

**Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary
Sanctuary Advisory Council Meeting
July 31, 2001
Sanctuary Office
Skidaway Island, Savannah, GA**

Attendance:

SAC Members Present: Jim Henry, Henry Ansley, Ann Frick, Matt Gilligan, Joe Kimmel, Patty McIntosh, Bing Phillips, George Sedberry, Doug Rader.

SAC Members Absent: Judy Wright, Dave Cinalli

NOAA Gray's Reef staff in attendance: Reed Bohne, Marcy Lee, Cathy Sakas, Becky Shortland, Greg McFall, Mark Boland, and interns Amber Himes and Michelle Duncan.

Public in attendance: Steve Booker, a Chatham County recreational diver.

Distributed Materials:

- Agenda
- March 21, 2001 meeting minutes
- Education and Outreach Proposed Plan Priorities
- Research and Monitoring Proposed Plan Priorities
- SAFMC June 28, 2001 Memorandum re Potential Marine Protected Areas
- Correspondence regarding the Blue Planet Ocean Discovery Network Concept Plan
- NOAA's Office of Ocean Exploration Voyages of Discovery Project Descriptions

Chairman Jim Henry called the meeting to order and introduced Mark Boland, Amber Himes, a Duke University graduate student intern, and Michelle Duncan, a master's degree candidate at Clemson University. Dr. Henry reviewed the agenda. Minutes from the March 21, 2001, SAC meeting were distributed as approved.

Status of Management Plan Development

Staff reported that the enforcement workshop would be held on August 1. This will be the first time all enforcement agencies (Georgia Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Coast Guard, National Marine Fisheries Service, etc.) will meet. GA DNR recently signed a joint enforcement agreement with NMFS. Following the workshop, staff will pull together a draft of the plan while closely coordinating with NOAA on the format and content. Staff is shooting for completion of draft by end of fall 2001. Becky Shortland noted that, because a NOAA Administrator has not yet been appointed under the Bush Administration, the plan approval process might be delayed further.

Matt Gilligan arrived with news he had received regarding the introduction of turkey fish and / or lion fish - venomous, Pacific invader - in Southeast waters. Joe Kimmel mentioned that he had heard similar reports and that according to a video clip he received; these species have been there several years.

Jim Henry asked where Gray's Reef was relative to other sanctuaries in the management planning process. According to staff, Gray's Reef is among the first, with Stellwagen Bank NMS and Channel Islands NMS on similar schedules.

Staff mentioned that, although the NEPA process is set, there was still a need to discuss a process for SAC review of the draft plan.

Steve Booker (public attendee) asked if the SAC were developing regulations for sports fishermen/divers. Reed answered that such decisions will be part of the strategy. Mr. Booker then stated that, as a resident of Chatham County for 30 years, he would like to know what the SAC has in mind. Reed Bohne answered that the Sanctuary held public meetings and workshops to gather information, and review recommendations regarding the drafting of a new management plan. Mr. Booker stated that he has been a diver for 30 years, and has seen how rules come up - like prohibiting power heads - which put limits on fishing, rather than on the method. He would like to continue taking fish by spear fishing. He stated that recreational fishermen have a place in this world, and although conservation is important, recreation is a legitimate use. Reed Bohne reiterated that we were glad to have his comments.

Education and Outreach Strategies

Education Coordinator Cathy Sakas reviewed proposed education strategies resulting from the workshops, noting that all of the workshop results (habitat, species, education, research and enforcement) will provide input for the draft plan. Cathy described the process for synthesizing results into categories and establishing priorities, and then reviewed proposed strategies for fishing impacts, marine debris, formal education, serving minority populations, media and outreach, diver impacts, the establishment of a sanctuary foundation and awareness regarding anchoring impacts.

Matt Gilligan emphasized the need to link research and education and to take science directly to the people quickly. The SAC discussed a variety of opportunities and needs related to the proposed strategies including coordination and alliances with other programs and organizations, the need for additional education staff, particularly to integrate research and education. Reed suggested that the Sanctuary could provide money to other programs that advance Gray's Reef objectives - efficiencies may be found in working with other organizations that would not entail adding staff.

Becky Shortland asked the SAC to provide feedback on what the Sanctuary's priorities should be. The SAC will provide input by email.

Research and Monitoring Strategies

Research Coordinator Greg McFall reviewed proposed strategies for research and monitoring. He stated that he was overwhelmed at the response from the workshops - 54 different strategies were discussed, resulting in 56 pages of text. Strategies were put into five categories (not in priority order) in a logical, sequential flow. Greg also discussed current research activities, such as the side-scan and multi-beam mapping completed during the Whiting cruise, as well as research and funding needs.

Reed Bohne noted that we don't expect to complete or address all the strategies in the next five years.

