

STATE OF MISSISSIPPI

MISSISSIPPI ADVISORY COMMISSION ON MARINE RESOURCES
COMMISSION MEETING

Friday, January 24th, 2025, 9:11 a.m.,

Bolton Building Auditorium

1141 Bayview Avenue, Biloxi, Mississippi 39530

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

1 CAM ROBERDS:

2 Ladies and gentlemen, thanks, everyone,
3 for enduring through the cold weather and making
4 it out to the Mississippi Advisory Commission on
5 Marine Resources. I want to call to order this
6 meeting, and ask Jason if he can lead us in the
7 Pledge.

8 (Pledge of Allegiance recited.)

9 CAM ROBERDS:

10 Thank you, Jason.

11 General, would you like to lead us in a
12 prayer, sir?

13 JOE SPRAGGINS:

14 Yeah. And before we get started, I hope
15 everybody endured their unusual snow season in
16 South Mississippi. And, you know, I have lived
17 here a couple, few years and I have not seen
18 anything like that in my life, but you know what,
19 we're strong and we will endure, right?

20 And we just hope we don't have a whole
21 big fish kill. I know Rick and them are looking
22 at it and everybody is looking at what we're
23 having to do, so hopefully, we don't have a huge
24 fish kill because of it, but I'm sure we will have
25 some.

1 But also before we start, too, we do
2 need to remember the people in California. A lot
3 of people have lost a lot of things out there. We
4 know what that means, you know. Whether it's a
5 fire or whether it's a hurricane, we understand
6 it, and so we understand what that means to them
7 and so, please, keep them in your players.

8 Let's go to the Lord, please.

9 (Moment of prayer.)

10 CAM ROBERDS:

11 Thank you, Director. Do we have any
12 questions on the minutes from December 17th?

13 (No response.)

14 CAM ROBERDS:

15 If we don't have any questions, do we
16 have a motion to approve?

17 RONNIE DANIELS:

18 I make a motion.

19 JASON OSBORNE:

20 I second.

21 CAM ROBERDS:

22 All those in favor?

23 (Unanimous vote.)

24 CAM ROBERDS:

25 All right. Has everybody had the

1 opportunity to look at the agenda? If so, do we
2 have any questions on the agenda for today?

3 (No response.)

4 CAM ROBERDS:

5 If not, do we have a motion to approve
6 the agenda?

7 JONATHAN MCLENDON:

8 I will make a motion to approve the
9 agenda.

10 MATTHEW MAYFIELD:

11 Second.

12 CAM ROBERDS:

13 All those in favor?

14 (Unanimous vote.)

15 CAM ROBERDS:

16 All right, Director. It's all yours.

17 JOE SPRAGGINS:

18 All right. Once again, we appreciate
19 you taking the time. Sorry we had to move the
20 meeting. I don't think anybody wanted to try to
21 get here Tuesday morning, and -- you know, we had
22 a little bit of difference in the weather and
23 everything else and -- but I appreciate everybody.
24 Appreciate the Commission for being able to work
25 their schedule around and being able to move.

1 If you have public comment, TJ is in the
2 back and just see TJ and give it to him and we'll
3 be glad to get it in. And if it's about a certain
4 thing that we're talking about, please put which
5 one it is, you know, like whether it's in K or C
6 or D or whatever it is, but if you can, put it
7 that way.

8 Let's see, our next Commission meeting
9 is scheduled for Tuesday, February 18th at
10 9:00 a.m. Do we have any issues with that?

11 JASON OSBORNE:

12 I'll call in.

13 JOE SPRAGGINS:

14 Okay. All right. One Commissioner will
15 probably be remote, but we can get him to call in
16 on it.

17 So legislative update -- we have a
18 legislative update and -- this thing is not right,
19 but I will get it in there in a minute. But as
20 far as the update, there -- before we do that,
21 let's do employment. I think we have that, don't
22 we? Yeah.

23 You see the names up there. We have got
24 Joshua Williams, Jessica Woodall, Randy Wilson,
25 and they're all new employees, glad to have them

1 here and -- working at the NERR and then some in
2 facilities operations. And then Randy came to
3 us -- Randy, you was with forest service at one
4 time, right?

5 RANDY WILSON:

6 Forestry commission, yes, sir.

7 JOE SPRAGGINS:

8 Yeah, forestry commission. And then now
9 he's with us, so we're getting a little bit of
10 background with that, too, so that's good. That's
11 fantastic.

12 And we've got a couple -- one promotion
13 there and it's McDonald, Kyle McDonald is being
14 promoted, so we're always glad to do that.

15 Any questions on that?

16 (No response.)

17 JOE SPRAGGINS:

18 Okay. All right. Legislative update.
19 Well, the Legislature is in session. They're
20 doing -- oh, here we go. Breakwater Marine, I
21 forgot that.

22 I'll tell you what, I've got two
23 different lists here and I can't keep up; you know
24 what I mean?

25 Invitation for bid, we've done that for

1 RESTORE, and that's Deer Island, a beneficial use
2 cell project. Breakwater Marine, I think, is the
3 one, the vendor who was selected for that.

4 Any questions?

5 (No response.)

6 JOE SPRAGGINS:

7 All right.

8 Now I'm back on track.

9 Once again, we'll talk about the
10 Legislature. All right. They're there. They're
11 wide open, so get ready for them. You know, their
12 biggest bills, right now, they're trying to cut
13 taxes, you know, so we know that. We see what
14 they're trying to do, so that's what they're
15 working on.

16 Our biggest bill that we have in the
17 Legislature this year is the one that we're trying
18 to do with seafood labeling, and one of the things
19 with seafood labeling is we're trying to be able
20 to get it to where -- that restaurants in our
21 seafood markets and distributors and all that,
22 that they have to mark or at least label where the
23 seafood -- is it domestic or is it foreign?
24 That's the main thing. Is it domestic or is it
25 foreign?

1 So why are we doing that? We're doing
2 that because we want to get as much as we can out
3 for the domestic. We're going to do something a
4 little different after we get all this -- if we
5 get it passed through the Legislature, then we'll
6 probably do something through DMR where we do Gulf
7 Fresh, and it will be a Gulf Fresh deal through
8 the tourism. And we'll go out and if a restaurant
9 is serving Gulf Fresh, we're going to advertise
10 for them. We're going to put some advertisement
11 on their, you know, billboards out or whatever
12 that talks about who does Gulf Fresh.

13 Why? Because that's where our
14 fishermen, if -- they come from the Gulf and
15 that's where we get -- you know, we want them to
16 put as much of that on the market as they can. So
17 that's what we're working hard to do, is to be
18 able to get Gulf Fresh seafood.

19 And I believe that the legislation will
20 go through with no problem. I know that we're
21 working with the restaurants and working with
22 others, but I think it's a thing that needs to be
23 done.

24 It's similar to what happened in 19 -- I
25 didn't realize it. 1975 is when they passed the

1 bill to where you had to label catfish. 1975. I
2 didn't realize how far back that was. But we
3 should have done this long ago. We tried a few
4 years ago and it failed, but we're going to try
5 again and see what we can do.

6 Some other legislation that we're doing
7 are just kind of minor stuff, and it's basically
8 just some stuff to straighten up some
9 administrative things, you know.

10 Right now, we have a bill that says
11 that -- the way it is written when they changed
12 the Commission to advisory -- it used to be a
13 situation to where it would go to the Commission
14 and then -- to me, to the Commission and the
15 Commission would make a decision.

16 Well, now, it has to go -- it goes to me
17 for something -- if anything is brought to me by
18 the staff on something that's going on, and it has
19 to come to me and then I have to take it to the
20 Commission and then it comes back to me to approve
21 again.

22 Well, you know, that's kind of not
23 right. We need to have another person in there.
24 We need to have somebody else saying that this
25 needs to come to the Commission first, and then

1 the Commission needs to tell me do I need to take
2 it farther and so that's what we're trying to
3 straighten up with that. We tried last year with
4 that bill and had some issues with it, but I think
5 maybe we got it worked out.

6 We have got a -- what other bill am I
7 missing, Rick?

8 SANDY CHESNUT:

9 The public records.

10 RICK BURRIS:

11 Yeah.

12 JOE SPRAGGINS:

13 The public records, oh, yeah. With the
14 public records, we don't want to be able -- I know
15 we have a bill that says that basically that we
16 don't have to give your information to somebody if
17 they ask for it in public records because wildlife
18 has that and we want to have the same thing.

19 If you buy a license, we shouldn't have
20 to give your information out and that's what we
21 want to do, but right now, we don't have a choice.
22 And so what we want to do is we want to get like
23 wildlife and have that, so another issue we're
24 working on.

25 What else, Sandy? I'm missing one more.

1 SANDY CHESNUT:

2 I gave you one.

3 JOE SPRAGGINS:

4 Well, you know, you've got to give me
5 two.

6 RICK BURRIS:

7 The taxes on -- off-bottom taxes.

8 JOE SPRAGGINS:

9 Huh?

10 RICK BURRIS:

11 Off-bottom taxes.

12 JOE SPRAGGINS:

13 Oh, the on-bottom -- yeah, off-bottom.

14 Yeah, the taxes, that's what it is.

15 We're trying to get it exempt to where
16 that if you have an off-bottom lease, that it
17 doesn't go back to the Tax Assessor and the Tax
18 Assessor sells the lease because we don't want
19 that.

20 We want to be able to -- we need to
21 manage that, and we need to be able -- because
22 anything that goes to the Secretary of State has
23 to come back, and it's basically a situation to
24 where -- that if you are delinquent on your taxes
25 through the Secretary of State and not paying it,

1 then they can turn around and come back because
2 they can tax you off of your off-bottom, and they
3 can tax you off of it. And so what they're doing
4 is they're turning around and coming back and then
5 if you're not, then they're selling the lease.

6 Well, I don't want somebody that don't
7 know what they're doing out there running, you
8 know, and having control of a lease, and so that's
9 what we're working on. And I think that we've
10 pretty much got it. It's Harrison County only,
11 and we have pretty much got it worked out with the
12 County that we can kind of get to know that
13 something is about to happen. So we'll see where
14 to go with that.

15 The big thing is the seafood labeling,
16 though. That's where we're at.

17 Any questions on that?

18 (No response.)

19 JOE SPRAGGINS:

20 Update on our on-bottom lease program.
21 It's still in effect. I know we've got some
22 people that want to talk about that in a little
23 bit, so we'll wait and get into that when we do.

24 But right now, it is set. It closed on
25 the 15th. The 15th of January was when all the

1 data had to be there, and so we're working it from
2 that point right now. I don't know a time frame.
3 I don't have that answer for you, so I don't
4 really know exactly when the off-bottom leases
5 will start.

6 We have got the information now. We
7 did -- if you had any accounting information, that
8 was turned over to an accounting firm and
9 that's -- we don't have that and it was graded by
10 the accounting firm. And what we're going to do
11 is we will turn over our grading of the criteria
12 of the leases to another firm, and we're going to
13 let another firm, an independent firm, do that.

14 So the grading of the leases and
15 everything else will be done out of DMR. We won't
16 have anything to do with it. It will come
17 straight out of a private company that's being
18 able to do it, and working on that contract as we
19 speak.

20 All right. Any questions on that?

21 (No response.)

22 JOE SPRAGGINS:

23 All right. Oyster season. You know,
24 you saw what we had in December. We tried hard to
25 open up in January. Lord, have mercy, the --

1 nature just does not want us to do it sometimes,
2 you know. We tried every way in the world.

3 You've got to have the water -- you
4 know, with all the rains that we had and the
5 things that were happening, it was very hard
6 trying to find a way to get it back opened. We
7 were only able to open one area and that was
8 Telegraph Reef and that's the only one that was
9 outside the area where the water quality met.

