

1 GULF OF MEXICO FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

2
3 ADMINISTRATIVE/BUDGET COMMITTEE

4
5 Webinar

6
7 January 25, 2021

8
9 **VOTING MEMBERS**

10 Phil Dyskow.....Florida
11 Susan Boggs.....Alabama
12 Dave Donaldson.....GSMFC
13 Martha Guyas (designee for Jessica McCawley).....Florida
14 Robin Riechers.....Texas
15 Chris Schieble (designee for Patrick Banks).....Louisiana
16 Bob Shipp.....Alabama
17 Joe Spraggins.....Mississippi
18 Ed Swindell.....Louisiana
19 Troy Williamson.....Texas

20
21 **NON-VOTING MEMBERS**

22 Kevin Anson (designee for Scott Bannon).....Alabama
23 Leann Bosarge.....Mississippi
24 Dale Diaz.....Mississippi
25 Jonathan Dugas.....Louisiana
26 Tom Frazer.....Florida
27 Lt. Adam Peterson.....USCG
28 John Sanchez.....Florida
29 Andy Strelcheck.....NMFS
30 Greg Stunz.....Texas

31
32 **STAFF**

33 John Froeschke.....Deputy Director
34 Beth Hager.....Administrative Officer
35 Karen Hoak.....Administrative & Financial Assistant
36 Lisa Hollensead.....Fishery Biologist
37 Mara Levy.....NOAA General Counsel
38 Jessica Matos.....Document Editor & Administrative Assistant
39 Natasha Mendez-Ferrer.....Fishery Biologist
40 Emily Muehlstein.....Public Information Officer
41 Ryan Rindone.....Fishery Biologist & SEDAR Liaison
42 Bernadine Roy.....Office Manager
43 Carrie Simmons.....Executive Director
44 Carly Somerset.....Fisheries Outreach Specialist

45
46 **OTHER PARTICIPANTS**

47 Chris Conklin.....SAFMC
48 Peter Hood.....NMFS

1 Clay Porch.....SEFSC
2
3 - - -
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1 The Administrative/Budget Committee of the Gulf of Mexico
2 Fishery Management Council convened via webinar on Monday
3 morning, January 25, 2021, and was called to order by Chairman
4 Phil Dyskow.

5
6 **ADOPTION OF AGENDA**
7 **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**
8 **ACTION GUIDE AND NEXT STEPS**
9

10 **CHAIRMAN PHIL DYSKOW:** I would like to call this meeting of the
11 Admin and Budget Committee to order. The members of this
12 committee are myself, Phil Dyskow, as Chair, and General
13 Spraggins is the Vice Chair. Patrick Banks is a member, Susan
14 Boggs, Dave Donaldson, Martha Guyas, Robin Riechers, Dr. Bob
15 Shipp, Ed Swindell, and Troy Williamson.

16
17 The first order of business on the agenda is to approve and
18 adopt the agenda, and so I would like a committee member to
19 propose a motion to adopt the agenda.

20
21 **DR. BOB SHIPP:** I so move.

22
23 **MR. DAVE DONALDSON:** Second.

24
25 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Thank you, Dave. Any opposition to the agenda
26 as it stands? If not, the agenda is approved. Next, we need to
27 approve the minutes of the October meeting, and so I need a
28 motion to approve it.

29
30 **MR. DONALDSON:** So moved.

31
32 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Thanks, Dave. I need a second.

33
34 **DR. SHIPP:** Second.

35
36 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Great. Thank you. We have a second from Dr.
37 Shipp. Any opposition to the minutes as written? If not, we
38 will move directly into the first item on the agenda, which is
39 the Action Guide and Next Steps, and Dr. Simmons will lead us
40 through that.

41
42 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CARRIE SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. What
43 we could do is just go over this maybe item-by-item, and we have
44 several things on the agenda, if that's okay with you, Mr.
45 Chair, and I can started with the Item Number IV.

46
47 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Certainly.
48

1 **DISCUSSION OF ADVISORY PANELS DUE FOR REAPPOINTMENT IN 2021**

2
3 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Okay, and so the first item on the
4 agenda is the discussion of the advisory panels that are due for
5 reappointment in 2021, and so both the Reef Fish AP and the
6 Shrimp AP are up for reappointment this year, and, also, the
7 Standing and the Special SSCs are up for reappointment this
8 year.

9
10 Regarding the Standing and the Special SSCs, we're going to send
11 out the call for applications in early April, and the council
12 will have a closed session in June and select those members.
13 Because we had several meetings last year, but, due to the
14 pandemic, many of them were virtual, and I didn't know if the
15 council wanted to consider keeping the current membership for
16 the Shrimp AP and the Reef Fish AP, perhaps for one year, and
17 then consider reappointments in 2022 for the next cycle.

18
19 If the council decided, or the committee decided, to do that,
20 then we would have to consider membership for four APs next
21 year, but I know the SSC is going to take up a lot of the
22 council's time, and it will be a large portion of the closed
23 session in June, and so I was just throwing that out there for
24 consideration. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

25
26 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Any discussion on the AP panels that are up
27 for reappointment? Susan, go ahead, please.

28
29 **MS. SUSAN BOGGS:** The only thing that I would suggest, and I
30 honestly haven't looked at the makeup of the Reef Fish AP, but,
31 in light of some of the storms this past year, we might want to
32 look to make sure those members are still engaged in the
33 fishery. Again, I haven't taken an actual look at the list, to
34 see who all is on the list, but that might be the only reason
35 that I would say that we consider repopulating it. Thank you.

36
37 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** I think that's an excellent idea, and I would
38 ask staff to do that. Just as a reminder, and correct me if I'm
39 wrong, Dr. Simmons, but, as we go through this agenda, some of
40 these are information-only items and some of them are items
41 where we actually need to take some action, and the three items
42 where we need to take action are this current topic, the
43 advisory panels up for reappointment, and how do we want to
44 handle this, and staff needs direction on that.

45
46 Then, as we get into a couple of the stock assessment issues, we
47 need to take some action, and we also need to take action on
48 Item VIII, and so I will remind us of those items as we get to

1 them, but, for this one, I think what Dr. Simmons is looking for
2 is some direction from the council of do we go with the panel as
3 it stands, assuming that the members are all active in the
4 fishery, or do we want to start over, and so we need to get some
5 kind of a consensus on that.

6

7 **MR. ROBIN RIECHERS:** Phil, can I ask a question of Carrie?

8

9 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Certainly.

10

11 **MR. RIECHERS:** Carrie, I am recalling that our SOPPs do call for
12 us to -- However it is, but stagger those, so that we don't end
13 up with four, like we would end up with, and, given Susan's
14 notion as well, and the notion that some people may still have
15 served out their time, meaning they feel like they need to move
16 on, I guess my inkling, even though it's a COVID environment,
17 and certainly we understand, and we've got some options of just
18 reappointing, but you have those options even if we ask those
19 folks do they want to be reappointed and then need to sprinkle
20 in a few new ones, if we do.

21

22 I do realize that it's going to create a little heavier lift in
23 an upcoming meeting, but it seems to me that we would still want
24 to go through with that process, because some folks may be ready
25 to get off, for reasons we're not even aware of at this point in
26 time, but can you confirm SOPPs for me, Carrie?

27

28 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you. That is correct, and
29 this is based on the SOPPs that these two APs are up for
30 reappointment. It is up to the council, should they choose to
31 keep the current membership and/or readvertise, and we can
32 certainly move forward with advertising for these two APs.

33

34 All of the Reef Fish AP members are active, and I pretty certain
35 that all but maybe one of the Shrimp AP members have been very
36 active, and this is up to the council, and we can certainly go
37 ahead and proceed with what we have on the books, and it was
38 just a suggestion, because I know we're going to have a very
39 heavy lift with the SSC membership. I would note that we do
40 have two meetings scheduled for both of these APs, and they
41 would go ahead and be convened prior to the reappointment
42 process on the books.

