

Meeting Summary
Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary
Advisory Council Meeting- July 18, 2023
(GRNMS Ocean Discovery Center, Savannah, Georgia and Webinar Access)

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)
Rick DeVictor (NOAA Fisheries)
Hermina Glass-Hill (Conservation)
Jaime Gormley (U.S. Navy)
Rachel Guy (Sapelo Island NERR)
Ben Hughes (NOAA Office of Law Enforcement)
Kathy Knowlton (GA Dept of Natural Resources)
Shelly Krueger (FL Sea Grant)
Chris Sawyer (Citizen-At-Large)
Jeff Soss (Sport Fishing)
Michelle Taliercio (Sport Diving)
Kent Wicker (Citizen-At-Large)
Brock Woodson (Non-Living Resource Research)

Primary SAC Members Absent

Natalie Helbling (K-12 Education)
Chris Hodge (GA Dept of Natural Resources LE)
Jack McGovern (NOAA Fisheries)
Peter Tomlin (U.S. Coast Guard)

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

Stan Rogers, Superintendent
Elliott Lam
Abigail Lewine
Madison Monroe
Ben Prueitt

GRNMS Foundation (GRNMSF) Staff

Jody Patterson

ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS

Peter Auster, council chair, called the Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary (GRNMS) Advisory Council (AC) meeting to order at 10:02 AM with the ringing of a cowbell.

Executive Officer Russell Kent called roll. He reported that 17 members were present and confirmed that a quorum of voting members was also present. Council members attending remotely were: Peter Auster, Hermina Glass-Hill, Rachel Guy, Chris Hodge, Chris Sawyer, Jeff Soss, Michelle Taliercio, and Brock Woodson.

Chris Hodge's remote camera feed stopped at approximately 10:11 AM and did not resume during the remainder of the meeting.

MOTION #1: Approval of the April 12, 2023 SAC meeting summary (notes)

The meeting summary for the April 12, 2023 GRNMS AC meeting was approved (with identified technical changes regarding Shelly Krueger's presentation) by general consent of the council. The draft summary had been previously emailed to all council members on June 7, 2023 for their review and consideration. Kathy Knowlton suggested that action items formed during council meetings be highlighted in the meeting summary (or distributed to the SAC in an email along with the draft summary) to remind members and staff of follow-up tasks. Stan said that the Executive Committee recently determined that official council advisory actions will be catalogued, numbered, and tracked more formally on the SAC's website, including dates,

progress, and resolutions. He agreed that a post-meeting reminder to SAC members about follow-up administrative actions (such as participant commitments to provide documents or information) would be helpful.

The chair noted that the SAC has had several previous discussions of how to best promote Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) principles in its operations and actions. He commented that the SAC should incorporate DEI principles within all of its deliberations, collaborations, and actions as a guiding standard of conduct (an ethos), rather than view DEI as a list of stand-alone tasks or projects for completion. He mentioned that the President's Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) is developing a federal ocean justice strategy. The chair said he would forward a public announcement about the strategy to the SAC executive officer for distribution to council members in the event they wish to submit individual, personal comments on the strategy by the close of the public comment period on July 24, 2023. The nearness of the deadline would not afford sufficient time for the SAC to corporately deliberate and submit official comments.

Stan Rogers acknowledged Peter Auster's 9 years of service on the GRNMS Advisory Council and thanked him for his support and service as both an advisory council member and partner. Meeting attendees expressed their thanks for his service and shared stories of his contributions.

Hermina Glass-Hill entered the webinar meeting remotely at 10:17 AM.

Call for Nominations for SAC Chair

Council members were invited to submit nominations for the Advisory Council Chair position. Stan Rogers asked members to submit nominations by mid-August so an election can be placed on the agenda for the October SAC meeting. Lauren Stefaniak and Russell Kent were both nominated for the position. Lauren Stefaniak declined the nomination due to employment obligations, but said she intended to continue serving as vice chair. Russell Kent said that he would consider the nomination.

