



**GRAY'S REEF NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY
ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING -
August 19, 2015
Beaufort County Public Library, Beaufort, SC**

Sanctuary Advisory Council (SAC) Attendees

Rick DeVictor, Chair
Michael Denmark, Vice-chair
Scott Noakes
Emily Kroutil
Jene Nissen
Suzanne VanParreren
Mary Conley
Warren Hupman
Pat Geer
Mark Padgett
Peter Auster
Mark Carson
Al Samuels
Amy Hockenberry
Mona Behl
Randy Rudd
Tim Goodale
Dustin Rhyan

SAC Members Absent
Anna George – Secretary
Tim Henkel

GRNMS
Sarah Fangman
Jody Patterson
Alison Scott
Jared Halonen
Becky Shortland

GRNMS Foundation
Chris Hines

Public in attendance
Pete Schramm
Tom Wright

Advisory Council Business

Council Chairman Rick DeVictor called the Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary (GRNMS) Advisory Council meeting to order. He and Superintendent Sarah Fangman welcomed members, staff and public in attendance. Rick briefly reviewed the agenda. The May meeting summary was approved unanimously.

Recognitions

Rick DeVictor thanked Tim Goodale and Randy Rudd for their excellent service to the council over the past three years and presented them with a framed Gray's Reef NMS photo.

Council membership

Sarah Fangman began by noting there were several excellent candidates for each seat during the last recruitment and the selection process was difficult. As a result, staff would like the council to consider options that could be employed to better capture applicants even when they are not chosen to serve, and to overall engage more people in Gray's Reef activities. For instance, the Council Charter could be amended to add alternates for all non-governmental seats, and/or new primary seats (e.g., volunteer and informal education representatives); or simply add another primary seat for a constituent group (e.g., sport diving), or increase utilization of working groups. There are many considerations, and all options should be considered carefully. Staff suggested a subcommittee of the council

to examine the options. After extensive discussion, a motion was made to form a subcommittee of the council including: Rick DeVictor, Mark Padgett, Peter Auster, Mona Behl, Pat Geer and Michael Denmark.

Rick and Sarah also welcomed incoming member Dustin Rhyan (sport diving) and noted that Tim Henkel was appointed in the university education seat, Anna George was reappointed to a conservation seat, and Michael Denmark was moved to the vacant citizen at large seat replacing Christine Laporte. Becky Shortland also noted that another recruitment just began for five seats – charter/commercial fishing, K-12 education, non-living resources research, conservation and sport fishing. The deadline for applications is September 30. She asked all members to please help spread the word about this recruitment.

National Sanctuary Advisory Council Summit – Becky Shortland

Becky Shortland explained that each year the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries hosts a gathering of all sanctuary advisory council chairs in an effort to further ongoing communications and information exchange among advisory councils and with staff. The summit was tentatively scheduled for October, but has been postponed until possibly December.

Council working groups:

Ecological Connectivity Working Group

Sarah Fangman reported that extensive discussion has been ongoing internally and with working group chair Peter Auster to establish the Ecological Connectivity Working Group. The group will begin meeting with a webinar on October 29. The working group is tasked with gathering information that is known and needs to be known to understand the connections to resources and locations outside the sanctuary. They will report back at future meetings.

Law Enforcement Working Group

The Law Enforcement Working Group is scheduled to hold its annual meeting on September 29. Representatives from GA DNR Law Enforcement Division, the U.S. Coast Guard, NOAA Office of Law Enforcement and NOAA General Counsel will all be attending. The working group will report on the outcomes at the next council meeting.

Next Meeting

Becky Shortland suggested either the week of November 2 or the 9 for the next Gray's Reef Sanctuary Advisory Council meeting. It was decided that the week of November 9 was preferred.

Follow up from May BOEM presentation

Mary Conley gave an overview of activities around proposed oil and gas development off the Southeast coast and the presentation from the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM; U.S. Department of the Interior) during the May council meeting. Following that presentation from Dr. Brad Blythe on proposed oil and gas leasing, there was interest expressed by current and former council members for additional bottom mapping and questions about how priorities in BOEM's research program are developed. It was noted that bottom mapping is lower on BOEM's priority list for research. New data collection for the Southeast has been limited, so members discussed the possibility and usefulness of the council sending a letter to BOEM to support a suite of seafloor hard bottom data collection. After discussion, the council decided to draft a letter to distribute among members for comments. The letter could then be approved during the November meetings. Mary Conley and Peter Auster will lead the effort with support from Becky Shortland.

Council Members' Report

Soundscape equipment

Jene Nissen and Scott Noakes gave some background on the equipment and purposes of the hydrophones being supplied by the U.S. Navy to enhance soundscape recording in the sanctuary. Jene reviewed the approximate costs to the sanctuary for batteries and memory for the MicroMARS units. The units will hopefully be ready to deploy to capture a portion of the right whale calving season (November-April). Scott also mentioned that working with Mote

Marine Lab; he identified one of the sounds already recorded as an oyster toad fish. Pending proposals may result in more instrumentation and interest in Gray's Reef leading to more comprehensive and consistent monitoring.

Dive charters

Both Island Dive Center (St. Simons Island) and Divers Den (St. Marys) have been attempting to bring divers out to Gray's Reef this summer. Warren Hupman talked about the difficulties including a workable launch location for charter boats. A location mid-coast is desirable so that fuel costs (e.g., departing from St. Mary's) can be minimized. Dustin Rhyan also spoke about Diver's Den's attempts to bring divers out to the sanctuary. . The question was raised about the feasibility of establishing designated dive sites with mooring buoys. Sarah Fangman responded with several concerns about mooring buoys, but indicated that it is a topic that can be discussed in the future when more divers are able to get to Gray's Reef.

