

Meeting Summary

Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary

Advisory Council Meeting – November 8, 2021

(On-Line Webinar)

Sanctuary Advisory Council (SAC) Attendees

Michael Denmark, Chair
Scott Noakes, Vice-Chair
Mona Behl, Executive Officer
Peter Auster
Paulita Bennett-Martin
LT James Bruce
Mark Carson
Robert Crimian
Rick DeVictor
Graham Gaines
Joseph Glenn
Jaime Gormley
Rachel Guy
Ben Hughes
Kathy Knowlton
Allison Rychtanek
Lauren Stefaniak

Primary SAC Members Absent

Monique Gordon
Colby Harris
Chris Hodge

Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary (GRNMS) Support Staff

Stan Rogers, Superintendent
Vicki Baglin
Scott Kathey
Ben Prueitt

Council Business

Chair Michael Denmark called the Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary (GRNMS) Advisory Council (AC) meeting to order at 10:00 AM.

AC Executive Officer Mona Behl called roll, reported 17 members present and confirmed a quorum of 8 voting members.

AC Chair Michael Denmark and GRNMS Superintendent Stan Rogers thanked departing member Scott Noakes for serving three consecutive terms as a Research representative on the council, and displayed on-line a certificate and framed Gray's Reef photo that will be presented to him at a later date. The chair also recognized departing Sapelo Island NERR representative Suzanne VanParreren and welcomed Rachel Guy as her replacement. He also welcomed Allison Rychtanek as the new US Coast Guard alternate representative and Graham Gaines as the new Sea Grant alternate representative.

Motion #1: Approve the meeting minutes for the August 23, 2021 AC meeting.

The Chair moved to approve the draft meeting summary for the August 23, 2021 AC meeting. Scott Noakes seconded the motion. Before voting, the Chair asked for comments or corrections. No one replied. The council approved the draft August 23 meeting summary with no changes by a voice vote. No objections were stated.

GRNMS Advisory Council Officer Election

The Chair reviewed officer roles and rules & procedures for the election. Scott Kathey (GRNMS) presented a short slide presentation on election rules per the AC charter and AC Handbook.

The Chair noted that the Executive Committee sent several emails to members informing them that officer nominations would be accepted until close of business on Nov 5, and that floor nominations on the day of the vote would only be accepted for a position for which no nominations had been submitted by Nov 5. He informed the council that one nomination had been received for chair (Peter Auster) and another for vice chair (Lauren Stefaniak) by Nov 5, but none had been received for executive officer (formerly the secretary position). He invited the nominees for chair and vice chair to make a brief statement and then called for nominations from the floor for the executive officer position. No nominations were made. He therefore proceeded with a vote for chair and vice chair only.

The Chair asked Scott Kathey to explain the e-voting process. Scott Kathey explained that each primary member (or official alternate) would simply reply to an Election Ballot email from him by entering the name of a declared candidate beside each officer title printed in the email. He would, in turn, reply with a confirmation email to let each member know their ballot had been received and recorded.

The Chair announced a 10-minute pause to allow members to vote and take a short break.

Upon resumption of the meeting at 10:40 AM, Scott Kathey announced that 12 votes had been received. Peter Auster had been elected chair and Lauren Stefaniak had been elected vice-chair [Official Vote Tally: Each of the two candidates received 9 votes]. He also noted that three write-in votes had been received to appoint Peter Auster as executive officer. Peter Auster declined to serve in the post. Since he had not been

declared as a nominee for the position prior to the vote and the voting rules and AC charter offered no provision for write-in candidates, the three write-in votes were not valid. Similarly, three write-in votes each were submitted for both the chair and vice-chair positions and were invalid for the same reasons.

The Chair congratulated the officers-elect and noted the immediate need to schedule a future election to fill the executive officer position. Scott Kathey informed Peter Auster that he would cover the duties of executive officer as needed to fill the gap between the expiration of the current executive officer's term and the election of a successor.