REPORTS

Report of Findings: Socioeconomic Assessments of GRNMS – Danielle Schwarzmann and Giselle Samonte (Office of National Marine Sanctuaries, NOAA)

Two economists from the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS) delivered presentations on four socioeconomic assessments of GRNMS: a 2020 decadal review of public perceptions about GRNMS; a 2023-2024 sanctuary condition report that includes assessments of the significance of GRNMS to society; a report in-progress on the economic contributions of research activities within GRNMS; and a newly commissioned study on public awareness of GRNMS and willingness to pay to conserve ocean and coastal natural resources.

Giselle Samonte presentation:

Due to a lack of data about recreational use activities, attitudes, and public knowledge concerning Gray's Reef, the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS) conducted a 2020 Knowledge, Attitudes, and Perceptions Survey (KAPS) to better understand how the public views ocean and coastal resources and management off the Georgia coast and at GRNMS. Since ocean users may change their attitudes over time as they experience what actually happens after creation of no-take marine reserves or research-only areas, ONMS economists compared the recent study results with those of a 2010 KAPS to assess how public views of the sanctuary may have changed over the past decade.

The 2020 KAPS questionnaire contained seven sections: socio-demographics, recreational activities, activity specialization, sources of information, status and conditions of the resources, opinions about ocean protection and management, and ways people value ocean and coastal resources. The questionnaire was emailed to a sample of Georgia saltwater fishing permit holders, and 367 respondents completed the survey. A screening question asked respondents whether or not they fished at GRNMS. If they responded "yes," they were considered users; if they responded "no," they were considered non-users.

Compared to 2010, users in 2020 were slightly more diverse with more women and more African Americans participating in fishing at GRNMS. In 2010, about 60 percent of recreational users in the sanctuary were in the 50-64 age range. Currently, the average age of recreational fishers at GRNMS is 57 years old. In general, the users of GRNMS are well educated, fully employed, and have high incomes. There is a diverse ethnic and racial community among recreational anglers in Georgia, however, minorities are under-represented as users in GRNMS.

Recreational anglers are also highly engaged in other leisure activities in ocean and coastal areas of the South Atlantic Bight, including GRNMS. These alternate activities include SCUBA diving, spear fishing, sailing, and whale watching. The top five reasons for primary activity remained the same from 2010 to 2020: being close to the water, being outdoors, being with friends, relaxing, and enjoying natural surroundings. The most influential factors considered when deciding to visit GRNMS are sea conditions, weather, prevalence of fish species, and seasonal patterns. The majority of users (80%) engage in recreational bottom fishing with a private boat for about 19 days per year, on average.

A majority of survey participants who fish at GRNMS (55.6%) are somewhat familiar with the sanctuary's regulations, and 24.4% are very familiar with sanctuary regulations. A majority of survey respondents said Georgia DNR, NOAA Fisheries, the Gray's Reef website, and Gray's Reef staff (in that order) are trusted sources of marine-related information. When anglers fishing GRNMS were asked about how they would like to receive information from the sanctuary, the largest number (40%) preferred getting emails from the sanctuary list serve or staff, and 32% of respondents preferred getting information from the GRNMS website. Only 2.3% of anglers accessing the sanctuary prefer to get information via telephone.

Recreational anglers were asked about changes in the condition of resources since the implementation of the sanctuary in 1981. Overall, recreational anglers perceive the condition of resources in GRNMS as getting better since designation in 1981. Specifically, they believe that bottom fish populations, live bottom habitat, diversity, and number of species are getting a lot better. Among the perceived conditions of GRNMS, only prevalence of invasive species, such as lionfish, changed significantly from 2010 to 2020. In 2020, more respondents considered lionfish numbers a threat, compared to respondent impressions in the 2010 KAP survey. In both 2010 and 2020, recreational anglers were equally concerned about pollution, coral health, and marine animal health in the ocean, GRNMS, and coastal areas around Georgia.

More than half of recreational anglers strongly support the protection of ocean and coastal resources inside GRNMS (59.4%) and outside GRNMS (54.1%). Two-thirds (64.4%) of users also stated that they support the use of marine zoning in ocean and coastal areas - very similar to angler responses in 2010. The term “marine zoning” was defined in the survey questionnaire. The questionnaire found that GRNMS is extremely important to recreational anglers and provides other socioeconomic benefits to the local economies such as: seafood availability, support for recreational activities, education, and research. The ecosystem services valued by anglers remained unchanged from 2010 to 2020.