43

44 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons. What we really need
45 is for the committee to come up with a consensus of the
46 direction that they would like staff to proceed with, and it
47 sounds to me, from the comments that we've had, that the council
48 would prefer that we go through the normal reappointment

1 process, realizing that many of the existing members of the
2 panel would be retained on the new panel, and is that
3 essentially what the committee would prefer?
4

5 **DR. SHIPP:** That's what I read out of it, Phil, yes.
6

7 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Is there any opposition to this kind of --
8 Rather than put this in a motion, I will just ask, informally,
9 is there anybody that opposes that direction? If there isn't,
10 Dr. Simmons, that's the consensus of the council, which is to go
11 through the normal process, and many of the existing members
12 will be reappointed. All right. If there's no other discussion
13 on that point, the next item --
14

15 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Chair, I'm sorry, but I believe
16 there is two hands that were raised. Excuse me.
17

18 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Okay. I'm sorry. I just saw those come up.
19 Martha, would you like to comment?
20

21 **MS. MARTHA GUYAS:** I was just going to agree with Susan and
22 Robin that we should just move forward on schedule, I think, for
23 the reasons they talked about. Thank you.
24

25 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Ms. Boggs, you had your hand up again?
26

27 **MS. BOGGS:** Yes, and I lowered it, but just to make a quick
28 point, because there may be folks out there that would like to
29 get on the AP and have been waiting for this opportunity, and so
30 I think this is the direction we need to do. Thank you.
31

32 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** I agree, and I think that's the consensus of
33 the committee, and we can pass that on to Dr. Simmons, and staff
34 will go forward. The next item is to review the 2020 budget and
35 expenditures, and I believe Beth Hager is going to run us
36 through those, and so you're up, Beth.
37

38 **REVIEW OF 2020 BUDGET AND EXPENDITURES** 39

40 **MS. BETH HAGER:** Thank you. Bernie, if we could put up Tab G,
41 Number 5. For the council, the numbers will be displayed in
42 thousands, like we normally do. Here, we're presenting the 2020
43 funded budget on the left-hand side and the approved -- Excuse
44 me. Funded and approved budget on the left-hand side and the
45 actual are in the middle, and the funds remaining are to the
46 right.
47

48 We were funded, in total, \$3,964,336, and the actual

1 expenditures were \$3,116,000, and that does leave us a
2 carryover, at the bottom, of \$848,000, and that's 21 percent of
3 our total funding.

4
5 As you can see, most of the unspent funds were in the travel
6 category, and this is due to the COVID pandemic, which curtailed
7 travel from early March. Of the travel costs incurred, we were
8 also able to allocate about 39 percent of the costs out to the
9 2019 no-cost, as they were activities that were approved in that
10 budget.

11
12 Personnel costs remain largely on-budget for staff. However,
13 the decrease in travel did affect the expenditures related to
14 normal council travel days and some of the SSC meetings that
15 were shortened because they were held virtually. We did realize
16 savings in health insurance, and this is because of credits back
17 from providers due to the COVID situation. However, the total
18 fringe benefits were over budget, and this is because we did
19 choose to fund the leave accounts in full at the end of the
20 year.

21
22 The annual analysis of the leave balances indicated that we had
23 a marked increase in accrual for staff leave. Just as we were
24 unable to travel for council meetings, staff were also largely
25 unable to travel for vacations, and, thus, took very little
26 leave in 2020. In an effort to correlate the elevated leave
27 accruals with the period in which they occurred, we went ahead
28 and funded the leave accounts in full.

29
30 The savings realized in equipment and supplies, the \$19.8, were
31 due to the extended replacement warranties that we have on the
32 server equipment, and we were able to compress files on the
33 backup, and so we didn't use as much space as we have typically
34 on the file backup system, and the decision to lease our phone
35 equipment decreased our frontend costs related to that.

36
37 Contractual cost savings included activities like training and
38 the council visioning exercise, and also the office remodel did
39 not occur, for various reasons, in 2020. We may get realized
40 savings in unexpended funds from the state liaison contracts,
41 and I expect this figure to adjust as the second activity
42 reports for 2020 are received throughout the end of the month.

43
44 The large variance in meeting room costs was due in part to
45 holding those activities virtually, and, just like the savings
46 in communications, we were able to charge off part of this to
47 the 2019 no-cost, part of these costs. Do we have any questions
48 on details of anything?

1
2 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** I don't see any hands up at the moment. While
3 we're waiting to see if anyone has a question, I think there
4 should be some clarification. We have a carryover, and I can't
5 see the screen right now, but it looks like \$848,000 and change.
6

7 **MS. HAGER:** Yes, we do.
8

9 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** At our previous meeting, which I guess we
10 would call our November/December meeting, we discussed subjects
11 that we may engage in with some of these funds, and I see two of
12 them are on the agenda for further discussion today, and a new
13 one has been added by Andy Strelcheck, at Andy Strelcheck's
14 request, and are there any other items that we discussed at our
15 previous meeting of any consequence that aren't listed here?
16

17 I think, before we move on then, I think there is one other item
18 that is not on here that was discussed, and that was to
19 subsidize the shrimp boat efforts in evolving to the new
20 software reporting system, and there was a request for some
21 funds to be provided for that, and can somebody fill in the
22 details from that previous meeting, and perhaps Leann has some
23 input?
24

25 **MS. LEANN BOSARGE:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We did discuss
26 that a little bit in our last Shrimp Committee, but I would
27 leave that to Dr. Simmons to tell us kind of where we're at on
28 that.
29

30 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Thank you, Leann. Dr. Simmons.
31

32 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. We have two
33 presentations for you to consider, based on a motion that was
34 made during the October 2020 council meeting, regarding use of
35 carryover funds, or potential use of carryover funds.
36

37 You are correct that the council may also want to consider
38 assistance with the electronic logbook program shift for the
39 shrimp industry. I don't have estimated costs in front of me,
40 except for what was paid to Dr. Gallaway and his team, and I
41 believe it was around \$330,000 to develop the software, the P-
42 Sea WindPlot software, and move forward with his pilot project,
43 and we could certainly bring more information back to the
44 council on that at a later date, and I can work with him on
45 that, but that's all I have at this time.
46

47 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Thank you, Carrie. When we go through these
48 carryover fund potential uses, it's sort of like wheeling your

1 grocery cart through the grocery store, and you can put anything
2 you want in the cart, but, at some point, we have to circle back
3 to what funds are actually available, and we have some very
4 expensive items on here, and so maybe the next thing we should
5 do is go through Item Number VI, which is the abundance study on
6 red drum, and I think that is in your basket, Dr. Simmons.

7
8 **LOGISTICS AND ESTIMATED COSTS OF CONDUCTING A GULF-WIDE FISHERY-**
9 **INDEPENDENT OFFSHORE ABUNDANCE STUDY ON RED DRUM**

10
11 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. My
12 suggestion would be that I will go through this presentation,
13 and then I think we should let Dr. Clay Porch chime in and
14 provide any additional details. He was a co-author on the study
15 that was posted, and I provided a link to a published paper,
16 where I took a lot of the information from Dr. Sue Barbieri that
17 she provided, from a study that was done in the eastern Gulf,
18 around the Tampa Bay area, for the red drum spawning
19 aggregation, and so I think it would be helpful if he could fill
20 in any missing pieces that I forgot about. This is Tab G,
21 Number 6.

22
23 In October, the council passed a motion to request staff provide
24 guidance on using 2020 budget funds for the intention of a red
25 drum independent offshore purse seine data, and so that's what
26 we've tried to put together here in this presentation.

27
28 My presentation will talk about the management status of red
29 drum, some logistics and considerations for this type of study,
30 some of the main questions that need to be answered to get a
31 good estimate of abundance for the adult red drum population
32 Gulf-wide, some estimated costs of the study, based on the
33 published paper that I just told you about that's posted, the
34 study areas that may be needed to be covered in the Gulf of
35 Mexico, which makes a big difference on the estimated costs, and
36 some next steps for the council to consider.

37
38 Red drum is closed in federal waters, and it has been closed
39 since 1988, and it's primarily an inshore fishery with effort on
40 juveniles and sub-adults throughout the state waters in the Gulf
41 of Mexico. As everyone knows, each state manages these
42 fisheries independently, based on the sub-adult red drum
43 escapement rate.

44
45 Some considerations of logistics. Adult and sub-adult red drum
46 form large spawning aggregations in federal waters of the Gulf
47 of Mexico, and, to date, there have been multiple sampling
48 methods that have been employed, as you can see from that

1 published article that I posted, and they used aerial surveys to
2 determine the number and abundance of spawning aggregations, and
3 this was primarily in the eastern Gulf of Mexico, this study.

4
5 They used purse seines to determine the abundance as well, and
6 they tagged multiple fish. They also employed genetic
7 profiling, to determine abundance and closed-population
8 modeling, some mark-recapture techniques. They also used
9 acoustic tracking, where they put internal or external tags that
10 transmit to receivers that are in the Gulf at a set ping rate,
11 so they know exactly where the animal is, versus an external
12 tag, and then they also used external tags to help estimate
13 movement, exploitation, and discard mortality. Again, this is
14 primarily from discussions with Dr. Sue Barbieri and the
15 publication that's posted.

16
17 The main questions that need to be answered to estimate
18 abundance of this adult population and sub-adult population
19 Gulf-wide is what sample sizes do we need to characterize this
20 age structure? We need to sample about sixty schools of fish,
21 and we need to sample between ten to twenty fish per school.

