

Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council Meeting
April 13, 2007, Wayne County Airport, Jesup, GA
Meeting Summary

Distributed Materials

- Meeting Agenda
- Advisory Council Meeting Summary January 2007
- GRNMS Program Report
- GRNMS Condition Report
- GRNMS Annual Report

Advisory Council Members Present

Danny Gleason, Living Resources Research
Joe Kimmel, Chair, NOAA Fisheries SERO
Clark Alexander, Non-living Resources Research
Spud Woodward, GA DNR Coastal Resources Division
Aimee Gaddis, Sapelo Island NEER
Doug Lewis, GA DNR Law Enforcement
Ralph Neely, Sport Diving
LTJG Laura Swift, U.S. Coast Guard
Venetia Butler, K-12 Education

Advisory Council Members Absent

Christi Lambert, Regional Conservation
Judy Helmey, Commercial/Charter Fishing
Will Berson, Georgia Conservation
Leslie Sautter, University Education
Tim Tarver, Sport Fishing

GRNMS and NMSP Staff Present:

Cathy Sakas, Education Coordinator
Becky Shortland, Stewardship Coordinator
Gail Krueger, Outreach Coordinator
Sarah Fangman, SE & GOM Region, NMSP
George Sedberry, GRNMS Superintendent Elect
Brian Keller, FKNMS and Acting SEGoM Region Science Coordinator

Public Present

Fiona Wilmot, former FKNMS SAC Coordinator
Henry Ansley, former GRNMS SAC member

Welcome, Introductions, Advisory Council Business

Gray's Reef NMS Advisory Council Chair Dr. Joe Kimmel opened the meeting, welcomed everyone and asked for introductions. He announced the selection of Dr. George Sedberry as the new superintendent for Gray's Reef NMS. He quickly reviewed the agenda and asked for approval. All present approved the agenda.

Dr. Kimmel called for approval of the minutes that had been distributed electronically as a final summary. Minutes, as amended, were approved.

Election of Officers

Dr. Kimmel then turned to the election of officers. Becky Shortland gave a reminder of the terms. A brief discussion followed with nomination and election of the following:

Chair – Joe Kimmel (to serve a second two-year term)
Vice-chair – Clark Alexander (two-year term)
Secretary – Venetia Butler (one-year term)

National Advisory Council Meeting

Joe Kimmel read excerpts from a letter sent from NMSP Director Dan Basta to all Sanctuary Advisory Council Chairs explaining the need to cancel this year's national advisory council meeting due to funding cuts. Brian Keller added that other coordinators' meetings were also cut including research and education.

Next GRNMS Advisory Council meeting

Becky Shortland proposed that the next meeting of the Advisory Council be scheduled for June when the NOAA Ship R/V NANCY FOSTER will be in the sanctuary supporting various research projects. The concept is to meet in Shellman Bluff at the Sapelo Saltwater Fishing Club and to transport out to the NOAA ship. A variety of activities could be observed. She asked about dates in June and it was decided that she would email members present and not present to consider June 18, 19 or 20. Doug Lewis offered the use of GADNR law enforcement vessels to support GRNMS in transporting to the FOSTER. Staff gladly accepted the offer. Clark Alexander noted that it might be useful to visit during an active tournament, but others noted the difficulty in doing that with so many boaters participating in tournaments and our meeting would need to be rescheduled for a weekend.

Sanctuary Program Updates

Becky Shortland briefly introduced the topic of "Greening the Program," a new initiative in the NMSP to be more "carbon neutral" and reduce the environmental impact of activities. Clark Alexander and Danny Gleason noted that one way the GRNMS Advisory Council can help is to eliminate Styrofoam cups and give members mugs to bring to meetings. Joe Kimmel suggested using electronic materials, and while it will help reduce the amount of paper used, it may not work for all members, especially those who do not have a laptop. He suggested staff project the materials for all to see during the meeting. Danny Gleason also noted that GRNMS is planning more consolidated trips offshore, which could already be reported as "greening" efforts.

Becky then introduced the new GRNMS “programs report” that has been created to keep members more fully informed of sanctuary activities and to reduce the amount of unnecessary verbal reports. Joe Kimmel also suggested that we might add the list of Advisory Council members and staff to the report providing the public with names of individuals they may contact to answer questions about Gray’s Reef NMS.

