

Artificial Reef Council Meeting

September 15, 2016

Louisiana Room, LDWF Headquarters, Baton Rouge, LA

Attendees:

Douglas Peter, BSEE
Chris Auer, FMOG/Crevalle
Victor Agafitei, FMOG/Crevalle
Joseph Orgeron, Montco
Nick Odinet
Deborah Abibou, CRCL
Jason Duet, LDWF
David Cresson, CCA
John Walther, CCA
Nicole Sims, Stone
Jason Sullivan, Stone

- 1) Mike McDonough opens the meeting, introduces Craig Gothreaux as new to the program, responsible for inshore, monitoring, and supervising staff.
- 2) Agenda for meeting and minutes from the previous meeting are approved by the Council
- 3) M. McDonough gives an update on offshore and nearshore parts of the program. He explains the different zones of the program: inshore (inside coastline), nearshore (coastline to 100' water depth), and offshore (48 Planning Area, 18 SARS, & 10 Deepwater). There are 375 platforms reefed in offshore reefs. 14 were reefed in 2015, and 10 in 2016. Permits for additional reef sites and platforms. 5 Nearshore reefs. There are about 1300 platforms nearshore LA, 55% fixed—candidates for reefing. Nearshore platforms are coming out of Gulf fast. Hadn't had nearshore reefs; still obstacles.
- 4) M. McDonough asks Artificial Reef Council to add an agenda item. Passes unanimously.
- 5) C. Gothreaux updates inshore. 30 established sites, 3000 acres, mix of materials used. Past fiscal year: enhanced Redfish Point & Independence Island, created West End. Partnered with CCA. Upcoming: enhancement of Point Mast, creation of reefs in Calcasieu and Pontchartrain. Partnering with CCA. Calcasieu Lake: Oyster Reefs reverting to harvest; Turner's Bay Island may be impacted by Turner's Bay Island purchase/reclamation project. Monitoring: talking with Ed Chesney, testing trap designs; chevron and pinfish traps. Hook and line sampling caught more individuals, more species. Looking at materials of opportunity, buoys. Living shoreline project with CRCL. Dr. Twilley asks about suitability index—developed by Dr. Melancon for oysters. Patrick Banks asks about CPUE—line sampling was 30 minutes when picking up traps.
- 6) M. McDonough presents Nearshore Planning Areas. Program wanted to address accessibility issue and fact that nearshore platforms are coming out at high rate, not affect shrimpers negatively. Identified areas with low shrimp effort (shrimp data from NMFS), high number of standing platforms. Bart Yakupzak helped with suggestions off western

Louisiana. Shrimp effort more spread out there. Shrimp trawl data show trawls avoid standing platforms, heard from shrimpers that they avoid by ¼-1/2 nautical mile. Quarter-nautical mile avoidance would go around a 100-acre reef site. Ship Shoal does not have a lot of platforms, but low shrimp effort; Dr. Chesney finds important to red snapper. P. Banks asks about Ship Shoal as sand resource for CPRA. M. McDonough answers that we will have to accommodate the concerns of CPRA in any deployments. Targeting existing, standing platforms keeps us in areas that are already “off-limits” to other user groups—not adding to impacts. Good snapper fishing at sites near mouth of river. Public comment: outreach with members of shrimping community, members of recreational fishing community; started in 2015. In 2016, George Melancon and Jeff Marx met with shrimpers in western LA. Concerns fell under several categories: “too many reefs, too much space”, “reefs in state waters” (mistaken impression), “availability of coordinates”, “types of materials/clearance”, “compensation for hangs”, “buoys”. Program developed answers: reef sites smaller than planning areas, no reefs in state waters in western LA, will provide coordinates to their sources of info, keep working with Sea Grant, base reefs around existing, standing platforms, try to keep in mind draft of vessels when establishing clearances, reefs are not hangs, will not likely be using buoys. Will try to do outreach at shrimpers’ meetings. No phone calls or emails. One call from report, positive comment. One question about Eugene Island area after planning areas were developed. “Ideal candidate”: with varying water depths, best start to reef site is the base of the structure—will meet clearance, even if top of jacket does not. There will be effort to enhance with additional materials. Dr. Twilley asked about Sea Grant’s involvement. M. McDonough answered that getting information to the local Sea Grant agents might help the shrimpers know what’s going on. Dr. Twilley: Sea Grant investing in an app, information for fishing offshore; how often are charts updated? M. McDonough: we update NOS every time we finish a project. P. Banks: enough public input? M. McDonough: I asked the Sea Grant agents, and they felt like we talked to a representative sample and that the process broadcast the info adequately—people who had concerns had ability to come forward. Dr. Twilley had concerns about charting and a lack of marking by buoys. M. McDonough answered that shrimp trawlers rely heavily on their GPS to navigate—as platforms disappear, they continue on same track, because they perceive the hang hazards to continue. Motion to pass, second, motion carries—Nearshore Planning Areas approved. P. Banks asks about whether there is any Commission notification—hadn’t happened previously, but a possibility. P. Banks mentions that he has text from Myron Fischer stating that there are 372 federally-permitted shrimpers in LA.

