JOINT GSMFC & ASMFC ARTIFICIAL REEF SUBCOMMITTEE MINUTES
Tuesday, February 7, 2017 & Wednesday, February 8, 2017
Jacksonville, FL

Chairman Rousseau called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. The meeting began with introductions of the members and guests. The following were in attendance:

ASMFC Members
Peter Clarke, NJ DFW, Port Republic, NJ
Chris Deacutis, RIDEM FW DMF, Jamestown, RI
Brad Ennis, FL FWCC, Tallahassee, FL
Lisa Havel, ASMFC, Arlington, VA
Christopher LaPorta, NYS DEC, East Setauket, NY
Mike Malpezzi, MD DNR, Annapolis, MD
Bob Martore, SC DNR, Charleston, SC
January Murray, GA DNR, Brunswick, GA
Alicia Nelson, VMRC, Newport News, VA
Jason Peters, NC DMF, Morehead City, NC
Mark Rousseau, MA DMR, Gloucester, MA
Jeff Tinsman, DE DFW, Dover, DE

GSMFC Members
James Ballard, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Mike McDonough, LA DWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Keith Mille, FL FWCC, Tallahassee, FL
Craig Newton, AL DCNR, Dauphin Island, AL
Doug Peter, BSEE, New Orleans, LA (via conference call)
Jimmy Sanders, MS DMR, Biloxi, MS
Dale Shively, TPWD, Austin, TX

Staff
Ali Ryan, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Others
Larry Beggs, Reef Innovations/Reef Ball Foundation, St. Cloud, FL
Russ Brodie, FL FWCC, Jacksonville, FL
Amy Comer, NC DMF, Morehead City, NC
George Frankel, Eternal Reefs, Sarasota, FL
Christine Kittle, FL FWCC, Tallahassee, FL
Tim Mullane, Coleen Marine, Inc., Virginia Beach, VA
Kenta Suda, Okabe, Tokyo, Japan

Adoption of Agenda
A motion was made to adopt the agenda, and the motion passed unanimously.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes from the meeting held on March 14-15, 2016 were presented for approval. LaPorta made a motion to accept the minutes. Nelson seconded, and the minutes were approved.

HAPSs, Permitting, and Artificial Reef Deployment Discussion

Murray reported that they are waiting on renewal of their artificial reef permit, which is renewed every five years. The documents were submitted to ACOE in January 2016. At issue is the Right Whale critical habitat. Artificial reefs cannot be deployed during November to April, which is calving season. This is a problem, because if DNR receives a donation for an artificial reef, they cannot wait to deploy. Hopefully by the next meeting, a permit will have been issued.

Peters stated that an oyster sanctuary will be created sometime in 2017. A permit application was submitted in 2016, and the permit process could have taken almost two years, but the permit was received due to the risk of losing federal funding.

Shively stated that in Texas, construction permits are required for deployments. **Newton** stated that for inshore reefs, they file for a nationwide permit because it is easier to obtain approval. It is, however, only for maintenance of the reefs. **Nelson** stated that for VA, the permitting process has been uneventful, and no new artificial reefs are currently being developed. **LaPorta** stated that there was an issue with new permits due to Atlantic sturgeon habitat. Monitoring stipulations by NMFS were hard to meet.

PCB-Free Military Vessels for Reefing

Mille gave a PowerPoint presentation entitled 'PCB-free Military Vessels'. In June 2013, the ASMFC and GSMFC Artificial reef Committees submitted a letter to MARAD to reconsider its new ship reefing policy of only allowing MARAD vessels newer than 1985 to be released for use as artificial reefs. In October 2013, MARAD replied that they would pursue the most cost-effective methods for ship disposal available at the time. PCB sampling and analysis was done on the Ex-Steven W. Groves, a navy ship commissioned in 1982, that could possibly be deployed as an artificial reef.

Update on South Carolina's Deepwater Artificial Reef MPA

Martore gave a PowerPoint presentation entitled "The Charleston Deep Reef: South Carolina's Artificial Reef MPA". This area is proposed as an experimental artificial reef site as a result of public comment and support for creating artificial reefs. Study of this site in the long-term may provide important biological information about deep-water snapper and grouper species, and the effectiveness of deep-water artificial reefs.

The South Carolina Memorial Reef is located approximately 52 nautical miles southeast of the Charleston Harbor. Water depths range from about 300 to 450 feet. The reef site was planned as a potential deep-water Marine Protected Area (MPA), an area of ocean bottom with limited angling activity, for the protection of snapper and grouper. The Memorial Reef is part of the greater Charleston Deep Reef site which covers a four- by six-mile section of ocean. Red Snapper and many species of Grouper are found on the memorial reef.

A National Artificial Reef Workshop was held in June 2016 with the purpose of exploring artificial reefs as a management tool to support and/or enhance sustainable fisheries. The workshop

outcomes include: Production vs. aggregation is a continuum of variable importance; establishing clear objectives is essential; standardization in design and testing are needed. Challenges include: materials procurement, permitting, and monitoring.

Review of 2016 National Artificial Reef Workshop

Havel gave a PowerPoint presentation entitled "National Artificial Reef Workshop". The workshop was held on June 9-10, 2016 in Alexandria, VA. Approximately 80 participants shared lessons learned in artificial reef applications, discussed opportunities and challenges, and considered the potential future direction of artificial reefs in U.S. waters.

The objectives of the workshop were to: provide an overview of current science and applied experience regarding the application of artificial reefs as a tool to support or enhance sustainable fisheries; identify management challenges and associated research needs, knowledge gaps and limitations, and strategies for monitoring, using, and managing artificial reefs; identify and examine key considerations associated with artificial reefs as a potential management tool to support and/or enhance sustainable fisheries; discuss the potential roles of federal, state, and private sector partnerships in resolving artificial reef challenges and achieving objectives.

Presentations and panel discussions helped create awareness of various state artificial reef program objectives, strategies, and applied experiences from across the nation. Highlights included challenges, methods for overcoming barriers, and future needs, as well as, improving communication and collaboration among artificial reef practitioners across the U.S.

Harwich Reef Update

Rousseau gave a PowerPoint presentation entitled "Harwich Artificial Reef". The Harwich Artificial Reef was funded through Massachusetts saltwater fishing licenses. The revenues are divided in three ways: 1/3 goes to public access; 1/3 goes to law enforcement; 1/3 goes toward recreational fisheries research. The Harwich Reef site is 9.9 acres, and located 2.2 nautical miles south of Saquatucket Harbor on featureless bottom, in approximately 30 feet of water. It is constructed of concrete rubble. It was recommended that commercial fishing be prohibited on the reef site, as well as within a 100-mile buffer zone on each site, which would result in a 39.54 acre closed area. The purpose of the project is to add structure where structured habitat is limited, target recreationally important species, and provide additional recreational angling opportunities.

The reef material was deployed onto the reef site on March 23, 2016. Monitoring was done to ensure material stability, monitor species presence, document macro invertebrate species colonization and succession, and to assess invasive species presence. In the first year of deployment, tasks include: a permanent geo-referenced photo monitoring station; deployments of onset HOBO temperature sensors and an acoustic receiver; creating a site map using side-scan sonar to monitor material placement and movement. The reef was dedicated on August 4, 2016. Future plans for year two include: continued sampling; set-up of acoustic array; catch-and-tag of onsite fish.

SMZ Designations in the EEZ off New Jersey

Tinsman gave a PowerPoint presentation entitled "SMZ Status for the Delaware Reef Program". Their reef site selection criteria is to select sites with no existing structure, avoid "live bottom"; avoid existing shipwrecks; avoid areas supporting existing commercial fishing; avoid navigational conflicts. Wallop-Breaux Sportfish Restoration Program funds provide 75% of their program funding.

Delaware's five permitted reef sites (EEZ) consist of 4.6 square nautical miles in the 2,323 square nautical miles of the Atlantic continental shelf off the Delaware coast. The percentage of the area impacted by SMZ designation is <0.2%.

New Jersey and Delaware made two presentations to the MAFMC in 2007 regarding gear conflicts and the possibility of a future SMZ request, as provided for in the BSB (Black Sea Bass) Plan. This meeting was informational, and no formal request was made.

In July 2008, the USFWS informed states that they must be able to control gear types on their reefs in order to use Sportfish Restoration funds for reef development activities. At reef sites in the EEZ, control of gear types is done by SMZ designation, through the MAFMC. The SFR office informed Delaware and New Jersey in July 2008 that commercial gear was in conflict with the intended recreational goals for Wallop-Breaux-funded projects. In April 2010, New Jersey's SFR funds for reefs were suspended due to failure of legislation to correct gear conflicts. The entire NJ reef program was terminated.

In April 2010, Delaware House Bill 270 was passed, giving the Division of Fish and Wildlife authority to manage gear types on permitted reef sites in state waters by regulation. This regulation went into effect in fall 2011. 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. In June 2011, Delaware initiated the process with MAFMC.

SMZs can eliminate gear conflicts, resulting in the enhanced hook-and-line fishing opportunities, which is a goal of the Reef Program. Delaware could continue to manage ocean reefs for both recreational and commercial hook-and-line fishermen, and conduct other surveys and activities with Sportfish Restoration Funds that are essential to fisheries management. 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. On June 9, 2015, NOAA published the final rule in the federal register. The rule went into effect on July 9, 2015. Four of five states were granted year-round SMZ status, allowing harvest by only hook-and-line, spear, and hand methods of take. Delaware requested no buffer zone around the perimeter of the sites. Commercial hook-and-line fishing is permitted.

Clarke gave a PowerPoint presentation entitled "New Jersey Reef Program". In 2011, Federal Aid Grant was removed from the NJ Reef Program due to gear conflicts on reefs. Sportfish Restoration Funds could not be used for reef work until the gear conflict was resolved. After five years of negotiations, a resolution was passed for the two reefs in state waters. On June 1, 2016, $159,000 of SFR funding was restored to the NJ Artificial Reef Program. This is a five-year grant cycle. In December 2015, NJ DFW officially requested SMZ regulations for all NJ permitted reefs in Federal waters. The MAFMC placed NJ's request on the 2016 Implementation Plan. The Council's Monitoring Team evaluated NJ's request. In October 2016, the Council recommended NJ receive SMZ status for all reefs in Federal waters, and it went to public hearings in NY, NJ, and DE. In November 2016, the Council voted to recommend to NMFS that all NJ reefs located in Federal waters receive SMZ status, and NMFS is currently reviewing the recommendation.

Update on the SAMFC Artificial Reef Policy Document

Havel reported that they have had one conference call, and will be meeting after the artificial reef meeting is over to continue working on the document, which will be completed by mid-April.

ROI with Relation to Large Artificial Reef Systems in Japan

Kenta Suda gave a PowerPoint presentation entitled "ROI with Relation to Large Artificial Reef Systems in Japan". The fishery environment improvement project in Japan creates suitable living environments that benefit the life cycle of aquatic creatures. The government and prefectures develop a master plan for each individual area of the sea and record the benefits of the project with monitoring techniques.

The Aomori Prefecture project used goldeye rockfish, seaweed beds, nursery artificial reefs, and steel artificial reefs. Three main benefit factors determine the Return on Investment (ROI) for this $16.62m project: Effect of maintenance and increase of fisheries resources; effect of industry other than fisheries; effect of maintenance and restoration of aquatic environment. The benefit for this project was $19.2m.

Overview and Implementation of Northeast Florida's Offshore Reef Fish Fisheries-Independent Monitoring Program

Russ Brodie gave a PowerPoint presentation entitled "Overview and Implementation of Florida's Reef Fish Monitoring in the U.S. South Atlantic". A beneficial hooked-gear survey was done for development of a fisheries-independent index of abundance for red snapper along Florida's Atlantic coast. Four anglers, using electric reels on traditional fishing rods, did simultaneous two-minute timed drops, for a total of 10 timed drops. The sampling effort resulted in 364 stations sampled, and 5, 690 individuals caught (1,294 red snapper). The red snapper were aged, with the mean age being 4.39 years. Distribution was bimodal, with peaks at 2-3 years, and 5-6 years. Younger fish were caught in the Southern zone.

A three-year grant (2014-2017) was received from MARFIN to do a pilot study for developing fisheries-independent indices of abundance for juvenile red snapper in the U.S. South Atlantic. Trawls and Z-traps were used during July-October 2015/2016. From the traps, 111 red snapper were collected. From the trawls, 83 red snapper were collected. In 2016, preliminary data showed 68 red snapper collected from traps, and 110 from trawls.

Three proposals have been submitted to continue the studies.

Status of Historical Resource Survey Requirements

Mille stated that Florida is working with a new compliance officer on historical resource survey requirements. A training certification for projects would make it easier for the permitting process.

Tinsman stated that they had to obtain permits, hire a contractor to side-scan sites, and get them analyzed by an archaeologist, which cost $32,000.

Newton stated that they must have a certified marine archaeologist on board to collect data and be involved throughout the entire project. There are old inshore reefs that have not been surveyed, but no retroactive surveys have been required so far.

Shively stated that archaeology surveys are required for their projects. Permits must be obtained to perform the surveys.

Other Business/Public Comment

A recreational fisherman from Texas, Tom Hilton, spoke on behalf of recreational fishermen, and agreed that fish habitat is important. He owns a mapping company and a marine habitat company. He believes that management should be given to the states, and that the Federal government is not interested. He feels that red snapper should not be managed as one stock in the Gulf. He stressed the need for funding, and plans to harness commercial harvest royalties and put them back into the states. Harvesters of public trust resources would be required to pay a fee that would then be channeled back to the states, and placed into fisheries management. Mr. Hilton's company manufactures concrete reef pyramids. They are mobile, and can pack up and go wherever they are needed.

A former University of Florida faculty member, Bill Seaman, informed the meeting attendees about the 11th International Conference on Artificial Reef and Related Aquatic Habitats (CARAH) that will be held September 11-13, 2017 in Terengganu, Malaysia. He will be giving a talk at the conference. The theme of the conference is: Artificial Reefs and Related Aquatic Habitats: Contributions to Science, Policy and Livelihoods. He will send the link for the conference to Keith and Lisa.

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

Wednesday, February 8, 2017

Chairman **Rousseau** called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. **Newton made a Motion that state updates be given first. The Motion passed unanimously.**

State/Federal Artificial Reef Program Updates

GSMFC

Ballard reported that he reformatted and reviewed the revised draft of the *Guidelines for Marine Artificial Reef Materials: Second Edition*. It has been sent back to both subcommittees for final review. He asked the panel members to send their updates to him, along with photos with captions on them to know who to contact. Hopefully, the third edition will be finalized and ready for distribution by the end of 2017. **Ballard** is also developing a proposal for a gulf-wide standardized artificial reef demonstration project with the Artificial Reef Technical Committee. The goal is to fill some of the key science gaps that were identified at the National Artificial Reef Workshop.

ASMFC

Havel reported that they funded a black sea bass habitat project last year, which was awarded to the University of Maryland. The project objective is to improve understanding of the relationship between black sea bass abundance and habitat characteristics in the mid-Atlantic region. The data is being analyzed, and results are anticipated next spring.

BSEE

Peter reported that policy has not changed over the last year. Changing height levels of conductor wells in the Rigs-to-Reef program is being discussed. Applications for structural removals have declined to under 100 per year. Currently, there are 2,100 structures still remaining in Gulf of Mexico waters.

GA

Murray reported that their Coastal Resources Division (CRD), Habitat Restoration and Enhancement Unit (HREU) continues to focus on providing suitable and accessible quality habitats for coastal recreational anglers through enhancement of Georgia's 15 estuarine and 30 marine artificial reefs. GA DNR is currently working with the Department of Defense on deployment plans to fully submerge the eight decommissioned TACTS Towers. Once deployed, ownership of the towers will be transferred to GA DNR.

In June 2016, 68 metal poultry transport cages, 26 culvert sections, and six truckloads of concrete culvert/boxes were deployed at the SAV Reef site.

In 2016, the HREU drafted an Artificial Reef Strategic Plan (ARSP) to establish strategies for promoting reef habitat enhancement along the Georgia coast. The ARSP is intended to serve as a blueprint for HREU statewide operational activities, serve as a guide for future activities, and to provide a coordinated approach to habitat enhancement projects.

During April 2016, GA DNR conducted two artificial reef enhancements at estuarine reef sites.

There is a lack of suitable "natural cultch" materials available for oyster settlement. Shell and other materials must be reintroduced into the environment to promote growth and expansion of new oyster reefs. GA DNR manages seven Shell Recycling Centers, where community members from restaurants, etc. voluntarily donate oyster shells to be used in future projects. Shell is also bagged through volunteer outreach events, and placed at designated restoration sites each spring.

The Georgia Oyster Reef Mapping Project created a Geographic Information System (GIS) dataset of existing natural and restored oyster reefs along the Georgia coast. This dataset can be used to search for favorable conditions of potential oyster reef restoration sites, while not disturbing known oyster reefs.

SC

An effort is being made to construct and deploy new reef modules in-house. Three new designs of concrete and steel have been built that can be deployed from their own research vessels. Two of the designs have been placed on three reef sites. The structures will be monitored regularly to determine which ones justify further construction and distribution.

The request to the South Atlantic Fisheries Management Council (SAMFC) to have two unpublished experimental reefs declared Type II Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) has been approved as part of the Council's Amendment 36 to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan. These areas are now classified as Spawning Special Management Zones (SMZs).

Numerous Grouper species and red Snapper were observed at the deep-water artificial reef MPA, which is two years old. Their presence is highly encouraging, as the original purpose for creating this reef was to provide spawning habitat specifically for these species.

A new addition of the "Guide to South Carolina Marine Artificial Reefs" has been printed. It is a comprehensive listing of all reef sites and materials, along with GIS-generated maps of all SC artificial reefs.

NC

Peters reported that the restoration budget was increased, and they are pushing for increased reef developments. In 2016, a new 10-acre oyster sanctuary was created, two vessels were deployed on a nearshore reef site, rock and reef unit enhancements were done on an existing inshore fishing reef, and eternal reef deployments were done at a nearshore fishing reef. A new 40-acre oyster sanctuary (Swan Island Oyster Sanctuary) will be built in the southern Pamlico Sound. It is currently in the planning, permitting, and contracting phase, but will be constructed sometime in 2017 using 25,000 tons of marine limestone marl.

Two new artificial reefs have been sited in Bogue Sound. They will be constructed of newly-designed reef structures that were built by NC DMF personnel. The reefs will serve as small experimental reefs. They are in the permit review stage, and are expected to be constructed in 2017. A project to sink two vessels at a nearshore site off Pine Knoll Shores is under permit review, and the vessels will be deployed in 2017 after the permits are issued. Funding is provided through state recreational fishing license money, and will be completed in partnership with a local dive club.

The first year of estuarine finfish and oyster sampling has been completed. This included 38 gillnet, longline, chevron trap samples, and 114 oyster quadrat samples. The objective of this 10-year study is to evaluate community differences among different materials in different estuarine environments.

In 2016, the Artificial Reef Program published a new edition of its Artificial Reef Guide in both print and interactive web formats. The website was also redesigned, and offers updated information on the program, and the ability to collect user feedback through an anonymous survey. Waterproof booklets are available to the public free of charge that contain GPS location of the artificial reefs, material type, and deployment date. The booklet is also available online as a pdf, and also in an interactive format that allows users to personalize maps, measure distance, overlay various data layers, and connect to material meta-data.

MD

Malpezzi reported that in May 2016, 55 "lo-pro" reef balls were deployed at Memorial Stadium Reef in Chesapeake Bay.

The Federal Corps of Engineers permit for the Chesapeake Bay sites expired in August 2015. A new permit was issued in June 2016. This is a 10-year "umbrella permit" that covers 21 sites in Chesapeake Bay through the end of 2026.

Three deployments were completed at the Love Point reef site in northern Chesapeake Bay.

In July 2016, 70 "mini bay-ball" reef balls were deployed at the Tilghman Island reef site.

At the Cedar Point reef site in Chesapeake Bay, 600 tons of concrete rubble was deployed. The concrete rubble was donated by Dominion Resources, who also covered the cost of the deployment.

Deployments are scheduled in the first quarter of 2017 for three reef sites. Also, the demolition and replacement of the Rt. 301 Bridge over the Potomac River will likely be a major source of material for many sites in the next 3-4 years.

DE

Tinsman reported that their reef program has been deploying large concrete pieces over the last several years onto reef site #9, which is three miles SE of Rehoboth Beach in DE in 60 feet of water.

In 2016, the major effort of their reef program was the preparation of the Zuni/Tamaroa, a 205' Navy tug/USCG cutter. Deployment is expected in summer 2017 on the Del-Jersey-Land site, 26 nm SE of the Indian River Inlet.

The first round of subway car deployment was 2001-2003. Delaware requested and was granted permission to "bank" the donation of clean-up costs and transportation costs for 619 NTC subway cars for use in future project segments. This amounted to over $6M. Use of this never-ending supply of matching funds has made reefing very easy. However, Federal auditors took exception with that practice. In 2018, Delaware will have to generate match within the project segment, during which SFR funds are spent. This could mean that large vessel projects might be very difficult.

The Delaware Reef Program hopes to acquire, clean, prepare and reef a 325' "Stealth Vessel", which will create a good fish habitat, diving destination, and fishing destination in the mid-Atlantic region. More details will be available at a later date.

NJ

Clarke reported that after more than a five year hiatus, the NJDEP Division of Fish and Wildlife's Artificial Reef Program is active again. Five vessels were reefed in 2016 - The Austin, a 68' former trawler, on the Axel Carlson Reef; The Lisa Kim, a 115' former clam dredge boat, on the Wildwood Reef; the Tobacco Pointe, a 90' tugboat, was sunk off the Atlantic City reef; the Ohio, a 70' dredge vessel, was deployed on the Ocean City Reef.

Over 4,000 yards of concrete rubble from a seawall were deployed at the Sea Girt and Axel Carlson Reefs.

The former U.S. Coast Guard Cutter, the Tamaroa, will be sunk on the DelJerseyLand Inshore Reef. The Tamaroa was featured in the hit film "Perfect Storm" as the ship and crew that saved the US Coast Guard helicopter rescue team.

NY

LaPorta reported that their reef program is currently undergoing the scoping process for a Supplemental Environment Impact Statement to update New York's current GEIS & Reef Plan. The SEIS will be a requirement for future reef permits, which will expire in 2018.

In October 2015, 450 sections of concrete-coated steel pipe were deployed on 16 targets on Rockaway Reef. The reef has been colonized, and are now home to healthy populations of tautog, black sea bass, scup, and lobster.

The NY Reef Program holds valid permits for six of its ocean sites. Twelve Mile Reef is the largest and deepest, and is currently undeveloped.

An 85-foot steel tugboat will be deployed onto the Fire Island Reef later this year, through monies secured from the New York Environmental Protection Fund (EPF), which is a potential revenue source for future reef projects.

At the Hempstead Reef, 75,000 pounds of concrete buoy sinkers were deployed in March 2016 by the U.S. Coast Guard Aids to Navigation (USCG ATON). Additional sinkers will be deployed by USCG ATON on other reef sites in the near future.

RI

Deacutis reported that the Rhode Island DEM Division of Fish & Wildlife Marine Fisheries Program is engaged in a multi-year collaborative study with The Nature Conservancy funded by Sport Fish & Wildlife Restoration funds to examine whether fish habitat has improved in the urban Providence and Seekonk Rivers. The water quality in the urban Providence River has shown improvements due to increased treatments of wastewater discharges, major decreases in toxics from dischargers, and major decreases in raw sewage discharges from Combined Sewer Overflows. Seining surveys, benthic video transects, and water quality measurements in these areas were initiated in summer 2016, and will continue with the addition of fish pot surveys through 2017. This information will be used to develop plans for habitat improvement opportunities and restoration techniques, as well as any opportunities to improve the few areas of salt marsh that provide fish habitat.

MA

Rousseau reported that a new 10-acre artificial reef was created off Saquatucket Harbor in Harwich, and is the first artificial reef deployment in MA in a decade. A regulation was enacted prohibiting all commercial fishing activity on the Harwich Reef site and within a buffer zone extending an additional 100 meters from the site in all directions. This regulation establishes the Harwich artificial reef site as the first and only site in MA dedicated exclusively to recreational saltwater fishing.

Funding was received from the MA Marine Recreational Fisheries Development Fund for long-term support of reef monitoring and development at all permitted artificial reef sites in MA. Acoustic receivers were deployed in 2016 to five artificial reef sites to begin tracking the patterns of tagged migratory fish species of commercial and recreational importance.

Potential new artificial reef sites in lower Cape Cod Bay were explored, and additional near-shore artificial reefs in the southern portion of Cape Cod Bay were sited, in collaboration with the Cape Cod Bay Commercial Charter Captains Association.

DMF launched a project focused on siting and designing near-shore artificial reefs. The intent of this project is to examine the feasibility of reefs that could be used for shoreline protection, as well as serve as productive biological habitats.

VA

In 2016, two deployments were completed on the Triangle Reef, located 25 miles off of Virginia Beach, and the Cabbage Patch Reef, located in the SE corner of the Chesapeake Bay.

The reef program is working on a new public mapping system. The new system will have an interactive GIS map that will allow users to zoom in on the reef locations, with metadata on each deployment listed. This information will also be available through the agency's smart phone app so that anglers can locate and track reef activity in real time.

The reef program was approached in 2016 by a representative from the Oyster Company of Virginia, with a request to donate reef tech reef modules on a regular basis to the program. The contract is still under negotiation.

In April, the reef staff will be making a presentation at the 73rd Annual NEAFWA Conference. The presentation, entitled "Continuing a 40-year Legacy: Maintaining Virginia's Artificial Reef Program", will highlight the history of the program, challenges since losing funding and staffing, and future plans to move forward.

LA

McDonough reported that their Artificial Reef Program now has five established nearshore reefs. Their Artificial Reef Council approved 12 nearshore planning areas. They are actively soliciting platform owners within nearshore planning areas for potential reefing opportunities.

The Program now has 27 established inshore reefs. Their Artificial Reef Council approved two new inshore reef sites located in the southwest portion of Lake Pontchartrain, and the southeast portion of Calcasieu Lake. These projects will be constructed later this fiscal year.

Multi-beam surveys are being done on selected reefs, followed by high resolution video ROV surveys.

MS

Sanders reported that the Artificial Reef Bureau (ARB) continued securing and deploying structure in 2016, and monitoring fish assemblages and physiochemical parameters at selected inshore reef sites. Personnel checked and re-marked 22 inshore reefs in the three coastal counties to assist small boaters in locating the low-profile reefs. Offshore reef sites were visited to check for sustainability subsidence rates, and fish community structure. ARB staff also assisted the Finfish Bureau with collecting samples for a reef fish assessment project funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF).

Mapping to monitor deployed cultch material was completed in April for the Mississippi Oyster Cultch Early Restoration Project. Side scan equipment was used to map historic oyster bed locations in Biloxi Bay. Eleven inshore artificial habitats were side scanned to assess reef status and precise bought diaries of deployed habitat.

The ARB partnered with NFWF to complete the Artificial Reef Habitat Mapping Program. The Program consisted of 100% multi-beam coverage and 100% side scan sonar coverage. All 15 offshore reef sites, and all eight Rigs-to-Reefs sites were surveyed.

Staff personnel represented the ARB and MDMR at several outreach events and educational meetings throughout 2016.

The ARB is currently preparing for, and working on, ongoing projects. The Coastal Conservation Association abandoned the ARB are collaborating to deploy concrete culverts within the Cat Island Reef Site. MDMR is working with a contracting company to obtain and deploy valuable artificial reef material.

AL

Newton reported that in 2016, two new reefs were constructed near Point Clear and Fort Morgan, AL. Existing reefs were enhanced. During 2016, $2,197,922 was invested in inshore reef construction projects.

New inshore reefs will be constructed in the Mississippi Sound and Pelican Bay. A USACE permit has been acquired, and a $400,000 contract has been awarded to construct the reefs. A total of 132 pedestal style modules will be deployed, beginning in February 2017.

Reef habitats within the nearshore zones offshore of Alabama (Gulf beach to nine miles offshore) continue to be developed. An Endangered Species Act (ESA), Section 7 consultation with NMFS has been completed, and a National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), Section 106 cultural resources remote sensing survey, is currently being conducted.

AMRD has constructed and deployed 25 new reef sites using 125 pedestal-style low-profile anchored reef modules. The sites are located approximately three miles offshore of Baldwin County. They have been heavily utilized by juvenile gray triggerfish and red snapper.

Numerous offshore reefs were enhanced and created. Alabama Power Company, Cooper T. Smith, and the Alabama Wildlife Federation donated resources to construct a large artificial reef approximately 25 nm offshore of Alabama.

A pre-bid meeting for the construction of a shipwreck reef is scheduled for February. The project has a $1,000,000 budget, and the contractor will be selected based on the largest, most complex shipwreck proposed within budget.

FL

Mille reported that five prefabricated artificial reef modules made of limestone and concrete were deployed in Bay County in May 2016. In July 2016, a 324-foot sludge tanker was sunk in Broward County. The ship is the centerpiece of what will become known as Shipwreck Park, surrounded by 16 other existing wrecks covered with marine life. The Isle Casino is one of the main sponsors, and an underwater casino scene was created by an artist that has oversized dice, a card table with an octopus and three card sharks, a life-sized mermaid barmaid, and a steel slot machine. In September 2016, 510 tons of clean limestone boulders were deployed off Deerfield Beach. In Mexico Beach, 77 structures consisting of prefabricated modules and secondary-use materials were deployed in May 2016. In St. Marks, 101prefabricated modules were deployed at 25 patch reef locations within the St. Marks Artificial Reef permitted area. In January 2016, a tug boat was sunk roughly 10 nautical miles southeast of Pensacola Pass in 82 feet of water. In Martin County, 3,245 tons of concrete culverts, poles, pilings, and other concrete and steel materials were deployed to create four patch reefs. In Miami-Dade County, 930 tons of limestone boulders were deployed within the Anchorage Artificial Reef Site. In July 2016, a 170-foot cargo vessel was deployed in

Palm Beach County. The Reef Ball Foundation deployed 51 prefabricated reef modules in November 2016 at the Sarasota County M-8 permitted site.

During 2016, the Palm Beach County Reef Research Team, a non-profit group, was contracted to perform fish monitoring and mapping dives on 21 artificial and natural reefs to continue a 20-year long-term reef monitoring effort in Palm Beach County. The team has finished the dives associated with this project, and will submit a final report summarizing their findings in summer 2017.

FWC contracted with the University of Florida for 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. The final report indicated that the artificial reef sites are receiving significantly higher boating visitation activity than the natural reef sites.

Starting in 2014, the University of West Florida was funded by FWC to conduct a two-year study to examine the effectiveness and ecological benefits of targeted lionfish removals at the Escambia East-Large Area Artificial Reef Site off northwest Florida, where lionfish densities were among the highest in the western Atlantic. All lionfish were removed from 17 of the selected sample sites via spearfishing. Nine of the sites were periodically cleared of lionfish through May 2015. The remaining sites served as un-cleared controls. Both adult and juvenile lionfish quickly recruited to cleared reefs, and lionfish reached pre-clearance densities in less than a year. Declines in several fish species were observed throughout the study.

The FWC continued sampling legal-size recreationally-targeted reef fish for PCB analysis at the U.S.S. Oriskany that was sunk as an artificial reef in May 2006 off Pensacola Pass. Red snapper and vermilion snapper PCB levels did not result in fish consumption advisory actions. The remaining analyzed species (porgy, groupers, triggerfish) represent too few specimens sampled with too great a PCB variability to take any species-specific fish consumption advisory action, but due to elevated levels observed in scamp grouper and bank seabass, Escambia County requested a toxicology consult from the FL Department of Health. The FL Department of Health issued consumption guidelines for bank seabass (two meals per week) and scamp grouper (one meal per week). Sampling and monitoring will continue.

TX

Shively reported that they have one deep-water petroleum platform scheduled for reefing in 2017, and two more under negotiation. There are also reef site permits for two deep water platforms at the Garden Banks. The structures should be in the R2R program in 2017.

TPWD is working with W&T Offshore, FGBNMS, and the USACE to obtain the reef permit for a 20ac site. Only the base of the platform will remain. Permit approval is expected in spring 2017, with reefing to begin by late summer.

In late 2015, a $400,000 grant was awarded (with a $400,000 match from the reef program) for a Texas General Land Office Coastal Management Plan Grant. The grant is to create low and mid-relief habitat in the new Rio Grande Valley Nearshore Reef Site. The funds became available in fall 2016 and a Request for Proposals is being drafted for bid in early spring 2017. In January 2017, a $300,000 Coastal Management Plan grant was also awarded (with TPWD matching $300,000) for a similar reefing and study at Big Man Reef GA-22 offshore of Galveston. In September 2016, a tug and shrimp boat were reefed at the Rio Grande Valley Nearshore reef off South Padre. At the George Vancouver/Freeport BA-336 Nearshore reef in Brazoria County, 800

concrete pyramids were placed. This reef site is now considered complete. In January 2017, reefing of concrete pyramids began on the Matagorda Nearshore Reef BA-439. The project will be completed by April 2017.

In January 2017, the M/V Kraken, a 371-foot cargo carrier, was reefed in 141 feet of water at the HI-A-424 reef site as a diving and fishing attraction. Being a more modern ship, there was no asbestos or PCB materials on board. More than 2,000 tons of concrete was poured into the hold to facilitate landing the ship upright. Sixteen ships are in the Ships-to-Reef Program.

Under the Biological Monitoring and Research Program, biological monitoring and research was conducted with four universities and the U.S. Geological Survey. The program has increased its dive locker equipment and maintenance. The program began holding an Artificial Reef Consortium for its interagency contractors in 2014. This is for those who hold research contracts and conduct biological monitoring to present findings and discuss monitoring results and problems. The 4th Annual Texas Artificial Reef Program Consortium was held at the TAMU-Corpus Christi Harte Institute on February 26-27, 2017.

Matching SFR Funds in Delaware

Tinsman gave a PowerPoint presentation entitled "Delaware Reef Program. Recent Changes in "Banked Match" for Wallop-Breaux (SFR) Funding". Delaware lost assess to banked match in a 2016 federal audit. This will make large vessel projects much more challenging. Concrete can generate match, but requires expenditure of about half the budget on concrete, leaving less for large vessel projects in the $200k - $1m range. Potential solutions include structuring the large vessel preparation contract over several project years with threshold payments, or attracting foundation or other funding. New Jersey and Delaware are currently reefing the Tamaroa, with the Annie E. Casey Foundation providing matching funds.

Next Meeting/Other Business/Public Comment:

The next meeting location will be in New Orleans, LA.

The next meeting date will be in February 2018.

Election of Officers

ASMFC: **Jason Peters** was elected as Chairman.
January Murray was elected as Vice-Chairman.

A motion was made to approve, it was seconded, and the motion passed.

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

APPROVED BY:
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

FISHERIES INFORMATION NETWORK (FIN)
MINUTES
March 14, 2017
Gulfport, MS

Chairman **Mike Harden** called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. The following members, staff, and others were present:

Members
Chris Denson, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL
Michael Harden, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Thomas Sminkey, NOAA/ NMFS, Silver Spring, MD
Richard Cody, FFWCC, St. Petersburg, FL
Beverly Sauls, FFWCC, St. Petersburg, FL
Nicole Beckham, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL
Nicole Smith, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
John Froeschke, GMFMC, Tampa, FL
Jessica Stephen, NOAA/SERO, St. Petersburg, FL
Ken Brennan, NOAA/SEFSC, Beaufort, NC
Dave Gloeckner, NOAA/SEFSC, Miami, FL
Faye Grubbs, TPWD, Corpus Christi, TX
Justin Esslinger, TPWD, Rockport, TX
Paul Mickle, MDMR, Biloxi, MS

Staff
David Donaldson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Gregg Bray, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Donna Bellais, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Joe Ferrer, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Others
Brittany Chudzik, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Darrin Stewart, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Megan Fleming, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Harron Wise, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Joe Jewell, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Gary Fitzhugh, NOAA Fisheries, Panama City, FL
Todd Neahr, FFWCC, St. Petersburg, FL
Luiz Barbieri, FFWCC, St. Petersburg, FL
Trevor Moncreif, USM/GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Rick Burris, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Chris Mace, TPWD, Rockport, TX
Andrew Petersen, Bluefin Data, Prairieville, LA
Claude Petersen, Bluefin Data, Prairieville, LA
James Sampson, Bluefin Data, Prairieville, LA
Geoff White, ACCSP, Arlington, VA

Mike Cahall, ACCSP, Arlington, VA
Gordon Colvin, ECS Federal/NOAA Fisheries, Homosassa, FL
Jackie Wilson, NOAA Fisheries, Atlanta, GA

Approval of Agenda

G. Bray noted request to add an additional item to the agenda, 16b – Response to comments from MRIP operations team pertaining to the Gulf MRIP implementation plan. **C. Denson** moved to approve the agenda. **R. Cody** seconded.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the Fisheries Information Network (FIN) meeting held on March 14-15, 2016 in San Antonio, TX were approved as presented.

NAS Briefing of MRIP Review

Dr. Luiz Barbieri gave a summary of findings from the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) review of the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP). The NAS formed an ad-hoc review committee that was charged to evaluate and assess the components of the program especially the Fishing Effort Survey (FES) and the Access Point Angler Intercept Survey (APAIS). The NAS concluded that the FES mail survey represents a major improvement to the survey methodologies compared to the Coastal Household Telephone Survey (CHTS). The mail response rate is 3 times higher than the CHTS. Review committee recommendations for the FES are to continue to evaluate the cognitive properties of a 2-month recall period, consider evaluating prospective data collection, and further evaluate electronic data collection as an option. They also concluded APAIS is a substantial improvement on the older intercept survey methodologies. Review committee recommendations were to investigate small area estimation procedures for small domains, evaluate potential CPUE differences between public and private access points, and develop validation programs for the estimation of discards. The NAS committee also recommended to expand the pool of consultants and evaluate whether the design of MRIP is compatible with the needs of in-season management for ACL's. Additional recommendations for communications should involve NMFS expanding communications with partners to explain the role of MRIP in fisheries management and MRIP should allow the for-hire captains a method to review their own data submittals.

MRIP Update

T. Sminkey gave a brief MRIP update. No changes are being implemented for APAIS in 2017. FES implemented an option to include Puerto Rico and Hawaii in the mail survey although there is no license database in either place. **G. Colvin** stated the Gulf was the first of the regional implementation teams to submit a Regional Implementation Plan. MRIP has developed a steering committee to develop a draft strategic plan and should have it available for review in April. They hope for review and input from the regional fishery management councils and FINs. **B. Sauls** asked for permission for an APAIS add-on question for anglers on the west coast of FL (state & federal waters) that targeted and or caught certain species of reef fish. They are hoping to determine the level of under coverage for anglers that are supposed to be signed up for their

mandatory reef fish permit. **G. Bray** indicated it should not be a problem to add the add-on question to the form for scanner detection. The space allocated on the form for the add-on question cannot be used for comments by other states. **G. Bray** stated due to level funding some APAIS sample assignments have had to be cut in Florida for 2017. **B. Sauls** presented what the potential impacts might be for species where PSEs are already high. The concern is without additional funding to support APAIS, additional cuts in sampling will produce significantly less accurate landings estimates.

