

**Meeting Summary**  
**Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary**  
**Advisory Council Meeting- January 11, 2023**  
**(On-Line Webinar)**

**Sanctuary Advisory Council (SAC)**

**Attendees**

Peter Auster (Living Resources Research) Chair  
Lauren Stefaniak (Univ. Education) Vice-Chair  
Russell Kent (Conservation) Executive Officer  
Ralph Ainger (Citizen-At-Large)  
Hermina Glass-Hill (Conservation)  
Jaime Gormley (U.S. Navy)  
Rachel Guy (Sapelo Island NERR)  
Natalie Helbling (K-12 Education)  
Ben Hughes (NOAA Office of Law Enforcement)  
Kathy Knowlton (GA Dept of Natural Resources)  
Shelly Krueger (FL Sea Grant)  
Jack McGovern (NOAA Fisheries)  
Chris Sawyer (Citizen-At-Large)  
Jeff Soss (Sport Fishing)  
Michelle Taliercio (Sport Diving)  
Brock Woodson (Non-Living Resource Research)

**Primary SAC Members Absent**

Rachel Bair (U.S. Coast Guard)  
Rick DeVictor (NOAA Fisheries)  
Chris Hodge (GA Dept of Natural Resources LE)

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

Stan Rogers, Superintendent  
Scott Kathey  
Elliott Lam  
Madison Monroe  
Ben Prueitt

**GRNMS Foundation (GRNMSF) Staff**

Jody Patterson

---

**Advisory Council Administrative Business**

Peter Auster, council chair, called the Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary (GRNMS) Advisory Council (AC) meeting to order at 12:34 PM with the ringing of a cowbell.

AC Vice Chair Lauren Stefaniak called roll. She reported that 16 members were present and confirmed that a quorum of voting members was also present.

**MOTION #1: Approval of the October 26, 2022 SAC meeting summary (notes)**

**The meeting summary for the October 26, 2022 GRNMS AC meeting was approved (with minor changes) by general consent of the council.** The draft summary had been previously emailed to all council members on November 18, 2022 and again on January 4, 2023 for their review and consideration.

**MOTION #2: Decision on the format of future quarterly SAC meetings in 2023**

**The chair submitted, for general consent, a motion to conduct all remaining 2023 quarterly SAC meetings in a hybrid setting that facilitates both in-person and virtual attendance options. Hearing no objections, the Chair announced that the motion passed by general consent.** The advisory council reviewed the previously approved 2023 SAC meeting dates to decide the preferred meeting format [i.e. in-person and virtual (hybrid) or virtual only] for each future date. During council discussion of the matter, the GRNMS superintendent reported that he is investigating options for reimbursing council member travel

costs for attending meetings through either government or non-profit funding. Since government representatives attend SAC meetings as part of their professional duties, they are eligible for travel reimbursement by their respective organizations. The superintendent clarified that no reimbursement program will be in place by the scheduled April AC meeting.

### **SAC Election: Nominations and Voting for SAC Executive Officer**

**Russell Kent received 13 of 13 votes and was elected the SAC Executive Officer.** Council members were invited to submit nominations for the Executive Officer. Russell Kent was the sole nominee for the position. SAC members sent their votes to Scott Kathey via email. He confirmed receipt of each vote by email and reported the final results to the SAC at the conclusion of the administrative business items on the agenda.

### **Report from Nationwide Advisory Council Chairs Meeting**

The Chair will send electronic copies of materials from the Nationwide Advisory Council Chairs meeting to all SAC members that include information about sanctuary advisory council (SAC) protocols for making recommendations to leaders outside of their sanctuary, SAC accomplishments across the sanctuary system, and the “America the Beautiful” initiative and federal funding support for related community and state conservation activities over the next 5 years (through the recently enacted Inflation Reduction Act). There will be opportunities for partners to support the planning, potential designation, and expansion of coastal and marine protected areas.

