



**Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary  
Advisory Council Meeting  
September 1, 2010  
Georgia Southern University Museum  
Statesboro, GA**

**Members Present**

(Chair) Clark Alexander, Non-living Resources Research  
(Vice Chair) Will Berson, Georgia Conservation  
(Secretary) Venetia Butler, K-12 Education  
Kellie Parr, Sport Diving  
BMC Andrew VanderVeen, U.S. Coast Guard  
Wendell Harper, Charter/Commercial Fishing  
Sgt. Bob Lynn, GADNR Law Enforcement  
Joe Kimmel, NOAA Fisheries SE Region  
Tim Tarver, Sport Fishing  
Al Samuels, NOAA Office of Law Enforcement  
Danny Gleason, Living Resources Research  
Eric Robillard, GADNR Coastal Resources Division  
Dorset Hurley, Sapelo Island NERR  
Mary Conley, Regional Conservation  
George Sedberry, GRNMS Superintendent (Ex-officio)

**Members Absent**

Scott Harris, University Education

**GRNMS Staff Present**

Greg McFall, Deputy Superintendent/ Research Coordinator  
Becky Shortland, Resource Protection Coordinator  
Jody Patterson, Administrative Assistant

**Public Present**

Jeff Hart, GRNMS Team Ocean Volunteer Diver

**Welcome and Introductions**

Council Chairman Clark Alexander called the meeting to order, welcoming members, staff and public participants. Introductions were made and the agenda was reviewed with no changes.

**Council Business**

**April 2010 Meeting Summary-**A motion was made and passed approving the summary of minutes from April's Sanctuary Advisory Council meeting.

**Jim Henry tribute-**Dr. Vernon James 'Jim' Henry, inaugural chair of the GRNMS Sanctuary Advisory Council, died suddenly in early May. A tribute page will be added to the GRNMS website. Jim Henry was an important early investigator of the sanctuary's geologic framework, which laid a critical foundation for the understanding and protection of the GRNMS. Advisory council members were asked to add commentary to the page.

**Council membership-**Two advisory council seats were recently advertised: Georgia conservation and living resources research. Will Berson and Danny Gleason were reappointed for another term. Discussion followed about the new Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS) policy on term limits of advisory council members. That and other topics, such as adding an at-large seat to the council led to staff's suggestion to form a standing subcommittee on membership and charter. Other topics that could be addressed by such a subcommittee include review of the council charter and alternate seats. Will Berson volunteered to chair the subcommittee; Tim Tarver, Danny Gleason, and Dorset Hurley also offered their participation. A motion was made, seconded and passed to form the Membership/Charter Subcommittee.

**2011 ONMS advisory councils summit-**Clark Alexander spoke briefly about the upcoming Annual National Sanctuary Advisory Councils Summit to be held in Savannah May, 2011. He encouraged all council members to participate, particularly in the reception to be hosted by the GRNMS and the advisory council at the Savannah College of Art and Design's River Club. Becky noted that the summit will take place over three days, will be based at the AVIA Hotel on Ellis Square in downtown Savannah, and includes a field trip to Sapelo Island.

**January retreat follow-up-**George addressed actions from the January 2010 Advisory Council Retreat that have been completed and what has not been addressed. Following are the items and status of each item:

- Work with Kellie Parr to explore "friends groups" concept - need "face to face"; explore pros and cons of a GRNMS friends group;
- Visitor Center working group - include Kelly Parr; the working group needs guidance from staff;
- Work with advisory council members to create op-ed pieces on issues of interest to the sanctuary and the public - Danny Gleason, Greg McFall and Will Berson are working on a climate change/marine protected areas piece; a press release on GRNMS as a sentinel site with CO2 monitoring is still being considered;
- Encourage advisory council members' contributions to the GRNMS quarterly programs reports - no action yet;
- Follow up with "Frequently Asked Questions" as suggested by advisory council members (i.e., Are we shutting down GRNMS? What is the purpose of the research area? Goal of research area? How do you know when you've achieved the goal? Is GRNMS part of NMFS? What is the difference between the 2 organizations? What is SAFMC in relation to both NMFS and GRNMS? What is a NMS? Why is GRNMS a NMS?)

