

SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Webinar

September 30, 2024

Transcript

Executive Committee Members

Trish Murphey, Chair
Jessica McCawley, Vice Chair
Dr. Carolyn Belcher

Kerry Marhefka
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John Carmichael
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Attendees and Invited Participants

Rick DeVictor
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Observers and Participants

Other observers and participants attached.

The Executive Committee of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council convened via webinar on Monday, September 30, 2024, and was called to order by Mr. Kelly Klasnick.

MR. KLASNICK: All right. Welcome, everybody, to the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council Executive Committee. I appreciate everyone's patience as we wrapped up the first agenda item in the closed session, and I'm just going to go through and get the committee members unmuted here. People are still coming over. All right, Madam Chair, and Ms. Jessica McCawley is going to run things for us today, because Trish Murphey was not able to make it, and, Jessica, I'm taking a look here, and it looks like all the committee members are online, and so, whenever you're ready to get us started.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks. All right. I believe we already approved the agenda in the closed session, since it's partially closed and partially open, and then, John, one more time, do we have minutes that need to be approved or not?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, we have minutes, and, Kelly, did you send them out probably in the stuff?

MR. KLASNICK: Yes, and there was the prior ExCom, and it was about a year ago, but they were in the briefing materials, and so, yes, there are minutes for approval.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Great. Are there any modifications, or changes, to those minutes?

MR. KLASNICK: I am seeing no hands.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. Any objection to approval of the minutes?

MR. KLASNICK: No hands.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. We will consider the minutes approved. We've already done the personnel and budget component in closed session, and I'm going to pass it over to John and Kelly to do the open session budget review.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Okay. Thank you, Jessica. Kelly will bring up the presentation and walk us through it.

MR. KLASNICK: All right. Very good. The only thing I would note, for the record, related to the agenda, is, you know, we had published this out before the council held its elections here at the recently-concluded September meeting, and so, just for the public, Trish Murphey is now the chair, and so that would make her normally the chair of this committee, and Jessica McCawley is now the vice chair of the council, which would then typically make her vice chair of this committee, and, as I indicated earlier, Trish was not able to join us, and so Jessica is running things for us today, which we appreciate.

All right, and so we're going to start off here today just taking a walk through Attachment 2a on the briefing materials, and you may want to refer to the budget table, as we're talking through this, Attachment 2b here, and, just to orient everybody on this attachment, so this is reflecting -- This first column is reflecting the 2025 proposed budget that we're going to look at here. The middle

column reflects the 2024 budget that was passed by the council last year, prior to moving into our calendar year budget, and this column is showing you what has been expended through the time that the materials were put together for the briefing book, and so you've got numbers through 8/31/2024.

Then just the final column is just showing you the percentage of each one of those budget categories, and where the council currently stands, and so the short is, you know, things are looking good, as far as through 8/31, where we're expended, compared to where are moving through the budget year, and things are looking in good shape, but we'll take a little more detailed look at that. If folks have questions, or comments, on the committee, please, you know, just go ahead and raise your hand, and we'll keep things moving that way.

All right, and so, taking a look at 2024, just a reminder that we had budgeted -- The council had approved a \$5.9 million budget for that fiscal year, which, you know, again, the council runs on a calendar year, and we operate with the federal government operating on that, you know, October 1 through September 30, but the numbers that we're putting out here for everybody are January 1 through 12/31.

Our funding that had come through was about \$4.15 million, which was, you know, essentially flat, and you can see a less than a half percent increase there. The council also agreed to allocate \$100,000 of that \$4.15 million back to the Regional Office, based on a request to help with a software project on the wreckfish initiative, and so that was done, and the allocation that came to the council, you know, was reduced by that amount.

As the table shows, we're about 50 percent expended through August, which, you know, puts us in good shape overall. There are still, you know, some costs, that we'll talk about later, that, you know, have not hit yet, that we know will be coming through, and that tends to skew those numbers a little bit lower at this time of the year.

