



## GRAY'S REEF NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING – MARCH 3, 2016

<u>Sanctuary Advisory Council (SAC) Attendees</u>	<u>Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary (GRNMS) and Office of National Marine Sanctuary (ONMS) Staff</u>
Rick DeVactor, Chair Michael Denmark, Vice-chair Anna George, Secretary Peter Auster Mona Behl LT David Clifford Mary Conley Tim Henkel Warren Hupman Emily Kroutil Kevin Mitchell January Murray Jene Nissen Scott Noakes Mark Padgett Dustin Rhyan Tim Tarver Suzanne VanParreren	Sarah Fangman Steve Gittings Jared Halonen Jody Patterson Becky Shortland Todd Recicar Michelle Riley George Sedberry Allison Scott Sean Yeckley  <u>GRNMS Foundation</u> Chris Hines  <u>GRNMS Volunteers</u> Mandy Harvey Kelsey Hymel Richard LaPalme
<u>SAC Members Absent</u> Capt. Bob Lynn	<u>Public in attendance</u> Kathy Knowlton Dawn Franco Delaine Hildreth Lola Barker Larry Yawn Lynn Burkhalter Al Samuels (Retiring SAC member) Buster Thompson Tom Wright Vernon Baxter and guest

### **Advisory Council Business**

Council Chairman Rick DeVactor called the Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary (GRNMS) Advisory Council meeting to order. He and Superintendent Sarah Fangman welcomed members, staff and public in attendance. Rick briefly reviewed the agenda and outlined the meeting objectives. The November 2015 council meeting summaries for

the November 9 webinar and November 20 conference call were unanimously approved with the following changes: Peter Auster and Tim Henkel were both present for the webinar on November 9.

#### GRNMS Sanctuary Advisory Council Charter

Becky Shortland noted that the Charter was last revised in 2011 for a period of five years and thus should be reviewed and potentially revised in 2016. Becky proposed that a subcommittee be formed to evaluate and revise the Charter, as needed. The Executive Committee (Rick DeVictor, Michael Denmark, Anna George) volunteered to serve as the subcommittee.

#### Sanctuary Advisory Council Officers

Rick DeVictor was unanimously elected to another term as Chair. Michael Denmark was unanimously elected to another term as Vice-chair. Anna George was unanimously elected to another term as Secretary.

#### Recognitions

Rick DeVictor and Sarah Fangman presented Al Samuels with a framed certificate in recognition of his outstanding service as a member of the Sanctuary Advisory Council from 2008 – 2015. During his tenure, Al supported efforts to work more closely with law enforcement and develop strategies to raise public awareness of GRNMS regulations.

#### National Sanctuary Advisory Council Summit

Rick DeVictor provided a summary of the annual National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council Summit conducted on January 12 – 14, 2016 in Annapolis, MD. Key discussions during the summit included: budget challenges within NOAA and the resultant competition for resources; the potential addition of new NMS sites and the associated resource considerations; how to demonstrate the importance of national marine sanctuaries by moving the perception from a “nice to have” to a “gotta have” and presenting the value of the system as a whole; the role of SAC as a grassroots link between the community and the NMS superintendents; SAC role in expanding understanding and awareness of climate change.

Discussion followed, during which it was proposed that a working committee be formed to develop strategies specifically for GRNMS to demonstrate and communicate the overall value of the sanctuary as it relates to climate change issues. There was some debate within the group about whether these efforts should begin at a national, rather than a regional/local level. Rick DeVictor will raise this issue for discussion during the next conference call of the national SAC chairs. In addition, Peter Auster suggested a letter be written to the national office regarding the high level of interest of GRNMS in actively addressing this issue.

Anna George asked a question regarding possible defunding of the NOAA marine debris program beginning in 2017. Sarah will look into this issue and follow-up with Anna.