Who enforces the rules at GRNMS?) – work with Tim Tarver and Wendell Harper to finalize questions; get information on website and out to public and users; get information on website and out to public and users;

- Follow up with Rivers to Reefs (R2R) teacher workshop participants to encourage them to present their experience with GRNMS and the workshop at conferences and meetings - Lesson plans posted; need follow-up on use in classroom and at conferences; workshop evaluations in progress;
- Improve communications with the sport diving community - flyers and posters about regulation changes were sent out to marinas, fish camp, and dive shops (state wide); large quantities of the materials were also distributed to the GADNR office and to partners; materials to be printed
- GREAT education program – Suggested that it relate more to GRNMS; followed up with Kelly to expand to dive community; followed up with DNR EPD to establish a program in schools;
- Boater Corps - a work in progress; must be coordinated with NOAA marine ops;
- Navy activities information - Followed up to get contacts; contacts unavailable this spring/summer;
- Advisory council meeting materials out in timely manner - doing our best;
- Fill Georgia conservation and living resources research advisory council seats – done
- Develop and send letter requesting research coordinator for GRNMS – done
- Add topics from retreat on regional advisory councils agenda (climate change and budget/reauthorization) – done
- Management plan review with advisory council – four meetings to present program areas; research/monitoring action plan presented at April meeting; marine resource protection action plan September meeting; education/outreach January 2011;
- Find out who key Congressionals are regarding budget and reauthorization of the National Marine Sanctuaries Act (NMSA) - talking points on budget and reauthorization and contact information sent to advisory council members;
- Discussion of education and outreach and how it can be better focused on research activities and GRNMS; how to have land-based education programs and field activities that give hands-on experience when the site is relatively inaccessible - a focused effort of promoting education concerning the proposed research area is a top priority for Superintendent George Sedberry.

Dorset strongly supported the boater corps concept because the presence of these boats could have a great impact. Joe Kimmel suggested modeling the boater corps after the FL Keys NMS' Team Ocean. Dorset mentioned that Danny Gleason gave a recent lecture hosted by the Sapelo Island NERR on ocean acidification that may be of interest to council members. Clark asked Danny to forward the presentation to Becky Shortland who would then send it out to all members. Joe Kimmel added that NOAA Fisheries Service does not address climate change often and that this may be something the sanctuaries could present to the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC). Clark requested that Danny act on behalf of the advisory council and present his findings on ocean acidification to the SAFMC. Will Berson offered to add the article for inclusion in The Georgia Conservancy's (TGC) newsletter. Another discussion followed about the possibility of SAFMC including GRNMS regulations and information in their publications.

Discussion continued on budget challenges and reauthorization of the NMSA, which is five years overdue. George noted we don't expect an increase in the ONMS/GRNMS budget. Clark suggested getting a list of GRNMS needs to use for letters of support. Questions were also raised about the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation (NMSF). George explained that the NMSF is a non-profit, membership organization that was created to assist the ONMS. GRNMS can apply for small foundation grants. Contributions to GRNMS can also be sent to NMSF for our needs, but so far those amounts are very small.

Will Berson mentioned that TGC is interested in developing dive trips for TGC members to GRNMS. He and Kellie Parr have been discussing the idea.

**Gray's Reef Ocean Film Festival** – Becky Shortland distributed posters for the upcoming festival and asked that advisory council members help get the word out.

