



GRAY'S REEF NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY ADVISORY COUNCIL WEBINAR – NOVEMBER 29, 2017

Sanctuary Advisory Council (SAC) Attendees

Rick DeVictor, Chair
Michael Denmark, Vice-chair
Anna George, Secretary
Peter Auster
Mona Behl
Mary Conley
Pat Geer
Monique Gordon
Warren Hupman
Capt. Bob Lynn
Scott Noakes
Jene Nissen
Mark Padgett

SAC Members Absent

LT Warren Fair
Tim Henkel
Kevin Mitchell
Tim Tarver
Suzanne VanParreren

Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary (GRNMS), and Office of National Marine Sanctuary (ONMS) Staff

Chris Hines
Jody Patterson
Kim Roberson
George Sedberry
Becky Shortland
Mandy Harvey (GRNMS volunteer and today's note taker)

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC)

Chip Collier
Kelsey Dick

Public in Attendance

None

Council chair Rick DeVictor called the Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary (GRNMS) Advisory Council meeting to order at 2:00 PM with a roll call of attendees. He and George Sedberry, Acting Superintendent of GRNMS, welcomed members, staff and public in attendance. Rick briefly reviewed the agenda and outlined the meeting objectives. The September 22, 2017 SAC meeting summary was unanimously approved with minor typo corrections as noted by Jene Nissen.

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) MyFishCount App – Chip Collier, Fishery Biologist at the SAFMC, and Kelsey Dick, Fishery Outreach Specialist for the SAFMC, updated the group on MyFishCount, a new pilot electronic reporting program being developed by SAFMC to help with fishery data collection for snapper and grouper. MyFishCount is intended for use by recreational anglers and is designed help improve landing estimates of specific species. This agenda item is a follow-up on discussions during the September 22 meeting of the SAC.

Kelsey shared a presentation outlining the objectives and capabilities of the MyFishCount platform, as well as the results from a recent pilot test of the program. The program collects many data points including catch size and

identification, information on what is kept and what is released, and the area fished. It is also capable of storing pictures of caught and released fish. It is presently available in an online form, with a mobile app currently in development.

A pilot test of the MyFishCount web portal was conducted during the recent snapper mini-season. A total of 250 registered users completed 59 trips with another 197 trips abandoned due to poor weather conditions. A total of 61 red snapper catches and discards were reported. The most common reasons for release cited by the reporting parties were undersized fish and bag limit reached.

The SAFMC is utilizing various tactics to raise awareness of MyFishCount with recreational anglers, including working with sport fishing clubs and fishing forums, utilizing social media platforms, publishing online articles, and creating a dedicated page on the SAFMC website with specific information about the program. Next steps include the addition of new features to the platform and development of the mobile app. A pilot version of the app should be available in January 2018, with updates based on the pilot test period being made in April and the final version of the app available in June or July.

Several questions were posed to Kelsey and Chip following the presentation, many of which were focused on data collection and usage. Chip confirmed that a similar app is already in use in the Gulf of Mexico and that the data are being considered for stock assessments in the region. Chip stated that the data from MyFishCount will also likely be considered during development of stock assessments in the South Atlantic, including data on the size distribution of released fish. When asked if there is threshold number of reports at which data are aggregated, Chip responded that if 3 or fewer boats report, the data are treated as confidential. This is also the case for all angler-submitted photos. However, Chip indicated that SAFMC would have the ability to contact individual anglers and request permission to share the photos with other entities, such as GRNMS. In response to a question about the ability of the program to collect more detailed data on discard methods and mortality rates, Chip stated that the program can collect data on discard method and depth, however more information is needed on discard mortality to apply these values.

Rick DeVictor reminded the group that the quarterly meeting of the SAFMC will take place next week (December 4 – 8) in Atlantic Beach, NC. SAFMC will be conducting a recreational fishing reporting workshop during this meeting. The workshop will also be available to view online. Rick confirmed that there will be an additional snapper mini-season December 8 – 10, 2017 with the same regulations as the November mini-seasons (1 fish per day per person, no minimum size limit).

Following the discussion, an informal poll of the meeting participants indicated that GRNMS should be very engaged with the MyFishCount program, pending the recommendations of the Recreational Fishing Working Group. Chris Hines indicated that the working group will be actively evaluating this issue and will present their recommendations to the SAC in the near future. Warren Hupman suggested waiting to see how MyFishCount works out before deciding how to engage.

Rick and Chris thanked Chip and Kelsey for their participation and insights. Chip and Kelsey encouraged SAC members to contact them with any additional questions and gave their approval to share today's slide presentation with SAC members who unable to attend today's webinar.

