

APPROVED BY:

Darin Topping
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**TECHNICAL COORDINATING COMMITTEE
MINUTES
Wednesday October 16, 2019
Biloxi, MS**

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

Members

Jason Froeba, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Dan Ellinor, FWC, Tallahassee, FL
Harry Blanchet, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Rick Burris, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Matt Hill, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Scott Bannon, ADCNR, Dauphin Island, AL
John Mareska, ADCNR/MRD, Gulf Shores, AL
Darin Topping, TPWD, Rockport, TX
Christopher Mace, TPWD, Rockport, TX
Roy Crabtree, NOAA Fisheries, St. Petersburg, FL
Glenn Constant, USFWS, Baton Rouge, LA
Allan Brown, USFWS, Atlanta, GA
Beverly Sauls, FWC/FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL

Staff

James Ballard, GSMFC, Sport Fish/Aquatic Invasives Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Joe Ferrer, GSMFC Systems Administrator, Ocean Springs, MS
Jeff Rester, GSMFC, 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
Donna Bellais, GSMFC, ComFIN Survey Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS

Others

Paul Mickle, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Jason Saucies, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Trevor Moncrief, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Jerry Mambretti, TPWD, Dickinson, TX
Jason Adriance, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Lance Robinson, Commissioner, Austin, TX
Michael Travis, NOAA Fisheries, St. Petersburg, FL
Chris Nelson, Commissioner, Bon Secour, AL
Laura Picariello, TX Sea Grant, College Station, TX
Jon Bell, NOAA, Pascagoula, MS
Julie Lively, LA Sea Grant, Baton Rouge, LA
Corky Perret, Public, Poplarville, MS

Jeremy Timbs, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Traci Floyd, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Laura Deighan, Audubon, New Orleans, LA
John Fallon, Audubon, New Orleans, LA
Read Hendon, USM/GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Julien Lartigue, NOAA, Biloxi, MS

Adoption of Agenda

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

Approval of Minutes

A motion to approve the minutes for the March 21, 2019 meeting was made by Bev Sauls and passed with no opposition.

Alternative Bulkhead Design Program Overview

Paul Mickle provided an overview of Mississippi's Alternative Bulkhead Design Program that they are developing to combat the increasing problem of shoreline hardening with the goal of increasing fish habitat and secondary production. This is a non-regulatory program that will provide marine contractors with a specialized skillset to provide shoreline stabilization needs of private homeowners while regenerating marsh production. This new program will be comprised of three phases. Phase 1) Certification course and initial design creation (first course will be held in January 2020); phase 2) Design implementation and permitting assistance; and phase 3) Monitoring and promotion. The program is not only targeting new bulkhead construction, but also augmenting existing ones by utilizing some of the new materials and designs to add habitat complexity. Moving forward, the program will rely on the marine contractors to promote the new designs over conventional bulkheads.

Overview of the Gulf Offshore Research Institute

Kent Satterlee provided a presentation on the Gulf Offshore Research Institute (GORI). GORI is proposing to establish MMEERSET (Marine Monitoring, Energy, Environmental Research, Science Education, and Training) Stations in offshore waters of the Gulf of Mexico utilizing retired oil/gas platforms. GORI plans to acquire oil/gas structures in 200-400 feet of water on long-term leases from oil companies that are looking to delay the required removal of the structure once it is no longer producing. They will then repurpose these structures to accommodate a number of possible subleases (offshore renewable energy, autonomous underwater vehicle operations, offshore aquaculture, etc.). They are currently working with Peregrine Oil and Gas on two different structures in the western Gulf of Mexico and have filed an alternative use right of use and easement request with BOEM. If approved, they will work with Excipio Energy to convert the platforms into offshore renewable energy facilities (wind and wave) and plan to be operational in December 2020. **Matt Hill** asked if states are being included in the discussions about which structures they are targeting. **Kent Satterlee** stated that at this point, states have not been included, but they see the importance in including them in future discussions. The oil/gas companies that own the structure will maintain the liability insurance on the structures that are being leased by GORI.

