

FINAL MINUTES
Recreational Fishing Advisory Board Meeting
May 11, 2009

Members Present

George Hudgins - Chairman
John Barr
Carolyn Brown

Jim Deibler
Jesse "Jimmie" Duell
Charles Randolph

Members Not Present

Edward Rhodes - Vice-chairman
Carlisle Bannister

Charles Southall

At 7:00 p.m., Chairman Hudgins called the meeting to order.

Ms. Jane McCroskey provided a brief status report of the budget. She explained that the report shows a negative balance of \$507,405. This report includes the on-going projects and VMRC obligations, and the estimated license sales through June 30, 2009. Earlier today, Ms. McCroskey contacted the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF) and was told that the estimate for license sales in April was around \$300,000. An improved estimate of funds should be available, when the RFAB meets again in July. Also, she pointed out there was one additional expenditure, of \$50,000, to be paid to the DGIF, for license sales administrative costs, for the last three years.

Mr. Hudgins asked for a review of the draft November 10, 2008 RFAB meeting minutes. Mr. Deibler made a motion to approve the minutes. Ms. Brown seconded the motion, and the vote was unanimous to accept the draft minutes as final.

Multi-Year Projects for 2009 Renewal.

- A) 2009 Sunshine Children's Fishing Program. Denny Dobbins, Portsmouth Anglers Club. **\$7,194.** Mr. Dobbins provided an overview of the past and planned program. The program introduces around 300 children to fishing by utilizing 4 head boat trips and 1 pier day. The head boat trips are planned for four Fridays in July and the pier day is planned for the third Thursday in July. There is some difficulty with maintaining the same level of sponsorship, but he felt confident that he would prevail. Mr. Barr asked what he would do, if funds are not available this year. Mr. Dobbins said they may have to reduce the number of boat trips. Mr. Barr also pointed out that the other difficulty for this year is that funding may not be available until after the program is done. Mr. Dobbins indicated that they could still do the pier and maybe 1 boat trip, but without funding or at least the promise of funding, he would not be able to do the full program for this year. He realizes that these will be problems for all the summer programs for kids.

- B) 2009 Saxis Fishing Pier Youth Fishing Tournaments (Year 8). Allen Evans, Eastern Shore of Virginia Anglers Club. **\$1,325.** Mr. Evans was unable to attend the meeting. Mr. Barr pointed out that, in past years, this project was normally 2 tournaments. This year the Club has already cut down to only one event at the Saxis Fishing Pier.

