

**GRAY'S REEF NMS  
SANCTUARY ADVISORY COUNCIL  
Meeting, March 24, 2005  
10:00am – 4:30pm  
Georgia Department of Natural Resources  
Coastal Resources Division  
Brunswick, GA**

**Distributed Materials**

- Meeting Agenda
- Bluewater Network Letter to Dan Basta, NMSP Director
- SAC Chairs Letter to Secretary Gutierrez
- Gray's Reef NMS 2005 State of the Sanctuary Report
- National Marine Sanctuaries 2005 State of the Sanctuary Report

**Advisory Council Members Present**

Leslie Sautter, university education	Joe Kimmel, NOAA Fisheries Service
Buddy Sullivan, Sapelo Island NERR	Doug Lewis, GADNR law enforcement
Danny Gleason, living resources research	Judy Wright, sport diving
Venetia Butler, K-12 education	Will Berson, local conservation
Bing Phillips, sport fishing	Clark Alexander, non-living resources research
Henry Ansley, GA DNR CRD	Reed Bohne, GRNMS manager

**Incoming Advisory Council Members Present**

Ralph Neely, sport diving  
Tim Tarver, sport fishing

**Advisory Council Members Absent**

LCDR Scott Rogers, USCG  
Incoming member Judy Helmey, charter/commercial fishing

**GRNMS Staff Members Present**

April Fendley, administration  
Becky Shortland, planning and evaluation  
Jim Sullivan, regional projects

**Public Present**

Fiona Wilmot, advisory council coordinator, Florida Keys NMS  
Brian Keller, research coordinator Florida Keys NMS

**Welcome, Agenda, and Minutes**

Chair Judy Wright welcomed meeting participants and distributed materials. Judy asked participants to review December minutes. Venetia motioned to approve the minutes; all participants were in favor.

## **Advisory Council Business**

### *National Advisory Council Chairs and Coordinators Meeting*

Judy presented an overview of the National Advisory Council Chairs & Coordinators meeting in San Francisco, CA, in February. Discussion ensued about the various topics mentioned in the presentation, including the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation (NMSF), management plan reviews, telepresence, National Marine Sanctuaries Act (NMSA) reauthorization, and sanctuary case studies. Judy then commented on the letter to Dan Basta from the Bluewater Network about their concerns regarding cruise ship discharges.

### *Recognitions and New Advisory Council Members*

Reed welcomed and introduced new sport fishing representative Tim Tarver. Tim briefly described his background. Tim will succeed Bing Phillips for this seat. Reed then recognized and honored Bing for his extensive participation on the council.

Reed welcomed and introduced Ralph Neely as the new sport diving representative. Ralph stated that being on the council is an honor. He brings a breadth of experience to the council. Ralph succeeds Judy Wright for this seat. Reed then recognized and honored Judy for her extensive participation on the council. Reed noted that GRNMS has nominated Judy for the NMSF Volunteer of the Year Award, which will be announced during Capitol Hill Oceans Week in June. Judy stated that she has learned so much and that being a part of the council has been an honor.

Reed also noted that Capt. Judy Helmey is the new charter/commercial fishing representative. She was unable to attend the meeting.

### *New Officers*

Outgoing Chair Judy Wright called for nominations of new officers. Leslie Sautter nominated Joe Kimmel as the new Chair. Venetia Butler seconded the motion, which was then unanimously approved. Dr. Kimmel then described his background and experience. He appreciates the opportunity to serve as Chair.

Joe Kimmel nominated Leslie Sautter for Vice Chair. Clark Alexander seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved.

Venetia Butler then accepted Judy Wright's nomination to remain as Secretary, seconded by Leslie Sautter, and unanimously approved.

The Advisory Council adjourned for lunch at 11:45 a.m. and reconvened at 12:30 p.m.

