

Sixty-Seventh  
**Annual Report** of the  
Gulf States Marine  
Fisheries Commission  
For the Year 2016



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

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Bon Secour Fisheries, Inc.  
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Gregory S. Bray, FIN Program Coordinator  
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Ralph E. Hode, Program Coordinator  
Lloyd W. Kirk, SEAMAP Database Programmer  
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Survey Coordinator  
Deanna L. Valentine, Data Entry Clerk  
Steven J. VanderKooy, Program Coordinator

# GULF STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION

## SIXTY-SEVENTH ANNUAL REPORT (2016)

*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.



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Preserving the Past ▪ Planning the Future ▪ A Cooperative Effort

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In submitting this Sixty-Seventh 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.

Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission Executive Committee,  
Mark Lingo, Chairman  
Chris Blankenship, 1st Vice-Chairman  
Kelly Lucas, 2nd Vice-Chairman  
Dan Ellinor, Immediate Past Chairman  
Patrick Banks, Chairman's Appointee  
David Donaldson, Executive Director

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# ACTIVE COMMITTEES

## Executive Committee

Mark Lingo, Chairman  
Chris Blankenship  
Kelly Lucas  
Patrick Banks  
Dan Ellinor

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Chad Hebert, Chairman

## State-Federal Fisheries Management Committee

Chris Blankenship, Chairman

## Menhaden Advisory Committee

John Mareska, Chairman

## Commercial/Recreational Fisheries Advisory Panel

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Bob Fairbanks, Recreational Chairman

## Technical Coordinating Committee

Chris Denson, Chairman

## TCC Artificial Reef Subcommittee

Eric Zlokovitz, 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. The Commission was established by an act of Congress (P.L. 81-66) in 1949 as a compact of the five Gulf States and 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, participation 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*

Presidential election years are always interesting and 2016 was no different. The issue with elections, especially presidential elections, is the uncertainty. With the potential (and actual) changes to the people in office, it introduces a whole new set of variables regarding their stance and views on the marine resources in the Gulf of Mexico. This year these facts are emphasized with the election of Donald J. Trump since he is not the “typical” Washington political insider. One can only assume that his approach will be more business-oriented and will examine the possibility of making Washington D. C. more efficient and effective.

So, what does all of this have to do with the management and conservation of marine resources in the Gulf of Mexico? President Trump’s business approach to running the country has the potential to dramatically increase the level of uncertainty and have a profound effect on available funding resources. In order to combat the ambiguity, we all need to work together – cooperation is the key. To quote my old boss, Larry Simpson, “All we need is warm bodies, cold cash, and cooperation and we can accomplish anything”. There is a lot of truth in that statement and the Commission is uniquely poised to facilitate cooperation among our member states, federal partners and others. The Commission has a long-standing history of providing a forum to discuss and address issues and problems regarding the marine resources of the Gulf of Mexico and will continue to provide that environment into the future.

While everyone has his or her own opinion and perspective, we cannot lose sight of the ultimate goal – the effective management of the marine resources in the Gulf of Mexico. So let’s pull up our boot straps, strengthen our existing relationships, develop new partnerships, and do what it takes to make Gulf fisheries great again!

