

**Gray's Reef NMS
Sanctuary Advisory Council Meeting
January 28, 2009
Georgia Southern University Museum**

Members present

Scott Harris, University Education
Venetia Butler, K-12 Education
Clark Alexander, Research
Danny Gleason, Research
Sgt. Doug Lewis, GADNR WRD LE
Al Samuels, NOAA OLE
LT Charlie Gris SERFTC
Will Berson, Conservation
Tim Tarver, Sport Fishing
Bob Bunkley, Sport Diving
Spud Woodward, GADNR CRD
Mary Conley, Conservation

Members absent

Joe Kimmel, Chair, NOAA Fisheries
Wendell Harper, Charter/commercial
Fishing
Dorset Hurley, Sapelo Island NERR

Gray's Reef and other NOAA staff
present

George Sedberry, Superintendent
Becky Shortland, Resource Protection
Gail Krueger,
Outreach/Communications
Sarah Fangman, SE GoM Carr Region
C.J. Carroll, SSU Intern
Allison Alexander, NMS Foundation

Welcome & Introductions

Vice-chair Dr. Clark Alexander presided over the meeting in Chair Dr. Joe Kimmel's absence. Dr. Alexander welcomed everyone and asked for introductions. New Advisory Council members Bob Bunkley, Scott Harris and Mary Conley were welcomed, along with visitors C.J. Carroll and Allison Alexander. The agenda was reviewed and no changes were made.

Advisory Council Business

Meeting summary – Dr. Alexander asked for a motion to approve the October 2008 meeting summary. The motion was made, seconded and passed unanimously.

Orientation for New Members – Becky Shortland asked for suggestions regarding how to orient new members. Most information is on the web site, but more may be beneficial. Dr. Scott Harris suggested a reading list would be useful; he also suggested a short “job description” which outlines representatives' responsibilities.

Membership – Becky also noted the K-12 education and non-living resources research seats will be open for appointment later this spring. Current seat holders are eligible to reapply.

Alternate seats: At the suggestion of former member Christi Lambert, Becky brought the issue of creating alternate seats to the Advisory Council. The suggestion is to consider having alternates for each non-governmental seat. The general feeling of the Council is attendance is usually good. The Council also feels budgets are tight – having two people to pay for per meeting could stretch budgets. The question was posed

whether the Council could have “proxies” when needed. Becky noted there is no language in the Charter for proxies. Conference calling was also suggested as a possibility. The Council asked staff to explore the options from other sites and provide more information.

“Greening” the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries – Becky Shortland gave an update. Last year ONMS Director Dan Basta asked each council to consider establishing a working group to consider how to “green” the sites and their communities. The Advisory Council had asked Becky to look at the results from the Ocean Climate Summit hosted last April by the Gulf of Farallones NMS to see what outcomes were transferable to GRNMS. The Gulf of Farallones NMS is focusing on reducing the carbon footprint of its facilities and how to manage marine habitats for resilience and sustainability.

GRNMS has looked at the use of biodiesel. However, it is not available for the vessels at this point. Vessel Operations Coordinator Todd Recicar is looking into bio lubricants and other possible bio replacements. Clark Alexander suggested looking for commercial connections. Allison Alexander reported the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS) is moving to make newsletters available electronically to reduce the “printing” burden and decrease the demand for paper copies. ONMS is also making small changes such as lessening the number of people that have their printers on at the same time. A member asked what the “Green” working group would do, which led to discussion of options ending with the suggestion GRNMS consider doing an audit of the GRNMS carbon footprint.

Information Items

Invasive lionfish - Lionfish are now established in parts of the Atlantic, especially off the southeast coast. Observations of lionfish have recently been reported -- and the lionfish removed -- in the Florida Keys. Lionfish have also been sighted as far north as New England. Gray’s Reef is working with the Georgia Aquarium to capture fish for an invasive species display at the Aquarium. Gray’s Reef is looking for discussion on the issue of management. There is concern marine protected areas are in fact, protecting the lionfish. There is also concern those native stocks of fishes, which are overfished or undergoing overfishing may not recover since lionfish feed on the juveniles. Gray’s Reef management has been suggesting a workshop to deal with all these issues.

Studies show the species were introduced through the aquatic species trade. It is thought many species were released during Hurricane Andrew’s destruction of the Miami Seaquarium. Gray’s Reef staff would like to have some kind of information meeting for the public and would like to find partners to host the meeting. Discussion began on possible solutions including eradicating lionfish, which most researchers believe would not be possible. It may, however, be possible to remove those individuals found in Gray’s Reef.

