

Commission on Marine Resources

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COMMISSION ON MARINE RESOURCES

COMMISSION MEETING

Tuesday, February 20, 2018
9:00 a.m.
Bolton Building Auditorium
1141 Bayview Avenue
Biloxi, Mississippi 39530

Commission Members:

Steve Bosarge, Chairman
Ron Harmon, Vice Chairman
Richard Gollott
Mark Havard

Also Present:

Joe Spraggins, Executive Director DMR
Sandy Chestnut, Esq., Assistant Attorney General

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COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: Good morning everyone.
It looks like we've got a pretty lively crowd today. I would like to welcome everybody to the February meeting of the Commission on Marine Resources.

To start it all off, I would like to ask Ron Harmon to lead us in the Pledge of Allegiance.

(Pledge of Allegiance was recited.)

COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: Next on the agenda is a moment of silence to do whatever you may want to do, thank the good people that protect us in this country, or whatever it may be.

(Moment of silence observed.)

COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: Approval of the minutes.

Do we have a motion to approve the minutes, or are there any changes to the minutes of the January meeting?

COMMISSIONER HARMON: Mr. Chairman, I make a motion that we approve the minutes.

COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: We have a motion.

Do we have a second?

COMMISSIONER HAVARD: I'll second that motion.

COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: We have a motion and a second.

All those in favor say aye.

(All in favor.)

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COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: Opposed?
(None opposed.)
COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: Motion carries.
Approval of the agenda.
Do we have any changes, or modifications, to the agenda?

COMMISSIONER GOLLOTT: Mr. Chairman, I would like to make a modification to the agenda. I would like to put Patrick Levine in other business.

COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: We have a motion.

Do we have a second?

COMMISSIONER HARMON: So seconded, Mr. Chairman.

COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: We have a motion and a second.

All those in favor say aye.

(All in favor.)

COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: Opposed?

(None opposed.)

COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: Motion carries.

Next is the Executive Director's report.

JOE SPRAGGINS: Just a couple of things.

We had a great day at Capitol Day. I appreciate everybody's support for that, and it worked out very good for the agency.

The other thing is one of our bills, the Oyster

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Shell Retention Bill, died in the Senate and it also died in the House, and we can go over that.

What has happened there is they want to have a meeting. They want to call a workshop with the legislators and sit down and go over this and try to work it out some more, and they promised me that they would do everything in their power to do it next year.

Sorry we didn't get that one through, but the other one is still working.

That's all I have.

COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: Which other one are you referring to?

JOE SPRAGGINS: The other bill is one to be able to allow the permitting to give government agencies ten years, rather than five years, to be able to help, like, the Ports. Whenever we do a permit for a Port, they have five years with a one-year extension, and we know it is never going to be complete and they have to go through all the paperwork.

COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: Thank you, Mr. Spraggins.

Next is the Office of Marine Patrol, Chief Davis.

Chief, we are going to hate to see you go, my friend. It seems like you just got here, but I've got to say you kept us all in line and kept everybody straight.

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1 You have done a great job.

2 KEITH DAVIS: Thank you.

3 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: Thank you for your
4 service, and I know where you're going you are going to
5 have your hands full, but, if anybody can handle it, I
6 know you can.

7 KEITH DAVIS: I certainly hope so, and I
8 appreciate those words.

9 The report this month is pretty straight
10 forward. There are a couple of things I do want to point
11 out.

12 On page one, when Biloxi Bay was open, we did
13 encounter one individual that was out of compliance by not
14 having a MSD onboard. One sack of oysters had to be
15 returned to sea.

16 On page three, some of you may wonder about the
17 category of individuals caught. We were checking for
18 wetlands violations and came upon an individual hunting
19 for ducks. The individual did not have a hunting license
20 and he did not have the proper stamps.

21 The last thing I want to mention is we did
22 encounter one commercial fisherman in possession of eight
23 spotted seatrout before the commercial season opened. The
24 individual knew that he was wrong for having the fish
25 onboard. When he noticed the officers, he had an

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1 expletive that indicated that he knew he was out of
2 compliance.

3 Any other questions on the report?

4 (No response.)

5 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: Thank you, Chief.

6 KEITH DAVIS: Thank you.

7 JOE SPRAGGINS: Mr. Chairman, if I may?

8 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: Yes, sir.

9 JOE SPRAGGINS: Chief Davis, thank you. We
10 appreciate you, and we wish you the best of luck in the
11 future.

12 KEITH DAVIS: Thank you, Director.

13 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: Next will be Office of
14 Marine Fisheries, Mr. Joe Jewell.

15 JOE JEWELL: Thank you Commissioners.

16 I would like to wish Chief Davis the best of
17 luck in his new position. We certainly appreciated the
18 time that he was here.

19 We have a pretty aggressive agenda this morning
20 both in Marine Fisheries and overall for the agency.

21 First up for Marine Fisheries, I want to give
22 our annual Marine Fisheries Year in Review. I'm going to
23 try and move through this presentation relatively quickly.
24 This is our normal end-of-the-year presentation, but, as
25 you know, we accomplish a lot during the year in the

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1 Office of Marine Fisheries.

2 Of course, I'm the office Director. Traci Floyd
3 and Mike Brainard are the Deputy Office Directors.

4 We have five bureaus. Artificial Reef is our
5 first bureau. It is directed by Mr. Jimmy Sanders. One
6 of their main functions is gillnet sampling. They sample
7 all of our inshore reefs to do an assessment on viability
8 and biological production. A total of thirty-six gillnet
9 sets were done, and almost eight hundred fish were
10 sampled, representing nineteen different species.

11 We did several deployment projects. One was in
12 conjunction with the CCA at Cat Island. Two hundred and
13 seven tons were deployed, creating four new sites. CCA
14 provided twenty-five thousand dollars in matched funds.
15 Artificial Reef Bureau provided seven thousand and the
16 material deployed.

17 We also did some deployment projects on our fish
18 havens. The first one was Lee Street Concrete Culvert
19 Deployment. It occurred over three of our major reef fish
20 havens, two, eight and thirteen, at eleven different
21 sites, enhanced seven existing sites and created four new
22 ones. About six hundred tons of material was used.

23 Donated material. Three companies donated
24 material to the Artificial Reef Bureau, in 2017. Fifty-
25 six loads were delivered; six hundred and sixty-three

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1 pieces of concrete material. This is a very nice use of
2 concrete material that would otherwise be waste, disposed
3 of, or broken up. They actually donate the time,
4 equipment and personnel to bring the materials to our
5 site, and, then, we are just obligated to deploy it
6 afterwards.

7 These are some of the outreach programs that the
8 Artificial Reef Bureau participates in:

9 Capitol Day, Jackson Wildlife Expo, Biloxi Boat
10 Show.

11 As with all other offices, we are tasked with
12 keeping up-to-date training and compliance. They
13 participated in Captain License. All of our major bureaus
14 were in this Captain License.

15 I do want to point out that at this point in our
16 office we have just over twenty certified U.S. Coast Guard
17 trained Captain License and, first for our agency, we have
18 a female Coast Guard Captain. We are very proud of that
19 accomplishment.

20 Our Finfish Bureau is directed by Mr. Matt Hill.
21 Two of our big programs are IJ and FAM. That's
22 Interjurisdictional and Fisheries Assessment Management.
23 These are given to us by Gulf States.

24 We completed ninety-six gillnet sets. We took
25 water quality parameters. Thirty-two species totaling

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three thousand fish were sampled. Approximately eight hundred otoliths were collected and processed from twelve different species.

Recreational and Commercial Harvest Programs. Of course, our main recreational one is the MRIP Program. There are three modes of survey; shore, party/charter and private/rental. A total of just over two thousand interviews were conducted through November of 2017.

Trip Ticket Program is primarily our commercial data collection. We processed over forty-eight hundred scannable trip tickets, and fifty-two hundred electronically submitted trip tickets. We set a new record of just over ten thousand trip tickets for 2017. We have five hundred and eighty-two active fishermen and dealers.

NFWF, our Reef Fish Project, is another one of our main primary programs. This program samples just over two thousand square miles of the Gulf of Mexico. We completed year two this year. We primarily focus on Red Snapper, but we do catch other species while out sampling. Survey focuses on artificial reefs, fish havens, oil and gas platforms, and rigs to reefs sites.

One hundred and sixty-one total sites were sampled, in 2017. Five hundred and fourteen fish were collected and are currently being processed.

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Another one of our main programs is Tails n' Scales Red Snapper. It's a recreational program. For 2017, recreational had sixty days; for-hire forty-nine days.

Total harvest was one hundred fifty-four thousand one hundred pounds. Number of fish harvested was just over twenty-seven thousand. The average weight was just over six pounds. The average length was just about twenty-two inches. Just over four thousand trips total. Effort was just over four anglers per vessel per trip, and harvest was about one-and-a-half fish per angler per trip.

On our graph on the right-hand side of the slide, you will see that we do a comparison between the MRIP data and the Tails n' Scales data. We feel like the Tails n' Scales data is a lot more accurate representation of the recreational fisheries. I do want to point out waves 5 and 6 are not yet computed for MRIP.

