



**GRAY'S REEF NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY
ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING - MAY 21, 2015 – VIA WEBINAR**

SAC Attendees

Rick DeVictor, Chair
Michael Denmark, Vice-chair
Anna George – Secretary
Scott Noakes
Emily Kroutil
Jene Nissen
Suzanne VanParreren
Mary Conley

Warren Hupman
Pat Geer
Mark Padgett
Peter Auster
Mark Carson
Al Samuels
Mike Mastrianni

SAC Members Absent

Christine Laporte
Randy Rudd
Susan White

Tim Goodale

GRNMS

Sarah Fangman
Amy Rath
Alison Scott
Jenny Vander Pluym

Jody Patterson
Jared Halonen
Becky Shortland

GRNMS Foundation

Chris Hines

Public in attendance

Alice Keyes
Karen Grainey
Clay Mobley
Clark Alexander

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. A roll call of members and other attendees was taken. The February 2015 meeting summary was approved unanimously.

Council Coordinator Becky Shortland noted that several seats are currently being recruited – citizen-at-large, sport diving, conservation and university education. The closing date for applications is June 30. It was also noted that Capt. Doug Lewis of the GADNR Law Enforcement Division will be retiring as of July 1st.

Working Group Reports

Education & Outreach: The new GRNMS management plan calls for an evaluation of the sanctuary's education and outreach programs. This winter, a SAC working group was formed to assist with this evaluation. The group was convened for a total of five days during two workshops in February and March. During the first workshop, participants reviewed existing activities, events and communications components to determine which existing activities reach which audiences and provide feedback on sanctuary education and outreach activities. During the

second workshop, participants considered target audiences for Gray's Reef messages, to draw connections between what the sanctuary is trying to achieve, and who the site's programs are reaching. In addition, the working group provided feedback on how to prioritize the different activities undertaken by the sanctuary, and to consider any gaps that may exist between target audiences and existing programming. During these two workshops, the sanctuary gained tremendous feedback (including constructive comments about how to make programs stronger). The staff are currently synthesizing the working group's recommendations and implementing modifications to the education and outreach programs. The goal of this effort is to ensure that in the future, Gray's Reef education and outreach programs will have clear focus, refined messaging, will carefully consider audience and utilize the appropriate tools to match audience and message. The next SAC meeting will be an opportunity for the staff to present specifics of the education and outreach plan and to seek input from the council on the Communications Strategic Plan and the implementation plans.

Connectivity: Peter Auster gave an update on the development of the process and initiation of the first phase – a working group of the advisory council tasked with gathering existing information. Over the summer, he and staff will be developing “terms of reference” and other background information for the working group, and contacting scientists to participate starting in the fall. Sarah Fangman noted that internally we are thinking through the broader implications for recommendations that may come out of this.

Law Enforcement: Since July 1, 2014, GADNR has conducted 13 trips to Gray's Reef for a total of 263 man hours. There have not been many boats observed or boarded in the sanctuary. Rangers are going to Gray's Reef at different times (day/night, morning, afternoon). There have been no cases and no warnings documented. They expect to be able to conduct one more patrol before June. Mark continued that they hope to patrol the sanctuary during tournaments. Al Samuels congratulated GADNR on their good work. He also mentioned that there is ongoing discussion surrounding summary settlements and that of the Office of Law Enforcement's (OLE) national priorities, in the southeast division, three priorities are related to national marine sanctuaries. Al concluded with the news that there is now an OLE law enforcement officer based in Charleston, but that he is the only officer in a very large district. Sarah Fangman noted Al and others were the recipients of a silver medal from the Secretary of Commerce for work on the protection of the endangered right whale. LT Mike Mastrianni reported for the U.S. Coast Guard. In the last quarter there has been only one vessel sighting and boarding in Gray's Reef with no violations. They also conducted an annual training with Air Station Savannah for new pilots that included information about Gray's Reef and use of the job aide created for the pilots. General Counsel Karen Raine commented on the summary settlement discussion regarding charges that are appropriate for summary settlements and that there are reports on their website as well.

Presentation: Bureau of Ocean Energy Management's (BOEM) Oil & Gas Leasing Proposal

The presentation was preceded by a brief update on ONMS interactions with BOEM and proposals including seismic testing in the area of Gray's Reef. Dr. Brad J. Blythe, Chief of the Branch of Biological and Social Sciences, Division of Environmental Sciences for the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) then gave an introductory presentation on oil and gas leasing, the timeframe for the decision-making/planning process, and what might be expected after the leases are issued. This was followed by an extensive question and answer period with council members and then the public in attendance. (NOTE: The slides and recording of this presentation are available upon request.) Dr. Blythe was also joined by Greg Boland who has worked with Flower Garden Banks NMS. Questions and discussion touched on the structure of BOEM (environmental studies side and the assessment side of BOEM); seismic testing proposed off the Atlantic coast; BOEM mandates; the program development process and “why” the Atlantic is being considered at this point.

