

Sixty-Fifth
Annual Report of the
Gulf States Marine
Fisheries Commission

For the Year 2014



COMMISSION ROSTER

Commissioners

(Order of listing – administrator, legislator, Governor’s appointee)

ALABAMA

N. Gunter Guy Jr., Commissioner
Alabama Department of Conservation
& Natural Resources
Montgomery, Alabama
Representative Steve McMillan
Bay Minette, Alabama
Chris Nelson
Bon Secour Fisheries, Inc.
Bon Secour, Alabama

FLORIDA

Nick Wiley, Executive Director
Florida Fish and Wildlife
Conservation Commission
Tallahassee, Florida
Senator Thad Altman
State Senator, District 24
Melbourne, Florida
Stephen M. Greep, Jr.
Alexander & Greep Insurance
Ft. Lauderdale, Florida

LOUISIANA

Robert Barham, Secretary
Louisiana Department of Wildlife and
Fisheries
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Senator R.L. “Bret” Allain, II
State Senator District 21
Franklin, Louisiana
Campo “Camp” Matens
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

MISSISSIPPI

Jamie Miller, Executive Director
Mississippi Department of Marine
Resources
Biloxi, Mississippi
Senator Brice Wiggins
Pascagoula, Mississippi
Joe Gill, Jr.
Joe Gill Consulting, LLC
Ocean Springs, Mississippi

TEXAS

Carter Smith, Executive Director
Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
Austin, Texas
Troy Bello Williamson, II
Corpus Christi, Texas
TBD
Texas Legislature Members

Commission Staff

David M. Donaldson, Executive Director

James R. Ballard, Program Coordinator
Donna B. Bellais, Survey Coordinator
Gregory S. Bray, Program Manager
Joseph P. Ferrer, III, Systems Administrator
Robert W. Harris, Programmer/Analyst
Ralph E. Hode, Program Coordinator
Lloyd W. Kirk, SEAMAP Database Programmer
Ashley P. Lott, Staff Assistant
Nancy K. Marcellus, Administrative Officer

Debora K. McIntyre, Staff Assistant
Alexander L. Miller, Program Coordinator
Cheryl R. Noble, Administrative Assistant
Angela R. Rabideau, Senior Accountant
Jeffrey K. Rester, Program Coordinator
Alyce R. Ryan, Staff Assistant
Douglas J. Snyder, Survey Coordinator
Deanna L. Valentine, Data Entry Clerk
Steven J. VanderKooy, Program Coordinator

GULF STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION

SIXTY-FIFTH ANNUAL REPORT (2014)

*to the
Congress of the United States
and to the
Governors and Legislators
of
Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas*

Presented in compliance with the terms of the Compact and State Enabling Acts creating such Commission and Public Law 66-81st Congress assenting thereto.



Edited by:

Debora K. McIntyre and Steven J. VanderKooy
Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission
2404 Government St
Ocean Springs, Mississippi 39564
(228) 875-5912
www.gsmfc.org

Preserving the Past ▪ Planning the Future ▪ A Cooperative Effort

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In submitting this Sixty-Fifth Annual Report, we the Commissioners, wish to express our most sincere appreciation for the splendid cooperation of the members of Congress and the Governors and Legislators of our Compact states. We fully appreciate that success in the management of the public's fishery resources would not be possible without your valued assistance. This acknowledgement is also extended to the directors of the federal, state, and interstate agencies and their respective staff, and to representatives of all organizations and individuals who have contributed to the realization of the objectives of the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

Respectfully submitted,

Randy Pausina., *Chairman*
Dan Ellinor, *1st Vice-Chairman*
Robin Reichers, *2nd Vice-Chairman*
Joe Gill, Jr., *Immediate Past Chairman*
Chris Blankenship, *Chairman's Appointee*
David M. Donaldson, *Executive Director*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iii
ACTIVE COMMITTEES	iii
INTRODUCTION	1
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT	3
FISHERIES INFORMATION NETWORK (FIN)	4
HABITAT PROGRAM	6
INTERJURISDICTIONAL FISHERIES PROGRAM (IJF)	7
OIL DISASTER RECOVERY PROGRAM (ODRP).....	9
SOUTHEAST AREA MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT PROGRAM (SEAMAP)	13
SPORT FISH RESTORATION ADMINISTRATIVE PROGRAM (SFRP).....	15
AQUATIC NUISANCE SPECIES (ANS)	17
ECONOMICS	19
2014 ANNUAL MEETING SUMMARIES	20
STATE AGENCY PARTNER ACTIVITIES	23
LYLES-SIMPSON AWARD	25
COMMONLY USED ACRONYMS	26
2014 PUBLICATIONS	28
2014 FINANCIAL REPORT.....	30
CREDITS	33

ACTIVE COMMITTEES

Executive Committee

Randy Pausina, Chairman
Dan Ellinor
Robin Riechers
Joe Gill, Jr.
Chris Blankenship

Law Enforcement Committee

Scott Bannon, Chairman

State-Federal Fisheries Management Committee

Randy Pausina, Chairman

Menhaden Advisory Committee

Ron Lukens, Chairman

Commercial/Recreational Fisheries Advisory Panel

Philip Horn, Commercial Chairman
Bob Fairbank, Recreational Chairman

Technical Coordinating Committee

Chris Denson, Chairman

TCC Artificial Reef Subcommittee

Jimmy Sanders, Chairman

TCC Crab Subcommittee

Ryan Gandy, Chairman

TCC Data Management Subcommittee

Vince Cefalu, Chairman

TCC Habitat Subcommittee

Ron Mezich, Chairman

TCC SEAMAP Subcommittee

John Mareska, Chairman

TCC Outreach Subcommittee

James Ballard, Facilitator

INTRODUCTION

The Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) is an organization of the five states whose coastal waters are the Gulf of Mexico. This Compact, authorized under Public Law 8166, was signed by the representatives of the Governors of the five Gulf states on July 16, 1949, at Mobile, Alabama.

THE PURPOSE

The Commission was formed specifically to provide interstate and state/federal coordination of interjurisdictional programs. The general purpose of the Commission is "...to promote the better utilization of the fisheries, marine, shell, and anadromous, of the seaboard of the Gulf of Mexico, by the development of a joint program for the promotion and protection of such fisheries and the prevention of the physical waste of the fisheries from any cause." While this statement of purpose is broad, it is clear that cooperative programs involving its member states to assist in managing coastal and marine resources constitute appropriate and legislatively authorized activities. Coordination and management of data collection programs for coastal and marine fisheries constitute appropriate programmatic activities to be conducted under the auspices of the Commission.

COMMISSIONERS

Fifteen Commissioners, three from each of the five Gulf states, work to set policy, approve the Commission's budget, and provide direction for Commission activities. Of these voting members, one-third are appointed by the state legislatures, one-third are private citizens with a knowledge of and interest in marine fisheries who are appointed by the states' governors, and the remaining third are state fishery resource agency directors. The offices of chairman, first vice-chairman, and second vice-chairman of the Commission are rotated annually among the states.

One of the most important functions of the Commission is to serve as a forum for the discussion of various problems and programs of marine management, industry, research, etc., and to develop a coordinated policy to address those issues for the betterment of the resource and all who are concerned. The annual meeting of the Commission is held each year during the third week in the month of October. The spring meeting is held each year during the third week in the month of March. Upon written request of a majority of the Commissioners of each state from three or more states, the Chairman shall call a special meeting of the Commission. The regular meetings are rotated among the states in order that the Commission may better familiarize themselves with the fisheries and coastal areas of the entire Gulf of Mexico.

STAFF

Located in Ocean Springs, Mississippi, the Commission staff administers Commission programs while participating in public forums and other councils, commissions, and committees, and inter-organizational efforts. When the Commission is joined by the Atlantic States and Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commissions on national fisheries issues, a 24-state voice is raised in unison to foster the needs of coastal fisheries.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Executive Director – David M. Donaldson

The year 2014 was my first full year as Executive Director of the Commission. At my first meeting as Director, someone pointed out that most of the people around the table had started their careers as field biologists, just as I had, and most were now serving in leadership positions. This comment made me think, “What a long, strange (and exciting) trip it has been” (to paraphrase Jerry Garcia).

I started my career at the Commission almost 25 years ago as SEAMAP Coordinator - a wide-eyed kid who was ready to conquer the fisheries world. As my time and responsibilities at the Commission increased, I saw the organization grow and provide critical support to the Gulf states regarding fisheries management, data collection, disaster recovery, and other resource needs.

