


APPROVED BY:

  
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

## BLUE CRAB TTF CONFERENCE CALL SUMMARY

February 4, 2014

### Participants:

Ryan Gandy – FFWCC, St. Petersburg, FL  
Glen Sutton – TPWD, Rockport, TX  
Traci Floyd – DMR, ~~Ocean Springs~~, MS *Biloxi*  
Alex Miller - GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS  
Jason Herrmann – ADMR, Dauphin Island, AL  
Jeff Marx – LDWF, New Iberia, LA  
Harriet Perry – GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS  
Steve VanderKooy – GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS  
Debbie McIntyre – GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

The Blue Crab TTF held a conference call/webinar to review and update individual sections of the FMP revision. The meeting began at 8:30 a.m. **VanderKooy** posted for the group's review the most current versions of each section.

### *Table of Contents*

**VanderKooy** will rebuild the *Table of Contents* once all of the draft sections are complete.

### *Economics Section*

**VanderKooy** pointed out that this section has been streamlined but contains a lot of information. The group agreed that an introductory paragraph summarizing the section should be added. **Miller** will write this paragraph and send back out to the group for review by February 18<sup>th</sup>.

**Perry** stated that the terminology and descriptions used in the GDAR and the FMP referencing the declines and increases in the fishery must be consistent. **Perry** and **VanderKooy** will compare the two documents and make any necessary changes to assure that they are consistent.

**Perry** also would like to see this section word-smithed to make it less repetitive and to simplify some of the descriptions. She and **VanderKooy** will also work on this.

The group discussed the use of the terms “dollars in a particular year or nominal dollars” and “real dollars or inflation-adjusted dollars” and decided that these terms should be included as they are necessary and informative.

**VanderKooy** polled the state representatives to make sure that each had reviewed this section and gives it final approval. Each stated gave its okay with the exception of Texas. **Sutton** stated that he will report back after he has double-checked the Texas information included in this section.

### *Biology Section*

**Perry** reported that this section is almost complete with the exception of *Invasive Species* and *Summary of Life History Characteristics Relevant to Management*. **Perry** will finish this section as soon as possible.

### ***Habitat Section***

**Marx** and **Rester** have this section ready for the group to review. **VanderKooy** posted completed sections to the website. Everyone should start re-review of these sections and forward to him any changes or comments.

### ***Enforcement Section***

**VanderKooy** stated that he has posted this section on the website. He asked everyone to double check that his/her state information is correct and forward to him any changes or comments.

### ***Fisheries Section***

**Floyd** and **VanderKooy** have not heard anything regarding commercial and recreational on a state-by-state basis. **VanderKooy** has reformatted and provided some minor editing and the draft is available on the website for all to review. **Perry** has not yet checked with Williams as to whether there were other swimming crab species included in the “blue crab” (non-U.S. GOM production) landings. Otherwise, **Floyd** reported that this section is complete.

### ***Sociology Section***

**VanderKooy** explained that he continues to try to converse with **Jacob**. In the meantime, he needs some help with *Industry-Related Stressors* – particularly those areas that he has highlighted. There are acute and chronic stressors which he has identified in this section that could use some fleshing out.

### ***Management Goals, Considerations, and Recommendations***

**Sutton** reported that he had Tom **Wagner** review this section and **Wagner** suggested that the statement referring to *C. rathbunae* should be removed as it is only speculation. After discussion, the group decided that **Gandy** will remove this sentence and possibly place near the beginning of the *Biology* section if it is not already there.

**Gandy** reported that he has incorporated comments from **Perry**. He has received comments from Tom **Wagner** but has not yet updated the section with those. Barring any other comments from this committee, he is finished.

Under *Management Objectives*, (f) “units based on stock status”, this should be changed. **Gandy** will address this.

**VanderKooy** will blend this section with the *Recommendations*. He will send the entire updated section and the updated IJF matrix out when changed.

**VanderKooy** asked the group to spend time on some hard and serious editing of these recommendations. Make sure how these will be received by management. **VanderKooy** will send out a list of the recommendations and asked that everyone split up and each person take responsibility for whichever of these they would prefer. First come, first serve but let **VanderKooy** know which one you are taking so that they are all covered.

### *Timelines for Completion*

**VanderKooy** asked that all comments on the completed sections be sent to him by March 7<sup>th</sup> so that he can blend everything together and hopefully have some finalized material going into the New Orleans meeting. A couple of calls after that meeting should get us totally finished and ready for review.

### *Other Business*

**Gandy** will make the presentation to the TCC in March in New Orleans at the GSMFC Annual Spring Meeting. He will provide a power point overview of the FMP, changes, data, etc.

**VanderKooy** asked all state reps to provide written state reports electronically and **McIntyre** will print them and include them in the meeting folders. **VanderKooy** will attempt to include **Sutton** in the meeting through a speaker phone or his cell phone as **Sutton** will not be able to attend in person. The webinar ended at 9:40 a.m.

**JOINT GSMFC & ASMFC ARTIFICIAL REEF SUBCOMMITTEE  
MINUTES**

**Tuesday, February 25, 2014 – Wednesday, February 26, 2014  
Charleston, SC**

APPROVED BY:  
  
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**Chairman Jimmy Sanders** called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. The meeting began with introductions of the members and guests. The following were in attendance:

**ASMFC Members**

Mel Bell, SC DNR, Charleston, SC  
Hugh Carberry, NJ DWF, Port Republic, NJ  
Bill Horn, FL FWC, Tallahassee, FL  
Nicole Lengyel, RI DWF, Jamestown, RI  
Bob Martore, SC DNR, Charleston, SC  
January Murray, GA DNR, Brunswick, GA  
Mark Rousseau, MA DMR, Gloucester, MA  
Jeff Tinsman, DE DWF, Dover, DE  
Melissa Yuen, ASMFC, Arlington, VA  
Erik Zlokovitz, MD DNR, Annapolis, MD

**GSMFC Members**

James Ballard, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS  
Michael Bailey, NOAA, St. Petersburg, FL  
Jon Dodrill, FL FWC, Tallahassee, FL  
Mike McDonough, LA DWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Craig Newton, AL DCNR, Dauphin Island, AL  
Doug Peter, BSEE, New Orleans, LA  
Jimmy Sanders, MS DMR, Biloxi, MS  
Dale Shively, TPWD, Austin, TX  
Jeff Tinsman, DE DFW, Dover, DE

**Staff**

Ali Ryan, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

**Others**

Gregg Bodnar, NC DENR, Morehead City, NC  
Jeff Dey, REEFMAKERS, Mount Holly, NJ  
Wally Jenkins, SC DNR, Charleston, SC  
Chris Jensen, NC DENR, Morehead City, NC  
Bill Maxwell, NJ DFW, Forked River, NJ  
January Murray, GA DNR, Brunswick, GA  
Tim Mullane, American Marine Group, LLC, Philadelphia, PA  
Joe Weatherby, REEFMAKERS, Key West, FL

**Adoption of Agenda**

**A motion was made to adopt the agenda with a minor change, and the motion passed unanimously.**

### Approval of Minutes

The minutes from the meeting held on March 6-7, 2013 in Tampa, Florida were approved with a minor change. Horn made a motion to adopt the minutes. The motion was seconded and the minutes were approved.

### South Carolina Memorial Reef Project

**Martore** gave a PowerPoint Presentation entitled "South Carolina Memorial Reef". The project has been 10 years in the making.

A new deepwater artificial reef site was planned 52 nm from the seaward end of Charleston Harbor south jetty. The site is a marine protected area and is 350'-450' deep. It is closed to bottom fishing, but is available for top-water trolling, etc. However, an arrangement to use bridge material for the reef fell through, and no reef material was available for deployment.

In the meantime, offshore fishermen contacted DNR about creating a memorial deepwater reef site. **Martore** suggested to the fishermen that they obtain funds for the site, so the fishermen created a website for soliciting donations to fund the site. A lot of support was received from the public, so marketing of the memorial reef site was also done at fishing tournaments. A portion of the proceeds from the tournaments were donated to the memorial reef site fund. Other fund-raising events were also held. Approximately four years later, \$400,000 had been collected for the site. **Martore** located a 260' barge, but the profile was not large enough to be a deepwater reef. It was decided that materials would be welded to the barge to raise the profile. The offshore fishermen began soliciting for more funding, and materials that could be added to the barge. A large crane, steel pipe, shipping containers, truck chassis, a cell phone tower, a cement mixer drum, pieces of steel cable, and other materials were all welded onto the barge to make the reef. The final profile was 118'. Large memorial crosses were created out of steel beams and welded onto the deck. Twenty-five small memorial steel crosses were welded onto the barge to be used as personal memorials for fishermen who spearheaded the effort. On each of the small crosses, names and dates of deceased loved ones were burned into the steel. A Memorial Reef Blessing was held on December 15, 2013. Some attendees brought containers of ashes of their loved ones to be welded onto the barge.

The barge is currently docked and will be deployed as soon as weather conditions are favorable. Construction on the second reef will begin after the first reef has been deployed.

**Horn** asked what sort of monitoring would be done on the reef. **Martore** replied that they will periodically place cameras on the site, and they hope to also do side-scan monitoring. NOAA has volunteered to periodically monitor the site.

### Overview of Georgia's Recent Reef Ball and Barge Deployment

**Murray** gave a PowerPoint Presentation entitled "Overview of Georgia's Recent Barge Deployments". The goals of the Artificial Reef Program are to restore fish habitat for recreational fishers, deploy donated materials of opportunity, and to establish new and maintain existing partnerships. There are 30 offshore artificial reef sites, and the reef program is environmentally safe. The relatively stable materials do not degrade quickly or subside.

Offshore reef accomplishments for 2012-2013 include: Regional Permit #36 updated; material donations; deployments to several reef sites; inspections and monitoring of reefs; buoy inspections; certification of four additional staff as GADNR Dive Team members; collection of 45 general contaminants samples; Department of Navy Notice of Availability of Real Property; decommission of eight tactical aircrew training systems towers to create essential fish habitat off of Georgia's coast.

Offshore artificial reef plans for 2014 include: deployment of a 110' steel deck barge onto the "SAV" Reef; deployment plans for a reef site (contingent on available funds and materials); reef coordinate updates in a March/April Press Release; assisting with the Coastal Arrays Diving Project; inspection and monitoring of 10+ reefs; collection of general contaminants samples via diving; TACTS coordination.

Georgia has 13 inter-tidal inshore artificial reefs, and two sub-tidal artificial reefs. In 2013, state and federal permits were obtained. The Georgia Inshore Artificial Reef Restoration plans for 2014 include replacing Timmons pilings; replacing signage at Timmons and 4 Mile; deploying power poles to High Point. The oyster reef monitoring plan is their top priority.

Inshore Artificial Reef Restoration plans for 2015 and beyond are to annually deploy materials of opportunity.

#### **Discussion of Fish Aggregating Devices**

**Martore** stated that they do not use a lot of FADs in their reef program, but they have discovered that a lot of fishermen put out their own FADs, particularly when they fish in billfish tournaments and want to attract large billfish. However, the FADs are not retrieved. **Martore** introduced Wally Jenkins from SCDNR, who oversees the Governor's Cup Billfish Tournament series. Jenkins stated that at the Captain's meeting that is held before the tournaments, rules and regulations are discussed. One of the primary rules is that state-effective laws cannot be broken. Prior to 2011, it was against the law from their prospective to deploy FADs. However, in February 2011, the Army Corp of Engineers established Nationwide Permit #4 which exempts fishermen from obtaining a permit for certain things. One of the exempted items listed in the permit is FADs. Purportedly, the item was placed into the permit for tuna fishermen in the Pacific Ocean who place the FADs in the ocean for weeks at a time to reduce dolphin interactions and other marine mammals. To comply with the permit, there must be intent to retrieve the FADs, and they must not be used as artificial reefs, which are considered permanent. Jenkins spoke with Washington officials and was told that FADs are legal. However, federal law enforcement considers them illegal because they are not permitted gear. For recreational and commercial HMS permit holders, FADs are not among the listed gear. Jenkins stated that from their perspective, it violates NEPA. Most, if not all, of the FADs that are placed in the ocean are not retrieved. The legality of this, and the interactions with marine animals such as right whales are big concerns. A lot of fishermen who do not know where the FADs are located, believe that the fishermen who do know where the FADs are located are winning the tournaments. Several people who have won recent tournaments fished on the FADs. Charter boat businesses have also placed FADs in the ocean.

Jenkins asked for suggestions from the members and their opinion of FADS, and what he should tell attendees at tournament Captain's meetings about stopping the practice of placing FADs in the ocean.

**Bell** stated that vertical lines in the water are a big issue for protected species.

**Doddrill** stated that when the nationwide permit came out for review, they noted that the FADs in the permit were specifically for tuna and dolphin protection, and they did not want FADS allowed in Florida state waters. On a ship reef site off of Palm Beach, the West Palm Beach Fishing club spent thousands of dollars attaching a FAD onto the ship. The FL FWCC made the club remove it.

**Horn** stated that their policy is that if FADS are deployed, they must be removed the same day. If the FAD is to remain, it would require a reef permit.

Jenkins stated that the need is to identify the fishermen who are using FADs and indicate to them that it is illegal to use them. It was suggested that the fishermen be told that if their winning fish is caught on a FAD, it would be disqualified.

Jenkins is waiting on a letter from NMFS that identifies legal and illegal FADs. Jenkins is also going to write an article in their newsletter about FADs being illegal. He stated that in the future, lie detector tests will probably be administered, which are now being used in some states.

Several members stated that their policies are that FADs cannot be used.

#### **Update on the Steinhatchee Fisheries Management Area Project**

**Doddrill** gave a PowerPoint Presentation entitled “Partnering Research and Construction: Rationale and Evaluation of an Artificial Reef System Designed for Enhanced Growth and Survival of Juvenile Gag, *Mycteroperca microlepis*”.

At the SFMA, there are 500 standardized 4-cube patch reefs. The 4-cube reefs are considered “lower quality” from fish perspective. The 16-cube reefs are considered “higher quality”. Growth was smaller on the 4-cube reef.

The evaluation plan for the Steinhatchee Fisheries Management Area is to continue fishery-independent monitoring; do non-lethal sampling of gag within SFMA and “control” areas; estimate and compare gag growth and total mortality; evaluate assumptions for estimating natural mortality; spatially explicit population modeling/how much reef enhancement would show a population response.

The objectives of artificial reef management are to identify target species and life history stage; consideration of complex biological processes; consider physical and biological scale.

Findings should be shared with county reef managers and stakeholders through publications, workshops, and conferences. Resolution of mapping and monitoring efforts should be enhanced. Fisheries managers, module manufacturers, and reef builders should be involved.

#### **Overview of Maryland's Recent Reef Ball Projects in Ches Bay**

**Zlokovitz** gave a PowerPoint Presentation entitled “Overview of Recent Reef Ball Projects in Maryland MARI & MDDNR Artificial Reef Program”. CBF’s volunteers build reef balls and set in oyster spat tanks.

The Memorial Stadium Reef “MSR” deployment was done on May 10, 2013 as part of the CBF/MSSA-Perry Hall Reef Ball Project.

Deployments at the Cambridge Bill Burton Pier and Cook’s Point were done in summer 2013 as part of the CBF/MSSA-Dorchester Reef Ball Project. Black sea bass and red bearded sponge were observed at the Cook’s Point reef ball site. Oysters were observed growing on concrete at the Cedar Point Reef. Fish were reported at the Gooses Reef site, but the reef is most likely too deep for oysters.

In 2014-2015, deployments will continue at Ocean City reef sites with OCRF; scientific and statistical monitoring will be done; the Hail Cove Project in lower Chester River will be completed and bids will be sought for deployment at Love Point; experimentation, research and development with “more natural” reef building materials will continue.

Two pilot volunteer angler surveys were completed in 2013: Pier angling survey at Bill Burton Pier, and a logbook survey at Memorial Stadium Reef.

Future volunteer logbook surveys will be advertised with the DNR Artificial Reef Committee (ARC), Sportfish Advisory Committee (SFAC), CCA, MSSA, PSG, and other fishing clubs.

### **Florida NRDA Artificial Reef Projects**

**Dodrill** gave a PowerPoint Presentation entitled “Florida NRDA Regional Reef Project Update, February 2013 – February 2014”. On April 20, 2010 the Trans Ocean Deepwater Horizon platform at BP’s Macondo Well in Louisiana exploded, caught fire, and sank in 5,000 feet of water. This resulted in approximately 210 million gallons of crude oil being released into the air, waters, and 491 miles of shoreline of the Gulf of Mexico over the next three months. Damage assessment and restoration is through the Oil Pollution Act of 1990. The damage assessment and restoration process is long-term and can take decades.

On April 21, 2011 the Framework Agreement was signed by the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill Trustee Council and BP to provide \$1 billion for early restoration projects. This type of agreement allowing for early restoration is unprecedented in the history of NRDA. It does not affect their overall ultimate liability for natural resource or other damages.

The Oil Pollution Act and Framework Agreement require that projects address contributing to making the environment and the public whole by restoring, rehabilitating, replacing, or acquiring the equivalent of natural resources or services injured as a result of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill or response, or compensating for interim losses resulting from the incident; address one or more specific injuries to natural resources or services associated with the incident; seek to restore natural resources, habitats, or natural resource services of the same type, quality, and of comparable ecological and/or human use value to compensate for identified resource and service losses resulting from the incident; are not inconsistent with the anticipated long-term restoration needs and anticipated final restoration plan; are feasible and cost-effective.

The FL NRDA Early Restoration Project Phase I involves ongoing boat ramp construction and repair to compensate for boater opportunity loss during the oil spill. Also, over four linear miles of dune vegetation has been planted to compensate for damage by oil and vehicular traffic, oil removal machines, and foot traffic.



The FL NRDA Early Restoration Project Phase II involves the restoration and protection of habitats for beach nesting birds, and reducing artificial lighting impacts on nesting habitat for sea turtles from Escambia County through Franklin Counties. The projects partner with USFWS and were prioritized to initiate before the 2013 nesting seasons.

The NRDA Early Restoration Project Phase III has been implemented. The final public meeting on the project was held on February 3, 2014. The formal comment period ended on February 19, 2014. Escambia, Santa Rosa, Okaloosa, Walton, and Bay Counties have all proposed artificial reef construction to compensate for fishing opportunity loss during the spill. Projects are being considered in Phase III.

There are NRDA programmatic restrictions: Reefs can only be in state waters, not federal waters; only pre-fabricated reef units can be used; the only two types of reefs allowed are snorkel and near-shore.

The final EIS has not been approved. The Trustees approved the final reef plan, and funding was approved by BP and the courts. Money was transferred to FDEP and then to FWC. Grants were executed with five counties. Reefs were deployed and will be monitored for five years.

#### **Update on Delaware's SMZ Status for Offshore Reefs**

**Tinsman** gave a PowerPoint Presentation entitled "SMZ Status for the Delaware Reef Program? Request for Special Management Zone (SMZ) designation for five artificial reefs in the EEZ – June, 2011 – Infinity and beyond!"

The goals of the Delaware Reef Program are to enhance fish habitat by providing protective structure and trophic support for fish; increase invertebrate and fish biodiversity; increase invertebrate and fish biomass; provide hook and line fishing opportunities.

The origin of Special Management Zones in Federal waters is the Snapper-Grouper Plan (SAFMC). The Black Sea Bass Plan contains language allowing reef permit holders to petition the MAFMC for SMZ designation to address conflicts on their permitted sites. Once a reef site has been designated an SMZ, gear restrictions can be used to eliminate conflicts with recreational and commercial hook and line fishing. Delaware initiated the process with MAFMC with an official request in June 2011. With SMZs in place, Delaware could continue to manage ocean reefs for both recreational and commercial hook and line fishermen, and conduct many other surveys and activities, essential to fisheries management, with Sportfish Restoration funds.

The MAFMC Monitoring Team findings from their August 2012 report showed that through vessel trip reports, gear conflicts were documented at sites 11 and 13. The value of landings was approximately \$34,000 annually. The value of the recreational fishery, based on aerial flight survey, exceeds \$1.5M annually (Sites 11 and 13). SMZ status would not impact a significant number of entities, and they are well established in the southeast. The monitoring team provided a range of SMZ measures, including no action, seasonal and full-time SMZ status, and SMZ status for only certain sites.

The BSB Advisory Panel was convened and made recommendations.

Three public hearings were held in Ocean City, MD, Lewes, DE, and Toms River, NJ.

MAFMC asked Dr. John Organ of USFWS SFR Funding Office which SMZ measures would meet Delaware's needs for continued funding. He indicated that all ocean sites must be SMZs; SMZ status must be year round - not seasonal; fishing must be limited to hook and line and spear.

In February 2013, the Council decided that this is a gear limitation request, not an attempt to restrict commercial fishing. Commercial hook and line would not be affected. The MAFMC voted 11-3 to support Delaware's request and sent it to John Bullard, the NMFS Northeast Regional Administrator. NOAA will publish a proposed rule granting SMZ status to five Delaware reef sites in the EEZ, including a 500 yard buffer, permitting only hook and line, spear and hand harvest of fish and lobsters. Public comment will be taken for 60 days, as part of information gathering. An EA will be produced considering the expected impacts of this action. Sometime in the future, the final rule will be published by NOAA, and the gear conflict will be resolved at Delaware reef sites in the EEZ.

### **Overview of Rhode Island's Newest Artificial Reef Project**

**Lengyel** gave a PowerPoint Presentation entitled "From Production to Exploitation: Understanding the Functional Role of Artificial Reefs in Narragansett Bay, Rhode Island". The 5-year project is a collaborative project started in 2013 by DEM and the Nature Conservancy. The objectives are to provide a better understanding of what the real value of artificial reefs are as a fisheries enhancement and conservation tool by determining if artificial reefs increase the abundance and biomass of important species of demersal sport fish, and if reefs attract existing numbers of fish to the reef and increase the rate of exploitation, thus potentially decreasing the population.

The reef design consists of three replicate reefs of similar sediment type, depth, and slope. It is designed to mimic a low-profile boulder field, and is comprised of reef ball modules of differing sizes. Several different GIS data layers were used to map out suitable and non-suitable areas within Narragansett Bay. Additional considerations included current DFW surveys, mooring fields, and fishing uses.

In 2013, sites were identified and the design process began. Stakeholder input was sought, and a baseline survey of the sights was done. In 2014, permit applications were submitted to agencies, and contracts were secured for modules. Next was to delineate and groundtruth the sites. Modules will be constructed, deployed and monitored. From 2014 – 2017, evaluations include reef succession, use by juvenile finfish, and exploitation rates.

The RI Artificial Reef Plan will be finalized based on the project findings.

### **MARAD Ships Policy Update**

**Horn** spoke on the MARAD Ships Policy Update. MARAD changed the way they manage their Ships-to-Reef Program as it applies to ships being disposed of in a document entitled "MARAD Artificial Reefing Program - Frequently Asked Questions". **Horn** stated that they felt that a condition in the MARAD policy that restricts vessels built prior to 1985 from artificial reefing consideration was too restrictive. The Artificial Reef Technical Committee and Habitat Committee requested that a letter be sent to the Administrator of U.S. Department of Transportation's Maritime Administration to rescind the policy change. The letter was mailed on June 5, 2013. GSMFC sent a similar letter. On October 24, 2013, MARAD replied via letter

explaining their decision. MARAD wrote that their decision was not based on the PCB issue, but because the cost to clean and reef the vessels was too costly.

**Horn** remarked that if an older ship is to be reefed and everything is in compliance, MARAD will probably give approval for reefing the ship. He pointed out that the vessels listed on MARAD's list to be disposed of were all older than 1985, which effectively eliminates them from being reefed, according to the policy.

**Horn** asked the subcommittee members if they felt that any further action is needed.

**Tinsman** asked for a show of hands from the members who would still be interested in acquiring a vessel from MARAD and the Navy. Most of the members raised their hands.

**Horn made a motion to form a subcommittee to create a white paper that details the long-term economic value of vessels deployed as artificial reefs. Carberry seconded the motion, and the motion passed. Members who volunteered to be on the subcommittee are: Horn, Tinsman, Weatherby, Shively, Mullane, and Martore.**

#### **Guidelines for Artificial Reef Materials Updates**

**Horn** pointed out that the guidelines are valuable and need to be updated. The NERDA trustees cited in their document that all artificial reefs be built in accordance with the guidelines.

**Ballard** reported that three chapters have been updated: Concrete; Railroad/Subway/Street Cars; Military Hardware.

**Horn** suggested adding Memorial Reefs to the Miscellaneous chapter. The members agreed.

**Ballard** will send chapters to members who volunteered, and when he receives all of the chapters back, he will draft a document and then send it to the Sub-Committees for review.

#### **NC Division of Marine Fisheries Artificial Reef Program Overview**

Bodnar gave a PowerPoint Presentation entitled "NC Division of Marine Fisheries Artificial Reef Program Overview". The reef site selection criteria includes sediment type and depth; salinity regimes; geographical location and distance to inlet; side scan sonar evaluation. Material suitability/durability is also a criteria. A large scale oyster restoration feasibility study is being done.

Enhancements were done in 2013 to several artificial reef sites, and more enhancements will be done to several other sites in 2014.

The original 1988 Master Plan will be updated. Also, an interactive reef guide website is being created that will incorporate side-scan images, history, and photographs. Regional print guides will also be done.

An ocean buoy system will be removed. The buoys have been out for two years and are starting to break free. USCG approval has been granted, but not NC Coastal Management and USACE.

### New Legislation on Coastal Towing

Mullane reported on changes to the towing industry that will ultimately affect the ability to create artificial reefs. He stated that recently there has been notice of proposed rulemaking change that will require formerly un-inspected towing vessels to be inspected. The final ruling has not been made, but is expected this summer. A Towing Vessel Bridging Program has been initiated to introduce the uninspected towing vessel industry to the Coast Guard inspection process in anticipation of the implementation of Subchapter M regulations. Mullane stated that there has already been an 8% loss of towing companies. As of now, there are approximately 1,000 towing businesses, and 92% of those businesses are small businesses. The GAO has stated that in the coming years, 93% of these businesses with less than 500 employees will be gone when the program is integrated. One year ago, there were 5,280 towing vessels in the U.S. Now, there are approximately 5,000. The cost to put the program in effect is between \$129 million - \$153 million. To bring a vessel into compliance with a towing safety management system is \$143,000 per vessel. Mullane stated that another issue raised with the program is that all vessels working on other than a strict rivers route must have a crew that is credentialed by the Coast Guard. The process takes several months. The crew member must also complete a nine-page medical report, and be issued a medical card. Mullane stated that due to these stipulations, finding adequate, licensed crew members to man the boats has been a problem.

### Update on Lionfish Activities

**Ballard** gave a PowerPoint Presentation entitled “Lionfish (*Pterois volitans*)”. He reported that the invasive lionfish populations are made up of two species: *Pterois volitans* and *Pterois miles*. These are two of several species of lionfish - the majority of which are still in the pet trade industry with no regulations on them. In the 1980s and early 1990s, they were localized in southeast Florida. By the late 1990s, they had moved into Bermuda and the east coast. By 2004, they were in the Bahamas. From there, they moved into the Caribbean. As of 2013, they had invaded the entire Caribbean, and the Gulf of Mexico. Using manned submersibles, they have been sighted in depths of 1,000 feet. They have invaded natural reefs, artificial reefs, and mud bottoms. Recently, lionfish have been found inland, such as mangroves. They have been sighted in the Loxahatchee River, and in late 2012, there was a lionfish sighting four miles upstream from Jupiter Inlet, in 8 parts per thousand water.

Lionfish are showing that they can reach high abundances, and can become heavily established. Their densities are far above any native top-level predators. With those high numbers, they will consume a large amount of prey. They are gape-limited, so any prey that enter their mouth will be eaten. If prey is abundant, they will gorge-feed. They consume over 60 species of prey. In some localized studies, it was found that lionfish reduce native prey species on reefs by 65 - 95% within a two-year period. They then move on to another reef.

**Ballard** spoke on the lionfish invasion in northern gulf waters and the Mississippi Bight Lionfish Response Unit, a cooperative pilot project between GSMFC, MS DMR, AL DNR, USFWS, and the National Park Service. Gear was supplied to dive groups who participated in the lionfish assessment. Custom-designed dive slates were supplied to the divers for native-associated species surveys, as well as spears with lionfish tips, puncture-resistant gloves, and GoPro cameras. Videos of the dives were made for later assessment. A scientific diver was assigned for each diving trip. GSMFC developed a database with an online fish survey for the divers to fill out. The survey data was entered into the database. From the data, it was found that the majority of lionfish sightings were in deeper sites and further to the east, which is what was expected. It

is hoped that in coming years, additional funding will be secured to assess the sites that are now negative for lionfish to see if they have become invaded.

**Ballard** stated that the pilot project went well, and many things were learned, such as what types of gear worked well, and what types didn't.

Outreach efforts include flyers and t-shirts.

**Dodrill** reported that they held a lionfish summit in October 2013 in Cocoa Beach, Florida to raise awareness of the seriousness of the lionfish invasion. Lionfish brochures and t-shirts were printed and distributed to dive shops and dive clubs. Several lionfish derbies were held. Seventy-five lionfish were shipped on ice to the summit, and a professional chef prepared various recipes using the lionfish meat. It was filmed for a promotion on television to raise awareness.

### **Overview of Monitoring/Research Projects in Florida**

**Horn** gave a PowerPoint Presentation entitled "Florida Monitoring Program Update 2011-2013". Since 2010, there have been 22 artificial reef monitoring grants. The recipients include eight universities, ten counties, and four non-profits.

Florida State University received a research grant for 96 fish counts and 12 mapping events over two years on four artificial reefs and eight natural reefs.

The University of South Florida received a research grant for quantifying anglers and a diver's use of artificial reefs using acoustic remote sensing techniques. Passive receivers were placed on four pairs of artificial/natural reef sites in the Pinellas County-Clearwater area. A fish census will also be done by divers.

The Pinellas County Artificial Reef Project will examine the ability to characterize artificial reef habitats and assemblages in a way that can directly be integrated into the stock assessment process through the FWRI Fisheries Independent Monitoring Group. It will also assess the current status and structural complexity of known artificial reef habitats in near-shore waters of the west Florida shelf through side-scan sonar imagery, and characterize species composition and relative abundance of reef fishes associated with artificial reefs and conduct comparisons with proximate natural reefs within near-shore waters of the west Florida shelf. Gear deployment include chevron traps/GoPros and video/stereo cameras.

**Horn** displayed a rotating camera mount for GoPro cameras that was developed to mimic the movement of a diver.

### **Other Business/Public Comment**

There being no further business to discuss, **Sanders** recessed the meeting at 5:00 p.m.

### **Wednesday, February 26, 2014**

Chairman **Sanders** called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m.

## **State/Federal Artificial Reef Program Updates**

### **North Carolina:**

**Jensen** reported that the NC Division of Marine Fisheries Artificial Reef Program is continuing its focus on the state's estuarine system, and coordinating all offshore reef deployments.

The Artificial Reef Program has focused its sampling efforts on assessing the estuarine reef system as Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) and a juvenile abundance index (JAI) for reef related finfish. Estuarine artificial reefs and oyster sanctuary sites are being assessed. Trawl sampling in grass bed areas for gag grouper, sheepshead, spotted seatrout, and Paralichthys flounders is being conducted. The data will be used to develop criteria for siting of new artificial reef sites. A grant application is in review to conduct a feasibility study to identify the state's ability to conduct large-scale oyster restoration efforts.

Complete enhancements have been done to several artificial reef sites. Others will be enhanced in the future.

The Master Plan update is in draft review.

An interactive reef guide web site that will incorporate side-scan images, history, and photos for each reef site is being created. Printed regional reef guides that will be more detailed are being created to complement the web site.

The Division was granted authority to remove all ocean artificial reef buoys by the USCG 5<sup>th</sup> District, and is currently in negotiations with the NC Division of Coastal Management and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to complete the process. The estuarine reef system will continue to be buoyed.

### **Alabama:**

**Newton** reported that the AMRD continues to be active in constructing, deploying, and maintaining artificial reefs within its territorial waters and adjacent Federal waters in the Gulf of Mexico, up to 65 nautical miles offshore of Alabama. AMRD has invested \$374,000 to increase finfish habitat in shallow-water reef zones. In May 2013, 220 six-foot pyramid reefs, and 34 low-relief anchored reefs were deployed. The combination of the low-relief anchored reefs and the pyramid reefs will result in increased habitat complexity, additional fishing opportunities close to shore, and unique shallow-water dive sites. Also in May 2013, a 270' coastal freighter was reefed 17 nautical miles offshore in 116' of water. Additionally, a 70' steel supply vessel and 30 25' pyramid reefs were deployed in 2013.

AMRD has acquired U.S. Corps of Engineers permits to begin constructing two new reefs at two sites near Point Clear in Mobile Bay and in Weeks Bay. AMRD was also awarded two permits for refurbishing projects at 22 inshore reef sites and new construction/refurbishing activities will begin once funding is secured.

AMRD continues to encourage owners of idle iron offshore of Alabama to consider reefing as a viable option, as well as by updating policy to streamline Idle Iron reefing activities. The Rigs-to-Reef policy has been updated by incorporating a Rigs-to-Reef section into the AMRD Artificial Reef Plan.

The owners of two gas platforms contacted AMRD in December 2013 to inquire about reefing them. Permit applications to reef each of the platforms has been submitted, and a successful outcome for the projects is expected.

**Florida:**

**Dodrill** gave a PowerPoint Presentation entitled "Florida State Program Update February 2013-2014". For FY 2013, SFR Apportionment to FWC was \$11,943,743. The Reef Program SFR grant funds operating expenses, three employee salaries, and much of the FWC reef construction managed projects. Public artificial reef funding sources in Florida consist of local government (56%), sport fish restoration (29%), and state funded (15%). During 2013, 62 state-wide deployments were done.

At Horseshoe Beach Reef in Dixie County, 272 tons of limestone rock and concrete culverts, and nine new patch reefs were deployed. At Mexico Beach, 62 pre-fabricated concrete modules in four permitted areas, and 19 new patch reefs were deployed. At Floyd's Folly Reef in Jacksonville, 800 tons of pre-use concrete materials, and one patch reef were deployed. In Pinellas County, 100 concrete goliath reef balls, and two patch reefs on two permitted reef areas were deployed. In July 2013, the Joe Patti Memorial Reef was deployed in Escambia County. It is a 95x40x10 foot metal barge with stainless steel sculptures on the deck.

For FY 2013-2014, \$8000.000 LBR is appropriated, plus \$500,000 legislative support. Federal SFR funding was reduced by \$124,785. There are seven FWC-SFR construction grants, and nine supplemental FWC-MRCTF construction grants.

For FY 2014-2015, \$800,000 LBR has been requested. The SFR grant start-date is September 1, 2014. Grant applications were due by March 15, 2014. Appropriation to be determined by July 1, 2014.

In February 2013, a 110' steel hulled tug boat was deployed in 76' of water in Palm Beach County as a county-sponsored Ship-to-Reef.

PCB monitoring of the USS Oriskany has continued. Mean total PCB fish tissue sampling Round #10 was done in April 2012. Oriskany red snapper total was 11,857.9 pg/g (mean for 21 fish). Oriskany reef vermilion snapper total was 4547.0 pg/g. The EPA screening Tier 1 monitoring screening level is 20,000 pg/g. The FDOH screening level is 50,000 pg/g.

The Sierra Club and Basel Action Network (BAN) petitioned the EPA to halt deepwater sinking of partially-cleaned naval vessels during "sink-ex" military exercises. The EPA will issue no future PCB risk-based disposal permits for AR vessel sinking. All future vessels sunk as artificial reefs must have no regulated PCBs on board.

Lionfish derby divers have removed over 4,000 lionfish from Florida. In 2011-2012, commercial fishermen harvested over 12,000 lionfish in Florida, with a dockside value of \$57,970.

Small (1/4 mile square) reef permits are being considered and sought in state waters in both the Panhandle and off NE Florida in Volusia County by the County Reef Program. The reasoning for the rationale for this approach appears to be a combination of cheaper permit cost for a general

DEP permit (\$250.00) vs \$750.00 for an individual permit, quicker DEP permit authorization, increased ease of access, and more fishing sites in state waters should Florida go inconsistent with federal fishing regulations.

On February 19-20, 2013, a NW Florida Artificial Reef Workshop was held in Niceville.

On February 28, 2013, a GMFMC Artificial Reef Substrate Advisory Panel Initial Meeting was held to discuss Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) designation as related to Gulf of Mexico Artificial structures.

A Florida Lionfish Summit Meeting was held on October 22-24, 2013.

**Georgia:**

**Murray** reported that their 2014 Artificial Reef Program funding increased from the previous year.

In June 2013, a 130' barge and some power poles were deployed at the "ALT" Reef. In November 2013, a 254' hopper barge and 330 chicken coops were deployed at the "KC" Reef. In February 2014, a 110' steel deck barge was deployed at the "SAV" Reef.

In 2013, reef and buoy inspections were done, and 45 general contaminants samples were collected. Four additional staff were certified as GADNR Dive Team members.

Regional Permit# 36 was updated.

The goals for Georgia's Offshore Artificial Reef (OAR) Program are to restore and/or enhance fish habitats for recreational fishers; annually deploy donated materials of opportunity at multiple reef locations; establish new and maintain existing partnerships; create an OAR Monitoring Plan and an Artificial Reef Management Plan.

**South Carolina:**

**Martore** reported that their program funding increased for the current fiscal year. Funds generated from the state saltwater fishing license were greater than anticipated, and the license committee voted to give a portion of those excess funds to the reef program.

The cooperative program with the SC Army National Guard continues to be retained. Sixty armored personnel carriers were deployed this year on three separate reef sites. Another 50 vehicles will be deployed this summer. However, the National Guard Bureau in Washington, D.C. will no longer fund these types of exercises.

During the past year, 13 material deployments were made. These manufactured and surplus materials make up the majority of the deployments.

A study comparing fish communities on reefs made of similar materials but of different ages, and their comparability to natural live bottom areas has been completed. It was determined that fishing pressure is more important than reef age in determining community structure.

Construction has been completed of the first 260' barge for the deep-water memorial reef MPA. Once deployment of the barge is complete, construction will begin on the second 260' barge.



### **Louisiana:**

**McDonough** reported that the Program continues to be very active in accepting new platforms into permitted artificial reef sites.

A total of 344 oil and gas jackets were accepted. Twenty-two were deployed in 2013, and 30 are in the permit process.

Several inshore artificial reefs are being developed. The Reef Program, in collaboration with the Coastal Conservation Association of Louisiana, developed a reef in Vermilion Bay utilizing 10,000 tons of recycled concrete rubble. At the Laketown Pier Reef in Lake Pontchartrain, an additional 2,000 tons of quarry limestone is being deployed.

An inshore/nearshore reef plan is being drafted. This plan will be complete by this summer, and will allow the Program to develop and preserve fisheries habitat and fishing opportunities in new areas of the Louisiana coast.

### **Mississippi:**

**Sanders** reported that the DMR Artificial Reef Bureau started its inshore reef enhancement project in late 2012, using National Resources Damage Assessment (NRDA) money. Beginning in November 2012, five reefs were enhanced in Jackson County. The project ended on June 18, 2013. In that time period, 37 low-profile reefs in the three coastal counties of Harrison, Jackson, and Hancock received 24,546 cubic yards of limestone.

Also involving NRDA, the Artificial Reef Bureau staff conducted pre/post side-scanning of approximately 1,400 acres of the state's oyster reefs. These images helped identify areas on the state's oyster reefs that needed to be enhanced for the upcoming oyster cultch deployment.

Two offshore deployments of 26 Florida Limestone Pyramids on Fish Haven 13 were done.

In March, the Katrina Key Expansion Project will begin. Approximately 550 concrete columns will be used for the expansion from the old Margaritaville Casino in front of the Grand Casino. Three of the four keys maintained by the DMR are located in west Harrison County (Pass Christian) and in Hancock County (Jailhouse Key and Square Handkerchief Key). Due to sustaining damage from storm surge and high waves from Hurricane Isaac, plans are underway to restore these keys to original design specifications.

Approximately 20,000 tons of concrete culverts will be deployed on selected offshore reefs this summer.

### **Texas:**

**Shively** gave a PowerPoint Presentation entitled "Texas Artificial Reef Program 2013 Year in Review". The Corpus Christi near-shore reefing project began in September 2013. Reefing consisted of 20,000 tons of box culvert and 470 concrete semi-enclosed reef. The Coastal Conservation Association (CCA) funded the construction of 70 of the pyramids.

Four Eternal Reefs were placed at Barr's Reef in federal waters on October 25, 2013. Eternal Reefs covers all of the costs of these deployments, which does not cost the program any money.

In September 2013, over 100 1-ton natural quarry rocks were deployed at Sabine Reef.

**Shively** reported on the Rigs-to-Reef Program. Five petroleum platforms were reefed, generating \$1,290,000 in donations. There are currently 58 additional platforms in the TPWD project list in various stages of negotiation.

New emphasis is being placed on archeological impacts at newly permitted reef sites now by the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE), Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM), and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. All new reef sites now require an archaeology survey, which is done by the petroleum companies using BSEE/BOEM survey guidelines.

EB-110 is scheduled to become the program's first deep-water reef. The upper portion will be cut at 90 feet below the surface and towed to shore for scrapping. The base would remain in place, giving a profile off the bottom of 570 feet.

In November 2013, the artificial reef program received a new reef site permit for MU-870. The reef site is approximately 30 miles off Corpus Christi and will house a towed platform in the spring of 2014. Several additional Rigs-to-Reef sites will be added in the next few years.

The TPWD Artificial Reef Program submitted three Natural Resources Damage Assessment (NRDA) projects using funds from the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill Restoration Projects. Four reef sites are listed for consideration: Matagorda near-shore reef-site, Freeport reef-site, Corpus Christi near-shore reef site, and a new ship reef site located in the High Island General Permit zone 67nm from Galveston.

The archaeology and bottom survey work required for all reef sites was completed in December 2013. Public hearings were held in January 2014 in Corpus Christi, Port Arthur, and Galveston. Federal trustees are now reviewing input into the Environmental Assessment documents. Funding and approval is expected later this year.

In July 2012, the TPWD ARP created an Artificial Reef Program Facebook page. Updates are posted about near-shore reefings, rigs-to-reefs deployments, biological monitoring trips, etc.

The TPWD Artificial Reef Program created a new interagency agreement with Texas A&M University. The two-year agreement is to provide biological monitoring and research on nine TPWD reef sites from Freeport to Sabine using vertical longlines, diver surveys, remotely operated vehicles (ROV), and acoustic technology to determine fish biomass and the general health of the reef sites.

Three offshore sampling trips were completed in the 2013 monitoring season. A new sampling protocol was enacted this season: SEAMAP's vertical longline. TPWD ARP is compiling a database of categorical abundance of fish species through roving divers surveys, estimates of fish lengths through video surveys, water quality, and now biological sampling through the vertical longlines.

The Texas Artificial Reef Survey was conducted by Texas A&M University at College Station. Approximately 10,000 surveys were mailed, and an online website was created to take the survey. Those who did not respond online received a hard copy survey. The purpose of the

survey was to obtain socio-economic data from users of TPWD refs from boaters/anglers. The final report is due mid-2014. A new survey to target divers will be conducted by TAMU-Corpus Christi in 2014.

On January 17, 2014 the 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Artificial Reef Program Science and Research Consortium was held at the Harte Research Institute in Corpus Christi.

Lionfish continue to be found on reef sites. In July 2013, 16 lionfish were removed from artificial reefs.

The pyramid reef design was modified to prevent sea turtles from becoming trapped inside.

**Maryland:**

**Zlokovitz** reported that the annual deployment of concrete reef balls in upper Chesapeake Bay at Memorial Stadium Reef has been completed. Over 1,400 reef balls have been deployed at this site since 2001. They are working with MD DNR Shellfish Division and Army Corps on expanding the existing area by one acre for additional reef ball deployments.

A new reef ball project is underway at the Cambridge, Choptank River at the Bill Burton Piers. Three hundred reef balls were deployed alongside the fishing pier on the Dorchester County side of the river. There are plans to deploy additional reef balls in 2014 at the Talbot County side of the river. A pre-deployment volunteer fishing survey was done in 2013, and more pre and post-surveys will be done in 2014.

In 2012, the Cooks Point oyster sanctuary reef ball site was expanded.

Due to issues with barge handling and mooring liability, deployment of limestone and granite at shallow-water site in Hail Cove in the lower Chester River had been delayed in 2012-early 2013. A new contract with Chesapeake Stone Structures has been signed, and completion of the project is planned for April 2014.

Dive surveys and photography of oyster growth on four Woodrow Wilson bay reef sites and smaller reef ball sites were completed. The main purpose of the dives was to document growth of oysters and other invertebrates on the reef material.

Work with DNR Fisheries staff to develop a more statistically rigorous monitoring program that can be maintained with limited staff and budget is ongoing. A Pilot Volunteer Angler Logbook study was conducted in 2013. Comparison of CPUE and size distribution at natural vs. artificial reefs was done. Analysis indicated that there was no significant difference between the artificial and natural reef. There was no difference in fish lengths between the natural and artificial reef. In summary, the artificial reef performed as well as a natural reef for fishing success.

Anglers will be recruited for an expanded Baywide 2014 volunteer angler logbook study on several artificial reef sites. Barren-bottom, "featureless" comparison sites may be added in addition to natural reef comparison sites.

Deployments of concrete "coral castle blocks", steel, and concrete pipe were completed at Jack Spot Reef, Little Gull, Great Gull, and other ocean reef sites.

Volunteers of the MD coastal chapters of CCA and MSSA have constructed concrete “stars” and “jax” (similar to the shape of the beach obstacles used at Normandy during WWII) for deployment on OCRF reef sites.

MD DNR staff received multiple reports that subway car debris was being caught daily by commercial draggers during 2011-2012 at a distance of 10-15 miles from the original reef sites. The distances could not be verified. DNR staff requested natural disaster-related NOAA funding to conduct an extensive side-scan sonar survey in the area in and around the four reef sites where subway cars were deployed. To date, funding has not been received, but DNR continues to monitor reports from commercial fishermen, recreational anglers, party boat captains, and divers. DNR coastal program staff will meet with the Ocean City commercial fleet at a constituent port meeting on February 21, and will share any new reports of subway car debris.

**Delaware:**

**Tinsman** reported that in 2013, approximately \$335,000 worth of concrete material was deployed at two bay reef sites.

Video and biological monitoring of the ex-Navy destroyer Arthur W. Radford is ongoing. This is the second year of a 5-year monitoring program.

Efforts to secure SMZ status for Delaware’s five reef sites in the EEZ continue.

**New Jersey:**

**Carberry** reported that the NJ Department of Environmental Protection is in the process of developing regulations to balance access to reefs in marine state waters. Provisions include: commercial fishers who utilize pots will have continued access to small sections of the two reefs that are located in marine state waters; recreational anglers will have access to all portions of the reefs including the full access zones; commercial fishers who utilize dredges, gill nets, otter trawls, and hook and line will still have access to all portions of these reefs; a new reef site is to be constructed that will be open to hook and line fishing only; once regulations are in effect for the two reefs located in marine state waters, the NJDEP will petition the MAFMC for SMZ regulations for the remaining 13 artificial reef sites that are located in the EEZ. It is hoped that these regulations will be in effect by July 2014.

**Massachusetts:**

**Rousseau** reported that the MA DMF continues to administer the MA Artificial Reef Program on a part-time basis. To date, the Program has relied on Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration (Wallop-Breaux) money for reimbursement of a portion of agency funds for staff time used to provide technical assistance and data analysis on projects that provide benefits to recreational fishing, including artificial reefs.

In 2013, DMF continued working with Federal and state resource agencies to permit two artificial reef sites within state waters in Nantucket Sound. The permit application has been submitted to the Corp and approval is pending.

Funding was received from the MA Marine Recreational Fisheries Development Fund for long-term support of reef monitoring and development activities. Funds supported monitoring efforts at all permitted artificial reef sites in MA.

A state-wide GIS-based artificial reef site selection model targeting hard bottom habitat limited areas is being developed.

Permanent bottom temperature monitoring stations at all existing artificial reef sites have been established.

The DMF participated in a multi-agency working group of federal, state, local, and nonprofit resource agencies in MA to identify potential suitable options for the beneficial reuse of one million cubic yards of dredge rock material that will be removed from Boston Harbor in 2014-2016.

The DMF participated in a multi-agency working group of Federal, state, local, and nonprofit resource agencies in MA to examine the roll of artificial reefs as “living shoreline” option for coastal protection.

### **Rhode Island:**

**Longyel** reported that the RI DEM, in cooperation with The Nature Conservancy, is currently in the second year of a five-year research project on artificial reefs in an attempt to discover if artificial reefs increase the abundance (and biomass) of important demersal sport fish species such as sea bass, tautog, cunner, and scup, or if reefs attract existing numbers of fish to the reef and increase the rate of exploitation, thus potentially decreasing the population (or community).

The goal of the project is to better understand what the real value of an artificial reef is as a fisheries enhancement and conservation tool.

In early 2013, the project was vetted to the RI Saltwater Anglers Association to receive feedback. Potential sites and design were vetted to RISAA, the RI Marine Fisheries Council, and certain commercial industry representatives. Potential sites were surveyed in the field to ground truth data. Permit applications were submitted to agencies, and contracts are being developed for contractual services. The next steps will be to collect baseline data in the spring, followed by reef construction in early summer once permits have been received.

### **BSEE:**

**Peter** gave a PowerPoint Presentation entitled “Rigs to Reef Program Policy Overview”. The Rigs-to-Reef Program was formalized in 1985 and has resulted in the donation of over 445 platforms as reef material on the GOM OCS.

In 2009, an addendum was done to the Rigs-to-Reef Policy. The Addendum outlined enhanced reviewing and approval guidelines in response to the post-Katrina regulatory environment. It halted dozens of reef proposals incorporating platforms destroyed or toppled during the 2005-2008 hurricane seasons that were not adequately prepared for reefing and outside traditional reef planning areas. It helped the agency tackle public criticism and NGO assertions that Rigs-to-Reefs was becoming an unofficial “Ocean Dumping Program”.

The new Rigs-to-Reef Interim Policy Document issued by The Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE) removes some restrictions, and evaluates reef proposals on a case-by-case basis instead of only within a planning zone. It allows for time extensions to regulatory deadlines, provided companies are actively pursuing a viable reef option. It

discourages the use of explosives for structures proposed for reefing. It eliminates storm-topped platforms from consideration as reefs.

The Rigs-to-Reef Alternative to onshore disposal supports and encourages the reuse of obsolete platform jackets as artificial reef material and will grant a departure from removal requirements and applicable lease obligations provided that the structure becomes part of a state reef program that complies with the National Artificial Reef Plan, the operator satisfies any U.S. Coast Guard navigational requirements for the structure, the reefing proposal complies with BSEE engineering and environmental reviewing standards, and the state agency acquires a permit from the Army Corps of Engineers and accepts title and liability for the reefed structure over removal and reefing operations are concluded.

**New York:**

**Yuen** provided the report for New York. She reported that they have had fiscal cutbacks. There currently are four active reef permits.

Through a partnership with the USACE, dredged rock from the New York Harbor channel deepening project is being deployed onto numerous New York artificial reef sites. To date, approximately 20,000 cubic yards of reefing material has been received. Over 5,500 cubic yards has been deployed onto the Hempstead Reef. Additional deployments will be made onto other New York artificial reef sites.

Funds will be used for upcoming biological reef monitoring studies.

Multiple offers for reefing material donations and sponsorships have been received.

**Next Meeting/Other Business/Public Comment**

**Zlokovitz** was elected Chairman. **Newton** was elected Vice Chairman.

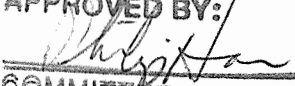
The next meeting location is in Clearwater, Florida.

The next meeting date will be in January 2015.

**There being no further business to discuss or public comments, Sanders adjourned the meeting at 12:00 p.m.**



**Commercial/Recreational Fisheries Advisory Panel  
Minutes  
Monday, March 17, 2014  
New Orleans, Louisiana**

APPROVED BY:  
  
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN  
APPROVED BY:

COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**P. Horn** called the meeting to order at 1:34 p.m. with a quorum for the Commercial component of the Panel and the overall Panel. The recreational component only seated two reps. The following in attendance:

**Members**

Philip Horn, Clark Seafood, Pascagoula, MS  
John Rawlings, Colorado River Seafood, Matagorda, TX  
Bob Fairbank, Mississippi Power, Gulfport, MS  
Bob Zales II, Panama City, FL  
Ronnie Luster, Texas CCA, Houston, TX  
Ed Swindell, Marine Process Services, Hammond, LA

**Speakers**

Ava Lasseter, GMFMC, Tampa, FL  
Kelly Lucas, GSMFC Commissioner, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Julianna Mullen, Audubon Nature Institute, New Orleans, LA  
Randy Pausina, GSMFC Commissioner, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Dale Diaz, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Scott Bannon, AMRD, Dauphin Island, AL

**Others**

Mark Schexnayder, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Richard Cody, FFWCC, St. Petersburg, FL  
Justin Esslinger, TPWD, Rockport, TX  
Jeff Marx, LDWF, New Iberia, LA  
Steve Brown, FFWCC, St. Petersburg, FL  
Joseph Smith, NOAA Fisheries, Beaufort, NC  
Martin Bourgeois, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Rene LeBreton, LDWF, New Orleans, LA  
Drue Banta Winters, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Judy Jamison, GSAFF, Tampa, FL  
Lance Robinson, TPWD, Dickinson, TX  
Douglass Boyd, GMFMC, San Antonio, TX  
Troy Williamson, GSMFC Commission, Corpus Christi, TX

**Staff**

David Donaldson, Acting Executive Director, Ocean Springs, MS  
Steve VanderKooy, Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS  
Ralph Hode, Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS  
Jeff Rester, Habitat Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS  
James Ballard, Sport Fish Restoration Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS



Gregg Bray, RecFIN(SE) Programmer/Analyst, Ocean Springs, MS  
Angie Rabideau, Staff Accountant, Ocean Springs, MS  
Donna Bellais, ComFIN Programmer, Ocean Springs, MS  
Debbie McIntyre, Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS

### **Introductions**

**Horn** asked everyone at the table to introduce themselves along with the audience and to review the panel roster for accuracy. **VanderKooy** was pleased to report that all the seats on the Panel were filled despite not having all the Panel members in attendance. With four commercial reps and two recreational reps present, the overall Panel and the Commercial sector have a quorum, the recreational sector does not but can still act within the overall Panel.

### **Adoption of Agenda**

Under other business, **Zales** asked to add discussion regarding an unusual letter that was sent out asking for funding for electronic reporting on charter boats and MRIP in the Gulf. **Fairbank** moved to accept the agenda with the addition, **Zales** seconded and the agenda was adopted.

### **Approval of Minutes (March 14, 2011 – Houston, TX)**

The last set of minutes was actually a workgroup summary since there was not a quorum and therefore did not require approval. It was provided as information only.

### **State Boundary Extension**

**VanderKooy** indicated that the supporting proposed bills and legislation for the extension of the state boundaries for Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama had been sent for review prior to the meeting but were also included in the Panel folders. This included H.R. 1430 and S. 681, both referred to as the Offshore Fairness Acts and the unnamed bill HB403. **Pausina** provided a brief history of how the proposed legislation had originated. Each one essentially started as “fairness” bills. Two of the states, Texas and Florida, already had legal state boundaries out to three leagues or nine nautical miles and the three central Gulf states simply wanted their boundaries to match. Initially, the proposals were to extend for all purposes, minerals and fisheries, but today are primarily specific to state fisheries. A few concerns were raised by the Panel members such as how to deal with the Louisiana and Mississippi line. **Diaz** and **Pausina** indicated that the actual line was already being negotiated between those two states and would likely not be a major issue. **Bannon** indicated that, at least in Mississippi and Alabama, the extension would probably not change things for those two states since they already adhere to the Federal closure schedules.

The question was raised regarding federal fishing permit holders for reef fish and trawling. **Pausina** noted that federal regulations for gear would supersede any state regulations in those waters until such time as a Congressional or court decision was made. For reef fish (red snapper mainly), the state recreational bag and possession limits would apply. Shrimping is a big issue that in federal waters, if the boat has the horsepower to pull gear, they were welcomed to. State seasonal closures would still apply to the current lines and the six miles in question, would continue to be under the federal guidelines. TEDs would still be required in those waters. The TED rule isn't enforced in Louisiana state or federal waters by statute and isn't enforced anywhere by LDWF officers, although it is enforced by other states and federal officers. **Bannon** indicated that in Alabama waters, the state lines are fairly easy and simple. The affects are not as great in AL

because they don't make any changes to trawl sizes inside vs outside in Federal waters. When the federal reef fish seasons close, the state waters close as well making everything even more straight forward. The Alabama bills are currently listing waters and submerged lands in their extension but it will likely end up being only for fisheries.

The three state reps indicated that as of this time, there are some reefs built in the three to six mile range but if the extension does happen, there will likely be additional reef building efforts directed to that area. **Diaz** indicated that some of the driver for the range extension, in Mississippi at least, was to also open up more waters for the legal harvest of red drum, something the charterboat operators and recreational anglers would all like.

Red snapper in state waters would be an interesting issue. For example, in Texas waters, when the federal waters close for reef fish (red snapper), commercial harvest is eliminated in state waters and those with a commercial permit are only allowed to retain the recreational state water bag and possession. There are a lot of questions regarding exactly what NOAA will do if this comes to fruition. A few of the Panel members suspect that there will be unexpected consequences; they recommend caution in moving forward.

The federal permit holder was again discussed regarding whether there would be any affects if the boundary would pass. **Diaz** reported that the response would be based on the language in each bill. **Lasseter** noted that the Council approved the 30B provision but the SERO has indicated that they won't move forward with it. Ultimately, the effect will be on a state-by-state basis depending on the specific language in each bill.

**Bannon** noted that, under the current Joint Enforcement Agreements (JEAs) which allow the states to participate in federal fisheries enforcement, boundary expansion may potentially be an issue. As the JEAs currently operate, if an officer is on 'federal' patrol, he is effectively deputized as a federal agent and must enforce federal regulations. If the states of Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana begin to manage the additional six miles under state regulations, how will federal cases be made? This is a gray area and when the NOAA OLE is contributing the funds for state patrols, which jurisdiction will take priority? It will not likely result in a reduction in funding, but the switch from operating as a state officer to operating as a federal officer may not occur until further out. The Gulf agencies will be meeting with OLE in a national conference to discuss JEAs in the next month or so. **Pausina** indicated that a Louisiana officer will not likely write up a Louisiana case in those six miles until something official is completed. All anglers are instructed to proceed with caution with which regulations, state or federal, that they wish to comply with in the 'gray zone'. Regarding transiting through other states' waters, most of the officers generally follow a 'don't stop and pee' rule. As long as an angler doesn't stop for anything, he is able to pass through another state and possess the legal limit of the state in which he caught the fish. However, if the angler stops, he becomes subject to that state's size and possession limits.

**Horn** indicated that he is very concerned about the 'trickle down' effect if these were to be approved. There is no way to know what NOAA would do if state water enforcement were to be ignored. The hammer that NOAA has is funding to force the states into compliance.

**Diaz** reported that under the Mag-Stevens reauthorization provisions, the House version (Rep Hastings) has mentioned boundary extensions seaward to nine miles for all states. That's the only mention in any of the proposed reauthorization and it does mention red snapper only. **Diaz** indicated that MS has provided comment that the language should include 'reef fish' and 'red drum', not just red snapper. **Zales** suggested that if this were to happen, it should be for ALL fish; you can't flip back and forth between jurisdictions in the same location depending on the species you happen to hook.

### **Potential GSMFC Role in Red Snapper Management**

**VanderKooy** introduced the topic and the overall issue. There have been several bills brought to both the House and the Senate regarding red snapper management in the Gulf, and the Commission has been mentioned as a potential management body. The Panel asked the state representatives who were present about the current thoughts on taking power from the Council and NOAA and giving it to the states. Each representative gave their own state's perspective. **Zales** noted that the Commission doesn't have any regulatory authority like the ASMFC and at the Council level, state management would take the pressure off NOAA and instead put the pressure on the state agency. In hindsight, this might not change anything except 'who gets yelled at'.

**Donaldson** noted that the Commission is wrestling with this very issue at the current meeting, and staff was asked to develop a white paper to provide information on what the options might be. While the paper is a draft and not ready for distribution, the options were essentially, status quo with the state splitting up allocations, the states taking authority and the Council/NOAA coordinating those efforts, or the states giving authority to the Commission completely as the ASMFC has done for summer flounder and other species.

The Panel wanted to know if the stock assessment would potentially be divided into a state-by-state approach, who the authority would reside with if the Council and NOAA relinquished their authority, and finally, would the Commission be the appropriate body to take authority of a federal fishery? If that is the case, would every state have a different size limit, bag limit, and how would these data be combined into something coherent in an assessment? **Pausina** indicated that everything remains pretty much the same but each state would simply get its own historic allocation; all would remain under Magnuson. Some bills are worded differently but it's hard to imagine the Commission having to run a snapper assessment. **Horn** noted that the ASMFC's main issue with authority is related to flounder. The fish are all pretty much harvested from the same place but are landed in different places depending on who has an opened season. Red snapper is a shared population in the Gulf but each state seems to consider them state property simply because they've put out their own reefs and therefore 'claim' those landings.

**Lasseter** and staff had been asked to come up with some red snapper options when this issue first came up at the Council. Several options were presented similar to what **Donaldson** had noted. **Pausina** pointed out that the states would simply get flexibility in the ability to catch 'their' allocation when and how they wanted. They didn't want 'regional management' but that's how the terminology developed. The states want the opportunity to simply meet the needs of their constituents. **Zales** pointed out that if we just move authority and don't modify/improve the data collection programs, this is just the same problem with different players. Without a standard data

system, this could be a bigger problem in the future. If each state holds its own monitoring, the ability to assess a stock regionally would become a nightmare.

Each state is undergoing its own revision to the recreational monitoring. **Pausina** indicated that Louisiana has opted out of MRIP in favor of doing its own monitoring and harvest management which should be much more accurate and closer to real-time. Florida is considering changes to its own sampling in cooperation with MRIP, and Alabama has proposed implementation of a mandatory red snapper reporting system to run in conjunction with MRIP using a drop box at the landing sites for reporting. **Horn** and **Zales** both agreed that, while better data might reduce the allowable catch, the accuracy of the landings are more important in the long-term and most people realize this. **Bannon** believes that Alabama may end up with a 90% validation rate with the recreational landings once the reporting is in place. Alabama is a small state so they should have an easier time capturing real numbers after the first year. **Lucas** reported that Mississippi will likely follow Alabama's methodology.

Ultimately, no one could answer what this end product of the proposed legislation might look like but the Panel was encouraged that the Commission was considering all the options discussed. **Swindell** asked what is it the Panel would like to see in moving forward with this. As a result, the Panel took the following action. **Zales** moved that *the CRFAP recommends that the GSMFC continue putting together options for coordination of the five Gulf states and/or complete management of the recreational red snapper fishery in the GOM.* **Fairbank** seconded. **Zales** reminded that this should remain exclusively to the recreational fishery; the commercial fishery would still be under the federal government. **Pausina** reminded everyone that the recreational/commercial management will fall to Congress to decide, so we might not get much choice. After considerable discussion and clarification, the motion passed with one in opposition.

**Swindell** pointed out that there is another issue that was not addressed regarding the expansion of the state boundary waters from the first issue so the Panel backed up. **Zales** moved that *the CRFAP recommends that the GSMFC supports all five Gulf states in expanding state waters to three marine leagues for all fisheries.* **Swindell** seconded. Without further comment, the motion passed 4 to 2 with **Horn** and **Rawlings** in opposition citing concern over what unforeseen issues might result from these actions.

**VanderKooy** noted that the report was going to be delivered to the Commission by **Drey** on Wednesday but he became sick. Since no one from the Panel was remaining through Wednesday, **VanderKooy** would provide the report to the Commission.

#### **Audubon/GSMFC Sustainability Project**

**Mullen** presented the Panel with their first glimpse of the Audubon Nature Institute's sustainability activities through Gulf United for Lasting Fisheries (GULF), a program dedicated to demonstrating and enhancing the conservation and management of our region's fisheries. The GULF program highlights the quality and value of our Gulf of Mexico seafood through education and outreach and is intended to help fisheries managers in the region to meet the highest international standards for responsible fisheries management. The program makes use of Management Action Plans, or MAPs, when coupled with the ongoing Trace Register, Finfo, and other marketing strategies, are

intended to 'rebrand' the Gulf seafood in a more national market to eventually allow the regions fisheries to obtain third-party assessment and potential sustainable certification of our fisheries.

The Audubon Nature Institute provides objective, unbiased analysis for harvesters, dealers, retailers, consumers, and certification bodies without 'endorsing' the fisheries themselves. Many of the criticisms of the current certification process are that the major retailer 'big box stores' are unable to identify seafood that meets the high standard set by the MSC and other such certifying bodies. Those retailers have indicated that even fisheries which are moving toward certification are better than none and the MAPs are an effort to prove how close our fisheries already are to that kind of designation. Through the GULF program, Audubon will assist interested fisheries in obtaining the documentation necessary to confirm that the Gulf of Mexico fisheries are already responsibly managed and allow us to differentiate 'Gulf' seafood products and a 'Gulf' brand in the marketplace.

The Audubon was contracted through the Commission's Oil Disaster Recovery Program (ODRP) to develop the MAP process in an effort to help rebrand the Gulf of Mexico. At this time, the project is working on MAPs for Louisiana Blue Crab, GOM Red Snapper, and Louisiana Oyster. In addition, they will MAP another seven fisheries over the next several months.

The Panel had not met since 2011 and the members were not completely familiar with all the efforts through the Commission's hurricane and BP disaster programs related to marketing of Gulf products. **VanderKooy** and **Hode** provided very brief overviews of how all the various projects tie together with the Audubon program.

**Fairbank** was mostly concerned with truth-in-labeling rather than sustainability. **Mullen** noted that the issue was being addressed in the other programs and this is just another component to get at the label AND the responsible management label. All of the marketing efforts in cooperation show that the Gulf of Mexico is innovating in the seafood world, not just reacting to concerns and circumstances.

### **Other Business**

**Horn** suggested that maybe it was appropriate now to address the topic **Zales** had requested and then come back to the main agenda before it got too late. Prior to the meeting, **Zales** had asked a question regarding the origination of a letter to the Department of Commerce asking for \$2M in support of electronic reporting and smartphone technology onboard charterboats. Half of the funding is designated for the purchase of reporting technology for the charter industry in the Gulf and the other half is to go to the MRIP program for additional data collection.

**Donaldson** stated that the source of this letter was unclear. He noted that in January, there was an electronic monitoring meeting and one of the people from that meeting has moved on this and there is some sort of proposal associated with it. **Donaldson** has not seen a proposal but expects to learn more in the next couple of weeks and will pass that information to this Panel as he gets it.

### **Role of the CRFAP within the Commission**

Finally, the Panel took considerable time to discuss their origins as a committee and the original intent of the committee. **VanderKooy** provided some of the background and relayed the

conversation he had had with Alabama recreational representative Owen Drey who had brought this issue up last fall. The Panel was developed after a couple of failed attempts to create an advisory body to and from the Commission. **VanderKooy** provided all the first meeting minutes (1998) and a bit of the history of how the Commission had originated.

Commercial Chair **Horn** and Recreational Chair **Fairbank** and **Barber** (who wasn't present) have been members since the Panel's inception in 1998. They conveyed to the newer members how communication went back and forth between the Panel and the Commissioners directly. This was the case until the Panel experienced some extended vacancies for some states, and as funding became harder, the Panel met less frequently. In addition, the hurricanes and oil spill has made it difficult for many to be as involved and now is a good time to get back to the basics of the Panel and generate some useful discussion and outreach. **Horn** acknowledged that in the past, the Panel has relied more heavily on staff to provide agenda topics but early on, the Panel brought their own issues to the group and asked staff to bring in resources to go through them. **Fairbank** noted that in the past, he would come to the Panel meeting, get a lot of information and then convey that information back to his fellow fishermen (Wildlife Federation and the CCA) and others including legislative members and the Governor's office. The opportunity to become more knowledgeable about ALL the aspects of fishery management is a valuable tool to explain the activities related to both the recreational and the commercial sectors. The fishermen and harvesters need to hear from the state and federal managers to really become vested in the process. **Zales** agreed and would like to see the Panel continue. It was agreed that transparency is key and this forum brings that transparency to the participants and provides input directly into management.

When asked if the current version of the Panel still had value, the members overwhelmingly that it does. **VanderKooy** noted that at this time, we have a full complement of all ten members (two from each state, one recreational and one commercial) but the 'newness' of some members has perhaps resulted in confusion over the role of the Panel.

**Swindell** wanted to know how today's agenda was generated. Who asked for the items? Was it from the Commission or did they originate from within the Panel? All the items on this agenda were brought by Panel members and the actions and concerns raised today would be presented to the Commission. **Swindell** believed that the fact that the Panel could cover these topics and bring actions to the Commission is fantastic. He asked if the commercial and recreational sectors represented anywhere else in the Commission's structure. **VanderKooy** reported that the answer is yes and no. Commissioners can be appointed from either sector for the private citizen seat on the Commission but this Panel is balanced by state and sector. The original Panel members were asked to determine their own setup and at that time, it was agreed that proxies or alternates would not be as conducive to building the relationships at the table. If a member was not present for several meetings, the appointing agency was asked to look into that member and determine if he or she was still able or willing to participate. When the Panel originated, there was much greater familiarity between members. Events and vacancies over the last several years have made it more difficult to keep that momentum and regain that familiarity. Three years ago, the idle iron issue was raised and the Commission paid the way for the Panel members to attend.

**VanderKooy** reminded the Panel members of another role they serve within the Commission and that is as a pool of representatives for the various Technical Task Forces (TTF) working on the

Fishery Management Plans (FMPs) that **VanderKooy's** program coordinates. In general, a commercial and a recreational representative serves throughout the FMP process, making sure that their sector is included in the discussions and drafting and providing comments related to any recommendations that are generated for management and research. There are three plans currently in revision and nearing completion and the Panel will be asked for representation later in the year for the next task force. **VanderKooy** will be sending the Panel drafts of the plans as soon as they are available from the Blue Crab TTF, the Flounder TTF, and the Menhaden Advisory Committee.

All agreed that 'other' advisory groups that attempted to engage the two sectors at a common table have been much less successful than the Commission's. The Panel suggested that the ability of the members to disseminate information gained from the meetings to their counterparts in their respective states and likewise, bring issues and insight to the Commission from their counterparts, is critical and doesn't really exist in any other venue. They suggested that the Commission staff engage them earlier, ahead of annual meetings, by providing bullet topics of what the various committees intend to cover in the Commission meetings and the topics that the committees spent time working on during previous meetings, not the FYI topics but the more substantive ones. In the end, the members agreed that the transparency and interaction the Panel is provided with the Commission is critical to them being able to provide input into all the Commission activities and initiatives. With that, **Zales** moved that the **CRFAP supports maintaining this panel (CRFAP) in its present status that challenges the group to address timely and pertinent issues that are important but not limited to the Commission.** **Swindell** seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

#### **Other Business**

**Zales** noted that on the Commission Business agenda, there is a National Lionfish Plan mentioned. **Ballard** explained the draft plan and where they were in the process. **Zales** will forward **Ballard's** contact information to some of the folks he interacts with who are very concerned about lionfish.

**VanderKooy** reminded all that the Commercial/Recreational Fisheries Advisory Panel is invited to participate in the Gulf of Mexico Alliance meeting for the rigs-to-reefs/idle iron discussion starting Tuesday morning at 8:30am.

With no further business **Swindell** moved to adjourn, **Zales** seconded and the meeting adjourned at 5:05pm.

APPROVED BY:  
  
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**TCC CRAB SUBCOMMITTEE MINUTES**  
**Monday, March 17, 2014**  
**New Orleans, Louisiana**

**Chairman, R. Gandy** called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. with the following in attendance:

**Members**

Martin Bourgeois, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Jason Hermann, AMRD, Dauphin Island, AL  
Traci Floyd, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Ryan Gandy, FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL

**Others**

Jeff Marx, LDWF, New Iberia, LA  
Tony Reisinger, TX Sea Grant, San Benito, TX  
Julie Anderson, LA Sea Grant, Baton Rouge, LA  
Ronnie Luster, CCA, Houston, TX  
Dale Diaz, MDMR, Biloxi, MS

**Staff**

Steve VanderKooy, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS  
Debbie McIntyre, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

**Introductions**

**VanderKooy** addressed housekeeping issues with the group. **Chairman Gandy** led the audience and the committee members in introductions.

**Adoption of Agenda**

*Floyd moved to adopt the agenda as written. Bourgeois seconded the motion, and the agenda was adopted.*

**Approval of Minutes**

The Subcommittee reviewed their minutes from the GSMFC annual meeting on March 20, 2013. *Bourgeois moved to accept the minutes, Floyd seconded, and the minutes were approved unanimously.*

The group also reviewed the Blue Crab TTF minutes from their meeting held July 22-25, 2013. *Floyd moved to accept the minutes, Bourgeois seconded and the minutes were approved unanimously.* The group reviewed the conference call/webinar summary that took place on November 20, 2013. *Bourgeois moved to accept the summary, Floyd seconded, noting a minor change, approved unanimously.* The group reviewed the conference call/webinar summary that took place December 16, 2013. *Bourgeois moved to accept the summary, Floyd seconded, with the same change noted, approved unanimously.* The group reviewed the conference call/webinar summary that took place February 4, 2014. *Floyd moved to accept the summary with the same noted change, seconded by Bourgeois, and approved unanimously.*



helped. There were 26 staff, 100 volunteers, and 16 boats participating. The weather was great for what is now referred to as a “rodeo” for the second consecutive year. Volunteers received hats, t-shirts, lunch, and a chance to win a number of door prizes that had been donated by sponsors. **Ronnie Luster** (Texas CCA) suggested the possibility of a joint effort in the future between Louisiana and Texas. **Bourgeois** would like to see this happen as well and will work with **Luster** toward this end.

**Gandy** reported that, in order to reduce disruptions to commercial blue crab activities, Florida has been alternating annual trap cleanups between the Gulf and Atlantic sides of the state since 2011. In 2013, 1,044 derelict traps were removed from the Gulf Coast of Florida.

**Herrmann** reported that, upon visual inspection of their main derelict trap removal sites, there are too few derelict traps accessible to warrant organizing a volunteer removal program in the spring of 2014. AMRD will continue to monitor these sites to determine if a fall trap removal should be scheduled. Alabama’s last removal was in March of 2010.

**Floyd** reported that Mississippi’s last cleanup was February 21-23 of 2013. No new work has been necessary; however, MDMR will continue to monitor the situation in case the need for a cleanup arises. Since 1999, over 18,900 traps have been recovered and recycled.

**State Report Summaries** (Individual state reports available at GSMFC office)

**Bourgeois** indicated that the Louisiana Crab Task Force met in December and February. That group endorsed writing letters to the district attorneys in coastal parishes, requesting greater prosecution of crab and trap thieves and also those fishing in closed areas. The Task Force also expressed interest in transferring funds dedicated to the Derelict Crab Trap Removal Fund to the Crab Promotion and Marketing Fund and for use in funding crab disease research; however, new legislation would be required. The 2014 Louisiana Legislative Session agenda does not include introduction of any bills that would immediately impact the blue crab fishery. The Wildlife and Fisheries Commission adopted a Resolution of Support for Sustainability Certification of LA Blue Crab. Louisiana had no report on landings.

**Sutton** was not present at the meeting so **Gandy** presented the Texas report. Preliminary data indicate that commercial landings are down by almost 1M pounds. Crab fishermen licenses are also down from 188 in 2012 to 178 in 2013. The blue crab growth study has been completed and is available upon request. Fisheries-independent monitoring data for 2013 has not been fully uploaded yet into TPWD’s database.

**Herrmann** reported that both landings and effort are low in Alabama. Commercial crab fishermen have shown frustration with low income which is a big concern. Audubon Nature Institute is facilitating possible development of certification for Alabama blue crabs. A committee is being formed currently and initial meetings have started. **Herrmann** would like a state stock assessment to compare to our GDAR numbers.

**Floyd** reported that preliminary data show that Mississippi’s total resident commercial crab license sales are down from 177 in 2012-2013 season to 158 for the 2013-2014 season. The only license that has increased in number is shrimpers who sell crabs and that number is slightly up. The trip

ticket program is still in the beginning stages but quality is improving. Preliminary landings for 2013 are substantially down from the same time period in 2012 although price is up.

**Gandy** reported that preliminary 2013 landings data suggest a continuation of landings volume below historic average. Gulf trips for hard shell crabs started to decline in 2011 and the decline continues. Gulf trips for soft shell crabs continued the decline that started in 2010. All 2013 data is preliminary. As a result of the Blue Crab Effort Management Program implemented in 2007, endorsement numbers appear to have stabilized.

**Other business**

**VanderKooy** asked if the subcommittee would be interested in generating a white paper regarding terrapin for the purpose of beginning to address how to get better resolution on the terrapin issue. This would bring together a lot of information. **Gandy** shared a terrapin trapping study with the group. **Gandy** will send the final draft of this study to Committee members. This information is on Florida's website.

**ACTION ITEM:** To begin work on a white paper to accumulate terrapin information amongst the states.

**Gandy** shared a rough draft PowerPoint presentation with the group that he is going to present to the TCC. He will add the terrapin issue to his report.

Each state agreed to summarize and plan a terrapin report for the next meeting. **Julie Anderson** (Louisiana Sea Grant) stated that she has ghost trap information from the last two years which will be published by summer. **Anderson** also informed the group that there is a study of disease in blue crabs which is also being published.

There being no further business to discuss, **Gandy** moved to adjourn, **Floyd** seconded, and the meeting was adjourned at 11:45 a.m.

APPROVED BY:  
  
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**TCC DATA MANAGEMENT SUBCOMMITTEE  
MINUTES  
Monday, March 17, 2014  
New Orleans, Louisiana**

**Chairman Vince Cefalu** called the meeting to order at 8:35 a.m. The following members and others were present:

**Members**

Chris Denson, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL  
Nicole Shaffer, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL  
Richard Cody, FWRI, Saint Petersburg, FL  
Justin Esslinger, TPWD, Rockport, TX  
Vince Cefalu, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Mike Harden, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
John Froeschke, GMFMC, Tampa, FL  
Bill Richardson, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Dave Gloeckner, SEFSC, Miami, FL

**Staff**

David Donaldson, Assistant Director, Ocean Springs, MS  
Donna Bellais, ComFIN Programmer, Ocean Springs, MS  
Gregg Bray, Programmer/Analyst, Ocean Springs, MS  
James Ballard, Sport Fish Restoration/Aquatic Invasive Coordinator  
Steve VanderKooy, IJF Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS

**Others**

Nicole Smith, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Steve Brown, FWRI, Saint Petersburg, FL  
Joe Desfosse, NOAA Fisheries/HMS, Pascagoula, MS  
Dale Diaz, MDMR, Biloxi, MS

**Adoption of Agenda**

The agenda was approved and adopted as written.

**Approval of Minutes**

The minutes of the Data Management Subcommittee (DMS) meeting held on October 14<sup>th</sup>, 2013 in South Padre Island, TX were approved as written.

**Status of Biological Sampling Activities**

**Bray** provided an update on processing and data entry of biological sampling activities for 2013. All states are either completed or close to completing processing and data entry of 2013 samples. Processing and data entry should be completed by summer. States were asked about the utility of having an otolith processors meeting in 2014. All states agreed that this would still be a useful exercise especially with the possibility of obtaining some FIN funding for a shortened biological

sampling program for 2014. **Bray** also reminded states that GSMFC plans to provide ageing data for the upcoming red snapper stock assessment in July 2014.

#### **Review of Response to SEFSC Data Peer Review Report**

**Donaldson** provided a brief summary of a draft response letter. **Donaldson** asked the DMS to review the report and provide recommendations. The DMS approved the response letter in its current format so the final version will be reviewed by the FIN committee in June 2014. Any editorial changes need to be provided to GSMFC by April 15, 2014. **Donaldson** also provided a copy of a national response letter from NOAA Fisheries of the review process.

#### **Discussion of Updating FIN DMS**

**Bellais** stated recent discussions have taken place as to whether the FIN Data Management System (FIN DMS) needs to be updated to new software to provide more access and more user friendly tools. Oracle Discoverer is being discontinued so no program support will be available in the future. GSMFC is attempting to find a new end user tool and that prompted the discussion of completely redesigning the FIN DMS. **Donaldson** stated that the current system was originally designed for receiving and housing trip ticket data only. The FIN DMS now is much more complex with additional data programs feeding into the old design. Funding may be available through NOAA Fisheries Information System (FIS) to design a new FIN DMS in cooperation with states and NOAA Fisheries to better collect and manage data feeds coming to FIN. **Harden** agreed this would be a good idea to help better document current data programs and design a new user friendly system. **Esslinger** asked if GSMFC staff would be able to handle the programming components. **Donaldson** stated the proposal would include money for programming assistance if needed. **Gloeckner** asked if the proposal would include a plan for improvements over time or would it be a one-time upgrade. **Donaldson** agreed that planning for continued program improvements over time would be a necessary component. **Cody** asked if the FIS funding is a single year opportunity. **Donaldson** stated that monies are available each year but there are restrictions on what can be funded. The DMS agreed that this would be useful so **Bellais** will develop an initial proposal and provide it to the subcommittee for review before it will be submitted to FIS.

#### **Discussion of Carry-over Funds for FIN**

**Bray** provided a spreadsheet that detailed two spending scenarios for carry-over and supplemental NOAA Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) funds provided for 2014 sampling. **Bray** described the two scenarios and **Donaldson** provided some history on where the carry-over funds originated from. **Donaldson** stated that the increases provided for recreational sampling would be long term and not just one year increases. The increases described in scenario two for menhaden sampling, trip tickets, and biological sampling would not be available from MRIP for future years. **Donaldson** stated that scenario two could be modified to best utilize the available funds if the states so decided. **Donaldson** also stated the 1.8 million increase is essentially recreational MRIP money and should be spent on recreational sampling. The Gulf Fisheries Information Network (GulfFIN) line item is approximately \$640k annually and has been supplementing recreational sampling over the years and the argument could be made that increased MRIP funds could be utilized for other sampling programs. **Cody** asked what the total payback line in scenario one represents. **Donaldson** stated under that scenario those funds would not be utilized by GulfFIN and would be deducted from the total monies received for 2014 from NOAA. **Froeschke** asked if having a partial year biological sampling program would make analyses for

scientists more difficult. The group discussed that having some data would likely be more beneficial than not having any data. **After further discussion the FIN DMS recommended that scenario 2 be preferred with menhaden funds removed and added to biological sampling. Menhaden sampling could be funded from other FIN carry-over funds and would maximize the funds available for biological sampling.**

#### **Discussion of Commercial Electronic Reporting/Unified Trip Ticket**

**Bellais** discussed a brief overview of the current status of unified trip ticket development. Currently Florida, Texas, Mississippi, and Alabama have developed their species table required under unified trip ticket. Louisiana is still in development. Additional discussions regarding potential new codes for live bait, dead bait, and tournament caught landings are ongoing. **Gloeckner** stated that there is no need to add codes because codes exist for bait and live and dead grade codes. **Peterson** reminded the states that development of a unified trip ticket system is ongoing and differs from the current PC based system in that the unified system will be communicating with a web server instead of a permanent local database. Recent work has focused on communications between local PC's and the web server. **Peterson** hopes to be able to have a presentation on the status of the development progress in summer 2014. **Cefalu** stated that LA is considering adding a unit of measure for a half sack of oysters and wanted to see if that would cause problems for Bluefin Data. **Peterson** stated it would just be another code added to the species table. **Peterson** also stated the unified trip ticket system is being developed with newer coding but will still not run on Apple operating systems, Android systems, and most tablets. At some point unified trip ticket will likely not satisfy all of the end users as it cannot be easily built to run on all operating systems currently available. **Harden** stated that LA and TX have discussed the unit condition conversion table and if these old conversion units need to be updated. **Gloeckner** stated that there is work ongoing on the Atlantic Coast to update Atlantic conversion factors. **After further discussion the DMS agreed that the current NOAA conversion tables are likely outdated and recommended that the FIN Commercial Technical Work Group be tasked with exploring how to update the species conversion table for the Gulf of Mexico.** **Bellais** also stated an issue has come up with regards to flounder species codes. **VanderKooy** stated that during a recent flounder FMP process that commercial data records were not speciated very well and a stock assessment was not possible for southern or gulf flounder due to data discrepancies. **VanderKooy** asked if there was a way to improve the commercial species table list to provide better data for a future stock assessment process for southern and gulf flounder. **Denson** stated Alabama has not provided separate species codes because dealers are not going to sort their flounders to the species level. Prices for southern and Gulf flounder are the same and dealers would not take the time to separate them correctly. Most states agreed with Alabama with regards to why they do not provide species codes for southern and Gulf flounder.

#### **Discussion of Consistent Confidentiality Roll-Up Methods**

**Gloeckner** discussed NOAA Fisheries staff are working on developing consistent methods for restricting confidential data that would prevent end users from back calculating confidential numbers. **Bellais** stated GulfFIN data removes confidential records from all non-confidential reports and data queries. **Gloeckner** would like to eventually come to an agreement in 2014 with all state and federal partners on consistent methods. **Cody** stated he has been asked by the Gulf and South Atlantic Fishery Management Council regarding access to confidential commercial data. **Cody** asked if both councils could be added to the current FIN Memorandum of Agreement

(MOA). **Donaldson** said potentially yes but the time it would take to get it through the approval process might be multiple years. **Cody** stated they might look into a separate MOA between Florida and the councils.

**Other Business**

**Miller** provided a brief description of the newly created Gulf FINFO website. FINFO was developed to highlight the sustainable fisheries management activities in each state. FINFO was developed from oil disaster recovery funds and all five states provided input. The website has four components focusing on fisheries profiles, sustainable fisheries management, Gulf fisheries economics, and marketing programs for Gulf fisheries in each state. **Miller** wanted to thank all of the state representatives for their help in development and the site has already received some positive feedback.

**Donaldson** reminded the DMS to review the subcommittee listing provided and send any editorial comments or changes to GSMFC.

**Being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:10 a.m.**

APPROVED BY:  
  
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**Gulf Sea Grant Advisory Committee  
Minutes  
Tuesday, March 18, 2014  
New Orleans, Louisiana**

**Members Present**

Bryan Fluech  
Betty Staugler  
Rhonda Cummins  
Tony Reisinger  
Peter Nguyen

Dave Burrage  
Julie Anderson  
Thu Bui

**Guests:** Chuck Adams, Gary Graham, Ben Posadas, Bill Richardson, Bill Mason, Alex Miller, Judy Jamison, Thor Lassen

**Opening of Meeting**

Tony R. called meeting to order at 1:38 PM. Members and guest introduced themselves

**Approval of Minutes from the Past Meeting**

Dave B. noted his last name was misspelled in the minutes from the previous advisory meeting. This correction was noted, and there was a motion to approve the minutes, which passed unanimously

**Special Reports**

TED/BRD Outreach

Gary G. gave a report on his TED/BRD outreach projects associated with G/SA Fisheries Foundation and GSMFC. He along with Lindsey Parker with UGA Extension have been going out in the Gulf/S. Atlantic testing out various TEDs/BRDs. They are also doing gear inspection forms in conjunction with sustainable fisheries partnership, fisheries improvement program, and good faith commitment by producer. Gary would inspect the gear, but it was not a certification program,( just good faith efforts). Buyers want increased accountability that shrimpers are using responsible practices. He is also coordinating with NMFS gear monitoring team, and working with LE on gear training. He also addressed BRD certification, investigation into a topless trawl (from the flounder fishery). They are looking into expanding electronic log books for shrimpers; they are using volunteer vessels with observers.

Ocean Trust Project Update

Thor Lassen with Ocean Trust provided an update on Ocean Trust Projects. He handed out document that addressed evaluation of fisheries management efforts in the Gulf. He has been working with NOAA for 2 years now. There are two major gaps: 1) availability of certain assessment data for certain species. 2) The criteria on some of the management assessments not always accurate/thorough. While federal fisheries in the Gulf are sustainable managed, some state fisheries don't meet formal assessment criteria, and there is not enough funding to support assessments for all of them. There aren't reference points/ MSY proxies. Many fisheries are small-scale, ecosystem driven. Might not move forward trying to get full certification because of missing stock assessments for all species. Thor did say that the Gulf's past record of good management

should be taken into consideration. He's considering hosting a sustainable coastal fisheries seminar for managers to discuss fisheries issue in the region. Also considering going back to FAO to look at situations where their criteria doesn't apply in all cases such as they have seen with the Gulf. He is part of the U.S. Delegation that will address the FAO. He wants to make the case to look at fisheries management systems and use various criteria for assessing fisheries, not just the traditional criteria. It was mentioned FAO's criteria was created for temperate fisheries and not tropical.

Thor also mentioned two briefings to seafood marketing/retail groups about the sustainability of Gulf seafood. He is looking to do a state assessment workshop in the next month. Not sure where yet. He's hoping to review state assessments, get input on rationale/ methods for their assessments. In June, he'll be a part of the U.S. Delegation at the FAO meeting in Rome, Italy. He's hoping to "plant a seed" with FAO to get some kind of endorsement on how fisheries are managed in Gulf. He will also be organizing a Seafood and Sustainability Forum in New Orleans with the American Institute of Fisheries Research Biologists. It will be a chance for seafood buyers to meet and interact with fisheries scientists, and learn about the status on regional, global fisheries; address species that are of interest to seafood buyers (like red list species). Dave asked Thor to send announcements to the group about upcoming workshops. T

There was a brief discussion about future of 3<sup>rd</sup> party certifications. Thor mentioned he sees more fisheries trying to move away from them (like Alaska did). He's seeing more groupers trying to look more at fishery systems, and not always just case by case scenarios.

### **State Sea Grant Reports**

#### Florida: Bryan F./Betty S.

- FSG has updated their catch and release brochure to include information about fish descending gear and changes to the venting tool rules in the Gulf of Mexico.
- Betty discussed how they are wrapping up conducting a needs assessment with various charter captains in an effort to organize and deliver future for-hire industry workshops based on other Sea Grant programs.
- FSG is currently developing a survey for recreational anglers on their perceptions of barotrauma and venting/fish descending gear.
- Betty Staugler has been appointed as the new co-leader of FSG's fisheries work action group.
- Several agents have been delivering fisheries regulations workshops that target park rangers, resource managers, law enforcement, and marina workers who interact with anglers and get questions about fisheries issues. It was suggested that FSG should highlight their efforts working with LE as this is a perceived need.
- FSG is still looking for a seafood specialist. Dr. Steve Otwell retired, but is still serving in an Emeritus role.
- FSG and FWC are organizing the next Florida Artificial Reef conference, which will be held Jan13-16, 2015. Clearwater, FL. Concurrent sessions will cover best management practices, permitting/regulation/policy changes, fisheries management applications will etc.

#### Louisiana: Julie A/Thu B.

- LSG is also looking for seafood specialist.



- They are continuing with their direct marketing efforts with LA fishermen, and they are making great strides with their efforts.
- LSG has a contract with state to develop a “Professionalism Training” Program for fishermen. It will include curriculum, videos; (how to be a commercial fishermen, seafood demos). Money is coming from state wildlife agency, and it will be a 5 year, multi-million dollar project.
- Their agents have been conducting various “Dock Days” that focus on gear and technology. Since several boats are being taken out of the water for repairs the training has been on propellers and how to outfit boats, different kinds of doors, shark repellent technology, industry updates etc. They work with the Coast Guard to conduct safety demos.
- Julie gave an overview of the blue crab populations around the Gulf. Apparently numbers across the Gulf are down. LA numbers are way down. TX down about a million pounds, MS down about 200,000, Florida less than 4 million in 2013. Lowest since 1986. AL down about .5 million lbs. Seem to be glitches in state assessment numbers, but there have been steady decline since across Gulf since 1996. Thought to be attributed to climate-drier conditions. There was a question about role habitat change has played in declines; the group agreed this was important. There is no evidence declines are a result of the BP oil spill. As a result are seeing rise in crab prices (\$49/lb for lump). Regardless of these declines the crab fisheries are still considered sustainably managed. LA Fishermen are asking for limited license, and mandatory training programs. Right now it is an open fishery. Fishermen are asking for more regulation to ensure long-term sustainability.
- Delaware Sea Grant is conducting a series of seafood training for Extension Agents/ Industry over the next year. The first training will be in DE next month, west coast: fall 2014 and Gulf training will be in Louisiana in March/April 2015. Julie didn’t have any more information

Meeting adjourned at 3:10 PM for a break.

Meeting resumed 3:30 PM

MS/AL: Dave B./Peter N.

- Peter has been helping NMFS with TED inspection and maintenance workshops because high number of Vietnamese in the region.
- Dave mentioned a new rule in MS that before oystermen can renew their oyster harvest license they have to attend state training on temperature control, sanitation, quality. (Florida is also doing this for oysters/clams). He also mentioned the role out of new electronic logbook for shrimpers. Fishermen picked randomly. It is mandatory for Gulf shrimp moratorium permit. The system uses cell phone technology and fishermen are required to have a Verizon account. Fishermen need to submit certain documentation to NMFS. They should have a unique number assigned to them from NMFS. Many of their fishermen are not computer savvy, and they getting these notices via email. Dave suggested Sea Grant can put this information in newsletters to help spread the word to those who don’t have email. First thing they should do is activate their Verizon account. They need to use the number they are assigned from Verizon to submit to NMFS.
- Ben P with MSU is working on economic impact of Sea Grant programs in the Gulf. Results should be out by June.

Texas: Rhonda C./Tony R.

- Tony provided a summary of their BRD proof of concept study. They tested 5 different gear types, and were offshore for 50 days. They fished 30-40 fathoms. Results are preliminary. Not meant to be certification of gear, but proof of concept
- They caught 8 red lionfish in their trawls. There is potential of shrimpers getting envenomated by lionfish.
- Tony/Gary are also doing Gulf-wide outreach (in all Gulf states except FL). Not certifying TEDs, but doing inspections to see if they are in compliance.
- Rhonda mentioned TSG has a new agent in Matagorda County. He is coming from the TX Parks and Wildlife, and has fisheries experience and knowledge on freshwater flow issues which are important to that area.

**Special Reports continued**

Kemp Ridley Stock Assessment

Benny Gallaway provided an overview of the most recent Kemps Ridley Stock Assessment. In 2010/2011 there were a high number of kemps ridley sea turtle strandings events (much higher than other species). The assessment is a result of lots of partnerships and collaborations. The assessment used a number of fisheries techniques to come up with data (shrimp effort data, capture and tracking data, prey abundance, stranding data). Anthropomorphic causes of death have dropped significantly in recent years. It's estimated there are around 200 K females in the population. There is not enough funds to conduct continued field work for kemps this summer.

GSMFC Update:

Alex Miller showed the committee the new Gulf FinFo site. It is meant to communicate the sustainability, management, science, enforcement and whole "process" to manage/sustain Gulf fisheries. Most of the species featured are state managed. The federal ones are linked to NOAA's Fish Watch website. The site also includes information on economic data, and enjoying seafood as well.

**Rotation of Chair Discussion**

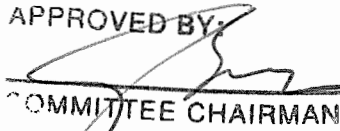
Tony Reisinger is rotating off as the group's chair. Bryan Fluech will become the new chair. Julie Anderson assumed role of secretary. The group voted and it was passed unanimously. Tony provided Bryan with copies of the past meeting minutes.

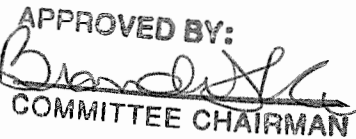
**Next Meeting Topic**

Bryan suggested the topic of the next GSMFC Gulf Sea Grant Advisory Committee focus on Sea Grant –sponsored citizen science monitoring programs in the region. The committee approved the topic unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 5:00 PM CST.

Minutes prepared by Bryan Fluech

APPROVED BY:  
  
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

APPROVED BY:  
  
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

LEC/LEAP Joint Meeting Summary  
Wednesday, March 18, 2014  
New Orleans, Louisiana

The meeting was conducted by GSMFC Law Enforcement Committee (LEC) Chair Scott Bannon as neither the Chair nor Vice-chair of the Gulf Council Law Enforcement Advisory Panel (LEAP) was present. The meeting was called to order at 1:00 p.m. The following members and others were in attendance:

**LEAP Members:**

Scott Bannon, ADMR  
Rusty Pittman, MDMR  
Cliff Comeaux (for Jeff Mayne), LDFW  
Cynthia Fenyk, NOAA/GCES  
Rama Shuster, FWC  
Larry Young (for Brandi Reeder), TPWD

**LEC Members:**

Scott Bannon, ADMR (Chair)  
Rusty Pittman, MDMR (Vice-chair)  
Cliff Comeaux (for Jeff Mayne), LDFW  
Cynthia Fenyk, NOAA/GCES  
Rama Shuster, FWC  
Larry Young (for Brandi Reeder), TPWD  
Denny Ernster (for Jason Brand), USCG

**Others:**

Donald Armes, MDMR  
Jeff Barger, Ocean Conservancy, Texas  
Bruce Buckson, NOAA/OLE  
Doug Boyd, GMFMC Chair, Texas  
Sidney Charbonnet, USFWS/OLE  
Stephen Clark, USFWS/OLE  
Camp Matens, GSMFC Commissioner/GMFMC Council member, Louisiana  
Robert Perkins, Commander 8<sup>th</sup> District, USCG  
Russell Stewart, COMCAST, Florida  
John Williams, Southern Shrimp Alliance, Florida  
Troy Williamson, GSMFC Commissioner, Texas

**Staff:**

Steven Atran, GMFMC  
John Froeschke, GMFMC  
Assane Diagne, GMFMC  
Steve VanderKooy, GSMFC  
Debbie McIntyre, GSMFC

**Adoption of Agenda**

The agenda was adopted unanimously.

**Approval of Minutes**

The minutes of the October 15, 2013 LEC/LEAP meeting were approved by LEAP as written.

## GMFMC LAW ENFORCEMENT AP SESSION

### Framework Action to Revise Definition of Charter Fishing

**John Froeschke** reviewed the draft Framework Action to Define For-Hire Fishing in the Gulf of Mexico Exclusive Economic Zone. An earlier draft of this Framework Action had been reviewed by the LEAP in October, but no federal members were present due to the federal government shutdown. The purpose of this action is to address situations referred to as contractual services, where a vessel operator takes clients out who pay for some service such as investment advice, but allows fish on the trip. Such trips are de facto charter fishing trips, but without the vessel having a charter reef fish permit or being subject to the other requirement for charter fishing vessels. Council staff was aware of one such activity that had occurred in Texas but was no longer in operation.

Panel members did not feel that the proposed changes would make the charter fishing rules more enforceable. It was suggested that undercover operations would be the best way to enforce charter fishing regulations. It was also noted that charter vessel operators will police themselves, and will often report illegal actions. Panel members felt that situations that should not be subject to charter fishing requirements include private trips where passengers share the cost. A gray area might be a corporate vessel that is used to take staff and clients or potential clients out on fishing trips. The company will often have licensed captains to operate the boats. One person pointed out that any trip on which there is a paying customer for any reason is by definition a charter trip under Chapter 46 of the Code of Federal Regulations. For such a vessel the captain and vessel must meet Coast Guard requirements to operate as a for-hire vessel. If that person then fishes, it becomes a charter fishing trip. Doug Boyd added that the South Atlantic Council had considered this proposed action but decided not to pursue it.

Panel members felt that the most effective enforcement approach was for persons to notify the Coast Guard when they hear of wrong-doing.

**By consensus, the LEAP recommends that the Council not pursue changes to the charter fishing definition.**

### Proposed Changes to the Red Snapper IFQ Program

**Assane Diagne** briefly summarized some potential changes to this program. This has to be reviewed at frequent intervals. Panel members noted that this had been discussed at a summer workshop held in Grand Isle a couple of years ago. During discussion, several council members indicated that they would like some changes. These were highlighted in the 5 year review.

*Share, allocation, vessel caps*

The LEAP considered this to be a management issue, not a law enforcement issue.

*Public participation – transfer eligibility requirement*

The LEAP considered this to be a management issue, not a law enforcement issue.

*Inactive accounts (about 1%)*

The LEAP considered this to be a management issue, not a law enforcement issue.

*Use it or lose it*

The LEAP considered this to be a management issue, not a law enforcement issue.

*Overages*

Panel members felt that there are already allowances and procedures for fishermen to purchase additional shares while at sea if necessary. To allow vessels to come to the dock and acquire the IFQ shares needed to cover the catch at a later time would be an enforcement nightmare.

**By consensus, the LEAP opposes allowing a fisherman who does not have sufficient red snapper IFQ allocation to land his catch and acquire the allocation prior to his next trip.**

*Rent collection*

The LEAP considered this to be a management issue, not a law enforcement issue.

*Hail-in requirements*

One Panel member suggested that all commercial reef fish vessels capable of catching snapper or grouper be required to hail in rather than for the enforcement officer to have to determine if a vessel returning to port was carrying snapper or grouper. Another Panel member disagreed with this suggestion. He felt that the vessels that had hailed in were the ones known to be carrying snapper or grouper. This left a smaller universe of vessel that had not hailed in to possibly investigate for snapper or grouper on board. In addition, it was noted that vessels are required to announce their trip when they hail out, so when vessels return, enforcement knows what type of a trip they were supposed to be on.

**By consensus, the LEAP recommends that leave the requirement as to which vessels are required to hail-in alone.**

Another issue was a vessel that had submitted its three-hour notification but was going to come in early or late. If a vessel is only going to be a few minutes early or late, most fishermen have the phone numbers of the enforcement personnel and the enforcement officer will allow it if the fisherman communicates with him.

If a vessel is coming in early and an enforcement officer is at the dock, Panel members felt that the vessel, with the enforcement officer's approval, should be allowed to land early. This would avoid wasting the enforcement officer's time waiting for the three-hour window to open.

**By a unanimous vote, the LEAP recommends that an IFQ vessel that has submitted a three-hour landing notification may land early only if law enforcement is present at the approved landing site and affirmatively approves.**

If coming in more than a few minutes late, the vessel is currently required to submit another three-hour notification even if it's only going to be a little late. The vessel may then have to wait up to three hours before docking. **Dr. Diagne** noted that the issue of early or late landings is going to be addressed in administrative changes section of the proposed rule. The current wording of the proposed rule regarding this issue reads as follows.

For early landings: Allow vessels to land early prior to the end of the three-hour notification if an authorized law enforcement officer is present at the landing site and authorizes the owner or operator of the vessel to land.

For late landings: If a vessel is landing more than 30 minutes after the time on the initial landing notification, an additional notification must be made with a new landing time, but the vessel does not need to wait an additional three hours to land.

Panel members felt that the proposed rule should not include the 30-minute allowance for a late landing, since that would effectively turn the three-hour window into a 3 ½-hour window. Some Panel members felt that the current wording of the rule allowed a vessel to take up to 3 to 12 hours to land once a hail-in time estimate is given. Part of the reason for revising the rule was to clear up what the time allowance can be. The Panel recommended the following modified language for late landings.

**By a unanimous vote, the LEAP recommends that an IFQ vessel that cannot meet its initial three-hour notification, an additional notification must be made with a new landing time but the vessel does not need to wait an additional three hours to land only if law enforcement is present at the approved landing site and affirmatively approves.**

#### *Weight estimate*

A Panel member stated that 3 out of 4 dealers in his state have been telling fishermen to underestimate the weight of their fish. This is because it is easier for them to correct an underestimate than an overestimate. There is currently no penalty for an incorrect weight estimate if the dealer makes the adjustment. Panel members felt that most of the fishermen are good at estimating their fish weights. Because of the difficulty of weighing fish at sea, nothing would be gained from requiring more accurate estimates, and estimates should continue to be allowed as is. However, Panel members were concerned that dealers were asking fishermen to lie by deliberately under-reporting. If this is because it is administratively easier for the dealer to correct an under-report than an over-report, then perhaps NMFS could look at revising the administrative requirements to address this issue.

**By consensus, the LEAP recommends leaving the requirements for estimating the weight of fish as is.**

### *Full retention fishery*

The LEAP considered this to be a management issue, not a law enforcement issue. However, it was noted that the term “full retention” can mean different things to different people. For example, in Alaska full retention means no fish can be thrown back. One Panel member stated that fishermen in his area would like to catch smaller fish are not seeing undersized snapper. There is a greater demand for smaller (plate-size) fish. Consequently, it was felt that culling for smaller fish by commercial fishermen and for larger fish by recreational fishermen is here to stay. Enforcing a full retention rule would be difficult unless there were observers onboard.

### **Options Paper for Reef Fish Amendment 40 – Sector Separation**

**Dr. Diagne** reviewed the summary report and alternatives for recreational red snapper sector separation. The Council has made an initial conclusion that, if sector separation is adopted, it would have to be a voluntary program. There would also need to be separate season closures for each sector. Dr. Diagne asked what the best way would be to enforce such a program.

**By consensus, the LEAP recommends that the most effective way to enforce a voluntary sector separation program is endorsement to the reef fish charter/vessel permit for those vessels participating in the program.**

The Panel felt that the alternatives addressing allocation between the sectors was a management issue, not a law enforcement issue.

### **Red Snapper Slot Limits and Hook Size Possible Regulations**

**Steven Atran** reviewed an abbreviated Powerpoint presentation on a preliminary analysis of recreational red snapper slot limits. The purpose of considering slot limits is to reduce the average size of a fish caught in the recreational sector in order to extend the season length. Another possible advantage is to protect the larger and older spawners. The preliminary analysis indicated that a 16-inch to 24-inch slot limit would provide the greatest increase in season length. Council staff has not yet started looking into hook sizes as a way to control the size of fish caught. However, one of the issues with hook size is that different hook manufacturers do not measure hooks the same way.