#### **Council Members' Report**

Artificial Reefs – Tim Tarver spoke to the group regarding the potential of artificial reefs to increase the global food supply, while maintaining a healthy fish population and mitigating the detrimental environmental impact of standard commercial food production methods such as livestock farming and aquaculture. GRNMS facilitated this discussion at Tim's request and it should be noted that GRNMS is not endorsing any position relative to artificial reefs, nor considering adding artificial reefs within GRNMS.

Many points were set forward in the discussion that followed Tim's presentation, including the potential of artificial reefs to minimize demand on the sanctuary, barriers to deployment of additional reef structures despite the widespread availability of permitted sites in Georgia's offshore waters, the most effective structure for artificial reefs, and potential research opportunities relative to fish populations and other environmental factors to aid in understanding the influence of habitat on fish population and harvest. In addition, the importance of understanding the interaction of species that inhabit artificial reefs was discussed and it was suggested that it might be informative to quantify the

degree to which fishing within the sanctuary has decreased, and could continue to decrease, due to the deployment of artificial reefs. Rick DeVictor proposed that these issues be captured for future discussion and asked January Murray and Tim Tarver to keep the group updated on developments pertaining to artificial reefs.

GRNMS 101 – Michael Denmark presented the proposed GRNMS 101 presentation to the group for review and feedback. This presentation will be utilized by a corps of trained volunteer speakers to provide an introduction to Gray's Reef, raise awareness of its significance, and motivate the public to get involved. This is intended to be a 15 - 20 minute presentation, but can be customized based upon the audience and length of the talk. Speakers notes are provided, but presenters are encouraged to deliver the talk in their own words.

Michael proposed the following next steps for the slide kit: beta-test in a small number of programs with "friendly" groups; fine tune as necessary; solicit speaker volunteers from the advisory council, foundation, and volunteer corps via a formal letter; determine if a "speakers workshop" is needed; develop an "outreach solicitation letter" to be sent to target clubs and organizations to which GRNMS would like to present; schedule presentations and assign speakers. In addition, Michael recommended that information on the GRNMS Foundation be available at all events for those who wish support the organization.

Michael thanked Jody Patterson for her work developing the presentation and Sarah Fangman thanked Michael for serving as a champion of the slide kit. Other recommendations from the group included: add a slide regarding the NMS mission and showing the location of all the sanctuaries; be cautious about saying "Georgia's Amazing Underwater Park" as it could alienate the South Carolina audience; replace the body-cavity photo of the grouper as it may upset some people – a photo of a fish with an external monitor might be a good substitute; ensure that the speakers' notes provide information on all the images on the slide so the speaker can answer any questions that arise; change out the photos at the bottom of the slides for more variety.

Descending Devices for Catch and Release – Warren Hupman demonstrated the use of a descending device that aids the survival of reef fishes caught and in need of release. This device is available commercially and costs approximately \$50. To the best of his knowledge, the use of these devices is not widespread in Georgia, but the reaction of his charter customers has been mostly positive.

Steve Gittings discussed two catch and release methods that he has used in the Cayman Islands when tagging grouper for research purposes. One of these is a weighted PVC cube covered in mesh on all sides except the bottom. The cube is lowered on a line and then raised after the fish reaches the bottom. The other is a weighted hook with no barb. The fish is placed on the hook and lowered on a line. When the fish is at a safe depth, the line is pulled up from the surface and the fish is released.

### **Council Working Groups**

Ecological Connectivity Working Group – Peter Auster reported that the group is currently working on synthesizing information on connectivity to resources and locations outside the sanctuary. Subject experts have been identified and a webinar was conducted to develop a work plan, goals, and timelines. Outlines for most sections have been completed and the group members are currently developing drafts of initial topic areas. After the outlines are finalized and the text is completed, Peter will review and edit. The group will then meet to identify gaps and synthesize the information. The results will be presented in a peer-reviewed NMS report, accompanied by slides that can be used for communicating key findings to various stakeholder groups.

