

Seventy-Third
Annual Report of the
Gulf States Marine
Fisheries Commission
for the Year 2022



GULF STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION

SEVENTY-THIRD ANNUAL REPORT (2022)

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



Publishing Editors:

Keith E. Wilson and Steven J. VanderKooy
Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission
2404 Government Street
Ocean Springs, Mississippi 39564
(228) 875-5912
info@gsmfc.org
www.gsmfc.org

Preserving the Past • Planning the Future • A Cooperative Effort

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In submitting this Seventy-Third 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 acknowledgment is also extended to the directors and staff of the federal, state, and interstate agencies; representatives of all partner organizations; and individuals who have contributed to the realization of the objectives for the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

GSMFC Executive Committee,

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

COMMISSION ROSTER

Commissioners

Order of Listing by State: Administrator, Legislator, Governor's Appointee

ALABAMA

Chris Blankenship

*Commissioner, Alabama Dept. of Conservation
& Natural Resources
Montgomery, AL*

Rep. Chris Pringle

*State House District 101
Mobile, AL*

Chris Nelson

*Bon Secour Fisheries, Inc.
Bon Secour, AL*

FLORIDA

Eric Sutton

*Executive Director, Florida Fish and Wildlife
Conservation Commission
Tallahassee, FL*

Rep. Jay Trumbull

*State House District 6
Tallahassee, FL*

Jay Brown

Apalachicola, FL

LOUISIANA

Jack Montoucet

*Secretary, Louisiana Dept. of Wildlife and Fisheries
Baton Rouge, LA*

Sen. R.L. "Bret" Allain, II

*State Senate District 21
Franklin, LA*

John Roussel

Zachary, LA

MISSISSIPPI

Brig. Gen. Joe Spraggins, USAF/USANG Retired

*Executive Director, Mississippi Dept. of
Marine Resources
Biloxi, MS*

Legislator TBA

Joseph Read Hendon, Ph.D.

*The University of Southern Mississippi
Gulf Coast Research Laboratory
Ocean Springs, MS*

TEXAS

Carter Smith

*Executive Director, Texas Parks and Wildlife
Department
Austin, TX*

Legislator TBA

Doug Boyd

Corpus Christi, TX

Commission Staff

David M. Donaldson, *Executive Director*

James R. Ballard, *Program Coordinator*

Donna B. Bellais, *COM/FIN Programmer*

Gregg S. Bray, *Program Manager*

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*

ACTIVE COMMITTEES

Executive Committee

Scott Bannon, Chairman
Jason Froeba, Vice Chairman
Joe Spraggins, 2nd Vice Chairman
Doug Boyd, Immediate Past Chairman
Dan Ellinor, Chairman's Appointee

Law Enforcement Committee

Scott Pearce, Chair

State-Federal Fisheries Management Committee

Jason Froeba, Chair

Menhaden Advisory Committee

Ray Mroch, Chair

Technical Coordinating Committee

Beverly Sauls, Chair

TCC Artificial Reef Subcommittee

Mike McDonough, Chair

TCC Crab Subcommittee

Jason Saucier, Chair

TCC Data Management Subcommittee

Steve Brown, Chair

TCC Fisheries Information Network

Ken Brennan, Chair

TCC SEAMAP Subcommittee

Ted Switzer, Chair

TCC Molluscan Shellfish Subcommittee

Carolina Bourque, Chair



COMMONLY USED ACRONYMS

ADCNR/MRD	Alabama Department of Conservation & Natural Resources/Marine Resources Division
ANS	Aquatic Nuisance Species
ANSTF	National Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force
ASMFC	Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission
ComFIN	Commercial Fisheries Information Network
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease of 2019
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
RER	Return 'Em Right
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 Excluder Device
TPWD	Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
TTF	Technical Task Force
TTS	Texas Territorial Sea
USFWS	United States Fish and Wildlife Service



TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR’S REPORT	3
FISHERIES INFORMATION NETWORK (FIN)	4
INTERJURISDICTIONAL FISHERIES PROGRAM (IJF)	6
AQUACULTURE	8
SOUTHEAST AREA MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT PROGRAM (SEAMAP)	10
SPORT FISH RESTORATION ADMINISTRATIVE PROGRAM (SFRP)	12
FISHERIES RESTORATION PROGRAM (FRP)	14
AQUATIC NUISANCE SPECIES (ANS)	17
CORONAVIRUS AID, RELIEF, AND ECONOMIC SECURITY ACT (CARES)	18
ANNUAL MEETING SUMMARIES	20
STATE AGENCY PARTNER ACTIVITIES	23
FINANCIAL REPORT	24
PUBLICATIONS	26
LYLES-SIMPSON AWARD	27
CREDITS	28





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 Commission was formed specifically to provide state, federal, and interstate coordination of interjurisdictional programs.

PURPOSE

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 state fishery resource agency directors; one-third are appointed by the states’ legislatures, and one-third are private citizens with a knowledge of and interest in marine fisheries who are appointed by the respective state governors.

One of the most important functions of the Commission is to serve as a forum for the discussion of various problems and programs for 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 Commission’s Annual Meeting is held each year during the third week of October. 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. An election for officers including *chairman, first vice-chairman, and second vice-chairman* of the Commission is held every two years with positions rotating among the states.

HEADQUARTERS & STAFF

Located in Ocean Springs, Mississippi, the Commission staff as supervised by the Executive Director administers Commission programs and participates in public forums and other councils, commissions, 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

“We believe building relationships and working collaboratively remains the best way to address the difficulties facing our marine fisheries.”

Fortunately for 2022, navigating the COVID-19 pandemic became a rear-view mirror concept, which enabled GSMFC to turn essential corners as needed. Nearly one year after modifying office dynamics, our staff came home in May 2022. In essence, transitioning back into our space in Ocean Springs was more like a “reset” vs. “restart”. We were certainly better together. Still, it’s worth noting that the definition of “normal” has forever changed in part by the pandemic. Going forward, we shall make peace with a “new normal”.

This “new normal” has taught us that not all meetings must be face-to-face for accomplishing identified tasks. It has merely reinforced the notion that there is no substitution for human interaction when facilitating discussion and finding solutions in a cooperative manner. The importance of being in-person allowed us to engage others directly in discussions while also building and strengthening relationships with our state and federal partners. And, that enabled the Commission to administer two rounds of CARES Act funding, which gave hope to fisheries participants who have since put their boots back on the ground despite the impacts of novel coronavirus (refer to the CARES Act section in this annual report for additional details).