# FISHERIES INFORMATION NETWORK (FIN)

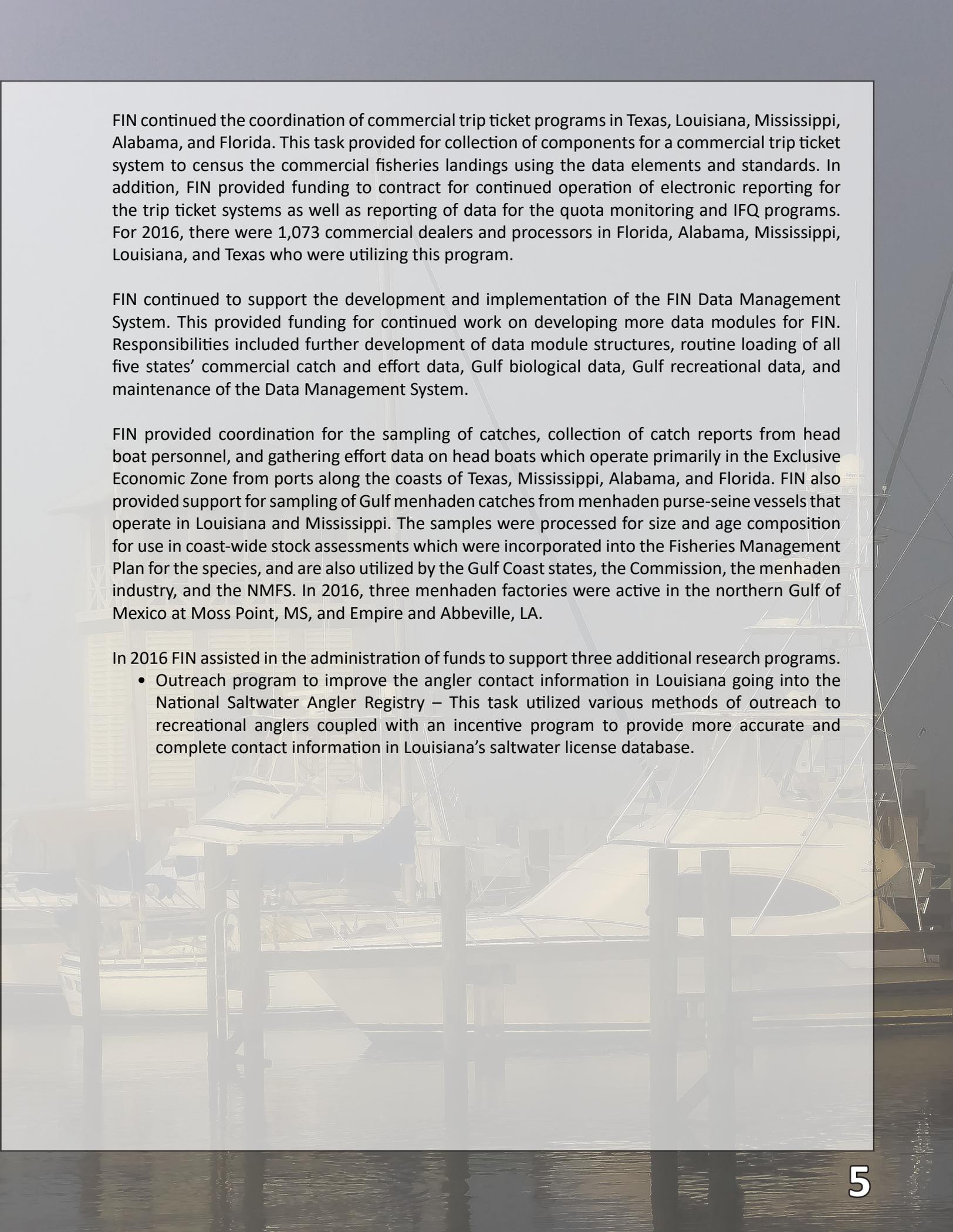
*Program Manager – Gregg Bray*

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 States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) and the 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, Gregg Bray, is assisted by Ashley Lott.

## YEAR IN REVIEW

In 2016, FIN continued the coordination of the MRIP survey in Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida for shore, for-hire, and private modes. FIN provides for coordination of the survey, a field-intercept survey of shore, for-hire and private boat anglers to estimate angler catch using the existing MRIP methodology, and entry of the data. In 2016, over 32,000 angler interviews were collected across all three states. In addition, the states conducted supplemental sampling of the intercept portion for the MRIP for charter boats in Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida (east and west coast). The states also conducted weekly telephone calls to a 10% random sample of the Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida (east and west coast) charter boat captains to obtain estimates of charter boat fishing effort. In 2000, NMFS adopted this method as the official methodology for estimation of charter boat effort. FIN also provided partial funding to help support implementation of the LA Creel Survey in Louisiana.

FIN obtained some S/K Funding mid-year from NOAA Fisheries to support a partial year biological sampling program. For that reason, sampling only occurred in August through December of 2016. These data are essential to accurately assessing the status of commercial and recreational species. FIN provided funding for collection, processing, and analysis of these data. 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 & 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 2016, the states were able to collect over 37,000 age structures from the primary species list.



