

TCC SEAMAP SUBCOMMITTEE
MINUTES
Tuesday, March 19, 2019
New Orleans, LA

Chairman T. Switzer called the meeting to order at 8:40 a.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, New Orleans, 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
Paul Grammer, USM/GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Zach Zuckerman, LDWF, Grand Isle, LA
Paige O'Malley, LDWF, Grand Isle, LA

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

Under Other Business, **J. Hendon** added a brief update on the vertical line experimental work they have been doing. **J. Mareska moved to adopt the agenda. B. Falterman seconded and the motion passed.**

Approval of Minutes

J. Hendon moved to approve the SEAMAP minutes from the October 16, 2018 meeting as submitted. F. Martinez seconded and the motion passed.

Administrative Report

J. Rester stated that 2019 marked SEAMAP's 38th year of fishery independent sampling. **J. Rester** selected stations for the Bottom Long Line Survey in early February with 57 stations selected for each season. SEAMAP will now be sampling from statistical zone 10 in Florida through statistical zone 21. The States have picked their stations for the year and sampling should be starting soon. **J. Rester** has been in contact with Louisiana, Alabama and Texas regarding the vertical line stations for 2019. If any of the Subcommittee has new information on artificial reef coordinates or any other new information, please send this information to **J. Rester**. The SEAMAP Environmental and Biological Atlas of the Gulf of Mexico of 2017 was published in February. It describes the various SEAMAP surveys in the Gulf of Mexico and presents summarized data that was collected during those surveys. A few problems occurred with the Atlas where the species changed names. Some of

the species were listed twice due to different partners using different scientific names with some using the old name while others used the new name. For the future, when entering in data, make sure you have the most updated biocode list. Currently, David Hanisko is working on updating the biocode list and it should be ready for April 1. SEAMAP will be doing real time again this summer. **J. Rester** stated that he was still waiting on some 2018 data and cruise reports. Please get your data and cruise reports in as soon as possible. **J. Rester** reported that the Joint Annual Meeting was set for July 23-24 in St. Petersburg, Florida

Fishery Independent Sampling in the Gulf of Mexico

J. Rester was notified in December that SEAMAP would have \$500,000 available to optimize fishery independent surveys in the Gulf of Mexico. **E. Hoffmayer** stated that the money was part of the money from the Red Snapper work. NOAA leadership would like to use this money to evaluate fishery independent work in the Gulf of Mexico. Most of SEAMAP's surveys would stay intact, but might have some modifications to them. A steering committee will need to be established. It will be important that the members on the steering committee be involved for this process to work. Once a steering committee has been established, an initial workshop will be held, and a facilitator will be hired to focus the group and make sure goals were met. A statistician will also be hired. The Subcommittee has used Mary Cristman in the past, but if the Subcommittee has any other suggestions for a statistician let **J. Rester** know. RFPs for both the facilitator and the statistician will be sent out. An important component of this new steering committee is to incorporate new technology into the surveys. **J. Rester** stated that he was finalizing the statement of work. The goal is to hold the initial workshop later this year.

T. Switzer had a program review with NFWF. They stated that they are interested in continuing to fund fishery independent sampling. The plan was to present their findings to all Gulf partners within the next year or so. **J. Rester** noted that there were a lot of funding sources available. He was looking into funding from the Open Ocean TIG. The hope was that by 2020 when NFWF funds run out, the Subcommittee can go to Open Ocean TIG for funding. **J. Rester** asked Louisiana and Texas if other funding became available, would they be able to use that funding for independent fishery work. Louisiana and Texas stated that it would be a possibility.

Shrimp/Groundfish Trawl Surveys

Avoiding Hard Bottom Habitats

The Subcommittee was optimistic about excluding areas to be trawled, however it did not work out as anticipated for the fall survey. Several stations had to be dropped because the areas were not conducive to trawling. It was noted however, that Subcommittee members had minimal damage to the nets. If Subcommittee members have any updates to areas to be excluded or buffered around, please get that information to **J. Rester**. Once **J. Rester** has that information, he will send out a new trawling area polygon and buffer area polygon.

