

STATE OF MISSISSIPPI

MISSISSIPPI ADVISORY COMMISSION ON MARINE RESOURCES
COMMISSION MEETING

Tuesday, December 17th, 2024, 9:07 a.m.,

Bolton Building Auditorium

1141 Bayview Avenue, Biloxi, Mississippi 39530

COMMISSION MEMBERS:Ronnie Daniels
Matthew Mayfield
Jonathan McLendon
Cammack "Cam" Roberds**ALSO PRESENT:**Joe Spraggins
Sandy Chesnut, Esquire
Steven Eckert, Esquire**REPORTED BY:**Melissa Burdine-Rodolfich
mburdine@sbmreporting.com

1 CAM ROBERDS:

2 Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I
3 want to welcome everybody to the Mississippi
4 Advisory Commission on Marine Resources for
5 Tuesday, December 17th, 2024.

6 I want to ask Commissioner Mayfield, if
7 he would, please, lead us in the Pledge of
8 Allegiance.

9 (Pledge of Allegiance was recited.)

10 CAM ROBERDS:

11 Thank you, Commissioner.

12 Director, would you like to lead us in a
13 prayer?

14 JOE SPRAGGINS:

15 Yeah. And I'd just like to thank
16 everyone for coming today and also that --
17 understanding the time of the year that we're at.
18 We're here because of Christ. We're not here
19 because of ourselves, so we're here because he
20 gave everything for us. And so I hope that this
21 season, that you will find time to thank him and
22 thank Jesus for everything he did for us.

23 (Moment of prayer.)

24 CAM ROBERDS:

25 Thank you, Director.

1 Do we have any questions on the minutes
2 from November 19th?

3 If not, do we have a motion to approve?

4 RONNIE DANIELS:

5 Motion.

6 JONATHAN MCLENDON:

7 Second.

8 CAM ROBERDS:

9 All those in favor?

10 (Unanimous vote.)

11 CAM ROBERDS:

12 I see the agenda here. Does anybody
13 have any questions on the agenda?

14 If not, do we have a motion to approve?

15 RONNIE DANIELS:

16 Motion.

17 MATTHEW MAYFIELD:

18 Second.

19 CAM ROBERDS:

20 All those in favor?

21 (Unanimous vote.)

22 CAM ROBERDS:

23 All right. Director, it's all yours.

24 JOE SPRAGGINS:

25 Well, once again, thank you, and I

1 appreciate everyone taking the time to come out
2 today. I know we've got a lot of things on the
3 agenda to look at.

4 And first off, you know, we want to look
5 at what we have as far as employment contracts.
6 Pull that up. Two new law enforcement officers,
7 so we're proud to have both of them on board. I
8 tell you what, anytime that we can keep our law
9 enforcement and continue to operate with them,
10 it's a great thing. And we've been lucky and --
11 to be able to get these men and women to be able
12 to go out and keep our water safe, so thank you
13 for the two new hires.

14 Next, this is our -- we've got an
15 invitation for bid for marine -- I tell you, that
16 thing is whopping, isn't it -- Marine Archeology
17 Resource Assessment Report and that's a GOMESA
18 project. And the vendor is -- has been picked, so
19 we will start that. About a 12-month program.

20 Any questions on those?

21 (No response.)

22 JOE SPRAGGINS:

23 Okay. As far as agency updates, our
24 next Commission meeting will be Tuesday, June 21st
25 at 9:00 a.m. Any issues with that?

1 RONNIE DANIELS:

2 January.

3 JOE SPRAGGINS:

4 What did I say? June?

5 RONNIE DANIELS:

6 June.

7 JOE SPRAGGINS:

8 Maybe I ought to wait till June. But
9 January. Forgive me. Sorry about that. So no
10 issues on that.

11 All right. Legislative forum, we had
12 the forum that we met with the legislators this
13 last week and talked about some of the things.
14 Mainly, we have got a couple of minor things that
15 we're looking at as far as bills that we're going
16 forward with, but -- it's doing some updates.

17 One of the things, though, that we feel
18 like that we ought to do is we're trying to put
19 something together to be able to label the
20 seafood, and we want to be able to label the
21 seafood in the restaurants and in the markets and
22 all to be able to say, is it domestic or is it
23 imported. So that's something that we're looking
24 at.

25 We've seen several things happen. We

1 have a bill. We talked with Commissioner Gipson
2 the other day from the Ag and they have a bill
3 that what -- basically, it will -- it's for the
4 catfish and it was put in in 1975 to where it had
5 to be labeled. We looked at that. Could we
6 possibly marry off of their bill and continue to
7 do this, or do we have to have a standalone bill?
8 We're still working on that.

9 But all we're asking -- we're not saying
10 that you can't -- as a restaurant or anything
11 else, that you can't serve import. We just want
12 to know is it, or is it domestic. Because one of
13 the things that we're finding right now is our
14 fisheries in the world out here, it's very hard to
15 be able to keep people in the operation and keep
16 fishing because the -- whenever you go out -- and
17 especially -- just take shrimp. When you go out
18 and you go to catch your shrimp and bring them
19 back, if you're getting 75 cents a pound and
20 you're paying \$5 a gallon for diesel, it's kind of
21 hard to operate, isn't it?

22 So how can we do this? How can we make
23 it? How can we get it out? I think that we owe
24 it to the public. I think we owe it to the -- to
25 our visitors that come in to be able to look at it

1 and say they're getting -- and I would love to see
2 the word "Gulf fresh" because -- I would love to
3 see the word "Gulf fresh" on ours. If you're
4 serving Gulf fresh shrimp or if you're serving
5 Gulf fresh fish or crabs or, you know, oysters,
6 whatever you're serving, I would love to see it
7 come out as Gulf fresh because that's what's going
8 to keep us operational.

9 That's a -- you know, I wasn't born and
10 raised here, but I remember coming here in my
11 younger age and then on up in life. And every
12 time I walked in a seafood restaurant or anything
13 else, I just automatically thought I was eating
14 Gulf fresh and I probably wasn't in those days.

15 But the point I'm getting at is, now,
16 let's let the people have the opportunity to be
17 able to know that they're getting that. Most of
18 our restaurants and all want to do it. I don't
19 think we have any of them that are trying to fight
20 us or anything on this and a lot of them want to
21 do it. But if we can put the word out and put the
22 word out to say that it's Gulf fresh and we can
23 put that labeling on your restaurant and put it on
24 your stores and other things that you're selling
25 Gulf fresh, then hopefully, that will help us with

1 the industry.

2 Any questions on that, Commissioners?

3 (No response.)

4 JOE SPRAGGINS:

5 All right. And there's several other
6 bills that we're looking at, but the -- also, we
7 have a -- the CPRA. We met with the CPRA. And if
8 you don't know who that is, it's the Coastal
9 Protection group out of Louisiana. We met with
10 them, and we met with the Number 2 guy in the
11 Corps of Engineers, Major General Kelly, and then
12 Major General Peeples over the Mississippi River
13 Commission.

14 And we talked with them and met with
15 them over in Louisiana and we sat and went to the
16 Bonnet Carré and we looked at the Bonnet Carré and
17 we talked about the Bonnet Carré and we talked
18 about some things and what we can do. One of the
19 things is how can we mitigate operation of the
20 Bonnet Carré as minimal as possible. How can
21 we -- you know, how can we get it to the point
22 that we're not operating the Bonnet Carré any more
23 than we have to?

24 And, you know, it seeps every day. It
25 seeps, you know, 5,000 cubic feet per second or

1 something like that, but that's not hurting us
2 that much. It is putting some nutrients in there
3 that I wish wasn't in there, but as far as the
4 water, the fresh water itself, it's really not
5 hurting us.

6 Because y'all, especially -- I know
7 we've got quite a few oysterman out here today and
8 fishermen, but y'all know very well that you have
9 got to have some fresh water in the summertime and
10 all to be able to have it and if you don't, the
11 salinity gets so high the drills and everything
12 else eat them up and there's other things that
13 happen.

14 But what we're trying to do is we're
15 trying to find a way to be able to mitigate it,
16 and one of the things that we're looking at is
17 they have a -- it's called a Lower Mississippi
18 River Study, and that study is being done by the
19 Corps of Engineers. They were given \$25 million
20 to do this study.

21 And when talking to them, the Generals,
22 one of the big issues was that we don't have --
23 you know, it's basically going to be a study that
24 starts in Missouri and goes all the way to the
25 mouth of the Mississippi. That's a long way.

1 That's a lot of water to look at.

2 So what are we going to do in that?
3 What are we going to look at? So what -- we met
4 again after this, and I met with the Lieutenant
5 Governor Hosemann and Lieutenant Governor
6 Nungesser from Louisiana and the five mayors from
7 the Coast here. We had a meeting in Pass
8 Christian the other day, and one of the things
9 that came out of that meeting was that we're going
10 to go and put something forward to the Lieutenant
11 Governor and them to be able to give us our top
12 three to five things that we want to look at on
13 the Mississippi River. What do we want to look
14 at? What do we want to ask Congress to help us to
15 get funding for? What do we want to do?

16 Obviously, one of them is going to be
17 the Bonnet Carré. One of them is going to be how
18 do we operate it? What do we do with it? What's
19 the possibilities of mitigating some of it and how
20 can we do it?

21 Another thing is these two new
22 diversions that's been brought up. And I know we
23 hate the word "diversion" in Mississippi, but
24 these are before the Bonnet Carré. They're
25 between the Morganza and the Bonnet Carré. One of

1 them's called the Ama and one of them's called the
2 Union. The Ama Diversion goes to the west. The
3 Union Diversion goes to the east, and those
4 diversions can put as much as 75,000 cubic feet
5 per second into that area.

6 Where do they go? They go into a
7 cypress forest. The cypress forest then turns
8 around and absorbs a lot of it, but it also
9 absorbs a lot of the nutrients and everything in
10 the water before it trickles down.

11 The one -- the Union that's going to the
12 east would be -- would still trickle down through
13 Maurepas and all the way into Lake Pontchartrain,
14 but it's going to be a trickle factor and it's
15 going to be a trickle factor without the nutrients
16 in it.

17 And the question was -- Louisiana, a
18 couple of their scientists did a study, and their
19 idea was that had this been opened in 2019, that
20 we could have cut us 40 to 45 days off of opening
21 the Bonnet Carré.

22 Well, my question is -- you know, we
23 need to look at that. We're going to look at
24 those two diversions and we're going to look at
25 what we need to do with them. And is this viable?

1 Is it -- we're going to put the funds together to
2 do a study on it and find out is it viable for
3 this to be something that would help Mississippi
4 and not hurt Mississippi. Would it help our Sound
5 and not hurt us? What can we do with it?

6 You know, it may be -- right now, it's
7 set to where the one in the -- the Ama -- the
8 Union, the one that would be to the east, the
9 Union Diversion is set that it would open up at
10 1.25 million cubic feet per second. Well, that's
11 the same thing that the Bonnet Carré did. That's
12 when it opened. Well, maybe we want to open the
13 Union at 1 million cubic feet per second and maybe
14 try to keep that from reaching the 1.25 million
15 cubic feet.

16 We've got to look at those things.
17 We're going to do studies on it. We've got to
18 figure it out. Somehow, some way, we've got to
19 stop what's happened to us in the last 10 years to
20 15 years. We've got to stop the Bonnet Carré
21 being opened as many times as it is with the
22 amount of fresh water that's being put forward
23 because it does us no good to spend the money and
24 turn around and build oysters and do everything
25 else and build the estuary back and then have it

1 destroyed in a small amount of time.

2 Because what happened in 2019, about
3 90 percent -- and I say that because I'm sure
4 there was one or two hanging on somewhere, but
5 about 90 percent of our oysters was all wiped out.
6 Our shrimp was devastated. The breeding of them
7 was devastated. The crabs were devastated. The
8 finfish moved a little bit, but they still -- the
9 spawning part of it. There is a lot of things
10 that happened because of that.