Discussion: IJF Research Funding

Steve VanderKooy provided an overview of the IJF research funding proposal that would utilize

the supplemental funding that was provided to the Commission in 2019. **Steve** outlined a potential process that could be used to establish a new small grants program. Under the proposed process, the various subcommittees and technical task forces (TTFs) of the Commission would develop project proposals and present them to the TCC for their evaluation and prioritization prior to their meeting in October. Additional projects may be submitted by the TCC or state agencies as well. Once the reviews have taken place, a prioritized list would be forwarded to the S-FFMC for their consideration, and depending on the available funds, one or more projects would be selected for funding the following year. Projects may be single year or multi-year, depending on the need, but the commitment to funding would always be contingent upon the funds available after the basic IJF program needs are covered. All proposals would follow the current format for cooperative agreements already developed by the FIN Program. The TCC had a long discussion on different activities that could be supported or increased with this available funding, including state independent monitoring, TCC subcommittee activities, etc. **Dave Donaldson** suggested that the staff pull together a spreadsheet, similar to the FIN prioritization list, of current activities and proposed new activities with budgets and statements of work for the TCC to consider at their March 2020 meeting. **Following the discussion, The TCC approved the proposed IJF funding process and forwarded it to the S-FFMC for their consideration.**

Discussion: Using Watershed Scale Assessments to Identify Conservation Priorities and Prioritize

Restoration Actions that Link Inland Waters and Coastal Estuaries

Glenn Constant led a discussion on using watershed scale assessments to identify conservation priorities and prioritize restoration actions that link inland waters and coastal estuaries. He asked the group if they would be interested in assessing and providing feedback on current and future inland restoration, modeling, and data collection projects that would ultimately have an impact on coastal waters and habitats in the Gulf of Mexico. **John Mareska** stated that Mobile Bay NEP was doing a similar effort by developing watershed management plans for all watersheds that drain into Mobile Bay and ADCNR provides input on the development of those plans. However, they find it difficult to find a real benefit to coastal environments because the data is very noisy. It was the general consensus of the TCC that this is something the group should be aware of but they were unclear on the role that they could play with all the existing efforts. **Glenn agreed to work with GSMFC staff to pull together more information on existing efforts and provide it to the group at the next meeting.**

Discussion: SOPs for New Oyster Subcommittee

The group had a discussion on their draft SOPs for a new oyster subcommittee. During the discussion they decided to expand the scope of the subcommittee to encompass all molluscan shellfish and changed the name to the Molluscan Shellfish Subcommittee given the interest within the industry to culture other molluscan shellfish in the region. They also decided to expand the purpose of the subcommittee to include assessment of research and monitoring efforts in the five Gulf states. Finally, they decided to limit the membership to just state representatives (up to two from each state) so it more closely aligned with the structure of other TCC Subcommittees. Following the discussion, **Matt Hill made the motion; To establishment the Molluscan Shellfish Subcommittee utilizing the SOPs as amended and it passed without opposition.**

Proposed Mechanism for Gulf Menhaden Management (Harvest Control Rule)

Steve VanderKooy stated that the harvest control rule was not ready for release yet and tabled the discussion until a future meeting.

Discussion: Guidelines for Marine Artificial Reef Materials: Third Edition

James Ballard provided a brief update on the Guidelines for Marine Artificial Reef Materials: Third Edition that was sent to the TCC for final review. **John Mareska** stated that Alabama had some new research that they would like to incorporate and would like to have two months to conduct their review. The group agreed to provide all final comments to James by January 1st with the hopes of taking final approval of the document at the March 2020 meeting.

Subcommittee Reports

Data Management

Gregg Bray provided an update on the state agency efforts to provide minimum data elements to address a unique commercial vessel database. Each state discussed their capabilities in accessing and delivering data to GulfFIN. Several states mentioned vessel registration data is collected and maintained by different state agencies which makes accessing and sharing these data difficult. Each state provided feedback on their capabilities and limitations. NOAA Fisheries stated one of the primary purposes of this database will be determining how many active vessels were fishing during a specific time period. GSMFC staff will continue to work on this issue through GulfFIN Commercial Technical Workgroup.

The committee discussed a draft report NOAA Fisheries developed in response to section 201 of the Modernizing Recreational Fisheries Management Act of 2018. The report addresses methods for greater inclusion of state and nongovernmental organization data in the stock assessment process. The committee discussed that the report does a good job of explaining current methods but some suggestions were made on how to improve the process in the future. One of the main ideas brought up was to develop a calibration process that would be simpler and easier as calibration is an impediment to utilizing certified state survey data. States were asked to provide written comments by December 1, 2019 and GSMFC staff will compile the comments into a response letter for NOAA Fisheries.

Dominique Lazzarre from FWRI provided a presentation on their revised methods for collecting age structures and lengths from the recreational fishery. Florida has moved away from opportunistically sampling a list of target species and representatively sampling the fishery. Florida is still obtaining biological information from most of the important federal species but has also observed an increase in data collected from important inshore species. GulfFIN hopes that other states will move away from opportunistic sampling as that has been recommended by stock assessors and we hope to have a meeting sometime soon to continue these discussions.