The results of this study will support effective sanctuary management of GRNMS by facilitating the inclusion of cultural ecosystem services in the GRNMS condition report; developing and improving communications strategies; informing the evaluation of GRNMS public education and outreach efforts for saltwater recreational anglers; identifying management actions to address anglers’ concerns; and providing a framework that can be used for similar assessments in the National Marine Sanctuary System.

Danielle Schwarzmann presentation:

For routine 10-year Sanctuary Condition Reports, the status and trend of ecosystem services (provisioning, regulatory, and cultural activities) are now evaluated in addition to Key ecological factors. GRNMS is currently developing a new condition report to assess status and trends in the sanctuary since the last such report, completed in 2012. In this cycle, each status and trend score will be assigned a confidence rating based on the level of evidence presented and the level of agreement of the experts scoring a given ecological or ecosystem services topic. The “consumptive recreation” ecosystem service was scored with a status of *good/fair* with a trend of *not changing* (since 2012); the confidence rating for both status and trend scores was *medium*. West Virginia University (WVU) researchers received 995 completed surveys from Georgia Saltwater Information Permit holders that assessed their knowledge about GRNMS; their fishing patterns within and outside of the sanctuary; top species landed; and actual and perceived fishing costs. The surveys aided evaluation of consumptive recreation in the sanctuary.

“Non-consumptive recreation” received a status score of *good/fair* and a trend score of *improving*. The confidence rating for the status score was *high*, while the confidence rating for the trend score was *low*.

The “sense of place” ecosystem service received a *fair* status score and *improving* trend score; the confidence rating for both status and trend scores was *high*. Danielle noted that when WVU survey respondents were asked to pinpoint GRNMS’ location on an unlabeled map, only 4% were able to accurately identify the sanctuary’s position. Individual responses were spread across the coastal and offshore waters of Georgia, South Carolina and north Florida.

The “heritage” ecosystem service received a *good/fair* status score and an *improving* trend score. The status confidence rating was *high* and the trend confidence rating was *medium*.

“Education” received a status of *fair* with an *improving* trend. Confidence for the status score was *medium* and the trend confidence level was *very high*.

The assessment of “science” within the sanctuary produced a status score of *good/fair* with an *improving* trend. The confidence rating for status was *low*, while the confidence rating for trend was *medium*.

Danielle discussed an ongoing study of the socio-economic value of past research activity at GRNMS and outlined questions posed to individuals who have conducted research at GRNMS. ONMS has coordinated with the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation to conduct a socioeconomic study of research within GRNMS. Surveys were sent to past researchers, and 40% of recipients (19 individuals) have responded thus far. Respondents characterized their research in the sanctuary as follows: Investigative Research 38%, Monitoring 30%, Site Characterization 19%, Exploration 14%. Respondents cited pursuit of multiple objectives as follows: One objective 26%, Two objectives 53%, Three objectives 16%, Four objectives 5%. In 2019, eight of the respondents (42%) received an average of \$48,000 each from various funding sources to conduct science within GRNMS. In 2022, five of the respondents (26%) received an average of \$37,000 each. Most researchers were affiliated with government or academic institutions. Peter Auster noted that Covid protocols were still an impediment to field research in 2022. Stan Rogers noted that in recent years, coastal resilience studies have received a large amount of research funding. The final study will be released in a few more months.

NOAA will be working with the University of Georgia (UGA) on another socioeconomic study in coming months to collect socioeconomic data for the GRNMS Management Plan Review. This study will focus on attitudes and perceptions toward coastal conservation and stewardship, willingness to pay for ocean and coastal protection, and the awareness and use of Gray’s Reef National Marine Sanctuary. Collecting socioeconomic data for GRNMS continues to be an Office of National Marine Sanctuaries priority. Greg Landry at UGA will be leading the study.

ONMS is using GRNMS as a focus area for socioeconomic study, with a strong reliance on partnerships and relationships to complete the work. ONMS is continuing to develop tools to understand human use and visitation in all national marine sanctuaries.