11 How do we fix it? How do we try to make
12 it work? And so one of the things that we're
13 trying to do is we're trying to find a way, and
14 this is -- we're going to get back something
15 hopefully in the next 30 to 60 days that we will
16 get back with the Lieutenant Governor and them and
17 decide where we're going to go with this as far as
18 Mississippi is looking at.

19 But I can tell you those -- and, you
20 know, the other question is the Morganza. Why
21 have they never opened it? Well, mainly because
22 the Morganza, the way it's built, it has to get
23 1.5 million cubic feet per second -- it has to get
24 57 feet on the gate before it will ever get there.
25 Well, there's a way to modify this. Is that

1 something we want to look at? What do we need to
2 do?

3 And the other thing that I -- and I
4 learned long ago is that when the Corps of
5 Engineers opens up the Bonnet Carré, it doesn't
6 cost the Corps of Engineers anything but the
7 maintenance of it and what they're doing. When
8 they open up the Morganza, they have to pay money
9 right off the bat.

10 Well, let's put skin in the game in the
11 Bonnet Carré, if that's the case. Let's ask
12 Congress to look at it. Let's ask Congress to
13 look at changing the rules. What are we doing?
14 And ask them to look at it.

15 And, you know, the Corps is there to
16 help us, even though you don't think they are, but
17 they've just got to -- we've got to help them help
18 us. How do we do this? How do we help them help
19 us? So that's one of the biggest things.

20 Any questions on that, Commissioners?

21 CAM ROBERDS:

22 No, sir.

23 JOE SPRAGGINS:

24 All right. Well, we do have some good
25 days. It's not good news because of what happened

1 because we lost a great fisherman. But the
2 "Linda K," the boat that the gentleman was on and
3 passed away and when that happened, you know, we
4 had a lot of people looking at it. And I know
5 that the family went out and we tried to tow the
6 boat back in. And this was one of the oldest
7 shrimp boats on the Gulf Coast. I want to say
8 1928. I may be wrong, but I think it's somewhere
9 along in there is when that boat was built, so
10 you're looking at almost 100 years and 100 of --
11 that boat has been fishing in the Gulf of Mexico.

12 So what we did is, we went in -- and the
13 family tried to get it moved. Some people tried
14 to help them. Our fishermen out there are always
15 willing to jump in and help people and especially
16 the ones that are working in the field. And they
17 could not move it, so we contracted with a group
18 that went in. They was able to lift her up all
19 intact and we got her on shore now and she is --
20 Linda K is on shore now.

21 And what we're going to do is -- we're
22 able get her out of the water all intact and
23 everything. And one of the things that we're
24 looking at, we're going to work with the family
25 and see how we can do this, but, hopefully, we can

1 put her in the Seafood Museum. We would love to
2 put the Linda K in the Seafood Museum to show
3 everybody just what this was because it's an icon
4 to the Gulf of Mexico. So you will be hearing
5 more about that shortly and we're going to do what
6 we can.

7 Update from the fisheries on the oyster
8 season, we're going to have -- we're going to talk
9 about that and we're going to talk a little bit
10 about what we're doing with the oyster season.

11 I don't have the numbers in front of me.
12 Rick, do you have the numbers? I know we've had
13 to shut down. Where are we, about 1,800 sacks or
14 something?

15 RICK BURRIS:

16 Yes, sir. I think we're around --
17 between 1,700 and 1,800. Jason is going to have
18 all the metrics in his -- in his presentation.

19 JOE SPRAGGINS:

20 All right. And we'll talk about that
21 during that presentation.

22 I know that one of the things, too,
23 that -- you know, we opened it up in November.
24 We've had a lot of rain and the wind and the --
25 you know, it just wasn't conducive to get out

1 there very much, and so we had a small amount of
2 oystermen that were fishing.

3 So we came back in December to open it
4 again and this time, we decided to raise the limit
5 on the dredgers. And I may have made a mistake,
6 because I was told that the tongers were getting
7 about as much as they could do in a day, and maybe
8 because I did not ask the right questions. But
9 they're saying that they could have caught a lot
10 more, so maybe -- you know, I may just change that
11 in a matter of hours that if the tongers want to
12 get more, we can get more to the tongers too.
13 That's all right. That's not a problem, but we
14 can do something about that.

15 But we're going to open it back up and
16 hopefully tomorrow, Rick, I think, is what we're
17 looking at because the water -- all the rain we
18 got last week. And we're not going to be able to
19 keep it open through Christmas because we're not
20 going to extend it any more than that after the
21 20th. But what we will do is we'll probably go
22 back and look at either the end of the year or
23 January and open it again. So we're going to look
24 at it and see what we can do about being able to
25 do that. That's just where we're at.

1 Any questions on that?

2 CAM ROBERDS:

3 No, sir.

4 JOE SPRAGGINS:

5 All right. Well, we've got -- I'm going
6 to hold this update on the on-bottom oyster lease
7 program because I know that we have quite a few
8 people here today that want to talk about that, so
9 I'm going to hold that. I think it's under "K"
10 that we have something when we're talking about
11 marine fisheries. When we get there, I'm just
12 going to hold off to talk about it at that point
13 because then we can go through the whole process
14 if that's all right with everybody. Is that all
15 right with y'all?

16 CAM ROBERDS:

17 That's good.

18 JOE SPRAGGINS:

19 All right. Bonnet Carré update, we're
20 trying to get funds out, and, you know, we did --
21 we were able to get the funds out to the
22 fisheries. I was looking at it. The financial
23 assistance of the Mississippi commercial
24 fisheries, seafood dealers and charter fishing
25 businesses, we funded right at \$8 million, and we

1 spent -- we had about 8 million and we spent about
2 7.7 million of that already. 7.1 million of that
3 went straight to the commercials, and 575,000 of
4 it went to the charter boat.

5 I want y'all to know something else too,
6 and I know there is a lot of commercial fishermen
7 out here today or some fishermen, and, you know,
8 Mississippi is the only state that does this with
9 our Bonnet Carré funds. Alabama, Louisiana, none
10 of them give money direct to the fishermen for
11 their losses. Mississippi is the only one that
12 does it.

13 And now, did we help you? Maybe a
14 little bit. Did we make you well? By no means.
15 You know, it's impossible. All we can give you
16 under that is what you have lost, what would have
17 been your loss that one year. That's all Congress
18 will let us do, but we can do that and we do do
19 that. And I hope it helped you some. I hope it
20 helped you be able to get by a little bit. I
21 think if you had had an oyster business and you
22 would -- you know, it was something like \$15,000.
23 Is that right, Rick?

24 RICK BURRIS:

25 (Nodding head affirmatively.)

1 JOE SPRAGGINS:

2 And then shrimpers were 7,000-something.
3 And anything after that, was the numbers that came
4 up above that as to how much money that the
5 shrimpers were able to get.

6 All right. We -- also, we're doing the
7 processors and, hopefully, we'll get that done.
8 And what we're doing there is we've got about
9 \$3 million that we're spending on the processors
10 and that's to help them to be able to update
11 equipment. It's nowhere near what it needs to be,
12 but that's all we had to be able to spend.

13 And so what we did is went out and got
14 them to give us information on what they were
15 going to be able to do. And some have already
16 bought stuff and we can help reimburse them up to
17 a certain amount of that, but that is going out as
18 we speak. We're trying to get it out before
19 Christmas. And I don't know exactly where we're
20 at, but I think we're close to it.

21 Any questions on that, Bonnet Carré?

22 CAM ROBERDS:

23 No, sir.

24 JOE SPRAGGINS:

25 We will be closed Christmas Eve,

1 Christmas Day. And we'll also be -- the agency
2 will -- the building will be shut down 21 through
3 25 and that's because they're working on the
4 building here, but we will still be operational on
5 the 23rd and that weekend as far as anything
6 that's going on. But we'll still have people
7 working, but the point is, the building will be
8 shut down, so you can't come to the building. And
9 if you're looking at buying a license or something
10 on the 23rd, you will not be able to do that.
11 We'll also be shut down on the 1st of January.

12 We have got derelict vessels, our grant.
13 We have 172 derelict vessel cases that have been
14 reported. 148 of them have been removed. 28 --
15 four of them are still pending and eight of them
16 are in court orders for removal, so we're doing
17 pretty good.

18 I think we're still leading the Gulf as
19 far as the amount of people as how many we are
20 being able to remove. And I think that our group
21 is doing a great job on that and I thank them for
22 everything that they're doing.

23 Commissioners, I know we've got a busy
24 schedule going on and some other stuff.

25 Let's see. I've got agency update.

1 I've got that, so now I'm looking at actions. Is
2 there any actions?

3 STEVEN ECKERT:

4 Yes, Director, there are. Good morning,
5 Commissioners and Director.

6 Discussed at the November 2024 meeting,
7 the Commission and the Director -- the Commission
8 recommended and the Director approved the
9 following motions: One, there was a permit
10 requested by MDEQ for the filling of Coastal
11 wetlands for the construction of a submerged
12 artificial reef near Buccaneer State Park.

13 There was an approval for a requested
14 variance, the use plan change and the permit
15 itself, and there were also conditions to the
16 permit containing an adaptive management plan,
17 coordination with the U.S. Coast Guard and a plan
18 for the -- inspection for the presence of
19 subaquatic vegetation.

20 There was also a motion recommended and
21 approved for the following state saltwater finfish
22 records: First being a conventional tackle for an
23 Atlantic stingray of 8 pounds, 3.68 ounces for
24 Jawaun Walton.

25 And also, a youth conventional tackle

1 for a sharpnose shark of 11 pounds, .064 ounces
2 for Rodie Armes, and for a northern kingfish for
3 6.8 ounces for Cooper Wrightson.

4 And that is the action items -- action
5 update.

6 JOE SPRAGGINS:

7 Okay. Any questions on that?

8 If not, Commissioner, that's my report.

9 CAM ROBERDS:

10 Thank you, Director. That's good news
11 on the "Linda K" that you guys were able to pull
12 that out and, hopefully, salvage it. That's
13 definitely a relic.

14 Do the Commissioners have anything to
15 report today?

16 JONATHAN MCLENDON:

17 I just want to say a quick thing. I
18 talked to some of the folks in our neighboring
19 states regarding the Bonnet Carré disbursements
20 and they're all just amazed, you know, at how
21 quickly and efficiently Mississippi has
22 distributed their money, so great job there.

23 I also want to comment on the Gulf fresh
24 label for the domestic shrimp. Some things that I
25 have seen in neighboring states that have

1 instituted these laws, Number 1, is the fact that,
2 you know, they have violations, but there's really
3 no enforcement on it. So who's actually going to
4 enforce the laws that we write is very, very
5 important.

6 And then another thing I would like to
7 see is also some type of language with -- that
8 covers the attribute of the shrimp. So we see
9 things like Southern fried shrimp, Cajun shrimp
10 pasta, Atchafalaya shrimp, all insinuating that
11 they're local from the Gulf and, of course,
12 they're not. So thank you.

13 CAM ROBERDS:

14 That's some good points there,
15 Commissioner.

16 Anyone else have anything to report?

17 RONNIE DANIELS:

18 No, sir.

19 CAM ROBERDS:

20 Nope.

21 All right. Moving on to Office of
22 Marine Patrol, Chief Wilkerson.

23 KYLE WILKERSON:

24 Good morning. Everybody well and having
25 a good holiday season?

1 CAM ROBERDS:

2 Yes, sir.

3 KYLE WILKERSON:

4 Christmas is coming. Hope we got all
5 that shopping done.

6 All right. So this particular month
7 was -- once again, it was very compliant. The
8 people, the fishermen, they were -- they played
9 well with others out there, which is awesome. We
10 always like it when it goes smoothly.

