



GRAY'S REEF NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY ADVISORY COUNCIL WEBINAR – JULY 19, 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 DeVictor, Chair Michael Denmark, Vice-chair Anna George, Secretary Peter Auster Mark Carson Warren Fair Pat Geer Tim Henkel Warren Hupman Emily Kroutil Kevin Mitchell Dustin Rhyan Tim Tarver Suzanne VanParreren Susan White	Sarah Fangman Jody Patterson Michelle Riley George Sedberry Becky Shortland Mandy Harvey – volunteer and notetaker <u>GRNMS Foundation</u> Chris Hines <u>Georgia Department of Natural Resources</u> Jennifer Kline <u>Skidaway Institute of Oceanography</u> Clark Alexander
<u>SAC Members Absent</u> Jene Nissen Scott Noakes Mark Padgett Mary Conley	<u>Public in attendance</u> Dan Chapman Katherine Doyle Karen Raine Doug Samson Tom Wright

Advisory Council Business

Council Chair Rick DeVictor called the Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary (GRNMS) Advisory Council webinar to order. He welcomed members, staff and public in attendance. Rick briefly reviewed the agenda and outlined the meeting objectives. The May council meeting webinar summary was unanimously approved with no changes.

National Sanctuary Advisory Council Summit Follow-up – Climate Change

As part of the ongoing discussion on climate change that began during the annual National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council Summit in January and continued during subsequent SAC meetings, Dr. Clark Alexander from the Skidaway Institute of Oceanography (SkIO) and Jennifer Kline from the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Coastal Resources Division spoke to the group. Dr. Alexander focused on projected sea level rise and its potential impact on the Georgia coastal ecosystem. He reviewed past changes in sea level spanning geological time

and reviewed projections indicating a rise of between 1' and 4' over 1990 sea levels by 2100. Projections for encroachment for our local area can be found on the Georgia Coastal Hazards Portal (gchp.skiog.usg.edu) and the NOAA Coastal Flood Exposure Mapper (coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/tools/flood-exposure).

An increase of this magnitude could have far-ranging effects, including saltwater intrusion, increased storm damage and flooding, less efficient drainage and complications to septic systems, increased shoreline erosion and retreat, and loss of intertidal habitat. Dr. Alexander explained that even areas perceived as being far inland could be impacted due to increased saltwater flow up our many rivers. This would have obvious implications for marsh habitat, with those rivers having more minimal seaward flow experiencing the greatest degree of impact.

Jennifer Kline highlighted the upcoming DNR *Prepare, Respond and Adapt: is Georgia Climate-Ready?* climate conference scheduled for November 2 and 3 on Jekyll Island. The conference is intended to inform participants about coastal hazards and resiliency planning, share information between agencies, and maximize available resources in the state of Georgia. The key topics of the conference will be the many factors that impact, and are impacted by, statewide resiliency such as public health, agriculture, research, mapping/GIS, law and policy, invasive species, local governments, communications, economics, habitat and impacted species, and energy resources. Carl Parker from the Weather Channel will be keynote speaker. Registration opens on August 1 at coastalgadnr.org/ClimateConference. Suzanne VanParreren noted that there will be a poster session during the conference, and invited SAC members to submit any relevant abstracts.

Following the presentations, the group posed several questions. Rick DeVictor asked what the Georgia DNR was doing to prepare for sea level rise. In addition to the November conference highlighted by Jennifer, Dr. Alexander stated that the DNR is developing web-based tools to begin the process of identifying key impacted areas in Georgia where resources can be deployed to protect marsh migration pathways. The DNR is also promoting "living shorelines" to reduce the amount of armoring along Georgia's waterways.

Peter Auster inquired as to whether offshore habitat is being evaluated and considered as part of the discussion surrounding sea level rise. Dr. Alexander mentioned the work John Hare from NOAA is doing on the translocation of species such as lobsters to colder, deeper waters. Other than this project, most work has been focused on estuarine species including fish, birds, amphibians, and mammals. George Sedberry added that the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) is undertaking research regarding offshore habitat and the findings will be factored into future management plans. At this point biological reference points are largely unknown and no one can accurately predict how changes in sea temperature will affect individual species.

