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MEETING MINUTES

Virginia Recreational Fishing Advisory Board

Virginia Marine Resources Commission

Monday, May 13, 2024

5:00 p.m. Work Session; 6:00 p.m. Presentation Meeting

Members Present

Wayne Jessie Jr.
Charles Randolph
Ed Rhodes (via webinar)
Charles Southall
Maggie Whittemore (via webinar)

Staff Present

Debbie Corker
Sheri Crocker
Pat Geer
Lewis Gillingham
Gloria Hatcher
Alicia Nelson
Ethan Simpson

Board Members Absent

J.T. Holland
Randy Pack
Meriweather Payne

Others Present

Wesley Brown
Bob Burstein
Robin Carpenter
Ike Eisenhower
Allison Eubank
Bernadette La Casse
Ellery Lundy
Jan McDowell
Susanna Musick
Butch Pierce
Hamish Small

The meeting minutes were recorded by Alicia Nelson. A recording of the audio and presentations are available.

Agenda:

I. Introduction, Announcements, Comments.

Alicia Nelson welcomed everyone and noted that there were some changes to the agenda. Due to a lack of quorum, voting on the minutes and any other voting needs will be deferred to the July meeting. She gave a very brief update that the reef program had successfully completed two deployments so far in 2024, and that several more were scheduled later this year.

II. Status of Fund.

Sheri Crocker gave updates on the status of the fund.

III. Review of Minutes from the September 12, 2022 RFAB Meeting.

The board deferred reviewing meeting minutes until the July meeting.

IV. Fishing event applications:

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- A) 0424-01 2025 Hope House & Oak Grove Nursing Home Fishing Excursions and Clinics. T.B. Butch Pierce; Great Bridge Fisherman's Association. **\$2,450.**

Butch Pierce gave a brief overview of their annual event and offered to answer any questions. He noted that there were 80-90 expected participants, and that no substantial changes are expected for the 2025 season.

- B) 0424-02 2025 Virginia Beach Anglers Club/Seton Youth Shelter Children's Fishing Trip. Bob Burstein, Virginia Beach Anglers Club. **\$2,500.**

Mr. Burstein gave a brief history of the program and noted that the Seton Youth program consists of children of incarcerated adults and that the participants list must include a chaperone for each child. Mr. Southall noted that that is taken into consideration and thanked him for his presentation.

- C) 0424-03 2025 Norfolk Youth Head Boat Fishing Trip. Ike Eisenhower, Norfolk Anglers Club. **\$1,800.**

Mr. Eisenhower noted that 25 to 30 children were expected for the 2025 trip, and that the trip had been very successful in past years. He also noted the partnership with the recreational center that helped provide adult chaperones. He commented that they planned on using the FV Nancy Anne again, but the price had increased by a small amount.

- D) 0424-04 2025 Kiwanis Club Children's Fishing Clinic and Kiwanis Fishing Clinic. Wesley Brown, Capital District Kiwanis Club. **\$11,000.**

Wesley Brown described the two events held in Smithfield (expecting 100 kids) and Hampton (expecting up to 300 kids) each year. He noted that the 2024 Smithfield event had just occurred. He noted that the event provides rod and reels, hats (donated) and t-shirts. He noted that the Coast Guard and VMRC Marine Police support the program and help with demonstrations. He noted that Lewis Gillingham and the stranding team provide support as well.

- E) 0424-05 2025 Saxis and Morley's Wharf Children's Fishing and Conservation Educational Outings. Robert Mucha, Eastern Shore of Virginia Anglers Club. **\$2,662.**

Robert Mucha described the Eastern Shore Angler's Club and their annual three youth events held on the Eastern Shore. Those events include a surf event at Assateague Beach and pier events at Morley's Wharf and Saxis fishing pier. He noted that ages are limited from 6 to 15 years of age and must be accompanied by an adult.

- F) 0424-06 2025 Knights of Columbus Annual Kids Fishing Day. Jim McCaddin, Knights of Columbus. **\$7,500.**

The presentation on this project was deferred to the July meeting due to schedule conflict with the applicant.

- G) 0424-07 2024 Broken Men Foundation Incentive-Based Goal Fishing Trip. Ellery Lundy, Broken Men Foundation. **\$13,975.**

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Ellery Lundy described the Broken Man Foundation, a mentorship program for children aged 11 to 18 in Richmond. He noted that the program consists of a 20-week mentorship program to educate boys in all elements of life skills, and incentivizes their completion of the program with end of session trips. He explained some of the program curriculum including life skills, college visit, talks with law enforcement and judges and camping trips.