We talk a lot about, you know, the variable costs, and we're going to take a look at the activities schedule, but it's really that travel component is, you know, really our most difficult item to anticipate. We put a lot of effort into trying to plan out, you know, the next year, but circumstances arise, and things change, and some meetings happen, and some don't happen, and that type of thing, which really leads to a lot of variability in that portion of the budget, which are going to be all those, you know, travel categories. If you're looking at the table, you know, the travel incorporates the meeting expenses, to some extent, those types of things, and so it's really depending upon how those events occur, as opposed to how they were planned, and that can often have a big impact on a good portion of the budget.

As we're going through and just looking at the expenses, you know, some things will stand out for me from time to time, and I call them out on occasion here, but, you know, one thing that was interesting is the council had moved locations for the Georgia meeting, you know, basically in the same general area, but from one facility to another, and, you know, I was just kind of caught by how substantial the savings were, but moving, you know, from that Westin location to the Villas, and, you know, it ended up being almost about a 20 percent savings.

Now, you know, there are some other variables, and, you know, maybe there weren't quite as many attendees, and so there could be a few other things there, but, you know, the location can have a

pretty big impact on those costs, and we acknowledge that, you know, cost is not the only factor in determining what's a suitable meeting space, but it certainly works out nicely whenever it can meet the council's needs to meet in a location and potentially be a little bit of a less expensive one.

You're still seeing, you know, vendor increases, and not at the rate that I had seen come through in 2023. You know, certainly I think most of our vendors are trying to catch up with that inflationary environment that everybody has been dealing with, and a lot of them pushed through, you know, some substantial, and some not so substantial, increases in 2023, but I'm not seeing that trending nearly as aggressively in 2024, and so good news there, but we're still seeing, you know, some increases, certainly.

One pleasant surprise that came out of 2024 was we were able to renew the healthcare for council staff, and it was at a no increase, which is very unusual, and, actually, it actually decreased just slightly, and so, you know, I wish I had a magic answer for that, but that market is very hard to predict. We typically build-in about a 10 percent increase into the budget, which is, you know, what was essentially done again this year, but, last year, you know, things worked out really well, and we were able to renew, to keep the benefits stable, with, you know, no decreases, and we didn't have to change providers, and they just came in with a really good price, and so we'll take it, basically, and we'll see what 2025 brings.

The IRS, they increase the mileage a little over 2 percent, and, you know, that is a fairly large expense for us, given all the driving travel that we have in our region, and they have not put out the number for 2025 yet, and so we'll see where that comes in.

I mentioned that we do still have a good bit of contractual items that the council is committed to that we have not paid yet, and so that 50 percent expended number -- It is a good trend, and it shows that we are, you know, managing our expenses, I think, well, and the council is doing a good job of watching its balance sheet, but there are still a lot of contracted items that are going to be coming due in these last few months of the year, or possibly extending into 2025, that will, you know, bring that spend number up.

I don't think it's going to get to the budgeted number, and I don't see that happening, which is a good thing, but it's definitely going to come up as we move through these last three months of the year, which leads me into the next bullet item, which is the council, you know, operates, or has historically operated, on a five-year budget cycle, and then the stipulations of that permit what is referred to as a no-cost extension.

In this line item, you're seeing a twelve-month extension is permitted for items that the council had planned to complete in the prior grant cycle, which it was running from 2020 to 2024, but was not able to accomplish for, you know, various reasons, whether it was data availability, or partners, you know, were working on other things, and there's a whole litany of reasons as to why something could have been planned and not been able to get done, but the stipulations of our grant permit us to extend items up to one year, if they were planned and not completed, and so we're going to, you know, take advantage of that, with a lot of this work that -- Some of it is currently being done, and some of it may not have been to get started, but, if it can be done in the next twelve months, then that is eligible to be included in the extension, and council staff is working on the details of that extension now, and that will need to be submitted basically by the end of October to the grants office for review and approval.

