



**Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary
Advisory Council Meeting
October 14, 2011
Georgia Department of Natural Resources
Coastal Resources Division
Brunswick, Georgia**

Members Present

Clark Alexander, Non-living Resources Research (Chair)
Danny Gleason, Living Resources Research (Vice-chair)
Venetia Butler, K-12 Education (Secretary)
Pat Geer, GADNR CRD
Capt. Doug Lewis, GA DNR Law Enforcement
Chuck Hopkinson, Sea Grant
Rick DeVictor, NOAA Fisheries SE Region
Al Samuels, NOAA Office for Law Enforcement
Mary Conley, Regional Conservation
Kellie Parr, Sport Diving
Suzanne VanParreren, Sapelo Island NERR
LT Brandon Fisher, U.S. Coast Guard SRFTC
Tim Tarver, Sport Fishing

Members Absent

Wendell Harper, Charter/Commercial Fishing
Scott Harris, University Education
Vacant - Georgia Conservation

NOAA and GRNMS Staff Present

George Sedberry, Superintendent
Greg McFall, Deputy Superintendent/Research Coordinator
Becky Shortland, Resource Protection Coordinator
Jody Patterson, Administrative Assistant
Gail Krueger, Outreach Coordinator
LTJG Chris Briand, Vessel Operations Officer
Sarah Fangman, Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean Region, Program Coordinator
Michelle Meadows, Intern
Otha Easley, NOAA Office for Law Enforcement

Public Present

Sgt. Mark Carson, GADNR LE

Guest Speaker

Dr. Marcel Reichert

Welcome and introductions

Council Chairman Clark Alexander called the Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary (GRNMS) Advisory Council meeting to order. He welcomed new member Dr. Chuck Hopkinson (Sea Grant), new NOAA Fisheries Service alternate member Rick DeVictor, new Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Coastal Resources Division alternate member Pat Geer, Suzanne VanParreren attending for Sapelo Island NERR, other members, visitors, and staff. All-around introductions followed and the agenda was reviewed with no changes.

Superintendent George Sedberry announced that the research area final rule was published in the *Federal Register* that day. The regulations will not, however, become effective until later in the year or early 2012 after congressional review.

Council Business

June 2011 meeting summary – A motion was made and passed approving the summary of minutes from the June Sanctuary Advisory Council meeting.

Membership/Charter Subcommittee report – Subcommittee Chair Venetia Butler opened the discussion and explained that descriptions of the conservation seat and citizen-at-large seats were discussed during meetings of the subcommittee (Venetia Butler, Chair; Tim Tarver; Danny Gleason; Dorset Hurley). The subcommittee suggested that the conservation seats not be limited geographically. Descriptions of the two other seats that are to be advertised soon were also developed by the subcommittee (university education and charter/commercial fishing). These were all then discussed by the full advisory council. Clark clarified that the university seat should be reworded to specify that it is open to university and college faculty. Modifications were suggested and the descriptions were approved. One of the two approved citizen-at-large seats will be recruited now for a two-year term. The second citizen-at-large seat will be recruited next year for a two-year term. The university education and charter/commercial fishing seats will expire this fall with the current seat holders eligible to reapply (Scott Harris and Wendell Harper).

The council was then asked to discuss and approve the proposed revised council charter. Becky Shortland gave an overview of the general charter modifications, already-approved new and modified council seats (total of 12 voting members and six non-voting members for a total of 18 council members), and new language in the charter. She pointed out policy that suggests each council have an annual work plan. Discussion followed and George Sedberry explained that an annual plan can be more of a general outline for the year and could help with budget planning as well. Also of particular interest was the term limits policy, which resets the number of terms served by current members back to their first term. In addition, after further questions and discussion, the council suggested that nominating new and renewing council members should remain part of the duties of the executive committee (chair, vice-chair, secretary). The revised charter was then approved by the council. The charter will now be sent to the ONMS Director for final approval, after which vacant seat announcements will be developed and sent out.

In addition to the above discussions, Mary Conley raised concerns about reaching a quorum with more members. A quorum is "more than half of the voting members", so with 12 voting members the quorum will be seven voting members present for the council to be able to vote; the quorum now is six voting members present. It could be an issue, but has not been as yet.

