Artificial Reef Council Meeting - April 30, 2019, 9:00 am

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

Jason Froeba for Patrick Banks, Assistant Secretary of the Office of Fisheries, LDWF

Attendees:

Douglas Peter, BSEE-OEC

Benny Galloway, LGL

Scott Raborn, LGL

Jim Dicharry, GHD

Brandon DeWolfe, Fieldwood Energy

Vic Agafitei, FMOG

Laura A Christensen, BSEE- Decom Support

Capt. G. Ricks, SBPG/SLC

Jerry Gilmore, TSB/ExxonMobil

Carlos Alvarez, ExxonMobil

Clint Rayes, ExxonMobil

Jason Duet, LDWF

Michael Dance, LSU

Andy Fischer, LDWF

John Seip, FMOG

Acy Cooper, LSA

Julie Falgout, LA Sea Grant

Beau Martin, B & J Martin

Chad Courville, Miami Corporation

David Cresson, CCA

Brett Falterman, LDWF

1) Jason Froeba welcomes everyone and begins the meeting
2) The Council approves the agenda
3) The Council approves the minutes from the previous meeting (11/27/18)
4) Mike McDonough begins the Program updates, nearshore, inshore, offshore, and monitoring. Defines the zones for inshore, nearshore, and offshore. Points out the difference between 'inshore' for shrimping: the 'three-mile line' and inshore for Program: the coastline. There are 77 offshore reefs: new deepwater. 11 new jackets reefed. Recently completed multibeam surveys of 39 reef sites. Nearshore: 6 existing sites; 6 permits, with a contract awarded for SS-94 & SS-108. GI-9 & the Pickets will be done with Rec Use money. SM-233 W & E: permit plus CEA with CCA. New Planning Area: two new reefs VR-119 & VR-124, both are permitted and part of CEA. Ashley Ferguson updates inshore & NRDA Rec Use: a number of Rec Use projects awarded for the 18-19 & 19-20 fiscal years. (West End and Lakefront to be awarded soon). Four new projects being done with Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation (LPBF). Currently under budget, in good shape for next year. First reef, East Calcasieu: material inspection (4,000 tons of concrete) finished, material needed to be re-worked for too much exposed metal. There will also be 2,000 tons of limestone. 3,000 questionnaires sent out for human dimension NRDA survey. Not closed yet, but 20% response rate. Preliminary results: ~12% of anglers fish over reefs. 74% do not: 1) no reefs in area 2) don't know where they are. Follow-up in one year, after reef-building. Bio West completed multibeam sonar of inshore reefs, poling and dredging for ground-truthing. Robert Twilley: what is the outreach to let anglers know where the reefs are. A. Ferguson answers no solid plan yet, but we do press releases, work with Outreach (Fisheries) group, have discussed doing a booklet to hand out. R. Twilley asks about the 'treatment' for the survey, offers to have LA Sea Grant help. Acy Cooper, president of Louisiana Shrimp Association, member of Shrimp Task Force, speaks about the inshore reefs in Lake Borgne, concern because shrimp effort in this area is high. Felt like shrimpers were left out of the discussion. Mentions that boats without federal permits do not have ELB boxes (how NOAA Fisheries estimates shrimping effort). Lake Borgne is within 3-mile line, so effort is not taken into account. Task Force was concerned about these reefs. Potential for problems because not everyone gets the latitude/longitude for the locations. R. Twilley references minutes, states that Council asked what was the conversation with the industry. A. Cooper states that the problem was that they didn't hear anything until the Task Force meeting, stated their objections, but didn't feel like they were a part of the process. Did mention that the Task Force was supposed to write a letter. It didn't happen; that's on the Task Force. R. Twilley wants A. Cooper to know these issues are important to the Council. A. Cooper reiterates that there's plenty of effort within 3 miles, no catch effort data, creates a big problem for inshore. J. Froeba mentions that there will be more discussion on effort and reefs. Addresses LPBF: RFIQ process to get project ideas—then brought ideas immediately to Task Force (harder to do sooner). Knew Task Force wasn't happy, but feedback was brought to Council. A. Cooper feels that breakdown is happening before the Task Force meetings, that there must be communication before that. Reiterates that Lake Borgne is a high effort area. M. McDonough talks about presenting

