

**Virginia Recreational Fishing Advisory Board  
Virginia Marine Resources Commission  
2013 Cycle 2 Presentations Meeting  
Monday, July 8, 2013**

**Board Members Present**

George Hudgins  
Ed Rhodes  
Carlisle Bannister  
Carolyn Brown  
John Crowling  
Jimmie Duell  
Charles Randolph  
Ken Schultz

**Board Members Absent**

Charles Southall

**Staff Present**

Rob O'Reilly  
Jane McCroskey  
Joe Cimino  
Joe Grist  
Lewis Gillingham  
Renee Hoover  
Mike Meier  
Alicia Nelson  
Sharon Wilson  
Reneé Hoover

**Others Present**

Mary Fabrizio  
Stewart Hall  
Frank Kearney  
Jan McDowell  
Susanna Musick  
Darryl Nixon  
Hamish Small

The minutes were recorded by Reneé Hoover and Alicia Nelson.

I. Introduction, Announcements, Comments.

The meeting was called to order at 7:07 p.m. Alicia Nelson gave a brief introduction and welcome to the Mr. John Crowling of Virginia Beach, who was recently appointed to the RFAB.

II. Status of Fund.

Ms. Jane McCroskey gave an update on the status of the fund. She explained that the money estimated to date for projects was \$1,779,011. She reminded the board members that several one-time reconciliations led to the current amount in the fund and that the VSRFDF does fund portions of the law enforcement division. She asked said that the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF) has asked to be reimbursed for the cost of administering the saltwater licenses, and staff is currently working to estimate what that cost may be, in addition to working on a Memorandum of Understanding with the DGIF at this time. She asked for any relevant comments or concerns about the potential reimbursement be sent to Alicia Nelson.

Mr. Rhodes asked the cash transfer from the Department of Accounts listed in the budget, and Ms. McCroskey explained that the state of Virginia charges agency non-general funds for central service costs that are incurred. The total listed in the budget is the cost over time.

Mr. Rhodes also asked how much VMRC pays VITA, and Ms. McCroskey said that it was roughly \$350,000 and that a portion is taken from the recreational fund (about \$24,000). The recreational fund pays for the cost for the computers and services that are applicable to recreational services.

Mr. Randolph asked about the contract governing the Fishermen Identification System (FIP), and Ms. McCroskey explained that the current contract will be ending at the end of August, and staff is still seeking a new contractor to handle the phone call-in system for new registrants to the FIP.

III. Review of Minutes from the May 2013 RFAB Meeting.

The minutes from the May 2013 RFAB meeting were unanimously approved.

IV. Marine Sportfish Collection Project update.

Reneé Hoover gave an update of the MSCP. She explained the project's history of placing freezers at recreational locations for carcass collection and providing t-shirts and other rewards to those donating fish to the program. Biological information and hard parts (otoliths) are collected for ageing. She said that this is a way to look at biological characteristics of fish that are generally caught recreationally (and not captured frequently in the commercial sampling program). She described the funding and activities for the last few years and explained that the project is not requesting additional funding for this cycle, but will be asking for funding in the next cycle.

V. Greenbackville Harbor Enhancements Project parking review.

Mr. Hall, from Accomack County, described the areas in their parking plan that would be designated as recreational only. He also read language that was proposed to specify where recreational and commercial activities are allowed to occur that delineated specific recreational-only areas and parking spaces. The board clarified how many spaces would be exclusively set aside for recreational anglers.

Mr. Hall also said that they will be re-bidding the project in the next few months. Mr. Rhodes stated he was uncomfortable approving the proposal if the budget would be re-bid, and he requested to see an updated budget.

Mr. Hall described potential changes in the construction changes, but not necessarily the scope of the project, and there was a discussion with Ms. McCroskey and Ms. Nelson about what documentation would need to be resubmitted for the project.

Mr. Rhodes asked what the timeline was for the project, Mr. Hall responded as soon as possible (a few months). The Board asked Mr. Hall to come back with the new, complete proposal (including the new bids) at the September 9 meeting.

V. Multi-Year Projects for 2014 Renewal.

A) Virginia Game Fish Tagging (Year 20). S. Musick, L. Gillingham, VIMS and VMRC. **\$77,672.**

Susanna Musick gave an overview of the VGFTP. She said that the project was an ongoing cooperative program between VMRC and VIMS since 1995. She said that the main objectives were to train and maintain a group of anglers trained in tagging techniques and use angler-collected data to understand movement patterns in recreationally important species of finfish. They will also be working to further the online tag-reporting, continue working with taggers to try new types of tags that may help increase tag retention, produce updated reports for the website in addition to the annual report, they will also conduct an annual training workshop for tagging.

