

**Joint LEC/LETC Virtual Meeting
March 9, 2021**

**GENERAL SESSION
10:30 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. CST**

Present at the virtual webinar:

Members

Jason Downey, ADMR, Vice-Chair
Duane Smith, NOAA, GCES
Jarret Barker, TPWD
Jim Stinebaugh, FWS
Manny Antonaras, NOAA OLE
Scott Pearce, FWC
Nicholas Giancola, USCG
Joe Scarpa
Edward Skena, LDWF

Eric Brazer, Shareholders Alliance
George Lapointe
Richard Malinowski, NOAA
Scott Bannon, ADMR
Stephen Stang, FWC
Steven Atran
Chris Schieble, WLF
Peter Hood, NOAA
Corporal Crabstein, Blue Claw McGraw

Others

Dale Diaz, GMFMC representative
Charles Bergmann
Dylan Hubbard, Hubbard's Marina

Staff

Ava Lasseter, GMFMC
Dave Donaldson, GSMFC
Steve VanderKooy, GSMFC
Debbie McIntyre, GSMFC

The meeting was called to order at 10:30 a.m. by Vice-Chair, **Downey**. The agenda was adopted with additional items on motion by **Barker** and second by **Pearce**. **Diaz** asked for update from USCG. Additionally, contact info for reporting violations. The motion passed unanimously. The summary of the March 11, 2020, meeting held in Gulf Shores, Alabama was approved as written on motion by **Pearce** and second by **Barker**. Introductions were made and **Downey** welcomed everyone.

GMFMC LETC Session

Enforcement of Recreational Red Snapper Case Handling (closed session)

In closed session, LETC members discussed case handling for enforcement of recreational red snapper regulations.

Officer/Team of the Year Award (closed session)

In closed session, LETC members reviewed the nominations for the 2019 Officer/Team of the Year Award and ranked their top two nominations, which will be provided to the Gulf Council for review.

Southeast For-hire Electronic Reporting Program Update

Rich Malinowski, NMFS, reviewed the electronic reporting program for charter vessels and headboats that do not participate in the Southeast Region Headboat Survey and progress on program implementation. Phase 1 has been implemented, while Phase 2 has not. **Malinowski** reviewed the

online portal for law enforcement officers to monitor vessel notifications and activity and confirmed that officers would be receiving email notifications, similar to those for the commercial individual fishing quota (IFQ) programs. He noted that law enforcement's role is seen largely as compliance assistance. **Antonaras** noted that compliance remains mandatory during the initial 6-8 months, but that they will be focused on ironing out issues and conducting outreach during that time. This process of implementation is designed to be similar to the initial stages of implementation of the commercial IFQ programs.

Cobia Management (Amendment 32)

Lasseter reviewed the actions under development by the Gulf Council for modifications of management for cobia. Actions are being considered which could modify the possession limit, establish a trip/vessel limit, and modify the minimum size limit. **Lasseter** will provide updates to the LETC as the document develops.

Lane Snapper and Changes to Accountability Measures

The Gulf Council took final action on a document that will change the trigger for an in-season fishing closure to any year in which the annual catch limit is expected to be caught. **Lasseter** reviewed the action with the group and asked if LETC members are receiving timely notice of in-season closures and whether modifications to accountability measures in general should be included in the pre and post-Council email updates. **Smith** noted that as a general enforcement issue, it is preferable to have fixed season closures as opposed to in-season closures. As they often occur with little notice, in-season closures require timely communication to law enforcement officers, who then must educate the public.

Illegal Charters Discussion

Pearce and **Scarpa** summarized recent activities to address the issue of illegal charters (i.e., non-federally permitted vessels taking paying passengers fishing in federal waters). This includes a meeting among state and federal law enforcement offices and for-hire operators in St. Petersburg. **Pearce** and **Scarpa** noted that law enforcement intends to have biannual meetings to share

Other Business

Implementation of the Mask Mandate in the Maritime Transportation System

Giancola shared the USCG's interpretation of the recent mask mandate, stating that the mask mandate applies to commercial and charter vessels and that the USCG is following the CDC guidelines. **Giancola** will arrange to have a legal office representative from District Eight speak to the Gulf Council at its April 2021 meeting to clarify how the USCG will enforce the mask mandate. NOAA OLE was also requested to provide further clarification to the Gulf Council at its April 2021 meeting.