Proposed NOAA Administrator: Dr. Jane Lubchenco – Dr. Lubchenco has been selected by the Obama Administration to head NOAA; approval, however, is delayed until a Secretary of Commerce is chosen. She is a top-notch research scientist.

Offshore activities – George Sedberry spoke about the increasing interest in offshore energy development and the issues that raise a lot of questions among the public and our constituents. He asked Sanctuary Advisory Council to consider establishing a working group to keep up with these issues. Spud Woodward noted GADNR/Coastal Resources Division is taking the lead on Minerals Management Service actions and requests for leases. There are already companies interested in leasing blocks offshore Georgia. The southern wind project is considering placing experimental windmills offshore of Tybee Island; a limited testing permit has been requested. Clark Alexander stated he doesn't think a working group is needed at this time. Mary Conley suggested Gray's Reef consider some sort of decision process, which drives whether a working group gets involved; e.g. if a project is within a certain distant from Gray's Reef. Danny Gleason noted there is another issue related to invasive species – putting new structures offshore allows for “migration” from structure to structure and/or from surface to seafloor. Al Samuels suggested the staff and Council consider doing this electronically to start, and get more organized if that it is needed. Spud added a suggestion that Gray's Reef consider having expert workshops where presentations can be made and bring everyone up to speed on the issue. It was also suggested offshore activities be considered in the context of the South Atlantic Bight – not just Georgia.

GSU Office of Sustainability presentation

Dr. Lissa Leege, Director of the Georgia Southern University, College of Science and Technology, Office of Sustainability, gave an overview of activities and projects undertaken in the last year. She explained the mission of the new office of sustainability is to increase education and awareness of sustainability issues, both on campus and in the community; to provide incentives for faculty, staff and students to incorporate sustainability; to form partnerships to improve sustainability; to implement best practices in the College of Science & Technology.

Among the accomplishments are a Sustainability Seminar Series, community education, student action, dialogue, and grants. A Student Sustainability Summit was held emphasized the theme “think global act local.” Students made films which can be downloaded and viewed and they did a river cleanup. The students also partnered with Statesboro City Hall to develop a Sustainability Action Plan. Danny Gleason asked if the same could be done for Gray's Reef NMS. Dr. Leege will explore the idea.

The Office of Sustainability is developing an academic concentration in sustainability. It is also developing a sustainability advisory certificate, which could be completed in one semester online and would include a practicum where students go out and do an audit.

Discussion followed on how the Office of Sustainability can we work together with Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary to achieve common goals. Ideas included teleconferencing the seminar series to other sites, developing a Gray's Reef class project for a sustainability audits.

Tim Tarver mentioned Georgia Power Company will also do energy audits when requested. Will Berson suggested Gray's Reef staff may want to consider partnering with the GA Aquarium working on sustainable food and food transportation.

Break and Tour of Georgia Southern Museum

Law Enforcement Working Group

Sgt. Doug Lewis reported that GA DNR law enforcement rangers have made 10 trips to Gray's Reef so far on this year's Joint Enforcement Agreement (JEA) which began July 1, 2008). There were no cases made or warnings issued with 15 boats boarded in that time period. GA DNR and NOAA Office for Law Enforcement are currently working on the next JEA to become effective July 1, 2009. Shifts in fuel prices have significantly changed things making it difficult to plan for hour estimates.

Doug also reported the new building at Priest Landing on Skidaway Island should have power in the next few days. Planning for the Law Enforcement Working Group meeting should be started soon; they are open to suggestions about where and when to hold the meeting.

Doug was asked what the typical cases are that officers encounter at Gray's Reef. Doug replied there have been two anchoring cases made so far and that littering is also a problem. He emphasized the outreach efforts have really helped. The dive flag issue may be something to be discussed at the next LE Working Group meeting.

LT Charlie Gris reported for the U.S. Coast Guard. Station Brunswick made 5 trips to Gray's Reef with four boardings with no violations. The CG Cutter *Tarpon* spent most of the first quarter of the fiscal year in dry dock, but they were in Gray's Reef on January 19 with no contacts. CG Cutter *Yellowfin* was in the sanctuary October 30th and between January 12-16, 2009 with no contacts. Air Station Savannah had completed several air surveys of the sanctuary also with no contacts. They did, however, sight several endangered Northern right whales in and out of the sanctuary.

Special Agent Al Samuels ((NOAA Office for Law Enforcement (OLE)) reported the live rock case near Gray's Reef has been settled; the person was caught in illegal possession of 20lbs of live rock. The person was reported to be in the sanctuary *trying* to find live rock. The long-awaited summary settlement was published in December but there are no specifics for Gray's Reef. Also Al reported right whales have become a high priority for NOAA OLE with a new speed restriction rule recently put in place (Nov – April, any vessel 65ft or greater is restricted to less than 10 knots in designated areas).

