

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

For the Year 2017



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

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GULF STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION

SIXTY-EIGHTH ANNUAL REPORT (2017)

*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-Eighth 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,
Bret Allain, Chairman
Joe Spraggins, 1st Vice-Chairman
Dan Ellinor, 2nd Vice-Chairman
Scott Bannon, Immediate Past Chairman
Mark Lingo, Chairman's Appointee
David Donaldson, Executive Director

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ACTIVE COMMITTEES

Executive Committee

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Dan Ellinor, 2nd Vice-Chairman
Scott Bannon, Immediate Past Chairman
Mark Lingo, Chairman's Appointee

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TCC Crab Subcommittee

Rick Burris, Chairman

TCC Data Management Subcommittee

Nicole Beckham, Chairman

TCC SEAMAP Subcommittee

Ted Switzer, 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 Commission members 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 and participates 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

In this day and age, everything has a tagline. I believe 2017's tag line would be "The more things change, the more they stay the same." The reason I say this is that the Commission and member states continue to struggle with diminishing resources to conduct critical work for assessments and management. The Commission continues to coordinate and administer the Fisheries Information Network (GulfFIN) and Southeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program (SEAMAP). These cooperative state/federal data collection programs have been providing critical data and information for the assessment and management of a wide variety of species for decades and the Commission is committed to continuing this important task.

Unfortunately, there are only so many resources to go around so we have to continually make more out of the limited available resources. In order to successfully accomplish this, we all need to work together. Not to sound like a broken record, but cooperation is key. The reason I repeatedly mention this idea is because I truly believe it. As Director, I will make sure the Commission continues to facilitate discussions with our state and federal partners as well as other interested parties. I am hopeful these discussions will lead to solutions and, ultimately, to more effective management of the marine resources in the Gulf of Mexico.

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 2017, 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 2017, over 30,000 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 coasts) 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 the help support implementation of the LA Creel Survey in Louisiana.

FIN obtained some S/K Funding mid-year in 2016 from NOAA Fisheries to support a partially funded biological sampling program. For that reason GulfFIN funded sampling only occurred in January through March of 2017. 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 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 2017, the states were able to collect over 4,000 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 2017, there were approximately 1,100 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. GulfFIN received two NOAA Fisheries FIS proposals to improve aspects of the Data Management System. Commission staff will be working with contractors to develop new data entry programs for the biological module and also improve quality control functions for both commercial trip ticket and biological sampling databases.

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 states, the Commission, the menhaden industry, and the NMFS. In 2017, three menhaden factories were active in the northern Gulf of Mexico at Moss Point, MS, and Empire, LA, and Abbeville, LA.

In 2017 FIN assisted in the administration of funds to support two additional research programs.

- GulfFIN assisted with a project to better validate commercial landings data from the Caribbean. Utilizing an independent contractor, an extensive field work sampling design is being developed to better estimate total landings of several managed species in that region.
- GulfFIN assisted with a project testing electronic swipe cards for initiating commercial landings transactions for the state of Florida. If successful, this research will help Florida move away from paper transactions and transition to all electronic data submission, increasing the speed for which they can provide high quality data for stock assessment purposes.

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

At the March 2017 Annual Spring Meeting of the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, the Commissioners directed staff to focus on a single species profile rather than two concurrently. The funds that would be used to support a second Technical Task Force (TTF) would instead be used to support the Crab Subcommittee and the Menhaden Advisory Committee on a more regular basis. In 2017, the IJF Program finished the Biological Profile for Atlantic Croaker and began work on a Management Profile for Cobia in the Gulf of Mexico and Eastern Florida. The Croaker Profile was presented to the TCC for their review and consideration in April and it was approved at the end of August. The first meeting of the Cobia Technical Task Force took place in late August 2017 in New Orleans as Hurricane Harvey was moving through the northern Gulf on a course to Texas. The final document will be in the Management Profile format since Cobia is a federally-managed species and there is a stock status available. The TTF is highly motivated to complete the draft prior to the next SEDAR benchmark for the Gulf of Mexico Cobia population scheduled for 2019.

