STATE OF MISSISSIPPI

VIDEO TRANSCRIPTION OF THE

MISSISSIPPI ADVISORY COMMISSION ON MARINE RESOURCES

COMMISSION MEETING

Tuesday, September 22, 2026

D'Iberville City Hall,

10383 Auto Mall Parkway

D'Iberville, Mississippi 39540

COMMISSION MEMBERS:

Ronnie Daniels
Matthew Mayfield
Jonathan McLendon
Jason Osborne
Cam Roberds

ALSO PRESENT:

Joe Spraggins
Sandy Chesnut, Esquire

REPORTED BY:

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(Beginning of video.)

CAM ROBERDS:

Motion by Ronnie; Cam second.

JONATHAN MCLENDON:

Cam second.

All right. Turning it over to you, General. Executive Director's Report.

JOE SPRAGGINS:

Okay. Thank you very much.

Yes, I'm still on.

All right. First off, we'll start out with employment.

Maybe not. I know. I'm talking about there on the screen. I'm looking for the screen up there. Screen's not working. Okay.

Anyway, all right. We have Brian Drieling, who was promoted for -- Law Enforcement II to Staff Sergeant in Marine Patrol. We have Nicholas Moreno, who was -- is an Environmental and Natural Resources Specialist III in Marine Fisheries, and then Jamie Marroy, who was promoted to Dispatch II out of Marine Patrol. And then we -- is that Tonnor Segree, who was promoted to -- Officer II to Sergeant in Marine Patrol, and Melody Kessen is New Procurement Officer II in

Finance. So we've got Melody -- and matter of fact, her husband is one of our Marine Patrol officers, so I'm glad to have that.

Any questions on that?

(No response.)

JOE SPRAGGINS:

Okay. I don't think we have any contracts, so we'll move right on into the Agency update.

Bolton Building, looks like we're going to be in it next week -- next month. We are planning on having our Commission meeting there next month, and so we'll have ours on the 20th, I think it is. Is that right? And then the Wildlife and Fisheries is going to have theirs on the 21st here, so if you get a chance and you have time to come to theirs on that morning, maybe it would be nice just to say something.

We're going to try to put something together and maybe get all of the Wildlife and Fisheries Commissioners and our Commissioners together the night before, so we'll see if we can get with y'all and if there's any possible way, we'll put something together to get y'all together on that.

But, hopefully -- the building is almost finished. They're waiting on some tiles, some different flooring to come in. Now, I'm understanding it will be in somewhere around the end of the month. And so as soon as they can get through with it after -- that is what they're working on.

But I think they're going to start doing some more painting on the second floor where we're at right now because they hadn't painted it before, but they're going to paint it. But it will start next week there. But as far as our floors, 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 6th, I think have all been painted now and ready to go. So we'll still have air condition work -- I mean, excuse me, roof work being done until around the end of the year. Going to be almost a brand new building, so we ought to be able to be able to move in there soon.

Any questions on that?

(No response.)

JOE SPRAGGINS:

2019, '20 Bonnet Carré is still going pretty good. We had a couple of people -- you know, just some things, late stragglers coming in on it, but most of it's working pretty good.

Rick, do you have an update about transferring that money yet?

RICK BURRIS:

So we're having some back and forth with NOAA about getting it approved, and as y'all are all aware, it's a very time consuming issue to get done, but, hopefully, we'll get that moved pretty soon.

We are working on the sub-award for the seafood marketing thing, so we're trying to get that done before we get those funds approved so it will be seamless.

JOE SPRAGGINS:

Okay. All right. Well, we got some funds that we're using right now, but we're just going to need that pretty quick. What we're going to do is we're going to go back in and we're looking for that.

So I'll give you an idea. We're doing the update on the Seafood Task Force meeting. That Task Force meeting, what we -- we had one yesterday and it worked out pretty good. A lot of -- and the commissioner and I was on there and Rochelle was on from the tourism and we had a good meeting.

Moving forward, we're going to kick off

things. If you see the hat that we gave you, these are our new hats that we're going to be giving out at Cruisin', so it has our new logo on it and that's the Mississippi Gulf Seafood logo. So we're going to have that new logo there and it's going to be there. And that's what's going to be in our stores and, you know, areas and our restaurants and all when we go to the ones that are serving mostly, you know, Mississippi seafood and -- you know, Gulf -- or excuse me, American seafood. So we're working on that. That's going pretty good.

We're trying to put together a campaign. We're wanting to do a $9 million five-year campaign, and that is to advertise Mississippi seafood. And we're working on that right now. We have about 2.5 million of it that between two or three different projects that we're using for the first -- start, and then we're looking at about 1.7 million a year after that to be able to continue it.

But we want to get this Mississippi seafood out everywhere we can. We want everybody to know how much -- how great our seafood is. This is how we keep our fishermen operating because if we keep -- get people buying the Mississippi

seafood, then we'll have fishermen out there catching them. And that's what we've got to do. We've got to get that and we've got to get the prices up. And so that was very good.

Matter of fact, I saw that, you know, our shrimp prices are up a little bit, so that's pretty good. So, hopefully -- the oysters are coming here soon and, hopefully, they'll be up there and we'll be able to move forward with this.

But the task force, one of the things we are going to do that we're trying to set it up right now, but everything going -- the Rose Bowl Parade. The Rose Bowl Parade is going to have -- we have a float in it, the State of Mississippi does, Visit Mississippi. The very front of the float is Mississippi seafood. It's going to have the Biloxi Lighthouse on it and some other things on there, and it's going to have crabs, fish, everything else.

And we're going to be doing Mississippi seafood. We're going to have a reception dinner the night before on -- I think it's the 29th of December, and so we're going out to it. And we're going to invite a tremendous amount of people there in California that wants to come and eat

Mississippi seafood. So we're going to let them know how great this Mississippi seafood is. And that's a big issue that's going out and that's going to be a lot of things that we're advertising.

But if you -- it should happen this week that the billboards go up. So once you hit any place coming into Mississippi, you ought to see Mississippi seafood. We're trying to get it before Cruisin' the Coast and you're going to see signs that say Mississippi seafood and it's going to have this symbol on it. It's going to have the new things about it. So, hopefully, we're going to get Cruisin' the Coast for everybody in the world to be looking at Mississippi seafood when they walk out of here. We want them to take as much of it back as they can.

And with oyster season opening October the 1st, we'll even have oyster season, fresh oysters for them, so it will be fantastic.

Any questions on the task force?

(No response.)

JOE SPRAGGINS:

So our big rollout for the task force will probably be sometime right after the first of the year because we're trying to work out some

stuff there. We've got two or three different events we're looking at where we're going to roll it out, but I think that you will see that the task force has worked hard and doing a good job.

Our next Commission meeting, that says on October 20th and it's not going to be at City of D'Iberville. It's going to be at the Bolton Building.

Cruisin' the Coast, obviously, October 5th through the 10th. You know, we're the title sponsor again this year. I think it's that third year as a title sponsor. And we're going to have a booth set up and we will be -- what dates are they, Charmaine?

CHARMAINE SCHMERMUND:

The 5th and the 6th at Cruise Central and then the 7th and the 11th.

JOE SPRAGGINS:

Okay. And Cruise Central is -- this year will be down at the Pavilion --

CHARMAINE SCHMERMUND:

Yes.

JOE SPRAGGINS:

Yeah -- in Gulfport. So we'll have -- we'll be cooking shrimp and handing them out to

people, so boiled shrimp, you know, and doing that. And then we'll also do the Town Green in Biloxi that we're going to do on the 7th. Is that it? And then we'll do the -- that day, we'll also be giving them out.

But, you know, we'll be giving them out from like 9:00 to 11:00 and then we take a break from 11:00 to 1:00 because we don't want to compete with the other vendors that are serving food and stuff. And then we'll come back from 1:00 to 4:00 and we'll do that as far as, you know -- at Town Green, I think. It's what?

CHARMAINE SCHMERMUND:

10:00 to 1:00.

JOE SPRAGGINS:

10:00 to 1:00 at Town Green. So if you get a chance, come by.

We're also going to be in Ocean Springs. I think we're going to be in Bay St. Louis and Pascagoula that we'll have tents set up, but we're not actually cooking at those places.

But you'll see, Cruisin' the Coast -- Woody says it's going to be as good -- bigger and better, so it's just -- you know, it's just the Number 1 in the world, I think, right now. The

Number 1 cruising in the world, so that's pretty good.

So we'll be back there for that, so if you get a chance, come by and see us. And maybe we can get some people to take home some stuff.

All right. Update on Gulf Council. We had a great Gulf Council meeting on the 24th through the 27th, and they -- we talked about a lot of different things, but basically, it was -- Jason, is there anything particular that stuck out to you on it?

JASON OSBORNE:

No. I mean, I think there is one thing and I want to say it at least for the record. One of the discussions that we're having at the Gulf Council is about state management of federal waters. Some of the arguments that have been going around by the captains is that they don't trust their state management, and I just want to say for the record, regardless of how we end up voting on it, I trust our state management. I think the work that you all do here at the department is valuable and thoughtful. The work of Trevor, of Patrick and Rick and Crystal and everybody else, except for you, you know, I think is great.

