

Artificial Reef Council Meeting – September 25, 2019, 9:00 am

Joe L. Herring Louisiana Room, LDWF Headquarters, Baton Rouge, LA

Council Members:

Chris D’Elia, Dean of the College of the Coast and Environment, LSU

Robert Twilley, Executive Director of Louisiana Sea Grant

Patrick Banks, Assistant Secretary of the Office of Fisheries, LDWF

Attendees:

Clint Rayes, ExxonMobil

Jerel Gilmore, TSB/ExxonMobil

Chard Courville, Miami

Nelson Schexnayder, Hunt Oil

Jim Dicharry, GHD

Doug Peter, BSEE

David Cresson, CCA

Camp Matens, CCA

1) Patrick Banks welcomes everyone and begins the meeting, the Council members introduce themselves.

2) Before approval of the agenda, P. Banks asks the Council to consider moving item six up. A motion to modify passes; a motion to adopt the agenda as modified passes.

3) A motion to approve the minutes passes.

4) Mike McDonough presents the Proposed changes to the Nearshore Planning Areas. States that Phase I of proposal was presented to Council at previous meeting, given conditional approval based on Shrimp Task Force (STF) input. Program presented to STF and sent info about the proposal to Louisiana Shrimp Alliance for a meeting. No further questions or comments. Phase II is new, but based on lessons learned, process of building Phase I. Also trimmed some overlap, sites within the 3-mile line. Overlaid shrimp trawl effort—98% had < 1 trawl/year. Five had more; all were trimmed. Final proposal: 208 removed favorites, 170 standing favorites. P. Banks asks whether shrimp effort data might include non-active shrimping. M. McDonough answers that NOAA Fisheries’ algorithm detects tows, based on rate of travel. Effort was low within polygons and low in the vicinity. P. Banks clarifies that Phase I was conditionally approved, asks about Program outreach effort. M. McDonough answers that Program went to fishermen’s meetings held by Sea Grant, presented to STF and made adjustments based on their feedback, presented revised proposal (Phase I) to Council and STF, stayed in touch with Acy Cooper and

STF—no further questions and comments. P. Banks mentioned he had heard from a dealer who questioned the quarter-nautical mile size of the zones. M. McDonough answered that distance was chosen based on trawler avoidance of platforms (info gained from previous outreach efforts), and that there would be a 100' buffer within each zone where material would not be placed. P. Banks asks whether Phase II has been presented to shrimping community, and M. McDonough answers that it is on next STF agenda. Robert Twilley asks about the numbers, standing and already-removed, Phase I and Phase II. M. McDonough answers Phase I: 263 already removed, 267 still standing; Phase II: 208 already removed, 170 still standing. Some discussion about the map on screen: shows some of the sites that were trimmed from the original proposal. R. Twilley asks whether there will be further proposals. M. McDonough answers that Phase II is the final step for nearshore planning. P. Banks asks about the timeline for actual development. M. McDonough answers that timeline is decades: 1-2 nearshore deployments per year so far—hundreds of sites to address. R. Twilley asks about the standing platforms and % reefing. M. McDonough answers that it will likely be difficult to reef even 10%, obstacles to reefing in < 100' water depth. P. Banks asks for public comment, motion to approve Phase II. M. McDonough mentions there were 32 letters of support. David Cresson, Coastal Conservation Association of Louisiana, encourages Council to approve, states that it's big positive for recreational community, cites positive comments on social media about two recent deployments. Removal of platforms biggest issue he hears about. Cites good relationship with commercial sector on this point. P. Banks thanks D. Cresson for his, CCA's efforts on behalf of proposal. No further comment. Motion passes. M. McDonough thanks Council and partners.

5) M. McDonough begins Program updates. Reminds boundaries: inshore, nearshore, offshore. 78 offshore reef sites, 1 new deepwater: 48 Planning Area, 18 SARS, 12 Deepwater. 405 platforms jackets, 12 in current year. Nearshore: South Marsh Island (SM) 233 W & E finished, awaiting survey, Ship Shoal (SS) 94 & 108 ongoing, Vermilion (VR) 119 & 124 ongoing. Rec Use funding for the "Pickets" and Grand Isle (GI) 9.

Ashley Ferguson updated inshore and NRDA (Rec Use) projects.

There are eleven NRDA projects in total. The West End, Lakefront, Cypremort Point, and Rabbit Island Reef sites are underway. Material delivery has been a challenge due to the river being high, and now it is too low and silted in in some areas, causing limestone delivery challenges, particularly in an area called Victoria Bend. Contractors are working hard to have projects completed by the end of 2019.

Ship Shoal 26 is under contract. California Point's funding is being reconsidered. Bird Island and Point Mast are estimated to be completed by July 2020. Most projects have been bid at or below their budget, but Independence Island and Grand Isle 9 were budgeted at \$750,000 and the bid came back over 1 million for each reef. We are going to rebid these projects after our other reefs are completed to make sure we get the best bang for our buck on the Ind Island and GI9 reefs.

The East Calcasieu reef site has been deployed. There was already 1500 tons of crushed concrete and concrete pilings at this site, so we enhanced it with NRDA funds. We deployed 6000 tons of

material – 4000 tons of crushed concrete and 2000 tons of limestone. This was a cooperative endeavor with CCA.

