

STATE OF MISSISSIPPI

MISSISSIPPI ADVISORY COMMISSION ON MARINE RESOURCES

COMMISSION MEETING

Tuesday, February 18, 2025, 9:04 a.m.,

Bolton Building Auditorium

1141 Bayview Avenue, Biloxi, Mississippi 39530

COMMISSION MEMBERS:

Ronnie Daniels
Jonathan McLendon (Via phone)
Matthew Mayfield
Cammack "Cam" Roberds

ALSO PRESENT:

Joe Spraggins
Sandy Chesnut, Esquire
Steven Eckert, Esquire

REPORTED BY:

Melissa Burdine-Rodolfich
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1 CAM ROBERDS:

2 I want to call to order the Mississippi
3 Advisory Commission on Marine Resources for
4 Tuesday, February 18th, 2025.

5 Commissioner Mayfield, would you please
6 lead us in the Pledge of Allegiance?

7 (Pledge of Allegiance recited.)

8 CAM ROBERDS:

9 Thank you, sir.

10 Director Spraggins, if you want to lead
11 us in a prayer.

12 JOE SPRAGGINS:

13 Yeah. First off, I just, you know, want
14 to say that -- you know, let's keep the people in
15 mind, you know. Had another plane crash yesterday
16 and, you know, rolled over in Taranto. And, you
17 know, luckily, nobody was killed this time, so
18 everything is going better with that. But
19 hopefully -- I can't imagine what the ride was
20 when they hit the runway and then they flipped
21 upside down and landed and sitting there hanging
22 and all, so that's got to be a terrifying thing.
23 So keep everybody in your mind and the ones in the
24 tornadoes the other day, so keep them in your
25 mind. And let's go to the Lord.

1 (Moment of prayer.)

2 CAM ROBERDS:

3 Thank you, Director Spraggins.

4 Has everybody had an opportunity to
5 review the minutes from January 24th, and if so,
6 do we have any questions?

7 JOE SPRAGGINS:

8 I have got one question. Oh, no, never
9 mind.

10 CAM ROBERDS:

11 All right. If not, do we have a motion
12 to approve?

13 RONNIE DANIELS:

14 Motion.

15 MATTHEW MAYFIELD:

16 Second.

17 CAM ROBERDS:

18 All those in favor?

19 (Unanimous vote.)

20 CAM ROBERDS:

21 All right. And then the approval of the
22 agenda for today. Does anybody have any questions
23 on the agenda?

24 If not, do we have a motion to approve
25 that?

1 MATTHEW MAYFIELD:

2 Motion to approve.

3 RONNIE DANIELS:

4 Second.

5 CAM ROBERDS:

6 All those in favor?

7 (Unanimous vote.)

8 CAM ROBERDS:

9 All right. Director, it looks like it's
10 all yours.

11 JOE SPRAGGINS:

12 Okay. So looking at it, we'll go first
13 off with the employment contracts. Just a couple
14 of promotions, Jennifer Cumbest and Alicia Carron
15 have been promoted. Always glad to be able to do
16 those.

17 Next, I don't think we have any
18 contracts, do we?

19 CRYSTAL MATTA:

20 No.

21 JOE SPRAGGINS:

22 All right. The agency update, first
23 off, if you have any comments, any public
24 comments, see TJ in the back, back there and get
25 it to him so we can get it up here.

1 Also, next Commission meeting is
2 scheduled for Tuesday, March, 18th at 9:00 a.m.
3 Any problems with that for the Commissioners?

4 CAM ROBERDS:

5 No, sir.

6 JOE SPRAGGINS:

7 Jonathan, you on board?

8 JONATHAN MCLENDON:

9 I'm actually scheduled to be in Boston
10 then, but I can certainly call. That's the
11 International Seafood show.

12 JOE SPRAGGINS:

13 Okay. All right. But you can -- all
14 right.

15 A little bit of legislative update just
16 to give you an idea of where we're at, you know.
17 We had four bills that we had in -- that we had
18 put in and the crawfish seafood -- the seafood
19 marking bill, labeling bill. That's still in --
20 going forward.

21 Public records is exempt. The form is
22 still going forward. Exempt to certain leases
23 for -- and basically for the off-bottom is what
24 we're talking about. It's the tax, the revenue
25 and stuff will go back to us and we're trying to

1 get the counties out of it because it just causes
2 a lot of problems when people are delinquent on
3 their tax and then they tax -- they go and sell
4 the tax -- the property, which they can't sell
5 because it's State property, and it just causes a
6 whole bunch of issues. And we're trying to
7 straighten that out.

8 The boat and vessel bill, that's coming
9 out of Ports and Marines also, but it's also a
10 Wildlife thing that they put forward on that.
11 That's in the House and the Senate. We've got the
12 boater bill still there.

13 And then we've got the Mississippi
14 Comprehensive Coastal Conversation and Restoration
15 Act of 2025. That's alive there. Public Trust
16 Tidelands Assessment Fund is alive, and approval
17 for oyster leases by the Department of Marine
18 Resources clarifying authority is out there. And
19 then the authority for the Secretary of State to
20 approve leases for Public Trust Tidelands is
21 there.

22 So we've got several bills we're looking
23 at. We don't know whether they'll be --
24 obviously, if they're a revenue bill, they have
25 till the end of the month, I think, the 26th, is

1 it, TJ, to be able to come out. If they're not
2 revenue, they're already out. If they didn't,
3 they've already died on the floor. And so we will
4 just -- the menhaden processing plant odor
5 elimination died on the floor with the House, and
6 also administrative hearing died on the House.

7 Let's see. Several things, oyster
8 bottoms, that's died, but one of them -- once --
9 you know, a lot of things that die in the House
10 will be taken up in the Senate and a lot of things
11 that died in the Senate will be taken up in the
12 House, so all they're doing is basically -- a very
13 few of them are ever double, and then they'll go
14 back and pass them out of the Senate and pass them
15 out of the House.

16 And they'll send it to the other, and
17 then it will go to them. And if it's passed at
18 that point, they will go to conference or either
19 they'll be passed or either they'll say, go to
20 conference. So most of the time, you know, you're
21 looking at towards the end of March before we're
22 going to know anything as to what's going to
23 happen, so just a heads-up on that for everybody.

24 Also, we've got update on the on-bottom
25 lease program. Right now, to tell you where it's

1 at, we have received applications, but we have
2 decided to use a third party to grade it, so it's
3 not going to be graded by the Department of Marine
4 Resources.

5 And we used a third party to do the
6 finance, and so whatever you filed as far as your
7 financial doing -- you know, the ability to be
8 able to do on-bottom leases, that went to an
9 accounting firm and now we're in the negotiations,
10 trying to finalize the contract with the group out
11 of Jackson to be able -- and they're going to be
12 the ones that are reading, and they will take all
13 the applications and grade them according to
14 what -- their ability to be able to cultch and
15 what the ability in the past have been and how
16 they've harvested and their experience.

17 And so those things will be put
18 together. I have no idea who they are. Some
19 people might, but I don't. I have no idea. I
20 have not seen a single one of them. So when I had
21 people ask me for the names, I can't give them to
22 you. They're sealed. They're in a sealed
23 computer and they're sealed in an envelope. And
24 they're going to that group in Jackson and that
25 Jackson -- and I don't want them to know the

1 names.

2 They will see it when they open it, but
3 they're going to grade this thing with the names
4 redacted. They're going to grade it with the
5 names redacted out of it. That way, nobody can
6 say that they knew somebody. Nobody can say that
7 I had friends with somebody or nobody else.
8 They're going to grade the actual -- whatever the
9 person is for the on-bottom lease, they're going
10 to grade it that way to that point.

11 And if it ever gets to a point they have
12 to ask a question, then there will be another
13 group in that same organization that goes and asks
14 the question to the people, and then they will
15 come back and give it to that.

16 So it will never be graded by -- the
17 people grading the actual forms or what was sent
18 in, the applications, will not know the names.
19 And that way, we can keep this as -- you know, I
20 want it as open as we can, to be honest about
21 everybody and get it by what they put in and not
22 by what -- and they will -- if you're one of them
23 and they have questions, somebody in that
24 organization that does not grade you will be
25 calling and asking that question. And they will

1 come back and give it back to that organization.

2 We're trying -- that group.

3 We're just trying to keep this as
4 straightforward as possible. We want everybody to
5 know that if a lease is offered to an organization
6 or a company, that they're the ones that graded
7 out as the best to be able to get that lease.

8 So where are we at on it? I don't know.
9 I can tell you right now they're going to be
10 working on it, and until that point, I don't know
11 where we'll be, but it's going forward as we speak
12 right now.

13 There's nothing been done other than the
14 fact that the application -- I mean, we do know
15 there was 19 -- no, 61, I mean, applications. We
16 know that, that were turned in, but I don't have a
17 clue what the names are. So if you ask me and I
18 tell you I can't give it to you, I don't know
19 them. And I did that on purpose because I don't
20 want to know. I don't want somebody thinking that
21 anybody in this agency is doing anything
22 different. I want it separated 100 percent.

23 So that way, whenever it's graded out,
24 they will come back to us and give us the grade
25 that this is what's the finance. This is what's

1 the ability to do these jobs and they will put
2 them both together and they'll say, this piece of
3 property, this little area right here, this
4 company graded the best and they'll move to the
5 next, move to the next one.

6 If three of you applied for the same
7 piece of property, the one that grades the highest
8 is the one that's going to get the first offer on
9 it, and that's the way it's going to be.

10 All right. Any questions on that?

11 (No response.)

12 JOE SPRAGGINS:

13 January 27th through January 30th, Gulf
14 Council meeting. We had -- one of the things
15 that's going forward with that is that, you know,
16 last year we took a gamble and tried to add a
17 little extra to our red snapper and we wound up
18 going 18,000 pounds over and had to pay it back
19 the next year.

20 Well, now we're doing a bill that we're
21 trying to do a process there to be able to move it
22 forward to where that if we, as the five states,
23 Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana and Florida and
24 Texas, if we don't go over the ACL for the whole
25 Gulf, then we can sit down as the Council and

1 decide if one goes over and the others are under,
2 that we can allow that person to have those
3 allocations.

4 So it's something that we'll work back
5 and forth, and I think it's great. They're doing
6 it in the South Atlantic, and I think it's a good
7 deal and I think it will work out real good.

8 Matter of fact, I'm going to the
9 South Atlantic in March 3rd -- 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th,
10 6th, that time frame, to be able to meet with them
11 and I'm going to be the Gulf representative for
12 the South Atlantic. So we're going to go there
13 and I'm going to listen there and see what they're
14 doing any different than we are and maybe we can
15 add something to theirs and maybe they can add
16 something that we can bring back.

17 But our MS Creel is going forward.
18 There is some issues in Washington right now.
19 It's funding, as to whether or not they can give
20 us funding to be able to pay for it, but we're
21 going to take it out of ours because we're going
22 forward. We're going forward with it until we get
23 it and we'll just hope to get paid back. And
24 that's what we're working on, but we're not going
25 to back up. We're going to marry it up against

1 their MRIP and we're going to do this study so we
2 can come back and have our snapper back to where
3 we ought to be and our reef fish.

4 Any questions on that?

5 (No response.)

6 JOE SPRAGGINS:

7 February 4th legislative dinner in
8 Jackson, it was a good deal. We had a good deal.
9 We had about 65, 70 people showed up for it. It
10 was a good night. We were able to sit down and
11 talk to a lot of different legislators about
12 things that we needed to do and what we're looking
13 at.

14 And so for the amount of money, that is
15 probably the best thing in the world because we
16 don't go to a big restaurant and pay for all the
17 money. We do it at the co-op and we just do it
18 ourselves. Our cooking team cooks for us, so it's
19 a great deal. We just basically buy the food, is
20 all we have to do.

21 February 5th, we had Capitol Day. Big
22 turnout. Next year, we're going to try to do
23 something different. They only allow you to have
24 half of it now, you know, one side of the rotunda.
25 So what we're going to do is marry up with

1 Wildlife and Wildlife is going to take one side
2 and we're going to take the other. So we're going
3 to take them all together. We're going to go in
4 there as a joint deal, so that's working out
5 great.

6 For the ones that don't know, you know,
7 we are a member of the Mississippi Wildlife,
8 Fisheries, Parks and Marine Foundation now. So we
9 joined with them and they made us an equal partner
10 in the foundation to be able to raise money to be
11 able to help people. One of our goals that we
12 want to do with that is to be able to go forward,
13 with, you know, giving scholarships for students
14 to go to the universities and to be able to study
15 marine biology.

16 We also want to do things to where we
17 help with children and teach them about fishing,
18 and we also want to do things with underprivileged
19 and handicapped and other things that we're doing.
20 And we can't do that, but we can with the
21 Foundation money.

22 And we're looking to have -- right now,
23 we're trying to set the date, but I think it's
24 going to be sometime in June. But we're looking
25 at a tournament, to have a governor's cup, and

1 that will be a fundraiser for us to be able to put
2 money into it that people will come in and help us
3 pay for that. And so, hopefully we'll be able to
4 raise some money and be able to do that and use
5 that to be able to help people to move forward.

6 Any questions on that?

7 (No response.)

8 JOE SPRAGGINS:

9 All right. February 11th, 12th, we had
10 the GOMA, Gulf of Mexico Alliance. It's now Gulf
11 of America Alliance because we changed -- we
12 couldn't change the name 100 percent, but we did
13 change it to doing business as Gulf of America
14 because -- and President Trump named it Gulf of
15 America the other day when he flew over it going
16 to the Super Bowl. He signed the paperwork and
17 said, now it's the Gulf of America. So everybody
18 better get on board there. We're going to have to
19 learn new words. Instead of saying Gulf of
20 Mexico, we're now at Gulf of America. And so we
21 will go forward with that. And we had a good
22 meeting there and some things are going forward
23 with it.

24 February 24th through 26th, I'll be at
25 the Gulf States Delegation. Myself and Rick

1 Burris will be going to Washington DC and we'll be
2 meeting with NOAA and Wildlife and Fisheries and
3 also meeting with congressmen and senators. So
4 we're going to talk about where we're at, what we
5 need and some of things we're looking at and how
6 to go forward and to help us.

7 Any questions on that? If you've got
8 anything, let me know.

9 (No response.)

10 JOE SPRAGGINS:

11 As I said, I'm going March 3rd through
12 the 7th to the Atlantic Council.

13 Bonnet Carré update, let's see. I have
14 got it somewhere up here. Okay. Financial
15 assistance for Mississippi commercial fisherman,
16 seafood dealers, charter boat fishermen businesses
17 funding was 7.94 million and we've spent 7.694 at
18 this point. The commercial is 7.12 of it, and the
19 charters is 573,000 of it.

