

APPROVED BY:

COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**STATE-FEDERAL FISHERIES MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

**Thursday, October 17, 2024
Gulf Shores, AL**

Chairman **Jason Froeba** called the meeting to order at 8:40 a.m. The following members and others were present:

Members

Scott Bannon, ALDCNR, Gulf Shores, AL
Dan Ellinor, FLFWC, Tallahassee, FL
Joe Spraggins, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Jason Froeba, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Chris Mace, TPWD, Corpus Christi, TX
Dave Donaldson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
James Ballard, USFWS, Ocean Springs, MS

Others

Amy Schueller, NOAA Fisheries, Beaufort, NC
Rick Burris, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Kevin Anson, ALDCNR, Gulf Shores, AL
Ryan Montegut, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Eric Gigli, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Barry Thom, PSMFC, Portland, OR
Julien Lartigue, NOAA RESTORE, Ocean Springs, MS
Chris Bradshaw, FLFWC, Charleston, SC
Doug Boyd, GSMFC Commissioner, Boerne, TX
Peter Himchek, Omega Protein, Tuckerton, NJ
Patrick Banks, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Jason Walker, Daybrook Fisheries, New Orleans, LA
Joel Anderson, TPWD, Palacios, TX
Jim Brown, GSMFC Commissioner, Vero Beach, FL
Cliff Hutt, NOAA Fisheries, Silver Spring, MD

Staff

Gregg Bray, FIN Program Manager
Steve VanderKooy, IJF 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
Dalton Powell, FIN Recreational Data Analyst, Ocean Springs, MS
Michael Brochard, SEAMAP Data Analyst, Ocean Springs, MS

Angela Rabideau, GSMFC Senior Accountant, Ocean Springs, MS

Adoption of Agenda

The agenda was approved as written.

Discussion and Final Approval of GulfFIN Funding Activities for 2025

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 2025 that was developed by the FIN Committee. Bray stated **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 2025 available funding will be provided when clarity is obtained with the NOAA Fisheries budget. **Bray** mentioned the preliminary proposed funding levels are utilizing 2024 amounts. The preliminary numbers show the GulfFIN line item at \$4.367M and RecFIN line item at \$2.858M. The total amount available for FIN funding in 2024 totals \$7.226M. The original amount proposed for 2025 for all the jobs was approximately \$8.910M, which meant there is a potential funding shortfall. The breakdown of the proposed 2025 funding is as follows:

2025 Proposed Funding		
GulfFIN line item		\$4,367,886
Gulf portion of RecFIN (1/3)	\$778,840	
MRIP base allocation funding	\$880,000	
2025 MRFMA Rec General Survey funds	\$900,000	
2025 MRFMA State Survey funds	\$300,000	
RecFIN - available		\$2,858,840
TOTAL AVAILABLE FUNDING		\$7,226,726

The committee members discussed in detail different options for operating under the funding shortfall. With all proposed jobs included GulfFIN was realizing a 21.2% shortfall. The committee agreed that taking that large of a reduction to all the programs would little funding for each job to sample at sufficient levels. The committee suggested that historically the landings programs were deemed more critical than biological sampling. After discussion the committee made the following motion:

Motion: The State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee moved to approve the following GulfFIN activities for 2025 (Coordination and Administration of FIN Activities; Collecting, Managing, and Disseminating Marine Recreational Fisheries Data; Operation of FIN Data Management System; Trip Ticket Program Operations; Alabama Snapper Check Implementation; and Southeast Headport Port Sampling (pending NOAA SEFSC funding availability) and to forward this onto the full Commission for their approval. The motion passed unanimously. The committee motion still resulted in a funding deficit of 3.39%. The committee agreed that the deficit

would be applied equally to all programs. **Bray** stated GSMFC will attempt to absorb the deficit for Bluefin Data to ensure the support and maintenance costs for the trip ticket electronic reporting system are maintained. GSMFC staff will work with all program coordinators to obtain revised budgets that reflect the reduced totals for 2025.

The group discussed the situation where the funding level was either higher or lower than the amount discussed at the meeting. **Bray** noted that if the additional money was obtained or substantial reductions were realized then the Committee would convene (via webinar) to discuss how to handle revised reduction or surplus. The reductions are as follows:

GSMFC	(\$32,041)	-4.48%
Texas	(\$12,159)	-3.39%
Louisiana	(\$68,457)	-3.39%
Mississippi	(\$10,916)	-3.39%
Alabama	(\$21,111)	-3.39%
Florida	(\$103,883)	-3.39%
TOTAL	(\$248,567)	

