

STATE OF MISSISSIPPI

MISSISSIPPI ADVISORY COMMISSION ON MARINE RESOURCES
COMMISSION MEETING

Tuesday, March 19, 2024, 9:00 a.m.,

Bolton Building Auditorium

1141 Bayview Avenue, Biloxi, Mississippi 39530

COMMISSION MEMBERS:Ronnie Daniels
Jonathan McLendon
Jason Osborne (Via Telephone)
Cammack "Cam" Roberds**ALSO PRESENT:**Joe Spraggins (Via telephone)
Patrick Levine
Sandy Chesnut, Esquire
Steven Eckert, Esquire**REPORTED BY:**Melissa Burdine-Rodolfich
mburdine@sbmreporting.com

1 RONNIE DANIELS:

2 All right. Good morning, ladies and
3 gentlemen. Welcome to our March 19th Advisory
4 Commission meeting on Marine Resources.

5 Director Spraggins and Jason are both
6 going to be on the phone today. They're
7 traveling, but they are in attendance with us.

8 We're going to go ahead and call the
9 meeting to order now.

10 I'd like to ask Commissioner Roberds to
11 lead us in the Pledge of Allegiance.

12 (Pledge of Allegiance.)

13 RONNIE DANIELS:

14 Thank you.

15 Patrick, would you like to lead us in
16 prayer this morning?

17 PATRICK LEVINE:

18 It would be an honor. Let us pray.

19 (Moment of prayer.)

20 RONNIE DANIELS:

21 Thank you, Patrick.

22 All right. February 20th minutes, do we
23 have any discussion on those minutes?

24 (No response.)

25 RONNIE DANIELS:

1 Do we have a motion to approve?

2 CAM ROBERDS:

3 I'll make a motion to approve the
4 minutes.

5 JONATHAN MCLENDON:

6 I'll second it.

7 RONNIE DANIELS:

8 All in favor?

9 (Unanimous vote.)

10 RONNIE DANIELS:

11 Jason, are you on here with us?

12 JASON OBSORNE:

13 Yes, sir. Aye.

14 RONNIE DANIELS:

15 Okay. Good deal. Good deal. I wanted
16 to make sure you could hear us.

17 Approval of the agenda, do we have any
18 discussion on the agenda?

19 (No response.)

20 RONNIE DANIELS:

21 Do we have a motion to approve?

22 JONATHAN MCLENDON:

23 I'll make the motion.

24 RONNIE DANIELS:

25 I will second.

1 All in favor?

2 (Unanimous vote.)

3 RONNIE DANIELS:

4 All right. Patrick -- he is going to be
5 sitting in for Director Spraggins today -- I'm
6 going to turn it over to you.

7 PATRICK LEVINE:

8 Well, thank you, sir. Good morning and
9 thank you for the opportunity to be here.

10 I want to remind everybody if you have a
11 public comment to see TJ back in the back. He is
12 standing there by the clock. If you have a public
13 comment, you can get a form on the table in the
14 back, fill it out, get it to him, and he will make
15 sure he gets it turned in for later in the
16 meeting.

17 As the Chairman said, Director Spraggins
18 is traveling today, but he's very much involved
19 and at any time he may jump in on the meeting.

20 We do have some employment updates, some
21 new hires: Patricia Simmons, a Dispatcher II in
22 the Office of Marine Patrol, and Jamie Marroy,
23 Dispatcher I in the Office of Marine Patrol. They
24 both started, and it's great to be back full
25 staffed in that office, ready to go. I know that

1 was a huge need, so we're thankful for those folks
2 that have come on board to help us out here at the
3 DMR.

4 For promotions, Thomas Butera was
5 promoted to an ENRS Team Lead and that's in the
6 Office of Coastal Resources Management, so
7 congratulations to Thomas for the work well done.

8 There is a couple of contracts this
9 month. The first one was for Spat Tech for some
10 oysters. That's part of Bonnet Carré and GOMESA.
11 It's there. And then also Eco-Restore, there is
12 an invitation for the bids, and that's for Wolf
13 River Coastal Preserve Habitat Management. So
14 that's the contracts and procurements that we have
15 going right now.