There was interest expressed by current and former council members for additional bottom mapping and how priorities in BOEM's research program are developed. It was noted that bottom mapping is lower on that priority list. It was also noted that this information would be useful to integrate with Gray's Reef's needs for understanding areas of connectivity with the sanctuary. Dr. Blythe also noted that the Programmatic EIS is expected to be done in 2016

and that document will have the alternatives considered for oil and gas leasing. More information can be found on the BOEM website.

Additional council questions included more on bottom mapping and the suggestion that the sanctuary advisory council consider a letter to BOEM supporting more mapping off the South Atlantic coast if the council feels that is beneficial. Other questions and discussion from the public focused on potential landside effects from oil and gas activity off the coast, as well as a means to relay local government and community concerns. In conclusion, Dr. Blythe noted that BOEM is very interested in public engagement and he will follow up with information that has been requested.

Sanctuary Report

Outreach and Education

Outreach and Education programs were reported on by Administrative Assistant Jody Patterson who detailed the sites recent participation in the Savannah St. Patrick's Day parade. This effort was intended to promote our FareWhale Festival, a local event that the sanctuary hosted to bring awareness to the endangered species whose only known calving grounds are along the southeastern coast of the US. The parade placed staff and partners in front of over 100,000 attendees and media interests with a life-sized inflatable right whale calf riding the custom designed and hand built float. The FareWhale Festival took place the weekend following the parade and engaged locals and visiting tourists with a right whale obstacle course provided by NOAA's NMFS, a beach walk with former GRNMS education coordinator Cathy Sakas, ocean-related arts for sale benefiting the Gray's Reef Foundation, a photo booth, face painting and more.

Patterson also highlighted the sanctuary's recent MATE ROV competition that took place in Savannah for regional student teams. The challenge this year revolved around science and industry in the Arctic and had fourteen teams from nine schools across Georgia vying for the coveted spot to the international event being held in St. John's Bay, Nova Scotia this summer.

And lastly, sanctuary staff and research partners from Georgia Southern University engaged local educators in a drifter building workshop and deployment on May 18 in the mouth of the Altamaha River to track the output of Georgia's largest watershed. Researchers released a dye to track surface currents and the GPS-tagged drifters are being monitored via a Google map to determine the path of solid materials released from the river into the Atlantic.

Gray's Reef NMS Foundation

Chris Hines, Executive Director of Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary Foundation gave an update of foundation activities. The foundation elected three new trustees bringing the total to 11 very strong and engaged board members. The three new trustees are Gordon Matthews, CEO of Savannah Bee Company, Michelle Riley, Director of Marketing and PR of Telfair Museums, Letta Sneed, Attorney with Chatham County.

Spring was very busy with festivals and outreach events attended. The foundation attended five festivals with over 800 visitors, and received \$2,000 in donations. The foundation will host a "party" Saturday, May 23rd in Wright Square from 10am-4pm to engage the Savannah community.

Four grants were submitted, three rejected and one approved for \$250 from Savannah Community Foundation. Many more prospects will be sought and grants submitted. Common feedback from rejections include the organizational fit may not be correct and familiarity is important so we will keep applying.

Chris reported that he attended the ONMS Business Advisory Council (BAC) meeting and meetings on Capitol Hill recently in DC. He met Guy Harvey and the Coca-Cola representative on the BAC. He also met with staff from senators Perdue's and Isakson's offices, and Congressman Carter to promote the foundation and start building the relationship.

Our second signature fundraising opportunity outside the Film Festival is *A Fishy Affair: Malicious...but Delicious*. Save the date, September 24th, for this chef's competition as we try to eat up invasive lionfish.

Chris also offered details of the foundations impact : >3,000 web hits, >1,000 since FF, social media reach over 22,000, > 200 emails collected, >800 booth visitors, \$26,500 total funding raised.

Trustees recently approved funding for two intern stipends and funding to increase the presence of Gray's Reef throughout Savannah using visual and educational tools.

Last meeting there was a question about funding process. Since then, we put together a simple proposal form for GRNMS to fill out to request funding to the foundation and detailed the process. If anyone is interested, Chris can send the details once that is approved as it is currently under review.

Chris concluded by thanking everyone for their support!