20 Of the 94 round -- second applicants, 72
21 of them were found to be eligible, so we were able
22 to do that. 72 applications have been submitted
23 to finance for Round 2 direct payment. This
24 includes 66 commercial fishermen, five charters
25 and one dealer.

1 The grant program for new and emerging
2 seafood processing technology funding of 3.6
3 million, we have spent 1.4 at this time. Payments
4 have been approved for eight of the 24 eligible
5 applicants. Fisheries staff is working with the
6 applicants and finance to be able to move forward
7 with it.

8 Any questions on the Bonnet Carré?

9 (No response.)

10 JOE SPRAGGINS:

11 All right. Let's see where else am I
12 at? Am I missing something else here?

13 The derelict vessels, we have, at this
14 point 174 derelict vessel cases have been reported
15 since we started tracking. 155 vessels removed.
16 19 vessels pending, and seven received court
17 orders for removal.

18 Also, the Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks,
19 you know, the hunting and fishing license that you
20 go online and buy is on hold right now. They're
21 changing the contractor. That's happening today.
22 The system is down maybe one to two days, just
23 keep an eye on it.

24 You know, deer season is over, so --
25 turkey season hasn't started, so it shouldn't be

1 an issue there other than your hunting -- your
2 fishing license, but you can still come and buy
3 them here. You can buy them manually. I think we
4 can work it out to be able to buy a manual license
5 if you need to.

6 You can't? Patrick is shaking his head
7 no. All right. We can't sell our marine license?

8 PATRICK LEVINE:

9 No, sir. Everything goes through the
10 Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and
11 Parks, and with them transitioning to a new
12 contractor, the system is completely shut down.
13 They're saying one to two days.

14 JOE SPRAGGINS:

15 Okay. So a couple of days we're going
16 to be shut down. If you get in a situation about
17 that, let me know and we'll work it out, try to
18 help you if you need something. If it's something
19 that your license expires today and you still need
20 to fish tomorrow, okay, just let me know.

21 But if it's a commercial license, you
22 know, that doesn't go through Wildlife, Fisheries
23 and Parks, so if it's commercial, you're okay. We
24 can do that for seafood and commercial license.

25 All right. Am I missing anything?

1 Let's see what else I've got down this list here.

2 I don't think I see anything on that.

3 Now we go to actions update.

4 STEVEN ECKERT:

5 Good morning, Director, Commissioners.

6 Discussed at the January 2025 meeting, the
7 Commission recommended and the Director approved a
8 motion to recommend approval of the following
9 state saltwater finfish records. That was one for
10 a common -- a 15.16-ounce common snook, caught by
11 Vince Wray on conventional tackle, and an
12 8.96-ounce common snook caught by Zachary
13 Broussard under youth conventional tackle.

14 And that is all the actions update that
15 we have for this week.

16 JOE SPRAGGINS:

17 Any questions?

18 If not, Mr. Chairman, that is my report.

19 CAM ROBERDS:

20 All right. Thank you, sir.

21 Commissioners, do you guys have anything
22 to report today?

23 MATTHEW MAYFIELD:

24 No.

25 RONNIE DANIELS:

1 No.

2 CAM ROBERDS:

3 All right. We'll move on to Chief
4 Wilkerson, report on citations.

5 KYLE WILKERSON:

6 Good morning. Everybody doing well?

7 CAM ROBERDS:

8 Good.

9 KYLE WILKERSON:

10 Well, the report itself -- and it was
11 going to be the January report -- it looks to be
12 everybody was compliant. There were a few
13 citations written, but nothing that just stands
14 out to me. A little less checks due to the fact
15 that all that cold water, unfortunately. Nobody
16 likes to be on the water when it's cold, except
17 these oystermen. They like to be out there. I
18 don't like chasing them when it's that cold.

19 But anyway, if you have any questions,
20 please feel free to ask and I will answer what I
21 can.

22 CAM ROBERDS:

23 Any questions?

24 (No response.)

25 KYLE WILKERSON:

1 Thank you very much, Chief.

2 What we've got is Deputy Chief Gex is
3 under the weather. He was going to present a no
4 wake zone, but Captain Strickland is going to
5 present it today.

6 CAM ROBERDS:

7 Okay. Thank you. Morning.

8 MICHAEL STRICKLAND:

9 Good morning. As Colonel mentioned,
10 Deputy Chief is a little under the weather today,
11 so he asked me to step in, fill in for the no wake
12 proposal for Wolf River at Menge Avenue.

13 If you go to the next slide, you can see
14 the existing wake zone on the northern extension
15 part from the boat ramp there. That's in place by
16 state statute. It's 100 feet out adjacent from
17 any public launching facility.

18 What they're -- what they've asked is
19 that that wake zone be extended to the
20 southernmost portion down to the bridge, and
21 that's to cover a new launch that's being
22 developed. If you look at the slide there where
23 it's cleared, the southernmost portion of the
24 clearing, there is a new boat ramp that's gone in
25 right there.

1 And what's taking place is when people
2 are transiting the river and they're heading north
3 and they come up under the bridge, it actually
4 creates a little bit of a blind spot because of
5 the natural curve of the river. And by the time
6 the people notice that the ramp is there where
7 people are actually launching their facility and
8 they come down, that wake that's created by them
9 decreasing the speed is probably greater than had
10 they just be been able to transit the system
11 originally.

12 So what they've asked for is for that no
13 wake zone to extend down the southern portion of
14 the bridge for the safety of the people launching
15 the vessels there.

16 If you go to the next slide and look at
17 the considerations. So boaters will be operating
18 at idle speed for approximately three minutes.
19 That's all it's going to add to the transit time.
20 Special considerations including the bridge and
21 the no wake zone would ensure higher safety
22 precautions, transiting between bridge pilings and
23 around a blind spot where boaters would be
24 launching and recovering their vessels.

25 The no wake zone proposal is an

1 extension of an already existing no wake zone that
2 is required by state law, which was 100 feet
3 adjacent to all public launching facilities. And
4 the total length of the no wake zone is 992 feet
5 at the center line of the river.

6 Next.

7 So the staff recommendation is: The
8 Office of Marine Patrol requests that the
9 Commission recommend to the Director approval of
10 the establishment of no wake zone for the proposed
11 Wolf River bridge and boat launch at Menge Avenue
12 based on normal operation and vessel speed in
13 relation to the public access areas in which
14 people fish, boat and socialize.

15 CAM ROBERDS:

16 Do we have any questions?

17 RONNIE DANIELS:

18 I know that's a high-trafficked area in
19 there and it is a blind spot there, so -- I think
20 that three minutes is more like nine, though
21 because nobody is getting up and running where
22 those camps are. You might get shot at if you do.

23 JOE SPRAGGINS:

24 Y'all need a motion.

25 CAM ROBERDS:

1 Yeah. It looks -- safety-wise, it
2 definitely looks warranted to me.

3 Do we have a motion to approve the --
4 and move forward with the staff's recommendation?

5 RONNIE DANIELS:

6 I'll make the motion.

7 MATTHEW MAYFIELD:

8 Second.

9 CAM ROBERDS:

10 All those in favor?

11 (Unanimous vote.)

12 CAM ROBERDS:

13 All right. Thank you.

14 MICHAEL STRICKLAND:

15 Thank you.

16 CAM ROBERDS:

17 Okay. Moving down to Resource
18 Management. It looks like Willa.

19 WILLA BRANTLEY:

20 Good morning.

21 CAM ROBERDS:

22 Morning.

23 WILLA BRANTLEY:

24 I have a quick update on our numbers for
25 the year. So these are all of our permitting

1 actions for the calendar of 2024. As you can see,
2 we had a total number of actions of 813. Most of
3 those are things that we either regulate directly
4 or that happen within the Coastal zone that we
5 have to review to make sure they are consistent
6 with our Coastal program.

7 Comparing to the last two years, just to
8 show that our numbers are staying pretty steady
9 lately. We did go down just a little bit in our
10 regulated activities, but we also went up in
11 things that we review and pre-application meetings
12 that we hold with people getting ready to turn in
13 their applications.

14 Our violations stayed about the same as
15 last year. We did have a few less actual
16 violations. We like to put our actual number up
17 there because we get a lot of reports that when we
18 get to the field, they don't actually turn out to
19 be violations. So out of those 22 actual
20 violations, five of those were things that would
21 have met our guidelines. Had they turned in an
22 application, we would have issued it, so those
23 were issued and approved under an after-the-fact
24 process by the Director. The rest were taken care
25 of by the property owner themselves voluntarily

1 and fixed.

2 I did want to point out that only 16 of
3 the 47 were in the last six months, so hopefully
4 we're starting to go down a little bit on our
5 numbers there. And we didn't have any that needed
6 to be presented to the Commission for a
7 recommendation, so we are happy with that.

8 If you have any questions, just let me
9 know.

10 CAM ROBERDS:

11 I don't.

12 Thank you very much, Ms. Willa.

13 WILLA BRANTLEY:

14 Thank you.

15 JOE SPRAGGINS:

16 Yeah. Rick, one thing, you know -- one
17 of the things in the past, we've had some issues
18 and they've worked out. But Secretary of State
19 stepped up with us the other day and there was an
20 issue over in Jackson County and -- about a
21 bulkhead being made -- put in the wrong place.

22 And we talked to the Secretary of State
23 about it. Secretary of State did go forward with
24 it, and so now they're pursuing it to be able to
25 change it. And it looks like that everything is

1 going forward. I don't know where we're at yet or
2 not, but I think that the contractor and all are
3 coming back to get with us to be able to do it.
4 So Secretary Watson, thank you very much for your
5 help on that.

6 WILLA BRANTLEY:

7 They're supposed to be turning in an
8 application for that restoration work, and we
9 probably, once that is finished, will present that
10 to the Commission just because the original was
11 presented to the Commission. So we'll follow up
12 with that and let you know what the final result
13 is.

14 CAM ROBERDS:

15 Thank you very much.

16 WILLA BRANTLEY:

17 Thank you.

18 CAM ROBERDS:

19 All right. It looks like we have a Reef
20 Bureau permit, Ms. Allison.

21 ALLISON FAGGARD:

22 Good morning.

23 So we have an application by the
24 Mississippi Department of Marine Resources
25 Artificial Reef Bureau. The proposed project is

1 located two miles north of Petit Boy Island in the
2 Mississippi Sound. It's in the general use
3 district.

4 The project need and purpose is to
5 create and enhance valuable reef habitat that will
6 support and sustain healthy populations of
7 estuarine fish and other invertebrates.

8 So the applicant is proposing to fill
9 approximately 15 acres of Coastal wetlands for the
10 construction of a submerged artificial reef. The
11 reef will consist of ecosystem discs, concrete
12 culverts and other material.

13 The reef will maintain a minimum
14 clearance of 12 feet mean low water, as requested
15 by the Coast Guard, which I will cover in a later
16 slide.

17 This is a diagram or layout of the
18 proposed project. The eco disc system on the left
19 just kind of shows a generic layout of what it
20 could approximately look like. This is
21 approximately 200 units. The ecosystem discs are
22 the ones in the top right, as well as the picture
23 of the concrete culverts of what this could
24 potentially look like for them.

25 This is the project location with the

1 coordinates. Again, this is approximately
2 two miles north of Petit Boy Island there.

3 The applicant is requesting a variance
4 to the requirements for filling of Coastal
5 wetlands, and they justified the variance by
6 stating that the location of the proposed
7 artificial reef site avoids Coastal vegetation.
8 It's going to add habitat for the flora and fauna
9 and will add an overall positive effect for
10 fisherman and ecosystem itself.

11 Notification of the project ran in the
12 *Sun Herald* January 11th, 19th and 26th of this
13 year. It also appeared on the
14 Mississippi Department of Marine Resources'
15 website January 10th and ran to February 3rd of
16 this year.

17 We did not receive any public comments
18 to our notice, but the Army Corps of Engineers
19 received comments on their public notice, which
20 will be in the next slide.

21 There were no comments from MDEQ or
22 MDAH, and the Secretary of State's office stated
23 "no comment" on this application.

24 The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers posted
25 their public notice. They received three

1 comments.

2 The U.S. Coast Guard requested a 12-foot
3 minimum clearance, and the reef must be marked on
4 all corners with private aids to navigation. This
5 was as opposed to the original application that
6 was going to propose an eight-foot clearance.
7 Because of the high trafficked area, the Coast
8 Guard has requested a 12-foot minimum low water
9 clearance, and the DMR has responded and said that
10 they will meet that 12-foot minimum clearance.

11 The U.S. EPA asked if there was a more
12 recent version of 1999 Artificial Reef Development
13 Plan and was the purpose for the reef for
14 mitigation or restoration to improve habit.

15 The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers project
16 manager responded to the comment on behalf of the
17 applicant that the 1999 Development Plan is the
18 most recent and that the reef is not for
19 mitigation. The primary purpose is to provide
20 hard substrate to improve habitat and water
21 quality for state resources.

22 The Gulf Intracoastal Waterway also
23 commented and asked if there was a concern that
24 the structures may pose a navigation threat if
25 they are potentially dislodged by a hurricane and

1 be deposited into the federal channel, and was the
2 design and location taken -- and this risk taken
3 into consideration and if so, how would it be
4 mitigated?

5 The DMR applicant responded, stating
6 that the location is over 3,700 feet from the
7 Intercoastal Waterway, and there had been studies
8 conducted and concluded that no indicated
9 displacement of reef materials would happen.

10 Therefore, the staff -- after a thorough
11 evaluation of the project, based on the decision
12 factors and the Mississippi Coastal program, the
13 project would serve a higher public interest by
14 enhancing the fishing opportunities and provide a
15 quality fishing site. It would provide a quality
16 habitat to promote successful species transitions
17 from juvenile to maturity and it avoids
18 biologically sensitive areas.

19 Therefore, staff requests a motion that
20 the Commission recommend to the Executive Director
21 to approve the requested variance, to approve the
22 permit as requested and condition the permit to
23 contain the following: That the coordination with
24 U.S. Coast Guard for necessary aids to navigation
25 at the project location be conditioned.

1 Any questions?

2 CAM ROBERDS:

3 Who is the actual applicant funding?

4 ALLISON FAGGARD:

5 It's Artificial Reef Bureau.

6 I was about to say Travis was.

7 RONNIE DANIELS:

8 The picture of the discs, is that five
9 discs stacked on top of each other or do the
10 five -- is that one unit?

11 TRAVIS WILLIAMS:

12 That's all one unit. They're stacked
13 together. Five discs, approximately five foot
14 high with a base, five by five.

