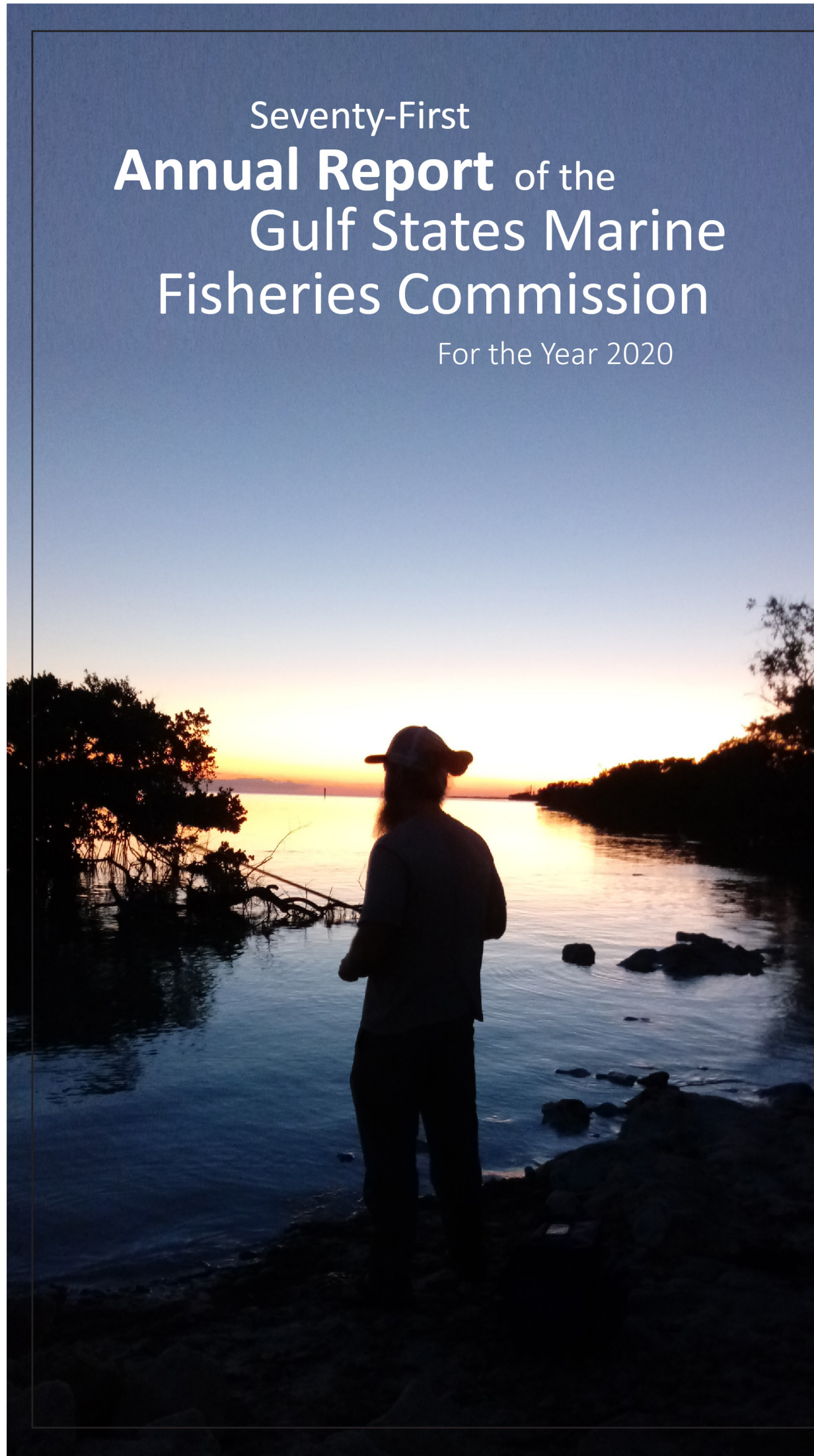


Seventy-First  
**Annual Report** of the  
Gulf States Marine  
Fisheries Commission

For the Year 2020



# COMMISSION ROSTER

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

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& Natural Resources  
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Representative Chris Pringle  
Mobile, Alabama  
Chris Nelson  
Bon Secour Fisheries, Inc.  
Bon Secour, Alabama

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Florida Fish and Wildlife  
Conservation Commission  
Tallahassee, Florida  
Representative Jay Trumbull  
Tallahassee, Florida

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Louisiana Department of Wildlife and  
Fisheries  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Senator R.L. “Bret” Allain, II  
District 21  
Franklin, Louisiana  
John Roussel  
Zachary, Louisiana

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Mississippi Department of Marine  
Resources  
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Read Hendon  
USM/Gulf Coast Research Laboratory  
Ocean Springs, Mississippi

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Texas Parks and Wildlife Department  
Austin, Texas  
Doug Boyd  
Boerne, Texas

### *Commission Staff*

David M. Donaldson, Executive Director

James R. Ballard, Program Coordinator  
Donna B. Bellais, ComFIN Programmer  
Gregory S. Bray, Program Coordinator  
Joseph P. Ferrer, III, Systems Administrator  
Lloyd W. Kirk, SEAMAP Database Programmer  
Ashley P. Lott, Staff Assistant  
Nancy K. Marcellus, Administrative Officer  
Debora K. McIntyre, Staff Assistant  
Cheryl R. Noble, Administrative Assistant

Angela R. Rabideau, Senior Accountant  
Jeffrey K. Rester, Program Coordinator  
Charlie E. Robertson, Program Coordinator  
Douglas J. Snyder, FIN Data Programmer/  
Survey Coordinator  
Deanna L. Valentine, Data Entry Clerk  
Steven J. VanderKooy, Program Coordinator  
Alice R. Wilhelm, Staff Assistant

# GULF STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION

## SEVENTY-FIRST ANNUAL REPORT (2020)

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

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



Edited by:

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Preserving the Past ▪ Planning the Future ▪ A Cooperative Effort

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In submitting this Seventy-First 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,

Doug Boyd, Chairman  
Scott Bannon, 1st Vice-Chairman  
Jason Froeba, 2nd Vice-Chairman  
Dan Ellinor, Immediate Past Chairman  
Joe Spraggins, Chairman's Appointee  
David Donaldson, Executive Director