11 There was only one citation that really
12 popped out at me. It was a -- commercial fishing
13 north of the CSX Bridge. It was a Vietnamese
14 gentleman that caught 93 sheepshead and was trying
15 to sell them. So at the end of the day, when we
16 -- in an entanglement at that. It was pretty
17 good. It was a pretty good pop.

18 We have checked 1,400 individuals
19 roughly in the month of November, and that's
20 pretty good for a winter month.

21 So I will field any questions if you
22 have any.

23 CAM ROBERDS:

24 Questions?

25 RONNIE DANIELS:

1 No, sir.

2 CAM ROBERDS:

3 All right. I really appreciate the
4 report, Chief. Thank you very much.

5 KYLE WILKERSON:

6 Yes, sir. Thank you.

7 CAM ROBERDS:

8 All right. Moving on down, looks like
9 Ms. Charmaine for Public Affairs.

10 CHARMAINE SCHMERMUND:

11 Good morning. The Mississippi
12 Department of Marine Resources had 14 media
13 mentions since the November MACMR meeting. News
14 items included the opening of oyster season in
15 Mississippi, the cockroach artificial reef being
16 deployed and restaurants selling seafood on the
17 Mississippi Gulf Coast.

18 The Office of Marine Patrol assisted
19 with Long Beach's Sea Santa Sail-a-bration on
20 December 7th. Marine Patrol and the Artificial
21 Reef Bureau took part in the Pathways 2
22 Possibilities on November 20th and 21st. Marine
23 Patrol was stationed in the law and public safety
24 pathway, and the Artificial Reef Bureau had their
25 booth in the marine science pathway. The two-day

1 event had thousands of students participating from
2 throughout the southern part of the state.

3 Staff in the Office of Marine Fisheries
4 participated in the Bays and Bayous symposium on
5 November 19th through the 20th in Biloxi. In the
6 Shellfish Bureau, Scientist Katherine Glover
7 presented "Tracking the Natural Replenishment of
8 Mississippi's Eastern Oyster Reefs After a
9 Fisheries Disaster." Scientist Madison Parker
10 presented "From Training to Harvest: The
11 Implementation and Outcomes of Mississippi's
12 Off-bottom Oyster Aquaculture Training Program,"
13 and Team Lead Ellen Coffin presented "Reviving
14 Biloxi Bay: MDMR's Adaptive Restoration of a
15 Local Oyster Reef." Shellfish Bureau Director
16 Jason Rider served on the event steering
17 committee.

18 In the Shrimp and Crab Bureau, Team Lead
19 Melody Chaplin presented "Impact of Hydrological
20 Changes and Flood Events on Recruitment of
21 Juvenile Fish and Invertebrate Populations in
22 Mississippi's Estuaries." And additionally, all
23 Shrimp and Crab Bureau staff represented MDMR in
24 our agency booth for the duration of the
25 symposium.

1 I also added calendars to the back. We
2 have our 2025 marine information calendars, and
3 they've also been distributed along the Coast. I
4 really want to thank our Coastal CRM and Shrimp
5 and Crab Bureau for distributing the calendars for
6 our office. It takes a lot of people to kind of
7 get everything in and brought in, so if anybody
8 needs calendars, we have them up in the front in
9 licensing and also with Capitol Police and there
10 are also some in the back.

11 CAM ROBERDS:

12 Thank you very much.

13 Lots of participation I see every month.
14 That's great stuff.

15 Moving on down to Office of Marine
16 Fisheries, Jason.

17 JASON RIDER:

18 Good morning, everyone. My name is
19 Jason Rider.

20 Brady, do you mind pulling up the
21 presentation? Thank you.

22 Jason Rider, I'm the Shellfish Bureau
23 Director. I'm going to give a quick update on the
24 2024 oyster season to where we're at today.

25 So just a summary of what we had in

1 November: It was 10 days. Opened on 13th, ran
2 through the 26th. We did have some bad weather
3 days, as the Director mentioned. We did have some
4 windy days, but people were out there fishing and
5 we saw some good results on it.

6 West -- all the western reefs were
7 available. Permitting areas were open. It was
8 for tonging and dredging, and the November season,
9 it was 10 sacks per boat per day.

10 Some of the numbers that we had in
11 November: We had just over 700 sacks harvested.
12 The average sacks per day was 64. Licenses was
13 101. And then you can see the breakdown below.
14 In-state dredge was 62 and tong was 26, and then
15 we had some out-of-state licenses sold.

16 Of those licenses that were sold, we had
17 20 people fishing during the season. We had
18 approximately six tongers per day, and then
19 approximately three dredgers per day. Those
20 numbers are averages.

21 So -- and then the main area fished was
22 II A and II F, and I can show you that next. If
23 you look on the screen here, it was basically the
24 tonging box, the southern side tonging box and
25 then inside the tonging box. This whole area over

1 here is where everyone was fishing.

2 As you can see, we had about
3 79.9 percent of the total harvest came from that
4 area. And then we did get reports from the
5 harvesters. They saw a lot of clusters on the
6 oysters, a lot of variation of sizes. We talked
7 to a lot of people that had to cull the oysters,
8 spent a lot of time cleaning off their oysters for
9 the market and had to get them ready. So that's a
10 good sign for us. I know it is more work for
11 them, but we do want to see size class variations,
12 and we wanted to see a significant amount of
13 oyster in those areas. So that was the November
14 season.

15 And then, real quick for the -- where
16 we're at for December right now: The season did
17 open on December 9th. We closed last week on
18 December 13th due to management condition,
19 management criteria.

20 And, again, we did have the western
21 reefs available, tong and dredging, and it was 10
22 sacks for tongers, 20 sacks for dredgers and then
23 rec was three sacks per week.

24 To date, we have harvested approximately
25 1,200 sacks in the December season and that brings

1 the total to date of just shy of 2,000 sacks.
2 It's going to be 1,911 sacks for the year. And
3 then we're seeing an average of 18 dredgers per
4 day for the December season and seven tongers per
5 day for, again, the December season.

6 As I mentioned, the areas in the west
7 are closed at this time due to the rainfall and
8 the Pearl River stages. We have to have
9 acceptable conditions in both of those.

10 Unfortunately, it did rain last week and the river
11 did increase. The flood stage did increase.

12 We ran samples on Saturday. We got
13 those results on Sunday. Unfortunately, they did
14 not come back adequate, so we ran them again
15 yesterday. And we're waiting for those results
16 today and as soon as we get those, we will make
17 decisions according to the results.

18 Any questions? Yes.

19 JOE SPRAGGINS:

20 Jason, just talking to some of the
21 people out here this morning, even a possibility
22 -- you know, we looked at -- whenever we changed
23 the rules to say we'd go to 20 for the dredgers,
24 but we kept it 10 for the tongers, I was under the
25 impression that the tongers at 10 was about what

1 they wanted today, but I think that -- from
2 talking to some of them that they would like to
3 see it upped.

4 So is that something that we could do
5 just by changing the order now before we open --
6 when we open back up tomorrow? Could we do that?
7 Is that something we could do or do we have to go
8 through some other thing? Sandy, maybe you can
9 help me.

10 JASON RIDER:

11 So I think we do have the authority.
12 Sandy, correct me if I'm wrong, but I think we do
13 have the authority to make those types of
14 decisions.

15 SANDY CHESNUT:

16 Yeah. You can do an amended order.

17 JOE SPRAGGINS:

18 And, you know, I would like to do
19 something else and -- you know, just to say
20 that -- let's change it to maybe -- I mean, if
21 somebody can give me idea. Is 15 sacks a good
22 number for the tongers or do we need to -- is that
23 a good number?

24 AUDIENCE MEMBER:

25 That's a good number.

1 JOE SPRAGGINS:

2 All right. And so why don't we do 15 --
3 why don't we just change tomorrow since our
4 numbers are -- and the rain we have. Let's change
5 it to 15 and 25.

6 JASON RIDER:

7 So we can look at that, but I do -- I do
8 want to caution. We have to wait for those
9 results and get those back.

10 JOE SPRAGGINS:

11 I know, but if it's going to come out
12 tomorrow.

13 JASON RIDER:

14 Okay.

15 JOE SPRAGGINS:

16 If we're going to open tomorrow, when we
17 open back up for the rest of this season, we're
18 going to have this -- let's change it to 15 and
19 25.

20 Is that all right, Rick? I know
21 you're sitting there and I'm hitting you
22 blindsided here.

23 RICK BURRIS:

24 That's something we can --

25 JASON RIDER:

1 I think we can --

2 JOE SPRAGGINS:

3 Well, I mean, right now, we've lost four
4 days.

5 JASON RIDER:

6 Yeah.

7 JOE SPRAGGINS:

8 You know, let's try to help them get
9 what we can. All right? So let's change it to 15
10 and 25.

11 JASON RIDER:

12 I think there's some things we can look
13 at, and I think we can certainly discuss it and
14 make those changes if deemed necessary.

15 JOE SPRAGGINS:

16 Okay. Let's try to do that.

17 Okay. Any other questions for Jason?

18 No. Appreciate the update, Jason.

19 JASON RIDER:

20 Thank you.

21 CAM ROBERDS:

22 Thank you, man.

23 All right. Ms. Ayesha Gray.

24 JOE SPRAGGINS:

25 Wait. We've still got K.1. We're still

1 on that. All right.

2 CAM ROBERDS:

3 Okay.

4 JOE SPRAGGINS:

5 All right. The other thing is I said I
6 was going to hold off on the stuff about the
7 oyster season and about the on-bottom.

8 CAM ROBERDS:

9 Yeah.

10 JOE SPRAGGINS:

11 All right. What we did is, you know, we
12 went out -- and I was trying to get all the data
13 in front of me because we started this in, gosh, I
14 want to say, 2018 that we started looking at this,
15 and we brought it up, a bill. And it was a bill
16 that was brought up in the House and the Senate to
17 be able to lease the bottoms to private
18 individuals, and it was shot down by the Senate
19 and the House and they did not -- when I say "shot
20 down," it didn't pass. It didn't come out of
21 committee, and so then it came back.

22 And then in 2023, we had a new bill that
23 came out and it was brought out of the House and
24 the Senate to be able to lease the bottoms to
25 private individuals, and this is to -- what we

1 were looking at is, you know, what we could do
2 to -- and how much of it would be done.

3 That bill was put out and it was passed.
4 But then when it was passed, we had some issues
5 with it and so we were able -- we tried to go
6 through the process of being able to figure out
7 how to legally lease these things to individuals,
8 and it just didn't work out in the 2023 bill. So
9 what we told the House and Senate is that we need
10 to modify that, if that's what we're going to do.

11 And so in 2024, January 2024, we had a
12 new bill, and I don't have the House bill -- the
13 Senate Bill in front of me, but it was put out.

14 And, Rick, y'all maybe can look it up
15 and get it to us so we can put this to the public
16 out here.

17 But we went in -- and so the
18 basically -- oh, Sandy's got it. Thank you.

19 2648 was the bill and that was
20 publicized and it was brought out. And one of the
21 things that they did, the House and the Senate,
22 and it was brought to us that basically we would
23 like to lease the bottoms and lease them to
24 private individuals so that we can get more
25 oysters into the estuary.

1 The other -- the biggest problem -- one
2 of the big problems that we had, as far as the
3 Department of Marine Resources, is we had 12,000
4 acres and out of that 12,000 acres, we were having
5 a hard time, especially after a thing like the
6 Bonnet Carré, to re-cultch it and modify it and be
7 able to keep it going. So they were looking at
8 what we could do to be able to help bring this,
9 and it's worked well in Louisiana. It's
10 worked well in -- it's working well in Texas right
11 now, so the idea was, let's try it in Mississippi.