16 You know, the legislative session has
17 been going strong and there have been quite a few
18 things that we have been watching and keeping a
19 pulse on. There is a few bills that we have up
20 there. I know we put some up there. Senate Bill
21 2654, House Bill 1200, both of them having to do
22 with administrative procedures and creating a
23 compliance officer, neither one of those made it
24 out and/or moving forward, so we won't be
25 following those anymore.

1 But we will keep following House Bill
2 1006, the crab license. Remember, we had the
3 discussion about the bill. Right now, it says
4 that they're allowed six traps. The license is to
5 a household. They're going to change that
6 language to where the license is for the
7 individual, so we are watching House Bill 1006.

8 1007, House Bill 1007, that's for the
9 ability for oyster harvesters to be able to work
10 with an approved vendor to purchase their tags
11 themselves. Right now, individuals that harvest
12 oysters, they have to come to the agency to get
13 their tags, but what this will do is it will allow
14 the opportunity for the oyster harvesters to work
15 with an approved vendor, who will provide that
16 information to the agency, to be able to print
17 their tags on their own, because, Lord willing, we
18 really hope to see some movement on the oysters
19 here in the Mississippi Sound and this will just
20 help those fishermen out moving forward.

21 House Bill 1279, that's the one about
22 shrimp trawling. You know, we wanted to make sure
23 that we clear up some language allowing for
24 people -- we already allow people to throw brill
25 nets, cast nets, et cetera out there, but it

1 needed a little bit of clarification in the
2 language on that.

3 Senate Bill 2648, that's a bill on the
4 authorization to lease bottoms for on-bottom
5 oyster development, and that one is moving
6 forward. It's over in the House, and so if you
7 want to keep up -- keep up with everything -- I
8 know we watch things daily and we want to know how
9 things are moving forward, so definitely keep a
10 good pulse on that.

11 Some questions came up about where we're
12 at on Bonnet Carré disaster funds and the plus
13 payout. The DMR is in the process of releasing
14 plus payment payouts for commercial fishermen as a
15 result of the Bonnet Carré disaster, and the plus
16 payout is for eligible individuals whose loss
17 exceeds that of the base payment. And so we all
18 are moving forward with the plus payout on Bonnet
19 Carré disaster funds.

20 Last month, we started talking about the
21 Commercial Vessel Safety Reimbursement Program,
22 and I can tell you this, we have had a huge
23 response on that. Such a huge response that
24 tomorrow night is going to be the deadline.
25 Wednesday, the 20th is going to be the deadline

1 for application on those funds.

2 And if you're applying for those
3 applications -- if you're putting in an
4 application whenever you're applying for
5 reimbursement, a couple of things you need to
6 know, we need to know what you're doing. You need
7 to make sure that you provide a receipt and then
8 photo documentation. If it's equipment or
9 something that you're adding, you have to be able
10 to show that you put that -- you received that
11 equipment or put that on your vessel.

12 So make sure if you have an interest in
13 the Commercial Vessel Safety Reimbursement
14 Program, tomorrow is going to be the deadline.
15 But we've had a huge response on that, and so it's
16 been a good thing, a great way for us to be able
17 to help our fishermen to try to make their vessels
18 and their programs more resilient for future
19 disasters, so a good thing.

20 Last month we wrapped up the crab trap
21 removal program, and I'm going to ask, Jason,
22 would you be willing to come up here and give us
23 an update on what happened with the -- this year's
24 crab trap removal?

25 JASON SAUCIER:

1 Good morning, Commissioners. So very
2 successful program. We had it at the end of
3 February, the 22nd through the 24th. We had 91
4 volunteers come out and join us at the three
5 sites, and we've collected 398 traps Coastwide.
6 Our biggest collection was at the Pascagoula site,
7 I believe, and it was very successful. We talked
8 to a bunch of volunteers. A bunch of fishermen
9 came out and joined us and everybody was excited
10 about it. We did have good weather for us,
11 especially for Saturday, so a very successful
12 event.