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# ACTIVE COMMITTEES

## Executive Committee

Doug Boyd, Chairman  
Scott Bannon  
Jason Froeba  
Dan Ellinor  
Joe Spraggins

## Law Enforcement Committee

Patrick Carron, Chairman

## State-Federal Fisheries Management Committee

Scott Bannon, Chairman

## Menhaden Advisory Committee

Peter Himchak, Chairman

## Technical Coordinating Committee

Darin Topping, Chairman

## TCC Artificial Reef Subcommittee

Dale Shively, Chairman

## TCC Crab Subcommittee

Ryan Gandy, Chairman

## TCC Data Management Subcommittee

Justin Esslinger, Chairman

## Fisheries Information Network (FIN) Committee

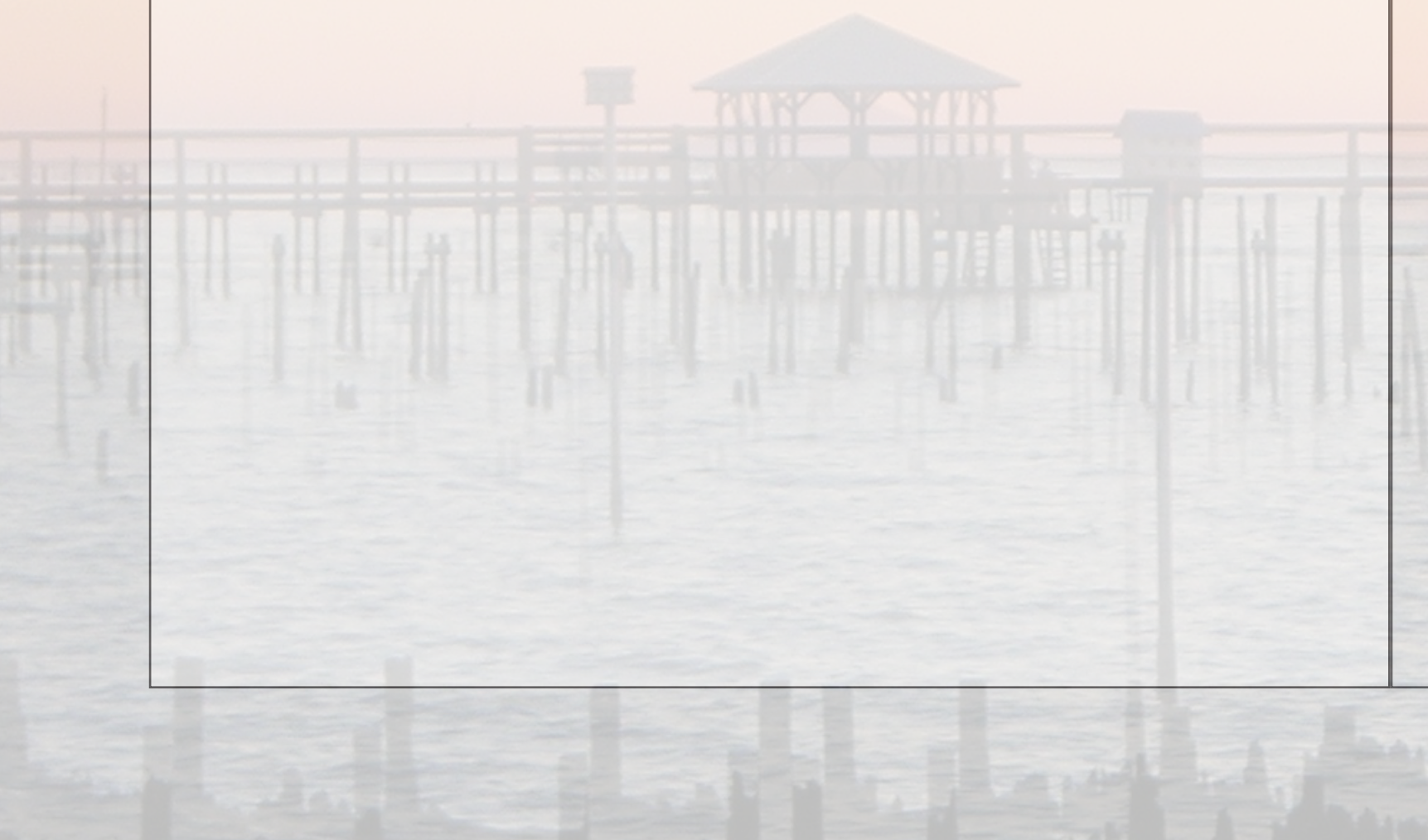
Justin Esslinger, Chairman

## TCC SEAMAP Subcommittee

Ted Switzer, Chairman

## TCC Molluscan Shellfish Subcommittee

Carolina Bourque, Chairman



# INTRODUCTION

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

## THE PURPOSE

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

## COMMISSIONERS

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

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

## STAFF

Located in Ocean Springs, Mississippi, the Commission staff administers Commission programs 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*

There are years when I struggle to come up with ideas to write about for my report. The year 2020 is not one of those years. The issue that dominated not only the Gulf of Mexico but the world in 2020 was the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic forever changed how we conduct our business and live our lives. The 70<sup>th</sup> Annual Spring Commission meeting was the last in-person meeting that I attended in 2020. Our member states and federal partners, as well as the Commission, spent the rest of the year working from home and conducting our business via email, phone and too-many-to-count Zoom meetings.

It was an interesting and trying time, not only because we had to adapt to a new way of getting our business accomplished, but also because there was the underlying concern about contracting the COVID-19 virus and attempting to stay out of harm's way. However, as we have done in the past when faced with adversity, we pulled up our boot straps and soldiered on. I want to commend our Gulf states, federal partners and the Commission for continuing to get the job done despite the hardships and difficulties everyone faced. It is that type of "Git 'er done" attitude that makes it a pleasure to work and live near the Gulf of Mexico.

With all situations, there are lessons to be learned, both positive and negative. Being an optimistic person, I like to focus on the positive aspects. I believe it has made us more effective in the way we approach management of our marine resources. It has forced us to examine the need and purpose of our multitude of meetings and programs and realize that some of these tasks can be accomplished in a more efficient manner. While the use of technology has made it easier to get together virtually, it also emphasized the importance of the interactions that face-to-face meetings provide. There is no substituting human interaction to help facilitate discussions and come up with solutions in a cooperative manner. I know I have said it before, but the Commission will continue to provide that forum to facilitate these discussions and hopefully lead to positive solutions to the issues and challenges we face in conservation of the marine resources in the Gulf of Mexico.

# FISHERIES INFORMATION NETWORK (FIN)

*Program Coordinator – 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 FIN Program Coordinator, Gregg Bray, is assisted by Ashley P. Lott.

In 2020, 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 2020, over 20,000 angler interviews were collected across all three states. The number of angler interviews was down significantly due to impacts of COVID19. 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 coasts). 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 additional NOAA Southeast Fishery Science Center funding mid 2018 to support our biological sampling program. GulfFIN was able to support sampling for all 2020 with this additional money. 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, Gulf and Southern Flounders, 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. The states collected almost 14,000 age structures from important managed species in the Gulf of Mexico and East Florida.

The program 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. FIN also continued to support the development of a new electronic reporting tool from Bluefin Data called VESL. This is being developed to support web-based technology and allow access through mobile applications like tablets and smartphones. This new reporting system is almost complete for Florida and Texas. Work is ongoing to customize the application for the other states. There were approximately 1,200 commercial dealers/processors in Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas who were utilizing the electronic reporting option.

