefs have been rebuilt, utilizing 125,000 to 150,000 cubic yards of cultch material, and 94,600 sacks of seed oysters in place on both public and lease reefs.

He reviewed habitat rehabilitation and restoration for shrimp, crab and other fishing grounds. He also updated the Commissioners on artificial reef restoration and cooperative research efforts. To date, \$33.6 million has been reimbursed through grants funded by the EDRP I program, which is funded at \$127 million.

EDRP II is authorized at \$85 million and has been awarded as follows:

Louisiana	\$41 million
Mississippi	\$25 million
Alabama	\$15 million
Florida	\$ 2 million
Texas	\$ 1 million

A total of 16 sub award agreements are now in place with the various Gulf states under EDRP II. This brings the total of sub awards to 21 for EDRP I and II.

Habitat Program Report

J. Rester reported on the Habitat Program. He reported on the Gulf Mexico Fishery Management Council's Louisiana/Mississippi Habitat Protection Advisory Panel that met in October 25 of last year.

The Commission reviewed the Mississippi River/Gulf of Mexico Watershed Nutrient Task Force's draft "Gulf Hypoxia Action Plan 2008" in December and sent a letter to the Task Force urging the Task Force not to weaken the Action Plan and do whatever necessary to reduce the nutrient loads entering the Gulf of Mexico. U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) released a report in late January stating that nine states in the Mississippi River Basin contribute more than 75 percent of the nitrogen and phosphorus to the Gulf, but make up only one-third of the 31 state Mississippi River drainage area. These states include Illinois, Iowa, Indiana, Missouri, Arkansas, Kentucky, Tennessee, Ohio and Mississippi. A 2008 journal article by Gene Turner and Nancy Rabalais stated that because of the yearly hypoxic zone, the northern Gulf of Mexico has potentially undergone an ecosystem shift. The potential size of the hypoxic zone for a given nitrogen load has increased as a result and has doubled from 1980 to 2000. They state that the Action Plan goal of reducing the size of the hypoxic zone to an average of 5,000 square kilometers by 2015 becomes more difficult to achieve for every year there is no significant reduction in nutrient loading. In 2007, the hypoxic zone was the third largest ever measured at 20,500 square kilometers.

Work continues on the Commission's Aquaculture Grant from NOAA Fisheries. Most of the work is being performed by the University of Southern Mississippi's Gulf Coast Research Laboratory. The Commission will be developing a geographic information system (GIS) model

for aquaculture site selection in the Gulf of Mexico. J. Rester completed an extensive literature search to develop buffer zones around ecologically significant habitat types within the Gulf. When completed the GIS information will be used to support the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council's Aquaculture Amendment.

Work on the Commission's Bottom Mapping Project has come to a stand still. The contractor from the University of Colorado responsible for the data gathering portion of the contract has been going through family problems and has not fulfilled his obligations under the contract. The final report and final products were officially due from the contractor at the end of January, but had been promised at the end of October, the end of their no cost extension. The contractor has provided a timeline for completion and has stated that all final products will be delivered by the end of March.

In 2005, the Department of Energy (DOE) proposed to expand the Strategic Petroleum Reserve up to 1 billion barrels of oil. The preferred alternative would involve hollowing out a salt dome in Richton, Mississippi. As proposed in the Final EIS, 50 million gallons of water per day would be taken from the Leaf River, pumped into the salt dome, and then the 260 part per thousand brine would be pumped 5 miles south of Horn Island and Mississippi Sound. The Richton brine plume would typically increase the salinity by 4 parts per thousand for 0.9 square nautical miles surrounding the brine discharge and 1 part per thousand for 5.9 nautical miles. The record of decision for this project was released in February 2007 without much public input. The public did become aware of the project in October 2007 and the DOE will be releasing a supplemental EIS some time in the future due to the DOE changing their plans on withdrawing the water from the Pascagoula River and not the Leaf River, the main tributary of the Pascagoula.

J. Rester updated the Commissioners on LNG facilities. A draft EIS for the Port Dolphin facility should be out shortly.

B. Gautreaux discussed problems in his Senate District (St. Mary Parish) with the sediment build-up in the Atchafalaya River. It is a fight to keep the build-up from growing and in 2007 they have already spent \$27 million dredging. The budget for this year's dredging is only \$9 million which is less than 1/3 of what they need to keep the channel open. He discussed the possibility of introducing these sediments into Terrebonne Parish where they have had the fastest land loss. St. Mary Parish has the fastest land gain. He and other groups have urged the USCOE to look at pipelining the sediments into Terrebonne Parish rather than just sending it out to the Gulf of Mexico. He suggested that this might reduce the hypoxia problems. **He moved to consider a resolution or letter to urge the U. S. Congress that in accordance with Congressional mandate for beneficial use of dredge material, that they urge and request the USCOE to design and implement a plan to move the sediment from the Atchafalaya River to coastal sites in Terrebonne Parish that are experiencing significant loss of fish estuary and land. In addition, he would request that they analyze whether or not this would be beneficial in reducing the size of the dead zone that currently exist in the Gulf of Mexico. J. Roussel seconded.** It was suggested that the Executive Director send a draft resolution or letter out for review prior to distribution. It was also requested that in addition to the Congressional delegates, that it also be sent to USCOE and to the appropriate government officials in the Louisiana legislature. **The motion passed without objection.**

Interjurisdictional Fisheries Program

S. VanderKooy distributed a copy of a news release regarding the regional derelict trap removal program and its success. This information was to provide information to the public regarding clean-ups and other aspects of the removal program. He also provided the GSMFC's Annual Report for 2005.

He reported on primary IJF activities since October 2007. The Oyster FMP revisions are about 50 to 60% complete. The Oyster TTF will meet in two weeks to continue their efforts.

The *Arenarius* Profile, commonly known as white trout, began in October 2007. The TTF will meet again in April.

The Crab Subcommittee completed revisions to the *Guidelines for Developing Derelict Trap Removal Programs in the Gulf of Mexico*. He provided a copy for the Commissioners for their consideration and final approval. **M. Ray moved to approve the document. C. Perret seconded. The motion was approved without objection.**

S. VanderKooy is continuing to develop the ageing protocols for four additional species currently being added to FIN hard part sampling. The Otolith Manual is still being revised as time permits, but should be complete in 2008.

Billfish Program Status Report

D. Donaldson referred the Commissioners to the briefing book which covered all activities of this program. There were a total of 11 projects funded under this program which amounted to approximately \$2 million. It began in 2005 and the majority of the projects are now complete. A Symposium was held during the TCC meeting. There were six presentations that dealt with a variety of issues regarding billfish gender and reproduction status, post release survival and hooking efficiency, age and growth, and reproductive biology and spawning potential. It was well attended and provided up to date information. It was well received by both attendees and presenters.

SEAMAP Program Report

J. Rester reported on SEAMAP activity. He distributed copies of the *2007 Joint SEAMAP Annual SEAMAP*. The joint report details activities of all three SEAMAP components.

In 2008 the SEAMAP program received an increase to \$4,392,000, an increase of more than \$3 million. They will use the funding to restore current surveys to full utilization, expand data collection from current sampling platforms, and implement new seasonal survey programs designed to provide data for marine fisheries management. The Gulf states and the Commission received \$1.8 million of the total. The Commission will take over SEAMAP data management responsibilities for the Gulf of Mexico. New surveys in the Gulf include a Florida trawl survey to monitor and assess the abundance of red snapper in the Eastern Gulf of Mexico, a winter plankton survey, a winter and spring trawl survey, near shore sampling in coastal waters, and an inshore shark survey.

He reported that the President's 2009 budget has SEAMAP funded at \$5,090,000. He will continue to watch the budget closely as it progresses through the Senate and House.

Fisheries Information Network Report

D. Donaldson provided a written report on current program activity as well as a Power Point presentation updating the Commissioners on the Marine Information Program (MRIP). The Executive Steering Committee (the oversight group) of this initiative approved 16 research projects. Projects cover a range of topics that include: exploring new methods of estimating catch and effort; developing common data standards across all saltwater recreational data collection programs; experimenting with new ways to count released fish; and, conducting effort surveys using a list of anglers.

The Fisheries Information Network (FIN) consists of two major components, ComFIN and RecFIN(SE). He reviewed the 2007 FIN activities by project. The Recreational Catch/Effort project conducted over 53,000 interviews, exceeding the 2007 quotas by 40%. The Commercial Trip Ticket Programs have been fully implemented in Florida, Louisiana, Alabama and Texas. While Mississippi has implemented trip ticket programs in oyster, bait shrimp and finfish they will be working on other fisheries in the future. The Biological Sampling Programs have collected approximately 35,000 otoliths for over 70 species. He reviewed the progress of the At Sea Head Boat Sampling. The FIN Data Management System has loaded almost 19 million records which include: commercial trip ticket data for the period 1985-2007; recreational data for the period 1981-2006; and, biological data for 2002-2007. The system has been online since July 2002 for confidential and non-confidential users.

Recipient Selection for the 2008 Charles H. Lyles Award

Chairman J. Gill made a recommendation that all Commissioners select **Ralph Rayburn** as the nominee for the 2008 *Charles H. Lyles Award*, that all Commissioners second the nomination, and that the nominations be closed. **M. Ray** moved to accept the recommendation. **C. Perret** seconded the motion. **Ralph Rayburn** was selected for the 2008 *Charles H. Lyles Award* for 2008 by acclamation.

Sea Grant Fisheries Extension

D. Donaldson reported on behalf of the Sea Grant Fisheries Extension Advisory Panel (SG-FEAP). He reported that this was **R. Rayburn's** initiative and he referred the Commissioners to the briefing book to review a white paper that outlined a proposal to establish an official liaison between the Commission and the SG-FEAP. The SG-FEAP reviewed the white paper and requested the Commission take official action to adopt it. **B. Gautreaux** moved to adopt the white paper. **C. Perret** seconded. The white paper was adopted as presented.

State Director's Reports

Florida – **G. Vail** presented a report on behalf of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC).

The Sunset Committee of the Florida Legislature is in the process of reviewing the statutory responsibilities of all state agencies. The FWC is among the first group of five agencies and five water management districts to be reviewed for: performance, interactions with the public, a determination if the agency duties/services should be provided by state government; and determination if there is a duplication of services (e.g., land management, law enforcement). Recommendations for enhanced efficiencies based on the review are expected to be introduced during the 2008 legislative session, which began on 4 March.

A bill combining Chapters 370 [marine fisheries] and 372 (wildlife, freshwater fisheries, recreational licenses), Florida Statutes, has been filed for consideration by the 2008 Legislature. The legislative initiative to combine the two statutory chapters is a follow-up to the merger of the Marine Fisheries Commission and marine functions of the Department of Environmental Protection with the Florida Game and Freshwater Fish Commission in 1999. At this time, the bill is a technical exercise, combining two existing chapters into a new Chapter 379, with no change to existing statutory language. Identification and subsequent repeal of obsolete or redundant language will occur in the future.

The Legislature is also being asked to consider bills that would create criminal and non-criminal penalties for scarring sea grasses (willful and wanton damage to sea grasses would be a first degree misdemeanor punishable by a year in jail and a \$1000 fine) and require residents fishing from shore or a structure affixed to shore to possess a recreational saltwater fishing license. Currently, shore fishing residents are not required to hold the license, or recreational snook or spiny lobster permits which are attached to the license.

The FWC received legislative authority to request donations from hunters and anglers buying their licenses in order to support youth fishing and hunting programs that would encourage safe and responsible participation in the sports. The FWC is also participating in a campaign to encourage anglers who have not renewed their fishing license to do so.

Preparation of the *Hoyt Vandenberg*, a 500 foot former missile tracking ship, for deployment off Key West is nearly complete. A walk through inspection of the vessel was conducted on February 14 by staff of the FWC, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Coast Guard, and Reef Makers. PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) were of particular concern during the clean-up process; approximately 810,000 linear feet of electrical wire plus other electrical equipment and paint possibly containing PCBs had been removed before the walk through. The ship is scheduled to be moved to Key West for final preparation and deployment on May 15.

A bill to establish a Ships-2-Reefs program has been introduced for consideration by the 2008 Legislature, which convened on 4 March 2008. The program is a matching grant program to provide funding to assist local governments to obtain and prepare decommissioned vessels for deployment as artificial reefs. A similar bill was introduced last year but, due to time constraints, was not passed.

At their February 2008 meeting, the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission considered proposals that would make Florida's regulations for red snapper consistent with recently enacted federal regulations. The Commission approved a reduction of the recreational

bag limit to two fish per person per day, a reduction of the commercial size limit to 13 inches, and a prohibition on possession of the recreational bag limit by captain and crew of for-hire vessels. The Commission, considering the broader impact of the regulations on the fishery and the fishing communities, did not approve a reduction of the recreational season in state waters, which will remain open from 15 April – 31 October. In addition, the Commission approved requiring the use of non-stainless steel circle hooks when fishing for any reef fish species using natural bait and the use of venting tools and de-hooking devices when releasing any of the reef fish species. The new state regulations will take effect April 1, 2008. The Commission also expressed support for qualified fishery disaster relief requests to the U.S. Department of Congress. Each request will be considered on a case by case basis and reviewed for eligibility under federal criteria, the number of potentially eligible fishers, and whether or not matching funds would be required.

Alabama – **S. Heath** presented a report on behalf of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Marine Resource Division (ADCNR, MRD).

Alabama met its NMFS MRFSS quotas in all modes for Wave 6 (Nov -Dec). However, Alabama did not meet its add-on quota, in charter mode during Wave 6 do in part to a lack of fishing activity. For the year, Alabama samplers collected 2,567 angler interviews (17 % above the annual quota) and measured and/or weighed nearly 3,900 fish representing 57 species of fish.

Pilot at-sea head boat survey was completed December 2007. This ended a four year project designed to collect catch and harvest information from head boat anglers using MRD observers who accompanied anglers on fishing trips. The observers also attempted to collect length and release condition of released fish during these trips. For 2007, 494 anglers were interviewed during 22 head boat trips. Initial comparisons between the at-sea pilot survey (AL & FL for 2004-2006) and Beaufort logbook survey indicated that observed data had more detailed fish information (more accurate numbers of species and fish caught and released by trip and larger numbers of fish lengths and weights collected) but the method for determining effort within the at-sea survey led to high variability. The consensus among the comparison participants was that a combination of the two surveys would probably be best.

As of December 31, 2007, nearly 10,000 (~ \$2.0 million) commercial EDRP I forms collecting detailed fishing effort data have been completed and submitted for payment. In addition, over 3,200 for-hire EDRP I forms have been submitted and most of the data reported has been stored electronically and is undergoing QA/QC procedures.

MRD has begun the initial phases of developing programs to assist the recovery efforts of Alabama seafood dealers and seafood related businesses which sustained economic losses from the storms of 2005. This program is the first of its kind to be implemented in Alabama. A total of \$8.4 million from EDRP II monies has been reserved for this program; \$2 million of this amount has been reserved for the development of a seafood waste recycling center in Bayou La Batre.

The trip ticket program continues operation. Currently, there are 31 dealers actively reporting landings using the electronic program. These landings represent around 50% of the total commercial trips reported and over 60% of the total reported landings.

The fall shrimp and groundfish cruise totaled seven day and three night stations taken on October 9, and November 6, 2007. Shrimp were taken at eight of the 10 stations. White shrimp were the most abundant captured (36), followed by pink (30), and brown shrimp (1). Bycatch ranged from 4.1 to 124.8 kilograms. Bycatch was dominated by Atlantic croaker, silver sea trout (*Cynoscion nothus*) Atlantic butterfish (*Peprilus burti*) and inshore lizardfish. A total of 118 juvenile red snapper was captured; with 100 captured at two stations just south of Dauphin Island. Red snapper were taken at five of the 10 sample stations.

The Division completed a spotted seatrout assessment this year and it is available upon request.

The Division participated in public outreach at the Mobile Boat Show February 21-24 and a meeting with the Fowl River Civic Association.

The Enforcement section has been busy checking IFQ Red Snapper Boats landing in Alabama. There were increases in the number of landings during the last quarter of 2007. This was partly due to several of the IFQ Red Snapper Fishermen waiting until the end of the year to fill their quota because they felt that prices would be higher during this time period.

The enforcement section stayed busy monitoring the gill net striped mullet roe fishery during November and December 2007. Catches were above normal but prices remained lower than past peak years.

The enforcement section assisted in the recovery efforts for the four young children, ages 4 months, one year, two years, and three years old, allegedly murdered by their father. The recovery operation for the four children was concluded with the recovery of the fourth body. The operation started on January 8, 2008 and concluded on January 20, 2008, a period of thirteen days. The Marine Resources Enforcement Section was the first waterborne asset notified by the Bayou La Batre Police Department and was the first assets on the scene.

Furthermore, during the recovery operation the Marine Resources Enforcement Section assisted with the rescue of two duck hunters whose boat had sank. The two hunters were rescued in a fairly short timeframe since officers were in the area for the recovery operation, but still both of the hunters had to be admitted to the hospital. One was treated for severe hypothermia and probably would not have survived because of the cold temperatures if officers had not been close.

Again, our officers have proven to be an asset during a crisis situation. The caring, dedication, and training of our officers came to the forefront. Past equipment purchases, planning, and training provided our officers with the needed tools to effectively assist during this operation. The community and other agencies have repeatedly complemented our officers and their work efforts.

Lt. Bob Hasting retired effective February 1, 2008 and we are in process of establishing register to fill this position. Lt. Scott Bannon returned from military leave with the US Coast Guard. He served eight months at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba. He was selected as the Senior Enlisted Trooper of the Year by the Joint Task Force Guantanamo Community while serving in Cuba.

The enforcement section was recently involved in the following case involving the F/V Slick as Glass, Marcus Murphy III:

On Saturday, 2/09/2008, CEO Edward Willis and Lt. Scott Bannon were on an offshore JEA patrol in the Federal waters (EEZ) south of Alabama and Mississippi in MR-22 a 10m state patrol boat. The officers boarded the f/v Slick as Glass and advised them there were there to inspect their fish. The captain stated they were just out catching a "few redfish". The ice chest on the back deck of the boat was inspected and the officers saw four red drum that had been gutted, lying on the ice. Also, there was red mesh sack containing fish fillets. The officers advised the captain that it was illegal to possess red drum in federal waters and asked him what kind of fillets they were. He stated there were about forty or so red snapper in the bag. They then advised him they would be filling out a federal case packet to be forwarded to the National Marine Fisheries Service. He was very cooperative and presented all of his information. They took digital photos of the boat, crew, fish in the ice chest, and electronics. The vessel had no registration numbers or documentation and there was no paperwork onboard. There was a sticker were the boat had been registered in Mississippi in 2007. He stated the paperwork was with the co-owner so that he could purchase the new registration. As the officers departed, they asked if he was commercially fishing and he said he was going to buy a commercial hook and line license when the season opened. There were 110 fillets (55 fish) that had the skin on them and all appeared to be red snapper.

Mississippi -- **D. Diaz** presented the report on behalf of the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (DMR).

The Office of Marine Patrol, Marine Law Enforcement activities for October 2007 – February 2007 consisted of 1,352 boat patrol hours with 652 contacts which resulted in 14 total citations. These citations mostly consisted of violations concerning red snapper and sharks.

This past fall 22,594 cubic yards of cultch material (limestone) were planted on two Mississippi oyster reefs, Henderson Point and Telegraph reefs. Between the two, a total of 215 acres were planted.

Mississippi's oyster season began on September 6th. The daily sack limit is 20 per vessel. To date there have been over 61,000 sacks harvested. Oyster season is scheduled to end March 13, 2008.

The Shellfish Bureau held an Oyster Stewardship Program Meeting Tuesday October 2, 2007. Sixty-three harvesters and industry representatives attended the meeting which was held to receive input on management strategies needed for the rebuilding of the oyster industry in Mississippi.

In February a meeting was held with oyster harvesters for the purpose of contracting with them for the spring 2008 EDRP II oyster relay. Plans are also underway for a spring 2008 cultch plant.

Total EDRP I program participation to date included 380 shrimp and crab fishermen. Shrimp fishermen submitted 17,771 individual fisheries monitoring reports and crab fishermen submitted 3,930 (21,701 tickets program total). All of the fishing trip data information sheets have been scanned. Work has begun on analyzing the data.

The Mississippi Crab Task Force met December 11, 2007 to discuss EDRP I commercial crab data results and EDRP II plans. The 2008 MS Derelict Crab Trap Cleanup is set for March 9 - 21.

In 2007, 11,500 derelict crab traps were removed by 85 contracted commercial crab and shrimp fishermen. Traps and associated data sheets were collected by DMR and GCRL staff. All traps were recycled by a scrap metal facility. Excellent cooperation was provided by commercial fishermen.

Distribution of crab traps (50 to each qualified commercial crab fisherman) equipped with escape rings and Terrapin Excluder Devices (TEDs) continues. To date, 500 new traps have been distributed to Mississippi fishermen. Additional traps will be distributed upon receipt from the trap fabricators.

Public meetings were held with shrimp and crab fishermen in February 2008 to share EDRP results and get their input on EDRP II plans. Contracts are currently being signed by eligible fishermen to participate in EDRP II programs.

A new site (Popps Ferry Bridge in Biloxi Bay) has been added to the MS Real-Time Hydrological Monitoring Program. This is the 9th monitoring station installed since all were lost in Hurricane Katrina. Data on water temperature, salinity and tidal stage are updated every 15 minutes and are available from the DMR webpage (www.dmr.state.ms.us).

The Mississippi Artificial Reef Rigs to Reef Program is currently working with petroleum industry representatives on 2 projects in the main pass area south of Mississippi. Reef permits were obtained and deployments should begin in early summer.

There were three steel hull vessels deployed during this time frame in reef sites south of Horn Island. These vessels were donated by the U.S. Coast Guard. A local Contractor was hired to clean and deploy the vessels.

Site plans for inshore and offshore reef construction are currently being made for this year's upcoming deployment. Biological assessments are beginning this month on the Florida Limestone Pyramids that were deployed last year. This is a coordinated effort between DMR and Mississippi State University.

There are 56 charter boats participating in the finfish recovery program. As of January 31, 2008, 4,084 charter trips have been reported. The charter vessel fisheries recovery report program is ongoing.

In February, the Finfish Bureau held a public meeting for eligible Commercial finfish license holders to provide information on contract work which requires data collection by fishermen. That program is scheduled to begin March 15, 2008 and continue until March 14, 2009.

A program for the release and monitoring of hatchery raised red snapper on Mississippi's offshore artificial reef sites began March 1, 2007 and will continue for the next 30 months. Currently red snapper larvae have been reared under experimental conditions and optimal feeding rates have been tested. Wild stock will be caught in the spring of 2008 and strip spawned. These fish will be reared to three to five inches then released on Mississippi's offshore reefs.

In February the Commission of Marine Resources voted to reduce the minimum length of spotted seatrout from 14 inches to 13 inches. There were 3 public hearing, one in each of the coastal counties of Mississippi for public input.

Louisiana – **J. Roussel** presented a report on behalf of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF).

The new Louisiana Governor is Bobby Jindal, the new Department Secretary is Robert Barnham, and the new Assistant Secretary for Fisheries is Randy Pausina. Over half of the Louisiana Legislature is new. This is the first wave of impacts due to term limits. There is also a new Commissioner for the Wildlife and Fisheries Commission (WFC) that has recently been appointed. Governor Jindal has held one special session on ethics reform, and the legislature is now in its second special session to consider business tax cuts and how to spend State surplus funds. The regular session starts on March 31. Despite the State surplus funds, all State agencies are facing a budget cut. The budget will be discussed during the regular session. LDWF is scheduled for a Sunset Review this year.

The WFC imposed a moratorium on leasing of previously un-leased water bottoms for oyster cultivation on March 7, 2002. They have now partially lifted the moratorium to allow processing of oyster lease applications that were pending when the moratorium was put in place. The LDWF staff is working with the Louisiana Oyster Task Force to develop a plan for lifting the moratorium.

Several actions have been taken by the WFC. The WFC has reviewed and passed on to the Louisiana Legislature, stock assessments for black drum, sheep head, flounder and mullet. They have closed a portion of the central coast to shrimping on December 6, 2007. It will be reopened concurrent with or just prior to the opening of the inshore shrimp season this spring. They have expanded the Lake Michaud public oyster seed grounds, implemented a crab trap closure and authorized the clean-up. Last week the WFC adopted regulations for red snapper and vermilion snapper that is compatible with those in Federal waters. In addition a Youth Fishing Promotion

was implemented to establish a rule that exempts anglers under 16 from the current size limit on black bass in the Atchafalaya Basin and two adjacent Lakes.

The Louisiana Recovery Authority (LRA) has earmarked approximately \$19 million for development of fisheries infrastructure that was impacted by Hurricane Katrina.

He reported that the oyster season is still open so he only has preliminary harvest estimates. He added that on all oyster grounds, seed oyster production and harvest by the industry of seed oysters has been above pre-hurricane levels. In terms of sack oyster production it has been above pre-hurricane levels but not on all oyster grounds. In the extreme Southeast Louisiana area production has been the highest on record. He contributed this to the effort level in that area as also being the highest on record. In fact they have had complaints from the industry reporting a lot of boats from Texas. There is clear evidence that there is significant recovery in the oyster fishery since the hurricane.

He reported that since October 2007, they have added 22 additional oil and gas structures to their artificial reef program and donations amounting to \$5.8 million to their trust fund. Most of the structures were storm damaged and they are looking at an additional 31 structures being added over the next 6 to 8 months, with cumulative donations on the order of \$15 million.

Texas – **M. Ray** presented a report on behalf of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD).

During January, Coastal Fisheries held public scoping meetings in Port Arthur, Dickinson, Port Aransas, and Port Isabel to explore four items in advance of the 2008 statewide hunting and fishing proclamation process. In particular, Coastal Fisheries wanted to explore possible changes in the current red snapper and shark regulations to attain greater consistency between current federal regulations and state regulations. Also, the ongoing fishery for menhaden in Texas state waters was reviewed, and the possibility of closing Texas state waters to the commercial harvest of menhaden was scoped. In addition, a voluntary coastal fishing guides program was scoped within the statewide process, although it may not require a regulatory change. This item considers the creation of a Texas Saltwater Certified Guides Program which would establish a certification program by the department, which may include safety, angler ethics and various training to promote the protection of coastal natural resources. The 4 public scoping meetings collectively drew more than 360 attendees with an additional 135 written comments received, an unusually high turnout for so early in the regulations process, which indicated a strong constituency interest in these topics. During 23 January 2008, the TPW Commission met and decided not to change TPWD's current red snapper and shark regulations to become more consistent with federal regulations. Although the Commission was silent on the voluntary coastal fishing guides program, Coastal Fisheries will continue working with the guide community to discuss and develop a program.

The Commission did decide to continue with a proposal regarding the menhaden fishery in Texas waters. The proposal takes a precautionary ecosystem-based, predator/prey approach with the management of the menhaden fishery in Texas waters and proposes a Total Allowable Catch (TAC) limit on gulf menhaden caught in the Texas Territorial Sea but landed commercially in

Louisiana, with the TAC set at the 5-year (2002-2006) average of 31.5 million pounds per year. During February and March, TPWD took the TAC proposal to 22 public hearings statewide, including 4 which were held on the coast.

President George W. Bush signed an executive order in October to protect red drum and striped bass. This order prohibits the sale of striped bass and red drum caught in federal waters and encourages periodic federal stock assessments of the species. It also directs federal agencies to work with state officials "to find innovative ways to help conserve striped bass and red drum populations, including the use of the State designation of 'gamefish,' where appropriate, to prohibit commercial sales of the fish." This executive order establishes the same protection for red drum in federal waters that is already established in Texas state waters, but will help protect spawning stocks of red drum in federal waters if harvest of the species is allowed again there.

Life History Research - All ongoing routine life history special studies continued, including the FIN biological sampling program. Coastal Fisheries' Life History Team continued collecting and processing sand seatrout samples for a life history study. They continue collecting red drum otoliths from gill net samples for an age analysis study, and spotted seatrout otoliths, from a sex ratio study, also will be used for an age analysis study.

Genetics Research - Coastal Fisheries Genetics Team continued collecting fin clip samples from southern flounder and alligator gar for genetic variation studies. Red drum fin clip and otolith collections continue for a DNA project being conducted by Dr. John Gold at Texas A&M University.

Artificial Reef Project - The USTS Texas Clipper received national news headlines when it 'went down' in history on Saturday, 17 November 2007 off South Padre Island. After windy weather caused a two-day delay, the Texas Clipper was sunk to create Texas' newest artificial reef. After valves were opened to flood the ship, it took about two hours for the Clipper to start sinking, but she went down fast in the final minutes. The 473-foot, 7,000-ton ship was reefed in about 134 feet of water, 17 nautical miles off the coast. After the Texas Artificial Reef Program staff did a technical dive to visually inspect the ship to make sure it was safe for the public, it was opened to recreational diving. Unfortunately, the Clipper settled on its port side, so the Artificial Reef team is working with the reefing contractor to explore options to erect the ship on the bottom. Although this project cost about \$4 million, it is expected to generate \$10 million-to-\$50 million per year in fishing and diving tourism economic benefits for local communities over the anticipated 50-year life of the reef.

Buyback Programs

Inshore Shrimp License Management Program - Round #21 of TPWD's inshore shrimp license buyback program closed on 15 October 2007. A total of 69 inshore shrimp licenses (32 bay and 37 bait) were purchased at a cost of \$563,590, with an average of \$8,167 and a range of \$2,500 to \$10,000. An additional 4 licenses (2 bay and 2 bait), held from a previous round pending a law enforcement investigation, and were also purchased for \$31,690.

Since 1996, 938 bay and 920 bait licenses for a total of 1,859 shrimp licenses have been purchased by this program at a cost of \$11.9 million, representing a 57% reduction in licenses being sold (1,859 buy backs / 3,231 original licenses).

Crab License Management Program - Round # 8 of TPWD's crab license buyback program closed on 15 October 2007. A total of 6 licenses were purchased at a cost of \$42,000, with all purchases costing \$7,000.

Since December 2001, TPWD has purchased 35 commercial crab licenses at a cost of \$188,849, with an average cost of \$5,396. This represents a 12% reduction in licenses being sold (35 buybacks / 287 original licenses).

Commercial Finfish License Management Program - Round 11 of TPWD's inshore shrimp license buyback program closed on 15 October 2007. A total of 16 finfish licenses were purchased at a cost of \$97,700, with an average of \$6106 and a range of \$4000 to \$7500

Since September 2002, 177 finfish licenses have been purchased at a total cost of \$896,004, with an average of cost of \$5,062. This represents a 32% reduction in licenses being sold (177 buybacks / 549 original licenses).

Abandoned Crab Trap Removal Program - During mid-February's Texas Abandoned Crab Trap Removal Project, 1,100 crab traps were removed coastwise by 63 volunteers and staff. Most traps came out of Galveston Bay (~43%) and San Antonio Bay (~32%). During the last 7 years, this program has removed 23,846 abandoned traps.

Oysters - As part of this Commission's Emergency Disaster Relief Program, Texas has acquired high-resolution sidescan sonar and bathymetry equipment and has begun mapping oyster habitat in Galveston Bay and will be relocating equipment to Sabine Lake later this spring.

Oyster leaseholders in Galveston Bay will be meeting with TPWD and Department of State Health Services (Seafood and Aquatic Life Group) staff in mid-March to discuss options for implementing part of the Vibrio Management Plan as it relates to *V. parahaemolyticus*. Indications from DSHS are that the time-temperature matrix will be tightened whereby oysters must be under refrigeration within 5 hours of the first oyster hitting the deck of the boat.

TPWD staff will begin a survey of commercial oyster dredges this spring to get a better handle on the types of dredges that are currently being used. Complaints have been received from some industry participants that dredges are being modified (but still within the legal definition of the gear) such that they may be fishing the substrate harder and may subsequently be having an adverse impact on oyster habitat.

The Nature Conservancy received notification of approval of an \$800,000 grant to restore oyster habitat at Half-Moon Reef in Matagorda Bay. Also, CCA-TX has contacted TPWD about opportunities to assist in restoration efforts of oyster habitat in Texas estuaries.

In February, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration advised commercial seafood processors not to accept certain kinds of fish from the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary area due to ciguatera toxin, and the Texas Department of State Health Services advised recreational fishermen and other consumers not to eat the fish since cooking does not affect the toxin. The warnings followed several human cases of ciguatera fish poisoning being linked to eating certain fish from the area.

Red Tide/ Brown Tide/ Pfiesteria/ Hypoxic Zones/ Fish Kills - During mid-January, an orange surf event occurred between the 35 and 40-mile markers of Padre Island National Seashore and in the Aransas Pass Channel. The bloom was found to contain a species of Noctiluca, which is nontoxic but routinely turn the water orange as well as bioluminescence.

Carter Smith was named executive director of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department by the TPW Commission on December 5, 2007. Smith has been with The Nature Conservancy of Texas since 1998 and has been the state director since 2004.

In mid-February, Coastal Fisheries staff met in Galveston to discuss how various coastal fisheries pieces fit together for ecosystem management. Topics presented included ecosystem modeling, new technologies such as side scan sonar, and legislative issues such as water for wildlife, red drum genetics studies, the Red Fish Bay State Scientific Area seagrass protection effort, and various wetland restoration projects.

The Coastal Fisheries field station at Port O'Connor is in poor condition and ill-suited for fisheries management operations that are housed on the site. Funding to remove the existing building and construct a new office/lab facility was approved in 2007. The new facility is currently in the design phase and is approximately 25% complete. Under ideal conditions, construction of the new facility could begin in the fall of 2008 and be completed in 2009. The total budget for the project facility is approximately \$2 million.

The Texas Environmental Flows Advisory Group, authorized by SB3, met for the first time this week. The Advisory Group acknowledged that it missed several legislative deadlines due to a delay in appointing all members of the group. November 1, 2007 was the deadline for defining the geographical extent of each river basin and bay system and for appointing basin and bay stakeholder groups for the Sabine/ Neches system and Trinity/San Jacinto system. At its next meeting the Advisory Group is expected to consider for adoption the river basin boundaries used by the Texas Water Development Board. Nominations for the Sabine/Neches and Trinity/San Jacinto basin and bay stakeholder groups are being accepted until March 14.

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's Wildlife Division commissioned the Southwick group to ascertain the economic effect from fish and wildlife-related recreation in Texas. According to their report, the economic effect from Texas hunters, anglers and wildlife watchers was estimated to be \$14.4 billion. The total Texas economic impact from sportfishing accounted for \$4.73 billion (\$2.93 billion from freshwater and \$1.79 billion from saltwater). There were 1.1 million saltwater anglers (residents and nonresidents), fishing a total of 15.1 million days in Texas, the survey indicated. Of the total saltwater anglers in Texas, 1.07 million were state residents and 76,946 were nonresidents. Most fishing effort was directed at redfish.

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department is hosting the 62nd Annual Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Conference on October 12-15, 2008 in Corpus Christi. We extend a special invitation for manuscripts, presentations, and posters that relate to marine, estuarine, and freshwater fisheries topics, including management, research, and culture. The fisheries program will include oral presentations of peer-reviewed manuscripts (for publication in the Conference Proceedings), oral presentations of unpublished studies, and posters. The deadline for

submissions is May 1, 2008. For more information visit the conference website (<http://seafwa2008.org>).

Future Meetings

G. Herring reported that she had contracted with the Key Largo Grande Resort (now the Hilton Key Largo Beach Resort) for the October 13-16, 2008 Commission meeting. She has not booked a meeting for the March 16-19, 2009 but indicated that the Royal Sonesta in New Orleans has expressed an interest in hosting the meeting. The Louisiana Commissioners stated that the Royal Sonesta would be a good choice.

Publications List


A new listing of publications was provided for informational purposes.

Other Business

At our October 2007 meeting, V. Minton had asked the Commission staff to look into ways to encourage attendance of entry level biologists and other personnel at our annual meetings. To keep cost down, only the host state would be contacted. The Commission staff contacted our Texas Commissioners and offered complimentary registration for up to 5 persons. Texas invited 5 Biologists. The Commission extended complimentary registration and the TPWD picked up their travel for the entire meeting. Their attendance at the various meetings was mutually beneficial and the Commission will continue to encourage this type of participation.

J. Gill took the opportunity to thank the Commission staff for their efforts in making this a successful meeting.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 4:25 pm.

APPROVED BY:

COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**OYSTER TECHNICAL TASK FORCE
MINUTES
March 26-27, 2008
Ocean Springs, MS**

Moderator, **Steve VanderKooy** called the meeting to order at 8:50 a.m. with the following members and guests in attendance:

Members

Brian Lezina, LDWF, Lacombe, LA
Cherie O'Brien, TPWD, Dickinson, TX
Mark Berrigan, FDACS, Tallahassee, FL
Tom Herrington, ISSC/FDA Representative-Retired, Ocean Springs, MS
Kris Bishop, *proxy for Pete Flores*, TPWD, Austin, TX
Lance Robinson, TPWD, Dickinson, TX
John Supan, LSU, Baton Rouge, LA
Mark Van Hoose, ADMR, Dauphin Island, AL
Bill Arnold, FWC/FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL

Guest

Patrick Banks, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA

Staff

Steve VanderKooy, GSMFC, IIF Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Madeleine Travis, GSMFC, FIN Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS
James Ballard, GSMFC, Sport Fish Restoration Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS

To review and comment on other TTF members sections, go to the oyster website <http://oyster.gsmfc.org/index.php>, select the section you wish to review, copy it to your computer hard drive, make changes/edits and then provide comments directly to the author, via email.

Adoption of Agenda

VanderKooy reviewed the agenda, Table of Contents, roster, and the handouts that were provided in the meeting folders. He noted that the agenda was in reverse order of the previous meetings to allow everyone adequate time for review and discussion of their sections should time run short. **Herrington** wanted to add a discussion regarding the timetable for completion. **VanderKooy** agreed and it was added to the agenda after approval of minutes. **O'Brien** moved to approve the agenda as modified and the motion passed without objection.

Approval of Minutes (November 27-28, 2007)

The minutes from the meeting Key Largo, FL from November 2007 were approved as written.

Revision Timeline

VanderKooy reported that he had planned on a fall/winter 2008, completion for the rough draft and was optimistic that the final review and editing could be completed by late spring 2009.

Herrington noted that the ISSC would meet again in August 2009, and would likely implement several management scenarios in the Gulf related to *Vibrio vulnificus* risk management, since we had not met the required illness reduction. Not knowing for sure what would be implemented and how quickly, it was agreed that the revision would proceed with our specific management recommendations and in the event that the ISSC acted, it could easily be pulled out of the GSMFC's review process and updated quickly to reflect those changes.

VanderKooy pointed out that several sections were still incomplete and needed to be provided for review soon. Several members have mentioned that they've got drafts, but have not provided them yet. While funding was limited, **VanderKooy** intended to hold a couple more meetings this year, in order to keep the momentum going and to meet the 2008 deadline for a rough draft.

Stock Assessment Update

VanderKooy and **Berrigan** had been tasked at the previous meeting to provide additional questions to the Commission's Stock Assessment Team to determine the appropriateness of MSY and OY in the Gulf's oyster fishery. They were also to ask about whether there could be any sustainability-type formulas developed for Gulf Oysters. Neither **VanderKooy** nor **Berrigan** had followed it up yet. It was intended to generate some helpful discussion in lieu of a formal stock assessment. **VanderKooy** had asked the Stock Assessment Team and task force members to look at their available GIS information or other types of data related to mapping both productive and ecological reefs in the region. Even without an assessment, the MSY and OY discussion will be required to complete the FMP revision.

There was considerable discussion related to the need to really address an assessment of the population, including the possibility of locating a consultant to try using Gulf data. **VanderKooy** was hoping that the original discussion with the Stock Assessment Team would be a sort of SEDAR process and look at what data we do have for assessment. **Berrigan** indicated this is another example of the need to provide standardized assessment techniques and there needs to be several approaches to evaluate the resource after disasters, depending on what outcomes you are looking for.

Supan noted that there is some funding available through Gulf Oyster Industry Program through SeaGrant, for this kind of research, although the timing won't work for us. There are other funding sources which might generate some grant opportunities through the Commission. **VanderKooy** suggested that perhaps the EDRP I and II money would be a source for the states to use to conduct an assessment under contract. It was suggested by **Arnold** that there were a number of graduate students in the Statistics Group at the University of Florida looking for thesis/dissertation projects that, could probably examine the models currently being used elsewhere for shellfish, and apply them to our data if we provided it. **Arnold** offered to look into it and would get back to the group. Fish Folk would be another location to solicit interest in this

type of project. In addition, **Supan** recommended a 'need statement' from the Task Force or a call for pre-proposals to see how much interest there would be in contracting for an assessment. Need to provide some sort of indication of funding sources to ensure responses however. **Berrigan** noted there are lots of consulting firms out there who could handle this for very little money as an option.

Assignment Status and Section Updates

VanderKooy showed the group the live website to show where the section drafts were, what was new, and how to upload documents. The website should be used to save a copy of the draft sections to your computer for your review. Only the author should upload updates to their sections. By replacing someone else's document may overwrite their changes. Make comments to the author directly on the paper copy or electronically by e-mail. The author is the ONLY person changing their section directly on the website. The task force working site is <http://oyster.gsmfc.org>. If anyone needs help with it, contact the Commission office. As we get closer and have drafts of all the sections in, **VanderKooy** would renumber everything to fit in the Table of Contents and fix the sections to match.

Section 03 – Description of Stocks

Robinson was unable to stay until Wednesday and asked if his section could be discussed first. **Robinson** had inserted a few comments in the draft that were still lacking any citations and were carryovers from the original document. If anyone had that information, forward it to him or he would delete the statements. **Berrigan** commented that any state specific material **Robinson** was waiting on needed to be provided quickly. **Robinson** would provide more details on what he was looking for. He reported that he was currently working on the final details of the genetics section and that most of the text that was included in the ESA Status Review of the Eastern Oyster was being blended into this section. **Arnold** discussed the idea of oyster eggs falling to the bottom and thought that perhaps natural turbulence in the water column would keep the eggs suspended where the sperm are. **Supan** noted this was probably an artifact of culture, but didn't know if there was any literature that discussed eggs in the wild. **VanderKooy** would put the final copy of the ESA document on the oyster website for everyone and bring hardcopies in the morning. **Robinson** plans to include some of the genetics terms into the glossary with his working definitions. As soon as the genetics component is complete, **Robinson** will provide it to the website or to **VanderKooy** to begin a serious review and wordsmithing from the task force.

Section 16.1 - Glossary

VanderKooy reported that there were a number of terms which were commonly used in the drafts provided so far, which needed to be added to the existing boilerplate Glossary. Everyone would note those terms as they continued to draft their sections and provide a list to **VanderKooy** for inclusion. When possible, a working definition would also be included. As the revision nears completion, all would review the existing terms and delete those which were not used or applicable to the oyster fishery. For example, what is the definition of depuration? **Berrigan** found several definitions and didn't know how to proceed. **Herrington** noted that

FDA has very specific definitions for lots of these terms, but we need to agree on how we intend to use it in the document.

Section 16.2 - Fishery Disaster Criteria

VanderKooy noted that to date, **Leslie Craig** (NOAA) had not been able to attend any of the task force meetings and he intended to schedule around her for the next meeting. **Craig** and **Berrigan** have been tasked with fleshing out this section for the purpose of making recommendations in the future for standardized protocols, for assessing populations and impacts on the fishery and its participants.

Section 16.3 - Aquaculture/Mariculture

Supan is still working on the draft which he had provided at the last meeting. He is approaching this as an educational overview to help managers understand what it is rather than a 'how to' manual for starting culture. The reference section will have suggested readings for more of the 'how to' materials. He is also splitting the material into extensive and intensive culture to cover bottom vs. off-bottom, container-type operations.

Supan noted that at some point we will need to have a policy discussion related to triploid and/or exotics production for the states use in the future. There will be a recommendation on policy of these options for **Berrigan's** section later. **Berrigan** noted that the state agencies responsible for aquaculture needs to be added somewhere and could be put in the enforcement section (Section 6). Each state representative would have to provide that information for their state. **VanderKooy** added aquaculture to the jurisdiction table from that section as well. **VanderKooy** noted that we were still waiting on materials from the 'other' state agencies involved with oyster management and need contact points for those agencies in each state. **Arnold** noted that enhancement and restoration need to be defined clearly since they are often used interchangeably, but incorrectly. **Supan** would post any changes to the draft on the website.

Section 16.4 - Cultch Materials

Randall was unable to attend the meeting, since the MDMR is currently relaying oysters and understaffed. **Randall** has reported however that he has a draft developed for cultch materials and would provide it shortly. **VanderKooy** would let everyone know when it was posted on the website.

Section 16.5 - Public Education

Herrington has a lot of material for education and outreach for at-risk consumers, medical health professionals, resource enforcement officers, fishermen, etc. There are videos and other pamphlets which could be included. **VanderKooy** suggested that each broad category of materials get a short paragraph and then a simple list of websites, publications, and other resources that are available, sort of like a webpage links page. It would have to be noted that the materials are available as of the point of this publication. The states would provide any agency

links that **Herrington** does not have access to. **Herrington** would provide the categories and introductory text and the states would add additional resources as they locate them.

Section 13 – Research and Data Needs

VanderKooy noted that this section was primarily for the purpose of identifying the things that need to be done regarding research. It identifies data gaps, other issues, and things like stock assessment, would be appropriate. **Arnold** would like to add remote sensing methods for mapping of reefs to the research list also. Jeff Denson, Texas Geological Group, has done some of this work in South Carolina and is helping Florida review their data from Tampa Bay, which was surveyed using hyperspectral analysis.

VanderKooy added several items to the list and highlighted them in yellow. Everyone needs to review that section and determine what needs to come out and what needs to be added to the list. Some categories have already been addressed since the original FMP and have been removed or need to be updated. All changes need to be sent to **VanderKooy** for inclusion. **VanderKooy** thinks this section could be a prioritized list as well especially if the ISSC takes actions related to V.v., but recommends waiting to do so until we know more.

Arnold mentioned the risk survey, sent out via e-mail by the Nature Conservancy and asked if everyone had gotten it. **VanderKooy** would resend it to be sure it was distributed.

Section 12 – Management Considerations and Specific Management Recommendations

Berrigan reported that he had spent some time based on the notes from the last meeting. The subsections were rearranged to meet the order of the FMP objectives (Section 12.3). It will be renumbered correctly later. **Berrigan** would like to have some review of the draft and comments from the rest of the task force. The group reviewed each subsection ‘on the fly’ and provided some suggestions, but would provide a more detailed review later.

Section 12.4.1.1.2 - There are some serious water rights issues in Texas that **Berrigan** needs more information on. Diversion projects and spillways in Louisiana are examples of water rights and **Berrigan** would be used to discuss this issue relative to oyster management.

Section 12.4.1.2 – A place holder which **Berrigan** believes could be developed out of **Weeks’** section somewhat.

Section 12.4.1.4 – **Berrigan** reported that “controlling and preventing pollution,” with issues such as overboard discharge, would probably be best addressed by the public health representatives. **Herrington** had provided some of the material already, but it never got placed in the document. It was available on the website, but needed to be incorporated into the document somewhere, whether as an appendix which is referenced or directly in this section.

Herrington noted that there is a need to find a location for the use of non-native species for the recommendations section and **Berrigan** has got a place for it; whenever we agree to the policy issue and get the states background material.

Point-source pollution was also added as a note in **Berrigan's** section and it needs to be either moved or fleshed out here. **Supan** noted some recent publications related to the use of marshes for pollution control and quantification of those coastal areas for that purpose. **Herrington** reported that NOAA had lacked funding for the development of a new shellfish registry for the Gulf States and that was an issue that needed to be included in the recommendations.

Herrington noted that we might also need to include ballast water introductions as well since it's included for several topics elsewhere in the FMP.

Section 12.4.2 - "Measures to manage harvesting" needs to be reviewed with specific examples provided to **Berrigan** for inclusion. This includes limiting or limited access efforts in the states and could include area closures to certain gears, might fit here as well. These need examples of adaptive management and strategies, which already exist in the states. Please send **Berrigan** material that is applicable from each state. State license and user fees need to be consistent with the Section 6 information. Under 12.4.2.2 Resource Management Measures, Enforcement is currently empty, but will need to be fleshed out by the task force yet. 12.4.2.2.3 Cooperative Management will need to be reviewed by **Weeks**, since it has part of its origin in the sociology section. Somewhere there needs to be more discussion on industry task forces and their role in the management process. Each of the states need to provide that information. **Lezina** will draft a paragraph to start it, using Louisiana's task force.

Section 12.4.3 - Measures to Increase Production – **Berrigan** needs everyone's estimates of cultch purchase/planting to include 1988-2007 (twenty years). This may need to be put elsewhere (economics or fishery history) and referenced in some sort of recommendation. Table format? This may not be all that useful, but it might be interesting to see how much money and effort is being put into restoration in the form of planting. **VanderKooy** noted that it is less about the actual values, as much as it is, a retrospective look at how it has changed over the years. **Leard**, **Dugas**, and **Berrigan** had a report sometime in the mid-90s which should have some of this information in it.

Berrigan asked a question unrelated, but wondered if anyone had leaseholders who purchased shell for planting and have they paid sales tax? Aquaculture/agriculture under Florida law is exempt when buying lime, limestone, etc., but some leaseholders were charged, and **Berrigan's** not sure if they should be.

12.4.3.2 Aquaculture – As state policies are determined, **Berrigan** will send readers to see the discussion of aquaculture policy. He will wait for **Supan** to finish the culture section before he develops any recommendations from that section.

12.4.4 Measures to Increase Utilization – **Berrigan** is looking for which states have summer harvests and what the restrictions are for continual harvest. Alabama has continual and **VanHoose** would look into it for **Berrigan**.

12.4.4.2.1 Relaying – **Berrigan** has changed some things in this section, but his interpretation of relaying might be different from the other states and he needs this reviewed. **Berrigan** needs lots of input here as well.

Berrigan is still looking for information on container relaying which **Supan** reported is detailed from his thesis work in the model ordinance. **Arnold** noted that there is a lot of information which could be included on the impacts of relaying on essential fish habitat (EFH) or Essential Habitat as defined by the Commission.

12.4.4.2.2 Depuration – The cleansing versus depuration needs to be fleshed out a little more. **Berrigan** would like some more help with this discussion. **Herrington** noted that he would be able to clear this up easily as FDA has all the ‘official’ definitions. These will also need to be clear in the Glossary. There is a fine line between product enhancement and actual relaying from areas for cleansing. This is really confusing. Model ordinance is what needs to be followed, which means everyone should read it.

12.4.4.3.1 Post-harvest Treatments – need to develop better the treatment and processing.

12.4.4.4 Harvest with Analysis for Pathogens – Need to see what ends up in the other section before **Berrigan** can really develop this section.

Same thing applies all the way through resource management.

12.4.6.1.3 Stock Assessment – There are still a number of questions that need to be answered before we can proceed with development of this section. This will take place at a later time in all likelihood.

Berrigan’s take home message is that he has moved everything around based on the management objectives and needs help with the advantages and disadvantages for each of these recommendations. We need the information in there, if for no other reason, we’ve got it there when the need arises to act or make changes to management. Developing standardized methodologies would allow us better to assess impacts, due to natural or man-made disasters in the future. When we were trying to quantify the impacts immediately after the 2005 hurricanes, the extreme differences between how the states had done their analysis, made it nearly impossible for NOAA to assess the overall impacts. **Leslie Craig** had been involved in some of this discussion early on, and that is why **Berrigan** wanted to get her involved in the criteria development. **Lezina** will send his written protocols for disaster assessment to see if it helps. As we get a stock assessment completed and perhaps develop a couple models, it would all get to slightly different results (economic loss, biological loss, fishery loss, tonging reef vs. dredging reefs, low salinity vs. high salinity areas).

Section 11 – Social and Cultural Characteristics of Oyster Fishermen and Their Communities

Please read over **Weeks’** section and provide her comments where necessary. **Weeks** had several questions which are embedded in the document. Someone previously had asked about passage of family business, she included a single paragraph. If anyone has any additional

information or anything anecdotal, please provide it. The main topics she worked on or needed help with were identified at the top of her draft as:

- 1) Working waterfronts
- 2) Processor dealer descriptions or characteristics
- 3) Declining industry (less passage of the family business)
- 4) Product diversification
- 5) Labor force ethnicity changes
- 6) Other fishery dependency

Please read the section and provide **Weeks** any material that might help. If you can draft a short paragraph to fill in a component that is lacking for your state, please do so and e-mail it to her.

Section 10 – Description of Economic Characteristics

Keithly was unable to attend the meeting, but had reported to **VanderKooy** that he had not had a chance to do any additional work. He would try to send something in or post it on the website when he got a chance. **VanderKooy** will get the table he handed out at the last meeting and provide them on the website.

Section 9 – Description of Oyster Processing, Marketing/Distribution and Trade Organizations

VanderKooy explained how this section is supposed to fit in with economics and sociology. There was nothing to discuss without having both **Weeks** and **Keithly** together. **Herrington** has the assignment within this section regarding the shellfish shippers list, HAACPS, and other processor type information.

Section 8 – Public Health Concerns Introduction and History

Herrington had provided a draft of this section previously, but needs everyone to read through it and provide any comments. It is available on the website for download. **Herrington** had made some updates, but lost them when his computer crashed. He would review it and see what could be recovered from his cerebral memory, rather than his computer memory. **Herrington** needs the task force review, but it's not ready for outside review yet.

Section 7 – Description of Fishery Activities

VanHoose had made a few changes and they were listed on the draft provided. He wondered about the start of regulations in each of the states. Alabama's first legislation related to oysters was in 1852, and was regarding the tonging only of reefs. **VanHoose** would like to add in even anecdotal information like this in the historical section. **VanHoose** is also listing some of the Atlantic landings just to give some perspective to the Gulf landings. **VanHoose** has built the state-by-state landings tables and numbers, as well through 1950-current. He noted that there were several years that looked like they must have had specific events such as tropical systems. State reps could identify hurricanes and droughts that impacted the realized landings immediately. **VanHoose** asked that each rep send him the specific information for each major

event which impacted the landings. **Berrigan** provided **VanHoose** with Florida's landings and effort for Franklin County from 1986-2007 trip data. **Lezina** noted Louisiana's catch per unit effort is not about harvest, it's about demand from the processor/dealer these days.

There was considerable discussion related to listing or tabulating total days of closures which might impact the landings data. **VanHoose** would like to have this data provided, if possible, and attempt to span the last twenty years (1988-2007), which is close to where the last plan cut off. As far as lease data, Alabama and Louisiana might not have much, but **Berrigan** believes that Florida might have some, just because the lease holders want some base level numbers in the event they qualify for assistance sometime in the future.

There is still a need, to perhaps define what a sack, box, and barrel make up. Perhaps a conversion table is needed somewhere in the FMP for how to measure what these standards are in each state, how they were derived and how to convert them. There is also a NMFS conversion, whose origination is unknown and it might include this information.

Section 6 – Fishery Management Jurisdiction

VanderKooy reported that **Bill Robinson** had provided the state sections to the LEC for their update long ago, but acknowledged that we were still lacking the input from the other state agencies responsible for management and enforcement (health departments, etc). Both **VanderKooy** and **Walter Chatagner (LEC Chair)** asked the LEC to provide any contacts that they had to complete this section at their meeting in Galveston at the GSMFC meeting. The state sections have been updated as far as license fees and harvest regulations. If there are historical changes to regulations or mode of harvest that would contribute to the changes in landings over time, other than climate and closures, each state needs to include those in their section as well.

VanderKooy asked that everyone review the Federal acts and actions in the first part of this section to determine if all apply to oyster management and if there is any items missing. Send the additions or deletions to **VanderKooy** directly.

Not all the state agency categories fit since multiple departments or agencies may overlap. The state representatives need to determine if any of the existing items, like reciprocal agreements, data reporting, or area restrictions need to be moved to another agencies section rather than simply filling in as NOT APPLICABLE to their own agency.

VanderKooy can provide the individual state sections to the representatives if they want them as Word files. Statute numbers and administrative codes related to oyster management within each state could be summarized, such that a reader could be directed to a single resource in order to reduce the number of pages but if detail is appropriate, it shouldn't be discouraged. FDA may have a good summary of each of the states information available on-line; **Herrington** would look into. Area classifications and definitions will be included in the Public Health section and could be eliminated from the enforcement section since they should have the same descriptions. **VanderKooy** will strike these items from this section.

Section 5 – Threats to Survival

Lezina reported that he had made a few minor changes and cleaned up some of the sub-sections due to overlaps elsewhere. Section 5.2 and following is all new and **Lezina** will continue to work on and provide to the task force soon. He has picked up all the material to fill in the section; he just needs to begin to synthesize the language to put in. **Herrington** noted the Pensacola shellfish meeting several years ago included a large discussion on threats to survival in the Gulf and would be a good source for this section. He would locate it and get a copy to **Lezina**.

Section 4 – Habitat

O'Brien has been working primarily on the boilerplate section and is waiting for some of the states to provide their reef acreages to update. She has been told she was sent some material, but hadn't actually received it yet. **O'Brien** is looking for total reef acreage, not leases vs. public and not based on condition. Please double check your e-mail address for her and resend any materials. The material in blue is what **O'Brien** has changed; the rest is still from the crab FMP. She welcomes anyone to review their own state information and citations and update them if they wish.

VanderKooy was asked about units (English or Metric). The general rule of thumb is, whatever the accepted standard is such as inches for length of fish but could include the converted number in parenthesis.

The Table of Contents will need to be updated, but **VanderKooy** was waiting until everyone's sections had been fairly complete. At this time the current TOC is appropriate with the other FMPs the Commission has already.

VanderKooy noted that he had requested each state rep try to provide their GIS maps or the closest proximity to current maps or shape files of reef sites. Whatever can be added into some sort of a distribution map would be helpful and should include total oyster areas (production and ecological reefs combined).

Other Business

Arnold agreed to begin to look at the stock assessment information and try to develop some sort of plan for the task force to proceed with. He would get back with **VanderKooy** and see if he could talk Bob Muller into re-examining the issue at the regional level.

VanderKooy reminded everyone to keep track of their citations and provide copies of them and the papers to him for inclusion in the database and library. If you have any papers you can't locate, check with **VanderKooy** as there may already be an electronic copy available.

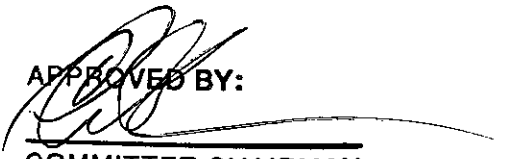
VanderKooy will get some dates to everyone to consider in late July or August and one more meeting for reaching final draft stage in late November or early December back in New Orleans. The meeting will likely be in St. Pete in order to be sure **Leslie Craig** can attend. **VanderKooy**

will try to first work around **Leslie's**, **Weeks'**, and **Keithly's** schedules to be sure they are able to participate. *It's expected that everyone will have downloaded the available sections and will provide reviews and comments at this upcoming meeting.*

Lezina, Robinson, and Patrick Banks talked briefly regarding the non-resident oystermen in Louisiana.

With no further business, Arnold made the motion to adjourn, the motion was seconded by Herrington and the group adjourned at 10:00 a.m.

APPROVED BY:


COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**ARENARIUS TECHNICAL TASK FORCE
MINUTES
April 15-16, 2008
Apalachicola, Florida**

The Arenarius Technical Task Force (TTF) was called to order on Tuesday, April 15, 2008, at 8:33 a.m. at the Gibson Inn, Apalachicola, Florida. Attendance was as follows:

Members Attending

Chuck Adams, UF, Gainesville, FL
Mark Van Hoose, AMRD, Dauphin Island, AL
Walter "Tiny" Chataginer, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Denise Kinsey, LDWF, Borg, LA
Erick Porche, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Jessica McCawley, FWC, Tallahassee, FL
Brenda Bowling, TPWD, Dickenson, TX
Ron Mezich, FWC, Tallahassee, FL

Staff

Steve VanderKooy, IJF Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Teri Freitas, IJF Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS

VanderKooy announced that our recreational representative, Captain Mike Brackin, passed away last week and we are currently seeking a replacement for him; looking for any suggestions from TTF members.

VanderKooy opened the meeting by asking each participant to introduce themselves and welcomed our newest member, **Ron Mezich**. The task force is made up of a scientific representative from each Gulf State (**Van Hoose, Porche, Kinsey, McCawley, and Bowling**); a recreational fishery representative (TBD); a commercial fishery representative (TBD); an economist (**Adams**); a habitat representative (**Mezich**); and a law enforcement representative (**Chataginer**).

Adoption of Agenda

The agenda was reviewed by the TTF members, **Chataginer** made the motion to accept the agenda as written; it was seconded by **Adams** and passed unanimously.

Minutes

The minutes from the September 25, 2007 meeting in New Orleans, LA were approved. The motion to accept the minutes was made by **Chataginer**; it was seconded by **Adams** and passed unanimously.

Review of Arenarius Website

VanderKooy demonstrated how to use the Arenarius Technical Task Force Website <http://arenarius.gsmfc.org>. The home page on the website consists of the following sections: home, calendar, document repository, forum, and contact us. **It is very important that you download documents to your computers hard drive before you make any comments, send your comments directly to the author or to VanderKooy and he will forward it to the author for you.** Please post your documents (Word, PDF or Excel files) as you complete them and feel free to contact **VanderKooy** if you have any questions or problems using the website. **VanderKooy** then showed TTF members how to upload draft documents to the website by clicking on the document repository. Look in the document store column (left), click on the name of the folder you want to deposit the document, look in the documents column (right) click on the upload documents icon. Complete all the information in the document repository screen, and then click on the upload icon. The intention is to have the individual authors post up their drafts for everyone to review, when you go to the website download the document and save it to your hard drive, print it on paper, do not edit it electronically and repost it, if you want to edit it electronically, provide a paragraph for the author, take the electronic copy that you put on your hard drive make the changes and email it to the author. Let the author make the changes and upload the most current version to the website. Please do not re-upload other people's documents.

VanderKooy then handed out a CD, **Reprint Library Vol. 1**, to all Arenarius TTF members. This CD contains, in PDF format, all 471 references that are available on the GSMFC database related to spotted seatrout and sand seatrout and it will be a great reference resource.

Table of Contents/Assignments

VanderKooy again reminded the TTF members that the Table of Contents is only a guide and is not set in stone, the numbering system is very difficult, but it is the best way to keep track of the hierarchy of how things fall out in the outline, the page numbers are going to change, so don't worry about that yet. Sections may be combined, modified, split, rearranged, added or deleted. You may find a lot of things that just don't apply to this species, and that is okay. All reference material should be copied and mailed to the GSMFC to be scanned, so that we can make it available electronically in our database. **VanderKooy** will email library links to task force members; this will also be a good reference tool. To be consistent, please use the official name sand seatrout (the AFS common name) throughout the document.

Section 1.0 Summary and Section 2.0 Introduction – **VanderKooy** briefly reviewed these sections and stated that it will be primarily boilerplate.

Section 3.0 Description of Stock through Section 3.2.1.2.4 Adults - **Bowling** presented her first draft of the following sections: geography, classification, eggs, larvae, juveniles, adults; this is an excellent start for her first draft. **Bowling** is looking for anything information on juvenile descriptions and larvae; she drafted these sections with her own description as a bookmark for this section. The task members offered a couple of suggestions; **Van Hoose** will forward to **VanderKooy** a 1982 or 1983 reference by Laroche and Richardson on the *sciaenid's larvae* in

the Mississippi Sound and **McCawley** gave **Bowling** a couple of electronic papers she had on juveniles. **Bowling** also provided a list of references that she used in her sections; she is still looking for two references, (Vicks 1964) largest reported size is 590mm from Florida; and (Sanchez 1997) geographic description – Nicaragua and Honduras. **VanderKooy** found the (Vicks 1964) reference at GCRL and said he will forward it to **Bowling**, and then reiterated how valuable the library at GCRL is. After the TTF members reviewed these sections, **VanderKooy** then posted **Bowling's** draft to the Arenarius website.

Section 3.2.2 Age and Growth – Van Hoose reported that he has not done much on this section, but had some questions on whether any of the states had any material on age and growth. **Porche** indicated that he may have some of GCRL's old data and **Bowling** offered to send **Van Hoose** some otolith samples. **Van Hoose** asked the possibility of getting some sand seatrout from the SEAMAP samples on the Tommy Munro. **McCawley** reported that Florida does sampling and **Bowling** reported that Texas does as well. **VanderKooy** recommended that we use what we have and go from there. **VanderKooy** also suggested looking at the labs old data first. **Bowling** said she has seen some age and growth reference material and **McCawley** stated that she has some for Florida that she would forward also to **Van Hoose**. During the morning break electronic information was exchanged among TTF members.

Section 3.2.3 Reproduction through Section 3.2.3.5 Larval Transport – Kinsey presented her first draft of the reproduction section, which included: gonadal development, spawning, fecundity, incubation and larval transport. She is seeking more recent information (i.e. 2000 to present) related to reproduction and is also currently looking for Landry and Armstrong 1981 - NOAA Technical Memorandum #28. **Kinsey** provided **VanderKooy** with an electronic copy of the cited references in her section. **VanderKooy** thought he might have something done by Mark Peterson, Chet Rakocinsky and Bruce Cummins that was before the hurricane, but he was not certain that is was for sand seatrout; he will check his desktop computer when he gets back.

Section 3.2.4 Genetics – McCawley had several questions: Florida has 600 samples that need to be worked up that are from Tampa, Charlotte Harbor, Cedar Key and Apalachicola; but unless another state has genetics data, how useful will only the Florida data be? **Bowling** stated that Texas has been collecting sand seatrout for several years for genetic purposes, but they have not been worked up, she will check to see where they stand. Mississippi and Alabama reported that they do not sample. **VanderKooy** recommended that **McCawley** see what preliminary data is available, check a reference by Fitzsimmons, Rogers and Camner; and use what we have available in the Gulf. **McCawley** is looking for any published, unpublished or raw data, phone conversations or emails available on genetics.

Section 3.2.5 Migration and Movements, Section 3.2.6 Parasites and Diseases and Section 3.2.7 Prey-Predators Relationships – Porche reported that so far he has drafted the Prey-Predator Relationships section and started it with a quote “They eat shrumps and squids; what else you need to know?” (Mike Brackin, personal communication, 2008); he too is running into old reference data and is looking for anything newer. **Kinsey** had some information on shrimp and offered to send it to him. **Porche** reported that he has started research on the other sections, but has not put anything on paper; he is looking for a thesis paper from Dietz 1976, University of South Florida and a tech paper “Contributions of Marine Science”, University of Texas by

Moffett 1979, which was provided to him by **Bowling**. Also he is looking for a dissertation by Rogers 1977, Texas A&M, and **Bowling** offered to get this dissertation for **Porche**.

Section 4.0 Description of Habitat of the Stock(s) through Section 4.9.4.12 LNG Plants – Mezich is our newest TTF member and this was his first meeting, so **VanderKooy** quickly reviewed the process, the Habitat section, overlap of sections, boilerplate sections, and the table of contents. **Mezich** reported that since his appointment to the TTF, he has been gathering data and publications for the habitat section.

Section 5.0 Fishery Management Jurisdictions, Laws, and Policies Affecting the Stock(s) through 5.3.2.1 Development of Management Plans (Title II, Section 308(c))

Chatagner reported that most of this section will be a cut and paste from the Spotted Seatrout FMP or Sheepshead Profile. He has already made contact with each state law enforcement representative regarding their laws and regulations on sand seatrout and found that there are no commercial landings for this species. There is no commercial interest in the sand seatrout and they are primarily bycatch. This section will need a lot of weeding out; many sections will probably end up being removed, because they do not apply and the ones that do apply will need some minor updates. **VanderKooy** will email the LEC this section for review and comment.

Section 6.0 Description of Fishing Activities Affecting the Stock(s) in the United States through Section 6.2.2.5 Texas - McCawley had more questions; it seemed that some of the background for this section seemed kind of boilerplate like the Spotted Seatrout FMP. Where

can she get recreational landings other than MRFSS (which does not include Texas)? **VanderKooy** recommended sticking with MRFSS for now, MRIP is being implemented, and get the data for Texas from Page Campbell; **VanderKooy** will request the recreational data from Page. What about state records, months targeted, and landings by month? **VanderKooy** suggested Jessica gather what information she can get and then see if fits and how it will fit into this section. **McCawley** also asked how far to go back on the commercial landings data? It was recommended to go as far back as the 1950's, since the NMFS data goes back that far.

Section 6.3 Incidental Catch – Porche questioned whether it would be worth mentioning that sand seatrout is often not the targeted species; they are incidental catch that are usually kept and not thrown back. This section should probably be re-titled Incidental Catch with Bycatch as a subsection and the law enforcement section should cover Incidental Catch and Bycatch for the commercial side of the fishery.

Section 6.4 Mariculture – Adams reported that he reviewed the Sheepshead Profile and the Spotted Seatrout FMP and did not find much of anything for the mariculture section, because there is not really a market for them.

Section 7.0 Economic Characteristics of the Commercial and Recreational Fisheries –

Adams reported that he has done some on-line research on the recreational/commercial landings, but has not put any of this to paper; he will be using the NMFS website and trip tickets for landings data. **Adams** stated that aside from doing some kind of a survey (like we have done in the past), it is going to be down to just some anecdotal information. **Adams** reported that he will see what he can come up with, and if after a few phone calls and talking with people, if

something doesn't start to shape up, we may need to reconsider doing a survey. **Adams** is going to Washington, DC next week and will knock on a couple of doors and look for some additional information to see what is out there. This section will basically be a rehash of the Spotted Seatrout FMP. **VanderKooy** stated that if you can identify a speckled trout fisherman, you will find sand seatrout fisherman.

Section 8.0 Social and Cultural Framework of Domestic Fishermen and Their Communities

VanderKooy found a few names of Economists in the Louisiana Social Economics Department and asked **Kinsey** if LDWF has any Sociologist on staff, she offered to look into it.

Section 9.0 Regional Research Needs and Requirements – **VanderKooy** indicated that these are placeholders out of the Sheepshead FMP and a lot of these will apply to the sand seatrout.

Technical Task Force Membership

VanderKooy asked TTF members for suggestions to fill the following openings: Recreational, Commercial and Sociology. The Habitat vacancy was filled by **Ron Mezich** of FWC, who is a member of the GSMFC Habitat Committee.

Next Meeting

VanderKooy stated that based on what we talked about today and what little information is available; the bulk of this could be written by spring, a draft ready for review by next summer, edited and polished and possibly get it out for public comment by the fall. All rough draft writing assignments should be uploaded to the website and submitted to the Commission office by August 1, 2008, so that the drafts can be assimilated and copied for review prior to the meeting. The next meeting was tentatively scheduled for August/September and then possibly again in December/January; some recommended locations were Tampa, St. Petersburg, Wakulla Springs State Park or Corpus Christi.

Election of Chairman

Adams volunteered to take on the role of Chairman, **Chatagner** made the motion to accept the nomination; it was seconded by **Porche** and passed unanimously.

GSMFC Travel Policy

Freitas provided the group with a brief overview of GSMFC travel policies. The authorization and reimbursement procedures were explained and the group was referred to the *GSMFC Travel Guidelines* for detailed information. Any additional questions regarding travel should be addressed to Gayle Jones, the Commission's travel coordinator.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:00 p.m.