Another item that we had talked about, going into 2024, that we were able to accomplish was getting the files server, the physical files server here at the office, completed, and so it was good news to get that item done and get that expense booked against, you know, this current grant cycle that we're dealing with, and so that should set up, for IT, hopefully for the next several years on that stuff. All right, and I will pause there, if there's any questions from the committee on the 2024 recap. Again, that's going back to this middle column here. You will see that we had budgeted out a \$5.9 figure, and we're about halfway through that, through August. I am not seeing any hands, and so we're going to continue on.

Looking at 2025, which is also contained in that same budget table, in this first column over here, and you'll see the main categories broken out, the personnel and the fringe, travel, supplies, contractual, and other.

Based on the numbers that we've worked out, we've got a \$5.4 million budget. Now, one thing I will point out is that \$5.4 figure includes items that are anticipated in that twelve-month extension that I mentioned on the previous slide, and so I think it's important, you know, for folks to be aware that this is not all, you know, new money that we're expecting to come in, and it's because we are going to have some funds available, both contracted items and just staff time, and travel, and meeting expenses, that were not able to be done in the last five years that we're working into this 2025 budget number, which is, really, the majority of the reason why we're seeing the \$5.4 number there, as opposed to the more traditional, you know, around \$4 million budget number that we would see.

A couple other items just to highlight for everybody, that are included in those 2025 numbers, right now, the anticipation is that there will be a 2 percent across-the-board federal pay raise. That's not final, but that is what is in the news, and that is what the President has proposed, and, barring, you know, Congress taking some other action to do something differently, which they certainly could do, it's anticipated that there would be this 2 percent across-the-board pay raise, and so that's included in there.

We have the per diem, which these are the amounts that travelers that are traveling under the council's authorization are eligible to claim each day, depending upon location, and they can claim a certain expense amount for travel, and, you know, the council reimburses that, for those authorized travelers that are conducting business on behalf of the council, and, even though we had a couple of high inflationary years, because of the way they calculate these per diem rates at the federal level, there was quite a lag, and, you know, we weren't seeing any increases the last couple of years, really, in them, but that has now caught up a bit, and so, in 2025, I have them listed here by each one of the four states that we do, you know, the vast majority of our travel in, and you will see pretty much double-digit increases across-the-board, with Georgia coming in at 9 percent.

Those numbers are -- Those new numbers are included in the estimates for this 2025 budget. Whenever the activities schedule is built out, I put those new numbers, because there were available, in there, and so those are some pretty substantial increases, and, as we know, travel makes up a large portion of the council's budget, and so we'll have to keep an eye on these per diem rates, and, if they continue to, you know, trend like this, it could definitely have an impact down the road. I'm not seeing any need to make any big, drastic changes in 2025, but, as you're

going to see, our allocation doesn't increase by a percent, you know, if we're fortunate, and here we're seeing, you know, 16 percent increases in per diems, which are a large expenses for the council, and so that's something we'll be keeping an eye on.

I mentioned increases, and although, you know, we had the healthcare, which was fantastic news, coming in at basically no increase, we were able to renew our internet contract, which is not a huge expense, but it was just nice to see something that we were able to get a decrease in, and so we'll take them where we can get them, for sure.

I talked a little bit about the prior cycle extension, and so that is included in the numbers that were put in the briefing materials, and that's why you're seeing a bit of a bump in that 2025 number, compared to what we would have historically seen, because of that carryover work that we're hoping to get done in 2025. We're still seeing a few price increases, but, again, not trending nearly as high as they were in 2023, and so hopefully that will continue.

When we built-out the activities schedule, you know, we pretty much returned to business as usual, as far as a lot of in-person meetings, but there's no doubt that a lot of work is getting accomplished in a virtual environment, which, from a budgetary standpoint at least, is night and day, compared to holding an in-person meeting, and so as much of those that make sense for the council to do, and it can be effective, it's certainly good on the budget side of things.

I've started putting this Federal Register notice trend, and I just think it's real high-level snapshot of kind of the volume of work, I guess, from a meetings standpoint, and we all know that there's a lot of other things that go into them than just the meetings, but I just think it's kind of interesting to see where it's happening year-to-year, and I will also point out that we are holding this meeting about a month, or even a month-and-a-half, earlier than we have in the past, and so these numbers are, you know, from earlier in the year, but you can kind of see where they were trending at least in 2024, whenever this was put together, in early September.