An important note from the meeting was the clarification that SACs can make recommendations to elements of NOAA beyond the sanctuary-site level and to other agencies, provided they relate to the management of the sanctuary and the business of the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS). ONMS has developed a process by which a SAC may submit a recommendation to higher authorities, even if the site superintendent does not concur with the recommendation. The superintendent attaches a cover letter explaining the divergence of views and sends the recommendation forward through ONMS. The GRNMS AC used this process a few years ago to send a recommendation letter to the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) regarding proposed oil and gas leasing off Georgia. Protocols for SAC submission of recommendations to entities beyond a site superintendent are described in the *2022 SAC Implementation Handbook* (<https://nmssanctuaries.blob.core.windows.net/sanctuaries-prod/media/docs/2022-sanctuary-advisory-council-handbook.pdf>).

### **Likeness and Copyright form**

At the AC Chair’s request, Scott Kathey explained the process used for submitting the SACs letter about the ONMS likeness and copyright forms to ONMS Director John Armor and his response. There is an inter-NOAA/Department of Commerce working group that is working on this issue. The terms in the forms are developed and approved by attorneys at the Department of Commerce who specialize in privacy and copyright law. There are several SACs that have raised concerns about the form. The current forms expired on December 31, 2022, but they will remain in effect until a new form is approved by the Office of Management and Budget, likely within the next 3-4 months. ONMS is advocating for significant simplification and shortening of the forms. Scott Kathey assured the members of the SAC that the concerns mentioned in the

council's letter are shared by other advisory councils and parts of NOAA. Stan Rogers explained the purpose of the likeness forms and elaborated that the sanctuary would only use likenesses for outreach related to sanctuary business. SAC members are not required to sign the likeness form to serve on the SAC, and SAC members representing government agencies, as part of their official duties, never need to sign a likeness form to authorize NOAA's use of their likeness.

### **30X30 Working Group Update**

Jack McGovern provided an update in the absence of the working group chair, Rick DeVictor. Members of the working group are Peter Auster, Michelle Taliercio, Chris Sawyer, and Mary Connelly (non-SAC member). The purpose of the working group is to determine if any regional and marine management scientific actions related to Gray's Reef would further the intent and provisions of Presidential Executive Order 14008 to conserve 30% of U.S. Lands and waters by 2030. The first meeting for the group occurred in October 2022; they defined terms of reference for the group, discussed contacting other groups with interests in 30x30 to understand area initiatives and status, and discussed ways to move forward. If others are interested, Rick DeVictor will send a meeting summary to the SAC upon request. The next working group meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, January 18, 2023.

### **MOTION #3: Initiate development of a GRNMS Advisory Council Logo**

**The chair submitted, for general consent, a motion to begin searching for an external process to develop a GRNMS Advisory Council logo. Hearing no objections, the Chair announced that the motion passed by general consent.** Scott Kathey explained that SACs are allowed to develop their own logos for letterhead and other official use; this is due to the fact that there is restricted use of NOAA logos. The logo would be on the sanctuary's website, official documents, and branded outreach items, such as shirts, caps, etc. The SAC discussed the potential for an outside group to produce a logo at no cost. The potential for development of a logo through a competition by local high school students was also discussed. Natalie Helbling offered to help make connections with local school art and graphic design programs if the SAC desires to engage them. Creating a logo competition could spark interaction with the public to increase awareness of the SAC and public engagement with the council. Kathy Knowlton stated that if the council pursues contracting a logo or hosting a design competition, it should explicitly articulate that the logo is for the SAC and explain how it will be used and publicly displayed. Natalie Helbling, Lauren Stefaniak, Shelly Krueger, and Kathy Knowlton will work together informally to gather advice and develop a proposed criteria, process, and options for creating a logo through external parties. Lauren will initiate email communication among the group. Ben Prueitt will send out NOAA's 508-compliant accessibility guidelines for outreach products.