SEAMAP Longline Work Group Meeting Summary
April 21, 2008

Attendance

Jeff Rester
Todd Neahr
Mark Grace
Eric Hoffmayer
Jaime David
John Mareska
Bob McMichael
Terry Henwood

NMFS Longline Survey

Mark Grace stated that the NMFS longline survey was developed in 1995 in response to increasing management concerns related to the decline of sharks populations. During 1999, research objectives were expanded to include red snapper. The bottom longline survey uses a standardized survey design with random station selection. The survey takes place from July to September each year. The longline is one mile long with 100 number 15 circle hooks on 12-foot gangions. Mark Grace stated that the longline survey can survey both sharks and fish with the same standardized gear and has produced useful data for both sharks and fish. He stated that both size and catch rates for sharks were similar to commercial effort.

Mississippi Shark Survey

Eric Hoffmayer stated that the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory (GCRL) has been performing shark surveys since 1998. He stated that the SEAMAP longline survey began in 2007. The objectives of the longline survey were to conduct a monthly inshore longline survey (March to October), to collect information on coastal shark abundance and distribution, and tag as many sharks as possible to elucidate movement patterns. He reported that there were three sampling regions. They were the Mississippi Sound, south of the barrier islands, and northern Chandeleur Sound. He stated that they used a random, stratified sampling protocol with different depth strata (2-5m, 5-10m, and 10-20m) within each region. He reported that they were using a 1 nautical mile mainline with 100 number 15 circle hooks, L/P hook timers on all gangions, and Atlantic mackerel as bait.

Dauphin Island Sea Laboratory Shark Survey

Mark Grace stated that the Dauphin Island Sea Laboratory (DISL) was currently conducting a longlining survey in conjunction with NMFS using the same gear and protocols as the offshore NMFS survey. He stated there were four survey areas south of Alabama. Two areas are sampled monthly with stations chosen randomly by depth. The survey began in 2006, and the Work Group discussed whether the survey would be continued in the future. Terry Henwood stated that the project was funded from a pool of money that had to be applied for each year. The Work Group discussed the possibility of Alabama taking over the survey if funds were not available to continue the survey. John

Mareska stated that he would check on the interest of Alabama in continuing the survey if funding were not available for the Dauphin Island Sea Lab to continue the sampling.

Proposed Texas Longline Survey

Todd Neahr stated that a red drum longline survey began in the early 1990s to monitor populations of red drum, to summarize catch rates and mean size of other commercially and recreationally important species caught, and to summarize tag release and recapture information by species. He reported that Texas had proposed a shark longline survey from June to September each year with four random longline sets out of each field station each month. He stated that there were five field stations along the Texas coast that sample offshore waters. The Work Group discussed the proposed survey and questioned whether more than one set could be made per month. The Work Group also stressed the advantages of using gear and protocols similar to those already employed in the NMFS, Mississippi, and DISL longline surveys. Todd Neahr stated that he would take the recommendations back to his supervisors and discuss survey modifications with them.

Future Survey Expansion

Jaime David stated that she would check on Louisiana's interest on potentially participating in the longline survey in the future. Bob McMichael stated that he would do the same for Florida.

Development of a SEAMAP Longline Operations Manual

Jeff Rester stated that the main purpose of the meeting was to develop a longline survey operations manual. He stated that Mark Grace had provided a copy of the NMFS standard protocols for longlining that he distributed to everyone before the meeting. He stated that what he would like to use the language from the NMFS document and modify it to suit the needs of the SEAMAP survey. He stated that the current gangion length may need to be modified for use on smaller vessels. Bob McMichael stated that he would like to see language in the operations manual that allowed for a shorter mainline length, but kept the same hook spacing. Mark Grace described the sling that NMFS uses to measure and weigh large sharks. He stated that he would send a paper that was published describing the sling. Bob McMichael stated that a discussion of the survey design should be at the beginning of the operations manual. Jeff Rester stated that he would draft language for the operations manual and then distribute it to everyone for their review. After the Work Group's review, he would send it to the SEAMAP Subcommittee for their approval.

Other Business

Jeff Rester stated that the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission was now responsible for SEAMAP data management in the Gulf of Mexico. He stated that he would be working with Mississippi and Texas in designing a data entry system and database that suited their needs for data management.

SEAMAP Shrimp/Groundfish Work Group Meeting Summary
April 22, 2008

Attendance

Jeff Rester
Bob McMichael
Butch Pellegrin
Mark Van Hoose
Nate Sanders
Read Hendon
Fernando Martinez-Andrade
Jason Froeba
Andre Debose
Kim Johnson

Review of the SEAMAP Trawl Operations Manual

Jeff Rester reported that the operations manual was currently being updated to include information about the FCS system. He stated that in the review of the operations manual, he wanted to document how each state differed from the operations manual. Butch Pellegrin stated that NMFS followed the operations manual as written.

Mark Van Hoose stated that Alabama would be adding electronic measuring boards to their sampling this year. He stated that Alabama would tow parallel to the depth stratum to reach the 10 minute tow minimum. He stated that Alabama would also move any stations located within the Alabama artificial reef zones to outside the reef zones.

Read Hendon stated that Mississippi would use a cable warp of 3.5 to 1 when trawling. When trawling off Louisiana, he reported that they would stern trawl instead of off the side of the boat. This was in an effort to avoid shrimpers. He also stated that a decision was made back in the 1990s to limit trawls to a 30 minute tow time.

Jason Froeba stated that Louisiana would sample each station during the night and during the day. He reported that sampling sites were chosen randomly by depth and that trawls were towed for a minimum of 10 minutes, but only a maximum of 30 minutes. He stated that Louisiana processed the catch differently in that all individuals were identified to species and then 50 individuals were measured and then weighed. Any excess were only weighed and not enumerated. For shrimp during the summer survey, he stated that 200 shrimp from each species were sexed, staged, measured, and weighed. Any remaining individuals were only weighed. For the spring, fall and winter surveys, a sample of 50 shrimp from each species were sexed, staged, measured, and weighed.

Fernando Martinez-Andrade stated that Texas had five vessels that worked out of their five bay systems. These smaller vessels used 20 foot instead of 40 foot trawl nets. He stated that Texas towed for 10 minutes parallel to the depth stratum. All stations were randomly selected, but no night stations were conducted. He stated that 50 individual shrimp were measured during the summer survey.

Jeff Rester then asked if anyone had any updates to the operations manual. Bob McMichael stated that he had trouble with some of the terminology used in the operations manual. He stated that a section on experimental design that contained definitions would be helpful. Words like strata and what constitutes day and night should be defined. He also stated that he did not see the sense in collecting data that could be derived from the station location. These included things like faunal zone and statistical zone. Read Hendon stated that NMFS had developed an informative presentation on the FCS system that could be included as an appendix. Butch Pellegrin stated the section on electronic measuring boards probably needed to be redone.

Butch Pellegrin also brought up the issue of all SEAMAP partners following the operations manual. The Work Group discussed the issue of having a maximum tow time of 30 minutes and not covering the depth stratum completely. The Work Group made a recommendation that each state investigate the possibility of not limiting their tow times to 30 minutes during the Summer and Fall Shrimp/Groundfish Survey.

The Florida Trawl Survey

Bob McMichael stated that Florida would begin trawling off their coast this year. He stated that the survey would extend from the Alabama/Florida line to around Naples. He stated that Florida would pool statistical zones 8 through 10 and 6 and 7 to aid logistics and broaden spatial coverage. Florida would follow SEAMAP protocol to select sites within depth strata for the four Florida areas, but would limit trawl time to 30 minutes. A CTD cast would be conducted in conjunction with each trawl to collect environmental data. While plankton samples would be collected in the future, they would not be taken this year. He stated that the summer survey would begin on July 30 and last until August 16 this year. The fall survey would begin on October 8 and end on October 21. Finally, he stated that results from the 2008 and 2009 surveys would be used to determine sampling times after 2009.

The issue of limiting tows to 30 minutes came up again. Butch Pellegrin stated that he would investigate the possibility of limiting all SEAMAP stations to 30 minutes and report to the Subcommittee at the August meeting.

State Inshore/Nearshore Trawl Surveys

Mark Van Hoose stated that Alabama began inshore sampling with 16-foot nets in 1981. He stated that the survey would be a continuation of this work. He stated that SEAMAP was paying for 12 months of sampling at fixed stations and that they would not be sampling at night.

Jason Froeba stated that Louisiana had begun their inshore sampling with 16-foot trawls in 1966. They also sampled fixed stations. He reported that the original SEAMAP proposal had changed and that SEAMAP would now be sampling during March, April, November, and December at 24 stations twice a month in each of five areas along the coast.

The Work Group discussed the advantages and disadvantages of fixed and random stations. The Work Group made a recommendation that any new SEAMAP trawl surveys should use a stratified, random design for picking station locations.

The Work Group also thought it was important to develop an inshore trawl survey guidelines document. Jeff Rester requested that the states doing inshore surveys send him the guidelines they currently use so he can use them as a guide. The Work Group also discussed comparison studies between 16 and 20-foot trawl nets. Bob McMichael stated he would send a study of 16 verses 20-foot nets and Butch Pellegrin stated he would send a study on 20 verses 40-foot nets.

Winter Shrimp/Groundfish Survey Proposed Work

Fernando Martinez-Andrade stated that in 2009 Texas would start sending their February trawl data in to SEAMAP as part of the Winter Shrimp/Groundfish Survey. He stated that there would be 80 samples total. Mark Van Hoose stated that Alabama would try to get out in the January or February time period. He stated that they did not have a target for the number of stations, but it would include their randomly selected stations out to 20 fathoms. Jason Froeba stated that Louisiana would be conducting their survey during January and it would include 30 stations along with 7 plankton stations. He stated that Louisiana would be conducting four trawl surveys. These would take place in January, April, July, and October. NMFS and Mississippi did not express an interest in participating in a Winter Survey at this time.

Other Business

Jeff Rester told everyone to make sure that they have the proper permits onboard their vessels for handling turtles, interacting with marine mammals, and for TED exemptions. Butch Pellegrin stated that Karen Mitchell could help each partner in making sure that they have the correct permits onboard.

APPROVED BY:



COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**GULF & SOUTH ATLANTIC REGIONAL PANEL
ON AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES
MINUTES**

**Tuesday, April 22 and Wednesday, April 23, 2008
San Antonio, Texas**

Chairman Earl Chilton 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

Diane Altsman, EPA/GMPO, Stennis Space Center, MS
James Ballard, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Harry Blanchet, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Mike Brainard, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Paul Carangelo, Port of Corpus Christi Authority, Corpus Christi, TX
Earl Chilton, TPWD, Austin, TX
Steven de Kozlowski, SCDNR, Columbia, SC
Pam Fuller, U.S. Geological Survey, Gainesville, FL
John Goolsby, USDA-ARS, Weslaco, TX
Lisa Gonzalez, Houston Advanced Research Center, The Woodlands, TX
Leslie Hartman, AL Marine Resources Division, Dauphin Island, AL
Dewayne Hollin, Texas Sea Grant, College Station, TX
Tom Jackson, NOAA-Fisheries, Miami, FL
Chuck Jacoby, University of Florida/Florida Sea Grant, Gainesville, FL
David Knott, SCDNR, Charleston, SC
Jim Long, National Park Service, Atlanta, GA
Ron Lukens, At-Large Member, High Springs, FL
James Morris, NOAA, Beaufort, NC
Doug Nemeth, US Navy, Jacksonville, FL
Marilyn Barrett O'Leary, At-Large Member, Baton Rouge, LA
Harriet Perry, GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Bob Pitman, USFWS, Albuquerque, NM
George Ramseur, Land Trust for the MS Coastal Plain, Ocean Springs, MS
Steve Rider, AL Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries, Montgomery, AL
Dennis Riecke, MDWFP, Jackson, MS
Lance Robinson, TPWD, Dickinson, TX
Don Schmitz, FDEP, Tallahassee, FL
John Teem, FL Dept. of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Tallahassee, FL
Jay Troxel, USFWS, Atlanta, GA
Keith Weaver, GDNR, Social Circle, GA

Staff

Nancy K. Marcellus, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

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Others

Denise Gregoire, US Geological Survey, Gainesville, FL
Jacqueline N. Langston, US Geological Survey, Gainesville, FL
Julie Nachtrieb, USACE LAERF, Lewisville, TX
Pamela J. Schofield, US Geological Survey, Gainesville, FL

Public Comment

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

Review and Adoption of Agenda

Steve de Kozlowski made a motion to adopt the agenda as presented. Ron Lukens seconded the motion and the agenda was adopted.

Review and Approval of Minutes

Paul Carangelo made a motion to approve the minutes from the October 30 - November 1, 2007 meeting held in Miami, Florida. Ron Lukens seconded the motion and the minutes were approved.

Current Research Efforts for Control of Hydrilla (*Hydrilla verticillata*)

Don Schmitz reported on the FDEP Research Funding Program for Invasive Plants.

DEP Research Funding Program Facts:

1970 - 2008	\$17,604,352
Funded	178 projects

1970-2008 Research Projects

• Aquatic plants	\$11,479,492
• Upland plants	\$4,501,890
• Both	\$1,622,670

DEP Funding History fo Invasive Plant Management Research in Florida:

1970s	The "Golden Age", physiology, ecology, herbicides, grass carp, mechanical harvesting, biocontrol \$4.0 million (55)
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**GULF & SOUTH ATLANTIC REGIONAL PANEL
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1980s	Fluridone research, defining use of new and existing management tools, biocontrol \$1.9 million (13)
1990s	Wetland and upland plant species, biocontrol \$2.8 million (31)
2000s	Hydrilla and Old World climbing fern, new herbicides, biocontrol \$8.9 million (79)

A new newsletter summarizing DEP funded research in clear and concise language targeting resource managers in the aquatic and upland plant areas is planned for the Fall of 2008.

Need for a National Center for Invasive Species

Don Schmitz discussed the need for a National Center for Biological Invasions. He described the fragmented and piecemeal response by government agencies to biological invasions in the United States, some useful national models that help coordinate multi-jurisdictional responses, and how a national center could enhance existing federal, tribal, state and local programs.

Our nation is at great risk for new invasions because of present national policies that regulate the importation of non-native species arriving at our ports:

- By not requiring that all imported non-native species be pre-screened for their potential invasiveness.
- By making it difficult and time consuming to add new invasive species to existing federal prohibited lists because of industry pressure and a lack of a sense of urgency about the economic and environmental harm these invaders cause.
- Because no one agency is responsible for compiling detailed economical and statistical information about invasive species across the nation.

Specific Federal Initiatives:

- National Invasive Species Council (NISC)
- Aquatic Nuisance Species (ANS) Task Force
- Federal Interagency Committee for the Management of Noxious and Exotic Weeds (FICMNEW)
- Midwest Natural Resources Group (MNRG)
- National Plant Diagnostic Network (NPDN)
- 100th Meridian Initiative
- Plant Conservation Alliance
- TAME Melaleuca

**GULF & SOUTH ATLANTIC REGIONAL PANEL
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There are 176 federal agencies/institutions with entities that have authority, and/or have divisions or programs pertaining to non-native and invasive species.

In 2007 there were 20 proposed Congressional Bills that deal with invasive species.

Online databases that contain information about invasive species:

143 - U.S. information systems on invasive species (identification, digital images, maps, references, management and control information).

4 - U.S. based general flora databases that contain information on invasive plants.

When including global information systems, there are approximately a total of 252.

Benefits of a National Center for Biological Invasions:

- No one agency's agenda dominates
- When asked, the National Center provides a service to federal, tribal, state, and local governments to help improve prevention, eradication, research, and management activities.
- Staff eats, breathes, and sleeps for enhancement between federal, tribal, state, and local government programs.

A National Center enhances existing federal and state programs by:

- Helping to coordinate surveillance activities (between states and feds).
- Tracking invasive species range expansions owing to global climate change.
- Helping to coordinate early detection and rapid response efforts.
- Maintaining a taxonomic expertise database for the purpose of assisting state agencies in the identification of non-native species.
- Developing national standards and guidelines.
- Coordinating U.S. policy with other countries with regard to trade.
- Tracking invasive species expenditures.
- Producing economic impact studies along with risk analyses.
- Being a national repository of accurate invasive species information.

How could a National Center help local and regional efforts?

- Avoid duplication of efforts by tracking management and research efforts.
- Help increase funding for control and prevention (economics, risk analyses).
- Better coordination for current prevention activities.
- Help target those species that lack an affected constituency.
- Provide useful management models.
- Work with importers and plant and pet industries.
- Provide and Emergency Contingency funding source, or grants to federal and state agency eradication 1st year efforts on public conservation lands and waterways.

**GULF & SOUTH ATLANTIC REGIONAL PANEL
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Schmitz agreed to put together a paper on this topic and send out to the other Panels for their review and comments. Schmitz would then present this again at a future Task Force meeting.

Politics Involved with Utilizing Herbicidal and Biological Controls

Earl Chilton provided a PowerPoint presentation entitled "Politics Involved with Utilizing Herbicides and Biological Controls". Chilton discussed the competition between competing interest groups or individuals for power and leadership.

Salt Cedar and Russian Olive Control Demonstration Act (SCROCCA)

- Public Law 109-320 on October 11, 2006
- Administered by the Secretary of the Interior through the Bureau of Reclamation and the USGS - in cooperation with the Secretary's of Agriculture and Defense
- \$20 million for fiscal year 2006 and \$15 million for each of fiscal years 2007 through 2010 - 75% maximum cost share for NON-Federal lands
- Senator Domenici (NM) - Chaired Energy and Water Development Appropriations Subcommittee and Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

The Texas Invasive Species Coordinating Committee was formed to facilitate information exchange and to help acquire federal funds.

Louisiana State Report: Update on Transport of MARAD Vessels to Louisiana

Harry Blanchet reported on actions taken since the last meeting:

- In July, 2007, LAIS Council and Task Force received presentations on issues regarding the MARAD fleet of obsolete government vessel.
- Subcommittee organized to develop recommendations for action.
- LDWF used input from subcommittee and LDEQ, drafted and sent letter on August 17 to MARAD outlining "interim plan".
- Intent was to allow Louisiana facilities to participate in ship dismantling program without creating undue risks to Louisiana ecosystems.
- Would allow transport of ships from Beaumont fleet only, under specified conditions.

Louisiana Interim Plan for MARAD Vessels:

- Intended to be used to limit potential for introducing AIS until more complete assessment of biota and issues could be developed and reviewed.
- Only pertains to Beaumont (Texas) fleet - James River (Virginia) and Suisan Bay (California) fleets not accepted at this time.
- 5 Point Plan
 - Survey ship before transport to Louisiana waters
 - If non-native species on hull, document information on species, including potential to impact Louisiana ecosystems.

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- If non-native species with potential to impact Louisiana ecosystems, implement mitigation measures.
- Clean all external surfaces of fouling growth.
- Internal areas that may hold water and organisms, including ballast tanks and bilges must be treated to minimize transport of those organisms to Louisiana waters.

Results:

- MARAD had solicited bids on 4 Beaumont fleet vessels on July 23.
- Louisiana sent letter to MARAD on August 17.
- Louisiana contractor bid on vessels from Beaumont, Texas fleet was not allowed by MARAD in bid opening of August 30.
- Louisiana contractor agreed to abide by Louisiana "interim plan", but MARAD said those conditions not acceptable since Louisiana has imposed unacceptable conditions, but other bidders were eligible.
- Louisiana contractor appealed MARAD decision.
- Legal and administrative procedures still ongoing for results of August 30 bid opening.

Additional Actions:

- MARAD began development of plans to sample Beaumont fleet, beginning in September 2007.
- Seasonal sampling for 1 year, with final report in about 18 months from beginning of project.

New Bid Solicitation by MARAD:

- On November 19, MARAD solicited bids on 3 ships.
- Louisiana ship dismantler provided plan to meet criteria of Louisiana "interim plan", including sampling and evaluation of fouling organisms.

Further Actions:

- Louisiana ship dismantler located biologist and dive crews to assess benthic biota on a ship from the Beaumont fleet.
- LDWF reviewed sampling protocols to ensure consistency with prior studies on MARAD fleet from James River, Virginia and Suisan Bay, California.
- Beaumont sampling occurred in December.
- Draft report provided to LDWF in mid-February.
- Draft report reviewed by DWF staff, based on comparison to criteria of Louisiana "interim plan".
- Corrections and modifications to report through end of February.

Results of Biological Sampling:

- Low numbers of species found in samples.
- Platyhelminthes and Nemerta not identified below major taxa.
- Species accumulation curves indicate that more species would be found with additional sampling (this is consistent with findings from other fleet sites).

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- Most species found were either native to region, or have been established and recorded in Louisiana for some time.
- One species identified which could have been new to region - final identification provided to LDWF last week.

Texas State Report: Update on Transport of MARAD Vessels

Lance Robinson reported on Post-Voyage Analysis of Hull Biofouling on the Vessels *Point Loma* and *Florence* after Transit from California to Texas.

- Pre- vs. post transit photographic survey - most striking observation was reduction of bryozoan mat (2-5 cm during pre-transit survey)
- 23 distinct species recorded during post-transit survey (5 not encountered in post-transit survey).
- 51 distinct species recorded during post-transit survey. Live specimens observed for at least 25 or the 51 species.
- 2 barnacles (*Balanus amphitrite* and *Lepas pacifica*) recorded from post-transit survey only.
- Of species found in Texas but not Suisan Bay, many were rare (< 5% of samples); may not have been detected in pre-transit surveys or attached during transit.
- Of the species recorded on the hulls in Texas, at least 8 were non-native to the western Gulf of Mexico. Two of these are known to be already established, however introduction of different genotypes may cause shifts in ecological characteristics and community dynamics.

Current Status - 2008

“Vessels from Beaumont fleet may be relocated to scrapping facilities in Brownsville without scamping. This decision is based on the best available information and the lower potential risk of invasive issues between these two Texas ports. This determination could change with new information or if concerns are raised by either Louisiana or Mexico because of their proximity to the Texas ports in question.”

“Vessels from Suisan Bay, California and James River, Virginia fleets may be brought into state waters provided they are scamped before coming into the Gulf of Mexico. It is also advised that any vessel originating from the Pacific should be scamped before entering the Caribbean via the Panama Canal.”

The Invasive and Nonindigenous Fauna of Coastal South Carolina

David Knott discussed the production of the brochure: The Asian Green Mussel - Unwelcome Addition to Fouling Communities of South Carolina. A grant of \$1,000 was received from the GSMFC to produce 2,500 brochures. 2,250 have been distributed at a variety of venues.

Objective of the South Carolina Aquatic Invasive Species Management Plan:

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- Educate public and private stakeholders about impacts and how they can help.
- Identify and implement needed research.
- Monitor occurrence and spread of AIS.

Non-Native Pet Amnesty Day - February 23, 2008

Scott Hardin reported on the Non-Native Pet Amnesty Day which was created to prevent illegal introductions, increase awareness, and promote adoption network.

Attendance: 400-500
148 Surrenders - 21 Post Event

“Day-Of” Cost:
Exhibitors: \$800
Tents, Tables, Chairs: \$1,420
Supplies: \$150
Signs, Banners: \$220
Food: \$290
Volunteer Gifts: \$400
TOTAL: \$3,280

Staff Commitment:
FWC - 84 Days
Cooperators - 68 Days

Media Value:
Audience: 28.6 million
Publicity Value: \$1,280,500

Next? A Mobile Unit for Local Sponsors.

Risk Analysis of Ornamental Trade

Scott Hardin presented a PowerPoint presentation entitled “Pathway Risk Analysis for Exotic Marine and Estuarine Species in Florida’s Pet Trade”. To determine conservation threats from the release of invasive animals, they initiated a project to conduct a risk assessment on all commercially available exotic marine or estuarine animals in Florida’s pet trade.

Funds were provided by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Florida’s Wildlife Legacy Initiative, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s State Wildlife Grants Program (T-11(R)).

The process included:

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- Literature Review
 - 20 books
 - 14 journal articles
 - 13 websites
 - 12 government/university reports
 - 5 online databases

- Knowledgeable Stakeholders
 - state (4) or federal agencies (1)
 - national or state universities (2)
 - commercial aquaculturists (2)
 - marine ornamental fish importers (3)
 - wholesale and retail businesses (5)
 - marine hobby aquarists (1)

- Workshops
 - Methodology
 - Pathway description

What did they learn?

- Trade data is out-of-date and deficient
- Socio-economic data anecdotal
- Species occurrence data is deficient
- Ecological effects uncertain
- Focus is on fish

Future -

- High level of trade participation
- Focus on public education

For more information on this project: FloridaAquaculture.com/pub.htm
or Paul Zajicek zajicep@doacs.state.fl.us.

Use of *Hydrellia* Flies as Biocontrol Agents for Management of *Hydrilla*

Julie Nachtrieb

U.S. Army Engineer Research and Development Center (ERDC), Environmental Laboratory,
Lewisville, Texas

Mass-rearing

- Began in 2000
- Cost
 - Laboratory & Greenhouse \$0.50/fly

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- – Pond rearing (mass rearing) \$0.0018/fly
- From 2000 - 2007
 - > 28 million released
 - 6 states - Texas, Florida, North Carolina, Virginia, Georgia, Arkansas
- High establishment success
 - Present in 78% of sites in years following initial release

Conclusions

- Flies suppress hydrilla by causing reductions in
 - Ability to photosynthesize
 - Biomass
 - Tuber numbers
 - Turion numbers
 - Fragment establishment
- Success at field releases
 - Reductions in surface coverage
 - Weakened competitive ability

Current Research

- Competition & Biocontrol
 - Large ponds with native plant preemption
 - Field Sites
- Overwintering behavior of flies
- Biocontrol Agent Mass-rearing
 - Salvinia weevil *Cyrtobagous salviniae*
 - Waterlettuce weevil *Neohydronomus affinis*

Overview of 2005-2009 Strategic Plan for Work Groups

James Ballard led a section by section review of the strategic plan:

Early Detection/Rapid Response

1. Completed yearly
2. Have the start of the plan but needs to be revisited.
The plan needs to have info from NC, SC & GA added. Ron received info from SC before he left but not the others.
It is mostly background on how states have dealt with problems; it needs to be more of a step by step procedure for carrying out a Rapid Response.
Incorporate ICS?
3. Not completed.
Look at Pam's website as a model.
4. Have done a lot of this, but it needs to be revisited.
5. Completed

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6. Not completed
7. Not completed

Research/Development

1. Completed yearly
2. Completed yearly
3. Completed yearly
4. Not completed
Would be a good thing for the work group to do at this time
Develop a funding document for the ANSTF (b/c there are funding source gaps).
The NISC website would be a good starting point. They have a list of funding sources.
5. Not completed
Harriet is working on this
6. Completed
7. Not completed
It is up to the work group to see if there is any use in still updating this document
Just needs to be looked at in detail
The original document is available on the GSARP and EPA websites

Education/Outreach

1. Completed yearly
2. Completed yearly
3. Completed yearly
4. Completed some
5. Completed some
Have looked into this with Sea Grant, however, more could be done
6. Not completed
This is a follow up to #5. At this time not organized enough to contact agencies and suggest what they should do.
7. Not completed
There is a new National Plan available that can be looked at.
8. Completed some but not a targeted effort
We can start adding the panel's materials to the WRP database to help keep track of what we have done (or set up a database at GSMFC?)
Need to have more consistency in our outreach materials throughout our region
Look into "Wonders of Wildlife" program to get our outreach materials and information incorporated into schools curriculum
9. Add new task: Develop educational materials addressing the human health risks involved with the Rat Lung Worm in the Channeled Apple Snail in New Orleans

Pathways/Prevention

1. Completed yearly
2. Completed some

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3. Remove from tasks, this is being completed by other organizations
Use the section in LA state plan dealing with vessel pathways as a model?
4. Not completed
5. Not completed
Nicole is gathering this information. When Ron left, she was still waiting on states to send in their lists
6. Not completed
The group needs to determine if there is still a concern about shrimp virus in the GOM and if there should be a more thorough study performed on this issue.
7. Remove from tasks, this is being completed by other organizations
8. Add new task: Look at possible pathways and ways to prevent VHS in our region
9. Add new task: Review the pathways document that Pam is finalizing.

Information/Management

1. Completed yearly
2. Need to update
3. Need to update
4. Need to update
5. Not completed
Nicole is gathering this information. When Ron left, she was still waiting on states to send in their lists
6. Not completed
Can use A&M Corpus Christi's Heart Research Institutes database of researchers as a model or a section in it for AIS researchers
Under R/D this task has been completed?

Eradication/Control/Restoration

- * This work group has never met; therefore, none of the tasks have been completed.

This activity will be discussed at the next Panel meeting.

Expert Database Demonstration

As requested at the last meeting, Pam Fuller provided a demonstration on the expert's database.

Applesnails and Other Exotic Mollusks: Status in Texas and the Gulf Coast

Robert G. Howells
BioStudies, Kerrville, Texas

Exotic Mollusks in Texas:

- Cheatam collected applesnails (*Pomacea*) of at least two species in Texas waters early in the 20th century.

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- By the 1950s and 60s, an array of aquatic and terrestrial gastropods began to appear in Texas, as did Asian clam.
- More recently, populations of *Pomacea insularum* have been documented at numerous sites, *Perna perna* invaded, and a report of giant African snail (*Achatina* sp.) remains unconfirmed in the Houston area.

Applesnails - Genus *Pomacea*

In the 1950s, heat tolerant *Pomacea* began to replace heat and low DO intolerant *Cipangopaludina* (*Bellamya-Vviparus*) in the aquarium trade. Note: the name mysterysnail (from viviparids) was retained for *Pomacea* in the aquarium industry.

Ultimately, native Florida applesnail and several channeled applesnails were rejected due to damage to aquarium plants and spiketop applesnail became the primary gastropod in aquarium culture (periphyton feeder).

Channeled species (3) and spiketop applesnails were released or escaped captivity and Florida applesnail was introduced outside its native range.

Genetic studies (2005-present) helped clarify the species involved in U.S. waters and around the world.

Florida Applesnail - *Pomacea paludosa* - Texas

Reported by Fullington (1978) based on collections earlier in the century.

Neck (1984a, 1986) confirmed the identifications.

No evidence of existing populations in the past. Were these shells aquarium introductions?

No evidence of this species in Texas since.

Florida Applesnail - *Pomacea paludosa* - U.S.

In addition to native populations in the Florida peninsula, Florida applesnail is present at sites in the Florida panhandle, Georgia, and Alabama.

Spiketop Applesnail *Pomacea diffusa* (*bridgesii*) - Texas

Genetic studies by Rawlings, Hayes, Cowie, and Collins in Florida and Hawaii (2007) confirmed the species involved in the U.S. was *P. diffusa* and not *P. bridgesii* as long believed.

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Two recently-dead specimens were found in the Brazos River, Waco, Texas, in January 2004 during a cold, low-water period (Howells et al. 2007).

Not known to be established in Texas.

Spiketop Applesnail *Pomacea diffusa (bridgesii)* - U.S.

First reported in Florida (as *P. bridgesii*) in Florida in 1966 (Clench 1966), but may have been present since the 1950s and other populations found in subsequent years (Thompson 1984; Strange 1998).

An introduction in Mobile, Alabama, has not been examined since Hurricane Katrina and current status is unknown there.

Apparently not sufficiently cold tolerant to allow wide-scale establishment.

Insularum (Island) Applesnail *Pomacea insularum* & Others With Channeled Shells - Texas

Applesnails with channeled shells that have not been examined genetically have been reported (historically - present) at scattered sites in Texas, but none "currently" support populations.

P. insularum (originally called *P. canaliculata* or *P. canaliculata*-complex) currently occurs in six Texas counties and has been expanding its range for at least 10 years.

Giant Rams-Horn Snail - *Marisa cornuarietis* - Texas

First observed in Texas in the headwaters of the San Marcos River in 1981; then reported in 1983 (Neck 1984b; Horne et al. 1992).

Found in the headwaters of the Comal River in 1984 (Horne et al. 1992).

Found in the headwaters of the San Antonio River in 2000 (Howells 2001).

Reported present in the San Marcos and Comal rivers, but not in the San Antonio (Karatayev and Burlakova 2007).

Giant Rams-Horn Snail - *Marisa cornuarietis* - U.S.

First reported in southern Florida in 1957 (Hunt 1958); now established.

Reported at two sites in Texas 1980s and at a third in 2000; established in the headwaters of the San Marcos and Comal rivers, but apparently no longer in the San Antonio River headwaters.

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Reported in a heated spring in Idaho in 1992 (Frest and Bowler 1992); current status uncertain.

Listed by California Department of Fish and Game (2003), but without details.

Chinese Mysterysnail - *Cipangopaludina chinensis* - Texas

Early reports in Texas from Waco (two sites) and Kidd Spring, Dallas (Clench and Fuller 1965; Dundee 1974; Fullington 1978).

Another population found in Bachman Lake, Dallas, and a shell in Lake Sweetwater, Nolan County (Howells 2001).

Bachman L. population apparently lost by 2000-2001 (Howells 2001); none reported alive by Karatayev and Burlakova (2007).

Kidd Spring population still present (Karatayev and Burlakova 2007).

Status in Waco undetermined, but none reported in recent years.

Other undocumented records likely.

Red-Rim Melania - *Melanoides tuberculatus* - Texas

First found in Texas in the headwaters of the San Antonio and Comal river in 1963 (Murray 1964), but may have invaded earlier.

Additional waters invaded since (summaries in Howells 2001; Karatayev and Burlakova 2007).

Present at most invaded sites in 2007 (Karatayev and Burlakova 2007), including Diamond-Y Spring (J. Karges, TNC, March 2008; pers. comm.).

Taxonomic status of an odd morph in Salado Creek, Bexar Co. remains unclear.

Quilted Melania - *Tarebia granifera* - Texas

Introduced upper San Antonio and Comal rivers in 1963-64 (Murray 1971); possibly much earlier (Murray and Wopschall 1965).

Found in the upper San Marcos River 1977-78 (Lindholm and Huffman 1979).

No additional populations found in Texas since (Howells 2001; Karatayev and Burlakova 2007).

Still present at all three original introduction sites (Karatayev and Burlakova 2007).

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Aplexa Snails - *Stenophysa* spp. - Texas

Tawny and Marbled aplexa were reported by Te (1978) as collected in Texas, but without details (Burch 1989; Howells 2001 and others).

Tawny aplexa specimens taken in 1949 in Cameron and San Jacinto counties are listed among the Florida State Museum collection.

Marbled aplexa is not currently listed by FSM.

Neither species has been found in Texas since despite collection efforts in these areas.

Asian Clam - *Corbicula fluminea* - Texas

First reported in Texas near El Paso in 1964 (Murray 1966); but with specimens in the Houston Museum of Natural Sciences taken there several months earlier and another from the Neches River in 1958 (Howells et al. 2004).

Texas distribution summarized by Karatayev et al. (2005). But, since then, one report from Chambers County was found to actually refer to Harris County.

Dreissenid Mussels - Native and Exotic - Texas

Zebra mussel has been found on boats brought to Texas on three occasions: Once at L. Grapevine (1999) and twice at L. Texoma (2006-07). All were detected before launch; none are known from Texas waters.

Reports of quagga mussel in Texas are based on native dark falsemussels.

Dark falsemussel has caused alarm at several sites in lower drainage basins around the state and at Lake Texoma.

Mytilid Mussels - Marine and Freshwater - Texas

Brown mussel was found in Texas waters in 1990 and spread from the central coast south (Hicks and Tunnell 1994).

Green mussel has become established in Florida and is likely to expand its range westward.

Asian lake mussel (also golden mussel) has invaded South America and may well appear in Texas in the future.

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Exotic Land Snails

A variety of terrestrial Old World gastropods are well established in Texas including Asian tramp snail, several helicids, and several slugs. All are agricultural and horticultural pests.

Mediterranean decollate snail is particularly problematic because it is sold to control garden snails and slugs. However, it also consumes native gastropods and garden plants themselves.

Results of Rat Lung Worm Study

John Teem presented a PowerPoint presentation entitled "Human Health Risks Associated with Channeled Apple Snails in the GSARP Region".

The predominant channeled apple snail in the GSARP region is *Pomacea insularum*. *Angiostrongylus cantonesis* - the life cycle of *A. cantonesis* requires infection of a rat host in addition to a snail host.

Assessing the health risks associated with channeled apple snails in the GSARP region:

- Collect apple snails from New Orleans and Miami, send samples to the CDC in Atlanta to assay for the presence of the rat lung worm using DNA-based detection assays (PCR).
- Develop an in-house capacity to detect the rat lung worm using PCR. Test channeled apple snails from a third location (to be determined).
- Develop a mathematical model to predict the spread of channeled apple snails.

Conclusions:

- Snails were collected at sites in Miami and New Orleans and samples sent to the CDC in Atlanta for DNA analysis.
- No snails from New Miami Zoo were found to be positive for parasite.
- 5 snails from New Orleans were found to be positive for parasite.

What Next?

- Survey additional *P. insularum* snails from Miami, Tallahassee, and Texas.
- Complete invasion modeling software using Florida as a template spatial domain.
- Information transfer (publication and education).

Brown Treesnake Prevention Strategies on the Receiving End of Pathways to CONUS

S.S. Wisniewsik, S. W. Henke, and B. Pitman
Texas A&M University-Kingsville and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The brown tree snake (*Boiga irregularis*) is an invasive species which has caused economical, ecological and human health issues on Guam. Brown tree snakes have been found in CONUS: Corpus Christi, Texas and McAlester, Oklahoma. The U.S. is at risk for BTS establishment.

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North American Brown Tree Snake Control Team (NABTSCT):

- 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.

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."

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
- Provide a forum to share information between agencies, cooperators, and organizations.

Website: www.nabtsct.net

- Re-vamp to make more accessible and intuitive for the public
- Addition of the interactive snake ID system
- Addition of maps to define military bases and port authorities.

Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers Brochure (Revision)

Dennis Riecke distributed a spreadsheet containing the brochure revision data. Some information is still needed from the states. The remaining details on the brochure revision will be handled by email.

Nutria Distribution and Status in the United States. Information for the ANSTF Nutria Management Plan

Denise R. Gregoire
U.S. Geological Survey, Gainesville, Florida

Nutria in the NAS Database

- 373 records from over 70 references
- Records from 1899 to 2007
- Records from 27 states.

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States where nutria are established: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oregon, Texas, Tennessee, Virginia, and Washington.

States where nutria were introduced but failed to establish: California, Iowa, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, and Ohio.

States with unknown status and/or limited data in the database: Delaware, Missouri, New Mexico, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Oklahoma.

Nonindigenous Aquatic Species Database: <http://nas.er.usgs.gov>.

MRBP Concerns with Proposed Trophy Carp Regulations

James Ballard discussed an email he had received regarding carp control in Lady Bird Lake. It was noted that the Panel does not have the authority to send a recommendation to the State of Texas. The topic can be discussed and if the Panel has any recommendations they can be forwarded to the Task Force. Earl Chilton indicated that he had responded to their email.

Ron Lukens made the motion to authorize James Ballard to respond that the Panel discussed the issue with TPWD at this meeting and have no action to recommend. The motion was seconded and passed.

Other Business

James Morris made the motion to accept the request of membership for Trish Murphey from the North Carolina Department of Natural Resources as a Panel member. Ron Lukens seconded the motion. Without objection the motion passed.

Lukens indicated that the Panel logo would need to be changed to include the State of North Carolina. He added that he would speak to Don Schmitz to see if his graphics department could make those changes.

The Panel discussed key points to address at the upcoming ANSTF Meeting:

- Current status of marine ornamentals project
- Progress of brown tree snake control team
- Progress of rat lung worm study
- Concept of a National Center and make a recommendation that the joint panels discuss the possibility of establishing a center for invasive species
- Progress of states on management plans
- Accepted North Carolina as a Panel member
- Giant salvinia in Texas and Louisiana
- Movement of obsolete Navy ships and MARAD issues.

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The next meeting will be held in Savannah, Georgia the week of November 17, 2008.

Public Comment

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

There being no further business the meeting adjourned at 5:03 pm.

Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission

State Directors Meeting

Venice, Louisiana

May 12-14, 2008

Discussion Items

EDRP I & II
NOAA Funding
FIN Activities
IJF Activities
MAFAC members from the GOM

Participants

Virginia Vail
Stevens Heath
Bill Walker
Corky Perret and Dale Diaz
John Roussel
Mike Ray

Roy Crabtree
Larry Simpson
Steve VanderKooy
Dave Donaldson
Ralph Hode

Itinerary

May 12, 2008 Arrive at New Orleans International Airport by 12:00 pm
Pick up by the GSMFC and travel down to Venice

Dinner, meet, and sleep at Cypress Cove Lodge in Venice

May 13, 2008 Arranged small boat tours of area from morning until mid-day (marshes or
mouth-of-the-river)

Meet, dinner, and sleep at Cypress Cove Lodge in Venice

May 14, 2008 Breakfast and morning departure from Venice
Tour Buras, Empire, Daybrook Fisheries on way to airport

Depart 3:00 pm from New Orleans International Airport

**FISHERIES INFORMATION NETWORK (FIN)
MINUTES
June 11 and 12, 2008
St. Thomas, USVI**

Vice Chairman Guy Davenport called the meeting to order on June 11, 2008 at 9:00a.m.
The following members, staff, and others were present:

Members

Steven Atran, GMFMC, Tampa, FL
Page Campbell, TPWD, Rockport, TX
Richard Cody, FFWCC, St. Petersburg, FL
Kerwin Cuevas, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Guy Davenport, NOAA Fisheries, Miami, FL
Chris Denson, ADCNR, Gulf Shores, AL
Dave Donaldson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Shenell Gordon, USVI DPNR, St. Thomas, USVI, (*proxy for W. Tobias*)
Michelle Kasprzak, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Craig Lilyestrom, PRDNER, San Juan, PR
Jim Long, NPS, Atlanta, GA (*proxy for T. Schmidt*)
Daniel Matos-Caraballo, PRDNER, Mayaguez, PR
Christine Murrell, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
John Reed, NOAA Fisheries, St. Petersburg, FL
Tom Sminkey, NOAA Fisheries, Silver Spring, MD
Vicki Swann, TPWD, Austin, TX

Staff

Donna Bellais, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Gregg Bray, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Madeleine Travis, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Alex Miller, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Others

Terry Cody, Rockport, TX
Ellen Lovelidge, ACCSP, Washington, DC
Scott Steinback, NMFS, Woods Hole, MA
Geoff White, ACCSP, Washington, DC

Approval of Agenda

The agenda was approved as presented.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the Fisheries Information Network (FIN) meeting held on June 19 and 20, 2007 were approved as presented.

Status of Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program

G. White of the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP) gave an overview of activities for the past year. **White** reported on the data warehouse noting that commercial fisheries data is complete for 1980 to 2007 for North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and Florida as well as 1994 to 2007 data for states from Maine to Virginia. The recreational (MRFSS) data (1981 through 2007) are also in the system. All web queries for commercial, recreational, and the Standard Atlantic Fisheries Information System (SAFIS) have been migrated to Discoverer. **White** reported that 100% of dealers in Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey and Virginia are participating in the SAFIS, and some dealers in Delaware, and Maryland. **White** reported that the ACCSP is providing data to the Southeast Regional Office. **White** gave an update on the ACCSP staff noting that Mike Cahall was named Director in September 2007. Ellen Lovelidge was hired as program coordinator and Paul Philip has been hired as application developer. Two positions remain open; outreach coordinator and data coordinator. **White** explained that SAFIS is an integrated State-Federal system which is standardized and flexible producing improved data integrity. Benefits of SAFIS are real-time quota monitoring, improved compliance monitoring, reduced reporting to multiple agencies, and optional recording of dockside sales. **White** reported that routine updates from the states are being stored in the data warehouse. Biological data is being collected on lobster and Atlantic herring. **White** gave updates on ACCSP activities including SAFIS, FIS, MRIP, and metadata. The warehouse redesign includes registration tracking which matches SAFIS, and an additional data layer for catch/landings. **White** reported that when data is still in the reporting system of SAFIS the agreement between partners allows all agency personnel to see everything. FIN members discussed the issue of data confidentiality between the states. When one state partner wants information, they go to the state agency that collected the data. **R. Cody** noted that Florida has an agreement that allows some states access to confidential data. **Cody** will check on this confidential data agreement and forward to **D. Donaldson**. **G. White** will look into ACCSP data sharing agreements as well.

FIN Data Management System (DMS) Issues

Review of list of personnel with access to confidential data - **G. Davenport** reported that he has developed a spreadsheet with the entire history of personnel with access to NMFS confidential data. He will forward this to FIN members and requested that members review this list and make the proper additions and deletions and return this spreadsheet to him with corrections. **D. Donaldson** distributed a list of personnel with access to the FIN Data Management System (DMS) and requested that members make corrections and return them to him or **D. Bellais**.

Status of the FIN DMS -- **D. Bellais** reported on the status of the FIN DMS noting that several new reports have been created for quality assurance purposes. These include reports for landings by year, grade, gear, area, and market. These reports will be reviewed annually. **Bellais** requested that members contact her if they want any other reports generated. **Bellais** reported that data are continued to be loaded (by wave) into the Recreational Fishing License module for Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, and Mississippi. NMFS has access to these data and they are utilizing this information for the angler license directory pilot survey (ALDS) being conducted in the Gulf of Mexico. **Bellais** noted that the FIN database conversion to Oracle Cluster/GRID was put on hold due to electrical issues in the building, however they have been corrected and the conversion is now in progress and should be complete by late August 2008. Oracle Discoverer public access tracking continues to be a work in progress and the states

continue to update and enter metadata into the InPort system. **G. Davenport** noted that **D. Gloeckner** is now handling TIP online and **J. Bennett** has Puerto Rico biological data that can be provided to FIN. **Bellais** then reported on loading biological data. Biological data entry forms have been deployed on the web for the states to test. **Bellais** reported on the forms server, marine recreational fishery catch and effort estimates, and menhaden data.

Review of FIN Program Review Report

Committee members were provided with an Executive Summary of the FIN program review. **D. Donaldson** gave some history on the review, noting that a review is conducted every five years. Some members read this program review and have found that it is not very useful and suggested that the FIN Committee discuss whether a program review for the FIN program was necessary and worth the time and effort. **T. Sminkey** suggested that a review could be integrated into the FIN Annual Report. **D. Donaldson** noted that a facilitated session is held every five years and seems like a much more effective tool for providing feedback on the FIN program. It was noted that if FIN does not conduct a program review, the goals and objectives would need to be modified to reflect that change. After some discussion, **P. Campbell** moved to charge the Administrative Subcommittee with modifying the existing goals and objectives to reflect the decision of discontinuing the program review. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

Presentation of Angler Expenditure and Impact Estimates

S. Steinback gave a presentation on angler expenditures and the economic impact of saltwater sportfishing in the Gulf States. **Steinback** gave a summary of data collection methods, expenditure and economic impact estimates by state, and the way these estimates were used. The Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS) was used in Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama, and the license frame was utilized in Texas for data collection purposes. **Steinback** reviewed the response rates of deliverable mail surveys, as well as daily trip expenses and annual trip expenses by state and mode. Using 2006 expenditure estimates he listed the rank of the five Gulf States among all twenty-three U.S. coastal states. **Steinback** also listed economic impacts for expenditures, sales, income and employment by state and the percent of total economic activity attributable to marine recreational fishing in each state. In closing, **Steinback** explained how expenditure and impact estimates are used. These estimates are required for proposed state legislation for recreational fishing management actions, as well as for disaster preparedness and recovery. **Steinback** noted that all of this information will be compiled in a NOAA report which will be available in late summer 2008. Staff will provide copies of **Steinback's** presentation as well as the report to FIN members.

Discussion of State Involvement in GSMFC Economic Program

D. Donaldson introduced Alex Miller, staff economist for GSMFC and noted that NOAA Fisheries had provided some funding to hire an economist and conduct activities. **Miller** explained that the FIN Social/Economic Work Group had suggested five areas for the economist to coordinate in the course of the next five years, including commercial and recreational fishing economic activities, public attitudes, knowledge and use of coastal and marine ecosystems, marine angler expenditure survey, economic survey of the inshore shrimp fleet, and an economic survey of fishing related businesses. **Miller** asked FIN members for input on conducting some of these surveys. **C. Murrell** and **M. Kasprzak** stated that they would be interested in being involved in the inshore shrimp fleet survey and the fishing related business survey. **R. Cody**

noted that Florida has a staff economist who may be interested in working with the Social/Economic Work Group. **C. Lilyestrom** noted that if Puerto Rico were able to secure some funding, they would like to be included in the recreational expenditure survey as well. **Miller** will keep FIN partners informed as the economic program is developed.

Update on Marine Recreational Information Program

D. Donaldson gave background information on the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) by explaining that the National Research Council (NRC) conducted a review of marine recreational fishery survey methods and made several recommendations. Since that time several meetings have been held and a variety of different work groups have developed projects. **Donaldson** reported that the Executive Steering Committee approved 16 research projects. These projects cover a wide range of topics from exploring new methods of estimating catch and effort, developing common data standards for all saltwater recreational data collection programs, finding new ways to count released catch, and conducting effort surveys using a list of anglers. **Donaldson** reported that these research projects will address issues related to survey design and analysis, data management and standards, for-hire, and highly migratory species. **Donaldson** noted that the MRIP website has much more detailed information on these projects. **Donaldson** reported that MRIP had sent out a news release about the 60 day comment period for the Gulf of Mexico License Frame Pilot Survey. **Donaldson** and R. Cody will participate in a conference call later today regarding this subject.

T. Sminkey reported that a panel of outside consultants has been tasked with reviewing the estimation procedures. In addition, the for-hire work group has secured two of three expert reviewers and is planning a meeting to determine the best method for collecting catch and effort from the for-hire fisheries. The meeting is tentatively scheduled for the last week in July at the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission office.

Update on Electronic Trip Ticket/IFQ Compatibility Issues

J. Reed stated that one of the goals of this activity is a need for consistency in data collection. Theoretically the best consistency you can get is a single point of data collection. The concept was to leverage the already in place red snapper IFQ that the regional office had started back a couple of years ago and see if we could not integrate the collection of trip ticket data in the Gulf through that program. The ideal is that the electronic trip ticket program would collect data for a variety of species and pre-populate the trip ticket system with that data so the dealer would not double enter that data. Our goal eventually would be to also have a back office validation to ensure that the data had not been changed between the time it was entered, transmitted and the time it was submitted to the states. **D. Donaldson** stated that that is the short term solution and then the long term goal would be to get the electronic trip ticket program certified and accredited. That would give the dealers some other options for entering that information. The ultimate goal is for dealers to only enter the information once, just for ease for them but also make sure there weren't different numbers being entered in the two programs. **M. Kasprzak** stated that there might be an issue with compliance of the trip ticket reporting system. The regulations say a trip ticket must be completed at the point of sale and the dealer has to maintain those records on site and if enforcement came and checked and they saw red snapper coming across the dock and it wasn't on the trip ticket that dealer would be cited at that point. **Donaldson** stated that the concept that had been discussed was that a dealer would fill out the trip ticket, he would get to red snapper it would prompt the dealer to go to the website, enter that information, and then the program would send that data back. Once he was done and exited the

web site, it would send that data back to trip ticket program. **Reed** noted the ability of the dealer to move red snapper off of the dock, is based on that approval code. One of the parts of an IFQ that complicates it is that the IFQ has to be real time. It's the only way that NMFS can debit that fisherman's account and insure that he doesn't overfish his allocation. If the trip ticket is done at the dock, then that would be consistent. If a trip ticket is done away from the dock, in other words the fish has to be transported to a place first, that is not consistent and that is against the regulations. A solution to that is if a dealer wants to use the trip ticket program, he has to do it at the dock. **G. Davenport** asked if there was a plan for implementation and the time frame for that plan. **Reed** stated that he recommended that we do this during the grouper design so that we can get together in a much more collaborative way so that we all understand the needs. It would also be useful to have some dealers involved to get a better sense of their business practices. **Donaldson** stated that we should work on some of these issues with red snapper to identify any potential problems instead of waiting for grouper. It was noted that we can get a proof of concept approval for this activity. It was pointed out that we already have a proof of concept, at the meeting in Baton Rouge 2 years ago. However, it appears that not much progress has been made. At the Baton Rouge meeting, the idea was that there would be 2 stand alone systems. The web based system and the electronic trip ticket system and the dealer could fill out trip tickets however he wanted and then go to your system and enter red snapper or we could modify the trip ticket program to enter red snapper and get all the approval codes, etc. Apparently that is not without significant certification and accreditation and not possible at this point. **Reed** noted that that scenario is problematic since there is resistance in giving a contractor who NMFS does not have immediate control over the responsibility of collecting data that is under their regulations. **Donaldson** stated that it appears to be more of willingness on NMFS's part to do it. It was noted that it is very difficult to balance the resource needs in the regional office but they are hiring another programmer so maybe NMFS can be more responsive. It was noted that if NMFS had come to FIN when they were initially establishing the IFQ system, the trip ticket program could have been modified to meet their needs and we would not be in this situation. **Reed** pointed out that NMFS wouldn't have given up the responsibility of collecting data. **Kasprzak** noted that at this point, the states are giving up responsibility of collecting the red snapper data to NMFS. So NMFS is asking the states to trust their system. It needs to be a two-way street. **Davenport** stated that there is going to have to be a compromise and we need to work together. There was agreement among the members that FIN and NMFS staff needs to continue to work on this issue and provide another update to the FIN Committee at their next meeting.

Discussion of National Recreational Registry

Status of Gulf of Mexico pilot survey - FIN members were provided with information on the angler license directory pilot survey (ALDS) being conducted in the Gulf of Mexico. **D. Donaldson** reported that this survey began in 2006 and continued through last year and is scheduled to end this year. This survey utilizes recreational fishing licenses as a sampling frame. **Donaldson** reported that the most important issue was missing information. When licenses were first collected from the states only about 30% of the licenses had phone numbers. This is still an issue but may be a matter of education for the vendors. There were also some data loading problems where states haven't been able to get an updated frame. The response rate was only about 30% but it is a difficult population to contact. **Donaldson** noted that there was a wide range of survey coverage, getting anywhere from 20% to over 90% of the intercepted anglers. This varies by state and fishing mode. **Donaldson** reported that cooperation was good, about 70 % of the anglers contacted have agreed to participate. Approximately 50% of respondents report

their fishing activity compared to 10% for the coastal household telephone survey (CHTS) random digit dialing survey. Therefore, instead of having to call 100 people for a good sample size, now only 20 to 50 anglers have to be called for the same amount of information. **Donaldson** reported that because of issues with exemptions, etc. this is actually a dual frame survey using the ALDS and supplementing that with CHTS. This dual frame provides significant improvement in coverage of anglers. Some improvements have been implemented this year such as almost tripling the sample size, using a reverse telephone directory, advance letters are sent out to prepare the anglers, and providing a call-in number. Future improvements in 2008 will allow leaving messages on answering machines, and caller ID messages.

Discussion of MRIP licensing issues - **D. Bellais** reported that the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) is in the process of establishing a national saltwater angler and for-hire vessel registry by January 2009. Bellais reported that she is a member of the Angler Registry Database Work Group (ARDWG) which was formed with E. Barth of Virginia as Chair. **Bellais** reported that California, Oregon, Texas, Alabama, Florida, South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, Connecticut, and Alaska have been targeted for participation in the Program. Alabama, Florida, and Texas in the Gulf of Mexico have provided information on data sharing policies, geographic coverage of licenses, data quality and quality control processes, primary contact for data management related to registry process, preliminary assessment of registry category, and information on different types of recreational saltwater licenses. **Bellais** also noted that data will be submitted electronically either quarterly or annually, the timely submission of data will be the responsibility of the state, and data will be a delimited flat file. **Bellais** reported that this is still a work in progress.

Discussion of Multi-year Cooperative Agreement for FIN

D. Donaldson noted that in 2007 the FIN Committee decided to do a three-year cooperative agreement since there is much more flexibility than in a one-year agreement. Since 2009 is the third year of this agreement, **Donaldson** asked the Committee if they were in favor of a five year grant beginning in 2010. It will entail a few more projections of budgets and statements of work but statements of work can be amended in the future if necessary. The Committee agreed to go ahead with five year cooperative agreements beginning in 2010.

Review and Approval of 2007 Annual Report

FIN Committee members were provided with copies of the draft 2007 FIN Annual Report. **T. Sminkey** suggested having the Annual Report more results-oriented than activity-oriented. **D. Donaldson** moved to task the Administrative Subcommittee with modifying the FIN Annual Report and developing more results-oriented information about the various activities in the Report. The 2008 Annual Report would reflect these changes. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously. **G. Bray** requested that members of the Committee review the Report and provide comments, revisions, or corrections to staff by June 30, 2007. **K Cuevas** moved to approve the 2007 Annual Report as amended. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

Subcommittee and Work Group Reports

FIN members were provided with copies of all Subcommittee and Work Group Reports. The Reports are part of these minutes and are attached.

Commercial Port Sampler Meeting – (Attachment A)

G. Bray reported that the Caribbean Port Sampler meeting was held in St. Thomas, USVI in October 2007. There were no action items. This group will be meeting again in the fall of 2008, possibly in Mayaguez, Puerto Rico. **M. Kasprzak moved to accept the Commercial Port Sampler Meeting Report.** The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

Gulf of Mexico Geographic Subcommittee – (Attachment B)

G. Bray reported that the Gulf of Mexico Geographic Subcommittee met twice since the last FIN meeting, in the fall of 2007 and the spring of 2008. One issue that the Subcommittee wanted discussed at this FIN meeting was the possibility of sending all federal species to the NMFS Panama City lab for otolith processing. NMFS would process priority species as needed and shelve the rest for later processing. It was noted that the concern was that the more people involved in reading otoliths the higher potential for inconsistency ages among readers, but with QA/QC procedures in place it doesn't warrant a change in procedure. **The Committee discussed this issue and recommended continuing the current processing.** Bray reported that at the March 2008 meeting of the Gulf of Mexico Geographic Subcommittee the issue of QA/QC of commercial data loaded into the FIN DMS was discussed. The recommendation was made that D. Bellais would produce a spreadsheet that details the landings from each state database and the FIN DMS. The group recommended that they would like to meet on an annual basis during the GSMFC fall meeting. Bray noted that this group will meet in the fall of 2008. **P. Campbell moved to accept the Gulf of Mexico Geographic Subcommittee Report.** The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

FIN Otolith Processors Training Workshop – (Attachment C)

G. Bray noted the otolith processors met in May of 2008. There were several issues raised at that meeting and need to be addressed by the FIN Committee. It was suggested by the group that since there are more species being read and some species are difficult to read, they will be using smaller groups to read otoliths to ensure that everyone has equal opportunity to read them. It was also suggested in order to improving the training workshop, it is very important to have the experts on particular species attend these meetings. **D. Donaldson** noted that this group will be meeting in May of next year and all the reference sets that were discussed at this year's meeting, will be distributed to the various agencies for reading and APEs will be calculated and discussed at next year's meeting. **V. Swann moved to accept the FIN Otolith Processors Training Workshop Report.** The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

ComFIN Data Collection Work Group – (Attachment D)

G. Bray reported that the Data Collection Work Group has had two conference calls this year. One of the issues that group addressed related to need for trip-level data in the U.S. Virgin Islands. The group determined that the USVI does collect trip-level data for commercial fisheries so they did not need to discuss this issue further. Also at the last FIN facilitated session the issue of conversion factors for commercial species was raised. The Work Group identified and compiled conversion factors that the states are using for the various species and determined that the conversion factors being used by the states are the same or very similar for all major saltwater species. **C. Murrell moved to accept the ComFIN Data Collection Work Group Report.** The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

FIN Data Collection Plan Work Group – (Attachment E)

G. Bray reported that a conference call was held in May of this year to review otolith collections for 2007 and 2008, discuss the process of generating targets for biological sampling and determine the 2009 sampling target levels. The Work Group noted that federal collection of red snapper and vermilion snapper exceeded the targets for those species. Because of this, **G. Davenport** suggested that NMFS be responsible for all commercial red and vermilion snapper sampling to allow the states to concentrate on other species. **D. Donaldson** stated that this would allow the states to focus on some of the secondary species. It was noted that the states need to look at the various options and determine if this would be viable. Staff will develop several scenarios and provide it to the states for their consideration. Since this could affect the funding levels, a final decision will be made prior to submission of the draft statements of work and budgets for 2009. **Bray** reported that G. Fitzhugh and L. Lombardi mentioned that the collected numbers of otoliths for FIN did not match the numbers for NMFS. G. Davenport stated that the discrepancies had been identified and it has been resolved. **Bray noted that the Work Group recommended that FIN should continue to use the current targets for the 2009 sampling season. M. Kasprzak moved to accept the FIN Data Collection Plan Work Group Report.** The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

FIN Outreach Work Group – (Attachment F)

G. Bray reported that since this work group has not met in some time, the membership needs to be revisited by the FIN Committee. **T. Sminkey** stated that his agency should be able to provide a member to the Outreach Work Group this year. **R. Cody and M. Kasprzak** also stated that they will check with their agencies and let Bray know by the end of June. **Bray** reported that this group has met twice via conference call and have developed a fact sheet on electronic reporting for commercial dealers in the Gulf of Mexico. The Work Group made some modifications and improvements to this fact sheet and it was distributed to FIN members. **Bray** asked FIN members for one or two quotes from dealers who use electronic reporting and these would be included in the fact sheet. S. Atran was concerned that this fact sheet needed more work to be useful. **P. Campbell moved to accept the fact sheet on electronic reporting for commercial dealers.** The motion was seconded and passed with the Gulf of Mexico Fisheries Management Council opposed. **Bray** reported that the Work Group has also developed a brochure detailing the FIN Data Management System in order to inform partners about the system. It was suggested that the states could add a link on their web pages directing people who would like to access the data to the FIN DMS. The states will contact Bray about that possibility. The FIN Committee reviewed this document and **C. Murrell moved to accept the brochure on the FIN Data Management System with edits and links.** The motion was seconded and passed unanimously. **M. Kasprzak moved to accept the FIN Outreach Work Group Report.** The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

Operations Plan

Status of 2008 Activities

The FIN Committee was provided with a list of activities currently being conducted. The Committee reviewed the various activities and noted that all activities were either completed or being addressed as outlined in the Operations Plan.

Review and approval of 2009 Operations Plan

The FIN Committee reviewed the 2009 Operations Plan. It was noted the activities in the plan were developed from committee, subcommittee and work group activities. The FIN Committee needs to ensure that all proposed activities are necessary and will move the program forward. The State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee (S/FFMC) will meet in August 2008 to give final approval to the Plan. FIN Committee members were asked to forward any comments or corrections to staff. **K. Cuevas moved to give tentative approval to the 2009 Operations Plan.** The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

The meeting recessed at 4:15 p.m.

The meeting reconvened at 8:30 a.m.

Discussion of 2009 FIN Priorities

Committee members were provided with a list of items for funding consideration in 2009. D. Donaldson reported that the list was generated from activities conducted last year as well as discussions in various subcommittee and work group meetings. The final prioritized list will be forwarded to the S/FFMC for their meeting in August 2008. At that time they will decide which items will be included in the 2009 FIN cooperative agreement. All items listed as high priority will require budgets and statements of work by July 18, 2008. FIN members discussed the collection of detailed effort for blue crab in Louisiana and agreed to expand to shrimp to further test methodology and at sea sampling. **The Committee agreed to list as high priority all ongoing activities.** The prioritized list of activities for 2009 is as follows:

High Priority

Coordination and Administration of FIN Activities (ongoing)

Expand electronic trip ticket contract to include compilation of data for quota monitoring and IFQs (new)

Collecting, Managing and Disseminating Marine Recreational Fisheries Data (ongoing)

Head Boat Port Sampling in Texas and Florida (ongoing)

Gulf Menhaden Port Sampling (ongoing)

Operation of FIN Data Management System (ongoing)

Full Implementation of Trip Ticket Program and Operations in Mississippi (ongoing/new)

Trip Ticket Program Operations in Alabama (ongoing)

Trip Ticket Program Operations in Louisiana (ongoing)

Trip Ticket Program Operations in Texas (ongoing)

Recreational/Commercial Biological Sampling (ongoing)

At-sea Sampling (catch) for Head Boats in Texas, Louisiana, Alabama, and Florida (new/ongoing)

Collection of Detailed Effort for Blue Crab and Shrimp in Louisiana (ongoing/new)

Low Priority

Biological Sampling for Additional Species (new)

Time Schedule and Location for Next Meeting

The Committee agreed to schedule the next FIN meeting for the 2nd week in June of 2009 in the Savannah, Georgia area.

Other Business

Donaldson asked Committee members for input on how to handle future meeting materials. After Committee discussion members agreed that in the future it would not be necessary to print paper copies of meeting materials. The materials will be sent to members in a zip file via e-mail. Members will be responsible for downloading material and bringing to FIN meetings.

D. Donaldson updated the FIN Committee on an MRIP conference call that he and R. Cody participated in with members of the Executive Steering Committee (G. Colvin and J. Boreman) regarding the National Saltwater License Registry. During the call, **Donaldson** expressed concern about the perceived lack of cooperation by NMFS. G. Colvin responded that they are still committed to working with the states and perhaps there had been some misunderstanding. It was suggested that the Commission and state members need to continue to voice their concerns and not allow NMFS to completely dictate the direction. At some point there will have to be final criteria developed that outlines which licensing systems are acceptable. It is still a work in progress. **Donaldson** noted that he was still concerned but feels that we can work within the system. **Donaldson** noted that there will be a 60-day public comment period and recommended that members go to the website to read the NOAA proposed rule to require saltwater angler registration. If there are comments or concerns, members need to provide them to NMFS by August 11, 2008. **Donaldson** stated that the rule is very similar to what was discussed by the registry work group in the past and there is not much detail in terms of standards or criteria. A system will be developed and in use by 2011. After Committee discussion, it was agreed to have a presentation on this subject at the next FIN meeting.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:30 a.m.

**Caribbean Port Sampler Meeting
Meeting Summary
October 2 and 3, 2007
St. Thomas, USVI**

Attachment A

David Donaldson of the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission called the meeting to order on October 2, 2007 at 9:00 a.m. The following were present:

Josh Bennett, NOAA Fisheries Service, SEFSC, Miami, FL
Shenell Gordon, USVI DFW, St. Thomas, USVI
Gerald Greaux, Jr., USVI DFW, St. Thomas, USVI
Jesus Leon, PRDNER/LIP
Hector Lopez Pelet, PRDNER/LIP
Daniel Matos Caraballo, PRDNER, Mayaguez, PR
David Olsen, USVI DFW, St. Thomas, USVI
Noemi Pena Alvarado, PRDNER, Mayaguez, PR
Luis Rivera, PRDNER, Mayaguez, PR
Jose Rodriguez, PRDNER, St. Croix, USVI
William Tobias, USVI DPNR, Frederiksted, 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 changed and the Port Samplers will meet all day October 2, 2007 and will visit fishing locations and the US Virgin Islands Division of Fish and Wildlife (USVIDFW) offices on October 3, 2007. The revised agenda was approved.

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, at-sea headboat sampling, trip tickets, biological sampling, and operation of the FIN data management system. The trip ticket program is fully implemented in Texas, Louisiana, Alabama, and Florida. Mississippi has trip tickets for oysters, bait fish, and finfish, and they are looking into the possibility of trip tickets for all fisheries. Dealers in all Gulf states are currently using electronic trip ticket reporting. There are approximately 560 dealers online. **Donaldson** and the group discussed the availability of internet access for fishermen in the Caribbean. Since access is not readily available to most fishermen, **D. Olsen** suggested they could go to the USVIDFW offices monthly to enter trip reports. **Donaldson** will provide the group with copies of electronic trip reports.

Donaldson reported that due to funding shortfalls some activities had to be cut, including head boat sampling, at-sea sampling, and detailed effort sampling in Louisiana. Hopefully funds

will become available for 2008 and 2009.

Overview of Data Entry Programs

J. Bennett of NOAA Fisheries Service, Miami gave an overview of NOAA Fisheries Service data entry programs and noted that he had been working with USVIDFW as well as Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources (PRDNER). **Bennett** stated that once the data is in the proper format the data will be moved into the main computer and this will be available to FIN members. **D. Olsen** of USVIDFW noted that they are trying to move toward real-time data because of quota monitoring. **Olsen** also noted that fishermen will be required to report monthly rather than annually.

Bennett reported that NOAA Fisheries Service has caught up with biostatistical data entry from PRDNER and the USVIDFW. **Bennett and Olsen** discussed various issues and problems and will work to resolve them. **Olsen** stated that Bennett has been an enormous help and is one of NOAA Fisheries Service major assets.

Presentation on Puerto Rico Whelk Survey

N. Pena of the PRDNER gave a presentation on the Puerto Rico whelk survey, noting that this is one of the most valuable food items in Puerto Rico. Based on commercial landing statistics, landings appear to be diminishing and a lack of biological and ecological information is one of the main problems for management. A starting point for this study was to determine the distribution of the West Indian topshell (whelk), and collect general information on populations. This information will be used to improve management decisions and regulations.

Pena reported that commercial catch reports were reviewed to identify whelk fishermen. These fishermen were interviewed about fishing methods, sites and general knowledge of the whelk. Ten sites per coastline were surveyed based on fisherman reports. Shell length and base diameter of each whelk collected were measured and these individuals were returned to the area where they were found. **Pena** noted that the difference in recruitment rate between areas exposed to high waves versus calm areas is a factor to be considered in further studies as there are signs of overfishing in calm areas.

Presentation of U.S. Virgin Islands Whelk Survey

S. Gordon of the USVIDFW gave a presentation on their whelk survey. Whelks are a popular food item in the US Virgin Islands and are harvested commercially and recreationally and sell for \$10.00 per pound. In the late 1980's concern over declining whelk stocks prompted regulations on whelk harvest. **Gordon** displayed a map of the whelk survey sites around St. John, St. Croix and St. Thomas. Various slides described the abundance and density of whelk around the islands as well as average abundance between exposed and protected sites.

Gordon reported as a result of this survey the following steps will be taken: long term regional monitoring, study the effectiveness of MPAs, and collect fishery-dependent data on both

recreational and commercial whelk fishery. Future studies should be conducted on reproductive biology of the whelk, spawning behavior, and fertilization success in relation to population density.

Presentation of MARFIN Project in the U.S Virgin Islands

J. Bennett of NOAA Fisheries Service gave an overview of a future MARFIN project to be conducted in the USVI. This project is being funded by a \$60,000 grant which will be used to

hire samplers in St. Thomas and St. Croix. This project will sample the trap fishery and reef fish hook and line fishery studying day vs. night fishing, deep vs. shallow water, and sampling the top 15 species for each trip. **Bennett** noted that electronic measuring boards will be used in sampling and he will demonstrate when this group next meets.

Presentation of Puerto Rico Fishing Regulations

D. Matos of PRDNER gave a presentation on fishing regulations in Puerto Rico and noted that the Commercial Fishery Statistics Program (CFSP) was established in 1967. **Matos** discussed the objectives of the program, statistics on landings from 1971 to present, species landed, locations of landings, and gear used by commercial fishermen. **Matos** also reported on biostatistical data and noted the importance of collecting CFSP data. At the conclusion of the presentation the group discussed **Matos**' findings and held a question and answer period.

Presentation of U.S. Virgin Islands Biostatistical Summaries

W. Tobias of the USVIDFW began by acknowledging the port samplers and the important work they do in working with the fishermen. **Tobias** noted that the USVI has two primary sources for commercial fisheries data: (1) the TIP port sampling program and (2) commercial catch records. **Tobias** reported that TIP sampling began in 1982 with 11,000 trips sampled. Commercial landings records began in 1974 with a total of about 400,000 records.