- C) 2009 Hope House & Oak Grove Nursing Home Fishing Excursions and Clinics. D. Hurst, C. Macin, Great Bridge Fisherman's Association. **\$4,000**. No one was in attendance to present this project.
- D) 2009 Youth Developmental "Hooked on Fishing" Adventure (Year 2). A. Fisher, R. Lockhart, Virginia Charter Boat Association. **\$5,780**. Mr. Al Fisher provided an overview of the past and planned program. Of the 85 scouts from all over Tidewater that registered for the 2008 fishing trip, 100% participated. They took the kids out for a great day of fishing. Because of the financial situation this year, they have reduced their request by \$1,000. The Virginia Charter Boat Association will still match the same amount, as they did last year. They streamlined the budget and cut a few of the niceties. The goal is still to get the kids out for a nice day of fishing and boating.
- E) 2009 Virginia Marine Sportfish Collection (Year 3). J. Grist, J. Cimino, VMRC. **\$10,000**. Mr. Joe Grist provided a PowerPoint showing the past success of the program. This program, over the last 2 years, has allowed the Biological Sampling Program to get fish samples that have been difficult to obtain from the commercial sector. Since inception, over 511 anglers have participated, and over 1,000 carcass donations (head and tail intact) have been received. In return for donations, the angler receives a hat or T-shirt. Over the last 2 years, 6 sites have been utilized for the freezers. Because of this program, samples have also been collected at the Hampton Creek Cobia and Cape Charles Black Drum tournaments. The freezer at Chris' Bait and Tackle and the Black Drum Tournament have greatly increased the sample size for black drum by 250 fish, and also provided much older fish -- some that were born in 1952 and 1943. To cut back on the budget for the project this summer, grouper, tilefish, and spadefish have been dropped from the program, temporarily. The program will also drop to 4 sites this summer, Chris', Long Bay Point, Wallace's, and add the Buckroe Fishing Pier as a new site. The amount requested is only for supplies and rewards.
- F) 2009 Deployment of Artificial Reef Structure. Mike Meier, VMRC. **\$100,000**. Mr. Meier provided an overview of what funds he currently has available, what is currently under contract or going to bid, and expected deployments. The Artificial Reef Program has an annual deployment quota of about 6,400 tons of material. To date, 1,152 tons of material have been deployed. In the near future, 740 tons of stainless steel subway cars, approximately 500 tons of the old Chickahominy bridge pilings, and another 1,600 tons of concrete pipe are expected to be available for deployments. Mr. Hudgins asked if there was an estimate of cost to deploy the anticipated materials. Mr. Meier indicated that the cost could run from \$35,000 to twice that amount, but until the bids are finalized, he will not know the exact cost. Because of the situation with the economy, donated materials have been very difficult to locate this year. Mr. Meier plans to do all he can to locate enough material to, at least, meet the quota for this year.
- G) 2009 Estimate and Assess Social and Economic Importance and Value of Menhaden to Chesapeake Bay Stakeholders and Region (3 Year Study) - Year 3. James Kirkley, VIMS. **\$154,452**. Dr. Kirkley focused on some complications that have developed through the course of this study. The complication is that in some areas people do not know what menhaden are and some people do not even know what the Chesapeake Bay is. This lack of knowledge makes it very hard to determine what the values of menhaden are to an area. Also, how do you educate the people being surveyed without biasing their

response. Another problem is this issue deals with one company, Omega Protein, and how to extract the value of menhaden versus the value of shattering the company. Dr. Kirkley indicated that they have been able to deal with these complications and feels they will be able to finish the study in the third year.

- H) 2009 Enhancing Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (SAV) Habitat: Research and Education for Restoration (Year 15). Robert Orth, VIMS. ~~\$98,309~~. **Amended 5/8/09 to \$48,309**. Dr. Orth provided a PowerPoint showing the past success of the program. The request was reduced by \$50,000 because other sources of funding and savings from other projects have been found. Dr. Orth has been working very closely with the Nature Conservancy on a number of projects. Over the last 20 years, the decline of water quality in the Chesapeake Bay has added to the decline of grass beds, especially in the deeper water areas. For this reason, the recent restoration focus has been on the Seaside of the Eastern Shore. However, test plots have been done in the Chesapeake Bay and tributaries, and some areas have been identified as possible restoration areas. Since 1998, on the Seaside, about 208 acres have been seeded. The seeding efforts have resulted in about 800 acres of continuous growing grass bed areas. Dr. Orth also highlighted what was going on with small beds on the northern shore of the lower James River.
- I) Federal Assistance (Wallop-Breaux) Matching Funds, Federal FY 2010. Jack Travelstead, VMRC. **\$235,563**. Mr. Travelstead explained that this was the annual request to provide matching state funds for the 6 federally funded projects. Although the Virginia license sales seem to be decreasing, the federal funds available have been increasing in the last few years. He expects to see a decline of federal funds at some point in the future. The current federal funds available to VMRC are around \$2.3 million. If available federal funds remain high, it is possible that some new projects could be added, such as artificial reef work.
- J) Jun. – Dec. 2009, Estimating Relative Abundance of Young-of-Year American Eel in the Virginia Tributaries of Chesapeake Bay (Yr 8 ½). M. Fabrizio, T. Tuckey, VIMS. **\$24,544**. Dr. Troy Tuckey provided a PowerPoint showing a brief overview of the monitoring program that has been occurring for a number of years. Currently, 4 sites are monitored; Kamp's Millpond on the Rappahannock River, Brackens and Wormley Ponds on the York River, and Wareham's Pond on the James River. These areas are monitored during the recruitment period, which runs March through June. The monitoring of American eel recruitment is an Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) mandate. This proposal is to finish the monitoring for 2009. Item O is the request to continue for January through December 2010. Mr. Travelstead explained that in past years, this project was traditionally split funded between the recreational fund and the commercial fund. The staff recommendation will be to fully fund this proposal, Item J, with the commercial fund. For Item O, the recommendation would be to fund the first half of the project with recreational funds and the second half with commercial funds. Mr. Barr asked if Wallop-Breaux funds could be used to fund the American eel monitoring. Mr. Travelstead said that staff would look into that possibility. [Note: American eel is not considered a sportfish, and therefore does not qualify for Sportfish Restoration (Wallop-Breaux) funds.]

