

GULF COUNCIL

ADMINISTRATIVE/BUDGET COMMITTEE

Hyatt Centric

New Orleans, Louisiana

January 26, 2026

VOTING MEMBERS

Joe Spraggins.....Mississippi
 Kevin Anson.....Alabama
 Brenda Ballard.....Texas
 Dave Donaldson.....GSMFC
 Troy Frady.....Alabama
 Dakus Geeslin (designee for Robin Riechers).....Texas
 John Marquez.....Louisiana
 Jason Osborne.....Louisiana
 Anthony Overton.....Alabama
 Chris Schieble (designee for Ryan Montegut).....Louisiana
 C.J. Sweetman (designee for Jessica McCawley).....Florida

NON-VOTING MEMBERS

Mike Allen.....Florida
 Kesley Banks.....Texas
 Billy Broussard.....Louisiana
 J.D. Dugas.....Louisiana
 LT Jackson Morton.....USCG
 John Sanchez.....Florida
 Andy Strelcheck.....NMFS
 Ed Walker.....Florida

STAFF

Assane Diagne.....Economist
 Matt Freeman.....Economic Analyst
 John Froeschke.....Deputy Director
 Sarah Gardiner.....Fishery Biologist
 Beth Hager.....Administrative Officer
 Lisa Hollensead.....Fishery Biologist
 Mara Levy.....NOAA General Counsel
 Jessica Matos.....Administrative Document Editor & IT Coordinator
 Emily Muehlstein.....Public Information Officer
 Ryan Rindone.....Lead Fishery Biologist & SEDAR Liaison
 Bernadine Roy.....Office Manager
 Carrie Simmons.....Executive Director
 Anabelle Suitor.....Social Scientist
 Verena Wang.....Ecosystem Analyst

1	<u>OTHER PARTICIPANTS</u>	
2	Frank Helies.....	NOAA
3	John Walter.....	SEFSC
4		
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1 The Administrative/Budget Committee of the Gulf Council convened
2 at the Hyatt Centric in New Orleans, Louisiana on Monday morning,
3 January 26, 2026, and was called to order by Chairman Joe
4 Spraggins.

5
6 **ADOPTION OF AGENDA**
7 **APPROVAL OF AUGUST 2025 MINUTES**
8 **ACTION GUIDE AND NEXT STEPS**
9

10 **MR. J.D. DUGAS:** Okay, folks. If we can make our way to the table,
11 we're going to get started. Okay. Good morning, everyone.
12 Welcome to the blizzard in south Louisiana. I hope everyone stays
13 warm this week.

14
15 A couple of announcements. The agenda has changed somewhat. We
16 have a three-day meeting, as you all see, due to the government
17 shutdown and the SSC not being able to get to some of our work.
18 NMFS' shop is behind a little bit, and so we thought it was best
19 if we could squeeze it into three days instead of four, and so
20 that's why we're here for only three days.

21
22 I want to remind everyone that Full Council is going to start
23 Wednesday at 8:30, and public comment will start at 9:15. That is
24 all my announcements I have. I will turn it over to Dr. Simmons
25 for a moment.

26
27 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CARRIE SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good
28 morning, everyone. I would like to announce that we have a
29 longstanding council staff member that will be retiring, and that's
30 Charlotte Schiaffo, and so we would like to take a moment to
31 recognize and honor Ms. Charlotte Schiaffo, and there she is, as
32 she will be retiring from council staff after twenty years of
33 service.

34
35 She started her career with the council in 2005 as a secretary.
36 In those days, secretaries transcribed meeting notes, made copious
37 copies of briefing books, brewed gallons of coffee for meetings,
38 and often drove rental cars loaded with technical staff and council
39 members to various backwater sites throughout the Gulf Coast.

40
41 She has been a familiar face with both scientists and fishermen,
42 serving as the Gulf staff administrative support at numerous SEDAR
43 and SSC meetings.

44
45 She has also dragged us into modernity, from printed binders of
46 briefing book materials at every meeting to the electronic age. I
47 don't know if many of you remember that. There's probably a couple
48 of folks that do. She has worked diligently to ensure that council

1 records are digitized as well at the office.