One of the biggest benefits of being a part of the Commission is the opportunity it provides to interact and develop relationships with a wide variety of people and to participate in a vast array of experiences and dialogue. It also offers a unique forum to address and discuss fisheries issues and has been helpful to many aspiring marine biologists throughout the Gulf of Mexico (myself included).

As I enter a new chapter as the Executive Director of the Commission, I am looking forward to strengthening my existing relationships and developing new ones in the fisheries arena and beyond. The Commission will continue to provide that unique environment for aspiring scientists and managers and I will strive to make the Commission even better than it already is. I am excited about the new challenges and experiences associated with this new position and I am thrilled with the opportunity to guide the Commission into the future.

FISHERIES INFORMATION NETWORK (FIN)

Program Manager – Gregory S. Bray

In the 1980s and 1990s, state and federal fishery managers in the southeast region (the region) agreed that there was an urgent and compelling need for coordinated collection of comprehensive data on the region's marine commercial and recreational fisheries resources, and recommendations were made through a series of workshops and meetings. These recommendations of the Gulf and Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) led to the development of the Fisheries Information Network (FIN). The purpose of this state-federal cooperative program is to collect, manage, and disseminate statistical data and information on the commercial and recreational fisheries of the region. The programs are the result of combined efforts of program partners which include states and territories of the region, the national marine fisheries service (NMFS), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife service (USFW), the National Park Service, the Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean fishery management councils, and the commission. The program manager, Gregory S. Bray, is assisted by Ashley P. Lott.

YEAR IN REVIEW

In 2014, FIN continued the coordination of the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) survey in Florida, Alabama, and Mississippi for shore, for-hire, and private boat modes. FIN provides coordination of a field intercept survey of anglers fishing in all three modes to estimate angler catch per trip using the existing MRIP methodology. In 2014, over 67,000 angler interviews were collected across all three states. In addition, the states conducted weekly telephone calls to a 10% random sample of charter boat captains in Florida, Alabama, and Mississippi to obtain estimates of charter boat fishing effort. The method was adopted by NMFS in 2000 as the official methodology for estimating charter boat effort. Effort estimates are combined with the catch per trip estimates to produce overall estimates of fishing effort and catch by species, state, and year.

FIN provided funding for collection of biological data from the recreational and commercial fisheries in Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas. Due to limited funding that was made available late in 2014, FIN was only able to support sampling for May through December. FIN provided funding for collection, processing, and analysis of these data. These data are essential for accurately assessing the status of commercial and recreational species. The primary target species include black drum, gag, gray snapper, gray triggerfish, greater amberjack, king mackerel, red drum, red grouper, red snapper, sheepshead, flounders (Gulf and southern), spotted seatrout, striped mullet, and vermilion snapper. The secondary target species include Spanish mackerel, scamp, yellowtail snapper, cobia, black grouper, black sea bass, red porgy, snowy grouper, speckled hind, and Warsaw grouper. In 2014, the states were able to collect over 25,000 age structures from the primary species list.

FIN continued the coordination of a commercial trip ticket program in the five states. This task provided for collection of components for a commercial trip ticket system to census the commercial fisheries landings using FIN data elements and standards. In addition, FIN provided funding to contract for implementation and operation of electronic reporting for the trip ticket systems as well as reporting of data for the quota monitoring and IFQ programs. The electronic program provides data in a more timely fashion and allows for increased quality control at the point of data entry. For 2014, there were 970 commercial dealers and processors Gulf-wide who were utilizing this program.

FIN continued to support the development and implementation of the FIN Data Management System. This provided funding for continued work on developing more data modules for FIN. Responsibilities included further development of data modules structures, routine loading of all five states' commercial catch effort data, Gulf biological data, Gulf recreational data, and maintenance of the Data Management System.

FIN provided coordination for the sampling of catches, collection of catch reports from head boat personnel, and gathering effort data on head boats which operate primarily in the Exclusive Economic Zone from ports along the coasts of Texas, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida. FIN also provided support for sampling of Gulf menhaden catches from the Gulf's menhaden fleet. The samples were processed for size and age composition for use in the coast-wide stock assessments which were incorporated into the Fisheries Management Plan, utilized by the Gulf Coast states, the Commission, the menhaden industry, and the NMFS.

In 2014, FIN assisted in the administration of funds to support three additional research programs:

- *The Survey of Recreational Boat Fishers in the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI)* – to determine if the USVI boat registration lists can be used to efficiently contact regional anglers and obtain information regarding the boat-based recreational fishery. Results showed that additional work was needed to convert the registration lists to a suitable database with increased quality control.
- *The Internet-based Angler Logs as a Source of Fishery-dependent Data* – attempted to provide guidelines for the establishment and upkeep of panel-based electronic or E-logs that are consistent with MRIP goals and augment rather than compete with MRIP data. The findings show that electronic, self-reporting smartphone apps can provide data for recreational fisheries management that is comparable to existing data collection programs, although problems with spatial coverage and overall usage prevents these systems from being the sole source of fishery-dependent data for management purposes.
- *The Pilot Study of Queen Conch and Spiny Lobster Recreational Fishery in Puerto Rico* – collects information on the recreational harvest of queen conch and spiny lobster in Puerto Rico to address several issues including magnitude (total and by location) of the recreational fishery for these species; first, to determine if conch and lobster are target species or retained/discarded when harvesting finfishes; second, to characterize the catch for undersized queen conch and spiny lobster; third, to identify location and time of year when queen conch and spiny lobster are harvested; fourth, to evaluate the number of recreational anglers harvesting queen conch and spiny lobster; and finally, to recognize types of methods used to harvest queen conch/lobster. The principal investigator requested an extension due to difficulty finding qualified samplers on the island and the work is continuing.

HABITAT PROGRAM

Program Coordinator – Jeffrey K. Rester

The Habitat Program works with the Commission's Habitat Subcommittee which is composed of two representatives from each Gulf state, along with members from the National Marine Fisheries Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The Habitat Subcommittee works closely with the Interjurisdictional Fisheries Program (IJF) in the review, updating, and formulation of the habitat sections of the Commission's Fishery Management Plans. The Habitat Program Coordinator is Jeffrey K. Rester who is assisted by Ashley P. Lott.

YEAR IN REVIEW

The Habitat Program Coordinator participated in a RESTORE Act Science Advisory Panel Work Group Meeting in June. The purpose of the meeting was to review a draft of the NOAA RESTORE Act Science Program Science Plan and to provide recommendations to the NOAA RESTORE Act Science Advisory Board at their July meeting. Long-term priorities for implementation of the Program were drawn from prior science and research needs assessments for the Gulf of Mexico and from input the Program received while engaging with stakeholders. The NOAA RESTORE Act Science Program Science Plan was released in late 2014 for public review.

The NOAA RESTORE Act Science Program is intended to initiate and sustain an integrative, holistic understanding of the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem and support restoration efforts and the long-term sustainability of the ecosystem, including its fish stocks, fishing industries, habitat, and wildlife through ecosystem research, observation, monitoring, and technology development. This program represents an opportunity to help integrate the disparate science efforts across the Gulf into something that would consider the connectivity and entirety of the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem and advance overall understanding as an integrated system.

INTERJURISDICTIONAL FISHERIES PROGRAM (IJF)

Program Coordinator – Steven J. VanderKooy

Since the 1970s, the Commission has had the responsibility of administrative support and coordination of the Gulf State-Federal Fisheries Management Program. This program was designed to develop management plans for trans-boundary stocks that migrate freely through state and federal jurisdictions. In 1986, that program was replaced with the Interjurisdictional Fisheries Program (IJF). This program promotes fisheries management among the Gulf states through the cooperative development of fishery management plans (FMPs). The states are requested to implement FMP recommendations through consistent regulations wherever possible and to address research and data needs with cooperative collection efforts. The Commission has completed FMPs for menhaden, flounder, spotted seatrout, Spanish mackerel, striped bass, blue crab, oyster, black drum, and striped mullet. The IJF Program Coordinator, Steven J. VanderKooy, is assisted by Debora K. McIntyre.

YEAR IN REVIEW

In 2014, the IJF staff put considerable time into revamping the program and significantly revising the look and content of its profiles and management plans. While continuing to work on revisions to three existing fishery management plans (FMPs) for Gulf menhaden, blue crabs, and Gulf and southern flounder, the entire program was reformatted to modernize the document results. It was agreed that, in the modern electronic age, the FMPs were most often downloaded; therefore, an electronic “E-pub” approach was proposed. At its March meeting, the Commission considered three levels of documents based on the historical and present-day needs of our state agency partners.