SAC members had several questions/discussions about KAP and ecosystem service survey designs and assumptions, term definitions, data interpretation, data/information sources, scope, sample size/source, and public awareness of GRNMS and sanctuary regulations.

Conversation with the Director, Gray's Reef Chapter of the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation – Jody Patterson

Jody Patterson began by providing an overview of the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation. She shared that the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation recently hired a new CEO, Joel Johnson, and that he may attend future SAC meetings. Established in 2000, the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation: increases local, national, and international awareness and protection of the National Marine Sanctuary System and its value to communities and local economies, raises revenue for national marine sanctuaries and the National Marine Sanctuary System, and builds a constituency of stewards for America's Ocean and the Great Lakes.

The Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary Foundation (GRNMSF) chapter was established in 2014. The chapter focuses on educational programming and supporting programs for the sanctuary. The chapter engages in formal education (student competitions and teacher trainings), professional development (experiential education), informal education (visitor center, lecture series, and special events), public outreach (social media channels, membership campaign, and board of trustees), and legislative advocacy (community spending, earmarks, and policy action).

The largest program that the foundation chapter hosts is the MATE ROV competition. This competition engages K-12 students with the opportunity to get involved in underwater robotics and develop practical technological skills. The chapter also hosts a Rivers to Reef workshop for teacher professional development. In conjunction with other organizations, GRNMSF takes teachers on immersive learning fieldtrips through watersheds from the rivers of Atlanta to GRNMS. Jody stated that the chapter also engages with public outreach, elected officials, and interpretive education at the Ocean Discovery Center. Finally, the foundation chapter is engaging in conservation with Right Whale monitoring.

Russell Kent asked for an explanation of the relationship between the foundation, the sanctuary advisory council, and the sanctuary. Stan Rogers said that the foundation chapter is an extension of the sanctuary to help bolster and garner additional support in ways that the sanctuary cannot. For example, the sanctuary's visitor center is leased through the foundation chapter. The new visitor center provides opportunities for the chapter to raise funds and public support for projects and programs that compliment sanctuary conservation goals. The chapter is not a fiduciary for the government, but works in partnership with the sanctuary. Stan Rogers serves as an ex officio board member for the GRNMSF.

Russell Kent asked if the foundation chapter could help fund SAC public engagement sessions with communities to enhance public awareness of and active support for GRNMS. Jody replied that such a collaborative effort is possible, but due to a current lack of discretionary funds, dedicated grant or funding support is required to fund new projects. For large and/or unfunded events, Jody said the chapter must collaborate with ONMS, the national foundation, and

potential sponsors for funding and logistics, citing a potential sustainable seafood event next spring as an example. This would require partnership and collaboration between the chapter and partners to define objectives and metrics of success.

Russell asked what protocol the SAC would follow to request chapter support for setting up a public engagement event. Stan Rogers said that the SAC could communicate their desire and details to he and Jody for a feasibility determination. At present, the chapter has limited funding in hand and would need to seek sponsors or support from the national foundation.

Chris Sawyer asked Jody to describe the annual chapter revenue, budget, and governing board size. Jody responded that last year's revenue was about \$100,000, and that the majority of funds support science and technology educational programs. The chapter director works part time and is the only paid staff for the chapter. The board is comprised of eleven trustees and two advisors.

The SAC members took a recess for lunch at 12:28 PM and called the meeting back to order at 1:50 PM.

Chris Sawyer departed the meeting at 1:50 PM.

Rachel Guy entered the webinar meeting remotely at approximately 1:50 PM.

OLD BUSINESS

Citizen Science – Julia Byrd, South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC)

Julia Byrd, SAFMC Citizen Science Program Manager, joined the meeting remotely to provide an introduction to citizen science in general; then describe the SAFMC Citizen Science Program as a model; discuss the project selection process and program development; highlight select SAFMC citizen science projects; and share lessons learned at SAFMC.

She began by defining citizen science as the scientific work undertaken by members of the general public, often in collaboration with, or under, the direction of professional scientists and scientific institutions. Citizen science is also called participatory science or collaborative science. There are four types of citizen science projects: data collection projects, data processing projects, community projects, and curriculum projects. There is also a varying degree of volunteer involvement with citizen science. There are contributory projects where volunteers are just collecting the data, collaborative projects where volunteers are more involved and provide local knowledge to support data analysis, and co-created projects where scientists and volunteers are working together to develop and implement and analyze data within a project.

