



**Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary
Advisory Council Meeting
June 26, 2013**

Skidaway Institute of Oceanography,
Marine and Coastal Science Research & Instructional Center,
Skidaway Island, Georgia

Advisory Council Members Present

Danny Gleason, Living Resources Research (Chair)
Mary Conley, Conservation
Michael Denmark, Sport Fishing
Brandon Fisher, U.S. Coast Guard SRFTC
Emily Kroutil, K-12 Education
Randy Rudd, Sport Diving
Doug Lewis, GA DNR LE

Attending via Conference Call

Rick DeVictor, NOAA Fisheries SE Region (Vice-Chair)
Anna George, Conservation (Secretary)
Pat Geer, GA DNR CRD
Scott Noakes, Non-living Resources Research
Suzanne VanParreren, Sapelo Island NERR
Al Samuels, NOAA OLE
Jene Nissen, U.S. Navy
Christine Laporte, Citizen-at-large

Members Absent

Tim Goodale, University Education
Chuck Hopkinson, Sea Grant
Warren Hupman, Charter/Commercial Fishing
William Cliett, Citizen-at-large

Gray's Reef and ONMS Staff Present

Greg McFall, Sanctuary Superintendent
Becky Shortland, Resource Protection Coordinator
Jody Patterson, Administrative Assistant
LTJG Chris Briand, Vessel Operations Coordinator
George Sedberry, ONMS SEGoM Research Coordinator

Public Present

Patty Forrestal
Tom Wright
LT Mike Mastrianni, USCG SRFTC
LT Nathan Downend, USCG Sector Charleston

ENS Cate Giguere, USCG Sector Charleston
SGT Mark Carson, GA DNR LE

Welcome and introductions

Council Chairman Danny Gleason called the Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary (GRNMS) Advisory Council meeting to order welcoming members present and those joining via conference call, sanctuary staff and the public in attendance. Introductions were made and the agenda reviewed with no changes. A brief announcement was made concerning management changes at GRNMS. George Sedberry has accepted the position of sanctuary science coordinator with the Southeast, Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean Region. Greg McFall has been named superintendent of GRNMS.

Council business

The minutes from February's advisory council meeting were forwarded to the members for review and finding no comments or edits to the document, a motion was made to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded and approved unanimously.

The council recognized LT Brandon Fisher for representing the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) on the advisory council the past few years. He is assuming the position of executive officer of Coast Guard Cutter *Dauntless* based in Galveston Texas. He may become the USCG representative on the advisory council for the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary. With the change of command at the USCG Southeast Regional Fisheries Training Center (SRFTC), we welcome LT Mike Mastrianni to the advisory council.

Council Coordinator Becky Shortland discussed the merger of our campus partner Skidaway Institute of Oceanography with the University of Georgia which will result in some accounting changes relating to council expenses. Council members will need to complete vendor forms to be added to the UGA payables system for reimbursement of travel related expenses.

The next quarterly meeting of the advisory council is planned for October and may likely be a webinar.

2013 Nancy Foster research cruise report

Superintendent (and Research Coordinator) Greg McFall introduced the report from this year's *Nancy Foster* research cruise. The 2013 research cruise, from June 2 - June 15, focused on five research projects at GRNMS: acoustic fishery survey, fish censuses, invertebrate density and abundance, monitoring of ecological conditions and multibeam mapping. Simultaneously a sixth project, piscivore ecology, was occurring with scientists aboard the GRNMS R/V *Joe Ferguson*. More information on all of these projects, the organizations that are helping, and how day to day operations ran, are available on the GRNMS website at:

<http://graysreef.noaa.gov/science/expeditions/welcome.html>

Dr. Danny Gleason recapped the details and very preliminary findings from the invertebrate surveys. He reported that they are still finding new organisms that haven't been identified and all but one site was assessed this year for a total of 36 sites assessed. Danny also noted that two days of research were lost due to Tropical Storm Andrea. In addition, Danny explained that an add-on study was conducted by Georgia Southern University (GSU) researchers sampling for the existence of groundwater at GRNMS.

Dr. Peter Auster from the University of Connecticut accomplished his work using the R/V *Joe Ferguson*, conducting dive operations to observe fish predation events in the water column. Danny Gleason added that due to sequestration, most other cruises aboard the NOAA ships were canceled this year; the GRNMS cruise was approved because of the high productivity planned to maximize use of the vessel.

Dr. Scott Noakes from the University of Georgia presented an update of his findings from the [pCO₂ monitoring in the sanctuary](#). He noted that GRNMS is the only sanctuary with a seafloor monitor in addition to a surface monitoring

system. Based on 6 ½ years of data so far, Scott noted that when water temperatures are lower at GRNMS, the ocean acts as a carbon sink; and with increased water temperatures it acts as a source of carbon. The sanctuary and advisory council will receive a copy of his report when it is complete.

Proposed Ship Strike Rule for Protection of Right Whales

Becky Shortland gave an overview of the proposed rule from NOAA Fisheries Service Protected Resources Division to eliminate the “sunset clause” on regulations that require vessels 65 feet or longer to reduce ship speed to 10 knots during certain times of the year and in certain locations when North Atlantic right whales are present. The regulation is scheduled to end (sunset) on December 9, 2013. NOAA proposes to make the regulation long-term with no sunset clause. Public comments are being received on the proposed rule until August 6. She noted that the Stellwagen Bank NMS advisory council voted to send a comment letter in support of the rule.