The IJF Coordinator, along with biologists from USM/GCRL, and the USA/Dauphin Island Sea Lab, continued to investigate the genetics of Tripletail populations from around the world which was identified as a research need in the Tripletail Profile. As of 2017, 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. Additional samplers are still being located in other regions of the world. Through this effort, we have collected about 40 tissue samples from Georgia, 22 from Eastern Australia, 11 from Southern Brazil, and a few from Panama and Costa Rica, along the Pacific Coast. Additional samples are being collected from the Central Gulf, Texas, the Big Bend region of Florida and the east coast of Florida from Tequesta to Miami. 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 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 three work sessions held at the three primary NOAA ageing labs: Panama City in November 2016, Beaufort in February 2017, and Woods Hole in March 2017. As noted before, a number of additional species were added for the Atlantic as well as some ageing techniques that are definitely outside our 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.

AQUACULTURE

Program Coordinator – Steven J. VanderKooy

In 2016, the Commission began a cooperative effort with NOAA's Office of Aquaculture to develop and manage a small grants program to address the technical and regulatory opportunities and challenges of oyster farming in the Gulf region. In 2017, the program expanded to include additional regional funding opportunities. The NOAA Office of Aquaculture provided additional funds for a second small grant program to support commercial start-ups beyond our near-shore waters with production in mind, not necessarily research and development. The new 'pilot' program was coordinated with the sister Commissions on the Atlantic and Pacific. The Aquaculture Program is coordinated by Steven VanderKooy.

YEAR IN REVIEW

Oyster Off-Bottom Small Grants Program

In 2016, the Commission began a cooperative effort with NOAA's Office of Aquaculture to develop and manage a small grants program to address the technical and regulatory opportunities and challenges of oyster farming in the Gulf region. A total of six projects were funded across the Gulf in 2017 for a total of \$375,000. The six projects ranged from outreach tools for advancing aquaculture to education of future industry participants, as well as, development of oyster hatcheries and creation of tetraploid oyster seed sources for industry expansion throughout the Gulf region. In its first year, the six projects taking place in the Gulf were:

- Advancement of the Gulf of Mexico Shellfish Initiative (GoMexSI)
- Initiation of a Program to Produce Florida Tetraploid Founder Stocks for the Gulf Oyster Industry
- Development and Operation of a Mobile Oyster Spawning System
- Development of a State of Alabama Oyster Aquaculture Permitting and Informational Website
- Increase of Oyster Production in the Gulf of Mexico: Adopting High-Density Larval Culture at the Auburn University Shellfish Lab
- Identification of Information Needs and Regulatory Impediments to Off-Bottom Oyster Culture in Texas

A second round of oyster projects was provided in 2017 with a total of seven projects funded for a total of \$398,000. The 2017 opportunity was virtually identical in priorities and focus to the first year, and was intended to further explore spatial planning and siting, regulatory constraints, and production challenges. These included:

- Experimentation of Different Oyster Growing Methods and Spat Retention in Oyster Bay
- Induction of Oyster Tetraploid Founders to Address the Triploid Seed Production for the Gulf Oyster Industry

- Identification of Potential User Conflicts and Solutions for Off-Bottom Oyster Culture in Texas
- Lessons from the 'Dirty Dozen'
- Regulatory Solutions to Stimulate Off-Bottom Oyster Farming in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico Region
- Creation of a Mobile Single Set Production System for the Eastern Oyster (*Crassostrea virginica*)
- Testing Causes of Triploid Oyster Summer Mortality

Offshore Aquaculture Pilot Project Grants Program

In late 2017, the NOAA Office of Aquaculture provided another regional aquaculture small grant opportunity through the Commission, intended to not necessarily fund research and development for aquaculture, but rather to support commercial start-ups with production in mind. The Gulf Commission, in conjunction with our sister Commissions on the Atlantic and Pacific, released similar RFPs and received 102 total proposals nationwide for the 2018 Pilot Program. NOAA made approximately \$450,000 available through each Commission to fund demonstration projects intent on moving forward with offshore aquaculture. In the Gulf, a total of 20 proposals were submitted and reviews were underway to select projects intended to begin in early 2018. It is expected that these small grants programs will continue in the future for all three of the regions.



Cultured oysters from Wakulla Bay, Florida

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, Jeff Rester, is assisted by Ashley Lott.

YEAR IN REVIEW

In 2017, SEAMAP operations continued for the 36th consecutive year. SEAMAP resource surveys in 2017 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.

During 2017, 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.