Multi-Year Projects for 2010 Renewal.

- K) 2010 Children's Fishing Clinic (Year 13). Rob Cowling, Newport News Rotary Club and Coastal Conservation Association-Peninsula. **\$6,500**. Mr. Cowling provided an overview of the past and planned program. This program brings about 250 at-risk children to the James River Fishing Pier for a day of educational booths, fishing, and food. A large number of experienced volunteers help out. The program also provides the children with a rod-and-reel and tackle to take home in hopes that they will continue fishing in the future. This year, a \$500 increase has been added to the budget because some of the corporate sponsorship has dried up. The plan is to continue with the same program format.
- L) 2010 Kiwanis Club Children's Fishing Clinic (Year 9). Wesley Brown, Capital District Kiwanis Club. **\$6,500**. Mr. Brown plans to continue with the same program format. This year, a \$500 increase has been added to the budget because they plan to build their own mist tent to be used by Item K, also. By building their own tent, they would not have to rent one each year. Mr. Barr asked if the request in future years would be reduced by \$500. Mr. Brown explained that the reduction may be a possibility unless other expenses, such as rods-and-reels, increase in cost.
- M) 2010 Virginia Game Fish Tagging (Year 16). J. Lucy, VIMS and L. Gillingham, VMRC. **\$87,800**. Mr. Jon Lucy provided a PowerPoint showing the past success of the program. He explained that with the economy and budget situation, he and Mr. Gillingham tried to look at ways to cut some costs. They looked at reducing costs in travel and supplies. In past years, they have had as many as 4 workshops for tag training to accommodate taggers from around the Bay. This year they decided to only have 1 training session in March at the Bass Pro Shop, and the taggers were cooperative with the change. As in past years, they try to maintain the program at about 200 taggers and continue to tag the same 10 species. About 88 anglers make up the core group of taggers. This core group tags about 97% of the fish. The taggers are now tagging around 20,000 fish, annually. With this group of trained taggers, they are able to receive good information to track the seasonal migration patterns and critical habitat of all these species. Mr. Lucy said that they are maintaining the information in a database, with over 150,000 records of tagged fish and around 15,000 records of recaptures. This corresponds to about a 10% recapture rate which he feels is a pretty good rate, for this type of information. The data is being used by more and more people, including the angling community, researchers, and managers, which is what they hoped would happen over time. Mr. Lucy has been working with Joe Grist to update the management plan for red drum, and for the first time Virginia has been able to provide red drum tag and recapture data. Now, Virginia is able to discuss and provide information on the red drum stock from Virginia to Florida, with some solid seasonal migration and habitat data. Mr. Lucy continued to show some examples of the migration patterns of the drums, cobia, and flounder.
- N) 2010 Improving Stock Assessment of Weakfish - Year 3. Y. Jiao, D. Orth, VPI & SU, and R. O'Reilly, VMRC. **\$111,356**. Dr. Yan Jiao provided a PowerPoint showing the progress of the first 1 ½ years of the project. Coastwide commercial and recreational harvests are at historical lows for weakfish. Because the ASMFC stock assessment, for weakfish, was rejected by the peer review, there is no biomass estimation and no fishing mortality estimation. Consequently, precautionary management measures that vary by state may limit harvest more than necessary. Because of the numbers of recreational fishermen, the recreational fishery is more likely to benefit from a stock recovery.