12 So they passed legislation this last
13 January. Well, it passed in April, I think, is
14 when it actually got through, and it was signed
15 over by the Governor. And so the bill is in to
16 where we would lease 80 percent of the bottoms,
17 and that's what the word is. 80 percent of the
18 bottoms will be leased and 20 percent will be
19 kept.

20 And I don't know. Rick, did we ever get
21 a copy? I would love to be able to show them what
22 is leasable and what's not. Can we get that?
23 Brady, have you got it by any chance, the picture
24 of what we've been working off of, the map?

25 Okay. Is that just the blue areas?

1 Rick, where is the whole area?

2 RICK BURRIS:

3 So these are just the state-owned reefs.
4 Brady, if you will pull up the website, it has an
5 interactive map where it has the available areas
6 for lease, as well as the state-owned reefs.

7 JOE SPRAGGINS:

8 I want y'all to see what we're talking
9 about. And, you know, I was very surprised this
10 morning because I thought we got the word out. I
11 thought we done as good a job as we could possibly
12 do to get the word out. And, you know, we had
13 been talking about this on the news. We've
14 talking about this in the papers. We've been
15 talking about this with -- on Facebook and
16 everywhere else, you know, in social media, and
17 we've been trying to do everything we could to get
18 the word out that we were going to do this.

19 We had public comment, and I'm still
20 waiting for the actual paperwork to tell me when
21 the actual public comment was. But we went out on
22 public comment. I want to say it was back in
23 August, September time frame. Am I right?

24 I'm sorry. I'm not prepared because I
25 did not realize that this was coming up today

1 because it had not been brought to my attention
2 until this morning, okay, so we're trying to get
3 prepared as much as we can here, Commissioners,
4 and to the public.

5 All right. Help me walk through this.
6 Round 1 application period was 7/21 to 8/04, and
7 Round 2 was 10/1 to 12/2. And we put out public
8 notice at MDMR we'd accept proposals for
9 on-bottom, and that was done in July of -- the
10 20th. I'm trying to keep this -- back in
11 February, we issued notice of cancellation of it
12 and that was for the first one and that's what I'm
13 talking about from the year before.

14 And then September 20th, accepted
15 proposals for on-bottom shellfish leases, and then
16 in December is when it closed, on December 2nd, I
17 think is when it closed.

18 But, Rick, when did we do the public
19 notice thing? When did we put out the public
20 notice? That's not public notice right there.

21 RICK BURRIS:

22 So Round 1 was July 20th.

23 JOE SPRAGGINS:

24 Did we put out a thing that we had -- I
25 think we had it -- did we not meet with the

1 Commission here and the Commission put out a thing
2 to go forward and say that we would put out a
3 public notice for 30 days, I think it was?

4 RICK BURRIS:

5 Yes, sir. So that would have been prior
6 to -- it would have been in the June 2023 meeting.
7 And then for this year, it would have been
8 sometime -- I can -- we can get the dates, but it
9 was talked about multiple times with this
10 Commission, and then it was voted on to move
11 forward for October.

12 JOE SPRAGGINS:

13 Let's see. Before this meeting is over
14 today, we're going to have some comments here and
15 we're going to have time to be able to get this
16 information. Let's find out the information we
17 can. Let's get when was it actually put out for
18 public notice for people to be able to make
19 comments to say whether or not they wanted this to
20 happen. Okay? All right?

21 RICK BURRIS:

22 Yes, sir.

23 JOE SPRAGGINS:

24 And let's get that information now. So
25 what I want to do is I want to get that

1 information.

2 And the situation we're in now -- and
3 one of the gentlemen I was talking to a while
4 ago -- I'm not going to call names out or anything
5 else, but he was like, well, you know, we saw you
6 on the news talking about that it was going to be
7 January.

8 The January thing was that we gave all
9 the people that had put in public -- to lease the
10 bottoms, we gave them till January 15th to get
11 their correct data in case they had something that
12 was messed up that we could get it back to them
13 and we could work back and forth with them. And
14 so that's what the January 15th was and that's
15 what we're looking at.

16 We're going through leases right now. I
17 don't have the exact number, but I -- we did -- on
18 the last Commission meeting, I think we talked
19 about the numbers of leases. And, Sandy, maybe
20 you can -- one of y'all -- if somebody can help me
21 pull that up, because I want to be as open as I
22 can. I'm not trying to hide anything. I didn't
23 try to hide anything to start with, and I'm not
24 trying to hide anything now. I never, ever not
25 wanted the fishermen to be aware of what was going

1 on, but, obviously, I have failed. And I've got
2 to find out what we did and how we did it and
3 figure out where is our mistakes. You know, what
4 did we do wrong? But I have got to find out that.

5 But I don't have -- had I known about
6 this, you know, that y'all were upset about it, I
7 would have already had everything in the world put
8 together, but I did not. I can just tell you, I
9 want to say that we had -- and I can't remember
10 the number. It was like 18 different companies or
11 individuals that put in for a lease. I want to
12 say that's the number and I'm not right, but
13 I'll -- we'll get that data for you, okay, here in
14 just a few minutes. And it may have been that --
15 it was, like, 61 different leases, I want to say.
16 I'm trying to remember from the last meeting,
17 but -- and out of that, it was from 18 different
18 organizations.

19 Now, one thing that we did for that is
20 we went in and said that you have got to show us
21 that you have the capability of managing this reef
22 and you have the capability to do what you're
23 supposed to do. I don't want somebody -- I didn't
24 want somebody to come in and say, oh, I will give
25 you \$2 and \$3 an acre for the lease and then I'll

1 turn around and I'll go out there and take every
2 oyster off that and I won't ever do anything with
3 it. We didn't want that.

4 What we wanted was somebody that was
5 going to maintain it. We wanted someone that if
6 they're going to lease this bottom, that they
7 would maintain it. They had to show us that they
8 had experience doing it and it was experience of
9 -- that you have to have experience, as far as how
10 many years that you've done this, how many
11 years -- the capability of it, the financial
12 backing. Can you -- and it's required that if you
13 leased 100 acres, you had to be able to at least
14 cultch and seed 50 percent of that in the first
15 five years. So we're trying to feed back. We're
16 trying to feed back and feed back and feed back to
17 be able to get it out.

18 One of the main things that we wanted to
19 do is, you know, the more oysters that we can get
20 in the water, the better off that we'll be because
21 they feed our estuary. That was one of the major
22 reasons that we looked at this, because they do
23 feed our estuary. They feed our estuary. About
24 the best thing in the world that we can have is an
25 oyster growing. And so that's the -- something

1 that we looked at and how could we make this work.

2 And, you know, once again, I don't know
3 anything other than to say I'm sorry that -- the
4 fact that I didn't get the word out correctly. I
5 just don't understand how I didn't, but I'm going
6 to find out because I'm the type of person that I
7 am an open book. And I think if any of you have
8 ever talked to me and come to me and sat down with
9 me, anything, that I'm an open book about
10 everything. I will tell you everything. I don't
11 hold anything back. That's not my job.

12 I work for you. I don't work for
13 myself, and I don't work for anybody else. I work
14 for you, and that's what my job is. My job is to
15 maintain the estuaries in the State of Mississippi
16 for what we have and be able to do it to the best
17 ability we can, and that's what we're going to do.
18 We're going to try every way we can.

19 Here we go. All right. You see the
20 areas there? Now, Rick, somebody come here with
21 it so I don't mess this up. Jason, Rick, somebody
22 talk to us about what we're talking about here,
23 what areas and what we're looking at.

24 JASON RIDER:

25 So what we have here is this is a map of

1 all -- of the Western Sound, and the colored
2 portions are available for private leasing. This
3 is the presentation we gave earlier this year. We
4 divide it into zones, and then you would apply per
5 zone in the area that you want. So if an
6 applicant was interested in Zone II, they could
7 come in and draw a box through the application
8 portal that we had on the DMR website, submit and
9 then apply with coordinates and provide the
10 associated documentation to prove that they're
11 eligible and qualified to lease that area.

12 JOE SPRAGGINS:

13 Jason, now -- and the hatched areas that
14 are not colored, they were either going to be
15 state reefs or either were already privately
16 leased before; is that correct?

17 JASON OSBORNE:

18 That's correct. So state reefs are
19 these areas in Zone III and IV. And then the
20 other hatched areas are all private existing
21 on-bottom leases, so those are leases that have
22 been in -- they have been active for a long period
23 of time with private companies.

24 And this website, I believe, went
25 live --

1 JOE SPRAGGINS:

2 Jason, do you remember when we first
3 started leasing bottoms to private individuals?

4 JASON RIDER:

5 It's been a while. We've been doing it
6 for multiple decades. I would say back to at
7 least --

8 JOE SPRAGGINS:

9 But we had very little participation in
10 that, right?

11 JASON RIDER:

12 Yes. We never had much participation
13 with private leases because we had the public
14 resource available.

15 JOE SPRAGGINS:

16 Okay.

17 JASON RIDER:

18 Yeah.

19 I believe this -- the application period
20 opened. It was -- I believe it was the 2nd of
21 October and it ran till the -- it may have been
22 1st of October through the 2nd of December the
23 application period was open for this.

24 Any other questions with this?

25 I think --

1 JOE SPRAGGINS:

2 Well, one thing, I just want to -- they
3 showed -- if you look in the red area and the
4 green area, the hatched out there, that is what
5 the State is keeping; is that correct?

6 JASON RIDER:

7 Yes.

8 JOE SPRAGGINS:

9 So I want y'all to understand that's
10 what the State is keeping right now. Whenever we
11 worked with the Legislature, we hashed it down and
12 I tell you what, we fought hard to get 20 percent.
13 And, you know, fought hard to be able to get
14 20 percent of that and be able to keep that much.
15 Our goal is to maintain that 20 percent and be
16 able to cultch it and be able to seed it and be
17 able to keep it going over the years.

18 That's the only -- now, we've got some
19 on the east side, too, I think, which is probably
20 not showing here.

21 JASON RIDER:

22 So real quick. As you mentioned,
23 Director, that is our focus on restoration, is
24 those state-owned reefs. Any restoration that
25 we're doing is going into those areas. And the

1 goal of that is to help restore the Sound and help
2 promote oysters on -- for private or public reefs,
3 so that's the goal there.

4 JOE SPRAGGINS:

5 Yeah. The idea is to be able to keep
6 the estuary fed as much as we possibly can.

7 JASON RIDER:

8 Yeah.

9 JOE SPRAGGINS:

10 And how we do that is we -- you know, I
11 don't know -- we looked at it and, you know, just
12 to take an acre of land and be able to take it
13 from -- if it wasn't already cultched, is about
14 \$4,000. Is that right, Jason, to be able to
15 cultch that and be able to -- to be able to get it
16 presentable for oysters, I think is what we
17 figured, right?

18 JASON RIDER:

19 That's what we came up with, yes.

20 JOE SPRAGGINS:

21 All right. We'll work on -- I want to
22 get the other data, but I know we've got comments
23 and I want to get comments from the fishermen
24 here. But let's look at this and we're going to
25 make this open so, you know, when we get down, we

1 -- you know, once again, I'm going to have to
2 limit you to three minutes, so we can get
3 everybody, okay, but that's understandable. But
4 the point is, we're not going to get out of here
5 until we get to hear what you have to say. Is
6 that understandable too? We're not going to leave
7 you out.

8 And, you know, once again, I'm very
9 shocked about what's happening this morning
10 because it just caught me totally off guard. I
11 had no idea that y'all didn't know. I had no
12 idea, and, you know, it's really caught me totally
13 off guard.

14 So let's go back. And, Commissioner, if
15 you want to start out with which one you want to
16 do first as far as calling for public comment, and
17 then we'll have the others. And then maybe we can
18 get this other data so we can bring it to the
19 people.