So -- but I do -- I think one of the things that I mentioned to a couple of the Mississippi captains that came and also spouted the same talking points was we don't see you every month and we want to see you. If you have concerns about state management, then come to our meetings once a month. But, Director, I think you do a great job and -- as well as the rest of your department.

JOE SPRAGGINS:

Well, appreciate that, but, yeah, they -- you know, some people just talk. I don't think they have a problem. I think overall everybody knows that our state management is pretty good and I appreciate that -- the good points there, but I don't know where -- once again, the argument's about whether or not to be under federal or under state, so, you know, I think a majority of our commercial -- federal-for-hire want to stay there, and I don't have a problem with that. I don't have a problem with that at all because they're doing a good job, but, you know -- but as far as if they do, if the Council votes everything one way or something, if it was to happen that way, then, you know, we'll do a great job doing state management,

I believe, also. So thank you for that.

And we're also working on our snapper season. We're working on some stuff with that. Trevor's going to be at the SSC at the end of the month, and I'm going to go down because I want to hear what they -- be there and make them look me in the face, but they -- we're going to talk about what's going on and about, you know, the allocation and what we should have and so -- and the calibration stuff and Trevor's going to do a great job with that. He's been doing fantastic with it,

And he leads the SSC. I don't know if y'all knew that or not, but, you know, he's over the SSC, so that is a good thing to have someone from Mississippi there doing that. But he's got good facts. And then, you know, just bring the facts together and let them look at it. And it's just kind of like a -- in college and pro football every now and then, you know, they have something that they go back and review and sometimes the reviewers still don't get it right. So let's just hope we get them right this time, you know, but we're going to give them all the facts and that's all that we can do. So, hopefully, that will work out.

We got GOAA. We had a GOAA meeting in Fairhope on the 11th -- 10th and 11th and that was a good meeting. We talked about a lot of different things that we're doing and -- the states themselves.

And one of the things that I thought was very interesting that came out of it was Alabama got a grant and they got it from Shell Oil Company. And they got a grant to go in and to do some oyster seeding and all in some areas there by Shell Oil Company, and Shell Oil Company was -- give them this to do it.

And now they think very strongly that Chevron and some others might look at this also, so maybe Mississippi will get involved in that too and we might be able to get into some of that grant too and be able to put some more oysters in the water.

August 23rd, Department of Banking and Commerce, the reception, we had 36 different states. They were great, fantastic. They had a good time there. We did it at the Markham Building on the top floor there. And, you know, if you hadn't been there, it's a beautiful place that they've rebuilt down there.

But we had 36 different states and they

really enjoyed the Mississippi seafood and they were just ranting and raving over it. Matter of fact, several people asked me where to do it and I set them up with different places to go and they would call me the next -- or two days later and said, hey, we're headed home with your shrimp. We're headed home with this and -- you know, but they did buy it. They bought it from Mississippi.

The Croatian Legacy and Heritage Reception on August the 20th. I tell you what, if you want to run for public office, you ought to have been there because that was the one. But Fofo and them put on a great deal downtown. I got tickled at him. He said -- the first two things he said is that we don't talk about religion and we don't talk about politics, and the only two things we talked about all night long was religion and politics. I kind of like that. It was a good deal. But they did a great job.

We cooked some food for them and shrimp and oysters and the oysters were fantastic. The shrimp was fantastic, so thank you all for doing that.

WRRDA 7001 update. We're working on it right now. It has gone to Washington, D.C. and,

hopefully, we will be able to find out where we're going to be at with that.

Patrick, do you have any -- where's Patrick? You have any update on that?

PATRICK LEVINE:

I do not have any updates, but on the WRRDA 7001, I know Rick put a lot of time. Director worked on it, looking at alternative approaches to the Bonnet Carre' Spillway and what can be done in the Mississippi Sound.

And so, hopefully, what will happen is the legislature, Congress will say, hey, Corps, you need to put a little bit more focus on other alternative approaches to the Bonnet Carre' Spillway.

So we'll find out. It may be a year or two before we know exactly where it's at, but it's in the pipeline. So if you talk to your congressman, ask them to take a look at it.

JOE SPRAGGINS:

Yeah. Thank you. And, you know, we've got both of our senators and we've got Congressman Ezell to sign off. Obviously, our governor, the governor of Alabama signed off on it also. And this is a plan going forward, and Louisiana, I

think, is on board with us, and they're working on getting some stuff together for theirs.

But, basically, it's the -- when we did the lower Mississippi River study, everybody thinks lower Mississippi River, we think New Orleans, you know, that area. That's not it. The lower Mississippi River starts in Missouri. So does that give you an idea? So, you know, it's from Missouri south. So we had to -- they gave them $25 million to do the study, but that's not enough money to do everything you need to do.

And, obviously, one of the things in it was the Bonnet Carre' and we asked them, we said, hey, where's the Bonnet Carre' standing in this? And they said, well, it's really not in the study, you know. It's there to look -- it's something there, but, you know, we don't have the money. There's no way we'll have the money to do it.

So we worked with NOAA -- I mean, excuse me, with the Corps and we talked with them, and I had a meeting with them a few -- back a year, a little over a year ago, but we talked with them. We had -- Nungesser was here and Delbert -- Governor Hosemann was here, and we sat down and we talked about what we needed to do. And one of the

things was that we need to get more money to be able to put into the pot.

And so what I've done is we are asking Congress to go in and put more money in it, and we're asking Congress to -- we used the number 5 million. I don't know if it's going to go up or down, but, you know, that was just a number. We had to have a number to put in.

And so we're going to ask them to look at the Bonnet Carre' and look at what -- you know, the Bonnet Carre' was built in 1928. You know, that was right before Jason was born.

JASON OSBORNE:

A couple years.

JOE SPRAGGINS:

But anyway, they -- it was built in '28, and you know, that was a -- a long time ago. And when you think about what's happened in that amount of years, you know, it's built -- have you ever -- I don't know if you've ever been there. Have any of y'all ever been to the Bonnet Carre'?

Well, it's got creosote post-type that are -- that they just -- slots down in the ground, in these things and that's what it is. I mean, you know, it's just basically big long posts that

are put down and, obviously, they've got cracks in them.

And even when it's -- when it's all put down and put into the foundation, it still leaks and seeps water through, but that's okay. They're talking maybe 5,000 cubic feet per second or something like that that's coming through there, but it's not enough to hurt anything and it probably helps us in the long run.

But anyway, long story short, we need to decide, are we going to rebuild that thing? And if we do, do we need to rebuild it a different way to make it to when you open it and how you have to open it.

And then the other thing is the levee in Louisiana and New Orleans. What used to be 20 feet -- it used to be before you opened the Bonnet Carre', it had to reach 1.25 million cubic feet per second for the flow and 20 feet on the levee. Now, they've lowered that to 17 feet. They lowered it to 17 feet for one reason, and that's because they don't trust the levee. All right? And it's so old, too, and they don't trust the levee system.

So the other question with the Corps is,

do we need to rebuild the levee system up some? Do we need to stiffen it up, you know, and maybe help out? So there's some options there that we're looking at.

Other options are the Morganza and also the Old River structure, and then we've got the Ama and the Union diversions that we're looking at. So all this has got to be something that's looked at and it's got to be something that we can look at and put together. And if we do that, then we could get to a point to being back like we used to when the Bonnet Carre' opened one time every 20 years or something like that, you know, if it opened.

But, you know -- and it could get to a point to where we could look at something different. The Corps is doing a fantastic job trying to help us. I'm not downing the Corps at all. They're doing a fantastic job trying to help us.

Just to give you an idea, last year when the waters got to a certain level, the Corps just kept holding, kept holding, kept holding, kept holding, and said, we're going to trust it to the last second before we have to do anything.

Prior to that, they used to would say, okay, we're just going to open it. Right? But they didn't do it, and that helped us a lot. We didn't have any issues. So they're working hard.

So any questions on that as far as what's going on -- let's see -- with the water?

(No response.)

JOE SPRAGGINS:

All right. That's a 2028 project, so to give you an idea.

All right. Gulf Council, SSC meeting, like I said, we're going to have that and Trevor will be running it.

The Wildlife Commission meeting, we talked about that on the 21st, so they're going to -- you know, they do one a year. They come south, so we just -- they wanted to come to our building and have it, so I think that will be fantastic.

All right. Any other questions on any of that?

If not, we've got an update on the vessels. We have 266 derelict vessel cases that have been reported; 234 have been removed; 32 are impending, and two are receiving court orders.

We got big accolades at GOAA for that. They were talking about us the other day about how great Mississippi was doing on that.

All right. Actions update.

SANDY CHESNUT:

Okay. At the August meeting, Jonathan McClendon was elected as the chairman of the Commission, and Matthew Mayfield was elected as the vice chair.

The Commission recommended to the Director to -- excuse me -- request staff to review and recommend changes to speckled trout regulations concerning raising the quota, the size limit, and the qualifications.

There was a motion to recommend to the Director that the fines for the Kenny Lamulle violation that was made at the July 19th meeting be rescinded and allow the staff to proceed under the correct procedures, so that will be coming forth in due time.