The pandemic has also proven that things can and do change very quickly. While the journey has somewhat changed, we believe building relationships and working collaboratively remains the best way to address the difficulties facing our marine fisheries. This approach will surely lead us toward finding positive solutions and better conservation of the marine resources in our beloved Gulf of Mexico.



FISHERIES INFORMATION NETWORK (FIN)

Program Manager – Gregg S. Bray

In the 1980s and 1990s, state and federal fishery managers in the southeast region (the region) agreed that there was an urgent and compelling need for coordinated collection of comprehensive data on the region's commercial and recreational marine 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. FIN Program Manager Gregg S. Bray is assisted by Ashley P. Lott.

FIN continued to provide coordination of the NOAA Fisheries MRIP survey in Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida. This is a field-intercept survey for shore, for-hire, and private boat anglers to estimate angler catch using existing MRIP methodology. In 2022, almost 28,000 angler interviews were collected.

The states also conducted supplemental sampling on the intercept portion of the MRIP for charter boats in Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida (east and west coasts). Field staff continue to utilize mobile (electronic) tablets to collect dockside survey data. This tool greatly increases speed and accuracy for which data are provided to FIN databases. Also, a random sample of weekly telephone calls to 10% of the Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida (east and west coast) charter boat captains helped obtain estimates on charter boat fishing effort. Since 2000, this NMFS-adopted methodology has been used for estimating charter boat effort. FIN also provided partial funding to help support implementation of the LA Creel Survey in Louisiana and TPWD dockside surveys that increase trip sampling effort at sites where Red Snapper trips typically originate.

FIN utilized additional NOAA Southeast Fishery Science Center funding to support our biological sampling program. While FIN was able to support sampling in 2022 with this additional money amid the final year of the agreement, we still operated with a funding shortfall. 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: Black Drum, Gag, Gray Snapper, Gray Triggerfish, Greater Amberjack, King Mackerel, Red Drum, Red Grouper, Red Snapper, Sheepshead, Flounders (Gulf & Southern), Spotted Seatrout, Striped Mullet, and Vermilion Snapper. In 2022, over 15,000 age structures and nearly 35,000 additional lengths from important managed species in the Gulf of Mexico and East Florida were collected.

FIN continued the coordination of commercial trip ticket programs in the five Gulf States. This task provided for collection of components for a commercial trip ticket system to census the commercial fisheries landings using data elements and standards. In addition, FIN provided funding to contract continued operation of electronic reporting for the trip ticket systems as well as reporting of data for the quota monitoring and IFQ programs. FIN's support on the development of a new electronic reporting tool from Bluefin Data called VESL also continued. This supports web-based technology and allows for access through mobile applications like tablets and smartphones. While this new reporting system is complete for Florida and Texas, work is ongoing to customize the application for the other states. Approximately 1,200 commercial dealers and processors in the five Gulf States utilized electronic reporting options during 2022.

Support for the development and implementation of the FIN Data Management System also continued. This provided funding for further work on developing more data modules for FIN. Responsibilities included more 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. GSMFC staff are working with the contractor, and development is almost complete on new data entry and access products for the biological sampling database. We are also working to implement record tracking systems on our trip ticket and biological sampling databases, and to provide higher levels of quality control at the point of data entry or data loading.

FIN helped coordinate the sampling of catches, collection of catch reports from head boat personnel, and gathering effort data on head boats that operate primarily in the Exclusive Economic Zone from ports along the coasts of Texas, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida.

FIN also provided coordination for the dockside validation survey implemented in all five states for the Southeast For-Hire Integrated Electronic Reporting (SEFHIER) project. This was designed to be a mandatory electronic logbook for reporting of trips and landings by all federally permitted reef fish or coastal migratory pelagic permit holders in the Gulf and South Atlantic. Dockside validation survey data would be used to determine if reporting errors were in electronic logbooks while also collecting some biological information. Field staff in 2022 collected over 1,800 dockside interviews of federal for-hire charter captains. Unfortunately, this program ceased in February 2023 due to a court ruling.

In 2022, FIN also assisted in the administration of funds to support two additional research programs. And, 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 also assisted with a cooperative project with Gulf state partners to possibly improve the quality and accuracy of commercial data by collecting and analyzing important reef fish species samples to validate, verify, and update conversion factors used to determine whole (live) weight of commercial landings from reported units. 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 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. IJF Program Coordinator Steven J. VanderKooy was assisted by Debora K. McIntyre.

Drafting of the Management Profile for Gulf of Mexico Red Drum ended during Spring 2022. The TTF completed all chapters, and IJF staff began final edits and formatting on most of the document throughout summer. The profile draft was provided to the TCC for review during the October meeting, and final approval via email came by early December. As the Red Drum Profile was completed, the Mangrove Snapper TTF was identified in the fall, and work began on scheduling their introductory meeting, which is anticipated to be held in early 2023.

The Crab Subcommittee met in March and October 2022. The subcommittee covered topics related to predation on Blue Crabs, Terrapins, and habitat use. They also dedicated a majority of the fall meeting towards discussing current management practices in the region and trends in abundance indices to evaluate effectiveness of management.

The Law Enforcement Committee (LEC) met in October to discuss a number of items related to their continued work toward regional enforcement goals and objectives. The Joint LEC and Gulf Council's Law Enforcement Technical Committee (LETC) discussed the value of continuing the four-year Strategic Plans and two-year Operations Plans. The Operations Plans, which are now deemed unnecessary, will be discontinued. The Strategic Plan will be updated on an as-needed basis. The most current Strategic Plan will remain as general guiding principles with a vision and mission statement, until a change is determined.

The Menhaden Advisory Committee (MAC) met in March and October to review routinely updated items such as the forecast and hindcast, the status of fishing in both the Gulf and Atlantic, and some discussion regarding ecosystem management as well as the drafted Harvest Control Rule. It was agreed that the MAC would like to continue and potentially come to decisions on reference points for management. The MAC asked IJF staff to work on a follow-up stakeholder workshop to complete work that began prior to the pandemic. Staff will develop an agenda and begin exploring a host meeting location in 2023. An assessment update is to be completed in 2024.

The IJF State Research Funding (SuRF) continued in 2022. Each state submitted projects totaling \$194,960 to begin pilots or continue ongoing research and data projects tied to otherwise unfunded interjurisdictional species in respective waters by using existing funds. Essentially, all projects are continuations of work done in 2021, which covers various issues related to Blue Crab, Southern Flounder, scallops, and oysters as well as general commercial and recreational data collection on IJ species.

