

# FINAL MINUTES

## Recreational Fishing Advisory Board Meeting

### July 9, 2007

#### Members Present

George Hudgins - Chairman  
Edward Rhodes - Vice-chair  
John Barr  
Carolyn Brown

Jim Deibler  
Jesse "Jimmie" Duell  
Charles Randolph  
Charles Southall

#### Members Not Present

Carlisle Bannister

At 7:07 p.m., Chairman Hudgins called the meeting to order.

Ms. Jane McCroskey informed everyone that the revenue available for projects is estimated as \$1.6 million, as of September 30, 2007. Another projection will be provided for the September meeting.

Mr. Hudgins asked for a review of the draft May 14, 2007 RFAB meeting minutes. Mr. Southall made a motion to approve the minutes. Ms. Brown seconded the motion, and the vote was unanimous to accept the draft minutes as final.

#### **Multi-Year Projects for Renewal.**

- A) 2008 Children's Fishing Clinic (Year 11). Rob Cowling, Newport News Rotary Club and Coastal Conservation Association-Peninsula. **\$6,000**. Mr. Cowling was unable to attend the meeting. Mr. Wes Brown was in attendance to answer any questions. The format for the 2008 program will be the same as in past years. The 2007 Clinic will be held Saturday, July 14 between 8 a.m. and noon.
- B) 2008 Kiwanis Club Children's Fishing Clinic (Year 7). Wesley Brown, Capital District Kiwanis Club. **\$6,000**. Mr. Brown explained that this Clinic is similar to the Rotary/CCA Clinic. Over 250 kids are expected for the 2007 program, which will be held on Tuesday, July 17 between 9 a.m. and 1 p.m.
- C) 2008 Virginia Game Fish Tagging (Year 14). Jon Lucy, VIMS and Claude Bain, VMRC. **\$73,093**. Mr. Lucy provided an update on the status of the 2006 and 2007 tagging projects. He thanked the Board for their past support and hoped it would continue for 2008. Generally, the tagging program would continue as in the past. They are researching possible high tag losses for red drum and speckled trout, and looking at alternate tags to use for those species.
- D) Federal Assistance (Wallop-Breaux) Matching Funds FY 2008. Jack Travelstead, VMRC. **\$283,512**. Mr. Travelstead said that the Wallop-Breaux federal assistance that the Agency receives continues to increase. VMRC now receives nearly \$1.9 million of

federal money. This is great news because it allows the use of federal money for projects that might otherwise need recreational license funds for support. Because the Agency has more federal funds available, more matching funds are required. The Commercial Fishing Advisory Board (CFAB) and Commission have already committed \$75,000, and VIMS and ODURF will continue to provide their portions of the state match, as well. Because of the increase of available federal funds, the VIMS Trawl Survey was added to the list of Wallop-Breaux funded projects for this year.

E) Sheepshead Population Dynamics in Chesapeake Bay, Virginia (Year 3). H. Liao, J. Ballenger, C. Jones, ODURF. **\$67,206**. Mr. Joey Ballenger provided an update on the status of the 2006 sheepshead project. The current request is for the third and final year of the study. One goal is to try to increase the sample size of some of the smaller size classes. In 2008, the plan is to hold a sheepshead tournament to possibly collect some fresh gonad samples, as the anglers bring the fish to the dock. Also, during the tournament they may offer additional incentives to anglers for bringing in some smaller fish samples. State funds may not be used for cash prizes, so they will research other funding sources for tournament prizes. Some expected results from the three years of study will be to provide management recommendations for the species; continued outreach to the anglers; and two manuscripts will be produced, one on sheepshead growth and one on reproduction. Most of the samples, thus far, have come from the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel area. The researchers have not discovered external morphological differences between males and females. The fish must be cut open for sex determination. Currently, they are collecting 2 females for every male. The researchers need to find and collect more gravid (immanent reproductive status) female samples. At this point, most of the samples have come from the recreational industry, though they have coordinated with the VMRC Biological Sampling Program to obtain some commercial industry fish samples.