There was also an approval of a state saltwater finfish record for the youth conventional tackle, bonnethead shark, 10 pounds, 13.4 ounces by Ben Cain. And that is it.

JOE SPRAGGINS:

Okay. Any questions?

(No response.)

JOE SPRAGGINS:

Chairman, that's my report.

JONATHAN MCLENDON:

Thank you, Director. Any of our Commissioners have anything to report today?

RONNIE DANIELS:

I've got just one I'd like to talk about. Joe, thank you for allowing the department to help support the Hook 'em for Heroes tournament that we had in the Pass this weekend. It was an amazing turnout, an amazing event. They estimated about 4,500 people showed up for that event on Saturday. And the whole population of Pass Christian is 6,000, so that's a lot of people in our town and everything went off great. It was a great event that raises money for a good cause.

JONATHAN MCLENDON:

And, General, you were correct earlier that the shrimp price did go up. We were actually discussing this with some restaurant chains yesterday. Year over year, the shrimp price is actually down five to 10 percent from where it started and the fuel price is up 70. So those guys

are having a -- you know, a super hard time.

And I was just looking out the front door of our plant the other day and there's about 40 of them just tied up and what they're doing is they're missing, you know, the peak of the season and it's a -- you know, it's certainly a shame because I think down the line, maybe into the springtime, there's going to be some people that want to buy Gulf shrimp and we won't have the ability to provide it. So you guys just keep eating all you can.

JOE SPRAGGINS:

One thing we're doing too -- I don't know. I think you may have seen it, but Senator Cindy Hyde-Smith, you know, they did a bill to buy $20 million worth of shrimp.

JONATHAN MCLENDON:

Yep.

JOE SPRAGGINS:

And we're looking at some other things with them. And one of the things that we're talking about -- and it came out of that meeting yesterday, and I think Commissioner Gipson's going to help us and some others and -- we're going to try to get shrimp in the schools and -- you know,

protein. It's good protein, and trying to find menus that we can put shrimp in the school systems and also in the corrections facilities, you know. We're looking at that. And so we're looking at different places to be able to put the shrimp, you know, and be able to get this shrimp out there and have a market for it, so maybe our shrimpers can afford to go out after it.

JONATHAN MCLENDON:

Yeah. No. It certainly all helps, and I thank Senator Hyde-Smith, the purchase that she, you know, assisted in, that's going to be about six percent of the entire landings of the Gulf, so, you know, we get a couple of the schools on board and all of those things help to offset this consumer demand that varies so badly with these high fuel prices.

JASON OSBORNE:

Is there a Bubba Gump reference in here anywhere?

JONATHAN MCLENDON:

Not yet.

JASON OSBORNE:

A Bubba Gump reference.

JOE SPRAGGINS:

No. We don't do any of the Alabama crap.

JONATHAN MCLENDON:

All right. Next up, Chief Wilkerson, Office of Marine Patrol.

KYLE WILKERSON:

Good morning, Commissioners, Director, Legal. Congratulations on your seat there.

JONATHAN MCLENDON:

Thank you.

KYLE WILKERSON:

You make it look well.

The August report itself, pretty standard, a lot of work, a lot of hard work, a lot of citations written. 1,300 stops. We had one that just stood out. It was -- we had one shrimping inside closed waters outside Biloxi Lighthouse about half mile in -- or he was inside the half mile. Yeah, yeah. Brilliant, but he was cited. Pretty standard.

I do want to put -- give props to my reserve unit. They -- Labor Day weekend, it was seen that the Park Service was low staff because of training and all that stuff, so we utilized our reserve unit to go out to Horn Island and put boots

on the ground, walk around the public, interact, look for violations but just mainly to be seen. They were out there all that day.

We had two shifts running in and out, boats running around, so they had enforcement on Horn Island the entire day -- or the entire weekend, for that matter. So I want to give props to them. They did a phenomenal job. Park Service is ecstatic, so as long as we can help our federal partners, that's what we're there for.

Other than that, do you have any questions?

JASON OSBORNE:

Just --

KYLE WILKERSON:

Yes, sir.

JASON OSBORNE:

Are we already in FY '27?

KYLE WILKERSON:

What's that, sir?

JASON OSBORNE:

Are we already in FY '27 because on the report, it says FY '27 year to date.

KYLE WILKERSON:

Well, I'd have to --

JOE SPRAGGINS:

Well, FY '27 started on the 1st of July.

KYLE WILKERSON:

1st of July, yeah.

JASON OSBORNE:

Okay. That's what I was confused about.

JOE SPRAGGINS:

Yeah. We're not like these people in Louisiana. We're already ahead of things.

JASON OSBORNE:

We're already like a year ahead. I've aged already.

And you're saying that alcohol is not allowed on a boat if you're hunting alligator?

KYLE WILKERSON:

No.

JASON OSBORNE:

Okay. That's good to know.

KYLE WILKERSON:

I don't have anything to do with that.

JASON OSBORNE:

And there were six people there.

KYLE WILKERSON:

Now, what happens is with the violation you're looking at, that happens at the NERR.

That's more the federal properties and all that stuff. I have an officer out there and that's the violation you're looking at.

JOE SPRAGGINS:

One thing about the Park Service, they was -- when I met with them back after the 4th of July incidents and things that happened there, we talked about it and they was telling me how short they were on people and how they was hurting so bad to be able -- and they got some new hires. They do have some new hires in. They got three or four new hires that are coming in, and we offered to help them.

And what I did was went back and got with Chief and we said, hey, you know, what could we do? And we could put some reserve officers on so they could be able to be out there. Obviously, we have officers in the water all over the place, you know, in the boats and all. But they were ecstatic that we were able to help them, and I think it did a lot to have them -- more presence out there, so thank y'all.

KYLE WILKERSON:

They enjoyed it too.

JONATHAN MCLENDON:

Thank you, Chief.

KYLE WILKERSON:

Thank you.

JONATHAN MCLENDON:

All right. All the way down to Office of Public Affairs, Ms. Charmaine.

CHARMAINE SCHMERMUND:

Good morning. The Mississippi Department of Marine Resources had 27 media mentions since the August MACMR meeting

News items included MDMR offering a free basic seafood HACCP workshop, last month's fish record, photo submissions for MDMR's 2027 calendar, and oyster season opening October 1st.

The NERR's Brianna Andrews and Jennifer Cumbest gave presentations for the On the Road Program at HEARTS Christian Homeschool on August 24th, the Ocean Guardian School Program at Woolmarket Elementary School on August 27th, and the City of Auburn's Adventures in Art on August 31st.

CSO Rick Burris and Coastal Resources Management's Director -- Deputy Director Jared Harris participated in Mississippi State University's Fall 2026 College of Forest Resources

Career Fair in Starkville on September 2nd.

Jason Ryder and Ellen Coffin participated in the Integrated Ocean Observing System Association fall meeting in New Orleans on September 9th.

The Office of Marine Patrol participated in Vancleave High School's college and career fair on September 10th. The Agency's cooking team cooked for the Conference of Bank Supervisors Strategic Planning meeting in Gulfport on August 23rd.

And MDMR hosted a reception for the Gulf Council held at the Maritime and Seafood Industry Museum on August 24th.

And then we also launched our annual photo contest where the winning photos will be used in the agency's 2027 calendar. We ask that submitted photos depict an aspect of the marine resources available on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, including recreational and commercial fishing, coastal preserves, marine, plant and animal life, marsh areas, boating, and Mississippi seafood. The deadline to submit entries is Friday, October 16th, and they can be emailed to publicaffairs@dmr.ms.gov.

JONATHAN MCLENDON:

Thank you, Miss Charmaine.

CHARMAINE SCHMERMUND:

Thank you.

JONATHAN MCLENDON:

Next up, Office of Marine Fisheries, Mr. Matt Hill.

TREVOR MONCRIEF:

All right. So first up, before Matt gets up here, the next two ones you have are kind of multifaceted. There's a lot of moving parts and things that are in our heads that aren't necessarily always in the presentation. So I would ask that y'all feel free to ask any clarifying questions or anything y'all might need because there's plenty of knowledge and Mr. Hill and Mr. Ryder should be able to answer what you need.

JONATHAN MCLENDON:

Thanks, Trevor.

MATT HILL:

Good morning. Thank you.

JONATHAN MCLENDON:

Good morning.

MATT HILL:

Everything is yes, Sandy. Everything's

yes.

Just a quick update on our commercial spotted seatrout. Try to get through this briefly. I know the main event is following me.

So current status is a 50,000 pound annual quota. The size limit sits at 14 inches currently. In 2014, we did establish an endorsement for people to be able to qualify for this fishery. it's gone through multiple qualification requirements through the years. I didn't go all the way back to 2014. We just kind of went to 2020 because that's when some significant changes obviously started happening.

Before that, we did see the same increase, so we felt like it was time to change some things. So the main thing that did happen in 2020 was there was a 20 percent income requirement, which did require the fishermen to bring in their taxes. It was a very messy process, but, obviously, you see it did cut it down, a little bit too much, in our opinion, down to 40 fishermen. I mean, we were -- our goal has always been around 75 to 80 fishermen, but you can see since then, it's began to climb and in -- the next slide -- some of that explanation will be in here.

