

**Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council
Meeting Minutes, January 18, 2006**

Center for Wildlife Education and Lamar Q. Ball Raptor Center
Georgia Southern University, Statesboro, Georgia

Distributed Materials

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Advisory Council Members Present

Doug Lewis, Georgia DNR Law Enforcement

Tim Tarver, Sport Fishing

Danny Gleason, Living Resources Research

Christi Lambert, Regional Conservation

Henry Ansley, Georgia DNR Coastal Resources Division

Clark Alexander, Non-living Resources Research

Joe Kimmel, Chair, NOAA Fisheries Service

Will Berson, Local Conservation

Ralph Neely, Recreational Diving

Kevin Saunders, US Coast Guard

Dorset Hurley, Sapelo Island National Estuarine Research Reserve

Venetia Butler, K-12 Education

Advisory Council Members Absent

Leslie Sautter, University Education

Judy Helmey, Commercial/Charter Fishing

Other Member Agency Representatives

Stephen Adams, Georgia DNR Law Enforcement

Michael Cash, US Coast Guard

GRNMS Staff Present

Greg McFall, Co-Acting Manager and Research Coordinator

Cathy Sakas, Education Coordinator and Co-Acting Manager

Sarah Fangman, Regional Research

Gail Krueger, Communications and Outreach Coordinator

Becky Shortland, Advisory Council and Stewardship Coordinator

Advisory Council Business

Gray's Reef NMS Advisory Council Chair Dr. Joe Kimmel opened the meeting, welcomed everyone and asked for introductions. He quickly reviewed the agenda

and then asked for additional time to review the minutes of the September 2005 meeting prior to approval.

Annual National Advisory Council Chair and Coordinator Meeting

Dr. Kimmel then relayed information about the upcoming Annual National Advisory Council Chair and Coordinators Meeting to be held in Washington, DC in April. He explained that reductions in the program budget have led to cuts in the meeting. The original intent was to invite two members of each Council, but those travel expenses, and other aspects of the annual meeting have been cut. Joe continued by informing members of planned agenda items for discussion at the chair's meeting. One topic will be the discussion of the creation of a National Advisory Council. NMSP Director Dan Basta is looking for feedback on this topic from Advisory Councils. Becky Shortland explained options that have been considered for a national council. Dr. Clark Alexander asked about the purpose of such a group on a national level. Becky explained that the purpose is to bring together a group to look at cross-cutting, national issues. Henry Ansley and others noted that they thought the Council of Chairs option made most sense, even though that option is no longer active. Further discussion and questions led to members asking to review the materials further before making a recommendation for Joe Kimmel to carry to the annual meeting. Becky will email the documents for review between now and the next Council meeting on April 20th, which falls the week before the meeting in Washington, DC.

Proposed Research and Education Working Groups

Greg McFall explained that GRNMS realized a great deal of value with the Research Area Working Group, so the site is proposing to establish standing research and education working groups. Henry Ansley questioned whether the working groups were needed. Greg responded that the groups would be helpful given the scope of work under each program and budget cuts. Clark Alexander stated that he thought it was a good idea as long as there are clearly defined tasks. Danny Gleason stated that he believes working groups can be good at this time with limited resources; it's a good time to expand partnerships like a program on which he is working. Dorset Hurley noted that from his experience participants get to consider programs and opportunities on a local level and transfer it to the national level. Venetia Butler offered a motion to create working groups for research and education. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously. Henry Ansley asked if there is a law enforcement group. Greg McFall responded that there is not but a law enforcement workshop was held last February; it should probably be reconvened on a regular basis. Becky Shortland noted that each group must be chaired by a member of the Advisory Council. Venetia Butler volunteered to chair the education working group; Clark Alexander and Danny Gleason agreed to co-chair the research working group.

Becky reminded members that working groups serve at the pleasure of the full Advisory Council, and as such would report to the full Council with recommendations and other information. The Council charter also permits reimbursement of travel for working group meetings. Members asked how often

staff thought the working groups would meet. Greg McFall responded he thought it may be quarterly or twice a year.