15 RONNIE DANIELS:

16 Okay. That's pretty cool.

17 TRAVIS WILLIAMS:

18 Cam, did you mention -- did you ask
19 about the funding?

20 CAM ROBERDS:

21 Yeah. I was just curious where the --

22 TRAVIS WILLIAMS:

23 So the funding for this project right
24 now is proposed -- we're putting in an application
25 with the NFWF funds, National Fish and Wildlife

1 Foundation funds.

2 CAM ROBERDS:

3 I think it's great, by the way. I think
4 it's a great, great, great program. I like the
5 location too.

6 TRAVIS WILLIAMS:

7 Yeah. We tried to look at something on
8 the east side of the state and help those folks
9 out over there.

10 CAM ROBERDS:

11 Sure. Sure.

12 Any other question, Commissioners?

13 (No response.)

14 CAM ROBERDS:

15 All right. Do we have a motion to take
16 the recommendation from staff?

17 MATTHEW MAYFIELD:

18 Motion to take the recommendation from
19 the staff.

20 RONNIE DANIELS:

21 Second.

22 CAM ROBERDS:

23 All those in favor?

24 (Unanimous vote.)

25 TRAVIS WILLIAMS:

1 Thank y'all.

2 CAM ROBERDS:

3 All right. It looks like we're moving
4 down to the Public Affairs, Ms. Charmaine.

5 CHARMAINE SCHMERMUND:

6 Good morning. The Mississippi
7 Department of Marine Resources had nine media
8 mentions since the January MACMR meeting. News
9 items including the seafood labeling law proposed
10 in Mississippi, Mississippi's oyster reefs and the
11 effects of the winter storm on inshore fish.

12 On February 5th, DMR held our annual
13 Capitol Day in Jackson where we met with
14 Legislators, Capitol staff and guests throughout
15 the morning, handing out informational pieces
16 about our agency.

17 Blake Stringfellow in the Shellfish
18 Bureau took part in Jumpstart to Success in
19 Hattiesburg on February 4th. Blake talked about
20 his role at the agency, answered questions and
21 talked about the career path for a biologist at
22 DMR. The event featured over 2,000 students from
23 the Hattiesburg area, who were able to explore a
24 variety of careers.

25 At this weekend's Biloxi Boat Show, the

1 Artificial Reef Bureau staffed the agency's public
2 outreach booth each of the three days of the show
3 at the Mississippi Coast Convention Center. They
4 shared insight on fishing reefs and fisheries
5 management, as well as handing out DMR
6 informational materials.

7 Marine Patrol, Coastal Resources
8 Management's Invasive Species program and the
9 Grand Bay NERR participated in the Kids Fishing
10 101 program during the boat show. Each group
11 featured a booth at the event and educated
12 attendees about their respective roles and
13 programs at DMR.

14 Additionally, the Hatchery Bureau
15 provided Mississippi Gulf Fishing Banks with eight
16 hatchery-reared spotted seatrout of eight to 10
17 inches each for their display at the show.

18 RONNIE DANIELS:

19 Thank you for all the help with the
20 kids' event at the boat show this weekend. It was
21 a huge success.

22 CHARMAINE SCHMERMUND:

23 You're welcome.

24 CAM ROBERDS:

25 That's great to see everybody involved

1 as much as you are with that, so we appreciate
2 that, Ms. Charmaine. Thank you.

3 CHARMAINE SCHMERMUND:

4 Uh-huh.

5 CAM ROBERDS:

6 Okay. Moving down to Marine Fisheries,
7 it looks like Jason Rider on this oyster update.

8 JASON RIDER:

9 Good morning, everyone. I want to give
10 a quick update regarding the season, and then I'll
11 talk about some sampling efforts that we had in
12 the agency.

13 So first off, as we do every month
14 recently, quick update, the season did open on
15 January 15th. It has been open since then. We
16 have been closed a decent amount due to river and
17 rainfall, but we're trying to keep it open as much
18 as possible.

19 And we are -- all right. The season
20 total right now is 7,371 sacks of oysters.
21 Average sacks per day is 136. Licenses are
22 ticking up. We're seeing interest from in-state
23 and out-of-state for license sales. We're
24 continuing with those.

25 If anyone wants to purchase a license

1 and needs the harvester training class, we're
2 available at any time, so give us a call.

3 License -- approximate number of
4 licenses harvesting is 80 and then with -- the
5 average number per day is 10 for tongers and 12
6 for dredgers.

7 The main area fished is continuing to be
8 2F, which is around the tonging box close to Pass
9 Christian.

10 So with that, I did want to talk about,
11 last Commission meeting, Director asked to look
12 into some sampling efforts in the past and where
13 we've been and what we've done, so I wanted to
14 brief everyone with some maps and graphs and go
15 over anything and answer any questions.

16 So first off, this is the sampling
17 efforts from 2019 to 2024. As you can see on this
18 map, all gold and/or black dots are where we have
19 sampled. The black dots are from 2019 to 2022 and
20 then the gold dots are from '23 and '24. The
21 reason we did that is because in '23, we
22 transitioned from sampling everything to sampling
23 only state-owned reefs. So the gold dots do -- or
24 gold or yellow dots do indicate that.

25 JOE SPRAGGINS:

1 Hey, Jason, before you go forward with
2 that, when you say "state-owned," state-owned is
3 all of them still.

4 JASON RIDER:

5 Yeah. Correct.

6 JOE SPRAGGINS:

7 But this was what was projected out of
8 that bill that the State would own; is that
9 correct?

10 JASON RIDER:

11 That's correct.

12 JOE SPRAGGINS:

13 Okay. Just to clarify.

14 JASON RIDER:

15 So the blue areas -- yeah. Thank you,
16 Director.

17 So the blue areas are where we focused
18 our efforts in 2023 and '24. As you can see at
19 the bottom of that chart, we sampled a total of
20 2,298 samples, and then the years, we broke it
21 down. So with this, we wanted to show that we did
22 have a good distribution over the reefs and over
23 the Western complex. We did focus this slide just
24 on the West. We do have Biloxi and the East also.
25 But if anyone has any questions about that, we can

1 answer that.

2 Next is a -- this is just a quick
3 snapshot of our efforts with a live-dead map, so a
4 green indicates a live oyster in our sampling and
5 red indicates no live oysters. So from 20 -- and
6 we're just looking at from Bonnet Carré to 2022.
7 And the reason we did this is because in 2017 to
8 2022, we had some poor conditions for water
9 quality. We had a lot of rainfall, Bonnet Carré
10 openings. The environmental conditions were not
11 ideal during those times.

12 So 2019 to 2022, sampling efforts, we do
13 show some growth on our cultch plants, is mainly
14 where we're seeing it. If you look at the map
15 here, every box or polygon that you see is a
16 cultch plant that the DMR has deployed in the
17 Western Sound, so we are seeing some growth over
18 these years but nothing substantial at this time.

19 And then if you look at this one, this
20 is a total from 2019 to 2024. So you're really
21 looking at the difference between '22 and '24.
22 From that time period, we've had tremendous water
23 quality conditions. The temperature has been
24 right. Salinity has been right. Water quality
25 has been right. We have not had a heavy rainfall

1 or Bonnet Carré opening, so the oysters have had a
2 chance to rebound.

3 What we're trying to show here is that
4 it was growing substantially in this -- I'm going
5 to go back to 2019 to '22. It was growing in that
6 time frame, but then in '22 to '24, we really saw
7 exponential growth on our cultch plants. We have
8 sampled -- again, on the blue areas, that's where
9 we focused in this time frame. We did not sample
10 outside of the blue areas from '23 and '24, but if
11 you look at this map or this area, you can apply
12 the same logic to the gray historic reef
13 footprint.

14 And then this is just a chart.

15 JOE SPRAGGINS:

16 Real quick on that.

17 JASON RIDER:

18 I'm sorry.

19 JOE SPRAGGINS:

20 Before we go any further with that, what
21 you want to understand is they was going back and
22 they was doing the -- and checking. Now, you say,
23 why did you only go to those areas? Because in
24 2023, there was a bill passed that said that we
25 would lease 80 percent of the bottoms.

1 JASON RIDER:

2 That's right.

3 JOE SPRAGGINS:

4 And so we didn't look at it. We thought
5 it was going forward. We did go out and do
6 contracts -- or look at contracts. We didn't do
7 any actual contracts because we saw something with
8 the grading criteria on it. And so we went back
9 and said, okay, we've got a grading criteria issue
10 here, so we can't go forward with that. But
11 that's why we were looking in those areas back in
12 those days.

13 And then we turned around and in '24, we
14 passed another -- they passed another legislation
15 and it was signed to say we would lease it, and
16 that's why we're going forward at this point.

17 But I want people to understand we
18 didn't stop looking at that just because we didn't
19 want to look at it. We stopped looking at it
20 because we were under the impression that the
21 State was going to lease 80 percent of the
22 bottoms, and we didn't have any choice and that's
23 what we're going to do. So that's what we looked
24 at in that point.

25 So when you -- you've got some more

1 slides, and I'll let you go through them before we
2 talk about the other.

3 JASON RIDER:

4 And to the point, Director, we did stop
5 outside of the blue area because we want to
6 continue with cultch plants inside of that area.
7 We want to identify good, quality locations, so we
8 focused our efforts in those areas, sampling
9 efforts.

10 So this is just an estimated harvest
11 graph, estimated harvest -- I mean, sorry,
12 estimated oyster sacks versus harvested and this
13 goes all the way to 1998 and 1999. If you can
14 see, in the early 2000s, '99 to 2000, we were over
15 1 million sacks of oysters that we had estimated
16 in the Western Mississippi Sound. We were
17 harvesting around 400 sacks. And then in '05, of
18 course, it's coming down and it does significantly
19 go down in that time frame, and it picks back up.

20 But if you see the graph and the trend,
21 I just wanted to show you a scale of where we're
22 at compared to where we've been. We are seeing an
23 uptick, and I think it's great that we're seeing
24 an uptick. We're showing about 50,000 sacks,
25 estimated sacks on the state-owned reefs, those

1 blue areas. So, again, we did not sample outside
2 of those blue areas in '23 and '24, so you can
3 take that estimate and apply it to the other
4 areas.

5 We are seeing an uptick, but overall
6 against where we were historically -- where we are
7 historically, we're still very far down and we
8 want to harvest these oysters responsibly. We
9 don't want to inhibit them from growing and
10 expanding. That's our goal here, is to harvest
11 this season responsibly, take some oysters, allow
12 people to harvest but also allow it to continue to
13 rebound and continue to grow.

14 So this just shows a pretty good
15 overview from the last 25 years, and I just -- if
16 anyone has any questions with that, I will take
17 them. This is the same but just in a different
18 chart, different way to look at it.

19 But any questions?

20 CAM ROBERDS:

21 Great job on laying it out like that and
22 giving a visual, and the documentation is really
23 clear.

24 JASON RIDER:

25 Okay.

1 JOE SPRAGGINS:

2 And, you know, just to give you an idea,
3 obviously -- Jason, can you pull that slide back
4 up about the -- just the one that showed the
5 picture of the oysters there? Right in that area.

6 If you look at the areas that are marked
7 in blue that we've checked off, that's the area
8 that the State is going to -- under the new
9 legislation that's been passed last year, that's
10 the areas that the State would keep on the Western
11 Sound. Now, there's areas on the Eastern Sound,
12 too, some areas over there that we're keeping.
13 But that's the area we're talking about.

14 Over the last three years, that's where
15 we put all of our efforts at.

16 JASON RIDER:

17 That's right.

18 JOE SPRAGGINS:

19 That's where we put every bit of our
20 efforts. And when I say "efforts," that's where
21 we put our cultch. That's where we put our seed
22 oysters and said -- and to give you an idea too --
23 and I don't know. Jason, maybe you do. But we
24 bought back in 2021, I think it was, that we
25 bought 1 million oysters from Texas that were

1 market-sized and we put them in those areas,
2 right?

3 JASON RIDER:

4 Yeah, we did. We put some -- and it was
5 before these blue areas were identified, so we
6 did -- we did put some in the Pass Christian area.
7 I believe it's right in this area, and then we did
8 put some in St. Joe at the time.

9 JOE SPRAGGINS:

10 Right. But we put those oysters in
11 there to help because we had nothing to seed the
12 Gulf with, and so we bought market-sized oysters
13 and put them in there to be able to help them to
14 be able to move forward and that was our idea.
15 How could we rebuild this the best way we could
16 possibly do?

17 I know some of you are catching some --
18 and especially at the first part of the season
19 when we opened in November, we were allowing you
20 to fish on the ones that are in the blue and I
21 know you was catching some big oysters. Well, a
22 lot of those probably came from that same way
23 because they came from that same area. Whenever
24 you put a three-inch oyster in there, two years
25 later, it's going to be a lot bigger. And a lot

1 of them are probably in that point.

2 But as Jason said, we have had the
3 luxury of having -- especially the last year, this
4 past year the waters have been beautiful and
5 that's why we looked at this. We looked at it
6 last year as to whether or not we could open, but
7 from the sampling that was done and the way that
8 the scientists looked at it, they felt that it was
9 a little bit early to open it up last year because
10 we didn't want to take a chance of degrading
11 whatever the reefs were at the time.

12 So whenever you go back and look at that
13 and you think about it, I want you to
14 understand that -- put that slide back up there
15 you had a while ago. Yeah, right there.

16 All right. You see the blue area and
17 you see the -- every one of us, we all know where
18 most of you've been fishing. I think it's been in
19 the Pass Marianne and then the Henderson Point
20 area. Up in that area right in there, that's
21 where you've been fishing here in the last few
22 weeks, you know, when we've had it.

23 Now, we did cultch some of that. We did
24 seed some of that prior to 2022, right, but that
25 was the time that we did it. And then after that,

1 we stopped doing it and started looking at ours.

2 Now, there is -- and also -- and the way
3 this thing is set up, the reason that, you know,
4 we picked the areas that we picked was to be
5 able -- to be able -- the most productive and be
6 able to move those oysters and obviously to spawn
7 and being able to feed the whole estuary. That
8 was what they were looking at.

9 Our initial goal was to keep all of Pass
10 Marianne and all of the Pass Christian and
11 Henderson Point in that area, but it didn't work
12 out that way. That was our initial goal of
13 what -- we wanted to keep it all because we know
14 what that is. All right?

15 If you go down to Telegraph, Telegraph
16 has not been very productive over the years, you
17 know, from just talking to the staff. It has not
18 been a very productive oyster reef over the years
19 because a lot of different things have killed it.
20 A lot of things have happened, but we didn't put a
21 whole lot of effort in there. We did put some
22 effort in St. Joe, though, right?

23 JASON RIDER:

24 Yeah.

25 JOE SPRAGGINS:

1 And we did put some effort there and
2 St. Stanislaus, a little effort and some other
3 stuff in that area.

4 But the idea, it was to -- and
5 whenever -- in December when I shut off the areas
6 that you see in the blue, I shut it off for one
7 reason: Because if we do go forward with these
8 leases and it does go forward and it happens and
9 that area that you're seeing in the -- not the
10 blue, but in the Pass Marianne and Pass Christian,
11 that area, if it is leased out, I wanted y'all to
12 fish off of that. I wanted you to fish off of
13 that area right now and get what you could there
14 and then hold the other areas for you.