New regulations outreach

Communications and Outreach Coordinator Gail Krueger talked about the multiple efforts that have been made to get the word out to users and the general public about new sanctuary regulations. This includes the updated website and National Data Buoy Center webpage; NOAA weather radio marine forecasts; mailed and hand delivered copies of posters and flyers to every marina, dive shop, bait and tackle stores, Bass Pro, and fish camp along the coast – thanks to volunteer Hal Jenkins. A newsletter will be going out soon; the new state fishing regulations brochure is out; rack cards are in production for tourist sites; and radio messaging is now targeting the new regulations. Fishing tournaments will also be targeted to distribute the information, especially during captains meetings.

Enforcement summit overview

Cathy Sakas noted that we had a very good meeting with our partners last week on law enforcement and compliance for the sanctuary. We all gained new information about the amount of GADNR effort that is put forth through the Joint Enforcement Agreement (JEA) between NOAA and the State of Georgia. Participants also identified a number of areas that could enhance enforcement efforts; chief among those is identification for GADNR officers to show NOAA authorization to enforce regulations outside of state waters and in GRNMS. In the meantime, the sanctuary will increase outreach efforts to inform users that the authorization exists. It was also suggested that staff provide Advisory Council members with proof of authorization so members can outreach to their constituent groups. GRNMS and NOAA will also work toward establishing a summary settlement schedule for lesser violations. It was noted that a big misconception is that harvest of lobster is legal – as an invertebrate, lobster harvest is *not* legal!

Doug Lewis emphasized the revelation that the dollar value of GADNR efforts was probably under calculated. In ten months, 29 trips were made to the sanctuary and 21 boats were checked. This totaled 138 boat hours (out of a total of 193 planned hours for the year) and 411 man hours. The misconception was that the boat hours were the total man hours. Doug also noted a few other important details from the meeting including the fact that under the JEA officers don’t have to meet the “21 fish” standard in GRNMS. He also echoed the concern that the public does not realize they have authority in the sanctuary. Sgt. Lewis also said that GADNR had a meeting to coordinate efforts to board and check as many vessels as they can, and that during tournaments they will try to have more patrols. He also mentioned that a “cheat sheet” would be very helpful for officers

to cite code sections, especially for violations like depositing marine debris in the sanctuary. Becky Shortland said that she will follow up with that and other requests to enhance enforcement as discussed during the meeting.

Doug also noted that so far this year, going to or coming from GRNMS, officers have spotted 11 right whales—five inside the sanctuary. One officer who spotted a right whale cow/calf pair in the Brunswick shipping channel contacted the Port Authority to prevent a possible collision from a ship that was entering the area.

Discussion then focused on boating safety in the sanctuary and the fact that there is no authority for the U.S. Coast Guard or GADNR to enforce safe boating in the sanctuary. USCG can only enforce boating safety rules out to 12 miles, although fisheries rules extend to the full 200 miles. Joe Kimmel asked about the impact of Magnuson-Stevens Act national standard dealing with “safety at sea.” Spud Woodward pointed out that they are national standards, but do not carry the force of law. All agreed that this is an area that needs attention.

Spud Woodward and others expressed concerns over illegal exploratory fishing for stone crab. He explained that the small black plastic traps (similar to a milk crate) are set on live bottom with pig ears for bait. They are pulled several days later when a delayed corrodible zinc buoy float is released and surfaces to identify the location of traps. The gear is already not legal. Law enforcement knows about the situation and there is need to get word out to the dive community who may locate the traps incidentally.

Doug Lewis also noted that GADNR has a good retention rate with boundary markers at the Special Management Zones offshore. Gray’s Reef may want to explore options for sanctuary boundary markers.

LTJG Laura Swift said that she believed the law enforcement meeting went very well and that such meetings should continue on an annual or biannual basis. Doug Lewis emphasized the comment by saying the players change so often it is a good idea to get together. Laura Swift then noted that the Executive Officer from the Coast Guard Cutter *Tarpon* out of Tybee Island, Georgia, also attended. She emphasized that while the primary mission of the USCG is search and rescue, they are boarding vessel as much as possible. She noted that the USCG Southeast Regional Fisheries Training Center (SERFTC) is engaged in training South Carolina DNR officers and that there is discussion about Georgia officers being trained at the center as well. If GADNR officers have questions about federal laws, they can contact SERFTC.