2
3 In 2013, Charlotte completed her Master's Degree in Library Science
4 and served as our Librarian and our Human Resources Assistant until
5 she recently transitioned to the position of Administrative
6 Research Assistant under the Inflation Reduction Act, focusing on
7 regulatory streamlining and the ecosystem efforts of the council.

8
9 The Gulf Council is stronger because of her service, and her
10 contributions will leave a lasting legacy, and so we thank her for
11 her many years of dedication, and please join us in wishing her a
12 well-deserved and fulfilling retirement.

13
14 **MR. DUGAS:** Thank you, Dr. Simmons. Happy retirement, Charlotte.
15 We're going to work through the agenda, straight down the agenda
16 today, and we're going to start with General Spraggins and the
17 Admin and Budget Committee. General Spraggins.

18
19 **CHAIRMAN JOE SPRAGGINS:** Well, good morning, and thank you all.
20 Boy, isn't it a beautiful day out there? You know, my two days of
21 winter are over, folks. All right.

22
23 Anyway, first off, with the Administrative/Budget Committee, I
24 would like to call it to order, and then, first, we need the
25 Adoption of the Agenda, but the agenda is --

26
27 The members of the meeting is myself as the chair, Dave Donaldson
28 as the vice chair, Mr. Anson, Ballard, Frady, Marquez, Mr.
29 Sweetman, Mr. Schieble, Osborne, Overton, and Geeslin. Any
30 questions, and, if I can, can I get a motion for the agenda, to
31 adopt it?

32
33 **MR. DAVE DONALDSON:** So moved.

34
35 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** I have a motion. A second?

36
37 **UNIDENTIFIED:** Second.

38
39 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** All right. Any discussion? All right.
40 Motion carries, and the agenda is adopted. Next is Approval of
41 the August 2025 Minutes. Can I get a motion for that?

42
43 **MR. DONALDSON:** So moved.

44
45 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Okay. A motion. Have I got a second? Got
46 it. Okay. Any questions? Then we will adopt the minutes from
47 2025, and next we'll move into the Action Guide and Next Steps,
48 and, Dr. Simmons, I'll turn it over to you.

1
2 **REVIEW AND DISCUSS PROPOSED 2026 ACTIVITIES AND BUDGET**
3

4 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** All right. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and
5 so we'll start with the first two tabs, Tab G, Number 4a and 4b.
6 For these activities, this is really for the committee's awareness
7 and feedback. We have some draft activities listed in Tab G,
8 Number 4(a) for 2026, and then we have a draft budget, Tab G,
9 Number 4(b). We won't need any motions this time, but we just
10 want some feedback, and this is for your information, Mr. Chair.
11

12 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Okay. Any questions?
13

14 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** All right. So just testing your
15 vision here.
16

17 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** I can't see on the other end. Is there
18 anything?
19

20 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Just maybe for some of the newer
21 council members, so these are our draft list of proposed
22 activities. We're going to be going through in more detail the
23 outreach efforts later in the day today, but this is just to give
24 you an idea of some of the things we have planned.
25

26 We also have kind of a catch-all as well as we go through the
27 budgeting process, but this is just for your awareness, as to what
28 we have planned, and, of course, we'll be flexible in making
29 changes as we get our final funded budget, and so I'm not going to
30 read all these, but I will read the categories, if anybody has any
31 questions or feedback on them.
32

33 We've listed the number of meetings at the council. Trainings, we
34 have training carryover, because that was canceled during the
35 shutdown for the three newer council members, plus potentially
36 other members that could be changing in August. We have SSC
37 meetings listed. We do not currently have a couple of our special
38 SSCs populated, and those are listed there.
39

40 We have our advisory panel meetings, technical committees, summits
41 and other meetings, SEDAR meetings, public hearings, and so I'll
42 pause there and see if there's any questions or feedback from the
43 committee.
44

45 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Are there any questions? You're doing good.
46

47 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Okay, and so I'll turn it over to Ms.
48 Hager.

