

**Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary
Sanctuary Advisory Council Meeting
January 28, 2010
Skidaway Institute of Oceanography
Savannah, GA**

Members present

(Chair) Clark Alexander, Non-living Resources Research
(Vice-Chair) Will Berson, Georgia Conservation
(Secretary) Venetia Butler, K-12 Education
Mary Conley, Regional Conservation
Kellie Parr, Sport Diving
LTJG Nathan Downend, U.S. Coast Guard
Wendell Harper, Charter/commercial Fishing
Doug Lewis, GADNR LE
Joe Kimmel, NOAA Fisheries SERO
Tim Tarver, Sport Fishing
Al Samuels, NOAA OLE
George Sedberry, GRNMS Superintendent

Members absent

Danny Gleason, Living Resources Research
Dorset Hurley, Sapelo Island NERR
Spud Woodward, GADNR CRD
Scott Harris, University Education

Gray's Reef staff present

Greg McFall, Deputy Superintendent/Research Coordinator
Becky Shortland, Resource Protection Coordinator
Jody Patterson, Administrative/Volunteer Coordinator
Gail Krueger, Outreach/Communications Coordinator
Cathy Sakas, Education Coordinator
Chad Meckley, Vessel Operations Officer
Todd Recicar, Marine Operations Coordinator
Debbie Meeks, Financial/IT Coordinator/Web Master
Sarah Fangman, SEGOM Program Coordinator
C.J. Carroll, Graduate Intern

No Public in Attendance

Welcome and Introductions

Sanctuary Advisory Council Chair Clark Alexander welcomed everyone and reviewed the agenda with no changes made. Kellie Parr was introduced as the new sport diving representative. Other members and staff introduced themselves.

Advisory Council Business

Membership - Becky Shortland mentioned that terms for the Georgia conservation and living resources research council seats will expire soon and will be advertised later this spring. Seats are currently held by Will Berson and Danny Gleason, respectively; both may apply for the seats again.

October meeting summary - Clark called for approval of the October 2009 meeting summary, which was seconded by Will Berson and approved unanimously.

Ocean acidification resolution – A second draft GRNMS Advisory Council resolution was sent electronically to members prior to the meeting. Venetia Butler moved to approve the resolution and send it forward to Office of National Marine Sanctuaries Director Dan Basta. The motion was seconded and approved unanimously.

GRNMS Ocean Acidification Resolution

WHEREAS the Gray's Reef NMS Advisory Council recognizes that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reported that uptake of anthropogenic carbon has led to the ocean becoming more acidic, and that increasing atmospheric CO₂ concentrations are likely to lead to further acidification, and

WHEREAS the IPCC reported that the resilience of many ecosystems is likely to be exceeded in this century with severe localized impacts because of global warming, ocean acidification and other human disturbances¹, and

WHEREAS National Marine Sanctuaries and Gray's Reef NMS have long-term monitoring programs and data sets, and can be used as sentinel sites for monitoring ocean acidification and climate change, and

WHEREAS the Gray's Reef NMS Advisory Council recognizes ocean acidification as a significant threat to the long-term conservation and health of the resources of Gray's Reef NMS, warranting additional National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) research, monitoring, education and outreach, and management action to reduce and mitigate its impacts,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Gray's Reef NMS Advisory Council recommends that NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries support coordinated national and regional approaches to addressing ocean acidification throughout the National Marine Sanctuary System, and that the approaches be coordinated with the sanctuaries' research and community partners.

¹IPCC, 2007: Climate Change 2007: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [Core Writing Team, Pachauri, R.K and Reisinger, A. (eds.)]. IPCC, Geneva, Switzerland, 104 pgs.

Clark Alexander requested an update on ocean atmospheric CO₂ in the water column and from sensors on the bottom at GRNMS. Data has been accumulating for atmospheric and sub-surface waters for about 4 years and data from the bottom for about 2 years. Dr. Scott Noakes (University of Georgia), along with GRNMS staff, has been doing the research. Staff will ask Scott to attend the next council meeting and give a report.

