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 megalop 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.