10 And we were able to do that, but I don't
11 think there was very many oysters on Telegraph.
12 We knew that to start with, but we had to open it
13 because it was something that could be opened and
14 that was the only thing, you know. It was the
15 only place that we could open, and we couldn't
16 open any other areas.

17 I know some gentlemen had asked me about
18 looking at different ones, but -- we did and they
19 did not meet the water quality, and so we were not
20 able to do it.

21 Hopefully -- Jason, do you know where
22 we're at? Did we get to look at all --

23 JASON RIDER:

24 Yes, sir. I do have a presentation. I
25 can wait to give it, but I can update you.

1 We did -- we were able to get out
2 yesterday and sample. We're waiting for those
3 results now. As soon as we get those results, we
4 will update everybody on the next steps.

5 JOE SPRAGGINS:

6 When is the earliest we could open?

7 JASON RIDER:

8 We really need to wait for those results
9 to see when they come back.

10 JOE SPRAGGINS:

11 If they come back good, what would it
12 be?

13 JASON RIDER:

14 It would be Saturday or Monday, yeah.

15 JOE SPRAGGINS:

16 Okay. All right. Any questions on
17 that?

18 (No response.)

19 JOE SPRAGGINS:

20 All right. We talked about the extreme
21 cold weather.

22 Rick, have y'all seen anything? I know
23 I have got a few pictures of people sending me
24 stuff about some dead fish in mainly the bayous
25 and stuff. Have y'all seen anything else?

1 RICK BURRIS:

2 Yeah. We're seeing a little bit. And
3 Trevor is going to -- when he talks about snook,
4 he is going to kind of build that into his
5 presentation, talk about it a little bit. And I
6 think they're going to go do some assessments
7 after the meeting too.

8 JOE SPRAGGINS:

9 Okay. All right.

10 All right. As far as the Bonnet Carré
11 update, we have financial assistance for the
12 commercial fishery seafood dealers. We're working
13 on it as we speak. We'll be able to get -- we
14 have got some of them out.

15 What I would tell the seafood dealers
16 and all, if you're buying equipment, please work
17 with the staff as much as you can to be able to
18 get the right documentation to them because,
19 obviously, finance is not going to let it go if it
20 doesn't have the right documentation.

21 And that's what their job is, and so,
22 you know, even though that -- you buy a piece of
23 equipment or whatever and we say that we can help
24 you pay back a percentage of that, we have to have
25 documentation. We have to have the right

1 documentation to show that you purchased it and
2 that it is in operation because I can't do
3 anything -- I had one of the guys -- a gentleman
4 called me the other day and said, I want to buy,
5 you know, a couple of this, this and this. And I
6 said, you know what? I can't do it until you buy
7 it. If you buy it, then I can help you pay back
8 on it, but I can't do it if you didn't already
9 purchase it.

10 He said, well, I did already purchase a
11 bunch of other stuff. He said, I was just going
12 to tell you what I was going to do with the money
13 that I got, and I said, well, that's fine, do
14 whatever you want to with the money that I've
15 given you because we're giving you to pay back for
16 what you've already purchased.

17 So make sure that you help them. If
18 they call you, give them everything you can. We
19 want to get this done. I'm already mad at them
20 and they're mad at me because I wanted it done in
21 December and it hasn't be done yet, all of it.
22 And, so, you know, help them out because I'm
23 giving them a hard time, and if you'll help them,
24 it will probably help them get me off their back.

25 But we have Round 2 that we did for

1 commercial fishermen that we put some money in
2 there because some of the commercial fishermen
3 were not able to be here, some due to different
4 reasons, you know. They were either shrimpers and
5 out fishing and didn't get the information or
6 whatever they were. And we wanted to try to find
7 a way to help them so we had some extra money and
8 we decided to do a Round 2 of the commercial
9 fishermen.

10 Is it 94 of them -- 72 that we found
11 eligible out of the 94 that applied? 72 we found
12 eligible, so that's 72 more fishermen that's going
13 to be able to get something for this that wasn't
14 going to because they failed to get into the first
15 round.

16 So we're doing everything we can. We're
17 trying everything in the world. If you didn't get
18 in the first round and -- you know, we tried every
19 way in the world to get to a second round so we
20 can be able to do something.

21 Included in that, it says that there was
22 66 commercial fishermen, five charters and one
23 dealer that were included as far as the ones that
24 were approved for -- as far as the second round.

25 All right. We're looking at a grant for

1 new and emerging processing technologies. Once
2 again, that's the seafood processors. We're
3 working with that, so we're trying to get the
4 money out.

5 I want y'all to understand, too, the
6 only state in the Gulf -- the only state that pays
7 direct to fishermen is Mississippi in any of these
8 disasters. Alabama, Louisiana, Florida, Texas
9 don't pay directly to their fishermen. We do.
10 We're the only state in the Gulf that does that.
11 And it's going to be Gulf of America, I think,
12 isn't it, instead of Gulf of Mexico? But anyway,
13 we're the only state that does that.

14 So I want you to know that we're looking
15 after you as much as we possibly can, because
16 y'all were very much the ones that suffered when
17 the 2019 Bonnet Carré happened. Y'all are the
18 ones that suffered hard. You couldn't fish. You
19 couldn't do anything else, and we tried every way
20 in the world to be able to make as much as we
21 could possible for that and we're working on it.

22 Any questions on that before I keep
23 elaborating?

24 (No response.)

25 JOE SPRAGGINS:

1 All right. January 17th, Lower
2 Mississippi River meeting. We had a meeting with
3 the mayors, and we also had a meeting with the
4 Coast -- with the Corps from New Orleans and from
5 Mobile. And we sat down and we had a very good
6 meeting.

7 And I tell you what, we talked about
8 what we need to do and what needs to be done about
9 the Bonnet Carré. That was our major topic and
10 how could we do something to be able to mitigate
11 the opening of Bonnet Carré as much as possible.

12 The Corps was very open to us, and I
13 think the mayors were very appreciative of that,
14 the way they saw how the Corps was so open with us
15 to talk to us about it. And they realize that the
16 DMR, on a day-to-day basis, we're talking to them
17 and we're trying to get things done.

18 And the Corps is trying to work with us.
19 They're not trying to work against us. They're
20 trying to work with us. Their hands are tied in
21 some places. We need to help them get them
22 untied. And how do we do that? We go to
23 legislation somewhere -- in Washington and help
24 them do it.

25 But they did say one of the major

1 things -- and this came out of the young lady
2 that's in charge of the whole Mississippi River --
3 Lower Mississippi River study -- was that -- one
4 of the major things that they did was, what could
5 we do to mitigate the operation of the Bonnet
6 Carré, so they are looking at it. They're looking
7 at it very hard, and that impressed a lot of
8 people because they was like, man, we didn't
9 realize this. But they are working hard to do it.
10 They're trying. We're trying to give them every
11 information that we can. We're trying to get
12 information to them, and they're trying to use
13 that information.

14 Hopefully -- you know, we need to do
15 something in the future with the Bonnet Carré. It
16 was built in 1927. How many of y'all are driving
17 a 1927 vehicle? I don't know very many of you
18 unless you're doing it on Cruisin' the Coast or
19 just a Sunday afternoon drive, right? But that's
20 what we're operating with. We're operating with a
21 1927 version of a spillway. We need to find a way
22 to modify that spillway. We need to find a way to
23 modify things about it and how it's done and what
24 we can do.

25 We're looking at a 1953 model for the

1 Morganza. We need to find a way. What can we do
2 to modify the Morganza? What can we do? See, the
3 Morganza, one of the things that you don't
4 understand -- everybody says, why don't they open
5 it? Why don't they open it? Well, until the
6 water gets to a certain level, it doesn't make any
7 difference. You can open it all day long. It
8 will not spill or throttle the water. It's
9 about -- it's almost like there is a hill built
10 there and you've got to go over that before you
11 can open the Morganza, so the water has got to get
12 there first.

13 Well, is there a way that we can look at
14 this and ask the Corps to maybe look at something
15 to where we can take it and we could build some
16 channels in there to where you can open it before
17 that? That might be a situation. Okay.

18 The old river structure, what can we do?
19 What could we do to look at it? The old river
20 structure right now operates at 70/30 rate.
21 30 percent every day goes down the Atchafalaya.
22 70 percent comes down the Mississippi River. It's
23 by law. They don't have a choice. Corps sat
24 there and looked us in the face and said, I don't
25 have a choice. I can't do it. I can't do

1 anything.

2 But in a time like -- what may happen in
3 the next few months because of all the snow that's
4 going on in the north and everything else, in a
5 time like that, we might be able to -- if we had
6 the capability with the Corps to say, hey, let's
7 make that a 60/40 where you open it and 40 percent
8 goes down the Atchafalaya a few months out of the
9 year and then the 60 percent comes down. That's
10 not going to hurt the Mississippi. It's going to
11 help it and not going to hurt the Atchafalaya.

12 So we're going to look at things like
13 that. There is some things that coming out of
14 that we're able to -- it's more open now than it's
15 ever been. It's more open to conversation. It's
16 more open to listening to South Mississippi. Back
17 when General Kaiser was there, he was the first
18 general in the Mississippi Valley Region that ever
19 even said he would come down here and talk to us.
20 And we talked and got to be good friends.

21 And now General Peeples told me the
22 other day, she said, I apologize. I need to get
23 down there. I need to get down there more often.
24 I need to get down and listen to you people. I
25 need to understand what's going on, so we're

1 getting more information.

2 General Kelly, the Number 2 guy at the
3 Corps of Engineers, is saying, Joe, give me the
4 information. We will do everything in our power
5 to help you with it.

6 We're working. It's going to get there.
7 It's not going to happen tomorrow because you know
8 how that goes, but we might be able to get
9 Louisiana -- if we can get Louisiana and
10 Mississippi and get our legislators and especially
11 our senators and congressmen on board together and
12 we can do something in Washington -- I've learned
13 more than one time -- and, Jason, you know this
14 very well -- if you get two states, it works a
15 whole lot better, doesn't it?

16 JASON OSBORNE:

17 Uh-huh.

18 JOE SPRAGGINS:

19 So I want y'all to know we're fighting
20 for you every day. We're fighting hard. I don't
21 know the answer. You know, I have an answer, but
22 I don't know how to -- I can't get that answer
23 done tomorrow, but we'll see what happens.

24 Any questions on that?

25 (No response.)

1 JOE SPRAGGINS:

2 All right. January 27th through 30th,
3 we're going to Gulf Council. That's next week. I
4 don't know what the topic will be, probably
5 whether we're going to be Gulf Council or Gulf of
6 America Council. I don't know. That will
7 probably be the topic more than anything, but I
8 don't know what all it's going to be. There's a
9 lot of the stuff we're talking about and we will
10 see where it goes.

11 I don't think it's -- Rick, do you
12 remember anything real big that's coming up in
13 that?

14 RICK BURRIS:

15 There will be discussions on lane
16 snapper and minimum size limits and bag limits,
17 king mackerel, Spanish mackerel and some IFQ
18 stuff, but nothing too eye-opening.

19 JOE SPRAGGINS:

20 Is IFQ going final?

21 RICK BURRIS:

22 I don't think so, no, sir.

23 JOE SPRAGGINS:

24 Okay. It goes final -- it's got --

25 RICK BURRIS:

1 It's the next few meetings, I think.

2 JOE SPRAGGINS:

3 All right. But anyway, we will keep you
4 updated on that after the next meeting and we'll
5 know where we're at.

6 February 5th, if you're in Jackson,
7 Mississippi, we'll have Capitol Day that morning.
8 We'll be at the Capitol, and we'll be set up in
9 one half of the rotunda to have Mississippi -- to
10 have DMR Capitol Day there, so welcome anybody
11 that would love to come there.

