



**Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary
Advisory Council Meeting
June 29, 2011
Stevens Wetlands Education Center
Richmond Hill, Georgia**

Members Present

Clark Alexander, Non-living Resources Research (Chair)
LT Brandon Fisher, U.S. Coast Guard SRFTC
Capt. Doug Lewis, GA DNR Law Enforcement
Jack McGovern, NOAA SE Region Fisheries
Tim Tarver, Sport Fishing
Al Samuels, NOAA Office of Law Enforcement
Mary Conley, Regional Conservation
Scott Harris, University Education
Venetia Butler, K-12 Education (Secretary)
Capt. Wendell Harper, Charter/Commercial Fishing
Kellie Parr, Sport Diving
Dorset Hurley, Sapelo Island NERR
George Sedberry, GRNMS Superintendent

Members Absent

Danny Gleason, Living Resources Research
Spud Woodward, GADNR CRD
Georgia Conservation, vacant seat

GRNMS Staff Present

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

Public Present

Marcella Matthaei
Pat Hamilton
Mike Greenberg
Devin Dumont
Tom Wright

Welcome and Introductions

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

Council Business

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

2011 ONMS Advisory Council Summit – Clark Alexander gave an overview of the Annual National Advisory Council Summit that was hosted by Gray's Reef in May. He discussed several highlights of the 2-day meeting in Savannah including the concept of a national council and the status of potential sanctuary system additions and/or expansions that may be possible in the future if/when the National Marine Sanctuaries Act (NMSA) is reauthorized. He also noted that Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS) leadership charged council members with reviewing the NMSA to be informed about the foundation of the sanctuary system and ONMS. Clark requested that Becky Shortland forward a copy of the NMSA to all council members. George Sedberry also offered a PowerPoint presentation that summarizes key points. George Sedberry also reported on the bronze markers that are in development for River Street in Savannah. The markers, a project that was funded some years ago, depict GRNMS, its location and resources. GRNMS also hopes to install interpretive signs on the north side of the river at some point in the future.

Membership Charter Subcommittee report – Acting subcommittee chair Tim Tarver reported after lunch about the discussion of the group on the need for better public awareness (see reported appended). He also reported the subcommittees' recommendations as follows:

- Maintain the status quo of ex-officio (non-voting) government seats (SINERR, NOAA Fisheries SERO, NOAA OLE, GADNR LE, USCG). Government seats would remain non-voting seats. The exception is GADNR Coastal Resources Division, which is a voting seat. The conclusion was that having the ex-officio seats become voting would not be beneficial and in fact may be perceived as a conflict of interest particularly with the NOAA seats.
- Add 3 new seats to the GRNMS SAC: Georgia Sea Grant (3-year term, ex-officio/non-voting) and 2 at-large seats (2-year, staggered terms, voting). The subcommittee recommends that at-large seats be added to the GRNMS SAC to help fulfill the need for particular expertise as it is needed (e.g., invasive species) and capture more of the interested general public that do not now fit into the specific seats that exist (conservation, research, user, education). The subcommittee also recommends that a seat for Georgia Sea Grant (ex-officio/non-voting) be added to the GRNMS SAC to better network GRNMS with the research and funding community in Georgia.
- Begin the charter renewal process in 2011 vs. waiting until 2013 when the council charter expires. The subcommittee agreed that due to the fact that the GRNMS council charter would need to be amended to add new seats (as recommended above), and that the new term limits policy adopted on a national level should be integrated into the charter, beginning the full renewal process this year may be beneficial. Should the GRNMS Advisory Council choose to add new seats, it would require an amendment to the Council Charter. The process to amend the Charter and the process to renew the Charter are similar in that HQ approval is needed. Both an amendment and the Charter renewal could be accomplished at the same time.

