MR. RIECHERS: Okay, moving on to Spotted seatrout then. Again, giving you just a tad bit of the regulation history and obviously I've already discussed gillnet bans and so forth; but most recently -- and 1990 was probably one of the last recent actions. That's when we moved the minimum size limit to 15 inches. Then in 2002, we had a fairly lengthy discussion with a lot of folks regarding Spotted seatrout and we basically took away the captain and crew limit aboard guide vessels or charter vessels and we increased the -- we set a bag limit of greater than 25 inches on fish to only one fish per day, trying to distribute those bigger fish and keep some of those bigger fish in the population longer. So right now, that puts us at a ten-fish daily bag limit, that 15-inch minimum sizes limit just discussed, and the 25 per person per day.

In addition to that, you-all may recall that in 2007, we came to you and suggested that the Lower Laguna Madre needed a different set of regulations and that's a place where we reduced the bag limit to five fish based on their long-term trends and the possession limit we made equal to the bag limit and also a fish saving opportunity there. And so that's where we stand with Spotted seatrout regulation as a whole along the coast at this point in time.

When you look at the overall coastwide landings -- and again, this is our fishery dependent data. I'm sorry. This is -- this is our fishery dependent data. I earlier described fishery independent data. This is the data that we collect at boat ramps from anglers as they're coming off those public boat ramps. We do over a thousand survey days a year, collect over 10,000 interviews at those various boat ramps. So when you look at this data, basically you can see that landings have remained fairly stable dating all the way back to the early 1990s. What I will refer here and that's private boat landings. Party boat landings here refer to guide vessels basically. That's how we characterize them.

And you can see that those back into the 1990s, obviously increased. That increase is a reflection of an increase in the overall number of guides that we had and then that too has leveled off in most recent years. Again, going back to the fishery independent data, the coastwide gillnets. You can see here the one we look at most often when we're looking at Spotted seatrout is the spring and then there's fishing pressure on those spring fish and then we also collect it in the fall; but spring is the one that we look to guide us a whole lot in this respect.

And you can see, again, that the gillnets, you know, we scoped in 2010-2011 some issues regarding Spotted seatrout. We had concern over what was going on in Aransas, San Antonio Bay, and the Matagorda Bay System and we had quite a discussion about whether or not we should pass some rules and you can see that I think we came back to you at that time and said we have some really strong year recruit classes coming on and you can see that they've kind of bounced up from that low period there in about 2009 from those couple downward years in '08 there and they did bounce back up according to those recruit classes coming on into the fishery.

The next set of slides I'm going to kind of share with you are trying to put a little more granularity on this instead of just showing you the coastwide average, but trying to show you a little bit about what's happening in various regions of the state. We can do this bay system by bay system; but for purpose of presentation today, we kind of tried to break this down and group some of those bay systems and when we talk about the Upper Coast, we're going to talk about Sabine, Galveston Lake, and East Matagorda Bay. When we talk about the Middle Coast, we're going to talk about West Matagorda Bay, San Antonio, and Aransas where we had that concern previously. When we talk about the Lower Coast, we're going to talk Corpus Christi and Upper Laguna Madre and then we single out the Lower Laguna Madre because it has a different management regime associated with it right now.

So here is the spring gillnets by region. You've just seen those coastwide. And really what you see here and what -- the reason it's here is just to show you that coming off after the gillnet bans and so forth, we increased to a level in that period in the mid 19 -- or early 1990s, mid to early 1990s. Been fairly stable and level since then. You can see that the Lower Laguna Madre, as you hear from many people who get to fish that area, has always had a pretty high catch rate and it -- you know, you can see that that line typically bounces above some of the other lines. But for the most part then, other than the Lower Laguna Madre, they mirror one another fairly well.

Another fishery independent set of data that we collect is our bag seines and basically this gives us an indication of those young of the year, those recruits that are coming into the system, not yet being caught by our gillnets; but a stage below that. And what you can see here just as we discussed with you in those prior times, we basically after that low period, we've had -- well, three to four of the highest years on record that we've seen and, of course, in the most recent year it has come down considerably. Actually, two years in a row it came down coastwide; but one of those periods, that second year back, is still one of the highest on record. But the most recent one is a little bit lower than that.

