
**GRAY'S REEF NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY
ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING - FEBRUARY 4, 2015**

Skidaway Institute of Oceanography, 10 Ocean Science Circle Savannah, Georgia
31411, Library Auditorium. Directions:

<http://www.skiio.usg.edu/?p=aboutus/geninfo/directions>



SAC Attendees

Scott Noakes
Emily Kroutil
Jene Nissen
Suzanne VanParreren
Michael Denmark
Rick DeVictor
Anna George
Warren Hupman

Randy Rudd
Eddie Leonard (for Pat Geer)
Mark Padgett
Tim Goodale
Susan White (conference call)
Peter Auster (conference call)
Christine Laporte (conference call)
Lt. Morgan Fouler (for LT Mastrianni)

SAC Members Absent

Doug Lewis
Al Samuels

Mary Conley

GRNMS

Amy Rath
Alison Scott
Abby Murphy
Chris Hines
Jenny Vander Pluym

Jody Patterson
Jared Halonen
Sarah Fangman
Becky Shortland

Public in attendance

Tom Wright

Advisory Council Business

Council Chairman Rick DeVictor called the Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary (GRNMS) Advisory Council meeting to order. He welcomed members, staff and public in attendance. The November 2014 meeting summary was approved unanimously.

Science Advisory Group

Working group chair Peter Auster reported that the annual science advisory group meeting will be held the following day, February 5. This year the group will focus on "process" studies in and around the research area. These are processes that influence resources and patterns within the different natural communities. There will also be a focus on emerging issues.

Ecological Connectivity Working Group

Peter Auster also reported that the ecological connectivity working group has not yet been initiated pending finalization of the terms of reference. Peter also noted that the timeframe for the working group is approximately 12 months for a report and recommendations for the SAC.

Education & Outreach Assessment Working Group

Working group chair Emily Kroutil reported that the first meeting (orientation webinar) of the working group was held last week. The group will be evaluating all programs for efficacy in two upcoming workshops (Feb. 17-19 and March 25-26).

Law Enforcement Working Group

No members of the law enforcement working group were in attendance so there was no report.

Sanctuary Report

Gray's Reef Ocean Film Festival

Communications and Outreach Coordinator Amy Rath reported that the film festival was a great success in part due to the efforts of the newly-formed GRNMS Foundation. They estimated there were approximately 1500 guests. Holding the festival in January seems a good choice so as not to compete with too many other events. Sarah Fangman noted that some attendees stated they were inspired by the film festival.

FareWhale Festival

Education Specialist Abby Murphy informed the council about the upcoming FareWhale Festival to be held at Tybee Island on March 21. The event celebrates the approximate end of calving season for the endangered North Atlantic right whale. There will be a beach cleanup, naturalist tours with Cathy Sakas, and other activities. Tybee Arts Association and Sea to Shore Alliance are co-sponsors. The event is to be preceded by participation in the Savannah St. Patrick's Day parade advertising the festival and focusing on right whales.

Gray's Reef Foundation

Foundation Executive Director Chris Hines gave an overview of activities since the group's establishment late in 2014. He noted that the first and primary focus has been the film festival and the "gala" that launched the foundation and film festival in January. He encouraged council members to let foundation sponsors know you are sanctuary advisory council member. Chris went on to outline funding that has been received and grant proposals submitted, as well as ideas for future fundraising events and programs.

Sanctuary soundscapes

Council member Scott Noakes updated the council about the ongoing sound recording take place in GRNMS with a simple hydrophone. The set-up has a four-day recording time that produces a tremendous amount of data to review. Scott also reported that there is a page on the GRNMS website now that includes some sound clips.

Becky Shortland acknowledged the council's action by writing to ONMS supporting the monitoring of sound in sanctuaries. While there is no funding for a comprehensive noise reference station at GRNMS, ONMS will continue to seek funding and a system-wide working group on noise has been established. The working group recognizes what the GRNMS council suggested – that system-wide parameters for all ONMS for comparison purposes is important. The Noise Working Group is also developing a three-minute video to explain soundscapes and anthropogenic noise issues.