2006 Advisory Council Meetings

The next meeting of the Advisory Council is confirmed for Thursday, April 20th on Sapelo Island. This meeting, hosted by the Sapelo Island National Estuarine Research Reserve (SINERR) will be a joint meeting with the SINERR Advisory Committee. Becky Shortland thanked Christi Lambert for aiding with arrangements; Christi serves on the SINERR committee as well as the GRNMS Council.

All meetings of the Council are open to the public, including this meeting on the island. If there is an agenda item that requires more public participation, we may hold part of the meeting on the mainland. Billy Causey, Acting Regional Superintendent for the Southeast/Gulf of Mexico confirmed that he will be attending this next meeting.

Although members had requested that the summer meeting be held at the new Georgia Aquarium, it is our recommendation that we hold the meeting instead in the coastal region due to agenda items that may be of interest to local constituents – it is expected that the Final Management Plan may be released at that time and that the research area process may also begin. Becky Shortland further suggested that we hold the fall meeting of the Council in October in Charleston, SC, possibly hosted by the USCG.

NOAA Fisheries Constituent Discussion

Cathy Sakas spoke about the evolution of the Office of Constituent Services in NOAA Fisheries Service. The recreational fishing group has developed a strategic plan for outreach to constituents. Sanctuaries is looking at this plan to see how NMSP can better collaborate with and better serve the fishing community as we want our relationship to continue to expand in fishing groups. Tim Tarver noted that the Sapelo Saltwater Fishing Club has decided to make Ocean Conservation their theme for the upcoming year. He has asked for photographs and information that might be useful for their publication. GRNMS staff is working with Tim to supply material.

Wind farms Update

Clark Alexander gave a brief presentation on the current status of wind turbine “farms” proposed for offshore of the coast of Georgia. At this point, the proposal from Georgia Tech includes 3-5 turbines 180 feet tall. Clark also noted that the US Dept of the Interior’s Minerals Management Service now has jurisdiction over such projects. Georgia Tech is currently gathering baseline data on living and non-living resources. Clark said that he thinks the project is many years down the road. Southern Company could benefit from the project because power companies must have some green energy resources. Clark believes that no proposal sites are near Gray’s Reef NMS. Joe Kimmel noted that he did see some early concepts near the sanctuary. Negative impacts are anticipated to include

visual impacts, marine mammals, bats, and birds. Christi Lambert asked if GA Tech is coordinating with GADNR Coastal Resources Division. Henry Ansley responded that DNR was contacted initially. Clark Alexander emphasized that the proponents want to avoid live bottom areas. Henry noted that vibration/acoustics may have an impact as well. Greg McFall asked about the footprint of the turbine towers. Clark responded that they are looking at monopod designs that would have no legs. Dorset Hurley asked how many other areas on the Atlantic seaboard are being considered. Clark responded that there are proposals only off of Nantucket and Long Island and Georgia. The technology has been deployed in Europe for some time. Dorset Hurley mentioned that SINERR may consider the topic for a Coastal Training Program.

Joe Kimmel spoke with staff in the NOAA Fisheries Service Habitat and Protected Resources divisions to gather additional information on the topic. Impacts that Fisheries staff note include whales, birds migrating, construction impacts, live bottom, estuarine areas, and cable concerns. Joe also showed a *Federal Register* notice published December 30th that calls for comments on rulemaking for implementing the energy policy act, specifically offshore energy projects other than oil and gas. Becky Shortland will send the notice to all members.

Sanctuary Condition Report

Greg McFall introduced the topic of a “condition report” for GRNMS. Participating on a conference phone was NMSP National Science Coordinator Steve Gittings, National Programs Branch’s Kathy Dalton, and consultants Jeff Rosen and Karen Fox of Clancy Environmental, the group contracted to pull together the site reports. Handouts were distributed that showed the seventeen questions that are going to be addressed in the condition report.

Steve Gittings explained the purpose of a system wide monitoring program due to required Congressional reporting on progress in sanctuary resource protection. The system wide monitoring program was designed to look at parameters affecting all the sanctuaries. The program is a simple model of ecosystem integrity including water quality, habitat and living resources. Each sanctuary has been asked to consider each of these parameters and develop a condition report. Understanding the pressure on and status of the resources in the context of those pressures is integral to management response.

