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Recreational Fishing Advisory Board (RFAB) Meeting Virginia Marine Resources Commission July 9, 2012

Members Present

George Hudgins-Chairman
Edward Rhodes – Vice-Chairman
Charles Randolph
Carolyn Brown
Jim Deibler
Ken Schultz

Staff present

Rob O'Reilly
Jane McCroskey
Sonya Davis
Joe Grist
Mike Meier

Members not present

Jesse J. Duell, Jr.
Charles Southall
Carlisle Bannister

Others present

Jackie Bort (VAQ Stranding Team)
Rob Cowling (NN Rotary Club)
Susanna Musick (VIMS)
Bob Orth (VIMS)
Jan McDowell (VIMS)
Wesley Brown (Kiwanis)
Bob Allen (PSWSFA)
Beth Synowiec (recreational angler)
Reggie Mariner (GMB for Greenbackville)

I. Introduction, Announcements, Comments.

Mr. O'Reilly mentioned that no one would be available to speak for the eels/elvers project

George Hudgins announced that Sonya Davis would be leaving and presented her with a plaque of recognition for her years of service.

II. Status of Fund.

Jane McCroskey said that the financial projection took the \$1,367,516 available for expenditure at the time of the meeting. She noted that this projection included funding of the reviewed projects.

III. Review of Minutes from the May 2012 RFAB Meeting.

Mr. Rhodes moved to accept the meetings. The motion was seconded by Ms. Brown. The motion passed unanimously.

IV. A brief update by Dr. Orth, VIMS, on the on-going Eastern Shore seaside SAV work, which is partially funded by the recreational license fund.

Dr. Orth provided a PowerPoint presentation on the sea grass restoration project on the Eastern Shore. He said that the goal is to reestablish sea grasses to the Virginia coastal lagoons that died out in the 1930's. The project began in 1997 by collecting and broadcasting seeds in four Virginia coastal bays (South, Cob, Spider Crab, and Hog Island Bays). Over

DRAFT

DRAFT

100 acres of sea grass has been restored in South Bay, and Dr. Orth said that he is very happy with how quickly the grasses are returning to the coastal bays. He showed maps that highlighted the increase in sea grasses in less than a decade. He said that his team is using RFAB funds as leverage for access to other grants as well (he mentioned water quality study using NOAA grants). He said that sea grass benefits have also been observed – turbidity has decreased with increasing sea grass, and the clearer conditions help the bed to further spread.

Dr. Orth commented that scallop restoration is also a part of this project. Prior to the bed declines, the area supported a significant bay scallop fishery that disappeared as the beds declined. About 4 years ago, VIMS received grants from NOAA to put hatchery-raised juvenile or adult scallops in the beds with hopes that within the next 4-5 years, we may see the return of the bay scallops to these coastal bays. This would be very exciting to see the return of both the habitat and the fishery to these areas.

Mr. Rhodes asked if there were still problems with boat scarring, and Dr. Orth said that that has been reduced significantly by working with the VMRC.

Mr. Schultz noted the tremendous amount of assistance from volunteers. He said there were people from many areas who came to pick the seeds for the grass beds.

V. Multi-Year Projects for 2012 Renewal.

H) 2012 Virginia Marine Sportfish Collection (Year 6). J. Grist, J. Cimino, VMRC. **\$10,000.**

There were no public comments on this item.

I) *Federal Assistance (Wallop-Breaux) Matching Funds, Federal FY 2013. Rob O'Reilly, VMRC. **\$256,156.**

There were no public comments on this item.

VI. Multi-Year Projects for 2013 Renewal.

J) 2013 Children's Fishing Clinic (Year 16). Rob Cowling, Newport News Rotary Club and Coastal Conservation Association-Peninsula. **\$6,500.**

There were no public comments on this item.

K) 2013 Kiwanis Club Children's Fishing Clinic (Year 12). Wesley Brown, Capital District Kiwanis Club. **\$6,500.**

There were no public comments on this item.

L) 2013 Norfolk Youth Head Boat Fishing Trip (Year 2). Ned Smith, Norfolk Anglers Club. **\$1,115.**

There were no public comments on this item.

DRAFT

DRAFT

M) 2013 Virginia Game Fish Tagging (Year 19). S. Musick, VIMS and L. Gillingham, VMRC. **\$72,392.**

There were no public comments on this item.

N) *2013 Estimating Relative Abundance of Young-of-Year American Eel in the Virginia Tributaries of Chesapeake Bay (Yr 12). M. Fabrizio, T. Tuckey, VIMS. **\$51,971.**

There were no public comments on this item.

VII. New Projects for 2012

Q) Greenbackville Harbor Enhancements. S. Hall, Accomack County, R. Mariner, GMB. **\$225,000.**

Jane McCroskey asked the representatives to contact Hank Badger.