A *Biological Profile* would contain only the data elements related to the species itself (biology and habitat) and a brief overview of the fisheries that exist in each state (landings, effort, economics, and a description of participation). This option would be provided when biological or fisheries data is limited or unavailable to provide any type of evaluation of the fishery or population. Research and data needs would be highlighted and presented for state agency consideration. A *Management Profile* would contain the same elements as the Biological Profile plus any state information related to the stock status, but not a regional stock assessment. The Management Profile would identify research and data needs as well as management considerations which are optional for the states should a need arise to change existing management scenarios or to conduct a stock assessment for the resource in the future. Finally, the *Fishery Management Plan* would remain as the final option should a state or particular sector within the fishing community request a formal stock assessment by the Commission. This may be useful only to the states who do not already have their own state-derived management plans or stock assessments and require a traditional FMP for sustainability certification or other purposes.

The three management plans currently in review would be modified to fit into the new format. In addition, there would be a reduction in the boilerplate material common to all previous documents, such as broad descriptions of the Gulf of Mexico habitats in general and the laundry list of various federal treaties and acts which may contribute to the management of a fishery. Referencing previously published Commission documents would simplify the documents and reduce the size to make a more manageable, yet informative, treatise of the information.

In addition to the above revisions, the IJF staff were directed to begin pulling together representation for two new species for Biological Profile development: Atlantic tripletail (*Lobotes surinamensis*) and Atlantic croaker (*Micropogonias undulatus*). It is expected that work on those profiles will begin sometime in 2015.

The IJF staff continued to work in collaboration with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) staff to revise the 'otolith manual', *A Practical Handbook for Determining the Age of Gulf of Mexico Fishes*, published originally in 2003 and revised in 2009. For several years, the ASMFC indicated an interest in combining their species information with the Gulf's information into a single standard manual. In August, the Gulf workgroup met with staff from the ASMFC to begin this process. The revision is expected to add an additional 20+ species to the manual and include a number of new techniques which should blend the laboratory protocols for ageing fish from Maine to Texas.

Finally, during the completion of the Gulf Menhaden Stock Assessment (SEDAR32A), it was determined that there was a serious need to expand NOAA's menhaden ageing expertise to include the states. Some of the agencies were already beginning to collect more detailed information on menhaden from their long-term sampling programs and training would be required to ensure compatibility with the NOAA Fisheries Beaufort Lab in North Carolina. To begin that process, the IJF and NOAA staff worked together to generate a training set of Gulf menhaden scales and a reference set which could be circulated through the Gulf annually. The state agency technical personnel involved in fish ageing were invited to the Beaufort Lab last fall to participate in a two-day training exercise with long-term NOAA reader, Mrs. Ethel Hall. The group successfully completed the training and returned with the information and techniques to their respective states for their fishery-independent samples. A similar training workshop is scheduled for next spring for the Atlantic menhaden samplers along the East Coast.

OIL DISASTER RECOVERY PROGRAM

Program Coordinator – Ralph E. Hode

The Oil Disaster Recovery Program (ODRP) evolved from the receipt of \$15M in October of 2010 and is aimed at improving the public perception and confidence in Gulf of Mexico seafood following the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil disaster. Funding for this program, like that of the post-Katrina recovery program (EDRP), came from the U.S. Congress following fishery disaster declarations by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce. Scheduled to be completed in September of 2015, the activities under the program are identified through an ad-hoc advisory committee consisting of the marine resource directors from each of the five Gulf of Mexico states. Under this component, multiple post-disaster recovery elements have been executed to address issues relative to improving both the perception of and confidence in Gulf of Mexico seafood products. Ralph E. Hode, ODRP Program Coordinator, is assisted by Ashley P. Lott.

YEAR IN REVIEW

The ODRP experienced significant progress during 2014 as it approaches its completion in 2015. A total of 23 contracts or sub-award grant agreements were in place throughout the year and most ended the year with a sense of accomplishment as they approached the final six months of their contract periods. Concurrently, the marine directors of the five Gulf states examined potential programmatic fund balances in an effort to identify unmet marketing, sustainability, and seafood testing needs that could be addressed in the remaining nine months of the ODRP grant program.

With the support of the Gulf and South Atlantic Fisheries Foundation, the Gulf Seafood Marketing Coalition (Coalition) experienced increased interests in retail partnerships throughout the year, resulting in the provision of in-store advertising and/or Gulf seafood sampling opportunities in supermarkets throughout the U.S. Supermarket chains such as Win Co with 93 stores on the West Coast, Wegmans with 84 stores in the New England area, Fairway Supermarkets in New York, and the Publix chains with 1,090 stores in the southeast, conducted in-store seafood sales campaigns for Gulf shrimp and other products wherein sources were verified through the Gulf Seafood Trace program during select times of the year. The Coalition provided support via the internet and other digital media, as well as in-store advertising, as their part of the retail partnership. Reports of sales impacts during the respective sales periods indicated increased shrimp sales ranging from 79% to a remarkable 1,049%. Post-event impact information remains confidential under most partnership agreements, but indications based on product volume are that events of this nature are very successful during select seasonal periods such as Labor Day, Memorial Day, and during the Lenten season.

Other Coalition activities and accomplishments during the year included the development of a Summer Grilling matte release, a 500–700 word printed advertisement that drew consumer attention to unique flavors experienced by the grilling of seafood. The Summer Grilling release

reached an estimated 1.7M readers across the U.S. Additional successes were found with Gulf seafood stories in a number of national publications such as *Southern Living*, *Epicurious*, *Eating Well*, and *Well Being*. Concurrently, the Coalition developed informational tool boxes for distribution to media and related public information sources throughout the Gulf in an effort to provide science-based crisis management information designed to provide uniform responses to public concerns over the health and safety issues relative to preparing and consuming wild domestic seafood from the Gulf.

The Market Maker web-based advertising program also remained active across the Gulf states during the year. These sites contained broad-based information on local products, primarily agricultural-related, but included links to a growing number of marine recreational (for-hire) fishing opportunities and commercial fish and shellfish marketing businesses. Participant numbers continued to increase throughout the year as opportunities became available for local businesses to promote seafood products and recreational fishing unique to their respective regions of the Gulf.

The Gulf Seafood Trace (Trace), funded under the ODRP since 2012, effectively ended in December of 2014. Its success was documented in the fact that a combined total of 82 businesses, processors, and distributors are currently enrolled in the program and that, since its inception, nearly 72M pounds of seafood products entered the marketplace having been documented as wild domestic products originating from the Gulf of Mexico. While not all marine seafood products from the Gulf require source traceability in order to meet current market demands, there is reason to believe that seafood traceability will play a role in addressing illegal, undocumented, and unreported (IUU) marine seafood products being offered to the U.S. consumer in the future. As a result of the Trace initiatives implemented by the Commission through the ODRP, many key marine seafood industries in the Gulf are now well-positioned to comply with potential federal mandates for seafood source verification if and when such requirements become law.

The Commission is also working with GCR, Inc., and each of the five Gulf states' fishery management agencies to create an informational website (GulfFINFO) for commercially and recreationally significant species harvested from the Gulf. The portal puts credible, easy to understand, science-based information about Gulf seafood in the hands of consumers, buyers, and industry members alike, with the primary goal of communicating sustainability. In 2014, the website was officially activated and the number of species profiled increased throughout the year to its present level of 29 significantly important species. The GulfFINFO website will be housed at and maintained by the Commission in 2015 and work will continue with member states to update profiles and related regulatory and economic information over time.