Reef Fish Observer Program. We completed a total of nineteen trips. Ten vessels participated; six federal for-hire and four state for-hire. We interacted with a hundred and forty-two different anglers. Eight species were observed, and three hundred and fifty-five Red Snapper discards were observed.

Red Drum Project. This is an acoustic telemetry tagging program. We have this established here in Biloxi

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Bay and Back Bay Biloxi.

We completed the acoustic array in Biloxi, and deployed over eighteen acoustic receivers within the project area. We tagged twenty-seven Red Drum with acoustic transmitters and dart tags. The goal is to have fifty Red Drum tagged by the end of March 2018.

For our Red Drum Sampling Program, we collected a hundred and six supplementary samples of Red Drum. Biological data taken from these samples include length, weight, sex, otoliths and stomachs. Data will provide additional information on age and growth, age at maturity and feeding habits of Red Drum along the Mississippi Coast.

Three hundred and twenty-five Red Drum stomachs were analyzed for contents, and three hundred and forty-eight Red Drum stomachs are currently being processed.

Biological Sampling. Approximately six hundred and fifty otoliths were collected and processed for aging. Nine recreationally and commercially important species were collected.

This is a list of all the species that were collected (indicating slide).

In 2017, over forty-five trips were conducted to obtain biological samples.

Assessments and Research Projects. Of course,

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our main assessment is through out Stock Assessment Panel. We completed two assessments. We did the annual update for 2017 of Spotted Seatrout, and we are currently in progress for Sheepshead which is scheduled to be presented before the Commission next month, March.

We reviewed external stock assessments for the State of Louisiana for Striped Mullet.

Our future stock assessment needs include Black Drum and the annual update for Spotted Seatrout.

Research Projects.

Trophic examination of Red Drum diets from different age classes.

Drought impacts on estuarine fish communities which is a manuscript that is done by a lot of our staff headed up by Dr. Mickle.

Menhaden Sampling Project.

Just over twenty-one thousand scales were mounted and submitted to the laboratory for analysis.

Additional Programs.

We have our State Fishing Record Certifications. Seven new State conventional tackle records were processed and certified by the Marine Commission for six different species.

We have our Monofilament Recycling Program. Currently Mississippi has forty-six recycling stations.

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1 Sixteen in Jackson County, twenty-four in Harrison County
2 and six in Hancock County.

3 Just over a hundred pounds of line has been
4 recycled. That's about two hundred and forty-two miles of
5 fishing line. Enough to reach from Biloxi to Tallahassee,
6 Florida.

7 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: That's amazing.

8 JOE JEWELL: It is a lot of material we have
9 moved out of the environment.

10 Our next bureau is the Seafood Technology Bureau
11 headed up by Ms. Ruth Posadas. As y'all know, this is one
12 of our most important programs. It ensures the safety of
13 the seafood consumed by the public.

14 This is an overview of our regulatory
15 responsibilities (indicating slide).

16 We had just over forty-seven hundred regulatory
17 inspections and technical assistance with the industry.

18 We passed our FDA PEER evaluation review.

19 We passed our FDA Vibrio Risk Management Plan.

20 We completed a hundred and twenty-two water
21 samples, in 2017.

22 This is an overview of all of our Mississippi
23 seafood dealers and processors (indicating slide).

24 As you can see, it kind of fluctuates for
25 different conditions in the market. We had Hurricane

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1 Katrina in 2005, the BP oil spill in 2010, and opening of
2 the Bonnet Carre in 2011 (indicating slide).

3 For our oyster processors, we are nearing the
4 levels that we were pre Katrina. The industry itself has
5 evolved into one, or two, major processors with a lot of
6 small mom and pop facilities.

7 Post Harvest Processing.

8 We have two main types that occur, individually
9 quick freezing and irradiation. We have three facilities
10 that have the capability of doing this.

11 Vibrio Risk Management Control.

12 This is our ability to keep under control and
13 monitoring of potential risks for Vibrio.

14 This is just a list of all the types of
15 inspections and responsibilities that this bureau has to
16 comply with those (indicating slide).

17 Public outreach, again, is another bit part of
18 ours. We have attended several major fairs and Celebrate
19 the Gulf.

20 Shellfish Bureau is headed by Mr. Erik
21 Broussard.

22 Licenses and harvest data.

23 If you will notice, the first two are
24 Mississippi dredge and Mississippi tong. That's the
25 darker blue and the red. They remained relatively stable

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1 until Katrina and the BP oil spill, and, then, our most
2 significant drop in landings is when the opening of the
3 Bonnet Carre occurred. We never really recovered from
4 that. We remained around thirty-five, or forty, thousand
5 sacks of oysters (indicating slide).

6 Bonnet Carre. The 2017 spring cultch plant.

7 We did a limestone cultch plant of just over
8 thirty-three thousand cubic yards over five hundred acres.

9 We have updated our restoration permit to
10 include about twenty-four thousand acres over a ten-year
11 period of our major commercial oyster reefs.

12 We did oyster reef cultivating. We just did
13 over five hundred acres; Pass Christian, Henderson Point
14 and Pass Marianne Reefs.

15 Our oyster relay activities. We relayed just
16 over three thousand sacks of oyster reef material from
17 Pascagoula Bay to Biloxi Bay.

18 We are also in the process of staging both
19 oyster shell and limestone at our artificial reef staging
20 site in Gulfport to start the 2018 cultch plants in Biloxi
21 Bay.

22 Growing Area Management.

23 We completed just over fifteen hundred fecal
24 coliform samples from shellfish growing waters.

25 We completed annual shoreline and sanitary

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1 surveys.

2 We identified actual, or potential, pollution
3 sources.

4 We maintain growing area classification.

5 We do Phytoplankton Monitoring. We did forty-
6 eight samples at four stations; two in Biloxi Bay and two
7 in Pass Christian.

8 Our HAB Program.

9 We did nineteen samples for the presence of a
10 jubilee fish kill that occurred in late July in Gulfport
11 harbor and extended westward into Long Beach.

12 Our Oyster Reef Assessment Program.

13 The MDMR completed just under five hundred
14 dives, square meter dives, and eighty one-minute dredge
15 tows, and this is a list of all the major reefs that were
16 analyzed during this process (indicating slide).

17 NRDA/MDEQ Cultch Monitoring.

18 We did a hundred and ten square meter dives and
19 thirty one-minute dredge tows across all of the western
20 Mississippi Sound NRDA Cultch Plant Sites.

21 There is a list of all the NRDA cultch plant
22 sites (indicating slide).

23 We had two major regulatory changes that
24 occurred, in Title 22 Part 1.

25 The first change impacted Chapter 18. What that

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essentially did was we had to split Biloxi Bay into north and south zones so that we could maintain harvest in the area.

Our second major regulatory change occurred in Chapter 7, and what this did was it banned the use of basket dredges.

Our research vessel, the Conservationist, is back up in action and doing good service for our agency in Marine Resources. It was christened on January 12th, 2017, by Governor Phil Bryant. It has done several relay activities and cultivation, and spat-on-shell deployments.

Future uses include planting of materials stored at the artificial reef staging site. We have acquired the hopper and graded the banks. Most of these improvements have already occurred.

Here are some of the major workshops and certifications that the bureau has been through (indicating slide).

One of our bigger ones was Mississippi's turn to host the Gulf and South Atlantic States Shellfish Conference. We had well over a hundred attendees from almost all the Gulf states, our Federal and State partners. It was very successful on behalf of our agency.

This is just a list of other programs that the Shellfish Bureau engages in during the year (indicating

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slide).

Next is the Shrimp and Crab Bureau. Mr. Rick Burris is the director of this bureau.

The 2017 Shrimp Season.

January 1st, we closed North of the ICW. May 1st, all waters west of the Gulfport Ship Channel were closed.

As you may recognize, Chairman Bosarge, that leaves this area east and south open year round for shrimping (indicating slide).

June 7th, 2017, the shrimp season opened.

Landings to date include just over ten million pounds, with a dockside value of almost seventeen million dollars.

If you notice from our landings chart that we have up here on the slide, you will see that we are slightly up over the last couple of years, and it is a slightly increasing trend upwards as far as landings, but the actual price of shrimp has remained relatively low.

Trawl Sampling is a program that supports a lot of the management decisions, including opening and closing of shrimp season.

Approximately three hundred and twenty trawl samples were collected; a hundred and seventy-six trawl samples for Mississippi's Shrimp Population Assessment and Monitoring Program and a hundred and forty-four trawl

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samples for the NOAA Project Monitoring and Assessment of Mississippi's Interjurisdictional Marine Resources.

2017 Crab Season.

The landings January through November -- the December data is still preliminary -- is just under a million pounds with a dockside value of one point three million dollars.

One hundred and thirty-three derelict crab traps were removed this year. We began utilizing side scan sonar to locate and remove submerged traps.

As you know, our previous chairman of the Marine Commission that was a big issue for him and how we would initiate the program for a lot of these traps that were abandoned and continue to fish being removed.

To date, the program has removed just over twenty-one thousand derelict crab traps, since 1999.

I do want to say, at the American Fisheries Society, their meeting this month, the Department of Marine Resources and the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory won the joint State award for their derelict crab trap removal. It is a big honor for both our agency and Gulf Coast Research Laboratory.