Joe Kimmel asked to be included in the distribution list on the law enforcement meeting summary and suggested that a “summit” every two years is a good idea. Spud Woodward emphasized that it is important to follow up and “bulldog” the issues, especially GADNR’s need for NOAA identification.

Becky Shortland asked the Council's approval to establish a Law Enforcement Working Group with Doug Lewis and Laura Swift as co-chairs. She also asked to add NOAA Special Agent Al Samuels to the group. The Advisory Council approved and Laura and Doug accepted the charge.

Upcoming research cruises

Regional Research Analyst Sarah Fangman reported that Gray's Reef has been fortunate to get a good amount of ship time on the NOAA SHIP R/V NANCY FOSTER this coming season. The cruise has been divided into two "legs" of about 10 days each. She noted that we have wanted to extend the research opportunities to the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) and the first leg of the cruise will do just that. Using an autonomous underwater vehicle (AUV) and the ship's multibeam capabilities, SAFMC will be able to map more of the proposed fishery marine protected areas. The second leg of the cruise will be more traditional cruise by allowing partners, such as Georgia Southern University to continue their research activities. Sub-bottom profiling will also continue; this helps to identify areas of thick and thin sand cover and the underlying general rock relief and how it fits into the Shelf.

Lunch – During lunch, GRNMS and the Advisory Council honored former member Henry Ansley and presented him with a plaque in recognition of his years of service.

Working Group Activities

Research Advisory Panel

Danny Gleason and Clark Alexander have co-chaired the Research Advisory Panel (RAP) for the Advisory Council, which undertook development of the Gray's Reef Condition Report. The current draft report was distributed for review. Danny Gleason said that he and Clark Alexander have some reservations because they are concerned about how the information could be used. Most of the disagreement surrounds the color-coded findings and more specifically the description of the findings. RAP members were told that those descriptions cannot be changed despite the possible misinformation. Another concern is that the public and Congressionals in particular will not read the text that supports the full understanding of the sanctuary's condition. The summary tables can be misleading.

Joe Kimmel asked whether or not footnoting similar to the fisheries reports to Congress could resolve the issues. Sarah Fangman asked if it is a matter of misunderstanding. Danny Gleason and Clark Alexander emphasized that it is hard to characterize as just a misunderstanding as there were no alternatives allowed when the concerns were raised. The problem is that the summary shows lots of "green" but they are really unknowns. The known information is really baseline rather than a trend. Brian Keller mentioned these issues had been raised before. Sarah Fangman stated that she wanted the report to be as meaningful as possible. Members also proposed ideas like removing the description of findings column, or to have the site define its own description. Another concern is that the summary may make it more difficult to justify

funding for further research. Danny Gleason asked members to review the draft report with the “eye” of a constituent. Spud Woodward agreed that the public and Congressionals may interpret the colors and not read the text and that the RAP needs to suggest alternative language.

Members asked whether the RAP may meet again to discuss the report. It seems unclear whether that will be necessary or not. Clark Alexander asked whether the Advisory Council would like to entrust the RAP with the final product or bring RAP recommendations back to the Council. It was decided that the RAP would be entrusted to finalize the document and bring the final report back to the full Advisory Council. Sarah Fangman noted that the report will also be peer reviewed before it is finalized.

Research Area Working Group

There is nothing to report from the Research Area Working Group, although Sarah Fangman and Becky Shortland are reviving discussions. The primary recommendation accepted by NOAA is to proceed with a more formal public process to develop a decision on a research area.

Education/Outreach Working Group

Working Group Chair Venetia Butler reported that while the working group has not met on any projects, a new grant proposal has been submitted with partners Armstrong Atlantic State University (AASU), Skidaway Institute of Oceanography and University of Georgia Marine Education Center and Aquarium. The proposal seeks to improve ocean literacy standards through teacher curriculum taught at AASU and other teacher professional development opportunities. It is also expected that the grant proposal work will help finalize the GRNMS oceanography curriculum. Cathy Sakas noted that she is looking forward to George Sedberry coming on staff, so that she is able to concentrate on the curriculum.