15 And if -- you know, for maybe -- if we
16 do look at it and then this goes through and just
17 say it goes through in March and we can still
18 harvest oysters in March, we may harvest -- we can
19 open up maybe our season in our area. And then
20 next year, we'll have your area there and we'll be
21 able to open it up with that.

22 That's what we're working for. I'm
23 trying to find every way in the world I can to
24 find a way to make sure that we can still have an
25 oyster season for our oystermen, our commercial

1 oystermen here in the state. And I'm trying to
2 find a way. That's what we're working on right
3 now, and that's exactly what I have done.

4 So if you've got any questions of why
5 I'm not letting you, you know, fish those areas
6 right now, it's to save them for you for the next,
7 you know -- in maybe next month or whatever if it
8 goes through. And why not let's fish the areas
9 that we have already some type of resources in and
10 why not let's go ahead in case they do lease them
11 out. If they do lease them out, then at least
12 we've fished some of it and we've got some of it
13 for that, but that's what I'm looking at.

14 So I want you to understand we're trying
15 every way we can. And once these leases go out,
16 if they -- if we do go forward with it and just
17 say it leases and there is some of that brown area
18 or gray area you want to look at there is not
19 leased, it will still stay as state-owned land.
20 It's not going anywhere else. Okay? It will
21 still stay as state-owned on those reefs, if it's
22 not leased out.

23 And at that point, the senators asked me
24 the other day and they were talking about it and
25 they said, well, can we just say that that will

1 continue to be? And I said, that's up to you
2 because you wrote -- you know, they wrote the law.
3 I didn't. So if they want to say that, then I'm
4 all for that. Tickle me to death if they want to
5 say yes, for these to go back and not going to be
6 leased. I would be fine with that, and so that's
7 what I'm working on.

8 And I just want you to understand a
9 little bit more about why they put the efforts in
10 there, in the places they did, and why we only
11 sampled in the places that we sampled in the last
12 couple years and then why we closed the season to
13 the areas that you were catching so many of them
14 right at one time, but they're still not going
15 anywhere. Those oysters are still there and
16 they're still owned by the State of Mississippi
17 and so they will still be a public reef and we'll
18 be able to harvest that.

19 Does that make -- Jason, anything you
20 want to add to that?

21 JASON RIDER:

22 No. I think you summarized it pretty
23 well.

24 JOE SPRAGGINS:

25 Commissioners, y'all got anything?

1 CAM ROBERDS:

2 Nope. Thank you.

3 JONATHAN MCLENDON:

4 No, sir.

5 CAM ROBERDS:

6 I'll guess we'll move --

7 JOE SPRAGGINS:

8 Before you go to the next -- do the
9 public comments.

10 CAM ROBERDS:

11 I'll do the public comments, yeah.

12 JASON RIDER:

13 Okay.

14 CAM ROBERDS:

15 All right. First up is A. Miller
16 possibly. I can't --

17 JOE SPRAGGINS:

18 Catfish.

19 CAM ROBERDS:

20 30 something Avenue.

21 JOE SPRAGGINS:

22 Catfish.

23 CAM ROBERDS:

24 Please, three minutes, if you can keep
25 it in within that time frame. Just state your

1 name and your city.

2 JAMES MILLER:

3 James Miller, D'Iberville, Mississippi.

4 I've been fishing all my life since I've
5 been seven years old, Mr. Spraggins.

6 Now I know what the Indians feel like
7 when the white man shoved the railroad down their
8 throat. You're taking our land from us and I'm
9 upset. Can't even hardly talk to you today.

10 If you so worried about our resources,
11 you ought to be fighting for us up there in the
12 legislature. I have been up there with you, man.
13 Pig in a blanket up there, man.

14 I'm so mad right now, I'm shaking,
15 Spraggins. Totally upset at you. I feel you've
16 done a bad job. Taking our livelihood from us. I
17 just -- you wanted to save oysters. I'm trying to
18 pay my bills. I just got a boat back running. I
19 went on that reef. First time I trolled on that
20 reef was Saturday. An hour and 35 minutes, I had
21 the prettiest oysters you ever want to lay a human
22 eye on.

23 I don't know what the problem is. You
24 don't want to keep -- you don't want to keep it
25 open. You want to keep closing. You want to

1 claim this. You want to claim -- up the sack
2 limit, cuz.

3 We're starving down there. I can't
4 believe you're trying to lease out 80 percent of
5 our ground. Millionaire leaseholders, you're
6 shoving them down our throat. I hope we can do
7 something about it, sir, because we working on it.

8 Just like you said, I'm all for the
9 fishermen. I pray you are. I do, man, because
10 what you've done to us -- Mr. Gollott died and I
11 knew this was coming, shoving this lease down our
12 throat. I prayed that man was on that board
13 today, right now. He wouldn't let none of this
14 happen.

15 I'm so sad that we've got to come up
16 here and fight for our grounds that's been out
17 there since the 1900s. I cannot -- I'm at -- lost
18 for words. You're supposed to be protecting our
19 product, not giving it to the millionaires, man.

20 And that list you say you've got, man,
21 you want me to get my phone out for y'all and
22 let's see who's all on the list? Wow. I've got
23 the list, and there ain't a damn fisherman on it,
24 not one of us, a license holder. All you
25 millionaires out there is on there. Do you want

1 me to start naming the names? Boy, it hurt me. I
2 don't want to sit up here and beat people up over
3 it, but I've got the list in my pocket on my phone
4 and it ain't us.

5 And I don't want a lease. I don't want
6 to lease none of our ground down there. I want to
7 work on our ground and make a living, not come up
8 here and beg for y'all to do something. Man, you
9 should have our back, everybody on this board.

10 And Mr. Richard Gollott -- you're looking at that
11 clock. It's running. My time's run out. I know
12 what you're looking at. You have a nice day,
13 Spraggins.

14 JOE SPRAGGINS:

15 Mr. Miller, if I can -- you know, I
16 understand you and I understand what you're saying
17 but --

18 JAMES MILLER:

19 You don't, sir.

20 JOE SPRAGGINS:

21 -- I don't think you've been up there
22 with me in the way I fought it. And you're
23 saying -- you've been up there two times that I
24 have seen y'all there, but I am not going to fight
25 in the middle of a meeting that they're having for

1 the resource meeting or whatever because that's
2 not the time and place to do it. It doesn't work
3 that way in Jackson. That won't do anything.
4 They won't listen to it.

5 The fight was before that, and the fight
6 was whenever you're sitting there and you're
7 talking to the people and you're talking to the
8 legislators and you're trying to get them to
9 understand what you want.

10 But when -- there is one thing I'm going
11 to tell you and you can think about me ever how
12 you want to and that's your privilege.

13 JAMES MILLER:

14 I don't hate you, sir, not one bit. I'm
15 not like that. I'm not a hater. I just think you
16 could have done a better job for our fishermen.

17 JOE SPRAGGINS:

18 Well, you can think the way you want to
19 on that and that's your privilege. Okay?

20 JAMES MILLER:

21 Yes, sir.

22 JOE SPRAGGINS:

23 But you've have not been there with me
24 and you've not been in the fight I've been in and
25 you've not seen what I've done.

1 But I also understand two things. I
2 understand that I -- that the legislators set the
3 rules for the State of Mississippi and, I, as the
4 Director of the Department of Marine Resources,
5 will follow those rules because that's what I'm
6 here for.

7 Now, if there is a way that we can
8 change them, I'm all for it. Let's go for it and
9 look at it. But for people to try to tell me that
10 they didn't know about this, they're not telling
11 the truth. They knew about this and they knew it
12 was going on.

13 JAMES MILLER:

14 Well, I've been a license holder --
15 listen, I've been a license holder for a long
16 time. Why didn't you send a letter to my mailbox?

17 JOE SPRAGGINS:

18 Why didn't you -- all right.

19 JAMES MILLER:

20 Whoa. Hey, look. I don't have a
21 computer. Why didn't you send a license to --

22 JOE SPRAGGINS:

23 Why didn't I send a letter to --

24 JAMES MILLER:

25 Everybody that owns a license.

1 JOE SPRAGGINS:

2 -- to everybody that does shrimp? Why
3 didn't I send them that does finish? Why didn't I
4 send them that does crabs?

5 JAMES MILLER:

6 This is about oysters.

7 JOE SPRAGGINS:

8 Why didn't I do it every time we change
9 any rules? That's what it's for.

10 You know, look, Mr. Miller, you knew
11 about it.

12 JAMES MILLER:

13 You're wrong.

14 JOE SPRAGGINS:

15 Well, I don't see how you didn't.

16 JAMES MILLER:

17 You're wrong, sir. I'd have been up
18 here complaining then.

19 JOE SPRAGGINS:

20 Well, I don't see how you didn't know
21 about it --

22 JAMES MILLER:

23 Oh, you don't?

24 JOE SPRAGGINS:

25 -- because I was told the other day that

1 a lot of the people, the oystermen themselves came
2 up here and sat down with our staff and talked to
3 them. And they sat down and talked to them about
4 it. They just didn't feel like they could qualify
5 financially.

6 But not a single one, not a single one
7 ever called me and said, hey, can you help me try
8 to change this because this is the way we're doing
9 it? There ain't a one -- you know, this a two-way
10 street, sir. Why didn't you pick up the phone and
11 call me?

12 JAMES MILLER:

13 I call you all the time.

14 JOE SPRAGGINS:

15 Yeah. And I talk to you.

16 JAMES MILLER:

17 I call you all the time, sir. Why
18 didn't you call me back?

19 JOE SPRAGGINS:

20 Well, you didn't call me lately.

21 CRYSTAL MATTA:

22 I took a message.

23 JAMES MILLER:

24 Okay. Well, what you mean I didn't
25 call?

1 JOE SPRAGGINS:

2 Well, I didn't know it. Okay?

3 JAMES MILLER:

4 I don't hate you. I told you. I just
5 think that you've done a poor job for us
6 fishermen.

7 JOE SPRAGGINS:

8 I'm just trying to tell you this is a
9 two-way street. You can do it the same.

10 JAMES MILLER:

11 It ain't a one-way street.

12 JOE SPRAGGINS:

13 We going to walk out of here shaking
14 hands.

15 JAMES MILLER:

16 Oh, absolutely.

17 JOE SPRAGGINS:

18 We might not like each other, but that's
19 what we're going to do.

20 JAMES MILLER:

21 Absolutely. I'm not hating on you.

22 JOE SPRAGGINS:

23 All right, buddy. Thank you.

24 JAMES MILLER:

25 All right. You have a nice day.

1 CAM ROBERDS:

2 Thank you.

3 Next up is Jimmy.

4 JIMMY ROWELL:

5 My questions have been answered already.

6 Thank you.

7 CAM ROBERDS:

8 Okay. Thank you.

9 All right. Mr. John Livings, name and
10 city.

11 JOHN LIVINGS:

12 I'm John Livings, Pass Christian,
13 Mississippi.

14 I was just coming to see about the reef,
15 but you had mentioned you was wanting to do it
16 later. I was going to make sure we're still going
17 to try to stay at the 18,000 sacks and then
18 reassess it. Is that the plan?

19 JOE SPRAGGINS:

20 I'm sorry. What did you say?

21 JOHN LIVINGS:

22 For the oyster season, are we still
23 sticking to the 18,000 sacks before it closes
24 down?

25 JOE SPRAGGINS:

1 Oh, we're going -- yeah. We're not
2 going to change that number if we can get to
3 there.

4 JOHN LIVINGS:

5 Okay.

6 JOE SPRAGGINS:

7 I'm sorry. Let me put it to them.
8 We're not -- you know, we're not changing our
9 numbers. That's not what we're trying to do. I
10 mean, we're looking at it. Right now, what, we're
11 at 8,000, 7,000-something?

12 JOHN LIVINGS:

13 Yeah.

14 JOE SPRAGGINS:

15 So, you know, we're not even halfway
16 there, so if -- the problem that's happened,
17 Mr. Livings, is that the weather hasn't cooperated
18 a whole lot, you know what I'm talking about, with
19 the rivers and everything else.

20 JOHN LIVINGS:

21 Right.

22 JOE SPRAGGINS:

23 And once that river crests to a certain
24 point, you know, we have to. Once it gets above a
25 certain point, we have to. And so at that point,

1 you know, we try to go back and sample every way
2 to open it back up.

3 I don't have a problem doing it in
4 February and March. I don't think there's a
5 problem, one, in March of harvesting oysters.

6 JOHN LIVINGS:

7 Even April. We used to work in April.

8 JOE SPRAGGINS:

9 Even April, yes, sir. I don't have a
10 problem, one, with that.

11 JOHN LIVINGS:

12 I think another thing we may ought to
13 look at is our Pearl River stage because
14 everything is based on Pearl River, but everyone
15 here knows that since Katrina the marsh is
16 below -- it's gone. So that water that's coming
17 out is not diverting like it used to. It goes out
18 through Three Mile now, and so maybe the 11 feet
19 is not where we need to be. Maybe it needs to be
20 14, 15 feet.

21 JOE SPRAGGINS:

22 And I have addressed that. Me and you
23 talked about that the other day, and I have
24 addressed that with the staff and they're looking
25 into it now. And the question is, how can we do

1 something to get it changed. And we're going to
2 look at it. It's not going to be a simple thing,
3 so it won't change in the next 24 hours or, you
4 know, two months, but it will take something.

5 But we are looking at it and we're
6 trying to decide what could we do. Could we lower
7 that number? Could we make it work and -- so, you
8 know, to where, in other words -- or raise the
9 height as far as instead of 11'1", maybe we can go
10 to 12 foot. Maybe we can go to 12'6". Maybe we
11 can go to something else.

12 JOHN LIVINGS:

13 Used to be 14 way back.

14 JOE SPRAGGINS:

15 But I'm just saying a number. Maybe we
16 can put a number up there, but that's what we are
17 looking at, sir. We are. We did not turn away
18 from that. We're looking at it to see if there's
19 a way to do it.

20 JOHN LIVINGS:

21 All right. And like the southern reefs
22 that we talked about, like Telegraph, I believe
23 that's why they're not growing, because the marsh
24 is gone.

25 JOE SPRAGGINS:

1 Yeah.

2 JOHN LIVINGS:

3 It's not getting the freshwater that it
4 needs. That's why the shells are deteriorating.

5 JOE SPRAGGINS:

6 And I've got a thing here. I know we --
7 me and you talked about the Long Beach Reef. You
8 remember we talked about it?