One Panel member stated that a slot limit would result in a lot of culling on the slot limit. Also, if one fish over the slot limit is allowed there will be a question of accountability as to whose fish is the one over. Panel members felt that the depth of water is going to be an issue with respect to release mortality of the oversized fish. Panel members felt that, since they are already enforcing minimum size limits and slot limits on other species, slot limits for red snapper would not create an enforcement issue. However, hook size regulations would require catching a fisherman in the act of fishing. One member suggested that hook size would be better approached as an outreach program

**By consensus, the LEAP recommends that red snapper slot limits are manageable, but the LEAP is opposed to hook size regulations.**

## **GSMFC LAW ENFORCEMENT COMMITTEE SESSION**

### **Implementation of NOAA TED Boarding Form**

**Cynthia Fenyk** read a statement from the NOAA Office of General Counsel "Enforcement Section regarding TED boarding forms. The statement read:

The Office of General Counsel Enforcement Section is in favor of region-wide implementation of the TED boarding form because it was designed to achieve consistency in prosecution of TED violations. Simply stated, the TED boarding form helps GCSE prosecute appropriate violations and helps boarding agents identify appropriate offenses for summary settlement, while ensuring consistency in enforcement across the region. The form was also created for ease-of-use by officers conducting TED inspections.

The TED boarding form should be employed whenever a TED inspection occurs, even if the inspection results in a finding of full compliance. This is because, first, each measurement on the form is required in order to determine that a TED is in compliance, and, second, data showing fully compliant TEDs must be collected by the Agency in order to measure the effectiveness of our enforcement efforts.

Should any members of the committee have questions about how NOAA measures compliance rates, the Protected Resources Division plans to issue a new Biological Opinion at the end of March, and is willing to arrange a conference call or webinar with state enforcement partners to answer questions about the use of boarding data.

**Bruce Buckson** stated that JEA partnerships are critical and that 130 agents/officers are not enough. He reassured the group that leadership at NOAA knows this well. The issue of TEDs is a challenge. The agency has a lawsuit pending about TEDs. We all need to be on the same page. This could be a huge win for Gulf States and for NOAA. Less data may be worse than too much data in this case. We may identify non-compliance and not recognize compliance. Compliance should not be the reason to open or close a fishery. One of the main issues here is consistency.

**Mr. Buckson** further pointed out that this is a unique fishery of those who are required to use TEDs. It started out at about 2600 and is now down to 1400 gulf-wide. We could touch every single one of those 1400 permitted folks within a certain amount of time to set up a baseline. Another opinion is expected at end of month per Ms. Fenyk. There must be a consistent form used for this data.

**Donald Armes** stated that Mississippi has designed a 3-part form. One copy is for NOAA, one for the fisherman, and one for Mississippi. Mr. Armes objected to situations where enforcement



provides voluntary inspections at fishermen's request to determine if their vessels are compliant with regulations, and counts any boats with issues as non-compliant. 50 plus boats called and asked them for help just prior to shrimp season.

**Rama Shuster** stated that most states appreciate the form but Florida does not use it. Florida needs answers regarding how the data will be used and what will be shared outside of Law Enforcement. How will area closures be enacted and what will trigger the closure. He said that a Mississippi boat found in violation while shrimping in Florida water or even just rigged to fish will show noncompliance for Florida.

**Rusty Pittman** pointed out that Mississippi was faulted for turtle deaths when there were actually no shrimpers fishing during that time period.

**Mr. Shuster** also mentioned that a fixit ticket is now shown as a violation which is inconsistent with penalty policy.

**Mr. Buckson** assured that group that he will work toward a solution to these issues.

### **Interjurisdictional Fisheries Program Activity**

**Mr. VanderKooy** gave a review of the Interjurisdictional Fisheries Program (IJF) activities which included the three FMPs currently under revision. The LEC provides representation on the Technical Task Forces which develop or revise these FMPs.

#### *Blue Crab*

**Mr. Beaton** (FL) is the law enforcement representative for the blue crab FMP revision. He is no longer on the LEC, but he wanted to see the blue crab FMP through to completion. This FMP is very near beginning the review process.

#### *Gulf Menhaden*

**Mr. VanderKooy** coordinated with the LEC members and state biologists on the Menhaden Advisory Committee. He will distribute the current draft section following this meeting.

#### *Gulf and Southern Flounder*

**Mr. Bannon** serves as the LEC representative on the Gulf and Southern Flounder TTF. **Mr. VanderKooy** reported that this document is close to being finalized.

It is anticipated that all three of these FMPs will be completed this year.

**Mr. VanderKooy** reminded the LEC that the enforcement information only goes through the same fiscal year as the data, which is 2011 for crab and flounder, and 2012 for menhaden.

License schemes and rules and regulations should only go through that terminal year. Disregard current regulations, even if they are different.

### **GSMFC Enforcement Publications**

For the information of the several new LEC members, **Mr. VanderKooy** noted that, in the past, the Commission produced an annual law summary called the *Red Book* to let officers know what the regulations were in each area. Over time, this book expanded into a 430-page collection of the fishing magazines printed by each state, and it was not very useful other than as a historical archive. This publication is still available online. **Mr. VanderKooy** reminded LEC members that this information will be requested from them in mid-August and will be posted to the website.

In recent years, the Commission developed a waterproof publication that was sized to fit in officers' ticket books (*Officers' Pocket Guide*). Due to lack of funding, the Commission was unable to print these books for distribution in 2013. **Mr. VanderKooy** asked the Committee members if, in their opinion, these waterproof publications would be worth the expenditure of printing again should IJF funds become available. It was the consensus of the group that each individual state could take care of their own printing of this document should they elect to, but they would appreciate being provided the PDF of the publication by Commission staff. **Mr. VanderKooy** reminded LEC members that this information was requested on March 5<sup>th</sup> with a deadline of April 11<sup>th</sup>.

**Mr. VanderKooy** also informed the group that state information to be included in the annual summary of licenses and fees for 2013 will be requested at the first of May. Deadline for this information will be mid-June and the brochures will be printed in-house by Commission staff mid-September. He reminded everyone that these are licenses for marine activities only. These will also be available on the Commission's website.

### **State Reports**

The state representatives highlighted a number of enforcement-related items in their state reports which were submitted electronically. Due to lack of time at this meeting, representatives did not have the opportunity to present their reports. These reports will be emailed to LEC members and will be available through the Commission office.

**Mr. VanderKooy** report that this fall, Commission staff will be addressing another species that will need representation from LEC. Just one representative from this committee will be needed for each FMP in progress.

### **Other Business**

**John Williams**, Southern Shrimp Alliance, commented from the industry perspective that there are inconsistencies in TED issues and inspections. He applauded the committee to continue helping to address these. It was agreed that the 3-part inspection form, like the one that MDMR

has developed, would be useful for fishermen when they are inspected or corrections are required and made on their gear.

**Doug Boyd**, Gulf Council Chair, stated that the Council tried to develop a policy or guideline for infractions for people who have applied for Council AP membership. The Council needs to know if applicants have significant or multiple violations in order to determine their eligibility to serve on panels. One question is how far back in time such checks should go. LEAP could help determine how to get information and use it.

**Mr. Boyd** stated that the Council will come up with some draft protocols that the LEAP could review at its next meeting.

**Mr. Bannon** reported that Alabama is pursuing federal mandatory snapper reporting regulation, and that there is a bill going through the legislature to extend state waters out to 3 leagues.

**Mr. Boyd** and **Mr. Atran** will find out if the Council would like to have the LEAP/LEC to meet in conjunction with their upcoming fall Council meeting instead of at the October GSMFC annual meeting.

Adjourn 5:15 p.m.

APPROVED BY:  
*Ralph E Hode*  
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**OIL DISASTER RECOVERY PROGRAM (ODRP)  
MINUTES  
Tuesday, March 18, 2014  
New Orleans, Louisiana**

A meeting of the Ad Hoc Committee for the Oil Disaster Recovery Program was convened on March 18, 2014 in New Orleans, LA for the purpose of receiving reports from contractors and GSMFC staff regarding progress being made towards fishery disaster recovery from the impacts of BP Oil disaster of 2010. Ralph Hode, Fisheries Disaster Program Coordinator for the GSMFC, facilitated the meeting.

The following state, staff and other attendees were present:

**States**

Kelly Lucas, *GSMFC Commissioner*, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Chris Denson, ADCNR Director, Gulf Shores, AL  
Randy Pausina, *LDWF* Baton Rouge, LA  
Dan Ellinor, *FWC*, Tallahassee, FL  
Lance Robinson, *TPWD*, Dickinson, TX

**Others**

Judy Jamison, GSAFF, Inc., Tampa, FL  
Benny J. Gallaway, LGL Ecological Research, Bryan TX  
Thor Lassen, Ocean Trust Texas, Brownsville, TX  
Rene LeBreton, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Chuck Adams, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL  
Julianna Mullen, Audubon Nature Institute, New Orleans, LA  
John Hewitt, Audubon Nature Institute, New Orleans, LA  
Sara Gretchen, Audubon Nature Institute, New Orleans, LA  
Jason Pechek, Audubon Nature Institute, New Orleans, LA  
Traci Floyd, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Kelly Donnelly, NOAA Fisheries SERO, St Petersburg, FL  
Ben Posadas, Miss State University, Ext. Service, Biloxi, MS  
Richard Cody, FL FWCCC RI, St Petersburg, FL  
Ralph Hode, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS  
Thomas Hymel, Louisiana Sea Grant, Baton Rouge, LA  
Mark Schexnayder, LDWP, Baton Rouge, LA  
Mike LeBlanc, New Orleans Pelicans, New Orleans, LA  
Bryan Fluech, Florida Sea Grant, Naples FL  
Harlon Pierce, Louisiana Fish, New Orleans, LA

**Staff**

Angela Rabideau, GSMFC Financial Officer, Ocean Springs, MS  
Ralph Hode, GSMFC EDRP Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS  
Alex Miller, GSMFC Economist, Ocean Springs  
Dave Donaldson, Acting Director GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS  
Donna Bellais, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

### **Agenda**

**R. Hode** called for approval and/or amendments to the agenda. There being none the agenda was approved as presented.

### **Approval of the Minutes**

EDRP Workshop of October 15, 2013 –minutes were included for the record.

### **Overview of Projects and Financial Summary Report**

**R. Hode** provided a financial overview of the overall ODRP recovery initiative noting that through the program a total of 21 contracts were currently in place in multiple areas including marketing, seafood trace and sustainability, and seafood testing; that the total value of these contracts amounted to \$12.8 M; and, that reimbursements to date amounted to \$9.7 M or about 65% of budgeted expenditures. Hode reported that all contracts appeared to be on schedule and within budget. He reported also that recent discussions with NOAA fisheries indicated that the ODRP effectively expires in September, 2015, that there was **no likelihood** of no-cost extensions, and that the GSMFC staff would be examining all existing contracts/grant end dates to ensure that all expired no later than June 30, 2015. The early end dates were necessary in order to close all contracts, pay all reimbursement requests, receive final individual program/project reports, and to prepare final reports for the overall ODRP to NOAA Fisheries.

## **PROJECT REPORTS**

### **Gulf of Mexico Seafood Marketing Coalition**

Marketing Coalition initiatives – Reports indicated that planned programs within the guidance and directions of the Marketing Coalition are moving forward as planned. Significant progress is being seen in all sectors including social and web based media activities as well as the retail partnership element. To date partnerships with five of the major retail chains in the south and southeast have been conducted to include in-store sampling of gulf traced seafood and related point of sale materials. A partnership agreement was signed this week at the Boston Seafood Show with the Publix retail chain and partnerships agreements with Whole Foods (southwest region) and Winco, Inc (mid-west region) are anticipated soon.

Representatives of the Coalition continue to examine options for long term funding of this initiative, including meeting with Gulf Congressional delegations in Washington in February.

### **Sustainability and Traceability**

Reports indicated that the trace component is scheduled for completion in 2014 and has resulted to date in a combined total of 1,052 participants (including 66 processors, docks, distributors, and 987 fishing vessels). An estimated 42 million pounds of gulf product have passed through the trace program since inception. Additionally the trace is now being utilized as the source documentation device that supports seafood marketing partnerships, local marketing initiatives, and a certified Gulf Wild initiative by the LDWF.

### **Gulf Fish Watch**

Gulf fisheries information component (FINFO) – a report was provided on the recent introduction of the FINFO initiative. The web based information system went live this week at the Boston

Seafood show and received multiple endorsements from key stakeholders in the Gulf as well as elsewhere in the US. FINFO is a reflection of NOAA's Fishwatch but is a one stop information website for Gulf State managed fisheries.

### **Market Maker Program**

A report was received from the Louisiana Sea Grant program focusing on historically significant ports that were undergoing revitalizations as a result of port direct marketing initiatives funded in part through the States market maker component.

A report was also provided by the MS State Extension service on use of the program in the Gulf as compared to the combined enrollees across the country. Gulf numbers remain low on a percentage basis but has continued to increase since inception; and the number of seafood enrollees in the Gulf continues to lead all areas of the country with seafood users.

### **GAP Analysis**

This is a project to compare exiting marine fisheries management systems with FAO guidelines and define weaknesses that may preclude favorable sustainability ratings - ultimately to serve as a basis for the development of improvement and advancement targets/plans which managers could voluntarily work towards on the way to improved sustainability ratings. This project also supported initiatives to draw attention to the need for FAO tailored guidelines that were applicable in sub-tropic zones such as the Gulf where short life cycles of commercially significant species preclude compliance with existing FAO criteria.

**Thor Lassen** provided a briefing on progress but failed to provide the Gap analysis for each of the five Gulf States which was due November 2013. There followed significant discussion as to why the Gaps was not moving along better. Indications were that the principal was concentrating on getting the FAO support for changes that would address the development and adoption of sub-tropic guidelines for environs like the Gulf.

**Hode** emphasized that the GAP was integral to development of MAPs being developed by the Audubon GULF group and that in the absence of state findings and reports (I.e., the GAPs) the GULF was being forced to conduct independent analysis of state management schemes and to compare them to the FAO. Ad Hoc members opted to discuss this issue further at a meeting to be scheduled for April, 2014.

### **Seafood Certification Initiative – Audubon; G.U.L.F. Marine Advance Plan Initiative**

**Julianna Mullen**, Sustainability Program Coordinator for the Audubon G.U.L.F. initiative, provided a brief power point presentation of the Audubon action plan to address issues relative to the sustainability of Gulf seafood. G.U.L.F is currently working with stakeholder industries and marine management agencies to define management schemes and to develop strategies that may be utilized to improve FAO defined sustainable fisheries ratings for select fisheries. Initial work is being performed to develop Marine Advancement Plans (MAPs) within the blue crab industries of Alabama, Mississippi, Texas and Florida. The blue crab work for Louisiana has already been done and will only require formatting to match the MAPs being developed for the other states.

A sustainable fisheries web-based information system has been developed and is being refined on a continuing basis to bring attention to those practices and programs currently in existence in the Gulf that lend themselves to sustainable management. These activities are being linked to other

information systems being developed under the ODRP to promote Gulf products and to create additional opportunities for consumers and buyers to make sound decisions regarding Gulf products.

#### **Kemp's Ridley Stock Assessment**

A report on the Kemps Ridley stock assessment was provided to the State Marine Directors. Findings indicated that the inclusion of 2012 shrimp landings had little effect on earlier projections of population distribution by age and nesting activity. The report indicated that age distribution had changed sometimes between 2009 and 2010 and that nesting activity observed did not reflect projected activity. Plans are to re-examine following the spring 2014 nesting abundance and aging studies but expectations are that observed nesting will likely remain inconsistent with projected.

The report also expressed concern on loss of US Fish and Wildlife support of annual nesting programs –the loss of which would impact collection of data and inability to conduct annual assessments.

#### **OTHER BUSINESS**

##### **Gulf Wild Certified**

**Rene LeBreton** provided an overview of Louisiana's recently installed "Louisiana Gulf Wild Certified Seafood" initiative which focused on branding products from Louisiana as certified Gulf wild products. Use of the brand required products to be caught by licensed Louisiana fishermen, landed in Louisiana ports, and processed/packaged by Louisiana processors. Inherent to the branding was the requirement that products be traceable either through trip tickets or through the Gulf Trace Program.

The purpose of the presentation was to develop interest in a Gulf wide approach with participation from all five States. No action was taken; but, the States agreed to further consider the idea and to get together at some point in the near future to discuss further the benefits and related actions that would be necessary to move the concept forward.

##### **Great American Seafood Cook-Off - Federal Funding Opportunity (FFO)**

**Hode** provided a report on an FFO to continue support of the Great American Seafood Cook-off (GASFCO). The opportunity was tentatively defined as a five year program and would be an independent grant opportunity (separate from ODRP or other existing disaster relief funding programs). According to preliminary funding announcements (Note: the formal FFO announcement had not been released at the time of the Ad Hoc meeting) the grant would be up to \$250 thousand per year, dependent on Federal funding availability.

**Harlon Pierce**, former member of the Louisiana Seafood Promotion and Marketing Board (SPMB) briefed the Committee on the importance of the cook-off in promoting Gulf seafood and encourage the Committee to submit a proposal for the grant opportunity; and, to consider use of the Gulf of Mexico Marketing Coalition as the lead agency to facilitate the event for the upcoming August 2014 Louisiana Hospitality and Restaurant Association's annual seafood exposition.

Committee members concurred that the GSMFC should proceed with applying for the funds and generally agreed that the practice of regionally promoting Gulf products would be enhanced if the GOM Marketing Coalition were to take the lead in face-lifting the cook-off.

**Randy Pausina** noted that the event had successfully been facilitated by the Louisiana Seafood Marketing Board for several years and that there was justification for continuing with the SFPMB in order to maintain continuity.

A motion was made by **Pausina** to approve applying for the funds and to send the funding support to the LA SFPMB and seconded by **Lance Robinson**. The following vote was recorded:

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
Texas	Mississippi
Louisiana	Alabama
	Florida

A follow-up motion was made by **Blankenship** to approve applying for the funds and to send the funding support to the Marketing Coalition and was seconded by **Lucas**. The following vote was recorded:

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
Mississippi	Louisiana
Alabama	
Texas	
Florida	

*Note: In subsequent actions the Committee determined that the GASCO action was out of order because it had not requested proposals nor had it formally received proposals for the awarding of the sub-award agreement. Staff was requested to expedite an RFP and to have proposals before the Committee at a follow-up meeting to be scheduled in April.*

In other business a number of proposals were brought forward for consideration by the Committee in an effort to commit the remaining balance of unobligated ODRP funds in a timely manner.

#### **Additional Support for the Kemps 2014 “Bi-national Nesting Beach Monitoring Study”**

Based on previous discussions, a motion was made by **R. Pausina** and seconded by **L. Robinson** to utilize \$150 K from the current unobligated ODRP fund balance (approximately \$500 K) to aid in continuing with the necessary Kemps nesting study/preservation (ageing and tagging) program for the spring 2014 nesting season. There no objections.

*Note: Funding would be through an addendum with the current LGL contract for the “Shrimp Interactions Study and Kemps Stock Assessment” in the Gulf in order to expedite funding in time to support the April-May beginning of the nesting season. LGL would act as a pass through agency and there would be no administrative cost associated with the funding.*



**The following additional proposals came forward:**

Gulf and South Atlantic fisheries Foundation - \$249,846 for expanded support for the Marketing Coalition;

GCR, Inc. - \$125,500 for continued maintenance of the FINFO website and expanded fisheries profiles through June 31, 2015;

New Orleans Pelicans /GOM Marketing Coalition Partnership to promote Gulf seafood at Pelicans Basketball games in New Orleans - \$112,980 for development of a food booth partnership to promote Gulf seafood through the GOM Marketing Coalition for the 2014-2015 professional basketball season. The proposal included additional seasonal options for the seafood promotion partnership through 2018.

Texas Sea Grant/LGL Additional Kemps Study Support - \$105,000 for support of a fall 2014 "International Kemp's ridley Sea Turtle Symposium" in Brownsville TX (\$30,000) ; and to modify the Kemp's ridley stock assessment model to include an analysis to determine if the population has reached carrying capacity of the Gulf (\$75,000).

No action was taken on either of the additional proposals pending review of spending plans for existing ODRP programs and possible additional funds that may be available for final funding commitments. Staff was requested to verify spending plans from other contractors/sub-award recipients and have updated fund balances available for consideration at a follow-up meeting in April 2014.

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned.

APPROVED BY:  
  
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**S-FFMC MENHADEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
MINUTES  
March 18, 2014  
New Orleans, Louisiana**

**Chair Lukens** called the meeting to order at 8:34 a.m. with the following in attendance:

**Members**

Joe Smith, NMFS, Beaufort, NC  
Matt Hill, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Rick Schillaci, Menhaden Advisory Council, Moss Point, MS  
John Mareska, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL  
Jerry Mambretti, TPWD, Port Arthur, TX  
Harry Blanchet, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Ron Lukens, Omega Protein, Inc., Gainesville, FL  
Borden Wallace, Daybrook Fisheries, Inc., Empire, LA

**Others**

Dale Diaz, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Tommy Williams, Daybrook Fisheries, Inc., Empire, LA  
Ben Landry, Omega Protein, Inc., Houston, TX  
Scott Herbert, Daybrook Fisheries, Inc., New Orleans, LA  
Laine Kaplan-Levenson, WWNO, New Orleans, LA  
Camp Matens, *GSMFC Commissioner*, Baton Rouge, LA  
Emily Posner, Recirculating Farms, New Orleans, LA  
Phil Cossich, Belle Chasse, LA  
Marianne Cufone, Tulane Univ., New Orleans, LA  
Sean Simeson, Tulane Univ., New Orleans, LA  
Molly Hughes, Tulane Univ., New Orleans, LA  
Gary Graham, Texas Sea Grant, West Columbia, TX  
Tony Reisinger, Texas Sea Grant, San Benito, TX  
Tabitha Lindley, Omega Protein, Inc., Houston, TX  
Jeff Barger, Ocean Conservancy, Austin, TX  
Harry Lowenburg, Gulf Restoration Network, New Orleans, LA  
Steve Shepard, Gautier, MS  
Linda St. Martin, Gulfport, MS  
Markham Dickson, Salty Dog Charters, Shell Beach, LA  
Louis Skrmetta, Gulf Islands Conservancy Inc., Gulfport, MS  
Helen Rose Patterson, Gulf Restoration Network, New Orleans, LA  
Michelle Erenberg, Ocean Conservancy, New Orleans, LA  
Shane Treadaway, Daybrook Fisheries, Inc., Empire, LA  
Gregory Holt, Daybrook Fisheries, Inc., New Orleans, LA  
Glenn Speakman, Daybrook Fisheries, Inc., Morristown, NJ  
Jason Adriance, LDWF, New Orleans, LA  
Drue Banta Waters, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Emile LaPointe, Daybrook Fisheries, Inc., Empire, LA

Lee Alexander, Daybrook Fisheries, Inc., Empire, LA  
Karl Wulf, Daybrook Fisheries, Inc., Empire, LA  
Dalton Berry, Daybrook Fisheries, Inc., Empire, LA

### **Staff**

Steve VanderKooy, Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS  
Debbie McIntyre, Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS  
Jeff Rester, Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS  
Dave Donaldson, Acting Executive Director, Ocean Springs, MS

### **Introductions**

**Lukens** led the introductions of the MAC and the audience.

### **Approval of Agenda**

**Lukens** asked the MAC members to review the agenda. **Smith** noted that he would like to have the MAC address a resolution under other business.

**VanderKooy** reviewed the procedures for allowing the public to comment. It is unusual to have a large audience for this meeting and the MAC hopes that it will continue in the future. **VanderKooy** asked audience members who intended to speak to hold all questions and comments until the end of the meeting when they would be allowed to come to the microphone and address the MAC. If there were any questions specific to the agenda items or presentations, the presenter would be happy to go back and address them at that time.

***Mareska** moved to accept the modified agenda and **Blanchet** seconded. Without objection, the agenda was approved.*

### **Approval of Minutes (October 14, 2013 MAC Meeting and November 12, 2013 GoToMeeting Webinar)**

**Lukens** asked the MAC to review both sets of minutes included in the folders. The first were the minutes from the regular MAC meeting in Texas and the second were the follow-up conference call minutes which addressed the items that were tabled due to the Government shutdown which prevented **Smith** from attending the regular MAC meeting. ***Wallace** moved to approved, **Mambretti** seconded and without objection, both sets of minutes were approved.*

The MAC members reviewed their roster for any necessary updates to contact information and **VanderKooy** asked everyone to sign the attendee sheets that were being passed around the room. **VanderKooy** reminded everyone that, if the audience had any general comments for the MAC, they should be related to the topics covered as much as possible. Again, it was pointed out that the audience is typically much smaller and normally engages with the committee members throughout the meeting so the inclusion of a 'public comment period' is a new format for this meeting.

### **Review of 2013 Gulf Menhaden Season and Forecast for 2014**

**Smith** delivered the final 2013 report for the Gulf fishery. He reported that the landings were 497,503 mt which was down 14% from 2012, but up 1% over the previous five-year average. Fish meal and fish oil prices started out high and yield was good throughout the fishing season. The fleet experienced generally fair weather most of the year, although there were weeks with relatively high winds which restricted some fishing effort. There was considerable fishing activity west of the Mississippi River. April and May were moderate for fishing and the weather improved at the end of May. There was an issue with crewing the vessels initially and a full complement of boats did not fish until almost June. Good fishing occurred in June and smaller fish were located in Breton Sound so again, the boats spent most of the month west of the River. A few minor tropical disturbances occurred in July, but did not affect fishing much. August was the peak month for landings and September was fair. October saw a few days early and late with some wind, yet landings were higher than in September. All boats cut out a day before the official end of the season.

One vessel out of Moss Point struck a submerged object in late May and was tied up. The two bait boats landed a few fish for reduction at Abbeville. A couple of fish kills occurred; one in May in Mobile Bay and one that the LDWF responded to in Breton Sound at the end of May. At both times CDFRs (logbooks) indicated that most menhaden fishing effort at the time was west of the River. In July, there was an area west of the River that the LDWF closed to fishing due to emergent tar mats.

During 2013, a total of 37 vessels fished (33 "steamers", 2 run boats, and 2 bait boats in Abbeville). The estimated effort for 2013 is 332,000 vessel ton weeks and was about the same as 2012.

The age composition of the catch indicates that Moss Point was split equally between age-1s and age-2s and Abbeville saw few age-1 fish with age-2s dominating the catch at 88%. Coast-wide, the age distribution was about 25% for age-1s and 73% for age-2s. **Smith** noted that **Mambretti** provided some independent data from TPWD related to juvenile indices. The index from the bag seine data was down a little from 2012 but it was comparable to the 2010 year class. The index for the last five years has been significantly higher than the previous decade. This suggests there continues to be relatively strong year classes coming up through the fishery.

Last year's NOAA forecast for 2013 from **Smith** was for the fleet to land around 475,000 mt and the actual landings were 497,500 mt, off by only 5%. At the end of last season, Omega decided to close the Cameron plant and tie up most of those vessels. Based on the historical catch/effort data and since it's expected that only three factories will fish 32 vessels (31 steamers, 1 run boat, and 1 bait vessel), **Smith** forecasts the 2014 landings should be around 428,000 mt. Even though the age-1s had poor showing in the overall catch, those in the eastern Gulf were strong and the TPWD indices suggest that there should be a good age-2 class available this coming season. **Smith** noted that the Forecast Report would be available by the end of this week on the NMFS Fishery Market News website: <https://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/commercial-fisheries/market-news/index>.

**Lukens** wondered if there was any size-at-age data for 2013 and if the fish were larger or more robust. **Smith** indicated that the plant managers he talked to indicated that they were in fact bigger,

more robust fish than the previous years. **Smith** would work on the condition factor from the port samples to gauge the 'robustness'.

#### **Update on the 2013 Atlantic Menhaden Fishery**

**Smith** updated the group on the Atlantic coast and the menhaden activities from the ASMFC, our sister organization. In 2013, the landings for Atlantic menhaden at the Reedville plant were 131,031 mt which was down 18% from 2012 and down 18% from previous 5-yr average. Omega only fished seven reduction vessels (down two from the previous year). Three were four Virginia 'snapper' boats (bait vessels), two landed for bait only, and five to six purse-seiners landed bait in New Jersey. The landings and effort continue to go down in the Atlantic as the industry is contracting more every year. Most of the fishing occurred in and around Chesapeake Bay although there was some limited catch north and south.

In 2010, the Atlantic Menhaden Technical Committee (TC) noted that the stock assessment update had substantial problems and the TC recommended an expedited new benchmark assessment. The TC agreed that overfishing was probably occurring, but did not know to what degree. The TC suggested that maybe ad hoc harvest limits could be put in place until a new assessment was completed. In December 2012, the Atlantic Menhaden Management Board approved a coast-wide TAC of 170,000 mt for reduction and bait fisheries combined. The TAC was allocated on a state-by-state basis; the reduction fishery received about 129,000 mt of the TAC. Virginia received the biggest allocation based on the historical landings at around 85% of the TAC. New Jersey received just over 11% and the remainder was split across the remaining states. A state can give their allocation to another state if they choose to. As a result, Omega reduced its fleet by two vessels and did not begin fishing until later in the season (mid-June). In addition, bait was scarce and expensive in 2013 and will likely be in 2014, as well, on both coasts. **Smith** forecasts that with the TAC as it is, the landings for reduction in 2014 will be about 130,000 mt.

**Smith** noted that the Atlantic benchmark assessment is underway and the staff at Beaufort are busy providing the data and analysis for the assessment. **Smith** also reported that the Beaufort Lab has been granted access to NOAA's 'drone' program, the PUMA, an unmanned aircraft for conducting survey work. At the end of March, **Smith** will ride along with the Grays Reef National Marine Sanctuary staff in Georgia in an attempt to look for nearshore schools of menhaden as a proof-of-concept project. The Atlantic coast assessment folks have been considering an aerial survey for several years now and this remotely-operated system may prove useful. It has an onboard video and still camera setup which can be monitored in real time. If it works, it may have some use in the Gulf as well, although turbidity here could be problematic.

Finally, **Smith** noted that the President's FY 2015 Budget has a line item in USDOC's list of reforms that would close NOAA's Beaufort Laboratory as of 2015. Staff at the Lab have been assured their jobs and responsibilities would continue, but from alternate locations. The Lab is actually a National Ocean Service (NOS) facility. The potential labs for the staff move may include Miami, Panama City, Pascagoula, or any of the Louisiana NOAA labs.

There was considerable discussion regarding the issues with the Atlantic assessment. The update had some retrospective error suggesting something internally in the BAM model was causing it. **Lukens** noted that the Atlantic menhaden folks found through the Data Workshop, that the basis

for age-at-maturity of the Atlantic stocks is that a larger number of age-1s and -2s were actually maturing earlier than they thought, and as a result, this might really change the assessment since it's contrary to the earlier belief. In addition, the Multispecies VPA which was used in the Atlantic benchmark to provide a better estimate of natural mortality (includes predator/prey relationships) has been found to have problems as well. The new Atlantic assessment may be very different from the previous benchmark.

#### **Status: Louisiana Forecast for 2014**

**Blanchet** will continue to update the MAC as he can regarding progress made on redesigning the LDWF forecasting tools. The change in fishery-independent data (FID) collection protocols and work load of existing assessment staff prevent immediate work on forecasting. They will work on it and will attempt to generate something in the future. **Blanchet** noted that the seine index was included in the assessment, but the forecast which Guillory previously provided was based on a trawl index. **Lukens** wondered how soon a new forecast might be available. **Blanchet** simply could not offer a time frame at this point. The original forecast was updated annually and was simply an analysis of variance based on the trawl data and some environmental indicators. The LDWF believes it's time to look at a new approach with the sampling that is currently underway.

**Blanchet** indicated great concern over the potential closure of the Beaufort Lab. The Lab is absolutely essential data and provides analysis that the states don't currently have the expertise to just start doing. **Blanchet** would like to consider a fall-back plan in the event that the Lab does close. There has to be a way to cross train the state ageing staff. **Smith** has been discussing this issue with the Atlantic Commission and they have suggested holding a training workshop at Beaufort and potentially develop a reference set of menhaden scales for training purposes. **Smith** and **VanderKooy** have discussed similar training on the Gulf. **Smith** will be attending the Gulf processors' meeting in May to demonstrate the ageing of menhaden scales and introduce the techniques, regardless of the Beaufort Lab's situation. **VanderKooy** reminded all that the Commission's 'Otolith Manual' already has a section with protocols in place to sample scales from menhaden as well as how to age them. **Smith** and **VanderKooy** are working on developing a Gulf reference set which will be used for training and eventual Quality Control and Assurance exercises. There is great concern within Beaufort regarding the real continuity of its programs if the staff are spread around.

**Diaz** would like to have the MAC and the Commission send a letter strongly supporting the continuation of the Beaufort Lab into the future. ***Diaz** moved that the MAC recommends that the Executive Director of the GSMFC send a letter to appropriate individuals regarding the importance of the NOAA Fisheries Beaufort Laboratory, the need for continuation of the Atlantic and Gulf menhaden program, and the level of dedication that the NOAA staff has to the issues in the Gulf of Mexico.* **Mareska** seconded and without further discussion, the motion passed unanimously.

In addition, **Mareska** noted that, if the Lab closed, the existing knowledge would potentially be lost. If the MAC suggests that the states could fill the role of the NOAA Lab, we might inadvertently provide another reason for the USDOC to actually close the Lab. The states could not just pick up where the Beaufort Lab is currently; the level of effort required and coordination to rebuild that program elsewhere would be a serious issue. Therefore, for the purpose of not

providing an 'out' to the USDOC regarding the loss of the Lab, *Mareska provided the motion that the MAC recommends that the state directors prioritize training of state personnel from the expertise at the Beaufort Lab for the purposes of ageing fishery-independent samples in light of the pending closure.* The motion was seconded by **Diaz**, and passed unanimously.

#### **Texas Cap for 2014**

**Mambretti** updated the group on the monitoring of the Texas Cap in 2013. The fleet fished only eight weeks in Texas waters and landed only 32.3% of the available quantity under the Cap (about 10.8 million lbs). **Smith** noted that the Texas Cap is tracked weekly using the Captain Daily Fishing Reports (CDFRs) which provide a real-time reporting system. **Schillaci** indicated that the closing of the western-most plant (Cameron) in 2014 will likely change the fishing effort in Texas in the future. **Lukens** and **Mambretti** reminded everyone that the ability to do this detailed monitoring highlights the importance of continuing the CDFR program through the Beaufort Lab.

#### **FMP Revision Discussion**

**VanderKooy** gave an overview of the FMP status. He reviewed where the MAC was in the revision process. The draft reference points which were recommended by the MAC last October were approved by the S-FFMC and the Commission for inclusion in the draft management plan. There was substantial comment provided by both the Pew Trust and Recirculating Farms following that meeting. The recommendations remain draft and will be made available for public comment sometime late summer, after the draft has gone through the internal Commission review.

The MAC continues to work on finalizing the other various components of the FMP which include the economics, fishery, and sociologic sections.

**VanderKooy** reviewed the various research needs resulting from the SEDAR process and the MAC worked to narrow down our priorities after considering the reviewers' priorities. Some of the key items included those areas of research that were the most practical and achievable in the event funding and opportunity were available. Most of the items that were considered lower priority were much less achievable compared to the higher priority. This didn't mean that they weren't important but that they may be items that won't be a high priority until much further into the future.

**Lukens** wants to be sure that the reviewers' comments and concerns are included but pointed out that they shouldn't necessarily trump the MAC's priorities. **Blanchet** noted that there are two components to the genetics and the priorities in general. The first is specific to the FID collection, especially in the periphery of the population which is what we are already doing and intend to do. The other part is related to the offshore population and the fishery-dependent data. This seems to be more related to the Atlantic issue with topping off and it doesn't really apply here so maybe we don't need to worry so much about that component. **VanderKooy** reminded everyone that some of these priorities were also derived from the Restore Act proposal when we threw everything in the list just in case funds were made available for expanded sampling.

**Lukens** noted that the last two items, which related to modeling, require some additional discussion. The idea of using a MVP, ECO-SIM, or EcoPath models are just too far in the distance to really consider a priority at this point. While we want to head in that direction

eventually, it's not a high priority simply because we don't have the capacity to provide data on predator/prey relationships to even begin to look at these data-hungry models. **Lukens** explained that, given funding opportunities, there are more basic research and data needs that should be addressed to improve the current models. **Blanchet** noted that the predator/prey issue is not a menhaden specific problem, it's a Gulf-wide problem for ALL fisheries. We just don't have the data that's required to go down the road of ecosystem management at this time. We have enough trouble figuring out how to pay for the collection of fishery-dependent data annually.

The consensus of the MAC was to reduce the overall list down to the ones identified after the SEDAR review. **VanderKooy** and **Smith** would consolidate and provide the list back out to the MAC for review.

**VanderKooy** provided a timeline for completion. **VanderKooy** and **Smith** are working with the draft sections and should have final versions out to the MAC in the next few weeks. **VanderKooy** has drafted an extensive history of the reduction fishery and the bait fishery in the Gulf of Mexico that didn't exist before. He thanked the members of the MAC and others who contributed to the oral history through interviews. He reported that Alex Miller, the Commission staff economist, has looked at the NOAA data issues which have been unearthed. There was a concern over how the products data (meal, oil, and solubles) were derived and reported by NOAA. **VanderKooy** and Miller are working with the HQ and Miami Lab folks to figure out exactly how these values and prices are determined.

**Smith** and **VanderKooy** have scheduled a week in Beaufort to complete the final editing of all the sections and will be providing them to the MAC for final review by the end of May, if all goes well. **VanderKooy** is making a formal presentation to the TCC at their meeting this week to provide an overview of the FMP and inform them that the draft is expected to be available for their review in the late spring. The TCC will also be reviewing the other two FMP drafts so hopefully the menhaden plan will be able to move to the S-FFMC in early summer and public comment in late summer. The S-FFMC typically allows a 30-60 day public comment period. **VanderKooy** will make it as accessible as possible and any comments received will be provided to the S-FFMC for their consideration. If there is nothing additional to address in the draft, the S-FFMC can move the draft to the full Commission for their review and final approval.

#### **Port Sampling 2014**

**Smith** reported that the Port Sampling would be handled in 2014 through the GSMFC for the three remaining menhaden plants (Omega has closed the Cameron plant). The LDWF had provided some funding and staff the last of couple years but they are unable to provide the help any longer. **Smith** reported that port sampling jobs will be contracted this year through GSMFC contracts utilizing graduate students from schools near the remaining plants. The fish would be processed by the contractors; they would gather the samples from the factories and pull scales to forward to the Beaufort Lab for ageing. The MAC was concerned that we continue to piecemeal this sampling program along for the largest, most valuable fishery in the Gulf and that the 2014 'extra' funds won't be available next year. **Lukens** reminded all that continuity of this sampling is critical for future assessments so we need to figure out a way to dedicate funding to this effort. The MAC can't provide any action but certainly can make a recommendation/action to the S-FFMC and the Commission that the *MAC strongly urges the Commission to help secure funding in the future for*



*this work which, while minimal in expense, is critical in maintaining the data for future assessments.*

**Diaz** pointed out that in fisheries, a lot of the programs have been level-funded and are unable to keep up with the increasing costs due to inflation. **Blanchet** noted that LDWF is unable to continue to fund the Louisiana portion in part because, after three years, it has become expected and it needs to be put back into discussion to find money to do it, not expect the states to carry the load. **Lukens** agreed and stated that the group needs to seriously pursue resolution to this issue by the 2015. **Smith** reported that the total cost has been around \$60,000 a year and, with the Cameron plant closing, it will be cheaper.

#### **Potential for Assisting Dr. Anderson's Genetics Work and the Implications**

The MAC reviewed work by Dr. Joel Anderson at TPWD and it was agreed that each state present could provide samples for his ongoing genetics work from each region around the Gulf. **Mambretti** explained that this effort would include FID and any YOY from the commercial catch. This work would begin to allow the states to confirm and better ID menhaden species using genetics. Anderson's work will need samples from the various states' bag seine, gillnet, and trawl samples as well as additional dependent samples from the three factories. The periphery is the critical area to examine so Anderson would like 50 YOY individuals with general location (lat/long) and would like the other two species besides Gulf menhaden. **Blanchet** will be happy to provide samples from Louisiana as long as Anderson can provide his exact protocols for sampling. **Diaz** and **Mareska** believe both Mississippi and Alabama can provide samples. **Mambretti** will coordinate with the MAC members to accomplish this. Someone will get in touch with the FWC's new representative to the MAC to see if there are samples available from Florida. **Lukens** and **Smith** noted that there may be an issue with getting FID samples with YOY versus YOY from the commercial catch. **Mambretti** hopes that if there some late season YOY in the catch, the vessel crews may be able to gather some for Anderson.

**Lukens** was concerned about the Anderson paper itself which might suggest that there is not a single unit stock. Anderson was posed with the question in an email and he did not seem to think there was an issue with the current single stock concept but stated that he was still investigating the population structure. **Mambretti** will talk to Anderson and pass information back to the MAC through **VanderKooy**. **Mambretti** noted that this research will actually address some of our research priorities already included in the FMP draft.

#### **Other Business**

**Smith** offered a draft resolution in recognition of **Dr. Behzad Mahmoudi's** service to the MAC. **Mahmoudi** had reported during the last conference call in November that he was stepping down from some of his various committees due to health issues and would not be representing Florida on the MAC any longer. As everyone was aware, **Mahmoudi** had provided insight into biological issues to population modeling. **Mahmoudi** was a proponent of ecosystem modeling and had presented to the MAC on a number of occasions, explaining the various data needs and where more research was still needed to begin to incorporate the ECO-SIM and Ecopath models in the menhaden fishery. **Smith** noted that when he started working with menhaden and attending the MAC meetings in the early 1990s, **Mahmoudi** was already on the committee. ***Diaz** moved that the MAC forward this resolution for Dr. Mahmoudi to the SFFMC and the Commission in*

*recognition of his excellent service to the MAC and the GSMFC.* **Mambretti** seconded and the motion was passed by acclamation.

### **Public Comment**

**Lukens** offered the opportunity for the audience to provide their comment. The presenters were asked to approach the microphone so they could be heard and state their names and affiliations.

**Markham Dickson**, Salty Dog Charters, Shell Beach, LA. – I am **Markham Dickson** and I run a charter out of Shell Beach and moved to the coast for fishing and have been fishing all my life. I see fishing on all levels from recreational to commercial shrimping, crabbers, and others and am the most concerned with the menhaden fishery because it's a pure volume fishery. Menhaden are out there in huge numbers because they are so important in the environment. They tend to live in the deltas and need that habitat to grow up. When I am out there fishing for speckled trout, they are out there feeding on the peanut menhaden. They are an important resource. The menhaden's future depends on the delta and the erosion of those areas is critical. So moving forward as the coast erodes, the data being collected on the stability of the population needs to be closely monitored. As delta is destroyed their ability to reproduce will change. The state, federal, and MAC need to keep a close eye on that erosion's effect on the population because if it's toppled like it was on the Atlantic, there would be a crash in the population and redfish would be the stripers of the Gulf. Obviously everyone here is interested in keeping the current populations healthy and surviving for years to come and it has been harvested for a long time. I want to know why is there not a quota per state? Just comparing the numbers of the entire east coast to the state of Louisiana alone is concerning. Is it too much and as the coast erodes, is the population destined to topple?

**Dickson** - My second issue is bycatch in Breton Sound. Last year there was a huge kill of redfish floating in the pogy foam. Clearly they were fishing in the area and were likely responsible for the kill of thousands of redfish. In 1998, redfish populations were pushed to endangered status and were in trouble but after being protected, they miraculously came back. Look at the level of recreational fishing all the way up to the large commercial purse seine boats, these are my concern. Recreational fishermen don't target the big mature bull reds because the quality of the fish to eat is not there (over 20-lb fish are pretty much untouchable) so only the smaller younger fish inshore are what my charters target. That leaves the big fish to live and reproduce offshore for the future. When the pogy boat comes into Breton Sound and sucks all the menhaden out of their purse seines, the big redfish that were also captured are stressed and they basically suffocate in the nets and are left floating. The numbers of red fish in Breton Sound was high last year and they are following the menhaden around eating on them, it's pretty clear what happens if they're netted. Nobody sees the redfish in the bottom of the nets when they set them and after they die, they float after the fact. Shouldn't we impose some sort of observers onboard the boats to quantify the numbers of redfish that were in the bottom of that net? Those fish don't make it back to the processing plant and are left in the water without being counted. We need to have someone quantifying the losses as they occur.

**Steve Shepard**, MS Chapter of Sierra Club. – I am **Steve Shepard** and I have a real problem with the way menhaden are managed. I am heartened by the fact that the people who work here are generally public employees, they work for the state and federal government, and I'm glad that they

are getting data from the private industry. But, I'm concerned with the idea that the public is not able to access any of this data. I think this stuff should be public. This is not the industries' fish, they belong to everyone, this is a public resource. No one should be able to go out on that scale, and for that matter no one should be able to go fishing even recreationally without expecting to be asked to reveal what they caught; all should be prepared to tell the marine patrol or anyone else who comes by who is interested to tell them what they caught. They shouldn't even be allowed to go out at all unless everything is public. I think all the boats should have cameras which they have no control over like security cameras that just run in the background and are made available to public access. We need public access at the dock when the boat arrives and public access when the fish are pumped in there to be cooked at the factory. No one should be begging for the right to see their data, they ought to be begging us to even go out and fish. They are OUR fish and we have the right, not just the scientists who keep it all secret. I've noticed it's all cozy here, that is probably a good thing but the public isn't cozy and we should be.

**Shepard** - The second issue I have is related to the graph provided in **Smith's** report on the 2013 season. I want to ask about the missing age-1s at Abbeville. The graph indicates that there were virtually no 1-yr old fish and Moss Point has over 50%. I heard **Smith** explain that Moss Point will have a good year because they have a lot of 1-yr olds, so would Abbeville expect a bad year without any 1-yr olds?

**Smith** responded that there was an extensive tagging study conducted in the 1970s. The results of the study indicated that on the eastern and western fringes of the population, there tended to be more young fish and as they grow and get older, they move into central Louisiana more. In Abbeville, you tend to get those older fish and in Texas and Mississippi Sound you get younger fish. **Smith's** comment was actually that fishing in central Louisiana, fishing on age-2s will be good next year because there are lots of young fish out there. **Smith** indicated that the states' independent data suggests that the incoming year classes are very good; therefore, the fish will pass into older ages and do well next year.

**Shepard** - So this is based on the assumption that this is one population? So pretty much a handful of parents if they were highly reproductive, they could replace the whole population so we shouldn't worry about young fish missing? Just to contrast, I have my own observations on the mouth of the west Pascagoula River for 40 years where I fish. The area I fish had the poorest number of baby fish I've ever seen. 2010 was a huge hatch and I can't recall anytime when it was that high but each year since 2010 it has dropped and now in 2013 there are virtually no baby menhaden to be caught in my cast net. There was no increase through the year either, just continual dropping numbers. I think that it will in fact be a bad year in Pascagoula. I talked to Dr. Monty Graham and he indicated that the menhaden numbers were down because of a warm winter and I was shocked that nobody at the table mentioned this at all during the meeting. If Graham is wrong, we should have an explosion of menhaden if that is true. Who is wrong, me or Graham?

**Smith** explained that Graham was mostly correct; a cold dry winter provides good year classes on average. In addition, warm wet winters often lead to poorer year classes. This is the basis of Louisiana's forecast that had previously been provided to the MAC and which **Blanchet** reported on earlier. **Smith** noted that we published in the stock assessment how the Mississippi River flow contributes to recruitment. When we have greater River flow, we generally see poorer recruitment.

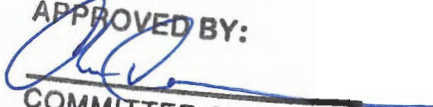
**Smith** offered one last comment that in his 20+ years with NOAA, no state or federal sampler has ever been denied access to the industry. The industry provides their deck logs/catch records and every boat reports every day. This is voluntary, unlike on the Atlantic. All of this data is public and is included in the FMP and the current stock assessment.

**Shepard** asked if the CDFR data is available to the public. **Smith** published a paper in 2000 which included all the CDFRs from 1994-1998. Currently, there are problems with confidentiality because there are only two companies in the fishery. This is a federal requirement, it's not to hide the data. This rule applies to any industry, not just fishing companies. **Shepard** – I have an issue with this and with not knowing the bycatch. I've heard rumors from the Moss Point plant that there a lot of sharks which go through the plant and there was a special band saw to cut up the sharks so they could be cooked with the menhaden. I didn't just dream that up.

**Lukens** assured **Shepard** that the rumor was not true.

**Marianne Cufone**, Tulane Law School. – I am **Marianne Cufone** and I am introducing myself to those of you who may not know me. I have been working in fisheries management for nearly 20 years now. I am an environmental attorney, I went to Miami Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Science and have worked in natural resources management, focusing on oceans, fisheries and seafood and am a professional chef. I'm also here to introduce my students who are working on a semester project in marine policy. They will be speaking to the Commission so please be kind. I came today because I heard about the SEDAR process and have sat on the Gulf Council for several years and was curious about SEDAR process for menhaden. I was excited to hear that there was an update on the FMP which hadn't been done in eight years. I was disappointed that the priorities for future research had predator/prey relationships listed very low. Menhaden are just so important for environment. We need to consider how many menhaden need to be left in the Gulf to provide all the other environmental services that they do. I didn't come here today to shut down any fishery but I think we do need to address a quota or cap, transparency in data collection, and the potential for vessel monitoring. If you have faith in the data, you need to get behind the data.

Without any additional comment, **Lukens** thanked everyone for participating and providing comment. The meeting adjourned at 11:45 am.

APPROVED BY:  
  
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**TECHNICAL COORDINATING COMMITTEE  
MINUTES  
Tuesday, March 18, 2014  
New Orleans, LA**

**Chairman Chris Denson** called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. The following members, staff and others were present:

**Members**

- Harry Blanchet, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
- Richard Cody, FWC/FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL
- Roy Crabtree, NMFS/SERO, St. Petersburg, FL
- Chris Denson, ADCNR/MRD, Gulf Shores, AL
- Dale Diaz, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
- Jerry Mambretti, TPWD, Port Arthur, TX
- John Mareska, ADCNR/MRD, Dauphin Island, AL

**Staff**

- James Ballard, GSMFC, Sport Fish/Aquatic Invasives Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
- Gregg Bray, GSMFC, RecFIN Programmer/Analyst, Ocean Springs, MS
- Ali Ryan, GSMFC, Sport Fish/Aquatic Invasives Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS
- Joe Ferrer, GSMFC, Systems Administrator, Ocean Springs, MS
- Jeff Rester, GSMFC, SEAMAP/Habitat Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
- Donna Bellais, GSMFC, ComFIN Survey Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
- Dave Donaldson, GSMFC, Acting Executive Director, Ocean Springs, MS
- Steve VanderKooy, GSMFC, IJF Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS

**Others**

- Ryan Gandy, FWC/FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL
- Kelly Donnelly, NMFS/SERO, St. Petersburg, FL
- Justin Esslinger, TPWD, Rockport, TX
- Vince Cefalu, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
- Drue Banta Winters, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
- Thor Lassen, Ocean Trust, Reston, VA
- Luiz Barbieri, FWC/FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL
- Chuck Adams, UF/Florida Sea Grant, Gainesville, FL

**Adoption of Agenda**

**A motion to adopt the agenda as written was made by Jerry Mambretti and passed unanimously.**

**Approval of Minutes**

**A motion to approve the minutes as written for the March 20, 2013 meeting was made by Dale Diaz and passed with no opposition.**

Old Methodology	New Methodology
Sampling occurred at peak time periods	Sampling occurs in 6 hr time blocks during peak and non-peak periods
Samplers had some discretion in selecting sites	Sites sampled in clusters in a specific randomized order
Samplers directed to maximize number of interviews, potentially creating a bias toward peak times and popular fishing sites	Samplers directed to maximize number of sites visited to obtain a more representative sample of fishing activity
Little sampling conducted at night	Sampling conducted during all time periods of the day

**Update on Red Snapper Recreational Catch Methodologies**

**Luiz Barbieri** provided the Committee with an update on the red snapper recreational catch methodologies. He covered three relevant issues 1) Status of the MRIP Re-estimation Phase II (1999-2003), 2) Evaluating the effect of recent MRIP design changes, and 3) Potential improvements to the Gulf red snapper recreational survey – (i.e., improved catch/effort estimates, quota monitoring).

For the MRIP re-estimation Phase II, Luiz stated that project members have been identified and planning is underway. This new estimation is likely to include the years 1999-2003 which will build on Phase I that included years 2004-2011. Because of this increased number of years, Phase II will provide for an increased ability to, interpret the dynamics of the stock and participate in stock assessments, however, it is also complicated by additional data gaps and survey changes in years prior to 2004. Luiz pointed out that this summer (2014) there will be a MRIP calibration workshop that is expected to provide more specific guidance on how to proceed with this new process. The technical group charged with completing Phase II are hoping to have it finished sometime in 2015.

**Dale Diaz** asked if under this new Phase of MRIP if a small state like Mississippi would get more meaningful data then they were getting under the old program that produced a very limited data set for small states? Luiz pointed out that he was not in a position to address that question because he is not a member of the MRIP staff; however, he feels that the new program could provide better estimates.

**Richard Cody** asked if there were any discussions to extend the calibrations further back (prior to 1999) to get a better time series? Luiz said there were but it gets more complicated the further back you go in the data set.

Luiz then went over the evaluation of the effect of recent MRIP design changes that were implemented in March 2013. He stated that these changes were pilot tested in North Carolina and it worked very well but it is unknown whether this result will hold true in a larger geographic area. The key changes in methodology are outlined in the table below. Luiz stated that these new MRIP methodologies appear to provide estimates that are more accurate and less biased then the ones

produced under the old system. They also resulted in a higher proportion of offshore trips and much higher red snapper landings estimates. This increase presents a challenge with how to interpret these changes as representing more accurate catch and effort estimates and how to compare the new estimates with previous ones and incorporate them into stock assessments. There are currently efforts underway to evaluate the potential effects of this new sampling design utilizing empirical and simulation approaches. The MRIP calibration workshop discussed earlier is also expected to provide more specific guidance on how to proceed with these new methodologies.

**Jerry Mambretti** asked if it was too late to run parallel surveys, one with the old methodologies and one with the new ones, to directly evaluate the effects of the new methodologies and provide for a correction factor from the old system to the new one. Luiz stated that it was not too late and it has been discussed but funding is a limiting factor.

Luiz then provided an overview of the potential improvements to the Gulf red snapper recreational survey. He pointed out that GSMFC is facilitating a coordinated effort between NMFS (MRIP) and Gulf states to evaluate potential survey improvements. The first workshop was held on November 4-5, 2013 to discuss requirements for red snapper recreational catch and effort data to support management and stock assessments. From the discussions at this workshop, the group recommended the following red snapper recreational survey designs for further development and testing:

1. Expand/improve MRIP or equivalent general angling survey.
2. Make use of logbooks and/or mandatory reporting combined with on-site validation.
3. Require permits with contact information to delimit target population, then on-site survey for catch and off-site survey for effort.
4. Complement MRIP (or equivalent) with longitudinal panel survey for effort.

A second workshop is scheduled for next week (March 27-28, 2014) to continue discussions and discuss pilot implementation.

### **Overview of Florida East Coast Red Snapper Monitoring**

**Richard Cody** provided an overview of the Florida East Coast Red Snapper Monitoring. He stated that the program had some issues including the small recreational quota (~9000 fish) and a time scale that was too short to accommodate the MRIP methodologies. However, it also had some unique advantages, the effort was compressed over six days in 2012 and three days in 2013. Moreover, there were bottlenecks to ocean access with only 9 inlets which allowed them to focus their efforts.

Richard stated that the study design to collect the catch data included 54 sites among the nine inlets. They simplified the MRIP pressure estimates to high (50+ boats), medium (20-49 boats), and low (<20 boats). They had a list of all possible site, day, and times for the draws and they randomly selected the draws. Their base sample consisted of 20 assignments north of the Cape Canaveral and 16 south. For these assignments they selected 50% from the high, 30% from the medium, and 20% from the low pressure sites. If they had additional manpower they would add additional sample draws at the same percentages. To collect the catch data they conducted boat level interviews instead of angler based. They looked at filtering out ocean vs. inshore fishing and the trips targeting red snapper. They also collected the time the trip exited the inlet, the number of people onboard, number of anglers onboard, number of red snapper harvested, number of red

snapper released, hours fished, distance from shore (miles) fished, depth fished (collected in 2013), and release size categories (<16", 16-20", >20"). From the harvested red snapper they collected length, weight, and otoliths.

For the effort data, recreational vessel traffic was monitored at each inlet with two reference inlets (monitored each day from sunrise to sunset) and seven randomly sampled inlets. From this monitoring effort a weighted mean CPUE was calculated.

Richard then summarized some of the data collected during the 2012 monitoring efforts including the number of red snapper boat trips taken at each inlet, the catch per boat trip at each inlet, the average distance from shore traveled per trip at each inlet, and the proportion of intercepted boats offshore fishing at each inlet.

Richard also went over the Florida Atlantic coast red snapper surveys that were used for charter catch and effort estimates. This program used modified for-hire telephone survey (FHTS) methodologies conducted in addition to the standard FHTS utilizing the same FHTS regions. In 2012 all for-hire vessels > 21 ft. and all vessels selected for standard FHTS (regardless of vessel specifications) were included. In 2013 they used a combination of lists including vessels participating in the East coast MARFIN project, FHTS vessels >21 ft. (Nassau – Dade Counties), and Keys vessels.

Richard pointed out that for their survey, catch and effort information was obtained for trips that targeted and/or caught red snapper by adding catch questions to the standard FHTS. All vessel representatives were notified by mail a few days in advance of the survey starting and the survey was restricted to only the days the red snapper season was open. They utilized field observations to validate reported information as well as provide biological data (fork length, weight, sex, gonad stage, otoliths). In 2012 they conducted two rounds of calls with a target of five call attempts per vessel representative. This resulted in the two rounds of calls overlapping with each other and vessel representatives ignoring the calls for the first week and reporting all catch during the second week of calls which they had to adjust the catch and non-response estimates for. They did not have a problem with this in 2013 because the season only lasted for one weekend. Richard stated that their survey had some major assumptions including; vessel list contains all vessels that potentially could make a "reef fish/red snapper trip", activity of reporting vessels is representative of the entire fleet, reporting in the FHTS was un-impacted by red snapper survey and vice versa, and that field observations supported the validity of the survey assumptions. From there survey, they were able to calculate: number of for-hire trips taken per week, depth fished, and catch (harvest and discards).

Richard stated that one big benefit of all of this monitoring effort was the amount of cooperation they got from fisherman in collecting otoliths with ~2500 fish sampled in the six day season in 2012 and ~1700 in the three day season in 2013.

### **IJF Programmatic Activities**

**Steve VanderKooy** pointed out that the primary role of the IJF program is to develop FMPs and currently they have three that are almost finished and ready to be reviewed by the TCC.



### **Blue Crab FMP Revision**

**Ryan Gandy** stated that the Blue Crab Committee has updated all sections with new research and references. The genetics section and the parasites and disease section were expanded. They have also expanded and updated the economic characteristics of fishermen and the fishery including emphasis on imports, as well as the social/cultural characteristics of fishermen and communities based on a follow-up survey of all commercial crab license holders. They added two new sections, aquaculture and culturing techniques, which were also added as appendices. For this revision of the FMP, the group utilized the newly-developed GDAR process and conducted GDAR01 Blue Crab stock assessment to provide the first Gulf-wide quantitative assessment of the population. GDAR01 also informed the group on climate-driven dynamics of the population and research needs for further climate based assessments and management unit development. As well as, contextualizing management based climatic zones, for example, they are finding that blue crab population abundances are strongly linked to fresh water inflows. This stock assessment was a peer reviewed document and was approved by the group that conducted the Chesapeake Bay assessment. The GDAR01 assessment expressed specific concern over the Gulf-wide trend in decreasing biomass in recent decades. Gulf-wide landings peaked in 1987-1988 (78 and 79 million pounds) a general downward trend in Gulf-wide landings began in 2000 that has continued through 2010. Fishery-independent estimates of abundance for both juvenile and adult stocks have shown either decreasing or steady trends throughout the last two decades. Overall, both stocks (eastern and western) are currently not overfished nor undergoing overfishing, although the Western stock is in a depressed state and approaching an overfished limit.

Ryan stated that the recommendations outlined in the FMP are;

- The current level of management in this fishery is adequate to maintain status quo based on the data currently available to the assessment.
- No necessary management action were revealed in this process.
- Ongoing monitoring programs need to be continued and enhanced to increase the resolution of future stock assessments and FMP's.
- The population dynamics that underlie the fishery are tied more to ongoing climate regimes than effort.
- Increase the coordination of monitoring and management between the five states involved in the GOM fishery.
- Develop a clear and defensible stock structure to determine if the GOM should be managed as a single or mixed stock.
- Develop justifiable fisheries management units based on population distributions.

**Richard Cody** stated that the fishery-dependent monitoring recommendations were geared toward the commercial fishery and asked if the group had a feel for how extensive the recreational fishery was. Ryan said that the group had discussed that issue and a few states have some data on the recreational fishery and in some areas the effort is fairly high.

Ryan pointed out that this revised FMP should be ready to go to the TCC for their review in the next few weeks.

### **Gulf and Southern Flounder FMP Revision**

**Chuck Adams** pointed out that the Task Force has made updates to all sections with new research and references. Included all new genetics work from TPWD. He pointed out that the enforcement-related material was updated, as well as the fishery data for each state. The group updated the economic characteristics of the fishery and the sociocultural characteristics of flounder fishermen in the Gulf. Chuck stated that the fishery-dependent data issues identified in the original FMP related to Gulf and southern flounder remain unresolved and the Commission's Stock Assessment Team agreed that there was insufficient data and resolution of the commercial landings to develop a regional assessment. Chuck pointed out that the recommendations in this FMP remain relatively unchanged from the last version, and include;

- There remains a considerable need for speciated fishery-dependent data. Gulf and southern flounder remained lumped as 'flatfish' for most Gulf states (LA is exception). No listing for Gulf flounder at all.
- The lack of resolution in the dependent data hampers the ability of the states to conduct regional stock assessments.

This revised FMP should be ready for the TCC to review in the next few months.

### **Gulf Menhaden FMP Revision**

**Steve VanderKooy** updated the Committee on the progress of the Gulf Menhaden FMP. He stated that the FMP has been updated with new references throughout and all state and federal regulatory agencies and regulations have been updated. Landings and fishery information through 2012 (terminal year of assessment was 2011) have been incorporated. He also pointed out that the group has updated and expanded economic data for bait and reduction fisheries and added an oral history of the reduction and bait fisheries. They conducted a sociocultural survey of the Gulf reduction industry to generate baseline data on fishery participants (industry employees). This FMP's revision also included the addition of the SEDAR32A stock assessment for Gulf menhaden including approved biological reference points.

Steve provided a brief summary of the menhaden fishery. He stated that the number of plants in the Gulf have declined to four and the number of active vessels has fallen to 37. Also, by 2012 there were virtually no bait companies in the Gulf landing menhaden other than some limited cast net landings. The average total landings through the 1990s were around 554,000mt, while the average through the 2000s were just under 490,000mt. Recent landings (the last decade) have varied widely partly due to the 2004 and 2005 hurricanes and the DWH disaster.

Steve pointed out that SEDAR32A was unable to define a  $F_{MSY}$  for menhaden and it was classified as infinite and based on a suite of benchmarks, it was determined that overfishing is not occurring and the stock is not overfished. Steve explained that the Commission approved threshold and target values for management measures, and the harvest rates associated with the equilibrium yield as recommended by the MAC last fall (threshold  $F_{30\%} = 680,765\text{mt}$ , target  $F_{35\%} = 663,583\text{mt}$ ). Included was the approval of 5-year benchmark assessments and a request for an immediate benchmark update tied to two consecutive years exceeding the target and one year exceeding the threshold. This revised FMP should be ready for the TCC to review in the next few months.

## **Subcommittee Reports**

### **Data Management**

**Vince Cefalu** reported that at the TCC Data Management Subcommittee meeting, Gregg Bray provided an update on processing and data entry of the 2013 biological samples collected. All states are either completed or close to completing processing and data entry for 2013. Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission plans to provide data for the upcoming red snapper stock assessment meeting in July. Also, all the states agreed that an otolith processors meeting would be beneficial in 2014, so Gulf States will begin the process of setting up a meeting.

The Subcommittee also agreed that it would be useful to better document current data programs feeding into the Data Management System and to design a new system to better meet the needs of the provider and the end user. Gulf States will develop an initial proposal and provide it to the group for review at the upcoming FIN meeting this June.

Gregg Bray provided the Subcommittee with a spreadsheet that detailed two scenarios for FIN carry-over and supplemental MRIP funds provided for 2014 sampling. After detailed discussions, the Subcommittee recommended a revised spending scenario that will be presented to the SFFMC for their consideration at their meeting tomorrow.

The Subcommittee also discussed the Unified trip ticket and the recent work that has focused on communications between local PCs and the web server. Claude Peterson hopes to be able to have a presentation on the current work ready for this summer. The Subcommittee also discussed the need to update the unit/condition conversion tables. The committee agreed that the current tables are likely out dated and recommended that the FIN Commercial Technical work group be tasked with updating the species conversions table for the Gulf of Mexico.

NOAA Fisheries staff are working on developing consistent methods for protecting confidential data. NOAA would like to come to an agreement in 2014 with all state and federal partners on consistent methods for releasing data.

Alex Miller provided the Subcommittee with a brief description of the FINFO website which was developed to highlight the sustainable management activities in place in each state. The website focuses on four things: fisheries profiles, sustainable fisheries management, gulf fisheries economics and marketing programs for gulf fisheries in each state.

**John Mareska made a motion to accept the report as presented, and it passed unanimously.**

### **SEAMAP**

**John Mareska** reported that the budget was increased for FY2014 to 97% level of the first year of the grant cycle. This is up from the 88% level last year. This increase will allow for surveys to be fully conducted as originally proposed.

The Subcommittee continues to make changes and improvements to the trawl and vertical line manuals in order to improve consistency among partners and the data collected. States requested from NMFS that site selection for surveys be conducted up to 2 years in advance. This will allow planning and side scanning of areas to reduce gear and habitat damage.

The Subcommittee received a presentation by Bob McMichael related to NFWF funding of projects that will use SEAMAP protocols and expand the surveys over a 5-year period. Surveys such as the fall trawl, plankton survey, video, vertical and bottom long-line surveys will be conducted.

The Subcommittee received a presentation on Secchi and transmissivity related to water clarity measurements. A motion was passed to discontinue use of Secchi disk readings unless objections are raised by the environmental workgroup.

They had a brief discussion of a presentation to be given to the Gulf Council concerning standardized SEAMAP sampling methods and data. The SEAMAP subcommittee felt that the presentation was not accurate and noted this was without the actual presentation being given. NMFS representatives noted, that the presentation is being revised to be more representative.

States continue to ask NMFS for species and measurement codes updates for the onboard data collection system (FSCS). NMFS has also requested these updates internally.

Motion to convene the vertical line working group to improve the structure type characterization by incorporating the Coastal Marine Ecological Classification System (CMECS) and LDWF habitat classification of petroleum platforms and artificial reefs was passed. Specialists in this area of sampling natural and artificial structures will be invited.

SEAMAP cruises will begin noting birds and turtles observed for NEPA requirements. This information is lacking from fishery independent surveys.

**A motion to accept the report was moved by Jerry Mambretti, and passed without opposition.**

#### **Crab**

**Ryan Gandy** stated that at the Subcommittees meeting they spent a lot of time talking about the FMP revision that was discussed earlier in this meeting. He also pointed out that the states with long standing derelict trap removal programs are starting to see a decrease in the number of traps removed each year, suggesting that the programs are working. The Subcommittee also discussed the interactions between terrapins and crab traps and decided to develop a white paper of all the research that is being conducted in the states on this issue.

**Harry Blanchet made a motion to accept the report and it passed unanimously.**

#### **Artificial Reef**

**James Ballard** reported that at the last Joint ASMFC and GSMFC Artificial Reef meeting there was an update on the Steinhatchee Fisheries Management Area in which, artificial reefs are being studied for their usefulness in the management of gag grouper.

The Subcommittee had an update on Florida's NRDA funded artificial reef projects. Under phase III artificial reef projects are being considered, but only in state waters. The proposed projects will be utilizing a variety of man-made reef modules.

There was an update on Delaware's SMZ status for offshore reef sites. They are pursuing SMZ status in order to alleviate conflicts between commercial and recreational fisheries on reefs developed using Sport Fish Restoration funds.

The joint subcommittees decided to develop a white paper on the beneficial economic impacts of reefing older naval ships in response to MARAD's new ban on reefing ships built before 1985.

Both Subcommittees are continuing to work on the revision of their 2004 publication "Guidelines for Marine Artificial Reef Materials". They are hoping to have this revised edition ready for printing first thing next year.

James also pointed out that the majority of the Artificial Reef subcommittee attended the Gulf of Mexico Alliance's meeting on Tuesday concerning the Rigs-to-Reefs program. This meeting was setup to be an information sharing meeting between all of the agencies and industries involved in this program with the intent of establishing working relationships between everyone involved and to get the program running more smoothly.

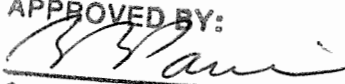
**Jerry Mambretti made a motion to accept the report as presented, and it passed unanimously.**

#### **State/Federal Reports**

Written reports were provided to the TCC members the week prior to the meeting and hard copies were incorporated in the meeting folders. **During the meeting, Richard Cody made a motion to dispense with the reports in the interest of time, which passed without opposition. To see the full reports that were provided to the TCC, please see the minutes from the Commission Business meeting held on Wednesday, March 19, 2014.**

**With no further business to discuss, Chris Denson adjourned the meeting at 4:30 p.m.**

**GULF STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION (GSMFC)  
BUSINESS MEETING  
MINUTES  
Wednesday, March 19, 2014  
New Orleans, LA**

APPROVED BY:  
  
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

Chairman R. Pausina called the meeting to order at 8:35 a.m.

D. Donaldson gave a brief overview of Commission voting procedures

The following Commissioners and/or Proxies were present:

**Commissioners**

Randy Pausina, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF),  
Baton Rouge, LA (*Proxy for Robert Barham*)  
Camp Matens, Baton Rouge, LA  
Lance Robinson, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD),  
Dickinson, TX (*Proxy for Carter Smith*)  
Troy Williamson, Corpus Christi, TX  
Chris Nelson, Bon Secour Fisheries, Bon Secour, AL  
Chris Blankenship, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources,  
Marine Resources Division (ADCNR/MRD), Gulf Shores, AL  
(*Proxy for Gunter Guy*)  
Dan Ellinor, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC),  
Tallahassee, FL (*Proxy for Nick Wiley*)  
Jamie Miller, Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (MDMR), Biloxi, MS  
Brett Allain, Jeanerette, LA

**Staff**

Dave Donaldson, *Acting Executive Director*, Ocean Springs, MS  
Nancy Marcellus, *Administrative Officer*, Ocean Springs, MS  
Chery Noble, *Administrative Assistant*, Ocean Springs, MS  
Steve VanderKooy, *IJF Program Coordinator*, Ocean Springs, MS  
Jeff Rester, *SEAMAP/Habitat Coordinator*, Ocean Springs, MS  
Gregg Bray, *RecFIN(SE) Programmer/Analyst*, Ocean Springs, MS  
Joe Ferrer, *Systems Administrator*, Ocean Springs, MS  
Ralph Hode, *Fisheries Disaster Recovery Coordinator*, Ocean Springs, MS  
James Ballard, *Sport Fish Restoration/Aquatic Invasive Coordinator*,  
Ocean Springs, MS  
Alex Miller, *Economic Program Coordinator*, Ocean Springs, MS

**Others**

Jeff Barger, Ocean Conservancy, New Orleans, LA  
Harry Lowenburg, Gulf Restoration Network, New Orleans, LA  
Markham Dickson, Gulf Restoration Network, New Orleans, LA  
Scott Hebert, Daybrook Fisheries, New Orleans, LA  
Christina Cossich, Cossich, Sumich, Parsiola & Taylor, New Orleans, LA

Philip Cossich, Jr., Cossich, Sumich, Parsiola & Taylor, New Orleans, LA  
Gregory Holt, Daybrook Fisheries, New Orleans, LA  
Borden Wallace, Daybrook Fisheries, Empire, LA  
Ben Landry, Omega Protein Corporation, Houston, TX  
Tabitha Lindley, Omega Protein Corporation, Houston, TX  
Ron Lukens, Omega Protein Corporation, High Springs, FL  
Rick Schillaci, Omega Protein Corporation, Moss Point, MS  
Thor Lassen, Ocean Trust, New Orleans, LA  
Sean Simeson, Loyola University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA  
Andrea Rogers, Loyola University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA  
Emily Posner, Recirculating Farms Coalition, New Orleans, LA  
Drue Winters, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Teri Larose, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Mark Schexnayder, LDWF, New Orleans, LA  
Laura Bowie, Gulf of Mexico Alliance, New Orleans, LA  
Angela Sallis, NOAA/National Coastal Data Development Center, SSC, MS  
Russ Beard, NOAA Restore Acting Director, SSC, MS  
Gary Graham, TX Sea Grant, West Columbia, TX  
Judy Jamison, Gulf and South Atlantic Fisheries Foundation (GSAFF), Tampa, FL  
Benny Gallaway, LGL Ecological Research Associates, Inc., Bryan, TX  
Kelly Donnelly, NOAA Fisheries/SERO, St. Petersburg, FL  
Nick Russell, Loyola University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA  
Dale Diaz, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Kelly Lucas, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Joe Jewell, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Roy Crabtree, NOAA Fisheries/SERO, St. Petersburg, FL

#### **Adoption of Agenda**

The Sea Grant report will be given by G. Graham and Item Numbers 11 and 12 will be given this afternoon. *D. Ellinor moved to adopt the agenda as amended. C. Nelson seconded and the agenda was adopted as amended with no opposition.*

#### **Approval of Minutes**

*C. Blankenship moved to approve the minutes of the Commission Business Session held on October 16, 2013. C. Matens seconded and the minutes were approved with no opposition.*

#### **GSMFC Standing Committee Reports**

##### **Law Enforcement Committee (LEC)**

**S. Bannon** reported they had the joint meeting of the LEC/Law Enforcement Advisory Panel (LEAP) and most items were related to Council issues. He stated S. VanderKooy gave a report on the status of the Fishery Management Plans (FMPs) and all three are near completion. He said the Committee discussed appointing a LEC representative for the next FMP that is presented. There were discussions to have a joint meeting with the Council instead of just meeting with the

Commission. He said the committee will start working on the two year and four year operations and strategic plans updates.

There were no questions or public comments.

### **Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC)**

**C. Denson** reported Luiz Barbieri provided the Committee with an update on the red snapper recreational catch methodologies. He covered three relevant issues: status of the MRIP Re-estimation Phase II (1999-2003); evaluating the effect of recent MRIP design changes; and potential improvements to the Gulf red snapper recreational survey.

**C. Denson** reported Richard Cody provided an overview of the Florida East Coast Red Snapper Monitoring Program. This was done last year because of the 3-day red snapper season on the Atlantic Coast. From this monitoring program they were able to calculate for each inlet the 2012 number of red snapper boat trips, the catch per boat trip, the average distance from shore traveled per trip, and the proportion of intercepted boats fishing offshore.

**C. Denson** reported the Committee received an update from the Blue Crab, Flounder and Menhaden FMPs. He said they are including updates for genetics, enforcement and regulatory activities, and inclusion of socio-economic information.

### **SEAMAP Subcommittee**

**C. Denson** reported John Mareska gave a report on the SEAMAP and the budget was increased for FY2014 to 97% level of the first year of the grant cycle. This is up from the 88% level last year. This increase will allow for the surveys to be fully conducted as originally proposed. The Subcommittee continues to make changes and improvements to the trawl and vertical line manuals in order to improve consistency among partners and the data collected. The States requested from NMFS that the site selection for surveys be conducted up to two years in advance. This will allow planning and side scanning of areas to reduce gear and habitat damage. There was a presentation regarding the secchi disk and transmission and a **motion** was passed to discontinue the use of secchi disk readings unless objections are raised by the environmental work group. A **motion** was passed to convene the vertical line work group to discuss improving structure and top characterizations by incorporating the coastal marine ecological classification system and LDWF habitat classification of petroleum platforms and artificial reefs. Specialists in the area of sampling natural and artificial structures will be invited.

### **Crab Subcommittee**

**C. Denson** reported Ryan Gandy stated most of the discussion in the Crab Subcommittee meeting involved the FMP revisions. He also pointed out that the states with long standing derelict trap removal programs are starting to see a decrease in the number of traps removed each year,



suggesting that the programs are working. The Subcommittee also discussed the interactions between terrapins and crab traps and decided to develop a white paper of all the research that is being conducted in the states on this issue.

#### **Artificial Reef Subcommittee**

**C. Denson** reported James Ballard stated that at the last Joint ASMFC and GSMFC Artificial Reef meeting there was an update on the Steinhatchee Fisheries Management Area in which artificial reefs are being studied for their usefulness in the management of gag grouper. He also stated that the joint subcommittees decided to develop a white paper on the beneficial economic impacts of reefing older naval ships in response to MARAD's new ban on reefing ships built before 1985. Both Subcommittees are continuing to work on the revision of their 2004 publication "Guidelines for Marine Artificial Reef Materials."

#### **Data Management Subcommittee**

**C. Denson** reported all of the states have either completed or are close to completing processing and data entry for 2013. Gulf States Marine Fisheries plans to provide data for the upcoming red snapper stock assessment meeting in July. **The States agreed that an otolith processors meeting would be beneficial in 2014 so Gulf States will begin the process of setting up a meeting.** The Subcommittee also agreed that it would be useful to better document current data programs feeding into the Data Management System and to design a new system to better meet the needs of the provider and the end user. **GSMFC will develop an initial proposal and provide it to the group for review at the upcoming FIN meeting this June.**

**C. Denson** reported NOAA Fisheries staff are working on developing consistent methods for protecting confidential data. NOAA would like to come to an agreement in 2014 with all state and federal partners on consistent methods for releasing data.

**C. Denson** reported Gregg Bray provided a spreadsheet that detailed two scenarios for FIN carry-over and supplemental MRIP funds provided for 2014 sampling. NOAA Fisheries MRIP staff have committed to increased funding for increased dockside sampling for future years, but the funding used to restore trip tickets and biological sampling are one time opportunities. After detailed discussions, the Data Management Subcommittee **moved** to pass a revised spending scenario where menhaden funds were removed and allocated to biological sampling. Menhaden sampling would be funded from other FIN carry-over funds and would maximize the funds available for biological sampling. ***C. Nelson moved to approve this funding scenario. C. Blankenship seconded and the motion passed with no opposition.***

There were no questions and no public comment.

***K. Lucas moved to accept the TCC Report. D. Ellinor seconded and the motion passed with no opposition.***

## State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee

### **Menhaden Advisory Committee (MAC)**

**R. Lukens** reported the MAC met on March 18, 2014 with a relatively routine agenda and a large audience. Those in attendance indicated an interest in providing public comment. To be able to dispense with the agenda, the audience was asked to hold questions until *Other Business*.

**R. Lukens** reported Joe Smith gave the final 2013 report for the Gulf fishery. He stated landings were 497,503 mt which was down 14% from 2012 but was about 1% over the previous 5 year average. The industry fished 37 vessels in 2013, 33 steamers, 2 run boats, and 2 bait boats in Abbeville. Fish meal and fish oil prices started out high during 2013 and the oil yield was good throughout the fishing season. The weather was generally fair.

**R. Lukens** said Joe Smith reported that in 2014 it is expected that 3 factories will fish 32 vessels and forecasted that 428,000 mt will be landed in 2014. Omega Protein will be closing the Cameron, LA facility in 2014.

**R. Lukens** stated Joe Smith updated the group on Atlantic menhaden activities in 2013. Landings were 131,031 mt which was down 18% from 2012 and down 18% from the previous five-year average. The landing level was dictated by an overall Atlantic coast wide Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for the first time in the history of the fishery. The TAC will stay in place for the 2014 season.

Finally, **R. Lukens** reported the President's FY2015 Budget proposal includes a line item that would close NOAA's Beaufort Laboratory. **R. Lukens** stressed the importance of that Lab and stated the NMFS menhaden program is ran from that Lab. The Committee strongly objects to the closure of this Lab.

**The MAC moved that the Executive Director of the GSMFC send a letter to appropriate individuals regarding the importance of the NOAA Fisheries Beaufort Laboratory, the need for continuation of the Atlantic and Gulf menhaden program, and the level of dedication that the NOAA staff has to the issues in the Gulf of Mexico. C. Blankenship moved the Commission accepts this motion. D. Ellinor seconded and the motion passed with no opposition.**

**The MAC moved that the state directors prioritize training of state personnel from the expertise at the Beaufort Lab for the purposes of ageing fishery-independent samples in light of the pending closure.**

**R. Pausina** commented that this is a very important activity and stated LDWF will assist in the training. **D. Donaldson** stated that as mentioned in the DMS report, there will be an otolith Quality Assurance/Quality Control (QA/QC) meeting and one of the agenda items will be discussing menhaden sampling and processing the samples. The meeting will focus on fishery dependent samples and will include the processing of the scales. **L. Robinson** asked if the states would absorb the costs associated with the training. **R. Lukens** stated they wanted to bring this issue to the attention of the Commission but they have not discussed the financing and said travel would

be the main cost. The closure of the Beaufort Lab has been proposed but a final decision has not been made. **S. VanderKooy** stated the Beaufort Lab will continue processing all samples until it actually closes, if it closes. If the facility does close, it is assumed that all positions will be transitioned to another facility.

**T. Williams** moved the Commission accept the MAC motion to prioritize training. **C. Blankenship** seconded and the motion passed with no opposition.

**R. Lukens** reported that Harry Blanchet, LDWF, will continue to update the MAC on the progress of redesigning the LDWF forecasting tools for menhaden. The change in the FID protocols and work load of existing Population Dynamics staff prevent immediate work on forecasting. **R. Lukens** emphasized the importance of this product.

**R. Lukens** reported Jerry Mambretti updated the MAC on the monitoring of the Texas Cap in 2013. The fleet fished only 8 weeks in Texas waters and landed 32.3% of the available quantity under the cap. **R. Lukens** reported Steve VanderKooy gave an overview of the three FMPs that are currently being revised. **R. Lukens** reported Joe Smith updated the MAC on port sampling and stated securing fishery dependent menhaden sampling funding has been a problem. **R. Lukens** stated the MAC urges the Commission to help secure funding in the future for this sampling as it is critical in maintaining the data for future assessments. **R. Lukens** stated the Committee reviewed genetics work by Dr. Joel Anderson who asked that each state provide samples for his ongoing genetics work. Each state present agreed to do this.

**R. Lukens** stated Dr. Behzad Mahmoudi will curtail some responsibilities due to health reasons. The MAC approved a resolution in recognition of Dr. Mahmoudi. **The MAC** moved the Commission approve the resolution in recognition of Dr. Mahmoudi. **D. Ellinor** moved the Commission approve the resolution. **K. Lucas** seconded the motion and it passed with no opposition.

**R. Lukens** stated there was public comment at the meeting and their concerns ranged from the data reported in the NOAA presentation during the meeting and observed declines of young of year (YOY) in the marshes off their property to the need to recognize menhaden as filterer and foragers for all the other levels of the ecosystem. The public comments from the MAC meeting are included under the MAC minutes.

### **Public Comment**

Verbatim public comment from the CBM is attached (**Attachment I**).

**C. Matens** moved to adopt the MAC report. **T. Williamson** seconded and the motion passed with no opposition.

### **Commercial/Recreational Fisheries Advisory Panel (CRFAP)**

**S. VanderKooy** reported the Panel met on Monday, March 17 and this was the first meeting since March 2011 due to funding issues and lack of agenda items. The Panel discussed proposed state

boundary extensions for Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas. A number of people were brought in to address the state specific bills and proposals, and to provide additional information on items like federal permitting, enforcement by state agencies in the impacted waters, and the overall impact of extension for all fisheries, not just certain species. **S. VanderKooy** reported each presenter provided their states' perspective on the boundary extension and answered specific questions unique to that state. After extensive discussion, **the CRFAP moved that the GSMFC supports all five Gulf States in expanding state waters to three marine leagues for all fisheries.** **S. VanderKooy** noted the motion did not pass by unanimous consent in the CFRAP, there were two oppositions. ***C. Blankenship moved to accept the motion. L. Robinson seconded the motion and it passed with no opposition.***

**S. VanderKooy** reported the second topic discussed was the proposed regional management bills brought to both the House and the Senate regarding red snapper management in the Gulf and the Commission being the potential management body. Each representative stated their views on the topic. There was discussion about the ramifications of dividing up the stock assessment into a state by state approach and who would be the authority if the Council and NOAA relinquished their authority, and if the Commission would be the appropriate body to take authority of a federal fishery. **S. VanderKooy** noted D. Donaldson developed a white paper on this topic and the Commission will be discussing it later in the agenda. **S. VanderKooy** stated that after discussion, **the CRFAP moved that the GSMFC continue putting together options for coordination of the five Gulf States and/or complete management of the recreational red snapper fishery in the Gulf of Mexico.** **C. Matens** asked to amend the motion to state "recreational and commercial red snapper fishery." **L. Robinson** seconded the motion. **K. Lucas** stated the Panel discussed changing to commercial but it kept being deferred back to recreational so as not to get confused with what would fall under federal boundaries. **C. Matens** withdrew his amendment to the motion. ***The Commission approved the motion with one opposition. It was made clear the motion was accepted as part of the CRFAP report only.***

**S. VanderKooy** reported the Panel discussed changing the format of the panel to an ad hoc committee or other status. **After discussion, the CRFAP moved to maintain the panel (CRFAP) in its present status that challenges the group to address timely and pertinent issues that are important but not limited to the Commission.** ***T. Williams moved to accept the motion. C. Blankenship seconded and the motion passed with no opposition.***

***C. Blankenship moved to accept the CRFAP report. J. Miller seconded the motion and it passed with no opposition.***

There was no public comment.

### **Executive Session**

***C. Matens moved to close the Commission Business Meeting to go into Executive Session to discuss Executive Director Interviews. J. Miller seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.***

## Sea Grant Fisheries Extension Meeting Report

**G. Graham** reported on the TED/BRD Outreach Projects they are doing with GSAFF and GSMFC. He said that Sea Grant, along with Lindsey Parker with the University of Georgia, has been testing various TEDs/BRDs. They are doing gear inspection forms in conjunction with sustainable fisheries partnerships, fisheries improvement programs, and good faith commitment by producers. He said this is not a certification program, just a good faith effort to show the fishermen are using responsible practices. He said they are also coordinating with NMFS on gear monitoring and training. He also addressed the BRD certification and reported on using a topless trawl (from the flounder fishery), and are looking into expanding electronic log books for shrimpers. He stated the Seafood Marketing Coalition gave a report and publications were distributed. He also stated Thor Lassen updated them on the Ocean Trust Project. He said there are two major gaps: availability of certain assessment data for certain species and criteria on some of the management assessments are not always accurate or thorough. He said while federal fisheries in the Gulf are sustainably managed, some state fisheries do not meet formal assessment criteria and there is not enough funding to support assessments for all of the fisheries. **G. Graham** said T. Lassen has planned a seafood and sustainability forum in New Orleans. There was discussion about third party certification. **G. Graham** said each state gave a report on their specific program and he gave a brief report to the Commission on each program. They also received reports on the Kemp Ridley Stock Assessment and the Gulf FINFO site. Detailed reports are provided in the Sea Grant section of the minutes. **G. Graham** reported Bryan Fluech will be the new Sea Grant chairman and the next meeting topic will be to focus on Sea Grant sponsored citizen science monitoring programs in the region.

There was no public comment.

## Report on Information Sharing Meeting Regarding Rigs-to-Reefs Program

**L. Bowie** reported there were 45 people in attendance representing four of the five Gulf States, federal agencies and industry. She said there was a federal report from Doug Peter from Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE) who gave an update on how the Rigs-to-Reef program is running since the interim policy document came out last summer. There were lots of questions and comments about that, sharing around the room, and clarification of how the policy is interpreted. She said they discussed how each state program ran. There were updates from the oil and gas industry. Shell gave a presentation on the ecosystem services study they are running on a couple of their rigs showing the benefits to the reefing program. At the very end of the meeting there was general consensus that this would be a good meeting to continue to have on a regular basis because it did allow states, federal agencies and industry to share and ask questions, and clarification of comments among the different players in the program. **L. Bowie** stated she will send a detailed report on the meeting and the Shell presentation to the Commission and all that were in attendance. The summary report is included under **Attachment II**.

There was no public comment.

## NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office Comments

**R. Crabtree** stated there was appropriations language passed by congress for 2014 where \$75 million was approved for mitigation of fisheries disasters. Of that, there were two disasters funded in the southeast. One was in Florida for approximately \$6 million for the Apalachicola Oyster region and the other was in Mississippi for \$10.9 million for damages as a result of the flood, and the matching requirements are being waived on both on these. NMFS is working with Florida and Mississippi to develop spend plans. **R. Crabtree** said there has been some ongoing regulatory actions. One is a joint action by the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils to develop a dealer reporting amendment. The intent of this is to develop a federal seafood dealer permit for all federally managed species with the exception of shrimp, and to increase the reporting frequency. Public comment on the proposal ended February 18, 2014. Comments are being reviewed and development of the final rule is in progress. There was also a final rule published to modify headboat reporting requirements that was effective on March 5, 2014, and that action will require that Gulf of Mexico headboats report landings electronically on a weekly basis. The same requirements were also implemented in the South Atlantic region. There was also a framework action that the Council approved and has been put in place, to establish a cost sharing program with shrimp industry. New units have been sent to approximately 500 vessels which are replacing the existing log book program. The main difference with the new units are they are able to transmit the data over cell phone frequencies. The main action going on at the Gulf Council now is the red snapper action, Amendment 28, and that amendment is considering changing the allocation of red snapper, which is currently 51% commercial and 49% recreational, to any quota above the 9.12 million pound historical catch level would allocate quota above that 75% to the recreational fishery and 25% to the commercial fishery. The Council will meet the week of April 7 and review public comments. There have been public hearings in the Gulf and then the council is scheduling a special meeting in late May to take final action.

There was no public comment.

## NOAA Fisheries Budget Update

**D. Donaldson** stated congress passed an omnibus budget bill that included funding for 2014. He said that overall the budget was better than expected. There were only three areas that affect the Commission that took a cut and the most significant cut was in enforcement. The amount was a little over \$2 million and that includes the funding to the Joint Enforcement Agreements (JEA). **D. Donaldson** said Paul Doremus gave a presentation at a meeting last month on the NOAA management and assessment fees that will be taken from the budget and at this point it will be 3.9%. Some of the taxes have been waived in the past but it is not known if it will be waived for the upcoming year. He and the other two Commission Directors have met with P. Doremus to try to minimize the amounts and impacts to the Commissions' budget. **D. Donaldson** said the FY2015 President's budget has been developed and presented but he does not have any details at this point but will inform the Commission when he receives the information.

There was no public comment.

## Discussion of Legislative Issues and Actions

**D. Donaldson** stated the main legislative bill being discussed is the reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. The House has developed a draft and it has been distributed to the Commission and it was discussed at the last meeting. He said he has been told the Senate version should be distributed shortly and the Commission can submit comments at that time. He said final action of the bill will probably not be taken until later this year or early next year. **D. Donaldson** said there is a National Fish Habitat Conservation Act, Senate Bill 2080, which considers the conservation of fishing and aquatic communities in the United States. He said in the past these bills usually deal with freshwater but if it is marine related, he will keep the Commission informed.

There was no public comment.

## Briefing on the RESTORE Act Science Program

**Russ Beard**, Director of the National Coastal Data Development Center at Stennis Space, Acting Director for the NOAA Restore Science Program, and the Team Lead for the NOAA Line offices in Gulf of Mexico, gave a presentation on the RESTORE Act (in briefing book). He stated there is currently \$800,000 million in the Trust Fund. Their budget is \$40 million. He reviewed the legislative requirements and reviewed how the funds will be distributed. He said he has been working closely with the Commission and other agencies to get the program started. He stated an office has been provided for the Commission at Stennis Space Center (SSC) giving easier access to the science coordinator for the Restoration Council, the Deputy, and to him. The vision of the Act is long-term sustainability of the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem and the communities that depend on it. He said the priority under the requirements is to look at long-term projects that address management needs. Funds may not be used for existing or planned research by NOAA. The funds are not to fill budget shortfalls within the NOAA operational budget or not to be used for implementation or initiation of new regulations or the development or approval of a fisheries catch share program. He reviewed all partners involved, the goals, focus areas, priorities, challenges and opportunities, recent program actions, and future program actions.

**C. Nelson** asked where the Science Program contacts are located and **R. Beard** said all are located in the Gulf. **C. Blankenship** said he will discuss facilitating an Alabama representative with R. Beard after this meeting. **K. Lucas** asked who represents the Naval Research Lab and **R. Beard** stated he is a modeler with his expertise being in sediment transportation but would have to get back with her on his name. **R. Pausina** asked if a portion of the 2.5% in the NOAA part would be coordinated through the Commission. **R. Beard** stated yes, the language says that they may enter a cooperative agreement with the Commission and give a direct grant. He said the Restore Act Science Team is making the recommendation to the Executive Oversight Board that they should, because they may (bill language), do grants with the Commission. **R. Pausina directed staff to draft a letter to the appropriate personnel (R. Beard will provide names) asking that the 2.5% available money from the Restore Act be coordinated through the Commission via a cooperative agreement.** **D. Donaldson** asked if there was a timeline on when the funding will be available. **R. Beard** stated the RFP should be out in September with monies in the first quarter of 2015.

There was no public comment.

### **Presentation of Illegal, Unreported, Unregulated (IUU) Fishing**

**William Ward** from the Gulf Fishermen's Association gave a presentation on Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing. He stated the economic impacts of illegal fishing are estimated to be \$23 billion per year. He stated illegal fishing activity take up to 26 million tons of illegal fish every year. That is six times more than the entire US commercial fleet take legally. Illegal vessels are often associated with other types of crime including drug smuggling, illegal immigration, and human trafficking. He reviewed the International Fisheries Stewardship and Enforcement Act (IFSEA) and the Pirate Fishing Elimination Act. He stated the benefits of these acts would level the playing field, help in the sustainability in fisheries, and have more accurate data. He asked for the Commission to support passage of these bills. The entire presentation is in the briefing book. *No Action was taken on this item.*

There was no public comment.

### **Review of White Paper Regarding Red Snapper Management**

**D. Donaldson** stated this white paper is the first attempt at looking at the different scenarios if congress gave the Commission regulatory authority over red snapper management. It was pointed out that this paper focused on recreational and should be expanded to include the commercial side. It was also suggested that a team of lawyers would be needed instead of a staff lawyer. **D. Donaldson** will compile all comments and resend to the Commission for further review. **C. Matens** stated until the Commission receives direction to actually manage red snapper, it will be hard to plan for a set amount. **D. Donaldson** stated that the budget and identified resources should be accurately reflected.

*C. Nelson moved to resend the white paper to the commissioners for additional comments and to identify areas that need to be expanded upon, and include items that are not currently included, then have it presented at the October 2014 meeting. C. Matens seconded the motion.*

**R. Crabtree** commented that they need to research if the red snapper management will be moved from under the Magnusson Act because then they will have to decide how legal situations would be handled. If it stays under the Department of Commerce (DOC), the DOC will handle all legal issues. **C. Matens** stated it is important to start working on this but he would like to know how much each state is willing to provide as far as resources, i.e., biologists, enforcement, etc. It was also suggested to set up a coalition of the state's attorney generals staff to review the legal issues.

*After discussion, the motion passed with no opposition.*

There was no public comment



### Discussion of Commission Strategic Planning Activities

**D. Donaldson** presented a draft of the Commission Strategic Planning Activities. He asked if the Commission wants to move forward with this strategic planning activity. The Commission asked for this to be done because of the changes at the Commission and when making funding decisions it will help guide to decide which programs the states are in agreement are the most important. **C. Blankenship** suggested providing sub activities under each program sending the document back out for review by each state and discuss this again at the October meeting. **R. Pausina** reiterated to break down the programs and decide what their value are as a group and to individual states. He asked all the states to take time to review and comment on this document.

There were no public comments.

### Update on Review of the Commission's Bylaws and Operating Procedures

**R. Pausina** stated he asked for this agenda item because of the fishery disaster funds, oil spill recovery funds, and the potential of some regulatory authority and litigation to the Commission. He feels the Commission's Bylaws and Operating Procedures need to be updated and some items need more specificity. He asked Drue Winters to review the Commission's Bylaws and Operating Procedures and give recommendations. He stated technically, there is no oversight over the Commission.

**Drue Winters**, Staff Attorney for LDWF, made suggestions on changes/updates to the bylaws. She said there are six major items she feels need to be added/updated: an ethics provision; public meetings and transparency – how to handle notice of meetings, public comments, executive session and what is allowed to go on in the executive session; capturing minutes of the meetings which is currently not in the bylaws; voting procedures and proxies; cleaning up certain terms such as chairman to chair; and updating financial matters such as petty cash and the surety bond. She said there is a reference to a Table of Organization in the bylaws but it was not included.

**D. Donaldson** stated the Commission no longer uses petty cash and the surety bond is now \$300,000. He said there is a Table of Organization available and it is in the briefing book. **K. Lucas** asked to define "financial interest" in the bylaws. The Commissioners agreed to add language to post all CBM agendas on the GSMFC website in advance of all meetings. Changes to the agenda (additional items) may not be made after 48 hours before the meeting and there must be unanimous consent to change the agenda once it has been posted. **D. Donaldson** will send D. Winters language on the current process of how the agendas are prepared and how notice is given to the public on the meetings.

There was extensive discussion and suggestions were made by the commissioners for other changes. **D. Winters** will incorporate suggestions and distribute to the commissioners for review. Each state will check to see if there is a mechanism for the legislative and private citizen commissioner to appoint a proxy in their absence. **The revised bylaws/rules and regulations will be reviewed at the next meeting.**

There was no public comment.

### **Discussion of Legislative Committee**

**D. Donaldson** presented a report on developing a Legislative Standing Committee. *The Commission moved to create a legislative committee and the motion passed with no opposition.* **D. Donaldson** said he will poll the legislative people and decide on a date to meet to develop a plan on what the committee will do and the issues to discuss.

There was no public comment.

### **Update on SEDAR and MRIP Steering Committees**

**D. Donaldson** stated the Commission has a seat on both the SEDAR and MRIP Steering Committees and suggested the Commission be briefed on the activities of the Committees annually. He said the SEDAR Steering committee met once since the October 2013 meeting in January this year via conference call. He said they will utilize webinars for the data and assessment workshops when practical. They are planning on conducting both a data methods workshop in 2014 and an assessment methods workshop in 2015 if funds are available and develop best practices for the various workshops. They have discussed inviting a Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission representative to join the steering committee because Florida conducts various stock assessments on species that are mainly just Florida species. He said the proposed SEDAR assessment schedule and species being proposed to be assessed are in the information packet that was distributed.

**D. Donaldson** said the Commission is also a member of the MRIP Committee and this Committee also met in January of this year. He said they discussed the 2014 appropriations and the preliminary spend plans on the recreational side, and they are expecting to receive approximately \$8.5 to \$9 million. They are planning on utilizing the funds to pay for the approved MRIP proposals that were submitted. They are also looking at updating their terms of reference. He also stated that MRIP initially focused on pilot studies and testing methodologies but now they are moving towards operational activities and implementing and moving forward with improving recreational data. He said they now have a communication and education team that is getting word out about the new MRIP methodologies and developing protocols, and plan to have an annual work shop to receive feedback on the methodologies and protocols. **D. Donaldson** said if it is the Commission's pleasure, he will continue to brief them on the two Committees annually.

There were no public comments.

### **Interjurisdictional Fisheries Program Report (IJF)**

**S. VanderKoooy** gave a report on the IJF Program. He stated three fishery management plans, Gulf Menhaden, Blue Crab and Gulf and Southern Flounder, are in various stages of revision and all three should be finalized by the end of the year or shortly thereafter. He said he will send the Commissioners a list summarizing the dates and the extent of the FMPs that are currently out of date and potentially needing revision, and ask which species are priority for revision and then start the process after the first of the year. There are usually two FMPs being revised concurrently. He stated IJF continues to work closely with the LEC and updates several publications. They also

work closely with the Crab Subcommittee and Commercial/Recreational Fishery Advisory Panel. Projected 2014 IJF activities will be dominated by editorial work and eventual publication of the three FMPs currently in revision, and all final editing will be handled through email and webinars with Technical Task Force members.

**R. Pausina** asked how much money is spent on the fishery management plans in a given year. **S. VanderKooy** stated that the IJF Act gives \$750,000 that is split between the Atlantic, Pacific and Gulf States, minus taxes and fees, so the Gulf receives approximately \$230,000 each year. **R. Pausina** asked what is the value of the management plans and **S. VanderKooy** stated from his perspective they have potential. The coordination and collaboration of the five states in putting these documents together, vetting them amongst the agencies before they come into review here means it is a very comprehensive document, all of the agencies have weighed in unlike the Council where staff produces the plans, then provides options and then it goes back to the Council for all the various changes and acceptance. He said he thinks the states weigh in early enough that the material inside, the tools that are available and outlined in the management plans are potentially very valuable. It identifies all the data needs, the gaps, but the problem is getting these things implemented. **R. Pausina** said he encourages reevaluating publishing these huge documents and calling them management plans because all of the states do not adhere to them, it is just a culmination of the rules and regulations and practices of the five states and perhaps some agreement of recommendations on moving forward. He suggested having a committee meeting to look into moving the documents into a more user friendly document or website such as FINFO. **R. Pausina** also asked if there is any NGO type sustainability sections in the fishery management plans and **S. VanderKooy** said no, but there may be an appropriateness to ranking each fishery in the management plan as they fall into the standards, but is not sure how to pursue that. He said the Fishery Management Plan is a source document and there is value in that. **R. Pausina** stated he agreed that it is a great source document but he would like to pursue discussing modernizing the document. **C. Nelson** stated this is a fishery overview document and the IJF program requires producing these documents in the IJF process.

There was no public comment.

### **SEAMAP Program Report**

**J. Rester** gave a report on the SEAMAP. He stated that since the last meeting SEAMAP has completed the Bottom Longline Survey, the Vertical Line Survey, and the Fall Shrimp/Groundfish Survey. He said the Winter Plankton Survey was not conducted in 2014 due to ship time limitations within NMFS. The Bottom Longline and Vertical Line Surveys will start within the next few days and the Spring Plankton Survey will start next month. He said SEAMAP should be level funded for FY2014 at the FY2013 level which will be approximately \$2 million for the Gulf. The Commission continues to handle the SEAMAP data management responsibilities for the Gulf and they are working to fulfill the NRDA data request for all SEAMAP data that will be used to examine the impact of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill on biological resources in the Gulf of Mexico. He stated the Council passed a motion at their October 2013 meeting that requested “the SEAMAP Red Drum Work Group to formulate a Gulf-wide tagging program, incorporating what the various states already have in their red drum tagging program and so using the existing ideas and incorporating that into a Gulf-wide program.” The Commission will be providing comments

to the Council in the next few weeks. The SEAMAP continues providing reports on all activities including the 2013 Joint Annual Report of the three SEAMAP components which outlines program management, resources survey operation, information services activities, and proposed activities for FY 2014.

There was no public comment.

### **Sportfish Restoration Program Report**

**J. Ballard** gave a report on the Sportfish Restoration Program. He stated the Artificial Reef Subcommittee continues drafting a standardized monitoring protocol for artificial reef habitat across the Gulf of Mexico and the protocols will be modeled after existing long-term monitoring programs, utilizing comparable gear types and methodologies where possible. The goal of the program is to provide baseline data for artificial reefs. They are also exploring funding opportunities to support Gulf-wide Artificial Reef monitoring. Both the Gulf and South Atlantic Artificial Reef Subcommittees are updating the publication "Guidelines for Marine Artificial Reef Materials: Second Edition." He said they continue to promote the "Rigs to Reefs" program and are trying to get it to run more smoothly and timely so it will be beneficial to both the states and industry. He stated the pilot project "Mississippi Bight Lionfish Response Unit" was a success. The program assessed lionfish densities and reef associated species densities at different sites between Pensacola, Florida and the Mississippi Delta. He said there was interest from Alabama to continue this project this year and has received funding to go to the same and some new sites this year to assess any changes in lionfish densities. He said there is also funding to start an "Adopt a Reef" program to get the public involved in reef monitoring and lionfish assessment at those reefs. The funding is from USFWS Region 4 through the invasive species branch.

**D. Ellinor** asked if the funding will be for just the reefs he reported on or can they create their own program. **C. Blankenship** stated the local dive shops and local residents are interested in going out to shoot more lionfish and remove them from the reefs and they provide information back to the state. The data will be posted on the website for the public to view.

### **Fisheries Information Network Program Report**

**D. Donaldson** gave a report on the Fisheries Information Network Program. He gave a Power Point presentation reviewing all the programs under the FIN. He stated for the recreational catch/effort almost 37,000 interviews were conducted in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and on the east and west coast of Florida. They also conducted 1,100 interviews in Puerto Rico. He said less interviews were conducted this year due to the first year of new methodology. He stated the commercial trip ticket program allows for electronic reporting of data and they currently have almost 800 dealers online. He said this information is also used for federal quota monitoring as well as HMS reporting. He said there are over 30 million records loaded into the fin data management system and stated the commercial data trip tickets from 1985 to 2014 and biological data from 2002 to 2013 are in the system, and the recreational catch and effort data from 1981 to 2010 is also in the system. The system has been online since July 2002 accessible to confidential and non-confidential users. There are approximately 30 users with access to the confidential data. He said as far as biological sampling they have collected over 20,000 otoliths for almost 25 species

and this includes both commercial and recreational sampling. The data from this program has been used in recent SEDARs including the King Mackerel, Red Snapper, Red Grouper, Greater Amberjack and Gag Grouper.

### **Habitat Program Report**

**J. Rester** gave a report on the Habitat Program. He stated as mentioned earlier in the RESTORE Act Science Program report, he is the Commission representative involved with the Restore Act Program. He has been appointed to the Science Advisory Board which will provide input on the development of the Science Plan which is scheduled to be released for public comment this summer. He has also been working with several groups to develop monitoring plans for monitoring ecological and biological impacts of the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill. He also continues to monitor the Army Corps of Engineers public notices, environmental impact statements, and other sites for projects that may adversely impact marine fish habitat throughout the Gulf of Mexico. He has been working with Alabama on their marine special planning effort in coastal and offshore areas of Alabama and has also been working with the Kemp's Ridley project the Commission funded through the ODRP.

There was no public comment.