Citizen science is often used as a tool for natural resource managers because they have limited resources, are dealing with increasingly complex management issues, and want to increase capacity so they can make the best management decisions. In recent years, interest in utilizing citizen science has increased, reflected by growth in the number of scientific publications that use or study citizen science. NOAA named citizen science as a Science and Technology focus

area in January of 2020, released their citizen science strategy in January of 2021, and issued a citizen science action plan in 2023 identifying how NOAA will use citizen science to help meet its mission.

The South Atlantic Fisheries Management Council (SAFMC) utilizes citizen science programs because they have longstanding data needs that cannot be met without the help of fishers. Citizen science provides an opportunity for fishers to get involved in collecting data that informs management of their fisheries. In 2016, the SAFMC held a citizen science program design workshop to brainstorm a successful program; the result of the workshop was a 'blueprint' that informed development of the program. The SAFMC citizen science program approach is to: fill data gaps and address research needs, complement existing programs and partnerships, develop intentional project design, encourage fisher and scientist collaboration, and act as an umbrella to support internal and external projects with partners. The specific goals of the program are to:

1. Design, implement, and sustain a project framework to guide the development of projects that support fishery management decision making
2. Facilitate the development of individual projects to address specific SAFMC research priorities
3. Ensure that data collected by projects are accessible, robust, and fit for purpose
4. Foster mutual learning, collaboration, and program engagement

In order to meet data needs, fishers and scientists collaborate to identify SAFMC citizen science research priorities by specifying topics, the data needs for each topic, and potential outcomes. Citizen science projects are selected based on their ability to meet six criteria. Proposed projects must: meet a research priority of the SAFMC; help address a data gap or deficiency; clearly identify how data could be used for assessment or management; work well with a citizen science approach; have available resources and capacity to support the project; and a viable project design team. Each approved project then forms a project design team which includes a stakeholder group with diverse expertise to provide guidance during project development and implementation. The data end users and science partners are involved in the project from the start. The project design team ensures that volunteers are involved to ensure the project is based on realistic expectations of volunteer support and to ensure collective agreement on the measurement of success.

The design team determines if citizen science is the right approach to address a data need. Julia shared tools SAFMC uses for framing citizen science projects, citing citizen science development aids from Pocock, M.J.O et al, 2014; Jennifer Shirk and Rick Bonney, 2015; and the U.S. Forest Service (citizen science toolkit).

Julia highlighted four of SAFMC's citizen science projects and discussed the following three projects in greater detail:

1. SAFMC Release – commercial and sport fishers use a simple mobile phone application to report data about released fish (first SAFMC citizen science project). See <https://safmc.net/citizen-science/safmc-release/>.

2. FISHStory – collection of historic leader board photos of fish catches to gather fishery catch and size statistics from decades prior to systematic collection of such data by fishery management agencies. <https://safmc.net/citizen-science/fishstory/>.
3. SciFish Platform – a mobile application and menu-driven project builder designed to collect fishery-related citizen science data. It allows partners of the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP) – a state-federal cooperative - to easily create a customizable app without the need to develop stand-alone applications for each new project or data need. The platform supports the collection and sharing of information about Atlantic fish species and will reduce the time and cost required to create applications from the ground up, as well as increase consistency in data fields and structure. ACCSP integrates data into a single user friendly database – the Data Warehouse. See https://safmc.net/documents/scifishonepager_final/ and <https://www.accsp.org/>.

Hermina Glass-Hill's camera feed stopped at 2:17 PM and resumed at 2:50 PM.

She then shared lessons learned about developing and implementing a citizen science program. She stated that citizen science is a powerful tool for fisheries management. Intentional preparation leads to a better chance of success for both the volunteers and the project. As organizations develop their own citizen science projects, there are a lot of tools and lessons learned that can be leveraged to benefit a new citizen science effort. Citizen science is not a no-cost endeavor, requiring significant work and resources to create a successful program. She also mentioned that it was important to involve data end users and volunteers early and often during the planning process. Finally, Julia stated that building relationships with stakeholders is key, but it can take time. Recruitment and retention of citizen science participants is an ongoing challenge. Hosting volunteer awards and pre-public release of data outcomes with volunteers are two practical ways to build goodwill and trust.