Virginia tends to be one of the top three states on the Atlantic coast for recreational weakfish harvest. Any benefits gained by a coastwide stock assessment will also directly benefit Virginia. The problems with the current ASMFC stock assessment that this study will try to address are: individual growth varies from north to south; data conflicts of relative abundance indices; spatial coverage of the relative abundance indices; “borrowed” age-length key; uncertainty in the catch (random, bias); and ageing bias caused by the ageing method. Dr. Jiao went on to explain each problem in more detail and how they plan to resolve these problems. The current working document has been sent to the ASMFC and weakfish stock assessment committee and will be reviewed this June. Eventually, all the data from all the states and surveys will be incorporated into this operational stock assessment model or multiple models. Dr. Jiao is still applying to other funding sources to see if any monies are available to help fund this study. This is the third and final year of the study.

- O) Jan.-Dec. 2010, Estimating Relative Abundance of Young-of-Year American Eel in the Virginia Tributaries of Chesapeake Bay (Yr 9). M. Fabrizio, T. Tuckey, VIMS. **\$46,574**. See Item J.

New Projects for 2009.

- P) 2009 Virginia Fishing Line Recycling Program. A. Nelson, J. Grist, VMRC. **\$3,500**. Mr. Joe Grist provided a PowerPoint outlining the plan for this new program. The Commission, in conjunction with the Secretary of Natural Resources and the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, are working together to collect and recycle monofilament fishing line for the purposes of keeping Virginia’s waterways cleaner. Improperly disposed fishing line can tangle and harm marine life, as well as boat props. Collection bins will be placed at docks, marinas, fishing piers, and tackle shops around the state. The National Marine Fisheries Service and Berkley Trilene are partnering to recycle the monofilament line into fish habitat structures. Currently, the structures are used in freshwater, but research is being done to see if the structures could be used for saltwater habitats. Initially, funds from a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) grant have provided 10 bins to start the program in each state participating. This budget request includes items that have not been provided such as mounting materials, identification stickers, and collection bags, as well as some funds to make additional bins. In the first week at Long Bay Point Marina, 8 pounds of fishing line were collected. Many people have shown an interest that they would like to have a bin placed at their recreational fishing business locations. This is a one time request for funds. Ms. Brown asked if Virginia gets anything back from Berkley Trilene, and if any recycling program exists for braided line. Mr. Grist said that they were trying to get some of the fish habitat structures back for our use, and that he was not aware of any braided line programs. Ms. Alicia Nelson will be the lead staff person on this project and is keeping up with developments as the program progresses. Ms. Brown suggested using the anglers club to help with this project. Mr. Grist let everyone know that it was in the plan to utilize the clubs to help out with this program, and that DGIF has had a lot of support from freshwater clubs with their bins. They are working closely with DGIF on this project, and if materials can be purchased, the DGIF hatchery staff will make the PVC pipe bins at no cost.

Q) 2009 Trophic Position and Ecological Function of Juvenile Menhaden in Chesapeake Bay. C. Jones, J. Schaffler, ODURF. **\$43,967**. Dr. Jason Schaffler provided a PowerPoint outlining the proposal for this new project. From previous studies, it is known that striped bass rely heavily on menhaden as a food source. It is also known that problems, such as poor body conditions and lesions, with striped bass, are attributed to the lack of forage. It is also known that menhaden are near historic lows. Menhaden recruit in Chesapeake Bay in late winter to early spring. Menhaden feed primarily on phytoplankton and detritus. What is not known is if they are deriving their energy primarily from phytoplankton or detritus and why does that matter. With changing land use patterns and climate changes, the inputs are changing and will that have an effect on menhaden and their food source. One objective of this project is to quantify the menhaden diet using the stable isotope technique. Another is to try to find out how that energy is passed up the food chain. The plan is to look at carbon and nitrogen ratios in menhaden muscle, look at their stomach contents, and also look at the carbon and nitrogen ratios in phytoplankton and detritus. Samples will be taken from the different tributaries of the Chesapeake Bay to see how they differ from one area to another. Mr. Hudgins asked if Omega Protein had been approached about funding part of this research. Dr. Schaffler said that they were working with Omega Protein on other issues, but they had not requested for any funding, but it was a possibility.

