**0Oyster Task Force Meeting**

**Tuesday, February 1, 2022, 1:00pm**

**New Orleans Lakefront Airport**

**6001 Stars and Stripes Blvd.**

**New Orleans, LA**

**I.** Pledge of Allegiance

II. Roll Call

**Voting Members Present:**

Shane Bagala

Tracy Collins

Dan Coulon

Jakov Jurisic

Mitch Jurisich

Brad Robin

Brandt Lafrance

Matthew Slavich

Sam Slavich

Peter Vujnovich

Willie Daisy

**Voting Members Absent:**

Byron Encalade

Al Sunseri

**Non-Voting Members Present:**

Carolina Bourque

Justin Gremillion

Bryan Marie

Harry Vorhoff

Brian Lezina

**Non-Voting Members Absent:**

Karl Morgan

**III.** Peter Vujnovich motioned to approve the December 7, 2021 meeting minutes, 2nd by Tracy Collins. Motion carries.

Jakov Jurisic motioned to postpone item E. To Hear a Presentation on the Louisiana Search for National Estuarine Research Reserve- Dr. Robert Twilley-LSU to a future meeting, 2nd by Brandt Lafrance. Motion carries.

Peter Vujnovich motioned to approve the February 1, 2022 meeting agenda as amended, 2nd by Tracy Collins. Motion carries.

**IV.** Treasury Report

Remaining Fund Balance- $582,558

Remaining Budget Balance- $122,658

Peter Vujnovich motioned to approve the treasury report as presented, 2nd by Dan Coulon. Motion carries.

**V.** Committee Reports:

A. Public-Private Oyster Seed Grounds Committee Report- no report

B. Enforcement Report

Region 4

Iberia

No violations

Region 5

Vermillion, Calcasieu

No violations

Cameron

3-take oysters from an unapproved area

1-sack of oysters

Region 6

Terrebonne, Lafourche

No violations

Region 8

Plaquemines

1-Unleased state water bottoms

1-violate sanitary code (log book)

26 sacks seized

St Bernard

3-violate sanitary code (log book)

218 mini sacks seized

Jakov Jurisic requested that enforcement bring more details on the log book citations in St. Bernard for the next meeting

C. Legislative- no report; plans on hosting a meeting prior to the next OTF meeting

D. Legal- no report

E. Research- no report

F. Coastal Restoration- no report

G. Marketing- Anna Koehl from BMF stated that the OTF Facebook and the webpage- oystertaskforce.org have launched; open to ideas for the OTF website and Facebook page if anyone has suggestions

H. Health Report- March/April seasonal classification line is up on the website for comment; send any questions or comments to Chris Lemaire and cc Jen Armentor

Jakov Jurisic is South West Pass going to be opened? Justin Gremillion will take a look at it and get back to task force on Vermillion and Iberia Parish

Willie Daisy stated that when the November/ February line came out there was an error, it was the old line from year before and it was a while before it was updated, asked that LDH get together with LDWF to work out issues and prevent this from happening

I. Aquaculture- no report

J. Joint Task Force Working Group- no report

**VI.** New Business

1. The task force heard an update on the 2021 Fisheries disaster declaration

Patrick Banks stated that NOAA just simply needs a request for disaster declaration, it doesn’t take the Governor declaring a disaster, it takes a request from the state to NOAA to request a fisheries disaster for the 2021 hurricanes. The issue is that NOAA and the Secretary of Commerce will not declare a fisheries disaster until a 35% or greater loss in revenue can be proved due to that storm compared to the previous five years. We asked for a disaster declaration after the 2020 hurricanes and we are just now having those conversations with NOAA about declaring a disaster for that. Takes a full year to prove the revenue loss and that’s why they haven’t pushed hard for the 2021 declaration yet

Jason Froeba stated that the spending plan has been submitted to NOAA and we are waiting for them to accept it, we were able to update the plan with a lot of public comment received and were able to submit a version to NOAA for review prior to the end of the year. NOAA confirmed a few weeks ago that the plan was received and that they will get back to us with edits by mid-February. It is suspected that those edits might warrant some changes to the plan