Unified Trip Ticket Program Issues

C. Petersen stated the web site is ready for Texas state only dealers for testing. He is looking to quickly follow with Florida state only dealers and then federal dealers for Texas and Florida. The timeframe for adding federal dealers to the system is about three months. The system is being designed with the flexibility to handle commercial, head boat, and charter boat landings with the current focus on commercial landings. **A. Petersen** announced the system will now be called VESL. He gave a demo of the log in process, the new page designs, along with page help and help center. He showed new features added including a drop down list for fish time on the ticket page, an automated dealer favorites species list detected by the dealers most frequently used species, and the ability for carry over fields for multiple species. **D. Gloeckner** asked if the fields for carry over were customizable by the agencies and **A. Petersen** stated they are. Filters are implemented for the species table based on species, grade, market and unit to ensure valid data combinations are entered. Once all fields are entered click add and species is added to the report. Dealers can repeat the process to add and are able to review and submit report. Once the report is submitted by the dealer a status of submit is shown and it becomes available for export by the agencies. The dealers will be able to see the status of all their tickets for a given time period using the filter option. If a ticket is not submitted, a submit button will appear next to it for submission. This screen also shows if the dealer is or is not in compliance and gives the dealer the ability to file negative reports. **A. Petersen** indicated that all the pages demoed are available on mobile devices with scaling for phones and tablets. **J. Sampson** gave a demo of the system's phone automated ability for a dealer to hear their status and file a negative report via a phone call instead of logging into a computer. **C. Denson** asked why the min and max count fields were not on the data entry screen. **C. Petersen** stated the goal was to minimize free form entry fields. **C. Denson** and **D. Gloeckner** mentioned not having these fields is a problem for their respective agencies. **D. Gloeckner** suggested maybe a drop down list containing valid numbers a dealer could select instead of entering them. **D. Gloeckner** asked if there will be a unique key to identify the entire record on a ticket. **C. Petersen** acknowledged there will be a unique key. **J. Stephens** asked if there is a way to track what has changed on a ticket if a change has been made. **A. Peterson** stated currently the system does not track what has been changed only that there was a change and future development will include tracking what has been changed. **F. Grubbs** asked if the system will be application based for mobile applications. **A. Peterson** stated the web site is mobile compatible but there has not been development of a downloadable mobile application. **C. Denson** asked when the offline version will be available. **C. Petersen** stated the development concentration has been on the on-line version and offline version development is later down the road. **D. Gloeckner** asked if this system will be compatible with the IFQ system. **A. Petersen** stated it can be, but development has not

been done at this time. **D. Stewart** asked if a method was in place to identify which fisherman license to use when a fisherman has more than one license type. **A. Petersen** stated they are currently developing a license type drop down to show licenses a selected fisherman has. **D. Gloeckner** asked if this system will be able to handle 3rd party software. **C. Petersen** stated yes, it will be handled through an API. **G. Bray** stated GulfFIN was awarded an FIS proposal to supplement the development budget shortfalls of this system and to develop new quality control measures. **R. Cody** mentioned Florida was awarded an FIS proposal to increase the electronic ticket capability of Florida's system and hopefully eliminate paper tickets by implementing a mandatory swipe card for initiating a transaction and have it compatible with the VESL system.

ACCSP Update

M. Cahall stated a confidential standards workgroup has been working towards releasing the maximum allowable data without violating confidentiality with a consensus recommendation within months. The confidentiality access request process is fully automated with all access being userid/table driven. There has been a newly formed Standard Codes Committee to work on more detail code definitions such as gears and the ability to use these codes across the four data collection disciplines. A new query interface has been released with tweaks being made to the non-confidential interface and the preliminary 2016 data load is in progress with an expected completion date for the end of this month. He stated ACCSP is working collaboratively with GARFO and the visioning process with the committee recommending a transition to ACCSP/SAFIS for most data warehousing and fisheries-dependent data collection. The next steps in the GARFO collaboration are to develop a universal trip ID generator tool and expand voluntary eVTR reporting. He stated SAFIS tablet reporting is expanding with mobile trip reporting in production for NE federal and states using eTrips for both commercial and for-hire. Mobile dealer reporting is in production with a swipe card version in ME and MA. Pilots are running in SC and SE federal region for testing of for-hire reporting and validation. The update on SAFIS redesign included the completion of the initial review, an integrated reporting workshop scheduled for May, 2017, and the expected completion of system specifications by fall of 2017. The next steps in planning for mandatory trip reporting include the need to establish roles and responsibilities, conduct outreach and training to ease transition, and provide ongoing technical support. He stated APAIS completed the transition to state conduct and data management improvements have been made with many of the processes being automated. The ACCSP headboat add-ons exceeded the 2016 plan and the 2017 funding has been approved to include social economic questions. He stated ACCSP had been working collaboratively with GSMFC in the re-use of the data warehouse query tool and the APAIS tool in the Gulf.

Status of Biological Sampling and Analysis Activities

G. Bray stated that all states are up to date with entry of 2016 sample data. States are in various levels of progress with age sample processing and data entry. All states are expected to complete processing and entry of 2016 age samples by summer of 2017. He also stated that GSMFC was awarded an FIS proposal aimed at improving the biological sampling module. The goals are to develop a new key entry system, develop a record tracking system, implement newly designed quality control systems, and develop a reporting tool for developing end-user summary reports. This work is planned to start in the summer of 2017. **B. Sauls** provided a presentation on a MARFIN project on the East Coast of Florida that will demonstrate the utility of a random survey design to supplement MRIP and provide biological length and age data for stock assessments. This

research has just started and she plans to update the group as to the results at a future meeting. **G. Bray** also mentioned that current funding for biological sampling would only last through March 2017. There is hope that additional money will be found by NOAA Fisheries in summer of 2017 to either restore a limited biological sampling program or potentially restore funding cuts to base landings programs. GulfFIN Committee members will be kept aware of those discussions held between GSMFC and NOAA Fisheries.

Next Strategic Planning Meeting Discussion

G. Bray mentioned that GulfFIN received some money from NOAA Fisheries to support another strategic planning session. All of the major tasks identified from the last strategic planning session have been accomplished or are in development. He asked if the committee had a desire to schedule a strategic planning session in 2017 or wait till 2018. The committee agreed that with the current work schedule and the uncertainty regarding potential impacts of the GulfFIN MRIP Implementation Plan and uncertainty in programmatic funding that it would be better to wait till 2018. The committee will discuss details at the March 2018 meeting and finalize a plan for having a strategic planning session in summer/fall 2018.

Ongoing Activities

Commercial Conversion Factor Plan

G. Bray stated at the Data Management Sub-Committee fall 2016 meeting, a sample design starting with shrimp was suggested as the first step. He mentioned the methodologies from the ACCSP East Coast conversion project are available as a reference. **C. Denson** asked if they were to sample all shrimp species, what is the sample size to collect, how long to sample, do we collect condition/grade, market, length and weights, is the current conversion factor for shrimp a starting point for tail weight to whole weight conversion, do we use fishery dependent or fishery independent samples. **R. Cody** cautioned using fishery independent samples for a dependent fishery as standards may not be the same. **J. Esslinger** asked if the GSS folks would be willing to help with the fishery dependent samples from dealers. **D. Gloeckner** will have to check and see if they have time available. The committee decided to start with white and brown shrimp and collect condition/grade, market, length and weights. **T. Sminkey** suggested to do some pre-sampling to help answer the questions about sample design. **G. Bray** stated in order to move this forward, the Commercial Technical Workgroup will have a pre-summer call to work on shrimp (white and brown) sampling methodologies and budget costs from each state.

Progress update on migrating ACCSP end-user query tool

D. Bellais stated GSMFC has been working with the ACCSP contractor, Karen Connell, on migrating their end-user tool to GSMFC with modifications to accommodate the Gulf. She gave a brief demonstration of the end-user tool highlighting non-confidential data queries for commercial landings and recreational data. **C. Denson** asked if the data will be formatted with commas and decimals. She stated this is a very BETA version and the final product will have the formatting. She asked if the committee would be willing to show true total pounds and dollars for the Gulf as a region. **C. Denson** suggested to show two row totals, one row for non-confidential pounds and dollars and one row for confidential pounds and dollars for each year in the Gulf as a region. She explained the confidential data queries will be accessed via a username and password and access will only be given to what is approved for each user. The default access is the monthly

summary level. Each user will need a statement of non-disclosure on file with SEFSC and a GulfFIN access request form on file with GSMFC. **G. Bray** stated the FIN Data Management Workgroup will test the tool prior to going live.

FIN Data Management System (DMS) Issues

Review of list of personnel with access to confidential data

D. Bellais provided a list of personnel with access to the FIN Data Management System (DMS) and requested that members look over it and provide any changes needed to her.

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 for the previous year. An update was given on record counts in the FIN DMS for commercial landings. The Louisiana and Alabama recreational fishing license data are being loaded on a monthly basis and 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 Bluefin Trip Ticket program continues to be loaded into the FIN system. **D. Bellais** gave a review on biological sampling data, marine recreational fishery catch estimates and marine recreational fishery effort data. **K. Brennan** asked if head boat data from Miami can be added to the GulfFIN recreational data. **D. Bellais** stated tables can be created to house the data in GulfFIN. **D. Gloeckner** asked for SEFSC to have access to the Texas high-use/low-use recreational data via database link. **D. Bellais** will grant this access in the database. **D. Gloeckner** asked to have LA Creel data added to the recreational APEX queries. This will be added in the future.

Status of Metadata Compilation and Reporting

R. Reidel provided a presentation on the progress of metadata compilation. Data entry is up-to-date for fishery independent sampling programs, gulf economic programs, licenses and fees, annual reports, and research entities. He gave a demonstration of the InPort tool and it's capabilities for metadata. He stated current work continues on fishing regulations, fisheries databases, meeting minutes, current press releases, and publications. He also continues researching for new data sources to include and reviews all existing data entry for completion.

Review and Approval of 2016 FIN Annual Report

FIN Committee members were provided with copies of the draft 2016 FIN Annual Report. This is a summary of what GulfFIN accomplish over the prior year. **D. Bellais** requested that members of the Committee review the Annual Report and provide comments, revisions or corrections to **G. Bray** by June 30, 2017. **C. Denson moved to accept the FIN 2016 Annual Report with pending editorial changes. N. Beckham seconded and the motion passed unanimously.**

Subcommittee and Work Group Reports

Otolith Processors Training Workshop

The Otolith Processors Training Workshop was held in May 2016 in Panama City, Florida. It was a productive workshop with the normal otolith reading exercises. **G. Bray** stated the meetings continue to provide positive benefits including APE's remaining low for non-problematic species

and APE's getting better for species that have been problematic in the past. He stated this year's meeting will be in Panama City the 2nd week of May. **P. Mickle moved to accept the report. C. Denson seconded and the motion passed unanimously.**

Gulf Geographic Subcommittee

The Gulf of Mexico Geographic Subcommittee/TCC Data Management Subcommittee (DMS) met in October 2016. No significant motions or action items needed to be addressed at the FIN meeting. **J. Esslinger moved to accept the report. N. Smith seconded and the motion passed unanimously.**

Commercial Technical Workgroup

The workgroup met via conference call in August 2016 to discuss the commercial conversion factor study in the Gulf. This was discussed in detail above. **J. Esslinger moved to accept the report. N. Smith seconded and the motion passed unanimously.**

Operations Plan

Status of 2017 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. **D. Bellais** noted a couple of the highlighted areas to the Committee:

- B6 - Define Partner Needs and Requirements
- B10 - Evaluate Alternative Methods for Collecting Recreational Discards Data – Steering Committee has been formed and will have a call end of March
- B11 - Review of Commercial QA/QC Standards
- B15 - Integration into the Stock Assessment Process

Review/approval of 2018 Operations Plan

The FIN Committee was asked to review the 2018 Operations Plan. The Operations Plan is in preliminary form, pending edits and comments by the committee and will be finalized later this year when the State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee (S/FFMC) decides what activities will be funded in 2018. Any edits to the 2018 Operations Plan should be sent to GSMFC by June 30, 2017. **R. Cody moved to accept the FIN 2018 Operations Plan with pending editorial changes. C. Denson seconded and the motion passed unanimously.**

Discussion of FIN Funding Issues

2018 FIN Funding Priorities

Committee members were provided with a list of items for funding consideration in 2018. The final prioritized list will be forwarded to the S/FFMC for their review at the October 2017 meeting. At that time, they will decide which items will be included in the 2018 FIN Cooperative Agreement. All items listed as high priority will require budgets and statements of work by August 1, 2017. **N. Smith made a motion to include all ongoing activities as high priority and move Biological Sampling of FIN Priority Species for Commercial and**

Recreational Catches as high priority. B. Sauls seconded and motion passed with no opposition.

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
H - Head Boat Port Sampling
New
H - Biological Sampling of FIN Priority Species for Commercial and Recreational Catches

New
L - Gulf Menhaden Port Sampling
L - Biological Sampling for FIN Secondary Priority Species
L - Commercial Conversion Factor Development
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

Election of Officers Discussion
Committee members were provided with a list of historical committee chairpersons. Currently the vice chairman is **Justin Esslinger. Justin Esslinger** was nominated to become the chairman. **Ken Brennan** was nominated as vice chair. The nominations were closed and the chairman and vice chairman selections were approved by the Committee.

Other Business
AFS Meeting 2017 - Tampa, FL
B. Sauls mentioned that she along with G. Bray and C. Collier from SAFMC were organizing a symposium at the national American Fisheries Society meeting being held in Tampa this year. The symposium is focusing on specialized survey techniques for reef species in the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic. She encouraged state and federal partners with pertinent work in this area to submit an abstract for this symposium. The deadline for submission is March 31, 2017.

Discussion of MRIP OT Comments on Regional Implementation Plan
G. Bray stated he just recently received comments from the MRIP Operations Team regarding the Gulf MRIP Regional Implementation Plan. Since there was insufficient time to address the comments during the GulfFIN Committee meeting he suggested to produce an initial response document and share it with the GulfFIN Committee members for their input. That final response document would be sent back to MRIP staff for their review.

Questions from South East Regional Office
D. Gloeckner posed several questions:

Will Florida be willing to remove DO in front of coast guard numbers on trip ticket data? **R. Cody** stated it would not be a problem.

Is there a way to uniquely identify dealers, fisherman and vessels, across the Gulf? Due to the various state issues with supplying vessel information, this is currently not possible. **M. Cahall** stated ACCSP will share their programming code with GSMFC when the Gulf is able to work on this task.

Are bait shrimp landings reported on trip tickets for all states? **C. Denson** stated it is not required in Alabama.

Do Florida and Texas report shrimp count sizes on trip tickets. **J. Esslinger** stated it is not mandatory for Texas and **R. Cody** stated it is not mandatory for Florida either.

Do the states report catch retained for personal use? All states said no.

Do all states collect trip start date? All states stated yes.

Do all states collect crew size? All states stated no.

GMFMC Fishery Management Tool

J. Froeschke gave a brief demo on the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council regulation web query tool. The tool is accessible via the following: www.gulffisheryregulations.org. This query tool allows users to search for regulations of federally managed species back to 2005.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:55pm.

TCC SEAMAP SUBCOMMITTEE
MINUTES
Tuesday, March 14, 2017
Gulfport, MS

APPROVED BY:
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

Chairman T. Switzer called the meeting to order at 8:15 a.m. The following members and others were present:

Members
John Mareska, ADCNR/MRD, Gulf Shores, AL
Read Hendon, USM/GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Ted Switzer, FWC/FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Chloe Dean, LDWF, Grand Isle, LA
Darin Topping, TPWD, Rockport, TX
Christian Jones, NOAA/NMFS, Pascagoula, MS

Others
Eric Hoffmayer, NOAA/NMFS, Pascagoula, MS
Jill Hendon, USM/GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Gary Fitzhugh, NOAA Fisheries, Panama City, FL
Emily Satterfield, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Mark Lingo, TPWD, Austin, TX
Travis Williams, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Ryan Bradley, MSCFU, Biloxi, MS
Franklin Parker, MSCFU, Biloxi, MS
Michael Sweda, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Taniya Wallace, NOAA Fisheries, Pascagoula, MS
Chrissy Stepongzi, NOAA Fisheries, Pascagoula, MS
Andre DeBose, NOAA Fisheries, Pascagoula, MS
Breland Broadus, NOAA Fisheries, Pascagoula, MS
Jimmy Sanders, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Butch Pellegrin, NOAA/NMFS, Pascagoula, MS (retired)

Staff
Jeff Rester, *SEAMAP/Habitat Program Coordinator,* GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Steve VanderKooy, *IJF Program Coordinator,* GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
James Ballard, *Sport Fish Restoration/ANS 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
E. Hoffmayer would like to discuss some trawl protocol questions under Other Business if time permits. **T. Switzer** would like to give an update on the Reef Fish Workshop they had last week if time allows as well. **J. Rester** would like to talk about the budget under Other Business. **R. Hendon moved to accept the agenda with the above mentioned additions. J. Mareska seconded and the motion passed.**

Approval of Minutes

J. Mareska moved to approve the SEAMAP minutes from the October 12, 2016 meeting as submitted. R. Hendon seconded and the motion passed.

Administrative Report

J. Rester reported that the 2016-2020 Management Plan has been sent to the TCC for approval. We still have not heard about our two proposals submitted to the NOAA Science Program. Julien Lartigue said they will be in contact with us shortly. They are looking for a June 1st start date. Since October, SEAMAP has completed the Fall Groundfish Survey, the Vertical Line Survey and the Winter Plankton Survey is still ongoing. 2017 will be the 37th year of SEAMAP doing surveys in the Gulf of Mexico. Since October, SEAMAP has published the 2016 Joint Annual Report and the 2014 Atlas. Waiting on one update to complete the 2015 Atlas. SEAMAP will once again do Real Time data this summer. J. Rester will send out reminders and templates before sampling starts in May. Please send in your data in a timely manner. The Joint Meeting between all three components of SEAMAP is scheduled for the week of July 24 in St. Croix. Due to funding, only able to send the Chair and Vice-Chair to the meeting. The subcommittee will meet by conference call a week or so before the Joint Meeting to discuss the budget.

Vertical Line Survey Issues

Use of Spectra Line in the Vertical Line Survey

J. Hendon gave a presentation on Vertical Line Survey Gear Comparison. She hopes to go out this spring to compare the spectra rigs to the SEAMAP rigs. Based on the discussion with the subcommittee, she will use 100lb monofilament, use squid as the bait and will do multiple drops per site, i.e, do five (5) drops per spectra rig then then do five (5) drops with SEAMAP rigs and use a standard 1 minute fish for both line types. **J. Hendon** will report back to the group with the results hopefully in July, if not then, then in October.

Use of Five Pound or Ten Pound Weights

J. Rester stated that in reviewing the Vertical Line Operations Manual last October, we discussed using 5lb or 10lb weights due to differences in the currents. The subcommittee never came up with a standardized weight. If we move to spectra in the future, this will need to be reevaluated anyways. **T. Switzer** pointed out that the minutes' state that we should stay with 10lbs. The subcommittee agrees to keep the manual at 10lbs for now.

2017 Vertical Line Survey Design and Stations

J. Rester stated that it became apparent after our discussion in October that some sample sites needed to be removed from the universe because the targets could not be found and that some of the states were not able to really sample some of the offshore stations. **J. Rester** wanted to look at the 2016 samples to see what was assigned, what was sampled and what was not found. Looking at completed stations, Alabama was able to complete most of them. Louisiana had issues with not enough sea days due to funding but also not finding several sites. He pointed out that Louisiana completed stations but not near stations that were assigned. The question is why were these stations sampled and not the assigned ones? We want to get away from doing this. We want to get away from the situation where we are assigned a natural reef but cannot find it and are by an oil platform so we do that one instead. As the survey progresses, this will/may skew the results.

To alleviate this situation this sampling season, **J. Rester** will offer alternate sites to sample that match the original reef type assigned. **J. Rester** stated that the percentage of stations completed is not good. We would like to improve this, asking the states for realistic number of stations they can do. **C. Dean** stated that Louisiana is fine going out to the further depths, but maybe reduce the number of stations they get in those depths to increase the percentage. **T. Switzer** proposed that it may be better for Louisiana to take the middle third of the state and get all three depth zones in that area as opposed to spreading out the effort. J. Rester is open to suggestions as to what we can do to get full coverage versus piece meal coverage. **M. Lingo** stated that Texas can do the middle coast and get good coverage in all three depth zones and would feel more comfortable doing this. **D. Topping** will discuss this with his Texas people to see which area/section they want to cover. **C. Dean** stated that she will get back with J. Rester letting him know if Louisiana could do the full coast or just a section. **J. Mareska** stated that Alabama is ok with what they did last year and continuing to do it this year. **E. Hoffmayer** pointed out that it is critical that the states cover all three depth zones. **J. Hendon** pointed out that we need to keep trying to increase spatial coverage or finding ways to increase that coverage but with the current funding situation, understands not possible, but we do not want to get in the habitat of continually narrowing our coverage. **T. Switzer** suggested that the committee not make a final decision until we have heard back from the NOAA Science Program on the two proposals we sent in. **J. Rester** asked the states to talk with their people to see how they would like to handle the sampling this season and we will come back as a group, probably with a conference call, to further discuss. **D. Topping** had a question, say you go out and do not find your station, so what do you do? **J. Rester** stated that he will provide you with alternate stations within five (5) miles that is the same habitat to sample. As long as you are in the same depth zone, you may need to go out ten (10) miles. Just make sure that the alternate is in the same depth zone and is the same habitat that was originally assigned. **J. Rester** asked that the states turn in to him any universe or site information that they may have. **J. Rester** and **E. Hoffmayer** will put a call in to John Walter to discuss Texas and Louisiana using only part of the state for sampling all three depth zones and how that could affect the stock assessment.

2017 Shrimp/Groundfish Station Allocation

At the October meeting, it was mentioned that we are currently sampling about 400 stations for the summer groundfish survey and 350 for the fall groundfish survey. We need to discuss trawling off of Florida and how to handle this in the future as well as allocation issues with Mississippi, Alabama and western Florida. **T. Switzer** stated that for 2017 and 2018, Florida can do 15-16 days at sea for the summer and fall surveys for a total of 30-32 days. Florida will cover the southern portion of the state, from Tampa south, with NMFS covering the northern half. Another issue to discuss is excluding areas for trawling. **E. Hoffmayer** stated that since about 2008 Florida has complied information on hang ups and areas untrawlable. These areas would be excluded from the survey. The goal is to develop buffers and eliminate bad areas on the front end. Florida and NMFS have been working on this. **E. Hoffmayer** is trying to work out buffer zones and to have it ready for station selection for the summer survey. He will be responsible for picking stations and sending them to **J. Rester** who will then forward them on to the states. As for station allocation and how the stations are allocated off of Mississippi, Alabama and western Florida, hopefully the states will be willing to work together to maximize the stations surveyed while limiting the cost of doing those stations. **E. Hoffmayer** raised the question of how do we handle non representative tows? **J. Rester** stated that we have plenty of codes, use them and put information in the comments

section and let the person who is doing the analysis decide if it was a good tow or not. **E. Hoffymayer** suggested that the subcommittee have a discussion on opt codes at a later date, but for now, use them and be as descriptive as possible. **R. Hendon** suggested passing this on to the Trawl Work Group to discuss. **J. Rester** agreed and will schedule a Trawl Work Group meeting to handle this issue and to get it done before the start of summer trawling. **T. Switzer** asked on the status of SCS and FISCS. **E. Hoffmayer** replied that they hope to have a new update by June 2018. **E. Hoffmayer** had a question regarding the 2-5 fathoms and what do we do with that data. **J. Rester** was not sure. Will do a query search on the species composition to see what we are getting and will report back to the group. **E. Hoffmayer** also had a question regarding red snapper protocol. Why does every fish get measured, weighed and sexed? Do we still need to do this? **J. Rester** stated that this started several years ago from the Gulf Council. **R. Hendon** suggested we pass this to the work group as well for them to discuss and then report back to the subcommittee.

Staff Time Needed for SEAMAP Surveys

The subcommittee once again looked at the number of hours it takes to participate in SEAMAP surveys. Per **E. Hoffmayer**, SEAMAP has standardized surveys, but man time varies from state to state. Looking for a standard time across the board for all the states to do. **J. Rester** will send out SEAMAP man hour spreadsheet to the states to make final changes as needed.

Other Business

T. Switzer mentioned that FWRI and the Pascagoula and Panama City video teams met last week for their annual workshop. They have been doing this since 2007. Two things came out of the workshop. First, they developed new habitat based analytical approaches for combining historical data for assessment purposes. And second, they identified initial steps toward moving to implementing an integrated reef fish design throughout the entire gulf. This will be discussed at the upcoming AFS Symposium.

J. Rester stated that he is not sure when SEAMAP will get its funding for 2017. Will keep the subcommittee updated on the funding situation.

This is **R. Hendon's** last meeting as the Mississippi representative for SEAMAP. **J. Hendon** will take over for him. Since R. Hendon is vice-chair, how should we handle this. **R. Hendon made a motion to make J. Hendon vice-chair. C. Dean seconded and motion passed.** Also, J. Anderson will replace R. Hendon on the Shrimp/Groundfish subcommittee.

E. Hoffmayer had a request from his plankton folks. They would like the states to send the plankton data to NOAA first and then to L. Kirk at GSMFC.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:25 a.m.

APPROVED BY:
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

S-FFMC MENHADEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MINUTES
March 14, 2017
Gulfport, MS

Chairman Herbert called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. with the following in attendance:

Members
Rick Schillaci, Menhaden Advisory Council for the Gulf of Mexico, Moss Point, MS
Jason Adriance, LDWF, New Orleans, LA
Ray Mroch, NOAA Beaufort Lab, Beaufort, NC
Jerry Mambretti, TPWD, Dickinson, TX
Peter Himchak, Omega Protein, Tuckerton, NJ
Matt Hill, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Scott Herbert, Daybrook Fisheries, New Orleans, LA
John Mareska, ADCNR/MRD, Dauphin Island, AL
Borden Wallace, Westbank Fishing, LLC, Empire, LA

Others
Megan Fleming, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Traci Floyd, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Read Hendon, USM GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Ryan Bradley, MS Commercial Fishermen Union, Long Beach, MS
Joe Jewell, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Tabitha Lindley, Omega Protein, Inc., Houston, TX
Ben Landry, Omega Protein, Houston, TX
Tommy Williams, Daybrook Fisheries, Baton Rouge, LA
Shane Treadaway, Westbank Fishing LLC, Empire, LA
Jeff Short, JWS Consulting, Juneau, AK
Eric Powell, NSF Science Center, USM GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Robert Leaf, USM GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Chris Lirette, Daybrook Fisheries, Empire, LA
Dalton Berry, Daybrook Fisheries, Empire, LA
Patrick Banks, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Ed Swindell, Marine Process Services LLC, Hammond, LA
Randy Wilcox, Menhaden Conservation Project, St. Petersburg, FL
Kevin Thompson, FL Fish & Wildlife Research Institute, St. Petersburg, FL

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

Introductions
Chairman Herbert welcomed everyone.

Adoption of Agenda

Mareska moved to approve the agenda, Adriance seconded, and the agenda was approved.

Approval of Minutes

The MAC reviewed the draft minutes from the last annual meeting on October 12, 2016, in New Orleans, Louisiana. ***Schillaci moved to accept the minutes with two minor corrections, Mareska seconded, and the minutes were accepted.***

Public Comment

The audience was offered the chance to provide any comment related to the agenda topics or anything else menhaden. There were no comments.

Review of 2016 Gulf Menhaden Season and Forecast for 2017

Mroch reported on the final Gulf landings for 2016. There were 34 vessels fishing in 2016, 31 steamers, 2 run boats, and one bait boat. The total landings were around 485,000 mt which was a decrease of 9.3% from the previous year. The 2016 season started with a warm wet winter. Landings were good until mid-summer when several weather related events reduced the number of fishing days. July and August landings were low compared to recent years.

The age composition of the catch was as expected with older fish to the West and younger fish to the East but overall, the catch was nearly 50/50 between age-1s and age-2s. **Mroch** indicated that the Beaufort Lab was a little behind in processing samples, in part because of Federal hiring restraints and getting **Amanda Myers**, Ethel's replacement, up to speed with scale reading. **Mroch** also indicated that there are some problems with the scanning of the CDFRs. The error checking is taking a lot more time than he had anticipated. **Mroch** is exploring the possibility of implementing electronic CDFRs on the vessels. He hopes to run a pilot on a couple of vessels next season.

Mroch provided the forecast for 2017 based on the previous year's effort and participation, he estimates landings of 436,000 mt this season.

Update on the Atlantic Menhaden Fishery

Mroch also provided a short update on fishing in the Atlantic in 2016 which is under a coastwide TAC. One plant is in operation in Reedville with 8 vessels unloading menhaden for reduction. In addition, one VA snapper boat and one bait boat had minor landings at the plant for reduction. In 2016, the TAC was increased 10% to 142,894 mt. The total landings for reduction were just over 137,000 mt which was a 4.2% decrease from the previous year and short of the TAC. **Mroch** noted that several tropical systems moved up the Atlantic in 2016 reducing effort in a few months. September landings were the lowest since at least 1980. The 'fall fishery' which typically occurs late in the year in North Carolina never really happened as few fish seemed to migrate south. NOAA no longer forecasts landings on the Atlantic since the TAC pretty much sets the landings annually.

Updated Indices of Abundance from Louisiana Fishery-Independent Sampling

Adriance reviewed the updated indices from the department's fishery-independent monitoring program used to look at the recruitment in Louisiana waters. The indices are the same ones utilized

in the menhaden stock assessment and are examined annually. The gears used for the indices include seines, trawls, and gillnets. The seine and trawl juvenile indices and the adult gillnet index remain stable.

Texas Cap for 2017

Mambretti reported that very little fishing took place in Texas waters in 2016. Since the closure of the Cameron, Louisiana plant, the fleet just doesn't travel as far west. The industry only landed about 3.5% of the available Texas TAC at around 1.2M lbs. Because of the underage, the TAC will increase by 10% for 2017 to 34,650,000 lbs.

An Update and Status Report of Project: Examination of Age Composition of Brevoortia Patronus in Fishery-Independent Sampling

Dr. Robert Leaf (GCRL) provided a short update on the work he and Dr. Amy Schueller (NOAA) are continuing. The project receives adult menhaden from several of the Gulf states fishery-independent gillnet sampling to compare ages from the inshore catch to the fishery-dependent offshore harvest. They are looking at scales and otoliths in comparison to determine the age composition. They have a student who is working on the project which will continue through this year. The intention is to determine the minimum effort needed on the part of the states to generate age-length comparisons between the commercial and state sampling programs for potential inclusion in future stock assessments. The project has been providing the supplies and resources to those who are sampling and will continue this season. Leaf expressed appreciation for the MAC's support of this project.

Overview of Florida's Fish Gut Lab

Kevin Thompson (FWC) provided an overview of the diet work the FWC conducts through their fishery-independent monitoring work. The 'gut' lab started in 2005 but was fully implemented in 2008. There are three fulltime and one part-time staff member who open and analyze stomachs from a wide variety of the species collected during routine sampling. The intention is to add trophic information (predator prey interactions) into stock assessments.... "Who is eating whom?" **Thompson** noted that when they started the lab, they examined mostly inshore species but their current focus is filling in the offshore species interactions.

Florida has been able to improve their state species assessments now that they are gathering predator/prey data. To date, the lab has identified 1,597 number of prey species or taxa and >90,000 interactions and examined around 50,000 stomachs. The gut lab is the largest producer of trophic data in the Gulf of Mexico and they share their data with the GoMexSI website maintained by Jim Simons at Texas A&M and contribute substantially to the various SEDAR stock assessments.

Other Business

Herbert gave the audience an opportunity once again to provide any public comment. There was none. VanderKooy reminded the members that the next meeting will be in October in Alabama.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 2:30pm.

APPROVED BY:
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

TECHNICAL COORDINATING COMMITTEE
MINUTES – 67th Annual Spring Meeting
Wednesday March 15, 2017
Gulfport, Mississippi

Chairman Joe Jewell called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. The following members, staff, and others were present:

Members
Harry Blanchet, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Jason Froeba, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Richard Cody, FWC/FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Joe Jewell, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Matt Hill, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Christopher Mace, TPWD, Rockport, TX
John Mareska, ADCNR/MRD, Dauphin Island, AL
Darin Topping, TPWD, Rockport, TX
Chris Denson, ADCNR/MRD, Gulf Shores, AL
Roy Crabtree, NOAA Fisheries, St. Petersburg, FL

Staff
James Ballard, GSMFC, Sport Fish/Aquatic Invasives Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Donna Bellais, GSMFC, ComFIN Programmer, Ocean Springs, MS
Joe Ferrer, GSMFC Systems Administrator, Ocean Springs, MS
Ali Ryan, GSMFC, Sport Fish/Aquatic Invasives Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS
Jeff Rester, SEAMAP Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Dave Donaldson, GSMFC, Executive Director, Ocean Springs, MS
Steve VanderKooy, GSMFC, IJF Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Gregg Bray, GSMFC, FIN Data Program Manager, Ocean Springs, MS

Others
Jeff Gearhart, NOAA Fisheries, Pascagoula, MS
Travis Williams, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Corky Perret, Public, Poplarville, MS
Paul Mickle, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Jimmy Sanders, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Traci Floyd, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Rick Burris, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Carly Somerset, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Emily Satterfield, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Megan Fleming, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Todd Neahr, FWC/FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL

Adoption of Agenda

A motion to adopt the agenda was made by Chris Denson and passed unanimously.

Approval of Minutes

A motion to approve the minutes as written for the October 13, 2016 meeting was made by John Mareska and passed with no opposition.

Overview of the Proposed TED rule for Skimmer Trawls

Jeff Gearhart delivered a presentation on reducing incidental bycatch and mortality of sea turtles in the southeastern shrimp fisheries. In his presentation, he provided an overview of the southeastern U.S. skimmer trawl fishery and explained how the fishery commonly exceeded their tow times which increased the risk to sea turtles. Recognizing tow times are difficult to enforce, the Southeast Fisheries Science Center was asked to develop TEDs for skimmer Trawls. After extensive testing it was concluded that Standard TEDs with 4" bar spacing resulted in minimal handling problems and averaged only 4.97% shrimp loss. As a result, in May 2012 mandatory observer coverage was implemented in the skimmer trawl fishery and the NMFS published a proposed rule to withdraw alternative tow time restrictions and require all skimmer trawls, pusher-head trawls, and wing nets (butterfly trawls) to use TEDs (77 FR 27411). From May-Aug, 2012, observers report 24 Kemp's ridley (*Lepidochelys kempii*) sea turtles captured aboard skimmer trawl vessels operating in the Northern Gulf of Mexico (GOM). More than half (58%) had Body Depths less than 4". Because of these captures, NMFS withdrew their proposed TED rule for skimmer trawls pending additional research to identify optimum bar spacing and evaluation of TEDs capable of excluding small sea turtles (78 FR 9024). After three years of testing, it was determined that a 3" bar spacing TED configuration would have minimal handling problems and resulted in shrimp loss averages of 6.21%. In March 2016 NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office announced its intent to prepare a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and to conduct scoping meetings to discuss the 7 potential management alternatives and the potential impacts the different alternatives may have on the industry and the resource. The preferred Alternative is number 3: Amend the existing TED regulations to require all vessels using skimmer trawls, pusher-head trawls, and wing nets (butterfly trawls)—with the exception of the Biscayne Bay wing net fishery prosecuted in Miami-Dade County, Florida—to use TEDs designed to exclude small turtles (3" bar spacing TED with top escape openings). The comment period for the DEIS ended at the end of January, and a review committee is currently reviewing those comments.

Joe Jewell asked, did NOAA consider any other regulatory possibilities? Jeff stated that they did, they looked at VMS, tow timers, increased law enforcement, etc. but TEDs were the most feasible option. **Joe Jewell** asked, why was Biscayne Bay excluded? Jeff pointed out that the Biscayne Bay fishery is more of a sight fishery that is conducted at night with lights and they use much smaller nets, with some of them even being constructed out of mono. He stated that he was not sure they have a TED that would work in their nets and not sure there is a turtle interaction problem in that fishery. **Matt Hill** asked, what will the implementation date of the proposed regulation be? Jeff explained that it would depend on when the TED producers can have TEDs available for implementation. There will be a large outreach component, if this moves forward, to educate the TED producers and industry on the exact specification of these new TEDs. **Dan Ellinor** asked if the exemption will only be for Biscayne Bay because there is a fishery in Volusia County Florida that uses identical fishing techniques as Biscayne Bay. **Roy Crabtree** explained that right now the exemption is specific to Biscayne Bay and they will need info on the Volusia County Fishery soon so they can evaluate it for inclusion in the exemption.

Overview of the Atlantic Croaker Profile

Carly Somerset provided a presentation overviewing the Biological Profile for the Atlantic Croaker Fishery in the Gulf of Mexico. The profile covers the distribution, biology, commercial and recreational landings (including a history of the pet food industry that operated on the Gulf utilizing the groundfish fishery and the more recent live bait industry in LA and TX), and future research needs for croaker. Carly pointed out that, as a result of the rising price for croaker in the live bait industry and the hardiness of the species, there is a growing interest in the aquaculture of croaker.

Chris Denson stated that the landing spikes in AL in the 70s of unspecified bait and animal feed is probably white trout and other species and not croaker, and the decrease in landings were not a result of reduced catch, but instead, decreased market price which didn't make it economical to bring the fish in. **Steve VanderKooy** pointed out that they had an advantage going into this profile because they were able to pick up where the Gulf of Mexico Fisheries Management Council left off in 1978 on their Gulf Groundfish Management Plan that went through 1975 landings. **Steve VanderKooy** stated that the draft profile is almost finalized and will be ready for distribution to the TCC for their review in 30-45 days.

Overview and Approval of the 2016-2020 SEAMAP Management Plan

Jeff Rester provide a presentation overview of the 2016-2020 SEAMAP Management Plan. The management plan provides a statement of current goals, management policies, procedures, and priorities for all SEAMAP components and partnerships. The plan also serves as a reference on SEAMAP history and accomplishments, and details priorities for future activities.

Richard Cody asked which surveys will have to be removed if funding continues to decline. Jeff stated that they have not reached that point yet, but if they have to, they would probably start with the newest surveys and try and save the long-term ones. **Joe Jewell** asked if there is a proposal in process to secure these needed funds. Jeff stated that there was no proposal developed at this time, but there have been discussions to try and increase the overall programmatic funding. **Matt Hill** asked what expanding the reef fish video survey would entail. Jeff stated that it would be an expansion of FL's and NMFS' efforts. **Chris Denson** asked what the habitat mapping component was. Jeff pointed out that it would be directed habitat mapping to build better sampling universes for their surveys.

Richard Cody made a motion: To approve the 2016-2020 SEAMAP Management Plan and move it to the full Commission for their approval, and the motion passed without opposition.

Update on Gulf FINFO

James Ballard provided a brief update on the status of the Gulf FINFO website and the activities that have taken place since the last meeting. He also expressed the importance of the states keeping their sections of the site up-to-date so that members of the public that are using the site are not receiving false information about state fisheries. James also pointed out that an automatic reminder email has been established to remind State Liaisons to login and check their state's content.

Subcommittee Reports

Data Management

Gregg Bray stated that the Committee received a presentation from Dr. Luiz Barbieri on the National Academy of Sciences 2016 review of the Marine Recreational Information Program. He stated the committee recognized impressive progress since 2005 and major improvements to soundness of statistical survey designs, reduced sources of bias, and stated there are some remaining challenges

(communication/outreach, nonresponse, electronic data collection).

The Committee received a presentation from Andrew Petersen with Bluefin Data regarding the continued development of the new VESL unified trip ticket system. Development is ongoing and Bluefin is working to get dealers online in Texas for beta testing and they are also working with the state of Florida on the setup and customization of their data screens. Florida and Gulf States also were awarded FIS proposals to address trip ticket systems. Florida will be exploring the possibility of using a swipe card system to initiate trip tickets and would eliminate the need for paper reporting, and GSMFC will be developing more quality control functions of their database to provide clean data in a more timely fashion.

The Committee was updated on the status of the GOM MRIP Regional Implementation Plan. Comments from the MRIP Operations Team were just received last week and the GulfFIN Committee plans to generate a document to respond to the reviewers comments. Overall the comments were constructive and positive in nature.

The Committee received updates on the MRIP Program, Atlantic Coast Cooperative Statistics Program, GulfFIN Biological Sampling Activities, and reviewed administrative reports and committee summaries from the GulfFIN 2016 calendar year.