Advisory Council Business

SAC Executive Committee – Rick DeVictor and Chris Hines reminded the group that the term of the current the Executive Committee expires at the beginning of next year. Rick, Anna George, and Michael Denmark thanked their colleagues on the Executive Committee and GRNMS staff for their hard work and support during their tenure. Chris thanked Rick, Michael, and Anna for their excellent service. Mary Conley nominated Michael Denmark as Chair,

Scott Noakes as Vice-Chair, and Mona Behl as Secretary. Peter Auster seconded. There were no objections and the motion was unanimously approved by a quorum of the SAC.

Visitor Use Letter – Chris Hines and Peter Auster provided an update on the proposed visitor use letter. The impact of visitor use on GRNMS was initially discussed during the February 28, 2017 SAC meeting, where concern was expressed regarding the challenges inherent in identifying the degree of present and future human activity in GRNMS, any related impacts, and the identification of human-use and associated ecological indicators when patterns of use significantly impact GRNMS resources. The Science Advisory Group (SAG) was tasked to provide comment and general guidance on this issue. The output of this process was a proposal that outlined a preliminary approach to address ecological effects of visitor use on GRNMS. This proposal was a topic of discussion during both the April 27 and June 28 SAC webinars. Following these discussions, a small subgroup of SAC members, including Peter, evaluated the SAG proposal and developed a letter addressed to John Armor, Director of ONMS. This letter was discussed during the September 22 SAC meeting and it was agreed that the letter should be simplified and include a clearer and stronger statement of what the letter is asking of ONMS. This feedback was incorporated into the letter and distributed to the SAC members for review in advance of today's meeting.

Following a brief discussion, Scott Noakes made a motion to approve the letter and send to John Armor. Anna George seconded. There were no objections and the motion was unanimously approved by a quorum of the SAC, with the following changes: add Peter Auster as a signatory, change Michael Denmark's title from "Vice-chair" to "Chair", change "there" to "the" in the last 2 lines in the next to last paragraph. Staff will revise the letter accordingly and send to Michael and Peter for electronic signature.

An informal poll of the group indicated that a majority feel the letter is a good next step, but that there is still much to be done regarding the issue of visitor use. Discussions on this topic will continue at future SAC meeting. George Sedberry noted potential funding resources available for further study of visitor use, including settlement funds. It will be important to determine what the scope of funding will be before proposals are developed.

Council Working Groups

Recreational Fishing Working Group Update – Becky Shortland, reporting on behalf of Tim Tarver, provided an update on the recent activities of the Recreational Fishing Working Group, which is charged with finding better ways to communicate and promote collaboration with recreational fishing interests, raise awareness of GRNMS, enhance compliance, and obtain more visitor use information. Recent activities of the working group include increased outreach to local sport fishing groups via a presentation in preparation for the November red snapper mini-season and another presentation planned for January 2018 with the Ft. McAllister Sport Fishing Club. In addition, descending devices were distributed free-of-charge to a number of local organizations and individuals in conjunction with the red snapper mini-season. Brian Fluech of Georgia Sea Grant provided approximately 100 free descending devices to GRNMS to aid in this effort and he supplied an additional 100 to the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Thanks to the efforts of SAC member Pat Geer, questions relative to angler use of GRNMS are included on a survey currently being conducted by DNR. This survey will close within the next couple of weeks and results will be available soon.

A request for funding for the public awareness video discussed during the September SAC meeting has been submitted to the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation. Mona Behl offered to put staff in contact with several students from the New Media Institute at the University of Georgia who produced an award-winning video on sea level rise, to gauge the students' interest in partnering with GRNMS on the video.

The next meeting of the Recreational Fishing Working Group is tentatively scheduled for January 12, 2018. GRNMS engagement with MyFishCount will be a key topic of discussion during this meeting.

Chris Hines reported that recreational fishing is a top priority for the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS). ONMS has developed an actionable “roadmap” for recreational fishing that will be presented via webinar within the next couple of weeks. Chris will share the roadmap with the SAC if/when it becomes available for dissemination.

Law Enforcement Working Group Update – Both Georgia DNR and Ben Hughes of NOAA Law Enforcement were on patrol during the red snapper mini-season and did not observe any violations. Additional patrols will be conducted during the December mini-season.

Council Member Reports

NOAA Fisheries Update – As discussed earlier, Rick DeVictor confirmed that an additional red snapper mini-season will be open December 8 – 10 since the November mini-seasons fell below the catch limit. This is likely due to the poor weather conditions experienced during the second mini-season weekend. Rule-making is currently underway to re-open the snapper fishery in July of 2018 for both recreational and commercial harvest. Rick is scheduled to present three proposals for exempted lionfish fishing permits during next week’s meeting of the SAFMC. The proposals each feature a different method of capture—spiny lobster traps, black sea bass pots, and FADs. Although no specific locations have been noted in the proposals Rick stated that the final permits will be sensitive to regional concerns. The goal is to have the approved permits in place by the end of spiny lobster season in April.