13 PATRICK LEVINE:

14 That's awesome.

15 RONNIE DANIELS:

16 Good deal.

17 PATRICK LEVINE:

18 Absolutely. Thank you for that, Jason,
19 and thank you to all the volunteers and the staff
20 who made that possible, going out and working the
21 different sites and putting all the work into it.
22 That's the entire DMR team when you think about,
23 you know, finance and fisheries and marine patrol,
24 you know. It takes the whole DMR to put something
25 like that on, so just a fantastic opportunity, you

1 know, to protect those resources we have on the
2 Sound.

3 The last thing that I wanted to hit on
4 an update is, Chairman, last month you asked the
5 question about commercial use authorization form
6 permits out at the -- out at the islands, and you
7 asked the question about they're now bringing up a
8 three percent fee and then insurance that's being
9 required.

10 And while I wish we could come in here
11 and say we could make a change to that, it appears
12 that what the parks are doing is they're -- our
13 parks here are getting consistent with what's
14 happening at other national parks throughout the
15 country. And whenever you read the language, the
16 way I was reading it is they look at those charter
17 fishermen going into the parks as very similar to
18 a vendor, so providing a vendor service to the
19 people at the parks. And so whenever a charter
20 captain is bringing a crew into the parks and
21 inside of the park boundaries and they're -- it
22 appears to be pretty clear, as they say. Whatever
23 funds that are generated as a result of activities
24 while inside the boundaries of the park, it's
25 subject to this three percent fee. That's got to

1 be reported by the charter fishermen -- the
2 charter captains and the fishermen, and they have
3 a process set up online to do that.

4 Whenever they buy their CUA permit, that
5 fee already starts. You know, it's already
6 counted towards that three percent, so, you know,
7 if they exceed that amount, then they start paying
8 three percent. If they meet that amount, then
9 they don't have to pay anything on the three
10 percent, so it's something the fishermen have to
11 do.

12 The insurance, you had a question about
13 the insurance rate, that it seemed like it was a
14 little excessive. Each park is able to determine
15 their required amount of insurance based off of
16 the liabilities of activities performed in that
17 particular park. And so what's happening here is
18 the park service is getting consistent with what's
19 happening in other national parks and that's what
20 they see as the cost of doing business and how to
21 pay for their administrative costs and the work
22 that they have to do at the parks. And so
23 that's -- in a nutshell, that's the update I can
24 give you.

25 RONNIE DANIELS:

1 You know, I would like to tell you thank
2 you. I know you and Matt, and whoever else,
3 worked on that. It's nice for us, as
4 commissioners, to know whenever one of our
5 constituents comes to us with something and we, in
6 turn, ask y'all about that, that y'all actually
7 put the work in. And I know that y'all dug into
8 everything on it. It's nice to have the comfort
9 to be able to say, we'll get it looked at, and
10 once it's looked at, we know what it is. And I
11 just want to tell y'all thank you for putting the
12 time in on that.

13 PATRICK LEVINE:

14 Well, you're welcome. And once again,
15 that goes to the staff because there were several
16 staff members that jumped on it immediately and
17 said, hey, we want to be in front of this thing,
18 so kudos to the men and women that made that
19 possible and put the hard work into it. So good
20 things.

21 That's everything that I have. Steven
22 or Sandy, can y'all -- will y'all take care of the
23 actions updates from the prior meetings?

24 STEVEN ECKERT:

25 Sure. Thank you.

1 Good morning. Discussed at the February
2 2024 meeting was, the Commission recommended and
3 Director approved the following motions: First,
4 there was a motion to recommend approval of the
5 requested variance and permit for the Jackson
6 County Port Authority located in the wetlands
7 adjacent to the Escatawpa River near Highway 63 in
8 Moss Point. The project includes the fill of 3.27
9 acres of tidal or tidally-influenced marsh to
10 construct a railway that will allow more efficient
11 movement of goods by rail from Bayou Casotte and
12 the Port of Pascagoula and increase public safety
13 through the abandonment of 21 railroad crossings
14 through Moss Point and Pascagoula.