Discussion followed and Scott Harris suggested that an ex-officio Sea Grant seat could be any Sea Grant representative, not just Georgia Sea Grant. The council concluded with a motion that was approved unanimously to amend the Charter to include two new, voting, at-large seats with staggered 2-year terms; and one ex-officio (non-voting) seat for Sea Grant. It was further recommended that Georgia Sea Grant be approached to fill the seat for the first term; other Sea Grant representatives from SC or FL might be sought for future terms. The council also agreed that beginning the Charter renewal process at the same time as amending the Charter for new seats would make sense instead of waiting for 2013 to renew the Charter.

Discussion then turned to replacing Will Berson on the subcommittee and Tim Tarver as chair. Venetia Butler agreed to take that position and to chair the subcommittee. Discussion then turned to the SAC Chair and Vice-chair positions. Clark's term as chair concludes in July and a replacement is needed for Will Berson who was

Vice-chair. After some deliberation, Clark agreed to remain as Chair of the SAC until the end of the calendar year. Danny Gleason was nominated and unanimously approved as Vice-chair (contingent upon his agreement) to move into the Chair's position at the end of the year. (Note: Danny Gleason subsequently agreed.)

Follow up from January 2010 advisory council retreat – George Sedberry reviewed the action items from the January 2010 retreat including:

- Gray's Reef Eco Ambassador Team (GREAT) program – Jody is trying to establish a core group of retired teachers as speakers.
- U.S. Navy activities – The presentation on right whales may answer some of the questions that are still outstanding. If not, Becky Shortland now has contact information for others who will speak to the issues.
- Re-drafting of a letter on the need for a research coordinator at Gray's Reef has not been completed.
- ONMS budget and NMSA reauthorization – Becky will send an updated list of key congressional contacts to all members. Mary Conley asked if staff knows when those contacts need to be made. George responded that it varies a lot but January to April. If there is current information from ONMS, Becky will send that out to members along with any talking points. Mary also suggested that such support could also come from a GRNMS "friends" group. George Sedberry also suggested the electronic newsletter "Ocean Leadership Weekly" to keep up with NOAA-related matters such as the budget. Becky will also send that link to members.
- Friends group – George updated the advisory council with recent discussion on a potential friends group. Kellie Parr would still like to participate.
- Op Ed items – A piece on climate change had been drafted by Danny Gleason from a science perspective and Greg McFall from a sanctuary perspective. There is additional perspective needed to address public concerns. Members were asked if anyone would be willing to fill that spot. Clark Alexander suggested that Skidaway Institute's Mike Sullivan may be a good person to ask.
- Outreach needs – Wendell Harper noted that many fishing constituents don't work on websites and that GRNMS must get, and keep, information about sanctuary regulations "out there". We must get that information out to all access points, including fish camps, boat ramps, etc., and keep it maintained. Clark Alexander suggested that a poster sized piece would work best. Tim Tarver and Wendell Harper agreed again to work with staff to create products. Gail Krueger is the lead on that project. Jack McGovern said that he would be happy to work with the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) to establish a link to GRNMS from the SAFMC website. SAFMC will also be asked to include GRNMS regulations in its brochure. Other means to get the information out to constituents includes through annual fishing tournaments. Al Samuels reiterated that it is difficult to find offshore regulations, including sanctuary regulations. All agreed that these matters are a high priority for public support and compliance with regulations. It was also suggested that feedback from outlets on how many are picked up and which outlets are most heavily used would be very beneficial.

Programs report and discussion – Clark Alexander asked if there were any comments on the Programs Report; there were none. Becky will begin contacting council members for items to include in upcoming programs reports.

Next meeting – Becky Shortland will email everyone to determine the date for the next Sanctuary Advisory Council meeting. Staff is considering October.

Volunteer of the Year – George Sedberry and Greg McFall introduced Randy Rudd. Randy is a Gray's Reef Team Ocean diver whom staff nominated as the site's volunteer of the year for the national award given by the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation. Randy was chosen as the national volunteer of the year by the Foundation and attended the Leadership Awards dinner in Washington DC. Greg presented Randy with a plaque honoring his contributions and Randy talked about his experiences as a volunteer and diver in the sanctuary.

