

**MISSISSIPPI AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES TASK FORCE**  
**Wednesday, February 15, 2006**  
**9:15 a.m. – 11:45 a.m. CST**

**Minutes of Meeting**

**Participants:** Phil Bass (MDEQ); Dale Diaz (MDMR); Vernon Hartley (MS Farm Bureau); Rebecca Flores (MDMR); Jeff Clark (MDMR); Craig Tucker (MS State National Warm Water Aquaculture Center); Marilyn O’Leary (SARP/ Louisiana Sea Grant); Ron Lukens (Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission); Dennis Riecke (MDWFP); Alysia Kravitz Loshbaugh (Center for Bioenvironmental Research).

**I. OPENING REMARKS AND INTRODUCTION**

The meeting commenced at approximately 9:15 a.m.

P. Bass reminded the Task Force of its status prior to Hurricane Katrina, and that the original goal for completion of the management plan was July 2006, at which time it would be ready to present to the Governor’s office. This date is unrealistic, however, due to the devastation of the hurricane, so the group discussed, and it was agreed, that a new target date for management plan completion and submission to the Governor would be December 2006.

P. Bass also announced his retirement from MDEQ, effective April 2006. He will still participate in the task force, however, through his new role at the EPA Gulf of Mexico Program. P. Bass will work with MDEQ to find a suitable replacement, though there was some discussion over whether DEQ would remain the chair agency on the task force, or if this responsibility should be transferred to MDMR.

**II. WHERE WE ARE IN THE PROCESS**

A. Loshbaugh gave an overview of the management plan process thus far, and the current status of the plan.

- It was decided to define “aquatic species” in a three-tier system comprising (1) aquatic-based species, (2) aquatic-impacting species, and (3) aquatic-associated pathways. These tiers will determine how species are organized in the management plan.
- It was decided to include “native transplant” species (species native to the U.S. and southeast region but not to Mississippi.) R. Lukens suggested that “native transplant” also include species that may be native to the northern portion of the state but not to the coastal region, and vice versa.
- It was decided to include non-native viruses, bacteria, and parasites, particularly stressing those that may arrive in ballast water or via other aquatic pathways.
- The task force voted to make education / outreach the primary objective in the management plan, followed by control and management, early eradication, and lastly regulation.

Regarding the Approved / Restricted / Banned species lists, A. Loshbaugh reminded the group that at the last meeting (April 2005), the task force decided the following:

- The lists should be very inclusive and include both fresh- and salt-water species.
- The **Approved List** will comprise all species native to Mississippi and nonnative species found to be benign or beneficial. The “benign” or “beneficial” classification will be based on the results of a scientific risk assessment.
- The **Restricted List** will include species approved for aquaculture and/or that require a permit for possession / sale / use / transport / etc.
- The **Prohibited List** will comprise certain species already known to be invasive (example: all snakehead species). In general, all nonnative species not already on the “approved” or “restricted” lists will be placed on the prohibited list. For a species to be removed from the prohibited list and placed on one of the other two lists, it must undergo a scientific risk analysis.

It was decided that these lists would be placed in an appendix and referenced in the management plan text, as necessary and appropriate. The task force agreed that the lists it develops should be “the lists” for the entire state and all its agencies. The task force will make this recommendation in the “Management Actions” section of the plan.

**ACTION:** R. Campanella and A. Loshbaugh will sort the USGS species list (compiled and distributed to membership before meeting) into the three lists using the above definitions. The sorted lists will be circulated to the Task Force for approval. Any species about which R. Campanella and A. Loshbaugh have no knowledge or incomplete knowledge will be placed on a fourth “unknown” list and will be sorted by the Task Force at a later date.

The task force members then discussed whether to include methodologies for scientific risk assessment in the management plan. The general consensus was to not include specific methodologies, as different methods may be appropriate or inappropriate, depending on the species and available technology. It was decided to emphasize Risk Assessment is a requirement for new non-native species, but development of Risk Assessment guidelines will be included in the "Management Actions" section of the plan, to be completed at a later date, after completion of the management plan.