Georgia Sea Grant – Mona Behl reported that Daniel Gleason’s project on ocean acidification has been approved for funding by Georgia Sea Grant. She also encouraged the researchers on SAC to contact Sea Grant with relevant research proposals. The organization has program development funds (up to \$10,000 each) available at all times for rapid response funding for emerging projects in Georgia. Other states have similar programs. Mona invited everyone to attend the oyster roast at the UGA Marine Extension and Aquarium in Savannah this Saturday, December 2.

Other - Mary Conley invited the group to attend The Nature Conservancy’s Altama Day this Friday, December 1 from 12:00 PM – 6:00 PM at the Altama Wildlife Management Area. The Southeast Seafloor Habitat Mapping Workshop has been rescheduled for January 23 and 24 in Charleston. Contact Mary for more information on either of these events.

GRNMS Report

Superintendent’s Report – George Sedberry reminded the group that he will be retiring on December 23 of this year. The superintendent position has been posted with a closing date of December 8. George anticipates that the new superintendent will be in place by mid-March, at the earliest. In the interim, Jessica White, currently the Deputy Director at the NOAA Gulf of Mexico Disaster Response Center in Mobile AL, will assume the role of Acting Superintendent effective January 1. She and the new Regional Director, Matt Brookhart, will be visiting the GRNMS office the week of December 18.

The GRNMS Climate Vulnerability Assessment Workshop was conducted on November 7 and 8. Workshop participants were drawn from a variety of organizations including the SAC, NOAA Fisheries, NGOs, universities, and a number of other state and federal agencies. The group looked at typical species representing different life history strategies and trophic levels to determine potential impacts of a changing climate on these species and their habitats. These included 3 invertebrate species, 3 reef fish species, 2 pelagic species, and the southern stingray. Additional species were added to the assessment during the workshop, including an algal species (sargassum), endangered species (loggerhead sea turtles and Atlantic sturgeon), and soft bottom invertebrates. The participants developed outlines during the workshop and topic authorship was assigned based upon individual areas of expertise. George hopes to have an initial draft of the workshop output completed before his retirement date.

Staff is currently working to finalize the budget for FY 2018.

Sounds of Gray's Reef – Chris Hines played 6 audio clips representing the “Sounds of Gray's Reef”. These clips were obtained from the hydrophones deployed at GRNMS and edited by Todd Recicar. Chris credited Dr. Jenni Stanley, lead researcher on the hydrophone project, for her visionary work. Mona Behl suggested that these audio clips could be integrated into the speakers bureau slide kit and also be incorporated into the GRNMS exhibit at the UGA Aquarium. Kim Roberson will contact Dr. Stanley for clarification on how and in what venues these sounds can be used.

SAC Questionnaire Action Plan - Chris Hines recapped the key points contained in the action plan, which was distributed to SAC members in advance of today's webinar. This action plan is a product of the SAC questionnaire that was completed by 13 SAC members in July/August of 2017. After discussion, the following next steps were agreed to:

- Staff will prioritize each action (i.e. high, medium, or low)
- Staff will incorporate the alignment of each action with the GRNMS Management Plan and the ONMS Strategic Plan into the action plan
- Staff will review with the SAC Executive Committee
- The action plan will be presented for discussion and feedback during an upcoming SAC meeting.

Resource Protection Implementation Plan – Becky Shortland provided an overview of the Resource Protection Implementation Plan that was final output of the Resource Protection Program Evaluation Working Group convened in 2016. A report from the working group was issued this past spring. Staff subsequently developed a preliminary implementation plan based on key outcomes. The final implementation plan is currently in development and will be distributed to the SAC when available. Becky thanked Pat Geer for leading the working group.

GRNMS Foundation Update – Reporting on behalf of Cathy Sakas, Chris Hines provided an update on Foundation activities, including the Third Annual *a Fishy Affair* that took place on September 22. The event raised over \$42,000, approximately \$25,000 of which was profit. The Executive Director position is currently open and in active recruitment. In the interim, the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation will be assisting with local chapter activities, including the 2018 Gray's Reef Film Festival scheduled for February 9 -11.

Next Meetings

The next SAC meeting will take place on January 31, 2018 from 2:00 PM – 4:00 PM via webinar. The next in-person meeting will take place on March 28 in Savannah, preceded by the meeting of the Science Advisory Group (SAG) on March 27. Potential topics for upcoming meetings include Recreational Fishing Working Group recommendations on GRNMS engagement with MyFishCount, next steps relative to visitor use, and staff recommendations on the prioritizations of the SAC action plan.

Public Comment

There were no comments from the public

The meeting was adjourned at 3:55 PM.