

APPROVED BY:

COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**TCC CRAB SUBCOMMITTEE
MINUTES
Tuesday, October 15, 2019
Biloxi, MS**

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

Members

Ryan Gandy, FWC, St. Petersburg, FL
Traci Floyd, MDMR, Biloxi, MS (Proxy for Rick Burris)
Jason Herrmann, AMRD, Dauphin Island, AL
Harriet Perry, USM/GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Peyton Cagle, LDWF, Lake Charles, LA
Jerry Mambretti, TPWD, Dickinson, TX (Proxy for TPWD)

Others

Claire Crowley, FWC, St. Petersburg, FL
Jeremy Timbs, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Zach Darnell, USM/GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Luis Hurtado Clavijo, TAMU, College Station, TX
Robert Leaf, USM/GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
L. Lee, NC Division of Marine Fisheries, Morehead City, NC
Julie Lively, LA SEAGRANT, Baton Rouge, LA
Laura Picariello, TX SEAGRANT, Corpus Christi, TX
Laura Deighan, Audubon Gulf, New Orleans, LA
John Fallon, Audubon Nature Institute, New Orleans, LA
Chris Swanson, FL FWC, St. Petersburg, FL
Ryan Bradley, MS Commercial Fisheries United, Biloxi, MS
Scott Bannon, GSMFC Commissioner, Dauphin Island, AL
Chris Blankenship, GSMFC Commissioner, Montgomery, AL

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

Gandy led the audience and the committee members in introductions and **VanderKooy** addressed housekeeping issues. **Mambretti** pointed out that **Sutton** is no longer with the TPWD and **Mambretti** will be his proxy at this meeting. A replacement Blue Crab representative for Texas will be announced before the March meeting.

Adoption of Agenda

Cagle moved to adopt the agenda. Floyd seconded the motion, and the agenda was adopted.

Approval of Minutes

The Subcommittee reviewed their minutes from the meeting held on March 19th in New Orleans. *Cagle moved to accept the minutes as written, Herrmann seconded, and the minutes were approved unanimously.*

Public Comment

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

Results from Blue Crab Population Modeling Exercise

Leaf updated the committee members on the meeting that was held yesterday. All changes requested by the group have been incorporated. Some documentation is still needed for the tabs at the top of the app. **VanderKooy** showed an example of the Traffic Light Analysis. The time series has been updated as well. The data query is such that you may now add any categories with no restrictions. **Leaf** showed the traffic light result. These have equal weighting which must be changed in the CSV file. The whole thing can be screen shot to a picture for use when reporting. **Leaf** will condense the summary figures for viewing.

Overall Utility of Traffic Light Model

Gandy and **Leaf** went on to explain more detail for the benefit of those who did not attend the Workshop yesterday. **Leaf** pointed out that there are recruitment indices included in this model. The model was demonstrated using the CSV file with the index data. **Leaf** will work with **Mambretti** to update him on this app. **Gandy** explained that some of this came out of the GDAR and assessment to help prevent doing a full assessment every year.

Gandy stated that with this on a web app, it could go away or be changed in a few years so the whole process should be integrated into each state's system so that they can make the changes themselves. **Cagle** pointed out that the transparency in LA has to be same as this app. With MSC certification, they are doing two audits per year. The indices provided are mapped one to one per **Leaf**. Each state can erase columns and add columns as needed as long as they follow the format. The output of both final reports from August meeting and yesterday's meeting will be provided to the group by **Leaf**, along with some documentation of the process to explain to those who did not attend the modeling meeting. Consensus of the group was that it is not necessary to have a section explaining the Z score. The states must provide their own data to meet their own needs.

Gandy stated that this is useful the way it is and can be tailored to each group, but it is not intended to be used as a public site. This tool is for managers to use and pull from to provide information to the legislature and/or the public. Each state is creating its own indices and weighting them in the CSV. The more categories that are included, the more explanatory the traffic light is. Adding additional indices and updating the CSV falls to each state representative.

Proposal/Presentation for TCC

The group decided that they would report this tool to the TCC and move forward in the subcommittee, using the app as another method of reporting in their state reports. This would be in lieu of a formal benchmark assessment unless necessary.