Again, if you notice, on our blue crab landings, the landing data is trending up, but, unlike shrimp, the value of crab meat is also trending very high (indicating

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slide).

Recreational Blue Crab CPUE, Catch Per Unit Effort, Study.

Assess the catch per unit effort and sex composition of the recreational blue crab fishery in our major bay areas; Bay St. Louis, Biloxi Back Bay and Pascagoula River.

Compare catch rates of different trap designs and bycatch reduction devices.

MDMR Crab Trap Bycatch Reduction Program.

Some of the main accomplishments this year; we distributed almost six thousand Terrapin Excluder Devices to two hundred and twelve Mississippi resident commercial and recreational crab fishermen. We distributed just over fifty-five thousand Crab Trap Escape Rings to five hundred and twenty-seven Mississippi resident commercial and recreational crab fishermen.

Diamondback Terrapin Reporting System.

This is a system that we developed at the Shrimp and Crab Bureau. We have so far to date twenty-nine registered commercial crab fishermen. Approximately three hundred and fifty-five surveys were submitted, from October to December, and forty-six Terrapins have been observed.

This map shows sort of the concentration of the

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1 Terrapin, as reported by the fishermen participating in
2 this program.

3 Licensed Live Bait Shrimp Dealers.

4 There are sixteen licensed live bait shrimp
5 camps, eleven licensed live bait catcher boats, just over
6 a million live shrimp sold through November of 2017, and
7 almost nineteen thousand pounds of dead shrimp sold
8 through November of 2017.

9 Sport Fish Restoration Projects.

10 The Mississippi Artificial Reef Program,
11 Assessment of Red Drum Stock in Mississippi Coastal
12 Waters, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Coordination and
13 Administration grant.

14 We had two that were administered with the Gulf
15 Coast Research Lab. One is a Sport Fish Tag and Release,
16 and one is the Mississippi Coastal Sport Fish Studies.

17 Other Programs.

18 We monitor and maintain the hydrological
19 monitoring stations. There are eleven of them. These are
20 located on our website for people to use.

21 We have our Special Permits Program. Thirty-
22 seven special research permits have been issued. These
23 are mainly to universities and research organizations.
24 Four experimental gear permits, and one brood stock
25 collection permit have been issued.

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1 That completes the year in review for Marine
2 Fisheries.

3 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: I tell you what, that is
4 amazing. That's a lot of good work, a lot of valuable
5 information coming out of your group. Some of it I have
6 been involved in, especially with the Crab Task Force.

7 Traci, a lot of good work.

8 I give you a big hand and your group on what you
9 do. You give us the information we need to make
10 management decisions. Thank you, from me.

11 JOE JEWELL: I appreciate that. I mainly give
12 most of the credit to our staff. We have a lot of
13 dedicated hardworking employees that work with both the
14 commercial and recreational fisheries and do a very good
15 job every day.

16 Next on the agenda for the Commission's
17 consideration, the next three items are an overview of the
18 Bonnet Carre Disaster Grant.

19 As the Commission is aware, this grant was
20 awarded for the opening of the Bonnet Carre Spillway in
21 2011. There were two components of this. There was the
22 disaster that occurred for the oyster industry and the
23 disaster that occurred in the crab industry.

24 First up is Ms. Kristina Broussard. She is
25 going to provide an overview of the disaster grant for

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1 oysters.

2 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: I have one question
3 before she starts. Mr. F. J. Eicke wanted to make a
4 public comment.

5 F. J. EICKE: I will do it after all of the
6 reviews.

7 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: All right. Thank you.

8 KRISTINA BROUSSARD: Good morning. My name is
9 Kristina Broussard. I'm with the Shellfish Bureau, and
10 I'm going to present on the Bonnet Carre Fisheries
11 Disaster Recovery Program for the Oyster and Blue Crab
12 Fisheries.

13 For the Bonnet Carre Program, there are two jobs
14 associated with this program. Job One is Oyster
15 Restoration and Job Two is Crab Restoration.

16 I'm going to give you an update on the Oyster
17 Restoration, Job One.

18 This job was funded at six million nine hundred
19 and nineteen thousand dollars. Job One is thirty-nine
20 percent complete. We have spent two million seven hundred
21 and ten thousand dollars. We have sixty-one percent
22 remaining at four million two hundred and eight thousand
23 dollars.

24 Job One is divided into five categories, and I
25 will go through each one of those.

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1 The first one is Job Title I.1, Mississippi
2 Oyster Restoration and Resiliency Long Term Plan.

3 This job was funded at one hundred and fifty
4 thousand dollars, and it is ninety-nine percent complete.
5 We spent one hundred and forty-seven thousand dollars, and
6 we have one percent remaining at two thousand dollars.

7 The goal of this project was to create the
8 Governor's Oyster Restoration and Resiliency Council.
9 They put together the final report, and the goal of this
10 report was to prioritize and recommend actions that
11 restore, enhance and sustain oyster resources in
12 Mississippi.

13 The next one is Job Title I.2, Commercial
14 Shellfish Reef Cultch Plants.

15 This job was funded at four million one hundred
16 and ten thousand dollars, and we have currently spent
17 thirty percent of that, at a total of one million two
18 hundred and nineteen thousand dollars. We have seventy
19 percent remaining at two million eight hundred and ninety-
20 one thousand dollars.

21 The goal of this Job I.2 is to enhance existing
22 Mississippi oyster reefs to provide increased fishing
23 opportunities for local fishermen and small businesses,
24 and also to replenish oyster habitat by depositing shell,
25 or other suitable cultch material, providing clean

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substrate for oyster spat attachment.

Just a side note on this. We do have one million dollars pending for two cultch plants for 2018.

Next is Job Title I.3, Oyster Stewardship Program.

This job was funded at three hundred thousand dollars, and we have currently spent seven percent of that, twenty-two thousand dollars. We have ninety-three percent remaining at two hundred and seventy-seven thousand dollars.

The goal of this job is to create a program to better educate and promote the active involvement of oyster harvesters and the industry in harvest practices and other techniques that can be used to assist resource managers.

Also, some of these funds will be used to provide replacement fishing gear to fishermen, with the intended purpose of reducing negative impacts to marine fisheries habitats.

Next is Job Title I.4, Commercial Oyster Reef Substrate Mapping.

This job was funded for two hundred and four thousand dollars, and it is one hundred percent complete.

The goal of this job was to survey reef areas and potential cultivation and cultch plant sites to

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determine suitability for oyster reef restoration and/or enhancement work.

Finally, we have Job Title I.5, Commercial Oyster Reef Cultivation and Relay Program.

This job was funded for two million one hundred and fifty-four thousand dollars. It is currently fifty-two percent complete at one million one hundred and sixteen thousand dollars, with forty-eight percent remaining at one million thirty-seven thousand dollars.

The goal of this job was to cultivate reefs, exposing covered shell and removing some of the encrusting materials and, also, to relay oysters from areas of greatest abundance to areas of greatest need.

A good portion of this money was spent on the St. Joe relay, in January of 2016. We moved forty thousand sacks from St. Joe and, of that, twenty-four thousand eight hundred and sixty-five sacks were moved to Pass Christian Tonging and Dredging Reefs, and fifteen thousand one hundred and seventy-eight sacks were moved to Shearwater Reef in Biloxi Bay.

Now, I would like to introduce Erik Broussard who will give more details about this. This is a big job.

ERIK BROUSSARD: Good morning Commissioners, Director Spraggins, Ms. Chestnut.

The Commission requested the staff look into a

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possible funding source for a potential work program back at the November Commission meeting. We have identified Job I.5 of the Mississippi Bonnet Carre Grant.

Job Title I.5, Commercial Oyster Reef Cultivation and Relay Program.

As Ms. Broussard just spoke about, the job was two point one million dollars. It is fifty-one percent complete.

For the St. Joe relay, I spent about one point one million, and there is about forty-eight percent left, or a little over a million dollars. It would be a potential funding source with enough to sustain our work program.

Staff's recommendation would be to relay oysters from the Pascagoula Causeway Reef and the West River Reef. The Commission, again, has expressed interest in moving oysters from a greater abundance to a lesser abundance, as well as direct the staff to move oysters from these reefs.

It would accomplish the overall goals of the grant, as well as some of the goals of the Commission.

We would use commercial oyster fishermen that qualify for the Bonnet Carre Grant, which would be very similar to what the St. Joe relay looked like, except for the method of take would be tonging, instead of dredging.

We would use a contractor to transport relayed

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material on a barge to reefs in Biloxi Bay, or the Western Sound.

The reason that we would recommend toning versus dredging is -- here you have a map of these two reefs, the Causeway Reef on the right and the West River Reef on the left -- these areas are very shallow and they are also small. If we had a large fleet -- there are over a hundred qualified fishermen for the Bonnet Carre Grant -- it would really condense fishing effort. With that many boats, if it were to get dredged, we would have a concern about the condensed fishing effort having a negative impact on these reefs.

These are some of the last healthy reefs that are thriving currently in the State, and we feel like tonging would minimize the impact, as well as accomplish some of the overall goals.

A couple of hurdles. As you see on the Causeway Reef, there is a thin black line that is currently the line between prohibited to the east, or right, of the line, and restricted to the left. We can move material from the left of the line to the west.