Outreach support

Michael Denmark talked about his interest in taking a generic Gray's Reef presentation to area civic and special-interest groups. He suggested that the PowerPoint be customized for different audiences and that a plan will be developed to target audiences. Michael also asked others for their willingness to help with the presentations. He will be working with Jody Patterson on the presentation and plan. Mona Behl and Al Samuels would like to have the presentation or some slides they could include in talks they give. Jody will get that to them on a thumb drive.

"A Fishy Affair"

Suzanne VanParreren and Pat Geer were thanked for their efforts to get the word out about the upcoming Foundation event.

NOAA Fisheries update

Rick DeVictor gave an update on relevant activities with NOAA Fisheries Service (National Marine Fisheries Service). A primary topic is that there is no red snapper fishing season this year due to overfishing last year. There is a stock assessment underway. Considerable discussion followed and a suggestion was made to have a future presentation on the science and policy sides of fisheries management. Rick also touched on related topics including the effectiveness of monitoring existing marine protected areas and spawning special management zones that are in discussion region-wide.

Sanctuary Advisory Council 2015 and beyond

Sarah Fangman reviewed the council retreat that was held last August in South Carolina. The retreat was an opportunity to reflect on 15 years of the Gray's Reef Sanctuary Advisory Council, and kicked off initiatives from the Gray's Reef NMS Management Plan, such as connectivity and the evaluation of programs. Sarah further explained how and why the regular programs report and "morphed" into regular email updates. She asked members for feedback on the report and status of the initiatives begun during the retreat. Members remarked that the email updates are easier to digest than the quarterly report. Additional comments included the need to engage more with recreational fishermen. Questions also arose from new council members about the decision to prohibit spearfishing in the sanctuary. Becky will follow up with background information for new members. New members commented that they are still in a learning stage about other council members and their roles, along with the sanctuary's needs and council member roles and activities. Networking and communications between council members could be enhanced and encouraged. Others noted that the retreat environment last year accomplished much of that and increased partnerships between members. It was also suggested that the Council Members' Report be moved to an earlier slot on the agenda each meeting.

Sanctuary report

Staffing update

Sarah updated the council on the delay in securing a research coordinator until 2016. A new deputy superintendent "detailee" is due to join the staff for a few months beginning in October. Sarah also hopes to be able to announce the selection for outreach and communications coordinator very soon.

Strategic Communications Strategy

Sarah Fangman gave an overview of the Strategic Communications Strategy that has evolved from the in-depth evaluation of education and outreach programming over the past year. She explained the structure and focus on specific audiences. She further asked for feedback on an example of the communications objectives for the recreational diving audience. After reviewing the information, members offered a number of suggestions, including means to develop relationships with various members of the dive community and consciously thinking about what entities in the diving community we want to attract and how to develop that.

Due to extensive discussion about the diving community communications strategy, no time remained to examine the recreational fishing audience. Therefore this discussion was postponed to the following meeting. It was determined that there was not sufficient time to review the recreational fishing audience information and that could be done at the next meeting.

Social Value Survey

Research Specialist Alison Scott gave an overview of the survey that should launch this fall on social values of ecosystem services. The survey is a collaboration headed by NOAA's Hollings Marine Laboratory. Sapelo Island NERR and Gray's Reef NMS are the partners seeking the information from the survey. Members asked that staff send them a link to the online survey as soon as it is available and a list of the sites that are being targeted for in-person (intercept) surveys. Alison emphasized that volunteers for the intercept surveys are still being sought; members offered some suggestions and committed to forwarding the survey to their constituents.

Leatherback incident

LTJG Jared Halonen gave a report on the follow up actions from the incident in May where a leatherback sea turtle was struck by a sanctuary vessel. The vessel was on a safety stand down immediately following the incident until the sanctuary program completed an internal review of the incident and response actions were identified and implemented... Al Samuels offered that from the NOAA law enforcement perspective it was determined that the incident was not the result of negligence and it was not intentional. Two Council members were onboard during the incident and observed that the staff's immediate reactions were prudent and responsible.

Field season operations

Peter Auster reported on implementation of field operations for scientific projects. Substantial work was to be conducted on the NOAA Ship *Nancy Foster*, but the cruise was cancelled due to a lack of personnel. Gray's Reef marine operations crew worked exceptionally hard to fill the gap with Gray's Reef vessels. Peter's team was able to accomplish the hydroacoustics work and multiple dive operations over a period of two weeks. The work accomplished should be enough for a proposal. Great "thanks" were expressed for staff and volunteers who all made the operations possible.

Sanctuary nominations update

Becky Shortland gave a brief update on nominations that have been submitted to ONMS for consideration as a future national marine sanctuary. The nomination for a sanctuary off northeast Florida is under review for the second time. Two other nominations are moving more quickly through the various reviews.

Gray's Reef NMS Foundation report

Foundation Executive Director Chris Hines gave an update of activities with the Foundation, including the upcoming "A Fishy Affair" which has already sold out.

Public comment

Pete Schramm, a master naturalist and volunteer at the Coastal Discovery Museum on Hilton Head Island, SC, noted that he is interested in seeing the science and knowledge generated by Gray's Reef out in the public domain. He also noted that the information could be another aspect of what the museum interprets.

Tom Wright with the Savannah Maritime Association noted that he had a question about requirements for visiting the sanctuary, but that had already been explained during the meeting.

Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 4:45 PM.