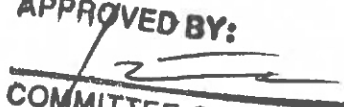


APPROVED BY:

COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**STATE-FEDERAL FISHERIES MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

**Thursday, October 19, 2023
New Orleans, LA**

Chairman **Jason Froeba** called the meeting to order at 8:35 a.m. The following members and others were present:

Members

John Mareska (proxy for Scott Bannon), ALDCNR, Gulf Shores, AL
Luiz Barbieri, FLFWC, St. Petersburg, FL
Rick Burris, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Jason Froeba, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Chris Mace, TPWD, Corpus Christi, TX
Andy Strelcheck (virtual), NOAA Fisheries, Saint Petersburg, FL
Dave Donaldson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Glenn Constant, USFWS, Baton Rouge, LA

Others

Chris Bradshaw, FLFWC, Charleston, SC
Jill Hendon, USM GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Ted Switzer, FLFWC, St. Petersburg, FL
Beverly Sauls, FLFWC, St. Petersburg, FL
Doug Boyd, Boerne, TX
Laura Picariello, TX Sea Grant, Galveston, TX

Staff

Gregg Bray, FIN Program Manager
Jeff Rester, SEAMAP Program Manager
Steve VanderKooy, IFJ Program Manager
Charlie Robertson, Fisheries Restoration Coordinator
Keith Wilson, IJF Program Staff Assistant
Joe Ferrer, Systems Administrator, Ocean Springs, MS
Donna Bellais, ComFIN Programmer, Ocean Springs, MS
Deanna Valentine, FIN Scanning Specialist, Ocean Springs, MS
Ali Wilhelm, Sport Fish Restoration/Aquatic Invasives Staff Assistant/Travel Processor
Angie Rabideau, Senior Accountant, Ocean Springs, MS

Adoption of Agenda

The agenda was approved as written.

Discussion and Final Approval of GulfFIN Funding Activities for 2024

G. Bray provided a brief overview of the documents that were distributed to the group. He also discussed the summary of the activities for potential funding in 2024 that was developed by the

FIN Committee. **R. Cody** from NOAA Fisheries Office of Science and Technology (OST) stated the likelihood of operating with level funding is high but more details on 2024 available funding will be provided when clarity is obtained with the NOAA Fisheries budget. He mentioned that NOAA Fisheries remains committed to getting a significant portion of GulfFIN funding moved to the Commission late in 2023 or early in 2024. **Bray** mentioned the preliminary proposed funding levels are utilizing 2023 amounts. The preliminary numbers show the GulfFIN line item at \$4.367M and RecFIN line item at \$3.458M. These totals reflect Congressional increases and increases to improve the amount of recreational sample days for MRIP surveys. The total amount available for FIN funding in 2024 totals \$7.826M. The original amount proposed for 2024 for all the jobs was approximately \$9.400M, which meant there is a potential funding shortfall. The breakdown of the proposed 2024 funding is as follows:

2024 Proposed Funding		
GulfFIN line item	\$3,962,679	
Congressional increase - 2024	\$405,207	
GulfFIN - available		\$4,367,886
Gulf portion of RecFIN (1/3)	\$685,364	
MRIP base allocation funding	\$880,000	
2023 MRFMA Rec General Survey funds	\$900,000	
2024 MRFMA Rec General Survey funds	\$900,000	
Congressional increase - 2024	\$93,476	
RecFIN - available		\$3,458,840
TOTAL AVAILABLE FUNDING		\$7,826,726

Bray discussed that GulfFIN has some significant underspending over the last 3 years that can help offset the funding shortfalls in some areas. He also discussed that NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office (SERO) staff received Congressional approval to repurpose unspent SEFHIER funding to support Headboat Port Sampling activities in 2024. **Bray** also discussed underspending from Commercial Trip Ticket Operations in the prior 3 years and the GulfFIN Committee's desire to use a portion of that for continued research into Commercial Conversion Factors. After discussion the committee made the following motion:

Motion: The State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee **moved** to accept the proposed funding for the following GulfFIN activities for 2024 (Coordination and Administration of FIN Activities; Collecting, Managing, and Disseminating Marine Recreational Fisheries Data; Operation of FIN Data Management System; Trip Ticket Program Operations; Southeast Head Boat Port Sampling; Commercial Conversion Factor Research; and Alabama Snapper Check Implementation) for a total budget of \$9.0M and to forward this onto the full Commission for their approval. The motion passed unanimously.