You can tell by this graph that what is driving this to some degree or that previous picture is that Middle Coast area. That's the one that exhibits that two years down in a row period with that blue line. The Upper Coast shows just -- and the others all show a one-year decline in that overall recruitment there.

Next, looking at private boat trips landing Spotted seatrout by region. Again, I'd -- we'd previously shown you the overall landings coastwide. You can see here, as indicated before, Lower Laguna Madre has some higher catch rates and it's depicted here and those people catching those fish at higher rates and you can see that when you look at those others. Again, they all fairly well mimic one another in regards to kind of the bigger trends you see or the blip-ups and the blip-downs, if you will.

COMMISSIONER HUGHES: Robin, the percentage here, is percentage of a limit or is that -- what is the percentage of what?

MR. RIECHERS: That's coast -- that's what it contributes coastwide by region.

COMMISSIONER HUGHES: Okay.

MR. RIECHERS: Right here, just wanted to kind of show everyone what the impact of these size limits are. You know, typically when we put a size limit like a 15-inch minimum size limit or 12 or whatever it may be, this is the kind of picture that you see. Your highest frequency is caught right at the inch class where you set that size limit and then it basically goes down after that, declining kind of in that decay rate.

What you can see here also is that the party boat folks or guides are better at catching big fish. That's what we would expect that they're capable of and because they do it every day, they, in fact -- you know, our data certainly shows and proves that as well. When you look at the coastwide bag distribution, not only are they better at catching big fish, they're also better at catching more fish and so this, again, depicts that picture. If you're a private angler, you're more than likely going to catch one or two Spotted seatrout on any given trip. Some lucky ones get that third and so on. But if you're going with a guide, you're much more likely to get four or five fish as opposed to the private rec angler and certainly you're way more likely to get your bag limit of ten fish.

At our creel surveys, we also ask them some other questions and one of those questions is a satisfaction rating and just want to show this to you. Since those early 1990s, you can see that that satisfaction rating just on a scale perspective has continued to increase and that's reflective of the better fishing opportunities that we've had and those increase in populations from that time period, we believe anyhow certainly.

I'm going to give you a little more granularity for Lower Laguna Madre because it is the differential regulation and when it's kind of lumped in with those other graphs, it's a little bit harder to see what impact that regulation might have had. And so here you're looking at the Lower Laguna Madre gillnet catch rate. Again, our rule went into effect in 2007; so you can see that if you look at the most recent year, we're about a -- have a 50 percent increase in our overall catch rate numbers per hour in our gillnets as opposed to that lower period of time. So we have had the impact of getting more fish to older sizes, which is what we thought we would do.

When you look at the landings in that respect, both private and party boats somewhat have mirrored that in some respects. What we do know in addition to that is that more people now are catching that third, fourth, and fifth fish in the Lower Laguna Madre. We also have some evidence that there might be some high-grading going on. Meaning they're trying to capture a larger fish and they may be doing that by releasing fish or they may just be targeting larger fish; but there's some evidence of as well.

And so in some respects, you know, the Lower Laguna Madre hasn't increased the overall young of the year or hasn't increased recruitment necessarily; but it has done what we set out to do, which is push some more of those fish further along to get to those larger size classes and we do believe we can see some of those results.

So as a whole, kind of the status of Spotted seatrout where we are today, our 2011 landings were the second highest on record. Our Spring 2013 catch per unit effort in our gillnets are fifth highest on record. All bays are reporting an average to above average gillnet CPUE. We're still kind of living off the recent gains of that four years of strong juvenile recruitment. Though obviously as you saw by the coastwide picture, as well as those individual region pictures, that the most recent recruitment has been going down or this year's recruitment was down, last year's recruitment was down, and overall it was down for two years in a row when you did it coast wide.

And then lastly, our bag seines are still reflecting a strong recruitment; but some of that -- you know, for this year is not totally complete; so that's where we kind of stand today in regards to Spotted seatrout along the Texas Coast.

COMMISSIONER DUGGINS: Dan Allen.

