

**Gray's Reef NMS
Sanctuary Advisory Council Meeting
April 15, 2009
Georgia Department of Natural Resources
Coastal Resources Division
Brunswick, Georgia**

Members present

Joe Kimmel, NOAA Fisheries SERO
Venetia Butler, K-12 Education
Clark Alexander, Research
Sgt. Doug Lewis, GADNR WRD LE
Al Samuels, NOAA OLE
LT Laura Swift, U.S. Coast Guard SERFTC
Will Berson, Conservation
Tim Tarver, Sport Fishing
Bob Bunkley, Sport Diving
Spud Woodward, GADNR CRD
Mary Conley, Conservation
Wendell Harper, Charter/Commercial Fishing
Greg McFall, GRNMS for Superintendent

Members absent

Scott Harris, University Education
Danny Gleason, Living Resources Research
Dorset Hurley, Sapelo Island NERR

Gray's Reef and other NOAA staff present

Becky Shortland, Resource Protection
Gail Krueger, Outreach/Communications
Sarah Fangman, SE GoM Carr Region
C.J. Carroll, Graduate Intern
Chad Meckley, Marine Operation

Public in attendance

Gene Miles
Jeff Hart

Welcome & Introductions

Sanctuary Advisory Council Chair Dr. Joe Kimmel welcomed everyone and asked for introductions. Greg McFall is acting for Superintendent George Sedberry who is presenting at a meeting in New Zealand. LT Laura Swift is standing in for LT Charlie Gris who just became a father last night! LT Swift will be transferring to California soon for her next assignment. The agenda was reviewed and no changes were made.

Advisory Council Business

Meeting summary – Dr. Kimmel asked for a motion to approve the January 2009 meeting summary. The motion was made, seconded and passed unanimously.

Membership and officers – Joe Kimmel noted we had hoped former members Christi Lambert and Ralph Neely would be at the meeting today to present them with framed photos thanking them for their service on the Sanctuary Advisory Council. Staff will present them with the photos as soon as possible. Becky Shortland said The K-12 education and non-living resources research seats are advertised as of today, April 15, 2009; application deadline is May 29, 2009. Current representatives are eligible to re-apply. The Executive Committee (Chair, Vice-chair, and Secretary) reviews the applications serving as the nominating committee. In this case, however, the Vice-chair and Secretary hold the seats which are open and they may reapply. A different approach for a nominating committee will need to be considered.

The election for Chair, Vice-chair and Secretary was to be held today, but since two executive committee members who could be nominated may or may not be eligible due to term expiration, the Executive Committee has recommended the election take place at the July meeting. At that time, new or returning members could participate in the process.

National Sanctuary Advisory Council Summit – K-12 Education Representative and Council Secretary Venetia Butler will be attending for the Gray's Reef Sanctuary Advisory Council, along with Council Coordinator Becky Shortland. Venetia asked members to discuss the "charge" given by Office of National Marine Sanctuaries Director Dan Basta. The document titled "Our Challenge" was distributed electronically prior to the meeting. Members discussed "touchstone" issues, including the lionfish invasion, marine debris, the Navy's undersea testing range, which all have the potential to impact species using GRNMS. Other issues mentioned were marine spatial planning and management, and energy.

Another topic which has been somewhat on the backburner is the Latitude 31-30 project, which can be seen as an ecosystem management approach. Spud Woodward suggested many of these issues, such as spearfishing activities, may need to be addressed on a national level while looking at compatible use of sanctuaries. Doug Lewis said he thought activities in sanctuaries like spearfishing may be more easily addressed on a national level instead of each small group approaching these polices over and over. Will Berson emphasized GRNMS has a geological record to put into the context of helping people understand the timeline of climate changes and sea level rise.

Venetia asked members to email her with other ideas prior to the national summit.

Quorum – Dr. Clark Alexander asked before continuing with any actions, the Advisory Council and staff determine whether a quorum of members was present or not. A quorum constitutes more than half of the voting members (10 members) according to the Advisory Council Charter. With the arrival of Capt. Wendell Harper, there were then eight voting members. Prior to his arrival, seven voting members were in attendance, constituting a quorum.

Old Business

Sanctuary vessels – Marine Operations Coordinator LTJG Chad Meckley gave an update on GRNMS vessels since his presentation in October 2008. He reported the R/V

Sam Gray was still operational but the R/V *Joe Ferguson* is having significant maintenance issues and is currently out of service. The vessel R41-06 is going to stay with GRNMS for the foreseeable future instead of being transferred to a site in Hawaii. The R41-06 is a more stable platform and offers more opportunities for field operations year-round. The question was raised whether two vessels are adequate to meet sanctuary needs. Staff responded it is adequate for now, but the site is looking at the possibility of additional assets including a regional vessel. Greg McFall explained the real need is to have a vessel capable of multi-day missions for 10-12 people with better science capability, better fuel capacity, and the ability to do more than just diving operations.