In addition to the 11 NRDA sites we are working on cooperative endeavor with the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation. These are 4 new artificial reef sites located in the Biloxi Marsh area. We have 4 10-acre sites. There will be reefball, limestone and shell deployed, which will be about 1 acre of material in each site.

We have the results of our human dimension survey. 3000 questionnaires were mailed out, 644 responded. 87% reported they had fished in 2018. 11.7% visited a reef in 2018. GI9 followed by East Calcasieu were the highest fished reefs. SST was the highest targeted fish, followed by red drum. Fishermen reported they choose reefs based on type of fish they will catch, distance from port, depth of water and current strength were important to them. Material type, size and style of material layout did not matter to anglers. Anglers would like us to make our coordinates and provide more information about our reef program. While we are enhancing reefs, we will be able to improve on awareness through our website and outreach groups and hopefully see an increase in our future surveying efforts. Overall satisfaction of the reef program surveyed at 58.8%, which is not bad but leaves some room for improvement. We are hoping to see that number rise in the future due to our increase in nearshore efforts and increased awareness.

Zachary Chain provides an update on inshore and nearshore artificial reef monitoring efforts and describes proposed pre-deployment monitoring efforts within the Point Mast, Bird Island and Independence Island reef sites. Brief description of eDNA techniques being utilized by the Pillar Lab at Southeastern Louisiana University to assess species diversity at 9 reef sites and corresponding control sites. R. Twilley adds that SeaGrant provided funding for this project. Z. Chain continues, stating that preliminary data shows that 8-13 species are being identified per reef sampling site through the analysis of eDNA samples. In general, more species are being detected at reef sites in comparison to their controls. Future work on this project involves continued analysis of samples and the expansion of the sequence reference database. Z. Chain transitions to a description of NRDA Rec. Use funded artificial reef enhancement monitoring efforts, which include the use of gillnets, benthic trays, rod and reel fishing and user observations to assess the health and public use of reef enhancements. The East Calcasieu Reef is the only reef that has been enhanced at this time. Reef enhancement delays afford the opportunity to assess pre-deployment reef enhancement sites utilizing gill net and rod and reel sampling techniques. Pre-deployment monitoring sites include the Point Mast, Bird Island and Independence Island Reef sites. Bathymetry maps of those sites is displayed. Robert Twilley asks about the timeline for the Department's monitoring efforts. Z. Chain replies that NRDA funds have been provided for 5 years of monitoring and that the goal is to continue monitoring efforts beyond that. P. Banks asks if Dr. Piller is utilizing other sampling techniques in addition to water sampling for eDNA. Z. Chain responds that only water samples are being taken. P. Banks expresses an interest in the results of the Department's sampling efforts versus those of Dr. Pillar's. Z. Chain is asked what is being extracted from water samples for DNA analysis. He responds that DNA is sequenced from traces of blood, mucus or other materials shed by aquatic

organisms. Z. Chain is asked how many reefs are being sampled by Dr. Pillar and he responds with 9 inshore reefs.

6) M. McDonough presents the budget plan for the current fiscal year. Activities conform to Artificial Reef Strategic Plan, passed last year. First slide displays current level and history of Artificial Reef Fund: end-of-year balance, revenue, expenditures. Current year's expenditures calculated on two years ago, per Strategic Plan. Underspent that last three years, tapping those savings this year. Administration a little over \$2M. Monitoring projects (beyond Zach's group's work). Master's level research—still working to create this program. R. Twilley mentions that the CPRA program Sea Grant manages got accolades, strong for internships and workplace development. Enhancement activities: cooperative endeavor agreements with CCA and LPBF: reef deployments; buoys; spat on shell project. Great red snapper project: \$2M to supplement. Multi-beam survey/offshore: almost \$200K, 14-16 reefs per year. Monitoring by ROV survey, want to investigate for management decisions. There is \$200K for the Vermilion nearshore reefs. Another \$200K for further nearshore development. P. Banks addresses red snapper: legislature asked Department to do a Louisiana specific stock estimate: number of fish offshore Louisiana. Bid package is out, two very good bids: one LSU, one private. "Great red snapper count" is the Gulf-wide project, administered by Sea Grant. Greg Stunz is leader, hasn't been as much progress as he'd like. P. Banks able to get update from Stunz at Gulf Council meeting. Louisiana effort will augment and complement. R. Twilley speaks to importance of return on investment, asks Jack Isaacs about estimates. (J. Isaacs: recording not loud enough). R. Twilley: Sea Grant has been asked if they'd be able to evaluate tourism dollars and what is the value of the coast. Number attributable to reefs could be significant. (J. Isaacs not loud enough). R. Twilley would like to talk about further, ensure Sea Grant's projects and any \$ estimates related to reefs are compatible. P. Banks points out the follow-up survey may be an opportunity for this kind of question.

7) No public comment

8) No other business, but P. Banks asks about next Council meeting. M. McDonough answers 2-3 months or early next year. Discussion about progress report meeting telling how we met goals set in 'budget' meeting. P. Banks would like to get an update on red snapper, might not be ready for next meeting. Jason Froeba states that we have gotten 'ok' to send out notification letters, should be on Secretary's desk. Work won't start until spring. P. Banks: timeline for work? J. Froeba: wanted to be one year, but some negotiation on that point, maybe more time for reporting and analysis.

9) Motion to adjourn passes.