### **Aquatic Nuisance Species Project Update**

**James Ballard** reported the Aquatic Nuisance Program (ANS) provides coordination to oversee the Gulf and South Atlantic Regional Panel (GSARP) which is one of six regional panels under the ANS Task Force. As reported at the last meeting, due to federal budget cuts and sequestration last year, the funding level for the Panel has been reduced by 20%. He is working with Region 4 USFWS to move the funding from the national office to the regional office and he said it will be moved and they are also receiving \$60,000 on a five year grant. He is coordinating the Invasive Lionfish Control Ad-Hoc Committee which is charged with developing the "National Invasive Lionfish Prevention and Management Plan." Panel members are also collaborating on efforts to understand more about the Asian tiger shrimp and to assess the population and the impacts to the environment and native species. He reported the Commission database manager has developed a new database to house the RAT data that has been collected. The invasive species traveling trunk has been used by over 25 different organizations and they have received positive reviews and there is still demand to utilize the trunks. He said both sub-awards have been completed and they will receive a final report at the upcoming meeting. The next ANSTF meeting will be May 7-8, 2014 in Arlington, VA and he is currently setting up a joint meeting with the western region which will encompass 38 states participating.

### **Economic Data Collection**

**A. Miller** stated the Economic Data Collection program started in July 2008 and the funding will end in June of this year. He said they are working to finish the data collections, finalize the reports and complete obligations to NOAA. The program consists of three different components: data collection, research and analysis, and outreach and dissemination. He said they completed the Economic Survey of the Inshore Shrimp Fleet for 2008 and 2012 and recently completed a survey

for the recreational shrimpers, receiving a very good response. He said they have also collected economic data from the processors and dealers and the report will be on the website in the near future. They have also collected data on expenditures of marine anglers throughout the five Gulf States as part of a national study coordinated by NOAA and the report should be available soon. They are conducting a survey on recreational anglers to determine values for the for-hire and charter mode on species. He reviewed the Economic Modeling/Analysis for the commercial and recreational industry and they have sponsored several work shops for fisheries economists to share information, and have received positive feedback. The Power Point presentation may be obtained by request from the GSMFC office.

### **Oil Disaster Recovery Program (ODRP)**

**R. Hode** reported the ODRP ends September 30, 2015. He gave a report on the different programs under ODRP. He stated most contracts and sub-awards should end on or before July 2015 in order to close out the program in a timely manner. He stated the Committee discussed how to use approximately \$500,000 in unobligated funds. The detailed report on the ODRP may be obtained by request through the GSMFC. The ODRP **moved** that the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission act in a coordinating capacity to receive and distribute funds provided under the Saltonstall Kennedy Act through NOAA Fisheries in support of the Great American Seafood Cook-off to be conducted in concert with the annual Louisiana Seafood Show and Exposition; and, that the Commission contract with the Gulf of Mexico Seafood Marketing Coalition for the facilitation and conduct of the Great American Seafood Cook-off in order to draw on the Coalition's experience and capabilities in creating a new and lasting awareness of the uniqueness of Gulf Seafood at regional and national levels. **R. Hode** stated the Committee passed the motion with one opposition, stating the Cook-off would serve a greater benefit as a Gulfwide event. **K. Lucas moved to accept the motion by the ODRP.** **C. Blankenship seconded and the motion passed with one opposition.**

**R. Hode** also reported on the Kemp's Ridley nesting program and stated USFWS may not continue funding this program. **K. Lucas moved to approve \$150K to continue the Kemp's Ridley nesting program. The motion was seconded and passed with no opposition.** **D. Donaldson** stated a letter was sent to the USFWS asking for their continued support of the program but to this date, no response has been received. **Benny Galloway** thanked the Commission for their continued support of the Kemp's Ridley nesting program.

**A. Miller** gave Power Point presentations on both the Gulf FINFO and the Gulf Seafood Trace programs that are available by request from the Commission office. He stated the FINFO site has been launched and this was an initiative of the five Gulf States through the ODRP program to supply information about sustainability and sustainable fisheries management in an easy and understandable format. The website address is GulfFishInfo.org.

**A. Miller** reported the Trace program was launched in Boston two years ago and to date 66 companies have signed up for the program but the total number of participants and interactions are over 1,000. There has been over 42 million cumulative pounds of product moved through the system. He said they continue to work to enhance the program in terms of a traceability platform in data quality and marketing; integrating the electronic trip ticket into the Trace Register System and integrating the trace registering system with the individual software applications that the processors and dealers have; and doing the data check in order to assure the information means something. The website for the Gulf Seafood Trace Program is [gulfseafoodtrace.org](http://gulfseafoodtrace.org).

### **Charles H. Lyles Award**

**C. Nelson** *moved to select Mike Voisin as the Charles H. Lyles Award Recipient to be awarded at the October 2014 Meeting, and to rename the award the Lyles/Simpson award. The motion was seconded and passed with no opposition.*

### **State Directors' Reports**

**R. Pausina** stated all the reports have been submitted and distributed to the Commissioners. He asked if there were any questions or comments on the individual reports. The State reports are under **Attachment III**.

### **Future Meetings**

**N. Marcellus** stated the next annual meeting will be in Mississippi. She asked the Mississippi Commissioners to contact her with any preferences on hotels or where to have the meeting. Once the location is decided, she will send formal proposals to the hotels. The Spring meeting will be in Alabama and she asked the Alabama contingent to be thinking about where they would like to have it.

### **Publications List**

A new listing of publications was provided for informational purposes.

### **Other Business**

**D. Donaldson** stated NMFS will host another National State Directors meeting this year on the west coast. It was suggested to develop a steering committee to help guide the discussion items and he asked the Commissioners to appoint a Gulf representative. **J. Miller** *moved to appoint Kelly Lucas as the GOM Representative on the Committee. The motion was seconded and passed with no opposition.*

**There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 4:26 pm.**

## ATTACHMENT I

### Verbatim Public Comment Under Agenda Item 4, C, 1 – Menhaden Advisory Committee

**Markham Dickson**, boat captain in Shell Beach commented that he has been fishing in that area for the last 5 years in Breton Sound and has had exposure to the Menhaden fishery. He stated he is concerned because he has seen a lot of the top of the food chain predators, big fish, fish kills particularly red fish and jack cravel. So many times there will be a big line of fish that are dead that are all jacks and red fish that are mixed in with pogies and over the summer. There is concern that these fish are being killed in the process of catching menhaden because when they catch the menhaden in the big purse seine, then draw it closed, the concern is in the summer the oxygen levels are so low that when they are condensed with all of these fish, this slimy mass, the process of the time it takes to suck the menhaden off the top, that these big fish could be dying inside these purse seines. I think the issue I'm bringing up is, is there a way to quantify that. Is there a way to know? When you think about trawl bycatch, you bring the whole catch in, dump it on the boat and you know the croakers are dead and you throw them back because you saw that they died. The idea with these bigger fish and the way the purse seine works, from what I understand, there is a possibility that you don't know because everything is not actually brought on board. So what I'm trying to propose is hopefully that we can consider some type of monitoring with wildlife to figure out if this is taking place because it's not proof positive. I have had discussions with people from Omega and it came to a point where they are like we don't know if we killed the fish, I don't know if they killed the fish but the point of the matter is they are dead and hopefully we can do some research to figure out why. It could have been other things that killed the fish. It's just jacks and red fish, why aren't the croakers and the white trout and the specs all mixed in with this fish kill like it was just oxygen or red tide because if it's indiscriminate it will kill all the fish. So it's fishy to say that just the red fish and the jacks are there and lots of time it's mixed with menhaden and a lot of times the fish kill will be mixed with the byproduct slime from the pump station. It's this brown foam with little scales in it so lots of times it's all mixed together so the ideal. Hopefully, we can get something because I know out in Breton Sound there's not much regulation. Everything that happens out there it's not as if officials are following the boat watching what is happening. So the only think you can quantify is okay the catch that they bring back how much bycatch is mixed in with that because of the process of the harvest the larger fish usually aren't because its coming through this right when it's pumped out and all that. I guess just trying to say as a local fishermen, as somebody who loves fish, have lived fish my entire life, just hoping we can get a good line of communication between wildlife, state wildlife and the menhaden fishery and maybe try to figure out if some of these red fish are dying from it.

**Harry Lowenburg**, Gulf Restoration Network, stated they are an organization that works in all five Gulf States on any issues that have to do with the health of the Gulf of Mexico and my job is the organizer of the "Gulf Fish Forever" campaign. We came to the meeting yesterday (MAC) and I want to bring up that there was a large audience there. I noticed a real disconnect between what was going on in the Committee and what was going on in the audience and it's reflected in the report you just heard, it was very very little connection at all. The way that I see it is that the committee, which is composed largely of industry and then one representative from each of the states has no representation from any other fishing interests other than the industry, no representation from any conservation interests, and it is focused on how we maximize the industry. How can we better inform so that we can be more efficient and more effective in catching these



fish. The problem is that the fish are very very important to the entire ecosystem and the telltale for me is when there was a discussion about whether it would be helpful to have some modelling around relationship between prey and predator that was dismissed immediately as that's not a menhaden issue that's a Gulf of Mexico issue. I would say that would be the response I would anticipate from your committee on anything that had to do with affect of the menhaden fishery on the entire ecosystem. What we came to hoping to see and to ask for is an ecosystems based approach to managing the fishery so that we are monitoring what is the affect of taking such a large quantity, is it a large quantity, where are the limits, the Atlantic coast commission has now the Atlantic coast fishery now has a cap, that was brought up but what is the affect that is going to be on our resource here. Does that mean there is going to be more taken? We are supportive of having this industry, we want to make sure that it is carefully monitored so we want to make sure that there's observers, that there's electronic monitoring, there's transparency and that the bycatch is being reported as well. I want to just bring up to you that as the committee operates now and it is chaired by someone from the industry, as it's operating now it is not looking at the whole benefit of the Gulf of Mexico and at the affect on other fisheries, the affect on the ecosystems. There is some endangered species out there that have to be protected by law and if you're not going to be doing it, if you're not going to be bringing those subjects up then we need to go elsewhere. Thank you very much.

**R. Pausina** stated he appreciates those comments but as a reminder this entity has no regulatory power. **Harry Lowenburg** stated he is very aware of that but there is an obligation to recommend and to be looking at the benefit. **R. Pausina** said it's generally a state by state issue particularly with menhaden and he will speak for Louisiana, he feels they have a great program and they watch all of the species very well to insure that in action with the other species, with gears and bycatch and such. He stated he would encourage Mr. Lowenburg to visit the states independently and work it from there.

**Sean Simeson**, third year law student at Loyola University in New Orleans stated he has been researching the menhaden industry as part of one of his classes. I've come to learn and I'd like to echo some of my peers here and say that menhaden are a pretty vital resource to the overall health of the Gulf of Mexico. One, they are a very important food source for marine predators such as larger fish like tuna, sea birds like osprey and brown pelican, and some marine mammals. In addition to that, menhaden help to clean and filter ocean water in the gulf and this is a process that helps to maintain healthy oxygen level in gulf waters and it can help to eliminate the build up of some harmful pollutants that can cause catastrophic environmental problems. I recognize that the government and the Commission's position is that menhaden are not overfished nor is it a threat of overfishing exists however just through my research I've come to be a little bit skeptical of the voracity of that assertion. What I do know is that pogies are very important to the overall health of the gulf for the reasons that I just mentioned and I also know that the menhaden fishery is relatively under regulated in comparison to some other fisheries. For example, there is a fishing season, as I understand, but there is no gear restrictions, no annual cap, nor or there any other affirmative requirements such as bycatch monitoring. So given those two facts in my opinion they serve as the basis for a more comprehensive regulatory structure for the menhaden fishery and I'm here to say that I think that a more comprehensive management structure should include an annual cap on the amount of menhaden that can be drawn from the Gulf of Mexico annually in addition

to the fact that there should be independent bycatch monitoring over the fishery. That you very much for your time and attention I appreciate it.

**Andrea Rogers**, a resident of the Mississippi gulf coast and also a third year law student at Loyola. I will make this quick because I am essentially echoing what my peers have said. I come today to express my concerns over the lack of a cap on the menhaden fishery. My concern is that we are not going to leave enough menhaden in the water to perform its other vital functions as both a food source for other marine life and as a filter feeder helping to maintain balance in the water. I feel that because of the menhaden's overall importance to the health of the gulf that it's insufficient to measure this stock in the way we do other fish, so today I would like to urge you to recommend to the states that they adopt an ecosystem based fisheries management plan, one that would take into account the vital functions that menhaden provide. I feel this is vital to the overall health of the gulf as well as to the longevity of the menhaden stock and the fisheries that rely on it. Thank you.

**Emily Posner**, new policy counsel at the recirculating farms coalition, stated they are a national nonprofit with over 6,000 members based here in New Orleans and have 1,000 members throughout the gulf region. We come to the table because we support and advocate on behalf of recirculating farmers, consumers, advocates and academics who are supporting a new innovative agricultural techniques that use close system recirculating farms using hydroponics, aquaponics and aquaculture systems. We're about to build a model farm that models these types of agricultural here in New Orleans and we come to the table because menhaden is a product that is often times used in fish feed and we want to make sure that our farmers have the opportunity to source sustainable fish feed so they can market this type of sustainable seafood and it's humanely raised seafood to their consumers. We're very concerned about the status of the menhaden fishery currently and I want to bring, I do echo what has already been said but I want to bring other points to the table. The first point is really one about democracy and I think Harry spoke very eloquently about the current make up about the menhaden advisory committee and we would urge this Commission to seat one or two additional members onto that committee so that there would be additional voices at the table when recommendations do come to ya. Whether that be a member of environmental groups or commercial or recreational fishing industry we would hope that we would begin to see an enlargement of that committee so that recommendations have a more holistic representation of what the interests in the gulf are around the menhaden industry. Second, I would like to encourage that this Commission recommend to the states as well as to encourage that menhaden advisory committee to look more deeply to as how shoreline loss and the BP oil spill is impacting this industry. We are very concerned that the loss of our shoreline and our coastline is destroying the habitat for the menhaden to repopulate itself. So that we continue to have a robust industry and have the opportunity to create important fish oils and fish feed for our human consumption. However that wasn't much part of the conversation yesterday and we do believe that kind of science needs to be looked into and that type of science needs to be incorporated into the future fishery management plan. Those are the types of things that we believe are essential to having an ecosystem based management plan. The other aspect of an ecosystem based management plan would be to incorporate predator prey relationships into how we manage our fishery. However, sadly when I saw that the various types of data that were passed out that were priorities that we would like to see incorporated into the future of the fishery management plan, predator prey relationships and ecosystem based modeling was either low or medium to low priorities. I'd like to see that change so that data is known and we can make important decisions

with more data about this management plan. Again, I have been for the last six to eight months trying to find data as to how the BP oil spill has impacted this industry. I know at the last MAC in Texas the industry itself was asking for that type of data and I'd really encourage that we work together to try to make sure that data is made public as we know the dolphins in Barrataria Bay are very sick and one of the findings about the dolphins was that they were tremendously underweight and menhaden is a source food for the dolphins in Barrataria Bay. So with that said I would really encourage this Commission to go back to the states and go to NOAA and try to get this information and make it available so that when the future fishery management plan is published we will have all that data so that we can make appropriate decisions with all of the data when we move forward with the next fishery management plan this summer and the next Commission. With that I would like to conclude my comments thank you for the time and I do appreciate the making of public comment I do want to put that on the table at the last meeting this opportunity wasn't there and I do think it's important so that the public can participate. Thank you.

**Ben Landry**, Director of Public Affairs for Omega Protein stated he just wanted to clear up a couple of things that were said. I think some of the previous speakers really marginalized the stock assessment that was conducted last year. It was very comprehensive, done over the course of the year and that is the best available science that we have and all of you that allocated resources in terms as your professionals as well as the NMFS to work on this so that we can identify the health of the gulf menhaden population and the results of that assessment was that it is not overfished nor is overfishing occurring and until there is something new in terms of the research then that is the best guidance that you guys can use. In terms of the unregulated nature of the menhaden fishery that is also not exactly the case, there are reference points, thresholds and targets that must be maintained by the fishery. If thresholds or targets are exceeded then action is taken. There is an immediate stock assessment to determine the health of the population so there's a notion in that the fishery is unregulated that it's the wild wild west is simply just not the case so there are a lot of things that I think were just said that research over the last 10, 20, 30 years may disprove a little bit so I just wanted to talk about the stock assessment because I don't think there's a lot of questions about whether the population is healthy or not. Thank you.

**Marianne Cufone**, environmental attorney said she has a background in marine science and sat on a number of the GMFMC advisory panels for many years and is now a professor here at Loyola Law School and some of those are my students that came up today to talk to you. It is their first foray into the policy management process and I just want to follow up on what everybody said. I think there's been some really strategic and smart comments made here today that we've been talking about the menhaden industry for many years, I can remember back in 2007 and 2008 when there was a push for a cap in Texas and that happened, there was recently a cap put on the Atlantic fishery and so I don't think it's unreasonable to discuss that here. I know the Gulf fishery is only two companies and so there's some political nature to all of this and that the MAC is almost entirely comprised of government and cities and those two companies so I think it would be great to expand the composition to other folks who might have an interest in this like say the general public whose fish those actually are. Additionally, I would like to address the comments that were just made about the stock assessment, I think you know it's a great process that we've done another stock assessment it's been something like 8 years or so since we've done one but by no means is it a comprehensive assessment. I sat through the MAC yesterday and watched the scientific priorities

fly off the board like they were meaningless and that was very disheartening to me. One of the things I think that was most important on that that was sort of discarded as into the either I believe the terms were, was a predator/prey relationship study. We don't have that in the stock assessment and we don't have that and it's been demoted to a low if not no priority. And that's something that everybody's been talking about here today. So just because the stock isn't overfished or considered undergoing overfishing by legal definition doesn't necessarily mean the stock is adequate to do the things it needs to do in the Gulf of Mexico. So just kind of wanted to remind everybody of that that there are other scientific priorities that ought to be included in the stock assessment that ought to be discussed at a meeting such as this if we really do want that industry to continue long term. Thanks so much I appreciate your time.

**Phil Cossich**, attorney in Louisiana stated he represents Daybrook Fisheries and Omega Protein. I probably know as much about menhaden as any lawyer except for my daughter who does it all the time. I'm also one of the attorney's appointed by the judge in BP to be on the steering committee. As part of my role on the steering committee for the last three years I ran the science, I was on the science team so I know a little bit about what's happened, I know what's out there, a lot of science you want to know is happening is part of the NRDA process, there was a lot of science we were involved in and I also represent the oyster industry and a lot of the shrimpers so the ecosystem matters are very important to all of us, there is a lot of great science that is going to be coming out and it's going to answer a lot of your questions. It's going to shock a lot of these thinking. Speculations, I'm a Tulane Lawyer grad, my daughter a Loyola grad, always learn your facts before you bring up your positions. There's going to be some great science coming out that's going to show the importance of this industry in the overall ecosystem. Particularly Barrataria Basin and Breton Sound. It will be coming out very soon and this industry is very very concerned about the fishery as much as anybody and they are very concerned about the ecosystem and they have funded a lot of the research. Trust me I've seen it all, we've hired the best scientists from Valdez, the guys who were working there were working with us. The Steering Committee did it, the industry did it, and the states have done it. There's a lot of great stuff going to come out so I say be patient, this industry is well regulated, it's the most transparent industry I've ever seen in fisheries and I've dealt with all of the industries. Be patient, don't do something just to do something, let's do what's right for this industry because the menhaden are important for everyone. Thank you.

## Attachment II Rigs to Reefs Summary by Laura Bowe

### Welcome/Introductions/Meeting

Laura Bowie (Gulf of Mexico Alliance)

Welcomed participants and explained purpose of the meeting. She explained the goals of GOMA and how we were asked to co-host this meeting with Gulf State Marine Fisheries Commission. Then she asks participants to introduce themselves.

### Overview

### Federal Program Updates

Doug Peter (Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement)

Hurricanes took rigs down prematurely, interim policy where toppled structures could not be placed as reefs, brakes on RTR program. Public engagement, June 2013, new policy relaxes the 2009 policy, structures evaluated on case by case basis as to whether RTR option pursued. No longer a 5 mile rule but still evaluating if artificial reefs are too big or too close together; hurricane toppled are not utilized (non-starter with the existing policy). BSEE is still in favor of RTR if all regulations are met; state takes on full liability once the agreements are met and structures are in place. It is a 3 page policy.

- Since the interim policy came out, there are 90 structures are being considered; 50 or so have gone through the artificial reef process; states have already been talking with the oil companies. We don't proceed unless the state has the permits in place; working with 2 in AL USACE as of Friday. Identify structures that may have RTR potential and line operators up with the state when possible.
- Copies of the policy can be found on the BSEE website: <http://www.bsee.gov/Exploration-and-Production/Decommissioning/Rigs-to-Reefs/>
- Question about removing of decommissioned rigs – the 2009-2013 meetings were taken into consideration when developing the current policy. If structures were not properly prepared, they were scattered, components are loose, debris, concern about ocean dumping when that many rigs are left on the ocean floor. RTR is a departure from the original policy that allows rigs to be used. There has been talk about an interactive map with the opportunity to see which ones would make good RTR candidates. I do not know the status but there are people in our office working on that; Right now I don't have the ability to put a map out there.
- GOMA is currently identifying several layers to go in a marine planning database, including BOEM's Marine cadaster. This might make a good layer to add - who is doing what in which areas, avoid potential user conflicts. The compiled data will go into a dashboard that will link to different datasets; might make permitting efficient and planning go smoother.
- Gulf Council has started assembling what platforms are available, looking at this strategically, existing permitting areas, user conflict areas, we've begun to look at this (i.e. for shrimp they want to increase trawl-able area,

making a smaller footprint). As we populate this database we can make it available.

- BSEE's list of criteria that must be met (environmental factors): Architectural review, not a definitive list, artificial reef review, no structures near active pipelines, there are a number of people reviewing from different aspects. Trying to figure out what is a safe distance from a known archeological site, etc. is difficult. Is it 1000' away? BOEM has defined distances, this is laid out in the review process, each type of review NTL (Notice To Leases); Advice to operators about the interpretation of our policies.
- USACE and BOEM are looking for different things during application process; would be easier to know ahead of time.
- Majority of NTL information can be found on the BOEM website: <http://www.boem.gov/Notices-Letters-Information-to-Lessees-and-Operators/>
- In AL, the decommissioning application is going on simultaneously with the application we have with the Corp. The outcome of one will affect the other one. The state is the permit holder; we apply to the USACE for this permit. The state has to get the permit from the USACE to remove it completely.
- Last year, Shell started a study that looked at this (ROV data). We took into consideration an ESV approach, what would the resource be used for. We've come a long way with this study and about to go back and look at the structural stability of the structure.
- The process is BSEE gets a decommissioning application and the review starts. USACE is permitting the structure that will remain. NOAA, role is primarily consultation in reviewing the permits from the other agencies. NOAA has a role with the National Artificial Reef plan, last revised in 2009, that plan provides a lot of criteria regarding suitability of materials, also consultation in the development of the oil and gas rigs in the first place; try to get the rigs sited in the right place in the first place; largely an advisory role.
- Essential fish habitat under the Magnuson Act is the main legislation that requires consultation with NOAA; gives recommendations but are not regulatory.
- The RTR part is a small portion of the overall decommissioning process.
- ESV is harder to quantify if it is an ecological review (quantifying species diversity, etc). But if ESV for recreational fishing, then it is much quicker. Several universities in FL have economic data about the benefits of artificial reefs.

- Fishing community is concerned about the removal of rigs; if they are taken out, you are removing habitat. Marine protected area advisory committee, national part of NFWS, we discussed creating marine protected areas.
- How we can use science to inform the decommissioning process; what would happen if we leave it, what would happen if we take it out.
- Call US Coast Guard to get an official ruling for navigation markers prior to the structure being deployed. Send the permit from the USACE and USCG can get a final assessment.

### State Updates

Mike McDonough (LA)

How RTR works in LA:

- Operator approaches them with an idea
- 73 offshore sites,
- we investigate a possible site, tow distance, reef site has adequate clearance, enough space within the site to accommodate the structure
- Most of our sites are within our planning area created in the 80s to create the planning areas; from there we take opportunities when they are presented to us
- If we agree the structure is a good option for reefing, we work with the federal agencies and the operator to work through the process

The LA Enhancement of Fisheries Act (1980s) allows the program to operate. Minor changes since then.

Craig Nelson (AL)

We just added the RTR component, references the artificial reef program

Brooke Shipley-Lozano (TX)

- 67 sites,
- general permitting area with 33 sites, the rest are case by case basis;
- attend decommissioning world in Houston each year, get the word out to operators we are interested;
- depth varies,
- Planning areas were agreed upon, least objectionable areas
- Need to develop a new set of guidelines for special exception artificial reefs.

Special siting requirements?

TX: 2 years to get planning zones approved then the policy was revoked. We have two defined planning zones now started in 2009, high island area began as general permitting area, but now it is considered a planning zone. Sat down with user groups and discussed the zones, had a conflict with the shrimping association, planning zones have been publically vetted but outside of these areas they must be vetted.

NOAA: special artificial reefs sites being used for toppled platforms?

LA: After Katrina, there were a number of toppled platforms that were selected under the program

AL: We have 1200 square miles of artificial reefs zones that must meet USCG clearance; 5 different jackets and/or platforms reefed right now starting in the late 80s until the 90s; reefed under special artificial reef sites; program was dormant for a long time; about a year ago, we started trying to get a RTR component into our artificial reef plan; been contacted by 3 operators for entry. It may go up if I can get to the decommissioning world next year, would love to see it increase.  
BSEE: 445 federal structures that have been incorporated into the reef sites overall.

MS: 8 sites in the main pass area; total of 12 structures down, all of our sites as smaller sites that accommodate multiple platforms; would like to get more out there and learn the process; water depths 150, deepest at 400' (outside of state waters) Deepest state waters are 90', so we have to look outside the state waters Does the hypoxic zone come into consideration? Decision making process?

LA: Our planning areas were created so long ago but not sure this was part of the conversation; contractors we have worked with do think they provide refuge from the hypoxia zone.

AL: Does BOEM have jurisdiction over state water rigs? What if the rigs are taken offshore?  
BOEM: New reef sites developed in federal waters would be of interest to BOEM so we would comment on it.

On any of the RTR, have any of the decommissioned reefs been left just like they are in the water? By doing that aren't you eliminating costs?

- Cost would skyrocket, the state has liability, state won't take that chance 50K-quarter of a million a dollars a year to keep the navigation aids working, companies are not going to want to maintain, can partially abandon
- Funding for the RTR programs comes from the operators; half of the money that is realized savings comes from the operators; liability insurance, staff salary.
- Operators look at it from an economically viable option, what will cost us more? Will it be a viable reef? Look at what is around it.

Are there any obstacles to getting things through your program?

- MS: A heads up, giving us a time frame; let us approach the oil company and give them options; we've had a few that came in so late it wasn't really an option; we can actually approach these guys, that kind of communication would be helpful.

Difference between artificial reefs and RTR programs?

- RTR is a large component of the artificial reefs program in LA;
- Opposite in AL; pyramids, reef falls, tanks, liberty ships, freighters, chicken transport devices.

## **Industry Updates**

Stephen Truchon (Shell) via powerpoint

Platforms are reaching retirement, we are at a time when the number of rigs to be removed is at an all-time high. Study to determine the platform ecology and determine options for converting



to artificial reef.

Project objectives: Mississippi Canyon platform, installed in the 1970's, document marine life, id potential decommissioning options, inform mgt, decisions.

- Used a ROV video to conduct biological characterization
- Took video log data , pooled the data from all the years, looked at the species diversity at different depths.
- Looked at ESV in 4 ways: provisioning services, regulating services, cultural services, and supporting services
- For each decommissioning alternative, they looked at the human activity categories and ecosystem services
- Looked at pros and cons of several decommissioning options considering the liability, ecological impacts, short vs long term impact, etc, ranked and scaled all the options

Project Conclusions: Services currently provided by living marine resources associated with platforms would be disrupted by any of the decommissioning alternatives removing the deck and leaving the jacket fully in place and at the water surface would retain the highest level of ESV; 2014 ROV survey planned; potential future studies on attraction vs production studies; additional biotic assessments; large scale linkages, invasive species transmission, alternative/actual usage

How many RTR do you have out there right now?

- 3-4 so far; we are on the pinnacle right now. We started down this path to look at trying to get the dialogue going with the states; the front end science is only to add to the decommissioning program.
- Exxon: We do have a scientific study in place to look at the decommissioning process; looking at species diversity; it is informing everyone's decisions about what happens.

What is a common depth for reefed rigs?

- Not regulatory but mandated by the Coast Guard,
- 85 is not a magic number; we've permitted 6' before, done on an individual basis.

You might want to assess seasonal variation in future studies, not just vertical zonation

- It is hard to get ship time and ROV time and it is expensive so we try and coordinate that when we can; on the datasets I showed, we might be able to do that
- Many managed reefs, biomass will increase over time, a given habitat may produce a higher carrying capacity could have implications on the true value of the system
- Right now there is not a coordinated effort between the oil companies, but we do have some higher level studies

Have you used any technology that allows you to see things over time; drop them down and leave them?

- Good point, ROV study was just a quick snapshot; a longer term study is of interest to us but we have not done it yet

Any anticipated activities from Shell coming up?

- We may have some in the next 6-10 years.

Do you ever coordinate with the universities on the data gathering?

- Yes, for this study we developed a SOW and sought proposals; got a lot of great proposals back in; this one was done with CSA in coordination with Shell scientists.

Any other industry folks want to share?

- Exxon: We are looking at a few structures that need to be decommissioned in the near future; 1 is a deep sea structure; exploring options of what would be best to do.

Would this be a good meeting to host each year at the spring or fall GSMFC meeting?

We could get this set-up on a more regular basis if you see a use of sharing information in this type of setting.

- With all the NOC stuff, I think it would be beneficial to the fishing industry, especially because of the potential impacts to fishing industry
- What would help is that it is meant to be informal, it would be helpful if we do this more often, if we could come up with on the industry side, what objectives you would like to cover, what's going to happen at the meeting, will help us prepare if we have some guidelines, not too limiting but some more guidance so we can send the right people.
- Maybe have more targeted discussions in the future. Should also invite more of the stakeholders such as commercial and recreational fishing.

We will make sure and capture these at our next meeting

**Adjourn**

**ATTACHMENT III  
STATE REPORTS**

FLORIDA FISH & WILDLIFE CONSERVATION COMMISSION  
Nick Wiley, Executive Director



DIVISION OF MARINE FISHERIES MANAGEMENT  
Director: Jessica McCawley

The major responsibilities of the Division of Marine Fisheries Management include: (1) development and implementation of marine fisheries management and policies; (2) angler outreach and marine aquatic resource education; (3) commercial fisheries assistance; (4) the state artificial reef program; (5) monitoring compliance with the marine fisheries trip ticket reporting requirements through audits of applicable fish house records; (6) administrative penalty assessments for violations of specified fisheries regulations, and retrieval of lost and abandoned spiny lobster, stone crab and blue crab traps; and (7) issuance of Special Activity Permits. Highlights of staff efforts in 2013 [i.e., state fiscal year 2013/2014] are summarized below.

**ANALYSIS AND RULEMAKING SECTION**

The Marine Fisheries Management and Policy Development program develops regulatory and management recommendations for consideration by FWC Commissioners designed to ensure the long-term conservation of Florida's valuable marine fisheries resources.

The 2013 Florida Legislature passed one bill that allowed for four additional recreational license-free fishing days.

During the state fiscal year 2013/2014, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) approved a number of amendments to marine fisheries rules contained in Chapter 68B of the Florida Administrative Code.

A Restricted Species Endorsement Exemption was created for Florida's veterans wishing to enter the commercial fishing industry. The endorsement waived the income requirements for a restricted species endorsement for Florida veterans wishing to enter into commercial fishing for one year for veterans meeting certain requirements.

At the June 2013 Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) meeting, Commissioners voted to let the recreational harvest of snook in Gulf of Mexico waters reopen to harvest Sept. 1 after being closed since Jan. 2010. Gulf waters were closed to harvest due to a 2010 cold kill that negatively impacted

The recreational and commercial harvest of giant anemones (*Condylactis gigantea*) was closed off of Florida state and federal waters. Sand perch, dwarf sand perch and unicorn filefish were removed from the Marine Life rule. The size limits for angelfish and butterfly fish species were applied to the recreational sector and also applied to angelfish hybrids.

A recreational harvest season for gag grouper was established for Franklin, Wakulla, Jefferson and Taylor counties, Indian Pass Apalachicola Bay and the Steinhatchee River to be April 1 through June 30. For the rest of the Gulf of Mexico excluding Monroe County a July 1 through December

3 season was established to be consistent with the federal Gulf of Mexico Fisheries Management Council (GMFMC) season.

The FWC Commission eliminated the February 1 through March 31 grouper closure for black, red, yellowfin, yellowmouth, rock hind, red hind, and scamp. These species of grouper are now open year-round in state waters of the Gulf.

Consistency with the GMFMC was established for gray triggerfish. A recreational and commercial closure of June 1 through July 31 was established and a recreational two-fish daily bag limit and a commercial trip limit of 12-fish were established.

A rule was created that waived the recreational fishing license requirements for divers harvesting lionfish using specific gears and excluded lionfish from recreational and commercial bag limit requirements.

FWC Commission removed the venting tool requirement in Gulf state waters, making state regulations consistent with rules in federal waters.

A rule cleanup process has begun that will simplify rule language and improve enforceability. Nineteen chapters were amended in the first phase of this process and a general chapter has been created comprised of definitions and provisions that apply to all saltwater fishing.

The 2014 Gulf of Mexico red snapper federal recreational season will be 40 days, opening at 12:01 a.m., June 1, 2014, and closing at 12:01 a.m., July 11, 2014. State season subject to change....

Several changes to the recreational and commercial management of swordfish in state waters were approved by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC). Changes to state rules approved by the Commission will allow fishermen who participate in this new commercial fishery to land and sell their catch in Florida. Additional changes include designating swordfish as a restricted species and specifying hook and line as allowable gear for swordfish harvest in state waters. Several changes to state rules are also consistent with existing federal rules, including a change to the cleithrum-to-keel (see below) minimum size limit for recreational and commercial swordfish harvest.

Tarpon and bonefish rules were amended to make them a catch-and-release-only species. However, anyone in pursuit of a tarpon IGFA record may possess a tarpon with a tarpon tag. The vessel limit was reduced to one tagged tarpon per day and a limit of one tarpon tag per person per year was established.

#### **OUTREACH AND EDUCATION SUBSECTION**

The Outreach and Education subsection objective is to inform the public and increase public participation in the management and preservation of Florida's marine resources by heightening their awareness of and personal responsibility toward these resources.

Overall there were: (1) 60,356 outreach fishing event contacts; (2) 1,169 presentation and seminar contacts; (3) 13,726 email, telephone, mail outs and in-person contacts; and (4) 221,799 website contacts during fiscal year 2012-2013.

Nine Kids' Fishing Clinics (KFC) were conducted in coastal cities throughout Florida. A total of 2,470 children, 637 volunteers and an estimated 1,498 parents attended the KFC's. All participating children received a rod and reel combo provided by Fish Florida! or purchased with donations from individuals and businesses from the hosting community. Fishing vessel partners took 382 participants on fishing excursions to reinforce the Kids' Fishing Clinics curriculum.



Five *Ladies, Let's Go Fishing!* (LLGF) seminars were conducted in five locations. A total of 198 women participated. In addition to learning what FWC does to conserve fisheries resources in Florida, the participants at these events learned about how they can have a positive impact on Florida's marine resources and what they can do to promote fish conservation while fishing.

Four one-day events targeting 86 current and future female recreational anglers were conducted. These shore-based clinics focus on the Sport Fish Restoration Program, basic saltwater fishing skills (casting, knot tying, rods and reels, conservation equipment, terminal tackle, and lures/bait), how FWC functions to conserve marine fisheries resources (research, outreach, and management), catch-and-release techniques, and ways participants can support and be actively involved in the conservation of Florida's marine resources.

Twelve events were attended by 260 youth in the Cedar Key region. At these events the participants were provided with information about importance of marine habitats to coastal fisheries, how they as anglers can conserve fish resources and ways they can contribute to the overall enrichment of marine resources. The participants also conducted field sampling activities similar to what state biologists do to gather resource data for management.

A partnership with the International Game Fish Association (IGFA) and their community marine education and outreach efforts was continued by providing various FWC marine resource publications (*e.g. Fishing Lines* magazine) for participants in their education activities and Junior Angler tournaments. IGFA continues to incorporate specific aspects of FWC curricula (*e.g. Kids' Fishing Clinic* stations) into their educational activities.

Partnered with several other agencies and organizations to conduct environmental education projects aimed at marine resource conservation including: Mote Marine Laboratory, Florida Sea Grant and Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute.

Distributing FWC/SFR educational literature aimed at heightening citizen awareness of and personal responsibility for protecting Florida's marine resources. Educational information was distributed by fishing clubs, tackle shops, Florida state parks, Florida state aquatic preserves, fishing organizations (such as IGFA), National Estuarine Research Reserves, Florida Keys

National Marine Sanctuary, Florida Sea Grant, International Game Fish Association and FWC field offices.

The following educational publications were made available to the public through numerous events. Most of these publications are also available online and, if so, the links to each publication are provided below.

- *Fishing Lines: An Angler's Guide to Florida's Marine Resources*  
<http://www.myfwc.com/fishing/saltwater/publications/fishing-lines-magazine/>
- *Florida Recreational Saltwater Fishing Regulations (English and Spanish editions)*  
<http://www.myfwc.com/fishing/saltwater/recreational/>
- *Fish ID Poster series by artist Diane Rome Peebles*
- *Sea Stats*  
<http://research.myfwc.com/products/products.asp>
- *Catch and Release Techniques*  
[http://catchandrelease.org/Catch\\_and\\_Release\\_web.pdf](http://catchandrelease.org/Catch_and_Release_web.pdf)
- *Florida Boater's Guides*  
<http://research.myfwc.com/products/products.asp>
- *Kids Fishing Activity Book (Freshwater and Saltwater)*  
[http://myfwc.com/media/1316038/Fishing\\_Florida.pdf](http://myfwc.com/media/1316038/Fishing_Florida.pdf)
- *Monofilament Recycling and Recovery Program*  
<http://mrrp.myfwc.com/educational-materials.aspx>

In the Apalachee Bay/Apalachicola Bay region of the Florida Panhandle, staff interacted with anglers at boat ramps, tackle shops and other fishing related events to promote fisheries conservation, resource stewardship and the Sport Fish Restoration Program. This work included giving presentations at various fishing club meetings in the region. In the Cedar Key region (Big Bend area of Florida), Outreach and Education staff performed similar activities targeting anglers, which resulted in 1,537 anglers and other resource users on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico receiving information about marine fisheries conservation, SFR and habitat conservation. Staff responsible for this program conducted similar activities at other locations (and with other organizations) around the state, interacting with 77 current and future anglers. FWC staff also interacted with 2,330 stakeholders to promote Florida Fishing at the I-75 and I-95 Florida visitor centers.

Modified versions of Kids' Fishing Clinics called *Nature Coast Fishing for Youth* (formerly known as *1-2-3 FISH*) were conducted in Cedar Key during the summer months. Eight youth events were conducted with participation from 192 youth. The participants in these programs learned about the importance of marine habitats to coastal fisheries, how they as anglers can conserve fish resources,

the basics of saltwater fishing, and ways they could reduce pollution while fishing. These events were partially supported by Fish Florida!, which provided rods, reels and tackle boxes to the participants.

Forty-three educational tours and 11 fishing events were conducted at the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's Stock Enhancement Research Facility. Five hundred and thirty-eight children and adults participated in these hands-on activities designed to increase their knowledge of marine fisheries conservation, ethical angling, and habitat preservation. Partnering organizations included The Florida Aquarium, Tampa Bay Watch, Anclote Key Anglers Club, Tampa Bay Fly Fishing Club, Manatee County Sheriff's Youth Ranch, the Florida Sheriff's Youth Ranch and the Make a Difference Fishing Tournament Foundation.

FWC staff worked with organizations and schools to showcase Florida's SFR programs through the established fish loan program. FWC loaned hatchery-raised red drum to Mote Marine Aquarium, Mote Aquaculture Park Environmental Learning Center, Houston Downtown Aquarium and Environmental Learning Center, Florida Oceanographic Society, Loggerhead Marine Life Center, The Pier Aquarium and FWC Tallahassee and Cedar Key labs. Staff also provided educational publications for public distribution at these locations. FWC loaned hatchery-raised juvenile fish to eight schools through the *Aquaculture in the Classroom* program. Educational materials on the fundamentals of marine aquaculture and fisheries enhancement were also provided to the schools. A total of 661 hatchery-bred fish were provided to these facilities.

### **COMMERCIAL AND RECREATIONAL REGULATORY OUTREACH**

Through the efforts of this group, FWC will develop and distribute new informational tools, conduct presentations, and provide other services that are designed to improve the understanding of state and federal marine fisheries regulations and how they are changing over time.

The subsection, a team of three including a public information specialist, is currently developing new tools to make our management efforts easier to understand. One example is a new web-based and printable "Recreational Seasons Chart" that will allow the viewer to quickly determine which species are open or closed on any given day of the year. The team is also reaching out to recreational and commercial fishing organizations and charter boat captains, offering direct assistance with saltwater fishing regulations.

This subsection has taken the lead on the agency's lionfish efforts. On Aug. 8 and 9, 2012, several members of the agency gathered to discuss future plans for controlling lionfish populations. Staff left this meeting with a focused agency message and plan. In April 2013, a photo contest via Twitter and Instagram was conducted where anyone who submitted a photo of their lionfish catch would receive a Lionfish Control Team t-shirt, created and designed by agency community relations staff. The contest was revealed via a live Twitter chat on March 28, the first of this kind of social media effort conducted by the agency. More than 30,000 Twitter accounts were reached during





the chat. Participants used the #FWCLionfish to chat and to send photos to the FWC. During the chat, FWC posted facts, asked questions, answered questions and asked trivia for the chance to win a t-shirt. The photo contest officially started March 28 and ended April 30. During that time frame, 65 t-shirts were mailed out to participants. Staff is currently planning a lionfish symposium for October 2013. Staff also responded to at least 5 media calls a month in regards to the lionfish issue.

The 2012 Florida Legislature restored a reduction that was previously made in an attempt to lower FWC's operating costs and achieve a balanced budget state-wide. The restored funds allowed FWC to print and distribute copies of the recreational and commercial saltwater regulation magazines. The recreational publication was printed and shipped to license sales agents by Griffin Publishing and the commercial regulations were designed in-house and sent to all saltwater products license holders.

During state fiscal year 2012/2013, the FWC continued ongoing commercial and started recreational saltwater fisheries regulatory assistance activities.

Three commercial fisheries newsletters were prepared and a total of 45,000 newsletters were distributed by mail (also available on agency website). As many as 325,000 emails were prepared and sent, informing commercial license holders, law enforcement and commercial industry representatives of 35 agency press releases (also available on agency website). As many as 5,400 telephone calls related to commercial fisheries were received and answered and 7,200 emails related to commercial fisheries were received and answered. As many as 11,245 saltwater products license holders received the printed copy of the commercial regulations publication (also available on the agency website) thanks to Cummins.

Two editions (January and July) of the recreational regulation publication (550,000 each edition) were distributed to 2,000 license sales agents and FWC regional offices around Florida. The recreational regulatory position has given twelve presentations to fishing clubs, solved 1339 knowledgebase questions, and answered 1400 telephone and 1300 e-mail request.

Our public information specialist sends out, on average, 65 press releases each year on subjects including season openings and closures; Commission meeting updates; regulation changes; and events such as Kids' Fishing Clinics, Women's Fishing Clinics and Ladies, Let's Go Fishing! More than 150 media calls were responded to including calls from newspapers, local television stations, magazines, national television production companies, radio stations and more. Responses varied from supplying basic information to conducting live and recorded television and radio interviews.

Marine Fisheries is always involved in the agencies social media efforts, including helping craft posts and responses for Facebook and Twitter, providing photos for Flickr and video for YouTube. Three promotional videos were created with the assistance of the video editing team and FWRI staff on Ladies, Let's Go Fishing! (347 views since published Sept. 27, 2012); Kids' Fishing Clinics (84 views since published July 18, 2013); and how to remove a stone crab claw (13,120 views since published Oct. 9, 2012). These were featured on YouTube and on the MyFWC.com website.

## **ARTIFICIAL REEF PROGRAM**

The primary program objectives are to provide financial and technical assistance to coastal local governments, nonprofit corporations and state universities to develop artificial reefs and to monitor and evaluate these reefs.

Over the spring and summer of 2013, nine artificial reef construction projects were completed in Florida utilizing funds from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Federal Sport Fish Restoration Program and managed by the FWC Artificial Reef Program with the Division of Marine Fisheries Management.

Five of the nine new artificial reef construction activities took place off the Atlantic Coast and four of the nine were off the Gulf Coast. Within the Atlantic Coast activities, two construction activities were off south central Florida (Martin and St. Lucie Counties), two construction activities occurred off northeast Florida (Flagler County and City of Jacksonville), and one construction activity took place off southeast Florida (Palm Beach County). Within the Gulf Coast activities, one artificial reef construction activity took place in the Florida 'Panhandle' area (the City of Mexico Beach), two off the Florida Big Bend located off the mouth of the Suwannee River (Taylor and Dixie Counties), and one off of southwest Florida (Pinellas County). There were also five artificial reef monitoring projects under way in 2013. These various projects are summarized below.

### Dixie County (Florida Big Bend, Gulf Coast)

Dixie County deployed 270 tons of limestone boulder and concrete culverts as nine patch reefs (approximately 30 tons each patch reef) within the Horseshoe Beach Artificial Reef permitted area. The deployments are located approximately 10 nautical miles on a west of Horseshoe Beach, Florida, at a depth of 22 feet.

### The City of Jacksonville (Northeast Florida)

The City of Jacksonville deployed 800 tons of concrete bridge pieces and pilings at a depth of 75 feet within the Floyds Folly (FF) Artificial Reef Site. The materials were deployed as single cluster in a concentrated location with an estimated 644 square feet of bottom footprint and providing a relief of less than 20 feet. The deployment location is approximately 18.5 nautical miles southeast of the St. Johns River jetties at a depth of 75 feet.

### The City of Mexico Beach (Northwest Florida)

The City of Mexico Beach deployed 52 concrete modular units distributed as 12 patch reefs across three permitted sites, with two to nine modules placed at each patch reef for an average of four modules per patch reef. Two of the 12 patch reefs accounting for 18 of the reef modules were placed within the Bell Shoals artificial reef site located 2.3 nautical miles on a bearing of 244 degrees from the Mexico Beach canal entrance. Five of the 12 patch reefs, consisting of 16 modules, were placed within the North Reef Site



located 16.8 nautical miles on a bearing of 235° from the Mexico Beach Channel. And the final five of the 12 patch reefs, consisting of 18 modules, were placed within the Bridge Rubble Reef Site located 13.6 nautical miles on a bearing of 220° from the Mexico Beach Channel.

#### Palm Beach County (Southeast Florida)

Palm Beach County deployed 850 tons of limestone boulders at a depth of 35 feet within the Boynton Reef Inlet Artificial Reef Site. The 3 - 4 foot diameter limestone boulders were stacked at least two high for approximately 8 feet vertical profile. The patch reef is a single pile within the southern quadrant of the permitted area located approximately .5 nautical miles at a bearing of 36 degrees from the Boynton Inlet, at a depth of 35 feet.

#### Pinellas County (Southwest Florida Gulf Coast)

Pinellas County deployed a total of 100 concrete modules, with 50 modules placed in the Treasure Island II permitted area located 26.6 nautical miles west of John's Pass at a depth of 100 feet, and 50 modules placed in the Indian Shores Reef permitted area located 11.6 nautical miles southwest of Clearwater Pass at a depth of 42 feet.

#### St. Lucie County (South Central Florida East Coast)

St. Lucie County deployed 2,000 tons of concrete culverts, clean concrete railroad ties, concrete light poles, and concrete storm water basins and other concrete construction materials in two patch reefs, one within the St. Lucie County Site 3 at a depth of 100 feet located 11 nautical miles east of Fort Pierce Inlet, and the other within the St. Lucie County Site 4 at a depth 50 feet located 5.6 nautical miles east of Ft. Pierce Inlet.

#### Martin County (South Central Florida East Coast)

Martin County deployed about 2,000 tons of concrete culverts, clean concrete riprap and/or other concrete modular construction materials divided among four patch reefs. Each of the four patch reefs consists of concrete materials placed as a single pile (500 tons each) about 50 feet (15.2 m) apart from each other on the Donaldson Reef permitted area. The permitted site center is located approximately 4.4 nautical miles on a bearing of 50 degrees from St. Lucie Inlet. The total footprint from the southern edge of the south patch to the northern edge of the north patch, including the adjacent open sand bottom, is approximately 315 feet (96 m) wide by 318 feet (97 m) in length and encompassing approximately 2.3 acres.

#### Flagler County (Northeast Florida Coast)

Flagler County deployed 750 tons of concrete slabs, concrete pilings and concrete bridge materials at one location at a depth of 68 feet within the Flagler County Permit Site #3 Artificial Reef Site located 13.8 nautical miles to the southeast on a bearing of 103° from the center of the Matanzas Inlet Bridge, at a depth of 68 feet.

### Taylor County (Florida Big Bend, Gulf Coast)

Taylor County deployed 120 prefabricated concrete cube modular artificial reef modules placed at 30 patch reefs of 4 cubes each about 200 feet apart in the NW corner of the Buckeye Reef. This reef site is located about 20.5 nautical miles on a bearing of 235 degrees from Marker #1 at the Keaton Beach navigational channel, at a depth of 48 feet.

### **Artificial Reef Monitoring Projects**

The FWC Artificial Reef program is also funding the University of West Florida to conduct acoustic tracking of selected reef fishes associated with modular concrete and concrete and steel units located in 110-130 feet of water in federal waters within the Escambia East Large Area Artificial Reef Site, 15 nautical miles south of Pensacola Pass. Work began during winter 2012. The project is conducting a multidisciplinary, process-oriented study using an acoustic array of 16 Vemco VR2 receivers deployed in a defined pattern over a 22 kilometer squared area to continue work on the ecological function of small artificial reef patch reefs deployed by the FWC in 2003. Twenty-five reef fish will be tagged and tracked over a three-month period to produce three-dimensional tracks of fish and estimate home ranges and factors effecting tagged fish. Results of this study will add to our knowledge of reef fish ecology on small-scale artificial reefs off the Florida Panhandle. The final report from this one-year monitoring effort is expected by November 2013.

The FWC Artificial Reef program is also funding the University of South Florida to conduct acoustic tracking to quantify the use of artificial reefs off of Pinellas County, Florida, across multiple spatial and temporal scales using acoustic remote sensing techniques. The research project will compare whether and how participant use of artificial reefs differs with nearby, paired natural reefs. Using visual fish census techniques, the University of South Florida will quantify the seasonal dynamics of fish communities on artificial and natural reefs and examine relationships with participant use. The final report for this two-year research project is expected by March 2015.

Funding is also being provided to Florida State University to conduct a study of the functional role of artificial reefs supporting the offshore migration of reef fishes off of Franklin County, Florida, in the Gulf of Mexico. Using side scan mapping and underwater video and video census techniques, Florida State University is identifying the faunal communities (i.e., fishes and macro-invertebrates), including their abundances and size distributions with particular attention on gag grouper, associated with artificial reefs compared to those on nearby, natural hardbottom habitats. Seasonal comparisons between the artificial and natural habitats are being conducted, and potential biotic (e.g., abundances of prey, competitors, and predators) and abiotic factors (e.g., structure type, relief, surrounding seascape) driving patterns identified are being examined. The final report for this two-year project is expected by June 2014.

The FWC Artificial Reef program is also providing funding to Nova Southeastern University to examine and monitor the effects of a system of artificial reefs (FDOT Reef) in Broward County, Florida, on the trophic interrelationships between artificial reef-associated fish assemblages and the surrounding soft-bottom infauna relative to a nearby natural reef. Although previous studies have examined macroinfauna in local waters (Dodge et al. 1989, 1995), this project is the first to

investigate relationships between sediment assemblages and adjacent reefs and associated fish faunas anywhere in southeastern Florida. The grantee is employing multiple methods, including field and laboratory identification, stomach content identification and stable isotope analysis, to a range of faunal size classes to help assess the trophic contribution to the overall reef fishery productivity and enhancement. This monitoring project follows the evolution of an artificial reef and the associated infauna to help assess the changing trophic contribution of these organisms to the fish community. This is a two-year project, with the final report expected by February 2015.

The FWC and Escambia County continue annual sampling of legal-size recreationally targeted reef fish (red snapper, gray triggerfish, red and whitebone porgy, vermilion snapper, grouper) for PCB analysis (using skin-on lateral muscle tissue fillets) in compliance with requirements of the EPA risk-based PCB disposal permit for the ex-U.S.S. Oriskany (CVA-34), sunk as an artificial reef in 212 feet of water 22.5 nautical miles off Pensacola Pass on May 17, 2006. Between Dec. 14, 2006, and April 24, 2013, 11 reef fish sample collection events were completed. The 388 retained reef fish from the Oriskany Reef through sampling round 11 included eight reef fish species: 235 red snapper, 87 vermilion snapper, 28 red porgy, 15 whitebone porgy, 10 scamp grouper, five slipper lobster, three gray triggerfish, three gag grouper, one red grouper and one bank sea bass. Some individual specimens of six of seven species during one or more of the first 10 sampling rounds (sample round 11 has not yet been analyzed) had one or more specimens whose total PCB concentrations exceeded the Florida Department of Health (FDOH) PCB screening level of 50 parts per billion and the EPA Tier 1 monitoring screening threshold of 20 parts per billion total PCBs.

Red snapper and vermilion snapper were the only two reef fish species providing enough information to evaluate mean total PCB concentration trends over the first 10 sampling rounds analyzed. During the first four sampling rounds, red snapper total PCB concentration means remained above both FDOH and EPA screening thresholds, spiking during sampling round two. By sampling round five, red snapper mean total PCB levels had declined below the FDOH threshold but remained above the EPA Tier 1 screening threshold. During sampling rounds six through 10, mean red snapper PCB concentration levels fell below both EPA and FDOH total PCB screening thresholds. Mean vermilion snapper levels remained consistently below FDOH and EPA screening levels from the time they became available for capture through round nine. The benthic invertivores red porgy and whitebone porgy continued through sampling round nine to have individual specimens with elevated PCB levels above EPA screening levels, or in some cases exceeding FDOH screening levels through sampling round eight. However, sample sizes were small for red and whitebone porgy and there was considerable variability in PCB concentrations among individual porgy specimens and in sampling round nine red and whitebone porgy sample results were below the FDOH but slightly above the EPA screening level. The highest recorded total PCB concentrations for any of the individual 254 Oriskany Reef PCB sampled fish were from red porgy (1,654.7 parts per billion (ppb) during sampling round four and 1,222.7 ppb in sampling round eight). These individual Oriskany Reef fish had total PCB levels 24 to 33 times higher than the FDOH screening level. Five legal size piscivorous grouper (scamp) from the Oriskany Reef have been analyzed to date with two of three captured in sampling round eight exceeding the FDOH screening threshold (highest concentrations 208.7 ppb and 94.1 ppb respectively), and one captured in sampling round eight exceeding the FDOH screening threshold (292 ppb). Additional scamp are pending analysis in sample round 11.

The downward trends of mean red snapper total PCB concentrations to below EPA and FDOH screening levels at the Oriskany Reef and the consistently low vermilion snapper mean PCB levels presently do not require any fish consumption advisory action to be taken. The remaining species (triggerfish, groupers, porgy) represent too few specimens sampled at the Oriskany Reef with too great a PCB variability among individuals of the same species to take any species.

Oriskany Reef sampling and monitoring will continue. Fifty-three reef fish specimens from sample round 10 were collected from the Oriskany Reef on April 24, 2013, (6.9 years post-deployment) are presently undergoing analysis with results expected by the end of 2013.

Additionally, 11 underwater visual assessments were conducted on the Oriskany Reef over the past few years by FWC divers, confirming that the observed recreationally targeted species found on the Oriskany are well represented among the fish retained for PCB analysis. Visual observations by FWC divers also documented that the Oriskany Reef had settled into the sediments about 10 feet at 2.5 years post-deployment and sustained minor structural change to the exterior covering of the smoke stack at 3.5 years post-deployment following the tropical storm events of 2007 and 2008, respectively.

#### **MONITORING COMPLIANCE WITH THE MARINE FISHERIES TRIP TICKET REPORTING REQUIREMENTS THROUGH AUDITS OF APPLICABLE FISH HOUSE RECORDS**

Nine wholesale dealer audits have been conducted. Two additional audits were carried over from the prior year.

Research was conducted on reported landings from 30 wholesale dealers and 50 commercial saltwater harvesting licenses. Fifty percent of the research was related to requests from FWC staff. Twelve of those cases were FWC investigations of BP Gulf Coast and East Coast claims. The other fifty percent of research was requested by federal agencies (NOAA, US Fish & Wildlife and one case for Homeland Security).

One hundred ninety-three wholesale dealers received delinquent notices for failing to submit any trip tickets during a 90-day period.

Landings information submitted by two individuals for blue crab license requalification was found to be fraudulent.

The FWC auditor assisted in a NOAA case in which three individuals were sentenced for illegally harvesting lobster having a retail value of approximately \$660,000 dollars. The NOAA case resulted in the individuals being sentenced to a cumulative 25 months in jail and two years probation. One individual faces additional fines of up to \$250,000 dollars while another has been ordered to forfeit a vessel valued at \$40,000 dollars, along with a trailer and equipment.

## **ADMINISTRATIVE PENALTY ASSESSMENTS FOR VIOLATIONS OF SPECIFIED FISHERIES REGULATIONS**

Florida Statutes specify administrative penalties and license suspensions for violations of specific fishery regulations.

Twenty-three administrative penalties were assessed in FY 2012-2013 for a total of \$96,000. Penalties paid totaled \$11,100. Sixteen of the administrative penalties (70%) were for net violations; two (9%) were for unlawful harvest, purchase, or sale of saltwater products; one (4%) penalty was for major blue crab violations; one (4%) penalty was for major stone crab violations; and three (13%) were for other major violations.

During the 2013-2013 fiscal year, the FWC received eight petitions requesting informal administrative proceedings, and two petitions requesting formal administrative hearings. Two petitions for informal administrative proceedings and one petition for a formal administrative hearing were dismissed. Four informal administrative hearings were conducted, and three informal administrative proceedings were conducted, where the petitioner elected the option to submit additional evidence for consideration in lieu of proceeding with an informal administrative hearing. There were no formal administrative hearings conducted during the 2012-2013 fiscal year. One petition for an informal administrative hearing and one petition for a formal administrative hearing were resolved by settlement agreement.

## **RETRIEVAL OF LOST AND ABANDONED SPINY LOBSTER, STONE CRAB, AND BLUE CRAB TRAPS**

The FWC has two programs dedicated to removing lost and abandoned traps from state waters. **The Spiny Lobster, Stone Crab and Blue Crab Trap Retrieval Program** contracts with commercial fishermen to remove lost and abandoned traps from state waters during closed seasons.

The **Derelict Trap and Trap Debris Removal Program** provides a mechanism to authorize volunteer groups to collect derelict traps and trap debris during open or closed seasons.

Blue crab, stone crab and spiny lobster have a number of trap restrictions and/or tagging requirements. Trap retrieval programs were conducted with revenues paid from fees received by these fisheries. During the 2012-2013 fiscal year, 45 trap retrieval trips were conducted (32 trips for stone crab and lobster; 13 trips for blue crab) where a total of 4,872 traps (4,425 stone crab and lobster traps; 447 blue crab traps) were retrieved for a total expenditure of \$119,989. Additionally, 11 authorizations were issued for volunteer derelict trap cleanup events, resulting in the removal of 268 traps (one cleanup event was canceled, and one event did not provide a report).

## **ISSUANCE OF SPECIAL ACTIVITY LICENSES**

The marine fisheries special activity license program issues licenses for activities that require a waiver of marine fisheries regulations.

Two hundred forty-four Special Activity Licenses were issued, 79 license amendments were issued, seven applications were denied, and four applications were withdrawn. Forty-six percent (152) of the licenses issued or amended were for scientific research, 35 percent (116) were for education and or exhibition, and 12 percent (39) were for redfish catch, hold and release tournament exemption permits (the remainder were for stock collection and release (10), aquaculture brood stock collection (9), bonefish catch hold and release tournament exemption permits (4), gear innovation (3), and non-profit corporations (1)).

**FLORIDA FISH AND WILDLIFE RESEARCH INSTITUTE:  
2013/2014**

Director: Gil McRae

**FINFISH**

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Institute exists to provide timely information and guidance to protect, conserve and manage Florida's fish and wildlife resources through effective research and technical knowledge.

We continued our efforts to monitor and characterize the recreational snook fishery in Florida and to conduct studies to establish movements and exchange rates between groups of snook inhabiting freshwater, estuarine and coastal reef habitats and also between the major estuarine systems. We also expanded our biological sampling of snook for age and reproductive status into riverine and offshore areas not previously sampled. Monitoring of spotted seatrout courtship sounds at a key spawning site was continued and a project to evaluate red drum spawning sites and site fidelity off the mouth of Tampa Bay was continued, using a combination of acoustic telemetry and passive acoustic monitoring.

Our studies of movements, habitat fidelity and home ranges of recreationally important reef fish species in the Florida Keys were continued, as was our effort to identify and document spawning sites of the mutton snapper (*Lutjanis analis*) and other reef fish species.

We also continued a field study to provide quantitative information on habitat associations and movement patterns of goliath grouper (*Epinephelus itajara*) within the central eastern Gulf of Mexico, as well as initiating a catch and release mortality study and continuing our opportunistic collection of life history information from specimens made available through natural mortality events or enforcement actions of this protected species. Additionally, we initiated a catch-and-release mortality study for gag grouper using acoustic telemetry on the west Florida shelf. Lastly, we began development of a histological atlas of Florida reef fish using samples from FWRI's West Florida Shelf reef fish surveys.

Statistically robust habitat suitability models (HSM) are being developed that relate water quality and benthic habitat data to fish catch rates derived from Fisheries Independent Monitoring (FIM). The HSM models (BEINFO, ZAGA) account for zero-inflation in the FIM data. The model is currently being evaluated. A new web-enabled database has been created called Ecospecies that incorporates over 90 species life history (SLH) profiles. As part of the Ecospecies contract with the South Atlantic Fisheries Management Council, a comprehensive SLH profile was



created that cites almost everything published on red snapper.

## MOLLUSCS

Bay scallop (*Argopecten irradians*) population monitoring is ongoing with success evaluated via surveys of adult abundance and recruitment patterns. Only two of the five regions open to harvest (Homosassa/Crystal River, Steinhatchee) were classified as stable in 2013; the other three regions were classified as vulnerable to overharvest (Hernando, St. Mark's River, St. Joseph Bay). On average, the density of scallops in open harvest areas was at 63% of the average density from the previous 10 years. There is no recreational harvest data available for bay scallops but anecdotal reports suggest effort has increased greatly in the last 10-years. None of the five regions closed to harvest were rated as sustainable. Anclote was classified as stable, and St. Andrew Bay, Tampa Bay, Sarasota Bay, and Pine Island sound were classified as collapsed populations. As a whole, the density in areas closed to harvest was at 17% of the average density in the previous 10-years.

Post-season surveys were conducted in three open-harvest areas (St. Joseph Bay, Steinhatchee and Homosassa) and two closed-to-harvest areas (Anclote and St. Andrew Bay) to assess mortality rates during 2013. In the closed areas, total mortality was 70% at Anclote and 100% at St. Andrew Bay. In the open areas, total mortality ranged from 11% (St. Joe Bay) to 97% (Steinhatchee); Homosassa/Crystal river was intermediate (64%).

Ancillary data to the scallop surveys describing the density of three gastropod species (tulip snails, *Fasciolaria* spp; lightning whelk, *Busycon sinistrum*; and horse conch, *Triplofusus giganteus*) in seagrass beds was published (Stephenson et al. 2013. J. Shellfish Res. 32: 305-313). A follow-up study will assess seasonal variation in their density in seagrass, oyster reef, and soft-bottom habitats.

The fall 2013 oyster (*Crassostrea virginica*) population assessment studies conducted by FL Dept. of Agriculture and Consumer Services in Apalachicola Bay were below regulatory limits, prompting FWC to restrict winter harvest to weekday only during 2013-2014 winter season, as was done during the 2012-13 season. Preliminary results suggest 2013 landings were at ~ 30 % of the 10-year historic average (2002-2012). A request for federal disaster declaration was made and a federal fishery disaster declared for the fishery. No funds associated with this declaration have been provided.

A study showing that biological function of oysters growing on non-reef habitat was roughly comparable to those on natural reefs was published in Estuaries and Coasts (Drexler et al. DOI 10.1007/s12237-013-9727-8). A study which describes a portion of ongoing Everglades Restoration monitoring provides baseline density and settlement rates of oysters in seven FL estuaries was published (Parker et al. 2013. J. Shellfish Res. 32: 695-708).

FWC applied for and has been awarded a grant to study appropriate cultching densities on Apalachicola oyster reefs. University of Florida and FDACS will be subcontracted for some portions of the study, scheduled to begin in 2014.

Hard clam (*Mercenaria mercenaria*) Gulf of Mexico commercial landings fell by 47%, to 3241 pounds, 26% of their 2001-2012 average landings.

## **CRUSTACEANS**

### **Florida Blue Crab**

Florida has participated, over the past three years, in the Gulf Data Assessment and Review (GDAR) process. The GDAR process resulted in a successful peer reviewed region-wide blue crab stock assessment (GDAR01) that was finalized in 2013. The stock assessment serves as a platform for exploration into the structural dynamics of the blue crab population in the Gulf of Mexico. The formalized GDAR process revealed complexities and resource interrelationships throughout the region that iterative benchmark assessments on a regular schedule will build upon and result in the eventual development of regional management reference points in future management plans.

The base model of the assessment found that Gulf of Mexico blue crab stocks are currently not overfished nor are they undergoing overfishing. The population abundance in the eastern and western stocks are currently approximating the optimal abundance for achieving MSY, however the assessment model indicated that in the last few years the western stock has been slightly lower than that optimal abundance. Florida blue crab landings continue to be below the historic average. The years with lowest landings appear in 6 to 10 year intervals. The trend of landings for these lowest landing years appears to declining over time. The stock assessment suggests that there are climate regime shifts where the Gulf of Mexico coastal region has become warmer and drier than the years prior to 1996 and landings that are lower than the historic average may be a more common.

Florida is working as part of the blue crab Technical Taskforce to finalize a fisheries management plan for blue crabs in the Gulf of Mexico. The management plan is a comprehensive review of relevant aspects of the biology, ecology, and fisheries associated with blue crabs in the Gulf of Mexico. The plan provides a framework for resource management and maintenance of a sustainable fishery. The Gulf-wide Blue Crab Fisheries Management Plan should be finalized and available for distribution in the Fall of 2014.

## **FISHERIES GENETICS**

Studies of genetic structure and population connectivity were completed for hogfish, sand seatrout, and spotted seatrout. Federal managers identified stock structure and stock assessment boundaries as research priorities for hogfish (SEDAR 37). We identified a significant genetic break between hogfish inhabiting the FL Gulf coast from the Panhandle to Marco Island and those occurring off of southernmost FL peninsular coast, including the FL Everglades, FL Keys, and southeastern FL Atlantic coast to Jupiter Inlet. Additionally, hogfish comprising these two stocks were shown to be genetically distinctive from those inhabiting the coastal waters of North and South Carolina. A draft manuscript has been prepared and detailed findings have been reported to the SEDAR data-scoping workgroup.

Local populations of sand seatrout and spotted seatrout in FL were found to be semi-discrete and largely self-recruiting on estuarine scales. We have further identified three fully discrete regional stocks of spotted seatrout which, respectively, are bounded in FL waters by: 1) the western border of Florida to Apalachicola Bay, 2) east of Apalachicola Bay through southernmost Peninsular FL to upper Biscayne Bay, and 3) Sebastian Inlet through the northeastern border of Florida. The current geographic boundaries used by FWC scientists during periodic stock assessments and other fishery evaluations are incongruent with the genetically derived boundaries; we have recommended that they incorporate the genetically derived boundaries into assessment design and implementation when appropriate.

Offshore spawning populations of red drum were sampled along Florida's Gulf coast for the second consecutive year. During these sampling events, fin clips from more than 5,300 red drum specimens (released live) were obtained for a DNA-based capture-recapture study. To date, 2,948 of these specimens have been genotyped.

With angler assistance, we continued to genetically track individual tarpon in Florida. To date, about 19,742 DNA samples from released tarpon have been genotyped. Approximately 194 of these genetically 'tagged' tarpon have been recaptured by participating anglers. Movement data are currently being analyzed for temporal/spatial patterns and trends. For recaptured tarpon, the majority of movements occurred within small distances (less than 10 km); however, several occurred over large distances (e.g., from the Tampa Bay area to the Florida Keys).

Genotyping assays of 414 goliath grouper from FL Gulf, FL Keys, and FL Atlantic have been completed and statistical analyses are underway. In addition to analyses of genetic structure and population connectivity, genetically effective population numbers and levels of kinship and inbreeding will be evaluated.

Genotyping assays for 287 permit throughout FL have been completed and preliminary analyses are underway. Additional specimens of permit are also being processed from Mexico and Puerto Rico. For future work, genetic collections of tilefish and several highly exploited groupers throughout FL are underway as part of a comparative analysis of population-connectivity trends among reef-fish species exhibiting disparate life histories.

## **FISHERIES STATISTICS**

Fisheries-independent monitoring (FIM) of fish continues in Tampa Bay, Charlotte Harbor, Indian River Lagoon, Cedar Key, Apalachicola and Northeast Florida. The FIM program uses a systematic sampling strategy to collect fish free from the biases associated with collecting data from recreational and commercial fisheries. Data has been used for numerous stock assessments for several inshore species. Staff has spent much time developing models that describe fish abundance associated with different habitats. Additionally, staff in this program have been involved in the mercury concentration in fish program, fish health assessment, environmental health and fish diets, as well as studying fish from the rivers feeding Charlotte Harbor and Tampa Bay. We have continued to work on expanding our FIM program into reef areas along the coast. During 2012-2013, preliminary numbers indicate Florida commercial landings from 220,384 commercial fishing trips totaled approximately 84.7 million (M) pounds of fish, crab, clams (wild harvest only, excludes aquaculture), lobster, shrimp and other invertebrates worth over \$195 M in

dockside value. Marine life landings (live fish and invertebrates for aquaria and other uses) from 5,825 commercial collecting trips in 2012-13 amounted to 10.2 M individual specimens worth nearly \$3.6 M in dockside value. The top 10 species in dockside value harvested during 2012-13 in Florida were: Caribbean spiny lobster (\$25.1 M), stone crab (claws: \$23.1 M), red grouper (\$15.3 M), pink shrimp (\$11.7 M), white shrimp (\$11.4 M), blue crab (including soft-shell crabs; \$10 M), oysters (\$7.4 M), black mullet (\$7.3 M), bait shrimp (\$7.25 M), king mackerel (\$7.16 M), and. The total commercial harvest of food shrimp in Florida was 12.7 M pounds (heads on; \$30.6 M dockside value) in 2012-2013.

Recreational anglers made an estimated 24 million fishing trips in the 2012-2013 FY. Of those trips, 62% occurred in the Gulf. Total catch for the Gulf coast of Florida was estimated at more than 90.6 million fish, of which, 34.3 million fish (>34 M pounds) were harvested. Species of note from the Gulf, in terms of total catch (numbers of fish) included: spotted seatrout (9.9 M); gray snapper (4.89 M); white grunt (4.23 M); red drum (2.64 M); and Spanish mackerel (2.08M). In addition to ongoing dockside sampling efforts, we continue to build our at-sea data collection programs on both coasts, with an emphasis on the recreational reef fish fishery. Since the inception of the program in late 2009, more than 800 for-hire trips have been sampled alone in the Gulf, with more than 28,000 fish tagged and released.

## **FISHERIES DATA COLLECTION**

**Recreational :** March 2013 saw the introduction of the new MRIP Access Point Angler Intercept Survey (APAIS) sample draw. The new survey involved a departure from the old MRFSS methodology in that alternate site selection was predetermined and sites were selected as clusters (up to 3 sites) based on fishing pressure estimates for the cluster. Selection probabilities for given clusters reflected fishing pressures for all sites visited rather than just the primary site. Similar to the old MRFSS, assignments were categorized as either weekday or weekend day. However, assignments are now allocated four 6-hour time intervals for a 24 hour fishing day rather than just concentrated in peak activity time periods. The draw has proved challenging in terms of staffing (locally and regionally) because protocols are so strict that activities such as biostatistical sampling and vessel validations routinely done during a normal work day are no longer possible. NMFS S&T has worked with FWC to optimize the draw allocations regionally based on staff availability. This has proved to be an iterative process. Productivity in terms of the number of angler interviews per assignment has been and continues to be a concern for assignments during periods when few anglers are expected to complete their fishing trips (early AM and late PM). There remains the issue of accessibility of the guide fishery to the APAIS which is being addressed by NMFS with the introduction of a new boat mode which will combine for-hire and private boat interviews into a single mode. This latest methodological change is set for introduction in Wave 3 of 2014. Although the biological sampling program was not funded through FIN for 2014, we continue with limited data collection funded with Sport Fish Restoration funds and anticipate additional funding through the NFWF for at least the second half of the year. In 2014, samplers collected more than 30,000 otoliths and spines for age determination. As the early part of 2014 is anticipated to be less busy in terms of sample processing than previous years when FIN funding was in place, 2014 is seen as an opportunity to make needed changes to the database structure in terms of variables included, their formats and how the db is to be served in the future. Currently, Fisheries Dependent Monitoring staff members involved have been busy retooling the database. The major focuses include: improvements to processing efficiency, quality control of data, inclusion of biosamples

from sampled at-sea trips, and improved matching of biological data (and eventual age information) to specific trip information. The Gulf of Mexico reef fish program began in late 2009 to collect information on discards or released catch ended at the end of 2013. Over 17,000 fish were tagged over the course of the project with the majority being red snapper, red grouper and gag. It is hoped that the program can continue in 2014 (with NFWF funding) to collect information on discards with a goal toward gaining a better understanding of release catch mortality and obtaining size information for released catch which for red snapper and gag make up the majority of the recreational catch.

**Commercial:** We are in the final stages of migration of the Trip Ticket Program databases (Marine Fisheries Information System - MFIS) from Oracle to MS SQL Server. A new SQL Server native application is in the process of being tested for production and is expected to be fully implemented by July 2014. The new system will be followed by a move to a new server located in Tallahassee. Integration with the licensing and permitting databases is an anticipated component of the new system which should help in the accuracy of matching license information with landings. License holders will be able to access their landings directly and a public query system is also being developed that will allow queries of harvest information to create basic summaries. Currently, PDFs of landings are made available for download from the website. However, updates to the landings information on the website require the periodic generation of new summaries which is a labor-intensive task. The new system would allow automatic updates as new data become available.

There has been considerable discussion on the continued use and need for paper ticket reporting. Currently, about 75% of landings information is reported electronically. However, the majority of those landings are accounted for large volume wholesale dealers and approximately 60-70% of dealers still use paper tickets. The currently used trip ticket is based on the old credit card carbon copy receipt. It has become increasingly difficult to find vendors that print this type of ticket. Moreover, desired changes to the current paper ticket to allow higher resolution trip/effort information would likely necessitate a change to the overall design of the ticket that would also require a new imprinter design to accommodate the larger ticket. The cost of reconfiguring or replacing the old imprinter would be approximately \$80-\$100 per dealer for the imprinter and an additional 25-40% increase in printing and mailing costs. FWC has finished a cooperative effort with the NOAA HMS group to update the state species codes list to include HMS species. Also included are prohibited shark species.

The NFWF funding referred to in this report represents a joint Fisheries Dependent/Independent plan outlined in a 2012 proposal. The effort would be spread over a five year period and would include (among others) enhancements to the current SEAMAP sampling program, enhanced or continued biological sampling (commercial and recreational) as well as continued at-sea monitoring of the recreational fishery. The award is set to commence in 2014 although no start date is available at this time.

## **STOCK ENHANCEMENT RESEARCH**

Preliminary designs for future marine eco-centers were completed for sites in Escambia and Walton counties in the panhandle. Demolition of buildings and progress on the youth development

center and aquatic plant nurseries were ongoing at the New Smyrna Beach Ecocenter. Planning continued for development of an intensive marine hatchery for Tampa Bay. A fourth trial of intensive culture of juvenile red drum *Sciaenops ocellatus* was completed evaluating new equipment to optimize oxygen levels in circular culture tanks. We continued to make improvements to transition existing culture capabilities from extensive to intensive. A new, six-tank production system for intensive culture of larval red drum was completed in the intensive culture lab. Larval red drum were stocked into these tanks to develop husbandry protocols for indoor, phase-I production. We continued coordination with the crustacean group for an aging study for blue crabs (*Callinectes sapidus*) in pond 16 and greenhouse two. There were no snook or red drum releases during this period. Spartina plugs (33,000) and shoots (10,000) were harvested from the hatchery effluent treatment marsh for shoreline restoration or nurseries at six locations throughout Tampa Bay.

## MARINE FISH

Fish and Wildlife Health (FWH) staff in St. Petersburg monitors the health of aquatic animals throughout the state of Florida, responds to fish kills and disease events, provides technical guidance and support for fish health in state stock enhancement efforts, and conducts applied research to support these efforts by asking specific questions about factors that impact fish health for the purpose of enhancing Florida's sport fishery.

During the 2012-2013 FY, the FWH group conducted necropsies (laboratory or field examinations of fish to collect health data) 1,177 specimens that covered four project aspects: 1) health monitoring (n = 331), 2) event response (n = 123), 3) stock enhancement support (n = 392), and 4) special projects (n = 331).

**Event response** specimens (10.5%) were evaluated as part of fish kill investigations or other fish and wildlife health related events. **Health monitoring** specimens (28%) were collected primarily by Fisheries Independent Monitoring (FIM) as part of our collaborative disease surveillance efforts, and were submitted to FWH because they exhibited gross external abnormalities or because we requested apparently healthy specimens to gather baseline data and develop health profiles for sport fish. Fish categorized under **special projects** (28%) included sport fish collected for parasitological analysis to study parasites that may impact potential aquaculture species and experimental research. Studies described philometrid nematodes infecting yellowedge grouper (*Hyporthodus flavolimbatus*), northern tilefish (*Lopholatilus chamaeleonticeps*), Atlantic Spanish mackerel (*Scomberomorus maculatus*), scamp (*Mycteroperca phenax*), Atlantic needlefish (*Strongylura marina*), jack crevalle (*Caranx hippos*), and red drum (*Sciaenops ocellatus*). Fish examined for **stock enhancement** purposes (33%) were evaluated in support of the Florida Marine Fisheries Enhancement Initiative (FMFEI). These fish came from trial recirculating aquaculture systems from FWC's Stock Enhancement Research Facility.

The statewide, toll-free Fish Kill Hotline (1-800-636-0511) and our web-based fish kill reporting form allow the public to report aquatic mortality and disease events directly to scientists, who can respond immediately to their concerns. Since its inception, the FWH group has received and responded to over 18,000 reports/information requests (hereafter referred to as reports). In 2012-2013, we received a total of 1,190 reports on FWH Fish Kill Hotline, through the FWRI website or via direct calls. Approximately 29% of reports were related to unique fish kills, while 37%

referred to previously reported fish kills, and the remaining 34% fell into other categories including other wildlife mortalities.

Twenty two sites were investigated by Fish and Wildlife Health staff for fish kills and 65 sites were investigated by other FWC field laboratory staff. A fish kill was considered an “event” when it was politically, economically, or ecologically significant. Four groups of reports were designated as events: 1) co-occurring reports of water discoloration, unhealthy mullet, and lower than normal baitfish catches in the northeast Gulf region, 2) brown tide bloom in the Mosquito and Indian River Lagoons resulting in multi-species fish kills, 3) a red tide bloom in SW FL resulting in 238 reports of fish kills and information requests between October 2012 and April 2013, and 4) a high profile catfish kill in Crescent Lake in Jacksonville FL. It is likely that stress from the blue-green algae blooms resulted in fish kills and secondary opportunistic infection.

FWH participated in various types of outreach activities to promote the Fish Kill Hotline and to promote conservation through education. Outreach consisted of a variety of activities intended to reach many segments of the public. To promote the hotline as a public resource, we gave out specialty items throughout the year, including fishing towels, stickers, reusable grocery bags, and key chains imprinted with the FKH number and the Sport Fish Restoration logo. We logged over 560 hours of preparation time and 209 direct contact hours with the public during outreach events.

#### **MARINE MAMMALS**

FWC documented 392 manatee carcasses in Florida during 2012. Preliminarily, 102 of the cause of death determinations in 2012 were human-related fatalities. Eighty-one statewide manatee rescues were conducted in 2012. Of those rescues 32 were from natural circumstances, 48 were from human-related causes and one was from an undetermined cause.

A statewide “synoptic” survey was not flown in 2013 because of warmer than average winter weather. An important objective within the state Manatee Management Plan includes improving these methods and implementing statistically sound methods to estimate the manatee population. Work progressed in developing and refining new methodology.

During the 2012-13 North Atlantic right whale calving season (December 01, 2012 –March 31, 2013) staff coordinated and conducted aerial surveys off the coastal waters of Florida and portions of Georgia in an effort to alert vessels to the presence of right whales, monitor calf production, identify unique individuals and describe whale distribution and habitat. Nineteen mother/calf pairs were documented during the 2012/2013 North Atlantic right whale calving season. A two year-old male right whale was reported floating dead off Palm Coast, Florida, and was subsequently recovered and necropsied in December 2012. FWC staff assisted with the necropsy which revealed the whale died as a result of chronic entanglement in fixed fishing gear. Preliminary analysis of the gear by NOAA Fisheries Service indicated that it was nearshore fisheries trap/pot gear from the northeast U.S.

FWC documented three injured whales during the calving season. A neonate calf as well as an adult female with a calf were sighted with vessel-related injuries that likely occurred while the mother-calf pairs resided in the southeastern U.S. The third whale, a juvenile female, was sighted with numerous entanglement wounds in various stages of healing. In collaboration with Georgia

Department of Natural Resources, staff conducted 46 right whale biopsy sampling trips resulting in samples from 17 calves, one juvenile and two adult whales.

## **COASTAL AND MARINE HABITAT CHARACTERIZATION**

The coastal and nearshore marine habitats that fisheries depend on are a focus of FWRI mapping efforts. Statewide compilations of seagrass, coral/hardbottom, oyster reefs, salt marsh and mangroves continue to be updated with the best available data. Modern technologies, such as satellite imagery, LiDAR and sidescan sonar, are being implemented to modernize habitat mapping methods. Off the Springs Coast for example, the western extent of seagrass and extensive areas of colonized hard-bottom were mapped for the first time in several decades. These map-based data provide significant baselines for seagrass extents in areas where they are most susceptible to change. These types of coastal nearshore habitat maps are viewable and made publicly available through easy to use Internet-based mapping tools.

The Unified Florida Reef Tract Map (Unified Reef Map) provides a consistent geospatial framework for management, monitoring, and characterization of the Florida reef tract from Martin County to the Dry Tortugas. The Unified Reef Map integrates many different existing benthic cover maps under a Unified Classification (UC) system which provides a common and consistent picture of the entire area while retaining the original detailed information specific to different source maps. The UC contains five levels of seafloor classification detail providing flexibility in the scope of analysis. Where mapping projects overlap spatially, data are edited to create a seamless and consistent transition. The results of this work reflect a collaborative effort between FDEP, FWC, NOAA, Nova Southeastern University, and the National Park Service.

## **DIVISION OF HABITAT AND SPECIES CONSERVATION**

Director: Thomas Eason

### **IMPERILED SPECIES MANAGEMENT**

The Imperiled Species Management Section (ISM) in this Division is responsible for the planning and implementation of management activities directed toward the protection and recovery of manatees, right whales and five species of marine turtles. Marine turtle activities are funded from the Marine Resources Conservation Trust Fund. Manatee and right whale protection efforts are funded from the Save the Manatee Trust Fund.

#### Marine Turtles

The Imperiled Species Management Section (ISM) implements tasks from recovery plans for five species of marine turtles and provides recommendations to ensure compliance with the Florida Marine Turtle Protection Act (F.S. 379.2431 (1)) for state-authorized activities. The activities are focused in the following program areas.

1. Commenting on state- and federal-permitted activities to minimize negative impacts to marine turtles and their nesting habitat, including the development of innovative strategies such as regional, littoral cell-wide agreement for all beach management activities.



2. Provide permits to individuals, organizations and facilities that conduct research or conservation activities with marine turtles or keep captive marine turtles.
3. Assist local governments and the private sector in efforts to reduce impacts of lights and other disturbances on marine turtle nesting.
4. Conduct outreach activities to provide current information to the public and promote conservation stewardship.
5. Respond to unusual or catastrophic events that impact marine turtles or their habitats.
6. Participation in intra- and interagency teams to provide expertise on marine turtles, their nests and habitats.
7. Pursue funding opportunities such as development of decals, promote sales of the sea turtle license plate, or obtain grant funds to achieve program goals.

#### Accomplishments

- Development and implementation of an ~\$3,000,000 Early Restoration Project proposal focused on marine turtles and their nesting habitat for injuries due to activities during response efforts for the 2010 catastrophic Deepwater Horizon event. Staff also continued participation in Technical Working Groups (TWGs) for Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) planning. Staff is currently working with Franklin, Gulf and Escambia Counties and the City of Destin to provide approximately \$115,825 in funding to enhance local efforts to reduce the impact of lights on marine turtle nesting beaches.
- Participation in the development of the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) inaugural Beach Management Agreement for beach restoration activities on the Island of Palm Beach.
- Participated in the coordination and streamlining of permit commenting, including revising existing commenting logs and developing standard conditions and best management practices to streamline the review process and ensure protection of marine turtles, their nests, hatchlings and nesting habitat as required under the Marine Turtle Protection Act (F.S. 379.2431 (1)).
- Provided input to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service designation of critical habitat for loggerhead sea turtles.
- Educational presentations at schools and meetings of local conservation groups, home owners associations, and other interested groups concerning marine turtles, lights and other impacts and display of the Sea Turtle Lighting Trailer educational display by request.
- Administered the Marine Turtle Permit Program and participated in a Rapid Process Improvement for the Marine Turtle Permit Program to better serve researchers working with marine turtles in Florida.

- Coordinated transfer and release of marine turtles during rehabilitation and supervised public sea turtle releases; identified and transferred non-releasable marine turtles to other countries and states for captive display to reduce pressure on Florida facilities with limited space to maintain these animals.
- Staff reviewed more than 350 applications or plans, including revisions, submitted to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) District Offices, DEP's Division of Water Resource Management, the Water Management (WMD) Districts and the State Clearing House. Projects reviewed included Coastal Construction Control Line applications, Environmental Resource Permit applications, and Joint Coastal Permit applications as well as DEP Clearing House reviews for federal projects to ensure authorized activities comply with Florida Statute 379.2431 (1).
- Participated in review of Department of Environmental Protection proposed rule revisions for Florida Statute 161 and 373 that could impact marine turtles, their nests, hatchlings and nesting habitat.
- Participated in more than 90 site inspections, including lighting inspections, as part of our environmental commenting responsibilities or at the invitation of local governments and property owners.
- Conducted public workshops at the request of local government commissions or staff.
- Participated in the following intra- and interagency teams, working groups, and committees: Archie Carr Sea Turtle Refuge Working Group, FWC's Coastal Wildlife Conservation Initiative, the FWC Permitting Team, and the Marine Turtle Grants Committee.
- Management of the marine turtle disorientation database.
- ISM co-hosted the 2013 Marine Turtle Permit Holder Workshop with the Sea Turtle Conservancy in Orlando for over 400 Marine Turtle Permit Holders, volunteers, local government, state and federal agency staff. This three-day event included presentations by agency management and research staff, conservation organizations and local governments, as well as summaries of Marine Turtle Grant projects and workshops focused on key issues.
- Provided educational materials concerning marine turtles including educational brochures, posters, rack cards and other information, including the creation and production of a colorful decal featuring a loggerhead sea turtle hatchling. This decal, number 22 of a series, was distributed to local tax collectors' offices across Florida.

- Oversight of the Wildlife Friendly Lighting Certification program for lighting companies to encourage development of products that meet the requirements to keep light low, long (wavelength) and shielded. Lights that meet certain specifications are featured on the FWC website as options for reducing impacts from artificial lights on marine turtles and other wildlife.

**Manatees:**

The Imperiled Species Management Section (ISM) implements the tasks of the Florida Manatee Recovery Plan and the newly approved state Manatee Management Plan (2007). The activities are focused in six program areas.

1. Development and implementation of county-based manatee protection plans (MPPs).
2. Promulgation of boat speed regulations to protect manatees.
3. Review of permitted activities to minimize negative impacts to manatees.
4. Various directed efforts to protect and enhance manatee habitat, particularly warm water refuges and sea grasses.
5. Outreach activities to provide current information to the public and promote conservation stewardship.
6. Stakeholder engagement to encourage participation and partnerships.

More details on the manatee program are available in the Save the Manatee Trust Fund Annual Report to the Legislature, which can be found at:

<http://www.myfwc.com/research/manatee/trust-fund/annual-reports/>

Highlights

- Duval County: Staff continues to work with the county and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service staff to complete a final revised draft of the MPP. A complete draft is expected in fall of 2013 when it will be available for public review.
- Charlotte County: FWC continues its work with the County to draft an MPP. An initial draft is expected by late fall of 2013.
- Staff produced 340 comment letters for development projects reviewed during the year and offered recommendations to reduce or eliminate potential adverse impacts to manatee from the proposed activities. Several of the permit review efforts focused on maintenance and expansions of Florida ports. Implementation of the boat facility-siting portion of FWC approved MPPs is accomplished during the permit review process. Distribution of public information about manatees is also accomplished through these comments, as facilities are required to post informational signs on manatees and distribute written materials to boat users. A brochure specifically designed for boaters was developed and is available for marina educational plans, called *A Boater's Guide to Living with Florida Manatees*.

- Flagler County (68C-22.028, FAC) – The proposed rule for coastal Flagler County was finalized last fiscal year, and was posted by March 2013.
- In advance of considering a potential rule for western Pinellas County staff completed data review and met with County staff to discuss the data analysis. Staff also met with boating and environmental stakeholders to discuss the data analysis and to learn about local concerns. Staff plans to meet with additional groups to share our data evaluation and collect local input.
- Structure Related Manatee Deaths have totaled 210 (since 1974) as a result of interactions with the numerous water control structures located on the state's waterways. The annual average structure related deaths pre-retrofitting has decreased from an average of 6.2 manatees/year (1974-2000) to a post-retrofitting average of 3.7 manatees/year (2001-2012). A milestone was reached this year when the Moore Haven Lock was retrofitted with a manatee protection device, completing the retrofitting of all known state or federal water control structures that have caused a manatee mortality. Overall, coordinated efforts are having a significant influence on reducing structure-caused mortality at retrofitted structures.
- FWC is working with state's Water Management Districts in development of Minimum Flows and Levels (MFLs) for spring systems that provide warm-water habitat for manatees. MFLs for the following Gulf Coast springs, Manatee Springs, Fanning Springs and the Weeki Wachee Springs system have all been developed using criteria to protect winter warm-water manatee use. FWC is working with The Nature Conservancy and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to identify and complete restoration and enhancement projects for Florida Gulf Coast springs systems that will improve manatee access to natural warm-water habitat at Salt Creek (Sarasota County) and Three Sisters Springs (Citrus County). FWC also worked with Mote Marine Lab to conduct an assessment of manatee warm-water habitat at Lithia Spring (Hillsborough County) and a final report on that investigation was completed in 2012.
- FWC worked with Florida Power and Light (FPL) to ensure that the interim warm-water refuges that are being used during the conversions of the Cape Canaveral and Riviera Beach power plants provided the necessary refuge to manatees. This was the last winter of a three winter conversion process at the FPL Cape Canaveral Energy Center. The conversion of the Cape Canaveral plant is complete and it is now generating electricity. This winter manatee use of the plant's thermal discharge and water temperatures in the warm-water refuge will be monitored to document any changes in the warm-water refuge or in manatee behavior. At the FPL Riviera Beach Energy Center the conversion is entering its last winter, and at the Port Everglades plant this will be the first full winter with an interim heating system. At each of these plants, manatee distribution data will be collected via aerial surveys and manatee movement data will be collected from satellite tagged manatees at Port Everglades. These data will provide information regarding how manatees responded to the changes in warm water availability in southeast Florida during the winter cold season. In addition, daily health assessments at the interim warm-water refuges will be conducted to monitor manatees for cold-stress symptoms.

- Educational activities for manatee conservation included the distribution of brochures and other informational materials to local governments, stakeholders, conservation groups, marinas, schools, libraries, and the general public. Staff responded to 143 requests for printed materials. The “Ask FWC” service on the agency’s website generated 6,500 hits for manatee related questions. FWC responded directly to 71 online requests. In keeping up with today’s social networks, staff worked with the agency’s Community Relations Office to conduct a month-long social media manatee awareness campaign during Manatee Awareness Month (November). The campaign included a photo share promotion that encouraged the public to submit personal manatee images to the agency along with permission to use the images for educational purposes as needed.

### **Aquatic Habitat Conservation and Restoration**

The Marine and Estuarine Subsection (MES) of the Aquatic Habitat Conservation and Restoration Section is responsible for the FWC’s coordinated management of marine and estuarine habitat in Florida waters. This subsection is staffed by regional biologists that work around the state with partners to develop and implement conservation projects, such as marine habitat restoration efforts, which support healthy marine fisheries. MES activities are supported by the state Marine Resources Conservation Trust Fund, and through various federal grant programs for specific habitat restoration efforts.

### **Marine and Estuarine Conservation through MES**

The strategic actions of the marine and estuarine habitat program revolve around collaboration with other agencies, partners, and stakeholders to support marine habitat conservation activities. These actions revolve around five central goals:

1. Restoration and enhancement of the quality and quantity of marine and estuarine habitats.
2. Conservation and maintenance of intact native estuarine and marine habitats and their ecological functions.
3. Protection of Florida’s native estuarine and marine habitats and their functions within respective ecosystems from degradation.
4. Influence marine and estuarine habitat management through proactive coordination and participation with partners.
5. Support marine and estuarine habitat restoration, conservation, and protection activities.

### **Accomplishments**

- FWC northwest regional biologists refined and developed phase I planning for an oyster and seagrass restoration project in West Bay (St. Andrews Bay-Panama City) to restore a seagrass community lost to the combined effects of shrimp farming and municipal waste disposal. The project will use a series of oyster reefs of about 10 acres in area located on the historic deep seagrass bed edges to anchor sediments that currently suspend during periods of wave activity and cause light limitations in the water column. Combined with appropriate seagrass transplantation, this project will restore as much as 2,000 acres of seagrass historically found in West Bay. The resulting oyster reefs will enhance habitat for

important fish species such as red drum, spotted seatrout, and gray snapper, and will support endangered species such as Kemp's ridley sea turtles.

- FWC had initiated a 3 acre living shoreline oyster and saltmarsh enhancement project in coordination with the Florida State University Marine Laboratory (FSUML) at Turkey Point. This project will enhance existing oyster reefs, augment saltmarsh habitat and improve shorebird nesting habitat on FSUML lands, and will be used by research and outreach coordinators well into the future.
- FWC worked with TNC, USFWS, NOAA and regional and local governments to develop coordinated and prioritized watershed-level conservation projects related to RESTORE Act activities in waters from Franklin to Escambia Counties. This effort will result in a comprehensive priority list of aquatic habitat conservation efforts supported by regional partners and directed toward a significant funding source for the conservation and restoration of estuarine marine habitats in coastal northwest Florida.
- FWC staff conducted an eighth season of integrated seagrass monitoring in the Big Bend region of Florida as part of a long-term seagrass health assessment effort. This monitoring effort has continued for a number of years, and has been incorporated into an comprehensive "Seagrass Integrated Monitoring and Mapping (SIMM)" report available at: <http://myfwc.com/research/habitat/seagrasses/publications/simm-report-1/>
- This monitoring effort is designed to assess changes in seagrass system health over a broad area of highly productive habitat in the northeastern Gulf of Mexico, and report the findings to managers and the public.

**FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER SERVICES**  
**Adam H. Putnam, Commissioner**

DIVISION OF AQUACULTURE  
Director: Kal Knickerbocker

The Division of Aquaculture conducts numerous activities to promote the development of aquaculture and ensure the quality of aquaculture and shellfish products in Florida. These activities include regulatory, administrative, advisory, and technical functions directed toward ensuring that aquaculture operations are compatible with the Florida Aquaculture Plan, Aquaculture Certification Program, best management practices, resource management goals, and public health protection. The Division provides several primary service programs to support aquaculture and shellfish resource development:

- 1) Aquaculture Certification Program;
- 2) Sovereignty Submerged Lands Aquaculture Leasing Program;
- 3) Oyster Culture and Shellfish Resource Development Program;
- 4) Shellfish Sanitation;
- 5) Shellfish Environmental Assessment; and

#### 6) Technical Support Program (Ombudsman, training, technical outreach, grants).

The Division has been very progressive in its support of aquacultural development as a practical alternative to commercial fishing and conventional agriculture to foster economic development in rural and coastal communities. The Division's programs offer unique and essential services to this emerging sector of Florida's agriculture community. These programs provide the regulatory framework for aquacultural operations and public health protection, provide specific farming areas on state-owned submerged lands, and provide responsible stewardship for Florida's natural aquatic resources.

During FY 2012/2013, the Division continued its commitment to encourage the development of the aquaculture and shellfish industries in Florida. This commitment is based on the belief that aquaculture will become an integral segment of Florida's agricultural and economic future by providing high quality aquacultural products to worldwide markets while advancing resource management.

The following is a summary of the activities related to aquaculture and shellfish industry regulation and development carried out during fiscal year 2012/2013.

##### Aquaculture Certification Program

Chapter 597, Florida Statutes (F.S.) established the Aquaculture Certificate of Registration to recognize aquafarming businesses. Aquacultural businesses in Florida are required to be certified annually and to attest that they will comply with the Best Management Practices provided in Chapter 5L-3, Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C.). The aquaculture certificate is used to identify aquaculture producers as members of Florida's agricultural community and to identify aquacultural products produced in the state.

The Aquaculture Certificate of Registration is linked to the Best Management Practices Program. Best Management Practices have been established by and for the aquaculture industry and represent the most appropriate and practical framework for Florida's diverse aquaculture businesses. More than 1,100 site inspections are conducted at aquaculture facilities to ensure compliance with Aquaculture Best Management Practices and state and local regulations. Staff is trained to provide a standardized evaluation, provide the aquaculturist with applicable industry updates and act as a resource for the aquaculture industry.

The Division certified 962 aquaculture facilities during FY 2012/2013. Shellfish producers (354 farmers) make up 37% of the certified farms, 273 food fish producers make up 28% of the certified farms, 189 ornamental producers make up 20% of the certified farms, with the remaining producing live rock, alligators, and bait. Certified farms are found in 61 of the state's 67 counties: with the highest number of certified farms occurring in Levy County (17%) and Hillsborough County (8%).

##### Sovereignty Submerged Lands Aquaculture Leasing Program

The Division is responsible for the Aquaculture Lease Program under the provisions in Chapter 253, F.S. During FY 2012/2013, the Division administered 475 aquaculture leases containing about 1,106 acres and 56 shellfish leases containing about 999 acres. Aquaculture and shellfish leases are located

in 16 counties, including: Bay, Brevard, Charlotte, Collier, Dixie, Franklin, Indian River, Lee, Levy, Manatee, Monroe, Palm Beach, Pinellas, Santa Rosa, St. Johns and Volusia Counties. In response to its statutory mandate, the Division identifies tracts of submerged lands throughout the state that are suitable for aquacultural development. Twenty special aquaculture use areas have been identified by the Division and authorized by the Board of Trustees in nine coastal counties.

Unlike many upland agricultural ventures that are conducted on privately-held lands, marine aquaculture must be conducted on or over submerged lands that are largely held in the public domain. Since only an insignificant amount of suitable submerged acreage is privately owned, marine aquafarmers are uniquely dependent upon the use of public lands to grow their crops. Accordingly, the Department must act on behalf of the Governor and Cabinet to administer and manage these public lands in the best interest of the people of Florida, including protecting valuable natural resources.

Late in 2013, the Board of Trustees approved two modified lease agreements for floating oyster cages in Alligator Harbor. Utilization of the full water column allows aquaculturists to place oysters in the nutrient dense upper layer of the water column and offers protection from common predators.

The Aquaculture Lease Program supports marine aquaculture in a very unique way, and producing hard clams on sovereignty submerged lands is the largest marine aquaculture business in Florida. The most recent sales and value survey of hard clam farmers reported that 136.3 million clams were sold during 2012.

#### Shellfish Sanitation and Environmental Assessment Programs

A total of 39 shellfish harvesting areas totaling 1,445,833 acres are currently classified and managed statewide. During FY 2012/2013, 481 sampling excursions were conducted to collect and analyze 10,588 water samples for fecal coliform bacteria. There were 358 management actions to close or re-open shellfish harvesting areas in accordance with the management plans for individual shellfish harvesting areas. During FY 2012/2013, a total of 87 Shellfish Processing Plant Certification Licenses were issued and 313 regulatory processing plant inspections were conducted. Based on inspection results, 31 warning letters and two settlement agreements were issued.

#### Oyster Culture and Shellfish Resource Development Program

Under the mandate to improve, enlarge and protect the oyster and clam resources of the state, the Division is actively engaged in enhancing shellfish resources and restoring oyster reefs on public submerged lands. During FY 2012/2013, the Division collected 120,744 bushels of processed oyster shell from processors located primarily in Franklin County and collected 24,624 bushels of clam shell from processors in Cedar Key. Shell planting operations accounted for the deposition of 8,292 cubic yards of processed and fossil shell on public oyster reefs in Bay, Franklin, Levy and Santa Rosa Counties. Oyster resource development projects involving the relaying and transplanting of live oysters were conducted in cooperation with local oystermen's associations in three coastal counties. A total of 92,796 bushels of live oysters were re-planted on public reefs in Dixie, Levy and Wakulla Counties.

In 2006, the Department entered into a subcontract agreement with the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (through NOAA) to restore oyster reefs adversely affected by hurricanes under the Emergency Disaster Recovery Program (EDRP). The grant subcontract agreements were extended



several times with a firm ending date of Sept. 30, 2013. The \$4.2 million contract provides for three project components: 1) restoring public oyster reefs, 2) providing economic assistance to oyster farmers, and 3) developing a scientific model to assess the success of oyster reef restoration efforts in the Pensacola Bay system. In 2012/2013, the Division began winding down the restoration activities to coincide with the remaining funds and grant deadline. Oyster reef restoration operations accounted for the deposition of 8,292 cubic yards of substrate materials on public oyster reefs in some of Florida's most productive estuaries.

#### Technical Support Programs

Providing technical assistance to the aquaculture and shellfish industries is an important role of the Division. Staff provides substantial technical and administrative support for aquacultural and shellfish operations through site visits, compliance inspections, technical meetings, conferences, workshops and outreach projects. Staff provides guidance to aquaculture businesses to ensure compliance with Aquaculture Best Management Practices and other state and local regulations.

#### Apalachicola Bay Oyster Harvesting License

An oyster harvesting license is required to harvest oysters from Apalachicola Bay. In FY 2012/2013, 1,790 oyster harvesting licenses were sold, representing a 12 percent decline in the number of licenses sold in the preceding year. License sales continue to demonstrate a large number of fishers remaining in the fishery, although the number of license holders has declined from a high 1,909 in 2010.

## Alabama State Report to GSMFC

Spring 2014

### Fisheries Section

The Alabama Marine Resources Division (AMRD) opened bids for renovations to the boat basins located at Claude Peteet Mariculture Center (CPMC) in Gulf Shores. Renovation plans include the installation of 4 boat slips with lifts, a boat ramp, new docks, and seawalls, and renovation of a barge basin to be used in conjunction with Alabama's artificial reef program. Construction is expected to begin within the upcoming months.

AMRD staff is currently installing the aquaculture and hatchery equipment in the newly constructed wet lab at CPMC. The new 23,000 square foot facility is anticipated to be fully operational by late spring.

AMRD is still set to receive funding for oyster restoration from through the NRDA process and from a NFWF grant. Fishery independent dives have failed to recover significant numbers of individual seed oysters (18-25 mm) previously planted on Alabama oyster reefs. This year, approximately two hundred thousand seed (20-50 mm) were planted again; however, these were clumped with 3-4 oysters per clump. We hope to evaluate their survival in the summer. Surveys continue to show high mortality to oyster spat from drills and unknown causes. The 2013/2014 oyster season was completed with 12,230 sacks being harvested.

SEAMAP program is expected to be level funded for 2014 from the previous year. All red snapper from the 2013 vertical line work were processed and entered into the FIN database to be used in the red snapper update.

AMRD continued to participate in the Mississippi Bight Lionfish Response Unit (MBLRU) along with the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources, Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, National Parks Service, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Mississippi Bight Lionfish Response Unit T-shirts were distributed to help increase awareness and promote public involvement to help address the lionfish invasion

AMRD's turtle excluder device (TED) study for skimmer trawls is still awaiting changes in the TED design from NMFS. Potentially the study may resume in the spring of 2014

AMRD continued the State's Fishery-independent Assessment and Monitoring Program (FAMP) by collecting up to 44 samples each month using a 16' shrimp trawl, beam plankton trawl, 50' seine, and water quality meter. The gillnet sampling target remains at 240 sets per year.

The Biological Sampling program was continued during 2013. From October 1-December 31, 2013, a total of 130 recreational otoliths with 15 additional lengths and 160 commercial otoliths with 2 additional lengths were collected by AMRD's staff.

From October 1, 2013 through January 31, 2014, a total of 340 APAIS interviews collected in all modes combined. Throughout this time period, samplers received ongoing training and malfunctioning/missing field equipment was replaced.

AMRD continues to register anglers in the Angler Registry Program. AMRD continues to publicize the Registry through posters and business cards displayed and handed out at public fishing access sites. Exempted individuals such as lifetime license holders and residents over the age of 64 are required to register annually at no cost to them.

