

**TCC CRAB SUBCOMMITTEE
MINUTES
Tuesday, March 19, 2019
New Orleans, LA**

APPROVED BY:

COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

S. **VanderKooy**, called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. in Chairman **Gandy's** absence with the following in attendance:

Members

Claire Crowley, FWC, St. Petersburg, FL (*proxy for Ryan Gandy*)
Traci Floyd, MDMR, Biloxi, MS (*proxy for Rick Burris*)
Jason Herrmann, Dauphin Island, AL
Harriet Perry, USM/GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Glen Sutton, TPWD, Dickinson, TX
Peyton Cagle, LDWF, Lake Charles, LA

Others

Zach Darnell, USM/GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Luis Hurtado Clavijo, TAMU, College Station, TX
Robert Leaf, USM/GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Ben Young, LDWF, Lafayette, LA
L. Lee, NC Division of Marine Fisheries, Morehead City, NC
Y. Li, NC Division of Marine Fisheries, Morehead City, NC
Corky Perret, Poplarville, MS
Ray Mroch, NOAA Fisheries, Beaufort, NC

Staff

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

Introductions

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

Adoption of Agenda

Perry moved to adopt the agenda. **Crowley** seconded the motion, and the agenda was adopted.

Approval of Minutes

The Subcommittee reviewed their minutes from the meeting held on October 16, 2018, in South Padre Island, Texas. **Cagle** moved to accept the minutes as written, **Floyd** seconded, and the minutes were approved unanimously.

Public Comment

VanderKooy offered the audience a chance to provide any comments related to the agenda topics. There were no comments.

Range-wide Population Genetics Update

Luis Hurtado provided some updated genetics work looking at crabs from Texas, the Florida Panhandle and the Chesapeake. Since last report, he and the subcommittee have collected tissue samples from four of the five Gulf states. **Cagle** stated that Louisiana will supply additional samples to contribute to these results over the next month. These tissues are being used to explore the whole blue crab genome. Dr. Hurtado's results continue to indicate that the previous approach using neutral markers did not provide the resolution necessary to determine a single or multiple stock. There is some difference between the southwestern Gulf (south Texas and the Yucatan) and the rest of the northeastern Gulf (mid-Texas to Georgia). The division presumed in the benchmark assessment (GDAR01) may need to be reexamined if these data hold true. Hurtado will have more results in October.

New Tagging Information

Darnell (GCRL) reviewed his tagging project with the group and informed them that he will have a full report at the 2019 fall meeting. They have tagged over 18,000 female crabs and have had about 3,600 returns which is a 19.7% recapture rate. Generally, movement has been from the west to the east in most of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama, stationary around Panama City, and to the west from the Cedar Key/Steinhatchee area of Florida with those crabs ending up in Apalachicola.

Another phase of the study is tagging crabs on the north side of Horn Island in Mississippi. Out of 288 mature females tagged in that area, only four have been recaptured thus far. They are finding huge numbers of mature female crabs in traps there. Gulf-wide tagging will continue through May/early June of 2019. They will spend June through September analyzing the data which will allow them to have complete analyses available by the fall meeting. **Darnell** encouraged everyone who has been tagging crabs to continue doing so for a few more months.

His team has been doing some more focused tagging in the Terrebonne, Barrataria, and Pontchartrain estuaries in Louisiana, trying to get some more detailed movement data within the estuaries as opposed to once the crabs leave and also trying to get an estimate of exploitation rates, using low and high value tags to allow them to account for reporting rates. This should also allow a way to look at the relative magnitude of commercial vs recreational harvest. They also will be doing some active telemetry of a relatively low number of crabs in the lower Pontchartrain basin, west of Mississippi sound to get some very detailed information regarding walking vs active swimming vs treading water or getting carried by the tide. They are continuing to release tags this year as time and money permit.

Alternative Assessment Models

Two presentations were given by Doctors Yan Li and Laura Lee from the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries. Yan Li presented the North Carolina Catch-Survey which has a lot of potential for the Gulf to apply in the next assessment. Laura Lee presented the North Carolina Traffic Light concept which is a simplified approach to using some simple indices to generate a green, yellow, red designation for a variety of parameters in their crab population. The traffic light is not an assessment but it does offer a very understandable status for stakeholders when looking at short and long-term trends.

Next Steps toward GDAR

The subcommittee agreed that a data and modeling workshop would be useful this summer to explore the potential models with existing data in advance of any revision to a benchmark and **VanderKooy** pointed out that he does have funds available for this. The purpose of the workshop would be to explore any potential models and the application of the traffic light. The objectives for the fishery

and the needs of the agencies will also be defined before moving forward with another benchmark. The terms of reference for the workshop would include specifics on better defined parameters such as fecundity and natural mortality. Research recommendations could also be discussed. The analysts will get together with **VanderKoooy** in the next couple of months to discuss this idea. Ideally, this workshop would take place prior to the October meeting.

A rough timeline was discussed. **Cagle** suggested that waiting until 2020 for an assessment would allow Louisiana to have their own assessment which is required for their MSC certification. **Cagle** will check with the folks in Louisiana regarding this.

Leaf pointed out that the goal of the stock assessment is to provide information for management of state resources. An assessment would let us see where we stand now versus six years ago. The workshop would be 2-3 days and the preliminary model results would be presented in October as an exercise in modeling.

SARP and Seafood Watch

VanderKoooy mentioned the Seafood Watch blue crab report for the Gulf and explained the issues that have arisen with trying to help a group understand the Gulf fishery. In the process of Audubon, GSMFC, and others providing input on the report, the status of Gulf blue crabs actually went down and they have become red-listed. It is up to the Commission to determine if staff will assist on these reviews for other species in the future. Seafood Watch is only concerned with Terrapins and the lack of measures to protect turtles, despite all our efforts, is what pulled down the status. The program has a predetermined narrative and will not accept the evidence provided. The fact that the Gulf still has legal hunting of Terrapins only further hurts the scores. Without widespread use of TEDs, the MSC certified population will remain red-listed everywhere except Alabama.

Other Business

Perry expressed concern regarding the continuing downward trends in juveniles that enter the fishery regardless of how the fishery is managed. She pointed out that this is happening in North Carolina and Chesapeake Bay. She pointed out the need for research in this area because why this is happening is not known. She stated that her group monitored settlement starting in 1991 in a huge Atlantic and Gulf-wide program with VIMS. She does have sporadic data and shared a handout showing average number of megalope that settle on the collectors each day. Settlement has increased tremendously and peak settlement has shifted from late summer to fall. She would like to have a discussion regarding what implications this has on the blue crab fishery.

State Report Highlights

The state representatives touched upon highlights of their state reports including derelict crab trap removals. The representatives had provided written reports prior to the meeting in the interest of time, so the state reports were only addressed briefly. The full reports are available on the Commission website or by request to Commission staff.

Adjourn

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 12:35 p.m.