

MISSISSIPPI AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES TASK FORCE
Wednesday, January 26, 2005
9:00 a.m. – 11:55 a.m. CST

Minutes of Meeting

Participants: Phil Bass (MDEQ); Dale Diaz (MDMR); Tom Herrington (FDA/GoMP); Vernon Hartley and Brent Bailey (MS Farm Bureau); Craig Tucker and Jimmy Avery (MS State National Warmwater Aquaculture Center); Marilyn O’Leary (SARP/Louisiana Sea Grant); John Meyers (U.S. Coast Guard); Ron Lukens (Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission); Eric Dibble (MS State Department of Wildlife and Fisheries), Danny Davis (Sea Grant Law Center); Richard Campanella and Alysia Kravitz (Center for Bioenvironmental Research).

I. OPENING REMARKS AND INTRODUCTION

P. Bass discussed the need to develop a list of banned / restricted / approved species for the Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks (DWFP). The list is required by state statute and will also be important to the Task Force in the development of a Mississippi management plan. To date, DWFP has not developed the list due to the lack of input from outside the agency. It is hoped that this Task Force will serve as an outside advisory group. One of the goals for today’s meeting is to discuss this list.

P. Bass also provided an update on funding issues. Tulane submitted an estimate for the cost to complete the Mississippi management plan over the next 18 months. One-third of the money is already committed; the Gulf of Mexico Program may be able to provide another one-third. R. Lukens advised that DWFP might also be able to provide some funding.

II. STATUS AND PLANS FOR TODAY

R. Campanella reminded the group that the bottom line goal of this Task Force is the preparation of a Mississippi Aquatic Invasive Species Management Plan, and it is hoped that Mississippi can leverage off the Louisiana experience. Ultimately, the management plan will be submitted to Governor Barbour and then to the federal Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force.

The Task Force’s first meeting was in late October 2004. Members were surveyed as to their agency’s / organization’s involvements in this issue. R. Campanella and A. Kravitz provided a “tour” of the Louisiana plan, and they queried the Mississippi Task Force as to how the Louisiana plan might be altered. This query was the homework assignment.

III. DISCUSSION OF HOMEWORK RESPONSES

A. Kravitz lead a discussion of the homework responses regarding the Louisiana management plan and how it could be altered to fit Mississippi.

Question 1: Note how the invasive species problem is approached in Chapter 3—first from a “pathways” perspective, then from a “species” perspective, and then from the angle of “exacerbating circumstances.” Does this make sense for Mississippi? Would you advocate changing this approach or its emphases, and if so, why and how?

The overall response from the group indicated agreement to the “pathways,” “species,” and “exacerbating circumstances breakdown. Responders felt that consistency between adjacent states would be helpful for long-term management of invasive species. Another comment expressed concern that some of the species or pathways in the Louisiana plan may not be relevant to Mississippi, therefore the relative emphasis of these items should change.

Some Task Force members expressed concern about the definition of an “aquatic species,” primarily that they did not like the definition used by Louisiana. After much discussion, it was decided by consensus that Mississippi’s management plan will focus on (a) aquatic-based species, (b) aquatic-impacting species, and (c) aquatic pathways. This delineation will exclude agricultural pests, for example, which are not truly aquatic species, but will allow inclusion of species such as Chinese tallow trees.

The group also discussed the definition of “invasive species—should it be defined as a non-native species causing adverse impacts, or is there a better definition? After discussion, it was decided by consensus to use a traditional definition of “invasive,” but to allow some deviation from that definition on a “case-by-case” basis.

Question 2: Note the goals and objectives in Chapter 5. These reflect the decision of the Louisiana Task Force to prioritize for education first, then prevention and control, and lastly legislation, to tackle invasive species problems. What do you think of these goals and objectives?

The overall response from the group was that these goals and objectives are appropriate for Mississippi. Two comments from responders: the ranking / emphasis of the goals and objectives should be altered to reflect the priorities of the Mississippi Task Force, and another objective to combat most damaging and widespread species should be added to the management plan. After discussion, the group decided that this objective was redundant and should not be added, but that the ranking / emphasis of the goals and objectives should definitely be altered.