15 Our second motion involved the
16 recommendation and approval of the requested
17 variance, use plan change and permit for the
18 Mississippi Department of Marine Resources to
19 create a beneficial use site located at Railroad
20 Corner near the mouth of the Pascagoula River.
21 The project will create approximately 175 acres of
22 tidal marsh habitat and provide an additional site
23 for the placement of dredged materials.

24 And finally, there was a motion to
25 recommend and approve a saltwater finfish record

1 with conventional tackle for a red grouper of
2 22 pounds, 12 ounces for Mr. Ron McMillan.

3 And that is our -- our other business
4 involved what you just mentioned and discussed.
5 Commissioner Daniels requested for DMR to look
6 into the issue of the charter boats being charged
7 an additional three percent of gross revenues.

8 And this is our actions update for
9 today.

10 PATRICK LEVINE:

11 Well, thank you for that and thank you
12 for those updates.

13 Before we move on -- and I know he's
14 traveling, but I know he was on. Director
15 Spraggins, do you have anything that you would
16 want to add before we move on?

17 JOE SPRAGGINS:

18 I just thank everybody for being here
19 today and sorry I couldn't be with you, but I can
20 guarantee you that the team is working and we're
21 prepared (inaudible). Thanks very much.

22 RONNIE DANIELS:

23 Thank you, Director. Y'all be safe
24 traveling.

25 We good?

1 PATRICK LEVINE:

2 We're good.

3 RONNIE DANIELS:

4 Thank you, Patrick.

5 All right. Do any of our commissioners
6 have anything to report today?

7 None.

8 JASON OBSORNE:

9 Hey. Before -- this is Jason. Before
10 we lose Director Spraggins, I didn't know if he
11 wanted to talk about the meeting we had a couple
12 of weeks of ago with the new secretary of the
13 Louisiana Department of Fish and Wildlife.

14 JOE SPRAGGINS:

15 Yeah, Jason. Thank you for reminding me
16 of that. Yes. We did have -- Jason and I went
17 over and met with the secretary of Wildlife and
18 Fisheries and all for Louisiana. Great meeting,
19 Madison is a great person. She's very easy to
20 work with --

21 RONNIE DANIELS:

22 Director --

23 JOE SPRAGGINS:

24 -- great relationship --

25 RONNIE DANIELS:

1 Director Spraggins, I'm very sorry to
2 interrupt you. Are you on speaker phone right
3 now? We're having a really hard time making out
4 what you're saying.

5 JOE SPRAGGINS:

6 No. I'm talking into my iPad.

7 RONNIE DANIELS:

8 All right. That's a little better
9 there. Thank you.

10 JOE SPRAGGINS:

11 Okay. All right. But anyway, we met
12 with her. And I'm not sure what you heard, but as
13 far as -- we met with Madison and her team. It
14 was a great deal. I think we'll have a great
15 relationship between us and Wildlife and Fisheries
16 and all of Louisiana. We are able to work on
17 quite a few things together.

18 Jason, we appreciate your help in
19 setting up that meeting. I know that we will
20 probably have more meetings in the future, but as
21 far as what I saw from the meeting and all --
22 Jason, please chime in -- that, you know, we
23 are -- definitely have a good relationship. And I
24 think that as far as our issues that we have, if
25 we have an issue with anything in Louisiana, then

1 we can take it to her and I believe we can get a
2 great response from it.

3 Jason, do you have anything else?

4 JASON OBSORNE:

5 No. I would concur with that. I have
6 had a couple of follow-up conversations with both
7 her and her chief of staff and her deputy, Ryan
8 Montegut, who came over from the attorney
9 general's office, and they're looking forward to a
10 closer collaboration and look forward to the
11 future. Thanks.