### **MOTION #4: Discussion and SAC recommendation to convert the SAC Fishing Industry seat to a Tourism seat**

**Kathy Knowlton proposed the motion, "Shall the council recommend to the superintendent to convert the Fishing Industry seat to a Tourism seat?" The motion was seconded by Chris Sawyer. The Vice Chair conducted a roll call vote resulting in 10 yes votes, 0 no votes, and 0 abstentions, and announced that the motion passed.**

GRNMS has recruited for the Charter/Commercial Fishing seat (re-defined as the Fishing Industry seat) three separate times since 2018 (Spring 2018, Summer 2020, Spring 2022) and,

despite concerted outreach efforts, has received zero applications. The Ocean Discovery Center provides a new opportunity to advance GRNMS and marine conservation messaging to the 14 million annual visitors to Savannah through collaborative efforts with tourism entities. During the last Fishing Industry seat recruitment, charter boat captains were targeted from South Carolina to Northern Florida and there was no response from the sector. Kathy Knowlton cited recurring problems recruiting commercial fishery representatives for deliberative bodies at both the state and federal levels. Shelly Krueger cited a recently failed attempt to fill two commercial fishing seats on the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council. Several council members advocated for converting the Fishing Industry seat to a Tourism seat. Scott Kathey noted that any SAC proposed change to an existing advisory council seat would require NOAA approval and positive action to amend the SAC charter. The SAC proposes to recommend to the Superintendent to convert the Fishing Industry to a Tourism seat.

#### **MOTION #5: Mooring Buoys at GRNMS**

**Michelle Taliercio proposed the motion, “The council recommends to the superintendent to assess installing mooring buoys within GRNMS as part of the upcoming management plan review and update” The motion was seconded by Lauren Stefaniak. The Vice Chair conducted a roll call vote resulting in 10 yes votes, 0 no votes, and 0 abstentions, and announced that the motion passed.**

There have been ongoing conversations within the GRNMS Advisory Council for many years about potential installation of mooring buoys at Gray’s Reef to support sport diving. Michelle Taliercio talked to diving constituents about the proposal, who generally favor the idea of mooring buoys to increase accessibility and safety for a variety of divers. Among constituents, there were concerns about the maintenance, installation, access, and cost of the buoy. There was a recommendation by one dive constituent for multiple moorings (on a rotating basis) to minimize traffic, access, and impact on the reef. Several other National Marine Sanctuaries have mooring buoys on site, for example, Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (moorings up to 70 ft deep), and Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary. Brock Woodson and Peter Auster noted that mooring buoys could also be helpful to research diving efforts at the reef. Jeff Soss wanted to initiate a conversation on making the buoys dual-purpose for both fishing and diving, such as at Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. Ben Hughes supported installation of moorings that allow access to both fishers and divers.

#### **Gray’s Reef National Marine Sanctuary Foundation Update**

Jody Patterson, Director of the Gray’s Reef National Marine Sanctuary Foundation (GRNMSF) provided basic information about the foundation and updates about its activities. GRNMS and GRNMSF hosted a dedication event on October 15, 2022, for the opening of the Gray’s Reef Ocean Discovery Center in downtown Savannah. The foundation then held a Gray’s Reef Society Soiree at the Pei Ling Chan Gallery for members, sponsors, and partners following the dedication.

One of the keystone education programs of the GRNMSF is the Gray’s Reef Southeast MATE ROV competition, which allows students (3<sup>rd</sup> grade to university level) to engage in marine technical training and engineering innovation. This is an ongoing opportunity that Gray’s Reef has been a part of since 2004. This year, the competition will be held from May 5-6 at the

Chatham County Aquatic Center. The foundation also supports teacher professional development training for the MATE competition as well as the Rivers to Reefs project that demonstrates linkages between rivers and the marine environment.

In response to a question from Chris Sawyer, Jody stated that the chapter has just under 20 members at present, having launched its first membership drive this year. It does not currently have an endowment. She said she would send membership application information to SAC members through the GRNMS AC Coordinator.

A member of the public asked if Savannah State University Marine Biology Department will participate in GRNMSF initiatives. Jody Patterson responded that Dr. Sue Ebanks is a foundation board member and associate professor at Savannah State, and the foundation would welcome participation by Savannah State students at the ODC and various research projects. More information about the GRNMSF can be found at <http://graysreeffoundation.org>.