FIN continued the coordination of commercial trip ticket programs in Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida. This task provided for collection of components for a commercial trip ticket system to census the commercial fisheries landings using the data elements and standards. In addition, FIN provided funding to contract for continued operation of electronic reporting for the trip ticket systems as well as reporting of data for the quota monitoring and IFQ programs. For 2016, there were 1,073 commercial dealers and processors in Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas 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 module structures, routine loading of all five states' commercial catch and 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 menhaden purse-seine vessels that operate in Louisiana and Mississippi. The samples were processed for size and age composition for use in coast-wide stock assessments which were incorporated into the Fisheries Management Plan for the species, and are also utilized by the Gulf Coast states, the Commission, the menhaden industry, and the NMFS. In 2016, three menhaden factories were active in the northern Gulf of Mexico at Moss Point, MS, and Empire and Abbeville, LA.

In 2016 FIN assisted in the administration of funds to support three additional research programs.

- Outreach program to improve the angler contact information in Louisiana going into the National Saltwater Angler Registry – This task utilized various methods of outreach to recreational anglers coupled with an incentive program to provide more accurate and complete contact information in Louisiana's saltwater license database.

# 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. This program promotes interjurisdictional 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 Gulf Menhaden, Flounder, Spotted Seatrout, Spanish Mackerel, Striped Bass, Blue Crab, Eastern Oyster, Black Drum, and Striped Mullet. The IJF Program Coordinator, Steven VanderKooy, is assisted by Debora McIntyre.

## YEAR IN REVIEW

Throughout 2016, the IJF Program continued to draft Biological Profiles for Tripletail and Atlantic Croaker, as well as continuing the work on the joint GSMFC/ASMFC ageing manual. The Tripletail Task Force completed their draft in June and presented to the TCC over the summer. The TCC approved the Biological Profile shortly after their meeting in October in Gulfport, MS and the document was made available on the Commission website in November.

This work on the Tripletail Profile stimulated additional research which is currently being conducted by the Commission, USM/GCRL, and the USA/Dauphin Island Sea Lab investigating the genetics of tripletail populations from around the world. The Commission has distributed tissue sampling kits to 21 anglers from Australia, Brazil, Panama and Costa Rica, as well as Georgia, and both coasts of Florida. It is hoped that these efforts will further describe the population structure through the Gulf and South Atlantic and the relationship throughout the rest of its distribution from the Western Gulf of Mexico to the Eastern Pacific.

The Atlantic Croaker TTF continued working on the draft Biological Profile through 2016. A considerable effort was made to provide a complete chronicle of the history of the croaker fishery in the Gulf from pet food to live bait. A number of people involved with the historic pet food industry were contacted and were able to provide substantial detail into the extinct industry. The TTF should complete the Profile early in 2017 and present it to the TCC at the March meeting.

The Ageing Manual found a new stimulus to continue work. In the summer of 2016, NOAA directed some funds to this state/federal effort in an attempt to move the process along. As a result, with the additional monies, segments of the complete team (Atlantic and Gulf members) met for two work sessions held at two of the three primary NOAA ageing labs: Panama City

in November and Beaufort in February. A third segment of the group will meet in Woods Hole in the last week of March. As noted before, a number of additional species were added for the Atlantic as well as some ageing techniques that are definitely outside of standard Gulf techniques. It is anticipated that the manual will continue to be revised in the future as additional ageing needs are identified and additional species fall under NOAA's assessment program.

Finally, in 2016, NOAA's Office of Aquaculture requested that the Commission assist them with a small grants program to address the technical and regulatory opportunities and challenges of oyster farming in the Gulf region. An RFP was developed and the Commission solicited proposals throughout August. The technical review was completed and final decisions were made in mid-November. A total of six projects were funded across the Gulf with a total of \$375,000. They were as follows:

1. Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium - Advancing the Gulf of Mexico Shellfish Initiative (GoMexSI)
2. University of Florida, School of Forest Resources and Conservation - Initiation of a Program to Produce Florida Tetraploid Founder Stocks for the Gulf Oyster Industry
3. Alma Bryant High School - Development and Operation of a Mobile Oyster Spawning System
4. Alabama Marine Resources Division - State of Alabama Oyster Aquaculture Permitting and Informational Website Development
5. Auburn University - Increasing Oyster Production in the Gulf of Mexico: Adopting High-Density Larval Culture at the Auburn University Shellfish Lab
6. Texas A&M University at Corpus Christi - Identifying Information Needs and Regulatory Impediments to Off-Bottom Oyster Culture in Texas.