But going back all the way to 1978, there was just a 12-inch size limit. There was no quota or any type of endorsement. In '86, the size limit was moved to 14 inches. In 1995, and this was passed late in the year, so it really didn't take effect until 1996, there was a 35,000 pound quota. There was a pretty insignificant increase in 2011 to 40,000 pounds. And I'll just be completely honest with you. I'm not sure why we increased it by that small amount, but we did.

2013 is our only significant increase in the last -- since the quota was established, so that's -- you're talking about a 30-year period, and we did go up to the 50,000 pounds.

The following year, we did establish a spotted seatrout endorsement. That's where we had fishermen basically, through the trip ticket system, had to prove they had $5,000 in seafood sales in any 12 consecutive month periods.

Then we get down to 2019, and that's when we kind of outsmarted ourselves a little bit. We put the 20 percent income requirement, which was verified through the trip ticket records, but it was verified upon earned income of the taxes of the previous year. And, obviously, that's where we saw

the sharp decrease in 2020.

2022 is our current regulations where we sit. $1,000 in finfish sales or $5,000 in seafood product verified through the trip ticket records.

So that's been a little bit of a messy process. It did accomplish some of the things that we wanted, but in recent years, we have, obviously, seen the endorsements continue to grow as people are, and we're not against that. But the biggest -- one of the biggest issues we have now is we do currently have 155 endorsements. However, only 98 of those are active and out of those 98, only about 50 of them make up about 99 percent of the catch, so, basically, we have a lot of latent endorsements.

So we started looking at some options because we have met the quota the past two years fairly quickly. So Consideration 1 is the actual quota. It's currently 50,000 pounds. We can keep it status quo.

Option B would be moving it to 60,000 pounds, and Option C would be moving it to 70,000 pounds or, you know, those are just some generalized numbers. It doesn't necessarily have to be that type of a whole number.

Consideration 2 is the spotted seatrout endorsement qualifications. Like I said, currently it's at $1,000 finfish product or $5,000 seafood product. We've looked at it several different ways. The $2,000 finfish product and a $5,000 seafood product seems to be where we may want to get to. And then $3,000 of finfish product, $5,000 seafood product starts cutting it back down a little bit too much from some of the predictions we made.

And also the third thing would be to consider raising the spotted seatrout size limit from 14 inches to 15 inches to be consistent with the recreational fishery. And I can tell you, since raising the recreational size limit to 15 inches, the percent SPR increased through 2019, which was our last full assessment.

Since then, we have moved more to an index-based approach in which the stock has remained stable and shows sign -- definitely has shown signs of increase in recent years, which I don't think anybody that's out there fishing can deny that.

So this is the section that is in our current regulations. All regulations pertain to

this fishery -- pertaining to this fishery reside in Title 22, Chapter 8, Rule 8.1, Parts A, J, and K.

So before we get into the changes, do we have any questions, comments, any more information?

JASON OSBORNE:

So just based on what you were saying, I mean, it sounds to me like if -- would you say around 50 are producing about 99 percent of the catch?

MATT HILL:

So, actually, I give you an exact number here, so 52 percent -- 52 fishermen accounted for the full 50,000-pound quota in 2025. Now, we did slightly go over that year by a few thousand pounds, so we had some of the other guys, but you're talking about -- we have a core of about 50 to 60 fishermen that pretty much catch the entire quota every year.

JASON OSBORNE:

So based on that, I mean, I would think on Consideration Number 2, if you're raising the -- you're just raising the finfish product?

MATT HILL:

That's right.

RONNIE DANIELS:

Not -- so the rest of the folks, the other, would you say about another 60 fishermen?

MATT HILL:

It's about a hundred -- right now, there's 150 -- 55 of them that are active.

JASON OSBORNE:

So pretty much everyone is qualifying under the 5,000 seafood product?

MATT HILL:

No, not everyone. We're -- there's a fair amount of them, which we did that because these are multifaceted fishermen. So that's why we did do the 5,000 seafood product, so we had the crabbers, the shrimpers, and then they may dabble into the finfish thing and it would allow them to keep the spotted seatrout that we have.

But it was just another avenue to get what we kind of consider our historical or our true fishermen, true commercial fishermen that are trying to do this as a living. It was just an avenue to allow them to get that if they wanted. It was just a bonus for them. I mean, they've been in the fishery. I mean, you start getting up to that 5,000 mark, I mean, the shrimper -- we have

several shrimpers that have it, obviously, because of their sales.

JASON OSBORNE:

Well, have you looked at, if you raised B, how many -- what that total number would be reduced to?

MATT HILL:

So if we raised -- if we raised it to the 2,000 pound of finfish product and just left the 5,000 alone, that would get us around that 75 to 80 fishermen mark, somewhere in there.

JASON OSBORNE:

But would you -- I guess what I'm looking at is if 99 percent of the quota is by 50, are you losing any of those 50?

MATT HILL:

Absolutely not, no. Those 50 would still continue to qualify under the 2,000 finfish product. And I say "absolutely not." I mean, there may be a handful of them, but this would give them the opportunity. They would know they would have to fish their way into it to get to that 2,000.

And, you know, we can give a grace period. We're very flexible with this. Obviously,

this has been a moving target for a long time, and a lot of us, we would look at, especially in the first year, if they did qualify and have been qualifying, we would try to work with them.

And Director Spraggins has been very gracious to several of them. I mean, we've given them some extensions and things like that based on just from their past history. Some of them didn't -- weren't able to fish for a year because their boat was -- or for health reasons. And like I said, we work with Director Spraggins and we feel like we're getting the majority of the people that need to be into the fishery in the fishery one way or the other.

RONNIE DANIELS:

You know, one thing I've always said, nobody's making a living just off speckled trout. These guys that are commercial fishing, they've got their hands in a lot of different pots and it takes all those pots for them to survive, especially if one thing is down one year.

JASON OSBORNE:

Well, I guess real quick -- and I apologize, I have to leave, but is the goal to reduce the number of fish?

TREVOR MONCRIEF:

The goal -- go ahead.

JASON OSBORNE:

I mean not fish, but fishermen?

TREVOR MONCRIEF:

Yeah. The goal is just to produce stability in the fishery. I mean, you've seen in the past, every change we've made has kind of yo-yoed this fishery back and forth. And so the goal is kind of to make stepwise changes and see how it reacts because the last few times we've made larger changes, you've seen drastic reductions and that's not what we need. So I think a stepwise change here will probably be for the best.

And to Matt's point earlier, I mean, they're selling most of our main finfish species -- they're going for about $4 a pound at this point. That's 500 fish over the course of 365 days to qualify, so it's -- it's a reasonable qualification. And the fishery has to continue at the same level of performance now to stay on that trajectory.

JASON OSBORNE:

I mean, if that's the goal, then I would think if 99 percent of the quota is being caught by

the folks that aren't going to be affected by certainly Consideration 1 or 2, then -- and you want to sustain the fishery, I would take -- Consideration 3, Number B would probably be the way to do that, wouldn't it?

MATT HILL:

That's kind of in the -- that's the sweet spot. That's kind of where we start losing some guys. I mean, that's that threshold of right there that we -- with our projector even doing it. When we projected it, if you go to the 2,000, you keep the fishermen that you need, you raise the quota. Right now, we have it. If you get into that range, what we're talking about, if you raise the quota to 60,000 pounds, we would be able to fish for roughly 300 days. We would be able to keep the season open right now.

If we go to the 75,000, we have not reached 75,000 pounds. So it would be those fishermen at 75,000 would be able to fish year round. 70,000 pounds would go up to the 365 days currently.

JASON OSBORNE:

Well, I mean, increasing the quota obviously impacts how many fish you have. Right?

So if the goal is sustain it, at least for another year, I would say maybe -- I mean, my preference would be just to go with Consideration 3, Number B. If that's the goal. Right?

JONATHAN MCLENDON:

So, Matt, is this -- Consideration 2, is this qualification for spotted trout. Is this similar to the other finfish regulations?

MATT HILL:

It's not just spotted sea -- it's any finfish, so any red drum, flounder --

JONATHAN MCLENDON:

Got it.

MATT HILL:

-- everything. We run it through the trip ticket system. If they have $2,000 of finfish product in the system, they qualify for the endorsement.

JONATHAN MCLENDON:

Okay. So the same qualification throughout the whole finfish segment?

MATT HILL:

That's correct.

JONATHAN MCLENDON:

Okay.

JOE SPRAGGINS:

Matt, is -- out of the 150 that we have, you said that 52 of them are the ones that are actually -- so there's roughly 100. Are they going to lose? Are some of those going to automatically lose endorsement because they didn't get the 1,000?

MATT HILL:

They won't automatically. They would have the ability to -- and that's what we've done in the past. If they would come in next year -- obviously, it would start next year. I mean, the endorsement process. So when I'm saying that, we have 50 to 60 that are significant harvesters. We have 98 that are -- of those 155 that are active, that have shown activity into the fishery. So 98 of them are catching fish and they're turning them in.