### **Superintendent's Report**

Stan Rogers provided an overview of the priorities for the sanctuary over the current fiscal year. He began by reviewing the sanctuary's original terms of designation (the reasons the sanctuary was created), the sanctuary vision, mission, and goals, and the GRNMS team structure. Stan provided information about the dedication and initial operations plan for the new Gray's Reef Ocean Discovery Center (ODC) and how it exemplifies the work being done by sanctuary staff to reach new audiences and increase visibility in the community. The ODC will be open for a few events in February with a grand opening around April. Once established, it will likely be open 4-5 days per week.

The sanctuary is focused on continuing vessel-based research and monitoring. There are multiple research priorities for the sanctuary this year: benthic habitat mapping and characterization, fish movement and migration, North Atlantic Right Whale detection, invertebrate monitoring, and passive acoustic monitoring. The 2023 expedition on the *NOAA Ship Nancy Foster* is in the planning stages. Notices for research partners and time on the ship should be coming out soon. The *R/V Joe Ferguson* will be decommissioned from GRNMS this year and placed in dry storage. All American Marine and NOAA announced that Gray's Reef will be acquiring the research vessel R5202, a 52-ft customized research vessel currently under construction in Washington state. Stan outlined the characteristics of this multi-purpose vessel and the new capabilities it will provide for an expanded year-round science program at GRNMS.

The sanctuary is developing a revised Condition Report (a big priority this year), which is a 10-year retrospective summary of the resources in the sanctuary, the pressures on the resources, the current conditions and trends, and management responses to the pressures that threaten the integrity of the marine environment. GRNMS is reporting on the status and trends of water quality, habitat, living resources, maritime archeological resources, and human activities. The sanctuary will host an expert workshop to evaluate the status and trends on these topics from March 21-23. The report's anticipated completion date is the summer of 2023.

A priority for the sanctuary is to help facilitate the GRNMS Advisory Council's 30X30 working group to inform scoping for the review and update of the 2014 Management Plan in late 2023. GRNMS will also initiate internal scoping for the review and update of the Management Plan in late 2023.

In response to a question from Peter Auster, Stan reported that the Sanctuary Sound acoustic monitoring project has ended, and that while there is no research report, since the data was collected for soundscape baselining purposes, some of the raw data has been analyzed for use in specific studies, such as two visitor-use studies at GRNMS. Stan referred council members to the soundscape portal (<https://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/science/monitoring/sound/sanctsound-storymap.html>) and said he would follow up with Peter Auster regarding any potential publication or project report summary beyond the information provided at the on-line portal.

Peter Auster asked what will replace the recently disbanded Science Advisory Working Group as a vehicle for coordinating science at GRNMS. Stan responded that the research seats on the advisory council can make recommendations for research and scientific endeavors at Gray's Reef. He also stated that the GRNMS is planning a science symposium in the fall of 2023 to bring together the scientific community to discuss ongoing work within GRNMS and the surrounding region, as well as interests in new projects and questions. GRNMS will receive input from the scientific community *more directly* since the group will no longer have to pass input to GRNMS management through the SAC. The group will be able to coordinate directly with the GRNMS Research Coordinator and Superintendent on issues it believes the sanctuary needs to address in its management plan and annual science planning and prioritization. At the 2023 fall symposium, activities of the past year will be reviewed and science priorities will be developed 18 months in advance for the FY2025 field season (i.e. summer 2025). Invitations for this year's science symposium are pending, as well as solicitation for proposed research projects for the summer 2023 NOAA Ship Nancy Foster research expedition to GRNMS.

#### **MOTION #6: Amend Agenda**

**The chair submitted, for general consent, a motion to table the following topics until the next meeting: JEDI, citizen science at GRNMS, and 2023 SAC priorities and work plan. Lauren Stefaniak seconded the motion. Hearing no objections, the Chair announced that the motion passed by general consent.** The meeting was 1 hour behind schedule, so the SAC tabled the three agenda items to end the meeting on time.