Superintendent's Report

GRNMS Superintendent Stan Rogers presented a report summarizing recent and pending activities by GRNMS staff:

- He began by asking Scott Kathey to report on 1) the AC charter revision, 2) status of AC recruitment action, and 3) results of NOAA's socio-economic analysis of the GRNMS Research Area required by the Regulatory Flexibility Act.
- Scott reported that ONMS Director John Armor signed the revised AC charter, accepting all the council's suggested changes, except that the title of AC *secretary* was changed to *executive officer* instead of the council's recommended title of *operations officer*, per the superintendent's suggestion. Stan Rogers explained his preference for *executive officer* over *operations officer* since the officer position does not manage "operations" but does manage "executive" functions of the council. There were no questions/comments from council members. Scott also reported the AC recruitment period had been extended by 3 weeks to November 28 to capture as diverse an applicant pool as possible. He also explained that NOAA's socio-economic assessment of the Research Area determined the area has posed no significant impact to small businesses.
- Stan Rogers reported that the signing of a lease for the new GRNMS Visitor Center facility in downtown Savannah was only days away. He described next steps toward engaging the AC & community about exhibit content and design.
- Staff will receive the final design for the new GRNMS research vessel in late November. ONMS is pausing the bidding process in case passage of an infrastructure bill by Congress makes additional funds available for enhanced design options. Solicitation for construction of a 52' – 60' vessel will likely be announced Mar/Apr 2022 for a spring 2023 delivery. Partners will be able to schedule research work aboard the vessel at posted day rates.

AC members asked questions about anticipated partner day-rate schedule and partner diving operations aboard the new GRNMS research vessel.

Presentation: 2021 GRNMS Science Summary & Research Expeditions - Kim Roberson

Kim Roberson (GRNMS) delivered a slide presentation with rich photos and videos showcasing GRNMS' science and research activities during fiscal year 2021. Due to the Covid pandemic, government field activities were constrained due to health and safety precautions, but GRNMS lead benthic mapping of 142 square kilometers in two areas adjacent to GRNMS and sponsored a multi-day partnered research expedition to GRNMS aboard the NOAA Ship NANCY FOSTER in August. Some critical field work was completed by contractors during 2021 to ensure continuity of long-term data collection efforts within GRNMS. In response to decreased field operations, staff pivoted to develop Gray's Reef science outreach products, such as the on-line sea turtle story map. The presentation was well received by the AC.

During the question and answer period, Kim responded to a question about the next meeting of the GRNMS Science Advisory Group, stating it will be re-invigorated in 2022. She was also asked if GRNMS staff are required to meet an Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) protocol for humane treatment of sea bass when fitting them with research tags during catch and release. She responded that she is unaware of any such requirement by NOAA. In response to a question about observations of a potential increase in the presence of tropical species at GRNMS, Kim replied that 2019 data show a trend of changed assemblages of tropical species migrating further north into GRNMS and remaining longer before returning. In response to a question about GRNMS' readiness to identify research needs should new federal funding become available for marine conservation science, Kim explained that her team is developing a living document known as the GRNMS Science Plan that will provide short but detailed science needs at GRNMS that could be implemented with appropriate support and funding. GRNMS is also leveraging internship and fellowship opportunities to increase science team capabilities at GRNMS. In response to a question whether her presentation could be recorded or presented to Georgia Department of Natural Resources officials, Kim and Stan Rogers replied that GRNMS could accommodate such requests from any AC member.

President's 30x30 Conservation Initiative and GRNMS Subcommittee Draft Letter of Recommendations to NOAA

Scott Noakes introduced a draft letter prepared by the GRNMS 30x30 Subcommittee with recommendations to NOAA about the President's call for community input on the federal initiative to conserve 30% of U.S. lands and waters by 2030.