to the Shrimp Task Force, expressed difficulty in communicating that presenting is still part of the planning process. Discusses possibility of adding to next meeting's agenda how to communicate better with shrimp industry when there are new proposals. J. Froeba suggests we might be able to meet with Shrimp Task Force before if they want to have some restricted areas before sites are picked. Dean D'Elia wants to know about whether research is being done to pick the best sites for reefs. J. Froeba answers that there will be a monitoring presentation. Zach Chain, new program manager, updates monitoring. Z. Chain thanks the people who've helped developed the presentation. NRDA: $550K in funds for long-term monitoring, includes biological. Program has developed some sampling techniques to address. Want to assess the base first, deploying benthic trays filled with same material as reef being sampled. Sampling for benthic fouling and cryptic species. Gill nets parallel to reefs, similar to CSA sets; catch measured, weighed, and identified. Rod-and-reel sampling while gill nets soak. More info on recreational species and how to catch (important to public). Observations of users on site—people fishing? Successful? Trying to sample each reef 4x/year. R. Twilley asks about timing. Z. Chain answers ideally as close to deployment as possible. R. Twilley asks about site suitability, based on productivity? Z. Chain answers that the Rec Use reefs are existing reefs, being enhanced. (There are some new reefs to be built – LPBF). The NRDA monitoring funding is for 5 years. C. D'Elia asks whether there will be outside reviewers. Z. Chain answers we're always open to outside input, fair amount of discussion on the trays and gill-net sets. J. Froeba states that anything done with NRDA funds must go through trustee review process.

5) Benny Galloway: BOEM platform removal study. What is the effect of explosive removal of platforms on fisheries? Funded by Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) and Bureau of Safety & Environmental Enforcement, in federal waters out to 300 meters. Began in 2016. Offshore Louisiana contains a vast majority of the platforms in the Fisheries Management Zone for Red Snapper. Platform numbers are continually decreasing. Key depth zone: 31-90 meters. Even with artificial reefs, standing platforms are the dominant habitat available for reef fish in the Fisheries Management Zone. B. Galloway feels that platforms are significant habitat; explosives removals have a significant take and remove habitat. Well-coordinated reefing program is critical to fisheries production. Emphasizes, this is his/LGL's position; not BOEM/BSEE. Peer review included Greg Gitschlag (NOAA) John Walter (NOAA Fisheries Stock Assessment), and Ed Chesney (LUMCON). Comprehensive literature review included in design, sampled 30 platforms/year, randomly selected. Hydroacoustics plus underwater video to estimate total fish present. Hydroacoustics for numbers, video for groundtruthing and fish ID. Line sampling for age and growth—dockside sampling same day as catch. Mark-recapture for population estimates; red snapper—big effort. Acoustic telemetry—snapper proximity to platforms, any wandering among platforms. Red snapper, vermilion snapper, greater amberjack, cobia, primary species on platforms (also some mahi-mahi). Dataset of red snapper on platforms shows decrease, with decrease in number of platforms (Gulfwide). Louisiana has lion's share of snapper (lion's share of platforms). Percentage on platforms about 4% Gulfwide; 75% of snapper on platforms off LA—high