Work on the six projects will begin January 2017 and will run through December 2017.

# 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 (began 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, Jeff Rester, is assisted by Ashley Lott.

## YEAR IN REVIEW

In 2016, SEAMAP operations continued for the 35th consecutive year. SEAMAP resource surveys in 2016 included the Spring Plankton Survey, Summer Shrimp/Groundfish Survey, Reefish Survey, Bottom Longline Survey, Vertical Line Survey, Fall Plankton Survey, Fall Shrimp/Groundfish Survey and plankton and environmental data surveys. Several states have received National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) funding to conduct additional fishery-independent sampling work. Since the NFWF projects used SEAMAP gear and protocols, the collected data will be managed by the Commission. NFWF funds will allow SEAMAP to fill in spatial and temporal gaps in current SEAMAP surveys since current funding levels do not allow for expansion of existing surveys.

The SEAMAP Subcommittee continued to work towards standardizing gears, station selection, protocols, and techniques in all SEAMAP surveys. The Subcommittee updated and approved operations manuals for the Shrimp/Groundfish Surveys, Bottom Longline Survey, and Vertical Line Survey in 2016. All SEAMAP surveys are now using standardized gear, station selection protocols, and methodology.

During 2016, the SEAMAP Subcommittee revised and approved the SEAMAP 2016-2020 Management Plan. The Management Plan provides a statement of current goals, management policies, procedures, and priorities for all SEAMAP components and partnerships. The Management Plan also serves as a reference on SEAMAP history and accomplishments, as well as detailing priorities for future activities.

Another project the SEAMAP Subcommittee worked on was pursuing additional funding for fishery-independent data collection in the Gulf of Mexico. The SEAMAP Subcommittee submitted two proposals to the NOAA RESTORE Act Science Program's funding initiative that focused on

comprehensive understanding of living coastal and marine resources, food web dynamics, habitat utilization, protected areas, and carbon flow. One proposal would collect and analyze gut contents from fish caught during SEAMAP surveys. The other proposal would collect and analyze otoliths from fish caught during SEAMAP surveys.

The Commission handles the data management responsibilities for SEAMAP in the Gulf of Mexico. All data collected during 2016 were uploaded to the appropriate SEAMAP database and made available to the public via the Commission's web site. SEAMAP data were used for a variety of purposes during 2016. These include:

- 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 2016 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 Ballard, assisted by Alyce Ryan.

## YEAR IN REVIEW

The SFRP Coordinator will be conducting a pilot study of the Gulf Artificial Reef Monitoring and Assessment Program (GARMAP) with the state of Mississippi in 2017. This pilot study will utilize a draft standardized monitoring protocol that incorporates vertical line, side-scan/multibeam sonar, Chevron traps with GoPro cameras, and water quality sampling that was developed with input from the Artificial Reef Subcommittee. This draft protocol is modeled after existing long-term monitoring programs, utilizing comparable gear types and methodologies where possible. All necessary gear that will be utilized in the project has been purchased and/or built and a data entry program, that will be used to collect and distribute all the sample data back to the Commission where it will be housed, has been developed. Currently, staff is waiting for the state boat to be repowered and outfitted with the necessary equipment to carry out the sampling. The long-term goal of this effort is to develop a program that will provide standardized baseline data for artificial reefs across the Gulf of Mexico. 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 goal of this pilot study will be to test the protocol's

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, and average amount of time required to carry out the sampling procedures outlined in the protocol per site, etc. Once all aspects of the protocol have been tested and modified where necessary, the protocol will be finalized, and the remainder of the pilot study will be focused on collecting standardized data on Mississippi's artificial reefs.

The SFRP Coordinator served on the Steering Committee for the 2016 National Saltwater Artificial Reefs Workshop that was hosted by NOAA Fisheries and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) June 9-10, in Alexandria, VA (Workshop Summary Report). Now that the summary report from this workshop has been released, the Program Coordinator will pull together a Technical Committee from across the Gulf, made up of state artificial reef Coordinators and university researchers with experience in artificial reef studies. The goal for this new committee will be to develop a proposal for a Gulf-wide artificial reef demonstration project that will address some of the major science gaps identified at the workshop.

