March 18, 2015

**OTF Research Committee Meeting**

Meeting called to order at 1:07 p.m.

Item A- in shell versus meat weight conversion.

State currently uses 6.47 pounds of meat per Louisiana sack of oysters. Discussion was held on variability. Patrick Banks indicated that LDWF did a 6-year study in Sister Lake and Bay Junop from 2002-2007 and found that, on average, the meat weight was approximately 7.9 pounds per sack. The sacks all were 105 pounds of carefully culled oysters, so these sacks would likely not be representative of what is normally landed by commercial vessels, but still provides some data to consider. Banks also provided information from the 1991 Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission Oyster Fishery Management Plan which indicated that meat weight per sack was 7.01 pounds.

Al Sunseri would like to see reporting of landings at the dock, where you could also gather landing data. He feels true number is dependent upon the unit of measure for the sack and believes there is a lot of variability in what industry is calling a “sack” of oysters. He reported that his records show the average pound per sack is 6.1. John Tesvich said that the issue was with accurate reporting and not variability. All oystermen at the meeting were in agreement that their landings are lower than they were before the BP Oil Spill, but the NMFS data shows that overall landings are about the same as pre-oil spill, so doing another study would be a good idea. NMFS is aware that we may look into updating the conversion and would be willing to entertain this, if there was new data. Each state uses its on conversion number.

**Final recommendation:** Recommend to full task force that Department or some entity should do a study to see if the meat/weight conversion should be updated and report their findings back to the task force.

Item B – Severance Tax Landings versus Trip-Ticket Landings

Patrick Banks presented the task force the severance tax information collected from 1997-2013. In 2013, $19,683 was collected. This goes into the LDWF Conservation fund is not earmarked for oyster related spending. Al Sunseri presented a document with his suggestions, including a 2c per pound severance tax, oyster inspectors at the dock, and a credit card system for paying severance immediately at the dock. He feels the integrity of the trip-ticket landings have been compromised due to inadvertent reporting of mini-sacks as full Louisiana sacks. All proceeds would go into the state’s oyster development account. Many committee members were not in favor of increasing the fees that need to be paid by the fishermen at this time due to the industry still recovering from BP oil spill. Others would be in favor of increasing tax if they knew it would be dedicated to oyster work or oyster enforcement. It was suggested that instead of increasing the tax that vessel permit fees be increased since the public ground vessel permit is only $15. John Tesvich suggested raising severance to $0.50 per sack from the public grounds. Byron suggested bringing this to a management committee for them to put together some kind of plan for how the monies would be spent. A higher severance tax of out of state boats was suggested. Al Sunseri suggested that we go back to where everyone on a boat had to be a Louisiana resident or show proof that they were in the process of becoming a Louisiana resident. The state’s auditors report on LDWF oyster leasing practices was mentioned several times. Byron Encalade, Brad Robin, Brandt Lafrance, and Al Sunseri all agreed that a comprehensive management plan for the industry should be developed and felt LDWF is the entity to put the first draft together for review by the OTF.

**Final recommendation**: Recommend that OTF request LDWF to develop a management plan that would include items such as license restructuring, severance tax restructuring and uses for money gathered through increased fees or taxes that would directly benefit the oyster industry.

Item C. – Update on the status of the public oyster seed grounds

Patrick Banks gave an update on the public grounds, including information on the current oyster season, cultch planting activities between 2011 and 2014, upcoming cultch planting plans in Calcasieu Lake, and a summary of oyster hatchery and remote-setting activities —no recommendations were made

Motion to adjourn passed unanimously.