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 are working with the contractor and development is almost complete on new data entry and access products on the biological sampling database. The committee is also working to implement record tracking systems on our trip ticket and biological sampling databases and providing higher levels of quality control at the point of data entry or data loading.

The program 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. Unfortunately, the COVID19 pandemic impacted the US right at the point where headboat field sampling was starting to increase as headboat operators increased fishing activity. Due to federal guidelines on social distancing, essentially no headboat field work was permitted during the 2020 fishing season.

In 2020, 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 and extensive field work, a 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.

GulfFIN assisted with a cooperative project with Gulf state partners to possibly improve the quality and accuracy of commercial data by collecting and analyzing shrimp samples to validate, verify, and update conversion factors used to determine whole (live) weight of commercial landings from reported units (ex. gutted to whole, bushels to pounds, units to pounds). This allows for commercial landings to be reported accurately in common currency for use in stock assessment and management.

# 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 J. VanderKooy, is assisted by Debora K. McIntyre.

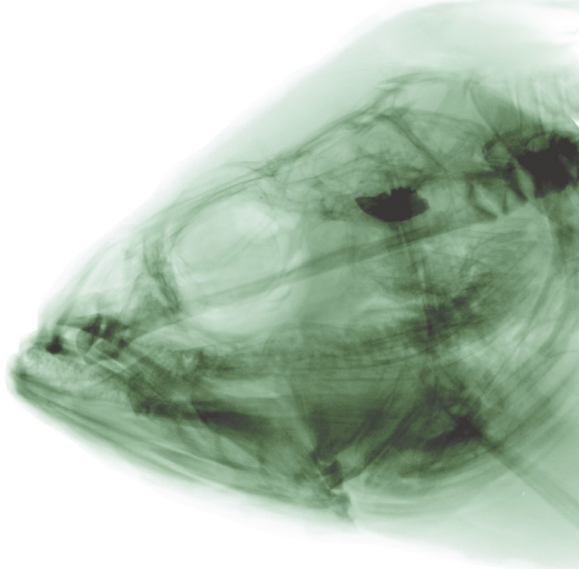
The Management Profile for Gulf of Mexico Red Drum was started in earnest in 2019 and the drafting process was begun, but as 2020 rolled in, plans to meet in March 2020 fell apart as the country shut down. The meeting scheduled for San Antonio was cancelled due to the pandemic and every state agency and the Commission went to 'stay at home' orders. This resulted in a delay that continued through the rest of the year. The TTF did meet virtually in June to touch base and see if anyone needed help with their sections or finding literature but progress was slow. The extended closures also pushed off the implementation of a Mangrove Snapper Technical Task Force which was expected to begin a Management Profile in the fall of 2020 as well.

The Pandemic hit in February 2020 and agency closures began in late March. However, the Commission's Annual Spring meeting did take place in early March ahead of the closures. The Crab Subcommittee met during the Spring meeting and heard updates on the Gulf-wide Blue Crab tagging project and progress on the Diamondback Terrapin Conservation Action Plan. The Subcommittee planned to meet in September 2020 virtually due to COVID restrictions but Hurricanes Marco and Laura caused the emergency closure of most of the state agencies in the Gulf and the subcommittee was not able to meet.

The Law Enforcement Committee (LEC) continued to work toward regional enforcement goals and met in conjunction with the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council's Law Enforcement Technical Committee in March 2020. The group planned to meet virtually in September 2020 due to COVID but Hurricanes Marco and Laura resulted in the cancelation of the meeting. The group did manage to update their four-year strategic plan and two-year operations plans during the summer in anticipation of completing them in October. Those two documents were put on hold until 2021.

**A Practical Handbook for Determining  
the Ages of Gulf of Mexico and  
Atlantic Coast Fishes**

THIRD EDITION



GSMFC No. 300

NOVEMBER 2020

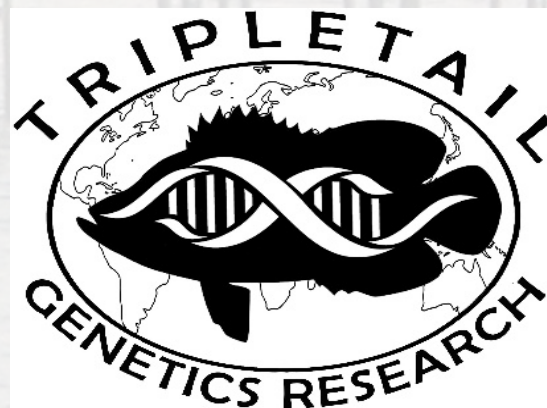
At the March 2020 Menhaden Advisory Committee (MAC) meeting, the MAC moved to request the Commission begin an update to the Gulf Menhaden FMP. Since there had been no significant fishery or management changes since the last FMP (2015), the Commissioners did not agree. In October, the MAC met virtually and addressed the numerous complications COVID and the heightened tropical season had brought. Plans are in place to begin the update to the Gulf Menhaden stock assessment in 2021.

The IJF Small Grants were funded in the fall of 2020 amid the agency closures but provided \$280,000 to each of the five states to initiate otherwise unfunded research and data projects tied to IJ species in their respective waters. The projects are one-year in duration and cover a variety of issues related to Blue Crab, Southern Flounder, and Eastern Oysters with three

states adding acoustic tagging and expanding receiver arrays. These projects will run from October 2020 through December of 2021. Additional funds will be available next year and the IJF staff will request continuations or new proposed projects in spring of 2021.

Despite the issues with COVID, the IJ staff and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) staff continued finalizing the revision to the Otolith Manual while working from home over most of 2020. The final draft was distributed to the 49 contributors for their “last look” review in October and the completed *A Practical Handbook for Determining the Ages of Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic Coast Fishes – Third Edition* was made available online in November. This concluded the six-year project which began in the fall of 2014.

During the development of the *Tripletail Profile for the Gulf and Western Central Atlantic* in 2016, concerns arose regarding the stock unit definitions. In an effort to address appropriate management units, anglers from the Gulf, South Atlantic, and far outside the U.S. were recruited to collect and provide tissue samples for potential genetic testing. These global samples will further expand general knowledge of the world genome. Since the implementation of the sampling, a total of nearly 600 individual tissue samples have been collected



worldwide. Upon receipt of the final samples in Malaysia, the Canary Islands, and Sénégal, all samples will be analyzed and research is expected to be completed in 2021. It is believed that this information will be critical as Tripletail become more popular with recreational anglers and also help inform hatchery managers looking for broodstock in support of aquaculture moving into the future.