12 Out of the derelict vessels, 173 cases,
13 154 have been solved. That's pretty good. I tell
14 you what, you show me any state in the Gulf
15 anywhere close to that and I can guarantee to you,
16 there is not any one close to that. 19 vessels
17 are pending right now and seven are sitting there
18 waiting on court orders, so we're getting these
19 derelict vessels out of the way. And I appreciate
20 Roy and Steven and them for working hard on that,
21 so they do a great job.

22 Have I got anything else or can I shut
23 up?

24 I think that's -- we go to actions
25 agency update -- I mean, actions. Actions update,

1 excuse me. I said "agency."

2 STEVEN ECKERT:

3 There are none today, Director.

4 JOE SPRAGGINS:

5 Okay.

6 Well, then, Chairman, I'm going to be
7 quiet, if that's all right with you.

8 CAM ROBERDS:

9 Yes, sir. Thank you very much. A lot
10 of information there and glad to see that we're
11 progressing on the Bonnet Carré. I know it's a
12 long, drawn-out process, but I see you guys
13 working -- working hard on it for a few years.
14 Hopefully, it's -- you've definitely made an
15 impact for the state it seems like.

16 Do we have any reports from the
17 Commissioners today?

18 RONNIE DANIELS:

19 I don't have a report. More of a
20 request. Joe, if we could, could we get an update
21 on speckled trout? We haven't heard anything on
22 that in quite some time. I was wondering if maybe
23 they could come back with the information, where
24 we're at with our spawning, with our recreational
25 fishery, our commercial fishery, all of it.

1 JOE SPRAGGINS:

2 Yeah. Trevor -- is Trevor here?

3 TREVOR MONCRIEF:

4 Yeah.

5 JOE SPRAGGINS:

6 How far -- where are we at on that?

7 Real quick, we can get something right now. We'll
8 let you know where we're at and how much we need
9 to do for it.

10 TREVOR MONCRIEF:

11 So we've been running, essentially
12 trying to update the indexes for all of our
13 inshore species, and spotted sea trout is one of
14 them. It's relatively stable.

15 Like I said, the last time we kind of
16 brought an assessment forward, we noticed the
17 trend of -- the divergence in catch in the index
18 of abundance mainly because of the freshwater
19 impacts of Bonnet Carré that continued on through
20 record rainfalls in 2021 and '22, which decreased
21 the SPR, and so our kind of notion was to take
22 caution and not quite go down the realm of
23 management measures or anything else like that.

24 If we want to bring back a presentation
25 for the next month, we can do so and detail what

1 exists for recreational landings, maybe give y'all
2 a glimpse of what we've observed with MS Creel as
3 far as that -- the effort comparison goes because
4 that's where the big difference was. If we can't
5 rely on removals to help inform us, then it kind
6 of throws us off when it comes to the index as
7 well because you would expect that if the
8 population decreases, catch will decrease, but
9 with MRIP, we just weren't seeing that.

10 So, yeah, that may be just a
11 presentation next month where we can detail
12 recreational landings, the commercial landings,
13 kind of just give you a glimpse of the fishery and
14 what the index looks like.

15 RONNIE DANIELS:

16 That would be the great.

17 JOE SPRAGGINS:

18 Okay. All right.

19 RONNIE DANIELS:

20 Thank you.

21 JASON OSBORNE:

22 I apologize. I just was looking through
23 the minutes and there was a -- on Page 45, it
24 attributes a comment that Jason Rider had to me.
25 So while we all look alike, we're not as smart as

1 each other, and Jason Rider is much smarter than
2 me. So Line 17, it just says "Jason Osborne" and
3 it should be "Jason Rider."

4 CAM ROBERDS:

5 Okay. Well, we'll make a note of that
6 in the minutes, I'm sure, to get corrected. Thank
7 you, Jason.

8 Not to -- while we're here, as well, I
9 had a question. I know Rick spoke on it real
10 quick, but at the Gulf Council meeting next week
11 or in a few days, we're discussing the lane
12 snapper and other species.

13 Has there been any talk about wahoo,
14 Rick, at all? Is there any -- I know we don't
15 really have much limits on that. I don't know if
16 there is any kind of assessments. I just know the
17 fishing has been pretty good this winter. I was
18 curious.

19 RICK BURRIS:

20 So at the last meeting, it was brought
21 forth by the --

22 JOE SPRAGGINS:

23 Louisiana, wasn't it?

24 RICK BURRIS:

25 No. It was Texas.

1 JOE SPRAGGINS:

2 Texas.

3 RICK BURRIS:

4 Steamboat? What was it? What was the
5 name of it?

6 TREVOR MONCRIEF:

7 Steamboat Lumps.

8 RICK BURRIS:

9 The Steamboat Lumps. There is a
10 management area down there, and they brought it
11 forth saying that there is a lot of catch.
12 They're seeing a lot of fish being caught. And
13 they're looking at social media pictures, and
14 there is a lot of wahoo being caught on these
15 party boats. And it's several day trips and
16 things like that.

17 And so they wanted the -- two meetings
18 ago. So they wanted the Council to take a look at
19 it. There was a presentation given at the last
20 Council meeting. I can get that to you and you
21 can look at it.

22 But there was a lot of misconceptions
23 and some not real good data that were used on the
24 Louisiana landings. They were saying a lot of
25 these fish were coming -- were being caught at

1 these Steamboat Lumps and being brought back to
2 Louisiana and that's just really not fathomable to
3 do that. It's such a long run. A lot of the --
4 most of Louisiana's fish come out of Venice, as
5 you know, so they're kind of looking into it.

6 I can't remember what the outcome was,
7 if they -- if they're going to look into some
8 management measures. That won't be on this
9 meeting, but I can look into it again and get back
10 to you.

11 CAM ROBERDS:

12 Okay. Thanks for the update, Rick.

13 Any questions or other Commissioner
14 reports?

15 (No response.)

16 CAM ROBERDS:

17 Okay. Well, Chief Wilkerson, Office of
18 Marine Patrol, has a report on citations for us.

19 KYLE WILKERSON:

20 Good morning. I tell you what, I am
21 ready for summertime, not going to lie.

22 Listen, I'm going to be brief with this.
23 December was a pretty calm month. The checks were
24 down. We had 873, meaning that a lot of people
25 were Christmas shopping and not on the water

1 because our people are always on the water and
2 they only came across 837 people. That's very low
3 for us. But once again, summertime and springtime
4 will be here and we'll be back in the four-digit
5 realm.

6 The report itself is pretty
7 self-explanatory. Nothing just jumps out at me.

8 I do know that our dive team assisted
9 Biloxi PD with a recovery of a car and individual
10 off the fishing pier at the Highway 90 bridge. We
11 were instrumental in that recovery with our dive
12 team.

13 Other than that, it explains itself, but
14 if you have any questions, I'll entertain them.

15 JASON OSBORNE:

16 I'm curious if you had -- when it was
17 snowing out there, you had boats out, I assume?

18 KYLE WILKERSON:

19 No.

20 JASON OSBORNE:

21 No.

22 KYLE WILKERSON:

23 No, no, no. We will have boats if you
24 call for an emergency, but, no, we were not out in
25 the snow, no, sir.

1 JASON OSBORNE:

2 I was just seeing if there was any
3 fascinating pictures of those boats out there.

4 KYLE WILKERSON:

5 Well, we probably have some by land.
6 But, listen, if you call for help, we're going to
7 be there in the snow.

8 JASON OSBORNE:

9 All right. Got ya.

10 CAM ROBERDS:

11 Appreciate it, Chief. Thank you, guys,
12 for everything.

13 KYLE WILKERSON:

14 Thank you.

15 JOE SPRAGGINS:

16 All right. Moving on down to Ms. Leslie
17 Brewer for our accounting quarterly report.

18 LESLIE BREWER:

19 Good morning, everyone. I am reporting
20 on the financials for the end of December.

21 Our state revenue was 4.4 million. Our
22 agency revenue was 20.4.

23 State net income was 822,000, and agency
24 net income was a negative 3.3 million.

25 And after six months of '25, we have

1 92.4 remaining of the operating budget, and
2 Tidelands is at 65.8 percent.

3 Does anybody have any questions?

4 JOE SPRAGGINS:

5 Note that that 3 million is not that
6 we're broke, in a deficit. That is waiting on the
7 federal government to give us our money back.

8 LESLIE BREWER:

9 That, and appropriations don't come
10 until after the end of the year.

11 CAM ROBERDS:

12 Understood.

13 Any questions?

14 (No response.)

15 CAM ROBERDS:

16 All right. Thank you, ma'am.

17 LESLIE BREWER:

18 Thanks.

19 CAM ROBERDS:

20 Ms. Charmaine with Public Affairs.

21 CHARMAINE SCHMERMUND:

22 Good morning. The Mississippi
23 Department of Marine Resources had 30 media
24 mentions since the December MACMR meeting. News
25 items included the oyster leases, oyster season,

1 seafood labeling in Mississippi, MDMR's marine
2 information calendars and the promotion to Make
3 Seafood Great Again.

4 MDMR's Capitol Day in Jackson is
5 scheduled for the morning of Wednesday,
6 February 5th, where we will have staff on hand and
7 our informational publications available for
8 anyone who would like to stop by and learn more
9 about our agency.

10 CAM ROBERDS:

11 All right. Thank you, Ms. Charmaine.

12 Office of Marine Fisheries. It looks
13 like the oyster season update with Jason Rider is
14 up first.

15 JASON RIDER:

16 Good morning.

17 Hey, Brady, do you mind?

18 So I will give a quick update. Not much
19 is -- not too much new information just due to the
20 situation in January with the weather, but I will
21 go through it. If you have any questions, let me
22 know.

23 So to recap, December, we opened on
24 December 9th, closed on the 21st. Y'all have seen
25 this information. The biggest thing is we did

1 harvest between November and December right north
2 of 4,000 sacks of oysters, so that's -- that
3 number reflects November and December there.

4 Here's some more details on those
5 numbers. Y'all have seen a lot of this
6 information. Nothing has changed, but I did want
7 to bring it back up. Just north of 4,000 sacks of
8 oysters. Sacks per day was 176. Licenses are
9 broke down. And then the main area fished, we
10 discussed last time, was 2A and 2F.

11 January, not much to report on January
12 as of yet, as Director mentioned. To start, we
13 did open the season on January 15th. We opened
14 the Telegraph area. That was all we could open
15 due to the river stage and rainfall. Right when
16 we were trying to open the season, we had a lot of
17 rainfall and the river was very high at the time,
18 so we had to wait for that to crest. And then we
19 did get this past week the cold weather and the
20 snow, so we had to wait for all that to pass.

21 As I mentioned, we did sample. We're
22 waiting to get those results back and as soon as
23 we get those back, we'll notify everyone and make
24 some decisions.

25 Does anyone have any questions regarding

1 the seasons?

2 JOE SPRAGGINS:

3 Just got one comment, if you question in
4 December why we closed a certain area -- you know,
5 we closed the area, what, Pass Marianne, Pass
6 Christian, that area there?

7 JASON RIDER:

8 Yes, sir.

9 JOE SPRAGGINS:

10 And I'll will tell you why we closed it.
11 We closed the areas that the State is keeping, and
12 I did it for a reason. I did it so we'll have
13 them in February if we want to go get them. And
14 what I did was I opened up the areas that were
15 not -- that were possibly going to be leased, so I
16 opened those areas up for you to be able to go out
17 and get the ones that was possibly going to be
18 leased.