A brief discussion then ensued about partnering with the U.S. Navy to explore other vessel support and access to data. A motion was offered by Tim Tarver to consider adding a seat on the Advisory Council for the U.S. Navy; the motion was seconded. Becky Shortland noted in order to add a seat an amendment to the Charter would be needed. She encouraged council members to consider other new seats if a change is made so amendments are kept to a minimum. Will Berson asked about a seat for the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC). Discussion followed about current interactions with SAFMC and was concluded with the consensus that several current advisory council members are active with SAFMC already. More discussion followed on the benefits of a U.S. Navy representative and led to withdrawal of the motion to add a council seat. It was decided, however, asking a Navy representative to present to the council in the future could be a good opportunity.

Mary Conley raised the topic of the South Atlantic Alliance, a group of federal and state agencies as well as non-governmental organizations which have come together to implement science-based action and policy solutions to sustain coastal-ocean ecosystems. The suggestion was made to add a discussion of the Alliance to the July Sanctuary Advisory Council meeting.

National Marine Sanctuary Foundation (NMSF) membership – As a follow up from NMSF's Allison Alexander who presented to the Advisory Council in January, Becky Shortland asked the group to consider membership to the NMSF. Funding supports sanctuary programs. Membership information can be found on the NMSF website <http://nmsfocean.org/>.

New sanctuary advisory council member information, orientation and responsibilities – Dr. Scott Harris suggested at the January meeting staff consider developing a reading list, a job description, and any other materials which would help new members become familiar with GRNMS and the National Marine Sanctuary System. Becky has compiled a list and some ideas for this purpose. "Representative Roles and Activities of an Advisory Council" was sent out electronically prior to the meeting; members agreed it will work as a job description. The reading list will be sent out for review prior to the July meeting. Joe Kimmel stated any new member needs to learn all he/she can about the sanctuary and the NMSS. He requests all advisory council members be familiar with the materials.

Discussion followed on the responsibilities of members to attend GRNMS meetings other than the quarterly Sanctuary Advisory Council meetings. Attendance at other meeting, such as public scoping, is not required but is certainly beneficial to

council members and GRNMS. Spud Woodward suggested there is probably a misunderstanding in the public about what the Sanctuary Advisory Council does; this is an advisory body, not a regulatory body which makes policy decisions. Will Berson emphasized it is incumbent on members to represent constituents, but at times there are irreconcilable differences. And Joe Kimmel added members should represent those people, too.

“Greening” – Volunteer Jody Patterson did preliminary work toward an audit of the GRNMS operations carbon footprint. Electricity and travel may be the most significant contributors. This is a work in progress and we’ll keep working on this issue.

Alternate members – The January meeting also included discussion of the concept of adding “alternate” seats to the council for each non-governmental seat. Another question raised was whether proxy votes could be allowed. Becky Shortland reported proxy votes are not allowed but members can participate by telephone on occasion if needed. She also noted the topic of advisory council alternates would be discussed at the national summit and she suggested the topic be tabled until after the summit discussion. Will Berson proposed all meetings have a conference call-in capability for purposes of reducing our carbon footprint by driving to meetings, logistics and cost. Joe Kimmel responded conference calling during a meeting can be cumbersome and confusing, but advantages are understood.

On a separate topic Al Samuels reminded the group if council discussion is going to be on the internet (web cast), members should be notified of it prior to the meeting so they can take it into consideration.

New Business

Programs report – Joe Kimmel asked if there are any questions or a need for discussion regarding topics in the programs report. Spud Woodward suggested the programs report would be a perfect to put into captains’ packages at tournament pre-meetings. It was noted the report is now posted on the GRNMS web site. This generated some discussion that using the internet has its limits and advantages as a means to get information to the public, and staff should consider how to reach others who don’t use computers. The council appreciates these documents.

NMSF Volunteer of the Year – Greg McFall announced Venetia Butler was chosen by staff as the NMSF Volunteer of the Year nominee. She will travel to the awards dinner and other activities in Washington DC in June. The winner is announced at the dinner. Venetia was congratulated.