T. Switzer gave a presentation on Efforts to Mitigate Sponge/Trawl Interactions: Improving Sponge Detectability Using SSS Mapping Data. The goal was to better identify sponges using side scan sonar and buffer around these areas as best as possible. For the 2019 station selection, the Subcommittee will continue as they have done in the past. **E. Hoffmayer** suggested excluding/buffering areas with mud tows. In fall 2018, 350 stations were selected and 360 stations were selected in summer 2018. The Subcommittee agreed to do 360 stations for summer 2019, but decided to reduce the stations for the fall to 330 stations.

Sensors and Cameras on Trawls

E. Hoffmayer stated that they have been using trawl sensors during the Shrimp/Groundfish Surveys. They have been working well and providing a lot of information. He stated that using sensors provides data throughout the entire tow. NMFS continues to use cameras and if they can add a sensor to the trawl, they will try and do that.

Measuring Shrimp during the Summer Shrimp/Groundfish Survey

At the October 2018 meeting, **E. Hoffmayer** questioned the necessity of measuring and sexing 200 shrimp at every station. **E. Hoffmayer** asked Walter Ingram and Rick Hart to look into the matter and they found that reducing the number of shrimp measured and sexed would have minimal impact on the data. They are working on the final analysis and discussions on this and will let the Subcommittee know before the summer survey as to whether or not they need to measure and sex 200 shrimp or a lesser amount.

Vessel Pool Funding

J. Rester informed the Subcommittee that \$247,000 was available in the vessel pool for 2019. **J. Rester** needs an accounting from Subcommittee members of how many days need to be paid for. Moving forward, at the start of each year, **J. Rester** would like to go ahead and budget for the days with the money that was available. **E. Hoffmayer** noted that last year NMFS sent out Andre DuBois with Louisiana and it was a great learning experience. If possible, NMFS would like to do that again this year.

Use of Cameras to Characterize Bottom Habitat in All SEAMAP Surveys

E. Hoffmayer stated that the idea is to have some type of drop camera to identify habitat. NMFS used a GoPro camera this past year and it worked well. It is a simple read for identification purposes, however a standardized way to identify habitats will need to be established so that all partners are characterizing the bottom the same way. **E. Hoffmayer** hopes that the SEAMAP partners will start to use cameras to characterize bottom habitats.

SEAMAP Side Scan Sonar Use

T. Switzer gave a presentation on SEAMAP habitat mapping. Florida currently uses side-scan sonar (SSS) for the Reef Fish Survey. **T. Switzer** stated that Florida was in the process of purchasing another SSS which would be available for use by the other SEAMAP partners by the end of May. Texas, Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana expressed interest in using the SSS to map areas off their coast. The Subcommittee agreed to form a Habitat Mapping Workgroup to further look into the matter. **J. Rester** asked the Subcommittee to submit representatives to be on the new Workgroup.

Review of Annual Reef Fish Video Survey Workshop

T. Switzer gave a presentation on the review of the 2019 Reef Fish Survey Workshop. This workshop was held in early March in St. Petersburg, Florida. The workshop involved video training and discussions on survey unification.

Other Business

J. Hendon and **P. Grammer** gave an update on the vertical line work they have been conducting. They have gone out to four sites. They tested the gear using smaller hooks and repeated drops. For the camera, some of the video was useful and some was not. They were hesitant to drop the camera next to an oil and gas platform. Since it was the only camera, they were afraid to lose it. The Subcommittee agreed that it would be better to go ahead and take more risks with the camera to try

and get as close to the platform as possible. **J. Hendon** stated that they will go ahead and do as many stations as possible and report back to the Subcommittee at the July meeting.

Suggestion for Joint Meeting topic in July is to have the Red Snapper Count Group give a talk/presentation. Another possible topic for the Joint Meeting is a discussion on the utility of hook gear. J. Rester will get with the Sarah and Edgardo to discuss Joint Meeting topics.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:56am.