Highlights for the program included an increase in tagging effort and recorded species in 2013. There was also a large increase in red drum, making up a significant component of the tagging effort (58%). She said that more than 500 anglers have participated in the program.

Mr. Crowling asked if some species (such as speckled trout) were tagged too often (such as being tagged and recaptured in the same day). He also asked if it would skew the data. Ms. Musick said that in high density areas, recaptures of the same fish are possible. She said that in those cases, the tagging program is documenting what is there. In some cases,

Mr. Duell said that it was rare that fish he tags in one year are recaptured in the next year. He said that he was worried that a lot of the tags were lost, and that valuable information was being lost in the process. Mr. Gillingham described the program's history of trying a few different types of tags to try to find the best recapture rates. Ms. Musick mentioned that they would be continuing to test new types of tags and treatments on the tags in the following year.

- B) \*2014 Estimating Relative Abundance of Young-of-Year American Eel in the Virginia Tributaries of Chesapeake Bay (Yr 12). M. Fabrizio, T. Tuckey, VIMS. **\$51,676.**

Dr. Mary Fabrizio provided a presentation on the project. She said that this would be the 12<sup>th</sup> year of the project. She noted that at the recent benchmark assessment, it was determined that the stock of American eels was depleted based on a number of data sources (including the VIMS data).

She described the glass eel index provided by the project in the James, York, and Rappahannock Rivers. Recruitment was variable over time and was particularly low in 2008 and 2009.

She said that there is a lot of spatial variability in the recruitment and abundance of American eels throughout the east coast, so it is important to monitor the populations annually. She mentioned that the ASMFC did recommend continued monitoring of these populations.

Dr. Fabrizio also said that the project was asking for partial funding from the Marine Fishing Improvement Fund (MFIF).

Mr. O'Reilly noted that the MFIF did contribute 50% of the project last year, but the amount of funds in the MFIF has diminished over the years.

- C) Federal Assistance (Wallop-Breaux) Matching Funds, Federal FY 2014. R. O'Reilly, VMRC. **\$240,740.**

Mr. O'Reilly said that this was an annual request, and that the biggest benefit of this project is the return of three federal dollars for every dollar spent as match. He said that the current funding request is slightly less than the amount requested in 2012. He also noted that there will be an artificial reef proposal going in this year (separate from the match requested here). He also noted that there was a plan to use some funds from the MFIF for this project as well if possible.

Mr. Rhodes asked if about the money listed on page 2 of the application from the general fund. Mr. O'Reilly and Ms. McCroskey explained that was money used in the past.

- D) \*Cooperative (VMRC, Virginia 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. O'Reilly said that this project would be the second and last year of the project. He said that it was a continuation of a development among three agencies (VMRC, Virginia Tech, and the ASMFC). He stated that the also asks for \$5,000 of the requested total from the MFIF as well, but considering the uncertain status of the fund, that may not be possible this year.

Mr. O'Reilly said that the important part of this project for recreational fishermen is that they will get information on the status of the weakfish population. It is an inter-jurisdictional fish that effects a lot of states, and the ASMFC did not have a lot of population information and came close to issuing a moratorium. He said that populations of weakfish have been low in recent history, but the important thing for fishermen is to get an idea of the status of the stock. He noted that the contract with the three agencies for year one was just finalized, and we should see a good product coming out for the assessment and peer review process taking place in 2015. He said the benefit of gathering this information could be avoiding a moratorium.

## VII. New Projects for 2014

- E) Town of Saxis Pier Enhancement Project. D. Nixon, Town of Saxis. **\$49,600.**

Darryl Nixon, representative from the Town of Saxis, Virginia, gave an overview of the proposal to create artificial reefs near the Saxis Pier to increase the productivity around the pier and provide greater biodiversity and density of game fish. He said the reefs would remain above the surface at high tide so that the fishermen could see them to cast to them and to protect the pier from storm. The proposal includes a monitoring program to document the increase in biodiversity and productivity.

Ms. Brown asked about the depth of the water, and Mr. Nixon said that it was generally shallow (about 2 feet) and around 4 feet at the end of the pier at high tide.