Tobias reported that beginning in 1989 the USVI was hit with a series of hurricanes over the next decade. Losses by trap fishermen were tremendous. Fishermen changed gears, funding was cut, and biostatistical data collection was reduced.

Tobias summarized FY2007 catches by gear, species composition, and location and noted that there are no fish houses or co-ops in the USVI. He also explained that the USVIDFW provides fishermen with a tarp, coolers, and ice in order to be able to sample their catch quickly.

Discussion of Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Island Sampling Activities in 2008

D. Matos reported that there is a proposal which will allow Puerto Rico to continue with collection of landings data and collection of biostatistical data for the next five years.

Matos noted that a meeting is planned for late this year with NOAA Fisheries Service, SEFSC to discuss improved methods of data collection for stock assessment analysis.

D. Olsen presented information on USVIDFW landings data noting that Virgin Islands data shows an increase in landings. In St. Thomas the trap, seine, and line fisheries account for almost 95% of all landings, while in St. Croix most are scuba-based landings. Two studies recently conducted, a port sampling study and a trip ticket study of bycatch, have generated much information and revealed some concerns. One problem is that over the past few years in St. Croix the exporting of conch to Puerto Rico has rapidly escalated and new regulations have been put in place.

Using TIP data, **Olsen** described the difference in fish landed in St. Thomas and fish landed in St. Croix with fish from St. Thomas being larger than fish from St. Croix.

W. Tobias reported that USVIDWF plans to revise fishing regulations in 2008 by requiring mandatory compliance for fishermen to provide information.

Discussion of Fishing Area Maps used on the U.S. Virgin Islands

D. Olsen noted that prior to 1976 there was no border between the U.S. and British Virgin Islands waters until a treaty was signed between the United States and Great Britain. Specific language allowed the continuance of traditional fishing in these waters and in 2005 the

British withdrew from that treaty. Because of this, new fishing area maps are being developed.

W. Tobias distributed a commercial fisherman information booklet and a copy of a catch report with area fishing maps. These maps indicate areas closed to fishing because of sanctuaries, preserves, and National Park property.

Update of US Virgin Island Catch Reports and SEAMAP Trap and Line Data Bases

W. Tobias gave an overview of the catch reports and explained that since fishermen may use more than one gear type on a trip the report form has been designed to accommodate this. Abbreviations for certain species have also been added as well as a section to record information on bycatch. Over 109 species are included in the catch reports and since certain species have different names in various locations it sometimes makes the catch report forms difficult to complete accurately. The catch report forms are supposed to be done on a daily basis, however DFW officials doubt that this is happening. **D. Olsen** noted that until reporting is done on a real-time basis it is difficult to enforce.

Tobias discussed the Commercial and Recreational Fisheries Information Booklet which the USVIDFW produces every year in conjunction with Law Enforcement. Each fisherman is given a booklet when they register annually.

Olsen gave a brief report on the SEAMAP program noting that a new boat is in service for the collection of SEAMAP data. Those data are being put in an Access database and **Olsen** will contact Mark McDuff of NOAA Fisheries Service to assure this will interface with the SEAMAP database.

Other Business

The group agreed to meet next year during the first week in October in Puerto Rico, possibly in Mayaguez.

The meeting was recessed at 4:30 p.m.

The meeting resumed on October 3, 2007 at 8:30 a.m.

The port samplers traveled as a group to various fishing locations around the island and visited USVIDFW headquarters.

TCC DATA MANAGEMENT SUBCOMMITTEE (GULF OF MEXICO GEOGRAPHIC SUBCOMMITTEE)

MINUTES – 58th Annual Meeting

Monday, October 15, 2007

Pt. Clear, AL

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

Members

Kevin Anson, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL
Chris Denson, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL
Richard Cody, FWC/FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Page Campbell, TPWD, Rockport, TX
Kerwin Cuevas, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Michelle Kasprzak, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Steven Atran, GMFMC, Tampa, FL
Vicki Swann, TPWD, Austin, TX
Ted Flowers, NMFS, Mobile, AL

Staff

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

Others

Terry Cody, TPWD, Rockport, TX
Mike “Buck” Buchanan, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Pete Sheridan, NMFS, Panama City, FL
Michael Jepson, Gulf & South Atlantic Fisheries Foundation, Tampa, FL

Adoption of Agenda

The agenda was approved as presented.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on March 12, 2007 in Biloxi, Mississippi were approved with changes to the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council report at the request of **S. Atran**.

Status of Biological Sampling Activities

Review of targets and collection activities – **D. Snyder** discussed the handouts that summarized the otolith and lengths collected for the thirteen FIN target species. Each state seemed to be having trouble finding greater amberjack otoliths from the commercial and the recreational fishery. **T. Cody** mentioned that greater amberjack fishermen in Texas are sparse and finding catches that field samplers can sample is difficult. **D. Donaldson** mentioned that we present results on federal biological data collections and he would discuss those results with **Guy Davenport**. **P. Campbell** mentioned that cooperation rates with commercial fish houses have affected sampler's ability to collect commercial biological samples but hopefully that will improve in the future. **R. Cody** also mentioned that Florida's high turnover rate of samplers affects the ability to collect samples because the ability to collect large numbers of samples is closely tied to the amount of experience samplers have in the field.

Review of analysis activities – Subcommittee members were provided with a matrix detailing otolith analysis from 2002 to 2006 listing the five Gulf States. **D. Snyder** mentioned that we just received and loaded red snapper age data from Florida and FIN should be receiving king mackerel data for 2005 soon. That will bring us up to date through 2005. Mississippi has had some technical difficulties with 2006 age data but will be delivering it by the end of the year. Florida is also in the process of delivering 2006 red snapper age data.

Feasibility of collecting eye lens from sampled fish – **D. Donaldson** reported previous research from Dr. Sandra Diamond on the Pacific Coast has shown the possibility of determining fish ages from eye lenses analysis and asked if FIN would collect eye lenses for those species where an otolith was collected. **M. Kasprzak** mentioned that it might slow down sampler's ability to collect otoliths efficiently. **The group decided they needed a little more detail concerning the types of species, amount of sample necessary, and additional collection methods before making a commitment for collecting.**

Protocols for selecting participants for the Otolith Processor's Meeting – **D. Donaldson** reported at the last processors meeting some participants did not find out about the meeting in a timely manner. For the most part, the group of attendee's is usually the same. Donaldson asked if FIN could contact the processors directly as opposed to going through the supervisors. The group agreed this would be acceptable.

Compiling fishery-independent sampling protocols into InPort – **D. Donaldson** requested that each state begin compiling their fishery-independent protocols into the InPort metadata system. The stock assessment biologists mentioned this would be beneficial to understand what data are available and how it was collected. **Donaldson** mentioned that **D. Bellais** would be contacting each state to help and assist with the data entry.

Status of on-line data entry program – **D. Bellais** reported that FIN is still putting the finishing touches on the data entry system for biological sampling. Bellais said that hopefully the forms sever at GSMFC will be up and running in early November 2007 which will allow for initial testing to begin.

Red snapper reference set – **D. Donaldson** noted that most states did well at achieving a low average percent error (A.P.E) with the red snapper reference set. **Donaldson** mentioned Mississippi might need some additional training as their A.P.E was a little too large. If the A.P.E.'s are too high there is a possibility that stock assessment biologists won't use the data due to a lack of confidence in the reading accuracy. **Donaldson** mentioned the red snapper reference set has been returned to the NMFS Panama City lab. The next data workshop is concerning king mackerel and that reference set is currently being distributed through the states. **Donaldson** also

mentioned that FIN is planning on holding a training session for gray triggerfish and vermilion snapper early in 2008.

Processing Issues with Panama City Laboratory – **D. Donaldson** reported NMFS Panama City lab has raised questions concerning the large number of folks reading all species could increase the amount of reading errors. **Gary Fitzhugh** has asked that FIN consider sending all federal species to the Panama City lab to allow them to process them. **Donaldson** mentioned that NMFS would only process otoliths as stock assessment needs arose which is in contrast to the FIN goal of processing samples soon after they are collected. **Donaldson asked the group to consider the possibility of sending all federal species to Panama City lab.** The potential drawbacks are the reduced cost for the state might make it difficult to complete any biological sampling program. He also mentioned the money saved might not be enough to hire one or two samplers to work on FIN samples at the Panama City lab. One of the biggest concerns is that the FIN samplers working out of the Panama City lab might get pulled into other tasks that would affect the efficiency of processing FIN samples. **R. Cody** mentioned the state of Florida has a sampler working in the Panama City lab and they have noticed problems in receiving state data in a timely manner. **Donaldson stated that this issue will need to be discussed at the FIN meeting next June.**

Compilation of Commercial Fishermen, Dealer and Vessel Information

D. Bellais reported that GSMFC has received several requests for vessel information in the recent months. Many of the requested characteristics are items that states have been unable to provide. **V. Swann** mentioned she does not think there will be any quick resolution to the Texas problems because they would need to amend the contract on how the data are collected. Most of the other states agreed they are in the same situation as Texas. **C. Denson** said he's made some significant progress after talking to Alabama's marine police division. Alabama will only be able to deliver data quarterly but that would be acceptable for GSMFC. **D. Donaldson** mentioned FIN has some partial data from Florida. **K. Cuevas** of Mississippi DMR mentioned that their last attempt to merge data between the Biloxi and Jackson Mississippi offices did not work but they are working again to resolve the problem. **C. Denson** and **M. Kasprzak** noted they have fairly complete data sets for dealers and fishermen.

Discussion of Coding Issues Regarding Trip Ticket Data

D. Bellais mentioned that in the process of reviewing commercial data loaded to the FIN Data Management System (DMS) FIN has found some significant coding mistakes mostly with the shrimp landings. A large number of the mistakes were found in Florida data but other errors were found for other Gulf States. **D. Donaldson** mentioned **FIN needs to explore different ways for quality control analysis of all data loaded to the FIN DMS.** In the past each state was sent a report that summarized their loaded data but it needs to be reviewed by state supervisors for errors. **G. Bray** mentioned that it might be useful to have **commercial data review meetings that forces everyone to sit down and review data quality control issues.** **The group agreed that this would be a useful first step in developing a review process.**

Status of License Frame Pilot Survey

D. Donaldson reported FIN received some preliminary results that showed a low contact rate due to missing or incorrect telephone numbers. For the anglers that were contacted the telephone contractor did collect useful fishing information. Starting in wave 4 the sample size has been increased and the telephone contractor has been paid to start using a reverse lookup process to attempt to increase the number of useable telephone numbers. The project has been extended through 2008. **D. Bellais** noted that states need to continue to report issues with data transmission to her so she can forward it onto Rob Andrews at NMFS.

Presentation of Detailed Effort Pilot Survey

M. Kasprzak gave a presentation on the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Crab Effort Survey. All of the results she presented were preliminary results from merging trip ticket data with the pilot survey effort data. **Kasprzak** presented results from data collected from October 2006 through May 2007 for Atchafalaya River, Barataria, Calcasieu River, Lake Pontchartrain, Mississippi River, Terrebonne and Vermillion-Tech River basins. No samples were collected from the Pearl River, Sabine Lake, and Mermentau basins due to sampling difficulties or a lack of significant blue crab landings in those basins. **Kasprzak** stated samplers did a decent job of reaching sampling goals in all basins but overall they interviewed less than 2% of the total estimated trips. The number of crab fishermen ranged from 333 in the Lake Pontchartrain basin to 36 in the Mississippi River basin. The average number of traps set per fishermen was largest in the Vermilion-Tech basin while the smallest was in the Calcasieu basin with the statewide average being 314 traps per fisherman. The estimated number of total traps set ranged from 93,269 in Barataria basin to 13,320 in the Mississippi River basin. **Kasprzak** stated that after consulting with field personnel they think the survey results may have underestimated the total number of traps set. The highest average traps per fisherman per day were in the Vermilion-Tech basin and the lowest was in the Calcasieu basin with the state average being 259 traps per fisherman per day. Large variation in average trap soak time was observed and these data likely need to be cleaned with respect to outliers before producing final results. Average blue crab landings per trap were highest in the Mississippi River basin and lowest in the Vermilion-Tech basin. The statewide average was 1.81 pounds of blue crab per trap at a value of \$1.28 per trap. Average trip times were fairly uniform across basins with the state average being 7.15 hours per trip with an average value of landing per trip of \$330.69.

Kasprzak mentioned they learned they needed a larger sample size to reduce confidence intervals on statistical results. They also need to base their dockside sampling strategy on more recent data instead of the pre storm data. The state also needs to work with the dealers to get more accurate trip ticket data to make better matches with the detailed effort survey data. They are planning to continue with the data analysis from this project and would like to determine how bait type affects landings per trap and take a closer look at the crab counts from each trap landed from the different basins. **D. Donaldson** asked how this pilot would apply to getting effort data for all species. **Kasprzak** mentioned she thought it would work but it might be more difficult to identify locations for dockside sampling for some species. **C. Denson** mentioned that sampling all commercial fisheries could be difficult due to the magnitude of sampling necessary. **Donaldson** mentioned that it might not be

necessary to sample every fishery every year. **Kasprzak** mentioned that seasonality of most fisheries might ease the sampling burden throughout the year.

Donaldson mentioned that due to funding shortfalls there is currently no money to continue this project for 2008. Hopefully FIN can continue this project in 2009 with additional funding.

Discussion of FIN Outreach Work Group Activities

Establishing links to FIN DMS - **G. Bray** reported that the FIN Outreach Work Group has been tasked with developing outreach materials for the FIN Data Management System. The initial constituent group targeted will be state agencies. **Bray** asked if each state would be willing to post a link on their state web pages for the FIN Data Management System. State representatives mentioned they would need to determine if there would be any road blocks to establishing a link on their websites. Most states said they didn't expect issues. **Bray** mentioned he is developing an e-mail or e-bulletin describing the FIN Data Management System and would distribute that to the state supervisors after the outreach work group approves it.

List of Contacts for FIN DMS Information - Any materials describing the FIN Data Management System will be sent to the members of this work group and they will forward it onto their IT staff.

Status of Metadata Data Entry - **D. Donaldson** stated that states that have not completed their metadata entry should continue to work on this. Most states are still working to enter their data. Alabama has not made a good deal of progress yet. Mississippi and GSMFC have published their materials but if documents change those updates need to be entered. Florida already has a large amount of their metadata published on their website. **R. Cody** mentioned they could provide that website as a link that InPort users would be directed to. **Cody** will provide the link to **Bellais** at GSMFC. **Cody** also mentioned that the commercial data is complete but the recreational data has not been completed due to a lack of data entry personnel.

Election of Officers - **C. Denson** of Alabama was elected chairman and **V. Swann** of Texas was elected Vice Chairman.

Being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:56 a.m.

TCC DATA MANAGEMENT SUBCOMMITTEE (GULF OF MEXICO GEOGRAPHIC SUBCOMMITTEE)

MINUTES – 58th Annual Spring Meeting

Monday, March 10, 2008

Galveston, Texas

Vice Chairman Vicki Swann called the meeting to order at 8:39 a.m. The following members and others were present:

Members

Kevin Anson, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL
Richard Cody, FWC/FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Page Campbell, TPWD, Rockport, TX
Kerwin Cuevas, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Jason Duet, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Steven Atran, GMFMC, Tampa, FL
Vicki Swann, TPWD, Austin, TX
Guy Davenport, NMFS, Miami, FL

Staff

David Donaldson, FIN Data Program Manager, Ocean Springs, MS
Larry B. Simpson, GSMFC Executive Director, Ocean Springs, MS
Donna Bellais, ComFIN Survey Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Gregg Bray, RecFIN Programmer/Analyst, Ocean Springs, MS

Others

Cindy Bohannon, Texas Parks and Wildlife, Dickinson, TX
Rhonda Cummins, Texas Sea Grant, Port Lavaca, TX
Terry Cody, Rockport, TX
Bonnie Ponwith, NOAA, Miami, FL

Adoption of Agenda

The agenda was approved as presented.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on October 15, 2007 in Point Clear, Alabama were approved with two typographical changes.

Status of Biological Sampling Activities

Review of targets and collection activities – **G. Bray** discussed the handouts that summarized the otolith and lengths collected for the thirteen FIN target species for 2007 and 2008. There were some shortfalls for 2007 but many were due to a late sampling start because of early season funding issues. Some of the shortfalls were also due to lower numbers of certain species like greater amberjack observed dockside by samplers. All states were satisfied with 2007 data

collections. Collections for 2008 are off to a slow start but sampling intensity is starting to increase. **D. Donaldson** asked **G. Davenport** if the tables FIN produces that summarize TIPS collections are useful. **Davenport** agreed that they find those tables very useful.

Review of analysis activities – Subcommittee members were provided with a matrix detailing otolith analysis from 2002 to 2006 listing the five Gulf States. **G. Bray** mentioned the states are doing a good job of getting age data on a timely basis. Florida is working to get age data for additional FIN target species besides red snapper for 2005 and 2006. R. Cody mentioned they just received age data for red snapper for 2006 and 2007 from the Panama City Laboratory. We should be getting those data into the data management system in the near future.

Status of web-based data entry program – **D. Bellais** reported the server is up and running and the form is available for testing purposes. She has made some slight modifications to allow for easier editing of data and to allow samplers to easily query specific fish for age data entry. **K. Anson** asked if it might be more useful to enter the biosampling and age data separately and merge them back together later. **Bellias** said that could easily be handled if needed. **Bellias** said she thinks the online program will be ready to run by the end of April. **Donaldson** asked if we could aim for a June 1, 2008 switchover to the new online program. **Bellais** will provide each state a link to the new data entry system and get feedback as to how to improve the form for each state.

Discussion of Commercial QA/QC Meeting

D. Donaldson discussed a meeting held at GSMFC that reviewed commercial trip ticket data to provide an additional measure of quality control and quality assurance. Representatives from Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana were present. A representative from Texas will attend future meetings but the lack of data provided from Texas precluded their attendance at this meeting. The majority of the state data sets matched the data in the FIN Data Management System (DMS) well. The majority of the differences in Florida were due to differences in species coding associated with marine tropical species. Some of the differences were attributed to Florida having a more updated data set than FIN had available at the time of review. Mississippi and Alabama had a few internal species coding issues that they are working to fix. Louisiana had some issues with how they calculated landings for this comparison but those problems have been fixed. **For future meetings D. Bellais will produce a comparison spreadsheet that details the landings from each state database and the FIN DMS. The review group recommended that they would like to meet on an annual basis in conjunction with the GSMFC annual fall meeting, likely in the afternoon after the data management subcommittee meeting.** Meeting in the fall would allow each state to have the prior year's data completed and loaded into the FIN DMS. There is a possibility of collecting state/federal reports electronically prior to the data management subcommittee meeting to allow for the commercial data review. **Cuevas** asked if we could possibly compile and distribute the state/federal reports prior to the meeting for informational purposes. **Donaldson** agreed that would not be a problem. **Donaldson** mentioned at the upcoming October meeting the review panel will be targeting the review 2007 commercial data.

Compilation of Commercial Fishermen, Dealer and Vessel Information

D. Bellais reported we are receiving vessel registration numbers but no additional vessel characteristics. **Donaldson** mentioned that we are still hampered because we can not uniquely

identify the number of fishing vessels within a specific state. We are fairly close with being able to identify dealers but identifying unique vessels and fishermen continues to be problematic. **Donaldson** asked if the Louisiana issue was still because of a lack of data entry staff. **J. Duet** mentioned that was part of the problem but **Michelle Kasprzak** is still working on this issue. **K. Anson** mentioned Alabama is having difficulty obtaining these data from their own agencies on a regular basis. **Donaldson** asked everyone to continue to work hard towards getting this information compiled.

Status of License Frame Pilot Survey

D. Donaldson reported in 2007 we started using recreational fishing licenses as a sampling frame to obtain improved fishing effort estimates with the coastal household telephone survey (CHTS). Preliminary results show low percentages of license frame records with complete and accurate telephone numbers for all Gulf States. There have also been difficulties getting updated license frame data from some states during the fishing season. Overall the telephone survey using the fishing license frame obtained an approximate response rate of 30%. The survey coverage using just the fishing license database ranged from 20-90% of the anglers and varied greatly between states and areas. Coverage increased to 75-100% coverage by using the dual frame method (angler license and random digit dial database). Approximately half of the license frame respondents have completed a fishing trip in the previous 2 month sampling period. The phone contractor has started using a reverse lookup procedure to increase the number of useful telephone numbers. They have also started sending pre-contact letters and leaving a toll free call back number on answering machines to hopefully improve response rates. NOAA Fisheries is starting to produce estimates of fishing effort from this dual frame study and preliminary findings should be available later in the year. NOAA Fisheries is pleased that a larger portion of the data is based on direct observations using the license frame database and will hopefully reduce the impact from using correction factors when calculating fishing effort estimates. **S. Atran** asked if the telephone contractor is cataloging the reasons for refusals and if they have started asking about fish caught during the telephone survey. **Donaldson** mentioned they still only collect data for effort estimates on the CHTS and that he was not sure if the contractor collected the reason for refusals.

Status of Metadata Data Entry - **D. Donaldson** mentioned this should continue to be a priority for state personnel. InPort is a useful tool only if the states utilize its full potential. GSMFC and Mississippi are current with their metadata entry. Florida has recently made their metadata website available outside the agency and InPort will direct users to Florida's site. Texas is getting close to publishing their metadata documents. **K. Anson** mentioned Alabama has placed metadata entry lower on their priority list but they still plan to enter those data into the system. **J. Duet** was not sure how Louisiana is progressing but he mentioned they have entered some of their documents. **G. Davenport** mentioned that National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is using InPort but not all of the documents have been completed and published yet. **Donaldson** mentioned we previously discussed using InPort for cataloging biological data collected from fishery independent sampling and we should continue to pursue that topic.

Being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:49 a.m.

FIN Otolith Processors Training Workshop
Meeting Summary
May 6-7, 2008
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
Laura Crabtree, FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Alison Amick, FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Jessica Carroll, FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Jaime Miller, AMRD, Dauphin Island, AL
Jerome Little AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL
Brandy Coates, AMRD, Dauphin Island, AL
Wes Devers, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Debbie Belk, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Heather Fox, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Isis Longo, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Jaimie David, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Kym Walsh, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Kathy Brown, TPWD, Palacios, TX
Carrie Fioramonti, NMFS, Panama City, FL
Beverly Barnett, NMFS, Panama City, FL
Andy Fischer, LSU, Baton Rouge, LA
Read Hendon, GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Dave Donaldson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Steve VanderKooy, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Gregg Bray, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Conducting Otolith Reading Exercise for Black Drum, Red Drum, Spotted Seatrout, Gray Triggerfish, King Mackerel, Flounders, Sheepshead, Striped Mullet, Gray Snapper, Red Snapper and Vermilion Snapper

The first day of the meeting consisted of a reading exercise where the groups read otoliths. The group split into five sections and conducted readings of various sets of otoliths for king mackerel, gray triggerfish, snappers (red, gray and vermilion), sciaenids (black drum, red drum and spotted seatrout) and inshore species (flounder, sheepshead and striped mullet). 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.

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

May 7, 2008

The meeting was reconvened at 9:00 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 APEs for all species. The following table outlines the APEs for each species and provides a historical look (where applicable) for those species.

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Black drum					0.7%	0.2%
Red drum					0.5%	4.4%
Spotted seatrout					0.0%	4.6%
Gray triggerfish					16.8%	21.8%
King mackerel			13.6%	2.9%	11.5%	6.5%
S. flounder		10.5%	9.5%	4.0%	2.9%	8.8%
Sheepshead					0.4%	8.7%
Striped mullet					7.0%	7.5%
Gray snapper					3.2%	9.2%
Red snapper	16.0%	5.0%	5.6%	3.3%	1.1%	6.0%
Vermilion snapper					6.1%	16.3%

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. It was pointed out that it is very important that the experts for each of the species attend this meeting to ensure that any issues or problems can be address. **D. Donaldson stated that this issue will be discussed by the FIN Committee and measures will be discussed to make sure that these personnel attend the meeting.** Since the group was smaller in size than in the past, the individual groups were smaller and that appeared to be beneficial to the reading exercise. **It was decided to stay with smaller groups for future meetings. It was also suggested that the documentation (from the otolith manual or other sources) be provided at each station and the group review this information prior to conducting the readings. This will provide some direction to the groups regarding the proper procedures for accurately reading the otoliths. Also, it was noted that it is important the every group member look at the otoliths through the microscope, not just via the screen.** The group discussed margin codes and it was pointed out the all readers should be either utilizing the standard 1-4 codes outlined in the manual or converting the codes to that standard prior to submission to the FIN Data Management System.

Overall, the APEs for all the species were fairly good. Where the APEs exceeded the 5% standard, there was usually one or two otoliths where there were discrepancies usually caused by differences in the interpretation of the margin codes. It was pointed out that even though there were differences, all groups were usually within 1 year of the actual age. The exception to this statement was gray triggerfish and the reading exercise pointed out the need for additional training and the importance of having the experts at this meeting.

Discussion of Red Snapper Reference Set

Prior to discussing the individual sets, the group asked that a master list of points of contact and shipping addresses be compiled for all of the readings and reference sets. **D. Donaldson stated that he would compile this information and distribute it to the group.** It

was also noted that those reading the reference sets should provide the ring counts and margin codes to the responsible individual and that person would determine the ages for the particular set. The group then discussed the red snapper reference set and B. Barnett stated that Robert Allman is the point of contact for this set but was unable to attend this meeting due to prior commitments. The set is currently in Mississippi and will be sent to Louisiana and then Texas. B. Barnett stated that several of the slides have been damaged and once all agencies have read the set, these slides will be removed and **R. Allman will reduce the set to 200 randomly-selected otoliths**. The results of the readings will be presented to the group at the May 2009 meeting.

Discussion of Flounder Reference Set

A. Fischer and I. Longo are the points of contact for this set and they distributed documentation regarding the set. It was noted that the APEs were 7.35% for all states. While this is a bit higher than the standard, it was pointed out that errors were probably due to variability in assigning the margin codes and additional examination of this issue at these workshops should lower the APEs. It was also pointed out there were several transcription errors from last year's readings which lead to an artificially high APE. The results of the readings will be presented to the group at the May 2009 meeting.

Discussion of King Mackerel Reference Set

C. Fioramonti stated that Chris Palmer was unable to attend this meeting. She noted that a new reference set for king mackerel has been developed and distributed and the overall APEs ranged from 2.75% to 8.76%. All of the states were under the 5% standard for the sectioned otoliths but the whole otoliths caused some problems and were the main factor in the higher APEs. This again stresses the importance of having the experts at the meeting. It was noted that the reference set was used to determine if the king mackerel otoliths collected under FIN would be used in the upcoming king mackerel SEDAR. D. Donaldson stated that it is very important that everyone involved take these workshops seriously since they have major implications on the usefulness of the data being collected. The reference set will be distributed in the near future and the results of the readings will be presented to the group at the May 2009 meeting.

Discussion of Red drum/Spotted Seatrout/Striped Mullet Reference Set

J. Tunnell is the point of contact for this set and she stated that all three reference sets have been completed. It was decided that the sets will be distributed starting in west (TX) and moving to the east. Since Texas does not collect striped mullet, that set will be started in Louisiana and travel east. The results of the readings will be presented to the group at the May 2009 meeting.

Discussion of Vermilion Snapper Reference Set

B. Barnett stated that Robert Allinan is the point of contact for this set. She reported that they have only received 20 otoliths from Alabama for the reference set. She asked the each state provide 30-40 otoliths to ensure a representative sample throughout the Gulf of Mexico. Hopefully, a completed reference set will be available at the May 2009 meeting.

Discussion of Sheepshead Reference Set

D. Donaldson reported for W. Devers that the sheepshead set is near completion. Once completed, the set will be distributed starting in west (Texas) and moving to the east. The results of the readings will be presented to the group at the May 2009 meeting.

Discussion of Black Drum Reference Set

S. VanderKooy stated that work on the black drum reference set is nearly complete. The set should be done by mid-summer and he will distribute it to the group. The set will be first sent to Florida and move to the west. The results of the readings will be presented to the group at the May 2009 meeting.

Discussion of Developing Reference Sets for Other Species

D. Donaldson stated that FIN has developed reference sets for all the primary species with the exception of gag grouper, red grouper and gray triggerfish. C. Fioramonti volunteered to develop the reference set for gray triggerfish and ask each state to provide her with 20 spines (or as many as possible). She will begin compiling the samples and hopefully, a completed reference set will be available at the May 2009 meeting.

Status of Greater Amberjack Ageing Techniques

D. Donaldson stated that Deb Murie was unable to attend the meeting due to other commitments. D. Donaldson noted the work continues and they are re-aging all of the otoliths on four axes now because the axes along the sulcus do not have the extension of the otolith that is seen on the dorsal and ventral medial edges. They just want to make sure that they are not under-aging the otoliths/fins. D. Donaldson stated that she also wanted to convey to the group her appreciation for the greater amberjack otoliths from all of the states.

Status of Otolith Manual Revision

S. VanderKooy stated there are four species (gag grouper, red grouper, vermilion snapper and gray snapper) that FIN is collecting samples so there needs to be sections developed for each of these species. He has developed drafts for each of these sections and needs to get some feedback from the experts for each of these species: red grouper (Linda Lombardi/Gary Fitzhugh); gag grouper (Gary Fitzhugh); and vermilion snapper (Robert Allman). He will compile the comments and present the revised sections at the May 2009 meeting.

Discussion of Future Training Meeting

The group discussed the date and location for the next meeting otolith processors training workshop. It was decided that it should be held at Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute during the 1st or 2nd week of May 2009. This was the first year of the expanded two-day meeting and while there was some down time, the group believed that the two day format was effective and should continue especially since there will be additional topics that need to be addressed. As part of the meeting for next year, the group believed it would be a good idea to have the experts provide a "how to" demonstration regarding the reading of otoliths for the various species. D. Donaldson stated that he would develop a draft agenda prior to the meeting and distribute it to everyone for comment.

Being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:40 a.m.

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

Guy Davenport, NMFS, Miami, FL
Steve Brown, FWRI, St. Pete, FL
Page Campbell, TPWD, Rockport, TX
Chris Denson, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL
Michelle Kasprzak, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
David Olsen, USVIDFW, St. Thomas, USVI
Dave Donaldson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Purpose of the Meeting

D. Donaldson stated that the purpose of the meeting was to assess the need for trip-level commercial data to meet management needs in U.S. Virgin Islands; and identify and compile conversion factors used for various species in the Southeast Region.

Discussion of Trip-level Commercial Data in the U.S. Virgin Islands

D. Donaldson stated this was an issue that was identified during the last facilitated session as a topic that needed to be addressed by FIN. **D. Olsen stated that USVI currently has implemented trip-level reporting for their commercial fisheries. Therefore, the group decided that no further work needs to be conducted on this topic.**

Identify and Compile Commercial Conversion Factors

D. Donaldson stated that another issue identified during the facilitated session was the development of standardized conversion factors for commercial species in the Gulf of Mexico. **As a first step, staff will compile the various conversion factors that are used by each of the partners and once that have been completed, the group will get together and determine where the similarities and differences are among the various factors.**

Being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:45 a.m.

ComFIN Data Collection Work Group
Conference Call Summary
August 30th, 9 a.m.

The following workgroup members were present:

Guy Davenport, NOAA Fisheries, Miami, FL
Steve Brown, FFWRI, Saint Petersburg, FL
Chris Denson, ADCNR, Gulf Shores, AL
Michelle Kasprzak, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Page Campbell, TPWD, Rockport, TX

Staff

Gregg Bray, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Dave Donaldson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Compare the various conversion factors used by each state and determine similarities and the need for validation

Dave Donaldson mentioned that this issue was brought up by the most recent FIN facilitated session and we basically need to determine if these factors are accurate and valid. Gregg Bray mentioned he compiled conversion factors from each state and provided them in an Excel spreadsheet for review. **The review of the factors showed that the states are using exactly the same or very similar conversion factors for all the major saltwater species.** Guy Davenport mentioned that as long as the states are providing “as landed weight” and the classification of how the fish were landed, those data were sufficient for assessment purposes. **The group decided that because of what Davenport mentioned, validation of the conversion factors was not necessary.**

There being no further business, the call was adjourned at 9:17 a.m.

FIN Data Collection Plan Work Group

Conference Call Summary

May 19th, 9 a.m.

The following workgroup members were present:

Harry Blanchet, LADWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Kerwin Cuevas, MSDMR, Biloxi, MS
Britt Bumguardner, TPWD, Palacios, TX
John Mareska, ALDCNR, Dauphin Island, AL
Bob Muller, FWC/FMRI, St. Petersburg, FL

Staff

Gregg Bray, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Dave Donaldson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Others

Wes Devers, MSDMR, Biloxi, MS
Gary Fitzhugh, NMFS, Panama City, FL
Linda Lombardi, NMFS, Panama City, FL

Review of 2007 Otolith Collection Reports

G. Bray described the results presented in the spreadsheet comparing otoliths collected and total landings for 2007 for the FIN priority species. Targets were slightly adjusted prior to the 2007 sampling season due to cuts in the FIN budget. **D. Donaldson** mentioned that each state seemed to be doing a decent job of reaching targets and the comparison of landings distribution and otolith sampling across states was decent. The largest discrepancies were observed in commercial mode as it appears that Federal TIP samplers are not following the prescribed targets for each species. Federal collections of red snapper and vermilion snapper greatly exceeded the targets for those species. **FIN needs to talk with G. Davenport to determine if the targets generated for Federal collections are useful and if the monthly tracking reports are getting reported to the samplers to help direct their sampling.** **L. Lombardi** asked if FIN has discussed having a minimum target to avoid having calculated targets that are really small. **Donaldson** mentioned that FIN has discussed this issue but the group has not reached a conclusion. **G. Fitzhugh mentioned that the Federal collections that they have hand counted do not match up to the totals provided to FIN by NMFS. GSMFC and NMFS in Panama City will work with D. Gloekner and G. Davenport to resolve this issue.** **Bray** discussed some of the additional review materials that were distributed for the call. Most of these were provided for informational purposes only. **B. Muller** asked that we consider distributing targets throughout the season to ensure that samplers are getting samples from all possible seasons. **Lombardi** mentioned she might be able to put together some materials to help samplers with age determination as this is becoming an important issue too. **Fitzhugh** reminded everyone that we should continue to place biological sampling as a high priority. As new species

come up for stock assessments we need to have otoliths available and it is impossible to go back in time and collect them. **After further discussion the workgroup recommended that FIN should continue to use the current process for generating targets for the 2009 sampling season.**

There being no further business, the call adjourned at 9:51 a.m.

**FIN Outreach Work Group
Conference Call Summary
August 28th, 9 a.m.**

The following workgroup members were present:

Michael Bailey, NOAA Fisheries, St. Petersburg, FL
Charlene Ponce, GMFMC, Tampa, FL
Marcia Taylor, USVI Sea Grant Advisory Service, Kingshill, USVI
Rick Wallace, Alabama Sea Grant Extension Service, Mobile, AL

Staff

Gregg Bray, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Dave Donaldson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Establishing a system for notifying commercial dealers about electronic reporting options

Dave Donaldson mentioned that currently only 5% of the commercial dealers report landings electronically but those dealers account for approximately 40% of the commercial landings. Electronic reporting provides data to the states in a more timely fashion than paper tickets and informing all dealers of this reporting option might help encourage more dealers to use electronic reporting software. **Donaldson mentioned that GSMFC could produce a fact sheet about the program with detailed information on the electronic reporting option and its benefits. Michael Bailey also suggested that providing materials to the port agents might be beneficial as they are in direct contact with many commercial dealers.** Charlene Ponce and Rick Wallace mentioned they might be able to help improve the overall look of the fact sheet once GSMFC gets the details outlined.

Developing a survey of commercial dealers for input on the best methods to facilitate reporting

Dave Donaldson mentioned that currently we are not in an easy position for implementing any changes that might come from dealer suggestions. The program has received some good feedback in the past from commercial dealers with respect to reporting data. **The work group decided that at this time it is not necessary to pursue a survey of commercial dealers.** Marcia Taylor mentioned that a survey might be useful for the USVI and Donaldson will address that topic at the upcoming Caribbean port samplers meeting.

Improve outreach to constituents on FIN Data Management System

Ponce asked what group of constituents we were trying to target for outreach and Donaldson said that initially we should be focused on scientific and technical data users such as the state agencies. Ponce suggested an email or e-bulletin describing the system, what data are available, and the link to the system could be distributed to each state agency. Bailey mentioned that a description could be added to NOAA Fisheries FishNews.

Donaldson and Bray will work on producing some details on the Data Management System and distribute it to the group for review.

Exploring ways to involve Sea Grant in the entire FIN outreach process

Rick Wallace mentioned that Sea Grant is always looking for information to include in newsletters and if FIN provided a couple paragraphs on the program he could provide it to the appropriate Sea Grant personnel. Donaldson also mentioned that he would like to give a presentation about the FIN program at the next combined GSMFC -- Sea Grant meeting.

There being no further business, the call was adjourned at 9:35 a.m.

**FIN Outreach Work Group
Conference Call Summary
March 26th, 9 a.m.**

The following workgroup members were present:

Michael Bailey, NOAA Fisheries, St. Petersburg, FL
Charlene Ponce, GMFMC, Tampa, FL
Marcia Taylor, USVI Sea Grant Advisory Service, Kingshill, USVI

Staff

Gregg Bray, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Dave Donaldson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Outreach document for notifying commercial dealers about electronic reporting options

GSMFC staff produced a fact sheet detailing the electronic reporting options for commercial dealers that the work group reviewed prior to the call. **C. Ponce** reformatted the materials and made several edits to improve the readability of the document. **D. Donaldson** mentioned this would likely be a direct mail document as we do not have a large number of email addresses for commercial dealers. **G. Bray** will be obtaining some direct positive feedback from commercial dealers currently using the electronic reporting option and incorporate that into **Ponce's** edited document. All of the workgroup members found these changes satisfactory.

Outreach document to constituents on FIN Data Management System

GSMFC staff generated an outreach document detailing the types of data and results you could find in the GulfFIN DMS. **G. Bray** described that initially this outreach would target state agency personnel to make them aware of the data available in the FIN DMS. Most of the state personnel associated with FIN are aware of the DMS but additional state agency personnel could benefit from becoming more aware of the FIN DMS. **C. Ponce** suggested the document should specifically ask state agencies to add a link to the FIN DMS on their web sites. **Ponce** also had some additional revisions that she will send to GSMFC.

Both of these documents will be presented at the FIN annual meeting in June and if approved will be distributed in late summer/early fall.

Seeking additional work group members

The Outreach work group has shrunk to 3 working members not including GSMFC staff. At the upcoming FIN annual meeting we will be asking FIN committee members for suggested names of people that could be added to the outreach work group.

There being no further business, the call was adjourned at 9:30 a.m.

APPROVED BY:


COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**Joint LEC/LEAP Work Session
MINUTES
August 6-8, 2008
Ocean Springs, MS**

Steve VanderKooy called the meeting to order at 8:08 a.m. The following members were in attendance:

Members Present

Robert Goodrich, TPWD, Austin, TX
Chris Blankenship, AMDR, Dauphin Island, AL
Mark Kinsey, NOAA, Galveston, TX
Brett Norton, FWC, Tallahassee, FL
Karen Raine, GCEL/SE, NOAA, St. Petersburg, FL
Jeff Mayne, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Walter Chataginer, MDMR, Biloxi, MS

Others

Steve VanderKooy, GSMFC, IJF Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Teri Freitas, GSMFC, Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS

Approval of Agenda

VanderKooy reviewed the agenda with LEC/LEAP members and it was approved unanimously.

LEC/LEAP Chairman and Vice Chairman

In an attempt to clarify the LEC/LEAP Chairmen and Vice Chairmen: The current LEC Chairman is **Chataginer** and the current LEC Vice Chairman is **Mayne**.

Bill Robinson, LEAP Chairman retired and at March 2008 LEAP Meeting they elected to move **Jenkins** to Vice Chairman, as opposed to letting **David Sinclair (TPWD)** take over as **Robinson's** replacement, until he could get some experience. At the October 2008 LEAP Meeting, this will have to be re-addressed since **Jenkins** has been promoted and replaced by **Blankenship** and **Sinclair** has been replaced by **Goodrich**.

"Strategic Plan" 2009-2014 and Operations Plan 2009-2010

VanderKooy addressed the Committee regarding the *Strategic and Operations Plans* and then asked **Mayne** to give the new members a brief history on both plans. The work sessions are scheduled to meet every other year in July and the LEC and LEAP meet at the GSMFC annual meetings, which are held in March/October.

The group discussed whether to do the *Strategic Plan* as an amendment or as a new publication. It was agreed that the *Strategic Plan* should be a new publication with the dates of 2009-2012 and to make the *Operations Plan* dates 2009-2010. These documents will be updated and presented to the commission at the October 2008 meeting for approval.

The changes to the plans were incorporated into the draft, but a few of bigger items will be discussed below:

There was a minor change made to the Mission Statement, NOAA was added to the list of agencies.

Goal 1 - "Professional law enforcement expertise and input are integral to the development, promulgation and implementation of clean and effective regulations". (added implementation)

Objective 1.3 - Increase participation in Secretary of Commerce Plans and the bullet -- Provide timely and substantive comments on Secretary Management plans. (inserted new objective for inclusion of enforcement reps in NOAA management plans)

Objective 3.3 - Promote the use of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's National Crime Information Center (NCIC) and NLETS as a point source for natural resource violations and provide input to that system (reworded based on improved accessibility of federal system). Acquire the wireless ability to access this system in the field by enforcement officers in real time. (new component based on previous bullet)

Objective 6.1 -- Explore and enhance federal grant and funding programs for law enforcement. (moved up in list of objectives based on priority). Promote adequate long-term funding for JEAs that takes into account increased operation costs at a minimum of the current Consumer Price Index (CPI) to maintain historical JEA patrol levels. (recommend an annual adjustment to JEA in keeping with rising inflation and operating costs such as fuel prices)

Objective 6.2 - Seek a long term, dedicated source of funding/appropriations for the JEA program to support regulatory compliance initiatives in the Gulf of Mexico. (reworded objective for clarification and redirect focus to JEA rather than Homeland security specifically) Identify the positive performance of the JEA program (reworded toward JEA). Evaluate the cost effectiveness of current federal funding in fisheries law enforcement in the Gulf of Mexico. The other three bullets in this section were removed. (reworded for all programs taking away hours and effort from state enforcement)

Outreach Activities Update

VanderKooy reviewed the document "An Overview of Enforcement Outreach Programs in the Gulf Region". This is a catalog of the current community outreach activities in the Gulf and will continue to be updated, as needed. LEC members will continue to explore documentation of community oriented policing events conducted by enforcement officers which encompass regulatory and management information and identify other forms of fisheries education and public outreach.

JEA Status Reports

It was suggested that since GSMFC has several new Commissioners, it may be a good idea to give a short PowerPoint presentation at the next Commission meeting on JEA's, we need to hit them with some numbers, the everyday work, and an overview of the program. It was agreed that each state will report on their JEA activities from the July 07-June 08 timeframe and prepare 3-4 PowerPoint slides with the following information: The **number of JEA patrols** – the number of hours: patrol offshore, nearshore, dockside, commercial, recreational and outreach. **Vessels/Violations/Dealers** – the number of vessels boarded – commercial recreational and headboat. The number of violations and a couple of good examples of those cases and the number of Dealers inspected. The last slide should have **JEA Spending** - equipment purchased, etc. Each state is to send their PowerPoint slides and photos to **VanderKooy** by **September 15, 2008**, so that he can coordinate and edit them.

VanderKooy also suggested adding a page on JEA to enhance the GSMFC webpage, which currently has no LEC information. He requested input from the LEC members and asked that each state representative provide a brief paragraph overview of their states JEAs and to also include photographs. **VanderKooy** would like to be able to present a draft at the October meeting – deadline for overview information is **September 15, 2008**.

LEC/LEAP Other Business

The LEC members requested that the following items be added to the LEC/LEAP agenda in October:

- Funding for Public Service Announcements (State vs. Gulf)
- Presentation to the LEC from an FDA & U.S. Customs and Border Department Representative on inspection of fisheries products
- Presentation to the LEC from an Aquaculture Representative
- A reformat of the GSMFC Annual Law Summary Publication for the field

VanderKooy will email the Sheepshead Profile boilerplate for the LEC members to update with the Arenarius regulations and data. LEC members are to update and return their revised sections to **Chatagner** at walter.chatagner@dmr.ms.gov

VanderKooy and Freitas reviewed GSMFC travel policies. GSMFC and GMFMC are each paying half of the expenses for this meeting. Please send your expense report with original receipts to Gayle Jones and GSMFC first, she will process it and return your original receipts for you to file for travel reimbursement by GMFMC.

The meeting adjourned at 11:45 a.m.

**OYSTER TECHNICAL TASK FORCE
MINUTES
August 12-13, 2008
St. Petersburg, FL**

APPROVED BY:


COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

Moderator, **Steve VanderKooy** called the meeting to order at 8:40 a.m. and started with each TTF member introducing themselves. The following members and guests were in attendance:

Members

Brian Lezina, LDWF, Lacombe, LA
Cherie O'Brien, TPWD, Dickinson, TX
Lance Robinson, TPWD, Dickinson, TX
Mark Berrigan, FDACS, Tallahassee, FL
Tom Herrington, ISSC/FDA Representative-Retired, Ocean Springs, MS
Robert Goodrich, TPWD, Austin, TX
Bill Arnold, FWC/FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Bradley Randall, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Priscilla Weeks, Houston Advanced Research Center, Woodlands, TX
Walter Keithly, LSU, Baton Rouge, LA

Guest

Eric Powell, Haskin Shellfish Research Laboratory, Rutgers University, Port Norris, NJ

Other

Leslie Craig, NOAA, St. Petersburg, FL

Staff

Steve VanderKooy, GSMFC, IJF Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Teri Freitas, GSMFC, IJF Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS
Ralph Hode, GSMFC, Emergency Disaster Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS

Adoption of Agenda

VanderKooy reviewed the agenda and the handouts that were provided in the meeting envelopes. **VanderKooy** noted that there is a change in the agenda, that due to **Keithly's** travel schedule, the economic section will be reviewed first and then we will be jumping around the other sections. **Herrington** moved to approve the agenda as modified, **Robinson** seconded the motion and the motion passed without objection.

Approval of Minutes (March)

The minutes from the meeting Ocean Springs, MS March 26-27, 2008 were approved with corrections to Section 6 Fishery Management Jurisdiction. **O'Brien** moved to approve the minutes as modified, **Lezina** seconded the motion and the motion passed without objection.

should go about pulling together this data, and if funding could be obtained, could he help us with our assessment needs. **VanderKooy** reminded TTF members that in order to obtain funding, we will need to come up with an RFP.

Section 3 – Description of Stocks Comprising the Management Unit (MU) and Description of the Habitat

Robinson has more information to upload to the webpage and questioned **Lezina** on the Threats Section and where it fits. Currently he is looking for citations in this section. Please read Robinson's section and get your comments back to him.

Section 4 – Habitat

O'Brien reported that she needs to make a few minor changes from **VanderKooy's** comments and then she is ready to have her draft upload to the website for comments (within the next 2 weeks). **O'Brien** will email everyone once she has updated the file on the website.

Section 5 – Threats to Survival

Lezina reported that he recently posted his section and he is ready for comments from the TTF members, he took a lot of **VanderKooy's** suggestions and moved quite a few sections around. **Lezina** did note that he has not updated his reference section. **Arnold** suggested expanding the metapopulations discussion in paragraph two in Section 5.2.2.1

Section 6 – Fishery Management Jurisdiction

Goodrich is new to the process and to the Oyster TTF, so **VanderKooy** gave him a brief history on the enforcement section. We have repeatedly asked LEC members and Oyster TTF members to help us identify other organizations within their states, some states have responded, but we are currently missing a few. Some of the states provided too much information and it needs to be synthesized down into the FMPs format. All of the blanks need to be completely filled in by December 2008. **Berrigan** stated that he modeled the Florida section after Table 6.1 – State Management Institutions for the Gulf of Mexico, it was agreed that all the other states should do the same. This section is very hard to follow and will be difficult to coordinate and pull together.

Section 7 – Description of Fishery Activities

Van Hoose was unable to attend the meeting and has not updated his section. **VanderKooy** indicated that **Van Hoose** is looking for more information on the individual states oyster history, landings by state and history of closures. **VanderKooy** indicated that he provided **Van Hoose** some additional comments and suggestions to fill in the history section. It was recommended that we read "The Big Oyster" – this book gives an excellent history of oysters and has a lot of reference material in it as well. **Van Hoose** will revise and update this section and then repost it to the website in the next couple of weeks. Please read this section and provide any information and comments you have directly to **Van Hoose**. There will be tables and figures completed for the landings.

Section 8 – Public Health Concerns Introduction and History

Herrington reported that he sent out a couple of e-mails in the last two weeks regarding the FDA backing down and not making any decisions on *Vibrios* before next year; with that being said, **Herrington** stated that he will have to pare down and rewrite this section

Revision Timeline

VanderKooy pointed out that several sections were still incomplete and need to be provided for review soon. Several members have mentioned that they have drafts, but have not provided them yet. While funding remains limited, VanderKooy intends to hold one more meeting this year, in order to keep the momentum going and to meet the 2008 deadline for a rough draft.

VanderKooy reported that he had planned on a fall/winter 2008 completion for the rough draft and was optimistic that the final review and editing could be completed by late spring 2009.

To review and comment on other Oyster TTF members sections, please go to the oyster website, select the section you wish to review, copy it to your computer hard drive, make changes/edits and then provide comments directly to the author, via email. **VanderKooy** also did a brief tutorial to show TTF members how to use the GSMFC database to find reference materials.

TTF members reviewed and discussed some of the Oyster FMP cover options. If anyone had artwork or an artist that they thought would make a nice cover, please forward information to **VanderKooy** soon.

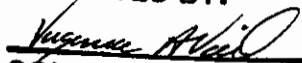
Other Business

VanderKooy briefly reviewed the GSMFC travel policy and procedures and reminded members that the new mileage of .585 went into effect on August 1, 2008.

Next meeting will be sometime in early December in the Biloxi area. **Arnold** stated that he will be on vacation December 10-20, 2008 and will not be available that week.

With no further business, O'Brien made the motion to adjourn, the motion was seconded by Randall and the group adjourned at 12:00 p.m.

APPROVED BY:


COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**STATE/FEDERAL FISHERIES MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

Monday, August 25, 2008
New Orleans, Louisiana

Facilitator Dave Donaldson called the meeting to order at 10:03 a.m. The following members and others were present:

Members

Ginny Vail, FFWCC, Tallahassee, FL
Steve Heath (proxy for V. Minton), ADCNR, Gulf Shores, AL
Dale Diaz (proxy for C. Perret), MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Randy Pausina, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Mike Ray, TPWD, Austin, TX
Bonnie Ponwith (proxy for R. Crabtree), NMFS, Miami, FL
Doug Fruge, USFWS, Ocean Springs, MS
Larry Simpson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Others

Mike Buchanan, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Chris Denson, ADCNR, Gulf Shores, AL
Dave Van Voorhees, NMFS, Silver Spring, MD

Staff

David Donaldson, Assistant Director
Wendy Garner, Staff Accountant

Adoption of Agenda

The agenda was approved as amended with the addition of *Review of EDRP Trip Reports* under **Other Business**.

Discussion and Final Approval of FIN Funding Activities for 2009

D. Donaldson provided a brief overview regarding the status of 2009 funding for data collection and management activities. The preliminary numbers show GulfFIN line item at \$4.3M and RecFIN line item at \$3.4M. The Southeast Region has charged FIN an administrative fee (~\$100K) to process the cooperative agreement but R. Crabtree agreed not to charge any administrative fee again this year. The Gulf portion of the RecFIN line item works out to be about \$640K. However, with the upcoming presidential election, there is a good chance that there will be a year-long continuing resolution. In light of that information, FIN should probably count on about \$4.85M being available in 2009. **D. Van Voorhees** noted that with availability of MRIP funding, NMFS could fund some of the telephone survey activities with these funds and agreed to provide an additional \$100K toward FIN. Therefore, the amount available for FIN funding in 2009 totals

\$4.95M. After some discussion, the Committee decided to use \$4.95M as the planning figure for 2009. The breakdown of the funding is as follows:

GulfFIN line item		\$4,207,788
RecFIN line item	\$3,418,578	
Gulf portion of RecFIN (1/3)	\$1,139,536	
Economic surveys	(\$191,378)	
RDD phone survey	(\$0)	
SEFSC data collections	(\$209,715)	
RecFIN - available		\$738,433
TOTAL AVAILABLE		\$4,946,221

D. Donaldson then provided an overview of the documents that were distributed to the group. He then discussed the summary of the activities for potential funding in 2009 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 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. Job 2 pertains to the collection, management and dissemination of marine recreational fisheries data. This job will prove for the conduct of the MRFSS survey in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida for shore, for-hire, and private modes. 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 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. It was noted that FIN funded this job as a placeholder until NMFS could secure funding for this task and never intended to provide long-term funding for this activity. Job 3.2 refers to the collection of catch data for head boats operating in the Gulf of Mexico via at-sea sampling. The catch and bycatch data will 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. As is the case for Job 3.1, FIN funded this job as a placeholder until NMFS could secure funding for this task and never intended to provide long-term funding for this activity. Job 5 refers to the operations of the FIN Data Management System (DMS) which will provide for operations 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 Texas,

Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. 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 using the data elements and standards developed by the ComFIN. It also provides funding for Texas, 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. **D. Donaldson** noted that the electronic trip ticket contract was increase by \$15,000 to fund expansion of the program to include collection of data for quota monitoring and IFQs. 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. A new method for calculating sample size was developed by FIN and has allowed for an increase in the number of species sampled. And Job 8 refers to the collection of detailed effort (multiple gears/areas fished) from the commercial blue crab and shrimp fisheries 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.

The amount proposed for 2009 for all the jobs was approximately \$6.165M which meant there was about \$1.219M deficit. Therefore, the group needed to figure out how to reduce the proposed activities. As in the past, the Committee's approach has been to conduct a handful of jobs well instead of conducting all jobs poorly and the Committee members continue to support this method. **D. Donaldson** noted that there were some new jobs recommended by the FIN Committee: At-sea head boat sampling (Job 3.2) and detailed effort survey (Job 8). In addition, it was recommended by the FIN Committee that the electronic trip ticket contract be increased to support quota monitoring and IFQ compatibility (part of Job 6). After some discussion, **the Committee agreed to remove the following new activities:**

- Remove funding for the at-sea head boat sampling under Job 3.2 - \$457,566
- Remove funding for detailed effort pilot survey under Job 8 - \$216,485

Total reduction - \$674,051

Removal of those tasks reduced the total proposed budget to \$5.491M which meant that \$545K still needed to be removed from the proposed budget. The group discussed several options. Option 1 was to take an across the board cut for 9.92%. Option 2 was to reduce the number of species being targeted and sampled under the Biological Sampling job. After some discussion, **the group agreed to Option 1 – taking an across the board cut to further reduce the proposed budget. Therefore, each agency needs to reduce their budget by 9.92% to reach the 2009 funding level (at \$4.95M). It was noted that the Proposed column is the revised total (with the outlined cuts from above taken out). The % reductions are as follows:**

	Proposed	Reduction	Revised total
GSMFC*	\$822,484	-\$94,220	\$728,264
Texas	\$164,051	-\$16,280	\$147,771

Louisiana	\$1,482,056	-\$147,078	\$1,334,978
Mississippi	\$384,280	-\$38,136	\$346,144
Alabama	\$457,139	-\$45,367	\$411,772
Florida	\$1,948,376	-\$193,356	\$1,755,020
TX Biol	\$105,848	-\$10,504	\$95,344
TOTAL	\$5,491,162	-\$544,941	\$4,946,221

* GSMFC's percentage is higher since it absorbs the reductions for the head boat port samplers (Job 3.1) and electronic trip ticket contracts (Job 6).

The Committee agreed to reduce their budgets by outlined amounts. D. Donaldson stated that in order to meet the submission deadline, states would have to provide their revised statement of works and budgets to the GSMFC no later than September 24, 2008. It was noted if these cuts prevent any agency from adequately address any of the identified tasks, the group would get back together and discuss alternative plans.

Discussion of Feasibility of Using Trip Ticket System for the For-Hire Fishery

L. Simpson stated that at the recent Gulf Council meeting, the Council passed a motion that requested NMFS in conjunction with GSMFC to evaluate various methods (such as mandatory trip ticket system, e-log books, web based reporting, video monitoring, and/or catch cards) for collected data from the permitted for-hire vessels in the Gulf of Mexico and report their findings back to the Council within six months. **B. Ponwith** stated that there is concern about the quality of the data that are currently being collected and this concern is what prompted this action. **D. Van Voorhees** noted that MRIP is examining this issue and it is important that all entities investigating this issue be engaged in this process. **R. Pausina** noted that Louisiana has passed regulations that all for-hire vessels operating in their state must report via a trip ticket-type system. He stated that he would provide the regulations to the GSMFC staff for distribution to the group. **D. Donaldson** mentioned that this issue will be discussed by the Data Management Subcommittee at the upcoming Commission meeting in October 2008.

Discussion of Review of EDRP Trip Reports

L. Simpson stated that under the Emergency Disaster Recovery Program (EDRP), one of the jobs is to collect fisheries trip data from commercial fishermen and for-hire operators. So the agencies involved have a better understand what actually is being compiled, it is important to quantify what is being collected. Such information as the number of trips data was collected from, number of fishermen providing information, number of fisheries sampled, etc. needs to be enumerated. In an effort to begin the process of looking at these data, the pertinent states will provide summary reports regarding their trip reporting activities. This information will be presented at the upcoming EDRP workshop during the Commission meeting. The summary information is the first step and will lead to more detailed analysis of these data.

Being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 1:10 p.m.

ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION IN 2009

HIGH PRIORITY

Coordination and Administration of FIN Activities (ongoing)

Expansion of electronic trip ticket contract to include compilation of data for quota monitoring and IFQs (new)

Collecting, Managing and Disseminating Marine Recreational Fisheries Data (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/new)

Trip Ticket Program Operations in Alabama (ongoing)

Trip Ticket Program Operations in Louisiana (ongoing)

Trip Ticket Program Operations in Texas (ongoing)

Biological Sampling of Commercial and Recreational Catches (ongoing)

At-sea Sampling for Head Boats in Texas, Louisiana, Alabama and Florida (new/ongoing)

Detailed Effort Sampling of Blue Crab and Shrimp Fisheries in Louisiana (new/ongoing)

LOW PRIORITY

Biological Sampling for Additional Species (new)

**Socio/Economic Workgroup
Meeting Summary
September 10th and 11th, 2008
St. Petersburg, Florida**



Call to Order:

A. Miller of the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (GSMFC) called the socio/economic workgroup meeting to order on September 10, 2008 at 9:00 a.m. The following members were present:

Members:

Rita Curtis, NOAA Fisheries, Silver Spring, MD
Stephen Holiman, NOAA Fisheries, St. Petersburg, FL
David Lavergne, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Jeremy Leilz, TPWD, Austin, TX
Carl Lian, NOAA Fisheries, Seattle, WA
Christopher Liese, NOAA Fisheries, Miami, FL
Larry Perruso, NOAA Fisheries, Miami, FL
Michael Travis, NOAA Fisheries, St. Petersburg, FL

Staff:

Dave Donaldson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Alex Miller, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Approval of Agenda:

R. Curtis was concerned that the time allocated on the agenda for discussing the marine angler expenditure survey was probably too long. After a brief conversation concerning this issue, the agenda was approved.

Overview of the GSMFC/NMFS Cooperative Economic Data Program:

D. Donaldson gave an introduction and background description of how the GSMFC/NMFS cooperative economic data program was developed. **D. Donaldson** described that NMFS approached the GSMFC with the initial idea of developing a cooperative partnership in order to improve economic data collection throughout the Gulf of Mexico (GOM). To achieve this goal, he explained, the GSMFC had recently hired an economist to coordinate and conduct commercial and recreational fishing economic data collection activities throughout the GOM over the next five years.

Discussion of Goals for the GOM Economic Data Program:

A. Miller initiated the discussion of goals for the cooperative economic data program. He noted that the collection of economic data through this project would hopefully be used within economic models to better manage fisheries and their subsequent stakeholders. The use of input/output models such as IMPLAN and bioeconomic simulation models such as Stella were discussed as to how they would possibly be used to achieve this goal. It was largely concluded that IMPLAN was a well accepted method to conduct regional economic impact analysis and would work well for this project. **R. Curtis** noted that **J. Kirkley** at VIMS has recently worked to develop a national fisheries economic IMPLAN model. **A. Miller** explained that he would like to create a bioeconomic simulation model for the inshore gulf shrimp industry using Stella. **C. Liese** discussed previous biological gulf shrimp simulation models and some of the concerns he foresaw with developing a bioeconomic simulation model for the inshore gulf shrimp fleet. **R. Curtis** suggested that the workgroup develop a timeline for each individual project discussed.

Marine Angler Expenditure Survey:

A presentation was given by **C. Liese** concerning prior marine angler expenditure surveys conducted for the southeast region. The MRFSS survey for effort (random digit dialing of coastal households) and catch (intercepting fishermen for in-person interviews) is the backbone for southeast recreational and for-hire data collection. These surveys collect data such as the species targeted and the amount of time spent fishing on a "per trip" basis. Over the past years, follow-up and add-ons to the MRFSS intercept surveys have been conducted in the form of expenditure (details on trip expenditures), valuation (trip details), and cost and earnings (for charter operations) surveys. Follow-up and add-on surveys have primarily been conducted by mail and phone. **C. Liese** suggested that durable expenditure questions be rephrased and tested for future surveys. He also suggested the possibility of add-on surveys being skipped or pared down. **C. Liese** also questioned what variables collected within the surveys are used within input output models and if a national license frame was available. It was mentioned that the recreational data collection priority for NMFS's social science research group in Miami is to add a charter fee question to the weekly for-hire telephone interview survey (FHS). A data collection focusing on annual cost of the for-hire sector and a follow-up and/or self-standing conjoint survey differentiated by MRFSS mode were also discussed.

The workgroup discussed the timeline and implementation for the upcoming marine angler expenditure survey that will be completed as part of the five year cooperative economic data program project. **R. Curtis** mentioned that **W. Keithly** at LSU was in the process of developing a for-hire survey that will start in 2009. The workgroup generally agreed that **A. Miller** would work with the NMFS national marine angler expenditure survey workgroup as they approach the 2010 implementation of their project. **R. Curtis** mentioned that **S. Lovell** from NMFS headquarters would be leading this effort. Moreover, it was agreed that the recommendations and general methods used by the angler workgroup be applied to the GOM regional segment of the national survey.

The targeted completion data for the survey data frame and survey instrument is October of 2009, with the start date for the survey occurring approximately June 2010.

Gulf of Mexico Inshore Shrimp Survey:

C. Liese gave a presentation on collecting economic data in the Gulf Shrimp Fishery. The presentation consisted of a comparison of the inshore and offshore gulf shrimp fleet, details and experiences with surveying the federally permitted shrimp fleet, and thoughts and suggestions on surveying the inshore shrimp fleet in the Gulf.

The federally permitted shrimp fleet is primarily comprised of offshore vessels. **C. Liese** initially described an annual economic survey of federal gulf shrimp permit holders, which was conducted in 2006 and 2007. **C. Liese** noted that this population is difficult to survey and had low response rates in past years. Therefore, a minimalist approach to collecting essential economic data was used for the survey in an attempt to improve the response rate. Questions for the survey were developed with the purpose of constructing an industry balance sheet (point in time), cash flow statement (period of time), and income statement (period of time). Given this approach, the response rates for 2006 and 2007 have increased. A preliminary comparison of 2006 and 2007 active gulf shrimp federal permit holders was presented. **C. Liese** noted that the 2007 results will likely indicate that the federally permitted shrimp fleet struggled with hurricanes, high fuels costs, low dockside prices, high maintenance costs, and the influence of foreign imports.

As compared to the off-shore shrimp fleet, a significant proportion of the inshore shrimp fleet is not federally permitted. The inshore fleet is a very diverse group and even more difficult to survey. For example, the fleet is comprised of commercial and recreational fishermen that work full-time or part-time. Prior studies have documented difficulties in achieving satisfactory response rates.

The workgroup largely concluded that the upcoming survey will closely parallel the federal permit holder's survey used in 2007. Improvements to the survey instrument include incorporating revenue, days at sea within alternative fisheries, and removing the signature and depreciation questions. The use of this modified mail survey is currently on track to be employed before the end of May 2009, with the initial mailing starting February to April 2009. While there was some debate concerning the collection of either annual or per-trip data, the use of a random sample approach with the possibility of using a 'snowball' technique with industry help was largely agreed upon. The sampling frame was discussed and it was concluded that Louisiana trip tickets, licenses, and vessel registrations would be used. Fishermen will be linked to individual vessels and bait shrimp vessels will be incorporated into shrimp vessels. Additionally, the sampling frame will be stratified using a measure of activity, such as revenue volume, in order to target relevant segments that maximize the response rate. Recreational, part-time, and non-professional fishermen will not be surveyed (if their catch contribution is negligible (i.e. <5% of total)).

Based on prior experiences and studies, **C. Liese** suggested dedicating one person as the project manager for this specific survey. The approach used in Louisiana will likely be used in other Gulf States in order to insure consistency.

Survey of Fishing Related Businesses

C. Lian gave a presentation on the design of the West Coast community economic survey. The purpose of the presentation was to allow the workgroup to gain additional background information on how a similar survey might be conducted for the GOM. The West Coast survey has received OMB PRA approval, and will be fielded by the Northwest Fisheries Science Center in cooperation with the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission later this year. The data from the surveys will be used to construct a regional economic simulation model in order to analyze the economic impacts of fishery management alternatives and investigate the degree of economic dependence on marine resources. The survey is broken into three different individual surveys. These include a household survey, a business survey, and a visitor survey. The household and business surveys will begin in late 2008 while the visitor survey will occur during the summer of 2009. A contractor will assist in survey fielding. The survey population includes communities on the West Coast which have populations less than 10,000 and commercial shoreside landings. Samples include two communities from each of the four selected strata, which were primarily determined by the value of commercial landings. **C. Lian** noted that the survey questions must be appropriate for a wide range of business establishments and must have instructions that are not confusing. Asking questions that require consulting records makes getting responses more difficult. **C. Lian** discussed conducting a pre-survey telephone call to all members of the sample rather than following up calls with non-respondents. **C. Lian** also suggested that in order to maximize sampling response rates, the questions should be short and understandable, use outreach methods through community groups, insure one contact point for survey recipients, and use the Dillman Tailored Design Method protocol for survey fielding.

After a discussion on how the workgroup will go about conducting a GOM fishing related business survey, it was tentatively decided that an initial mailing would be conducted in order to stratify and identify the appropriate sampling frame. It was suggested by **M. Travis** that the post-Katrina list of fishing related businesses in Louisiana be used as a starting point. The group also tentatively decided that the 'West Coast' survey will be used as the template for the actual survey which will likely be conducted in an interview-type format. As the survey and sampling frame is developed **A. Miller** will work with other states and use the procedure developed for Louisiana as a template for other states. **D. Lavergne** noted, however, that the group may be difficult to interview in person due to its size and the relatively high cost of in-person interviews. The survey is slated to be employed in late 2009 or no later than June 2010.

As there was no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 12:00 p.m.

**Port Sampler Meeting
Meeting Summary
September 23 and 24, 2008
New Orleans, Louisiana**

Dave Donaldson of the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission called the Port Sampler meeting to order on September 23, 2008 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
Jay Boulet, NOAA Fisheries, New Orleans, LA
Beth Bourgeon, NOAA, Lafayette, LA
Brittany Breazeale, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Melissa Cook, NOAA, Panama City Beach, FL
Mandy Courville, LDWF, Lake Charles, LA
Guy Davenport, NOAA Fisheries, Miami, FL
Claudia Dennis, NOAA Fisheries, New Smyrna Beach, FL
Wes Devers, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Kit Doncaster, NOAA Fisheries, Brownsville, TX
Noel Estes, AMRD, Dauphin Island, AL
Pamela Brown-Eyo, NOAA Fisheries, Miami, FL
Debbie Fable, NOAA Fisheries, Panama City, FL
Gary Fitzhugh, NOAA, Panama City Beach, FL
Ted Flowers, NOAA Fisheries, Mobile, AL
Aimee Fortier, LDWF, New Orleans, LA
Pam Fuller, USGS, Gainesville, FL
Corey Gabel, NOAA Fisheries, Port Arthur, TX
Michelle Gamby, NOAA Fisheries, Tequesta, FL
Dave Gloeckner, NOAA, Beaufort, NC
Linda Guidry, NOAA Fisheries, New Iberia, LA
Richard Hall, NOAA Fisheries, Wilmington, NC
Brett Hano, LDWF, New Orleans, LA
Kathleen Hebert, NOAA Fisheries, Houma, LA
Tom Herbert, NOAA Fisheries, Fort Myers, FL
Jason Herr, FFWRI, Melbourne, FL
David Hoke, NOAA, N.C.
Jill Jensen, NOAA, New Orleans, LA
Denise Kinsey, LDWF, Bourg, LA
Albert Lefort, LDWF, Cut Off, LA
Brian Linton, NOAA, Miami, FL
Edward Little, NOAA Fisheries, Key West, FL
Linda Lombardi-Carlson, NOAA Fisheries, Panama City, FL
Edie Lopez, NOAA Fisheries, Brownsville, TX
Alan Lowther, NMFS, Silver Spring, MD

Carlos Llull, FFWRI, Pensacola, FL
Charlotte Mansfield, FFWRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Terri Menzel, FFWRI, Pensacola, FL
Gary Moore, FFWCC, Cedar Key, FL
Pam Machuga, NOAA, St. Petersburg, FL
Christine Murrell, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Michelle Padgett, NOAA Fisheries, Freeport, TX
Chris Palmer, NOAA Fisheries, Panama City Beach, FL
Liz Pritchard, NOAA, Silver Spring, MD
Edwin Pulido, FFWCC, Lauderhill, FL
Holly Rolls, FFWCC, Marathon, FL
Keith Roberts, NOAA, Galveston, TX
Prince Robinson, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Renee Roman, NOAA, St. Petersburg, FL
Gary Rouse, NOAA Fisheries, Cut Off, LA
Charlie Schaefer, NOAA Fisheries, Tequesta, FL
Amanda Shahan, LDWF, Lake Charles, LA
June Weeks, NOAA Fisheries, Panama City Beach, FL
Laura Wiggins, FFWRI, St. Petersburg, FL

Staff

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

Approval of Agenda

The agenda was approved as written.

Discussion of Reproductive Staging of Fishes

G. Fitzhugh and M. Cook of NOAA Fisheries Panama City Lab gave a presentation on reproductive staging of fishes. **Fitzhugh** noted that the Panama City Lab has been doing a lot of work on reproductive biology and age and growth to assist in stock assessments. **Fitzhugh** thanked the port samplers for their help in collecting samples for stock assessments and SEDARs. **Fitzhugh** reviewed the major reproduction components for assessments including sex ratio, sex transition, maturity, and reproductive output at age. **Fitzhugh** also noted the need to collect samples timed to the reproductive cycle. Some important needs are to have more port agents and observers looking at more fish at more times in more places, training, and quality control sampling. **Fitzhugh** displayed many photos in his presentation which included determining the sex of a fish, the maturity of a fish, and reproductive output. **Fitzhugh** also

noted the importance of hands-on training, and devising a way to take samples without having the problem of storage space.