Julia responded to several SAC member questions about citizen science development, participant recruitment, and project implementation. She said she would share a PDF version of her PowerPoint presentation with the advisory council and invited any post-meeting questions.

Stan Rogers noted that the GRNMS will be hosting a science symposium on October 19, 2023. Citizen science at GRNMS will most likely be a topic that is discussed during the symposium. Peter Auster commented that since symposium attendees will be primarily researchers, a broader audience will ultimately be necessary for a comprehensive discussion of citizen science opportunities at GRNMS.

Kathy Knowlton spoke in more detail about the SciFish platform addressed in Julia Byrd's presentation, providing additional details about how fishery-related citizen science project developers can access the SciFish platform through an application and review process.

Several SAC members described the contributions of a long-standing citizen science marine life monitoring project sponsored by REEF (Reef Environmental Education Foundation).

Rick DeVictor asked if GRNMS has developed research recommendations for the sanctuary. Stan Rogers responded that GRNMS science priorities are posted at the ONMS website (see <https://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/science/assessment/grnms.html>), but these are currently being revised by the GRNMS science team and will be vetted with attendees at the October GRNMS Science Symposium.

Enhancing Public Engagement with the SAC and GRNMS

Peter Auster characterized this meeting topic as a brainstorming session and started the conversation by suggesting that foundation and council activities should be more synergistic moving forward. Russell Kent agreed with Peter Auster about creating a better relationship with the foundation and increasing advisory council involvement with foundation activities. Russell stated that the relationship between the three entities is the key to increased awareness and public support. He commented that there are many good ideas about how the council can better engage with the public, but there is a lack of resources for implementation.

Stan Rogers agreed that public engagement should be a core aspect of the advisory council. The main role of council members is to act as a liaison to their respective communities. Stan mentioned that in the next year sanctuary staff will be interacting with the advisory council to get opinions about management plan revisions and priorities that could potentially provide insights about improved SAC/GRNMS public engagement. He also said that future advisory council meetings could be held in cities throughout the region to gather input from other constituencies, like Brunswick or Charleston, focusing on topics of local interest.

Russell Kent posed the concept of a SAC/foundation chapter hosted fish fry, with a band, in a previously unreached community to build relationships and promote better understanding of GRNMS. He also discussed the importance of de-coupling foundation fund-raising from such an event to make it more inviting, casual, and accessible for community members.

Hermina Glass-Hill mentioned that when it comes to persons of color, the narrative is often focused on their consumption of seafood and not their involvement as seafaring people who value the ocean. She commented that because we are in the epicenter of the Gullah Geechee corridor, we need to seek methods to include these and other under-represented voices in ocean conservation discussions and foundation plans for community outreach about GRNMS.

Hermina and Russell Kent both noted that fundraiser events are often expensive and exclude large groups of people. Any foundation supported community meet-and-greet events should focus on public participation, rather than fundraising. Hermina mentioned that event information should be widely spread through avenues that would engage the general public by diversifying communication channels (e.g., churches in the African American community).

Peter Auster said the SAC needs to introduce the sanctuary to people and explain why they should care about it. Hermina added that the SAC should strive to promote a feeling of public belonging to the sanctuary – inclusion and investment. Rachel Guy suggested investigating anthropogenic linkages between the Gullah Geechee community and Gray's Reef. Stan Rogers noted that Gullah Geechee crew members participated in the 1960s research discovery of

Gray's Reef and that several fish species found at Gray's Reef live part of their lifecycles in inshore habitats surrounding Gullah Geechee coastal communities.

Lauren Stefaniak suggested a SAC dialogue with the foundation about supporting a booth at the many festivals in the area to introduce the sanctuary to the community.

Stan Rogers announced that GRNMS has received authorization to hire an Education/Outreach Coordinator in 2024 and will be hiring an Educational Specialist soon, who will primarily manage the Ocean Discovery Center. Ben Prueitt conducts digital and festival outreach and volunteer efforts for GRNMS.