Finally, the IJF staff, in collaboration with USM/GCRL, deployed 50 acoustic tags in Tripletail in the northern Gulf and Florida Bay in 2019. The tags are audible pingers which are heard by receivers all along the Gulf Coast. A number of 'listening stations' are deployed and managed by both state agencies and academic institutions who share the data through the iTag and FACT partnerships. One of the Tripletail tagged in the northern Gulf was detected in the Tampa Florida area moving south in late 2019 and another was detected off the coast of Texas around the same time. Most of the Keys fish were detected throughout Florida Bay and the Everglades throughout



the spring of 2020. However, due to the COVID shutdowns, many of the receiver array owners in the Gulf were unable to service their equipment during the pandemic resulting in a very delayed return of any detection data. As 2020 progressed, there were a few tag returns reported from earlier in the year but not as many as hoped. As a follow-up to the tagging, plans were made with GCRL to expand the existing acoustic array in Mississippi Sound. The IJ Program Coordinator worked with GCRL staff to acquire and place around 25 receivers along the Mississippi/Alabama line as a gate to close off the eastern portion of

Mississippi Sound. The expansion benefits a number of other ongoing studies being conducted by the GCRL staff as well as the Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alabama state agencies. Species expected to be encountered in the array include Gulf Sturgeon, Tripletail, Southern Flounder, Cobia, Red Drum, and Spotted Seatrout. The GCRL staff have begun the pre-deployment survey, requests for permits through the various agencies, and all the necessary supplies have been ordered to get the gear in the water in early 2021.

# 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 J. VanderKooy.

## Oyster Consortia

In 2018, NOAA recommended combining the oyster funding into a single large opportunity to begin a coordinated exploration of oyster genetics and breeding. The 2019 Gulf Oyster Consortium project included three primary objectives: 1) to develop improved lines of Eastern Oyster with superior genetic values for traits critical to the industry based on regional genotypes; 2) to generate a repository of genetic resources from regional populations and selected lines adapted to environmental conditions to support ongoing and future restoration efforts and the industry; and 3) to transfer platforms in each state to disseminate genetically improved seeds to the industry. The Oyster Consortium is a multi-university team which includes the University of Southern Mississippi - Thad Cochran Marine Aquaculture Center, the Auburn University Shellfish Lab - Dauphin Island Sea Lab, the University of Florida - Molluscan Shellfish Aquaculture Laboratory, and the Texas A&M University at Corpus Christi - Agrilife Research Mariculture Center.

The Consortia held several meetings in 2019, including a Business Advisory Council meeting in September 2019. Broodstock was collected as the families were defined for the hatchery work scheduled for the spring of 2020. However, in March, the COVID-19 pandemic shut down most of the efforts on this project. There were a number of activities anticipated in 2020 but the pandemic eliminated most of the spawning. The broodstock was maintained and conditioned in hopes of spawning later in the year. The Consortia members attempted spawning in early September at both the Auburn Shellfish Lab and USM Thad Cochran facilities in Alabama and Mississippi just ahead of Hurricane Sally. Auburn spawned with moderate success but was able to produce most of the crosses. USM stopped spawning after one day because the oysters were in really bad condition leading to extremely low fecundity and viability so instead of wasting the broodstock, they will hold them for reconditioning for spring 2021. The seed produced at Auburn was transferred to USM before they were hit by Hurricane Sally in late September and then a portion was returned to the Auburn hatchery after the facility returned to service. The R2 larvae were sent to UFL and LSU and will be sent to the grow-out sites in spring 2021 once the contribution of families has been analyzed and determined to be sufficient.

### Aquaculture Pilot Projects

In late 2018, the NOAA Office of Aquaculture provided additional funding to support commercial start-ups with production in mind and demonstration projects intent on moving forward with offshore aquaculture. In 2019, a second round of pilot projects was funded which included Kampachi Farms and Mote Marine Lab who are working on hatchery techniques for Almaco Jack intended to support the Velella Epsilon project off Florida; Auburn University who is combing Sea Urchin culture into off-bottom oyster techniques as a natural anti-fouling agent and potential second crop; and the University of Southern Mississippi which is continuing to move toward a finfish farm in the northern Gulf in collaboration with Manna Fish Farms. Previously unobligated funds were provided to the University of Florida to continue the Hard Clam study initiated in 2018. However, the pandemic caused the shutdown and delays on these projects beginning in March



and most were provided no cost extensions. Additional funds were provided to the Manna Fish Farms project to offset the increased contractor quotes since the original contractor was no longer able to perform the work post-COVID. Despite the delays, Kampachi and Mote have completed their hatchery work with the Almaco Jack broodstock but, until permits are secured, their project is done. Manna was able to conduct their required benthic surveys and the Hard Clam project remains delayed due to environmental setbacks in conjunction with the shutdown. The Sea Urchin project was able to complete their work and assessed the final results in late 2020.



# SOUTHEAST AREA MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT PROGRAM

*Program Coordinator – Jeffrey K. Rester*

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

In 2020, SEAMAP operations continued for the 39th consecutive year. SEAMAP resource surveys in 2020 included the Spring Plankton Survey, Summer Shrimp/Groundfish Survey, Reef Fish Survey, Bottom Longline Survey, Vertical Line Survey, Fall Plankton Survey, and Fall Shrimp/Groundfish Survey.

During 2020, SEAMAP sampling was severely impacted by COVID-19. The SEAMAP Spring Plankton Survey, which normally takes place during April and May, was cancelled. The majority of the Bottom Longline Survey was cancelled also. Except for Alabama, the Spring time period was not sampled and the majority of the Summer time period was not sampled due to COVID-19 restrictions on staff. The SEAMAP Vertical Line Survey was scheduled to sample 218 stations off Texas, Louisiana, and Alabama, but partners were only able to sample 79 stations. The SEAMAP Reef Fish Survey was completed with a reduced sampling effort. A new reef fish survey design was supposed to be implemented with supplemental funding from a NOAA RESTORE Act Science Program grant. NOAA Fisheries did not conduct any reef fish sampling in 2020. Florida was able to sample approximately 1,000 stations in the eastern Gulf. The SEAMAP Summer Shrimp/ Groundfish Survey usually is conducted in June and July, but because NOAA Fisheries would not have been able to participate during June or July, the SEAMAP Subcommittee decided to only sample the eastern Gulf of Mexico. The states planned to sample 150 stations during July east of the Mississippi River. At the last minute, the entire survey was cancelled due to crew limitations. The Fall Plankton Survey was also cancelled due to COVID-19. SEAMAP was able to complete the Fall Shrimp/Groundfish Survey. SEAMAP sampled 250 stations between October 1 and December 11, 2020.

SEAMAP has been working to improve the identification of invertebrates captured during sampling activities. SEAMAP held several invertebrate identification workshops online in 2020 to help field staff in the identification of various invertebrates including echinoderms, commercial

shrimp, noncommercial shrimp, and lobsters and lobster like shrimp. The workshops are part of a larger effort to hold a face to face meeting at some point in 2021 to provide a more hands on approach to help in the identification of invertebrates in the Gulf of Mexico.

The SEAMAP Subcommittee met online in July with the South Atlantic and Caribbean SEAMAP components. All components discussed their ongoing activities as well as the FY2021 SEAMAP budget. The group also discussed the SEAMAP 2021-2025 Management Plan. SEAMAP decided to break the Management Plan into a Management Plan and a Strategic Plan. The Strategic Plan provides a prioritized list of future project activities for each of the SEAMAP components while the Management Plan provides a statement of current goals, management policies and procedures, and current activities.