M. Cook then addressed the group on gonad classification systems, noting that there are various classification systems and sometimes it is difficult for everyone to be on the same page at the same time.

Golden Tilefish Sampling and Ageing Techniques

L. Lombardi NOAA Fisheries Panama City Lab reported that in 2005 she addressed the port agents meeting in an attempt to get more focused sampling on the golden tilefish since it is up for assessment in 2010. **Lombardi** noted the tremendous cooperation she has received from the port samplers and thanked them for their efforts. **Lombardi's** presentation then reviewed federal and state port agents sampling effort over a four year period for otoliths and gonads as well as ageing procedures. The presentation then compared otolith weight vs. fish length and otolith weight vs. age, and also gonad sampling in the Gulf of Mexico compared to the east coast of Florida. **Lombardi** requested more samples and stressed the importance of having an intact gonad – at least 90%, and taken during the reproductive season.

Lombardi reported that B. Barnett at the Panama City Lab has been working on the otolith chemistry of the red snapper has requested red snapper otoliths from the Tampa/St. Petersburg area and south.

Discussion of TIP Issues

D. Gloeckner, TIP coordinator, NOAA Fisheries Beaufort Lab discussed additional data elements that he would like to incorporate into TIP data collection at the suggestion of J. Hoenig of Virginia Institute of Marine Science. **Gloeckner** stated that trip ticket number and fisherman license number are needed to increase the matching rate between TIP and trip ticket data. He also noted that in the future there may be mandatory electronic reporting which may incorporate some elements from logbooks to identify a trip. **Gloeckner** reported that NMFS is currently working on a new export function and electronic measuring board upload for TIP online. J. Hoenig received a grant to evaluate the TIP program and he traveled with samplers to evaluate sampling methods being used. Hopefully this information will aid in rewriting the TIP sampling manual. **Gloeckner** then gave examples of bias resulting in smaller mean size fish and noted that it is necessary to have weight of landings for each trip. He suggested that samplers use

cluster sampling, sorted samples, or interrupted sampling. **Gloeckner** noted that further evaluation of TIP data is necessary to determine the extent of biases in historical data and methods to account for biases.

Discussion of Hurricane Relief Efforts for Fishing Industry

P. Robinson of Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) gave a presentation on hurricane relief efforts for fisheries. In 2007 Congress authorized \$41.3 million in federal funds for commercial and recreational fisheries affected by hurricanes Katrina and Rita. **Robinson** listed the requirements for fishermen to qualify for these funds, including trip ticket sales or purchases and they must also have held a resident Louisiana vessel license. The recreational total was \$11,539,086, the commercial total was \$27,670,264 and administration costs were \$2,063,650. **Robinson** noted that in order to inform fishermen and dealers about this program several public meetings were held throughout Louisiana, as well information on the LDWF website, radio, magazines, and newspapers. The South Central Planning and Development Commission handled the distribution and processing of applications for assistance.

Discussion of Monitoring of Non-Native Species

P. Fuller of the U.S. Geological Survey gave a presentation on non-native species, also known as nonindigenous, non-native, or invasive species. **Fuller** reported that she manages the nonindigenous aquatic species (NAS) database maintained by the U.S. Geological Survey in Gainesville, Florida. This database tracks over 1500 marine and freshwater animals and plants nationwide. **Fuller** stressed the importance of early detection of these species and the important work port samplers can do by reporting anything unusual from commercial vessels and fishermen. **Fuller** also noted that if port agents needed help in identifying the species the following website would be helpful, <http://www.anstaskforce.gov/experts>. Port agents were also provided with a web address for the NAS database (<http://nas.er.usgs.gov>). This database tracks aquatic freshwater and marine species nationwide. Port agents coming in contact with nonindigenous species were encouraged to collect species name, detailed harvest locations, date collected, name of port sampler, and how the species was collected. Port agents should save specimens whenever possible but high quality photographs are useful when specimens can not be collected. **Fuller** requested that port agents notify her as soon as possible when finding a nonindigenous species.

Discussion of Representative Sampling Philosophies

B. Linton of NOAA Southeast Fisheries Science Center presented an overview on the subject of representative sampling by explaining that the sample should accurately reflect the distribution of variables in the target population. The relevant variables are size and age structure of the landed catch. **Linton** mentioned several variables in a random sample, including different types of gear, different vessels, different times of the year, etc.

In order to illustrate different sampling philosophies **Linton** used a case study from the 1960's that is considered a classic, the blue fish fishery.

Discussion of Law Enforcement Issues

S. Campbell of NOAA Fisheries Law Enforcement in Slidell, Louisiana reported that he works criminal investigations which are violations of the Lacey Act and civil investigations which are violations of the Magnuson-Stevens Act. His area encompasses Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana with species such as Gulf reef fish, sharks, tuna, highly migratory species, red drum, grouper, and snapper. **Campbell** discussed the Joint Enforcement Agreement which includes the LDWF, and noted that after hurricanes Katrina and Rita National Marine Fisheries Service provided LDWF with \$3 million for disaster assistance to purchase boats, fuel, an emergency response station or mobile command center, satellite phones, and other emergency equipment.

Campbell reported that some of the cases they are involved in are health related violations and deal with the harvesting of oysters. Another area of involvement for NOAA Enforcement is sustainable fisheries, particularly sharks and red snapper. **Campbell** relayed several instances of fishermen taking illegal catch, either over the limit, undersized, or closed season in the thousands of pounds. **Campbell** encouraged port agents to be observant and aware of their surroundings when possible and also requested that anyone interested in a career in NOAA Law Enforcement should contact NOAA.

Discussion of Processed Products Reports

A. Lowther of NOAA Silver Spring office gave a presentation on the Fishery Products Annual Report for U.S. Processors. **Lowther** showed a sample of the fishery products survey form which includes address, employment, product, quantity, and value. **Lowther** noted that this survey is for use by fisheries processors. Completed forms are sent to F-ST1, the data are entered and analyzed. **Lowther** requested that port agents attempt to collect timely, accurate,

and more complete data on wholesale value. These data are used by economists, international data reporting requirements, and as background information for the International Trade Commission. This information is never provided to the public and is maintained in a confidential manner pursuant to all laws.

Discussion of New Data Confidentiality Provisions

G. Davenport explained the revised Magnuson-Stevens Act Administrative Order 216 which establishes what comprises confidential data. This involves NOAA interaction with state partners, Commissions, and other contractors. Each sampler has read the Administrative Order and signed the statement of non-disclosure. This Administrative Order will be updated and a NMFS policy statement will be included. **Davenport** reviewed the section of the revised Magnuson-Stevens Act dealing with confidentiality and discussion followed. **Davenport** also reported on the purpose and scope of a new Regional Handbook and noted that when a port agent is in doubt in determining what is and what isn't confidential, port agents should call their supervisor.

Other Business

Due to the budget situation, the group discussed various localities for the next port sampler meeting and agreed to have the meeting in mid to late September, 2009 in the Panama City, Florida area. The number of state samplers may be limited to one (1) per state. All of the above presentations are available from the offices of the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:00 p.m.

September 24, 2008

The group took a field trip to a commercial processor in the New Orleans area.

APPROVED BY:

Dan Wagner
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**TCC Crab Subcommittee
Minutes – 59th Fall Meeting
Monday, October 13, 2008
Key Largo, FL**

Facilitator S. VanderKooy called the meeting to order at 8:40 a.m. with the following members and others in attendance:

Members

Traci Floyd, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Vince Guillory, LDWF, Bourg, LA
Anne McMillen-Jackson, FWC/FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Harriet Perry, USM/GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS

Others

Leslie Hartman, TPWD, Palacios, TX
Gilmore “Butch” Pellegrin, NOAA/NMFS, Pascagoula, MS
Virginia Vail, GSMFC Commissioner, FWC, Tallahassee, FL
Glenn Thomas, LA SeaGrant, Baton Rouge, LA
Chris Blankenship, ADMR, Dauphin Island, AL

Staff

Steve VanderKooy, IJF Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Teri Freitas, Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS
James Ballard, Sport Fish Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS

Adoption of Agenda

VanderKooy stated that since B. Pellegrin was also attending the SEAMAP Meeting, he has requested that his agenda item be moved to the end of the agenda. **Guillory** moved to accept the agenda with changes and the motion was seconded by **McMillen-Jackson**.

Approval of Minutes

Hartman moved to accept the minutes with corrections. The motion was seconded by **Guillory** and approved unanimously.

NSA Blue Crab Special Session

H. Perry asked if the subcommittee members were interested in participating in the NSA Blue Crab Special Session meeting in Savannah, GA in March. **Perry** stated that she will need to know which members plan on attending and the titles of their presentations as a placeholder, by Wednesday of next week. Louisiana stated their travel budget has been slashed by 40%, Florida and Mississippi said they were interested and **Hartman** will check with **Wagner** about Texas’ participation. This is a totally dedicated blue crab session sponsored by NSA.

2009 Proposed List of Fisheries

VanderKooy reported that the Federal Register dated June 2008, listed the Gulf of Mexico Blue Crab Trap fishery as a Category III, which meant there was minimal impact to marine mammal populations in the Gulf from the traps. In addition there was not a footnote with the listing regarding a pending elevation, suggesting that the level of interaction is no longer such to cause immediate concern. **VanderKooy** will get back to the Subcommittee should there be a change in the status or if the outreach efforts are picked up again by the Office of Protected Resources.

Regional Adult Blue Crab Tagging Program

H. Perry asked that with all the interest in genetics would the Crab Subcommittee members be interested in a timely tagging study on mainly females and large male crabs. Florida indicated that they would be interested in doing tagging in the panhandle near the Alabama border; Texas indicated an interest in doing it in the Sabine Lake area; Louisiana asked how it would this program be funded, because it could be quite expensive to do the program Gulf wide. **Perry** asked **Glenn Thomas** of LSU SeaGrant if they would be interested in participating in a tagging program and he stated he would need an abstract to present to SeaGrant for consideration. It was recommended that the best time to do tagging is in the summer/fall, when the females are on the move more. It was suggested that this could be a 1-2 year project and **VanderKooy** suggested possibly doing CRP again for a \$50K project. **Perry** agreed to present more data on this potential program at the March 2009 meeting.

Derelict Trap Cleanups

Louisiana cleanup

Guillory reported that 1,234 traps were picked up in 2008 by agency staff and only 3 volunteers participated. Due to volunteer fatigue, it appears that the volunteer program is not as successful as it once was. In the future, Louisiana will have agency staff go out and cleanup traps without the help of volunteers and there would be no closure, as staff would retrieve traps opportunistically. It is expected that there will not be a cleanup in 2009, but that commercial fishermen may be used in 2010-2011. LDWF may pattern their cleanup program similar to Mississippi's EDRP and pay commercial fishermen a bounty for traps in certain closed area and a contractor would have to be hired to handle something on this large a scale.

Mississippi – **Floyd** reported that derelict trap cleanup this year was nothing like last year. A total of 1,259 traps were picked up. Mississippi used EDRP monies and had 43 participating fishermen that were paid \$10/trap with a 40 trap maximum per fisherman. There probably will be no 2009 derelict trap clean up; if one is done it will be done with just MDMR staff.

Alabama – **Hartman** reported on behalf of Alabama that in 2008, 356 traps were collected from the causeway area of Mobile Bay. The CCA wants to continue the program and are actually paying for the dumpsters. A full system cleanup had been recommended for 2009, but it is unknown what will happen. There has not been a full system cleanup since 2004. A new crab biologist has been hired, but it's not known when another cleanup will occur.

Florida – McMillen-Jackson reported that the blue crab advisory board met in July and the first thing they discussed was trap pick up. They discussed having a closed season for the purpose of retrieving derelict and abandoned traps. Members recognized that a closed season was necessary to facilitate trap retrieval and that the timing of the closed season must coincide with the stone crab and lobster closed seasons, so that any trap buoy in the water would be fair game for retrieval. The state was deemed too large to conduct a single statewide closure, so it was divided into thirds and non-overlapping ten day closure periods were agreed upon. The east coast closure period was set during January; few stone crab or lobster traps are used in this region, so it was not considered a problem. A strategy for trap retrievals has not yet been finalized. A portion of the blue crab endorsement fee is dedicated to trap retrieval – similar to the stone crab and lobster trapping fisheries. For the stone crab and lobster fisheries, FWC gives contracts to groups, usually commercial fishing groups, to retrieve traps. 4,700 stone crab and lobster traps were retrieved between June 1st and October 1st as part of the FWC trap retrieval program.

Vail reported that Florida's costs have gone up considerably. FWC pays their contractor \$15 per trap plus \$300.00 a day for fuel and the contractor pays the fishermen \$13.00 per trap. In previous years they had been paying the contractors \$7.00 per trap.

Texas – Wagner was unable to attend so **Hartman** served as his proxy. A 2009 derelict crab trap cleanup is in question and will be based on need for a cleanup. Gary Graham of Texas SeaGrant had mentioned that approximately 1,700 crab traps were moved by Gustav and Ike and SeaGrant would be looking at it as a possible project. Primarily the hurricane damage done was in the Sabine Lake and Galveston Bay areas.

State Reports

Florida – McMillen-Jackson reported that Florida's landings were down a bit due to the drought, the rains have started in some parts of the state and the crabs are starting to come out. The 2007 Florida blue crab landings overall were about 14% lower than 2006. Hard shell blue crab landings were down 29% from the previous year on the Gulf coast and up nearly 30% on the Atlantic coast. The pattern is contrary to the 2005/2006 pattern, in which the Gulf landings increased and the Atlantic landings decreased. Peeler/soft-shell landings were down on both the Gulf and Atlantic coasts compared with 2005, by about 11% and 24% respectively. The peeler/soft shell landings composed 0.6% of total landings. Trips and number of people (endorsements) have decreased since the 1994/1995 fishing season. A moratorium on issuing new endorsements was instigated in 1998, and the limited entry program started with the 07/08 fishing season. The FWC Blue Crab Effort Management program started in July 1, 2007, but no fees were assessed for the first fishing year. Starting July 1, 2008, a blue crab endorsement fee was assessed, and fishermen were required to buy a trap tag for each trap that they would fish. FWC DMFM staff noted that about 70 fishermen did not renew their endorsements by the deadline; annual renewal is required to keep the endorsement. Tags are sold in batches of 50 up to 650 inshore (only 600 can actively be fished at any given time) and 400 for offshore traps.

McMillen-Jackson reported that as an outreach program the FWC issued a Blue Crab Health Field Identification handout that supplied a Fish Kill hotline phone number and information on how to identify a healthy blue crab.

In September 2008, FWC had two *Penaeus monodon*, black tiger prawn, specimens that were captured separately by local shrimpers from the lower St. Johns River in Jacksonville, FL. These are an invasive species that was introduced accidentally in SC. A specimen was captured in Mobile Bay as well in 2006, and its origin is currently unknown. In addition, there have been two recent reports in Alabama and Louisiana.

Alabama – No Report

Hartman stated that before she left Alabama a lot of fishermen were getting out of the industry due to high gas prices, but that they were holding on to their licenses.

Mississippi – Floyd reported that resident commercial trap license sales are down slightly from 138 for the 2007-2008 to 134 for 2008-2009. Non resident commercial licenses are up to 13 from last year's 7. Total recreational license sales are down from 593 in 2007-2008 to 460 in 2008-2009. Crab trawl licenses (shrimpers who keep their crab harvest for sale) are up from 53 in 2007-2008 to 56 in 2008-2009. Preliminary landings for 2008 through August are 329,548 lbs. with a value of \$33,843, down from 2007 which was 501,945 lbs. when the value was \$538,372. Early year environmental conditions such as flooding and the Bonnet Carré Spillway opening in early April may have contributed to a reduction in productivity. Also, high fuel costs may have caused a reduction in participation in the fishery. EDRP I crab work is completed, 3,000 monitoring tickets were processed and over 10,000 derelict crab traps have been removed and recycled. The 40 commercial crab fishermen participating in EDRP I each received 50 new traps (2,000 total) equipped with TEDs and BRDs. Based upon their responses, about half of those would install TEDs in their traps if provided; so DMR will begin providing TEDs in the coming year. EDRP II Fishery Disaster Recovery Monitoring to compensate resident commercial fishermen to report on their catch, effort, area fished, price per pound, port landed etc., is a potential to eventual trip tickets. A little over \$250,000 was budgeted to compensate crab trap fishermen \$160 per report (one per 24-hour period). DMR accepted 25 trip data sheets from April 16 through May 30, 2008. Also through this project, funding is being provided to continue GCRL's CPUE study working cooperatively with commercial fishermen.

MDMR now has the Lymon fish hatchery and they have stocked crabs for rearing from the GCRL hatchery. The known age crabs they harvested (900) have been taken to FWRI for lipofuscin testing. The ponds might get used for cocktail softshell crabs and develop that as a possible market.

Louisiana – Guillory reported that the Crab Task Force sponsored a bill that was passed during the 2008 regular legislative session. The bill created an out-of-state shipping license for wholesale and retail outlets, with revenues dedicated to a "crab promotion and marketing account" and administered jointly by the crab task force and the Louisiana Seafood Promotion and Marketing Board. The license cost is \$105.00. Landings in 2007 were 43.9 million pounds, dropped from an excellent 2006 season of 52.39 million pounds. Preliminary data from January through July indicates that the 2008 landings have declined 15.8% from 2007. Southwick Associates, Inc. (an economic firm) was contracted by the LDWF to estimate the economic benefits of fisheries and wildlife in Louisiana. According to 2006 data the economic effect (including dockside values and retail sales) of the blue crab industry was \$293 million dollars. A

total of 3,829 jobs were supported, and revenues generated for state and local governments were \$20.8 million dollars. Hurricanes Gustav and Ike had significant impacts on the crab industry infrastructure, fishermen vessels and gear. The closed and partially operational facilities occurred throughout coastal Louisiana, although some areas were hit harder than others. Preliminary Louisiana loss estimates are \$37M-\$71M Marine Commercial Fisheries Revenue Loss and \$121M-\$169M Infrastructure Damages. Because of high Mississippi River discharges, the Bonnet Carré Spillway was opened on April 11, 2008 for 28 days allowing turbid and cool river water to flow into Lake Pontchartrain. There was a short-term negative impact on the crab fishery, but the inflow of low salinity water into the Lake generally results in increased crab catches in the future.

Texas – Hartman reported that Texas commercial hard crab landings increased from 1.96 million pounds in 2006 to 3.43 million pounds in 2007. Fishery-independent monitoring trends showed declining blue crab catch rates in spring gill nets, bag seines, bay trawls, and Gulf trawls. Only in the fall gill nets did the catch rates rise to the second highest value on record. No word yet on specifics for the 2009 Closed Crab Trap Season and Abandoned Crab Trap cleanup, but if there is one, it would run from February 20-March 1, 2009. Hurricane Ike undoubtedly had a negative impact on crab populations and habitat in Sabine Lake and Galveston Bay, although the TPWD staff has not yet been able to document this through routine sampling.

Gulf Stock Assessment Data Set Progress

Pellegrin reported that he used the Collie-Sissenwine or Catch Survey Analysis for the crab assessment. It is a relatively simple model which generates a number of outputs to look at mortality estimates, population estimates, biomass, etc. Louisiana's data was used as an example. The comparisons of observed abundance of recruits need more tweaking, due in part to habitat losses. Post recruits match well with model, and fishing mortality on adults goes up as the fishery matures. This technique was used for Chesapeake and Delaware Bays for crabs and looks like a good model for our needs.

Other Business

The motion was made by the TCC Crab Subcommittee to draft a letter of support for Luis Hurtado Assistant Professor at Texas A & M for his proposal on genetics in the blue crab Callinectes sapidus. Guillory moved to accept the motion, Hartman seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

VanderKooy reported that last year the TCC and SFFMC had been informed that a change would be in store for the Interjurisdictional Fisheries FMP Compliance Matrix, which checks the states against the recommendations put forth in the Commission's FMPs. It was agreed at that time that a number of key recommendations were being omitted from the matrix, due to the nature of the SFFMC's role. **VanderKooy** will be drafting a TCC version of the matrix to cover those items not included or not appropriate for the SFFMC. The Subcommittee will be asked to review those changes prior to them being sent to the TCC for review this coming summer.

Election of Chair

Guillory made the motion to elect **Tom Wagner** as the new chair. The motion was seconded by **Perry** and passed unanimously.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 12:10 p.m.

APPROVED BY:

COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**TCC SEAMAP SUBCOMMITTEE
MINUTES – 59th Annual Fall Meeting
Monday, October 13, 2008
Key Largo, Florida**

Chairman **J. Hanifen** called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. The Subcommittee, staff, and guests in attendance introduced themselves. The following members and others were present.

Members

Jim Hanifen, *Chairman*, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Steve Heath, *Vice Chairman*, ADCNR/MRD, Gulf Shores, AL
Bob McMichael, FWC/FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Fernando Martinez, TPWD, Corpus Christi, TX
Gilmore “Butch” Pellegrin, NOAA Fisheries, Pascagoula, MS
Richard Waller, USM/CMS/GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS

Staff

Jeff Rester, *SEAMAP/Habitat Program Coordinator*, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Others

Ellie Roche, NOAA Fisheries, St. Petersburg, FL
Mike Buchanan, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Terry Cody, Rockport, TX
Read Hendon, GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Alton Waldrep, ADCNR, Gulf Shores, AL

Adoption of Agenda

B. McMichael moved to adopt the agenda as submitted. **B. Pellegrin** seconded and the motion passed.

Approval of Minutes

R. Waller moved to approve the August 12, 2008 minutes with minor changes. **F. Martinez** seconded and the motion passed.

Administrative Report

J. Rester stated that Mississippi had performed portions of their longline survey since the last meeting in August. He also stated that Florida had conducted their new trawl survey and that **B. McMichael** would be discussing this in more detail in the next agenda item. He stated that the Fall Plankton Survey had been conducted from September 4 – 30,

2008. NMFS sampled 64 stations, Alabama sampled 9 stations, and Louisiana sampled 9 stations. Survey effort was affected by Hurricanes Gustav and Ike. J. Rester stated that he needed everyone to communicate SEAMAP information discussed at the Subcommittee meetings to everyone involved with SEAMAP. He stated that even after discussing this at the August meeting, he was still encountering people who were not aware of changes that were discussed at the meetings. He asked everyone at the August meeting to send him an email a few days before they initiated any SEAMAP sampling. He stated that he had not received anything yet even though SEAMAP sampling had occurred. The Subcommittee suggested that a web site be developed that would allow chief scientists to enter the information for when they would be sampling. This would be used to notify the Commission for when the Commission should expect data and cruise reports.

Preliminary Results from the Florida Trawl Survey

B. McMichael stated that Florida followed all SEAMAP trawling protocols for their recent survey on the west Florida shelf. One trawl station was selected within depth strata for four Florida areas. One trawl station was selected in the 5 to 20 fathom area, one in the 20 to 22 fathom stratum, one in the 22 to 25 fathom stratum, one in the 25 to 50 fathom stratum, and one in the 50 to 60 fathom stratum. One 30 minute trawl was conducted per strata with a CTD cast to collect environmental data. **B. McMichael** stated that they were not able to sample in the area south of Tampa. Also they lost two days due to weather, so they dropped the inshore stations west of Tampa. The first trawl survey was from August 1 to 10, 2008. They were able to sample 57 total stations. **B. McMichael** then discussed the preliminary catch results. He also stated that Florida was able to collect otoliths from approximately 250 managed fishes for age and growth, stomach contents from approximately 1,500 fish for dietary analyses, and approximately 1,600 samples for mercury analysis at no cost to SEAMAP. The second survey has been scheduled for October 14 to 23, 2008. The results from the 2008 and 2009 surveys will be analyzed to determine the time period for future Florida surveys after 2010.

30 Minute Tow Time Analysis

B. Pellegrin stated that in an effort to increase the number of stations during the trawl surveys NMFS would be switching to a standard 30 minute tow time at each station. NMFS also would no longer stratify stations by depth or day or night. He stated that instead NMFS would assign a station by simple random sampling within the current sampling area and continually sample each trawling station regardless of time of day. The standard 30 minute tow time would lead to an increase in the number of stations that NMFS could sample during a survey. The increased number of samples would lead to a subsequent decrease in the coefficient of variation. **B. Pellegrin** stated data collected with the different survey designs would still be comparable. The states stated that they would not change their sampling design this year, but would consider it for next year. **B. Pellegrin** stated that he would discuss the results from the Fall Groundfish Survey at the March Subcommittee meeting. **B. Pellegrin** also stated that he would provide the Commission with a document discussing the survey design changes.

SEAMAP Data Management Protocols

J. Rester stated as directed at the August Subcommittee meeting, a meeting was set up for the states that use the FISCUS system onboard their vessels. He reported that over the course of three days, NMFS trained everyone's staff on how to set up, operate, and manage the system. He stated that he wanted to thank NMFS for agreeing to do this. **J. Rester** stated that Commission staff met last week with Mark McDuff and Lisa Desfossee, the new Pascagoula Lab Director, to discuss SEAMAP data management. One of the issues that they discussed was SEAMAP plankton data and how plankton data would be handled. **J. Rester** stated that NMFS ships all plankton samples off to Poland and needs the station location and lot numbers before the shipments are sent. **J. Rester** requested the Subcommittee's input on how they wanted this to be handled in the future. He stated that the plankton station location information could be sent to the Commission or NMFS first. **S. Heath** suggested that the plankton information be sent to the Commission who would then send it to NMFS before the plankton samples were sent to Poland. The Subcommittee agreed upon this method of data flow. **J. Rester** stated that the Commission would coordinate with the Archiving Center concerning this also since they needed the data also before the samples could be catalogued once they returned from Poland.

Election of Chairman

S. Heath nominated **J. Hanifen** as chairman. **B. McMichael** seconded the nomination and it passed unanimously. **J. Hanifen** nominated **B. McMichael** as vice chairman. **S. Heath** seconded the nomination and it passed unanimously.

Other Business

J. Rester requested that everyone discuss their upcoming SEAMAP survey work. **S. Heath** stated that Alabama would soon start their inshore sampling and that the Winter Shrimp/Groundfish Survey would take place in February. **R. Waller** stated that Mississippi would participate in the Winter Plankton Survey in the January or February time period with their Spring Plankton Survey being conducted in May. **B. Pellegrin** stated that NMFS was about to start their Fall Shrimp/Groundfish Survey with the Winter Plankton Survey starting in January. **F. Martinez** stated that Texas was conducting their inshore longlining survey during the summer. Their portion of the Fall Shrimp/Groundfish Survey would take place in November with the Winter Shrimp/Groundfish Survey taking place in February. He stated that their old red drum longline survey would be changing their protocols to conform to the new protocols for inshore longline surveys. They would no longer be using fixed stations. All stations would be random stations. **J. Hanifen** stated that Louisiana had just completed their Fall Plankton Survey and that the Fall Shrimp/Groundfish Survey would take place in November. Inshore sampling would begin in December in Chandeleur Sound. The Spring Shrimp/Groundfish Survey would take place in April with a Winter Shrimp/Groundfish Survey in January. **B. McMichael** stated that Florida's fall cruise would be starting on October 14.

J. Hanifen stated that the Jambon Researcher, a converted 80-foot shrimp boat, would soon be ready to book research charters. He stated that he would be using some of Louisiana's SEAMAP funds to do comparison trawls with the Tommy Munro when it was doing the 2 to 5 fathom work off Louisiana next summer. J. Hanifen stated that he would coordinate this effort with R. Waller.

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 10:37 a.m.

**TCC DATA MANAGEMENT SUBCOMMITTEE
MINUTES – 59th Annual Meeting
Monday, October 12, 2008
Key Largo, Florida**

Vice-chairman Vicki Swann called the meeting to order at 8:32 a.m. The following members and others were present:

Members

Kevin Anson, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL
Richard Cody, FWC/FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Page Campbell, TPWD, Rockport, TX
Vicki Swann, TPWD, Austin, TX
Kerwin Cuevas, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Christine Murrell, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Michelle Kasprzak, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Jason Duet, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Steven Atran, GMFMC, Tampa, FL
Guy Davenport, NMFS, Miami, FL

Staff

David Donaldson, FIN Data Program Manager, Ocean Springs, MS
Larry B. Simpson, GSMFC Executive Director, Ocean Springs, MS
Donna Bellais, ComFIN Survey Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Gregg Bray, RecFIN Programmer/Analyst, Ocean Springs, MS
Alex Miller, GSMFC Staff Economist, Ocean Springs, MS
Madeleine Travis, GSMFC, FIN Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS

Others

Steve Turner, NMFS, Miami, FL
Chris Robbins, Ocean Conservancy, Austin, TX
Beverly Sauls, FWC/FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Mike Brainard, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Peter Murphy, NOAA, Seattle, WA
Terry Cody, Rockport, TX
Steve Heath, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL
Jeff Barger, EDF, Austin, TX
David McKinney, EDF, Austin, TX
Dale Diaz, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Joseph Smith, NMFS, Beaufort, NC

Adoption of Agenda

The agenda was approved as presented.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on March 10, 2008 in Galveston, Texas were approved as written.

Status of Biological Sampling Activities

Review of targets and collection activities – **G. Bray** discussed the handouts that summarized the otolith and lengths collected for the thirteen Fisheries Information Network (FIN) target species for 2008. All states are doing a good job of collecting otoliths and working toward their species specific targets. The Data Management Subcommittee will review the final 2008 collection numbers at the March 2009 meeting.

Review of analysis activities – Subcommittee members were provided with a matrix detailing otolith analysis from 2002 to 2007 listing the five Gulf States. **G. Bray** mentioned the states are getting age data in on a timely basis. Florida is working to get age data for additional FIN target species in addition to red snapper for 2005 and 2006. **R. Cody** mentioned they have age data for king mackerel for 2006 and 2007 and should also be able to catch up on most of the inshore species aged by FWC staff. Those data should be in the data management system in the near future.

Status of web-based data entry program – **D. Bellais** reported that the web-based program has been available for online testing for a few months. Alabama has tested the program and is concerned with speed problems. Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (GSMFC) thinks that new hardware currently being installed will improve the program's speed problems. Louisiana has lost several people from their age and growth lab so they have not been able to do a thorough program review. Louisiana may continue with the old standard of data entry and delivery until they have an opportunity to test the online program.

Discussion of inclusion of state targets in tracking documents – **G. Bray** noted that Louisiana has a few state otolith targets that are collected using state funding sources. **M. Kasprzak** reported that Louisiana is delivering these data to GSMFC and should continue to report those numbers but GSMFC needs to adjust the overall target for those species.

Discussion of duplicate records in FIN and TIP databases – **G Bray** questioned why some states are entering commercial samples as duplicates into the FIN biological sampling database. All the states agreed that this is not necessary and only FIN commercial samples should be entered into the FIN database. Duplicate recreational lengths that were collected as part of a Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS) sample will still be accepted into the FIN biological sampling database.

Discussion of Commercial Fishermen, Dealer and Vessel Information

D. Bellais reported that these data are still important and each state needs to continue to improve the quality of the fisherman, dealer, and vessel information provided to GSMFC.

Similar problems in previous years occurred in Texas, Louisiana, and Mississippi. Alabama is hoping that new leadership might allow for an opportunity to overcome current obstacles. Louisiana is still understaffed and does not have the manpower to make the necessary programming fixes. Florida is still having problems with confidentiality issues. **D. Donaldson suggested that FIN identify this issue as a high priority in 2009 and hire a contractor to collect these data from each state in 2010.** Having the necessary funding will possibly be an issue but this seems like the best possible approach given the current state obstacles.

Discussion of Trip Ticket Requirements to Facilitate E-reporting

Steve Turner reported that his job is to monitor landings of multiple species including groupers, mackerels, greater amberjack, grey triggerfish, sharks, and swordfish. The Magnuson-Stevens Act states that by 2010 NOAA Fisheries will need to be monitoring landings of all overfished species and all species by 2011 (probably a large subset of the total species complex). Annual catch limits for each species will be set up by each regional council. Accountability measures will be set up in case fisheries are not managed correctly from year to year. The need for timely monitoring of fisheries landings will be essential. Currently NOAA Fisheries are using a bi-weekly reporting system for coastal sharks collected commercially. Dealers are required to deliver landings to NOAA Fisheries within 10 days after the specified reporting period. These data are aggregated off the current trip ticket forms that the states require. The Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) has been working with GSMFC and the states to receive data instantly from dealers reporting with the electronic interface developed by Claude Peterson. This will soon eliminate the need for aggregated duplicative reporting for the dealers using the e-report system. The trip ticket e-reports will provide more and better quality data to the SEFSC. SEFSC is very interested in ways to move towards increased e-reporting from commercial dealers. It will likely require some outreach or mandates to decrease lag times because some dealers may only transmit e-reports once per month. Turner suggested that some additional quality control during data submission might be a good way to increase the quality of e-reported data. **For 2010 SEFSC is considering making e-reporting mandatory for dealers required to report certain species.** They currently require reporting for dealers that account for the top 95% of the landings for species they are required to monitor. This amounts to approximately 75-125 dealers. **M. Kasprzak** asked if SEFSC compared their list of required dealers with the list of dealers that are currently reporting electronically. **Turner** stated that many grouper dealers are likely reporting electronically but they are not clear how many mackerel and shark dealers are currently reporting electronically. **Turner** suggested that offering the dealers one single electronic reporting option could help reduce a paper burden for the states. SEFSC has looked into some software used by the Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) and has shared that with GSMFC for consideration. **Peterson** looked at this software and said he could tailor software similar to that but he still preferred his system for future development. In August SEFSC met with GSMFC, Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP), and R. Cody of Florida as well as many of the South Atlantic states to update everyone on electronic reporting needs in use with quota monitoring. Agreement was reached on how to move

forward with the electronic reporting system. SEFSC hopes that data will transmit directly to GSMFC and allow the states to update and clean records directly with GSMFC. SEFSC would then perform their quota monitoring directly using the data at GSMFC and not have to manage a database at their end. **Kasprzak** asked how often SEFSC would be requesting dealer reports. **Turner** mentioned that weekly reports would likely be the necessary option. **S. Turner** asked how the states thought the reception would be if mandatory reporting for all dealers was implemented. Most states said small dealers still face some technological problems that might prevent electronic reporting. **Donaldson** mentioned FIN is getting ready to send outreach material to paper ticket dealers detailing the benefits of electronic reporting.

Presentation of National Recreational Fishermen Registry

G. Colvin reported on the new implementation plan for the Marine Recreational Information Plan (MRIP). The program goal is to build a new national recreational data collection program tailored to regional needs. MRIP hopes to enhance accountability, timeliness, and decision-making ability. MRIP is evaluating current estimation methods, conducting outreach to key stakeholders, and developing the final rule for the National Saltwater Angler Registry (NSAR). A few pilot projects are beginning to evaluate survey process and estimation techniques. In the future MRIP will begin a phased implementation of new survey methods and also benchmark new methods for possible adjustment of historical data. Several comments were received from states and fishery management councils. States asked if NOAA Fisheries could complete the final rule but delay implementation of the federal registry for one year. This would allow states to work with their legislatures to either institute a saltwater license or broaden their current license to meet federal registry guidelines. Many public comments address opposition to fees and fees going to federal treasury instead of conservation, placing the burden on commercial fishing, using different methods to gather data outside of a fisherman registry, and thoughts that reporting should be voluntary. The NSAR is set to begin in January 2009. **Colvin** mentioned many of the states that did not previously have a saltwater fishing license have been working with state government to institute a license program to help exempt them from the NSAR. **S. Atran** asked if registered anglers will receive a registration card and also asked if penalties will be imposed if an angler fails to register. **Colvin** mentioned that all anglers will receive a registration card with an ID number and also mentioned a penalty schedule needs to be proposed that would be appropriate for not registering.

Discussion of State Participation in Economics Data Collection Activities

A. Miller updated the group on a meeting held with the socio/economic workgroup in September 2008. The Marine Angler Expenditure Survey will likely not be implemented until 2010 at the earliest. The survey of fishing related businesses will hopefully be implemented in late 2009. Currently the group is working with the state of Louisiana on the sampling frame and methodology for the Gulf of Mexico inshore shrimp survey. GSMFC is hoping that Louisiana will refine the sampling frame and methodology and will move forward with implementation in other states that are willing to participate.

Donaldson asked if anyone had a problem with Louisiana taking the lead in data collection. There was no objection to this approach. **Miller** asked if other states would be interested in collecting inshore shrimp economic data. **R. Cody** mentioned that working with Steve Brown initially would be best before bringing the FWC economist into the process. **K. Anson** mentioned that it should not be too difficult for Alabama to produce the initial sampling frame. Mississippi also agreed to participate with the implementation process. **Donaldson** asked if additional funds would be necessary for compiling sampling frames and most states said it would not be necessary. **Miller** mentioned that the inshore shrimp survey would likely be a mail survey. **Kasprzak** asked if the issue has been resolved on whether it was a vessel or fisherman based survey. **Miller** said the issue has not been resolved and we need to get input from each state to resolve that issue before moving forward. **Miller** hopes to have a draft of the initial survey to distribute in the next few weeks.

Discussion of Feasibility of Using Trip Ticket Systems for the For-Hire Fishery

D. Donaldson mentioned this issue came up from the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council meeting in August. The original motion has been expanded to include e-log books, web-based reporting, video monitoring, and/or catch cards. **Kasprzak** mentioned Louisiana is currently working with Claude Peterson to develop an electronic reporting system for offshore for-hire fishing vessels similar to what **Peterson** has created for an MRIP pilot program in Puerto Rico. The Louisiana program will only be voluntary. Louisiana hopes to match up the voluntary electronic reported data with the current dockside intercept data to analyze for similarities and differences. **S. Atran** mentioned this motion came out of the Ad Hoc Recreational Red Snapper AP so the motion was really focused on improving red snapper management. Some of the recommendations could apply to advances being made through the MRIP process. **Donaldson** mentioned that it has not been determined if the states have the authority to mandate data collection for the for-hire fishery. Currently there are no state regulations in the Gulf of Mexico for mandatory reporting in the recreational fishery. **R. Cody** thinks it would be very difficult to get the necessary legislation approved in Florida to require mandatory reporting. **K. Cuevas** asked if the federal government could handle the burden of regulating and enforcing mandatory reporting for vessels permitted and fishing in the EEZ. **R. Cody** mentioned that waiting to hear what MRIP recommends for sampling the for-hire fishery would be a good course of action. **Donaldson** mentioned that this is the first step in this process. NOAA Fisheries, the Gulf States, and Commission staff will continue to work on this issue.

Status of Metadata Data Entry

D. Donaldson asked the states to give an update on the metadata entry progress. Florida has moved their metadata to a new system that is compatible with InPort. **R. Cody** will be trained in the near future on how to use their new system. **K. Anson** mentioned metadata entry is still a priority for Alabama but a low priority. Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas have entered some information but it still needs to be reviewed and published. **Donaldson** reminded everyone about the importance of these data and getting them into

InPort in a timely manner. **Donaldson** asked that all states have published data in InPort by March 2009.

Commercial QA/QC Data Review

After some Subcommittee discussion this review was postponed and will probably be rescheduled as a short afternoon session on Mondays during each October meeting.

Election of Chairman

Richard Cody was elected as chairman. Kerwin Cuevas was elected as vice chairman.

Other Business

D. Donaldson mentioned that FIN has been asked to get more involved in helping provide data for the publication *Fisheries of the United States*. The states need to attempt to get end of year data into the FIN DMS as soon as possible.

G. Davenport mentioned they need previous year's data by April 1st of the following year. Donaldson asked the group to keep this in mind as they are processing data towards the end of each year.

Being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 12:07 p.m.

**JOINT COMMERCIAL/RECREATIONAL FISHERIES
ADVISORY PANEL
Meeting Summary – 59th Annual Meeting
Monday, October 13, 2008
Key Largo, Florida**

P. Horn called the meeting to order at 1:05 p.m. without a quorum for either sector or the panel as a whole with the following in attendance:

Members

Philip Horn, Clark Seafood, Pascagoula, MS
John Rawlings, Colorado River Seafood, Matagorda, TX
Bob Fairbank, Mississippi Power, Gulfport, MS
Daniel Babin, Gulf Fish Inc., Houma, LA

Others

Virginia Vail, *GSMFC Commissioner*, FWC, Tallahassee, FL
Bill Walker, *GSMFC Commissioner*, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Dave McKinney, *GSMFC Commissioner*, Austin, TX
Dave Burrage, MS Sea Grant, Biloxi, MS
Christopher Liese, NOAA Fisheries, Miami, FL
David Carter, NOAA Fisheries, Miami, FL
Joe Borowicz, FWC, Marathon, FL
Gordon Colvin, NOAA Fisheries, Silver Spring, MD
Tommy Williams, Daybrook Fisheries, Empire, LA
Dale Diaz, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Chris Robbins, Ocean Conservancy, Austin, TX
Judy Jamison, G&SAFF, Tampa, FL
Chris Blankenship, ADMR, Dauphin Island, AL
Peter Murphy, NOAA-Marine Debris Program, Seattle, WA
Jackie Wilson, NMFS – HMS, Silver Spring, MD
Read Hendon, GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS

Staff

Larry B. Simpson, Executive Director, Ocean Springs, MS
David Donaldson, Assistant Director, Ocean Springs, MS
Steve VanderKooy, Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Ralph Hode, Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Teri Freitas, Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS
Alex Miller, Fisheries Economics Program, Ocean Springs, MS
Gregg Bray, MRFSS Analyst, Ocean Springs, MS
Donna Bellais, ComFIN Programmer/Analyst, Ocean Springs, MS

Introductions

Horn asked everyone at the table to introduce themselves along with the audience. Since there was not a quorum, **Horn** noted that no action could be taken on approving the agenda or approving the previous minutes. **VanderKooy** explained that there are currently two vacancies in need of filling, the recreational representative for Florida and the recreational representative from Alabama. In addition, a couple members had conflicts with the meeting and sent their regrets.

Discussion of New NOAA Fisheries Economic Surveys

David Carter, NMFS, presented the regular collection of critical economic data through the MRFSS For-Hire Survey. NOAA is proposing to add up to 3 questions about each trip to the FHS telephone survey (pilot add-on) to look at charter fees, fuel use, and fuel price. These items will measure the value of the product (charter) which any economic analysis needs to begin. In addition it will begin to include the fuel costs which are important component of expenses incurred and contribute to the overall value of a trip.

NOAA Gulf of Mexico Marine Debris Project

Peter Murphy, NOAA's Marine Debris Program (MDP), provided an overview of the program, especially in the Gulf of Mexico. The MDP was established in 2005 through the Marine Debris Research Prevention and Reduction Act. The program goals include the survey of offshore areas impacted by Hurricanes Katrina & Rita to be translated into maps to support debris removal. Another component of the project in the Gulf is to inform the public of debris which may not be able to be removed, conduct public outreach to stakeholders which include anglers, fishermen, boaters (both commercial and recreational), as well as resource managers. Information and maps generated can be accessed at the project website: <http://gulfofmexico.marinedebris.noaa.gov/>

Amendment 3 to the Consolidated Highly Migratory Species Fishery Management Plan

Jackie Wilson, NOAA, provided the group with an overview of the proposed Amendment 3 to the 2006 Consolidated Atlantic Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Fishery Management Plan (FMP). Based on latest small coastal sharks (SCS) stock assessment, new management measures are needed because blacknose sharks are overfished with overfishing occurring. The expected timeframe by NOAA is to have final measures become effective January 1, 2010. The potential objectives are to rebuild/prevent overfishing of blacknose and other spp. as needed, develop sustainable fisheries for other SCS, and improve monitoring and compliance. Wilson's primary discussion was centered on rebuild blacknose sharks and NOAA presents several options for both the commercial and recreational fisheries.

In the commercial fishery NOAA proposes the removal of blacknose sharks from the commercial SCS quota, creating a blacknose-specific quota, establish bycatch caps,

establish an Individual Fishing Quota system, and work with the GMFMC and SAFMC to reduce blacknose bycatch mortality in shrimp trawls and other fisheries, if needed. Other options include time/area closures, revised trip limits for incidental commercial fishermen, a gillnet endorsement (limit future gillnet effort), and possible commercial gear modifications to reduce blacknose discards.

Options presented for the recreational fishery include outreach to recreational anglers on regulations and spp. Identification, revised bag limits, banning possession of blacknose sharks in the recreational fishery, create seasons and/or closed areas for the recreational fishery, and require reporting for recreationally landed shark species.

Wilson reminded the group that this was only a scoping effort at this point and they have already held several public meetings to seek input on the potential changes. NOAA is looking to have a pre-draft in December 2008/January 2009, complete a draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and develop and publish a proposed rule by summer 2009 which would include a 60 day comment period. They hope to have the final EIS by November 2009 and a final rule in December 2009 which would become effective January 1, 2010.

Historical Overview of Recreational Fishing Effort

Gregg Bray, GSMFC, gave a brief overview of some of the recreational fishing effort data over the last several years in the Gulf. Angler trips have varied by area fished, season, and mode with the largest component of effort still residing with the west coast of Florida. **Bray** identified some of the charter effort, especially the last four years around the tropical events pre-Ivan to post Katrina and Rita.

Improving Marine Recreational Fishing Information

Gordon Colvin, NOAA, provided an update to the panel on the MRIP program and answered questions they had on the National Saltwater Registry. In a continuing effort to rebuild sustainable fisheries, NOAA has built a new program to improve the collection, analysis, and use of recreational data which is replacing MRFSS and will be known as Marine Recreational Information Program or MRIP. MRIP will enhance accountability, timeliness, and decision-making ability, but everyone must remember that it will not be a silver bullet solution to all fisheries management issues. Ongoing activities include evaluating current estimation methods, conducting outreach to key stakeholders, and developing final rule for National Saltwater Angler Registry. They hope to release the final rule shortly and have the Angler Registry implemented around the beginning of 2009. NOAA will begin charging registration fees by 2011 for EEZ anglers in states that either don't have saltwater licenses in place or have inadequate licenses.

NOAA is continuing collaboration and engagement through dialog with stakeholders about what they feel are needs in the program and their expectations from a well designed program. There are essentially three elements that are being implemented in stages. First

is improving current methods of estimation; second is exploring additional methods which might be useful and thirdly, broadening the application of the methodology.

Currently, the National Registry final rule is coming in November and NOAA is working to provide state license updates, review public comments, and publish the Final Rule. It is expected that the Registry program will begin in January 2009.

GSMFC Program Updates

James Ballard, GSMFC, reported on the artificial reef activities (including the LAARS meeting) and the invasive species program.

Alex Miller, GSMFC, introduced the panel to the newly established fisheries economics program within the Commission's Data Program.

Ralph Hode, GSMFC, offered an update on the progress of the EDRP I and EDRP II programs since the last panel meeting.

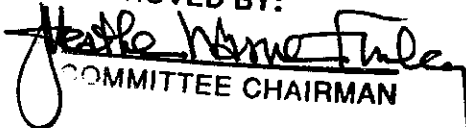
Jeff Rester, GSMFC, reported that the TORP offshore LNG project had been withdrawn under harsh environmental criticism and the threat from the Alabama Governor to veto any permit issued by the USCG.

VanderKooy, GSMFC, provided an update on the IJF activities since the last meeting of the Panel in March 2008.

Election of Chair

Without a quorum, the group discussed the issue with the vacancies on the panel and a lack of a recreational chair. **Bob Fairbank** offered to serve temporarily as the recreational chair until such time as a quorum can be achieved and the position filled.

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 4:05 pm.

APPROVED BY:

COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**TCC HABITAT SUBCOMMITTEE
MINUTES – 59th Annual Fall Meeting
Monday, October 13, 2008
Key Largo, Florida**

Chairman Heather Warner-Finley called the meeting to order at 1:05 p.m. and asked members and guests to introduce themselves. The following members and others were present:

Members

Frank Courtney, FWC, St. Petersburg, FL
Ron Mezich, FWC, Tallahassee, FL
Cherie O'Brien, TPWD, Dickinson, TX
Robert Adami, TPWD, Corpus Christi, TX
Paul Cook, LDWF, New Iberia, LA
Heather Warner-Finley, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Doug Frugé, USFWS, Ocean Springs, MS
Steve Heath, ADCNR MRD, Gulf Shores, AL

Staff

Jeff Rester, Habitat/SEAMAP Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Cheryl Noble, Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS
James Ballard, Sportfish Restoration/ANS Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS

Others

Jerry Mambretti, TPWD, Port Arthur, TX
Joseph Smith, NMFS, Beaufort, NC
Jim Hanifen, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Richard Cody, FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Kevin Anson, ADCNR, Gulf Shores, AL

Adoption of Agenda

The agenda was adopted without changes.

Adoption of Minutes

The minutes of the March 10, 2008 meeting were adopted without changes.

Administrative Report

J. Rester stated that the Commission sent a letter concerning the beneficial use of dredged material from the Atchafalaya River to the head of the Army Corps of Engineers, Louisiana's Congressional Delegation, the Louisiana Governor's Office, the Louisiana

Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources, and the Coastal Wetlands Planning Protection and Restoration Act Task Force members in July. The letter stressed the importance of Louisiana's coastal wetlands both to fish and wildlife and humans as natural storm buffers and the need to use more dredged material beneficially. **J. Rester** stated that a new study came out this summer that calculated that Louisiana's coastal wetlands provided approximately \$1.8 billion (\$4,321 per acre) in storm protection services each year. He reported that the freshwater inflow brochure would be sent to the printer soon. **J. Rester** stated that in September the Commission reviewed the final environmental impact statement for the Bienville Offshore Energy Terminal approximately 63 miles south of Mobile Point, Alabama, in a water depth of approximately 425 feet. He reported that the Governor of Alabama had threatened to veto the project, so the applicant withdrew their deepwater port license application. Finally, **J. Rester** stated that the Commission's aquaculture grant should be finished by the end of the year.

Inshore Artificial Reefs

H. Finley stated that Louisiana has had a lot of requests for building inshore artificial reefs recently. She stated that the proposed artificial reefs had a wide range of goals. She wanted to discuss the inshore artificial reef issue with the Habitat Subcommittee and possibly the Artificial Reef Subcommittee to determine if there was a need to develop guidelines or best management practices for inshore artificial reefs. **S. Heath** stated that Alabama had deployed approximately 20 inshore artificial reefs using mostly concrete rubble or culverts. He stated that they tried to deploy the reefs in areas that would not interfere with navigation or shrimping. **S. Heath** stated that all material used complied with the Commission's Guidelines for Artificial Reef Materials document. He reported that the Coast Guard told them how much clearance was needed above the artificial reefs. **P. Cook** asked how you would determine success of an inshore artificial reef. Success was dependant upon the goals of the project whether it was to improve fishing success for certain species or provide habitat. **R. Mezich** stated that Florida had also deployed inshore artificial reefs. He stated Florida tried to control who held a permit for a reef and only permitted entities or organizations that would be around in the future. He stated that in some inshore areas, artificial reefs had been colonized by invasive species like the Asian green mussel. **S. Heath** stated that the state was the only entity that could hold a permit in Alabama. The Subcommittee also discussed the difference between an inshore artificial reef and oyster domes or oyster reefs that served as breakwaters for shoreline protection. The Subcommittee agreed that while the benefits may be the same, the intention of a shoreline protection project and an inshore artificial reef were different. The Habitat Subcommittee agreed that they should assimilate current information on inshore artificial reefs and each state program. They would also like to know what problems states had encountered in permitting, siting, and monitoring of inshore artificial reefs. **J. Ballard** stated that he could broach the issue with the Artificial Reef Subcommittee at their next meeting in November. **D. Frugé** made a motion that the **Habitat Subcommittee requests the Artificial Reef Subcommittee, with the assistance of the Habitat Subcommittee, to compile information on state inshore/estuarine artificial reef programs including policies, regulations, issues, and**

concerns, but not including shoreline protection projects. S. Heath seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

2008 Hurricane Impacts to Habitat

H. Finley stated that after the passage of Hurricanes Gustav and Ike that there were reports of floating marsh grass from all areas of the coast. Hurricane Ike had an extremely large wind field that covered most of Louisiana in hurricane force winds. She showed images of large marsh balls or large clumps of marsh that had been rolled up into a ball. H. Finley stated that over 10,000 nutria had washed ashore in Mississippi after Hurricane Gustav. She stated that the Isle Derniere island chain had taken a direct blow from Hurricane Gustav and that there was significant beach erosion, over-washing, and scour. She then discussed the various pollution events associated with the hurricanes. She stated that an estimated 500,000 gallons of oil had been spilled from 448 oil releases with an additional 3,000 pollution reports. She reported that oyster mortalities east of the Mississippi River were highest north of the MRGO and mortality rates reached as high as 24% there. She stated that oyster mortalities for the Barataria/Terrebonne Basin averaged about 30%. She stated that vast areas of freshwater marsh were burned by the storm surge associated with the storms. She reported that there were fish kills associated with the storms, but these were mainly confined to freshwater areas. Finally, H. Finley stated that the economic impact of the storms on fisheries was between \$158 and 240 million for the commercial fishing industry.

C. O'Brien next discussed the impacts of Hurricane Ike on Texas. She reported that Texas had also seen vast areas of marsh burned by saltwater intrusion and freshwater fish kills. She stated that water was still pouring over the beach ridge back into the Gulf of Mexico a couple of weeks after Ike's passage. She stated that approximately 4,000 pollution events were reported. Next, J. Mambretti showed photos from around the Port Arthur area and discussed the various impacts that Hurricane Ike had on coastal Texas.

Commission Bottom Mapping Project

J. Rester reported that since the March meeting, the contractor had returned to the U.S. and that he had delivered a final report, final data, and metadata for the project. J. Rester stated that the purpose of the 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 data produced from the project could be used in several ways. These include designating EFH, fisheries management, helping plan marine protected areas, ecosystem modeling, habitat suitability index modeling, ocean observation and monitoring, coastal zone management and planning, sea floor engineering planning and design, and ocean disposal site placement and monitoring. He then went on to describe the data contained within the database and demonstrate how it could be used. J. Rester stated that the project should be completed by the end of the year.

Habitat Issues of Interest From Each State

Florida – **R. Mezich** stated that a proposed nuclear power plant was examining locating its cooling water discharge pipe in a seagrass area. He stated that Florida had developed a minimum flow level for the Weekiwachee River. The minimum flow was set at 10% of the mean flow. With this minimum flow level only 1% of the flow remained unobligated for water users. **R. Mezich** stated that FWC recently hosted a climate change workshop that examined how wildlife habitat will change over the next 50 years in Florida. He reported that a whooping crane population was currently being introduced into the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge. **R. Mezich** stated that Georgia was still in a drought condition, but that Florida had received large amounts of rain this summer.

Alabama – **S. Heath** stated that Alabama was currently planting oyster cultch with EDRP funds. He also stated that the governor had threatened to veto the TORP LNG facility off Alabama. The applicant then withdrew their license application. He stated that the downturn in the economy had slowed the number of applications for condominiums and marinas that Alabama had reviewed.

Louisiana – **H. Finley** stated that due to the high water levels in the Mississippi River, the Bonnet Carré Spillway was opened in April. She stated that the Corps, LDWF, and MDMR all sampled for potential impacts. She stated that they did not see any hypoxia, algal blooms, or fish kills associated with the opening. **P. Cook** reported that the Port of Iberia expansion project was looking to use the dredged material from the deepening of the Intracoastal Waterway to build levees for hurricane protection. **H. Finley** stated that levee building will continue to be a big issue in Louisiana.

Texas – **R. Adami** stated that Texas stocked 20.6 million red drum fingerlings and 3 million spotted seatrout in 2008. He reported that Texas will hold a derelict trap removal next February. He stated that the Texas clipper was sunk as an artificial reef, but it did not sink correctly and it will take approximately \$5 million to right the vessel. He stated that the Texas Great Barrier Reef project was working on developing an EIS for the project. He reported that aquaculture shrimp production was down 400 acres to 1,000 acres. **C. O'Brien** stated that Texas had been reviewing the potential impacts of the deepening associated with the Matagorda Ship Channel. A FEIS will be released shortly. She stated that she was working on three land acquisition projects on Galveston Island. CIAP funds will be used to purchase the land.

USFWS – **D. Frugé** stated that on September 24 the National Fish Habitat Conservation Act of 2008 was introduced in the Senate. The bill would authorize specific funding to be dedicated to implementing the National Fish Habitat Action Plan through actions to restore and enhance stream, lake, and coastal habitat to improve recreational fishing and help recover endangered species. The FWS is working with the State of Florida to develop a statewide habitat conservation plan (HCP) for beach habitats. Through completion of an HCP stakeholders can be granted incidental take permits for ESA listed species. **D. Frugé** stated that the FWS continues to work with the Corps on dealing with issues related to the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint (ACF) rivers water management

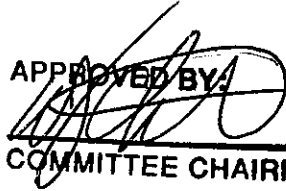
plan. The FWS Florida Panhandle Coastal Program assisted in forming the Panhandle Living Shoreline Initiative in 2006 to discourage coastal armoring and promote a softer approach to coastal development.

Election of Chairman

P. Cook nominated H. Finley to again serve as chairman. C. O'Brien seconded the nomination and it passed unanimously. H. Finley nominated R. Mezich to serve as vice chairman. C. O'Brien seconded the nomination and it passed unanimously.

Other Business

With no other business, the meeting adjourned at 4:10 p.m.

APPROVED BY: 
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

LAW ENFORCEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING
Minutes – 59th Fall Meeting
Tuesday, October 14, 2008
Key Largo, Florida

Vice Chairman, J. Mayne called the meeting to order at 8:40 a.m. The following members and others were present:

Members

- Chris Blankenship, ADCNR/MRD, Dauphin Island, AL
- Robert Goodrich, TPWD, Austin, TX
- Jeff Mayne, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
- Karen Raine, NOAA General Counsel, St. Petersburg, FL
- Carmen DeGeorge, U.S. Coast Guard, New Orleans, LA
- Brett Norton, FWC, Tallahassee, FL
- Hal Robbins, NOAA/OLE, St. Petersburg, FL
- Tracy Dunn, NOAA/OLE, St. Petersburg, FL

Others

- Richard Leard, GMFMC, Tampa, FL
- Donald Armes, Jr., MDMR, Biloxi, MS
- Dave McKinney, Austin, TX – *GSMFC Commissioner*
- Pat Reynolds, FWC, Miami, FL
- Laurie Luher, FWC, Marathon, FL

Staff

- Steve VanderKooy, GSMFC, IJF Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
- Teri Freitas, GSMFC, Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS

Adoption of Agenda

Robbins moved to accept the agenda as written. The motion was seconded by Blankenship and passed unanimously.

Approval of Minutes

The LEC members reviewed the minutes of the March 11, 2008 meeting in Galveston, TX and the August 6-7, 2008 Workshop in Ocean Springs, MS. **Robbins moved to approve the minutes as written. The motion was seconded by Norton and passed unanimously.**

Strategic and Operations Plans Final Approval

The Committee briefly reviewed their Strategic and Operations Plans and made a few minor corrections. **Blankenship** made a motion to accept Strategic and Operations Plans with the corrections. The motion was seconded by **Robbins** and passed unanimously.

PowerPoint Presentation for Commission Business Meeting

The LEC reviewed in detail the JEA PowerPoint presentation that is to be presented at the Commission Business Meeting. Each state representative went through each of their JEA slides and talked about the data presented on each slide; this discussion led the LEC members spending a considerable amount of time talking about and sharing the problems with the current JEA software. **Robbins** reported that NOAA has decided that they do not want to throw anymore money at the old software and its issues and that has been shutdown due to database reporting issues. Several LEC members reported that the old software was dropping information and then at other times it was doubling and tripling information. LEC members also discussed the need for definitions for the various data field categories; **Mayne** suggested that the Gulf provide their definitions to NOAA so that everyone was on the same page; **Robbins** agreed that it would be a very good idea. After much discussion the LEC members agreed that an oral disclaimer was needed at the beginning and end of the JEA slide presentation, to make it clear that each of the States JEAs are different and unique; that there are documented problems with the JEA software and that the numbers shown are not 100% accurate. It should also be mentioned that without JEAs programs like VMS and Red Snapper IFQs would not be possible.

Leard asked if the LEC could also do the JEA presentation for the Gulf Council at an upcoming meeting, to give the Council a better picture of what JEAs are all about and how important they are. The LEC members agreed, but decided that a video on JEAs would be better and might have a greater impact.

IJF Program Activity

Goodrich reported that he attended his first Oyster TTF meeting in August and he asked that each LEC member look at the law enforcement section of the Oyster FMP to ensure that their state sections are updated with the latest regulations. **VanderKooy** reported that a first draft of the Oyster FMP should be ready next spring. **VanderKooy** then reported that the Arenarius Profile is moving along, but they have recently hit a snag on the NMFS data reporting of sand trout.

GSMFC Annual Law Summary

VanderKooy discussed the current format and use of the GSMFC's Annual Law Summary and then handed out a draft of the Rules and Regulations Officer's Pocket Guide. The LEC members reviewed the prototype and agreed that this is exactly what they need in the field. **VanderKooy** reported that he plans on printing the pocket guide on a waterproof paper in a 4 1/2 x 8 format, which will fit in the officer's ticket book for

easy reference. The GSMFC will continue to print the red book "A Summary of the Marine Laws and Regulations for the Gulf of States – Law Summary" for historical purposes, but in a much smaller quantity. **VanderKooy** noted that he will send out a request to each state and the USCG, asking the quantities they will need for their field officers who work on the Gulf of Mexico. **Freitas** will send each state representative their states section for review and comment prior to publishing.

Funding for Public Service Announcements

LEC members agreed to table this agenda until the next meeting due to time constraints.

JEA Support Letter to Carlos M. Gutierrez, Secretary of Commerce

The LEC reviewed a copy of a draft letter to Carlos M. Gutierrez the current Secretary of Commerce that supports the continuation of the authorization and appropriations for the JEAs and Commissions support of increasing these funds. **A motion was made by B. Norton and seconded by C. Blankenship to request a letter be sent from the GSMFC Executive Director to support the continuation of the authorization and appropriations for the JEAs and Commissions support of increasing these funds from 13.9M to \$30M. Robbins and Raine obtained from voting and the motion passed.**

Presentation on U.S. Customs and Border

Inspector Pat Reynolds from the FWC gave a comprehensive PowerPoint Presentation on Airport Protocol and Inspections of Fish and Wildlife, Import and Export and the procedures and documents required. The FWC checks all air-cargo off-loading, breakdown of container pallets and holding of product for pickup. The U.S. Customs Border Patrol is responsible for airway manifest, cockpit inspection, dog inspection, visual off-load and probing. Each container must contain the following information: airway bill, number of pieces, what's in the box, common names inventory number and country of origin. The airway bill is assigned by the airline company; it tracks the shipment, indicates the contents and identifies the consignee. The Customs Clearance Center is where the paperwork package is submitted, proper checks are conducted, the shipment is either released or held for further inspection and wildlife shipments are passed to USFWS for inspection. The USFWS Declaration contains a summary of Import/Export information – especially the wildlife contents, scientific names and their status is checked. Shipments are held In-Bond beginning at unloading and until cleared by a customs bonded broker. When transporting tropical fish for example, the airline regulations require double bagging and lined cardboard boxes to prevent leakage, smugglers will use this to their advantage, they put liquid cocaine between the layers of the bags, straws are molded into Styrofoam to hide drugs, they use false bottoms, or place drugs in with dangerous or loose wildlife. The USFWS looks for violations like declared fish or wildlife that are suspicious, like common or scientific name that are incorrect, product that is prohibited or restricted, injurious wildlife species, fruit bats, mongoose, wild dog, java sparrow, walking catfish, snakehead and brown tree snakes. Reptiles and

small mammals are shipped under IATA rules which state that they must be single housed, have air flow, have food and substrate (bedding) for mammals, be securely sealed in containers like cloth or mesh bags or plastic cups and the contents labeled. Out of Bond is upon clearance by USFWS or US Customs and the goods are now considered to be in Florida. Exports are domestically produced fish and wildlife, imports processed and repackaged and brokered fish and wildlife. The following sanitary precautions are adhered to: all seafood is iced down, officers wear gloves for their protection and to protect the food product, and wash up after each inspection. Commercial Possession and Transportation of Saltwater Products must have a SLP aboard vessel during transport for sale; other transports must have invoices, bill of lading. A FWC license is not required for transport of in-bond products destined outside Florida, and the size of imported saltwater species found in Florida waters shall meet FWC size limits. The LEC thanked Inspector Reynolds for his thorough presentation on fish and wildlife imports.

State/Federal Reports

Due to time constraints the state/federal reports will be given at the afternoon LEAP session, if time permits.

Other Business

The meeting was adjourned at 11:55 a.m. The motion to adjourn was made by Blankenship, seconded by Norton and passed unanimously.

**EMERGENCY DISASTER RECOVERY PROGRAM (EDRP)
 MINUTES – 59th Annual Fall Meeting
 Tuesday, October 14, 2008
 Key Largo, Florida**

The Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission Fisheries Disaster Recovery Coordinator **Ralph Hode**, called the meeting to order. The following state representatives, staff and other attendees were present.

States

Virginia Vail, FWC, *GSMFC Commissioner*, Tallahassee, FL
 Alton Waldrep, ADCNR, Gulf Shores, AL
 Kevin Anson, ADCNR/AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL
 Dale Diaz, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
 Jim Hanifen, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
 Lance Robinson, TPWD, Dickinson, TX
 Kerwin Cuevas, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
 Mike Brainard, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
 Ewell Smith, LA Seafood Promotions and Marketing Board, Baton Rouge, LA
 Richard Cody, FWC-FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL
 Mike Ray, *GSMFC Commissioner*, TPWD, Austin, TX
 Bill Arnold, FWC-FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL
 Mark Berrigan, FLDOACS, Tallahassee, FL
 Mike Buchanan, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
 Tracy Floyd, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
 Dr. Bill Walker, *GSMFC Commissioner*, MDMR, Biloxi, MS

Others

Ellie Roche, NOAA-NMFS, St. Petersburg, FL
 Frank Courtney, FWC, St. Petersburg, FL
 Chris Robbins, Ocean Conservancy, Austin, TX
 Gwen Hughes, Tampa FL
 Judy Jamison, Tampa FL
 Jeff Barger, Austin, TX
 Reid Hendon, GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
 Martha Bademan, FWC, St. Petersburg, FL

Staff

Wendy Garner, Accountant, Ocean Springs, MS
 Ginny Herring, Administrative Officer, Ocean Springs, MS
 Ralph Hode, EDRP Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
 Dave Donaldson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
 Joe Ferrer, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Opening Comments

Ralph Hode made opening comments thanking the states, NOAA-NMFS representatives, and the GSMFC staff for their attendance.

Participants and visitors were introduced.

Approval of the Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of March 11, 2008 held in Galveston, Texas were presented for approval. There were changes to correctly identify the **LA Department of Health and Hospitals** vs. Louisiana Hospital Board, and to “...equipping of the damaged **Claude Peteet Mariculture Center.**” vs. the Dauphine Island Sea Lab in Alabama. On a motion by Cuevas and a second by Hanifen, the minutes were approved as amended.

Agenda

Hode then opened the meeting and called for approval and/or amendments to the agenda. There being no changes, a motion was made and seconded and the agenda was approved as submitted.

Introduction and Purpose

Special recognition was given to **Ellie Roche** who once again commended the states for timely reporting and the GSMFC staff for not only its reporting but also for the timeliness of interim reports as periodically required. Hode seconded Roche’s comments and thanked member states for reporting on time and being willing to provide additional information as necessary.

Hode gave an overview of the Emergency Disaster Recovery Program as follows:

Planned Utilization of Funding October 1, 2006 through September 30, 2011

	Oyster Recovery	Cooperative Research	Shrimp and Shellfish Recovery
Louisiana	22,900,000.00	5,000,000.00	25,016,667.00
Texas	1,814,940.00	382,800.00	977,260.00
Florida	2,994,700.00	425,033.00	813,600.00
Mississippi	15,000,000.00	10,041,668.00	12,000,000.00
Alabama	7,116,306.00	6,224,706.00	221,251.00
		7,950,714.00	8,120,355.00
Total	49,825,946.00	30,024,921.00	47,149,133.00
Percent of Total	39.23%	23.64%	37.13%

Total Program Allocation \$127,000,000.00

MEASURABLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS GULFWIDE TO DATE – September 2008

Oyster Rehabilitation and Restoration Efforts

- 1,385 acres of public reefs rebuilt
- 168,165 cubic yards of cultch material in place
- 179,971 sacks of seed oysters in place (*both public sites and lease sites primarily in Mississippi and Louisiana waters*).

Cooperative Research Efforts

Stock Recovery Assessment

- 47,882 Stock Recovery Assessment reports completed

Artificial Reef Restoration

- 240 limestone offshore reefs installed
- 16 barge loads of concrete rubble offshore reefs
- 6 steel hull vessel reefs
- 10,500 cubic yards low profile nearshore reefs in place

Shrimp and Crab Grounds Restoration Effort

Debris Removal Efforts

- 488 square miles cleaned of small debris
- 11,500 abandoned crab traps removed

Reimbursements to States - October 1, 2006 through September, 2008

	Oyster Recovery	Cooperative Research	Shrimp and Shellfish Recovery
Louisiana	11,015,007.24	226,520.96	4,026,017.82
Texas	222,640.25		313,682.80
Florida	425,992.07	241,961.03	46,819.00
Mississippi	7,263,024.13	5,449,549.81	6,804,380.49
Alabama	1,029,002.43	7,377,661.82	281,209.13
Total	19,955,666.12	13,295,693.62	11,472,109.24
Percent of Budgeted	40.05%	44.28%	24.33%

TOTAL TO DATE (September 15, 2008) \$44,723,468.98

EDRP II

EDRP II is a five year program that was funded in the amount of \$85,000,000 by the U.S. Department of Commerce in September, 2007. The recipient agency is NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service and the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission is the administering agency under a Special Award Agreement. This program focuses on providing assistance to fishermen, businesses and industry impacted by the storms of 2005.

- Assistance for TED and BRD compliance – two percent (2%) of the combined program funds are to be used to provide additional assistance to Gulf fishermen who comply with federal and state regulations regarding use of Turtle Excluder Devices and other Bi-catch Reduction Devices.
- The balance of the funds were to be used to provide direct assistance to Gulf fishermen, fishery related businesses and industries, and Gulf fishery agencies to address marketing of Gulf seafood products, seafood testing programs and other programs aimed at providing long term assistance to the overall industry.

Planned Utilization of Funding October 1, 2007 through September 30, 2012

	TED-BRD Compliance	Assistance to Fishermen	Assistance to Business and Ind.	Seafood Marketing and Testing
Louisiana	825,460.00	39,153,631.00		1,293,909.00
Texas	27,000.00		1,173,000.00	
Florida	40,000.00	460,000.00	1,500,000.00	
Mississippi	750,000.00	6,300,000.00	14,000,000.00	3,950,000.00
Alabama	300,000.00	3,900,000.00	10,800,000.00	
Total	1,942,460.00	49,813,631.00	27,473,000.00	5,243,909.00
Percent of Total	2.28%	58.97%	32.35%	6.18%

Total Program Allocation \$84,473,000.00

Reimbursements to States - October 1, 2007 through September, 2008

	TED-BRD Compliance	Assistance to Fishermen	Assistance to Business and Ind.	Seafood Marketing and Testing
Louisiana		5,976,058.91		
Texas				
Florida			479,251.50	
Mississippi	529,741.49	2,089,996.63	245,970.19	94,203.09
Alabama	300,000.00	33,083.89	340,001.41	
Total	829,741.49	8,099,139.43	1,065,223.10	94,203.09
Percent of Budgeted	42.72%	16.26%	3.88%	4.78%

TOTAL TO DATE (September 15, 2008) \$10,088,307.11

Hode noted that progress in spending appeared to be in line with the grant cycle time lines and referenced a meeting with OMB and NMFS in September in which a power point presentation was made outlining program progress and spending to date. It was noted that a number of adjustments to individual programs and budgets had already been accomplished and that more changes are expected as the states become increasingly involved in their respective implementation programs and find that there are better ways to accomplish program objectives.