9 JOHN LIVINGS:

10 Yep.

11 JOE SPRAGGINS:

12 And I have got a thing and basically the
13 area has been unclassified since 2006, and the
14 reclassification primarily resulted from the lack
15 of harvestable resources. And the reef assessment
16 from 2006 to 2010 show spat shell in the area.
17 However, only four percent survived to the market
18 size during that time.

19 Rick, you're sitting there. You help me
20 with this. Come up and talk to him real quick
21 because I want him to understand that we did look
22 into this already for you. Okay?

23 JOHN LIVINGS:

24 Okay.

25 JOE SPRAGGINS:

1 And we're not going to take that off
2 your three minutes.

3 RICK BURRIS:

4 There was some confusion on that and we
5 went and looked back at it and it was 2006
6 whenever the area was reclassified. I want to say
7 it hasn't been harvested since then because it
8 was -- because it was reclassified.

9 But we've looked at the area and we
10 haven't found any sign of any growth on it, and we
11 think that the cause for the lack of resource on
12 it is, I think after Katrina there was some
13 discharge from Long Beach, from the USM Long Beach
14 campus that was cut off and so there wasn't any
15 freshwater getting over there to keep those
16 oysters. The oysters that were there weren't
17 thriving, so it's pretty much a dead reef since
18 about 2006.

19 JOHN LIVINGS:

20 I think it was, '04, right?

21 JOE SPRAGGINS:

22 And we did go and dive it the other
23 day -- or drag it? Didn't we test it the other
24 day?

25 RICK BURRIS:

1 Yes, sir.

2 JASON RIDER:

3 We pulled a dredge.

4 JOE SPRAGGINS:

5 And we didn't see any oysters over
6 there, so we did go look at it.

7 JOHN LIVINGS:

8 Yeah. I worked it before they
9 cultivated it. In 2004 is when it was -- that's
10 when the reef was destroyed.

11 RICK BURRIS:

12 And it was reclassified. Once it's
13 reclassified to unclassified, you can't open it up
14 for harvest because you don't have that data.

15 JOHN LIVINGS:

16 Okay.

17 JOE SPRAGGINS:

18 Okay.

19 JOHN LIVINGS:

20 My other question was -- and I don't
21 want to beat you up, but I'm kind of confused. I
22 don't understand why you're not more on our side.
23 When we were in Jackson, you seemed like you were
24 really perturbed at us. You didn't speak to us
25 much other than to just say there was nothing on

1 Telegraph. But, I mean, in my mind, you should be
2 our biggest fighter. Everything we're fighting
3 for keeps you in power.

4 JOE SPRAGGINS:

5 Well, sir, you've got to understand a
6 couple of things. When -- I learned a lesson
7 years ago. When people start throwing hatchets at
8 you, you stop and get your facts before you go
9 back and try to answer.

10 JOHN LIVINGS:

11 I never threw a hatchet at you.

12 JOE SPRAGGINS:

13 No, but there was several threw at me.

14 JOHN LIVINGS:

15 I can't speak for them. I can only
16 speak for me.

17 JOE SPRAGGINS:

18 And the point I'm getting at is, I did
19 not know you were coming.

20 JOHN LIVINGS:

21 Right.

22 JOE SPRAGGINS:

23 All right. That's Number 1. And
24 Number 2, I had a budget meeting 20 minutes after
25 that thing started, so I was in a high rush to

1 head there. And I had to do that so we had a
2 budget for the agency to still operate.

3 JOHN LIVINGS:

4 I get that. I get that.

5 JOE SPRAGGINS:

6 But I did not -- I did not -- the point
7 is, that was not the time or place to do that.
8 The time or place would have been for y'all to sit
9 down and maybe say, hey, can we all get together
10 and can we get a few legislators with us that are
11 part of this and sit down and just have a private
12 meeting on this and not a -- and just talk about
13 it and let them understand it. That's the way to
14 work it up there.

15 If you want to get something done,
16 that's the way. Because you can go up there and,
17 you know, bring a mass and do whatever, but they
18 just going to walk away from it, you know. Give
19 them a chance to sit down because they don't -- if
20 they get caught blindsided, they're not going to
21 listen to it either because they don't know.
22 They're going to listen, but they're not going to
23 know what to tell you.

24 JOHN LIVINGS:

25 Yeah.

1 JOE SPRAGGINS:

2 And so sit down, have a private meeting
3 with them. Ask for them to have a private
4 meeting. Sit down with them and talk to them like
5 y'all did here a few weeks ago. You sat down and
6 had Senator Thompson and them there and y'all had
7 a meeting in Pass Christian or somewhere. I don't
8 remember where exactly it was. I was out of town.
9 But anyway, y'all had a private meeting and talked
10 about it.

11 That's the way to do it and talk to them
12 that way, because if you go storming in there,
13 they're not going to -- you know, they're going to
14 listen, but there's not much they can do.

15 JOHN LIVINGS:

16 Well, being that you left pretty quick,
17 Mike Thompson actually come to us and stopped us
18 and we had a meeting up there with him.

19 JOE SPRAGGINS:

20 Well, great. Great.

21 JOHN LIVINGS:

22 But I would have liked for you to have
23 been in there with it.

24 JOE SPRAGGINS:

25 I wished I could. I didn't know about

1 it.

2 JOHN LIVINGS:

3 But yeah, he actually come to us, so it
4 worked, what we did, by going up there.

5 JOE SPRAGGINS:

6 Yeah, but, I mean -- the point I meant,
7 going up there, I'm not telling you not to do it.

8 JOHN LIVINGS:

9 Right.

10 JOE SPRAGGINS:

11 What I'm saying is, get it all organized
12 before you walk in there and sit down and see if
13 you can get some meetings with some people.

14 JOHN LIVINGS:

15 To tell you the truth, our purpose of
16 going up there and not telling y'all was because
17 we didn't want them to come up with something else
18 against us. That was the purpose of not telling
19 you we were coming up there and it worked because
20 we did get a meeting with him, which it didn't
21 accomplish anything.

22 JOE SPRAGGINS:

23 Okay. And I don't think -- and, you
24 know, I don't think there was anything up there
25 that they were going to bring anything different.

1 And they want to help. You've got to
2 understand, too, when they do those things and
3 they have a meeting, they have an agenda for that
4 meeting and that's what they're going to bring up.

5 JOHN LIVINGS:

6 Yeah.

7 JOE SPRAGGINS:

8 And when y'all went to the Senate, I was
9 there with you. I saw you sitting there. I
10 didn't even open my mouth to anything at the
11 Senate, though, because I wasn't asked any
12 questions and so I didn't open my mouth. And
13 neither did one of y'all, because I think it was
14 y'all sitting there. Y'all were listening.

15 JOHN LIVINGS:

16 Yeah. Exactly.

17 JOE SPRAGGINS:

18 You wanted to see were they going to
19 bring this bill out.

20 JOHN LIVINGS:

21 Yeah. He spoke to us after that one
22 also.

23 JOE SPRAGGINS:

24 Yeah. They were going to bring that
25 bill out anyway because we had already talked to

1 them. They told us they were.

2 But the point I'm getting at is, just be
3 a little bit -- call them, talk to them, ask them
4 to come sit with you, ask them to do it. They
5 don't mind doing that. They'll do it with you.
6 Talk to them because that's who you need to -- you
7 need to have a good conversation with them to
8 where you're sitting down in an organized fashion
9 and tell them why you're thinking what you're
10 thinking. But do two things, also have your facts
11 together.

12 JOHN LIVINGS:

13 That's right. Well, I've been -- I
14 didn't mean to cut you off.

15 JOE SPRAGGINS:

16 And also have your facts together and
17 also make sure you're telling the truth --

18 JOHN LIVINGS:

19 That's right.

20 JOE SPRAGGINS:

21 -- you know. Because when you embellish
22 something, they'll find out and it will just be
23 like (indicating), you know. Same way you are.
24 When somebody talks to you and they ask you and
25 they tell you something, you listen to them.

1 First off, is this 100 percent, they're telling
2 you, the truth, so -- and then after that if you
3 find out they didn't, you want -- you've got a
4 little different opinion of them.

5 JOHN LIVINGS:

6 Right.

7 JOE SPRAGGINS:

8 Because you know they -- if they
9 deliberately did it. Now, if they didn't know it,
10 that's one thing. If they didn't understand why
11 they were saying what they said, that's a
12 different story because a lot of people talk about
13 something that they just don't know the facts.
14 All they know is what they know at that point.

15 But if they know that they have -- just
16 like when y'all come in here the other day and
17 people tried to tell me that y'all knew nothing
18 about this for three years, and then I come to
19 find out that there is a bunch of you that had
20 went and actually sat down with our staff and
21 others and talked about it.

22 JOHN LIVINGS:

23 Who was it? I don't know any fishermen
24 that --

25 JOE SPRAGGINS:

1 I don't recall, but you can -- the point
2 I'm getting at is, don't lie to me. I'm not going
3 to lie to you.

4 JOHN LIVINGS:

5 Yeah. Well, I can promise you I didn't
6 lie to you, sir. You come hang, spend one day
7 with me, you'll see.

8 JOE SPRAGGINS:

9 I'm not arguing that.

10 JOHN LIVINGS:

11 I work from 6:00 in the morning till
12 about 9:00 at night.

13 JOE SPRAGGINS:

14 But, you know, I think there is two
15 things if I had to make a decision on -- if I was
16 asking you what you ought to do right now.
17 Number 1, is you ought to still talk to your
18 legislators. Okay? I can't do it.

19 JOHN LIVINGS:

20 Right. But your voice is more than
21 ours.

22 JOE SPRAGGINS:

23 My voice has been there.

24 JOHN LIVINGS:

25 You can work with us and not be against

1 us, though.

2 JOE SPRAGGINS:

3 My voice has been there. As I told
4 Mr. Miller, my voice has been there, and this
5 staff can tell you my voice has been there, but it
6 didn't win.

7 JOHN LIVINGS:

8 Right. Well, maybe we all need to go
9 together and go with you and back you to fight for
10 it.

11 JOE SPRAGGINS:

12 And there is an Option 2 that we can
13 look at that we could possibly even do better and
14 we can take care of the fishermen.

15 JOHN LIVINGS:

16 Yeah. Well --

17 JOE SPRAGGINS:

18 I know it -- and I'm not going to tell
19 you something I can't tell you the truth on right
20 now, okay, but I'm working on something right now.

21 JOHN LIVINGS:

22 That's right. Yeah. But, I mean,
23 still, it's -- the whole goal of DMR is to protect
24 the resource.

25 JOE SPRAGGINS:

1 And that's exactly --

2 JOHN LIVINGS:

3 It's not to say, hey, every director, in
4 the past took care of this reef and now all of a
5 sudden we going to lay down and give it away, no.
6 I mean, we will fight with you if that's what you
7 really want to do.

8 JOE SPRAGGINS:

9 We'll fight together.

10 JOHN LIVINGS:

11 What we seen up there said that you
12 wasn't -- you was for the lease.

13 JOE SPRAGGINS:

14 No. I just -- what I told them was
15 after -- hey, it's just like anything else. When
16 you sit down and you look at it and you know that
17 there is a battle here and if that -- I am not the
18 one that brought the lease up.

19 JOHN LIVINGS:

20 Right. But you could have opposed it at
21 that time.

22 JOE SPRAGGINS:

23 I did. And then whenever I talked
24 about -- I told you I went back and even talked
25 about the resources that you're concerned about,

1 really, the main resources that you're concerned
2 about, a lot of them. I sat down and told them
3 why in the world would we do this? Why would we
4 go forward with this? Why would we give resources
5 away that we have already put assets to? Why
6 would we do any of that? And I fought that
7 battle, and their answer came back.

8 And you can talk to the staff. We
9 started out with numbers and then it just kept
10 getting to this point and we come out of there
11 with 20 percent, and that was what we came out of
12 there with. And then the only good part about it
13 is we asked for some of the 20 percent to be
14 different than what we got and we didn't get it.

15 JOHN LIVINGS:

16 Yeah. Well, the legislators are not
17 telling the truth either because they told us to
18 our face that you was only willing to keep
19 20 percent.

20 JOE SPRAGGINS:

21 No, that's not true.

22 JOHN LIVINGS:

23 That you wanted to lease it all out.
24 That's what they told us.

25 JOE SPRAGGINS:

1 Well, I don't know which legislator said
2 that, but I don't think that's true.

3 JOHN LIVINGS:

4 It was Mike.

5 JOE SPRAGGINS:

6 Well, I don't want to disagree with
7 Senator Thompson, but I will look at him -- and he
8 knows that I did not say that's all I wanted to
9 keep.

10 JOHN LIVINGS:

11 Right. I'm just telling you what he
12 told us, so, you know, you -- when you tell us
13 something --

14 JOE SPRAGGINS:

15 Now, he may have been saying that I
16 agreed to the 20 percent because I did because I
17 didn't have a choice at that point.

18 JOHN LIVINGS:

19 Right. Well, that's -- I mean, you
20 weren't there, but, yeah, that's not what he said.

21 JOE SPRAGGINS:

22 Okay. Well, once again, we'll work at
23 it. I met with y'all last time. I told you. I
24 said, just go back and talk to them more and just
25 -- but do it organized.

1 JOHN LIVINGS:

2 Yeah. Well, we were kind of led to go
3 there by -- I'm not going to say his name, but he
4 told us to get proof and have everything in order
5 and then come with a bunch of fishermen and he
6 would stop this.

7 JOE SPRAGGINS:

8 Well, I don't know who --

9 JOHN LIVINGS:

10 And he didn't do anything he said he was
11 going to do and we provided him with
12 everything that we -- what he asked for.

13 JOE SPRAGGINS:

14 I don't know who said that.

15 Yeah. Y'all worked that yourselves,
16 but --

17 JOHN LIVINGS:

18 Right. But that's what I'm saying. We
19 could work it together and maybe get a lot more
20 done.

21 JOE SPRAGGINS:

22 Hey, let's be organized.

23 JOHN LIVINGS:

24 If you really want to keep the reef,
25 we're willing to do whatever you need to do from

1 us to go fight with you.

2 JOE SPRAGGINS:

3 Let's go. Let's get together and get
4 organized.

5 JOHN LIVINGS:

6 Thank you.

7 CAM ROBERDS:

8 All right. Mr. Ryan Bradley, name and
9 city, please.

10 RYAN BRADLEY:

11 Ryan Bradley, Long Beach. I'm the
12 executive director of Mississippi Commercial
13 Fisheries United, and these comments are in
14 regards to this private leasing program.

15 The majority of Mississippi's commercial
16 oyster fishermen and our members continue to
17 oppose the private leasing of our historic natural
18 bottom public oyster reefs.