Michael Denmark thanked Jennifer Kline and Dr. Alexander for their participation and asked how well informed legislators are regarding sea level rise in our area and if they are aware of the data reviewed today. Dr. Alexander explained that there have been opportunities over the years for state legislators to be exposed to this information but never in a large group setting. He feels the coastal delegation is better informed than those from inland areas where sea level rise is of less immediate concern.

Susan White wondered about the ecological impact of the Savannah River harbor deepening. Dr. Alexander stated that there are ecological concerns regarding saltwater migration upstream, but several engineering solutions have been proposed to mitigate the effects. About half the cost of the deepening is for environmental mitigation projects such as oxygenation systems. Ideally, additional funding would be identified to study saltwater intrusion upstream of the port as it equates to approximately 50 years of sea-level-rise-driven change.

Rick DeVictor thanked Ms. Kline and Dr. Alexander for their participation in the meeting and suggested that the group continue educational activities focused on climate change. Dr. Alexander invited the group to contact him with any additional questions.

Recreational Fishing Working Group

During the May meeting, the council elected to establish a recreational fishing working group to find better ways to communicate and promote collaboration with recreational fishing interests, raise awareness of GRNMS, enhance compliance, and obtain more visitor use information. Tim Tarver was selected to chair this working group. Due to technical difficulties, Becky Shortland reported on his behalf. The draft terms of reference are attached to the webinar. SAC members are encouraged to review this document and submit any suggestions for improvement to Becky via email.

Following finalization of the terms of reference, the next step is to identify and invite potential members to join the group and conduct the first meeting prior to the September SAC meeting. Becky encouraged SAC members to email her with any suggestions. Kim Iverson from SAFMC has already provided some suggestions. Michael Denmark also suggested that Becky contact local sport fishing clubs.

Resource Protection Program Evaluation Working Group

Pat Geer reported on the progress of this working group, which is charged with assessing the various resource protection programs within GRNMS such as permitting, regulatory compliance, and protection efforts. A webinar was conducted in June to kick-off the process and identify key areas of focus and target audiences. A follow-up working session via webinar will take place on July 21, followed by a live meeting in Savannah August 29 and 30.

Law Enforcement Working Group

Mark Carson of Georgia DNR reported that 12 trips to GRNMS totaling 66 hours were made during the 2015/2016 Joint Enforcement Agreement (JEA) period, which runs from July 2015 to June 2016. Eighteen vessels and 59 people were checked during these patrols, which occurred mainly between July and March. There were no cases to document and no warnings issued. However, some violations were observed in close proximity to GRNMS boundaries. The 2016/2017 JEA takes effect on August 1 and includes 48 planned hours at GRNMS.

Becky Shortland reported that Kevin Mitchell of the NOAA Office of Law Enforcement made a trip to GRNMS this past Saturday (July 16) during the Sapelo Open King Mackerel Tournament and did not spot any violations.

LT Warren Fair of the US Coast Guard recently joined the advisory council and stated that he is looking forward to being involved with GRNMS. His team is currently assembling data on the patrols in GRNMS in the past 6 months and he will have that information available soon. He stated that there was an aviation patrol in January with two vessel sightings. Another aviation patrol in March had no vessel sightings. Additional aviation hours are being planned for GRNMS. In addition, the Coast Guard vessel *Reef Shark* will be transiting through GRNMS within the next 2 weeks and will make observations/inspections as appropriate.

Council Members' Report

NOAA Fisheries Update – Rick DeVictor reported that NOAA Fisheries will be increasing the bag limit on black sea bass from 5 to 7 fish per person per day effective August 12 due to the increasing population of black sea bass. However, red snapper will remain closed in 2016 in South Atlantic waters because the total number of red snapper removed from the population exceeded the limit in 2015. The excess mortality is from release of red snapper, not from landings. To this point, George Sedberry asked if any recommendations have been proposed on the use of descending devices to increase survival of red snapper when released. Rick answered that a regulation requiring the use of descending devices for both recreational and commercial fishing is being considered.

Last April NOAA Fisheries divided green sea turtles into 11 population segments. Green sea turtles in our area have been reclassified as threatened rather than endangered. Two distinct populations of Atlantic sturgeon have been identified in southeastern rivers.

NOAA Fisheries is developing a regional action plan relative to climate change and how it will impact fisheries. The document will outline the proposed response to climate change over the coming years. Action items outlined in the plan include hosting a climate science workshop to understand climate needs and strategies of partners in the area. The plan will be available in early August for public comment. Rick will circulate to the SAC members.