Overview of Projects

FLORIDA

Mark Berrigan provided a report on progress to date under the Oyster Recovery and Rehabilitation Program for the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services/Division of Aquaculture noting that both programs are fully engaged.

In the EDRP I element **Berrigan** indicated that the Public Reef Restoration Program is fully operational and that the Department continues to stock pile cultch materials for reef restoration in Apalachicola Bay, Escambia Bay and East Bay. However, it was pointed out that public reef restoration in Escambia and East Bays is delayed pending receipt of a new deck barge which will be used for transport of materials to areas more remote from the cultch stock pile in Apalachicola Bay. The barge, which is funded under EDRP II, is expected to be completed and delivered in late December or early January.

The State's private lease holder program funded under EDRP I is also moving forward with about 50% of its lease holders actively participating in the recovery effort; and, a number of these having completed work to the extent that individual funding assistance allocations have been exhausted. Several are also involved in re-surveying and marking leases and assessing the remaining work to be done towards restoration. The Department has also had success with a pilot program whereby private leaseholders may be authorized to purchase cultch materials from the State for private lease restoration resulting in cost savings as well as expedited restoration. The cooperative project appears to have worked well and the Department will consider continuation in the future.

Under the EDRP II program additional funds are being scheduled for continued assistance to leaseholders who are ahead of the curve in restoration efforts. The Department is currently examining its options for disbursement of these funds and expects to see expanded cultch plants in the spring with receipt of the new deck barge. Providing further support for the oyster industry, the Department entered into a cooperative project wherein Franklin County acquired a piece of property and the FDACS utilized recovery funds to repair and re-construct waterfront access facilities including ramps, and docking space for offloading of products. All work was completed and a formal ribbon cutting ceremony was held in time for use by area fishermen during the 2008 oyster season.

FDACS is also moving forward with the necessary plans and permitting to relocate its cultch loading site and stock pile from the public commercial harbor area to an adjoining property which does not compete with local commercial fishermen for dock space. All approvals and work are expected to be completed in year 2 of the EDRP II element in time to expand reef rebuilding components funded under EDRP I.

Dr. Bill Arnold gave a report on the status of the oyster larval distribution model being developed for Pensacola Bay. Larval dispersal data sample collection was completed in July 2008 and the hydrologic circulation model of the Bay is approximately 50% complete. The larval dispersal model will be linked to the circulation model by Ilene Hoffman at Old Dominion University when the circulation data is completed.

It was noted that sample analysis includes genetic probes (unique gene sequencing) that will be used to quantify the abundance of larvae in each sample. Also, with the purchase of a Polymerase Chain Reaction machine, FFWCC staff will begin the processing of water samples in lieu of having them sent out for analysis. Once the model is developed it will be tested in the field and validated by conducting samples to determine how well the model predicts larval abundance and possibly recruitment.

Arnold indicated that the project was behind schedule but would be completed before the five year grant cycle.

Richard Cody reported on the for-hire program funded under EDRP II in which an electronic log-book reporting system to report CPUE data is being developed. The web based reporting system (WBRS) survey instrument is completed and will begin testing

soon. **Cody** reported that the project is taking longer than anticipated because of problems in developing the audit segment of the program; but it is expected that the final audit tests will be completed in the November/December 2008 time period and overall program testing will begin in January 2009.

Cody indicated that there were approximately 700 potential participants for the program in the Florida Gulf area but estimated that less than 200 charter fishermen would likely agree to participate in the reporting program.

Dr. Virginia Vail reported on the EDRP II TED and BRD assistance program for the Florida Department of Fish and Wildlife indicating that \$40,000 had been dedicated to recognizing compliant fishermen. **Vail** indicated that the State has about 600 shrimpers but the Department continues to have problems excluding those with TED violations because citations have been issued in the name of the boats found in violations and not individuals. This in turn is making it difficult for the Department to identify eligible recipients. **Vail** reported that they hope to begin issuing checks within the next few months.

Lance Robinson indicated similar problems in Texas; and noted that if they cannot isolate eligible recipients and given the amount dedicated to potential fishermen, recipients would only receive about 20 dollars each.

ALABAMA

Kevin Anson gave a report on the Alabama EDRP I programs and began by explaining the justification and process by which funding from the habitat element for mapping had been re-allocated to other elements of the recovery program. Specifically, because of the lack of qualified local services, the mapping and side scan effort in the Mobile Bay area had been delayed. It was subsequently determined that capabilities were being developed outside the Department and that further effort on the part of the ADCNR would be duplicative. Through a Memorandum of Understanding the habitat portion of the program was reduced and the cooperative research element increased.

Anson indicated that the shallow water oyster cultch program is in its 2nd year and appears to be going well. He also indicated that deep water cultch plant efforts are seeing limited delay and/or postponement due to a proliferation of oyster drills.

A report on the Habitat Restoration project revealed that the State Lands Division continues to work with its engineering firm for location and design of a 2500 linear foot wave attenuation breakwater. The plan is to install the submerged breakwater and to follow that with localized marsh plantings to get new marsh established. The Department is also working with the Dauphin Island Sea Lab on the restoration of a number of short-term, smaller controlled marsh development sites so that they can maintain close post-planting monitoring programs.

The report also included a briefing on the ongoing long term egg and larval distributions study being conducted by the Dauphin Island Sea Lab under EDRP I; as well as a special study to examine the distribution of finfish, crustacean and benthic organisms in the Mobile Bay area.

Anson provided a report on the cooperative research effort indicating that approximately 619 Alabama licensed fishermen participated in the trip report program netting nearly 14,000 reports on catch and disposition of released fish. He indicated that though the state had not yet begun to analyze their reports, it was felt that they would provide additional information above that which they receive via the trip ticket reports from commercial dealers.

Anson reported under the EDRP II Assistance for TED Compliance program that a total of 128 checks had been released to qualified fishermen netting each approximately \$2300 each. He also commented on the ongoing seafood related assistance element in which nearly \$6.4 million is slated for distribution to qualified businesses and related industry. It was estimated that approximately 80 dealers will be involved under this element. **Alton Waldrep** explained the State's use of organized fishery related associations in the identification of recipients and distribution of assistance checks to commercial fishermen. He also noted that internal controls within such associations had been examined and that they appeared to be working well and that checks should begin to be mailed in November.

Other project reports included one on the cooperative seafood by-product facility being rebuilt in Bayou La Batre, a University of South Alabama and Auburn University study of off-shore fishing efforts; a public waterfront facility monitoring program and an assistance program at Alma Bryant High School in Bayou La Batre to provide technical training and orientation to students in order to keep them interested in fishery processing and related industries as an occupation once they are out of school.

Questions were asked regarding the continued participation in the State's shallow water cultch plant program and it was determined that there has been some fall off but still about 200 fishermen are participating. Also inquiries were made regarding the logistics of providing cultch for the shallow water plants. **Anson** advised that the organized associations which are overseeing the program monitor the materials as they are off-loaded from barges to individual boats and that fishermen are paid based on monitoring reports.

Hode commended Alabama for its invoicing system and noted that each invoice comes with back up documentation and a break down on personnel, contractual, costs, etc. He indicated that invoicing of this nature helps the Commission staff to determine if work is staff, contract, travel or other work programmed for each subaward.

MISSISSIPPI

Dale Diaz, Manager of the MS DMR marine fisheries program, commended his staff for the work they have done on the Disaster Recovery program since its beginning; indicating that they have worked very hard with little or no outside help in accomplishing the work they have done thus far. He also thanked GSMFC for its help in working with the Department to make scope and budget adjustments as necessary in order to move their program forward in a timely manner.

Mike Brainard provided an overview of Disaster Recovery and began by addressing the menhaden recovery assistance needs under EDRP II. Brainard indicated that a CPA firm has been hired to address assessment of damages at the Omega Protein menhaden plant in Moss Point, MS, taking into consideration all three plants in both LA and MS and the assistance already provided for in LA. The purpose of bringing in an independent review is to separate damages to the MS plant and to isolate LA assistance funding so that there is no overlap in assistance.

Brainard also addressed the State's job application program funded under EDRP II indicating that the Department is working with USM to develop a curriculum for training in various elements of fisheries. Tentative plans call for USM to administer the training program including contacting fishermen or other applicants and the provision of actual training.

Brainard indicated that the EDRP II trip reporting program concludes this month; and, that checks had been mailed to resident licensed shrimpers who had met the TED-BRD compliance checks conducted by the Department.

Diaz provided a brief report on the State's cultch plant program being funded under EDRP I. He noted that the planned spring and fall 2008 cultch plants were delayed due to the opening of the Bonnet Carré Spillway. There was general department consensus that it would be better to wait until the silting effects of the opening had passed before depositing additional cultch. Other factors contributing to delayed plants were Hurricane Gustav and a ship accident on the Mississippi River. In spite of these delays, **Diaz** reported that contractors were still able to distribute about 50,000 cubic yards of material out of the planned 65,000.

LOUISIANA

Jim Hanifen provided an overview of activities under the Disaster Recovery Program for the State of Louisiana, indicating that the recent impacts of Hurricanes Gustav and Ike has in fact caused the Department to begin re-evaluating programs so that assistance to the industry could be provided much more quickly.

Under EDRP I the primary effort is seen in the State's POLR program. There are about 550 active oystermen involved in an assortment of activities which includes marking reefs, cultivation, planting of cultch and bedding oysters. To date approximately \$8.0

million dollars have been sent out. Under the public reef restoration program, reef repair has been seen in the Mississippi Sound area of Lake Borgne and in Black Bay. Additionally, side scan work is being conducted in Hackberry Bay and in Calcasieu Lake areas west of the River with the intent of determining if additional cultch in these areas would be beneficial. The Department is working to do the same in Sabine Lake; and, is currently taking bids for cultch plants in these areas.

Hanifen indicated that given the damage and impact of recent storms, work originally scheduled under habitat and cooperative research is being re-evaluated in order to more quickly get assistance out to fishermen and businesses which were still recovering from Hurricane Katrina. Tentative plan calls for approximately \$13 million out of the habitat program to be moved into the cooperative research program where fishermen could be provided assistance in the form of incentives for providing reports on catch.

Hanifen also commented on the State's debris removal program where \$4 million had already been expended for contractual work to remove debris from nearshore and inshore areas of the State's marine fishery habitat. The original budget was nearly \$16 million; but the state has been successful in obtaining support through the Coast Guard for the remainder of the coastal debris cleanup needs, leaving a balance of nearly \$12 million in the habitat program. Those funds will now be re-aligned to the cooperative research program. Additionally, plans for refurbishment of the Marine Lab on Grand Isle have been dropped from the recovery program.

Hanifen described programs that will not be affected by the changes including: continuing with engineered structures to facilitate shore protection while promoting additional oyster growth in selected areas of the state; and, continuing with the planned data management system upgrades.

For informational purposes, **Hanifen** gave a brief PowerPoint presentation of the LAWF effort to design and implement a tier type reimbursement program that provides multiple levels of assistance to a broad spectrum of fishermen and overlapping fishing effort in the state. The program includes fishermen as well as wholesale and retail dealers who participated in the State's trip ticket program. Eligible participants had to be licensed from the 2004-2005 license season through August 2008. He indicated that the draft plan had been presented to the State Legislature for concurrence; and that it was modified by the Legislature to provide additional funding, amounting to an additional \$1.4 million for the menhaden industry. An excess of 8000 packages were sent out fishermen, businesses and industry, and charter boat license holders and they were given until the end of October 2008 to complete their packages and return them to the state. The level of assistance was dependent upon the level of participation and landings and they are to share nearly 12 million dollars. The maximum amount of assistance for extremely high level participation was set at nearly \$100,000. A total of nearly 18 million dollars have been mailed since June of 2008.

TEXAS

Lance Robinson gave a report on recovery activities to date for the State of Texas. In summary:

The State's mapping is ongoing and has proven beneficial as the preliminary work is being used as the state assesses the impacts to its oyster grounds following Hurricane Ike. It was pointed out that staff was able to quickly assess the damage to oysters in the Galveston Bay area following Ike and to determine the dollar value of losses.

Under the Habitat Restoration component, the state has finally received COE permits for cultch plants in several locations. Tentative plans call for plants to begin in the spring of 2009 in time for spring spawns. **Robinson** commented on the potential for use of building rubble from a demolition project in Houston where an estimated 3000 to 4000 truck loads of crushed concrete may be made available to the State. Demolition is to begin in January and if the mechanics of the work can be worked out cultch plants would follow. **Robinson** also indicated that programmed modeling work in the Sabine Lake system has been completed and that a preliminary report has been received; and, that programmed debris removal work under contract with Jefferson County, TX has been completed.

In the EDRP II element for assistance for TED BRD compliance, **Robinson** indicated that the State had identified approximately 1200 fishermen who could potentially be eligible for assistance. He noted that the state, like Florida, was having problems in isolating non-violators and that if they were reduced to making payments to all shrimpers, the 24,000 dollars scheduled for this element would be of little benefit to the fishermen. **Robinson** indicated that this element should be completed by the end of this year.

In describing the Texas Assistance to Business and Industry element **Robinson** said the assistance will involve additional cultch plants. He added that given the damage to the Galveston reefs following Ike, additional cultch plants would indeed provide long term benefits to the industry. He also noted that the damage assessments revealed that the damage following Ike is well beyond anything that current funds could address. He estimated that approximately 8000 acres in the Galveston Bay area were impacted because of silting. Additionally, **Robinson** said that 75% of the state's access points were lost; that there were no boat access points in the Galveston area proper; and that early estimates for restoration is set at nearly 7 million dollars. Overall losses in the oyster industry were estimated at 360 million dollars.

Berrigan commented on the effects of scouring and sedimentation on the reefs noting that it would take time to either heal itself or to determine the final impacts. Discussions followed regarding impacts on existing stocks, specifically with damage to reefs in Texas, Louisiana and Mississippi, could overfishing of minimally damaged remaining reefs in Alabama and Florida occur? GSMFC agreed to monitor landings over the next several months to see if some conclusions on which areas are receiving the most pressure could be drawn.

Having completed the state reports and questions, **Hode** inquired as to whether bi-annual meetings of the EDRP work group continued to be beneficial. It was noted that the meetings were beneficial and it was recommended that they continue. **Hanifen** suggested however, that in future meetings the states should give abbreviated reports and that the host state should prepare a detailed report on that state's overall program, its progress and expenditures to date. The group concurred and **Hode** indicated that the next meeting would take place in March 2009 in New Orleans, Louisiana.

There being no further discussion or business the meeting was adjourned.

**S-FFMC MENHADEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MINUTES – 59th Annual Meeting
Tuesday, October 14, 2008
Key Largo, Florida**

V. Guillory called the meeting to order at 8:32 a.m. with the following in attendance:

Members

Ron Lukens, Omega Protein, Inc., Gainesville, FL
Borden Wallace, Daybrook Fisheries, Inc., Empire, LA
Vince Guillory, LDWF, Bourg, LA
Corky Perret, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Jerry Mambretti, TPWD, Port Arthur, TX
Joe Smith, NMFS, Beaufort, NC
Steve Heath, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL

Others

Joe Gill, *GSMFC Commissioner*, Ocean Springs, MS
Ben Landry, Omega Protein, Inc., Baton Rouge, LA
Kimberly Thibodeaux, Omega Protein, Inc. Baton Rouge, LA
Michelle Kasprzak, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Clinton Scheynyder, Omega Protein, Inc., Baton Rouge, LA
Chris Brantley, USACOE, Norco, LA
Peter Murphy, NOAA Marine Debris Program, Seattle, WA
Glenn Thomas, LA SeaGrant, Baton Rouge, LA
Guy Davenport, NOAA Fisheries, Miami, FL
Brian Cameron, UF/IFAS FL SeaGrant, Panama City, FL
Tommy Williams, Daybrook Fisheries, Inc., Baton Rouge, LA
Jason Duet, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA

Staff

Larry Simpson, Executive Director, Ocean Springs, MS
Steve VanderKooy, Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Jeff Rester, Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Gregg Bray, MRFSS Analyst, Ocean Springs, MS

Introductions

Chairman Guillory led the introductions of the MAC.

Approval of Agenda

Guillory asked to amend the agenda to include a presentation on the LA Trip Tickets and Captains Daily Fishing Reports as an item before the debris presentation. *Smith moved to make the change, Perret seconded. Lukens moved to include a discussion on a*

menhaden recruitment index survey under other business and adopt the revised agenda, Perret seconded and the motion carried.

Approval of Minutes

Perret moved to accept the minutes as written, Wallace seconded and the motion carried. Perret asked for a copy of any follow-up letter from Texas regarding the letter sent from the Commission regarding the Texas Cap. VanderKooy would provide ASAP.

Louisiana Trip Tickets and CDFRs

Michelle Kasprzak, LDWF, discussed the apparent discrepancies in landings between CDFRs and the LA Trip Tickets and asked for a chance to merge the two reporting forms into something useful to all. Duplicative reporting is a problem especially if the CDFR and the Trip Tickets don't seem to match. Smith reported that with the CDFRs he gets dock unloads and real set locations using the improved forms which might be lost with the trip ticket. The NOAA population dynamics modelers might need to be convinced. Lukens mentioned that they may not be replaced, but just updated to make useful for all and consistent with the long-term dataset.

Perret was concerned about ending up with two different systems between the Gulf and the Atlantic. The amount of under-reporting varies and may be on the NOAA side versus the LDWF side. The existing dual systems just need to be made to match. It was agreed that there needs to be a meeting with Claude Peterson, Smith, Guy Davenport, and LDWF to see what the data system needs. There is also an enforcement issue for LDWF that the trip tickets must be signed by the captain and provide an ex-vessel value as well. Kasprzak noted that the Trip Tickets are submitted by fishermen and not by vessel which can be a problem and Smith reminded everyone that the CDFRs are "at sea estimates" and not necessarily the offload which is what LDWF needs.

It was noted that this is a one state issue at this time, but it might affect others in the future, therefore, *Perret recommended that the appropriate people in LDWF, MDMR, NOAA, and industry, meet to see if they can reach a compromise on the existing reporting systems for consistency and accurate data collection to satisfy LDWF and NOAA. Lukens seconded.* LDWF and Lukens will coordinate a meeting.

NOAA Debris Program

Peter Murphy, NOAA's Marine Debris Program (MDP), provided an overview of the program, especially in the Gulf of Mexico. The MDP was established in 2005 through the Marine Debris Research Prevention and Reduction Act. The program currently has a Director and 6 full time staff and is based out of Silver Spring with regional offices in the Pacific NW, Hawaii, and New Orleans. The MDP provides regional coordination of debris projects and to date has worked on 100+ projects with its partners at NFWF, NMFS, National Geographic, BoatUS Foundation, USCG, and FEMA. In the Gulf of Mexico Marine Debris Project, the project goals include the survey of offshore areas

impacted by Hurricanes Katrina & Rita to be translated into maps to support debris removal. Another component of the project in the Gulf is to inform the public of debris which may not be able to be removed, conduct public outreach to stakeholders which include anglers, fishermen, boaters (both commercial and recreational), as well as resource managers. The information and maps generated can be accessed at the project website: <http://gulfofmexico.marinedebris.noaa.gov/>

Update on the 2008 Season

Smith reported on the 2008 Gulf menhaden fishing season. As of September, 376,653 mt of menhaden had been landed which is down 11% from 2007 and 13% from the previous 5-yr average. There were 41 vessels operating in the Gulf in 2008, 39 regular steamers (2 fished sparingly) and 2 run boats.

Both companies continue to have difficulties crewing vessels. Several items that **Smith** noted include the Texas reduction quota of about 14,000 mt, the closing of the ABC Bait Co. in Morgan City, LA, and the high Mississippi River flows this past spring resulting in an opening of the Bonnet Carré' spillway. **Smith** reported that fishing was good in April and early May with spotter pilots seeing good signs of fish. In addition, oil yields appeared to be good in 2008. By May, windy and wet weather hampered fishing, but the fleet saw improvements in June and good catches. July was a good month for fishing, although a tanker-fuel barge collision near New Orleans closed the Mississippi River for some time in last July and Hurricane Dolly halted fishing when it went into Brownsville, TX. August was good until mid-month when Tropical Storm Fay dumped rain over much of the southeastern U.S. and the associated winds and ground swell restricted fishing. In September, Hurricane Gustav made landfall near Morgan City with the Gulf plants surviving reasonably well, but power outages and flooding did lead to a loss of fishing time. In mid-September, Hurricane Ike made landfall at Galveston causing major flooding at the Cameron and Abbeville plants. Cameron will remain closed for the rest of the year. So far in October, the Cameron vessels have redeployed to Abbeville or Moss Point and fishing off the central Louisiana coast has been good, but **Smith reported** that a front has hampered effort this past week.

Smith predicts that through the end of the season, the total landings should be around 412,000 mt which is 5% less than Katrina and Rita season and down 12% from previous 5-yr mean. **Smith** also provided a very preliminary draft forecast for 2009 working under the assumption of final landings of 412,000 mt, the 2008 nominal fishing effort of 341,000 vessel/ton/weeks and 2009 nominal fishing effort estimate of 359,000 vessel/ton/weeks. The forecast landings might approach ~ 450,000 mt in 2009.

Wallace would like to have the hypoxic zone mapped over the fishing grounds when **Smith** prints the set locations over a given year. **Smith** would work with **Rester** to get that map produced for 2008 for the March meeting.

Update on the Atlantic Menhaden Fishery

Smith also provided an update on the activities on the Atlantic related to reduction fishing. Omega's plant at Reedville was the only reduction plant active in 2008 with 10 vessels. There were also 3 bait vessels in Virginia, 5-6 in New Jersey, and 2 fishing in Rhode Island and Maine. The landings for reduction through September 30 were 110,672 mt which is down 19% from 2007 for equivalent time and down 8% from previous 5-yr average. Atlantic menhaden were very abundant in Chesapeake Bay this summer, to the point of generating complaints from recreational anglers and this marks the 4th consecutive summer that adult menhaden were abundant in southern New England waters around Narragansett Bay.

Smith reported that the 'Compromise Cap' on menhaden removals from Chesapeake Bay was not reached again and since underages are applied as credit to the following season, the 2009 cap will be set at 122,000 mt for the third year in a row. The ASMFC's Atlantic Menhaden Management Board (AMMB) met in August 2008 to discuss what would happen after the 'cap' expires in 2010. The AMMB agreed to appoint a working group to establish 'ecological reference points' to manage the fishery which will include preferred total mortality rate, preferred age structure, etc. In addition to the cap, the Gilchrist (MD) and Saxton (NJ) bills (HR 3841 and 3840) which had been introduced in October 2007 to prohibit commercial fishing of Atlantic menhaden for reduction in inland, state, and federal waters along the Atlantic coast of the US, appear to have died in committee. Finally Rhode Island had bill in it's legislature to prohibit purse-seining for menhaden for bait in Narragansett Bay, but it was withdrawn.

Texas Quota

Mambretti reported that the Texas Cap officially began in September, so most of the 2008 fishing season was not affected, however, Texas took the opportunity to develop the communication system for monitoring the quota during this time. Early in the season the industry fished well in Texas and approached within 2% of the cap by early July. Tropical systems messed up the rest of the season and basically eliminated fishing in Texas waters. From July 27 to date, there have been no reduction landings from Texas. Without the storms, the industry would have been just under their quota and the underage would have carried over to the next season. **Lukens** noted that had it not been a storm year, the industry would have greatly exceeded the Cap, because it was based on less than normal year averages and therefore Omega Protein would like to have TPWD look at some different or additional years to generate the average to reset the quota.

State Updates on Effects on 2008 Hurricanes

Lukens reported that Omega lost fishing days and had damage to infrastructure at its Louisiana facilities due to both Gustav and Ike. **Perret** noted that in Mississippi, the damage to the Omega plant in Moss Point in Jackson County was relatively minor, but that in the far western part of the state, there was considerable damage. **Perret** noted that there were over 7,000 nutria washed up dead in Hancock County. Mississippi's oyster

resources took some hits as did the bait trawl fishermen, especially to the western side of the state.

Guillory reported that in Louisiana there were a number of fish kills, primarily in the upper bay systems and included all species, fresh and brackish species. In Gustav, there was a large fish kill in the Pointe Aux Chenne area. Prior to the storms landfall, the north winds drained the marshes and the south winds drove in the surge with a lot of silt and they lost a number of sportfish. There were a lot of menhaden and carp included in the smaller fish kills, which persisted for a few weeks as the water drained off after the storm. Once the drainage occurred, the cities started pumping water out from inside the levees and that stirred it up even more.

Mambretti reported that Texas had significant fish kills as well, including red drum and menhaden, bumpers, bass, and sunfish. There was considerable shoreline damage resulting in a large amount of habitat loss. All the marsh grasses were torn up and burned by the saltwater. Sabine Lake oysters were a huge loss and there have been very few live harvestable oysters in those area reefs. A large coastal prairie and estuary important for menhaden was completely inundated and burned by the high salinity surge water. **Mambretti** expects that menhaden recruitment will be low for the next couple years from this area.

Captain's Daily Fishing Report (CDFR) Scannable Forms

Smith presented the new, scannable version of the CDFR including a history of how the CDFRs were originally developed. NOAA has had problems with money and time to key enter the forms the following winter, so Beaufort has now gone to an optical scanner so that the forms can be character recognized and inputted electronically. The new form has red boxes which the scanner interprets as data to capture. **Smith** runs a batch at night and when he returns in the morning, they verify the data and address any boxes the computer could not read.

Based on the trip ticket discussions from earlier, **Smith** needs to have the meeting before February for him to be able to order any forms he might need for 2009. **Perret** would like to see a meeting take place in Beaufort in November or December. **Lukens** volunteered to handle the logistics with **Smith** for sometime in early December.

LNG Update

Rester mentioned that the TORP facility has been withdrawn under fire from conservationists and fishery managers. The Alabama Governor was ready to veto the permit so the company dropped it.

Election of Chair

Joe Smith is nominated by Perret since the rotation went back to the federal member and seconded by Heath, there was no opposition.

Other Business

Lukens reminded the MAC that in March of 2006 there was a note by Vaughn in the stock assessment to improve the recruitment index. A motion was passed that the MAC recommend to the SFFMC to improve gear and sampling to target menhaden recruitment. The item was passed along, but it did not move further. *Lukens would recommend that the SEAMAP subcommittee look at developing a protocol specifically targeting menhaden recruitment. Perret would like an idea of cost as well as a protocol. Perret seconded the motion and there was discussion about what might be the best venue to discuss and pursue this.* **Lukens** reported that both **Dave Donaldson** and **Jim Hanifen** thought that SEAMAP was probably the best.

Smith reported that Vaughn is looking at 2012 under SEDAR for the next Gulf menhaden stock assessment.

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 11:10 a.m.

APPROVED BY:

COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**SEA GRANT FISHERIES EXTENSION ADVISORY PANEL
MINUTES – 59th Annual GSMFC Meeting
Tuesday, October 14, 2008
Key Largo, Florida**

Attendees

Gary Graham, Chair – Texas Sea Grant Program
Tony Reisinger – Texas Sea Grant Program
Dr. Chuck Adams - Florida Sea Grant Program
Brian Cameron – Florida Sea Grant Program
Dr. Glenn Thomas – Louisiana Sea Grant Program
Dave Burrage – Mississippi/Alabama Sea Grant Program

Visitors

Dr. Rick Wallace
Judy Jamison
Gwen Hughes
Ellie Roach

Chairman Gary Graham called the meeting to order and introductions were made. As this was the first formal meeting of the Sea Grant group, **Dr. Chuck Adams** suggested that it would be meaningful to discuss the intent and mission of the committee. The meeting focused briefly on discussion of how the committee came into being and the outlined goals of the joint meetings to be conducted with the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission. Planned presentations for the meeting then began.

Dr. Chuck Adams gave a scheduled presentation regarding the Florida Sea Grant Artificial Reef Program Project. He indicated that much effort had been directed toward reef research in the past by both consultants and agencies. The Florida Sea Grant effort would address specific issues associated with reefs in the region from Lee through Pinellas Counties. He indicated that funding had been received from Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and the West Coast Inland Navigation District. . Dr. Bob Swett, Assistant Professor in the Fisheries and Aquatic Science Department at University of Florida was the P.I. on this project. Chuck emphasized that this project was designed to provide communities and counties with a better understanding of roles provided by artificial reefs. He stated that this work was important and that concerns existed relative to the recent impact of budget restrictions regarding artificial reefs in the study area.

Dr. Adams indicated that he was in the process of developing a survey instrument for his portion of the project. He explained that the survey would take both an internet-email and a surface mail out approach and specifically indicated that Survey Monkey would be the principle instrument to be utilized the email portion of the project. He indicated that the for-hire sector of the recreational fisheries was to be his primary focus of study and that this included charter boats, head boats, guides and dive boats. He stated that the

number of trips taken, number of patrons, number of reefs utilized, where users are from, and money spent by users would be included in the information that he was to acquire.

The committee broached a discussion of the benefits of developing a document regarding artificial reefs. **In fact, the committee recommended that the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission consider the potential of developing a profile of artificial reefs for either the U.S. or Gulf waters.** Included in this document would be regulations that now exist regarding artificial reefs, economic benefits, and the importance of artificial reefs as they relate to fish stocks.

Dr. Adams then discussed the Florida Sea Grant Effort regarding Sustainable Fisheries through development of venting techniques for fish, circle hook use and release techniques for fish. Chuck discussed various workshops that had been conducted. Efforts in other states were discussed by the committee participants. Dr. Adams indicated that some concern and complaints had been received by commercial suppliers of venting tools and de-hookers in regard to the free items that Sea Grant had been supplying industry. The companies claimed that the free gear was in competition with their sales. Florida Sea Grant is no longer distributing the gear to the industry. FSG will only be involved in educational activities in the future.

Dr. Adams also discussed interest being generated from anglers of smallmouth bass in the Great Lakes region regarding venting information and materials. He explained that some of these fish were caught in deep water and that anglers found that venting had an application for these freshwater species. . This information was gleaned from a recent FSG-sponsored symposium at the AFS meetings in Ottawa.

Other discussion by **Dr. Adams** related to a project concerning mislabeling of seafood products. He stated that funding had been obtained from the Gulf and South Atlantic Fisheries Foundation to perform this work and that it primarily focused upon grouper. Dr. Steve Otwell and Dr. Sherry Larkin are investigators in this project and that they were in the process of developing a telephone survey instrument. Randomly selected households would be asked to participate in this study and it would have an email based format. Dr. Adams indicated that such questions regarding the awareness of the substitution issue, impact on the demand for grouper, product perceptions and price would be but a few of the topics which would be addressed by the study.

Dr. Glenn Thomas, Louisiana Sea Grant Program then made several presentations which were directed toward their state efforts. It was indicated that Rex Caffey who was to attend this meeting and make several of the presentations could not attend because of the recent loss of his mother. Dr. Thomas agreed to make presentations for him as well as his own efforts. The first topic for discussion was the 2009 Charter Boat Survey. It was explained that this work was conducted every ten years and that the Center for Natural Resource Economic Policy and Assessment was taking on this task. This project is designed to define the size and economic profile of the charter boat industry from the west coast of Florida to Texas. Additionally, the Louisiana Sea Grant program is planning to perform a similar, but more in-depth analysis of the Louisiana charter boat

industry. Dr. Thomas indicated that the survey for Louisiana was so long and time consuming that they were considering compensating participants for their input.

Dr. Thomas then discussed the Hurricane Damage Assessment to Louisiana Fisheries and Aquaculture for Hurricanes Gustav and Ike. He emphasized that this Sea Grant effort was intended to derive the best number regarding losses and not necessarily the largest numbers attainable. Much of the work was done through coordination with the Louisiana Department of Fish and Wildlife utilizing some of that organization's data. Dr. Thomas discussed the sophisticated programs and models incorporated into the assessments. He indicated that tidal surge was an important element in the assessment. He indicated that the LSU assessment reflected two portions of the fishery – first, the fisheries, both commercial and recreational, and secondly, fishery infrastructure losses. He stated that losses from the fishery included those of aquaculture, freshwater commercial fisheries, recreational charter boats and as well as traditionally recognized marine fisheries such as oysters, shrimp and crabs. He stated that their estimate for losses in the commercial fisheries was in a range of 70-126 million dollars and calculated that the average was about 100 million dollars. Infrastructure losses were significantly higher and reflected damage to processors, vessels (both commercial and recreational), marinas, as well as aquaculture facilities. Damage to infrastructure ranged from 127 million to 177 million dollars with a calculated average of about 152 millions dollars. Dr. Thomas stressed that biophysical modeling, trip ticket data and as well as the huge GIS capabilities of his organization enabled the calculations for this very sophisticated process. He stated that overall losses from Ike were about 251 million dollars as opposed to 582 million dollars calculated for Katrina. He concluded his presentation by emphasizing that recovery efforts should focus on “Back to the Docks” which included getting the fisheries back up and operating. He stated that this has not been the case and efforts seem to be initially undertaken in the direction of habitat recovery and other projects.

Dr. Thomas then gave a presentation on work being conducted with the culture of Cocaho minnows (mud minnows), *Fundulus grandis*. The entire extension group agreed that there was significant potential for marketing these fish for recreational bait in their states. The committee discussed traditional marketing of wild produced fish in their areas. Dr. Thomas discussed ongoing efforts to culture these fish and discussed research gaps which included broodfish and optimum egg/fry production. He indicated that there was a need to identify potential producers and to direct research efforts to bring this potential bait aquaculture operation on line as a viable enterprise.

Dr. Thomas concluded his presentations with a discussion of a recent tour of aquaculture operations that he had participated in Honduras. He stressed that this work was not conducted along the lines of consulting, but instead was more on the order of a press team. He showed pictures of tilapia and shrimp aquaculture operations which were owned and operated by European investments. Dr. Thomas showed the various culture and procession facilities to the committee. It was clear that these operations were being conducted in an environmentally friendly manner. The processing plants were state of the art and appeared to be extremely sanitary. Dr. Thomas emphasized that Honduras has

a 37% unemployment rate and that these operations were highly regarded by the country as a source of employment. It was emphasized that although the companies were European owned, staffing was filled by Honduran workers which is a government directive.

Tony Reisinger, County Extension Agent in Brownsville, Texas presented work that he has been involved regarding mercury content in local fish. He acknowledged work performed by Harriet Perry, Gulf Coast Research Laboratory and also the Alabama/Mississippi Sea Grant Programs. Mr. Reisinger indicated that he had sampled 812 fish and that many of these were fish landed at fishing tournaments. He stressed that because some of these fish were landed for tournaments, they might be larger than normal, hence the potential for more bioaccumulation. He stated that high mercury samples were found in bonita, cobia, certain shark species, king mackerel, amberjack, blackfin tuna and yellowfin tuna. He noted that samples obtained from dolphin (dorado fish) were low. Mr. Reisinger theorized that pelagic fish may have a tendency to be higher in mercury than demersal fish. He stated that pelagic fish required more nutrition because of energy needs for their highly mobile lifestyles. He said that this higher level of intake provided more of an opportunity for bioaccumulation of mercury.

Mr. Reisinger indicated that his findings of elevated mercury levels would place some of these fish on cautionary lists, especially for pregnant women and children. He stressed that the serving portions of fish was based on 8 ounces of product for a 159 pound person. Based on FDA recommendations the following monthly servings would be allowed within their guidelines:

- Snook – 4.0 monthly servings
- Dolphin – 8.0 monthly servings
- Wahoo - 0.5 monthly servings
- King Mackerel - ~~0.5~~ monthly servings ← CHANGE
- Blackfin tuna – 0.5 monthly servings
- Spotted seatrout – 2.0 servings
- Flounder – 1.0 monthly servings

Mr. Reisinger indicated that health advisories had been issued for the freshwater longnose gar in his area because of high mercury levels. He stressed the importance of this because of the desirability of this fish to the Hispanic culture.

The potential importance of selenium regarding mercury in seafood was discussed. **Mr. Reisinger** stated that it is believed that selenium may be an antagonist to the uptake of mercury relative to the consumption of seafood products. He stressed that this relationship is still unknown but potentially extremely important. He added that many believed that the mercury advisories may contribute to unintended consequences. For example, some scientists believe that the mercury health advisories discourage some pregnant mothers from eating fish. This prevents the uptake of Omega 3 fatty acids which are know to be important to fetal development.

The committee recommended that the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission be advised of the mercury concerns and potential benefits of selenium content in fish to counteract mercury uptake. The group agreed that it would be beneficial for the Commission to endorse any upcoming research directed toward the mercury/selenium phenomenon.

With time almost expired for the committee meeting, **Gary Graham**, Texas Sea Grant Program, gave a brief overview of work that he was doing with new BRDs in the shrimp fishery and also efforts with gears to reduce fuel consumption in the shrimp industry. He indicated that many of the demonstration vessels which he was working with were experiencing fuel savings of around 20-25% by utilizing the new cambered trawl doors and sapphire netting. He indicated that the almost 2/3 of the Brownsville fleet had converted to these gears and that he was continuing investigations with the gear.


Mr. Graham also gave an overview of BRD workshops that he was conducting throughout the Gulf and discussed efforts to place new BRDs on various vessels for industry evaluation.

The meeting was adjourned.

**TECHNICAL COORDINATING COMMITTEE
MINUTES – 59th Annual Meeting
Tuesday, October 14, 2008
Key Largo, Florida**

APPROVED BY:

COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

3/17/08


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

Members

Jerry Mambretti, TPWD, Port Arthur, TX
Bill Balboa, TPWD, Palacios, TX
Virginia Vail, FWC, *GSMFC Commissioner*, Tallahassee, FL
Richard Cody, FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Corky Perret, MDMR, *GSMFC Commissioner*, Biloxi, MS
Kerwin Cuevas, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Jim Hanifen, LDWF, Lacombe, LA
Vince Guillory, LDWF, Bourg, LA
Steve Heath, ADCNR, Gulf Shores, AL
Doug Frugé, USFWS, Ocean Springs, MS
Roy Crabtree, NMFS, St. Petersburg, FL

Staff

James Ballard, Sport Fish/Aquatic Invasives Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Jeff Rester, Habitat/SEAMAP Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Larry Simpson, Executive Director, Ocean Springs, MS
Steve VanderKooy, IJF Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Dave Donaldson, Assistant Director, Ocean Springs, MS
Gregg Bray, RecFIN Programmer/Analyst, Ocean Springs, MS
Ralph Hode, EDRP Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Joe Ferrer, Systems Administrator, Ocean Springs, MS
Alex Miller, Economic Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Madeleine Travis, Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS

Others

Mike Ray, TPWD, *GSMFC Commissioner*, Austin, TX
Vicki Swann, TPWD, Austin, TX
Mike Brainard, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Dale Diaz, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Harriet Perry, GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Jeff Barger, EDF, Austin, TX
W. Borden Wallace, Daybrook Fisheries, INC. Empire, LA
Holly Rolls, Marathon, FL
Read Hendon, USM/GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Ron Lukens, Omega Protein Corp. High Springs, FL
Anne McMillen-Jackson, Fl. FWC, St. Petersburg, FL

Martha Bademen, FL. FWC, Marathon, FL
Joe Borowicz, FL. FWC, Marathon, FL

Adoption of Agenda

The TCC decided to move item 6 (Federally Funded Program for Reefing Decommissioned Naval Ships) to follow the Artificial Reef Subcommittee report. **With no further modifications, a motion to adopt the agenda was made by K. Cuevas and was passed unanimously.**

Approval of Minutes

A motion to approve the minutes as written, for the meeting held on October 16, 2007 was made by D. Frugé and passed with no opposition.

State/Federal Reports:

All reports were provided to the TCC members the week prior to the meeting. Key points and questions about the reports were discussed during the meeting. The full reports are provided followed by any discussion that took place during the meeting.

Florida Report

At their September meeting the FWC approved draft rules that would be consistent with the interim regulations enacted by NOAA Fisheries for Gulf grouper. A final public hearing will be held in December on proposed regulations that would establish a two fish bag and two month closure [February 1 – March 31] for the recreational gag grouper fishery in Florida's Gulf waters, excluding Monroe County. The FWC will also conduct final public hearings in December on draft rules that would increase the recreational bag limit of Gulf red grouper from one fish to two per person within a five fish aggregate, increase the minimum size for greater amberjack from 28 to 30 inches, and increase the commercial and recreational size limit on gray trigger fish from 12 to 14 inches.

An updated stock assessment on pompano, a commercially and recreationally important species in Florida, was recently completed; the previous assessment was in 2002. An analysis of data through 2006 showed Gulf pompano were neither over fished nor undergoing over fishing in both the Surplus Production [SP] and Stock Reduction Analysis [SRA] models. Results for Atlantic pompano were not as conclusive; they may or may not be over fished or undergoing over fishing as the models are contradictory. The next assessment, scheduled for 2010, is expected to clarify the situation.

Commission staff continues working with advisory groups to evaluate management protocols for several species. A series of public workshops is being conducted to receive comments on recommendations for management changes for the Marine Life [a.k.a., ornamental] fishery. Recommendations for the commercial fishery included adding species to the list of designated Marine Life species, adjustments to various bag and size

limits, and a closed season for *Condylactus* anemones. Recommendations for the recreational fishery included a bag limit of 20 organisms per day with a maximum of five of any one kind. [Note: a tiered Marine Life endorsement and Restricted Species endorsement on the commercial fishing license are required for harvest and sale of those saltwater organisms designated as "restricted Marine Life species". Non-designated species may be harvested and sold with only a commercial Saltwater Products License. The number of Tiered Marine Life endorsements is capped.] Staff are working with the Blue Crab Advisory Board to address issues related to recovery of trap debris and retrieval of traps left in the water during a closed season, including identifying time frames for a closed season or seasons.

With reference to the artificial reef program, the 520 ft. former missile tracking ship *General Hoyt S. Vandenberg* could not be deployed before the 2008 hurricane season began. The ship is still in Norfolk, Virginia at the Colonna's shipyard, who remains custodian of the vessel. The environmental cleanup of the ship is approximately 90% completed. It will take about 1 week of final preparation before the tow to Key West, where another 30 days of sink preparation may be needed. Target date for the tow remains around December 1, 2008 with deployment in January 2009. However, no work is currently being done due to a hold on the current funding by the three banks loaning the funds to the project. The banks had provided a \$4.6 million credit line to the project but froze further withdrawals last April after releasing \$3.3 million then being informed that the Shipyard and other creditors were owed an additional \$2.2 million because costs had unexpectedly climbed to \$8.5 million. Despite the addition of \$1 million in general revenue provided to the project through FWC by the Florida Legislature in May, the banks are very close to calling in their loans. There is an ongoing request by the City of Key West to the Florida Governor's office for the additional \$1.6 million needed to complete the project in the form of a non-loan grant. The City of Key West, the vessel title holder refuses to take on the burden of this amount as an additional loan. The City of Key West and Monroe County will not release any bank repayment funds, until, by agreement, the vessel is on the bottom. If additional funds are not secured, the project will not go forward and the ship will be sold for scrap.

The FWC has developed a draft contract for the \$1 million appropriated last year by the Florida Legislature for the *Hoyt S. Vandenberg* project; it is currently under review by the City of Key West. It is a reimbursement contract for expenditures needed to complete the project. The U.S. Maritime Administration previously provided \$1.25 million for the project.

The *Oriskany*, an 888 ft, 32,000 ton vessel deployed off Pensacola in May 2006, was affected by two of the recent hurricanes. 28-30 ft. seas generated by the passage of Hurricanes Gustav (late August 2008) and Ike (early Sept. 2008) across the Gulf resulted in sand movement and scouring around the base of the hull, causing the vessel to settle about 10 feet into the sand, increasing the depth to the top of the superstructure from 68 to 78 feet. There have been a few complaints because the increased depth now places the flight deck at 147 ft - beyond range of recreational dive limits (130 ft) with a slight (5 degrees est.) list to starboard. Otherwise the vessel is intact and at its original location

Recreationally caught fish from the *Oriskany* are being sampled for analysis of PCB levels. The fourth sampling effort was completed April 2008. Analysis results are still pending. Total PCB results from initial *Oriskany* Reef sampling of 30 red snapper (404-808 mm TL) from 14 Dec. 2006 had a mean PCB concentration in skin-on fillets of 34.137 parts per billion, above the EPA basic Tier 1 screening level of 20 ppb. but below the FL Dept of Health level of 50 ppm. As a result, sampling efforts will be expanded to a reference site in addition to the Oriskany site itself.

During FY 2007/2008, \$564,000 from a Sport Fish Restoration grant plus \$110,000 in state saltwater fishing license revenues funded 9 artificial reef construction projects, three monitoring projects and one research project. Ten local coastal governments, one non-profit organization and one university were issued grants for 2007-08. Concrete modules, limestone boulders and secondary use concrete materials were used in the nine completed reef construction projects. The three monitoring projects consisted of fish censuses, deployment verification and mapping projects. The FWC also awarded a special \$36,819 research grant to the University of West Florida for the fourth year of a study evaluating the performance of a portion of a system of 502 unpublished artificial patch reefs deployed by the FWC in 2003 in 4 expansive permit areas off Northwest Florida. Three different types of pre-fabricated reef units are utilized in this system.

“Florida 2060: Population Distribution Scenario for the State of Florida” is the title of a report recently issued by the 1000 Friends of Florida. The report assumes Florida’s population will double to 36 million people in the next 50 years with a corresponding conversion of approximately seven million acres of rural and natural lands [equivalent to the area of Vermont!] to urban use. This report prompted the FWC to examine the future of Florida’s fish and wildlife resources if the loss and fragmentation of habitat plus changes in water quality and quantity come to pass. The FWC issued a report, “Wildlife 2060: What’s at stake for Florida”, and recently convened a conference of scientists and resource managers to identify potential problems and possible management strategies for insuring healthy populations of fish and wildlife in the future. For more information and to view a copy of the report, visit: www.MyFWC.com/wildlife2060.

The FWC has also recognized that a change in Florida’s climate will have significant affects on the fisheries and wildlife resources and their habitats. On October 1-3, 2008 approximately 300 experts and professional resource managers attended a Commission sponsored conference to explore all aspects of climate change on Florida’s resources, including needs in terms of information, strategies and policies to effectively manage Florida’s fish and wildlife resources in a changing environment. For more information visit: www.ces.fau.edu.

The FWC, with support and coordination from the Wildlife Foundation of Florida, has recently implemented the Florida Marine Fisheries Enhancement Initiative to establish partnerships with public and private entities to develop and operate a network of eleven hatchery systems dedicated to enhancing the fisheries resources and public awareness of marine resources.

Recreational and commercial data collection programs have been operating effectively thus far in 2008. Recreational angler intercept quotas for charter, private boat and shore mode were met for all months for which numbers are available (Jan-Sep). The HMS pilot project for South Florida received favorable reviews at a recent HMS Advisory panel meeting in Palm Beach. Preliminary data were presented to the panel by Ron Salz of NOAA. As of Sept. 30th 2008, there were 10,517 biological sample records in the fisheries dependent database. Of those records, otoliths were available for 10,180 fish, representing 75 species. Approximately 40% of the otoliths applied to FIN recreational and commercial otolith quotas. A concerted effort has been made this year to eliminate errors associated with the conversion of biological records to FIN standards.

On the commercial front, a total of 148,846 trip tickets were received (Jan-Sep, 2008) of which 57% were submitted electronically. Of the 343,323 species records received for the same period, 63% were submitted electronically. Also for the same period, 176,279 trip tickets/409,368 species records were edited. Electronic records accounted for 53% and 60% of edited records, respectively. Errata applied to edited data included 1,807 FWC corrections, 858 NMFS reported corrections and 979 duplicate records (deleted).

FWC Licensing is transitioning to SQL-server with an expected completion date of January 2009. We expect some changes to variable formats associated with the move from Oracle. However, we are following the move and expect to collaborate more closely with Licensing as the completion date approaches. Monthly extracts of recreational angler license information should not be affected by the move.

The EDRP funded electronic logbook (Web-based reporting system or WBRS) for the For-Hire fleet affected by the 2005 hurricane season is progressing and a beta-version is expected to be available for testing within the next few weeks. If all goes well with testing, the application is expected to go online by the end of 2008.

R. Cody pointed out that in the last sentence of the third to last paragraph, were he is talking about "errata applied to edited data"; the numbers represent totals from 2003 to the present.

Alabama Report

Rehabilitation of marsh habitat around Coffee Island in Mississippi Sound was discontinued due to the emergence of submerged aquatic vegetation (*Rupia*). Work continues on marsh rehabilitation of Little River Bay near Bayou La Batre.

The Alabama Marine Resources Division (AMRD) is working with other states on a SEAMAP near shore long-line survey. Reviewed existing NMFS protocols and subsequently integrated into a state procedural manual. DISL continues to conduct sampling off Alabama's coast.

The Division is working with graduate students from several universities on data requests to address production and distribution of marine species. AMRD is also conducting an internal review of our sampling programs to improve sampling design and quality of data.

The fisheries section has conducted nine Outreach events with over 2500 total participants that were informed of the activities of the Marine Resources Division and of opportunities on the Gulf coast. These events have included a tourism day in Dekalb County, Art reception for the AMRD's Kids Calendar and a high school in Montevallo, AL. An officer and biologist went to Vigor High School Career Day to inform upcoming graduates of employment opportunities with the Marine Resources Division. Representatives were present at grand opening of Bass Pro Shops in Spanish Fort.

The Division is currently completing the first of two oyster cultch plantings near Heron Bay. The 14,000yd³ will provide attachment locations for spat that will aid in the recovery of the oyster reefs from damage sustained during Hurricane Ivan and the subsequent drought during 2006 and 2007, which allowed large abundances of oyster drills to prey on existing oysters. Shallow water planting of oyster cultch material was initiated in July. Local oystermen were employed to ferry cultch material from a barge to pre-determined shallow areas. A second planting is scheduled for late summer using EDRP monies. The second half of planting will use limestone when the limited shell resources are exhausted. Oystermen were paid \$25 per cubic yard of material (up to \$200.00/day) to plant designated areas.

Oyster drills coming in with high salinity water continue to be detrimental to recovery of oyster reefs. The Division is working with the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM) and the Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) to investigate the possibility of relaying oysters from upper Mobile Bay to south of the closure line and oysters from a closed area in West Fowl River to open areas in the river.

Division biologists are meeting with ADEM to discuss their fish-tissue monitoring program. Atlantic croaker and spotted seatrout tested below limits for chlordane at the Three mile Creek location in Mobile County. May be de-listed from advisory sites for chlordane.

All areas not permanently closed are open to shrimping in Alabama state waters. High fuel prices and low shrimp prices both played a major role as deterrents in the number of trips that shrimp vessels made this summer. The majority of shops that handle bay boats considered the brown shrimp season a poor one. Shops are reporting 10-15 and 21-25 count white shrimp in Mississippi Sound. They are reporting 31 – 35's from the lower Mobile Bay and 36 – 40's in the upper bay.

Staff attended annual otolith training in Tampa to validate current age assignment by each state and receive new training on recently added species of interest.

A member of the biological staff attended a meeting in Washington to address the new observer rule that will monitor turtle interactions with several commercial gears as well as recreational gears in state waters.

AMRD fisheries section conducted four cruises to record video of off shore reefs to document the durability and longevity of different reef materials. Approximately a dozen sites have been recorded. The staff has fine tuned the operational performance of a submersible remotely operated vehicle camera system and gained experience with controls, photography, and limits of the system. The system will be used to assist AMRD in the documentation and long-term monitoring of artificial reef structures

Alabama's coastal areas received minimal damage from Hurricanes Gustav and Ike as compared to Hurricanes Ivan and Katrina. However, the break in Dauphin Island caused by Katrina was widened during Ike. This action may increase the salinity of Mississippi Sound further disrupting the historical oyster fishery within this body of water.

Progress continues on the construction of the Gulf State Park Pier in Gulf Shores. The section of the pier that will contain the water intake structure for the pipeline to CPMC has been reached. This is roughly at the midpoint of the pier. The 14" gravity flow pipeline from the intake structure on the pier to the pump sump has been connected along with additional pipe that was reconnected to the existing pipeline not destroyed by hurricane Ivan. The stairs that will be used to access the water intake platform structure under the pier are currently under construction and should be installed in the next few weeks. The pumps for the project have been delivered.

Marine Resources' staff has worked with personnel from the Engineering section and Parks Division of the Department of Conservation personnel in the development of a plan to reef the damaged Gulf State Park Pier around the new Pier. Public meetings were held to solicit public comment on the proposal. The Department is pursuing approval of the project from the United States Army Corps of Engineers.

Through August 2008, AMRD staff members have collected 762 lengths of fish representing twenty-one species. From these fish 516 otoliths, representing fifteen fish species, have been collected. Processing of these biological hard parts will begin this fall and it is anticipated all hard parts AMRD is responsible for will be processed and aged by January 2009.

AMRD staff continued participation in the dockside and for-hire effort surveys within the NMFS' Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey. AMRD staff members have collected 1,998 intercepts from shore, charter, and private/rental boat anglers through August 2008. This represents an increase of 24.7% over the cumulative quota for all fishing modes. Quotas were met in all modes for all Waves except charter and private/rental modes in Wave 1.

Alabama commercial data collection programs have experienced no significant problems.

AMRD biological staff has discussed options for reducing gasoline usage and have begun to implement some of the ideas.

AMRD biologists continue to assist the National Marine Fisheries Service in the development of an electronic database comprising of state-supplied and/or NMFS collected angler information to provide the basis of a recreational fishing license registry from which fishing effort may be collected. This method is thought to provide the most efficient means for collecting this data. NMFS plans to start the program in 2009.

AMRD staff investigated the potential of several sites in Mobile Bay for artificial reef development. The best site was found off Pt. Clear; however, meetings with local shrimpers will be conducted to assess the impact of developing this site on other fisheries prior to initiating USACE paperwork.

The Alabama Legislature passed a Jurisdictional Bill in 2007 that gave the Marine Resources Division jurisdiction over Alabama registered or licensed vessel fishing in the EEZ. In 2008, a regulation was signed that further clarified the violations that were to be enforced and how they were to be prosecuted in State court. This regulation went into effect on August 30, 2008. Our officers are currently using this valuable enforcement tool.

A regulation was signed by the Commissioner of Conservation that brought our current "Saltwater Fish, Creel, Bag, Possession, and Size Limits" in line with federal regulations concerning the bag limit for red snapper and the size limit for grey triggerfish and greater amberjack. This regulation also set a ten fish per person flounder creel limit. Previously there was no creel limit on flounder in Alabama.

A regulation was signed that will enhance the current "Marine Turtle and Marine Mammals" regulation so mammalian dolphins (porpoises), manatees, and marine turtles are more effectively protected. This regulation went into effect on August 30, 2008.

A shark regulation that will limit chumming and blood baiting for sharks from the beach and piers was signed and went into effect on May 7, 2008. The regulation targets practices associated with shark fishing that cause an unsafe environment for swimmers and beach goers.

Mississippi Report

The Office of Marine Patrol, Marine Law Enforcement activities for JEA consisted of 2,201 boat patrol hours with 930 recreational vessel contacts and 200 commercial vessel contacts which resulted in 44 total violations.

Shellfish Bureau staff coordinated with contractors and planted approximately 50,000 cubic yards of cultch material using both oyster shells and # 57 limestone on 6 reefs located in the western Mississippi Sound. A total of 20 cultch planting days were completed in September.

Mississippi's oyster season began this past September 25th on public reefs. The daily sack limit is 30 per vessel for dredging and 15 per vessel for tonging.

Shrimp season opened June 17 at 6:00 a.m. (coordinated with Alabama opening). 308 boats were seen shrimping in Mississippi waters based on our aerial count. That number of boats is consistent with the aerial counts in the years since Hurricane Katrina; however, ten years ago the opening day count was slightly over 1,000 boats.

EDRP II program has begun with 346 eligible resident commercial fishermen (292 shrimpers + 54 crabbers) contracted. The 2008 crab cooperative fishery trip ticket recovery program (1,303 trips harvest info, 25 tickets per crabber), and derelict crab trap cleanup and BRD/TED compliance compensation have been completed. DMR began accepting trip monitoring reports from shrimp fishermen for the first three months of the Mississippi shrimp season. Each shrimp fisherman can submit up to 23 trip tickets. To date 3,094 individual shrimp harvest trip tickets have been submitted by fishermen.

Since 1999, the MS Derelict Crab Trap Cleanup has yielded over 17,000 derelict crab traps recovered and recycled, with over 12,000 of those traps being recovered by storm-affected commercial fishermen participating in EDRP II. The cleanup has been a cooperative effort of MS commercial fishermen, MDMR, and Gulf Coast Research Lab (GCRL). For these efforts the MS program has been awarded a First Place 2008 EPA Gulf of Mexico Program Gulf Guardian Award, which will be presented at the EPA Partnerships in Action 20th Anniversary Celebration, October 29 in New Orleans.

The Artificial Reef Bureau personnel side scanned six coastal harbors after Hurricane Gustav to locate possible navigational hazards within the harbors and navigational channels. Reef personnel were also asked to side scan Port Bienville in Hancock County to allow commercial traffic in the port. All data was given to the local authorities for the removal of the debris.

There were 315 Goliath Reef Balls and two steel hull vessels deployed during this time frame in reef sites south of Horn Island. Funding for this project was provided by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and EDRP I.

There are 56 charter boat operators under contract. Captains turned in reports on a monthly basis through May 2008. 756 fisheries recovery reports have been submitted. Data is being scanned into a database and checked for errors. Some preliminary analysis has been conducted. EDRP I funds for this program ended May of 2008. 4,828 fisheries recovery reports were submitted for this job. EDRP II funds are being utilized to continue this program and an additional 1612 recovery reports have been submitted under this program.

Fifty commercial fishermen have signed contracts to participate in fisheries recovery monitoring, which began March 15, 2008. As of August 31, 2008, 826 commercial finfish fishermen trips have been reported. The commercial fisheries recovery report program is ongoing with EDRP II funds.

New recreational fishing records for May and June of 2008.

Conventional Tackle

Yellowtail snapper: 6 lbs .32 oz
Striped Burrfish: 1 lb 4 oz
Spotfin Hogfish: 10.4 oz
Finetooth Shark: 11 lbs 7.92 oz
Bonnethead shark: 7 lb 14.07 oz
Greater Amberjack: 111 lb .8 oz

Blue Runner: 7 lbs 14.99 oz
Atlantic Cutlassfish: 2 lb 2.2 oz
Bearded Brotula: 14 lb 5.6 oz
Blacknose Shark: 14 lb 13 oz
Leatherjacket: 3.34 oz

Fly Fishing Tackle

Bluefish: 2 lb 10.86 oz
Gray Snapper: 5 lb 12.65 oz

The Seafood Technology Bureau (STB) has certified fifty three licensed seafood dealers and processors:

Crab Licensed Processors and Dealers:	10
Shrimp Licensed Processors and Dealers:	19
Oyster Licensed Processors and Dealers:	24

Prior to Hurricane Katrina, Mississippi had 76 certified.

Bureau personnel participated in the ISSC sponsored *Vibrio vulnificus* workshop at Kenner, LA to discuss on the *V. vulnificus* controls and its effectiveness, and the short/long term strategies that maybe considered for recommendation to ISSC. To drum up *V. vulnificus* workshop participation from the MS seafood industry, invitations were mailed out to the industry.

Louisiana Report

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) is, again actively engaged in hurricane damage assessment and recovery following Hurricanes Gustav and Ike. After search and rescue missions were terminated a statewide assessment was conducted with losses identified. Utilizing information gathered by LDWF, the Louisiana State University Agricultural Center, and Louisiana Sea Grant preliminary Louisiana loss estimates are as follows:

Marine Commercial Fisheries Revenue Loss: \$37,000,000 to \$71,000,000
Recreational Charter Fisheries Loss: \$6,500,000 to \$10,500,000
Infrastructure Damages: \$121,000,000 to \$169,000,000

These economic loss estimates will continue to be updated as more information becomes available. In addition LDWF staff assessed natural resource damages. There were extensive freshwater fish kills noted and major losses to coastal wetland habitats. Increased oyster mortality was noted after both storms with areas near Gustav's landfall and in the northern Pontchartrain Basin suffering the highest mortalities. Damage to LDWF facilities included damage to several coastal field offices ranging from minor to

severe. Louisiana has received a TED exemption out to 20 nm that started September 24 and will expire on October 26.

The Bonnet Carre' Spillway was opened on April 11, 2008 for 28 days allowing Mississippi River water to flow into Lake Pontchartrain. The spillway is opened when river stages threaten the safety of the levee protection system around New Orleans. The LDWF initiated an intensive monitoring in cooperation with the University of New Orleans. The spillway opening resulted in large algal blooms and isolated fish kills. Although the salinity of the Lake was greatly reduced, there do not appear to be long-term negative changes. This large data set is currently being analyzed and represents the largest data gathering event during any spillway opening.

The Department continues to oversee the disbursement of fisheries related aid funding following the hurricanes of 2005. To date a total of \$10.8 million of the \$22 million dedicated to public and private oyster fisheries (EDRP 1) has been spent. This includes monies used for the Private Oyster Lease Rehabilitation (POLR) Program and the planting of cultch on the Public Oyster Seed Grounds. The POLR program will continue through June 2009. To-date cultch planting projects have been conducted in Breton Sound, Mississippi Sound and Hackberry Bay in the Barataria Bay system. Water bottom assessments in anticipation of cultch planting have been conducted in St Bernard Parish, Calcasieu and Sabine Lakes, and Sister Lake.

Debris removal efforts continue throughout coastal Louisiana focusing on the fishing grounds. Four hundred square miles of coastal water bottoms in Breton Sound, Lake Pontchartrain Middle Grounds, Lake St Catherine, Calcasieu Lake and Vermilion/Cote Blanche Bays have been cleaned of debris through the Department's contract with Crowder-Gulf Joint Venture. LDWF continues to work with the LA Recovery Authority (LRA), the LA Department of Natural Resources (LDNR) and Governors Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness (GOHSEP), federal agencies and local and parish officials and community and fishing organizations to identify the locations of underwater obstructions which are fouling the fishing grounds or access channels used by fishing vessels.

In addition, direct assistance payments have begun to Louisiana resident commercial fishers, commercial fishing vessel license holders in selected fisheries, wholesale/retail dealers, and charter boat guides impacted by Katrina and Rita and who meet qualifying criteria. Since late June more than \$15 million has been disbursed to program participants. (For a complete description of activities please refer to EDRP 2 reports).

In the wake of Hurricanes Gustav and Ike, the Department has identified funds within the first EDRP grant to reprogram into cooperative research to monitor recovery of the fishing industries. Staff is working with the Louisiana Department of Economic Development to implement a reimbursement grant program that will provide recovery and socioeconomic survey data from Louisiana resident commercial fishers, wholesale/retail dealers and recreational marinas.

With the passage of current legislation, the LDWF is now designing a reporting system for the recreational charter industry. The for-hire reporting will be voluntary and will provide valuable management information.

The Habitat section continues to work with state and federal partners concerning the myriad coastal restoration and hurricane protection projects occurring throughout the state. These include several new freshwater introductions and extensive levee systems. In addition, two outside projects have been funded using EDRP 1 funds; the first concerns the utilization of cultch materials as shoreline protection. The second investigates the interaction between aquatic organisms and water control weirs. The project will utilize acoustic imaging.

Louisiana opened and closed recreational red snapper season with creel and size limits consistent with Federal regulations.

Established emergency rules and published Notice of Intent to establish permanent rules for harvest of Large Coastal Shark (LCS) in Louisiana waters similar to those in EEZ waters. However, commercial state-permitted shark harvesters would be allowed 33 LCS per vessel, with one trip per day. Likewise, federally-permitted vessels would be limited to one trip per day (not limited in Federal regulations).

Louisiana continues to examine the life history and fisheries characteristics of species that are experiencing increasing harvest pressures with new regulations (such as gray and vermillion snappers).

The Crustacean Program anticipates greatly increasing samples in outside waters to complement current SEAMAP sampling.

The Department continues its involvement in the Louisiana Cooperative Marine Sport Fish Tagging Program. Since the program's redevelopment in 2004, over 10,000 red drum and spotted seatrout have been tagged by volunteer anglers. To date, there have been over 650 recaptures.

Activity continues concerning a spotted seatrout telemetry study in Calcasieu Lake. The work is being conducted by the Louisiana State University in cooperation with the LDWF. The acoustic receivers were removed before hurricane activity and have since been redeployed.

The Artificial Reef Program continues to assess and permit reef deployments related to oil and gas structures. Hurricane Gustav severely damaged the 4 buoys marking the Grand Isle 9 Reef. The Artificial Reef Program has already received inquiries about reefing some of the 52 oil and gas platforms destroyed by Hurricane Ike. Further assessments will be necessary before deciding whether to accept any of the destroyed structures as artificial reefs.

The LDWF is collaborating with Southeastern Louisiana University to examine the genetic structure of red drum and spotted seatrout populations within Louisiana's bay systems.

Texas Report

Regulatory Issues

The TPW Commission established a total allowable catch (TAC) limit on Gulf menhaden caught in the Texas Territorial Sea and commercially landed in Louisiana. The TAC went into effect on 1 September 2008 and was set at the previous 5-year (2002-2006) average of 31.5 million pounds per year. This regulation did not apply to the 2008 fishing season, but Mike Carmony, General Manager of Omega Protein's Cameron Plant, reported Texas landings on a weekly basis as a trial run for next year's season. This effort proved to be a good opportunity to develop communication formats, which worked out well. Each week, a weekly report was provided that reported the previous week's landings, the percentage of the TAC poundage landed and remaining.

The Commission also approved sending proposed regulation changed for offshore aquaculture to the Texas Register for public comment. The proposed changes are administrative in nature.

Menhaden Total Allowable Catch

With just a few weeks remaining in the 2008 menhaden fishery, it appears this year's landings from Texas waters will top out at 30.9M pounds, which is about 98% of the TAC (if it was in place). Tropical weather impacted Cameron's 2008 operations. This year, the last Texas menhaden landings occurred during the week of July 27th. Cameron did not catch any fish in Texas waters due to fishing in Louisiana waters, Tropical Storm Edouard, and hurricanes Gustav and Ike. Damages at the Cameron plant resulting from Hurricane Ike prevented the Cameron plant from processing fish for the balance of the 2008 fishing season. The Cameron boats continue to fish, but they are delivering their catch to the Abbeville, Louisiana and Moss Point, Mississippi plants. As such, it is highly unlikely that they will make any more sets in Texas waters.

Coastal Fisheries Programs & Projects

Life History Research - PRBMFRS

All ongoing routine life history special studies continued, including the FIN biological sampling program. Coastal Fisheries' Life History Team completed and submitted a final report for the sand seatrout life history project. Spotted seatrout otoliths from gill net samples continue to be collected for an age analysis study.

Genetics Research - PRBMFRS

Coastal Fisheries Genetics Team continued collecting finclip samples from southern flounder and alligator gar for genetic variation studies. Red drum fin clip and otolith collections continue for a DNA project being conducted by Dr. John Gold at Texas A&M University.

Artificial Reef Project

TPWD staff continued their discussions with Resolve Marine Services on the status of the *Texas Clipper* ship. Formal mediation took place on 8 October 2008 to discuss damages.

Three petroleum platforms have been reefed since the last reporting. Several other petroleum platforms are in various stages of completion, delayed several times by Hurricanes Dolly, Gustav, and Ike.

The program is working towards the completion of the cleanup of an obsolete tugboat (Coshecton) that hopefully will be the center point of a nearshore reef site.

Buyback Programs

Inshore Shrimp License Management Program

During the TPWD's Commission meeting in May, a significant contribution of \$1.2 million was received from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation for the final big push on outside fundraising for the shrimp license buyback program.

The application period for the 22nd round of the Commercial Shrimp Boat License Buyback Program closed on April 25, 2008. Approval of 69 licenses (35 Bay Shrimp Boat Licenses and 34 Bait Shrimp Boat Licenses) was granted for a total price of \$570,000, average purchase price was \$8261 (actual range \$4000 to \$10,000).

The application period for the 23rd round of the Commercial Shrimp Boat License Buyback Program closed on September 15th. There were 60 applications received, representing 88 licenses. Approval for 56 licenses (26 Bay Shrimp Boat Licenses and 30 Bait Shrimp Boat Licenses) was granted for a total price of \$462,000. The accepted bid range is from \$7000 to \$9700, with an average bid price per license of \$8,250. These licenses were accepted using the ranking procedure used in Round 22, with the Executive Director option to purchase any additional licenses that are within 10% of the current valuation.

Crab License Management Program

The application period for the 9th round of the Commercial Crab Fisherman's License Buyback Program closed on September 15th. There were 13 applications received. Approval for 8 licenses was granted for a total price of \$55,699, at an average bid price per license of \$6,962. These licenses were accepted using the ranking procedure used in Round 8, with a base price of \$4,000 which could be credited with an additional \$1250 for each license history year between 2004 and 2007. The maximum bid the Department would accept would be \$9,000.

Commercial Finfish License Management Program

The application period for the 12th round of the Commercial Finfish Fisherman's License Buyback Program closed on September 15th. There were 26 applications received. Approval for 17 licenses was granted for a total price of \$120,200, at an average bid price per license of \$7,070. These licenses were accepted using the ranking procedure used in

Round 11, with a base price of \$4,000 which could be credited with an additional \$1,250 for each license history year between 2004 and 2007. The maximum bid the Department would accept would be \$9,000. One license, outside the EMV was accepted as the license holder received additional credit for flounder landings in excess of 1,000 pounds.

2008 Fish Stocking Efforts

Red drum - 19,237,768

Spotted Seatrout - 2,907,882

Oysters

During Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission Oyster Technical Task Force (TTF) meeting in Ocean Springs, Mississippi, Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries staff revealed their plans to open the Louisiana side of Sabine Lake to commercial oyster harvest. The oyster reefs in this system have not been commercially harvested since the mid-1960's and most likely represent the only natural, sub-tidal oyster reefs in the U.S. that have not been subject to recent commercial fishing impacts. The LA-TX state line runs across this reef, so impacts to the Texas habitat are expected as there are no current boundaries that can be used for enforcement purposes.

Coastal Fisheries Oyster Mapping and Restoration Team continues to collect high resolution sidescan and bathymetry data on the main reef and plan to re-assess this reef after commercial harvest, should it open, in order to better assess gear impacts to oyster reefs by comparing pre-fishing data against post-fishing data.

Coastal Fisheries staff was notified that water quality sampling in Sabine Lake, conducted to assess the possibility of opening the Louisiana side of the lake to year-round commercial oyster fishing, will conclude in August. Bacteriological results suggest that water quality standards will be adequate to allow commercial oyster harvest. Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries staff have not finalized their decision but expect to get pressure from industry to open the area once the bacteriological data is released. It's not expected that the area will open until sometime next year.

A meeting between LDWF, TPWD (CF and Law Enforcement), Texas Department of State Health Services, and Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals staff was held in Lake Charles, Louisiana to discuss issues related to a possible opening.