These reports are not the primary monitoring report that will be done for the sites. The condition reports are small executive summaries with consistent reporting frameworks for all marine sanctuaries. Greg McFall distributed the Stellwagen Bank NMS Condition report as an example. Each site’s efforts to generate and review such a document are the prerogative of the site; but it is important to have the right people involved in creating and reviewing these documents.

Jeff Rosen noted that most of the sites that have started these documents have a useful summary of the pressures on the marine resources of their sanctuary. Sanctuary Advisory Councils may have a different perspective on the appropriate level of review. He said they would like to understand what GRNMS Advisory Council members view as their participation in development of a condition report for Gray's Reef. He also noted that they are summarizing information as best as they know at this time, trying to identify gaps as well.

Henry Ansley asked if this information was located on the GRNMS website. Greg McFall responded that it is not. Discussion followed among members over the proposed rating system. Steve Gittings explained that Stellwagen Bank NMS developed the ratings largely internally using published information and personal knowledge of the resources and site. He noted that it is appropriate to defer making judgment on status or trends if the information is not available that identifies a gap. He would however prefer that sites try to judge trends. Steve suggested that GRNMS could have a workshop with invited experts, or the research coordinator could meet with experts to solicit input, or there could be other models.

Dorset Hurley commented that when he looks at this "report card," he sees the build-out of a monitoring program and that he couldn't give a subjective response to things like eutrophication without a monitoring program; these are intensive environmental surveys. He noted that the National Estuarine Research Reserve Program is also grappling with these questions that they are trying to design a monitoring program around similar questions. The application of the "not applicable or unknown" would be better than "undetermined". He cautioned about attributing values to these parameters without extensive research and monitoring.

Greg McFall responded that this is a part of the NMSP's efforts to develop a better monitoring program to be able to assess these general components of the ecosystem. Jeff Rosen explained that they are not looking for these responses to be based on perfect data, but rather the best that is available; it is okay to assign a condition based on the best available information.

Members asked who the intended audience would be for the condition report. Steve Gittings responded that there are two major audiences: Congress (as a Congressional requirement) and the Executive Branches such as NOAA and its National Ocean Service (NOS). The second audience is the NMSP in a management sense.

Discussion followed with staff and Advisory Council members regarding the rating system and concerns that it could reflect poorly on sanctuaries, updates in future years and identifying priority research needs and gaps.

Danny Gleason asked what would happen if a sanctuary received poor reporting. Steve Gittings responded that the NMSP cares about objectivity; that it is

important to identify areas where goals are not being met. Some reasons may be out of our control, such as lack of funding.

Steve Gittings asked the group for a general feeling on whether this would be helpful to the sanctuary or if they want to be a part of the process. Danny Gleason responded that he thought it was necessary and that he would be willing to work with GRNMS. Clark Alexander said that he thought it would be a great idea to get a summary of where things are. Even though it may not be right at first, it would be refined over time. Joe Kimmel also noted that he thought a report card was a good idea and that the questions may need to be polished, but it's a good place to start.

Other members commented that while they appreciate the value of a summary document, they are concerned that it could be dangerous to give very basic general information, as some people will only go that far. Joe Kimmel cited the example of NOAA Fisheries Service's stock assessment where the assessments Status of the Stocks Report to Congress were was not meant to be a report card, but were interpreted that way because of the way they were set up. This situation very quickly turned into a battle among the regional councils to "be the best".

Dorset Hurley added that he believes it is most important to have identified the gaps, which can help to promote the programs for obtaining that information. NERFS took more basic questions as opposed to a larger array of questions and worked more towards developing an objective approach to answering them. This stimulated the development of more monitoring; although, it is increasingly difficult to get funds to monitor.

Steve Gittings again noted that one of the reasons they believe it is critical to link to management plans and 5-year reviews is so we can demonstrate that we're developing monitoring plans to address specific management issues.