Becky Shortland also reminded members about the NOAA Marine Debris Program grant proposal that is still pending. The working group may be asked to assist with outreach efforts from that grant.

Cathy Sakas praised volunteer Hal Jenkins for his support with the ROV workshops and competition. Hal has also been selected by GRNMS staff as Volunteer of the Year nominee for the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation annual award. Venetia continued with mention of her meeting with the new education director at the Georgia Aquarium, Al George.

Law Enforcement Working Group

See above discussion of law enforcement meeting.

National Programs

NMSA reauthorization

Cathy Sakas reminded Advisory Council members of the reauthorization efforts for the National Marine Sanctuaries Act. It has been a few years in progress and the hope is to have a bill released by summer.

Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary

Dr. Brian Keller, Science Coordinator and Southeast Regional Science Coordinator (Acting) gave a presentation on the Florida Keys NMS, background and current conditions. (The PowerPoint presentation is available upon request.)

Public Comment

Joe Kimmel noted that no one from the public was in attendance to give comment and closed the public comment session.

Constituent reports

Spud Woodward spoke about the Georgia legislature, which is in extended session, so GADNR is unsure of budget items such as boat access repairs and renovations. A bill was also proposed to require a mandatory license for saltwater fishing guides. This should give managers an accurate registry of saltwater fishing guides and would be beneficial for GRNMS and other socioeconomic studies. Spud went on to talk about House Bill 500, which would require a 50 foot marshlands buffer. The bill is expected to have action next year.

Spud also noted that GADNR Coastal Resources Division is in the process of identifying and hiring a habitat coordinator. The coordinator's job will be to follow through with DNR's strong commitment to coastal aquatic habitat, which compliments what is being done in assessment, restoration and enhancement.

Representing Sapelo Island NERR, Amy Gaddis mentioned the management plan in development for the reserve, which is in revision after NOAA review and comment. The plan will be distributed to the Sapelo Island NERR Advisory Committee for comments in the near future. The intent is to host public comment in December. Amy also noted that the new island ferry *Katie Underwood* is now in operation. Coastal Training Programs have also been busy with Geographic Information System (GIS), green infrastructure, and teacher workshops. School tours (K-12 groups) are booked until 2008,

LTJG Laura Swift highlighted the number of students trained at the Southeast Fisheries Training Center – just under 200 students so far this year.

Ralph Neely mentioned that there are currently no dive operators taking customers to Gray's Reef at this time. TLC Charters is no longer operating. He believes that the charters to GRNMS are not profitable because of the distance to the sanctuary, when operators can do better hosting trips outside of the area like the Florida Keys or Cozumel.

Danny Gleason noted that his paper on range extension of invertebrates has been accepted. He also talked about a new U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

(EPA) grant that is coming through to look at possible connectivity between upland activities and impacts to GRNMS through the Altamaha River. That work may begin in fall 2007.

Clark Alexander said that he is working up data from last year's research. He also highlighted the recent Southeast Geological Society meeting during which Jim Henry was honored with a special session on his work.

Venetia Butler announced that Thunderbolt Elementary Marine Science Magnet School won a Magnet School of Excellence award; Bill Eswine received the GA Environmental Education Association's Eugene Odum Lifetime Service Award

Gail Krueger passed out the new GRNMS annual report, a synopsis of sanctuary activities for 2006. She explained that this year and into the future the sanctuary will only do individual pages to insert into a booklet cover, instead of doing a full report booklet.

Joe Kimmel mentioned the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC), through Amendment 14 to their Snapper Grouper FMP, is in the process of establishing eight fishery marine protected areas (MPAs). There is also movement toward a prohibition of shark bottom longlines in the MPAs, but pelagic fishing would be allowed. Final action is expected at the June SAFMC meeting in Florida. On Amendment 15 – overfishing and overfished determinations for certain species; addressing some permit issues; addressing recreational sale of fish; and considering a maximum number of black sea bass pot deployments per trip – public hearings may be scheduled for September. Snapper Grouper Amendment 16 on considering a limited access privilege program is in early development. The fisheries ecosystem comprehensive plan is also in the early stages of development and mackerel plans are being amended.

The meeting was adjourned.