Mr. Crowling asked how many people generally used the pier during the year, and Mr. Nixon answered 4,500. Mr. Duell asked how the figure was calculated, and Mr. Nixon said that they gathered data from interviews and discussions with Mayor Drewer. On

the weekends, they can see 100 people per day, and during the week, and additional 100 people may visit.

Mr. Nixon also said that the pier had been damaged and was currently being repaired. Mr. Hudgins asked how it had been funded up to this point, and Mr. Nixon described the history of storm damage to the pier and that FEMA funds were being used on the current repairs. He also noted that this was the second time FEMA funds had been used and that those funds may not be available if the pier is damaged again.

Several board members discussed the potential for charging for access to the pier, and Mr. Rhodes reminded Mr. Nixon that any fees on projects funded by the RFAB would require RFAB approval.

Mr. Rhodes also asked if there was insurance on the pier. Mr. Dixon said that the pier cannot be insured for ice, water, or wave energy.

Ms. Brown asked if there were examples of successful projects that showed evidence of improved fishing, and Mr. Nixon said that they didn't have examples, but because of the change in substrate, they expect an increase in fish (such as speckled trout).

Mr. Schultz asked about the projects funded previously by RFAB (the pier was originally constructed using funding from the VSRFDF). The board clarified that this request was not specifically for the pier repair (those funds are coming from FEMA). This project hopes to serve as both a fish attractant and protection for the pier.

Mr. Mike Meier, of the VMRC Artificial Reef Program, said that there was a potential project in the past from VDOT, but the project never got off of the ground because of concerns about scour. He said that as well as he could tell, the structure would draw in fish better than a flat, sandy bottom. Mr. Schultz asked if this project may serve as a potential model if successful, and Mr. Meier said it could start a new effort for construction of this type.

Ms. Nelson clarified that the pier was originally built in one of the first few years after the fund was created. There was also another application that was approved but never contracted to extend the pier in the late 2000's.

Mr. Randolph was concerned about the potential for structural damage to the pier and suggested that they consider a nominal fee in the event of future damage. Mr. Nixon said that he had spoke with the Buckroe pier to consider options for charging patrons. Ms. McCroskey asked for details about the match described in the application. She specifically asked about the hours listed for volunteers.

Mr. Nixon said that funds would be matched with town participation. Town residents would be doing the work rather than hiring contractors to build the structures. Ms. McCroskey asked how those hours would be valued, and Mr. Nixon said that it was estimated based on hours charged by contracting companies outside of Saxis. He also said that the Town of Saxis has a very small tax base and may not be able to pay the residents for their work up front, but that they would be paid in the future. Ms. McCroskey noted that during the grant process, we generally require receipts or evidence of payment.

Mr. Rhodes suggested meeting with Ms. McCroskey to clarify the approach for the match funding.

Mr. Schultz noted that the Saxis Pier was the site of several important fishing events including the Eastern Shore Angling Club's event (which is funded by the RFAB). He also noted that the town of Saxis had been recently devastated by Hurricane Sandy.

- F) Patterns in prey selectivity of key sportfishes in Chesapeake Bay. R. Latour, J. Graves, VIMS. **\$38,446.**

Dr. Robert Latour gave an overview of prey field dynamics, and how the ChesMMAP program operates. The project he is proposing would be an add-on to the existing sampling program. He said that this project would help to determine if fish are consuming certain prey based on the abundance of those prey species in the environment, or are they picking out specific types of prey (favoring some over others regardless of abundance). The goal of the proposal is to be a contribution to the general transition from single-species to multi-species models. He described the outreach website they have produced for the ChesMMAP program to synthesize the data for the public.

Ms. Brown asked if the stomach contents were also being studied. Dr. Latour explained that the existing survey takes stomach content samples, and that this study would also take benthic samples of the prey available in the same area. Ms. Brown asked if there was already data available about the diet of the fish (such as striped bass), and Dr. Latour said that the diet is available; however, this project would study how the fish are choosing that diet and if it is based on availability or selection.

Dr. Latour said that fisheries assessments are basically accounting exercises. He said that a better understanding of how the fish select prey may help the understanding for assessments.

Mr. Schultz asked when an analysis would be complete and data available for the project, and Dr. Latour said that he final report period would be two months after the close of the project (he estimated February or March).

The board discussed several fisheries and prey interactions with Dr. Latour, and discussed concerns with the sampling platform.