Input is being sought from the core states (Florida, Louisiana, Texas and California) of the Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Conference, Food and Drug Administration and Texas Department of State Health Services on what management strategies will be implemented to better control *Vibrio vulnificus* levels in oysters so that reportable cases meet the 60% reduction mandate. The main goal is to reduce the temperature of the oyster as soon as possible to limit the growth of Vv. Several options, including incorporating the use of seawater chillers on-board vessels to spray cooled water over the oysters, harvesting during periods of the day when air temperatures are coolest (e.g. at night), transferring oysters to large vessels with onboard coolers during harvest operations, and reducing the

time between harvest and when the oysters are placed under refrigeration. Obviously, some of these options would require approval and regulation changes by TPWD.

Hurricane Ike made landfall on the Texas coast at Galveston on Saturday, September 13, 2008. A 15-20 foot storm surge preceded the storm and was responsible for severe damage to commercial fishing industry infrastructure. Several oyster boats were sunk, lost or relocated up to 20 miles away from their dock. Anecdotal reports from commercial oyster fishermen and preliminary TPWD data indicate oyster resources were impacted by sedimentation and heavy debris fields. TPWD will be conducting sidescan sonar surveys and fishery independent sampling over previously surveyed transects to better assess resource impacts. Water quality remains an issue and Galveston Bay remains closed as many waste water treatment plants are still off-line. It is possible that the opening of the public oyster season in Galveston Bay may be delayed depending on water sampling conducted by the Texas Department of State Health Services, Seafood and Aquatic Life Group.

TPWD is dealing with a problem that involves groups dumping shell cultch in areas without the involvement of TPWD. Coastal Fisheries believe they should be coordinating with TPWD on the best location for restoration efforts. As the guidelines are developed we want to ensure future efforts are directed to areas that actually need restoration and the locations have been vetted by local staff as being suitable for supporting oyster restoration (taking into consideration future water resource issues, if possible).

Special Efforts, Studies and Topics

Red Tide/ Brown Tide/ Pfiesteria/ Hypoxic Zones/ Fish Kills/Tropical Storms

In mid-March, the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) closed Aransas, Corpus Christi, and Copano bays to shellfish harvesting and issued a recall of oysters, clams, and mussels because of an algae bloom. The DSHS considers St. Charles Bay and Carlos Bay as part of the "Aransas Bay Complex," so these bays were also closed. DSHS officials say high concentrations of the Dinophysis organism have been found in several locations in the area. The toxin produced by this algae bloom, okadaic acid, can accumulate in shellfish tissue and cause diarrhetic shellfish poisoning, or DSP, in people who consume oysters, clams, or mussels. Shellfish harvested from these bays or purchased on March 1 or later were included in the recall. DSHS officials said they know of no health issues associated with people being in water containing the algae.

After the initial closure of Corpus Christi, Aransas (including St. Charles Bay and Carlos Bay) and Copano bays due to the bloom of *D. acuminata* and the resulting okadaic acid levels, DSHS expanded their oyster sampling efforts north and closed an additional 7 bays as a preventative measure: Mesquite, San Antonio, Espiritu Santo, Lavaca, Tres Palacios, Caranchaua and Matagorda. By the end of March, DSHS received oyster tissue results from the FDA and re-opened the approved portion of Lavaca Bay, Caranchaua Bay and the approved portion of Tres Palacios Bay. Oyster samples in Aransas and San Antonio Bay contain toxin above the FDA action level. Toxin below

but near the action level was observed in samples from Espiritu Santo near Matagorda Bay. Therefore, DSHS kept Matagorda Bay, Espiritu Santo and Mesquite Bay closed.

On April 8, 2008, the DSHS opened Corpus Christi, Aransas, and Copano Bays to shellfish harvesting. With this opening, all Texas bays previously closed because of the Dinophysis bloom have been opened to harvest. DSHS will continue to monitor Dinophysis cells in the previously affected areas.

In mid-July, TPWD received reports of reddish-colored water near the Texas City Dike in Galveston Bay and Sabine Pass. The species for both areas was identified as *Alexandrium monilatum*, a species that can cause fish and invertebrate kills. *A. monilatum* is one of a few bioluminescent dinoflagellate species, which was good to know when a concerned early-morning angler reported glowing waves in a Sabine Pass boat ramp, and how his cast net forming a large luminescent ring when it hit the water as well as a glowing prop wash as he left the area. There were no fish kills or other effects associated with the bloom.

On March 19, 2008, EPA added an abandoned toxic waste site in the San Jacinto River to the National Priorities List (NPL) of Superfund sites. This Superfund listing results from collaborative efforts of TPWD, TCEQ and EPA to address the problem of dioxin contamination in the Houston Ship Channel, the San Jacinto River and Galveston Bay, where fish consumption advisories for dioxin have been in place since 1990. In 2005, TPWD received anecdotal information suggesting the presence of abandoned waste pits in the area. Coastal Fisheries staff researched the information, found it credible, and informed TCEQ, who moved quickly to sample the area. Their sampling confirmed extremely high levels of dioxin, which is due to waste pits that were used for transfer or disposal of a paper mill's wastewater treatment sludges in the 1960's. Modeling suggests that dioxin from the waste pits has spread widely in the Houston Ship Channel and Upper Galveston Bay.

On July 8, 2008, The Texas Department of State Health Services issued an advisory warning people to limit their consumption of spotted seatrout and catfish from Galveston Bay. The advisory, which includes Chocolate Bay, East Bay, West Bay, Trinity Bay and contiguous waters, was issued after a two-year study showed elevated levels of dioxins and PCBs, in the two fish. Other fish species such as red drum, black drum and flounder were sampled and found safe to eat. Adults are advised to limit consumption of the two fish to no more than one 8-ounce meal a month. Women who are nursing, pregnant or who may become pregnant and children should not eat any catfish or spotted seatrout from these waters. This marks the first time the state health department has issued an advisory for an inshore gamefish species from an entire major bay system. TPWD worked closely with DSHS to prepare for the advisory, and the department has prepared a set of Frequently Asked Questions on the TPWD Web site. The advisory appears to have sparked less initial concern among anglers and the public than had been expected. Coastal Fisheries staff, marina operators, fishing guides, and others are continuing to watch how the advisory may affect long-term pressure and landings.

Coastal Fisheries facility near Brownsville fared well through Hurricane Dolly in mid-July, considering how close the eye of the storm came to Brownsville. All staff members were fine and the field station was in good shape except for downed trees, limbs, and power lines. The storm made landfall on South Padre Island about 35 miles northeast of Brownsville as a Category Two Hurricane, maximum sustained winds were about 100 mph with higher gusts on July 23.

On 5 August 2008, the eye of Tropical Storm Edouard passed over Sea Rim State Park near Port Arthur, causing minimal wind damage from gusts up to 60 mph. and dumping a little more than an inch of rain. Coastal Fisheries, Wildlife and other divisions with field offices and sites in the storm's pathway reported no major damage or problems.

On Labor Day, East Texas dodged Hurricane Gustav. For TPWD this storm was a case of better safe than sorry. In the post-Katrina world, TPWD facilities improved their preparedness and response plans, and by all accounts those plans rolled out flawlessly with Gustav. More than 230 TPWD game wardens equipped with high-clearance vehicles and shallow-draft boats were pre-positioned to respond to rescue and evacuation requests in East Texas and Louisiana as Gustav rolled ashore. Staff in the Coastal Fisheries, Inland Fisheries, and Wildlife divisions stayed busy with Gustav preparation and response. Several offices and sites along the coast and East Texas were evacuated temporarily, but all quickly reopened.

On September 13, 2008, Hurricane Ike struck the upper Texas gulf coast near Galveston. Sixty-six TPWD employees suffered losses from or were affected by Hurricane Ike. Insults range from some who lost everything to others who were temporarily inconvenienced and had additional costs such as hotel lodging. Galveston Island and Sea Rim state parks were destroyed by the hurricane. The storm's 15-20 ft surge pushed 4-feet of water through the Port Arthur Marine Lab, destroying furnishings, equipment, supplies, and files; and left a few inches of mud behind.

Hurricane Ike caused widespread flooding and infrastructure damage all along the upper Texas coast. Sabine Lake and Galveston Bay makes up approximately 37 percent of the inshore waters of the Texas coast. This is area is an important center for both recreational and commercial fisheries, accounting for approximately 55% of the ex-vessel value of commercial landings and 36% of the total recreational fishing pressure along the Texas coast.

The impact of Hurricane Ike has resulted in the closure of waters that had been approved for commercial or recreational harvest of oysters. This closure took effect at 12:01a.m., September 13, 2008 and remains in effect until further notice. All Texas public oyster reefs are currently closed to harvest, so only the commercial oyster lease industry is impacted by Hurricane Ike. The public oyster season along the entire coast will begin on November 1, 2008. The Shellfish Order may impact this opening in Galveston Bay.

A larger issue is the return of power and availability of fuel to the commercial fishing industry in Sabine Pass to the Galveston Bay area. Lack of electrical power has resulted

in a loss of fish products that were stored in freezers and storage facilities of commercial fish houses and processors. It is unknown at this time the number of commercial vessels which may have been damaged by Hurricane Ike, but those vessels that could otherwise be operating at the current time will have limited fuel sources and limited commercial dealer facilities in the Sabine Pass or Galveston area to purchase their products. If they were to fish, at the current time they would have to travel further west outside the storm affected area to process or deliver their catch.

In addition to impacting commercial fisheries, Hurricane Ike also severely impacted recreational fishery operations (fishing guides, charter boats, and party boats) along much of the coast during most of the week of Sept. 8-13 because of storm preparation and evacuations. The impacts of Ike on Galveston Bay and Sabine Lake will continue until electricity is reestablished, infrastructure is rebuilt, and travel can resume to normal levels in the area.

All current and former Coastal Fisheries staff members of the Ecosystem Management Program were recognized by the TPWD Commission on receiving the State of Texas Public Employees Association Unsung Heroes Award. The Unsung Hero award honors outstanding public service and community contributions of individual state employees and groups of state employees.

The first TPWD commission meeting to go on the road in more than a decade drew an impressive crowd during mid-August at the Houston Zoo's Brown Education Center in late August. About 60 speakers addressed the commission on a variety of topics. The consensus seems to point to the commission hitting the road for another meeting in the near future.

On 30 June 2008, Dr. Larry McKinney, Coastal Fisheries Division Director, retired from TPWD in order to take up the position as Executive Director of the Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies (HRI) at Texas A&M University Corpus Christi.

As of 2 October 2008, Mike Ray is the acting Division Director for the Coastal Fisheries Division until the position is filled.

A new position, called Deputy Executive Director for Natural Resources, has been created to oversee the department's Wildlife, Coastal and Inland Fisheries Divisions. The intent is to bring more scientific and policy expertise to help lead these divisions as they face large-scale conservation challenges, such as water resources for people and wildlife, changing demographics of private landownership, invasive species, climate change, declining and fragmented fish and wildlife habitats, and evolving outdoor recreation trends.

Sadly, Sea Center Texas' beloved Gordon the Grouper died in late June. Staff went to extraordinary lengths to save the king of the offshore aquarium but in the end, he was too sick to respond favorably.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Report

The Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) does not have a budget yet for Fiscal Year (FY) 2009. A continuing resolution (CR) was passed by the Congress and signed by the President on September 30. The CR funds the agency at 2008 levels through March 6. The bill also provides \$75 million in supplemental funding for hurricane damages. The President's budget request to the Congress for Resource Management for 2009 was about \$1.07 billion, about \$10 million less than the FY 2008 enacted level. Most of the reductions would be in construction and land acquisition. The request for the Endangered Species Program is \$146.8 million, about \$3.7 million less than for 2008. The request for Fisheries is \$116.6 million, a decrease of \$9.9 million from the 2008 level. Included within that amount is a request for Aquatic Habitat and Species Conservation of \$47.3 million, which is about \$6.4 million less than in 2008, including a major decrease for fish passage of \$5.9 million.

On September 24 the National Fish Habitat Conservation Act of 2008 was introduced in the Senate. This bill would authorize specific funding to be dedicated to implementing the National Fish Habitat Action Plan through actions to restore and enhance stream, lake, and coastal habitat to improve recreational fishing and help recover endangered species. During FY 2008 the FWS provided more than \$3 million from general operating funds to support 70 fish habitat projects in 31 states across the nation. The bi-partisan legislation was jointly introduced by Senators Lieberman, Bond, Clinton and Voinovich.

A 90-day finding published in the Federal Register on March 25, 2008 found that the petition received by NOAA Fisheries Service and the FWS on November 15, 2007 to change the listing of the western North Atlantic loggerhead sea turtle population from threatened to endangered status under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) presented substantial scientific information indicating that the action may be warranted. Early this year two FWS Southeast Region personnel were assigned to a Loggerhead Biological Review Team to advise the NOAA Fisheries Service and FWS on the status of loggerhead populations globally.

The draft Atlantic Loggerhead Sea Turtle Recovery Plan was published in the Federal Register on May 30, 2008, and comments were accepted through July 29. The Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle Recovery Plan is also being revised. The Recovery Team is supposed to be meeting this week to discuss comments on the draft plan.

Approximately 17,000 Kemp's ridley sea turtle nests were documented on beaches in Mexico this year, which is another record for recorded nests since the United States and Mexico began bi-national efforts to conserve the species. In addition to these, 197 nests were documented on US beaches as of the end of August.

Partly as a result of discussions with staff of the FWS Panama City Ecological Services Field Office (ESFO) in Florida, the Bay County Tourist Development Council recommended that the Panama City Beach City Council and the Bay County Commission

formally adopt a draft lighting ordinance to help protect sea turtle hatchlings on Bay County beaches.

Also in the Florida Panhandle, Walton County is working with the Panama City ESFO to establish a lighting ordinance to protect sea turtles. Using a digital terrain model generated from LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) data in a geographic information system (GIS), the FWS conducted viewshed analyses to determine the visibility of lights along the 26-mile coastline at various distances landward of the mean high water. This information was then used to establish the zone within which landowners must install turtle-friendly lighting.

The FWS is working with the State of Florida to develop a statewide habitat conservation plan (HCP) for beach habitats. The lead agency for development of the plan is the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). Through completion of an HCP stakeholders/participants can be granted incidental take permits for ESA listed species by the FWS under Section 10(a) of the ESA for construction or other activities that would otherwise be prohibited, provided certain conditions are met through provisions of the HCP.

In 2008 the FWS awarded more than \$337,681 in international conservation grants under the Marine Turtle Conservation Fund to aid recovery of endangered sea turtles in six countries and provide training for natural resource managers in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The FWS continues to work with the US Army, Corps of Engineers (CE) and other state and federal agencies in the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint (ACF) rivers watershed to deal with drought conditions in the river basin. During late 2007 the CE developed a plan for reducing water releases from the basin's reservoirs, primarily Lake Lanier in Georgia, which serves as the major water supply for the City of Atlanta. The FWS determined that the plan would not jeopardize the continued existence or critical habitats of the Gulf sturgeon, fat threeridge mussel and the purple bankclimber mussel. Proposed revisions to that plan this spring triggered the need for a revised biological opinion (BO) from the FWS on the plan's effects on those species as well as another mussel, the Chipola slabshell. The revised BO, released on June 2 stated that the plan revisions would not appreciably reduce the likelihood that the four listed species would survive nor preclude their future recovery. The revised plan provides for reduced flow down to 4,500 cubic feet per second (CFS) at Jim Woodruff Lock and Dam during periods of extreme drought. The revised plan provides some slight benefit to the Apalachicola River estuary in that it decreases the number of days per year of flows less than 16,000 CFS which would shorten some periods of high salinity in the bay.

The FWS Florida Panhandle Coastal Program assisted in forming the Panhandle Living Shoreline Initiative in 2006 to discourage coastal armoring and promote a softer approach to coastal development. Following a similar event held in Alabama last fall, partners in the initiative hosted a free public workshop on June 13 attended by over 100 people to learn what living shorelines are, where it's appropriate to construct them, how to get permits, and who can help.

The FWS this spring began publishing a quarterly magazine focused on the agency's Fisheries Program. The magazine titled *Eddies: Reflections on Fisheries Conservation* highlights the aquatic conservation work of the Fisheries Program and its partners. The new magazine is a key component of the FWS's efforts to better communicate with the public. It can be read online or subscribed to for e-mail alerts or print copies at www.fws.gov/eddies.

Effective September 15, 2008 the FWS implemented changes to regulations governing international transport of sturgeon and paddlefish caviar. The regulations reduce from 250 to 125 grams the amount of caviar that international travelers may carry into or out of the country as a personal effect (i.e., without a permit). The regulation implements changes recommended by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) to protect sturgeon and paddlefish species worldwide.

During FY 2008 the FWS's National Fish Passage Program provided nearly \$8.3 million to remove or bypass more than 168 barriers to fish passage. Along with nearly \$18 million in partnership funds, the Fish Passage Program will help reopen 1,716 miles of streams and rivers and 9,471 acres to improve habitats for anadromous and other migratory fish and imperiled aquatic species. The Program uses a voluntary, non-regulatory approach to work with municipal, state, tribal and federal agencies, as well as nongovernmental entities to reopen and improve aquatic habitats in the nation's streams and rivers.

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Report

Fishery Openings and Closings and Quota Monitoring Summary

Shrimp: Federal waters off Texas closed to shrimping May 15 and re-opened on July 15, 2008. In March 2009, NOAA Fisheries Service will evaluate the level of effort demonstrated during 2008 in the 10 to 30 fathom depth stratum of the north-central and western Gulf of Mexico. This action will determine if a time-area closure is needed to maintain a 74 percent reduction in effort in this area to help rebuild red snapper.

Recreational Red Snapper: Federal waters opened June 1 and closed August 5, 2008. The recreational fishery in federal waters will re-open June 1, 2009; during early 2009, a quota closure date for federal waters will be projected based on up-to-date recreational landings, and the level of compatibility of state regulations. **Commercial Red Snapper:** As of September 15, 2008, 74 percent of the red snapper quota has been harvested under the Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) program.

Commercial King Mackerel: The 2008-2009 fishing year for the Gulf migratory group of king mackerel began on July 1, 2008. As of mid-August, approximately 38 percent of the quota for the western Gulf of Mexico had been caught, and only minor landings were reported for the eastern Gulf of Mexico. Given the impacts of hurricanes in the western Gulf of Mexico, there is a good possibility this segment of the fishery may not close.

Commercial Shallow Water Grouper (SWG): As of August 31, 2008, 44 percent of the SWG quota had been landed, and 53 percent of the red grouper quota had been landed. NOAA Fisheries Service does not anticipate the SWG fishery will close during 2008. In 2009, a gag quota will be implemented as well. Adjustments to the red grouper and SWG quotas will also be made in 2009.

Commercial Deep Water Grouper and Tilefish: Using landings through mid-April 2008 and projecting subsequent catches based on previous years' landings, NOAA Fisheries Service closed the deep water grouper and tilefish fisheries on May 10, 2008. The projections were optimistic in regard to the anticipated landings, and neither quota was met by the closure date. NOAA Fisheries Service will re-open these fisheries on November 1, 2008, for 10 days to allow the remainder of the quota to be harvested.

Commercial Greater Amberjack and Gray Triggerfish: As of August 31, 2008, approximately 34 percent of the greater amberjack quota and 45 percent of the gray triggerfish quotas had been landed. NOAA Fisheries Service does not anticipate these quotas will be met during 2008. Recreational Greater Amberjack: A recreational quota for greater amberjack was implemented in August 2008. As of July 1, 2008, less than 50 percent of the recreational quota was projected to have been landed. NOAA Fisheries Service does not anticipate this quota will be met during 2008, but will continue to monitor recreational landings through the end of the year. If landings are projected to meet or exceed the quota, then the recreational greater amberjack fishery will be closed.

Recreational Gray Triggerfish: Annual catch limits (ACL) and accountability measures (AMs) for gray triggerfish were implemented in August 2008. As of July 1, 2008, more than 70 percent of the ACL was projected to have been landed. If the ACL is exceeded during 2008, the length of the recreational fishing season in 2009 will be shortened to ensure landings remain within target catch levels.

Permits Status

Active permits as of July 22, 2008:

- 1,737 moratorium Gulf shrimp permits and 319 royal red shrimp endorsements
- 1,350 for-hire coastal pelagic moratorium permits; 49 historical captain permits
- 1,474 commercial king mackerel moratorium permits (includes South Atlantic) (20 commercial king mackerel gillnet)
- 1,472 commercial Spanish mackerel permits (includes South Atlantic)
- 1,323 for-hire reef fish moratorium permits; 48 historical captain permits
- 884 commercial reef fish moratorium permits

Amendment Status

Red Snapper IFQ: NOAA Fisheries Service continues to monitor, develop, and refine the support infrastructure for the IFQ program. A final report for the 2007 fishing year is complete and available on the SERO Web site at <http://www.sero.nmfs.noaa.gov>. In summary, 96 percent of the quota was landed, 1 percent was sanctioned, and 3 percent was not harvested. Under separate action, the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management

Council (Council) and NOAA Fisheries Service lowered the commercial minimum size limit in 2007 to 13 inches fork length (FL), which led to a significant decline in regulatory discards for the commercial fishery.

Framework Action to Revise the List of Allowable Bycatch Reduction Devices (BRDs): NOAA Fisheries Service proposed rulemaking in 2008 to revise the list of allowable BRDs for the Gulf of Mexico shrimp fishery. In summary, the allowable placement of fisheye-type BRDs would be restricted to less than 9 feet from the cod end tie off rings, and the Expanded Mesh BRD would be decertified. A final rule for this action is under review; if published, the new BRD regulations would be effective in the spring of 2009.

Reef Fish Amendment 29: This amendment would establish a multi-species IFQ for the Gulf of Mexico grouper and tilefish fisheries. The proposed IFQ must first be approved by a majority of those voting in a referendum among eligible reef fish permit holders. NOAA Fisheries Service will conduct this referendum in the fall of 2008. Should the referendum pass, NOAA Fisheries Service anticipates the IFQ would be implemented effective January 1, 2010.

Reef Fish Amendment 30A: Amendment 30A contains several regulatory actions intended to end overfishing of greater amberjack and gray triggerfish. NOAA Fisheries Service published a final rule implementing these actions, effective August 4, 2008. Several regulatory actions are intended to control harvest either in-season or by adjusting harvesting restrictions the following year.

- The Regional Administrator (RA) has the authority to close the greater amberjack fishery in-season if annual landings for either the commercial or recreational sector exceed their share of the total allowable catch (TAC).
- In the event overages of greater amberjack occur for a sector, the RA has authority to enact AMs to shorten the fishing seasons for the affected sector, or in the case of the commercial fishery, reduce the quota the following fishing period.
- To restrain greater amberjack harvest to the TAC, the recreational daily bag limit remains at one fish per person, and the recreational size limit is increased to 30-inches FL; bag limits for captains and crews of for-hire vessels are prohibited.
- For gray triggerfish, the commercial and recreational minimum size limit has been increased to 14 inches FL.
- The RA will close the commercial fishery for gray triggerfish in-season when the quota is reached.
- If commercial landings of gray triggerfish exceed the ACL, which is a harvest level higher than the quota, then the quota in the subsequent season would be reduced by the amount the ACL was exceeded in the previous year.
- If the recreational ACL for gray triggerfish is exceeded, the season length would be reduced in the following fishing year.

Reef Fish Amendment 30B: In 2007, stock assessments for gag and red grouper indicated gag were undergoing overfishing, but were not overfished, and red grouper were determined to be rebuilt. Amendment 30B proposes actions to end overfishing of gag, increase red grouper harvest, and would establish sector specific ACLs and AMs for

these two species. The Council recently submitted this amendment to NOAA Fisheries Service for review and possible implementation by the Secretary of Commerce. Because gag are undergoing overfishing, the Council also requested NOAA Fisheries Service to implement an interim rule (see below) to apply-harvestingrestrictions-for-gag-and-other-reeffish-species-undergoingoverfishinguntilthe actions in Amendment 30B can be implemented.

Amendment 30B would establish ACLs, AMs should these limits be exceeded, and other harvesting restrictions intended to constrain harvest to the TAC.

- If the recreational or commercial landings exceed the sector-specific ACLs, the RA would not implement any scheduled quota increases for the following fishing year.
- Currently, there is a SWG commercial quota and a red grouper quota; Amendment 30B also establishes a gag commercial quota. If 80 percent of the gag or red grouper quota is met, the trip limit for the applicable species would be reduced to 200 lb, until the quota for any of the other species, or the SWG complex, is met.
- To reduce discards and discard mortalities in the commercial fishery, the size limit for red grouper would be reduced to 18 inches total length (TL) from its current 20-inch TL size limit.
- For the recreational fishery, there would be a 2-fish per person bag limit on gag, a 2-fish per person bag limit on red grouper, and a 4-fish aggregate grouper bag limit.
- In addition, the recreational fishery for SWG would be closed from February 1 through March 31 each year.
- For the commercial fishery, an area along the 40-fathom edge between the Madison-Swanson and Steamboat Lumps Marine Reserves would be closed to all fishing from January through April. The current February 15 to March 15 Gulf-wide closure for the commercial fishery would be repealed.
- Lastly, there would be a regulation requiring all vessels with a federal reef fish permit to comply with the more restrictive of state or federal regulations when fishing in state waters.

Interim Rule: Because gag are undergoing overfishing, and Amendment 30B will not be implemented by the start of the 2009 fishing year, the Council requested that NOAA Fisheries Service implement interim regulations to control harvest of gag until Amendment 30B regulations are implemented. The interim rule would:

- Establish a commercial quota for gag.
- Establish a 2-fish per person recreational bag limit for gag.
- Extend the current recreational closure for gag to February 1 through March 31 (vs. the current February 15 to March 15 closure).
- Require all vessels with federal reef fish permits to comply with the more restrictive of state or federal regulations when fishing for gag, greater amberjack, gray triggerfish, and red snapper in state waters.
- The 5-grouper aggregate recreational bag limit and February 15 to March 15 commercial closure for gag, black, and red grouper would remain in effect under interim regulations, until replaced or repealed by Amendment 30B regulations (see above).

Generic Aquaculture Fishery Management Plan (FMP): This action would establish a detailed, rigorous, and extensive regional permitting, monitoring, and enforcement process for regulating and promoting environmentally-sound and economically-sustainable aquaculture in federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico. A draft environmental impact statement is currently out for public comment, and the Council is tentatively set to approve this FMP at its October 2008 meeting. Highlights of the requirements include:

- Broodstock must be harvested from U.S. waters of the Gulf of Mexico.
- No genetically modified organisms may be used or possessed at the aquaculture facility.
- Only U.S. hatcheries may provide juvenile organisms for grow-out.
- Notify NOAA Fisheries Service within 24 hours of discovery of major escapements or interactions with marine mammals, endangered species, and migratory birds.
- Create a restricted access zone for each aquaculture facility within which fishing and transit of fishing vessels is prohibited.
- Prohibit the possession of any wild fish or invertebrates at an aquaculture facility or aboard transport or service vessels, vehicles, or aircraft, except when harvesting broodstock.
- Provide 72 hour advance notice to NOAA Fisheries Service to harvest or land product.
- Cultured finfish must be maintained with heads and fins intact.
- Require a permit onboard any vessel, aircraft, or vehicle servicing an aquaculture operation.
- An aquaculture permit may be revoked, suspended, or modified.
- Dealers must possess an Aquaculture Dealer Permit to receive cultured organisms.

Spiny Lobster Joint Amendment: The amendment would establish a minimum import size for spiny lobsters coming into the United States. The amendment is scheduled to be submitted for review by the Secretary of Commerce in October 2008.

- No person in the United States would be allowed to import a spiny lobster with less than 5 ounces tail weight, or if less than 5 ounces, carapace length must be greater than 3.0 inches for whole animals, or the tail must be more than 5.5 inches (for tails only).
- For Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, the imported product must have a tail weight of 6.0 ounces (5.9 — 6.4 ounces), carapace length must be 3.5 inches (whole animals), or the tail must be 6.2 inches (tail only).
- In addition, importation would be prohibited for spiny lobster tail meat which is not in whole tail form with the exoskeleton attached. It would be prohibited to import spiny lobster with eggs attached or to import spiny lobster where the eggs, swimmerets, or pleopods have been removed or stripped.

Protected Resources Division

Tow Time Authorizations: Because of conditions created by Hurricanes Gustav and Ike in the northwestern Gulf of Mexico, NOAA Fisheries Service has authorized the use of tow times in lieu of TEDs by shrimp trawl vessels operating off Louisiana, extending offshore 20 nautical miles, through October 26, 2008. A similar authorization for shrimp vessels operating in Texas from the Louisiana-Texas boundary to the Brazoria-Matagorda County boundary extending offshore 20 nautical miles is expected to be effective for a 30-day period beginning in mid- October.

TED Rule Changes: NOAA Fisheries Service is currently considering several changes to the existing TED regulations, which could potentially apply TED requirements to additional fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico and along the Atlantic coast.

Bottom Longlines: New information collected through NOAA Fisheries Service's observer program for the Gulf of Mexico reef fish fishery indicates this fishery may be interacting with turtles at a rate greater than expected in recent biological opinions. The Southeast Fisheries Science Center is expected to provide information regarding this issue by the end of October, for consideration by NOAA Fisheries Service and the Council.

R. Crabtree added that NOAA authorized a TED exemption the week prior to the meeting for shrimp vessels operating in Texas.

The Bonnet Carré Spillway and Associated Monitoring

C. Brantley gave a presentation on the Bonnet Carré Spillway. The presentation outlined the history of flooding in the lower Mississippi River Valley including the great flood of 1927. The devastation caused by these floods led to Louisiana abandoning the old "levees only" policy and passing the 1928 Flood Control Act that gave the Army Corps of Engineers jurisdiction over flood control in the Lower Mississippi Valley. This Act contained the Mississippi River & Tributaries Project which included constructing the Spillway. Dr. Brantley also talked about the most recent opening that took place on April 11, 2008 and briefly discussed the environmental impacts that resulted from that opening and compared them to the opening in 1997.

A copy of this presentation is on file at the GSMFC office.

C. Perret introduced a letter written by the GSMFC to the ACOE asking for the development of a comprehensive and fully funded monitoring program to be implemented when Mississippi River levels dictate a Bonnet Carré Spillway opening, or when a significant River discharge is forecasted through the "closed" structure. **S. Heath made a motion to recommend that the Commission send the letter to the ACOE. This motion was approved by the TCC with no opposition.**

State Acoustic Monitoring Procedures

Florida: **V. Vail** talked about some of the acoustic studies that FWC's Fish and Wildlife Research Institute are conducting. One of the studies is using internal sonic tags in spotted seatrout, black drum and red drum in the Tampa Bay area to identify the species by the sound they make, to identify the locations of their spawning grounds and to study the species behavior like their movement patterns. They have also used acoustic telemetry for evaluating tarpon catch and release mortality in the Tampa Bay area. The preliminary results of this study show that catch and release mortality is relatively low when the fish is handled properly; however, attacks by large predators like sharks does increase post release mortality rates. The FWC has also used acoustic equipment to study

snook behavior along the south west and east coasts of Florida. All of these studies are still underway.

Alabama: **S. Heath** stated that ADCNR has never done any acoustic monitoring.

Mississippi: **K. Cuevas** expressed that Mississippi has been utilizing acoustic monitoring (side scan sonar) since 2001. They use it for artificial reef and oyster reef monitoring and assessment, derelict vessel removal compliance, search and recovery, verification of navigation hazards for the USCG and MDMR, and for assessing the affects of hurricanes on artificial reefs and navigable waterways.

Louisiana: **V. Guillory** pointed out that LDWF is not directly doing any acoustic monitoring projects. They have however, contracted other organizations like Crowder Gulf to map out marine debris and several years ago they contracted LSU to map out some of their oyster sea grounds and to do some bottom profiles for planned cultch plants. LDWF is also assisting LSU with an ongoing project to track spotted seatrout movement.

Texas: **J. Mambretti** stated that from 2001-2004 acoustic monitoring of spotted seatrout drumming was conducted in bays along the central Texas coast. Through this it was verified that spawning activities is associated with drumming. During 2002-2003 TPWD and Texas A&M University Galveston worked jointly to complete oyster reef surveys in two Texas bays using side scan sonar, sub-bottom profiler and eco sounders to compile maps of the bay bottom. The TPWD's oyster reef mapping project that is funded by the Emergency Disaster Relief Program was able to survey more then six square miles of oyster reefs in Galveston Bay and 2.5 square miles of the main oyster reef in Sabine Lake.

R. Lukens talked briefly about two studies that were conducted by the USGS using acoustic monitoring. The first involved tagging yellow fin tuna off of Venus, Louisiana, with acoustic tags and using acoustic receivers on oil structures in the area to track the movement of the tagged fish to see if they were dependent on the structures. They also looked at the movement of Gulf sturgeon as they moved out of the Suwannee River using a similar experimental design. Ron offered to get the contact information of the researcher conducting these studies for the TCC.

Subcommittee Reports

Crab – **A. McMillen-Jackson** reported that all the states had derelict trap retrievals in 2008 and that many of them were considering postponing their efforts for a year because numbers of retrieved traps has been steadily decreasing. The Subcommittee reported that crab landings were down in all states except for Texas. The Subcommittee also discussed a proposal being submitted by Luis Hurtado to a Texas A&M funding agency to look at blue crab genetics using nuclear DNA to examine populations throughout the Gulf including Mexico. The Subcommittee drafted a letter of support for the proposal on Hurtado's behalf. Tom Wagner was elected as Chairman.

V. Guillory moved to accept the Crab Subcommittee Report and in turn have the TCC approve the letter for submission pending review by the full Commission. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

SEAMAP – **J. Rester** stated that the SEAMAP Subcommittee discussed the new SEAMAP surveys that have started in 2007 and 2008. Louisiana and Alabama will be conducting inshore sampling. Mississippi and NMFS are conducting a winter plankton survey. Texas, Louisiana, and Alabama will be conducting a winter shrimp/groundfish survey. Mississippi and Texas are conducting an inshore adult finfish longline survey. The Subcommittee discussed data management protocols now that the Commission has assumed data management responsibilities for SEAMAP in the Gulf of Mexico. The Subcommittee discussed the new Florida Trawl Survey. The trawl survey was conducted in early August and sampled waters from the Alabama/Florida line to waters off Tampa Bay. Bob McMichael discussed the preliminary results from the survey and stated that Florida would be going out again in October. They would survey the west Florida shelf again in August and October 2009. The data would then be analyzed with a single trawl time period being picked for sampling in 2010 and beyond. Butch Pellegrin discussed a move by NMFS to a standard 30-minute tow time at each trawl station. The survey design will no longer be stratified on day or night or depth. This move will be in an effort to maximize the number of samples collected. The 2008 Fall Shrimp/Groundfish Survey will be the first time that the new survey design is incorporated and it will be analyzed for adoption by the states next year. Jim Hanifen was elected Chairman with Bob McMichael elected to serve as Vice Chairman.

A motion was made by K. Cuevas to accept the report. It was seconded and passed without opposition.

Data Management – **V. Swann** reported that the Data Management Subcommittee discussed the web based data entry program and stated it was on track for a January release. Steve Turner from NMFS discussed upcoming deadlines in Magnuson-Stevens Act under trip ticket requirements for reporting. 2010 is the deadline for reporting overfished species and 2011 for all species (top 100 species). The Subcommittee had a long discussion concerning the request from the Gulf Council to look at the feasibility of trip tickets for the For-Hire Fishery. The Subcommittee decided to wait for the results of three similar projects that are currently underway before making their recommendations. Richard Cody was elected as Chairman and Kerwin Cuevas as Vice Chairman.

D. Frugé made a motion to accept the report and it was seconded and passed unanimously.

Artificial Reef: **J. Ballard** pointed out that the Subcommittee has not had an official meeting since its last report. In response to a motion passed during the Commercial/Recreational Fisheries Advisory Panel's March 2008 meeting; the GSMFC hosted and members of the Subcommittee participated in a meeting to discuss the issues with the Large Area Artificial Reef Sites (LAARS) in North West Florida. The next

Artificial Reef Subcommittee meeting will be held jointly with the ASMFC's Subcommittee on November 12-13, 2008.

A motion to accept the report was moved by S. Heath and passed without opposition.

Federally Funded Program for Reefing Decommissioned Naval Ships

C. Perret introduced a motion to ask the Artificial Reef Subcommittee to look into a program where the federal government would fully fund the reefing of decommissioned naval ships and to generate a letter to the appropriate federal personnel addressing this issue that can be reviewed by the TCC at their next meeting.

K. Cuevas moved the motion and it passed unanimously.

Habitat – **J. Rester** reported that the Habitat Subcommittee met on Monday afternoon and discussed several items. The first item was a discussion of the 2008 hurricane impacts on habitat in Louisiana and Texas. The Subcommittee discussed the Commission's bottom mapping project along with habitat issues of interest from each state. The main agenda item was a discussion of inshore/estuarine artificial reefs. While many states have deployed inshore artificial reefs, currently there is not a set of guidelines or best management practices available for states to provide to interested reef builders. Also, there have not been a lot of studies examining the effectiveness of different materials or configurations. The Subcommittee wanted to develop some type of guidelines or best management practices. The Subcommittee passed a motion that the Habitat Subcommittee requests the Artificial Reef Subcommittee, with the assistance of the Habitat Subcommittee, compile information on state inshore/estuarine artificial reef programs including policies, regulations, issues, and concerns, but not including shoreline protection projects. Heather Finley was elected Chairman with Ron Mezich being elected Vice Chairman.

V. Vail made a motion to accept the report and it passed unanimously.

Other Business

There was no other business to discuss.

Election of Chairman

S. Heath nominated Corky Perret for Chairman and he was elected with out opposition.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:35 p.m.

**STATE-FEDERAL FISHERIES MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
MINUTES – 59th Annual Meeting
Wednesday, October 15, 2008
Key Largo, Florida**

Chairman **V. Vail** called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. Facilitator **D. Donaldson** conducted the meeting. The following members and others were present:

Members

Doug Frugé, USFWS, Ocean Springs, MS
Steve Heath, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL
Randy Pausina, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Corky Perret, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Mike Ray, TPWD, Austin, TX
Dave Donaldson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Roy Crabtree, NMFS, St. Petersburg, FL
Virginia Vail, FFWCC, Tallahassee, FL

Others

Dale Diaz, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Ron Lukens, Omega Protien, High Springs, FL
Harriet Perry, GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Ellie Roche, NOAA/SERO, St. Petersburg, FL
Bonnie Ponwith, NOAA, SEFSC, Miami, FL
Tommy Williams, Daybrook Industries, Baton Rouge, LA
Borden Wallace, Daybrook Fisheries, Empire, LA
Read Hendon, GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Martha Bademan, FFWCC, Tallahassee, FL
Jeff Barger, EDF, Austin, TX
Jackie Wilson, NOAA, HMS, Silver Spring, MD

Staff

Larry Simpson, Executive Director, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
James Ballard, Sportfish Restoration/Aquatic Invasives Coordinator, GSMFC
Gregg Bray, RecFIN(SE) Programmer/Analyst, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Madeleine Travis, FIN Staff Assistant, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Joe Ferrer, Systems Administrator, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Teri Freitas, IJF Staff Assistant, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Alex Miller, Staff Economist, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Ralph Hode, Disaster Program, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Jeff Rester, SEAMAP/Habitat Coordinator, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Steve VanderKooy, IJF Program Coordinator, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Wendy Garner, Accountant, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Adoption of Agenda

The agenda was adopted as presented.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes from the meetings held on March 12, 2008 in Galveston, Texas and August 25, 2008 in New Orleans, Louisiana were approved as written.

Menhaden Advisory Committee Report

V. Guillory of Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries provided the Menhaden Advisory Committee report. There was discussion about discrepancies in landings between the Captains Daily Fishing Reports (CDFRs) and Louisiana trip tickets. **J. Smith** of NMFS explained that with the CDFRs NMFS gets dock unloads and set locations using the improved forms. Further discussion concerned having two different systems between the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic, therefore it was agreed that a meeting be held with **C. Peterson**, **J. Smith**, **G. Davenport**, **R. Lukens**, LDWF and MDMR to see if they can reach a compromise in existing reporting systems for consistency and accurate data collection. **R. Lukens** and LDWF will coordinate a meeting sometime in November or December.

P. Murphy of NOAA's Marine Debris Program provided an overview of the program, specifically in the Gulf of Mexico. The program goals include the survey of offshore areas impacted by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. This survey will be translated into maps to support debris removal. The information and maps generated can be accessed at the project website: <http://gulfofmexico.marinedebris.noaa.gov/>

J. Smith reported on the 2008 Gulf menhaden fishing season. As of September 2008 376,653 metric tons of menhaden had been landed which is down 11% from the previous season and 13% down from the previous 5 year average. There were 41 vessels operating in the Gulf in 2008.

Smith also reported on the Texas reduction quota of about 14,000 metric tons, the closing of the ABC Bait Company in Morgan City, LA, and the high Mississippi River flows this past spring resulting in the opening of the Bonnet Carre' Spillway. In September Hurricane Gustav made landfall near Morgan City. The Gulf menhaden plants survived, but power outages and flooding lead to loss of fishing time. Hurricane Ike caused major flooding in Cameron and Abbeville plants and Cameron will remain closed for the rest of the year. **Smith** also provided an update on the Atlantic menhaden fishery.

The states gave reports on varying amounts of damage to infrastructure, lost fishing days, flooding, loss to habitat, and fish kills due to Hurricane activity in 2008.

J. Rester reported that the Torp Technologies LNG proposal had been withdrawn due to complaints from conservationists and fishery managers. Since Governor Riley of Alabama was going to veto the permit, Torp dropped their request.

J. Smith was re-elected as Chairman of the Menhaden Advisory Committee.

The MAC discussed a motion passed at a previous meeting that recommended finding funding to improve specific gear and sampling to target menhaden recruitment however this has not happened due to lack of funding. The MAC recommended that the SEAMAP Subcommittee develop a protocol specifically targeting menhaden recruitment with an idea of cost and report findings to the MAC.

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

Commercial Recreational Fisheries Advisory Panel Report

S. VanderKooy provided the CRFAP report on behalf of Chairman Philip Horn. The CRFAP met Monday afternoon without a quorum. There are currently two vacancies – the recreational representatives for Florida and Alabama. Although no actions were taken, several items were presented and discussed.

D. Carter of NMFS gave a presentation on collection of critical economic data through the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS). NOAA is proposing some changes to the survey which will include some additional questions as well as information on fuel costs. This is an important component of expenses and contribute to the overall value of a trip.

P. Murphy of NOAA's Marine Debris Program provided an overview of the program, specifically in the Gulf of Mexico. The program goals include the survey of offshore areas impacted by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. This survey will be translated into maps to support debris removal. The information and maps generated can be accessed at the project website: <http://gulfofmexico.marinedebris.noaa.gov/>

J. Wilson of NOAA gave an overview of the proposed Amendment 3 to the 2006 Atlantic Highly Migratory Species Fishery Management Plan and **G. Colvin** of NOAA updated the Panel on the MRIP and the National Saltwater Registry.

Several presentations were given to the CRFAP by GSMFC Program Coordinators including: **G. Bray, J. Ballard, A. Miller, R. Hode, J. Rester, and S. VanderKooy.**

The CRFAP discussed the issue of vacancies on the panel and the lack of a recreational chair. **B. Fairbank** agreed to serve temporarily as recreational chair until such time as a quorum can be achieved and the position of chair filled.

S. Heath moved to accept the Commercial/Recreational Fisheries Advisory Panel report. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

FIN Data Program Report

D. Donaldson reported on the FIN Program and noted that the 2009 cooperative agreement for FIN has been submitted. The agreement includes coordination and administration of FIN activities, collection of marine recreational fisheries data, headboat port sampling in Texas and Florida, menhaden port sampling activities, trip ticket implementation and operation, data management system, recreational and commercial biological sampling. The total budget was just over \$4.9 million. **Donaldson** reported that due to funding shortfalls several critical activities could not be funded. These include at-sea head boat sampling in Texas, Louisiana, Alabama and Florida, and the detailed effort pilot survey. In addition a 10% cut across the board was taken. **Donaldson** noted that any more cuts will affect core programs. Final funding allocations are not yet known, and hopefully funds will be found to restore these activities.

Amendment 3 to the Consolidated HMS Fishery Management Plan

J. Wilson of NOAA Highly Migratory Species Management Division gave a presentation dealing with the current status of small coastal sharks (SCS). Subcommittee members were provided with literature on Amendment 3. **Wilson's** presentation included a summary of current regulations and comments received to date, as well as some potential options and issues for the upcoming Amendment 3 for SCS. **Wilson** noted that new management measures should be in place by January 2010 in order to rebuild and prevent overfishing of blacknose sharks. **Wilson** reviewed current commercial management measures as well as current recreational management measures for SCS.

Wilson noted that Scoping Meetings have been held in July, August, and October of 2008 in Texas, Florida and Massachusetts. She requested feedback on issues, options, and comments by mid November 2008. Email comments to: SCS_Scoping@noaa.gov.

Wilson reported that an amendment is being developed for HMS in the Caribbean as well.

Update on MRIP and National Saltwater Fishing Registry

G. Colvin of NOAA provided an update on the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP). **Colvin** noted that NOAA is very appreciative of the cooperation and service that has been provided by representatives of state agencies, Commissions, and Councils around the country in developing this Program. **Colvin** also noted that NOAA looks forward to hearing from state agencies about anything they can do to maintain that level of commitment and involvement.

Colvin stated that NOAA does expect the Program to result in enhanced accountability, timeliness, and decision making using MRIP recreational data in fishery stock

assessments and fishery management programs. The vision for MRIP is to become the trusted source of recreational fisheries data. **Colvin** reported that the three Commission Executive Directors make up part of the Executive Steering Committee of MRIP. The technical work of overseeing the process is the Operations Team. This Team has several projects underway particularly in the area of the evaluation of the current estimation methods. **Colvin** noted that there is a Communications and Education Team which is involved in developing the website and outreach programs. **Colvin** reported that the Implementation Report has just been issued and the Registry Team is developing the final rule on the National Saltwater Angler Registry which should be implemented in 2009. NOAA is continuing collaboration and engagement through ongoing dialog with stakeholders and their expectations for a well designed program.

The S/FFMC discussed issues concerning states with no saltwater fishing licenses. **Colvin** stated that all of the Atlantic states except New Jersey have a commitment to introduce legislation next year to require saltwater fishing licenses. All of the Gulf States have licenses in place, except Florida which has licenses but does not require them when fishing from shore.

Status of IJF Fishery Management Plans and Other IJF Activities

S. VanderKooy gave an overview on activities related to FMP development. The Oyster Task Force has been working on a revision to the 1991 Oyster FMP and it is currently 85% complete. A final working draft should be completed by the end of this year. After editing, etc. a final draft should be finished by late summer. **VanderKooy** reported that a white trout/sand seatrout profile is also being developed. There will be a meeting in November to continue working on the drafting process. The Crab Subcommittee completed the revision to the derelict traps guideline document. This is available electronically and on the GSMFC website as a download.

VanderKooy reported that the Law Enforcement Committee (LEC) continues to work through their JEA program. A meeting was held this summer with the LEC and the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council Law Enforcement Advisory Panel (LEAP) to update the Gulf of Mexico Cooperative Law Enforcement Strategic Plan as well as their Operations Plan for 2009-2010. **VanderKooy** noted that the LEC had requested a consolidated law enforcement pocket guide for officers only. The LEC was pleased with the draft guide especially with the size which can fit inside an officer's ticket book.

VanderKooy noted that since printing costs have escalated and the amount of publications being done in-house, staff had been discussing making publications available through the GSMFC website as a download or having them available on CD/DVD. Hard copies will still be available when requested.

IJF Compliance Report Card

S/FFMC members were provided with a summary of changes by state for the Fishery Management Plans. The Committee reviewed this summary with **VanderKooy**.

Election of Chairman/Facilitator

V. Vail was retained as Chairman and D. Donaldson as Facilitator.

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:45 a.m.

APPROVED BY:
URS for Powell Gaultier
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**COMMISSION BUSINESS MEETING
MINUTES - 59th Annual Spring Meeting
Wednesday, October 15, 2008
Key Largo, Florida**

Chairman Gill called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m.

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

Steve Heath, ADCNR/MRD, Gulf Shores, AL (*Proxy for Barnett Lawley*)
Virginia Vail, FWC, Tallahassee, FL (*Proxy for Ken Haddad*)
Butch Gautreaux, Louisiana Legislature, Morgan City, LA
Randy Pausina, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA (*Proxy for Robert Barham*)
David McKinney, Environmental Defense Fund, Austin, TX
Mike Ray, TPWD, Austin, TX (*Proxy for Robert L. Cook*)
Joe Gill, Jr., Joe Gill Consulting, LLC, Ocean Springs, MS
Dale Diaz, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
William Perret, MDMR, Biloxi, MS

Staff

Larry Simpson, Executive Director, Ocean Springs, MS
Dave Donaldson, Assistant Director, Ocean Springs, MS
Ginny Herring, Administrative Officer, Ocean Springs, MS
Nancy Marcellus, Administrative Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS
Steve VanderKooy, IJF Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Jeff Rester, SEAMAP/Habitat Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Joe Ferrer, System Administrator, Ocean Springs, MS
Ralph Hode, EDRP Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Alex Miller, Staff Economist, Ocean Springs, MS
Gayle Jones, Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS
Madeleine Travis, Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS

Others

Roy Crabtree, NOAA/NMFS/SERO, St. Petersburg, FL
Doug Frugé, USFWS, Ocean Springs, MS
Ellie Roche, NOAA/NMFS/SERO, St. Petersburg, FL
Ron Lukens, Omega Protein Inc., High Springs, FL
Bonnie Ponwith, NMFS/SEFSC, Miami, FL
Chris Blankenship, Alabama Marine Resources, Dauphin Island, AL
Martha Bademan, FWC, West Palm Beach, FL
Gay Gialian, Texas A&M Sea Grant

Randy Blankinship, NOAA/NMFS/SERO, St. Petersburg, FL
(Please note: there was a missing sign in sheet so all attendees may not be listed.)

Adoption of Agenda

C. Perret moved to adopt the agenda with the following changes: The Sea Grant Fisheries Extension Meeting Report was moved up from Item 21. to Item 4. M. Ray seconded. The agenda was adopted as changed.

Approval of Minutes

C. Perret moved to adopt the minutes. M. Ray seconded. The minutes were adopted as presented.

Sea Grant Fisheries Extension Advisory Panel Report (SG-FEAP)

Gary Graham reported that the SG-FEAP met on Tuesday, October 14. The group received a presentation regarding the Florida Sea Grant Artificial Reef Program Project. The group discussed the benefits of developing a document regarding artificial reefs. The SG-FEAP recommended that the Commission consider the potential of developing a profile of artificial reefs for either the U.S. or Gulf waters.

The SG-FEAP received reports from the Florida, Louisiana, and Texas Sea Grant Programs. These reports discussed current projects and program updates. **G. Graham** advised the Commissioners of mercury concerns and potential benefits of selenium content in fish to counteract mercury uptake. **They recommended that the Commission endorse any upcoming research directed toward the mercury/selenium phenomenon.** **B. Gautreaux** expressed an interest in further discussion on testing selenium as well as mercury. He stated that this is important data. **B. Pondwith** stated that the National Seafood Safety Laboratory has done some testing and that would be a good source of information

GSMFC Standing Committee Reports

Law Enforcement Committee (LEC) – **J. Mayne** reported that the LEC met on Tuesday, October 14, 2008.

He briefly reviewed several topics discussed by the LEC. He presented a PowerPoint presentation that the LEC had reviewed on the previous day. The LEC is concerned about problems with the current Joint Jurisdictional Enforcement Agreement (JEA) software, which has been shutdown due to reporting issues in their database and NOAA has not indicated a willingness to continue support of the JEA software programs.

On behalf of the LEC, **J. Mayne** recommended that the Commission adopt the LEC's *Gulf of Mexico Cooperative Law Enforcement Strategic Plan (2009-2012)* and *Gulf of*

Mexico Cooperative Law Enforcement Operations Plan (2009-2012). **C. Perret** moved to adopt. **S. Heath** Seconded. **The motion was approved.**

Additionally, **J. Mayne** recommended that the Commission direct the Executive Director to draft a letter to Secretary of Commerce, Carlos M. Gutierrez in support of the continuation of the authorization and appropriations for the JEAs and that the Commission support the LEC's request for an increase of these funds from \$13.9M to \$30M. The Commissioners discussed making this recommendation and felt it would be appropriate to move forward in conjunction with the ASMFC and the PSMFC. **C. Perret** made the motion. **V. Vail** amended the motion stating that if ASMFC and PSMFC did not want to jointly make this request, that the Commission do so on its own. **D. McKinney** seconded. **The motion was approved.**

V. Vail moved to approve the LEC report. **S. Heath** seconded. **The report was approved.**

Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) Report – **C. Perret** reported that the TCC met on Tuesday, October 14, 2008. They received written status reports from all of the Gulf States, NMFS and FWS. (These reports are a part of the TCC Minutes in their entirety.) The following subcommittees reported to the TCC: Crab, SEAMAP, Data Management, Artificial Reef, Habitat, and Anadromous Fish Subcommittee. He briefed the Commissioners on their activities.

On behalf of the TCC **C. Perret** recommended the Commission send a letter to Brigadier General Michael J. Walsh to encourage the development of a comprehensive and fully funded monitoring program to be implemented when the Mississippi River levels dictate a Bonnet Carré Spillway operation, or when a significant river discharge is forecasted through the "closed structure". **B. Gautreaux** moved to accept the recommendation. **D. Diaz** seconded. **The motion was approved.**

On behalf of the TCC Crab Subcommittee, **C. Perret** recommended the Commission send a letter to the Review Committee at Texas A & M University, dealing with Collaborative Research Grant Programs to ask them to consider funding the proposal by Drs. Rocha-Olivares, Mateos, and Hurtado to develop a set of amplified fragment length polymorphisms DNA markers to assess population subdivision of the blue crab in the Gulf of Mexico and *C. bellicosus* in the Gulf of California. **B. Gautreaux** moved to accept the recommendation. **S. Heath** seconded. **The motion was approved.**

M. Ray moved to accept the TCC report. **B. Gautreaux** seconded. **The TCC report was accepted as presented.**

State-Federal Fisheries Management Committee (S-FFMC) Report – **D. Donaldson** reported that the S-FFMC met earlier in the day. The S-FFMC received reports from the Menhaden Advisory Committee (MAC) and the Joint Commercial/Recreational Fisheries Advisory Panel (CRFAP). They also heard updates on the Interjurisdictional Fisheries Program, Fisheries Information Network Program, Habitat Program, EDRP I and II.

Other topics discussed included Amendment 3 to the Consolidated HMS Fishery Management Plan and, an update on National Saltwater Fishing Registry.

On behalf of the MAC he recommended that the appropriate people in LDWF, MDMR, NOAA Fisheries and industry, meet to see if they can reach a compromise in the existing reporting systems for consistency and accurate data collection to satisfy LDWF and NOAA. Additionally he recommended that the SEAMAP Subcommittee look at developing a protocol specifically targeting menhaden recruitment. **V. Vail moved to approve both recommendations and the S-FFMC report. D. McKinney seconded. The motion was approved.**

USFWS Region 4 Office Comments

D. Frugé reported on behalf of USFWS. On September 24 the National Fish Habitat Conservation Act of 2008 was introduced in the Senate. This bill would authorize specific funding to be dedicated to implementing the National Fish Habitat Action Plan through actions to restore and enhance stream, lake, and coastal habitat to improve recreational fishing and help recover endangered species. During FY 2008 the FWS provided more than \$3 million from general operating funds to support 70 fish habitat projects in 31 states across the nation. The bi-partisan legislation was jointly introduced by Senators Lieberman, Bond, Clinton and Voinovich.

Approximately 17,000 Kemp's Ridley sea turtle nests were documented on beaches in Mexico this year, which is another record for recorded nests since the United States and Mexico began bi-national efforts to conserve the species. In addition to these, 197 nests were documented on US beaches as of the end of August.

The FWS is working with Florida to develop a statewide habitat conservation plan (HCP) for beach habitats. The lead agency for development of the plan is the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). Through completion of an HCP stakeholders/participants can be granted incidental take permits for ESA listed species by the FWS under Section 10(a) of the ESA for construction or other activities that would otherwise be prohibited, provided certain conditions are met through provisions of the HCP.

The FWS continues to work with the US Army, Corps of Engineers (COE) and other state and federal agencies in the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint (ACF) rivers watershed to deal with drought conditions in the river basin. During late 2007 the COE developed a plan for reducing water releases from the basin's reservoirs, primarily Lake Lanier in Georgia, which serves the major water supply for the City of Atlanta. The FWS determined that the plan would not jeopardize the continued existence or critical habitats of the Gulf sturgeon, fat threeridge mussel and the purple bankclimber mussel. Proposed revisions to that plan this spring triggered the need for a revised biological opinion (BO)

from the FWS on the plan's effects on those species as well as another mussel, the Chipola slab shell. The revised BO, released on June 2 stated that the plan revisions would not appreciably reduce the likelihood that the four listed species would survive nor preclude their future recovery. The revised plan provides for reduced flow down to 4,500 cubic feet per second (CFS) at Jim Woodruff Lock and Dam during periods of extreme drought. The revised plan provides some slight benefit to the Apalachicola River estuary in that it decreases the number of days per year of flows less than 16,000 CFS which would shorten some periods of high salinity in the bay.

The FWS this spring began publishing a quarterly magazine focused on the agency's Fisheries Program. The magazine titled *Eddies: Reflections on Fisheries Conservation* highlights the aquatic conservation work of the Fisheries Program and its partners. The new magazine is a key component of the FWS's efforts to better communicate with the public. It can be read online or subscribed to for e-mail alerts or print copies at www.fws.gov/eddies.

FY 2009 USFWS Budget

Doug Frugé reported on the FWS FY2009 budget. He provided a "budget at a glance" information sheet for the Commissioners that represented the FWS Fiscal Year (FY) 2009 budget justification.

He reported that the FWS does not have a budget yet for FY 2009. A continuing resolution (CR) was passed by the Congress and signed by the President on September 30. The CR funds the agency at 2008 levels through March 6. The bill also provides \$75 million in supplemental funding for hurricane damages. The President's budget request to the Congress for Resource Management for 2009 was about \$1.07 billion, about \$10 million less than the FY 2008 enacted level. Most of the reductions would be in construction and land acquisition. The request for the Endangered Species Program is \$146.8 million, about \$3.7 million less than for 2008. The request for Fisheries is \$116.6 million, a decrease of \$9.9 million from the 2008 level. Included within that amount is a request for Aquatic Habitat and Species Conservation of \$47.3 million, which is about \$6.4 million less than in 2008, including a major decrease for fish passage of \$5.9 million.

Essential Fish Habitat Amendment to the Consolidated Highly Migratory Species FMP

R. Blankinship gave the Commissioners a PowerPoint presentation on Draft Amendment 1 to the Consolidated HMS FMP-Essential Fish Habitat (EFH). The EFH requirements are to identify and describe EFH; minimize effects on EFH caused by fishing activities; and, identify actions to encourage conservation and enhancement. The EFH Regulations published in 2002 require a review of EFH information at least once every 5 years. He reviewed the EFH Amendment timeline which should be finalized in

the summer of 2009. He discussed how to access the EFH data and provided information about future public hearings.

Presentation of GSMFC Web Site Improvements

J. Ferrer, GSMFC Systems Administrator presented the Commission's new and improved website. He asked the Commissioners to visit the new site and to provide him with feedback. He reviewed the navigational menu and walked those present through the various steps and enhancements. The data has not been changed but has been cleaned up and made more accessible.

Aquatic Nuisance Species (ANS) Program Report

J. Ballard provided a written report in the Commissioner's Briefing Book. He discussed various meetings that he attended in the fall of 2008. He updated the Commissioners on the various States' ANS Plans. Florida and Louisiana have completed plans and are actively implementing them. South Carolina has sent their final plan out for review. Mississippi and Texas will soon submit a final draft of their plans to the ANS Task Force. Georgia has sent a revised draft to the Task Force for review. Alabama's draft plan is being revised. It is hoped that all states will have completed plans by the end of 2009.

He concluded his report with a video entitled "*Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers*".

Discussion of State/Federal Coordinated Management of Red Snapper

L. Simpson provided facts regarding the red snapper fishery. He referred the Commissioners to information in the Briefing Book which included NOAA Fisheries publishing a final rule that would implement the Gulf Council's amendment that was designed to end overfishing and rebuild the Gulf of Mexico (GOM) red snapper fishery. A recreational bag limit and fishing season was implemented to constrain the recreational fishery to its quota, based on the assumption that Gulf coastal states would implement compatible regulations in state waters. Florida and Texas declined to adopt compatible regulations for recreational fisheries in their state waters. This resulted in shortened seasons and other states indicating that they may not adopt regulations in their state waters. Based on unanticipated harvest in Florida and Texas it was determined that the recreational fishery would exceed 2008 quota before the end of the season. As a result, NOAA Fisheries closed the red snapper fishery in federal waters on August 4, 2008. He indicated that **R. Crabtree NOAA/SERO** has been very open to discussion with the states and constituents and has gone above and beyond to clarify NOAA's position and actions in the red snapper fishery.

Red snapper data is used in the Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) process and all states participate. It is currently scheduled to be updated the first quarter of 2009.

The Commissioners briefly discussed their inability to coordinate red snapper regulations, because each state has different entities making these decisions.

R. Crabtree stated that if the recreational fishery continues to exceed its quota there will be a very difficult decision to make regarding federal waters.

Discussion centered on issue that the overage could be avoided if the states were able to implement compatible regulations.

Discussion of State Limited Entry Programs

L. Simpson stated that limited entry in a classical sense has been going on in the states for many years. A new era in federal management is developing where we are not only limiting entry or capping effort; we are getting into actual, individual, transferable quota in some fisheries. He thought it would be good to review some of the historical limited entry programs in the GOM by State and in State waters. In his opinion open ended fisheries with an ever increasing population in a finite habitat is a recipe that is going to end with a problem. If any limited entry is to be efficient and useful in a fishery it must be coordinated between state and federal fisheries.

He provided written information on how the various Gulf States currently conduct limited entry in their fisheries. He discussed the always present and changing elements in fisheries that make it hard to collect good data. He does not see certain fisheries, such as the shrimp fishery, as ever being the same due to economic changes.

Interjurisdictional Fisheries Program (IJF)

S. VanderKooy provided a written report on the fall 2008 IJF activities. He added that the Commission staff has caught up with all publications, annual reports, *License and Fees, Law Summary*, etc. He recognized Staff Assistant Teri Freitas as being responsible for getting this done.

SEAMAP Program Report

J. Rester provided a written report on SEAMAP activities. He distributed copies of the *SEAMAP 2008 Annual Report to the TCC*. Of major importance to this program is that SEAMAP received increased funding in 2008. Several new surveys are now being conducted. The entire program received an increase of \$4,392,000. Funding for 2009 is uncertain at this time. The Commission has now taken over data management full time for SEAMAP in the GOM in July of this year. Previously it was done by NMFS. To coordinate this activity the Commission has hired a SEAMAP Database Manager.

The meeting ended at 5:13 pm, to reconvene in the morning.

**COMMISSION BUSINESS MEETING
MINUTES - 59th Annual Spring Meeting
Thursday, October 16, 2008
Key Largo, Florida**

Chairman Gill called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m.

NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office

R. Crabtree reported on the activities of the SERO. He had just received an email in regards to the red snapper fishery, which opened June 1 and closed August 5. The preliminary numbers for wave 4 (through August) are in and though he was not prepared to say what the catches were but what he has seen is not good news. He thinks the prospects for an overrun of the quota appears likely. He will provide the Commissioners with definite numbers soon. The commercial fishery as of September 15 had caught 74% of their quota under the IFQ program.

He reported that in the GOM there is a deepwater grouper and a tilefish quota. Both of those fisheries were closed on May 10, 2008. When the final landing numbers were reviewed it was determined that the fisheries were closed too early. The fisheries came in 10 % under quotas, so a notice has been sent out that they will reopen the deepwater grouper and tilefish fisheries on November 1, for 10 days.

TED exemptions have been issued for Louisiana and Texas, and they will continue to review that season. At the last Gulf Council meeting, Amendment 30 b, which was intended to address overfishing of gag, and to address catch rates in other shallow water grouper. The Gulf Council requested an interim rule to get regulations in place by January 1, 2009. That Amendment would put in place a quota for gag and close the shallow water grouper fishery when that quota is met and also establishes a February through March recreational closure of the shallow water grouper fishery.

They have published a draft environmental impact statement on the Gulf Council's Aquaculture FMP. That comment period ends before the October Gulf Council meeting.

The Southeast Fisheries Science Center put out a report last week on turtle takes in the reefish longline fishery. The takes are high – 900 loggerheads taken with a substantial mortality. This will be discussed at the Gulf Council meeting.

Sport Fish Restoration Program Report (SFP)

J. Ballard provided a written report of SFP activities during the fall 2008 period. He held a meeting at the request of the C/RFAP to discuss the issues with the Large Area Artificial Reef Sites (LAARS). The purpose of the meeting was to help everyone involved understand the new permit special conditions that were being proposed by the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers and to allow input regarding concerns.

He reported that since coming on board he has worked to get this program up to date following the resignation of the previous coordinator.

A meeting has been scheduled in November 2008 to meet jointly with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's Artificial Reef Subcommittee. They have planned a workshop on side scan sonar.

Fisheries Information Network (FIN) Report

D. Donaldson provided a written report on current program activity. He reported that in 2009 the FIN program budget is \$4.9M. These funds will provide continued administration of the program as well as recreational data collection which exceeded quota by almost 30% so far in 2008. He noted that his office and our state partners have been active in the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) Operation Team as well as participation on various work groups. The FIN group is also working with NMFS to examine various options of for-hire reporting.

The program continues to provide funding for the head boat port sampling in Texas and Florida as well as Gulf menhaden. The trip ticket program has been implemented and operational in Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. Biological sampling has targeted 14 species. Almost 12,000 otoliths have been collected between January and August 2008.

The FIN Data Management System continues to load trip ticket and biological sampling data. They are working on vessel, fishermen and dealer information. He noted that Texas recreational data is now available.

Due to budget shortfalls in 2008 several critical activities were not funded. They were the at-sea head boat sampling and the detailed effort survey. The Commission and the States took a 10% across the board cut. If funding continues to decline the FIN program will be severely impacted.

Habitat Program Report

J. Rester reported on the Habitat Program. In July the Commission sent a letter concerning beneficial use of dredged material from the Atchafalaya River to the head of the Army Corps of Engineers, Louisiana's Congressional Delegation, the Louisiana Governor's Office, the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources, and the Coastal Wetlands Planning Protection and Restoration Act (CWPPRA) Task Force members in July. The letter stressed the importance of Louisiana coastal wetlands both to fish and wildlife and humans as natural storm buffers and the need to use more dredged material beneficially. In order to do this the Corps of Engineers needs to change the way that the Federal Standard for dredged material is calculated. The Corps is required to dispose of dredged material in the least costly, environmentally acceptable manner consistent with engineering requirements

established for the project. This calculation does not account for the benefits that wetlands play as natural storm buffers and fish and wildlife habitat. On this note, a new study came out this summer that calculated that Louisiana's coastal wetlands provide approximately \$1.8 billion (\$4,321 per acre) in storm protection services each year.

The Habitat Program has been working with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the National Coastal Data Development Center (NCDDC) to clean up the Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) GIS files that were produced for the Council's EFH Generic Amendment 3 in 2004. . The EFH GIS files will be important when the Council updates and refines EFH designations in the future.

The brochure that the Habitat Subcommittee developed targeting water managers in the southeastern United States has been printed.

In September the Commission reviewed the final environmental impact for the Bienville Offshore Energy Terminal (BOET) approximately 63 miles south of Mobile Point, Alabama, in a water depth of approximately 425 feet. The main concerns in reviewing the final EIS stem from relying only on Southeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program (SEAMAP) ichthyoplankton data in the fishery impact assessment, that the fishery impact assessment does not use all available SEAMAP plankton data from the April and May time period, and that the fishery impact assessment does not examine impacts to species that are common around the BOET location.

In late 2007, the Commission began administering an aquaculture grant from NOAA Fisheries. Most of the work is being performed by the University of Southern Mississippi's Gulf Coast Research Laboratory who will be constructing a copepod culture system for raising larval fish. The Commission is developing a geographic information system (GIS) model for aquaculture site selection in the Gulf of Mexico. The aquaculture grant should be completed by the end of the year.

The Commission's MARFIN Bottom Mapping Project has still not been completed, but the contractor has delivered the final report, final database, and the final metadata. The contractor needs to make changes to the metadata in order for it to be checked for accuracy and this has not been done yet. This task should be completed shortly and the entire project should be completed by the end of the year.

Billfish Program Status Report

D. Donaldson referred the Commissioners to the briefing book which covered all activities of this program. There are a total of 11 projects. All projects have been completed with the exception of the U.S. Virgin Islands. They are currently having staffing problems but should be completed by the end of October 2008. At the March 2008 meeting a symposium was conducted. There were a total of 6 presentations. The Commission developed proceedings of the symposium on CD, which will be distributed following the meeting. The proceedings are also available on the Commission's website.

Emergency Disaster Recovery Program (EDRP I & II) Report

R. Hode updated the Commissioners on the EDRP. He reported that the Commission is well into both implementation and administration and coordination of two emergency disaster grants. The first grant was awarded in 2006 in the amount of \$127M for resource recovery. The other awarded in 2007 in the amount of \$85M for assistance to fishermen and fishery related business and industry. He provided a detailed written report that described administrative and sub-award activities. He discussed accomplishments by project and reported on reimbursement by project.

He discussed the Commission's willingness to work with the States to amend and/or revise sub awards. He recognizes that circumstances and priorities change and amendments or realignment are necessary in some instances.

R. Pausina reported that one of his major problems is getting the word out regarding the distribution of disaster funds. The public wants to know how the money is being distributed, what is the intent of disaster money, what are timelines. He has even received inquiries from Washington, D. C. congressional staffers wanting to know where and what the funds are being spent on. Even though money is going out the door he is constantly hearing remarks like "why are you sitting on the money"? Louisiana recently hired a coordinator to interact with the various Louisiana state agencies, legislators and Washington D. C. staffers regarding disaster funding. He asked the Commission if they could assist him in getting the word out to the public to let them know how funds are being used. He would like to see the Commission involved via a website. **R. Pausina** is moving forward with an aggressive plan within the state to let the public know what is going on. He would like to see a website similar to others he has seen that provide detailed information. For example a weekly update on applications taken, consultations held, and money distributed. He feels that the Commission would be a logical agency to develop this type of website. **R. Hode** indicated that the Commission has the ability to provide financial information on a weekly basis but did not think that this would answer the questions that Louisiana constituents are asking – who is getting what dollars – who qualifies, etc. The Commission does not have access to the individual states distribution data. The Commissioners discussed this issue and the consensus was that the individual states need to take the lead in getting out information regarding disaster assistance to the fishermen and fishery related business in their state. **R. Hode** stated that the Commission will assist where possible.

Economic Data Program (EDP) Report

A. Miller gave a PowerPoint presentation on the Commission's EDP. In order to improve data collection and fisheries management of the recreational and commercial fisheries in the Southeast Region, the Gulf of Mexico (GOM) Fisheries Economic Data Program was formed in July of 2008. The data program is a cooperative partnership among Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (GSMFC), and NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service. The program monitors the economic performance of the fisheries of the Gulf of Mexico and assesses

the economic impacts of fishery management decisions on specific fishing fleets and regional economies. In conjunction with the Fisheries Information Networks' (FIN) Social/economic Workgroup, the GSMFC coordinates, plans, and conducts specific economic data collection projects throughout its five member states.

