**Shrimp Task Force Meeting**

**Thursday, May 20, 2021, 10:00am**

**LDWF Headquarters**

**2000 Quail Dr.**

**Baton Rouge, LA 70898**

I. Pledgeof Allegiance

II. Roll Call

**Voting Members Present:**

George Barisich

Acy Cooper, Jr.

Rodney Olander

Alan Gibson

Andrew Blanchard

Craig Authement

**Voting Members Absent:**

Lance Nacio

Kristen Baumer

**Non-Voting Members Present:**

Peyton Cagle

Jack Isaacs

Gene Cavalier

**Non-Voting Members Absent:**

Meg Bankston

Justin Gremillion

III. Rodney Olander motioned to approve the March 31, 2021 meeting minutes, 2nd by Andrew. Motion carries.

IV. Rodney Olander motioned to approve the May 20, 2021 meeting agenda, 2nd by Acy Cooper. Motion carries.

V. Financial Report:

Remaining Fund Balance- $657,799

Remaining Budget Balance- $59,969

Rodney Olander motioned to accept the financial report as presented, 2nd by Alan Gibson. Motion carries.

VI. The task force reviewed the Federal Shrimp Permit expiration list

VII. New Business:

1. Jason Froeba led discussion and provided an update on the 2019 Federal Fisheries Disaster Funding

CARES ACT 1- funding should be out the door by now, anyone who has not received their second payment should contact LDWF. The second payment has been approved by Gulf States for a couple of weeks now and should be going out pretty quickly.

CARES 2- Submitted a spending plan for the second round of CARES Act funding, referred to as CARES 2, it’s pretty much a mirror of what was done in CARES 1. NOAA would like to see money being disbursed by September. Switched from a 3-4 month loss period to a year (12 months) loss period now that we have a full year behind us. The time of loss period being considered was one of the primary complaints from the industry. It was hard for some industry members to figure out how much money was made in the early spring period when the pandemic first hit, so this was changed to the full 12 month loss period. Because of the shortened time frame there will only be one payment, no first round or second round will be one payment. NOAA will require another application because a new certification is needed to prove a 35% loss. If you submitted an application on the first round, will not require all the information again some information will be saved from first application; looking at a 35% loss for 2020

Acy Cooper stated that one issue is the guys that went to work and it came back to bite you, the ones who went back to work got penalized while the ones who stayed home got more money

Alan Gibson stated that lots of guys who he’s spoken to had a more than 35% loss at the time of the first round but when you go back to the full year loss period, those guys who have continued to work will have less than a 35% loss because they continued to work they will actually get nothing. Where the guys who sat at home and didn’t do anything will get one check, two checks, and maybe three checks. The guys who continued to work are being penalized, NOAA needs to know this is not working, the guys who went to work to try and keep the industry alive are the ones suffering

Acy Cooper requested feedback on the farmers’ loss percentage requirement on disaster funding from the LA Dept. of Ag and Forestry

2019 Flood Disaster Funding: no loss requirements so if you went to work you have just as much of an opportunity as the guy who didn’t go to work. Plan sent out to task force chairman in hopes that they would share it with the board members. Plan to release this plan to the public sometime during the first week of June, will then have 45 days of public comment, take comments and make any adjustments to plan and submit a final draft to NOAA for approval. This plan is a little different than the last time the STF has seen it there was a lot more programs in the plan before, it was later decided to do away with so many programs and put as much money as possible towards an equipment reimbursement grant program. Initially this program would have a $10K cap but at this level of funding that cap has been increased to $30K.

Rodney Olander asked where did the match come from? The equipment program was discussed several times amongst the task force and never once was it favorable by the industry to do matched money. The issue is there are not many fishermen with the years the industry has been having that have the $30K to use towards purchasing equipment. Was under the assumption this program would be for the industry to purchase equipment not be matched for equipment purchased. Also nowhere in the draft does it go back to the 2019 flood where reimbursements for improvements already made can be considered. Certain fishermen made improvements to boats and equipment thinking they would be reimbursed through this program, would like to make sure it is included in the plan to reimburse the industry for improvements and equipment purchases already made

Jason Froeba stated that new expenses and previously incurred expenses that were acquired on or after September 1, 2019 will be eligible for reimbursement, provided it meets program requirements. Stated that LDWF will take into consideration the total reimbursement instead of a match. If the plan gets approved by NOAA there will have to be a set of application guidelines that goes into this

George Barisich what happen to the survey deal? Got put into the equipment reimbursement, didn’t feel the survey could be justified falling under NOAA rules, right now cap $30K at 50% would like 100% instead of an equipment match

Nothing on hurricane relief funding as of yet, working with NOAA, the issue with NOAA fisheries disaster program requirements are a loss based on a 12-month period, it and so would not benefit the industry if you do it now you would be looking at a time prior to the hurricanes, nothing to report on that at this point