Research and Monitoring

GRNMS will once again have a busy field season. We will be supporting research area monitoring work, the Nancy Foster cruise (July 27-August 5), and an effort to collect 3-D photomosaics of the ledge habitats. We will also be conducting our usual monitoring projects (telemetry, CO2, invertebrate surveys, etc.). We will not be utilizing the PUMA this year as planned because the flight distance restrictions do not justify utilizing this expensive tool. NOAA and FAA requirements currently restrict the PUMA from flying greater than one nm from the support platform. Since the objective of using the PUMA was to observe vessel activity, if the PUMA can only fly one mile from the GRNMS vessel, it offers no greater observational capability than the team on the boat. Therefore, the expense of supporting the mission is not justified. The Monterey Bay NMS received permission to fly the PUMA further from their support platform this summer, and if that mission goes well, we are hopeful that such restrictions can be lifted for GRNMS as well.

Staffing

We have received permission from our headquarters office to move forward on hiring a research coordinator. This process has begun, however federal hiring processes move slowly, so the current estimate is to have someone hired by the fall. Debbie Meeks, who supports GRNMS budget, IT and web programs, will pass her 10 year anniversary with the sanctuary on June 1, 2015. Also of note: Richard LaPalme was selected as the GRNMS Volunteer of the Year. Richard is a Team Ocean diver who supports the sanctuary despite the challenge of distance (he lives in North Carolina). We are grateful for his, as well as all the wonderful volunteer's, support of Gray's Reef.

Get Into Your Sanctuary weekend will take place June 26-28. The National "Get into your Sanctuary" days is proposed as a national system-wide, simultaneous weekend-long event and corresponding social media campaign and includes potential physical activities with politicians for social media opportunities. The purpose is to raise awareness of National Marine Sanctuaries as unique and iconic destinations. GRNMS will participate in this event by promoting visits to Gray's Reef, as well as highlighting the opportunity for "virtual visits" to the sanctuary by way of exhibits at aquaria and museums. We will highlight these opportunities using social media. The National Marine Sanctuary Foundation is planning to sponsor a dive to the sanctuary. And we hope to use the event to explore opportunities to work with local ecotour operators to communicate messages of ocean protection and conservation.

Resource Protection

Soundscapes - Scott Noakes' reported that his student Haley Haynes has been working on data files from deployment of the hydrophone in GRNMS. Haley was unable to attend, but Scott gave a brief update of her work.

Protected species - Gray's Reef has a seat on the right whale recovery Southeast Implementation Team. The team held its spring meeting recently to review the 2014-2015 calving season for this highly endangered

species, and to make recommendations on data needs. The Georgia Sea Turtle Cooperative semi-annual meeting was also held recently, which Becky attends.

Sanctuary nominations and expansions

George Sedberry reported that the nomination for the Eubalina-Oculina NMS (EONMS) has been resubmitted. The new nomination is slightly smaller in area, and does not extend into state waters. There is also interest from people in southeast Florida in a sanctuary that would protect coral reefs north of Miami, and would pretty much extend from the Florida Keys NMS up to the proposed EONMS, near Ft. Pierce, FL. George also reported that there is interest from the marine resources agency of Puerto Rico and other organizations who would like national marine sanctuary protections for coral and other habitats in Puerto Rico.

Council Members' Report

Tennessee Aquarium/Hollings Grant - Anna George reported that the aquarium did receive the Hollings grant and they have started gathering information for a new exhibit. In the meantime, Anna made a trip to Maryland to visit the NOAA offices.

NOAA Fisheries update – Rick DeVictor gave an update on actions of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC), including the consideration of special management zones for spawning snapper and grouper species. SAFMC is still drafting documents toward decisions on the use of black sea bass pots and concerns about entanglements by right whales.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) participatory mapping/International training – Mary Conley reported that she had the opportunity to lead training in Peru with Sarah Fangman and others from ONMS on coastal and marine spatial planning. She noted that it was an exciting, intense and positive experience. Mary also reported that TNC is also conducting a participatory mapping exercise in partnership with GADNR and others to get information on how the coastal areas and offshore are used and what is important to people.

ROV Competition - Emily Kroutil noted that some of her students attended and volunteered at the ROV competition and they hope to be able to participate in future competitions.

Public Comment

Rick DeVictor asked for public comment. Clark Alexander encouraged the council and GRNMS staff to communicate with BOEM about the importance of hard bottom mapping in the south Atlantic. Clark offered to send more information to members and staff. He suggested that the council consider a formal comment to BOEM on the issue. Rick suggested that the council should consider this further at the next meeting.

Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 1:00 PM.