Another seafood sustainability initiative was effectively instituted in 2014 with the Audubon Nature Institute's Gulf United for Lasting Fisheries (G.U.L.F.) program. The objective of the program is to measure management effort for select species against guidelines developed by the Food and Agricultural Organizations of the United Nations (FAO) for responsibly managed species. The goal of this program is to position key industries within each state to achieve full independent third party seafood sustainability certifications where required. Doing so allows key industries such as shrimp, blue crab, and oysters to better compete in markets which are dominated by commodity

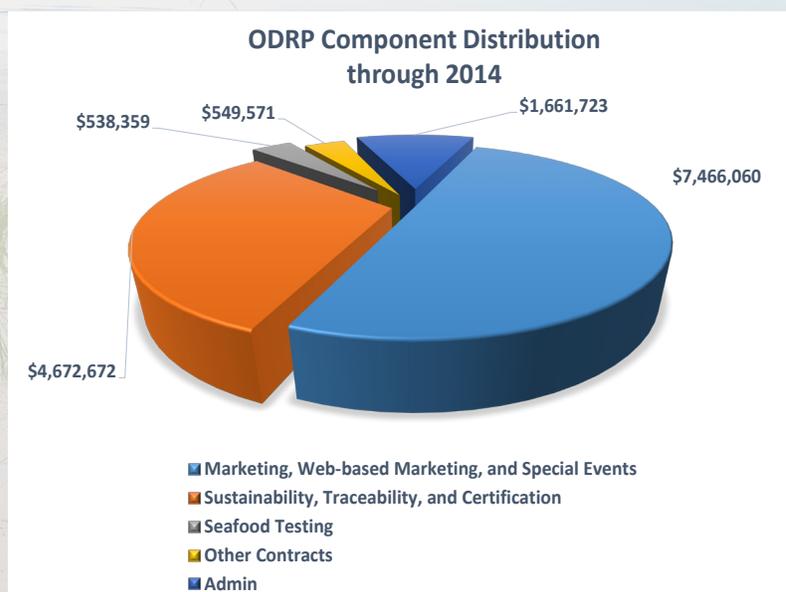
products, many of which are farm-raised and imported. A G.U.L.F website has been developed as a fisheries sustainability information site for select Gulf products and to track progress on how individual states are managing their resources for sustainability. This is being aided by Marine Advancement Plans (MAPs) which are being collaboratively developed with each state marine fisheries agency to aid in closing gaps between management and accepted FAO guidelines.

Projects were also funded under the ODRP in support of Kemps Ridley sea turtle abundance and mortality studies being conducted by LGL Ecological Research Associates, Inc. in collaboration with the Gladys Porter Zoo, who heads up the multi-national Kemps program in which both Mexico and the U.S. are working together to protect the turtles on their native nesting beaches. Key accomplishments during the year were the completion of a temporal analysis of shrimping effort, turtle interaction, abundance and age distribution, and the continuation of a turtle nesting and aging program to include an enhanced tagging element.

The seafood testing component, which was instituted early in the ODRP to expedite the testing of Gulf seafood, continued throughout 2014. Under this program, funding was provided to the Mississippi State Chemical Lab in Starkville and the Alabama Department of Public Health Bureau of Clinical Laboratories in Montgomery for the installation of testing equipment, acquisition of related supplies, training of personnel, and the analysis of samples submitted by the state marine agencies. The purpose of the testing is to determine the levels of Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons (PAHs) and oil dispersants that might be found in seafood samples taken from the Gulf following the oil disaster. After nearly 1400 tests, over approximately 3.5 years, results continue to reflect minimal findings and none in excess of the limits of contamination as defined by the FDA.

Finally, the stage was set in 2014 for a program that would provide initiatives at the individual state level for enhanced marketing and/or sustainability projects that would further lend to the overall objective of the post-oil disaster fisheries recovery program. Project proposals under this funding opportunity were expected to be reviewed and approved early in 2015, with anticipated project completion dates set for late June 2015.

By the end of 2014, nearly 99.4% of the \$14,985,000 budget had been obligated and approximately 86% or nearly \$14.9M had already been spent. With minor exceptions, most components were fashioned so that each could independently be implemented and prove beneficial to the overall objective of the ODRP. When examined as a whole, however, all components work in concert to better meet the broad goal of



the ODRP – to improve public perception of Gulf products following the oil disaster and aid in regaining markets lost as a result of the disaster.

Fund balances at the end of 2014 amounting to approximately \$2.0M are expected to be utilized by June 30, 2015. Any funds not utilized by then or by the respective contract end dates are being reallocated to the extent practical under the direction of the Ad Hoc Advisory Committee. Any funds not utilized by the ODRP grant end date of September 30, 2015 will expire.

SOUTHEAST AREA MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT PROGRAM

Program Coordinator – Jeffrey K. Rester

The Southeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program (SEAMAP) is a state/federal/university program for the collection, management, and dissemination of fishery-independent data and information in the southeastern United States. The overall program consists of three operational components: SEAMAP-Gulf of Mexico (begun in 1981); SEAMAP-South Atlantic (implemented in 1983); and SEAMAP-Caribbean (formed in 1988). The SEAMAP-Gulf component is coordinated through the Commission. SEAMAP resource surveys include the Fall Shrimp/Groundfish Survey, Spring Plankton Survey, Reef Fish Survey, Summer Shrimp/ Groundfish Survey, Fall Plankton Survey, and plankton and environmental surveys. Publications of the SEAMAP program include environmental and biological atlases of the Gulf of Mexico for each year from 1983 through present. The SEAMAP Program Coordinator, Jeffrey K. Rester, is assisted by Ashley P. Lott.

YEAR IN REVIEW

SEAMAP started 2014 with the SEAMAP Red Drum Work Group meeting via conference call in January to discuss a red drum mark and recapture project for the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council). The Council passed a motion at its October 2013 meeting that requested “the SEAMAP Red Drum Work Group to formulate a Gulf-wide tagging program, incorporating what the various states already have in their red drum tagging program and so using the existing ideas and incorporating that into a Gulf-wide program.” The SEAMAP Red Drum Work Group developed a list of options for a tagging program that would meet the goals of the Council’s motion.

The Council requested a presentation at its April 2014 meeting on current SEAMAP survey activities in the Gulf of Mexico. The presentation discussed how standardized the various SEAMAP surveys were amongst SEAMAP partners. The Council passed a motion requesting that SEAMAP standardize all of their surveys as much as possible. The Gulf Subcommittee and Work Groups spent quite a bit of time in 2014 working to standardize gears, station selection, protocols, and techniques as much as possible. As part of this effort, the Bottom Longline Work Group met in June and October while the Vertical Line Work Group met in May and October. The SEAMAP Subcommittee met in July in conjunction with the Caribbean and South Atlantic SEAMAP components to discuss the 2015 SEAMAP budget, updating the 2016-2020 *SEAMAP Management Plan*, and other joint SEAMAP issues.

In 2014, regular SEAMAP sampling operations continued for the thirty-third consecutive year. SEAMAP resource surveys included the Spring Plankton Survey, Summer Shrimp/Groundfish Survey, Reef Fish Survey, Bottom Longline Survey, Vertical Line Survey, Fall Plankton Survey, Fall Shrimp/Groundfish Survey, and plankton and environmental data surveys.

The Commission handled the data management responsibilities for SEAMAP in the Gulf of Mexico. All data collected during 2014 were uploaded to the appropriate SEAMAP database and made available to the public via the Commission's website. SEAMAP data were used for a variety of purposes during 2014, which included:

- evaluating the abundance and size distribution of penaeid shrimp in federal and state waters to assist in determining opening and closing dates for commercial fisheries;
- evaluating and plotting the size of the hypoxic (Dead Zone) area off of Louisiana;
- assessing shrimp and groundfish abundance and distribution and their relationship to such environmental parameters as temperature, salinity, and dissolved oxygen;
- identifying environmental parameters associated with concentrations of larval finfish;
- assessing the potential impact the Deepwater Horizon oil spill on marine fish stocks; and
- compiling the 2014 SEAMAP Environmental and Biological Atlas.

SPORT FISH RESTORATION ADMINISTRATIVE PROGRAM (SFRP)

Program Coordinator – James R. Ballard

The Sport Fish Restoration Administrative Program (SFRP) was established by the Commission in 1987, under the authority of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Program through the administrative portion of that program's enabling legislation. The primary goal of the program is to provide coordination of the recreational fisheries programs in the five Gulf States. Historically, there were three major categories of this program, including anadromous fish restoration, artificial reefs, and fisheries data, all of which supported interstate fisheries management. As these individual components developed and expanded, the fisheries data portion became a new and separate program within the Commission called the Fisheries Information Network (FIN). The original efforts conducted through the SFRP with respect to anadromous fish focused on recovery work for Gulf sturgeon and Gulf race striped bass restoration. The striped bass work resulted in the development of an FMP, a regulatory amendment, establishment of sampling guidelines for all life stages of striped bass, and a strategic plan for restoration which encompasses regulatory, database development, habitat, research, and enhancement issues. The Anadromous Fish component was later incorporated into the Commission's Interjurisdictional Fisheries Program (IJF). Today, the primary focus of the SFRP pertains to artificial reefs and has established regional policies and planning documents, including a regional database on all permitted artificial reef sites in the Gulf of Mexico. These documents are available from the Commission office and can be accessed from this site under Publications. The Sport Fish Restoration Administrative Program Coordinator is James R. Ballard, assisted by Alyce R. Ryan.