Update on Senate Bill 134, which provides relative to taking shrimp in Lake Pontchartrain. Acy Cooper and George Barisich attended the Senate Natural Resources Committee meeting. There were issues on both sides from the shrimp and crab industry so Senate Resolution 105 was introduced, which requests the Crab Task Force and the Louisiana Shrimp Task Force, with input from the Dept. of Wildlife and Fisheries, to study ways to minimize damage to crab traps, return crab traps to crab fishermen in order to reduce derelict crab traps in Lake Pontchartrain and report any recommendations to the Senate Committee on Natural Resources on or before February 4, 2022. The issue is not night time trawling as much as it is an issue between user groups, currently trying to come up with a solution. STF to meet with the CTF to see if they can come up with a solution, need to do this within the next 12 months.

Rodney Olander stated that this was done years ago, bay closed to night trawling because too many traps being lost at night, since then the area is only day trawling instead of night trawling, need to continue fighting this or the lake will become a crab lake, crabbers fish 12 months and shrimpers only fish 5

Acy Cooper stated that it puts all the pressure on the shrimp industry, need a joint TF meeting soon, Mississippi trawlers were coming in and getting traps and leaving with them, why is the issue being placed on the LA shrimp industry

Rodney stated that there should be a limit on crab cages during the shrimp season, the shrimp industry has to fight with cages

1. The TF heard an update on HB 691, which provides relative to fee increases for the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries.

George Barisich led discussion stating that LDWF presented an increase in fees, talked about this two years ago with the STF and now this is just being brought up a few weeks before the bill is heard. Went to the hearing, small changes were made to the commercial fishing license and the vessel license fees, totality of the increases is what’s hurting the industry. Considered going down 35% on the fee increases originally proposed, also would give three years to phase the increases in, industry requested for a simple 30% increase in all fees with the agreement that if the improves and goes up it would be agreeable to have a yearly increase in fees, needed 70 votes and they only got 68 votes so it failed, the bill was called up for reconsideration, an amendment came up to take shrimp and crawfish out of the bill and that passed, now the bill has significantly changed to where the crabbers and oyster industry is going to carry most of the weight, still have to go in front of the Senate Natural Resources Committee and would like to propose taking a 30% increase across the board on all license fees, that way every industry will be paying a little bit of a n increase

Acy Cooper stated that the bill should not have went to the legislature the way it was, as much as the shrimp industry has worked with LDWF and vice versa disappointed to see this go the way it did. To come two years ago and tell the shrimp industry that the licenses are going to go up and then come 10 days before the bill is heard doesn’t work, LDWF should have come back within the two years to work the issues out the industry, could have worked something out but it’s disappointing to fight this issue out, the industry wants to work with LDWF

Alan Gibson stated that when he met with the house committee, one of the questions is why do we have a task force if we don’t have representation and communication here, that fight should never have been, to have a 73-page document with many amendments not the industry cannot support at this time because not sure what is in it at this point, it’s a changing document, this questions the amount of time and effort the task force puts forth to meet why wasn’t it brought to us sooner, would like to see more communication between the industry and LDWF in the future

Rodney Olander stated that at the last STF meeting a motion was made to form a committee to work with LDWF on the licensing bill before anything went forward and nothing was ever done

Acy Cooper stated that the task force’s funds comes from vessel license sales, the bill proposes creating one account waiting on Attorney General opinion on hiring a lobbyist for the industry and the STF

Alan Gibson another concern is that it is only going to produce $16M of the 30M deficit, if we end up with a deficit and do end up in the general fund, need to make sure this is clear

Andrew Blanchard stated that the industry keeps on shrinking and LDWF can’t keep looking to the industry to support the deficit, the commercial side is not the answer to the problem, we have to figure out another way to get funding and not just rely on the commercial industry, the industry should contribute but the industry is not making any money right

1. The board discussed a NOAA proposed rule which would consider the use of TEDs in skimmer trawl vessels less than 40ft in length

Chris Schieble stated that back in 2016 a proposed rule was put in place for skimmer boats 40ft and above and then a final rule was implemented on that and then we also had a final rule delaying implementation of that back in 2016. So it has gotten us to this point now where we have an advanced notice of proposed rulemaking that is currently open for public comment through today. Back at the April Commission meeting, the Commission asked LDWF to draft a letter on behalf of the Commission opposing the implementation of this rule. A comment was drafted from LDWF and before the May Commission meeting NOAA to change the rule to include all vessels regardless of size if they had skimmer nets. So we went back and redrafted the letter. A new letter is currently drafted in it is in our legal department for final review. The letter serves two purposes, the first is to express the Commission’s opposition to the rulemaking which requires turtle excluder devices on all shrimp boats using skimmer nets regardless of size and it also serves to communicate the continued opposition to implementation to the new final rule which is for TEDs in skimmer vessels which are 40ft in length and greater. The letter will be submitted today on behalf of the Commission

Acy cooper asked when STF might be able to see the LDWF comment letter?