Our typical process, you know, is to walk through this with the committee at this meeting. If everybody is, you know, good with it, we'll get a draft motion, and we'll put that on the table for the Full Council in December, to push this budget through, and, of course, if there's some, you know, dramatic change, or unanticipated change, that comes through from a funding standpoint, then we would raise, you know, that back to the council, and, if we needed to make adjustments, then, you know, we would do so, because this is all based on the guidance that we had received at the time this was created, which, you know, is essentially pretty much a flat, to maybe less than a percent increase, in our allocation for 2025, but, again, if there was some big change, or we got notified otherwise, you know, the council can always reopen this, and we would make adjustments as needed, but hopefully that won't be the case.

We don't talk a lot about, you know, the SEDAR component, because they have their own, you know, steering committee, but their travel is included in this budget, because the money does come in with our main admin grant, and so we put it on there just to keep track of it that way, and their travel tends to be even more variable than the council's, and so we usually end up making some updates to that, but, again, if it's anything that would be significant, that would really flow through the SEDAR Steering Committee, and they would have to make adjustments, if they're having issues, you know, within their allocated amount.

Then, as always, you know, we monitor this, and, you know, Suzanna, on the team here, does a great job of producing monthly reports for us to keep an eye on how things are moving throughout the year, and, if there was anything that was, you know, raising concern, of course, we would bring that back to the council, as needed.

We added this slide in this year, and we just thought it was kind of interesting and to help, you know, folks -- To just bring it into perspective, and so what you're looking at is -- You know, we just did this for the last couple of years, and we didn't really put in the COVID years, because the travel was so suppressed those years that it really wasn't a good reflection on how we typically spend, but what you're looking at is you've got -- The award amount means, you know, that is the revenue, at least from, you know, the main sources that had come in to the council, in each one of those years.

In 2022, you're at \$4.2 million. In 2023, you're at a little over \$4.3 million, and then the budgeted column shows, you know, what the council had approved to spend in those years, and you can see, you know, an increase in 2023, and that's reflective of, again, work that wasn't able to be done, you know, during some of those shutdown years, and trying to shift that work, and get some contractors in to help catch up on some of that work, and then the last column, you know, shows what actually ends up being expended, and, you know, the variance there -- There can be a lot of reasons on it, but, if you look at the numbers, it always comes back, pretty much, to the travel and the meetings.

We estimate those out, based on who we think is going to be there, and which meetings we think are going to happen, and then, as the year plays out, you know, the reality comes in often differently, and, luckily, lower, and so that's a good problem to have.

All right, and so, shifting a little bit, there was a lot of effort, and attention, given to the Inflation Reduction Act efforts, and proposals, and everything that went into, you know, trying to get those funds allocated to the various councils, and, just as a refresh, the council had originally submitted a request for about \$3.4 million, and, as of at least the publication of these materials, funding had finally come in in the amount of about \$990,000.

There is still the possibility of additional funding of projects, and John probably has more on this than I do, but we have actually in-hand was primarily related to this climate resiliency and preparedness initiative, which is -- It was \$375,000, plus some add-on projects, and that gets you up to that \$990,000, and the timeline on this was 2024 to 2026, but, you know, funding was only received about a month or so ago, and so that has, you know, obviously impacted the progress on that. I don't know if you have anything else, John. You've been much closer to --

MR. CARMICHAEL: Kelly, that's a good summary, and we have submitted a revision for the project that was going to look at updating EFH in response to potential species shifts, and so that's up with NMFS now for the next-level review. That's the one we have, and the one we've submitted was the -- I'm trying to remember the other project we were looking at. Oh, it was the data-limited species. That was the one that I was going to highlight that we sent in, and so we were looking at applying data-limited methods to a couple of stocks, to develop catch level information, you know, data-limited stock assessment approaches.