20 CAM ROBERDS:

21 Okay. We'll start with Mr. John
22 Livings. Mr. Livings, if you just state your name
23 and address, and then the clock is on the wall
24 there for three minutes.

25 JOHN LIVINGS:

1 Okay. My name is John Livings. I live
2 at -- in Pass Christian. I have been a fisherman
3 my whole life.

4 I -- the bottom -- I don't think y'all
5 realized what y'all were doing with leasing it out
6 really because you're taking -- you're giving
7 100 percent to the leaseholder, so the fishermen,
8 they have no voice in it no more, none. So if
9 they work, 50 percent of what they make goes to
10 the dealer, to whoever the leaseholder is, so they
11 have no control to even possibly sell sacks to
12 people that's been buying for years and years from
13 them.

14 I, personally, in 2015, when it last
15 closed, was catching 150 sacks a day in
16 Mississippi. We worked five boats every day. My
17 address is on every one of those licenses I
18 bought. You would think that a letter could come
19 to my house to talk about on-bottom leasing.

20 The other thing was, in 2014, I applied
21 to lease some bottom on the southwest corner of
22 the Square Handkerchief and I was denied because
23 it's -- the law that they read to me said, no
24 bottom in Mississippi could be leased if it had
25 grit, shells, or live oysters on this. It had to

1 be raw, untapped bottom.

2 So I don't understand how they're giving
3 them millions of dollars worth of oysters on
4 something that all the taxpayers paid for and
5 money was delegated and already seeded. They're
6 not going to have to put anything on that lease.
7 All they've got to do is go to work. That's all
8 they've got to do because they're -- Mother Nature
9 and what y'all have done has already re-seeded the
10 reefs, so they don't have to do anything. All
11 they've got to do is go make money.

12 So I think it's -- it's crazy really,
13 because this is historical reefs. It's always
14 been public reefs. There was a few private reefs,
15 but the guys that had the private leases, they
16 didn't fall under the five-year program to have
17 the lease. Some of them's had them for 20 years
18 and done nothing. All they've done is collect
19 money on those leases when there's a natural
20 disaster. They'll put a few tons of crushed
21 concrete on it and collect hundreds of thousands
22 of dollars, so their leases all should have been
23 pulled.

24 I mean, and our kids that are growing
25 up, they no longer have the opportunity to go out

1 there and publicly learn and do. I'm second
2 generation. I have eight kids, so two of my sons
3 have done it, but the two of them's just now
4 coming of age to do it. And, I mean, I don't want
5 them to go to work for someone else. They should
6 be able to go and freely do it on their own on the
7 public reef like it's been forever.

8 Every time we have put our fingers in
9 Mother Nature, we mess it up, so, I mean -- and I
10 think you're making a huge mistake now, and that's
11 all I have got to say.

12 CAM ROBERDS:

13 Thank you, Mr. Livings.

14 All right. We have Mr. Roscoe Liebig.
15 I might not have said that right, Roscoe --

16 ROSCOE LIEBIG:

17 Liebeg.

18 CAM ROBERDS:

19 -- but, if you could, state your name
20 and address when you get up.

21 ROSCOE LIEBIG:

22 Roscoe Liebig. Is this thing on?

23 Roscoe Liebig, Pass Christian,
24 Mississippi.

25 My father wasn't a fisherman. My

1 grandfather wasn't a fisherman. And like John
2 said, the last time we drug an oyster, my daughter
3 was four years old. And this oyster reef will
4 come back. I mean, I've seen down on the wave.
5 We had two dredges on a shrimp boat to make 15
6 sacks. Oysters was in bad shape.

7 Bonnet Carré came. I own a bait shop.
8 I've seen everything. I've seen -- I've spent
9 eight hours a day driving my boat. I've seen the
10 oyster reef die. I've seen the reef come back.
11 I've seen oysters around my bait shop. This reef
12 will come back. But leasing it out, no.

13 We have got a limited season right now.
14 All the boats are doing the same thing. They're
15 going to one spot where it's good. They gave us
16 like 10 days. We missed the first 10 days. We
17 didn't make it. It took me about \$1,800 to get my
18 boat ready to go catch these oysters. We're
19 pulling dredges out of the woods, out of the
20 grass, but this reef will come back. I have got a
21 feeling.

22 And y'all have not seen anything yet.
23 You've got all -- what few boats -- you guys work
24 in one spot, and you're talking about leasing
25 80 percent of the ground out. Turn these boats

1 loose. Let them go out there. And if you had to
2 manage them, say, y'all work this spot for
3 10 days, close that area. Send the boats to
4 another spot. Then you'll get an idea of what's
5 out there because these boats ain't even went
6 looking around yet.

7 But my boat, they're dredging 20 sacks.
8 It's taking them two hours and 15 minutes to get
9 them. That's about 10 sacks an hour.

10 I've got another minute and a half to
11 go, but I can't say anything else. I mean, I
12 just -- it's amazing. I think y'all see the
13 outcome of all these people here. But this reef
14 will come back and we have had hundreds of boats
15 out there working. And you're talking about maybe
16 one of the world's largest public reefs and if you
17 lease it out, you're taking that from them.

18 And I only took two minutes.

19 It's one of them things -- my boat today
20 is tied up. I'm not out catching bait because of
21 this meeting, and tomorrow, I will be out catching
22 bait. I was supposed to go today, but you see the
23 outcome. You see the people here. That's all I
24 can say.

25 JONATHAN MCLENDON:

1 Thank you, Roscoe.

2 ROSCOE LIEBIG:

3 That's all I can say.

4 CAM ROBERDS:

5 All right. We have Mr. Ryan Bradley.
6 Name and address, Ryan, please.

7 RYAN BRADLEY:

8 So Ryan Bradley, R-y-a-n, Long Beach,
9 Mississippi. I currently have been serving as the
10 executive director of Mississippi Commercial
11 Fisheries United.

12 I had the privilege and honor to grow up
13 in Pass Christian Harbor on the oyster reefs. I
14 know a lot of these guys and girls in the back.
15 We have worked together. We have bled together.
16 We've weathered every storm together, and here we
17 are still standing. We're still here. And the
18 biggest threat that we have comes from the
19 political class taking away what we've been
20 holding on to for decades.

21 And this -- these comments aren't
22 directed at this Commission. I know y'all are in
23 an advisory capacity only, and I want to give my
24 apologies to Director Spraggins for not bringing
25 this directly to you. You've been great over the

1 years keeping communication open with us. But
2 these comments are really directed at our
3 politicians because they are the ones that
4 authorized this. Right? They are the ones that
5 approved this.

6 And we talk about all the notice that
7 was given. We have got an Oyster Task Force. Did
8 they have a chance to comment on this proposal?
9 Did we convene that Oyster Task Force to let them
10 vet out some of these issues? I don't recall that
11 we did.

12 It's come to my attention -- and this is
13 very concerning to us -- those last leases that
14 were approved, we have learned that some of the
15 staff here at the agency's relatives were getting
16 prime spots of these leases. That's very
17 concerning. We've learned that one of the
18 Commissioners sitting up here has been awarded a
19 spot last year.

20 These are things that are concerning to
21 us because it's the same trend that we've seen
22 before decades ago. And if you don't know what
23 we're talking about, we can get specific, but we
24 don't want to go there.

25 JOE SPRAGGINS:

1 Ryan, before you get the -- you know,
2 once again, I'm going to address everything. I
3 don't know what you're talking about. First off,
4 I don't know that there is a single soul in this
5 agency that has applied for anything and none that
6 -- and I don't think that they -- I don't even
7 know if there's a single soul on this Commission
8 that have because, first off, I haven't seen them.
9 I don't even know who they are. All right?

10 RYAN BRADLEY:

11 Fair enough.

12 JOE SPRAGGINS:

13 The point I'm getting at is, there is a
14 process that it goes through, and if there is
15 something that is happening there, I would love to
16 know about it. Because, first off, I mean,
17 obviously, if you -- I'm trying to think of -- if
18 someone here like Matthew, I know he does
19 off-bottom and -- you know, I know he does
20 off-bottom and everything. He's been doing that
21 and everything else. But if he's got an oyster
22 business and -- then, yes. Should he be able to
23 apply? Yeah, he would be able to apply for
24 something like if that's what he's got, but he's
25 going to have to compete through the same process

1 as everybody else. He's not going to get any
2 little attaboy, a checkmark just because he's
3 doing it. I'll tell you that.

4 RYAN BRADLEY:

5 That's fair enough. And we respect the
6 process, and it's not an affront on anybody that
7 may be taking advantage of what's available to
8 them. We don't criticize anybody for that.

9 But it's hard for us to trust the
10 process when we have been systematically
11 disregarded. The fishermen have been
12 systematically disregarded for years now. For
13 four years, we sat here with no seat, no
14 representation for the last four years on this
15 seat.

16 Mr. Mayfield, I don't know who you are.
17 I've asked about you. I can't find one person to
18 tell me who you've commercial fished with. That's
19 not an affront on you, but we have got
20 multimillion dollar industries here that's been
21 around for decades who their voice has been
22 drowned out.

23 No offense to you, Mr. Mayfield. I'm
24 sure you're a great guy. In fact, you do the tuna
25 dip; is that right?

1 MATTHEW MAYFIELD:

2 Yes.

3 RYAN BRADLEY:

4 I love it. It's great stuff, so nothing
5 against you personally. This is about the
6 fishermen, how we've been systematically
7 disregarded. It started seven, eight years ago
8 with all the net stuff. It started when they made
9 this Commission advisory only. That was an attack
10 on these fishermen, so I hope that moving
11 forward -- here's our request: We need to ease
12 back on some of this. And I hope the Senators are
13 listening. Let's ease back on some of this
14 private leasing.

15 We believe that we've been sold a bill
16 of false pretenses on the need for this leasing
17 program. We've been told that we need this
18 private investment to spur the reefs. The truth
19 is, Mother Nature takes care of 100 percent of it,
20 and it's already doing it and it's already there.

21 And so let's quit telling lies about why
22 we need to do these things. Our Senators, let's
23 review this. Let's go back. We would agree to --
24 let's lease 20 percent and let's keep 80 percent.
25 Why do we want to give away our crown jewels,

1 right, when they're coming out the seam?

2 These fishermen have been starving to
3 death for decades and here we are. A chance to
4 recover what we've lost for so many years and
5 you're going to take it right out from underneath
6 them like a slap in the face. I don't know how
7 you stand up here and look these fishermen in the
8 eyes, but I tell you y'all just better hope I
9 never get elected to the Senate or the Legislature
10 because I'm going to fix it. That's enough.

11 JOE SPRAGGINS:

12 Ryan, you know, me and you can be
13 straightforward with each other. We've been
14 straightforward a lot of times on a lot of things.

15 My question is, you know, you have the
16 Mississippi Commercial Fisheries United, right?

17 RYAN BRADLEY:

18 That's right.

19 JOE SPRAGGINS:

20 All right. On September 20th, you
21 publicized this?

22 RYAN BRADLEY:

23 That's right.

24 JOE SPRAGGINS:

25 Why didn't the fishermen know about it?

1 RYAN BRADLEY:

2 We shared it out everywhere. The
3 fishermen have been so beat down to where they're
4 all having to work other jobs to make -- work
5 three jobs to make a living.

6 JOE SPRAGGINS:

7 I understand that, but, I mean, you
8 know, you get on social media and everything and
9 we talk about this and you put it out. And today,
10 there's people here because they got word, but,
11 you know --

12 RYAN BRADLEY:

13 Yeah.

14 JOE SPRAGGINS:

15 -- I would think you're kind of the eyes
16 and ears that they're looking at, and -- but if
17 you didn't get the word to them --

18 RYAN BRADLEY:

19 Like I said, we feel like we've been
20 lied to because year after year, the Agency has
21 told us that there's no oysters out there. The
22 oysters are dead. The reefs are barren.