After some initial discussion about appropriate protocols for AC deliberation and amendment of subcommittee recommendations, council members suggested some minor edits to paragraph 3 of the draft by displaying proposed edits real-time through the GoToWebinar meeting platform. Once edits were completed absent any objection,

and no further edits were proposed, the Chair facilitated a vote to approve the amended draft.

Motion #2: Approve the amended 30x30 recommendation letter from the AC to ONMS Director John Armor.

The Chair called for a motion. Kathy Knowlton moved to approve the draft 30x30 letter as amended and displayed on everyone's screens via the GoToWebinar platform. Peter Auster seconded the motion. Before voting, the Chair asked for comments or corrections. No one replied. The Executive Officer conducted a roll call vote of present members, and the council passed the motion with 7 yeas, 0 neas, and 0 abstentions.

Call for Council Member Updates

The Chair asked if any AC members had any updates to present to the council.

Mona Behl (primary Sea Grant representative) announced that in order to promote more diverse perspectives on the AC, Sea Grant will begin annual rotation of its primary AC representative, drawing on personnel from its regional programs in North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and Florida. At the end of each year, the Sea Grant primary member will rotate off the council, and the alternate member from the past year will move into the primary seat. A new alternate will then be assigned and eventually succeed the primary member one year later. To initiate the new protocol, Graham Gaines will serve as alternate for the next 6 months and then take the primary position, as Mona Behl rotates off the AC.

Rick DeVictor reported that the South Atlantic Fisheries Management Council (SAFMC) will meet the first week in December in Beaufort, NC for its first in-person meeting since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some fishery stock numbers are up, while others are down. The SAFMC will be reviewing fishery management plans, amending gear changes, catch sizes, time and area restrictions, etc. He also reported a trending increase in proposed wind energy project proposals off NC, VA, and the Gulf of Mexico for which NMFS will need to prepare biological opinions. NMFS will be developing Regional Action Plans for climate strategies within the region – guidance for managers and decisionmakers in the use of various tools for climate planning in fisheries management. AC members discussed the potential future need for AC comment on any wind energy projects affecting GRNMS. Lauren Stefaniak noted the current wind energy project proposal nearest to GRNMS is the Carolina Long Bay project off Cape Fear, NC. Stan Rogers noted that wind models have demonstrated that ocean waters off Georgia have weak wind energy potential compared to other areas in the region.

James Bruce reported that the Coast Guard conducted one cutter patrol and no boardings within GRNMS since the August 23 AC meeting.

Mark Carson reported that GADNR conducted one patrol in GRNMS in August, encountering 1 vessel with 2 people onboard and 0 violations. In September, GADNR wardens completed five patrols to GRNMS and encountered 5 vessels and a total of 22

people and 0 violations. In October, wardens referred some violation cases to NOAA Office of Law Enforcement (minor fisheries violations according to Ben Hughes).

Joseph Glenn asked how many anchoring and spearfishing violations have been detected within GRNMS. Ben Hughes responded that NOAA has taken enforcement action for 2 anchoring violations within GRNMS in the past 5 years and he has received one report of someone spearfishing in the sanctuary, but no spearfishing or speargun control violation was detected by enforcement personnel.

Public Comment

At 12:45 PM, the Chair asked if any member of the public wished to address the council. No members of the public were in attendance.

Closing Remarks

Michael Denmark noted that this meeting would be his last as AC chair, and he expressed that he enjoyed serving in the position. He wished success to the new officers, thanked his fellow current officers, and said that he and the current team would be working behind the scenes through December and helping with transition. One of the first items for the new team will be the election of a new executive officer. He invited Peter Auster and Lauren Stefaniak to participate in the review of new AC candidate applications during December.

Next AC Meeting

The Chair announced that the next council meeting will be in February. Scott Kathey will poll AC members for availability for potential meeting dates from February 22 – 25.

Adjournment

The Chair adjourned the meeting at 12:52 PM for a total meeting duration of 2 hours and 52 minutes.