Mrs. Taylor Naquin asked why is it taking so long to get help, the industry needs help now

Patrick Banks stated that another delay that happened in the middle of all of this was the Department pivoted and sort of stopped the work on the 2021 fisheries disaster and moved towards Covid and the CARES Act assistance and the reason for this was there was not enough staff to work on both simultaneously. We had to concentrate on one or the other and we decided to pause our efforts on the flood disaster and focus on CARES because it was direct paid and direct assistance to the fishing community and we felt that that was needed

Mitch Jurisich asked LDWF to keep the task force updated on this

1. The task force heard an update on the oyster strategic plan

Patrick Banks stated that the last version that the task force heard is the current version that it is in, the document is a living document, meaning that if there is new initiatives that we think can help the resource and the industry then we want to be able to include that. We are working from this and trying to implement some of the initiatives that we feel confident in, but we have not moved ahead with some of the initiatives that we do not feel as confident in

Mitch Jurisich stated that the concern he has is that money is being disbursed out from this plan, $3 million to aquaculture and $5M on the research for a low salinity tolerant oyster- this oyster should already exist because after the flooding event those are the oysters that would have survived are currently out there, these are the new broodstock for the new generation of oysters, it’s mind boggling to throw $5M into researching this; expressed concern that this plan, being a living document, can be moved on without coming to the industry first

Brad Robin requested some feedback on what exactly is spent and what is being allocated to be spent for this plan?

Patrick Banks stated that he will have to put the figures together and will get them over to the task force, some money has been spent on cultch planting, AOC initiatives, and the low salinity oyster

Carolina Bourque provided a presentation to the board

**Louisiana Oyster Strategic Plan**

Draft submitted to legislators Dec 2020 - Overall Goals: to increase oyster density, to expand oyster resource in POSG, to expand oyster resource resilience: - Habitat improvement projects - Development and protection of spawning reefs - Research to develop a low-salinity tolerant oyster, to provide resilience to oyster industry by offering options to expand operations into Alternative Oyster Aquaculture (AOC), such as off-bottom cage culture

**Initiatives** 1. Traditional Cultch Planting and Water-Bottom Mapping 2. Cultch Planting with Remote-Set Oysters 3. Development of Spawning Stock Sanctuary Network 4. Expansion of Alternative Oyster Aquaculture 5. Private Oyster Lease Rehabilitation (POLR) Program 6. Expansion of Hydrologic Monitoring 7. Evaluation of Leases Incapable of Oyster Production 8. Establishment of Cultivation and Production Requirements on Leases 9. Establishment of New Public Oyster Areas 10. Mississippi River Gulf Outlet Hydrologic Evaluation (MRGO) 11. Evaluation of the Restoration Bohemia Spillway Water Control Structure 12. Research and Development

Jakov Jurisic asked what the findings were broodstock reefs that were created last fall what were initial findings- just started sampling and didn’t collect data yet, what were the dates when rock was planted? Carolina stated that have to look back on data and get back to task force, asked that this information be ready for the next meeting, will put together with expense table

Jakov in regards to shell plant in drum bay what type of rocks? Most likely will be limestone but bids are currently open so do not know exactly yet, how many tons? 13,000 yards/ reef total of 27K yards

Peter Vujnovich asked for summary on research that is going to be done

Dr. Beth Stauffer associate professor in the Dept of Biology at UL Lafayette, the research is about identifying broodstock and harnessing the low salinity tolerance traits that are in that broodstock and as we are doing that trying not to compromise future production, harnessing the potential of some of the oysters out there to withstand low salinity events, will be able to share more with this group

Brad Robin stated that they will have to create a miracle oyster to survive the salinity that was there and is still there; have an issue with wasting money on research into this, have areas that prove this point

Peter Vujnovich one challenge is having a broodstock that can withstand low salinity but another issue is finding the bloodstock that can breed in low salinity