22
23 There was also a document that was developed, which I am citing
24 below, by Brian Linton in 2008, and they also asked what impacts
25 would harvesting a number of these fish for the survey have on
26 the red drum stock, and this analysis equated that you would
27 need about 5,600-plus fish that would need to be obtained by
28 sampling at least thirty-six schools with about 156 fish
29 collected by school, and that would not have an impact.

30
31 How many fish were needed to be marked and recovered?
32 Approximately 20,000 fish and recover and inspect 50,000 fish,
33 and, again, that's information that was garnered from the study
34 cited below.

35
36 I have to thank Dr. Sue Barbieri for her information and her
37 spreadsheet. This was put together for the study that was
38 published from 2012 to 2014, and so, again, these costs could be
39 higher, or they could be lower, based on the area you're
40 studying, whether you're a university or a state or federal
41 agency, et cetera, and so she had some high personnel costs in
42 this particular study, and, as you can see, there were techs, a
43 post-doc, and she had a geneticist on this study, and that was
44 estimated to be around \$400,000.

45
46 She used acoustic receivers, which are quite expensive in
47 themselves, plus the batteries, and so that was estimated to be
48 around \$85,000. She also had a lot of laboratory supplies,

1 because of the genetics work of this study, \$80,000-plus, and
2 then the vessel costs are quite high for this type of study,
3 because of the purse seiners, and then they also need a spotter
4 plane to find the spawning aggregations and then follow-up with
5 the vessels for the seine, and so that price was around \$6,000
6 per day, and they needed at least eight trips for this one area
7 of the Gulf of Mexico, which was estimated to be about \$48,000.

8
9 They also used aerial surveys, where they didn't follow-up with
10 purse seiners, to do counts, and that was about \$1,500 per day,
11 and they estimated about twelve trips that they used, at about
12 \$18,000. From that total, for this one area in the Gulf, for
13 one year, the estimated costs was \$632,350.

14
15 It's possible, and I think Dr. Porch probably has some more
16 insight, and he can help me with this, that we maybe only need
17 to sample three areas, main areas, in the Gulf of Mexico to
18 answer this question, off of Texas, off of
19 Louisiana/Mississippi, and then off of the Peninsula of Florida,
20 but it's also possible that we may need to add an area, and that
21 would include the Florida Panhandle and Alabama, which would
22 increase the cost of this study.

23
24 Depending on whether you need three regions or four, it makes a
25 large difference in the estimated costs of this study, and so,
26 if you only need three regions, you need to cover it for about
27 three years in order to be able to find these aggregations and
28 get out there and properly sample them, and that's about \$5.6
29 million estimated project costs, where, if you add the fourth
30 region in, you're looking at about \$7.58 million total project
31 estimated costs.

32
33 Again, there might be costs that could be greater to
34 universities, due to overhead. However, the personnel may be
35 lower, if you have graduate students, and it may be less for
36 state and federal agencies, because you wouldn't have that
37 overhead, but you may have more personnel costs. Again, I
38 really appreciate this information that was provided by Dr.
39 Barbieri via personal communication.

40
41 Next steps, we don't have the funding, obviously, and we only
42 have \$800,000-plus from our 2020 travel budget, to fund this
43 type of study Gulf-wide, but it is possible that we could fund a
44 small portion of a study, and so we would need to find some
45 collaborators or other people that could look at these other
46 areas, in order to make this a robust study.

47
48 In my mind, our next steps would be, if the council wanted to

1 move forward with something like this, we would have to put
2 together a request for proposals, and we would need to take it
3 to the SSC, and we would need to consult with independent
4 experts, and the council would need to add this to the budget,
5 to determine how many years and how much funding they would want
6 to consider for this type of study.

7
8 We would have to put this up for request for proposals and have
9 some period of time, where we develop a review and ranking
10 process, and then the end question we have is what are we going
11 to do with this information, and, if the council were to move
12 forward with funding it, what's the benefit of this type of
13 information? Are we able to get enough collaborators to
14 complete this type of robust study, if the council were to
15 contribute some portion of it in some part of the Gulf, that
16 would help with management and implications of management?
17 Thank you.

18
19 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** We'll entertain questions at this time, and
20 I'm sure there are a lot of people that have some questions. I
21 will just summarize the questions that I've been asked leading
22 up to this meeting, and they all revolve around do we have the
23 capability of spending this amount of money from carryover
24 funds, which would mean we wouldn't be able to really do
25 anything else, and the other question, which Dr. Simmons already
26 brought up, is what is the end game if we do this survey? What
27 are we going to use the information for? We have a number of
28 hands up, and the first one is Dr. Porch, and so I'm going to
29 start with you, Dr. Porch.

30
31 **DR. CLAY PORCH:** I just have a couple of points, which Carrie
32 raised during the presentation. The first one is it is good to
33 get full coverage of the whole fishery, and so that speaks to
34 the three versus four areas, but you don't have to have equal
35 coverage in each area.

36
37 Obviously, the teeth of the fishery, the center of the
38 population, is in Louisiana, and so you're going to want a
39 little more sampling effort there than some of the other areas
40 where the density is a little bit lower, and so you probably
41 could adjust the cost a bit in that way, and the other thing to
42 keep in mind is this is sort of the Cadillac version, and Sue
43 Barbieri's study was a great study, where they used several
44 different methods to get population estimates, and, ideally,
45 that's what we would do, but we could still get enough
46 information to move forward with a Gulf-wide assessment even if
47 we just did a part of it.

48

1 For instance, you will notice that, if you just look at the age
2 composition costs, where it was around sixty schools, and about
3 ten to twenty fish per school, if you only did that, it would be
4 a lot cheaper, and then, if you added the aerial surveys on top
5 of it, it would be a little more expensive, but not that much,
6 and so I think we could -- This is entirely scalable.

7
8 Yes, it would be nice to do the Cadillac, but I think it's
9 important to do something, and so, if you can't necessarily pay
10 for the Cadillac, we can probably scale it and pick some of the
11 things in here that would still be useful for an assessment.

12
13 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Thank you, Dr. Porch. Martha Guyas.

14
15 **MS. GUYAS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think my question is for
16 Beth. If the council decided to do this, and we felt like it
17 needed to be a multiyear project, I guess my question is,
18 outside of this year, or I guess 2020, which was kind of a funky
19 year, in terms of carryover, because of the pandemic, are we
20 typically carrying over funds year to year, and how much is that
21 that we might have to play with, if this ended up being a
22 multiyear project?

23
24 **MS. HAGER:** We do historically, in the beginning of an award
25 period at least, have some funds to carry over. It runs between
26 usually \$200,000 to \$500,000 or \$600,000 each year. However, we
27 do frequently use some of it toward the end of the award period,
28 and so, in the previous five-year award period, we were
29 experiencing several changes in staff and things that affected
30 our overall costs that were great savings, and so, at the end of
31 the award period, we did wind up having a bunch left over, but,
32 in prior years, we've had funding cuts, too.

33
34 Unfortunately, we don't know, going forward, what we're looking
35 at in funding, and hopefully it will increase a moderate amount
36 each year going forward, and we will have some space, but we
37 don't know, and we are in the first year of an award period, and
38 so that's the thing. If we kick off something, we don't know
39 what we can continue at this point.

40
41 Yes, in 2020, we do have some funds. We can re-budget those
42 funds, or repurpose those funds, each year, based on 10 percent
43 of the overall amount funded at that period, if necessary, to
44 different activities.

45
46 If it's something that wasn't originally budgeted in our
47 activities, we might need to do a re-budget, or go through the
48 Grants Office, in other words, to get approval for it. That's

1 not terribly cumbersome, but it's just something that we would
2 keep in mind and a part of the process of spending any carryover
3 funds going forward that we are continuing to carry over, but,
4 unfortunately, it's always a process, but we do the best we can
5 to be conscientious of the fact that we don't know what tomorrow
6 will bring. I hope that was helpful.

7
8 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Thank you very much. Next we have up is
9 General Spraggins.

10
11 **GENERAL JOE SPRAGGINS:** One of the questions is, obviously, we
12 are talking \$5 to \$7 million-plus to do something with this
13 study, and I talked with Carrie about this a little bit, Dr.
14 Simmons, last week, but do we have to make a decision on this
15 one at this time?

16
17 Could we delay that until we could look at it, and maybe go in
18 for a budget request, or maybe for a grant request or anything
19 to be able to do this? I know we only have like \$800,000 left,
20 and, obviously, there is a couple of other issues out there, and
21 I'm asking the question, but do we have to make a decision on
22 this one today?