**Next meeting date-** An email will be distributed to determine availability possibly in January 2011.

### **Nancy Foster expedition recap**

As recapped by Greg McFall, the May 2010 cruise onboard the NOAA *Ship Nancy Foster* was extremely successful. During the 10-day cruise twenty-five fish were caught, tagged with acoustic transmitters and released in the sanctuary (three red snapper, four scamp and 18 gag grouper). Fishing activities were supported by the GADNR's R/V *Marguerite* and the GRNMS R/V *Joe Ferguson* and R/V *Sam Gray*. Over 45 volunteers assisted with seven days of offshore fishing and four days of inshore bait fishing. Four new acoustic receiver sites were established and 13 existing receiver arrays were serviced and downloaded. Divers conducted habitat assessment surveys at five acoustic receiver sites. Eight marine debris monitoring sites surveys were completed. CO2 sensors were deployed on the seafloor and on the GRNMS data buoy. An underway CO2 system collected samples during the entire cruise. During the cruise, divers conducted 75 dives and spent over 26 hours underwater. At night, scientists continued a multi-year multibeam sonar mapping effort to characterize habitats to the east and north of GRNMS covering 19.5 square nautical miles of area.

Outreach efforts during the cruise included two media days and an expedition site on the ONMS webpage. Two documentaries were shot during the cruise and several print and broadcast stories resulted from media outreach efforts. An open house took place aboard the ship on Memorial Day and drew more than 290 people.

After the successful first leg, the ship was called to duty to support oil spill efforts in the Gulf of Mexico. Plans were then scrambled to enable Dr. Peter Auster (University of Connecticut) and Dr. Laura Kracker (NOAA) to conduct their scheduled work on GRNMS vessels instead. Auster and Kracker are continuing investigations on the interactions between pelagic predators and the coupling between the prey upon which they feed and the benthic fish predators that live on or near the bottom. They are attempting to quantify these interactions by conducting censuses of the interactions as well as filming them and using sonar on the water column.

### **Visitor Center Working Group report**

A feasibility and marketing study has been conducted for the proposed visitor center. Working group chair Venetia Butler stated that there is still no direction for the working group until the consultants finish their work. Different sites have been evaluated, costs assessed, and tourism statistics calculated, and more questions to be answered. Asked what the target audience and message is expected to be, George Sedberry answered that his ideal target is Georgia locals interested in culture and marine habitats. GRNMS currently has funding for kiosks and signage on River Street but none for the construction or operations of a facility.

### **Research Area update**

The Proposed Rule and Draft Environmental Impact Statement for designation of a research area in GRNMS are expected to be published soon. The preferred boundary alternative is the Southern Option and NOAA GRNMS proposes to prohibit fishing, diving, and stopping while transiting through the proposed research area. There will be a 90-day comment period with public meetings scheduled for October 19-21 in Richmond Hill, Statesboro, and Brunswick. Comments will also be accepted online (<http://www.regulations.gov>) or by mail to GRNMS.

### **NOAA Fisheries update**

The red snapper stock assessment from 2008 depicted the species as overfished and undergoing overfishing. Mandates of the Magnuson Stevens Act require action. Amendment 17A is under consideration now to rebuild red snapper through time and area closures. An interim rule resulted in prohibition of red snapper harvest through this year. Another stock assessment is expected to be completed before the end of the year, which may alter the area closure. George Sedberry is now on the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) of the SAFMC. The SSC is the SAFMC's primary technical advisory body charged with developing, evaluating, and peer reviewing all technical aspects of SAFMC documents.

Lastly, NOAA Fisheries Service representative Dr. Joe Kimmel is retiring as of December 31<sup>st</sup>. All present encouraged Joe to return to the next advisory council meeting for a proper send-off.

### **Programs overview: Resource Protection**

All ONMS site management plans must be reviewed every five years and revised as appropriate. The current GRNMS management plan was released in July 2006 and GRNMS is now in the pre-management plan review stage assessing programs. The advisory council had a presentation during the April meeting on the research and monitoring action plan. Becky Shortland presented an overview of the six strategies in the marine resource protection action plan:

1. Prevent damage to benthic habitats from anchoring;
2. Prevent diver impact on benthic habitat;
3. Remove marine debris from the sanctuary and prevent new debris from accumulating;
4. Increase protection for fish and invertebrate species;
5. Enhance enforcement efforts;

6. Enhance coordination and cooperation with SAFMC, NOAA Fisheries Service, and GADNR on marine reserves and other regional programs.