The GSMFC's and ASMFC's Artificial Reef Subcommittees have completed the preliminary revision of their 2004 publication of "Guidelines for Marine Artificial Reef Materials: Second Edition". Currently, the Program Coordinator is working on pulling together all of the revised sections into a new draft that will be distributed back to both Subcommittees for a final review. The new third edition will include updates to the reef materials covered in the second edition, as well as, cover new materials that have been implemented in recent years.

The Program Coordinator is continuing to maintain and update the FINFO website. This program was developed by the Commission's Computer System Administrator and automatically updates the catch data on the site so it stays consistent with the data provided on NOAA's website. While this is working well, it is still important that each state updates their sections of the site to insure that the data that is being provided to the public is accurate.

The Program Coordinator continues to work in conjunction with the National Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force (ANSTF) to determine appropriate actions and roles for the Commission and its member states in addressing invasive species issues. In addition, the Commission provides administration for, and participation in, the Gulf and South Atlantic Regional Panel on Aquatic Invasive Species (GSARP). During this reporting period, the SFRP helped support meetings of the GSARP, its associated work groups, and its steering committee.

# 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 Ryan.

## YEAR IN REVIEW

The GSARP met twice in 2016 and the minutes for those meetings are available on the Panel website ([www.gsarp.org](http://www.gsarp.org)).

The Program Coordinator helps administer the Region 4 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) AIS Small Grants Program and provides administrative oversight of all non-federal projects funded through the program. The 2016 RFP was sent out by the USFWS's Regional Office in February 2016, and a total of 57 proposals were received totaling \$1.375M. After all proposals were reviewed and ranked by the review committee, a total of seven projects were selected for funding totaling \$163,206. The ANS Coordinator is administering five of the 2016 project sub-awards totaling \$114,816. The regional office is pleased at how smoothly this new partnership is working, and plans to continue it in subsequent years if funding allows.

**Invasive Species Traveling Trunk:** The Panel decided that it was time to update the content in the trunks and expand the number of species covered, given the amount the trunks are being utilized. The Panel charged its Education and Outreach Workgroup with this effort. All of the information for the 11 species currently covered in the trunks will be updated and three or four new species will be added to the content (Asian carp, feral hogs, apple snails, and possibly another plant species). The workgroup will also explore the possibility of incorporating a game for elementary-aged children, and developing a poster that the teachers can display in their classroom to keep the message about invasive species in the class after the lesson is complete.

The GSARP decided to establish a clearinghouse of relevant outreach materials that have already been developed, with links to the points of contact that can provide more information on the availability of a particular product. The hope is that this will help to reduce duplication of effort by just modifying materials that have already been developed to meet a particular state's needs, and help to increase a unified message about invasive species in the region. The Commission is currently collecting PDFs of developed materials to incorporate into the clearinghouse, which will be incorporated into the GSARP's website when it is updated.

# ANNUAL MEETINGS

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.

## MARCH 2016

The 66th Spring Meeting of the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) was held at the Holiday Inn San Antonio Riverwalk in San Antonio, Texas. Below is a summary of some 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](http://www.gsmfc.org).

The FIN committee started work on generating current recreational data priorities for developing the GulfFIN MRIP Regional Implementation Plan. The FIN committee agreed upon 7 prioritized items to focus on. The items are 1) full funding for general surveys at base sampling levels, 2) MRIP certified specialized catch and discard surveys, 3) improved timeliness of recreational catch and harvest estimates, 4) redesigned biological sampling program integrated with recreational catch sampling and expanded to include the Atlantic Coast of Florida, 5) for-hire electronic logbook implementation and validation, 6) improved recreational fishery discard data, and 7) improved spatial resolution and technical guidance for post-stratification of MRIP estimates. Andrew Peterson stated that development is ongoing with regards to the new unified trip ticket system. Recent work has focused on development of dealer entry pages for Texas. Additional state pages will be developed and input will be obtained from each state partner to make sure development meets the state requirements. The FIN committee also received a presentation from Mike Lewis on confidential data roll-up procedures with the goal of preserving species totals in the Gulf but also protecting confidentiality. After extensive discussions and concerns about changing our current method the FIN committee made a recommendation that GulfFIN keep the current method for confidential commercial landings data when presented to the public and ask FOSS to adopt this same method for the Gulf of Mexico commercial data.

The Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) discussed the two recommendations made by the FIN Committee. Following the discussions, the TCC made the following motions to the Commission: 1) to identify the following prioritized areas of importance for the initial GulfFIN MRIP Regional Implementation plan:

1. Full funding for MRIP general survey at base sampling levels
2. MRIP certified specialized landings surveys
3. Redesigned biological sampling program integrated with recreational catch sampling
4. For-Hire electronic logbook implementation and validation
5. Improving timeliness and accuracy of saltwater license frames
6. Improve precision of landings estimates by increasing dockside sampling levels
7. Improve recreational discard/release data

and 2) that the appropriate documents to on-board new GulfFIN Administrative subcommittee members are a welcome letter, the GulfFIN Framework Plan, the current year Operations Plan, the current Annual Report, the statement of non-disclosure form, and the GulfFIN confidential data user request form.

## OCTOBER 2016

The Commission's 67th Annual Fall Meeting was held at the JW Marriott in New Orleans, Louisiana. Below is a summary of some 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](http://www.gsmfc.org).

Julie Defilippi-Simpson from ACCSP gave a demonstration of their new end-user query and reporting tool. GulfFIN is in need of new end-user tools and is interested in using a modified version of the tool developed by ACCSP. Gordon Colvin provided an MRIP update and stated NOAA Fisheries received the GulfFIN MRIP Regional Implementation Plan and would be asking their Operations Team to review the contents of the plan. He also updated the FIN committee on current MRIP priorities including continuing executing the FES transition plan, working with the FIN partners to certify for-hire electronic trip reporting methods, testing, reviewing and potentially certifying supplemental surveys, and 2017 Gulf workshops.

The Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) had a presentation from Ms. Krista Shipley (FWC) on the Commission's draft Tripletail Profile which covers the Gulf of Mexico and the south Atlantic. The profile outlines several research needs, both critical and secondary, that are necessary to fill science gaps to better understand and manage this species. The TCC had a long discussion on whether they were ready to approve the draft Profile and following the discussion, it was the consensus of the group to take two more weeks to review the document. After the review period, Steve VanderKooy would seek a final approval vote via email. The Profile was made available on the Commission website in November.

The Crab Subcommittee met and discussed the issues and concerns associated with the Diamondback Terrapins and interactions with commercial crab traps in the Gulf. The subcommittee plans to continue working on improving communication with the terrapin research community and work to change the narrative and approach to recovery. One such measure will be to request a special session during the next October meeting of the Commission (2017) to bring Gulf crab biologists and the regional terrapin workgroups (Gulf and Florida) together to begin to change the tone regarding turtle/trap interactions.

The Menhaden Advisory Committee (MAC) received the 2016 Gulf Menhaden Stock Assessment Update from Dr. Amy Schueller (NOAA Beaufort). The MAC passed a motion to accept the assessment update for use by the states to manage the fishery, and during the Commission Business Session, the updated assessment was approved.

# STATE AGENCY PARTNERS

*Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida*

The five Gulf state agencies continued to work through the Commission in 2016 on projects such as the FIN Data Program, IJF, and SEAMAP. Below are some of the highlights of those various Commission related activities in 2016.

## YEAR IN REVIEW

**FIN:** In 2016, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida actively participated in coordination of the MRIP survey for recreational harvest and effort estimation. All states in the Gulf of Mexico assisted with the collection of ageing structures for the biological sampling program. The commercial trip ticket program is also developed and ongoing for all states in the Gulf of Mexico.

**SEAMAP:** SEAMAP operations continued for the 35th consecutive year. All five state partners participated in the various SEAMAP resource surveys in 2016 including the Spring Plankton Survey, Summer Shrimp/Groundfish Survey, Reefish Survey, Bottom Longline Survey, Vertical Line Survey, Fall Plankton Survey, Fall Shrimp/Groundfish Survey, and plankton and environmental data surveys.

**IJF:** The five state agencies provided representation on two task forces: Tripletail and Atlantic Croaker. The states continued to support the revision to the Otolith Manual by sending representatives to the joint ASMF and GSMFC meeting in Woods Hole, Massachusetts.