19 And to your point about, you know,
20 working with the lawmakers and getting with them
21 ahead of time, we did sit down with several of
22 them ahead of time before we went up to Jackson
23 here recently. We sat down with Mike Thompson.
24 We sat down with Brent Anderson.

25 We had three different lawmakers

1 introduce legislation this session to address our
2 concerns. We had two of these bills -- two out of
3 three of these bills are still active and working
4 through the legislation today. Any of those that
5 want to follow along, that's HB1102 and Senate
6 Bill 2263, and so we're going to continue working
7 those bills.

8 And, you know, our goal is to completely
9 repeal this private leasing legislation, this law
10 that's allowing this. We don't believe in it. We
11 don't believe that it's the correct course of
12 action to continue to maintain and support our
13 oyster reefs, and so we're going to continue
14 working those.

15 We would like to thank Representatives
16 Carolyn Crawford, Timmy Ladner and Senator Philman
17 Ladner for introducing those pieces of legislation
18 and hearing the concerns of our fishermen. They
19 made decisive action and we're still working that
20 and have their support and we're going to continue
21 working these bills.

22 Moving forward, you know, short of a
23 full repeal of this legislation or this law that
24 allows and enables the Department to lease these
25 historic natural reefs, you know, we'll be looking

1 for compromises. You know, can we roll back the
2 percentages that the State is allowed to lease? I
3 believe it will probably be wiser and the
4 fishermen believe it will be wiser to ease into
5 this private leasing.

6 This data that we showed today shows
7 tremendous recovery of our reefs and we're poised
8 for a really great recovery and we expect to see
9 those oysters throughout the Sound based on what
10 we're seeing currently, as long as we can keep
11 that spillway closed. And, General, I know you're
12 working hard to keep that closed.

13 The fishermen contend that the current
14 lease program criteria set by the Legislature does
15 not give ample consideration for a historic
16 traditional oyster fishermen. In fact, when we
17 look at the qualifications, hardly any of the
18 other commercial fishermen are eligible to qualify
19 for this program. They do not meet the financial
20 stability requirements that are mentioned and
21 outlined in the law.

22 You know, I really wished that we would
23 have known more about this data. My question is,
24 this stock assessment data, was that shared with
25 the public before we out for private lease

1 applications?

2 JOE SPRAGGINS:

3 Ryan -- Rick or Jason, when is the last
4 time that we did -- I'd have to go back and look
5 at meetings because I don't have them in front of
6 me right now, Ryan, but I can go back and look at
7 whenever we did it. Because we looked last year
8 and we looked the year before because I kept
9 asking for an oyster season. And we kept looking,
10 but I'll find out and get that you information.

11 RYAN BRADLEY:

12 Well, and we will admit that since the
13 Commission has become advisory, we haven't been
14 following along as closely as we used to. We used
15 to come to these meetings every month and attend
16 and participate. Since it's advisory, General, I
17 know how to contact you. I can call you and
18 advise you if we need to.

19 But moving forward here, you know, for
20 example, if we would have known what was on these
21 reefs in this private leasing program, the
22 fishermen could have went and applied for areas
23 that are -- currently have oysters that we're
24 leasing out and they could have factored the
25 harvest of those oysters into their economic

1 business model so that the money that they would
2 generate from the oysters that's on the ground now
3 could help generate revenue to continue to fund
4 the cultivation and maintenance of these reefs.
5 That would have been a way that we could have got
6 our fishermen to participate.

7 JOE SPRAGGINS:

8 Ryan, in that comment, one of the things
9 that when we were looking at it, obviously, they
10 wanted to know because of -- last year, you know,
11 we looked at it and some of the things the way the
12 grading came out is people that didn't, you know,
13 really have anything at all. All they had to do
14 was say they could do this and say they can do
15 that. And then it came out, wait a minute. This
16 is not really factual data about what's going on
17 here, so that's why we backed up and regrouped.
18 All right?

19 I don't know that this would have been
20 something that would have helped you at all if
21 you'd have known, and I'll tell you why. Because
22 the way the criteria was set up, it had to prove
23 what -- you only got graded on what you had done
24 in the past, okay, and what you were capable of
25 doing in the future. That's the way the criteria

1 was written, and it was written to say that we
2 used -- and Jason and Rick, what was it? Right at
3 \$4,000 a cubic -- I mean, an acre? That was the
4 number you had to say that you could cultch, about
5 4,000 -- you had the capability of being able to
6 do that.

7 And if you rented -- if you wanted to go
8 and lease 500 acres, you had to be able to do 250
9 of those acres in the first five years to that
10 criteria.

11 And Rick, Jason, y'all tell me if I'm
12 off track here somewhere, off in another world.

13 But the deal is, it was written that
14 way. And whenever you look at it, the
15 financial -- if you think of how much that costs,
16 if you just take 100 acres and you had to -- and
17 you had to go and cultch 50 acres, that's a lot of
18 money. And that's what the numbers are that
19 they're looking at. And their idea was and they
20 came back -- and one of the things that I fought
21 with -- and I may be part of the problem here,
22 okay, because I fought for -- I don't want
23 somebody just to come in and take the resource and
24 walk away with it. I want somebody that's going
25 to come in if they do it, that they're going to

1 maintain it and that we're not going to just take
2 the resource and walk away with it.

3 So I don't think that being able -- and
4 here's what I'm trying to get at with you. I know
5 what you're asking. All right. Just say that we
6 had taken the Pass Marianne Reef, you know, or
7 whatever that had oysters on it and you -- I don't
8 think it would allow it in the way it was written
9 for you to say that I'm going to use this as a
10 resource to be able to qualify, and I don't think
11 it would have worked that way.

12 I don't know if we could have helped
13 either way on that because the way it was written.
14 But, I mean, if we didn't -- as far as the
15 resource itself, I'm going to let you know what we
16 did as far as putting it public, out there, you
17 know, and where we're at. Okay?

18 RYAN BRADLEY:

19 Okay. General, I appreciate that. You
20 know, I can say as a fishery community, a lot of
21 these fishermen feel that they've been misled on
22 not only the need and purpose for the private
23 leasing program, but also the health and abundance
24 of the oysters on our public reefs. And, you
25 know, we wish we had a little bit better access to

1 some of this data ahead of time. You may have
2 already put some of that out there. Again, some
3 of that could be on us for not following along
4 closer to the process.

5 You know, there's been a lot of myths
6 postulated about the need for the private leasing
7 that we believe simply just do not hold water.
8 Some of the ones, I just want to go through them
9 quickly.

10 You know, we've heard things like, you
11 know, Louisiana has been able to recover their
12 oysters much quicker down in this Three Mile area.

13 We've heard those arguments that, oh,
14 well, these private lease guys right across the
15 state line, they were able to recover much
16 quicker.

17 I wanted to point out that the State of
18 Louisiana spent extensive amount of money cultch
19 planting that area down there shortly after the
20 Bonnet Carré Spillway, so it's not a very real
21 fair assessment to compare that to what we've got
22 going on in Mississippi.

23 I also would like to point out that
24 Louisiana allows their private leaseholders to go
25 onto the public oyster reefs and transplant and

1 relay from the public reefs to their private
2 leases, and they allow those private leaseholders
3 to do that before they open those reefs to the
4 public. And that is a major difference in
5 Louisiana's program and our program that makes
6 theirs work.

7 And that leads us to the question, is
8 that the intent of the State or is that the intent
9 of our Legislature? Is that the next phase that
10 we're going to see in this private leasing? I
11 know we're keeping 20 percent now, but eventually
12 these private leasers come to the legislature and
13 say, hey, we want that 20 percent too. Can we use
14 it as a seed ground?

15 You know, that is the concern from the
16 fishermen. I don't think there's anything in the
17 statute that would protect us from that currently,
18 so we're going to work to address those concerns.

19 JOE SPRAGGINS:

20 Ryan, if I could real quick --

21 RYAN BRADLEY:

22 Yes, sir.

23 JOE SPRAGGINS:

24 -- that is by no means the intent that
25 we see in there. I have seen that and, you know,

1 they let them harvest them at two inches or
2 whatever, you know, and then take them and put
3 them on their private leases. That is not any
4 intention on our part that I know of, and I
5 haven't seen anything in legislation that says
6 that.

7 But maybe you might -- maybe you brought
8 up a point that we need to put that in legislation
9 that they can't do that, you know --

10 RYAN BRADLEY:

11 Right.

12 JOE SPRAGGINS:

13 -- and because that's -- Number 1, we
14 don't want to do that because then that's
15 really -- to me, I don't see how they could
16 possibly do it and go and do it because that's
17 taking, spending state and federal taxpayer
18 dollars and giving it to private business and I
19 don't think we can do that.

20 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

21 That's what you're doing now.

22 JOE SPRAGGINS:

23 And now, you're going to say, well, wait
24 a minute, though. You did that before, you know,
25 over here with the -- if you do these leases over

1 here. I brought that up and -- I brought that up
2 and that's exactly what I brought up to the
3 legislature and talked about it. And their idea
4 was that they didn't think that the people
5 would -- you know, if big companies got that, they
6 would do anything to hurt it.

7 Now, I will tell you whenever -- you
8 know, I don't want to say that Joe Spraggins
9 wasn't for leasing at all. Yes, Joe Spraggins is
10 for leasing to a point. And I just told the
11 legislature I don't have the funds or the people
12 to maintain properly the 12,000 acres roughly that
13 we have, and I don't have that when they asked me
14 about it.

15 Now, the number 80/20 was not that
16 number, you know. We could maintain -- because
17 what we could do, we could do a lot of cultching
18 this area this time, this area next time, this
19 area next time. And, you know, could I do 80
20 percent? No, it wouldn't help me. I can tell you
21 that. You know, I probably couldn't take care of
22 80 percent, but I could take care of a number more
23 than 20 percent.

24 RYAN BRADLEY:

25 I hear you. A similar question, is it

1 the State's intent to allow the relay of oysters
2 from these areas for like Pascagoula Reef? We
3 seen that that area was leased in the last year's
4 applications. Is that the intent, that these
5 areas that are currently closed for direct harvest
6 for consumption to allow these private leasers to
7 lease these areas to relay the oysters? Is that
8 the intent?

9 JOE SPRAGGINS:

10 No. And, you know, the -- over there,
11 what, at Graveline Bayou, that area?

12 RYAN BRADLEY:

13 Uh-huh.

14 JOE SPRAGGINS:

15 And -- yeah. Pascagoula, that is a --
16 some of that area got to be restricted. It was
17 prohibited for a long time and some of it got to
18 be prohibited -- I mean, to restricted to the
19 point to where we couldn't move oysters.

20 Well, let me tell you something, those
21 oysters cannot be harvested and sold that -- right
22 there at that point.

23 RYAN BRADLEY:

24 Right.

25 JOE SPRAGGINS:

1 Because if they're harvested and sold
2 there, then they won't meet the criteria to meet
3 the health issue. They would have to take them --
4 any of them that's in the restricted area would
5 have been taken and depurated for at least
6 14 days, I believe, is the number. Rick, is that
7 right? Jason, is that right?

8 JASON RIDER:

9 Yes.

10 RYAN BRADLEY:

11 And that's what we're referring to,
12 General. Is that the intent of the State to allow
13 that, the private leasers to lease that Pascagoula
14 Reef to relay those oysters to their private
15 leaser?

16 JOE SPRAGGINS:

17 Rick is looking at me, so y'all help me.
18 I don't know anything about this.

19 RICK BURRIS:

20 Yeah. There is some areas over there
21 for lease and -- for leasing and that is an
22 opportunity if someone wanted to go in there and
23 harvest those oysters. They could not, like you
24 said, put them in the market without going through
25 the depuration process, so they would have to move

1 them from one area to another before they're
2 available for harvest if they have their own. But
3 they're -- I would say that's --

4 JOE SPRAGGINS:

5 But I can tell you they can't count that
6 as if -- how they qualify.

7 RYAN BRADLEY:

8 Okay.

9 JOE SPRAGGINS:

10 And I -- but I don't --

11 RICK BURRIS:

12 And, yeah, we also have a state-owned
13 reef over there as well that we will continue to
14 maintain.

15 JOE SPRAGGINS:

16 Okay. I guess -- you know, now that I
17 think about it, Ryan, what you're asking, that if
18 you owned a reef anywhere in the Gulf, you could
19 move your oysters from one reef to another if you
20 have two different reefs. That's your -- if you
21 leased it, you could move either way.

22 So I guess that's -- and thinking about
23 that, yeah, they could possibly do that, but it
24 would be a situation that they would have to let
25 us know what was going on and it wouldn't be a --

1 and that could be some seeds that's coming there
2 that I had never thought about. But I appreciate
3 you.

4 RYAN BRADLEY:

5 Well, that is concerning for us because
6 that Pascagoula reef is a tremendous seed reef for
7 the State of Mississippi, you know. We've relayed
8 a tremendous amount of oysters out of that area
9 and transplanted them to other places. Go ahead.

10 JASON RIDER:

11 So to that point, I just want to
12 reiterate, we are keeping that state-owned reef
13 over in the east, the Pascagoula reef, so --

14 RYAN BRADLEY:

15 The entire reef?

16 JASON RIDER:

17 The majority of it.

18 JOE SPRAGGINS:

19 But we are -- is there some that's over
20 there for lease, though? Is there some over in
21 that restricted area for lease?

22 JASON RIDER:

23 That are some areas over there that are
24 for lease, but we identified --

25 JOE SPRAGGINS:

1 What he's saying, though -- what he's
2 saying, Jason, is that if I lease that area, I
3 know I'm not going to sit there and try to
4 cultivate it, so we've got to look at that. And
5 that's going to be something we need to look at in
6 this lease, that if they're going to harvest the
7 stuff off of that, they've got to continue to
8 cultivate it and, you know -- and not to allow
9 somebody to go over there and take those and turn
10 around and put them on the private lease somewhere
11 else and then make all the -- we've got to look at
12 that. We've got to look into it.

13 JASON RIDER:

14 Okay.

15 RYAN BRADLEY:

16 So, you know, we're just beginning to
17 touch on some of the issues and concerns that we
18 foresee, you know, with the private leasing, but
19 we haven't even began to get into the difficulties
20 and challenges with enforcement challenges and
21 keeping the public and private leases, you know,
22 where people aren't stealing off of them. That's
23 a big concern.

24 I would note that Louisiana on many of
25 their vessels, require a vessel monitoring system,

1 GPS tracking on these boats so they know where
2 they're at at all times. To me, that would be the
3 best route to monitor what's going on because it's
4 really difficult for enforcement to monitor these
5 areas like Telegraph and other areas offshore
6 unless you're flying drones maybe. Maybe that
7 might be an enforcement tactic.