We submitted the one to look at either rock shrimp or wreckfish, is what we've submitted, and so that's up there with NMFS now, for the next review, and we think that we've cleared out the issues with that, and so that should be going through, and hopefully, before too long, we'll have the funding on that, and that leaves two projects that we're still working on, and one is to look at communities, and how we interact with communities, and dealing with their issues with climate change, sea level rise, infrastructure, that sort of thing, and we're still trying to get that. Really, the issue is getting it aligned with the funding criteria here, which has to be related to climate change, and it has to result in the council taking action.

Then a slightly smaller project, which is to contract out making progress on various things that came from the scenario planning, and that one I anticipate sending up to NMFS probably this week. Chip and I have just been kind of working out the final funding details on that, and how we want to budget for that, and, you know, what we think is the best way just to get someone to get that work done, but it would be looking at four or five or so of the action items that came out of the scenario planning process, and so we're still working on that.

NMFS doesn't anticipate another broad funding RFP going out on this, but they are working with each individual council to finalize their remaining projects, which we certainly hope to have all of this done, and maybe money in hand, by the end of the year, so we can get moving on these.

MR. KLASNICK: All right. Thank you, John. All right, Madam Chair. That's all I had on that agenda item. Any questions, or comments, from the committee? All right. I am not seeing any hands, and, Jessica, would you like me to move forward with Item Number 3 on the agenda? John. Sorry.

MR. CARMICHAEL: I was just going to say, before, Jessica --

MS. MCCAWLEY: Do we need a motion?

MR. CARMICHAEL: If someone would make a motion to approve the draft 2025 budget.

MS. DUKES: **I make a motion to approve that as a budget for 2025.**

MR. CARMICHAEL: There we go.

MS. DUKES: Thanks.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Is that your motion?

MS. DUKES: **I make a motion to approve the draft 2025 operational budget, as presented and modified.**

MS. MARHEFKA: Second.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Motion by Amy, and seconded by Kerry. Any more discussion on this?

MR. KLASNICK: I am seeing no hands, Jessica.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay. **Any objections?**

MR. KLASNICK: I'm not seeing any.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. **Then we will consider this motion approved.**

MR. CARMICHAEL: Thank you.

MR. KLASNICK: Thank you. Okay. Jessica, are you good if I move on to Number 3 here?

MS. MCCAWLEY: Yes, please.

MR. KLASNICK: All right. Thank you. All right, and so I talked a little bit about variables that make up, you know, a big portion of the expense profile of the budget, and a lot of that is, you know, the travel, and so the tool that we use -- We refer to it as the activities schedule, which is, you know, basically a list of the main meetings, and events, that, you know, the council, whether it's all the council, some of the council, different segments, APs, all the various workgroups, and we try to put those in here, as best as we can estimate for 2025, and then that helps build-out those travel items on the budget profile, and so we don't typically, you know, go through this line-by-line or anything like that, and a lot of it is, you know, very similar to prior years.

You have the four main council meetings, of course, and then you have the typical advisory panels that meet on, you know, a fairly regular scheduled basis, and then, if there are, you know, items that -- Whether it's come directly from the council, or whether, you know, John, or some of the other staff here, know our initiatives that are being looked at, and we'll include them on this plan, so that we can at least get them into that budget, so we can see if, you know, we need to make any adjustments or anything along those lines.

Based on the way this played out, you know, we're not anticipating needing to make any kind of radical adjustments to what was proposed, and so I guess I'll just open it to the committee, if they have any specific questions about any items that they see on here or anything along those lines.

All right. I'm not seeing any hands on that, and, you know, certainly, if you guys are working through any of this, and you have, you know, questions, you can let us know, but it is still a good tool. It's not perfect, but it at least gives us somewhere to get those numbers going, and then it gives us an idea of how we do year-to-year, based on what we anticipate spending as compared to what we do actually end up spending. Okay, and so we'll move on to the workplan, and I'll bring that up here.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, and so this is very similar, and a bit streamlined and cleaned up, to what we present at the end of each council meeting, but it extends out to cover the full next administrative grant period, and so 2025 through 2028, and we put this together as a tool for preparing that admin grant, so that we could go from, you know, the workplan that -- As far as it carried out in the last couple of meetings, but also then looking at the SEDAR schedule, to know what assessments are coming up, because a big part of the workplan is responding to assessments that are scheduled.