19 And that's what we will continue doing
20 until we have -- if this leasing goes forward,
21 whatever happens with it, but, you know, we will
22 continue to do that. And I want to save our
23 resource because that 20 percent that we were able
24 to keep for the State, I want to keep that for you
25 so we'll continue to have that. And then we

1 can -- and let's get the resources other than that
2 and then let's move forward. So that's why I did
3 that in case you asked any questions about it.

4 JONATHAN MCLENDON:

5 Jason, I'm just curious. Like, do we
6 collect any data, the DMR, on like the dockside
7 prices of sacks? Like, how is that holding up
8 over the two openings?

9 JASON RIDER:

10 So we do collect that information on
11 trip tickets. We do collect the number of sacks
12 they're purchasing or tags they're purchasing and
13 then what they expect to sell it for. We do
14 collect that from the harvester and the
15 wholesalers also.

16 We did see it held pretty consistent in
17 the November season. It went up slightly in the
18 November season. And then December, it started to
19 drop slightly at the end of December, but it
20 maintained for the most part. But we do have that
21 information if you would like to see it.

22 JOE SPRAGGINS:

23 And just for your information, too,
24 Jason, you know -- I think it's probably on your
25 things here. Yeah, the 10 and 15, the reason we

1 changed that from 20 and 15 is because we were
2 asked by the oystermen to change it. We were
3 asked by the oystermen to -- come up and asked us
4 to change that because they wanted the 10 sacks
5 per day for tongers and 15 for dredgers, and
6 that's why we changed that number, you know.

7 We didn't change it up because we just
8 said, hey, we want to cut back. We were asked by
9 you to do it and that's why we did. Hopefully --
10 I think your vision was that it would prolong the
11 season a little bit, and that's what we're looking
12 at.

13 And so hopefully, we will be able to
14 open up next week and if we do, we'll open up
15 everything but the state -- the ones that the
16 State is going to own. All right? Whatever the
17 State is going to own, I'm going to save that
18 because I'm going to save it back till I find out
19 what's going to happen with the leases. Does that
20 make sense? And then we will have that resource
21 to go back to. All right.

22 JASON RIDER:

23 All right. Thank y'all.

24 CAM ROBERDS:

25 Thank you, Jason.

1 Trevor is going to give us an
2 observation of the snook in Mississippi.

3 JOE SPRAGGINS:

4 Did you want to talk -- K.1., we did
5 have some --

6 CAM ROBERDS:

7 Oh, I'm sorry. Yeah. Let me back up on
8 the -- I'm sorry, Trevor.

9 Let's go ahead and move forward with the
10 public comments since they are related to this
11 bullet point here.

12 First up, we have John Livings.

13 Mr. Livings, just if you want to state
14 your name and just your -- just the city and --

15 JOHN LIVINGS:

16 Hello. My name is John Livings. I'm
17 from Pass Christian.

18 Sinuses, can't hardly -- we just come --
19 we wanted to come today and see about just maybe
20 taking the -- just 10 days at a time off. Like,
21 just open the season up, let it run through April.
22 If it -- if there's no -- if the oysters get
23 limited and there's none, then we'll quit or y'all
24 can close it then.

25 But there is a lot of people that's not

1 willing to put the money into their boats that's
2 been sitting for five years with no long-term,
3 really, because they -- if they put thousands of
4 dollars in, they get 10 days and it closes,
5 they're really not making money. They're going
6 backwards.

7 And the other thing we were wanting to
8 talk about was just to see what are y'all's
9 thoughts -- and I'm sure we already know, but
10 about the leasing programs. We're going to keep
11 trying to see about keeping the reefs public
12 instead of private.

13 We made some comments to a few people
14 that people that already have leases are the same
15 people putting in for the new leases, and if -- I
16 mean, if they were so good at growing oysters,
17 they should have oysters on their leases now and
18 all the reefs around them should have oysters.
19 So, I mean, it sounds like they just want to put
20 in for what's there because I don't think a lot of
21 the mud-bottom leases have been even applied for.
22 I think it's all stuff that's -- and you just
23 admitted that you know there is oysters on these
24 spots that's going to be leased, so I think we
25 need to keep it.

1 I mean, if we give it to public -- I
2 meant, to private, really, we don't ever have a
3 chance to work it, but if we keep it public, we
4 have a slim chance to be able to work that
5 product. But once it's private, it's over with
6 for that. And once you give it away, you can't
7 take it back. So that's just all I had to say.

8 JOE SPRAGGINS:

9 Can I address that?

10 CAM ROBERDS:

11 Yes, sir.

12 JOE SPRAGGINS:

13 Mr. Livings, yeah, as far as the
14 10 days, the reason we do that -- and Rick or
15 Jason, you can help me if I need you, but it's --
16 we have a limit of what we can get. We know what
17 we think is an -- is a number out there, and I
18 will just give you that number. What was it,
19 18,000, something like that, sacks that we were
20 looking at?

21 RICK BURRIS:

22 It was lower than that.

23 JOE SPRAGGINS:

24 Well, we're going to say 18-, you know.
25 We're not going to worry about that, but there was

1 something like 18,000 sacks. I've already opened
2 my mouth, so we're going to use that, right, but
3 it might have been 15-, but it doesn't matter.

4 But say it was 18,000 sacks. Right now,
5 we're at, what, 8,000, something like that?

6 JOHN LIVINGS:

7 4-.

8 AUDIENCE MEMBER:

9 4-.

10 JOE SPRAGGINS:

11 4,000 sacks. Okay. We're at 4,000, so
12 we're looking at, you know, 12- -- you know,
13 somewhere around 12-, 14,000 sacks still out
14 there, right, so we -- and we can do that if we
15 think that we can work it, but we've got to look
16 at the numbers.

17 In other words, when we open it up next
18 time, we can extend it after we open it if we see
19 that we're not catching all of them real quick or
20 anything, and we can try to extend that and move
21 it forward. But I know we've got to be able to
22 keep some kind of data.

23 Rick, help me. Why is -- the staff
24 tells me we need to do it in this way so we can
25 keep a tab on it, is that correct, and make sure

1 that we don't overexceed because we don't want to
2 overfish anything and that's not what we're after.
3 But, Rick, you got --

4 RICK BURRIS:

5 The effort too. We're not -- unsure of
6 the effort, if --

7 JOE SPRAGGINS:

8 Yeah, the effort. When we first
9 started, we had, what, five boats or something
10 like that. And then I know it's moving up as the
11 time comes because of just what you're saying. I
12 think some of you are getting your boats back
13 ready to go and operational and doing whatever you
14 need to do.

15 So I will look at that. I will look at
16 that with them, and we will put a -- if we see
17 when we open it -- as long as the water -- water
18 is usually what stops us, you know, if we get the
19 rain, and this is the time of year that we're
20 going to get it. We can't do anything about it.

21 JOHN LIVINGS:

22 No.

23 JOE SPRAGGINS:

24 All right. But if the rain doesn't stop
25 us and we can -- and we haven't reached our limit,

1 then I think we can continue it and we would
2 probably look at that, just extending it and keep
3 continuing it until we reach our limit of where we
4 need to be.

5 JOHN LIVINGS:

6 Right.

7 JOE SPRAGGINS:

8 All right.

9 JOHN LIVINGS:

10 I just know that they'd like some
11 assurance that it's going to be open, you know
12 what I mean, instead of just keep saying 10 days,
13 10 days, 10 days.

14 JOE SPRAGGINS:

15 Yeah. And I'm going to tell you
16 something. Honest facts. I don't care if we
17 catch more than 18,000 as long as it's not on
18 state reefs.

19 JOHN LIVINGS:

20 Yeah. Well, it's all state reefs right
21 now.

22 JOE SPRAGGINS:

23 Yeah. But, I mean, it's not on the
24 state reefs that we're going to keep. I don't
25 want to fish them out, but I'm not worried about

1 what I'm leasing. If they're going to be leased,
2 I'm not going to worry about that.

3 JOHN LIVINGS:

4 Right.

5 JOE SPRAGGINS:

6 And so if it's going to be there, I
7 don't care if we keep it open and fish to what we
8 need to, but I don't want to hurt the resource
9 either because we've got to have that. You know
10 it as a fisherman that if we get too much of the
11 resource out, then it takes forever to rebuild it,
12 just like what happened in Bonnet Carré.

13 JOHN LIVINGS:

14 Right. Well, sack quota that's coming
15 in tells you that.

16 JOE SPRAGGINS:

17 Yeah. Well, we will look at that and we
18 will look at that for you. And I'll be honest
19 with you. As far as what's happening with the
20 leases, I have statute by law, and I have to
21 follow it. I don't have a choice.

22 JOHN LIVINGS:

23 That's right. Well, we're going to keep
24 fighting till the end, so --

25 JOE SPRAGGINS:

1 Legislation and everything was passed
2 and it tells me what I have to do and I have to do
3 it.

4 JOHN LIVINGS:

5 Yes, sir.

6 JOE SPRAGGINS:

7 And that's exactly what I have to do,
8 whether I -- either way about it, that's the way
9 it should be done. And unless the legislation is
10 changed or something happens, then I have to
11 follow the rules.

12 JOHN LIVINGS:

13 That's right. We're not asking you to
14 bend the rules for us. We're just asking you not
15 to give it away.

16 I had one more thing. Is the -- like
17 the Long Beach Reef, has something changed where
18 the fresh water line goes further?

19 JOE SPRAGGINS:

20 Yeah. Rick, that's -- you're the one
21 that talked to me about that, right?

22 JOHN LIVINGS:

23 I did.

24 JOE SPRAGGINS:

25 Yeah. Rick, do you remember I

1 questioned y'all and I asked you about the Long
2 Beach Reef and you said now it was part of that
3 same area. All right? Whenever we was talking
4 about what we could open because of the fresh
5 water -- you're who sent me the message, I think,
6 right, and I was back and forth with you?

7 JOHN LIVINGS:

8 Yes, sir.

9 RICK BURRIS:

10 So which --

11 JOE SPRAGGINS:

12 All right. When I asked y'all -- I
13 think it was back when we opened up Telegraph,
14 even right before that, that we -- whenever we had
15 the freshwater intrusion, which we're having
16 right -- you know, had at that time. And I said,
17 what about Long Beach Reef, and you said that's
18 traditionally been a -- you talked to me about it.
19 Something -- I can go back and look at my texts.

20 RICK BURRIS:

21 I'm trying to gather my mind.

22 What area is that in, Jason?

23 JOE SPRAGGINS:

24 Y'all said it fell in the -- you know,
25 it used to not be into that area, but now it is.

1 RICK BURRIS:

2 It may have been reclassified.

3 JASON RIDER:

4 That's the situation, is that reef used
5 to be combined with another area that they could
6 fish or used to be able to fish when other areas
7 were closed. Now it's in a different
8 classification, so we're not able to open it at
9 this time.

10 JOE SPRAGGINS:

11 Okay.

12 JOHN LIVINGS:

13 I was just trying to figure out how the
14 fresh water line moved; you know what I mean?

15 JOE SPRAGGINS:

16 I don't know, but, you know, it has.

17 JOHN LIVINGS:

18 Because it's -- in the past, we've --

19 JOE SPRAGGINS:

20 Let me tell you, ask them, because I
21 don't know.

22 JOHN LIVINGS:

23 In the past, we have worked Long Beach
24 when Telegraph was closed, but it has not been
25 checked or open since it was killed by the

1 conservationists.

2 JOE SPRAGGINS:

3 Yeah.

4 RICK BURRIS:

5 So it was just reclassified. So the
6 sampling that we do, we've been continuing doing
7 the samples since 2019, so that can change and
8 those lines can change based on -- based on the
9 water quality data that we gather.