Discussion of SEAMAP Funding Activities for 2025

The State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee reviewed the various SEAMAP surveys along with their associated costs. **G. Bray (on behalf of J. Rester)** discussed the expected FY2025 SEAMAP appropriation should be approximately \$6.725 million and stated that SEAMAP would receive approximately \$6.38 million for fishery independent sampling for all three SEAMAP components. All three SEAMAP components based their FY2025 budget on level funding of \$6.725 million. The total proposed for the Gulf was \$2.787 million. 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 2025 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 2025

The committee received an update from **S. VanderKooy** on the Interjurisdictional Fisheries State Research funding program. GSMFC is making available \$179,903-\$230,596 in new monies to each state based on need for work in 2025 and budgets have been received from 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 2025 for a total budget of \$1.05M and to

forward this onto the full Commission for their approval. The motion passed unanimously.

Menhaden Advisory Committee Report

S. Alhale from NOAA Fisheries provided a review of the 2024 Gulf season to date. Through September, the landings were 335,551 metric tons, which is a decrease of 15% from 2023 and an 18% decrease on the 5-yr average. NOAA anticipates the year to end with 366,721 metric tons, which is still about a 15% reduction overall for 2024. The 2025 forecast is for the catch to be about 382,402 metric tons.

A. Schueller presented the 2018 Gulf Menhaden benchmark for the Gulf of Mexico (SEDAR 63) and the 2021 Gulf Menhaden update assessment (GDAR 03). She stated the assessment showed the stock is not overfished or undergoing overfishing. She stated the Gulf menhaden stock is healthy and should be in good shape for many years to come. The MAC forwarded the stock assessment report for Gulf Menhaden onto the State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee for their approval. After discussion the State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee made the following motion:

Motion: The State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee moved to approve the Stock Assessment Report for Gulf Menhaden and to forward this onto the full Commission for their approval. The motion passed unanimously.

C. Gelpi provided an update to the MAC regarding the Texas Cap on menhaden removals. In 2023, the industry made about 25 sets in Texas waters and harvested around 4% of the available cap. TPWD will continue to monitor the removals, but there probably isn't a need to report on the cap annually unless fishing practices change.

R. Hazelkorn provided a summary of the observer project looking at sea turtle interactions with the menhaden fleet.

S. Raborn updated the MAC on the progress through September on the bycatch study in Louisiana waters. They expect to have final results by early 2025.

C. Chee presented the work he is conducting with Dr. Robert Leaf to model trophic interactions in the northern Gulf specific to menhaden to help inform ecosystem models in the region.

R. Mroch presented a portion of his dissertation work that explores forecasting of harvest in the menhaden fishery.

S. VanderKooy spoke about the port sampling efforts in 2024 and the transition to electronic reporting. NOAA has turned over management of these programs to the Commission.

P. Himchak gave a short overview of the menhaden fishery's MSC surveillance audit. At this point the industry is confident that five of the six scores are closed out.

The SOPs for the MAC were approved in 1992 and have never been updated. **S. VanderKooy** is going to provide the SOPs in a format that reflects the other Commission SOPs over the next year. The MAC will review the revisions and potentially take action at the next October meeting.

The MAC Chair rotated back to industry and **B. Landry** was elected chair, and **C. Gelpi** was elected vice-chair.

Atlantic HMS Proposed Rule on Electronic Reporting

C. Hutt provided an update on a proposed rule that would modernize and expand reporting requirements for HMS commercial limited access permits and commercial and for-hire open access permits by moving to electronic formats. The new reporting requirements would create consistency with NOAA Fisheries' efforts in other fisheries and augment data necessary for fishery management and would help to reduce reporting burden through a single reporting system that meets needs of multiple partners. **Hutt** described the preferred alternatives pertaining to vessel reporting and dealer reporting. The proposed rule published September 6, 2024 and the public comment period ends on January 6, 2025. NOAA Fisheries staff are holding 3 public webinars in 2024 to share details on the proposed rule and take comments.

Inflation Reduction Act Funding Discussion

G. Bray provided an update on the IRA red snapper funding received by Gulf States. Currently approximately \$7.5M has been received that is being used to make infrastructure improvements to state and commission data management systems, expanding the for-hire at-sea observer project into Louisiana and Texas, and helping fund a 12-month benchmarking period for the transition to Alabama and Mississippi Creel surveys. GSMFC is also working with NOAA Fisheries to acquire approximately \$7M in new monies to fund studies seeking new methods to improve recreational data collection surveys in two key areas of focus that were the focus of two workshops held in 2024. A request for proposals has been published and pre-proposals are due November 15th with full proposals due January 15, 2025.

Election of Officers

L. Barbieri was nominated for chairman and **C. Mace** was nominated for vice-chairman. The nominations were closed and both were approved unanimously by the committee.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:00 a.m.