SEAMAP examined ways to minimize trawling impacts to coral, hardbottom, and sponge habitat on the west Florida shelf. Currently stations are selected and then stations are excluded to minimize trawling impacts. We are now examining potential buffers around known coral and hardbottom areas so they can be excluded before stations are selected. The SEAMAP Subcommittee has to balance minimizing impacts to habitat while also minimizing any potential impacts to abundance estimates of reef associated species. A new site selection universe will be developed.

In 2017, SEAMAP published the 2014, 2015, and 2016 SEAMAP Environmental and Biological Atlas of the Gulf of Mexico. The Atlases provide a summary of all SEAMAP sampling activities during each year.

SEAMAP held a Shrimp/Groundfish Work Group meeting in May to discuss the standardization of operation codes and comments during the trawl surveys. After a presentation on catches within

the 2-5 fathom depth stratum, the Work Group recommended that SEAMAP no longer sample the 2-5 fathom depth stratum since trawl catches did not differ significantly from catches in the 5-20 fathom depth stratum. The Work Group also reviewed sampling protocols to make sure that all SEAMAP partners are operating the sampling gear in the same manner and adhering to the approved protocols.

SEAMAP held a Vertical Line Work Group meeting in December to discuss the vertical line database and ways to improve the accuracy of submitted and historical data within the database. The Work Group reviewed the Operations Manual and added new data collection fields to make the data more useful for stock assessment purposes. The Work Group recommended that all partners verify existing vertical line data and resubmit data in the new standardized format.

The Commission handles the data management responsibilities for SEAMAP in the Gulf of Mexico. All data collected during 2017 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 2017. 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 2017 SEAMAP Environmental and Biological Atlas.

During 2017, SEAMAP contributed data and analyses, and several SEAMAP partners participated in several federal stock assessments, including SEDAR 48 (Black Grouper), SEDAR 49 (Data Limited Assessment for Gulf of Mexico Red Drum, Lane Snapper, Wenchman, Yellowmouth Grouper, Speckled Hind, Snowy Grouper, Almaco Jack, and Lesser Amberjack), and SEDAR 51 (Gulf of Mexico Gray Snapper). Several SEAMAP surveys will provide data for SEDAR 52 (Gulf of Mexico Red Snapper).

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 components 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. These documents are available from the Commission's office and can be accessed from the Commission's website (www.gsmfc.org) under Publications. The SFRP Coordinator is James R. Ballard, assisted by Alice R. Wilhelm.

YEAR IN REVIEW

The Program Coordinator helped to set up a two-day "Marine Artificial Reef Research and Development: Integrating Fisheries Management Objectives" symposium at the American Fisheries Society's 147th Annual Meeting in Tampa, FL. The proceedings from this symposium are going to be published as a book by the AFS. All manuscripts submitted for inclusion as chapters in this book will be peer reviewed using the same standards as professional journals. The target publication date for this book is August 2018.

The Program Coordinator is currently working on reformatting and conducting final edits on the updated edition of the GSMFC's and ASMFC's 2004 publication "*Guidelines for Marine Artificial Reef Materials: Second Edition*". During the process, it has become clear that there are a few chapters that are still in need of updating by our state members. The Coordinator will be working directly with specific states to acquire this needed information. 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 plan is to have the third edition finalized by the end of 2018.

Following discussions at the Gulf State Directors' meeting in May, the Commission has taken steps to discontinue the Gulf FINFO and EatGulfSeafood Websites. The state of Louisiana expressed interest in components of Gulf FINFO, and they have been transferred to them. If any other state is interested in acquiring sections of the site, they may contact the Program Coordinator or the Commission's Computer System Administrator. The home page of the EatGulfSeafood site has been redesigned to redirect the viewers to the individual state seafood websites. Once the traffic on this site drops off, it will be shut down.

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 participates 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

In September 2002, the Commission began administration of the Gulf and South Atlantic Regional Panel (GSARP) on Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS), under the National Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force (ANSTF/Task Force), authorized by the Non-Indigenous Aquatic Nuisance Protection and Control Act of 1990. GSARP helps to coordinate AIS activities in the region through information sharing which permits states and agencies to learn about what has already been tried in the region and what species are posing the greatest risk to native species and environments. This information allows them to focus their limited resources on the most threatening species and on control measures with the highest probability of success. The GSARP is made up of approximately 35 members from federal and state agencies, NGOs, universities, industry and one international member representing Mexico. The Aquatic Nuisance Species (ANS) Program Coordinator is James R. Ballard who is assisted by Alice R. Wilhelm.