Mitch Jurisich stated that he believes that this is a waste of money, the oyster is already in existence and out there, people come to eat salty oysters and don’t want to stray away from the native oyster

Sam Slavich stated that you have to worry about the surviving oysters being able to breed. They do not develop the proper stuff to be able to spawn and successfully have a spat set, this is a greater issue than an individual animals survivability, agree with others that this is going down the wrong road and spending money in an improper way

Dr. Lea stated that we all the know the major problem is salinity regimes across the Gulf coast and that is controlled by CPRA, asked that LDWF do what they can to convince the CPRA that they should provide the salinity regimes that will help the oyster industry. The problem with the strategic plan is that it doesn’t incorporate CPRA’s efforts to develop a salinity regime to help the oyster industry

Jakov Jurisic asked that the task force receive the requests made in paper form at the next meeting

1. The board discussed the LDH lease checking rules and permitting guidelines **(1:57)**

Jennifer Armentor stated that permits are only granted 1st two weeks of each month, 1000 performance bond required and will be returned upon completion, need bonded security guard, cannot have any empty sacks on boat, can only check on 5 leases, have to notify LDWF prior to and upon returning, can only use one vessel and have to have copy of permit on vessel and only good for one day

Peter Vujnovich stated this is pretty restrictive for someone who owns a business to have to jump through all these hoops to just check on their own lease, not worth the attempted effort

Sam Slavich stated that an oyster lease is a property right and the way these rules are written is restricting my property right, if you so encumber the process so that it costs the fishermen money and restricts, you are infringing on property rights, thinking that it’s unconstitutional and an unfair abridgement of property rights

Sam Slavich stated that when it comes to a public health consequence there is none when it comes to checking on a lease

Justin Gremillion stated these rules have always been in place and this is a preventive health measure, feel the restrictions and laws, regulations that are in place are preventing this and hate to roll these things back and cause issues

Peter Vujnovich asked if it was possible to remove some of these restrictions and replace with just a check in, any change to these regulations would take a legislative change

Mitch Jurisich stated that the task force will need to hold a Health Committee meeting prior to the next meeting to iron out some of the issues

Jakov asked for comitment from Justin for health committee meeting

1. Brian Lezina provided a presentation and update on the stewardship and mitigation plan for the Mid-Barataria Sediment Diversion

**Mitigation Plan Formation:**

* Building the foundation and gathering information
* Public Outreach, Community Engagement, Coastal Connections
* Impacts Identified through DEIS
* Draft Mitigation Plan based on community input + DEIS identified impacts
* Community Outreach + Survey tool
* Held a series of outreach meetings focused on helping community understand impacts in DEIS and solicit feedback on mitigation measures. Survey tool deployed to collect more formal data and gave residents time to compile feedback.
* Updated Mitigation Plan based on DEIS comments + Community Input
* Incorporated into FINAL EIS
* Implementation

**Fisheries Mitigation- Total $54 Million**

**Oyster - $32M**

* + New public seed grounds
	+ Enhance public/private grounds
	+ Alternative Oyster Culture
	+ Broodstock Reefs
	+ Marketing and Outreach

**All Affected Fisheries- $3 Million:**

* Workforce/Business Training
* Increased Subsistence Access
* Operational Considerations



Mitch Jurisich stated that this is political propaganda it looks good to people outside of the industry but industry members know this is not going to work

Brian Lezina stated that he is asking for feedback from the industry and we value the input of the industry on how this is done

Jakov Jurisic stated that it’s $32m, in 2017 oyster dockside value was $40M probably triple or double of this now and right now oysters are way more expensive, how will this amount even scratch the surface?