AMRD has incorporated a Rigs-to-Reefs section into its Artificial Reef Plan. The Rigs-to-Reefs section describes which agencies to coordinate with regarding the reefing project, requirement for permits depending on the location of the reefing project, the potential for ROV and/or sidescan sonar surveys, and the donation and title transfer agreement.

An application to the US Army Corps of Engineers to reef the jackets of the VK 385 and MP 255 "A" rigs has been submitted. VK 385 is approximately 35 nm due south of Sand Island Lighthouse and sits in approximately 139 feet of water. The jacket will be cut approximately 61 feet below the water line, and the top portion of the jacket will be placed on its side adjacent to the base. MP 255 "A" is approximately 54 nm south of the Fort Morgan peninsula and is in approximately 333 feet of water. The jacket will be cut approximately 105 feet below the water line, and the top portion of the jacket will be placed upright and adjacent to the base.

A Private Aids to Navigation application has been submitted and accepted by the USCG to indicate the presence of 3 limestone gabion reefs in the southwest portion of Alabama waters in the Mississippi Sound on nautical charts. The corners of each of the 3 reefs will be marked with a Danger Light, and all pilings will be marked with a Danger Mark sign to notify captains.

AMRD is working with Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (GSMFC), as well as, all other gulf states, to develop the Gulf FINFO website. This website will be dedicated to promoting local seafood and will showcase 20 of the most important commercial and recreationally species for each state. The Gulf FINFO website is expected to go live March 2014.

AMRD continues to work with all Division's of the Department to improve the outdooralabama.com website. The new and improved website is expected to go live in August 2014 providing consumers a more streamlined layout.

AMRD participated in several outreach events by providing educational opportunities to learn about the marine environment. These events included the Alabama Coastal Birdfest and the multiday Mobile Boat Show.

### **Enforcement Section**

From September 1, 2013 to January 31, 2014, AMRD enforcement officers conducted 2,998 commercial fishermen intercepts, 7,286 recreational fishermen intercepts, 7,084 patrol hours, and 3,678 vessel boardings.

AMRD officers have been conducting joint investigations with NOAA/OLE regarding Gulf Reef fish resulting in the indictment of 7 individuals in federal court for multiple violations regarding IFQ/VMS. Officers are continuing to work with other states and NOAA/OLE on multi-jurisdictional cases.

AMRD completed the installation of 5 additional cameras in Alabama's Coastal Remote Monitoring program. The system currently operates 19 remote operated cameras used for SAR, Port Security and fisheries enforcement. Two of the cameras are "off the grid" and utilize wind and solar power.

AMRD submitted a change to state fishing regulations for vermilion snapper establishing a 10 per person limit to be included in the 20 fish reef fish aggregate. This change maintains consistency with federal regulations. AMRD also submitted a state regulation proposal to establish a red snapper landing requirement. The regulation would require any vessel possessing red snapper in Alabama to report the number of fish, number of fishermen onboard and the total dead or floating discards prior to landing. This is an effort to collect accurate red snapper landings data in the State of Alabama.

#### **AMRD Oil Spill Response and Activities**

AMRD, in conjunction with the Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) and the Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries (ADAI), continued the 3-year seafood tissue testing program. The testing program is broken down into 2 projects: (1) Direct Sampling Effort Project and (2) Dealer/Processor Sampling Project. Both programs are testing polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAH) levels using the LC-Florescence method, dispersants and key heavy metals. The Direct Sampling Effort Project, operated by AMRD and ADPH, is testing seafoods collected directly from Alabama waters or reef zones. The Dealer/Processor Sampling Project, operated by ADAI, is testing seafoods obtained from processors and dealers regardless of harvest location. The results of this program will be distributed to the public. AMRD has submitted a total of 1,163 composite samples for testing; all results have been returned as being below the FDA's level of concern. This multi-agency program is administered by AMRD.

Alabama continued a seafood promotional campaign under the direction of the Alabama Seafood Marketing Commission. The Alabama Seafood Marketing Program consists of public relations, television commercials, print ads and articles, radio ads, billboards, speaking appearances, distribution of marketing materials, sponsorships of events and participation at community festivals and chef events. The website [eatalabamaseafood.com](http://eatalabamaseafood.com) has been developed and has received rave reviews from the public. The program to date has been very successful. The Seafood Marketing Program is managed by AMRD.

AMRD continues to participate in the Natural Resources Damage Assessment program.

**Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (MDMR)**  
**Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission**  
**Activity Report ~ September, 2013 to January, 2014**

**Shrimp and Crab Bureau**

Mississippi territorial waters north of the Intracoastal Waterway (ICW) closed to shrimping at 12:00 a.m. on January 1, 2014. Shrimping will remain open south of the ICW until April 30, 2013. Preliminary reports for the 2013-2014 season show decreased landings from 2012, most likely due to springtime conditions being less than favorable for shrimp growth caused in part by above average rainfall. Since the season opened, there have been a total of 15 confirmed tiger shrimp (*Penaeus monodon*) reported in the Mississippi Sound, 48 since 2009.

The Mississippi Seafood Safety Newsletter continues to be updated online at MDMR's website. The report contains a summary of the on-going efforts and results of the data that the Office of Marine Fisheries has been gathering in cooperation with the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality to ensure that Mississippi seafood is free of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) and safe for consumption. To date, none of the 652 samples have been found to contain PAH concentrations above the FDA levels of concern.

The Shrimp and Crab Bureau and partners held a free, public seminar titled: "Oysters: Science on the Half Shell" on October 24, 2013. The seminar was the eleventh part of an ongoing series aimed at enhancing familiarity between interested groups and increasing awareness of the programs, needs and opportunities that are relevant to marine research in Mississippi waters. Over 50 people attended this seminar.

Staff completed all components and reporting for NOAA **Emergency Disaster Recovery Program (EDRP)** I and II, essential for fisheries recovery following Hurricane Katrina.

In 2013 there were a total of 476 Mississippi Sea Turtle strandings documented. Staff have continued frequent (twice monthly) aerial surveys of vessel activity in Mississippi waters (59 to date) to help correlate any type vessel interactions that may possibly be occurring, as mass spring strandings were evident 2010 through 2013. An Environmental Species Act Section 6 grant proposal is awaiting approval in hopes that NOAA will provide Mississippi with funding to address increasing strandings. As over 200 hook and line incidental catches have been reported this year, the proposal includes staff to man popular fishing piers to ensure hooked sea turtles receive proper care.

**Shellfish Bureau**

Due to the potential ephemeral nature of oyster populations from natural and anthropogenic influences, the Shellfish Bureau is dedicated to the assessment and evaluation of the Mississippi oyster reefs in a spatial and temporal concept. This investigation uses quantitative measurements of existing stocks using one-minute oyster dredge tows, twice monthly phytoplankton tows and quarterly Dermo samples along with other techniques.

The Mississippi Commission on Marine Resources granted the Executive Director the authority to open oyster season for tonging September 30<sup>th</sup> and for dredging October 14<sup>th</sup> 2013. Daily sack limit will be 12 sacks for tonging and 20 sacks for dredging. With limited oyster resources available, the dredging season will most likely be abbreviated. Through the end of January 2014, a total of 65,372 sacks of oysters were harvested over 4,816 trips.

The annual fall intensive assessment of 60 sampling stations was surveyed over the commercial oyster reefs with one-minute dredge tows. A successful summer spat set was found at most stations in the 60 station sample section. The R/V Conservationist spent "A Day on the Sound" with the MDMR Executive Director, oyster fishermen and various stakeholders to explore the oyster stocks and determine the status of the oyster fishery. The Oyster Stewardship booklet is in circulation and being distributed to the various stakeholders. Shellfish staff has been coordinating with the USM Gulf Coast Research Lab and Department of Environmental Quality contractors for the evaluation of the success of early oyster reef restoration project.

Staff completed all components and reporting for NOAA **Emergency Disaster Recovery Program (EDRP)** I and II, essential for fisheries recovery following Hurricane Katrina.

The Book 'The Oystermen's Guide to Mississippi Gulf Coast Oyster Reefs' was published by the Shellfish Bureau in October, 2013. It is a 118-page reference guide intended for all oystermen working in Mississippi Waters. The guide was distributed to working oyster license holders at the Pass Christian Check Station beginning October when oyster season opened. Any oyster license holder is eligible to receive a copy. A PDF version of the guide is available on the MDMR website. The goal of this book is to offer oystermen a unified reference guide for working in the MS Sound. This guide includes an abundance of information including: MS oyster reef harvesting locations, a map of the Western MS Sound Oyster Reefs, rules and regulations for harvesting oysters in MS, the trip ticket program, MDMR's on-going efforts to enhance and preserve the oyster reefs for future generations, spotting predators and threats to the oysters, understanding shellfish toxins and what the MDMR does to monitor for these toxins, boating safety on the water including weather emergencies. This book was printed on waterproof, tear-resistant, synthetic paper with a plastic spiral binding to avoid corrosion from sea water. This project was funded by a grant from the **EDRP**.

Shellfish staff has been coordinating with the USM Gulf Coast Research Lab and the Department of Environmental Quality for the evaluation of the success of early oyster reef restoration project. Staff has continued monthly analysis of oyster beds by quantitative measurements of existing stocks using one-minute oyster dredge tows, twice monthly phytoplankton tows and quarterly Dermo samples along with other techniques.

### **Seafood Technology Bureau**

The Seafood Technology Bureau (STB) organized four Serve-Safe training workshops with 100 trainees and three Basic Seafood HACCP training workshop with roughly 75 participants. Several of these workshops were funded through the Emergency Disaster Recovery Program (EDRP). Two Seafood Officers attended a "Train-the-Trainer" HACCP course in Orlando, FL. This training will

allow MDMR staff to teach Basic Seafood HACCP courses for the Coastal Mississippi seafood industry.

STB Staff completed the second quarterly regulatory inspections of the 38 certified seafood dealers with 58 certified as seafood processors. Staff also completed all samples of approved water sources for seafood processing facilities. STB was inspected by United States Federal Drug and Administration (FDA) Officer on the following: program implementation of the Vibrio Risk Management controls for Mississippi, the processing industry following the time-temperature controls, and the post-harvest processing (PHP) validation and verification records of the PHP dealers. Fourth quarter inspections and re-certifications for 2014-2015 are on-going.

STB Staff started an on-going collaborative investigation of a possible violation of time-temperature regulations by a restaurant, a seafood processing plant, and a retail market. Work on the economic impact study of the time-temperature regulation change in the Title 22 Part 17 is on-going. Staff assisted in two on-site technical assistance visits for construction of new seafood facilities in Gulfport and Vancleave. STB Officers certified two new oyster dealers a shipper and a re-shipper.

### **Artificial Reef Bureau**

The Artificial Reef Bureau monitored fish assemblages on selected inshore reef sites. Staff continued to stockpile reef material at the Gulfport staging site for future offshore and inshore reef development. Bureau staff, along with Reef Makers of Orange Beach, deployed 26 Florida Limestone Pyramids on Fish Haven 13. The bid process started to extend Katrina Key in early spring with 550 concrete columns from the old Margaretville Casino site.

On December 11, 2013, Bureau staff and members from Aqua Green Aquaculture released 2,200 juvenile Florida Pompano at East Ship Island. ARB personnel worked with the Cedar Point Hatchery in Ocean Springs to help release 650 juvenile Red Snapper on Fish Haven 2.

### **Finfish Bureau**

The Finfish Bureau continued to oversee the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) during this time period. All assignments were completed and surveys obtained were reviewed and processed. Site effort estimates continue to be refined in an effort to improve the accuracy of the survey. Otoliths were collected and processed for species selected for the biological sampling program. The ages collected through this process will aid in upcoming stock assessments and management decisions for our state.

Since implementation of the Mississippi Trip Ticket Program in February, 2012, MDMR staff has continued to work with seafood dealers, processors and commercial fishermen along with the software developer to refine the process of ticket entry and submission. Staff has continued to assist and further train users to improve the accuracy and validity of ticket submissions. Over 5,000 trip tickets have been submitted during this time period.

Three conventional and three fly fishing tackle records were accepted from October 1, 2013 through December 31, 2013. These included:

Conventional Tackle:

- Blueline Tilefish (*Caulolatilus microps*) 2 lbs. 13 oz.
- Gray Triggerfish (*Balistes capriscus*) 11 lbs. 3.96 oz.
- Spotfin Hogfish (*Bodianus pulchellus*) 12.64 oz.

Fly Fishing Tackle:

- Great Barracuda (*Sphyraena barracuda*) 17 lbs. 13 oz.
- Dolphin (*Coryphaena hippurus*) 9 lbs. 7.88 oz.
- Red Snapper (*Lutjanus campechanus*) 26 lbs. 9 oz.



**Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission**  
**64<sup>th</sup> Annual Spring Meeting**  
**LOUISIANA STATE REPORT**

***LA Creel***

Beginning on January 1, 2014, the LDWF initiated a new recreational statistics sampling program, LA Creel, in place of the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP). LDWF is in consultation with NOAA to establish benchmarking procedures that will allow for the comparison of harvest estimates between both surveys. LA Creel has been designed to provide statistically significant recreational fishery information to aid in management of Louisiana's valuable fishery resources. The saltwater component of the recreational fishery encompasses state waters including marsh habitat, bays, beaches and nearshore areas as well as the offshore federally managed waters of the EEZ. Recreational landing estimates will be calculated separately for the private recreational sector and the for-hire sector. An access point survey to collect harvest rate in conjunction with a phone survey to determine total effort will be used in developing landing estimates by sector. Quota monitoring of certain species, such as red snapper, will be incorporated as part of LA Creel.

***Research and Assessment***

**Stock Assessment:**

LDWF fisheries staff participated in a review workshop for the Gulf of Mexico Data, Assessment, and Review (GDAR) of blue crab where a non-sex-specific version of the latest Chesapeake Bay blue crab assessment model was used along with non-equilibrium surplus production modeling to estimate status of blue crabs stocks in the Gulf of Mexico. The assessment was accepted by reviewers as the best available information to guide management of the GOM blue crab resources and is available at <http://www.gsmfc.org/publications/GSMFC%20Number%202015.pdf>

LDWF fisheries staff completed an update of the annual stock assessment of striped mullet in Louisiana waters where a statistical catch-at-age model (ASAP3 Version 3.0.12; NOAA Fisheries Toolbox <http://nft.nefsc.noaa.gov>) was used to describe the dynamics of female striped mullet in Louisiana waters.

LDWF fisheries staff began updates of black drum, southern flounder, and sheepshead stock assessments in Louisiana waters. This updated assessment will explore alternative population models appropriate to available data (statistical catch-at-age, virtual population analysis, and non-equilibrium surplus production modeling) and will be completed in spring 2015.

**Habitat Programs:**

The Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority released 2012 Comprehensive Master Plan for a Sustainable Coast. The document is revised every 5 years. LDWF Habitat staff is working with CPRA on the modeling efforts for the 2017 plan.

LDWF staff also takes part in the deliberations of the Caernarvon and Davis Pond Interagency Advisory Panels which advise the state about effects of operations, and possible changes in

operations of these two freshwater diversion structures. These Panels met in October to approve the 2014 operations plan.

Each year, LDWF fisheries staff participates in the Environmental Work Group deliberations of the yearly CWPPRA priority project list (PPL). The Environmental Work Group evaluates up to 11 projects per year for final recommendation to the CWPPRA Technical Committee for funding of engineering and design.

Fisheries staff reviews coastal use, consistency, and 404 permit applications for possible impacts to fish resources and fish habitats. Since the beginning of October 2013, staff have reviewed and commented on 185 permit applications including the review of the EISs for the West Shore of Lake Pontchartrain levee project and the Southwest Coastal feasibility project. Staff continues to work with other state and federal partners on restoration and protection projects including West Shore of Lake Pontchartrain levee project where staff recently assisted in the WVA process.

LDWF participates with other state and federal agencies in planning restoration of hazardous materials sites. Two planning activities continue in 2014: Bayou Trepagnier in St. Charles Parish and Bayou D'Inde in Calcasieu Parish. Bayou Trepagnier has started to move forward with restoration planning and the trustees and RP are working to reach suitable restoration project. The trustees for Bayou D'Inde are currently collecting additional field data to support their claim. Fisheries habitat staff serves as the state representative on the Aquatic Nuisance Species (ANS) panels for the Gulf States and Atlantic Regional Panel (GSARP) and the Mississippi River Basin Panel (MRBP). These panels work with state and Federal partners to help implement the state and national ANS plan. Fisheries Habitat staff also serves as a point of contact of all ANS reports from LDWF field staff as well as the public. LDWF fisheries staff has utilized grants through this national plan to increase our knowledge on the spread of Asian Carp in Louisiana waters and the potential for public urban lakes to be sources of exotic species introductions into native waters of the state. This year's grant proposal will look at the effect Asian carp have on the productivity of some Louisiana lakes.

#### Marine Mammal and Turtle Stranding Response:

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries is the lead stranding and rescue response organization for marine mammals and sea turtles covering the coastline of the State of Louisiana, including the entire Louisiana coast and waters offshore of Louisiana. Since October of 2013, approximately 125 marine mammal incidents (including dead and live animals; whales and dolphins) and approximately 36 sea turtle incidents (including alive and dead) have been investigated. These efforts are critical to monitoring marine mammal mortalities along the coast of Louisiana, particularly in light of the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill. The largest and longest lasting Unusual Mortality Event (UME) ever experienced in the Northern Gulf of Mexico is ongoing. Since February 2010, 563 dolphins have stranded in Louisiana alone which far exceeds the 2002-2009 average stranding rate of 20 marine mammals per year for the state.

In November 2013, LDWF Staff collaborated with NOAA on Dolphin Photo ID field work in Barataria Bay as a part of the Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA).

LDWF staff members have also undergone extensive marine mammal necropsy trainings working alongside NOAA veterinarians over the past several months.

### Data Management:

LDWF processes requests for trip ticket landings to assist with commercial fishermen's claims related to the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill. After BP announced that it would require certified copies of trip tickets from LDWF, the Department started receiving multiple sets of trip tickets from previous years, 2008 and 2009 in particular. All late submissions were thoroughly reviewed and forwarded to LDWF Enforcement for investigation. Several citations have been issued and two arrests for fraud have been made to date. Investigations are still continuing. Since October, LDWF data management personnel have completed 61 data requests, bringing the total to 6,590 requests.

### Inshore / Nearshore Sampling:

In response to the need for information to assess the status of living marine resources in inshore waters, and in the shelf waters off of Louisiana, a long-term sampling program has been designed and implemented and is ongoing. LDWF is also conducting nearshore sampling as part of the independent monitoring program in order to generate fisheries-independent data on the species composition of groundfishes and shrimps found in the coastal waters of the Northern Gulf of Mexico as well as track environmental parameters. LDWF is also conducting nearshore sampling as part of the independent monitoring program in order to generate fisheries-independent data on the species composition of groundfishes and shrimps found in the coastal waters of the Northern Gulf of Mexico as well as track environmental parameters.

### Age and Growth:

The collection of age, growth, and reproductive information used to develop age-structured stock assessments is coordinated through the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Fish Assessment Laboratory, in Baton Rouge, La.

Since the fall of 2013 the Fish Assessment lab in Baton Rouge has received 3,687 otoliths and 2 Gray Triggerfish spines. Out of the 3689, structures received 1,130 have been aged. Within that total 701 of those otoliths are freshwater fish. Many of the freshwater otoliths are usually sent to us during the fall months. Right now Spotted Seatrout is our most collected species, for the final quarter of the year. However, that may change, because Largemouth Bass has been our most collected species the past couple of years. The totals for each species are: Black Crappie-265; Black Drum-346; Gray Snapper-1; Greater Amberjack-23; Gray Triggerfish-2; King Mackerel-7; Largemouth Bass-701; Red Drum-542; Red Snapper-150; Sheepshead-253; Southern Flounder-235; Spotted Seatrout-705; Vermilion Snapper-16; White Crappie-77.

In 2014, LDWF will continue working on several new projects including the Vertical Long Line otolith study, Red Drum Reproductive Study, and the Nearshore Bottom Long Line otolith study.

### ***Fisheries Research Lab***

The Fisheries Research Lab (FRL), located on Grand Isle, continues to work on the following sampling programs and research projects:

Nearshore Independent Monitoring, SEAMAP Vertical Line Survey, SEAMAP Bottom Longline, SEAMAP Ichthyoplankton Survey, SEAMAP Shrimp/Groundfish Survey, Assessment of fish assemblages on artificial structures in the northern Gulf of Mexico, Green Stick feasibility, Tarpon Tagging, T-bar and Dart-tipped Anchor Tag Retention Rates of Spotted Seatrout, Larval Fish Trap sampling, Histology processing, Research Tank Systems design, Micro Hatchery design, and an evaluation of effective sampling gear for sampling juvenile red drum.

#### Artificial Reef Program:

The Artificial Reef Program continues to assess and permit reef deployments related to offshore oil and gas structures. The Program has accepted 10 new structures. Forty-three (43) structures are permitted for deployment as permanent artificial reefs. Permitting of an additional 30 structures is currently underway. The multibeam surveying of the Program's offshore reefs is in the final stages of completion and will be available shortly on the Program's website. The Program is currently reviewing ROV video footage of 152 deployed artificial reef structures.

The Program is also developing inshore reefs to facilitate access and create additional fishing opportunities. The Coastal Conservation Association of Louisiana is currently deploying 2000 tons of recycled concrete material within the newly permitted 4 acre Laketown Pier Reef in Lake Pontchartrain.

#### *Marine Fisheries*

##### Shrimp Program:

The 2013 fall inshore shrimp season dates were as follows:

- Opened at 6 a.m., Monday August 12 in state inside waters from the western shore of the Atchafalaya River and the Atchafalaya River Ship Channel westward to the Louisiana/Texas state line
- Opened at 6 a.m. Monday August 12 in state inside waters east of the Atchafalaya River
- Closed at official sunset December 18 in state inside waters from the eastern shore of South Pass of the Mississippi River westward to the Louisiana/Texas state line
- Closed at official sunset January 13 in remaining state inside waters except for the open waters of Breton and Chandeleur Sounds as described by the double-rig line (R.S. 56:495.1(A)2)

##### Offshore Shrimp Seasons:

- Closed at official sunset December 18 in state outside waters extending a distance of 3 nautical miles seaward of the inside/outside shrimp line from the Atchafalaya River Ship Channel at Eugene Island as delineated by the Channel red buoy line westward to Freshwater Bayou Canal at -92 degrees 18 minutes 33 seconds west longitude
- Closed at official sunset in state outside waters extending a distance of 3 nautical miles seaward of the inside/outside shrimp line from the northwest shore of Caillou Boca at -90 degrees 50 minutes 27 seconds west longitude westward to the Atchafalaya River Ship Channel at Eugene Island as delineated by the Channel red buoy line

## Landings:

Preliminary statewide shrimp landings (all species combined/heads-off weight) for January-December, 2013 totaled 57.69 million pounds (Source: NOAA Fisheries).

## Shrimp Task Force:

The Louisiana Shrimp Task Force Shrimp Management Subcommittee held a public meeting in February to gather input on proposed changes to skimmer net regulations and to introduce potential new legislation for the 2014 Regular Legislative Session.

## Crab Fishery

The Louisiana Crab Task Force last met on December 3, 2013. Discussions included potential soft crab shedding grants, enhanced cooperation from parish district attorneys in prosecuting crab trap thefts, professionalizing the crab fishery, and key handling and quality impacts on Louisiana blue crab and fishermen.

Work on a coastwide crab trap bycatch survey designed to collect and analyze data incidental bycatch in commercial blue crab traps with special emphasis on diamond back terrapins (*Malaclemys terrapin*) has continued since the inception of the study in Dec. 2013.

In February, a portion of western Terrebonne Parish was temporarily closed to the use of crab traps for purposes of a trap clean-up over a 10-day period beginning at 6:00 am Feb. 15, 2014 through 6:00 am February 24, 2014. All crab traps were required to be removed from the closure area during the closure period and any remaining crab traps within the closure area during the closure period were considered abandoned and subject to removal. However, crab fishermen were allowed to remove their traps from the water and stack them on the bank within the closure areas, provided they had permission from the landowner. During the crab trap closures, traps were removed only between one-half hour before sunrise to one-half hour after sunset. Anyone could remove these abandoned crab traps from within the closed areas. Abandoned traps were required to be brought to LDWF designated disposal sites and could not be taken or possessed outside of the closed areas.

A mailout announcing the closures with maps and descriptions was mailed in January, 2014 to commercial crab trap license holders and wholesale/retail seafood dealers residing in Terrebonne, Lafourche, St. Mary and St. Charles parishes.

The LDWF hosted a volunteer day on Feb 15 at Toby Voisin's oyster dock on Bayou Dularge in which a total of 103 volunteers including 28 LDWF staff members and 16 boats (6 LDWF boats) participated. A total of 1,063 traps were collected during the trap closure/cleanup in addition to several tires and pieces of monofilament gill net and trawl webbing.

## Oyster Program:

LDWF conducts monthly biological monitoring on the public oyster areas of Louisiana via dredge sampling. Data suggests very little change in oyster stocks since the annual oyster stock assessment in July 2013. Oyster stocks are significantly reduced on public grounds east of the

Mississippi River, and very few spat have been found in biological samples. In areas west of the MS River, some spat was noted in the fall of 2012 with the majority of increases in oyster stock coming from Sister Lake in Terrebonne Parish. Dedicated cultch plant sampling continues with some cultch plants showing positive signs while others showing poor recruitment.

The 2013-2014 oyster season on the public grounds generally opened in October 2012, but has produced just over 110,000 sacks as of February 9, 2014. While this is an increase over the production during the previous season, nearly 80% of this season's harvest came from the Sister Lake Public Oyster Seed Reservation, an area that is opened only every other season. The season is scheduled to close, by law, no later than April 30, 2014.

#### Finfish Program:

LDWF conducts biological monitoring statewide in the coastal, nearshore, and offshore areas of Louisiana for finfish. In October, Louisiana waters were closed, until January 1, 2014, to the recreational harvest of gray triggerfish consistent with federal closures. The Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission (LWFC), in January, authorized the opening of the commercial king mackerel season on July 1 and gave the Secretary of the Department the authority to modify that season if needed. New regulations published in January that:

- established a closed season (June 1-July 31) and a 2 fish limit for gray triggerfish
- established a 12 fish commercial trip limit for gray triggerfish
- established a 2,000 pound trip limit for greater amberjack
- established a 10 fish limit on vermilion snapper
- modified the shallow water grouper closed season to outside of 20 fathoms
- removed the venting tool requirement

In February, the annual striped mullet stock assessment was brought before the LWFC prior to transmittal to the Legislature. The assessment found that the stock is not overfished and no overfishing is occurring. New regulations for the commercial and recreational harvest of tripletail were also published in February. Anglers that recreationally harvest tripletail are now subject to a 5 fish bag and possession limit with a minimum size restriction of 18 inches total length. Commercial fishermen are now subject to a 100 pound trip limit, with no more than one trip per day with a minimum size restriction of 18 inches total length.

#### ***Seafood Certification Program***

##### Professionalism:

LDWF continues to work closely with Louisiana Sea Grant MEP/LSU AgCenter to finalize the details of a multi-year and multi-phase professionalism program for Louisiana's commercial fishing industry. The details are expected to be finalized and possibly announced in March 2014. The professionalism program is designed to offer expanded professional education programming to commercial fishers, dock owners, processors and distributors. Once launched, the professionalism program will provide a mechanism to deliver industry education and training essential for economic sustainability.

LDWF continues to develop LOFTSeries III to be deployed in early 2014. The LOFTSeries serves as an outreach program that provides training and continuing education. Topics such as Weights

& Measures, Human Waste Management, and Refrigeration/Cooler Equipment/Fabrication (raised floor airflow management system) and Oyster Traceability Pilot Study (temperature sensor results) will be amongst the featured LOFT Series III topics. In February 2014, the Best Practices for Producing High Quality Seafood in Louisiana video underwent the first edit. The video is scheduled to premiere at the 2014 Louisiana Fisheries Summit. The summit will take place March 12-13, 2014 at the Houma-Terrebonne Civic Center, Houma, Louisiana. The summit offers a wide range of informational, training and educational topics for Louisiana's commercial fishing industry.

Sustainability:

In February 2014, the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission adopted a new Resolution supporting sustainability of the blue crab fishery. The resolution provides that should the fishing mortality or exploitable biomass exceed the overfished or overfishing limits, or exceed the targets for three consecutive years, as defined in the most current Louisiana blue crab stock assessment, the LDWF shall come before the Commission with an updated assessment and a series of management options for the Commission to review and act upon, intended to keep the fishery from becoming overfished. This Resolution was also supported by the Louisiana Crab Task Force.

***Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill***

Disclaimer: This report does not rely on information collected as part of the *Deepwater Horizon* Oil Spill Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA), and is not intended to analyze impacts resulting from the *Deepwater Horizon* Oil Spill and related response for NRDA purposes.

Fishery Openings/Closings:

A number of areas remain closed to commercial and recreational fishing in areas that were significantly impacted by the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill. Maps detailing the locations of these areas may be found on the LDWF website at <http://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/oilspill>. A reduction in the size of the recreational and commercial fishing closure extending from Caminada Pass westward to Belle Pass took place in December 2013. The closure was reduced from waters extending one mile seaward from the shoreline to one-half mile seaward of the shoreline. No other changes to recreational and commercial fishing closures were made.

Tissue Sampling for Seafood Safety:

Since May 2010, the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries has collected, tested and analyzed seafood tissue samples from inshore species, near shore reef fish, and pelagic species along with corresponding water and sediment samples. Since the inception of the sampling program, over 3,000 tissue samples of crabs, oysters, finfish, shrimp from coastal Louisiana have been tested for hydrocarbon contamination, along with corresponding sediment and water samples in many cases. A website ([www.gulfsource.org](http://www.gulfsource.org)) is available for the public to access the results of those samples. To date, no samples have exceeded the FDA-established levels of concern for safe seafood consumption. The program is funded by BP through xx, 2014.

NRDA:

LDWF Fisheries staff along with other state and federal trustees are actively assisting with the *Deepwater Horizon* Oil Spill Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) to quantify impacts

to Louisiana's natural resources and the human use of those resources. Some NRDA workplans are available online here: <http://losco-dwh.com/viewworkplans.aspx>.



**Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission 64<sup>th</sup> Annual Spring Meeting  
TEXAS REPORT**

**REGULATORY ISSUES**

**Regulatory Changes and Proposals**

During January 2014, Coastal Fisheries Division conducted coastwide public scoping meetings to gather input from user groups regarding possible changes to oyster, southern flounder, and spotted seatrout regulations. The Texas Parks & Wildlife Department Commission requested 3 coastal proposals for public regulatory hearings during March:

- 1) A temporary 2 years closure of restoration sites in East Galveston Bay totaling 180 acres and a 54-acre area encompassing Half-Moon Reef in Matagorda Bay. The East Galveston Bay closure will be the largest oyster habitat restoration project done in Texas. These proposed closures will allow staff to conduct post-construction monitoring for success as required under the Coastal Impact Assistance Program grant in East Galveston Bay, and allow The Nature Conservancy to similarly monitor their restoration efforts on Half-Moon Reef. The two year time period is proposed as it takes 18-24 months for oysters to attach and grow to a marketable size (3-inches) in Texas. Other public oyster reefs and private oyster leases in East Galveston Bay will not be impacted by these closures. Closure boundaries around the restoration sites will be marked and maintained with buoys to aid commercial fishermen and law enforcement in identifying the closed area.
- 2) Extend the November two-fish bag and possession limit of southern flounder into the first two weeks of December. Harvest during this time can occur by any legal means. This regulation would provide additional protection during the flounder spawning run. The department has determined this measure must be implemented to protect and replenish spawning stock biomass in the fishery. Current harvest regulations for flounder, outside the month of November, consist of a 14-inch minimum size limit and a 5-fish daily bag and possession limit for recreational take and a 30-fish daily bag and possession limit for commercial take. During the month of November all anglers may take two flounder per day by pole-and-line only.
- 3) Expand the 5-fish bag and possession limit of spotted seatrout up the coast to the FM 457 bridge in Sargent, TX. This proposal contains a 5-year sunset provision. This proposal reduces the spotted seatrout bag and possession limits from 10 to 5 from FM 457 in Matagorda County to the Rio Grande River. This is a geographic extension of the regulations established for the lower Laguna Madre in 2007. Results from the 2007 regulations indicate an increase in the number and size of spotted seatrout in the lower Laguna Madre, and similar results are expected for the extended area. Surveys and modeling have indicated landings will be reduced by 13.6%, with an increase in the spawning biomass of 16.4% and a 41.8% increase in the number of spotted seatrout  $\geq 25''$  in length in the extended area. Modeling indicates a substantial improvement would be possible in a relatively short period of time, with 89% of the effects realized within 3 years, and 99% of the effects realized within 6 years.

## COASTAL FISHERIES PROGRAMS & PROJECTS

### Current 2014 Fish Stocking Totals

Red Drum	21,081,468
Spotted Seatrout	9,999,206
<u>Southern Flounder</u>	<u>124,386</u>
<b>Total Stocked</b>	<b>31,205,060</b>

Staff members continue refining southern flounder broodfish spawning techniques, larviculture, and fingerling grow-out methods. Coastal Fisheries is planning to expand our space for culturing flounder by constructing a greenhouse-like structure at its Sea Center Texas facility.

### Perry R. Bass Marine Fisheries Research Station

Otolith collections from routine gill net samples continued, as was the processing and aging of otoliths collected in previous years.

The GSMFC funded FIN-Biological Sampling Project for otolith collection and processing for various marine species was completed before this project discontinued as of December 31, 2013 due to lack of funding. All 2013 samples and data were successfully processed and entered in the FIN database.

Temperature and salinity tolerance trials for larval flounder continued, with some scheduled trials postponed due to lack of flounder juveniles.

In cooperation with Texas State University, initial trials were conducted for a State Wildlife Grant project to investigate the effects of increasing salinity and temperature levels on growth and survival of juvenile red drum.

Sample processing and data analysis for an alligator gar genetic variation study was completed, and a final report is being drafted.

A genetic survey of gulf menhaden along the Texas coast was continued; sample collection and processing is ongoing.

A genetic survey of inshore black drum populations was initiated, samples collected, and processing is ongoing.

### Artificial Reef Program

During September 2013 through January 2014, the Artificial Reef Program received 3 platforms for reefing (HI-A-447A, HI-A-447B, and HI-A-568). The total donation amount was \$779,000. The Artificial Reef Program received a new reef site permit in November 2013 for MU-870. This reef site is approximately 30 miles off Corpus Christi and will be home to a towed platform in the spring of 2014.

Over 100 1-ton+ natural quarry rocks were deployed at Sabine Reef (HI-117) in September 2013. These rocks are delivered to a storage area in Sabine from drill bit producers and donated to the

program. Over the years, the reef program has gained hundreds of rock for reefing operations in the Port Arthur / Sabine area.

The Corpus Christi nearshore reefing project (MU-775) began September 22, 2013. Reefing consisted of 20,000 tons of box culvert with 66 large ones being placed in an upright position, and 470 concrete pyramids (10ft base x 8ft tall). The Coastal Conservation Association (CCA) funded the building of 70 of the pyramids. The Saltwater-Fisheries Enhancement Association (SEA) has been instrumental in locating the culverts and arranging for their transportation to the port, and promoting the reefing with the City of Corpus Christi. Both CCA and SEA were present for the reefing event.

Four Eternal Reefs were placed at Barr's reef site in federal waters on October 25, 2013. Due to conflict with the TX General Land Office, Eternal Reefs are not allowed to be reefed in state waters as the GLO insists this would constitute the creation of an underwater state cemetery; deployment of these reefs outside state waters avoids this restriction.

The TPWD Artificial Reef Program applied for 3 NRDA projects: two nearshore pyramid deployments and a ship project. Another nearshore project is listed as an alternative to the ship project if it is not feasible to do. The archaeology and bottom survey work required for the three reef sites was awarded and work should begin soon. Surveys are needed at the two nearshore reefs and at the proposed HI-A-424 ship sites to meet requirements from the federal review team that is overseeing the Deepwater Horizon Project Proposals. Public hearings were held in January 2014 at Port Arthur, Galveston and Corpus Christi. Contrary to some media releases, the majority of folks are in favor of the artificial reef projects and some did express ideas on additional resource-type projects. Matagorda County Judge Nate McDonald and Jefferson County Judge Jeff Branick have indicated their support for the projects. Staff continues to receive positive comments concerning the proposed projects, including numerous people from the Houston/Galveston region wanting a ship project off Galveston.

The TPWD Artificial Reef Program created a new 2-year interagency agreement with Texas A&M University at Galveston. This agreement is to provide biological monitoring and research on 9 TPWD reef sites from Freeport to Sabine using vertical longlines, diver surveys, remotely operated vehicles (ROV), and DIDSON (acoustic technology) to determine fish biomass and the general health of the reef sites. Currently, TPWD has agreements with the University of Texas at Brownsville, Texas A&M University at College Station, Texas A&M University at Corpus Christi, US Geological Services, and now Texas A&M University at Galveston. These agreements along with the work that TPWD artificial reef staff carry out cover all of the TPWD artificial reef sites and encompass a very robust biological monitoring program.

The Texas Artificial Reef Survey was conducted by Texas A&M University at College Station. About 10,000 surveys were sent out and an online website was created to receive responses from the survey. Those who did not respond online received a hard copy survey. The total mailing list included 5,000 anglers and 5,000 boaters.

The first annual Artificial Reef Program Science and Monitoring Symposium was held at the Harte Research Institute in Corpus Christi in January 2014. The symposium was well organized and

many presentations were made by the TPWD Artificial Reef Program staff as well as the TPWD contracted agencies (Texas A&M University at Corpus Christi, Texas A&M University at Galveston, US Geological Services, and the University of Texas at Brownsville). Overall, it was a successful meeting of the Texas artificial reef researchers with the hope that this gathering happens every year in order to open the flow of research among all parties involved.

As of February 2014, The Artificial Reef Program Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/TexasParksAndWildlifeArtificialReefProgram>, there are over 792 “likes,” nearly double what it was a year ago.

## **Buyback Programs**

### **Shrimp License Buyback Program**

Inshore shrimp buyback round #31 application period closed 25 October 2013. During this round, 43 bids were received and a total of 20 (12 bay and 8 bait) licenses were purchased at a total cost of \$175,500. The average purchase price was \$8,775 with a range of \$7,000 to \$10,000.

Shrimp - Overall totals since 1996

- 2,145 licenses purchased
- 1,084 bay licenses and 1,061 bait licenses
- Total cost of \$14.2 million
- 2,145 / 3,231 original licenses = 66% of licenses retired

### **Crab License Buyback Program**

Crab buyback round #17 application period closed on 25 October 2013 during which 12 applications were received and 2 licenses were accepted at a total cost of \$17,500, with a range of \$7,500 to \$10,000.

Crab - Overall totals since 2001

- 63 licenses purchased
- Total cost of \$436,949
- Average price over all rounds = \$6,936
- 63 / 287 original licenses = 22% of licenses retired

### **Finfish License Buyback Program**

Finfish buyback round #20 application period closed on 25 October 2013 during which 8 applications were received and 1 license was purchased at a total cost of \$10,000.

Finfish - Overall totals since 2002

- 241 licenses purchased
- Total cost of \$1,446,200
- Average price over all rounds = \$6,000
- 241 / 549 original licenses = 44% of licenses retired

### **Oyster Fishery**

The 2013-14 commercial oyster season opened to lower than expected oyster resource availability. High mortality from predators/disease due to several years of high salinity in Texas bays and heavy fishing pressure are believed to be the reasons for the poor season. Demand for oysters remains

high and complaints are being received from fishermen and dealers of large quantities of undersize oysters being harvested and of high percentages (30%) of shell pieces being loaded into "legal" sacks. Some industry members are calling for enhanced penalties for fishermen and dealers who are participating in this activity.

#### **SPECIAL EFFORTS, STUDIES, AND TOPICS**

On 1 November 2013, the first day of the Texas oyster season, the Texas Department of Social and Health Services issued two oyster area closures related to rainfall events that occurred during 30-31 October 2013. Conditionally Approved Areas 2 and 3 of Galveston Bay, Conditionally Approved Areas 1 and 2 of Lavaca Bay, and the Conditionally Approved areas of Carancahua Bays were closed to the harvesting of shellfish due to rainfall. On November 2, 2013, Conditionally Approved Areas 1 and 4 of Galveston Bay, Conditionally Approved Area 3 of Lavaca Bay, and the conditionally approved area of Tres Palacios Bay were also closed to the harvesting of shellfish due to rainfall.

A report from Louisiana of norovirus illnesses resulting from the consumption of oysters harvested from Copan Bay prompted the temporary closure of Copano Bay to commercial oyster harvest by the health department in January 2014. The Department of Health staff collected water samples from Copano Bay and found high bacteria levels that may have resulted from rain runoffs. The bay remained closed for 21 days after the initial closure date of 9 January 2014.

#### **'OTHERS'**

In mid-September, Coastal Fisheries staff met with local, state and federal entities as well as people representing Non-Governmental Organizations, universities, and the private sector in a "Workshop to Improve Collaboration among Texas Estuary Researchers" in Victoria, Texas. The goal of the workshop was to serve as the initial meeting of an ongoing series of Inflows to Texas Estuaries Workshops. Improving collaboration among researchers was identified as essential to assessing and quantifying drought response and to understanding the state of coastal systems before, during and after drought.

Since cold weather events began in Texas on 25 November 2013 until 13 February 2014, over 1,000 cold stunned sea turtles have been recorded. All were green turtles except one loggerhead and one hawksbill. The majority of the sea turtles were found alive and transported to rehabilitation. Hundreds of the sea turtles rescued earlier in the event have been recovered and released into warmer water of the Gulf of Mexico.

**GULF & SOUTH ATLANTIC REGIONAL PANEL  
ON AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES  
MINUTES  
Tuesday, April 8, 2014 & Wednesday, April 9, 2014  
Gulfport, MS**

APPROVED BY:  
*Pam Fuller*  
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

On Tuesday, April 8, 2014 Chairman Hartman called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. The meeting began with introductions of the members and guests. The following were in attendance:

**Members & Proxies**

James Ballard, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS  
Tim Bonvechio, GA DNR, Waycross, GA  
Robert Bourgeois, LA Dept. of Wildlife & Fisheries, Baton Rouge, LA  
Rick Burris, MS DMR, Biloxi, MS  
Paul Carangelo, Port Authority, Corpus Christi, TX  
Rob Emens, NC DENR, Raleigh, NC  
Pam Fuller, USGS, Gainesville, FL  
Leslie Hartman, TPWD, Palacios, TX  
Jeffrey Herod, USFWS, Atlanta, GA (By phone)  
Chuck Jacoby, Indian River Lagoon National Estuary Program, Palatka, FL  
Tom Jackson, NOAA-NMFS-SEFSC, Miami, FL  
David Knott, At-Large Member, Charleston, SC  
Herb Kumpf, At-Large Member, Stuart, FL  
Robert McMahan, UT Arlington, Arlington, TX  
Roberto Mendoza, Univ. of Nuevo Leon, Nuevo Leon, Mexico  
Craig Newton, AL DCNR, Dauphin Island, AL  
Dennis Riecke, MS DWFP, Jackson, MS  
Kristen Sommers, FL FWC, Tallahassee, FL  
John Teem, FL DOA, Tallahassee, FL

**Staff**

Alyce Ryan, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

**Others**

Jason Ballard, MS DMR, Biloxi, MS  
Matt Cannister, USGS, Gainesville, FL  
Patric Harper, USFWS, Moss Point, MS  
Jennifer Hill, Dauphin Island Sea Lab, Dauphin Island, AL  
Matt Neilson, USGS, Gainesville, FL  
Mike Pursley, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Tamesha Woulard, USFWS, Arlington, VA

**Public Comment**

Chairman **Hartman** provided the opportunity for public comment. No public comments were received.

### **Adoption of Agenda**

**A motion to adopt the agenda was made, and passed unanimously.**

### **Approval of Minutes**

After minor changes, the minutes of the meeting of the April 10-11, 2013 meeting in Atlanta, GA were presented for approval.

**A motion was made to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded, and the motion passed.**

### **Constructed Wetland Sewage Treatment Ponds as Pathways and Vectors of Aquatic Invasive Species – A Case Study**

Pursley gave a PowerPoint Presentation entitled “Constructed Wetland Sewage Treatment Ponds as Pathways and Vectors of Aquatic Invasive Species”. Constructed wetland water treatment ponds are inexpensive to build, energy efficient, an effective water treatment, provide wildlife habitat, and are accepted by the public. However, they require more land, can harbor mosquitoes, they are not for all wastewater types, their performance varies, there is a prolonged start-up time, AIS control options are limited, and they are the ideal habitat for invasive species. The Wes Jackson County Land Treatment Facility treats 5 million gallons of water per day. The pond attracts large numbers of waterfowl. New ponds are planted with aquatic plant species from an out-of-state grower. The facility discharges into Bayou Costapia. In September, a volunteer Audubon birdwatcher reported a giant apple snail egg mass in Jackson County, Mississippi. There were eggs and live snails present. No snails were larger than 6.5cm, and were found only in newly-planted ponds. Baited traps used as a control effort for giant apple snails are ineffective in dense duckweed, and the use of metal salt-based molluscicides are not feasible. Plant workers are removing the egg masses by hand. A recent infestation had no fully-grown snails. Common salvinia was also found in ponds with apple snails.

Another aquatic invasive species found at WJCLTF was the Bloodfluke Planorb, a tropical freshwater snail native to South America, the Caribbean, and Puerto Rico. They have a high reproductive rate, and are considered a threat to agriculture. A large number of these snails were found in the infested ponds. They were observed to be feeding on water lettuce, and trapping was not necessary to capture live specimens. In captivity, they will feed on common salvinia. Escape into Bayou Costapia was prevented by a chlorination chamber, and no exotic snails were found in discharge so far. The USGS has requested funding to genetically identify this population. It is the first US report since 1991, and the first sighting in Mississippi.

The potential means of dispersal of the snails include attaching to crawfish, turtles, alligators, hogs, and bird feet. Also, by passing through the stomachs of birds, and the flooding of treatment plant ponds.

It is recommended that constructed wetland treatment systems and retention ponds be identified and monitored for AIS; require that aquatic plants grown off-site be inspected for AIS,

quarantined, and have a phytosanitary inspection certificate; provide AIS identification/control resources and education to treatment plant personnel.

**Conversation on the USFWS Region 4 Transition**

**Herod** provided his report via conference call. He informed the members that he is leaving his position as USFWS Region 4 Aquatic Invasive Species Coordinator, and is transitioning over to a newly created position within the USFWS. There will be a vacancy when he leaves his current position for six months or more. He stated that he is looking for ways that the GSARP can be more incorporated with project selection and development.

To stay connected with the Panel, and provide some stability, **Herod** proposed that USFWS Region 4 would provide the GSARP with \$60,000 for each of the next five years for operations of the Panel, travel support, and possibly some funding for some projects.

**Herod** presented an *Action Item*: *The GSARP would support receiving \$60,000 for each of the next five years from USFWS Region 4 to support the Panel's operations.* **Herod** would grant the funding directly to GSMFC. **Ballard** would be appointed as the Fiscal Officer.

**A Motion was made that the GSARP would support receiving \$60,000 for each of the next five years from USFWS Region 4. The Motion was seconded, and the Motion passed.**

**Herod** next proposed a workload shift that, for the first year in his absence as the USFWS Region 4 Aquatic Invasive Species Coordinator, would have the Panel convene a work group to review the projects that are submitted to **Herod** at the USFWS for aquatic invasive species funding. **Herod** would pass the projects on to the Panel work group for their review based on scientific merit, then rank the projects, and resubmit a list back to him to discuss funding of the projects with **Ballard**. **Herod** would in turn, provide funding to GSMFC to implement and manage those projects for the first year. After that, USFWS would appoint someone to work through the Panel, and decide if this is a mechanism that they could move forward with in the future. **Herod** asked the Panel members if they would be willing to take on that workload. This would be short-term.

**Herod** presented a second *Action Item*: *The GSARP would convene a work group to review the proposals for USFWS Region 4.*

**Fuller** pointed out that, as a federal employee who has submitted several proposals to **Herod**, if money was given to the GSMFC for projects, it could not be given by GSMFC to federal employees. **Herod** stated that she was correct, but that he has set aside nine proposals from federal agencies. Those proposals would be handled at the USFWS regional office. **Herod** has already ranked the proposals, and will be discussing funding details with his supervisor. The projects that **Herod** is asking the Panel to review would be non-federal partner projects. He stated that he is currently looking at 23 proposals that are not federal. Typically, a proposal is one page. Currently, no ranking matrix has been developed for the proposals. **Ballard** suggested that separate meetings could be held for the work group to review the proposals, rank them, and then send them back to **Herod**.



**Herod** would like to have the rankings done by sometime in May. He will notify each person on the proposal to notify them of the process, and to see if they want to be removed from the process, due to non-interest.

**Herod** would provide funding for the selected non-federal projects. Sub-award contracts would be handled through GSMFC by **Ballard**, who would then forward all of them back to the USFWS regional office.

Multi-year proposals? Some of the proposals are phases. None of the proposals are set up for multi-year funding, but they are set up with the option for a grant for the next phase. He recommends that if this process works, it should remain unchanged, even after the person who takes over **Herod's** position at USFWS is hired. However, that person should also be given autonomy at some point to run the program as they see fit.

**Ballard** stated that there is a concern that the Panel doesn't have representation from all of the states that are receiving funds, so he recommended that representatives could be selected to sit on the Panel for those states.

**Fuller made a Motion to accept Herod's offer to convene a work group to review the proposals for USFWS Region 4. Kumpf seconded the Motion, and the Motion passed.**

#### **Wildlife Inspection Overview**

Woulard gave a PowerPoint Presentation entitled "U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Office of Law Enforcement - Wildlife Inspection Overview 2014".

Under the Lacey Act, the injurious wildlife provision regulates the importation and interstate transport of species determined to be injurious to the health and welfare of humans, agriculture, forestry, and wildlife resources of the US. Permits are issued only for zoological, educational, medical, or scientific purposes. The wildlife trafficking provision of the Lacey Act prohibits interstate and international commerce in wildlife taken, transported, or possessed in violation of Federal, State, Tribal, or foreign law.

The Endangered Species Act requires any person or company to obtain permission to engage in business as an importer/exporter of fish and wildlife and as a licensee, to keep records of the import/export and subsequent disposition of the fish or wildlife.

LEMIS (Law Enforcement Management Information System) is a Fish and Wildlife Service Law Enforcement database that is used to collect and store import/export data such as species, quantity imported/exported, country of origin, etc. This data is shared with various other agencies and divisions via FOIA requests.

Approximately 140 of the Fish and Wildlife Service Wildlife Inspectors are located at 18 designated ports and 20 other locations. They are stationed at major international airports, ocean ports, and border crossings. They work the passenger terminals at airports, and conduct inspections at international mail facilities. The inspectors review FWS Declarations, permits and

other paperwork, and conduct physical inspections of shipments. They serve as the nation's front-line defense against illegal international trade in wildlife and wildlife products.

A "Notice to the Wildlife Import/Export Community" is put out periodically. The subject heading is: "Filing Changes Affecting Import and Export of Fish and Crustaceans".

#### **Update on NOAA Fisheries ANS Activities**

**Jackson** gave a PowerPoint Presentation on NOAA Fisheries ANS activities. He spoke on the ongoing Invasive Mangrove (*Lumnitzera*) Removal Project in Biscayne Bay. *Lumnitzera* is an Indo-pacific mangrove genus that was grown in Fairchild Tropical Garden that propagated and spread into the natural mangrove forests. In April and October 2014, NOAA will be hosting surveys, and cooperate in removal or survey days over the remainder of 2014.

There is a focus on the endangered native snail kite, due to the presence of invasive caiman lizards in the Everglades. Snail kites eat native and non-native apple snails, and depend on them for survival. Caiman lizards, which are from South America and grow over a meter in length, also have a preference for freshwater molluscs and crustaceans. This is a topic of concern for the Tropical Audubon Society, and restoration goals.

Another regional invasive of concern is *Xenia macrospiculata*, a soft coral that was initially seen in 2007 as a small colony off the east coast of Venezuela. It has spread several km away from the first observation site, covering 20% of substrate as a monoculture. It overgrows scleractinian corals, which are species critical to NOAA restoration goals. It exhibits a remarkably high reproduction potential, which contributes to its dominance in the Red Sea coral reefs. It is considered an aquarium pest, and an aggressive colonizer. This is a potential ballast water/hull fouling risk for transfer to other locations.

According to FFWCC, the most common pathway by which exotic fish and wildlife species find their way into Florida's habitats is through the pet trade (escape/release/trade). Despite large local and regional campaigns ("Don't let it Loose"), as well as national campaigns in cooperation with industry ("Habitattitude"), releases continue to occur.

It is believed that the lionfish invasion was begun by the release of "pet" lionfish, due to their aggression (eating their fish tank mates), eventual size, and/or lost interest in the fish, causing "empathetic releases". Within 40 years, two lionfish species (*P. miles* and *P. volitans*) populated 7.3 million km, including the Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico, the southeastern US coastline, and the Bermuda coastline. They are a management problem for 36 countries, and there is no effective control at this time.

Two bills on regulations for lionfish were recently filed by two Florida State Representatives. HB 1060 would prohibit importation, aquaculture, and sale of illegally imported lionfish. It would also provide penalties. The FWCC and DACS would be authorized to adopt rules enforcing those provisions. SB 1336 would provide a definition, prohibit the importation and aquaculture of lionfish and the sale of illegally imported lionfish, provide penalties, and authorize the FWCC and the DACS to adopt rules enforcing those provisions. However, it would allow "Florida caught lionfish" to be sold as pets for the purpose of trade, and allow

continued commercial fisheries development, both being proposed as a “form of control”. The bills are still in committee.

It is easy to understand that boat ballast carries a large number of organisms, from microscopic plankton to large fish. However, many people do not understand the number of organisms living on the outside and inside of a released pet. Bony fish species are estimated at approximately 28,000, and contain several species of parasites. The prevailing view has been that only a small number of generalist parasite species infect all sorts of different fish. However, a DNA barcoding study done on freshwater fish in the St. Lawrence River in Canada revealed that fish eye lenses were home to five species of non-specialized flukes that thrived in many different fish species, and even frogs. The immunosuppressed eye is a better habitat for parasite infestation.

As a rule, there is no pressure for documentation for parasite/interactions and their pathways/vectors for imports. For most imported ornamentals, there is no substantial background that could be used in risk assessment analysis. Open filtration systems provide global opportunities of exposure. Such globally exposed released ornamentals are a pathogen vector risk to native species, including threatened and endangered, and commercial species. In a study done on 32 species of tropical fish in Florida, Columbia, and Singapore, antibiotic resistance was found in many of the fish. It was also noted that a number of common bacterial isolates from ornamental fish also possess zoonotic potential.

Recently documented population incursions of invasive *P. monodon* in the western north Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico carry with them the risk of a number of pathogens they are susceptible to, such as white spot syndrome virus. *P. monodon* acts as a vector to commercially important native panaeid shrimps.

#### **Update on Lionfish Activities in Florida**

**Sommers** gave a PowerPoint Presentation entitled “Lionfish – Florida Update”. Complete eradication of lionfish is unlikely, as the population is widespread throughout the Gulf of Mexico, Caribbean, and the Atlantic. Deepwater lionfish repopulate shallow reefs, and are difficult to harvest. Harvesting by divers using spears and hand-held nets is currently the primary means of lionfish removal, and localized removal efforts can significantly reduce densities.

Recreational lobster surveys are being done to gather information on lionfish encounters. The number of lobster fishermen who kill and/or remove lionfish increased from 2010-2013. The proportion of respondents to the surveys who observed lionfish increased from 2010-2011. Studies are being done on re-colonization rates, species abundance, and diversity after removal. Tagging, acoustic tracking, and video monitoring are being done to observe lionfish behavior and movement. Fishery independent trawl and camera surveys are being done in the Gulf of Mexico, and lionfish presence in deep-water habitats was observed.

Due to the public’s increasing interest in eating lionfish, recent research is being done by FWRI on the mercury content in lionfish in Florida. Results of the research revealed that mercury contents in the fish had lower levels than many other fish that were used for food.

Recent FWC efforts in management and rulemaking include removal of the bag limit for recreational and commercial fishermen; removal of the Collier County spearfishing ban; waived license requirements for harvest by specific gears; creation of the FWC Lionfish Team made up of staff across the agency.

Recent FWC efforts in outreach and collaboration include online and print publications; a new budget request was submitted to facilitate additional outreach efforts for 2014-2015; cooperating with other Gulf Coast states, REEF, Sea Grant, and other organizations; non-native species roundups, and pet amnesty events; outreach and social media; and the FWC Lionfish Summit 2013.

The 2013 FWCC Lionfish Summit was held on October 22-24, 2013 in Cocoa Beach, Florida. The purpose of the summit was to develop a collaborative framework between scientists, managers, and stakeholders for lionfish management, and to identify research gaps and collect stakeholder input on management. A total of 127 people attended the summit, and a wide variety of ideas were exchanged. Discussions included: examining potential incentive programs; developing a formal lionfish management plan; relaxing area-specific spearfishing regulations; considering the development of directed trap areas with high densities; the creation of a vehicle license tag with funds going to lionfish control; and continued research to fill information gaps.

Suggested management approaches to regulatory measures include: curtailing the introductions of new lionfish; and to facilitate removal and localized population control. Non-regulatory strategies include: the development of a FWC Lionfish Control and Action Plan; providing education on the issue of lionfish and how the public can help; encouraging stakeholder involvement and providing incentives where feasible.

One initiative to prevent the introduction of additional lionfish into Florida waters would be to prohibit the importation of live lionfish, which would prevent the introduction of other lionfish species. The continued live harvest and sale of Florida-caught lionfish would be allowed, and an additional demand for Florida-caught fish would be created. Another initiative to prevent the introduction of lionfish into Florida waters would be to prohibit the aquaculture of lionfish by preventing the development of lionfish aquaculture in Florida, and eliminating the potential large-scale accidental aquaculture-related releases. FWC is working with the Legislature on a bill that will aid in these initiatives. Proposed draft rule amendments would reduce the probability of additional lionfish releases, and reduce regulatory barriers to harvest lionfish.

Harvesting marine organisms while diving on a rebreather is prohibited in state waters. The first proposed draft rule would eliminate regulatory barriers by allowing the harvest of lionfish when diving with a rebreather. Other measures would be to increase the number of divers using rebreathers for deep or extended dives, and to provide opportunities for additional lionfish harvest.

The second proposed draft rule would allow the Executive Director or his designee to issue permits to tournaments or other events for the use of spearing gears (in areas where spearfishing is otherwise prohibited by FWC rules) to remove lionfish or other non-native invasive species.

A permit facilitates removal, while limiting impacts to public safety. Also, a reference would be created to the new rule that provides an exception to statewide spearing prohibitions.

The third proposed draft rule would prohibit the importation and aquaculture of lionfish in Florida.

If approved and directed, staff will return for a final public hearing in June. Best-case scenario is that the Draft Rules would be enacted by August.

Staff has coordinated with FDEP, NPS, and the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary on the development of the proposed rules. Park permits would still be required in addition to the Saltwater Harvest Exception Permit when harvesting from these areas.

Ongoing non-regulatory strategies include coordination on a national level; and Outreach efforts which include marketing programs to encourage public participation; FWC-designed t-shirts distributed as an incentive to participate in lionfish derbies; web pages dedicated to lionfish issues; sponsoring lionfish derbies; attending seafood festivals and events; and the development of a Lionfish Reporting App.

The next steps are to pursue a grant to research additional incentive programs; develop an FWC Lionfish Action and Control Plan; identify additional opportunities to remove regulatory impediments to lionfish control efforts; continue evaluating rules that inhibit removal efforts; continue conducting lionfish research; coordinate with universities, other research institutions, and stakeholders to identify potential management options.

**Sommers** stated that the GSARP could possibly make a recommendation to the Task Force to put lionfish on the injurious species list. **Ballard** stated that the Panel could make the recommendation, since one of the roles of the Panel is to make recommendations to the Task Force that the Panel feel are important. **Hartman** stated that a Motion and a second would be necessary to make an official recommendation to the Task Force. **Sommers** wondered what some of the implications would be in making lionfish injurious. **Jackson** stated that he believed that the conflict was regarding the act being prohibited from having lionfish promoted as a commercial species if it is listed. He stated that this would need to be confirmed before the recommendation is made. **Hartman** pointed out that once it has been made a commercial fisheries, Magnuson-Stevens requires that it would have to be managed as a productive, viable fisheries if it has been designated as fisheries. An exclusion or a modification would need to be done.

#### **Update on Ongoing Aquatic Invasive Species Activities in Mexico**

**Mendoza** gave a PowerPoint Presentation entitled "Aquatic Invasive Species in Mexico". He showed a map of 595 sites of imminent species extinction. Shown on the map were sites either fully or partially contained within protected areas, and sites that were completely unprotected or have unknown protection status. Introduction of exotic species result in the extinction of 54% of native fauna; 70% of fishes from North America; 60% of Mexico's fishes.

Mexico has 545 native species, and 115 exotic species.

**Mendoza** spoke on *The National Strategy on Invasive Species in Mexico: Prevention, Control and Eradication*, which is a guide for directing the actions in Mexico for the prevention, control, and eradication of invasive species. The strategic objectives are to prevent, detect, and reduce the introduction, establishment, and dispersal of invasive species; establish control and eradication programs of exotic invasive species to minimize or eliminate their negative impacts; and inform society in an efficient way so that people can act responsibly in the prevention, control, and eradication of invasive species. Strategic actions include reviewing and developing the legal framework; developing scientific, technical, and institutional capabilities; fostering coordination between and within the government, institutions, and society; promoting education and public awareness; generating sound knowledge for decision making.

**Mendoza** spoke on a book that was written entitled “Aquatic Invasive Species in Mexico”. Seventy-seven authors contributed to the book. The book has nine sections, and is about identifying invasive species of greatest risk, and addressing the main pathways of introduction. Management options described are on the prevention, early detection, control and eradication of invasive species. They contribute to the objectives of the National Strategy on Invasive Species.

**Mendoza** next spoke on Sea Grant’s *AIS-HACCP, Aquatic Invasive Species-Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point* training curriculum that is used for HACCP Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point workshops. The manual identifies pathways through which aquatic invasive species could invade aquaculture. It also shows methods to prevent accidental transfer to new areas.

**Mendoza** next spoke on the Commission for Environmental Cooperation’s *Trinational Risk Assessment Guidelines for Aquatic Alien Invasive Species – Test Cases for the Snakeheads (Channidae) and Armored Catfishes (Loricariidae) in North American Inland Waters*. These guidelines will be used for risk assessments and socioeconomic impacts and analyses of invasive aquatic species in Canada, Mexico and the United States. Also available in the appendices are: an organism risk assessment form, an inferential estimation of organism risk and pathway risk, and a glossary of terms and definitions. **Jackson** suggested that a link to the book be placed on GSARP's website. **Ballard** stated that he will put a link on the GSARP website.

### **Update on Panel Funded Projects**

**Teem** gave a PowerPoint Presentation entitled “Trojan Y Chromosome Eradication: Sex-specific DNA Markers for Invasive Fish”.

Females with two Y chromosomes produce only male progeny, half of which are Myy. Myy males are viable and produce only male offspring. Four different matings are possible, leading to increased male production. The male/female ratio will increase over time if Fyy added. The addition of a Trojan Y female (Fyy) to a target population will cause females (Fxx) to go to extinction over time. The carrying capacity of the system becomes occupied by Myy fish (males with two Y chromosomes).

Three invasive fish species were screened for sex-specific DNA markers using RAPD PCR: Nile Tilapia, African Jewelfish, and Silver Carp. No primers were identified that demonstrate sex-linkage in individual fish DNA. African Jewelfish have been the first priority because YY

broodstock are being developed for this species by USGS. USGS will sequence the African Jewelfish genome to aid in the identification of sex-specific markers.

There are problems with the Trojan Y chromosome genetic biocontrol strategy. Continuous addition of an autocidal Trojan fish over a long period of time is required, and adding too few autocidal Trojan fish will not cause extinction. It also requires decades to achieve eradication.

Perhaps better genetic biocontrol strategies could be developed by modeling them on natural systems such as the Amazon Molly, and mitochondrial defects that cause male sterility in insects. Amazon Mollies produce only Amazon Mollies as progeny. *P. Formosa* (Amazon Molly) causes local extinction of *P. mexicana*. Extinction of *P. mexicana* will occur with the addition of just a single molly. Development of an Amazon Trojan would require knowledge of the unique reproductive features of the Amazon Molly, and whether or not the reproductive differences can be linked to specific genes that can be genetically modified in an invasive fish species. The Trojan female technique requires that a mitochondrial mutation is isolated that causes male sterility in the invasive species. TRT females must be added continuously to achieve extinction, but in smaller numbers compared to the Trojan Y chromosome strategy.

Other genetic biocontrol strategies that result in propagation of an autocidal fish within the system should be considered (Amazon Trojan, Trojan Female Technique). The Amazon Trojan would be the most effective, requiring only a single autocidal Trojan fish to achieve eradication. The TFT strategy might offer a non-GMO alternative to the Amazon Trojan.

#### **GSARP Research and Management Priorities Lists**

**Ballard** reported that the Panel updated the list at the last meeting. **Ballard** incorporated all of the changes that were discussed at that meeting. **Ballard** asked the Panel members to review the updated list, and if they were satisfied with it, the list would be adopted with the understanding that it would be a living document, and would be reviewed every few years for possible updating. **Ballard** will forward the adopted list to the Task Force.

**Ballard** instructed the members to email any changes for their state lists to him.

After several suggestions were made, the list was revised. **Hartman** asked the Panel for a Motion to accept the revised GSARP Research and Management Priorities Lists. **A Motion was made by Bonvechio to accept the revised list. The Motion was seconded by Jackson. The Motion passed unanimously.**

#### **Discussion on the 2010-2014 Strategic Plan**

**Ballard** asked the Panel how they wanted to proceed with updating the draft Plan. **Hartman** stated that perhaps changing the name to "Guidance Document" instead of "Strategic Plan" might give a better indication of what it actually is. An actual Strategic Plan is not required, so changing the name would have no impact.

**Hartman** stated that the gaps in the Plan should be examined. For example, expansion of the knowledge-base of the Panel should be done beyond biology.

Further discussions were deferred until the Work Group sessions on Wednesday.

### **GSARP Membership Discussion**

**Ballard** stated that he received a letter from Jerry Cook, the President of ISIS (Institute for the Study of Invasive Species), in which he requested a seat on the Panel. A copy of the letter was provided in each Panel member's folder. The seat would be non-standing. It would also be a voting seat. After discussion by the Panel, it was decided that the request be denied due to limited funding and limited available seats. **Ballard** will draft a letter to Mr. Cook. However, if a seat becomes available, his submission for membership would be accepted. All meetings are open to the public, and if he (or someone else) would like to give a presentation, they can contact **Ballard** about being put on the agenda.

The Panel membership will be studied to see which members have not attended meetings, and to possibly seek new members. **Ballard** stated that in the Panel's SOP, it states that if a state or agency standing member misses two years/four meetings, the agency will be contacted and informed that their representative is not participating in meetings, and ask if someone else from that agency can be appointed, or have their representative start attending meetings again. For a non-standing member, the Panel can vote to remove the member from the Panel. For federal members, meeting attendance has been intermittent.

**Knott made a Motion to approve Ballard drafting and sending a letter to Jerry Cook declining his request for membership in the GSARP at this time due to limited funding and limited available seats. The letter will also include the dates and location of GSARP's next meeting in Houston, Texas as an invitation to attend. Bonvechio seconded. The Motion passed unanimously.**

Tribal Representation on the Panel will be pursued.

### **Public Comment**

**Hartman** provided the opportunity for public comment. No comments were received.

**The meeting recessed at 5:00 p.m.**

### **Wednesday, April 9, 2014**

**The meeting reconvened at 8:30 a.m.** The Chairman again provided the opportunity for public comment. No comments were received.

### **Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force Update**

**Ballard** reported that the Executive Secretary of the Task Force, Susan Mangin, has retired. The position will be filled at a later date.

Panel funding and the program budget were discussed at past meetings. At the last meeting, an update was given by FWS. They projected a \$1.2 million cut, which would fall out of the bottom 25% of their budget, as the top 75% is fixed. The Panel is in the bottom 25% of the budget.



**Ballard** has not heard any updated information regarding whether or not Panel funding will remain the same, or be reduced. State Plan funding is also in the bottom 25% of the budget, and it is hoped that it will also not be reduced.

The report to Congress still needs to be done. The last report was done in 2004. The members of the Task Force have been asked to supply information on what their role is, what the role is of the Panels, and what each Panel's accomplishments have been in the past few years. The information will be compiled into one report, which will be sent to Congress.

**Ballard** stated that the budget cut is drastically hindering the Panels.

There are several decisional items on the Task Force meeting agenda for the May 7-8, 2014 in Arlington, VA. It will be decided what role the Task Force will have in the National Invasive Species Awareness Week; there will be approval of the revision to the Lake Tahoe AIS Management Plan; a decision will be made on the approval of the Snakehead Management and Control Plan; approval is slated for the National Invasive Lionfish Prevention and Management Plan. A full revision was done a month ago, which was reviewed, and edits were made. After revision again, the revised Plan will be sent to the Task Force. Also to be discussed will be fracking as an AIS pathway.

#### **National Invasive Lionfish Prevention and Management Plan Update**

**Ballard** reported that a 22-member Adhoc committee has been formed to draft the Plan. The Plan covers other species in trade, and will address the prevention of those species being released.

**Ballard** is hoping to have the revised Plan approved by the Committee to send it to the Task Force for a 30-day review. The Task Force will provide their comments, then it will be sent back to the Committee. The comments will be addressed, and the Plan will be sent back again to the Task Force. If approved, the Plan will be put into the federal register for 30 days. After the Plan is reviewed and comments are provided by the federal register, it will be sent back to the Task Force. The comments will be addressed, and if approved, the Plan will be signed off on, hopefully at their fall meeting, and be an approved Task Force Plan. Once approved, the Plan can be used by any agency to achieve any action items listed in the Plan, or for states to develop their own specific regional plan. As soon as the Plan is put into the federal register, **Ballard** will send it to the Panel members.

#### **State Reports/ Members Forum**

##### **Alabama**

**Newton** reported that the Asian tiger shrimp continues to be a species of concern. Captures of *P. monodon* have increased. However, AMRD has received fewer validated reports in 2013 compared to previous years, despite personnel communications between AMRD and commercial shrimpers which indicate encounters with *P. monodon* do occur within Alabama waters. Commercial shrimpers are no longer recording collection information, preserving the specimen,

or reporting the encounters to AMRD in a timely manner. In 2012, 16 Asian tiger shrimp were validated by AMRD. In 2013, only three were validated. There have been no reports in 2014.

Evidence suggests the Asian tiger shrimp has become established in Alabama's waters. AMRD continues to focus on documenting occurrence, characterizing population structure, and processing samples for genetic investigation. Efforts are also being made by local academic institutions to acquire live specimens and conduct research regarding behavior and interactions of Asian tiger shrimp with native fauna. Ideally, this research will have the ability to identify negative interactions and qualitatively evaluate the impacts.

Encounters with lionfish typically are unknown unless AMRD representatives actively seek potential observers such as dive shops, spearfishing tournament organizers, etc. Numerous unconfirmed reports of lionfish have been made to various government agencies that indicate lionfish are abundant on the Trysler Grounds in 2011. SCUBA divers reported observing up to 30 lionfish during single dives in this area during the 2011 dive season. During 2012-2013, unconfirmed reports indicate lionfish are now more abundant than previous years. During the 2012 diving season, a recreational diver reported observing approximately 60 lionfish during a dive at Trysler. During a dive in June 2012 at an artificial pyramid reef, a SCUBA diver reported observing approximately 100 lionfish during a dive. Unconfirmed reports being made by SCUBA divers indicate that lionfish are widespread throughout Alabama's artificial reef permit zone. After a lionfish rodeo by a local dive shop in June-July 2012, 26 lionfish were donated.

AMRD pursued financial support to fund outreach efforts and monitoring associated with the lionfish invasion. A \$9,240 sub-award agreement was received from the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission in December 2012 to monitor reef communities in the Gulf of Mexico, dispatch red lionfish when encountered during SCUBA surveys, increase public awareness of the lionfish invasion, and streamline the general coordination between State agencies, Federal agencies, and the public.

Eighteen dive surveys were completed by AMRD personnel from May 2013 through July 2013. Twenty-eight lionfish were documented, and 34 lionfish were dispatched that were not in the field-of-view of the survey recorder. All lionfish harvested by AMRD during MBLRU operations were delivered to National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) for research. Approximately 200 red lionfish have been acquired and processed by AMRD, NOAA, and/or GCRL as a result of the increased coordination and dive surveys associated with the GSMFC grant.

Outreach efforts by AMRD has increased the local SCUBA community's awareness of the lionfish invasion. AMRD partnered with REEF to hold a workshop on October 24 to educate the public about the lionfish invasion and demonstrate safe harvesting and handling techniques. As a result, numerous SCUBA divers have become more active at targeting lionfish, and restaurants are beginning to include lionfish on their menus. AMRD has developed an Adopt-a-Reef program that allows SCUBA enthusiasts the ability to submit their lionfish observations more efficiently, and creates enthusiasm of the participants to generate and submit data regarding lionfish.

Educating the public is paramount to obtaining quality information. The DCNR/MRD continues their efforts to enhance public awareness of lionfish and the Asian tiger shrimp. Participation in additional workshops, and the promotion of the Adopt-a-Reef program is expected to produce significantly more lionfish reports and harvest.

A notification that describes the Asian tiger shrimp and provides information concerning proper reporting continues to be distributed to the shrimping community.

A page within the Alabama Marine Information Calendar dedicated to educating the public about lionfish and the Adopt-a-Reef program has been distributed. The calendar has been widely distributed to a variety of establishments.

**Rider** provided a written freshwater report. Anglers have reported silver carp in the Wilson Dam tailwaters (Pickwick Lake). These reports are unconfirmed.

Bighead carp have been observed during electrofishing below Wilson Dam by ADWFF. They continue to be collected while gillnetting for paddlefish in the lower Tombigbee River, and are more abundant in the lower Tombigbee River than once thought. Bighead carp were also caught in Miller's Ferry Reservoir (Alabama River Basin) by commercial paddlefish harvesters in February 2014.

Blueback herring were first detected in Lewis Smith Reservoir (Black Water Basin) in 2009, and the population continues to expand rapidly. They were likely illegally introduced by anglers fishing for striped bass. They have also been reported in Sipsey Fork.

Flathead catfish population continues to increase in the upper Choctawhatchee River. Sunfish and spotted bullhead numbers have severely decreased. The fish assemblage change is continually monitored with annual sampling each May.

Blue tilapia are now established in Threemile Creek.

Oriental weatherfish continue to expand in the Coosa River basin.

Cuban bulrush and water lettuce continue to expand in the Tombigbee River and the Black Warrior River.

Water hyacinth has been reduced in the Tombigbee River and the Black Warrior River following a cold winter and high flows.

There is no change in hydrilla coverage in the Tombigbee River and the Black Warrior River.

### **Dauphin Island Sea Lab**

Jennifer Hill reported that they received funding from Sea Grant to study the interactions of native shrimp and invasive tiger shrimp. A shrimper brought in six tiger shrimp last fall. On other studies done on tiger shrimp, it was observed that they will consume juvenile blue crabs. The diets of tiger shrimp are also being studied. She stated that they will continue to keep the

Panel updated on their studies. She would like to coordinate with other states to try and obtain as many tiger shrimp as possible so that further experiments can be performed this summer. **Pursley** stated that he would be able to provide her with live tiger shrimp.

### **Florida**

**Sommers** reported that a lionfish summit was organized and hosted by FWC's Lionfish Team in October 2013. The goal was to develop a collaborative framework for partnering on future lionfish management. Participants generated categorized potential actions that were ranked by their relative importance by the participants. The Lionfish Team is evaluating the action items made at the summit.

FWC passed into rule in 2013 a regulation that waived the license requirement for lionfish harvest by specific gear, and removed the bag limit for recreational and commercial fishermen. Proposed 2014 legislation includes: prohibiting the import and commercial aquaculture of lionfish in Florida; to review the diving rule to allow rebreathers while SCUBA diving for lionfish; and to allow FWC to issue permits to allow spearfishing for lionfish in areas where spearfishing is not allowed.

A small number of tiger shrimp reports from around the state continues to be received. However, commercial shrimpers reported to USGS that they had caught 25 and 40 pounds of tiger shrimp in individual trawls off the coast near St. Augustine. This is highly unusual, based on FWC records.

In central Palm Beach County, a population of bullseye snakehead was recently confirmed in the canal system in the city of Wellington. This canal system empties into the West Palm Beach canal, a major east-west canal interconnected with canals leading to Lake Okeechobee, water conservation areas, and ultimately Everglades National Park. This finding represents a 12.5 mile northern jump from their previous northern boundary. The most likely pathway for this introduction was an illegal angler introduction rather than a range expansion. Once they penetrate the West Palm Beach canal, they will have access to hundreds of miles of canals that support an important recreational sportfishery comprised primarily of native species.

Two non-native fish species new to this canal were collected: *Paraneetroplus* (Theraps) *melanurus* x *P. zontaus* and Asian swamp eel. Both of these collections represent illegal introductions rather than range expansions.

A collaborative study to examine potential interactions between the morphologically similar non-native bullseye snakehead and native bowfin is under way between FWC and researchers at the University of Florida's Tropical Aquaculture Laboratory. A study of selected life history attributes of bowfin collected from everglades-type habitats has been completed and will be compared to bullseye snakehead.

**Sommers** noted that there are other invasive species considered to be a problem in Florida, such as the Burmese python. She will provide updated reports to the Panel on that issue. Last year, 230 pythons were removed. This year, 135 have been removed so far. The North African python is another problem species in Florida. Due to their elusiveness, only one has been removed so far

this year. Two populations of Nile monitors are in the canal systems. Thirty Caiman have been removed since July 1<sup>st</sup>. A Nile crocodile was recently removed from the Everglades National Park. Crocodiles have escaped over the years from a facility near the Everglades National Park that breeds crocodiles. Some have been recovered.

**Schmitz** did not attend the meeting, but provided a written report on Florida's Invasive Plant Management Program for FY 2012-2013. Managers spent about \$5.8 million controlling 46,757 acres of floating invasive plants in Florida public lakes and rivers during FY 2012-2013. This was an approximately 40% increase in funds expended and acres controlled in FY 2011-2012.

Hydrilla was reported in 194 public waters in 2013 and is considered to be under maintenance control in 98% of Florida's public lakes and rivers. However, tubers infest about 90,000 acres, and represent the potential for immediate regrowth. Insufficient funding allowed hydrilla to evolve into statewide water, infesting approximately 100,000 acres in 365 of Florida's public lakes and rivers. Sufficient, recurring funding and improved technology aided by FWC-funded research enabled managers to reduce hydrilla to about 28,610 acres in 2013. Among Florida's largest and most important multiple-purpose waterways, 65% of the hydrilla reported in 2013 occurred in the four lakes of the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes. Managers spent \$7.43 million treating approximately 14,150 acres of hydrilla in Florida public lakes and rivers during FY 2012-2013.

Invasive non-native plants were reported in 96% of Florida's 451 public lakes and rivers that comprise 1.26 million acres of fresh water.

Floating water hyacinth and water lettuce covered as much as 125,000 acres of Florida public waters. They are FWC's highest management priorities.

The Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council lists 12 Category I invasive plants, capable of disrupting aquatic ecosystems and causing harm in Florida public waters. Seven Category I plant species, in addition to hydrilla, water hyacinth, and water lettuce, were detected covering approximately 6,670 acres in 91% of Florida's public waters in 2013.

During FY 2012-2013, \$2.74 million was spent managing over 6,000 acres of aquatic plants other than hydrilla and floating plants during FY 2012-2013.

### **Georgia**

**Bonvechio** reported on the Satilla River Flathead Catfish Removal Project. In an effort to weaken the impacts on native fish populations, Wildlife Resources Division (WRD) Waycross Fisheries staff began aggressive removals in 1996 via electrofishing. Despite these efforts, the number and size of flathead catfish continued to increase since their introduction. In 2006, Georgia legislature appropriated funding for three new positions (reduced to two in FY 2009). These personnel were assigned the task of reducing the flathead catfish population levels through direct removal, while searching for a long-term population control.

Crew removed 4,725 flathead catfish during the 2013 sampling season. Over 30,000 fish have been removed from the river since the implementation of the full-time flathead management

program in 2007. The size structure has declined, with the average size fish removed progressively dropping from 5.8 pounds in 2007, to 0.8 pounds in 2013. Average length, age structure, and biomass per effort have also declined. There appears to be a compensatory shift in sexual maturity due to increased exploitation.

Given the reported changes in biomass, size and age-structure, maintenance control and/or suppression of flathead catfish in the Satilla River is possible. Intensive harvest needs to be maintained to prevent the flathead population from rebuilding within 2-5 years.

Impressive stringers of large redbreast sunfish are being reported by anglers. There are some reports of some 10" "Roosters", many caught in the area of the flathead removal area. The increase may be due to the reduction of large flathead catfish in the Satilla River, but likely other contributing factors have played a part in the recent catches, such as the water level and fishing effort.

WRD personnel collected eight flathead catfish in the Ochlockonee River in the summer of 2013. Otoliths revealed ages ranged from 3-8 years of age. This is the first time flathead catfish have been documented to exist in the Ochlockonee River in Georgia.

The WRD removal crew documented the non-indigenous range expansion of the blue catfish occurring in the Satilla River, Georgia. Seven blue catfish were recovered in 2011. Ages ranged from 3-5 years old. This is the second large, non-native riverine catfish to be found existing in the Satilla River basin. No blue catfish were collected during sampling in 2012 and 2013.

A report on channeled apple snails was received in December 2013 from UGA on the St. Mary's population.

### **Louisiana**

**Bourgeois** reported that there were no reports of tiger shrimp from early November 2012 to July 2013. From August 1, 2013 to November 2013, there have been approximately 50 confirmed reports. Many of these shrimp appear smaller than years past. There is an early increase in the red stripe variant than previous years.

Several reports of lionfish have been reported to LDWF from the commercial diving industry. Most of these reports are related to lionfish stings.

In 2013, over 99,000 acres of nuisance aquatic weeds were treated by LDWF.

Throughout 2013, areas previously controlled by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers remained a priority, especially large areas of the Terrebonne marsh and Henderson Lake. Over 27,000 acres were treated in these areas in 2013. The majority of the effort was directed toward water hyacinth control, but some giant salvinia was treated as well. The USACE Removal of Aquatic Growth Program will resume in 2014 on a limited basis.

Since 2006, giant salvinia has been a major focus of aquatic plant control efforts in Louisiana. The combination of herbicide applications, water level fluctuation, and biological control is

being used to keep giant salvinia coverage at a level that allows for recreational use of waterbodies. The unusually cold temperatures and multiple freezes associated with the past winter should significantly reduce the amount of giant salvinia present this spring, especially in north Louisiana. An aerial survey in early March of Lake Bistineau revealed that less than 100 acres of salvinia was currently on the lake. Prior to a drawdown in 2013, over 3,000 acres had been covered. Concentrated spray efforts will be necessary in 2014 to prevent access issues because of the accelerated growth rate of the plant.

Stocking and monitoring efforts of Giant salvinia weevils will continue in 2014. It appears that weevils continue to increase their level of control on giant salvinia infestations in south Louisiana. New infestations in Henderson Lake and the St. Bernard marsh have been stocked with weevils since 2012. Weevils will continue to be stocked, and established populations are expected to exhibit some level of control on these infestations in 2014.

LDWF and the LSU Agricultural Center will be entering into an agreement in 2014 to research and develop a population of cold-tolerant weevils for use in north Louisiana. Weevils that survived the recent winter in north Louisiana lakes will be the foundation of this population. As the population builds, it will continually be exposed to low temperatures in growth chambers to select those weevils that can survive a cooler winter climate. It is expected that eventually, a cold-tolerant weevil population will be created that can be mass produced for stocking across north Louisiana. The LSU AgCenter will also research factors that may contribute to winter survival, such as habitat type, and flight ability.

Continual reports are being received of apple snails in more of the canals in the New Orleans area and the upper Barataria Basin. New reports have been received of apple snails in City Park and Bayou St. John. Bayou St. John is now open to tidal influence from Lake Pontchartrain, so the potential for the snails to move further is possible. A field investigation found that Apple snails were in small roadside ditches, neighborhood ponds, and in Bayou Manchac in Ascension Parish. This population will be monitored this year to see if it survived last winter's extreme cold weather. So far, no snails or eggs have been seen.

A LDWF 2013 ANS grant to survey selected public urban ponds in Baton Rouge and Lafayette for the presence of ANS is complete, with the exception of some analysis. Fish, plants, and invertebrates were sampled in Baton Rouge and Lafayette. Plants were the only exotic species found so far in the samples.

The 2014 ANS grant will be used to observe the tropic effects of Asian carp on some LA oxbows.

A large effort is being made for better public outreach and education of ANS. LDWF is posting brochures, links, and articles about ANS species and concerns on their Facebook page.

The revision of the state Wildlife Action Plan is underway. The Introduced and Exotic Species section will be expanded in this version. Hopefully, this will result in an increase in state wildlife grants to provide needed research on ANS species. So far, one ANS-related grant has been submitted for funding.

## **Mississippi**

**Pursley** reported that new infestations of water lettuce, wild taro, and bloodfluke planorb snail were discovered. Preserved bloodfluke planorbs were sent to the Smithsonian Institution for confirmation of identity.

Two low-altitude aerial photo surveys totaling 303 miles were conducted to aid in early detection of AIS, and to help monitor on-going control efforts.

Seventeen field surveys totaling 239 miles were conducted for early detection of AIS.

One confirmed sighting of an invasive Asian tiger shrimp was reported to the NAS database from a specimen provided to MDMR by a local fisherman.

Populations of giant salvinia, common salvinia, water lettuce, water hyacinth, giant apple snail, and bloodfluke planorb in south Mississippi were suppressed by unusually cold winter temperatures, but not killed. Monitoring efforts to determine survival of introduced salvinia weevils are underway.

AIS personnel participated in the interstate/interagency Mississippi Bight Lionfish Response Unit (MBLRU) and the Mississippi Cooperative Weed Management Area.

First MS pre-proposal was sent to the ANS Task Force to obtain dedicated aquatic invasive species funding made available via the newly-approved state AIS management plan.

A "Water Hyacinth Round-up Day" was held in conjunction with the Audubon Pascagoula River Nature Center. Nineteen United Way-Alternative Spring Break volunteers from Clemson University removed 96 cubic feet of water hyacinth from the Pascagoula River.

In cooperation with members of the MBLRU, 100 "Wanted Poster"-style lionfish awareness t-shirts were designed and produced for distribution early this summer to local dive shops.

**Riecke** provided the freshwater report. A list was compiled of all bait vendor locations in the state to compose a map to aid anglers and identify locations that will be sent live bait sale regulations when they are promulgated in the future.

A non-native plant species article was written for the agency foundation magazine.

The North American Invasive Species Network survey on the costs of controlling, monitoring, and managing ANS was completed.

A report was received of a helicopter that was transferring water from a river below a reservoir into the upstream reservoir as part of aerial firefighting training. The company was contacted and the trainee was reprimanded, as it was against their company policy.



A meeting was held with three Asian groups that were interested in assessing the harvest and processing possibilities for Asian carp in the MS Delta Region.

Treatment is ongoing of aquatic plants at the Ross Barnett Reservoir, Little Eagle Lake, and Beaver Dam Lake.

MS DWFP is in cooperation with MS Cooperative Weed Management Area on aquatic plant control.

Posting of the “Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers” signs at new boat ramp sites is ongoing.

Distribution of the “Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers” cards with all mailed boat registrations or renewals is ongoing.

The “Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers” logo and bullet list are still being printed in the annual regulation guides – *Mississippi Outdoor Guide* and *Mississippi Saltwater Fishing*.

The department website has posted links to the Mississippi River Basin Panel on Aquatic Nuisance Species, the Gulf and South Atlantic Regional Panel on Aquatic Invasive Species, “Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers”, and “Habitattitude”.

There is a permanent exhibit on exotic species on display at the Mississippi Museum of Natural Science.

Freshwater fishing bait regulations to specify which bait can be legally sold, possessed, transported, and used in Mississippi will be composed. Wild-caught bait will be prohibited from being used on any water body, except where it was collected.

The activities specified in the Mississippi State Management Plan for Aquatic Invasive Species will be implemented.

An EDRR monitoring program will be established that is comprised of state and federal personnel who routinely sample aquatic species in Mississippi public waterways.

Approval will be sought of legislation required to initiate licensing of retail bait outlets that sell live freshwater fishing bait.

A list will be adopted of approved, restricted, and prohibited species under the authority specified in MS Code 49-7-80, and as specified in the *Mississippi State Management Plan for Aquatic Invasive Species*. The list of approved, restricted, and prohibited species as specified in the public notice that regulates aquaculture activities in Mississippi will be amended.

Information for Mississippi contacts who are listed in the Expert Taxonomic database will be updated and expanded.

### **North Carolina**

**Emens** reported that in 2012, there were 34 tiger shrimp sightings reported from all along the coast. Of those reports, 30 were confirmed either by photograph or by receiving the specimens. Several shrimp were passed on to James Morris for genetic research.

In 2013, there were 35 tiger shrimp sightings reported. Of those reports, 27 were confirmed. Twenty-one specimens were sent to James Morris for genetic research. There was a report from Atlantic Beach this year of a juvenile tiger shrimp that was later identified as a “red stripe” variant. DMF also confirmed another variant from a photograph taken on a shrimping vessel by an observer off Carolina Beach.

In 2012, a code for tiger shrimp was added by the commercial trip ticket program to the commercial landings database. To date, 29 pounds have been recorded.

The new 2013-2014 budget provides \$200,000 for aquatic plant control. The budget specifies that \$250,000 of additional funding is available for the Lake Waccamaw Hydrilla Eradication Project. A proposal is being considered for 2014, which calls for fluridone herbicide treatment of the entire infested area, at a cost of \$570,000.

### **South Carolina**

**Knott** reported that a preliminary funding proposal was recently submitted under the state and interstate ANS Management Plan Program. The work will be directed primarily towards improving the understanding of the recent invasion of the south Atlantic Bight and Gulf of Mexico by the Asian tiger shrimp. Tiger shrimp will be collected across a range of habitats. Some of the potential effects of the establishment of the tiger shrimp on native shrimp, crab, and bivalve populations will be examined through an investigation that will look for the ontogenetic shifts in feeding preferences using stable isotope analyses.

The preservation and archiving of pleopod tissue samples for genetic analyses began in 2008. As fresh tissue become available, samples are held in a tissue repository maintained by the NOAA National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science Laboratory. Using this tissue, USGS researchers will attempt to identify the geographic origins of tiger shrimp living along the Gulf and Atlantic coasts of the US. Confirmed reports of tiger shrimp captures continue to be recorded and reported to the USGS as they are received from points of contact in the coastal states of the GSARP region. A manuscript was written by several GSARP members and others, that documents the first seven years (2006-2012) of the tiger shrimp invasion in the western north Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico. Data for the manuscript was from the USGS and SCDNR database.

Recent molecular analysis on the nematode *A. crassus* that was referred to in prior reports as *Anguillicoloides* has resulted in the replacement of this species into the genus *Anguillicola*. This native parasite in the Japanese eel has become widespread as an invasive parasite in swim bladders of American and European eels, as well. The parasite is the subject of ongoing research by SCDNR’s Inshore Fisheries Research Section. Their recent study found that at least 58% of American eels at larval and adult stages that were sampled in SC estuaries are infected. Infection

prevalence at the glass eel stage becomes high within months of recruitment to freshwater habitats. Funding has been requested by SCDNR to develop and test the use of qPCR to detect and quantify the presence of the parasite in planktonic and benthic fauna, which includes a known intermediate host of *A. crassus*.

Faunal identification of invertebrates scraped from settlement blocks deployed for approximately three months at various locations throughout the ACE Basin NERR is nearing completion. Preliminary results from examination of 12 of the 15 recruitment samples present a faunal list of 60 invertebrate taxa. Four of those species are known to be invasive. An additional species, the South American mussel, was collected from outside of the targeted sampling surface of one block.

Dr. Erik Sotka from the College of Charleston and his colleagues have been investigating the impacts of *Gracilaria vermiculophylla*, a nonindigenous seaweed, on mudflats in South Carolina and Georgia. Much of their initial work has now been published. Dr. Sotka and his colleagues will use a new NSF grant to conduct laboratory experiments and use genetic tools on seaweed samples from various locations in order to reconstruct the evolutionary history of the seaweed, and to search for an explanation of its pervasiveness across so much of the world.

### **Texas**

**Hartman** reported that they are modifying their exotic species rule, chapter 57.

Inland fisheries is planning to survey up to 200 lakes in Texas to look for zebra mussels this summer. Bio-control has begun for salt cedar.

The hydrilla on Lake Austin is under control.

Greenhouses have been constructed to house giant salvinia weevils.

**Hartman** met with a member of The Nature Conservancy who is working on the lionfish issue. They concluded that there are many people who are doing lionfish work, but no networking is being done. It was decided that a Texas-specific lionfish workgroup should be planned, and plans are underway to schedule a meeting. It will possibly be held in June in Corpus Christi.

**Carangelo** spoke on ballast water. In 2012, the U.S. Coast Guard published final regulations requiring ship owners to install ballast water treatment equipment. The equipment filters and cleans ballast water to remove aquatic organisms. Ship owners all over the United States must comply with the rules. However, on the international front, this is sometimes not the case. Some ships do not have certified technologies to meet the IMO standards, which have not yet been ratified, and there is concern on whether or not they will be in compliance when IMO does go into effect. A bill was recently introduced that would set uniform ballast water standards for all of the states. The bill would also require all commercial fishing vessels to operate according to a nationwide system of 'best management practices' for discharges incidental to their normal operation, as will be required by regulations to be developed and administered by the US Coast Guard.

**McMahon** reported that the peak population of zebra mussels in Lake Texoma peaked in 2010. Since then, veliger densities have been studied. It has been discovered that their densities have been falling dramatically. **McMahon** has been doing settlement experiments in the lake. Adult zebra mussels can no longer be seen on the shoreline. It is not known for certain what has caused these changes. There is evidence that, no matter how much food is available, they cannot consume enough to support the metabolic demands, and they starve when the water temperatures rise about 25°C. Zebra mussels move micro-nutrients from the water column into the sediments, where they get sequestered. It appears that after the zebra mussels become established into huge densities, they remove so much phosphorous and nitrogen, that phytoplankton densities decline. The zebra mussels must put on weight in the winter when water temperatures drop below 25°C that will sustain them until the next summer. As they reduce primary productivity, they cannot get enough weight back on in the winter to get through the next long period of high temperature starvation. **McMahon** will also be following the zebra mussel population in Lake Ray Roberts over the next several years.

This year, a third population of zebra mussels was confirmed in Belton Lake. In the Trinity River Basin, veligers in low numbers have been found in several rivers, but they cannot be confirmed as an infestation until adults or settled juveniles have been found.

In Lake Texoma and Lake Ray Roberts, zebra mussels have the most rapid growth rates ever reported for mussels anywhere. Once settled, they are of reproducing size within a month or two. They only live a year, instead of 3-4 years. Within this year, they reach full size. They then die. This is evidence that the reproductive cycle is occurring faster. This poses more problems for water-usage facilities, because instead of fouling between 3-4 years, it now occurs within a year.

**McMahon** has set up a risk-assessment for lakes in Texas, which involves studying summer water temperatures in August (the hottest time of year for lakes), calcium levels, pH and oxygen levels, and surface waters. This assessment is to identify which lakes are not likely to be infested, and which lakes would be.

More rivers are being monitored for zebra mussels. They are spreading into more and more water bodies. Hopefully, some southern lakes will not become infested, due to their high water temperatures. Also, some east lakes do not have enough calcium to support zebra mussels.

### **USGS**

**Fuller** asked Matt Neilson from USGS to speak on their Nonindigenous Aquatic Species (NAS) Program, and its use of GBIF (Global Biodiversity Information Facility), which is an international organization that focuses on making scientific data on biodiversity available via the internet, using web services. NAS staff are developing tools to retrieve and process data through web services, such as museum collection data that is available from GBIF. Georeferenced occurrence data for each species that was tracked by NAS will be downloaded and processed. Also included will be the known introduced range, and locations inside and outside the species' known ranges. A new bulk data entry tool has been developed, which has increased their data entry capabilities tremendously. **Fuller** added that previously they had to enter each record by hand. She stated that they have found many museum errors, such as georeferencing or

identification errors, and the errors can now be corrected to improve the museum's data, their data, and GBIF's data.

**Ballard** asked about the status of NEMESIS. **Fuller** replied that they reached their technology limits, and funding was cut off. It is still operational, but it is not growing.

### **Indian River Lagoon**

**Jacoby** gave a PowerPoint Presentation entitled "Phase IV – Can We Expect Any Help from Predators?" That hypothesis has not been tested. According to a survey done by a group from Australia, in locations where there is a large presence of predator fish, lionfish numbers were down. In another study done by a different group, that finding was discounted.

**Jacoby** reported on Phase IV of a lionfish study being done. With assistance from The University of Florida and other partners, tethering experiments were done on lionfish in the Cayman Islands to discover if predator fish could help with the eradication of lionfish. Lionfish culling is now regularly being done in the Cayman Islands. Tethering of the lionfish was done in three different types of habitats – seagrass where no culling occurred, rarely culled reefs, and intensely culled reefs. Results of the experiments revealed that predation was 13 times more likely on culled reefs than on rarely culled reefs, and approximately 30 times more likely on culled reefs than on seagrass. Videos surveillance was also done, and showed that Nassau grouper and nurse sharks were feeding on the tethered lionfish. **Jacoby** noted that each phase of studies has shown that: lionfish removals can be effective (Phase II), maintenance control is a viable option (Phase III), and predators are proving to be helpful (Phase IV).

### **Work Group Breakout Session**

Each work group independently met to discuss their task recommendations listed in the Strategic Plan. **Hartman** reminded the Panel that the purpose of the work groups is to go through the Strategic Plan, keeping in mind that the main focus should be to discover what the Panel can do better, what gaps they can fill, what their accomplishments have been, while keeping in mind what their historic priorities have been and what their current priorities are.

### **Work Group Updates and Future Directions**

Pathways/Prevention Group: **Riecke** stated that Strategy C. on page 9 should be removed, because VHS is a disease that occurs mainly in cooler climates, and is not a threat to the Gulf region. Resources will be re-diverted elsewhere. He further stated that "Evaluate Current Shrimp Virus Issue" should also be removed, as it is not a threat. For the Task "State & Federal Prohibited Species Lists Linked", **Riecke** suggested developing a comparison of what each state has as a prohibited species list, a restricted list, and a white list of approved species. A new Task suggestion was to compile a list of risk assessment methods, and put them on the GSARP website. Also, to investigate if there are lists of aquatic plant species that have had risk assessments done on them. Several members stated that there are clearinghouses of completed risk assessments. **Ballard** noted that Mike Hoff at FWS had informed him that they will be developing a clearinghouse, and a link could be created. A clearinghouse database of many agencies can be set up on the GSARP website. **Riecke** suggested that perhaps that could be a recommendation from the Panel to the Task Force. He also suggested encouraging each state to

create an “Amnesty Day” program, such as the one Florida has. **Fuller** introduced suggesting to neighboring states, and potentially to the Task Force, to develop a list of inherently dangerous species to humans. Also, possibly species that are currently in the pet trade that shouldn’t be, due to the fact that they grow too large, too quickly. The list would be proposed to the states and FWS to see if they would be interested in listing those. Also discussed were parasite transfers from aquatics, and if FWS would consult with the CDC before letting species in. **Riecke** also stated that **Fuller** would undertake the new Task: “Review Pathways Document”.

Eradication/Control/Restoration Group: **Bourgeois** stated that on page 3 in the “Eradication/Control/Restoration” section, they rewrote the “Charge” section and added the heading: “Identify, Evaluate, and Share”. Underneath are four bullets: Non-native organisms for which eradication is possible; non-native organisms for which management and control actions are needed; actions to halt and minimize the growth and spread of invasive species populations; actions to restore habitats and native populations.

On page 10, under Objective 4 - Strategy A, **Bourgeois** stated that after the work group collects and evaluates the information regarding eradication, control, and restoration methods and techniques, they want to develop white papers for species of concern in the GSARP region. Other strategies include: identify speakers for meetings who support the role of eradication/control/restoration; keep abreast of new research by having conference calls between meetings; collect papers and critical literature and direct and suggest presentations for the meetings; identify promising and innovative research to support eradication/control/restoration.

**Bourgeois** noted that they also deleted the timeline because the tasks are ongoing. It was decided that all of the work groups would drop the timelines.

**Ballard** asked the Panel members how they wanted the eradication, control, and restoration methods and techniques addressed on the GSARP website. Several suggestions were made, but it was decided that more future discussion will be needed to determine what exactly should and could be put on the website.

Research and Development Work Group: **Teem** stated that Strategy A on page 8, under Goal 2. – Objective 1. – Task 2. to examine appropriate partnership opportunities for conducting research or collecting data through workshops and/or conference calls, was a completed activity, and also an ongoing activity. They looked at each of the research and development items and decided whether or not they were completed, incomplete, ongoing, or needed to be removed. They added one new item for research and development work group activities.

On page 13, under Goal 3. – Objective 1. – Task 2. – Strategy A: **Teem** stated that they had made a list of all of the grant opportunities that were available for invasive species research, but that list became quickly outdated. Even though the task was completed, they do not consider it to be useful, and have decided not to continue it in the future.

On page 14 – Task 3. – Strategy B: **Teem** stated that they consider the strategy to identify multi-agency proposal needs as a completed activity. They have made a list of research priorities that would be relevant to multi-agency proposals, if that were to be initiated.

Also on page 14 – Objective 2 – Task1: **Teem** stated that the strategy to develop a list of funding programs that will consider funding invasive species work is redundant. A list was developed, but they felt it was not useful. They decided to reword the Strategy to state that the Research and Development Work Group will lead the review of research proposals submitted for funding through GSARP. **Ballard** suggested also adding the chairs of the other work groups. **Teem** added that they also decided to remove the statement that the GSARP will create an information/funding clearinghouse using the website.

On page 17 – Objective 2 – Task 1 Strategy: **Teem** stated that the Strategy for the Research and Development Work Group to review the need to update the document entitled *An Initial Survey of Aquatic Invasive Species Issues in the Gulf of Mexico Region* is a completed activity, and also an ongoing task. However, the Species of Concern table in the document, which has been redone, is relevant and should be revised every five years.

Also on page 17 – Objective 2 – Task 2 Strategy: **Teem** stated that a workshop to develop guidelines for conducting rapid assessments based on the AMRAT experience was not held and they feel that it is not necessary to hold one. **Hartman** noted that she has created an in-house guidelines document. **Riecke** suggested putting the document on the GSARP website.

**Teem** stated that they are also rethinking GSARP Research Priority #10 (Assess the adaptations that have allowed zebra mussels to recently invade warm southern water bodies that were believed to be outside the physiological tolerance of the species). It has been reworded to incorporate Priority #1, and now states: To conduct long-term studies on established non-native species to understand the ecological, evolutionary, and physiological adaptations and explain why a species is invasive in one geographic region and not in another.

Education/Outreach Work Group: **Jacoby** stated that Strategy B. on page 9 to examine appropriate partnership opportunities for implementing outreach activities and distribution of information using workshops and/or conference calls will be kept as an ongoing effort. They also added the concept of evaluating the effectiveness of their efforts.

On page 12 – Objective 6., the Strategy to target environmental user groups that utilize the resources affected by aquatic invasive species with outreach material and for research within the Gulf and South Atlantic Region was reworded. The Objective was changed to: Evaluate the extent and effectiveness of outreach efforts in the region. **Jacoby** felt that the word “target” should be removed. To progress the Panel, information will be gathered from the states so that it can be noticed at the Task Force level. Rewording for Task 1: Organize and facilitate recording of outreach efforts, and meet on an annual basis to see what outreach efforts have been done in the various states. Task 2: Review and compile the results of the evaluation of outreach, and possibly write a synopsis to put on the GSARP website. Task 3: Encourage incorporation of voluntary recording of all education and outreach materials that go out, and compile statistics on reporting.

On page 13 – Objective 7. - Reworded to: Facilitate the education of the public on aquatic invasive species issues.

On page 17 – Objective 3. – Task 1 that stated to review Panel activities for consistency with the priorities identified in the National Management Plan was deleted.

On page 4, the Education/Outreach Charge was changed to: Identify, recommend specific education and outreach materials; facilitate distribution in the region. Review the existing methodologies for evaluating the effectiveness of education and outreach efforts, and encourage their use in the region.

It was pointed out that Page 11 has Tasks 1, 2, and 3, but page 12 starts with Task 5, instead of Task 4.

**Riecke** suggested that the Strategic Plans of other Panels be looked at to see what some of their objectives and work groups are, which could be beneficial to the GSARP. **Hartman** asked **Riecke** to look at the Mississippi River Basin Panel's Plan.

Early Detection/Rapid Response Work Group: **Newton** stated that they moved the Charge of Early Detection/Rapid Response activities to: for the eradication, control, and restoration.

For the Task of State Rapid Response Plan Components: They are in the process of being developed, and each state plan is at some level of acceptance, approval, etc. For the Task to ID Data Elements Needed in Volunteer Reports: USGS will compile a list of different fields that are needed for the reports. For the Task to ID Monitoring Programs: They suggest that the monitoring programs incorporate some type of sampling with gears similar to what the particular state uses for those areas that are most susceptible for initial introductions of invasive species.

On page 11 – Task 2: They discussed using some MOUs to help outline early response activities between states in the event that an adjacent state, or one in the Region, needed operational or logistical assistance dealing with the occurrence. Other states with specialists for that particular issue would be able to provide the support needed.

For the Task to develop a Taxonomic Expert Database: Several Panel members stated that the list had been done. **Newton** noted that it needed to be updated.

For the Task to Explore Potential for Swat Teams: **Newton** stated that this has not been done, but it could easily fall into the idea of using MOAs between the states, and developing Task Force swat teams.

**Hartman** added that an Early Detection/Rapid Response Plan for the Gulf was already developed, revised, and then sent for editing. There was a large amount of editing done, but no final document. It has come up that the group is willing to re-address whatever version it is currently in, and provide the document to the GSARP. **Hartman** suggested that, instead of attempting to get consensus with everyone, a straight up or down vote on the document might be something the Panel could possibly consider. She asked the Panel if they would consider accepting a simple majority up/down vote on the document. This matter will be addressed in the future.