F) Wishart's Point Landing. Stewart Hall, County of Accomack. **\$275,000**. (RF# 03-05: \$25,000 Engineering Study)

Mr. Hall introduced Mr. Ed Darby, president, and Mr. Ron Greenly, vice-president, of the group, Citizens United for Wishart's Point. This citizen's group is made up of about 25 members who have been working for approximately 10 years to improve this area. Mr. Hall also introduced Mr. James Brawley and Mr. John Lowenthal, from the LandMark Design Group. The original 2002 project was proposed as a 2-ramp project, however, the Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) has cut the funding for small channel dredging. The Wishart's Point channel on the western side would be difficult to navigate without dredging. They have modified their proposal to allow for 1 shallow draft boat ramp and a courtesy/fishing pier on the eastern side of the peninsula to give some small boats and anglers access to the water. Also, with the current proposal they would add a parking lot and other amenities to accommodate the shallow draft vessels able to use the ramp. If the ACOE ever decides to dredge, an additional proposal would be submitted to add a boat ramp on the original western side of the peninsula. The last meeting with the ACOE was approximately a month ago, and the Corps has given no indication as to when funding may be available for small channel dredging. A private developer plans to provide additional amenities such as a gazebo, pavilion, boardwalk, and additional parking in the area. The depth is minus 4 feet of mean low water out to the channel. Total cost of the project is \$432,000 with the recreational fund providing \$300,000. The recreational fund

has already provided \$25,000 for the engineering study, so the current request is \$275,000. Shallow draft vessels draft about a foot or less of water. A joint-permit application has not been made, as of yet, for this location. The current users of this location are a mix of local small boat recreational and commercial fishermen. There is no plan to charge a fee to use the boat launch facility. On July 10<sup>th</sup>, representatives from Accomack and Northampton Counties will be meeting with Congresswoman Drake to discuss all the issues with small channel dredging on the Eastern Shore of Virginia.

### **New Projects.**

- G) 2008 Youth Developmental "Hooked on Fishing" Adventure (Year 1). A. Fisher, R. Lockhart, Virginia Charter Boat Association. **\$6,780**. Mr. Al Fisher, one of the 10 directors of the Virginia Charter Boat Association (VCBA), introduced Mr. Joe Shelton, VCBA, and Mr. Jerry Smith, who will provide his expertise to the VCBA in developing this program. The plan is to have 2 charter boats from each of the 4 areas of Virginia take the kids out for a day of fishing. They plan to have 1 chaperone for every 5 kids. Some of the charter boats, that have committed to participate, are registered to hold more than 6 people. The plan for the first year is to work with the Girl Scouts, Cub Scouts, and Boy Scouts to select the young people for this day of fishing. Maybe, if this program is successful, they may work with other groups of children in the future. Some of the expected benefits for the young people are to promote recreational fishing as a healthy activity, gain a better understanding of protecting the environment, knowledge of boating safety, and knowledge of the rules and regulations of fishing and why they are necessary. The scout leaders of the various troops contacted will have to select which children will get to participate. They will not have enough space for everyone in a troop, so the scout leaders will have to set their own criteria for attendance. For the first year, headboats will not be utilized, but that may be an option in future years. They are planning to accommodate 85 scouts, with 17 chaperones for this first year.
  
- H) Saxis Fishing Pier Expansion. Charles Tull, Mayor, Town of Saxis. **\$173,151**. Mayor Tull was unable to attend. Mr. Stewart Hall was in attendance to answer any questions and to take questions back to Mayor Tull. Some questions raised were 1) what was being done about the erosion problems reported in the Virginia Pilot?; 2) could a representative from the engineering firm, assisting Saxis, attend the next meeting?; 3) how will the Town address swimming and safety around the pier?; and 4) and is there a local place to purchase fishing licenses or will the Town purchase the annual pier license?
  
- I) Pilot Study: Application of pop-up satellite archival tags (PSATs) to assess postrelease survival, habitat utilization and short term movement of striped bass in Virginia's winter recreational fishery. J. Graves, R. Latour, A. Horodysky, VIMS. **\$71,371**. Dr. John Graves said this proposed project is to gather data from the striped bass "trophy" fishery, which is primarily made up of large female fish from the coastal migratory stock. These fish make up the bulk of the spawning stock for striped bass. This is primarily a catch-and-release fishery with some "trophy" sized fish taken. A wide variety of gear is used, such as lures and live bait, and deep hooking does occur. Previous studies of postrelease survival for striped bass have been on smaller fish and in confinement with different temperature regimes. With these studies, a 9% postrelease mortality rate is assumed. They plan to use a smaller pop-up satellite tag rather than the larger tag, currently used on