Acoustic tagging of Tripletail in the Mississippi Sound and throughout the Florida Keys also continued in 2022. A sampling trip was made to the Keys in February, and 22 tags were deployed in Florida Bay and around the Everglades National Park. Tags were deployed in the northern Gulf over summer around Mobile Bay, the Mississippi Sound, and the Louisiana Marsh. A number of Tripletail were tagged off Venice, Louisiana in a joint effort by IJF staff and the Mississippi DMR. Large fish were captured and double tagged (acoustic and satellite tags). Discussions looking at potentially deploying receivers in other states' waters to supplement arrays in 2023 have begun. To date, 108 Tripletail in the Gulf of Mexico have been tagged amid this IJF program. At least an additional 50 taggings are anticipated in 2023. Staff may need to include additional species such as Cobia and Mangrove Snapper in collaborative work.

IJF staff, in collaboration with Drs. Midway and Dance at LSU/LA Sea Grant, during March 2022 hosted a symposium on flounder issues in the Gulf and South Atlantic regions. Close to 90 people representing each of the Gulf and South Atlantic states attended the two-day meeting to discuss what might be happening with flounder and develop a plan to address population declines moving forward. Midway, Dance, and several presenters are currently developing a synthesis paper from this symposium in hopes of publishing for a larger audience. Attendees suggested additional, similar symposiums should be planned to follow up and evaluate future progress.



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 for addressing 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 sister Commissions on the Atlantic and Pacific. The Aquaculture Program Coordinator is Steven J. VanderKooy.

Oyster Consortia

In 2019, the Commission began funding the Gulf Oyster Consortium, and 2022 was year three of a project referred to as SALT (Selection of Aquaculture Lines with improved Traits). This multi-partner project has 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 for supporting ongoing and future restoration efforts, and the industry; and 3) to transfer platforms in each state for dissemination of genetically improved seeds to the industry.

For 2022, the group continued to process the first generation initiated in 2020 and prepare for breeding the F2 generation. The consortium continued to evaluate experimental challenges simulating extreme high chronic temperature stress and acute low salinity stress, which are potential contributors to mortality as recorded during the warm season in the northern Gulf of Mexico. The group also collaborated with the ASMFC’s oyster consortium to develop a high-density genotyping platform (600K Single Nucleotide Polymorphism SNP markers). They anticipate the platform will be available for use in estimation of breeding values of candidates for the forthcoming second generation of this project in 2023-2024.

Aquaculture Pilot Projects

The NOAA Office of Aquaculture continued to provide funding through the Commission to support commercial start-ups with production in-mind and intent on demonstration projects moving forward with offshore aquaculture. A new round of projects totaling \$1.45M was funded in 2022. This work involved Atlantic Croaker, oysters, Tripletail, and seaweed as well as education and outreach related to integrated multi-trophic aquaculture (IMTAs) and aquaculture (broadly). An additional \$530,000 was announced during October. Five awarded projects will run through 2023. These include work on oysters, Caribbean crabs, seaweed, and Black Grouper for IMTAs.

Integrated Multi-Trophic Aquaculture (IMTA)

In 2021, Congress authorized and provided funds to the NOAA Office of Aquaculture for a demonstration project in the Gulf to explore the utility of IMTA in the region. That fall, a RFP was released to support a multi-year demonstration project culturing native species of Finfish, Bivalve Mollusks, and Macroalgae. The Commission awarded the project to the Dauphin Island Sea Lab.

This project will demonstrate the culturing of a combination of native species of Finfish, Bivalve Mollusks, and Macroalgae in our region's state waters. The Dauphin Island Sea Lab, in collaboration with The University of Southern Mississippi, MS/AL SeaGrant, and the University of New Hampshire, has identified a potential site in Alabama state waters south of Fort Morgan to place one AquaFort platform.

There continues to be a number of planning and coordination meetings underway, and the team has held a public workshop. Presentations to numerous local and regional stakeholder groups have also provided information on the system and the value of the product potential using this technology.



SOUTHEAST AREA MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT PROGRAM (SEAMAP)

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. Publications of the SEAMAP program include environmental and biological atlases of the Gulf of Mexico for each year from 1983 through Present. SEAMAP Coordinator Jeffrey K. Rester is assisted by Ashley P. Lott.

In 2022, SEAMAP continued fishery independent sampling for the forty-first consecutive year. SEAMAP resource surveys included the Spring Plankton Survey, Summer Shrimp/Groundfish Survey, Reef Fish Survey, Bottom Longline Survey, Vertical Line Survey, Fall Plankton Survey, and Fall Shrimp/Groundfish Survey.

SEAMAP continued discussions on the future of the Vertical Line Survey in 2022. Vertical line data was submitted to the Red Snapper SEDAR Workshop in May. Although the panelists felt the analyses were sound, several concerns with indices developed using data from the Vertical Line Survey (analyses also included data from other states collected by using ancillary funds). The most significant concern was strong temporal variability in sampling intensity, spatial coverage in sampling effort, and the types of habitats sampled and unable to be adequately accounted in the conducted statistical models.

Concerns were also raised regarding whether observed indices correlated with true site abundance due to gear saturation and the influence of other species. Due to these issues and how the Reef Fish Survey provided data on the same size of Red Snapper collected in the Vertical Line Survey, the panel determined indices of abundance from the Vertical Line Survey were not suitable for assessment. The Vertical Line Survey was primarily a Red Snapper survey (over 90% of the catch was Red Snapper). The Subcommittee met July 11 and decided to discontinue this survey at the end of 2022.

The Environmental Data Work Group met February 22 and reviewed the environmental section of the trawling operations manual. Other SEAMAP sampling bases all environmental sampling on the environmental procedures within the trawling operations manual. The Environmental Data Work Group recommended all environmental procedures be detailed in a separate operations manual and no longer be located strictly within the trawling operations manual.

The Bottom Longline Work Group met April 7 and reviewed the operations manual. The Plankton Work Group met April 19 and reviewed the operations manual that will soon be updated.

The Trawl Work Group met April 21 to review the operations manual as well as sampling protocol before the beginning of the Summer Shrimp/Groundfish Survey.

A new work group, the Bottom Photography Work Group, formed and discussed attaching a video camera on the CTD to collect information on bottom type every time a CTD is lowered during routine sampling.

In 2022, SEAMAP data were submitted for use in SEDAR stock assessments of Great Hammerhead and Spanish Mackerel.

Of note, the Commission handles data management responsibilities for SEAMAP in the Gulf of Mexico. All data collected during 2022 were uploaded to the appropriate SEAMAP database and made available to the public via the Commission's website.