8 But, you know, to your point, General,
9 about, you know, saying that the State doesn't
10 have the resources or the capacity to manage these
11 oysters or restore them, you know, that's a
12 difficult thing for us to swallow, to accept
13 because every director that's been before you has
14 managed these oyster reefs and did what they
15 needed to do and they've done it with less money.
16 And so it's really hard for us to accept that
17 argument that the agency cannot do the job here.

18 And, you know, what I would say,
19 General, is, you know, if we're not able to do our
20 job, if I'm not able to do my job as a director,
21 if I was the director, then I would probably
22 resign because you're essentially telling these
23 fishermen that because you can't do your job, that
24 they should be out of a job and that's where we're
25 headed. And so that's where at with it.

1 You know, we don't agree with the fact
2 that the names of the leases are being withheld
3 from the public record. I would love to hear from
4 Sandy what the legal exemption is for not allowing
5 transparency of these names, the list of names.

6 JOE SPRAGGINS:

7 He's okay. He's okay.

8 RYAN BRADLEY:

9 The General will let me know when my
10 time is up.

11 General, I appreciate you allowing the
12 time to speak. My time has been interrupted
13 through the responses and questions.

14 I would like to say that we're on the
15 verge of a great success story for this agency on
16 the recovery of our oyster reefs. And to say that
17 the State can't do it or has not been able to do
18 it is really selling the staff here short within
19 the agency. They really deserve a big pat on the
20 back because the oyster assessment that we're
21 seeing, the oysters are coming back. Y'all are
22 doing your job. Things are starting to work.
23 Let's not give it away just too soon.

24 But with that, I will leave that there.
25 I appreciate the opportunity to indulge.

1 JOE SPRAGGINS:

2 Just a real quick thing, you know,
3 obviously, the directors prior to me, I'm not
4 going to say anything about what they've done and
5 what they haven't. I don't think a single one of
6 them ever went through Bonnet Carré in 2019.

7 RYAN BRADLEY:

8 I agree with that, General.

9 JOE SPRAGGINS:

10 I don't think any one of them have ever
11 seen the natural disasters that we've had in this
12 time frame. So, you know, they saw the Bonnet
13 Carré -- they saw it get torn up in 2005.

14 If you want to go to the '90s -- if you
15 go back to 2005 -- I was the first director after
16 that that saw anything -- and they saw the
17 hurricane. All right? The hurricane did some
18 damage, but it didn't do the damage that wiped it
19 totally out.

20 Then in 2011, they saw a Bonnet Carré
21 that was halfway devastating compared to what this
22 one was, but they haven't seen that. So did
23 they -- walk in their shoes? Then, I don't think
24 I have to worry about what they did or what they
25 didn't do.

1 I can tell you right now, if you think
2 that you can tell me how to manage it better, I
3 would love to hear your points, but I don't think
4 that you can tell me that you can show me the
5 resources that I have, that I have misspent them
6 any way because I have put them everywhere that I
7 possibly could to make it work as much as
8 possible. We're lucky to have the resources that
9 we have, but you don't have a clue what it takes
10 to manage 12,000 acres and if you do, you wouldn't
11 be saying that.

12 RYAN BRADLEY:

13 Well, I disagree with that assessment,
14 General. And, you know, your points about the
15 natural disasters, you're correct. We can't blame
16 you or this agency for the lack of oysters.

17 JOE SPRAGGINS:

18 You just did.

19 RYAN BRADLEY:

20 But you're the one saying that you can't
21 do it.

22 CAM ROBERDS:

23 All right. We're going to wrap it up.

24 RYAN BRADLEY:

25 But, General, that's exactly what you

1 just said is why the problems we've had with our
2 oysters, natural disasters, not because you can't
3 do your job, not because the agency doesn't have
4 the resources. So thank y'all. Have a great day.

5 CAM ROBERDS:

6 Trevor, spotted seatrout update.

7 TREVOR MONCRIEF:

8 All right. Spotted seatrout, cold kill
9 update, which is going to be another
10 straightforward topic to go through, but it's got
11 a few levels to it. If at any point you have any
12 questions as we run through here since we're going
13 to cover a bunch of different topics, just stop me
14 and we'll explain through.

15 So first off, obviously, y'all are aware
16 we've conducted basically annual stock assessments
17 since 2016. We did -- we were able to show
18 improvements overall to the spotted seatrout stock
19 resilience as a whole and we saw increases in
20 abundance over that time period.

21 Obviously, we had Bonnet Carré in 2019.
22 We tried to conduct a preliminary assessment in
23 2021, and essentially what we saw is that the
24 impacts from the Bonnet Carré Spillway and the
25 subsequent rainfall that occurred really had a

1 large impact on the index of abundance for spotted
2 seatrout, while we also had sustained catches of
3 the species over that time period, which basically
4 gave us a false signal as to what was going on in
5 the population.

6 So, obviously, we saw the catches.
7 We've had the dealings with red snapper and
8 everything else. We essentially had to go through
9 the removal examination on the species, similar to
10 what we did with red snapper. We are currently
11 transitioning to MS Creel, so that's laying into a
12 couple of different levels when it comes to us
13 actually running an assessment on the species.

14 And because of that, we decided to move
15 forward with index-based monitoring and really
16 this is what we've been pushing for across the
17 board, not only in our state, but also on the
18 federal side as well. This is more of a
19 commonsense approach basically saying we know what
20 data gives us a signal that we can rely on and
21 we're going to rely on that signal over time until
22 we get the landings time series corrected. And
23 we'll talk a little bit more about the landings
24 time series here in a minute.

25 So regulatory history, we haven't showed

1 this one in a while, but, obviously, we've had a
2 lot of changes in the species over time, not only
3 on the recreational side, but also on the
4 commercial side. The -- January 2017 was when the
5 15-inch minimum came into place on the species.
6 We had shifts in the endorsement requirements.
7 Those are the last two regulations. That first
8 one being the 20 percent of your income
9 requirement. 2022 was the \$1,000 finfish, \$5,000
10 in seafood to qualify.

11 If we look at our recreational and
12 commercial removals over time, this figure on the
13 left, that is going to be -- that's going to be
14 the recreational catch and that's going to be from
15 MRIP. You see I've got this red bar highlighted
16 here. That's an exceptionally high year in catch
17 in 2016. We'll go into more detail on that. You
18 can see 2024, we still don't have the last two
19 months because that's on a delay for two months
20 after the year for it to get finalized and sent to
21 us, so that one's not quite representative.

22 The interesting story's here on the
23 commercial side. So, obviously, we had a change
24 in the overall endorsement structure, given the
25 regulation changes I stated earlier. You can see

1 the impact from Bonnet Carré, '19 to '20, but
2 you've seen the endorsement number gradually
3 increase from 37 all the way up to 100. And you
4 see a step-wise increase also in the landings
5 where it was at 20,000 and now, this previous
6 year, we landed over 40,000 pounds of quota. So
7 we're moving in a positive trajectory on the
8 commercial side, and it looks like hopefully in
9 the next year or two we'll be right where we need
10 to be.

11 All right. So I talked about 2017. And
12 this is a little bit of a complicated subject and
13 I'm going to try to go through. You've heard this
14 story when it comes to red snapper. You've heard
15 it in a bunch of different ways. You probably
16 listened to it on the Council floor. You've seen
17 it across the board for the Gulf and the South
18 Atlantic, but essentially, there's been a
19 large-scale evaluation of MRIP landings really
20 over the last five years, and our staff have done
21 a lot of it.

22 Essentially, we looked at the
23 distribution of wave-specific landings for spotted
24 seatrout. A wave is a two-month period in the
25 year, and essentially what you see is some level

1 of patterning across all those waves. We know
2 what our fishery does and how it conducts itself.
3 It's fairly consistent over time, right, you have
4 peaks in the summertime and drop-offs in the
5 wintertime.

6 But if you'll look here at the figure on
7 the right, the top right, you can see the
8 distribution of wave-specific estimates across all
9 these different months. And you can see here on
10 the right that there's a huge scatter associated
11 with November and December and there's also a huge
12 number here on the shoreside for November and
13 December.

14 Both of those occurred in November and
15 December, which we know is not a very high-use
16 wave overall. And they were both 1 million pounds
17 and both of those occurred in 2016. And when you
18 combine those together, that leads to that huge
19 vol you saw in 2016. And that's problematic,
20 right? That's saying that we landed 5.4 million
21 pounds of spotted seatrout in a single year, which
22 isn't -- our fishery is not able to do that. So,
23 obviously, we're going to need to reconcile this
24 time series and that's going to take a little bit
25 of work, but we are going down that route through

1 MS Creel and the efforts that staff have
2 undertaken.

3 In that manner, we've updated you about
4 it a couple of times, but here's your first look
5 at basis of direct comparisons of the estimates.
6 So Creel is over here in your light green. MRIP
7 is in the blue. You can see there is still a
8 large vol difference, eight to 10 times across
9 these.

10 To put it in the logical scale, the wave
11 estimate here in Wave 3 is 1.2 million. That
12 would mean that essentially every single one of
13 our anglers on average would have to take between
14 12 and 15 trips in that two-month time period.
15 That's on average. And as you-all are aware,
16 that's not something that typically happens with
17 your regular angler.

18 If you look here at ours, essentially
19 it's saying that approximately one to two trips is
20 the average across the board, which makes a little
21 bit of sense when you start to think about it,
22 right? You should see this exponential decay.
23 Most folks aren't taking many and then you have
24 the few that are taking a lot.

25 If you look here on our right, so that

1 figure just shows the monthly distribution of
2 effort estimates with the Creel survey. And
3 remember, this is the first time we're doing it,
4 so, obviously, there's some learning curves and
5 everything else. And it's likely we were doing
6 some signal-to-noise analysis, stuff like that to
7 be able to look at the -- you know, the
8 uncertainty around these and which estimates are
9 reliable and where we see spikes.

10 And obviously we identify some spikes
11 here where you see this patterning disruption, and
12 so, obviously, there is some changes here. But
13 overall, the Creel survey has provided us the
14 exact pattern that we would expect to see in this
15 fishery. It's showing a pattern that's relative
16 to the fishery and that's the commonsense test
17 Number 1, and it seems to be passing.

18 So here's the overall index. And so,
19 like I said, this is the -- an index-based
20 monitoring approach. This isn't accounting for
21 removals in the assessment or anything else like
22 that. It's important to note that when you
23 include removals into the assessment, that is what
24 scales your biomass estimate.

25 So it's not quite representative for us

1 to think that our removals are 2 to 6 million over
2 this time period and that our biomass should be
3 justified based on that. And the variability that
4 the landings showed also indicates that that's
5 probably not the likely time series that we should
6 be using here.

7 So we used our fishery-independent
8 index, which essentially is sampling that occurs
9 across the entire state month by month. Staff
10 were sent out and this is basically what it looks
11 like, so I'll walk you through it.

12 Obviously, we had a higher level in the
13 beginning of the time series. We saw this
14 decline. We saw a big recruitment class come in
15 in '16 and '17 that was documented. Basically,
16 was smaller-sized classes pushing through the
17 fishery. In '17, it's a little bit -- it's
18 already been talked about in this meeting, but in
19 '17 we had record rainfall in the single month of
20 July. We had 22 inches of rain.

21 For those of you out on the water,
22 remember, you could probably walk across the boats
23 at East Ship. They were all stacked up. All the
24 fish were stacked up at the islands. It's likely
25 that that event had an impact on recruitment and

1 then basically for every two years since that
2 point we've seen some manner of impact.

3 So we've had the 22 inches of rain in
4 June during peak spawning season; '19, Bonnet
5 Carré opening. 2021 was record rainfall across
6 the entire Coast, so you obviously probably had
7 impacts here to recruitment over time. And
8 really, we've had a regular year for the last two
9 or three years, so 2022, 2023, 2024, with the
10 latter two being the most -- you know, basically
11 conducive to recruitment. And we see that uptick
12 right here in 2024 at the end of the time series.

13 So it does look like we're on a positive
14 trajectory. Things are looking good for spotted
15 seatrout. I know the fishery is doing well based
16 on everything we've observed and reports we're
17 getting from fishermen.

18 And I will go ahead and stop here and
19 get any of your questions about those previous
20 slides on the spotted seatrout and then I will
21 move to the cold kill.

22 CAM ROBERDS:

23 Any questions?

24 RONNIE DANIELS:

25 No, I'm good.

1 CAM ROBERDS:

2 I think we're good, Trevor. Keep
3 rolling.

4 TREVOR MONCRIEF:

5 All right. So we obviously are well
6 informed about the cold kills. So the background,
7 we had a multi-day freeze event, coupled with
8 eight inches of snow, which is unheard of in this
9 area. The kind of -- the difference between this
10 and what we've experienced in the past, we had
11 frozen precipitation directly into the system and
12 subsequent frozen runoff for multiple days.

13 The impacts observed that mainly we saw
14 were when the temperatures reached 40 degrees and
15 below, and I'll show you the difference between
16 that and a case example.

17 But the first thing we did here was
18 solicit some public reports, so we put out the
19 post on social media to try to get some folks just
20 to have eyes on the ground for us. That way, we
21 could spread out a little bit and see exactly what
22 was going on. Obviously, we had a lot of folks
23 reporting across the board and we were able to
24 really direct our path from there.

25 So we started out on Saturday. We had

1 some reports of obviously some fish out at the
2 islands, some larger fish, things like that, and
3 that was really where we were able to start.

4 But just to give you some perspective of
5 the event as a whole, this is the -- a long time
6 series, a 17-year time series of the Bangs Lake
7 Weather Stations over at the NERR. You can see
8 there's plenty of times where we see these
9 sub-40s, but if you look at the end of the time
10 series, we see this severe dip.

11 And now this data might need to still be
12 reconciled for a sensor being out of the water or
13 anything else like that, but it just shows you in
14 scale that the event we experienced is unlike one
15 we've seen in the last 17 years as a whole. And
16 that's likely why we saw the impacts that we saw.

17 I also did touch base with everyone's
18 favorite fisheries biologist, Jim Franks, who also
19 said that he has not seen anything like this in
20 his tenure while he's been here. It doesn't mean
21 that it hasn't happened. Just means we don't have
22 a reported observation of it.

23 So we had reports from across the Coast.
24 Most of these were restricted to mullet, right,
25 close to canals. Everything else that were around

1 there were in small tributaries and bayous. We
2 also observed two distinct reporting peaks, so one
3 was right after the event and one was when the
4 fish started smelling decomposed. So, obviously,
5 when the fish started to float, we started seeing
6 a lot more.

7 And that's something of note for the
8 future of everyone else who deals with these
9 events. Obviously, there's a lag period of when
10 these fish actually die and when they float, and
11 there's about four to five days that you really
12 have to keep an eye on these things to make sure
13 you're getting a full scope.