A southeast regional action plan for fisheries is also under development. Russ Dunn, NOAA Fisheries' National Policy Advisor for Recreational Fisheries, will speak about this plan at the upcoming SAC meeting in September.

Artificial Reef Workshop – George Sedberry reported that he attended the artificial reef workshop organized by NOAA Fisheries and Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission in June. The workshop focused on the design, placement and use of artificial reefs in fisheries management. The presentations from the workshop are currently available online and a full report of the meeting is forthcoming. George will share the report with the council when available, and will forward the link to the presentations in the meantime.

Get Into Your Sanctuary Day – Dustin Rhyan updated the group on the special dive charter to GRNMS that was offered in conjunction with *Get Into Your Sanctuary Day*. Dustin ran a dive trip to GRNMS on June 26 and the group did two dives, during which sharks and groupers were observed. He is planning another trip in the near future.

Sarah Fangman thanked Dustin for providing recreational divers an opportunity to visit GRNMS. She then provided an update on the new GRNMS informational signs that have been placed at numerous local marinas and boat ramps along the Georgia coast in an outreach effort to the boating and fishing communities. Eleven of these signs have been installed to date, with another 20 to go. One of these signs, which is located at the Rodney J. Hall boat ramp near Skidaway Island, was unveiled to the general public on June 25 also in conjunction with *Get into Your Sanctuary Day*.

Sanctuary Research Cruises – Tim Henkel and Peter Auster reported on the key findings of the recent research cruises to GRNMS aboard the NOAA research vessels *Nancy Foster* and *Sand Tiger*. Peter was aboard the *Sand Tiger*, where the researchers evaluated aggregation of prey fish and movement of predators during the day and at dusk. The team found that many forage fish dispersed at dusk, but tight schools were also observed well after sunset, perhaps due to the presence of mid-water predators. Acoustic monitoring conducted by the research team aboard *Nancy Foster* during the same timeframe will be used to supplement these findings.

Tim was aboard the *Nancy Foster*, along with 11 science crew members who were diving and performing acoustic surveys. Their objective was to assess and compare the marine communities inside and outside of the GRNMS research area. Tim reported that it was a very successful trip with 4 to 6 dives a day for 8 out of 10 days. Acoustic surveys were conducted 6 times a day (including at night) at 8 different locations.

Sarah Fangman thanked Peter and Tim for their commitment to the research cruise and for their part in assembling wonderful research teams. Analyses of the data obtained during the research cruises is ongoing and will be utilized to generate a report summarizing findings in the Research Area over the last 5 years.

On Sunday, July 17 following the completion of the research cruise, the *Nancy Foster* was docked on River Street in Savannah for an "open house", which provided an opportunity for the public to tour the vessel and meet the scientists onboard. Jody Patterson reported that Mark Padgett and 11 other volunteers and staff toured 120 members of the public through the ship. Five different media outlets were also in attendance.

GRNMS Foundation Update Report

Foundation Update – Reporting on behalf of Foundation Executive Director Chris Hines, Sarah Fangman reminded council members that they are invited to attend the 2016 *A Fishy Affair* event, which will take place at The Landings

Plantation Clubhouse in Savannah on Friday, September 23 at 6:00pm. Tickets are now on sale online. The event is almost sold out.

Sarah also updated the group on the mobile exhibit. RFPs were due yesterday (July 18) and 7 proposals were received. These will be reviewed and a firm will be selected. She also let the group know that the Foundation is seeking a new executive director. The application period closes this Sunday (July 24) and Sarah encouraged SAC members to share the job posting with any interested parties.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be a full-day, in-person meeting in Savannah (exact location TBD) on Friday, September 23. This will enable council members to attend *A Fishy Affair* later that evening. Proposed topics include a presentation on NOAA Fisheries' recreational fishing initiatives as mentioned earlier by Rick DeVitor. John Armor, Acting Director of NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries, will also be in attendance. Additional suggestions for meeting topics can be emailed to Becky Shortland.

In closing, Sarah Fangman delivered a hearty "Thank You" to council members for their high level of engagement in not only the SAC meetings, but also in numerous forums such as *Get into Your Sanctuary Day*, the research cruises, and the various working groups.

Public Comment

Tom Wright thanked everyone for the updates and good information.

The webinar was concluded at 11:51am