Projects that are currently under development include an economic survey of the GOM inshore shrimp fleet, a marine angler expenditure survey for the GOM, an economic survey of fishing related businesses in the GOM, and a nonmarket evaluation of the value of coastal and marine ecosystems throughout the GOM. Results from these surveys will primarily aid in the development of a regional input-output impact model. More specifically, the model will be used to evaluate the potential economic impacts from fishery management actions, hurricanes, and other environmental events such as hypoxia. It is the intent that the collection of dependable economic data will further maximize the economic benefits of fisheries resources while reducing the negative costs to fishing communities in the GOM.

The GOM fisheries economic data program is currently within its initial planning and development phase. As the surveys and studies described above are completed and data and model results become available, detailed reports will be presented through various distribution methods. If you need additional information concerning this program, please contact Alexander L. Miller at the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission office at (228) 875-5912 or via [e-mail](#).

Executive Committee Report

J. Gill reported that the Executive Committee met on Wednesday, October 15, 2008 at which time they reviewed the FY2007 audit report, the Financial Statement as of 9/30/08, and the Commission's Proposed FY2009 budget and staff compensation package. They met again in a luncheon meeting with all Commissioners to discuss the meeting.

G. Vail moved to approve the FY2007 audit report. **D. Diaz** seconded. The motion was approved.

B. Gautreaux moved to approve the Financial Report. **S. Heath** seconded. The motion was approved.

J. Gill presented the FY2009 proposed budget in the amount of \$7,097,033. **D. Diaz** moved to approve the budget. **B. Gautreaux** seconded. The motion was approved.

J. Gill stated that staff compensation was reviewed in Executive Session and will be provided to the Executive Director for implementation upon approval. **M. Ray** moved to approve the compensation. **S. Heath** seconded. The motion was approved.

State Director's Reports

Florida – G. Vail presented a report on behalf of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC).

“Florida 2060: Population Distribution Scenario for the State of Florida” is the title of a report recently issued by the 1000 Friends of Florida. The report assumes Florida’s population will double to 36 million people in the next 50 years with a corresponding conversion of approximately seven million acres of rural and natural lands [an area equivalent to the size of Vermont!] to urban use. This report prompted the FWC to examine the future of Florida’s fish and wildlife resources if the loss and fragmentation of habitat plus changes in water quality and quantity come to pass. The FWC issued a report, *“Wildlife 2060: What’s at stake for Florida”*, and recently convened a conference of scientists and resource managers to identify potential problems and possible management strategies for insuring healthy populations of fish and wildlife in the future. For more information and to view a copy of the report, visit: www.MyFWC.com/wildlife2060 [bottom right of the FWC home page].

The FWC has also recognized that a change in Florida’s climate will have significant affects on the fisheries and wildlife resources and their habitats as well as the human population. On October 1-3, 2008 approximately 300 experts and professional resource managers from agencies, universities and NGO’s attended a FWC sponsored conference to explore all aspects of climate change on Florida’s resources, including needs in terms of information, strategies and policies to effectively manage Florida’s fish and wildlife resources in a changing environment. Topics discussed included: Resource Management and Land Planning; Marine, Estuarine and Coastal Ecosystems; Hunting and Fishing; and Invasive Organisms Effects on Biodiversity in Future Climates. Key note speakers included Dr. Virginia Burkett (Senior Climate Change Scientist, Global Change Research, USGS), Dr. Reed Noss (Davis-Shine Professor of Conservation Biology, University of Central Florida), Dr. Thomas Crisman (Patel Professor of Environment, Patel Center for Global Solutions, University of South Florida), and Dr. Jean Brennan (Defenders of Wildlife, Senior Climate Change Scientist). For more information visit: www.ces.fau.edu.

The FWC, with support and coordination from the Wildlife Foundation of Florida, has recently implemented the Florida Marine Fisheries Enhancement Initiative to establish partnerships with public and private entities to develop and operate a network of eleven hatchery systems dedicated to enhancing the fisheries resources, research on economical, efficient culturing techniques for key species, and fostering public awareness of marine resources and the marine environment. For more information check out www.MyFWC.com [link is at the bottom of the FWC home page].

With reference to Florida’s artificial reef program, the saga of the General *Hoyt S. Vandenberg* continues. The 520 ft. former missile tracking ship could not be deployed before the 2008 hurricane season began. The ship is still in Norfolk, Virginia at the Colonna’s shipyard, who remains custodian of the vessel. The environmental cleanup of

the ship is approximately 90% completed. It will take about 1 week of final preparation before the tow to Key West, where another 30 days of pre-deployment preparation may be needed. Target date for the tow remains around December 1, 2008 with deployment in January 2009. However, no work is currently being done because of a hold on the current funding by the three banks that had provided a \$4.6 million credit line to the project. They froze further withdrawals on the credit line last April; \$3.3 million was released before they were informed the Shipyard and other creditors were owed an additional \$2.2 million because costs had unexpectedly climbed to \$8.5 million. Despite the addition of \$1 million in general revenue provided to the project through FWC by the Florida Legislature in May, the banks are very close to calling in the loans. There is an ongoing request by the City of Key West to the Governor's Office for the additional \$1.6 million needed to complete the project in the form of a non-loan grant. The City of Key West, the vessel title holder refuses to take on the burden of this amount as an additional loan. The City of Key West and Monroe County will not release any bank repayment funds, until, by agreement, the vessel is on the bottom. If additional funds are not secured, the project will not go forward and the ship will be sold for scrap.

The FWC has developed a draft contract for the \$1 million appropriated last year by the Florida Legislature for the *Hoyt S. Vandenberg* project; it is currently under review by the City of Key West. It is a reimbursement contract for expenditures needed to complete the project. The U.S. Maritime Administration previously provided \$1.25 million for the project.

The *Oriskany*, an 888 ft, 32,000 ton vessel deployed off Pensacola in May 2006, was affected by two of the recent hurricanes. 28-30 ft. Seas generated by the passage of Hurricanes Gustav (late August 2008) and Ike (early Sept. 2008) across the Gulf resulted in sand movement and scouring around the base of the hull, causing the vessel to settle about 10 feet into the sand, increasing the depth to the top of the superstructure from 68 to 78 feet. There have been a few complaints because the increased depth now places the flight deck at 147 ft - beyond range of recreational dive limits (130 ft) with a slight (5 degrees est.) list to starboard. Otherwise the vessel is intact and at its original location

Recreationally caught fish from the *Oriskany* continue to be sampled for PCB analyses. The fourth sampling effort was completed in April 2008. Analysis results are still pending. Total PCB results from initial *Oriskany* Reef sampling of 30 red snapper (404-808 mm TL) in December 2006 had a mean PCB concentration in skin-on fillets of 34.137 parts per billion, above the EPA basic Tier 1 screening level of 20 ppb. but below the Florida Department of Health level of 50 ppm. As a result, sampling efforts will be expanded to a reference site in addition to the *Oriskany* site itself.

At their September 2008 meeting, the FWC approved draft rules that would be consistent with the interim regulations enacted by NOAA Fisheries for Gulf grouper. A final public hearing will be held at their December meeting in Key West on proposed regulations that would establish a two fish bag and two month closure [February 1 – March 31] for the recreational gag grouper fishery in Florida's Gulf waters, excluding Monroe County. The FWC will also conduct final public hearings in December on draft rules that would

increase the recreational bag limit of Gulf red grouper from one fish to two per person within a five fish aggregate, increase the minimum size for greater amberjack from 28 to 30 inches, and increase the commercial and recreational size limit on gray trigger fish from 12 to 14 inches.

FWC staff continues working with advisory groups to evaluate management protocols for several species. A series of public workshops is being conducted to receive comments on recommendations for changes in management of the Marine Life [a.k.a., ornamental] fishery. Recommendations for the commercial fishery included adding species to the list of designated Marine Life species, adjustments to various bag and size limits, and a closed season for *Condylactus* anemones. Recommendations for the recreational fishery included a bag limit of 20 organisms per day with a maximum of five of any one kind. [Note: a tiered Marine Life endorsement and Restricted Species endorsement on the commercial fishing license are required for harvest and sale of those saltwater organisms designated as "restricted Marine Life species". Non-designated species may be harvested and sold with only a commercial Saltwater Products License. The number of Tiered Marine Life endorsements is capped.] Staff is working with the Blue Crab Advisory Board to address various management issues, including recovery of trap debris and retrieval of traps left in the water during a closed season and identifying time frames for a closed season or seasons.

The FWC will again request the Florida Legislature to consider requiring residents fishing from shore or a structure affixed to shore to possess a recreational saltwater fishing license as an alternative to the pending federal saltwater angler registry. Currently, Florida residents fishing from shore are exempt from the requirement to possess the license and recreational snook and spiny lobster permits which may be attached to the license.

Alabama – **S. Heath** presented a report on behalf of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Marine Resource Division (ADCNR, MRD).

Rehabilitation of marsh habitat around Coffee Island in Mississippi Sound was discontinued due to the emergence of submerged aquatic vegetation (*Rupia*). Work continues on marsh rehabilitation of Little River Bay near Bayou La Batre.

The Alabama Marine Resources Division (AMRD) is working with other states on a SEAMAP near shore long-line survey. Reviewed existing NMFS protocols and subsequently integrated into a state procedural manual. DISL continues to conduct sampling off Alabama's coast.

The Division is working with graduate students from several universities on data requests to address production and distribution of marine species. AMRD is also conducting an internal review of our sampling programs to improve sampling design and quality of data.

The fisheries section has conducted nine Outreach events with over 2500 total participants that were informed of the activities of the Marine Resources Division and of

opportunities on the Gulf coast. These events have included a tourism day in Dekalb County, Art reception for the AMRD's Kids Calendar and a high school in Montevallo, AL. An officer and biologist went to Vigor High School Career Day to inform upcoming graduates of employment opportunities with the Marine Resources Division. Representatives were present at grand opening of Bass Pro Shops in Spanish Fort.

The Division is currently completing the first of two oyster cultch plantings near Heron Bay. The 14,000yd³ will provide attachment locations for spat that will aid in the recovery of the oyster reefs from damage sustained during Hurricane Ivan and the subsequent drought during 2006 and 2007, which allowed large abundances of oyster drills to prey on existing oysters. Shallow water planting of oyster cultch material was initiated in July. Local oystermen were employed to ferry cultch material from a barge to pre-determined shallow areas. A second planting is scheduled for late summer using EDRP monies. The second half of planting will use limestone when the limited shell resources are exhausted. Oystermen were paid \$25 per cubic yard of material (up to \$200.00/day) to plant designated areas.

Oyster drills coming in with high salinity water continue to be detrimental to recovery of oyster reefs. The Division is working with the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM) and the Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) to investigate the possibility of relaying oysters from upper Mobile Bay to south of the closure line and oysters from a closed area in West Fowl River to open areas in the river.

Division biologists are meeting with ADEM to discuss their fish-tissue monitoring program. Atlantic croaker and spotted seatrout tested below limits for chlordane at the Three mile Creek location in Mobile County. May be de-listed from advisory sites for chlordane.

All areas not permanently closed are open to shrimping in Alabama state waters. High fuel prices and low shrimp prices both played a major role as deterrents in the number of trips that shrimp vessels made this summer. The majority of shops that handle bay boats considered the brown shrimp season a poor one. Shops are reporting 10-15 and 21-25 count white shrimp in Mississippi Sound. They are reporting 31 – 35's from the lower Mobile Bay and 36 – 40's in the upper bay.

Staff attended annual otolith training in Tampa to validate current age assignment by each state and receive new training on recently added species of interest.

A member of the biological staff attended a meeting in Washington to address the new observer rule that will monitor turtle interactions with several commercial gears as well as recreational gears in state waters.

Alabama conducted two offshore SEAMAP cruises in June covering 11 stations. In July, 26 inshore trawls, 6 seines, 7 BPL's were collected as part of the inshore SEAMAP samples.

MRD fisheries section conducted four cruises to record video of off shore reefs to document the durability and longevity of different reef materials. Approximately a dozen sites have been recorded.

Alabama's coastal areas received minimal damage from Hurricanes Gustav and Ike as compared to Hurricanes Ivan and Katrina. However, the break in Dauphin Island caused by Katrina was widened during Ike. This action may increase the salinity of Mississippi Sound further disrupting the historical oyster fishery within this body of water.

EDRP II TED/BRD Compliance Project has been completed. Funds (\$300,000) have been distributed to 128 registered participants (each received \$2,343.75).

EDRP II Seafood Related Business Project has been initiated. AMRD accepted applications for seafood related businesses seeking assistance for damages related to hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Applications have been reviewed by AMRD and ADCNR accounting sections. Reimbursement of funds is anticipated to begin prior to the end of 2008.

AMRD has reimbursed commercial and for-hire fishermen for the completion of trip reports through the Emergency Disaster Reporting Program. Through 27 August 2008, AMRD has reimbursed 619 commercial fishermen who have submitted 14,094 trip reports. Through August 2008, 4,272 reports have been reimbursed in the charter boat fishery. AMRD began the second round of chart boat fishermen reports in July 2008 and the second round of reports in the commercial fisheries should start before November 2008.

Progress continues on the construction of the Gulf State Park Pier in Gulf Shores. The section of the pier that will contain the water intake structure for the pipeline to CPMC has been reached. This is roughly at the midpoint of the pier. The 14" gravity flow pipeline from the intake structure on the pier to the pump sump has been connected along with additional pipe that was reconnected to the existing pipeline not destroyed by hurricane Ivan. The stairs that will be used to access the water intake platform structure under the pier are currently under construction and should be installed in the next few weeks. The pumps for the project have been delivered.

Marine Resources' staff has worked with personnel from the Engineering section and Parks Division of the Department of Conservation personnel in the development of a plan to reef the damaged Gulf State Park Pier around the new Pier. Public meetings were held to solicit public comment on the proposal. The Department is pursuing approval of the project from the United States Army Corps of Engineers.

Through August 2008, AMRD staff members have collected 762 lengths of fish representing twenty-one species. From these fish 516 otoliths, representing fifteen fish species, have been collected. Processing of these biological hard parts will begin this fall and it is anticipated all hard parts AMRD is responsible for will be processed and aged by January 2009.

AMRD staff continued participation in the dockside and for-hire effort surveys within the NMFS' Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey. AMRD staff members have collected 1,998 intercepts from shore, charter, and private/rental boat anglers through August 2008. This represents an increase of 24.7% over the cumulative quota for all fishing modes. Quotas were met in all modes for all Waves except charter and private/rental modes in Wave 1.

Alabama commercial data collection programs have experienced no significant problems.

AMRD biological staff has discussed options for reducing gasoline usage and have begun to implement some of the ideas.

AMRD biologists continue to assist the National Marine Fisheries Service in the development of an electronic database comprising of state-supplied and/or NMFS collected angler information to provide the basis of a recreational fishing license registry from which fishing effort may be collected. This method is thought to provide the most efficient means for collecting this data. NMFS plans to start the program in 2009.

AMRD staff investigated the potential of several sites in Mobile Bay for artificial reef development. The best site was found off Pt. Clear; however, meetings with local shrimpers will be conducted to assess the impact of developing this site on other fisheries prior to initiating USACE paperwork.

AMRD staff have fine tuned the operational performance of a submersible remotely operated vehicle camera system and gained experience with controls, photography, and limits of the system. The system will be used to assist AMRD in the documentation and long-term monitoring of artificial reef structures

The Enforcement Section completed a handout of the laws and regulations of the AMRD and it was made available to the Commissioner of the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and could prove useful to legislators.

Major John Jenkins was hired by Alabama's Marine Police Division as Director. His new duties for this position started July 17, 2008. Captain Chris Blankenship has been named as the Acting Chief Enforcement Officer for the Marine Resources Division.

During Hurricane Gustav, AMRD assisted the Bayou La Batre Police Department patrolling in Bayou La Batre to prevent looting and to assist in the evacuation of residents after an evacuation order was issued due to coastal flooding.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Ike, AMRD assisted the Dauphin Island Police Department with patrols and security checkpoints at the severely damaged West End of Dauphin Island.

The Enforcement Section's public outreach efforts have continued with numerous meetings with commercial and recreational fishermen.

The Enforcement Section took delivery of a 10 meter patrol vessel built by Silver Ships in Theodore, Alabama. Another 10 meter as well as an 8 meter patrol vessel are on order and will be delivered in early 2009.

In the legislature this year, a gill net bill passed. The bill establishes a voluntary buy out program for commercial gill net licenses and limits future participation in the gill net fishery by recreational and commercial fishermen to those that were properly licensed on June 1, 2008.

The Alabama Legislature passed a Jurisdictional Bill in 2007 that gave the Marine Resources Division jurisdiction over Alabama registered or licensed vessel fishing in the EEZ. In 2008, a regulation was signed that further clarified the violations that were to be enforced and how they were to be prosecuted in State court. This regulation went into effect on August 30, 2008. Our officers are currently using this valuable enforcement tool.

A regulation was signed by the Commissioner of Conservation that brought our current "Saltwater Fish, Creel, Bag, Possession, and Size Limits" in line with federal regulations concerning the bag limit for red snapper and the size limit for grey triggerfish and greater amberjack. This regulation also set a ten fish per person flounder creel limit. Previously there was no creel limit on flounder in Alabama.

A regulation was signed that will enhance the current "Marine Turtle and Marine Mammals" regulation so mammalian dolphins (porpoises), manatees, and marine turtles are more effectively protected. This regulation went into effect on August 30, 2008.

A shark regulation that will limit chumming and blood baiting for sharks from the beach and piers was signed and went into effect on May 7, 2008. The regulation targets practices associated with shark fishing that cause an unsafe environment for swimmers and beach goers.

The enforcement section continues to participate in homeland security exercises with other local, state, and federal agencies.

On July 4, 2008, Captain Joseph Anthony Nelson II was issued a Fisheries Violation Notice for taking king mackerel for commercial purposes from the Exclusive Economic Zone without a permit. He was fishing in the Exclusive Economic Zone south of Alabama. A total of 71 king mackerel were confiscated. The fish were sold and the money and the case packet were forwarded to the National Marine Fisheries Service Office of Law Enforcement for further investigation and prosecution. The case was settled for a fine of \$11,500.00 and forfeiture of the seized proceeds in the amount of \$1431.13 from the confiscated fish.

Mississippi – **D. Diaz** presented the report on behalf of the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (DMR).

The Office of Marine Patrol, Marine Law Enforcement activities for Jurisdictional Enforcement Agreements (JEAs) consisted of 2,201 boat patrol hours with 930 recreational vessel contacts and 200 commercial vessel contacts which resulted in 44 total violations.

Shellfish Bureau staff coordinated with contractors and planted approximately 50,000 cubic yards of cultch material using both oyster shells and # 57 limestone on 6 reefs located in the western Mississippi Sound. A total of 20 cultch planting days were completed in September.

Mississippi's oyster season began this past September 25th on public reefs. The daily sack limit is 30 per vessel for dredging and 15 per vessel for tonging.

Shrimp season opened June 17 at 6:00 a.m. (coordinated with Alabama opening). There were 308 boats seen shrimping in Mississippi waters based on our aerial count. That number of boats is consistent with the aerial counts in the years since Hurricane Katrina; however, ten years ago the opening day count was slightly over 1,000 boats.

EDRP II program has begun with 346 eligible resident commercial fishermen (292 shrimpers + 54 crabbers) contracted. The 2008 crab cooperative fishery trip ticket recovery program (1,303 trips harvest information, 25 tickets per crabber), and derelict crab trap cleanup and BRD/TED compliance compensation have been completed. DMR began accepting trip monitoring reports from shrimp fishermen for the first three months of the Mississippi shrimp season. Each shrimp fisherman can submit up to 23 trip tickets. To date 3,094 individual shrimp harvest trip tickets have been submitted by fishermen.

Since 1999, the Mississippi Derelict Crab Trap Cleanup has yielded over 17,000 derelict crab traps recovered and recycled, with over 12,000 of those traps being recovered by storm-affected commercial fishermen participating in EDRP II. The cleanup has been a cooperative effort of MS commercial fishermen, DMR, and Gulf Coast Research Lab (GCRL). For these efforts the MS program has been awarded a First Place 2008 EPA Gulf of Mexico Program Gulf Guardian Award, which will be presented at the EPA Partnerships in Action 20th Anniversary Celebration, October 29 in New Orleans.

The Artificial Reef Bureau personnel side scanned six coastal harbors after Hurricane Gustav to locate possible navigational hazards within the harbors and navigational channels. Reef personnel were also asked to side scan Port Bienville in Hancock County to allow commercial traffic in the port. All data was given to the local authorities for the removal of the debris.

There were 315 Goliath Reef Balls and two steel hull vessels deployed during this time frame in reef sites south of Horn Island. Funding for this project was provided by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and EDRP I.

There are 56 charter boat operators under contract. Captains turned in reports on a monthly basis through May 2008. 756 fisheries recovery reports have been submitted.

Data is being scanned into a database and checked for errors. Some preliminary analysis has been conducted. EDRP I funds for this program ended May of 2008. 4,828 fisheries recovery reports were submitted for this job. EDRP II funds are being utilized to continue this program and an additional 1612 recovery reports have been submitted under this program.

Fifty commercial fishermen have signed contracts to participate in fisheries recovery monitoring, which began March 15, 2008. As of August 31, 2008, 826 commercial finfish fishermen trips have been reported. The commercial fisheries recovery report program is ongoing with EDRP II funds.

New recreational fishing records for May and June of 2008.

Conventional Tackle

Yellowtail snapper: 6 lbs .32 oz
Striped Burrfish: 1 lb 4 oz
Spotfin Hogfish: 10.4 oz
Finetooth Shark: 11 lbs 7.92 oz
Bonnethead shark: 7 lb 14.07 oz
Greater Amberjack: 111 lb .8 oz

Blue Runner: 7 lbs 14.99 oz
Atlantic Cutlassfish: 2 lb 2.2 oz
Bearded Brotula: 14 lb 5.6 oz
Blacknose Shark: 14 lb 13 oz
Leatherjacket: 3.34 oz

Fly Fishing Tackle

Bluefish: 2 lb 10.86 oz
Gray Snapper: 5 lb 12.65 oz

The Seafood Technology Bureau (STB) has certified fifty three licensed seafood dealers and processors:

Licensed Processors and Dealers:	10
Shrimp Licensed Processors and Dealers:	19
Oyster Licensed Processors and Dealers:	24
Prior to Hurricane Katrina, Mississippi had 76 certified.	

DMR personnel participated in the Interstate Shellfish Conference (ISSC) sponsored Vibrio vulnificus (Vv) workshop in Kenner, LA to discuss Vv controls and its effectiveness, and the short/ long term strategies that maybe considered for recommendation to ISSC. To drum up Vv workshop participation from the MS seafood industry, invitations were mailed out to the industry.

Louisiana – **R. Pausina** presented a report on behalf of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF).

Governor Jindal has tasked the LDWF with reprioritizing disaster funds from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in light of the 2008 storm season (Hurricanes Ike and Gustav) and to also take some of the longer term projects and move them to short term projects in effort to provide more immediate relief for people affected by the recent storms. In addressing this task they had to determine the major concern of the fishermen after the storms. Ice

was an immediate need following the storms because the white shrimp fishery was experiencing good landings but ice was not available.

He reported that LDWF currently has a volunteer-for-hire electronic reporting system being developed. They plan to have it in place by January 2009.

Since March 2008 the LDWF Artificial Reef Program has accepted 16 new structures with a total donation of \$3.6M. Fifty-two platforms off of the Louisiana coast were destroyed by Hurricane Ike. They still have 6 pending Special Artificial Reefs (SARS) from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, which have since been moved forward in the process and they have placed a moratorium on any new SARS applications. The reason for the moratorium is to collect information from stakeholders so that a new protocol can be established for accepting SARS.

Texas – M. Ray presented a report on behalf of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD).

He reported on the TPWD's Buyback Programs: Inshore Shrimp License Management Program - During the TPWD's Commission meeting in May, a significant contribution of \$1.2 million was received from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation for the final big push on outside fundraising for the shrimp license buyback program.

The application period for the 22nd round of the Commercial Shrimp Boat License Buyback Program closed on April 25, 2008. Approval of 69 licenses (35 Bay Shrimp Boat Licenses and 34 Bait Shrimp Boat Licenses) was granted for a total price of \$570,000, average purchase price was \$8261 (actual range \$4000 to \$10,000).

The application period for the 23rd round of the Commercial Shrimp Boat License Buyback Program closed on September 15th. There were 60 applications received, representing 88 licenses. Approval for 56 licenses (26 Bay Shrimp Boat Licenses and 30 Bait Shrimp Boat Licenses) was granted for a total price of \$462,000. The accepted bid range is from \$7000 to \$9700, with an average bid price per license of \$8,250. These licenses were accepted using the ranking procedure used in Round 22, with the Executive Director option to purchase any additional licenses that are within 10% of the current valuation.

Crab License Management Program - The application period for the 9th round of the Commercial Crab Fisherman's License Buyback Program closed on September 15th. There were 13 applications received. Approval for 8 licenses was granted for a total price of \$55,699, at an average bid price per license of \$6,962. These licenses were accepted using the ranking procedure used in Round 8, with a base price of \$4,000 which could be credited with an additional \$1250 for each license history year between 2004 and 2007. The maximum bid the Department would accept would be \$9,000.

Commercial Finfish License Management Program - The application period for the 12th round of the Commercial Finfish Fisherman's License Buyback Program closed on

September 15th. There were 26 applications received. Approval for 17 licenses was granted for a total price of \$120,200, at an average bid price per license of \$7,070. These licenses were accepted using the ranking procedure used in Round 11, with a base price of \$4,000 which could be credited with an additional \$1,250 for each license history year between 2004 and 2007. The maximum bid the Department would accept would be \$9,000. One license, outside the EMV was accepted as the license holder received additional credit for flounder landings in excess of 1,000 pounds.

Oysters - During Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission Oyster Technical Task Force (TTF) meeting in Ocean Springs, Mississippi, Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries staff revealed their plans to open the Louisiana side of Sabine Lake to commercial oyster harvest. The oyster reefs in this system have not been commercially harvested since the mid-1960's and most likely represent the only natural, sub-tidal oyster reefs in the U.S. that have not been subject to recent commercial fishing impacts. The LA-TX state line runs across this reef, so impacts to the Texas habitat are expected as there are no current boundaries that can be used for enforcement purposes.

Coastal Fisheries Oyster Mapping and Restoration Team continues to collect high resolution side scan and bathymetry data on the main reef and plan to re-assess this reef after commercial harvest, should it open, in order to better assess gear impacts to oyster reefs by comparing pre-fishing data against post-fishing data.

Coastal Fisheries staff was notified that water quality sampling in Sabine Lake, conducted to assess the possibility of opening the Louisiana side of the lake to year-round commercial oyster fishing, will conclude in August. Bacteriological results suggest that water quality standards will be adequate to allow commercial oyster harvest. Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries staff have not finalized their decision but expect to get pressure from industry to open the area once the bacteriological data is released. It's not expected that the area will open until sometime next year.

A meeting between LDWF, TPWD (CF and Law Enforcement), Texas Department of State Health Services, and Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals staff was held in Lake Charles, Louisiana to discuss issues related to a possible opening.

Input is being sought from the core states (Florida, Louisiana, Texas and California) of the Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Conference, Food and Drug Administration and Texas Department of State Health Services on what management strategies will be implemented to better control *Vibrio vulnificus* levels in oysters so that reportable cases meet the 60% reduction mandate. The main goal is to reduce the temperature of the oyster as soon as possible to limit the growth of Vv. Several options, including incorporating the use of seawater chillers on-board vessels to spray cooled water over the oysters, harvesting during periods of the day when air temperatures are coolest (e.g. at night), transferring oysters to large vessels with onboard coolers during harvest operations, and reducing the time between harvest and when the oysters are placed under refrigeration. Obviously, some of these options would require approval and regulation changes by TPWD.

Hurricane Ike made landfall on the Texas coast at Galveston on Saturday, September 13, 2008. A 15-20 foot storm surge preceded the storm and was responsible for severe damage to commercial fishing industry infrastructure. Several oyster boats were sunk, lost or relocated up to 20 miles away from their dock. Anecdotal reports from commercial oyster fishermen and preliminary TPWD data indicate oyster resources were impacted by sedimentation and heavy debris fields. TPWD will be conducting side scan sonar surveys and fishery independent sampling over previously surveyed transects to better assess resource impacts. Water quality remains an issue and Galveston Bay remains closed as many waste water treatment plants are still off-line. It is possible that the opening of the public oyster season in Galveston Bay may be delayed depending on water sampling conducted by the Texas Department of State Health Services, Seafood and Aquatic Life Group.

TPWD is dealing with a problem that involves groups dumping shell cultch in areas without the involvement of TPWD. Coastal Fisheries believe they should be coordinating with TPWD on the best location for restoration efforts. As the guidelines are developed we want to ensure future efforts are directed to areas that actually need restoration and the locations have been vetted by local staff as being suitable for supporting oyster restoration (taking into consideration future water resource issues, if possible).

On September 13, 2008, Hurricane Ike struck the upper Texas Gulf coast near Galveston. Sixty-six TPWD employees suffered losses from or were affected by Hurricane Ike. Insults range from some who lost everything to others who were temporarily inconvenienced and had additional costs such as hotel lodging. Galveston Island and Sea Rim state parks were destroyed by the hurricane. The storm's 15-20 ft surge pushed 4-foot of water through the Port Arthur Marine Lab, destroying furnishings, equipment, supplies, and files; and left a few inches of mud behind.

Hurricane Ike caused widespread flooding and infrastructure damage all along the upper Texas coast. Sabine Lake and Galveston Bay makes up approximately 37 percent of the inshore waters of the Texas coast. This is area is an important center for both recreational and commercial fisheries, accounting for approximately 55% of the ex-vessel value of commercial landings and 36% of the total recreational fishing pressure along the Texas coast.

The impact of Hurricane Ike has resulted in the closure of waters that had been approved for commercial or recreational harvest of oysters. This closure took effect at 12:01a.m., September 13, 2008 and remains in effect until further notice. All Texas public oyster reefs are currently closed to harvest, so only the commercial oyster lease industry is impacted by Hurricane Ike. The public oyster season along the entire coast will begin on November 1, 2008. The Shellfish Order may impact this opening in Galveston Bay.

A larger issue is the return of power and availability of fuel to the commercial fishing industry in Sabine Pass to the Galveston Bay area. Lack of electrical power has resulted in a loss of fish products that were stored in freezers and storage facilities of commercial fish houses and processors. It is unknown at this time the number of commercial vessels which may have been damaged by Hurricane Ike, but those vessels that could otherwise be operating at the current time will have limited fuel sources and limited commercial dealer facilities in the Sabine Pass or Galveston area to purchase their products. If they were to fish, at the current time they would have to travel further west outside the storm affected area to process or deliver their catch.

In addition to impacting commercial fisheries, Hurricane Ike also severely impacted recreational fishery operations (fishing guides, charter boats, and party boats) along much of the coast during most of the week of Sept. 8-13 because of storm preparation and evacuations. The impacts of Ike on Galveston Bay and Sabine Lake will continue until electricity is reestablished, infrastructure is rebuilt, and travel can resume to normal levels in the area.

All current and former Coastal Fisheries staff members of the Ecosystem Management Program were recognized by the TPW Commission on receiving the State of Texas Public Employees Association Unsung Heroes Award. The Unsung Hero award honors outstanding public service and community contributions of individual state employees and groups of state employees.

The first TPWD commission meeting to go on the road in more than a decade drew an impressive crowd during mid-August at the Houston Zoo's Brown Education Center in late August. About 60 speakers addressed the commission on a variety of topics. The consensus seems to point to the commission hitting the road for another meeting in the near future.

On 30 June 2008, Dr. Larry McKinney, Coastal Fisheries Division Director, retired from TPWD in order to take up the position as Executive Director of the Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies (HRI) at Texas A&M University Corpus Christi.

As of 2 October 2008, **Mike Ray** is the acting Division Director for the Coastal Fisheries Division until the position is filled.

A new position, called Deputy Executive Director for Natural Resources, has been created to oversee the department's Wildlife, Coastal and Inland Fisheries Divisions. The intent is to bring more scientific and policy expertise to help lead these divisions as they face large-scale conservation challenges, such as water resources for people and wildlife, changing demographics of private landownership, invasive species, climate change, declining and fragmented fish and wildlife habitats, and evolving outdoor recreation trends.

Sadly, Sea Center Texas' beloved Gordon the Grouper died in late June. Staff went to extraordinary lengths to save the king of the offshore aquarium but in the end, he was too sick to respond favorably.

Future Meetings

G. Herring reported that she has sent out several request for proposals in the New Orleans area (Westin, Royal Sonesta, Holiday Inn Chateau Lemoyne, Embassy Suites and Marriott. She will be making a decision shortly.

The Mississippi site has not yet been determined.

Publications List

A new listing of publications was provided for informational purposes.

Election of Officers

D. Diaz nominated **B. Gautreaux** for Chairman. **S. Heath** seconded. Without opposition, **B. Gautreaux** was named Chairman for FY2008-2009 by acclamation.

S. Heath nominated **G. Vail** for 1st Vice Chairman. **M. Ray** seconded. Without opposition, **V. Vail** was named 1st Vice Chairman by acclamation.

G. Vail nominated **V. Minton** 2nd Vice Chairman. **D. Diaz** seconded. Without opposition, **V. Minton** was named 2nd Vice Chairman by acclamation.

L. Simpson presented a token of appreciation to outgoing **Chairman J. Gill**.

Other Business

The Commissioners requested staff to write a letter of appreciation to **Doug Frugé** and to request that USFWS replace his very important position in a speedy manner.

The Commissioners requested staff to write a letter of appreciation to **Steve Heath** upon his retirement for ADCNR.

J. Gill took the opportunity to thank the Commission staff for their efforts in making this a successful meeting.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 10:30 am.

ASMFC and GSMFC Joint Meeting of Artificial Reef Subcommittees

November 12 & 13, 2008
Jacksonville, Florida

Meeting Summary

Committee Members Present:

Staff Present: Jessie Thomas (ASMFC), James Ballard (GSMFC), and Nancy Marcellus (GSMFC)

Visitors Present:

Wednesday, November 12, 2008

ASMFC/GSMFC Joint Reef Subcommittee Meeting **9:00 am**

- ❖ Welcome and Introductions, *J. Thomas* 9:00 – 9:15

Jessie welcomed everyone and went through the travel information. Everyone introduced themselves.

- ❖ Workshop on Side-Scan SONAR and Artificial Reefs, *V. Capone* 9:15 – 10:30

Vince noted that most people are using some side-scan sonar for monitoring their artificial reefs. He does some surveying of reefs now, but mostly he trains people in the techniques. He is going to cover four topics. He will give the group a baseline. He wants everyone to understand how the images are created. He is going to go through basic image analysis, review sonar imagery, and review reef mapping processes.

Vince noted that some people have their own side-scan, or contract with others to do it. He was going to try to give a universal presentation that should apply regardless of the system. Sonar stands for sound navigation and ranging. Side-scan sonar creates images of the bottom. It is like aerial photography, except sound creates the images. Most systems are towed behind a vessel. This is not the only option. Generally, the other types of systems are not as applicable for reef systems.

The detail in side-scan images is very clear. Side-scan does textures very well. It can show bottom habitat. Multibeam sonar is being used by NOAA for charting. You can generate imagery from it, but it is mainly for contours. Side-scan gives clearer imagery with more detail. Multibeam is getting better, but it does not reach the resolution of side-scan.

Jim asked why NOAA is requiring multibeam surveys when side-scan gives better imagery. He does not think that it makes sense. Vince thought that they were just stuck in old techniques. He

thought that it might be discrepancies between the two types of imagery, with side-scan showing material that NOAA might not want to see.

Vince showed an example of sand waves in the image. Side-scan has two transducers. The range of one transducer is the range. Swath is the total coverage of both transducers (2X). He noted that if you are too high in the water column, you will only have a slant range; it will be reduced if it is too high.

The towfish altitude is the output pulse to the first bottom return. He noted that the slant range has a slight correction because it is a diagonal angle to the true position. Anything that comes off of the bottom gives an acoustic shadow. The shadows are important. Whatever is closest to the towfish will appear closer in the water column. The sonar pings and listens. There are little strips of data that are compressed into an image. The pings have to do with resolution and motion. If the boat is moving, that will effect the image.

Vince explained that returns from close material come back sooner. He noted that the sonar pings and listens, then starts over again. Sometimes there is a false return from one ping after the next ping. More pings give more resolution. Sometimes false pings lead to ghost images, but it is rare with reefs. The resolution is good because the pings are so small. If there is a wider beam, it makes the images run together. He noted that everyone should know what frequency they are dealing with to know their resolution. The higher the frequency, the narrower the beam.

The physics of creating a narrow beam in the horizontal, it creates a wider beam in the vertical. He noted that surface materials (like fishing boats or boat wake) will create false surface return images. Some of the surface return will block sonar imagery. Air bubbles block the sonar almost totally. He noted that whales and dolphins use that concept when they are foraging.

If a material is closer to the towfish, it will appear in the water column. Multibeam can give better position of things in the water column. The reflection from the natural bottom is called backscatter. Smooth bottom would give no reflection, but generally there is roughness to the bottom that cause a reflection. Something like oil on the bottom would show no reflection, and allow you to find it. The image shows roughness, not hardness.

In general, the darker areas are mud, and the brighter areas are rock. However, modern sonars constantly adjust image to make it look pretty, and that will change what the image will look like. You need to know what your software is doing.

Vince noted that everybody likes to get fancy with color. He noted that it is arbitrary. The color spectrum has darker colors for weak returns, and lighter colors for strong returns. The water column is the shadow color. The gold patterns seem to work well; it is effective and easy on the eye. Height of towfish affects shadows and texture. The towfish needs to be down in the water column to show detail.

Vince spoke more about shadows and targets. Shadows have to do with a material's acoustic properties and shape. Steel is a good reflector. When material is biologically fouled, that

changes the reflectance. Fiberglass is a weak reflector. The more perpendicular a target is to the sonar gives a stronger return.

Vince moved on to talk about shadows. You can get more detail from a shadow than the material image itself many times. The shadow indicates what is going on with the material. It can tell the orientation, and other information. Side-scan measuring heights is not exact. If the shadow is attached to the material, it is flat on the bottom. If the shadow detaches, the target is up in the water column.

Frequency, range, and resolution all tradeoff and are connected. If you have really high frequency sonar, the range will be very small. That would not be practical to map an area. 500 kHz is the minimum frequency for mapping a reef site. Not all sonar manufacturers will get the same range with a particular frequency. Lower frequency (100 m) can map a basic area, and higher frequency (500 m) can give sharper more “Kodak” images.

Weather days can really screw up sonar imagery. Motion plays havoc with images, creating banding and stretch/compress images. Motion also can be caused by the boat captain. Speed and course in combination with motion can create poor images as well.

Dale asked what conditions are ideal. Vince noted that it depends on the size of your boat. In general, he likes wind offshore to be 15 knots or less. He noted that choppy waves and white caps are going to start to create problems. The data looks at an average boat speed, and that makes it difficult.

Doug asked if multibeam would have that same motion issue. Vince replied that multibeam does deal with the motion better because it has a sensor and correction mechanism. He noted that system would cost more though. He noted that there are pros and cons to owning your own system. He noted that if you are going to own a system, you need someone who is very experienced with it working on that full time.

Vince noted that gain adjusts the brightness of the image. Echo sounder noise may show up on images. Normally the towfish is deep enough that the echo sounder does not impact the image, but in shallow water it will. Most of the time, problems with the system are with the cables. There can be other electronic noises in the images. There will also be biological noise.

Break

10:30 am

❖ Workshop Continued

10:45 – 12:00

Vince noted that the information presented before the break should have given a background to everyone. He noted that anyone should interrupt with questions at any time. He noted that fulfilling the federal requirements for mapping is one thing, but selling the reef program to the public is something that is also very important. He thinks that taking the time to get nice images is an important marketing tool. The height of the sand waves is based on the size of the sand grain. He showed some example images. Vince warned everyone to be wary of people giving deals on old sonar equipment.

Vince next covered the survey plan, field techniques, and post processing. In the survey plan, you need to consider the range and survey line spacing. This depends on what sonar system you are using. You need to know what sonar manufacturer you are thinking of using. This will impact your line spacing. Even within the same manufacturer, you need to know the model because they have different capabilities. You also need to ask yourself if you want pretty pictures or coverage extent, if you have limited time with the survey. Some boats have limitations on how slow they can go. Experienced technicians help increase the quality of the images. Vince plans a long-range survey that will have time at the end to get some nice details images.

For nice pictures, you want the captain to be 10 to 20 m off of the site to capture it in the side-scan image. Otherwise you just run over it and divide the image. Sometimes you want to get the nice images in the morning when the water is calmer. It depends on how much time you have.

Dale asked if there are systems that have multiple frequencies included. Vince noted that there are dual frequency systems. Some of those can run simultaneously, and some cannot.

After you have decided on the range (75-100 m will show lay of material), you need to figure out how far apart to make survey lines. You have to determine how much overlap you want. Experienced captains require less overlap. Running lines are not fun, and are very tedious. Captains that are not used to running lines can have problems with this. Vince overlaps as little as 10% with experienced captains, and increases based on experience. Lines need to be as straight as possible. You do not want to have gaps because in post-processing the layback of the towfish causes some error. The images can be adjusted if there is overlap if the survey lines are adjacent and in opposite directions. You can have too much overlap. You will get more centerline data, and less sweet spot information.

Once you have a survey plan, you need to discuss field techniques. The GPS is essential for these surveys. It has to interface with your sonar. In order to follow the survey lines, you need a display for the captain. The captain's GPS plotter may not be good enough, and will require more overlap. In Vince's system, it shows the lines and a boat and the direction. You do not need to follow a constant latitude/longitude line with his system.

Vince covered layback, which determines where the towfish is located. It is the position from your GPS antennae to the back of the boat, plus the length of the chain to the towfish. The towfish is the scanner part in the water. NOAA uses a very expensive system to determine layback. Vince has a program that calculates layback. Even after accounting for layback, there will always be error associated with a target. If you really need to specifically locate a target in real time, you should take multiple surveys of it from different directions to get an accurate position. Multibeam will give better information on exact position.

Vince moved on to post processing. There are hundreds of GPS positions and thousands of data files. He starts by aggregating the positions and data files together. He does a running average of all positions and then merges the data files into lines. The water column block gets taken out, and the two halves are merged together into one image. The bottom is tracked and the images

are merged together. Sometimes the bottom track has to be forced to lock in. Even when you adjust for layback and offset, you will still have some error. As you change speed, or go into and out of the current, the height of the towfish changes or the cable angle changes. The algorithms cannot adjust for that, but there are things you can do to correct it. It still will not be perfect, but it is close.

Next, you have to adjust the gain, or brightness, of the image. You can have the program do this automatically, but that may not show both the materials and habitat. You may need to manually adjust the image. It still will not be perfect.

Next comes target analysis. Vince does not use mosaics to look for targets. He goes back to the original data files to look for targets and get their position. The mosaic is for the overview, but not for target identification. He likes the water column included with target identification because it gives clues. In the mosaic, he can use colored shapes to identify where different types of targets are in a large scale. You could do this same type of identification based on scouring.

Jim noted that when they first started doing side-scan, they used to consider the wind, and adjust their images. Then they got into doing the mosaics, and someone told him to do north-south or east-west transects to help his post processing. Vince notes that "Chesapeake Sonar Wiz Map Pro" is the best post processing program. He did not understand Jim's question. Jim noted that they travel due north or due west. Vince noted that you have to run it the most efficient way. Jim noted that they do not pre-plan their lines. Vince noted that he usually has to work in a strict timeframe, and he does not usually have problems with the post processing. He thought that the more expensive program might help with that. He noted that "Decline" is the best real time processor. Jim noted that they need to buy a new system because theirs is worn out.

Vince moved on to the final products. He noted that you need to determine what you are going to do with the data. Marketing images are always a good thing. He noted that you might want to put something on your website. You might want everything to be GIS compatible. You need to determine how you want your targets reported. There are many different products that can be created.

The digital mosaics are great. They used to do this by using paper. The digital is much better. They can be very complex deliverables, or more simple. Images can go into GIS or web products. Target reports can be completed with information about individual targets, like height, and with thumbnail images. They can print the mosaics in high resolution.

Vince noted that you can get his complete detailed course on a DVD at blacklaserlearning.com.

Keith asked about correcting images, and using divers to verify images. Vince noted that he can outline targets to scale, that does not need additional interpretation of side-scan. Keith asked how many lines you need to verify targets. Vince noted that you need two, each in opposite directions. He noted that you have to understand the limitations of the system you are using. Only divers or ROVs can make 100% certain that a material is what you think it is on the side-scan image. The cost of that generally is prohibitive.

Doug asked how sector sonar would help correct the images. Vince noted that it would depend on how good the system is, and how it is all setup. It depends on how well you know the position of the sector.

Lunch

12:00 pm

❖ State artificial reef program updates

1:00 –3:00

Jessie read George Steinbach's update from California Rigs to Reefs.

Jeff Tinsman deployed 1264 subway cars, and five states participated in the program. Delaware got the first loads that were all Redbird cars. This time six states will participate, with Maryland getting involved. They have gotten three loads at this point. They put in an application for the Ex-Radford. Hugh requested an extension for the application. The schedule required them to submit letters of interest earlier this year. It is a three state effort. There are newly permitted sites established in 130' and 190' water for ships. There are a lot of hurdles in the state to do this, like accepting low bids from contractors. Final application went in at the end of April. In July, Navy asked them eleven questions. Some were about clean up and sinking plans. American Marine Group would be doing the work. They hope for a decision soon, and would hope to get the vessel at the first of the year. They decided to update their reef support vessel, which will allow them to go into deeper water. They are getting a 27' Worldcat that will go 53 mph. It is a catamaran, which will be great in rough conditions. They do not have a concrete contractor; they will rebid that work for next year. They have been dealing with vessels in the interim. They have divided their program into "BF" and "AF", which stands for Before Figley and After Figley (referring to the former NJ Reef program Coordinator, Bill Figley).

Bob Martore noted that their program has been up and down this year. They have sunk 44 subway cars this year. The Army National Guard has been providing materials for reefing over the past ten years. They have gotten some barges and coastal freighters to sink. This week they had budget cuts, and are losing a good chunk of their money. They are running out of money as a result. He asked if anyone has experience with deepwater sinkings (400'+). They have a group that is interested in sinking bigger boats in deeper water. He would like to talk to anyone with experience in that area. He also brought a brochure on their Saltwater Fishing License Program and its relation to artificial reefs. He also had an economic impact of reefs document to share if anyone was interested. They are stalled with Navy about the Ex-Forrestal. They are not moving much on it. He does not know if they are still working on it. The Council has classified their deepwater site as a Type 2 MPA, which does not allow bottom fishing.

Doug Peter became the coordinator for the Louisiana Reef Program earlier this year. They have offshore and inshore reef sites in the Rigs to Reefs program. They have nine planning areas, but they have a process for developing special artificial reef sites outside of that area. They are trying to deal with damaged structures from Hurricane Katrina. They will re-evaluate the SARS process and how they identify the out-of-area reef sites. They have hurricane damaged structures and traditional removal rigs. Some companies are worried that their rigs will get damaged by a hurricane, and that is a more costly decommissioning. They are working through regulatory hurdles to deploy reef balls in Lake Ponchartraine. Twin span bridges will be removed and they

hope to get 73 spans of those bridges. Other proposals for that material include shoreline stabilization.

Mark Rousseau noted that in December the Massachusetts DMF reorganized their staff. The artificial reef program is now under a new habitat program. They do not have any projects going on currently. There is increasing interest in artificial reefs as mitigation measures. The windmills in the sound will be considered de-facto artificial reefs. There is an Ocean Plan from the Governor. The fisheries habitat group is providing information for that, including artificial reefs. They would like to use GIS to figure out where to locate artificial reefs. Right now, people propose reefs and then they decide if that location is appropriate. In this new process, they would have more organization over the reefing in the state. They have a new artificial reef plan that is being printed currently.

Jimmy Sanders noted that Hurricane Katrina destroyed 35 of their inshore reefs. They have restored 29 of those reefs. They have used concrete for those restorations. They have deployed 11,000 concrete culverts, mooring bouys, limestone, reef balls, and other materials. They have had eight new deployments since Hurricane Katrina.

Steve Heath noted that he would be retiring in February. He introduced Kevin Anson as his replacement. Kevin Anson mentioned that they finished deployments of concrete pyramids (about 860 over three years). Their fishing partner group that was providing matching funds for Wallop-Breaux have changed their minds for offshore reefing due to federal snapper-grouper regulations. They are changing their interest to inshore reef sites, and plan to work in those areas next year.

Herb Leedy noted that they have been working on structures damaged in Hurricane Katrina and subsequent hurricanes. Some companies want to leave topsides on the ocean floor. They are asking the companies to pull them because they are contaminated. They are leaving the jackets on the bottom because they are not contaminated. They completed a study in 2005 on deepwater wrecks. The wrecks are pretty deep. They are drafting a study on the ecological effect on removing all rig platforms in the Gulf of Mexico.

Jon Dodrill noted that they have been involved cooperatively with other state agencies to comment on permits. Jacksonville ACOE has been working on permits this year because there was a lot of variation around the state. They want those permits to be more standardized. They ran ideas by Jon's section on the standards. They added requirements for endangered species. They added some materials requirements, including 500 lb. Minimum weight.

An ACOE representative (Bev?) noted that there is a critical habitat for right whales, which has created a time-of-year restriction on deployments. The changes are for the compliance folks. They want to make sure that the materials that they have permitted are what have been deployed.

Jon noted that they have funded nine artificial reef construction projects (using concrete and limestone boulders), three monitoring studies (fish census, deployment verification, and something else), and one research project on prefabricated reef units.

Keith noted that in March they worked with the Florida DEP and Southeast Florida Coral Reef Initiative to develop marine construction best management process document. One of the subjects of that document is on artificial reefs. They are trying to compile existing references to create a document targeted toward new coordinators and regulatory staff. They want everyone to be on the same page. It has been a challenge to consolidate their documents. They have met three times and have a preliminary draft. They hope to go out for public comment in January, and he will send the document to the committee at that point.

Robert Terpin noted that they had a lot of activity due to Hurricane Ivan. They had to replace a bridge (100,000 tons of concrete), and the use of the material as artificial reef was put into the RFP for bridge demolition. They loaded three barges with the material, and followed navigational and deployment procedures. They had another bridge that they reefed 15,000 tons of that. They have nine reefs in the Gulf of Mexico, and each received material. They are going through a regulatory review for a new site (35-60 feet depth). He thought the state folks were doing a great job providing lots of help.

Jon noted a Navy project to set aside a sonar area. It may go in Mayport. Florida submitted comments to Navy on their proposal, especially on marine mammal impacts. They also did not identify how they would route their cable to avoid damaging the artificial reefs that already exist. They also wanted information on deepwater effects on grouper species. The Navy area would cover the entire northeast Florida MPA area for snapper-grouper. They voices many concerns.

Hugh noted that it was a lackluster year for getting vessels. They lost two vessels to scrap, and assume it was due to the high price for scrap metals. They reefed three ships, when the normally average seven per year. They deployed reef balls and eternal reefs. They are not getting demolition concrete either. He did get part of a sea wall that went to the Cape May reef. The highlight of the year was subway cars. They got 120 cars. The divers preferred piled up subway cars. He noted that he had been working with Jeff and Marty on the Radford application. They did some side-scan sonar and underwater videography for monitoring. They initiated a long-term study to assess dredge rock. They made cages to represent dredge rock. They will pull three of these structures up every three months. There is still an issue with gear on the reefs. They are moving forward to prohibit potting on the reefs in their state waters. Bill Figley would be giving an update on legislation for reefs. Hugh noted that they get most money from donations that goes into a non-profit sportfishing fund. The Department of Treasury shut down the program because it was not state funds. Hugh has been writing legislation to get an account for a reef construction fund. That will be the future of their program, since they cannot use the 501(c)(3).

Chris Laporta is working on reef permits. He is meeting with the NY ACOE on November 19. They are trying to get in on the subway cars. They do not know if that will happen. They hope their Commissioner will come through. They cannot handle the requirements of the ACOE permits. They have been out of the construction business for a long time. Steve Heins now leads the finfish section. He was the previous coordinator three years ago. They have no staff. They have been focusing on monitoring. They had the most successful dive season this year. They are doing monitoring by diving. Their aerial monitoring has been down for a while. They are doing trap surveys at four sites. His agency has put in a requirement that at last one existing site,

when permits go through, a Special Management Zone portion be added to that. It has been a difficult push, and he cannot believe it has been so long without permits. He is not sure why it has become such an issue. Concrete has become an issue. The state now lists it as a hazardous waste. Staffing is their biggest critical issue. He wanted to thank everyone who has helped throughout their permitting process. It has meant a lot to him.

Dick Satchwill noted that they have started a five year monitoring program. It is a fish census. They are monitoring invertebrates. They have black sea bass, cunner, scup juveniles, tautog, cod, and sculpin. They have not analyzed any data.

Jim Francesconi has not been having a great year. They went almost one full year with no deployments because of a ship issue. In the meantime, they deployed bouys, side-scan, and other monitoring. They are doing a research project to figure out how much material is good for a patch reef. They have a person working on side-scan work, but he has been called up for the Army National Guard. They did 15 loads of pipe (1850 tons). They are doing another bouy round. They may use boat moulds. He wondered what people thought of using those. There is a concern about lead. He thanked everyone who commented on the reuse of porcelain urinals. He told the proposer that they would need 3100 urinals, and be hand placed. It did not make sense financially to do that. He also does not like to use the ocean as an easy way out for dumping materials. They had a state representative that had a bad experience with a gill net on the reefs. They have prohibited commercial fishing on the reefs as a result. They are going to do a revision of their reef plan, since it is twenty years old.

Dale noted that they have had the year of the hurricanes. The Texas Clipper is coming up on one year on its side. He noted that Doug Peter was instrumental in the project until it went on its side, then he left. They have had estimates of 5-6 million to upright it. They are looking at other projects that Resolve Marine could do for them to mitigate the damage. They have had 6 platforms turn to reefs this year. They have not created any new reef sites. Some nearshore reef sites that they had wanted to create have been delayed- some due to Hurricane Ike. The ACOE office in Galveston was destroyed, so they are working through Corpus Christi. They have to have an ACOE permit, and a general office surface lease. Part of the surface lease says that they cannot use eternal reefs because that is an underwater cemetery. There are lawyers working on that. They have reefed concrete blocks, and are working on a tugboat. They are waiting for approval on grants to use for nearshore reef work. They had to replace most bouys after the hurricane.

Break

3:00 pm

❖ Using artificial reefs for military training, *W. Nuckols*

3:15 – 3:45

Bill noted that he has known some folks in the room through various projects over the years. He does some work as a contractor for NOAA, so he has a few different hats. He is a policy wonk. He has access to some of the military leadership. He mentioned that Reef-Ex has been a variety of programs over the years. They all have the same generic name. In South Carolina they are working with the National Guard under this program. A Colonel used to work on this program years ago was asking about people being interested in this program. He thinks this is timely because everyone is broke. A number of grant programs in the federal system look at

partnerships. Bill thinks that working in groups can be very costly and complicated, unless you will get something out of it. He mentioned the tire reef program in Florida that had a lot of bad PR. There is a multi-disciplinary team with Florida Solid Waste Office, their contract staff, marine watercraft folks, and Navy salvage experts. He noted that it would only cost \$2 million by using this group. Also, there were a lot of expertise that needed to be gathered.

They have started to engage the dive community to help remove derelict fishing gear. You have to figure out where your project fits into something that someone in the Navy is doing. The Coast Guard has been kicked out of the program, but they are still actively engaged, especially with the auxiliary folks.

This year they did a full scale Navy assessment. They used this as a training opportunity, and cleaned up deep water tire cleanup. There is a great press component to these projects because folks in camouflage deliver the message. They talk about marine health, but people pay more attention because they say it is military readiness programs.

A couple of years ago they moved a dolphin because dolphins are in the military. They have another project for a dam destruction project in California. He noted that they Navy ships are often too big and harder to move, but the Army has better matched assets for reefing. Army watercraft includes: tugs, landing craft, barges, and cranes. Planning for the missions is part of their training as well. They have large and small tugs. The ocean tugs can come to you. They have lots of landing craft available, especially smaller ones. Their weight carrying capacity is variable. Barges are few in number in the reserves. Cranes pair up with tugs and have a large tonnage capacity. They really need work. Most people bring small jobs (3,000 lbs). They need larger numbers of items or larger tonnage for their practice. What might be a nightmare logistically to you, is what they are looking to do.

Reserves and active duty do not really talk to each other, so it takes time. This is an evolving process. There is no cookbook to do this. They are trying to come up with something, but it is too long for their regulations right now. They require a statement of interest, non-competition aspects, hold harmless agreements, permitting requirements, and eligibility. These things need to be actually sent in on letterhead to be considered a real request. State letterhead helps avoid some problems. They are now willing to work with private contractors on projects. They do not want to take work away from private contractors, they are just trying to fill the holes. You have to be able to deal with all of the paperwork for the permits. They do not know what permits are needed, so that is your responsibility. This hold harmless agreement should go through the state attorney that deals with ACOE agreements. They will have dealt with liability contracts for those projects so it will not be as big of a deal. State governments and 501(c)(3) organizations can apply for this help.

The range of this help is anything that military personnel do. They prefer real world problems because they actually take less time than making something up themselves. There is an annual application process. Applications are due at the end of February 2009 to the Secretary of Defense, so they are really due around the end of the year (so one year in advance). If it is a smaller local project, and would not break the budget of the local unit, you may not have to go through this process. However, you may have to plan pretty far ahead anyway because they plan

their practice missions ahead of time. They would prefer to actually benefit someone than doing something random on the military base. Most people are highly motivated, and like to be helping in the real world.

Bill noted that he has done this mostly for the federal government so far. He noted that this would probably need to be organized through the regional Commissions. He thinks it is better to deal with larger entities to keep things moving forward. The military likes consistency. If they are doing something, they want to be doing it but they do not so much care where that is happening. The prioritization of projects will have to be sorted out because they do not like a ton of different applications. They would prefer one application because otherwise they tend to shut down. He thinks that collectively we could be a big player. He thinks that we would be a good competitor.

❖ Presentation on PCB monitoring on the Oriskany, *J. Dodrill*

3:45 – 4:15

Jon noted that the Ex-Oriskany was sunk upright in 212 feet depth. The ship has settled ten additional feet since the sinking. It is an advanced dive due to depth and complexity of the structure. One of the issues with sinking the Oriskany were PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls). It is found in insulation, rubber gaskets, and other things. In 2004, as they started the cleanup program, the Navy asked EPA if they could leave some of the materials on the ship. The Navy had to demonstrate to EPA, they had to demonstrate that there would not be any harm to humans or the environment. They estimated that 723 pounds of solid PCBs would be left on the ship. That material had some PCB measurements above 1500 ppm. They simulated a leaching study. They created a Time Dynamic Model and Prospective Risk Assessment Model.

EPA did an extensive evaluation of the documents. They decided to allow those PCBs to be left on the ship. They required that monitoring happen. The Navy did some pre-deployment monitoring. The FWC was tasked with post-deployment monitoring in a very basic evaluation. The Navy got PCB baselines before the deployment. They were all fairly low or undetectable. Older or larger fish tended to have higher PCB levels due to bioaccumulation.

FWC collected 30 fish, mainly red snapper. They were wrapped in tin foil, put in a bag, and frozen. They have done four skin-on sampling rounds so far. In Round 1, they had 34 ppb average not including the outliers. That is above the EPA screening level of 20 ppb, and 50 ppb human level. In Round 2, they had 82 ppb average, which exceeded both limits. The Navy expected an initial pulse in PCBs. In Round 3, they found 55 ppb average. A control site in that round had only 4 ppb. After their next round of sampling, they will meet with EPA to discuss future sampling.

Herb asked if they have publicized the elevated levels to the public, and what their reaction was. Jon noted that they did not have much fishing this year due to regulations and other issues. He noted that EPA has the raw data. They need to reanalyze some samples.

Jim asked what material is on the control site. Jon noted that it had concrete. It is eight miles West of the Oriskany.

Doug asked if they have used the same lab the entire time. Jon noted that they have used Texas A&M the entire time. Doug asked if they considered re-sampling at another lab. Jon noted that might be a consideration.

Tim Mullane asked if there would be targeted sampling of predatory fish. Jon noted that ideally, EPA would like to see extensive sampling, but it would be very expensive to do. That degree of sampling would exceed their budget. There is a lot of potential sampling that could be done.

Will Nuckols asked if they would be able to tell if the PCBs in the fish came from the Navy ship, or somewhere else. Jon was not sure.

❖ AR Monitoring Document, *J. Thomas*

4:15 – 4:45

Jessie gave the background on the monitoring summary document, and asked if the subcommittees wanted to take this farther into a guidance document or something else.

Dale noted that he would send in a summary for Texas. He noted that he had brought up this issue because he would like to know what other states are doing for monitoring. He wanted to see how his state's monitoring compared with other states to explore new ideas. He remembered that Steve had mentioned that guidelines might try to force states to do monitoring.

Steve liked the information exchange, but still does not want any guidance paper. He would rather see the summaries continue to be developed as an information exchange.

Jeff noted that so few states are represented in the document at hand, that it is not ready to go to the Habitat Committee. He thought maybe we should have some sort of a matrix or something. He noted that it is a sensitive issue, like permitting. He understands that states that are not doing anything do not want to be called out. He is not sure how this should best be approached. He thought it needed to be fleshed out.

Jim was hoping that we would be able to share with other people down the line for the future. He noted that what we find important is very different than a university is inclined to do. Someone new into the system does not need to use a framework that the university system is working with- they need to have a framework document that will achieve state needs. Jeff noted that everyone will have different objectives due to different ACOE and NMFS districts. He is required to have a biannual meeting with the regulatory community. He wanted to know what that group wants from them, and could not get that information. However, they continue to get erratic comments. He thinks that Delaware has a comprehensive monitoring program, as necessary. He is not getting guidance from regulators. He thinks that a lot of the studies that regulators ask for are very difficult to design on a broad scale. He does not think that it matters anyway. He noted that the National Artificial Reef Plan does not require monitoring, but it is getting built into permits.

Bob asked what the Habitat Committee wanted. Jessie responded that at least the summaries would be complete for all states. She noted that at the moment it was really a question of if this subcommittee could use something more than this. The folks on the subcommittee talked about

this to clarify what the issue was with the document. Jessie noted that she wanted to know what the subcommittee wanted to do with this document.

Steve thought that the missing states should submit information. He thought we should have one more round of inquiry to complete the document for the subcommittee's information. Jessie thought that was fine.

❖ AR Program Updates, *J. Thomas*

4:45 – 5:00

Jessie reviewed the background behind the reef program summaries. She noted that she had more states information for this than the monitoring summaries, and that was good. She noted that any state that had not submitted a summary should let her know asap if they plan to submit one, otherwise we will consider the document complete. She noted that it would be posted on the ASMFC and GSMFC websites. She noted that it would likely be distributed to the ASMFC ISFMP Policy Board as well. She asked if anyone could think of any other uses, and no one responded.

Recess

5:00 pm

Thursday, November 13, 2008

ASMFC/GSMFC Joint Reef Subcommittee Meeting Continued

9:00 am

❖ Presentation on California Ships to Reefs Effort, *E. Rewerts*

9:00 – 10:00

Eleanore noted that California Ships to Reefs was organized two years ago. They are a 501(c)(3). They have sink groups in five regions of California. They had a meeting in NJ in March and one in May of last year. They determined that all states were facing the same issues as they were, so they decided to form Ships to Reefs International. They hope to create ships as artificial reefs around the world. They are going to coordinate a national reefing program for states to work with the federal government. They have resolutions from some local governments. Their first exhibit at a show was at DEMA last month. They talked to people from all over the US that want to create artificial reefs or work with their state to create reefs. They provided over 300 DVDs based on how all segments of the dive industry can benefit from artificial reefs. They have made presentations to all dive shops in California, and other groups as well. Online polls after articles have come out have had a 98% positive reaction from the general public.

There is confusion internationally between reusing a vessel and disposing it. There are 14 or 15 countries that are working to resolve this issue through the International Maritime Organization. Greenpeace has signed on to this project. Canada has legislation for reefing, but they are having issues with wire on the vessels. They were not sure how the wire with PCBs was going to be disposed. Now they remove all wire and toxics from a ship before they give it to an NGO for reefing. Two years ago the new regulations went into effect in Canada.

In Australia and New Zealand, they have been working with Canada to set up programs. They used to send their wire to southeast Asia. Now they take out all of the wire like Canada. There is a great demand for ships in Australia, so they are trying to get ships from other countries. They anticipate systems in newer ships can be removed more easily.

In the UK, they also worked with the Canadians to get their program established. The royal Navy will remove all of the wire from the ships. They are discussing whether the Royal Navy will do all of this work, or give them money to get it done elsewhere. All projects are supposed with government funding. The most effective management approach has been to use small contractors in small ship yards. They find that it is easier to reef a vessel before it is decommissioned. They have to put concrete in the ballast to make it safe. The insurance costs vary with these projects.

In the US, as of September 30, there are 230 vessels available between Navy and MARAD. Only 3 ships have been reefed since 2001. There are lots of places to put vessels. Scrap steel is rated at \$400 per ton. Recycling is still a lower investment because reefing is an ongoing income for local economies. Because Navy/MARAD never see these local funds, they are less amenable to reefing. Basically nothing is happening. They can only scrap a limited number of ships per year (14).

They are proposing that ecological and economic impact studies be done prior to any reefing. They think that extensive scientific studies will be necessary to show recruitment reestablishment issues. They think this needs to be done on three sites simultaneously. They propose that everyone use the random utility model for an economic study. The hazard of ships sitting in these harbors, we could end up with a ecological disaster. He noted species depletion issues.

They would like to see the federal government fund reefing, and send ships to facilities for cleaning and reefing. It will provide jobs for folks that work in shipyards, would provide habitat for fish and other aquatic species, and provide money to local ports for tourism and diving. Almost 20 cents on the dollar goes back to the federal government. They approximate that \$4.5 to \$6 million average costs for reefing a ship. If you take the high end of the average and apply to all 204 vessels in the inventory, it would be \$1.25 billion to reef all vessels. They want the federal government to responsibly take care of the vessels by reefing them.

They want people to approach their congressional delegations to get this introduced in the next congress. They talked with Barbara Boxer to get this into an economic stimulus package.

Eleanore wanted to know what the group would like to see happen. They realize that the state folks cannot lobby their congressional delegations, but they are trying to get NGOs set up in each state that can do the lobbying.

Bob asked if they had spoken with Navy or MARAD. Eleanore noted that Navy/MARAD had stopped talking with them in March. They are happy dangling ships selectively. She suspects that they are nervous about everyone getting together to work on the issue collectively. Bob noted that it was not that they are an NGO, it is just that they do not want to reef ships. Eleanore thinks that they do not see the money, and that is why they do not want to do it.

Jeff noted that he was uneasy about the approach is diver orientied and economics oriented, but he thinks that it is a small step to show that the states with big diver investment should get all of the ships. Many states in the north are more fishing oriented, and will probably never really be diving oriented. Dean responded that they like fishing. They want to promote fishing. They think artificial reefs are good for diving and fishing. They do not plan to ask that the reefs make no take zones. The idea is that the federal government needs to take the responsibility for the ships. This way there would be no competition for the ships, and whoever is ready could get a ship. They would welcome the support of the fishing community. They have support of fishing groups in California. Eleanore noted that the Oriskany is getting fished as well as dived. Dean noted that a balance has to be struck between habitat protection and fishing. It is everybody's ocean.

Jim noted that there is a dive operator who is negatively impacting fishermen. He is frustrated with the attitude of dive operators and divers because they fishermen have been providing the funding, not the divers. It is the businesses that are paying for the reefs. He noted that there is certain realities, like with the insurance. He noted that the government has to have responsibility for the ship until it is placed at the reef site. Eleanore agreed.

Tim noted that this is an old argument with the Navy/MARAD. Many people nodded.

Jim noted that if an area is closed, then it should be closed to everything- both diving and fishing. Eleanore noted that they are trying to create something for everyone. They want to make the ocean better. Off the coast of California, they have no structure. Dean noted that they would like to work with everyone to address all of the issues. Jim noted that people he works with have a false hope that Ships to Reefs will be able to make a difference, and they think that Jim is not doing anything to fight for them anymore. He noted that he had already been through that fight. He added that some of the ships that Navy has are not appropriate for reefing. He asked if they would be willing to sink ships that would not be good for divers. They noted that they would definitely be willing to sink ships for fishing.

Dean noted that they would like to get folks with the subcommittees expertise to join and help them.

Dale noted that they have disorganized divers in Texas. He thinks that if they can organize everyone, that will be helpful. He noted that they have lived this issue with Navy/MARAD. They do the work, and know the reality of it. They have divers and fishermen as a whole constituency- they cannot be separated or it does not work. They have to get things approved as just habitat.

Dean noted that they have to sell this to California as an economic issue. They do not even have a funded reefing program in their state. Dale noted that he cannot promote this to his senators because he is a state employee. He noted that it would be nice to have this group make that noise. Eleanore noted that they have found some leaders for Texas. Dean noted that if someone from this group would help them craft their message, that would be helpful. He noted that everyone is in this together. He thinks that reefing will help the economy.

Jeff noted that he would feel better if the economic studies were expanded to the fishing industry. Eleanore noted that exists for Florida. She noted that if the state could provide that information to them, they would use it. Jeff noted that they have spoken with people about trying to do that in Delaware. He noted that the same methods can be used for fishermen versus divers.

Jim thought that 95% of the support for reefs would come from fishermen. He gave an example. Dean noted that the divers and fishermen need to talk. Jim noted that he would like them to succeed. Dean noted that he would like help from everyone. Eleanore noted that they would like studies, or contacts that can help move things forward. Bob noted that he can give them information from a recent economic study. They found that the economic benefit from fishing was \$83 million per year versus \$0.3 million for diving. He noted that most states are more fishing oriented. Jon noted that while they have a lot more diving, they are still fishing dominated. Dean noted that they would welcome any information that anyone can share.

Eleanore noted that they have a revised webpage with individual state pages. She asked if they could post the information from the program summaries on their webpage. Everyone thought that would be fine.

❖ Current status of Texas Clipper Project, *D. Shively*

10:00 – 10:30

Dale noted that was going to do an update on the Texas Clipper. He noted that the project has taken on a life of its own. He gave a history of the ship. He noted the openings that they had planned to create. They removed debris and all asbestos. They removed 1680 yd³ of asbestos, 7,000 gallons of hydrocarbons, and a lot of bilge water. PCB wiring was a problem. They had agreed to remove all of the wiring (72250 pounds). They found a black tar substance on bulkheads and ceilings that was full of PCBs. Removal of this delayed the project. They used sand blasting. They tried to maintain the ship structure. They removed the funnel, masts, and kingposts, but they were rewelded on the ship surface. They removed 700 tons of metal. They left the doors but welded them open. Winches were cleaned. He noted that you need an onsite manager almost 24 hours a day. Making a couple of trips a month is not adequate because they will do whatever they want. They removed a bunch of things from the interior. There was a cartoonist named Saul Steinberg who did cartoons for *The New Yorker*. He made a mural that was on a vinyl material. They found it hidden behind wallpaper. They removed it in four pieces, and it is in storage. They are trying to get a museum to restore it.