YEAR IN REVIEW

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. Over the last three years, we have been able to fund 26 projects totaling \$556K. These projects include development of control measures, assessment of impacts on native species and habitats, and distribution for a variety of invasive species (Salvinia, Hydrilla, Phragmites, Didymo, Asian Carp, Rusty Crayfish, Speckled Crayfish, Red-rimmed Melania, Lionfish, Apple Snail, Asian Clam, and an invasive parasite of American Eels). The Commission has closed out all but six of these projects, with the remaining ones scheduled to finish up by the end of 2017. 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 the Education and Outreach Workgroup with this effort. All of the information for the 11 species currently covered in the trunks has been updated, and three new species have been added to the content: Asian Carp, feral hogs, and Apple Snails. The workgroup will also explore the possibility of incorporating a game for elementary-aged children, and developing a poster that teachers can display in their classrooms that will keep the message about invasive species in the class after the lesson is complete.

The Panel 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 add to the clearinghouse, which will be incorporated into the new GSARP website that is being developed by the Commission's Computer System Administrator.

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 Commissioners may better familiarize themselves with the fisheries and coastal areas of the entire Gulf of Mexico.

MARCH 2017

The 67th Spring Meeting of the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) was held at the Courtyard by Marriott in Gulfport, Mississippi. 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.

The FIN Committee received a presentation on the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) review of MRIP. Overall the NAS concluded MRIP has made significant improvements since 2006 but did not make specific recommendations for further improvement especially in the area of communication and education. 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 and Florida. 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 Donna Bellais on development of a new end-user query page for the Data Management System. Work is ongoing, but the goal is to obtain input from state and federal partners and approve the new system early in 2018.

The SEAMAP Subcommittee discussed potential ways to improve the Vertical Line Survey. In deeper waters, the vertical line gear is impacted by currents and it is hard to deploy the gear directly over a natural or artificial reef without using heavy weights. The heavy weights potentially can impact catchability of certain species. The Subcommittee discussed the use of Spectra line instead of the currently used monofilament line. Spectra line is thinner than monofilament, has less stretch, and is not impacted by currents as much as monofilament line. The Subcommittee also discussed the Vertical Line Survey design and station selection for the 2017 sampling season. Minimizing impacts to habitat during the Shrimp/Groundfish Surveys was also discussed. Appropriate buffers around sensitive habitats and areas were discussed and the Subcommittee will work towards developing a new trawl sampling universe that excludes sensitive habitats without impacting catch rates of reef associated species.

The Menhaden Advisory Committee (MAC) received an update from Kevin Thompson (FWC) on the diet work his agency conducts through their fishery-independent monitoring work. The intention is to add trophic information (predator prey interactions) into stock assessments. The lack of this interaction data in the Gulf has always been the restriction to ecosystem management and certainly hinders our use of those models in the current menhaden assessments.

The Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) discussed the 2016-2020 SEAMAP Management Plan. The management plan provides a statement of current goals, management policies, procedures, and priorities for all SEAMAP components and partnerships. The plan also serves as a reference on SEAMAP history and accomplishments, and details priorities for future activities. Following the discussion the TCC made the motion to approve the 2016-2020 SEAMAP Management Plan and move it to the full Commission for their approval.