Led by Greg, the SAC discussed proposed strategies to address needs related to trophic level investigations, habitat characterization, data management, life history of fishes, and long term monitoring. Doug Rader added that recommendation that we expand, as possible, the scope of research and monitoring on a regional basis to look at habitat and ecosystem links.

Reed mentioned that the R/V Jane Yarn would be auctioned off. He explained that the Sanctuary does not have needs appropriate for that type of vessel and that maintenance and liability costs are high. Funds will go into marine operations

The SAC commended the staff and workshop participants for their work on the strategies.

Proposed Gulf Stream MPA

Joe Kimmel noted that he had received an anonymous document concerning an unofficial proposal for a "Gulf Stream" marine protected area. Although there is no endorsement or involvement by the National Marine Sanctuaries Program, the concept has also been termed the Gulf Stream National Marine Sanctuary. The SAC and Gray's Reef staff discussed the concept, but agreed that no action was needed.

Matt Gilligan asked if there should be a national level advisory council to make recommendations on new sanctuaries. SAC members also asked what process is used to select new national marine sanctuaries. Becky Shortland offered to bring that information to the SAC at the next meeting.

Review of Side Scan and Multi-beam Mapping Results

Clark Alexander of the Skidaway Institute of Oceanography presented the results of recent mapping activities during the R/V Whiting cruise. He described the methodology used, coverage, GIS compatibility and capabilities, limitations, and applications for research. Dr. Alexander is talking with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources about doing this kind of work across Continental Shelf (swath bathymetry). Reed noted that national security issues might limit possibilities.

Status of South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) Activities

Becky Shortland discussed SAFMC's consideration of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). SAFMC identified 25+ areas off the coasts of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and Florida. A research-only area in Gray's Reef was one MPA concept that was rejected by the SAFMC. Instead, the concept was referred back to Gray's Reef for consideration in revision of the management plan. SAFMC will continue to work closely with Gray's Reef as we consider the concept. Becky, Henry Ansley, Doug Rader, and George Sedberry will all be participating in SAFMC advisory panel meetings to review the remaining MPA considerations at the end of August.

Ocean Discovery Center

Reed reviewed activities that have taken place regarding a concept plan for an Ocean Discovery Center in or near Savannah. Meetings with local leaders took place in January and March; Senate and Congressional support letters came forth in April. Dan Basta wrote a letter calling for the establishment of a working group to look at the concept plan, with interpretative themes and regional scope, which would be advanced to NOAA officials. The working group would be established as a function of the SAC as outlined in the Gray's Reef SAC Charter.

Reed reported that the Administration's proposal includes \$850,000 to go to Gray's Reef for this purpose. House and Senate versions vary; it is unclear what the conference version will be. Despite the uncertainty, we should continue planning and development of a prospectus for a center in this region.

The SAC will suggest individuals to serve on the working group and will play key role in the concept development. The SAC selected Matt Gilligan to chair the working group. Reed stated that each site is expected to develop a prospectus to address any or all of elements in concept plan, but that the plan should encompass a broader region. The next step is for the SAC to work with Matt to assemble the group. The SAC discussed criteria for group makeup and agreed to include a broad base of representation and look at potential partnerships (e.g., South Carolina Aquarium).

The SAC requested that Matt Gilligan and Reed Bohne be charged with selecting members of the working group. Jim Henry asked the SAC to think about possible members, purpose and concepts and to make recommendations to Matt in the next two weeks.

New Business

Cathy explained and provided the status of initiatives under NOAA's "Voyages of Discovery". She noted that exploratory data from these projects can be used in a variety of applications and that information could be provided to the public quickly, in real time in some cases. The data can be used in educational efforts, and the projects introduce technology in a way that is interesting to the public. Cathy discussed Islands in the Stream, which originated under Sustainable Seas Expeditions, and Deep East. Cathy is also working with Claire Johnson to develop a template for education.

Becky led the SAC in a discussion of a possible SAC retreat in late October or early November. The SAC agreed that a retreat would be valuable, particularly in reviewing the draft management plan.

Becky discussed the SAC Implementation Handbook, which is being finalized and will be sent to the SAC.

Public Comment

The only public comment came from Steven Booker, who spoke at the beginning of the meeting and then left.

The SAC discussed whether public comment should be moved to the beginning of the agenda. Becky discussed methods used at other sites to invite the public. Options included sending cards to persons on the mailing list and press releases with stated time for comment. The SAC directed staff to schedule and advertise public comment times during SAC meetings at the beginning and ending of SAC meetings.

Final Comments

Matt Gilligan will be representing Gray's Reef at an upcoming marine protected areas conference at Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute. Joe Kimmel gave a brief follow-up report on sightings of lionfish. Evidently, lionfish have been seen off North Carolina, but there are no known sightings off Georgia. All the NC sightings were aquarium species that had been released.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be a retreat for SAC members and staff.

The week of October 22nd will be explored, and members will be notified as soon as possible.

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