SEAMAP data were used for a variety of purposes during 2022. 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 Louisiana;*
- *Assessing shrimp and groundfish abundance and distribution, and their relationship to environmental parameters (e.g. temperature, salinity, dissolved oxygen);*
- *Identifying environmental parameters associated with concentrations of larval finfish;*
- *Assessing the potential impacts of the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill on marine fish stocks; and*
- *Compiling the 2022 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 program’s primary goal is to provide coordination of 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 Striped Bass restoration. Today, the primary focus of the SFRP pertains to artificial reefs. SFRP has established regional policies and planning documents, which are available at the Commission’s office and public access on the Commission website under Publications. SFRP Coordinator James R. Ballard was assisted by Alice R. Wilhelm.

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), which is one of six regional panels that serve as an advisory panel to the ANSTF. During this reporting period, the Program Coordinator arranged two in-person meetings for GSARP.

General coordination for the Commission’s Technical Coordinating Committee’s (TCC) Artificial Reef Subcommittee is a continued priority that provides the opportunity to address issues of national scope and importance. The TCC’s Artificial Reef Subcommittee held one in-person meeting in 2022. Meeting minutes, once finalized and approved, will be available on the Commission website.

Work to arrange a joint meeting between the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission’s (ASMFC) Artificial Reef Subcommittee and GSMFC’s TCC Artificial Reef Subcommittee is ongoing.

The Program Coordinator continues to manage a network of water quality monitoring multiparameter datasondes at several offshore sites. The datasondes are strategically deployed on the bottom in several Mississippi Department of Marine Resources’ fish havens. Each datasonde utilizes an acoustic release cage system to avoid entanglement issues associated with a surface buoy and mooring line system.

The end of 2022 marked the first full year of continued water quality monitoring. Units functioned as planned, with only one malfunction. The program achieved 41,000 data records with readings every 30 minutes. Parameters collected by datasondes include temperature, conductivity, salinity, dissolved oxygen, turbidity, and pH. A partnership was also established with the Commission's Interjurisdictional Fisheries Program to incorporate acoustic fish tag receivers in each unit. This resulted in almost 4,000 fish tag detections over a 12-month period.

The collected water quality data has been added to the Gulf Artificial Reef Monitoring and Assessment Program (GARMAP) database and website (<http://garmap.gsmfc.org/>) for public access. This website allows data to be viewed in graphical form over a 30-, 60-, or 90-day timeframe. It also provides graphical comparison of two different parameters. The System Administrator has added the ability to view all individual data records for a single day instead of daily averages as graphics.

Three additional water quality monitoring units are planned for deployment in 2023. All datasondes will be deployed year-round in order to assess seasonal changes in water quality for marine waters off Coastal Mississippi, and to determine the prevalence and duration of low dissolved oxygen events.

The long-term goal of GARMAP 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 understand how their reefs are functioning over time as compared to natural reefs.



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 (2010). 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 DARRP where their two missions align, particularly relating to the conservation and restoration of fisheries resources. FRP Coordinator Charlie E. Robertson is assisted by Alice R. Wilhelm.

The Program Coordinator continued working with the Project Management Team (PMT) on administrative tasks associated with managing the Return ‘Em Right program (RER). This program, which was originally known as the “Reduction of Post-release Mortality from Barotrauma in Gulf of Mexico Recreational Reef Fish Fisheries”, has goals of reducing mortality in reef fish resulting from barotrauma and release, increasing the health of reef fish fisheries, and improving angler experiences. The Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission’s (GSMFC) primary responsibility under this program is managing and overseeing various activities related to research, and monitoring to evaluate restoration success.



In RER’s second year, the program coordinator continued working with the Principal Investigators (PI’s) for each of the four collaborative studies funded in the prior year. A few studies were affected by carryover issues from the previous health crisis and were consequently unable to commence on time. However, all are in-progress and on schedule to finish as planned. The following table summarizes these studies:

<u>Principal Investigator</u>	<u>Institution</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Priorities</u>
Dr. Stephen Szedlmayer	Auburn University	MS/AL coast	Compare release mortality & survival of descended Red Snapper across depth zones
Dr. Marcus Drymon	Mississippi State University	Gulf-wide	Evaluate depredation rates of released reef fish; depredator ID
Erik Lang	Louisiana Dept. of Wildlife & Fisheries	LA coast	Compare efficiency of release; characterize depredation; survey anglers’ device type preferences
Dr. Will Patterson	University of Florida	West FL Shelf	Estimate seasonal release mortality of descended Gag



A recreationally-caught Red Grouper with eyes protruding from its head is a result of barotrauma. This often occurs from gas expanding in fish caught in deep waters. (Photo courtesy: Return 'Em Right)

A survey developed by Southwick Associates in conjunction with GSMFC and state resource agencies was administered in late 2021. The survey was designed to help understand and measure changes in recreational reef fish anglers' perceptions and knowledge regarding best handling and release practices for reef fish in the Gulf. Approximately 4,200 responses (over 600 per state) were received from self-identified Gulf of Mexico recreational reef fish anglers, which is the highest sample size from any survey of this type. This data was analyzed in early 2022 and a report published in July. Gulf-wide stakeholders received this distributed report, which is also available via websites for the Commission and RER. A follow-up survey will be administered in December 2024 to measure changes possibly resulting from the RER outreach campaign.

The program coordinator continued to work closely with representatives from Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida to expand and improve fishery-dependent monitoring through at-sea observer programs and state reef fish validation surveys in each participating state. Progress was also made to improve data collection standards for the participating states. In 2022, at-sea observer staff recorded information from 145 for-hire recreational fishing trips across the Gulf and were able to tag and release thousands of recreationally-caught priority reef fish species, such as Red Snapper, Gag, Red Grouper, Gray Triggerfish, and Greater Amberjack.

(Continued on next page)



*A recreational angler holds a Greater Amberjack.
(Photo courtesy: Return 'Em Right)*

Tagged fish have already been caught and reported by anglers. This is providing researchers valuable information on survival rates of released fish, a correlation to the type of release device being used, and the level of barotrauma the fish experiences. Information collected via these programs will be valuable for measuring the success of the RER program. It may also help inform fisheries managers on the changing trends in fisheries and effects that best handling practices may have on discards.