OCTOBER 2017

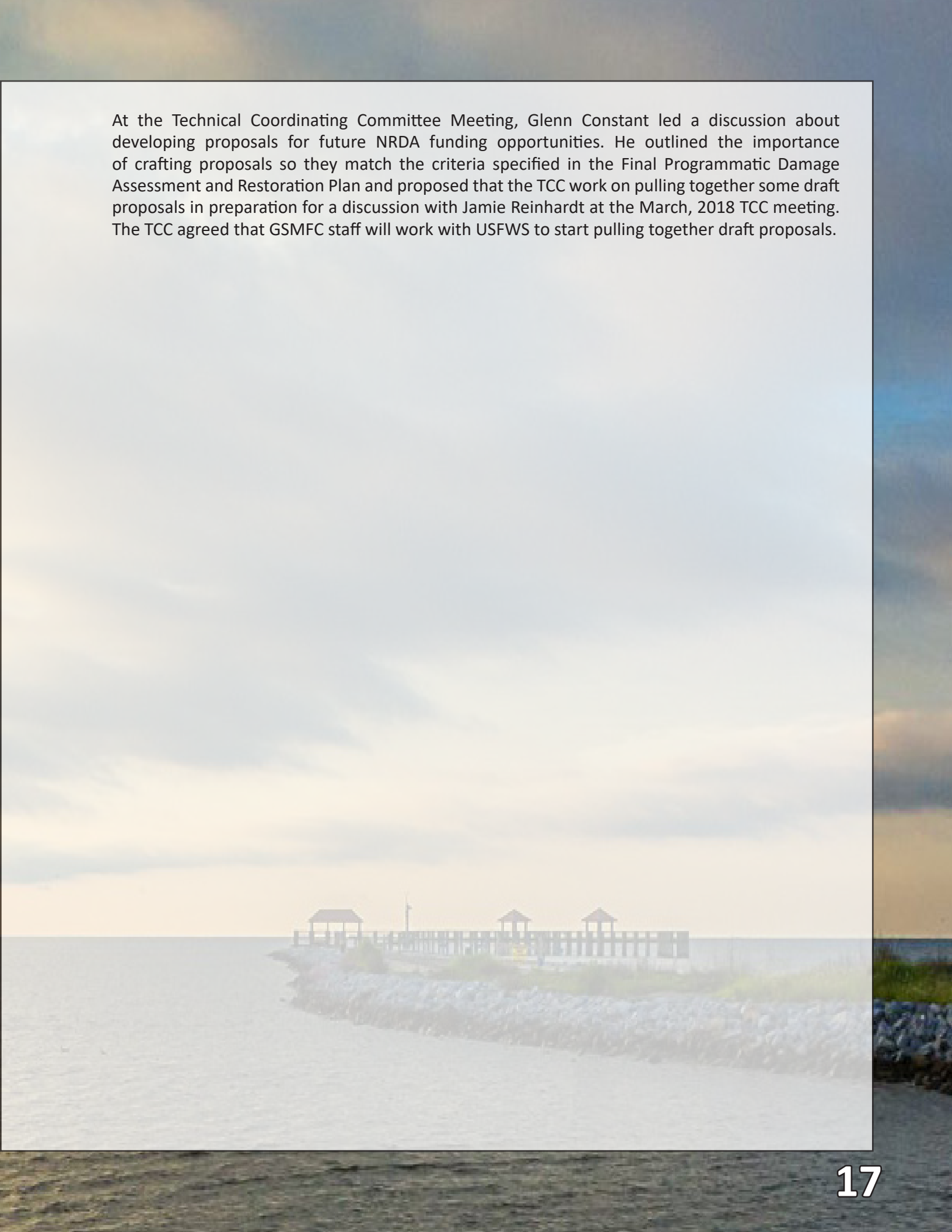
The Commission's 68th Annual Fall Meeting was held at the Battle House Renaissance Hotel in Mobile, Alabama. Below is a summary of some of the topics and actions taken by the various subcommittees as well as the full Commission. Complete minutes of all Commission meetings are available on the Commission's website at www.gsmfc.org.

At the FIN meeting, Nick Farmer gave a presentation on the Southeast For-Hire Integrated Electronic Reporting System (SEFHIER). The implementation team is made up of 50 individuals representing various federal agencies and interstate commissions. They have had several meetings with various presentations given. The team is divided into six subgroups: Data Housing; Minimum Standards; Survey Design; Compliance Enforcement; Outreach and Education; and Program Management and Budget. Data Housing has had several meetings. The Data Housing subgroup is evaluating the pros and cons of warehousing data with different partners. Minimum Standards is focused on the minimum standards for data transmission from charter vessel to agency. Survey Design is working on identifying the minimum data elements and avoiding duplication. Compliance Enforcement is working on timeliness, non-reporting, and penalties. The Outreach/Education and Program Management/Budget workgroups will meet after further progress is made in the other subgroups. The goal of this program is to be more timely and accurate than current MRIP for-hire data collection programs.

The SEAMAP Subcommittee again discussed issues related to the Vertical Line Survey. Problems were discovered in the structure of the vertical line database and the Subcommittee felt the Vertical Line Work Group should meet to discuss rectifying these issues. The Subcommittee reviewed 2017 vertical line sampling and discussed planning for 2018 sampling. Lack of funding continues to be an issue with SEAMAP and the Subcommittee talked about 2018 sampling and how SEAMAP can prioritize surveys to collect as much data as possible with limited funds. The Subcommittee again discussed the Shrimp/Groundfish Survey station selection process to minimize impacts to habitat.