The Commission handles the data management responsibilities for SEAMAP in the Gulf of Mexico. All data collected during 2020 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 2020. 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 of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill on marine fish stocks; and
- Compiling the 2020 SEAMAP Environmental and Biological Atlas.

# SPORT FISH RESTORATION ADMINISTRATIVE PROGRAM (SFRP)

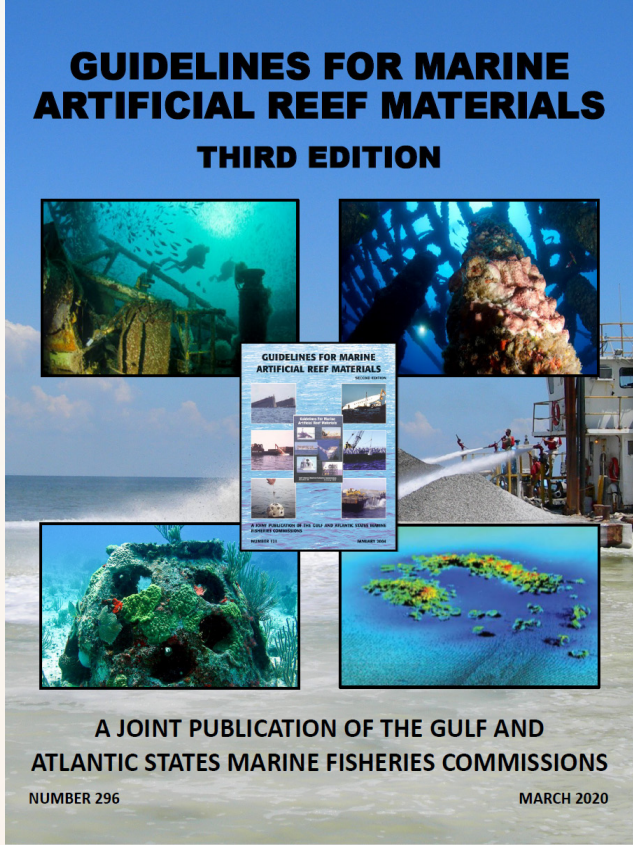
*Program Coordinator – James R. Ballard*

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 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](http://www.gsmfc.org)) under Publications. The SFRP Coordinator is James R. Ballard, assisted by Alice R. Wilhelm.

After final approval of "Guidelines for Marine Artificial Reef Materials: Third Edition" at the March 2020 Commission meeting, the Program Coordinator made the document available through the Commission's website and provided it to the ASMFC for approval and distribution. Moving forward, this will be a living document so the TCC Artificial Reef Subcommittees can update specific chapters as new information becomes available without having to do a full revision of the document.

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.

The Program Coordinator continued to pilot test the Gulf Artificial Reef Monitoring and Assessment Program. During the sampling events carried out in 2019, extremely low dissolved oxygen levels were detected at several sampling locations. In an effort to better assess the water



quality, including dissolved oxygen levels at artificial reef sites off the coast of Mississippi, the Program Coordinator will employ water quality monitoring multiparameter datasondes at several offshore sites. These datasondes will be deployed on the bottom and will utilize an acoustic release system so there will be no entanglement issues associated with a surface buoy and mooring line system. The datasondes will be deployed year-round in order to assess seasonal changes in water quality at the sites and to determine the prevalence and duration of low dissolved oxygen events. The Program Coordinator has acquired the datasondes and has been conducting lab tests to assess battery life and deployment duration. He is also working to equip the datasondes with anti-fouling modifications that will help to insure accurate data collection throughout the planned three-month deployments. The Commission's System Administrator is working on developing a database that will

house all the collected data and website updates to make the data available to the public. The plan is to pilot test the datasondes at reef sites within the sound in the summer of 2021 with hopes of moving into offshore water later in 2021 or early in 2022. 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.

# 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.

The GSARP met twice (virtually) in 2020 and the minutes for those meetings are available on the Panel website ([www.gsap.org](http://www.gsap.org)).

The Program Coordinator continued to help 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 six years, the program has been able to fund 39 projects totaling \$850K. These projects have addressed invasive species eDNA data standards, model bait regulations, risk analysis of injurious fish species, lionfish, human health risks from AIS, apple snails, Giant Salvinia, Hydrilla, Phragmites, Didymo, invasive carp, Rusty Crayfish, Speckled Crayfish, Red-rimmed Melania, Asian Clam, American Eel swimbladder parasite, whirling disease, Snakehead, invasive Black Bass, and novel cyanotoxin. The program has resulted in increased collaboration and communication between FWS, GSARP, and the academic community.

The Program Coordinator continued to support the Invasive Species Traveling Trunk Outreach Program that was developed by the GSARP. The GSARP's Education and Outreach workgroup will continue to explore other materials that can be added to the trunks to keep them new and relevant. They will also look at developing lesson plans to make it easier for teachers to incorporate the materials in the trunks into their science curriculums. The trunks have been utilized for 1,552 days since they were made available to the public in the summer of 2012.

In 2020, the Program Coordinator worked with MS DMR to carry out the third year of the "Jimmy Sanders Memorial Lionfish Challenge". Due to the current circumstances at the time, a virtual tournament was held utilizing Fishing Chaos. The new format worked very well and participants were able to increase 2019's number of Lionfish collected by about 50%. These efforts are made possible by the support from sponsors like Engel Coolers, Neritic Diving, ZooKeeper, and Fishing Chaos.

# CORONAVIRUS AID, RELIEF AND ECONOMIC SECURITY ACT (CARES)

*Program Coordinator – Jeffrey K. Rester*

The CARES Act Program is a new program that the Commission started in 2020. It was created to help administer funds from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) that was signed into law on March 27, 2020. On May 7, 2020, the Secretary of Commerce announced the allocation of \$300 million in fisheries assistance funding provided by Sec. 12005 of the CARES Act to states, Tribes, and territories with coastal and marine fishery participants who were negatively affected by COVID-19. Fishery participants included Tribes, persons, fishing communities, aquaculture businesses, processors, or other fishery-related businesses, who incurred a loss, as a direct or indirect result of the coronavirus pandemic. The CARES Act Coordinator is Jeffrey K. Rester, assisted by Ashley P. Lott.

Eligible fishery participants must have incurred an economic revenue loss greater than 35% as compared to the five-year average revenue; or any negative impacts to subsistence, cultural, or ceremonial fisheries. NOAA Fisheries will be disbursing the fisheries assistance through the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, and the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission.

The Gulf states allocations were as follows.

Texas	\$ 9,237,949
Louisiana	\$14,785,244
Mississippi	\$ 1,534,388
Alabama	\$ 3,299,821
Florida*	\$23,636,600

\*Florida did not split their coast and will be working with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission.