23 AUDIENCE MEMBER:

24 That's right.

25 RYAN BRADLEY:

1 All right. For years, they would
2 take -- Jennifer Jenkins, they would take all the
3 oyster dealers out on the boat and let them see
4 the sampling.

5 When is the last time y'all took any of
6 the dealers out to see the sampling going on?
7 When is the last time the Oyster Task Force was
8 convened?

9 So I'll take the blame. I should have
10 been raising hell.

11 JOE SPRAGGINS:

12 We can both take the blame. That ain't
13 got anything to do with it.

14 RYAN BRADLEY:

15 I should have had these fishermen up at
16 the Capitol raising hell when they were passing
17 the legislation, but here we are. So thank you.

18 JOE SPRAGGINS:

19 Well, and I appreciate it. And like I
20 said, you know, there is a lot of things out there
21 that -- you try to get the word out. You try to
22 do everything you can. I got told that
23 Ms. Reeder, back in her day, would pick up the
24 phone and call people or do whatever. Well, you
25 know, maybe we need to get Ms. Reeder's attitude

1 back in here, if that's what we're missing. Maybe
2 I missed something there. Okay?

3 RYAN BRADLEY:

4 Listen, drop the hate for the commercial
5 fisheries. That's what we've had for many years
6 and it's time that it stops today. Okay?

7 JOE SPRAGGINS:

8 But and -- but the point I'm getting at
9 is, you know, we've all got to work together here
10 to get the word out when we do stuff and, you
11 know, we've got to work hard to be able to try to
12 do this. And me and you have talked on numerous
13 bases about a lot of different things with the
14 fisheries, and, you know -- and I guess maybe I
15 put trust that you are talking to your people
16 there that are fishermen, and I'm talking to
17 that -- by that because of what you represent.
18 And maybe you are, and maybe I'm just not getting
19 the right word out.

20 RYAN BRADLEY:

21 Well, General, I hear your comments.
22 You're trying to dismiss my capacity and my role.
23 That's fine.

24 Listen, General, let's continue to work
25 together. Let's try to make this right. Again,

1 these comments aren't directed at any individual
2 up here or you, General. It's for -- Senator Mike
3 Thompson and the rest of the legislators can hear
4 what we have to say today. That's where these
5 comments are directed.

6 JOE SPRAGGINS:

7 Well, and I understand that, too, but, I
8 mean, I'm not one that's going to back down from
9 taking blame, you know, and you knew that. If
10 I've done something, I'm going to stand up to the
11 plate and say, I did it. Let's find out a way to
12 fix it.

13 But as I always said, there is nothing
14 wrong with making a mistake and nothing wrong with
15 learning a lesson. There's something wrong with
16 doing either one of them twice, and that's what
17 I'm going to look at and I'm going to try to find
18 a way to do this.

19 But, you know, as I said, I was very
20 shocked when I saw that -- the people coming today
21 because I had no idea that they did not know. I
22 have no earthly idea.

23 RYAN BRADLEY:

24 Yeah. All right, General. We
25 appreciate you. Thank you.

1 CAM ROBERDS:

2 Thank you, Ryan.

3 Richard Bosarge. Name and address,
4 please, sir.

5 RICHARD BOSARGE:

6 Richard Bosarge, Long Beach,
7 Mississippi.

8 Good morning, everyone. Merry
9 Christmas.

10 It seems that you are and have been
11 taken by surprise by this group of us, and I think
12 you were asking Ryan, Mr. Bradley just how come --
13 you know, him being the leader, how come he didn't
14 get the word out, you know, with the social media
15 and what have you, and he answered. He said -- he
16 said that we were under the impression that there
17 was nothing out there. And that's the propaganda
18 that we've heard, and some may be true and some
19 may be not.

20 Coincidentally, I sold off all my
21 equipment, which, fortunately, I was able to buy
22 back. Right after, I heard a *Daily Journal*
23 interview with Mr. Burris and his evaluation of --
24 I can't quote him directly, but he did say that
25 there was significant small spat, as if, you know,

1 some of the reefs had a heartbeat and that this
2 whole leasing program was a direct result of the
3 State turning it over to leaseholders that could
4 do such a good job to bring back and resuscitate
5 and nurture this heartbeat.

6 Well, to our surprise, we get out there
7 and every spot that we checked it was mature
8 oysters and lots of them. And when I say "mature
9 oysters," I'm talking up to six inches, and it
10 takes a little while to go from May 22nd, 2024 to
11 significant spat to November 2024 with mature
12 oysters.

13 And I just -- I'm, like, in agreement
14 with Mr. Bradley and with you. You know, we
15 prayed to Jesus today, and I believe he's God.
16 We're not here to discuss that, but I do believe
17 that 95 percent was God's doing and the rest, he
18 used man on the other five percent to go plant the
19 federally-funded shell stock. And so I just hope
20 that your prayer is answered and our prayer is
21 answered.

22 And I would like to make a request or
23 vote on it that -- I think 25 sacks is a little
24 high because normally when you raise the sack
25 limit, you drop the sack price.

1 AUDIENCE MEMBER:

2 That's right.

3 RICHARD BOSARGE:

4 It inadvertently happens that way. The
5 sack price drops. If you need data, we can give
6 you data, but it also shortens the season. We
7 would rather have a lower sack limit and a longer
8 season. And, typically, the season would go to
9 April.

10 Hey, all of this is new to us. I was
11 all in for the baby steps, 10-sack, 10-day here,
12 10-day December. Let's get some data, but I
13 think -- it's like we're fully engaged, but it's
14 like it's a teaser because I feel like the rug is
15 about to get pulled out from under us when we were
16 told all those years there wasn't even a heartbeat
17 until May.

18 So thank you. Merry Christmas.

19 JOE SPRAGGINS:

20 Mr. Bosarge, hang on.

21 All right. Two things. Number 1, Jason
22 or Rick or someone else, all right, we looked hard
23 over the last -- since 2019. We have looked at
24 this hard as to what was there and you know as
25 well as I do, in '19, it got wiped out. You know

1 what I'm talking about.

2 But then after that, you know, we've
3 been looking every year. Where are the oysters,
4 where are the oysters, where are the oysters and
5 where -- you know, how are we -- are we close
6 enough to open a season? I mean, they will tell
7 you. We sit there and talk about it on a regular
8 basis here about is it there to open the season?
9 Last year, was it there to open the season? In
10 2022, '23, '24, was it there at all? Was there
11 something?

12 I know that they're going out doing
13 sampling and I know they try hard to do that.
14 And, Jason, you're welcome -- because he runs this
15 program, but we're trying hard to look at that.
16 It's not that we wasn't.

17 Now, I know there is some big oysters,
18 but they, you know -- but you've got to
19 understand, too, that we put -- we went in after
20 2019 and we bought 1 million oysters that were
21 already market-sized oysters and put them out into
22 the Gulf out here to be able to just seed
23 something so that those oysters could go out and
24 seed the estuary and some of those --
25 RICHARD BOSARGE:

1 Then, why are we going to 25 sacks,
2 then? If we put all -- forth all this effort to
3 go purchase oysters for seed, why can't we nurture
4 this, cultivate correctly --

5 JOE SPRAGGINS:

6 Okay. Well, we can.

7 RICHARD BOSARGE:

8 -- have a little education on how the
9 fishermen should do or --

10 JOE SPRAGGINS:

11 All right. You've got to look at me.
12 All right? I'm on this side of it and this side
13 of it and I'm getting pulled both ways.

14 RICHARD BOSARGE:

15 Got ya.

16 JOE SPRAGGINS:

17 One of y'all are telling me we need to
18 raise it and one of you are telling me we need to
19 keep it, so y'all, you know --

20 RICHARD BOSARGE:

21 I do have one other question, though, if
22 you'll allot me this.

23 JOE SPRAGGINS:

24 Oh, I will give you any time.

25 RICHARD BOSARGE:

1 You made the statement to Ryan that we
2 had to fight for that 20 percent. Who did you
3 have to fight?

4 JOE SPRAGGINS:

5 Well, whenever we sat down and we were
6 trying to decide what we was going to do, it was
7 pretty much how much could we keep for the State.
8 And I'll tell you right now, we worked hard with
9 the Legislature to say why we wanted -- we felt we
10 needed to have, you know, state resources left.
11 And I'm not going to throw any one of them under
12 the bus. They do their job the best that they
13 can, and I know that and they try hard to do
14 what's right.

15 But the point I'm getting at is, we were
16 trying to find a number, and 20 percent was what
17 we could come up with and this was over a two-year
18 fight with that, was -- about 20 percent is what
19 we were able to keep.

20 But, I mean, once again, I haven't put
21 the order out to change it to 25 and 15. I'm
22 being told by one group that, hey, we'd like to do
23 this and one group not. Y'all need to come down
24 here today. Before we walk out of here today,
25 let's get together as a group and decide what

1 we're going to do and where we're going to be.

2 You know what I'm worried about? I'm
3 worried about that we can't -- that this situation
4 now -- and this is what I was looking at. I
5 wanted to be able to get y'all as many oysters as
6 I could. And I want you to get as many as you
7 could get right now because if we do start leasing
8 these things in January, then I can't give you a
9 right to go fish them in February, so I need to
10 know.

11 RICHARD BOSARGE:

12 Well, I'll tell you what.

13 JOE SPRAGGINS:

14 And then, you know -- and I was looking
15 at a way I can do that.

16 RICHARD BOSARGE:

17 Well, one way is that you can close
18 every reef that you have set -- you could close
19 all 20 percent of the reefs and then let us go
20 work the other reefs and then we'll give you your
21 data. And then we can come up on a number and let
22 maybe the leaseholders have half of that,
23 depending on what we see. And then we will go
24 back to harvesting. We'll do some of the dirty
25 work and the task force for you. We're looking

1 for the future here. That's why I mentioned
2 something about a smaller sack limit and a longer
3 season.

4 JOE SPRAGGINS:

5 And, you know, and --

6 RICHARD BOSARGE:

7 And, therefore, the price would be still
8 there.

9 JOE SPRAGGINS:

10 And, I mean, we could close the
11 20 percent that we have, the State, right now and
12 just hold off on it and we can just close that and
13 say we're not going to harvest that right now.

14 RICHARD BOSARGE:

15 It's obvious that you have the authority
16 to do a lot and you've earned that. And I want to
17 give you a salute and I would like to dismiss
18 myself. Thank you.

19 JOE SPRAGGINS:

20 Yes, sir. Thank you for comments,
21 though, sir.

22 CAM ROBERDS:

23 Thank you, Mr. Bosarge.

24 All right. Next up is George Storrs.

25 GEORGE STORRS:

1 S-t-o-r-r-s.

2 CAM ROBERDS:

3 George, full name and address, please,
4 sir.

5 GEORGE STORRS:

6 My name is George Storrs, McHenry,
7 Mississippi 39561, just up the road a ways, not
8 far.

9 I have to echo exactly what John Livings
10 said and a lot of what Mr. Bosarge has said and
11 even Joe. I love you, Joe. You're a good guy,
12 but there is some stuff that just can't be. This
13 can't be. 80 percent, no. There is some crooked
14 crap going on somewhere. I'm not saying it's in
15 here, but it's in Jackson. It starts right along
16 this Coast somewhere.

17 And I'm going to go back -- to
18 illustrate this, I'm going to go back to when the
19 tonging reef was stolen from us. They put us in a
20 box. That happened in the summertime and it
21 happened because it was a big-shot. They went up
22 there in the summertime. They couldn't take it
23 away legally, so they went up there and did it
24 legally up there, which it's still not legal. As
25 far as I'm concerned, they don't own everything

1 they say they own, and put us in a box. We still
2 have everything, except we just don't have
3 everything. You know what I'm saying?