billfish. This new, smaller tag is 2/3 the size of the larger tag. The tags used on billfish stayed on the fish for 10 days before floating to the top of the water column and transmitting information to the satellite. Dr. Graves continued to explain how the pop-up satellite tags have worked for other fisheries, and information that may be collected from the tags. He described the postrelease mortality, between J hooks and circle hooks, found for the white marlin fishery. He also showed how some of the data from the tags are analyzed. Dr. Graves did acknowledge that there are problems with the use of these tags and that the tags are very expensive. The plan for this pilot study is to start with small number (10) of striped bass to make sure they can carry the tags, and to see what some of the other problems may be for this species. They believe that they will have a better chance to recover the released tags, using GPS, for the striped bass fishery than they would with other species that are traveling in the waters of foreign countries. The tags may be refurbished for \$800, as opposed to \$4,000, which is the cost for a new tag. By retrieving the tag, they will get 100% of the information collected by the tag, as opposed to 60% or 70% of the information transmitted via satellite. Some expected benefits of the pilot study would be to receive some postrelease mortality data, habitat utilization data, and some movement data. They plan to use 5 fish caught on J hooks and 5 fish caught on circle hooks and set the tag release time to 30 days. If funded, they plan to begin the study in January or February, well before the fish begin their move to freshwater. Saltwater corrodes the wire attachment mechanism and causes the tags to release from the fish, and freshwater does not. The benefits to the scientific community would be to gain information to evaluate the potential use of this tool, the applicability of this tool to other species of interest, to provide initial data to see if there is a statistical difference between hook types, and to provide leverage to seek funding elsewhere. Dr. Graves was asked why additional studies were needed when most anglers already know that the circle hooks are better for fish than the J hooks. Dr. Graves answered that most hook studies were done on smaller sized fish and not the large “trophy” sized fish. Also, many anglers still do not use the circle hooks either because they do not know how to rig them properly, or that the anglers do not have enough information to encourage the use of circle hooks on the larger fish. Dr. Graves spends a fair amount of his time educating the angling community about circle hooks. Various RFAB members indicated that they believe anglers already know the circle hooks are better for the fish, but the real question is whether the anglers believe they are as effective at catching the fish as the J hooks. Mr. Andrij Horodysky was also present. He pointed out that the Virginia recreational striped bass fishery is managed based on a 9% mortality rate. This mortality rate was based on an average of studies, most of which were conducted on smaller fish in freshwater reservoirs with a wide variety of hooks and water temperature issues, and one saltwater ponds study done in Maryland. The researchers were asked whether the company that manufactures these tags had done any studies or had information on what animals can carry these tags. Dr. Graves said that the company does very minimal testing, so it is up to the researchers in the field to determine whether these tags will work on the size and species in question. Dr. Graves was asked if the manufacturer would give them a price break for testing the tags. Dr. Graves said that in past studies the manufacturer would not give a price break, but may give the researchers a few extra tags to work with. Normally, negotiations for discounts or extra tags take place when funding is secured and an order is being placed.

- J) Improving stock assessment of weakfish (*Cynoscion regalis*). Dr. Yan Jiao, Dr. Don Orth, Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University and Rob O'Reilly, VMRC. **\$87,194**. Dr. Jiao explained that weakfish are currently at a historically low level. In 2006, the stock assessment for weakfish was rejected by the peer review committee for the following reasons: ignorance of the stock structure; uncertainty of the catch data; and borrowed usage of the age-length key. The consequences of the rejection are no biomass estimation, no fishing mortality estimation, and precautionary management measures that vary by state. The question that scientists want to answer: is it commercial fishing, recreational fishing, climate, predators, or competitors that drive population changes in weakfish? Dr. Jiao said that the recreational fishery would most likely benefit from improved stock assessment and stock recovery, since Virginia is usually one of the top 3 states for recreational weakfish landings. Dr. Jiao continued in more detail as to why the current stock assessment was rejected and how this proposed study would address these issues. This is a 3 year project and the projected 3 year budget was included in the proposal, however the current request is only for year 1. Mr. O'Reilly, who is the currently the ASMFC Weakfish Management Board representative for Virginia and was previously the Technical Committee representative, reiterated the problems with the rejection of the weakfish stock assessment. Mr. O'Reilly said that because the ASMFC does not have an approved stock assessment, they have reacted by capping the weakfish fishery in each state. The recreational fishery will be capped at 6 fish, regardless of the size limit, and the commercial fishery will be capped at a three year level of landings (pounds) from 2002-2004. The current stock assessment was based on a virtual population analysis (VPA) called ADAPT, and when this was not working, time has been spent to figure out why it was not working. What Dr. Jiao is proposing is a multi-pronged approach, several different ways, to look at this problem. Everyone involved hopes this approach will speed up the stock assessment, the management, and eventually the stock recovery. Mr. O'Reilly also explained how the ASMFC and management process works and how this project proposal will help. The RFAB asked about the potential for other funding sources for this study. Mr. O'Reilly indicated that they were looking into possible support from ASMFC, and would provide additional information at the next meeting. Also, funding from other states that may benefit from this research is most likely not available. Some states have not yet complied with the ASMFC mandate to collect biological samples, due to lack of funding, resources, and man-power.
- K) Reef Monitoring Equipment Support for VMRC's Fisheries Management Division. M. Meier, J. Grist, VMRC. **\$42,964**. Mr. Mike Meier indicated that the amount requested is for mainly for fuel, supplies and equipment, including video monitoring equipment, to develop a pilot monitoring program of the artificial reef sites. This project is a joint effort between the staff of the Plans and Statistics Department and the Artificial Reef Program. The plan is to systematically survey all the artificial reefs to determine whether or not the reefs are doing what was anticipated. Throughout the Program's history, they have not been able to do any consistent monitoring of the reef sites. The small amount of monitoring that has been done in the past was contracted through outside sources. Mr. Joe Grist and other Fisheries Management Division staff have agreed to work with Mr. Meier to design and execute an in-house monitoring program. Over the long term, this monitoring could help the Program to determine whether the use of designed structures are worth the extra expense or are "materials of opportunity" just as effective, why one