#### **Public Comment and Potential SAC Member Discussion**

At 4:07 PM, the Chair asked if any members of the public wished to address the council. No public attendees verbally responded.

Two typed comments were received from public attendees:

1. "I don't have a question but I want to compliment you all on how you conduct your meeting. You treat everyone very well. Thank you."
2. "Congratulations on the upcoming new research vessel, perhaps the timeline for research include investigators from other sites like Padre Island Nat. Seashore or Tortugas Reserve and other sanctuaries. Congratulations."

Over the course of the meeting, a total of 8 members of the public attended.

**SAC Member Comments (primary members only)**

Ralph Ainger mentioned that he has been asked by two different groups to give presentations on Gray's Reef since they've heard of the reef but don't know much about it. The presentations will occur later this spring. Stan Rogers mentioned that the staff is working on a Gray's Reef 101 presentation that can be sent to the SAC members.

Peter Auster explained that he is continuing his permitted work to capture 360-degree videos of fish activity at Gray's Reef (using virtual reality camera technology) to study trophic structure and predator-prey relationships. He is also working on new technologies that facilitate in-situ underwater science presentations for interpretation and outreach.

Hermina Glass-Hill met with the Georgia Conservancy on their South Atlantic Salt Marsh Initiative (SASMI). They are conducting community engagement work with leaders in the African American Gullah Geechee community in Liberty County, identifying cultural, religious, and historical resources for protection within the county.

Rachel Guy mentioned that she is very interested in working with the sanctuary on connectivity issues. SINERR is now fully staffed after 5 years of reduced staffing. The new training program coordinator at SINERR is also interested in talking with GRNMS staff about future collaborations with the reserve.

Natalie Helbling is compiling a list of the educational facilities in the Savannah area and beyond to identify educational constituencies within the Gray's Reef community. She is focused on identifying public school teachers, STEM teachers, or after-school programs that may be interested in GRNMS educational and outreach programs. She is establishing her presence as the K-12 SAC representative in the community. Stan Rogers noted that GRNMS has partnered with the Coastal Heritage Society on education programming for K-12 group tours at GRNMS' Ocean Discovery Center

Ben Hughes has made two patrols to GRNMS since the last SAC meeting aboard his new patrol vessel and processed two violation cases recently. One case in GRNMS involved possession of very small baby groupers (out of season) and undersized black sea bass. The second case involved a boat encountered on the return from GRNMS and outside sanctuary boundaries. The people onboard had 2 red snapper (out of season) and several undersized black sea bass without descending devices.

Russell Kent is investigating ways to dialogue with constituents about GRNMS. He has talked to staff at Coastal Conservation Association (CCA) Georgia who have allowed him to insert a Gray's Reef update (highlights of activities) in their January 15 quarterly e-newsletter distributed to 1,000 recipients. He is working on similar outreach arrangements with other organizations he has been involved with in the past. He also mentioned that he is interested in marine education and may be contacting Natalie and ODC staff to discuss ways he can assist outreach efforts.

He is particularly interested in reaching a large user group from Bulloch, Wayne, and Tattnall Counties that he would like to reach about GRNMS.

Kathy Knowlton said that she discovered two Georgia DNR coastal incentive grants that have been awarded for 2-year projects. People who are interested in fishing might be interested in the results of a 2020 grant-funded project by Dr. Eugene Frimpong (UGA) on the socioeconomic impact of the for-hire fishery in Georgia from 2021. Another part of that project is development of a survey instrument to go out soon to saltwater anglers related to permit data. A 2022 grant-funded project will look at the economic impact of artificial reefs off of Georgia. Stan Rogers asked Kathy to forward the reports to him so that he can share them with the lead economist at ONMS. She said she will send the published 2021 report. The 2022 project is not yet complete. GADNR is also rebooting a fun, informative quarterly newsletter for the general public called *Coastlines Georgia* (<https://coastalgadnr.org/coastlines>).