Question 3: Additional comments and recommendations

One additional comment suggested inviting members of the Legislature to join the Task Force. Louisiana's Task Force included one senator and one representative, and their input was invaluable. After some discussion the group agreed to pursue adding legislators to the task force membership. P. Bass asked Task Force members to recommend possible legislators.

In the homework, one member inquired about the target audience for the management plan. The group decided that the management plan should be accessible to all stakeholders.

Another comment received was that the Task Force should develop a plan to inform the public, particularly industry, of Task Force activities, and to disseminate the management plan. M. O'Leary stated that in due time the public will be informed but that will be accomplished once the plan is completed. P. Bass also stated that anyone else who may have interest in the group is welcome to attend the meetings.

A fourth homework comment was made in reference to invasive viruses, particularly those that may enter the food chain. A. Kravitz informed Task Force members that in Louisiana, viruses and other microbes were acknowledged, but since people and institutions are already in place to address them, the Louisiana group chose not to address microorganisms in their management plan. After some discussion, the group decided to include non-native viruses, particularly those with aquatic means and pathways that are potentially dangerous and of social concern, but state the degree to which they are monitored by other societal institutions.

The last comment received by homework responders addressed genetically modified organisms and whether they should be considered invasive species. After discussion, the group's consensus was to not address it at this time.

IV. VOTE ON PLAN EMPHASIS

In accordance with the homework suggestion and the group's agreement, the Task Force voted on the various emphases (prevention via education and outreach; prevention via regulation, early eradication and rapid response, and control / management) from the Louisiana plan in order to fit Mississippi's priorities. The group was instructed to distribute a total of 100 points for the four options. The results were as follows:

Prevention via education and outreach	48%
Prevention via regulation	15%
Early eradication and rapid response	18%
Control / Management	10%

These weights will influence the focus of the management plan, the recommended actions, and future activities of the Task Force.

V. DISCUSSION: PREPARATION OF APPROVED / RESTRICTED / BANNED LISTS

P. Bass stated that one of the Task Force's major "deliverables" over the next 18 months is to develop approved / restricted / banned species lists. DWFP is the responsible party for the list, as required by the state statute dated 1-21-1998. R. Campanella asked the following discussion questions:

1. What is the role of the task force in developing these lists?
2. What exactly are we approving, restricting or banning?
3. What is the approval process for DWFP?
 - *Public notice or participation
 - *Commission Approval
 - *Protocols/Decision Tree
 - *Some decisions may affect citizen's rights and livelihoods
 - *Process needs to be defensible due to legal implications and enforcement issues
4. Time frame required

5. How to determine list of species to be considered? Who keeps, maintains, and updates the list and how often?

Group discussion followed. The general consensus was to make recommendations for the three lists. R. Campanella recommended that a starting point for sorting aquatic species into the three lists is using USGS data on non-native aquatic species.

ACTION In February, R. Campanella and A. Kravitz will circulate the beginnings of a master list of species derived from USGS data. Task Force members may add aquatic species with which they are familiar.

At the next meeting, a decision tree will be proposed which would allow the group to route each of the species through a series of inquiries and categorize them as "approved," "restricted," or "banned."

P. Bass emphasized that the lists are not intended to be a cornerstone of the management plan, but are intended to help DWFP deal with the mandate. The lists will supplement the management plan. Creation and approval of the lists is a DWFP responsibility, so the Task Force will make its recommendations and DWFP will present to its commission what it recommends.

VI. FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, April 26, 2005, from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. CST. The meeting will be in the second floor conference room at the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources, Bolton State Office Building, located at 1141 Bayview Avenue in Biloxi.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 11:55 a.m. CST.

Respectfully submitted,

Phil Bass
Chairman, Mississippi Aquatic Invasive Species Task Force

Subject to Approval