part of a reef site is more productive than another part, why is one site more productive than another site, and also what is the best sampling protocol to use to monitor these sites. The plan is to start with two reef sites, like Northern Neck and one in the lower Bay, and see what information may be learned and the best approach to use.

L) **Adult Red Drum Population Structure Study. Joe Grist, VMRC. \$20,390.**

Mr. Grist said that in 2009 the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC), in conjunction with the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC), will be completing a comprehensive stock assessment on red drum, from Virginia to Florida. This past May, the Technical Committee began a review of the data available and realized that information was lacking. Virginia's recreational red drum data is very limited, and much of that is due to the regulations in effect (3 fish possession limit, 18"-26"). Information is available for smaller-sized fish and juveniles, but not the large, older fish. The number of red drum tagged in the Game Fish Tagging study has increased greatly in the last 2 years, but the tagging study does not give all the information needed. The Technical Committee is trying to get a one year "snap shot" of data for age structure of the population, how far the fish are traveling up and down the coast, and how much genetic mixing is going on between the fish from the various states. The plan is to have each state collect a couple hundred adult red drum and utilize all body parts for the various studies. The South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR) is set-up to do the genetic studies, for all the coastal states, with minimal overhead costs. SCDNR currently does the genetic studies for samples from NC to GA. Additional funding is needed to add samples from VA and FL. The requested amount is only for VA fish samples. Ageing and stomach content analysis will also be completed at the same time. This is a one year project. A few samples will be collected this fall, but most next spring, from the ocean and up into the Chesapeake Bay, wherever the large fish may be found. Collections will start with hook-and-line sampling teams working with anglers, and, if necessary, staff may set a few tended trot lines.

**2007 Deployment of Artificial Reef Structure (immediate funding requested). Mike Meier, VMRC. \$400,000.** Mr. Meier asked for support from the RFAB, so immediate funding may be requested of the Commission at the July 24 meeting. These funds are to cover the cost of deployment of concrete pipe, which is currently available in lower Tidewater. There are acres of "factory seconds" and damaged concrete pipe stacked up on the manufacturer's property, and the manufacturer would like to utilize the space taken up by this pipe. The manufacturer is willing to transport the pipe to a local barge loading facility, if the Artificial Reef Program can secure funds and find a contractor(s) to deploy the material onto the various Bay reef locations. Mr. Meier has worked with this company in previous years, and the partnership was a benefit to the Program. In the past, the cost to deploy material of this type has ranged from \$24 to \$50 per ton, depending on the size of material and the distance to the reef site. There is enough material to augment all the Bay reef sites. Ms. McCroskey explained that the Commission must receive approval to be able to accept this donated material. The Commission has already started the process to seek approval to receive this donation. If the RFAB and Commission approve the funding request in July, then a request for bid (RFB) to locate a contractor(s) to deploy material may be advertised. This RFB procurement process takes about a month to 6 weeks to complete. Three written public comments were received prior to the meeting in support of this funding request. Mr. Joe Shelton, VCBA, support the request for funding, especially if material will be added to the Northern Neck Reef. Mr. Deibler made a

motion to approve the request, and was seconded by Mr. Rhodes. The vote was 8-0 to approve the funding request.

The next Second Cycle RFAB meetings are scheduled for September 10 and November 5.

Chairman Hudgins adjourned the meeting at 9:47 p.m.

**Note:** Audio files of the meeting are available at <http://www.mrc.virginia.gov/vsrfdf/index.shtm>  
(Choose, Current Proposals, on the left-hand menu)