YEAR IN REVIEW

The SFRP Program Coordinator worked with the state Artificial Reef Program coordinators to develop a standardized monitoring protocol for artificial reef habitat across the Gulf of Mexico, incorporating vertical line, side-scan/multi-beam sonar, chevron traps with GoPro cameras, and water quality sampling. This protocol is modeled after existing long-term monitoring programs that focus on natural reef habitats, utilizing comparable gear types and methodologies where possible. This draft protocol will be used in a pilot study of the Gulf Artificial Reef Monitoring and Assessment Program to test its functionality, including site selection procedures, best order to deploy the selected gear types, usability of the selected gear types on the vessels available to the state agencies, average amount of time required to carry out the sampling procedure outlined in the protocol per site, etc. The goal of this effort is to develop a program that will provide baseline data for artificial reefs. This will allow states to assess impacts from natural and man-made disasters in the future, and to understand how their reefs are functioning over time, compared to natural reefs.

The Gulf Commission and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's Artificial Reef Subcommittees continued to revise the 2004 publication of *Guidelines for Marine Artificial Reef Materials: Second Edition*. Once all chapters have been updated, the Program Coordinator will perform the final review to get the document ready for publication.

The SFRP Program Coordinator secured funding from Region 4 of the USFWS to carry out a second year of the Mississippi Bight Lionfish Response Unit project. In 2014, the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources/Marine Resources Division revisited sites sampled in the first year of the project to assess any changes in the lionfish density and the native species assemblages. Also, the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources will conduct survey dives at sites in the western reach of the study area that they were unable to visit in 2013 due to some unforeseen staffing problems. Moreover, Alabama assessed the possibility of utilizing the diving public to conduct reef surveys through an Adopt-a-Reef program with a website for the public to enter their assessments of the reef sites, including density of lionfish. The data collected in this project will give a clear picture of the invasive lionfish population in northern Gulf waters, and how that population has changed over the last two years. It will also provide much-needed information on how lionfish are impacting the native species assemblages, which will be useful when considering future management actions.

AQUATIC NUISANCE SPECIES (ANS)

Program Coordinator – James R. Ballard

The Sport Fish Restoration Administrative Program (SFRP) has begun to address issues related to fisheries habitat and nonindigenous/invasive aquatic species. The SFRP coordinator also provides coordination for the Aquatic Invasive Species Program which includes oversight of the Gulf and South Atlantic Regional Panel (GSARP) on aquatic invasive species and participation in the National Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force. The Sport Fish Restoration Administrative Program Coordinator is James R. Ballard who is assisted by Alyce R. Ryan.

YEAR IN REVIEW

The Gulf and South Atlantic Regional Panel met twice in 2014 and the minutes for those meetings are available on the Panel website (www.gsarp.org). To help the Region 4 USFWS AIS Program with their coordinator position transition, the ANS Program Coordinator took over administration of their AIS small grants program. A review committee made up of GSARP members and the program coordinator reviewed and ranked the proposals that had been submitted to the program. The USFWS provided funding to the Commission to support selected projects and to administer all sub awards. A total of \$205,000 was awarded to 11 projects under this effort. The program coordinator revised the RFP for the 2015 funding opportunity under this small grants program with input from the review committee and provided it to the USFWS for distribution.

The Invasive Lionfish Control Ad-Hoc Committee, coordinated by the Commission's ANS Program Coordinator, finished drafting the *National Invasive Lionfish Prevention and Management Plan* for the ANSTF. The committee is made up of 22 members from federal and state agencies, universities, NGOs, and the pet trade industry. The plan has been through a review by the ANSTF and the National Invasive Species Council, and will be placed in the Federal Register for a public comment period. Once all comments received have been addressed, the draft plan will be sent to the ANSTF for final approval. The vision of the lionfish plan is to serve as a guide to the ANSTF and other interested parties involved in managing lionfish and natural resources in U.S. waters.

Several GSARP members are collaborating on efforts to understand more about the Asian tiger shrimp (*Penaeus monodon*). In 2011, there was a 20-fold increase in reported collections of tiger shrimp from 2010, with 678 reports. In 2012, the reported collections dropped to 208 and, in 2013, there were approximately 333; however, this decrease is most likely the result of reporting apathy as opposed to less individuals being collected. Recently, the specimens that have been reported are smaller individuals being collected earlier in the year. This trend supports the theory that this species is now established and reproducing in U.S. waters. To answer this question and to shed some light on the geographic origin of the *P. monodon* inhabiting the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic Coast, the group is setting up a tissue repository and running DNA analyses with samples from the species native range and all known introduced populations. The next big question is what impact this species may have on the invaded environment or native species.

Finally, three Invasive Species Traveling Trunks were produced and made available to the public at no charge through a GSARP subcontract. Since the trunks were made available in July of 2012, they have been utilized by over 25 different organizations, ranging from federal and state agencies to schools and NGOs that have presented the enclosed material to thousands of people across the U.S. In total, the trunks have been utilized for 314 days over the 28-month period that they have been available.

ECONOMICS

Program Coordinator – Alexander L. Miller

The Economics Program was formed in July of 2008 in an effort to improve economic data collection and management of the recreational and commercial fisheries throughout the Southeast Region. Through the program, the Commission and the states monitor the economic performance of the fisheries of the Gulf and assess the economic impacts of these fisheries on the local and regional economy. The program is the first of its type to collect economic data and conduct economic research, analysis, and outreach throughout the Gulf of Mexico. The Economics Program Coordinator is Alexander L. Miller.

YEAR IN REVIEW

Funding for the Economics Program was guaranteed through June 2014 and the data collection activities of the program are now complete. The program was a cooperative partnership among Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, the Commission, and NOAA Fisheries. The program monitored the economic performance of the fisheries of the Gulf and, where feasible, assessed the economic contribution of these fisheries on local and regional economies. In general, the activities of the Economics Program were divided into three main components: economic data collection, economic research and analysis, and economic outreach and dissemination. During the six years of its activity, the program completed an inshore shrimp fleet economic survey, a fishing-related businesses economic survey, a marine angler recreational fishery economic survey, and a marine recreational use economic survey. The Economics Program was intended to gain an understanding of the economic contributions that specific fishing industries provide to the local and regional economies of the Gulf, including employment, income, value-added, and sales. In addition, the program examined the value of changes in recreational regulations for key federally and state-managed species in the Gulf (MRIP states). There was considerable research on preferences for harvest levels and the values of anglers fishing from private boats or from the shore, but less so on for-hire fishing trips. The data derived from these studies will be used in the future for assessing changes in regulations.

ANNUAL MEETINGS

The annual meeting of the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) is held each year during the third week in October. The spring meeting is held each year during the third week in March. Upon written request of a majority of the Commissioners of each state, the chairman shall call a special meeting of the Commission. The regular meetings are rotated among the states in order that the Commission and staff may better familiarize themselves with the fisheries and coastal areas of the entire Gulf of Mexico.

MARCH 2014

The 64th Spring Meeting of the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) was held in New Orleans, Louisiana, at the Royal Sonesta Hotel. Below is a summary of many of the topics and actions taken by the various subcommittees. The complete minutes of all Commission meetings are available on the Commission's website at www.gsmfc.org.

The Data Management Subcommittee discussed multiple options for spending FIN carry-over and supplemental MRIP funds provided for 2014 sampling. The subcommittee recommended a revised spending plan to allocate funds to reinstate biological sampling and suggested that menhaden sampling be removed from the spending plan to maximize the amount available for biological sampling. It was determined that menhaden sampling could be supported via other FIN carry-over funds so as to not eliminate this work. The subcommittee also received an update on development of the new unified trip ticket system by Bluefin Data Inc. Extensive discussion centered on the use of NOAA conversion tables and the subcommittee recommended that the FIN Commercial Technical Workgroup be tasked with updating the species conversion tables for the Gulf of Mexico.

Action was approved for the Menhaden Advisory Committee (MAC) to generate a letter from the Commission in support of the need for continuation of the Atlantic and Gulf menhaden program at the NOAA Fisheries Beaufort Laboratory. It was also recognized that the state directors would prioritize training of state personnel from the expertise at the Beaufort Laboratory for the purpose of ageing fishery-independent samples in light of the pending closure of that lab. This committee also urged the Commission to help secure funding in the future for port sampling which, while minimal in expense, is critical in maintaining data for future assessments. The drawing up of a resolution was approved for Dr. Behzad Mahmoudi in recognition of his excellent service to the MAC and the Commission.

The SEAMAP Coordinator was tasked with composing a letter to NOAA Fisheries in an attempt to address problematic issues being experienced by Florida and Mississippi with the Fishery Scientific Computer System.