10 JOHN LIVINGS:

11 Right.

12 JOE SPRAGGINS:

13 I know we did look at it and that was
14 why we talked about it earlier, you know, because
15 you had asked me about it and we went back and
16 forth. And I asked them and they said it was
17 under reclassification and it couldn't be open.

18 JOHN LIVINGS:

19 Yeah. And maybe we were misinformed
20 before in the past, I don't know, because they
21 showed us models before when Scott was here and
22 stuff and it went to the east side of Pass Harbor
23 and turned to the channel and went around Long
24 Beach.

25 JOE SPRAGGINS:

1 Yeah. And, once again, all I know is
2 what I'm given, so, you know, the comment -- and I
3 don't think they would tell me something wrong.
4 And they have to do it or they would have found a
5 way. If they could have, they would have found a
6 way.

7 JOHN LIVINGS:

8 Okay.

9 JOE SPRAGGINS:

10 All right.

11 RONNIE DANIELS:

12 Joe, if y'all don't mind, can we let
13 them -- do we know what our goal for sacks are
14 this year? Can we let them know what that actual
15 number is? That way, it gives them some sort of
16 assurance that they've got this much room between
17 4,000 and wherever we're going to end up.

18 JOE SPRAGGINS:

19 My goal was, I said -- I think Rick and
20 them was thinking 15-. I just raised it to 18-,
21 okay, so it's 18,000 sacks. We're at 4,000 sacks,
22 so there is 14,000 sacks sitting out there. And
23 as soon as we can open the season, we're going to
24 open it.

25 And the only thing I'm going to tell

1 you, I'm still going to hold back that 20 percent.
2 That 20 percent the State is going to keep, I'm
3 going to hold it back because I know if we do go
4 forward with these leases and it happens, then I
5 have got that for you to fall back on in like
6 February, late February or first of March or
7 something like.

8 JOHN LIVINGS:

9 Okay.

10 JOE SPRAGGINS:

11 Does that make sense?

12 Is that all right?

13 RONNIE DANIELS:

14 Yes, sir. Thank you.

15 JOHN LIVINGS:

16 All right. Thank you.

17 CAM ROBERDS:

18 All right. Next up, we have Brad
19 Stapleton.

20 BRAD STAPLETON:

21 How y'all doing? I'm Brad Stapleton,
22 commercial fisherman for Pass Christian.

23 John covered some of the topics I was
24 wanting to talk about, about a little more
25 stability there for us fishermen, you know, that's

1 got to invest a lot of money getting those boats
2 ready for that 10-day stuff. And then, you know,
3 limited days, it's hard to want to go and invest
4 everything into just breaking even when the days
5 was just numbered up, so -- but y'all giving us a
6 goal there on the number of sacks, that helps a
7 little bit.

8 But another thing I wanted to ask is
9 years previous, past, the Pearl River, it shut
10 down on 12 feet. Now we're falling at 11 feet.
11 The seasons was closed for five years. There was
12 no evidence showing that 12 foot wasn't a good
13 plan, you know. Why is it now 11 feet we're
14 closing it? It makes it pretty difficult for
15 these two months here, January and February,
16 especially with these fronts, for us to ever get a
17 chance to work.

18 I was just wondering why that got
19 changed and how it got changed, you know?

20 JOE SPRAGGINS:

21 Right. Jason, let's address it.

22 JASON RIDER:

23 Director, basically the same thing. So
24 it did used to be 12 foot. We continue to water
25 sample throughout the years. We water sample

1 every month and over those samples, we did have to
2 reclassify and it dropped from 12 to 11 in some
3 areas.

4 And we follow the operational plan. We
5 work with our organizations in state and out of
6 state to follow this. And I'll be happy to
7 address that with you and where it changed and
8 when it changed, but we follow an operational plan
9 as the agency.

10 The issue is that it changed during the
11 downtime between the -- '18 and now, so no one's
12 been affected by it and this is the first time
13 it's been affected during a harvest season.

14 JOE SPRAGGINS:

15 Do we have data that we could put --
16 maybe we can publish it and that data could be out
17 there for y'all to be able to get?

18 JASON RIDER:

19 Certainly, we can work with them if we
20 want to get together and go over it. We'll go
21 over that and show you the changes that affect it
22 and where and when it happened.

23 JOE SPRAGGINS:

24 Okay. So what we'll do is we'll put it
25 on the website. And Charmaine will get something,

1 and we'll put in on our website and there will be
2 why that was done.

3 And feel free, any one of you, at any
4 time, you can call any one of us in the DMR and
5 just ask us to give you -- and they'll sit down
6 with you and go over it one on one. All right?

7 BRAD STAPLETON:

8 All right. That's what I would like to
9 know, is could we call for one-on-one because I
10 did speak with Jason Rider the other day and asked
11 about the Long Beach tonging reef and, you know,
12 he didn't communicate too good with me. I hate to
13 call him out on the spot, but he ended up hanging
14 the phone up on me when I asked did he even know
15 it exists. So I'd like to bring that up. I'd
16 like to speak to you and one-on-one is good
17 information to get.

18 JOE SPRAGGINS:

19 If you'll hang around after the meeting,
20 I'll sit down and talk with you.

21 BRAD STAPLETON:

22 All right. Thank you, sir. That's all
23 I've got.

24 CAM ROBERDS:

25 All right. Thank you, Mr. Stapleton.

1 Next up, we have Mr. Storrs.

2 JOE SPRAGGINS:

3 George Storrs.

4 CAM ROBERDS:

5 George Storrs.

6 JOE SPRAGGINS:

7 He's like me. He's getting old, can't
8 move as fast.

9 GEORGE STORRS:

10 I'm George Storrs. I'm a commercial
11 tonger, been that way for like 52 years, ever
12 since I've been married, however long that is, so
13 I have been here a while.

14 I used to come here when we had nothing
15 and then -- not here, but to the buildings when
16 they were just buildings and there wasn't nobody
17 there, except for the skeleton crews. They were
18 maxed out at the time, but they were skeletons
19 compared to what we have now.

20 But anyway, I've had some ups and downs
21 in here mostly with the dredging population, but
22 we're all thrown into one big barrel right now,
23 dredgers and tongers.

24 Our reefs are in peril. They are being
25 taken away and it's doing it systematically. It's

1 happening because of statute.

2 The statute was never a problem until a
3 handful of people -- not even a handful, probably
4 one or two of these senators, or whatever they
5 call themselves up there, decided they wanted to
6 change the statues, not telling anybody else about
7 it, probably not even telling you. You just have
8 to obey their law.

9 But they did that to us, and
10 consequently, instead of being the guardian of the
11 resource, we can just advise now. That's not what
12 we were. We were the guardian. We didn't let
13 people just walk over us.

14 The Legislature stayed away from us.
15 They let us handle our own problems. Now they
16 don't do that. Now they write laws where you
17 can't stand up to them or you have to take the
18 heat for what they've done up in Jackson, and I
19 don't -- you know, I'm not for any of that.
20 That's just crooked crap to me.

21 But anyway, there's a proposal that I
22 want to make to you and it's not in writing yet,
23 but I have got to get with Ryan and a few other
24 people and John. If you, Joe Spraggins, would
25 give us the same amount of money -- I'm talking

1 about the organization, the Fishermen United --
2 that you gave to the farmers, the off-bottom
3 farmers, if you'll put that money in our
4 organization, we, the fishermen, will take care of
5 getting our shells and getting our rocks and we
6 will put out the stuff where it goes where we want
7 it.

8 We never had any input on where all
9 these millions went that you had to put out there
10 and try to make it happen. We never had input on
11 where to put that stuff. Somebody told you where,
12 but it was not a fisherman. It wasn't one of us.
13 It wasn't somebody that's been doing it all their
14 life or most of it. It was somebody else.
15 Consequently, we ain't got jack still hardly, and
16 this is the big consequence, a big consequence to
17 me.

18 So this small amount of money, even
19 though it's going to be a \$1 million or 2 or 3 or
20 whatever it is that they got, I want you to do the
21 same thing for us, and I don't want it year after
22 year. I would love to have it year after year,
23 but I think once we get it going, we're not going
24 to need it year after year. We just need one good
25 lick and we can show you that we can take care of

1 these reefs. We know how to turn them over. We
2 know where to put the stuff that needs to be put.
3 We can put the rocks in certain places and shells
4 in certain places. And it's not going to be as
5 much as you were able to put out, but it's going
6 to be enough to where we can show you a
7 difference.

8 But once they take all these reefs away
9 from us, it's going to fall on our enforcement
10 people to guard what we've been doing, to guard
11 our work because if they don't watch them, those
12 shells will be just drug over to the edges of all
13 these new leases they want. That's all they're
14 going to do, is steal them.

15 That's what my -- that's what I think
16 they've already done. That's why it's so slick
17 out there and nothing ever came back because they
18 just kept it drug off, you know. That's just me
19 saying that, and I can't prove it because I don't
20 watch them.

21 But if you get some enforcement people
22 looking at them and watching those reefs, you will
23 be seeing something going on out there day and
24 night, if you could just be there. They need to
25 be there and they need to guard what we do and

1 guard our work.

2 If you'll do that and take it into
3 consideration -- because I know that you're tied
4 as far as statutes go and I don't know how you're
5 going to give us that money or if you even will,
6 but I'm asking for it. And I want you to do
7 something about it if you can, any way humanly
8 possible to do this for us. The same amount of
9 money you gave the farmers, do that for the
10 fishermen, just the regular commercial oyster
11 fishermen and we will take care of the reefs for
12 you.

13 And Long Beach -- let me say something
14 before I go any further. Long Beach Reef was
15 built by -- it's called the Kittiwake Reef and
16 Fred Deegan built that reef when he was in Long
17 Beach. He was -- that was his baby. That was a
18 fine reef because -- and it all had to do with the
19 freshwater flow and salt intrusion and stuff like
20 that, and it was built scientifically. Fred did a
21 good job on that reef.

22 The mussels started taking over a little
23 bit on that reef, and that's back when Rick Laird
24 was the chairman, but he was stepping down or
25 stepping aside or something and Tommy Van Devender

1 stepped in. Van Devender is about as worthless as
2 this floor right here. He didn't know nothing
3 about nothing. It was just a name that was next
4 in line.

5 And I went to him several times and told
6 him that reef is being taken over by mussels, let
7 us work this reef. And he did everything he could
8 to stop and he finally -- it finally got -- the
9 mussels got so big, it just about -- it killed it.

10 But those mussels will come and go. It
11 just takes -- it's a process. It's a long
12 process, but if you get on them and work them,
13 that won't put you out of business like what
14 happened to us. He put us out of business.
15 That's a good reef. That reef's got shells on it.
16 That reef's in a perfect place. Whoever's got
17 dubs on that reef, whoever put their name on that
18 reef is on the inside of something because that's
19 a fine, fine reef, not to lease it to someone
20 who's just a private guy.

21 I'm just not for leasing any of it,
22 actually, and I want what's -- back what's been
23 leased, but, you know, that's still up to you guys
24 to do that.

25 But all we need is our enforcement guys

1 to watch us, and all we need is for you to give us
2 the money and we can take care of that.

3 I yield back to you, Joe. Sorry I took
4 your time.

5 JOE SPRAGGINS:

6 Well, first off, I'm not sure what
7 you're talking about, the money we gave
8 off-bottom.

9 GEORGE STORRS:

10 Well, I was called in by Dale Diaz. He
11 said, you want to be a fish farmer -- an oyster
12 farmer? I said, yeah. I'd love to look at it
13 anyway. And matter of fact, one of these other
14 meetings -- somebody in here has got some bottom
15 and I told him, I have no problem having a bottom,
16 except that I live too far away to watch my
17 bottom.