## **Program Status**

### *Research Area Working Group*

As Chair of the Marine Research Area Concept Working Group, Joe Kimmel provided an overview of the final meeting held the previous day in Savannah. He noted that the group worked to develop a draft recommendation to the Advisory Council regarding the establishment of a research area. Joe recognized Gray's Reef and National Marine Sanctuary Program (NMSP) headquarters staff who worked hard to organize and facilitate the meetings. He stated that the

group intends to recommend that a research area be considered for recommendation to NOAA by the Advisory Council, and he touched on some suggestions that may be made by the group regarding the model research area. Joe noted that the model is being refined at this point by Matt Kendall of the National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science (NCCOS), and that Matt Kendall is performing more analyses that incorporate prior data and home range. He emphasized that the effects of fishing activities on Sanctuary resources have been identified through the working group process, both as the most important to the Sanctuary and those that a research area could help to answer. Additionally, Dr. Kimmel noted that, should NOAA decide to proceed after receiving a recommendation from the full Advisory Council, the research area recommendation will be presented for full public scrutiny in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process.

Henry Ansley asked about final recommendations regarding law enforcement and area markings. Joe stated that a minimum of four (4) buoys on corners and possibly buoys along boundaries were suggested. He recognizes that enforcement needs may impact the size and specifications of a research area. In response to Henry's question, Joe also stated that the group did not debate prohibition of activities within the research area; this discussion should be left up to the Advisory Council and the public during the NEPA process. Judy Wright noted previous discussion centered on the effects of bottom fishing. Henry Ansley also commented on concerns about diving and trolling activities within the area. Ralph Neely asked about types of buoys considered, to which Joe Kimmel responded that FKNMS buoys are large and yellow. Joe Kimmel stated that discussion of research area size considered both displacement of fishermen and edge effect (complications for research from fishing that would take place along the edge of a research area). Bing Phillips noted that marking buoys need to be in line of sight. Dr. Sautter commented on research issues and how the group narrowed their focus to bottom fishing. She also noted that Steve Smith, a statistician from the University of Miami, participated in this week's meeting via conference call. Judy added that Steve Smith recommended selecting a single research area and using the remainder of the sanctuary as a reference.

Jim Sullivan presented an overview and details of the entire research area working group process. He also presented an overview of Matt Kendall's systematic GIS-based optimization study and analysis of various research area sizes and placements. Clark Alexander expressed his concern about minimizing displacement of fishermen, which would not be beneficial if you are trying to study fishing effects. Leslie Sautter also noted that habitat type had the most weight in the analysis and discussion. Dr. Sullivan discussed some concerns that arose regarding the NCCOS analysis, e.g. boat displacement, high vs. low relief (defining ledge height), prior data, and boat counts during tournaments that may skew user data. Jim Sullivan and Joe Kimmel stated that the group asked Mr. Kendall to review ledge height and to identify ledges that are over 1.5 meters, which would be of most relevance to research questions. Dr. Alexander stressed that relevant research sites should be given a lot of weight in area placement and that the current monitoring site should be included in the research area. Leslie Sautter commented on the desire to include certain habitat within the research area, and then overlaying prior research and boating into consideration. Henry Ansley expressed concerns about displacement of fishermen trolling on the surface. Joe Kimmel noted that trolling activities have not been an activity of concern in the working group discussions. Jim Sullivan explained that in future models, habitat type will be of principal concern; other issues will be secondary. Joe Kimmel also commented on how prior

research sites skewed the research area model. The idea is not to choose from what is being presented but to use the NCCOS methodology and tool to analyze placement further. He added that the general consensus of the working group is to limit or remove activities within the research area, except for trolling.

Jim Sullivan emphasized that the model is extremely useful, given the correct criteria, which was discussed in the working group meeting. He noted sonar data may have changed since 2001 and that research needs may change, which should be considered. Jim also described caveats and additional issues that were discussed by the group. Danny Gleason commented on the population of invertebrates that occur on scarp edges, which are limited in the sanctuary. He feels that it is crucial to include these areas to encompass a varied population of invertebrates and fish. Dr. Gleason also stressed that when information is gathered in the research area, that research should also be gathered immediately in an area where fishing is occurring at that moment. Joe Kimmel recommended that Advisory Council members also contact GRNMS Research Coordinator Greg McFall with questions or concerns.