The Committee discussed GulfFIN funding priorities for 2018. The Committee was provided a list of ongoing projects, along with a list of potential new items that could be considered for funding in 2018. The committee identified all of the ongoing tasks as high priority items and voted to add Biological Sampling to the high priority list. The ongoing tasks are:

1) Coordination and Administration of FIN Activities
2) Collecting, Managing and Disseminating Marine Recreational Fisheries Data
3) Operation of FIN Data Management System
4) Trip Ticket Program Operations
5) Head Boat Port Sampling
6) Biological Sampling of Commercial and Recreational Catches

States will develop budgets and statements of work for each high priority task and the State/Federal Fishery Management Committee will be convened in October to determine how funds will be utilized based on proposed costs and total available funding.

Finally, the committee elected new officers: Justin Esslinger from TPWD was elected chairman and Ken Brennan from NOAA Fisheries was elected vice chairman.

Chris Denson made a motion to accept the report as presented, and it passed unanimously.

SEAMAP

Jeff Rester reported that the Subcommittee had a presentation from Jill Hendon on GCRL's proposed spectra line project. This project will compare a vertical line constructed from spectra line to that of the current SEAMAP vertical line gear.

The Subcommittee also had a discussion about the 2017 vertical line survey design and station selection. Most of the discussion focused on the possibility of narrowing the distribution of sampling

sites in some states to enable the states to adequately sample all three depth strata with the limited funding that is available.

The Subcommittee had a discussion about trawling off of Florida and trying to build a sampling universe that would minimize the interactions with live bottom.

Lastly, the Subcommittee had a discussion about the staff time needed for SEAMAP surveys which will help the SEAMAP Program Manager in the review of SEAMAP projects.

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

Artificial Reef

James Ballard stated that the Subcommittee met jointly with the ASMFC's Subcommittee in February. The meeting had several presentations and discussions focused around establishing new artificial reef permits and permit renewals and the factors that are dragging the process out for 1-2 years including Habitats of Particular Concern, historical resources survey requirements, ESA requirements, etc.

January Murray hosted a discussion regarding Habitat Areas of Particular Concern, permitting, and artificial reef deployment issues. Permits come up every five years, and Georgia is having issues that they didn't foresee. They submitted the paperwork in the beginning of January 2016 and 13 months later they still don't have their permits. The North Atlantic right whale critical habitat runs from FL to NC and off the coast of Maine – and it was expanded in 2015. GA was told they can be issued a permit as long as they don't deploy during calving season (Nov – April). The problem is that they receive donations throughout the year, and they have to accept and deploy them within a given timeframe.

Bob Martore provided a PowerPoint presentation on SC's Charleston Deep Reef, a Marine Protected Area (MPA) in the South Atlantic region. They worked with the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) to develop a memorial reef 52 nm southeast of Charleston Harbor. The SAFMC asked SC to create an MPA with an artificial reef to be used in comparisons to natural reefs in other areas. It was sunk in May 2014 to a depth of 300-400'. The MPAs are in place mainly to protect deep water groupers. NOAA was tasked to survey the site every year using side-scan sonar, multi-beam, and ROVs. Species of concern that have been identified on the reef since deployment include snowy, warsaw, misty, yellowedge, and scamp grouper, as well as red snapper.

Jeff Tinsman and Peter Clarke provided PowerPoint presentations on the process of receiving Special Management Zone (SMZ) status off DE and NJ, respectively. Tinsman presented on the goals of the DE reef program and reef site selection criteria. 75% of their program funding comes from Wallop-Breaux (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) Sportfish Restoration Program Funds. No taxpayer funds (state) go towards reef development. In July 2008 DE and NJ were made aware that commercial gear was in conflict with the intended recreational goals for Wallop-Breaux funded projects by the Sportfish Restoration Office, and in April 2010 NJ's Sportfish Restoration funds were suspended.

DE signed a bill to give the Division of Fish and Wildlife authority to manage gear types, which went into effect in the fall of 2011. DE initiated the process of SMZ designation with the MAFMC in June of 2011. This would eliminate gear conflicts, improve tautog stock, and allow DE to continue to manage reefs for both commercial and recreational activities. It was a gear limitation request, not a restriction on commercial fishing. The MAFMC voted 11-3 to support the SMZ request. In December 2015 NJ

requested SMZ regulations for all NJ permitted reefs in Federal waters (13). In October 2016 the MAFMC recommended SMZ status, and it went out for public comment. In November the MAFMC voted to recommend to NMFS that all NJ reefs in Federal waters receive SMZ status. On June 1, 2016 NJ's Sportfish Restoration Funding was restored.

Russ Brodie from the FL FWC provided a PowerPoint on their monitoring program. In 2010 there was an emergency rule for full closure of Atlantic red snapper harvest, and in 2016 SEDAR indicated that red snapper continues to be overfished and that overfishing is occurring. SEDAR has called for more fisheries-independent surveys because of this. Multiple fishery-independent monitoring studies have been (and continue to be) conducted.

James Ballard also stated that he has reformatted and reviewed the revised draft of the GSMFC's and ASMFC's 2004 publication of "*Guidelines for Marine Artificial Reef Materials: Second Edition*". The new version has been distributed back to both Subcommittees and is currently undergoing a final review.

Christopher Mace made a motion to accept the report as presented, and it passed unanimously.

State/Federal Reports

Joe Jewell stated that written reports were provided to the TCC members prior to the meeting for their review and if there is no objections, by acclamation he would like to have them placed in the record and forgo reading them into the record. The committee had no objections. To see the full reports that were provided to the TCC, please see the minutes from the Commission Business meeting held on Thursday, March 16, 2017.

With no other business to discuss, Joe Jewell adjourned the meeting at 3:30 p.m.

APPROVED BY:
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

COMMISSION BUSINESS MEETING
MINUTES
Thursday, March 16, 2017
Gulfport, MS

Chairman Chris Blankenship called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. and asked the Commissioners and audience to introduce themselves.

The following Commissioners and/or Proxies were present:

Chris Blankenship, ***Chairman***, ADCNR/MRD, Gulf Shores, AL *(Proxy for Gunter Guy)*
Jamie Miller, MSDMR, Biloxi, MS
Joe Gill, Jr., Joe Gill Consulting, LLC, Ocean Springs, MS
Dan Ellinor, FWC, Tallahassee, FL *(Proxy for Nick Wiley)*
Mark Lingo, TPWD, Austin, TX *(Proxy for Carter Smith)*
John Roussel, Zachary, LA
Jack Montoucet, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Patrick Banks, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA *(Proxy for Jack Montoucet)*
Chris Nelson, Bon Secour Fisheries, Bon Secour, AL

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 Coordinator*, Ocean Springs, MS
Joe Ferrer, *Systems Administrator*, Ocean Springs, MS
Donna Bellais, *ComFIN Programmer,* Ocean Spring, MS
James Ballard, *Sport Fish Restoration/Aquatic Invasives Coordinator*, Ocean Springs, MS
Angie Rabideau, *Senior Accountant,* Ocean Springs, MS
Ali Ryan, *Staff Assistant,* Ocean Springs, MS

Others
Roy Crabtree, *NOAA Fisheries,* St. Petersburg, FL
Brian Pawlak, *NOAA Fisheries,* Silver Springs, MD
Jerry Mambretti, *TPWD,* Dickinson, TX
Brandi Reeder, *TPWD,* Austin, TX
Rusty Pittman, *MSDMR*, Biloxi, MS
Paul Mickle, *MSDMR*, Biloxi, MS
Gordon Colvin, *ECS Federal, Inc.,* Homosassa, FL
Luiz Barbieri, *FWC/FWRI,* St. Petersburg, FL
Stacee Karras, *National Academies of Science,* Washington, DC
Christopher Mace, *TPWD,* Rockport, TX
Emily Satterfield, *MSDMR*, Biloxi, MS
Thao Vu, *MS Coalition for Vietnamese-American Fisher Folks*, Biloxi, MS

Julie Lively, *Louisiana Sea Grant,* Baton Rouge, LA
Mandy Karnauskas, *NOAA Fisheries,* Miami, FL

Brief Overview of Commission Voting Procedures
D. Donaldson gave a brief overview of the Commission's voting procedures.

Adoption of Agenda
Several changes were made to the agenda. J. Ballard will give the TCC report; J. Mambretti will give the MAC report; Item No. 8, USFWS will be removed, G. Constant was not able to attend; agenda item number 13 will be moved before lunch; and under "Other Business" there will be a discussion of the Red Snapper RFP that was distributed this past Tuesday. J. Roussel moved to adopt the agenda with these changes. J. Gill seconded the motion and the agenda was adopted with changes.

Approval of Minutes
J. Gill moved to approve the October 17, 2016 minutes as submitted. D. Ellinor seconded the motion and the minutes were approved as submitted.

Public Comment
There was no public comment.

GSMFC Standing Committee Reports
Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC)
J. Ballard gave a brief overview of the TCC meeting. He stated there was one action item. **J. Ballard** reported several presentations were given to the committee. Jeff Gearhart gave a presentation on "Reducing Incidental Bycatch and Mortality of Sea Turtles in the Southeastern Shrimp Fisheries" which covered the proposed rule that would require TEDs in Skimmer trawls, pusher-head trawls, and wing nets. Carly Somerset gave a presentation overviewing the Biological Profile for the Atlantic Croaker Fishery in the Gulf of Mexico. The profile is almost finalized and will be submitted to the TCC within 30-45 days for their review. Jeff Rester gave a presentation on the 2016-2020 SEAMAP Management Plan and asked the TCC for approval of the Plan. Each Subcommittee gave an update to the TCC.

After discussion, the Commission asked J. Rester to distribute the finalized 2016-2020 SEAMAP Management Plan to the Commission for review. He will then conduct an email vote to approve the Plan.

J. Gill moved to accept the TCC Report. P. Banks seconded the motion and it passed.

Menhaden Advisory Committee (MAC)
J. Mambretti gave a brief overview of the MAC meeting and stated there were no action items. He said R. Mroch reported on the final landings for 2016 and provided a short update on menhaden fishing in the Atlantic in 2016 which is under a coast wide total allowable catch (TAC). J. Adriance reviewed the updated indices from the LDWF fishery-independent monitoring program used to look at the recruitment in Louisiana waters. **J. Mambretti** stated very little fishing took place in Texas waters in 2016 so the Texas TAC will increase 10% in 2017. R. Leaf gave a short update

on the work he and Dr. Schueller are continuing on examination of age composition of *Brevoortia patronus* in fishery-independent sampling. K. Thompson gave an overview on Florida's Fish Gut Lab. There was no public comment at the meeting.

C. Blankenship asked why there was a lack of fishing in Texas. **J. Mambretti** stated it was due to the closing of the Cameron Plant.

Mark Lingo moved to accept the Menhaden Advisory committee report. Dan Ellinor seconded and the motion passed.

Sea Grant Fisheries Extension Meeting Report

J. Lively reported G. Graham and T. Reisinger gave an update on the trainings with turtle excluder devices (TED) in trawls and the upcoming regulations in skimmers. A. Rosenberg gave a summary of the TED skimmer public meetings saying that no TED was the preferred alternative, but that the fishermen have safety concerns of the 32" frame when skimming in two to three feet of water, something not uncommon in Louisiana. T. Sempier presented a Gulf-wide overview of Sea Grant's role in coastal resiliency. Each Sea Grant component gave an overview of their current activities. G. Graham, T. Reisinger, and R. Cummins discussed Texas Sea Grant's report on the economic impact of recreational fishing in Laguna Madre. L. Graham provided an update on the resources available from the Gulf Oil Spill Sea Grant Team. A. Rosenberg gave a guest report on the activities of Audubon GULF relevant to Sea Grant including their TED skimmer meetings, responsible fishing verification, fishery improvement plans, and restaurant partners. B. Gill presented a summary of the Marine Resource Education Program (MREP) to the committee.

C. Nelson asked if Sea Grant is addressing the issue of conflict between land owners and fish farms. **J. Lively** said they are working on this. She said this has been an issue in other regions and the Sea Grant programs in the areas were directly involved so they hope to mimic some of the work the other Sea Grant programs have done.

J. Gill moved to accept the Sea Grant report. C. Nelson seconded and the motion passed.

NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office Comments

R. Crabtree stated a detailed report is in the briefing book under Tab B. He reported NOAA/SERO has been working on executing the FY16-20 Strategic Plan to improve management of NOAA trust resources by acquiring and applying the best available science. He said their priorities reflect the priorities of the Councils as well as the state partners, and all information from the Plan can be obtained on their website. He then reviewed upcoming Council activities. He said in reference to protective resource issues, they published a notice in the federal register proposing to list the Gulf of Mexico Bryde's whale as endangered under the ESA. They also published a notice in the Federal Register precluding that the Alabama Shad does not warrant listing under the ESA. He said the proposed rule to require TEDs in skimmer trawl vessels have received extensive public comments and they are in the process of reviewing those comments and will decide if any changes to the proposed rule would be appropriate.

C. Nelson asked if NOAA Fisheries has reviewed and responded to the document a group representing recreational fishing distributed focusing on options for managing red snapper

differently by limiting effort. **R. Crabtree** said there has been several recreational focus group meetings sponsored by the American Sportfish Association and they have submitted a report to the Gulf Council. The Council appointed a private recreational advisory panel to review the report but he does not think the Council will provide a response. He said they do recognize the dissatisfaction with the management of that portion of the fishery and the need for changes but they have not been able to obtain a consensus on a solution. He said he believes there is a role for the Commission to bring the different groups involved together to discuss this.

P. Banks asked about the Presidential Order stating if one rule is implemented two rules will go off the books and asked if that will have any impact on NOAA's regulations. **R. Crabtree** stated that executive order targets rules that are considered significant and by significant it must be $100 M or more. He said the Council has not reached that level of significance and he expects the council will continue business as usual.

C. Blankenship asked about Amendment 28 and what it means for allocation of red snapper. **R. Crabtree** stated Amendment 28 shifted about 2% of the allocation to recreational fisheries so the allocation of the fishery shifted from about 49% recreational and 51% commercial to 51% recreational and 49% commercial. There was a complaint filed by a group of commercial fishermen and the judge determined the shift in allocation was not fair and equitable. There are questions about how the order works and there were discussions about what actions the Department of Justice may take. He said he thinks if the ruling stands, then the allocation would likely revert back to what it was before Amendment 28. The Council would then have to decide if they want to address the allocation issue again in another amendment, and try to address the shortcomings found by the court. They are waiting to hear from the attorneys with more specific guidance on what needs to be done.

C. Blankenship then asked if the Council will set the red snapper season at the upcoming meeting. **R. Crabtree** said he does not expect an announcement on the season at the next council meeting.

NOAA Fisheries Budget Update

Brian Pawlak updated the Commission on the NOAA Fisheries Budget. He reviewed the Federal Budget Cycle and stated they are operating in a time of transition due to the new presidency. He said the House and Senate has commented on the FY2017 budget but they are still waiting to know what will be adopted and selected in that budget. He said normally by this time they would have the President's 2018 budget and it would have been submitted to OMB for review. He said an executive level Whitehouse blueprint budget was just released today but a lot of detail was not provided. The DOC budget was listed at $7.8 B and that is a 16% reduction. He stated there is a sentence in the Whitehouse blue print budget stating NOAA will eliminate $250 M in external grant programs so it can focus on its core mission functions. He said fisheries is one of the core mission functions. He said they are still operating on a CR which is near FY2016 level. He said final FY2017 appropriations could potentially be at a lower funding level than FY2016. He then reviewed the rest of his presentation on the cooperative data programs NOAA is funding. The presentation is available upon request from the GSMFC office.

D. Donaldson asked what constitutes an external grant program. **B. Pawlak** said he does not have the details only that fisheries is recognized as a core mission function. In the language they do eliminate Sea Grant and that component receives $73 M.

Increasing Stock Assessments in Southeast Region

B. Pawlak stated there has not been an update to the presentation P. Doremus gave at the October 2016 meeting on increasing stock assessments in the Southeast Region. The Commission will add an agenda item to the October 2017 Commission Business Meeting to discuss increasing stock assessments in the Southeast region. It was suggested to invite Dr. Bonnie Ponwith to give a presentation at the meeting and to be involved in the discussions.

Policy on Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing (IUU)

B. Pawlak then gave a presentation on the Outcomes of the Presidential Task Force on Combating IUU Fishing and Seafood fraud. The goal of the task force is to insure that product coming into this country is legally harvested and that it is truthfully reported. The action plan from the task force is focused on the point of harvest in international waters to the point of entry. He reviewed the Task Force actions and recommendations. The recommendations are to combat IUU fishing and seafood fraud at the international level; strengthen enforcement and enhance enforcement tools; create and expand partnerships with nonfederal entities to identify and eliminate seafood fraud and the sale of IUU seafood products in U.S. commerce; and to create a risk-based traceability program to track seafood from harvest/production to entry into U.S. commerce to prevent entry of illegal product into the supply chain. He reviewed the achievements of each of the recommendations. He stated the Seafood Import Monitoring Program rule became effective on January 9, 2017 and compliance is mandatory starting January 1, 2018. A copy of the presentation is available upon request to the Commission office. More information is also available at www.iuufishing.noaa.gov.

Presentation of National Academies of Science Review of MRIP

Luiz Barbieri updated the Commission on the review of the MRIP from the National Academies of Sciences. He gave a brief history of the program, reviewed the objectives of the program, and reviewed recommendations for the program. He submitted a summary report for the record and stated the full review can be assessed on the NAS website.

Presentation of Joint Enforcement Agreement in the Southeast Region

Brandi Reeder gave a presentation on the joint enforcement agreement (JEA) sponsored by NOAA and stated the numbers in her presentation are from NOAA JEA Fiscal Year 2015. She said the NOAA JEA Program is one of NOAA OLE (office of law enforcement) best examples of a cooperative partnership. She said the Cooperative Enforcement Program (CEA) through JEAs leverages state assets to enforce federal priorities while providing states funding which enables operation and the purchase of necessary equipment. The program receives approximately $16 million annually. She said JEAs officially started in 2002 and twenty-seven coastal states and territories have entered into JEA partnerships with NMFS and are receiving JEA funds. A copy of the presentation may be obtained from the GSMFC office upon request.

Briefing on Recreational Fishing Symposium

G. Bray briefed the Commission on the Symposium and stated it was well received and they had an extensive Q&A session. Six presentations were given relating to recreational fisheries data collection and management. All of the presentations are available upon request from the GSMFC office.

R. Crabtree stated this was a productive meeting and would like for the Commission to follow up with subsequent meetings. He said there are some real issues in the Gulf with red snapper and everyone involved has been struggling to find solutions for a long time. There is a lot of discussion for some potential legislation and legislative options that might address some of the issues.

D. Donaldson said there is an interest in having the Commission provide a forum and facilitate some of those discussions dealing with red snapper. He said the annual Gulf State Director's meeting is in May and they could add this to the agenda to discuss.

C. Nelson said there is not a more important issue for the Gulf fisheries than trying to get a solution to the red snapper issue. He said he urges the Commission to provide the necessary leadership to continue the process of reaching a consensus on the best practices for management of the recreational red snapper fishery. The other Commissioners agreed the Commission needs to stay involved in this issue and provide a forum for future discussions on recreational fishing.

L. Barbieri stated he wanted to commend the Commission staff for taking the initiative to have this symposium. He said the presentations were excellent and the discussions were very helpful.

Overview of Oyster Aquaculture Project

S. VanderKooy gave an overview of the Oyster Aquaculture Project. He stated last year the Office of Aquaculture at NOAA requested that the Commission assist them with a small grants program to address the technical and regulatory opportunities and challenges of oyster farming in the Gulf region. He said the Commission and NOAA developed a RFP to solicit proposals through August 2016. Six projects were funded in the amount of approximately $372,000. The projects are ongoing and will be completed in December 2017. The PIs for these six projects will give formal presentations of the projects at the GSMFC 2018 Annual Spring Meeting's General Session.

Presentation of Contribution of Artificial Reefs and Oil Rigs to Spatial Distribution of Gulf of Mexico Red Snapper

Mandy Karnauskas gave a presentation on the recently published study entitled "Red Snapper Distribution on Natural Habitats and Artificial Structures in the Northern Gulf of Mexico." She stated the motivation for the study is to answer the question, "Where are the red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico?" She reviewed the presentation and stated locally, artificial habitats are extremely important because they can harbor the majority of red snapper present in certain "hotspots" that are locally important for fishing opportunities; but calculated across the entire Gulf, artificial structures comprise a small fraction of the total seafloor and harbor a small fraction of the population. Because artificial structures harbor smaller, younger red snapper than are found on natural reefs, their contribution to the overall stock is low in terms of biomass and spawning potential. She said this study does not answer whether artificial habitats increase the production

of red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico though it does indicate that the relative impact of artificial reefs on red snapper production would be small due to the amount of this habitat relative to natural habitat. **M. Karnauskas** stated she will distribute the Ecosystem Status Report soon and asked for feedback from the Commission. The complete presentation may be obtained by request from the Commission office.

P. Banks stated that in Louisiana the oil companies are removing rigs and there has been concern about the fish populations. He asked if this study suggests there should be no concern from a fish standpoint, only a fisherman's standpoint. **M. Karnauskas** said yes, essentially that is what it suggests. She said they would not expect it to have a significant impact on the total population status but it certainly has a big impact on local fishing opportunities.

GSMFC Program Reports

Interjurisdictional Fisheries Program (IJF)

S. VanderKooy gave a brief report on the IJF Program and said a detailed report is under Tab C of the briefing book. He stated the primary focus of the IJF Program is to develop fishery management plans and profiles. The final draft for the Atlantic Croaker Biological Profile will be made available to the TCC shortly for their approval. He briefed the Commission on the age and growth manual they are currently updating. He also informed the Commission that they have distributed Tripletail tagging kits to collect fin clips and will seek funding to process the samples. **S. VanderKooy** stated the IJF program has not received increased funding for several years. He said it is time to decide which species they will do for the next profile. In the past they have worked on two species at a time and he proposes to change that to work on only one species and use the extra funds to pay travel for the Crab Subcommittee and the Menhaden Advisory Committee meetings.

After discussion, J. Gill moved to concentrate on one species at a time for the profiles and not start another until that is finished. J. Roussel seconded the motion and it passed.

M. Lingo moved to do cobia for the next species profile. C. Nelson seconded the motion and it passed.

SEAMAP

J. Rester briefed the Commission on SEAMAP and said the complete report is under Tab D of the briefing book. He said as stated earlier, he will distribute the 2016-2020 Management Plan to the Commission for their approval. He reminded the Commission that the SEAMAP Subcommittee submitted two proposals in 2016 to the NOAA Restore Act Science Program's funding initiative to collect more fishery independent data and they should be notified if the proposals are funded in the next few weeks. He reviewed all of the SEAMAP surveys that have been completed and are ongoing. Since the last meeting, SEAMAP has published the 2016 SEAMAP Joint Annual Report and the 2014 and 2015 SEAMAP Environmental and Biological Atlas of the Gulf of Mexico.

Sportfish Restoration Program

J. Ballard gave a presentation on the Sportfish Restoration Program and stated the full report is under Tab E of the briefing book. He reported the pilot study for GARMAP in Mississippi is ready

to begin, they are just waiting on the Mississippi's artificial reef boat to be repowered. He said they continue to maintain and update the FINFO website. The *Guidelines for Marine Artificial Reef Materials: Second Edition* has been distributed for review and the Third Edition should be finalized and ready for distribution by the end of the year. He said the first conference call of the Artificial Reef Technical Committee was held to discuss development of a proposal for a gulf-wide standardized artificial reef demonstration project.

Fisheries Information Network (FIN)

G. Bray stated the complete report for FIN is under Tab F in the briefing book. He gave a brief power point presentation reviewing FIN activities for 2016 and reviewed the highlights for 2017. He stated FIN funding has decreased approximately 12.5% so they were not able to fund the biological sampling program which will leave a gap in the sampling. They were awarded 3 NOAA Fisheries FIS proposals for improving the quality of the data provided for stock assessments, develop new quality control processes for the commercial trip ticket data, and initiate electronic reporting in Florida for all commercial dealers.

Aquatic Nuisance Species Program (ANS)

J. Ballard gave a brief overview of the ANS program and stated the complete report is under Tab G of the briefing book. He said the Gulf and South Atlantic Regional Panel (GSARP) on Aquatic Invasive Species had their fall meeting on October 4-6, 2016. The partnership with USFWS small grants program is continuing and in 2016 a total of 7 projects were selected for funding totaling $163,206. The Commission is administering 5 of the sub-awards totaling $114, 816. He reported the traveling trunk has been updated and three new species will be added to the content. The panel will develop a clearinghouse of relevant outreach materials available and it will be incorporated into the GSARP's website. The next GSARP meeting will be in May in conjunction with the North American Invasive Species Forum.

***Lyles-Simpson Award* Recipient Selection for 2017**

J. Miller moved to nominate Joe Gill to be the recipient of the Lyles-Simpson Award. C. Nelson seconded the motion and the motion passed.

State Directors' Reports

It was decided to highlight one or two items for each state instead of reading each report. The reports are under Attachment I.

Future Meetings

C. Blankenship stated Alabama will host the October 2017 annual meeting but the Grand Hotel is not available. N. Marcellus is working on finding another acceptable location.

Review of Committee Listings

D. Donaldson said the current committee listings for each state is under Tab L of the briefing book. He asked the Commissioners to review the members on the committees and submit any changes to the Commission office.

Publications List and Web Statistics

The current publications list is under Tab M of the briefing book. **J. Ferrer** gave a power point presentation reviewing the GSMFC website statistics. **J. Ballard** gave a power point presentation on the FINFO and EatGulfSeafood websites. He stated he has been contacted by Dogfish Head Brewing Company who are interested in working with gulf coast seafood restaurants to help promote seafood and their new craft beer. A percentage of the beer sales would be given to the Commission to be used to educate restaurant staff members on the pairing of seafood and their craft beer. He asked if the Commission is interested in pursuing this. The Commissioners asked J. Ballard to contact Dogfish Head Brewing Company to get more details on what they are proposing. J. Ballard with then provide the information to the Commission.

Other Business

Discussion of Red Snapper RFP

D. Donaldson asked the Commission if they would be interested in submitting a proposal in response to the recent Red Snapper RFP published by Sea Grant. He said he will meet with LaDon Swann to discuss the potential of the Commission submitting a proposal that would be a gulf wide effort. He said the Commission is the logical organization to coordinate developing the proposal. There was no objection to D. Donaldson pursuing obtaining information on possibly submitting a proposal.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:58 p.m.

ATTACHMENT I

STATE DIRECTORS' REPORTS

Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission
67th Annual Fall Meeting
Technical Coordinating Committee
Thursday, 13th October 2016
New Orleans, Louisiana

TEXAS REPORT

REGULATORY CHANGES

The recreational maximum total length limit for Black Drum has been clarified in the regulations as 30 inches. This was inadvertently left off of the 2015-16 printed regulations.

There was an increase in the recreational minimum size limit for Greater Amberjack from 34 inches to 38 inches (total length). The change is intended to provide an opportunity for a greater number of sexually mature Greater Amberjack to spawn, which could assist in efforts to end overfishing and rebuild the stock. The Texas Department of Wildlife Department (TPWD) determined that matching the federal regulation will help achieve management goals, be beneficial to the resource, and prevent angler confusion.

The following clarification was added to the regulation that prohibits filleting of fish before landing: "For sharks, only the head may be removed. The remainder of the carcass (including the tail) must remain intact and may not be filleted." The regulation serves to aid in identification of species and length and to prohibit shark finning.

2016-2017 Coastal Fisheries Scoping Items

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's Coastal Fisheries Division held Regulatory Hearings to receive public comments on proposals for regulation changes in the commercial oyster fishery. These proposals included:

- Temporary closure of four areas (28 acres total) in Galveston Bay for cultch planting projects and extension of the temporary closure of Half-Moon Reef (54 acres) in Matagorda Bay.
- Reduction in daily sack limit from 50 sacks to 40 sacks.
- Closure of Sundays to oyster harvest.

COASTAL FISHERIES PROGRAMS & PROJECTS

Oyster Fishery

At the direction of the Parks and Wildlife Commission, TPWD has temporarily withdrawn the proposal that would allow for an expansion of the oyster lease program, instead, focusing on the renewal of existing leases which are scheduled to expire at the end of February 2017. A proposal to renew existing leases while incorporating cost-recovery elements and active use criteria into the program was approved for consideration for rulemaking. Under the proposal, annual rent fees would increase from $6/acre/year to $60/acre/year. Active Use Criteria would require a minimal planting of cultch per acre, and is to be accomplished within the first five years of the lease term. Beginning in year six and continuing annually for the remainder of the 15-year term, leaseholders would be required to plant approved cultch materials upon areas designated by the Department. The amount of cultch planted would be based on the percentage (by volume) of oysters harvested from the lease during the immediately preceding harvest

season. Several alternative proposals/recommendations have been submitted by industry and are being evaluated. The Parks and Wildlife Commission will take final action on the proposal during their November 2017 meeting in Austin, TX.

During their August meeting, the Parks and Wildlife Commission approved temporary two year closures of four areas in Galveston Bay in order for the TPWD to conduct oyster restoration cultch plantings and to continue post-construction monitoring by The Nature Conservancy of Half-Moon Reef in Matagorda Bay. Additionally, the Commission lowered the daily sack limit for oysters from 50 sacks per day to 40 and removed Sunday as a legal fishing day for oysters. These new regulations go into effect on November 1, 2016.

Texas Marine Sport-Harvest Monitoring Program
During the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's 2015-16 creel survey year (15 May 2015 through 14 May 2016), 1,120 surveys were conducted at boat-access sites along the coast.

For private-boat bay-pass anglers, an estimated 5,225,300 man-hours were expended to harvest an estimated 1,601,500 fishes. Staff conducted 11,757 target interviews involving 29,156 anglers. Of the 86 species encountered, Spotted Seatrout, Atlantic Croaker, Red Drum, and Sand Seatrout were the most frequently landed species. Mean party size was 2.5 people and mean trip length was 5.5 hours. Staff observed 41,176 fishes and measured the length for 29,593 of them.

For private-boat Texas Territorial Sea anglers, an estimated 174,400 man-hours were expended to harvest an estimated 82,500 fishes. Staff conducted 602 target interviews involving 1,877 anglers. Of the 55 species encountered, Red Snapper, Atlantic Spadefish, Spotted Seatrout, and King Mackerel were the most frequently landed species. Mean party size was 3.1 people and mean trip length was 6.4 hours. Staff observed 3,461 fishes and measured the length for 1,973 of them.

For private-boat Exclusive Economic Zone anglers, an estimated 99,100 man-hours were expended to harvest an estimated 22,700 fishes. Staff conducted 254 target interviews involving 830 anglers. Of the 49 species encountered, Red Snapper, King Mackerel, and Atlantic Spadefish were the most frequently landed species. Mean party size was 3.3 people and mean trip length was 7.5 hours. Staff observed 1,235 fishes and measured the length for 886 of them.

Fisheries Enhancement Program (Hatcheries)

2016 Fish Stocking Totals

8,707,431	Red Drum fingerling
8,043,538	Spotted Seatrout fingerlings
78,716	Southern Flounder fingerlings
16,829,685	**Total fingerlings stocked**

Production will continue over the next few months to the end of the year, so final numbers will be higher than currently reported.

Artificial Reef Program
Natural Resources Damage Assessment (NRDA) - The program has three projects slated through Deepwater Horizon (BP) funds, totaling $6.6m:

1) The Ship Reef project will deploy a ship approximately 67 miles offshore of Galveston. TPWD has acquired the 371 ft. cargo carrier M/V *SCM Fedora*. It was renamed the M/V *KRAKEN* in order to secure the new title. The M/V *KRAKEN* arrived in Brownsville, TX in May 2016 and is in the process of being cleaned before reefing.

2) Freeport Artificial Reef (Brazoria County): This project will increase the amount of reef materials in the currently permitted George Vancouver (Liberty Ship) Artificial Reef site which is approximately six miles from Freeport. Concrete pyramids (artificial reef materials) will be placed at a water depth of 55 feet.

3) Matagorda Artificial Reef (Matagorda County): This project will create a new artificial reef site approximately 10 miles offshore of Matagorda County, through deployment of concrete pyramids (artificial reef materials) at a water depth of 60 feet.

Callan Marine has completed the original production of 2400 pyramids (as of September 2016, there were less than 100 pyramids left to build). They are now planning for deployment of pyramids at the Freeport (Vancouver) and Matagorda reefs this fall.

Nearshore Reefs

Port Isabel, TX: TPWD continued to work with the USCG to get the shrimp boat (Gulf Explorer) and tug boat (Sting) inspected and approved to be the first structures placed in the Rio Grande Valley Nearshore Reef by end of October. This reefing area is the largest to date, measuring 1,650 acres.

Port O'Connor, TX: A donation of $600,000 was made by the TPWD Foundation, CCA, and Shell Oil for the Port O'Connor nearshore reef. This will be matched with $400,000 from the reef donation account in a project known as "Keep it Wild Reef." Callan Marine has been awarded a contract to produce and reef 500 concrete pyramids at the site in spring 2017.

Rigs to Reefs

Artificial Reef staff met with the US Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) in Galveston to discuss new permitting requirements. The Corps is finalizing a plan to pull all of our reef sites into an overall General Permit (GP) that will cover all of Texas waters. The old GP expired in December 2015. The new permit will cover waters from the shoreline out to the 300m contour. If a new reef site does not meet qualifications for a general permit, we will still submit it as an Individual permit (IP). Supposedly, this will help stream-line the permitting process. The down side is our permits expire after each reefing event (i.e. once a platform is towed to an existing reef site, the permit expires; therefore a new reefing event several months later in the same spot would require a "new" construction permit.

TPWD discussed several Rigs-to-Reefs future projects with WT Offshore and Montco Company to include HI-370A and five structures around the Flower Gardens Banks National Marine Sanctuary. There are a number of Rigs-to-Reefs projects in process, as well as the anticipated NRDA/Restore Act reefings in 2016-2017.

Biological Monitoring

The Artificial Reef Dive Team completed their monitoring season with the successful deployment of three sondes that will collect data for three months, new snapper data from vertical line surveys, and abundance estimates from diver surveys on reef structures.

Contracts for biological and water quality monitoring of the TPWD Artificial Reef sites will expire in August 2017. Texas A&M University – Galveston, Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi, the University of Texas – Rio Grande Valley, and the United States Geological Services will continue to monitor and provide data for the reef sites in their regions through the term of these contracts.

Artificial Reef staff participated in ROV training in August 2016 to prepare for use of their new ROV to conduct reef surveys. The ROV is an Outland 2000 and has integrated multibeam sonar, positioning system, and stereo lasers that allow for replication of diver survey protocols.

Perry R. Bass Marine Fisheries Research Station

Life History Research

Routine otolith collections from gill net samples were continued, as was processing and ageing of otoliths collected in previous years. Black Drum and Spotted Seatrout were targeted for this study.

The GSMFC-funded FIN-Biological Sampling project for otolith collection and processing for various marine species was renewed. Otolith sample collection, processing, analysis, and data entry into the FIN biosampling database are ongoing. A statement of work (SOW) for August 1, 2016 through March 31, 2017 was approved by GSMFC, and an additional SOW for April 1, 2017 through December 31, 2017 was submitted to GSMFC.

A meristic-based method of differentiating Alligator Gar sex was improved using discriminate analysis and an online application using the analysis was developed for field use.

Genetics Research

A genetic survey of inshore Black Drum populations is ongoing.

Additional samples of Alligator Gar from selected drainages have been requested from the TPWD Inland Fisheries Division to better characterize genetic diversity of Alligator Gar from freshwater and estuarine areas.

A genomic survey for Atlantic Croaker was initiated using Illumina platform based high-throughput genetic processing and analysis techniques.

License Buyback Program

Dollars	License Types	Original licenses	Purchased	Retired	# of rounds
13.4 mill	Shrimp	3231	2174	67%	34
1.4 mill	Finfish	549	247	45%	22
0.4 mill	Crabs	287	66	23%	19
15.2 mill		**4067**	**2463**	**61%**	

Shrimp

Buyback Round 34

- Application period closed January 31, 2016 (opened approximately 60 days)
- 23 individual bids were received
- 10 (5 bay and 5 bait) would be accepted with 10% ED rule and an additional 6 licenses (3 bay and 3 bait), to meet match requirements for State Wildlife Grant funding for sea turtle restoration
- Proposed total Cost would be $150,000 at an average price $9,375 (if all accepted)
- Accepted range would be $6,000 to $10,000
- Purchased a total of 10 (6 bay and 4 bait)
- Total purchase price of $92,500
- Avg. purchase price was $9,250 (actual range $6,000 to $10,000)

Finfish

Buyback Round 22

- Application period closed January 31, 2015 (open approximately 60 days)
- 4 applications received
- 2 licenses accepted for purchase
- 1 license was purchased
- Total cost $9,400

Crab

Buyback Round 19

- Application period closed January 31, 2016
- 2 applications received
- 1 license accepted for purchase
- 1 license was purchased
- Total cost $8,500

Ecosystem Resources Program (ERP)

Oyster habitat

Pilot study to build sanctuary reefs (NFWF) - Partnering with Texas Nature Conservancy in 2016 to restore a minimum of 40 acres of degraded Galveston Bay oyster reefs using a reef design criteria intended to increase the sustainability and resilience of the restored reef habitats. The project will apply high vertical relief, optimal reef patch size design, and spatial configuration concepts to create conditions optimal for oyster larval production, settlement, survival, and enhanced adult oyster growth. Design will use smaller reef sanctuary totaling 15 acres and construction and restoration of a nearby commercially harvestable reef complex of 25 acres.

Pepper Grove/Middle Reef Restoration (NFWF, GBEF) - Restored 30 acres on Pepper Grove and 10 acres on Middle Reef.

Sabine Lake oyster restoration (NFWF/Shell Oil) - Restored approximately 25.8 acres of oyster reefs in Sabine Lake. Project constructs a network of small patch reefs to mimic the nearby natural reefs. Monitoring is ongoing for this area.

East Galveston Bay Oyster restoration Project (CIAP-GLO, CCA) - The primary purpose of this project is to restore 180 acres of previously productive oyster habitat in East Galveston Bay. The Sub-recipient will also commission an engineering study of the feasibility of restoring Galveston Bay's oyster reefs to their pre-Hurricane Ike acreage; conduct side scan sonar surveys of oyster habitat in West Galveston Bay; and educate the public on the important role of oyster reefs in estuarine ecosystems and the need to conserve and restore these valuable habitats. If funding allows, cultch may be added to South Redfish Reef, which is in the vicinity of East Galveston Bay. Shell recovery funds are being utilized to enhance existing oyster beds on Todd's Dump Reef.

Additional oyster projects

Oyster restoration/habitat and fishing opportunity creation includes Texas City Reef (areas identified by TPWD, funded through Texas City funds).

Mapping bays waters > 1 m depth for habitat (utilizing various disaster and recovery funds, plus USFWS funds to equip program for data collection and habitat assessment).

- Initially for oysters and Hurricane Rita/Ike impact in Galveston (last year, about 18,000 acres were added for a total of about 35,000 acres scanned).

- Utilizing current data gathering for Coastal Marine Spatial Planning tool for strategic areas for future work.

Areas Mapped.

- Copano Bay (39,290 acres total).
- Sabine lake Oyster Reef (1,600 acres total).
- Galveston Bay Complex (35,000 acres total West Galveston Bay) ongoing in other parts of system.

Currently funded State Wildlife Grants

- Mapping of San Antonio Bay oyster habitat currently in process.
- Aerial imagery and ground-truthing for seagrass and other habitat to identify areas for restoration and protection, and to assess impacts from regulation to not uproot seagrasses.
- Habitat assessment pilot study working in parallel with fishery independent resource monitoring.