Developed and maintained by Florida Sea Grant (FSG), RER's website hosts educational outreach materials, project details, and links to valuable resources plus the science on best practices. The site also provides access to an education module, which was reconfigured and launched to private recreational anglers in Spring 2022. This interactive module teaches anglers best practices for release in the Gulf within 15 minutes. If eligible and once the module has been completed, anglers are sent a free package of release gear that includes a SeaQualizer descending device pre-rigged to a three-way swivel with a three-pound weight, and a SeaYaLater inverted hook release device. To date, over 15,000 anglers have completed this training and received free release gear.

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 coordinate AIS activities in the region through information sharing that 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 consists of approximately 35 members from federal and state agencies, NGOs, universities, industry, and one international member representing Mexico. ANS Program Coordinator James R. Ballard was assisted by Alice R. Wilhelm.

The Gulf and South Atlantic Regional Panel (GSARP) held two in-person meetings in June and November 2022. The minutes for those meetings are available on the Panel website (www.gsarp.org). We are continuing to successfully administer Region 4 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) ANS Small Grants Program and provide oversight of all non-federal projects funded through this program. ANS has helped disseminate the research findings from funded studies by inviting the Principal Investigators (PI's) to present and participate in Panel meetings. To date, this program has been able to fund 43 projects totaling over \$1,000,000. However, the program has been paused due to increasing demands on the Region 4 USFWS's ANS funding.

The Panel and the GSMFC are continuing to support the Panel's Invasive Species Traveling Trunk program, which is still receiving steady use. The trunks have been utilized for approximately 1,660 days since being made available to the public during Summer 2012. Georgia DNR alone utilized the trunk to help educate over 1,300 students about the impacts of ANS between June and November 2022. At the fall panel meeting, a teacher who used the trunk in her science class gave a presentation. The Panel members followed with a long discussion about expanding content in the trunk and updating data on the current species. The ANS Program Coordinator is currently working on adding new species and securing more hands-on materials for the trunk. The Panel will also work to develop other resources as suggested by the teacher.



Nutria on top of wetlands vegetation.

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

Program Coordinator – Jeffrey K. Rester

The CARES Act Program began in 2020 after being created by the Commission to help administer funds from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) as signed into law March 27, 2020. On May 7, 2020, the U.S. 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. Four of five Gulf states were managed under this program. Each had participants including Tribes, persons, fishing communities, aquaculture businesses, processors, and other fishery-related businesses that incurred a loss as a direct or indirect result of the pandemic. CARES Act Program Coordinator Jeffrey K. Rester is assisted by Ashley P. Lott.

As part of the CARES Act Program, the Commission helped the states with another round of funding. The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 was signed into law December 27, 2020. The Act provided an additional \$300 million for fisheries disaster assistance. The funding was intended to respond to fishery-related COVID-19 pandemic impacts previously authorized under section 12005 of the CARES Act.

As previously specified in the CARES Act, fishery participants eligible for funding must have incurred an economic revenue loss greater than 35 percent as compared to the prior 5-year average revenue. The Commission referred to this new program as CARES Act 2.0.

CARES Act Funding by state:

Texas	\$ 7,795,841
Louisiana	\$12,477,165
Mississippi	\$ 3,000,000
Alabama	\$ 3,000,000
TOTAL	\$26,273,006

While most of this program's direct payments to affected participants took place in 2021, the Commission paid 277 Mississippi applicants \$2,923,033.59 in January 2022 and 470 Louisiana applicants \$355,558.38 in February 2022. These payments exhausted allocated funding for Mississippi and Louisiana. Alabama's allocation was spent in 2021.

In January 2022, Texas decided to offer a second chance qualification for CARES Act 2.0 funds to applicants whose original CARES Act application was denied. During the initial CARES Act application period, some applicants did not provide all qualifying documentation or missed deadlines for submitting required documentation. Texas gave these applicants a second chance to receive funding if their needed documentation was provided.

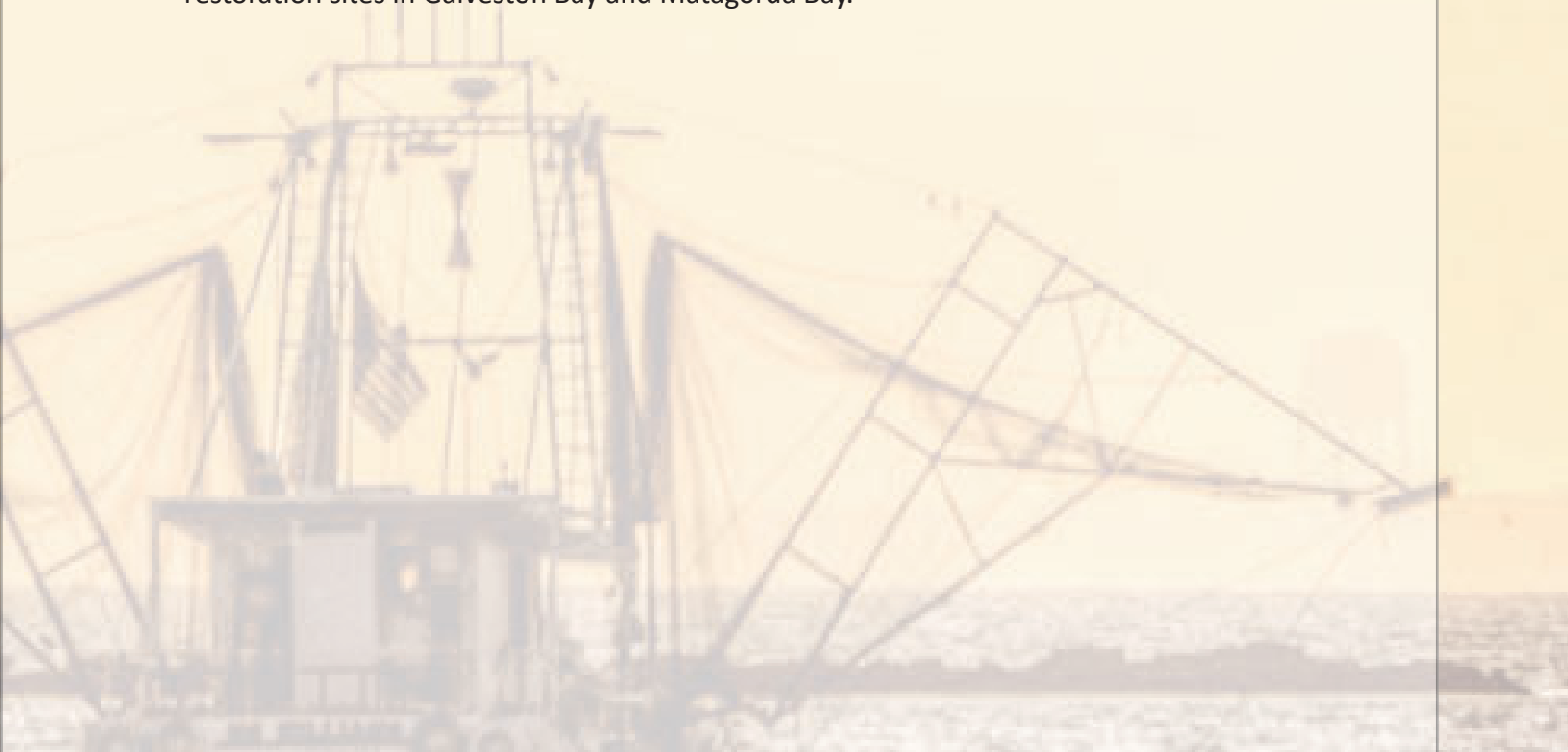
Letters explaining this funding opportunity were sent to these applicants by certified mail on February 1, 2022. Applicants were given 14 business days to submit required documents. In all, 85 applicants qualified to receive a second chance letter.