COMMISSIONER HUGHES: I've got a couple questions. Well, look back at the coastwide bag distribution for 2012 number per angler. It looks like to me that a pretty small percentage of the anglers are catching more -- less than 10 percent are catching more than five fish per day, but I guess there are some guys that are -- you know, that are still -- they still are catching it. What's the feedback from the Lower Laguna Madre as far as acceptance of the five-fish limit? Has that -- has there been any push-back, or has it been pretty widely accepted?

MR. RIECHERS: I would say that while there was some push-back when it started, there seems to be less of that push-back now that it's been there a while. We haven't necessarily, other than the scoping meetings that we held in '09, 2010 -- you know, we get feedback at boat ramps and with some of the guides and so forth and there seems to be some acceptance of it and they -- you know, certainly some folks talk it up greatly, that it's been a success.

COMMISSIONER HUGHES: Well, what I hear from anglers down there that I talk to is that it has been a success. They're catching bigger fish, more fish; so it's kind of -- at least this is just anecdotal conversation, but it seems like it's working. And I've talked to you about this, Robin, and several of the Commission -- Commissioners have talked about it. We'd really like -- and we're hearing from anglers that they would like to see this five fish or a smaller limit up and down the Texas Coast. Particularly the Middle Texas Coast.

I don't talk to that many people up in Galveston, but -- and I know it's been scoped before, but I would like to see it scoped again. Just take it out, talk to the CCA people and talk to our constituents and let's see what type of feedback we're getting because even though our surveys are showing that the fish have gone up and gone down a little bit, anglers are saying they're not catching as many fish as they historically have, you know.

MR. RIECHERS: Well, certainly any decrease in a bag limit will increase the numbers that are left, it will distribute the catch amongst more anglers and, you know, it will have some biological benefits; so we can certainly take this out for scoping. I assume if -- unless y'all want to talk about a scoping point, bag limit, or something like that, we will take it out with some of the discussions that we had last time in respect, is what I would assume. I think we had some discussions last time about seven fish, as well as five fish in the Lower Laguna or like the Lower Laguna.

COMMISSIONER HUGHES: I think we should -- I think we should go with a number. You know, this is -- and we've talked about five or seven. The more I've thought about it and I don't know what the other Commissioners think, I it's hard to have five at one place and seven in another. I think you've got to make it consistent up and down the Coast for Law Enforcement because, you know, how do they know where they caught those seven fish or those five fish and that's just -- again, that's -- I think we ought to go out with a number and hear what the constituents say and -- but I would like to hear the feedback from the rest of the Commission. This is a pretty big item. This is one of our -- maybe the biggest saltwater -- well, it's the biggest saltwater fishing fish that we have as far as number of anglers go out to target, Speckled trout.

MR. RIECHERS: Yeah, no. Red drum and Spotted seatrout obviously are two icon species and certainly that protection and that fishery is what really drives the economic engine on the Coast in regards to sport fishing.

COMMISSIONER DUGGINS: Dick.

COMMISSIONER SCOTT: I was down there fishing some guys, a couple of the old salts down there by Matagorda and stuff and they made that comment because they said we don't catch the big fish like we used to because the limit is ten, you know. And I've listened and, of course, you listen to a bunch of the guides, there are so many guides, that they kind of -- you know, they want to catch more fish because it makes them get more people to go fishing, right? But there's some merit somewhere in there and I hadn't cut through it, it would have to be -- have to be shown scientifically that it works. But it is well-known that the people down south, you know, they fall a little bit -- that five-bag, that five limit. But then it got good. You know, I mean they got so much better fish and everything there, they really like it, so. Anyway, it would be interesting to see what kind of response and what kind of feedback we'd get. I kind of agree with you though, Dan.

COMMISSIONER DUGGINS: Anybody else have comments? Well, I think that I share in Dan Allen and Dick's comments, too. I think we ought to look into that five -- across the board five number, and maybe the slot limit should change. I'm not sure what your thoughts are --

COMMISSIONER SCOTT: Yeah, y'all have got to do that.