COUNCIL ACTION – Determine 2023/2024 SAC Priorities

The chair opened discussion about approving four proposed SAC priorities for 2023/2024, based upon past SAC discussions and recommendations of the SAC Executive Committee. SAC members offered some amendments to the proposed “priorities”, and the council discussed an iterative, adaptive approach for developing customized outreach events that build connections with specific stakeholders. A general consent motion was prompted by the chair and passed by general consent, as described below.

MOTION #2: Determine 2023/2024 SAC Priorities

The following suggested actions were approved by general consent as SAC priorities over the next 18 months:

- **Investigate citizen science opportunities within GRNMS and make recommendations**
- **Provide recommendations to NOAA regarding the President's 30X30 conservation initiative**
- **Explore effective collaboration among the SAC, sanctuary, and GRNMS Foundation Chapter to build synergistic support for sanctuary programs and needs**
- **Develop an engagement strategy to enhance public awareness of, and connection to, GRNMS through their SAC representatives and implement at least one activity**

Brock Woodson's remote camera feed stopped at 3:50 PM and did not resume for the remainder of the meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

Public Comment and Potential SAC Member Discussion

At 16:07, the Chair asked if any members of the public wished to address the council. No public attendees were present.

SAC Member Comments (primary members only)

Ralph Ainger reported that he gave two public presentations about Gray's Reef using sanctuary resources. He reported that many audience members were interested in GRNMS, but they did

not know much about Gray's Reef or its location. Ralph also shared that many people thought it is a coral reef and that they cannot fish at GRNMS. So, there is some work to be done to educate the public about sanctuary regulations.

Peter Auster encouraged GRNMS staff to get word out about the science symposium as soon as possible since research academic's fall calendars fill quickly.

Rick DeVictor thanked Peter Auster for his service as chair and wished him well. He reported that red snapper season opened for 2 days. The black sea bass stock assessment determined the fishery is undergoing overfishing and is overfished, with significant discards. SAFMC is working on a fishery management plan with additional restrictive catch regulations for this important fish resource at Gray's Reef. NOAA was given an unprecedented \$3.3 billion by the Inflation Reduction Act, of which \$349 million will be used by NOAA Fisheries to promote projects that focus on building climate ready fisheries (e.g., modernize stock assessment processes, improve data). NOAA Fisheries will use \$82 million for right whale protection (e.g., ropeless fishing gear solutions), and \$20 million for red snapper research.

Hermina Glass-Hill shared that she was a panelist at Capitol Hill Ocean Week (CHOW), a sanctuaries advocacy event sponsored each year in Washington D.C by the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation. She also participated with Stan Rogers in welcoming the Healthy Ocean Advocacy Academy's training session at the Ocean Discovery Center in Savannah. Hermina wanted to get people involved in and excited about Whale Week in November. Stan Rogers thanked Hermina and everyone involved in CHOW and added that Congressman Buddy Carter joined the U.S. House Sanctuary Caucus shortly after his participation at CHOW this year.

Jamie Gormley highlighted the Navy Marine Species Monitoring Program. It was developed as part of the Navy's environmental compliance program to satisfy specific requirements for monitoring and reporting military readiness activities, like SONAR and military explosives activities. It includes various projects, from range-specific species monitoring to data distribution to the wider scientific community. The Navy submits annual reports to NOAA Fisheries as part of compliance requirements. The 2022 report for the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans was recently posted on the U.S. Navy Marine Species Monitoring website (<https://www.navymarinespeciesmonitoring.us/>), a comprehensive report repository. The Navy is conducting no current activities at Gray's Reef, but it is conducting a monitoring project for species composition and distribution within the Jacksonville Shallow Water Range. The Navy is also conducting a large-scale *Analysis of Acoustic Ecology of the North Atlantic Shelf Break Cetaceans and the Effects of Anthropogenic Noise Impacts* along the entire U.S. east coast in collaboration with NOAA Fisheries and the Northeast Fisheries Science Center. Acoustic data from east coast arrays is analyzed for seasonal and spatial occurrence of baleen whales, improving automated classification of beaked whales, accessing environmental impacts of anthropogenic noise, and other objectives. Several publications have come out of that work, for which Jamie can provide additional information. Stan Rogers commented that a large amount of marine cetacean research is funded by the Navy.