14 We did have reports of larger fish, like
15 I mentioned earlier, that began immediately
16 post-event, and the pattern of observations were
17 recognized essentially to be semi-enclosed lagoons
18 outside of the main watersheds in the State. And
19 so we used these reports as an initial guide to be
20 able to go.

21 So we started out at Round, Ship and
22 Horn Island, and these are basically the
23 semi-enclosed bays and lagoons. There's not a lot
24 of freshwater input or anything else like that.
25 We observed multiple species associated with these

1 kills. It was mullet, spotted seatrout, red drum,
2 black drum, and the concentrations varied across
3 systems. And you can see here in the bottom left,
4 that's a picture at Round Island and that is
5 basically a large-scale mullet kill. We've got
6 drone footage to go over that that we'll look at
7 here in just a minute.

8 You can see the size of some of these
9 spotted sea trout that were included. This one is
10 27 inches. There is an aerial view of that same
11 picture. This is spotted seatrout that were out
12 in another area and then red drum, sheepshead and
13 black drum, so it was really a multi-species kill
14 across the board that we observed.

15 So large picture, right, it's not doom
16 and gloom. We did not see -- we saw minimal
17 impacts across the major drainages on the west
18 side of the state and even at Cat Island, mainly
19 restricted to mullet across the board. In some
20 areas there were thousands, but there were not
21 many in a lot of the areas.

22 We saw a little bit of multi-species
23 impact in Graveline, but it was mainly mullet with
24 a couple of fish at the shallower areas that were
25 affected. The larger impacts were, as I

1 mentioned, at the barrier islands, Round Island
2 and also Grand Bay.

3 So here is a video. This is at Ship
4 Island, and I'm playing this because this is a --
5 there was a video that went out that spread across
6 social media and everyone pretty quick, showing a
7 lot of these fish in the water. And we went out
8 the following day because it was concerning to us,
9 so we went out and tried to at least enumerate and
10 see what we were seeing.

11 I know it's not good news, but for most
12 of this, this is mullet across the board, about
13 2,500 or so, a few thousand. And within them,
14 there were still spotted seatrout as you can see
15 piled up on the right, about 150 spotted seatrout,
16 50 red drum, 50 black drum. And so what was going
17 around is a large-scale trout kill. From our
18 observations, direct observations, it seemed to be
19 mainly restricted to mullet. This goes on through
20 the entirety of the area.

21 The next one we'll go to is the same one
22 I showed you a picture of at Round Island. So
23 thanks to IT staff, we were able to get out and
24 essentially take an aerial view. And you can see
25 as we go down, the kills themselves are 95 percent

1 mullet, but mixed in are larger spouted seatrout.
2 There's some -- a red drum here. You will see a
3 large spotted seatrout on the left here in just a
4 minute. And we're doing this to try to show
5 essentially what the distribution of the kill
6 looked like overall. Mainly restricted to mullet,
7 but these fish are mixed into that system as well.

8 I'll let this roll through for just a
9 little bit longer just so you can get a glimpse of
10 it, but it's mainly 95 percent mullet with species
11 mixed in. Now, obviously, your eyes look to the
12 large spotted seatrout there included in there, so
13 we tried to do a little bit more digging,
14 especially when it came to the next site, which
15 we'll go over, which is Grand Bay.

16 So this is obviously the area with the
17 largest amount of impacts overall. It was a
18 multi-species kill. We observed over 100,000
19 mullet in the area. We did get some drone
20 footage, but this picture here on the top right
21 really explains it all. You can see those fish
22 are stacked 20 to 30 deep along the shoreline.
23 And that occurred a mile from Bayou Cumbest all
24 the way out to Point of Pines, so there were --
25 all the way through there.

1 We obviously had some reports from local
2 fishermen in the area that have looked like Middle
3 Bayou had a lot of spotted seatrout in it and red
4 drum, so we essentially went off the path of if
5 that is the case, then it's a large probability
6 that every upper reef of the tributary is
7 impacted, and that is the case.

8 So we saw multiple large spotted
9 seatrout, undersized and slot size redfish
10 throughout the upper reaches and tried to cover as
11 much as we could. That there is basically what we
12 were met with. That's a 26-and-a-half-inch
13 spotted seatrout that's floating. That's what it
14 looks like. We scooped up two more fish that were
15 24 inches that were still on the bottom, so we
16 didn't have a full float at that point. We were
17 just getting there when they were starting to
18 float up.

19 But here is the case example, what I
20 wanted to show. So, once again, the steep peaks
21 here, sometimes that's due to things being out of
22 the water. Maybe the -- it was frozen around the
23 sensor or whatever else, but just look at the
24 general trend of when that line is under 40
25 degrees. This is Bayou Cumbest. This is where

1 all the mullet were. You can see it gets sub-40
2 for a large reach of time during the time period.

3 This is Bangs Lake. We also see sub-40
4 for a large period of time. And then this is
5 Bayou Heron, which we saw limited impacts
6 restricted to mullet. Not a multi-species kill,
7 and you can see that line barely gets below 40 in
8 that time period.

9 So really, it was a lot about the exact
10 habitat, how shallow it was and the amount of
11 runoff that was going into it that really
12 determined the impacts here.

13 And estimated totals, so I rounded these
14 off the best we could. We had multiple staff
15 doing observations. We tried to record what we
16 could, but essentially we're looking at 135,000
17 mullet, 1,175 spotted seatrout, 1,130 red drum,
18 550 black drum and 400 sheepshead. Now, that's
19 probably not the totality of everything, but that
20 should be a roundabout number of what we observed.

21 And while it is a staggering amount, it
22 is safe to say that the interior and the bulk of
23 the fishery was spared from this event, probably
24 because of the same things I indicated earlier,
25 the large amounts of volume of water moving

1 through the system. The depth of the system
2 really determined how far the impacts went.

3 So conclusions on the event, so we
4 obviously had observations across the Sound. The
5 interior of fishery is unaffected. We had
6 multi-species kills in a multitude of areas, but
7 what we need to focus on here is just the impact
8 we observed. The main concern that we had was
9 that the length composition of spotted seatrout in
10 the kill shows impact to larger size classes.

11 Smaller fish are in the interior, right.
12 They're sitting in the rivers everywhere else in
13 the deeper holes. These larger fish are out in
14 these areas and that's basically what we saw.

15 The black boxes here are the last
16 10 years. This is the length comps of the
17 recreational catch, and then what we see
18 essentially is that the affected size classes for
19 the kill are in the green and they stretch to the
20 right to the larger size classes associated with
21 the fishery.

22 These larger fish obviously produce more
23 eggs. They're more fecund, higher quality eggs,
24 everything else like that. It does present
25 somewhat of a concern to us that that's what

1 happened. But it does seem to be restricted to
2 those areas that we talked about, so it's probably
3 not a large magnitude.

4 So moving forward, our proposed next
5 steps are continue monitoring the fishery through
6 those independent monitoring measures and our
7 dependent side to be able to have any observations
8 in length distribution of catches or the catches
9 in the recreational fishery as well.

10 And we also want to monitor recruitments
11 of the fishery over the next few years to
12 determine if any impacts occurred to the
13 young-of-the-year. So I showed you that picture
14 after the event, but we caught some
15 young-of-the-year fish in the trawls, so hopefully
16 those -- all those fish survive and they'll be
17 able to make full recruitment status, but we are
18 going to monitor essentially the comps that we see
19 in our fishery-independent index to see if we are
20 getting those fish.

21 And we are developing currently a
22 project to monitor the repopulation of the
23 affected areas to inform potentially how these
24 future events are going to impact long-term. So
25 while it is a devastating scenario, this does

1 leave us in the case of having the opportunity to
2 conduct a natural experiment, one that we never
3 get to do unless something like this happened to
4 be able to see exactly how these areas populate,
5 whether there is a standing biomass around the
6 area, if it's transitory from the interior and
7 kind of how that all works. So we're trying to
8 make the best of the situation by doing that.

9 And with that, I'll take any questions
10 y'all have.

11 RONNIE DANIELS:

12 So my takeaway is our total abundance is
13 on or was on an uptick prior to this happening, so
14 that's good news. The fish kill itself didn't
15 look great, but it could have been a lot worse.

16 TREVOR MONCRIEF:

17 Absolutely.

18 RONNIE DANIELS:

19 So we came out relatively well.

20 TREVOR MONCRIEF:

21 Yeah. And we're trying to look at
22 essentially what I had listed earlier, the
23 large-scale freshwater events that occur and the
24 impacts they have. Right now, it's thought that
25 that's probably some level of recruitment impacts

1 and that's why essentially for the last -- you
2 know, every two years for the last eight years,
3 we've had something occur.

4 But in the last three years, we haven't
5 and then you start to see that uptick. You start
6 to see that swing in the fishery, especially in
7 the West, right? The West was mainly impacted
8 across the board, and then when we see the West
9 start to pick up, we start to see better
10 observations in the stock as a whole.

11 CAM ROBERDS:

12 It's interesting that the bigger trout
13 are the ones that aren't as resilient when it
14 comes to cold weather being older, but it's very
15 good information. Appreciate it, Trevor.

16 TREVOR MONCRIEF:

17 All right.

18 CAM ROBERDS:

19 Thank you, sir.

20 All right. Ms. Ayesha Gray with the
21 Grand Bay NERR, program update or --

22 JONATHAN PITCHER:

23 I'm definitely not Ayesha. I'm Jonathan
24 Pitcher. I'm the stewardship coordinator at the
25 NERR. Ayesha couldn't be here today, so I'm here

1 for her. I apologize for any gaps in my knowledge
2 of these slides, but I will do the best I can.
3 Substantially lighter topics.

4 So I'm just going to go through each
5 sector at the NERR and give you a short update of
6 things. This photo shows you Jeneil Patel. He's
7 our Davidson fellow right now. He's a graduate
8 student at Mississippi State. He is studying
9 phosphorous movements in Bangs Lake and Bangs
10 Bayou. And he's collecting bathymetry data right
11 now, is a big thing that he's been doing, and so
12 that's going to be a valuable dataset.

13 We've also collaborated with the
14 University of Florida to sample sediments in water
15 for PFASs, which stands for polyfluoroalkyl
16 substances, kind of throughout the Mississippi
17 Sound. So these are also called forever
18 chemicals. They're found in like flame retardants
19 and they don't go away. And we have no
20 information on them in Mississippi, so it's kind
21 of a cool project and we've helped with that for
22 the last couple of months.

23 And some of the data that Trevor showed
24 comes from the systemwide monitoring program at
25 Grand Bay, this 24/7 water quality monitoring.

1 We've kept this equipment running now, and we do
2 it all the time and so it comes in handy when we
3 have like fish kills and for a lot of other
4 reasons as well.

5 Did find a dead manatee. I guess that
6 was maybe about a week or 10 days ago and then
7 another one was found this past weekend, so that's
8 stemming from the cold, I'm sure. That's kind of
9 a rare thing that we find a dead manatee at Grand
10 Bay.

11 So in stewardship, we hosted some
12 livestock producers and we're forming a grazing
13 advisory team. This is a group of livestock folks
14 from the region. What we are trying to do is get
15 input on a grazing plan that we might use at Grand
16 Bay. We are, you know, actively doing grassland
17 restoration work. We feel like grazing could be
18 another tool in our toolbox and may be a very
19 valuable one.

20 So we had this group of livestock guys
21 out. We talked to them about our sites and our
22 plans and they gave us feedback. And it was a
23 very good event and we hope to have another one
24 before too long. They did -- they were all
25 cattlemen, so they were very emphatic that

1 pineywoods cows would be the best option for
2 vegetation management at Grand Bay.

3 So we do grassland restoration work and
4 we do monitoring of those grasslands. In the
5 wintertime, we're focused on migratory grassland
6 birds, so we're in the middle of those surveys
7 right now. We have 48 of those that we do in a
8 three-month period across 16 different sites.
9 We've detected over 90 species doing these
10 surveys. We've been doing them since 2019, I
11 believe. So we're in the middle of that, and it's
12 going well.

13 So with our Coastal training program,
14 they're working on some stormwater management
15 projects in the City of Moss Point. One that is
16 the furthest along is an EPA-funded project at the
17 Kreole Elementary School, and I believe they
18 actually started planting for that this weekend.
19 I don't know a ton about this project, but this
20 kind of shows you the overview of what it looks
21 like. You can see where the school is. They did
22 have substantial flooding problems on a regular
23 basis, and we've already had a fair amount of rain
24 since they have done this work, so they're seeing
25 that it's working already.

1 You can see here, these photos show you
2 where they did some excavation, a little over
3 1,100 feet of bio swales, five rain gardens,
4 native plantings. And like I said, it's already
5 been tested with the rain and the snow and it
6 seems to be working well.

7 And so this kind of shows you where they
8 fill in. They put in these perforated pipes that
9 drain the water and kind of pipe it to the
10 stormwater system faster without -- I don't know
11 if I should say faster, but less pressure flooding
12 and then they put gravel on top of that.

13 So like I said, the next steps were to
14 do the planting and they've had some school kids
15 out actually even yesterday doing some of the
16 plantings, and I think this project is almost
17 done, so pretty cool.

18 Okay. So as far as the education
19 sector, Jennifer Cumbest -- this was mentioned
20 earlier -- she was hired as the new education
21 coordinator. We are planning for the Celebrate
22 the Gulf Festival on April 5th.

23 And then we had two artwork shops in
24 January. It looks like about 24 people showed up
25 for that, so it was a success. You can see some

1 of the teak artwork that they did.

2 And then I think this is the last one.
3 We have a monthly Adventure Quencher where we have
4 people come out and they learn about what we're
5 doing at Grand Bay and they get to do something
6 like kayak. It's too cold for that, so we had a
7 sparrow sweep where we actually worked with
8 Mississippi State and we netted some Henslow's
9 sparrows, which are an endangered sparrow that
10 migrate down here. And we caught a few and talked
11 to them about -- talked to the kids about them.

12 And we did have a booth at the Biloxi
13 Boat Show as well. And I believe that's all I
14 have.

15 Any questions?

16 CAM ROBERDS:

17 Great to see all the educational
18 outreach you guys are always doing and the
19 programs. Those are great, great to watch and see
20 the update. Appreciate it.

21 JONATHAN PITCHER:

22 Appreciate that. All right. Thank you.

23 CAM ROBERDS:

24 All right. I think we got through the
25 other business, so with that being said, anybody

1 want to make a motion to close?

2 RONNIE DANIELS:

3 I'll make a motion.

4 MATTHEW MAYFIELD:

5 Second.

6 CAM ROBERDS:

7 All those in favor?

8 (Unanimous vote.)

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CERTIFICATE OF COURT REPORTER

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

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

15 Witness my signature and seal, this the 10th
16 day of March, 2025.

17
18 /s/Melissa Burdine-Rodolfich

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