We use this to draft the narrative and the things that we'll work on in the next five-year grant, and so I wanted to share this with you guys, just to give you this longer-term view of what's on our plan, and, you know, really the details of the specific fisheries management actions that are included in the next admin grant that we submitted.

As you can see, there's a very full workload in 2025 and 2026, and it gets to be a little bit more manageable, at least in the long-term view, of looking at 2027, but, if you go down in the first column there, in Column C, you can see all the various things that are planned to be worked on by the council over the next several years, and so a number of assessment responses, and there's also things in there that I know that we're just getting started on, like the commercial fisheries issues, which is down there in Row 27, and we've got the deepwater coral HAPC, if that should come up to be discussed. Then bycatch reporting methodology update, which will come up at some time, and so, you know, all of these things need to be considered, need to be planned for, and we need to make space on the schedule.

One of the things that will certainly help us a lot, in terms of not just spending time, you know, keeping the trains running and dealing with changing catch levels and such from assessments, is that we can get to a place where a lot of those amendments are done more efficiently, without taking the full number of meetings that you see, the full almost year-and-a-half to two years, to get that worked out, and that's certainly something that staff is in contact with the Regional Office, to think about ways -- You know, a better use of things like the abbreviated framework, as it's called, and other things, to be able to just make adjustments to fishing levels pretty efficiently and then give the council the opportunity to really spend more detailed discussions on the things that make bigger changes within our fisheries.

Since we put this together for the five-year grant, I thought it would be very helpful to share this with you guys, so that, at least from the Executive Committee, you've got a good, bird's eye view of what is on our horizon, and, as I said, it really surprised me how we quickly moved beyond the next admin grant period, just by looking at what was already on the docket, as well as what's already on the SEDAR assessment schedule.

With that, I just, you know, put it out there, so that you can see it. If you've got any specific questions, you know, I would certainly be glad to take them, but, you know, as you know, what we will continue to do is each year refine it, and each meeting update it, based on the progress, and this spreadsheet of doom, as we like to call it, continues to be a useful tool for the staff and council to see what's on the horizon, and to particularly know when -- If something new comes up, how do we fit it into the schedule, and what sacrifices have to be made.

MR. KLASNICK: Any questions, or comments, on this workplan? All right. I am not seeing any hands from the committee. All right, and so, bringing us back to the agenda, Jessica, I believe that takes us to Other Business.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks, Kelly, and thanks, John. Okay, Executive Committee. Any other business to come before this meeting today?

MR. KLASNICK: I am not -- Amy.

MS. DUKES: Madam Chair, not necessarily for this particular agenda, but you had mentioned, earlier, a quick check-in, and is it appropriate for us to do that during an open session like this, from a standpoint of post-Hurricane Helene?

MS. MCCAWLEY: I would love to do that, but, John or Kelly, is it okay for us to have a discussion about storm damage?

MR. CARMICHAEL: Yes, I think that would be fine, you know, particularly as some of that could certainly affect our activities, and so, yes, I think that would be fine, Madam Chair.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Amy, I'm going to pass it to you.

MS. DUKES: I was actually more curious to hear, from your perspective, how things are in Florida. South Carolina did fare decently, compared to some of our sister states to the north and south. We had areas of tornadic activity that probably handled -- That did most of the damage, and we have several of our heritage preserves, and our wildlife management areas, that remain closed to the public, because of downed trees and powerlines.