COMMISSIONER DUGGINS: -- on that as well so that you have appropriate slots; fish classes, you know, sizes.

MR. RIECHERS: And the last time we looked at this, we did look at changing the minimum -- or we modeled some of the changes that would occur if we changed the minimum size limit. As I'm recalling and that's obviously been about three years ago, so I may not be recalling exactly; but the bigger benefit came from the bag limit as opposed to that increase in minimum size limit.

Now part of that is due to release mortalities and even though this fish does not have a high release mortality by any means; but what we can do is certainly look at both of those items and in our presentation before scoping audiences, have both of those modeled and considered as part of the discussion.

MR. SMITH: And just to be clear, are you asking us to do this for the entirety of the Coast outside of the Lower Laguna Madre, or do you want us to focus on the Upper Laguna and the Mid Coast? Is there a preference from the Commission right now just in this preliminary scoping phase?

COMMISSIONER DUGGINS: I'm looking at the map here for at second.

COMMISSIONER SCOTT: For sure Mid Coast, and you'd almost have to tie the Mid Coast into the Lower --

COMMISSIONER DUGGINS: Mid -- sorry, Dick. Go ahead.

COMMISSIONER SCOTT: I would think. I don't know. I hear different things up around Lake Sabine and everything. I've got a lot of friends that fish Lake Sabine and Galveston, and they're still catching a lot better limits around Galveston; so I don't know what -- I don't know where all this comes from. Y'all have got to tell us that. But I'd say Mid Coast to -- and Lower, you know, would be my suggestion just from the people I was fishing with.

MR. SMITH: Okay.

COMMISSIONER SCOTT: I mean I don't know.

COMMISSIONER DUGGINS: I think that's where I -- based on this map where you've regionalized it, you've got Middle Coast, Lower Coast, Lower Laguna Madre. I'd defer to Dan Allen.

COMMISSIONER HUGHES: Well, I agree. I think Middle and Lower Coast. We already have the Lower Laguna Madre with the five-fish limit and --

COMMISSIONER DUGGINS: Right.

COMMISSIONER HUGHES: -- it depends on the scoping there, then next year we may want to come back and consider Upper Texas Coast. But right now with the resource capability and manhours it takes to go out and do this, maybe focus on that part of the Coast where we seem to be hearing more feedback.

COMMISSIONER DUGGINS: Okay.

MR. RIECHERS: We will certainly confine it to that area. Look at minimum size limit of 16 or whatever those changes are and a bag limit of five fish and go scope that and get feedback on that.

COMMISSIONER DUGGINS: Correct.

MR. RIECHERS: Okay.

COMMISSIONER SCOTT: If we don't do nothing else is we stop the naysayers that say the reason we don't get any bigger is because we're catching too many. So if we throw this data out and we get opinions from everybody, at least we're going to be able to get a read on what people really want as opposed to what that science is.

COMMISSIONER DUGGINS: All right. Thank you, fellows.

At this point, I'm going to recess our work session to take up Executive Session Items 12 and 13 and we'll return after we complete Executive Session on Items 12 and 13.

Sorry, I made a mistake. We still -- I left Brandi off. She was sitting in the back of the room, so I flubbed. Brandi, will you come finish the -- then we'll do as I just said we would do. Sorry.

MS. REEDER: Oh, it will be short. Okay, good afternoon, Mr. Chairman, Commissioners. My name is Brandi Reeder. I'm the Fisheries Law Administrator for the Law Enforcement Division. I'm here to bring before you a potential proposal regarding recreational jug line buoy color requirements.

Previously, Law Enforcement had requested that certain devices with gear tag requirements be easily identifiable through color-coded buoys. This requirement is now superfluous in regards to recreational fishing devices, as all devices are required to have gear tags in order to be lawful. In order to facilitate recreational users, Law Enforcement will pursue the removal of the white buoy color requirement and allow any color other than orange, which is reserved for commercial use.

Thank you. May I answer any questions?

COMMISSIONER SCOTT: If you say we need to do it, why not.

COMMISSIONER DUGGINS: Anybody have any questions or comments on -- all right. Thank you, Brandi.

MS. REEDER: Thank you.