Dr. Sautter also recalled the lengthy working group discussions on possibly rotating the area on its axis. Danny Gleason commented that he thought the research area did not have to be a square. Dr. Sullivan stated that experimental units within a square research area might address this concern. Leslie Sautter also noted that the not knowing the home range of fishes was a limitation on specifying a particular size of a research area. Henry Ansley stated that some fish can be found over sand in addition to ledge, which may be beneficial to include for research purposes. Jim Sullivan said that a lot of analytical work has been and is being done to pull together objective criteria to consider in the establishment of a research area; the working group has done a tremendous job! Reed Bohne also stated that he is very impressed with the group putting together a method of working through this process; he anticipates a formal document will be presented at the June meeting. Mr. Bohne added that the Advisory Council will then send a recommendation to GRNMS. If GRNMS decides to move forward, the process to set aside an area in the sanctuary for research will be lengthy and rigorous with extensive public involvement. It is important that the public understand that this is still a process of examining a concept.

Tim Tarver suggested exploring aspects of deliberately concentrating bottom fishing and comparing that with normal fishing. Henry Ansley noted that that was discussed but that every area is fished and no ledges are really representative of a no-fished area for necessary comparison. Danny Gleason responded that concentrated fishing is already going on since boats are concentrated on ledges. Bing Phillips noted that many boat counts are taken during tournaments. He asked Tim Tarver for an estimate of the number of boats that bottom fish at GRNMS in a year, to which Tim responded that it is nothing close to the number of boats trolling. Bing also said that he has probably seen only a dozen boats in the last ten years that are anchored in the sanctuary. Dr. Sullivan reminded participants that the area selected has to leave enough equal habitat to be fished as a comparison and reference. Danny Gleason felt that the premise of setting aside a research zone is lost if there is not bottom fishing pressure at GRNMS. Bing Phillips added that black sea bass move, so it must be hard to study the effects of fishing; and that the majority of people who fish at GRNMS do it in summer when it's not the best time for bottom fishing, which is in the winter. Joe Kimmel commented on working group member

Russell Kent's input which was similar, but that the impacts will never be known unless it is studied. Mr. Phillips emphasized that commercial trappers affect black sea bass population more than recreational fishermen. Dr. Kimmel stated that current assessment indicates that black sea bass are overfished and undergoing overfishing, but they can probably recover in less than 10 years if regulated. Jim Sullivan commented that when they started the working group, research unknowns were identified including the effects of bottom fishing. He stated that GRNMS did not have data during management plan review.

Clark Alexander commented that if there is little or no bottom fishing pressure at GRNMS, staff may not want to focus research funding on it; he recommended fishing user surveys. Regarding allowable activities within the research area, Judy Wright commented that diving was not discussed at this week's working group meeting; the group may need to revisit and collectively discuss allowable activities in a research area that may have an impact on or possibly skew results. Ralph Neely added that most dive charters do not anchor at GRNMS. Reed Bohne stated that keeping the working group together and involved in the entire process would be beneficial and suggested making a recommendation to keep them together. He also noted that some boat counts are from overflights and some are on-water surveys.

Mr. Phillips asked why the staff would do research to look into a problem that they are not sure even exists. Reed Bohne stated that the research has to look at human use and extractions at GRNMS, which center on fishing. He then explained the shift of focus towards bottom fishing. The council needs to look at the broader question of validity from a scientific perspective of setting up a research area. Becky Shortland commented that this is an important management question for GRNMS and the region. She also stated that GRNMS has a mandate to do scientific research and to manage according to the best information available; currently, we do not have the best information on the effects of bottom fishing on sanctuary resources. Henry Ansley added that the research is not necessarily to address a problem but as a comparison. Venetia Butler asked for clarification about whether the discussion concerned studying a particular species or studying effects on a habitat area. She emphasized that the focus should not be on specific fish but instead on habitat. Leslie Sautter noted that she heard over and over in public comment during the management plan review process that there is no data to support management; the goal is to collect data to support or refute ideas for management. Bing Phillips stated that bottom fishing may have an effect on habitat, but too many external factors exist to study effects on black sea bass in particular. Ms. Butler responded that you have to start with something in order to gather baseline data. Dr. Sautter commented that if no effects of fishing are observed, then great; keep monitoring the area and establish baseline data. Venetia noted that the Advisory Council is not ready yet to identify specific research but should be simply trying to decide if a research area is beneficial. Joe Kimmel responded that the working group has not discussed any particular species or specific research.