We are actively in the process of upwardly classifying this area and moving the line so we would have access to the whole Pascagoula Causeway Reef. We have just sent off samples and pending those results, we will

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1 know if we can move the line, or not.

2 Also, contracting is a timely process. It's not
3 something we could probably get together in the next
4 month, or so, which would put us closer to the warmer
5 months which can really have an impact on the oyster, if
6 we get into June and some of those months, and we would
7 increase mortality and be counterproductive.

8 This is something we envision probably next
9 fall, or winter.

10 With that being said, if this is something the
11 Commission would want to move forward with, we could start
12 the process, now, so all these things would be addressed
13 and things would be in place for next year.

14 Any questions?

15 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: As far as myself, I
16 believe we need to move forward with it. I'm glad to see
17 there are some funds available for it. It sounds like you
18 are gearing up towards using some fishermen, and it is
19 structured in a way that it benefits everybody.

20 Richard, have you got any questions, or anything
21 you would like to say?

22 COMMISSIONER GOLLOTT: I would like to see the
23 price that you are proposing to pay the fishermen to do
24 this and the time line.

25 September is the best month to do this. This is

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1 when they do it in Louisiana and have great success.

2 I would just like to see more of the details on
3 this program that you are going to do.

4 One more question. That black line that you
5 showed, what is the difference in two feet one way, or the
6 other, on the prohibited and restricted?

7 If you can't answer that, now, we will wait
8 until later, but I was just curious.

9 ERIK BROUSSARD: We are working on changing the
10 line, and we can talk more about the area classification.

11 COMMISSIONER GOLLOTT: You are going to move the
12 oysters to Biloxi Bay, with tonging?

13 ERIK BROUSSARD: This is just to give everybody
14 some ideas, or some options. We can discuss the details
15 of how many sacks, price, where they go, as this
16 progresses.

17 COMMISSIONER GOLLOTT: That's the kind of stuff
18 I would like to sit down and talk about. Thank you.

19 JOE JEWELL: Commissioners, if y'all want us to
20 proceed with the program as we have it, now, we need a
21 vote for us to at least start progress on the program that
22 we presented to y'all here today.

23 You just need to vote and tell us to progress
24 with the recommendation that we made today.

25 COMMISSIONER GOLLOTT: Mr. Chairman, I would

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1 like to make a motion that we go forward with this program
2 and explore the options that we would have for it.

3 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: We have a motion.

4 Do we have a second?

5 COMMISSIONER HARMON: So seconded, Mr. Chairman.

6 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: We have a motion and a
7 second.

8 All those in favor say aye.

9 (All in favor.)

10 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: Opposed?

11 (None opposed.)

12 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: Motion carries.

13 We do have one public comment on this that I
14 would like to get to, Mr. Ryan Bradley.

15 JOE JEWELL: I just want to say what that means
16 is that we will develop a program and have a lot more
17 detail and present it.

18 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: State your name, please.

19 RYAN BRADLEY: Good morning. My name is Ryan
20 Bradley. I'm with the Mississippi Commercial Fisheries
21 United.

22 I just want to say thank you for taking this
23 vote today and advancing this forward. Commercial
24 fishermen really need all the help they can get. Working
25 with them on this relay would definitely give them a shot

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1 in the arm.

2 We would be happy to sit down in a workshop to
3 discuss some of the details of this program, some of the
4 procurement concerns. We've done some research into the
5 requirements for that, and there may be some ways we can
6 get around some of that stuff. We would be glad to look
7 at it further.

8 Being that you already took the vote on this
9 today, I'm not going to say much more, but, again, thank
10 you for your vote. We appreciate it.

11 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: Thank you, Mr. Bradley.

12 JOE JEWELL: I think we had one additional
13 comment.

14 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: I think so.

15 JOE JEWELL: Ms. Thao Vu, would you like to
16 comment, now, or wait until later?

17 THAO VU: I have a number of comments. I'll
18 wait until later.

19 JOE JEWELL: Ms. Vu says that she is going to
20 wait until the presentation is finished.

21 Next for Marine Fisheries is the completion of
22 the Bonnet Carre Job II, and Mr. Rick Burris will give
23 that presentation.

24 RICK BURRIS: Good morning Mr. Chairman,
25 Commissioners, Mr. Spraggins, Ms. Chestnut.

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1 The previous two presentations were on the
2 oyster side of the Bonnet Carre Spillway Project. Now, we
3 will focus on Job II, Crab Restoration.

4 Job II, the Crab Restoration Project, received
5 one point five million dollars. Currently, we are fifty-
6 seven percent complete, at eight hundred and fifty-nine
7 thousand six hundred and forty-three dollars spent. The
8 remaining is six hundred and forty-four thousand five
9 hundred and sixty-six dollars.

10 There are five projects within this job.

11 The first one is Job II.1, Commercial and
12 Recreational Blue Crab Catch-Per-Unit-Effort, or CPUE. It
13 is contracted with the Gulf Coast Research Lab. They have
14 been implementing this program in the commercial sector,
15 since 2007.

16 Job II.1 was budgeted five hundred and twenty-
17 five thousand dollars. It is currently fifty-three
18 percent complete, with two hundred and seventy-five
19 thousand seven hundred and six dollars spent, and the
20 remaining portion is two hundred and forty-nine thousand
21 dollars.

22 What this job does is we are able to collect
23 important catch-per-unit-effort data and size and sex
24 characteristics of the commercial and the recreational
25 blue crab fishery that we don't normally capture in our

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1 landings, so it is very helpful. It is used in stock
2 assessments across the Gulf. Like I said, we don't
3 normally capture this data.

4 The recreational data is basically one of a
5 kind. We just started doing this. It was previously non
6 existent. It is very valuable information in managing the
7 crab fishery.

8 Job II.2, Predation on Juvenile Blue Crabs by
9 Red Drum has a budget of one hundred and forty thousand
10 two hundred and nineteen dollars. It is currently thirty-
11 five percent complete. We spent forty-eight thousand
12 dollars, and the remaining portion is ninety-one thousand
13 dollars.

14 What this job does is it collects Red Drum from
15 our existing fishery independent sampling and supplemental
16 fishery dependent sampling, and analyzes stomach contents
17 to determine how much of an impact this resurgent species
18 is having on our juvenile blue crabs. We have seen a lack
19 of juvenile blue crabs in our sampling for a long time,
20 now, and the commercial adult catch as well.

21 This could be very valuable information to
22 manage the fishery, as we move forward.

23 Job II.3, Blue Crab Life History, Recruitment
24 and Habitat Needs.

25 This is also contracted to the Gulf Coast

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1 Research Lab. It was budgeted at three hundred and twelve
2 thousand seven hundred and thirty dollars. It is
3 currently sixty-two percent complete, and there is one
4 hundred and twenty thousand dollars remaining.

5 This project provides the needed information on
6 blue crab recruitment dynamics and will supply information
7 on habitat requirements through expanded current sampling.

8 Job II.4, Shorelines Initiative to Enhance Crab
9 Habitat.

10 This job is complete. We spent two hundred and
11 fifty-six thousand eight hundred dollars.

12 If you remember, our 2016 crab cleanup was
13 funded by this particular Job II.4. It was back in April
14 of 2016, and a total of twenty-five hundred traps were
15 brought in and recycled.

16 Job II.5, Crab Trap Bycatch Reduction Voluntary
17 Program.

18 It was budgeted two hundred and sixty-nine
19 thousand two hundred and sixty dollars. We are currently
20 thirty-two percent complete, with one hundred and eighty-
21 three thousand dollars remaining.

22 The funds are for our Terrapin Excluder Device
23 Distribution Program, of which we distributed six thousand
24 Terrapin excluder devices to both our commercial and
25 recreational crab fishermen.

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1 Through this particular funding project, overall
2 we have distributed nineteen thousand five hundred TEDs.

3 Our Bycatch Reduction Device Distribution
4 Program, or escape rings.

5 Since the Commission voted to make crab trap
6 escape rings mandatory in all the traps, we started
7 distributing these rings to our fishermen free of charge,
8 and we have given out fifty-six thousand BRDs so far. It
9 is very popular with the fishermen, especially since we
10 enacted this regulation. They are very pleased that they
11 are able to get that gear from us free of charge.

12 Also, this project funds a Diamondback Terrapin
13 Reporting System. We presented it to the Commission last
14 month.

15 With that, I will take any questions.

16 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: On some of the research
17 projects, how much longer do they have?

18 RICK BURRIS: 2020.

19 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: There has been a bunch of
20 work done with the crabs with escape rings.

21 The Diamondback terrapin, that app, that was
22 amazing to me that that could come out of this group
23 because I'm computer illiterate. I can't see how that
24 happened, but it happened and that's good.

25 RICK BURRIS: We have some very capable people.

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COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: I would say that.

Any further questions?

(No response.)

COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: Thank you, Rick.

JOE JEWELL: We do have some very talented people on our staff, but we did work in conjunction with our IT folks.

Next we have two regulatory changes that will be presented by Mr. Travis Williams and Mr. Jonathan Barr. These are Federal regulations that we are proposing changes in our State regulations to be consistent.