23
24 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Thank you for that comment. I will defer to
25 Carrie after I answer your question. It's my understanding that
26 we can punt on this, and we do not have to make a decision
27 today, and we do not have to approve this today, because of the
28 fact that it is a massive amount of money, with a very modest
29 carryover. I think what you're suggesting is possible, but I
30 will ask Dr. Simmons for her comments.

31
32 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Chair, that's correct. I
33 wasn't sure what you meant, General Spraggins, by a grant
34 request. Did you mean to reprogram the funds, or did you mean
35 try to get additional funding, because that is not possible.

36
37 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** I'm sorry, Carrie. I missed that. Could
38 you say it again?

39
40 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** You mentioned a grant request, and
41 I wasn't sure what you were referring to. We can't get
42 additional funds.

43
44 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** My question was is there a possibility that
45 we could go in and ask for some type of grant to do the study,
46 being as large as it is, and it's just a thought, and it's not
47 necessarily anything on my mind, but just that I know what we
48 can do with it.

1
2 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Thank you for those comments, General
3 Spraggins. The next question comes from Troy Williamson.
4
5 **MR. TROY WILLIAMSON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. **Given all the**
6 **comments and economic status that we're looking at, \$5 to \$7**
7 **million, and it's unclear how we're going to move forward on**
8 **this, I would move to strike the red drum abundance proposal**
9 **from consideration in the 2021 plan.**
10
11 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** All right. What we have is a motion from Mr.
12 Williamson to remove the red drum abundance study concept from
13 the 2021 budget. Is that correct? Is that what has been
14 stated?
15
16 **MR. WILLIAMSON:** That's correct.
17
18 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Okay, and so let's get the motion up on the
19 board. This is a committee motion. Let's get the motion up on
20 the board. Why don't you just read it back, Mr. Williamson, as
21 you articulated it?
22
23 **MR. WILLIAMSON:** I would move to strike --
24
25 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Move to strike.
26
27 **MR. WILLIAMSON:** **Move to strike the red drum abundance proposal**
28 **from consideration in the 2021 plan.**
29
30 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Thank you. Before I go into a discussion, we
31 would need a second for this committee motion. A member of the
32 committee would have to second this.
33
34 **DR. SHIPP:** I will second for discussion.
35
36 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Dr. Bob Shipp seconds the motion. Now we will
37 open it for discussion. Leann Bosarge has her hand up next, I
38 believe.
39
40 **MS. BOSARGE:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm not on your
41 committee, and, before this motion went up, I had my hand up,
42 and I was just going to mention that, based on what Dr. Porch
43 was saying, it sounds like the actual on-the-water part, with
44 the purse seiner vessels and spotter planes is the most
45 important part, if you want to scale back from the Cadillac
46 version, and so my request was going to be if staff could bring
47 us back a revised estimated costs that takes us down somewhat
48 from this Cadillac version.

1
2 Just off the top of my head, I'm guessing it's probably more in
3 the line of about \$250,000 a year, but that's just me
4 ballparking it and looking at the numbers on the page, but that
5 was going to be my request, to see a revised version of this
6 costs, because then that whole three-year cost, if it's
7 \$250,000, that does fit into our budget, but that was all.
8 Thank you.

9
10 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** You're welcome. The next person up is Susan
11 Boggs.

12
13 **MS. BOGGS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Because Troy has brought this
14 up, I would like to have some discussion, and, of course, it
15 will kind of brings us into the whole discussion of the
16 triggerfish, and possibly the shrimp ELBs, but a couple of
17 questions. One, has the council ever funded projects like this,
18 and, two, what concerns me is we will start a project, get
19 involved, not even be able to complete the project, or it's
20 something maybe we can complete three years or four years, if we
21 approve this red drum, but, if it needed to extend out, is there
22 any precedent for what the council is trying to do here? Thank
23 you.

24
25 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Dr. Simmons.

26
27 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So typically
28 the Gulf Council has funded some research projects or projects
29 that the data is already collected, to where it can be analyzed
30 and something can be concluded from that data that would go
31 towards management at the end of a five-year grant cycle. You
32 will recall, from 2019, we had several projects in front of the
33 council to consider.

34
35 The issue we run into is it's difficult for us to fund research,
36 because we don't know what our funding is going to be from year
37 to year, and, really, field work and research needs multiple
38 years, and it's difficult to get anything done, really, in a
39 one-year time period, and you may recall reading, from the study
40 that's published, that, in 2012, they couldn't find spawning
41 aggregations, and so there was no information, because they
42 thought from red tide in 2012, from that study. You run into
43 issues like that with field work, and so that is another
44 consideration.

45
46 One of the things I am going to ask the committee and council
47 later, in the triggerfish presentation, is if the council would
48 want to consider funding a smaller research and/or monitoring

1 project over multiple years. The Mid-Atlantic Council does
2 often fund research, typically for two-year cycles, and we can
3 continue to look into more of that, and I believe it's around
4 \$200,000 or \$275,000 annually. Thank you.

5
6 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** The next person with his hand up is Dr. Porch.
7 Dr. Porch, please.

8
9 **DR. PORCH:** Thank you. Ms. Bosarge made my first point, and
10 that is that this is, of course, quite scalable, and, of course,
11 it could be considerably cheaper, a fraction of that total \$7-
12 million price tag, and it would still be very useful.

13
14 Then the second point is just reinforcing what Dr. Simmons said,
15 in that other councils certainly do spend funds on activities
16 like this, and the Mid-Atlantic Council funded a longline
17 survey, for example. That's it for me. Thanks.

18
19 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Next up is Andy Strelcheck. Welcome aboard,
20 by the way.

21
22 **MR. ANDY STRELCHECK:** Thank you and good morning. It's good to
23 see everyone. I'm also not on the committee, and my comments
24 are similar to Leann's and Clay's, and I guess my suggestion to
25 the committee, if they're interested in moving forward with
26 consideration of this, is to have the Science Center and council
27 staff come back with a reduced scalable proposal, and we would
28 love to, obviously, get Carrie's and the council's input on what
29 they believe they could afford and whether or not a scaled
30 proposal would be within the funding levels that the council
31 thinks they could support over a multiyear period.

32
33 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Thank you, Andy. Next is Dr. Shipp.

34
35 **DR. SHIPP:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My comments are really in
36 response to those earlier figures of cost, and the Great Red
37 Snapper Count was a separate appropriation of \$12 million, and
38 the initial funds mentioned here were in the same ballpark, \$5
39 to \$7 million, and so it seems to me, if we're going to do it,
40 the Cadillac version, as Clay talks about, it ought to be a
41 separate appropriation from Congress, when you're going \$8 or
42 \$10 million. Now, if we cut it back to a monitoring program,
43 that's a different story, but my comment is, for the very
44 expensive version, it takes separate appropriation. Thank you,
45 Mr. Chairman.

46
47 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Thank you, Bob. Next up is General Spraggins.

48

1 **GENERAL SPRAGGINS:** I guess the question, after listening to
2 this, is I was wondering if Mr. Williamson would like to modify
3 his motion, or, if not, maybe Leann make an additional one, to
4 say that we have asked the staff to come back with a modified
5 version of what it would cost, but, after listening to that, it
6 might be a useable thing, listening to Dr. Porch, that it might
7 be a useable thing to be able to get part of this, and then, if
8 we wanted to go into the full scale, like Dr. Shipp was talking
9 about, then go in and ask for appropriations.

10
11 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Thank you, General Spraggins. Susan Boggs.

12
13 **MS. BOGGS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will save my comments for
14 after we vote on this motion, because what I have to say doesn't
15 really play into the discussion now, and I will save it for
16 later. Thank you.

17
18 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Thank you, Ms. Boggs. I don't see any other
19 hands up. It may be time to vote on this, but, Dr. Simmons, one
20 other question that hasn't been answered, and what is the end
21 game with this study? If we spend this kind of money on this
22 study, what is the intent? How would we use it? What is it to
23 be used for?

24
25 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Chair, that's an excellent
26 question, and I'm not exactly sure, and maybe Dr. Porch or Mr.
27 Strelcheck could explain what the scaled-down study could
28 provide to the council to aid us in management.

29
30 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Well, hopefully one of them will volunteer,
31 but, in the meantime, Ed Swindell's hand is up. Ed.

32
33 **MR. ED SWINDELL:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My question, and I'm
34 sitting here just thinking that we're doing one heck of a
35 proposal, and we're going through a heck of a proposal here for
36 an extreme amount of research on this resource, to find out just
37 what do we have. We know there's a lot of resource out there,
38 and I will be honest with you. With spotter pilots, there is
39 huge schools of red drum in the Gulf of Mexico, especially off
40 the coast of Louisiana, that I am most familiar with.