Shelly Krueger said Stony Coral tissue loss disease has impacted coral reefs throughout the eastern Caribbean and Florida since 2014 and could potentially spread to GRNMS. She said that is present in Florida and throughout the Caribbean. She offered to provide a presentation at the April 12 SAC meeting about how to identify stony coral tissue loss disease and some of the study and analysis underway at Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.

Jack McGovern mentioned that the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) is meeting in March to take final action on an amendment for red snapper. The amendment will adjust catch levels on red snapper based on catch-level recommendations from the SAFMC's Scientific and Statistical Committee. Public hearings for that issue will be held later this month. NOAA Fisheries is working with the SAFMC on amendments for other species (i.e. red porgy, gag, snowy grouper, greater amber jack, yellow-tail snapper, king mackerel, wreck fish and tile fish) in response to stock assessments.

Chris Sawyer raised concern about the exponential growth of urbanized areas and shipping occurring between Savannah and Brunswick. An incredibly large increase of 27 million square feet of storage area for industrial distribution products has been approved and permitted for construction along the I-16 corridor. One thousand acres along I-16 was recently cleared within a 6-month period for construction of a Hyundai automobile assembly plant. He wants to articulate how wonderful and unique the Georgia coastal ecosystem is and how we need to remain vigilant to protect that area. Because Gray's Reef is a nearshore reef, there are bound to be impacts coming from runoff in those areas. He recommended that everyone read the book, *And the Coastlines Wait: How the Grassroots Battle to Save Georgia's Marshlands was Fought - and Won*, by Reid Harris. (<https://ugapress.org/book/9780820356730/and-the-coastlands-wait/>)

Jeff Soss requested any fishing statistics GRNMS, NOAA Fisheries, or GADNR may have on recreational fishers and divers that utilize Gray's Reef. If the proposed North Atlantic Right Whale vessel speed rule amendment is implemented, he would like to see a report or impact analysis on stakeholder use of GRNMS. Stan Rogers noted that a socio-economic impact



analysis will be required as part of the rulemaking process, and should be available to the public.

Lauren Stefaniak is seeking accessible processed data about Gray's Reef for use in an academic setting. She is also seeking GRNMS posters or pop-up banners to place at various universities to increase awareness of the sanctuary. She would also like a copy of the Gray's Reef 101 PowerPoint slideshow that she and other professors could present at Lifetime Learning Institute and similar lectures. She also wanted to encourage graduate students pursuing policy studies to attend future hybrid SAC meetings to view and better understand policy development.

Michelle Taliercio is going to plan more charters out to Gray's Reef for the spring and summer and invited SAC members to contact her if they were interested in diving at the reef. She mentioned that several lionfish have been seen in the GRNMS Research Area over the past few months, but the divers reporting the sightings were not sure how to report that information. Stan Rogers suggested that they can email Scott Kathey sightings data on invasive species. Kathy Knowlton also reported that GADNR Wildlife Resources Division has a website and mechanism for reporting non-native lionfish sightings. Go to <https://georgiawildlife.com/ans> and scroll down to the lionfish reporting button.

Brock Woodson reported that he is talking with his various constituents about Gray's Reef. He also mentioned that he was interested in the issue of how researchers can provide scientific input into the research being conducted at the sanctuary now that the Scientific Advisory Group has been disbanded.

Scott Kathey reminded the SAC members that the sanctuary will be recruiting for a Citizen-At-Large seat and the University Education seat and encouraged members to forward the information to their respective networks.

Stan Rogers encouraged SAC members to sign up to receive the GRNMS e-newsletter: [https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USNOAANOS/subscriber/new?topic\\_id=USNOAANOS\\_7](https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USNOAANOS/subscriber/new?topic_id=USNOAANOS_7)

Peter Auster announced that he will not attend the April 12 SAC meeting due to scheduled travel abroad and that Vice Chair Lauren Stefaniak will chair that meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 5:03 PM for a total meeting time of 4 hours and 29 minutes.