During 2020 each state developed a spend plan detailing how they proposed to distribute their share of the funds. The spend plans described the main categories for funding, including direct payments, fishery-related infrastructure, and fishery-related education that addressed direct and indirect COVID-19 impacts to commercial fishermen, charter businesses, qualified aquaculture operations, subsistence/cultural/ceremonial users, processors, and other fishery-related businesses. Vessel repair businesses, restaurants, or seafood retailers were not considered fishery-related businesses. NOAA Fisheries approved each state's spend plan before the state started accepting applications.

All eligible fishery participants were required by the states to:

- self-certify that they were eligible
- self-certify that they incurred losses greater than 35% from their 2015-2019 average
- attest that they had not received other COVID related assistance and that the sum of all assistance, when combined with their reduced revenue, does not exceed the level of their five-year average (cannot make themselves more than whole).

Louisiana was the first state under the Commission's purview to submit their spend plan for review by NOAA Fisheries personnel. Louisiana began their spend plan review process in July 2020 and their finalized spend plan was submitted on July 21, 2020. Louisiana began accepting applications on September 14, 2020 and the application process was originally scheduled to close on October 26, 2020. Due to several hurricanes affecting Louisiana during this time period, the application window was extended to November 23, 2020. Louisiana received 1,696 total applications although not all of the applicants qualified for payment. Since LDWF did not know how many applicants to expect across their application period, LDWF decided to send out two rounds of payments. Depending on which sector the applicant applied for, each applicant received the same amount during the first round of funding. After paying all applicants for the first round, Louisiana will be calculating how much funding is left for each sector and sending out a second payment to all applicants in 2021.

Alabama was the next state to begin their spend plan review process, and their NOAA Fisheries review began on July 16. The final Alabama spend plan was submitted September 1, 2020. Alabama began accepting applications on September 14 and the application process was originally scheduled to close on November 13, but was extended to November 27 due to hurricane impacts. Alabama received 104 applications during their application period. Seventy-four applicants were deemed eligible.

Mississippi began their spend plan review process on July 30, and their final spend plan was submitted on October 8. The Mississippi application process began on November 9 and closed on December 8. Mississippi received 237 applicants in their initial application period. During the application process Mississippi encountered a problem where Mississippi residents who held fishing licenses in Louisiana did not qualify for payment in Louisiana because they were not Louisiana residents and were denied in Mississippi because they did not hold Mississippi fishing licenses. Mississippi worked with the Commission and NOAA Fisheries personnel to help assist this small group. The Mississippi spend plan was modified in December to allow applicants who held licenses in other states, but resided in Mississippi, to qualify and the application process was reopened from December 28, 2020 through January 5, 2021. The second application period was opened to all affected sector groups licensed out of state and an additional 19 applicants applied for funding.

Texas began their spend plan review process on December 9 intending to begin in early 2021.

# FISHERIES RESTORATION PROGRAM (FRP)

*Program Coordinator – Charlie E. Robertson*

The Fisheries Restoration Program (FRP) was established in 2020 through a cooperative agreement with NOAA and the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) to help restore recreational fish species impacted by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. This program is funded under NOAA's Damage Assessment, Remediation and Restoration Program (DARRP), which was established in 1992 after the Exxon Valdez oil spill to protect and restore natural resources by collecting settlement funds after pollution events to implement projects to restore losses. Currently, the Commission has the capacity to assist the DARRP where their two missions align, particularly as it relates to the conservation and restoration of fisheries resources. The FRP Coordinator is Charlie E. Robertson, assisted by Alice R. Wilhelm.

The first project managed under the FRP was titled, "Reduction of Post-release Mortality from Barotrauma in Gulf of Mexico Recreational Reef Fish Fisheries." The goals of this initial project are to reduce mortality in reef fishes resulting from barotrauma and release to increase the health of reef fish fisheries and improve angler experience.

Barotrauma occurs when a deep-water fish is rapidly reeled to the surface causing gases to expand in their tissues. This expansion of gas often causes internal organ damage, prevents fish from swimming back to depth, and may lead to death after release. Increasing the survival of fish experiencing barotrauma is a key focus for fisheries managers and fish descending devices (FDDs) are one tool anglers can use to help fish recover from barotrauma.

The Program Coordinator began working on the initial phases of the various components of this project in September of 2020. To accomplish the project's goals, focus will be placed on the development of best practices for FDDs by distributing them to recreational anglers and providing information on their use. Surveys on anglers' attitude changes, use, and effectiveness of FDDs will be conducted over the duration of the project to monitor and track success.

Plans are still being developed for the creation of a project web page that will host outreach and education materials and other project-specific information. It is anticipated that this will be available in Fall/Spring 2022 for Gulf anglers and the general public to learn about "best release practices" for reef fish in the Gulf of Mexico. Once anglers have sharpened their skills on proper release techniques, they may qualify to receive FDDs at little to no cost. A phased approach is being considered for distribution of FDDs to qualifying reef fish anglers in the Gulf.

Logistics and planning have been ongoing with state and federal fisheries management agencies to measure the extent anglers adopt FDDs as part of their routine fishing practices. The project hopes to utilize existing reporting programs to collect fishery-dependent data to better characterize the proportion of anglers who utilize best release practices in the Gulf.



With support from NOAA, the FRP awarded almost \$700,000 for three studies that will focus on the extent of catch-and-release mortality, depredation, and changes in anglers' attitudes and opinions concerning FDDs in the Gulf. These studies will begin in Spring 2021. The first two studies will be conducted offshore and will work with close to 40 recreational charter boat captains to recapture fish that were tagged and descended, train them on deploying underwater cameras to observe whether predators are targeting fish when they are released using descending devices, and teach them best practices while using descending devices. The third study will engage reef fish anglers across the five Gulf states by surveying them regarding their knowledge, attitudes, and opinions of FDDs and best fishing practices. Collectively, the results from the three studies will support the overarching project goals of increasing the health of reef fisheries and improving angler experiences.



# 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 2020

The 70th Annual Spring Meeting of the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (Commission) was held in Gulf Shores, Alabama. 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 received an update from the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP), specifically discussing progress on state survey data calibration, changes to the Access Point Angler Intercept Survey (APAIS), and a discussion of potential marine mammal add-on questions to the APAIS. The committee received a presentation on the status of the Southeast For-Hire Integrated Electronic Reporting (SEFHIER) program. Program implementation has been delayed but they are working toward a phased implantation in 2021. The committee was provided updates on the progress of VESL development in Texas and Florida including the Florida swipe card project and with a progress report from each state on the shrimp conversion factor research. States were complete with sample collection efforts and just working on final data analyses and report production.

The SEAMAP Subcommittee reviewed and finalized the SEAMAP Trawling Operations Manual. They reviewed progress on editing the SEAMAP 2021-2025 Management Plan. The Subcommittee discussed the November 2019 Habitat Mapping Work Group meeting and the future of SEAMAP habitat mapping without additional SEAMAP funding. The Subcommittee also discussed and planned out all 2020 SEAMAP sampling to make sure that everyone was clear on what sampling would be conducted in 2020.