41
42 My question is why -- I go back to wondering just why in the
43 world does the council go to complete restriction on no fishing
44 of this resource, back in whatever year it was that it happened,
45 and what research was done to see what -- Was the resource in
46 trouble? Just what was the reasons, and how did you come up
47 with any kind of knowledge about the resource abundance, if you
48 put such unreasonable restrictions on this resource? Thank you,

1 Mr. Chair.

2
3 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Thank you, Ed. Dr. Simmons, can you comment
4 on that?

5
6 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** I think Mr. Rindone had his hand
7 raised, and I heard some of the question, if that's okay, Mr.
8 Chair.

9
10 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Okay. We have actually three questions. If
11 Martha and Clay are okay with it, I will go directly to Ryan, so
12 he can address that. Ryan Rindone.

13
14 **MR. RYAN RINDONE:** Clay may be able to elaborate on some of this
15 as well. Mr. Swindell, the red drum fishery was closed for the
16 commercial and recreational fleets in 1988, and it was due to
17 the stock being dramatically overfished, and this was largely
18 due to -- At the time anyway, it was thought to be largely due
19 to purse seine fishing efforts offshore that primarily targeted
20 the adult spawning population.

21
22 The purse seines would encircle a large school of adult fish,
23 and then those fish were then sold to feed the soup du jour of
24 the day, which was blackened redfish. Removing that many
25 individuals from the spawning stock obviously reduced the
26 stock's ability to replace itself, and declines were seen Gulf-
27 wide, and so that offshore moratorium was put in place by the
28 council.

29
30 Since then, year after year, recreational landings of red drum
31 in state waters have continued to increase, and perhaps -- We
32 don't know what the data look like, necessarily, for 2020,
33 because of COVID-related things, but the trend has been
34 continually increasing, year-after-year, for recreational
35 landings since 1988. Mississippi maintains a small inshore
36 commercial fishery as well, which General Spraggins might be
37 able to clarify, but I believe it's capped at 75,000 pounds
38 whole weight, and that's up from 50,000 pounds back in the early
39 2010s, and so a very small commercial harvest in state waters,
40 just from Mississippi, and the rest of it is all recreational.

41
42 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Thank you. Dr. Porch, did you want to comment
43 any further?

44
45 **DR. PORCH:** Ryan has pretty much hit the nail on the head.
46 There was both some evidence from tag-recapture studies that we
47 did, declining age composition from the purse seine fishery, and
48 just anecdotal concerns with the blackened redfish craze that

1 hit in the 1980s and 1990s, that the stock was really
2 decreasing, and we did the last stock assessment using data, I
3 think, that was up to 1998 or 1999, and we haven't done one
4 since then, simply because the offshore fishery has been
5 completely closed, and so we don't have any surveys or fishery
6 data for that offshore population, and so there was no point in
7 doing any further federal assessments for the Gulf-wide
8 population, and you may as well just rely on the state
9 assessments of the juveniles in their waters.

10
11 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Thank you, Dr. Porch. Martha Guyas, you're up
12 next.

13
14 **MS. GUYAS:** Thank you. I guess there's been some discussion of
15 whether -- I guess, if we wanted to consider the scaled-down
16 version, I think, in terms of better understanding what we might
17 be able to get out of that, if we go forward with that option, I
18 guess I would just suggest that we have the SSC review that -- I
19 don't want to call it proposal, but I guess the scaled-down
20 option, to get their input on whether they think that would be
21 valuable, in terms of getting data that would be helpful for an
22 assessment, but we're not really going down that road at this
23 point, but I just wanted to put that out there, and it seems
24 like we would want the SSC to weigh-in before we decided to fund
25 something or not. Thanks.

26
27 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Thank you, Martha. I just want to remind
28 everyone that it's 9:59, and we have a lot of items still to
29 cover, and so I want to make sure that we stay on a reasonable
30 timeframe. We have two more questions from Leann Bosarge and Ed
31 Swindell, and then I'm going to probably ask to cut it off and
32 let's just have a vote. Leann.

33
34 **MS. BOSARGE:** Just a historical question for Dr. Porch, because
35 Ryan alluded to the stock being gravely overfished when we
36 closed it, and then Clay talked about some tagging studies and
37 anecdotal data, and did we actually have a stock assessment that
38 said this fishery was overfished and in bad shape when we shut
39 down all fishing for a species?

40
41 **DR. PORCH:** They shut down before the -- There were some stock
42 assessments back then that I think suggested some issues, but
43 they shut it down before the last, most comprehensive stock
44 assessment, but there had been stock assessments that Phil
45 Goodyear had been doing for a number of years that indicated the
46 stock was declining, and so yes.

47
48 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Ed Swindell.

1
2 **MR. SWINDELL:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Listening to the
3 discussion, I still don't understand the amount of resource that
4 was assessed and how they really did the assessments, unless it
5 was from the -- Was it directly from the commercial purse seine
6 fishery on red drum, and whether or not -- You know, it seems to
7 me that we're punishing not only the recreational people, but
8 also the commercial people, for not harvesting this resource,
9 and it's just sitting out there, and we're taking redfish in
10 state waters, and, in Louisiana, they're quite abundant in a lot
11 of years, and so I just don't understand the reason why you
12 cannot commercial harvest any of this resource in any manner,
13 and why not do some sort of reasonable amount of abundance
14 estimates, even using a lot of the spotter plane flyovers and
15 finding schools red drum that are out there and get a better
16 handle of just what the resource is, and I think we're doing the
17 nation a disservice here by not managing this resource properly.
18 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

19
20 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Thank you. I will take one other comment from
21 Andy, and then we're going to vote and move on. Andy.

22
23 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Thank you, Chairman. One of the things that
24 strikes me is Ed's comments and some of the discussion that's
25 ongoing in terms of how do we proceed and what are we trying to
26 accomplish, and, in my estimation, I think state management of
27 red drum has been fairly successful, and I am understanding that
28 the states have done a very good job of managing red drum, and
29 so I guess the question then becomes, with regard to what we're
30 trying to accomplish, and Ed is getting at the fact of doing an
31 assessment potentially to increase or allow some sort of harvest
32 not only for recreational anglers in federal waters, but also
33 commercial fishermen.

34
35 The other goal could certainly be true, which is just to kind of
36 validate, in terms of are the escapement rates accomplishing
37 what they were intended to accomplish across all five states,
38 given that we're managing this species with five different
39 assessments, or multiple different assessments throughout the
40 Gulf, but, in order to tailor, I think, the research and
41 science, in terms of what might be able to be answered and under
42 what funding levels, I think it would be helpful to understand
43 better about what is the end game, as someone mentioned, and
44 what can we focus on, in terms of answering that specific
45 question or questions. Thank you.

46
47 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Andy, I think that's an excellent question,
48 but I would like to remind everyone that this is the Admin and

1 Budget Committee, and that's more of a fishery issue, which is a
2 different group, and I don't think it's the purpose of the Admin
3 Budget Committee to make that decision, and so I don't know that
4 we can continue that discussion effectively at this committee,
5 and it's really the responsibility of another committee.

6
7 What we have before us here is a budget-related question, which
8 is do we or do we not do this red drum abundance proposal, as
9 outlined, and that's the motion we have before us, now with a
10 second, and so, Dr. Frazer, would you like this to be a roll
11 call committee vote, or would you like the do the yeas and the
12 nays? How would you like proceed?

13
14 **DR. TOM FRAZER:** I think we'll go with -- We'll try an aye and
15 nay, and see how it goes. If it's too problematic, then we'll
16 step back and we'll do a roll call.

17
18 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Thank you. All those in favor of this
19 committee motion, and now remember that only committee members
20 can vote on this motion, all those in favor of this motion say
21 aye; all those opposed to this motion say nay.

22
23 **MS. BOGGS:** Nay.

24
25 **MR. SWINDELL:** Nay.

26
27 **DR. FRAZER:** I would say the ayes have it, Mr. Dyskow.

28
29 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** That is my understanding as well. Thank you.
30 Let's move on to the next item, which is, I believe, the gray
31 triggerfish abundance study, or stock assessment, and I am going
32 to ask Dr. Simmons to begin.

33
34 **LOGISTICS AND ESTIMATED COSTS OF CONDUCTING AN INDEPENDENT STOCK**
35 **ASSESSMENT PROCESS FOR GRAY TRIGGERFISH**

36
37 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am going
38 to go to Tab G, Number 7. This presentation covers the second-
39 half of the motion that was passed in October of 2020 that was
40 to request that staff provide guidance on using 2020 budget
41 funds for the intention of an independent stock assessment on
42 gray triggerfish.