Restoration, conservation and acquisition projects

Goal is to work toward larger and landscape scale initiatives and connectivity versus small isolated projects.

Galveston Bay Blue Print - Working as a partner and with other partners (e.g., Galveston Bay Estuary Program) to restore over 20,000 acres. Areas being restored/protected currently around West Galveston Bay shoreline, nearby the State Park.

Follet's Island Initiative (NFWF, NRDA, and others) - Acquisition of ~2,000 acres (500 acres to date) of barrier Island land from various land holders would conserve and protect an area from the Gulf of Mexico, landward across Christmas Bay Coastal Preserve into Federal lands (NWR).

Powderhorn Ranch Acquisition (NFWF) - 10,000 acres of coastal habitat acquired. Future work to acquire additional funds (CEPRA, USFWS, etc.) to enhance existing habitats, prevent ongoing shoreline erosion and sea level rise impacts, and provide recreational opportunity.

Matagorda Peninsula Acquisition (USFWS, CMP, CEPRA, CCA, NRG) - Purchase of over 6,000 acres into conservation along the Golden Crescent area. Final efforts of acquisition have occurred during the past two years.

Dickinson Watershed Marsh Restoration (USFWS, CMP, CEPRA, CCA, NRG) - in an area of high erosion, protects over 20 acres of marsh, creating 10 acres of habitat.

Dagger/Ransom Island Initiative (mitigation funds, NRDA, NOAA RESTORE) - protect erosion of seagrass, tidal flats, shoreline habitat from large ship wakes.

SPECIAL EFFORTS, STUDIES, AND TOPICS

iSnapper Project

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation has agreed to fund the joint *iSnapper* project between Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi (TAMU-CC) and TPWD for two more years starting in 2017. This project encourages recreational anglers to use *iSnapper* to report their offshore fishing trip information with validation done through TPWD creel surveys and targeted creel surveys done by TAMU-CC. The targeted creels were directed at high pressure ramps and covered most days of the 11 day season. The results from the current year of the project are being validated and analyzed to extrapolate to total estimated landings (Table 1).

Table 1. Preliminary survey results from the 2016 federal recreational season (June 1-11).

2016 Method	Number of Trips	Total Anglers	Total Red Snapper Harvested	Total Red Snapper / trip	Private / For-Hire
TPWD creel	50	273	517	10.3	81.5 / 18.5 %
TAMU-CC creel	252	1110	2297	9.1	81.0 / 19.0 %
iSnapper	120	616	1238	10.3	79.2 / 20.8 %

SEAMAP

Bottom longlines have been completed for spring, summer, and fall. TPWD is currently conducting vertical longline sampling at various artificial and natural reef sites. We are also continuing to update our sampling universe list, as our initial list contains many "presumed reef" sites that have not been found. Additional sites not on the original list are being identified and will be included for selection in the following years.

Red Tide

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department is working with other agencies to monitor a red tide event along the southern Texas coast. On August 24, 2016, the Image Flow Cytobot (IFCB), located at the University of Texas Marine Science Institute in Port Aransas initiated notification of the possible presence of *Karenia brevis*. Water samples collected at Bob Hall Pier (North Padre Island) by staff at the Texas A&M - Corpus Christi, Center for Coastal Studies and South Padre Island by the University of Texas – Rio Grande Valley, Coastal Studies Lab confirmed very low cell ions of *K. brevis*. As of September 16th, there have been several localized fish kills (mostly whiting and shrimp eels at 1-5 fish per 10 feet) along the Gulf of Mexico shoreline and away from the coast, mainly in NOAA statistical zone 21.

Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission
67th Annual Spring Meeting
Technical Coordinating Committee
March 2017

LOUISIANA STATE REPORT

Resource Management:

LA Creel

Through the La Creel program 3,145 recreational fishing trips, comprising 7,330 individual anglers, were surveyed during the period of October 1, 2016 to January 23, 2017 (latest data available). Fifty-four different interviewers working 665 assignments during that time period were used during that period. Fish kept by anglers and are allowed to be viewed and counted are referred to as observation Type 1 fish. Fish in possession of the angler at the time of survey, not seen by the interviewer but reported by the angler, are classified as observation Type 2 fish. During the time period, a total of 26,930 Type 1 fish and 9,939 Type 2 fish were recorded.

In May 2016 La Creel began capturing discard data for black drum, gray snapper, gray triggerfish, greater amberjack, king mackerel, red drum, red snapper, sheepshead, southern flounder, Spanish mackerel, and spotted seatrout during all dockside surveys. This was done at the request of NMFS to assist in their estimates. Discarded finfish are grouped into three additional observation types: 3) undersize, 4) used as bait, and 5) all other reasons. During the same time period, surveyed anglers reported 27,501 Type 3's, 0 Type 4's, and 3,106 Type 5's.

In June 2016 NMFS granted provisional certification of the dockside and charter effort survey components of La Creel. Private effort methodology will continue to be evaluated.

Stock Assessments

An update stock assessment of striped mullet was completed in late 2016 and was presented to the LWFC for transmittal to the Louisiana Legislature in February 2017. This stock assessment used a statistical catch at age model to estimate annual time-series of spawning stock biomass and fishing mortality rates. Current status of the stock was determined with estimates of reproductive potential. Based on results of this assessment, no overfishing is currently occurring and the stock is not considered overfished.

Age and Growth

From the beginning of September 2016 to the end of December the Age and Growth laboratory in Baton Rouge has received 5,601 otoliths and no gray triggerfish spines. From that otolith total, 1,828 have been aged. During this time period 1,302 Inland Fisheries otoliths have been

collected and transferred to the lab, 454 of those otoliths are largemouth bass. The Age and Growth lab also received black and white crappie otoliths the past few months, because of Inland Fall sampling. Spotted seatrout is the most collected species for this time period and has been the most frequently collected marine species the past five years. The commercial striped mullet season is fall through early winter, and otoliths have been collected but not processed. The totals for each species are: black crappie-575; black drum-470; gray snapper-5; greater amberjack-0; gray triggerfish-0; king mackerel-1; largemouth bass-454; red drum-679; red snapper-140; sheepshead-213; southern flounder-489; spotted seatrout-1,763; striped mullet-0; tripletail-3; vermilion snapper-0; white crappie-273; yellowfin tuna-88.

Fisheries Research Lab:

The Grand Isle Fisheries Research Lab (GI-FRL) is the base for offshore fisheries independent monitoring and research projects conducted by the Fisheries Management Section. GI-FRL also performs a significant outreach capacity, as the Lab serves as a point of contact for the public, visiting researchers, and educational programs.

Southeastern Monitoring and Assessment Program (SEAMAP)

Louisiana SEAMAP is conducted by LDWF in coordination with NOAA and GSMFC from the FRL. LDWF staff conduct vertical line (VL), bottom longline (BLL), ichthyoplankton, and shrimp/groundfish trawl surveys following SEAMAP protocols. SEAMAP 2016 was completed in October 2016. LDWF was assigned 100 VL sites during the 2016 calendar year and 90 BLL sites in three seasons (spring, summer, and fall) statewide. The summer shrimp/groundfish cruise was completed in June 2016 aboard LUMCON's *R/V Point Sur*, the ichthyoplankton cruise was conducted aboard LDWF's *R/V Defender*, and the Fall shrimp/groundfish survey was completed in October 2016 on LUMCON's *R/V Pelican*. FRL staff are currently preparing for the 2017 SEAMAP sampling season which will begin in April 2017.

Research and Monitoring Projects

Fisheries Management staff worked on several research and monitoring projects during the current reporting period. Investigations were continued into the age, growth, and reproductive biology of several important management species, including spotted seatrout, yellowfin and blackfin tunas, wahoo, and deep-water grouper. GI-FRL staff continue to sample greater amberjack as part of a MARFIN grant with the University of Florida. All samples from year 1 of the project have been process and year 2 collections have begun, with a completion date of June 30, 2017 for field work and a final report due by the end of the 2017 calendar year. LDWF biologists attended a workshop on greater amberjack reproduction and histological reads in March 2017 at UF in Gainesville, FL. Field work for another MARFIN research grant on the biology of Warsaw and snowy groupers was begun in winter 2016. Lab staff also participated in a study with Texas A&M University at Galveston, USM's Gulf Coast research Lab, and Florida International University into the post-release survival of blacktip sharks caught on recreational gear.

Grand Isle Oyster Hatchery

The Michael C. Voisin Oyster Hatchery on Grand Isle, LA is operated by both LDWF and Louisiana Sea Grant staff for the purpose of producing larvae for restoration, research, or industry purposes. During the winter of 2016-2017, hatchery staff completed maintenance for hatchery systems and performed preparations for the 2017 hatchery season. Maintenance tasks included replacing seawater intake lines, and cleaning filtration units. Oyster farm maintenance was also completed and all hatchery broodstock, grown in an Adjustable Longline System at the Sea Grant Oyster Research Farm, were cleaned and culled. At the end of February 2017, approximately 200 of each diploid and tetraploid broodstock will be removed from the farm and conditioned in the Warm Broodstock Holding System. Conditioning broodstock allows the hatchery to extend its larval production season by ripening oysters when wild production does not exist or is minimal.

Improvements in the Algal Production Room included the addition of a tangential flow filtration (TFF) unit, which removes particulates in the hatchery seawater down to 0.1 micron, improving the water quality entering algal bags. Algal production in the Algal Stock Room began at the end of January, with five different species of algae being grown. This mixed algal diet is used for raising hatchery-produced larvae.

Larval production began in April and continued through the end of November 2016. A total of 183 million diploid, triploid, and tetraploid larvae and were harvested at various larval stages. Larval production was bolstered by an increase in algal production, with 1800 L of algae produced daily at concentration of 4-6 million cells per mL. Some of the hatchery-produced diploid larvae were deployed east of the Mississippi River as part of a LDWF alternative public oyster reef restoration effort. Future hatchery-produced diploid larvae will be delivered to a new remote setting facility in Buras, LA for large scale spat-on-shell production. Spat-on-shell will then be deployed on LA public oyster reefs.

Marine Mammal and Sea Turtle Monitoring:

The LDWF Marine Mammal and Sea Turtle Stranding and Rescue Program is the first responder to marine mammal and sea turtle strandings in Louisiana. Between September 1, 2016 and January 31, 2017, 13 marine mammal strandings (1 alive), and 5 sea turtle strandings, have been covered. The live marine mammal responded to was a sperm whale (*Physeter macrocephalus*) stranded on a mud flat south of Dularge, LA on December 1, 2016. Rescue attempts were unsuccessful.

LDWF Office of Fisheries Staff continued to perform necropsies on marine mammal and sea turtle carcasses during this period as appropriate. The walk-in freezer unit which was housed at the LDWF Fisheries Research Lab in Grand Isle and was provided by BP and NOAA through a long-term lease was picked up in October and all marine mammal and sea turtle carcasses remaining in the freezer had to be necropsied prior to its departure. A total of 11 necropsies

(including the live stranded sperm whale mentioned above), 3 internal exams (too decomposed to perform complete necropsy), and 1 human interaction exam on skeletal remains with saw marks were completed on marine mammal carcasses during this period. It is important to note that another sperm whale carcass was necropsied in Cameron Parish in October. Four sea turtle necropsies were completed during this period. Staff are working on incinerating remains and carcasses when possible depending on litigation hold requirements and are planning to be able to complete disposal of 3.5 chest freezers of remains in the coming months.

One LDWF Staff member attended the National Marine Animal Health and Stranding Response Conference hosted by NOAA at the National Conservation Training Center in Shepherdstown, WV. Attendee completed Small Cetacean Tagging Training provided by Dr. Randy Wells of Chicago Zoological Society and the Advanced Necropsy Training provided by marine animal experts and led by Dr. Deb Fauquier, NOAA while at the conference.

Beginning in December 2014, LDWF partnered with researchers from the United States Geological Survey (USGS) to initiate a long term mark recapture survey of live sea turtles at a mark-recapture study site in Louisiana. Capture efforts were deployed as part of this effort in December of 2014, May of 2015, December of 2015, May of 2016, and December of 2016. During these efforts a total of 100 sea turtles were captured, with 83 first-time captures and 17 recaptures. All captures were green sea turtles other than a one-time capture of a sub-adult loggerhead sea turtle. The establishment of a study like this aids in providing information regarding sea turtle habitat and usage of areas along the coast of Louisiana which in turn allows researchers, scientists and managers to know where sea turtles may be released for optimal survival chances following time in a rehabilitation facility. On September 21, 2016, a live green sea turtle that underwent rehabilitation at Audubon Nature Institute was released at the study site.

Shrimp Program:

The 2016 fall inshore shrimp season opened at 6:00 p.m. on August 15, 2016 from the Louisiana/Mississippi state line westward to the Atchafalaya River. The 2016 fall inshore shrimp season opened at 6:00 a.m. on August 22, 2016 from the Atchafalaya River westward to the Louisiana/Texas state line.

The 2016 fall inshore shrimp season closed in the majority of state inside waters on December 19, 2016 at official sunset. The state inside waters that remained open were: Lake Pontchartrain, Lake Borgne, Chef Menteur and Rigolets Passes, Mississippi Sound, Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MRGO), a section of the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway (GIWW) in Orleans parish from the GIWW East Closure Sector Gate westward to the GIWW intersection with the Inner Harbor Navigation Canal and the open waters of Breton and Chandeleur Sounds. The areas listed above

closed on January 20, 2017 at official sunset with the exception of Breton and Chandeleur Sounds.

State outside waters southward three nautical miles from the inside/outside shrimp line from the northwest shore of Caillou Boca at -90 degrees 50 minutes 27 seconds west longitude westward to the western shore of Freshwater Bayou Canal at -92 degrees 18 minutes 33 seconds west longitude closed to shrimping on January 2, 2017.

Shrimp Landings

Preliminary statewide shrimp landings (all species combined/heads-onweight) for 2016 totaled 89.9 million pounds with a dockside value of $127.4 million (Source: LDWF Trip Ticket Data).

Crab Program:

Beginning in January 2017, new blue crab harvest regulations took effect. The commercial harvest of blue crabs and the use of all crab traps was prohibited for a 30 day period beginning on February 20, 2017. Fishermen using crab traps were required to remove all of their crab traps from the waters of the state of Louisiana during this time period. LDWF will use this closure period to remove and dispose of derelict and abandoned crab traps. The commercial harvest of immature female blue crabs was prohibited year-round except for those crabs being held to process as softshell crabs. This 30 day closure and restriction of the immature female harvest will last through 2019.

Louisiana Blue Crab Landings

Preliminary statewide crab landings for 2016 totaled 40.4 million pounds with a dockside value of $44.9 million (Source: LDWF Trip Ticket Data).

Oyster Program:

Oyster Season

The table below contains a summary of the 2016-2017 oyster season for major public grounds production areas (data derived from boarding runs, not LDWF Trip Tickets).

Area	Season Opening	Season Closure	Seed Harvest (bbls)	Market Harvest (sacks)
CSA-1N	Nov. 14	Jan. 8 (full)	32,265	13,562
Re-opened	Jan. 31	Open (market)		
CSA-1S	Closed	NA	NA	NA
Hackberry Bay	Nov. 14	Nov. 20 (full)	890	1,420
Sister Lake	Closed	NA	NA	NA
Lake Mechant	Sept. 7	Open	2670	0
Bay Junop	Sept. 7	Open	15	2240
CSA-6	Sept. 7	Open	0	0
Calcasieu Lake	Nov. 1	Repeated-DHH	NA	17,259
		Total:	35,840	34,481

Oyster Stock Assessment

Sampling for the 2016 public grounds oyster stock assessment was completed in June - July 2016. The statewide estimate of seed and sack oyster stock size is 899,799 barrels of oysters, down 19% from the 2015 assessment and well below long-term averages. Oyster populations in CSA-1N and Hackberry Bay are near long-term averages and are supported by good spatfall, with populations near historic lows in CSA-1S, Sister Lake, and Calcasieu Lake. The oyster populations in Sabine Lake suffered extensive freshwater mortality in the summer of 2015, and the 2016 assessment showed signs of a strong recovery despite a smaller freshwater mortality event in the summer of 2016.

Additional stock assessment (square-meter) sampling was conducted in CSA-1N, CSA-1S, and CSA-3 in September 2016 as part of an agreement with the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA). Substantial mortality was observed in the Mississippi Sound area with mortalities of 70-100%. However growth in other areas resulted in an overall increase in stock size of 30% compared to July estimates. The stock size of CSA-1S showed a decrease of 80%, while Hackberry Bay showed an increase of 7%. In CSA-3, additional sampling was also conducted on private lease areas per the CPRA agreement to further characterize oyster resources in Barataria Basin. This included extra sampling to ground-truth areas surveyed with side-scan sonar by CPRA to determine bottom-type.

Cultch Plants

The three cultch plants in Calcasieu Lake appear to have been successful and currently support a total of 44,704 sacks of seed oysters, but no oysters have grown to market size (West Cove: 16,861 sacks, Commissary Point: 14,892 sacks, Lambert's Bayou: 12,950). No cultch plants will be conducted in 2016, but planning has begun to determine the possibility of conducting

additional cultch plants in 2017. Potential cultch planting sites being considered include Grand Banks (CSA-1N), Sister Lake, and Calcasieu Lake. The funding source for Grand Banks cultch plant will likely be remaining Early Restoration funds.

An addition, CSA's have recently acquired side-scan sonar units to allow rapid assessment of reef areas. Protocols are being refined and in addition to surveying unmapped reef areas, the primary goal is to establish routine surveys of cultch plant areas each season pre- and post-harvest to improve monitoring and a subsequent management of these investments.

Remote setting

Construction continues on the Oyster Remote Setting Facility in Buras, construction delays have postponed the anticipated completion date. Pumps, shell washer, and other equipment are expected to be purchased and installed by May 2017. The facility is anticipated to be operational and producing large volumes of spat-on-shell by September 2017. A potential project purchasing spat-on-shell from an outside source is being considered for the Lake Fortuna area. The funding source for this project will likely be remaining Early Restoration funds.

Transplants

In an effort to restore the oyster population in CSA-1S, a small transplant was conducted where LDWF hired an oyster harvester to collect oysters from low salinity waters frequently closed by DHH. In November 2016, 12 sacks of oysters were deployed in the Black Bay area at 3 sites along a salinity gradient (36 sacks total). This is an attempt to trigger a successful spawning event in the area. Two more additional transplants are planned, and if successful, a larger transplanting effort may be organized.

Spawning Stock Reef Network

In another effort to restore the oyster population in CSA-1S and in conjunction with the LDWF Artificial Reef Program, planning has begun to establish four reef sites in the Lake Fortuna/Black Bay area to create a spawning stock reef network. These reef sites would be typical 10-acre artificial reefs constructed out of large, un-harvestable material and located along a salinity gradient in waters conducive to oyster growth and reproduction. The goal is to improve oyster productivity and resilience in the area, and also to provide a deployment location for hatchery products to further supplement production.

Finfish Program:

LDWF conducts biological monitoring statewide in the coastal, nearshore, and offshore areas of Louisiana for finfish. During FY 2015-2016, the fishery-independent finfish sampling program

collected 936 (100 percent) gill net samples, 1,225 (100 percent) seine samples, and 271 (100 percent) trammel net samples for a 100 percent overall completion rate statewide.

Louisiana re-opened the state waters season for the recreational harvest of red snapper on October 7, 2017. The season was opened as a weekend only (Friday, Saturday, and Sunday) season.

Louisiana closed the state waters season for the recreational harvest of red snapper on December 15, 2017.

Louisiana waters closed for the commercial harvest of Small Coastal Sharks on December 31, 2016 concurrent with a closure in federal waters.

Louisiana waters opened for the commercial harvest of Small Coastal Sharks on January 1, 2017 concurrent with an opening in federal waters.

Louisiana closed the season for the recreational harvest of gray triggerfish for all of 2017 concurrent with a closure in federal waters.

The LWFC, at its January 2017 meeting set the 2017-2018 season for the commercial harvest of king mackerel in state waters to open on July 1, 2017.

The LWFC, at its January 2017 meeting passed a Notice of Intent to modify the harvest regulations for Large Coastal Sharks. The proposed Notice of Intent would adjust the daily possession limit of commercially harvested Large Coastal sharks from 36 to 45 and allow multiple permit holders to each harvest a daily possession limit from one vessel. Public comments will be taken on the rule until April 6, 2017. In a related action, the LWFC passed a Declaration of Emergency that mirrors the above Notice of Intent to allow commercial shark fisherman an opportunity to harvest at the higher possession limit for the 2017 commercial season, which begins February 1, 2017, concurrent with an opening in federal waters.

Louisiana state waters opened for the recreational harvest of red snapper on February 1, 2017. The season is open daily with a 2 fish bag limit at 16 inches.

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 7 new structures. There are 30 structures permitted for deployment as permanent artificial reefs, and two new reef sites have been recently been proposed. Permitting of an additional 28 structures is currently underway. Multibeam

surveying of the program's offshore reefs is ongoing (annually) and is made available on the program's website. The Program has completed one pilot project using remotely-operated vehicle (ROV) surveys to sample offshore reefs. After another trip this year, the Program will use the results of both cruises to design an offshore monitoring program.

The Artificial Reef Council approved twelve Nearshore Planning Areas. There is one active permit request for a new nearshore reef. The Program is actively soliciting the owners of platforms within Nearshore Planning Areas for potential reefing opportunities.

The Artificial Reef Council also approved two new inshore reef sites located in the southwest portion of Lake Pontchartrain and the southeast portion of Calcasieu Lake. Permitting for these new sites, as well as enhancing the existing Point Mast reef site in Lake Pelto is ongoing. These three inshore reef projects are slated to be constructed later this fiscal year. The Program has been conducting pre-deployment monitoring at the planned inshore project sites, and post-deployment biological monitoring at the recently enhanced Independence Island reef site.

Boating and Non-Boating Access Projects

One boating access project has been completed. Currently there is one boating access project under construction and four boating access projects in the planning and design phase. There are two fishing access project in the planning and design phase.

Commercial Seafood Programs:

Professionalism

From October 2016 to March 2017, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries and Louisiana Sea Grant continued to execute Phase II of Louisiana Fisheries Forward; mainly, the post-production of the training videos as noted below.

Phase II training videos are available on: *http://lafisheriesforward.org*.

Phase II training videos:

Best Practices for Oyster Fisherman

Best Practices for Shrimp Fisherman

Best Practices for Finfish Fisherman: (*not available – in post-production due to major edit*)

Fisheries Management and the Regulatory Process

Additionally, work continued on the production of educational materials (referred to as fast fact sheets), the offering of in-person training sessions (referred to as dock days), a refrigeration demonstration project, and the Louisiana Fisheries Forward website (*http://lafisheriesforward.org*). Within the time frame as noted above, aside from the voluntary component of Louisiana Fisheries Forward, the Commercial Crab Trap Gear Requirement

(*www.wlf.la.gov/crabtraining*) was re-activated from suspension and the Oyster Harvester Training Requirement was developed and launched (*http://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/mandatory-oyster-harvester-training*). As sidebar initiatives, materials supporting the proposed Nearshore Artificial Reef Planning Areas (*http://www.lafisheriesforward.org/artificialreef/*) and promoting meetings with the Louisiana Charter For-Hire Fishery (*http://www.lafisheriesforward.org/fisheries/charterfishing/*) were established, developed and executed as information/communications plans.

During the above noted timeframe, Louisiana Fisheries Forward launched one of two required commercial oyster fisheries trainings (Louisiana-2016-HB303, Act 276 and Act 291). Acts 276 and Acts 291, as referenced above, are now required trainings. Louisiana Fisheries Forward launched a Commercial Oyster Fisheries : http://www.lafisheriesforward.org/important-legislative-changes-to-oyster-harvest-regulations/ at the August 2016 Oyster Task Force meeting, and, to present date, continues to communicate the plan. The "communications plan" has been launched statewide.

Commercial Oyster Fisheries Trainings are available on: *http://tinyurl.com/oysterbrochure*.

By March 2017, Phase III of Louisiana Fisheries Forward is projected to be underway. Within phase III, two videos will be produced with corresponding fact sheets, several hands-on workshops will be offered to include new and trending topics and the Louisiana Fisheries Forward Refrigeration Demo Unit will travel the state - a 6,500 lb. unit that consists of a brine freezer, plate freezer and chilled water system. Additionally, within phase III, training models will be developed and launched for the commercial freshwater fisheries and charter for-hire fisheries

LDWF's intention is to give our seafood industry access and training to the latest trends, requirements and technology in their profession. The seafood industry should have as much opportunity for training as any other industry in our state - we believe it will yield higher quality products and give our seafood community a competitive advantage in the marketplace. Since the launch of Louisiana Fisheries Forward, Advancing Our Seafood Industry; this one-of-a-kind professionalism program for Louisiana's commercial fishing industry has received inquiry, acknowledgement and recognition throughout many facets of local, regional, national and world fishing industries.

Sustainability

LDWF has explored mainstream sustainability certifications for major fisheries, such as those offered by the Marine Stewardship Council. In March 2012, Louisiana's blue crab fishery became the first blue crab fishery in the world to receive Marine Stewardship Council sustainability certification. This certification ends March 2017 and the Louisiana Blue Crab Task Force has decided to forego re-certification. LDWF will therefore no longer administer the certification. However, an industry member has volunteered to renew the certification and allow it to continue to be applied to the entire Louisiana blue crab fishery. An on-site assessment visit will be conducted in February 2017.

In addition to Marine Stewardship Council certification, the Office of Fisheries has been developing a Gulf-centric sustainability certification system in partnership with the Audubon Nature Institute. The Audubon Gulf United for Lasting Fisheries (GULF) program is leading the development of this "Responsible Fisheries Management" (RFM) certification system based on the United Nations FAO and International Standards Organizations (ISO) protocols. In December 2016, the GULF RFM program was recognized by an ISO-affiliated body and the Louisiana blue crab fishery was certified to the GULF RFM program. The Louisiana oyster fishery, the other pilot fishery, is still undergoing assessment, but is expected to attain certification in spring 2017.

We are continually vetting our program with seafood buyers to ensure Louisiana seafood will have market acceptance. LDWF has engaged national retail organizations and suppliers in intense dialogue concerning sustainable seafood market needs and desires. LDWF continues active conversations with private-sector actors about "fishery improvement projects" for those Louisiana fisheries that have not taken up formal certification. In January 2016, revised pre-assessments were conducted for the Louisiana shrimp fishery according to the Audubon GULF RFM and the Marine Stewardship Council programs. Based on these pre-assessments, the Audubon Nature Institute is leading a joint fishery improvement project encompassing issues identified in both GULF pre-assessments. Following preliminary meetings among Audubon, LDWF, and potential industry participants in summer of 2016, actions taken under the FIP in fall and winter 2016 include gear compliance checks, especially turtle excluder devices, and information dissemination of tow-time restrictions for skimmer trawls. More formal discussions were initiated with the Louisiana Shrimp Task Force in November 2016. Meetings will be held in early 2017 to discuss appropriate new actions and expand participation.

Aquatic Plant Control:

Invasive aquatic weeds continue to threaten access and recreational activities throughout Louisiana. Fall surveys conducted in October-November 2016 revealed an estimated 287,709 acres of nuisance aquatic plant coverage. That total was mostly composed of water hyacinth (81,198 acres) and giant salvinia (57,138 acres). The fall surveys are conducted at the end of the growing season, and usually yield higher acreage of coverage than the spring estimates

conducted at the beginning of the growing season. In 2016, LDWF applied EPA-approved herbicides to 52,812 acres of nuisance vegetation across the state. The majority of plant control efforts focused on water hyacinth and giant salvinia, with 22,996 and 20,356 acres being treated, respectively. A major area of focus was the Terrebonne Basin which suffers from a chronic water hyacinth infestation. Approximately 9,191 acres of hyacinth in the Terrebonne marsh were treated by LDWF in 2016.

Winter temperatures and isolated flood events continue to be major factors in determining the severity of aquatic weed impacts, especially giant salvinia, in Louisiana. As of January 25, 2017, Louisiana has experienced one extreme cold event with temperatures getting below freezing for several hours. Occurrences of below freezing temperatures, for the duration of several hours, provide excellent control of aquatic vegetation. These long durations of below freezing temperatures will kill the plants and reduce the biomass going into the growing season. Drawdowns were also conducted on several waterbodies throughout Louisiana. With the combination of lower water levels and freezing temperatures, this should increase the effectiveness of the control effort. Vegetation assessments will be made in the spring and herbicide applications will be made accordingly.

Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (MDMR)

Activity Report: July 1, 2016 – December 31, 2016

Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (GSMFC)

67th Annual Spring Meeting – Gulfport, MS
March 13 - March 16, 2017

Artificial Reef Bureau

The Artificial Reef Bureau (ARB) continued monthly monitoring of fish assemblages and physiochemical parameters at selected inshore reef sites. Personnel marked and re-marked two inshore reefs to assist small boaters in locating the low-profile reefs. ARB staff also assisted the Finfish Bureau with collecting samples for the NFWF project and assisted the Shellfish bureau in building protective cages for data sondes.

In addition to monitoring artificial reefs, the ARB worked on securing and deploying more structure off the coast of Mississippi. From July through December, the ARB secured approximately 32 deliveries, totaling 502 concrete culverts. This material will be stockpiled at the Gulfport staging site for future offshore deployments.

Staff continued to side scan artificial habitat and assess reef status and location. Six inshore reef side scan projects were conducted during September and October. Staff also attended software training classes to expand capabilities relating to establishing reef status and location: 1) The R Project for Statistical Computing, 2) ArcGIS.

In August, Personnel represented the Bureau and MDMR at the Wildlife Expo in Jackson.

Lastly, the ARB is currently preparing for and working on several projects. The Coastal Conservation Association and the ARB are collaborating to deploy structure at Cat Island. ARB personnel are also negotiating and organizing the Federal Emergency Management Agency project to restore the Keys to pre-hurricane Isaac conditions. In addition to future deployments, the ARB is working on monitoring projects. These projects include the Gulf Artificial Reef Monitoring and Assessment Program, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation project, and the Mississippi Bight Lionfish Response project.

Finfish Bureau

The Finfish Bureau (FB) continued to oversee the Marine Recreational Information Program in Mississippi. Assignments from July to December were obtained, reviewed, and processed before being sent to the GSMFC office. A total of 223 assignments and 1176 surveys were completed July 1, 2016 through December 31, 2016 in Jackson, Harrison, and Hancock Counties. Survey site validations were conducted at all active sites to update the site registry for 2017 as state-wide site effort estimates continue to be refined in an effort to improve the accuracy of the survey design. The for-hire vessel frame was evaluated and edited to better reflect our most recent and updated state license file. This will allow FB staff to develop a more comprehensive and accurate active vessel frame to estimate for-hire effort more precisely.

Long term fishery independent sampling continued in conjunction with the NOAA Project "Monitoring and Assessment of Mississippi's Interjurisdictional Marine Resources." With cooperation from the Gulf Coast Research Lab (GCRL) a total of 292 otoliths were collected July 1, 2016 through December 31, 2016. Samples were collected from eleven different species: Atlantic Croaker, Black Drum, Gray Snapper, Red Drum, Sand Seatrout, Sheepshead, Southern Flounder, Southern Kingfish, Spanish Mackerel, Spotted Seatrout and Striped Mullet. Additionally, 137 samples were collected and processed as part of the MDMR biological sampling program from four species: Red Drum, Red Snapper, Southern Flounder, and Spotted Seatrout. The data collected through these programs will aid in management decisions for our state and are submitted to the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (GSMFC).

Otolith reference sets including: Red Drum, Spotted Seatrout, Striped Mullet, Southern Flounder, and Gray Triggerfish have been read and sent to their prospective locations.

Commercial landings data was collected from dealers utilizing Mississippi Trip Ticket program to monitor the quota on Red Drum, Southern Flounder, and Spotted Seatrout. FB staff continued working with commercial fisherman and dealers on trip ticket issues including lack of reporting and recording errors. 3,141 trip tickets were scanned from July 1, 2016 through December 31, 2016 and 2,991 tickets were submitted electronically. All commercial landings data collected from 2016 has been verified and sent to GSMFC. We currently have 578 active commercial fishermen and dealers participating in our trip ticket program.

FB staff continued to target Red Drum in Mississippi coastal waters as part of an ongoing research project aimed at filling in age and size information gaps of Red Drum in Mississippi waters. The Red Drum project began in February 2014 and targeted fish of sizes of 20-30 inches, however Red Drum collected from past and current monitoring projects have not captured this size range. In addition, fishery dependent samples have been collected on a voluntary basis from recreational fishermen and for-hire captains who relinquish the carcasses to MDMR staff. These samples will be used to enhance existing data sets to complete a Red Drum stock assessment currently underway. With all Red Drum processed, additional samples are collected in relation to

stomach contents (Trophic analyses), fin clips (Molecular analyses), gonad samples (histology), and otoliths (ages).

The Red Snapper reporting system "Tails n' Scales" completed a successful review of all 2016 landings for state and federal Red Snapper seasons for both private and Federal For-Hire recreational anglers. The review was conducted by NOAA and external consultant experts dealing with survey statistics. The program is currently being submitted as an application for certification.

The Mississippi Trip Ticket Program yielded 3,141 scannable tickets and 2,991 electronic tickets from July 1, 2016 through December 31, 2016.

MDMR in conjunction with GCRL have completed Year 1 for the offshore reef fish National Fish and Wildlife Foundation project. A total of 161 sites were sampled with fish and water quality samples currently being processed.

Seven recreational fishing records were approved by the CMR as state records between July 1, 2106 through December 31, 2016.

Angler	Catch Date	Common Name	Scientific Name	Weight	TL (in)	Tackle
Joey Antoon	6/11/2016	Scamp	*Mycteroperca phenax*	28lbs 4.32oz	38.50	Conv.
David Rogers	7/1/2016	Bull Shark	*Carcharhinus leucas*	203lbs	92.00	Conv.
David Rogers	7/2/2016	Tiger Shark	*Galeocerdo cuvier*	390lbs	120.00	Conv.
Mark Huffmaster	7/23/2016	Finetooth Shark	*Carcharhinus isodon*	34lbs 8.64oz	56.00	Conv.
Scott Corlew	7/26/2016	Tripletail	*Lobotes surinamensis*	24lbs 7.01oz	29.75	Fly
James S. Smith	7/30/2016	Southern Hake	*Urophycis Floridana*	1lb	14.87	Conv.
Aaron Gautier	11/6/2016	Inshore Lizardfish	*Synodus foetens*	4.416oz	10.62	Conv.

Seafood Technology Bureau

The Seafood Technology Bureau (STB) conducted 104 inspections including pre-operational, follow-up, certification, and routine inspections. STB certified five (5) new seafood processors. The required bi-annual water quality sampling for seafood processing facilities for September was completed with a total of 48 samples taken.

In August, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Molluscan Shellfish Compliance Program completed a Program Element Evaluation Review (PEER) of the Mississippi Shellfish Sanitation Program. In September, the STB received the official report from the FDA of the evaluation results. The program received a "Conformance" rating. This rating means the program meets all pertinent requirements of the National Shellfish Sanitation Program (NSSP) of the Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Conference (ISSC). In September, the STB received the official *Vibrio* Evaluation from the FDA conducted in March 2016. The evaluation found no compliance deficiencies.

December 19, 2016, STB confiscated 15 trays of individual quick frozen (IQF) oysters from a retailer. The trays were confiscated due to no tags or labels being affixed to the product. In compliance with the ISSC NSSP STB conducted several illness investigations. None of the illnesses were epidemiologically linked to ingestion of Mississippi harvested oysters.

In December one of the STB Seafood Officers successfully completed State Standardized Officer (SSO) certification with FDA Shellfish Specialist Earnest "Buddy" Levins. This certification is good for the next five (5) years.

In October 2016, the 2016-2017 Mississippi oyster season began. Due to warmer weather in October, Mississippi enacted a *Vibrio* Management Plan for the month. This plan contains time/temperature requirements for oyster processing. Processors were required to cool shellstock received from harvesters to 55°F within ten (10) hours. In preparation for these requirements STB conducted hands-on trainings with each primary processor. This training included an overview of the plan requirements, harvester/processor responsibility, and record requirements. Staff conducted on-site technical assistance visits to assist in time/temperature compliance.

In 2015, the NSSP published guidance documents assisting dealers in meeting the *Vibrio* management plan time/temperature requirements. The guidance documents detail a study that processors can conduct to validate their equipment. STB staff assisted a processor in October in conducting this validation study. STB staff is planning additional validation experimentation for the spring of 2017.

In November, STB staff conducted an audit of the October harvest to ensure Vibrio management plan time/temperature compliance. The audit discovered significant improvements in compliance compared to historical Vibrio management plan harvests. This improvement can be directly attributed to the hands-on training provided prior to the beginning of the season and the on-site technical assistant visits.

In 2013 STB staff completed Association of Food and Drug Officials (AFDOSS) Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) trainer certification. Since that time staff have HACCP certified 182 people. Over half of the certified seafood processors in Mississippi have personnel that received HACCP training from STB staff. In September, a STB staff member traveled to the AFDOSS conference in Gatlinburg, Tennessee.

STB in collaboration with the FDA, conducted two HACCP workshops. The workshops were held free of charge for Mississippi residents. The HACCP workshops were made possible through a grant from the Mississippi Tidelands Trust Fund Program FY 2009 which is administered by the Mississippi Secretary of State's Office and the MDMR. A total of 27 students attended HACCP.

STB is currently undertaking a historical data project of ten (10) years of inspection data. STB will utilize the data to create historical timelines. The data will also be analyzed and will serve as training tools. Each processor will be analyzed individually showcasing trends of deficiencies noted during inspections over time. It is anticipated that trends will show the STB areas that need improvement for each individual processor. These trends will assist in creating individually targeted hands-on trainings to be conducted during inspections by STB staff.

Shellfish Bureau

The Shellfish Bureau opened the Mississippi 2017 Oyster Season on October 3, 2016 by approving the harvest of shellfish from growing area waters Area I and II. Commercial and recreational harvesting was allowed within the growing waters of I "B", II "H and II I" and the Conditionally Approved waters of II "A", II "B", II "D", II "E", II "F" and II "G" all of which is in the Western Mississippi Sound. The daily sack limit for commercial oyster tonging is 15 sacks and 25 sacks for dredging.

The MDMR Shellfish Bureau opened Biloxi Bay for recreational and commercial tonging on November 5, 2016. This was the first-time oysters growing waters from Area V had been classified for harvest in 30 years. The Bureau had been investigating the reclassification of this area since February 2016 by analysis water quality and rain fall data recorded at the Keesler Air Force Base in Biloxi, MS. The data suggested some of the growing waters of Area V could be upwardly classified to Conditionally Approved following a 1-inch rain fall management plan. In August, the Shellfish Bureau met with the FDA Shellfish Specialist who agreed some of Area V's oyster growing waters should be reclassified to Conditionally Approved Status. All required documents were updated reflecting the new area classification including, the Sanitary Survey document, establishing harvest boundaries, Area V classification revision in Title 22 Part 1 and the publication of an Area V harvest zone classification map.

The Shellfish Bureau has team up with the Artificial Reef Bureau to conduct an in-depth field investigation of a potential West Pascagoula oyster reef resource. A preliminary investigation by shellfish staff was completed on an oyster resource using a standard sample dredge (Figure 1). It has been determined that Side Scan Sonar (SSS) imaging of the West Pascagoula oyster reef would be the proper technique to generate a clearer picture of the actual oyster resource, and in the selection of additional water quality sample stations necessary to ensure proper management of the resource and safe shellfish consumption by consumers.

The Shellfish Bureau has begun a preliminary field investigation into unexplained elevated fecal coliform levels within St. Martin and Davis bayous when no meteorological event had occurred for several days. Additional water quality sample locations have been established and are currently being schedule to be collected under wet and dry conditions. Dry conditions are defined as no rain for 5 days before collection of sample. The bureau is hoping the data collected from these new water quality stations will help in discovery of actual pollution "hot spots" not previously identified.