JOE SPRAGGINS:

Well, what about the other 50?

MATT HILL:

The other, they're not. They are not actively --

JOE SPRAGGINS:

So are they going to lose their endorsement anyway?

MATT HILL:

They would lose it.

JOE SPRAGGINS:

So we're going to be down to around 100 anyway?

MATT HILL:

Correct.

JOE SPRAGGINS:

So the question is, do we want to raise the number of limit to get it less than 100, is what you're looking at? And since you're mainly looking -- if you say 100 are doing the 1,000, right?

MATT HILL:

Yes.

JOE SPRAGGINS:

At least that much, right?

MATT HILL:

So -- but you also got to factor in that the prices are increasing. So that threshold, the money threshold is a lot easier to get there than it used to be, which is a good -- that's a good problem. There's no -- but that allows them to get there quicker.

And also, it does allow them to fish

theirself into -- if you get this passed and you go to 2,000 or 3,000, it would allow them the rest of the year. They know what they have. We tell them. They have access to the system. They call us. We know -- keep them up to date on what they have.

JOE SPRAGGINS:

So what we're looking for here is three different considerations. We're not looking for one?

MATT HILL:

That's right.

JOE SPRAGGINS:

And so we've got to -- Number 1, we've got to decide whether we're going to change the quota.

MATT HILL:

That's correct.

JOE SPRAGGINS:

Number 2 is decide whether we're going to change the amount, how much it costs to get the finfish?

MATT HILL:

Yes.

JOE SPRAGGINS:

And Number 3 is whether we go 14 to 15 inches; is that right?

MATT HILL:

That's correct.

JOE SPRAGGINS:

So that's what y'all need to look at.

MATT HILL:

So we don't necessarily have to do all three. This is just a --

JOE SPRAGGINS:

Yeah, but that's the three things we need to look at.

MATT HILL:

Those the three things that we're looking at.

JONATHAN MCLENDON:

So how long does it take them to fill the quota, this 50,000 pounds we're at right now from a time period?

MATT HILL:

So this year, we shut it down -- it was in August. We shut it down in August. We shut -- the commercial spotted seatrout was shut down in August.

JOE SPRAGGINS:

And we went a little over the 50-.

MATT HILL:

We definitely went a little over.

RONNIE DANIELS:

So one of the things that I thought about when looking at this specifically, Consideration Number 1, I mean, it's been a long time since we've given these guys any more fish, and 10- or even 20,000 pounds is fractional whenever we're looking at the overall catch of speckled trout in our waters. I mean, it's a very, very small percent of an increase in relation to the overall catch.

JOE SPRAGGINS:

And I would like to also just -- this right here, we're trying to push Mississippi seafood.

CAM ROBERDS:

As fishermen --

JOE SPRAGGINS:

If we don't have the seafood available to put on the market, then we're not going to be able to do that.

CAM ROBERDS:

That's exactly what I was about to say. As Matt said, too, the fishery is -- it's really --

it's performing right now, so being able to get the product to the table. It sounds like you have a good -- you know, you can offset it with the Consideration Number 3, the 15 for any impact, and then give the fishermen an opportunity to be able to sell year long would be the goal. Right?

MATT HILL:

And it sounds like what I'm hearing is there's some -- a little bit of a consensus to raise it, to raise the quota to some amount. I raised the size limit to -- 14 to 15 inches. There's a little hesitation on the spotted seatrout, the endorsement qualifications.

That is one that we can do the other two and kind of take an eye on it. It's just going up, but it is not changing the number of significant fishermen contributing to catching the quota as it is. I mean, that's just -- so if that's something that we're not comfortable with doing right now, we can leave that status quo and see how the other two work, but that's what we're here for.

JONATHAN MCLENDON:

Well, and correct me if I'm wrong, but so these commercial finfish operators are hitting you

guys in multiple segments, whether it's shrimp, oysters, crab. So like if we're adding to the quota, the way that I look at that is it's going to give them more time between all of these other seasons that they're going to go out there and try to reach a finfish quota.

MATT HILL:

And that's correct. I mean, and right now, it's -- we're talking about this because things are good. I mean, we've had this conversation before. At some point, it's not going to be good. That's just nature. There's nothing we can do about it. There's no regulations that can -- but we will go through the cycle again.

But currently, we have an extremely healthy fishery, is -- when it comes to spotted seatrout. I don't think anybody is going to deny that. And we have only significantly -- I mean, when we're talking about 30 years. I mean, that's -- we've only had one, basically, increase in the quota in 30 years, so -- and it's more of a demand and some of the reasons that -- you know, Director Spraggins does know. I mean, we have -- when we do go, you know -- and we don't go way over, but sometimes we're tugged to let it run a

little longer than it should because the price point is there. It's hard to close a season when you're seeing record prices. I mean, that's --

RONNIE DANIELS:

You don't want to snatch the rug out from under them whenever they're finally getting to do something.

MATT HILL:

You don't want to do that.

JONATHAN MCLENDON:

Yeah.

RONNIE DANIELS:

If nobody's opposed to it, I'd like to make a motion to go C, B, B on these considerations.

JONATHAN MCLENDON:

We have a motion.

Anybody second?

MATTHEW MAYFIELD:

Second.

JONATHAN MCLENDON:

So Ronnie made the motion; Mr. Mayfield seconded.

All in favor?

(Unanimous vote.)

MATT HILL:

Sandy.

SANDY CHESNUT:

Okay. For clarification, are we asking for a notice of intent to move forward with the changes that they mentioned in the highlighted areas?

MATT HILL:

That's correct. Those three areas highlighted would be changes and --

SANDY CHESNUT:

Okay. So 14 inches would go to 15 inches?

MATT HILL:

Correct.

SANDY CHESNUT:

50,000 pounds would go to 70,000 pounds?

MATT HILL:

Correct.

CHARMAINE SCHMERMUND:

And 1,000 will go to 2,000?

MATT HILL:

Correct.

JONATHAN MCLENDON:

Correct.

SANDY CHESNUT:

Okay. Great. Thank you.

MATT HILL:

So when we do this, Sandy, what -- obviously, we're running up at the end of the year. What's the time, like with the days? What are we looking at?

SANDY CHESNUT:

It has to go on notice of intent for 30 days. It has to come back before the Commission in -- what are we in, September -- October. If we can get the 30 days before the next meeting, it can come back in October for final adoption, and then it can go into effect 30 days after that.

Is that going to help?

JONATHAN MCLENDON:

Yeah.

MATT HILL:

Okay.

JONATHAN MCLENDON:

So we've got 35 days till the next meeting right now.

JOE SPRAGGINS:

Right. If we can get it out this week and get it done, but then again -- once again, it

depends on what public comment comes to. You know, if we get a certain amount of people with public comment, we have to have a meeting.

SANDY CHESNUT:

Yeah. We could get held up for that. But barring any extraneous meetings or comment periods, we should be able to get it back before them for final adoption in October.

MATT HILL:

Okay.

SANDY CHESNUT:

Okay.

MATT HILL:

All right. Thank you.

JONATHAN MCLENDON:

Thanks, Matt. I know that was a fun month.

Next up, oyster reef assessment, Mr. Jason Ryder.

JASON RYDER:

Good morning, everyone. As said, my name is Jason Ryder. I'm going to give an oyster season reef assessment for 2026, and then some overview of the '26-'27 oyster season.

Before I get into it, I did want to recap

a couple things and tell you about some of our accomplishments this summer. So to recap from last season, we harvested 50,427 sacks of oysters. We were open for harvest for about 136 days -- ran from October 13th to April 30th -- and then the majority of that effort was Pass Christian Tonging and Dredging.

There's a breakdown of the oyster licenses sold by type right there, so just a quick overview of that one.

Second thing I want to touch on before the assessment was our cultch planting accomplishments this summer. In 2026, we cultched a total of 236 acres across June, July and August. As you can see on the map above, we cultched Pass Christian Dredging, Pass Christian Tonging, Pass Marianne, Stanislaus, and St. Joe.

With that, we try to cover as many areas as possible to replenish some of the material that was taken last season. We felt that we had good spat recruitment, hopefully, this fall. We wanted to get material out there, so we did do a good job. All in, we cultched about 20,000 cubic yards of material just in the west, and that's limestone and spat on shell.

And, again, last thing before the assessment, but I did want to run through the sampling procedures for how we sample our reefs in Mississippi and what we do. So first thing I wanted to take -- put your attention to is the map in the top corner. Every dot that you see on that map -- I know the screen is a little far away in this room, but every dot on that map is the area that we sampled on our reefs.

We sampled -- our sampling runs from May through September. We break that into four rounds. What we do there is we want to capture the recruitment and growth throughout the season. We don't want to sample in May one time and not go back to that reef later in the season and see what occurred there.

We were able to sample all reef complexes this year. Our sampling method is to use a one-square-meter quadrant at randomly selected locations across two stratas, and that's the cultch plants and reef bottom itself. At each site, we look at the oyster density, the bottom type. We're looking to see if that's oyster, mud -- oyster shell, mud, sand, or a mixture of those materials. Also, we're looking to see what cultch material is

present, and then we're logging environmental parameters with that.