43
44 This is a similar overview, and it's slightly different items,
45 but generally similar. We'll talk about the assessment and
46 management status, some logistics, and consideration of some
47 estimated costs that we have for conducting a stock assessment,
48 some concerns about the existing data stream and some

1 considerations, and then potential next steps.

2
3 The last approved stock assessment for gray triggerfish had a
4 terminal year of data of 2015. SEDAR 62, in 2018, was aborted
5 early last year, and Dr. Porch told the council that this was
6 due to irreconcilable data issues, and a research track was
7 recommended.

8
9 You may also recall that an interim analysis was suggested in
10 the meantime, until a research track could be conducted for gray
11 triggerfish, and the council is acting upon that interim
12 analysis at this meeting, potentially, which could increase the
13 catch levels. Gray triggerfish is not overfished or undergoing
14 overfishing, but it is still in a rebuilding plan.

15
16 Hiring an independent contractor, and this information is from
17 the Science Center, and so, after I'm done, I think Dr. Porch
18 should have an opportunity to fill in any missing information to
19 this presentation, but it's only been estimated to really reduce
20 their workload by 30 to 40 percent, because this assessment
21 would really still need to be on the schedule, because of the
22 data providers that are involved in a stock assessment process.

23
24 We would still need to have updated indices and landings and
25 discards and get all of the biological sampling information from
26 the lab, and so it's really going to still need those state and
27 federal partners that are involved in this process, and so, when
28 we say "independent", it's difficult to be independent
29 completely of the Science Center, because you still need all
30 this information from state and federal partners in order to
31 conduct this type of assessment, and so it's really not going to
32 help, potentially, as much to reduce the workload on the Science
33 Center staff, because you're still going to have those data
34 providers involved.

35
36 It may reduce workload on those analysts that are conducting the
37 assessment, but you're still going to need to put it on the
38 schedule, is my understanding, during the SEDAR Steering
39 Committee as well, so that we can get that data updated and
40 provided to whoever may be conducting this stock assessment.

41
42 The other concern to think about is our existing monitoring and
43 research data streams that we have for gray triggerfish may not
44 necessarily, after this process, result in more informed
45 management advice, because we still have several outstanding
46 research questions, and I will touch on a few of those here in
47 the presentation.

48

1 Dr. John Walter provided this information to me, in a personal
2 communication, and they did a call for proposals for conducting
3 a stock assessment through Highly Migratory Species on sandbar
4 sharks, and so that's where this information was pulled from.

5
6 The analyst had the following responsibilities to complete that
7 particular assessment. They had to conduct all of the analyses
8 in one year, and they had to present the findings at several
9 webinar and meetings, and they had to prepare a report, and then
10 that was followed up by a peer review, where they had to
11 document and any analyses based on that peer review process.

12
13 The estimated cost of that for sandbar sharks, and that was a
14 standard stock assessment, was \$175,000. Now, since that was
15 still part of SEDAR, I believe, that did not include the costs
16 of having a review, and so we included the cost of an
17 independent reviewer, which is \$30,000, because this would be
18 outside of SEDAR, and then I also didn't include any travel
19 costs for meetings, if these meetings were to be in-person.

20
21 Just some concerns about where we stand right now with gray
22 triggerfish after the last stock assessment, and we know that
23 there is differences in age and growth between the sexes, and we
24 have a very thorough study that was done off of Alabama that
25 reports this, but we don't have that information Gulf-wide, and
26 so that's one big, outstanding research question.

27
28 We also know, from the last assessment, that this is this ageing
29 problem with gray triggerfish. The otoliths are very, very
30 small, and spines are used to age the fish, and there's been a
31 recent study that has been done that suggests that this bomb
32 radiocarbon dating process is an improved method for ageing the
33 hard parts of gray triggerfish, and so that's kind of in its
34 infancy, and I think there's a lot of proposals floating around
35 out there to continue to look at this, and so that's also a
36 concern, an outstanding research concern, for gray triggerfish.

37
38 During the last assessment, there was also new studies that
39 indicate that discard mortality is higher than previously
40 documented, and there are a couple of published studies on that
41 as well, and, just due to the unique life history of gray
42 triggerfish -- I mean, the current sampling methodologies that
43 we have in place, particularly for gray triggerfish, make it
44 difficult for this species, and so we have large unknowns and
45 limitations that came out in the western Gulf regarding gray
46 triggerfish from the last assessment, and that could be due to
47 the fact that, as you move to the west, there's more mud, and
48 there's less hard bottom, inshore at least.

1
2 There's also this long pelagic stage that triggerfish have,
3 where they're associated with the sargassum, and they are in
4 that sargassum and in the pelagic environment after the larval
5 stage, as juveniles, for anywhere from four to seven months, and
6 so we don't really have a monitoring practice in place right now
7 that's capturing that particular life stage, and so they recruit
8 to that benthic habitat.

9
10 Change in movement and distribution as well, and understanding
11 that for sargassum, and is that the limitation to the life
12 history, and we know, anecdotally, that there's been a lot of
13 movement and change in size and quantity of sargassum, and so
14 would we need to look at that to really get a good answer for
15 gray triggerfish, as well as potentially greater amberjack,
16 regarding recruitment in this stock?

17
18 If the council wanted to move forward with planning a stock
19 assessment for gray triggerfish, we need to know if you guys
20 want to do that, and perhaps, instead of moving forward with a
21 stock assessment, you might want to consider a single research
22 need, perhaps this ageing study, or perhaps looking at
23 recruitment in sargassum, and continue to fund that throughout
24 the five-year grant cycle, and maybe that's something the
25 council would want to consider. What are the priorities, and
26 what are those missing gaps, and how can they help us with the
27 next research track?

28
29 We would need to consider putting that in the budget and
30 determine how many years and how much funding would go towards
31 that and put it in the budget activities every year, and, again,
32 consider the cost-benefit analysis and management implications
33 of these project results, and so, if we were to go through this
34 whole process and get a stock assessment without answering some
35 of these research questions, are we going to end up with any
36 better management advice? With that, I will stop for questions.
37 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

38
39 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons. The first hand up is
40 Martha Guyas. Ms. Guyas.

41
42 **MS. GUYAS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I was just going to comment,
43 and I guess to answer one of Carrie's questions about where do
44 we go from here, and I think, given the data gaps that we have
45 for triggerfish, I would want to start not necessarily with the
46 assessment, but trying to fill in some of those gaps, and so it
47 looked like we have -- Like I have the most current schedule in
48 front of me, and we have an assessment starting for 2024, and I

1 would say, if there's anything on the data gap list that we
2 could fund, a quick-and-dirty project, to even inform that
3 assessment, that would be my priority, and maybe some of the
4 ageing work could be accomplished in just a couple of years.

5
6 Some of those studies, just looking at the list, it seems like
7 they would need to be longer term and may not be useful for this
8 upcoming assessment, but there are some significant gaps with
9 triggerfish, and I think it would be worth our time to fund some
10 of those before trying to attempt an assessment again, or trying
11 to fund another assessment, and that's just my thought. Thank
12 you.

13
14 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Thank you, Martha. The next question is from
15 Susan Boggs.

16
17 **MS. BOGGS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and Carrie kind of had
18 mentioned the sargassum and that there's not been a lot of
19 research, and what I was going to talk about earlier was, in --
20 I guess last year, we did the funded carryover funds, and we
21 funded -- It looks like seven projects, and I didn't count them,
22 and one of them was assessing the influence that sargassum has
23 on greater amberjack, and that was for \$75,000.

24
25 If we could fund something like that for the triggerfish, kind
26 of like what that one did, to fill in some of the gaps, and we
27 also did have a density estimation for triggerfish and vermilion
28 snapper that we haven't heard a report on, and so if we could
29 maybe do some smaller things like this, and that might be better
30 than trying to fund a complete stock assessment. Thank you.

31
32 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** That's a good point, Susan. Next is Kevin
33 Anson.

34
35 **MR. KEVIN ANSON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I agree with Martha's
36 comments and Susan's comments. Maybe, if there is some smaller
37 studies that really would provide us a good bang for our buck
38 that could be completed in time for the assessment, that could
39 be valuable.

40
41 Another thing that maybe, for discussion or consideration in
42 this development of a list, if it goes that far, of prioritizing
43 or identifying costs and relative benefits, is maybe using the
44 information or data that was collected through the Great Red
45 Snapper Count might be another possibility too, is to utilize
46 the video, particularly, since it's predominantly skewed, the
47 species, or it appears to be at least, in the eastern Gulf, and
48 that's where a lot of the video camera work was done.

1
2 There might be some potential for kind of doing some mining, if
3 you will, into that dataset, since it's currently on hand and
4 it's timely, and maybe that might help in at least comparing to
5 the assessment that's been recently conducted and maybe be a
6 good comparison to an upcoming assessment, and so I'm just
7 offering that as a discussion point. Thank you.