Brian Keller emphasized the interest in understanding dynamics of the benthic community, which cannot be understood with fishing and gear impacts. He stated that fisheries data exists in the Florida Keys NMS that is needed in GRNMS. The working group discussion was concerned more with gear effects rather than with removal of sea bass. Danny Gleason stated that GRNMS' need for baseline data is justification for a research area. He also stressed the need to communicate an "improvement of resources" for fishermen. Mr. Ansley added that it would be

beneficial to emphasize the efforts made not to displace large numbers of fishermen. Tim Tarver agreed with the need to communicate to fishermen that GRNMS is studying a section in order to improve fish habitat.

Bing Phillips asked again how research on recreational fishing can be done or justified when, in his opinion, devastation does not occur. Joe Kimmel reiterated that the basic recommendation is *to have a research area*. He was also concerned at first, but after the working group discussions, he now understands why a research area should exist. Reed Bohne added that if an area is established, it must be done so with dynamic management and regular review. Doug Lewis recognized the conflict in the discussion centers on the prevalence of bottom fishing in the sanctuary. He noted that if trolling is allowed and bottom fishing is prohibited in the research area, fishermen are going to stop bottom fishing and just start trolling. He further emphasized that enforcement is a very important factor for consideration. Dr. Kimmel responded that once you get buy-in, you get compliance. Leslie Sautter stated that we cannot understand the impacts of management and use without a research area. Doug Lewis added that the enforcement efforts are going to be difficult if anyone is allowed in that area and the bigger the area, the more difficult it will be to get buy-in and compliance. Dr. Keller noted that trolling and bait fishing are allowed in the FKNMS areas, which does confound law enforcement. Danny Gleason noted that natural affects from storms have impacted his current research significantly. Joe Kimmel stated that he appreciates everyone's comments on the research area and called for an end to the discussion for now. Henry Ansley also thanked the working group for their efforts.

#### *Law Enforcement Activities*

Reed Bohne commented on the recent Law Enforcement Summit held in Savannah in February. The purpose of the meeting was to improve coordination among agencies for enforcement at GRNMS. Current threats and practices were discussed. Reed mentioned that GRNMS will assemble a law enforcement strategy that will be based on information from the Law Enforcement Summit and on other information gathered from all sanctuaries. He hopes to have a report to the Advisory Council very soon. He commented on the program with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (GADNR) Enforcement Division through the Joint Enforcement Agreement (with NOAA enforcement), which allows GADNR to conduct patrols in the sanctuary. He hopes to identify strengths of that agreement and to outline roles of other agencies.

#### *Watchable Wildlife*

Becky Shortland described an incident in the sanctuary when a group of North Atlantic right whales were approached by boaters. She also discussed an eco-tourism workshop hosted by Sapelo Island NERR and co-sponsored by GRNMS and others, which highlighted a lack of understanding by the public of negative interactions with protected wildlife. There may be parts of the community, such as boaters, who do not understand or are not aware of current marine wildlife regulations. She suggested that GRNMS could play a role in education and outreach to increase awareness of these regulations and the protected wildlife themselves. She passed around a document put together by west coast marine sanctuaries about California wildlife that is a joint effort with NOAA Fisheries/National Marine Fisheries Service and other agencies.

Will Berson stated that through his work with the Coastal Marshlands Protection Committee, he feels that this is a tremendous opportunity to spread awareness and would love to see GRNMS as partner in this outreach. Buddy Sullivan commented that through the Sapelo Island NERR's Coastal Training Program, this is an excellent opportunity to utilize those resources. He would be excited to promote and partner with this in association with the workshop program. Buddy also asked that GRNMS staff comment on the idea at the next Sapelo Island NERR advisory committee meeting. Danny Gleason stated that 2000 students go through environmental biology each year at Georgia Southern University, thus he is always looking for local information to present to students each year. He would love information to give to professors to impact students. Leslie Sautter also commented that students are constantly looking for internships to do this kind of outreach.