4 We have it, but it's been stolen from
5 us. So the lines are still there. The old lines
6 are. I want to go back to the old lines. You
7 probably can't do it or won't do it, but my point
8 is, it was taken illegally. And this 80 percent
9 that we had to fight for so hard, that's
10 illegitimate and we shouldn't have to fight for
11 nothing, zero, zip, nada. We don't need to lose
12 any more.

13 If there is shells out there, if there
14 is a hard bottom out there, we don't need to be
15 giving it to anybody for any amount of money,
16 nothing. They don't deserve it. They have got
17 what they can have. If they've got enough money
18 to build a reef, let them go build it back where
19 they came from.

20 They don't need to build it. Let them
21 go south of Marianne and build it. That's a good
22 place. It's close enough, but far enough away.
23 They can do that. They don't need to come on this
24 side of Pass Marianne and have any more. I guess
25 20 percent is already gone, but don't give them

1 this 80 percent. That's absolutely wrong and it's
2 not good common sense in it to me. You guys look
3 at it from a different angle, but I'm a fisherman.

4 When I first started fishing -- let me
5 see how much time.

6 When I started fishing, there were,
7 like, 12 people that ran -- this building wasn't
8 here. They was working out in Long Beach down
9 there at the girls' school before turning into
10 Mississippi Southern, and I watched it grow from
11 what it was with that dozen or so people to what
12 it is now.

13 And I watched every right I had and all
14 our resources disappear slowly but surely, just
15 like quicksand, so -- not that fast. It's slow,
16 but it becomes that way because this is
17 bureaucracy now. And I'm not talking bad about
18 it. Everything is becoming that. If you're a
19 conglomerate of any type, you're going to be a
20 bureaucracy and when you become that, you're under
21 the gun to a lot of people that you don't need to
22 be under the gun to, but you don't have a choice.
23 That's your job. You just have to handle it well,
24 and I think you do a good job, Joe. I know you
25 want to be an honest man about this.

1 But I'll say, do not give 80 percent of
2 our reefs away. They've already got the 20.
3 I believe in taking that back too. I believe we
4 ought to take that back.

5 Oh, one other thing. Remember, you were
6 on TV the other day speaking about the million
7 oysters that were off-bottom raised and that was a
8 pretty good number. Sounds really, really good.
9 That's off-bottom stuff, and it is good
10 apparently.

11 But just imagine if we keep what we've
12 got, then you're getting more than what we've got,
13 like 1,000 sacks to date, somewhere a little
14 better than 1,000 in the short period of time that
15 we were able to go and get ready to go. And there
16 will be more of us. We just got hit hard, not
17 knowing this was going to happen. But just
18 imagine how many millions we'd have had in that
19 short period of time that we got compared to that
20 1 million they had to raise out there behind the
21 island. And I don't take nothing from them.
22 That's time-consuming. They've got to know what
23 they're doing.

24 The only reason I don't do it is because
25 I live farther away and somebody is going to rob

1 and steal from me. They'll rob and steal out
2 there on Pass Marianne or outside Pass Marianne.
3 They'll do it right there, too, so that's the
4 reason I don't do it. I'm going to be guarding my
5 stuff and nobody wants me to guard my stuff.

6 So anyway, I appreciate this, but take
7 this to heart, this common sense. Take the 20
8 back and don't give them the 80. That's what the
9 fishermen want. I believe that's what we want.
10 Am I wrong?

11 AUDIENCE MEMBER:

12 Yeah.

13 GEORGE STORRS:

14 Okay. Pretty much right.

15 JOE SPRAGGINS:

16 Mr. Storrs, you know, I have the
17 ultimate respect for you and you know that.

18 GEORGE STORRS:

19 I do.

20 JOE SPRAGGINS:

21 And I can tell you that, you know,
22 obviously, things are being listened to today. I
23 can't promise that I can do nothing.

24 GEORGE STORRS:

25 I understand that.

1 JOE SPRAGGINS:

2 But I would hope that our legislators
3 are listening to this and I think that they will
4 because most of them watch it in the podcast or
5 whatever, you know. They do look at it and see
6 what it is, but we will get the word to them.

7 GEORGE STORRS:

8 Yes, indeed. Thank you.

9 CAM ROBERDS:

10 All right. Thank you.

11 JONATHAN MCLENDON:

12 Mr. George, I have a technical question,
13 if I could, General.

14 JOE SPRAGGINS:

15 Uh-huh.

16 JONATHAN MCLENDON:

17 So Jason showed earlier on the maps --
18 we've looked at a lot of maps here and I think
19 that Zones III and Zones IV have the public back
20 open.

21 Out of the 1,700 sacks of oysters that
22 were harvested in the previous couple of months,
23 what percentage of them come from the open areas
24 that Jason spoke about earlier?

25 GEORGE STORRS:

1 I haven't been out there. I don't know.
2 I mean, if you put that back up -- and then
3 somebody that's been doing -- where is somebody
4 that's been catching these oysters? Let Brad come
5 back up here. Brad Stapleton. He's been -- I'm
6 just getting ready to go. I didn't -- it hit me
7 between the eyes when they said they were going to
8 have the season.

9 JASON RIDER:

10 Can you get me the presentation up?

11 So right here, 80 percent of the oysters
12 have come from Areas II A and II F. Essentially,
13 it's the tonging box and the surrounding areas
14 around the tonging box, not much further from it.
15 You're on the west side and south side of the
16 tonging box and then in the tonging box. That is
17 80 percent of the areas that have been fished and
18 that's where we're seeing all the oysters come
19 from.

20 So all that area is open or was open for
21 harvest in November and December. They could fish
22 anywhere they choose on this map, but as it's been
23 discussed, there was oysters that were easily
24 accessible close by shore and plentiful.

25 GEORGE STORRS:

1 Where is II F on here?

2 JASON RIDER:

3 It's there. II F.

4 GEORGE STORRS:

5 It's over in here?

6 JASON RIDER:

7 No, sir. It's top right, right there.

8 CAM ROBERDS:

9 Top right.

10 GEORGE STORRS:

11 That's II F?

12 JASON RIDER:

13 Yeah, but that whole area is II F.

14 GEORGE STORRS:

15 Okay. So Pass Marianne is down in here
16 somewhere?

17 JASON RIDER:

18 Yeah.

19 JOE SPRAGGINS:

20 And, once again, you know, first off,
21 you don't blame the oystermen because, you know,
22 wouldn't you go the shortest distance you have to
23 to get what you can get? I mean, I understand
24 that, you know. You're paying for the fuel.
25 You're paying for everything else, and I

1 understand that.

2 And now how much? I don't know what's
3 out there in the rest of it. Jason, do y'all know
4 what's in the rest of it?

5 JASON RIDER:

6 So it was discussed earlier about the
7 reefs and health of the reefs. We do do reef
8 assessments every year. We have been doing them
9 annually and we have that data. We talk about it,
10 like you mentioned, every year. We go over
11 everything. We've seen increases over the last
12 couple of years of the resource, of the size class
13 variations. We don't just want three-inch
14 oysters. We want seed oysters and submarket
15 oysters as well to repopulate if you take the
16 market-sized oysters.

17 Over the last couple of years, it's been
18 getting better and better. This year, we
19 discussed it, as you mentioned, and we felt that
20 we could have a small season, two 10-day seasons.
21 That was our plan to start with. We do know that
22 our cultch plants are producing a lot of oysters.
23 Unfortunately, that's what we're seeing, is that
24 our cultch plants are producing the oysters, so it
25 is a limited area with limited resources on them.

1 So if you target those areas, you will find
2 oysters, but outside those areas, we're still in
3 the rebuilding phase of our program.

4 JOE SPRAGGINS:

5 All right. Jason, if we can -- once
6 again, I'm not trying to intervene with the others
7 talking, but I want to address things as we get to
8 it. Right now, where have we put our majority of
9 our resources that we have spent from the State of
10 Mississippi that we have put in? Where have they
11 been put?

12 JASON RIDER:

13 We put some in area -- on the map, I'll
14 just reference the map, so Area -- on the west
15 side of II E. We put significant resources in
16 Area II A in the tonging box and Area II F and
17 then some in Area II G. That's been our recent --
18 I'd say the last five years where we've put cultch
19 plants.

20 JOE SPRAGGINS:

21 So we have not put any down in St. Joe
22 area or anything in that --

23 JASON RIDER:

24 It's been a couple years since we put
25 some in St. Joe.

1 JOE SPRAGGINS:

2 Okay. And where did we put the large
3 majority of the million oysters that we bought
4 that were the market-size, you know, when we tried
5 to re-seed?

6 JASON RIDER:

7 So that's been a couple of years and I
8 can get that information for you, but off the top
9 of my head, I think it was Area II E, but I don't
10 want to confirm that.

11 JOE SPRAGGINS:

12 And the reason I say that is, I think
13 some of these oysters that we're seeing that
14 are -- you know, that are five- or six-inch
15 oysters are coming off of those groups, a lot of
16 it, and that's what I'm -- you know.

17 JASON RIDER:

18 Yeah.

19 JOE SPRAGGINS:

20 I think the majority and I'm just --
21 once again, I'm going off -- and I trust my staff
22 because they do a hard job and they work every day
23 to try to be able to do this and they look at it
24 as hard as they can to be able to come up with the
25 right answer for everything.

1 I think that when you see those big
2 ones -- and, I mean, you can tell me from your
3 experience and -- is that where you think they're
4 coming from or what?

5 JASON RIDER:

6 The large oysters are coming from the
7 cultch plants. I mean, we've seen good growth
8 over the last couple of years. 2023 was a
9 great -- we had great recruitment. We saw a good
10 spat set. 2023 was an excellent year for us. So
11 if they would have got started a year or two
12 before that, they had a great year to grow, and
13 then they had '24 also, so those could be some
14 nice oysters.

15 CAM ROBERDS:

16 You guys sample all the areas yearly or
17 is it just a certain location?

18 JASON RIDER:

19 So since the new legislation passed --
20 we used to sample everything. We used to sample
21 all the reef complexes and we would randomize the
22 samples and take as best of a total sampling
23 result as possible.

24 Since the legislation passed, we did
25 sample only the state-owned reefs this last year,

1 the last couple of years.

2 CAM ROBERDS:

3 Thank you.

4 JOE SPRAGGINS:

5 Thank you.

6 RONNIE DANIELS:

7 But they've had the ability to work any
8 of those reefs, did I hear that correctly, for the
9 season?

10 JASON RIDER:

11 That is correct. Everything on that map
12 was open in November for harvest.

13 JOE SPRAGGINS:

14 But once again, you know, if you
15 catching fish out there, Ronnie, you're going to
16 catch where they're at, right? You're going to go
17 as quick as you can and get --

18 RONNIE DANIELS:

19 Oh, I ain't running 50 miles if all I
20 need is 10.

21 JOE SPRAGGINS:

22 -- you know, the least amount of
23 running.

24 RONNIE DANIELS:

25 Yeah.

1 CAM ROBERDS:

2 Thank you, Jason.

3 All right. Mr. Brad Stapleton. Just
4 name and city, please.

5 BRAD STAPLETON:

6 How y'all doing? I'm Brad Stapleton.
7 I'm from Pass Christian, Mississippi. I've been a
8 commercial fisherman most of my life.

9 And I'm here to -- I kind of agree with
10 what these guys are saying, you know. We don't
11 need to give this bottom away. We've been sitting
12 here for the last eight or 10 years waiting on it
13 to come back. Y'all spent millions on it, a lot
14 of time. The oysters is there. Y'all put that
15 much effort on the resource. Why give it out to
16 someone now, you know?