The Crab Subcommittee moved to approve a resolution honoring Ms. Harriet Perry for her many years of service to the Commission and the Crab Subcommittee and her other crab-related activities over the last 40+ years. The only significant discussion by the MAC was related to the upcoming benchmark stock assessment scheduled for 2018. It is anticipated that the SEDAR will be published before the end of the 2018. All workshops will be held in New Orleans to accommodate the Gulf participants.

At the Technical Coordinating Committee Meeting, Glenn Constant led a discussion about developing proposals for future NRDA funding opportunities. He outlined the importance of crafting proposals so they match the criteria specified in the Final Programmatic Damage Assessment and Restoration Plan and proposed that the TCC work on pulling together some draft proposals in preparation for a discussion with Jamie Reinhardt at the March, 2018 TCC meeting. The TCC agreed that GSMFC staff will work with USFWS to start pulling together draft proposals.



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 2017.

YEAR IN REVIEW

FIN: In 2017, 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 for months where funding was available. The commercial trip ticket program is also developed and ongoing for all states in the Gulf of Mexico.

SEAMAP: SEAMAP operations continued for the 36th consecutive year. All five state partners participated in the various SEAMAP resource surveys in 2017 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: Atlantic Croaker and Cobia. The states continued to support the revision to the Otolith Manual in conjunction with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission and the states along the East Coast.

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 2017 award was presented to Joseph I. Gill, Jr. Joe has been involved in the fisheries arena for over 44 years, and is currently the CEO of Joe Gill Consulting, LLC. Over his distinguished career, Joe has worked for the Mississippi Bureau of Marine Resources/Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Park, Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Park, and Mississippi Department of Marine Resources in various capacities, including Chief of Wetlands Division, Deputy Director of Coastal Operations, and Executive Director. In addition, he served as a Commissioner for the Commission for 22 years, including several times as Chairman. He also served as a voting member of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council.

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	Joseph I. Gill, Jr.	2017

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 is continually expanded as additional literature 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 2017.

No. 275 November 2017. Recreational Released Catch Workshop, November 6-7, 2017, New Orleans, LA. Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (online only).

No. 274 March 2017. Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs) in the Gulf of Mexico. March 2016 GSMFC 67th Annual Meeting General Session. Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (online only).

No. 273 March 2017. 2018 Operations Plan for the Fisheries Information Network (FIN). FIN Committee. Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

No. 272 March 2017. Annual Report of the Fisheries Information Network in the Southeast Region (FIN). January 1, 2016 - December 31, 2016. Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

No. 271 March 2017. Recreational Fisheries Management; Current Issues Facing Recreational Fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico. March 2017 GSMFC 67th Annual Meeting General Session. Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (online only).

No. 270 October 2017. Terrapins and Crab Traps; Examining interactions between terrapins and the crab industry in the Gulf of Mexico. October 2017 GSMFC 68th Annual Meeting General Session. Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (online only).

No. 269 October 2017. SEAMAP Subcommittee Annual Report to the Technical Coordinating Committee of the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission October 1, 2016 to September 30, 2017. Jeffrey K. Rester, Editor. Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

No. 268 October 2017. SEAMAP Environmental and Biological Atlas of the Gulf of Mexico, 2015. Jeffrey K. Rester, Editor. Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

No. 267 September 2017. Law Summary 2017. A Summary of Marine Fishing Laws & Regulations for the Gulf States. Debbie McIntyre (Editor). Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (online only).

No. 266 August 2017. Biological Profile for the Atlantic Croaker Fishery in the Gulf of Mexico. Steven J. VanderKooy, Editor. Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (online only).

No. 265 July 2017. Licenses and Fees for Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas in Their Marine Waters for the Year 2016. Debbie McIntyre (Editor). Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

No 264 July 2017. Rules and Regulations: Officers' Pocket Guide 2017-2018. Debbie McIntyre (Editor). Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

No. 263 February 2017. SEAMAP Environmental and Biological Atlas of the Gulf of Mexico, 2015. Jeffrey K. Rester, Editor. Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

No. 262 February 2017. SEAMAP Environmental and Biological Atlas of the Gulf of Mexico, 2014. Jeffrey K. Rester, Editor. Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

No. 261 January 2017. Joint Annual Report of the Southeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program October 1, 2015 – September 30, 2016 (online only).