Texas did give applicants the chance to appeal until February 21. Most appeals consisted of tax documents for proving income, especially during 2020, which in many cases was suspiciously low in applications versus trip ticket landings data. Overall, Texas received 23 appeals, 12 of which were approved to be funded. On April 26, 2022, the Commission sent 12 payments totaling \$1,569,590.13 (effectively paying off all Texas applicants who qualified for funding).

Following those direct payments, Texas had \$5,019,028.26 remaining for projects. Texas proposed to use \$1,591,975 for a seafood marketing campaign designed by the Texas Department of Agriculture. The seafood media campaign would promote, expand, and elevate the consumption of Texas Gulf seafood with a goal to unite, market, and create consumer awareness for Lone Star shrimp, Blue crab, fish, and oysters. This plan was approved in April 2022.

Contractors for Texas began working that same month and attended meetings with the Texas Department of Agriculture and Texas Sea Grant to discuss the campaign, brainstorm ideas, develop a creative briefing presentation, and design campaign framework and a logo concept. Advertisements were placed on TexasMonthly.com; social media platforms (Facebook and Instagram); and in magazines: *Texas Highway*, *Edible Rio Grande Valley*, and *AgMag*.

Texas also proposed to use \$1.9 million for restoring 52.5 acres of oyster reefs and approximately \$1.5 million for the Texas commercial oyster boat license buyback program. The oyster restoration plan, which was approved in April 2022, involves planting cultch material on pre-approved restoration sites in Galveston Bay and Matagorda Bay.



ANNUAL MEETING SUMMARIES

The Annual Meeting of the Commission is held each year during the third week in October. A spring meeting is held annually during the third week in March. Upon written request of a majority of the Commissioners for each state from three or more states, the Chairman shall call a special meeting of the Commission. The regular meetings are rotated among the five states for Commissioners to better familiarize themselves with the fisheries and coastal areas of the entire Gulf of Mexico. Complete minutes of all Commission meetings are available on the Commission website.

March 2022

The Commission's **72nd Annual Spring Meeting** was held in Panama City Beach, Florida. The following summarizes various topics and actions taken by committee/subcommittee.

The **FIN Committee** extensively discussed warehousing state recreational survey data within the FIN Data Management System and how to disseminate those data to federal partners for use in science and management. Although concerns exist about appropriate use of data, partners were willing to proceed with documentation and data transmission plans to meet this goal. MRIP leaders delineated ongoing transition planning and general program-related updates. The committee was updated on projects such as Return 'Em Right and SEFHIER. GSMFC staff also shared progress on the Oracle Cloud Transition. In-depth discussions on FIN funding priorities for 2023 were also held.

The **Molluscan Shellfish Subcommittee (MSSC)** learned about a database that summarizes oyster restoration projects funded by DWH. Impacts on alternative oyster aquaculture from significant hurricanes in recent years were discussed. Oyster shell recycling programs, oyster management plans, and oyster restoration activities within each of the states were also covered. Of note, remote setting hatchery facilities are being used by most states to supplement restoration.

The **Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC)** received updates from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) Aquatic Nuisance Species (ANS) Small Grants Program, which focused on non-indigenous, invasive species. Updates also included tracking non-indigenous aquatic species; a parasite affecting freshwater Trout; population and diet of non-native Carp; and the impacts of an avian parasite caused by cyanobacteria on Hydrilla. A NOAA representative provided an update on the strategic plan for Deepwater Horizon fish and water column invertebrates. USGS representatives highlighted the importance of their partnership with the Commission. The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management addressed some frequently asked questions received during the comment period. Interjurisdictional Fisheries (IJF) program discussed project funding in 2022, with all states starting at \$194,960. IJF also completed a Red Drum profile. The CARES Act program distributed over \$26M to approved applicants in Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas.

The **SEAMAP Subcommittee** discussed the capabilities of Saldrones as autonomous drones for fishery independent sampling. Since Saldrones can supply several data streams simultaneously, SEAMAP had interest in partnering with other researchers and agencies to potentially supply data for several projects while collecting fishery independent data. The Subcommittee also reviewed the trawl and bottom longline operation manuals and discussed the cost per station for the various fishery independent surveys. The Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) needed detailed costs for the surveys to know how much the SEFSC was spending on surveys and how much funding was coming from state and other sources to support SEAMAP surveys. The Subcommittee again discussed the Vertical Line Survey and future vertical line sampling.

The **Crab Subcommittee** had several presentations on the predator-prey relationship Blue Crabs have across the Gulf. Texas discussed abundance trends based on predation, and Mississippi presented preliminary data on Red Drum stomach contents in relation to Blue Crabs.

October 2022

The Commission's **73rd Annual Meeting** was held in San Antonio, Texas. The following summarizes various topics and actions taken by committee/subcommittee.

The **Data Management Subcommittee** discussed progress of VESL development for collecting commercial trip ticket landings. Some partners were frustrated with the speed of development, however, Bluefin Data (the contractor developing this new web-based system) assured development speed was increasing. All partners agreed that more frequent virtual meetings including all partners would be beneficial. The subcommittee also discussed progress on the reef fish conversion factor project and further discussed warehousing state recreational survey data at FIN. The afternoon was reserved for partner review of 2021 commercial landings.

MSSC members provided oyster resource updates across the Gulf including trends in landings, aquaculture developments, restoration efforts, and closing/opening procedures for reefs. They also heard presentations regarding an oyster genetics consortium project and a summary of the Gulf of Mexico Alliance's (GOMA) Oyster Community of Practice. They will prioritize coordinating more with GOMA in the future.