8
9 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Thank you, Kevin. We'll hear from Greg Stunz
10 next. Dr. Stunz.

11
12 **DR. GREG STUNZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm not on your
13 committee, and thanks for recognizing me. To Kevin's point,
14 just in general, regarding the Great Red Snapper Count, we
15 looked at -- As I mentioned during the last meeting, we looked
16 at a lot of things other than just snapper, although that's what
17 it was designed, and so there's a lot of opportunity there to
18 leverage that data that's already in-house to answer a lot of
19 these questions.

20
21 I'm not saying it's the end-all, and there's certainly a need
22 for directed studies and that sort of thing, but I would hate
23 for all that effort to go to waste and not utilize what we have
24 there to contribute to a lot of these other studies, and
25 triggerfish is just one example, and, obviously, amberjack and
26 many others, and so I just wanted to make sure that everyone is
27 aware of that, and the team is more than willing to share that
28 data or utilize it or participate or whatever we need to do to
29 make sure that work is used to its fullest extent.

30
31 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Thank you, Dr. Stunz. It sounds like all of
32 the questions that we've had so far revolve around the staff
33 taking another look at this and having a more specific analysis
34 of gray triggerfish in a defined area, and so, Martha, you did
35 the best of articulating what you wanted to do next, and could
36 you state that again, please?

37
38 **MS. GUYAS:** Sure. I think we should look at funding some of the
39 data gaps, using this funding to fill data gaps, particularly
40 those that could be filled prior to the 2024 assessment, and so
41 -- Well, I guess I would certainly rely on expert opinions here
42 about which items those would be, but potentially those could be
43 age and growth, and I don't know. Are you looking for a motion?

44
45 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** No, I'm not looking for a motion. I'm looking
46 for staff direction. Carrie, do you feel that's adequate for
47 staff direction of what the next steps to take here would be?

48

1 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Yes, and thank you, Mr. Chair. I
2 think we can do that, and we can work with the Science Center
3 staff and see would help and be the highest priority. Would the
4 council want to give us a bracket for funding?
5

6 Do you want to suggest like \$250,000 or \$275,000, so we have an
7 idea of what our budget is, and maybe potentially budgeting that
8 for the remaining three years of the grant cycle? Do you have
9 an idea of how much money you would like us to spend towards
10 this effort, I guess, would be helpful.
11

12 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Well, we could take a stab at that, Dr.
13 Simmons, but wouldn't you rather talk to the SSC first, to see
14 what they and your group together would come up with, as far as
15 how to address this?
16

17 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** I guess if the council, maybe by
18 Thursday, could give us an idea of how much money they would
19 like to put for this effort, that would be helpful, because you
20 know scientists, and we like the Cadillac and not just any
21 simple, stepped-down version, and so, if we know how much money
22 we have, I think that's always helpful to take to the SSC, is
23 our budget.
24

25 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** We're kind of running towards the end of our
26 time here, and we could, if there is somebody that felt prepared
27 to float a motion of how much we could spend, but I think what I
28 would prefer is that we defer that to Full Council on Thursday
29 and determine, at that time, what amount we want to spend here,
30 because I don't know that, within a few minutes here, that we
31 can come up with something that would be thoughtful enough to
32 justify the spending of that kind of money.
33

34 Does anybody have a different opinion? Does any other council
35 member have an opinion on this? I see Susan Boggs has her hand
36 up,
37

38 **MS. BOGGS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I was just going to float out
39 there maybe \$250,000 or \$275,000, and maybe that's something
40 that everyone can think about between now and Full Council.
41 Thank you.
42

43 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** That sounds good. I don't see any other hands
44 up right now, and so we have a couple of other items here, and I
45 think the next item is we have a request to support the
46 Southeast Regional Office permits software, and I don't know if,
47 Dr. Simmons, you're going to handle this or if Mr. Strelcheck is
48 going to handle it, but whoever is up next can begin.

1
2 **REVIEW OF 2021 PROJECTED ACTIVITIES AND BUDGET**
3 **DISCUSSION OF COUNCIL FUNDING SUPPORT FOR SOUTHEAST REGIONAL**
4 **OFFICE PERMIT SOFTWARE**
5

6 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Strelcheck is going to handle
7 that, and I would just ask, since we're running out of time,
8 that the committee take a look at Tab G, Number 8(a), the
9 activities, and I know we don't have enough time to go through
10 all those, and the budget, and we have not received all of our
11 2021 funds yet, and we have received approximately 40 percent.
12 Beth, is that correct, of our 2021 funding?
13

14 We do have a proposed budget in front of you, and we'll bring it
15 back at a later date, when we get our final funding, but, just
16 to kind of frame what Mr. Strelcheck is going to ask the
17 committee and council for, I think it's essentially taking some
18 of our 2021 funding off the top, before we receive it, and so
19 the council would need to make a decision at this meeting to
20 assist with the software development, and I will just let him
21 take over as to what exactly they're looking for. Thank you.
22

23 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Thanks, Carrie. For background, real quickly,
24 I reached out to Carrie and John in December, and we are doing a
25 major upgrade and overhaul of our online permits system over the
26 course of the last five to seven years, and we have been moving
27 more and more permits into that online system for renewal.
28 Unfortunately, the system is now at end of life and requiring us
29 to move to a new software platform.
30

31 Because of the pandemic, some of the cost savings that NMFS has
32 realized, we put a million-and-a-half dollars of our own budget
33 into this upgrade of the software system, which will be
34 significant, because what it's going to do is expand our online
35 system to not only allow fishermen to renew permits online, but
36 also to apply for new permits online, and so it will be a one-
37 stop shop for all of our permitting.
38

39 It's expected to provide significant efficiency, both for the
40 fishermen themselves who would use the system as well as our
41 permits office, in terms of reducing errors and information that
42 we have to request frequently back and forth between fishermen
43 and our office, as well as being able to send many of our
44 permits indirectly to them electronically.
45

46 Right now, we're in Phase 1, and we're close to wrapping up
47 Phase 1. Phase 2 is going to be less costly, but we're looking
48 at still another \$500,000 or \$600,000. Like the council, we are

1 experiencing some travel savings, and we're putting some
2 additional funds toward this project, but we have also
3 experienced some budget cuts, related to the latest
4 congressional budget, at the Regional Office.

5
6 I reached out to Carrie and proposed that, if the council is
7 interested in supporting this effort, given the utility of the
8 system for commercial and for-hire fishermen in the Gulf of
9 Mexico, that we would like to discuss with the council -- She
10 proposed that I present it to you, but the suggestion that I
11 have made is that you have about a \$3.94 million budget, and
12 about \$3.4 million comes directly from Congress through the
13 council project code, and that would remain untouched.

14
15 There's another \$475,000 that the Regional Office, as well as
16 our Headquarters Office, sends to the council for a variety of
17 purposes to support council activities, and we would propose
18 reducing that amount by whatever amount that the council would
19 be willing to support this effort, and I propose to carry up to
20 \$200,000 to support the effort, but certainly it's scalable, and
21 we're just looking for some assistance to finish the final
22 stages of this project.

23
24 Knowing that there was some carryover in your budget from 2020,
25 and you're moving that forward for 2021, I wanted to ask the
26 council if they would be willing to consider a slight reduction
27 in your 2021 budget in order to support this specific project,
28 and so I would be happy to answer any questions.

29
30 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Thank you, Mr. Strelcheck. Carrie, does the
31 council staff have any comments on this? Internally, have you
32 discussed this at all?

33
34 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Yes, Mr. Chair, we have discussed
35 it in the budget that we have provided in your briefing book for
36 2021, and we did budget a 1 percent increase. We do not know if
37 we'll actually receive a 1 percent increase, but that's what we
38 budgeted those activities on, and, within that, we have
39 estimated that -- I think it was \$94,000 in contractual services
40 could be provided to go towards this effort, if the council
41 concurred and was comfortable with that.

42
43 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Could you repeat that number, please?

44
45 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** \$94,000.

46
47 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Thank you. Tom, I see you have your hand up.

48

1 **DR. FRAZER:** Thanks, Mr. Chair. This question is actually for
2 Andy, and so I appreciate you guys moving forward and trying to
3 upgrade the system, and I understand the value that that would
4 provide. A couple of quick questions, and it's for
5 clarification. It's a one-time request, but, for the \$475,000
6 or so that gets run through the Regional Office to support
7 council activities, can you give me an idea of what those
8 activities are? So, if we are going to provide some for this
9 particular effort, what might we have to take away?