Presentation on the Status of the North Atlantic right whale – Becky Shortland introduced Barb Zoodsma (Right Whale Recovery Program Coordinator, Protected Resources Division, Southeast Regional Office, NOAA Fisheries Service) and Clay George (Natural Resources Biologist, GA DNR Nongame Conservation Section) who gave a thorough presentation on the status of the right whale and activities underway to recover this highly-endangered large whale.

Barb Zoodsma reviewed the legal authorities involved in right whale protection and the life history of right whales. She also talked about the challenges from ship strikes and fishing gear entanglements that have led to injuries and mortalities, along with risk reduction efforts such as the early warning system of overflights and ship communications. Scientists estimate that only 30% of North Atlantic right whale mortalities are detected. She also emphasized the ongoing discussion to revise the boundaries of the critical habitat, which was designated in 1994. The 1994 boundaries were based on sightings of whales and the current deliberations are examining new habitat models.

Clay George reiterated the belief that a large portion of the remaining North Atlantic right whale population comes south each winter, which includes females that are calving. The waters off southern Georgia coast and central to northern coast of Florida are the only known calving groups for this species. Clay also spoke about and gave video examples of fishing gear disentanglement efforts led by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. He explained that 75% of the whales show some indication of entanglement. The sources tend to be lobster and some gillnet gear. He also emphasized that each female North Atlantic right whale needs to have four calves over its lifetime in order to replace itself.

Discussion followed the presentations about how GRNMS might interface more with these agencies in order to support recovery of the species. Education Coordinator Cathy Sakas serves on the Southeast Implementation Team for recovery and Becky Shortland was just named alternate to that seat. GRNMS engaged in more outreach effort to recreational fishing and boating groups during the 2010-2011 calving season. The site should be able to continue, and perhaps expand on, those efforts in the future. Audiences that could be reached include: mariners, recreational boaters, fishermen, educators, students, general public and policy makers. Barb Zoodsma also explained that Protected Resources Division is very interested in getting more data on ambient noise levels in southeast waters to help determine if those trends may impact right whale ability to hear and locate. Clay expressed interest in having GRNMS help in the disentanglement network.

Advisory council members asked about potential impacts on right whales from U.S. Navy activities. Barb Zoodsma and Clay George agreed that there is currently no scientific evidence on the effects from the Navy's use of sonar, but that there could be behavioral impacts. They pointed out toothed whales that echolocate have higher mortalities, but the same pattern is not expected for baleen whales like the right whale. There are, however, significant concerns around vessel traffic and Navy activities. Support for long-term monitoring of these issues is critical.

Council members also asked about the use of passive acoustics to detect locations of whales in the southeast as it is done in the northeast, particularly in Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary. Barb Zoodsma and Clay George explained that it is believed that passive acoustics may not be useful in the southern waters for calves and mothers who may remain quiet. Many juvenile right whales, however, are also present and they do communicate with each other.

Among the emerging issues surrounding right whale recovery, Barb and Clay mentioned harassment by recreational boaters, including kayakers, and anthropogenic noise. There is also concern about offshore energy projects including wind energy due to anthropogenic noise, the potential for more vessels and other issues. To highlight a potential data source, Clark Alexander asked staff about the status of ambient acoustic recordings that Cathy Sakas was involved with collecting in the Sanctuary several years ago.

Research area/*Foster* research cruise report – George Sedberry gave a brief update on the status of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Final Rule to designate a research area in GRNMS. The FEIS is approved and ready for printing. The rule is being held while questions raised by the State of Georgia are being resolved.