First is Mr. Travis Williams with King Mackerel.

COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: Mr. Eicke, you wanted to speak, now?

F. J. EICKE: I do.

COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: Could you hold on to your thoughts just for a minute?

TRAVIS WILLIAMS: Yes.

F. J. EICKE: Good morning Commissioners. My name is F. J. Eicke. I'm with CCA and, on the first point, I would indicate that there was a third partner in the reef enhancement, and that was a group that spun off from CCA called Building Conservation Trust and they are a whole lot better at getting money than we are. That showed in that particular artificial reef.

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What I'm making a statement about -- I'm here as an individual, but representing some CCA members who have expressed concerns about generally the oyster resource and how it is being managed, and what we are doing is we are talking in terms of the values that we have always had, CCA members for conservation and environmental concerns.

The point I want to make is that Marine Resources is really a larger thing than just oysters. It includes oysters, obviously, as a major component, but sometimes we lose site of the total marine environment.

In the statement that I presented to you, which is similar to what I'm saying, there is a reference to an article, actually three articles, in the PressRegister@aol.com that I would recommend that you read.

I realize that Alabama and Mississippi are not exactly the same situation, but I'm familiar with his writings in that area and on environmental issues, and he did a great job of analyzing them, and I wish we had a similar article for Mississippi. It might be very enlightening.

We all know that oysters are an important component of the marine environment, when it functions as it should. We are human, however, and that leads us to tinker with this environment for commercial gain leading

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to, perhaps, reduction in biomass of oysters to a less than critical level, but it does not sustain the resource and benefit the total marine environment.

A major portion of the number of members who have come to me are concerned about the eastern side of the Coast, the Pascagoula watershed area and relay of oysters and whether this is going to deplete the resource to the point that it will not sustain what it has been and what it can be in the future.

You can take that into consideration as you will. You just did a vote to relay more. I don't know how that fits, but some of my members would be concerned about that.

We have spent tremendous funds on the oyster resource. We all know that, but we haven't gotten to the goal and we all know that the oyster population is susceptible to many factors attested to by the Bonnet Carre Spillway, but we all know about Katrina and what happened after it and any number of other events that we have had no control over and have had to react to.

Am I passed my time?

COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: Yes.

F. J. EICKE: I'm almost finished. Give me another few seconds.

What we do is we urge the Commission to think

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clearly about this. I know you attempt to do that, and we put our faith in you to do that, but we have more stakeholders than just the oyster harvesters and the commercial oyster industry.

I would also ask you to read the article in the Press Register. It is great, and I think it makes some points that perhaps are applicable to Mississippi.

COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: Thank you, Mr. Eicke.

We've got a pretty good team working on oysters. We are going to listen to them closely.

Ms. Thao Vu.

JOE JEWELL: I think Ms. Vu wants to wait until after all of the Marine Fisheries presentations.

COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: All right.

TRAVIS WILLIAMS: Good morning Chairman, Commissioners, Director Spraggins, Ms. Chestnut.

This action item is a regulatory change to Title 22 Part 7 Chapter 8. It's a recreational bag limit change for King Mackerel.

Recently, NOAA announced a final rule implementing Amendment 26 to the Fishery Management Plan for Coastal Migratory Pelagics in the Gulf of Mexico, specifically for the western zone, the Gulf of Mexico group.

This amendment increased the recreational bag

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1 limit from two fish to three fish per day. It also
2 increased the commercial quota about a hundred and sixty
3 thousand pounds.

4 We like to have our State and Federal
5 regulations consistent for federally-managed species.
6 This consistency reduces the concern recreational anglers
7 may have regarding the different rules and regulations
8 between State and Federal waters. It also removes any
9 confusion that law enforcement may have as well.

10 For the record, the regulation will read as
11 follows:

12 "Chapter 8 Section 100 Subsection 100.04,
13 Recreational Bag, Possession and Size Limits.

14 100.04 Three (3) King Mackerel (*Scomberomorus*
15 *cavalla*)."

16 What is required from the Commission is a motion
17 for a Notice of Intent to amend Title 22 Part 7 Chapter 8
18 Section 100 Subsection 100.04, Recreational Bag Limit for
19 King Mackerel.

20 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: I think King Mackerel is
21 one of the few species that seems to be doing pretty well.

22 COMMISSIONER HAVARD: I have a question.

23 What does our staff recommend?

24 Do you guys recommend following the Federal
25 recommendations?

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1 TRAVIS WILLIAMS: Yes, we do.

2 As I mentioned, they are federally-managed
3 species. Our Mississippi waters still govern out three
4 nautical miles. We do recommend going with the Federal
5 increase for management.

6 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: Do we have a motion?

7 COMMISSIONER HARMON: Mr. Chairman, I make a
8 motion for a Notice of Intent to amend Title 22 Part 7
9 Chapter 8 Section 100 Subsection 100.04, recreational bag
10 limit on King Mackerel.

11 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: We have a motion.

12 Do we have a second?

13 COMMISSIONER GOLLOTT: I'll second that, Mr.
14 Chairman.

15 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: We have a motion and a
16 second.

17 Any further discussion?

18 (No response.)

19 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: All those in favor say
20 aye.

21 (All in favor.)

22 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: Opposed?

23 (None opposed.)

24 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: Motion carries.

25 JOE JEWELL: Our next presentation will be done

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1 by Mr. Jonathan Barr on the Gray Triggerfish.

2 JONATHAN BARR: Thank you, Joe.

3 Good morning Commissioners, Director Spraggins,
4 Ms. Chestnut.

5 As Joe and Travis mentioned, we like to stay up
6 to date with the Federal regulations. With your
7 permission, we would like update Title 22 Part 7 Chapter
8 8, Recreational Bag and Size Limit Change for Gray
9 Triggerfish.

10 This is the Fishery Bulletin we were given by
11 NOAA highlighting the recreational change:

12 "The recreational bag limit will be one Gray
13 Triggerfish per angler per day within the twenty reef fish
14 aggregate bag limit."

15 The recreational minimum size limit will go up
16 to fifteen inches from fourteen inches.

17 Chapter 8 Section 100 Subsection 100.14.01,
18 Recreational Bag, Possession and Size Limits.

19 We are adding the words "reef fish" to match the
20 Federal wording to read:

21 "Twenty (20) reef fish aggregate".

22 Chapter 8 Section 100 Subsection 100.14.01, once
23 again, we are not marking anything out. We are just
24 adding words to read:

25 "Gray Triggerfish (*Balistes capriscus*) - may

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1 possess one (1) within the twenty (20) reef fish
2 aggregate".

3 Chapter 8 Section 102 Subsection 102.12. We are
4 striking out fourteen and underlined is "fifteen (15)", to
5 read:

6 "Gray Triggerfish fifteen (15) inches (fork
7 length)".

8 Required is a motion for Notice of Intent to
9 Amend Title 22 Part 7 Chapter 8 Section 100 Subsection
10 100.14.01 and Section 102 Subsection 102.12 for
11 recreational bag and size limit for Gray Triggerfish.

12 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: Any questions?

13 (No response.)

14 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: Do we have a motion?

15 COMMISSIONER HAVARD: Mr. Chairman, I'll make a
16 motion for Notice of Intent to amend Title 22 Part 7
17 Chapter 8 Section 100 Subsection 100.14.01 for
18 recreational bag and size limit change for Gray
19 Triggerfish.

20 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: We have a motion.

21 Do we have a second?

22 COMMISSIONER HARMON: Mr. Chairman, I will go
23 ahead and second that.

24 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: We have a motion and a
25 second.

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1 All those in favor say aye.

2 (All in favor.)

3 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: Opposed?

4 (None opposed.)

5 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: Motion carries.

6 JOE JEWELL: Thank you, Commissioners.

7 I think this is the point where Ms. Thao Vu
8 would like to make her comments.

9 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: Ms. Vu.

10 THAO VU: Good morning Director, Commissioners.
11 Thao Vu with the Mississippi Coalition for Vietnamese
12 American Fisher Folks and Families.

13 Thank you to Mr. Jewell and the staff of the
14 Marine Fisheries for giving an update, particularly for
15 the Bonnet Carre Spillway funds.

16 First of all, I need to reiterate how critically
17 important healthy oysters are. It's a keystone species.
18 Not all species in the ecosystem are considered critical
19 keystone species.

20 We do commend the Marine Fisheries Bureau,
21 particularly Mr. Broussard and the staff, for proposing
22 the oyster relay program. That has been a proven
23 longstanding method of restoring oysters, increasing
24 oyster population, longstanding with our fishermen.

25 Many of our fishermen couldn't make it, but a

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1 group of them are back there, and they have been involved.
2 Even for years following Hurricane Katrina, that was
3 highly successful and proven to work.

4 The concerns about relaying oysters from the
5 Eastern Sound to over here are not warranted because it is
6 a legitimate longstanding scientifically proven method of
7 working.

8 Further, reefs need some cultivation. A lot of
9 those reefs in the Eastern Sound have remained closed,
10 dormant. We know they are sampling. We know they are
11 monitoring activities, but it needs some occasional
12 cultivation.