He noted the importance of incentive-based goals and said that fishing trips had recently been too expensive to do with the foundation. He hopes to provide fishing rods to allow them to continue fishing past their time with the program. Because of scheduling changes, Mr. Lundy requested that the 2024 fund request be utilized for the summer program (an estimate of 45 kids). Those participants who will graduate at the end of the current semester would also be invited to the fishing trip. The estimate of participation for the 2025 fishing trip is 100 kids.

Mr. Southall thanked Mr. Lundy for the presentation and noted that event like these were a priority for the board. Mr. Randolph suggested that the fishing event coordinators connect to provide help and support for each other. Ms. Nelson offered to share contacts and help facilitate that effort. Mr. Burstein also noted that several clubs also worked together with the FWS with some programming at First Landing State Park.

- H) 0424-08 2025 Broken Men Foundation Incentive-Based Goal Fishing Trip. Ellery Lundy, Broken Men Foundation. **\$13,975.**

The information for item H was included in the presentation for item G.

V. Other Projects:

- D) 0424-09 Virginia Game Fish Tagging 2025. S. Musick (VIMS), L. Gillingham (VMRC). **\$92,495.**

Susanna Musick provided a presentation about the Virginia Game Fish Tagging program. Her presentation is part of the record. She described program's partnership with anglers and goals of the program over the past 30 years. In 2023, almost 15,000 tags were released.

- J) 0424-10 *Estimating Relative Abundance of Young-of-Year American Eel in the Virginia Tributaries of Chesapeake Bay. M. Fabrizio, T. Tuckey, VIMS. \$32,983. **(\$16,492 from VSRFDF, and \$16,491 from MFIF).**

The presentation on this project was deferred to the July meeting due to schedule conflict with the applicant.

- K) 0424-11 *Federal Assistance (Sportfish Restoration) Matching Funds, Federal FY 2025. P. Geer. \$204,822 **(\$153,616 from VSRFDF, \$51,206 from MFIF).**

Pat Geer described the funding request for matching funds for the Federal Sportfish Restoration Funds. He noted that for every state dollar contributed, we receive three dollars in federal funds. Mr. Southall asked if there were any substantive changes in this year, and Mr. Geer said that there are not any planned.

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- L) 0424-12 *Boat Scarring Effects on Submerged Aquatic Vegetation in Virginia: Monitoring and Recovery Patterns – year 23. Christopher Patrick, VIMS. \$21,919 (**\$10,960 from VSRFDF, and \$10,959 from MFIF**).

The presentation on this project was deferred to the July meeting due to schedule conflict with the applicant. Mr. Southall asked for clarification the project schedule. Alicia Nelson noted that this project had typically been taken directly to the Commission for presentation and review. However, upon revisiting our board processes, we prefer this program to be heard by the RFAB as well. She noted that both Dr. Patrick and Dr. Orth had presented this work to RFAB before as part of their larger SAV studies, and this work was not new or expanded, but is just being heard differently.

- M) 0424-13 M Use of Satellite Archival Transmitting Tags (PSATS) to evaluate air exposure and handling effects on the survival of red drum (*Scianops ocellastus*) released during Virginia’s late summer recreational fishery. Hamish Small, VIMS. **\$171,349**.

Hamish Small gave a brief presentation on his proposal to study handling mortality of red drum using satellite tagging. He also noted that after working with Alicia, he would be submitting a one-year segment proposal (with a second year to be submitted next year) shortly, so the cost of this year’s program would be cut in half.

He noted that he and other anglers had noted the handling techniques by average recreational anglers may be causing unnecessary stress, noting time out of the water and vertical hanging. He proposes to study large red drum released during the late summer recreational fishery around the CBBT comparing a variety of air exposure and use of a BogaGrip device. He noted that he planned a repeat study in 2026.

Mr. Southall asked if the satellite tags could be recovered and reused for future projects. Mr. Small said the proposed models are a lower cost, but cannot be reused. Mr. Southall also asked that results be shared with local fishing clubs, and Mr. Small noted that with the travel budget requested, there were plans to meet with and give presentations to the local fishing organizations.

- N) 0424-14 Genetic Analysis of the Distinctiveness of Gray Triggerfish, *Balistes capriscus* sampled from Virginia. Jan McDowell, VIMS. **\$78,295**.

