**Oyster Task Force Meeting Minutes**

**Tuesday, September 28, 2021, 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:**

Tracy Collins

Jakov Jurisic

Mitch Jurisich

Brad Robin

Brandt Lafrance

Al Sunseri

John Tesvich

Peter Vujnovich

Willie Daisy

**Voting Members Absent:**

Shane Bagala

Dan Coulon

Byron Encalade

Sam Slavich

**Non-Voting Members Present:**

Carolina Bourque via webinar

Justin Gremillion

Bryan Marie

Harry Vorhoff

**Non-Voting Members Absent:**

Karl Morgan

Brian Lezina

**III.** Peter Vujnovich motioned to approve the August 24, 2021 meeting minutes, 2nd by Tracy Collins. Motion carries.

Al Sunseri motioned to amend the agenda by adding an item under new business, A. To Hear an Update on Oyster Renewals, 2nd by John Tesvich. Motion carries.

Motion to approve the September 28, 2021 meeting agenda as amended, adopted unanimously.

**IV.** Treasury Report

Remaining Fund Balance- $558,461

Remaining Budget Balance- $129,876

August Tag Sales- 134,626

Motion by Peter Vujnovich to accept the treasury report as presented, 2nd by Brad Robin. Motion carries.

**V.** Committee Reports:

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

Plaquemines

1 – fail to maintain records (dealer)

1 – possess untagged oysters

Seizure – seven sacks of oysters

Board discussed tagging and regulations for oysters

John Tesvich stated that another practice in other parts of the country is bulk tagging, where a pallet of oysters or a pallet box is wrapped and it’s considered a single unit when it’s wrapped and you have one tag for this unit, is this something that is allowed from the boat to the dealer? Once with the dealer, the dealer would have to make separate tags as that unit is broken down further. A request was made for the item to be added as an agenda item for the next meeting, LDH to pull violation data. Bulk tagging is allowed by NSSP

Al Sunseri mentioned reshipped oysters and tagging

1. Legislative Committee- no report
2. Legal Committee- no report
3. Research Committee- no report
4. Coastal Restoration- no report
5. Marketing Committee- Greg Beuerman of BMF stated that the website is coming along well, making final approvals, have considerable interests in media interviews

Al Sunseri requested that the OTF have materials on hand at all times so that if we did want to provide materials to people like shirts, beads, cups, etc. is LDWF capable of storing these materials? Allison West stated that there is space to store these items if needed

1. Health Committee- Mitch Jurisich thanked the LDH for how they handled closures

Justin Gremillion stated that the samples collected looked good from a water quality standpoint, it seems like the pollutants that would have been present had moved out quickly enough to where us reopening the rest of the coast with the 21-day NSSP rule; working on bettering the system, working to find alternate locations to launch and park boats

Mitch stated the 21- day rule automatically reopens these closed areas? Try to look at buoy data cannot get out on the water every day to sample, 21 days after things go back to normal, not automatic required to look into a bunch of different things

Brad Robin stated that the biggest complaint that he received was communication, would like more communication as far as a heads up or advance warning of reopening

Al Sunseri NSSP allows to put together a plan for adverse events used a lot in the northwest, adverse event plans that allow for reopening based on historic data, would like to start working on a plan for adverse effects based on historic data

1. Aquaculture Committee- no report
2. Joint Task Force Working Group Meeting- no report

New Business:

1. The board heard an update on oyster renewals

Typically start in December but have been starting in November, will have 1500 renewals and will have about twice the amount of renewals than LDWF normally processes, typically process around 500 renewals, so there may be a longer wait, there are also issues with the mail and some may not get their renewal notices, would like the OTF and oyster community’s help to get the word out that renewals will begin on November 1, are allowing in person right now, don’t know if the mail-in renewals will be allowed as of yet- this will go to the Commission for consideration in November, renewal reminders may not be received by mail due to issues, if your leases are not renewed by February they will be canceled, Call LDWF if you are having issues with mail or if you have any questions

