Louisiana Oyster Task Force Meeting

Mitch Jurisich, Chairman

Tuesday, October 24, 2023, 10:00 a.m.

New Orleans Lakefront Airport

6001 Stars and Stripes Blvd

New Orleans, LA 70126

**I.** Pledge of Allegiance

**II.** Roll Call and Introduction of Guests

# Voting Members Present:

Mitch Jurisich

Brad Robin

Brandt Lafrance

Matthew Slavich

Sam Slavich

Willie Daisy

Peter Vujnovich

# Voting Members Absent:

Shane Bagala

Tracy Collins

Brandon Debarge

Steve Pollock

Dan Coulon

Jakov Jurisic

Al Sunseri

# Non-Voting Members Present:

Robert Caballero

Edward Skena

Kyle Balkum

Isabel Englehart in for Harry Vorhoff

# Non-Voting Members Absent:

Brian Lezina

**III.** Approval of September 20, 2023 meeting minutes and October 24, 2023 Agenda

Minutes for September 20, 2023 were not available for this meeting and will be approved at next scheduled meeting.

Brad Robin motioned to amend the October 24, 2023 meeting agenda by moving item E to the top of New Business, 2nd by Willie Daisy. Motion carries.

Brad Robin motioned to approve the October 24, 2023 meeting agenda as amended, 2nd by Sam Slavich. Motion carries.

IV. Treasury Report

Remaining Fund Balance - $567,787

Remaining Budget Balance – $71,660

Peter Vujnovich, Jr. motioned to approve the treasury report as presented, 2nd by Willie Daisy. Motion carries.

V. Committee Reports

A. Public and Private Oyster Grounds Committee – No report

B. Enforcement

**September 13, 2023 – October 15, 2023**

Region 4 (Iberia)

None

Region 5 (Calcasieu and Cameron)

None

Region 6: (Terrebonne, Lafourche, Grand Isle, St. Mary)

Terrebonne

1-56:424A(1)- Violate commission action on state seed ground. (possessing sacks during seed collection only)

56:433.1- Violate seed ground vessel permit. (no permit in possession)

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

St. Bernard

1-40: 4A – Violate Sanitation Code (Refrigeration- Oysters not placed under refrigeration within required time).

Seizures:

23- Sacks seized and returned to water.

Plaquemines

1-56:424 E- Take Oysters from Unapproved Area (Polluted)

1-56: 31.1 – Fishing Under License Revocation

1-56:424F- Fail to cull oysters in proper location

Seizures:

2 Sacks Seized

C. Legislative – No report

D. Legal – No report

E. Research – No report

F. Coastal Restoration (Dan Coulon) – No report

G. Marketing – Anna Koehl of BMF provided the marketing report

H. Health (LDH) – Two deaths were reported; One in Florida and 1 in Louisiana. Two pink tag illnesses were reported. Sacks reportedly came from dealer out of area 14 that were sold to different restaurants. One complaint of an illness from New York resident who consumed raw oysters at restaurant in New Orleans.

1. Aquaculture (Steve Pollock) – No report

J. Joint Task Force Working Group (Mitch Jurisich) – No report

VI. New Business

1. To Task Force heard a presentation and considered funding to create oyster industry YouTube snippets

Louis Guida provided a presentation on creating oyster industry YouTube snippets, it would be more cost effective to know on the outset of how many videos the task force is planning to do before hand

1. The board heard an update on the oyster Season

Robert Caballero with LDWF provided the Oyster Season Update:

* Bedding on 10/09- 20 boats harvested for 3,650 barrels. Only 9 boats daily reported 1800 barrels. Non-living reef material percentages were low, most under 1%, only one boat had 7.05%. (All still below 15% threshold).
* Sister Lake market harvest- daily reported at 18,183 sacks as of 10/23. Observed harvest by biologists at 19,165 sacks as of 10/20. 175 total vessels working Sister Lake, with up to 82 vessels a day max so far. During the two 82 observed vessel days, roughly 50% were completing their daily reporting.
* The observed harvest difference amounted to an estimated 1,000 sacks each day going unreported. Sister Lake Harvest is mostly coming from two reefs: Grand Pass and 2012 Cultch Plant.
* Calcasieu Lake harvest in West Cove is reported at 125 sacks as of 10/23, with 6 boats working.
* Oyster fishermen are having trouble finding oysters in tong-able/ hand collection locations. For daily reporting statistics, 158 vessels are using the phone option, 22 vessels are using the eReporting app, and 4 vessels were incorrectly reporting through email, which had to be remedied.
* There are 180 vessels total daily reporting and LDWF have only observed 147 vessels working so far.

1. The board discussed the Oyster Strategic Plan Initiative, ‘Evaluation of Leases Incapable of Oyster Production’

Robert Caballero provided an update stating that currently the legislator has directed LDWF to develop an active plan to determine if the water bottoms are in support of oyster populations prior to renewing existing leases or issuing new oyster leased. The Department could not reach a consensus on the best way to accomplish this initiative, so the department is seeking proposals for a defensible, scientifically sound method for their determination process. The proposals have until January 14, a copy of the bidding process has been provided to the task force. The proposals will be evaluated after the January 2024 deadline and then the method will have to approved by the incoming administration.

Mitch Jurisich stated that this is very disturbing and the task force has been opposed to this initiative since the strategic plan has come out; this a poor time to pursue this initiative

Brad Robin motioned to strongly oppose this initiative and any efforts to move this forward at this time, 2nd by Brandt Lafrance. Motion carries.

1. Considered a motion previously adopted to lower the sack limit in Calcasieu Lake

Peter Vujnovich motioned to indefinitely defer any commission action on lowering the sack limit in Calcasieu Lake at this time, 2nd by Brad Robin. Motion carries.

1. The task force considered hiring an Oyster Task Force legal consultant

Cole Garret stated that he stands ready to assist the task force in hiring legal representation but there are parameters that must be followed; this contract would also have to go through an approval process outside of the department at State Procurement and the Division of Administration

**VII.** Public Comment

**VIII.** Set Next Meeting

The next OTF meeting is set for Tuesday, December 5, 2023 for 10:00 am at the ~~New Orleans Lakefront Airport.~~ Belle Chasse Auditorium 8398 LA-23, Belle Chasse, LA 70037

**IX.** Adjourn

Meeting adjourned at 11:23 am. Motioned by Brad Robin and unanimously approved.