12 JOE SPRAGGINS:

13 Thank you.

14 RONNIE DANIELS:

15 All right. Thank you. That's all
16 positive news.

17 Nothing else from the commissioners.

18 All right, Chief.

19 KYLE WILKERSON:

20 Good morning, Commissioners, Legal.
21 What a beautiful day, right? It is a -- I'm
22 telling you what, we couldn't be blessed any more
23 than what we have with this weather. Now,
24 granted, it's a little chilly. I prefer the 70
25 weather and the 70-degree mark, but I think it's

1 coming and we're going to be wanting this weather,
2 I'd say, a month or two from now, I'm sure.

3 Looking at the report itself, February
4 was pretty normal. I mean, it is -- it's a cold
5 month and we don't have a lot of boat traffic, but
6 the traffic we do have and we did have, it was
7 safe going. No accidents were reported. No
8 fatalities, which is a blessing. Business as
9 usual for Marine Patrol.

10 We shift our operations to boat and
11 water safety and to fisheries, but fisheries is a
12 little slow this time of year, but everybody is
13 playing -- playing right out there and everybody
14 is safe.

15 I will field any questions.

16 RONNIE DANIELS:

17 Y'all got anything?

18 (No response.)

19 RONNIE DANIELS:

20 I like that 70-degree mark too.

21 KYLE WILKERSON:

22 Yes, sir.

23 RONNIE DANIELS:

24 I appreciate it, Chief. Thank you.

25 KYLE WILKERSON:

1 Yes, sir.

2 RONNIE DANIELS:

3 All right. Next, up we're going to have
4 Brandi filling in for Ms. Leslie.

5 BRANDI BUSBY:

6 Good morning. I'm Brandi Busby,
7 director of finance. I'm filling in for Leslie
8 this morning, and I will be presenting the
9 agency's financials for the month ending
10 February 2024.

11 At the end of February, our state
12 revenue was \$5 million, and agency revenue was
13 \$27 million.

14 Our state net income was negative
15 10,000, and agency net income was negative
16 1.5 million.

17 After eight months of Fiscal Year 2024,
18 the agency has 88.1 percent of budget remaining,
19 while tidelands budget has 58.2 percent remaining.

20 Do y'all have any questions?

21 RONNIE DANIELS:

22 No, ma'am. Thank you.

23 BRANDI BUSBY:

24 Thank you.

25 RONNIE DANIELS:

1 All right. Next up, we're going to have
2 Ms. Charmaine, Public Affairs.

3 CHARMAINE SCHMERMUND:

4 Good morning. The Mississippi
5 Department of Marine Resources had five media
6 mentions since the February MACMR meeting. News
7 items included the recreational season for gray
8 triggerfish opening, February's fish record and
9 the results of the 2024 Derelict Crab Trap
10 Program.

11 The office of Marine Patrol took part in
12 career fairs at North Gulfport Elementary School
13 on February 29th and Pass Christian Middle School
14 on March 15th, as well as Long Beach Chamber's
15 Touch-a-Truck event on March 16th.

16 Marine Patrol also participated in the
17 Kids Fishing 101 program on Saturday and Sunday at
18 the Biloxi Boat Show, along with the Grand Bay
19 NERR and Coastal Resources Management's Invasive
20 Species Program. Each group featured a booth at
21 the event and educated attendees about their
22 respective roles in programs at MDMR.

23 In addition to the Kids 101 program at
24 the Biloxi Boat Show, the Artificial Reef Bureau
25 staffed the agency's public outreach booth each of

1 the three days of the boat show at the Mississippi
2 Coast Convention Center. They shared insight on
3 fishing reefs and fisheries management, as well as
4 handing out MDMR informational materials.

5 The Lyman Aquaculture Hatchery assisted
6 with the South Mississippi St. Jude's Classic Bass
7 Tournament on March 17th by transporting live
8 adult bass back to the South Mississippi river
9 systems from areas they were caught during the
10 tournament.

11 RONNIE DANIELS:

12 Thank you, Charmaine, and I want to
13 extend a big thank you to you for helping organize
14 everything from the department. We had a lot of
15 participation through the department with Kids
16 101, which is a great event. We were able to
17 bring in and hopefully introduce fishing to -- we
18 saw 200-plus kids over two days there, so it was
19 great.