Advisory council annual work plan – Becky Shortland proposed development of an annual work plan for the advisory council. It could include a list of projects for the year in advance. The group agreed it was a good idea and recognized the benefits of planning ahead. Becky asked council members to review the list of ideas and add any missing topics. Clark Alexander suggested the council consider topics of interest to the general public, such as the lionfish invasion, in order to showcase the advisory council. Becky will continue to develop the plan and present it again in July. Joe explained the

preliminary meeting of the executive committee to preview the agenda and revise it prior to each quarterly meeting.

Next Sanctuary Advisory Council meeting – The next meeting is confirmed for July 16th in the Savannah area. Agenda items include: invasive Indo-Pacific lionfish, South Atlantic Alliance, updates on management actions, FOSTER cruise results and an update by Greg McFall on NOAA diving. The group would also like Al Samuels to give a presentation on developing a case package at a future meeting.

Law Enforcement Working Group

Commendations – Greg McFall presented a framed commendation letter to CPL Jessie Cook of the GADNR Law Enforcement Division. CPL Cook, along with RFC Mark Carson, made the first successful case in GRNMS – an anchoring violation. Staff and the advisory council expressed their gratitude for the good work these rangers do on behalf of NOAA and the sanctuary.

Updates and LE working group meeting – Sgt. Doug Lewis presented the quarterly report on GADNR patrols of GRNMS. He noted they will probably exceed the planned number of hours in the current Joint Enforcement Agreement (JEA). The new JEA is currently in review. Al Samuels noted budget is an issue for many in this economy. The good news, however, is Al Samuels will officially be taking the lead on the Georgia JEA.

Becky Shortland noted the annual Law Enforcement Working Group meeting is scheduled for July 17th and all sanctuary advisory council members are welcomed to attend. Doug Lewis emphasized it would be good for council members to meet the law enforcement personnel.

Al Samuels inquired about paleoarcheological activities offshore and also noted officers don't yet have IDs.

U.S. Coast Guard LT Laura Swift reported three over flights of GRNMS were conducted in the past couple of months. No vessels were spotted in the sanctuary but they did spot two right whales. She noted the USCG has been busy with right whale activities this season.

Grays Reef NMS Management Actions

Spearfishing proposed rule – Becky Shortland noted the comment period on the proposed rule to ban all spearfishing gear in GRNMS is open until May 4th. To comment go to <http://www.regulations.gov> and search for Gray's Reef NMS.

Research area designation – Becky reported she is engaged on putting together the documents (draft environmental impact statement and proposed rule) to establish a protected research area in the sanctuary. It may be the end of the summer before the documents are cleared by NOAA and ready to be published for public comment.

Discussion followed about the public comment meeting on the spearfishing rule and the need to stick with the planned meeting format. Joe Kimmel talked about the benefits of formal public hearings where commenters must fill out a card to comment and then they are limited to a certain time to speak. Spud Woodward suggested something of a hybrid between formal hearing and public comment where participants

are encouraged to make their comment and move on; actually use minute minders to keep the meeting moving.

Sanctuary Science: Accomplishments and Needs

Accomplishments – Research Coordinator Greg McFall reviewed the sanctuary's accomplishments such as the sonic telemetry and fish tagging. Sarah Fangman has been switching out the receivers and downloading data about every three months. Spud Woodward and his team from GADNR will again be assisting with fish tagging during the June research cruise on the NOAA Ship *Nancy Foster*. Joe Kimmel asked if there are any fish species using the sanctuary for spawning. Greg McFall replied gag move offshore for spawning, but there is evidence pre-spawning aggregations exist in GRNMS. More data is being collected on spawning in GRNMS. Residence of fish and the relation to age is also being looked at. Joe noted acoustic tagging for spawning grouper is being done in the Caribbean and GRNMS research should help to identify spawning aggregations. Greg McFall also noted several large male scamp have been seen in the sanctuary with color patterns suggesting GRNMS may have scamp spawning in the area.

Greg continued about the on-going water quality program with Marc Frischer from Skidaway Institute of Oceanography. The current findings are the sanctuary water is still pristine. Marc specializes in *ecoli* and *coliform* bacteria. Clark Alexander asked why more funds would be spent for monitoring if the waters are pristine. Sarah responded it was a good question. The sanctuary has requirements to continually measure certain parameters; it is necessary to show the water quality year after year. Greg talked about the sponge die-off in the last couple of years and staff are responding by trying to be more proactive and better at predictions.