**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.

**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 collaboratively with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's Artificial Reef Subcommittee through a joint meeting. 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*.

# LYLES-SIMPSON AWARD

The original Charles H. Lyles Award was presented annually by the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) to an individual, agency, or organization recognized for contributing 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 the Lyles-Simpson Award to include and honor the late Larry B. Simpson, longtime Commission Executive Director.

The recipient is selected by the full Commission from open nominations made at the 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 this honor at the Commission’s annual meeting in October of each year.

The 2016 award was presented to Michael S. Ray. After 25 years of dedicated service, Mike retired from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department in 2013. He was appointed by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce to serve on the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council in a number of capacities and was involved with sea turtle conservation projects in Texas and Mexico for 20 years. In addition to his various administrative duties over the years, Mike served as a commissioner for the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission for 16 years with two stints as Chairman. Mike’s dedication and commitment was greatly appreciated by those who worked with him.

## LYLES-SIMPSON AWARD RECIPIENTS

Charles H. Lyles	1984	Walter Fondren, III	2001
Theodore B. Ford	1985	Jerald K. Waller	2002
J.Y. Christmas	1986	Andrew J. Kemmerer	2003
John Breaux	1987	Hal Osburn	2004
John Ray Nelson	1988	Leroy Kiffe	2005
I.B. “Buck” Byrd	1989	Robert P. Jones	2006
Hugh A. Swingle	1990	Wayne E. Swingle	2007
John A. Mehos	1991	Ralph Rayburn	2008
J. Burton Angelle	1992	W. “Corky” Perrett	2009
Louis A. Villanova	1993	Albert L. King, Sr.	2010
Theodore H. Shepard	1994	Virginia “Ginny” Vail	2011
Edwin A. Joyce, Jr.	1995	R. Vernon Minton	2012
Tommy D. Candies	1996	Larry B. Simpson	2013
Walter M. Tatum	1997	Michael C. Voisin	2014
Thomas L. Heffernan	1998	Ellie F. Roche	2015
Trent Lott	1999	Michael S. Ray	2016
James Barkuloo	2000		

# COMMONLY USED ACRONYMS

ADCNR/MRD	Alabama Department of Conservation Natural Resources/Marine Resources Division
ANS	Aquatic Nuisance Species
ASMFC	Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission
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 Committee
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
Mag-Stevens	Magnuson-Stevens Fisheries Management
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 of the Commission 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 2016.

No. 260 December 2016. Law Summary 2016. A Summary of Marine Fishing Laws & Regulations for the Gulf States. Debbie McIntyre (Editor). Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (online only).

No. 259 November 2016. Annual Report of the SEAMAP October 1, 2014 – September 30, 2015. Jeffrey K. Rester, Editor. Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

No. 258 November 2016. Biological Profile for Tripletail in the Gulf of Mexico and the Western Central Atlantic. Steven J. VanderKooy, Editor. Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (online only).

No. 257 October 2016. SEAMAP Subcommittee Annual Report to the Technical Coordinating Committee of the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission. October 1, 2015 to September 30, 2016. Jeffrey K. Rester, Editor. Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

No. 256 October 2016. Gulf of Mexico Cooperative Law Enforcement Operations Plan 2017-2018. 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. 255 October 2016. Gulf of Mexico Cooperative Law Enforcement Strategic Plan 2017-2020. 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. 254 October 2016. GDAR02 Gulf Menhaden Assessment – 2016 Update. Amy Schueller, Editor. Gulf Data, Assessment, and Review. Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

No. 253 August 2016. Licenses and Fees for Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas in Their Marine Waters for the Year 2015. Debbie McIntyre (Editor). Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

No. 252 March 2016. 2017 Operations Plan for the Fisheries Information Network (FIN). FIN Committee. Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

No. 251 March 2016. 2016 Operations Plan for the Fisheries Information Network (FIN). FIN Committee. Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission

No. 250 March 2016. Annual Report of the Fisheries Information Network in the Southeast Region (FIN). January 1, 2015 - December 31, 2015. Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

No. 249 June 2016. Rules and Regulations: Officers' Pocket Guide 2016-2017. Debbie McIntyre (Editor). Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

# 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 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, 2016 and 2015. Detailed financial statements are available from the Commission office by request from Ms. Angela Rabideau.