Gregg Bray stated GulfFIN was awarded a NOAA Fisheries FIS proposal to transition to tablet based data collection for the MRIP APAIS in 2020. When money arrives in 2020 GulfFIN will purchase tablets and enter into an independent contract with the application developer to modify the application to the Gulf of Mexico requirements. The goal is a phased implementation that will start October 1, 2020 with a goal of being fully implemented by January 1, 2021.

Steve Brown was elected as the new Chairman. Darrin Stewart was elected to be the new Vice-Chairman.

During the afternoon session, representatives reviewed the 2018 commercial landings data from their respective state. No major problems were identified but state representatives will make necessary corrections to the 2018 data and re-submit to GSMFC to correct minor coding problems.

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

Crab

Ryan Gandy reported that **Robert Leaf** updated the Committee on the Blue Crab population modeling exercise meeting that included an overview of the overall utility of the Traffic Light Model. He also pointed out that there are recruitment indices included in this model. A CSV file was demonstrated and how the model works. **Ryan Gandy** explained that some of this came out of the GDAR and assessment to prevent from doing a full assessment every year.

Steve VanderKoooy brought up the subject of terrapins and the issue of trying to educate Seafood Watch. The Commission's position is that we will not review Seafood Watch material. At the March 2020 meeting, they may invite some terrapin folks for collaboration between groups. Also, in Florida, **Ryan Gandy** reported that stone crab and lobster have gone to red list in Seafood Watch. Entanglement issue is suspected of being the cause.

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

Zach 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. His team is done tagging for this study but they will start a new study next year on the Mississippi barrier islands. 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 at the March 2020 meeting.

Ryan Gandy was re-elected Chair.

A motion to accept the report was moved by Matt Hill, and passed without opposition.

SEAMAP

Jeff Rester reported that the SEAMAP Subcommittee had a presentation on the gear and technologies used for sampling in the Great Red Snapper Count project. Several new pieces of towable gear were used to count Red Snapper. Gears such as the camera-based towed assessment survey system (C-BASS) can be towed at speeds of 3-5 knots almost continuously to collect data on reef fish abundance and characterize benthic habitat. SEAMAP is interested in new gears that may be better for estimating actual reef fish abundances than the current gears employed in SEAMAP surveys.

SEAMAP in partnership with the GCRL, FWRI, and the Southeastern Regional Taxonomic Center will hold an invertebrate identification workshop next spring to aid SEAMAP in identifying invertebrates encountered during SEAMAP surveys. Many species that previously have been identified as one species may in fact be several species. The training workshop will help in identification of problematic species as well as recognizing species that we should probably only identify to the genus level due to the level of effort required to identify the species correctly to the species level.

The SEAMAP Subcommittee met with the Caribbean and South Atlantic components in July to discuss the SEAMAP budget as well as updating the SEAMAP 2021-2025 Management Plan. Besides updating the current information in the Management Plan, the Subcommittee would like to add information describing how the SEAMAP Subcommittee has been evaluating the current SEAMAP surveys, the gears used for collecting data, as well as the data that are being collected during SEAMAP surveys. The Subcommittee wants to stress how we are constantly looking to standardize, streamline, and collect the best data possible.

The SEAMAP Subcommittee has formed a new work group that will be tasked with developing protocols and operating procedures for using a new side scan sonar that SEAMAP purchased recently. The Habitat Mapping Work Group will meet in early November to develop an operations manual, develop a standardized sampling methodology, and learn how to deploy the side scan sonar and process the resulting data. The collected data will be used to help plan other SEAMAP surveys to find potential habitats for sampling as well as avoiding area during trawl surveys.

Ted Switzer was re-elected Chair with Jill Hendon elected as Vice-Chair.

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

State/Federal Reports

Darin Topping stated that written reports were provided to the TCC members prior to the meeting for their review. The group had a brief discussion about the new state report templet. Darrin Topping stated that the templet is a work-in-progress and if anyone had any suggested changes they can be addressed through email before the next meeting. It was the consensus of the group that the new templet was a good idea and each state agreed to use it for future reports. To see the full reports that were provided to the TCC, please see the minutes from the Commission Business Meeting held on Thursday, October 17, 2019.

Election of Officers

Darin Topping was re-elected as Chair and **Bev Sauls** was re-elected as Vice Chair.

General Session – The 2019 Freshwater Impacts to Marine Natural Resources Along the Northern Gulf of Mexico

The afternoon of the TCC meeting consisted of a general session on the freshwater impacts on marine natural resources as a result of the Bonnet Carré Spillway openings in 2019. For more details on this general session, see the proceedings which can be found on the Commission's website under publications. These proceedings serve as the administrative record of this session.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:00 p.m.