GRNMS staffing and vessels

Superintendent Sarah Fangman updated council members on completion of Kathleen Jamison's detail as deputy superintendent and a new rotation beginning in February. Jenny Vander Pluym will soon complete her detail as research coordinator. Sarah outlined long-term outcomes that are in development and the upcoming education and outreach programs assessment with a working group of the council. Hiring for a permanent research coordinator is possible by Fall 2015, but the process has not yet begun. Sarah also reported on a request to upgrade the R/V Joe Ferguson, the reasons it is needed, and the lack of funding at this time. Sarah offered, however, that GRNMS has a relatively robust budget compared to other offices and the site also received some discretionary funds for the fiscal year.

Evaluation training

Sarah Fangman reminded council members of the upcoming training on program evaluation. The two-day workshop will be led by facilitators from the Office of Coastal Management. She encouraged council members to participate.

Social science initiative

Research Specialist Alison Scott reported on the offer from staff of the Hollings Marine Laboratory in Charleston to support additional social science work to increase our knowledge of the public's awareness and community support for GRNMS, as well as "values" related to the sanctuary and its resources. Discussions with Hollings staff are ongoing and may include the Sapelo Island NERR in the project design. Alison requested ideas from council members on ways to reach user groups

Unmanned aerial systems

Sarah Fangman raised the topic of the use of unmanned aerial systems (UAS) such as the PUMA being tested by NOAA at various sites. The PUMA is scheduled to be tested within GRNMS boundaries this coming August in an effort to better understand sanctuary uses and users. Sarah would like to hear from council members about perceptions and attitudes about this technology, as well as their ideas for best communicating the activities to the public and users. Questions and discussion among council members and staff followed with suggestions to publicize the PUMA flyovers through the website, social media and a press release. Another idea is to communicate that UAS is an exploratory mission - a novel approach - to assess use of the sanctuary similar to use of remotely operated vehicles (ROV) under the water. It is a high-tech way to gain scientific data and to answer questions that are critical to GRNMS management; examples could be beneficial. It was also offered that the U.S. Navy has done extensive outreach on their UAS operations so the public completely understands the uses and needs.

Council Members' Report

Hollings grant proposal

Anna George gave a presentation about the Tennessee Aquarium, the Ocean Journey Building and the proposal submitted for Hollings Grant funding to update the exhibits and incorporate GRNMS. Although the aquarium is located on a watershed that empties into the Gulf of Mexico and already includes a focus on Flower Garden Banks NMS, visitor demographics indicate that Georgians, many from the headwaters that reach the Atlantic, are very being reached in large numbers. The proposal has currently made it to the second round of reviews.

Savannah Arts Academy ROV Club

Jody Patterson and Emily Kroutil reported that Jody leads weekly meetings at the school working with students to build ROVs. Jody further explained that the project is currently focusing on Chatham County schools. Jody also noted that the annual Southeast ROV competition will be held on April 25 at the Chatham County Aquatic Center. Winners of each regional competition feed into an international competition; and that a pitch may be made for Savannah and GRNMS to be the focus for next year's international competition.

Ecotour outreach opportunities

Mark Padgett explained his idea to train eco-tour operators, including himself, about GRNMS to add to the information operators relay to customers. Questions and discussion followed concluding with some ideas to follow up and reach eco-tour operators by linking coastal systems with GRNMS and the need to develop talking points for this purpose.

Sanctuary Watch article

Jene Nissen explained that there are currently six Navy representatives, including himself, serving on sanctuary advisory councils system-wide. He was asked to write a piece on the benefits of his participation. That and other inputs maybe used in a future ONMS Sanctuary Watch edition.

Diving at GRNMS

Randy Rudd has been communicating with a dive shop in St. Marys that has an interest in taking customers to GRNMS in the future. Randy has offered to accompany the charter on a first trip. Warren Hupman charters for diving out of Brunswick and would also be willing to take experienced divers to GRNMS. Sarah Fangman expressed that we would like divers to have the best possible experience while still protecting the resources.

Public comment

Tom Wright expressed that he had a concern about advertising the FareWhale Festival as though no whales were present at that time.

Next meeting and adjourn

Becky Shortland suggested seeking a BOEM representative to present at the next meeting; council members agreed. The next meeting may be planned for May 26-29 and will be a webinar.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:30 PM and council members met socially with new GRNMS Foundation board members.