Al Sunseri asked about trying electronic renewals, there is the opportunity for that but the way leases are generated right now there is not an easy fix, exploring it as a possibility

1. The task force heard a presentation on trip tickets

Michaela Mayers provided a presentation on trip tickets

Which trip ticket type can I record oyster on:

Any of them:

600 series- oysters only, monthly

700 series- shellfish only, daily

800 series- shellfish only, monthly

900 series- any commercial species, daily

Electronic- any commercial species, daily

More information on filling out trip tickets can be found here:

Visit the Trip Ticket page on LDWF's website at

<https://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/page/trip-tickets>

Here you can find the most up-to-date Trip Ticket Procedures Manual, maps, and videos describing in detail how to fill out every ticket type. Please call the Trip Ticket office at (225) 765-2449 or email triptickets@wlf.la.gov to get set-up with the electronic trip ticket reporting system.

Jakov Jurisic expressed concern with gifting oysters and what is required for reporting in these instances, requested an agenda item for next meeting

Task force will explore starting a committee for further discussion on this item

1. The force discussed temperature requirements in oyster coolers

Refrigeration of Shell-Stock Oysters, Clams and Mussels [formerly paragraph 9:052] A. Shell-stock shall be placed under mechanical refrigeration at an air temperature (measured 12 inches from the blower) not to exceed 45°F within the time period prescribed herein; and shall be maintained at or below that temperature throughout all levels of commerce. Shell-stock harvested for raw consumption during the months January through December shall be subject to the time to refrigeration requirements outlined in §329

Jakov Jurisic expressed concern for temperature requirements when doors are opening and air being sucked out for a small amount of time and changing the temperature and also an issue when there are two fans

1. The board discussed the POLR Program and reef cleanup after storms

Mitch Jurisich stated that after Katrina a POLR program was put in place and it seemed to be pretty successful. The storm was pretty enormous and everybody took some damage to the reefs and the resource. Would like another program like this put into place so we can start rehabilitating some of these reefs

Carolina Bourque stated that unfortunately we cannot tap into the 2019 Fisheries disaster funding as a program has already been submitted for how the funds are to be spent and making changes to that would further delay the process

Al Sunseri in 2005 when they did the POLR program they received funds from Hurricane Ivan Disaster assistance, are there any funds remaining from previous disaster assistance that may be able to be utilized quickly like back in 2005, asked Carolina to look into possible funding sources for this

John Tesvich asked if LDWF is throwing around numbers, data on oysters for public reef rehabilitation, can you share the numbers specifically from oysters so we know what we are looking at, look into numbers for the committee meeting

John Tesvich motioned to send the item to the Public Private Oyster Seed Grounds Committee to further work with LDWF to present a report on what the damages are, specifically for private leases, dealers, and growers, what the dollar value should be, and how we propose to move forward with a POLR Program that will be tailored to the Louisiana Oyster Industry, 2nd by Jakov Jurisic. Motion carries.

*A motion was made by John Tesvich to insert the words, “dealers and growers” after private lease holders, the amendment was approved by the 2nd- Jakov Jurisic.*

Al Sunseri asked that as soon as the information is available from the committee to come to the task force with a report

Chris Schieble stated that last week LDWF was asked by Senator Kennedy’s office to put together a very rough estimate of potential fisheries disaster damages, wanted the task force to know something has been submitted at that level, but nothing has been finalized as of yet

The task force plans to send this item to the Public Private Oyster Seed Grounds Committee to come up with program to present a report on damages

Dr. John Zach Lea stated that special arrangements might need to be made to calculate what was lost by AOC

1. The task force considered funding for oyster promotional items to be included in sponsorship bags at the Southern Weights and Measures Association Annual Meeting

Spoke with Samantha Carol at the LSPMB and she said that they can print out postcards with an oyster recipe, of the task force’s choice, on high gloss paper and attached it to mini Tobacco bottles

Weights and Measures Conference is set for October 9-13

Al Sunseri suggested having an oyster bar or shucked oysters at the reception

Al Sunseri motioned to dedicate up to $1000 for promotional items and oysters for the Weights and Measures Conference, 2nd by John Tesvich. Motion carries.