The committee also discussed continuation of the GulfFIN Biological Sampling program. **Bray** stated the proposed costs for Biological Sampling is \$1.3M and no new dedicated new monies have been provided by NOAA Fisheries. GulfFIN would like to use underspending from previous years to partially support Biological Sampling efforts. Continued discussions with NOAA Fisheries OST are required to make sure that is an appropriate use of available underspending. If approval is provided **Bray** will seek approval from State/Federal Committee to proceed with supporting Biological Sampling with underspending. If a funding shortfall is realized as a result of utilizing underspending **Bray** will work with states to reduce budgets based on the decision from the State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee.

Bray discussed that programmatic costs continue to increase and there is substantial concern that significant funding shortfalls will be realized in 2025. L. Barbieri suggested we document those funding shortfall if realized and try to present how those shortfall would negatively impact data collection efforts and the precision of landings estimates. **Bray** mentioned he would work on that with state and federal partners in preparation for the October 2024 committee meeting.

Discussion of SEAMAP Funding Activities for 2024

The State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee reviewed the various SEAMAP surveys along with their associated costs. **J. Rester** discussed the FY2024 SEAMAP appropriation was \$6.725 million and stated that SEAMAP received approximately \$6.38 million for fishery independent sampling for all three SEAMAP components. All three SEAMAP components based their FY2024 budget on level funding of \$6.725 million. The total proposed for the Gulf was \$2.787 million. He discussed all five Gulf States will be participating in the bottom long line survey in 2024. **Rester** also summarized the summer and fall shrimp groundfish surveys, reef fish survey, and fall plankton survey costs and participating agencies. After discussion the committee made the following motion:

Motion: The State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee moved to accept the proposed funding for SEAMAP surveys for 2024 for a total budget of \$2.78M and to forward this onto the full Commission for their approval. The motion passed unanimously.

Discussion and Final Approval of IJ State Research Funding for 2024

The committee received an update from **S. VanderKooy** on the Interjurisdictional Fisheries State Research funding program. GSMFC is making available \$187,460 in new monies to each state for work in 2024 and budgets have been received by each state. **VanderKooy** provided table of proposed projects submitted by each state. After discussion the committee made the following motion:

Motion: The State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee moved to accept the proposed funding for IJF activities for 2024 for a total budget of \$937K and to forward this onto the full Commission for their approval. The motion passed unanimously.

The committee received a motion from the GSMFC Technical Coordinating Committee to recommend black drum as the next species for profile development. **VanderKooy** also mentioned that once the mangrove snapper profile is completed in 2024 a recommendation from the TCC would be sought to select the next species for profile development. **J. Mareska** asked why striped bass was crossed off the list of potential priority species. **VanderKooy** stated management uncertainty with Gulf strain striped bass does not appear to be a priority at the moment and the group suggested it should not be a concern for profile development. After additional discussion the committee made the following motion:

Motion: The State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee moved to accept black drum as the next species for profile development. The motion passed unanimously.

Menhaden Advisory Committee Report

Sydney Alhale (NOAA Fisheries) provided a review of the 2023 season to date. Through September, the industry has landed almost 416,000 mt which was an 8.3% decrease from 2022. The projection for 2024 will be around 423,000mt.

Scott Raborn (LGL Ecological Research Associates, Inc.) provided a short overview of the bycatch study they are working on for 2024 in the Gulf menhaden fleet. The team has completed a pilot study to work out the sampling protocols on the run boats. They will utilize direct observation with personnel on the vessels, cameras as key points to view the pumping, and specialized gear to directly quantify the non-target species in the net at the end of the pumping. They will be estimating the quantity of bycatch species (by weight and number of individuals) and estimating species-specific size (length and weight) distributions, as well as sex ratios when possible. In addition, they will be determining mortality rates through holding experiments as well as dart tagging fish released alive from the vessels.

Carey Gelpi (TPWD) reported on the Texas Cap for 2023. No sets were made in Texas waters in 2023.

