September 14, 2019

Dear Marine and Coastal Fisheries,

We are submitting an original manuscript with the title “Trends in oyster populations in the northeastern Gulf of Mexico: An assessment of river discharge and fishing effects over time and space” to your journal for consideration for publication. This paper is important for several reasons. (1) we trace trends in Eastern Oyster populations in a region of the Gulf of Mexico that is of significant conservation concern as reflected by the high proportion of land and nearshore environment managed under protected status. In this region, considered one of the least developed regions of coastline in the continental US, we have documented large changes in intertidal Eastern Oyster populations from fisheries independent data. (2) We then compile available information on key environmental and commercial oyster fisheries and examine whether the documented declines in Eastern Oysters are related to available environmental or fisheries metrics. (3) Our results suggest a relationship between river discharge and trends in oyster populations, but not with commercial fishing. We also document increasing variability in river discharge and sea-level rise. (4) Finally, we discuss how these results are important to inform ongoing and proposed restoration actions for oyster reefs in this region using funding from the consolidated *Deepwater Horizon* settlements. Specifically, we think that it is important to consider whether restoration is likely to be effective over short and long-term time scales given landscape level changes that are occurring including frequency of drought and sea-level rise. These landscape level factors are not easily influenced by resource managers.

We have provided names of recommended reviewers as well as identified several reviewers that are not suitable to review this manuscript. Thank you for considering this manuscript for publication in your journal.

Regards,

Dr. Bill Pine