Becky reviewed the status of each of the strategies and discussion followed. A suggestion was made to place regulation signage at boat ramps and marinas. It was noted that Kellie Parr is doing a good job keeping the diving community informed. Regarding marine debris, staff explained that most debris is found on or under ledges. The Team Ocean volunteer dive program is helping with surveys and removal. Regarding the strategy to increase protection for fish and invertebrate species, regulations are in place to allow only rod and reel or handline fishing gear in GRNMS. Sanctuary enforcement has improved greatly over the past several years, but still presents a challenge with budget constraints and the lack of remote sensing capability. A law enforcement working group has been established and the development of a volunteer boater corps could be helpful. Efforts are ongoing to enhance user data and expand patrols. There is ongoing interaction with SAFMC, NOAA Fisheries Service and GADNR. Staff are considering providing more support for recovery of the North Atlantic right whale and loggerhead sea turtle through enhanced outreach efforts. It was suggested that the addition of a NOAA Fisheries Service Office of Protected Resources (OPR) seat to the council may be beneficial to that end.

#### **Law Enforcement Working Group update**

Sgt. Bob Lynn reported on GADNR Law Enforcement's activities. As has been the case for some time, they are limited by budget and the lower number of rangers in the region. They are continuing to patrol GRNMS as weather and availability of rangers allows. They were in attendance at king mackerel tournaments including the Sapelo tournament. They have clocked 28 boat hours, 96 man hours and checked 13 vessels this quarter.

Reporting on NOAA's law enforcement efforts, Al Samuels noted that there are several cases pending civil penalties regarding protection of North Atlantic right whales. Greg McFall suggested we schedule a presentation from OPR on right whales and vessel interactions for a future advisory council meeting.

BMC Andrew VanderVeen reported on the potential changes in USCG structure that may alter representation on the advisory council from the USCG SE Region Fisheries Training Center (SERFTC). He also noted that Air Station Savannah is conducting over-flights but most of the USCG vessels are currently in the Gulf of Mexico.

#### **Offshore activity concerns**

With issues such as U.S. Navy projects, alternative energy development, exploration and leasing for oil and gas, and concerns over the gulf oil spill, GRNMS staff have multiple, complex topics to consider. Assessing potential impacts to the sanctuary and priorities is becoming more difficult with limited staff resources. Discussion followed on the need for a "big picture" of offshore activities in the region of the sanctuary, which includes efforts for Coastal and Marine Spatial Planning (CMSP) through the new National Ocean Policy. A working group of the advisory council was suggested as a means to review, assess and prioritize these issues. Mary Conley volunteered to help assess risks and prioritize potential outcomes, policy and planning. Clark Alexander summarized the discussion into a motion that a working group should be established to assess the array of existing and potential offshore actions that could impact GRNMS and prioritize those activities to be

addressed. The motion was seconded and passed to form the working group with council members Mary Conley, Will Berson, Clark Alexander, and Dorset Hurley; George Sedberry offered to be the staff lead.

### **Public Comment**

Jeff Hart, GRNMS Team Ocean volunteer diver asked about the confusion over the use of marker buoys in the sanctuary for diving and fishing. He requested clarification on what constitutes a marker buoy. Becky Shortland explained that the intent of the regulations for discharge/deposit and anchoring is, among other things, to prevent damage to live-bottom habitat in the sanctuary. Page 65 of the GRNMS 2006 Management Plan states that “Items that are deployed and subsequently retrieved the same day, such as fishing line and small marker buoys, are not considered ‘deposited’ in the Sanctuary.” At the time the management plan was developed and finalized, marker buoys were not thought to impact the bottom. A recent incident – a diver using an anchor on the bottom at GRNMS attached to a marker buoy - indicates otherwise. George Sedberry stated that the issue will be addressed through the upcoming management plan review process and that Jeff and Kellie Parr’s participation in that discussion will be very important.

### **Adjourn**

The meeting was adjourned at 4pm