Sanctuary Research

Sarah Fangman reported on the sonic fish tagging project that was started during the May 2008 research cruise. She thanked the GA DNR and others who assisted in the tagging project. Right now there are eight fish tagged and four receivers in the sanctuary. The hope is to tag many more fish and place more receivers during the 2009 cruise in June. Sarah also emphasized the hope that tagged fish that are caught would be put back so

they can be tracked for up to two years. Sarah also introduced C.J. Carroll, a graduate student from Savannah State University, who is working part time with Gray's Reef staff on the tagging project. Also C.J. is leading the education and outreach efforts to get the project to the public and classrooms.

Benthic-Pelagic Coupling

Dr. Danny Gleason gave a presentation focused on a paper he co-authored with many others on the potential linkages between marine benthic and pelagic natural communities. He noted the incredibly complicated interactions within the food web and in benthic and pelagic organisms. Scientists are trying to make some recommendations regarding when fishing might be compatible within protected areas. Much debate has surrounded allowed or prohibited activities in protected areas; specifically, whether pelagic fishing should be allowed in areas that are being protected for reef-related fish species. Scientists first recommended that depth was an important driver in determining linkages between benthic and pelagic organisms. The size of the protected area should also be considered as well as the need to develop collaborations with fishermen.

Research Area Update

George Sedberry reported that after much discussion between staff and Sanctuary Advisory Council members regarding diving activities in a research area, the preferred alternative is to prohibit all recreational diving.

George also spoke to the concerns for marking the boundaries of the research area with buoys. The general conclusion is the presence of buoys will compromise the intention of the research area. Doug Lewis and others strongly suggested buoys are essential and regulations cannot be enforced without buoys. Others pointed out that there are numerous marine protected areas, including the new offshore fishery MPAs, that are not marked; and that good education and outreach efforts can counter some issues. Gray's Reef staff added the cost consideration suggests marking the boundaries won't be preferred. It was also suggested that people on the water will want to go in the research area because they suspect there is something special there.

Dr. Sedberry explained he hopes to take a required request for draft regulations to the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council in March. This step is required by the National Marine Sanctuaries Act. A draft Environmental Impact Statement and draft proposed rule may be available for release and public comment over the summer.

Spearfishing Update

George Sedberry reported the draft Environmental Assessment and draft Proposed Rule to prohibit all spearfishing gear in GRNMS is in NOAA clearance. It is expected the draft EA and proposed rule will be published in the *Federal Register* in the next couple of months. A public comment period will be open for 60 days and a public meeting is tentatively planned for March 19th at the Richmond Hill Wetlands Education Center. Changes in the White House administration may delay the rule. The spearfishing ban would be throughout the entire sanctuary.

New member Bob Bunkley (representing sport diving) asked about the process, which led to a proposed rule to prohibit all spearfishing gear in the sanctuary. Staff and others explained the long running process from the 2006 management plan, the new socioeconomic information, law enforcement concerns, and other analysis led the SAC and sanctuary staff to conclude all spearfishing gear should be prohibited. All supporting information has been available and will be posted on the GRNMS webpage when the draft EA and proposed rule are published. Following the comment period any and all comments will be considered and a final rule and environmental assessment will be developed, cleared through NOAA, and published.

National Marine Sanctuary Foundation

Allison Alexander, National Development Manager for the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation, gave a presentation about the Foundation. Allison is visiting the Gray's Reef office on a coordinated staff exchange between all sites and the Foundation. Becky Shortland is scheduled to spend one week at the Foundation office in Silver Spring, Maryland in September 2009. Allison explained the Foundation staff work very closely with the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries headquarters, but wanted to better connect with the actual sanctuary sites.

Next meeting

Becky Shortland proposed sometime in the week of April 13th for the next meeting. She noted it will be time for officer elections (chair, vice-chair, secretary) in April. She requested topics for the next meeting agenda. Through discussion of setting meetings it was decided the Advisory Council would attempt to set meetings one year in advance. The group is willing to try that approach. Becky will float some dates for the next year. The Council next discussed whether meetings should continue to be held in the late afternoon/evening or shift to daytime meetings due to a lack of public participation. It was agreed meetings times would be set according to whether or not items of particular interest to the public are on each agenda. If there are no items of controversy, then the Advisory Council meetings should be held during the day; if there are controversial items, the meetings should be held in the late afternoon/evening to promote public participation.

Suggested topics for the April meeting include Science Program needs and accomplishments, along with an update on lionfish issues, spearfishing and the research area.

The meeting was adjourned.