18 Anyway, Dale told me you get \$10,000
19 worth of spats free. You get all your equipment
20 free. All you have got to do is get your boat and
21 go out there and maintain them, to grow them --
22 grow them out, and, you know, you've got sellers.

23 You've got buyers. You've got a captive
24 crowd as far as buyers because you can't get
25 oysters. They've been shut down. I feel some of

1 these people that have those, those top-water
2 leases have a hand in what -- the restaurants that
3 want these things because there is some
4 restaurants that want these leases too.

5 JOE SPRAGGINS:

6 I can tell you that in all due respect
7 to Dale, I'm sure that -- I don't know why if --
8 he stated it that way, but the point is, we didn't
9 give them a basket, one. We let them use a basket
10 to learn how to do it. After that was over with,
11 the baskets came back to us. All right. They had
12 to buy their own. And I don't remember. I
13 want to say it's something like -- to do two
14 acres, it's like 80 -- \$50,000 that they had to
15 spend or something like that.

16 Rick or Jason, do y'all remember?

17 Mr. Lancon, you know. You were there.

18 CLIFF LANCON:

19 I was there. That's right.

20 JASON RIDER:

21 Yes, Director, you're correct. We loan
22 out the equipment and we teach them and show them
23 how to do it.

24 JOE SPRAGGINS:

25 Then we got it back.

1 JASON RIDER:

2 And then at the end of the training,
3 they give it back to us. Yes, sir, that's
4 correct.

5 JOE SPRAGGINS:

6 And as far as the oysters, they were
7 given by the university.

8 JASON RIDER:

9 That's correct.

10 JOE SPRAGGINS:

11 They were not given by us.

12 GEORGE STORRS:

13 Did the oysters come through Wiggins?
14 Where did they come from?

15 JOE SPRAGGINS:

16 No. The oysters came from the -- Auburn
17 University, I think, is the one who gave them to
18 us.

19 JASON RIDER:

20 Yeah.

21 JOE SPRAGGINS:

22 Yeah. Auburn University is the one who
23 gave them the oysters. We didn't pay a dime for
24 that.

25 GEORGE STORRS:

1 In other words, you didn't give those
2 people anything?

3 JOE SPRAGGINS:

4 No, sir. Nothing but the training.

5 JASON RIDER:

6 The focus of the program was training,
7 yes.

8 GEORGE STORRS:

9 And I could have fell into that.

10 JOE SPRAGGINS:

11 Y'all tell me. Am I wrong?

12 JASON RIDER:

13 No.

14 GEORGE STORRS:

15 No. I'll go with you on that.

16 JOE SPRAGGINS:

17 The only thing that we gave them is we
18 gave them the training for free and -- which might
19 have been worth \$10,000. I don't know what that
20 training was worth, but we gave them the training
21 for free.

22 We looked at it and we said you cannot
23 give a state asset away, so we could not give them
24 the baskets. And so we could not give them the
25 oysters, even the spat to go on the shell, right?

1 So what we did is we worked out and --
2 what's the professor out of Auburn?

3 JASON RIDER:

4 It was -- we worked with the Auburn
5 University.

6 RICK BURRIS:

7 Scott Rikard.

8 JASON RIDER:

9 Scott Rikard is his name and then Bill
10 Walton.

11 JOE SPRAGGINS:

12 Yeah. And Bill Walton. And they're the
13 ones that came up with a way to be able -- and
14 what they would do -- and I think USM even helped
15 toward the end.

16 JASON RIDER:

17 Yeah. We received -- USM has donated
18 oysters also.

19 JOE SPRAGGINS:

20 That they would give us spat on shell --
21 you know, spat to go put on the shell and that --

22 GEORGE STORRS:

23 For nothing? They would actually give
24 you all the spat that you needed for that program?

25 JOE SPRAGGINS:

1 They gave them for that program. We did
2 not buy that. We did not spend state money. We
3 did not spend federal money on that. That was
4 spent through another program and it was not us.
5 So I don't know how they got that misunderstood,
6 but the idea -- the only thing that we did, we got
7 a grant from the federal government to be able to
8 use that to be able to teach you how to do it.

9 Now, we are --

10 GEORGE STORRS:

11 Well, the grant, the money had to come
12 from somewhere, though, yeah.

13 JOE SPRAGGINS:

14 One thing that we spent money on is we
15 did buy a tumbler. All right. We did buy a
16 tumbler. We put it over here at the port -- the
17 harbor, I mean, and -- that tumbler, and they
18 would have to go back and forth to be able to
19 bring that -- their oysters in and tumble them and
20 take them back out.

21 GEORGE STORRS:

22 I've been there. I've seen them do it.

23 JOE SPRAGGINS:

24 Yeah. And so now, the other thing that
25 we did look at, we looked at a possibility -- and

1 I'll tell you this and this is the only time that
2 we've even looked at spending any money as far as
3 the grants that we get, is to be able to put a
4 barge out there with a tumbler on it so they don't
5 have to move them in and out. That's the only
6 thing that we're looking at right now. We have
7 not done that at this point, but that's something
8 that we are looking at. And I will tell you that,
9 and I don't know the number on that.

10 Do you know, Jason?

11 JASON RIDER:

12 We haven't received any quotes at this
13 time, so we don't have a hard number.

14 JOE SPRAGGINS:

15 But that's the only thing, and, I mean,
16 I just want the record to be straight. Okay?

17 GEORGE STORRS:

18 Okay. The record is good. Straight as
19 it can be.

20 In other words, there's no money for the
21 fishermen to be able to take care of these reefs
22 themselves? I don't want to be paid. We don't
23 want to be paid. All we want to do is to be able
24 to buy cultch material and we'll take care of
25 them.

1 JOE SPRAGGINS:

2 Mr. George, you know, we can always find
3 ways to get money if we need money, you know. We
4 use -- the money that we've used over the last few
5 years that -- we have taken the money from -- some
6 from the Bonnet Carré, from GOMESA funds that we
7 get and we've bought spat on shell and we've
8 bought shell or some type of cultch and put out.
9 And we have kind of put that in certain areas, and
10 the reason we put it in those areas is because
11 that's where the staff felt was least susceptible
12 to the Bonnet Carré if they opened it and what we
13 can do to be able to grow and be able to continue
14 to move forward.

15 And that's where we are in the situation
16 right now. And me and you talked earlier and if
17 you don't mind, I will bring it up now. I don't
18 have the money, and I don't have the resource to
19 take care of 12,000 acres. You know, in the past,
20 nature has been good enough to us that it took
21 care of it for us. We didn't have the money
22 before to do it and nature was taking care of it.

23 Now, with the situation the way it is
24 with nature, it's not taking care of it the way it
25 should, that it did in the past. I mean, we

1 can -- as far as Telegraph, I don't know, you
2 know, the reason there wasn't any oysters on
3 Telegraph. I don't know the answer to that. I
4 can tell you that we had areas that were open for
5 lease for how many years, Rick?

6 RICK BURRIS:

7 30.

8 JOE SPRAGGINS:

9 20, 30 years. One area of that was
10 leased in Telegraph, about 500 acres; is that
11 right? And I don't remember. How big is
12 Telegraph?

13 JASON RIDER:

14 I don't know the acreage on Telegraph
15 off the top of my head.

16 JOE SPRAGGINS:

17 A lot more than the 500 acres?

18 JASON RIDER:

19 Yeah, a lot more than 500 acres.

20 I'm sorry. Your other question?

21 JOE SPRAGGINS:

22 Well, the question was, we leased about
23 500 acres of it, right?

24 JASON RIDER:

25 We've leased roughly about 500, yeah.

1 JOE SPRAGGINS:

2 Okay. That was in there prior to leases
3 that we could do?

4 JASON RIDER:

5 Correct.

6 JOE SPRAGGINS:

7 And this was prior to anything being
8 done with this new legislation that's being done.
9 This was done on the -- off the old leases that
10 was there.

11 And as to whether or not anybody has --
12 I feel strongly that -- I don't know that anybody
13 has been out there. Maybe they have, and we will
14 put law enforcement more on looking at this. But,
15 you know, from what you're trying to say, though,
16 Mr. George, is that -- if you think that they
17 maybe have raked that over and that's why there
18 wasn't oysters out the other day, I don't know
19 that answer. I don't know the answer at all, but
20 I will find out.

21 And I can tell you we'll look at it and
22 we'll see if there's anything been done, if we can
23 have any -- we ought to be able to go back and
24 look at even some Google Map stuff and see if
25 there is anything out there and, you know,

1 research it and look at it. We can look at a lot
2 of different things, but we definitely will look
3 at it and see if there is anything being done. If
4 that's the case, I would love to know. I would
5 love to know that answer.

6 But I know that we -- the staff has went
7 out and looked at areas, and as far as the
8 assessment that we're seeing -- how many sacks of
9 oysters did you think there was totally in the
10 Gulf?

11 JASON RIDER:

12 Director, I don't want to quote numbers
13 off the top of my head. I can get that answer for
14 you, but I don't --

15 JOE SPRAGGINS:

16 I want to say 50- or 60,000 -- 50,000
17 sacks or something like that and we used the
18 number of 18- -- 15- to 18,000 where it would be
19 30 percent or whatever. 30 percent is what we
20 used off of, all right, and that's where we're
21 looking.

22 Now, we did not include in that the
23 Eastern Gulf because we never opened up anything
24 in the Eastern Gulf over here. Okay. There's
25 still oysters over there that could be opened up.

1 It's just a lot of room. It's just hard for most
2 of all y'all to get there. That's a long run for
3 most of you because most of you are working over
4 out of the Western Gulf.

5 GEORGE STORRS:

6 If there is an oyster over there, we'll
7 find it and we'll get it and we'll make money from
8 it. But if we're not allowed to go and look and
9 get them and it's not opened, obviously, we're
10 just going to stay poor and broke.

11 JOE SPRAGGINS:

12 Yeah. Yeah, I understand that. And we
13 will look at that because we do have some areas
14 over there. Right here in the back -- Biloxi Bay,
15 there's some oysters.

16 GEORGE STORRS:

17 Yeah, yeah.

18 JOE SPRAGGINS:

19 There's some oysters right there. All
20 right. We have got some oysters over in Graveline
21 Bayou, that area, but there is some restricted
22 areas over there. That area is restricted, and
23 that means you can't go harvest that oyster and
24 just take it and put it on the market.

25 Those would have to be taken and

1 depurated and everything else. We even looked at
2 how could we do that. How could we do something
3 to where we could be able to do that because in a
4 restricted area or in a prohibited area, it's two
5 different things.

6 We have been able to move some of that
7 restricted area -- that prohibited area in
8 Graveline Bayou to restricted area, which means
9 that they could be depurated, right, but we
10 learned -- I learned a lot of things.

11 And I'm not a fisherman by trade, but I
12 learned that whenever you move oysters, you lose
13 about 30 percent of them and that's just on a --
14 in other words, if you take oysters and you put
15 them in -- and do like we did in 2016 when I think
16 we made a bad mistake -- and I'm part of that
17 mistake and I learned a lesson on it because when
18 Jamie and I were looking at it, as to what we
19 could do to be able to help move some of them
20 oysters when we thought they was going to open up
21 the Bonnet Carré, which they did, we moved those
22 and we moved them over to the eastern side of --
23 the west side of the Gulf. We moved them over to
24 Pass Christian in that area. Remember that?