The **TCC** heard about advanced technologies in marine fisheries through updates on capabilities of uncrewed surface vehicles to collect data, animal telemetry technology and analysis, using artificial intelligence and machine learning to monitor oyster restoration, using off-the-shelf bathymetry technology to map oyster reefs, and using camera-based video with artificial intelligence to monitor recreational fisheries effort in Florida. The Committee learned more on the development of genomic tools for genetic management of Tripletail and also received a response from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center Shrimp Bycatch Survey concerning how fish species are characterized in the shrimp bycatch survey. The Deepwater Horizon Hotspot Mapping Initiative was discussed and feedback solicited from the TCC. The Committee also reviewed onboarding materials for new TCC members and provided staff guidance. Beverly Sauls was elected chair and Nicole Beckman vice-chair for two-year terms (rotation is east to west around the Gulf).

(Continued on next page)

The **SEAMAP Subcommittee** discussed how funds dedicated for vertical line sampling will be used in FY2023. After discussing G-FISHER at the July meeting, the Subcommittee decided to use the unobligated funds for state participation in reef fish sampling and habitat mapping. Trawl surveys over the years have encountered what were termed ‘mud tows’, where the trawl net becomes filled with mud and sand during routine trawl sampling. SEAMAP encountered approximately a dozen mud tows during the 2022 SEAMAP Summer Shrimp/Groundfish Survey and started investigating possible areas where trawls were more likely to encounter mud tows. After analysis, it was not possible to identify areas where SEAMAP was more likely to encounter mud. The Subcommittee will develop an operation code specific for tows that encounter mud in order to better track these uncommon events.

The Subcommittee also discussed the distribution of SEAMAP data to researchers and the public. The current SEAMAP database contains ample data from surveys and projects occurring during SEAMAP operations yet did not conform to SEAMAP survey standards. Valuable information is contained within these data. However, it is incumbent upon the researcher to understand the database and its documentation so these non-SEAMAP samples are not used in analyses. The Subcommittee decided to distribute all data, and include a SEAMAP trawl-only database.

The **Menhaden Advisory Committee (MAC)** covered a number of routine topics regarding the 2022 fishing season and plans for 2023. They also reviewed the data needs to support ongoing ecosystem-based models for potential management. Dr. Kim de Mutsert from The University of Southern Mississippi gave an overview of the two ecosystem-based models that have been developed in the Gulf as related to Menhaden. The need for expanded diet data for a number of potential predators is critical to both models. MAC also discussed the suite of reference points provided as part of the assessment results in SEDAR63 and GDAR03. Currently, the limit and thresholds are based on historical average not to be exceeded. The Commission hosted two workshops in 2019 to look at options for managers prior to COVID-19 with no progression to date. The MAC agreed to hold another facilitated workshop in 2023 for Gulf Menhaden stakeholders to continue developing biological reference points for management to define ‘overfishing’ and ‘overfished’ status for the Gulf Menhaden stock.

The **Law Enforcement Committee (LEC)** met jointly with the Gulf Council’s LETC to discuss in-common topics. One was the recent use of Fish Attracting Devices (FADs) and possible consideration of any problems related to user group conflicts and FAD deployment. The group consensus was while the latter may eventually become an issue needing management, no simple way to address this currently exists with no urgent need for immediate action. The joint group also discussed the need to continue the Strategic Plan and Operations Plan for enforcement in the region. These documents were instrumental years ago, with reference to generating support for JEAs and other projects. However, the utility of these documents has changed over time and are not leaned upon like in the past. The LEC and LETC agreed to stop regularly updating the Strategic Plan. The plan will remain as general guiding principles with a vision and mission statement. If anything changes, revisits for updating this document may occur as needed.

STATE AGENCY PARTNER ACTIVITIES

Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas

The five Gulf state agencies continued to work through the Commission in 2022 on projects such as the FIN Data Program, IJF, and SEAMAP. Below are some highlights of those various Commission-related activities.

FIN: In 2022, 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 was also developed and is ongoing for all states in the Gulf of Mexico. All five states participated in the SEFHIER dockside validation survey.

IJF: The five state agencies provided representation on the Mangrove Snapper Technical Task Force. The states also continued work on IJF specific projects under the SuRF (State Research Funds) program. These included monitoring and data collection activities intended to fill gaps in knowledge for various IJF species in the region needed for management.

SEAMAP: SEAMAP operations continued for the forty-first consecutive year. State partners participated in work group meetings and several online workshops for invertebrate identification throughout the year.

Sport Fish: 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, which all Gulf states have representation.

ANS: States from the Gulf and South Atlantic Regions have continued to contribute and stay engaged on current issues related to aquatic invasive species.

FRP: Alabama, Mississippi, and Florida have been meeting routinely to coordinate and discuss data collection processes and standards related to the at-sea observer programs and state reef fish validation surveys. They have been working diligently to ensure these programs are successfully collecting necessary information while also being sensitive to the burden felt by stakeholders when gathering information from them. Representatives in Texas are considering an attempt to pilot an at-sea observer program to assess feasibility of participating at a larger scale in the future.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Senior Accountant – Angela R. Rabideau

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 and on the next page. The auditor's final report is available for review by request to the Commission.

YEAR IN REVIEW

The following presents a summary of net position for years ending December 31, 2022 and 2021. Detailed financial statements are available upon request at the Commission's main office.

GULF STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION CONDENSED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION FOR THE YEARS ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2022 AND 2021

	DECEMBER 31,	
	<u>2022</u>	<u>2021</u>
Current Assets	\$606,757	\$384,680
Non-Current Assets		
Post-Employment Health Plan Investment Account	\$306,530	\$369,977
Capital Assets	208,762	214,823
Total Non-Current Assets	<u>515,292</u>	<u>584,800</u>
Total Assets	<u>\$1,122,049</u>	<u>\$969,480</u>
Current Liabilities	\$9,542	\$17,209
Non-Current Liabilities	-	8,079
Total Liabilities	<u>\$9,542</u>	<u>\$25,288</u>
Net Position		
Investment in Capital Assets	\$200,683	\$175,496
Unrestricted	<u>911,824</u>	<u>768,696</u>
Total Net Position	<u>\$1,112,507</u>	<u>\$944,192</u>

**GULF STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION
CONDENSED STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES
FOR THE YEARS ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2022 AND 2021**