The Marine Resources Division here in Charleston was without power until late Friday night. We had several downed oak trees that actually prevented staff from even getting to the property, and so we didn't work on Friday, because we couldn't get here, but, from an overall standpoint, South Carolina fared well, post this storm, and I'm curious to see how Florida and Georgia, and then I wish Trish was on here, from a North Carolina perspective, because what we're seeing coming out of Chimney Rock and Asheville and Hendersonville is -- It's tough to see.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks, Amy. I would love to hear about North Carolina as well. In Florida, I would say we're still assessing the damage. I've seen some drone footage of Cedar Key and Steinhatchee, and it's not good, and, if you haven't heard, before the storm, Cedar Key, there at the waterfront, experienced a big fire, and then it was hammered from the storm after the fire, and so Cedar Key doesn't look good, and Steinhatchee doesn't look good, but we are still trying to assess that.

Tallahassee was, I will say, spared again. We do have staff, including myself, that have some damage to their homes in Tallahassee, but, really, the worst damage, other than those coastal areas I was talking about, and so Pinellas County had record historic flooding in that area, and we have a number of staff that work at FWRI, and I want to say that the count, as of Friday morning, was thirty staff in that area with homes flooded, and I think that the SERO office -- Maybe the number was ten, on people at the SERO office that had homes flooded.

Also, our staff that are to the east of Tallahassee, and so think kind of the Lake City area, that region of the state, there are a number of staff members that also experienced flooding, or trees on their homes, et cetera, and there is other areas, like Perry, Florida, where we also have some staff in and around those areas, where we're talking, you know, the third storm that's hit there in the past eighteen months, and so I would say we're still assessing, but early reports from Friday were significant damage to FWC staff members, law enforcement, and non-sworn members' homes, and then I reported out the little bit that I had learned about the SERO office staff, that there were ten of those.

I hope to have some additional information as we try to assess the fishing community impacts as well, and so we're starting on that this morning. We had some reports from over the weekend, but we're preparing the information for a fisheries disaster request. Carolyn, what do you want to add from Georgia?

DR. BELCHER: Let's see. So we're still dealing with a lot of power outages, even here in the coastal area. The inner counties are -- There is more devastation to the inner counties than we know about. Our full department is very involved in it, between parks people, whether it's evacuees, and they had some folks from Florida come up and stay with them before the storm hit, or just helping with -- They've got chainsaw crews all over the place, trying to help with getting rid of trees and all of that, and LE is involved.

All in all, we were lucky. A lot of limbs and trees down, and, yes, water damage was not what they were -- They were telling us to prepare for one to two-foot of storm surge, but we didn't really get that aspect of it, and so we were lucky there. We did have three commercial shrimp boats down at City Dock, which was next to Bryan Fluech's place there on Bay Street, that two of the boats are sunk, and one is severely damaged, because of the winds and all and the river.

I mean, all in all, the coastal folks -- I think we fared well. The western side of the state did not -- It had its hit, but it did not get hit as hard as they were expecting in the Albany area, I think similar to what Tallahassee had. They were bracing for the worst, and, actually, it was not as bad as it could have been, and so, yes, all in all, we're still cleaning up. Georgia Power is working real hard out here, and we were down for -- The power came back up yesterday, in late afternoon, for us, and so it was three days down, almost.

The office is still down, and we're actually closed today and tomorrow, and we were closed Thursday and Friday. None of our boats were damaged. There was a little bit of damage on the roof to our marine services building out back, where the wind just caught and pulled the roof up a little bit, but at least no water damage, and so, all in all, lucky. It could have been a lot worse.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Kerry, do you have anything that you want to add about storm damage?

MS. MARHEFKA: Just we are incredibly lucky here in Charleston. I didn't hear anything about anything happening with our fleet, and just thoughts and prayers out to our western neighbors, who are having just a really much rougher time, but we were incredibly lucky this time, and so I'm thankful for that.

MS. MCCAWLEY: John, do you have anything that you want to add about council staff, or the council office, or anything else you know about the SERO office and folks in that area?

MR. CARMICHAEL: I haven't heard any more about SERO than what you had, just like you said, and the number of people that got flooded. Some of them were severe, and it certainly will have impacts on folks, and our thoughts are with them. As far as here, everybody is good. Nothing major. I will say, hearing about the power outages and stuff, there was definitely a lot more power outages from this, I think, than they were expecting out of it. We probably had half the staff that didn't have power, but most folks -- I think everybody is back on by now, which is good, but, yes, it's certainly been devastating out in the western parts of the states, and it's incredible what that water can do out there in the mountainous areas, for sure.