At the March 2020 Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) meeting, James Ballard provided a quick overview of the process used to develop the SOPs for the other four TCC Subcommittees (Artificial Reef, Crab, SEAMAP, and Data Management). The group discussed voting procedures, membership, and the amount of involvement each individual subcommittee had in developing the SOPs. The TCC made a motion to have Commission staff send the draft SOPs back out to the TCC for review and suggested changes, compile all changes, and send them back out for final review.

During the Crab Subcommittee meeting, members reviewed their revised SOPs and approved them with the understanding that Ms. Harriet Perry would remain an active voting member on the Subcommittee due to her long history with the Commission. The Subcommittee does not intend to have more than five voting members after Perry elects to discontinue participation.

The MAC was provided an overview of the potential for implementing ecosystem-based reference points (ERPs) for Gulf Menhaden. In both the Gulf Menhaden FMP and the most recent benchmark assessment (SEDAR63), goals and recommendations included the need for considering ecosystem services and the role of menhaden in the environment. Dr. David Chagaris (UFL) provided some summary indicators using the northern Gulf and Gulf-wide models. The various indicators could be examined individually or in combination looking at aggregates of all fish, all predators, only the upper trophic levels or based on individual groups of predators like Sciaenid predators, HMS and coastal pelagics, reef fish, as well as specifically for marine mammals or seabirds. The team could provide any portion of these examples for assessment moving forward.

The first meeting of the newly formed Molluscan Shellfish Subcommittee took place in March and the members reviewed the SOPs that had been drafted. The members provided some status updates of the individual states' on-bottom and off-bottom resources as well as discussed on-going oyster restoration projects.

#### OCTOBER 2020

The Commission's 71st Annual Meeting was held virtually. 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).

The Data Management Subcommittee met virtually due to the COVID19 pandemic and received a presentation from NOAA Fisheries on commercial shrimp data issues. The committee discussed the timeline for switching to electronic tablets for collecting MRIP APAIS data. This would follow the same procedures and tools implemented by ACCSP and allow the Gulf states to produce clean data in a more efficient process. The committee also had a significant discussion on the ongoing impacts of COVID19 on fishery dependent data collection surveys at the state and federal levels. The pandemic had significant impact in the earliest weeks as many states were forced to stop all sampling activities. By October, all states were in the field at some level of sampling and all developed their own protocols to help ensure samplers' safety.

The Joint meeting of the GMFMC's Law Enforcement Technical Committee and the GSMFC's Law Enforcement Committee, as well as the TCC Crab Subcommittee did not meet due to Hurricanes Marco and Laura that affected much of the Gulf Coast.

The TCC's MSSC met virtually in October and one of the primary discussions was related to sources of seed and broodstock in hatcheries and oyster farms. The members summarized the individual state restrictions and limitations for bringing material into their respective waters. In general, any shellstock from the US East Coast is not permitted to be introduced into the water anywhere

in the Gulf due to concerns over the introduction of MSX. Live oysters can be brought in to most of the states as long as they are only in restaurants or handled by processors. In addition, most states also require health certifications for products brought from other regions for culture or grow out.

The SEAMAP Subcommittee discussed 2020 SEAMAP sampling efforts and how COVID-19 had impacted 2020 SEAMAP sampling. Since SEAMAP was not able to fully sample during 2020, the Subcommittee discussed plans and potential uses for the unused FY2020 SEAMAP funds. The group also held their final review of 2021-2025 Management Plan and Strategic Plan. The Subcommittee approved the 2021-2025 Management Plan and Strategic Plan and felt it was ready to forward to the Technical Coordinating Committee for their review and approval.

The TCC was given a brief update on the CARES Act where it was noted that \$300 million in fisheries assistance was allocated to states, Tribes, and territories with coastal and marine fishery participants who were negatively affected by COVID-19. Funds will be disbursed by NOAA with assistance from the three Marine Commissions to eligible fishery participants. Once states have developed an approved spend plan consistent with the CARES Act, the Commission will process payments to eligible fishery participants on behalf of the states. The TCC also had a brief discussion on the SOPs for the other TCC Subcommittees. One minor grammatical change was made to the Artificial Reef Subcommittee's SOPs and a motion was made to approve the SOPs, with the grammatical change, and to send them to the full Commission for approval.

## STATE AGENCY PARTNERS

*Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida*

The five Gulf state agencies continued to work through the Commission on projects such as the FIN Data Program, IJF, and SEAMAP. Below are some of the highlights of those various Commission-related activities in 2020.

**FIN:** In 2020, 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 to address stock assessment needs. The commercial trip ticket program is also developed and ongoing for all states in the Gulf of Mexico.

**SEAMAP:** SEAMAP operations continued for the 39th consecutive year. Due to COVID-19, sampling by the SEAMAP state partners was curtailed this year. Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida were able to sample at a reduced capacity, but Texas was not able to sample at all. State partners also participated in several invertebrate identification workshops online throughout the year to help field staff in the identification of echinoderms, commercial shrimp, noncommercial shrimp, and lobsters and lobster like shrimp.

**IJF:** The five state agencies provided representation on the Red Drum Technical Task Force. The states also began working on proposals for the supplemental IJ funding which the Commission was making available for projects that address long-term monitoring and data collection activities or for special projects intended to fill gaps in data for various IJF species in the region. In late 2020, proposals were submitted by the five state agencies for the single year funds which totaled \$280,000 for each agency. Those projects were scheduled to begin in 2021. Additional funds will be made annually through this process based on the allocation to the program by NOAA.

**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 aquatic 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. In 2020, the two subcommittees completed the revision of their 2004 publication, Guidelines for Marine Artificial Reef Materials: Second Edition. The new third edition is available for download on the Commission's website.

# LYLES-SIMPSON AWARD

The original Charles H. Lyles Award was given annually by the 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 to include 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. The recipient is awarded this honor at the Commission’s annual meeting in October of each year.

The 2020 recipient of this award was Ms. Harriet M. Perry, a Senior Research Scientist and Professor Emerita with the University of Southern Mississippi’s Gulf Coast Research Laboratory (USM/GCRL) in Ocean Springs, Mississippi. For more than 50 years, she has been an educator, researcher and collaborator in the disciplines of environmental science and aquatic biology. Ms. Perry has partnered with five federal and greater than 20 state agencies over her career. She has also worked with numerous private industries and fishermen. She was a founding and active member of the TCC’s Crab Subcommittee for over 40 years and served in numerous leadership roles within the marine fisheries’ scientific community as member, chair and co-chair on fisheries committees, workshops, task forces, and fishery management planning teams. The Lyles-Simpson award recognizes those who are worthy to be labeled “fishery giants” and Ms. Harriet Perry exemplifies that in every way.