Youth seat – Discussions centered on the idea championed by ONMS Director Dan Basta that all sanctuary advisory councils should consider a youth member. Sites that have already taken action on a youth seat and/or a youth working group include: *Monitor*, Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale, Fagatele, and Flower Garden Banks. Clark Alexander has been exploring the

experiences of other sites by contacting council members and staff of those sites. He noted that some sites are having difficulty filling these seats and thinks that the biggest issue is the cultivation of students. Danny Gleason responded that he thought the education coordinator and/or K-12 education council member could have the best link. Danny also suggested that a university student on track to a conservation or environmental field might have an interest. Chair Clark Alexander asked the membership/charter subcommittee to further explore the concept and present recommendations to the council at a later date.

Council Officer Elections – Danny Gleason will assume the chair position effective January 1, 2012, so nominations were opened for the vice-chair and secretary positions. With the floor open, Doug Lewis nominated Clark Alexander as the vice-chair. There being no other nominations, Clark accepted and the motion carried. Clark nominated Venetia Butler to continue in the position of Secretary. Venetia accepted and the motion carried.

January 2010 retreat action items – Superintendent George Sedberry proceeded to revisit action items resulting from the January 2010 council retreat and the June 29, 2011, council meeting.

- GRNMS “friends group” - George stated that there has been no progress on a friends group, but he hopes to move forward after the ONMS meeting with all superintendents in January, where friends groups may be discussed.

- SAC contributions to the quarterly programs report – meant to incorporate regional and local perspectives - is an ongoing action item.

- Op Ed piece on climate change – Several elements of this op-ed piece have been produced, but the missing piece is a “why should it matter” to the general public. Mary Conley noted that timely pieces on relevant issues like the National Marine Sanctuaries Act, or sentinel sites published around the research area designation would be ideal. It was suggested that a staff person could work with council members to develop a draft pertaining to specific issues. Kelli Parr offered her assistance in contributing a written piece and George offered Gail’s assistance in crafting such an item. Clark also suggested that Mary Landers would possibly be onboard with publishing the op-ed.

- Q&A topics for sanctuary users - Clark reminded everyone that the original action item was to develop a partnership with local fishermen around their questions and issues. Additional action items include a frequently asked questions (FAQs) sheet to be developed and uploaded on the website. Gail noted that one-pagers have been developed for specific events; however they have not been uploaded to the website. Suzanne VanParreren suggested incorporating “Q codes” on printed documents that will link PDAs to our website.

- Teacher workshops follow up - Teachers participating with Rivers to Reefs workshops have submitted lesson plans relevant to their experience and GRNMS, which have been loaded to the website. Presentations have been given by teachers at professional meetings as well.

- Navy offshore activities – GRNMS staff have followed direction from the advisory council by scheduling NOAA and Georgia right whale experts at the June 2011 meeting. During that meeting the council heard that known causes of mortality (ship strikes and fishing gear entanglements) were a priority with agency representatives, whereas sonar activities are still an unknown effect at this time. It was explained that right whales are baleen whales that do not echolocate as toothed whales do. Toothed whales are more susceptible to sonar interferences. Despite the uncertainty of impacts on right whales, Clark Alexander

emphasized the need to get experts to speak to the council and staff as soon as possible. It was also noted that the Conservation Working Group's assessment of sanctuary resources and potential human effects identified the interface between marine mammals, shipping and Navy activities as a high ranking.

-Council meeting materials have been forwarded two weeks in advance of scheduled meetings, as requested.

- The Georgia conservation and living resources research seats were addressed soon after the January 2010 council retreat.

-The advisory council completed and forwarded a letter to Dan Basta concerning the need for a full-time research coordinator

-Review of the 2006 management plan will be complete with this meeting.

-Press release on GRNMS as sentinel site with CO2 monitoring - A press release on GRNMS as a sentinel sites with CO2 monitoring has not been developed as George doesn't know how to make it news worthy. However, a piece on CO2 monitoring from Scott Noakes is now on the website. Becky noted that the west coast region has education and outreach items around these issues. Mary Conley offered that individual pieces of the issue could have been presented at the film festival. Venetia Butler suggested a column to keep GRNMS in the news.

June 2011 council meeting action items - George Sedberry continued with action items from the June 2011 meeting.

-GRNMS regulations on the SAFMC website - Jack McGovern was to look into updating links and regulations for GRNMS on their websites.