25 GEORGE STORRS:

1 Yeah.

2 JOE SPRAGGINS:

3 And we paid the oystermen to come move
4 them.

5 GEORGE STORRS:

6 Yeah, yeah.

7 JOE SPRAGGINS:

8 All right. That was a payment that we
9 did. Well, we wound up losing about 30 to
10 40 percent of them because of the oysters being
11 damaged where they go upside down or whatever
12 happens once they're put back in the water.

13 Then we turned around and dad-burn it,
14 nature just didn't do us very good, because they
15 put them in Little OD and killed every one of
16 them. So, you know, we learned a lesson. My
17 lesson was, don't mess with nature.

18 GEORGE STORRS:

19 You've got to help her, though.

20 JOE SPRAGGINS:

21 And, you know, don't mess with it.
22 Nature knows what they're doing and I'm not going
23 to mess with it anymore.

24 And I told him, I said, as far as I'm
25 concerned, I'm not moving another oyster unless I

1 could find a way -- if there is a way to find
2 something that we can take -- if there was a way
3 that we could keep them still in the baskets or
4 something or in sacks or something to that effect
5 and take them and move them out of Graveline and
6 put them over here in the Biloxi Bay area and
7 depurate them for two weeks and then be able to
8 take them back out -- in fact, that's something
9 I've asked the staff to look at, and we're trying
10 to find a way to do that. Is that something that
11 we could do? And then that way, we don't tear --
12 you know, kill all the oysters because we drop
13 them back into the Gulf and we pick them back up
14 off the bottom again and put them back. And
15 you -- you know, you're an oysterman. You know
16 what I'm talking about.

17 GEORGE STORRS:

18 Overhandling.

19 JOE SPRAGGINS:

20 And so overhandling of them is not good,
21 but is there a way? We're looking at it.

22 GEORGE STORRS:

23 Well, look at paying us to do it, then.

24 JOE SPRAGGINS:

25 Oh, I would.

1 GEORGE STORRS:

2 Look at paying us. Look at -- I'm
3 talking about going to Graveline. Pay us. We
4 will go in there and --

5 JOE SPRAGGINS:

6 No. What I'm -- I'm not going to --

7 GEORGE STORRS:

8 If you can't get the pile of money, let
9 us go earn the money.

10 JOE SPRAGGINS:

11 Yeah. That's exactly right. And, you
12 know, it might be a situation that I turn around
13 and tell you that I'm going to let you -- and I'm
14 just off the cuff here now.

15 GEORGE STORRS:

16 Yeah.

17 JOE SPRAGGINS:

18 The staff hasn't got all this, but I'm
19 going to look at it to a point to say, hey, how
20 many -- how can we do this to where we get you to
21 go out there -- ever who wants to do it, all
22 right -- and you get your sacks of oysters and you
23 keep them in the sack and you take them over to
24 this area. And if nothing else, we have a barge
25 or we have something you tie them to or something

1 that we can do it to to a point where we've got it
2 set to where you can be able to depurate those
3 oysters for 14 days, I think is minimum to what we
4 have to have, and then they can be sold on a --
5 private. Then you could sell the oysters. You
6 know, if I pay you to go get them, then you can't
7 sell them.

8 GEORGE STORRS:

9 Well, if we brought them to that area
10 and depurated them, we could. We'd catch them.

11 JOE SPRAGGINS:

12 Yeah. But we'll find a way. I want to
13 help you any way I can.

14 GEORGE STORRS:

15 Help us by letting this season open
16 whenever the water is clean.

17 JOE SPRAGGINS:

18 Oh, I will.

19 GEORGE STORRS:

20 And keep our water guys on it so we'll
21 know. Open everything that the tonger could
22 possibly get at. Don't say you want to save
23 areas. Just let us go. There's not 10,000 of us
24 like it used to be. Let us go. Let us keep our
25 limit low and let it run all the way through March

1 like it used to.

2 JOE SPRAGGINS:

3 I can't tell you I can do that because
4 two things. Number 1, I do not know where the
5 situation is going to be on the leasing. And if I
6 lease a piece of property, I cannot let you fish
7 it. All right? And so until that is decided and
8 what we're going to be able to do, I don't know
9 the answer. And I'm not going to tell you I can
10 do something I'm not going to be able to do.

11 I can tell you that we're going to open
12 the season as quick as we can and that we're going
13 to open up a large majority of it, but I still
14 feel strongly -- and somebody is going to have to
15 do a lot of convincing to me to tell me to open up
16 that 20 percent that I can save for you that if I
17 do have to lease the other stuff and I lease it
18 before then, you know, then we can open it back up
19 and you can be able to utilize it in, you know,
20 the later part of February or March.

21 GEORGE STORRS:

22 Well, law enforcement will take care of
23 that 20 percent. They'll keep them from stealing.
24 The only thing that can hurt it is what hurts it
25 anyway, which is nature. That's the only thing

1 that's going to be able to hurt it. Us taking it
2 is not going to hurt it because we're going to
3 have our numbers low enough to where it's
4 sustainable as long as you don't have a
5 catastrophe.

6 JOE SPRAGGINS:

7 And I understand your thoughts there,
8 sir, but I want you to -- and I'll be glad to talk
9 to any of you about it and we'll sit down and go
10 over it. But I'm thinking in my mind that the
11 easiest reef to get to is the ones that we're
12 talking about and that's where everybody went
13 whenever we opened the season in November. All
14 right? The large majority of that has already
15 been taken.

16 Now, how much we have left, the staff is
17 doing a study on it to see where we're at, but a
18 large majority of that reef has been taken. And
19 so if we turn around and you take all of that reef
20 and then we lease the other right beside it, why
21 won't we let you take what's beside it and then
22 you come back and have what we have?

23 GEORGE STORRS:

24 Right.

25 JASON RIDER:

1 Director, I will reinforce that. I
2 mean, we've -- and I have said this before, but we
3 have cultch-planted large areas in the state-owned
4 reefs. That's where a lot of the oysters are and
5 that's where they're being harvested from. So
6 outside of those cultch plants is a little bit
7 less, but the main target has been on our cultch
8 plants.

9 JOE SPRAGGINS:

10 I mean, once again, I will be glad to
11 talk to any of you about it and -- but am I wrong
12 by wanting to save --

13 GEORGE STORRS:

14 I don't think you're wrong.

15 JOE SPRAGGINS:

16 I mean, you know, I'm trying to work out
17 a way that I can keep the resource for you to be
18 able to have if I do -- if this process of leasing
19 goes forward and it happens between now and March
20 that you have got a place to go to. That's what
21 I'm trying to look at.

22 GEORGE STORRS:

23 Okay. Thank you.

24 JOE SPRAGGINS:

25 You know, and I'll tell you, by law, I

1 have no choice. I have to do what the law states.

2 GEORGE STORRS:

3 I know. The statutes are written up
4 there by somebody that didn't know jack crap, so
5 you've got to live with them and I do too.

6 JOE SPRAGGINS:

7 Right.

8 GEORGE STORRS:

9 And I'm sorry you've got to take this
10 kind of heat, Joe.

11 JOE SPRAGGINS:

12 No problem.

13 GEORGE STORRS:

14 You ain't that kind of guy. You're a
15 good boy.

16 JOE SPRAGGINS:

17 Thank you, Mr. George.

18 GEORGE STORRS:

19 Thank you.

20 CAM ROBERDS:

21 Thank you, George.

22 Jason, just -- I was just curious. So
23 say the reef that's being worked right now -- what
24 kind of timeline, if it is wiped pretty well this
25 season, for regrowth? Is that something that

1 happens? I mean, are -- if it's pulled pretty
2 heavily, what kind of regrowth are you --

3 JASON RIDER:

4 Yeah. So, I mean, we just -- we
5 don't -- it's one of those things that if you take
6 it down so far, it's just going to compound. It's
7 going to take longer to rebuild. We want to leave
8 some resource on those reefs so when spawning does
9 occur this spring and fall that they have
10 something to attach to and grow to.

11 If you take it so far down like we saw
12 in -- after Bonnet Carré, the limited resource
13 there, it just takes longer for that reef to
14 recover.

15 JOE SPRAGGINS:

16 And I can tell you if we spend -- and
17 which we have a contract right now that is to put
18 some more -- what is it -- 1,000 or 2,000 cubic
19 yards of cultch -- of spat on shell. It will be
20 only on those reefs. It will be only the state
21 reefs that we have right now that we are thinking
22 that we're going to be able to keep. Let's just
23 put it that way. The 20 percent, that's where
24 we're putting it.

25 We're not going to put it anywhere else,

1 and we haven't been putting it anywhere. We've
2 been trying to maintain that area. And that's
3 what we asked for. Whenever we were told that we
4 were allowed to keep 20 percent, our goal was to
5 make sure that we spent our money in the area that
6 we kept what we spent our money on, so, hopefully,
7 we'll have more in the future with that.

8 CAM ROBERDS:

9 And managing those areas so it will
10 continue to produce, is what it sounds like.

11 JOE SPRAGGINS:

12 Right.

13 CAM ROBERDS:

14 I think I already did Brad.

15 JONATHAN MCLENDON:

16 Did we already have Brad?

17 CAM ROBERDS:

18 Yeah, we already had Brad.

19 JOE SPRAGGINS:

20 Okay. He did two of them. He's already
21 been called.

22 CAM ROBERDS:

23 Okay. Unless it's a different one.

24 We already had John too.

25 JOE SPRAGGINS:

1 Well, some of them turned in two
2 different ones, so we'll -- is there anybody else?

3 CAM ROBERDS:

4 Yeah. I do have a Mr. Cliff Lancon.

5 JOE SPRAGGINS:

6 Cliff Lancon.

7 CLIFF LANCON:

8 No. I didn't have anything.

9 JOE SPRAGGINS:

10 I don't know. We had one that you
11 wanted to talk. I didn't know.

12 CLIFF LANCON:

13 No.

14 CAM ROBERDS:

15 Do you have a public comment?

16 CLIFF LANCON:

17 I would address the gentleman that was
18 talking about the off-bottom fishermen.

19 JOE SPRAGGINS:

20 Come up.

21 CLIFF LANCON:

22 Hey, guys. Cliff Lancon.

23 JOE SPRAGGINS:

24 State your name and what city there,
25 Mr. Lancon.

1 CLIFF LANCON:

2 Cliff Lancon from Biloxi.

3 I will say that, talking about the
4 off-bottom oyster leases that we have, the
5 Department of Marine Resources didn't purchase our
6 oysters. I purchased my own oysters that I put
7 into my cages. I purchased my own cages. I had
8 100 cages at \$200 each. That's 20 grand. Then I
9 put another 10,000 in seed stock on them, plus a
10 boat, plus -- you know, it just -- it was just a
11 lot of money to get started.

12 So if someone thinks that the DMR gave
13 us a bunch of money to get this done, they're
14 wrong. That's not what happened at all. We paid
15 our own way. And I actually started at Auburn,
16 and I went to Auburn at the sea lab down there and
17 I paid \$500 to go through the course. So over
18 here, it was free. But I just wanted to let them
19 know that the Department of Marine Resources
20 didn't give us that kind of money to do that, so
21 they got bad information. That's all I had.