All three rounds of the 2016 Shellfish Square Meter Dive Assessments were completed for Pass Christian Dredging Reef, Pass Christian Tonging Reef, Pass Marianne, Telegraph and Henderson Point and Back Bay Biloxi totaling 350 dives.

For fiscal 2017, Mississippi's Shellfish Sanitation Compliance Program, and the *Vibrio vulnificus* Management Plan were both found meeting all standards and guidelines of the Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Compliance (ISSC) program.

Shrimp and Crab Bureau Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (MDMR)

Preliminary reports for 2016 show 7.61 million pounds of shrimp (all species head-on) landed in Mississippi with a dockside value of $15.2 million. Shrimp landings decreased from the 2015 season (9.1 million lbs.). Preliminary Blue Crab landings for 2016 were 881,753 pounds, an increase from the 2015 season (816,252 lbs.) with a dockside value of $1.03 million. Overall 15 live bait dealers, 11 live bait vessels and 8 live bait transport vehicles were licensed and inspected.

Mississippi does not anticipate an organized derelict crab trap clean-up in 2017, however MDMR staff is continuing to remove derelict traps and is currently investigating the use of side-scan sonar to locate and remove submerged traps in the Mississippi Sound. MDMR passed into regulation the mandatory use of crab trap escape rings in all crab traps fished in Mississippi territorial waters beginning January 1, 2017. Utilizing NOAA Disaster Recovery funds from the 2011 opening of the Bonnet Carré spillway, the MDMR has been able to provide 34,868 crab trap escape rings and 3,792 terrapin excluder devices to resident crab fishermen at no cost.

Long term fishery independent trawl sampling continued in conjunction with the NOAA Project "Monitoring and Assessment of Mississippi's Interjurisdictional Marine Resources."

Cooperation with the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory (GCRL) on commercial and recreational Blue Crab Catch per Unit Effort projects is also ongoing. Bureau personnel coordinated and administered U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Sport Fish Restoration Projects, issued Scientific Collection Permits per Title 22 Part 18, and inspected and licensed Live Bait Camps and vessels per Title 22 Part 6.

Alabama State Report to the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission
Spring 2017

Fisheries Section

Alabama Marine Resources Division (AMRD) has received National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) funding through 2018. Projects will supplement SEAMAP Trawl, vertical line and bottom long line, acoustic tagging of estuarine fish, the mariculture of red drum, Florida pompano, and southern flounder, at-sea observations for charter boats, red snapper reporting, red snapper tagging, habitat mapping (inshore and offshore), gut content processing, ageing, providing histological and fecundity samples to Gulf Coast Research Laboratory, water quality monitoring, baitfish survey, skimmer trawl survey, and commercial blue crab observer trips.

An oyster management station was utilized to monitor the commercial harvest of oysters from public oyster reefs from November 1, 2016 through December 23, 2016. Alabama waters were open to harvest for 37 working days. A total of 1,280 sacks of oysters were harvested.

In Spring 2016, the AMRD amended the scope of work, project budget, and duration of the NFWF project entitled "Restoration and Enhancement of Oyster Reefs in Alabama" to include the remote setting of oysters. The construction and setup of remote setting tanks and oyster shell cages was completed at AMRD's Dauphin Island facility in order to receive oyster larvae from the Auburn Shellfish Laboratory (AUSL) in June. After several unsuccessful spawning attempts, the AUSL was able to provide oyster larvae on August 5 and two successful deployments of spat on shell occurred on August 23 and October 3, 2016. Following the deployment on October 3, the set tanks were made ready to accept new larvae from the AUSL. Several attempts were made to produce viable larvae but were not successful. The AUSL advised AMRD biologists on November 28, 2016 that spawning attempts were done for the year. The AUSL is diligently trying to determine the cause of the larval mortality issues. The AMRD and the AUSL will be prepared to begin remote setting again during the 2nd quarter of 2017.

In addition to the annual quadrat oyster reef surveys that were completed between July 15 and August 15, 2016, the AMRD conducted three supplemental quadrat surveys on October 18 and October 20 to assess the condition of the oyster reefs just prior to the opening of the harvest season. The surveyed sites included a Heron Bay reef planted in 2014, a Cedar Point West reef planted in 2016, as well as a comparative reef in Portersville Bay. A total of 60 samples were collected and processed to assess the density of spat, sublegal oysters, harvestable oysters, cultch, and oyster drills and to determine if significant siltation had occurred in these areas. The results of these quadrat samples showed similar oyster and cultch densities to those collected between July and August of 2016 and that no significant mortality had occurred on these reefs.

AMRD biologists participated in 17 observer trips on five commercial blue crab vessels working in upper Mobile Bay, Portersville Bay, and the Perdido and Wolf Bay waterways between May 25 and November 23, 2016. For all trips combined, a total of 1,305 of 2,760 (47%) crab traps fished were sampled and 5,834 individual blue crabs were sexed and measured. External parasites and any abnormalities found on sampled crabs were documented and bycatch was recorded. Twenty (20) crabs were randomly selected and retained during each trip for a

combined total of 340 crabs retained during the reporting period. Selected crabs were kept on ice (for up to 24 hours post-collection) until they were measured, weighed, and examined to verify sexual maturity, the presence of internal/external parasites, and for other abnormalities.

The AMRD continued surveying historical oyster reef locations in Mobile Bay using sidescan sonar to determine possible locations for active oyster reefs. To date, over 7 mi^2 of water bottoms identified as have been surveyed. Several areas of potential hard substrate have been identified and ground-truthing is being conducted to verify if live oysters exist in these areas or if the suspect area is just a remnant of a past reef.

Hatchery activities continued at the Claude Peteet Mariculture Center (CPMC) with work pertaining to red drum, Florida pompano, and southern flounder. An estimated 40,000 one inch long and 400 (130 tagged) six to eight inch long red drum were released; 400 were retained at CPMC for additional grow-out and future tagging. Cooperative work concerning Florida pompano with Auburn University continues using the experimental drug Ovaplant. Two spawning events in October were unsuccessful; the next spawning event is scheduled for March.

SEAMAP activities completed all vertical and bottom longline stations. Atlantic sharpnose and blacktip sharks were the most abundant species encountered on the bottom longline. Vertical line sampling activities completed twenty-three stations during fall sampling events with four species being collected. Red snapper was the species most frequently encountered. The fall trawl cruise was cancelled due to engine failure on the sampling vessel; scheduled stations were sampled by other SEAMAP partners.

The latest cycle for the Biological Sampling Program, funded by the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, began August 2016 and will end March 2017. From August 1, 2016 through January 31, 2017, a total of 873 measurements representing 23 species of fish and 666 otoliths (49% commercial and 51% recreational) from 17 species of fish were collected by AMRD staff. Recreational otolith targets have been met for six of the 13 primary and secondary priority target species while commercial otolith targets for four of nine primary and secondary priority species have been met. Otoliths for most of the species collected during 2016 will be aged by AMRD staff by April 2017.

AMRD continues collection of dockside Access Point Angler Intercept Survey interviews and validation of charter vessels in 2017. From September through December 2016, AMRD APAIS samplers completed a total of 182 assignments interviewing 713 anglers. Training and fish tests will be given this spring.

AMRD continues to register anglers in the Angler Registry Program. Anglers who not required to purchase a license must register annually with AMRD if they intend to fish in Alabama's waters or transit through Alabama's waters in possession of fish. Exempted individuals such as lifetime license holders and residents over the age of 64 receive the angler registry at no cost. Preliminary (unaudited) license information for the 2016 license year indicated resident anglers 65 years or older comprised 8.2% of all licensed anglers (resident and non-resident and registered anglers combined).

The third year of the Snapper Check program was completed in 2016. Red snapper landed in Alabama caught on recreational vessels are required to be reported prior to fish being taken ashore. A total of 5,836 vessel reports with red snapper landings were submitted to Snapper Check. Preliminary 2016 Snapper Check landings totals were estimated to be 1,558,834 lbs; 1,338,449 lbs reported during the federal season and 220,385 lbs reported during the state season. Landings for charter and private vessels were estimated to be 737,067 lbs and 821,767 lbs, respectively. AMRD staff continue to work through the certification process with NOAA Fisheries' MRIP staff in order to have the Snapper Check program certified for use by federal fisheries managers in the future.

Inshore reefing projects during 2016 resulted in the construction of two new inshore reefs in Mobile Bay, one near Point Clear and the other near Fort Morgan, as well as, the enhancement of 13 existing inshore reefs. The 9.7 acre reef near Point Clear was constructed with 9,710 tons of 3" X 6" limestone aggregate; six (6) USCG approved lighted pilings mark its perimeter. The 3.6 acre reef north of the Fort Morgan was constructed with 5,490 tons of 3" X 6" limestone aggregate; four (4) USCG approved lighted pilings mark its perimeter. A total of 26,460 tons of 3" X 6" limestone aggregate was deployed to enhance eleven of the existing inshore fishing reefs covering a total of approximately 22 acres. Two inshore fishing reefs sited on approximately 21 acres of historic oyster bottoms were enhanced with 9,102 tons of #2 limestone aggregate. In total, $2,197,922 were invested in inshore reef construction projects during 2016.

A USACE permit to construct new inshore reefs in Mississippi Sound and Pelican Bay has been acquired; a $400,000 contract has been awarded to construct the reefs. A total of 132 pedestal-style, low-profile anchored reef modules will be deployed to enhance approximately 24 acres of water bottoms. Construction is expected to begin in February 2017.

The AMRD continues to create reef fish habitats within the nearshore area offshore of Alabama (Gulf beach to 9 miles offshore). A USACE application to create new artificial reef zones within 6-9 miles submitted in May 2014 is still pending authorization. An Endangered Species Act (ESA), Section 7 consultation with NMFS has been completed and a National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), Section 106 cultural resources remote sensing survey is currently being conducted.

A USACE permit application to construct 3 circalittoral reef areas has been submitted and AMRD is waiting on ESA and NHPA concurrence. Each of the 3 proposed circalittoral reef areas are approximately 8 acres in size with depths ranging from 8 feet to 23 feet.

In addition to seeking authorization to develop additional reef zones in the nearshore waters offshore of Alabama, the AMRD has constructed 25 new reef sites using 125 pedestal-style, low-profile anchored reef modules. Juvenile gray triggerfish and red snapper have been observed using these reef modules deployed approximately 3 miles offshore of Baldwin County. Additional habitat in the same general area, therefore, should increase the production potential in these waters.

Alabama continues to develop the Rigs-to-Reefs program. The jacket of the MP 255 platform was cut approximately 90 feet below sea level and reefed on site in approximately 333 feet of

water 54 nm south of Fort Morgan. Also, the jacket of the MP 261 platform is scheduled for reefing later in 2017. The top section of MP 261 will be cut at 110 feet and placed approximately 50 nm south of Dauphin Island in the Tatum-Winn North Artificial Reef Zone.

Modular concrete units and "materials of opportunity" were utilized to create and enhance numerous offshore reefs. Eleven existing reef sites were enhanced with 36 inch and 48 inch culvert pipe, large manholes and box culverts. Additionally, a "scattered" reef was created with the concrete materials of opportunity. The "scattered" reef was created by placing culverts/manholes in small piles approximately 20 feet from one another within a single 650 feet diameter area. Fifty 25 feet tall concrete and limestone pyramids were similarly deployed to enhance existing reefs and construct new reef sites. Previously deployed pyramids of this size appear to be utilized by a more diverse reef fish assemblage compared to smaller versions of the same design, therefore, constructing additional reefs with these large pyramids could result in a more stable reef community. The large pyramid modules were utilized to construct 17 new reef sites containing 2 modules per site and a single pyramid was deployed at 16 existing reef sites where the previous structure had subsided or was reaching the end of its usable life.

Alabama Power Company, Cooper T. Smith, and the Alabama Wildlife Federation donated resources to construct a large artificial reef approximately 25 nm offshore of Alabama. The reef was constructed with two 18 feet x 40 feet boilers placed inside of a 195 feet x 35 feet hopper barge.

A pre-bid meeting for the construction of a shipwreck reef was held during February. The project has a $1,000,000 budget. The winning contractor will be selected based upon the largest, most complex shipwreck proposed within the budgeted amount.

New members have enrolled in AMRD's Adopt-a-Reef program and 52 reports have been submitted to the online database. Currently, Adopt-a-Reef volunteers receive a tee shirt or a visor each time a report is submitted. Reports include information such as subsidence, the structural integrity of the reef, lionfish abundance and removals, and the degree of anthropogenic fouling.

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 www.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 Director Chris Blankenship.

Enforcement Section

From August 1, 2016 – December 31, 2016 AMRD enforcement officers conducted 1,847 commercial fishermen intercepts, 7,499 recreational fishermen intercepts, inspected 456 seafood shops or processor; conducted 5,292 patrol hours, and 2,975 vessel boardings.

The Enforcement Section hired 3 new officers that completed the Law Enforcement Academy in December 2016. This brings the total to 18 officers and that is the most number of officers employed at one time in over 20 years.

AMRD officers continued their partnership with Bryant High School in Bayou La Batre and Baker High School in Mobile-in their Career Academy programs. The programs are designed to introduce students to different career opportunities in the marine community. One JROTC cadet was selected for the first ever internship with law enforcement in the Mobile County Public School System.

Florida TCC Report

Commercial Fishery

The two-year process to move the Marine Fisheries Information System (MFIS) which houses Florida's commercial fisheries trip ticket data to SQL Server was completed in 2016. Some refinements to table structures continue as we prepare for the new online wholesale dealer reporting application to be developed. Currently, along with Texas, Florida has agreed to assist in testing the new system which will replace the desktop versions in use by wholesale dealers to report electronically. Currently, 2016 commercial landings information is mostly complete and is expected to be complete by April, 2017 but subject to revision. As of February 24, almost 80% of the 2016 trip records received for 2016 were electronic, and accounted for 85% of species records. FWC is researching ways to improve the attractiveness of electronic reporting to wholesale dealers. The use of swipe card technology to initiate a trip ticket report is currently being investigated.

In 2016, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission staff that participate in the NOAA Fisheries Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) Trip Interview Program (TIP) sampling of commercial catches on the Gulf coast of Florida, accounted for 818 TIP interviews, more than 30,000 biological samples and almost 19,000 age structures. TIP sampling in Florida is funded from a variety of funding sources that include: State of Florida, NOAA Fisheries, GulfFIN and NFWF.

Recreational Fishery

NOAA Fisheries Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) sampling conducted by FWC accounted for more than 32,000 Access Point Angler Intercept Survey (APAIS) intercepts in 2016. In addition to the APAIS, FWC is also running the catch and effort components of the Gulf Reef Fish Survey (GRFS) to complement MRIP. 2016 was the first complete year of data for the survey which began in mid 2015. Anglers that wish to fish for a suite of reef fish species are required to sign up for the GRFS and in doing so are eligible for selection in a monthly mail survey to obtain information on fishing effort. The GRFS catch survey draw is conducted as a component of the MRIP APAIS "offshore" stratum. FWC is working with NOAA Fisheries to conduct the assignment draws and to refine the estimation process. It is anticipated that the survey and estimation methodologies will be submitted for MRIP certification in 2017.

Information on the sizes and disposition/release condition of recreational discards was collected form more than 500 for-hire trips made in the Gulf of Mexico in 2016. From those trips, more than 9,000 reef fish were tagged, over 4,200 age structures were collected for processing and measurements from almost 18,000 released fish were made. More than 4,900 fish harvested from those trips received evaluated by our Fish Health group for abnormalities, lesions, parasite load and other health related parameters. Trip locations sampled for Florida's Gulf of Mexico headboat and charter fleets are presented in figures 1 and 2, respectively.

More than 45,000 biosamples representative of recreational and commercial fisheries in 2016, were recorded in the newly developed FWC Fisheries Dependent Monitoring *Biostat* database. The database was developed in part with funding from FIN with goals of improving compatibility with the FIN database and linking to project/program specific associated data fields not housed in the FIN database. Rigorous quality assurance checks are being developed for data contained in the FDM *Biostat* database with efforts concentrating on the past five years first and earlier years later.

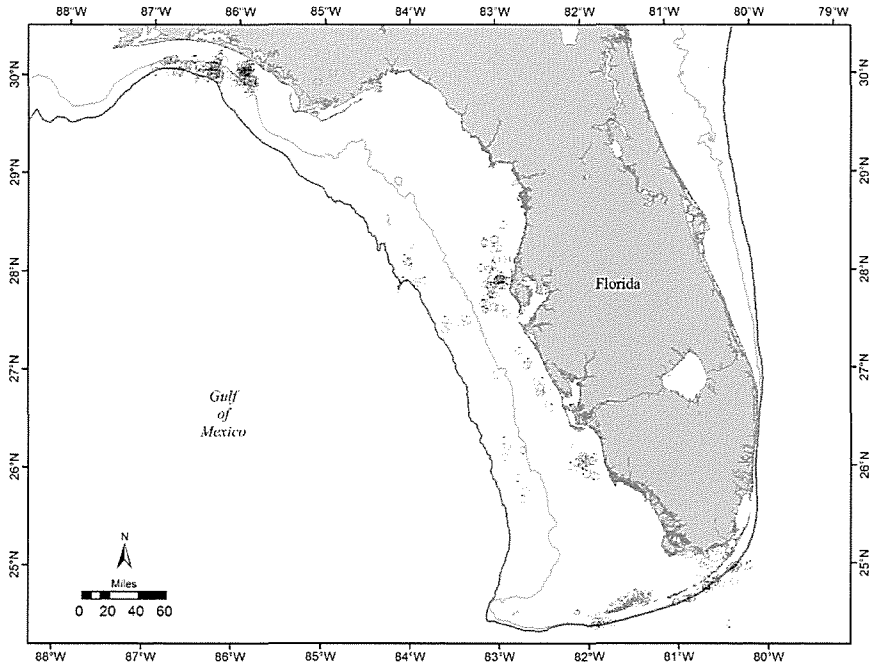

Figure 1. Distribution of 2016 at-sea sampled trip locations for the Florida West coast headboat fleet.

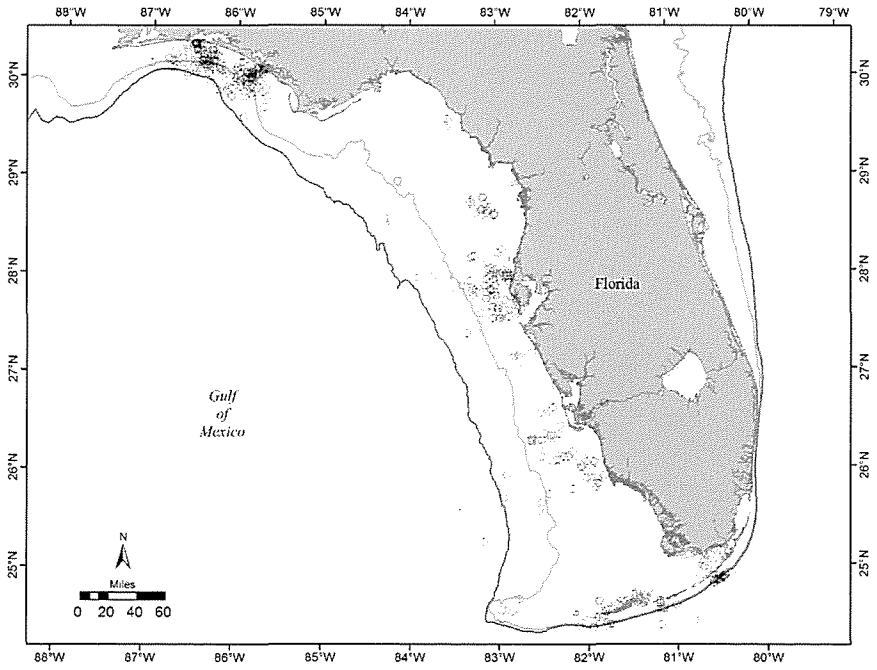

Figure 2. Distribution of 2016 at-sea sampled trip locations for the Florida West coast charter fleet.

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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
Wednesday, August 16, 2017
Meeting Summary

The meeting was called to order at 1:30 p.m. with the following members and others present:

Members
Mark Lingo, TPWD, Austin, TX
Jamie Miller, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Chris Blankenship, ADCNR, Montgomery, AL
Daniel Ellinor, FFWC, Tallahassee, FL

Staff
Dave Donaldson, GSMFC Executive Director, Ocean Springs, MS
Angie Rabideau, GSMFC Staff Accountant, Ocean Springs, MS

Others
Paul Mickle, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Kacey Williams, MDMR, Biloxi, MS

Review and Approval of the Standard Operating Procedures for Cash Management and Accounting Practices and Subrecipient Monitoring Policy

D. Donaldson stated that the Commission needs to approve some additions to the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (GSMFC) Administrative Manual related to the NOAA AG audit regarding the Emergency Disaster Recovery Program (EDRP) grant and subaward with the State of Mississippi. He stated that there are two procedures that need to be approved: 1) Standard Operating Procedures for Cash Management and Accounting Practices and 2) Subrecipient Monitoring Policy. Both documents were distributed to the Committee prior to the call for their review. The Committee first addressed the Standard Operating Procedures for Cash Management and Accounting Practices. The Committee reviewed the document and after some discussion, **D. Ellinor moved to accept the Standard Operating Procedures for Cash Management and Accounting Practices and include them into the GSMFC Administrative Manual as part of the Commission's policies and operating procedures. The motion was seconded by C. Blankenship and it passed unanimously**. Next, the Committee reviewed the Subrecipient Monitoring Policy and after some discussion, **C. Blankenship moved to accept the Subrecipient Monitoring Policy and include it into the GSMFC Administrative Manual as part of the Commission's policies operating procedures. The motion was seconded by D. Ellinor and it passed**

unanimously. By the Committee's acceptance and passage of these motions, these policies and procedures become part of the GSMFC's operating practices, effective immediately.

Being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 1:44 p.m.

COBIA TECHNICAL TASK FORCE
MEETING MINUTES
August 29, 2017
New Orleans, LA

Moderator VanderKooy called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. with the following in attendance:

Chuck Adams, Florida Sea Grant, Gainesville, FL
Rusty Pittman, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Krista Shipley, FWC, Tallahassee, FL
John Pituch, LDWF, New Orleans, LA
Ryan Easton, TPWD, Port O'Connor, TX (via Webinar)
Jim Franks, GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Josh Neese, ADCNR, Gulf Shores, AL
John Anderson, GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Steve VanderKooy, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Debbie McIntyre, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Introductions and Housekeeping

S. VanderKooy, IJF Program Coordinator, opened the meeting and introductions were made. Because Hurricane Harvey was threatening the Gulf Coast and out of concern for the meeting attendees' safety, the meeting material was condensed and expedited to include those areas most pertinent to getting the Task Force familiar with the project at hand and assigning tasks to members.

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

Interjurisdictional Program Overview and Profile/FMP Process

VanderKooy explained that the task force is typically made up of five scientific representatives (one from each Gulf state), a recreational/commercial fishery representative, an economist, a habitat representative, and a law enforcement representative. When it is deemed necessary by the task force, another member may be added to the group.

VanderKooy presented an overview of the Interjurisdictional Fisheries (IJF) Program and Commission development process for FMPs and profiles. The IJF Program is authorized through the Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act of 1986 (Public Law 99-659, Title III). The purpose of the Act was to promote and encourage state activities in support of management of IJF resources identified in profiles and interstate FMPs. The Act also promotes and encourages management of IJF resources throughout their range.

In order to alleviate confusion with the federal definition of essential fish habitat and its associated requirements, profiles and plans developed under the Commission program utilize the term "essential habitat."

The development of profiles and plans begins with species prioritization. The State-Federal Fisheries Management Committee (S-FFMC) accomplishes this task and establishes a technical task force (TTF) to review all technical material, draft a document incorporating current biological, sociological, economic, and fishery information. The TTF shall also provide management scenarios based on this information.

The TTF is composed of a core group of scientists from each Gulf state and is appointed by the respective state directors that serve on the S-FFMC. Also, a TTF member from each of the following GSMFC committees or subcommittees (Law Enforcement, Habitat, Commercial Fisheries Advisory, and Recreational Fisheries Advisory) is appointed by the respective committee. In addition, the TTF may include other experts in economics, socio-anthropology, population dynamics, and other specialty areas when needed. The TTF is responsible for development of the profiles and plans and receives input in the form of data and other information from the DMS and the SAT.

The Interjurisdictional Fisheries (IJF) fishery management plan (FMP)/profile development and review program of the GSMFC provided the Gulf states with quality information and recommendations for interstate management of fisheries. This information is continually being used by the states in their respective programs. During 2015, the GSMFC revised the IJF program to allow for development of additional documents to include a Biological Profile and a Management Profile, in addition to the FMP.

A **Biological Profile** contains the elements related to the species itself (biology and habitat) and a brief overview of the fisheries that exist in each state (landings, effort, economics, and a description of participation). This option is provided when biological or fisheries data is limited or unavailable to provide any type of evaluation of the fishery or population. Research and data needs will be highlighted and presented for state agency consideration.

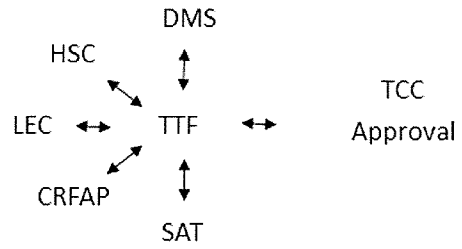
A **Management Profile** contains the same elements as the Biological Profile plus the addition of any state information related to the stock status but not a regional stock assessment. The Management Profile will identify research and data needs as well as management considerations which are optional for the states should a need arise to change existing management scenarios or to conduct a stock assessment for the resource in the future.

A **Fishery Management Plan** is the final option should a state or particular sector within the fishing community request a formal stock assessment be facilitated by the GSMFC. Along with a regional assessment will be recommendations on management goals and objectives as well as a suite of potential biological reference points for management which are available to the state as options.

In March 2015, the GSMFC approved a modification to the IJF review process for all current and future documents to include a combined S-FFMC and GSMFC Commission review. This allows

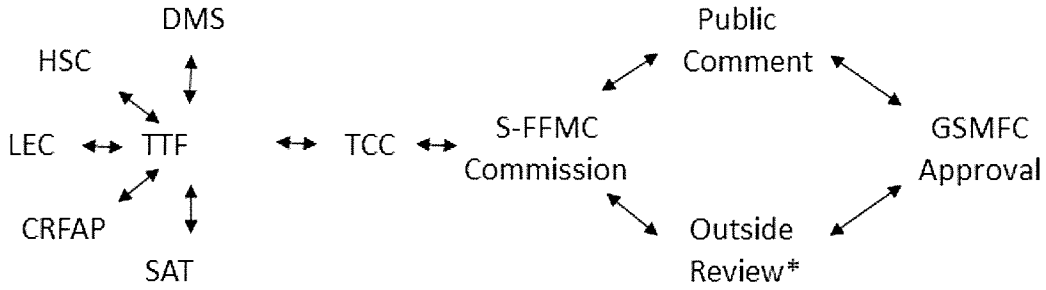
the group to review any input received during the public comment period as well as those offered during the GSMFC business session prior to taking any final action. In March 2016, the review was further revised to reduce the review for Biological and Management Profiles for final approval by the TCC rather than the Commission. As there are no management recommendations in either profile format, it is not necessary to go through a public comment period and review by the Commissioners, streamlining and speeding up the approval process. The two processes are now as follows:

Biological and Management Profiles



DMS = Data Management Subcommittee
SAT = Stock Assessment Team
HSC = Habitat Subcommittee
LEC = Law Enforcement Committee
CRFAP = Comm/Rec Fishery Advisory Committee
TTF = Technical Task Force
TCC = Technical Coordinating Committee

Fishery Management Plans



DMS = Data Management Subcommittee
SAT = Stock Assessment Team
HSC = Habitat Subcommittee
LEC = Law Enforcement Committee
CRFAP = Comm/Rec Fishery Advisory Committee
TTF = Technical Task Force

TCC = Technical Coordinating Committee
S-FFMC = State-Federal Fisheries Management Committee
GSMFC = Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission
*Outside Review = standing committees, trade associations, general public

It was explained that the management unit will be Gulf and all of Florida, both coasts.

VanderKooy pointed out that there is a lot of information available about this primarily

recreational fishery. Many tagging studies have been done, specifically by **Franks**, who has years and years of tag returns. In addition, there is good age and growth information available for Cobia.

VanderKooy reviewed some of the Gulf total landings and stated that the population status in the last stock assessment revealed concern over Gulf population. A full benchmark assessment will be completed in 2019 by the Gulf Council through SEDAR, and by July/August of 2018, the TTF should have a final draft available to assist the assessment in 2019.

Word files from the Tripletail document have been provided as an example and will serve as a template for the Cobia Profile. As both species are pelagic primarily and migratory, there will be a lot of overlap.

Table of Contents/Assignments

VanderKooy explained that the table of contents will serve as a means to divide up assignments and, in some cases, deadlines. TTF members volunteered to take responsibility for sections as the Table of Contents was discussed. These assignments are attached to these minutes.

A sociologist and a recreational fisherman may be added to this group.

There will also be an electronic library available. There is a bibliography search on the GSMFC website which provides a vast amount of information – all things fishery-related. **VanderKooy** gave the group instructions on how to use this database. Everyone was advised that if any explanation of how to use the website is needed to please contact **VanderKooy**. A PDF or hard copy can also be made available upon request. The group was instructed that, when writing individual sections, they should not cite things on someone else's citing but should cite the original research. Do not use "as cited by so and so." Get PDFs for all of the literature you use. Everyone can share these working files with others.

Everyone was encouraged to make notes as they compile their sections regarding data needs and gaps. Those notes will form the basis of the data needs chapter.

Task Force Dropbox

VanderKooy reviewed available data he had and explained that a Dropbox has been provided for use by the TTF to share literature, upload current drafts, and provide reviews of other sections when appropriate. **VanderKooy** will add east Florida data to the commercial and recreational landings Excel file. **Shipley** will add ASMFC FMP. Recreational data is needed from TX survey and some from LA creel which **Easton** and **Pituch** will provide.

Next Meeting

VanderKooy suggested another meeting in early December, possibly on Dauphin Island. It is hoped that at least some strawman of drafts will be ready by that time.

VanderKooy will send out template and assignments and asked that all respond to Doodle polls and each other's emails. He instructed everyone to attach citations to all drafts so that we do not have to search at the end for random papers.

Election of Chair

*A motion was made by **Adams** to have **VanderKooy** serve as TTF moderator. **Shipley** seconded.* The motion passed unanimously.

***Adams** motioned that the meeting be adjourned with a second by **Shipley**.* The meeting adjourned at 11:30 a.m. due to the inclement weather and approaching Hurricane Harvey.

Attachment: Table of Contents/Assignments

APPROVED BY:
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

TCC CRAB SUBCOMMITTEE MINUTES
October 17, 2017
Mobile, Alabama

Chairman **Burris** called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. with the following in attendance:

Members
Jeffrey Marx, LDWF, New Iberia, LA
Harriet Perry, USM/GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Ryan Gandy, FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Rick Burris, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Craig Newton (Proxy for Jason Herrmann), AMRD, Dauphin Island, AL
Glen Sutton, TPWD, Dickinson, TX

Others
Zach Darnell, USM/GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Julie Lively, LA SEAGRANT, Baton Rouge, LA
Corky Perret, Poplarville, MS
Dan Ellinor, FWC, Tallahassee, FL, *GSMFC Commissioner*
Laura Picariello, Audubon Nature Institute, New Orleans, LA
Paul Mickle, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Adam Kemberling, GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Meg Oshima, GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Robert Leaf, USM/GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Tracy Floyd, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Jack Husley, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Benny Gallaway, College Station, TX
Ryan Bradley, MSCFU, Long Beach, MS
Ashford Rosenberg, G.U.L.F, New Orleans, LA
Harron Wise, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Claire Crowley, FWC, St. Petersburg, FL
Tom Wagner, TPWD, Rockport, TX

Staff
Steve VanderKooy, GSMFC Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Debbie McIntyre, GSMFC Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS

Introductions
VanderKooy addressed housekeeping issues with those present. Chairman **Burris** led the audience and the committee members in introductions.

Adoption of Agenda
Gandy *moved to adopt the agenda with the addition of the introduction of* ***Dr. Robert Leaf*** *and* ***Ms. Meg Oshima*** *under other business.* ***Perry*** *seconded the motion, and the agenda was adopted.*

Approval of Minutes

The Subcommittee reviewed their minutes from the meeting held on October 12, 2016, in New Orleans, Louisiana. ***Gandy*** *moved to accept the minutes as written,* ***Marx*** *seconded, and the minutes were approved unanimously.*

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Summary of Latest Genetics on Gulf Blue Crabs

Gandy presented the latest summary on ongoing genetics of blue crabs. There is a good chance that future assessments will need to consider a single stock rather than the east/west division we used in the benchmark assessment GDAR01. The stock was divided at the Florida/Alabama line but recent work suggests that there is much more homogeneity of the stocks across the Gulf and may even include part of the south Atlantic. Dr. Joel Anderson is conducting work currently at TPWD using data from the entire Gulf and other work has suggested that the geologic break around Cape San Blas, Florida may not be accurate. As results come in, it was agreed that this committee should invite Dr. Anderson to come and present to group.

Diamondback Terrapin Status

VanderKooy reminded all that tomorrow there will be a General Session on "*Terrapins & Crab Traps*". The intention is to bring together researchers from the Crab Subcommittee and the Diamondback Terrapin Workgroup. A good attendance is anticipated as well as remote participation by webinar.

Blue Crab Tagging in the Gulf of Mexico

Darnell presented the most current results of the external tagging study which is examining migration of female crabs in the Gulf. To date they have wired tagged over 12,500 mature female crabs from Florida to Texas since March 2016. Approximately 2,500 recaptures have been reported, which is a 20.1% recapture rate. While many crabs were recaptured within the first 30 days, several crabs have been at liberty longer with one crab recaptured nearly 500 days from tagging. Distances traveled are still being calculated but range were from 0 – 446.23 km with a mean of 20.07 km. Tagging will continue through next summer. It is hoped that crabs recaptured offshore will provide critical information to the escapement of mature females out of the fishing grounds. Preliminary analysis indicates that the females offshore are healthy and still producing sponges supporting the hypothesis of a large spawning population away from the estuaries contributing to the overall reproduction in the Gulf.

Update on Crab Monitoring in the Gulf Specific to Resource Management

Perry noted discrepancies between the larval settlement data and juvenile/adult indices in Mississippi. She is finding record numbers of megalopal settlement yet there is no translation to juveniles in the fishery independent data. Despite this, they are still able to maintain average harvest levels. She is interested in what the other states are seeing. This will likely play into a new benchmark assessment for the Gulf. While it is not clear what other factors may be playing into blue crab abundances, it is hoped that we may find some answers by the time we re-examine the stock status.

Derelict Trap Cleanups

Each state reported on their respective derelict trap clean-ups.

TPWD reported that a trap removal is planned for February 2018 during which the fishery will be closed for 10 days.

LDWF had closure of fishery over a course of 30 days during which time 5,674 traps were retrieved. In 2018, a huge effort is anticipated.

MDMR did not have a closure/cleanup in 2017, however, staff continued to monitor and retrieved 82 derelict traps during the year.

AMRD had a volunteer day on March 25 during which time 84 derelict traps were removed. They have funding to cover blue crab derelict crab trap removal through spring 2019.

Florida has gone to an alternating coast cycle for crab trap removals and 2017 focused on the Gulf, where a total of 480 derelict traps were removed this past year.

State Reports

The state representatives on the subcommittee had provided written reports prior to the meeting so it was agreed that they would only mention some of the state highlights.

Gandy indicated that Florida's blue crab landings through 2016 suggest a continuation of landings volume below its historic average due to a negative trend since 2000. The value for hard and softshell blue crab was stable from 2012 through 2014 and increased during 2015 with a sharp decrease in 2016. Florida Gulf catch per trip for hard and softshell blue crabs is also in decline. Florida does not collect recreational blue crab data.

Newton (proxy for Jason Herrmann) reported that Alabama's 2016 data indicates that 1.9M lbs of blue crab were landed in 2016 for value of $1.8M. 2017 data is still preliminary. With funding from NFWF, AMRD biologists are collecting commercial blue crab catch data through observer trips which will continue through 2019.

Burris reported that the MDMR continues to work on projects designated by the Bonnet Carre' Fisheries NOAA Grant. He also stated that, effective in January, Mississippi's regulations changed to require escape rings in all crab traps. The state continues to give away TEDs to every recreational crab fishermen.

Marx indicated that, starting in November, LDWF will require that crab traps in Louisiana have a minimum of three escape rings with at least two rings located in the upper chamber of the trap. Single chambered traps will be required to have three rings. The minimum size of the rings will be 2 3/8" (current minimum is 2 5/16").

Sutton reported that commercial landings were high, totaling over 5M lbs. This was the highest total landings since 2003 and is attributed to the combined effects of favorable environmental conditions (high rainfall) and the Texas license buyback program.

Other Business

The Crab Subcommittee had previously and discreetly drafted a resolution honoring **Perry** who stepped out of the meeting while, *on motion by **Marx**, seconded by **Gandy**, the Subcommittee moved to approve a resolution honoring Harriet **Perry** for her many years of service to the Subcommittee and other various crab related efforts over the last 40+ years.* Upon re-entering the meeting, **Perry** was presented the resolution by **Burris**. The resolution will be brought to the full Commission for their consideration and approval.

*Motion made by **Perry** to bring **Wagner** back on to the committee to work on non-assessment issues. Second by **Sutton**. Motion carried.* **VanderKooy** would discuss the logistics of a potential new seat on the committee with **Sutton** and **Wagner**. The membership addition would be dependent on TPWD's approval of the change. Before further action is taken, **Wagner** and **Sutton** will discuss the issue with their superiors.

Election of Chair

***Perry** made a motion that **Burris** from Mississippi remain chair. **Marx** seconded and **Burris** was elected without objection.*

*With no further business, on motion by **Perry** and second by **Sutton**, the meeting adjourned at 4:51 p.m.*

APPROVED BY:
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

TCC DATA MANAGEMENT SUBCOMMITTEE MINUTES
Tuesday, October 17, 2017
Mobile, AL

Chairman Nicole Beckham 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 Beckham, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL
Steve Brown, FLFWC, Cedar Key, FL
Beverly Sauls, FLFWC, Saint Petersburg, FL
Darrin Topping (proxy for Cindy Bohannon), TPWD, Rockport, TX
Justin Esslinger, TPWD, Rockport, TX
Mike Harden, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Vince Cefalu, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Darrin Stewart, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Carly Somerset (proxy for Brittany Chudzik), MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Julie Defilippi-Simpson, ACCSP/ASMFC, Arlington, VA
John Froeschke, GMFMC, Tampa, FL
Dave Gloeckner, NOAA SEFSC, Miami, FL

Staff
David Donaldson, GSMFC - Executive Director, Ocean Springs, MS
Gregg Bray, GSMFC - FIN Program Manager, Ocean Springs, MS
Donna Bellais, GSMFC - ComFIN Programmer, Ocean Springs, MS
Ashley Lott, GSMFC – Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS

Others
Andrew Petersen, Bluefin Data, Prairieville, LA
Richard Cody, NOAA Fisheries, Silver Spring, MD
Steve Turner, NOAA SEFSC, Miami, FL
Jackie Wilson, NOAA Fisheries, Silver Spring, MD
Todd Neahr, FWC, Saint Petersburg, FL
Tom Sminkey, NOAA Fisheries, Silver Spring, MD
Kevin Anson, ALDCNR, Gulf Shores, AL
Jack Husley, MSDMR, Biloxi, MS
Josh Neese, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL
Jaime Miller, AMRD, Dauphin Island, AL
James Sampson, Bluefin Data, Prairieville, LA
Mark Lingo, TPWD, Austin, TX
Ashford Rosenberg, Audubon Nature Institute, New Orleans, LA
Wade Hardy, MSDMR, Biloxi, MS
Trevor Moncrief, MSDMR, Biloxi, MS
Harron Wise, MSDMR, Biloxi, MS
Rick Burris, MSDMR, Biloxi, MS

Nick Farmer, NOAA SERO,
Geoff White, ACCSP, Arlington, VA

Adoption of Agenda

Agenda Item number seven, Update on Federal For-Hire Electronic Logbook Development will be moved up to after the Approval of Minutes. **D. Gloeckner** would like to discuss some shrimp issues under other business. **V. Cefalu** made a motion to adopt the agenda. Seconded by **C. Denson.**

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the Data Management Subcommittee (DMS) meeting held on October 12, 2016 in New Orleans, LA were approved as written.

