



**Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary
Advisory Council Meeting
April 20, 2012
Georgia Southern University Museum
Statesboro, Georgia**

Members Present

Clark Alexander, Non-living Resources Research (Vice-chair)
Danny Gleason, Living Resources Research (Chair)
Capt. Doug Lewis, GA DNR Law Enforcement
Rick DeVictor, NOAA Fisheries SE Region
Dorset Hurley, Sapelo Island NERR
LT Nathan Downend, U.S. Coast Guard SRFTC
Bill Cliett, At-Large Representative
Randy Rudd, Sport Diving
Anna George, Conservation
Tim Goodale, University Education
Al Samuels, NOAA Office for Law Enforcement
Tim Tarver, Sport Fishing
Chuck Hopkinson, Sea Grant

Members Absent

Pat Geer, GA DNR Coastal Resources Division
Venetia Butler, K-12 Education (Secretary)
Mary Conley, Conservation
Vacant, Charter/Commercial Fishing

GRNMS and ONMS Staff Present

Dan Basta, Director, Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS)
Paul Orlando, Chief, Technical Programs and Support Division (ONMS)
Cathy Sakas, Education Coordinator (GRNMS)
Becky Shortland, Resource Protection Coordinator (GRNMS)
Jody Patterson, Administrative Assistant (GRNMS)
Gail Krueger, Outreach Coordinator (GRNMS)

Public Present

Tom Wright
Debbie Gleason
Brent Tharpe

Guest Speakers

Mark Dodd, GA DNR Sea Turtle Program Coordinator

Welcome and introductions

Council Chairman Danny Gleason called the Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary (GRNMS) Advisory Council meeting to order welcoming members, staff, public and presenters. Introductions were made and the agenda was reviewed with no changes.

Loggerhead sea turtles: status and ecology – Georgia Department of Natural Resources Sea Turtle Program Coordinator Mark Dodd presented an update on the status of the threatened loggerhead sea turtle and discussed threats to the Georgia population. Loggerhead sea turtles are commonly found in GRNMS and they nest on barrier island beaches. Positive short-term trends are shown in the data; however, management efforts to decrease human-caused mortality suggest little impact. The federal recovery goal is 2800 nests annually and the 2011 nesting total was 1992 nests. The survival of adult females is the largest factor in rebuilding populations, but mortalities due to fishing gear, vessel collision and dredging are deterrents.

Offshore seismic and sonar activities – Council Vice-Chairman Clark Alexander and Resource Protection Coordinator Becky Shortland presented information on both the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) geological and geophysical testing (seismic/air gun and other surveys) and the U.S. Navy's Atlantic Fleet Testing and Training (sonar and other activities) 2014-2019 programs that may affect sanctuary resources. In addition to marine mammals, sea turtles, fish and invertebrates, GRNMS has concerns for divers. GRNMS is involved with reviewing and commenting on both agencies' proposals (draft environmental documents). Among the GRNMS comments to BOEM is the need for a widely-publicized notification system for divers to prevent harmful effects from seismic (air gun) surveys that may take place near known dive areas including GRNMS. Discussion followed and staff agreed to arrange for both a presentation by U.S. Navy personnel at a future council meeting and a possible webinar with ONMS acoustics expert Leila Hatch. GRNMS staff will continue with review and comments on both proposals.

Law Enforcement working group – Capt. Doug Lewis with the GA Department of Natural Resources reported that there have been no violations in the Sanctuary and that sanctuary users are aware of the research area. They have hired additional rangers and will continue to enforce new and existing regulations with increased presence. Special Agent Al Samuels with NOAA Office of Law Enforcement notes that enforcement efforts in National Marine Sanctuaries are a priority for the office and that additional officers are being brought into the program, as opposed to special agents. He also noted concerns over bills introduced in Congress to limit enforcement capabilities. Lt. Nathan Downend with U.S. Coast Guard reported that the two Coast Guard cutters have conducted patrols of GRNMS and Air Station Savannah and conducted four over flights of the sanctuary with no significant sightings. He also noted that he will be moving to Sector Charleston enforcement from the Southeast Region Fisheries Training Center (SRFTC).

GRNMS staff also noted that the NOAA chart including GRNMS has been revised to include the research area. The chart can be found at:

<http://www.charts.noaa.gov/OnLineViewer/11509.shtml>

Outreach and Communications Coordinator Gail Krueger also discussed other outreach efforts to alert the community of the new research area and sanctuary-wide regulations. She noted that the National Weather Service will be broadcasting the regulations through spring and summer on the NOAA weather radio. The National Data Buoy Center will also note the new designation on its webpage found through the GRNMS website. In addition to the GRNMS website, information has been broadcast by email listserv, social media pages, and mailings to charter captains and marinas.