22 CAM ROBERDS:

23 Thank you, Cliff.

24 CLIFF LANCON:

25 Okay. Thanks.

1 CAM ROBERDS:

2 All right. Well --

3 JOE SPRAGGINS:

4 Where are we at?

5 CAM ROBERDS:

6 I think we can -- I had one gentleman, I
7 think it was -- he was asking -- did you have one
8 more question you had?

9 BRAD STAPLETON:

10 Yeah.

11 CAM ROBERDS:

12 If you want to come up. It's Brad
13 Stapleton.

14 JOE SPRAGGINS:

15 Oh, yeah, Brad.

16 State it again, your name and all, so we
17 can get it on record.

18 BRAD STAPLETON:

19 How you doing? It's Brad Stapleton
20 again.

21 What I would like to talk about, you
22 said a lot of the resource was gone that we've
23 already worked on the reef. I have been out there
24 tonging every day, and that's us you see in the
25 picture there tonging that you had earlier. We

1 haven't touched any of that, man. It's oysters
2 thicker this year than I have seen in the 20 years
3 I have tonged. I don't know where the assessment
4 come from, but they are plentiful.

5 We make a day in an area small as from
6 me to you and I can catch my limit. And there's
7 boats -- you can go there multiple days and do it
8 again in that same little spot, so there is a big
9 abundance of oysters. That assessment might be
10 wrong.

11 And y'all talking about working it down,
12 as long as enforcement is out there watching for
13 little ones and you're taking only the big,
14 harvestable oysters, I don't see where you're
15 hurting anything. It should bounce back the
16 following season just like it always has year in
17 and year out. If you're not taking the young
18 ones, they're going to grow. They'll be ready for
19 next year.

20 So I just wanted to -- you know, I
21 didn't want everybody to be confused about that
22 and be misunderstood to think that, you know,
23 we're at the bottom of it and we're working it
24 down and there's not going to be anything for next
25 year. It's more oysters here on that tonging reef

1 than I have seen since I was a teenager and
2 especially the young growth.

3 JOE SPRAGGINS:

4 And they're there for a reason. That's
5 because that's where we put the resource.

6 BRAD STAPLETON:

7 Well, right. It definitely is because
8 of the resource, but what I'm saying is you're not
9 going to overwork that if you're taking only the
10 big, harvestable oysters and you're leaving
11 everything back over that's young. That's your
12 next year's seed. It ain't going to take years to
13 regrow. It's going to be ready for next season.

14 JOE SPRAGGINS:

15 What I will do -- what I will do is I'll
16 ask the staff. Jason, would y'all look at it and
17 let's see what we can do about another assessment
18 of that area and so that we can see and look at it
19 and maybe we can come up with a bigger number? I
20 don't know. Let's look at it. Okay?

21 BRAD STAPLETON:

22 Because I think it did way better than
23 what y'all expected. I think it turned out.

24 JOE SPRAGGINS:

25 And we'll look at it. We'll definitely

1 look at it.

2 Jason, if y'all can, just look at it and
3 let's see whether we can do another assessment of
4 it.

5 BRAD STAPLETON:

6 All right. Thank you.

7 CAM ROBERDS:

8 Thank you, Brad.

9 All right. Moving on to Mr. Trevor for
10 the snook. I think this is really going to happen
11 here. This is the snook conversation.

12 TREVOR MONCRIEF:

13 A little change in topic.

14 So obviously, you see the next
15 presentation you're going to have is two records
16 on snook. So since that's the two new records, I
17 figured I'd give you a little bit of background on
18 what we've been observing on this species the last
19 little while.

20 So for those familiar, snook prefer a
21 subtropical inshore habitat, South Florida, South
22 Texas is where they really range throughout the
23 Gulf. Prefer mangroves, beaches, sea grass, and
24 there's limited survival of the species in less
25 than 60 degrees Fahrenheit. They are extremely

1 freshwater-tolerant.

2 Really, if you're comparing the two,
3 between snook and spotted sea trout or red drum,
4 essentially, you're looking at a species in
5 spotted sea trout and red drum that can tolerate
6 sub-40 degree temperatures for a little while.
7 Snook are in the upper end of 45 degrees, so
8 that's really the reason why they haven't really
9 inhabited this area too much.

10 So like I said, there's a concentration
11 in Coastal Florida, Big Bend, Southern Texas, down
12 to Brazil. They're protandric hermaphrodites,
13 meaning that they begin their lives as male and
14 then somewhere between 17 and 22 inches, some of
15 them transition into females and that's when they
16 become sexually mature and spawn.

17 Excellent table fare, highly targeted by
18 recreational anglers in Florida and in Texas and
19 really throughout the range.

20 So some of our observations, staff's
21 observations, we had an initial report that was
22 reported by us in 2017. It was a fish caught out
23 of Pascagoula. That was 17 inches. We went back
24 and looked through museum records, and there was a
25 single observation in 1937. And if I remember

1 correctly, it was either Bayou Cadet or Point
2 Caddy, so I wasn't familiar with exactly where it
3 was, but it could have been either one of those.
4 Either way, it's a positive finding.

5 And since 2017, both us and staff at the
6 lab have recorded instances of -- Brady, the
7 screen is off.

8 We recorded instances of snook, but it's
9 been about once a year. And then I can just
10 recite the rest of it.

11 But it culminated into this year where,
12 in the last 18 months, we've had 16 observations
13 of this species, which is a fair amount for us.
14 These range anywhere from juveniles all the way up
15 to subadults, so basically cast net size to hook
16 and line size with one instance of a fish being
17 caught at 10 pounds, which is fairly impressive.
18 That fish was likely here for multiple years and
19 could be evidence of what I will talk about here
20 in a minute. We actually have multiple throughout
21 Biloxi Bay, so it's not restricted just to
22 Pascagoula drainage. We've had observations in
23 Biloxi Bay as well.

24 We've also had increased occurrences in
25 Alabama, our neighboring state, and they saw an

1 increase in observations starting in 2017. So,
2 really, this is looking like the species that's
3 kind of skip-hopping along the Gulf and made it to
4 us.

5 So obviously, we have got some theories
6 behind what is going on, but we're not completely
7 sure. The first one, when we first saw the single
8 event, there was a thought that it could be just
9 larval displacement from their native range, so
10 obviously, when we have events like hurricanes or
11 anything else like that, that stirs up the water
12 pretty well.

13 If y'all were here after Hurricane
14 Katrina, there was a big push of red grouper that
15 occurred for the last -- the few years after that.
16 That was kind of one of those instances.

17 And when you see this, obviously, you
18 would expect that you would see juveniles or
19 adults, but that observation would decrease over
20 time with the absence of any events, or we have an
21 established local population, which is getting to
22 the point where we're kind of leaning in that
23 direction with our observations.

24 So we could have started with larval
25 displacement or it could be range expansion, where

1 they're skip-hopping across the Gulf, but
2 obviously, with this theory, you have increase in
3 occurrence. As more individuals become
4 spawning-capable, they reach that size where they
5 shift over to female. And obviously, if this is
6 the case, then there is a thermal refuge that
7 holds the bulk of individuals in the winter
8 months.

9 So considerations for y'all just as
10 we're thinking about the species, so range
11 expansion could lead to a larger fishery if we
12 increase observations and everything else like
13 that. You could have more and more folks
14 targeting them and catching them.

15 The potential for freeze conditions
16 could make any regulations ineffective for
17 long-term sustainability. I made this
18 presentation before Snowmageddon, so I'm actually
19 going to get out on the boat with a crew after
20 this and we're going to go look and see about cold
21 kills. But I'll -- I've got a couple of pictures
22 to show after this presentation about that.

23 And we'll continue to monitor and
24 encourage anglers to report catches. The lab
25 recently put out a reporting mechanism for

1 anglers. We're going to be just kind of passing
2 back and forth the information as it goes through.

3 But before I move on to that state
4 record presentation, Brady, do you mind pulling up
5 those pictures real quick?

6 So we -- the Director mentioned cold
7 kills. And obviously, if y'all saw it on our
8 Facebook page, we're asking folks to report what
9 they observe. This was actually from a crew of
10 Marine Fisheries that went out and did an inshore
11 monitoring, essentially looking at smaller
12 species, everything else like that. And there was
13 actually a positive catch of spotted sea trout,
14 along with sheepshead and young of the year,
15 essentially.

16 So go to the next picture. We've got
17 some sheepshead in there. Obviously, we all know
18 sheepshead move a little bit quicker than a trawl
19 should, so those are likely being a little bit
20 lazy on the bottom with the cold temperatures.

21 And then, the next one, Brady.

22 This is the size distribution of the
23 spotted sea trout. Note that all of those under
24 the ruler are young of the year. They're four
25 inches, so they were still alive. They were

1 caught.

2 Likely have a lot of species retreating
3 in the deep holes and everything else like that,
4 but obviously, we do still have live recruits that
5 are occurring in the area. So hopefully, cold
6 kills won't be too much of a concern, but we're
7 going to try to monitor the best we can.

8 And with that, I will take any questions
9 before I move on to the records.

10 CAM ROBERDS:

11 It looks like the fish that you guys
12 have caught were in a trawl and they were still
13 alive?

14 TREVOR MONCRIEF:

15 Uh-huh.

16 CAM ROBERDS:

17 That's good. Just lethargic probably?

18 TREVOR MONCRIEF:

19 Yeah. Yeah. Likely those fish are all
20 hanging out in deep holes. The good part is, is
21 that you've got young of the year, so recruits,
22 that are still alive and kicking down in those
23 holes and everything else like that. So
24 hopefully, this event isn't too large scale, but
25 we're going to try to keep our eyes on it.

1 Obviously, those fish -- if we're going
2 to observe it, it should be the next couple of
3 days. Those fish will start floating out of the
4 holes and everything else like that. We'll just
5 keep our eyes on them and try to stay in touch
6 with anglers and everything else like that. All
7 right.

8 CAM ROBERDS:

9 Any questions?

10 (No response.)

11 CAM ROBERDS:

12 Moving on to the records.

13 Finfish records.

14 TREVOR MONCRIEF:

15 All right. We've got two conventional
16 tackle records. One of these is going to be
17 youth, but it is common snook. And it's a new
18 record 15.36 ounces. So like I said, we had
19 multiple observations, but this angler was the
20 first one to bring one in for a record. It's
21 Mr. Vince Wray.

22 There is a picture of the fish, and
23 there is Mr. Wray with the fish.

24 And not two days later, we had the youth
25 conventional record come in. It was Mr. Zach

1 Broussard, son of Erik back here in the back. It
2 was 8.96 ounces, so it was going to be a record no
3 matter what because the record wasn't established,
4 but it does meet the 50 percent threshold.

5 There is the fish and there is the young
6 man with the fish.

7 So all we need is a recommendation to
8 adopt those new state records.

9 CAM ROBERDS:

10 Seeing if I can recognize that --

11 TREVOR MONCRIEF:

12 The house?

13 CAM ROBERDS:

14 -- behind him, if I can get a gauge on
15 that somehow.

16 All right. Do we have a motion to
17 recommend the adoption of the new state records?

18 JONATHAN MCLENDON:

19 I'll make that motion.

20 RONNIE DANIELS:

21 I'll second it.

22 MATTHEW MAYFIELD:

23 Second.

24 CAM ROBERDS:

25 All those in favor?

1 (Unanimous vote.)

2 CAM ROBERDS:

3 Thank you, Trevor.

4 Well, it looks like that's it. Is there
5 any other business?

6 I think we went through all the public
7 comments, Director, so we should be good on that.

8 Does anybody have any other questions?

9 (No response.)

10 CAM ROBERDS:

11 If not, do we have a motion to close?

12 JONATHAN MCLENDON:

13 I will make a motion to close.

14 JASON OSBORNE:

15 I second.

16 CAM ROBERDS:

17 All those in favor?

18 (Unanimous vote.)

19 (Meeting adjourned at 10:40 a.m.)

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CERTIFICATE OF COURT REPORTER

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

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

Witness my signature and seal, this the 10th day of February, 2025.

/s/ Melissa Burdine-Rodolfich

Melissa Burdine-Rodolfich
My Commission Expires 4/03/28