Update on Federal For-Hire Electronic Logbook Development

N. Farmer gave a presentation on the Southeast For-Hire Integrated Electronic Reporting System (SEFHIER). The implementation team is made up of 50 individuals representing various federal agencies and interstate commissions. They have had several meetings with various presentations given. They team is divided into six subgroups: Data Housing; Minimum Standards; Survey Design; Compliance Enforcement; Outreach and Education; and Program Management and Budget. Data Housing has had several meetings. The Data Housing subgroup is evaluating the pros and cons of warehousing data with ACCSP, SERO, or SEFSC. Minimum Standards is focused on the minimum standards for data transmission from charter vessel to agency. SEFHIER will generate a white paper on location devices, codified regulations, technical guidance document and approval list for hardware. Survey Design is working on identifying the minimum data elements and avoiding duplication. Compliance Enforcement is working on timeliness, non-reporting and penalties. The Outreach/Education and Program Management/Budget workgroups will meet after further progress is made in the other subgroups. **B. Sauls** asked how this system will work for vessels in Florida who are working on both coasts. **N. Farmer** stated the vessel will be required to report to the more strict reporting system. If a vessel has a Gulf permit, they would report to the gulf system. **N. Farmer** stated that they want to make sure vessels are identified correctly and to avoid double counting. He stated that adequate dockside validation is going to be essential when determining compliance. He asked for input from the states on how to gain efficiency in dockside monitoring. It was noted that Alabama has cameras at public marinas. This is a way to capture traffic and identify who is coming and going. **M. Lingo** stated that Texas had used still cameras in a pilot game study but had issues with visibility due to fog and darkness. **B. Sauls** asked if SEFHIR had reviewed the gulf pilot study tested in 2008 in Florida and Texas. **B. Sauls** will share the data from this study with him. **N. Farmer** stated that the goal of this program is to be more timely and accurate than MRIP. He stated that outreach for this program is going to be very important.

Discussion of VESL Trip Ticket Reporting System

A. Petersen from Bluefin Data gave a presentation on the VESL Trip Ticket Reporting System. They have been working on the rule engine, for quality control, advanced filtering, licensing and program documentation. He stated that they are in the final stages and are close to an initial release for the states, especially for Texas. The next steps involve more hands on involvement with the states to customize reporting pages. **G. Bray** noted that GulfFIN has some money from FIS that

he plans on using to work with the states to build in some additional quality control to hopefully help produce clean data in a timelier manner.

Demonstration of Proposed End-User Query Tools

D. Bellais gave a demonstration of the new end-use data access and summary tool being developed by Karen Connell from TH Technology. At the FIN meeting in March, **D. Bellais** demonstrated the end-user tool highlighting non-confidential data queries. This presentation focused on the confidential data side. She noted that nothing has changed in regard to the confidential procedures. The site is almost ready for beta testing and members of the Data Management Subcommittee will be asked to test the system and provide feedback. The goal is to have the new system approved by the FIN Committee in March 2018.

MRIP Update

R. Cody gave an update on current MRIP activities and priorities. The presentation covered four main areas: Fishing Effort Survey (FES) Calibration, MRIP Strategic Plan, Regional Implementation Plans, and MRIP Certification. The new FES is a more accurate method for estimating shore and private boat fishing effort. It provides better coverage, higher response rates and provides a higher probability of surveying people who fished. Immediate implementation of the new FES would cause a major disruption after dropping the household call survey. Calibrations are needed to account for both the switch to the new FES and the recent change in the APAIS design. A workshop was held in June 2017 for the FES/CHTS calibration model peer review. The panel's initial findings were positive and the independent reviews and Chair's summary are due soon. NOAA Fisheries is hoping to produce calibrated landings estimates using FES and APAIS data by summer of 2018. In 2015 the Government Accountability Office had a recommendation for MRIP to develop a strategic plan. The MRIP Strategic Plan (2017-2022) has been finalized. It has six major goals. The Plan emphasizes collaboration with regional partners and is based on a three phased process approach: Evaluation, Innovation, and Implementation. Regional Implementation Plans have been received from the Gulf States, Atlantic States, Caribbean and the Atlantic HMS. The Gulf States and Caribbean Plans have been approved by MRIP ESC. **R. Cody** also mentioned that several Gulf States are in the latter stages of review for MRIP Certification. **G. Bray** noted that the GulfFIN would like to be involved in the FHTS certification process if possible.

Released Catch Workshop Presentation

G. Bray announced that a Released Catch Workshop will be held November 7-8, 2017, in New Orleans, Louisiana. Recreational release catch is becoming a significant issue and there is a growing concern about the accuracy of released catch reporting. The workshop will discuss current needs and uses, criterion for evaluating collection methods, summarize existing released catch collection methods, and propose potential new methods.

Update on GulfFIN FIS Projects

G. Bray noted that two GulfFIN projects had been awarded funding as well as a project in Florida. **S. Brown** shared that Florida is working on a point of transaction swipe card reader program. They are working with Bluefin Data on vessel application and development of an interface with the swipe card readers. They are currently purchasing the printers and cards. The goal is to make transaction data more accurate and timely and to hopefully get more dealers to report electronically. As **G. Bray** noted earlier in the meeting, GulfFIN has been awarded some money

that they plan on using to build quality control for commercial trip ticket and biological sampling data. **D. Bellais** will be leading the commercial trip ticket work and will work with each state to help improve quality control for that state. The other project involves a complete overhaul of the biological sampling database. This work will implement more stringent quality control on the data and is also looking at cataloging the reference set data, creating new data entry programs for biological sampling and age data, and creating end user summary reports making data and results more accessible. The plan is to work on these projects over the winter and report back to the FIN committee at the March meeting

Status of Biological Sampling Analysis and Activities

G. Bray provided an update on processing and data entry of biological sampling activities for 2016 and 2017. All states are current through 2016. Florida data is now being loaded directly to GulfFIN. GulfFIN was only able to provide funding assistance through March 2017 but some states are feeding data into the Data Management System for data collected with state funding. States are still working to enter sample data and age samples collected in 2017.

Election of Officers

M. Harden moved to elect J. Esslinger as Chair. D. Gloeckner seconded. S. Brown volunteered to be Vice-Chair, V. Cefalu seconded. The nominations were closed and both were elected without opposition.

Other Business

D. Gloeckner wanted to discuss some shrimp issues. Working with Galveston, they are trying to figure out errors with trip ticket landings data. A lot of the errors are tied to vessel ID, mainly in Louisiana. **V. Cefalu** stated that Louisiana captures both state vessel and Coast Guard ID numbers. However, Louisiana only sends LA vessel id unless it is not recorded and a Coast Guard ID is present. In that case the Coast Guard ID is transferred to GSMFC. NOAA Fisheries will need a vessel table to cross reference state registration numbers with Coast Guard ID. **D. Gloeckner** will work to help gain state access to Coast Guard ID tables so a cross reference database can be developed. Another issue deals with the minimum and maximum fields for Florida. **D. Bellais** agreed to look into this issue and correspond with each agency.

D. Gloeckner also pointed out that the ACCSP is heading towards integrated reporting so all the reports need to have the same trip ID. This is currently being driven by the northeast, but eventually the southeast will have to come on board. It is possible this is several years into the future but he wanted to make states aware of this issue.

Review of 2016 Commercial Data

Each state provided feedback based on a review of the spreadsheets **D. Bellais** sent out prior to the meeting. The States mentioned that the GulfFIN DMS numbers were close to their state totals and the slight differences likely indicated they collected some additional data that has yet to be delivered to GSMFC. State representatives also mentioned there were a few coding errors on their part. All necessary corrections to the 2016 data will be made at the state level and submitted to GSMFC for loading into the GulfFIN DMS.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:30 p.m.

APPROVED BY:
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

TCC SEAMAP SUBCOMMITTEE
MINUTES
Tuesday, October 17, 2017
Mobile, AL

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

Members
John Mareska, ADCNR/MRD, Gulf Shores, AL
Jill Hendon, USM/GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Ted Switzer, FWC/FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Brett Falterman, LDWF, Grand Isle, LA
Fernando Martinez, TPWD, Corpus Christi, TX
Christian Jones, NOAA Fisheries, Pascagoula, MS

Others
Eric Hoffmayer, NOAA/NMFS, Pascagoula, MS
Darin Topping, TPWD, Rockport, TX
Jimmy Sanders, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Julien Lartigue, NOAA Restore Science Program, Pascagoula, MS
Read Hendon, USM/GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Travis Williams, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Mark Albins, USA/Dauphin Island Sea Lab, Dauphin Island, AL
Gary Fitzhugh, NOAA/SEFSC, Panama City, FL
Trevor Moncrief, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Wade Hardy, MDMR, Biloxi, MS

Staff
Jeff Rester, *SEAMAP/Habitat Program Coordinator,* GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Dave Donaldson, *Executive Director,* GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
James Ballard, *Sport Fish Restoration/ANS Coordinator*, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Ashley Lott, *Staff Assistant*, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Adoption of Agenda
J. Rester noted that he would like to discuss changes in taxonomic names and how we want to handle changes. **J. Mareska moved to accept the agenda. F. Martinez seconded and the motion passed.**

Approval of Minutes
J. Mareska moved to approve the SEAMAP minutes from the March 14, 2017 meeting as submitted. J. Hendon seconded and the motion passed. The summary of the conference call in July was approved as well.

Administrative Report
J. Rester reported that since the conference call in July, SEAMAP has completed the Bottom Longline Survey and the Fall Plankton Survey. A few partners are still trying to finish up the

Vertical Line Survey. The Fall Shrimp/Groundfish Survey began a couple of weeks ago and is currently ongoing. SEAMAP published the 2017 SEAMAP Annual Report to the Technical Coordinating Committee which discusses SEAMAP FY2017 survey activities in the Gulf of Mexico. SEAMAP has also published the 2016 SEAMAP Environmental and Biological Atlas of the Gulf of Mexico. The Atlas provides a summary of all 2016 SEAMAP sampling activities. **J. Rester** pointed out that we are now as caught up as possible with the Atlas publication and this is due to everyone sending in there data in a timely manner. Please continue to do so. **J. Rester** asked that if partners are not able to complete any assigned stations for the Fall Shrimp/Groundfish Survey, to please let us know so someone else may be able to sample that station. **J. Hendon** had a question, because of the hurricanes, they are not able to do their stations until November. She would like to know if in the future, can they go and do their stations before Florida in late September. Per **J. Rester**, this is outside of the historic time frame and would like to stay in this time frame. **J. Rester** also mentioned the Annual Joint Meeting with the South Atlantic and Caribbean was held in July. They would like to make these meetings more substantive, do more collaborations, and make the meeting more productive. This will be discussed later on the agenda.

SEAMSP Vertical Line Survey Power Analysis

M. Albins from the University of South Alabama, Dauphin Island Sea Lab gave a presentation on the SEAMAP Vertical Line Database. He found many errors in the data: missing data, duplicate data, hook number/hook size data blank. He feels that we need to go back to the beginning of the pipeline and check the data against the field data sheets. The main take away from this presentation was that over the years, there has been differences in sampling protocol and differences in sampling design among the state partners. That and the overall data consistency and quality need to be addressed. He is more than happy to help with these tasks by providing detailed reports of the issues and/or working with our data people to track down and fix the problems.

Use of Spectra Line in the Vertical Line Sampling

J. Hendon gave a presentation on the Vertical Line Survey Gear Comparison, comparing the use of spectra line to the SEAMAP rigs. They fished an equivalent number of spectra and SEAMAP stations, used cut squid as bait and used a standard one minute fish for both line types. This was done on August 22, 2017 with the results being no catch. **J. Hendon** would like to continue with this experimental test and to get enough data for a pilot study. If SEAMAP is ok with it, she would like to use unused plankton funds to fund this experiment because they are not doing plankton sampling. She will move ahead with sampling in the spring and will use a smaller hook type and squid as bait and will actively fish for two minutes per line type based on suggestions from the Subcommittee. She will keep in touch with C. Jones, E. Hoffmayer and J. Rester regarding the funding.

Review of 2017 Vertical Line Sampling and Planning for 2018 Sampling

J. Rester wanted to review the 2017 vertical line sampling and to find out how many stations each partner could sample for 2018. **J. Mareska** stated that they could not find four sites, but had alternate sites. Sampling is still ongoing and he has not heard of any complaints thus far. He stated that Alabama can do 29 stations per season again for 2018. **B. Falterman** stated that the season went well for Louisiana. They were able to sample 98 out of 100 stations. However, for 2018, would want to look at the budget before committing to sampling the full shelf. **F. Martinez** stated that Texas has sampled 51 out of 60 stations so far and they are on track to finish the remaining stations by the end of the month. Station selection worked very well this time. They only could not

find one station. **D. Topping** pointed out that since the grids are so close, they are not getting any artificial reefs. Texas stated that for 2018, since the grids are so close, they will be able to go up to 70 sites. **J. Rester** asked that he be kept updated as to new potential sampling sites so the sampling universe can be refined and updated.

Proposed 2018 SEAMAP Sampling

J. Rester wanted to review with the states what surveys they can participate in for 2018. **T. Switzer** noted that the NOAA tax may be reduced, trying to make the tax more consistent, around 5-6%. If this happens, it will bring SEAMAP close to the 2014 budget. **T. Switzer** stated that Florida will do close to what they did in 2017. Looking at 10-14 days for the summer and fall survey and a full vertical line time drop. For the past 20 years, Florida has done a spring bait fish survey. This spring, they are looking into doing a calibration cruise to compare this bait fish survey with the SEAMAP survey and hopefully will fold the bait survey into the SEAMAP survey. They are also exploring, at no cost, incorporating the fishery acoustic survey into SEAMAP. **J. Hendon** reported that Mississippi will do the same as they did in 2017. They will participate in the summer and fall trawl, fall plankton and bottom longline and maintain the archiving center for the invertebrates. And if it is ok with SEAMAP, will do the experimental survey added on to days already out. **J. Mareska** stated that Alabama will do the summer and fall trawl, fall plankton, three seasons of bottom longline and two seasons of vertical line. **F. Martinez** stated that Texas will do the bottom longline and vertical line. For the vertical line, they can increase to 70 stations. **B. Falterman** stated that Louisiana will do everything they did in 2017, but wants to look at the budget before committing to getting the full western half of the shelf during the Vertical Line Survey.

2017 SEAMAP Joint Annual Meeting and Planning for the 2018 Meeting

The Joint Annual Meeting with the Caribbean and South Atlantic was held in July. At the meeting, they discussed making the meeting more productive. The group would like to have presentations, talks, tours and organize a social event. The group would like to explore having the joint meeting at more centralized locations. The Gulf is hosting the next joint meeting during the week of July 23 in the Tampa/St. Petersburg area. **T. Switzer** noted that we want to make sure the Gulf has funding for everyone to attend. May need to look at not having the October SEAMAP meeting and just doing a SEAMAP meeting in March and the Joint meeting in July. **G. Fitzhugh** wanted to let the Subcommittee know that he is cohosting a fishery reproduction workshop the first week of April 2018, Marvels 3. He is encouraging all to come.

2018 Shrimp/Groundfish Survey Station Selection Process Update

E. Hoffmayer is working to revamp how we do station selection for the trawl survey. In the past, areas were blocked off, but selected stations and then did a complicated procedure to see where hangs/sponges have been and then throw out bad stations without any replacement. He hopes by summer 2018 to have the new station selection process, where areas are buffered ahead of time with realistic buffers. **E. Hoffmayer** stated that he hopes to have the new version of FSCS in place for the summer trawl survey. **J. Rester** wanted to discuss taxonomic name changes and how to handle. A trawl workgroup meeting may need to be held to look at these issues. **E. Hoffmayer** stated that they are looking at changing the biocode system and moving to something more flexible. J. Rester, E. Hoffmayer and David Hanisko will have some informal discussions on biocodes and name changes and bring back to the Subcommittee and/or workgroup at a later date.

Election of Chair

J. Hendon moved to nominate T. Switzer as Chairman. F. Martinez seconded and the motion passed. J. Mareska moved to nominate J. Hendon as Vice-Chairman. The motion passed.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:47 p.m.

APPROVED BY:
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN 3/13/18

S-FFMC MENHADEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MINUTES
Tuesday, October 17, 2017
Mobile, AL

Chairman Herbert called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. with the following in attendance:

Members
Rick Schillaci, Menhaden Advisory Council for the Gulf of Mexico, Moss Point, MS
Jason Adriance, LDWF, New Orleans, LA
Ray Mroch, NOAA Beaufort Lab, Beaufort, NC
Jerry Mambretti, TPWD, Dickinson, TX
Peter Himchak, Omega Protein, Tuckerton, NJ
Travis Williams, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Scott Herbert, Daybrook Fisheries, New Orleans, LA
John Mareska, ADCNR/MRD, Gulf Shores, AL
Borden Wallace, Westbank Fishing, LLC, Empire, LA
Joe O'Hop, FL FWRI/FWC, St. Petersburg, FL

Others
Traci Floyd, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Tabitha Lindley, Omega Protein, Inc., Houston, TX
Ben Landry, Omega Protein, Houston, TX
Shane Treadaway, Westbank Fishing LLC, Empire, LA
Robert Leaf, USM GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Ed Swindell, Marine Process Services LLC, Hammond, LA
Gavin Rhodes-Harrison, Daybrook Fisheries, Inc., New Orleans, LA
Mike Copeland, Daybrook Fisheries, Inc., New Orleans, LA
Fernando Martinez-Andrade, TPWD, Corpus Christi, TX
Al Vidrine, Daybrook Fisheries, Inc., Empire, LA
Dominique Seibert, LA Sea Grant, Belle Chasse, LA
Jimmy Sanders, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Jeanne Lebaco, Sierra Club, Ocean Springs, MS
Steve Shepard, Sierra Club, Ocean Springs, MS
Chris Blankenship, GSMFC Commissioner, AL

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

Introductions
Chairman Herbert welcomed everyone and **VanderKooy** addressed housekeeping issues. Introductions were made.

Adoption of Agenda

Schillaci *moved to approve the agenda,* ***Mroch*** *seconded, and the agenda was approved.*

Approval of Minutes

The MAC reviewed the draft minutes from the last annual meeting on March 14, 2017, in New Orleans, Louisiana. ***Adriance*** *moved to accept the minutes,* ***Wallace*** *seconded, and the minutes were accepted.*

Public Comment

Herbert offered the audience a chance to provide any comment related to the agenda topics or anything else menhaden-related.

> Mr. Steve Shepard with the Mississippi chapter of the Sierra Club provided some comments related to concerns over what he feels is overfishing of Mississippi Sound leading to only young, small fish compared to Louisiana waters. He reported personal observations of the vessels fishing nearly on shore and the need to move them out to at least the ICW to allow a buffer for some menhaden to survive. Mr. Shepard also brought up concerns over bycatch and lack of published reports from observers of the fleet. He would like to see well documented quantification of the total bycatch so that the public could review it and look at the impacts he knows the industry is having on all our other species.

Update on 2017 Gulf Menhaden Season

Mroch reported on the Gulf menhaden landings through September of this year. 27 vessels fished in 2017 with 4 run boats, and through September landed around 423,000mt of menhaden. So far, effort is down about 10% compared to the same time last year. As everyone knows, this was a very active tropical season with several systems pushing through in June leading to fewer fishing days. July was average but August and September were both lower as hurricanes Harvey and Irma impacted the western and eastern Gulf respectively. If the remainder of the season proceeds similar to last year, it is expected that the landings could be around 480,000mt which would be 2.9% decrease from the 5-yr average. The expected landings are around 10% higher than what **Mroch** had predicted in his March forecast.

Update on the Atlantic Menhaden Fishery

Mroch provided a short update on fishing in the Atlantic through September. This past year, the coastwide TAC was increased following the stock assessment to 200,000mt with about 77% being allowed to be taken by the reduction fleet in VA. The Reedville plant operated with 8 vessels again this season. In addition, one VA snapper boat had minor landings at the plant for reduction. Through September, a total of 91,530mt has been landed which is a 19% decrease from 2016 and a 23% decrease from previous 5-yr average.

Texas Cap for 2017

Mambretti reported that very little fishing took place in Texas waters in 2017. The fleet made a total of 41 sets in Texas waters and landed 2.7M lbs which was about 8% of the available TAC at around 1.2M lbs. Reporting continues to work well between NOAA and TPWD, and the fleet.

Review of Port Sample Acquisition and Processing in 2017 and Discussion of 2018 Sampling

VanderKooy and **Mroch** reported that the port sampling went well this year with both LDWF and MDMR providing the sample preparations and delivery to Beaufort for ageing. At this time the process will likely continue in the same arrangement in 2018. There were no noticeable delays in CDFR reporting despite the occurrence of several tropical systems in the Gulf including four named storms. **Mroch** reported that the Gulf port samples will be processed ahead of the Atlantic's in anticipation of the SEDAR next year.

Mroch indicated that there is still movement to switch the industry over to electronic reporting rather than paper CDFRs which require scanning and proofing, sometimes delaying the timeliness of the effort data for reporting back to the MAC.

Gulf Menhaden Assessment SEDAR Schedule

VanderKooy provided the SEDAR timeline for 2018. Data from the state agencies, through 2017, would need to be delivered to Dr. Schueller by early May to be able to have the indices developed for the Data Workshop scheduled for the first week of June. Several conference calls will be required to get ready for the Assessment Workshop the first week of August, and the draft assessment report should be complete in time for presentation to the MAC and the Commission ahead of the November 7 Review Workshop. It is anticipated that the SEDAR will be published before the end of 2018. All workshops will be held in New Orleans to accommodate the Gulf participants.

Marine Stewardship Certification (MSC) of Gulf Menhaden

Landry reported on the sustainability certification process they are conducting through MSC. SAI Global out of Dublin was selected for the assessment and review to MSC. Both Omega and Daybrook have partnered as clients for the pre-assessment. With the positive results of the updated stock assessment in 2016, it seemed like a good time to move forward as several customers of meal and oil were looking for sustainability designations. There will be another round of public comment coming up. Certification provides consumers and customers with confidence that product is healthy and safe. It is expected that the certification process should be complete by early next year.

Election of Officers

The chair position moved back to the state agencies. ***Schillaci*** *nominated* ***Adriance*** *for Chair in 2018.* ***Mambretti*** *seconded and* ***Adriance*** *was unanimously approved.*

Other Business

Herbert gave the audience an opportunity once again to provide any additional public comment or ask questions of the MAC. There were none. **VanderKooy** reported that the next Commission meeting will be in March somewhere in Florida; more details will be coming.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:32 am.

GSMFC LAW ENFORCEMENT COMMITTEE/
GMFMC LAW ENFORCEMENT TECHNICAL COMMITTEE
JOINT MEETING SUMMARY
Wednesday, October 18, 2017
Mobile, AL

LETC Chair Scott Bannon called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m.

The agenda was adopted as written, and the summary of the October 13, 2016 LETC/LEC meeting were approved as written.

Special Election for LETC Vice-chair

The LETC Vice-chair position was vacant as a result of former Vice-chair Grant Burton no longer being on the LETC. By acclamation, the LETC voted for Scott Pearce to be the LETC Vice-chair until the next election.

Discussion of Joint LETC/LEC Chairs

The joint Committee currently has separate Chairs and Vice-chairs for the LETC and LEC, resulting in a redundancy of officers. The two committees are identical except for the U.S. Coast Guard representative, who is on the LEC but not the LETC. Staff suggested that it would be more efficient to have a single Chair and Vice-chair for the joint committee.

> **Committee members agreed unanimously that at the next election (October 2018) there would be one Chair and Vice-chair elected for the joint committee.**

GMFMC LETC Items

Options Paper for Amendment 36B – Modifications to Commercial Individual Fishing Quota Programs

Council staff reviewed the potential actions in Reef Fish Amendment 36B. In the potential action to require shareholders to hold a commercial reef fish permit, the Committee felt that requiring everyone to have a permit would reduce incentives to cheat by having something of value that could be taken away. While recognizing that law enforcement may not have much direct involvement with shareholders, the Committee felt that requiring everyone to have the permit applies a common standard that all participants must meet. The Committee then passed the following motion.

> **The committee recommends that all shareholders and allocation holders be required to possess reef fish permits for ease of enforcement with no exceptions and feels the requirement will encourage compliance with regulations. -Reeder/Pittman**

In discussing a time frame for phasing in the requirement that shareholders have a permit, Brandi Reeder noted that Texas provides one year for compliance of new regulations. Other Committee members agreed that time should be provided to enable compliance should the new regulation be adopted. The Committee then passed the following motion.

LETC recommends a one year from effective date allowance to give shareholders an opportunity to acquire a permit. -Bannon/Pittman

The Committee felt that the remaining actions were administrative in nature and made no recommendations.

Draft Amendment – State Management Program for Recreational Red Snapper

Council staff reviewed the actions in the State Management Amendments. The Committee discussed enforcement issues should different states adopt different regulations, and enforcement implications should some states manage the private angling component, only, while others managed both the private angling and federal for-hire components. LCDR Stacy McNeer expressed concern that both of these issues (i.e., states having different regulations for harvest and some states managing one component while another manages both components) would pose enforcement problems. He expressed greater concern for determining whether federally permitted for-hire vessels would be required to follow state or federal law. Committee members felt that both of these issues would make enforcement more difficult but not impossible. Recognizing that the Council's current preferred alternative is to allow a state to decide whether to manage one or both components, Committee members agreed that they preferred not to tell other states what to do. Nevertheless, they expressed a preference for the states to manage all recreational vessels. The Committee then passed the following motion.

Committee recommends allowing states to choose [whether to manage private angling, only or both components] but, in further discussion with federal partners, it would be better if the states were consistent in managing both components across the Gulf. -Reeder/Pittman

Options Paper for Venting Tools and Descending Devices

Staff noted that the Council voted to have staff stop working on the framework action to require the possession of venting and/or descending devices on vessels with reef fish, and instead to develop a policy statement including development of an outreach program. Consequently, the Committee did not review the alternatives. However, the Committee did review the proposed definitions of venting tools and descending devices contained in the framework action's discussion, and recommended the changes highlighted below.

Venting tool: A venting tool is a device capable of penetrating the abdomen of a fish in order to deflate the expanded air due to a ruptured air bladder from the body cavity of a fish retrieved from depth, with minimum damage. A venting tool must be a sharpened, hollow instrument, such as a hypodermic syringe with the plunger removed, or a 16–gauge needle fixed to a handle. A larger gauge needle is preferred in order to allow more air to escape rapidly. A device that is not hollow, such as a knife or ice pick, is not a venting tool~~, although it may be possible to use such a device to vent a fish in the absence of a venting tool~~.

Descending device: A descending device is an instrument that ~~can return a fish to depth with minimum injury to the fish. The fish need not be returned to the bottom, but to~~ must release fish at a depth sufficient for the fish to be able to recover from the effects of

barotrauma, generally 33 feet (1 atmosphere of pressure) or greater. The device can be a weighted hook, lip clamp, or box that will hold the fish while it is lowered to depth, and will either release the fish automatically, or release the fish by actions of the operator of the device, or will allow the fish to escape on its own. Since minimizing surface time is critical to increasing survival, descending devices should be rigged and ready for use while fishing is occurring.

Options Paper for Draft Modifications to the Sea Turtle Release Protocol and Gear for the Reef Fish Fishery

Staff reviewed the draft options paper that considers modifications to the sea turtle release protocol and gear for the reef fish fishery. The first action considers including three new approved sea turtle release gears for commercial and charter vessel/headboat Gulf reef fish permit holders. The LETC made no motions regarding the document; however, they suggested adding specifications of the new gears that are pictured as examples as well as website links were various manufacturers are producing the gears. Council staff stated they thought that was possible as long as we were not endorsing a specific manufacturer thus they would just list them as examples under the new gear type. The second action is administrative and would modify the framework procedure to allow new gears to be approved for use without a full amendment to the fishery management plan. The LETC made no motions or recommendations regarding the second action.

Staff explained the Council intended to move quickly with this document as they were planning to develop a public hearing draft of the document for the January 2018 Council meeting and final draft for the April 2018 Council meeting.

Coral Amendment 9 – Public Hearing Draft of Coral Habitat Areas Considered for Management in the Gulf of Mexico

Council staff presented the Gulf Council's preferred alternatives for Coral Amendment 9. Specific to Action 1, the Committee was concerned with the distance from shore and the distance between the existing Pulley Ridge HAPC with regulations and the proposed expansion. Staff clarified Pulley Ridge is 127 nm offshore and the length of the bottom section would extend HAPC boundaries one additional nautical mile. The Committee stated that any distance less than 0.5 nautical mile was virtually unenforceable, but this proposed extension was of sufficient distance to be enforceable. The Committee also stated that areas with straight lines are preferred for enforcement. Specific to Action 3, Preferred Alternative 7 option c, the Committee recommended that staff include language specifying that no more than a certain percentage of catch be anything other than royal red shrimp on board. Lastly, the Committee recommended that the definition of dredging be included and referenced in Action 7.

Spiny Lobster Amendment 13 – Bully Net Gear Regulations for Spiny Lobster for the EEZ off Florida

Staff reviewed Action 1 of the document and informed the Committee that there would be three additional actions added to the document to align federal regulations (off Florida) with the State of Florida regulations for spiny lobster. The Committee felt that consistency between state and federal waters was beneficial.

Implications of Permit Transfers for Federal For-hire Vessels

Council staff reviewed the discussion that occurred at the October Council meeting relating to concern that some federally permitted charter-for-hire operators were transferring their permits to

another vessel after the red snapper season ends in order to circumvent rules prohibiting federally permitted vessels from fishing when the season is closed. The Council was informed by NOAA General Counsel that, if a vessel was federally permitted at any time during the year, it was considered a permitted vessel and cannot fish for red snapper in federal waters when the federal for-hire season is closed even if it transferred its permit. However, that designation did not carry over the following year. At that time, a vessel would be considered a private vessel until it transfers the permit back. Furthermore, without the federal permit conditions, federal regulations could not be enforced on a vessel fishing in state waters where the federal government has no jurisdiction. A Committee member noted that another issue existed for dual-permitted vessels. Such vessels are limited to a maximum of 4 crew members when operating as a commercial vessel. With more than 4 aboard it is considered a charter vessel. However, by transferring the charter-for-hire permit to another vessel, the vessel was no longer limited to a maximum crew size.

Committee members asked how prevalent permit transfers were. Staff noted that NMFS had informed the Council that they had not observed a spike in transfers when the red snapper season ended. Staff also noted that in 2015 295 out of 1,328 reef fish permits were transferred (22.2%), and in 2016 272 out of 1,311 permits were transferred (20.7%). A similar percentage of transfers was observed for costal migratory pelagic (CMP) permits even though mackerel were not encountering quota closures. Committee members could not explain why CMP permits were being transferred at the same rate as reef fish permits if the primary reason for reef fish permits to be transferred was to circumvent red snapper season closures.

The Council has asked staff to develop some regulatory options for limiting transfers, for the January 2018 Council meeting. One possible option would be to limit the number a times a permit could be transferred in a year. Committee members felt that was an enforceable option, but could not come up with any other alternatives.

Review of the Guidelines for the 2017 Officer of the Year Award

Staff reviewed the guidelines for nominating an officer of the year for 2017, and noted that the deadline for submitting nominations is February 1, 2018. The Committee discussed whether there should be a team of the year award, but decided that should be more thoroughly discussed at a future LETC meeting.

Overview of Congressional Activities

Staff noted that the Council Coordination Committee hired an individual to monitor Congressional and Senate activities regarding fishery related bills, and to provide periodic reports back to the Councils on the status of such bills and other Congressional activity. The August 26, 2017 activity report was included in the meeting handouts. If any of the LETC members would like to receive these reports, they should notify staff and we will add them to the e-mail distribution list.

GSMFC LAW ENFORCEMENT COMMITTEE SESSION

Potential JEA Gulf-Wide Observed Compliance Rates

LCDR Stacy McNeer stated that the USCG is currently working with NOAA/JEA program data managers to gather current enforcement effort compared to violations in an effort to increase the accuracy of compliance reporting throughout the Gulf. He appealed to the state representatives

present for their feedback regarding this process and the most efficient way to get an idea of overall compliance. He will contact the state representatives via email regarding this issue.

IJF Program Activity

Cobia Profile – Lt. Col. Rusty Pittman informed the group that the Cobia Technical Task Force held its organizational meeting in New Orleans on August 29th. Due to approaching Hurricane Harvey, the meeting was cut short but assignments were made and the process begun. The group intends to meet again in early December to continue work on this profile.

Officers' Pocket Guide – Debbie McIntyre explained the purpose of the *Officers' Pocket Guide* is for use by officers in the field. She stated that, due to budget issues in the recent past, the waterproof, spiral-bound version of this publication was discontinued and made available online only. However, she indicated that it is possible that there may be adequate funds in the future to cover this expense if the group felt that this was a valuable tool. Those present responded that the waterproof version was very helpful to the officers on the water and expressed appreciation that this may be available again in the next budget cycle.

Annual License and Fees – Debbie McIntyre thanked those who provided their state/agency's information for the *Annual License and Fees* publication and encouraged any new members of this committee to contact her with questions or for assistance with any of the enforcement publications.

Law Summary (red book) – Debbie McIntyre displayed a copy of the *2017 Law Summary* (red book) and explained that this publication is too large to print for distribution but is available online. For the benefit of those new on the committee, she explained that this document is a compilation of all five states' latest saltwater regulations books (commercial and recreational) as PDFs. Again, she urged new committee members to contact her if they have questions.

State Report Highlights

Written state reports had been submitted prior to the meeting. On motion by Lt. Col. Pittman, seconded by Asst. Commander Brandi Reeder, the written state reports were accepted as written.

Other Business

Col. Scott Bannon informed everyone that Lt. Col. Rusty Pittman is retiring in January 2018. He thanked Lt. Col. Pittman for his dedication to law enforcement and for his hard work on this and other committees. He also took the opportunity to welcome Lt. Col. Pittman's replacement, Sgt. Patrick Carron, who will also serve on the Commission's Cobia Technical Task Force.

Col. Bannon also welcomed Asst. SAC Charles Tyer from NOAA who is SAC Tracy Dunn's new alternate and Capt. Scott Pearce who is serving as Florida's new state representative to the LEC.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 2:45 p.m.

LETC Members in Attendance:
Scott Bannon, ADCNR, Chair
Neil "Scott" Pearce, FWC, Vice-chair
Cynthia Fenyk, NOAA/GCES
Steve McManus, LDWF *
Rusty Pittman, MDMR
Brandi L. Reeder, TPWD
Charles Tyer, NOAA/OLE **

* designee for Chad Hebert
** designee for Tracy Dunn

Staff:
Steven Atran, GMFMC
Ava Lasseter, GMFMC (via GoToMeeting)
Carrie Simmons, GMFMC (via GoToMeeting)
Morgan Kilgour, GMFMC (via GoToMeeting)
Debbie McIntyre, GSMFC

GMFMC Council Members
Kevin Anson, ADCNR
Paul Mickle, MDMR

LEC Members in Attendance:
Rusty Pittman, MDMR, Chair
Scott Bannon, ADCNR
Cynthia Fenyk, NOAA/GCES
Stacy L. McNeer, USCG
Steve McManus, LDWF*
Neil "Scott" Pearce, FWC
Brandi L. Reeder, TPWD
Charles Tyer, NOAA/OLE**

Others:
Steve Brown, FWC
Patrick Carron, MDMR
Jason Downey, ADCNR
Glenn A. Kornegay, ADCNR
John Mareska, ADCNR
Adam (Brad) Miller, Fish and Game Scales
Jamie Miller, MDMR
Todd Neahr, FWC
John Neese, ADCNR
Beverly Sauls, FWC
Travis Williams, MDMR

STATE-FEDERAL FISHERIES MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MINUTES
Wednesday October 18, 2017
Mobile, AL

Dave Donaldson called the meeting to order at 3:30 p.m. The following members and others were present:

Members
Scott Bannon (proxy for Chris Blankenship), ADCNR, Gulf Shores, AL
Dan Ellinor, FLFWC, Tallahassee, FL
Paul Mickle, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Patrick Banks, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Mark Lingo, TPWD, Austin, TX
Andy Strelcheck (proxy for Roy Crabtree), NOAA Fisheries, Saint Petersburg, FL
Steve Turner (proxy for Bonnie Ponwith), NOAA Fisheries, Miami, FL
Dave Donaldson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Others
Dave Van Voorhees, NMFS, Silver Spring, MD

Staff
Gregg Bray, FIN Program Manager
Angie Rabideau, GSMFC Senior Accountant

Adoption of Agenda
The agenda was approved as written.

Discussion and Final Approval of GulfFIN Funding Activities for 2018
G. Bray outlined the status of 2018 funding for data collection and management activities. The preliminary numbers show the GulfFIN line item at $4.248M and RecFIN line item at $3.468M. The Gulf portion of the RecFIN line item works out to be about $1.070M. In addition, there is an additional $855K provided by the NOAA OST to allow for large base sampling allocations for MRIP dockside surveys and $25K for travel participation support. **D. Van Voorhees** stated that NMFS will be operating under a continuing resolution through at least early December. **A. Strelcheck** stated NMFS may be able to waive part or all of the administrative fees in 2018. That could result in a savings of almost $600K but more information is needed from NMFS before determining the amount of actual savings. NOAA Fisheries Southeast Fishery Science Center is also planning to provide funding assistance to support headboat port sampling. With administrative fees removed, the amount available for FIN funding in 2018 totals $5.85M. The breakdown of the funding is as follows:

GulfFIN line item	**4,248,527**	
OMB administrative fee	**(314,460)**	
SER administrative fee	**(2,394)**	
GulfFIN - available		**3,931,673**
RecFIN line item	**3,468,918**	
OMB administrative fee	**(258,646)**	
RecFIN - available	**3,210,272**	
Gulf portion of RecFIN (1/3)	**1,070,091**	
SER administrative fee	**0**	
Economics survey	**(155,086)**	
SEFSC data collections	**(230,636)**	
RecFIN - available		**684,369**
Additional funds		
MRIP funds		**880,000**
SEFSC funds		**362,143**
SER funds		**0**
HQ funds		**0**
TOTAL AVAILABLE		**5,858,185**

G. Bray then provided a brief overview of the documents that were distributed to the group. He then discussed the summary of the activities for potential funding in 2018 that was developed by the FIN Committee. The list is attached (Attachment A).

The original amount proposed for 2018 for all the jobs proposed was approximately $7.703M, which meant there was about $1.845M (-24.0%) deficit. **G. Bray** stated Headboat Port Sampling funds traditionally are provided by NOAA Fisheries and do not impact the GulfFIN or RecFIN line item amounts.

After considerable discussion **M. Lingo moved to fund Job 1 (Coordination and Administration of FIN Activities), Job 2 (Collecting, Managing, and Disseminating Marine Recreational Fisheries Data), Job 3 (Head Boat Sampling), Job 4 (Operation of FIN Data Management System), and Job 5 (Trip Ticket Program Implementation and Operation) and was seconded by P. Mickle. The motion passed 5-0.** The committee motion still resulted in a funding deficit of 10.76%. The committee agreed that the deficit would be applied equally to all programs. GSMFC staff will work with all program coordinators to obtain revised budgets that reflect the reduced totals for 2018.