Jan McDowell the presentation on the proposed triggerfish study. The presentation is available. She described the distribution of gray triggerfish as they relate to *Sargassum* distributions in the Atlantic and Gulf and noted that changes in the *Sargassum* distribution raise questions about the impact of larval and juvenile gray triggerfish.

She explained that there is no regional management north of North Carolina, and that all gray triggerfish in the Atlantic were considered part of the same stock. overfishing was occurring based on the last assessment in the South Atlantic. The proposed study would examine the connectivity between gray triggerfish in Virginia and other regions in addition to examining sex-biased dispersal.

Mr. Southall clarified that one of the primary goals of the project is to determine if there is no distinction between populations above and below the VA-NC line. Ms. McDowell said that is a possibility but that researchers have been surprised by results before. Mr.

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Southall asked about the management implications of the research, and Ms. McDowell note that the more information we can gather and the better understanding of the diversity can help managers make fisheries decisions.

- O) 0424-15 MLC Public Access Waterfront Enhancement and Community Saltwater Learn to Fish Program. Bernadette La Casse, Mathews Land Conservancy. **\$27,600.**

Bernadette La Casse provided an overview of the Mathews Land Conservancy and the results of last year's programming and the plans for the future project. She highlighted that the Conservancy's mission is free public access in an area with little public waterfront access. She described the amenities included at Williams Wharf Landing and the variety of events and programming offered there.

The boardwalk and boardwalk have been renovated to include handicapped access with funds from the previous grant, and the fishing locker has been installed. The Learn to Fish program went well last year with high attendance and a variety of partners providing education and outreach stations for kids.

The 2025 plans include adding cable railing to the bulkhead to improve safety and allow handicapped use to the bulkhead. Fishing rod holders will also be installed. These improvements are in conjunction with the continuation of the saltwater learn to fish program.

- P) 0424-16 Phoebus Waterfront Park Dock Improvements. Alison Eubank, City of Hampton. **\$120,000.**

Alison Eubank introduced the project and noted that Robin Carpenter with Phoebus Partnership was also in attendance. The request includes adding and expansion and handicapped access to the dock. She noted the dock was part of the Phoebus Master Plan and was initially considered a dinghy dock but has been used by anglers and kayakers in recent years. She highlighted the living shoreline that had been added by the community in the area, and visitors have been accessing the water through the shoreline and have made a path through the shoreline.

There are hopes that the planned improvements will allow for additional access and protect the adjacent living shoreline. She described the 6 additional units planned to allow better access to Mill Creek and the accessible kayak launch. She noted that the closest other launch is the one at Fort Monroe that has been damaged by wave action.

She reviewed the planning and budget with the Board and clarified the match and license funds contributions.

Mr. Geer asked if there were any plans for additional parking at the site, noting that space was limited for kayak trailers and offloading. Ms. Eubank thanked him for the feedback and said she would look into any plans for additional parking and noted that there were plans for additional signage. There was some additional discussion about the shoreline effort by the community for the park and living shoreline nearby and that this proposal aims at protecting that area.

- Q) 0424-17 Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament: Youth Division Add-On. Joseph Grist, VMRC. **\$5,259.**

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Alicia Nelson presented the project after explaining that Mr. Grist was unavailable for the evening. She explained that the Youth Tournament was intended for anglers 16 and under who may not have many opportunities to fish from vessels and are more likely to fish from shorelines and piers. The proposed pilot study would align with the Secretary's initiative to increase outdoor experiences by 10% across the Commonwealth.

The budget includes funds for supplies and mailing for up to 1,000 youth citations (no staff time is included in this proposal). She noted that the proposal included suggested length citations that could later be reviewed by the tournament committee.

Mr. Southall asked about program staffing and participation. Ms. Nelson and Mr. Gillingham clarified the plans to pilot the youth program beginning in 2025 with existing staff and resources in addition to the funds requested.

Mr. Randolph asked if these may overwhelm the current program, and staff clarified that there would be seasonal time frames for species to help break up the staff effort. Mr. Southall noted that adding this program to the existing tournament program may also allow the use for additional staff. The board clarified that additional funds could be requested to support the program. Mr. Randolph noted that he would prefer additional funds be requested and returned if unused rather than funding not be enough for the project. Ms. Nelson asked where the board would be interested in additional funding, and the board suggested additional support for outreach and clarified that they had a lot of support for the project and children's projects. Ms. Nelson stated that she would share the board's suggestions with Mr. Grist.