1
2 **MS. BETH HAGER:** Good morning. On Tab G, Number 4(b), we have the
3 2026 proposed budget. At this point, we are just proposing a level
4 funding. There's a slight update to the action schedule. We
5 stated that the Commerce had only been funded through January 30.
6 However, the President did sign the Commerce budget on January
7 23rd, and so, at this point, we have a budget. We just don't know
8 what it is.

9
10 They're doing the calculations on the backend, and so we're going
11 to go ahead with this level funding for right now. I fully expect
12 it to be adjusted as soon as we get the actual figures, and, based
13 on the last call from NOAA, we should have those figures in hand
14 by the first quarter, and so, by March or April, we might actually
15 have our funding for the year, which is really exciting.

16
17 Looking at what we do have here, we have decreased the travel lines
18 just a little bit, to come back in line with where the activities
19 we have planned in the level funding. As we go throughout, you
20 can see that the staff salaries have gone up a little bit. We do
21 have a position that is currently vacant, and we are offsetting a
22 portion of the coral outreach position, the coral research outreach
23 position, and so we currently have 16.5 FTEs in this budget.

24
25 Health insurance went up a little bit. Supplies went down a little
26 bit. As we go down into the contractual line, you can see that it
27 has increased slightly. It may wind up having to increase a little
28 bit more, because we will be looking to move our office space. If
29 we go down into the rent, you can see that the rent does increase.
30 That's due to our lease, and the terms of our current lease, but
31 that lease will be expiring in December, and so we are currently
32 looking for office space.

33
34 We have a short list of places that are in our area, and in our
35 price range, amazingly, which is definitely at the lower end of
36 our market, but we're hopeful that, with some good negotiation, we
37 can get favorable terms and find some place that will be useful
38 for us, and also useful for holding meetings, maybe even council
39 meetings occasionally, and that would be the best. That's it,
40 short and sweet.

41
42 At the end, we see it's \$4,253.8. Bernie, can you scroll down
43 half a hair? There you go, and so it's level funded at this point.
44 When we do know numbers, we'll be back.

45
46 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Okay. Any questions? Yes, sir, Mr. Schieble.

47
48 **MR. CHRIS SCHIEBLE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I guess just more out

1 of curiosity, and how did the travel budget reduce for council
2 meetings for next year versus the past year? You would think that
3 would go up.
4

5 **MS. HAGER:** You would think, but it really didn't, based on the
6 actual activity. We also had a shutdown, and we are being able to
7 offset some of those costs with the other award that we have, the
8 Inflation Reduction Act. Every time we talk about that, we can
9 charge out that work to that award, and so it helps. I expect it
10 to go up this year, but I had to also budget level, and so we are
11 doing what -- At this point, it's based on the actual activity
12 last year and then reasonable going forward.
13

14 Also, with the SSC meetings, we were able to draw that in a little
15 bit, because those virtual meetings help the budget, and so it's
16 similar with the AP meetings. You know, it goes up and down based
17 on the actual activity.
18

19 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Okay. Any other questions?
20

21 **MS. HAGER:** Sorry. Number of days, also. We're only having a
22 three-day meeting today, or this week, and it makes a difference
23 in our budget.
24

25 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Yes, Mr. Schieble.
26

27 **MR. SCHIEBLE:** So you're saying that's how much the Louisiana
28 meeting saved the council?
29

30 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Well, we haven't got the budget for the
31 heating bill yet. Okay. Any other questions? Mr. Anson.
32

33 **MR. KEVIN ANSON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I realize it's a very
34 small portion of the budget, but I'm just curious, since it was
35 zeroed out, about the annual and sick leave accounts.
36

37 **MS. HAGER:** I hope to be able to put funds there when we know what
38 our budget is going to be. At this point, like I said, we haven't
39 rehired those positions. When we rehire those positions, we'll be
40 able to then project that a little more clearly. I also expect
41 the health insurance cost to possibly change slightly, because of
42 demographics. We are not sure who we're hiring, or anything like
43 that, and so, you know, there will be lines that are squishy, and
44 that will be adjusted. That's why we're not looking for a motion
45 here. This is just an, if we had to go forward level, hopefully
46 this is where we'll be.
47

48 **MR. ANSON:** Thank you.