1. The task force postponed discussion on the issue of buying and selling oyster seed, plan to have as an agenda item for the next meeting

Brad Robin motioned to postpone the discussion on the issue of buying and selling oyster seed to a future meeting, 2nd by Peter Vujnovich. Motion carries.

1. The task force discussed and considered a cooperative endeavor agreement between LDWF and Plaquemines Parish working with Plaquemines Parish

Frank Newell stated that is a civil engineer and land surveyer and has been working with Plaquemine’s Parish and the Oyster Task Force since 2017 to try to get Mardi Gras Pass under control. The first phase is to fill the dike and first stop the flow. The structure was built in the 1960’s by the Corp of Engineers, the State of LA and the Parish, but the purpose was to promote the health of the adjoining oyster grounds, providing a measured amount of fresh water to when it needed it. The structure breeched in 2012, forming Mardi Gras Pass. The original channel was about 50ft wide and about 5-6 feet deep and is now more than 300 ft wide and 60+ ft deep and has broken through the back canal containment. In 2017 the LOTF developed a program that would work for advancing the project. If money falls into place and they get the permit it will be closed, recommend put the CEA back in place and that way if the money falls into place this can be done. Recommended that $50K be appropriated for engineering going forward to coordinate, answer questions, putting CEA in place, build a consensus for doing the project, meet with CPRA, Corps, gov and LT gov, Mardi gras Pass seen as an opportunity to pursue coastal restoration and oyster advancement, also the CEA authorizes the construction procedures if the money falls into place for the project

Al Sunseri agreed that a meeting of the Corps, CPRA, LDWF, the Governor’s office, and Lt. Governor and move this thing forward, going to take the federal government come up with money to close this down; recommended setting this meeting as soon as possible

John Tesvich stated that the CEA has expired, needs to be renewed, the CEA doesn’t include construction costs

John Tesvich motioned to renew and update the CEA between LDWF and Plaquemines Parish Government, 2nd by Peter Vujnovich. Motion carries.

Brad Robin stated that before adding additional funding that the task force knows who agrees to this, stick with what was originally agreed to until a permit is in hand

John Tesvich stated that the Oyster Task Force has already made the request that $10M of disaster be allocated to the closure of Mardi Gras Pass

Mitch Jurisich stated that this will provide land and flood protection from hurricanes and flooding events

Duncan Kemp stated that the new proposal did include construction costs, would not recommend going forward with any open ended construction costs. As far as the scope of services on the original CEA, Nicole and I will endeavor to get that done

Al Sunseri stated that with Cupids Gap and Fort St. Phillip we have seen what happens

1. The board heard a status update on the hiring of Joe Piacun for OTF legal counsel

Joe Piacun stated that when the OTF last met just got a signed copy and it’s in route back to LDWF now; adjusted the proposal that was sent before

**VII.** Public Comment

Mrs. Naquin stated that due to the hurricane a lot of the fishermen had to evacuate and did not have time to apply for the second CARES Act funding, asking for more time to file for the second payment

Mitch Jurisich requested a deadline extension on CARES 2.0 due to Hurricane Ida

**VIII.** The next meeting was set for Tuesday, October 19, 2021 for 1pm ~~in New Orleans~~ at the St. Bernard Port Harbor and Terminal Building- 100 port Blvd. Chalmette, LA 70043

The task force set a Public Private Oyster Seed Grounds Committee meeting for ~~Tuesday, October 5~~ Wednesday, October 13, 2021 for 10:00am at LDWF Headquarters in Baton Rouge

**IX.** Al Sunseri motioned to adjourn, 2nd by Peter Vujnovich. Motion carries.