S. VanderKooy provided a draft summary from the third Menhaden Reference Points workshop and discussed the timeline for the coming Stock Assessment Update. He and Amy Shueller indicated that state fishery independent data should be delivered in January with the dependent data expected to be available in April. A preliminary assessment run would be conducted and several conference calls set up to work through the assessment over the late spring and summer. The draft report will be ready for the MAC by the October meeting and provided to the TCC for their review in November 2024.

Rebecca Hazelkorn (NOAA Fisheries) provided some results from the DWH Restoration Project to develop methods to observe sea turtle interactions in the Gulf of Mexico Menhaden Purse Seine Fishery. This work began in 2021 and should be completed in 2024. The team was able to document some interactions with both sea turtles and marine mammals the majority of

which were released alive. The results will help develop best practices to decrease impacts on sea turtles and marine mammals.

Peter Himchak updated the MAC on the audit results from their Marine Stewardship Certification of the Gulf menhaden fishery. There remain some items that the industry would like to address as part of their audit including a MAC or Commission statement regarding the goals and objectives for the fishery. The industry is continuing to work on their Harvest Control Rule and asked the state agency reps for updated FID to extend the annual index in the control rule portal developed by Robert Leaf and Catherine Wilhelm at USM.

Inflation Reduction Act Funding Discussion

A. Strelcheck (NOAA Fisheries) discussed there has been \$20M provided to address red snapper and reef fish management. A spend plan is in development but the major aspects includes money allocated to GSMFC to make infrastructure improvements at the state and commission data management systems along with workshops focused on recreational effort validation and improving recreational discard data. Some funding is also being provided to NOAA Fisheries SEFSC staff to improve and modernize fishery independent surveys.

Update on Gulf Commercial Fisherman Program

L. Picariello (TX Sea Grant) explained the Gulf Commercial Fisherman Program is a conceptual idea to develop formal training programs to help bring new commercial fishermen into the industry. The commercial fishing industry in the Gulf of Mexico is an ageing fleet and there are issues with crew and there are no formal training programs to address this issue. Gulf Shareholders Alliance have spearheaded a steering committee including Sea Grant and representatives from all commercial federal fishing fleets and supply chain. The steering committee are developing ideas for what training should look like and are seeking funding for getting a training program implemented. No implementation funding has been obtained at this point which would be necessary to get a pilot project running. There has been some interest in developing a national coalition for this issue and discussions are ongoing for creating opportunities to share knowledge and training programs that are in place within other regions. **R. Burris** mentioned MDMR is using Bonnet Carre' relief funds to develop a similar program in Mississippi for commercial fishermen targeting state managed species and he offered MDMR staff to help coordinate with this effort. **Burris** also asked if AL/MS Sea Grant is part of this process. **Picariello** mentioned FL and TX Sea Grant are part of the planning committee but all proposals have included participation from all of the Sea Grant programs. The goal is to be industry led program with support from Sea Grant staff to be most successful.

Aquatic Species Conservation Gap Analysis

Jarrad Kosa (US Fish and Wildlife Service) provided a presentation on the Aquatic Species Conservation Gap Analysis. The purposes of the program are to evaluate progress on meeting conservation efforts for priority species, identifying gaps to achieving objectives, and finding opportunities to make program refinements. Several species group assessments have been completed nationwide but a future Gulf Coast marine assessment currently would include Gulf Sturgeon and Striped bass. Some major themes from regional recommendations include improved

range-wide planning, increasing partner engagement and coordination, addressing gaps in technical capacity, and emphasizing proactive approaches to conservation. GSMFC can assist these efforts by supporting collection and synthesis of information, helping USFWS engage with regional partners, reviewing gap analysis reports, providing feedback on analyses and recommendations, facilitating briefings for technical committees, and helping connect with field offices to identify opportunities. **G. Constant** mentioned there is a great deal of national interest in collaborative efforts with the states and commission to advance fisheries and aquatic conservation efforts. He believes there are new opportunities to make progress with additional funding and changes in priorities within USFWS that can allow for improving conservation for federal priority species like striped bass that also address priorities for state partners.

Election of Officers

Dave Donaldson discussed GSMFC is attempting to get all committees and subcommittees on the same election cycle. To accomplish that his recommendation would be to wait till 2024 to elect officers. The current chair and vice-chair agreed to continue in their committee leadership roles.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:10 a.m.