## **Remaining Business**

### *Next Meeting*

Becky Shortland commented on the efforts to set quarterly meetings. She asked for participant input to schedule the next meeting. Members agreed that the next meeting will be scheduled for June 21<sup>st</sup> in Charleston, South Carolina.

### *Advisory Councils' Letter to the Secretary*

Joe Kimmel asked participants to review the distributed letter for a brief discussion. Danny Gleason inquired about semantics of "indigenous peoples and local communities." Judy Wright described the background and purpose of the letter that was composed at the National Advisory Council Chairs and Coordinators meeting in February. Buddy Sullivan commented that the Chairs did an excellent job of putting together a lot of information in a one-pager. Joe Kimmel stated that he gets the impression from the letter that the NMSA may encounter difficulty in reauthorization. Judy Wright noted that advisory councils cannot lobby Congress, but they can write a letter to the Secretary of Commerce. Reed Bohne stated that the letter is an opportunity to introduce the NMSP and advisory councils to the new Secretary.

Leslie Sautter motioned to approve the letter; Venetia Butler seconded. The motion was unanimously approved by the council.

## **Constituent Reports**

Joe Kimmel noted that the Southeast Regional Office of NOAA Fisheries/National Marine Fisheries Service has moved into a different, historic building. He is currently working on Amendment 13B of the Snapper/Grouper Fishery Management Plan, which is in process with the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council. He will also be working on sustainable fisheries plans for the Caribbean Council.

Tim Tarver said that he has been following the red fish recovery effort that GADNR Coastal Resources Division is doing. He feels that most recreational fishermen are for that and would support a saltwater fishing license to fund the effort.

Bing Phillips added that the red fish initiative will be expensive and needs to be funded somehow. It will be a joint effort between Coastal Conservation Association of GA, GADNR CRD, and South Carolina hatcheries. He stated that because of DNA tags, submitting red fish

catches for assessment will be almost mandatory and requires a tremendous amount of education/outreach.

Judy Wright noted that it has been a quiet winter for SCUBA diving off the Georgia coast. Business will pick up soon.

Ralph Neely emphasized Judy's comment. He expects to really start up charters again next month.

Buddy Sullivan has had a busy winter at Sapelo Island NERR. In collaboration with the University of Georgia, they will break ground for a research dormitory on Sapelo that is heavily funded by grants from NOAA. The dorm will house ~35 students/researchers at a time.

Will Berson noted that The Georgia Conservancy describes itself as an education and advocacy organization. He recognized Venetia Butler who is the Conservancy's Conservation Educator of the Year. He commented on outer continental shelf leasing and on Congress pushing around an idea to allow states to move forward on leasing offshore areas for exploration.

Leslie Sautter said that she is conducting the fourth of four (4) funded undergrad/grad transect programs. She will begin to generate a proposal to expand the local and regional program. She would like to present results of the project at the meeting in June. One of the graduates from last year's program participated in a GRNMS cruise, which was documented through Project Oceanica and posted as logs online, which will happen again this year.

Venetia Butler commented on teacher workshops developed by GRNMS Education Coordinator Cathy Sakas, which she helps to communicate to local educators. Upcoming workshops include: ROV workshop, Dive into Education workshop, and Rivers to Reefs. She noted that the oceanography class at Oatland Island Educational Center began this year and has been very successful. She also stated that Chatham County schools received a huge grant for magnet programs and mentioned that Thunderbolt Elementary will be a magnet school for marine science-based curriculum.

Danny Gleason noted that he has six projects going on at and around GRNMS. He is developing a web site of benthic invertebrates at GRNMS. He commented on the impacts of the fall storms on the bottom habitats. He stated that four graduate students are working on projects focused on Oculina coral, sponge distribution, and anti-predator compounds.

Henry Ansley stated that GADNR is concerned about possible budget cuts from the state legislature. They will know more when the General Assembly adjourns.

Doug Lewis reiterated the concerns in Henry's comments. GADNR has lost at least (one) position a year over the past few years. He appreciates the opportunity to be a part of the meeting.

Reed Bohne then distributed and commented on the Gray's Reef and the National Program annual reports.

**Public Comment**

There was no public comment at the meeting.

**Adjourn**