This summer, we did increase our sampling quite a bit. We -- on every reef complex, we increased. So for Henderson Point, we went from 96 to 154 dive samples. On St. Joe, we went from 20 in 2025 to 70. And Pass Christian Tonging, we went from 87 to 130. Pass Christian Dredging, 107 to 154. Pass Marianne from 119 to 168. And this year, we were able to sample Stanislaus and Waveland.

All in, that's about 285 more dives than we've done in the years -- last year.

And -- oops, sorry. I do want to take a minute and just give credit to the dive team and Marine Fisheries employees for putting in that work. I think it's the most we've ever dove in a season. It's a lot of effort. It takes a lot of time and effort and coordination on everyone's part. So but with those samples, we're able to get to where we are today and have a good suggestion for the season, good understanding what's on our reefs. And without that, we couldn't be here today.

But I do think, to my knowledge, we dove

the most out of anyone in the Gulf with our reef assessments, so that's something to be proud of. And we do take it serious and we're very cautious and it's important that we get it done correctly and right.

So I will -- now that I talked about the process and a couple of things that we did this summer, I do want to talk about the individual reefs. All these reefs are going to be about the same setup, but I will go through them just to give you an overview and answer any questions if y'all have any.

So the first one we're going to start with is Henderson Point. It's approximately 1,295 acres. We dove 77 sites. That gave us 154 dive samples. On this reef, this was -- harvest was fairly limited last season. There was not as much harvest from this area as we expected, and because of that, the overall biomass did increase. We saw recruitment on this area. Approximately 87 percent of the market-size oysters are located on cultch plants. We do see a healthy distribution of good growth from sub-market to market-size oysters.

And if you take a look at the chart in the bottom, comparing '25 to '26,

seed-and-sack-size oysters, both are showing good average counts on the square meters, which lines up with our assessments. So overall, this reef is growing and tracking in the right direction.

Next up is St. Joe -- oop. Sorry. Hit the button there. St. Joe covers about 575 acres. We dove 35 times. We got 75 dive samples from that. A couple takeaways from St. Joe, we saw limited harvest on this reef last season. About 67 percent of the oysters are located on cultch plants, but what's interesting about St. Joe is we are seeing some of the oysters and densities come off the cultch plants, which is a great sign for us in every size class. That's not just market-sized oysters, but we're seeing seed, spat, and market-sized oysters coming off the cultch plants and filling in that reef nicely. That's encouraging for us.

And then the chart at the bottom shows the distribution of sizes. Again, we're seeing sack-size oysters went up from 12.2 to 42.2 per square meter, and that is -- that's very good, and we have high expectations for this reef this year.

Now we can take a look at Pass Christian Tonging. This reef covers about 575 acres. We

dove 65 sites. It gives us 130 dive samples. This is one of our heaviest harvested reefs last season. We did have a lot of tonging pressure from this reef. About 60 percent of the oysters are located on cultch plants, and then we also did have a -- I'm sorry. We saw a decreased density across all the size categories and the number of market-sized oysters declined relative to previous years.

Also, in early June, we saw a rainfall event that caused a drop in salinity on this -- in this area and we saw increased mortality. So with that pressure and the salinity event, overall, it's trending a little bit lower than we'd like to see. In '26 -- you can see at the chart below, in '25 to '26, you see it went from 13.7 to 1.7 oysters per square meter. Seed went from 38 to 13 and then market went from 19 to eight oysters per square meter.

What this tells us is we did have some harvest from this area last season and the reef's not expanding as much as we'd like to see, but we are going to continue to track this reef and monitor it very closely.

Pass Christian Dredging, 1,194 acres. We dove 77 times. We got 154 dive samples. Majority

of the sacks from dredgers were harvested from this reef, and approximately 90 percent of the market-sized oysters are located on cultch plants.

As with Tonging, we saw a significant rainfall in early June, which caused us low salinity and we saw some mortality on this reef as well. Between the mortality event and the harvest, we saw decreased densities across all size categories. Again, the chart just shows what we sampled, what our results showed in our samples.

Comparing '25 to '26, spat went from 3.67 to 0.67 oysters per square meter. Seed went from four to two and sack-size oysters went from 2.6 to one. So between the harvest and the mortality event, overall biomass is down on this reef complex.

So, again, we're going to take a look at this reef. We're going to monitor it closely. We hope some people get some oysters from it this year, but we will stay monitoring and we're trying to keep it as healthy and as stable as possible.

The next one we're going to look at is Pass Marianne. Approximately 2,400 square acres. We dove 84 sites, gave us 168 dive samples. This reef is the third highest reef for dredge harvest

last season. We saw limited material and recruitment on this reef and this is also one of the reasons we cultch planted this area this season. We didn't have much material here, so we wanted to see if we could not put some down and see if we can't get recruitment and growth on it. We want to expand the footprint of the oysters and the densities.

Some of the details of this area, approximately 95 percent of the market-sized oysters are located on cultch plants. And overall, since 2023, we've seen low recruitment in this area.

And again, the chart, looking at the '25 to '26, spat went from 2.37 to 0.39 oysters per square meter. Seed went from 2.54 to 0.02, and sack size went from 0.6 to 0.3. So between the recruitment trends that we've tracked since '23 and where the reef's at right now, we're really monitoring. We're trying to put some cultch plants here and seeing how we can help support recovery and replenishments on this reef complex.

Next up is Stanislaus. This reef complex covers approximately 75 acres. We dove 15 times, gave us 30 samples. Harvest was pretty limited

from this reef last season, but we're seeing really good growth on this area over the last two to four years. We didn't see much spat throughout the summer, but this time in the season, the early fall, we are seeing some recruitment and we're hoping to see some growth on this reef there.

Overall, by size class, seed came in at 16.73 oysters per square meters and market at 14.63 and spat was at .5. These are some good size oysters per square meter for St. Stanislaus. It's relatively small, 75 acres, but we got reports last season that the oysters were nice. This could be a really good spot for tongers, give them another option other than the tonging box in Pass Christian.

Next up is Waveland. This is our smallest reef complex that we have in the west at 14 acres. We dove it four times. We have eight dive samples. Nothing was harvested from here last year, but despite being the smallest reef complex, it does have good size distributions. We have some market-sized oysters, some seed, and then some spat. Overall, it's a good little spot, not very big, but a good spot to get some oysters from.

One quick thing about this area, as with

some of the nearshore reefs, it is in area IIB. It's managed on a half inch of rainfall and then the 10 foot on the river stage. So anytime when it gets a little bit wetter throughout the season, this area will close down.

Biloxi Bay, so Biloxi Bay is about 227 acres. We sampled 50 sites, gave us 100 samples. One quick thing about Biloxi Bay, it's been cultched quite a bit since 2018. We've put cultch pretty much everywhere that you can see on this map. And at this point, I would say we have pretty good coverage of the cultch in that area.

Recruitment here was low -- lower to the Western Sound, and we're -- continued to see that low recruitment throughout the summer. Like I said a second ago, we do hope to see something this fall in the coming weeks or right now. And we're going to monitor our spat tiles with that.

And then if you look at the size class distribution, our 2025 seed class progressed into market-size oysters, and the market category went from 2.2 to 4 per -- oysters per square meter. But if you see what's behind that, it is fairly low, so we're keeping an eye on that and going to monitor it appropriately.

Overall, Biloxi Bay does have some oysters on it, but they're spread across the whole reef complex, so they're not in one designated spot as some of the western reefs are. They're over the whole 227 acres, which will make it a little bit more work for the harvesters to go out there and find those oysters. So that's all of the reef assessments individually.

I did want to take a second and just show you a visualization of what we're seeing in some of our areas in the west. If you take a look at this heat map on the screen right here, we have green dots which shows oyster densities on cultch plants. Every polygon on that -- on the map is a cultch plant. Green dots are oysters and densities. The thicker the dot, the more oysters there are.

If you look at it right now, you can see Henderson Point, Pass Christian Tonging and Dredging all show relatively good densities on those areas. That's 2024.

And then going into '25, you can see they all got a little bit heavier. Everywhere across the board on those cultch plants, our oysters increased. That's what we expect. We didn't have much harvest going from '24 to '25, and then

everything got a little bit better.

And if you move to this past season, I do want to just show this. If you look at those three spots -- or those areas specifically, you can see where harvest pressure and where some of the salinity events occurred near shore. And then Pass Christian Tonging and Dredging, we did have harvest from those areas.

And then the salinity event, so going from '25 to '26, you do see that it decreases slightly. That's not a bad thing. It just shows what we expected. That's where people are fishing and that -- there's going to be less resource there.

One of the good things to note is that if you look at Henderson Point, as you can see from '24 to '26, it increases. The density increases nicely, and, again, that reflects in our reef assessment. We have high hopes for Henderson Point this year and we want to see some people fishing over in that area,

So this doesn't tell you anything other than -- I mean, different than what I just told you. It just gives you a quick visual of where we're at. It's good to see and it's good to track

things on a map like this.