- 7) C. Gothreaux presents two inshore proposals. New reefs require decision from Council. St. John Reef, southwest part of Lake Pontchartrain. Partnering with CCA. Existing shell pad on site. Letter of support from St. John Parish. Pre-monitoring included poling for water depth and bottom type. Public meeting, 4 positive comments. Motion to approve passes. East Calcasieu—southeastern portion of Calcasieu, in the Public Oyster Seed Ground. Partnering with CCA. Relatively deep, relatively firm bottom. Planned to match acreage of Oyster Reefs—87 acres. Public meeting, 1 positive comment. Reef will be excluded from harvest by addition to Recreational Reefs rule. Motion to approve passes.

- 8) M. McDonough presents Special Artificial Reef Sites. In the early 1990s, there were opportunities to create reef sites that were outside the Planning Areas, namely Grand Isle 9 & South Timbalier 86. Both were popular fishing sites, ST-86 popular for diving. Program created Special Artificial Reef Sites (SARS) to be able to create these reef sites. SARS were seen as better option to creating new planning areas (very large). There are qualifying and mandatory criteria for creation, including removal of area developed from Planning Areas. 2008, SARS became controversial—removal of trawlable bottom. Individuals were coming to SARS comment meeting and ARC meetings and complaining the Program was taking up too much trawlable bottom. This, despite that fact that the Program was reefing platforms, shrimpers were avoiding platforms, and Program “gave back” equal area from Planning Areas. Program was reefing a lot of hurricane-topped structures. Part of the problem—hurricane-topped structures probably weren’t the right opportunity, not unusual. MMS enacted their own effective restriction on SARS in 2009 through a policy addendum to their Rigs-to-Reefs policy. In 2013, BSEE issued an interim policy document that lifted restriction on SARS but kept in place a restriction on reefing toppled structures. The Program has not taken even a proposal for a SARS for 8 years, and the percentage of structures we are reefing is decreasing. We have been approached by a decommissioning contractor with opportunity that would be difficult to accept if we have to tow the platforms. Also, nearshore planning areas don’t overlap a great deal with water depths favorable to red snapper. SARS would allow us to develop reefs sites in these areas. Offshore likely to have “good” reef sites we can’t accept. This is not an action item—looking for a decision at a future meeting. Included in proposal to lift moratorium would be update to guidelines: no reefing of toppled platforms, removal of higher-value shrimp area from planning areas. Dean D’Elia asks about timeframe. M. McDonough responds that Program will ask for public comment period of at least a month. Dr. Twilley asks about not reefing toppled platforms. M. McDonough responds that “toppled” in this context means unintentionally, so by storm or physical failure. The SARS moratorium was enacted by the Council, must be lifted by the Council. P. Banks asks whether toppled platforms could ever make good reefs. M. McDonough replied it’s *possible*, but a toppled structure is compromised itself and the work to plug and abandon the wells made things worse. D. Cresson thanked the Council, thanked the staff, spoke to advantages of partnerships. Jason Sullivan of Stone Energy spoke that leaving some structures in place would be good. Stone has taken structures to shore it couldn’t afford to take to reef sites.
- 9) Motion to adjourn, seconded, passed.