Greg went on to discuss studies done in GRNMS last year by Peter Auster from the University of Connecticut. Auster is using GRNMS as a middle ground for comparison for an ongoing study. When he came to GRNMS he became more interested in benthic-pelagic coupling. He is fascinated with interactions of fish in feeding cycles and is coming back in June to conduct more assessments. He has published initial findings from last year (http://graysreef.noaa.gov/fish_behavior.html). We can determine actual biomass in an area at one time and we are looking at noninvasive methods to determine biomass. Using a new type of sonar which produces photographic quality images, we are going to try to take data from the surface and two dimensions under water to get a three-dimensional picture of the biomass. Joe Kimmel noted benthic-pelagic coupling is becoming more important in terms of regulation development.

Danny Gleason is continuing invertebrate studies off shore at J-Y Reef. He is looking at colonizing species, how long it takes to colonize, recruitment, and successional invertebrate communities. He will be doing the same thing at GRNMS. He will set up quadrats then draw comparisons between GRNMS and the J-Y site. Danny was funded by GRNMS in the beginning but now has a grant supporting the research as well as two graduate students. He has four peer-reviewed publications as a result of this work. Clark Alexander emphasized the importance of peer-reviewed publications for the sanctuary and Greg agreed.

Greg went on to talk about the whale bone recovered from J-Y Reef by Scott Noakes and Erv Garrison with GRNMS support. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

provided the permit for recovery of the bone. It is a gray whale, which had been hunted to extinction on the east coast. Now the intent is to extract DNA to compare it to the modern gray whale.

Global climate change is a big focus for sanctuaries and GRNMS might be looking at ocean acidification. We can monitor atmospheric, subsurface, and bottom CO₂ to compare change in percentages over time. An increase in CO₂ would cause change in the limestone ledges of the GRNMS. We will try to determine how fast acidification levels might actually cause damage to limestone and to determine the link between atmospheric and sea level CO₂. The anticipation is we will see higher levels in the ocean. Joe Kimmel said if oceans begin to acidify, global changes will be dramatic because of the numbers of calcareous organisms. Will Berson noted this is a great case for sanctuaries to be a cradle for research, particularly for GRNMS. Greg talked about the concept of sanctuaries as sentinel sites for such changes.

The marine debris monitoring program is continuing. A lot of monofilament line and beer cans are found. This may be a result of tournaments with large numbers of boaters rather than local fishing activities. We can't be certain, but the indications are there. We are hoping to build the program into more of a citizen science project. Spud Woodward asked GRNMS consider such a project with the area fishing and diving community. Bob Bunkley agreed.

GRNMS has been supporting the Georgia Aquarium in collecting invasive lionfish for an exhibit. The aquarium wants to educate people about invasive species through the exhibit and 24 lionfish are on now on display. This has increased GRNMS and NOAA outreach at the aquarium.

Greg talked about the Team Ocean volunteer dive program he initiated. Participants must run through the same training as NOAA divers in order to allow them on NOAA vessels. The program has been very successful with several divers regularly supporting operations.

Greg McFall and Sarah Fangman then talked about the science needs assessment which is a ready list of GRNMS research projects in need of support. All ONMS sites have been asked to develop a needs assessment to show all the science projects necessary in the National Marine Sanctuary System and to demonstrate research gaps. Spud Woodward related Congress appreciates agency partnerships, and the fish tagging project is a good example. Greg emphasized the fish tagging project could not be done without the support of GADNR. All members agreed individual council members can do a great deal to seek necessary support for GRNMS. Council members are free to communicate as they wish, with whomever they wish, as private individuals and not as council members.

Bob Bunkley noted he is increasingly concerned about too much regulation. He also asked about establishing a mooring buoy system in GRNMS. The buoys could be moved around to prevent over use in areas and a network of divers could help maintain the buoys. Becky Shortland replied mooring buoys would be a good issue for consideration in the next review of the GRNMS management plan.

Public comment

Joe Kimmel noted it was the scheduled time for public comments. Local diver and spearfisherman Gene Miles said he thought the idea of conference calling participation for council members was beneficial. He also asked GRNMS to continue to monitor the

organization's carbon footprint. Gene would like to have GRNMS materials to distribute to small groups and schools. Staff responded with budget cuts materials are scarce. Gene then asked if phosphate testing is included in the water quality monitoring and Greg McFall responded it is included and levels are not harmful to the resources at this time. Gene also expressed some dissatisfaction with the handling of the public meeting on the proposed rule to ban spearfishing gear in the sanctuary and he suggested guidelines for facilitating from the NOAA Coastal Services Center.

Upcoming GRNMS Events

Gail Krueger mentioned the U.S. EPA vessel recently docked in Savannah. GRNMS staff helped to conduct tours and do outreach about the sanctuary. Upcoming events include the BLUE Ocean Film Festival in June, the ROV competition in late April and the Earth Day display in Savannah's Forsyth Park.

The meeting was adjourned.