1
2 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Yes, Mr. Geeslin.
3

4 **MR. DAKUS GEESLIN:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Beth, miraculously, we
5 ended up with the same total budget request, by design I suppose.
6 When you look at the approved from calendar year 2025, to project
7 into the next year, is there -- I'm just presuming there's also a
8 column somewhere in the sheet that is what you actually spent, the
9 actual -- Any of that -- I'm just assuming that's the case, but is
10 any of that in the expenditures, based on a pretty static or
11 oftentimes declining budget?
12

13 Does any of that give you concern moving into this next year? Any
14 specific category? You mentioned the rent, and the office
15 location, which is certainly a consideration, but any other -- Any
16 of those other -- Based on your approved and your actual spending
17 from 2020 to 2025, any of that moving forward into 2026 give you
18 any level of concern?
19

20 **MS. HAGER:** I don't think it gives us an area of concern. The
21 leave account, that Kevin just asked about a few minutes ago, we
22 didn't actually fund that with 2025 funds, and so there's no reason
23 to fund it right now in this projected level budget, and, if we
24 scroll down to the phone and other line, we can see that we had
25 originally budgeted 19.3. I drew that it down to 17 based on
26 actuals, and so, the places where I could do that, and where it
27 made more sense -- Under other, you can see it actually went up,
28 because the 2,000 that we saved in the phone line went down into
29 other for internet costs, and so, in the areas that we could do
30 that, and where it was reasonable to project that, I have at this
31 point.
32

33 When we bring it back to you all, I'm happy to drop in a column
34 for actuals for 2025, or 2026 at this point, at the point that we
35 come into, so that you can see how we're progressing on the actual
36 budget for this year. I'm happy to do that.
37

38 **MR. GEESLIN:** No, and I guess I'm not suggesting that I necessarily
39 want to see that. I'm trusting you all. I'm just asking if you
40 all had any, you know, any concerns, and I can see that the -- You
41 know, the reduced amounts over here, but they're eaten up in other
42 categories, and so no, and thanks for the clarification.
43

44 **MS. HAGER:** That's kind of how it works.
45

46 **MR. GEESLIN:** Sure. Sure. Thank you.
47

48 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Dr. Simmons.

1
2 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Also keep in
3 mind in 2025 what happened. I mean, we had -- We'll bring some
4 more detail back, obviously, when we have a funded budget, because
5 we have no money yet for 2026. As Beth said, we're waiting. We're
6 operating on our 2025 money, right, but remember that, last year,
7 it was very sporadic, maybe. It was not very consistent, and we
8 had to operate very close to our operating budget last year, and
9 we had to make a bunch of changes, and so, I mean, I think you
10 will see that reflected in expenditures, when we bring that back.

11
12 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Okay. Any other questions? If not, I think
13 you did a great budget there, and, obviously, we'll get our
14 funding. As soon as we get that, you'll be able to finalize a lot
15 more, hopefully by April, and so thank you very much. All right.
16 We'll move right along, and I think we go to Item V.

17
18 **UPDATE ON FINAL 2020-2024 ADMINISTRATIVE AWARD AND INFLATION**
19 **REDUCTION ACT FUNDING**
20

21 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so,
22 for the committee, for this item, it's just going to be a verbal
23 update of the final 2020 to 2024 admin award. That was our last
24 admin award, and then just a brief update on the Inflation
25 Reduction Act funding, and this is just for your information, or
26 if folks have any questions for staff.

27
28 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Okay. Is there any questions on the --

29
30 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Beth will provide the information
31 real fast.

32
33 **MS. HAGER:** It's real short, I promise.

34
35 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Go ahead.

36
37 **MS. HAGER:** Basically, the 2020 to 2024 administrative award is
38 spent, done. It was \$20,592,785, and that is closed, and we are
39 doing our final reports for that award right now. The Inflation
40 Reduction Act funding, it is on track for the current workplan.
41 We might be looking at some changes based on the staffing change.
42 Charlotte has retired, and we need to make sure that we get that
43 -- All that work completed in the appropriate timeline, and so
44 that's pretty much it.