13 I do want to remind the Commissioners, the staff
14 and the Director that most of the tongs in the State of
15 Mississippi licensed -- we have a list of all commercial
16 oyster fishermen, the dredgers and the tongs. Most of
17 the tongs are not in state. They are from Alabama.

18 We should be doing our best to help our local
19 fishermen. They are seriously financially struggling.
20 Last year was the worst year ever. Ten thousand sacks, or
21 less. We cannot reach our million sack goal that was
22 stated in the Governor's Oyster Council report. We can
23 never reach that, with ten thousand sacks, or less, or a
24 little bit more by 2025.

25 Our local fishermen, they have the experience.

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1 They know the waters. They are the ones who need the work
2 and they have the small boats, very small skiff boats that
3 are capable of doing some of the reef activities that are
4 being proposed. In fact, some of them are sitting back
5 there. They have these small boats.

6 We are willing to work with you, in terms of
7 making sure there is adequate outreach to inform everyone
8 who is qualified, any necessary training activities that
9 may need to be taken through a workshop, or whatever we
10 need to do, another public meeting. Thank you.

11 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: Thank you, Ms. Vu.

12 Joe, do you have any comment?

13 JOE JEWELL: I was just going to say that
14 completes our report, but I do want to address one of the
15 concerns that Ms. Vu had.

16 As Mr. Broussard indicated in his presentation,
17 only those Mississippi resident applicants that were
18 licensed under a Bonnet Carre event would be eligible.

19 Tongs from other states are not eligible for
20 this proposed program. I just want to make that clear.

21 If there are no other questions, that completes
22 the Office of Marine Fisheries.

23 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: That has been quite a
24 presentation.

25 I would like to propose a ten-minute break. We

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1 will take just a short break.

2 (CMR meeting stands in recess.)

3 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: I would like to call the
4 meeting back to order.

5 Next on the agenda is Mr. Jan Boyd, Coastal
6 Resources Management.

7 JAN BOYD: Good morning Mr. Chairman,
8 Commissioners, Director Spraggins, Sandy.

9 We have a very short presentation. Willa is
10 going to give you an update of what we did last month.

11 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: All right. Thank you.

12 WILLA BRANTLEY: Good morning. Yes, very short,
13 one slide. I just wanted to take you over our numbers of
14 what we had come in.

15 We had seventy-two new actions received. Most
16 of those, over three-quarters of those are applications,
17 but some are just requests to review projects and some of
18 those are violations that got reported. We closed sixty
19 items out this month.

20 These are typical numbers for this time of year.
21 It's starts picking up, usually, after Mardi Gras, so we
22 will see more coming in than what we've gotten closed out
23 because we had fewer come in last month.

24 If you have any questions about anything in
25 particular we worked on, I will be glad to answer them.

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COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: I don't have any questions. As long as we don't see any here, you are doing a great job.

WILLA BRANTLEY: We've got nothing this month and, so far, nothing next month, but we'll see.

COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: Thank you.

WILLA BRANTLEY: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: Next will be Office of Coastal Restoration and Resiliency, Mr. George Ramseur.

GEORGE RAMSEUR: Thank you. Good morning Commissioners, Director Spraggins, Sandy.

I know we don't get in here very often, but we have been working for a couple of months to get in to give you an update on restoration activity. Quite a lot has changed in the overall landscape of restoration in the last year.

Dr. Mickle has been good enough to help me work on some of the aspects, like, the financial sides and other things, which he is going to get up and give you a rundown on initially, and, then, I get to do the fun stuff after that.

Dr. Mickle.

PAUL MICKLE: Thank you, George.

Good morning Commissioners, Director Spraggins, Ms. Chestnut.

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I will let George take over shortly, but, first, I requested this presentation to accomplish several goals this morning; to provide a brief to some of the new Commissioners on the BP Restoration Funding format, share the need for restoration of the Mississippi Sound, emphasize the importance of your role in this tremendous opportunity we have, and introduce the many agencies, organizations and people that are involved with this great endeavor.

The MDMR and Mississippi DEQ are the main State agencies most directly involved, and luckily we have a wonderful relationship with Mississippi DEQ.

I would like to introduce Chris Wells, Chief of Staff and my counterpart at the agency, DEQ, who has shown up here today, has driven down from Jackson to show his support on the subject matter and this great endeavor we are taking on.

Many of you already know a lot about this, but I do want to just do a broad overspread of kind of the funding streams that actually occurred, when the BP oil spill settlements come to fruition.

All of the monies that have come to the settlements have kind of come through three major streams of funding.

NRDA is Natural Resource Damage Assessment which

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is contributed to making the environment and the public whole by restoring, rehabilitating, replacing, or acquiring, the equivalent of natural resources, or services, injured by the oil spill.

NFWF, or National Fish Wildlife Foundation, is a foundation which takes the value of restoring and maintaining the ecological functions of landscape scale, coastal habitats, including the barrier islands, beaches, coastal marshes, and ensure the viability and resilience against existing and future threats.

It kind of gets confusing, but NRDA is to restore what has been damaged, and NFWF is to restore what has been damaged, but, also, to take on at liberty enhancing the viability and resilience against existing and future threats. There is a little bit more ability to do certain things with NFWF versus NRDA.

The last one is RESTORE that I'm sure you have heard a lot about, and that literally stands for Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourist Opportunities and Revived Economies, which is a very long and interesting acronym, but it actually gets very confusing.

When the funds came through the Clean Water Act penalties, twenty percent of those total funds were syphoned off in the Liability Trust Fund, and, then, the remaining eighty percent goes into the buckets which I'm

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sure you have heard of, in the five buckets of direct component, council selected restoration component, impact component, Gulf Ecosystems Restoration Science Program which goes pretty much directly to NOAA, and the Centers of Excellence Program which is our academic institutions in the State of Mississippi. Our universities get to do research and provide the information that this Commission needs to make the management decisions and to allow y'all to do your jobs as well.

With that, I will turn it back over to George, but, again, I just wanted to do a broad overview and provide information to y'all as needed. This is a long journey we are going to take, ten, fifteen, twenty years. Snap decisions are definitely the thing we don't need to do. We need to move forward with as much information and science as we have to make these big impacts and to make sure the Mississippi Sound ends up to where we can have viable sustainable populations of our Marine resources.

GEORGE RAMSEUR: Thank you, Paul.

We prepared a pretty compact run through. It looked like it was going to be a pretty long meeting today, but I did want to emphasize that this is the start of a conversation and by no means a comprehensive recap of everything we see on the horizon.

The great question that I have had to answer a

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number of times, talking about the country, is why is Mississippi engaged in restoration.

Most people probably realize that we are losing a lot of land, but we are actually second in overall rate of land loss behind Louisiana, approximately, over two hundred acres a year for as far back as we can measure, essentially.

If you take the 1950's, for example, and bring it forward to current time, that means we have lost about twelve thousand acres of Coastal lands, a lot of it habitat that is critical for fisheries and that sort of thing, habitat reduction.

To put it in context, this red box out here in the Sound is what twelve thousand acres looks like, since 1950.

I also used the point down here in Hancock County as an example. We now know lately that there are places on that shoreline that are cutting back over fifty feet a year. There are certain areas in Mississippi where the pacing is certainly a concern, in terms of overall land loss. Land loss is a primary driver of our restoration programs (indicating slide).

I would like to say we have had tremendous ongoing success, really, since 2002, working with the Corps of Engineers, and, then, more recently with DEQ on

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the Beneficial Use Dredge Material Program which is now managed by the Coastal Resource Management Office under Jan.

This program is nationally significant. We have done a fantastic job in figuring out how to use our dredge materials in a natural way to replace historic shorelines and footprints.

Round Island is probably the biggest success, the outgrowth of that program so far. It is two hundred and twenty acres. A lot of you are familiar with it. The monitoring of that site has proven the stability and efficiency of this kind of effort and use of dredge materials.

This is a before-and-after Hurricane Nate image right here. It shows that basically this type of construction is very stable, even where it was built with dredge material that was put in less than eight months before Hurricane Nate and has not been vegetated, or anything like that (indicating slide).

I say that because we get a lot of feedback, concern about projects like this that they are going to get hit by a storm right after we build them and material is going to move out somewhere and cover an oyster reef, or other resource.

This survey one week ahead and one week after

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Hurricane Nate which was just about the perfect storm to damage the Round Island project shows virtually no mass movement in that project. I just wanted to share some of the things we are learning, as we work with these larger projects (indicating slide).

This site has already shown a lot of success. It's the biggest shorebird nesting site probably in the northern Gulf this last year. Every monitoring trip we have made out there the inlet up here on the upper left side has been schooling with speckled trout, fish and shrimp up into that inlet heading to the southeast (indicating slide).

What is next?

With the scale of land loss we are seeing over time, we are realizing that we are going to have to start scaling up our planning and estimation of restoration needs in the future.

The Ship Island Camille Cut Project is the type of project we are likely to see. This is a situation where it requires both more material and different material, mainly sand, than we are likely to get out of the Beneficial Use Program. We are sort of thinking the next step beyond the great work we have done up to the present.

