

OTF meeting minutes February 24, 2015

Meeting called to order at 1 p.m.

Present Voting Members

Al Sunseri

Brad Robin

Brandt LaFrance

Byron Encalade

Jakov Jurisic

John Tesvich

Peter Vujnovich

Ralph "Buddy" Pausina

Sam Slavich

Shane Bagala

Wilbert Collins

Willie Daisy

Absent Voting Members

Dan Coulon

Present Non-Voting Members

Mark Schexnayder

Karl Morgan

Chad Hebert in for Lt. Col Sammy Martin

Gary Lapinto in for Lance Broussard

Absent Non-Voting Members

Chip Kline

Kyle Graham

Motion by Al Sunseri to approve January 13 meeting minutes, second by Wilbert Collins. Motion adopted.

Motion by Al Sunseri to accept agenda modifications by Al Sunseri, second by Wilbert Collins.

Motion by Wilbert Collins to approve the financial report, second by Jakov Jurisic, who asked at this time that the task force lunch be covered. Cole Garrett said that the better way to do that would be to seek reimbursement individually since they are allowed per-diem. Ralph Pausina said that in the future they may be able to get approval from the secretary to bring food in. Motion adopted.

LaDon Swann addressed the task force and showed the Gulf Oyster Hatchery video. Chris Nelson addressed the group on the hatchery initiative.

Motion by Al Sunseri to support Gulf oyster hatchery initiative in general and that John Tesvich can represent the task force in discussions of the concept, second by Wilbert Collins. Motion adopted.

Buddy Pausina asked that Dr. Zach Lea address the task force in regards to his two proposals that he has submitted to the Coastal Restoration and Protection Authority, which suggest ways the CPRA can leverage public funds and maximize the achievement of its objectives by stimulating private sector investments in coastal restoration and protection.

Buddy Pausina made a motion that the chairman put together a committee of lease holders of those affected by the Lower Breton Sound diversion being proposed to meet with Dr. Lea. Motion adopted.

Buddy Pausina gave the public/private grounds committee report. In regards to VMS, no VMS systems were recommended to be required for private or public grounds. The committee asks that LDWF seek civil damages for oysters illegally taken from public grounds. Al Sunseri made a motion that the task force support the recommendations of the committee report. Second by Jakov Jurisic. Task force members also wanted to mirror the fines from private leases as to what was done with polluted areas, but thought that may have already been recommended. The task force and Cole Garrett confirmed that this should be submitted as part of the LDWF package. Motion carried. Tom Soniat addressed the task force on VMS and will continue to do that at each task force meeting. Dr. Soniat indicated that VMS research was being conducted by his Lab, but that he needed on-board verification (ground-truthing) of VMS data. This ground-truthing will assist in better understanding the VMS data and he requested assistance from OTF members to allow LDWF observers on their vessels for this purpose.

Enforcement- St. Mary/ Terrebonne area 28 tickets issued, St. Bernard, 3 arrests in addition to tagging and sanitary violations. Motion by Bryon Encalade to accept the enforcement committee report, second by Al Sunseri. Motion adopted

Coastal Restoration committee- Maura Wood addressed the task force on current Coastal Restoration projects. Ms. Wood gave a presentation about coastal restoration projects, including diversions, and described modeling work being performed by CPRA to help estimate fisheries responses to coastal restoration projects.

Al Sunseri asked that they move the discussion on considering an opening of the public seed grounds under new business. Motion approved.

John Tesvich provided an overview of a recent reconnaissance trip that he, Brad Robin, Pete Vujnovich, Robert Campo, and Patrick Banks made to the public grounds north of the MRGO in which many reefs were sampled using a commercial dredge. He reported that good signs were observed at nearly all sampling locations. Motion by Jakov Jurisic to open public seed grounds North of MRGO to MS state line for two weeks (last two weeks in March) and take away restrictions on sack limits and bedding Second by Peter Vujnovich. Discussion occurred with some speaking in favor of the restrictions (50-sack limit and a sacking-only area) and some speaking against the restrictions. Mr. Tesvich asked for all in favor to raise their hands. Motion carries by 7-4 vote. Randy Pausina asked that someone be at the commission meeting next Thursday when this is discussed.

Wilbert Collins left at 3 p.m.

Randy Pausina reminded the OTF of the inshore artificial reef plan he presented at the last OTF meeting and asked for OTF support. Motion by Brad Robin to accept the artificial reef plan as presented. Second by Al Sunseri. Jakov Jurisic asked that they be better marked, maybe with pilings in high traffic areas. Randy Pausina said that they will mark as appropriate. Motion adopted.

John Tesvich left at 3:13 p.m. Al Sunseri will chair.

Steve Sessums (LDAF) addressed the task force concerning the designation in rule of a "mini-sack." He indicated that the Commissioner of Agriculture has agreed to officially designate this new unit of measure for oysters.

Buddy Pausina left the meeting at 3:28 p.m.

Motion by Sam Slavich that the Department of Ag continue their work to put regulations in place to define a mini-sack (1/3 regular sack, or a cubic inch conversion or half a bushel) Motion adopted. Al Sunseri said that the trash issue needs to be addressed. Sunseri asked that this go to a professionalism committee. Steve Sessums asked for a percentage that can be allowed in bag or container and what the definition of trash is. Al Sunseri asked for an example of what is allowed currently. Currently a max of 15 % of weight can come from fluid in shucked oysters. Steve Sessums will look at other products as well.

The in-shell versus meat weight conversion table. Task force voted to send this to the research committee.

Trip ticket and excise tax update-Motion by Byron to send this to the research committee as well, motion adopted.

Al Sunseri asked if Patrick Banks could send his public grounds update out to the task force for discussion at a later meeting. Motion to defer to the next meeting, second by Peter Vujnovich. Motion adopted.

Motion by Sam Slavich deferred the discussion on the permit appeals board until next meeting, second by Peter Vujnovich. Motion adopted. The maker of the motion agrees to send this to the legislative committee.

Rusty Gaude said that the issue of incidental harvesting of clams may be able to address this through conversations with enforcement. Motion by Jakov Jurisic that this issue go to the public/private oyster grounds committee. Motion adopted.

Cole Garrett clarified from earlier in the meeting that it is enforcements recommendation that they mimic the increase in theft from private leases to be the same as penalties for harvesting from polluted areas.

Ashley Roth reminded task force members to fill our their Tier 2.1 financial disclosure forms

Next meeting scheduled for April 7, Tuesday at 1 p.m.

Meeting adjourned at 4:06 p.m.