2010 ONMS Advisory Council Summit – Clark Alexander and Becky Shortland will be representing GRNMS at the upcoming National SAC Chairs and Coordinators Summit hosted by the Olympic Coast NMS. The case study on lionfish that the GRNMS council requested was developed by Becky, Clark and George Sedberry. It has been submitted for consideration as one of 3 case studies that will be presented at the May summit.

Annual report and programs report - Clark Alexander requested comments from members on the timeliness of receiving materials, including the programs report, prior to council meetings. Some members noted they may “lose” materials if they are sent too early and benefit from a reminder closer to the meeting. SAC members were reminded to review the documents before attending each meeting. Everyone concluded that it is beneficial to receive reading materials 2 weeks prior to each meeting and a reminder of the meeting closer to the actual date. Kudos were given for an excellent GRNMS Annual Report.

A question arose about the recent “dye study”. Greg McFall offered some background on the purpose of the study. Contaminants, possibly transported by currents or atmospheric deposition, have been seen in the sanctuary in sponges, etc. A tracer dye (Rhodamine), often used in water transport studies, was released in the Altamaha Sound to see if there is a connection from the river to GRNMS. The weather was not conducive to a good sampling of transport, although the tide was preferred. Because it was not possible to follow the dye very far offshore, sampling of GRNMS filtering organisms will be done in the near future. The dye should be detectable in the filtering organisms if the dye was transported to the sanctuary. We do know that contaminants are reaching GRNMS, but we have not determined the means of transport.

The public was notified in advance through a press release and listserve notification warning of a bright red streak that would be very visible. There are plans to do this again in the spring when a larger vessel is available. The start point will move a bit closer to the mouth of the Sound. Wendell Harper suggested that peak flood times, such as now due to flooding, would be a good time to release the dye.

Staff, in response to a question, also explained the Battle of the Atlantic project off of North Carolina. GRNMS provided vessel support.

Regarding the ongoing fish tagging project, Joe Kimmel suggested that a receiver be taken to a spawning aggregation to see if the fish show up there. The suggestion is based on Cayman Island research.

Quarterly meeting schedule – Conflicts have arisen with the dates confirmed a year in advance, so that system of scheduling meetings may not work. Becky will send out suggested dates and sites for the spring meeting. A meeting in north Florida had

been discussed. However, costs for the meeting may be reduced if travel is limited to the Brunswick/south GA coast instead. The north Florida meeting location was suggested to draw people who are interested in a sanctuary in that area. The feasibility of really traveling for meetings to accommodate the public was discussed. The public seems to attend more often when meetings are held in the Savannah area (SKIO or Bamboo Farm). One suggestion is to alternate with Brunswick.

Enforcement Working Group

Sgt. Doug Lewis reported that due to vessel maintenance issues, GADNR law enforcement personnel have only clocked 15 hours for Gray's Reef in the last quarter. An outboard mechanic has been hired, and maintenance should not be a big issue in 2010. Doug also explained that the annual Joint Enforcement Agreement between GADNR LE and the NOAA OLE is in process; the new funding cycle begins July 1, 2010. Becky Shortland noted that the amount transferred from GRNMS for this purpose was decreased due to budget limitations.

Doug reported very good news that a grant of \$1.4M has been received from Homeland Security and the funds will be used to purchase 3 SAFE boats and retire older vessels.

The lack of IDs for rangers is still an issue, although GA DNR rangers are officially deputized NOAA law enforcement, the IDs are needed to show legitimacy. Joe Kimmel suggested distributing information pamphlets for users, marina, etc., so that the fact of GADNR ranger's authority is clear. This is especially important with possible new regulations coming out soon. George Sedberry noted that GRNMS will definitely need to get the information out again.

LTJg Nathan Downend of the U.S. Coast Guard reported that 2 patrols were completed in the GRNMS area in the last quarter and that Air Station Savannah has not conducted any patrols. USCG Auxiliary does not fly this time of year due to low water temperatures. They are, however, looking for opportunities to do more patrols out there. Clark Alexander asked if GADNR tries to coordinate with USCG Station Brunswick. Doug responded that it is difficult to coordinate patrols.