The Crab Subcommittee discussed progress being made on revision of the *Blue Crab Fisheries Management Plan*. It was decided that a white paper would be compiled, a consolidation of Gulf states information, regarding diamondback terrapin (*Malaclemys terrapin*) issues in the Gulf region and how they are currently being addressed in each state. This information would be made available to the Diamondback Terrapin Working Group.

The Commission received a summary report on expenditures and progress being made under the 21 ongoing contracts funded through the NOAA Oil Disaster Recovery Program (ODRP) grant. The summary included briefings regarding the marketing and public relations initiative involving the Gulf Marketing Coalition and individual state web-based Market Maker programs. A briefing was also provided on a potential Federal Funding Opportunity in support of the annual Louisiana Great American Seafood Cook-off and the potential role the Commission would play in coordinating this support. Also summarized were activities related to Gulf-wide sustainable seafood initiatives, including the Gulf Seafood Traceability element, the Audubon Nature Institute's Gulf United for Lasting Fisheries (G.U.L.F.) Marine Advancement Planning and outreach element, the development of a Gulf Fisheries Information system (FINFO), and a seafood Management Framework and Gap analysis through Ocean Trust, LLC to assess marine fisheries management systems in the Gulf based on guidelines of the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations. Reports were also provided on the ODRP Seafood Testing component and biannual findings based on chain of custody samples provided by both Mississippi and Alabama marine fisheries agencies. Finally, a report was given on the Commission's support through the ODRP of the Kemps Ridley nesting, ageing, and tagging program in an effort to examine the relativity of increased mortalities in the post-oil disaster recovery period.

A recommendation by the Commercial/Recreational Fisheries Advisory Panel was approved, that the Commission support all five Gulf states in expanding state waters to three marine leagues for all fisheries. Also approved was a recommendation by the panel that the Commission continue putting together options for coordination of the five Gulf states and/or complete management of the recreational red snapper fishery in the Gulf of Mexico.

OCTOBER 2014

The Commission's 65th Annual Meeting was held in Gulfport, Mississippi, at the Courtyard by Marriott. Below is a summary of many of the topics and actions taken by the various subcommittees as well as the full Commission. Complete minutes of all Commission meetings are available on the Commission's website at www.gsmfc.org.

The Commission received a summary report of the ODRP grant expenditures and progress made since the March meeting – one with LDWF for support in developing fisheries profiles for the FINFO program and the other with LDWF for a Seafood Sustainability Certification "Best Management Practices" component. The summary included briefings regarding the marketing and public relations initiative involving the Gulf Marketing Coalition and individual state web-based Market Maker programs, seafood sustainability initiatives and related contracts, seafood testing initiatives, and the Kemps assessment.

The Data Management Subcommittee received an update on biological sampling activities. Most notably, the FWC is close to completing necessary programming to provide biosampling data directly to the Commission to help reduce data entry burden for state samplers. The subcommittee received another presentation from Bluefin Data Inc. regarding progress on the new unified electronic trip ticket program. Bluefin provided access to a web portal to allow the states to start managing their non-confidential reference tables that support the dealer interface screens. The subcommittee also provided feedback on a response letter to SEFSC regarding a peer review of data that feeds into the SEFSC assessment and management process. The subcommittee decided to table a recommendation as to which version of the response letter they favored until they had another chance to review the report.

The Crab Subcommittee made plans to attend the Diamondback Terrapin Working Group in February 2015 in Lafayette, Louisiana, to start a roundtable discussion amongst the states in an attempt to consolidate terrapin issues. Dr. Zack Darnell of Nicholls State University provided a presentation on his blue crab tagging project. Following the presentation, all states agreed to try to help Dr. Darnell with any means of opportunistic funding they could. Ryan Gandy, Committee Chair, was tasked with coordinating a meeting of this subcommittee in October 2015 with the Atlantic group in connection with the Commission's annual meeting.

The SEAMAP Subcommittee recognized the discrepancy in Texas' trawl survey gear and methodologies and required either conforming to standard SEAMAP protocols and gears or reallocating their SEAMAP funds to other SEAMAP surveys that utilize standard gears and protocols by June 1, 2015.

The Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) instructed staff to reconvene the Oyster Task Force with the charge of compiling what is known about transplanting oyster hatchery larvae in the five Gulf states. The Menhaden FMP was approved as amended and passed on to the State Federal Fisheries Management Committee for review. The TCC agreed to a deadline of December 1, 2014 for completion of their review of the revised *Blue Crab Fisheries Management Plan*. The group agreed to explore the possibility of establishing a new subcommittee under the TCC to address ecosystem-based fisheries management, including modeling and identifying data gaps, at a future TCC meeting.

At the Commission Business Meeting, the Law Enforcement Committee's (LEC) *Cooperative Law Enforcement Operations Plan* was approved. The Commissioners asked that staff keep them updated on discussions of the Reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act because, if it is reauthorized in its present form, they would like to see changes made. The Commission asked staff to do a more in-depth evaluation on each program and develop a plan to be presented at the March meeting. The Commission has been reviewing and updating their *Rules and Regulations* and will incorporate changes/additions and tweak some language for distribution and further review. The Commissioners asked staff to further research the costs of hiring a lobbyist, advocate, or educator and to decide if this would be a full-time, half-time, etc. position. It was decided that, time allowing, the Commission Executive Director would take on this task. The Commissioners agreed to a joint meeting with the ASMFC in October 2015 in the St. Augustine, Florida, area.

STATE AGENCY PARTNERS

Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida

The five Gulf state agencies continued to work through the Commission in 2014 on projects such as the FIN Data Program, IJF, and SEAMAP. In addition, there were several state-specific activities ongoing in each of the states through the ODRP Program in response to the hurricanes in 2004/2005 and the British Petroleum Oil Disaster in 2010. Below are some of the highlights of those various Commission-related activities in 2014.

YEAR IN REVIEW

FIN: In 2014, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida actively participated in coordination of the MRIP survey for recreational harvest and effort estimation. The commercial trip ticket program has been successfully implemented for all states in the Gulf of Mexico. Landings data are being provided to the FIN Data Management System on a monthly basis. All states in the Gulf of Mexico assisted with the collection of ageing structures for the biological sampling program.

IJF: The five agencies all provided representation on the three task forces developing the revisions to the blue crab, Gulf menhaden, and flounder management plans. Each state was represented at the menhaden ageing workshop which took place in Beaufort, North Carolina, in November. The states provided representatives to revise the *Otolith Manual* which began in August 2014 and will continue through 2015. In addition, the NOAA Panama City Lab also provided representatives to update techniques specific to their own expertise. Derelict trap cleanups continue on an 'as-needed' basis and are coordinated through the Commission's Crab Subcommittee.

ODRP: The program continued to move forward in all of the elements as approved by the ODRP Ad Hoc Committee which consists of the Marine Directors from each of the five Gulf states and included partnerships in seafood marketing with several regional restaurants and retailers. Under the partnerships, Point of Sale Materials (POS); resource guides addressing species seasonality, flavor, texture, cooking, and similar information; as well as counter cards, door clings, ice picks, logo clings, recipe cards, and in-store training guides, were provided to promote Gulf products. In turn, participants agreed to utilize products verified (traceable seafood) to be from the Gulf. The states also continued with the sustainability certification and seafood traceability element of the ODRP which was designed to meet current demands upon the industry for assurances that Gulf products are both sustainable (as measured against accepted standards) and that they originate from the waters of the U.S. Gulf of Mexico. This program also supported initiatives to ensure the quality of seafood originating from Gulf waters through a seafood testing component involving sampling by state marine agencies and testing in accordance with FDA protocol by qualified state testing laboratories. The program also provided support in determining relationships of increased Kemp's Ridley turtle mortality following the oil disaster.

SEAMAP: Operation of the SEAMAP Program continued for the thirty-third consecutive year. The five state agency partners all contributed to the SEAMAP resource surveys including the Fall Plankton Survey, Fall Shrimp/Groundfish Survey, Spring Plankton Survey, Summer Shrimp/ Groundfish Survey, Reefish Survey, Bottom Longline Survey, Vertical Line Survey, and plankton and environmental data surveys. Other FY2014 activities included SEAMAP information services and program management.