- G) Genetic investigation into the distinctiveness of Tautog, *Tautoga onitis*, off the coast of Virginia. J. McDowell, H. Small, J. Graves, K. Reece. **\$76,031.**

Hamish Small gave a presentation describing the proposal to investigate genetic markers in tautog in Virginia waters. He mentioned that tautog is a data poor species, so Virginia cannot petition the ASMFC to opt out of portions of regulations (like other states have done). He said that the tagging data for tautog suggest that is limited north to south and onshore to offshore migration. tautog of Virginia fish from the Atlantic stock. He said that the proposed study will develop and generate high level genetic markers to test the independence of the Virginia populations. They would acquire samples from three local popular fishing locations (the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel,

the Chesapeake Light Tower, and the Triangle Reef). Samples from those locations would be compared between each other and with samples from states north and south of Virginia. With this study, they hope to identify any genetically distinct stocks of tautog.

Dr. Small said that the benefit of this project to the recreational angler would be scientific information on the local tautog stocks for use in the 2014 tautog stock assessment and data specific to local stocks for future management.

Mr. Schultz asked about when data would become available, and Dr. Small responded that it would be the same as the other projects (a few months after the close of the project).

Mr. Duell asked if they were sure they would be able to easily get samples from other states. Dr. Small said that most of those states have sampling programs, and that they are certain that there would be no problem getting samples.

Ms. Brown asked about acquiring local samples, and Dr. Small said that they plan to use the existing tagging network (ask anglers to collect fin clips). Mr. Randolph asked if they would do any independent collecting, and Dr. Small said that they had plenty from the other sources.

Ms. Brown also asked about the relevance of the genetic markers by the end of the study, and Dr. Small explained that the potential findings could help identify where specific stocks may be (coast-wide, regional, state-by-state).

- H) Speckled trout, *Cynoscion nebulosus*, in Virginia: are these fish genetically distinct?  
J. McDowell, J. Graves, S. Musick, T. Murray. VIMS. **\$70,005.**

Dr. Jan McDowell presented information about speckled trout genetics and her proposal to evaluate the independence of Virginia's speckled trout populations. She went over the life history and importance of the fishery in Virginia.

She said that management assumes that speckled trout are non-migratory. She said that there have been tagging studies, but not genetic studies. Given the economic value, it is surprising that we know very little about the stock structure. Studies in Florida and the gulf of Mexico have found that speckled trout are comprised of distinct stocks, and tagging studies have shown that there is very little movement in Virginia.

There are no studies that determine if stocks from North Carolina are the same as those in Virginia. Current management makes assumptions based on tagging data that show winter movement to North Carolina in Virginia, but it is unclear if the fish return to their natal rivers in Virginia to spawn.

The proposed study would use genetic markers to determine if the Virginia stocks are distinct from those in North Carolina. They would collect fish (utilizing the existing taggers) in several locations throughout Virginia and acquire samples from North Carolina (and potentially other areas) to see if there are statistically significant differences in the populations.

Dr. McDowell said that the benefit of this proposed research would be the evaluation of Virginia's stock independence compared to other areas. They also have a potential companion project with North Carolina State University to be looking at the additional samples from North Carolina.

Mr. Rhodes asked about the cost of supplies (\$15,000) listed in the applications, and Dr. McDowell said that the genetic primers, fluorescent markers, and supplies for the genetic sequencer are very expensive. She clarified that those costs are not for the machine or service contract, only the supplies to use them.

Mr. Rhodes also asked about the North Carolina involvement, and Dr. McDowell mentioned that there was a much higher recreational fishery in North Carolina. She noted that if the data show that the fish are genetically distinct, North Carolina's stock may be smaller than realized.

Mr. Schultz asked how the results may impact the management of speckled trout since so many fish go to North Carolina. Dr. McDowell and the board described the management in Virginia and North Carolina, as well as potential actions by the ASMFC.

Mr. O'Reilly described the ASMFC management of speckled trout. He said that currently, Virginia has autonomy, with our recreational limits and a non-biological commercial quota. He said that eventually, the ASMFC will probably take a closer look that could have implications for management.

Mr. Schultz suggested a collection location on the sea side of the Eastern Shore, and Dr. McDowell said that it was good idea and that they would look into it. She said that they initially targeted areas with high concentrations of taggers.

\* Indicates the project is also under review by CFAB (Marine Fishing Improvement Fund)

#### IX. Tentative Dates for Future 2013 RFAB Meetings.

Public Hearing (7 p.m.)	September 9
Work Session (5:30 p.m.)/Final Recommendations (7 p.m.)	November 18

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