New Projects for 2010.

- R) 2010 Academic Anglers Children's Fishing Clinic. C. Roberts, A. Bracey, Academic Anglers Fishing Team. **\$1,000**. No one was in attendance to present this project.
- S) 2010 Understanding the Impacts of Mycobacterial Disease on Striped Bass: When and Where does Mortality Occur in the Rappahannock River. J. Hoenig, W. Vogelbein, VIMS. **\$50,535**. Dr. John Hoenig provided a PowerPoint reviewing previous work done and outlining the proposal for this project. In 1997, anglers, watermen, and scientists started noticing some awful looking rockfish that had ulcerous lesions on them. At first it was misidentified, but scientists at VIMS identified the 2 new species of Mycobacteria found on the fish. They also researched the progression of the disease, starting with the external, small, brownish dots, called pigmented foci. Dr. Hoenig and his colleagues also looked at how prevalent the disease was in the Bay and tributaries. Some areas, such as the Rappahannock River, were showing signs that 60%-70% of the rockfish had the disease. They realized early on that if the disease caused mortality, this would be a big problem for the rockfish population. Dr. Hoenig is involved with the annual rockfish tagging study for Virginia and has developed models showing fishing mortality and natural mortality. They needed to determine the length of time that the disease takes to kill the fish. Pathologists began taking pictures of the fish they were tagging and categorizing the fish in 3 stages of the disease. What they found and were able to extrapolate from the data was that it took about 444 days for a Stage 1 fish to move into Stage 2 of the disease, and another 400 days or so to move into Stage 3. Dr. Hoenig believes that some fish under the right conditions are able to repair some of the skin damage caused by the disease, but he does not believe the fish are able to rid themselves completely of the disease. They have found that fall tagged fish in Stage 2 and 3 of the disease grow about 1/3 slower than healthy fish. However, they do not see quite that difference in growth with the spring tagged fish. Unfortunately, the sample size for spring tagged fish is very small compared to the fall. They have also found that fish in

Stage 2 and 3 have about ½ the survival rate of healthy fish. For fish in Stage 1, they estimate that they have about an 80%-90% survival rate of the healthy fish. Dr. Hoenig indicated that this study will attempt to determine what environmental conditions the disease thrives in, disease progression and associated mortality by season, and the movement of rockfish from the Rappahannock River. They have utilized some federal funding from Sea Grant and Wallop-Breaux, for some of this work. They are also working in cooperation with Maryland and Potomac River Fisheries Commission. Also, all three jurisdictions have added research exemptions for fishers to keep and call in information for any rockfish tagged with the bright green tags. A \$5 reward is offered if someone just turns in the tag, and a \$20 reward if someone puts the fish on ice and returns it to VIMS. The funds are needed to increase spring and fall tagging through the capture of rockfish in commercial pound nets upstream and at the mouth of the Rappahannock River. They do have to pay for the legal sized fish caught in the commercial pound nets. Mr. Randolph asked if recreational anglers could assist in the capture of striped bass for this study. Dr. Hoenig said that they had looked at using anglers, but decided that because of potential hooking mortality in warm weather months and the logistics of working with multiple boats catching a few fish at a time, the use of pound nets was a more efficient means of catching large numbers at one time. In the past, they had looked at using other types of gear, such as haul seine and trawl, but decided that pound nets caused the least stress on the fish and they could tag many fish quickly.