For Rapid Response portion of the management plan, it was decided that we should use the Gulf Regional Panel's Rapid Response Plan as a guideline, but to not include step-by-step instructions in the Mississippi management plan. References to Rapid Response will be woven throughout the plan as necessary, but the management plan writers will determine its appropriate location in the Table of Contents and the plan as a whole.

### **III. DISCUSSION: IMPACT OF KATRINA ON INVASIVE SPECIES IN MISSISSIPPI AND HOW THE HURRICANE SHOULD AFFECT THE MANAGEMENT PLAN**

A group discussion commenced on how Hurricane Katrina affected the coast. D. Diaz voiced a concern of invasive species perhaps being spread not just through the movement of debris, but also through the movement of construction equipment. The hurricane created some disturbed habitat that could be hospitable to invasive species, but the heavy-duty equipment being used to clean up debris is causing worse damage than the storm. He fears it may drastically increase the amount of disturbed habitat and increase the chance than an invasive could become established.

D. Diaz gave an update on the Giant Salvinia infestation present in the lower Pascagoula drainage, prior to the storm. The storm surge left some salvinia biomass on land, and there was a significant amount of salt water pushed into the area. Surveys have shown that the salvinia populations are reduced in these areas, but it may have been pushed further north in the drainage and not all killed off by the saltwater. He and others at MDMR are applying for a grant to work with USGS to map the Giant Salvinia distribution, post-Katrina.

Other hurricane-related concerns include aquaculture. Many culturing facilities may have been flooded or otherwise damaged during the storm. Red crawfish growers say that 40% of their crop was killed by the salt-water intrusion in the crawfish ponds, but the exact kill figures are unknown, and many of the crawfish could have escaped the ponds and are surviving in other waterbodies.

It was noted that there currently is no disaster response plan for aquaculture facilities growing non-native species. Some members of the task force suggested that perhaps there should be a regulation stating that aquaculture facilities growing non-native species and that are located in the flood plan must kill their product before a major storm. This may not be feasible, however (sometimes storm turn at the last minute,) and some natural disasters may occur without warning (tornado, earthquake, etc.)

Task force members recommended that after any major event, such as Katrina, that a Rapid Assessment be conducted to determine what species are alive in the affected areas, and to determine if anything appears to be expanding its range or perhaps escaped from a nearby aquaculture facility.

**ACTION:** R. Campanella and A. Loshbaugh will prepare a first draft of the Mississippi Management Plan and circulate it to the Task Force membership prior to the next meeting.

### **IV. AQUATIC NUISANCE SPECIES STATE AUTHORITIES**

A handout of PowerPoint slides prepared by the MS-AL Sea Grant Legal Program was distributed to the group to read over and discuss. The handout outlined the responsibility of state agencies as pertaining to aquatic invasive species. Agencies included in the outline were MDWFP, MDMR, MDAC, MDEQ, and MDoH.

Discussion followed as to individual agency authority as outlined by current laws and regulations. Task force members pointed out the absence of the MS Department of Transportation (MDOT.) Members agreed that MDOT should be included because they have jurisdiction over rights-of-way next to road and highways, which are pathways for invasive species. Another area that needs to be addressed is the port system, as that may serve as a pathway for a new species as well.

M. O'Leary suggested that federal agencies should be included too, and that the federal laws/regulations portion of the Louisiana management plan would likely suffice for this, since the federal laws and regulations haven't changed.

**V. CLOSING REMARKS AND FUTURE MEETINGS**

P. Bass suggested the end of the 2006 calendar year for a draft management plan to be ready for presentation to the Governor's office. A first rough draft will be ready in three to four months and will be circulated to task force members before the next meeting.

The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, June 14, 2006, from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. CST. The meeting will be at the Mississippi Farm Bureau Office in Jackson.

**ACTION:** V. Hartley will email the task force membership with directions to the Mississippi Farm Bureau, and suggestions for hotel accommodations for those that may require an overnight stay.

**VI. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 11:45 a.m. CST.

Respectfully submitted,

Phil Bass  
Chairman, Mississippi Aquatic Invasive Species Task Force

Subject to Approval