-Provide council members with a list of key members of Congress and an outline of how they have each voted on ocean issues - Mary Conley will forward congressional contact information to council members.

-Any new strategy for reauthorization of the NMSA, budget and Site Evaluation List - George updated members on the ONMS Site Evaluation List and will keep them informed as interest in revising the list moves through NOAA.

-Link to "Ocean Leadership Weekly" to keep up with NOAA-related matters such as the budget – This was sent to all council members soon after the June meeting.

-Graph overview of ONMS funding – George will provide as needed.

-Georgia Department of Natural Resources (GADNR) comments on Navy sonar and other activities – Becky Shortland explained that GADNR's comments are very useful in sorting out Navy activities and assessing potential impacts.

-Follow up on various suggestions for enhanced outreach/public awareness efforts – Gail Krueger noted various outreach actions for the research area. Information on GRNMS regulations to all boating access points (fishing camps, boat ramps, tackle shops, etc; check for inventory and maintain that information regularly; a poster-sized piece would work best. Participation in annual fishing tournaments will be for later discussion.

-Advertise GRNMS Advisory Council meetings through UGA MECA – This was done for the October meeting and will continue for future meetings.

-GRNMS staff participate in pre-calving season disentanglement training with GADNR – Suggestion made to GADNR to involve staff.

-Visitor Center Working Group meeting – As noted earlier, George noted that the working group has been “put on the backburner” due to a lack of funding.

-Consider future council presentations focused on topics highlighted by conservation working group – Becky explained that this is being done for 2012 meetings. The presentation in June was actually a start.

Programs report and discussion - The programs report was noted without comment.

Meeting Dates - It was determined that the next council meeting will be held in January, location to be determined. Becky will email staff and council members for this and other potential meeting dates in 2012.

Law Enforcement Working Group report

Capt. Doug Lewis reported on Georgia Department of Natural Resources Law Enforcement activities within the sanctuary. He noted that GADNR rangers made 11 trips to GRNMS in the past quarter (July, August and September) using 79 hours (64%) of the contracted 125 hours in the first quarter of the state fiscal year. Thirty-eight (38) vessels were checked and there was one warning. Doug also noted that their personnel have been further reduced.

LT Brandon Fisher reported on U.S. Coast Guard activities in the sanctuary noting that Air Station Savannah is continuing overflights.

NOAA Office for Law Enforcement (OLE) Special Agent Al Samuels reported that OLE is hiring more enforcement officers, while the number of special agents is diminishing. OLE is directing significant effort toward sea turtle protection in the Gulf of Mexico; Al has spent considerable time there in the last few weeks. Otha Easley gave a report for General Counsel Karen Raine (NOAA Enforcement and Litigation) noting the number of cases that have occurred in sanctuaries in the Southeast.

Conservation Working Group report

Working group chair Mary Conley noted the final copy of the group’s assessment of sanctuary resources and potential effects. The assessment will help guide staff and the council in preparing agenda items and speakers for 2012 council meetings. These topics, and the discussion around them, set the stage for the sanctuary management plan review and revision. GRNMS staff asked the working group to now assess the weighted marker buoy issue. Mary asked for other council members to be involved. Kellie Parr, Pat Geer, Tim Tarver, Al Samuels, Brandon Fisher and Doug Lewis volunteered. There will be a conference call scheduled in the near future to discuss the issue and develop recommendations for the council.

National Marine Sanctuaries Act (NMSA) overview

George Sedberry presented an overview of the NMSA (click [here](#) (📎 5061kb) for slides).

Management plan revision

George Sedberry continued with a discussion of the last three 2006 GRNMS Management Plan action plans. This completed the council's review of the current plan in preparation the full review and revision process.

-Exploration Action Plan – George reported that staff will revisit the Latitude 31³⁰ program during management plan review.

-Performance Evaluation Action Plan – George noted that on a site and national level the approach has been somewhat complicated. Although staff are getting things done, we have not tracked this as well as we could to see if we are making progress toward targets identified in the 2006 management plan. He mentioned that advisory council involvement could be incorporated on an annual basis with a new management plan.

-Administration Action Plan – George gave an overview to report that items like staffing and facilities are ongoing. Clark asked if there are still any staffing needs. All agreed that a full-time research coordinator is still a priority need.