DR. BELCHER: I just wanted to let you know that I've been texting Trish, and she just left the vet school, and so she's going to try to see if she can call in.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Okay. We'll listen for her. We've got a few minutes.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Sounds good. I appreciate the storm updates that we have so far, and I agree that thoughts are prayers with everybody that was impacted.

MR. KLASNICK: Yes, and just appreciation -- I know there are so many meetings, and things like that, but I appreciate the committee being able to still get on here for this today, and to keep things moving, as we had, you know, communicated to the public, and so I definitely appreciate everybody being able to make that happen while we're all -- While everybody is dealing with, if not direct impacts, indirect impacts from coworkers and friends and family and those things, and so -- I don't know if we want to give Trish a minute, to see if she is coming on, or she might not know we're almost wrapping up here.

DR. BELCHER: I'm texting her, and so she's going to try. I told her we were in the open session.

MR. KLASNICK: Okay. We'll give it a minute here and see.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Okay.

DR. BELCHER: I did have to say, Jessica, I saw the video of that water barrier they put up around the Tampa hospital. That was pretty amazing.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I haven't seen that.

DR. BELCHER: It's like an aqua wall, I think they called it, and it just basically, you know, looks almost like a cofferdam-type setup around the hospital, and it kept the water back.

MS. MCCAWLEY: No, I did not see that at all. That's interesting.

MR. KLASNICK: Well, I'm not seeing Trish on here, Jessica, and so I don't know how you want to -- If you want to wrap it up or --

MS. MCCAWLEY: Carolyn, do you --

MR. KLASNICK: Hold on. I'm sorry. She's popping in here now. Maybe we can get a North Carolina update. Hi, Trish. Welcome to the webinar. We see you were able to join us. We were just kind of going around, at the state level, and folks were giving some updates on your storm damage, and impacts, and we don't want to put you on the spot, but if you had anything that you wanted to share, and we're kind of on the Other Business item here.

MS. MURPHEY: As far as North Carolina, we're -- On the coast, we're fine. We got a fair amount of rain, and some wind, and probably what's worse is Charlotte way, and, of course, the mountains of western North Carolina. It's pretty much widespread cellphone outages, lots of --

Let's see. I-40 has had washouts, and I-26 has had washouts, and I think, on the news, I saw at least thirty people are dead, and 600 or so people are missing. Let's see.

We've got our swiftwater team up, VMS swiftwater team up that way, and the Wildlife Resources Commission has got their swiftwater team up working. There's a lot of devastation. A lot of the small towns are just gone, and I don't know if you've seen stuff online. Chimney Rock is gone, and I think there's a lot of damage to Blowing Rock and downtown Asheville. Weaverville, and that's where my mountain cousins are, and my mom did get in touch with them, and everybody seems to be okay, though we had one house down below my mom's house that washed away. I think that's really about all I can tell you at the moment, but, as far as the coast, I think we're fine, and so it kind of cut more west of our coastline.

MR. CARMICHAEL: Thank you, Trish.

MR. KLASNICK: Yes, thank you, Trish. I guess, Jessica, we'll send it back to you.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. I appreciate all the updates from folks. This storm -- Just the devastation is kind of unbelievable, especially across this big swath of area across multiple states, and keep watching. There's another one out there in the Gulf, and so maybe we're in the heart of the bad hurricane season now. Any other business to come before the Executive Committee?

MR. KLASNICK: I'm not seeing any hands.

MS. MCCAWLEY: All right. Anything else, John or Kelly?

MR. CARMICHAEL: No, nothing here. Thank you, everybody, for your time and getting through this, especially hearing that folks are still out of offices and not having power. It's a mess.

MS. MCCAWLEY: Thanks, everybody. We'll conclude this committee meeting. Thank you.

(Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on September 30, 2024.)

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