Research area update – An overview of the upcoming research cruise was presented by Danny Gleason who explained that the sanctuary was allotted 20 at-sea days aboard the NOAA Ship

Nancy Foster. The first leg of the cruise is scheduled May 14-24 and will repeat many of the projects conducted last year including multi-beam mapping, marine debris monitoring, expansion of the fine-scale fish movement tagging and receiver placement and lionfish surveys. In addition, Arc shells should be collected for long-term monitoring of ecological conditions in the sanctuary. The second leg of the cruise is scheduled for May 28-June 8 and will include a continued research area fish census, invertebrate density and abundance study, and continued multi-beam mapping. Tim Tarver noted that he remembers fishing the Sanctuary in the 1970's and recalls the abundance of fish present. He added that many fishermen feel that we allocated the best fishing spot as the research area, but that it is actually the least fished part of the sanctuary and is simply the best area remaining.

Gray's Reef management plan review – Becky Shortland discussed the process that each sanctuary site undergoes periodically to review current management strategies, regulations and policy. Gray's Reef began review of the 2006 management plan in April 2010. Public scoping of issues to be considered for a revised plan will take place in late July and will include discussion of an addendum to the 2008 GRNMS Condition Report, which is expected to be released sometime in June.

Conservation working group report – Tim Tarver addressed the issue of weighted marker buoys that the working group has been discussing via conference call to determine the types available, what differentiates them from anchors, and the existing GRNMS regulations that result in a prohibition. Mooring buoys are not an option due to the cost of maintenance. Anchoring in the Sanctuary is prohibited, so marker buoys are considered a safety factor for recreational divers. GRNMS staff currently uses a mushroom anchor (less than 8lbs.), attached to a shrimp float with a breakaway line for dive operations. The working group recommends an exemption be written into GRNMS regulation that allows weighted marker buoys, but does not add a formal definition to the regulation.

Council business – The Council has reviewed the minutes from the previous meeting and there was no discussion or changes requested. A motion was made and passed to approve the minutes.

Quorum issues – Danny Gleason reported for Venetia Butler, chair of the Membership/Charter Subcommittee. Due to national policy, the council may have some difficulty from now on reaching a quorum for meetings, especially with the charter/commercial fishing seat unfilled and the council's decision to hold recruitment for the second at-large seat until later this year. The policy is that quorum is calculated by the seats in each council's charter, not by the number of seats that are currently filled. The charter/commercial fishing seat has gone unfilled after two recruitment attempts and the subcommittee was asked if the seat should be advertised again or removed from the charter. GRNMS staff would like to solicit for the seat once more, targeting charter boat captains. The subcommittee agreed and recommended that an additional attempt be made to fill the seat, but if it remains unfilled after a third recruitment, remove it from the charter. Council members also decided to continue to wait until later this year to recruit the second at-large seat so that the two seats at two-year terms would be staggered. A motion was made and passed unanimously to support the subcommittee's recommendations.

Officers - The positions of vice-chair and secretary were discussed again as these positions are currently being held by veteran council members who have continued to serve in these capacities until new members are integrated into the council. It was clarified that all council members – government and non-government – may serve as officers. Both Brandon Fisher (USCG) and Jack McGovern (NOAA Fisheries) are willing to serve, but neither would be able to fulfill the commitment as needed. Council members again decided to wait until the next meeting when new

members are better acquainted with the program and then determine their interest in serving as an officer. A motion was made and passed unanimously to postpone election of officers.

Next meeting - The next council meeting is anticipated for August in the Charleston, South Carolina area.

ONMS Campaign – ONMS Director Dan Basta discussed the national “Campaign of Engagement” intended to increase public awareness and support for the program, and how it specifically relates to Gray’s Reef. He explained the specific activities including the Sanctuary Classic, which is a fishing and photo contest to promote compatible uses of the sanctuaries, show the value of balancing resource management and family-friendly recreation, and providing the public a personal place perspective of this offshore site. Participants register online through the sponsor, Sportfishing Conservancy, and agree to follow all federal, state and local regulations while observing conservation and ethics guidelines. The Classic runs from June 9th through September 3rd and is a photo contest with catch and release encouraged. Gray’s Reef is planning a catch and release workshop sometime later this year to support the conservation and ethical treatment of fish for this purpose.

Outreach to local schools – Graphics Design Contractor Deborah Harvey has spent the last year working with Gray’s Reef staff to incorporate images and information about the site into the design of three newly revitalized Bulloch County Elementary Schools. Each school has an assigned theme and Mattie Lively Elementary is specific to Gray’s Reef and Georgia watersheds. The purpose for the design is to immerse the students into these special areas while making the connection to watersheds and other geographic features, flora, and fauna throughout the state. The entire bottom floor of Mattie Lively is dedicated to the ocean and to Gray’s Reef, with images of marine life and reef habitat embedded in the floor, decaled on windows, and hanging in 3-D from the walls. The school opens during the 2012-2013 school year and will feature curriculum materials for teachers to further connect the graphic displays. She was asked about funding for the revitalization and stated that she cannot address the allocated budget but that community funding was provided for the revitalization of these older schools and that the school superintendent has been the driving force for implementing these changes.

Public comment – A member of the public in attendance, Tom Wright, commented on NOAA and U.S. Navy activities on the West Coast, suggesting that the agreement should also be in place for the East Coast. He also stated that BOEM surveys should be coordinated with NOAA. Regarding the smart phone app for tracking right whales, Mr. Wright noted that it is still experimental and is limited to iPhones.

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