They sunk it 17 miles out in the Gulf. They tried to use control flooding (they will never do that again). He showed a video of the sinking and the ship's present condition. He noted that they had problems with weather. In November 2007 they were able to sink the ship. They had trouble coordinating with the media. He noted that you should not delay your project for the media. The anchor was in the right place. Making the final cuts took longer than it was supposed to. They attached the marker bouy to the anchor. A tug was in the wrong place, and the contractor could not do anything about it at that point. It sunk on its side.

SO, they spent \$1 million for diver modifications that were buried. It turned into a cave dive essentially. The ship dug the anchor a half mile in the sinking, so now it is in a different site. They expect that the bow will break off, and allow technical divers to choose which floor to explore. Most of the structure is not in the photic zone the majority of the year.

At this point they are in mediation with the contractor over the damage claim. They are trying to avoid going to court. Resolve Marine does not think that they did anything wrong. The attorney general is involved. They estimated it would cost \$5 to 6 million to upright the ship. They are talking about what they can do to mediate the cost of the diver modifications that cannot be used.

Jeff asked what they would do differently. Dale noted that there had been a lot of concrete in the bow early on. They could not determine what else to do with it. They maybe should have put sand or gravel in the engine area. The contractor did not want to do anything. He thinks they should have used explosives like for the Oriskany. He did not use them because they did not want to have to have observers for marine species and all that.

Break

10:30 am

❖ Presentation on Status of Hoyt-Vandenberg, *B. Horn*

10:45 am

Bill noted that they have a new piece of ships to reefs legislation that came out of DEMA. It sets up a program within FWC to administer any funds, should they become available. People would register and apply for a grant through an application process for counties to be passed to MARAD or Navy for ships. They will have to write up some forms. He distributed a detailed handout on the Vandenberg project.

This project was generated by City of Key West. They wanted to take user pressure off the natural reef. The divers are destroying the reefs in Key West from overuse. It was a good justification that the sanctuary supported. They thought this would also increase dive activity, and provide economic development for the City of Key West. The reefs in Key West are not that attractive, so it will help bring divers to the area. He gave a history of the ship.

Their budget was \$8.3 million, and have been working on it for ten years. Proposed sink date is January 2009. They are having funding issues. They have a new permit for this ship. The PCB requirements have changed over time, but they have that under control. It took four years to complete the transfer application with MARAD. In March 2007 it moved to a shipyard for preparation. It has been in dry dock twice- once for invasive species and once for hull work. They also cut major holes and removed large equipment from the ship as well.

They had meetings to get everyone organized for the plan. They will need 10 or 12 FWC vessels to keep the spectators away. For the Oriskany, they had 450 spectators that they had to control. It was towed to Florida in April. Then it was arrested and all work was stopped because the funding had run out. The City of Key West owns this ship. As of Monday, there was an additional \$1.6 million approved from the Florida Governors office. He thinks that will give sufficient funds to complete the project. They think they can pay the back bills. The City of Key

West is under negotiations with the contractor right now. There are only minor cleaning that still needs to be done. They plan to sink in mid-January.

The first draft of the PCB plan was in 2005. They had a good evaluation. They sent a final PCB plan earlier this year. There was a lot more cable than anticipated. It also cost a lot more to remove ventilation gaskets. It greatly increased the cost because they had to dispose of hazardous waste.

They are doing monitoring. Every level of government is represented in the funding. The private sector was supposed to raise more money, but that did not pan out. They will use cutting charges to sink. They think it will take two minutes to sink. They will pre-deploy four anchors, and bring ship out the night before. They will attach to the other three anchors right before deployment. They will sink quickly.

Hugh asked if they would have to scamp the ship again. Bill noted that they would have to look at the issue in Key West. There is an acorn mussel that they are concerned about.

Will Nuckols noted that they had chosen the ship because it was heavy in the keel, and they have done things to hopefully keep it upright.

❖ NYCT subway cars, *M. Zachea*

11:15 am

Mike gave some background information from when they started the program. He went through how they prepare the subway cars. He reviewed the benefits to reefing subway cars instead of scraping. The first redbird project that they did cost \$11 million as opposed to \$32 million that it would have cost to scrap it.

Mike is looking for underwater footage of subway cars to show the NYCT. The newer cars are stainless steel. They normally land bottom side down, unless they are landing on other cars. When they reef the cars, they retain the asbestos.

Herb asked how stable the cars are after deployment. Jeff noted that deploy them in a certain way. Some cars sink to have the car bottom be flush with the sand. They it is unlikely that they move. Delaware sinks them in 85 to 90 feet of water. He said they had to be in at least 60 feet of water to be stable. Bill Figley noted that they have cars at 65 feet. He noted that the depth was more important than the distance from shore. He noted that their cars last about 20 years or so. He would like to see the footage from states that have deployed cars.

❖ Update on Radford, *J. Tinsman*

11:45 am

Lunch

12:00 pm

❖ Chicken transport cage DVD presentation, *S. Heath & K. Anson*

1:00 pm

Keith Anson noted that there has been a discussion in the Gulf of Mexico on materials deployed off of Florida. The chicken transport cages under these new regulations would no longer be

allowed for materials. They are not believed to be a long lived reef material. There is a ¼ inch restriction now on the thickness of the metal material. Alabama has some of these cages, but they have not consistently monitored their reefs. They have gotten some video footage recently to examine the cages. The DVD shows an example in 120 feet of water. Steve wanted to present this to show people some video evidence just for information- not to support or refute the new regulations. They have never had entanglement reported, but they do not really know because they do not monitor on a regular basis. The second clip was in 71 feet of water. The cages made it through Hurricane Katrina. Steve noted that the cages can move, but he thinks that it may have to do with bottom type or some other factor. He noted that his cages at 71 feet did not move, but another researcher lost pots at 100 feet. The cages weigh 550 to 750 pounds. They are deployed in singles or doubles. He noted that sometimes people steal the units. He is surprised that their cages did not move. He noted that individual fishermen are able to deploy the cages themselves, so he supports their deployment.

Jon showed a film from some mysterious chicken transport units in Florida. There were two units chained together. They are deployed primarily by private individuals. There was an issue with how long they last. They do not have information on longevity or movement because people have deployed them privately. Some of the counties are doing some monitoring now. They need to demonstrate that the materials have some longevity and are not moving around. If they can do that, Jon thinks that the ACOE may amend their regulations to allow the cages. There is another issue with people not putting material in permitted areas. Those people are breaking the law. They want their own secret reef.

❖ Discussion on MARAD issues, *J. Ballard*

1:20 pm

James noted that last month at the GSMFC meeting that asked the GSMFC Subcommittee where the federal government would pay for the reefing of ships. They asked that a letter be sent. He was wondering where folks should start with this issue. Steve noted that he was a Commissioner proxy, and that he had mentioned that we had already been over this issue with MARAD. He does not know if the Commission will get any farther with it. He thought that a letter from the Commission might get farther with Senators and Congressmen. What the Commission thinks should happen is that MARAD foot the whole bill, and they should come to us with that. They have ships that are sinking. We will give them places to put the ships. For a small amount of money, they could reef all appropriate ships. He does not have a lot of hope that this will happen. He does not think that the Commission will get a different reaction.

Bill noted that we had sent letters to MARAD before. Bob noted that they never responded to our letters. Steve noted that the letter would be carried by hand, and that might get more reaction if it goes to legislators.

Will Nuckols recommended that if we want to get a different answer than before, this is not the right timing because the heads of all organizations are leaving. He does not think they will be replaced until next June to September. He thinks that the letter would need to be targeted to that timeframe. It should be copied to MARAD, but sent to legislative folks. Steve thought that sounded like a good idea. He asked if we had a copy of the original letter. Jon noted that he would look for it.

Bill thought that they had a limited budget, and need to get rid of ships. He thinks they need more budget money to deal with the issue. Dale noted that they get money for scraping ships. He noted that it depends on the amount of hazmat in the ship.

Steve noted that the Reef-Ex program was originally sold as- they will not make money, but it would serve the American public and provide for the greater good. Dale noted that MARAD says that they have an artificial reef program, but they would prefer to scrap them. He noted that they need some ships because that is their job to take care of them.

Will noted that we might want to stipulate which types of ships we are interested in reefing. Steve noted that he thought it was anything that MARAD wants to get rid of that is seaworthy enough to make a reef. Will noted that there are classes of Navy warships that cannot be used. They have been disposing those. He noted that we might want to find out if there are ships that they will not learn anything from anymore that they could use.

James noted that we need to figure out who is the appropriate audience for the letter. Jon recommended sending it to congressional delegates, but copying MARAD and Navy. He agreed that if we were in a lame duck situation, we should wait until that is resolved. Bill thought there may be more data on socio-economics than we had in years past when letters were previously written. Bill asked if James could draft a letter and send it out to everyone for review. He noted that he would do that, and look for the old letter as well.

Other Business, D. Peter

Doug noted that Mississippi and Louisiana were reefing in the same area offshore terminal areas. There was some issue with commenting on the reefs. No one is talking to each other for what is going on. Some constituents feel like they are in charge of the area that Louisiana is reefing in also. They would like to comment on those projects. They need to come up with a solution for reefing in the area, so that all involved parties are notified that reefing is going on. He is working on addressing the issue with ACOE. The two ACOE districts are not talking to each other and it has become a problem with the public.

Jon asked how close the Mississippi reef sites are to the Louisiana sites. Doug noted that they encompass their planning area. They are kindof surrounded. There is also some question with LNG terminals, and those becoming reefs at some point. It is the Main Pass Planning Area. South Pass Planning Area is nearby as well. Jon asked if these were recent permits. Doug noted that they were from 2001 and 2007.

Adjourn

2:00 pm

Separate Artificial Reef Subcommittee Meetings

ASMFC Artificial Reefs Subcommittee Meeting

2:05 pm

❖ Discussion on artificial reefs as special management zones, *J. Tinsman*

2:15 pm

Jessie noted that Jeff had originally proposed this topic, but he had left the meeting. She noted that the ISFMP Policy Board had also asked about the issue. She needed the opinion of this subcommittee to take back to them in February.

Bob noted that South Carolina has the most special management zones. Some of the Mid-Atlantic have been having problems with commercial fishermen put pots on artificial reefs. They started classifying reefs in SC due to this same issue. The intent was to eliminate commercial fishing, but they cannot say that. So, they limited they gear types that could be used on these reefs. Bob thought that Delaware was having a similar issue in Delaware. The reefs are paid for by recreational fishermen. For South Carolina it has worked out well. The first few years there were problems, but that resolved itself quickly and has not been a problem for a long time. There is a discussion with designating a special management zone (SMZ) versus a marine protected area (MPA). The MPA had a negative connotation, so they are calling things SMZ with stipulated conditions. That is allowed and helps eliminate the negative connotation with MPAs.

Chris asked if the SMZ allowed any take. He asked if it was really semantics. Bob concurred. Chris noted that the gear issue is a big issue. Bob reminded that it is not legal to say commercial/recreational, but you can stipulate gear restrictions. Chris asked if all South Carolina reefs are SMZs. Bob noted that they were all federal offshore reefs. The reefs in state waters are not, but they have state regulations that are the same as the federal regulations but have a different terminology because they are state oversight. They do not have the commercial fishery that some other states have also. Chris noted that the gear conflict is a huge issue, and also where the funding is coming from. Bob noted that the recreational fishermen feel good about the restrictions. Chris noted that a saltwater fishing license is coming to New York, and this will need to be around when that happens. Bob noted that the fishermen are happy to buy a license because they are getting something out of it with these restrictions. They see that money come back to them.

Bill Horn noted that the counties have some SMZs, but they request that. They are only for restrictions on spear fishing, not other commercial gears. Bob asked if they were using power spears. Bill thought so, but he was not sure.

The group discussed the issue that folks seem to have with the term MPA. Bob thought the term SMZ was more widely accepted. People recognize that it is to protect them then.

Bill Figley noted that he loves retirement eventhough he loved being a reef coordinator. HE has been retired for three years, but he could not keep out of the program. He got involved with the lobster and fish traps being all over the reef sites. Off NJ, they set traps that are, or are not baited. The traps are set on long lines that are 1000 to 1500 feet on one line. At each end there is a surface line to a pole float with a flag. A lot of NJ reefs are designed as drift fishing areas. They spread material out thinly to catch flounder sea bass and othe rspecies. They counted flags on reef sites and there was 17,000 feet of bottom runners. Some fishermen say they set 400+ traps on a single reef site. There are about 30-35 trappers that set pots on the reefs. They have 95 licensed potters, but only a portion of those use the reef sites. About two years ago, Bill wrote an article that he sent to outdoor publications- he asked Do You Want To Fish or Play Golf-

because of all of the flags out on the reefs. They tried to get a regulation or legislation to prohibit trapping on the reefs using the SC model. Hook, line, and spear only. Immediately legislations was put into the NJ house and senate. They also worked with the NJ DFW to go over all of the arguments. Unfortunately there are 5 commercial fishermen and 4 recreational fishermen on their marine fishing council. They never even voted on the bill at the council. The amended the proposal, and passed it as a possible regulation. DFW said that is not going to be a regulation, so they disbanded the council. The first year it went to the state senate, they testified, and voted in favor of it. The commercial fishermen then did a bunch of things for the leader, and so he is never going to go against them and pass the bill. SO, this year they put pressure on DFW. They decided to play the Wallop-Breaux card, which says that these reefs are being paid for by recreational fishermen. They went to W-B national, to ask their opinion. They said that commercial fishing is fine on a reef, as long as it does not impinge on the recreational fishermen. It does impinge recreational fishermen because of catching hooks on traps, and getting lines tangled. Also, there is a problem in deploying reef material because there are traps where the material is supposed to go. They did destroy one commercial trapper's pots. They had posted announcements in the newspaper and emails, and the guy lost his gear because he did not pay attention to any of that. The penalties for W-B violations is loss of W-B funds for the state, or the repayment of funds. They said be careful what you wish for because the results are not what you asked for. Bill interpreted that they might end the reef program, and cut off their nose despite their face. They took the letter to DFW, and talked to Director who agreed to put a regulation that makes it hook line and spear only. There are a few recreational trappers. He is not sure at this point where it is going because things have been quiet since those ideas had passed around. He sees that this will continue to get worse. It is only a problem on a few of the reefs (5 of 15). Eventually it will be a problem on other sites as they gain more reef material.

Bob asked if they had a recreational license, or if there is only W-B. Bill noted that they do not have a recreational license. Hugh noted that a lot of clubs make donations for material and then get annoyed when gear is all over the reef they paid for. Bill noted that he explained to the rec fishermen that they need to get a license so the folks in the capital will listen. He thought that the MAFMC will have a problem with this also for federal waters. The only thing they have going for them is that the other states are having the same problem.

Bill Horn noted that the SC example is something to show.

Jim noted that Jeff had called him last week asking him to chime in on this issue. He noted that they do not have the same degree of problem that NJ has. They have 1 or 2 reefs that get gillnetted. There is commercial activity on reefs in federal waters, but it is only hook and line. Some divers take fish, but that has not raised its head. There is a push by a representative that had a poor experience on a reef with commercial fishing gear, and has proposed regulations restricting gear. Louis Daniel asked him what the issue was. Jim told him it was a gear issue, and that they needed to look at issues with all of the reefs. He noted that their AR Plan is inadequate to address this issue. They have regulation and rule that the Director can restrict up to 500 yards for artificial reefs from the boat. That addresses an aspect of the issue. The bouys are normally around the material. The bottom line is that he has been tasked to make the round to the regional Commission Advisory Panels to give updates on their AR Plan that is open for comments and will be rewritten. They hope to have something out in 2009 to provide some

direction. They may modify the rule that is in place on the Director's authority to make it more enforceable. The authority is only a mandate at best, and it has to be renewed every year. Otherwise they would have to make another rule at their Commission. Enforceability is the biggest question. The Commissioners are also not sure if it is really called for right now.

Bob noted that it is easier to say what is allowed than what is not allowed.

Jessie asked if we have a consensus opinion on this issue. She wondered if everyone supported the investigation into using SMZs. Does everyone think there is a need to look into this further and support these designations?

Bob noted that he thought that all future artificial reefs should be SMZs. Jessie asked if everyone agreed with Bob.

Bob asked if anyone has created artificial reefs for commercial fishermen? Jim noted that they have things that say that commercial fisheries are allowed on the reefs in NC. Bill Figley noted that it is a gear issue. He noted that commercial fishermen did not want reefs designed specifically for them when asked. They wanted to fish on the recreational reefs. He noted that the permit holders have to apply to the federal agencies for SMZ status on the reef- not just anyone.

Chris noted that the lobster pots are catching fish. Some people definitely think that they should do away with the pots on the reefs.

Bob noted that the consensus was that the subcommittee agreed that some gear restrictions were needed on artificial reefs, so they supported the idea of SMZs. They noted that SC was a good example of a successful use of SMZs. They requested that information be shared with the Policy Board.

Jessie thanked everyone for attending the meeting, and wished them safe travels.

Adjourn **3:00 pm**

GSMFC Artificial Reefs Subcommittee Meeting **2:05 pm**

❖ Policy, regulations, issues, and concerns for inshore reefs, *J. Ballard* 2:15 pm

Adjourn **3:00 pm**

**ARENARIUS TECHNICAL TASK FORCE
MINUTES
November 17-18, 2008
Ft. Myers, Florida**

APPROVED BY:


COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

The Arenarius Technical Task Force (TTF) was called to order on Monday, November 17, 2008, at 8:40 a.m. at the Sanibel Harbour Resort & Spa in Ft. Myers, Florida. Attendance was as follows:

Members Attending

Chuck Adams, UF, Gainesville, FL
Denise Kinsey, LDWF, Borg, LA
Erick Porche, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Brenda Bowling, TPWD, Dickenson, TX
Ron Mezich, FWC, Tallahassee, FL
Jack Isaacs, LDWF, Borg, LA

Staff

Steve VanderKooy, IJF Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Teri Freitas, IJF Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS

Chairman Adams opened the meeting by asking each participant to introduce themselves and welcomed our newest member, **Dr. Jack Isaacs**, the Sociologist representative from LDWF. The TTF is made up of a scientific representative from each Gulf State (**Van Hoose, Porche, Kinsey, McCawley, and Bowling**); a recreational fishery representative (**Harmon**); a commercial fishery representative (TBD); an economist (**Adams**); a habitat representative (**Mezich**); and a law enforcement representative (**Chatagner**).

Adoption of Agenda

The agenda was reviewed by all the TTF members, **Adams** made the motion to accept the agenda as written; it was seconded by **Mezich** and passed unanimously.

Minutes

The minutes from the April 15-16, 2008, meeting in Apalachicola, Florida were approved. The motion to accept the minutes was made by **Adams**; it was seconded by **Mezich** and passed unanimously.

Species Specific Data

Adams addressed the "lumping of" the NMFS data for the Florida landings of the sand and silver seatrout into one category called "sandtrout". There are two potential problems with this species (*nothus* vs. *Arenarius*), they are being recorded wrong or misidentified by samplers. **VanderKooy** had Gregg Bray of the FIN Program pull all the Florida recreational MRFSS landings, by county, for both *nothus* and *Arenarius* and found that there were consistently one or two counties that always showed some *nothus* landings, but not nearly as much as *Arenarius*. So

we can obviously say that the majority of the landings are sand seatrout, but this leads to us question is somebody misidentifying them elsewhere, or does this one particular county have a sampler who knows what they are looking at. When we throw into the mix, our concern about identification by the samplers becomes an even bigger problem. Louisiana reported they also have the same issue there. **VanderKooy** stated that since this is a single profile, we may need to make a disclaimer about the data being presented. Since there is an overlap of these two species we will need a description of both species. Below is the AFS definition of both species:

AFS Definition of *Cynoscion nothus* is: Dorsal spines (total): 11; Dorsal soft rays (total): 26 - 31; Anal spines: 2; Anal soft rays: 8 - 11; Vertebrae: 27. Colour greyish above and changing abruptly to silvery below. Back and upper sides sometimes with very faint irregular rows of spots. Dorsal fin dusky, other fins pale to yellowish. Mouth large, oblique, lower jaw projecting. Upper jaw with a pair of large canine-like teeth at tip. Lower jaw with a row of sharp enlarged inner-row teeth, widely spaced. Chin without barbels or pores. Snout with 2 marginal pores. Gas bladder with a pair of straight, horn-like anterior appendages. Soft portion of dorsal fin covered with small scales on basal half of in (Ref 51721).

AFS Definition of *Cynoscion arenarius* is: Dorsal spines (total): 9 - 11; Dorsal soft rays (total): 25 - 29; Anal spines: 2; Anal soft rays: 10 - 12. Colour uniform silvery grey above, without conspicuous spots, silvery below. Pelvic and anal fins pale to yellowish. A faint dark area at bases and axial of pectoral fins. Inside opercle darkish, often visible externally. Mouth large, oblique, lower jaw slightly projecting. Upper jaw with a pair of large canine-like teeth at tip. Lower jaw with a row of widely spaced larger inner-row teeth, gradually increasing in size posteriorly. Chin without barbel or pore, snout with 2 marginal pores. Gas bladder with a pair of horn-like anterior appendages. Soft portion of dorsal fin with few small scales rows at base between soft fin rays (Ref 51721).

TTF members asked why the sand seatrout was chosen as a species to be considered for a profile. **VanderKooy** stated that before he started at the Commission there was a ranked list of potential species to be developed into a Profile or FMP, and at the March 2007 S-FFMC Meeting it was voted on and they chose this species.

Below is a table that inventories the data we have so far and what data is still required:

	<u>Commercial</u>		<u>Recreational</u>		
	Annual lbs.	Annual \$	Monthly lbs.	Monthly \$	Annual #'s or lbs.
TX	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
LA	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
MS	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
AL	N	N	N	N	Y
FL	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Review of Arenarius Website

VanderKooy demonstrated how to use the Arenarius TTF Website <http://arenarius.gsmfc.org>. The home page on the website consists of the following sections: home, calendar, document repository, forum, and contact us. **It is very important that you download documents to your computers hard drive before you make any comments; send your comments directly to the author or to VanderKooy and he will forward it to the author for you.** Please post your documents (Word, PDF or Excel files) as you complete them, and feel free to contact **VanderKooy** if you have any questions or problems using the website. **VanderKooy** then showed TTF members how to upload draft documents to the website by clicking on the document repository. Look in the document store column (left), click on the name of the folder you want to deposit the document, look in the documents column (right) click on the upload documents icon. Complete all the information in the document repository screen, and then click on the upload icon. The intention is to have the individual authors post up their drafts for everyone to review, when you go to the website download the document and save it to your hard drive, print it on paper, do not edit it electronically and repost it, if you want to edit it electronically, provide a paragraph for the author, take the electronic copy that you put on your hard drive make the changes and email it to the author. Let the author make the changes and upload the most current version to the website. Please do not re-upload other people's documents.

Table of Contents/Assignments

VanderKooy again reminded the TTF members that the Table of Contents is only a guide and is not set in stone, the numbering system is very difficult, but it is the best way to keep track of the hierarchy of how things fall out in the outline; the page numbers are going to change, so don't worry about that yet. Sections may be combined, modified, split, rearranged, added or deleted. You may find a lot of things that just don't apply to this species, and that is okay. To be consistent, please use the official name sand seatrout (the AFS common name) throughout the document for *C. arenarius* and silver seatrout for *C. nothus*.

12.0 Appendix – All

VanderKooy briefly reviewed Section 12 and reminded TTF members to keep Section 12.1 (Glossary) in mind when writing their sections so that it can be easily updated when the time comes. **VanderKooy** also stated that we will not be doing a market survey for the Arenarius Profile.

11.0 References – All

VanderKooy reminded TTF members to keep track of their references and go back and look at the original source reference and get a copy of it before you cite it in your section. Please keep the list of your references at the back of your section; they will be removed and put in the back of Profile during the editing process. All reference material should be copied and mailed to the GSMFC to be scanned, so that we can make it available electronically in our database.

10.0 Review and Monitoring of the Profile – Staff

VanderKooy reported that this section is boiler plate and for the most part the draft is already complete.

9.0 Regional Research Needs and Data Requirements – All

VanderKooy stated that this section ties together all of the important research needs and data requirements in the biology, habitat, and fishery sections; including where the weaknesses are, what we do know, what we need to know, and what we need to work on in the future. This section can not be completed until the drafting process is complete, but TTF members should be making notes on what data might be lacking as they write.

8.0 Social and Cultural Framework – Isaacs

Isaacs shared his thoughts on how he plans to tackle this section and has found thus far that there is not a whole lot of data out there. In 2004, Louisiana they did a survey on the recreational fishing of senior anglers and hunters asking them what species they target 1st, 2nd and 3rd and there were actually some who said they targeted sand seatrout in particular. Texas reported that in their creel survey they ask if they are targeting any particular type of fish and what kind, and the sand seatrout has its own code. In Florida the default limit on an unregulated species is 100 lbs., so fishermen will often catch hundreds of them because of their abundance in some locations. **VanderKooy** suggested that **Isaacs** use the Spotted Seatrout FMP as a guide so he will not have to reinvent the wheel, but to keep in mind that not all sections will apply. TTF members should feel free to send **Isaacs** any Social and Cultural information that they find or may come across.

7.0 Economic Characteristics - Adams

Adams stated that he is waiting for all landings data before drafting the Economic section. He expects that he will be able start writing this section as soon as he receives the monthly data from Florida and all the data from Alabama, which he expects to receive in the next couple of weeks. **Adams** requested that TTF members send him any information that they may have on the recreational sector, like fishing activities or something that would lend some credence to the discussion on the values associated with this species from the recreational perspective.

6.0 Description of Fishing Activities - McCawley, Porche, Adams

Recreational Fishing/Commercial Fishing - VanderKooy reported that **McCawley** emailed her data request for landings to each state representative on the recreational, commercial fisheries, and history. Once she receives all the data for this section, it should come together pretty quickly. The individual states will need to advise **McCawley** of any landings data abnormalities from the year to year like hurricanes, really bad freezes, biological reasons, etc. Since we will not be doing a stock assessment, the trend analysis is what will tell what is happening to the population.

Incidental Catch - **Porche** reported that this will be the last section he will be drafting. **VanderKooy** suggested **Porche** look at the Spotted Seatrout and Flounder FMPs. **Porche** asked if anybody was doing any onboard observation anymore, **Texas** reported they did with BRDs, and **Louisiana** was not aware of any. It was suggested that **Porche** talk with Gary Graham of Texas SeaGrant or Judy Jamison of the Gulf and South Atlantic Fisheries Development Foundation; they might have some reports on bycatch characterization changes.

Mariculture – **Adams** suggested that this section be removed from the Profile, the TTF members agreed.

5.0 Fishery Management Jurisdictions - Chatagner/VanderKooy

VanderKooy reported that most of this section will be a cut and paste from the Spotted Seatrout FMP or the Sheepshead Profile. Initial contact was made with each state law enforcement representative regarding their laws and regulations on sand seatrout and it determined that there are no commercial landings for this species. There is not much commercial interest in the sand seatrout because they are primarily bycatch. Once we receive input from the LEC members, this section will need a lot of weeding out; some sections may end up being removed because they do not apply and the ones that do apply will need some minor updates. **VanderKooy** asked the TTF members review the first half of Section 5 and provide recommendations for inclusion or deletion to **Chatagner**.

4.0 Description of the Habitat – Mezich

Mezich presented the TTF members the first draft of the Habitat Section 4.1 to 4.7. Part of it is boilerplate from the Sheepshead Profile. TTF members reviewed the Habitat section for content and made a few minor edits. **VanderKooy** then upload this section to the webpage. **VanderKooy** will email **Mezich** the new oyster habitat section on submerged vegetation to assist in updating the vegetation section. Sections like Habitat Quality, Quantity, Gain, Loss and Degradation – Hypoxia and Algal Blooms will require some major updating. It was suggested that we may want to add a tropical weather impacts section to address the long term effects of storm activity and habitat alteration on effect reduction and the restoration vs. human protection.

3.0 Description of Stock - Bowling, Van Hoose, Kinsey, Porche

Description of Stock - **Bowling** presented her second draft of the following Sections: Geography, Classification, Eggs, Larvae, Juveniles and Adults. **Bowling** reported that she is still looking for any reference or data on juvenile descriptions and morphology; she has done her own, but is looking for more data. **VanderKooy** will check with Bruce Comyns at GCRL to see if he has any information on juvenile descriptions and morphology from the SEAMAP program. **Mezich** suggested looking at citation by (Thompson 1986); it might have what she is looking for. **Bowling** reported that she is also searching for three references: (Vick 1964) largest reported size is 590 mm from Florida; (Sanchez 1997) geographic description – Nicaragua and Honduras; Fish Bulletin (Devries and Chittendon 1987). TTF members then briefly reviewed and discussed this section. **Bowling** stated that she is ready for editorial comments; **VanderKooy** asked that TTF members download this section and send Brenda their comments directly.

Age and Growth – **Van Hoose** was unable to attend this meeting so there was no update given on his section.

Reproduction and Larval Transport – **Kinsey** presented her second draft of the reproduction section, which included: Gonadal Development, Spawning, Fecundity, Incubation and Larval Transport. **Kinsey** stated that she is looking for a reference by (Marmer 1954). TTF members reviewed, commented and made some suggestions to this section. **VanderKooy** will post the revised document to the Arenarius website.

Genetics – **McCawley** was unable to attend, but she did participate via the phone. She provided a draft of the Genetics section which the TTF members discussed and commented on. **McCawley** reported that she is looking for the (Ginsberg 1929) reference and any published, unpublished or raw data, phone conversations or emails, available on genetics. **VanderKooy** reported that he found the Ginsberg paper at GCRL, he will scan it and forward it when he returns to the office. **Bowling** reported that she has a new genetics paper from Texas on silver and sandtrout, which she forwarded via email to **McCawley** and **VanderKooy** during the meeting. **McCawley** reported that FWC has some genetic samples and plans on working them up in the near future. **McCawley** questioned how much detail she should go into on the Texas genetic study. **VanderKooy** suggested that she review the new genetics paper **Bowling** emailed her and incorporate that into this section as well.

Migration and Movements, Parasites and Diseases and Prey-Predators Relationships – **Porche** presented a very rough draft of the feeding section and will be adding predator-prey to this section; which will probably be a cut and paste from the Spotted Seatrout FMP. He stated that in its current form, it's more bullet points than an actual paragraph, but it is a starting point. **Porche** found that the more references he went through, the more repetitive it became. The TTF members reviewed and commented. **VanderKooy** will upload this section to the Arenarius website.

2.0 Introduction

VanderKooy briefly reviewed a draft of this section which includes the IJF Program and Management Process, Arenarius Technical Task Force, GSMFC IJF Program Staff, Authorship, Support for Plan Development and Profile Objective.

Next Meeting

VanderKooy reported that he does not expect to receive his 2009 IJF funding until April or May of 2009. Until funding is received we will not be able to meet. Please continue to use the Arenarius website as a means of communication, post your drafts there for comment and review to keep the process going until we can meet again. Web conference calling may be a potential option for meeting until IJF funding is received. **VanderKooy** showed a video on “Go to Meeting”; which is a flat fee meeting online service and talked about using a service like this, along with a conference call, as a temporary option to face-to-face meetings until funding is received. If approved by the Commission, **VanderKooy** will get a 30 day trial subscription and give it a try. Without meetings or deadlines the Profile tends get put on the backburner.

GSMFC Travel Policy

Freitas provided the TTF member with a brief overview of GSMFC travel policies. The authorization and reimbursement procedures were explained and the group was referred to the *GSMFC Travel Guidelines* for detailed information. Any additional questions regarding travel should be addressed to Gayle Jones, the GSMFC travel coordinator.

Other Business

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 11:00 a.m.

**OYSTER TECHNICAL TASK FORCE
MINUTES
December 3-4, 2008
Gulfport, MS**

APPROVED BY:

COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

Moderator, **Steve VanderKooy** called the meeting to order at 8:40 a.m. The following members and were in attendance:

Members

Brian Lezina, LDWF, Lacombe, LA
Cherie O'Brien, TPWD, Dickinson, TX
Mark Berrigan, FDACS, Tallahassee, FL
Bill Arnold, FWC/FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Bradley Randall, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Priscilla Weeks, Houston Advanced Research Center, Woodlands, TX
John Supan, LSU, Baton Rouge, LA
Mark Van Hoose, AMRD, Dauphin Island, AL

Staff

Steve VanderKooy, GSMFC, IJF Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Teri Freitas, GSMFC, IJF Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS

Adoption of Agenda

VanderKooy reviewed the agenda and handouts that were provided in the meeting folders. He also distributed two (2) CD's: Chesapeake Introductions Draft EIS Volumes 1 and 2 and Oyster Reprints. **VanderKooy** noted that we will be jumping around the agenda. TTF members agreed without objection.

VanderKooy indicated that due to funding issues, it is expected that travel will not be authorized until April or May of 2009. **VanderKooy** offered the possibility of doing a GoToMeeting web conferencing and conference call combination and then he showed a brief video of that service. TTF members agreed that this may be good temporary meeting solution until IJF funding is available.

Approval of Minutes (August)

The minutes from the meeting St. Petersburg, Florida, August 12-13, 2008, were approved. **Supan** moved to approve the minutes, **O'Brien** seconded the motion and the motion passed without objection.

Regional Oyster Stock Assessment Discussion

Arnold discussed the summary of the Stock Assessment presentation that was given by Dr. Eric Powell, Director of Haskin Shellfish Research Laboratory, Rutgers University. **Arnold** agreed with Powell's assessment that the Gulf needs to make estimates of the number of animals by

management area and have enough of a time series to generate an exploitation rate model to determine whether or not the fishery or stock, as it exists now, is likely to be in a sustainable mode. When you have limited data the Constant Abundance/Surplus Production is an easy calculation if you know your dermo mortality rates, growth rates, and some basic idea of the abundance at the size class level. **Arnold** suggested that we start with a simple model in 2 or 3 management areas to see what the options are. TTF members then discussed which areas to use for the model. **Berrigan** and **Arnold** suggested using two reefs in Apalachicola, FL since they have data going back 20 years.

Supan asked if each state does square meter samples; one of the ways to standardize dredge data and is to collect a standard volume of dredge material by building a cubic foot box and when you drag the dredge you keep the scope the same the whole time. Dredge the cubic foot box until it is full, look at the dead and live animals and then set up your histograms for your size categories. If you don't need to know the number of sacks per acre, this can work out very well because you are standardizing your volume. You can get good data on five (5) one cubic foot samples; you will get a good CV. If you need to know what your numbers of sacks per acre are, then you have to do square meter samples.

VanderKooy suggested that we ask **Butch Pellegrin** of NOAA/Pascagoula for his assistance on the stock assessment model he used for blue crabs 6-7 years ago. **VanderKooy** will contact **Butch Pellegrin** and he will also try **Dr. Richard Fulford** at GCRL who may be interested in or may have a student that would be interested in doing a Constant Abundance/Surplus Production model as part of a thesis project. After lunch **VanderKooy** reported that he spoke with **Pellegrin** and found that the surplus production model he had used for the blue crab assessment may not be adequate, as we found in that exercise. **VanderKooy** will forward him Powell PowerPoint presentation and the summary for him to get some idea of what we are trying to do.

Assignment Status and Section Updates

Section 16.4 - Cultch Materials

Randall presented his first draft of the individual states excel spreadsheets on the cost of cultch material, by date, location, cultch type, etc. TTF members discussed whether all the categories should be on every states spreadsheet. Should some categories be eliminated, because some categories on the matrix will not be filled in for every state? It was agreed that the categories should be the same on each states spreadsheet and that some blanks are to be expected; it will show the differences between each of the Gulf States and not all the information is available in each category for every state. The notes section of the spreadsheet will be important from the historical perspective to explain major differences and changes. **Randall** stated that he will work with the states individually to complete these spreadsheets. **Randall** asked TTF members if they had an opportunity to review the LDWF Socioeconomic Research Departments Final Report for Louisiana's Oyster Shell Recovery Pilot Project, dated March 29, 2004. **VanderKooy** uploaded the document to the website while the TTF members discussed it briefly. Several TTF members stated that they had not seen this report, but they thought they would find it very useful.

Section 16.3 - Aquaculture/Mariculture

Supan reported that he posted his latest draft to the Oyster website this morning and then reviewed his section with TTF members. There are two sections that he still needs to complete oyster gardening and zoning; which he expects to be done with very shortly. **Weeks** and **Supan** discussed the Social impact on the canned oyster industry and also on aquaculture and leasing. **Supan** offered to introduce **Weeks** to a couple of oyster fishermen to get their take on these issues. **Berrigan** suggested that we add the status of aquaculture in each state i.e. regulatory, production, numbers of acres, etc.

Louisiana reported that they have more oyster farmers than oyster fishermen. **VanderKooy** stated that TTF members need to decide where in the FMP they want to have the discussion on the difference between an oyster farmer and an oyster fisherman.

The question was raised as to what the TTF's definition of a lease is and where, in the document, it should be defined. It was discussed and agreed that the definition of leases will be provided in **Van Hoose's** Section 7.

VanderKooy reminded TTF members to please take the time to read and comment each other sections.

Section 16.2 - Fishery Disaster Criteria

Berrigan stated that at the last meeting it was decided that this section would be deleted out of the Appendix, but could be addressed in Section 12.

Section 11 -- Social and Cultural Characteristics of Oyster Fishermen and Their Communities

Weeks reviewed her progress on the pros and cons of collaborative research and management and found that she needs examples and input from each of the states. **Supan** will send a paper on a LA research program to **Weeks** (on GIOP). Alabama and Louisiana reported that they are using EDRP monies to involve the oyster fishermen. **Berrigan** suggested putting the list of Organizations, Associations and Other Groups in Section 9 (currently in **Keithly's** section) into a matrix; TTF members agreed. **Weeks** will email each state representative their list of Organization, Associations and Other Group and update in their states list and provide a small description of what each organization does. **Weeks** noted that there have been a number of social changes in the fishery and family history like changes in the ethnic groups participating, less family due to insurance needs, and children not replacing parents in the fishery. Is anyone seeing these changes such as few young people in the fishery, license numbers going up or down, movement to other areas or states to find work with the current unemployment situation nationwide? In Louisiana, gentrification is a big problem with leases becoming corporate and an immigrant labor force. **Lezina** noted there is actually a trend to more vertical stratification of the oyster fishery with numerous leases being held by single individuals or companies, some of which aren't even in Louisiana. Labor issues are not exclusive to the oyster fishery or to

Louisiana. The total fishing industry has been seeing a shift in the ethnic makeup of the workforce. Many laborers came in for construction and followed the work post-hurricane but that's not necessarily happening in the fishing industry. Crews are rotating between states and fisheries in some cases from week to week. **VanHoose** reported that even in local processors, small shops have closed and big shops are reduced simply because the demand is down at this time.

Mississippi reported that they do not have limited entry, but they do have the power to put a Moratorium on licenses. Louisiana reported that they do have limited entry. The recent high price of fuel did not affect the LA oyster industry.

Considerable discussion related to 'oyster gardening' was covered and **Weeks** would determine what role the concept has in the cultural aspect of the recreational fishery.

Section 10 – Description of Economic Characteristics and Section 9 – Description of Oyster Processing, Marketing/Distribution and Trade Organizations

VanderKooy read an email update from **Keithly** which stated that he will have a draft of his sections written before Christmas, but has the following questions so far: **Keithly** reported that he had rewritten much of the historical production section (poundage) which **Berrigan** had tackled previously. He did it to refamiliarize himself with production before he could address dockside value, processing, etc. and would, at some point, likely merge it with what **Berrigan** has already written. **Keithly** attempted to explain some of the changes in annual production for Louisiana as the change relates to environmental conditions but is not as familiar with other states but included a comment in his draft asking for additional information for that. **Keithly** was hoping that the TTF members might help identify possible explanations for what seems to be short-term/lung-run changes in production over time. He has not addressed, nor plans to address, the section on gear and CPUE by gear. **Keithly** concluded over the years that the NMFS data on operating units has historically been very poor and furthermore, it has become even worse since it began to simply use state licenses as a measure of operating units. He would like the TTF to discuss this issue and determine if it is worthwhile writing something about it.

VanderKooy will send out a CD after the first of the year with every draft section. Once you receive the CD please review every section and provide the section author your comments.

Section 13 – Research and Data Needs

VanderKooy noted that this section was primarily for the purpose of identifying the things that need to be done regarding research. It identifies data gaps, other issues, and concerns like stock assessment, would be appropriate. **Everyone** needs to review this section and determine what needs to come out and what needs to be added to this list. Some categories have already been addressed since the original FMP and have been removed or need to be updated. All changes need to be sent to **VanderKooy** for inclusion.

Section 7 – Description of Fishery Activities

Van Hoose has not had a chance to update his section, but stated that he has gotten a lot of good information from the various discussions today, but had several more questions: the table on closures for public health, how far back does each states data go? What are the states policies on closures? Who mandates those closures? Landings by state? **VanHoose** would contact each of the state reps to get some of the information he was looking for.

Section 6 – Fishery Management Jurisdiction

VanderKooy reported that state Health Department updates have been slowly coming in, to date he has made contact with Alabama and have already received their update that will need to be paired down. **Lezina** reported that he and Banks will probably end up writing this section for Louisiana. Contact has been made with Texas. Florida reported that they have made contact. Mississippi does not have Health Department involvement, it is done by the Shellfish Bureau within the MDMR. **Randal** would provide the necessary materials for Mississippi.

VanderKooy requested that the TTF members review Section 6 table of contents to see what is missing or needs to be added.

Section 8 – Public Health Concerns Introduction and History

VanderKooy reported that he and **Herrington** have been working on this section and have discussed moving this forward to between Sections 5 and 6. **Herrington** planned on participating via conference call on Thursday morning, but was unable to due so. **VanderKooy** led the discussion moving this section forward and the TTF members agreed to move the public health section forward and made it the new section 6.0 and title it Human Health and Risks. There have been a lot of changes with the ISSC that will affect this section and it will need to be re-written before the document is completed.

Section 16.5 - Public Education

Herrington will also have to rewrite this section as well, due to the FDA issues but it will have to wait until after the ISSC meeting next summer.

Section 5 – Threats to Survival

Lezina reported that he updated this section over Thanksgiving and will upload it to the website. He asked that TTF members read and provide him comments. **Arnold** suggested adding a section on oyster catchers and other migratory birds. **VanderKooy** suggested adding two diseases based on Harrington's e-mail from a few weeks ago on Bonamia in South Carolina, there was a second pathogen mentioned in that study. Coastal communities and coastal development are mentioned in a couple other sections as well, were should it exist? **Berrigan** thought is belonged in Threats and suggested using the ESA document for any additional information on the topic.

Berrigan asked if the TTF members are finding any recent reference citations, throughout this FMP he has noticed there have not been many current references cited and raised the concern of the peer review questioning why we did not reference anything more current. **VanderKooy** expressed that most of the newer information is on the biology. **Berrigan** noted that there is a lot of new information coming out from the east coast and we should be sure we're including those that are helpful. There is also newer information published on genetics and these would be reflected more in Robinson's section. **Weeks** expressed that she is finding a lot of information on the oyster fishery but not on sociology side of the fishery. **Randall** suggested that **Weeks** contact LaDonn Swann at MS/AL SeaGrant who is located at GCRL. **Supan** is offering one of his students to help find literature citations, just provide him with a keyword. **VanderKooy** also offered GCRL services through him.

Section 4 – Habitat

O'Brien reported that did make a few minor changes from **VanderKooy's** comments and sent out an email to TTF members (December 4, 2008) asking for oyster reef acreage data, the rest of section 4 is ready for TTF member comment and review. **Lezina** reported that he will not be able supply the data as requested for the tables, but will be able to supply total acreage of public areas and total surface area of lease area but not acreages. **O'Brien** reported that she received data from most of the states and got clarification on the data she received from several of the state representatives. **O'Brien** polled the members on the matrix categories; i.e. oyster reef (consolidated) in acres, shelly sediment (un-consolidated) in acres, oyster reef and unconsolidated shelly sediments in acres, etc. **O'Brien** will readjust the tables with the information she received today and will email the state reps. to verify the changes that she made.

TTF members had a lengthy discussion on what section side-scan sonar information should go in for habitat evaluation, disaster assessment, etc. These include specific data useful for habitat and stock assessment and could live under an assessment section or a possibly under a new section Reef Mapping and Monitoring. It may need to be placed prior to recommendations since they will be based on the assessment. Members agreed to make a new section titled "Mapping, Monitoring and Stock Assessment" placement of this section is TBD and to be spearheaded by **Arnold**.

Supan suggested adding a section after 4.7 on shoreline stabilization/restoration/rehabilitation; he will forward it to **O'Brien** for consideration.

Section 3 – Description of Stocks Comprising the Management Unit (MU) and Description of the Habitat

Robinson was unable to attend and there have not been any updates since the last meeting. **VanderKooy** stated that the document was fairly complete from the last meeting and that TTF members should review this section and provide comments directly to **Robinson**.

Section 12 – Management Considerations and Specific Management Recommendations

Berrigan began by identifying areas that he is not comfortable with and **reiterated that everyone needs to read section 12.0 and weigh in on it**, and then went on to review his draft section by section. **Please provide any recommendations to Berrigan related to your specific state ASAP.**

Section 12.4.1.1.2 Water Projects – **Berrigan** pulled the information on the Bonnet Carré spillway came out of a newsletter article and needs work. **Lezina** has some comments on that section specifically to help. There is a lot of information needed from **Robinson** on the ownership of water in Texas and the other states. **VanHoose** noted a few issues in Alabama and obvious problems in the ACF system. Is the management of water good or bad for oysters and if it's bad, what recommendations should be made to improve oyster growing areas? **O'Brien** will provide some minimum flow requirements on Texas freshwater discharges for oysters.

Section 12.4.1.2 Managing Coastal Development might be boilerplate from the threats section but there might be specific areas in the states that require additional attention. **Weeks** wondered about working waterfront issues and if policy recommendations might be required. At this time, **Berrigan** has no recommendations on the waterfront issue. Each state will have a different view possibly so comments would be appreciated. **Weeks** will try to provide what information she already has.

Section 12.4.1.4 Controlling and Preventing Pollution in Shellfish Growing Areas – **Berrigan** stated that he pulled most of data for this section from information provided by **Herrington** but the state reps will need to add their input.

Section 12.4.2.1.4 Limited Entry/Access – Every state has some limited entry information and that needs to be included or provided elsewhere so recommendations can be generated. **Lezina** has several items to provide.

Law Enforcement – The original FMP had recommendations to aim towards Gulf-wide size limits. This may not be practical based on market demands and variations in state legislation. Need to get the enforcement representatives to review and discuss these types of recommendations. **Berrigan** pointed out that these are management options and none are binding. Several TTF members suggested deleting (see page 9) “from a law enforcement perspective.....” many of these are not from a ‘management perspective’.

Section 12.4.4.6 Vibrio vulnificus and V. parahaemolyticus. With the V.v. plan likely being implemented in the Gulf for the ‘club members’, there may be a desire to make recommendations for V.v and V.p. management as preferred options already listed in the ISSC’s plan. It was pointed out that the whole V.v. control plan will change greatly over the next summer and it might not make sense to do much with any of it until we know more.

Berrigan made a final plea for additional help. Section 12 is very important and input is needed from each state in order to complete this section; this will require everyone to draft their sections and read each others sections and comment back to the author.

Section 16.1 – Glossary

VanderKooy reported that there were a number of terms and acronyms which were commonly used in the drafts provided so far and they need to be added to the existing boilerplate Glossary. Everyone please make notes of the terms they use as they continue to draft their sections and provide a list to **VanderKooy** for inclusion. When possible, a working definition should also be included. As the revision nears completion, we all will review the existing terms and delete those which were not used or applicable to the oyster fishery.

Response to Chesapeake Draft EIS

VanderKooy asked if the states would like to send a regional response to this document. It was discussed and agreed that this is not just an oyster issue it is a Fisheries issue. The TTF Members thought that this requires Fisheries Agency heads and State Directors to respond; it is not at the Oyster TTF level. Florida reported that they have drafted a letter for the Governor of Florida sign and will forward a copy of the draft letter to **VanderKooy** to discuss with GSMFC's Executive Director.

Revision Timeline

To review and comment on other Oyster TTF members sections, please go to the oyster website, select the section you wish to review, copy it to your computer hard drive, make changes/edits and then provide comments directly to the author, via email. **VanderKooy** also showed TTF members how to use the GSMFC database to find reference materials.

TTF members asked if there was any new on the Oyster FMP cover options – nothing new to report at this time, but several people have been contacted. If anyone has artwork or an artist that they thought would make a nice cover, please forward information to **VanderKooy** soon.

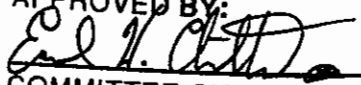
Other Business

VanderKooy briefly reviewed the GSMFC travel policy and procedures and reminded members that the new mileage of \$0.585 went into effect on August 1, 2008.

*With no further business, **Randall** made the motion to adjourn, the motion was seconded by **Weeks** and the group adjourned at 1:45 p.m.*

**GULF & SOUTH ATLANTIC REGIONAL PANEL
ON AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES
MINUTES**

**Tuesday, December 9 and Wednesday, December 10, 2008
Savannah, Georgia**

APPROVED BY:

COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

Chairman Earl Chilton 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 and Proxies

James Ballard, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Mike Brainard, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Paul Carangelo, Port of Corpus Christi Authority, Corpus Christi, TX
Earl Chilton, TPWD, Austin, TX
Leslie Hartman, TPWD, Palacios, TX
Dewayne Hollin, Texas Sea Grant, College Station, TX
Tom Jackson, NOAA-Fisheries, Miami, FL
Chuck Jacoby, University of Florida/Florida Sea Grant, Gainesville, FL
David Knott, SCDNR, Charleston, SC
Herb Kumpf, At-Large Member, Panama City Beach, FL
Jon Lane, US Army Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville, FL
Isis Longo, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Susan McCarthy, FDA, Dauphin Island, AL
Roberto Mendoza, Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo Leon, Mexico
James Morris, NOAA, Beaufort, NC
Trish Murphey, NCDMF, Morehead City, NC
Martin O'Connell, UNO, New Orleans, LA
Marilyn Barrett O'Leary, At-Large Member, Baton Rouge, LA
Harriet Perry, GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Bob Pitman, USFWS, Albuquerque, NM
Dennis Riecke, MDWFP, Jackson, MS
Don Schmitz, FDEP, Tallahassee, FL
John Teem, FL Dept. of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Tallahassee, FL
Keith Weaver, GDNR, Social Circle, GA

Staff

Nancy K. Marcellus, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Others

Andy Goodwin, University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, Pine Bluff, AR
Denise Gregoire, US Geological Survey, Gainesville, FL
Dane Huge, USGS, Gainesville, FL
Pamela J. Schofield, US Geological Survey, Gainesville, FL
George Selberg, Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary, Savannah, GA

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Public Comment

Chilton provided the opportunity for public comment. George Selberg from Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary in Savannah, Georgia commented on three invasive species found at Gray's Sanctuary and their concerns.

Review and Adoption of Agenda

With minor changes made to presentation times, Herb Kumpf made a motion to adopt the agenda. Chuck Jacoby seconded the motion and the agenda was adopted.

Review and Approval of Minutes

Paul Carangelo made a motion to approve the minutes from the April 22-23, 2008 meeting held in San Antonio, Texas. David Knott seconded the motion and the minutes were approved.

Synopsis of the Rat Lung Worm Study

John Teem provided a PowerPoint presentation "Human Health Risks Associated with Channeled Apple Snails in the GSARP Region" to discuss the parasite, *Angiostrongylus cantonesis*. The life cycle of *A. cantonesis* requires infection of a rat host in addition to a snail host. The predominant channeled apple snail in the GSARP region is *Pomacea insularum*.

Assessing the Health Risks Associated with Channeled Apple Snails in the GSARP Region:

- Collect apple snails from New Orleans and Miami, send samples to the CDC in Atlanta to assay for the presence of the rat lung worm using DNA-based detection assays (PCR).
- Develop an in-house capacity to detect the rat lung worm using PCR. Test channeled apple snails from a third location (to be determined).
- Develop a mathematical model to predict the spread of channeled apple snails.

PCR Detection of Rat Lung Worm in Infected Snails:

- Miami: 60 analyzed, all negative
- New Orleans: 60 analyzed, 5 positives.

Mathematical Model Objectives:

- Create partial differential equations that model the diffusion of a species over time through a spatial domain.
- Create a grid of polygons representing the spatial domain, in which each polygon represents a geographic area with specific properties related to the diffusion of the species.
- Model the diffusion of the species through the grid, calibrating the diffusion rate with experimental data.
- Generate new grids using existing GIS data maps.

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- Model the effects of biocontrol efforts on spread.

Conclusions:

- Five snails from New Orleans were found to be positive for rat lung worm.
- No samples were positive for the parasite in snails taken from Miami, Florida or Picayune, Mississippi. However, both sites had previously had cases of infected paratenic hosts (a gibbon and a horse, respectively).
- Samples from Texas and Everglades National Park still pending.
- Results thus far suggest that rat lung worm infections of channeled apple snails are not widespread throughout the GSARP region.

Eradication Strategy for Channeled Apple Snails Using Sterile Releases

John Teem presented a PowerPoint presentation entitled “Thinking ~~Outside~~ ^{back inside} the Box - Applying ~~V_{old}~~ ^{New} Technology to the Eradication of Invasive Species”.

Sterile Insect Technique:

- Devised by Knippling in 1950's as a means to eradicate pest insects.
- Used to control a variety of agricultural insect pests.
 - screw worms eradicated from the island of Curacao and southern USA
 - exotic fruit flies in Florida and California.
- Requires a dedicated facility for sterile insect production.
- Rear large numbers of insect eggs at a production facility.
- Irradiate insect eggs at the dose required to induce reproductive sterility.
- Hatch and distribute an overwhelming number of sterile insects over the target area.
 - increase the frequency of nonproductive matings.
- Measure the effect on population.

Proposed Sterile-Release Procedure for Channeled Apple Snails:

- Collect large numbers of snail eggs at the target site.
- Irradiate snail eggs at the dose required to induce reproductive sterility.
- Hatch irradiated snails and return the same number of sterile individuals over the target area.
 - increase the frequency of nonproductive matings.

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- Measure the effect on population.

Possible Site for CAS Sterile-Release: Lake Lure in Alma, Georgia

- Small lake, within fifty miles from Okefenokee Refuge, a priority for USFWS.
- Able and willing collaborators in Georgia: Department of Natural Resources, Lake Lure Homeowners Association.
- Egg masses can be sent to FDACS in Gainesville, Florida for irradiation, then returned to Lake Lure.

Alternative Site for CAS Sterile-Release: Brittle Pond in Tallahassee, Florida

Advantages:

- Water quality of the pond is important to several local organizations that may offer funding support: Leon County, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Northwest Florida Water Management District, City of Tallahassee, and Florida Department of Transportation.
- Eggs can be collected from barrier wall within pond. The wall additionally allows masses to be easily monitored.
- Egg collection and population studies can be done by Tallahassee FDACS staff.

Conclusions:

- A sterile-release strategy for eradication has historically been limited to agricultural pests, but may be appropriate for invasive species in some cases.
- A cost-effective sterile release program for channeled apple snails could involve -
 - collecting eggs from the target site for irradiation (instead of producing them in a production facility)
 - monitoring population decline by observing egg mass production at the target site
 - targeting areas where stakeholder involvement contributes effort and support.

The Arkansas Department of Agriculture Bait and Ornamental Fish Certification Program
Andy Goodwin, University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff

- Arkansas farm gate value: \$167 million
- Second in US
- Economic impact: over \$1.2 billion
- 80% of US baitfish production

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Arkansas Bait and Ornamental Fish Growers Association “A farm certification program can protect our farms from a fish health, economic, and public relations disaster!”

Certification Program: Industry Goals

- To prevent fish health and regulatory impacts from ANS introductions.
- To formally demonstrate the safety of their product.
- To make it easier for regulators to allow movements of farm raised baitfish.

Program Components:

- True 3rd party certification by a competent authority (Arkansas State Department of AG)
- On-site inspections
- Voluntary
- Costs paid by farmers
 - 1\$/acre/year
 - Collection \$100/hour
 - \$1000/yr in lab fees

Three Major Claims:

1. Freedom From Specific Diseases
2. Freedom From Exotic Aquatic Species
3. Biosecurity

Program Summary:

- Stringent
- Internationally recognized standards
- True 3rd party verification

Frequently Asked Question: How do I know that the farmers are really following program requirements?

- Third party oversight
 - Ag Department inspection - On Farm
- Self-protection

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- No way to fake disease inspection
- Malfeasance = positive = end of the world
- First AR fish health import reg.

Overview of Freshwater Aquatic Invasive Species Activities in Georgia

Keith Weaver gave a presentation on controlling the spread of invasive species through outreach, community-based research and education.

Education:

In on collaborative workshop, 12 fisheries students from UGA had the opportunity to learn first-hand about current fisheries issues in Georgia.

First, they came to the Marine Extension office to learn about pressing issues such as contaminants in seafood and invasive species.

Then, DNR biologists showed students how to capture Altamaha flatheads using electro-fishing methods. Students helped measure and weigh fish before they were released.

Community-Based Research:

Twenty-five fish were sacrificed and collected for gut content and contaminant analysis. Local volunteers helped process the fish.

At Altamaha Regional Park, recreational fishermen have joined the effort. While processing their fresh flathead catches at the park, they analyze gut contents with fisheries biologists. These interactions have been very important for gaining local perspectives as well as raising community awareness about invasive species.

Interviews with the founder and members of "The Brotherhood of Catfishermen" revealed that many fishermen would not be receptive to outreach materials that appear too one-sided (e.g. messages such as "do not release any flatheads"). In fact, this group promotes active protection of flathead resources with education campaigns such as "CPR: Catch, Photo, and Release."

However, there was an outreach message that could be agreed upon: "Either eat them or release them: never move live flatheads." In addition to preventing the spread of invasive species, this message addresses the concern that trophy fish are being removed from the wild and transported to pay ponds, sometimes across state lines.

Since members of "The Brotherhood" are passionate about not moving fish, this creates an unexpected area of common ground. Finding overlapping areas of interest between groups with different values and agendas is extremely important for successful outreach.

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North American Brown Tree Snake Control Team Update

Bob Pitman distributed a form Expanding the Early Detection Network and Building Rapid Response Capacity. This form is to identify agency, organization, and stakeholder contacts interested in detecting brown tree snakes to prevent introduction and/or rapidly responding to sightings or reports in the Gulf Coast Region. Pitman asked that Panel members fill out the form to identify those persons to include in the network. The form is also available online at www.NABTSCT.net.

Pitman also distributed a Workshop Announcement: Early Detection of Dreissena Mussels in the West. The workshop will be held 21-22 January in Denver, Colorado. This 1 ½ day meeting will be hosted by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation at their facilities within the Denver Federal Center (Lakewood) and is scheduled in association and immediately before a national-level 100th Meridian Initiative meeting (22-23 January) where a comprehensive regional monitoring plan for 2009 will be drafted. The ultimate goal for workshop participants is to provide vetted recommendations to the 100th Meridian Initiative regarding the early detection and monitoring of the dreissenid invasion of western waters.

Workshop Web Site: www.musselmonitoring.com.

Early Detection and Rapid Response for Marine (Fish) Invaders in South Florida

Time line of events:

- Developed GSARP working group at Miami Panel meeting (Fall 2007)
- Funding from NOAA, USGS, non-profit sources for workshop and field guide
- Held workshop in Marathon, Florida (June 18-19, 2008)
- 31 participants from ~25 academic and local, state, and federal governments
- 5 presentations and breakout groups
 - Early warning and detection
 - Permitting and jurisdiction
 - Rapid response
- Developed a conceptual model for ED/RR
- Developed “Field Guide to the Non-native Marine Fishes of Florida”

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Future Efforts:

- Distribute field guide
- Hold future workshops to provide ED/RR to Caribbean Islands
- Work to develop better regional collaboration on invasives
- Provide ED/RR model for implementation.

ED/RR Events Since Workshop (June 2008):

<u>Date</u>	<u>Species</u>	<u>Location</u>
June 15	Orbicular batfish	Key Biscayne, Florida
July 6	Sailfin tang	Dania Beach, Florida
August 8	Sweetlips	Palm Beach, Florida
October 22	Pacu	Indian River Lagoon, Florida
November 23	Racoon butterfly	Palm Beach, Florida
December 6	Sailfin tang	Palm Beach, Florida

Lionfish Update:

- >15 research projects underway
- >20 organizations involved
- Bio/eco research is maturing
- Large amount of outreach
- Impacts are being realized
- Magnitude of impacts TBD.

Status of Asian Tiger Shrimp (*Penaeus monodon*):

History

- Releases from South Carolina back in 1988
- Collected from South Carolina to Florida for several years
- Then disappeared.

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New Reports:

- 2006
 - Pamlico Sound, NC (1)
 - Mississippi Sound, Dauphin Island, AL (1)

- 2007
 - Pamlico Sound, NC (1)
 - Vermilion Bay, LA (1)
 - Fripp Island, SC (1)

- 2008 (All specimens were found in September, October, and November)
 - AL (1)
 - FL (1)
 - SC (4)
 - NC (8)

Source?

- United States?
 - Accidental release in South Carolina
 - There was an escape from a mariculture facility in Bluffton, South Carolina in 1988. Approximately 1,000 adults were later recaptured as far south as Cape Canaveral, Florida (McCann et al. 1996)
 - Not permitted in most states

- Caribbean?
 - Large amount of anecdotal evidence of shrimp farms.

Targeting New Vectors That Contribute to the Introduction and Spread of Non-native Marine Species - Alan Power

Traditional Vectors:

- Shipping: >2/3 recent marine species introductions

- Hull Fouling: Antifoulant effectiveness; sp. resistance; protected niches; vessel speed; seasons...

- Ballast Water: 3-5 billion tonnes transferred internationally each year carrying sediment, larval species and pathogens

- Regulations: 200 miles exchange, or retained, or treated

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- Safety exemptions; effectiveness of exchange; ship designs holding residual water; not all vessels enter U.S. from 200 nm offshore; treatment technologies still experimental and \$ costs
- Risk: Southeastern U.S. increasingly important in international shipping trade globally (container, automobile-heavy machinery, & break, breakbulk ports)

Alternative Vectors:

- General public unknowingly introduce/spread marine AIS
- **Recreational Vessels**
 - Coastal Georgia counties have 37,748 registered vessels (GA DNR)
 - Regional movement intracoastal waterway, and overland trailering
 - Large number of transient recreational vessels pass through state
 - Ramps, docks, marinas increase habitat for fouling species
- **Commercial Fishing Vessels**
 - 18-29% of vessels in Georgia waters over past 20 years from out of state
 - Georgia fishing boats also travel out of state
- Species moved on vessel hulls and boat trailers, in live well, bilge and motor water, and on fishing and water sports gear.

Outreach Campaign:

- Awareness among fishermen, marina operators, and recreational boaters of AIS causes and consequences
- Encourage preventative boating practices
- Encourage reporting unusual occurrences
- Boating outreach efforts:
 - Public Service Announcement
 - Boat ramp and marine signage
 - Newspaper and magazine advertisements
 - Rack card
 - Fact sheets
 - Booklet
 - Clean Marina BMP's
 - HullHitchers.com website and keychains.

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Mexican Strategy for Invasive Species

Roberto Mendoza gave a PowerPoint presentation on Invasive Species Mexican Strategy:

Risk Analysis and Management

- Prevention
- Monitoring
- Rapid Response
- Eradication and Control

Basic Actions

- Basic and Applied Research
- Databases Creation/Information Exchange
- Financial Support
- Education and Outreach

Transversal Actions

- Capacity Building
- Review Public Politics and Legal Frame
- Institutional Cooperation and Coordination at the Local, Regional, and International Levels.

Caribbean Pathways for Aquatic Invasive Species

Harriet Perry gave a PowerPoint presentation entitled “The Loop Current as a Vector for Connectivity of Invasive Species from the Western Atlantic to the Gulf of Mexico.”

Objective: Determine invasion pathways using satellite tracked drifters.

Summary:

- Principal pathway into the Gulf of Mexico through the Caribbean is from the western equatorial region of the Atlantic.
- Of 2567 drifters deployed in the North Atlantic, 46 entered the GOM (1.8%).
- Of 46 drifters that entered the GOM, 16 crossed 200 m isobath, but only 4 crossed the basin. However, one of the 4 associated with a non-indigenous invasion.

Synopsis of Louisiana’s Rapid Assessment

Marilyn Barrett-O’Leary gave an informal summary of the Barataria-Terrebonne Rapid Assessment Project.

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Goals - Objectives:

- Secure snapshot of information about the ANS in the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary
 - Fishes
 - Macroinvertebrates
 - Plants
- Add to state's baseline

Preliminary Results/Findings:

- Good news: No new invasive species
- Bad news: Spread of several known species, especially giant salvinia via the GIWW and Rio Grande cichlids in the Harvey Canal.

Invasive Species Advisory Committee Update

Earl Chilton discussed the production of biofuels and steps to be addressed when considering plants for biofuels. The topic was introduced to get thoughts from the Panel on the issue and to consider if the Panel should draft recommendations on the topic in the future.

Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force Update

James Ballard mentioned that the ANS Task Force hired a new Executive Secretary, Susan Mangin. All Panel coordinators met prior to the last Task Force meeting and discussed compiling success stories from all Panels to bring to Capitol Hill to solicit increased funding.

GSARP received two requests from the Mississippi River Basin Panel.

The first was the USFWS Triploid Grass Carp Program Review. The two specific requests to the Regional Panels were: 1) endorsement of the Triploid Program review; and 2) assistance funding the RFP. E. Chilton suggested that the Panel get more information on why they want to have another program review. Chilton mentioned that he would be attending the upcoming meeting of the Mississippi River Basin Panel and would get more information at that time. **Marilyn O'Leary made a motion that Earl Chilton attend the next meeting of the Mississippi River Basin Panel and request more information on behalf of the GSARP. The motion was seconded by Leslie Hartman. The motion passed unanimously.**

The next request from the Mississippi River Basin Panel (MRBP) was regarding an International Symposium on Genetic Biocontrol of Invasive Fish. The MRBP specifically requested the support of all Regional Panels in urging the Task Force to follow through on the 2006 decision to co-sponsor

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a symposium on genetic biocontrol of invasive fish by providing the remaining \$86,000 needed for the June 2010 symposium. The GSARP decided to take no action on the request.

Current Activities of the ANSTF Research Group 2008

John Teem discussed the Research Protocol - information to guide researchers in the safe conduct of invasive species research.

Possible Improvements to Research Protocol:

The current Research Protocol describes a process by which researchers obtain approval for their invasive species research through a research review committee. However, no such committee or review process currently exists.

Options:

1. Create a research review committee and implement the current review process as described.

The ANSTF does not have regulatory authority to implement such a committee.

Each funding agency would have to agree to ANSTF oversight on safety.

Not practical - Review of all proposals submitted to all funding agencies would be costly and time-consuming.

2. Have individual funding sources require researchers to meet defined standards for conducting research safely as a prerequisite for receiving funds.

Each agency would have to define their standards and review grant proposals accordingly before approving funds.

Funding agencies may have different guidelines for safety and may or may not choose to link funding to guideline compliance.

3. Provide option guidelines for conducting research safely.

Safety guidelines are offered as information only without any requirement for compliance to obtain funding.

Examples of safety guidelines currently used for aquatic species research at various universities may be included in Research Protocol.

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Future revisions of the Research Protocol will be based upon ANSTF feedback from the funding agency members.

Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers Brochure Update

Dennis Riecke distributed brochure revisions to the individual states displaying the individual state logos. The Panel agreed that the new GSARP logo be placed on the brochure.

Overview of 2005-2009 Strategic Plan for Work Groups

James Ballard gave a PowerPoint presentation "Current Status of Work Groups With Respect to the 2005-2009 Strategic Plan." Ballard reviewed the goals, objectives, and tasks of the Early Detection/Rapid Response, Research/Development, Education/Outreach, Pathways/Prevention, Information Management, and Eradication/Control/Restoration work groups and reported on the current status of each.

Work Group Updates to the Panel and Future Directions For All Work Groups

Early Detection and Rapid Response: The work group no longer has a Chairman; request more time to address the Strategic Plan; identified future issues of focus; and preplanning ideas for next breakout session.

Research and Development: Need for list of researchers from GSARP region; put list of researchers together with list of funding opportunities.

Education and Outreach: Completed one round of bilingual products; send contacts that can do translations; identifying outreach materials for distribution and pursue link with the Master Naturalist programs in the states; pursue link with Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts; and, work with John Teem on Rat Lung Worm Study.

Pathways and Prevention: Discussed inventory of species and prevention plans; state and federal prohibited species list; evaluate current shrimp virus issue; VHS issue discussed by Goodwin; and, review of pathways document.

Information and Management: Updating Panel website.

Eradication, Control and Restoration: Develop a definition for IPM; develop set of guidelines or guidance document that details information on different invasive plants, what can be used on them and collecting a set of case studies that illustrate how they can be used. After development, present to entire Panel for agreement.

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White Lists/Black Lists (Restricted/Prohibited)

Chilton reported that currently Texas has only a black list. Texas is considering a white list with a possible secondary black list.

Don Schmitz volunteered to take the lead on an ad hoc committee to develop recommendations. John Teem and Dennis Riecke agreed to work with him.

Emergency Protocols for Facilities Dealing With Non-native Species

Texas - has emergency protocol in the event of a hurricane.

South Carolina - has similar protocol as Texas.

Louisiana - currently has no emergency protocols. The Mississippi River Basin Panel is developing protocols which will probably be adopted by Louisiana.

Mississippi - does not have any emergency protocols. Topic was discussed when writing their Plan.

Florida - USDA quarantine facilities have a paragraph on what to do in emergencies, and this is the only protocol Florida has at this time.

Georgia - unaware of any currently in place. Topic was discussed when writing their Plan.

The Panel discussed the possibility of developing a set of protocols for the states to adopt. Leslie Hartman and Herb Kumpf agreed to take the lead on this project. Dennis Riecke mentioned that shut down procedures when industries go out of business could be included in the protocols.

Penalties for Releasing a Non-native Species

Panel members discussed their state's penalties for violations. A suggestion was made to summarize each state's penalties and put on the GSARP website. The Panel agreed that this was not a good idea since it could enable persons to ship into state's with lesser penalties. It was noted that this information is on the individual state websites.

Other Business

The Panel discussed how states were dealing with invasive species on the property of private land owners. The possibility of funding for this was discussed in the event states were willing to work with private land owners. Don Schmitz agreed to forward a website to Panel members on funding available to private land owners to control invasive species on their property.

The Panel discussed including North Carolina on the GSARP logo.

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It was reported that Walter Courtenay, At-Large Panel Member, has removed himself from the Panel.

The Panel discussed the membership of Marianne Cufone from the Environmental/User Group. There has been no response from her after numerous telephone calls and emails.

James Morris made a motion to replace the inactive Environmental/User Group member, Marianne Cufone, with Lad Akins from REEF. The motion was seconded by Harriet Perry.

Leslie Hartman made the suggestion that other Panel members have the opportunity to make nominations for that seat. No other names were suggested.

The Panel unanimously voted to name Lad Akins as the Environmental/User Group member of the Panel.

If financially possible, Monterrey, Mexico was suggested as the next meeting location and New Orleans, Louisiana was selected as an alternate.

Ballard will report findings to the Panel on location and date.

North Carolina - Atlantic Beach or Wilmington area - was suggested for the fall meeting.

Public Comment

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

There being no further business the meeting adjourned at 3:00 pm.