**Hartman** discussed intrastate and inter-agency MOUs, their value for early detection and rapid response, and the importance of having them done and established before an event occurs. This will possibly be a recommendation made to the ANS Task Force, to encourage states to consider doing MOUs with their neighboring states for early detection and rapid response.

Information Management Work Group: Cannister stated that the three Tasks for Objective 3 on page 15 that all relate to the GSARP website should be marked off the list as completed. **Ballard** pointed out that the website has been developed, but the Information Management Work Group has not edited its content. These Tasks are ongoing.

**Ballard** asked the work group chairs to send all of their edits to him so that he can incorporate them into the Strategic Plan.

### **Discussion of ANSTF Recommendations**

**Riecke** recommended that the Task Force find funding for non-indigenous aquatic plant species so they could be tracked again, and to make the data available for access. **Ballard** stated that he will work with **Fuller** to determine exactly how to word the recommendation. **Emens** stated that it would be a good idea to have a dollar amount when requesting the funding. **Riecke** replied that the amount he would request is possibly \$150,000.

**Fuller** recommended that the Task Force consider adding all species of lionfish to the Lacey Act's injurious wildlife list. **Ballard** asked if the Panel wanted to list just the lionfish that are in trade, or in general. **Kumpf** and **Knott** suggested adding just three genera of lionfish. **McMahon** stated that he would recommend adding all species.

**Riecke** stated that the AFS's introduced fishes section received word of a bill in Congress that would give agencies the authority to ban imports of invasive species.

**Hartman** also recommended asking the Task Force to suggest to the states that they do preemptory intrastate and inter-agency MOUs for an early detection and rapid response event, and have them done and established before the event occurs. After discussion, it was decided that this recommendation not be presented to the Task Force, as they are hesitant about making suggestions to the states.

**Riecke** also recommended that the ANSTF should explore alternative funding mechanisms and sources of funds for the Panel's aquatic nuisance species state management plans. After discussion, it was decided that this recommendation not be presented to the Task Force, as they are hesitant about requesting funds from any sources.

**McMahon** asked if an ad hoc working group should be formed to review the Strategic Plan. **Hartman** stated that it might be a good idea. **Ballard** will revise the Plan, and send it to the Panel before the next meeting.

### **Election of Officers**

**Pam Fuller was nominated for Chairman. It was seconded, and with no other nominations, Fuller was elected as Chairman.**

**Kristin Sommers was nominated for Vice Chairman. It was seconded, and with no other nominations, Sommers was elected as Vice Chairman.**

**A Motion was made to close nominations. The Motion was seconded, and was passed unanimously.**

### **Next Meeting Time and Place**

It was decided that Houston, TX would be the location of the next meeting. The next meeting will take place on September 17-19, 2014.

### **Public Comment**

**Hartman** provided the opportunity for public comment. There was none.

**A Motion was made to adjourn the meeting, and the Motion was approved. There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 5:00 p.m.**



APPROVED BY:  
*Richard P. Cody*  
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**FISHERIES INFORMATION NETWORK (FIN)  
MINUTES  
June 3, 2014  
Miami, FL**

Chairman **Richard Cody** called the meeting to order at 9:10 a.m. The following members, staff, and others were present:

**Members**

Chris Denson, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL  
Craig Lilyestrom, PRDNER, San Juan, PR  
Darrin Stewart (proxy for Matt Hill), MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Michael Harden, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Vicki Swann, TPWD, Rockport, TX  
Thomas Sminkey, NOAA/ NMFS, Silver Spring, MD  
Richard Cody, FFWCC, St. Petersburg, FL  
Nicole Shaffer, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL  
Andy Strelchek, NOAA/SERO, St. Petersburg, FL  
Nicole Smith, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Daniel Matos, PRDNER, Mayaguez, PR  
John Froeschke, GMFMC, Tampa, FL

**Staff**

David Donaldson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS  
Gregg Bray, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS  
Donna Bellais, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS  
Alex Miller, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS  
Ashley Lott, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

**Others**

Andrew Petersen, Bluefin Data, Prairieville, LA  
Claude Petersen, Bluefin Data, Prairieville, LA  
Geoff White, ACCSP, Arlington, VA  
Todd Phillips, Ocean Conservancy, Austin, TX  
Steve Turner, NMFS/SEFSC, Miami, FL  
Jackie Wilson, NMFS/FMS-HMS Management Division,  
Heather Balchowsky, NOAA/SEFSC,

**Approval of Agenda**

The agenda was approved with a few additions. A brief description of the Recreational Expenditure Survey was added to 13c. Under Other Business, **J. Froeschke** added the discussion of Electronic For-Hire Logbook reporting meeting that was recently held.

**Approval of Minutes**

The minutes of the Fisheries Information Network (FIN) meeting held on June 25, 2013 in Saint Pete Beach, FL were approved as presented.

### **Update of Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP)**

**G. White** gave an overview of ACCSP's current projects including Proportional Standard Error study, Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP), South Atlantic Fishery Information System (SAFIS) Handheld Trip Reporting and Lobster Trap Tag Transferability. Two new projects are under way from NOAA Fisheries funding awards. They are MRIP For-hire Data Integration and Fisheries Information System (FIS) End User Query Rebuild. **G. White** also reported on activities from the following committees: operations committee, recreational technical committee, by-catch committee, biological review panel, commercial technical committee, information system committee and the outreach committee's 2014-2018 strategic plan.

### **FIN Data Management System (DMS) Issues**

Review of list of personnel with access to confidential data – **D. Donaldson** distributed a list of personnel with access to the FIN Data Management System (DMS) and requested that members make corrections or additions. **S. Turner** also distributed a list of personnel with access to confidential data with the NOAA Southeast Fishery Science Center (SEFSC).

Status of FIN DMS – **D. Bellais** reported on the status of the FIN DMS and presented public access counts by commercial and recreational business areas. **D. Bellais** gave an update on record counts in the FIN DMS for commercial landings but noted that the ALS system was not available at the time the report was generated. The Louisiana and Alabama recreational fishing license data continues to be loaded by wave. Mississippi and Texas are loaded yearly. NMFS has access to the data for import into the Angler Registry Database and they continue to publish their findings. Quota Monitoring/HMS data from the Bluefin Trip Ticket Program continues to be loaded into the FIN system. Oracle Discoverer and Forms are no longer supported by Oracle for ORACLE 11g database. Oracle APEX and OBIEE are being evaluated for the reporting and data entry tools. **D. Bellais** gave a review on biological sampling data, marine recreational fishery catch estimates, marine recreational fishery effort estimates and menhaden data. It was noted that the menhaden data is confidential data and is not released to the public.

### **Unified Trip Ticket Program Issues**

Demonstration of current version of program – **C. Petersen** with Bluefin Data gave a presentation/demonstration of the Trip Ticket Program. He stated that they are rewriting the program from scratch. The new program will be called Gulf Trip Ticket. It is a single program to handle multiple dealers and multiple states. Data will be transmitted to a web-server. This does not mean data have to be entered using a web browser. It is PC based and will use a web-server to handle the data. **Andrew Petersen** is the primary developer for the Gulf Trip Ticket. He demonstrated the Elver System which was developed for the state of Maine to help manage eel quotas. **A. Petersen** would like to model the Gulf Trip Ticket after the Elver System. It is a swipe card system. Utilizing a web server allows for multiple data entry devices, and can be connected to mobile applications. States will have direct access to the information. **S. Turner** posed a question regarding quality control. **A. Petersen** stated quality control can be done at both the PC and webserver. **G. White** stated that with the Elver System and in reference to QA/QC, the states had the data the next day and could deal with any QA/QC issues. **R. Cody** had a question concerning how much access the dealer had to the data once it was in the Elver System. **A.**

**Petersen** stated that for the Elver System, if the dealer made a mistake, he would have to create a new ticket to correct the mistake. He also stated for Gulf Trip Ticket they are looking at having the dealers being able to edit the tickets but he can work with the states to customize it per state. **M. Harden** was concerned over the security of the information. **A. Petersen** stated that the server is not discoverable. All information is encoded and encrypted.

**C. Petersen** posed a question to the Committee: How will the Gulf Trip Ticket reference data be populated and maintained and by who? Dealer, fisherman and vessel license information all need to be prepopulated and maintained. Are the states willing to look at this and/or do it? Can each state develop a program to push license data to a central data server? GSMFC could be that place. Further discussion is needed on the issue, therefore the Committee decided to set up a conference call the week of June 23, 2014 to further explore how the license data will be populated and maintained. This is the last main question that needs to be answered by the states prior to the rollout of the Gulf Trip Ticket. **C. Petersen** plans on coming to the GSMFC March and October meetings. He is planning on a pre-release of the Gulf Trip Ticket by the end of 2014 with a full launch of the program in early 2015. He is not asking all five of the Gulf States to be ready for the launch but asked which State(s) would be ready? He stated the current trip ticket program will not be able to run forever.

Purpose of program – **D. Bellais** posed the question of how is the Gulf Trip Ticket program going to function in the Gulf on behalf of D. Gloeckner who was not able to attend the meeting. Are we looking at doing a Gulf SAFIS? Discussion over where the system is heading, are the states going to maintain their own data and is there a way to track changes made to the data ensued. The Committee decided that these issues needed further discussion and would take place in the conference call to take place the week of June 23, 2014. Hopefully D. Gloeckner will be on the call to discuss these issues.

Discussion of Revision of FIN DMS – Discussion of this issue was put on hold until the above issues are resolved.

### **Discussion of Developing Confidential Data Roll-up Procedures**

**D. Bellais** presented the above topic to the Committee to discuss. This came about with the Fishery One Stop Shop (FOSS) project. In the Gulf, commercial confidential landing data are removed from the public reports. The Atlantic rolls that information up to the next level. The Atlantic would like the Gulf to do the same. **S. Turner** stated that the objective here is to show all pounds landed. If something is confidential at a low level it will not show up. SEFSC are concerned about under reporting pounds because of confidential issues. FIS supports the confidential data roll-up procedures and has provided money to build a system to support it. Per **S. Turner**, the concept for the roll-up is to say that these are the total landings for the Gulf and as long as you do the roll-up in such a way that the confidential data cannot be figured out through subtraction, it protects that confidential data. **C. Denson** was concerned over protecting state specific landings. The public wants to know what is going on in their state. Once you start rolling up data, it becomes unusable. MS, AL, and LA would like to keep our confidentiality system in its current form. FL would be open to looking at the roll-up procedures. **C. Denson** stated that he would like more guidance from FOSS on exactly what they want. **D. Bellais** will relay this back

to FOSS stating that the states need more detail on what FOSS wants. The states would then be willing to look at this issue again.

#### **Discussion of Creating Area and Sub Area Codes for Waters outside of EEZ Waters**

**D. Bellais** stated that this topic came up at the last FIN meeting. The middle of the Gulf did not have any designated area codes. **D. Bellais** filled in the areas that did not already have numbers starting from Mexico by 1 degree grids. **S. Turner** noted that these numbers are already used in another area and you do not want duplicates. **C. Denson** mentioned using sub-areas. **H. Balchowsky** will take this issue back to D. Gloeckner for further discussion.

#### **Discussion of Data Delivery for FUS Deadlines**

**D. Bellais** brought up the issue of moving the Gulf data deadline from June/July to April 1 with the understanding that this is living data and changes will occur. The Committee had no issue with changing the deadline to April 1.

#### **Program Reviews Activities**

Discussion of regional FINS program review – This came about from the national review of the FINs. ACCSP, GulfFIN and PacFIN put a letter together that was their response to NMFS after that review process. This letter went out in early February, 2014. **T. Sminkey** noted that the goal is to produce a next step on what we would be doing with the FIN partners to address each of the recommendations in the review report. The hope is to start an open dialogue with each of the FINs independently about how to go about standardizing the operations of the FINs. GulfFIN decided to focus on strategic planning. **T. Sminkey** noted that if funds are available to spend on this, a proposal and budget are need by Friday, June 13, 2014. The Committee agreed that GSMFC and T. Sminkey will work on the proposal and a strategic planning session will be planned for the summer of 2015.

Review of FIN response to SEFSC Data Peer Review report – **G. Bray** stated that in 2013 NOAA started a process to peer review data feeds reviewing all fisheries science centers. Recommendations came out of that process and since GulfFIN provides data to SEFSC, some of the recommendations apply to FIN. The Committee was asked to review the letter and make comments, if any. If none, the letter will be sent to NOAA to provide our feedback to those recommendations. **A. Strelchek** noted that the response looks to be very general in nature and asked if we should provide a more specific response as to how the NOAA recommendations are being addressed? **C. Denson** stated that under biological sampling it would be prudent to talk about how various activities have been reduced and/or stopped because of lack of funding. **A. Strelchek** asked what is the purpose/outcome of our response. **D. Donaldson** stated that it is to notify NOAA what we are doing to address those recommendations. **G. Bray** noted that some of the recommendations are already being met by some of our programs already and may not be explained as well as possible in our response letter. **D. Donaldson** stated that he will rewrite our response letter from a more general response to a more detailed response. He will then send out both the general response letter and the more detailed letter for the Committee to review and to see where to go from there.

### **Discussion of Development of Recreational Data Standards**

**G. Bray** stated that the GulfFIN has some loose standards on the recreational side. The timing seems to be right to start working on more detailed standards for the recreational data. This can be tasked out to the Recreational Technical Subcommittee to start working on more detailed standards using the ACCSP recreational standards as a guide. **J. Wilson** stated we should talk to R. Dunn in her office because they are currently looking to develop recreational standards. Recommendation of the Committee is to task the Recreational Technical Committee with this and include R. Dunn, A. Strelchek and other pertinent folks.

### **Presentation of Economics of The Shrimp Industry**

**A. Miller** presented two Power Point presentations. The first was An Economic Survey of the U.S. Gulf of Mexico Inshore Shrimp Fishery: Descriptive Results for 2012. This was a look at the basic financial and economic performance of the inshore shrimp fleet for the data year 2012. It was a four page mail survey to the inshore shrimpers of Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and the Florida gulf coast. A sample size of 1,557 respondents was selected, 141 surveys were undeliverable, and 437 surveys were returned for a response rate of 30.9 percent. The survey looked at: Active Commercial Inshore Shrimpers; Main Shrimping Vessel Characteristics; Shrimping Activities for 2012; Percentage of Shrimp that was Sold as Food or as Bait; Percentage of Shrimp Respondents Sold to Different Recipients; and the Balance Sheet, Cash Flow Statement and Income Statement for 2012.

The next presentation was A Survey of Recreational Shrimpers in the Northern U.S. Gulf of Mexico. This was done at the request of the State of Alabama. This survey looked at active recreational shrimp license holders in the states of Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi. There was an average of about 50% response from each state. This survey looked at: Age of Survey Respondents by State; Number of Times in the Last Five Years That Active Recreational Shrimpers Acquired a Recreational Shrimp License by State; Reasons for Recreational Shrimping Cited by Active Recreational Shrimpers; Shrimping Gear Used; Average Trip-Related Expenditures by State; Average Itemized Trip-Related Expenditures per Trip; and Average Volume of Shrimp Kept.

**T. Sminkey** noted that this year the Recreational Fishing Expenditure Survey will be done in two phases. This year's questions regarding durable goods will be separated out and done as an independent mail-out survey. The license database will be used as the sample frame. A pdf explaining this was sent to G. Bray and he will share it with the Committee. This is basically an overview of what the survey is. The second phase of the survey will directly impact the Angler Intercept Survey but that is not scheduled to roll-out until 2016.

### **Status of Metadata Compilation and Reporting**

**D. Donaldson** stated that Ralph Riedel, a GSMFC contractor, continues to work on updating and compiling metadata. All of this data is entered in InPort. Ralph has been in contact with all the states regarding various issues and the hope is he will be able to continue work on this in the future.



### **Review and Approval of 2013 FIN Annual Report**

FIN Committee members were provided with copies of the draft 2013 FIN Annual Report. **D. Donaldson** requested that members of the Committee review the Annual Report and provide comments, revisions or corrections to staff by July 7, 2014. **G. Bray** noted to the Committee that on page 8 of the Report there are three programs that FIN does not directly coordinate for but FIN does assist in the administration of funds for these programs. They are: Survey of Recreational Boat Fishers in the U.S. Virgin Islands, Internet-based Angler Logs as a Source of Fishery-dependent Data, and Pilot Study of Queen Conch and Spiny Lobster Recreational Fishery in Puerto Rico. **G. Bray** also pointed out on page 17 that FIN does continue to produce results based tables from 2013 for various programs. **T. Sminkey moved to accept the FIN 2013 Annual Report with pending editorial changes. The motion was seconded by V. Swann and was passed unanimously.**

### **Subcommittee and Work Group Reports**

FIN members were provided with copies of all Subcommittee Work Group Reports. The reports are part of these minutes and are attached.

#### **Gulf of Mexico Geographic Subcommittee – (Attachment A)**

The Gulf of Mexico Geographic Subcommittee/TCC Data Management Subcommittee (DMS) met in October 2013 and March 2014. No significant motions or action items needed to be addressed at the FIN meeting. **D. Donaldson moved to accept these reports. C. Denson seconded and the motion passed unanimously.**

#### **Otolith Processors Training Workshop – (Attachment B)**

The Otolith Processors Training Workshop was held in May 2014 in St. Petersburg, Florida. It was a productive workshop with the normal otolith reading exercises. There was also demonstrations on reading menhaden scales. There was discussion about the need for more age information about menhaden for future assessments. The hope is to later this summer or early fall to get state biologists to the Beaufort Lab to continue the knowledge transfer of reading menhaden scales. **D. Donaldson** stated that he would like to continue having this workshop but it is up to the states and contingent on funding. **C. Denson moved to accept the report. M. Harden seconded and the motion passed unanimously.**

### **Operations Plan**

**Status of 2014 activities** – The FIN Committee was provided with the status of the 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.

**G. Bray** noted a couple of highlighted areas to the Committee:

B2 - Development of Funding Initiatives to Establish Marine Recreational Fisheries Surveys – language was added to reflect change.

B9 - Develop Methods for Validating Commercial Discards Data – this topic needs to be addressed by the Commercial Technical Work Group.

B14 – Integration into the Stock Assessment Process – this group did not meet this year but they expressed a desire to meet and get into the nuts and bolts of targeted estimation. This task needs to be revisited.

Review and approval of 2015 Operations Plan – The FIN Committee was asked to review the 2015 Operations Plan. The Plan is in preliminary form and will be finalized later this year when the State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee (S/FFMC) decides what activities will be funded in 2015. Any edits to the 2015 Operations Plan should be sent to GSMFC by July 7, 2014. **T. Sminkey moved to approve the 2015 Operations Plan as modified. V. Swann seconded and the motion passed unanimously.**

**G. Bray** pointed out to the Committee several tasks that were highlighted. These are new or modified tasks.

B9 – Develop Methods for Validating Commercial Discards Data

B10 – Review of Commercial and Recreational QA/QC Standards

B20 – Collection of Social/Economic Data

B27 – Review Location and Responsibility of Data Management System – the Data Management Work Group was tasked at looking at alternatives to the hardware being based in the Ocean Springs office, i.e. going to the cloud.

### **Discussion of Funding Issues**

2015 FIN funding priorities – Committee members were provided with a list of items for funding consideration in 2015. The final prioritized list will be forwarded to the S/FFMC for their meeting in August 2014. At that time, they will decide which items will be included in the 2015 FIN Cooperative Agreement. All items listed as high priority will require budgets and statements of work by July 7, 2014. **D. Donaldson moved to list as high priority all ongoing and reinstating activities. All other activities will be listed as low priority. C. Denson seconded and the motion passed unanimously. The list that will be presented to the S/FFMC is as follows:**

#### *Ongoing*

H - Coordination and Administration of FIN Activities

H - Collecting, Managing and Disseminating Marine Recreational Fisheries Data

H - Operation of FIN Data Management System

H - Trip Ticket Program Operations

#### *Reinstating*

H - Head Boat Port Sampling

H - Gulf Menhaden Port Sampling

H - Biological Sampling of Commercial and Recreational Catches

*New*

- L - Recreational Red Snapper Data Collection for Catch and Effort
- L - At-Sea Sampling for Catch and Discards Data from For-Hire Boats
- L - Collection of Catch and Effort Data via Logbooks for For-Hire Boats
- L - Highly Migratory Species Sampling
- L - Biological Sampling for FIN Secondary Priority Species

Development of new 5-year cooperative agreement – Every 5 years, the FIN Committee develops a new cooperative agreement. This is to include as much as we possibly can that the Committee might potentially fund in the 5 years. The 7 activities listed above as high priority will be included in the cooperative agreement as well as the following:

- Recreational Red Snapper Data Collection for Catch and Effort
- At-Sea Sampling for Catch and Discards Data from For-Hire Boats
- Biological Sampling for FIN Secondary Priority Species

The States need to send in statements of work and the first year's budgets for these activities by July 7, 2014. Commission Staff will work on the budgets for years 2-5.

### **Next Meeting**

Planning for facilitated/strategic planning session – T. Sminkey and D. Donaldson are working on this and the committee members will be updated in early 2015.

Structure, time schedule and location – A change has been proposed to the FIN Meeting. The FIN Committee typically meets in June, however, a proposal has been made for the Committee to meet in March and October in conjunction with the GSMFC Annual Meetings. At the March meeting, the Committee would meet all day going over work group reports, operations plan, funding, etc. In October, the FIN Committee would meet again and would provide time in the afternoon for commercial data review. It would be very important for all members to attempt to attend the March meeting. There were no objections to this so the next FIN meeting will be in March 2015 in Alabama.

### **Other Business**

**J. Froeschke** mentioned to the Committee that the Gulf and South Atlantic Council Electronic Logbook Technical Subcommittee had recently met. They are working on developing data standards for electronic reporting logbooks in the for-hire fishery. If this proposal moves forward, GulfFIN and ACCSP would likely be heavily involved in the coordination of data standards. He just wanted to put this on FINs radar.

The FIN Committee was asked to review the committee listings to make sure all of the information was correct. If changes need to be made, please contact the GSMFC staff.

***There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 6pm.***

**TCC DATA MANAGEMENT SUBCOMMITTEE  
MINUTES**

**Monday, October 14<sup>th</sup>, 2013**

**South Padre Island, TX**

**Chairman Christine Murrell** called the meeting to order at 8:35 a.m. The following members and others were present:

**Members**

Chris Denson, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL  
Nicole Shaffer, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL  
Richard Cody, FWRI, Saint Petersburg, FL  
Justin Esslinger, TPWD, Rockport, TX  
Vicki Swann, TPWD, Austin, TX  
Christine Murrell, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Vince Cefalu, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Steven Atran (proxy for John Froeschke), GMFMC, Tampa, FL  
Brittany Chudzik, MDMR, Biloxi, MS

**Staff**

David Donaldson, Assistant Director, Ocean Springs, MS  
Donna Bellais, ComFIN Programmer, Ocean Springs, MS  
Gregg Bray, Programmer/Analyst, Ocean Springs, MS  
James Ballard, Sport Fish Restoration/Aquatic Invasive Coordinator  
Jeff Rester, Habitat & SEAMAP Coordinator  
Ralf Riedel, Metadata Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS

**Others**

Steve Brown, FWRI, Saint Petersburg, FL  
Cindy Bohannon, TPWD, Dickinson, TX  
Page Campbell, Rockport, TX  
Terry Cody, Rockport, TX  
Thor Lassen, Ocean Trust, New Orleans, LA  
Claude Peterson, Bluefin Data, Gonzalez, LA

**Adoption of Agenda**

The agenda was approved and adopted as written.

**Approval of Minutes**

The minutes of the Data Management Subcommittee (DMS) meeting held on March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2013 in Destin, FL were approved as written.

### Status of Biological Sampling Activities

**Bray** provided a description of the biological sampling analysis matrix provided in the meeting folder. All of the states except for Florida are up to date with sampling and age data entry for 2013. Florida is working to provide data to **Bellais** at GSMFC for direct loading to the FIN Data Management System (FIN DMS). Florida hopes to provide historical sampling and age data for several FIN priority species in the coming months. **Bray** asked the states if samples collected in 2013 will be processed and aged in 2014 realizing that funding is not currently available. All states mentioned that samplers are doing a good job staying caught up with reading and ageing and a large backlog will not need to be processed during 2014. Some samples for Texas may need to be shelved for later processing. FIN contractual staff in Texas will have to be released due to funding cuts for 2014. **Bray** also stated that the data for the upcoming red snapper assessment will need to be delivered in August of 2014. All states agreed their 2013 red snapper data will be available prior to the deadline. **Donaldson** asked the states if they thought continuing to review the species specific reference sets would be useful if biological sampling is suspended for 2014. All states agreed that this would be useful. **Donaldson** stated even if biological sampling was suspended for 2014 travel funds would be available to continue to hold the sampling processors meeting. **Denson** agreed this would be useful to keep the samplers trained on processing species so that when funding is restored retraining would not be required.

### Status of Metadata Compilation

**Riedel** provided a brief summary of his progress with metadata compilation. The original plan at GSMFC included entering information on biological sampling programs, fishing regulations, licenses and fees, weather and climate, and economic data programs. Currently **Riedel** has completed entry for fishing regulations, licenses and fees, climatic/environmental data, and entry of some economic programmatic information. **Riedel** still needs to review data for each states biological sampling programs. His future plans are to move into the maintenance phase which consists of reviewing existing data modules and determining what potential new items need to be added for each states.

### Discussion of SEFSC Data Peer Review Report

**Donaldson** provided a summary of a peer review report of NOAA's Southeast Fishery Science Center (SEFSC). The focus of the review was on the data collection and management programs that feed into the stock assessments for stocks managed under the Magnuson-Stevens Act. **Donaldson** thought it would be useful for the DMS to review the recommendations list and provide some feedback to NOAA on what items FIN is addressing now or would like to address in the future. One of the recommendations discussed the need for a consolidated database for at-sea and discard data. **Cody** asked if FIN or GSMFC would have an interest in managing a consolidated database for at-sea collections and by-catch as opposed to NOAA taking the lead to create one. **Donaldson** stated that FIN has always worked to coordinate data collections based on state needs and this would be another area of interest if the states decided this was important. After a brief discussion **Donaldson** suggested having GSMFC staff generates a response letter that the DMS can review in March 2014. Those recommendations can then be forwarded to the FIN Committee in June of 2014 for final action. The DMS agreed on this course of action.

### Status of Commercial Electronic Reporting/Unified Trip Ticket

**Peterson** provided a brief review of what the unified trip ticket is designed to accomplish. Each agency would receive their own unique datasets but all lookup tables would have a single design. Currently some progress has been made on changing some lookup and species table formats. Florida and Texas have already submitted their unified species table. Also current discussions have centered on a browser based unified trip ticket system. **Peterson** stated Bluefin Data must relinquish the role of Gulf Trip Ticket Coordinator. A coordinating body must be established to determine changes and modifications to a unified trip ticket program since one state change could potentially impact the program for other states and federal partners. Coordination will be required by the 5 Gulf States, GSMFC, SEFSC, Highly Migratory Species Office (HMS), and Atlantic Coast Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP). This would improve communication amongst the partnering agencies when changes are agreed upon and made. **Peterson** stated that PC trip ticket is currently unified but operating under 5 different versions. Five state data files are produced along with the required Federal data files. **Denson** asked are Federal dealer files including all state and federal species data in their file. **Peterson** said the Federal data files do not filter any species data upon transmission. Alabama and Louisiana are both concerned that their dealers are not aware that all data are being sent in the Federal data reports and that this could be a volatile issue. A server based unification program still needs to be developed. **Peterson** stated a web based system may not be the best option. That would require a solid internet connection and a handful of dealers may not have access required for web based system. A PC based system might be necessary for those dealers with low speed internet capabilities. **Peterson** stated that a PC based system would require decisions on operating systems, mobile capabilities, and if there will be agency-controlled license lists. Louisiana and Alabama stated the agency-controlled license lists would not be favorable for their states. Both states are worried about the problems of managing and updating these lists and Louisiana is also concerned about policing the lists. **Peterson** suggested the functionality would be available for using agency-controlled license lists along with allowing states to opt out of using those lists. **Peterson** stated it is possible to create a server-based PC based system that would utilize a localized database for data entry. A PC based option would require an installation on one or multiple computers for each dealer utilizing this option. **Denson** agreed that a PC based option is going to be necessary based on Alabama dealer internet capabilities. **Peterson** stated that this will likely limit PC users to Windows based operating systems. **Peterson** asked if the goal is to produce a Gulf Trip Ticket Enhancement or a Gulf SAFIS-like system similar to what Atlantic Coast Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP) has produced. **Denson** stated that it needs to be designed so the states are receiving the data first for review and editing. **Peterson** reminded that the Federal data files are getting transmitted to the Federal review staff immediately too. **Bray** stated that a Gulf SAFIS-like program would seem unnecessary as the states are reviewing data and providing to GSMFC for loading into the FIN DMS as soon as possible. **Bellais** mentioned that NOAA has expressed a need to get clean trip ticket data in a more timely fashion for quota monitoring purposes which could potentially generate a need for a Gulf SAFIS-like system. This would allow multiple users to log in and review trip ticket data in a more timely fashion. **Peterson** stated that a server-based unified trip ticket will require a development team with additional programming skills as opposed to the one person that developed and maintained the old PC trip ticket program. **Peterson** has the resources in place to start this process but a strong plan for moving forward needs to be finalized and partners need to realize this will take some time to create. **Peterson** believes many of these

questions need to be answered first before getting started on creating this unified server-based version. **Donaldson** stated that not having NOAA staff at the meeting really prevents a productive discussion on this issue. We need to be able to discuss our current limitations and concerns with NOAA staff and come to a decision on a course of action for the future. **Donaldson** stated that a meeting with state representatives, SEFSC staff, and HMS staff would be necessary hopefully before the end of 2013. **Donaldson** suggested that New Orleans would be a good meeting location and the states agreed. **Bellais** agreed to coordinate the scheduling of this meeting.

### **Election of Officers**

**Vince Cefalu** was elected as Chairman. **Nicole Shaffer** was elected as Vice-Chairman.

### **Other Business**

**Lassen** discussed a program working the GSMFC comparing Gulf Fishery Management with FAO ecolabelling guidelines. **Lassen** has found that the FAO criterion previously developed are more suitable for large scale fisheries and are not tailored to most fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico. They hope to have a forum in 2014 to collect and provide better information for FAO certifiers on how Gulf species are managed. **Atran** asked if **Lassen** realized there is a provision being added to Magnuson-Stevens Act that if reauthorized would allow NOAA Fisheries to have its own sustainability certification program. **Lassen** stated he was aware of that and that NOAA has been participating in the Gulf project they are working on.

**Miller** provided an update on FINFO website to better communicate the sustainability of Gulf Species primarily at the state level. FINFO has been working with state personnel and fishery profiles are still being produced. **Denson** asked if the site is open for viewing yet. **Miller** stated a password protected site is available for states to review. **Miller** hopes there will be approximately 20 species profiles for each state prior to Boston Seafood Show in March of 2014. **Denson** asked if the focus of this website was strictly for sustainability. **Miller** stated the site is designed to highlight science and sustainability by showing how the management process and fish biology fits together. The site will eventually be housed at GSMFC and each state will manage their individual pages. The site will also present information on economics, landings, and a marketing component. **Atran** asked if the focus was primarily the commercial fishing industry. **Miller** stated the website is primarily designed to help seafood buyers and consumers understand the science and sustainability of Gulf seafood.

**Donaldson** asked the states to review the committee membership listing provided in the folder and provide any updates to GSMFC. GSMFC also needs a letter from Mississippi and Texas requesting changes to the committee membership based on members retiring from their state agency.

**Being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:26 a.m.**

### **Review of 2012 Commercial Data**

Each state provided feedback based on a review of the spreadsheets **Bellais** sent out prior to the meeting. The States mentioned that the FIN DMS numbers were very close to their state totals and the slight differences likely indicated that they collected some additional data that has yet to be delivered to GSMFC. The States also mentioned that there were a few coding errors on their part. Data will be redelivered and loaded into the DMS as needed. All necessary corrections will be made at the state data level and submitted to GSMFC for loading into the FIN DMS.

### **Review of FIN Standard Codes**

**D. Bellais** asked if there were any market, grade, gear, disposition, or area codes that needed to be added or modified. **V. Cefalu** asked for a gear code to be added for Off Bottom Culture. **S. Brown** asked for a Tournament Caught disposition code to be added. **V. Cefalu** asked for two grade codes to be added, one for Live Bait and one for Dead Bait. After **D. Bellais** gets verification from the agencies that may be affected by the additions, the requested codes will be added.



**TCC DATA MANAGEMENT SUBCOMMITTEE  
MINUTES  
Monday, March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2014  
New Orleans, LA**

**Chairman Vince Cefalu** called the meeting to order at 8:35 a.m. The following members and others were present:

**Members**

Chris Denson, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL  
Nicole Shaffer, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL  
Richard Cody, FWRI, Saint Petersburg, FL  
Justin Esslinger, TPWD, Rockport, TX  
Vince Cefalu, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Mike Harden, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
John Froeschke, GMFMC, Tampa, FL  
Bill Richardson, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Dave Gloeckner, SEFSC, Miami, FL

**Staff**

David Donaldson, Assistant Director, Ocean Springs, MS  
Donna Bellais, ComFIN Programmer, Ocean Springs, MS  
Gregg Bray, Programmer/Analyst, Ocean Springs, MS  
James Ballard, Sport Fish Restoration/Aquatic Invasive Coordinator  
Steve VanderKooy, IJF Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS

**Others**

Nicole Smith, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Steve Brown, FWRI, Saint Petersburg, FL  
Joe Desfosse, NOAA Fisheries/HMS, Pascagoula, MS  
Dale Diaz, MDMR, Biloxi, MS

**Adoption of Agenda**

The agenda was approved and adopted as written.

**Approval of Minutes**

The minutes of the Data Management Subcommittee (DMS) meeting held on October 14<sup>th</sup>, 2013 in South Padre Island, TX were approved as written.

**Status of Biological Sampling Activities**

**Bray** provided an update on processing and data entry of biological sampling activities for 2013. All states are either completed or close to completing processing and data entry of 2013 samples. Processing and data entry should be completed by summer. States were asked about the utility of having an otolith processors meeting in 2014. All states agreed that this would still be a useful exercise especially with the possibility of obtaining some FIN funding for

a shortened biological sampling program for 2014. **Bray** also reminded states that GSMFC plans to provide ageing data for the upcoming red snapper stock assessment in July 2014.

### **Review of Response to SEFSC Data Peer Review Report**

**Donaldson** provided a brief summary of a draft response letter. **Donaldson** asked the DMS to review the report and provide recommendations. The DMS approved the response letter in its current format so the final version will be reviewed by the FIN committee in June 2014. Any editorial changes need to be provided to GSMFC by April 15, 2014. **Donaldson** also provided a copy of a national response letter from NOAA Fisheries of the review process.

### **Discussion of Updating FIN DMS**

**Bellais** stated recent discussions have taken place as to whether the FIN Data Management System (FIN DMS) needs to be updated to new software to provide more access and more user friendly tools. Oracle Discoverer is being discontinued so no program support will be available in the future. GSMFC is attempting to find a new end user tool and that prompted the discussion of completely redesigning the FIN DMS. **Donaldson** stated that the current system was originally designed for receiving and housing trip ticket data only. The FIN DMS now is much more complex with additional data programs feeding into the old design. Funding may be available through NOAA Fisheries Information System (FIS) to design a new FIN DMS in cooperation with states and NOAA Fisheries to better collect and manage data feeds coming to FIN. **Harden** agreed this would be a good idea to help better document current data programs and design a new user friendly system. **Esslinger** asked if GSMFC staff would be able to handle the programming components. **Donaldson** stated the proposal would include money for programming assistance if needed. **Gloeckner** asked if the proposal would include a plan for improvements over time or would it be a one-time upgrade. **Donaldson** agreed that planning for continued program improvements over time would be a necessary component. **Cody** asked if the FIS funding is a single year opportunity. **Donaldson** stated that monies are available each year but there are restrictions on what can be funded. The DMS agreed that this would be useful so **Bellais** will develop an initial proposal and provide it to the subcommittee for review before it will be submitted to FIS.

### **Discussion of Carry-over Funds for FIN**

**Bray** provided a spreadsheet that detailed two spending scenarios for carry-over and supplemental NOAA Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) funds provided for 2014 sampling. **Bray** described the two scenarios and **Donaldson** provided some history on where the carry-over funds originated from. **Donaldson** stated that the increases provided for recreational sampling would be long term and not just one year increases. The increases described in scenario two for menhaden sampling, trip tickets, and biological sampling would not be available from MRIP for future years. **Donaldson** stated that scenario two could be modified to best utilize the available funds if the states so decided. **Donaldson** also stated the 1.8 million increase is essentially recreational MRIP money and should be spent on recreational sampling. The Gulf Fisheries Information Network (GulfFIN) line item is approximately \$640k annually and has been supplementing recreational sampling over the years and the argument could be made that increased MRIP funds could be utilized for other sampling programs. **Cody** asked what the total payback line in scenario one represents. **Donaldson** stated under that scenario those funds would not be utilized by GulfFIN and would be deducted from the total monies received for

2014 from NOAA. **Froeschke** asked if having a partial year biological sampling program would make analyses for scientists more difficult. The group discussed that having some data would likely be more beneficial than not having any data. **After further discussion the FIN DMS recommended that scenario 2 be preferred with menhaden funds removed and added to biological sampling. Menhaden sampling could be funded from other FIN carry-over funds and would maximize the funds available for biological sampling.**

### **Discussion of Commercial Electronic Reporting/Unified Trip Ticket**

**Bellais** discussed a brief overview of the current status of unified trip ticket development. Currently Florida, Texas, Mississippi, and Alabama have developed their species table required under unified trip ticket. Louisiana is still in development. Additional discussions regarding potential new codes for live bait, dead bait, and tournament caught landings are ongoing. **Gloeckner** stated that there is no need to add codes because codes exist for bait and live and dead grade codes. **Peterson** reminded the states that development of a unified trip ticket system is ongoing and differs from the current PC based system in that the unified system will be communicating with a web server instead of a permanent local database. Recent work has focused on communications between local PC's and the web server. **Peterson** hopes to be able to have a presentation on the status of the development progress in summer 2014. **Cefalu** stated that LA is considering adding a unit of measure for a half sack of oysters and wanted to see if that would cause problems for Bluefin Data. **Peterson** stated it would just be another code added to the species table. **Peterson** also stated the unified trip ticket system is being developed with newer coding but will still not run on Apple operating systems, Android systems, and most tablets. At some point unified trip ticket will likely not satisfy all of the end users as it cannot be easily built to run on all operating systems currently available. **Harden** stated that LA and TX have discussed the unit condition conversion table and if these old conversion units need to be updated. **Gloeckner** stated that there is work ongoing on the Atlantic Coast to update Atlantic conversion factors. **After further discussion the DMS agreed that the current NOAA conversion tables are likely outdated and recommended that the FIN Commercial Technical Work Group be tasked with exploring how to update the species conversion table for the Gulf of Mexico.** **Bellais** also stated an issue has come up with regards to flounder species codes. **VanderKooy** stated that during a recent flounder FMP process that commercial data records were not speciated very well and a stock assessment was not possible for southern or gulf flounder due to data discrepancies. **VanderKooy** asked if there was a way to improve the commercial species table list to provide better data for a future stock assessment process for southern and gulf flounder. **Denson** stated Alabama has not provided separate species codes because dealers are not going to sort their flounders to the species level. Prices for southern and Gulf flounder are the same and dealers would not take the time to separate them correctly. Most states agreed with Alabama with regards to why they do not provide species codes for southern and Gulf flounder.

### **Discussion of Consistent Confidentiality Roll-Up Methods**

**Gloeckner** discussed NOAA Fisheries staff are working on developing consistent methods for restricting confidential data that would prevent end users from back calculating confidential numbers. **Bellais** stated GulfFIN data removes confidential records from all non-confidential reports and data queries. **Gloeckner** would like to eventually come to an agreement

in 2014 with all state and federal partners on consistent methods. **Cody** stated he has been asked by the Gulf and South Atlantic Fishery Management Council regarding access to confidential commercial data. **Cody** asked if both councils could be added to the current FIN Memorandum of Agreement (MOA). **Donaldson** said potentially yes but the time it would take to get it through the approval process might be multiple years. **Cody** stated they might look into a separate MOA between Florida and the councils.

### **Other Business**

**Miller** provided a brief description of the newly created Gulf FINFO website. FINFO was developed to highlight the sustainable fisheries management activities in each state. FINFO was developed from oil disaster recovery funds and all five states provided input. The website has four components focusing on fisheries profiles, sustainable fisheries management, Gulf fisheries economics, and marketing programs for Gulf fisheries in each state. **Miller** wanted to thank all of the state representatives for their help in development and the site has already received some positive feedback.

**Donaldson** reminded the DMS to review the subcommittee listing provided and send any editorial comments or changes to GSMFC.

**Being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:10 a.m.**

**FIN Otolith Processors Training Workshop  
Meeting Summary  
May 6-7, 2014  
St. Petersburg, Florida**

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

Alison Amick, FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL  
Jessica Carroll, FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL  
Kristen Wolfgang, FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL  
Kristin Cook, FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL  
David Westmark, FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL  
Jessica Marchant, AMRD, Dauphin Island, AL  
Emily Seale, AMRD, Dauphin Island, AL  
Tyler Rose, AMRD, Dauphin Island, AL  
Debbie Belk, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Wes Devers, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Emily Satterfield, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Cijii Marshall, LDWF, Venice, LA  
Isis Longo, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Lacie Wilson, TPWD, Palacios, TX  
Morgan Cason, TPWD, Palacios, TX  
Gregg Bray, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS  
Steve VanderKooy, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS  
Joe Smith, NOAA Fisheries, Beaufort, NC  
Robert Allman, NOAA Fisheries, Panama City, FL  
Chris Palmer, NOAA Fisheries, Panama City, FL  
Beverly Barnett, NOAA Fisheries, Panama City, FL  
Ashley Pacicco, NOAA Fisheries, Panama City, FL  
Gary Gray, University of Southern Mississippi Gulf Coast Research Lab, Ocean Springs, MS

**May 6, 2014**

*Please note that this summary includes tables that outline the reference sets APEs, by year as well as the agency contacts and responsible person(s) for each of the reference sets. This information can found at the back of the document.*

Discussion of Greater Amberjack Reference Set

**D. Murie** was unable to attend but **R. Allman** mentioned the APE was approximately 2% after the last circulation of the reference set. The set will be distributed again later in 2014 and results will be presented to the group at the May 2015 meeting.

#### Discussion of Red Snapper Reference Set

**R. Allman** presented results for the red snapper reference set. He stated that the reference set was distributed and read by all states except LA and TX. LA recently received the red snapper set and will be reading and delivering ages back to **Allman** in the near future. The APE's for PC Lab, FWRI, AMRD, and MDMR were 3.3%, 2.5%, 2.4%, and 6.2%. The overall APE will be determined after LA and TX complete reading. The reference set will again be distributed to the various agencies and the results of the readings will be presented to the group at the May 2015 meeting. The historical APEs for this species can be found at the back of this document.

#### Discussion of Southern Flounder Reference Set

**I. Longo** presented they are still waiting for Texas results and have not calculated APE's yet. The reference set will again be distributed to the various agencies and the results of the readings will be presented to the group at the May 2015 meeting. The historical APEs for this species can be found at the back of this document.

#### Discussion of King Mackerel Reference Set

**C. Palmer** presented the results for the king mackerel reference set. Palmer stated the reference set is typically only read every 2 years and the set is scheduled to be distributed for 2014. PC Lab staff will read first and then distribute to the other states. The results of the readings will be presented to the group at the May 2015 meeting. The historical APEs for this species can be found at the back of this document.

#### Discussion of Red drum/Spotted Seatrout/Striped Mullet Reference Sets

**J. Carroll** stated that all agencies have read the various sets and the APEs are 2.68%, 3.53% and 4.81% for spotted seatrout, red drum and striped mullet, respectively. The reference sets will again be distributed to the various agencies and the results of the readings will be presented to the group at the May 2015 meeting. The historical APEs for this species can be found at the back of this document.

#### Discussion of Sheepshead Reference Set

**W. Devers** reported that the sheepshead reference set has not been read by AL and TX. The overall APE will be calculated once all agencies have completed reading the reference set. The reference set will again be distributed to the various agencies and the results of the readings will be presented to the group at the May 2015 meeting. The historical APEs for this species can be found at the back of this document.

#### Discussion of Vermilion Snapper Reference Set

**B. Barnett** presented the results for the vermilion snapper reference set. The set has been read by PC Lab staff and FWRI is currently completing their reading. PC Lab APE was 6.92%. The remaining states will finish reading later in 2014. The reference set will again be distributed to the various agencies and the results of the readings will be presented to the group at the May 2015 meeting. The historical APEs for this species can be found at the back of this document.

#### Discussion of Black Drum Reference Set

**G. Gray** stated he has completed the images for the reference set and he should be distributing the set to the states soon.

### Discussion of Gray Triggerfish Reference Set

**Allman** presented the results for the gray triggerfish reference set. The set was read by PC Lab and FWRI for all 115 slides in the set. It was noted that since the spines are difficult to read, the target APE for this species is 15% not the 5% standard. PC Lab and FWRI are both under 10% which is great. **Allman** recommends going over the training set that PC Lab staff have produced. GSMFC will obtain a copy of the training set and distribute it to the states as needed. The reference set will again be distributed to the various agencies and the results of the readings will be presented to the group at the May 2015 meeting. The historical APEs for this species can be found at the back of this document.

### Presentation of gray triggerfish ageing bias and validation study

**Allman** also discussed some issues with the gray triggerfish assessment in the South Atlantic. Ageing was accomplished as a collaboration between NOAA Fisheries at Beaufort, NC and South Carolina biologists. Size at age were determined to be much higher from NOAA Fisheries staff than South Carolina biologists. After recirculating reference sets it was determined that South Carolina biologists were ageing fish higher. This may be due to new readers being hired and possibly not trained effectively in the difficulties in ageing gray triggerfish. This forced NOAA Fisheries to put the stock assessment process on hold. All of the fish are now being re-aged by Jennifer Potts at the Beaufort Lab. This has demonstrated that ageing bias can lead to incorrect growth curves, incorrect weight at age, incorrect natural mortality, and incorrect weight at age. This could also imply incorrect fishery independent and dependent selectivity.

**Allman** also presented some results of a PC Lab study to validate and verify gray triggerfish ages. OTC marked fish demonstrated that gray triggerfish are laying down a translucent zone in spines during the winter. Research utilizing fin rays noted a similar pattern. Marginal increment analysis in spines showed that translucent zones are completed around May. On average, fin rays counted one more increment than spine ages. Fin rays are not easier to read and require a great deal more work to prepare. For this reason it is not preferable to utilize fin rays for routine ageing. **Allman** presented some research results with gray triggerfish otoliths. Otoliths are very difficult to remove which will likely prohibit using them for routine ageing. **Allman** also discussed some research utilizing vertebrae for verification of spine ages. They used the abdominal vertebrae which are closest to the head and sectioned them to about 0.5 mm. Vertebrae proved to be as difficult as the gray triggerfish spines. In many cases the ventral portion of the vertebrae proved to be easier to read than the dorsal. **Allman** noted it is hard to get older fish as most samples come from fishery dependent data. Maximum age is approximately 14 years in the Gulf. If some larger samples are available from fishery independent sources PC Lab would be interested in getting some. Further work with validation/verification will help improve the accuracy of ageing triggerfish spines.

### Discussion of Gray Snapper Reference Set

**A. Amick** reported that the reference set has been read by MS, AL, and FL and is currently in transit to LA. The overall APE will be calculated after LA is completed. MS was 9.09% and MDMR staff plan to compare results to determine why they were a little high this year. The reference set will again be distributed to the various agencies and the results of the readings will be presented to the group at the May 2015 meeting. The historical APEs for this species can be found at the back of this document.

### Discussion of Red Grouper Reference Set

**Barnett** stated PC Lab staff are planning to share their reference set with FWRI and FWRI also hopes to provide slides to PC Lab staff for to assist in building the set. They plan to share that between agencies and determine an APE for the upcoming assessment in 2014.

### Discussion of Gag Grouper Reader Exchange Set

**Barnett** stated FWRI is only state ageing Gag. APE for FWRI was 1.8%. The reference set consists of whole and sectioned otoliths. The preference is to read whole and use the sections when the whole otolith is difficult to read.

**Bray** reminded the group that continuing to circulate the reference sets is an important task. Current stock assessment models now have the ability to utilize APE's for each state reading lab and better account for observed variability. None of the states were opposed to continue reading the reference sets even with the possibility of FIN funding not being obtained for future sampling seasons.

### Demonstration of Gulf Menhaden scale reading

**S. VanderKooy** mentioned the need for providing some training to state personnel to begin ageing menhaden from their fishery-independent samples. NOAA Fisheries staff in Beaufort, NC have extensive knowledge regarding menhaden fishery but these key personnel are also getting close to retirement. Having additional people with knowledge of how to sample and age menhaden would be extremely beneficial. Some of the Gulf States have expressed an interest in getting staff trained in menhaden sampling and ageing. At this point the goal is to provide an introduction to sampling and ageing menhaden. A reference set has been developed and some example slides were provided at this meeting to review during the otolith reading exercise.

**J. Smith** provided a presentation regarding menhaden sampling and ageing. **Smith** mentioned that after the last Gulf menhaden assessment there was a lack of age data from the states fishery independent data. Hopefully by transferring some knowledge on menhaden sampling the states could provide some age data for future assessments from fishery independent data. **Smith** provided some historical information on the menhaden fishery. It's the largest fishery by volume in the Northern Gulf of Mexico by volume. There are three active factories in 2014 with approximately 32 vessels fishing. NOAA Fisheries sample from the top of the fish hold from menhaden vessels to obtain 20-25 fish. From that sample 10 fish are randomly selected and processed for fork length, weight, and scales for ageing. Scales are removed about mid-body along the lateral line below the insertion of the dorsal fin. Samplers attempt to remove 20-25 scales from each fish and are stored in vials with a couple drops of Dawn soap to remove some of the slime. Scales are mounted between two microscope slides. Scales are read with an Eberbach macroprojector under 40x magnification. NOAA Fisheries began sampling in 1964 for size and age. Scales are determined reliable as fish usually only live 1 to 4 years. There is some subjectivity but reading criterion have been developed. Approximately 90-95% of Gulf menhaden in commercial catches are age-1s and -2s while sizes range from 140-200 mm FL and 50-190 g. Scales are symmetrical from key sampling area and pectinations are the posterior edge of scale. Measurements are straight-line distance from focus to each annulus and edge perpendicular to scale pectinations. There is typically narrow growth between last annulus and edge in spring season. Wide growth is observed between last annulus and edge in fall season. **GSMFC** will



provide copies of **Smith's** presentation to the group. More detailed training sessions may be occurring in Beaufort, NC later in 2014.

#### Discussion of Revision to GSMFC Otolith Manual

**S. VanderKooy** discussed that currently two versions of the manual have been produced for about 20 species in the Gulf of Mexico. Some of the procedures for processing species have changed over time. **VanderKooy** has also received requests to produce a combined manual with the ASMFC to include many of the Atlantic priority species. **Carroll** stated that she is reviewing three Atlantic species methods that are pertinent to Florida and the Atlantic states are working on approximately 10 total species. **VanderKooy** would like to take on the task of this review and combined manual and would like each of the states to assist in the revision. He asked the states to review the current version and provide comments on errors, changes in techniques, and other necessary changes that would help him in the revision. He will likely ask for review in the next couple months and will contact people based on their area of species expertise. **VanderKooy** will also coordinate with the ASMFC to incorporate their additions and compile them into a unified document. The goal is to have a final document produced in early 2015.

#### Discussion of Future of Biological Sampling under FIN

**G. Bray** stated that currently there is no funding to continue FIN priority species sampling in 2015. He stated that the Commission continues to work with NOAA to identify funding for 2015 and beyond. Most states have expressed an interest in continuing with the otolith processors meeting even if FIN biosampling funding is not obtained. This would assist the states that are continuing to collect ageing structures utilizing state funding.

#### Discussion of Future Training Meeting

The group discussed the date and location for the next otolith meeting processors training workshop. It was decided that it should be held at Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute during the first part of May 2015.

#### Conducting Otolith Reading Exercises for Black Drum, Red Drum, Spotted Seatrout, Gray Triggerfish, Greater Amberjack, King Mackerel, Southern Flounder, Sheepshead, Striped Mullet, Gray Snapper, Red Snapper and Vermilion Snapper

The afternoon of 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), greater amberjack, 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. All groups were completed by lunch on the first day which indicates the readers are getting better and reading these priority species.

May 7, 2014

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

Review and Comparison of Reading Exercise by Groups

After each group determined the age of the various fish, the information was entered into a spreadsheet and J. Carroll, A. Amick, K. Wolfgang and K. Cook calculated APEs for all species. The following table outlines the APEs for each species and provides a historical look (where applicable) for those species (please note that APEs are recorded as a percentage).

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Black drum					0.67	0.21	2.67	0.00	3.93	4.69	2.67	1.08
Red drum					0.52	4.35	1.63	2.83	1.04	1.48	4.07	2.87
Spotted seatrout					0.00	4.55	1.17	1.44	1.64	0.86	2.78	2.00
Southern flounder		10.54	9.51	4.00	2.86	8.78	3.03	6.48	6.81	1.70	9.15	7.62
Striped mullet					6.97	7.48	9.84	2.87	2.72	2.08	2.40	2.89
Sheepshead					0.42	8.72	2.96	4.12	4.36	2.07	0.00	0.85
Red snapper	16.01	4.97	5.58	3.32	1.14	6.04	3.55	1.30	4.03	2.74	3.90	2.87
Gray snapper					3.19	9.22	1.80	3.41	1.34	1.36	0.00	2.01
Vermilion snapper					6.10	16.32	8.54	7.02	7	12.9	9.37	9.76
King mackerel			13.60	2.88	11.51	6.48	13.12	10.26	10.12	2.86	4.43	6.59
Greater amberjack									16.43	9.07	5.00	12.00
Gray triggerfish					16.81	21.79	16.02	10.18	28.58	23.95	10.61	13.09

After the comparison exercise, otoliths, where there were differences among the groups, were identified and everyone examined these otoliths (as a group) to determine where each group had differed. The group believed this was a useful activity and it helped everyone identify where errors can (and were) made while reading the otoliths. It was noted that having the groups mark where they counted the rings on print outs was also very helpful during the discussions. It is also useful to remind groups which species are important to measure to the first annulus. Overall, the APEs for most of the species were at or below the 5% threshold. Where the APEs did exceed the 5% standard, it was due to several issues: 1) difficulty in identifying the first annulus (vermilion snapper and greater amberjack) and 2) general difficulty in identifying what is considered a ring (gray triggerfish).

Being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:35 a.m.

**Reference Sets APEs, by Year**

<i>REFERENCE SET</i>	<i>2006</i>	<i>2007</i>	<i>2008</i>	<i>2009</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>2011</i>	<i>2012</i>	<i>2013</i>	<i>2014</i>
Black drum					7.93				
Red drum				2.36	3.82		7.96	3.80	3.53
Spotted seatrout				3.15	3.73		6.78	2.91	2.68
Southern flounder	6.71	18.89*	7.35	3.22	8.32	7.24	2.59	1.17	
Striped mullet				7.12	5.88		6.87	4.70	4.81
Sheepshead				3.91			5.05	6.25	
Red snapper	2.74	4.90	4.34	5.01				8.99	
Vermilion snapper								13.99	
King mackerel (overall)			5.83	7.45	5.92			5.05	
King mackerel (sectioned)			3.39	4.87	0.68			2.71	
King mackerel (whole)			9.13	10.04	13.83			7.43	
Greater amberjack								2.73	
Gray triggerfish						20.80		22.7	
Gag (only read by FWRI)									1.8

\*data transcription errors resulted in elevated APE

## AGENCY CONTACTS FOR REFERENCE SETS

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### ***RED DRUM/SPOTTED***

***SEATROUT/STRIPED MULLET (read by all agencies except TX for striped mullet only)***

Jessica Carroll

***RED SNAPPER (read by all agencies)***

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***GAG GROUPE*** (read by FL only)

TBD

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APPROVED BY:

John F. Mareska  
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**TCC SEAMAP SUBCOMMITTEE  
MINUTES  
Wednesday, July 30, 2014  
San Juan, Puerto Rico**

**Chairman J. Mareska** called the meeting to order at 8:04 am. The following members and others were present:

**Members**

John Mareska, *Chairman*, ADCNR/MRD, Gulf Shores, AL  
Read Hendon, USM/GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS  
Bob McMichael, GWC/FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL  
Chloe Dean, LDWF, Grand Isle, LA  
Fernando Martinez, TPWD, Corpus Christi, TX  
Butch Pellegrin, NOAA Fisheries, Pascagoula, MS

**Others**

Kelly Donnelly, NOAA Fisheries/SERO, St. Petersburg, FL  
Eric Hoffmayer, NMFS, Pascagoula, MS

**Staff**

Jeff Rester, *SEAMAP/Habitat Program Coordinator*, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

**Adoption of Agenda**

**R. Hendon** wanted to add SEAMAP survey standardization under Other Business. **E. Hoffmayer** wanted to add species identification QA/QC under Other Business also. With those additions, the agenda was adopted as submitted.

**Approval of Minutes**

**R. Hendon** moved to approve the SEAMAP minutes from the March 17, 2014 meeting as submitted. **C. Dean** seconded and the motion passed.

**Administrative Report**

**J. Rester** reported that since the last SEAMAP meeting, SEAMAP completed the Spring Plankton Survey, the Reef Fish Survey, and the Summer Shrimp/Groundfish Survey. The Bottom Longline and Vertical Line Surveys are currently ongoing. **J. Rester** stated that he had approximately 5 phone calls requesting real time data this summer or asking questions about the real time data. Several callers expressed disappointment over the sampling off Texas being finished in June so far in advance of the opening of the Texas Closure. The SEAMAP Red Drum Work Group met in January to discuss a red drum mark and recapture project for the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council. The state directors met in March to discuss the mark and recapture project. The state directors stated that while the majority of the states were supportive of a mark and recapture study, they were concerned that the perception would be if they developed something

through SEAMAP that SEAMAP would be supportive of funding the study. They therefore decided not to pursue the development of the mark and recapture study. The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council sent a letter to SEAMAP on April 23 stressing a need to find a continuity in sampling design and protocol. **J. Rester** reported that SEAMAP held a Vertical Line Work Group meeting on May 12 and a Bottom Longline Work Group meeting on June 17. **J. Rester** stated that he has finished the 2011 SEAMAP Environmental and Biological Atlas of the Gulf of Mexico. He began working on the 2012 Atlas and hopes to have the 2013 Atlas finished and printed before the end of the year.

### **Survey Activities and Budget Needs for FY2015**

**B. McMichael** stated that Florida needed \$855,000 to conduct the work that Florida is currently conducting for SEAMAP. He stated that he understood the limitations of SEAMAP funding and would continue to participate in the Summer Shrimp/Groundfish Survey and Reef Fish Survey and maintain the SEAMAP Archiving Center for \$540,000.

**J. Mareska** stated that Alabama would need \$220,000 to continue participation in the Bottom Longline Survey, Vertical Line Survey, Summer and Fall Shrimp/Groundfish Surveys, and the Fall Plankton Survey.

**R. Hendon** stated that Mississippi would need \$413,415 to continue participation in the Bottom Longline Survey, Summer and Fall Shrimp/Groundfish Surveys, and the Spring and Fall Plankton Survey.

**C. Dean** stated that Louisiana would be approximately \$12,000 over budget in 2014. She stated that even though it would cost \$460,000 for Louisiana to participate in the Bottom Longline Survey, Vertical Line Survey, Summer and Fall Shrimp/Groundfish Surveys, and the Spring and Fall Plankton Survey, Louisiana would get by with level funding of \$447,261.

**F. Martinez** stated that Texas would continue participation in the Bottom Longline Survey and Summer and Fall Shrimp/Groundfish Surveys for \$137,335.

**J. Rester** stated that the Commission would continue to provide coordination and data management responsibilities for the Gulf of Mexico for \$245,000. He stated that due to personnel changes, he should have funds available to sponsor face to face work group meetings later this year and next year.

**B. Pellegrin** stated that NMFS would continue their SEAMAP participation with whatever their historical percentage would be next year. He stated that the SEAMAP funds did not cover all of the expenses associated with NMFS participation in SEAMAP surveys.

During the budget discussion, the Subcommittee discussed additional fishery independent work that would not be funded by SEAMAP, but using SEAMAP protocols. **R. Hendon** stated that their National Fish and Wildlife Federation (NFWF) proposal was in the final review stages. If funded, Mississippi would start participating in the Vertical Line Survey. Florida's NFWF grant has allowed them to start collecting plankton samples during the Summer Shrimp/Groundfish

Survey and fully participate in the Fall Shrimp/Groundfish Survey. Florida would begin collecting data in the Bottom Longline Survey in 2015.

**J. Rester** asked about who would store and where the data would be stored for all of these additional fishery independent samples. The Subcommittee decided to dedicate time at the October Subcommittee meeting to discuss these issues fully.

The Subcommittee also decided to have a detailed budget discussion at the October meeting. This would include personnel and vessel costs associated with each survey. It would be a detailed discussion that allowed everyone to fully understand how much sampling cost per day by survey for each SEAMAP partner.

### **Review of the Bottom Longline Work Group Meeting**

**J. Rester** stated Bottom Longline Work Group met on June 17, 2014. He stated that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the current sampling design of the SEAMAP Bottom Longline Survey. He stated that the gear and survey protocols were the same between partners, but the station selection and sampling universe were not the same amongst partners. He also stated that the Bottom Longline Survey did not have clear objectives. After the meeting, the Bottom Longline Work Group developed the following draft objectives.

#### SEAMAP Bottom Longline Survey Objectives

- 1) Conduct standardized bottom longline surveys to monitor trends and abundances of fishes in water depths <20 meters in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico by following standardized site selection, sampling, and environmental data collection procedures as defined in the SEAMAP Bottom Longline manual.
- 2) Conduct fall bottom longline surveys in water depths <20 meters to coincide with the NOAA Bottom Longline Survey.
- 3) Conduct seasonal surveys in water depths <20 meters as a supplemental component to the offshore NOAA Bottom Longline Survey to account for recruits and seasonal movement patterns of fishes.
- 4) Sample stations from the offshore NOAA Bottom Longline Survey site universe in conjunction with the fall survey as funds and vessel limitations allow.
- 5) Collect biological samples for life history analysis as time and funds allow.

The Subcommittee felt it would be a good idea for the Bottom Longline Work Group to meet again in the near future to refine the objectives and also discuss seasonality for the survey and how it would interact with the NOAA Bottom Longline Survey. The Subcommittee also felt it would be a good idea to have Walter Ingram involved at the meeting to provide information on survey design and station selection amongst partners. Finally, the data needs identified through SEDAR might help in refining goals for the Bottom Longline Survey.

The Subcommittee also discussed soak time for the survey and decided to leave the final determination on how or if soak time should be stored in the database up to the Bottom Longline Work Group.

### **Review of the Vertical Line Work Group Meeting**

**J. Rester** stated that the Vertical Line Work Group met on May 12, 2014 with the primary objective being a discussion on adding additional habitat information into the database to allow for a more refined analysis of the catch data. He stated that currently the StructureType field allows you to enter whether you fished over an artificial reef, platform, or natural bottom. The StructureName field allows you to enter the name of the platform or artificial reef if it has a name. The Work Group developed a set of criteria for artificial structures and artificial reefs.

**B. McMichael** stated that Florida and NMFS had developed a standard classification for natural reefs and hardbottom area. He stated that he would send a copy of it to **J. Rester**.

The Vertical Line Work Group also discussed station selection for the Vertical Line Survey. Since some of the station selection questions are similar to those of the Bottom Longline Work Group, the Vertical Line Work Group will meet in conjunction with the Bottom Longline Work Group so that Walter Ingram can answer questions about station selection, number of stations, and impacts on confidence intervals for any acquired data.

### **Review of the SEAMAP Trawl and Plankton Operations Manual**

**J. Rester** stated he had compiled the comments he received at the March 2014 meeting. He modified the data sheets and associated instructions, but wanted everyone to review the sheets and instructions to make sure that the instructions were clear and that the sheets were easily understandable when recording data. **J. Rester** stated that he would like for everyone to distribute the Operations Manual within their organization and review it for accuracy. He stated that he would like to finalize the Operations Manual at the October Subcommittee meeting. **B. Pellegrin** stated that he would send in new information on the current stratified design of the trawl surveys.

During the Operations Manual discussion, **B. McMichael** asked if Mississippi identified all species that were caught in the net or only the fish that were in the cod end of the net. He stated that the Tommy Munro crew stated that Florida did it differently than Mississippi. **R. Hendon** stated that Mississippi did not pick fish out of the net to add to the catch. **B. Pellegrin** stated that NMFS shook the net, but did not get every single fish out of the mouth of the net. Alabama, Louisiana, and Texas stated that they counted every single fish whether it was in the cod end of the net or gilled in the mouth of the net.

**C. Dean** asked **B. Pellegrin** about sending out station coordinates for several years' worth of Summer and Fall Shrimp/Groundfish Surveys. This would enable partners to plan their survey days well in advance. **B. Pellegrin** stated that he had waited until after the 2014 Summer Shrimp/Groundfish Survey to determine a realistic number of stations that could be accomplished during the surveys. He stated that he would send out the stations locations in the near future.

### Review of the 2011 SEAMAP Atlas

**J. Rester** stated that the 2011 SEAMAP Environmental and Biological Atlas (Atlas) had been completed and sent out to the Subcommittee for their review. He reported that the format was the same as the last Atlas. He wanted everyone to review the document before it was sent out for publication. He stated that he was currently working on the 2012 Atlas and hoped to have the 2013 completed and printed before the end of the year.

### SEAMAP Funding Letter

**J. Rester** stated that after distributing the draft funding request letter to the Subcommittee, Louisiana wanted to add a paragraph stressing the need to fund the fishery independent NRDA project proposal that NMFS and states developed in 2013. **J. Rester** stated that he had provided a copy to the South Atlantic and Caribbean for their review. He stated that they would also review the draft letter during the joint meeting. Several Subcommittee members stated that they felt that the last paragraph requesting funding for the fishery independent project proposal should be removed from the letter since the proposal is not a SEAMAP project. The Subcommittee decided to discuss it again at the joint meeting.

### FSCS Problems Discussion

**J. Rester** stated that Chuck Weber responded on July 1, 2014 regarding the Subcommittee's letter concerning problems SEAMAP partners were having with the FSCS. **R. Hendon** stated that they have a new fathometer and have not been able to get it to connect to FSCS. He also stated that they were having problems with the latitude and longitude when recording some information. **B. Pellegrin** stated that in the near future, Chuck Schroeder would be developing a new FSCS for the Gulf of Mexico. All SEAMAP partners were glad to hear of this development.

### Other Business

Survey Standardization – **R. Hendon** stated that he had prepared a motion to help in the standardization of SEAMAP surveys between partners. He stated that this was in response to the recent Council presentation and Council letter expressing the need to standardize as much as possible.

**R. Hendon made a motion that in response to the motion passed unanimously by the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council at its April 2014 meeting, the SEAMAP-Gulf Subcommittee hereby establishes a requirement that all SEAMAP-Gulf partners must adhere to standardized SEAMAP protocols for surveys which utilize SEAMAP funding. B. McMichael seconded the motion.**

**R. Hendon** provided the following material to be considered with the motion. In conjunction with this motion, the Subcommittee accepts the following conditions relative to budgeting and defining standardization:

possibly

1) The motion does not impact or alter current state-specific funding allocations. For SEAMAP funded surveys which are currently not compliant with standardized SEAMAP protocols, the SEAMAP partner coordinating that particular survey has two options:

- a) modify the survey design to comply with SEAMAP standards, or
- b) reallocate funds from the currently non-compliant survey to an alternate survey component which does adhere to SEAMAP standards.

2) Where standardized protocols do not currently exist, the SEAMAP-Gulf Subcommittee will develop standards which, when finalized and approved by a majority vote of its members, shall be used by all partners using SEAMAP funds for said survey.

3) The GSMFC SEAMAP Coordinator will conduct a comprehensive review of Gulf SEAMAP survey protocols and associated partner-level compliance for evaluation by the SEAMAP-Gulf Subcommittee at its next meeting in October 2014. The Subcommittee will then discuss and approve "standard SEAMAP protocols" for each survey component in existence. Minor deviations among the partners which are not anticipated to negatively affect data comparability will be allowable, so long as approved by a majority vote of the Subcommittee.

4) Coordination with regional assessment scientists may be sought to address data comparability issues relative to minor deviations in survey standardization.

5) As necessary for expansion of SEAMAP programmatic activities, SEAMAP funding may be used for exploratory or pilot studies to test the efficacy of new or modified survey gears, methods and/or designs. In such instances, details of the proposed study must be presented to the Subcommittee and approved by a majority vote of its members prior to the use of SEAMAP funds for the exploratory/pilot study.

**With a vote of 5-1, the motion passed.**

Species Identification QA/QC – **E. Hoffmayer** asked the Subcommittee what guarantees were in place to assume that the identification of specimens collected during SEAMAP surveys were identified correctly. **E. Hoffmayer** stated that he thought it would be a good idea to start having routine meetings amongst partners where they went over identifications to make sure that everyone was identifying species correctly. **B. McMichael** stated that Florida routinely has meetings where personnel involved in SEAMAP surveys are required to identify organisms. **B. McMichael** stated that he would distribute the identification protocol that Florida has developed for everyone to examine. The Subcommittee also felt that it might be a good idea to have SEAMAP personnel from each partner go out on other vessels to see how their operations and identifications might possibly differ from other partners.

With no further business to discuss, **R. Hendon** moved to adjourn. **C. Dean** seconded the motion and it passed. The meeting adjourned at 12:05 p.m.

**SEAMAP - GULF, SOUTH ATLANTIC  
AND CARIBBEAN SUBCOMMITTEES  
JOINT MINUTES**  
San Juan, Puerto Rico  
July 30, 2014

APPROVED BY:  
*John F. Mareska*  
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**Gulf Chairman Roy Pemberton** called the meeting to order at 1:20 p.m. The following members and others were present:

**Members:**

Read Hendon, USM/GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS  
Bob McMichael, FWC/FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL  
John Mareska ADCNR/MRD, Gulf Shores, AL  
Chloé Dean, LDWF, Grand Isle, LA  
Fernando Martinez, TPWD, Corpus Christi, TX  
Butch Pellegrin, NOAA Fisheries, Pascagoula, MS  
Roger Pugliese, SAFMC, Charleston, SC  
Larry DeLancey, SCDNR, Charleston, SC  
Katy West, NCDMF, Washington, NC  
Patrick Geer, GADNR, Brunswick, GA  
Marcel Reichert, SCDNR, Charleston, SC  
Patrick Campfield, ASMFC, Arlington, VA  
Tina Udouj FWC/FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL  
Jeanne Boylan, SCDNR, Charleston, SC  
Roy Pemberton, DPNR, DFW, St. Thomas, USVI  
Eric Hoffmayer, NMFS, Pascagoula, MS  
Kelly Donnelly, NMFS, St. Petersburg, FL  
Aida Rosario

**Staff:**

Jeff Rester, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS  
Shanna Madsen, ASMFC, Arlington, VA  
Edgardo Ojeda, UPR Sea Grant, Mayaguez, PR

**Adoption of Agenda**

**A. Rosario would like to give a presentation on the Caribbean's 5-year cycle for surveys. With this change, the agenda was adopted.**

**Approval of Joint Minutes**

**The July 30, 2013 meeting summary of the Joint Annual SEAMAP meeting were approved as submitted.**



## **Overview of SEAMAP Components**

### **Overview of SEAMAP-Gulf**

**J. Mareska** stated that during the Fall Plankton Survey, 144 stations were sampled from August 24 through September 24, 2013. The objective of this survey was to collect ichthyoplankton samples with bongo and neuston gear for the purpose of estimating abundance and defining the distribution of eggs, larvae, and small juveniles of Gulf of Mexico fishes, particularly king and Spanish mackerel, lutjanids and sciaenids.

The Fall Shrimp/Groundfish Survey was conducted from October 9 to December 6, 2013 from off southwest Florida to the U.S.-Mexican border. Two hundred eight-nine trawl stations were sampled during the survey. Survey effort was negatively impacted by the government shutdown in early October. Vessels sampled waters out to 60 fm with trawls and plankton nets in addition to environmental sampling. The objectives of the survey were to sample the entire U.S. Gulf of Mexico to determine abundance and distribution of demersal organisms from inshore waters to 60 fm, obtain length-frequency measurements for major finfish and shrimp species to determine population size structures, collect environmental data to investigate potential relationships between abundance and distribution of organisms and environmental parameters, and collect ichthyoplankton samples to determine relative abundance and distribution of eggs and larvae of commercially and recreationally important fish species.

Due to budget and vessel constraints, the SEAMAP Winter Plankton Survey was cancelled in 2014. This plankton survey collects abundance and geographical distribution information on the early life stages of winter spawning fishes from mid continental shelf to deep Gulf waters. At this time, we do not know if a 2015 Winter Plankton Survey will occur.

The SEAMAP Spring Plankton Survey was conducted from May 2 to May 30, 2014. One hundred twenty-nine stations were sampled during the survey. The objectives of the survey were to collect ichthyoplankton samples on the continental shelf for estimates of the abundance and distribution of Atlantic bluefin tuna larvae and collect environmental data at all ichthyoplankton stations.

The Bottom Longline Survey samples the northern Gulf of Mexico from March through October each year. The survey is currently ongoing with Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, and Texas participating. So far in 2014, seventy-nine stations have been sampled. This survey targets shark and finfish species within the shallow waters of the north central Gulf of Mexico. The objectives of the survey are to collect information on coastal shark abundances and distribution with a 1-mile longline and also to collect environmental data.

The SEAMAP Vertical Line Survey is currently being conducted off Alabama and Louisiana. Seventy-four stations have been sampled this year. The survey samples reef fish over artificial reefs, oil and gas platforms and natural hardbottom to assess reef fish abundances and collect fishery independent biological samples.

NOAA Fisheries and Florida conduct reef fish sampling from May through July each year as part of the SEAMAP Reef Fish Survey. The primary purpose of this survey is to assess relative abundance and compute population estimates of reef fish found on natural habitat in the Gulf of Mexico. The

Reef Fish Survey uses video stereo cameras and chevron fish traps to sample reef fish populations. In 2014, Florida sampled 90 stations on the west Florida shelf. NOAA Fisheries has completed 349 stations.

The SEAMAP Summer Shrimp/Groundfish Survey was conducted from June 2 to July 17, 2014. Five hundred fifty-two plankton and trawl stations were completed in this year's survey. The objectives of the survey were to monitor size and distribution of penaeid shrimp during or prior to migration of brown shrimp from bays to the open Gulf; aid in evaluating the "Texas Closure" management measure of the Gulf Council's Shrimp Fishery Management Plan; and provide information on shrimp and groundfish stocks across the northern Gulf of Mexico from inshore waters to 60 fm. SEAMAP sent out weekly real time plots of total catch and brown, pink, and white shrimp distribution during the Summer Shrimp/Groundfish Survey. The plots were mailed and emailed to approximately 125 individuals and distributed via the Commission's web site.

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council requested a presentation at their April 2014 meeting on current SEAMAP sampling in the Gulf of Mexico. The presentation discussed how standardized the various SEAMAP surveys were amongst SEAMAP partners. The Gulf Subcommittee and Work Groups are working to standardize gears, station selection, protocols, and techniques as much as possible.

## **Overview of SEAMAP South Atlantic**

**R. Pugliese** submitted the following report.

### SEAMAP-SA Coastal Survey

The SEAMAP-SA Coastal Survey completed its 25th year of sampling in 2013. All 102 Coastal Survey sampling stations were successfully sampled during the fall of 2013, and spring and summer of 2014. In 2013, we collected 710,750 individuals (2,409 fish/tow), representing 185 different taxa.

The overall catches were relatively high with the three most abundant species in the catches were Atlantic Croaker, Spot, and Atlantic Bumper. Atlantic Croaker abundance in 2013 was at the second highest level in the survey history, with record abundance in 2014; King Mackerel abundance was low in 2013, but improved in the spring of 2014 with highest catches of the last seven years; and seven Red Snappers were collected in 2013, more than collected in the entire Trawl Survey history. Shrimp were abundant crustaceans in the Coastal Trawl Survey. Brown Shrimp, *Farfantepenaeus aztecus*, was the most abundant commercially important penaeid shrimp caught in 2013 (16.1 individuals/ha). The annual density for Brown Shrimp continued to decrease from a high of >20 ind./ha in 2011 but remained well above the mean annual density of 8.1 ind./ha of the time series. The overall seasonal pattern of abundance of Brown Shrimp has shown small spring catches, followed by larger summer catches and moderate fall catches. Black gill disease was found in approximately 2.2% of the Brown Shrimp with summer collections accounting for 92% of the incidence of black gill disease. White Shrimp, *Litopenaeus setiferus*, was the second most abundant commercially important penaeid (13.4 ind./ha in 2013). Densities in 2013 showed a decrease to the lowest level recorded by the Coastal Survey since 2003. Black gill disease occurred in 4.7% of the White Shrimp, with 96.5% of all infected White Shrimp collected in the fall trawls, mostly off Georgia and Florida.

The first draft of the 2013 Coastal Trawl Survey Annual Cruise Report detailing catches and life

history data was completed in June 2014 and will be available on the SEAMAP website later this year.

#### Life History Studies

Life history processing and analysis included collecting information on age, reproduction, diet composition, and genetics of priority species. Approximately 3,680 otoliths from Atlantic Croaker, Southern Kingfish, Weakfish, Bluefish, Spanish Mackerel, and King Mackerel were collected and processed in 2013. Collections of otoliths for these species continued in 2014. Histological maturity assessment continued for Spanish and King Mackerel, and Bluefish, but was discontinued in the spring of 2013 for Atlantic Croaker, Southern Kingfish, and Weakfish as a result of funding. Sampling for the diet study paralleled maturity sampling in 2013; but laboratory processing of diet samples was suspended in 2013, and collection was discontinued in spring 2014, also due to funding considerations. Approximately 70 King Mackerel, 200 Spanish Mackerel, and 600 Bluefish stomachs are archived, but are awaiting future processing.

Genetic research on *Cynoscion* complex was not continued, but samples from spring 2013 confirmed presence of *C. arenarius* off NE FL and *C. arenarius* x *C. regalis* hybrids as far north as Cape Romain, SC. *C. regalis* hybrids with *C. nebulosus* and *C. nothus* were also encountered. A Master's thesis by a College of Charleston graduate student is being completed and will detail these findings.

In 2013 and 2014, the SEAMAP Trawl Survey provided data and analyses for regional stock assessments, and various staff participated in workshops for the following SEDAR Stock Assessments:

SEDAR 34 Atlantic Sharpnose and Bonnethead Sharks. The trawl survey provided a fishery independent CPUE index.

SEDAR 38 King Mackerel. The trawl survey data was only source of fishery-independent data from the Atlantic and one of the few sources of age and growth information.

SEDAR 40 Menhaden. The trawls survey provided CPUE data and other information.

SEAMAP-SA Bottom-Mapping, Fish Habitat Characterization and Assessment

#### Reef Fish Survey

The 2013 sampling season was completed on October 5, with 50 sea days on the R/V Palmetto, 26.5 of those were funded by SEAMAP-SA. The 2013 Reef Fish Cruise report was completed on November 26, 2013. During the Reef Fish Survey, which includes MARMAP efforts, we made 851 gear deployments, including 544 chevron traps, 41 short bottom long-lines, 101 CTD casts, and 149 rod and reel collections to obtain reef fish and oceanographic data. All chevron traps were outfitted with 1 or 2 (mostly 2) underwater video cameras to record habitat and fish diversity and abundance. In addition, some traps were equipped with 1 or 2 additional cameras to study fish inside and around the traps. The analyses of the video data is coordinated with SEFIS (SEFSC, Beaufort) and examination and analysis of data is ongoing. Note that an index of relative abundance based on the video data is expected to be introduced for Red Snapper and Gray Triggerfish during the upcoming SEDAR 41 Data Workshop (August 2014).

During the 2013 sampling season, a total of 17,920 fish were caught by the SEAMAP-SA /MARMAP Reef Fish Survey, representing 68 species. The 10 most abundant species (and 97% of catches) were Black Seabass (56%), Tomtate (20%), *Stenotomus* spp. (5%), Red Porgy (5%), Gray Triggerfish (3%), Vermilion Snapper (3%), Bank Seabass (2%), White Grunt (1%), and Red Snapper

(1%), and Sand Perch (1%). Noteworthy is that Red Snapper, historically rare in our trap catches, has become the 9th most abundant species in the region's South East Reef Fish Survey.

We kept 4,527 specimens, representing 40 priority species, to obtain samples for life history studies, including otoliths and reproductive tissues. We also collected stomachs, DNA and other tissues for a variety of species. Over 4,800 lb of sampled and processed reef fish was donated to local charities in 2013 (e.g. LowCountry Food Bank).

Many SEAMAP-SA Reef Fish staff provided data and analyses to regional (SEDAR) stock assessments and participated in various assessment workshops:

SEDAR 10 update assessment for Gag (Completed April 2014)

SEDAR 32 benchmark assessment for Blueline Tilefish (Completed August 2013)

SEDAR 36 benchmark assessments for Snowy Grouper (Completed January 2014)

SEDAR 37 Hogfish benchmark assessment (to be completed in summer 2014)

SEDAR 41 Benchmark Assessments Gray Triggerfish and Red Snapper (Data WS August 4-8)

Wreckfish assessment (completed in March 2014).

The 2014 Reef Fish Survey sampling season started in April and has completed 20 sea days as of July 17, 11 of which were funded by SEAMAP-SA. As a result of additional SEAMAP-SA funding, we are resuming the short bottom long-line survey in the SE region during the ongoing sampling season.

#### Reef Fish Diet Studies

Diet studies were completed for Gray Triggerfish, Vermilion Snapper, Red Snapper, and Red Porgy. Main diet items for Gray Triggerfish were pelagic zooplankton, polychaetes, amphipods, and bryozoans. Vermilion Snapper mostly consumed young (larval) fishes, larval decapods, pelagic tunicates and zooplankton. Red Snapper ate mostly bony fishes, swimming crabs, shrimp, Octopus, and squid. Diet of Red Porgy consisted mostly of bony fishes, crabs, mollusks, echinoderms, and polychaetes. A paper detailing these findings is in preparation. We are currently collecting samples from Black Sea Bass, White Grunt, Squirrelfish, Blueline Tilefish, and groupers and Hinds.

#### Gag Ingress Survey

The initial gag ingress monitoring using Witham collectors occurred between 1995 and 1998. It resumed in 2005 and has continued until the present in collaboration with GA-DNR and NCDMF. Sampling occurs from March through June, and in 2014 a total of 1,289 collections were made at fifteen selected sites between Swansboro, NC, and Brunswick, GA. A "collection" comprises of the examination and collection of fish and other organisms from a single Witham collector on a given date. This spring, 41 juvenile gag were collected from all sites combined. Since 2009, the overall abundances have been between 0.031 and 0.061 gag/collection, but in 2011 the number dropped to 0.04 gag/coll. Note that the catches have varied by state, with generally the highest catches in NC sampling sites. Analysis to relate juvenile gag densities to oceanographic variables and adult recruitment to the fishery is ongoing.

#### Southeast Regional Taxonomic Center (SERTC)

SERTC staff completed a prey identification guide, largely focused on SEAMAP-SA Coastal Survey diet composition studies, in collaboration with personnel processing fish stomach contents. The guide lists frequency of occurrence of prey items for six predator fish species, and contains an

identification section for prey items organized by taxa, with species lists for each prey category. It also contains detailed species descriptions and photos of partially digested voucher specimens and close-ups of diagnostic characters. Work is underway on a second prey identification guide for Reef Fish diet studies in the SE region to aid in processing reef fish diet study samples. This guide will be similar in format and content to the Coastal Survey Guide, but will focus on prey items consumed by 16 important reef fish predator species.

SERTC staff provided taxonomic support to Reef Fish Study staff processing fish stomachs and assisted with identification and voucher verification of stomach contents when needed and maintained a database with identification changes.

SERTC collections were expanded by adding 30 lots of fish to SEAMAP fish specimen collection, 40 lots to SERTC invertebrate collection, and 30 images to photo gallery. New SEAMAP specimens were fin-clipped for possible genetic analysis. The SERTC website was updated, which will fix a number of broken links and outdated contact info, and replace old gallery images with newly edited and watermarked versions. The SERTC photo gallery images were loaned to 6 organizations for use in various publications, including Tulane University, the University of Florida, GoTri Magazine, NOAA, and Universidade Federal do Espirito (Santo, Brazil). Furthermore, 70 references were added to the SERTC library, and 700 posters and 65 Beachcomber Guides were sent to regional educators and nature centers. SERTC staff also provided various services to SCDNR staff and members of the public, including taxonomic inquiries and photography of numerous specimens.

#### Pamlico Sound Survey Update

The Pamlico Sound survey provides a long term fishery-independent database for the waters of the Pamlico Sound, and the lower Neuse and Pamlico rivers. Data collected from the survey provides juvenile abundance indices and long-term population parameters for interstate and statewide stock assessments and fisheries managements plans of recreationally and commercially important fish stocks. Annually, 54 randomly selected stations (grids- one-minute by one-minute grid system equivalent to one square nautical mile) are trawled for 20 minutes using double rigged demersal mongoose trawls over a two week period during June and September using the North Carolina Fisheries R/V Carolina Coast. The stations were randomly selected from seven strata based on depth and geographic location.

The June 2013 survey sampling (60th cruise) took place from the 10th through the 24th. Sixty-seven species of finfish and invertebrates were captured during the cruise. Several of the most abundant species are considered economically important and included in order of abundance: spot (*Leiostomus xanthurus*), Atlantic croaker (*Micropogonias undulatus*), blue crab (*Callinectes sapidus*), weakfish (*Cynoscion regalis*), pink shrimp (*Farfantepenaeus duorarum*), summer flounder (*Paralichthys dentatus*), brown shrimp (*Farfantepenaeus aztecus*), southern flounder (*Paralichthys lethostigma*), southern kingfish (*Menticirrhus americanus*), white shrimp (*Litopenaeus setiferus*), and bluefish (*Pomatomus saltatrix*). Spot and Atlantic croaker dominated the catches throughout both cruise seasons.

The September 2013 survey sampling (61st cruise) took place from the 9th through the 26th. Seventy species of finfish and invertebrates were captured during the cruise. Several of the most abundant species are considered economically important and included in order of abundance: Atlantic croaker, spot, weakfish, white shrimp, southern kingfish, summer flounder, blue crab, pink

shrimp, southern flounder, and bluefish.

During June 2014, 54 stations were sampled from the 9th through the 18th. In September 2014, 54 stations are planned to be sampled during the 9th through the 19th.

#### Red Drum Survey

The South Carolina Adult Red Drum Survey made 360 (incl. 358 randomly selected) long-line sets in 4 near-shore strata during 27 days from August through December of 2013. Sampling stations were located in Winyah Bay, Charleston Harbor, St. Helena Sound, and Port Royal Sound. Sites within each stratum were selected randomly from 253 possible sites. The sampling depths were between 3 and 22 m, the gear was soaked for 30 minutes, and sampling was conducted during daylight hours. In 2013, 631 red drum were caught and the total lengths ranged from 670 mm to 1,176 mm. A total of 475 fish were tagged and released, 20 were recaptured fish, and 120 were sacrificed for life history information (including two that were dead upon capture). The sex ratio of these 120 fish was 48 male: 72 female, and the ages ranged from 4 to 39 years. Red Drum CPUE (in fish per set of 40 hooks) has seen an increased from 0.9 in 2009 to 1.8 in 2013.

During the survey, the catches of small and large coastal sharks was relatively high with the 1,224 captured sharks representing 12 species. Survey staff tagged 173 small coastal sharks (Bonnethead, Blacknose, and Finetooth Sharks) and 222 large coastal sharks (Great Hammerhead, Scalloped/Carolina Hammerhead, Lemon, Nurse, Spinner, Blacktip, Sandbar Sharks and Tiger Sharks). Since 2009, the CPUE (in sharks per set of 40 hooks) of small coastal sharks varied from 2.7 in 2009 and 2013 to 2.0 in 2011, with intermediate values in 2010 and 2012. Large coastal sharks CPUE was 0.7 in 2009, 2010, and 2013, but dropped to 0.4 in 2010 and 2012.

#### North Carolina Red Drum Longline Survey

The North Carolina Red Drum Longline survey provides a fishery independent index of abundance for adult red drum in the waters of the Pamlico Sound. Tagging of red drum captured during the survey allows for additional information on migratory behavior and stock identification. For sampling year 2013, North Carolina conducted sampling in Pamlico Sound from July through October. Sampling occurred as either non-random 'exploratory' sets, or as part of a standardized, stratified-random sample design. All samples were conducted with a 1,500 meter mainline, with gangions placed at 15 meter intervals (100 hooks/set) during nighttime hours starting at sunset. On average, four sets were made per night. Two samples were collected from each randomly chosen sample site.

Random sampling occurred in July (n=12 sets), August (n=32 sets), September (n=28 sets), and yielded 356 red drum (15, 203, and 138, respectively). Red drum captured ranged in size from 29 to 47 inches fork length. Sixty-five red drum were sacrificed to determine age composition and for other biological investigations. The remaining fish were tagged and released to track migration, stock ID, and growth rates. Sampling during this period resulted in six recaptures of red drum. Results from the North Carolina Red Drum Longline Survey are compiled annually and included in the annual North Carolina compliance report to ASMFC. As such, data are readily available to NMFS and the ASMFC Red Drum Stock Assessment Sub-committee for inclusion in any future stock assessments.

#### Georgia Adult Red Drum Longline Survey

#### Project Objectives:

- 1.) To develop a state specific sampling protocol that provides a fisheries-independent index of abundance for adult red drum.
- 2.) To sample adult red drum and develop information on catch per unit effort (CPUE) and size.
- 3.) To collect migratory and stock identification data on adult red drum.
- 4.) To evaluate age composition and reproductive status of red drum >90 cm total length.
- 5.) To disseminate accomplishments and results to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC), the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), and the Southeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program for inclusion in stock assessment efforts.

Work consisted primarily of a stratified random sampling design based on proximity to shore, inshore (sounds, estuaries, behind barrier islands), nearshore (0-3 nm) and offshore (3-12 nm). General sampling locations were focused in areas historically associated with high probabilities of encounter. From April through December, a maximum of 25 sets per month (5 sets/day on average) were conducted in the central Georgia waters, and 10 sets per month (September to December) occurred in waters off northeast FL. Sampling was proportionately allocated across strata to account for temporal shifts in the population.

The sampling gear consisted of a main line approximately 926 m in length, made of 2.5 mm monofilament, containing 60 gangions/branchlines. Gangions/branchlines were 0.7 m in length, 1.6 mm monofilament, equipped with a single 15/0 or 12/0 depressed barb circle hook. Soak times were 30 minutes in duration, measured from the time the second anchor was deployed to when the first anchor was retrieved.

All catch was processed at the species level. All red drum were landed, processed for standard morphometrics and genetic material (e.g., fin clip). Viable animals were double tagged with both a conventional dart and PIT tag prior to release. Mortalities were processed further for sex and gonadal development information, and otoliths were extracted for age determination. Annually or periodically, a subsample of red drum could be sacrificed to estimate the adult stock age composition. Non-target species were landed and processed for standard morphometrics and released. Sharks were tagged prior to release with dorsal fin tags or harpoon tags issued by the National Marine Fisheries Service's Apex Predator Program.

A total of 217 sets were conducted over 34 days in waters off of southeast Georgia and northeast Florida. A total of 55 adult red drum were captured. All red drum were tagged with external dart tags prior to release, and all but one received an internal PIT tag. None of the tagged fish were recaptured. Highest catches occurred in October (21 fish) and November (25 fish).

Sampling effort during this period also yielded high numbers of shark species. A total of 660 sharks representing 11 species were captured during longline sets. All sharks were released and species other than Atlantic sharpnose shark and smooth dogfish were released with a tag. The species commonly encountered were Atlantic sharpnose shark (66.7%), blacknose shark (13.9%), bonnethead (11.8%), sandbar shark (3.6%), and blacktip shark (1.2%). These five species represented 97.2% of the sharks caught.

This year was more productive than last year for adult red drum catches, with 2013 total catch being three times higher than 2012's total catch. Sampling activities will commence in June 2014 and

hopefully this year will continue to be productive. The survey continues to produce strong numbers for coastal shark species and the data collected for Atlantic sharpnose sharks were recently included as a fishery-independent index in SEDAR 34. The data for bonnethead were also evaluated for inclusion, but were not sufficient for use. The time series currently includes 7 full years of data from this survey. The inclusion of the data from this survey supports its utility for species addition to adult red drum.

All data collected are stored in a central database with in-house access. At present, working with the prototype SEAMAP database that has been designed to house all sampling activities conducted under the SEAMAP umbrella. Raw data is currently available for approved users through a webpage access portal.

#### Cooperative Winter Tagging Cruise

The long running Cooperative Winter Tagging Cruise (Cruise) conducted a full research vessel, trawl-based cruise in 2013 as a result of receiving funding from a North Carolina Coastal Recreational Fishing License (CRFL) grant, using the R/V Cape Hatteras operating out of Beaufort, NC. Partners were also able to conduct hook-and-line striped bass tagging operations using the CRFL funds and with help of state and federal partners. Historically funded by NOAA Fisheries (through use of one of its survey vessels, or provision of charter funds) and supported with in-kind contributions from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife (USFWS), the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC), Maryland DNR-Fisheries Service, North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries and numerous additional state fishery agencies and universities, the Cruise provides important data for the striped bass stock assessment, as well as data on other ASMFC species. This marked the 24th year of the research vessel Cruise (since 1988; no vessel funding was available in 2011 and 2012 and data were gathered on only striped bass during those two years), and the 26th consecutive year for striped bass tagging in the Atlantic Ocean off NC and VA. Since 2010, the Cruise has employed charter sport fishing vessels and tagged striped bass caught on hook-and-line gear, using the protocol supplied by the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries. The fishing vessels used for the ten day-long trips conducted this year were the privately-owned, FV Smokin' Gun II, FV Poacher and FV Midnight Sun, all of which operated out of Rudee Inlet, VA. Tagging operations in 2013 resulted in a total of 2,030 striped bass tagged and released. All fish and invertebrates collected in the trawls were for the first time this year fully documented. Horseshoe crabs were also tagged as part of an ASMFC/USFWS program. Four Atlantic sturgeon were captured and documented, but none were tagged due to the lack of NMFS authorization.

Cruise partners continue working together to secure long-term funding to maintain tagging using a research vessel with traditional trawl gear, and hook-and-line. Use of the trawl gear has proven not only efficient, but also enables the collection of data on multiple ASMFC-managed species, including Atlantic sturgeon, spiny dogfish, weakfish, summer flounder and alosine species, such as shad and river herring. Collection of the fish via hook and line provides data only for striped bass.

#### Data Management

The SEAMAP SA data base officially went "online" in April of 2014. Data related to the Coastal Trawl Survey, Reef Fish Survey, Red Drum Surveys, and the NC Pamlico Sound Survey can now be publically examined and downloaded at <http://www.seamap.org>. Many individuals and groups have examined and used the online data already; e.g. the SEDAR 38 King Mackerel Assessment Team recently used the website to check and extract data during the Assessment Workshop. We have



continued to develop and update the data base, and are currently working on incorporating data from other surveys such as several ichthyoplankton surveys. The Reef Fish data is expected to be updated later this year and the 2013 survey data for the other projects are expected to be uploaded soon.

#### SEAMAP – SA Workgroup Activities

##### Bottom Mapping and Species Characterization and Assessment Workgroup

The SEAMAP-South Atlantic Bottom Mapping, Fish Habitat Characterization and Assessment Work Group met on January 23, 2014 at the Francis Marion Hotel in Charleston, South Carolina, in conjunction with Southern Division AFS Meeting. The Workgroup was presented an overview of the South East Reef Fish Survey (SERFS), a review of the modifications and updates to the Habitat Ecosystem Atlas/South Atlantic Fisheries including those accomplished in response to Workgroup Recommendations. The Workgroup discussed the process underway to update/refine species, Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) and fishery operations Information for the developing Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP) II and EFH 5 year review and update. The Workgroup was provided a presentation on the SALCC/TNC Resource Mapping project and provided input and recommendations on its further development. The Workgroup was engaged in initiating the development of a SA Mapping Strategy for FEP II. The Workgroup was introduced to the SA Ecospecies online species information system. The Workgroup discussed 2014 activities which in general support continued work on activities reviewed at the meeting. Tentative schedule to continue work initiated in January, will be to hold a Workgroup meeting in conjunction with the December 2014 SAFMC meeting in New Bern, NC.

##### Crustacean Workgroup

This workgroup continues to be a forum for state biologists and scientists from the South Atlantic region to discuss and address issues regarding shrimp and blue crab management and research.

A joint meeting as part of regional workshop on economically important crustaceans and horseshoe crab was hosted by SCDNR on April 8-10, 2014 and covered various topics including climate effects, disease, fishing practices, population monitoring for penaeid shrimp, blue, stone and horseshoe crab. The goals of the workshop were to: improve communication among area researchers; explore opportunities for funded collaboration. A group recommendation was developed for a regional blue crab assessment (similar to Gulf of Mexico exercise). The workgroup would coordinate through Webinars with SECOORA as a potential sponsor. The Crustacean Workgroup meeting topics included: State updates; tiger shrimp monitoring; horseshoe crab genetics survey in SC; black gill study in Georgia and South Carolina; and trawl bycatch in North Carolina.

##### SEAMAP-SA Data Management Workgroup

The goal of the SEAMAP-SA Data Management Group is a web based information system that facilitates data capture, error checking, data extraction, dissemination, and summary of fishery-independent data and information for all ongoing SEAMAP-SA surveys and special studies including: SEAMAP-SA Coastal Survey, NCDMF Pamlico Sound Survey, the Red Drum Longline Surveys (NC, SC, and GA), the SEAMAP-SA Reef Fish Survey, and the Cooperative Winter Tagging Cruise.

The hard work of the SEAMAP-SA Data Management Group through the numerous conference calls over the past several years is beginning to provide dividends. A primary object was met in November 2013 when the data extraction website went “live” for beta testing by a group of selected individuals. Since last year’s conference call, the Workgroup held three conference calls to

coordinate project activities (11/22/13, 1/6/14, and 6/27/14). The November meeting focused on establishing a date for the extraction site to live for the general public. Disclaimer, intellectual property rights, and citation methods were discussed and it was agreed that each member would provide a list of names that will be given accounts to test the site. Additionally, each project leader was asked to look at their data to verify its correctness and to provide feedback on the site. The January discuss focused on the data queries. It was decided that queries should look the same regardless of the project – to provide a uniform look for the extraction website. This may result in vacant fields depending on the project and data being extracted, but it was believed important to provide as much information to the end user as possible, and to limit the chances of erroneously handling the data received by each query. The June call was to prepare for the annual meeting and provide updates. The database was taken offline in May to develop administrative tools for uploading data and provide enhanced QA/QC. The data extraction website was operational (live) by the first of July.

For the upcoming year the goal is to continue to develop and enhance the database on a SCDNR test server while serving data and existing queries to the public on a production server. Discussions are underway to integrate data from the Ichthyoplankton Cooperative Research Group. The Data Management Guidance Plan (DMGP) will be modified – producing two documents: (1) a technical manual and (2) a user manual. The technical manual will outline the data structures of the website, the user manual will outline how to use it, and the DMGP will provide the future plans of the program as well as procedural constructs like monthly report schedules. There will be a frequently asked questions (FAQ) link developed for the website to help users. A monthly report will be created of the extraction website users and distributed to partners so they can see who is accessing their data.

Overall, the beta testing was very well received. The data were used at the SEDAR king mackerel assessment, December 9-13, 2013 in Charleston, SC. Additionally, blue crab data from the site were analyzed and presented at an Estuarine Habitat Workshop, sponsored by the Governors' South Atlantic Alliance and the Nature Conservancy, February 24th, in Savannah, GA.

## **Overview of SEAMAP NMFS**

**E. Hoffmayer** discussed the federal initiative for Public Access to Research Results. As of February 2013, all federal data must be accessible to the public. The government is requiring all federally funded data to be publically accessible by 2016. From that point forward, all data that they collect must be in a specific format and must open to the public by 2016. Right now, the guidelines are very broad but there are strict requirements that if it is not done by a certain time then funding will be pulled. **E. Hoffmayer** also updated the group on the Section 7 paperwork and the NEPA marine mammal LOAs. Currently, none of the fisheries science centers are in compliance with NEPA. SERO is completing the biological opinion for sea turtles and by the end of the fiscal year they are hoping to have the biological opinion done. Entities funded by SEFSC or SERO will be covered by this paperwork. There might be the need to discuss mitigation measures if they feel surveys have a high take.

**R. Pugliese** noted that it is necessary to consider the level of processing of the data with the release of information to the public. There can be issues with providing fishing maps, depending on the

resolution. **E. Hoffmayer** responded that they are currently trying to figure that out, since people are concerned with publications, but it is unclear right now what level of resolution they will require. **R. Pugliese** commented that SEAMAP-SA has a data system that is already integrated, but the information is truncated to minimize the potential impacts on the survey and the baselines for the stock assessments. E. Hoffmayer said it was not clear yet how they might distinguish user groups or if the mandate includes historical data. NOAA must retroactively post old data.

### **Overview of SEAMAP-Caribbean**

Roy Pemberton submitted the following report.

#### **Virgin Islands**

There were staff shortages in both districts, with St. Croix facing the most shortages. The process of hiring more staff has begun by announcing vacancies and conducting interviews. Few staff changes occurred during this reporting period. An Environmental Specialist III was hired for the St. Thomas/St. John district, and a Fisheries Biologist II from the St. Croix district transferred to St. Thomas/St. John district as a Fisheries Biologist III. A Fisheries Biologist II was also hired for the St. Thomas district along with a new Fisheries Chief for the territory.

Two more Acoustic Hydrophone deployments have occurred on the Hind closed Area on Lang bank, St. Croix and on St. Thomas for February 2014. This was done to investigate the timing, distribution and abundance of the spawning aggregations for Red hind (*Epinephelus guttatus*).

The parrotfish study has not begun however all the supplies for the STX and STT have been received. Supplies have been shipped to UPR. Gonad fixation protocol has been reviewed and agreed upon. DFW will also be extracting and preserving otoliths for age determination, to be performed when our fish lab equipment arrives.

The lobster, *Panulirus argus*, study has been conducted monthly for 2014 in both districts as currently outlined in the grant narrative. However, based upon discussion with our SEAMAP working group, grant amendments may be incorporated to include pueruli collectors known as Whitman collectors. Currently no lobsters have been sighted in the casitas in both districts. We have been unable to obtain 4' blocks to augment the sites. The benthic sites do not seem productive for our juvenile lobsters and as a result we are considering modifying the casita study towards utilizing the collectors.

#### **Puerto Rico**

Conch sampling was expected to be done through a contract with the University of Puerto Rico Mayagüez Campus during Puerto Rico's closed season from August to October 2012. A total of 100 stations around the east, south and west coast of Puerto Rico were planned to be sampled. Those also include areas in Mona, Vieques and Culebra Islands. Due to delays in the contract signing sampling could not be done during the close season. It was decided to move sampling for the close season of 2013 from August to October.

The purpose of this study was to resurvey the shallow water conch population off the west coast of Puerto Rico, which supports both, the primary fishing grounds and the longest time series of past

surveys. Goals were to generate density estimates that could be used (1) to assess trends and current status and (2) to address specific management questions. The latter include comparing the shallow and deep water spawning stocks with the status of those stocks within the EEZ (offshore), where fishing is prohibited. While local waters are open to conch fishing. Additionally, unlike past surveys, data analyses will employ Generalized Linear Models to generate more robust statistical comparisons.

Total area surveyed was calculated by multiplying the transect length by 4m width and then doubling the area (two transects per site) and finally summing over all 46 sites (92 transects). Densities were calculated by dividing number of conch observed at each site by the area surveyed. Comparisons of densities of both adults and juveniles between years (1997, 2001, 2006 and 2013) were made by modeling densities as a function of management regime (territorial or federal), depth, habitat and year using a log transformed negative binomial distribution. Analyses were conducted using the generalized linear model function (GLIMMIX) of SAS. This distribution was chosen over a Poisson because it is better equipped to handle high variability. No spatial correlation term was included in the model because the inclusion of the depth and habitat terms explained most of the variability. Including the management regime in the model helped to elucidate the effectiveness of a more than 10 year closure of the fishing grounds in the federal area. Trends regarding age structure and size frequency were also described. The spawning stock for the west coast was calculated using only the older age classes (adult, old adult and very old adult) densities multiplied by estimates of suitable habitat area on the western platform based on the previously digitized strata. This spawning stock was then compared to the mesophotic population estimate at Abrir La Sierra (Garcia Sais *et al.* 2012) to get an idea of the potential contribution of the mesophotic population relative to the shallow water stock.

Forty-six sites were sampled during the course of the 2013 survey off the west coast. Total area surveyed was 37.45 ha, with transect areas ranging from 0.3 ha at site 5 to 3.97 ha at site 11. Differences in the amount of area covered are based on a variety of factors including but not limited to depth and current. Average area per transect was 0.814 ha. Number of conch observed was 194 juveniles and 186 adults, for a total of 380 conch. This does not include site 6, where 1,399 juveniles less than ten cm shell length were observed. This site was not included in subsequent analyses due to statistical distortion effects.

The first question addressed temporal differences in the total, adult only or juvenile only densities as factors of depth and habitat. All significant results are represented at the  $p=0.05$  level. There was a lower density of total (adult+juvenile) conch in 1997 (-0.783) compared to 2006 or 2013. There was a lower density of total conch in the mud habitat (-1.4726). There was also a lower density of adult conch in 1997 (-1.0379) compared to 2006 and 2013 and again a lower density of adult conch in the mud habitat (-2.3756). With the juveniles, there were no significant changes in density temporally, but habitat was a much greater factor in determining density distribution. Hard bottom (-1.7592), reef (-1.3177) and mud (-1.405) all had significantly lower densities of juvenile conch, while gorgonians had significantly higher densities of juveniles (1.0776).