The group discussed the situation where the funding level was either higher or lower than the amount discussed at the meeting. It was noted that if the additional money was obtained or the OMB administrative fees were waived, then the Committee would convene (via conference call) to discuss how to handle revised reduction or surplus. The reductions are as follows:

	Proposed	Reduction	Revised total
GSMFC	$834,467	-$103,360	$731,107
Texas	$189,079	-$20,346	$168,733
Louisiana	$1,220,113	-$131,289	$1,088,824
Mississippi	$775,065	-$83,400	$691,665
Alabama	$470,863	-$50,666	$420,197
Florida	$2,798,877	-$301,170	$2,497,707
Bluefin Data (TT)	$150,000	-$16,141	$133,859
TOTAL	$6,564,557	-$706,372	$5,858,185

The Committee agreed to reduce their budgets by the outlined amounts. G. Bray stated that in order to meet the submission deadline, states would have to provide their revised statements of work and budgets to the GSMFC *no later than October 31, 2018*.

Discussion of SEAMAP Funding Activities for 2018

J. Rester provided some background on the SEAMAP budget and surveys for the Gulf of Mexico. While the SEAMAP appropriation from Congress has remained constant over the last three years at $5.125 million, the amount actually received by SEAMAP partners to conduct fishery independent sampling has decreased due to increasing taxes. The State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee reviewed the various SEAMAP surveys along with their associated costs. SEAMAP does not know how much funding they will receive in FY2018 and will not know their funding level until weeks after an FY2018 budget is passed, so it is not possible at this time to prioritize surveys based on anticipated funding. For FY2018, SEAMAP will continue the current SEAMAP survey work and sampling effort and hope that additional funding or less taxes will be realized.

Election of Officers

S. Bannon was nominated for chairman and **P. Mickle** was nominated for vice-chairman. The nominations were closed and both were approved unanimously by the committee.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:50 p.m.

APPROVED BY:
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

TECHNICAL COORDINATING COMMITTEE
MINUTES
Wednesday October 18, 2017
Mobile, AL

Facilitator Matt Hill called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. The following members, staff, and others were present:

Members
Harry Blanchet, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Jason Froeba, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Beverly Sauls, FWC/FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Dan Ellinor, FWC, Tallahassee, FL
Allan Brown, USFWS, Atlanta, GA
Glenn Constant, USFWS, Baton Rouge, LA
Matt Hill, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
John Mareska, ADCNR/MRD, Dauphin Island, AL
Darin Topping, TPWD, Rockport, TX

Staff
James Ballard, GSMFC, Sport Fish/Aquatic Invasives Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Joe Ferrer, GSMFC Systems Administrator, Ocean Springs, MS
Ali Ryan, GSMFC, Sport Fish/Aquatic Invasives Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS
Jeff Rester, SEAMAP Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Dave Donaldson, GSMFC, Executive Director, Ocean Springs, MS
Steve VanderKooy, GSMFC, IJF Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Gregg Bray, GSMFC, FIN Data Program Manager, Ocean Springs, MS

Others
Steve Turner, NOAA Fisheries, Miami, FL
Travis Williams, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Corky Perret, Public, Poplarville, MS
Jill Hendon, USM/GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Jimmy Sanders, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Traci Floyd, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Rick Burris, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Christian Jones, NOAA, Pascagoula, MS
Eric Hoffmayer, NOAA, Pascagoula, MS
Jack Husley, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Harron Wise, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Todd Neahr, FWC/FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Nicole Beckham, ADCNR/MRD, Gulf Shores, AL
Kevin Anson, ADCNR/MRD, Gulf Shores, AL
Kelly Lucas, USM/GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Steve Brown, FWC, Cedar Key, FL

Adoption of Agenda
A motion to adopt the agenda was made by Darin Topping and passed unanimously.

Approval of Minutes
A motion to approve the minutes for the March 15, 2017 meeting, with one minor edit, was made by John Mareska and passed with no opposition.

Proposal Development for Future Restoration Plans
Glenn Constant led a discussion about developing proposals for future NRDA funding opportunities. He stated that this agenda item arose from conference calls that the GSMFC and FWS had with the Open Ocean Trustee Implementation Group of the Deepwater Horizon NRDA effort about their RFP that was released in April. The proposal criteria and the process for ranking was not clearly identified in that RFP, so the GSMFC requested that Jamie Rhinehart from NOAA attend the March, 2018 TCC meeting to have a discussion on the process and criteria that will be part of the next RFP and how the Commission's two monitoring proposals may fit into that request. Glenn outlined the importance of crafting proposals so they match the criteria specified in the Final Programmatic Damage Assessment and Restoration Plan and proposed that the TCC work on pulling together some draft proposals in preparation for the discussion with Jamie at the March TCC meeting. The group agreed that GSMFC staff will work with USFWS to start pulling together draft proposals.

Subcommittee Reports
Data Management
Nicole Beckham reported that Nick Farmer gave a presentation on the For-Hire electronic logbook development. The program will increase geographic data and reduce redundancy, reporting burdens, and reconciling issues. This program will require substantial outreach to educate the participants on the reporting requirements.

Andrew Peterson updated the committee on the progress of the VESL Trip Ticket reporting system. Most of the development has been completed, and now Bluefin is working on the final processing. The next step will be to start working with each state to determine their specific needs. The program is customizable to fit the requirements for each state.

Donna Bellais gave a presentation on the new GSMFC end-user query tool. The system will be ready for beta testing at the start of the new year.

Gregg Bray announced a released catch workshop that will be held on November 7-8 in New Orleans. The purpose of the workshop is to evaluate current and proposed methods for collecting recreational released catch data.

The Subcommittee also conducted a review of 2016 commercial data. No major problems were identified, but state representatives will update data and resend to GSMFC.

Dan Ellinor made a motion to accept the report as presented, and it passed unanimously.

Crab

Rick Burris stated that Ryan Gandy presented the latest summary on ongoing genetics of blue crabs. There is a good chance that future assessments will need to consider a single stock rather than the east/west division that was used in the benchmark assessment GDAR01. The stock was divided at the Florida/Alabama line but recent work suggests that there is much more homogeneity of the stocks across the Gulf and may even include part of the south Atlantic. Joel Anderson is conducting work currently at TPWD using data from the entire Gulf and other work has suggested that the geologic break around Cape San Blas Florida may not be accurate.

Zack Darnell presented the most current results of the external tagging study which is examining migration of female crabs in the Gulf. To date they have wired tagged over 12,500 mature female crabs from Florida to Texas since March 2016. Approximately 2,500 recaptures have been reported (20.1% recapture rate). While many crabs were recaptured within the first 30 days, several crabs have been at liberty longer with one crab recaptured nearly 500 days from tagging. Distances traveled are still being calculated but range were from 0 – 446.23 km with a mean of 20.07 km. Tagging will continue through next summer. It is hoped that crabs recaptured offshore will provide critical information to the escapement of mature females out of the fishing grounds. Preliminary analysis indicates that the females offshore as healthy and still producing sponges supporting the hypothesis of a large spawning population away from the estuaries contributing to the overall reproduction in the Gulf.

Harriet Perry noted discrepancies between the larval settlement data and juvenile/adult indices in Mississippi. She is finding record numbers of megalopal settlement yet there is no translation to juveniles in the fishery independent data. Despite this, they are still able to maintain average harvest levels. While it is not clear what other factors may be playing into blue crab abundances, it is hoped that we may find some answers by the time we re-examine the stock status.

Each state reported on their respective derelict trap clean-ups in 2017. Those five removals lead to nearly 10,000 traps being removed Gulf-wide bringing the total since 1999 to over 100,000 traps.

The Crab Subcommittee moved to approve a resolution (Attached) honoring Ms. Harriet Perry for her many years of service to the Subcommittee and other various crab related efforts over the last 40+ years.

Motion: The TCC send the resolution to the full Commission for their consideration and approval.

The Subcommittee re-elected Rick Burris as chair.

A motion to accept the report, including the Motion, was moved by John Mareska, and passed without opposition.

SEAMAP

Jeff Rester reported that on June 27, SEAMAP learned that SEAMAP FY2017 funding for the Gulf of Mexico would be $1,769,178. This is a decrease of $12,000 from FY2016 funding levels. In the past 5 years, the SEAMAP funding level has decreased approximately 15%.

In 2016, the SEAMAP Subcommittee submitted two proposals to the NOAA RESTORE Act Science Program's funding initiative to collect more fishery independent data in the Gulf of Mexico. The SEAMAP Subcommittee heard in late March of this year that neither proposal was selected for funding.
Since March, SEAMAP has completed the Spring Plankton Survey, Summer Shrimp/Groundfish Survey, Bottom Longline Survey, Reef Fish Survey, and Fall Plankton Survey. The Vertical Line Survey and Fall Shrimp/Groundfish Survey are currently ongoing.

Over the past few months, SEAMAP contributed data and analyses, and several SEAMAP partners participated in several federal stock assessments, including SEDAR 48 (Black Grouper), SEDAR 49 (Data Limited Assessment for Gulf of Mexico Red Drum, Lane Snapper, Wenchman, Yellowmouth Grouper, Speckled Hind, Snowy Grouper, Almaco Jack, and lesser Amberjack), and SEDAR 51 (Gulf of Mexico Gray Snapper). Several SEAMAP surveys will provide data for SEDAR 52 (Gulf of Mexico Red Snapper).

SEAMAP has published the 2017 SEAMAP Annual Report to the TCC which discusses SEAMAP FY2017 survey activities in the Gulf of Mexico. SEAMAP has also published the 2016 SEAMAP Environmental and Biological Atlas of the Gulf of Mexico. The Atlas provides a summary of all 2016 SEAMAP sampling activities.

At their October, 2017 meeting the Subcommittee had a presentation from Mike Albins on the SEAMAP vertical line survey power analysis.

Jill Hendon updated the Subcommittee on GCRL's study that is comparing Spectra Line rigs to the SEAMAP vertical line gear that uses monofilament. There is a concern that the more visible monofilament design may be biasing the catch.

The Subcommittee also had a discussion about the 2018 shrimp/groundfish survey station selection process. SEAMAP is in the process of examining ways to minimize trawling impacts to hardbottom and sponge habitat on the west Florida shelf. Currently stations are selected and then stations are excluded to minimize trawling impacts. The Subcommittee is now examining potential buffers around known hardbottom areas so they can be excluded before the station selection process.

Ted Switzer was elected as chair and Jill Hendon was elected as vice chair.

Darin Topping made a motion to accept the report as presented, and it passed unanimously.

State/Federal Reports

Matt Hill stated that written reports were provided to the TCC members prior to the meeting for their review and if there is no objections, by acclamation he would like to have them placed in the record and forgo reading them into the record. The committee had no objections. To see the full reports that were provided to the TCC, please see the minutes from the Commission Business Meeting held on Thursday, October 19, 2017.

Election of Officers

Darin Topping was elected as Chair, and Beverly Sauls was elected as Vice Chair.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 2:15 p.m.

Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission

Resolution

Ms. Harriet M. Perry
for Distinguished Service to the
Technical Coordinating Committee's
Crab Subcommittee

Whereas, *Ms. Harriet M. Perry of the University of Southern Mississippi's Gulf Coast Research Laboratory has been involved with scientific research related to blue crab biology and the associated commercial and recreational fishery in the Gulf of Mexico since 1968; and*

Whereas, *she has been directly involved with the blue crab fishery since the early 1970s and an active member of the Technical Coordinating Committee's Crab Subcommittee for nearly 40 years; and*

Whereas, *she has served in numerous leadership roles within the marine fisheries scientific community as member, chair and co-chair on fisheries committees, workshops, task forces and fishery management planning teams associated with the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, Mississippi Department of Marine Resources, Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality, Gulf of Mexico Program; and*

Whereas, *she has provided outreach and education, and worked closely with crab fishermen and the coastal community to encourage ongoing environmental stewardship and fishery success, recognizing the cultural and economic impact of both; and*

Whereas, *she has contributed to the various derelict trap programs in each of the five Gulf states since their inception in 1999 and has led to the removal of over 100,000 lost or abandoned crab traps; and*

Therefore, be it resolved *that the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission wishes to express their sincere thanks to Ms. Harriet M. Perry of the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory for her dedication and service to the Technical Coordinating Committee's Crab Subcommittee.*

Given this the Nineteenth day of October in the year of Our Lord, Two Thousand and Seventeen.

GULF STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION

Chris Blankenship, Chairman

TERRAPINS AND CRAB TRAPS

Examining interactions between terrapins and the crab industry in the Gulf of Mexico

GULF STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION
October 18, 2017

Battle House Renaissance Hotel
Mobile, Alabama

October 2017

Pub No. 270

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TERRAPINS AND CRAB TRAPS

Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission • 68th Annual Meeting
Battle House Renaissance Hotel • Mobile, Alabama
October 18, 2017 • 8:00 a.m. – 11:45 a.m.

Agenda

8:00 Welcome and Overview – *Ms. Christina Mohrman (GoM Alliance)*

8:10 Encouraging Fisheries Cooperation in Conservation of the Diamondback Terrapin in Mississippi – *Mr. Rick Burris (MDMR)*

8:30 Evaluation of Diamondback Terrapin (*Malaclemys terrapin*) Nesting Ecology throughout Coastal Louisiana – D*r. Steven H. Pearson (LDWF)*

8:50 Bycatch in the Commercial Blue Crab Fishery in Louisiana – *Dr. Julie Lively (LSU AgCenter)*

9:10 Terrapins, TEDs, and Disintegration Timelines – *Dr. Willem Roosenburg (Ohio Univ.)*

9:30 Developing monitoring techniques and management tools to understand the conflict between the blue crab (*Callinectes sapidus*) fishery and diamondback terrapin (*Malaclemys terrapin macrospilota*) populations in Florida– *Dr. Ryan Gandy (FWC)*

9:50 *Break*

10:15 Regional Overview of Current Terrapin Collaboration – *Mr. Thomas Mohrman (TNC)*

10:45 Current Crab Research and Regulations Related to Reducing Terrapin Interactions

TX – *Mr. Glen Sutton*
LA – *Mr. Jeffrey Marx*
MS – *Mr. Rick Burris*
AL – *Mr. Jason Herrmann*
FL – *Dr. Ryan Gandy*

11:30 Working Together in the Future – *Ms. Christina Mohrman (GoM Alliance)*

11:45 Adjourn

Summary

The general session was an effort to improve communication with the Diamondback Terrapin research community and the Gulf's crab industry and state agencies. It was intended to begin to change the narrative and approach to terrapin protection and recovery. Utilizing the working knowledge of the Commission's Crab Subcommittee (Subcommittee) to meet the research needs of the Diamondback Terrapin Workgroup (DTWG), it is hoped that we will begin to change the tone regarding interactions between terrapins and the Gulf's crab industry.

Several presentations were made by members of the Subcommittee and the DTWG related to management of the commercial crab fishery in the Gulf of Mexico and local/regional terrapin populations and the effectiveness of bycatch reduction efforts in reducing terrapin mortalities. Following the presentations, a panel discussion allowed the Subcommittee representatives to explain current management practices and efforts related to derelict trap removals and bycatch monitoring and reduction in the fishery.

The panel discussions ended up centering primarily on the use of TEDs in crab traps. Dr. Willem Roosenburg (Ohio Univ.) described the region in Maryland where he works and noted that they have extremely high encounters of terrapins drowning in commercial crab pots in that region. He explained that most turtles in general are very slow to mature, more like whales and sharks. Additionally, terrapins can live up to 40 years and have relatively low fecundity. Predation on nests is very high, resulting in very slow population growth. Therefore, when 'pots' are fished heavily in an area, mortality is increased even more and can result in the elimination of a terrapin population in a matter of a few years. Dr. Roosenburg noted the lack of terrapins showing up in the derelict traps in the Gulf of Mexico and reported that they have studied the deterioration rates of carcasses in unfished traps. He indicated that in Maryland, they rot very quickly and the shells and skeletons disarticulate within about 30 days. The remains end up falling through the mesh when the trap is recovered during a cleanup and therefore, are not likely to be recorded. He indicated that, with the warmer waters in the Gulf, the process could be much faster and we are simply missing the mortality when conducting cleanups.

Dr. Roosenburg challenged the group to consider putting TEDs in our crab traps Gulf-wide. The Subcommittee members explained the reality of imposing harsh regulations on fishermen when the majority of traps are not likely to encounter terrapins. There are a number of tools available to managers to examine options for reducing bycatch rather than making large sweeping regulatory changes. The biggest issue for fishermen is that most of the TED studies have shown a reduction in crab catches where they have been implemented. Most crab trap fishermen will never encounter a terrapin and therefore, this is not something that would be well received and compliance could be difficult to enforce.

When asked what would help the state agencies to better address the terrapin issue, all the states stated that they need information on where the terrapin populations are and where the best potential nesting habitats currently exist. Without an understanding of the 'hotspots', managers can't begin to address the impacts in those areas. By addressing all the potential impacts on terrapins, fishery managers can do a better job at focusing management into something that is actually beneficial. They pointed out that they need to vet all the options before they act to make regulations... any action must be defensible and with more information from the DTWG, more useful changes can occur.

It was agreed that the DTWG and the Subcommittee are well on the way to begin develop working relationships with the terrapin people. Dr. Roosenburg complimented the Gulf on being proactive to address these issues. He noted that the Atlantic Coast is way behind in dealing with abandoned and lost crab traps and the Gulf has definitely set a high bar. In addition, the Atlantic states crab community has very little interaction with the DTWG and this type of a forum and effort is commended. It will go a long way to improve both fisheries management and threatened or endangered species.

Ms. Harriet Perry (GCRL) suggested that perhaps what is needed in each state is a new type of subcommittee or task force to bring in terrapin researchers, crab managers, and crab industry representatives to begin to address some of these issues on a state by state basis. The DTWG is planning additional meetings regionally and will meet again nationally and will include the Commission's Crab Subcommittee to perhaps provide some presentations on the work being conducted in the Gulf.

Abstracts

Encouraging Fisheries Cooperation in Conservation of the Diamondback Terrapin in Mississippi

Mr. Rick Burris, Mississippi Department of Marine Resources

Diamondback Terrapin mortality rates have been linked to nest predation, habitat loss through increased coastal development, and bycatch within the blue crab fishery. Derelict crab traps lost by fishermen also pose a threat to terrapins through ghost fishing. The Mississippi Department of Marine Resources, Office of Marine Fisheries has been actively promoting terrapin conservation through a variety of different approaches such as encouraging the use of Terrapin Excluder Devices (TEDs) in the blue crab fishery, increasing public awareness about the potential threats Mississippi's terrapin population face, and through the removal of derelict crab traps in Mississippi's marine waters. The Mississippi Derelict Crab Trap Removal Program, the most successful terrapin conservation initiative, through the help of Mississippi's commercial crab fishermen, has removed and recycled over 21,600 derelict traps from Mississippi waters since its inception of the program in 1999. The Mississippi Crab Trap Bycatch Reduction Device/TED Program has also been highly effective in distributing over 19,500 TEDs (4,800 traps) to both commercial and recreational blue crab fishermen.

Evaluation of Diamondback Terrapin (*Malaclemys terrapin*) Nesting Ecology throughout Coastal Louisiana

Dr. Steven H. Pearson, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries

The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) implemented a multi-year (2013-2015) project which evaluated diamondback terrapin (*Malaclemys terrapin*) nesting ecology. Diamondback terrapins are coastally distributed between south central Texas in the Gulf of Mexico along the Gulf and Atlantic Coast north through Massachusetts. Throughout their range many different biotic and abiotic factors have been shown to influence terrapin abundance, distribution and nesting success. In Louisiana our research has been principally focused on determining nest site locations, nest predators, nest surface characteristics, nest depth, clutch size, egg morphometrics, nest depredation rates and nest survivorship. Our results indicate that terrapin nesting occurs statewide in locations where suitable nesting substrates exist. Nests are laid in open areas and beneath dense vegetative cover with surface slopes in all orientations. Average nest ceiling height is varied between snad and shell hash substrate. Clutch size averages 5.5 eggs and varies between 1 and 13 eggs. Statewide, average egg morphometrics are: mass 11.8 g, length 38.1 mm and width 24.5 mm. Depredation rates are between 50 and 100 percent depending on location. In 2015 we implemented a detailed study within a single nesting site at which 92 nests were surveyed. Within these nests 43% of eggs were depredated, 31% successfully hatched and the fate of 26% of eggs was not determined. At the nest level 76% of all nests surveyed were fully or partially depredated while 43% of nests successfully hatched at least 1 egg. Collectively, these data are considered paramount in determining the overall conservation status of diamondback terrapins within Louisiana and can be useful in developing restoration projects.

Bycatch in the Commercial Blue Crab Fishery in Louisiana

Dr. Julie A. Lively, Louisiana State University AgCenter and Louisiana Sea Grant

Through a combination of blue crab research studies, our lab has documented the bycatch, specifically terrapins, across Louisiana since 2011. These research studies include documenting bycatch in a mixture of derelict fishing gear during clean ups, simulated derelict traps, and baited traps across multiple sites and seasons. From this information, we have been able to calculate some rates of terrapin catch and likelihood of encounters.

Terrapins, TEDs, and Disintegration Timelines

Dr. Willem Roosenburg, Center for Ecology and Evolutionary Studies, Ohio University

When first introduced into the commercial crab fishery, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources commissioned a study to investigate the potential impact of crab pots on bycatch species. That study published in 1942 identified the crab pots threaten air breathing organisms that lived in the shallows of Chesapeake Bay including Diamond-backed Terrapins. The result was that crab pot use was restricted to the open, deeper waters to limit the impacts, in part, on terrapins. Most states do not have similar location restriction of where crab pots can be used. Since the 1970s, the recreational use of crab pots was allowed in the previously excluded zones of Chesapeake Bay posing a threat to terrapins in areas where they were previously immune. In 1981 the first study quantified the impact of crab pots on terrapins in North Carolina, but subsequent studies in several states began to raise the alarm about crab pots and their substantial impact including data of high terrapin catch rates that can quickly extirpate local populations. Turtle excluder devices or bycatch reduction devices were developed, tested and required in some states, particularly in the near shore use of crab pots to reduce terrapin mortality. Nonetheless, resistance from recreational and commercial fisheries has cited the absence of terrapins in current day catches and recovered ghost crab pots as justification that terrapins are minimally affected. The surprisingly rapid decomposition of terrapins in crab pots and widespread reduction in their populations by a long-term fishery throughout the range have reduced crabbers' interactions with terrapins. My talk will integrate the history of crab pots and terrapin interactions, crab pots' potential to cause terrapin population decline and why terrapins are rarely encountered in abandoned crab pots, and discuss testing turtle excluder devices and implementing regulations with a hopeful eye toward the reduction of terrapin mortality in crab pots.

Developing Monitoring Techniques and Management Tools to Understand the Conflict between the Blue Crab (*Callinectes sapidus*) Fishery and Diamondback Terrapin (*Malaclemys terrapin macrospilota*) Populations in Florida

Dr. Ryan Gandy, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

The diamondback terrapin (*Malaclemys terrapin macrospilota*) shares Florida's coastal zone with the blue crab (*Callinectes sapidus*) and its associated fishery. Several subspecies of diamondback terrapin

collectively inhabit coastal zones throughout Florida, three are endemic and all share the potential for interaction with blue crab traps. Seasonal terrapin behaviors and commercial crab fishing patterns vary spatially and temporally in Florida and necessitate the development of a science-based mechanism for informed management decisions. Data from investigations into the development of standardized and habitat specific population survey methods, trap mortality, and maps of blue crab fishery effort within terrapin population 'hot spots' in Florida are presented.

Regional Overview of Current Terrapin Collaboration

Mr. Thomas Mohrman, The Nature Conservancy

The Diamondback Terrapin Working Group provides a forum for terrapin stakeholders to communicate, present, and collaborate research, outreach, and conservation efforts. In the Gulf Coast Region efforts have been made recently to increase this collaboration and effect outcomes at a regional scale. Two examples of this type of collaboration will be presented, demonstrating how stakeholders from each Gulf State have worked together.

Panel Round Table - Current Crab Research and Regulations Related to Reducing Terrapin Interactions

Mr. Glen Sutton, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
Mr. Jeffrey Marx, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries
Mr. Rick Burris, Mississippi Department of Marine Resources
Mr. Jason Herrmann, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resource/Marine Resources Division
Dr. Ryan Gandy, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Ms. Harriet Perry, Gulf Coast Research Laboratory (USM)

Presenters and Participants

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Attendees

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Mr. Chris Blankenship
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APPROVED BY:
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

SEA GRANT FISHERIES EXTENSION ADVISORY COMMITTEE MINUTES
Wednesday, October 18, 2017
Mobile, AL

Lively called the meeting to order at 1:35 p.m.

Introduction of committee and guests

Members Present
Julie Lively– LA Sea Grant
Bill Balboa – TX Sea Grant
Betty Staugler-FL Sea Grant
Dominique Seibert –LA Sea Grant
Marcus Dryman – MS-AL Sea Grant

Guests
Ben Posadas- MS-AL Sea Grant
Chris Nelson – Bon Secour Seafood/GOIC
Laura Picariello – Audubon G.U.L.F.
Ashford Rosenberg - Audubon G.U.L.F.
Jerry Mambretti - TPWD
Kevin Hanson-Alabama Div. of Marine Resources

Approval of Minutes
Staugler moved to approve minutes, **Lively** seconded – minutes approved as written.

Lively recommended the session presentation be moved to first on the Agenda to accommodate **Audubon** staff.

Presentation: Audubon G.U.L.F. United for Lasting Fisheries Update - Rosenberg provided updates on recent Audubon G.U.L.F. activity including - Fishery Improve Plans (F.I.P.). The F.I.P. program is an intermediate step that provides fisheries which cannot achieve sustainable certification an option to retain market position with retailers through documented efforts to achieve certification. Sea turtle interactions in the shrimp fishery are a primary use of F.I.P. and Audubon G.U.L.F. is working closely with Gary Graham in an effort to move this fishery closer to a sustainable certification. A Louisiana crawfish F.I.P. has just been initiated to address sustainability issues in the farmed and wild-caught crawfish fisheries. There are currently no F.I.P.'s for finfish. Audubon will be seeking certification of their program through Global Fisheries Sustainability Fund certification.

They continue to conduct industry outreach working with TED implementation in the Louisiana shrimp skimmer fleet. They have hosted several workshops, attended public scoping meetings and distributed tow time limit stickers to industry participants. Industry participants claim there is insufficient testing of TED's in shallow water and have requested a phased approach to implementation.

Audubon has recently begun working on bycatch in the pelagic longline fisheries with a NFWF initiative to explore the use of green stick as an alternative gear. Audubon acts as liaison to dealers and retailers to assess whether green stick use has negatively impacted their respective businesses. Fish dealers are expressing concern because green stick is not capable of producing the catches that longlines can. Audubon is currently working with finfish dealers to see if they can promote the sale of green stick produced fish to encourage acceptance of the new technique.

October is seafood month and Audubon will be working with restaurants and restaurant staff to train waiters on effective methods to promote sustainably harvested seafood. Restaurants are also participating in the use of the "Gulf Seafood Guide" - a mobile phone app that allows folks to search for restaurants that serve sustainably harvested product.
Audubon is also working on a "traceability" program that will allow tracking of product from dock to plate.

Lively discussed chair and vice-chair positions and asks if any members are interested in either of the two positions. There were no volunteers and the group voted **Lively** and **Balboa** as chair and vice-chair, respectively, for the next term.

Discussion:
Oysters
Balboa lead the discussion on oysters and oyster farming and asked the group to provide a brief update on the status of oyster farming in their respective states and how user conflicts are addressed.

Hanson addressed the Mississippi-Alabama perspective. Hanson explained that Bill Walton with MS-AL Sea Grant worked with state government to draft legislation that would provide for oyster farming and acceptable oyster farming zones in public water. A Sea Grant GIS specialist assisted with the development of maps to facilitate the new designations.

Staugler explained there was more hard clam culture in Florida than oyster culture. Leslie Sturmer, a Florida bivalve culture and health expert, has been working on bivalve culture in Florida since 1995.

Lively said triploid oyster culture in Louisiana is growing in popularity because of the year-round availability and quality of meats for the half-shell market. Oyster culture has been well accepted in Louisiana with minimal push-back from other commercial or recreational industries. There is very little conflict with commercial oyster harvesters because the farmed oyster is sold as a boutique product to specialty markets.

The Alabama industry is growing and there is an increased demand for oyster farming permits but the industry is stymied by a lack of approved seed stock.

Posadas explained Mississippi has not experienced significant user conflicts between commercial vs. farmed oysters but waterfront property owners and recreational anglers have expressed concerns about the use of nearshore areas for culture. The state is providing instruction and limited amounts of gear to individuals interested in starting their own oyster farms. A handbook "Oyster Farming Fundamentals" has been developed as a reference for new farmers.

Oyster seed is provided to Louisiana and Mississippi from the Louisiana hatchery at Grand Isle and the Auburn Shellfish Lab at Dauphin Island, respectively.

Nelson applauded Texas' efforts to establish the necessary legal framework for cage culture of oysters but suggests the greater benefit to the industry and the ecosystem is to expand the oyster lease program, currently limited to Galveston Bay, to the entire Texas coast. He suggests that all Gulf states could benefit from the addition of bay bottom leases to help reduce pressure on "wild" reefs and does not consider the genetic integrity of oyster stocks a critical issue.

Barotrauma

Staugler began the discussion explaining Florida Sea Grant evaluated the use of barotrauma mitigation devices in Florida's reef fish fishery. Staugler was asked to provide a summary of the barotrauma study to the Gulf of Mexico Fisheries Management Council at a recent meeting. The GFMFC voted to have each state's Sea Grant program provide outreach and education on the various options for mitigating barotrauma in the offshore fishery. There was general consensus among the Sea Grant committee that Florida is the only state with active barotrauma education and outreach efforts. Other Sea Grant programs provide some barotrauma education but it is limited in scope. Some discussion followed regarding the use of venting tools vs. descenders -venting tools are still the most widely used tool to mitigate barotrauma. In an effort to gather more data on recreational angler use of barotrauma mitigation devices Florida Sea Grant provides free descenders to anglers in exchange for information regarding obstacles and issues that prevent angler use. West Marine funded a program that paid charter captains to take reporters offshore to observe barotrauma and the use of various barotrauma mitigation devices.
Some anglers off Mississippi are using chum buckets, colloquially called "ascenders", to attract fish closer to the surface which eliminates the need for barotrauma tools when caught.

Gulf Sea Grant Fisheries Extension Updates

MS/AL: Dryman started in August and has submitted research proposals for a bull shark study and an evaluation of a new depredation gear for the reef fish fishery. Another proposal will use recreational angler survey data to characterize the nature and extent of depredation in the reef fish fishery.

Dryman attended the AFS meeting and participated in a discussion about the value of high dollar tag return data. His graduate student presented information on the grey triggerfish fishery and will be working with him at MS-AL Sea Grant upon graduation and developing grey triggerfish education and outreach programs.

Dryman will be handling extension and outreach for a Gulf-wide bottom longline sampling program that will begin in 2018. Marcus will summarize the results of 20 researchers collecting red snapper data across the Gulf of Mexico and synthesize the data for use in a series of workshops that are planned for each Gulf state. He is also collecting tarpon data using satellite tags to try and understand movement and habits in the eastern Gulf.

Florida: Staugler discussed that she and Chuck Adams presented the results of their barotrauma studies at the World Recreational Fishing Conference (WRFC) July 2017. A summary of their study results will be published in the Proceedings of the 8th World Recreational Fisheries Conference.

Florida just held their annual extension meeting which provided an opportunity for extension staff to meet with Florida Sea Grant's fisheries specialists.

Florida Sea Grant is promoting a guide certification program. The program is an online course that provides a "green" certification to each individual that completes the program and agrees to implement the BMP's specified in the curriculum. Focus group meetings to identify user needs will be held at four locations prior to finalization and launching of the guide certification program.

Fisheries specialists are "Mapping Humans" to understand the travel patterns and fishing habits of Florida anglers.

Florida Sea Grant primarily focuses on recreational angling but is discussing ways to keep and develop commercial fishing outreach and research.

Texas – Balboa discussed Hurricane Harvey and related flooding issues that continue to plague Texas. The floods likely caused significant oyster mortality but the extent and impact on landings is unknown. The public reef fishery opens on Nov. 1 with several new regulations in place including closures of minor bays and restrictions on harvest of oysters located within 300ft. of the shore.

A large superfund site located at the mouth of the San Jacinto river at Galveston Bay may have been compromised by floodwaters and is likely leaking dioxins into the bay. EPA is proposing to remove all of the materials within the site.

Hurricane Harvey's worst impacts were felt in Port Aransas and Rockport with most of the commercial, recreational and for-hire infrastructure suffering extensive damage.
Efforts to try and develop an oyster farming industry in Texas are ongoing.

Louisiana – Lively began discussing the Louisiana Fisheries Forward Summit March 6, 2018 and other Gulf states' programs are encouraged to participate and showcase studies or programs e.g. Supan's oysters and Louisiana's black gill partnership with Georgia. The Fisheries Forward Summit will include traditional commercial fisheries (shrimp, crab, finfish and oysters) but will now include for-hire recreational fishers and freshwater catfish producers. Sea Grant hopes to incorporate LDWF fisheries and aquatic species data with GIS to better characterize each industry.

Funding from the Sea Grant National Network Visioning exercise will be used to pay for the next meeting of the Fisheries Extension Network. The Fisheries Extension Network is planning to hold the next meeting in Gulf and hope to have the meeting following the Fisheries Forward Summit. The meeting will provide a variety of panel discussions/sessions to provide education and information to extension staff. The logistics have not been confirmed.

Louisiana Limited Plate Frozen Shrimp is an effort to get Louisiana shrimp out of the commodities market because local shrimp producers can no longer compete with the pricing of imported product. A NOAA – SK grant will fund the use of plate freezers on several shrimp vessels, at sea and at the dock. A standardized protocol will be required of all shrimpers participating and the Louisiana Limited Plate Frozen Shrimp Logo will be displayed on vessels, docks and packaged

shrimp. Sea Grant is facilitating the program but will not be responsible for follow-up quality control inspections.

The blue crab shedding industry is declining in Louisiana. Viral disease has resulted in significant mortalities in shedding facilities. Louisiana Sea Grant is studying viral loads of blue crabs in shedding facilities in an effort to determine what effect this and other sources of mortality may have had on the shedding industry.

A graduate student is completing research on shark interactions with the Gulf shrimp fleet. The student conducted surveys of Gulf shrimpers to try and characterize the extent of the problem. Shark damage to trawls has become an issue since fewer deck hands are proficient at mending damaged nets.

There is an issue with liability of state funded demonstration shoreline and oyster restoration and protection project sites in Louisiana's public marine waters. Restoration and shoreline protection projects that have reached the end of their contracted evaluation period will not receive continued funding to maintain navigation signage warning boaters of potential hazards. If no one agrees to assume liability and maintain required signage the state will remove gabion mat and offshore oyster cultch that may pose a navigation hazard at the project demonstration sites.

Seibert commented on the problem with mealy bugs (Roseau cane scale) destroying Roseau cane habitat all along the Louisiana shoreline. This has caused concern with agencies trying to prevent coastal erosion using natural landscapes.

The Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority is proposing some very large diversion projects to direct Mississippi River flood flows into historically sediment starved deltas. If approved, the projects would likely result in significant fisheries impacts to the receiving estuaries.

Other Business
None

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 5:15 p.m.

APPROVED BY:
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

COMMISSION BUSINESS SESSION
MINUTES
Thursday, October 19, 2017
Mobile, Alabama

Chairman Chris Blankenship called the meeting to order at 8:32 a.m. and asked the Commissioners and audience to introduce themselves.

The following Commissioners and/or Proxies were present:
Chris Blankenship, ***Chairman***, ADCNR/MRD, Gulf Shores, AL
John Roussel, Zachary, LA
Patrick Banks, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA *(Proxy for Jack Montoucet)*
Senator Brett Allain, Jeanerette, LA
Jamie Miller, MSDMR, Biloxi, MS
Joe Gill, Jr., Joe Gill Consulting, LLC, Ocean Springs, MS
Dan Ellinor, FWC, Tallahassee, FL *(Proxy for Nick Wiley)*
Chris Nelson, Bon Secour Fisheries, Bon Secour, AL
Mark Lingo, TPWD, Austin, TX *(Proxy for Carter Smith)*
Troy Williamson, Corpus Christi, TX
Representative Wayne Faircloth (via telephone), Galveston, TX

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

Others
Allan Brown, USFWS, Atlanta, GA
Glenn Constant, USFWS, Baton Rouge, LA
Andy Strelcheck, NOAA Fisheries, St. Petersburg, FL
Scott Bannon, ADCNR/MRD, Dauphin Island, AL
Harriet Perry, GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Julie Lively, Louisiana Sea Grant, Baton Rouge, Louisiana
Paul Mickle, MSDMR, Biloxi, MS
Jason Froeba, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Rick Schillaci, Omega Protein, Inc., Moss Point, MS
Laura Picariello, Audubon Nature Institute, New Orleans, LA
Julian Lartigue, NOAA RESTORE Science Program, Ocean Springs, MS
Alex Miller, NOAA Fisheries, Pascagoula, MS

Brief Overview of Commission Voting Procedures
D. Donaldson gave a brief overview of the Commission's voting procedures.

Adoption of Agenda
D. Donaldson stated Chris Oliver will not be able to attend the meeting to give the NOAA Assistant Administrator of Fisheries Report (Item 15), and asked to remove the item from the agenda. M. Lingo moved to adopt the agenda as amended. C. Nelson seconded the motion and the agenda was adopted with the change.

Approval of Minutes
T. Williamson moved to approve the March 16, 2017 minutes as submitted. D. Ellinor seconded the motion and the minutes were approved as submitted.

Public Comments
There was no public comments.

GSMFC Standing Committee Reports

Law Enforcement Committee (LEC)
C. Blankenship informed the Commission that Scott Bannon is now the new Director for the ADCNR/Marine Resources Division and the Commissioners congratulated him.

S. Bannon reported the meeting mainly consisted of Council business and he will answer questions on any of those issues after his report. He said the LEC and Law Enforcement Technical Committee discussed merging the officers of the two committees into one Chairman and one Vice Chairman, and that will begin at the next fall meeting. There was discussion from the USCG on a project to try to develop some gulf-wide compliance rates. They are compiling information from each state to compare the rates. They also discussed that if funding allows, to start printing the Officers' Pocket Guide again. The Committee was asked to provide their information for the *Annual License and Fees* and *Law Summary* publications. Finally, State reports were provided then the meeting adjourned.

P. Banks asked him to report on the discussion over the enforcement of federally permitted charter boats and charter captains supposedly taking permits off of their boats in order to fish state waters for red snapper season, then putting permits back on the boats after the state season is over. **S. Bannon** said that was discussed and a representative from NOAA, Charles Tyer, stated a letter is being drafted to address this issue.

C. Nelson moved to accept the Law Enforcement Committee report. T. Williamson seconded the motion and it passed.

Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC)
J. Ballard reported the TCC met yesterday with an abbreviated agenda. There was a discussion led by Glenn Constant, USFWS, about developing proposals for future NRDA funding opportunities. He outlined the importance of crafting proposals so they match the criteria specified in the Final Programmatic Damage Assessment and Restoration Plan. He proposed the TCC develop draft proposals in preparation for a discussion with Jamie Rhinehart at the March 2018

TCC meeting. After discussion, the group agreed that Commission staff and USFWS will start to work on that effort.

Data management Subcommittee (DMS)

J. Ballard reported that Nick Farmer gave a presentation on the For-Hire electronic logbook development; Andrew Peterson updated the committee on the progress of the VESL Trip Ticket reporting system; and Donna Bellais gave a presentation on the new GSMFC end-user query tool. During the afternoon session, representatives reviewed the commercial landings data from their state. No major problems were identified, but state representatives will update data and resend to GSMFC. Justin Esslinger from TPWD was elected Chairman and Steve Brown from FLFWC was elected Vice-Chairman.