- T) 2010 Connecting Productivity in Eelgrass Beds to Recreationally Important Finfishes in Chesapeake Bay: Forage Fishes as Trophic Conduits. R. Latour, K. Sobocinski, J. van Montfrans, J. E. Duffy, VIMS. **\$58,329.** Dr. Rob Latour provided a PowerPoint outlining the need and plan for this new project. This work is also in collaboration with Dr. Cynthia Jones, ODURF. Eelgrass beds are known to be productive systems. Sportfish, such as speckled trout, striped bass, red drum, and summer flounder, use the eelgrass beds, adults to forage and juveniles for refuge. The question they want to answer is what is the link between the grass beds and productivity of these sportfish, by looking at food web interactions. The relationship between grass beds, food web dynamics, and productivity of important fishes is not well known in the Chesapeake Bay, the east coast, or nationally. They recently submitted a 3-year proposal to the National Science Foundation (NSF), totaling \$1 million, to answer this question for the Chesapeake Bay. Even though the NSF reviewers evaluated the 3-year proposal with 5 excellents and 2 very goods, the proposal was not accepted for funding. A key weakness was that more pilot studies, like this one, were needed to have a basic understand of the food web interactions before the large proposal would be considered. The plan of this project is to sample two locations in each area, Eastern Shore bayside and western shore, 3 times a month for approximately 3 months in the late spring, summer, and fall. Each sampling, they would simultaneously collect the predator fishes and the prey fishes, in hope that they would be able to determine more clearly what the prey field looks like. To reduce the cost of the project, they are able to use sampling gear already in hand. Also, a graduate student, under a fellowship, will donate 100% of her time to this study. The basic budget is for Primary Investigator (PI) salaries, additional technical support for boat operation, and miscellaneous field supplies. They have a history of presenting their data and results to the anglers clubs, at the VIMS after hours lecture series, on the VIMS website, and at scientific meetings, and they plan to continue with any future projects. Ms. Brown asked if their sampling gear damaged the grass beds. Dr. Latour explained

that they use a 16' otter trawl deployed off the side of a 21' center console boat, the damage, if any, is very minimal. The trawl deployments are 2 to 5 minutes, so they are not traversing a significant area of the grass beds. The seines can only be deployed in certain areas, and the suction samplers survey an area about the size of the VMRC podium, so again not a significant area is traversed.

- U) 2010 Blueline and Golden Tilefish Population Dynamics Along the Virginian Continental Shelf, Year 1. J. Ballenger, C. Jones, ODURF. **\$72,768**. Mr. Joey Ballenger provided a PowerPoint outlining the need and plan for this new project. There is an increase in the demand for tilefish off the coast of Virginia from the recreational and charter boat fisheries. In 2007, VMRC established some preliminary management measures of 7 fish per person per day on tilefish. Currently, additional management measures are being discussed with the South Atlantic Fisheries Management Council (SAFMC). It is known that in the south Atlantic, the population is severely overfished. The preliminary management measures have been taken to prevent overfishing in areas off of the coast of Virginia. There is a serious lack of data on blueline and golden tilefish off of the coast of Virginia. A few studies have been done on age and growth off of New Jersey, New York, Florida, and South Carolina. The plan is to collect population structure data, so that Virginia has information to contribute to SAFMC, and discuss the management of these species. They plan to use the fish caught by recreational fishermen. They may also try to get some samples from the commercial fishery, and use fishery independent sampling from charter boats. They plan to collect data on growth rates and the reproductive biology. The data collection for tilefish is planned as a 3-year study. The budget and timeline presented is for Year 1. Mr. Randolph asked if they needed to collect the whole fish. Mr. Ballenger responded that they can use the carcass, but they do need to get lengths, if possible. Mr. Deibler ask what the cost might be for all three years. Mr. Ballenger explained that they estimate each year would cost about the same or maybe a little less, depending on whether they need to utilize charter boats or not. Ms. Brown asked how the reduction from 7 to 3 fish, if passed, would affect the study. Mr. Ballenger indicated that, if passed, it may cause a problem for collection from the recreational side of the fishery.

The dates for the next RFAB meetings of this review cycle are July 13, 2009 and September 14, 2009.

Chairman Hudgins adjourned the meeting at 9:11 p.m.

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