Camille Cut is currently underway. They are

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having some dredge issues. They started the first of the year. This is a four hundred and seventy million dollar project, two years in the running, if everything holds together with the dredge. They are going to move twenty-two million cubic yards which is over four super domes full of material, and one important thing to note about this project is the Corps estimates the benefits from this project, in terms of improving protection for the mainland shore, Biloxi, Gulfport and the other towns along our Coast, plus benefits to fisheries, will be about eighty million dollars a year.

Although this is a four hundred and seventy million dollar project, it has about a six-year payback.

As we look to the next step, how and who are we working with as we look down the road a little further.

Since 2015, since the Office of Coastal Restoration and Resiliency came into existence, we have worked with all sorts of folks. I'm not going to try to list everybody, but I put a lot of the logos up here to give you an idea of the variety of the State and Federal Governments, the institutions of higher learning, universities in all three states, Mississippi, Louisiana and Alabama.

Essentially, we have come to understand that we need to reassess the way we are looking at the estuary and

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1 basically expand what I call the planning area to include
2 all three states, and the acronym that developed out of
3 those discussions is it is the Louisiana Mississippi
4 Alabama Coastal System, or LMACS for short.

5 This is basically what it looks like. The
6 primary estuary we are describing runs from Lake Bourgne
7 all the way to Mobile Bay (indicating slide).

8 One of the really most important things, from my
9 sort of geological perspective in looking at this system,
10 is the barrier that creates it in the first place.
11 Starting with Biloxi Marsh down in Louisiana and running
12 through the Gulf Islands Seashore and over to Dauphin
13 Island in Alabama, this is the barrier that regulates salt
14 water mixing with the fresh water coming in from the
15 Coastal rivers and Lake Pontchartrain and Mobile Bay.

16 A very important thing about this barrier is
17 that it is falling apart. This is just an initial way to
18 look at the health of this barrier. We have mapped out
19 how much open water essentially is in the barrier.

20 In 1850, there were no significant breaches
21 until you got all the way out to Cat Island, and, then,
22 the total breaches, or passes in the barrier, totaled
23 twenty-three miles.

24 In 2004, that was up to thirty miles.

25 Now, they have closed MRGO and they working on

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1 closing Camille Cut, but right now as it stands about
2 thirty-three miles of open water in that barrier, in other
3 words about fifty percent more than was in 1850, ten miles
4 more open water.

5 This is bound to have an affect on the primary
6 mixing of salt and fresh water in the estuary and, also,
7 it has an affect on how much energy reaches our shoreline
8 on a day-to-day basis.

9 The goals for looking at this. We are realizing
10 essentially, in all this interaction, Mississippi really
11 needs to do -- I hate to call it a master plan because
12 people immediately think, well, look at all the challenges
13 that Louisiana has had doing theirs, but it is going to be
14 a master plan nonetheless that is focused on Mississippi's
15 needs and what we see going on in our specific situation.

16 One thing about our estuary is the marshes,
17 Biloxi Marsh and the islands that define it, since they
18 are deteriorating. We need to look at our ability to
19 manage that because closing MRGO and closing Camille Cut
20 have been fairly straight forward actions. MRGO is
21 already yielding positive results, in terms of salinity.
22 There are a lot things that can be done to this situation.

23 In the long run, if we engage in a comprehensive
24 assessment and master planning effort, we can learn a lot
25 more about this system and that will, among other things,

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1 give us the ability to interact with Louisiana more
2 effectively on their projects, some of which will very
3 definitely affect us.

4 First of all, there is an enormous amount of
5 information out there existing that has never been focused
6 on, in regard to this comprehensive look at restoration.
7 We are going to have to get new data. We are going to
8 have to do physical modeling to get a lot of this figured
9 out.

10 Right now, just in the universities and
11 institutions of higher learning, there is an enormous
12 amount of data that we just need to get compiled and
13 figure out if we can plug some of the gaps.

14 What is the Commission's role in all of this?

15 Well, we need strategic input from you, we need
16 input from your constituent groups, and we need support
17 and feedback for plan and for permits and implementation
18 of projects, when that comes to pass.

19 It seems to me the Commission meetings are a
20 great opportunity for constituents to give feedback that
21 can be incorporated in advance of developing projects to
22 the point where we want to turn in a permit application,
23 or something like that. This is a good early way to vet
24 some of these things.

25 Again, I want to say that we are not looking at

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1 a situation where we would restore the Coast and the
2 barriers to look like it did back in the heyday when we
3 were sort of the world power for seafood.

4 We have the ability. We have an opportunity to
5 recover a lot of the functions that gave us that dynamic
6 fisheries environment.

7 I think, once we do some more comprehensive
8 assessment and get a better handle on how the system is
9 working, we can answer some questions about what we need
10 to do.

11 I'm sure Paul may have some gaps to fill in that
12 I have left, but the main gaps are in the barrier out
13 there, right now.

14 Any questions?

15 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: I have a couple of
16 questions.

17 Do you want to go ahead?

18 COMMISSIONER HAVARD: A quick question. You
19 mentioned Bonnet Carre Spillway being opened in 2011
20 adding to all the additional rainfall that we had and
21 eventually killing all of the oysters.

22 Do we have too much rainfall, now?

23 GEORGE RAMSEUR: Well, fresh water events and
24 oyster die offs are a part of history. The main thing
25 about this situation is that, with the barrier opening up,

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1 the estuary is becoming too marine. We've got too much
2 salt during critical times, especially during the summer.
3 That interferes with the ability of the oyster population
4 to deal with fresh water disasters like the Bonnet Carre,
5 among other things.

6 Really, the only way to make something like the
7 Bonnet Carre not have any affect in the estuary would be
8 so open that you wouldn't have oysters in there to start
9 with.

10 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: Go back to that first
11 slide just for a moment so I can clarify myself on one
12 point.

13 When you were talking about the RESTORE and you
14 broke down where the money was going, is this slide
15 representative of all of the Gulf states, or is it
16 representative of what is going to take place in
17 Mississippi?

18 GEORGE RAMSEUR: Thank you for that. I should
19 have clarified further.

20 This is just for Mississippi. This is the
21 monies that filter down from the settlement for
22 Mississippi, and it is split up this way. This is what we
23 have to work with.

24 Now, there are regional NRDA's. There are open-
25 ocean NRDA's. There are additional funds, but I want to

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1 take on what we can control, at some point.

2 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: I just wanted to see if
3 that was what was going to take place Gulf wide, or just
4 in Mississippi.

5 I had another question. You were talking about
6 Round Island.

7 Have we made any headway with acquiring the rest
8 of Round Island?

9 GEORGE RAMSEUR: I don't know of anything
10 specific on that recently. I do know that there,
11 apparently, are a large number of heirs associated with
12 that. I think there are about twenty acres left of
13 private ownership.

14 It will be a complicated acquisition, a long-
15 term type thing anyway, I think. Unless we get some sort
16 of break that I don't foresee, it is probably a number of
17 years down the road before that would come our way.

18 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: What we're doing at Round
19 Island, if I remember correctly, can't really be tied to
20 the original island, until something like that transpires?

21 GEORGE RAMSEUR: Right.

22 Now, there is probably some chance of building
23 to the southwest of there. We would have to look at that,
24 but it would be a lot better to be able to go ahead and
25 deal with the unified project.

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1 Originally, it had sort of a boot-shaped
2 footprint and, actually, we saw a map of 1717 that
3 actually shows that boot shape, and, then, it kind of went
4 to the more teardrop shape that is has after that.

5 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: Are you going to put any
6 vegetation on what we've done, now?

7 Are there any plans for that?

8 GEORGE RAMSEUR: I was contacted the end of last
9 week, and they've got some planting plans in gear, but
10 there is an awful lot of vegetation, particularly up on
11 the barrier, on the berm, right now.

12 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: I don't want to get too
13 involved here with the loss of land for Mississippi.

14 Is the loss that we have in the barrier islands
15 counted into that?

16 GEORGE RAMSEUR: Yes. That figure that I showed
17 was actually just for Mississippi. We have really started
18 looking at this three-state concept recently enough that
19 trying to figure out how much has been lost out of the
20 Biloxi Marsh is a really huge job.

21 This last slide, that's got a lot of stuff with
22 just gaps in the barrier as a real thumbnail for looking
23 at the health of this.

24 This is a 1778 map which is not that accurate
25 laterally. I just put that up there to show kind of what

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1 sort of depth detail we had even back at that time.

2 The red here shows Biloxi Marsh extent in 1850,
3 and the yellow is current. All that red that is showing
4 essentially is land that has been lost in that system
5 since 1850 (indicating slide).

6 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: Some of this money that
7 will come down over the years will be able to be used
8 towards restoring some of these barrier islands?

9 GEORGE RAMSEUR: Well, hopefully some of it at
10 some point, but essentially what we have to do at this
11 point is get a better handle on what is going on. We've
12 got real good data going back to 1850, so we can kind of
13 look at how this barrier has performed, what kind of
14 mixing has been going on, what the currents have been and,
15 also, look at the changes, like, navigation channels, and
16 see how that has affected the overall salinity and the
17 patterns and the variability in the Sound.

18 The other thing I forgot to mention was that
19 Mississippi is really leading this out of the three
20 states, and I would say that's because we have the most to
21 gain, but, at the same time, we have the most to lose.