Mitch Jurisich stated this is not money coming to individuals but this is for project implementation and resource

Brad Robin stated that $32M is painting a picture to the public, it’s only $32 million for an industry that will be destroyed, there is $500M worth of revenue in Black Bay, $32m is unrealistic if you add up what has come out of that area, some of the best growing oysters in the state, that we had and what is being lost, this picture is bothersome

Jakov Jurisic stated that Mr. Kline always bragged about how much land was created by Wax Lake but he never said how much that river destroyed in its path, several reefs were impacted and what about shrimpers? There is an area outside of South West Pass, HWY 90, cannot find a single shrimp there any more

Dr. Lea stated that the idea that they are trading the oyster industry for a very small quantity of marsh is simply not good government how can we exploit the good resource that we have held there

Captain Ricks stated that the $54M is for all fisheries mitigation for 50 years

1. The task force discussed the contract with Beuerman Miller Fitzgerald and funding

Peter Vujnovich motioned to renew the contract reflecting the same terms as it was from last year, with the same funding amount, $40,000, 2nd by Jakov Jurisic. Motion carries.

1. The task force heard an update on the OTF Washington, D.C. trip

The task force expressed concern with the way the Covid policy changes were handled and the lack of transparency and communication in this regard from their Louisiana Alive contact, would like to write a letter to the Krewe’s Captain and president

Jakov Jurisic provided an update on the Washington trip, stated that he was the only one from the oyster task force who was able to make the trip, started out boring and on Monday/ Tuesday got together with the Shrimp Task Force and attended meetings with Senator Wicker and Congressman Palazzo, attended the meetings with the goal of leaving impression of unity in the seafood industry in D.C., was granted a few minutes at the end of every meeting to discuss anything for the oyster industry, first meeting was with Senator Wicker and Brent Richards at the first meeting hit on Barataria, Mid- Breton and Bonne Carre Spillway also asked questions about a particular piece of legislation that was filed by, Cindy Hyde Smith, also from Mississippi, the bill would provide $408M from the 2019 Fisheries Disaster, told the bill is dead as of now but they are working to resurrect it and it is a work in progress, asked for help in stalling sediment diversion projects, will report on future meetings, then went to Senator Kennedy’s office also meeting set with Rep.Troy Carter; the last meeting was with Senator Cassidy expressed concern with 2019 Flood Disaster and Mid-Barataria and Mid-Breton diversions, Shrimp Task Force was helpful in agreeing with every argument that was made, STF would like to meet and the next trip the STF and OTF takes that they take DC on as a group

There should be some type of farm bill coming up next year

Need a packet put together as a guideline for the oyster industry

**VII.** Public Comment:

Dr. Lea asked the task force to consider a resolution to support the request to the parishes to reduce the coastal use permit (CUP) fees that they are charging to AOC beginning farmers, asked for an AOC meeting asking that the task force put this on the agenda for a future meeting, currently the fees for less than 1 acre it’s $800

Captain George Ricks asked Brian Lezina about the $54m for 50 years stated in the mitigation plan, most of you all know that a day’s event caused $154M disaster, the money for mitigation is laughable, talking about $17M for shrimp for 50 years, shrimp landings in 2017 for brown shrimp was $42.2M, 41% came from Barataria Bay, shrimping will be gone in Barataria Bay, CPRA just released an annual plan to begin construction on Mid-Barataria, Feb 26 cutoff date for public comment on the annual plan would encourage anyone who has a stake in the industry to submit a comment

Brian Lezina stated that the annual plan is an authorization to expend funding if available

Dan Coulon stated that he received a letter again from LDWF requesting task force verification, don’t think we should have to do this

Are there any plans to reopen any public grounds later on in the year, possibility to open a short season in Sister Lake, the only area that holds a decent amount of resource, maybe around 4 days, the idea is that is the only season open we want to be aware of pressure, proposed sack limit is 25 sacks per day per vessel. Would probably be after Mardi Gras maybe the week of March 7, can be done internally and need 72 hours public notice

Legislative session starts March 14 and any legislation introduced needs to be before then, have to have author and bill information in by March 2

**VIII.** The next meeting was set for Tuesday, February 22 for 1pm at the New Orleans Lakefront Airport; plan to host a Health Committee meeting first at 9:30am followed by a Legislative Committee meeting

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