Jeff: Web based information – you'll be able to link back to the text on the generation of a particular assessment, so you can see the basis of an assessment.

Question: Besides making it easy for Congressional staffers to review, is there a reason for making a system wide sheet?

Steve: We are required to report on the progress as a system of marine sanctuaries.

Lunch & Tour of Raptor Center

The group adjourned for lunch and a guided tour of the Raptor Center.

Approval of Minutes

Joe Kimmel asked for any discussion of the minutes from the last meeting.

Henry Ansley noted that one change should be made regarding "stocking" instead of "re-stocking" red drum. The minutes from the last meeting were unanimously approved with that one change.

Budget and Future Management Structure

Greg McFall reminded members that Reed Bohne has accepted a position as the Acting Northeast & Great Lakes Regional Superintendent. As such he will be vacating his position as manager of Gray's Reef NMS. As soon as he officially moves into that position, his job will be vacant and will be competed. Until that time, Cathy Sakas and Greg McFall will alternate as acting managers for two month stints. At the end of February, if there hasn't been a new manager selected, they will revisit that arrangement.

Greg went on to relay that the NMSP budget is less in FY06 than it was in FY05. GRNMS staff is still trying to figure out what that means in terms of what we can and cannot do this year. There are some things in our Annual Operating Plan that we won't be able to do this year.

Status of the Management Plan and Marine Research Area

Greg McFall explained that the status of the GRNMS Final Management Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement (FMP/FEIS) is the same. We are now awaiting comments from General Counsel.

Greg went on to explain that staff has been discussing the appropriate timing to initiate formally exploring the concept of a marine research area in the sanctuary. The process will be public and guided by the National Marine Sanctuaries Act (NMSA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). We have decided to wait until the management plan is released and then start that process. In the meantime, staff are developing a scoping document and outlining the steps of the process. We hope the Management Plan document will be out by summer and the research area process could begin. The location of the summer Advisory Council meeting would be best in coastal Georgia since it may draw more attention from the public.

Georgia Southern University Research at GRNMS – Dr. Danny Gleason

Copies of Dr. Gleason's presentation and that of his graduate students can be obtained by request.

Upcoming Events

Communications and Outreach Coordinator Gail Krueger highlighted the 25th Anniversary of Gray's Reef NMS. The Sanctuary was designated 25 years ago on January 16th.

Two anniversary events are scheduled for later in January: January 26th - a celebration at the Thunderbolt Marine Science Academy; and September 22-24, 2006 - an expanded Gray's Reef Ocean Film Festival.

Cathy Sakas announced a teacher workshop at the end of January on remotely operated vehicles (ROV). Teams of teachers are instructed in building ROVs. They are given a set of supplies and components and four hours to create ROVs.

Teachers can then bring this back to their classrooms where students make their own vehicles. The focus is learning about marine technology and exploration. A regional competition will be held in Savannah in April at the Chatham Aquatic Center; regional winners will go to an international competition.

Cathy also noted that there will be two “Rivers to Reefs” teacher workshops in June and the “Salt Water University II” in May. Christi Lambert asked how many teachers can participate and where they come from; she noted a concern that more local teachers be involved.

Next Meeting

The next meeting of the GRNMS Advisory Council will be a joint meeting with the Sapelo Island National Estuarine Research Reserve (SINERR) Advisory Committee on Sapelo Island. The agenda may include a focus on joint education and outreach projects and the GRNMS Latitude 31-30 program. Christy Lambert also suggested ocean outreach “messaging” to discuss common themes.

Becky Shortland again asked that members consider the summer meeting in coastal Georgia for either July 10 or 11, and the fall meeting in Charleston in October.

Public Comment Period – no public present

Final Council & Staff Comments

Christi Lambert announced that The Nature Conservancy is hosting a Coastal Open House February 9th at their office near Darien. Everyone is invited.

Joe Kimmel spoke about the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council’s activities involving new amendments to the Snapper-Grouper Fishery Management Plan. Amendment 13C is currently in the Administrator’s office for review, while discussions continue on other topics including marine protected areas.

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