effort, high fishing mortality on platforms. Vermilion snapper: similar %'s. R. Twilley asks whether B. Galloway has estimate of fish per platform. B. Galloway answers, table forthcoming in presentation. Amberjack: again, most fish off LA; 42% of 'legal' fish occur on platforms, 30% on LA platforms. Cobia: abundant both shallow and deeper. Again, most fish off LA, decreasing with # of platforms. Juvenile red snapper common on nearshore platforms. B. Galloway does believe that loss of platforms puts fisheries resources at risk. C. D'Elia asks whether B. Galloway's conclusion per Attraction vs. Production hypothesis is that there is production. Depends on species, local vs. stock. Believes platforms do increase production for some species, including amberjack. Audience member asks whether all platform removals are explosive. Defers to Doug Peter. D. Peter states that explosive removals have decreased, currently about 40% of removals. Audience members says something about reef-dependent fish and migratory fish. B. Galloway states that some amberjack show high site fidelity, some move all over the Gulf. R. Twilley asks if there is a plan for the fate of these platforms. B. Galloway answers that platforms must come out without a variance, after useful life. D. Peter offers that reefing in a state program provides that variance to removal. R. Twilley asks about the projection for removals. M. McDonough asks if he means how many platforms are being reefed? R. Twilley asks how we get out in front of these losses? M. McDonough answers that Council has lifted SARS moratorium—allows Program potentially to capture more platforms. Proposal today for a new SARS. Nearshore proposal on agenda is something Program hopes will allow to reef more platforms and do work to replace some of what's been lost. R. Twilley asks specifically how much habitat loss are we talking about. M. McDonough answers that capture rate is low, reason for nearshore proposal on agenda and lifting of SARS moratorium. Less than 100' water depth a concern—economic and logistical obstacles still exist. Brandon DeWolfe, Fieldwood Energy, has a lot of facilities on the shelf, probably 550—vast majority do not have useful life exceeding 10 years.

6) M. McDonough presents proposed changes to nearshore planning areas: Program exists because platforms make good habitat and opportunities for fishing. West LA has been blind spot, have not reefed a lot in less than 100' water depth. Phase 1 of proposed adjustment to nearshore planning areas (the west). Phase 1 ~ 8.6 million acres. Focus on acreage to show impacts to trawlable bottom. Over time, 4,211 platforms installed (not all at once). Shrimpers have indicated they avoid standing platforms by ¼-1/2 nautical mile. For nearshore estimates of 'untrawlable' habitat, using ¼-nmi to be conservative. Those platforms 'took up' ~697,000 acres. 3183 have been removed, 1028 still standing. Commissioner Chad Courville has helped to collect angler opinions from West LA, collected a list of favorites—still standing, and already removed. Anglers' favorites included 288 removals—9.4% of the already-removed platforms. There are 1028 platforms still standing; the 267 favorites comprise 26%. All favorites together, standing (44,322 acres) and removed (47,808) add up to 92,130 acres. Shrimp trawl effort dataset (from NOAA Fisheries): existing PA's have 7.27 average tows per OCS block, proposed change about 17 tows per block. Not taking up entire block, though—quarter nmi radius around each site, and that includes a 100' buffer b/w material and outside. Of the 665,992 acres that became untrawlable due to platforms, this represents a return of 86.2% to