SPORTFISH: The Commission continued to work in conjunction with the National Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force to determine appropriate actions and roles for the Commission and its member states in addressing invasive species issues. In addition, the Commission provided administration for, and participation in, the Gulf and South Atlantic Regional Panel on Aquatic Invasive Species on which all of the Gulf states have representation. The Commission worked to secure a second year of funding for the Mississippi Bight Lionfish Response Unit through a USFWS branch of invasive species proposal. The second year of this project was a cooperative effort between the Commission, the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources, the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources/Marine Resources Division, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and aimed to assess the lionfish population in north-central Gulf waters.

ARTIFICIAL REEFS: The Commission's TCC Artificial Reef Subcommittee, which is made up of the state Artificial Reef Coordinators from the five Gulf states, worked to develop a sampling protocol for artificial reefs in the Gulf of Mexico, modeled after existing long-term monitoring programs that focus on natural reef habitats, utilizing comparable gear types and methodologies where possible. This protocol will be used in the new Gulf Artificial Reef Monitoring and Assessment Program (GARMAP) if funding to support the new program can be secured. The goal of GARMAP is to provide baseline data for artificial reefs that will allow states to assess impacts from natural and man-made disasters in the future, and to understand how their reefs are functioning over time, compared to natural reefs. In addition, the subcommittee worked with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's Artificial Reef Subcommittee. This coordination provided the opportunity to address issues of national scope and importance. Currently the two subcommittees are working on revising their 2004 publication, *Guidelines for Marine Artificial Reef Materials: Second Edition*.

ECONOMICS: All five states, as well as NOAA, worked collaboratively to provide data, endorse surveys at the respective industry level, and to serve in a review capacity as each of the studies were being conducted. The Commission worked particularly close with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Economic Division to develop the survey platforms and to compile the resulting data into manageable files for analysis. Draft reviews of individual studies were conducted by each participating state and NOAA Fisheries prior to final release. The latest versions of these studies are accessible at the Commission website.

LYLES-SIMPSON AWARD

The original Charles H. Lyles Award was awarded annually by the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) to an individual, agency, or organization which has contributed to the betterment of the fisheries of the Gulf of Mexico through significant biological, industrial, legislative, enforcement, or administrative activities. In 2014, this award was renamed to include Larry B. Simpson and is now called the Lyles-Simpson Award.

The recipient of this award is selected by the full Commission from open nominations at its spring March meeting. The selection is by secret ballot with the person receiving the highest number of votes being named the recipient. The recipient is awarded the honor at the Commission's annual meeting in October. The 2014 award was presented posthumously to Michael C. Voisin. Mike was involved in the fisheries arena for over 40 years and he cared very deeply about the coastal environment and the seafood industry. He not only listened but he truly heard the issues and difficulties being conveyed to him by his peers and others involved in the fisheries. His patience allowed him to build consensus in situations when it did not appear possible. Mike passed away in February, 2013, at the age of 59.

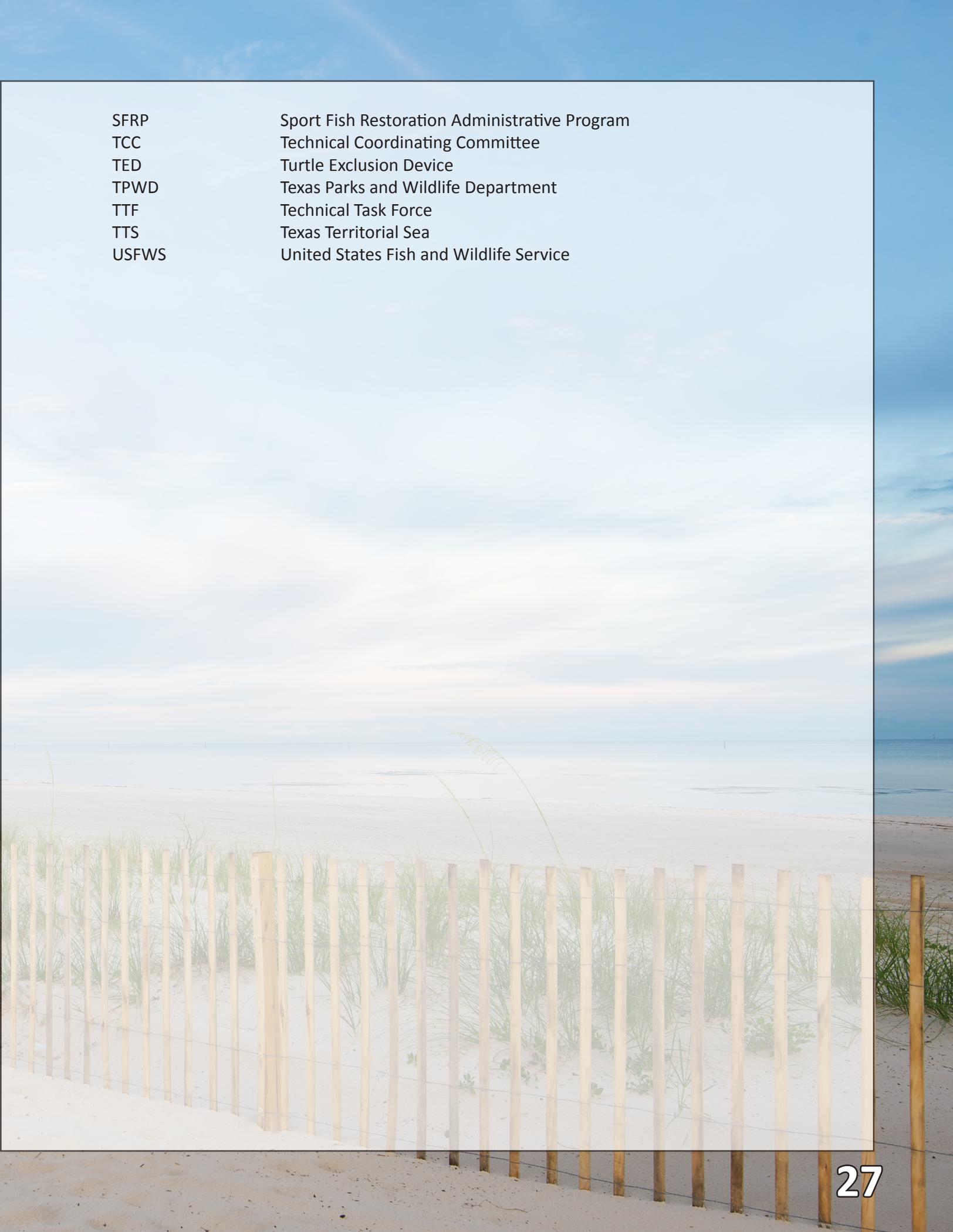
LYLES-SIMPSON AWARD RECIPIENTS

Charles H. Lyles	1984	James Barkuloo	2000
Theodore B. Ford	1985	Walter Fondren, III	2001
J.Y. Christmas	1986	Jerald K. Waller	2002
John Breaux	1987	Andrew J. Kemmerer	2003
John Ray Nelson	1988	Hal Osburn	2004
I.B. "Buck" Byrd	1989	Leroy Kiffe	2005
Hugh A. Swingle	1990	Robert P. Jones	2006
John A. Mehos	1991	Wayne E. Swingle	2007
J. Burton Angelle	1992	Ralph Rayburn	2008
Louis A Villanova	1993	W. "Corky" Perret	2009
Theodore H. Shepard	1994	Albert L. King, Sr.	2010
Edwin A. Joyce, Jr.	1995	Virginia "Ginny" Vail	2011
Tommy D. Candies	1996	R. Vernon Minton	2012
Walter M. Tatum	1997	Larry B. Simpson	2013
Thomas L. Heffernan	1998	Michael C. Voisin	2014
Trent Lott	1999		

COMMONLY USED ACRONYMS

ADCNR/MRD	Alabama Department of Conservation Natural Resources/Marine Resources Division
ANS	Aquatic Nuisance Species
ASMFC	Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission
BRD	Bycatch Reduction Device
ComFIN	Commercial Fisheries Information Network
CRFAP	Commercial/Recreational Fisheries Advisory Panel
DMS	Data Management Subcommittee
EDRP	Emergency Disaster Recovery Program
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
EFH	Essential Fish Habitat
FDA	Food and Drug Administration
FDD	Fishery-Dependent Data
FID	Fishery-Independent Data
FIN	Fisheries Information Network
FMP	Fishery Management Plan
FWC	Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
FWRI	Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute
GCRL	Gulf Coast Research Laboratory
GMFMC	Gulf of Mexico Fisheries Management Council
GSMFC	Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission
IFA	Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act
IJF	Interjurisdictional Fisheries Program
JEA	Joint Enforcement Agreement
LDWF	Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries
LEC	Law Enforcement Committee
MAC	Menhaden Advisory Committee
MDMR	Mississippi Department of Marine Resources
MMPA	Marine Mammal Protection Act
MOA	Memorandum of Agreement
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MRFSS	Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistical Survey
MRIP	Marine Recreational Information Program
NMFS	National Marine Fisheries Service
NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
ODRP	Oil Disaster Recovery Program
PSMFC	Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission
RecFIN	Recreational Fisheries Information Network
SAT	Stock Assessment Team
SEAMAP	Southeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program
SERO	Southeast Regional Office (NOAA Fisheries)
SFFMC	State-Federal Fisheries Management Committee