Greg McFall gave an overview of the successful research mission on the NOAA Ship *Nancy Foster* that was completed in May (see summary attached). Greg noted that there seems to be an increase in algae this year. He also mentioned that no lionfish were found in the many dives that were made all over the sanctuary. Greg attributed that to the lower winter water temperature at GRNMS, which can get below 60 degrees. Lionfish, however, are found further offshore where the temperature does not get as low in the winter.

Conservation Working Group report – Working Group Chair Mary Conley reported that the group met twice since January by conference call during which they established the purposes of the group and decided to expand membership of the group as needed. They defined relationships between sanctuary resources and uses that could impact those resources and reviewed the matrix developed to analyze those relationships. The results of this analysis will help inform topics to be discussed during the upcoming GRNMS management plan review and revision. The working group can proceed with further characterization of priority issues. GRNMS education and research programs can also benefit from this analysis and future work of the group.

Wendell Harper questioned how “threats” were determined. Mary Conley replied that the working group can revise the matrix to reflect “uses” and not necessarily “threats.” Clark Alexander concluded that the matrix will continue to be evaluated but these are issues that we can potentially manage.

Law Enforcement Working Group report - Capt. Doug Lewis reported that Georgia is completing its 9th Joint Enforcement Agreement (JEA) with the NOAA Office of Law Enforcement (OLE). He reviewed the all aspects of law enforcement’s responsibilities under the JEA and specifically responsibilities for sanctuary regulation enforcement. Gray’s Reef dedicated hours were clearly met and exceeded.

LT Brandon Fisher reported that there were three patrols in Gray’s Reef from Coast Guard Cutters *Tarpon*. He noted that Station Brunswick had scheduled two offshore opportunities but both had to be cancelled. Greg McFall explained the recent development with USCG Air Station Savannah. The station is now providing a GRNMS seat in overflights of the sanctuary as part of its normal living marine resources operations. This is important for the sanctuary as it provides more user information and information on sanctuary resources. GRNMS has also provided vessel support for Station for hoist training.

George Sedberry mentioned that the annual Law Enforcement Working Group meeting will be held the next day (June 30) at Skidaway Institute.

Special Agent Al Samuels provided a briefing of the extensive NOAA OLE authorities and noted the current status of overall documented enforcement cases under NOAA OLE. He detailed some revised policies and noted a recent case in GRNMS that may be reason for some technical changes in existing regulations. Al emphasized the need to review the enforcement approach for GRNMS and be strategic. Clark Alexander reiterated appreciation for the ongoing law enforcement efforts of all the agencies.

Visitor Center Working Group – George Sedberry gave a brief update on the status of a visitor center and other public awareness efforts summarized in a November marketing report that was distributed to all council members. The report suggests a three-phase approach (short, mid, long-term) to address GRNMS public awareness needs including a downtown Savannah visitor site. There are some activities, such as monument markers on River Street that are underway. The next step is to evaluate phases 1 and 2 and decide if more is needed and to hold a preliminary working group meeting to determine membership.

NOAA Fisheries Service, Sustainable Fisheries Division update – Jack McGovern gave an update on activities of the Sustainable Fisheries Division of the Southeast Regional Office. In addition to reviewing a map of managed areas in the South Atlantic, Jack discussed several fisheries amendments and actions affecting snapper/grouper species and potential catch shares.

Management Plan Review– George Sedberry reviewed the Exploration and Administration Action Plans from the 2006 GRNMS Management Plan. Due to time constraints, review of the final Action Plan - Performance Evaluation - was postponed until the next meeting.

Public comment – Clark Alexander called for any comment from the public present. Devin Dumont noted that this was very informative meeting. He would, however, not have known about the meeting had he not been invited to attend. He suggested advertising GRNMS Advisory Council meetings through the UGA Marine Education Center and Aquarium (MECA) along with other methods that are already used. George Sedberry noted that Devin is working on a research proposal as a cooperative effort with local fishermen and NOAA.

Adjourn – The meeting was adjourned at 4:00 PM.