Preliminary conclusions regarding length frequency and age structure between the 1997 survey and the latest show the following:

- (1) The increase in density seen between 1997 and the later years represents a more than a twofold

increase (8.49/ha overall in 1997 versus 14.42-22.4/ha overall in 2013 and 2006, respectively). This suggests that management efforts (closed areas, closed seasons, daily quota, size limits) have had some positive effect.

(2) The appearance of the 16-20 cm size class adults in the later surveys suggests that the minimum shell length regulation (9in=22.86cm) is also having some effect. Those individuals that are below the threshold are not fished, and are able to make it to adult stages.

(3) The main difference observed between the 1997 and the 2013 age structures is the presence in 2013 of the VOA in both the inshore and EEZ sites that were not present in 1997.

The lobster, *Panulirus argus*, study has not begun. The lobster survey will be conducted by personnel of the Fisheries Research Laboratory aided by a couple of contractors. Stations are located off the west coast of Puerto Rico. The survey consists of monitoring recruitment of juvenile lobster in casitas and the collection of the pueruli collectors known as *Whitman collectors* for monitoring settlement.

A total of 60 stations off the west coast and 60 off the east coast were scheduled for the Reef Fish Survey. Sampling started during January 2013 off the east and west coasts of Puerto Rico. During the sampling period of January 8 to September 17, 2013, a total of 31 stations off the west coast of Puerto Rico were sampled at least twice. Hook and line yielded 65 species representing 18 families weighing over 721 kg of finfish. The categories of fish that dominate the catch in terms of number were the snappers, followed by porgies and groupers. The snappers were represented by eight species representing 24.2% of total catch, of which two species represented 22% in terms of number. The pluma porgy (*Calamus pennatula*) was the most caught species making up 21.23% of the catch, followed by the lane snapper (*Lutjanus synagris*, 16.12%) and the blue runner (*Caranx crysos*, 14.94%) in terms of number. In terms of weight the blue runner was the most caught species with 23.57%, followed by the pluma porgy (16.87%) and the lane snapper (6.68%).

For the sampling period of January 22, 2013 to August 15, 2013, a total of 30 stations off the east coast were sampled twice. A total of 19 species representing 11 families weighing 100 kg of finfish were collected. Groupers constituted 53.8% of total catch by number.

Five species constituted the bulk of the east coast catch by number and weight 86.47% and 79.36%, respectively. Coney's (*Cephalopholis fulva*, 38.35%) was the most caught species; followed by the blue runners (*C. crysos*, 16.54%), the red hinds (*Epinephelus guttatus*, 15.04%), the vermilion snapper (*Rhomboplites aurorubens*, 10.90%) and the sand tilefish (*Malacanthus plumieri*, 5.64%) of total catch per number. Snappers and groupers which are considered the most valuable commercial species group represented 69.2% of the total catch.

Species composition by sampled stations varied according to two factors: area and depth. Species composition collected at the west coast was comprised by snappers (24.2%), followed by the porgies (21.4%), groupers (15.5%), jacks (15.4%), grunts (8.2%), sandtile fish (5.1% a single species), squirrel fishes (6.2%), trigger fishes (1.6%) and representation of eleven families made the other category (2.3%) in terms of number of individual caught. In terms of weight the species composition was led by the jacks (25.5%), followed by the groupers (16.9%), porgies (16.7%), snappers (15.4%), the sandtile fishes (5.5%), the triggerfishes (5.3%), the grunts (3.7%), the squirrel fishes (3.4%) and

the other category of fishes made up 8.0%.

The east coast species composition was comprised of groupers (53.8%), followed by jacks (16.9%), snappers (15.4%), sandtile fish (5.6%), squirrel fishes (2.3%), porgies (1.9%), grunts (1.5%), triggerfishes (0.4%) and others (2.3%) in terms of number. In terms of weight the three dominant groups were the same that in terms of number.

Observed differences in species composition by coast yielded statistically significant results in terms of number Mann Whitney Rank Sum ( $T = 124.000$ ;  $P = <0.001$ ). In terms of weight were statistically significant different ( $T = 120.000$ ;  $P = 0.003$ ).

#### SEAMAP-C UPR/Administrative Report

A total of five SEAMAP-C meetings were conducted between August 2013 and July 2014. The meetings took place alternately on Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands to review all programmatic surveys on conch, lobster, and reef fish being done in the USVI and Puerto Rico. In addition, the Caribbean SEAMAP chairing members from PR and USVI and the coordinator participated in the 2013 Annual Joint Meeting through a web session held at the CFMC in San Juan, PR. In 2014, the Puerto Rico coordination component made all the arrangements to host the SEAMAP annual joint meeting in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Two SEAMAP-C color posters summarizing the main studies performed by the Caribbean program in each region entitled “SEAMAP-C in Puerto Rico” and “SEAMAP-C in the Virgin Islands”, have been used as outreach materials to the general public during several fisheries workshops for fishermen. Educational brochures and handouts on conch, whelk, lobster, and reef fish were also used as outreach materials. These materials are in process to be updated to include the results from the most recent surveys, for their posterior printing.

A PhD graduate student was contracted to continue updating the sampling protocols and to summarize the information of all projects conducted by the Caribbean program, in addition to continue working on the SEAMAP-C web information maintenance. The main goal was to have a clear and uniform sampling protocol, and to make the information accessible for dissemination and outreach. The educational material was made available to fishermen during workshops and to targeted groups during routine coastal and shore visits. All SEAMAP-C study reports have been made available for public dissemination at the Puerto Rico Sea Grant fisheries coordinator’s blog site <http://prsgfisheriesoutreach.wordpress.com/>.

A Master’s degree graduated student from the Department of Marine Sciences has been hired under a part-time contract, to provide professional services with the ROV during fish spawning aggregation samplings and to provide collaboration on other SEAMAP-C samplings and equipment maintenance, hydrophone dataloggers deployment and retrieval. In addition, a PhD student assistantship is being processed to work on the post-processing of the hydroacoustic bottom dataloggers data, obtained during spawning aggregations in PR and the USVI.

After a malfunction of the ROV monitor and control console it was sent to the SEABOTIX matrix company for repair. All batteries sets needed for the seven “Bottom Acoustic Receivers Dataloggers” acquired by the Coordination section were provided during this period. Three of the data loggers have been recording fish spawning aggregation information on the Virgin Islands, and four in

Puerto Rico. The Virgin Islands Dataloggers have been deployed at the “Grammanik Bank” and the historic “Nassau-Hind Bank”. The four recording instruments deployed in Puerto Rico are located at two different depths at the “Bajo del Cico” and “Abril la Sierra” spawning grounds. Some data have already been retrieved and processed.

### **Proposed Activities and Budget Needs for FY2014**

**Gulf – J. Mareska** reported the Gulf component would continue with the surveys they have in place currently and will request level funding, \$2,003,011 or will be agreeable to receive 41.3% (historic percentage) of whatever amount SEAMAP receives.

**South Atlantic – R. Pugliese** reported the South Atlantic 2015 proposed funding is building on what was received in 2014. Before the budget was approved they were going to lose the reef fish survey, not reestablish the short-bottom long-line, and cut some sea days, as well as SERTC funding. The South Atlantic would be agreeable to receiving \$1,595,619 (level funding from FY2014) or the historic percentage of 32.9% of the funding that SEAMAP actually receives.

**R. Pemberton** stated that the Caribbean would like to receive \$509,240 or 10.5% of the funding SEAMAP receives for FY2015.

**E. Hoffmayer** stated NMFS would stay at the historic percentage level, 15.3%, and would try to continue all current programs.

### **Joint Discussion of SEAMAP Budget for FY2014**

**R. Pugliese made a motion to approve the 2015 SEAMAP budget based on level funding and change would result in changes based upon the following percentages: Gulf = 41.3%; South Atlantic = 32.9%; Caribbean = 10.5%; and NMFS = 15.3%. R. Hendon seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.**

### **Updating the SEAMAP Joint Management Plan 2016-2020**

**J. Rester** stated that he wanted to start the process of updating the SEAMAP Management Plan. A draft Management Plan should be approved at the 2015 meeting. **J. Rester** stated that the South Atlantic Coordinator has historically taken the lead on updating the Management Plan. **K. Donnelly** stated that with the new 5-year grant cycle coming up in 2016, SEAMAP needs to have a draft Management Plan completed sooner rather than later. She said a draft by this time next year would be appropriate. **R. Pugliese** stated that the Management Plan should expand discussion on future data needs.

### **SEAMAP-SA Data Management Update**

**M. Reichert** provided an online presentation of the South Atlantic data management system. He discussed how data from SEAMAP surveys feed into the SAFMC Habitat and Ecosystem Atlas.

### **SEAMAP Funding Letter Discussion**

The group discussed the SEAMAP funding letter that was proposed in 2013. **J. Rester** noted that the Gulf component is not necessarily happy with how the letter reads and suggested that the group make some modifications. **R. Pugliese** commented that the letter is asking for an increase, rather

than restoring funding, which is what they originally designed it for. **P. Campfield** commented that Bob Beal believed the letter should wait until we have a new Congress. The group discussed that it might be good to have the new Management Plan updated first so we have a clear list of how SEAMAP would end utilize an increase. Each component should create an itemized list of what they could complete with different funding levels. The group did note that it was important to highlight that level funding will still eventually cut projects. It was decided that Coordinators should work with their individual components to refine the letter.

#### **Planning for the 2015 Joint Annual Meeting**

Some ideas for locations discussed were Key West, Sanibel Island, New Orleans, and Ft. Myers. The group agreed to aim for the last week of July 2015.

#### **Other Business**

**K. Donnelly** noted that Jeff Brown is now the new branch chief for Grants in their office. She also reminded the group to spend funds as they are budgeted. As an example, there are personnel on the award for 6-9 months, do not use that portion of the award in the first 3 months. If you make changes such as this to the budget, you will need to re-budget for that. The budget needs to reflect how you are actually going to complete the work.

**There being no further business the meeting adjourned at 5:10 p.m.**





**Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission  
State Directors' Meeting  
Dallas, Texas  
September 17-18, 2014**

Participants

Dan Ellinor - FWC  
Chris Blankenship - ADCNR  
Jamie Miller - MDMR  
Robin Riechers - TPWD  
Rene LeBreton - LDWF  
Dave Donaldson - GSMFC  
Steve VanderKooy - GSMFC

1. *Call to Order*
2. *Discussion of GSMFC Strategic Planning*
3. *Discussion of Regional Management*
4. *Funding Issues Discussion*
  - a. *SFRP/Expansion of Activities*
  - b. *IJF*
  - c. *FIN*
5. *Discussion of Chairman Rotation*
6. *Follow-up to NMFS Call Regarding Data Issues*
7. *Discussion of Restructuring of IJF Program*
  - a. *Redefining FMPs*
  - b. *Management Plan Format*
  - c. *Future Species for Revision or Development*
8. *Potential Joint GSMFC/ASMFC Annual Meeting 2015 (FL)*
9. *Other Business*

APPROVED BY:  
  
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

## TCC CRAB SUBCOMMITTEE MINUTES

Monday, October 13, 2014

Gulfport, Mississippi

**Chairman, R. Gandy** called the meeting to order at 8:35 a.m. with the following in attendance:

### Members

Martin Bourgeois, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA

Traci Floyd, MDMR, Biloxi, MS

Ryan Gandy, FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL

### Others

Jeffery Marx, LDWF, New Iberia, LA

Zack Darnell, Nichols Statue University, Thibodaux, LA

Laura Picarililo, Audubon Nature Institute, New Orleans, LA

Christina Mohrman, NOAA ECSC, Moss Point, MS

Julie Anderson Lively, LA SEAGRANT, Baton Rouge, LA

Ashford Rosenberg, Audubon Nature Institute, New Orleans, LA

Joe Jewell, MDMR, Biloxi, MS

Senator Brice Wiggins, *GSMFC Commissioner*, Pascagoula, MS

Darrin Stewart, MDMR, Biloxi, MS

Glenn Constant, USFW, Baton Rouge, LA

Rick Burris, MDMR, Biloxi, MS

Ronnie Luster, Texas CCA, Houston, TX

Lance Robinson, TPWD, Dickinson, TX

### Staff

Steve VanderKooy, GSMFC Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS

Debbie McIntyre, GSMFC Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS

Dave Donaldson, GSMFC Executive Director, Ocean Springs, MS

### Introductions

**VanderKooy** addressed housekeeping issues with those present. **Chairman Gandy** led the audience and the committee members in introductions.

### Adoption of Agenda

*Bourgeois* moved to adopt the agenda as written. *Floyd* seconded the motion, and the agenda was adopted.

### Approval of Minutes

The Subcommittee reviewed their minutes from the GSMFC annual meeting held on March 17, 2014, in New Orleans, Louisiana. *Floyd* moved to accept the minutes, *Bourgeois* seconded, and the minutes were approved unanimously.

### **Blue Crab FMP Revision Status**

**VanderKooy** explained that progress on the Blue Crab FMP has been stalled because the TCC elected to wait to review the document at this October meeting. This subcommittee will get a realistic idea of the timing for approval of the FMP following the meeting of the TCC on Tuesday. **VanderKooy** indicated that, in the future, hard copies of these FMPs will probably not be printed as they have been in the past. Instead, an electronic version will be presented, similar to the Gulf FINFO website, but the complete document will be downloadable. Final approval of this FMP will probably take place at the GSMFC annual meeting in March, 2015. A five-year revision will still be necessary but we will maintain the historical background information and append starting at the year 2011, rather than starting over. This fishery is status quo, so there really are not any recommendations.

### **Diamondback Terrapin Status**

The members reported on their own state activities related to terrapins as preparation of putting together a white paper on the status in the Gulf. In the big picture, there are not a lot of interactions and some of the states that have been looking at bycatch in crab traps are identifying hotspots. There is not a lot of population data in the Gulf but there are some small limited datasets. In Florida, they have identified some locations where there were higher levels of occurrence such as along the northern eastern coast. To begin pulling the known data and sources together for the white paper, the subcommittee is looking at meeting jointly in February of 2015 with the Gulf Coast Terrapin Working Group in Lafayette, LA. If the timing works and the IJF program can provide travel, the subcommittee will have a separate breakout to cover a few of their routine subcommittee items and then not meet at the Spring Annual Meeting. **VanderKooy** or the chair would provide the report to the TCC however. With approval, **VanderKooy** will work with Christina Mohrman (Grand Bay NERR) to coordinate the joint effort.

### **Blue Crab Tagging in GOM**

**Dr. Zack Darnell** of Nicholls State University provided a presentation/proposal to tag female blue crabs to begin to estimate the offshore component of the species. Darnell is ready to begin a Gulf-wide mark-recapture network starting this spring assuming he can find funding. He is proposing an initial release of 10,000 tagged crabs from TX, LA, MS, and FL. If the project gets supported, he will provide tags to the state agencies who've agreed to assist opportunistically with him. In the long-term plan, there would be additional releases made in more locations. A \$5 reward will encourage the return of data.

### **Derelict Trap Cleanups**

**Sutton** was not present at the meeting but **VanderKooy** presented Sutton's report. Texas plans to hold their next synchronized joint trap pick-up with Louisiana for the Sabine Lake area February 20 – March 1, 2015. In order to conduct the clean-up, both the Louisiana and Texas

sides of Sabine Lake will be temporarily closed so that staff from both agencies and volunteers can conduct the clean-up.

**Bourgeois** reported that efforts made in Louisiana only touch the surface as the derelict trap problem is huge there. In 2014, 1,063 traps were collected for an overall total since 2004 of 24,223 traps cleaned up. LDWF and TPWD will cooperate in a joint clean-up effort February 20-March 1, 2015. In order to conduct the clean-up, both the Louisiana and Texas sides of Sabine Lake will be temporarily closed so that staff from both agencies and volunteers can conduct the clean-up.

**Burris** reported that no cleanups have been deemed necessary for Mississippi since February 2013; however, MDMR continues to monitor the situation.

**Gandy** did not have an updated report on this subject for the meeting. **McIntyre** will forward Florida's clean-up report to the Subcommittee when it is received.

**Herrmann** was not present at the meeting. **McIntyre** will forward Alabama's clean-up report to the Subcommittee when it is received.

**State Report Summaries** (Individual state reports available at GSMFC office)

**Gandy** reported that Florida did an assessment which revealed that overfishing was not occurring in the Gulf and blue crabs are not being overfished. He stated that issues of conflict still remain between regions. Fishing trips are on the increase. He pointed out that soft shells were increased this year; therefore, hard shell increase will follow the next year.

**Bourgeois** stated that there is a lot going on right now regarding crab legislation. During the 2014 Louisiana regular legislative session, there was a change to the number of escape rings required in crab traps and the diameter of the escape rings (Act 539). During the same legislative session, eligibility requirements were established for the sale of commercial crab trap gear licenses (Act 540).

He indicated that the Crab Task Force is very cooperative. This task force is taking some very positive steps and working together in a professional manner.

In regard to MSC certification, a surveillance audit is being conducted of the Louisiana blue crab fishery designed to review changes in management and regulations of the fishery and to evaluate progress against conditions of certification raised during the full assessment. LDWF is currently reviewing the draft audit report and considering revisions to the action plan.

Based on the results of the 2014 blue crab stock assessment update, the Louisiana blue crab stock is currently neither overfished nor experiencing overfishing.

LDWF is finalizing development of a Louisiana Blue Crab Fisheries Management Plan. This plan will serve as a centralized summary of current information pertaining to the blue crab fishery.

LDWF continues its coast-wide crab trap bycatch survey which it began in December of 2012. This survey collects and analyzes data on incidental bycatch in Louisiana's crab trap fishery with special emphasis on diamondback terrapins and also collects and analyzes blue crab sex, stage, and size frequency distribution.

**Sutton** was not present at the meeting but **VanderKooy** presented the Texas report. Blue crab landings for 2013 totaled 1.902 million pounds, down roughly 30% from 2012. The average ex-vessel price reported by dealers was \$1.20 per pound. Commercial fishermen license buybacks continued, but no licenses have been bought back this 2014/2015 registration year. This leaves 178 active commercial crab licenses available for the fishery.

**Burris** reported that total resident commercial license sales are down from 158 in the 2013-14 season to 135 in the 2014-15 season (preliminary data through 10-6-2014). Other crab licenses remained about the same.

MDMR is in its third year with a mandated trip ticket program. Quality improvements are ongoing as this program is still in the beginning stages.

Preliminary landings through September 2014 are substantially up from the same 2013 period. The price of crabs is also up from around \$1.15 per pound in 2013 to around \$1.40 per pound in 2014.

**Herrmann** was not present at the meeting. **McIntyre** will forward his Alabama state report to the committee when it is received.

### **Election of Officer**

*On motion by **Bourgeois**, seconded by **Floyd**, **Gandy** was unanimously re-elected chair.*

### **Other Business**

It was suggested that the subcommittee might move to a more 'annual' face-to-face meeting due to the current funding issues at the state level. The group could meet remotely or via webinar prior to one of the two meetings but provide a report to the regular TCC session. **VanderKooy** reported that the fall meeting in 2015 would be a joint meeting with the ASMFC and might be a good opportunity to get the Gulf crab folks to meet with the South Atlantic invertebrate folks. **VanderKooy** stated that, if travel is approved for the group to attend the terrapin workgroup in February 2015, the Crab Subcommittee could meet a half day then and not attend the GSMFC meeting in March. **Gandy** would help coordinate this effort if this was something that was approved.

There being no further business to discuss, **Gandy** moved to adjourn, **Floyd** seconded, and the meeting was adjourned at 11:10 a.m.

## TCC CRAB SUBCOMMITTEE

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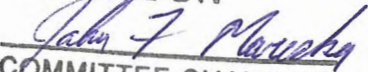
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APPROVED BY:

  
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**TCC SEAMAP SUBCOMMITTEE  
MINUTES**

**Monday, October 13, 2014 and  
Tuesday, October 14, 2014  
Gulfport, Mississippi**

**Chairman J. Mareska** called the meeting to order at 1:04 p.m. The following members and others were present:

**Members**

John Mareska, *Chairman*, ADCNR/MRD, Gulf Shores, AL  
Read Hendon, USM/GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS  
Bob McMichael, FWC/FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL  
Chloe Dean, LDWF, Grand Isle, LA  
Fernando Martinez, TPWD, Corpus Christi, TX  
Butch Pellegrin, NOAA Fisheries, Pascagoula, MS

**Others**

Landry Bernard, GCOOS, Stennis Space Center, MS  
Craig Newton, ADCNR/MRD, Dauphin Island, AL  
Eric Hoffmayer, NMFS, Pascagoula, MS  
Gary Fitzhugh, NMFS, Panama City, FL  
Doug DeVries, NMFS, Panama City, FL  
Charles Weber, NMFS, Pascagoula, MS  
Lance Robinson, TPWD, Dickinson, TX  
Jill Hendon, USM/GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS  
Ellie Roche

**Staff**

Jeff Rester, *SEAMAP/Habitat Program Coordinator*, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS  
Ashley Lott, *Staff Assistant*, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS  
Lloyd Kirk, *SEAMAP Database Programmer*, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

**Adoption of Agenda**

**R. Hendon** asked that Agenda Item 9, Review of the Bottom Longline and Vertical Line Work Group Meeting, and Agenda Item 10, Review of SEAMAP Survey Protocols and Associated Compliance, be moved to after the Administrative Report. There were no objections so these items were moved. Under Other Business, **J. Mareska** asked to add discussion of Fish ID Verifications. With those additions, the agenda was adopted as submitted.

**Approval of Minutes**

**B. Pellegrin** noted that in the FSCS Problems Discussion section, it should read “in the near future, Chuck Schroeder would likely be developing a new FSCS for the Gulf of Mexico.”



**R. Hendon** moved to approve the SEAMAP minutes from the July 30, 2014 meeting with the above minor correction. **B. Pellegrin** seconded and the motion passed.

### Administrative Report

**J. Rester** reported that since the Committee's last meeting in July, Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi, and NMFS had completed the Fall Plankton Survey and the Fall Shrimp Groundfish Survey has started. He has also drafted the TCC Report which is a recording of all of the FY 2014 SEAMAP activities and it is on the publications table if anyone would like a copy. Various conference calls and work group meetings were held and will be discussed in further detail below. Finally, the 2011 Atlas was printed and they are in the process of working on the 2012 Atlas.

### Review of the Bottom Longline and Vertical Line Work Group Meeting

The Subcommittee discussed the SEAMAP Bottom Longline/Vertical Line Work Group Meeting Summary from October 1, 2014. **C. Dean** finished some comments that she was not able to make at the meeting. She stated that Louisiana would like to divide the Chandeleur Island region into a northern and southern region and work with Mississippi on the sampling of this region. Louisiana is also looking into an eastern and western dividing line at 91.5 degrees longitude.

Discussion then moved to a map **J. Rester** made with grids from 2-10m and 10-20m for an area off Mississippi and Alabama. **B. McMichael** questioned the purpose of the grids since there are lines there already. **J. Mareska** stated that with the grids, you can assign a number to each grid box and then assign a depth contour.

**B. McMichael** made a motion for the site selection process for Bottom Longline Survey be 3 arc seconds that is identical to how SEAMAP does the trawling site selection. Further discussion ensued and the motion was amended. **R. Hendon** moved for the site selection process for the SEAMAP Bottom Longline Survey be consistent with methodologies used by NOAA Fisheries during their bottom longline survey in August-September. **J. Mareska** seconded and the motion passed. GSMFC will coordinate the site selection, but per **J. Rester**, the Subcommittee will need to show the Commission how it would like the site selection to be done.

Discussion next turned to conducting seasonal surveys in water depths from 2-20 m. **J. Mareska** stated that Alabama is doing 32 bottom longline sets but there is concern about down weighting. To prevent this, Alabama would like to move deeper offshore if funds allow. This would benefit multiple stock assessments by going deeper than 20 m. **C. Dean** stated that Louisiana is disappointed to lose the offshore data. Louisiana supports the inshore survey but will do deeper offshore bottom longline surveys as well. **J. Rester** asked if the other states would be able to go out past 20 m. Per **C. Dean**, Louisiana can and will be sampling waters deeper than 20 m. **R. Hendon** stated that Mississippi is not comfortable changing the primary objective of the bottom longline survey from shallow water (2-20m). **F. Martinez** stated that Texas has vessel limitations and can only sample in shallow waters. **E. Hoffmayer** stated that the primary priority is to develop an inshore index for stock assessment purposes. Since NOAA Fisheries is doing the offshore survey, the state inshore surveys are a complement to that. For the Bottom Longline Survey, the

primary objective is to survey 2-10 m and 10-20 m. The secondary objective will be to do some offshore or seasonal surveys if have the additional funds.

Station selection was next discussed by the Subcommittee. They would like something in place before next year and sampling begins. **J. Rester** stated that he has no problem pulling the sites for the states. He will work with Trey Driggers on selecting the stations. He did ask the group if they are starting at 2-20 m then moving offshore if any money is left. **B. McMichael** stated that Florida will only survey 2-20 m to match NOAA's protocols per the language in Florida's proposal. Alabama will be able to do 2-20 m for the spring, summer and fall survey. Mississippi will be able to do 2-20 m for the spring, summer and fall survey as well but is also looking at North Chandeleur and East Chandeleur. Louisiana will able to do 2-20 m for the spring, summer and fall surveys. Texas will be able to go out for the spring, summer and fall surveys but due to vessel limitations, will not be able to go out to 20 m. **F. Martinez** thinks they can do out to 15 m but will get with his directors for approval and he stated that maybe Louisiana could pick up a few of the Texas stations.

**J. Mareska** next brought up season selection. He stated that the committee needs to consider seasons for species. We do not want to eliminate abundance of species, which is important for stock assessments. He asked if the group had looked at the data to see what we could be impacting by setting our seasons as three, two month seasons (April-May), (June-July) and (August-September). A question was also raised about not having a buffer between seasons. **E. Hoffmayer** thinks there needs to be some type of gap between seasons, say a 15 day buffer between cruises/seasons. **B. McMichael** stated that if we are going to have designated seasons, there needs to be something in writing. The Committee decided to run some stations on historical allocations and then get back together to discuss how many stations each state can do and whether or not there needs to be a buffer between and seasons.

Discussion then moved to the Vertical Line Survey, objectives and recommendations. The Committee reviewed those with a few comments:

**C. Dean** stated that Louisiana is expanding their survey westward and sampling April-May, June-July, and August-September;

The Committee has no problem with a depth strata of 150 meters;

**J. Mareska** noted that no structure (unstructured, no vertical relief) is a habitat and needs to be added into the summary;

Non-structured sites are randomly drawn per **R. Hendon**; a question was raised as to do we need a standard number per zone and what/how far a buffer is needed around non structured sites. **R. Hendon** feels that sampling the reef and rig habitats would be the most beneficial/top priorities. **J. Mareska** will get with Clay Porch to find out how many non-structured sites need to be sampled.

Under Recommendations for the Vertical Line Survey, it was decided to come up with some general items then have the Environmental Data Work Group look at it. A full environmental

profile from a CTD is the recommended method but at a minimum need surface, mid, bottom and depth fished environmental parameters.

J. Rester will send this to the Environmental Data Work Group with an explanation of what the Subcommittee is looking for and see if they have any other recommendations.

Gangions are now standardized in the manual. They need to be 18 inches, twisted. For the states that are changing to this, you need to have a transition period for this.

For biological sampling, **J. Rester** will get with G. Fitzhugh at the beginning of the year for the species and life history needs for that year. SEAMAP will need to layout their criteria before G. Fitzhugh can help. There are limits as to what he can do. Per **R. Hendon**, this can be revisited on a year to year basis and if it works out, the states can provided follow-up coordination on the histology to G. Fitzhugh.

Habitat Classification in the Vertical Line Survey – Bob McMichael, Clint Edds and Matt Hill developed a list of detailed habitat classifications. B. McMichael has provided this list to the Committee and this list is their recommendations. Some changes were made to the list in the meeting and J. Rester will send this list out for all to review the changes. For habitat codes, need to use four characters. **B. McMichael** raised a question regarding horizontal area and vertical area for the stock assessments. How detailed do we need to get on these? (Define as small or large?). **B. McMichael** will start putting together draft definitions and details for this and pass out to the Subcommittee for review.

QA/QC protocols need to be develop for all SEAMAP surveys. Florida has model/protocols they are using. They test their staff to check accuracy of identification. Other states can use this. The Subcommittee agreed that each state will pull 20-30 species to test their staff to see how accurate they are. They will bring back the results and the subcommittee will discuss this in March and determine if/when a QA/QC workshop is needed.

Prior to the meeting, **R. Hendon** distributed to the group a summary and map for station allocation for Vertical Line for SEAMAP. **B. McMichael moved to use this summary as a baseline development for station allocation. This will be placed in the manual for vertical line sampling and will be a working document. R. Hendon seconded and the motion passed 4-1. J. Mareska** stated that Alabama is already using a grid system that covers the issues for station allocation for vertical line. He also pointed out that we need to make sure that we are compatible with NMFS since that is what we were asked to do. This is a living document and will be included in the operations manual.

### **Review of SEAMAP Survey Protocols and Associated Compliance**

A motion was passed in July setting forth things the Subcommittee needs to look at to standardize SEAMAP surveys. J. Rester compiled a spreadsheet of SEAMAP survey standards each state provided and the committee went through and discussed some of the major differences.

**B. Pellegrin** noted that the Subcommittee needs to be real conscience about the differences and make sure SEAMAP is standardized and all are doing the same thing because if not, SEAMAP could lose its funding for not following the goals and objectives it has set out.

A major point of discussion involved whether or not a 20ft. trawl should be funded with SEAMAP funds. This issue deals with Texas. **R. Hendon** stated that SEAMAP funds should not be used for 20-foot trawls. All other states are using 42-foot trawls. **J. Mareska** asked if Texas could use 42-foot trawls for some stations per SEAMAP protocols. **R. Hendon** moved that 42-foot trawls be the standard for shrimp and groundfish surveys and if a state does not use a 42-foot trawl their funds be redirected to other SEAMAP surveys that follow SEAMAP protocols. **B. McMichael clarified and amended the above motion and moved that it reads as follows: The SEAMAP Subcommittee recognizes the discrepancies in the Texas trawl survey gear and methodologies and requires either conforming to standard SEAMAP protocols and gears or reallocating their SEAMAP funds to other SEAMAP surveys that utilize standard gears and protocols by June 1, 2015. R. Hendon seconded and the motion passed.** For the record, **F. Martinez** wanted it noted that Texas strongly opposes the motion.

The group next looked at the Trawl Survey. Under the protocols column, add “shake fish out of the net and then count them.”

For the Plankton Survey, use 60 cm bongo and record information in correct gear code. Also, speed through water (STW) versus speed over ground (SOG). Collect SOG and collect STW if you have the capability to do so.

**B. McMichael** thinks it is a good idea to add another column to the sheet labeled SEAMAP Protocols/Standards. **J. Rester** will add this.

In the Vertical Line Survey, there are some differences in mainlines and weights. The group felt that this does not matter. For gangions, 18 inches, twisted is the standard.

For the Bottom Longline Survey, there are some differences in mainline breaking strength. It should be 1200 pounds and 4mm in thickness.

Environmental Data Collection, there are some discrepancies with Secchi disk. It should be use 30 or 52 cm solid white.

J. Rester will send out this document to everyone to use. This will be a nice reference tool.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:55 pm on Monday, October 13, 2014.

**Chairman J. Mareska** called the meeting to order at 8:27am on Tuesday, October 14, 2014.

## **Standardization of Laboratory Processing and Archiving of Fish Samples**

**G. Fitzhugh** gave a presentation on the standardization of laboratory processing and archiving of fish samples. He discussed how they are tracking too many pieces of paper and the challenges of keeping up with all of the paper. Better sampling kits have become available but it still entails a lot of handwriting, more work in the field, duplication, requires lots of QA/QC to correct errors, and all of this leads to time lost from processing. Electronic data recording is advancing across agencies and programs leading to more opportunities for barcoding. He gave Florida as a good example to follow for barcoding. They use a prefix, lab, year and sequence on the barcodes. It works better to have the barcodes ready to go at the point of collection. This allows processing to move faster and for him, that is the key to success. The main takeaways for barcoding include: a unique number; can be pre-printed for ease of use at point of collection; compatible as possible across agencies, labs and programs; and expandable and relevant over time.

## **Review of the SEAMAP Trawl and Plankton Operations Manual**

**J. Rester** received comments from Louisiana from the last edit/draft of the SEAMAP Trawl and Plankton Operations Manual that he sent out in September. He will be adding these editorial changes/corrections to the manual. A few of the items were discussed in the meeting:

The Subcommittee decided to use GMT as the recommended time zone. **C. Dean** felt it was important to do all lost gear protocols the same way. **J. Rester** will add more information to the manual to clarify. **B. McMichael** had a question for lost or damaged gear. Do we repeat that station, move somewhere else or just skip that station? **J. Rester** will add more information to the manual dealing with lost gear protocols, dropping known sensitive habitats, and a one nautical mile buffer as long as it is in the same depth and stat zone. In the case of sponges, drop that station.

The Subcommittee felt it was confusing to have both transmissivity and secchi as a primary measurement. This should be clarified to say take transmissivity as the preferred method but if not available record secchi depth.

The Subcommittee decided to keep the current water color codes and change salinity unit to PSU (Practical Salinity Units). On the labels for plankton, the actual start position for the gear needs to be added. The Subcommittee felt that for young of the year (YoY) that the code instructions need to be clear as to how to record this. Two entries would occur, one for each size class and you would use T for the smaller size entry code and leave the larger size entry code blank.

**C. Dean** asked if an operation code could be added to cover entangled lines. **J. Mareska** thinks we can do this but add this to the March meeting agenda to discuss.

The Subcommittee will review the manual again in March and hopefully finalize it.

### **Detailed SEAMAP Survey Budget Discussion**

The SEAMAP budget was discussed in July and it was decided that the Subcommittee wanted to discuss how much the different surveys were costing all of the partners. The Subcommittee would like some estimates of the cost for the various SEAMAP surveys. The states were asked to compile this information and send to J. Rester. He compiled it together and it was discussed. **R. Hendon** had a question regarding indirect cost. **E. Hoffmayer** will investigate a cap on indirect costs and report back to the Subcommittee. Per **E. Roche**, better to leave indirect cost as they are because it benefits boat time. Also, if you put a cap on it, it will have to be opened up to competitive bids. Since not all of the states had the same information submitted, Florida's spreadsheet will be sent out as an example to follow. Please include a detailed breakdown of: cost of survey; include number of days; hours/day; total time; salary; fringe cost; indirect cost; total cost; and what SEAMAP actually supports. Please return this information to J. Rester and it will be discussed by the group at a later date.

### **Data Management of Future Fishery Independent Surveys**

This was discussed in July about where we are going to store all the data that is being collected during oil spill related fishery independent surveys. The states were asked to generate a list of their fishery independent work and **J. Rester** put all of this information into a spreadsheet. Per **F. Martinez**, send him the spreadsheet and he will add the Texas information. The group looked over the spreadsheet and talked about their respective states. The point of this exercise was to get a handle on how much data can be expected with all the fishery independent surveys. Per J. Rester, if all is done in a standardized format like it is asked for, then there should be no problems. However, problems arise when small changes are made (such as field headings).

**E. Hoffmayer** asked if the group scanned in copies of the data sheets when they send the data to GSMFC. If not, please do so. Also, cruise reports are delinquent. Please turn them in on time.

### **Dead Fish in SEAMAP Trawls – To Count, or Not to Count, That is the Question**

This issue was brought by **B. McMichael**. What do we do if dead fish are collected in the trawl? Florida is dealing with red tide, but this is also applicable to diseased or fish with ulcers. In Florida, they have codes for it for their inshore sampling. The staff is also trained on identifying diseased fish or fish with ulcers. This is just something to think about for the future. To handle this right now, note it on the main station page to make sure that all the dead or diseased fish are recorded.

### **Election of Chair**

**R. Hendon** moved to nominate **J. Mareska** as Chairman and **F. Martinez** as Vice-Chair. **B. Pellegrin** seconded and the motion passed.

**Other Business**

**B. Pellegrin** discussed plankton sorting with Joanne in regards to NFWF projects that would collect plankton. If you do any additional surveys, make sure you budget the cost of sorting any plankton samples.

**Being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:56 a.m.**

APPROVED BY:  
*Ralph E. Hode*  
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**OIL DISASTER RECOVERY PROGRAM (ODRP)  
MINUTES**

**Tuesday, October 14, 2014  
Gulfport, Mississippi**

A meeting of the Ad Hoc Committee for the Oil Disaster Recovery Program was convened on October 14, 2014 in Gulfport, Mississippi for the purpose of receiving reports from contractors and GSMFC staff regarding progress being made towards fishery disaster recovery from the impacts of BP Oil disaster of 2010. Ralph Hode, Fisheries Disaster Program Coordinator for the GSMFC, facilitated the meeting.

The following state, staff and other attendees were present:

**States**

Kelly Lucas, *GSMFC Commissioner*, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Chris Blankenship, ADCNR Director, Gulf Shores, AL  
Randy Pausina, *LDWF* Baton Rouge, LA  
Richard Cody, *FWC*, Tallahassee, FL  
Lance Robinson, *TPWD*, Dickinson, TX

**Others**

Thor Lassen, Ocean Trust Texas, Brownsville, TX  
Rene LeBreton, *LDWF*, Baton Rouge, LA  
Julianna Mullen, Audubon Nature Institute, New Orleans, LA  
John Fallon, Audubon Nature Institute, New Orleans, LA  
Ben Posadas, Miss State University, Ext. Service, Biloxi, MS  
Joanne Zaritsky, Gulf and South Atlantic Fisheries Foundation, Tallahassee, FL  
Thor Lassen, Ocean Trust, Jew Orleans, LA  
Betty Staugler, Florida Sea Grant, Tampa, FL  
Dave Burrage, MS-AL Sea Grant, Biloxi, MS  
Emily Muehisten, Gulf of Mexico FMC, Tampa, FL  
Bryan Fluech, Florida Sea Grant, Tampa FL  
Peter Nguyen, MS-AL Sea Grant, Biloxi, MS  
Landry Bernard, GOM Coastal Ocean Observing System, Stennis Space Center, MS  
Steve Ashby, MSU Northern Gulf Institute, Stennis Space Center, MS  
Jeff Barger, Ocean Conservancy, [Oceanconservancy.org](http://Oceanconservancy.org)  
Rick Burris MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Chris Nelson, Bon Secour Fisheries, Bon Secour, AL  
Laura Picariello, Audubon Nature Institute, New Orleans, LA  
Ashford Rosenberg, Audubon Nature Institute, New Orleans, LA  
Phil Werdal, Trace Register, [Pwerdal@traceregister.com](mailto:Pwerdal@traceregister.com)  
Brice Wiggins, State of MS Senate, Jackson, MS  
Joey Sheppard, *LDWF*, Baton Rouge, LA



**Staff**

Angela Rabideau, GSMFC Financial Officer, Ocean Springs, MS

Ralph Hode, GSMFC EDRP Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS

Donna Bellais, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

James Ballard, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

**Approval of Agenda**

The agenda was approved with a no additions.

**Approval of the Minutes**

The minutes of the EDRP Workshop held on March, 18, 2014 New Orleans, LA, were approved as presented.

**Overview of Projects and Financial Summary Report**

**R. Hode** provided an overview of the overall ODRP recovery initiative to date; noting that a total of 23 contracts were currently in place, slated to end June 30 2014. Contractors have all been made aware of the end dates and are generally prepared to complete work, and submit invoices and final reports by that time. It was noted that the program is currently about 80% into the grant time line and slightly less than 80% into planned spending; and that approximately \$2M remains to be utilized over the remaining several months. Note was made that there is no prospect at this time for no cost grant extensions.

It was also reported that approximately \$300 K currently remained in an unobligated fund balance and that the Commission was working through the Ad Hoc Committee with each of the States to examine proposals for use of these funds.

**PROJECT REPORTS**

**Gulf of Mexico Seafood Marketing Coalition**

Marketing Coalition initiatives – Reports indicated that planned programs within the guidance and directions of the Marketing Coalition are moving forward as planned. Significant progress is being seen in all sectors including social and web based media activities as well as the retail partnership element. Web page was beefed up to include species information and to provide links to FINFO, TRACE and G.U.L.F. Representatives of the Coalition continue to examine options for long term funding of this initiative, including the possibility of funding through Saltonstall-Kennedy programs.

### **Sustainability and Traceability**

Reports indicated that the trace component is scheduled for completion in 2014 and has resulted to date in a combined total of 1,310 participants (including 82 processors, docks, distributors, and, an estimated 47 million pounds of gulf product have passed through the trace program since inception. Additionally the trace continues to be utilized as the source documentation device that supports seafood marketing partnerships, local marketing initiatives, and a certified Gulf Wild initiative by the LDWF.

A proposal was presented by Phil Werdal of Trace Register that would possibly extend support of the program beyond the 2014 contract period but no action was taken at this time.

### **Gulf Fish Watch**

Gulf fisheries information component (FINFO) – a report was provided on the current status of this initiative. Additional species and related information is being added to the website and the contract has been amended to go through June 2014. Additionally, the species information, including economics, is being updated to reflect 2013 landings information; and links to other ODRP components.

### **Market Maker Program**

A report was also provided by the MS State Extension service on use of the program in the Gulf as compared to the combined enrollees across the country. Dr. Ben Posadas pointed out that MM is now one of the largest food service data bases in the U.S.; and that there has been an increase in interests nationally. Furthermore, reports also reflect increased marine industry participation in the MM program as a result of initiatives begun in the Gulf.

Posadas also reflected on recent administrative changes that have directed the overall program to a new business model by Riverside Research. Expectations are that annual costs to states will ultimately come down making it appealing to State agencies which typically are charged with oversight. There was also emphasis on the need to address improvements in the way participating businesses project their MM web pages – I.e., improved storefronts.

### **GAP Analysis**

**Thor Lassen** provided a briefing on progress under this component indicating that he is working to facilitate changes to the FAO guidelines that address sub tropic environs. He also reported that the final gap analyses are expected to be completed by contract end.

### **Seafood Certification Initiative – Audubon; G.U.L.F. Marine Advance Plan Initiative**

**Julianna Mullen**, Sustainability Program Coordinator for the Audubon G.U.L.F. initiative, provided a brief power point presentation of the Audubon action plan to address issues relative to

the sustainability of Gulf seafood. G.U.L.F is currently working with stakeholder industries and marine management agencies to define management schemes and to develop strategies that may be utilized to improve FAO defined sustainable fisheries ratings for select fisheries. Initial work is being performed to develop Marine Advancement Plans (MAPs) within the blue crab industries of Alabama, Mississippi, Texas and Florida. The blue crab work for Louisiana has already been done and will only require formatting to match the MAPs being developed for the other states.

A sustainable fisheries web-based information system has been developed and is being refined on a continuing basis to bring attention to those practices and programs currently in existence in the Gulf that lend themselves to sustainable management. These activities are being linked to other information systems being developed under the ODRP to promote Gulf products and to create additional opportunities for consumers and buyers to make sound decisions regarding Gulf products.

#### **Kemp's Ridley Stock Assessment**

It was reported that the report on the Kemps Ridley initiative with LGL Inc., and the Gladys Porter Zoo was scheduled to be presented to the Commission on Wednesday.

#### **Unobligated Funds - ODRP**

**Hode** reported that approximately \$300 K remained in the ODRP that were yet to be committed. Two of the five States already had submitted projects and the remaining three indicated intent to submit proposals over the next month or so.

#### **OTHER BUSINESS**

#### **Great American Seafood Cook-Off - Federal Funding Opportunity (FFO)**

**Hode** reported that the Great American Seafood Cook-off (GASCO) in New Orleans was funded under independent funding opportunities through NOAA Fisheries' Saltonstall Kennedy program. The annual event was completed in August but requests for reimbursements have not yet been received. The opportunity was tentatively defined as a five year program and would be an independent grant opportunity (separate from ODRP or other existing disaster relief funding programs). According to preliminary funding announcements (Note: the formal FFO announcement had not been released at the time of the Ad Hoc meeting) the grant would be up to \$250 thousand per year, dependent on Federal funding availability.

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned.

APPROVED BY:  
*Ronald R. Lukens*  
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**S-FFMC MENHADEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
MINUTES  
October 14, 2014  
Gulfport, Mississippi**

**Chairman Lukens** called the meeting to order at 8:31 a.m. with the following in attendance:

**Members**

Rick Schillaci, Omega Protein, Inc., Moss Point, MS  
Joseph Smith, NOAA Beaufort Lab, Beaufort, NC  
Jerry Mambretti, TPWD, Port Arthur, TX  
Harry Blanchet, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Ron Lukens, Omega Protein, Inc., Gainesville, FL  
Borden Wallace, Daybrook Fisheries, Inc., Empire, LA  
Matt Hill, MDMR, Biloxi, MS

**Others**

Mark Schexnayder, LDWF, New Orleans, LA  
Tommy Williams, Daybrook Fisheries, Baton Rouge, LA  
Ben Landry, Omega Protein, Houston, TX  
Scott Herbert, Daybrook Fisheries, New Orleans, LA  
Emily Posner, Recirculating Farms Coalition, New Orleans, LA  
Karl Wulf, Daybrook Fisheries, Empire, LA  
Dalton Berry, Daybrook Fisheries, Empire, LA  
Lee Alexander, Daybrook Fisheries, Inc., New Orleans, LA  
Shane Treadaway, Daybrook Fisheries, Inc., Empire, LA  
Kelly Lucas, MDMR, *GSMFC Commissioner*, Biloxi, MS  
Dale Diaz, MDMR, *GSMFC Commissioner*, Biloxi, MS  
Ed Swindell, Marine Process Services, LLC, Hammond, LA  
Tabitha Lindley, Omega Protein, Inc., Houston, TX  
Camp Matens, *GSMFC Commissioner*, Baton Rouge, LA  
Kenny Hebert, Omega Protein, Abbeville, LA  
Paul Mickle, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Matthew Nuttall, Univ. of Miami, Miami, FL  
Phil Cossich, Daybrook Fisheries, Empire, LA  
Wes Devers, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Emily Satterfield, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Glenn Constant, USFWS, Baton Rouge, LA

**Staff**

Dave Donaldson, Executive Director, Ocean Springs, MS  
Steve VanderKooy, Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS  
Debbie McIntyre, Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS  
Gregg Bray, RecFIN Data Programmer/Analyst, Ocean Springs, MS  
Joe Ferrer, IT and Database Administrator, Ocean Springs, MS

## Introductions

**Lukens** took a few minutes for some housekeeping items and started the introductions around the room. For historical purposes, he explained the roster and how the Committee has been populated. He also explained the voting procedure.

## Adoption of Agenda

**Lukens** and **VanderKooy** pointed out that Agenda Item #8 was redundant and it was, therefore, struck. **VanderKooy** noted that if there was time under other business he would make a note on the ageing workshop which was coming up in November at the Beaufort Lab.

**VanderKooy** noted that there would be a public comment period offered for any topics not covered under the current agenda. However, he encouraged the audience to feel free to ask questions throughout the meeting as long as they were specific to the topic.

*Schillaci moved to approve the agenda, Mambretti seconded, and the agenda was approved as amended.*

## Approval of Minutes

The MAC reviewed the draft minutes from the last annual meeting, March 17, 2014. *Wallace moved to accept the minutes as written, Mambretti seconded, and the minutes were accepted as written.*

## Update on 2014 Gulf Menhaden Season

**Smith** reviewed the 2014 season to-date. Through the end of September, 329,595 mt of Gulf menhaden have been landed for reduction which was down 21% from 2013 and 25% from the previous 5-yr average. It was a cold, wet winter and spring resulting in a large amount of fresh water moving down the rivers. The start of the season was slow with high winds through June. Landings in June were the lowest on record for that month since 1958. Fish finally started to show west of the Mississippi River in early July and catches were good on both sides of the River through August. Catches were fair in September and October. The oil yield was fair, better than 2011 and 2012, and the price of meal and oil was relatively high throughout summer. Only three plants operated in 2014 with the Cameron factory closing at the end of last year. A total of 31 vessels fished thus far in 2014, with one run boat at Moss Point and one bait boat which fished from near Abbeville. Projected landings through the end of the fishing season (Nov 1) are expected to be around 380,000 mt, down 24% from 2013 and 25% from previous 5-yr mean. With the projected landings and observed fishing effort for 2014, it is forecast that landings in 2015 may be about 397,000 mt.

**Wallace** asked if NOAA was currently sampling the bait landings for age comps. **Smith** reported that at this time, they were not but that this is something that should be conducted considering the

close proximity with the reduction plant in Abbeville. This would be something to pursue in sampling next year as the bait fishery continues to develop.

**Wallace** wondered where the landings were in relation to the target and threshold benchmarks that were agreed upon and incorporated into the draft FMP. When should we evaluate the annual landings? **Smith** and **VanderKooy** agreed that the spring GSMFC meeting would be the appropriate place and time to gauge the 2014 landings against the benchmarks – that is, after the landings and age comps for 2014 were final. It was suggested by the MAC that an evaluation should be conducted at each spring MAC meeting, prior to the start of the next fishing season.

**Landry** asked about the environmental conditions that the old LDWF forecast was based upon. **Smith** reported that historically, Vince Guillory used the water temps, salinities, and rainfall over the winter months to compare with the juvenile index derived from the Department's trawl data in Calcasieu Lake. **Blanchet** reminded that the Department was still working on what existing data in the current sampling protocols would be more appropriate along with any additional environmental indices for future forecasting type efforts. **VanderKooy** would send **Landry** Guillory's published reports with the old model explained.

#### **Atlantic Menhaden Fishery Update**

**Smith** also reported on the Atlantic menhaden season. As of the end of September, Atlantic menhaden landings were 112,567 mt which was up 16% from 2013, but down 11% from previous 5-yr average. A total of eight Omega Protein vessels landed fish for reduction at Reedville; two Virginia "snapper" boats (bait vessels) also unloaded minor quantities for reduction at Omega, two others landed for bait only. In New Jersey, five to six purse-seiners unloaded for bait as well. The Atlantic Menhaden Stock Assessment Subcommittee of ASMFC is in the process of completing a benchmark assessment for Atlantic menhaden – this after the 2012 update assessment had some serious flaws. Because the 2012 update assessment was unreliable, the Atlantic Menhaden Management Board imposed a TAC on the coast-wide fishery that reflected a 20% reduction in coast-wide harvest from the previous three-year mean landings until the new assessment could be completed. The 170,800 mt TAC includes landings for both bait and reduction and allocations were distributed among the states based on historical percent contributions to the landings. As a result, Virginia received the largest share of 85% or about 146,000 mt of which the reduction fishery could land about 130,000mt. The peer review for the new benchmark assessment is scheduled for December and the Board will probably revisit the TAC at its February meeting and before the 2015 fishing season.

**Smith** also reminded the group that last spring, he had an opportunity to fly an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) or "drone" (NOAA's PUMA) to search for menhaden schools as a proof of concept for future aerial surveys. This was one of the high priority data needs listed by the MAC during the Gulf menhaden SEDAR assessment as well as in the FMP. **Smith** will be conducting more testing of NOAA's PUMA this coming November and December off the North Carolina coast when fish have historically been abundant.

Finally, **Smith** was pleased to report that the proposed closure of the Beaufort Lab has been averted. It appears that the message that was sent to NOAA was clear that this was not going to be an option. **Smith** expressed thanks to those who wrote letters of support.

#### **2014 Review of the Texas 'Cap'**

**Mambretti** and **Smith** reported on the Texas Cap. With the closure of the Cameron plant, there was very little fishing in Texas waters until late July and early August and in a very limited amount. So far, the harvest from Texas waters is just under 1M lbs which is far below the cap. **Mambretti** again thanked the industry for their quick reporting of CDFRs to aid the TPWD in monitoring effort off Texas.

#### **Status: Louisiana Forecast for 2015**

**Blanchet** reported that the LDWF has not yet replaced any forecasting model but that the current sampling regimes were being evaluated for use in models in the future. He would continue to update the MAC on any progress. **Mambretti** noted that the Texas bag seine data indicated good recruitment this year in Texas waters.

#### **Assessing the Drivers of Gulf Menhaden Dynamics and the Influence of this Stock on the Northern Gulf of Mexico Ecosystem**

**Matt Nuttall**, a PhD student from U of Miami, presented his intended research which centers on the ecology of the Gulf menhaden stock; namely, the environmental drivers of Gulf menhaden, the influence of these stock dynamics on the northern Gulf of Mexico ecosystem, and any potential feedback between these stock and ecosystem dynamics. To this end, he and his major professor/co-PI have requested fishery-independent data from the states similar to what was provided for the SEDAR. The states have now received their requests and will be evaluating the project and determine agency ability to provide the data. The project is very much in the preliminary, design phase, but **Matt** will return to the MAC with results as he proceeds in the future.

#### **FMP Revision Status Update and changes to IJF Program and FMPs**

**VanderKooy** reported that the draft FMP was still in review with the Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) and that there were some minor concerns over placement of a couple of research recommendations. He anticipated that these would be resolved quickly in their meeting tomorrow and they would approve the plan to go forward to the S-FFMC. **VanderKooy** noted that he was in the process of proposing a change to the review process for management plans in the future since a number of the committees now are made up of the same individuals. His proposal is to combine the S-FFMC review with the full Commission review since they now meet together for the same reason. Combining the reviews would take one step out of the process and could speed up reviews by at least a month or two. The combined reviews would then be released as draft for public comment; any additional input could be incorporated during the regular Commission

Business meeting prior to taking final FMP actions. **VanderKooy** anticipates that the change will be accepted and the menhaden plan can be released for public comment before the end of the year.

### **Discussion of Port Sample Acquisition and Processing in 2015**

**Smith** stated that for the last two years, we tapped into extra GulfFIN funds to help pay for processing of Gulf menhaden port samples. In years past, LDWF had helped provide some of the support for the Louisiana portion of the sampling. However, the funds continue to be cobbled together at the last minute, often just weeks before sampling is to begin. **Donaldson** provided an update that the Commission would be able to “band-aid” the project in 2015 with some available FIN funds. There still needs to be a long-term solution to the funding issue however. **Smith** did note that in 2014, there were a couple of graduate students who processed samples from the fish factories, then shipped data and scale samples to the Beaufort Lab. There were a couple of issues that came up in 2014, but the samples are secure and continued to be processed.

### **Timeline for Next Benchmark Assessment**

**VanderKooy** and the MAC discussed the assessment schedule. The SEDAR steering committee wanted clarification on the next Gulf menhaden assessment, that is, what type of assessment does the MAC envision for 2016 - another benchmark, a standard assessment, or just an update? After much discussion and under a recommendation by **Dr. Amy Schueller** via **Smith**, the MAC agreed that an update assessment would probably be appropriate for 2016, but that if circumstances changed prior to the start, they could request a more detailed assessment.

### **Election of Chair**

**Wallace**, keeper of the ‘parchment’, explained the chair history and annual rotation among a state, industry, and Federal member of the MAC. **Wallace** pointed out that the MAC has been active and meeting for 38 years. As the official record keeper, he noted that the Chair should come from a state representative for 2015 and that in the history of the committee, Alabama has never served. Therefore, despite his absence, **John Mareska** was nominated by **Wallace** and without objection, he was elected Chair of the MAC for 2015.

### **Other Business**

**Smith** reported that he had digitized three 16mm historical films regarding menhaden fishery which were left to him by Bob Chapoton at Beaufort. Two films were shot in the late 40s and the late 50s on the Atlantic. The third was produced by LSU in the early 70s and is interesting as well. He noted that either he or **VanderKooy** could provide copies to whomever may be interested.

### **Public Comment**

**Emily Posner** with Recirculating Farms provided the following comments:



My name is **Emily Posner** and I'm the Policy Council for Recirculating Farms Coalition and we remain concerned about a few items, in particular the lack of data assessing the possible impacts from the DWH oil spill on the species such as menhaden and environment. We'd like to see some way of determining any ongoing issues and impacts from that incident on this particular species in Gulf. We would like to continue to encourage the prioritization of predator/prey relationships for menhaden and other predator fish in the Gulf. Also, we would like to get a more qualitative and quantitative idea and understanding of bycatch in this industry. With that, thanks for the time.

**Lukens** did some explanation and encouraged ongoing research. Immediately after the DWH disaster, Omega contracted Dr. Nancy Brown-Peterson to conduct a cursory evaluation of menhaden samples to see if there were any effects of the oil or dispersant on the fish. Coupled with that is a lot of sampling for contaminants on menhaden by the NMFS which found no trace of any of the contaminants. **Lukens** indicated that any additional work would be welcomed. **Wallace** noted that this was more related to food safety. **Posner** indicated that they are still more interested in the long-term effects on these animals especially in their ability to continue to reproduce and repopulate. There are a lot of people who want to see more research in this area.

**Landry** responded that the DWH was indeed a major event which effected a lot of the Gulf and therefore we need more research in all areas related to the disaster. Any predator/prey research needs to be comprehensive if we hope to eventually get to things like ecosystem management. Work proposed by the academic community like **Nuttall's** seems to be more inclusive of the complete predator community as well as all the environmental variables necessary to understand Gulf dynamics. On the issue of bycatch, the industry has been open and transparent. There doesn't seem to be a lot of concern at this point by the state and federal scientists. Most of the research has proven that bycatch is a relatively insignificant portion of the catch.

### **Menhaden Ageing**

**VanderKooy** pointed out that one of the issues that emerged out of SEDAR32A was that there are not any age comp data from Gulf menhaden taken from the state fishery-independent monitoring programs. In addition, the reviewers and the MAC all acknowledged the importance of sharing the years of experience held by the sole menhaden ageing reader in Beaufort before she retires after 47 years. Ms. Ethel Hall has been the lone reader of menhaden scales for over 40 years. In an effort to share and transfer that knowledge and experience into the Gulf, **VanderKooy** and **Smith** have put together a menhaden scale reference set in an attempt to train others throughout the region and ensure standardized ageing protocols are used by the states as well as NOAA. There will be a training workshop in Beaufort in November so that others can age scales like Ethel does. **VanderKooy** also reported that this effort was deemed valuable enough for the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission to conduct their own training for Atlantic menhaden after the first of the year.

With no further business, *Blanchet moved to adjourn, seconded by Lukens and the meeting adjourned at 11:45 a.m.*



**TECHNICAL COORDINATING COMMITTEE  
MINUTES – 65<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting  
Tuesday, October 14, 2014  
Gulfport, Mississippi**

**Chairman Chris Denson** called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. The following members, staff and others were present:

**Members**

Harry Blanchet, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Richard Cody, FWC/FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL  
Chris Denson, ADCNR/MRD, Gulf Shores, AL  
Dan Ellinor, FWC, Tallahassee, FL  
Matt Hill, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Joe Jewell, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Jerry Mambretti, TPWD, Port Arthur, TX  
John Mareska, ADCNR/MRD, Dauphin Island, AL  
Randy Pausina, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Mark Schexnayder, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA

**Staff**

James Ballard, GSMFC, Sport Fish/Aquatic Invasives Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS  
Gregg Bray, GSMFC, FIN Data Program Manager, Ocean Springs, MS  
Ali Ryan, GSMFC, Sport Fish/Aquatic Invasives Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS  
Joe Ferrer, GSMFC, Systems Administrator, Ocean Springs, MS  
Jeff Rester, GSMFC, SEAMAP/Habitat Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS  
Donna Bellais, GSMFC, ComFIN Programmer, Ocean Springs, MS  
Dave Donaldson, GSMFC, Executive Director, Ocean Springs, MS  
Steve VanderKooy, GSMFC, IJF Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS

**Others**

Chris Blankenship, ADCNR/MRD, Dauphin Island, AL  
Joey Shepard, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Jamie Miller, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Dale Diaz, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Bill Richardson, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Karon Aplin, ADCNR/MRD, Gulf Shores, AL  
Chris Nelson, Bon Secour Fisheries, Bon Secour, AL  
Vince Cefalu, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Wesley Devers, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
LaDon Swann, MS-AL Sea Grant, Ocean Springs, MS  
Joe Smith, NOAA Fisheries, Beaufort, NC

### Adoption of Agenda

A motion to adopt the agenda as written was made by Jerry Mambretti and passed unanimously.

### Approval of Minutes

A motion to approve the minutes as written for the March 20, 2013 meeting was made by Harry Blanchet and passed with no opposition.

### Overview of State Red Snapper Monitoring Programs

**Texas** – Jerry Mambretti reported that Texas collected comprehensive data during the 9 day federal red snapper season using a newly developed website. They conducted an extensive outreach effort consisting of news releases, newspaper and magazine articles, E-mail blasts, social media, and printed brochures to make anglers aware of the website and to encourage them to report their landings. They also conducted special surveys to collect catch information from charter-for-hire trips from noon until as late as 8:00 pm. Through the special surveys they were hoping to get an estimate of charter-for-hire landings of red snapper during the federal season because their routine creel survey is not designed for such a short season. They also wanted to test the accuracy of self-reported angler landings and collect lengths of red snapper landed because only number caught were self-reported not lengths. Staff was present at the highest pressure sites for Gulf fishing activity every day of the federal 9-day season. They also collected meteorological data to identify fishable vs non-fishable days during the federal snapper season. Website reporting rates were 36% and 28% for private boat and charter-for-hire respectively. They had overwhelming support/participation by private sport-boat anglers and good support/participation by the charter-for-hire fleet. **Harry Blanchet** asked if there was any confusion between I-snapper and Texas reporting? **Jerry** pointed out that there could have been, but they were very comprehensive in explaining the program to the fishing public.

**Louisiana** – **Joey Shepard** stated that Louisiana's goal was to have their survey provide statistically significant recreational fisheries information to aid in the management of their valuable fishery resources. The saltwater component of their recreational fishery encompasses state waters including marsh habitat, bays, beaches and nearshore areas as well as the offshore federally managed waters of the EEZ. The survey was designed with a set of specific criteria including, increasing the speed with which data can be compiled into landings summaries, have a flexible design that is able to quickly respond to changing needs, provide information on area-specific harvest for all species landed by anglers, and maximize efficiency and minimize burden on anglers. In 2014 Louisiana incorporated recreational landings of red snapper into their general LA Creel survey. In their survey recreational landing estimates are calculated separately for the private boat and for-hire sectors and they utilize an access-point survey to collect harvest rate (concentrated at sites with higher offshore fishing efforts) and a phone/email survey to estimate total effort. They also, increased the precision of offshore effort estimates during the federal red snapper season by focusing increased effort on anglers with a recreational offshore landing permit and they concentrated biological sampling of red snapper during the federal season. With their survey they are able to get weekly estimates of landings to allow for in-season monitoring and to date they have landed ~500K pounds of red snapper. In comparison, NMFS projected LA to land ~800K pounds in 2014. They stratify their

survey as inshore and offshore and implemented a recreational offshore landing permit which they feel makes their survey much more precise than the current way it is being monitored by NMFS. In their effort survey they had a 62% success rate for private angler and a 73% success rate in the for-hire sector. Their biological sampling program is weighted to the areas where the majority of the red snapper are landed. **Richard Cody** asked what are the concerns with combining intercept survey and biological sampling? **Joey** stated that their samplers have a set number of intercepts they have to make per day and are not required to get biological samples; however if time allows, they are encouraged to do so. This allows LA to still get length and weight frequencies per day.

**Mississippi** – **Matt Hill** reported that Mississippi used a survey with 8 questions to collect catch information from recreational anglers during the 2014 season. The captain of each recreational vessel was asked to complete the survey for each trip that targeted red snapper, even if no snapper were landed. There were several ways this information could be reported, online with use of a web survey, catch cards, a smartphone app, and surveyors were available at select ramps and marinas with catch cards to collect the information directly. Surveyors conducted biological sampling every day during the federal season at sites that were predetermined to have the highest probability of intercepting offshore fishing trips. Their main priority was to collect as many weight and length measurements of red snapper as possible; however, if time permitted and the anglers had no objections, otoliths were also collected. They also incorporated an aerial survey covering approximately 900 square miles of areas where red snapper harvest was likely, to conduct vessel counts in order to generate daily effort estimates. Moreover, they conducted a vessel survey covering approximately 1000 square miles that focused on areas outside the limitations of the aerial survey. This survey provided managers the data to develop correction factors and apply these to the effort numbers provided in the aerial survey. The validation portion of their program consisted of dockside interviews, at-sea observations, enforcement reports, trailer counts at selected docks, and e-mail messaging and phone interviews were used for data reported on the catch cards. One of the major concerns they encountered with this program, is that over 50% of Mississippi's offshore anglers land at private access sites, which makes validation difficult. Matt pointed out that they are currently working on a mandatory reporting program for 2015 which would require an offshore landing permit. All permits will have an associated authorization code and the code will only be good for one day and must be reported on even if the trip doesn't occur. A new authorization code will only be generated once the existing code has been reported on. They are currently proposing this to be a no cost permit.

**Alabama** – **Karon Aplin** stated that in Alabama captains of recreational vessels were required to report any harvested red snapper prior to landing fish in Alabama. They had several methods available for captains to report their catch, a smartphone app ("Snapper Check"), online at outdooralabama.com, via a toll-free number (1-844-REDSNAP), or by paper catch cards which was available at select public boat launches. They utilized a large scale outreach campaign to get the word out about this mandatory reporting requirement prior to the start of the red snapper season. They also had an extensive report validation procedure including dockside surveys conducted by MRD staff asking the same questions required on the report. Staff would also collect biological data (weights and lengths) of landed red snapper to determine the average weight of harvested fish. MRD conservation enforcement officers also collected validation data from vessels while on patrol, both on-the-water and on shore. From their validation efforts, they were able to develop a non-reporting correction factor and adjust the number of reported landed fish by this factor in order to get the total

estimated number of landed red snapper for the state. The app was the most popular reporting method with 59% of the reporters using it, and based on their feedback it was also the least burdensome to use. Over 2300 fish were measured and weighed during the federal season. They are looking to intensify their outreach efforts in 2015 to increase reporting compliance for the private vessel trips which was only at 40% this season. In 2014 Alabama's program and the NMFS' MRIP program were run simultaneously. The Alabama program estimated 417,526 pounds of red snapper were landed through June, were as the MRIP program estimates that 1,041,121 pounds were landed. **Richard Cody** asked, was there any difference in the quality of data received from the different reporting methods. **Karon** stated that they didn't compare the different methods. **Bob Zales** ask if the difference between the AL estimate and MRIP was do to underestimating the average size or the effort. **Chris Blankenship** replied that the average weight was almost the same between the two systems, so the difference is in the estimation of the effort.

**Florida** – **Richard Cody** stated that Florida isn't as far along in the development of their program as the other states in the Gulf and is still in the pilot stage. For the recreational sector of the red snapper fishery they are looking to augment the existing MRIP program with increased dockside private boat catch biosampling and increased private boat effort surveys. To gather more effort data they are looking at a smartphone app, mail, and an online reporting option. Their main goals for their program to assess private boat catch is that it is compatible with MRIP without replacing MRIP and that it has a dockside angler intercept component that combines catch survey data collection with biosampling. They are also planning on focusing their sampling efforts on MRIP sites that have a higher percentage of offshore fishing trips. During the 2014 red snapper season they weighed their sampling into the first part of wave 4 to better capture the nine day federal season and they doubled their for-hire telephone survey calls. In 2015 they are going to continue with an augmented MRIP sampling program. In 2014 Florida introduced a voluntary offshore permit that will be mandatory in 2015 in order to fish for 15 offshore species which will provide the basis for their sample frame for the effort component of their program next year. This will more clearly define their sampling universe. Initially, they plan to use this list to assess the demographics of the people that are signing up for the permit and use this information to increase efficiency of sampling and possibly account for non-response factors. They are currently developing a list of offshore sites to be used to develop the "offshore sample frame". They are also looking at MRIP complimentary options that they can add to their program like to targeted phone/Mail survey of permit holders.

**Oyster Hatchery Discussion** - **Chris Nelson** stated that there are two main issues to discuss, the use of hatcheries to supplement Gulf oyster reef restoration efforts and what boundaries exist for transporting oyster larvae produced at these hatcheries across state lines for the purpose of transplanting in another states along the Gulf. Chris pointed out that the production on public reefs is at an all-time low and they are reaching a critical point. There are two things keeping the industry propped up, the Louisiana lease production and imports from Maryland. Washington State is also producing a large amount of oysters through aquaculture. Gulf oyster industry council is proposing the establishment of one or two mega Gulf oyster hatcheries that have the capacity to produce 50 – 100 billion eyed larvae per year. Hatcheries give you flexibility in the stocking of oysters by producing spat at a known time which allows managers to conduct reef restoration efforts at the most opportune time of year to provide for the best survival of the oysters. They need a facility 10 times larger than current facilities in the Gulf and are estimating a budget of \$130 million over a 10

year program which works out to be about \$800/acre of restored oyster reef. **Chris Denson** ask what species they are looking to produce? **Chris Nelson** stated that they are looking to produce diploid eastern oysters. **Randy Pausina** stated that in 2009-2010 they had the same idea to supplement bad natural spat set years and they got a \$3 million grant to build an oyster production facility from oil spill restoration funds. Randy also pointed out that LA has been doing this same thing on a smaller scale for 4-5 years so it may be better to have a separate meeting with the people in LA that have been doing this. **Chris Denson** asked if they have noticed a difference in their survival or harvest since starting their stock enhancement program. **Harry Blanchet** said they do have some studies that show some success, but off the top of his head, can't say if it has increased survivability to harvest size. It is very hard to track the impact from stocking larvae or spat because it is hard to tease apart from the native stocks natural reproduction. **Chris Nelson** asked the group to think about the amount of money that has been spent on putting cultch out and if the states find it useful to deploy cultch then it would be more useful to put out cultch with oyster spat already on it. **Harry Blanchet** stated that they need to more fully flush this out and have all the options available to fully understand this problem. **Chris Denson** asked how far can you transport spat? **Chris Nelson** said the hatchery would ship eyed larvae to strategically located facilities that would set the larvae on cultch for local deployment. The proposed budget incorporates the large hatcheries to produce the eyed larvae, setting facilities, and cultch materials. You also have to have a nursery site to harden the spat onto the cultch material to get it ready for deployment which takes about one month.

a. **Establishment of a Gulf Regional Oyster Hatchery**

**Chris Denson** asked the group if this is something they are interested in moving forward to the full Commission? **Harry Blanchet** stated he would like to have more details first and would like to know the cost benefits of this kind of program and at this time he is not comfortable with making a recommendation. **Chris Nelson** stated that he was just looking to see if the states were onboard with the Commission pulling together all the information and developed proposals on this proposed project and move this effort forward through e-mail with the member states before the March meeting because this is time sensitive if we are going to go after pots of money that are currently available. **After this thorough discussion about several aspects of this proposed project, it was the consensus of the TCC to continue this discussion at the Commission Business meeting.**

b. **Uniform Interstate Protocol for Transplanting Gulf Oyster Hatchery Larvae**

**Chris Nelson** proposed that the TCC produce a police document for the Commission on transportation of oyster larvae across state lines for the purpose of transplanting, that could be used by the five Gulf states. He pointed out that if the Commission could develop a document that was approved and adopted across the Gulf, it would be easier and more standardized than having each state develop their own document. **Chris Denson** asked Steve if this is something the Oyster Task Force could develop from the information they collected for the FMP. **Steve VanderKooy** stated it is something the group could do if the TCC wanted to direct them to. **The TCC charged staff with reconvening the Oyster task force with the charge of compiling what is known about transplanting oyster hatchery larvae in the five Gulf States.** **John Mareska** asked Steve to make sure the task force addresses the nursery component of the program and the possible regulations affecting holding time and when hardened spat could be deployed onto public reefs in the development of their white paper.

## Discussion of IJF Program

### a. FMP Revisions – Steve VanderKooy

#### • **Final Action on Menhaden FMP**

**Harry Blanchet** stated that he prefers to remove the management objective “to establish standardized aging programs for fisheries independent samples by 2015”. He stated that it is something that should be done for a few years until the question about the age composition of the adult population is known for the SEDAR process and then stopped. Therefor it is a technical issue and not a management objective. **Joe Smith** stated that their staff that is currently doing aging is going to be retiring and this objective was to get the states more involved with aging fisheries independent samples. **Chris Denson** asked if they could just reword the management objective to read “to establish standardized aging programs by 2015 in the Gulf region for Gulf Menhaden”. **Joe Jewell made a motion to approve the FMP as amended and pass it on to the State Federal Fisheries Management Committee. The motion passed unanimously.**

#### • **Status of Blue Crab FMP**

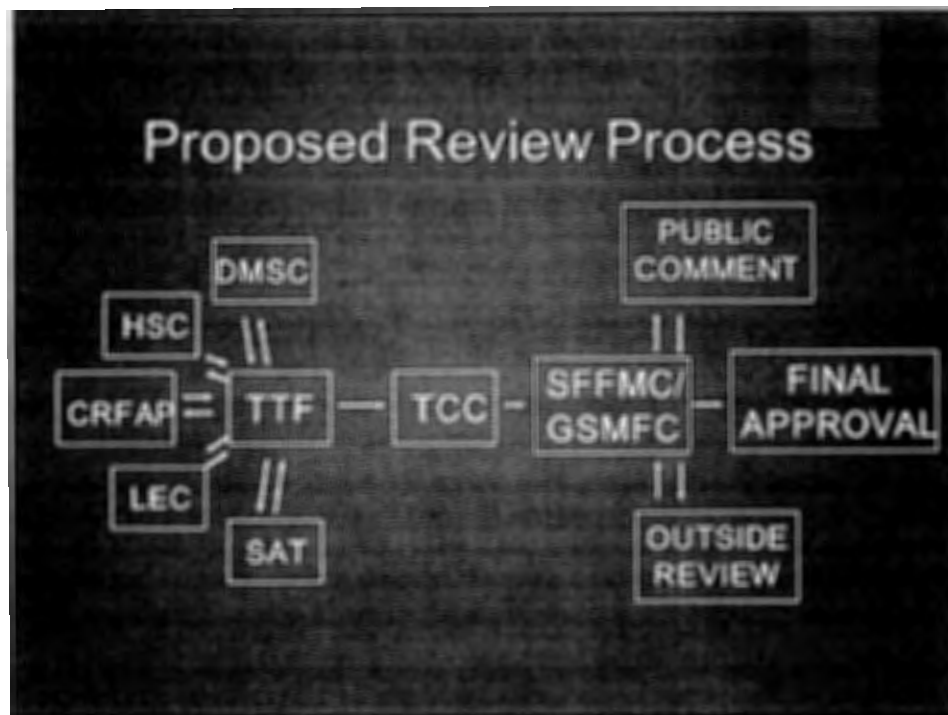
**Steve VanderKooy** ask how long the group would need to review the Blue Crab FMP? The TCC agreed to have their comments back to Steve by December 1<sup>st</sup>.

#### • **Status of Flounder FMP**

**Steve VanderKooy** stated that he will be sending the Flounder FMP out to the TCC in the next few week and the comments will be due in the middle of January. The TCC agreed to that deadline.

### b. IJF Review Process

**Steve VanderKooy** asked if the TCC would be amenable in changing the FMP review process by combining the SFFMC/GSMFC reviews into one review. The TCC agreed.



## **Subcommittee Reports**

**Data Management** – **Vince Cefalu** stated that Claude Petersen gave a presentation providing an update to the new unified trip ticket program which included a review of the basic system design, storage options, data flow and security. There are still concerns that Louisiana has with selecting Microsoft Azure cloud as the primary storage system for the commercial trip ticket database. Bluefin is also exploring the feasibility of developing and maintaining an SQL server onsite, in case all state partners do not agree to use Microsoft Azure. Andrew Petersen then provided login information and demonstration of the administration website that states will use to manage their non-confidential reference tables that support the dealer interface

Billy Guste gave a presentation of a tool GCR has created using commercial trip ticket data to assist in management and outreach using GIS based reports. This tool allows Louisiana to produce GIS maps and reports of landings and dockside product values over small geographic regions such as parish or voting districts.

Michael Kelly gave a presentation of the Thorium Mobile VMS tool that is currently being used on vessels worldwide. This product allows for the development of electronic forms that can be sent to vessels allowing for instant outreach and also provides data entry capabilities. Data can also be transmitted through options other than satellite such as cellular data and customized e-logbooks.

Gregg Bray provided two versions of a letter FIN has generated in response to the recommendations from a peer review of data that feeds into the SEFSC assessment and management process. One version is basically a summary letter and the second provides more detail with regard to specific recommendations provided from the peer review. The subcommittee will be given a couple weeks to review the peer review report and both response letters before selecting a version to send to the FIN Committee in March 2015.

In the afternoon the subcommittee reviewed commercial landings estimates collected in 2013. No major issues were identified. Some minor corrections will be made regarding incorrect species codes.

Additional discussion was held regarding the new electronic commercial trip ticket program. Many issues and concerns raised by the states were discussed by representatives from Bluefin Data. Bluefin is continuing to work on the administration website and will begin work on the dealer interface for Florida, Mississippi, and Texas in the near future. Bluefin hopes to have the first versions available for testing by spring of 2015.

**Chris Denson** added that it was pointed out that there has been a delay in getting word to the Commission that state's biological data has been cleaned and is free of errors.

**John Mareska made a motion to accept the report as presented, and it passed unanimously.**

**SEAMAP** – **John Mareska** reported that the Gulf SEAMAP subcommittee met in July to begin to address the standardization request by the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council. Trawl, plankton, environmental and vertical/bottom longline surveys protocols were reviewed and a motion



was passed where by all partners must use the standardized gears, protocols and design for SEAMAP activities.

MOTION: In response to the motion passed unanimously by the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council at its April 2014 meeting, the SEAMAP-Gulf Subcommittee hereby establishes a requirement that all SEAMAP-Gulf partners must adhere to standardized SEAMAP protocols for surveys which utilize SEAMAP funding.

In conjunction with that motion, all partners were asked to complete a spreadsheet listing all aspects of each survey to be discussed at this October subcommittee meeting.

Review of the standardization spreadsheet was conducted for trawl, plankton and environmental data and they found that the procedures were standardized for the most part. A Motion was made for Texas to begin using the 42' SEAMAP trawl in lieu of their 20' trawl.

Motion: SEAMAP Subcommittee recognizes the discrepancy in Texas' trawl survey gear and methodologies and requires either conforming to standard SEAMAP protocols and gears or reallocating their SEAMAP funds to other SEAMAP surveys that utilize standard gears and protocols by June 1, 2015.

The motion was strongly objected to by Texas partner. Video surveys, bottom longline and vertical line surveys are still being standardized, but are currently different due to differences in habitat and species being sampled Gulf-wide.

SEAMAP convened a workshop in the beginning of this month for the vertical and bottom longline surveys. Preliminary discussions of standardizing site selection, seasonality of sampling, habitat classification, stratification by depth of surveys, use of video and verification of the identification of species was conducted. Proposed methods for selecting and stratifying sites for the vertical and bottom longline were drafted and discussed during this meeting.

In review of the vertical line survey, habitat classifications were discussed with minor changes recommended to coding and improved definitions for some classifications (e.g. ship what size is it). Gangion length and depth stratification were agreed upon (20-40, 40-60, 60-150m). Site selection methodology for the vertical line was incorporated into the manual as a working draft, where sites will be stratified by depth and habitat types (natural, artificial, rigs).

After many reviews to the Trawl and Plankton manual, the subcommittee is making final edits and should have an updated version soon.

Gary Fitzhugh gave a presentation on standardization of laboratory processing and archiving of fish samples. Bar coding technology should increase accuracy of archiving and retrieving samples.

A review of each states detailed SEAMAP budget was requested and it turned out that they were not standardized. Each state was asked to modify their budget to be survey specific. This will be helpful in detailing request for future increases to SEAMAP funding and discussed early next year.

SEAMAP Fall trawl surveys have been completed for MS and LA. FL sampling is currently underway. AL will conduct theirs in late October and TX is scheduled for early November.

John Mareska was re-elected as chair and Fernando Martinez elected as vice-chair for the upcoming year.

**A motion to accept the report was moved by Harry Blanchet, and passed without opposition.**

**Crab** – Steve VanderKooy stated that the Subcommittee members reported on their own states activities related to diamondback terrapins in preparation of putting together a white paper on the status in the Gulf. In the big picture, there are not a lot of interactions and some of the states that have been looking at bycatch in crab traps are identifying hotspots. There is not a lot of population data in the Gulf but there are some small limited datasets. In Florida, they have identified some locations where there were higher levels of occurrence such as along the north-eastern coast. To begin pulling the known data and sources together for the white paper, the subcommittee is looking at meeting jointly in Feb 2015 with the Gulf Coast Terrapin Working Group in Lafayette LA. If the timing works and the IJF program can provide travel, the subcommittee will have a separate breakout to cover a few of their routine subcommittee items and then not meet at the Spring Annual Meeting. With approval, Steve will work with Christina Mohrman (Grand Bay NERR) to coordinate the joint effort.

Dr. Zack Darnell of Nicholls State University provided a presentation/proposal to tag female blue crabs to begin to estimate the offshore component of the species. Darnell is ready to begin a Gulf-wide mark-recapture network starting this spring assuming he can find funding. He is proposing an initial release of 10,000 tagged crabs from TX, LA, MS, and FL. If the project gets supported, he will provide tags to the state agencies who've agreed to assist opportunistically. The long-term plan would be to have additional releases made in more locations. A \$5 reward will encourage the return of data.

TX and LA are planning to host a derelict trap cleanup in Sabine Lake this coming February. FL is currently holding cleanups along their western coastline but there aren't any current numbers for this year. MS isn't intending to hold a cleanup in 2015 but continue to monitor trap numbers.

It was suggested that the subcommittee might move to a more 'annual' face-to-face meeting with the current funding issues at the state level. The group would meet remotely or via webinar prior to one of the two meetings but deliver a report to the regular TCC session. Steve reported that the fall meeting in 2015 would be a joint meeting with the ASMFC and might be a good opportunity to get the Gulf crab folks to meet with the South Atlantic invertebrate folks. Ryan Gandy would help coordinate if this was something that was approved.

Ryan Gandy was re-elected as chair for the upcoming year.

**Richard Cody made a motion to accept the report as presented, and it passed unanimously.**

**Artificial Reef** – **James Ballard** stated that the Subcommittee has not held a meeting since the last report; however, they are continuing to work with ASMFC's Artificial Reef Subcommittee to revise and update their 2004 publication of "*Guidelines for Marine Artificial Reef Materials: Second Edition*". The progress of this revision and the time-line for completing it, will be discussed at the Joint Artificial Reef Subcommittee meeting in January 2015 that will be held in conjunction with the 2015 Florida Artificial Reef Summit. The Subcommittee is also moving forward with the Gulf Artificial Reef Monitoring and Assessment Program and hopes to conduct a pilot test of the standardized sampling protocol, developed for this new program, next year.

**A motion to accept the report was moved by Mark Schexnayder, and passed without opposition.**

#### **State/Federal Reports**

Written reports were provided to the TCC members the week prior to the meeting and hard copies were incorporated in the meeting folders. **During the meeting, Chris Denson made a motion to dispense with the reports in the interest of time, which passed without opposition. To see the full reports that were provided to the TCC, please see the minutes from the Commission Business meeting held on Wednesday, October 15, 2014.**

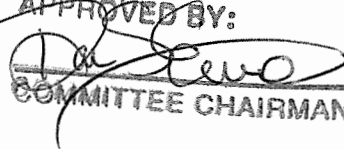
#### **Election of Officers**

Chris Denson was reelected at Chair and Dan Ellinor was reelected as Vice Chair.

**With no further business to discuss, Chris Denson adjourned the meeting at 5:25 p.m.**

**COMMISSION BUSINESS MEETING  
MINUTES**

**Wednesday, October 15, 2014  
Gulfport, Mississippi**

APPROVED BY:  
  
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**Chairman R. Pausina** called the meeting to order at 8:41 a.m.

**D. Donaldson** gave a brief overview of Commission voting procedures.

The following Commissioners and/or Proxies were present:

**Commissioners**

Randy Pausina, *Chairman*, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA (*Proxy for Robert Barham*)  
Michael Hansen, Tallahassee, FL  
Dan Ellinor, FWC, Tallahassee, FL (*Proxy for Nick Wiley*)  
Chris Blankenship, ADCNR/MRD, Gulf Shores, AL (*Proxy for Gunter Guy*)  
Chris Nelson, Bon Secour Fisheries, Bon Secour, AL  
Brett Allain, Franklin, Louisiana  
Camp Matens, Baton Rouge, LA  
Lance Robinson, TPWD, Dickinson, TX (*Proxy for Carter Smith*)  
Troy Williamson, Corpus Christi, TX  
Brice Wiggins, Pascagoula, MS  
Kelly Lucas, MSDMR, Biloxi, MS (*Proxy for Jamie Miller*)

**Staff**

Dave Donaldson, *Executive Director*, Ocean Springs, MS  
Nancy Marcellus, *Administrative Officer*, Ocean Springs, MS  
Chery Noble, *Administrative Assistant*, Ocean Springs, MS  
Steve VanderKooy, *IJF Program Coordinator*, Ocean Springs, MS  
Jeff Rester, *SEAMAP/Habitat Coordinator*, Ocean Springs, MS  
Gregg Bray, *FIN Program Manager*, Ocean Springs, MS  
Joe Ferrer, *Systems Administrator*, Ocean Springs, MS  
Ralph Hode, *Fisheries Disaster Recovery Coordinator*, Ocean Springs, MS  
James Ballard, *Sport Fish Restoration/Aquatic Invasive Coordinator*, Ocean Springs, MS  
Alex Miller, *Economic Program Coordinator*, Ocean Springs, MS  
Angie Rabideau, *Staff Accountant*, Ocean Springs, MS  
Ali Catchot, *Staff Assistant*, Ocean Springs, MS

**Others**

Glenn Constant, USFWS, Baton Rouge, LA  
Ron Lukens, Omega Protein Corporation, High Springs, FL  
Chris Denson, ADCNR/MRD, Gulf Shores, AL  
Bryan Fluech, FL Sea Grant, Naples, FL  
Miles Croom, NOAA Fisheries/SERO, St. Petersburg, FL  
Paul Doremus, NOAA Fisheries, Silver Spring, MS

Jason Froeba, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Jaime Peña, Gladys Porter Zoo, Brownsville, TX  
Benny Galloway, LGL Ecological Research Associates, Inc., College Station, TX  
Harlon Pearce, LA Fish, Kenner, Louisiana  
Joe Jewell, MS DMR, Biloxi, MS  
Dru Winters, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Dave Burrage, MS-AL Sea Grant, Biloxi, MS  
Joanne Zartisky, GSAFF, Tampa, FL  
Mark Schexnayder, LDWF, New Orleans, LA  
Tabitha Lindley, Omega Protein Corporation, Houston, TX  
Emily Muehlstein, GMFMC, Tampa, FL  
Peter Nguyen, MS-AL Sea Grant, Biloxi, MS  
Benedict Posados, MS-AL Sea Grant, Biloxi, MS  
Karl Wulf, Daybrook Fisheries, Empire, LA  
Emily Posner, Recirculating Farms Coalition, New Orleans, LA

### **Adoption of Agenda**

**D. Donaldson** asked to add two items to the Agenda. After Agenda Item 10, add *Discussion of Ranking of the GSMFC Programs* and add *Discussion of the Legislative Committee* under Other Business. He also asked to move Item 9, *NOAA Fisheries Update*, after Item 5 due to travel arrangements. **C. Blankenship** moved to adopt the agenda as amended. **L. Robinson** seconded and the agenda was adopted as amended with no opposition.

### **Approval of Minutes**

**T. Williamson** moved to approve the minutes of the Commission Business Session held on March 19, 2014. **L. Robinson** seconded the motion and the minutes were approved with no opposition.

**C. Blankenship** moved to approve the minutes of the State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee held on August 19, 2014. **L. Robinson** seconded the motion and the minutes were approved with no opposition.

### **Public Comment**

There was no public comment.

### **GSMFC Standing Committee Reports**

#### **Law Enforcement Committee**

**S. VanderKooy** stated the Law Enforcement Committee will meet next week at the Council meeting as a joint meeting with their Law Enforcement Advisory Panel. He stated the Committee worked on revising the Joint Operations Plan for 2015-2016 and the draft copy is in the

Commissioner's handouts. He stated all items that have been changed or added are highlighted. He asked the Commission to adopt the Plan so they may take this to the Council next week for their consideration.

**R. Pausina** informed the Commission that Louisiana's Commission has approved a new rule or notice of intent that they will be bringing to the Law Enforcement Committee. He said there is a water locked public marina located south of Venice they are asking if a person(s) can show receipt that they have stayed at the marina, they will be allowed up to a 3 day possession limit and allowed to transport their catch up river to their vehicle. He said they asked for the Council's and HMS Team's blessing but their feedback was to take it to the Law Enforcement Committee.

**C. Blankenship** moved to approve the Cooperative Law Enforcement Operations Plan. **L. Robinson** seconded the motion and the motion passed with no opposition.

#### **Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC)**

**C. Denson** reported each state provided a thorough overview of their red snapper monitoring programs including the methods being utilized and procedures being used to validate the data that was being reported. The general consensus was that public participation was welcomed although many states noted there needs to be an increase in effort for outreach to encourage higher participation. For most of the reports that had landings estimates calculated, those estimates were greatly lower than what NOAA had estimated through their MRIP program. Most of the states are still going through their data and reviewing it and some states are in consultation with NOAA in reviewing their data.

**C. Denson** reported that C. Nelson stated the production on public oyster reefs is very low and the fishery is reaching a critical point. He pointed out that there are two things keeping the industry propped up: the oyster production coming off leases in Louisiana, and imports from Maryland. Washington State is also producing a large amount of oysters through aquaculture. C. Nelson also stated that the Gulf needs to start taking lessons from the other coasts, and the Gulf Oyster Industry Council is in favor of establishing a Gulf hatchery. He asked the TCC if they were in favor of having the commission pursue the possibility of establishing a Gulf regional oyster hatchery. He pointed out that this is time sensitive to utilize funding sources that are currently available. **C. Denson** reported that after a lengthy discussion about several aspects of this proposed project, it was the consensus of the TCC to continue the discussion at the Commission Business meeting.

**C. Denson** reported there were also discussions of whether it was feasible or not to transport oyster larvae produced in one state through other states for planting on their public reefs. He stated C. Nelson requested the TCC to produce a policy document for the Commission on the transportation of oyster larvae across state lines for those purposes. The TCC charged the staff with convening the Oyster Task Force with the purpose of compiling what it known about transplanting and transporting oyster larvae across the five Gulf States.

**C. Denson** reported S. VanderKooy provided a brief overview of the Menhaden FMP final revisions and stated there was concern on the wording of one of the objectives. After discussions,

a motion was passed with no opposition to approve the Menhaden FMP after changing the wording of one of the objectives to state “to establish standardized aging programs by 2015 in the Gulf region for Gulf Menhaden.” The Menhaden FMP will now be submitted to the State Federal Fisheries Management Committee for their review.

**C. Denson** reported S. VanderKooy provided the Committee updates on the Blue Crab and Flounder FMP. The Committee agreed to provide comments to S. VanderKooy on the Blue Crab FMP by December 1<sup>st</sup> and by mid-January for the Founder FMP.

**C. Denson** reported that S. VanderKooy asked if the TCC would be amenable in changing the review process of FMPs by combining the State Federal Fisheries Management Committee and full Commission reviews into a single review. The TCC agreed to this process. **S. VanderKooy** then gave a brief presentation on the proposed new IJF Review Process. *The Commission agreed to accept the new process with no opposition.*

More in-depth discussion on these topics are in the Technical Coordinating Committee minutes.

#### **Data Management Subcommittee**

**C. Denson** reported Claude Petersen gave a presentation providing an update to the new unified trip ticket program which included a review of the basic system design, storage options, data flow and security. He said Andrew Petersen then provided login information and demonstration of the administration website that states will use to manage their non-confidential reference tables that support the dealer interface. Then Billy Guste gave a presentation of a tool GCR has created using commercial trip ticket data to assist in management and outreach using GIS based reports. This tool allows Louisiana to produce GIS maps and reports of landings and dockside product values over small geographic regions such as parish or voting districts. The final presentation was given by Michael Kelly on the Thorium Mobile VMS tool that is currently being used on vessels worldwide. This product allows for the development of electronic forms that can be sent to vessels allowing for instant outreach, and also provides data entry capabilities. Data can also be transmitted through options other than satellite, such as cellular data and customized e-logbooks that can be provided to vessels.

#### **SEAMAP Subcommittee**

**C. Denson** reported John Mareska stated that the Gulf SEAMAP subcommittee met in July and began to address a standardization request by the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council. Trawl, plankton, environmental and vertical/bottom longline surveys protocols were reviewed and a motion was passed where by all partners must use the standardized gears, protocols and design for SEAMAP activities. In conjunction with that motion, all partners were asked to complete a spreadsheet listing all aspects of each survey to be discussed at this October subcommittee meeting. In conjunction with the motion, all partners were asked to complete a spreadsheet listing all aspects of each survey to be discussed at this October subcommittee meeting.

The SEAMAP Subcommittee reviewed the standardization spreadsheet during yesterday’s meeting and determined the trawl, plankton and environmental data were standardized for the most

part. A motion was passed for Texas to begin using the 42' SEAMAP trawl in lieu of their 20' trawl. The motion was strongly objected to by the Texas partner. Video surveys, bottom longline and vertical line surveys are still being standardized, but are currently different due to differences in habitat and species being sampled.

SEAMAP convened a workshop in the beginning of this month for the vertical and bottom long line surveys. Preliminary discussions of standardizing site selection, seasonality of sampling, habitat classification, stratification by depth of surveys, use of video and verification of the identification of species was conducted. Proposed methods for selecting and stratifying sites for the vertical and bottom longline were drafted and discussed during this meeting.

John Mareska was re-elected Chair and Fernando Martinez was elected Vice Chair.

### **Crab Subcommittee**

**C. Denson** reported that S. VanderKooy gave an overview of the Crab Subcommittee. He stated that subcommittee members reported on their own state activities related to Diamondback terrapins in preparation for putting together a white paper on the status in the Gulf. He said overall there are not a lot of interactions and some of the states that have been looking at bycatch in crab traps are identifying hotspots. To begin pulling the known data and sources together for the white paper, the subcommittee is planning to meet jointly in February 2015 with the Gulf Coast Terrapin Working Group in Lafayette, LA.

Dr. Zack Darnell of Nicholls State University provided a presentation/proposal to tag female blue crabs to begin to estimate the offshore component of the species. Z. Darnell is ready to begin a Gulf-wide mark-recapture network starting this spring assuming he receives funding. He is proposing an initial release of 10,000 tagged crabs from Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Florida. If the project gets supported, he will provide tags to the state agencies who have agreed to assist opportunistically with him. In the long-term plan, there would be additional releases made in more locations. A \$5 reward will encourage the return of data.

Ryan Gandy was reelected Chair.

### **Artificial Reef Subcommittee**

**C. Denson** reported James Ballard stated that the Subcommittee is continuing to revise and update their 2004 publication of "*Guidelines for Marine Artificial Reef Materials: Second Edition.*" The progress of this revision and the time-line for completing it will be discussed at the Joint Artificial Reef Subcommittee meeting in January 2015 that will be held in conjunction with the 2015 Florida Artificial Reef Summit.

C. Denson was reelected Chair of the TCC and D. Ellinor was reelected Vice Chair.

**R. Pausina** asked if there were any questions or comments about the TCC Report. **M. Hansen** stated in reference to the red snapper survey, he would like to know what the findings mean. He said it was reported they caught fewer than NOAA estimated, and asked what does that tell us. Who made the mistake and what was the significance of that? **R. Pausina** stated it is yet to be determined. **M. Hansen** stated so they are counted and it is estimated how many will be caught, and the number is different, why count them when they get the results they do not know what to do with them? Is there a plan here? He said from coming from the outside and looking at this it is a total mystery to him what they are doing in counting these fish and trying to figure out who



can catch them when they do not know what the results mean. He stated it is very perplexing for someone on the outside.

**C. Blankenship** addressed the issue from Alabama's perspective. He said they did feel the current MRIP system was not accurate. They implemented a system in Alabama so they would have comparable data. There was a discrepancy between the MRIP data and the data that was collected in Alabama so now they are in the process of working with NMFS to calibrate one of their surveys or look at the differences between the two to try to determine which one is more correct. The red snapper season was finished in June and Alabama has their results and NMFS had their results in late August, so they are in the process of working with NMFS to see how they will be able to use these numbers and which one is correct, and he said he thinks other states are doing that as well. It is not as quick as all would like it to be once they found there was some disparity in the numbers.

**R. Pausina** said the same thing is happening in Louisiana. He said in January they will run side by side surveys to try to tease out what the issues are and calibrate the state survey and the federal MRIP survey. He said they found that on the charter side of things the numbers were somewhat comparable to the MRIP, but the gorilla in the room is the recreational side of things and managing the recreational and properly accounting for their take they saw the same discrepancies that Alabama and most of the other states saw as well. So it is methodology, there are several ways to survey this group and there will be different results so it takes time to tease it out and to figure out what actually is the issue and what numbers are more accurate or precise. It is all being done and after hearing the reports at the meeting yesterday everybody is working hard in that direction but, unfortunately, it takes time. **C. Blankenship** stated NOAA is working in good faith with the states to try to come to some resolution. **C. Matens** stated M. Hansen is not the only person in the room who is perplexed.

**M. Hansen** stated when one considers the economic impact of the decision making process on so many people and their livelihoods this is a very serious decision. Either one or two things must be the result. Either there are fewer fish than they thought since fewer were caught or it is not known how many fish there are but the fishing methods are less effective than they thought. In any scientific approach some discussion or thought beforehand is need so that when they get the results, they know what they mean. It is hard to listen to this because they are basically saying they did this but do not know the outcome, when there is such a huge economic impact. To see the season shorten to nine days and now it will probably be shorter, the impact that has based on such an imprecise science, people outside get very frustrated by that and they are wondering if there is some rational process for regulating this resource. It would be nice if somehow that could be clarified. Whoever is responsible should give people a better understanding of the process. Everybody does want to protect the resource but access should not be denied based on imprecise science, that does not serve anybody well.

**R. Pausina** asked if there were anymore comments on the TCC report and if not is there a motion to accept the report. **C. Matens moved to accept the Menhaden FMP as amended and pass to the State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee for their review and he also moved to accept the TCC Report. L. Robinson seconded the motion and the motion passed with no opposition.**

**C. Nelson** stated at the TCC meeting he gave a brief introduction of an ideal that the Gulf Oyster Industry Council in cooperation with Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium is proposing to restore the public oyster reefs around the Gulf to a level of production they feel will be necessary to continue to support the Gulf Coast Oyster Industry. They propose to build a large mega scale oyster hatchery that would produce on the order of 50 billion eyed larvae per year and potentially two such hatcheries over the course of 10 years. They estimate spending \$130 M over the next 10 years to construct these hatcheries and to construct the oyster setting operations to be strategically placed around the gulf coast in proximity to the public natural wild oyster reefs to use the hatchery. More details of the proposal are in the TCC minutes. **C. Nelson** feels they need to act now due to the opportunity of utilizing money from the restoration funds that will be available

**R. Pausina** stated Louisiana built an oyster hatchery near the new research facility in Grand Isle. He stated if it is the Commission's pleasure Louisiana will provide a report/presentation on their facility and how it operates.

*After lengthy discussion, C. Nelson moved to direct the Commission staff to work with the Gulf Oyster Industry Council and the States' fisheries managers to develop details of a proposal for the establishment of a large regional oyster hatchery for the purposes of enhancing and restoring the natural oyster population along the gulf coast. K. Lucas seconded and the motion passed with no opposition.*

**C. Nelson** stated if a hatchery system is approved they will also have to address the movement of hatchery products. J. Ballard emailed the Commissioners a copy of the Louisiana protocols on transporting the products for reference to use in establishing Commission protocols.

### **State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee**

#### **Menhaden Advisory Committee (MAC)**

**R. Lukens** reported the MAC met October 14, 2014 and J. Smith reviewed the 2014 fishing season to date. Through the end of September, the industry harvested 329,595 mt of menhaden in the Gulf which was down 21% from 2013 and 25% from the previous 5 year average. The start of the season was slow with high winds through June and catches were the lowest on record since 1958. Fish finally started to show west of the Mississippi River in early July and catches were good on both sides of the River through August. Catches were fair in September and October. The oil yield was fair, better than 2011 and 2012 and the price of meal and oil was relatively high throughout the summer. Only three plants operated in 2014 with Cameron closing at the end of last year. A total of 31 vessels fished with 1 run boat and a single bait boat which fished around Abbeville. The forecast through the end of the year is expected to be around 380,000 mt, down 24% from the 2013 harvest and 25% from the previous 5 year mean. With the current effort and landings, it is forecasted that the 2015 season may see around 397,000 mt.

**R. Lukens** reported J. Smith also reported on the Atlantic fishing season. As of the end of September, Atlantic menhaden landings were 112,567 mt which was up 16% from 2013 but down

11% from the previous 5 year average. A total of eight Omega boats landed fish and two Virginia 'snapper' boats (bait vessels) also unloaded minor quantities, and two others landed for bait only. In New Jersey, 5-6 purse-seiners unloaded for bait as well. The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) is in the process of completing a benchmark assessment for menhaden after the 2012 update indicated some problems in the model. As a result, the Management Board imposed a new TAC that reflected a 20% reduction in coast wide harvest until the new assessment could be completed. The 170,800 mt TAC includes landings for both bait and reduction and 'shares' are distributed among the states based on historical percent contributions. As a result, Virginia received the largest share of 85% or 146,000 mt of which the reduction fishery could land 130,000 mt. The peer review for the new benchmark assessment is scheduled for December and the TAC should be reconsidered for the 2015 season.

**R. Lukens** stated J. Smith reported the Beaufort Lab had won a reprieve from the budget chopping block and expressed thanks for the support.

**R. Lukens** reported J. Mambretti and J. Smith reported on the Texas Cap. With the closure of the Cameron plant, there was very little fishing in Texas waters until later July and August and in a very limited amount. So far, the harvest from Texas waters is just under 1M lbs which is far below the cap.

**R. Lukens** reported H. Blanchet reported that the LDWF has not yet replaced the forecasting model but that the current sampling regimes were being evaluated for use in models in the future. He would continue to update the MAC on any progress. J. Mambretti noted that the Texas data indicated good recruitment this year.

**R. Lukens** reported M. Nuttall, a PhD student from the University of Miami presented his intended research which centers on the ecology of the gulf menhaden stock. Namely, the environmental drivers of Gulf menhaden, the influence of these stock dynamics on the northern GOM ecosystem, and any potential feedback between these stock and ecosystem dynamics. To this end, he and his major professor and co-PI have requested fishery independent data from the states similar to what was provided for the SEDAR. The states have now received their request and will be evaluating the project and determine agency ability to provide the data. The project is very much in the preliminary design phase, but M. Nuttall will return to the MAC with results as he proceeds in the future.

**R. Lukens** reported S. VanderKooy provided a short update on the status of the FMP draft and some potential changes to the Commission's review process which has already been approved by the Commission.

**R. Lukens reported** J. Smith discussed the issue with continued funding for port samplers in 2015. D. Donaldson provided an update that the Commission would be able to provide funding for the project another year with some available FIN funds but there needs to be a long-term solution to the funding issue.

**R. Lukens** reported S. VanderKooy and the MAC discussed the assessment schedule. The SEDAR steering committee wanted clarification on the next menhaden assessment and what the MAC needed in 2016 - another benchmark, a standard assessment, or just an update. After much discussion and under a recommendation by Dr. Amy Schueller, the MAC agreed that an update would probably be appropriate for 2016 but that if anything changed prior to the start, they could request a more detailed assessment.

**R. Lukens** reported there was a short public comment period and Emily Posner from Recirculating Farms noted that the lack of data concerning the effects of the DWH disaster on menhaden populations and the ecosystem was disturbing and she encouraged the group to work at ensuring that issues related to the spill were monitored. She voiced concern that the group continue to work towards developing predator/prey relationships that include menhaden and finally, she wanted the states to better monitor the bycatch in the industry and make that data available to the public.

Finally, the state of Alabama representative on the MAC, **John Mareska** was elected chair for 2015.

*L. Robinson moved to accept the MAC report. C. Blankenship seconded the motion and it passed with no opposition.*

#### **Commercial/Recreational Fisheries Advisory Panel (CRFAP)**

**S. VanderKooy** reported the CRFAP met October 13, 2014 with a quorum for the commercial panel only. The group was provided an overview of the NOAA OLE office closures by Special Agent in Charge of the Southeast Division Tracy Dunn via phone. T. Dunn explained the overall staffing plan that NOAA had developed a couple of years ago and explained that the review of OLE determined there were too many criminal investigators on staff. It was recommended that there be a total of 73 nationwide with only 10 for the Southeast. T. Dunn admitted that they are in a difficult transition period but with retirements which have already occurred, they are down to 22 investigators with the goal of 10. He reassured that the reduction wouldn't reduce the enforcement presence in the region, just the number of criminal investigators. They are planning to rehire in the future with additional enforcement officers rather than investigators. The panel voiced concern that this reduction and consolidation of offices is going to cause very serious enforcement problems. T. Dunn stated that the close proximity and daily interaction with the state agencies in these consolidated offices will help improve effectiveness but that ultimately, OLE has no choice in the matter.

**S. VanderKooy** reported D. Donaldson provided a short overview of the white paper related to the potential role of the Commission in red snapper management. The Panel asked if the Commission could take on the job and D. Donaldson noted that at this time, the Commission does not have the capability to do stock assessments and would need additional resources to do it. The document would be provided to the panel following the annual meeting.

**S. VanderKooy** reported Gordon Colvin gave an update on the Access Intercept Survey and the results of the recent calibration workshop. After survey methodology changes were implemented

in 2013, NOAA Fisheries analyses determined that changes in the temporal distribution of when angler interviews were obtained was the major factor in causing the changes observed in landings estimates. The calibration workgroup determined a need existed to calibrate new estimates with old and not create a break in the landings time series. Two ratio estimator methods were developed in the short term to allow for calibration of landings estimates for species that will undergo a stock assessment in the near future. A modeling approach was also recommended and will be utilized to calibrate older year's estimates to the new method estimates once a few more years of data are collected using the newer dockside survey methodology.