Next the draft sanctuary vision, mission, goals and objectives were reviewed. It was decided after some discussion that a new version with some edits should be sent out again to council members for input.

Becky Shortland then gave a brief overview of the anticipated timeline and steps for the management plan review and revision (see attached). She emphasized the schedule is very changeable.

Status of projects for the research area

Greg McFall gave a presentation on the status of projects related to the research area. The projects are principally those that were done as “Year Zero” of the research area, collecting baseline data on fish, invertebrates, (populations and behavior), bottom mapping, and transport of waterborne substances. The most significant finding thus far is that there appears to be no significant difference between inside and outside the research area in terms of habitat characteristics, fish density, and invertebrates. Nineteen sites inside the research area and 18 sites outside the research area were sampled for a total of 37 sites.

Dye studies were conducted to assess the transport of waterborne substances across the shelf to GRNMS from the nearby Altamaha River. The dye was clearly detected in the sanctuary.

The sanctuary was also remapped using multi-beam mapping. An analysis and comparison from mapping ten years ago is underway.

An algal assessment was done over the summer months. There appeared to be a “bumper crop” of algae in the sanctuary this year. Twenty-five species were identified with none being invasive.

Greg was asked if there are other datasets that can be used for the research area. Greg responded that most of Danny Gleason's other work on invertebrates was done outside of the sanctuary. There is also data from Jeff Hyland's benthic sampling, some of which was done in what is now the research area. And, of course, there is the MARMAP data (presentation to follow).

Marine Resources Monitoring Assessment and Prediction Program (MARMAP) reef fish surveys

Guest speaker Dr. Marcel Reichert from the SC Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR) Marine Resources Research Institute gave a presentation on MARMAP. MARMAP is a fishery-independent reef fish monitoring program funded by NOAA Fisheries and conducted by the SCDNR. The MARMAP program samples reef fish with baited traps and cameras at about 600 sites per year, from North Carolina to Florida. Since 1993, GRNMS has worked with MARMAP to provide an annual index of abundance for black sea bass and other species in the sanctuary. The MARMAP survey provides the longest time-series of fishery-independent sampling data for the region and for GRNMS. The sampling enables GRNMS to detect changes in fish abundance over time and among different reefs in the region.

About 30 species of fish have been sampled at GRNMS by MARMAP, and the most abundant species in the samples were black sea bass, scup and tomtate. While there have been wide fluctuations in abundance, black sea bass are more abundant now than in the 1990s, although abundance peaked in 2006. Average size of black sea bass in the sanctuary has steadily increased since 1995.

The survey has provided considerable baseline data for the GRNMS research area, prior to designation, although the research area has not been the focus. Marcel would like to see more sampling inside the research area, but they need to coordinate with GRNMS to avoid other projects. He explained that fish are handled according to permit conditions for GRNMS, with all fish released after measurement. Marcel would like to increase sampling sites for MARMAP including GRNMS sites, but that would depend on the future of funding. Marcel also noted that they are catching lionfish in the chevron traps, although not in GRNMS.

George Sedberry was asked if the use of traps in the sanctuary was a concern due to potential damage to the habitat. George responded that, as with all research activities that are permitted in the sanctuary, the benefits of the data collected outweigh potential impacts to the habitat. MARMAP data are particularly valuable because they allow a time-series and regional analysis of fish abundance at Gray's Reef and other sites. Sarah Fangman commented that diver observations of many traps deployed in the sanctuary in 2005 indicated minimal impact to the habitat. George, Marcel and others have discussed concerns regarding the impact of trapping. It may be possible in the future to develop indices of abundance based solely on video cameras, but that would require the development of conversion factors to make the new data compatible with the long-term MARMAP database. Although such conversion factors are desirable, their development will require additional funding.

Danny Gleason requested an analysis of data from inside and outside the research area. Sarah Fangman also suggested that it may be possible to collect some data on the actual impacts of the traps on live bottom in addition to the anecdotal information as mentioned.

Public comment

Chair Clark Alexander asked for any comment from others in attendance. Regarding the university education council seat description discussed earlier in the day, Michelle Meadows asked whether the intent was to have someone from a university or someone who used to have experience at the university. Clark responded that the candidate must have a university appointment.

Adjourn - The meeting was adjourned at 4:00 p.m.