Fish Rules App

LETC members have noted that it would be helpful to include the state-specific contact information for reporting violations. **VanderKooy** will provide a list of contact numbers from the last Officers' Pocket Guide published by the GSMFC for LETC members to review for accuracy. **Lasseter** will provide the list to Gulf Council staff to be incorporated into the Fish Rules App.

GSMFC LEC Session

Approval of 2021 Strategic Plan

After discussion, the plan was approved on motion by **Pearce** and second by **Skena**.

Approval of 2021-2022 Operations Plan

After discussion, the plan was approved on motion by **Pearce** and second by **Skena**.

IJF Program Activity

VanderKooy reported that, due to the pandemic, progress on the Red Drum Profile has been very slow. He plans to initiate a reboot of this task force in the near future.

The pandemic has also impeded the progress of forming the new Mangrove Snapper Task Force. Establishment of this group will take place later this year.

VanderKooy stated that the *License and Fees* publication was completed and copies mailed out last September to the LEC, state directors, commissioners, and proxies. It had been discussed at last March's meeting that, because the states are not always providing regulations books in a published form any longer, a format similar to the discontinued *Officers' Pocket Guide* would be a cleaner, simpler way to update the rules and regs each year instead of the current format of the *Law Summary* (Red Book). At the top of each page, there will be a disclaimer stating that this information is current as of a given date and that changes may occur in each state at any time. For definitive enforcement regulations in your area, contact state or federal agencies directly. The entire effort is for archiving so a simpler format would potentially be better anyway. Both publications are mainly used for historical reference and serve as a way of comparing license and fees statistics and tracking regulatory changes over time. **McIntyre** will forward the new template soon requesting that information. **VanderKooy** explained that this document should include each state or agency's information that applies to the majority of the year 2020. **McIntyre** will also send a simple template for the state reps/agencies to use for their LEC reports in the future. Like all GSMFC publications, these are available on the GSMFC website.

State-Federal Report Highlights

Written reports were provided by the individual states/agencies in advance and highlights were discussed.

Florida – **Pearce** provided a written report.

Alabama – **Downey** noted that the Department was attempting to fill some positions, they transferred one officer in and hired four new but then lost a couple which put them back down in enforcement staff again. They will do more hiring soon.

Louisiana – **Skena** noted that the department spent fewer hours this past year on JEA enforcement due to so much time being spent on hurricane and disaster preparedness.

USCG – **Giancola** provided a few updates as IUU continues to be the lead issue the USCG is dealing with. Lanchas take up a lot of patrol and interception time off south Texas. So far, they have

interdicted 41 vessels to date for 2021. Last year, they were unable to detain a number of the individuals they interdicted because of COVID. They do continue to cooperate in joint enforcement operations with their Gulf partners.

NOAA OLE - **Antonaras** reported that NOAA has had some staff changes since Tracy Dunn retired in December and **Antonaras** has taken over. There are several new positions that will be filled soon. Two near the US/Mexico border as well as a number of locations around Florida. **Scarpa** indicated that another officer will be hired for the north-central Gulf as well. There have been some excellent cases coming out of the Gulf thanks to the cooperation with partners including the USCG to increase enforcement.

Other Business

VanderKooy will forward to Lasseter the most recent listing the Commission used in the discontinued Officers' Pocket Guide for reporting violations.

Having no further business to discuss, on motion by **Skena** and second by **Pearce**, the meeting adjourned at 12:55 p.m.

Written state reports are requested in advance and only highlights are presented for time purposes during state reporting item.

Jason Downey, ADMR, Vice-Chair

GMFMC Law Enforcement Tech. Comm.

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Neil "Scott" Pearce, FWC
Phillip Land, USFWS Region 2
Manny Antonaras, NOAA/OLE
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