**Oyster Task Force Meeting**

**Wednesday, September 20, 2023, 1:00pm**

**New Orleans Lakefront Airport**

**6001 Stars and Stripes Blvd.**

**New Orleans, LA**

**I.** Pledge of Allegiance

**II.** Roll call and introduction of guests

**Voting Members Present:**

Dan Coulon

Brandon DeBarge

Mitch Jurisich

Brad Robin

Brandt Lafrance

Al Sunseri

Willie Daisy

Steve Pollock

**Voting Members Absent:**

Shane Bagala

Tracy Collins

Jakov Jurisic

Matthew Slavich

Sam Slavich

Peter Vujnovich

**Non-Voting Members Present:**

Robert Caballero

Tim Fox in for Edward Skena

Kyle Balkum

Isabel Englehart in for Harry Vorhoff

Brian Lezina

**Non-Voting Members Absent:**

**III.** Brad Robin motioned to approve the August 29, 2023 meeting minutes, 2nd by Steve Pollock. Motion carries.

Al Sunseri motioned to approve the September 20, 2023 meeting agenda, 2nd by Brad Robin. Motion carries.

**IV.** Treasury Report:

Remaining Fund Balance- $574,565

Remaining Budget Balance- $85,989

August Tag Sales- 84,054

Brad Robin motion to approve the treasury report as presented, 2nd by Willie Daisy. Motion carries.

**V.** Committee Reports:

1. Public and Private Oyster Seed Grounds Committee- no report
2. Enforcement Report-

**August 21-September 12, 2023**

**Region 4** (Iberia)

None

**Region 5** (Calcasieu and Cameron)

None

**Region 6**: (Terrebonne, Lafourche, Grand Isle)

Terrebonne

2- 40:4A violate sanitation code (Refrigeration did not call in pink tags)

1- 56:424B Fail to have written permission

Lafourche

1-40:4A violate sanitation code (Log book)

**Seizures:**

**22 sacks**

**Region 8**: (Jefferson, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, Orleans

**St. Bernard Parish**:

1 –RS 40: 4A – Violate Sanitation Code (Refrigeration- No Lot ID)

1 – Warning Citation for Violation of RS 40:4A – Violate Sanitation Code (Waste Bucket)

1 – Warning Citation for Violation of RS 56: 449 A – Fail to Fill out Oyster Tags Correctly.

**Seizures:**

**50 Sacks**

1. Legislative Report- no report
2. Legal Report- no report
3. Research Report- no report
4. Coastal Restoration Report- no report
5. Marketing report- committee met prior to the OTF morning and discussed boosting OTF social pages with paid efforts, agreed upon last month. In the last week have seen around 200 additional likes and followers to the page, also working on putting together budget for materials for DC Mardi Gras and working on a white paper for Hill meetings
6. Health Report- committee met prior to the OTF meeting; provided a report on illnesses from 2023, total this year thus far was 24 illnesses, also discussed updating sanitary code to provide verbiage to make it clear when there is a refrigeration issue on the boat to be able to re-tag white tag product with a green tag if the requirements for green tags are met- will most probably include a call into LDWF to report the issue
7. Aquaculture Report- Steve Pollock stated that seed larvae/ spat intended for placement in Calcasieu Lake will no longer be restricted to product originating from Calcasieu Lake genetics, seed can now come from other parts of the state; also announced that the first AOC permit awardee, Jules Melancon, has passed away, the board took a moment of silence in commemoration
8. Joint Task Force Working Group Report-

**VI.** New Business

1. The board heard an update on proposed changes to the Bohemia Salinity Control Structure plan

John Helmers from Plaquemines Parish led discussion, stated that the best choice is to close Bohemia Salinity Control Structure completely and then after complete closure putting in a control structure, did some research with the Corps and determined that this is the best option for this project, will work with whatever funding is available, need to get the plans updated and will be undertaking this task moving forward, previously there were ways we looked into that would work around not closing the structure completely but it was determined that the best way is to completely close the structure and then install a control structure, have design in hand to close structure with a rock dike but this is outdated will need to be updated, will probably need a rock ridge at first, need to put the dike in and the road back in place, working on securing some funding, from Mardi Gras Pass to the Head of Passes there are 48 distributaries on the east bank side which now is a double edge sword, all of these distributaries are inlets now and we need some control to flow down back to the natural reef. St. Bernard Parish is putting in an emergency permit through the Corps to close Mardi Gras Pass, 2022 strategy document has a plan for the closure of Mardi Gras Pass and a spending plan

1. The board discussed and considered lowering the sack limit in West Cove to 7 sacks

Brandon Debarge from Calcasieu stated that the reason for the proposal is the year before last it was 10 sacks and it was raised last year to 15 sacks, it was taking an hour and a half to 2 hours to harvest 10 sacks, when season opened this year taking 4-5 hours and by the end taking from dawn to dusk to harvest 15 sacks, afraid that next year they will not have a season if we keep going this way, don’t want to wipe out the resource, community depends on these oysters to get through the winter, would like to lower the sack limit to save the resource

Robert Caballero stated that last season in 2022 the east side harvested 2520 sacks, about 10% of the take for all 120 days, the west side harvested 13,200 sacks for 13% of the resource for over 198 days. This year we have had over 52% increase in resource on the east cove and 101% increase in resource on the west side. There is no biological reason to lower the limit. There are plenty of oysters last season that did not reach harvest thresholds for the area from the resource that is available. Believe, depending on LDH closures that the season should last all year until the end of April; stated that he has spoken to three Calcasieu Lake permit holders in the last month and no one had any comments on lowering the sack limit but rather just on the hook muscle problem in the area

Al Sunseri stated that you do not have to harvest all 15 sacks, a part of being in the business is finding marketable oysters

Chris Schieble stated that this is a socio-economic recommendation vs biological recommendation, the LDWF Commission will need to consider this option, suggested that this be brought to the commission and bring this up during public comment or an item be added to the agenda for further discussion/ consideration

Brad Robin advised Brandon Debarge to go to the commission and bring people with him to support the claims and recommendations from the area

Brandon Debarge motioned to recommend that the LDWF Commission consider reducing the sack limit in West Cove from 15 sacks to 10 sacks, 2nd by Willie Daisy. 1 opposed- Al Sunseri. Motion carries.

1. The task force postponed item C. To Consider Hiring an Oyster Task Force Legal Consultant to a future meeting
2. The Task Force considered renewing the Beuerman Miller Fitzgerald marketing/ PR contract

Brad Robin motioned to renew the Beuerman Miller Fitzgerald marketing/ PR contract for another year, dedicating $50,000 for the year, 2nd by Brandt Lafrance. Motion carries.

1. Considered funding for an oyster day on the bay, need to get together with Tony Tesvich and enforcement to decide on a day, looking at second week of October 10 or 11th

Al Sunseri motioned to set a cap of $2000 to pay for boat costs and fuel for an oyster Day in the Bay, 2nd by Dan Coulon. Motion carries.

1. The task force considered funding to create oyster industry YouTube snippets

The snippets would cost $15K/ video; looking to put together 5-6 videos

The task force postponed consideration of this item until the next meeting

**VII.** Public Comment- no public comment

**VIII.** Tuesday, October 24 10am at the New Orleans Lakefront Airport

**IX.** Brad Robin motioned to adjourn the meeting, 2nd by Willie Daisy. Motion carries.