Update on Gulf-Wide Blue Crab Tagging Program

Darnell (GCRL) updated the group on his Gulf Wide Tagging project. His team is partly through the analyses of the final numbers. Their goal has been to look at how Blue Crabs are moving within estuaries associated with spawning migration. All analyses are being broken down by bay systems. His team is done tagging for this study but they will start a new study next year at Horn Island. They will be looking for sponge crabs to see how long they stay around the islands and looking at the benefits provided by the seashore. **Darnell** will have a full report of the analyses for the 2020 March meeting.

Population Genetic Differentiation and Diversity of the Blue Crab in the Gulf of Mexico Inferred with Microsatellites and SNPs

Hurtado updated the group on the challenges and subsequent progress that was made with the genetics work on Blue Crabs throughout their Gulf and South Atlantic range. Using more selective markers, he was able to determine there is genetic structure to the population.

State Report Highlights

The state representatives touched upon highlights of their state reports including derelict crab trap removals. The representatives had provided written reports and hit high points in those reports.

Herrmann reported that Alabama received a grant from NOAA under the Community Based-Marine Debris Removal program to conduct three volunteer aided blue crab derelict crab trap removal events through Spring 2019. In March, a total of 64 derelict crab pots were removed by AMRD staff with the help of 19 volunteers and four vessels. Participants included folks from CCA, Thompson Engineering, ADPH, the Nature Conservancy, USFWS, the Mobile Bay National Estuary Programs, and a few non-associated volunteers. CCA staff provided food and beverages for all volunteers. AMRD continues to support the GCRL with blue crab tagging efforts in Alabama.

Mambretti stated that Texas had a successful derelict trap pickup earlier this year and will do it again in February 2020 during which time the fishery will be closed for 10 days. The Texas Blue Crab Work Group met to review the progress of proposed fishery regulations to rebuild the blue crab stocks in response to the long-term declining fishery-independent monitoring trends and a recent stock assessment. Division managers are considering several proposals to reduce fishing mortality especially on females in order to boost productivity and biomass levels. These include 1) increase the minimum size to 5.5 inches, and introduce a 2.5 inch escape ring, 2) no-take of females from May 15th through June 15th, or 3) reduce trap limit from 200 to 150. These proposals are currently on hold.

While there was no organized derelict crab trap removal in Mississippi in 2018, **Floyd** reported that staff continues to monitor derelict traps and 90 have been removed in the past year. Side-view imaging sonar equipment is being utilized in locating and retrieving submerged unmarked derelict crab traps. To date, MDMR has retrieved 78 submerged derelict crab traps in Mississippi territorial waters. A total of 650 resident recreational crab trap licenses and 89 non-resident recreational crab trap licenses were sold within the last year.

To reduce disruptions to commercial blue crab activities, the annual Florida closures for blue crab trap retrieval changed in 2011 to an “even/odd year” closure by coast (odd years Gulf and even years Atlantic). In 2018, 681 total blue crab traps were removed. Crab landings in past five or six years have come to a more level state. Also, in Florida, **Gandy** reported that stone crab and lobster have gone to the red list in Seafood Watch.

Cagle reported that two volunteer days took place during the 2019 derelict crab trap closures. The first event was held on February 2, 2019, in the Barataria Basin, and the second event was held on February 16, 2019, in the Terrebonne Basin. These events host multiple volunteer organizations and members of the public. Lunch was provided by LA 23 BBQ for the Barataria event and by Coastal Conservation Association for the Terrebonne event. An updated stock assessment was completed in April 2019 for blue crab in Louisiana waters. Results from this assessment indicated that the blue crab stock is not overfished or experiencing overfishing. Model inputs were updated through 2018 for this assessment. No changes were made to the assessment model itself.

Election of Officers

Floyd nominated Gandy for Chairman. Perry seconded the motion and it carried unanimously.

Other Business

VanderKooy brought up the subject of terrapins and the issues with Seafood Watch. The Commission’s position is that we will not review any Seafood Watch materials in the future. At the March meeting 2020, perhaps we should invite some terrapin folks for contribution between groups. We do not want to lose the momentum of sharing with them. **Floyd** will share any information she gets from NFWF.

Ryan Bradley (MS Commercial Fisheries United) informed the group about a new derelict crab trap removal incentive program working with shrimpers, encouraging shrimpers to bring derelict traps in rather than drop them. The reward was increased from \$5 to \$10 and a total of 1000 crab traps were collected since January. Shrimpers have to be registered for the program. There is a place to drop them off and the shrimper’s tag can be turned in for credit. Often the traps can even be returned to original owners. Eventually they dropped payment from \$10 back down to \$5.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:15 a.m.