Mr. Rhodes asked Mr. Reggie Mariner, engineer working with the Greenbackville, if he was familiar with the regulation changes that were passed by the Virginia Department of Health last month. Mr. Rhodes told Mr. Mariner to contact Bob Hicks with the Virginia Department of Health regulations and to check the ADA requirements for accessibility. They also discussed the number of handicapped parking spaces and number of mooring slips what are planned at the site.

Mr. Rhodes asked Mr. Mariner to provide the Committee with basic plan drawings as soon as possible. Mr. Mariner said that they could be submitted to Mr. O'Reilly within a week and a half.

R) Chincoteague Historic Bridge Fishing Pier. K. Edwards, R. Ritter, Town of Chincoteague. **\$129,083.**

Ms. McCroskey asked the applicant to contact Hank Badger.

S) Genetic-based Investigation of Blueline Tilefish and Snowy Grouper Stock Structure (Year 1 of 2). J. McDowell, J. Graves, VIMS. **\$74,155.**

Mr. Rhodes asked about the last line in the Peer Review that stated that the investigators may not be aware that a portion of this project is part of an ongoing investigation between the VMRC and Old Dominion University entitled Population Dynamics of Grouper and Tilefish, funded through the National Fish and Wildlife service.

Jan McDowell said she was aware of the ODURF project, and that that project was not doing the genetic investigation.

Ms. Brown asked how this would benefit the recreational angler, and Ms. McDowell said that it's a fish that's not been commercially important; it is primarily a recreational fish, and there are a lot of records coming out of the Virginia fishery.

DRAFT

DRAFT

These types of fish are easily overexploited (they do not survive well as a hook-and-released fish). In other areas (such as North Carolina), these fish have been depleted. This project would get an idea about the mixing between Virginia and other areas and get a baseline of genetic diversity. The genetics will tell us if it an isolated sub-population, or if we are getting recruits from North Carolina.

Ms. Brown commented that she felt that there were very few snowy grouper off of Virginia waters.

Mr. Deibler asked if they had approached the commercial board with the project, and Ms. McDowell said they had not because these fish have very little commercial value (there is more economic value for recreational fishermen).

T) Fish Away from Whales Angler Outreach Project (Year 1 of 2). Mark Swingle, Virginia Aquarium Foundation. **\$76,151.**

Mr. Rob Cowling (not speaking on behalf of his organization) said that during the last (January to March) season, he was amazed at the number of whales he saw while jet skiing. He noted that he never saw any fishing vessel move toward any whales, and suggested that level of funding from recreational license sales may be unnecessary. He thought that it could be handled with educational fliers or radio announcements.

Mr. Randolph asked if people Mr. Cowling noted continued fishing when they saw the whales. Mr. Cowling said that most stopped fishing to pay attention to the whales – he did not see anyone going toward a pod of whales with their lines out. He did see a lot of whale watching vessels getting closer than the fishing vessels.

Jackie Bort, research tech with the Virginia Aquarium, gave a brief PowerPoint presentation addressing reviewer comments on the project. She clarified that the project is a positive outreach campaign (not enforcement). She noted the positive relationship the Aquarium staff has seen between fishermen and scientists, especially compared to the Northeast. She said that anything that people do to change whale behavior would be illegal. She said that while mail-outreach had been assessed, the program believed that face-to-face time would have more impact.

She said that this is the first year the VA Aquarium has had the ability to do photo-ID, so it is hard to say if the large number of whales this year is an anomaly. She compared the whale-watch and research trips, and she believes large numbers of whales corresponds to high water temperature.

She also showed some pictures of whales entangled with gear, and addressed the issues of monofilament line with whales and dolphins.

Mr. Randolph asked if the Aquarium has tried speaking with the fishing clubs on the south side and the peninsula. He suggested starting with those clubs with getting the word out.

VIII. New Project for 2013

DRAFT

DRAFT

U) *Cooperative (VMRC, Va Tech, ASMFC) Efforts to Utilize Alternative Methods for the Upcoming Stock Assessment of Weakfish. R. O'Reilly, VMRC, Y. Jiao, VPI, P. Campfield, ASMFC. **\$20,000.**

Mr. Randolph asked about the weakfish stock. Mr. O'Reilly said that the work the fund has already supported over a three-year period is going to be utilized in the ASMFC stock assessment. The ASMFC has some stock assessment scientists, so there should be some beneficial collaboration. Some of the work on the assessment may pinpoint the predation issue and other issues that surround the decline. The coast-wide commercial and recreational landings took a 50% cut in one year. The year classes from the recent surveys are average or close to it, and the recruitment looks good; however, a lot of the recruits don't often make it to the 1 and 2 year-old weakfish.

Ms. Brown asked if this was an on-going thing, and Mr. O'Reilly described that it would possibly last for two years.

* Indicates the project is also under review by CFAB/MFIF

IX. Date for Future 2012 RFAB Meetings. September 10 – Work Session (5:30 p.m.) & Final Recommendations (7 p.m.)

The motion to adjourn was passed, and the meeting ended at 8:02 p.m.

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