Rachel Guy reported that SINEER is preparing to start their 312 review process, a five-year review for NOAA's OCM program. SINEER or NOAA may be reaching out to members of the SAC as stakeholder representatives in late 2023 or early 2024 to provide input on future SINERR management goals. Rachel hopes for further integration of SINEER with GRNMS going forward. SINERR is in the process of heading up their third year in the estuarine fish monitoring cooperative, using crowd sourcing monitoring of lesser known fish species in the back estuaries. Creating a web-based guide that identifies the lesser known species and juvenile stages. The citizen science presentation today was very relevant and applicable to current SINEER program needs, triggering some ideas for the reserve.

Russell Kent has continued to write GRNMS quarterly updates in the CCA Georgia newsletter and will submit another article today.

Kathy Knowlton informed the council that CoastFest will be held on October 5, 2024. There will not be a CoastFest event in October of 2023. There is also a newly revived publication (from the 1980s) available from the Coastal Resources Division called Coastlines (<https://coastalgadnr.org/coastlines>). Kathy also requested that PDFs of all of the presentations at each SAC meeting be distributed to SAC members afterwards.

Shelly Krueger shared that she helped write the standard operating procedures for the Blue Star Program for dive boats at Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. Shelly is on the board for Georgia Adopt-A-Stream that sponsors Paddle Georgia. Each year 200 – 250 people paddle down a major Georgia River as part of that program. She noted that a sanctuary partnership with them could highlight the Altamaha River basin and its connection to Gray's Reef; Georgia Adopt-A-Stream is open to initiating a dialogue with the sanctuary about collaboration. Stan suggested that SAC members could paddle the Altamaha to promote GRNMS connections and added that the GA Aquarium is sponsoring two ocean guardian schools (one in Atlanta and one in Savannah) with an exchange program between them for under-represented schools.

Jeff Soss engaged with his constituents through Facebook. He posted a notice on three Facebook pages that reach more than 25,000 members. He asked for input on issues or concerns about the sanctuary. He has received 60-70 comments thus far to his Facebook post. There were a lot of comments about the snapper/grouper complex, which is telling about what the community thinks about the SAC and GRNMS. It demonstrates misconceptions about what the sanctuary does, and it serves as an indicator of future education needs. He also posted about the SAC proposal that GRNMS explore installation of mooring buoys at Gray's Reef and received a lot of positive feedback from divers. Divers responded that they would prefer multiple moorings and potential annual or semiannual rotation of buoys among several reef locations to offer more diverse moored diving options at GRNMS. However, responses from fishers indicated that they don't consider GRNMS mooring buoys of any significant benefit to fishing within the sanctuary. Jeff also queried Facebook members about any perceived need for sanctuary boundary buoys, but received no responses.

Lauren Stefaniak suggested agenda items for the next meeting, noting the need to form two subcommittees - one for citizen science and one for developing engagement strategies. In

addition, a working group will need to be established to explore effective collaboration between the SAC and foundation.

Michelle Taliercio thanked the presenters for taking the time to talk to the SAC. She highlighted that an important theme mentioned throughout the SAC meeting was outreach and citizen science. She's excited to see what outcomes result from future discussions that she can then share with divers and constituents. Michelle will reach out to Jeff Soss to discuss ideas for utilizing social media to establish effective dialogue about GRNMS with the sport diving community.

Kent Wicker offered three perspectives as a newly appointed SAC member. First, GRNMS has a great website with a wide variety of information. There is a broad diversity of expertise and abilities around the table. It's important, at every meeting, that council members remember why their work on the council is important. He said GRNMS is an important place to protect, and council members can use that as a teaching opportunity to explain their role in stewardship of the sanctuary. Kent gave a brief overview of his background and experience.

Peter Auster thanked everyone he has had an opportunity to work with during his past 9 years on the SAC.

The meeting adjourned at 16:39 for a total meeting time of 5 hours and 15 minutes.