Science Advisory Group – Peter Auster reported on the key discussions and outcomes of the Science Advisory Group meeting that took place yesterday (March 2, 2016). Topics discussed by the group included: the abundance and location of both sea turtles and lionfish; an update on the telemetry program and data from the 17 monitoring devices located within GRNMS; carbon dioxide monitoring and the link between storms and increases in CO<sub>2</sub> levels;

monitoring of contaminants; fish/invertebrate relationships and functional roles; distribution and abundance of echinoderms; examination of juvenile fish habitats; and findings of the piscivore ecology project to-date.

Law Enforcement Working Group – LT David Clifford from the US Coast Guard reported that he is working closely with the Coast Guard Auxiliary to increase the number of patrols within GRNMS. Kevin Mitchell of the NOAA Office of Law Enforcement requested that staff and advisory council members report the registration numbers of any boats observed in the sanctuary to him, along with any prohibited activities. Becky Shortland reviewed recent patrol observations in the sanctuary and highlighted several days where Coast Guard, Coast Guard Auxiliary, and DNR patrols overlapped. David Clifford and Kevin Mitchell will discuss upcoming patrol schedules and the increased deployment of resources during times of peak usage.

New Working Groups – A subcommittee to further explore options to increase engagement was created and reported during the November 2015 webinar. GRNMS staff agreed to further explore the purposes and possible “terms of reference” for recreational fishing, conservation and education/outreach working groups. Based upon staff evaluation, Sarah Fangman proposed that the creation of the new working groups be staggered, with the Recreational Fishing Working Group being the first. The next working group to be formed would be the Conservation Working Group. The timing for this will be determined based upon consultation with the advisory council. The Education and Outreach Working Group is considered a lower priority at this point due to the fact that a similar working group was recently convened and this group produced a wealth of valuable information.

Based upon Sarah's recommendation the council determined that a subgroup of advisory council members, to include Tim Tarver and Pat Geer, should be formed prior to implementation of the Recreational Fishing Working Group. The subgroup will convene to determine if similar groups already exist under the egis of other entities, the extent of the need for a GRNMS-specific working group, and, if warranted, possible “terms of reference” for the working group, such as the investigation of the barriers to increased knowledge of GRNMS and its regulations and the identification of fishing “best practices” such as descending devices. If formed, this group would be comprised 7 to 10 members and would meet quarterly.

#### **Council Members' Report (continued)**

NOAA Fisheries Update – Rick DeVictor reported that the critical habitat for the North Atlantic Right Whale was expanded on February 26, 2016. This expansion does not mean there are additional regulations relative to ship speed, etc., but it does impact permitting activities. Rick stated that a decision has yet to be made relative to whether or not there will be a red snapper fishing season in 2016. The recreational limit for black sea bass is expected to increase to 7 fish per person per day later this year, with the exact effective date yet to be determined. Rick is not aware of any changes in the size requirements for black sea bass. A recent hog fish stock assessment has determined that there are two distinct stocks. A hog fish management plan is in development and should be introduced in 18 to 24 months.

National Fishing Seminar – Kevin Mitchell notified GRNMS staff about a fishing seminar that was held in Savannah in February. He exhibited for NOAA Office of Law Enforcement and included GRNMS information. He found that some attendees thought that fishing was prohibited at GRNMS. He provided information on GRNMS and promoted the usage of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's App, which includes the GRNMS fishing regulations and the coordinates for the boundaries of the sanctuary and the research area.

Sapelo Island NERR 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary– Suzanne VanParreren provided an overview of the activities taking place to celebrate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Sapelo Island National Estuarine Research Reserve. A significant program has been planned for each month of the anniversary year, including a video on the history of Sapelo Island, book discussions, and lectures. Everyone is invited to attend. More information is available at [www.sapelonerr.org](http://www.sapelonerr.org).

#### **GRNMS Report**

Foundation Update – Foundation Executive Director Chris Hines gave an update on Foundation activities, including the Foundation operational plan and the 2016 GRNMS Ocean Film Festival. Chris noted that *A Fishy Affair* will take place in 2016 on either September 23 or 24 in Savannah. Chris provided an overview of the proposed mobile exhibit and asked the members to forward him any ideas for sponsors for this exhibit. Anna George suggested the Institute of Museum and Library Sciences.