**S. VanderKooy** reported Jason Froeba gave a presentation on Louisiana Wild Seafood Certified Program's traceability pilot with Trace Register. With the Certification, any seafood products bearing the program logo must be proven to be from the Louisiana /Gulf of Mexico waters, landed, processed, and packaged in Louisiana. The program is voluntary and utilizes paper documentation at this time which is submitted to the LDWF. If a processor/dealer is determined to be using the logo falsely, the product can be seized, the user pays fines and faces prosecution under federal trademark laws. The tracking program uses the Gulf Seafood Trace software which was developed under the ODRP. At this time, the management agency has limited access to the information in the Trace software but it is used to provide landings validation. Every trace document possessing the LWSCP certificate must be tied to a trip ticket and the amount of certified seafood leaving the system cannot exceed the amount of eligible seafood coming into the system. The current system requires significant manual data entry but Trace Register is working on scannable labels which may be able to be automatically entered using hand held scanners or even smart phone apps.

**S. VanderKooy** reported A. Miller gave a presentation on Gulf FINFO. The site is intended to be both commercial and recreational but it is definitely focused more on the seafood industry. The panel suggested that more recreational info be included. It was noted that there are sustainable fishing opportunities throughout the Gulf and they should be highlighted as well.

The Commercial Panel reelected Phillip Horn as their chair. There was not a quorum for the Recreational Panel so the chairmanship remains the same.

***C. Matens moved to accept the C/RFAP report. M. Hansen seconded the motion and the motion passed with no opposition.***

### **NOAA Fisheries Budget Update**

**P. Doremus** provided a broad overview of the NOAA Fisheries Budget and stated M. Croom will be providing an update on specific regional fisheries management issues and related programs. **P. Doremus** reviewed the budget changes since 2005 and stated NOAA is actually operating below the FY2005 level when deflation is taken into account. He stated a large portion of the budget includes staff compensation and they have lost over 300 positions in their organization. He stated they are operating under a continuing resolution that funds them through December and have received the House and Senate marks for FY2015. He reviewed the specific programs funded by the House and Senate marks. He said that the House mark for fisheries is \$790.2M which is 5.6% below the request level. The Senate mark for fisheries is \$836.2M which is 0.1% less than the

request level. He noted both the House and Senate mark for the weather service is above the President's request. He reviewed the National Program Activities and NOAA Fisheries Priorities. He stated NOAA recognizes the need to have more collaboration in the future with the State Directors and the three Commissions to have more input on budget needs and requirements than they have had in the past. He stated the biggest change is steps were taken to completely revise the priorities and they did that based on national priorities and they took a very close look at the regional level on the research priorities articulated by the Councils and the Commissions and they redrafted the entire priority set with that in mind. The complete presentation may be obtained upon request from the GSMFC office.

**B. Wiggins** asked **P. Doremus** to explain the disconnect between the states and NOAA on the red snapper issue. **P. Doremus** stated this is a complex issue and answered he is not in the best position to give a detailed answer. He stated **R. Crabtree** and others could give more detail but he feels, from a national level, the fundamental issue is coming to terms with how to get statistically valid data on recreational fishing effort. NOAA is committed to working with the states to get that resolved. It is not an easy data collection and analytical process and there is certainly room for improvement. He said it is not from lack of commitment, it is a scientifically and organizationally complicated thing to fix and NOAA is committed to working aggressively to do that. **B. Wiggins** stated he concurs that is the issue but the problem is that answer does not satisfy the fishermen and this has been going on for several years. He said just saying NOAA is working on it does not solve the problem. The states have been working on this issue and had to inform the recreational fishermen the data was wrong. He asked if NOAA could hold public meetings to explain the issue and ask the fishermen to work with them. **P. Doremus** said a lot has been done but nothing has been resolved. It will take some time and he accepts, does not disagree with his observations that NOAA has not been particularly effective in communicating to the states and the fishermen what they are trying to accomplish. They are acutely aware of that and hope to get more sophisticated in terms of explaining these kinds of things to the public. He said they hope to be able to get to greater consensus and ability to have a stable and effective monitoring data collection and consequent management and decision regime. That is what they are all shooting for. He said NOAA realizes how frustrating this situation is.

**B. Allain** stated to reiterate what his colleague is saying, it is frustrating on a state level trying to explain to their colleagues and constituents about why the days of fishing and the amount of fishing has gone down so drastically. He said the lack of communication between the states and NOAA on this issue is deafening. He said they have reached out several times to **R. Crabtree**, they even wrote a resolution that their legislature asked NOAA to send somebody to Louisiana to explain and to have a conversation about what is going on with the red snapper issue and what direction NOAA is going to take in the future. They received no response and **B. Allain** asked if a resolution from all the Gulf States would help. He said they are all in agreement that they want to sustain the fisheries but they want to fish also. **P. Doremus** said he does not know the history of his specific request for more focused communications related to the whole red snapper issue. He will look into that and stated he does understand their frustration. He said generally speaking, he thinks there is a lot of room for improvement and he feels that working through the Council and Commission they should be able to provide the type of outreach and understanding about where

NOAA stands, what they do know, what they do not know and what they are trying to do to address these things. **P. Doremus** said he will bring this message back to R. Crabtree.

**C. Blankenship** asked if the funding for SEAMAP had changed in the house or senate budget. **P. Doremus** stated in the House budget, the line item for SEAMAP was cut by 50% but they do not know if the intent was to cut the funding of the SEAMAP program or the Chesapeake Bay regional effort or both, but they are looking for the conference mark to clarify that issue. He said he hopes there is a lot more focus on the core data collection programs.

### **Sea Grant Fisheries Extension Meeting Report**

**B. Fluech** reported he is the new chair for the Sea Grant Advisory Committee and they had a very productive meeting on October 14, 2014. He stated A. Miller gave a presentation on FINFO, Emily Muehlstein gave an update on hot topics and one of the discussions was on outreach tools, the lack of understanding of how the management process works and the complexity, so they focused on some of the outreach efforts the Council has been doing through social media, in particularly with You Tube videos describing new amendments and the steps to getting involved. He said he thinks that is something all the Sea Grant Programs can use with their stakeholders to explain how rules are made and how the science is applied. Hopefully, those tools that the Council used can help Sea Grant get the information to the local level. He said F. Helies gave an update on some of the GSAFF funded projects including the red snapper tagging project in Florida, BRD and TED testing. One of the relatively new programs that they are planning is to have a TED compliance workshop. Basically, try to bring law enforcement together to discuss consistency with enforcement of TEDs. They are planning the work shop for the February through April timeframe in New Orleans or Tampa. **B Fluech** reported Gary. Graham continues to do voluntary outreach with the shrimpers on TED compliance and helps to make sure people are installing TEDs correctly. **J. Zaritsky** also provided an update on the Seafood Coalition. He said a large part of their meeting was an opportunity to meet the new Sea Grant Oil Spill Coordinators and he introduced Larissa Graham, the Mississippi-Alabama coordinator and stated there are several handouts available about this new project. **L. Graham** stated the main purpose is for the oil science coordinators to be able to get feedback from stakeholders and also to be able to get that information out to the groups that are affected in the gulf. **B. Fluech** stated the regular state reports were given and all reports and presentations may be obtained upon request to the Commission office.

### **NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office Comments**

**M. Croom** gave an overview on the activities of NOAA in the Southeast Region. He said they initiated a headboat collaborative exempted fishery permit that was issued in 2013 that started fishing in January of this year and it allows a collection of 17 headboats throughout the gulf to pilot test an alternative management strategy for red snapper and gag grouper. So far the collaborative has caught about 97% of the red snapper allocation and about 38% of the gag allocation. Fishing will continue through next year at which time they will look at how the program worked and what they have learned from that style of management.

**M. Croom** reiterated that electronic monitoring/reporting is an important effort within NOAA and in the Southeast the Gulf Council and the South Atlantic Council have developed a generic dealer reporting amendment. The Gulf Council approved that amendment in August of 2013 and the South Atlantic Council approved it in September of 2013. The final rule published this past April took effect in August 2014. NOAA is also publishing a rule to modify headboat reporting requirements that was effective March 5, 2014 and that provides actions for federally permitted headboats to report landings electronically on a weekly basis as selected by the Southeast Fisheries Science Center. Those requirements have also been implemented in the South Atlantic region.

**M. Croom** reported there has been a couple amendments passed on the shrimp fishery to modify the stock status determination criteria for penaeid shrimp and that will go to the Gulf council for consideration at the meeting next week. Also in the shrimp arena, Amendment 16, to adjust annual catch limits and management measures for royal red shrimp is under consideration and they are considering an amendment to address current moratorium on federal shrimp permits.

A final rule on the Coastal Migratory Pelagic fisheries was published in June for Amendment 20A which restricts recreational sales of king and Spanish mackerel. Amendment 20B is up for review by the Secretary to modify fishing gears and trip limits, establish regional quotas for King and Spanish Mackerel, adjust the framework procedures, provide annual catch limits and establish allocations between the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic for cobia and establish transit provisions for King Mackerel through closed zones.

**M. Croom** stated he appreciates all comments on the Red snapper issue and NOAA plans to present stock assessments to the Gulf Council in January. He said they are working to continue the MRIP and they realize the difficult situation and R. Crabtree is working very hard to find a better way to do business. He said he will inform R. Crabtree of all the comments that were given at this meeting dealing with the red snapper issue. He said the Gulf Council will meet next week and they will be considering Amendment 20A which is the reallocation amendment on red snapper, Amendment 39 which is the regional management amendment, and Amendment 40 to allocate quota and this could lead to further management strategy changes such as differing bag limits or fishing seasons. The Gulf Council may take final action on the amendments at the meeting next week.

**M. Croom** reported NOAA has been focused on the two primary program areas of emphasis. One being sustainable fisheries under the Magnuson Act and the other conserving and protecting resources that are listed under the Endangered Species and Marine Mammal Protection Act. He said they currently have a backlog of approximately 500 consultation requests under the endangered species act due to budget constraints. He said they have a similar challenge with Essential Fish Habitat which is a provision of the Magnuson Act that requires them to work with federal agencies on projects that could affect habitats. They have been working with headquarters to expedite the consultations. He also mentioned the Gulf Environmental Restoration Program Phase III should begin soon and approximately \$627 M will be available to fund 44 projects across the Gulf including barrier restoration, diversions, living shoreline types of projects, and some of those projects will go through the regional office for those consultations that were mentioned. So they are working to be able to do the consultations as soon as the project come into the office.



One of the major actions under the Endangered Species Act was the listing of corals. That rule came down in September and it added a total of 20 coral species across the country, 4 of which occur in the Gulf of Mexico. So those are new protected species that are listed as threatened and they will be involve in the consultations for those projects as well.

**M. Croom** explained their strategic planning effort. He said P. Doremus talked about the budget input that would be solicited from the state directors and the commission, and they have also started a strategic planning effort in St. Petersburg for the southeast region to do a similar effort at the regional level. So right now they have identified a number of strategic goals that focus on sustainable fisheries and protective resources. They will have a draft version of the strategic plan available for input at the beginning of next year.

**C. Nelson** asked if there are any updates on Kemp's Ridley turtles. **M. Croom** said he has not seen the numbers lately. **D. Donaldson** said B. Gallaway and J. Peña will give an update.

#### **USFWS Region 4 Office Comments**

**G. Constant** reported on USFWS Region 4 Activities. He thanked the Commission for keeping his seat. He stated there has been recent changes in the leadership of USFWS Region 4 and they plan to reengage with the Commission and the Council. He stated USFWS, like NOAA, realizes the trends in the budget will not change for the better so partnering with the states, Commission and Council will help get more accomplished. He stated USFWS has drafted a document on how they plan to address or prioritize the use of Gulf Restoration funds and he will send a link to that document upon request. This document is titled *A Vision for a Healthy Gulf of Mexico* and outlines 8 strategies the USFWS will be focused on, but stated this document is not meant to be limiting it is meant to be a conduit to engage in conversation between the partners. He stated he looks forward to once again start working with the Commission.

**R. Pausina** commented he looks forward to working with USFWS again through the Commission and stated Louisiana has worked with them for years through the Sport Fish Restoration Program and stated it is definitely a good blueprint on how communications and a partnership works.

#### **Discussion of Legislative Issues and Actions**

**D. Donaldson** referred to Tab C and D of the Briefing Book stating this is the latest versions from the House and Senate on reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. They are currently holding hearings on the reauthorization but he has heard it may be 2015 or as late as 2016 before the Act is reauthorized. D. Donaldson will distribute any new versions of the reauthorization to the Commissioners as they become available. The Commissioners asked that staff keep them updated on discussions of the Reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act because if it was reauthorized in its present form, they would like to see changes made.

### **GSMFC Program Rankings**

**D. Donaldson** referred to the handout with the feedback for GSMFC Program Rankings. He stated this shows where the Commission stands with the existing programs and the relative importance of those programs. The Commission agreed the core programs are important but if there is no funding for the program it should not continue.

**After discussion on the rankings, the Commission asked staff to do a more in-depth evaluation on each program and develop a plan to be presented at the March meeting.**

### **Review of Commission's Rules and Regulations Document**

The Commission has been reviewing and updating the Rules and Regulations of the Commission. **D. Winters** reviewed several issues that need to be resolved. The first deals with the ethics provision and what to do when a member has a conflict. She recommended not just disclosing the fact that a member has a conflict and the member vote anyway. She suggested having a subgroup or executive committee decide if a member has a direct interest or not. She asked for recommendations and she will incorporate new language. She also asked what the Commission decided on proxy members. She stated in Louisiana the only member who could have a proxy is the Secretary of the Department. The Commission decided that the other two members can appoint someone to represent them and participate in the proceedings but they will not be able to vote. The Commission decided if the member of the Executive Committee cannot attend a meeting, the member can appoint one of the other members of their state to be their proxy. After further discussion on several items, the Commission asked **D. Winters** to incorporate changes/additions, tweak some language and distribute the document for further review.

### **Review of Red Snapper Management White Paper**

**D. Donaldson** referred to Tab F the White Paper on Red Snapper Management. He stated the White Paper has two Scenarios. The first being complete responsibility for Management of Red Snapper by the Commission and the other being just the Coordination and Administration for management of Red Snapper by the Commission. The first paper only had the recreational fishery included but this expands it to both recreational and commercial. The commissioners agreed that the Commission should not do stock assessments because the states are already doing this. The Commissioners will send in additional comments within the next couple of weeks and a revised White Paper will be distributed for review.

### **Discussion of Hiring a Lobbyist for the GSMFC**

**D. Donaldson** stated this issue has been discussed informally and stated he put it on the agenda to formally discuss this with all the Commissioners. He said he has received varying reactions to hiring a lobbyist, some thought this was premature but others thought it would be good to explore. After discussion, the Commissioners asked staff to further research the costs of hiring a lobbyist,

advocate, or educator and decide if this would be a full-time, half-time, etc. position. It was suggested that D. Donaldson could do this if he has the time. Cost and time estimates will be presented at the next March meeting. Also of note, Texas funds cannot be used to hire a lobbyist.

### **Presentation of Louisiana Fisheries Forward**

**J. Froeba** gave a presentation on the Louisiana Fisheries Forward program. He stated the industry and the market place are constantly changing. Imports are increasing and the vessels are decreasing. There are programs in place to retrain fishermen to enter other fields of employment. With this program the goal is to better train and provide tools and knowledge to the industry to be more productive and educated about the fishery. He reviewed the different aspects of the program. A copy of the presentation may be obtained by request to the GSMFC office.

### **Discussion of Sea Turtle Activities in the Gulf of Mexico**

**B. Galloway** thanked the Commission for their funding for the Sea Turtle Activities. He stated the Commission funded a stock assessment program in 2012 and 2013. The assessment was completed and included incidentally all of the prominent sea turtle biologists who work on the Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle nesting beach monitoring studies and are active in assessment of Kemp's Ridley. They completed that project on time and made some recommendations to include a tagging program and to update the model. He stated the Commission, Council and other agencies funded the tagging for the 2014 season and J. Peña will give a presentation on that aspect of the program and funding was also received for a new stock assessment.

**J. Peña** gave a presentation on The Binational Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle Project, Past, Present and Future which is available upon request to the Commission office. He reviewed the history of the Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle and stated it was put on the most endangered animals in the world list in 1986 and is still considered one of the most endangered species in the world. In 1981, the USFWS asked the Gladys Porter Zoo to administer the United States' field portion of the joint US/Mexico effort to protect and increase the production of Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtles at their natal beaches located in the State of Tamaulipas, Mexico. In 1985 only 702 nests were registered which is a decline of over 99% in the number of Kemp's Ridley nests per season from 1947 to 1945. More turtle camps were opened in La Pesca, Tepehuajes, Rancho Nuevo, Playa Dos – Barra Del Tordo, Playa Tesoro – Altamira, and Playa Miramar – Madero covering approximately 137 miles for the project. He stated approximately 120,000 person hours are recorded in a period of 180 days and close to 150,000 miles are traveled each season for patrolling on this project. He stated it was a very good 25 years from 1985 to 2009 with a 19% increase average per year in number of nests recorded. He noted the statements from the second revision to the Binational Recovery Plan for the Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle stating Date of Recovery: *We anticipate that the Kemp's Ridley will attain its downlisting criterion of 10,000 nesting females in a season by 2011. Based on population growth rates of 19% per year, they anticipate that the Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle could attain its delisting criterion of an average of 40,000 nesting females per season over a 6-year period by 2024.* Then he stated the new decade started and they started seeing decreases in nests and funding for the camps. They started seeking outside funding which was secured and the Commission was also a source for this funding. He said they will continue tagging and

releasing eggs to the turtle camps and protecting the turtle camps. He stated they will have a Second International Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle Symposium in November and thanked the Commission for their help in keeping this program going. He reviewed other projects they did in 2014 besides the tagging project including recording over 11,600 nests and stated over 559,000 hatchlings were released from the coast of Tamaulipas in the Gulf of Mexico during the 2014 season. He then recognized all agencies that are involved in this project and thanked them all for their help and involvement in the cooperative effort.

**B. Galloway** stated that it was documented that the oil spill interacted with the Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle and has fundamentally changed the population of adults, stating they are basically gone and it will be years before the population is rebuilt. The Commission and other agencies provided funding to develop the best model for a Kemp Ridley's Sea Turtle stock assessment. He then reviewed all the findings and concluded it is reasonable to infer that reduced prey resources coupled with an increasing population might be sufficient to change the remigration interval and that this provides a plausible explanation for the observed nesting declines in 2013 and 2014. He stated the tagging data shows that over 90% of the turtles nesting now are first time nesters and the older turtles are almost gone. The turtles are still out there but the productivity aspect of the population has changed due to a change in the age structure which may be attributable in part to the oil spill but that is diametrically opposed to the viewpoint that all the turtles are dead and almost extinct again. He also stated shrimp trawl mortality is lower than it was in the 60s so trawling is not a significant problem for Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtles. He stated the tagging studies will be very important so they are hoping to keep this study and the monitoring program going. The complete presentation showing all of the results can be obtained by request to the Commission office.

**C. Nelson** asked if the BP Spill selectively kill the older turtles which were more productive in terms of number of times of nesting and that is why you only see these "shineys" on the beach. **B. Galloway** stated that is one of the hypothesis but he cannot say that for sure without more analysis of the age structure.

**Draft Environmental Assessment for Amendment 9 to the 2006 Consolidated Highly Migratory Species Fishery Management Plan**

**K. Brewster-Geisz** gave a presentation on Amendment 9 to the 2006 Consolidated HMS FMP. She reviewed all the proposed regulations on Amendment 9 and stated most of the proposed measures are in relation to smoothhound sharks but there a few that will affect all of the Atlantic shark gill net fisheries. She said most of the measures affect the species that are in the Gulf of Mexico. Most of the fishery is for smooth dogfish and that happens in the mid-Atlantic however fishermen in the Gulf do regularly catch smoothhound sharks but most use them as bait so that would change if they move forward with Amendment 9. She said they are currently working on the smoothhound shark stock assessment through the SEDAR process and the scientists have split smoothhound sharks into an Atlantic group which is composed of only smooth dogfish and into a Gulf of Mexico group which is smooth dogfish, Florida smoothhounds and Gulf smoothhound.

The assessment should be completed in March of next year. She said in 2009 they worked on Amendment 3 to bring smoothhound sharks into federal management. She said they are not federally managed at this point. There were a lot of measurements in Amendment 3 that Amendment 9 will put into place and those are dealer permits, commercial and recreational fishing permits, quotas, reporting mechanisms for dealers, pretty much everything that exists with the shark fishery would apply to smoothhound sharks as well once they get brought in. In 2011 they implemented a trawl rule that would allow some landings of smoothhound sharks with a trawl.

The first thing Amendment 9 would do is establish an effective date for those measures. Amendment 3 starts establishing quotas and there are three possible alternatives to use. If Amendment 9 is implemented Gulf fishermen could no longer land smooth dogfish to use as bait and those landings would count towards one of the quotas. Also in 2010, after Amendment 3 was finalized the Shark Conservation Act was signed and this requires fins to be naturally attached to all sharks that are landed in federal waters but there was a limited exception for smooth dogfish, but not any of the other smoothhound sharks. Fishermen who want to remove smooth dogfish fins would have to have 75% smooth dogfish onboard and would have to have a state commercial fishing permit for any species, would have to be on the east coast of the United States, not anywhere in the Gulf of Mexico, would need to be within 50 nautical miles, and would have to have a fin to carcass ratio of 12%. This does not mean that fishermen in the Gulf of Mexico would not be able to land smooth dogfish or any of the other smoothhounds they would have to land them with the fins naturally attached.

She said when they finalized Amendment 3, because they were adding smoothhounds into federal management they had to work under the Endangered Species Act, they received a biological opinion in 2012, and the only portion of that that required regulatory action was a term and condition that said they needed to have net checks for the gill net fishery every 2 hours or a 24 hour soak time. The last part of the Amendment deals with the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan (ALWTRP). She stated in 2003 they implemented a requirement that all shark gillnet fishermen have VMS onboard and working regardless of where they are from November through April. They are now preferring that they only need the VMS off a small part of Florida. This would not affect the Gulf fishermen they would not have VMS at all. This is the proposed rule, the comment period ends November 14 and they would appreciate any comments from the Commission and they hope to have the rule in 2015 and the measures would become effective 30 days after the final rule publication. This presentation and the full public comment presentation can be obtained upon request to the Commission office.

### **Program Reports**

The Interjurisdictional Fisheries Program, SEAMAP Program, Sport Fish Restoration Program, Fisheries Information Network Program, Habitat Program, Aquatic Nuisance Species Program, Economic Data Program, and Oil Disaster Recovery Program Reports were given by the Coordinators at the Commissioners' luncheon and all reports (which were in the briefing book) were accepted by the Commission. Additionally, the Commissioners agreed to a November 3, 2014 vote to release the draft Menhaden Plan for public comment and have the final draft ready for review in January. The Commissioners also agreed to a 30-day public comment in January for

the Blue Crab FMP. The S/FFMC also agreed to provide their species suggestions for the next FMP to S. VanderKoooy after this meeting. Please note that the complete program reports are in Appendix A.

### **Executive Committee Report**

The following Executive Committee Report was submitted by A. Rabideau and given by C. Blankenship.

### **Discussion of 12/31/13 Audit**

**A. Rabideau** reviewed the 12/31/13 Audit with the Committee. **A. Rabideau** mentioned that the audit was sent out on a RFP to various firms in the local area. Piltz, Williams, & LaRosa was selected and they completed the audit in early August. An unqualified opinion was received. There were no findings or deficiencies in the financial data. It was determined that the financial statements had been fairly presented. *A motion was made by M. Schexnayder to receive the 2013 Financial Audit. It was seconded by C. Blankenship and passed unanimously.*

*C. Blankenship moved the Commission accept the Audit report. K. Lucas seconded the motion and the motion passed without opposition.*

### **Financial Status Report as of 09/30/14**

**A. Rabideau** briefly went over the 9/30/14 Financial Statements with the Committee. **A. Rabideau** mentioned that the Financial Statements are electronically sent out once a month. The committee members should have received a copy by email. She pointed out that the cash account was slightly elevated due to the ASAP shutdown from September 22, 2014 through October 13, 2014.

### **Presentation of 2015 Budget**

**A. Rabideau** reviewed the 2015 budget. The budgeted amount for 2015 is \$7,010,812. **A. Rabideau** mentioned that the Economics Program ended June 2014 and the Oil Disaster Recovery Program has entered its final year. The SK grant was added this year, as well. The 2015 budget was slightly more than the 2014 budget due to contractual variations in the FIN program. *A motion was made by C. Blankenship to adopt the 2015 GSMFC budget for the amount of \$7,010,812. It was seconded by L. Robinson and passed unanimously.*

*C. Nelson moved to pass the 2015 Budget. L. Robinson seconded the motion and it passed with no opposition.*

### **Discussion of Proposed Changes to GSMFC Administrative Manual**

**D. Donaldson** discussed the proposed changes to the GSMFC Administrative Manual concerning a policy regarding the post-employment health plan. **N. Marcellus** explained that with the recent retirement of a long-standing employee, GSMFC had to examine the language in the

administrative manual concerning the PEHP plan. GSMFC will sponsor a guarantee issue health plan to any employee with twenty-five years of service after separation of employment until death. The retiree may elect to be reimbursed via a HRA up to an amount that would be equal to the Commission's established plan. *A motion was made by C. Blankenship to adopt the proposed change to the GSMFC Administrative Manual. It was seconded by D. Ellinor and passed unanimously.*

*C. Blankenship moved to accept the change in the GSMFC Administrative Manual on the Health Insurance for employees with twenty-five years of service. K. Lucas seconded the motion and it passed with no opposition.*

#### **Discussion of Adequacy of State Dues**

**D. Donaldson** discussed the adequacy of state dues. The state membership dues have not changed since 1986. Current dues stand at \$22,500 per state. **K. Lucas** pointed out that state membership dues need to be looked at periodically or in the event of additional management roles. However, it was agreed that at this time no action is needed.

#### **Discussion of GSMFC Office Location**

**D. Donaldson** discussed the location of the GSMFC offices. He met with J. Miller about the possibility of moving GSMFC offices to the Bolton Building in Biloxi, MS. However, GSMFC owns the building it currently occupies. It was decided that it would not be cost-effective to relocate the offices at this time.

#### **Discussion of a Training Policy**

**D. Donaldson** mentioned that GSMFC has researched adding a training policy to their administrative manual due to the recent training GSMFC has provided for several employees. All attendees agreed that further research is indicated for a continued service agreement.

#### **Discussion of Hiring Lawyer for GSMFC**

**D. Donaldson** discussed the possibility of hiring a lawyer for GSMFC for the review of contracts and legal counsel for issues that arise in the course of business. **D. Ellinor** agreed that GSMFC should further consider establishing a contract with an attorney. He also pointed out that current membership dues may not support the hiring of an attorney. **D. Donaldson** stated that GSMFC would pursue the matter further.

#### **Salary discussions**

The Committee recommended the GSMFC staff receive a 3% raise or at least \$1000 – whichever is higher – for all employees. It was also decided that GSMFC would hire an outside agency to perform a compensation study on all positions to ensure that salaries are competitive with other industry benchmarks. It was discussed that some positions may require a salary cap. *A motion*

*was made by C. Blankenship to accept these recommendations. It was seconded by D. Ellinor and passed unanimously.*

*C. Blankenship moved to accept the 3% raise or at least \$1,000 for all employees. C. Nelson seconded the motion and it passed with no opposition.*

#### **State Directors' Reports**

*Due to time constraints, the Commission accepted all of the written State Reports. The full state reports are in Appendix B*

#### **Future Meetings**

N. Marcellus reported the March 2015 Annual Spring Meeting will be in Alabama and she will contact the Alabama Commissioners for suggestions on where to meet. She said the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission would like to hold a joint meeting for the October 2015 meeting. Florida is the common state and they are planning to have the meeting in the St. Augustine, FL area. *All Commissioners agreed to hold a joint meeting with ASMFC in October 2015.*

#### **Publications List (Informational Only)**

**D. Donaldson** stated most of the publications are available through the website, this is just to make the Commissioners aware of all publications that have been published.

#### **Election of Officers**

##### **State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee**

*C. Matens moved to nominate C. Blankenship Chairman. C. Blankenship moved to nominate K. Lucas Vice Chairman. C. Nelson seconded the motions and the motions passed with no objection.*

##### **Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission**

*C. Nelson moved to nominate C. Blankenship 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice Chairman. M. Schexnayder seconded the motion and the motion passed with no opposition. D. Ellinor moved to nominate R. Reichers 1<sup>st</sup> Vice Chairman. C. Nelson seconded the motion and it passed with no opposition. M. Schexnayder moved to nominate D. Ellinor as Chairman. M. Hansen seconded the motion and it passed with no opposition.*

**D. Donaldson** presented D. Ellinor with the incoming Chairman gift. D. Ellinor thanked R. Pausina and D. Donaldson and the staff for all of their hard work.



## **Other Business**

**D. Donaldson** stated he is still trying to set up an initial meeting via conference call or meeting with the Legislative Committee. It has been very difficult to have them all meet as they are very busy. He asked for any help the Commissioners could give to get them together. It was suggested to have their aides meet. D. Donaldson will let the Commissioners know when they do meet.

**A. Miller** gave a brief presentation on the Economics Program. He stated the program started in July 2008 and just recently ended in June 2014. He reviewed the different projects done under the Economics program which included a survey of the Inshore Shrimp Fleet, a Survey of Seafood-related Businesses, a Marine Angler Expenditure Survey, National Marine Recreational Use Economic Survey, Stated Preference Choice Experiment Survey of Anglers in the Gulf, created an interactive website to obtain all data collected, and sponsored various workshops. He said after review of the program they suggest in the future to have a more longitudinal economic data collection, expand economic data collection to additional fisheries, and improve dialogue between biologists, economists, and policy makers. A copy of the presentation and more information can be obtained by request from the GSMFC office. **A. Miller** stated he appreciated the opportunity to do this work under the Economics Program.

**K. Lucas** thanked A. Miller and stated she recently used the interactive tool before they presented before their legislative budget committee for information they wanted on economics and found it very beneficial. **C. Nelson** also thanked A. Miller and stated if they ever do oysters to include the aquaculture sector and an economic analysis.

*With no further business, the Commission Business Session adjourned at 4:18 pm.*

# **APPENDIX A**

## **GSMFC Program Reports**

## **Interjurisdictional Fisheries Program Report**

### **FMP Revisions**

Several discussions took place over the summer regarding the current structure of the IJF program and the format of the Fishery Management Plans (FMPs). He said they are proposing to modify the review process which will speed up the time it takes to get final approval as well as provide a second level of public participation. The final format of future FMPs is still under consideration as they attempt to develop a more user friendly interface to provide the information traditionally bound in book form. They anticipate an electronic document will still exist but are working on development of a web-based format that will offer the information at different levels of detail, depending on the user's interest.

### **Gulf Menhaden**

The 5<sup>th</sup> revision to the Gulf menhaden FMP is still in review. Since the March meeting the Technical Task Force approved the draft for review by the TCC who halted it temporarily due to the above-mentioned discussion. The document has now been provided to the SFFMC who is currently reviewing it and should release it for a 45-day public comment. At the point that it is approved by the SFFMC, all the Commissioners will receive a copy to review. They expect the Commission will take action during the March 2015 meeting in Alabama for final approval of the plan.

### **Blue Crab**

The 3rd installment of the Blue Crab FMP is currently in review by the TCC who met yesterday. Pending the results of that review and the action taken here with the proposed changes to the review process mentioned above, the SFFMC and possibly the Commission should receive the document shortly. Again, action is expected by the Commission at the March 2015 meeting.

### **Gulf and Southern Flounder**

The revision to the Gulf and Southern Flounder FMP has been released to the TCC for review concurrent with the Blue Crab FMP. Again, depending on the proposed modification to the review process, it is expected that the SFFMC and/or Commissioners will receive the draft before the end of the year. They anticipate a 30-day public comment period sometime after the first of the year and final action by the Commission at the March 2015 meeting in Alabama.

### **Next Species for FMP/Profile Development**

Over the summer, the SFFMC was asked to review the list of priority species and previous, out-of-date FMPs, to give the IJF staff direction for the next document to update or develop. The staff will contact the agencies and solicit membership for the new or reactivated Technical Task Force and host an introductory meeting prior to the end of the year.

## **Law Enforcement Committee (LEC)**

The GSMFC Law Enforcement Committee (LEC) continued to work toward regional enforcement goals. The IJF Program continues to support enforcement activities in any way they can with a limited budget. The LEC and the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council's Law Enforcement Advisory Panel (LEAP) revised their *Gulf of Mexico Cooperative Law Enforcement Operations Plan for 2015-2016* over the summer. In addition, the IJF staff completed the *2014 Annual Law Summary* (red book), the *Rules and Regulations Officer's Pocket Guide for 2014-2015*, and the 2013 annual *License and Fees* publication.

## **Crab Subcommittee**

The Crab Subcommittee continues to make determinations regarding the need to hold annual derelict trap cleanups within their respective states to address lost and abandoned crab traps. In addition, the subcommittee will begin development of a white paper outlining the ongoing activities related to research on the incidental catch of Diamond Back Terrapins in the Gulf. Bycatch issues related to terrapins are a major concern among a number of NGOs, NOAA, the states, as well as seafood certifying bodies, and it is hoped that consolidation of the states work will aid in reducing some of these concerns.

## **Otolith Manual Revision**

The Commission published *A Practical Handbook for Determining the Age of Gulf of Mexico Fishes* (The Otolith Manual) in May 2003 and revised it again in 2009. Initially, copies were distributed to Gulf agencies and libraries. Nationwide requests were received and filled. It continues to be a frequently downloaded pub from the Commission website. The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) has been interested in collaborating on revising the manual for several years and sent a representative to the organizational meeting in August to discuss new material for inclusion from the Atlantic Coast. The new revision should further help standardize age-and-growth techniques within fisheries science.

## **Menhaden Ageing**

During the completion of the Gulf Menhaden Stock Assessment (SEDAR32A) and the revision to the Gulf Menhaden FMP, it was determined that the age composition of the menhaden population outside the commercial fishing grounds was needed. It was recommended that the states begin collecting more information on the menhaden captured in their respective monitoring programs. In an effort to train the state agency personnel on how to age their samples, a reference set has been developed that will rotate through the various agencies for training purposes, similar to sets used for the other species already aged through the FIN biological sampling protocols.

Because a single reader has been used to age Gulf menhaden from the commercial catches for the last 40+ years, a representative from each state has been invited to participate in a training workshop at the NOAA Beaufort Lab in November. It is expected that these representatives will

take the knowledge back to their agencies and assist in the ageing of menhaden from the fishery-independent sampling programs which will contribute to future stock assessments.

### **Other Activities**

The IJF staff have completed the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission's Sixty-Fourth Annual Report (2013) which is currently at the printer. The staff will distribute the report to Commissioners, the Gulf Congressional delegation, and other interested parties. As always, the report is available for download along with all publications on the Commission's home page at [www.gsmfc.org](http://www.gsmfc.org).

### **SEAMAP Report**

Since the last Commission meeting, SEAMAP has completed the Spring Plankton Survey, Summer Shrimp/Groundfish Survey, Reef Fish Survey, and Fall Plankton Survey. The Bottom Longline Survey, Vertical Line Survey, and Fall Shrimp/Groundfish Survey are currently taking place. More information on these surveys can be found in the 2014 SEAMAP Annual Report to the Technical Coordinating Committee.

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council requested a presentation at their April 2014 meeting on current SEAMAP sampling in the Gulf of Mexico. The presentation discussed how standardized the various SEAMAP surveys were amongst SEAMAP partners. The Gulf Subcommittee and Work Groups are working to standardize gears, station selection, protocols, and techniques as much as possible.

As part of this effort, the Bottom Longline Work Group met in June and October while the Vertical Line Work Group met in May and October. The SEAMAP Subcommittee met in July in conjunction with the Caribbean and South Atlantic SEAMAP components to discuss the 2015 SEAMAP budget, updating the 2016-2020 SEAMAP Management Plan, and other joint SEAMAP issues.

SEAMAP continued to distribute real time data plots of shrimp and fish abundances from the Summer Shrimp/Groundfish Survey. The real time data were distributed to over 125 individuals this summer and were also posted on the Commission's web site. The data plots show catch rates of brown, pink, and white shrimp along with total catch for SEAMAP sampling stations throughout the Gulf.

The Commission continues to manage SEAMAP data and distribute the data to interested parties. The Commission has fulfilled eleven SEAMAP data requests since March.

### **Sportfish Restoration Program**

The Program Coordinator has drafted a standardized monitoring protocol for artificial reef habitat across the Gulf of Mexico incorporating vertical line, side-scan/multibeam sonar, Chevron traps with GoPro cameras, and water quality sampling. This draft protocol is modeled after existing

long-term monitoring programs, utilizing comparable gear types and methodologies where possible. This draft protocol will be used in a pilot study of the Gulf Artificial Reef Monitoring and Assessment Program (GARMAP) to test its functionality, including site selection procedures, best order to deploy the selected gear types, usability of the selected gear types on the vessels available to the state agencies, average amount of time required to carry out the sampling procedure outlined in the protocol per site, etc. The goal of this effort is to develop a program that will provide baseline data for artificial reefs. This will allow states to assess impacts from natural and man-made disasters in the future, and to understand how their reefs are functioning over time, compared to natural reefs.

The Program Coordinator is exploring funding opportunities to support the previously-mentioned GARMAP.

The GSMFC's and ASMFC's Artificial Reef Subcommittees are continuing to revise their 2004 publication of "*Guidelines for Marine Artificial Reef Materials: Second Edition*". The 25 chapters that focus on the different types of materials utilized to construct artificial reefs were distributed to members from both Subcommittees for updating and some of the chapters have been completed. The progress of this revision and the time-line for completing it will be discussed at the Joint Artificial Reef Subcommittee meeting in January 2015. Once all chapters have been updated, the Program Coordinator will perform the final review to get it ready for publication.

The Program Coordinator secured funding from Region 4 of the USFWS to carry out a second year of the Mississippi Bight Lionfish Response Unit project. In 2014, AL DNR will be revisiting sites sampled in the first year of the project to assess any changes in the lionfish density and the native species assemblages. Also, MS DMR will be conducting survey dives at sites in the western reach of the study area that they were unable to visit in 2013 due to some unforeseen staffing problems. Moreover, AL will be assessing the possibility of utilizing the diving public to conduct reef surveys through an Adopt-a-Reef program with a website for the public to enter their assessments of the reef sites, including density of lionfish. The data collected in this project will give us a clear picture of where we stand in regards to the invasive lionfish population in northern Gulf waters, and how that population has changed over the last two years. It will also provide much-needed information on how lionfish are impacting the native species assemblages, which will be useful when considering future management actions.

### **Fisheries Information Network Program**

The Fisheries Information Network (FIN) is a state-federal cooperative program to collect, manage, and disseminate statistical data and information on the marine commercial and recreational fisheries of the Southeast Region. The FIN consists of two components: Commercial Fisheries Information Network (ComFIN) and the Southeast Recreational Fisheries Information Network [RecFIN(SE)].

The scope of the FIN includes the Region's commercial and recreational fisheries for marine, estuarine, and anadromous species, including shellfish. Constituencies served by the program are state and federal agencies responsible for management of fisheries in the Region. Direct benefits will also accrue to federal fishery management councils, the interstate marine fisheries

commissions, the National Park Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the NOAA National Marine Sanctuaries Program. Benefits that accrue to management of fisheries will benefit not only commercial and recreational fishermen and the associated fishing industries, but the resources, the states, and the nation.

The mission of the FIN is to cooperatively collect, manage, and disseminate marine commercial, anadromous and recreational fishery data and information for the conservation and management of fishery resources in the Region and to support the development of a national program. The four goals of the FIN include planning, managing, and evaluating commercial and recreational fishery data collection activities; to implement a marine commercial and recreational fishery data collection program; to establish and maintain a commercial and recreational fishery data management system; and to support the establishment of a national program.

The organizational structure consists of the FIN Committee, two geographic subcommittees (Caribbean and Gulf), standing and ad hoc subcommittees, technical work groups, and administrative support. The FIN Committee consists of the signatories to the MOU or their designees, and is responsible for planning, managing, and evaluating the program. Agencies represented by signatories to the MOU are the National Marine Fisheries Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, Mississippi Department of Marine Resources, Puerto Rico Department of Environmental and Natural Resources, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, U.S. Virgin Islands Department of Planning and Natural Resources, Caribbean Fishery Management Council, Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council and Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

The FIN Committee is divided into two standing subcommittees representing the major geographical areas of the Region: Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico. These subcommittees are responsible for making recommendations to the Committee on the needs of these areas. Standing and ad hoc subcommittees are established as needed by the FIN Committee to address administrative issues and technical work groups are established as needed by the Committee to carry out tasks on specific technical issues. Coordination and administrative support of the FIN is accomplished through the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

#### **ITEMS SUBMITTED FOR FUNDING IN 2015 FIN COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT**

##### ***Coordination and Administration of FIN Activities \$340,000***

This task 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. This is a continuation of an activity from the previous year. This activity pertains to all modules of the program.

##### ***Collecting, Managing and Disseminating Marine Recreational Fisheries Data \$2,800,000***

This task will provide for the conduct of the MRIP survey in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida for shore, for-hire, and private modes. This task will provide for coordination of the survey, an intercept survey of shore, for-hire and private boat anglers to estimate angler catch using

the existing MRIP 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. This is a continuation of an activity from the previous year. This activity pertains to the Recreational Catch/Effort Module for all modes of FIN.

***Gulf Menhaden Port Sampling*      \$25,000**

This task will provide for sampling of gulf menhaden catches from menhaden purse-seine vessels that operate in Louisiana. Samples will be processed for size and age composition for use in coast-wide stock assessments. In turn, gulf menhaden stock assessments are incorporated into the Fisheries Management Plan for the species, and are also utilized by the Gulf Coast states, the GSMFC, the menhaden industry, and the NMFS. This is a continuation of an activity from the previous year. This activity pertains to the Commercial Catch/Effort and Biological Sampling Modules of FIN.

***Head Boat Port Sampling in Texas, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida*      \$442,000**

This task will provide for the sampling of catches, collection of catch reports from head boat personnel, and gathering effort data on head boats that operate primarily in the Exclusive Economic Zone from ports along the coasts of Texas, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida. This is a continuation of an activity from the previous year. This activity pertains to the Recreational Catch/Effort Module for the for-hire mode of FIN.

***Operations of FIN Data Management System*      \$233,000**

This task will provide for operations of the data management system for the FIN. This task will provide funding for the FIN Data Base Manager, ComFIN Programmer and part-time Metadata Coordinator. Responsibilities include further development of data modules structures; routine loading of Louisiana, Mississippi (oyster and finfish only) Alabama, and Florida commercial catch data, Gulf biological data, Gulf recreational data; enter and maintain the metadata records into the InPort system and maintenance of DMS. This is a continuation of an activity from the previous year. This activity pertains to the Data Management Module of FIN.

***Trip Ticket Program Development and Operation*      \$1,460,000**

This task will provide for the further development and implementation of commercial trip ticket systems in the Gulf of Mexico. This task provides funding for Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama to operate their trip ticket programs. With the full implementation of trip tickets in Mississippi, all five Gulf States have operating trip ticket programs, which allows for a complete census of all commercial fisheries landings in the Gulf of Mexico. In addition, it provides funding for a contractor to implement and operate an electronic trip ticket reporting program that allows for a more efficient means for dealers to report the necessary data. This activity pertains to the Commercial Catch/Effort Module of FIN.

**GRAND TOTAL      \$5,300,000**

**Habitat Program**



J. Rester participated in a RESTORE Act Science Advisory Panel Work Group Meeting in June. The purpose of the meeting was to review a draft of the NOAA RESTORE Act Science Program Science Plan and to provide recommendations to the NOAA RESTORE Act Science Advisory Board at their July meeting. Long-term priorities for implementation of the Program were drawn from prior science and research needs assessments for the Gulf of Mexico and from input the Program received while engaging with stakeholders. The NOAA RESTORE Act Science Program Science Plan should be released shortly for public review.

In July, he participated in a Hypoxia Research Coordination Workshop sponsored by NOAA that addressed Mississippi River diversions and Gulf hypoxia. These issues are closely linked by the overlap in ecosystem model domains, affected species, and habitats, and by the intersection of mitigation efforts in influencing estuarine and shelf water quality (e.g. changing salinity and nutrient properties). The workshop aimed to advance fisheries ecosystem management in the northern Gulf to inform efforts to assess and predict the potential ecological and socioeconomic effects of Mississippi River diversions and hypoxia.

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) developed an Aquaculture FMP that was enacted in 2009. On August 28, 2014, NMFS proposed regulations to implement the Aquaculture FMP. If implemented, this rule would establish a comprehensive regulatory program for managing the development of an environmentally sound and economically sustainable aquaculture industry in Federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico. The purpose of this rule is to increase the yield of Federal fisheries in the Gulf by supplementing the harvest of wild caught species with cultured product.

The Commission has discussed aquaculture in the past and concerns were raised about restricted access zones around aquaculture facilities. A restricted access zone would be established for each facility. According to the Federal Register Notice, restricting access around aquaculture facilities would afford additional protection to an operation's equipment and allowable aquaculture systems, and increase safety by reducing potential encounters between fishing vessels and aquaculture facility equipment. The boundaries of the restricted access zone would correspond to the coordinates listed on the approved ACOE Section 10 permit for the site. Restricted access zone boundaries would have to be clearly marked with a floating device, such as a buoy. No recreational or commercial fishing, other than aquaculture, may occur within the restricted access zone. Only fishing vessels that have a copy of the aquaculture facility's permit with an original signature of the permittee would be allowed to operate in or transit through the restricted access zone.

NMFS is taking comments on the proposed regulations until October 27, 2014.

The National Academy of Sciences' Gulf Research Program Strategic Plan is now available at <http://nas.edu/gulf/index.html>. "Gulf Research Program: A Strategic Vision," establishes the Program's foundation and introduces its mission, goals, and objectives. It describes some initial activities and sets out the Program's vision for contributing lasting benefit to the Gulf region and the nation.

J. Rester continues to monitor Army Corps of Engineers public notices, environmental impact statements, and other sites for projects that may impact marine fish habitat throughout the Gulf of Mexico.

### **Aquatic Nuisance Species Program**

The Spring Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force (ANSTF) meeting was held May 7-8, 2014 in Arlington, Virginia.

The Gulf and South Atlantic Regional Panel (GSARP) held its fall meeting jointly with the Western Regional Panel on September 17-18, 2014 in Houston, Texas.

To help the Region 4 USFWS AIS Program with their coordinator position transition, the Program Coordinator took over administration of their AIS small grants program. A review committee made up of GSARP members and the Coordinator reviewed and ranked the proposals that had been submitted to the program. The USFWS provided funding to the GSMFC to support selected projects and to administer all the sub awards. A Total of \$205K was awarded to eleven projects.

The Invasive Lionfish Control Ad-Hoc Committee (ILCAC) has finished the drafting of the "National Invasive Lionfish Prevention and Management Plan" (NILPMP) for the ANSTF. The NILPMP has been through a review by the ANSTF and the National Invasive Species Council, and all received comments have been addressed. Final approval of the NILPMP is on the agenda for the fall ANSTF meeting in Falls Church, Virginia on November 5-6<sup>th</sup>, 2014. The vision of the NILPMP is to serve as a guide to the ANSTF and other interested parties involved in managing lionfish and natural resources in U.S. waters.

Several Panel members are collaborating on efforts to understand more about the Asian tiger shrimp (*Penaeus monodon*). In 2011, there was a 20-fold increase in reported collections of tiger shrimp from 2010, with 678 reports. In 2012, the reported collections dropped to 208 and in 2013 there were approximately 333; however, this decrease is most likely the result of reporting apathy as opposed to less individuals being collected. Recently, the specimens that have been reported are smaller individuals being collected earlier in the year. This trend supports the theory that this species is now established and reproducing in U.S. waters. To answer this question and to shed some light on the geographic origin of the *P. monodon* inhabiting the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic coast, the group is setting up a tissue repository and running DNA analysis with samples from the species native range and all known introduced populations. The next big question is what impact this species may have on the invaded environment or native species, which is widely unknown.

**Invasive Species Traveling Trunk:** Three trunks were produced and are made available to the public at no charge through a subcontract that was completed in 2012. Since the trunks were made available in July of 2012, they have been utilized by over 25 different organizations ranging from federal and state agencies, schools, and NGOs that have presented the enclosed material to thousands of people across the U.S. In total, the trunks have been utilized for 314 days over the

28-month period that they have been available. The reviews that we have received have all been very positive, and there is still demand to utilize the trunks.

### **Subcontract Awards**

**Reproductive Sterility as Tool for Prevention and Control of Invasive Aquatics:** Throughout the early part of this project, the PI found that the potential for generating radiation-induced sterility in apple snails for the purpose of producing sterile aquarium snails is low because of the high mortality associated with the dose of radiation required to make apple snails reproductively sterile. Consequently, in 2013 two genetic approaches were undertaken to generate sterile snails. In one approach, drugs affecting chromosome stability were injected into the gonad of snails in an attempt to produce sterile triploids. In a second approach, genetic recombination was used to produce chromosomal translocations resulting in sterility as an alternative to radiation.

Thus far, attempts to generate polyploidy snails by drug injections into the gonad have proved to be unsuccessful. Colchicine injections into the gonad cause changes in ploidy within the gonad (as measured by flow cytometry of treated cells post-treatment); however, this does not cause changes in the ploidy of progeny generated from these snails. These negative results may be a consequence of the drug having toxic effects on the gonad tissue such that affected germline cells are killed, or it may be that drug concentration and timing are not sufficiently optimized to see the effects of chromosome changes in the progeny.

The second approach to sterility involved a new method to create chromosome translocations without radiation, using genetic recombination. This requires that specific DNA sequences are introduced into the snail genome in order to cause breaks and rearrangements in chromosomes at specific locations. As a first step in this process, studies in 2013 focused on techniques to get DNA into the snail germline. Thus far, lipotransfection of DNA into gonad cells has been attempted with two different DNA sequences, but neither has been detected in the genome of snails (either in gonad tissue or in progeny of treated snails). This is not unexpected because the efficiency of DNA transfer into cells (cells of all types, not just mollusk cells) is low, even under optimal conditions. This project has been completed and the PI will be providing a final report to the GSARP at their fall 2014 meeting.

### **Economic Data Program Report**

#### **Introduction**

As part of an effort to improve economic data collection and management of the recreational and commercial fisheries throughout the Southeast Region, an Economics Program was formed in July of 2008 and was completed in June of 2014. The economics program was a cooperative partnership among Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (GSMFC), and NOAA Fisheries. The program monitored the economic performance of the fisheries of the Gulf of Mexico (GOM) and assessed the economic contributions of these fisheries on the local and regional economy. In general, the activities of the economics program were divided into three main components. These components included

economic data collection, economic research and analysis, and economic outreach and dissemination.

### **Data Collection**

In conjunction with the Fisheries Information Networks' (FIN) Social/economic Workgroup, the GSMFC coordinated, planned, and conducted specific economic data collection projects throughout its five member states. Results from these studies aided in describing the economic performance as well as the economic contributions of these industries. More specifically, economic data and analysis contributed to a better understanding of the economic contributions that these industries have on the local and regional economies. It is the intent that the collection of dependable economic data through the Economics Program will further maximize the economic and ecological benefits of fisheries resources while reducing negative costs to coastal communities throughout the Gulf.

The following economic data collection projects and subsequent analysis were completed and developed into a final report during the first half of 2014: an economic survey of the GOM commercial and recreational inshore shrimp fleet, an economic survey of seafood processors, data from an economic survey of seafood dealers, and data from a marine angler expenditure survey. Data collection was also completed for a stated preference choice experiment survey of anglers in the GOM during this period. Previously completed economic data collection activities included a marine recreational use economic survey and an economic survey of the GOM inshore shrimp fleet for data year 2008.

### **Inshore Shrimp Fleet**

Cited as one of the most valuable fisheries within the United States, the GOM commercial shrimp fishery constitutes fishing pressure from both an offshore fleet as well as an inshore shrimp fleet. Following recent data collection efforts conducted by NOAA Fisheries for federally permitted vessels that harvest shrimp in waters offshore, this data collection effort provided a systematic economic analysis of an important economic segment - the inshore shrimp industry. Having up-to-date economic data in hand will potentially enable fisheries managers, commercial shrimpers, and others who utilize shrimp resources to form unbiased conclusions and will lead to improved fisheries management decisions.

The GSMFC, in collaboration with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF), recently collected up-to-date economic data about the economics of commercial shrimping in inshore waters across the GOM. This effort repeated and built on the experiences learned from the previous economic survey of the GOM inshore shrimp fleet which collected 2008 data. A final report of the results for the inshore shrimp industry for data year 2008 was completed.

Analysis was completed during the first half of 2014 utilizing previously collected data that included information on revenue, operating costs, annual expenditures, employment data, and vessel characteristics of the inshore shrimp fleet for the year 2012. In 2012, the GSMFC obtained the cooperation and support of the relevant state regulatory agencies and several industry groups in each of the five Gulf States. During late 2012, sampling frame development and selection took place for each of the states. A survey instrument was also developed at that time and was built off of the 2008 inshore shrimp data collection. The first survey package was mailed in March 2013 to 1,557 commercial license holders. In April 2013, a reminder postcard was sent to 1,263

individuals who had not responded to the first mailing. A second copy of the questionnaire was sent to 1,217 individuals in April 2013. In May 2013, another reminder postcard was sent to 1,102 individuals who had not yet responded to previous mailings. A third copy of the questionnaire was sent to 1,107 individuals in June 2013. In late June 2013, a final reminder postcard was sent to 996 individuals who had not responded to the survey. As of December 31, 2013, 437 subjects had responded to the survey.

A non-response survey was mailed late summer and early fall. In August 2013, a single-page five-question questionnaire was sent to 509 individuals in the original database who did not respond to the inshore shrimp survey as part of a follow-up non-response survey questionnaire. Eighty-two questionnaires were returned.

In late 2013, it was determined that an additional survey of recreational inshore shrimpers for the northern Gulf States was needed based on requests from fisheries managers. A two-page nine-question questionnaire was developed by the GSMFC, LDWF, and the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. In late 2013 and early 2014, a sample of 1,200 individuals who held recreational shrimp harvester or recreational shrimp gear licenses in three states: 200 in Alabama, 900 in Louisiana, and 100 in Mississippi was drawn and survey instruments were mailed to these individuals.

Results from the commercial and recreational survey were entered into a database and data cleaning and analysis was completed prior to developing the final reports. A final report for the commercial inshore shrimp fleet can be accessed on the GSMFC website while a final report for the recreational inshore shrimp fleet can be accessed also. In addition to analyzing the economic performance of the commercial fishery, these studies also have the ability to provide an estimate of the economic contributions of the industry on the local and regional economy through the use of regional input-output impact models for the entire Gulf shrimp fleet. Similar to the 2008 data collection effort, economic data from the commercial inshore shrimp fleet from 2012 have the ability to be combined with federal economic data in order to have a representative data set for the entire Gulf shrimp fleet. This combined data set will again have the ability to be used to calculate the number of jobs and sales generated by the commercial offshore and inshore shrimp fishery, in the industry itself, and in other portions of the regional economy.

### **Fishing-related Businesses**

As fisheries management policies change, the economic consequences of these actions extend past commercial harvesters to supporting fishing related businesses. Understanding the linkages between specific industries and the regional economy can be helpful in determining the potential impacts of management decisions. The Commission's economics program, therefore, analyzed recently collected data to determine the economic performance of seafood processors and dealers. The availability of unbiased, systematic economic data of this nature should assist fisheries managers, commercial fishing-related business owners, and others who utilize the Gulf's resources in the formation of informed management decisions. This project was in the data analysis and report generation phase during the first half of 2014. The GSMFC worked with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) as well as the states throughout the GOM.

A workshop was conducted to review the Gulf States Seafood Processor Survey instrument and final plans for testing and full deployment of the survey instrument. The survey packet was field tested throughout the five states of the region using the NOAA Fisheries processor list for data year 2009. Data year 2009 was selected to create a baseline that was not influenced by natural and manmade disruptions to the industry. Working in cooperation with the University of Florida, The University of South Alabama, Mississippi State University, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, and Texas A&M, the survey packet was tested with approximately two to three individual processors in each state. Processors were initially mailed a survey packet, which included a cover letter to introduce them to the study. In-person interviews were conducted. Results from each in-person interview were used to improve the survey packet. Given minor changes to the survey instrument, the survey packet was deployed throughout the spring of 2011 using the aforementioned universities and approach. Data collection continued through the end of 2011 and throughout 2012. Periodic conference calls were conducted to ensure consistency and successes throughout the region.

At the end of 2012, data from 106 completed seafood processor surveys from throughout the Gulf had been entered into a database. Texas completed and delivered nine surveys; Louisiana completed and delivered 52 surveys; Mississippi completed and delivered three surveys; Alabama completed and delivered 21 surveys; and Florida delivered 21 surveys. The raw regional response rate was around 55%. The response rate for individual states was as follows: Alabama – 55%, Florida – 41%, Louisiana – 87%, Mississippi – 18%, Texas – 41%. Processor data was finalized and the results were compiled into a final report using a selected sample of 66 respondents, which represents complete and useable responses.

A similar survey instrument and supporting materials, which was shorter and largely based on the processor survey, was finalized for seafood dealers (first receivers) in 2011. A sampling frame was also developed using a database of seafood dealers from each of the states. Fifty-seven resident licensed seafood dealers were selected in Alabama, 264 in Florida, 343 in Louisiana, 135 in Mississippi, and 139 in Texas. Throughout late 2011 the dealer survey questionnaire, cover letter, and other materials were produced and assembled in mail survey packets. The dealer survey was distributed in 2012. Given an initial poor response rate, a shorter and more condensed survey was developed in the summer of 2012 in an effort to improve data collection. This improved survey, that included an increased compensation card, was redistributed to Gulf seafood dealers during late 2012. The response rate for this survey was around 20%. Data from the dealer survey was analyzed and compiled into a final report during the first half of 2014.

The final processor report and the final dealer survey report is available. All figures and estimates are presented as industry totals and averages. In addition to analyzing the economic performance of processors and dealers, the data also has the ability to estimate the economic contributions of the industry on the local and regional economy using regional input-output impact models.

### **Marine Angler Recreational Fishery**

Marine fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico provide recreational opportunities to millions of anglers and generate significant economic impacts in the region. Fisheries management decisions can be informed by a continued understanding of how marine angler expenditures influence local and regional economies in the GOM through sales, income, and employment impacts. To improve the

understanding of the current level of expenditures and impacts generated in the region, the GSMFC and NOAA Fisheries solicited saltwater anglers' expenditures on fishing trips taken in 2011 throughout the GOM states and Puerto Rico. The information was instrumental in understanding the economic contribution that marine recreational fishing has to the economy of the GOM region and to the United States.

Preparation for the marine recreational angler survey took place throughout 2010. This included finalizing survey materials and the survey sampling design in association with NOAA Fisheries. This also included awarding sub-awards from the GSMFC to the MRIP Gulf States in order to collect expenditure data from anglers via an intercept survey. A sub-award was also awarded to ICF Macro to conduct follow-up mail surveys throughout the region.

Data collection via field samplers began in January 2011 throughout Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Puerto Rico. Data collection in Texas, via a mail survey, began in March and April 2011. Extensive outreach efforts were conducted with the initial deployment of the survey. This included the development of a press release, informational flyers, and other supporting materials. A number of regional and national news stories were written concerning the data collection effort. Conference calls were also conducted and supporting informational materials were provided to each of the states and the mail survey contractor.

Data collection for the intercept and follow-up mail survey has been completed and data cleaning and expenditure analysis are complete. Analysis of the economic contributions began in late 2012 and was completed in early 2013. The percentage of completed dockside intercept surveys from January through December 2011 throughout the GOM and PR was about 73% (either fully or partially complete). The percentage of fully or partially complete surveys, out of all dockside interviews, was as follows in each area: AL: 61%, FL: 67%, LA: 87%, MS: 66%, PR: 82%. The percentage of contact info collected via intercept surveys for the follow-up mail/web survey was as follows in each area: AL: 13%, FL: 12%, LA: 26%, MS: 36%, PR: 27%. Cumulatively, the percentage of completed follow-up mail/web surveys was about 30%.

This project contributed to a national report entitled, "The Economic Contribution of Marine Angler Expenditures in the United States, 2011" and is available. A regional report was also developed for the GOM states and Puerto Rico by GSMFC and NOAA Fisheries and is available.

### **Marine Recreational Use**

Economic contributions from recreation to the local and regional economy also extend from other types of marine recreation besides marine angling. Such economic contributions might include bird watching, kayaking, canoeing, sailing, etc. Determination of the economic contributions that these activities have on the economy is an important aspect of marine recreation that needs additional attention.

Throughout early 2012, the GSMFC and NOAA Fisheries worked with Knowledge Networks in order to develop a contract and begin the data collection process. The GSMFC contracted with Knowledge Networks in the spring of 2012 to collect information and economic data on marine recreational use. Data collection commenced shortly thereafter. Data collection extended through 2012 and 2013. Data collection has now been completed for GSMFC's part of this national effort.

Over the course of the data collection, the target quota was 48,313 completed interviews in the Gulf/Atlantic regions and 49,144 completed interviews were achieved. Similarly, for the nation as a whole (including the Gulf/Atlantic states), the targeted completes were 76,983 interviews and 80,106 completed interviews were achieved.

Data from the survey will enable NOAA Fisheries to estimate the economic contributions and use value from marine recreational use activities. Such activities include canoeing, bird watching, sailing, and others. Data collected via the survey effort include expenditure data, access value data, demographics, and attitudinal information. The population sampled included the general public using the Knowledge Networks survey panel. The survey was implemented in monthly waves, with the sample rotating in and out each month and no individual being sampled more than a limited number of times. Notification to selected individuals occurred in advance, so that they could keep track of their activities and expenditures.

This project will contribute to a national report entitled, "The Economic Contribution of Marine Recreational Use in the United States, 2012" with the potential that a regional report could also be developed for the GOM states by GSMFC and NOAA Fisheries based on the analysis done for the national report.

### **Research and Analysis**

While economic data from initial collection activities is often presented in a simplistic format, further analysis and research investigations allow for a better understanding of the economic performance, contribution, and tradeoffs associated with Gulf fisheries. The research and analysis component of the economics program consisted of a contribution analysis initiative for the data collection activities of the program and a stated preference choice experiment for anglers.

### **Contribution Analysis**

While raw economic data allows for descriptive statistics and averages, economic contribution analysis (e.g. input/output modeling) for a particular fishery can help us to better understand the economic contribution that a fishery has to the local and regional economy throughout the Gulf. For example, contribution analysis can be used to describe taxes, employment, income, value-added, and sales generated from a particular Gulf fishery. Contribution analysis has been conducted using data from a variety of the economic survey activities discussed herein (e.g. marine angler expenditure survey).

### **Stated Preference Choice Experiment Survey of Anglers in the Gulf of Mexico**

U.S. law mandates that the fisheries management process consider the potential changes in economic value when promulgating new fishing regulations. For sportfishing policy changes, this requires estimates of angler valuation of regulations. Therefore, the primary objective of this project is to generate new estimates of saltwater anglers' valuation of changes in regulations for key federally and state managed recreational species on for-hire and private boat trips in the GOM. This project collected data and will ultimately estimate models that will allow NOAA Fisheries to examine, for each type of trip, whether the change in economic value associated with changes in bag limits is constant, linear, or discrete whereby anglers only lose value when the fishery is closed.



Then, using the best fitting model for each type of trip, compare the angler valuation of bag limits and closed seasons on for-hire and private boat trips.

A survey was designed and tested via focus groups for for-hire and private boat anglers in the GOM. The survey included questions about recent recreational fishing activities, preferences for different types of fishing trips, and angler household characteristics. The angler preference portion of the survey included a stated preference choice experiment with questions that asked anglers to choose between hypothetical fishing trips. There was a survey version for choices among for-hire fishing trips and a version for choices among private fishing trips.

Addresses for the for-hire mode were collected via the MRIP dockside intercept survey in the GOM, which started in early 2013. Addresses for the private angler mode were obtained from the private angler license database. ICF Macro administered the mail survey, including data entry and validation. The first mail survey was sent August 2013. Data collection was completed during the spring of 2014. The analysis of the data will be conducted by the PI's using accepted methods and reported in a manuscript to be submitted to a professional journal.

### **Outreach and Dissemination**

The third component of the economics program was outreach and dissemination. The objective of this branch of the program was to present the information collected and analyzed within the data collection and research and analysis components of the program. Additionally, this component of the program included organizing meetings for economists and associated stakeholders who were interested in or actively engaged in fisheries economic projects and activities throughout the Gulf.

### **Fisheries Economic Information Portals**

In order for there to be a location where stakeholders of fisheries resources can access fisheries economic data, the Commission successfully worked with the NOAA Fisheries headquarters office in order to develop a national interactive fisheries economic impacts tool. The GSMFC also updated their website, as appropriate, in order to enable web users the ability to access economic information for selected Gulf fisheries and industries. This information includes relevant publications and final reports as they relate to the Commission's economics program.

### **Gulf States Fisheries Economics Workshops**

Fisheries economic workshops were an initiative of the economics program aimed at promoting communication, coordination, and professional development among fisheries economists and associated stakeholders throughout the GOM. The workshops provided an opportunity to share data collections and research projects and to discuss the future direction of fisheries economics within the region. A fisheries economics workshop was held on March 17, 2014 at the GSMFC's 64<sup>th</sup> annual meeting in New Orleans, LA. This workshop included the participation of economists from a variety of different organizations from throughout the GOM and Southeast.

### **Oil Disaster Recovery Program**

The Oil Disaster Recovery Program, which was authorized by Congress October 1, 2010, continues to move forward in all of those elements as approved by the ODRP Ad Hoc Committee which consist of the Marine Directors from each of the five Gulf States. Twenty three subawards, contracts or contract amendments addressing Marketing, Sustainability and Traceability, information systems (FINFO); Seafood Testing and an expanded Kemp's Ridley assessment are currently in place under the ODRP.

## **MARKETING ELEMENT**

The [Gulf Seafood Marketing Coalition](#), working through a GSMFC subaward agreement with the Gulf & South Atlantic Fisheries Foundation, Inc. continues to promote Gulf seafood through multiple venues calling on the expertise of its professional consulting team with advice and oversight from the Coalition membership.

### **Retail and Restaurant Activities**

Additional funding was approved in 2012 to enhance partnerships with the retail sector for in store sampling and seafood promotion opportunities. This element continues to be well received with partnerships having been completed early on with HEB Supermarkets in the Texas area, Rouses Supermarkets in Louisiana, Mississippi and parts of Alabama, and Hannaford's in the northeast. More recent partnerships have included WinCo, Publix, and Fairway Markets. Additionally, plans are currently in place with Wegmans for a January 2015 in store promotion and with Whole foods for a Labor Day 2014 promotion.

Under these partnerships, Point of Sale Materials (POS) such as resource guides addressing species seasonality, flavor, texture, cooking and similar information, counter cards, door clings, ice picks, logo clings, recipe cards and in-store training guides are provided by the Coalition. In order to participate, retailers, in turn, agree to utilize traceable Gulf products.

A number of restaurants, including Aloha Hospitality, Ruby Tuesday, Al Copeland Restaurants, Hard Rock, Acme Oyster Restaurant and Darden's, have been approached for possible seasonal and/or product specialty promotions that feature Trace certified Gulf seafood.

The Coalition also collaborated with the Louisiana Seafood Promotion and Marketing Board at the 2014 Great American Seafood Cook-off in August. A booth was provided near the cook-off stage at which the Coalition, Gulf FINFO, and Gulf Trace informational materials were made available to exposition attendees.

### **Public Relations Activities**

Media relations continue on an ongoing basis through the Coalition's media consultant to draw attention to seasonal activities, events or key stories focusing on Gulf seafood. Among these were the inclusion of a summer buying guide in the June issue of Southern Living Magazine, and Shrimp season press releases resulting in placements with iSante magazine, Perishable News, Orlando Sentinel (online) and Grocery Headquarters. Estimates indicated the shrimp season press releases

resulted in over 3 million reader impressions, with nearly \$40 k in public relations value and \$13 k in ad value.

Another activity included an August interview with Chris Nelson and San-Antonio Express News regarding oyster shortages in the Gulf. The interview was picked up by the Associated Press and saw widespread coverage, with a concentration of coverage in the Texas markets. Additionally, a “*Seafood in Your Diet*” mat release was distributed in June resulting in 957 placements with more than 48 million impressions. Discussions are being held for possible additional mat releases in the fall of 2014.

Other activities involving public relations include online seafood related contests expected for September 2014; and Crisis Management activities which currently involve continued monitoring of media reports relative to Vibrio stories.

### **Coalition Website, Social and Creative Activities**

The Marketing Coalition website, [eatgulfseafood.com](http://eatgulfseafood.com), which was updated in 2013 to include a new smart phone based “**Find it**” feature continues to provide listings of retail stores, restaurants, and wholesalers that carry Gulf Coast Seafood by geographical areas. Concurrently, a species page was activated in August providing insights about buying, texture, and best uses for shrimp, crab, oysters, popular finfish, and a seasonality chart which shows which species are in season. Additionally, three new “*How to*” videos were incorporated into the website in August, as well as an **Enhanced Recipe Finder** that provides hundreds of recipes developed by local chefs and connoisseurs of Gulf seafood.

The website includes **Spotlight Videos** in which Gulf Coast personalities share their unique coastal experiences. Six videos are currently included in the website in which well recognized people like Tony Reisinger, a Texas Sea Grant marine biologist who shares his love of art and seafood are featured. Additional personalities include, Chris Hastings who is a James Beard Award winning chef and restaurateur who provides his “...expert take on why Gulf Coast Seafood’s distinct flavor is superior”, Duke Bardwell, as he reminisces and sings the praises of the world’s best seafood, Chef John Folse and fellow Gulf Coast restaurateur Bob Baumhower who share experiences which introduced them to the world’s best seafood.

The most recent videos include Martha Foose and John Currence, also James Beard Award winners, who recall their experiences as they prepare specialty dishes, and Tucker Fitz-Hugh and Martie Duncan, final four contestants in **The Food Network Star**, a reality television series produced by and aired on the Food Network that awards the winner his or her own series on the Food Network. All of these videos have been professionally prepared and each tells a unique and enticing story about Gulf seafood with hints about the culture here on the Gulf Coast.

Social and Creative activities also continue to be an integral component of the Gulf Marketing initiatives and involve management and maintenance of the Coalition's social media activities. This element is responsible for content management of the Coalitions website as well as for collaborative content management involving both the State and regional public relation agencies.

It is through this collaboration that the efforts of individual State marketing and public relation strategies are recognized as an integral element of the regional marketing initiative.

#### **Web Based Marketing – *MarketMaker***

[MarketMaker](#) is a national partnership of land grant institutions and State Departments of Agriculture dedicated to the development of a comprehensive user interactive data base of food industry marketing and business data. It is currently one of the most extensive collections of searchable food industry related data in the country. The site was created in 2004 by a team from the University of Illinois Extension Service with the intention of building an electronic infrastructure that would more easily connect food producing farmers with economically viable new markets.

MarketMaker became a program of choice under the Oil Disaster Recovery Program in 2011 to enhance marketing opportunities for seafood harvesters, micro or specialty added value processors, or seafood distributors. The program creates opportunities for them to connect with other retail or wholesale businesses across the region or country at no cost. Three of the five Gulf States had MarketMaker programs in place prior to the Gulf oil disaster in 2010; but, two additional states, Alabama and Mississippi, were added as a result of the ODRP funding opportunity. All five Gulf States now have a Marine Seafood and Shellfish category in the list of registered businesses in their MarketMaker programs.

Since the introduction of the Marine Seafood and Shellfish category, a total of 227 related businesses have been registered across the Gulf. According to studies conducted by Dr. Ben Posadas of the Mississippi State University Extension Service in 2013 the number of all businesses registered in the program in the Gulf States increased from approximately 93,000 in 2010 to 227,556. While not documented, it is suspected that a portion of the increase is a direct result of increased outreach and technical assistance provided by the Extension Services through ODRP funding opportunities.

The ODRP funded MarketMaker component of the marketing program, like all ODRP funded components will effectively end June 30, 2014. Extension Services from all five states, however, are continuing to promote the program and its marketing opportunities in an effort to increase registration and usage prior to the grant expiration. Most are expected to continue independently after the ODRP funding assistance opportunity expires.

#### **Port Direct Marketing - *Louisiana Direct Seafood***

Louisiana Direct Seafood is a marketing initiative administered by the Louisiana State University Ag Center and Cooperative Extension Service. Their original mission was to help stabilize coastal fishing communities that were faltering because of competition with imported seafood prices and increased costs per unit effort at the harvest level. The initiative focused not only on freshness and availability of product to consumers but also on delivery of high quality products that demanded premium prices.

The success of the [Delcom Direct](#) initiative, which was a collaborative effort with the City of Delcambre, Louisiana and its port community, was a catalyst for the development of the Louisiana Direct Seafood program through which the Delcom model has been utilized in the south New Orleans area, and in the Lafourche and Terrebonne parishes south of New Orleans to make fresh seafood readily available to area residents and businesses. Additional opportunities of this nature are being explored in the Cameron area in southwest Louisiana.

The revitalization of the Port of Delcambre, La and the evolution of a Vermillion Bay Sweet brand, a select shrimp peeled and packaged for niche markets, are seen as measurable successes stemming, in part, from funding through the ODRP marketing initiative. Most recently, a Vermillion Bay Sweet Black Drum was introduced into area restaurants and supermarkets such as Rouses, and Whole Foods – the result of micro-processor initiatives implemented at the local level. As a result, a species which for many years was considered an incidental catch with little commercial value, is now being harvested for commercial sales and is demanding premium prices. Concurrently and independent of the ODRP, the port of Delcambre, Louisiana has expanded its port direct opportunities through the revitalization of the docking facilities and the addition of an outdoor marketing pavilion. The Delcom experience has indeed been a model for collaboratively involving, the State, the community, the port proper, and federal funding opportunities to re-establish the economic health of the community and restore a long standing marine fisheries culture in south Louisiana.

### **Culinary Events**

Other events funded through the ODRP under the Marketing element included the annual Oyster Industry Council meeting and promotion in Washington and the annual [Great American Seafood Cook-off](#) (GASCO) in New Orleans. Both elements are managed by the LDWF Foundation through the Louisiana Seafood Marketing Board. The third and final event hosted by the Louisiana Oyster Industry Council was completed in January 2013; and the final GASCO event was completed in New Orleans at the Louisiana Seafood Show in August 2013.

Since the completion of these ODRP funded elements, however, additional support of the GASCO has been made available through NOAA Fisheries with Saltonstall Kennedy funds as an independent funding opportunity not related to the ODRP. It is referenced here because the intent of the program is to provide financial support for the continuation of the Great American Seafood Cook-off. Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission has been requested to coordinate the use of the funds and interim contracts with the Louisiana Seafood Promotion and Marketing Board, under the auspices of the Louisiana Lt. Governor's office of Culture, Recreation and Tourism have been developed. Funding for this activity is expected to be finalized in September. Tentative levels amount to \$200 K per year for five years dependent upon funding availability.

### **SUSTAINABILITY AND SEAFOOD TRACEABILITY ELEMENT**

The sustainability certification and seafood traceability element of the ODRP is designed to meet current demands upon the industry. Through this element the stage is being set to provide assurances that Gulf products are both sustainable (as measured against accepted standards) and that they originate from the waters of the US Gulf of Mexico. Actions which are currently in place to meet these demands include:

### **GAP Analysis Component**

The GAP analysis component of the ODRP was developed to examine how well Gulf marine fishery resource management programs and stock assessment systems are aligned with guidelines developed by the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations' (FAO) Code of Conduct for Responsibly Managed Fisheries and Federally mandated standards to prevent overfishing enacted through the Magnuson - Stevens Fisheries Conservation and Management Act of 1976 (MSFCM). This analysis focuses on the assembly and provision of information which, when compared to these guidelines and regulations, provides a measure of sustainability within Gulf fisheries. Included with this responsibility is the identification of "Actionable Items" that may be necessary to achieve a sustainable rating suitable for eco-labelling purposes based on the FAO criteria.

To date, regulatory and management information/data for all five of the Gulf States as well as NOAA Fisheries has been collected as part of the GAP analysis and is slated for assimilation in matrix format for comparisons against FAO guidelines. Preliminary reports for the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, developed as pilot study under this contract, have been forwarded to the State for review but have not yet been finalized. Concurrently, the contract provides for work with peer committees and the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) in an effort to address the unique needs of sub-tropic environments, such as those inherent in the Gulf of Mexico. The intent of this portion of the contract is to encourage amends to the FAO guidelines that are tailored to these environments; ultimately providing measures of sustainability based on geographically tuned guidelines in lieu of universally applicable standards for measurement. The consultant team met with the COFI representatives and presented position papers at the annual FAO conference in Rome in July, but reports have yet to be received regarding the success of this effort.

Because of delays in completion of the contractual requirements for the GAP proper, the Ad HOC Committee amended this contract to limit focus on FAO guidelines; but continued support for a sustainability symposium slated for October 27-30, 2014 in New Orleans, and for completion of the GAP analysis. The contract amended the end date of the GAP analysis to June 30, 2015 but imposed a retainer on payments pending completion.

### **Gulf Seafood Trace Program**

[Gulf Seafood Trace](#) (GST) has been making waves since it's rollout in March 2012 and has come a long way in educating consumers about electronic traceability and engaging the industry in efforts to prove that U.S. Gulf of Mexico seafood is safe and sustainable. To date, there are 44 processors, 21 dockside facilities and 10 distributors who are enrolled in the program and are actively providing trace information on products arriving at the docks and making their way to the consumer. Additionally, there are 1,235 fishing vessels which land their product at docks covered by the GST program. Current indications are that to date over 47 million pounds of seafood has been collectively traced through the program since inception.

Various partnerships have also been formed since the program's inception, including one with the Gulf Seafood Marketing Coalition, which has proven to be very successful in engaging customers and putting electronic traceability at the forefront of consumer education. Since February 2013,

this partnership has produced promotions with various supermarket chains including HEB Foods, Rouses, Hannaford and Wegmans.

The Coalition and GST also partnered with the Mississippi Hospitality and Restaurant Association (MHRA) to provide electronic traceability and assurance for a dining campaign that promoted Gulf seafood in Mississippi restaurants. The “Every Shrimp Has a Tale” dining campaign ran from September 8, 2013 through November 23, 2013 with 55 participating restaurants. The promotion was the first of its kind, integrating a multi-faceted marketing campaign and electronic traceability at the restaurant level. A total of 11,515 pounds of traceable Gulf shrimp was purchased throughout the promotion, and consumers had the ability to scan a quick reference (QR) code located on various marketing materials to trace their shrimp’s trail from its origin in the Gulf all the way to their plate. The results were successful and encouraging as MHRA reported positive feedback from both participants and the grant sponsor.

Outreach via various platforms has been performed by GST, including video, presentations, certificates, letters, and surveys. The GST “Your Seafood Has a Story” video won two bronze Telly Awards and has been promoted via press releases and social media. Outreach via presentations included a special forum at the Seafood Expo North America, the Alabama Seafood Summit, the American Shrimp Processors Association, Hancock County Chamber of Commerce, the North American Association of Fisheries Economists, special training seminars for enrollees held throughout the Gulf, with booth presence at the Great American Seafood Cook-Off and MHRA’s Restaurant University and Everything Local Expo. GST also awarded the most involved enrollees with framed certificates thanking them for their participation and commitment to GST. Additionally, letters were sent to current and potential enrollees informing them of the last year of GST and encouraging their use of the program. Lastly, GST conducted surveys to engage enrollees on how to improve GST’s current offerings and opportunities. After results were gathered and analyzed, GST, Trace Register, and MRAG Americas generated an action plan to increase enrollee participation and program progress.

Beyond outreach and partnerships, Gulf Seafood Trace consistently educates the public through social media. Facebook and Twitter advertising campaigns were performed to help draw attention to the program and potentially enroll more businesses. Updates are made each week to the social media sites, and to date, there are 1,302 Facebook page “Likes” and 345 Twitter followers. The GST website was updated as well with a revamped homepage.

### **Gulf Fisheries Information Website – Gulf FINFO**

The Gulf FINFO website puts credible, easy to understand, science-based information about Gulf seafood in the hands of consumers, buyers, and industry members alike, with the primary goal of communicating sustainability. Justification for the project lies in the fact that there is need to carry the same level of federal fisheries information that is currently contained in NOAA’s Fish Watch to the state and regional level for state waters of the U.S. Gulf of Mexico. The site provides a comprehensive resource for Gulf fisheries information including species descriptions, harvest information, landings, economic contributions, management plans/regulations, population statistics, and marketing efforts; and includes links back to individual state web pages and/or

information sites. By communicating the status of Gulf fisheries through the presentation of sound data and science, the site highlights the hard work and success of the agencies tasked with their management and promotion.

The site officially launched at the Seafood Expo North American in March with 13 state-level profiles and 11 federally managed species. Launching at the special session called *Gulf Seafood Today: Traceability, Sustainability, and Marketing*, the site has been well-received by buyers in the seafood industry. For example, the Vice President of Seafood Sustainability for Wegmans Food Markets noted that “Wegmans is very excited about the creation of this program with regards to sustainability of Gulf Seafood. This will enable us to educate our seafood folks who in turn educate our customers. We find more and more of our customers asking questions on the seafood we offer from this region. Being able to answer these questions with the help of the Gulf FINFO site will be a win-win.”

Since March the site has moved into Phase III which includes site improvement and maintenance. The Commission (GSMFC) is currently working with GCR, Inc. (GCR) and each of the five Gulf States’ fishery management agencies to update and enhance website in order to communicate the sustainability of Gulf seafood to buyers and consumers. The enhancements and updates to the website include the following:

### **Additional Species Profiles**

Currently, FINFO includes profiles on 24 species. In response to various feedback from the five Gulf states and other stakeholders, the addition of five state species and six federal species are currently in the process of being added following the species content collection and creation process established in Phase II. The state managed species being added are Blue Catfish, Menhaden, Spotted Seatrout, Black Seabass, and Quahog Clam while the federally managed species include Cobia, Scamp Grouper, Snowy Grouper, Mahi mahi, Royal Red Shrimp and Yellowtail Snapper. This species creation work includes utilizing Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) staff to generate original state-specific profiles and Gulf overviews encompassing basics about species biology and habitat as well as information on how fisheries operate and how each state ensures these operations are sustainable. Gaps in this research are translated into questions to each state; GCR conducts the necessary state related communication to complete the species profiles. An extensive review process is in place to confirm the data presented, perfect the language, and ensure consistent messaging and tone according to a preset, overarching FINFO Style Guide.

### **Site-Wide Updates**

It is important that FINFO become a true resource for seafood buyers in determining the sustainability of Gulf seafood. In order to fulfill this site mission, the information needs to be as current as possible, updated regularly to reflect the trusted nature of the information being conveyed. To accomplish this, the site is currently in the process of being enhanced by monitoring and updating all current site information, including:



- Landings, economic data, and corresponding language (most importantly, incorporating finalized 2012 NOAA data and updating all “Harvesting” species content)
- Attempting to secure landings and economic CSV files directly from NOAA to reduce data import effort
- Recent Gulf and state initiatives (ex. Audubon’s Gulf United for Lasting Fisheries MAP program)
- Current software and hosting agreements (specifically, website naming rights and CMS licensing)

### **Site Content Development and Maintenance Plan**

Since the first steps taken during the Phase I’s site requirements task, FINFO has been designed and built to allow a complete transfer of all hosting, site maintenance and updates, and content upkeep responsibilities to GSMFC. To assist in ensuring the same likelihood and quality of updates are made post-transfer, defined requirements for the aforementioned responsibilities are needed in the form of a Content Development and Maintenance Plan. This Plan will outline areas that need maintenance attention (data points, news articles, homepage headlines, references to changing or upcoming management plans and regulations, etc.) as well as the source/location of that information and the frequency to be addressed. Accompanied by a sample update schedule, this Plan will ease the burden of maintenance by providing an exact course of content development and update action, allowing both GSMFC and the states to understand what is needed to keep the site current and relevant over time.

### **Communications Plan**

While Phase II was dedicated to FINFO’s initial build and refinement, a Phase III communication component is needed to inform the site’s target audience of its value and to ensure that the tools provided on the site are fully utilized. While FINFO will reach a wide audience of Gulf seafood enthusiasts, its mission is to become a trusted resource for seafood buyers, allowing them access to information needed to determine whether their Gulf product is sustainable. To achieve full awareness and adoption of the site’s resources, significant outreach is needed. Working with GSMFC and GCR, LDWF staff will be responsible for crafting the Communications Plan; GCR will assist in its implementation and perform tasks that may include the following: draft press releases, conduct industry and media outreach, construct presentations, create promotional material, attend relevant meetings, conferences, summits, etc.

### **Sustainability Certification – Audubon Nature Institute’s G.U.L.F.**

Maintaining and improving market positions by demonstrating consistent advancement towards sustainability in accordance with standards recognized by the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) for Responsibly Managed Fisheries (RFM) is the goal of this initiative. This approach to defining sustainability is becoming an increasingly acceptable “interim alternative” to full sustainability certification; especially for those fisheries where reasonable assurances are necessary for eco-labeling purposes. The objective of this program is to create achievable, affordable and market-accepted avenues to sustainability through the creation of Marine Advancement Plans (MAPs) for Gulf of Mexico marine fisheries.

G.U.L.F. is currently working with Florida, Alabama, and Texas in the development of Blue Crab Marine Advancement Plans (MAPs) and is coordinating their findings, recommendations and final action plans with the GSMFC Blue Crab Fishery improvement plan which is in final review for the 2014 update. Louisiana has already received independent certification for its Blue crab fishery.

The next phase in the development of MAPs is underway and is focusing on the shrimp fishery in the Gulf. A total of ten MAPs are scheduled under this contract and G.U.L.F. expects to complete all of these by June 30, 2015.

Under this component G.U.L.F. has also developed a web based public information portal [Audubon's Gulf United for Lasting Fisheries](#) which addresses the status of select fisheries within the Gulf including those undergoing improvement and those undergoing full certification. It is expected that the website will serve as an information base for the retail sector as it considers the level of sustainability for wild caught Gulf products that may be acceptable under varying individual company requirements. Additionally, the G.U.L.F. initiative involves working collaboratively with other ODRP initiatives such as the Marketing component and the Seafood Trace component to complement their efforts, support them where applicable and to ensure appropriate cross references to each elements' ongoing programs. The website will reflect ongoing activities and action plans developed through MAPs as they are completed and endorsed at individual State levels.

### **SEAFOOD TESTING ELEMENT**

As part of the overarching mission to effect change in the perception of Gulf seafood, testing contracts were executed under the ODRP with the Mississippi State Chemical Laboratory (MSCL) in Starkville, Mississippi and with the Alabama Department of Public Health, Bureau of Clinical Laboratories (ADPH-BCL) in Montgomery, Alabama. These contracts provided for the installation of necessary equipment, supplies, training and analysis of Gulf seafood samples in order to provide a sound scientific set of data suitable for sound management. The purpose of the seafood testing activity is to facilitate near real time testing capabilities in keeping with FDA guidelines by unbiased qualified agents. Doing so enables participating marine agencies to rapidly respond to adverse findings that have the potential to affect the health and safety of the seafood consuming public and to make management decisions based on sound scientific data.

Both labs continue to work in concert with their respective State marine agencies and coastal environmental quality control agencies to collect samples and maintain appropriate chains of custody to ensure sample sources and quality. While sample frequencies have decreased over time, they are nonetheless qualified through sound sampling techniques and are representative of commercially and recreationally significant finfish and shellfish originating in coastal waters. During the immediate post disaster time period samples were collected approximately every two weeks. Currently, however, sampling has decreased, as expected, to a monthly basis which is more consistent with pre-event frequencies. Both Alabama and Mississippi are positioned to increase sampling as necessary and expectations are that sampling will continue to include tests for PAHs and Dispersants as appropriate beyond the grant period.

Based on the most recent bi-annual reports (September 2014), a combined total of 949 tests have been conducted by the Alabama Lab since the testing program began in October 2011; with 64 having been conducted during the past five months. The MSCL reported that a combined total of 662 samples from Mississippi waters have been tested since 2011; with 93 of these having been collected in the past five months.

The goal of these investigations is to gather long term information on the levels of PAHs and Corexit® in Gulf seafood following the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill. To date a total of 1611 samples have been tested by both Alabama and Mississippi labs; the results of which indicate that levels of contaminants detected to-date were below the FDA public health Levels of Concern (LOCs) at both facilities.

Specific findings from the Mississippi Lab revealed that "... *In summary, the PAHs detected in fish, shrimp, crab, and oyster samples collected from the Mississippi Gulf Coast areas shortly after the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill incident up-to-date were below the FDA public health Levels of Concern (10 ppb). The PAHs in the four matrixes investigated were at similar levels as those detected in the commonly consumed processed foods on the market. In addition, there is an insignificant concentration difference between PAHs detected in the oyster samples for the current study and the 10-year historical data from the NOAA Mussel Watch program. In 2013, we detected dispersant (Corexit®) in fish, shrimp, oyster, and crab. So far in 2014, we have detected dispersant (Corexit®) in fish, shrimp, and oyster. To date we have detected 37 samples with reportable values of Corexit®, however, all reported values are below action levels.*" Indications are that similar test are being conducted by the remaining Gulf States independently of the ODRP.

## **Other Elements**

### **Kemp's Ridley - Stock and Shrimping Interaction Assessment**

A preliminary review of findings of the Kemp's Ridley Stock Assessment was presented to the GSMFC Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) in March, 2013. During the report, Dr. Gallaway indicated that while there is evidence of both increased abundance and mortality; but the study did not include the 2012 shrimp landings which were unavailable at the time which would have added further credibility to the study's projections. The final report was completed in June, 2013 and has been posted on the GSMFC website.

During the October 2013 meeting of the AD HOC committee additional funds were approved to re-run the model to include the 2012 shrimp landings, and to fund the cost of a 2014 Kemp's tagging and aging project at the Rancho Nuevo nesting grounds. The Tagging program was approved in order to further assess age distribution in the Gulf and to better improve nesting predictions.

Analysis of offshore and inshore shrimping effort was completed in December 2013. Preliminary findings indicated that:

- Total offshore effort in 2012 was 70,505 nominal days fished as compared to 66,641 nominal days fished in 2011.
- Total Inshore effort in 2012 was 31,615 nominal days fished as compared to 55,027 nominal days fished in 2011 - a decrease of 23,412 nominal days.

(Note: due to the lack of shrimping effort data for 2012, the 2013 model assumed that 2012 effort would be the same as in 2011. In fact, 2012 offshore effort increased by nearly 4,000 nominal days while the inshore effort decreased.

The report indicated that the model will be re-run in the first quarter of 2014, taking into account the 2012 shrimping effort and anomalies in temporal nesting characteristics that appeared between 2009 and 2012. An updated report by Dr. Gallaway is scheduled for the ODRP workshop in October, 2014; and reports from Pat Burchfield on the Kemp's recovery effort and from Dr. Gallaway on nesting data collections is expected to be provided during the Commission business session on October 15<sup>th</sup>.

#### **ODRP Budget Summaries – September 9, 2014**

The ODRP program is currently 80% into the grant time period and approximately 74% (\$11,136,161) into budgeted expenditures (\$14,985,000). Other than additional support for the Kemp's nesting program at the Gladys Porter Zoo in the spring of 2014 and an extension of the FINFO element to include additional fisheries in the information website, there were no new contracts executed under the ODRP during the past six months.

With existing obligations and recent contract amends, the overall ODRP budget projected an unobligated fund balance of approximately \$360 K (assuming that existing contracts will be fully utilized by June 30, 2015). Staff members are currently working with each of the five states to develop proposals and sub-award agreements in keeping with the ODRP grant intent in order to obligate and utilize the fund balance in a timely manner.

All other elements and/or sub components including the Trace component and its related outreach element, both traditional and non-traditional marketing components, FINFO and seafood testing appear to be on schedule in terms of time and budgeted expenditures.

# **APPENDIX B**

## **State Directors' Reports**

**FLORIDA FISH & WILDLIFE CONSERVATION COMMISSION**

Nick Wiley, Executive Director



**DIVISION OF MARINE FISHERIES MANAGEMENT**

Director: Jessica McCawley

The major responsibilities of the Division of Marine Fisheries Management include: (1) development and implementation of marine fisheries management and policies; (2) angler outreach and marine aquatic resource education; (3) commercial fisheries assistance; (4) the state artificial reef program; (5) monitoring compliance with the marine fisheries trip ticket reporting requirements through audits of applicable fish house records; (6) administrative penalty assessments for violations of specified fisheries regulations, and retrieval of lost and abandoned spiny lobster, stone crab and blue crab traps; and (7) issuance of Special Activity Permits. Highlights of staff efforts in 2013 [i.e., state fiscal year 2013/2014] are summarized below.

**ANALYSIS AND RULEMAKING SECTION**

The Marine Fisheries Management and Policy Development program develops regulatory and management recommendations for consideration by FWC Commissioners designed to ensure the long-term conservation of Florida's valuable marine fisheries resources.

The 2014 Florida Legislature passed one bill that allowed for four additional recreational license-free fishing days.

During the state fiscal year 2013/2014, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) approved a number of amendments to marine fisheries rules contained in Chapter 68B of the Florida Administrative Code.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) moved forward to create a Gulf Reef Fish Data Reporting System that would help improve recreational reef fish data collection in Florida Gulf waters. This new system will help determine how many anglers are targeting reef fish in the Gulf. A sample of these anglers would be surveyed to provide more accurate catch and effort data for reef fish trips.

A Restricted Species Endorsement Exemption was created for Florida's veterans wishing to enter the commercial fishing industry. The endorsement waived the income requirements for a restricted species endorsement for Florida veterans wishing to enter into commercial fishing for one year for veterans meeting certain requirements.

The FWC implemented several management changes including prohibiting the importation of live lionfish into Florida. Management changes were developed in coordination with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) and include:

- Prohibiting the harvest and possession of lionfish eggs and larvae for any purpose other than destruction;
- Prohibiting the intentional breeding of lionfish in captivity.

A recreational harvest season for gag grouper was established for Franklin, Wakulla, Jefferson and Taylor counties, Indian Pass Apalachicola Bay and the Steinhatchee River to be April 1 through June 30. For the rest of the Gulf of Mexico excluding Monroe County a July 1 through December 3 season was established to be consistent with the federal Gulf of Mexico Fisheries Management Council (GMFMC) season.

Consistency with the GMFMC was established for gray triggerfish. A recreational and commercial closure of June 1 through July 31 was established and a recreational two-fish daily bag limit and a commercial trip limit of 12-fish were established.

FWC Commission removed the venting tool requirement in Gulf state waters, making state regulations consistent with rules in federal waters.

A rule cleanup process has begun that will simplify rule language and improve enforceability. Nineteen chapters were amended in the first phase of this process and a general chapter has been created comprised of definitions and provisions that apply to all saltwater fishing.

Several changes to the recreational and commercial management of swordfish in state waters were approved by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC). Changes to state rules approved by the Commission will allow fishermen who participate in this new commercial fishery to land and sell their catch in Florida. Additional changes include designating swordfish as a restricted species and specifying hook and line as allowable gear for swordfish harvest in state waters. Several changes to state rules are also consistent with existing federal rules, including a change to the cleithrum-to-keel (see below) minimum size limit for recreational and commercial swordfish harvest.

#### **OUTREACH AND EDUCATION SUBSECTION**

The objective of this activity is to inform the public and to increase public participation in the management and conservation of Florida's marine resources by heightening their awareness of and personal responsibility toward these resources.

Outreach and education staff engaged 31,204 contacts during fiscal year 2013-2014 in the Gulf of Mexico region of Florida

Three Kids' Fishing Clinics (KFC) were conducted in coastal cities throughout the Gulf. A total of 869 youth attended the KFC's. All participating children received a rod and reel combo provided by Fish Florida! or purchased with donations from individuals and businesses from the hosting community. One weeklong saltwater fishing camp was conducted with a total of 11 youth participating in this program.

One *Ladies, Let's Go Fishing!* (LLGF) seminar was conducted with total of 68 women participating in the event. In addition to learning what FWC does to conserve fisheries resources

in Florida, the participants at these events learned about how they can have a positive impact on Florida's marine resources and what they can do to promote fish conservation while fishing.

Three one-day events Women's Fishing Clinics targeting 51 current and future female recreational anglers were conducted. These shore-based clinics focus on the Sport Fish Restoration Program, basic saltwater fishing skills (casting, knot tying, rods and reels, conservation equipment, terminal tackle, and lures/bait), how FWC functions to conserve marine fisheries resources (research, outreach, and management), catch and release techniques, and ways participants can support and be actively involved in the conservation of Florida's marine resources.

Two events were attended by 45 youth in the Cedar Key region. At these events the participants were provided with information about importance of marine habitats to coastal fisheries, how they as anglers can conserve fish resources and ways they can contribute to the overall enrichment of marine resources. The participants also conducted field sampling activities similar to what state biologists do to gather resource data for management.

Staff interacted with anglers at boat ramps, tackle shops, and other fishing related events to promote fisheries conservation, resource stewardship, and the Sport Fish Restoration Program. This work included giving presentations at various fishing club meetings in the region which resulted in 1,521 anglers and other resource users receiving information about marine fisheries conservation, SFR, and habitat conservation. Staff also provided this information to anglers at three large events targeting 27,791 attendees of these events.

Staff also engaged the public at five outdoor events to provide information to 859 participants of these events.

The following educational publications were made available to the public through numerous events. Most of these publications are also available online and, if so, the links to each publication are provided below.

- *Fishing Lines: An Angler's Guide to Florida's Marine Resources*  
<http://www.myfwc.com/fishing/saltwater/publications/fishing-lines-magazine/>
- *Florida Recreational Saltwater Fishing Regulations (English and Spanish editions)*  
<http://www.myfwc.com/fishing/saltwater/recreational/>
- *Fish ID Poster series by artist Diane Rome Peebles*
- *Sea Stats*  
<http://research.myfwc.com/products/products.asp>
- *Catch and Release Techniques*  
[http://catchandrelease.org/Catch\\_and\\_Release\\_web.pdf](http://catchandrelease.org/Catch_and_Release_web.pdf)
- *Florida Boater's Guides*



<http://research.myfwc.com/products/products.asp>

- *Kids Fishing Activity Book (Freshwater and Saltwater)*  
[http://myfwc.com/media/1316038/Fishing\\_Florida.pdf](http://myfwc.com/media/1316038/Fishing_Florida.pdf)
- Monofilament Recycling and Recovery Program  
<http://mrrp.myfwc.com/educational-materials.aspx>

## **COMMERCIAL AND RECREATIONAL REGULATORY OUTREACH**

Through the efforts of this group, FWC will develop and distribute new informational tools, conduct presentations, and provide other services that are designed to improve the understanding of state and federal marine fisheries regulations and how they are changing over time.

The subsection, a team of three including a public information specialist, is currently developing new tools to make our management efforts easier to understand. One example is a new web-based and printable "Recreational Seasons Chart" that will allow the viewer to quickly determine which species are open or closed on any given day of the year. The team is also reaching out to recreational and commercial fishing organizations and charter boat captains, offering direct assistance with saltwater fishing regulations.

During state fiscal year 2013/2014, the FWC continued ongoing commercial and started recreational saltwater fisheries regulatory assistance activities.

Three commercial fisheries newsletters were prepared and a total of 45,000 newsletters were distributed by mail (also available on agency website). As many as 325,000 emails were prepared and sent, informing commercial license holders, law enforcement and commercial industry representatives of 35 agency press releases (also available on agency website). As many as 5,400 telephone calls related to commercial fisheries were received and answered and 7,200 emails related to commercial fisheries were received and answered. As many as 11,245 saltwater products license holders received the printed copy of the commercial regulations publication (also available on the agency website) thanks to Cummins.

Two editions (January and July) of the recreational regulation publication (650,000 each edition) were distributed to 2,000 license sales agents and FWC regional offices around Florida. The recreational regulatory position has given twelve presentations to fishing clubs, solved 1339 knowledgebase questions, and answered 1400 telephone and 1300 e-mail request.

Our public information specialist sends out, on average, 65 press releases each year on subjects including season openings and closures; Commission meeting updates; regulation changes; and events such as Kids' Fishing Clinics, Women's Fishing Clinics and Ladies, Let's Go Fishing! More than 150 media calls were responded to including calls from newspapers, local television stations, magazines, national television production companies, radio stations and more. Responses varied from supplying basic information to conducting live and recorded television and radio interviews.

Marine Fisheries is always involved in the agencies social media efforts, including helping craft posts and responses for Facebook and Twitter, providing photos for Flickr and video for YouTube. Three promotional videos were created with the assistance of the video editing team and FWRI staff on Ladies, Let's Go Fishing! (347 views since published Sept. 27, 2012); Kids' Fishing Clinics (84 views since published July 18, 2013); and how to remove a stone crab claw (13,120 views since published Oct. 9, 2012). These were featured on YouTube and on the MyFWC.com website.

### **STATE ARTIFICIAL REEF PROGRAM**

The primary Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission state artificial reef program objectives are to provide financial and technical assistance to coastal local governments, nonprofit corporations, and state universities to develop artificial reefs and to monitor and evaluate these reefs.

During the period September 1, 2013 through August 31, 2014 seven artificial reef construction projects were completed in Florida utilizing funds from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Federal Sport Fish Restoration (SFR) Program and managed by the FWC Artificial Reef Program with the Division of Marine Fisheries Management. An eighth reef construction project using state funding was also completed.

Four of the seven (57.1%) new SFR artificial reef construction activities funded took place on the Atlantic Coast and three of the seven (42.9%) were off the Gulf Coast. On the Gulf Coast, three artificial reef construction activities took place in the Florida 'Panhandle' (Bay County, and the City of Mexico Beach); while one other took place off the Florida Big Bend located southwest of the mouth of the Steinhatchee River Northern Dixie County). On the Atlantic Coast three construction activities occurred off south central Florida (Indian River, Martin, and St. Lucie Counties) and one construction activity occurred off southeast Florida (Palm Beach County). There were also three artificial reef monitoring projects under way as of August 2014. These various projects are summarized below.

#### Bay County (Florida Panhandle)

Bay County deployed 48 concrete and limestone rock modules (about 120 tons total) to create 8 patch reefs placed around the inside perimeter of each of two permitted artificial reef area locations in state waters known as Small Area Artificial Reef Sites (SAARS) C and D respectively. Both 40 acre sites (squares 1320 feet on a side) were located in 71-77 ft. of water seven and nine nautical miles SW of the St. Andrews Bay entrance channel respectively. The \$60,000 project consisted of three primary module designs (48 total); with three at each of 16 patch reefs). One unit design was the Walter hollow tetrahedron unit about eight feet high with a ten foot base and with windows cut in the limestone studded concrete walls. The other two modular unit designs were incorporated into a single module unit that consisted of one three feet by three feet three disk layer concrete rock studded "ecosystem" reef attached to the top of a low profile ten feet long by 5 feet wide by three feet tall concrete grouper ledge module, with one long side of the module left open. Modular units were lowered by crane at their respective locations on June 26, 2014.

#### Dixie County (Florida Big Bend, Gulf Coast)

Dixie County deployed 900 tons of concrete culverts, other pre-cast concrete materials and multi-

ton limestone boulders, approximately equally divided among 22 patch reefs. Deployments were made over a ten day deployment period beginning May 21, 2014 and concluding June 6, 2014. On each deployment trip, the contractor carried between 90 and 107 tons of material on the barge along with a crane. Each piece of material was lowered to the sea floor while the barge was held in position by an anchor and a small push tug. The patch reef complex was deployed at a depth of 25 feet in the 2,700 feet by 2000 feet Horseshoe Beach permitted area located approximately 10 nautical miles on a bearing of 239 degrees from Horseshoe Beach, Florida. This project had a federal share of \$69,047.67 and a state fishing license revenue match of \$20,952.32.

#### Indian River County (South Central Florida East Coast)

Indian River County on July 18, 2014 deployed 859 tons of concrete bridge decking, concrete culverts, box culverts and concrete light poles with materials divided approximately equally between two patch reefs located within the Indian River County Reef Site 2 permitted area. Each of the two patch reefs consists of concrete materials placed as a single pile (400 tons each) located about 200 feet apart from each other. The Reef Site 2 permitted area is a square permitted zone measuring one square nautical mile encompassing 745.7 acres, in federal waters off Indian River County. The permitted site center is located approximately 10 nautical miles on a bearing of 68° from St. Lucie Inlet. The patch reefs were located within the northeast quadrant of the permitted area at a depth of 70 feet and with a maximum vertical relief of about 16 feet. This \$62,091 project originally consisted of \$41,000 in SFR funds, \$12,091 in state match and a County cash match of \$9,000. A total of \$14,000 in state reimbursement was subsequently withheld from the County for placement of some materials outside the permit area in non compliance with the contract agreement and Army Corps of Engineers permit conditions.

#### Martin County (South Central Florida East Coast)

Martin County deployed 2,734 tons of nested concrete culverts (two feet-six feet inside diameter by eight feet long) along with concrete riprap, concrete poles and concrete cylinders to create six patch reefs placed in 72-75 feet of water at the South County permitted reef site, located eight nautical miles on a bearing of 125 degrees from St. Lucie Inlet. The patch reefs were located about 738 feet apart from each other. Patch Reef #11 (424 tons of concrete culverts) was deployed 7/28/14. Patch Reef #7 (490 tons of concrete culverts) was deployed 07/31/14. Patch Reef #8 (441 tons of concrete culverts, slabs and poles) was deployed 08/3/14. Patch Reef #10 (424 tons of concrete culverts with secondary material concrete slabs and poles) was deployed 08/07/14. Patch Reef #12 (490 tons of concrete slabs, cylinders and culverts) was deployed 08/12/14. The sixth and final Patch Reef #9 (465 tons of four feet diameter to six feet diameter concrete cylinders and two to four feet diameter culverts) was deployed on 08/14/14. The total project cost included \$50,000 in federal SFR funds, \$50,000 in state saltwater license revenue funds and \$48,702.35 in County Funds.

#### St. Lucie County (South Central Florida East Coast)

St. Lucie County on July 21, 23, and August 14, 2014 constructed a single 1,500 ton patch reef within the St. Lucie County permitted Reef Site #4 (North County Near shore Site) located 5.6 nautical miles on a bearing of 61 degrees from Fort Pierce Inlet, Florida. The reef, placed in 57 feet of water, comprised three barge loads (490, 535, and 500 tons respectively) of mixed secondary use pre-cast concrete materials that included concrete culverts, light poles, and solid concrete cylindrical light pole bases. The project was funded with \$59,000 in federal SFR funds and a \$7,500 County cash match.