A member asked about ship strikes since the rule was implemented in 2008. Becky replied that she believed there was at least one confirmed ship strike off of North Carolina. Becky recognized Tom Wright, an attending member of the public and a member of the Southeast Implementation Team for recovery of right whales and invited him to add comments at this time instead of waiting for the public comment period later in the day. Tom agreed that one ship strike was reported and that NOAA’s claim that there were no mortalities by ship strike was therefore wrong. (NOTE: NOAA’s determination concerns Seasonal Management Areas only. The ship strike off North Carolina was *not* in a Seasonal Management Area.) Tom added his opinion that the expiration date (sunset clause) should be extended.

Discussion among advisory council members continued for some time concerning the effectiveness in reducing mortalities of right whales from ship strikes or reducing the probability of ship strikes and the data to back it up. Some members said they thought another “sunset” would make sense because there could be many changes over five years. They also agreed that the regulation and associated economic effects should be revisited periodically along with the regulations as was done for this proposed rule. The council was asked if they want to make comment as a full advisory council. It was also noted that any individual can make a comment as a citizen (not as a member of the advisory council) without advisory council approval. Most members agreed that the GRNMS advisory council should make a collective comment. A motion was made to “...create a working group to draft [a] comment letter to be completed by July 15 for approval by [the full] council prior to official comment”. The motion was seconded and approved. The working group members are Michael Denmark, Randy Rudd, Mary Conley, Christine Laporte, and Emily Kroutil.

Law Enforcement Working Group report

Doug Lewis from the Georgia Department of Natural Resources Law Enforcement Division (GA DNR) reported that the Georgia Board of Natural Resources recently approved reorganization removing law enforcement from the Georgia Wildlife Resources Division and making it a new, separate division in GA DNR.

Doug also reported that due to NOAA’s budget constraints, the Joint Enforcement Agreement (JEA) between GA DNR and NOAA/GRNMS does not include funding support from GRNMS beginning July 1. He noted, however, that GA DNR will allocate some NOAA funding for GRNMS patrols anyway. SGT Mark Carson reported that DNR conducted several vessel boardings within the sanctuary this past quarter with one warning issued for a boat operator inside the Research Area.

The Law Enforcement Working Group of the advisory council will likely meet by conference call/webinar, also due to budget constraints. That group should be convened very soon now that LT Mastrianni has assumed command of the USCG SRFTC. LT Fisher noted that USCG travel has been curtailed but day trips for advisory council meetings have been approved. LT Nathan Downend of USCG Sector Charleston noted that “sequestration” has also cut over flights by Air Station Savannah and patrol boat hours. Al Samuels reported for NOAA Office of Law Enforcement (OLE) that summary settlement authority has been rescinded for JEA partners like GA DNR. GA DNR and USCG will

continue to work other violations, but NOAA OLE will do summary settlements that were created to make it simpler to issue citations for lesser violations.

Superintendent's report

Greg McFall reported on the status of the GRNMS draft revised management plan, which is in review at headquarters. Hopefully by the end of the month it will go to general council for review and approval. The greatest change to the plan is an altered regulation to allow the use of weighted marker buoys for diving and fishing in the sanctuary. There is also a simple addition to the existing anchoring regulation that makes it clear that "attempting" to anchor is also prohibited.

An education and outreach working group was formed last meeting but was postponed due to management changes. We now plan to move forward to review the site's education and outreach programming for efficacy and impact.

GRNMS' new outreach and communications coordinator Amy Rath reported on the ONMS "Campaign of Engagement" a program developed by headquarters to gain an increased and diverse coalition of support to reach ONMS goals. She aims to determine ways to engage the local business and tourism industries. ONMS headquarters is in the process of developing a national-level business advisory council (15 people from across the nation) to offer fresh ideas and possible infusion of cash to strapped programs. Danny Gleason recalled that he spent 3 days in December at the National Sanctuary Advisory Council meeting where this was discussed in great detail. Danny stated that he believes GRNMS staff have done a great job reaching out to the community. Anna George noted that the marketing for ONMS would better be done through ONMS headquarters, and that the strength at GRNMS is in research that can be translated into a communications piece emphasizing the importance of GRNMS in the community. Danny commented further that young people are the key to awareness and we need to incorporate messaging at schools. It was also noted that researchers provide some positive economic impact in local communities. The annual GRNMS Ocean Film Festival is also a successful site project.

Greg discussed the sanctuary site nomination process, which has not been active since 1995. A *Federal Register* notice will be released on Friday, June 28, calling for comments on a new process for sanctuary nomination and additional criteria for nominations. No new sanctuary sites are being nominated for designation at this time. Michael Denmark requested that the *Federal Register* notice be forwarded to the council. Emily Kroutil noted that she is working with advanced high school students who might be interested in reviewing and discussing the process.

The [National Marine Sanctuary Condition Report](#) was issued last week depicting a 'report card' of the condition of all national marine sanctuaries. Council members were encouraged to review it.

There was no update on a "friends" group for GRNMS.

Public comment

Tom Wright commented that he is pleased with GRNMS public presentations at the Ships of the Sea Maritime Museum in Savannah. He hopes to see these continue and increase information about GRNMS.

Patty Forrestal commented in support of right whale protections. She noted that she thinks more information on marine shipping traffic is also needed when considering the proposed rule.

Adjourn

With no additional comments or discussions, a motion was made, seconded and approved to adjourn at 4pm.