22 Louisiana has several estuaries this size,
23 Alabama can fall back on Mobile Bay to some extent, but
24 our entire estuarine bank account is just right here
25 behind some skinny little sand islands.

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1 Even though Biloxi Marsh is over the line, y'all
2 have talked about Three Mile Pass in here before. The
3 regulation it performs really controls a lot of our
4 destiny.

5 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: That was my reason for
6 asking.

7 Do you know if any of that money can be used for
8 restoring the islands?

9 As most people know, if they have been there,
10 they are still fairly long, but they are getting very
11 thin. They are not nearly as wide as they used to be.

12 GEORGE RAMSEUR: Right.

13 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: Three Mile Island and
14 Biloxi Marsh, Chandelier is the barrier island that
15 protects that.

16 Is there any work being done over there that is
17 not in our state?

18 Is Louisiana looking at anything on the east
19 side of the river to work on Chandelier Island to try to
20 help protect some of that?

21 GEORGE RAMSEUR: Well, the current master plan,
22 the 2017 plan does not, as far as I know, have anything
23 for Chandelier.

24 As a matter of fact, they had some barrier
25 projects for Biloxi Marsh, in the 2012 plan, and those

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1 rolled off and, in my opinion, those would be very
2 beneficial not just for the marsh, but the marsh provides
3 a lot of basic day-to-day protection for Hancock County
4 and St. Tammany Parish, as well as all the fishing
5 resource.

6 That's the sort of thing where maybe with our
7 own master plan tied with effort we can have a more robust
8 conversation with Louisiana and say, why don't we look at
9 putting these Biloxi Marsh barriers back in.

10 The way we drew this is just sort of the basic
11 estuary, but Chandelier, if we go to modeling performance
12 of this system, definitely has an affect on the overall
13 system. We've got to have it on our radar.

14 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: Louisiana has way more
15 issues facing them than what we do, and it appears to be
16 that the east side of the river is not a big concern to
17 them, but it is to us on this side.

18 GEORGE RAMSEUR: I think we can have a positive
19 affect on their trajectory, and, then, they have other
20 projects, like, the Pontchartrain barrier that may well
21 affect us in the negative way, according to their numbers.

22 We need to have our own numbers to work with.
23 Politically and intellectually, we need to do our own
24 homework on that, and, then, come back to the table with
25 them and say, Pontchartrain barrier ends at the state

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1 line, right now. What would happen if you brought it all
2 the way over to Bay St. Louis, just as a hypothetical,
3 just to remind everybody that project is just a plus two
4 feet. They looked at plus thirty feet at one point, but
5 it is real interesting how that project is changing.

6 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: Thank you, George.

7 GEORGE RAMSEUR: Thank you.

8 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: Very interesting. A lot
9 to look forward to in the future.

10 Office of Finance and Administration, Ms. Kacey
11 Williams.

12 KACEY WILLIAMS: Good morning Commissioners,
13 Director Spraggins, Ms. Chestnut.

14 These are our financial results as of January
15 31st, 2018.

16 Our State Revenue was four point five million
17 dollars. Our Total Agency Revenue was fifteen point seven
18 million dollars.

19 Our State Net Income is a hundred and eighty-
20 five thousand. Our Agency Net Income is five point four
21 million dollars.

22 After seven months of fiscal year 2018,
23 Operating Funds have seventy-eight point six percent
24 budget remaining, and our Tidelands Trust Fund has eighty-
25 three point four percent budget remaining.

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1 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: Thank you.

2 KACEY WILLIAMS: Thank you.

3 COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: Ms. Melissa.

4 MELISSA SCALLAN: Good morning Commissioners,
5 Director Spraggins, Ms. Chestnut.

6 The agency was mentioned thirty-one times in
7 local, state and national media, since the December
8 meeting.

9 The item that got the most attention last week
10 was Keith Davis leaving us and going to Moss Point. We do
11 wish him well in that new endeavor. He certainly does
12 have his hands full, but I'm sure he will be up to the
13 task.

14 Another item that got a lot of mention literally
15 from Seattle to DC was our oyster dredge exchange program.
16 We were mentioned in U.S. News and World Report for that
17 program and popular in states that have oysters that look
18 at the same kind of things that we do. That was a good
19 positive thing for us.

20 As Director Spraggins mentioned, we did have our
21 Capitol Day event on Wednesday, February the 7th, in
22 Jackson. We had representatives from each office and we
23 spoke to legislators, state employees and other visitors
24 about the things that we do here at the agency. Joe
25 Jewell had several people from Marine Fisheries to talk

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about their programs. We had Oyster Aquaculture, Tidelands, Seafood Marketing and Public Affairs.

We did some local events. Jennifer Frey with Coastal Resources Management represented the agency at the Pascagoula School District Super Saturday Wetland Animals event. That is something they do once a month. When they have a marine theme, they invite us to take part in that.

We also had several employees that participated in career days. Sometimes it's science. Sometimes it's Marine Patrol.

As Joe mentioned earlier, the agency received the Fishery Conservation Award from the Mississippi Chapter of the American Fisheries Society for the Derelict Crab Trap Program, and Rick Burris accepted that award at the meeting in Oxford.

For Marine Patrol, so far they have held nine boat-and-water safety classes and certified a hundred and fifty-two students. Compared to last year at the same time, they had conducted ten classes and certified seventy-eight students. The numbers seem to be going up.

COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: Thank you.

MELISSA SCALLAN: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: We have one other item under Other Business, and I think Mr. Joe is going to address that.

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JOE SPRAGGINS: Yes, sir, Mr. Chairman.

As you remember, we had Hurricane Nate that hit here several months ago. In that, we had some damage and we had a lot of overtime that was paid.

What we are looking at is we have a public assistance program, now, through FEMA. FEMA is working with public assistance to give us back the funds that are authorized by the Federal Government to give back to the agency.

We had a lot of overtime, and they had advised us to use the overtime and pay it and not use it as comp time because FEMA is not allowed to pay back compensation time, but they are allowed to pay back overtime.

We did that. We kept very great detail of what we were doing.

We also had a couple of items that were damaged in the storm around the waterfronts that we had to repair. We repaired them, and FEMA said turn in the items and we will look at it and see if it is eligible to be repaid.

We have an application and in the application we need to put an agent as basically representing the agency here. I would like to recommend that Lieutenant Patrick Levine be our representative for this, and I would like for the Commission to look at this, as a governing body, to be able to sign off and say that they appoint Patrick.

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Patrick, come up to the podium, in case they have any questions for you, please.

COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: I guess my first question would be, is this what you want to do?

PATRICK LEVINE: Yes, sir.

One thing the Director did not say is we started this process in December of 2017, and we are well on our way to receive those funds from FEMA. One of the last steps in the process is to seek approval from the Commission.

You would think it would be on the front end, but they do it on the back end. We have been working that grant. We have spent a lot of time on it.

One of the things I have shared with Director Spraggins and I want to make sure I make a public comment that this staff of the Department of Marine Resources has just been a fantastic team to compile all the information needed for this grant.

Commissioner Bosarge, I am willing to take that task. I thank you for the opportunity.

COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: We just wanted to have a conversation with you to figure out just exactly what this was all about.

If you are willing to take on the task, I think we, as the Commission, are willing to give you the

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opportunity.

Do we have any more questions?

COMMISSIONER HAVARD: I would agree that Patrick is the right person for the job and is willing to take it on.

COMMISSIONER GOLLOTT: I made a motion that we give this job to Patrick Levine.

COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: We have a motion.

Do we have a second?

COMMISSIONER HARMON: So seconded, Mr. Chairman.

COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: We have a motion and a second.

Any further discussion?

(No response.)

COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: All those in favor say aye.

(All in favor.)

COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: Opposed?

(None opposed.)

COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: Motion carries.

PATRICK LEVINE: Thank you, Commissioners.

COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: Any further public comments?

(No response.)

COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: Do I have a motion to

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adjourn?

COMMISSIONER GOLLOTT: I make the motion that we

adjourn.

COMMISSIONER HARMON: So seconded, Mr. Chairman.

COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: All those in favor say

aye.

(All in favor.)

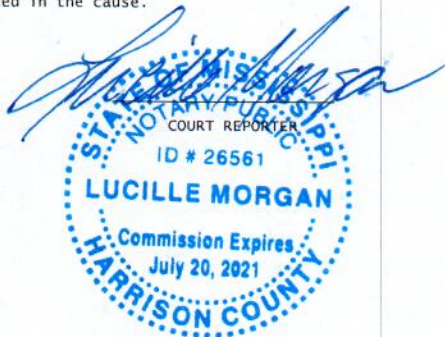
COMMISSIONER BOSARGE: Meeting adjourned.

(Whereupon, at 10:55 o'clock, a.m., the February 20, 2018, meeting of the Commission on Marine Resources was concluded.)

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C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Lucille Morgan, Certified Shorthand Reporter, do hereby certify that the above and foregoing is a true and correct transcript of the February 20, 2018, meeting of the Commission on Marine Resources, as taken by me at the time and place heretofore stated in the aforementioned matter in shorthand, with electronic verification, and later reduced to typewritten form to the best of my skill and ability; and, further, that I am not a relative, employee, or agent, of any of the parties thereto, nor financially interested in the cause.



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