17 And as far as us not being informed,
18 just like Mr. Livings said, every one of us has an
19 address on a license and stuff. It was nothing
20 sent in the mail or anything like that. Can't
21 depend on Ryan to inform everyone. It's not
22 actually his job to do that. It should have been
23 more of y'all's.

24 And, you know, I just don't think it's
25 right to -- one person to show up or you say

1 there's 18 agencies to show up to take these
2 leases and there's hundreds of families that
3 depended on this prior to -- before it being wiped
4 out. You know, why take it from all of them, when
5 it's taxpayers' dollars, to give to a select few?

6 That's kind of what we wanted to speak
7 about, you know. We just don't think it's right,
8 for generations that's been here, for the next
9 person and then -- once it wipes out -- y'all was
10 talking about putting the Linda K in the museum.
11 You might as well take a picture of these
12 fishermen and put them in it, too, because you're
13 putting them out of business.

14 And that's about what I've got to say.

15 CAM ROBERDS:

16 Any questions?

17 (No response.)

18 CAM ROBERDS:

19 Thank you, Brad.

20 BRAD STAPLETON:

21 You're welcome.

22 CAM ROBERDS:

23 Any other comments on the --

24 JOE SPRAGGINS:

25 I mean, I would like a couple of things.

1 Number 1, like I said, I'm sorry, because I failed
2 getting the word out, you know. It's just like
3 the head coach of a football team whenever he
4 doesn't win a game. It's his -- he's the one
5 that's got to take the heat. I'm the one that's
6 going to take this heat. I can tell you that
7 because I did -- me. I did not do something
8 correctly. I don't know what it was, but I'm
9 going to find a way to correct it. And, you know,
10 I thought I was trying to do everything I could.
11 I apologize for that.

12 I would like to get an idea before we
13 leave here today what y'all think. What do you
14 really think about -- should we increase the
15 number to 15 and 25 or should we leave it at 10
16 and 20? What's the number we ought to do for the
17 rest of the --

18 AUDIENCE MEMBER:

19 Leave it alone.

20 AARON TILLMAN:

21 I think you should leave the dredging at
22 20 where it's at.

23 JOE SPRAGGINS:

24 Come up. Tell me. I want to know.

25 AARON TILLMAN:

1 I think you should leave the dredging at
2 20 sacks. I mean, because if you raise the --
3 JOE SPRAGGINS:

4 The tongers?

5 AARON TILLMAN:

6 If you raise the -- no, for the
7 dredgers. If you raise the limit, the price drops
8 and we'll be working the same -- for the same
9 money.

10 JOE SPRAGGINS:

11 You know, and I'll be honest with you.
12 We did think about that when we was looking at
13 this, you know, and we went from 10 to 20. We
14 looked at it and we said, well, if you're going to
15 get -- if you're \$50 a sack at 10 and you're
16 getting \$40 a sack at 20, you know, what are you
17 really making here?

18 AARON TILLMAN:

19 Right. You're just working the reef for
20 the same -- for less money. I would leave it -- I
21 would like to see it at 20 for the dredging.

22 JOE SPRAGGINS:

23 What about the tongers?

24 AARON TILLMAN:

25 The tongers, I can't answer for the

1 tongers.

2 AUDIENCE MEMBER:

3 We would like to see 15.

4 AARON TILLMAN:

5 They'd like to see 15.

6 AUDIENCE MEMBER:

7 The oysters are there.

8 CAM ROBERDS:

9 Can you state your name real quick?

10 AARON TILLMAN:

11 Aaron Tillman.

12 JOE SPRAGGINS:

13 I mean, I'm open about this, you know,
14 so y'all think we ought to go to 15 and 20 and
15 leave it at that?

16 AUDIENCE MEMBER:

17 Yes.

18 JOE SPRAGGINS:

19 If you did, raise your hand and give me
20 an idea.

21 (Audience members indicate.)

22 JOE SPRAGGINS:

23 All right. Then that -- Jason, we'll
24 work on that. Okay? Where is Jason at? He's
25 back there somewhere. Oh, right there. All

1 right. So that will give me an idea of what we're
2 talking about.

3 I can tell you that -- I will be honest
4 with you about this, that, you know, once we do
5 this -- we've got, what, four more days or three
6 more days, right? We've got three more days; is
7 that correct?

8 JASON RIDER:

9 Friday.

10 JOE SPRAGGINS:

11 This Friday it closes. We might keep it
12 open till Saturday. We had talked about that. Do
13 you remember that? So we will see what we can do
14 about that and -- but then we will be closed for
15 the -- from that, but we will look at what we can
16 be able to do to open up a season in January and
17 see what we can do about that.

18 Yes, sir.

19 JIMMY RYLE:

20 I'd like to make a comment. My name is
21 Jimmy Ryle, Pass Christian, Mississippi.

22 I want to answer one of your questions.
23 Why are we all in one spot? We drag a dredge
24 right there for 30 seconds, it's puking. You
25 can't drag it over 30 seconds. Every one of us

1 are going around and around in the same spot. We
2 don't hurt that reef a bit. I mean, 30 seconds,
3 it's puking, and you could -- whether you drag it
4 five minutes or 30 seconds, it don't make no
5 difference. It's still puking in 30 seconds.

6 That's why we staying on the -- right
7 there. That's why we haven't went nowhere else to
8 look. We don't have to go nowhere else. The
9 oysters have got to be six-foot thick right there
10 for all the boats to go around and around there.

11 The last day I worked, there was
12 probably 15, 20 of us in the same spot. Every
13 dredge, puking. Thank you.

14 JOE SPRAGGINS:

15 Thank you. And I agree with you and I
16 understand, you know. You're going to go where it
17 is and I don't blame you. I would do the same
18 thing, you know. I would go the quickest place I
19 could and get what I could get because -- least
20 amount of time I have to put in it. I understand
21 that totally.

22 Sir, I don't know other than that, you
23 know, I can tell you that I will send the comments
24 forward. I will send the comments forward to our
25 Legislators and I will brief the Governor on this,

1 his staff and let me know that we -- it's been
2 brought up. And I can tell you that because --
3 once again, it just caught me really offguard
4 because I did not realize that y'all were not
5 informed. And I can promise you this. The DMR
6 will be better about getting -- and it will be
7 because I failed, not the staff.

8 JOHN LIVINGS:

9 Mr. Joe, you was talking about informing
10 everybody about the -- what was going on. Well, I
11 know y'all have my number because I am the
12 chairman of the Oyster Task Force, and I was never
13 notified and I know every fishermen here.

14 JOE SPRAGGINS:

15 And I'm not sure that we called anybody,
16 and I'm not sure that's part of the protocol that
17 we've ever -- that we do. It probably -- it may
18 have been something that Ms. Reeder just did, you
19 know, and I -- over the years because she has been
20 here for so long.

21 JOHN LIVINGS:

22 Well, I can tell you when Christina was
23 in there, we were notified about a lot of stuff,
24 and now we are not.

25 JOE SPRAGGINS:

1 Yeah. But I can tell you that it was
2 never, ever an intention for you not to be
3 notified and I can tell you that with my whole
4 heart. And I know the staff never intended that
5 not to happen. They thought that they were doing
6 the best they could, too, to do it. So we will
7 look at it. We'll learn a lesson. Okay?

8 JOHN LIVINGS:

9 I don't even know the new staff. I
10 still call her.

11 JOE SPRAGGINS:

12 Okay. Well, and love her to death.

13 But we'll look at it. We'll modify what
14 we're doing and we'll try to do something better
15 for the next time, from here out.

16 RONNIE DANIELS:

17 Joe, one thing -- I have learned a lot
18 of stuff here today. But, you know, across the
19 board in fisheries, whether it be oystermen,
20 shrimpers, we've got different sectors with
21 different licenses.

22 My kids' school gets a text message that
23 goes out to every parent. Why could we not
24 implement something like that for updates per
25 sector just straight off of their license

1 information? Why couldn't we set up a mass text
2 that anytime there is important information that
3 if it's oyster guys, we have a group, hit the
4 button and it's gone? It just seems like with
5 today's technology, we shouldn't have been
6 blindsided like this.

7 JOE SPRAGGINS:

8 Commissioner Daniels, I will take that
9 100 percent and look at it. And you're right. It
10 could have been a lot of things. I mean,
11 obviously, I'm not sure if every one of them has
12 got a -- they give us a cell number, but whatever
13 they give, we can try to do it, you know, try any
14 way we could.

15 But once again, we will look at our
16 procedures. It's not going to just be for
17 oysters. It's going to be for everything right
18 now. Okay.

19 CAM ROBERDS:

20 Thank you, Director.

21 All right. That is all the public
22 comments that we have.

23 I think we -- did we --

24 JOE SPRAGGINS:

25 Ayesha.

1 CAM ROBERDS:

2 Grand Bay, Ayesha Gray.

3 RONNIE DANIELS:

4 Big show to follow. I hope you've got
5 something good.

6 AYESHA GRAY:

7 Hey, actually, I do. So this is our --
8 is it on?

9 This is our report from the Star Party.
10 So we had our big open house event at the Grand
11 Bay NERR this weekend, on Saturday. We had 251
12 people, eight volunteers and 15 staff that worked
13 the program.

14 We didn't see any meteors, but it was a
15 really nice night with a full moon and a clear sky
16 and that's something that we haven't had that I
17 can remember in the entire time that we have had
18 the Star property. There's usually fog that's
19 kind of blocking the view, but we were able to see
20 four planets. Saturn's rings and Jupiter's moons
21 were also spotted, so we had a lot of excitement.

22 We had a little bit of a wardrobe
23 malfunction with Santa in the beginning, but these
24 two ladies fixed it right up. That's Bree and
25 Caitlyn who helped to make this go off really

1 smoothly.

2 We continued our pictures that we take
3 every year with Santa, and you can see that we
4 have a lot of folks that come to the Star Party
5 year after year. So we get to see a lot of
6 growing families there, and that is really a
7 pleasure to watch people grow up making the Star
8 Party and the Grand Bay NERR a part of their
9 tradition.

10 We had a lot of fun crafting. We made
11 ornaments using myrtle wood from the Reserve that
12 was cut into little circles and also pinecones
13 from the Reserve. I had many people come up to me
14 and tell me that they have ornaments over the
15 last -- the whole 10 years that they've been
16 going. And we do something different every time,
17 so we're adding to the decorations in their house.

18 The hayride was great, very brightly lit
19 with that big, full moon, and the stargazing was
20 also wonderful, as I mentioned. So we had a lot
21 of people and a lot of nice things that we were
22 able to see on that nice, clear sky. That's Venus
23 and Saturn in that view.

24 And then soup and cookies, as usual, on
25 the patio. A lot of people meeting up with good

1 friends and having a good time. And overall, the
2 whole purpose of the Star Party is so that we can
3 get people into the NERR so that they can have fun
4 and learn. And I was really excited to see so
5 many kids so curious about the natural resources
6 that we have here in Mississippi and so many
7 people interested in what the NERR is and what
8 we're doing.

9 So we'll be back next year, 2025, to
10 continue to -- making a family tradition. And
11 Jennifer Cumbest there will be -- have a couple of
12 extra boys to join us next year.

13 Thank y'all.

14 CAM ROBERDS:

15 Thank you.

16 All right. I guess that concedes the
17 meeting today, if we have a motion to close.

18 RONNIE DANIELS:

19 Motion.

20 JONATHAN MCLENDON:

21 Second.

22 CAM ROBERDS:

23 All those in favor?

24 (Unanimous vote.)

25 (Meeting adjourned at 10:44 a.m.)

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 hearing, 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 13th
16 day of January, 2025.

17
18 /s/ Melissa Burdine-Rodolfich

19
20 Melissa Burdine-Rodolfich
21 My Commission Expires 4/03/28
22
23
24
25