So to put the whole picture in perspective for you, this slide is going to summarize all the total sacks and the reef estimates across complexes. So for '25, our reef estimate across all complexes was 274,833 sacks. We had a 30 percent quota of 82,450 sacks. In that year, we harvested 50,427 sacks, which, again, was our highest since 2013.

And if you want to break that down by reef, we can do so. Henderson Point had a reef estimate of 146,000 sacks. We harvested -- approximately 11,000 sacks harvested. That was about eight percent of the available oysters on that reef complex.

St. Joe had an estimate of 29,451 sacks. They harvested -- 421 sacks harvested, which equates to about one percent of the available oysters on that reef.

Pass Christian Tonging had an estimate of 50,920 sacks, with 20,766 sacks harvested. That's about 41 percent of the available oysters from that reef complex.

Dredging had an estimate of 31,000 sacks. We harvested 11,000 sacks, which is about

37 percent of the available oysters on that reef complex.

Pass Marianne had an estimate of 16,893 sacks, with 5,770 sacks being harvested, which is about 34 percent of the available oysters.

Stanislaus harvested 342 sacks, and then Waveland had no harvest last year.

If we look ahead into '26, our total reef estimates have increased. That's great news. They're up to 398,645 sacks. By reef, Henderson Point's estimate is up 18 percent to 173,000 sacks.

St. Joe's estimate is up to 156,507 sacks -- sorry, excuse me.

Both of those reefs are showing strong estimates and that's where we are recommending focusing this season. We want to see those areas being fished and harvested from.

Pass Christian Tonging is down 52 percent to 24,596 sacks, and Pass Christian Dredging is down 21 percent to 24,618 sacks. Again, both of those reefs last year, saw some harvest from them, and then the mortality event in June.

Overall, that -- our numbers are tracking from what we saw between harvest and the mortality event last year.

To close it out, Pass Marianne is down 51 percent to 8,328 sacks, which lines up with the limited recruitment that we saw since 2023.

And Stanislaus has an estimate of 7,349 sacks. Waveland has an estimate of 3,605 sacks.

So overall, with these observations and our concern about the resiliency of the reefs, our recommendation to the Director is to maintain the 30 percent quota of each reef. We think this keeps the harvest in check and shows the areas that are stressed. We can monitor and we can also, at the same time, allow measured growth on the reefs with stronger estimates.

So overall, the bigger picture is a good one. Our oyster numbers are the highest we've seen in a long time. And I think it's a real sign of what we have here. I think we need to take some time and manage appropriately this season, let people harvest some oysters, and then track what we're doing and monitor going forward.

So with that, I do have a couple discussion topics I wanted to bring up for y'all. We had a meeting last week with the fishermen in Pass Christian. We went over the same presentation. We gained some feedback from them.

Essentially, what we got from them is they're requesting -- they were okay with October 1 start date for the season. They wanted to keep the sack limits the same. Last year was 20 for dredgers and 15 for tonging. Nobody had too much concern about that. They wanted to keep it there. They wanted to start harvesting some oysters early, see if they can't get ahead of the market, take advantage of Cruisin' the Coast and do some things like that.

One thing that we did talk about extensively was the tonging reefs, so Pass Christian Tong, as we discussed, is limited this season, so they're looking for other options. Some of those options can be St. Stanislaus, Waveland and Biloxi as tonging reefs only. We don't have any issues with that and I think we can do that in the opening order, but we want to make sure everyone's aware of what we're doing.

Another thing that we have is because of the October 1 start date, our time temperature matrix -- so that the time that the oysters have on the water -- is relatively reduced from what they're used to. It would run from 7:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. So we would open at legal -- or we would

open at 7:00 a.m. every day. The oystermen can go out there, harvest their oysters, but they have to be checked in at 1:30, so that's just kind of some of the things that we're looking into.

Also, we are looking at doing some checkout stations, so check stations at the Bay St. Louis boat launch, it's Washington Avenue over there, to ease them if they're fishing in that Waveland area in St. Stanislaus. We'd have a check station there. And then we'd have a check station in Ocean Springs if anyone's interested in harvesting in Biloxi.

Finally, we have a text message system that we communicated with the harvesters last season. It seemed to work pretty good. We put out opening and closing orders with that due to rainfall and things. Any changes in the season, we notify people from that. So if anyone wants to be notified, shoot us an e-mail with your telephone number -- your name and telephone number to that oyster@dmr.ms.gov account.

Any questions?

MATTHEW MAYFIELD:

I think it looks fantastic. It's like a great job with the team surpassing -- getting more

samples than ever before. That's very commendable.

JASON RYDER:

Thank you.

JOE SPRAGGINS:

One thing we do want to change -- I know you didn't put it in there. It's probably my fault for not talking with you about it, but the dredgers, we're going to open up -- when we open up, we're only going to open Henderson and St. Joe because that's where all the oysters are at, the large majority of them, and they're in the three-to four-inch size. And we definitely need to get those oysters. And they're good market-size oysters and that's what we need to go after before we open up the others.

You know, the reason that we're looking at the St. Joe and -- I mean, the Stanislaus and Biloxi and other reefs there for the tongers is because October seems to be the best weather. And then after that, we get a lot of rain and stuff like that. Well, that -- all those reefs close with, what, a half inch of rain, I think?

JASON RYDER:

Pretty much.

JOE SPRAGGINS:

And so the idea is let's get that first, and then we'll open up the rest of it for them, and we'll look at that. How about -- if that makes sense.

And we just want to -- we're trying to work with them. I didn't see any argument. I don't think y'all did either to -- you know, the fishermen last week, they didn't get mad about, you know, opening up the areas we're talking about. And, hopefully, we'll be able to get some fishermen out there and they'll be able to -- you know, oystermen and be able to catch some. And looks good as long as the weather will hold up.

JASON RYDER:

That's right.

JONATHAN MCLENDON:

So the reef estimates look absolutely phenomenal, and you guys did a lot of work out there sampling. I mean, that had to generate a lot of excitement among the oyster folks, huh?

JASON RYDER:

Yeah, it is. They did look good. We did a lot of sampling this season. Like I said, it takes a lot of work and I'll give credit to all the -- to everyone that sampled. It was the

majority of them that did all the work, but what it does is it allows us to get a pretty good understanding of what's on those reefs. So I feel like the more samples that we do, the better understanding that we have so we can present here and be confident in what we have out there.

JONATHAN MCLENDON:

And I know that after last year, before that, we were closed for several years, so a lot of the oyster fishermen showed up here and they were -- you know, the equipment is in disrepair and this kind of caught them all by surprise. I mean, so right now, like they're planning. They're investing in the equipment.

JASON RYDER:

Yeah. So last week we had a meeting and I think we had a good crowd there. I'm not quite sure of the total number of people, but we had a room full of people that were interested and they were ready to start going. We said October 1, no one batted an eye at it. They think they have some sales coming in and so we want to give them the opportunity to get those oysters.

JONATHAN MCLENDON:

Yeah. No. That's a huge quota.

JOE SPRAGGINS:

The good thing too, October 1, first off, the -- Texas is not open then. The East Coast is not open then, so that gives us a chance to get out there. And even the majority of Louisiana is not open then because, you know, they have some areas that are open that they use for moving from one to the other, but, you know, it's a good chance for our fishermen to get out there.

And we also got, you know, some more people that are stepping up to be in the buying program. And that's another good thing. Bradley's has bought into the Pass Christian area and they're looking at buying a lot of oysters. And then Shemper's is looking at buying oysters this year, you know, and doing some things that hadn't been able to do it.

And, obviously, we've got Jennifer still doing her thing with Crystal Seas, and, hopefully, if -- we can get this moving and get people to looking at the oysters. And I think the biggest thing that if we can get these market-sized oysters out there, and I'm talking three- to four-inch oysters, if we get those out there with a taste that they are in Mississippi, then that's going to

turn things around again because Mississippi got a little bit of a bad reputation last year because of all the oysters being too big. You know, they were big oysters. Well, we got some good oysters there, so let's go get them and let's put them out there, you know, and I think that's what we're looking at.

And I do appreciate the team, the whole team. Y'all did a great job. I tell you what, their pattern is working. What they do is working.

You know, if you go to look at us in 2019, there probably wasn't 20 oysters in the water out there, and look at where we're at now. 400,000 sacks of oysters, marketable sacks. That's what we're talking about, 400,000, so that's a lot of oysters in there that have come around and it's all because of them working hard, cultching and putting spat on shell and doing the things that they've done and being able to manage it. And they're doing a fantastic job of managing the resource.

And I think 30 percent, if we get 100,000 sacks, when we're done, we're going to double what we got last year. Does that tell you something?

JONATHAN MCLENDON:

Amen.

JOE SPRAGGINS:

So let's see where we're at.

JASON RYDER:

Thank y'all.

JONATHAN MCLENDON:

Thank you.

MATTHEW MAYFIELD:

Thank you.

TREVOR MONCRIEF:

I'll say the only thing to add there is that there's one -- one departure that we hadn't gone down, which is the -- designating those reefs as tonging only. If the Commission's in general agreement there with that recommendation, that's really the main significant one that's going to be changed from what we've done in the past.