## LYLES-SIMPSON AWARD RECIPIENTS

Charles H. Lyles	1984	Andrew J. Kemmerer	2003
Theodore B. Ford	1985	Hal Osburn	2004
J.Y. Christmas	1986	Leroy Kiffe	2005
John Breaux	1987	Robert P. Jones	2006
John Ray Nelson	1988	Wayne E. Swingle	2007
I.B. “Buck” Byrd	1989	Ralph Rayburn	2008
Hugh A. Swingle	1990	W. “Corky” Perret	2009
John A. Mehos	1991	Albert L. King, Sr.	2010
J. Burton Angelle	1992	Virginia “Ginny” Vail	2011
Louis A Villanova	1993	R. Vernon Minton	2012
Theodore H. Shepard	1994	Larry B. Simpson	2013
Edwin A. Joyce, Jr.	1995	Michael C. Voisin	2014
Tommy D. Candies	1996	Ellie F. Roche	2015
Walter M. Tatum	1997	Michael S. Ray	2016
Thomas L. Heffernan	1998	Joseph I. Gill, Jr.	2017
Trent Lott	1999	Christopher M. Blankenship	2018
James Barkuloo	2000	William Borden Wallace	2019
Walter Fondren, III	2001	Harriet M. Perry	2020
Jerald K. Waller	2002		

# 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 2020.

No. 300 November 2020. A Practical Handbook for Determining the Ages of Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic Coast Fishes - Third Edition. VanderKooy, S., J. Carroll, S. Elzey, J. Gilmore, and J. Kipp (eds). 2020. Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission and Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission.

No. 299 October 2020. SEAMAP Subcommittee Annual Report to the Technical Coordinating Committee of the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission October 1, 2019 to September 30, 2020. Jeffrey K. Rester, Editor. Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

No. 298 September 2020. Licenses and Fees for Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas in Their Marine Waters for the Year 2019. Debbie McIntyre (Editor). Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

No. 297 June 2020. Annual Report of the Southeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program (SEAMAP) October 1, 2018 – September 30, 2019 (online only).

No. 296 March 2020. Guidelines for Marine Artificial Reef Materials, Third Edition. A Joint Publication of the Gulf and Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commissions. James R. Ballard (Editor).

No. 295 March 2019. 2020 Operations Plan for the Fisheries Information Network (FIN). FIN Committee. Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

No. 294 January 2020. Law Summary 2019. A Summary of Marine Fishing Laws & Regulations for the Gulf States. Debbie McIntyre (editor). Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (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

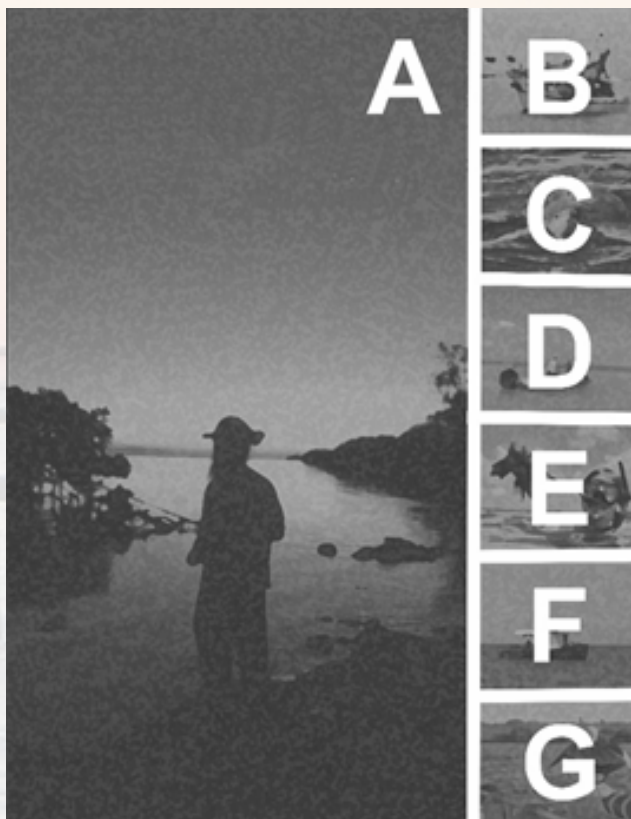
The following presents a summary of the Commission's net position for the years ended December 31, 2020 and 2019. Detailed financial statements are available from the Commission office by request from Ms. Angela Rabideau.

<b>Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission Condensed Statement of Financial Position for the Years Ended December 31, 2020 AND 2019</b>		
	DECEMBER 31,	
	2020	2019
Current Assets	\$459,067	\$847,847
Non-Current Assets		
Post Employment Health Plan Investment Account	318,348	268,722
Capital Assets	258,729	214,743
Total Non-Current Assets	577,077	483,465
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>1,036,144</b>	<b>1,331,312</b>
Current Liabilities	17,486	18,556
Non-Current Liabilities	23,702	38,640
<b>Total Liabilities</b>	<b>41,188</b>	<b>57,196</b>
<b>Net Position</b>		
Invested in Capital Assets	220,090	161,821
Unrestricted Net Assets	774,866	1,112,295
<b>Total Net Position</b>	<b>\$994,956</b>	<b>\$1,274,116</b>

**Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission  
Condensed Statement of Activities  
for the Years Ended December 31, 2020 AND 2019**

	DECEMBER 31,	
	2020	2019
General Revenues		
Member State Appropriation	\$90,000	\$112,500
Council Activities	45,000	65,000
Other Income	350	91
Interest Income	5,441	6,480
Dividend Income	10,760	13,859
Post Employment Health Plan Revenue	7,147	6,801
Registration Fees	6,894	16,208
Realized/Unrealized Gain (Loss) on Investments	32,232	32,923
Gain (Loss) on Sale of Assets	3,106	-
Program Revenues		
Collection & Decimation of Recreational & Commercial Fisheries Information Network	4,788,348	6,445,098
Biological Sampling & Head Boat Sampling	1,333,225	1,558,843
Unallied Science Programs	1,069,898	781,506
Interjurisdictional Fisheries Management	582,113	669,440
Coordination of Recreational Fisheries Programs	187,680	213,969
Collection & Decimation of Fishery-Independent Data & Information	251,853	349,705
SEAMAP Supplemental	67,907	16,900
Multiplier/Net Gains	60,500	-
SEAMAP Supplemental	1,045,848	-
CARES Act Recovery	24,340	-
Study of Aquatic Nuisances	101,273	124,142
<b>Total Revenues</b>	<b>\$9,713,915</b>	<b>\$10,413,465</b>
Expenses:		
Programs	\$10,089,377	\$8,659,712
General and Administrative	184,032	178,619
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$10,273,409</b>	<b>\$8,838,331</b>
Change in Net Assets	\$(279,160)	\$140,056
<b>Net Position, Beginning</b>	<b>1,274,116</b>	<b>1,134,060</b>
<b>Net Position, Ending</b>	<b>\$994,956</b>	<b>\$1,274,116</b>

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## Inside Photo Spread

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