SFRP Sport Fish Restoration Administrative Program
TCC Technical Coordinating Committee
TED Turtle Exclusion Device
TPWD Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
TTF Technical Task Force
TTS Texas Territorial Sea
USFWS United States Fish and Wildlife Service



PUBLICATIONS

The Commission staff accumulates data, research papers, and other materials critical to the further development of publications including those from the Profiles and FMPs in progress. An electronic repository for papers referenced in these documents is continually expanded as additional literature from outside sources as well as the Commission is added. The database is searchable from the Commission website and provides keywords and complete abstracts when available. All Commission publications are housed electronically and limited paper copies are available upon request. Below is a list of the publications completed by the Commission in 2014.

2014 PUBLICATIONS

No. 239 November 2014. SEAMAP Environmental and Biological Atlas of the Gulf of Mexico, 2013. Jeffrey K. Rester, Editor. Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

No. 238 December 2014. Current regulations related to the propagation, transport, and release of hatchery raised oysters in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico. Patrick Banks, Steve Geiger, Jason Herrmann, Charles Robertson, Lance Robinson, and Steve VanderKooy. Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

No. 237 November 2014. SEAMAP Environmental and Biological Atlas of the Gulf of Mexico, 2012. Jeffrey K. Rester, Editor. Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

No. 236 October 2014. Gulf of Mexico Cooperative Law Enforcement Operations Plan 2014-2015. Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission Law Enforcement Committee and Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council's Law Enforcement Advisory Panel. Steve VanderKooy, editor. Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

No. 235 October 2014. Law Summary 2014. A Summary of Marine Fishing Laws & Regulations for the Gulf States. Debbie McIntyre (Editor). Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

No. 234 October 2014. SEAMAP Subcommittee Annual Report to the Technical Coordinating Committee of the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission October 1, 2013 to September 30, 2014. Jeffrey K. Rester, Editor. Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

No. 233 September 2014. Licenses and Fees for Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas in Their Marine Waters for the Year 2013. Debbie McIntyre (Editor). Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

No. 232 June 2014. 2015 Operations Plan for the Fisheries Information Network (FIN). FIN Committee. Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

No. 231 June 2014. Annual Report of the Fisheries Information Network in the Southeast Region (FIN). January 1, 2013 - December 31, 2013. Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

No. 230 July 2014. Rules and Regulations: Officers' Pocket Guide 2014-2015. Debbie McIntyre (Editor) Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

No 229 September 2014. SEAMAP Environmental and Biological Atlas of the Gulf of Mexico, 2011. Jeffrey K. Rester, Editor. Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

No. 228 June 2014. A Survey of Recreational Shrimpers in the Northern U.S. Gulf of Mexico. A. Miller, M. Tabarestani, and J. Isaacs. Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

No. 227 June 2014. An Economic Survey of the U.S. Gulf of Mexico Inshore Shrimp Fishery: Descriptive Results for 2012. A. Miller and J. Isaacs. Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

No. 226 June 2014. An Economic Baseline and Characterization of U.S. Gulf of Mexico Dockside Seafood Dealers. A. Miller, E. Ogunyinka, and J. Isaacs. Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

No. 225 May 2014. An Economic Baseline and Characterization of U.S. Gulf of Mexico Seafood Processors. A. Miller, J. Isaacs, and L. Bharadwaj. Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

No. 224 May 2014. The Economic Contribution of Marine Angler Expenditures in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico and Puerto Rico, 2011. S. Lovell, S. Steinback, and A. Miller. Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

No 223 February 2014. Annual Report of the Southeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program (SEAMAP – Gulf of Mexico, South Atlantic and Caribbean Components) October 1, 2011 – September 30, 2012. Jeffrey K. Rester (Editor). Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

No. 222 January 2014. Digital Traceability for Oyster Supply Chains: Implementation and Results of a Pilot. A. Miller, M.S., D. Heggelund, Ph.D., and T. McDermott, B.A.

FINANCIAL REPORT

The Commission has a Single Audit conducted annually in compliance with the Single Audit Act and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circular A-133. The audit is performed by an independent certified public accounting firm and encompasses both financial and compliance components. A segment of the audited financial statements is published below. The full 2014 audit report is available by request from the Commission.

YEAR IN REVIEW

The following presents a summary of the Commission's net position for the years ended December 31, 2014 and 2013. Detailed financial statements are available from the Commission office by request from Ms. Angela R. Rabideau.

Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission Condensed Statement of Financial Position for the Years Ended December 31, 2014 and 2013

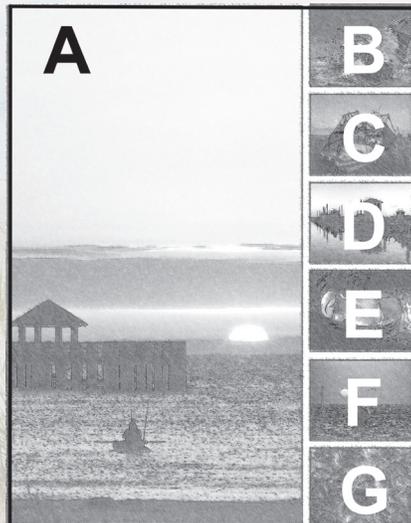
	DECEMBER 31,	
	<u>2014</u>	<u>2013</u>
Current Assets	\$592,331	\$558,050
Noncurrent Assets		
Post-Employment Health Plan investment account	\$176,080	\$161,714
Property and Equipment, net of accumulated depreciation	\$193,002	\$205,063
Total Noncurrent Assets	\$369,082	\$366,777
Total Assets	\$961,413	\$924,827
Current Liabilities	<u>\$ 3,583</u>	<u>\$ 1,771</u>
Net Position		
Investment in Capital Assets	\$193,002	\$205,063
Unrestricted	<u>764,828</u>	<u>717,993</u>
Total Net Position	<u>\$957,830</u>	<u>\$923,056</u>

Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission
Condensed Statement of Activities
for the Years Ended December 31, 2014 and 2013

	DECEMBER 31,	
	<u>2014</u>	<u>2013</u>
Revenues:		
General Revenues		
Member State Appropriation	\$67,500	\$135,000
Council Activities	45,000	35,000
Other Income	50,800	50,544
Interest Income	755	666
Dividend Income	7,244	8,859
Post-Employment Health Plan Revenue	9,222	9,763
Registration Fees	18,995	16,455
Unrealized Gain (Loss) on Investments	(1,375)	14,134
Program Revenues		
Collection & Dissemination of Recreational and Commercial Fisheries Information Network	7,017,066	6,354,459
Interjurisdictional Fisheries Management	196,408	215,174
Coordination of Recreational Fisheries Programs	143,225	199,924
Collection & Dissemination of Fishery-Independent Data And Information	232,122	237,037
Study of Aquatic Nuisances	64,737	19,126
Emergency Disaster Recovery Program I	-	2,755,106
Emergency Disaster Recovery Program II	-	5,358,987
Economic Data Program	295,855	673,551
Oil Disaster Recovery Program	3,492,029	3,214,974
Stock Assessment Enhancement	190,963	869,359
Fisheries Development and Utilization Research and Development Grants and Cooperative Agreements Program	230,000	-
Total Revenues	<u>\$12,060,546</u>	<u>\$20,168,118</u>
Expenses:		
Programs	\$11,857,833	\$19,903,216
General and Administrative	<u>167,939</u>	<u>174,584</u>
Total Expenses	\$12,025,772	\$20,077,800
Change in Net Position	34,774	90,318
Net Position, Beginning	<u>923,056</u>	<u>832,738</u>
Net Position, Ending	<u>\$957,830</u>	<u>\$923,056</u>



CREDITS



Cover Photo Credits

- A. Brian Wright
- B. Alex North
- C. Alex North
- D. Brian Wright
- E. Kevin Anson
- F. Alex North
- G. Kyle P. Miller

Inside Photo Spread
Alex North



**Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission
2404 Government Street
Ocean Springs, Mississippi, 39564**