Chris Schieble stated that the letter can be supplied to the task force any time after it’s submitted

Acy Cooper stated that the rule making on 40ft vessels or less cannot go into effect until rulemaking is done all over again by NOAA. Just put a letter in to NOAA from the LA shrimp Association, sent letters out to all representatives in Washington, D.C. also met with the Attorney General, asking for a waiver for Louisiana on this rule due to mud bottoms

George Barisich stated that once this letter is sent in from LDWF it needs to go to the media

George Barisich read a public comment aloud from David Martin, the comment stated, “Comment directed to item regarding the proposed TED requirements for vessels under 40 foot. First, this proposal is directed to smaller vessels that are in state waters, not federal waters. Also where do smaller vessels fish, inside waters, particularly way inside where NO sea turtles exist. Please we need the state to back us up on this issue. Also see safety issues with TEDs and smaller vessels. Thanks, David Martin”

Rodney Olander stated that a few of the STF members went to the Attorney General’s office a few months back and LDWF was supposed to get a draft together to send do we know if that was done?,

Acy Cooper stated that Cole Garrett was working with the Attorney General’s office, need an update on this, will get with AG to see where they are with LDWF on this

1. The TF considered Funding for the 2022 LA Fisheries Forward Summit

Rusty Gaudet, LA Sea Grant, led discussion on the 2022 LA Fisheries Forward Summit, the Summit will be in March 2022 at the Pontchartrain Center, trying to get funding for supplied meals, have to use the Pontchartrain Center catering company; Also mentioned the USDA’s intended purchase of shrimp, Sea Grant and LDWF trying to make things as graceful, the shrimp industry is the one who is being impacted the most by the USDA purchase. Would like to enforce the request that if anyone from the shrimp industry might have any comments on things like this please give them to Julie Falgout

Acy Cooper motioned to dedicate $5000 in for the 2022 LA Fisheries Forward Summit, 2nd by Alan Gibson. Motion carries.

Alan Gibson stated that out of all the issued the industry is going through one thing not brought up enough is coastal land loss, by seeing the work that is going on with CRPA I don’t see how this industry is going to sustain itself for the long term. Is there any work that Sea Grant can do to work with NOAA to get them to see how bad this issue is

VIII. Public Comment

Rodney Olander stated that last week we had a Police Jurors Association Conference, met with CPRA at one of the meetings and as you know the Atchafalaya River has a lot of sand. Spoke with CPRA and there are a lot of abandon pipelines along the coast, number one, would it possible? After speaking with CPRA yes it would be possible. Could pump the sand from the Atchafalaya River to other locations and build up the islands the problem is every five miles you would have to put in a pumping station to keep the sand moving. Another issue is the cost and after that who is responsible for upkeep? This could get rid of a lot of sand that is clogging up the river and build back a lot of barrier islands

Alan Gibson stated that dredging is proven to work and is much more preferred over diversions

George Barisich stated that one of the reasons we were able to defer some of the licensing fees is because we used to have an 8 month oyster season on the wild reef now we get about one day, oyster industry already taxing themselves but until something is done with Mardi Gras Pass and you are not going to get the grounds to recover, state is starting to take advice on where to put things 80-95% of state grounds east of the River are non-functional

Andrew Blanchard stated that with the shrimp season opening looks like the industry is going to have a short season, asked that the STF be informed of what’s going on before the State just comes in and closing the season, last year the season was closed maybe two weeks too early, need longer fishing days

Peyton Cagle, LDWF, stated that big fishermen have proposed amending the current NOI in Title 76 to allow them to use the same size commercial gear as a standard commercial shrimper. Would like input from the board on this before it is brought before the LDWF Commission. If the board wishes this can also be brought back before them as an official agenda item at the next meeting to discuss the NOI as it is written fully

Rodney Olander suggested waiting to handle this at the next meeting to able to fully discuss

Acy Cooper stated that he doesn’t think they should have the same gear as a commercial rig on the inside waters when the season is closed, once the season is open no issue with this, would like to discuss at a future task force meeting

Andrew Blanchard stated that legislation on menhaden industry on the closure of the coast line possibly ½ mile- 3 miles out, would think all fishermen would favor some type of closure where recreational beaches are but not the whole entire coast line, menhaden industry shouldn’t be penalized, thought last year there was a friendly user agreement to stay off of Elmers Island. This is something that the industry should be aware of

Acy Cooper stated that he backs the menhaden industry, something as a task force we are going to have to look at and maybe draw up a bill for next legislative session

IX. The task force set their next meeting set for Wednesday, August 4, 2021 10am in Houma

X. Andrew Blanchard motioned to adjourn, 2nd by Acy Cooper. Motion carries.