The Foundation is developing GRNMS informational signs for placement at local marinas and boat ramps. The council members provided input on content and placement over the lunch break.

ONMS Leadership Team Meeting in Savannah – Sarah Fangman informed the group that the 2016 meeting of the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS) Leadership Team is scheduled to take place in Savannah on May 2 – 6. This meeting presents an opportunity for the sanctuary staff to share what's happening at GRNMS, introduce others to our local area, and facilitate collaborative discussions among sanctuaries. There will be one evening event to which the council members will be invited and Sarah encouraged them to attend, if possible. More information on this event is forthcoming.

Resource Protection Program Evaluation – Becky Shortland provided an overview of this evaluation and let the group know that a working group will likely be formed to determine how to best assess the protection program for sanctuary resources. This would be a short-term task force as opposed to a standing working group.

Council Member Support – Michelle Riley asked for the council's assistance in increasing public awareness of GRNMS and provided examples of how this could be accomplished: friending "Logger Head" on Facebook; sharing the GRNMS Facebook page; personal email blasts to their contact lists; following GRNMS on Twitter and retweeting when possible; contributing to the creation of a poster and flyer distribution list for areas south of Savannah; placing GRNMS events on public calendars; and notifying Michelle of free advertising opportunities. Michelle also let the group know that the Gray's Reef overview one-pager and the diving one-pager have been updated and she distributed new social media business cards to the group. Steve Gittings suggested utilizing ONMS media, such as *Earth is Blue*, to broaden the reach of GRNMS stories, photos and videos.

Hydrophone Results – Becky Shortland provided a brief update on the hydrophones that were deployed in mid-December in 2 locations in the sanctuary—one inside the research area and one outside the research area. The hydrophones have been retrieved and the results are beginning to be analyzed.

GRNMS Volunteer of the Year – Sarah Fangman introduced and thanked the 2015 GRNMS Volunteer of the Year, Larry Yawn, and presented him with an award honoring his service to GRNMS. Larry started volunteering as a plankton monitor in 2013 and has consistently provided support at events and on the boat. In addition, Larry has been invaluable to the success of the ROV competition by serving as the event safety inspector and patiently working with the participating students to correct any safety defects.

GRNMS Strategic Communications Plan – Michelle Riley presented the third in a series of overviews of the plan. Today's presentation and discussion was focused on the audience defined as the Savannah Community. Sarah Fangman stressed that Savannah is only being prioritized because GRNMS is based in Savannah and that this prioritization does not imply that Savannah is more important than other localities. Savannah will serve as a starting point and then efforts will expand to other areas in the region. The plan follows the education-based behavior change model, which has a three-step progression: 1) increase exposure and name recognition; 2) continue to build knowledge and depth of understanding; 3) increase involvement and investment. Measures to assess the effectiveness of the communications strategies will be included in the plan.

Richard LaPalme expressed reservations about calling Savannah "the gateway to Gray's Reef" because it gives the impression that one can only reach GRNMS by coming to Savannah. The group also strongly recommended

reevaluating the terminology “Georgia’s Underwater Park” as it may be confusing to the audience and lead them to connect the sanctuary to a water park. Moving to terminology such as “Underwater National Park” was suggested as was testing this language. Mary Conley suggested the possibility of a baseline community survey that could be repeated at regular intervals.

### **Next Meeting**

There will be two, 2-hour webinars between now and the next in-person meeting. Topics could include the next strategic communications plan audience, new working groups, resource protection evaluation, various working group updates and council members’ reports. The idea of a fishery management policy and science educational presentation would be better suited to the in-person meetings where public can be involved more readily.

The next in-person advisory council meeting will be scheduled in conjunction with *A Fishy Affair* in September in Savannah.

### **Public Comment**

Buster Thompson expressed his pleasure in attending. Richard LaPalme thanked the group for allowing him to attend and complimented the group on its collaborative nature and lively debate.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:20pm.