#### Mexico Beach, City of (Northwest Florida)

The City of Mexico Beach over a two day period (March 31 and April 1, 2014) deployed 58 modules of three different artificial reef module types across a depth range of 22 to 100 feet within five different permitted sites: Bell Shoals, Bridge Rubble, Bridge Span, North and South Sites, located in state and federal waters off eastern Bay County, Florida. The module designs deployed were eight feet tall Florida Limestone Tetrahedrons (33 units), low profile concrete grouper ledge reefs (three feet tall by eight feet by five feet) with a triple disk layer three feet diameter by three feet tall "ecosystem" reef attached to the top of the grouper reef (15 units) and 20 ton "super reef" modules (concrete and limestone sided tetrahedrons 17 feet tall, some with metal rebar steeples extending the vertical height to 25 feet (10 units). The project was funded with \$70,000 in federal SFR funds, \$50,000 in state saltwater fishing license revenues and a \$55,000 local cash match.

#### Palm Beach County (Southeast Florida)

Palm Beach County on July 29, 2014 constructed a single boulder reef composed of 943 tons of limestone boulders deployed off a large double anchored barge utilizing two excavators. The limestone reef, built in 30 feet of water was spread in a north-south orientation, some portions of the reef comprising a single layer of boulders, at other locations stacking of the boulders occurred to a maximum height of 11 feet. The County, utilizing its own funding, constructed an additional reef with a foot print of 125 feet x 100 feet immediately to the west of the limestone boulder reef with 413 tons of pre-cast concrete materials. Both reefs are located in the Juno Pier artificial reef site, three nautical miles on a bearing of 163 degrees from Jupiter Inlet. The project was funded with \$50,000 in federal SFR funds, \$10,000 in state saltwater fishing license revenues and a \$69,899 County vessel registration fee match.

### **Other Artificial Reef Construction Projects Utilizing State Funds**

#### City of Carrabelle (Franklin County, Northwest Florida)

On June 17 and 18 2014 The City of Carrabelle in coordination with the non-profit Organization for Artificial Reefs (OAR) deployed 30 Florida Limestone Specials (limestone studded concrete walled hollow tetrahedron units, with a 10 foot base and a vertical height of eight feet) and one 20 ton Limestone studded concrete walled hollow tetrahedron reef module with a vertical height of 15 feet at the Carrabelle 10 mile permitted reef site south of Dog Island, FL. The units were distributed among four patch reef locations in the permit area at depths of 61-64 feet. Two additional super reefs paid for with private funding to serve as memorial reefs were also deployed. The project was funded by \$55,000 in state saltwater fishing license revenues, a \$12,000 cash match from the City of Carrabelle. Additional private donations of \$47,000 funded the memorial super reefs.

### **Artificial Reef Monitoring Projects (on going)**

#### **Fish Census Monitoring on the Hoyt Vandenberg**

The FWC continued to fund the Reef Environmental Education Foundation (REEF) for the July 2014 completion of year four of a five year fish census monitoring effort of the 520-foot-long, steel-hulled, former missile tracking ship the General Hoyt Vandenberg , sunk as an artificial reef in 2009 six miles south of Key West. This monitoring project continues to document the changes in fish presence /absence and relative abundance and biomass over time at the Vandenberg

artificial reef site and seven reference reef sites based upon single summer fish censuses at each location. The Vandenberg rests in 135 feet of water about six miles south of Key West at 24° 27.60' N latitude and 81° 44.25' W longitude. A summer 2015 monitoring effort by REEF will complete the five year monitoring period.

#### **Acoustic Tracking of Red Snapper on Artificial Reefs off Pensacola FL**

The FWC Artificial Reef program provided funding to the University of West Florida to conduct acoustic tracking of selected reef fishes associated with modular concrete and concrete and steel units located in 110-130 feet of water in federal waters within the Escambia East Large Area Artificial Reef Site, 15 nautical miles south of Pensacola Pass. The work which began during summer 2012 was the project will conduct a multidisciplinary, process-oriented study using an acoustic array of 16 Vemco VR2 receivers deployed in a defined pattern over a 22 kilometer squared area to continue work on the ecological function of small artificial reef patch reefs deployed by the FWC in 2003. Twenty-five reef fish were be tagged and tracked over a three-month period to produce three-dimensional tracks of fish and estimate home ranges and factors effecting tagged fish. Results of this study will add to our knowledge of reef fish ecology on small-scale artificial reefs off the Florida Panhandle. The final report from this one-year monitoring effort is expected by May 2015.

#### **Oriskany fish sampling for PCBs**

The FWC and Escambia County continued sampling legal-size recreationally targeted reef fish (red snapper, gray triggerfish, red and whitebone porgy, vermilion snapper, gag, red, and scamp grouper) for PCB analysis (using skin-on lateral muscle tissue fillets) in compliance with requirements of the EPA risk-based PCB disposal permit for the ex-U.S.S. Oriskany (CVA-34), sunk as an artificial reef in 212 feet of water 22.5 nautical miles off Pensacola Pass on May 17, 2006. Between Dec. 14, 2006, and April 16, 2014, 12 reef fish sample collection events were completed, eight during the spring and four during late fall/winter. A total of 417 reef fish collected on the Oriskany have been retained for PCB sampling through April 2014.

Sampling results on 53 fish (5 scamp, 3 gag, 1 gray triggerfish, 9 red porgies, 20 vermilion snapper and 14 red snapper) caught on the Oriskany April 24-25 2013 as sample round 11 were analyzed for total PCBs and 208 congeners by the Texas A and M Geological and Environmental Research Group (GERG). Mean total PCB concentration of skin on lateral muscle fillet samples for vermilion snapper and red snapper, the consistently most commonly caught fish species, continue to remain below the 20 ppb EPA tier 1 screening threshold as has been the case for the last several years. Sample Round 12 specimens caught April 16, 2014 are currently at the lab undergoing analysis as of August 2014. These include 3 bank sea bass, 15 vermilion snapper, 5 whitebone porgies, 4 red snapper, and 2 red porgies. Tier one hook-and-line sampling for recreationally targeted legal size reef fish to assess PCB concentrations on the Oriskany Reef is expected to continue at least through spring 2015.

Additionally, 11 underwater visual assessments have been conducted on the Oriskany Reef over the past few years by FWC divers, confirming that the observed recreationally targeted species found on the Oriskany are well represented among the fish retained for PCB analysis. Visual observations by FWC divers also documented that the Oriskany Reef had settled into the sediments

about 10 feet at 2.5 years post-deployment and sustained minor structural change to the exterior covering of the smoke stack at 3.5 years post-deployment following the tropical storm events of 2007 and 2008, respectively.

**Assessment of User Activities on Artificial Reefs and Natural Reefs off Pinellas County, FL.**

FWC has contracted with the University of South Florida to engage in a project utilizing passive acoustic listening devices to assess boating activity over and immediately adjacent to three artificial reef sites and their paired natural reef sites. This project is ongoing as of August 2014. Preliminary data from the acoustic listening devices indicate that the artificial reef sites are receiving significantly higher boating visitation activity than the natural reef sites. The draft final report is expected by August, 2015.

**Comparison of reef fish communities on artificial and adjacent natural reef sites off Franklin County (Northwest Florida)**

FWC contracted with the Florida State University Coastal Marine Lab to conduct reef fish population studies of artificial reefs and nearby natural reefs mapped using side scan sonar. The field work for this project concluded in August 2014 and work on a final project report has commenced.

**MONITORING COMPLIANCE WITH THE MARINE FISHERIES TRIP TICKET REPORTING REQUIREMENTS THROUGH AUDITS OF APPLICABLE FISH HOUSE RECORDS**

Monitoring the compliance with marine fisheries trip ticket reporting requirements ensures accurate fisheries information.

Four audits of wholesale dealers were conducted. Twenty-four wholesale dealers were visited to determine whether or not a detailed audit is necessary. Two hundred thirty-three wholesale and retail dealers received delinquent notices for failing to submit trip tickets within 90 days. Research into reported landings was conducted on three hundred fifty-seven wholesale dealers and commercial fishermen. Of these, ninety-three (93%) percent was for FWC law enforcement and staff and seven (7%) percent was for federal law enforcement.

Additionally, four audit reports were issued from prior year audit fieldwork. One report resulted in a substantial increase in the amount saltwater products one dealer reported in several prior years.

**ADMINISTRATIVE PENALTY ASSESSMENTS FOR VIOLATIONS OF SPECIFIED FISHERIES REGULATIONS**

Florida Statutes specify administrative penalties and license suspensions for violations of specific fishery regulations.

Twenty-three administrative penalties were assessed in FY 2013-2014 for a total of \$96,000. Penalties paid totaled \$11,100. Sixteen of the administrative penalties (70%) were for net violations; two (9%) were for unlawful harvest, purchase, or sale of saltwater products; one (4%) penalty was for major blue crab violations; one (4%) penalty was for major stone crab violations; and three (13%) were for other major violations.

During the 2013-2014 fiscal year, the FWC received eight petitions requesting informal administrative proceedings, and two petitions requesting formal administrative hearings. Two petitions for informal administrative proceedings and one petition for a formal administrative hearing were dismissed. Four informal administrative hearings were conducted, and three informal administrative proceedings were conducted, where the petitioner elected the option to submit additional evidence for consideration in lieu of proceeding with an informal administrative hearing. There were no formal administrative hearings conducted during the 2013-2014 fiscal year. One petition for an informal administrative hearing and one petition for a formal administrative hearing were resolved by settlement agreement.

### **RETRIEVAL OF LOST AND ABANDONED SPINY LOBSTER, STONE CRAB, AND BLUE CRAB TRAPS**

The FWC has two programs dedicated to removing lost and abandoned traps from state waters. **The Spiny Lobster, Stone Crab and Blue Crab Trap Retrieval Program** contracts with commercial fishermen to remove lost and abandoned traps from state waters during closed seasons.

The **Derelict Trap and Trap Debris Removal Program** provides a mechanism to authorize volunteer groups to collect derelict traps and trap debris during open or closed seasons.

Blue crab, stone crab and spiny lobster have a number of trap restrictions and/or tagging requirements. Trap retrieval programs were conducted with revenues paid from fees received by these fisheries. During the 2013-2014 fiscal year, 43 trap retrieval trips were conducted (29 trips for stone crab and lobster; 14 trips for blue crab) where a total of 5,202 traps (4,208 stone crab and lobster traps; 994 blue crab traps) were retrieved for a total expenditure of \$119,989. Additionally, 11 authorizations were issued for volunteer derelict trap cleanup events, resulting in the removal of 268 traps (one cleanup event was canceled, and one event did not provide a report).

### **ISSUANCE OF SPECIAL ACTIVITY LICENSES**

The marine fisheries special activity license program issues licenses for activities that require a waiver of marine fisheries regulations.

Two hundred eighty-three Special Activity Licenses were issued, 46 license amendments were issued, two applications were denied, and two applications were withdrawn. Thirty-seven percent (104) of the licenses issued or amended were for scientific research, thirty-nine percent (110) were for education and or exhibition, and 12 percent (35) were for redfish catch, hold and release tournament exemption permits (the remainder were for stock collection and release (23), aquaculture brood stock collection (6), and gear innovation (1)).

## **FLORIDA FISH AND WILDLIFE RESEARCH INSTITUTE:**

**2013/2014**

Director: Gil McRae

### **FINFISH**

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute exists to provide timely information and guidance to protect, conserve and manage Florida's fish and wildlife resources through effective research and technical knowledge.

*We continued our efforts to monitor and characterize the recreational snook fishery in Florida and to conduct studies to establish movements and exchange rates between groups of snook inhabiting freshwater, estuarine and coastal reef habitats and also between the major estuarine systems. We also expanded our biological sampling of snook for age and reproductive status into riverine and offshore areas not previously sampled. Monitoring of spotted seatrout courtship sounds at a key spawning site was continued and a pilot project to evaluate red drum spawning sites and site fidelity off the mouth of Tampa Bay was continued, using a similar combination of acoustic telemetry and passive acoustic monitoring as used in our spotted seatrout spawning studies.*

*Studies of Florida's permit fishery were initiated, with an emphasis on developing a better understanding of the fishery and examining population movements and stock structure using both conventional and genetic tagging studies. Our studies of movements, habitat fidelity and home ranges of recreationally important reef fish species in the Florida Keys were continued, as was our effort to identify and document spawning sites of the mutton snapper (*Lutjanis analis*) and other reef fish species.*

*We also continued a field study to provide quantitative information on habitat associations and movement patterns of goliath grouper (*Epinephelus itajara*) within the central eastern Gulf of Mexico, as well as initiating a catch and release mortality study and continuing our opportunistic collection of life history information from specimens made available through natural mortality events or enforcement actions of this protected species. Lastly, we began development of a histological atlas of Florida reef fish using samples from FWRI's West Florida Shelf reef fish surveys.*

*Statistically robust habitat suitability models (HSM) were developed that relate fish species catch rates to water quality and benthic habitat data derived from Fisheries Independent Monitoring (FIM). The HSM models (BEINF0, ZAGA) account for zero-inflation in the FIM data. Seasonal HSM maps were created for 87 species life-stages in Tampa Bay. The model was validated by comparing outputs from two time periods. Maps illustrating upper and lower bounds of the confidence intervals for CPUE estimates for each species/life-stage/season combination were also created. A new web-enabled database has been created called Ecospecies that incorporates over 90 species life history profiles. As part of the Ecospecies contract with the South Atlantic Fisheries Management Council, 6 life history profiles have been created and will be added to the database. These species are: Black Sea Bass, Gag Grouper, Gray Snapper, Goliath Grouper, Red Grouper and the Spanish mackerel.*

## **MOLLUSKS**

Bay scallop (*Argopecten irradians*) population monitoring and restoration is ongoing from Pine Island Sound to St. Andrew Bay, with success evaluated via surveys of adult abundance and recruitment patterns. All of the areas open to harvest that were surveyed in 2011 were classified



as healthy except the St. Mark's region, which was in a transitional status (showing signs of recovery after low densities in 2009 and 2010). The 2011 harvest season opened six days early compared to the 2010 season, which opened 11 days early. The 2011 season was also extended to September 25, elongating the season by 21 days total in 2011.

*We will conduct a post-season survey for the first time since 2003 (Steinhatchee), 2005 (St. Joe Bay and Homosassa) and 2007 (Anclote and St. Andrew Bay) to assess mortality rates in both open-harvest and closed populations. The two monitored populations in the region potentially affected by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill (St. Andrew Bay and St. Joe Bay) had densities in 2011 that exceeded those in 2010, and also had higher recruitment levels, suggesting no immediate impact. Scallop densities in most closed areas were at the highest levels seen since surveys were initiated in 1994. But two populations, Tampa Bay and Sarasota Bay, were at their lowest since surveys started there in 2007, suggesting the population in the southwest region has not fully recovered despite restoration efforts. These efforts are organized with the cooperation of FWRI, but are largely funded through micro-grants and other fundraisers by volunteer-based organizations.*

*Oyster (Crassostrea virginica) population assessment studies are being conducted in southeast Florida as part of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Program and also as a component of a federally-funded (ARRA) oyster restoration in St. Lucie County. Additional studies of Gulf of Mexico oysters were initiated as part of two actions related to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill: a rapid-response study meant to establish base-line metrics (which will be useful in comparing data from several Florida Gulf estuaries) and, also, as part of the Federal NRDA response. FWRI is also participating in updating the FMP for Gulf oysters. A draft version of the plan is complete and is being prepared for public comment and the 2012 GSMFC review process.*

## **CRUSTACEANS**

Research into lipofuscin age determination of Florida blue crabs continues with investigation into the correlation of lipofuscin accumulation and chronological age. The investigation into the effect of the Blue Crab Effort Management Plan (BCEMP) on commercial blue crab effort and landings continues to track annual changes in landings, license renewals and traps tags post-BCEMP implementation. A statewide disease monitoring program, using histology and qPCR for the detection of *Hematodinium sp.* in wild populations of blue crabs continues. This program is working to understand the role of this disease in the natural mortality of blue crab populations.

We continue to identify horseshoe crab spawning beaches and collect spawning site information through an online reporting system. This reporting system continues to demonstrate annual increases in public participation and has revealed new spawning sites throughout the state.

The stone crab fishery independent monitoring program continues at nine locations along the west Florida coast. This program gathers fishery independent data on the stocks exploited in this claws-only fishery. Since the implementation of this program, sufficient data has been collected to suggest fishery specific trends that are currently being integrated into the 2012 stock assessment.

This year, Florida has experienced an increase in the reporting of Giant Tiger Prawn, *Penaeus monodon*, from the Panhandle and East coast of the state. We have distributed press releases and

contact information statewide to encourage reporting from recreational and commercial fishermen. The extent of this exotic invasive population is unknown.

### **FISHERIES GENETICS**

With angler assistance, we continued to use DNA markers to genetically track individual tarpon in capture/recapture studies in Florida. To date, about 9,000 samples from caught-and-released tarpon have been obtained and genotyped. The majority of movements for recaptured tarpon have occurred over small distances (less than 10 km); however, some have occurred over large distances (e.g., from the Tampa Bay area to the Florida Keys).

Analyses of genetic data for spiny lobster and common snook continued. We also continued to examine the distributions of bonefish species inhabiting Florida and are completing the formal description of a newly discovered bonefish species, which occurs in south Florida, Mexico and some Caribbean locations (Wallace and Tringali. 2010. *J. Fish. Biol.* 76:1972-1983). Mean single-generation dispersal distances were estimated for members of sand seatrout populations along Florida's Gulf of Mexico coast. Observed patterns of genetic heterogeneity conformed to an isolation-by-distance model of gene flow, and individual sand seatrout can be expected, on average, to disperse from natal locations a distance of about 80 km. The genetic effective population size for the west-central Florida stock of Gulf of Mexico red drum was determined based on genotype data from more than 23,000 wild red drum ( $N_{ew} = 48,580$ ; 95% CI = 32,720 to 86,830). The effective size of hatchery red drum released during Project Tampa Bay was computed based on genotype data from more than 2,200 hatchery recaptures ( $N_{eh} = 34$ ; 95% CI = 32 to 36). Using 29 microsatellite DNA markers, about 250 specimens of hogfish from the Florida Atlantic and west-central Florida Gulf of Mexico were tested to ascertain levels of geographic connectivity. Spatially-associated genetic differentiation was not observed over the sampled range. For spotted seatrout, approximately 500 breeding adults and 650 young of the year from Tampa Bay were genotyped for mark/recapture and kinship studies, which are ongoing.

### **FISHERIES STATISTICS**

Fisheries-independent monitoring (FIM) of fish continues in Tampa Bay, Charlotte Harbor, Indian River Lagoon, Cedar Key, Apalachicola and Northeast Florida. The FIM program uses a systematic sampling strategy to collect fish free from the biases associated with collecting data from recreational and commercial fisheries. Data has been used for numerous stock assessments for several inshore species. Staff has spent much time developing models that describe fish abundance associated with different habitats. Additionally, staff in this program have been involved in the mercury concentration in fish program, fish health assessment, environmental health and fish diets, as well as studying fish from the rivers feeding Charlotte Harbor and Tampa Bay. We have continued to work on expanding our FIM program into reef areas along the coast.

During 2010-2011, preliminary numbers indicate Florida commercial landings from 216,902 commercial fishing trips totaled approximately 95.4 million (M) pounds of fish, crab, clams (wild harvest only, excludes aquaculture), lobster, shrimp and other invertebrates worth over \$200 M in dockside value. Marine life landings (live fish and invertebrates for aquaria and other uses) from 5,601 commercial collecting trips in 2010-11 amounted to 8.2 M individual specimens worth nearly \$2.9 M in dockside value. The top 10 species in dockside value harvested during 2010-11

in Florida were: Caribbean spiny lobster (\$38.3 M), stone crab (claws: \$25 M), pink shrimp (\$13.8 M), red grouper (\$12.4 M), blue crab (including soft-shell crabs; \$12 M), white shrimp (\$10.5 M), king mackerel (\$8.7 M), bait shrimp (\$7.4 M), oysters (\$6.7 M) and black mullet (\$5.9 M). The total commercial harvest of food shrimp in Florida was 17.4 M pounds (heads on; \$34.7 M dockside value) in 2010-2011.

### **STOCK ENHANCEMENT RESEARCH**

Preliminary designs for future marine eco-centers were completed for sites in Escambia and Walton counties in the panhandle. Demolition of buildings and progress on the youth development center and aquatic plant nurseries were ongoing at the New Smyrna Beach Ecocenter. Planning continued for development of an intensive marine hatchery for Tampa Bay. A fourth trial of intensive culture of juvenile red drum *Sciaenops ocellatus* was completed evaluating new equipment to optimize oxygen levels in circular culture tanks. We continued to make improvements to transition existing culture capabilities from extensive to intensive. A new, six-tank production system for intensive culture of larval red drum was completed in the intensive culture lab. Larval red drum were stocked into these tanks to develop husbandry protocols for indoor, phase-I production. We continued coordination with the crustacean group for an aging study for blue crabs (*Callinectes sapidus*) in pond 16 and greenhouse two. There were no snook or red drum releases during this period. Spartina plugs (33,000) and shoots (10,000) were harvested from the hatchery effluent treatment marsh for shoreline restoration or nurseries at six locations throughout Tampa Bay.

### **MARINE FISH**

Fish and Wildlife Health (FWH) staff in St. Petersburg monitors the health of aquatic organisms throughout the state of Florida. During the 2013-2014 FY, the FWH group conducted necropsies (laboratory or field examinations of fish to collect health data) on 844 specimens that covered four project aspects: 1) health monitoring (n = 217), 2) event response (n = 68), 3) stock enhancement support (n = 291), and 4) special project (n = 268). **Event response** specimens (8%) were evaluated as part of fish kill investigations or other fish and wildlife health related events. **Health monitoring** specimens (26%) were collected primarily by Fisheries Independent Monitoring (FIM) as part of our collaborative disease surveillance efforts, and were submitted to FWH because they exhibited gross external abnormalities or because we requested apparently healthy specimens to gather baseline data and develop health profiles for sport fish. Fish categorized under **special projects** (32%) included sport fish collected for parasitological analysis to study parasites that may impact native fish or potential aquaculture species and for other, experimental research. Fish examined for **stock enhancement** purposes (34%) were evaluated in support of the Florida Marine Fisheries Enhancement Initiative. These fish came from trial recirculating aquaculture systems from FWC's Stock Enhancement Research Facility.

During 2013-2014, we received a total of 977 reports on FWH Fish Kill Hotline, through the FWRI website or via direct calls. The statewide, toll-free Fish Kill Hotline (1-800-636-0511) and our web-based fish kill reporting form allow the public to report aquatic mortality and disease events directly to scientists, who can respond immediately to their concerns. We document and monitor fish kills, coordinate event response with partners, and provide general information about fish kills and disease to the public. Monitoring fish kills around the state allows us to recognize important

epizootics and opportunistly collect biological samples that we would not normally be able to get. The public and the media used the hotline not only to report fish kills and disease, but also to request information about on-going mortality events. Anglers called to report catching fish with parasites, tumors, lesions, and deformities. We also received information requests on other marine related topics such as fish identification, fishing regulations, and algal blooms (i.e. - red tide). Since its inception, the FWH group has received and responded to over 20,000 reports/information requests. Forty-three sites were investigated for fish kills. A fish kill was considered an “event” when it was politically, economically, or ecologically significant. Only one group of reports (n=164; group report ID 19499) from the Indian River Lagoon was designated as an event during this segment.

FWH participated in various types of outreach activities to promote the Fish Kill Hotline and to promote conservation through education. Outreach consisted of a variety of activities intended to reach many people, particularly anglers. This year, FWH Sport Fish Restoration research was one of several FWRI projects highlighted in a Mark Sosin video, to be shown at fishing shows and fishing shops. To promote the hotline as a public resource, we gave out specialty items throughout the year, including fishing towels, stickers, reusable grocery bags, and key chains imprinted with the FKH number and the Sport Fish Restoration logo. We logged over 241 hours of preparation time and 203 direct contact hours with the public during outreach events.

### **MARINE MAMMALS**

FWC documented 830 manatee carcasses in Florida during 2013, an unprecedented level. Two ‘Unusual Mortality Events’ were declared and those events contributed to the high number of reported deaths. Preliminarily, 88 of the cause of death determinations in 2013 were human-related fatalities. Eighty-eight statewide manatee rescues were conducted in 2013. Of those rescues 31 were directly from human-related causes including watercraft collision, entanglement, and entrapment.

A statewide “synoptic” survey was flown in January 2014 and 4,824 manatees were counted by a team of 20 observers from nine organizations. An important objective within the state Manatee Management Plan includes improving these methods and implementing statistically sound methods to estimate the manatee population. Work progressed in developing and refining new methodology.

During the 2013-14 North Atlantic right whale calving season (December 01, 2013 –March 31, 2014) staff coordinated and conducted aerial surveys off the coastal waters of Florida and portions of Georgia in an effort to alert vessels to the presence of right whales, monitor calf production, identify unique individuals and describe whale distribution and habitat. Through our collaborative effort with NOAA-Fisheries, Georgia Department of Natural Resources and the Sea to Shore Alliance, 52 unique right whales, including 10 newborn calves, were documented and fourteen right whales, including eight calves, as well as two humpback whales were biopsy sampled.

No right whale carcasses were detected during this calving season, but one calf loss was documented through photo-identification. FWC documented and assessed new injuries on three right whales. The injuries were likely caused by entanglement prior to the whales’ migration to the

calving area; these whales were not carrying any fishing gear. Lastly, one entangled whale was documented this winter. During a two-day operation, we assessed, tagged and partially disentangled a four year-old whale in collaboration with our partner agencies and organizations. Heavy fishing rope removed from the whale was examined by FWC and then transferred to NOAA-Fisheries along with a gear report. The rope is not consistent with that used in southeastern U.S. and the whale likely migrated here with the gear attached.

## **DIVISION OF HABITAT AND SPECIES CONSERVATION**

Director: Thomas Eason

### **Aquatic Habitat Conservation and Restoration**

The Marine and Estuarine Subsection (MES) of the Aquatic Habitat Conservation and Restoration Section is responsible for the FWC's coordinated management of marine and estuarine habitat in Florida waters. This subsection is staffed by regional biologists that work around the state with partners to develop and implement conservation projects, such as marine habitat restoration efforts, which support healthy marine fisheries. MES activities are supported by the state Marine Resources Conservation Trust Fund, and through various federal grant programs for specific habitat restoration efforts.

### **Marine and Estuarine Conservation through MES**

The strategic actions of the marine and estuarine habitat program revolve around collaboration with other agencies, partners, and stakeholders to support marine habitat conservation activities. These actions revolve around five central goals:

1. Restoration and enhancement of the quality and quantity of marine and estuarine habitats.
2. Conservation and maintenance of intact native estuarine and marine habitats and their ecological functions.
3. Protection of Florida's native estuarine and marine habitats and their functions within respective ecosystems from degradation.
4. Influence marine and estuarine habitat management through proactive coordination and participation with partners.
5. Support marine and estuarine habitat restoration, conservation, and protection activities.

### **Accomplishments**

- FWC northwest regional biologists acquired National Fish and Wildlife Foundation funding for Phase I (\$150,000) of the West Bay (St. Andrews Bay-Panama City) oyster enhancement and possible seagrass community restoration project. This phase of the project will use a series of oyster reefs of about 1 acre in area located on the historic deep seagrass bed edges to anchor sediments that currently suspend during periods of wave activity and cause light limitations in the water column. Oysters will also filter the water column and bind available nutrients further enhancing water quality in the system. FWC staff also submitted complete Phase II funding (\$2,000,000) for this project through the second round of the NFWF-Gulf Environmental Benefits Fund. Combined with appropriate seagrass transplantation, this project will provide approximately 2 miles of oyster reef habitat and potentially lead to the restoration of as much as 2,000 acres of seagrass historically found in West Bay. The resulting oyster reefs will enhance habitat for important fish species such as red drum, spotted seatrout, and gray snapper, and will support endangered species such as Kemp's ridley sea turtles.

- FWC completed surveys and initiated engineering design for a 3 acre living shoreline oyster and saltmarsh enhancement project in coordination with the Florida State University Marine Laboratory (FSUML) at Turkey Point. This project will enhance existing oyster reefs, augment saltmarsh habitat and improve shorebird nesting habitat on FSUML lands, and will be used by research and outreach coordinators well into the future.
- FWC continued to work with TNC, USFWS, NOAA and regional and local governments to develop coordinated and prioritized watershed-level conservation projects related to RESTORE Act activities in waters from Hernando to Escambia Counties. This effort will result in a comprehensive priority list of aquatic habitat conservation efforts supported by regional partners and directed toward a significant funding source for the conservation and restoration of estuarine marine habitats in coastal northwest Florida.
- FWC staff conducted an 9<sup>th</sup> season of integrated seagrass monitoring in the Big Bend region of Florida as part of a long-term seagrass health assessment effort. This monitoring effort has continued for a number of years, and has been incorporated into an comprehensive “Seagrass Integrated Monitoring and Mapping (SIMM)” report available at: <http://myfwc.com/research/habitat/seagrasses/publications/simm-report-1/> This monitoring effort is designed to assess changes in seagrass system health over a broad area of highly productive habitat in the northeastern Gulf of Mexico, and report the findings to managers and the public.

## **FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER SERVICES**

**Adam H. Putnam, Commissioner**

### **DIVISION OF AQUACULTURE**

**Director: Kal Knickerbocker**

The Division of Aquaculture conducts numerous activities to promote the development of aquaculture and ensure the quality of aquaculture and shellfish products in Florida. These activities include regulatory, administrative, advisory, and technical functions directed toward ensuring that aquaculture operations are compatible with the Florida Aquaculture Plan, Aquaculture Certification Program, best management practices, resource management goals, and public health protection. The Division provides several primary service programs to support aquaculture and shellfish resource development:

- 1) Aquaculture Certification Program;
- 2) Sovereignty Submerged Lands Aquaculture Leasing Program;
- 3) Oyster Culture and Shellfish Resource Development Program;
- 4) Shellfish Sanitation;
- 5) Shellfish Environmental Assessment; and
- 6) Technical Support Program (Ombudsman, training, technical outreach, grants).

The Division has been very progressive in its support of aquacultural development as a practical alternative to commercial fishing and conventional agriculture to foster economic development in rural and coastal communities. The Division’s programs offer unique and essential services to this emerging sector of Florida’s agriculture community. These programs provide the regulatory framework for aquacultural operations and public health protection, provide specific farming areas on state-owned submerged lands, and provide responsible stewardship for Florida’s natural aquatic resources.

During FY 2012/2013, the Division continued its commitment to encourage the development of the aquaculture and shellfish industries in Florida. This commitment is based on the belief that aquaculture will become an integral segment of Florida's agricultural and economic future by providing high quality aquacultural products to worldwide markets while advancing resource management.

The following is a summary of the activities related to aquaculture and shellfish industry regulation and development carried out during fiscal year 2012/2013.

#### Aquaculture Certification Program

Chapter 597, Florida Statutes (F.S.) established the Aquaculture Certificate of Registration to recognize aquafarming businesses. Aquacultural businesses in Florida are required to be certified annually and to attest that they will comply with the Best Management Practices provided in Chapter 5L-3, Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C.). The aquaculture certificate is used to identify aquaculture producers as members of Florida's agricultural community and to identify aquacultural products produced in the state.

The Aquaculture Certificate of Registration is linked to the Best Management Practices Program. Best Management Practices have been established by and for the aquaculture industry and represent the most appropriate and practical framework for Florida's diverse aquaculture businesses. More than 1,100 site inspections are conducted at aquaculture facilities to ensure compliance with Aquaculture Best Management Practices and state and local regulations. Staff is trained to provide a standardized evaluation, provide the aquaculturist with applicable industry updates and act as a resource for the aquaculture industry.

The Division certified 962 aquaculture facilities during FY 2012/2013. Shellfish producers (354 farmers) make up 37% of the certified farms, 273 food fish producers make up 28% of the certified farms, 189 ornamental producers make up 20% of the certified farms, with the remaining producing live rock, alligators, and bait. Certified farms are found in 61 of the state's 67 counties: with the highest number of certified farms occurring in Levy County (17%) and Hillsborough County (8%).

#### Sovereignty Submerged Lands Aquaculture Leasing Program

The Division is responsible for the Aquaculture Lease Program under the provisions in Chapter 253, F.S. During FY 2012/2013, the Division administered 475 aquaculture leases containing about 1,106 acres and 56 shellfish leases containing about 999 acres. Aquaculture and shellfish leases are located in 16 counties, including: Bay, Brevard, Charlotte, Collier, Dixie, Franklin, Indian River, Lee, Levy, Manatee, Monroe, Palm Beach, Pinellas, Santa Rosa, St. Johns, and Volusia Counties. In response to its statutory mandate, the Division identifies tracts of submerged lands throughout the state that are suitable for aquacultural development. Twenty special aquaculture use areas have been identified by the Division and authorized by the Board of Trustees in nine coastal counties.

Unlike many upland agricultural ventures that are conducted on privately-held lands, marine aquaculture must be conducted on or over submerged lands that are largely held in the public domain. Since only an insignificant amount of suitable submerged acreage is privately owned, marine aquafarmers are uniquely dependent upon the use of public lands to grow their crops. Accordingly, the Department must act on behalf of the Governor and Cabinet to administer and manage these public lands in the best interest of the people of Florida, including protecting valuable natural resources.

Late in 2013, the Board of Trustees approved two modified lease agreements for floating oyster cages in Alligator Harbor. Utilization of the full water column allows aquaculturists to place oysters in the nutrient dense upper layer of the water column and offers protection from common predators.

The Aquaculture Lease Program supports marine aquaculture in a very unique way, and producing hard clams on sovereignty submerged lands is the largest marine aquaculture business in Florida. The most recent sales and value survey of hard clam farmers reported that 136.3 million clams were sold during 2012.

#### Shellfish Sanitation and Environmental Assessment Programs

A total of 39 shellfish harvesting areas totaling 1,445,833 acres are currently classified and managed statewide. During FY 2012/2013, 481 sampling excursions were conducted to collect and analyze 10,588 water samples for fecal coliform bacteria. There were 358 management actions to close or re-open shellfish harvesting areas in accordance with the management plans for individual shellfish harvesting areas. During FY 2012/2013, a total of 87 Shellfish Processing Plant Certification Licenses were issued and 313 regulatory processing plant inspections were conducted. Based on inspection results, 31 warning letters and two settlement agreements were issued.

#### Oyster Culture and Shellfish Resource Development Program

Under the mandate to improve, enlarge, and protect the oyster and clam resources of the state, the Division is actively engaged in enhancing shellfish resources and restoring oyster reefs on public submerged lands. During FY 2012/2013, the Division collected 120,744 bushels of processed oyster shell from processors located primarily in Franklin County and collected 24,624 bushels of clam shell from processors in Cedar Key. Shell planting operations accounted for the deposition of 8,292 cubic yards of processed and fossil shell on public oyster reefs in Bay, Franklin, Levy, and Santa Rosa Counties. Oyster resource development projects involving the relaying and transplanting of live oysters were conducted in cooperation with local oystermen's associations in three coastal counties. A total of 92,796 bushels of live oysters were re-planted on public reefs in Dixie, Levy, and Wakulla Counties.

In 2006, the Department entered into a subcontract agreement with the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (through NOAA) to restore oyster reefs adversely affected by hurricanes under the Emergency Disaster Recovery Program (EDRP). The grant subcontract agreements were extended several times with a firm ending date of September 30, 2013. The \$4.2 million contract provides for three project components: 1) restoring public oyster reefs, 2) providing economic assistance to oyster farmers, and 3) developing a scientific model to assess the success of oyster reef restoration efforts in the Pensacola Bay system. In 2012/2013, the Division began winding down the restoration activities to coincide with the remaining funds and grant deadline. Oyster reef restoration operations accounted for the deposition of 8,292 cubic yards of substrate materials on public oyster reefs in some of Florida's most productive estuaries.

#### Technical Support Programs

Providing technical assistance to the aquaculture and shellfish industries is an important role of the Division. Staff provides substantial technical and administrative support for aquacultural and shellfish operations through site visits, compliance inspections, technical meetings, conferences, workshops,



and outreach projects. Staff provides guidance to aquaculture businesses to ensure compliance with Aquaculture Best Management Practices and other state and local regulations.

Apalachicola Bay Oyster Harvesting License

An oyster harvesting license is required to harvest oysters from Apalachicola Bay. In FY 2012/2013, 1,790 oyster harvesting licenses were sold, representing a 12 percent decline in the number of licenses sold in the preceding year. License sales continue to demonstrate a large number of fishers remaining in the fishery, although the number of license holders has declined from a high 1,909 in 2010.

**Alabama State Report to the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission**  
**Fall 2014**  
**Fisheries Section**

Renovation activities to the boat and barge basins located at Claude Peteet Mariculture Center (CPMC) in Gulf Shores began in July. Renovation plans include the installation of 4 boat slips with lifts, a boat ramp, new docks, and seawalls, and renovation of a barge basin to be used in conjunction with Alabama's artificial reef program. Construction is expected to be completed by spring 2015.

Alabama Marine Resources Division (AMRD) staff is currently installing the aquaculture and hatchery equipment in the newly constructed wet lab at CPMC. The new 23,000 square foot facility is anticipated to be fully operational by spring. Red drum and Florida pompano broodstock have been collected and are currently held in the new wet lab.

The Alabama Legislature passed a bill to extend Alabama's territorial waters to three marine leagues for fisheries management. This bill was signed into law by Governor Robert Bentley.

The Alabama Red Snapper Reporting program was implemented for the 2014 recreational red snapper season. Alabama Regulation 220-3-.83-.211ER – "Recreational Reporting of Red Snapper" requires the captain of each recreational vessel to report certain data including vessel registration, the numbers of anglers, the number of red snapper retained, and the number of red snapper discarded dead. Reporting was available through the Snapper Check app, the Outdoor Alabama website, a toll-free telephone number, and paper survey tickets associated with drop boxes available at six coastal public boat launches. A total of 2,685 trip reports were used to generate preliminary estimates of harvest from both charter and private vessels. These reports accounted for 15,886 anglers trips during the federal and state seasons. AMRD staff performed observations (validations) of vessel trips with red snapper in order to determine the non-reporting rate and under- or over-reporting rates of anglers and red snapper harvested. In addition to specific assignments, validations were also collected during MRIP's APAIS assignments and by AMRD's Enforcement Officers while on patrol. A total of 722 validations by AMRD staff were used to determine correction factors. Correction factors for under-reporting and over-reporting were very low and were not used to adjust reported fish. However, the correction factor for non-reporting by private vessel anglers during the federal red snapper season was significant at 2.16. Charter vessel reporting was much higher and resulted in a lower correction factor of 1.14. After these correction factors were applied to reported data from both groups, 418,000 pounds were estimated to have been landed in Alabama. The pounds estimated from the reporting program were nearly 60% less than the pounds estimated by the APAIS survey. AMRD staff and MRIP staff are examining the data from these two methods in order to determine if potential improvements to either survey can be identified. A final report of the results from the reporting program will be available later this year.

An emergency regulation was promulgated to set a special red snapper season for Alabama state waters for all Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays in July of 2014.

AMRD is scheduled to receive funding for oyster restoration through the NRDA process and has received funds for a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) grant. In April and May 2014, NFWF funds were used to plant 27,957 cubic yards of cultch material on 400 acres of Cedar Point and Heron Bay oyster reefs. In July 2014, selected oyster reef bottoms were cultivated to expose existing cultch to oyster larvae settlement. Settlement will be monitored and compared to adjacent, non-cultivated controls as part of the NFWF oyster restoration grant. These funds will also be utilized in a fall 2014 cultch planting of about 11,000 cubic yards of material. This cultch planting project is anticipated to begin in early October. Fishery independent dives were unsuccessful in the recovery of individual seed oysters (20-50 mm) that were planted late last summer on Alabama oyster reefs.

SEAMAP operations continued with trawl, vertical line, and bottom longline work during 2014. The summer shrimp/groundfish trawl cruise was conducted in July; the fall cruise is scheduled for mid-October. Plankton samples were collected in September. Vertical line surveys were conducted in May and September with all stations being sampled. All bottom longline cruises were conducted this year; sampling trips were conducted during March through October. Age information obtained from red snapper otoliths is being submitted to the GSMFC database.

AMRD continued to participate in the Mississippi Bight Lionfish Response Unit (MBLRU) along with the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources, Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, National Parks Service, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Mississippi Bight Lionfish Response Unit T-shirts were distributed to increase awareness and promote public involvement to address the lionfish invasion. AMRD personnel have also provided logistical support and resources for six lionfish derbies held by the Gulf Coast Lionfish Coalition.

AMRD continued the State's Fishery-independent Assessment and Monitoring Program (FAMP) by collecting up to 44 samples each month using a 16' shrimp trawl, beam plankton trawl, 50' seine, and water quality meter. The gillnet sampling target remains at 240 sets per year.

The Biological Sampling program began May 2014. From May 1-August 31, 2014, a total of 382 recreational otoliths with 140 additional measurements and 133 commercial otoliths with 11 additional measurements were collected by AMRD's staff. Some targets for primary species such as grey triggerfish, greater amberjack, and red snapper were not met due to fishing closures.

From January 1, 2014 through August 31, 2014, a total of 1,808 APAIS interviews were collected in all modes combined. In March, the peak time block sampling protocol was implemented and in May the charter and private/rental modes were combined into one boat mode. During the period, samplers completed a total of 347 assignments; winter storm Leon in January and the flooding storm in April hindered sampling; however, only a minimal number of assignments had to be cancelled. Two seasonal laborers were hired for June/July to assist with the increased sample draw. Throughout this time period, samplers received fish identification training and testing, ongoing survey training and malfunctioning/missing field equipment was replaced.

AMRD continues to register anglers in the Angler Registry Program. AMRD continues to publicize the Registry through posters and business cards displayed and handed out at public fishing access sites. Exempted individuals such as lifetime license holders and residents over the age of 64 are required to register annually at no cost to them.

AMRD has received a permit from the US Army Corps of Engineers to reef the jackets of the VK 385 and MP 255 "A" rigs. VK 385 is approximately 35 nm due south of Sand Island Lighthouse and sits in 139 feet of water. The jacket will be cut approximately 60 feet below the water line; the top portion of the jacket will be placed on its side adjacent to the base. MP 255 "A" is approximately 54 nm south of the Fort Morgan peninsula and is in approximately 333 feet of water. The jacket will be cut approximately 105 feet below the water line; the top portion of the jacket will be placed upright and adjacent to the base. The agreement for the "Act of Donation and Title Transfer" has been executed for both rigs, and the next step of reef each rig will be the demolition phase.

An application has been submitted to the US Army Corps of Engineers to reef the jacket of VK 780. VK 780 is approximately 56 nm south of Sand Island Lighthouse and sits in approximately 740 feet of water. The jacket is proposed to be cut approximately 90 feet below the water line. The top portion of the jacket will be transported and reefed approximately 12.5 nm north; the base will remain on site.

AMRD personnel completed a reef enhancement project at a relic oyster reef near the mouth of Weeks Bay. A total of 1,034 cubic yards of oyster half-shells were deployed on top of the remnants

of the old oyster reef. The center of the 190' X 600' reef is located at N30 22.840' and W87 49.972' and is marked with 3 pilings.

Two reef restoration projects were completed at Grey Cane and Fish River Reefs. A total of 5,086 tons of #57 limestone was deployed on Grey Cane Reef. Special care was taken to prevent placing too much limestone on top of areas of the reef that contained significant densities of oysters. As such, a 1.4 acre area of the northwestern side of Grey Cane Reef was lightly reefed with 283 tons of #57 limestone at a +1" elevation. The remaining 4,803 tons deployed on Grey Cane Reef were evenly distributed over 7.4 acres at +3" elevation throughout the remaining boundaries of the reef and immediately south of the southern piles. A total of 3,897 tons of #57 limestone was evenly distributed at Fish River Reef. A portion of the 3,897 tons were deployed within a small section along the northwest and northeast boundaries to expand the footprint of the reef. The expanded area was reefed at +3" elevation.

AMRD worked with Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (GSMFC) and the other Gulf states to develop the Gulf FINFO website. This website is dedicated to promoting local seafood and will showcase 20 of the most important commercial and recreationally species for each state. The Gulf FINFO website went live in March of this year.

AMRD worked with all divisions of the Alabama Department of Conservation & Natural Resources (ADCNR) to improve ADCNR's website. The new and improved website went live August 2014 providing consumers a more streamlined layout. The website can be found at [www.outdooralabama.com](http://www.outdooralabama.com).

AMRD participated in several outreach events and provided educational opportunities to the public in order to learn about the marine environment. These events included DISL Discovery Day, Dauphin Island Arts in the Park, the multi-day Rick and Bubba Outdoor Expo in Birmingham, AL, and Bellingrath Gardens Kids Discovery Day.

### **Enforcement Section**

From February 1 to August 31, 2014, AMRD enforcement officers conducted 1,422 commercial fishermen intercepts, 14,346 recreational fishermen intercepts, 8,516 patrol hours, and 4,901 vessel boardings.

AMRD officers have been conducting joint investigations with NOAA/OLE regarding Gulf Reef fish resulting in 7 individuals pleading guilty in federal court for multiple violations regarding IFQ/VMS. Officers are continuing to work with other states and NOAA/OLE on multi-jurisdictional cases.

AMRD Enforcement entered into the 13<sup>th</sup> Joint Enforcement Agreement with NOAA/OLE. The JEA provides equipment and funding for officers to enforce federal laws and regulations.

AMRD officers assisted in validating the Alabama Red Snapper reporting requirement. The reporting requirement provides an accurate count of fish being harvested and anglers participating in the red snapper fishery and landing in Alabama.

### **AMRD Oil Spill Response and Activities**

AMRD, in conjunction with the Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) and the Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries (ADAI), continued the 3-year seafood tissue testing program. The testing program is broken down into 2 projects: (1) Direct Sampling Effort Project and (2) Dealer/Processor Sampling Project. Both programs are testing polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAH) levels using the LC-Florescence method, dispersants and key heavy metals. The Direct Sampling Effort Project, operated by AMRD and ADPH, is testing seafoods collected directly from Alabama waters or reef zones. The Dealer/Processor Sampling Project, operated by

ADAI, is testing seafoods obtained from processors and dealers regardless of harvest location. The results of this program will be distributed to the public. AMRD has submitted a total of 1,430 composite samples for testing; all results have been returned as being below the FDA's level of concern. This multi-agency program is administered by AMRD. Sample collection for this program will end September 30, 2014.

Alabama continued a seafood promotional campaign under the direction of the Alabama Seafood Marketing Commission. The Alabama Seafood Marketing Program consists of public relations, television commercials, print ads and articles, radio ads, billboards, speaking appearances, distribution of marketing materials, sponsorships of events and participation at community festivals and chef events. The website [eatalabamaseafood.com](http://eatalabamaseafood.com) has been developed and has received rave reviews from the public. The program to date has been very successful. The Seafood Marketing Program is managed by AMRD.

AMRD continues to participate in the Natural Resources Damage Assessment program.

# Mississippi Department of Marine Resources

## Activity Report

### Shrimp and Crab Bureau

Mississippi territorial waters opened to shrimping at 6:00 a.m. on June 18, 2014. An aerial survey counted 368 boats trawling in the Mississippi Sound on opening day (the most since 2005); with shrimpers reporting good catches of 31-40 and 41-50 counts of brown shrimp (*Farfantepenaeus aztecus*). Preliminary landings for the 2014 season show a significant increase from 2013.

Since the season opened, there have been a total of 4 confirmed tiger shrimp (*Penaeus monodon*) reported from in the Mississippi Sound. Live Bait Shrimp inspections for the 2014-2015 license season were completed. Overall, 15 live bait dealers (3 in Hancock, 5 in Harrison, and 7 in Jackson County), 13 live bait vessels and 9 live bait transport vehicles were licensed and inspected.

The 2014 Mississippi Shrimp Newsletter was compiled and mailed to resident commercial shrimpers. The 5<sup>th</sup> annual edition includes information on the Mississippi Beneficial Use Program to restore habitat, Electronic Logbook Program, Asian Tiger Shrimp Reporting, Turtle Exclusion Device (TED) Enforcement, USCG Marine Safety Alert, Seafood Safety testing, Mississippi trip ticket program update, as well as environmental conditions influencing shrimp abundance this year. The newsletter is available on the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (MDMR) website at [www.dmr.ms.gov](http://www.dmr.ms.gov).

The Mississippi Seafood Safety Newsletter continues to be updated online at MDMR's website. This report contains a summary of the on-going efforts and results of the data that the Office of Marine Fisheries has been gathering in cooperation with the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) to ensure that Mississippi seafood is free of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) and safe for consumption. To date, none of the 770 samples (157 shrimp, 144 crab, 316 finfish, and 153 oyster) analyzed have been found to contain PAH concentrations above the FDA levels of concern.

### Artificial Reef Bureau

The Artificial Reef Bureau (AR) monitored fish assemblages on selected inshore reef sites. Staff continued to stockpile reef material at the Gulfport staging site for future offshore and inshore reef developments. AR staff members promoted the Mississippi's Artificial Reef Program at the 2014 Wildlife Expo in Jackson, MS.

There were 14 deployments of 786 concrete columns deployed on Katrina Key. The concrete columns came from demolition of the old Margaritaville Casino. Staff also continued the second phase of the NRDA Program: Mississippi Oyster Cultch Early Restoration Project. This project consists of post deployment side scanning of oyster reefs.

AR staff along with members from Gulf Coast Research Lab (GCRL) released approximately 2,200 juvenile Red Snapper south of Ship Island. AR staff also assisted members from GCRL in the collecting of Red Snapper for their spawning project from our fish havens.

### Finfish Bureau

The Finfish Bureau continued to oversee the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) during this time period. All assignments were completed and surveys obtained were reviewed and processed. Site effort estimates continue to be refined in an effort to improve the accuracy of the survey. The for-hire vessel frame is being evaluated and edited to more closely reflect our current

state license file. An accurate active vessel frame is being developed to more precisely estimate for-hire effort. Otoliths were collected and processed for selected species in the biological sampling program. The data collected through this process will aid in management decisions for our state and is submitted to the Gulf State Marine Fisheries Commission (GSMFC) in addition to the FIN Data Management System for use in upcoming stock assessments.

In 2014 MDMR required a spotted seatrout endorsement in addition to a current applicable harvester's license for any commercial fisherman harvesting and selling spotted seatrout (*Cynoscion nebulosus*). Commercial fishermen had to meet the requirements of a means test in order to qualify for this endorsement which is valid for a three year period at which time they must re-qualify.

Finfish Bureau personnel received and reviewed the results of an evaluation of Mississippi's red drum (*Sciaenops ocellatus*) stock provided by the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory. The report contained management recommendations regarding data needs for continued sustainable management. Staff began a red drum project in Mississippi coastal waters targeting size and age classes needed to complete a more robust assessment.

Finfish personnel implemented a supplemental data collection program during the nine day federal red snapper (*Lutjanus campechanus*) season. Anglers targeting red snapper were asked to report trip details via a voluntary reporting program. Aerial and vessel surveys were conducted in areas where red snapper fishing were likely to occur in order to measure effort and validate information received through the voluntary angler reporting program. Surveyors were also placed at selected boat ramps and harbors to collect lengths and weights of red snapper being landed. A state waters weekend only red snapper season was opened for the month of July. MDMR personnel conducted a similar data collection program during this time. At their September meeting the Commission on Marine Resources, required mandatory reporting of red snapper harvest and effort information for any future red snapper fishing seasons.

Twelve recreational fishing records for conventional tackle and one fly fishing tackle were accepted for state records between April 1, 2014 and September 30, 2014. These Included:

- Greater Amberjack (*Seriola dumerili*) 126 lbs. 0 oz.
- Atlantic Bumper (*Chloroscombrus chrysurus*) 6.03 oz.
- Red Porgy (*Pagrus pagrus*) 4 lbs. 2 oz.
- Gray Snapper (*Lutjanus griseus*) 15 lbs. 4 oz.
- Oyster Toadfish (*Opsanus tau*) 2 lbs. 4.2 oz.
- Speckled Hind (*Epinephelus drummondhayi*) 5 lbs. 8.8 oz.
- Spinner Shark (*Carcharhinus brevipinna*) 164 lbs. 7.0 oz.
- Cownose Ray (*Rhinoptera bonasus*) 28 lbs. 9.0 oz.
- Gulf Kingfish (*Menticirrhus littoralis*) 2 lbs. 0 oz.
- Bluntnose Jack (*Hemicaranx amblyrhynchus*) 10.2 oz.
- Unicorn Filefish (*Aluterus monoceros*) 1 lbs. 2.06 oz.
- Atlantic Croaker (*Micropogonias undulates*) 14.9 oz.

### **Shellfish Bureau**

The Limited Mississippi Oyster Season closed to dredging on February 7<sup>th</sup>, and to tonging on March 28, 2014. Daily sack limits were set at 12 sacks for tonging and 20 sacks for dredging. With limited oyster resources available, the dredging totals were 55,656 sacks harvested with 3,503 trips. The tonging totals were 22,363 sacks harvested with 2,328 trips. The season total was 78,091 sacks and 5,831 trips.

Shellfish Bureau personnel along with the MDEQ have completed the cultch plants for the early Oyster Reef Restoration Project. This project was funded through the Natural Resource Damage Assessment Program. An additional 110 cubic yards per acre of limestone cultch material was deployed over two sites, totaling 250 acres of oyster reefs located in the western Mississippi Sound. Additional cultch plantings were deployed in Biloxi Bay with 200 cubic yards of oyster shell. These shell deployments were funded by a grant from the Fish America Foundation, and was an addition to an earlier seventeen acre cultch plant site. The timing for these deployments coincides with prime historical oyster spawning peak for optimal oyster larvae recruitment. These projects were designed to mitigate potential damage of the oyster reefs due to the *Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill* of April, 2010, and to enhance existing reefs. Evaluation of the reefs has commenced using sidescan sonar and one-minute dredge tows.

The Shellfish Bureau began holding Mississippi Oyster Harvester Education certification classes in March, 2014, and certification is being required of all persons prior to their purchase of a Mississippi Oyster Harvester license. This harvester education requirement was mandated by the Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Conference's most recent change to the National Shellfish Sanitation Program. Mississippi licenses for the new fishing year went on sale April 1, 2014. Certifications are valid for a two year period. To date, approximately 380 students have been certified in this new program.

Shellfish Bureau Staff completed a book titled "The Oystermen's Guide to Mississippi Gulf Coast Oyster Reefs". The book consists of several helpful topics including: oyster reef locations, rules and regulations for harvesting oysters in MS waters, enhancing and protecting oyster reefs, predators and threats, etc. This publication was part of the Oyster Stewardship Program which is funded by the Emergency Disaster Recovery Program. It was distributed to Mississippi oyster license holders beginning October 1<sup>st</sup> 2013 and at Mississippi Oyster Harvester Education certification classes and is also available for view on the MDMR website.

Staff utilized the R/V Conservationist to move oysters from the Pascagoula River area to tonging reefs in the Pass Christian area. These oysters are being moved to provide additional harvestable stock to the tonging reef to allow a very limited harvest. The R/V Conservationist is able to move up to 1,100 sacks per trip. Oyster tissue samples will be collected from the transplanted oysters prior to the limited opening to harvest by tongers.

The Deer Island Restoration Project has been completed. The purpose of this project was to secure the east island shoreline with over 3,000 oyster shell bags being deployed with the assistance of labor from community volunteers. These bags were loaded with oyster shell and deployed to the east end of Deer Island for shoreline restoration.

#### **Seafood Technology Bureau**

The Seafood Technology Bureau certified 5 new seafood dealers and conducted recertification for 53 current seafood dealers during the months of April through September. Seafood Technology Bureau certified one oyster post-harvest processor using irradiation technology. Staff continued to conduct bi-annual water sampling of water source for Mississippi certified seafood processing plants. FDA Program Element Evaluation inspections and Vibrio Risk Management Plan Evaluation inspections found the program to be compliance with some minor deficiencies. Three foodborne illness investigations conducted with zero case for Mississippi oyster product as food source of any confirmed Vibrio cases.



Staff training included: Plant Standardization and “Train-the-Trainer” Basic Seafood Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP). Staff also conducted free training courses for the members of the Mississippi Seafood Industry including: five sessions of ‘ServSafe’ managerial training for a total of 150 participants and total of 8 sessions of Basic Seafood HACCP training for 73 participants. Forty two of these HACCP trainees and 100 of ServSafe trainees (funded by the Emergency Disaster Recovery Program) conducted and participated in 17 public outreach education events.

**Marine Patrol**

Marine Patrol Officers spent a total of 3,057 hours employed during the months of March – October, 2014. There were a total of 197 patrols on water and land, which resulted in 2,617 contacts. During these patrols, officers issued 55 state citations for various offenses and also issued 69 Enforcement Action Reports.

# **Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission**

## **65<sup>th</sup> Annual Fall Meeting**

### **LOUISIANA STATE REPORT**

#### ***Resource Management***

##### LA Creel

Beginning on January 1, 2014, the LDWF initiated a new recreational statistics sampling program, LA Creel, in place of the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP). Preliminary numbers show that through La Creel, LDWF has surveyed 7,572 recreational fishing trips constituting 20,340 individual anglers for the period of the program's implementation on January 1, 2014 through September 2014. Those numbers were obtained by 67 different interviewers working 1,105 assignments during that time period. A total of 61,755 finfish were recorded as harvested of which 43,447 (70%) were seen and counted by trained staff.

##### Stock Assessment:

LDWF fisheries staff completed updated stock assessments for striped mullet and spotted seatrout in Louisiana waters using a statistical catch-at-age model to describe the population dynamics of each species. Also completed were draft assessments of black drum, southern flounder, and sheepshead in Louisiana waters. Final assessments will be completed by spring 2015. Based on results of these assessments, none of these species are currently being overfished or experiencing overfishing.

##### Marine Mammal and Turtle Stranding Response:

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) is the lead stranding and rescue response organization for marine mammals and sea turtles, covering the entire vast coastline of Louisiana. Between March 2014 and October 2014, nearly 50 marine mammal reports (including dead and live animals; whales and dolphins) and approximately 65 sea turtle reports (including alive and dead) have been investigated by the LDWF Marine Mammal and Sea Turtle Stranding and Rescue Program. Three sea turtles (Green, Kemp's ridley and hybrid) were successfully released back into the Gulf of Mexico in June 2014.

Since February 2010, 613 marine mammals have stranded in Louisiana, which far exceeds the 2002-2009 average stranding rate of 20 marine mammals per year for the state. These efforts are critical to monitoring marine mammal mortalities along the coast of Louisiana, particularly in light of the *Deepwater Horizon* Oil Spill and the largest and longest lasting (ongoing) Unusual Mortality Event (UME) ever experienced in the Northern Gulf of Mexico.

In June of 2014, LDWF Staff collaborated with NOAA and other partners for Live Dolphin Health Assessments (captures) work in Barataria Bay as a part of the ongoing Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA). LDWF Staff have also partnered with NOAA to conduct Photo Identification surveys in the spring of 2014 as well as Dolphin Fecundity surveys as a follow-up to Live Dolphin Health Assessments performed in the summer of 2013 all in Barataria Bay.

During the Spring of 2014, a MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) was finalized between LDWF and Louisiana State University/LSU School of Veterinary Medicine: Louisiana Animal

Disease Diagnostics Laboratory (LSU LADDL) which provides laboratory space for staff to conduct marine mammal necropsies. Since then, LDWF Veterinarian and Stranding Staff members have independently conducted 16 marine mammal necropsies while following established protocols and guidelines.

LDWF Stranding Staff continue to work with NOAA/NMFS and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on carcass and evidence transfers and transports accordingly as all samples, paperwork and any other evidence associated with marine mammal and sea turtle operations are handled under Chain of Custody protocols.

#### Data Management:

LDWF processes requests for trip ticket landings to assist with commercial fishermen's claims related to the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill. After BP announced that it would require certified copies of trip tickets from LDWF, the department started receiving multiple sets of trip tickets from previous years, 2008 and 2009 in particular. All late submissions were thoroughly reviewed and forwarded to LDWF Enforcement for investigation. Several citations have been issued and two arrests for fraud have been made to date. The investigations are ongoing. To date LDWF has processed 6,646 data requests for commercial fisherman.

#### Inshore / Nearshore Sampling:

In response to the need for information to assess the status of living marine resources in inshore waters, and in the shelf waters off of Louisiana, a long-term sampling program has been designed and implemented and is ongoing. LDWF is also conducting nearshore sampling as part of the independent monitoring program in order to generate fisheries-independent data on the species composition of groundfish and shrimp found in the coastal waters of the Northern Gulf of Mexico as well as track environmental parameters. LDWF is also conducting nearshore sampling as part of the independent monitoring program in order to generate fisheries-independent data on the species composition of groundfish and shrimp found in the coastal waters of the Northern Gulf of Mexico as well as track environmental parameters.

#### Age and Growth:

The collection of age, growth, and reproductive information used to develop age-structured stock assessments is coordinated through the LDWF Age and Growth Laboratory, in Baton Rouge. The lab in Baton Rouge monitors 17 species of fish. Monitoring is done by the collection of otoliths and spines (gray triggerfish), for ageing purposes. Length, weight, gender, and location are also recorded when these fish are collected in the field. The 17 fish species consist of 14 saltwater and three freshwater species. Currently, the saltwater species are black drum, gray snapper, greater amberjack, gray triggerfish (spines), king mackerel, red drum, red snapper, sheepshead, southern flounder, spotted seatrout, striped mullet, tripletail, vermilion snapper, and yellowfin tuna. This year two new marine species were added to the list, tripletail and yellowfin tuna. These are considered research species, because they were added to this list to gain new fishery information through field dependent collection and to develop an ageing protocol. The three freshwater species are black crappie, white crappie, and largemouth bass.

All saltwater otoliths/spines are obtained through fisheries dependent sampling, except for tripletail, which are collected by both sampling methods. Dependent sampling requires our field

Marine biologists to collect the otolith or spine, when they interview a recreational angler. But, freshwater otoliths are obtained through independent sampling, done by our field biologists. Independent sampling requires the Inland field biologist to go out and target a particular species. Since March 2014 the age and growth lab in Baton Rouge has received 6905 otoliths and 25 gray triggerfish spines, of those 6930 structures received, 5885 have been aged. Within that total only 579 of those otoliths are fresh water, of which all are largemouth bass. At this time the age and growth lab has not received otoliths for black crappie, white crappie or striped mullet as these otoliths are usually sent to the lab during the fall months. Currently, spotted seatrout is the most collected species for the year and has been the most frequently collected marine species the past three years. The totals for each species are: black drum-870; gray snapper-235; greater amberjack-48; gray triggerfish-25; king mackerel-3; large mouth bass-579; red drum-1,139; red snapper-836; sheepshead-459; southern flounder-190; spotted seatrout-2,504; tripletail-8; vermilion snapper-31; yellowfin tuna-3.

Compared to this time last year, the number of marine otoliths has slightly increased and the lab expects to see additional otoliths for the majority of the remaining marine species during the fall. We do not anticipate receiving more of the research species (tripletail and yellowfin tuna), but field biologists will make strong attempts to locate those species.

Since the annual GSMFC (Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission) Otolith Processor's Workshop in May, the age and growth lab received the reference sets for red drum, spotted seatrout and striped mullet. These reference sets are used to help improve biologist otolith ageing skills and ensure that all labs are basing their ages on the correct criteria. There is a reference set for each of the saltwater species, excluding the research species and each biologist in the lab is required to view the reference sets. Reference sets are sent to each of the GSMFC member state's labs and once each state has had a chance to review them, the primary lab will present their findings at the annual meeting in May.

### Fisheries Research Lab

The Fisheries Research Lab (FRL), located on Grand Isle, continues to work on the following sampling programs and research projects:

The lab currently works in collaboration Federal, State, and University partners to conduct long-term monitoring of fisheries resources along the coastal waters of Louisiana. The Vertical Line Survey, Bottom Longline Survey, Ichthyoplankton Survey and Shrimp/Groundfish Survey are modeled after SEAMAP protocols and comprise the largest fisheries independent monitoring effort in the Gulf of Mexico. The lab also independently conducts a Nearshore Groundfish Monitoring that provides fisheries independent data that is used as a tool for constructing management policies. Biologists at the lab conduct routine surveys on standing artificial structures. This project is the Assessment of fish assemblages on artificial structures in the northern Gulf of Mexico and it allows biologists to document diversity, distribution, and abundance of fish assemblages and encrusting communities. Our Green Stick Feasibility Study looks at the characterization of the catch and by catch of an alternative fishing gear used to target Atlantic Tuna. The lab is currently engaged in Tarpon Tagging DNA project which assists in the understanding of the geographic distribution of Atlantic tarpon in the Gulf of Mexico. Our facility is home to a Biological reproduction laboratory that allows staff to process samples taken in the field to determine reproductive patterns of many commercially and recreationally important

species. The lab currently has several closed recirculating Research Tank Systems designed to conduct various studies and house different species of fish as well as a Micro Hatchery that is capable of producing 35 million *Artemia nauplii* per day. Staff at the lab are currently evaluating effective sampling gear for sampling juvenile drum by testing alternative nets. Preliminary work is being done at the lab to examine Oyster Clutch Material to examine Spat on shell survival on whole oyster shell planted on Louisiana public oyster reefs.

The Pelagic Fisheries Group of LDWF's Fisheries Management Section continued several offshore projects during the March-October 2014 period. Projects included both dockside sampling and offshore electronic tagging. Dockside sampling focused on offshore species with stomachs, gonads, otoliths, tissue, and finlets collected from yellowfin tuna from recreational catches in Venice, LA with a total of 1119 complete samples collected since the project inception in late 2012 and 300 samples collected during the report period. These samples are being processed at three different institutions (TAMUG, USM-GCRL, and LDWF FRL and A&G Lab). In addition, complete work-ups were performed on 97 wahoo and 107 blackfin tuna from the recreational catch. Also, samples were collected from deep-water bottom fishes collected by recreational anglers from offshore banks. Samples were collected from 205 deep-water fish, representing 19 species.

Tagging efforts during the report period focused on yellowfin tuna, coastal and pelagic sharks, and tarpon. The yellowfin tuna tagging project uses two different tag types to study the horizontal and vertical movements. Internal archival tags are surgically implanted in legal sized (>27" CFL) yellowfin tuna but must be recapture for recovery of the archived data set. To date, 91 of these tags have been deployed with nine returns (9.89% returned recapture rate). Pop-up satellite archival tags (PSAT) are also being deployed on yellowfin tuna >120cm CFL. The deployment schedule is 4 PSATs/ season. Three PSATs were deployed on yellowfin tuna during the report term and 23 deployed to date for this project. In addition, satellite position only tags (SPOT) were deployed on six species of sharks: scalloped hammerhead (N=14), greater hammerhead (N=1), tiger (N=3), dusky (N=2), blacktip (N=15), and whale (N=2). In addition to the SPOT tags, PSATs were attached to whale sharks at the annual aggregation documented at Ewing Bank. Photos IDs and tissue samples were taken from whale sharks encountered at the aggregation and 13 of the 57 whale sharks sighted were tagged with 1-year PTT-100 PSATs. Finally, a pilot study was performed on Atlantic tarpon adjacent to the Mississippi River delta. Four electronic tags (2 SPOT and 2 PSAT) were attached to tarpon during a local tarpon tournament to test attachment, feasibility, and short-term movement in preparation for an upcoming tarpon tagging project.

### **Shrimp Program:**

The 2014 spring inshore shrimp season dates were as follows:

- Opened at 6 a.m., Monday May 26 from the eastern shore of south Pass of the Mississippi River westward to the western shore of Freshwater Bayou Canal
- Opened at 6 a.m., Monday June 2 from the Mississippi/Louisiana state line westward to the eastern shore of South Pass of the Mississippi River and from the western shore of Freshwater Bayou Canal westward to the Louisiana/Texas state line
- Closed at one-half hour after sunset, Thursday, July 3 from the Atchafalaya River Ship Channel at Eugene Island as delineated by the River Channel Buoy Line westward to the western shore of Freshwater Bayou Canal

- Closed at 6:00 a.m., Tuesday, July 15 from the eastern shore of South Pass of the Mississippi River westward to the Atchafalaya River Ship Channel at Eugene Island as delineated by the River Channel Buoy Line
- Closed at 6:00 a.m., Tuesday July 15 from the Mississippi/Louisiana state line westward to the eastern shore of South Pass of the Mississippi River except for the following waters:
  - that portion of Lake Borgne seaward of a line extending one-half mile from the shoreline, and
  - that portion of Mississippi Sound north of a line beginning at 30 degrees 05 minutes 00.0 seconds north latitude and 89 degrees 30 minutes 00.0 seconds west longitude; thence southeasterly to a point on the western shore of Three-Mile Pass at 30 degrees 03 minutes 00.0 seconds north latitude and 89 degrees 22 minutes 23.0 seconds west longitude; thence northeasterly to a point on Isle Au Pitre at 30 degrees 09 minutes 20.5 seconds north latitude and 89 degrees 11 minutes 15.5 seconds west longitude, which is a point on the double-rig line as described in R.S. 56:495.1(A)2, and
  - the open waters of Breton and Chandeleur Sounds as described by the double-rig line
- Closed at 6:00 a.m., Monday July 21 in the remainder of state waters except for the open waters of Breton and Chandeleur Sounds

The 2014 fall inshore shrimp season opening dates were as follows:

- Opened at one-half hour before sunrise Monday, August 18 in state inside waters from the western shore of the Atchafalaya River and the Atchafalaya River Ship Channel westward to the Louisiana/Texas state line
- Opened at 6 p.m. Monday, August 18 in state inside waters east of the Atchafalaya River

#### Offshore Shrimp Seasons:

- That portion of state outside waters extending a distance of three nautical miles, seaward of the Inside/Outside Shrimp Line, from the northwest shore of Caillou Boca at -90 degrees 50 minutes 27 seconds west longitude westward to the eastern shore of the Atchafalaya River Ship Channel at Eugene Island as delineated by the channel red buoy line reopened at 6:00 a.m., Tuesday, April 29.
- That portion of state outside waters extending three nautical miles seaward from the shoreline from the Atchafalaya River Ship Channel at Eugene Island as delineated by the Channel red buoy line westward to the western shore of Freshwater Bayou Canal at -92 degrees 18 minutes 33 seconds west longitude reopened at 6:00 a.m., Monday, May 26

#### Shrimp Landings:

Preliminary statewide shrimp landings (all species combined/heads-off weight) for January-July, 2014 totaled 22.58 million pounds (Source: NOAA Fisheries).

#### Shrimp Legislation:

Under Act No. 14 of the 2014 regular legislative session, Louisiana commercial shrimp fishermen are allowed to modify the dimensions of their skimmer nets. These changes became effective August 1.

- Skimmer nets may be mounted to the horizontal net frame at any distance from the gunwale of the vessel as long as the mounting distance and horizontal length of the net frame does not exceed **20 feet** from the gunwale.
- Maximum length of the horizontal net frame increased from **16 feet** to **20 feet** from the gunwale of the vessel.
- Maximum length of the vertical frame “down pipe” attached to the skid is removed and fishermen may use vertical frames of any length.
- The entire opening of the skimmer net shall not exceed **72 feet** as measured along the hanging. This measurement includes the length of the cork line together with the depth of the wings and length of the lead line.
- Maximum length of skimmer net lead line increased from **28 feet** to **33 feet** (same as maximum length of a 25 foot trawl lead line).

The news release announcing these changes may be viewed at <http://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/news/37812>

Act 294 of the 2014 regular legislative session amended the position of the inside/outside shrimp line in the Calcasieu Ship Channel and provides authority to the Wildlife and Fisheries Commission to amend by rule other changes to the inside/outside shrimp line. Previously, authority to amend changes to the inside/outside shrimp line resided solely with the state legislature. These changes became effective August 1.

### Crab Program

Work has continued on a coast wide crab trap bycatch survey designed to collect and analyze data incidental bycatch in commercial blue crab traps with special emphasis on diamond back terrapins (*Malaclemys terrapin*) since the inception of the study in Dec. 2013.

In February, a portion of western Terrebonne Parish was temporarily closed to the use of crab traps for purposes of a trap clean-up over a 10-day period beginning at 6:00 am Feb. 15, 2014 through 6:00 am February 24, 2014. The LDWF hosted a volunteer day on Feb 15 at Toby Voisin’s oyster dock on Bayou Dularge in which a total of 103 volunteers including 28 LDWF staff members and 16 boats (6 LDWF boats) participated. A total of 1,063 traps were collected during the trap closure/cleanup in addition to several tires and pieces of monofilament gill net and trawl webbing.

**Table 1.** Annual derelict crab trap closure areas, dates, and trap totals.

2004	Upper Terrebonne Bay Estuary	2/28-3/14	6,676
	W. Vermilion Bay	5/14-5/22	218
	<b>2004 TOTAL</b>		<b>6,894</b>
2005	Sabine Lake	2/18-2/27	4
	Breton Sound Estuary	2/26-3/13	1,941
	Middle Terrebonne Bay Estuary	3/5-3/20	2,437
	E. Vermilion Bay / West Cote Blanche Bay	5/16-5/22	241
	<b>2005 TOTAL</b>		<b>4,623</b>
2006	SW Terrebonne Bay Estuary	3/4-3/13	<b>2,935</b>
2007	E. Lake Pontchartrain	2/24-3/5	774

	Upper Barataria Bay Estuary	3/3-3/12	724
	<b>2007 TOTAL</b>		<b>1,498</b>
2008	Upper Terrebonne Bay Estuary	2/23-3/2	<b>1,234</b>
2009	Terrebonne Bay Estuary	N/A	<b>788</b>
2010	Upper Barataria Bay Estuary	2/27-3/7	<b>477</b>
2011	Western Plaquemines Parish	2/26-3/5	<b>1,100</b>
2012	St. Bernard/Plaquemines Parish	2/25-3/5	1,961
	Terrebonne Parish	3/17-3/26	747
	<b>2012 Total</b>		<b>2,708</b>
2013	Plaquemines Parish	2/16-2/25	492
	St. Bernard Parish	3/9-3/18	411
	<b>2013 Total</b>		<b>903</b>
2014	Western Terrebonne Parish	2/15-2/24	<b>1,063</b>
2004-2014	<b>OVERALL</b>		<b>24,223</b>

In September, the Wildlife and Fisheries Commission adopted a Notice of Intent that targets Sabine Lake for a joint crab trap cleanup by both LDWF and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD). In order to conduct the cleanup, both the Louisiana and Texas sides of Sabine Lake will be temporarily closed to the use of crab traps so staff from both agencies and volunteers can conduct the cleanup. The Sabine Lake crab trap closure is scheduled to begin at 6:00 am February 20, 2015 through 6:00 am March 1, 2015 and also includes portions of the Sabine River and other parts of Cameron Parish immediately east of Sabine Lake. The news release announcing this action and a map of the proposed closure area may be viewed at <http://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/news/38443>.

#### Crab Legislation:

Act 539 of the 2014 Louisiana regular legislative session amended escape ring requirements in crab traps. A minimum of 3 escape rings with a minimum inside diameter of 2 and 3/8" with at least 2 rings located in the trap's upper chamber will be required in all crab traps. Present regulations require use of 2 rings with a minimum inside diameter of 2 5/16". Additionally, traps placed in Lake Pontchartrain will no longer be exempt from escape ring requirements. These changes will become effective November 15, 2017.

Act 540 of the 2014 Louisiana regular legislative session established eligibility requirements for the sale of commercial crab trap gear licenses. Beginning November 15, 2014, no person shall be issued a commercial crab trap gear license unless that person qualifies under one or both of the following provisions:

- The person possess a valid commercial crab trap gear license during any two license years between 2011 and 2014
- The person has enrolled in and completed the program to increase and elevate professionalism in the commercial crab industry

In July, the Wildlife and Fisheries Commission adopted a Notice of Intent detailing components of the program which includes education in the proper fishing techniques necessary for the health and sustainability of the species; proper techniques for the best capture and presentation of the



crabs for marketability; proper instructions regarding the placement, tending, and maintenance of crab traps to reduce potential conflicts with other user groups; and authorizes the program to include a mandatory apprenticeship program. The NOI was later amended in September adding an applicant permit provision. News releases announcing the program and the Notice of Intent can be viewed at <http://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/news/37880> and <http://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/news/38442>

Oyster Program:

LDWF conducts monthly biological monitoring on the public oyster areas of Louisiana via dredge sampling and annual quantitative sampling using quadrats. Data during the March-September time frame continues to show very little change in oyster stocks compared to the previous reporting period. Dredge sampling east of the Mississippi River and south of the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet has shown virtually no successful oyster reproduction indicated by the near absence of oyster spat in samples. Annual oyster stock assessment sampling in July using quadrats indicated a statewide increase in overall oyster stocks by approximately 10%, and seed production on some of the recent cultch plants drove the majority of this increase over 2013 levels. Dedicated cultch plant sampling continued to show positive signs from cultch plants in Mississippi Sound and Sister Lake, marginal oyster seed production on plants in Drum Bay and Hackberry Bay, and virtually no production on cultch plants in Lake Fortuna and Bay Crabe.

The 2014-2015 oyster season in some areas of the public grounds opened on September 3, 2014. The remainder of the areas will open on October 20, 2014. For the first time ever, sack limits were imposed in all areas of the public grounds, ranging from 50 sacks day in the eastern portion of the state to 40 per day in Terrebonne Parish to 10 per day in Calcasieu Lake.

Finfish Program:

LDWF conducts biological monitoring statewide in the coastal, nearshore, and offshore areas of Louisiana for finfish. In April, LDWF modified its state waters only snapper season to be open every day with a two fish bag limit at a 16-inch minimum total length until further notice. Also in April, Louisiana waters closed to all commercial and recreational harvest of sharks until July 1, 2014 in conjunction with an annual state waters closed season to protect pupping. Commercial harvest for Large Coastal Sharks remained closed for the remainder of 2014 after the seasonal closure.

On May 1, 2014 LDWF closed the season for recreational harvest of gray triggerfish until January 1, 2015, consistent with a closure in federal waters.

At its June 2014 meeting, the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission (LWFC) moved forward a Notice of Intent (NOI) that would increase the possession limit for saltwater finfish landed at the Port Eads Marina Facility and then transported to land. The LWFC is accepted public comment through its public meeting on October 2, 2014 regarding the Port Eads NOI. At the July 2014 LWFC meeting, the Commission moved forward with a NOI to remove regulations for several reef fish species (rock hind, red hind, misty grouper, dog snapper, mahogany snapper, schoolmaster, blackline tilefish, anchor tilefish, and black seabass) that have since been removed from federal management plans. Also in the NOI was a clarification of language regarding charter reef fish permits. The LWFC is accepted public comment regarding the reef fish regulations NOI through September 9.

On August 25, LDWF closed the season for the commercial harvest of greater amberjack, consistent with a closure in federal waters. The season is scheduled to reopen January 1, 2015.

Finfish staff continue to participate in Gulf Council SSC meetings, Gulf States Task Forces, the SEDAR process and other national and regional meetings and workshops.

#### Habitat Programs:

LDWF is participating in the current habitat related projects:

- Modeling efforts for the Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority 2017 Comprehensive Master Plan.
- Deliberations of the Caernarvon and Davis Pond operations.
- Environmental Work Group deliberations of the yearly CWPPRA priority project list (PPL 24).
- Reviewed and commented on 162 coastal use, consistency, and Section 404 permit applications for possible impacts to fish resources and fish habitats.
- Participating with other state and federal agencies in assessing injury and planning restoration of hazardous materials sites at two locations: Bayou Trepagnier in St. Charles Parish and Bayou D'Inde in Calcasieu Parish.
- Serving on Aquatic Nuisance Species (ANS) panels for various groups where a major focus has been placed on Asian Carp, Apple Snails, Lionfish and Tiger Prawns.

### ***Fishing Access and Opportunity***

#### Artificial Reef Program:

The Artificial Reef Program continues to assess and permit reef deployments related to offshore oil and gas structures. The Program has accepted 9 new structures. Forty-two (42) structures are permitted for deployment as permanent artificial reefs. Permitting of an additional 26 structures is currently underway. The Coastal Conservation Association of Louisiana has completed deployment of 2000 tons of recycled concrete material within the permitted 4 acre Laketown Pier Reef in Lake Pontchartrain. The multibeam surveying of the Program's offshore reefs has been completed and is available on the Program's website.

The Program is hosting an ROV monitoring workshop at the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission in October 2014. The workshop will bring together experts to discuss the establishment of standardized offshore reef monitoring protocols throughout the Gulf of Mexico.

The Program has completed the inshore/nearshore reef plan that will guide the development and preservation of fisheries habitat and fishing opportunities in coastal waters (inshore) and waters less than 100 feet deep (nearshore). The Program has also been in discussion with both Fieldwood Energy and CCA in efforts to preserve the nearshore oil rigs known as the Pickets, a premier speckled trout destination, and is currently developing plans to permit a reef that will preserve this valuable fisheries habitat.

## ***Commercial Seafood Programs***

### Shrimp Task Force:

The Louisiana Shrimp Task Force met on April 3 and August 6 and received and discussed information concerning the gulfishinfo.org website and the ability to use this as a tool when working with buyers. The STF also received an update on LDWF shrimp refrigeration grant, the shrimp certification program, skimmer net legislation, Louisiana Fisheries Forward program, and 2014 fall inshore shrimp season opening dates.

### Crab Task Force

The Louisiana Crab Task Force met on April 22 to discuss potential components to include in the professionalism program. The Task Force later met on June 5 to review the draft professionalism NOI and after discussion adopted a motion in support of the NOI. Members also discussed the potential of transferring funds from the Derelict Crab Trap Removal Account to the Crab Promotion and Marketing Account. Since both are established through statute, amending legislation would be required.

### Oyster Task Force:

The enforcement committee for the oyster task force met on August 5 to discuss ideas and strategies for decreasing theft on private oyster leases. The full task force also met on August 5 and discussion included the enforcement committee recommendations, upcoming educational tour with legislative staffers, the Save Louisiana Coalition and the preliminary stock assessment with 2014 oyster season recommendations.

### Professionalism:

Earlier this year LDWF and LSU Sea Grant began working together to create the Louisiana Fisheries Forward Program. This program will be developed and released in several phases. The first phase is scheduled for completion in early 2015 and includes the following:

- 4 web based training videos
  - How to be a Commercial Fisherman
  - How to be a Seafood Dealer / Processor
  - How to be a Crab Fisherman
  - Seafood Business Finance and Management
- State wide extension / outreach components
  - Sea Grant Dock Days
  - Annual Fisheries Summit
  - Demonstration projects
    - Chemical free black spot prevention
    - Vessel refrigeration systems

The program will be offered on a voluntary basis to Louisiana's entire commercial fishery. Later phases of the program will include at least 6 additional videos covering the other major Louisiana Fisheries, ecological, cultural, and economic significance of Louisiana's commercial fishery, and an overview of fisheries management.

The Louisiana Crab Task Force adopted some components of this voluntary program and will make them mandatory to obtain a commercial crab trap license beginning the 2015 license year. Fishermen not meeting previous license requirements will be required to complete the relevant online coursework and participate in some form of an apprenticeship program. Rules regarding program participation are still being finalized.

#### Sustainability:

LDWF continues to work with Audubon Nature Institute and Global Trust to develop a Louisiana certification model that can be used to certify gulf fisheries. We are in the final stages of development and will initialize the first two fisheries through the certification process.

In addition, LDWF has begun working on developing FAO technical guidelines for small scale subtropical fisheries with several international partners from Brazil, Mexico, Italy, and Australia. This working group held its initial meeting July and will meet again in October. The goal of this working group is to develop a new set of technical guidelines for responsible fishing as it relates to smaller subtropical fisheries in hopes that the FAO will elect to adopt the new guidelines giving the Gulf and fisheries around another tool in their sustainability tool box.

### ***Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill***

Disclaimer: This report does not rely on information collected as part of the *Deepwater Horizon* Oil Spill Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA), and is not intended to analyze impacts resulting from the *Deepwater Horizon* Oil Spill and related response for NRDA purposes.

#### Fishery Openings/Closings:

On August 4, LDWF re-opened certain state inshore and Gulf of Mexico waters that were previously closed due to oiling from the 2010 Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill.

LDWF re-opened the following waters to fishing pursuant to an agreement between state and federal officials for re-opening waters closed as a result of the *Deepwater Horizon* Oil Spill: (These openings apply to commercial and recreational fishing with the exception of the Birdsfoot Delta which was previously opened to recreational fishing.)

- A portion of the upper Barataria Basin centered near Bay Jimmy and Bay Batiste with the exception of a 100-yard shoreline buffer from any shoreline
- All waters within the Birdsfoot Delta of the Mississippi River
- Areas surrounding the Grand Terre Islands with the exception of an area one quarter mile seaward from the Gulf-facing shoreline

- The area seaward between Elmer's Island and Fourchon Beaches with the exception of a one-quarter mile area seaward from the Gulf-facing shoreline.

A news release announcing this action and map of waters that still remain closed to commercial fishing and certain recreational fishing activities may be viewed at <http://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/news/38135>

NRDA:

LDWF Fisheries' staff along with other state and federal trustees are actively assisting with the *Deepwater Horizon* Oil Spill Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) to quantify impacts to Louisiana's natural resources and the human use of those resources. Some NRDA work plans are available online here: <http://losco-dwh.com/viewworkplans.aspx>.

**Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission  
65<sup>th</sup> Annual Fall Meeting**

**TEXAS REPORT**

**REGULATORY ISSUES**

**Regulatory Changes and Proposals**

On 27 March, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission unanimously approved 3 Coastal Fisheries regulatory proposals related to the 2014-15 Statewide Recreational and Commercial Fishing Proclamation. The 3 proposals included 1) a temporary closure to public oyster reefs in East Galveston Bay and Half Moon Reef in Matagorda Bay, 2) the extension of the 2-fish bag limit for flounder into the first two weeks of December (though harvest would be allowed by any legal means during these two weeks), and 3) the extension of the 5-fish bag limit for spotted seatrout from the lower Laguna Madre through the FM 457 bridge in Sargent, Texas. The spotted seatrout proposal was amended to make the possession limit twice the daily bag (10). This regulation contains a 5-year sunset provision. These changes went into effect on 1 September 2014.

**COASTAL FISHERIES PROGRAMS & PROJECTS**

**Current 2014 Fish Stocking Totals**

Red Drum	13,773,342
Spotted Seatrout	6,945,532
Southern Flounder	38,866
<b>Total Stocked</b>	<b>20,757,740</b>

**Artificial Reef Program**

Three petroleum platform donations were received: HI-A-340 (\$299,100), HI-A-270B (\$230,000), and HI-A-270B AUX (\$230,000). The HI-A-561A 8-pile structure was towed to reef site HI-A-532 on 7/6/14 and the donation amount set to \$370,000. Apache Petroleum Company will begin reefing operations for platform BA-A-70A in July and the donation was set at \$275,000. These will bring \$1.4M into the reef donation account for future reefing projects.

The reef permit for HI-A-424 (NRDA ship project reef) was received from the USACOE in March 2014. Staff continues to provide information to the NRDA trustees for the Programmatic EIS. In May, Coastal Fisheries received the archaeology surveys for 2 reef sites that are scheduled for NRDA funding.

Fieldwood Energy has acquired the assets of Sandridge Petroleum which includes many deep-water platforms such as EB-110. This platform is located on the Outer Continental Shelf beyond the General Permit Area in the High Islands OCS. A donation agreement is underway with Fieldwood Energy to leave the base of the platform standing in 660ft of water with a 90ft clearance. This would leave 570ft of structure profile off the bottom. The top portion removed will be scrapped as it is not economical to off-load it again at another reef site. Fieldwood Energy is

conducting the archaeology survey this month and we expect to get the reef site permit from the USACOE by mid-summer. The structure is scheduled to be reefed in 2015. This will give the program its first deep-water structure.

Staff participated in a Rigs-to-Reefs panel discussion in New Orleans at GOM Alliance's first Rigs-to-Reefs meeting in March 2014. Participants included representatives from Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, BSEE, BOEM, USCG, Chevron, Exxon, Fieldwood, Shell, and stakeholder groups such as commercial fishermen and charter boat fisheries.

Work continues on permitting 3 new nearshore reefs off Sabine Pass, Galveston, and Port O'Connor. The Texas General Land Office reviewed a request to create a 360-acre reef off Port O'Connor. Coastal Fisheries proposed a 160-acre reef located 6.5nm from shore and 12nm south of the Galveston jetties in Texas state waters with a 48-foot water depth off Galveston, and a generalized area off Sabine Pass. All 3 areas will require an archaeology survey which is the next step before submitting applications to the USACOE.

Reefing support was obtained from the City of Corpus Christi and the Saltwater-fisheries Enhancement Association in July totaling about \$200,000. The entire project is expected to total approximately \$500,000. On 17 September, Walter Marine (Reefmakers) sank the M/V/ Kinta, a 155 foot long vessel that was built in 1976 at the Corpus Christi Nearshore Reef Site (MU-775) after towing the vessel from Alabama.

Staff attended the 2014 DECOM World in Houston, Texas for the fourth year in a row. This is an annual event held during the month of March is sponsored by petroleum companies and focuses on decommissioning issues, how to remove platforms, and what to do with them once they are removed. Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama's artificial reef staffs were also in attendance.

Staff worked with Ted Venker, Coastal Conservation Association National Headquarters, who is seeking to create a Gulf of Mexico-wide reefing plan where CCA might be able to assist in the creation, storage, and deployment of reefing materials on a much larger scale than they already do.

Staff participated in the annual Gulf of Mexico Foundation Industry/Agency cruise in late July, which brought together individuals from the oil and gas industry and federal and state agencies. This year's participants were from Shell, BP, Anadarko, BHP, W&T, Noble Energy, BSEE, BOEM, NOAA, TPWD and UT Brownsville.

In August 2014, there was almost 1,000 'likes,' to the Artificial Reef Project's Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/TexasParksAndWildlifeArtificialReefProgram>, and that number is steadily increasing.

Overall the Artificial Reef Program had 18 divers that logged 128 dives, for a total of 4,078 minutes underwater. Interestingly, nearly half of the time (1,985 minutes) was from decompression dives, which only made up 53 of the total dives, and were completed by 6 divers.

In June, staff began corresponding with staff with the Flower Gardens National Marine Sanctuary (FGNMS) about lionfish. We will be collecting lionfish during our monitoring trips and getting those shipped to FGNMS staff for a full work-up. This is part of a state-wide effort where FGNMS has agreed to do the work-ups of lionfish bodies should the collectors not be able to do so.

#### **Perry R. Bass Marine Fisheries Research Station - Life History Research**

Otolith collections from routine gill net monitoring continued, as was the processing and aging of otoliths collected in previous years.

The GSMFC funded FIN-Biological Sampling Project for otolith collection and processing for various marine species that was discontinued as of December 31, 2013 due to lack of funding was reauthorized as of April 2014. Contract staff members for this program were selected, sample collection and processing for 2014 was initiated, and 2014 samples and data are being entered into the FIN database.

Temperature and salinity tolerance trials for larval flounder continued. Results from these trials were analyzed and a manuscript was drafted.

Trials were completed for a SWG project to investigate the effects of tempering for various salinity and temperature levels on survival of stocked juvenile red drum in a cooperative project with Texas State University.

#### **Perry R. Bass Marine Fisheries Research Station - Genetics Research for GSMFC's Technical Coordinating Committee**

A coastwide genetic survey of Gulf menhaden continued with ongoing sample collections and tissue processing.

A genetic survey of inshore black drum populations continued with the collection and tissue processing of needed coastwide samples.

A genetic and meristic survey of *Menidia spp.* populations was initiated, sample collection and processing is ongoing.

#### **Buyback Programs**

There was no spring or summer buyback round for the shrimp, crab, or finfish license buyback programs, so these program totals did not change. Coastal Fisheries will have a fall round, with the application period ending November 7<sup>th</sup>.

#### **Oyster Fishery**

In April 2014, a commercial oyster dealer and private leaseholder from the Galveston Bay area, through a new company (STORM, LLC), leased approximately 23,000 acres of submerged bay bottom from a local navigation district and are claiming all oysters growing within this area are now private property. STORM has notified existing leaseholders with private oyster leases lying



within the STORM lease that their leases now belong to them and attempting to harvest or transplant to the leases would be considered trespassing. Additionally, STORM notified TPWD that all public reefs lying within the lease would be off limits to public commercial harvest beginning in November 2014. TPWD and the Texas General Land Office (the agency responsible for managing submerged state lands) have each provided letters to the navigation district they can only lease submerged lands for navigation projects and pursuant to state law and the Texas constitution it does not have the authority to convey private property rights for living natural resources to the lease.

In advance of the 83rd Texas Legislature convening in January 2015, the Texas House Committee on Culture, Recreation and Tourism received an interim charge to examine the viability of including the commercial oyster industry in the Commercial Fishing License Buyback Program with TPWD.

On 28 March, the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) temporarily closed bays along the Texas coast from Matagorda Bay to Corpus Christi Bay to the harvesting of oysters, clams and mussels because of elevated levels of an algae that can produce a toxin in some shellfish. The precautionary closure came after DSHS personnel found elevated levels of *Dinophysis* algae along the coast.

On 2 April, approved Areas 1 and 2 of East Matagorda Bay were also closed to the harvesting of shellfish due to the presence of *Dinophysis*. For all practical purposes, these closures temporarily closed the commercial oyster fishery in Texas, except for the Lower Laguna Madre and South Bay where limited oyster harvest occurs.

#### **SPECIAL EFFORTS, STUDIES, AND TOPICS**

In March 2014, a major oil spill occurred in Galveston Bay when a barge pushed by a tow boat named Miss Susan had collision with a 585-foot bulk carrier, Summer Wind. The collision caused the release of marine fuel oil that does not evaporate quickly, which makes it particularly harmful to the environment and difficult to clean up. The barge sank to the bottom of the channel where it laid partially submerged. The United States Coast Guard and the General Land Office are the federal and state agencies primarily responsible for oil spill response and clean-up activities. The reported release of approximately 168,000 gallons of fuel oil had a wide and devastating effect on Galveston Bay and the Gulf of Mexico.

During this summer's 9-day Federal red snapper season, Coastal Fisheries conducted a special study to estimate the Texas charter-for-hire landings of red snapper to test the accuracy of a new self-reporting of number of red snapper landings, plus obtain lengths of landed red snapper which are not self-reported. A special web site was set up for anglers to voluntarily report their catches of red snapper and a series of outreach efforts were conducted to make anglers aware of the site and to encourage fishermen to report. This outreach effort included several news releases and subsequent articles in coastal newspapers, distribution of wallet cards and brochures to anglers and bait camps/marinas, an email blast to over 40,000 licensed saltwater anglers, an article in Texas Saltwater Fishing magazine, mail-out to all Federally-permitted vessels in Texas (n=182), social

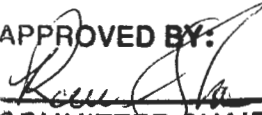
media outlets (including a posting on 2CoolFishing) and on the TPWD home page.

In addition, TPWD staff were present at the highest pressure sites for Gulf fishing activity every day of the 9-day season and conducted intercept surveys from noon until as late as 8pm to collect information about the trip, anglers were reminded to report their catches on the TPWD Red Snapper Landings web site.

**‘OTHERS’**

In mid-September, Texas A&M University's Imaging Flow CytoBot detected rising concentrations of *Karenia brevis* at Port Aransas. Cell concentrations were well below the threshold to cause fish kills, discolored water, or respiratory irritation at this site. Additional samples were collected at Bob Hall Pier, Swantner Park, Ropes Park and Cole Park in Corpus Christi, but *K. brevis* was not present in these sites.

In mid-September, staff attended the House Committee on Culture, Recreation and Tourism which met at the San Jacinto Historical Monument State Park in LaPorte, Texas. The committee received an interim charge to examine the viability of including the commercial oyster industry in the Commercial Fishing License Buyback Program. Support for such a program was provided by invited testimony.

APPROVED BY:  
  
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

APPROVED BY: Chad Hebert 29945  
  
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

## TAB H

**Joint Law Enforcement Committee, Law Enforcement Advisory Panel, and  
GSMFC Law Enforcement Committee Report  
Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council  
October 20, 2014  
Battle House Renaissance Hotel  
Mobile, Alabama**

The agenda was adopted with typographic corrections and the addition of consideration of an officer of the year program Other Business. This Other Business item was subsequently discussed during the review of the 2015-2016 Cooperative Enforcement Operations Plan.

The minutes of the Gulf Council's Law Enforcement Committee meeting of October 31, 2012 were approved as written by the Law Enforcement Committee. The minutes of the joint GSMFC LEC/LEAP meeting of March 18, 2014 were approved as written by the LEC/LEAP.

### **Election of LEAP and LEC Chair and Vice-chair**

The following were elected by acclamation.

#### **GMFMC Law Enforcement AP**

- Chair: Rama Shuster
- Vice-chair: Brandi Reeder

#### **GSMFC Law Enforcement Committee**

- Chair: Chad Hebert
- Vice-chair: Rusty Pittman

Note: in the following issues, the Council's Law Enforcement Committee and the joint LEAP/LEC made and voted on motions separately.

### **Usefulness of Charter-for-hire Decals**

Steven Atran summarized the June 2014 Council discussion on whether the decal requirement for federally permitted charter vessels and headboats was still necessary for enforcement. Among the issues, decals are difficult to read from a distance and they can peel off. Also, vessels may have multiple permits indicated on one decal. If one of those permits is transferred, the decal has to be peeled off and replaced, which costs time and money. State LEAP representatives responded that the presence of decals makes no difference in how vessels are approached on the water.

The following motions were initially passed with slightly different language, and were then reconsidered and modified to use language consistent with codified regulations.

**Council Law Enforcement Committee Motion: Without opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move, to eliminate the requirement to carry decals for vessels with charter vessel /headboat permits.**

**LEAP/LEC Motion: Without opposition, the Committee recommends to eliminate the requirement to carry decals for vessels with charter vessel/headboat permits.**

### **Review of Draft Definition of Charter Fishing**

John Froeschke reviewed the history of the abbreviated framework action to define charter fishing. The issue began with vessels conducting contractual services, i.e., a non-federally permitted vessel that was taking passengers out who had paid for an unrelated service (such as providing real estate advice, but allowing passengers to fish, thereby bypassing charter vessel fishing requirements). That vessel is no longer operating, and there are currently no vessels known to be conducting this type of service. Thus there is a question as to whether this is an ongoing issue. It was noted that the new definition in the Preferred Alternative that included any quid pro quo exchange could potentially affect several scenarios. For example, a corporation that owns a vessel may offer employees or clients a fishing trip as a perk. Another questionable scenario is a private vessels that hiring a professional fisherman as a guide. Dr. Froeschke explained that it was not the intent to eliminate such scenarios. State representatives on the LEAP/LEC felt that this was a minor issue, and at least in Texas is being addressed with state regulations that consider a vessel to be chartering if it accepts any pay, barter or exchange. However, Committee members also felt that proceeding with the new definition would provide tools that could help to enforce charter fishing regulations.

**Council Law Enforcement Committee Motion: Without opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move, to retain option 2: “Modify the current charter vessel and headboat definitions in 50 CFR 622.2 by adding the following words “or provides goods or services” after who pays a fee throughout the definition as outlined in the background material. In addition, add a definition of for-hire fishing in the Gulf of Mexico exclusive economic zone to clarify if vessels accept goods or services in exchange for fishing trips they must have a valid federal charter vessel/headboat permit and valid U.S. Coast Guard Captain’s License on board the vessel,” as the preferred alternative.**

**LEAP/LEC Motion: Without opposition, the Committee recommends to retain option 2: “Modify the current charter vessel and headboat definitions in 50 CFR**

**622.2 by adding the following words “or provides goods or services” after who pays a fee throughout the definition as outlined in the background material. In addition, add a definition of for-hire fishing in the Gulf of Mexico exclusive economic zone to clarify if vessels accept goods or services in exchange for fishing trips they must have a valid federal charter vessel/headboat permit and valid U.S. Coast Guard Captain’s License on board the vessel,” as the preferred alternative.**

Carrie Simmons noted that, because this framework action affects vessels with mackerel charter vessel/headboat permits under the joint Coastal Migratory Pelagics FMP, this proposed action would need to go the South Atlantic Council for their review and action.

### **Port Eads, Louisiana Marina Access**

Myron Fischer gave a presentation on the history of Port Eads and the Notice of Intent (NOI) from the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission. The Port Eads marina is not accessible by land. The marina was destroyed by Hurricane Katrina but has been rebuilt and re-opened in 2014. Port Eads hosts several multi-day tournaments, and anglers need to transit via state water to reach a highway-accessible marina. The nearest such port is in Venice. These vessels often will have multi-day bag limits, and the fish may be filleted. To accommodate anglers returning from a multi-day stay at Port Eads, Louisiana DWF has published an NOI to allow anglers who fish out of Port Eads to transport their multi-day catch (up to 3 days) for recreational saltwater fish back to a highway-accessible facility, provided certain criteria are met. One change that will likely be made to the criteria is to delete “designee” for the requirement to have catch certified by LDWF staff, agent, or designee upon landing daily catch at the marina.

A question was asked whether vessels leaving Port Eads could travel to a destination out of state. Mr. Fischer responded that vessels could travel out of state, but they would no longer be covered by the NOI, as Louisiana can only create regulations applicable to its own jurisdiction. In response to other questions, Mr. Fischer stated that charter vessels operate out of Port Eads, but such vessels are required to have a federal charter vessel/headboat permit. Biological/fisheries information is collected at the marina such as angler dockside interviews, lengths, weights, gonads, are special projects.

A question was asked as to whether fish transported out of Port Eads by float plane would be covered by the NOI. Mr. Fischer indicated that this question had not come up previously. It was pointed out that the South Atlantic Council allows the transport of snapper-grouper legally caught in the Bahamas, but it was questionable whether adding a specific provision for float planes to the NOI would be feasible. A suggestion was made to consider listing specific ports to which an angler could transport his catch under the NOI in order to facilitate enforcement. Mr. Fischer indicated that could be considered, but the nearest port was Venice (about 25 miles), and the next nearest was Empire.

Following discussion of the Port Eads issue and NOI, the Council's Law Enforcement Committee made a motion to recommend that as long as Louisiana and federal enforcement regulations are adhered to, the Council supports Louisiana's NOI as amended for Port Eads. However, Committee members felt that this motion was too specific, and instead the following substitute motion was passed.

**Council Law Enforcement Committee Substitute Motion: Without opposition, the Committee recommends and I so move to commend the LDWF for their ongoing efforts to solve the need for the transport within Louisiana state waters of multi-day on the water bag limits at Port Eads Marina as outlined in their NOI as amended.**

**LEAP/LEC Motion: : Without opposition, the Committee recommends to commend the LDWF for their ongoing efforts to solve the need for the transport within Louisiana state waters of multi-day on the water bag limits at Port Eads Marina as outlined in their NOI as amended.**

### **Overview of OLE Restructuring**

Tracy Dunn summarized the OLE restructuring plan. A workforce management committee reviewed the current enforcement staffing and felt that special agents, who are supposed to focus on criminal investigations, were spending too much time doing other enforcement activities. Their recommendation was to limit the number of investigators in the southeast, currently 34, to 10. This reduction will be accomplished through attrition, but the investigators will be replaced by enforcement officers. This will also result in a reduction in field offices because enforcement officers spend most of their time in the field and do not need offices. The remaining field offices will be located where they can be the most effective. However, criminal investigations can be conducted long distance, so the placement of the offices is not critical to their operation. The increase in enforcement officers will allow the same level of enforcement activities as is currently occurring, and may benefit the Joint Enforcement Agreement. The Southeast office is currently hiring five new enforcement officers, but any further hiring is on hold until more information about the budget is known. State enforcement representatives on the LEAP/LEC related that they have a good working relationship with the federal enforcement officers.

### **Review of 2015-2016 Cooperative Enforcement Operations Plan**

Steve VanderKooy reviewed changes made to the 2015-2016 version of the Gulf of Mexico Cooperative Enforcement Operations Plan. This plan was recently approved by the GSMFC. One change that will need to be made, however, is to change a continuing task that calls for the LEC/LEAP to convene monthly conference calls to conference calls only involve the LEC. If the Gulf Council or its LEAP is to be involved, these conference calls are considered public meetings that need to have advance notice and an opportunity for the public to listen in. If this is

not done, then these conference calls can only involve the LEC and cannot discuss Gulf Council issues. Where appropriate, similar changes will be made elsewhere in the agreement. One new task under Objective 1.1 (Increase participation in the GSMFC and GMFMC processes) is to request funding from the GMFMC for the LEAP state representatives to attend all other GMFMC meetings when in their respective home state.

**Law Enforcement Committee Motion: Without objection, the Committee recommends and I so move to request the Council to fund the LEAP state representative to attend Gulf Council meetings in their respective state.**

Under Objective 3.1 (Maintain cooperative enforcement agreements, joint enforcement agreements, memorandums of understanding, and reciprocal agreements across states and federal agencies), a new task has been added to develop a recognition/award program in each state for exceptional Gulf JEA officers. Such programs have been developed for the Atlantic and South Atlantic.

**Law Enforcement Committee Motion: Without objection, the Committee recommends and I so move to ask the Council staff to work with the GSMFC staff to develop an officer or team of the year program for the GOM.**

Mr. VanderKooy reviewed the remaining changes to the Operations Plan and asked if the Committee would approved the plan as modified.

**Law Enforcement Committee Motion: Without objection, the Committee recommends and I so move to accept the State's committee operation plan. (Council)  
Motion carried.**

Due to time constraints, the state highlights reports were not presented.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my report.

**Law Enforcement Committee**

**Members Present**

Vacant, Chair  
LCDR Jason Brand, Vice-chair  
Dave Donaldson  
Johnny Greene  
Camp Matens  
Jamie Miller/Dale Diaz  
Harlon Pearce  
John Sanchez  
Roy Williams

**GMFMC Law Enforcement AP and**

**GSMFC Law Enf. Comm Present**

Rama Shuster, FWC, LEAP Chair  
Brandi L. Reeder, TPWD, LEAP Vice-chair  
Chad Hebert, LADWF, LEC Chair  
Rusty Pittman, MDMR, LEC Vice-chair  
Scott Bannon, ADMR  
Jason Brand, USCG (LEC only)  
Tracy Dunn, NOAA/OLE  
Cynthia Fenyk, NOAA/GCES  
James Gale, USFWS  
Nicholas Chavez, USFWS (LEC only)