RONNIE DANIELS:

You're talking about Stanislaus and Waveland, right?

TREVOR MONCRIEF:

Yeah, Stanislaus and Waveland.

JONATHAN MCLENDON:

You need a motion?

CAM ROBERDS:

Did y'all talk about that with the fishermen? It sounds like in the last meeting --

TREVOR MONCRIEF:

It was brought up. Some of the fishermen discussed it. It wasn't explicitly brought up, but it was basically the tonging season, the availability of the amount of sacks and all that was going to restrict their season a little bit. And so those were two areas that were identified as tongable because of depth, proximity to shore, and I think everyone was there.

Currently, they don't have that designation, but our general recommendation is that because of the constraint they might be under and the availability of sacks on St. Joe and Henderson Point, that would be a good recommendation to make.

JONATHAN MCLENDON:

Can we go back one slide, Brady, to the discussion topics? So which one are we talking about, Trevor?

TREVOR MONCRIEF:

It's Number 3.

JONATHAN MCLENDON:

Okay.

JOE SPRAGGINS:

Yeah, tonging reefs only.

JONATHAN MCLENDON:

Yeah.

SANDY CHESNUT:

Trevor, remind me. It's been a while since I've looked at this. Are tonging reefs designated by regulation?

No. It's on a -- the Director does it on a season by -- basis?

JASON RYDER:

So we used to have a tonging line that designated the break on it. I believe that tonging line's removed. I believe we can do the -- accomplish this with tonging reef only in the opening order from the Director.

SANDY CHESNUT:

In an opening order?

JASON RYDER:

Yeah.

SANDY CHESNUT:

Okay. That's what I needed to know. Thank you. I just hadn't looked at it in a while.

JONATHAN MCLENDON:

Do we need motions on any of this, Sandy?

SANDY CHESNUT:

No.

JONATHAN MCLENDON:

Okay. Good deal.

TREVOR MONCRIEF:

Just general agreement is all we're looking for on that one.

CAM ROBERDS:

Looks good.

TREVOR MONCRIEF:

All right. So you got me on this last one. Josh called in.

I'm going to go ahead and knock out these records. So we have three records for you.

First one's conventional tackle. It's a Spanish hogfish. It's a new record, one pound, 6.4 ounces. The angler is James Graham. There's a picture of that Spanish hogfish, Mr. Graham with that fish.

We've another one. It's a southern stargazer. One of three species in the Sound that can produce electricity, believe it or not. It's a new record, 7.8 ounces. How they caught it, I have no idea. So there's a picture of the stargazer there, and there he is with the fish. Obviously, you can see he's not holding it. Don't want to get shocked.

RONNIE DANIELS:

That's how they caught it.

TREVOR MONCRIEF:

Yeah. And then the last one we have is a youth conventional tackle, Spanish mackerel. It's -- the old record was four pounds, 6.4 ounces. That new one is five pounds, 8.32 ounces. Riley Armes is the angler, and there's a picture of the fish.

And all we would need is just a motion to recommend the approval.

CAM ROBERDS:

I'll make the motion.

RONNIE DANIELS:

Second.

JONATHAN MCLENDON:

So Cam made a motion and Ronnie seconded.

All in favor?

(Unanimous vote.)

JONATHAN MCLENDON:

Next up, we have Dr. Gray for the Grand Bay National Research Reserve.

AYESHA GRAY:

Good morning.

JONATHAN MCLENDON:

Good morning.

AYESHA GRAY:

All right. So this is -- that's not the PDF.

Anyway, yeah. I'm here to invite you to our art show, so we're having -- and to tell you about the program that created this. So the show is called Rendered Nature, and these are both block prints and batik art prints that have been done by the public and folks. We call it Impressions from the Grand Bay NERR, and we're inviting folks to come and tour our reserve through the eyes of our artists.

This is going to be this next Monday evening. It's going to be an opening and then we'll have the show hanging for about three weeks.

Is that all you have? There was a full presentation on this. I think he's pulling it up right now. It should be on a PDF, Brady. There you go.

Okay. So this is part of the vision of the Reserve that we have written into our management plan, and that -- and our vision is that we inspire the community to value, support, and practice ecosystem conservation. And I've been doing habitat restoration and ecosystem

conservation for a long time, like 28 years.

And I'm kind of -- and I'm also an artist on the side. And one of the things I discovered along the way was that we ended up talking to the same people a lot. We talk to people who are outdoorsmen or people who enjoy walking on trails, but there's aspects of our community that I felt like we were missing.

And so with this vision, I made an aim to like reach out to what we called non-traditional audiences in our grant. And so one of those non-traditional audiences was artists, and so what we did was in 2015, we started to offer these art workshops.

And I'm a batik artist, so we sort of started with me as the trainer. And batik is an ancient art form where you draw with wax on fabric and then paint it and it goes through this long process. And so I asked folks to come to our Reserve, find something that inspired them and make a piece of art, render the Reserve in some way.

And so we started this in 2015. We connect artists with nature and ecosystem conservation. Our aim is that we're inspiring them to see something, to create something, and then by

looking at it carefully, to know more about it.

So if you look, that's a little ruby-throated hummingbird that I saw walking up to the Reserve one day, and I rendered it in batik. And by doing that, I had to take a real close look at it. I had to notice all the different parts of it.

And I think we're there as biologists in the background to talk about relevant current natural history along with this, and then we use these art pieces in an effort to further engage. And so I've gone to scientific conferences. I've talked about using art to engage or we call it artistic pathways to scientific understanding, so using art to help people understand science.

So it's a pretty simple format. We go outside and we unwind and we take a look and we walk on the trails and we find the different stuff. We talk about what we're seeing. We find something to act as our inspiration, so we find our inspiration.

And then we go back and we learn, in this case, to batik. We learn this complicated technique. We make a drawing. And I'm able to engage people to talk about the reserve, to talk

about the estuary, and we're bringing in folks that would never come out there, you know. Some of -- not never, but a lot of them don't usually come out there and so it's a new experience for them. We get a lot of newcomers. And then we create art through this process.

And then as we were doing that, we realized that we can use this same format in our different other aspects of our program. So we started incorporating it into our veterans program. So we have a relationship with the Biloxi VA. We bring out all kinds of veterans from all the different programs there. We bring them out to kayak and to take different tours of the Reserve.

And so we started doing -- making art with them, and so I really love this because that is the power line that's next to the Reserve, the transmission line, and there's an osprey nest on top of it. And so he decided that that was the piece of art he was going to make, and I love that. I love seeing the Reserve through the eyes of these other people, and that's really what I wanted to share with the public.

So this program, this has been 11 years, you know, so this -- we expanded the program.

Other independent artists joined us and wanted to teach their techniques. So we have botanical watercolor. We have pastel. Carrie-Ann in the middle taught a class where she taught teenagers how to draw, because I'm good at teaching a technique, but she has a master's in art. I'm aquatic sciences, and so she was able to -- like, we were able to really expand the program within these different areas.

And so we started naming Number 3 as learn a technique instead of learn to batik, and we taught all these other techniques like the block printing or the drawing for teenagers and their grownups. And then we created more art that reflects the Reserve.

And so as we do this, we're acquiring a lot of this art and I wanted to have a way to show it, and so that's what this art show is about.

Before we did the show, I also broadened the program, so these -- we invited the other NERRs across the Gulf Coast, so Apalachicola, Rookery, Weeks Bay, and Mission-Aransas all visited us. Their education coordinators came to our Reserve. We taught them what we were doing and we sent them back to their reserves to, you know, take the

program with them and they have.

And so this is a vibrant program across the NERR, so I think the real value of it is that, you know, we're getting mostly newcomers when this happens. These folks are seeing the Reserve, they're learning an art technique and they're leaving the Reserve with art that they made that's inspired by the Reserve. They create memories and this is -- and it's a great experience. And the whole aim -- my entire aim is that folks value land conservation because having these wild places, having wilderness to go to is so important for us.

So this is a little preview of our show. We have over 100 pieces that we're going to show.

And that was the end, I think. So do you have any questions?

RONNIE DANIELS:

That's impressive. Good job. I like that you're incorporating the veterans into that. That seems like that would be something really good for them.

AYESHA GRAY:

It has been really amazing. They have a great time when they're doing it. We have a great time doing it with them. And they often talk about

like how relaxing it is and how it's something that they want to continue doing, so -- on their own time. So that's the invitation.

MATTHEW MAYFIELD:

Great job.

AYESHA GRAY:

Yeah. Thanks so much.

JONATHAN MCLENDON:

Thank you.

CAM ROBERDS:

Appreciate it.

JONATHAN MCLENDON:

All right. Any other business?

(No response.)

JONATHAN MCLENDON:

All right. Can we get a -- no public comments today. Can we get a motion to close?

CAM ROBERDS:

Motion.

MATTHEW MAYFIELD:

Second.

JONATHAN MCLENDON:

All in favor?

(Unanimous vote.)

(Meeting adjourned.)

CERTIFICATE OF COURT REPORTER

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

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

Witness my signature and seal, this the 14th day of October, 2026.



Melissa Burdine-Rodolfich
My Commission Expires 4/28/24