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

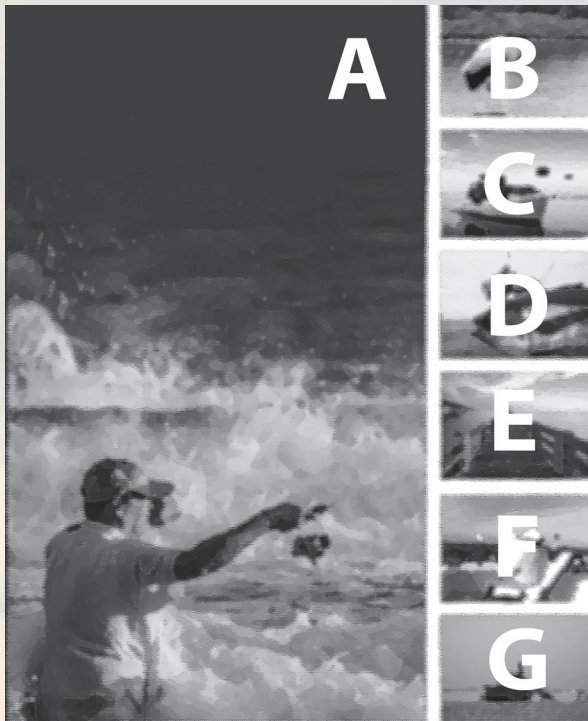
The following presents a summary of the Commission's net position for the years ended December 31, 2017 and 2016. Detailed financial statements are available from the Commission office by request from Angela Rabideau.

Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission Condensed Statement of Activities for the Years Ended December 31, 2017 and 2016		
	DECEMBER 31,	
	<u>2017</u>	<u>2016</u>
Current Assets	\$378,617	\$705,690
Noncurrent Assets		
Post-Employment Health Plan investment account	\$227,388	\$191,009
Property and Equipment, net of accumulated depreciation	\$244,178	\$189,397
Total Noncurrent Assets	<u>\$471,566</u>	<u>\$380,406</u>
Total Asset	\$850,183	\$1,086,096
Current Liabilities	\$14,898	\$1,966
Noncurrent Liabilities		
Notes payable	<u>\$66,576</u>	<u>-</u>
Total Liabilities	\$81,474	\$1,966
Net Position		
Investment in Capital Assets	\$164,547	\$189,397
Unrestricted	<u>\$604,162</u>	<u>\$894,733</u>
Total Net Position	\$768,709	\$1,084,130

Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission
Condensed Statement of Activities
for the Years Ended December 31, 2017 and 2016

	DECEMBER 31,	
	<u>2017</u>	<u>2016</u>
Revenues:		
General Revenues		
Member State Appropriation	\$112,500	\$135,000
Council Activities	\$45,000	\$69,951
Other Income	\$95	\$216
Interest Income	\$704	\$736
Dividend Income	\$11,957	\$7,439
Post-Employment Health Plan Revenue	\$6,192	\$3,777
Registration Fees	\$15,593	\$31,280
Unrealized Gain (Loss) on Investments	\$21,055	\$6,909
Program Revenues		
Collection & Dissemination of Recreational and Commercial Fisheries Information Network	\$6,517,262	\$7,099,260
Unallied Science Programs	\$280,273	\$170,978
Interjurisdictional Fisheries Management	\$155,513	\$227,497
Coordination of Recreational Fisheries Programs	\$199,791	\$261,849
Collection & Dissemination of Fishery-Independent Data And Information	\$187,958	\$234,010
Study of Aquatic Nuisances	\$177,722	\$152,304
Fisheries Development and Utilization Research and Development Grants and Cooperative Agreements Program	-	\$17,151
Other	-	-
Total Revenues	<u>\$7,731,615</u>	<u>\$8,418,357</u>
Expenses:		
Programs	\$7,861,086	\$8,146,021
General and Administrative	<u>\$185,950</u>	<u>\$217,884</u>
Total Expenses	<u>\$8,047,036</u>	<u>\$8,363,905</u>
Change in Net Position	\$(315,421)	\$54,452
Net Position, Beginning	<u>\$1,084,130</u>	<u>\$1,029,678</u>
Net Position, Ending	<u>\$768,709</u>	<u>\$1,084,130</u>

CREDITS



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Brian Wright



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