trawlable bottom; the "Restructuring the Gulf" effort would be re-enhancing or preserving 13.8%. Also, the Nearshore Planning Areas within roughly the same area are 125,377 acres--larger than the 92,130 acres being asked, so there would be a net return in that respect as well. Outreach to shrimpers has included Abbeville fishermen's meeting in March, Lafitte in April, Shrimp Task Force in between. Some negative feedback, including that 555 is a 'big' number. Dealer had a list of questions, but most were about inshore (within 3 miles). With a deeper dive on effort data, Program identified sites with trawl effort within quarter-nmi sites. No trend based on when platforms were removed. Program subtracted some of the 'highest-effort' sites from the proposal, while considering angler-favorite scale. 25 favorites in all. (Standing favorites considered currently untrawlable). Acreage reduces to 87,980. J. Froeba clarifies: we are proposing to dissolve the current PA's, create a PA of a quarter-nmi radius around 267 standing (allowing to reef in place), and around 263 platforms already removed (to be re-developed). Priority is reefing as many still standing as possible. Council asks for public comment, R. Twilley asks whether proposal has gone to STF. J. Froeba: the original 555 sites (267 standing, 288 already removed) went to the STF; some confusion about "inshore". Only one inshore, still standing. A. Cooper states that the biggest problem is within the three-mile line. Mentions (with input from Julie Falgout) that there are about 400 offshore permits in LA (Gulfwide about 1000). R. Twilley asks for clarification: Program is asking for approval for change to 530 sites? 555? Asks whether individual reefs are approved by Council. M. McDonough clarifies that is 530 planning areas are approved, approval would be to create reef sites when there is opportunity, plan would not come back to Council. C. D' Elia offers motion to approve, pending further comment from STF. A. Cooper clarifies that biggest issues are within 3 miles, but there are issues beyond 3 miles also. J. Falgout asks about the difference between Mississippi and Louisiana's rigs-to-reefs programs. M. McDonough answers that it's similar but smaller. D. Peter reiterates same. J. Falgout mentions that recent proposal from Mississippi was impactful to fishermen, has them fearful about changes in LA. D. Peter clarifies that all states have other components to Programs, likely something other than rigs to reefs problem in Mississippi. C. Courville talks about the current planning areas, don't really capture where anglers were fishing; he has spent time talking with anglers about where they'd like to see reefing. This effort helped/lead to current proposal. No intention to offend shrimpers, have to share Gulf—where there were platforms, not going to somewhere new. Want to properly mark sites, get info to shrimpers. References Dr. Galloway's presentation, value of platforms, value that we've lost. M. McDonough mentions that there were letters of support from recreational anglers. R. Twilley expresses concern there could be future, unforeseen problems, would like to see those come back to Council. C. D' Elia offers motion to approve, pending further comment from STF, adding what R. Twilley suggested, any unforeseen conflict, come back to Council. C. Courville permitting process, public comment. M. McDonough explains that there is a 15-day public comment period for Corps permits, however largely unused, so not likely source for comment on projects; suggests Program could help to distribute public notices. A. Cooper thanks Council for listening to concerns; STF will provide opportunity to get shrimping concerns together. C. D' Elia's motion passes.

7) M. McDonough introduces the East Cameron 278 C SARS proposal. Program is asking for approval to proceed; Program would go to STF, other meetings to get feedback on

proposal. Criteria: trying to show of historical or biological significance—Fieldwood designed ROV survey for biological assessment. Proposal is in a zone where Program has identified low capture rate, other platforms for future enhancement. Introduces Brandon DeWolfe; Vice President of Decommissioning for Fieldwood Energy. EC-278 C is an 8-pile in 177' water depth, installed in 1989. Large structure, piles and cross members are large; lots of surface area. Large footprint at seafloor. Proposal is to cut the top at -70', placing top next to base. Biological survey, using work-class ROV, with Blue Latitudes, who developed protocol, analyzed video, developed report. Survey performed December 2018. Transects: horizontal on each side at -65', -120', -177'; vertical on each leg; perpendicular, of bottom, out from structure. Encrusting organisms on structure, fish (pictures). Fish seen: snapper, angelfish, amberjack, spadefish, butterfly fish, other jacks. One lionfish. Numbers: 60 snapper spp., 11 angelfish, 275 amberjack, 3 creolefish, 16 spadefish, 52 jack spp., 23 bermuda chub, 70 crevalle jack. One shark. Several species, unable to identify. More than 600 fish, no attempt to record inside of structure. Greatest fish density at -65', only slight decrease to -120'. Most invertebrate coverage was T. *coccinea*, bryozoan spp. Structure recently installed, robust, built to last. Fieldwood also has EC-278 B available to reef at this site, same removal schedule. If approved intend to reef with C structure. M. McDonough reiterates that Program is asking approval to proceed; public comment next step—would come back to Council with proposal and public comment. Only then seek Corps permit, etc. Motion to approve passes

8) No public comment
9) No further business
10) Meeting adjourns.