10
11 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Thanks, Tom. Let me bring that up real quickly
12 here. To your point, I am not sure that you would have to take
13 away anything, depending on how you spend future carryover
14 that's moving forward, and there is four items that the \$475,000
15 pays for, and that's MSA for fishery management council work,
16 \$217,000 goes to ACL implementation, and \$61,000 for SSC
17 stipends, and then \$98,000 for NEPA work.

18
19 **DR. FRAZER:** Okay. Thanks, Andy. I appreciate it.

20
21 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** The next question we have I think was from
22 Susan Boggs, and you had your hand up?

23
24 **MS. BOGGS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just a reminder to council
25 staff, and it obviously won't be this council meeting, but I
26 would like to look at what came of the projects that we funded
27 in 2020, for the amberjack, cobia, red drum, triggerfish, and
28 vermilion, because a lot of that I think would play into some of
29 the decisions, especially that we're looking at over the next
30 few months, that we have to make for these species. Thank you.

31
32 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** The next hand up is Leann Bosarge.

33
34 **MS. BOSARGE:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think that's an
35 interesting idea that Andy has, and I certainly am supportive of
36 expanding the permits database, the online portal, where you can
37 also apply for new permits there.

38
39 However, I don't think I'm comfortable making a decision on that
40 at this meeting, on the fly. I think that it should be
41 something that is maybe added to the list of projects that we're
42 going to look at, I assume, at our next Admin/Budget Committee
43 meeting, where Carrie is going to bring us some more information
44 on possible triggerfish research, and I assume, at that point,
45 the shrimp information, shrimp ELB cost data, would be
46 forthcoming for that discussion as well, and then this could
47 also be an item that would be listed there as a possibility, but
48 I would hate to just go ahead and say, no, we have to do this

1 today, and put it ahead of everything else, but it sounds like
2 we have some time, because it is more of a proactive step,
3 rather than something that has to be implemented right this
4 second, and it's more something that would be very nice, but we
5 should have a little bit of time to think about it.

6
7 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Thank you, Leann. I think I would ask Carrie
8 for some clarification, because I believe -- At least it was my
9 understanding that, if we decided to support this request, they
10 are looking for a decision at this meeting.

11
12 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Yes, Mr. Chair, that is correct. I
13 don't think we have a lot of time on this. In fact, typically,
14 we get the rest of our funding hopefully by the April council
15 meeting, if not by the June council meeting, at the latest.

16
17 Once we have received all of our funds, it's almost impossible
18 for us to give that money back to the agency, unless it's taken
19 back at the end of the five-year grant cycle, and it's much
20 easier for them to take the money off the top, and so I do
21 think, if the council is interested in this, they should
22 consider funding it at this meeting, which is why we put
23 together the agenda the way we did, based on Mr. Strelcheck's
24 request, even though we hadn't received our final 2021 funding,
25 and we knew that this was timely, and so we do not have time to
26 add this onto a future agenda, because hopefully we will have
27 our funding by then. Thank you.

28
29 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons. Just doing the math
30 in my head, the three projects that seem to have the most
31 support would be the gray triggerfish project, on a somewhat
32 abbreviated level, the request from Mr. Strelcheck for support
33 of the permit software, and then the third item would be a
34 request for support for the software development for the shrimp
35 reporting project, and so, in my head, it looks like there's
36 enough carryover to do those three with some cushion.

37
38 If those are the areas that the committee wants to focus on, I
39 think we could go forward to Full Council with something that's
40 doable, and is there some agreement with that? Carrie.

41
42 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Certainly we have some cushion from
43 the 2020 funds, but just remember what Mr. Strelcheck is asking
44 for is to use 2021 funds, and they would take them off the top,
45 before we receive our final funding. Thank you.

46
47 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Got it. Apples and oranges. The next hand up
48 is Martha Guyas.

1
2 **MS. GUYAS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have a number of questions,
3 and so I'm just going to, I guess, rattle them off, and
4 hopefully Andy can answer most of these. I guess my first one
5 is what is the actual shortfall? You said what you would like
6 to get from the council, but that seems like that's not actually
7 what the shortfall is, and how did you get there, knowing that
8 these were -- I guess they should have been anticipated costs.

9
10 Then, if the council does not fund the full shortfall, how will
11 you make up these funds, and then I guess is there precedent for
12 this? Has the Gulf Council, or other councils, funded, I guess,
13 NMFS operating costs like this before? Then you mentioned that
14 this was for all permits, and so is this just Gulf permits, or
15 is it Gulf and South Atlantic and Caribbean, or does it include
16 other regions?

17
18 I know the South Atlantic has discussed this, and they chose not
19 to contribute funds, and so I'm just wondering if other councils
20 have been asked to do this as well, in addition to the South
21 Atlantic, and what was their response? I'm going to stop there.
22 Thank you.

23
24 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Andy, can you answer those questions?

25
26 **MR. STRELCHECK:** The ones I can remember. So, starting from the
27 latter questions, we did talk to the South Atlantic Council, and
28 this was brought up during their December meeting, and they
29 elected not to provide funding support for the program. They,
30 like you, were considering a number of additional projects to
31 use for carryover, as well as FY21 funding, and they just opted
32 not to proceed.

33
34 The online system supports South Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, and
35 HMS fishermen throughout the Southeast, and so it is broad in
36 scope, in terms of who it's supporting.

37
38 In terms of the shortfall, we don't have an exact number yet, in
39 terms of what the kind of second phase contract is, and it is an
40 estimate of around \$500,000 to \$600,000, and, right now, we are
41 contributing another \$300,000 or \$350,000 from our budget, and
42 we have put in some additional funding requests to some internal
43 funding request for proposals that the agency considers, and so,
44 at this point, those have not been decided. We have just
45 submitted them for consideration, and, at this stage, do not,
46 obviously, know if we will receive those funds or not, and so
47 that's how we're trying to fund the shortfall, in addition to,
48 obviously, talking with the councils directly about your

1 budgets.

2
3 Certainly, if we were able to obtain those funds, then we would
4 come back to the council and let you know that those funds are
5 no longer needed. Martha, I don't know if I missed any of your
6 questions, if you have any further to add on.

7
8 **MS. GUYAS:** Thanks, Andy. So my other question, or series of
9 questions, was about precedent. What's the precedent for this?
10 Have councils done this before, Gulf Council or other councils,
11 funding the NFMS operating budget like this?

12
13 **MR. STRELCHECK:** I can't say for certain that for other
14 councils, but what I will clarify is that, annually, the
15 Regional Office receives funding that then passes through us to
16 distribute to the councils, and that funding essentially comes
17 directly into the Regional Office budget, and so the money we're
18 talking about is essentially money that is on our books that we
19 then transfer to the council.

20
21 For the remainder of the council budget, which is the bulk of
22 it, about the \$3.4 million, that is specifically identified by
23 Congress and sent directly to you, and so we're not talking
24 about that portion, but only the portion that comes directly
25 through our budget.

26
27 **MS. GUYAS:** Yes, the pass-through. Right. Okay. I think
28 that's it.

29
30 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** The next question comes from Chris Schieble.

31
32 **MR. CHRIS SCHIEBLE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. This question is
33 more directed towards Dr. Simmons, I think, and someone may have
34 already answered the question, but we had some technical
35 difficulties and got cut off earlier. Is there any reason that
36 the council would expect that they wouldn't receive the
37 remainder of the funding in 2021, because only about 40 percent
38 has been allocated already, or received by the council, and do
39 we have any, I guess, reason to think that we wouldn't receive
40 100 percent?

41
42 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Dr. Simmons, that question was for you.

43
44 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. We don't
45 have any reason to think that we will not receive 100 percent of
46 our funding. What we don't know is if it will be level funding
47 or if we will get an increase in our funding.

48

1 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons. Well, what we really
2 wanted to do was to give some direction to staff on which
3 carryover projects we were interested in funding as a council,
4 and so I guess we could kick the can down to the Full Council
5 meeting, but if staff could prepare some rough idea of what a
6 redacted gray triggerfish assessment project would look like, at
7 least from a dollar standpoint, and even from an activities
8 standpoint, and if we could come up with a dollar figure for the
9 shrimp software, the shrimp catch reporting software expense,
10 and we could get a little more background on what is being
11 proposed by Mr. Strelcheck, as it applies to the permits
12 software, then we can discuss those in more detail, and perhaps
13 vote on them, at Full Council. Does that make sense? I guess
14 I'm asking Dr. Simmons.

15
16 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Mr. Chair, we'll do the best we
17 can.

18
19 **CHAIRMAN DYSKOW:** Okay. That makes sense. Is there any other
20 business that we need to have before the council? Barring that,
21 with about eight minutes over time, I am going to adjourn this
22 meeting.

23
24 (Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on January 25, 2021.)

25
26 - - -
27