Crab Subcommittee

J. Ballard reported Ryan Gandy presented the latest summary on ongoing genetics of blue crabs and Zach Darnell presented the most current results of the external tagging study which is examining migration of female crabs in the Gulf. He said each state reported on their respective derelict trap clean-ups. Rick Burris was re-elected Chairman. A motion was passed to approve a resolution honoring Ms. Harriet Perry for her many years of service to the Subcommittee and other various crab related efforts over the last 40+ years. The Subcommittee requests that the resolution be adopted by the Commission. **C. Blankenship** read the resolution to the Commission.

J. Gill moved to adopt the Resolution honoring Ms. Harriet Perry. C. Nelson seconded the motion and it passed.

SEAMAP Subcommittee

J. Ballard reported the SEAMAP Subcommittee will receive $12,000 less in FY2017 than in FY2016. He stated the SEAMAP Subcommittee submitted two proposals to the NOAA RESTORE Act Science Program but neither proposal was selected for funding. Mike Albins gave a presentation on the SEAMAP vertical line survey power analysis. Jill Hendon updated the Subcommittee on GCRL's study that is comparing Spectra Line rigs to the SEAMAP vertical line gear that uses monofilament. The Subcommittee also discussed the 2018 Shrimp/Groundfish survey station selection process and they are examining ways to minimize trawling impacts to hard bottom and sponge habitat on the west Florida shelf. Ted Switzer was elected Chairman and Jill Hendon was elected Vice-Chairman.

Darren Topping was elected Chairman and Beverly Sauls was elected Vice-Chairman of the TCC.

C. Blankenship asked if NOAA gave a reason why the SEAMAP proposals submitted were not funded. **J. Rester** said one of proposals had fairly high marks but was not considered. The other had two reviewers who felt the proposal was good, but one reviewer thought the ecosystem model that was proposed was not going to work across the entire Gulf of Mexico. They then explained why that model would not work.

A. Strelcheck said they have been asked why the electronic reporting effort is taking so long to begin. He said this effort will involve around 3,000 charter vessels from the North

Carolina/Virginia border all the way to Texas. He said there are different requirements in the South Atlantic than the Gulf and the implementation team is working with federal scientists, biologists, data analysts, staff from GSMFC and ASMFC, ACCSP and other data entities. He said they are making steady progress and the goal is to have a final rule published sometime next year with the implementation date of January 1, 2019.

P. Banks asked A. Strelcheck if the equipment currently being used by the Louisiana charterboat captains will be acceptable electronic logbook reporting equipment once the program come into place. **A. Strelcheck** said he expects the current equipment will be approved for reporting

C. Blankenship introduced Julian Lartigue, Director of the NOAA RESTORE Science Program. He briefed the Commission on the RESTORE program and stated he will answer any questions on the program after the meeting.

C. Nelson moved to accept the Technical Coordinating Committee report. T. Williamson seconded and the motion passed.

State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee (S/FFMC)

GulfFIN Priorities

S. Bannon stated Gregg Bray outlined the status of the 2018 funding for data collection and management activities. Preliminary numbers showed the GulfFIN line item of $4.2M and RecFIN of $3.4M, the gulf portion of the RecFIN is about $1.07M, in addition there's an additional $855K provided by NOAA OST to allow for large base sampling allocations for MRIP dockside surveys and $25K for travel participation support. With administrative fees removed, the amount available for funding for 2017 totals $5.5M. He said A. Strelcheck mentioned NOAA Fisheries is working to possibly waive part or all of the OMB administrative fees for 2018. The original amount proposed for 2018 for all jobs proposed is approximately $7.703M, which means there is about a $1.845M or 24% deficit.

S. Bannon stated that after considerable discussion, M. Lingo moved to fund Job 1 (Coordination and Administration of FIN Activities), Job 2 (Collecting, Managing, and Disseminating Marine Recreational Fisheries Data), Job 3 (Head Boat Sampling), Job 4 (Operation of FIN Data Management System), and Job 5 (Trip Ticket Program Implementation and Operation) and was seconded by Paul Mickle. The motion passed 5-0.

The committee motion still resulted in a funding deficit just over 10%, the committee agreed that the deficit would be applied equally to all programs and the Commission staff will work with all program coordinators to obtain revised budgets that reflect the reduced totals for 2018.

SEAMAP Priorities

S. Bannon said there was discussion on SEAMAP funding for activities for 2018. J. Rester provided background on the SEAMAP budget and surveys for the Gulf of Mexico. While the SEAMAP appropriation from congress has remained constant over the last 3 years at $5.125M, the amount actually received by SEAMAP partners to conduct fisheries

independent sampling has decreased due to the increase in taxes. The S/FFMC reviewed the various SEAMAP surveys along with their associated costs. SEAMAP does not know how much funding they will receive for 2018 and will not know their funding level until weeks after a FY2018 budget has passed, so it is not possible at this time to prioritize surveys based on anticipated funding for FY2018. SEAMAP will continue the current SEAMAP survey work and sampling effort and hope the additional funding or reduction in taxes will be realized.

Menhaden Advisory Committee (MAC)

S. VanderKooy reported the MAC met Tuesday morning with a relatively light agenda. One person gave public comment and that is Verbatim in the MAC minutes. R. Mroch reported on the Gulf menhaden landings through September of this year and he provided a short update on fishing in the Atlantic through September of this year. J. Mambretti reported very little fishing took place in Texas waters in 2017. The fleet made a total of 41 sets in Texas waters and landed 2.7M lbs which is about 8% of the available TAC at around 1.2M lbs. He said reporting continues to work well between NOAA, TPWD, and the fleet. He said port sampling went well this year with both LDWF and MDMR providing the sample preparations and delivery to the Beaufort Lab for ageing. This process will likely continue with the same arrangement in 2018. Gulf port samples will be processed ahead of the Atlantic's in anticipation of the SEDAR next year. S. VanderKooy showed the SEDAR timeline and stated it is anticipated that the SEDAR will be published before the end of 2018. All workshops will be held in New Orleans to accommodate the Gulf participants. B. Landry gave an update on the MSC Certification process for Gulf menhaden. Both Omega and Daybrook have partnered as clients for the pre-assessment. It is expected that the certification process should be complete by early next year. **Jason Adriance** was elected Chairman for the coming year.

J. Roussel asked S. VanderKooy if the committee discussed recent articles published stating gulf menhaden have been decreasing in size over the last 60 years. **S. VanderKooy** stated the committee did not discuss it but it is his understanding that NOAA staff are composing a rebuttal and will be sending it soon.

P. Banks asked S. VanderKooy if there was any discussion about bait landings from a menhaden standpoint. **S. VanderKooy** stated this was not discussed and they did not receive a report on the landings this year.

S. Bannon was elected Chairman and Paul Mickle was elected Vice Chairman of the S/FFMC.

J. Roussel moved to accept the S/FFMC report. M. Lingo seconded the motion and it passed.

Sea Grant Fisheries Extension Meeting Report

J. Lively reported 5 members representing all four Sea Grant Programs attended the meeting. Due to hurricane response in Florida and Texas, several members were not able to attend. She stated A. Rosenberg and L. Picariello with Audubon G.U.L.F. gave an update on their fishery improvement plans; their certification program; their industry outreach on skimmers and the potential upcoming rule for TEDs; update on the pelagic long line project they are doing with green stick; and promoting National Seafood Month. She said there was a discussion on the lack

of framework for oyster farming in Texas. B. Staugler led a discussion on Barotrauma work. She said there is an options paper at the Council to readdress Barotrauma. Each state gave a report on their current activities. They are planning a National Fisheries Sea Grant Extension meeting in New Orleans for the spring which will be a great place to showcase what is happening in gulf fisheries across the entire national network. J. Lively was reelected Chairman and B. Balboa was reelected Vice-Chairman.

A. Strelcheck stated the options paper on Barotrauma was tabled at the last Council meeting and in turn they recommended they move forward with the outreach program as well as a standardized policy.

P. Banks moved to accept the Sea Grant Fisheries Extension Meeting Report. M. Lingo seconded and it passed.

NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office Comments

A. Strelcheck stated the detailed report is in the Briefing Book under Tab C. He updated the Commission on regional activities. He said there is a Federal Fishery Management Plan for Offshore Aquaculture but they have not received any applications to date. There is a lawsuit against this and oral arguments are expected to occur in March 2018. He reported they have been working with other federal agencies to streamline the permitting process for aquaculture in the Gulf if the lawsuit is successful. He stated NOAA has been working with the National Ocean Service (NOS) to develop a Gulf aquaculture aqua mapper, which is an online mapping tool that will help site aquaculture facilities in the Gulf. NOAA also provided the Gulf States approximately $1M in funding for aquaculture with $400,000 of that being for off bottom oyster projects. He said they also have another $500,000 for regional pilot projects, and $75,000 for a market research study to look at the effects of marine aquaculture products on the market. He stated efforts are underway to improve upon the SEDAR process. He said due to the active Hurricane season, NOAA is proceeding with disaster relief declarations for Florida, Texas, USVI and Puerto Rico. He stated Bonnie Ponwith is retiring from the SEFSC at the end of the year and they expect to have a new director in place by the end of the year. **A. Strelcheck** also reported all of the states were sent letters prior to the Gulf council meeting stating congress, through the appropriations language, asked that NOAA allows the states to conduct management over designated artificial reef zones in the Gulf of Mexico. The letters outlined NOAA's exempted fishing permit process and how the states can apply for exempted fishing permits. He said that at the last gulf Council meeting, the council agreed to develop a letter to send to all the states regarding state management delegation.

B. Allain said Louisiana has not used their total allowable catch for red snapper and stated they are concerned about "if we don't use it, will we lose it?" **A. Strelcheck** stated this has been a very unusual year in terms of how the season was set and he feels a decision could be made to exempt 2017 from any sort of allocation formula to be used in the future.

B. Allain stated in the briefing book report, it mentions a framework action to adjust the buffer between the recreational red snapper ACLs and ACTs and asked for an explanation. **A. Strelcheck** said several years ago the agency was sued for overages in the recreational quota. The courts ordered NOAA to establish a mechanism to reduce the likelihood of future quota overages. The council specified a buffer of 20%, so the catch limit is reduced by 20% and then the season length

is projected based on whatever the state seasons are set at as well as the federal season, based on that catch target which is reduced from overall quota by 20%.

USFWS Region 4 Office Comments

Glenn Constant and **Allan Brown** updated the Commission on USFWS activities and stated they are going through some administration changes. They reported on the various programs they are involved in and said they have spoken with J. Ballard to possibly have someone from NRDA attend the next Commission meeting and review the criteria of their RFPs. The Commission agreed to invite Jamie Rhinehart from NRDA to the next meeting to discuss Region-wide and Open-ocean TIG programs.

Discussion of GSMFC Aquaculture Activities

S. VanderKooy stated the full report is in Tab D of the Briefing Book. He reported that in 2016, the Commission began a cooperative effort with NOAA's Office of Aquaculture to develop and manage a small grants program to address the technical and regulatory opportunities and challenges of oyster farming in the Gulf region. A total of six projects were funded across the Gulf at a total of $375,000. He then reviewed each project. He stated work on the six projects continues through December 2017, but two of the projects have received extensions; one due to staffing issues and the other due to Hurricane Harvey. All six of the PIs will be presenting on their projects at the half-day General Session at the March 2018 Commission meeting. He said the Commission has released another RFP for a new opportunity for oyster funding in 2018. The RFP includes the same basic scope and intent to address oyster farming in the region as the previous opportunity, and will total $370,000 with no single proposal to exceed $75,000.

S. VanderKooy reported the NOAA Office of Aquaculture has provided additional funding through the Commission as another small grants program intended not to fund research and development for aquaculture in the Gulf, but rather to support commercial start-ups with production in mind. This overall program is national with all three Commissions receiving $500,000 each to implement and manage the program. Under this RFP, any aquaculture in marine waters would be considered, from oyster to finfish, as long as the recipients are able to begin producing seafood as a result. Each Commission will develop the individual RFPs based on each region's unique needs and existing aquaculture frameworks. More information will be available as the Gulf RFP is developed. Awarded projects will begin in 2018.

Briefing on Diamondback Terrapin Symposium (General Session)

S. VanderKooy reported the general session was an effort to improve communication with the Diamondback Terrapin research community and the Gulf's crab industry and state agencies. It was intended to begin to change the narrative and approach to terrapin protection and recovery. By utilizing the working knowledge of the Subcommittee to meet the research needs of the DTWG, it is hoped that this will begin to change the tone regarding interactions between terrapins and the Gulf's crab industry.

There were approximately 40 attendees at the meeting and ten on the webinar broadcast. Six presentations were given from both the Crab Subcommittee and the Diamondback Terrapin Work Group, covering a number of crab and turtle topics from bycatch to general population status. Then there was a panel discussion and the audience was invited to ask questions of the state agency members as well as the Work Group.

S. VanderKooy thanked the invited speakers and stated a proceedings on the general session will be available soon on the GSMFC website www.gsmfc.org.

Impacts of Hurricanes Harvey and Irma

M. Lingo stated there was substantial infrastructure damage along the coast from Corpus Christi Bay to Sabine Lake. Fish houses, vessels and piers were lost. Two TPWD offices, the Rockport Marine Lab and the Dickinson Marine Lab sustained damage but are now up and running. He said oysters were the main thing impacted. It was a freshwater kill event which makes this the third year in a row where Texas has had substantial freshwater kill events from flooding. He said sampling shows some areas had a 100% mortality and other areas as low as 15% mortality. They will continue sampling to find the areas with low mortality so they can hopefully have an oyster fishery this year.

A. Brown asked if there has been any discussion on federal disaster assistance to help restore the oyster resource. **M. Lingo** said they are working on that now.

D. Ellinor thanked the states for sending assets and teams to help them get back up and running. He said the agency faired pretty well because Hurricane Irma went up through the middle of the state. The Keys took the brunt of the storm but the Lab was fine. Communication was down for quite some time and they will address that issue for future Hurricanes. The lobster fishery was affected losing around 300,000-400,000 traps, but no vessels were lost. The stone crab fishery was not affected and will be starting soon.

C. Nelson asked if either state applied for fisheries disaster declarations. Both states are in the process of applying for fisheries disaster declarations.

NOAA Fisheries Budget Update

D. Donaldson reviewed Tabs E&F of the briefing book, the House and Senate FY2018 Appropriations. He said the fisheries data collection surveys and assessments, the regional Councils and Commissions line item, and IJF grants and enforcement were either level or slightly increased in funding in the house and senate mark ups for next year. It also states NOAA is encouraged to ensure that adequate resources are provided to complete the SEAMAP mission. He said there is specific language in the Senate side about the Fisheries Information Network that they be funded at $22.5M. He said there may be a slight increase for the Gulf, Atlantic and Pacific, but they will not know for sure until the budget is passed. He reviewed other sections of the appropriations bills.

A. Strelcheck commented that as far as fisheries data collection and surveys the budget view is favorable. He said they are continue to operate under the Continuing Resolution until December 8th. At that point either a new budget will be passed or the Continuing Resolution will stay in place. He said the Senate and House marks are much more favorable to fisheries than the President's Budget.

C. Nelson said in reference to the section on developing artificial cultch, the language states NOAA is directed to work with partners to develop a competitive grants process to continue to evaluate and develop artificial cultch. It mentions the Chesapeake Bay area. He asked if that will

be for that area only or will it be for all regions. **A. Strelcheck** said he was not sure but he will contact him when he gets an answer.

Legislative Committee

D. Donaldson gave a brief history of the committee and stated they have not been successful in getting all members together to meet in person or via conference call. The purpose of the committee is to look at fisheries issues through a legislative perspective because they are in a unique position to assist the Commission and the states in moving things forward. Representative Faircloth from Texas (via speaker phone) reviewed some of the fisheries issues in Texas and Senator Allain from Louisiana spoke of the issues in Louisiana. It was decided to encourage the legislatures to participate more in Commission activities and D. Donaldson will try to schedule another meeting or conference call when none of the legislatures are in session. He stated they will keep the Legislative Committee Report on the October agenda.

Discussion of Legislative Issues and Actions

D. Donaldson reviewed the bills in Tab I, J and K of the Briefing Book dealing with red snapper. The Strengthening Fishing Communities and Increasing Flexibility in Fisheries Management Act (H.R 200) focuses mainly on giving the councils the proper tool for flexibility to allow them to manage their fisheries effectively. It allows them to use stock rebuilding framework on science rather than a one size fits all approach. It includes the public in the development of the FMPs, requires the Secretary of Commerce to develop a plan for implementing cooperative research and further improve the science and data.

D. Donaldson said the Modernizing Recreational Fisheries Management Act of 2017 (H.R. 2023) allows for increased access for recreational anglers to federal waters, improve the federal data collection by emphasizing inclusion of state data, and allow federal managers to use alternative measures for implementing fishing regulations. He said again that they are trying to move away from this one size fits all approach and allow for more flexibility.

D. Donaldson said H.R. 3588 and S. 1686 looks at providing management for red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico. They address the issue of recreational access to red snapper and it essentially establishes a depth based scheme of 25 fathoms or 25 nautical miles where the states would have exclusive management authority over recreational red snapper.

D. Donaldson said there actually seems to be a willingness among congress to move forward and reauthorize the Magnuson/Stevens Act. He said he will keep the Commission posted on any action that takes place

The Commission discussed the need to resolve the issue on red snapper as this and oysters consume the majority of the discussion on marine fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico. It was also discussed that changes will have to be made to the Magnuson/Stevens Act to allow for changes in red snapper management.

Update on Seafood Import Monitoring Program

A. Miller reported he is now with NOAA Fisheries in Pascagoula working on the Trade Monitoring Program. One program under the whole umbrella of trade monitoring programs that NOAA oversees is the new Seafood Import Monitoring Program. He gave a brief history of the

program and stated the driving forces behind the program relate to IUU Fishing and seafood fraud. He then gave an update of the program and stated January 1, 2018 is the mandatory compliance date. A copy of his presentation is available upon request to the GSMFC office.

Executive Committee Report

C. Blankenship stated the following Executive Committee Report was submitted and distributed to the Commission:

Approval of Minutes

D. Donaldson reviewed the minutes from an executive call on 8/16/17 concerning new Subrecipient Monitoring and Cash and Accounting Operating Procedures that were added to the GSMFC Administrative Manual. **C. Blankenship moved to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded by M. Lingo and passed unanimously.**

Discussion of GSMFC Audit

A. Rabideau reviewed the 12/31/16 Audit with the Committee. An unqualified opinion was received. An unqualified opinion means that the financial statements were fairly presented in all material aspects. Page 30 of the audit report outlines the summary of the audit results. **C. Blankenship moved to accept the audit report. The motion was seconded by M. Lingo and passed unanimously.**

Financial Report

A. Rabideau noted that the commissioners receive the financial report every month by email. She pointed out that the Statement of Cash has significant reimbursable/outstanding amounts due to the General Fund every month. This is due to the fact that an SF-270 form has to be filled out and submitted to NOAA at the end of every month and it takes a week or two to receive reimbursement from the federal grants.

Presentation of 2018 Budget

A. Rabideau reviewed the 2018 budget. She pointed out that the commission budget is very similar to last year's budget. The total projected budget for fiscal year 2018 is $7,184,799. Since final numbers haven't been established for IJF and SEAMAP and discussions were held yesterday concerning the FIN budget, the total budget will likely change. **Senator B. Allain moved to accept the 2018 budget. The motion was seconded by C. Blankenship and passed unanimously.**

Staff Compensation

The Executive Committee recommended the following regarding staff compensation:

- 2% or a minimum of a $1,000 raise for all.
- $1,200 for Angie Rabideau, Joe Ferrer and Steve VanderKooy
- $2,400 for James Ballard

C. Blankenship moved to accept these recommendations. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

Being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:06 a.m.

J. Gill moved to accept the Executive Committee Report. D. Ellinor seconded the motion and it passed.

GSMFC Program Reports

Interjurisdictional Fisheries Program (IJF)

S. VanderKooy stated the full report is under Tab L of the Briefing Book. He said the Croaker Profile has been completed since the March meeting. It is available on the website. They have started the Management Profile for Cobia. The first meeting of the Cobia TTF was cut short due to the arrival of Hurricane Harvey. He said they are working on the revision of the Otolith manual. This is a slow process because many collaborators are involved in the revision effort. He said he continues to work with Audubon to stay apprised of what is going on with the Gulf standard. The Annual Report is on bid to print and will be distributed when it is delivered to the Commission.

Southeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program (SEAMAP)

J. Rester stated the full report is under Tab M of the Briefing Book. He said as stated previously, SEAMAP funding for FY2017 was decreased $12,000 from previous levels. He said in the last 5 years funding has decreased approximately 15%. There is some language in the House budget supporting SEAMAP but no specific amount of funding is mentioned. SEAMAP will continue to pursue additional funding sources to collect additional fishery independent data. SEAMAP has contributed data to several SEDARs. SEAMAP is in the process of examining ways to minimize trawling impacts to hardbottom and sponge habitat on the west Florida shelf. Since March, SEAMAP has fulfilled 14 data requests and the SEAMAP database has been downloaded 359 times.

Sportfish Restoration Program (SFRP)

J. Ballard stated the full report is under Tab N of the Briefing Book. He reported he was involved in setting up a two-day summit entitled "Marine Artificial Reef Research and Development: Integrating Fisheries Management Objectives" at the AFS annual meeting. He said it was very well attended and proceedings for the symposium will be published by August 2018. He said the Commission has taken steps to discontinue the Gulf FINFO and EatGulfSeafood Websites. Louisiana expressed interest in components of Gulf FINFO and they have been transferred. He said if any of the other states are interested in acquiring sections of the site, contact J. Ferrer. He is working on the reformatting and conducting final edits on the updated edition of the GSMFC's and ASMFC's 2004 publication "Guidelines for Marine Artificial Reef Materials: Second Edition." The third edition is expected to be completed by the end of the year. He stated he is continuing to collect information for the development of a proposal for a gulf-wide standardized artificial reef demonstration project that will fill some of the key science gaps that were identified at the National Artificial Reef Workshop.

Fisheries Information Network (FIN)

G. Bray stated the FIN report is under Tab O of the Briefing Book. He said this is a very successful program because the state and federal personnel on the committee are extremely professional, knowledgeable and motivated. He reviewed the items submitted for funding in 2017. As stated earlier, there will be a deficit again for 2018. They are hopeful for some potential relief through less or eliminated OMB administrative fees and additional funding in the future that could eliminate the deficit. If this occurs, they can possibly do other prioritized data collection programs.

He reported they are working on a major overhaul of the data management system to make it easier and more user friendly for the public or interested scientists to get access summary level results from the website. They have received funding from the NOAA FIS Program that will help with that effort. They will also be working on new quality control processes for both the commercial trip ticket data and the biological sampling database. He said the goal is to increase the amount and quality of data that is provided for stock assessments. **G. Bray** then mentioned the opportunities available through the NOAA Fisheries FIS process which funds development projects for data management, data acquisition, electronic reporting, electronic monitoring, etc. He will send RFPs to all the members on the committee when they become available. He said that in November they are holding a catch release work shop in New Orleans and this is a collaborative effort between GulfFIN, ACCSP, Pacific RecFIN and NOAA Fisheries. The purpose of the meeting is to find ways to improve the quality and amount of recreational release catch data that is being used in stock assessments. The meeting notice is available on the Commission website for anyone who is interested in attending.

Aquatic Nuisance Species Program (ANS)

J. Ballard stated the full report is under Tab P in the Briefing Book. He then gave a Power Point presentation update of the Program which can be obtained upon request to the GSMFC office. He said Region 4 USFWS AIS Small Grants Program has funded 26 projects totaling $556K from 2014-2016. The Commission hosted the Aquatic Invasive Species in the Southeast meeting in October. He has completed the update of the Invasive Species Traveling Trunk. He then updated the Commission on the USARK v. Zinke Ruling. He said the USARK filed a lawsuit in the D.C. District Court challenging a 2012 rule in which the USFWS designated 4 species of constrictor snakes as injurious under the Lacey Act. The shipment clause on transporting injurious wildlife from one state to another was challenged. In April of 2017, the D.C. Circuit Court stated the shipment clause does not prohibit transport of injurious wildlife between states within the continental U.S. The shipment clause is unambiguous and its interpretation is consistent with the legislative history. **J. Ballard** stated the Lacey Act can prohibit injurious wildlife from entering the country but not prohibit shipment from state to state. He said to stop the transport of these animals between states, each state can include them on the states' prohibited list. He then informed the Commission that another invasive tropical fish, the regal damsel fish, has been reported in every state of the northern Gulf of Mexico. He said they do not know what the impacts are at this time but will keep the Commission updated. He then reviewed a new tool developed by the USGC to assist managers to help assess impacts on nonindigenous aquatic species distributions due to flooding associated with storms.

State Directors' Reports

The State Directors' Reports are in the Briefing Book. **C. Blankenship** asked if the Directors had anything to add to their reports. **C. Blankenship** stated Alabama is in the process of sinking another ship for an artificial reef.

J. Miller stated Mississippi fared well during Hurricane Nate. He said they encountered no apparent resource damage to oyster reefs or other species. They also did not have any damage to any state property. He said he will work with J. Gill to find a legislative representative for Mississippi. He stated the governor has committed approximately $8M of RESTORE funds to purchase an oyster hatchery which is off the coast of Gulfport, Mississippi. He said they have identified other areas for oyster farms but are receiving resistance from property owners and other

groups. He said they have a pending permit south of Deer Island off of Biloxi's coast but the "friends of Deer Island" is against that location too, but they are working to solve these issues. They have also received $1M for aquaculture training. He said they set a quota of 10,000 sacks for oyster harvest this year which is 30% of the available resource. He then congratulated J. Gill on receiving the Lyles/Simpson Award.

P. Banks stated Louisiana recently changed a closure for commercial crabbing from a 30 day complete closure of commercial crabbing to a 2 month closure on all female harvest, so that will occur in March and April this upcoming year. He asked the other states for financial assistance of the Audubon certification program. He thinks this program is of value to the states but Louisiana is no longer able to support it at the levels they have in the past.

Future Meetings

C. Blankenship stated the next meeting will be in Florida on March 13-15, 2018 and the October meeting will be in Texas on October 16-18, 2018. The Commissioners will be contacted when the location is secure.

Publications List and Web Statistics

The Publication List is available on the website and J. Ferrer gave a brief presentation on the activity of the website.

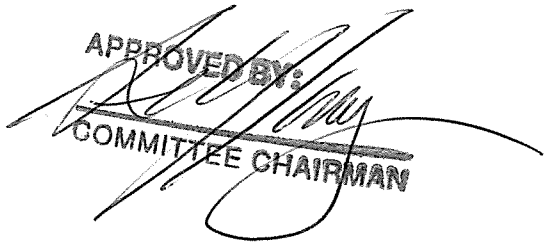
Election of Officers

J. Gill moved to elect J. Miller Chairman. C. Nelson seconded and the motion passed.

P. Banks moved to elect B. Allain First Vice-Chairman. J. Gill seconded and the motion passed.

C. Nelson moved to elect D. Ellinor Second Vice-Chairman. J. Gill seconded and the motion passed.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 2:02 p.m.



COBIA TECHNICAL TASK FORCE
MEETING MINUTES
December 12 & 13, 2017
Juno Beach, Florida

Moderator VanderKooy called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. with the following in attendance:

Chuck Adams, Florida Sea Grant, Gainesville, FL
Patrick Carron, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
John Pituch, LDWF, New Orleans, LA
Ryan Easton, TPWD, Port O'Connor, TX
Jim Franks, GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Josh Neese, ADCNR, Gulf Shores, AL
John Anderson, GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Bob Zales, II, Panama City, FL
Steve VanderKooy, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Debbie McIntyre, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Introductions and Housekeeping

VanderKooy, IJF Program Coordinator and the group's moderator, opened the meeting and welcomed attendees. Everyone welcomed **Zales** to the Task Force. **Zales** is a Charter Boat Captain and long-time angler who will serve as recreational representative.

VanderKooy reviewed the GSMFC travel policies and referred everyone to the *GSMFC Travel Guidelines* for detailed information. Any questions regarding travel should be addressed to Alyce Wilhelm, the Commission's travel coordinator.

Approval of Minutes

*The minutes from the introductory meeting on August 29th in New Orleans were reviewed and, on motion by **Anderson** and second by **Franks**, the minutes were approved unanimously.*

Task Force Dropbox

VanderKooy made sure that everyone has access to the Dropbox to share literature, upload current drafts, and provide reviews of other sections. He shared the Genealogybank.com link so that everyone can use this resource. **VanderKooy** reminded the group about the bibliography search available for use on the GSMFC website which provides a vast amount of fishery-related information.

Draft Reviews

VanderKooy explained that the table of contents will continue to serve as a means to follow up on progress and keep track of assignments.

Description of stocks – Shipley was not present at the meeting.

Anomalies & Abnormalities – Pituch

Pituch found that the most common deformity in Cobia is 'pug face' but the cause is unknown and will be listed as a research need. Oil spill papers revealed different contaminants which may have increased the pug face occurrence. We will include published work and state that it is unknown to what degree the oil spill may have contributed but not speculate if possible. **Pituch** reported that there we a number of papers that mentioned spinal and heart deformities. Franks explained that information on inflammatory diseases of fish hearts is essentially non-existent. Bacterial infections are known to cause myocarditis (Wood and Yasutake 1956; Herman 1975) and pericarditis (Herman 1975) in trout, however, pericardial adhesions, usually sequelae to pericarditis in mammals, were not reported for fish prior to a study on fish hearts by Howse et al (1975). Although the findings of that study provided no information concerning the etiology of the pericardial adhesions, the adhesions most probably resulted from pericarditis. This disease may occur in a substantial number of Cobia in the Gulf of Mexico (Howse et al. (1975).

Apparently, the Cobia heart and respiratory system function well without the need for active swimming, as is proven by the fact that Cobia frequently have been observed by divers lying motionless (as individuals or in groups) for hours on the seafloor in water 30 – 50m deep (Overstreet et al. 1992; Capt. Mike Bell, personnel communication) and on the bottom of aquacuture tanks (Franks, personnel communication).. Cobia have been observed to swim rapidly to the surface from 75m depth. Overstreet et al. (1992) proposed that '*perivenous smooth muscle cords found in the viscera of Cobia may have a role in the adaptation of Cobia to accommodate rapid changes in temperature and hydrostatic pressure by coordinating constriction and relaxation of the veins, thus forming reservoirs of the pooling blood in strategic sites and the shunting of blood to critical organs, such as the liver, heart and brain. This may counteract the absence of an air bladder. Other fishes with similar habitats do not have such a mechanism*'.

Note: This should be included in Shipley's section as well.

Howse, H. D., J. S. Franks and R. F. Welford. 1975. Pericardial adhesions in the Cobia Rachycentron canadum (Linnaeus). Gulf Research Reports 5 (1): 61-62.

Howse, H.D., R.M. Overstreet, W.E. Hawkins, J.S. Franks. 1992. Ubiquitous perivenous smooth muscle cords in viscera of the teleost Rachycentron canadum, with special emphasis on liver. Journal of Morphology 212:175-189.

Pituch will work with **Franks** to attain some of his input regarding the rates and causes of these anomalies and abnormalities and any others that **Franks** may have personal information on.

General Behavior & Coloration – Anderson

Anderson reviewed the general behaviors of Cobia. **Franks** referred again to Cobia laying on the bottom and it was agreed that it should be referenced here. Like many of the pelagics, cobia are attracted to FADs and can change color when they are stressed and in accordance with their surroundings, i.e. color of tanks in captivity. They also have an obvious stripe which fades from the juvenile as it gets older. **Anderson** will work with **Easton** to exchange information regarding this.

Physiologic Requirements –

The state representatives were asked to review their Fishery-Independent Data to look at mean and extreme hydrologic conditions where Cobia were collected so **Anderson** can summarize beyond what little is published. Some lab and culture information may be included on temperature, salinity, etc. if there is not much in the literature.

Parasites and Diseases -

Anderson stated that a lot of literature on parasites and bacteria was available and provided a draft. **VanderKooy** recommended showing it to Dr. Overstreet once it is near completion so he can be sure it's inclusive and that the scientific names are correct and current. Overstreet has offered to review our sections in the past, but not to draft them.

Feeding Prey and Predators –

Anderson pointed out that Cobia eat blue crab and other swimming crab but will transition to eating bony fish as they get bigger. Not much information is available on Cobia predators – other than dolphin and mako. Cobia will eat diamondback terrapin per **Franks**.

Other stress factors –

The issue of FADs was discussed at length. This is being ignored for the most part by management and was well developed in the Tripletail profile. The use of FADs as they relate specifically to Cobia should be noted here as well, especially around tournament fishing and should be added to research needs. **VanderKooy** noted that at some point, FADs will need to be addressed within the artificial reef guidelines and regulations. The practice won't go away but should be managed at least.

Anderson stated that acidification is affecting other organisms and could contribute to issues in the future with Cobia. He will provide any references to **Easton** for the Threats Section but like oil related affects, should not be overly speculative.

Reproduction – Franks

Franks reviewed several resources of his information. The amount of South Atlantic information to include in this profile was discussed, since most work was done there. It is important that we identify where the data came from in the Gulf where possible but, since East Florida is included in the Gulf, we will need to use any source, including the SA.

Franks explained that peak spawning occurs during spring to summer – different peaks in different regions – and it ends by the end of fall. Cobia are batch spawners based on work by Brown-Peterson. Newer terminology is being used for maturity and stages and should be included and updated in the chapter.

Migration –

Franks has a proposal in for satellite tracking of these fish because there is no new data. This is definitely a research need.

Franks reported that a number of Cobia were tagged in Texas but he wasn't sure if they were recaptured in the US and, if they did go to Mexico, what the reason was. **Franks** needs more data from these particular tags in order to draw any conclusions.

Courtship and Spawning Behavior –

Franks stated that not much is known and nothing is published regarding Cobia spawning behavior in the wild. He will share his life stage descriptions with **Shipley**.

Easton will check with Joel Anderson (TPWD) for help with Cobia genetics and whether the published works have genetic significance to the Gulf proper. The current genetics is how the Atlantic and Gulf 'stocks' have been divided so any help understanding would be useful.

Age and Growth – Neese

The life span of male Cobia is 8-9 years while females live 10-11 years. Since 1999, there has very little work done ageing Cobia per **Franks**. **Neese** will contact Panama City for otolith information and see if they have anything new on Cobia regarding age and growth. **Franks** reported that his tagging has resulted in 6% return. It is likely that the LA CCA has some data and it was suggested that T-Meaux Claverie be contacted since he helped run that tagging program.

Satellite tagging information is being worked on currently by **Franks** and Hoffmayer. The fish being used were at large seven months or less. Today's methods of analyzation are much improved over methods used in the past. **VanderKooy** will contact Puerto Rico about tagging there. He will also double check the draft chapter for the Otolith Manual to see if there is anything to add from there.

Mariculture – Neese and **Adams**

Franks has information on a large pen culture facility on the Gulf side of Colombia, at the border with Panama. China's production has exploded in the last decade (84M lbs) but no one is sure where the product goes. **Neese, Adams,** and **VanderKooy** will take a look at global data for culture. **VanderKooy** has downloaded most of the data from the FAO but the market or final destination for product is unknown. Most of the imports to the US come from Panama and it's possible that the Columbia operation ships from Panama as well.

Habitat – Easton

Easton adjusted the Habitat boilerplate so that it is Cobia specific and removed what was not relevant to Cobia. He will remove Georgia references which were specific to tripletail and make them more generalized. **VanderKooy** pointed out that there is information regarding Cobia in SEAMAP data, more than originally thought in the trawl surveys. It is possible that the SEAMAP data may have useful hydrology info associated. They may also have floating vegetation in the comments. Glenn Zaphe (NOAA) may have additional data on cobia larval occurrence in the plankton trawls.

Easton asked the group to send him anecdotal references about FADs regarding Cobia. Also pictures of FADs would be valuable.

Description of the Fishery – VanderKooy

Commercial/Recreational

Cobia is almost exclusively a hook and line fishery which is becoming more active on the East Coast. A lot of commercial landings are probably not being recorded or reported due to back-door sales since Cobia is predominantly marketed in restaurants as a specialty item.

Recreational landings are also by hook and line anglers. It is hard to track how much of these rec landings are being sold and not reported. Other state reps were encouraged to follow up on this in their states.

Zales pointed out that reporting mechanisms have improved so much over the years that it is hard to tell if Cobia were being reported correctly previously. He said that most people jig Cobia but you can catch them on bottom with live or cut up bait. If the fish is on surface, it can be caught with live bait.

Anderson and **Franks** noted that in MS, anglers anchor up and chum and put bait on the bottom to catch Cobia which is less popular in other states apparently.

The Gulf and Caribbean commercial capture fishery is dominated by Brazil and Mexico. **VanderKooy** will flesh this info out. Commercial – **VanderKooy** went state by state to collect information from each rep regarding what they know about state-specific commercial fisheries.

Neese will check with Mareska for **Alabama** information on the decline in landings in the 1970s. **VanderKooy** will look at some of the Croaker data and get some info to add from there. It is likely that cobia were bycatch in the finfish trawl fishery for Croaker and as it went away, so did some of the incidental commercial landings.

Easton will try to find out why Texas commercial data is lumped together as gear and will follow up on other issues that came into question. If they separate recreational catches by month (in Florida and Texas), from southern to northern bays, is there a sub-population that comes from Mexico up toward north central? By bay system and by month, we may be able to look at western Louisiana management and see if fish are being picked up from Texas traveling east.

Louisiana has had a bad decade for harvest of cobia, in part, due to storms etc. Why did commercial landings go down so much over a period of 8-9 years and never come back up? Limited entry seems to have been the cause of the drop. **Pituch** will check on this.

Between now and the next meeting, **VanderKooy** will contact committee members individually. All need to interpret their landings so that **VanderKooy** can work on all of this data. He will probably send this to each state rep and then blend all information together.

Adams and **VanderKooy** will coordinate the fisheries data to the economics section, i.e. divisions by gear, month, wave, etc. **VanderKooy** will try to get additional data from Mexico and **Franks** will check on the culture production from Colombia and Panama. **Adams** and **VanderKooy** will also explore Belize wild capture and China culture production. Global production would be useful in this profile since it is a species with very high potential for future culture in the Gulf. The entire culture section may become an appendix if it turns out that there is much more information available than is specific to the Gulf proper.

Enforcement - Carron

The group briefly reviewed the Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana contributions which had been sent to **Carron**. Reeder will provide Texas information and Neil "Scott" Pearce and **Shipley** will provided Florida info.

In the Enforcement Section, we need to include those regulations that may have caused ups and downs in landings. **VanderKooy** will also add information on historic weather events which may contribute to the interpretation of landings trends over time.

Economics - Adams

Adams asked where most Cobia are coming from. Imports are reported by customs but wild catch and cultured is not clear. Panama product appears to be the most imported.

It is difficult to distinguish between what is caught recreationally and commercially. In March, April, and May when migration happens is when effort increases to target Cobia in Florida off

Destin. NMFS import data was reviewed. There are a lot of fish coming in to Miami from Panama. **Adams** will tease this out to find out countries of origin.

Adams will create an outline and forward to **VanderKooy**. **Adams** and **Zales** will touch base regarding any further collaboration on this.

A lot of this information can be derived but must be done by individual year from the NOAA site. **VanderKooy** will work on this.

Neese and **Adams** will work together regarding mariculture. There appears to be a good solid success story with Cobia.

Next Meeting

VanderKooy suggested that the next meeting take place the last week of March, possibly on Dauphin Island. He will follow up with everyone after the first of the year.

*On motion by **Adams** with a second by **Anderson**, the meeting was adjourned at 5:15 p.m. on Wednesday, December 13.*