20 And if anybody was wondering, we don't
21 have any state records today, but Rodie Armes did
22 stop by and he told me he's been busy. He's got a
23 lot of stuff going on, but not to worry. He'll be
24 bringing more to us.

25 CAM ROBERDS:

1 That's awesome.

2 PATRICK LEVINE:

3 That's awesome.

4 RONNIE DANIELS:

5 All right. Wow. We didn't have a whole
6 lot to do today.

7 PATRICK LEVINE:

8 We did not.

9 RONNIE DANIELS:

10 This is -- this is pretty easy.

11 We do have a public comment, so we
12 will -- well, before I get there, do we have any
13 other business?

14 (No response.)

15 RONNIE DANIELS:

16 All right. Nobody has got anything
17 else.

18 Mr. Greg Cenac, of Mississippi Gulf
19 Fishing Banks, has a public comment.

20 GREG CENAC:

21 Excuse me. I'm not used to talking in
22 public.

23 I do want to say thanks to DMR and all
24 for the activities. We work hand in hand in
25 building artificial reefs offshore. And a lot of

1 times it's, hey, we're deploying this thing, this
2 day, this -- and I just want to bring some
3 attention to something.

4 We were just recently given a large
5 donation by Bay Pest Control. We're going to be
6 building and constructing the largest cockroach in
7 the world and sinking it offshore, so you're going
8 to start seeing WLOX, on TV. We're going to do it
9 from the very inception of the cockroach,
10 families, people, everybody involved in
11 construction and then going into deployment. So
12 if you see that on TV, that's where it's going to
13 be coming from.

14 RONNIE DANIELS:

15 Can you explain what a cockroach is?

16 GREG CENAC:

17 Well, if you use Bay Pest Control, you
18 won't have them.

19 Yeah. A cockroach. It's going to be a
20 large structure, the largest cockroach in the
21 world. There is one in Australia. What we're
22 doing is taking parts and pieces of abandoned
23 boats and metals and constructing a metal
24 cockroach as an artificial reef and then sinking
25 it out on fish havens.

1 RONNIE DANIELS:

2 I thought that was some kind of a weird
3 name for the design on a reef, which it's
4 really --

5 GREG CENAC:

6 It might be a palmetto bug, little
7 palmetto bugs, those --

8 RONNIE DANIELS:

9 Yeah. All right. Well, great.

10 GREG CENAC:

11 Yes. It will be -- you'll be seeing it
12 on TV, so I just want to let y'all know.

13 RONNIE DANIELS:

14 Thank you.

15 No other public comments?

16 PATRICK LEVINE:

17 No other public comments.

18 RONNIE DANIELS:

19 All right. Easy peasy.

20 Do we have a motion to adjourn?

21 CAM ROBERDS:

22 I make a motion to adjourn.

23 RONNIE DANIELS:

24 I will second that.

25 All in favor?

1 (Unanimous vote.)

2 RONNIE DANIELS:

3 Everybody have a good week. Enjoy this
4 weather.

5 (Meeting adjourned at 9:32 a.m.)

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CERTIFICATE OF COURT REPORTER

1
2 I, MELISSA BURDINE-RODOLFICH, Court Reporter
3 and Notary Public, in and for the County of
4 Harrison, State of Mississippi, hereby certify that
5 the foregoing pages, and including this page,
6 contain a true and correct copy of my stenotype
7 notes and/or electronic tape recording of the
8 public meeting, as taken by me at the time and
9 place heretofore stated, to the best of my skill
10 and ability.

11 I further certify that I am not in the employ
12 of, or related to, any counsel or party in this
13 matter, and have no interest, monetary or
14 otherwise, in the final outcome of the proceedings.

15 Witness my signature and seal, this the

16 _____ day of _____, 2023.

17
18 _____
19
20 Melissa Burdine-Rodolfich
21 My Commission Expires 4/28/24
22
23
24
25