	DECEMBER 31,	
	<u>2022</u>	<u>2021</u>
General Revenues		
Member State Appropriation	\$90,000	\$112,500
Council Activities	45,000	45,000
Other Income	300	150
Interest Income	718	265
Dividend Income	11,637	10,760
Post Employment Health Plan Revenue	8,133	7,867
Registration Fees	9693	-
Realized/Unrealized Gain (Loss) on Investments	(80,794)	14,186
Gain (Loss) on Sale of Assets	(376)	7370
Program Revenues		
Collection & Dissemination of Recreational & Commercial Fisheries Information Network	7,775,951	5,604,276
Biological Sampling & Head Boat Sampling	1,597,822	1,080,930
Unallied Science Programs	1,478,909	1,476,573
Interjurisdictional Fisheries Management	1,644,158	866,337
Coordination of Recreational Fisheries Programs	223,893	188,626
Collection & Dissemination of Fishery-Independent Data & Information	831,752	377,935
SEAMAP Supplemental	134,496	65,965
Fisheries Restoration Project	872,211	139,291
CARES Act Recovery	5,804,073	43,169,984
Study of Aquatic Nuisances	166,717	73,694
Total Revenues	<u>\$20,614,293</u>	<u>\$53,257,868</u>
Expenses		
Programs	\$20,275,671	\$53,180,897
General and Administrative	170,307	132,913
Total Expenses	<u>\$20,445,978</u>	<u>\$53,313,810</u>
Change in Net Position	\$168,315	\$(55,942)
Net Position, Beginning	944,192	1,000,134
Net Position, Ending	<u>\$1,112,507</u>	<u>\$944,192</u>

PUBLICATIONS

Commission staff accumulates data, research papers, and other materials critical to further development of publications by the Commission including those from the Profiles and FMPs in progress. An electronic repository for papers referenced in these documents is continually expanded as more literature from outside sources and the Commission is added. A database on the Commission website provides for searchable keywords and links for downloading complete abstracts when available. All publications are housed electronically. Limited printed copies may be available upon request.

The Commission completed the following publications in 2022:

No. 316, October 2022. *SEAMAP Subcommittee Annual Report to the Technical Coordinating Committee of the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission October 1, 2021 to September 30, 2021*. Jeffrey K. Rester (Editor). Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

No. 315, February 2022. *Annual Report of the Fisheries Information Network in the Southeast Region (FIN) January 1, 2021 to December 31, 2021*. Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

No. 314, August 2022. *Licenses and Fees for Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas in Their Marine Waters for the Year 2021*. Debora McIntyre (Editor). Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission.

No. 313, July 2022. *Law Summary 2021. A Summary of Marine Fishing Laws & Regulations for the Gulf States*. Debora McIntyre (Editor). Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (online only).

No. 312, July 2022. *Awareness, Attitudes, Perceptions, and Use of Best Fishing Practices by Recreational Reef Anglers in the Gulf of Mexico*. Southwick Associates (Editor). Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (online only).

No. 311, May 2022. *SEAMAP Annual Report of the Southeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program (SEAMAP) October 1, 2020 to September 30, 2021*. Jeffrey K. Rester (Editor). Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (online only).

No. 310, March 2022. *Floundering Around - Evaluating a Declining Species in the SE United States*. Steven J. VanderKooy (Editor). Symposium Program. Embassy Suites by Hilton – Baton Rouge, March 29-30, 2022.

LYLES-SIMPSON AWARD

2022 Recipient - Tom McIlwain, Ph.D.

Originally named the Charles H. Lyles Award, the Commission annually recognizes an individual, agency, or organization for contributing to the betterment of the fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico through significant biological, industrial, legislative, enforcement, or administrative activities. In 2014, the award was renamed the “Lyles-Simpson Award” to include Larry B. Simpson, longtime Commission Executive Director. Open nominations by the full Commission are made at the Spring Meeting and selection is by secret ballot. The recipient is honored at the Commission’s Annual Meeting in October.

A lifelong resident of Coastal Mississippi, Thomas (Tom) McIlwain, Ph.D. both graduated and worked for The University of Southern Mississippi serving as Assistant Director of Fisheries at USM’s Gulf Coast Research Laboratory (GCRL) from 1978-1989 and Director until 1994. After retiring from GCRL, Tom joined the NMFS Pascagoula Laboratory as a fisheries administrator and retired from federal service in 2003 to return to GCRL and coordinate the expansion of facilities for the Thad Cochran Marine Aquaculture Center at the Cedar Point site. Tom also served as a Mississippi representative to the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council from 2006-2012 and was Council Chairman from 2007-2009. Tom passed in 2012 after a long battle with cancer.

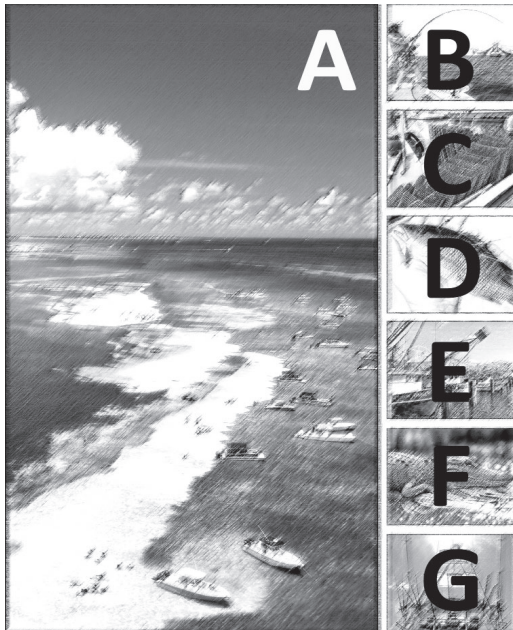
LYLES-SIMPSON AWARD RECIPIENTS

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 Perry	2020
Jerald K. Waller	2002	Thomas McIlwain	2022

*Due to COVID restrictions and virtual meetings, a recipient was not chosen for 2021.

CREDITS

The Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission and the Publishing Editors of this Seventy-Third Annual Report for 2022 would like to extend our sincere gratitude to the following individuals who have provided images for exclusive use by the Commission, specifically on the cover and inside spreads.



Cover Photos:

- A. Dan Eidsmoe
- B. Capt. Alex McIngvale
- C. Keith Wilson, StreetcarPR
- D. Jeff Rester, GSMFC
- E. Keith Wilson, StreetcarPR
- F. Ben Pierce Photography
- G. Sylvia Anderson

Inside Photo Spread:

Jeff Baldock/Creative Visions





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