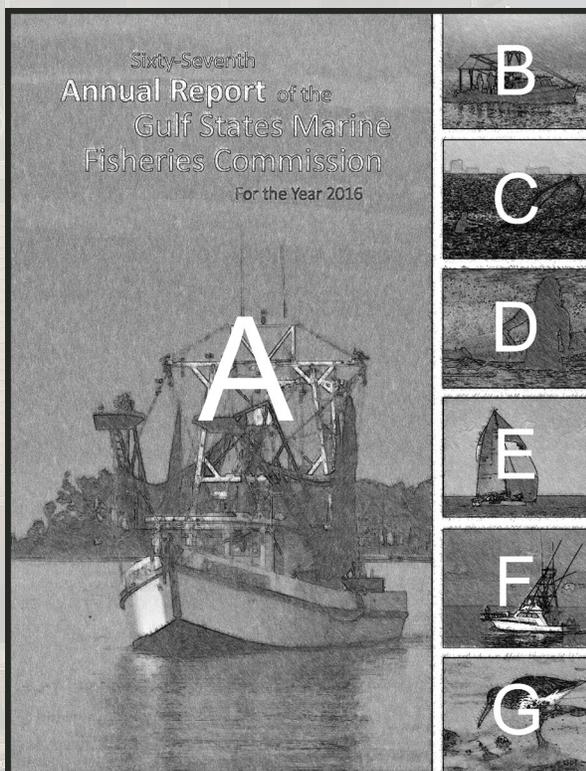
Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission  
Condensed Statement of Activities  
for the Years Ended December 31, 2016 and 2015

	DECEMBER 31,	
	<u>2016</u>	<u>2015</u>
Current Assets	\$705,690	\$642,307
Noncurrent Assets		
Post-Employment Health Plan investment account	\$191,009	\$175,602
Property and Equipment, net of accumulated depreciation	\$189,397	\$212,496
Total Noncurrent Assets	\$380,406	\$388,098
Total Assets	<u>\$1,086,096</u>	<u>\$1,030,405</u>
Current Liabilities	<u>\$1,966</u>	<u>\$727</u>
Net Position		
Investment in Capital Assets	\$189,397	\$212,496
Unrestricted	<u>\$894,733</u>	<u>\$817,182</u>
<b>Total Net Position</b>	<b><u>\$1,084,130</u></b>	<b><u>\$1,029,678</u></b>

Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission  
Condensed Statement of Activities  
for the Years Ended December 31, 2016 and 2015

	DECEMBER 31,	
	<u>2016</u>	<u>2015</u>
Revenues:		
General Revenues		
Member State Appropriation	\$135,000	\$112,500
Council Activities	\$69,951	\$122,300
Other Income	\$216	\$198
Interest Income	\$736	\$779
Dividend Income	\$7,439	\$5,712
Post-Employment Health Plan Revenue	\$3,777	\$4,339
Registration Fees	\$31,280	\$23,275
Unrealized Gain (Loss) on Investments	\$6,909	(\$8,221)
Program Revenues		
Collection & Dissemination of Recreational and Commercial Fisheries Information Network	\$7,099,260	\$7,102,289
Unallied Science Programs	\$170,978	-
Interjurisdictional Fisheries Management	\$227,497	\$234,455
Coordination of Recreational Fisheries Programs	\$261,849	\$218,277
Collection & Dissemination of Fishery-Independent Data And Information	\$234,010	\$254,802
Study of Aquatic Nuisances	\$152,304	\$263,304
Economic Data Program	-	\$(5,582)
Oil Disaster Recovery Program	-	\$2,558,072
Stock Assessment Enhancement	-	\$1
Fisheries Development and Utilization Research and Development Grants and Cooperative Agreements Program	\$17,151	\$250,268
Other	-	\$5,356
Total Revenues	<u>\$8,418,357</u>	<u>\$11,142,124</u>
Expenses:		
Programs	\$8,146,021	\$10,824,913
General and Administrative	\$217,884	\$245,363
Total Expenses	<u>\$8,363,905</u>	<u>\$11,070,276</u>
Change in Net Position	\$54,452	\$71,848
Net Position, Beginning	\$1,029,678	\$957,830
Net Position, Ending	<u>\$1,084,130</u>	<u>\$1,029,678</u>

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