45
46 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Okay. Any questions? Yes, Mr. Donaldson.

47
48 **MR. DONALDSON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Beth, you mentioned that

1 the admin grant was the \$20 million. Was that completely spent,
2 or did we -- Perfect. Thanks.

3
4 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Okay. Any further questions? Okay. I think,
5 Dr. Simmons, we can move on to Item VI.

6
7 **REVIEW ADVISORY PANEL APPOINTMENTS FOR RED DRUM, COASTAL**
8 **MIGRATORY PELAGICS, AD HOC RED SNAPPER/GROUPER-TILEFISH**
9 **INDIVIDUAL FISHING QUOTA (IFQ) AND AD HOC CHARTER-FOR-HIRE DATA**
10 **COLLECTION**

11
12 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so, in Item
13 VI, we're going to look at the advisory panels that are up for
14 reappointment, and those are Red Drum and Coastal Migratory
15 Pelagics, and then, at the beginning of every year, we look at our
16 ad hocs, just to kind of remind the council, you know, what their
17 charge was, and how often they've met, and so we'll put that up
18 here in a second.

19
20 We really just need only a motion, if you don't want to do what,
21 I guess, staff is proposing, and so what we would do is go ahead
22 and readvertise for Red Drum and Coastal Migratory Pelagics, unless
23 you tell us otherwise, and, if we do that, then you would look at
24 the preliminary selections of those committees in April, and we do
25 the background checks with law enforcement, and then you would
26 finalize those in June. That's how we typically do that.

27
28 Then I'll go through ad hocs, the two ad hocs we have, and the
29 meetings that have been held, and so only a motion if you don't
30 like what we have proposed, Mr. Chair.

31
32 All right, and so, on Tab G, Number 6, you can go to that link,
33 and that will give you your current membership of those two AP
34 meetings. The last reappointments were in June of 2023. We have
35 them on three-year cycles right now, and this shows you the number
36 of meetings that have been held for CMP and for Red Drum.

37
38 Then, if you go down to the ad hoc advisory panels, we've listed
39 the number of meetings that have been held, what their charge is,
40 and staff thinks that we probably want to keep these around at
41 least one more year.

42
43 We'll revisit next year, and see if they've completed their charge
44 or not, but we think we need them potentially this year, and so
45 I'll pause there and see if there's any questions or feedback or
46 concerns about readvertising for those two APs.

47
48 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Yes, Mr. Walker.

1
2 **MR. ED WALKER:** Thanks, Mr. Chair. I just -- I don't -- I didn't
3 know we had a -- I don't remember hearing any results from a Red
4 Drum AP meeting. Is that just me, and what was the topic?

5
6 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** Remember we had -- We convened almost
7 all our APs when we were looking at the executive orders in July
8 on the seafood competitiveness and reducing regulatory burden. I
9 can't remember the numbers of the executive orders, but we had
10 them virtually give us feedback, and we had a series of webinar
11 meetings with all the different -- I think almost all the APs,
12 except Data Collection or something like that, we convened.

13
14 **MR. WALKER:** Okay. Thank you.

15
16 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Any other questions? So, Dr. Simmons, do we
17 need a motion to be -- To give you the -- To go forward with
18 filling these, or do we need --

19
20 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SIMMONS:** No, and I think only if you don't
21 want to go forward a motion would be good. So, I guess, if the
22 committee is in agreement, we will go ahead and readvertise for
23 these two APs, and we'll keep the ad hocs.

24
25 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Yes, Dr. Sweetman.

26
27 **DR. C.J. SWEETMAN:** Yes, and I'm good with council staff's plan.

28
29 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Okay. Thank you. All right. Let's see. I
30 think I'm ahead of schedule for a second here. I better find my
31 sheet here. So that's -- I think that pretty much covers
32 everything on it. Do we have any other business? If we have no
33 other business, Mr. Chairman, then I think that completes our
34 Administrative/Budget Committee, and we'll give you back a couple
35 of minutes.

36
37 (Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on January 26, 2026.)

38
39 - - -
40