**GRNMS Advisory Council
Membership/Charter Subcommittee
March 25, 2011 Conference Call Notes**

Participants:

Tim Tarver, acting subcommittee chair (sport fishing seat)
Dorset Hurley (Sapelo Island NERR seat)
Danny Gleason (living resources research seat)
Becky Shortland (staff lead)

Agenda item: Considerations for subcommittee to present to full GRNMS Advisory Council at the next meeting, June 29, 2011.

Discussion:

- Tim Tarver agreed to serve as chair of the subcommittee until the next GRNMS SAC meeting.
- The group was asked to consider the report and recommendations from the November 2010 conference call as the report from the subcommittee to the SAC in June. Additional information was suggested to further explain the recommendations (below). Tim will present the report and recommendations at the June meeting.
- Discussion followed that the public generally still does not understand the role of advisory council members and the status of GRNMS (e.g., the sanctuary is closed to fishing). Outreach on both fronts is still needed. When communicating with marinas and charter captains, GRNMS might add boat dealers as well. When offering information to the public, a “give away” item accompanying the information is very helpful to capture public interest (e.g., reading the cereal box; printing of a “local water navigational chart” with some narrative referencing to the advisory council and its mandates/objectives/process). The question also arose about the development of GRNMS kiosks and using those to inform the public about allowed activities in GRNMS and SACs.

Recommendations to be presented for full council consideration:

- Maintain the status quo of ex-officio (non-voting) government seats (SINERR, NOAA Fisheries SERO, NOAA OLE, GADNR LE, USCG). Government seats would remain non-voting seats. The exception is GADNR Coastal Resources Division, which is a voting seat. The conclusion was that having the ex-officio seats become voting would not be beneficial and in fact may be perceived as a conflict of interest particularly with the NOAA seats.
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- Begin the charter renewal process in 2011 vs. waiting until 2013 when the council charter expires. The subcommittee agreed that due to the fact that the GRNMS council charter would need to be amended to add new seats (as recommended above), and that the new term limits policy adopted on a national level should be integrated into the charter, beginning the full renewal process this year may be beneficial. Should the GRNMS Advisory Council choose to add new seats, it would require an amendment to the Council Charter. The process to amend the Charter and the process to renew the Charter are similar in that HQ approval is needed. Both an amendment and the Charter renewal could be accomplished at the same time.

Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary Expedition 2011

Summary of Accomplishments

Scientists, staff and volunteers conducted a research mission within Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary aboard the NOAA Ship *Nancy Foster* beginning May 17th through May 29th. Scientists aboard the *Nancy Foster* concentrated on five research projects:

- 1) Fish Censuses
- 2) Invertebrate Density and Abundance
- 3) Piscivore Ecology
- 4) Multibeam Mapping
- 5) Dye Tracer Studies

Piscivore Ecology

This project is focused on quantifying patterns of direct and indirect cooperative (i.e., facilitative) foraging interactions by piscivorous (fish that eat other fish) fishes. The primary goal of this work is to determine the importance that these types of behavioral interactions have in local food webs.

Some of the highlights of the cruise are noted below:

- This is the fourth year of the study and on this cruise 141 NITROX dives were conducted.
- The investigators observed 161 predation events during 49 piscivore behavior surveys.
- 34 community surveys were conducted to assess local community composition as it relates to the interaction of the predators.
- Twelve daytime DIDSON (sonar) deployments were completed to quantify patterns and rates of predation.
- Twelve dawn and dusk split-beam sonar surveys were conducted at targeted reef sites to assess distribution of prey and predators during these periods.
- Groups of greater amberjack, Spanish mackerel, and barracuda interact with coordinated behaviors both separately and together when preying upon mixed schools of tomtate and round scad.
- Such behaviors by mid-water predators "drive" small fish closer to reef habitats and produce opportunities for enhanced predation by scamp, gag grouper, black sea bass and other species that are associated with complex reef habitats.
- It appears there are three states of mid-water piscivory: (1) classic mid-water predators such as barracuda, amberjack and Spanish mackerel; (2) demersal (seafloor associated) piscivores assuming the functional role of mid-water piscivores such as scamp grouper and red snapper; and (3) YOY barracuda assuming the functional role of mid-water piscivores.