Special Agent Al Samuels of the NOAA OLE brought an incident to the attention of the SAC. A GADNR ranger documented a potential violation when he found a diver in GRNMS using an anchor deployed on the bottom tied to a dive buoy. The final outcome is a warning instead of a citation due to the regulatory language related to the anchoring prohibition. The dive buoy was not attached to the vessel. The buoy was, however, placed on the bottom, although temporarily. This incident has identified the need to clarify regulations. This can be done through the upcoming management plan review.

Al Samuels also talked about the increased attention to protection of right whales. Enforcement of the new speed restrictions on vessels of 65 feet or more has ramped up this year. Will Berson emphasized the need to protect endangered right whales from ship strikes (a leading cause of right whale mortality) and asked what can be done to assist law enforcement. Al responded that developing partnerships in distributing regulations and information on ship speeds and approaching whales would be very useful.

Research Area and Spearfishing

George Sedberry reported that the proposed rule to prohibit all spearfishing gear in GRNMS is still in NOAA clearance. If/when the rule is published, the only gear that would be allowable gear in GRNMS would be rod and reel and handline fishing gear. The prohibition is primarily to address law enforcement concerns and to decrease fishing for large snappers or groupers.

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement on designation of a research area in GRNMS has been through preliminary review at ONMS and edits are being incorporated. The Southern Option Boundary remains the preferred boundary alternative at this time. Discussion followed about the research and monitoring plan for the research area and the small amount of funding that is available currently. It may be a good time to convene the advisory panel to prioritize projects in light of the budget limitations.

NOAA Fisheries Service Report

Dr. Joe Kimmel gave an update of South Atlantic Fishery Management Council/NOAA Fisheries Service activities. He explained that there are a number of regulations being implemented or explored to address overfishing, such as red snapper. Clark Alexander asked if it is possible to get additional resources from NOAA Fisheries for the GRNMS research area. Overfished species of snapper and grouper exist in the sanctuary. Joe responded that he thinks there could be some collaboration between NMFS and NMS to to design and possibly to conduct research at Gray's Reef.

Clark Alexander went on to reiterate his concern that a research coordinator be in place to focus specifically on the research area and other responsibilities. Given Greg McFall's appointment as Deputy Superintendent and significant National Ocean Service Dive Officer responsibilities, he is unable to give the needed attention to the additional role of research coordinator; it is too much for any individual to do well. Discussion followed on writing a letter to that effect. A motion was made, seconded and passed unanimously for the SAC to send a letter encouraging attention to the need to fill the full-time research coordinator's position on the GRNMS staff.

Tim Tarver commented that there are so many restrictions on fishing that it may be easier to let the public know what they *can* fish for. Discussion followed with Tim and Wendell Harper on how GRNMS can help improve the public's understanding of regulations and the differences between Fisheries and Sanctuaries. Wendell said he speaks to constituents about what is going on and continues to try to get accurate information out. He approves of the way we work to alter management, rules and regulations; now he understands the complexities. George Sedberry noted that one of the purposes of the retreat is to improve communication. Greg McFall asked if Tim and Wendell could help create a list of Q&As for a GRNMS FAQ document. They agreed to work with staff to make a list of frequently asked questions. Then Gray's Reef staff will put together the answers into a pamphlet for passing out to constituents. Sarah Fangman emphasized the need to distinguish between ONMS/Gray's Reef and NOAA Fisheries Service. Joe Kimmel will also ask the Fisheries Information Officer to connect with Gray's Reef and provide specific hot links.

Tim Tarver further suggested that distributing such information might be timed with new regulations. Mary Conley gave suggestions for how to approach and get clear delineation between Sanctuaries and Fisheries. Another suggestion was to put some

clear indicator on GRNMS vessels. Will Berson again reminded GRNMS staff that new marinas must be permitted through the State of GA and that such a process is a natural avenue to get the information out. Joe Kimmel also suggested the idea of conducting public information meetings on such specific topics. Gail Krueger noted that GRNMS can always use additional input from council members for increasing coverage of constituencies.

George Sedberry explained that NOAA Fisheries Service and NOAA Sanctuaries generally work well together but do sometimes have communication problems. A meeting is scheduled for early February between Sanctuaries and Fisheries in the Southeast.

Public Comment

No members of the public were in attendance.

Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 5:30 p.m.