Fish Censuses

The fish counts focused on quantifying the distribution, abundance, size and diversity of fishes both inside and outside the proposed Research Area. It is important to know what these parameters look like prior to establishing a Research Area, so we'll be able to see changes that might occur throughout subsequent years. Some of the successes of this phase of the cruise are:

- Surveys were conducted at 37 sites of which 19 were inside and 18 were outside the proposed research area.
- At six locations from each site, benthic (bottom of the seafloor) habitat photoquadrats were obtained and structural benthic habitat characteristics, including ledge height and undercut depth, were assessed

Invertebrate Assessments

We also were able to look at the invertebrate (animals without backbones) community. Because fish interact with their environment, there is the potential that as the fish community structure changes, we might see concordant change in the animals which colonize the surface of the rock ledges and those that crawl or swim around the features. On this cruise we also:

- Visited 37 sites, 19 inside the proposed Research Area and 18 outside.
- Conducted a grand total of 391 benthic invertebrate quadrats of 0.5m x 0.5m each.
- Identified 12-15 different species of which Sea squirts (tunicates) were the dominant benthic animal.
- Found that various species of sponges and cnidarians, especially the hard corals, soft corals were also common.
- Determined that sites outside the proposed research area are, in general, more diverse than those inside the research area.
- Took companion digital photos of almost all the quadrats quantified by divers which will be used to verify the species identification and to compare species diversity and percent cover.

Dye Tracer Study

This study was conducted to determine the potential for coastal watersheds (rivers, creeks and estuaries) to transport nutrients, contaminants and pollutants into Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary. The bright red dye is harmless to the marine environment but can be detected in very small amounts. Here are some of the highlights of the dye study:

- Dye was detected from a constant flow raw seawater feed which was pumped on board the NOAA Ship *Nancy Foster*.
- The detector is specific to the wavelength of the Rhodamine dye which greatly reduces the chance of a "false positive" reading.
- Fifty gallons of Rhodamine fluorescent dye was released just south of Wolfe Island National Wildlife Refuge in Altamaha Sound on the out-going tide of May 18, 2011.
- Though the exact direction or speed of flow after that point was not known, dye was detected in GRNMS over a 30-minute time period at about midday on May 21, 2011.
- It took approximately three days for water leaving the Altamaha watershed to track northeast and reach the sanctuary.
- The concentration of dye reaching GRNMS was significant, reading at over 50 parts per billion (ppb) at its highest point.
- These results suggest that the Altamaha - as well as other rivers along the Georgia coast - is a likely source of both nutrients and contaminants for organisms living in GRNMS and other offshore hardbottom reef sites that occur off the Georgia coast.

Remap Gray's Reef

In 2001, the entire seafloor of Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary was mapped using a technology called multi-beam sonar imaging. Over time, storms and currents move sand around in the sanctuary; there is the potential to uncover some parts of the rock structure and bury others. Because it has been ten years since the seafloor was last mapped, we decided to re-map the entire sanctuary. We were able to complete the entire survey within the dates of the cruise and, after processing the data, we will be able to compare the new map of the seafloor to the map created in 2001.

Acoustic Tagging Project

Even though we were not engaged in conducting fish tagging this year, we did have the opportunity to switch out some of the receivers which have been down for almost six months and download the data. This project is ongoing and we'll have to continue to swap out the receivers and download data on fish movements until the project is completed.

It was a very successful cruise and thanks to the hard work of all the scientists, staff, crew and volunteers we'll have great baseline data that can be used to compare to future year assessments.

http://graysreef.noaa.gov/science/expeditions/2011_nancy_foster/welcome.html