

Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary

Sanctuary Advisory Council Meeting
September 26, 2007, 2:00-7:00 p.m.
Coastal Electric Cooperative
Midway, Georgia

Highlights

- ➔ Next meeting January 31st, Bamboo Farm and Coastal Gardens
- ➔ Gray's Reef Condition Report in final draft stages
- ➔ Further discussion of sanctuary boundary markers needed
- ➔ Lionfish documented at Gray's Reef
- ➔ Marine debris surveying expected to be conducted by Team Ocean
- ➔ Spearfishing socioeconomic studies conducted; action anticipated by summer
- ➔ Research area process to include public meetings co-hosted by sport fishing clubs; present boundary options and supporting information
- ➔ Public comments

Distributed Materials

- Meeting Agenda
- Advisory Council Meeting Summary June 2007 (email)
- GRNMS Program Report (email)
- Draft Research Area Process Summary

Advisory Council Members Present

Joe Kimmel, Chair, NOAA Fisheries SERO
Clark Alexander, Non-living Resources Research
Spud Woodward, GA DNR Coastal Resources Division
Dorset Hurley, Sapelo Island NEER
Doug Lewis, GA DNR Law Enforcement
Venetia Butler, K-12 Education
Christi Lambert, Regional Conservation
Will Berson, Georgia Conservation
Leslie Sautter, University Education
Tim Tarver, Sport Fishing
LT Charlie Gris, U.S. Coast Guard
Danny Gleason, Living Resources Research
Judy Helmey, Commercial/Charter Fishing

Advisory Council Members Absent

Ralph Neely, Sport Diving

GRNMS and NOAA Staff Present:

George Sedberry, GRNMS Superintendent
Greg McFall, GRNMS Research Coordinator
Becky Shortland, GRNMS Stewardship Coordinator
Gail Krueger, GRNMS Outreach Coordinator
Todd Recicar, GRNMS Marine Operations Manager

Karen Raine, NOAA GCEL
Rod Ehler, NMSP Economist
Laura Kracker, NCCOS

Public Present

Wayne Foster
Stan Kane
Tony Reagan

Welcome, Introductions, Advisory Council Business

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

Dr. Kimmel quickly reviewed the agenda and asked for approval. All present approved the agenda. He then called for approval of the June 2007 meeting summary that had been distributed electronically. The meeting summary was approved.

Becky Shortland suggested that the next meeting of the Advisory Council be held in January 2008, possibly in conjunction with a Research Area Working Group meeting. She will request input on dates through email.

Sanctuary Programs

Dr. George Sedberry spoke about the National Marine Sanctuary Program's Leadership Team (LT) meeting held in September in the Great Lakes area and the interest shown in that region for new sanctuary designations. He also noted the success of the Gray's Reef Ocean Film Festival just held in Savannah the weekend of September 21-23 and acknowledged Gail Krueger's contributions. The attendance was approximately 2500. Greg McFall further explained the top story in the electronic Program Report concerning a sponge die-off in the sanctuary and elsewhere in the region. Greg is working on analyzing the sponge die off. (See programs report).

Working Group Reports

Research Advisory Panel – After a brief reminder on past discussion on the sanctuary's Condition Report and its development by the Research Advisory Panel (a working group of the Advisory Council), Dr. Clark Alexander gave an update reminding members of the concerns expressed about the color coding and definitions. Dr. Danny Gleason noted that after polling the members of the panel, there was a good consensus to change some of the color coding and trends to better reflect the status of resources. Based on the direction from the Advisory Council, the report will now come back to them as a final product. Joe Kimmel noted that sanctuary condition reports are now being reviewed at National Marine Fisheries Service before final approval.

Law Enforcement Working Group

Sgt. Doug Lewis distributed a report on patrols to the sanctuary and other activities in July and August. He noted that two warnings were issued in the sanctuary for anchoring. LT Michael Gris stated that there have been no changes in USCG patrols since the last report. CG Cutter *Yellowfin* does make routine transits and USCG continues some fly overs, but no violations have been reported. Becky Shortland asked whether the wide outreach efforts made by GRNMS have been helpful or if users are not getting the information. Doug Lewis responded that the information is indeed useful and actually could help make any violation cases. Discussion also followed as to whether the sanctuary could obtain information from law enforcement sources on locations of boats contacted to add to visitor use data. Both GADNR and USCG representatives agreed that it was possible. GRNMS staff will follow up on a request. Doug Lewis added that there has been no progress on securing identification for GADNR officers from NOAA.

Marine Operations Manager Todd Recicar asked members for advice on boundary marker buoys at the corners of the sanctuary. Buoys have not remained for any length of time and the costs to replace them may override the benefits. While marker buoys are not required, all the law enforcement representatives agreed that boundary markers are necessary. Tim Tarver agreed. Danny Gleason stated that the buoys do create problems in that they provide habitat for non-native species like the large acorn barnacle. Spud Woodward also noted that buoys become "bait stations". Discussion switched to marking the possible research area and George suggested the need for a buffer if it is marked.

Todd noted that costs are in the range of \$10-15K just for materials. Past buoys have not remained in place very long. DNR representatives explained that they use 500 lb concrete blocks to anchor buoys. Doug Lewis again focused the debate on enforcement asking Karen Raine what is needed to prosecute. Karen emphasized the need for markers, perhaps even more than just corners. Judy Helmey noted that boaters should understand and know the GPS coordinates; they should know the boundaries. Will Berson agreed that buoys are a good demarcation device, but very expensive and GRNMS may be able to use the funding for better things such as enforcement outreach programs. Joe Kimmel summed up the discussion by saying that not everyone sees the benefits of buoys. It was finally agreed that the topic would be placed on the agenda for the next meeting.

Research Area Working Group

George Sedberry acknowledged that Matt Kendall and Laurie Bauer from NOAA's Biogeography Team are here to present on the research area and the marine debris survey program. The research area discussion will come later in the day, but he noted that Matt and Laurie did document lionfish at Gray's Reef in their dives earlier this week.

Marine Debris

Matt Kendall and Laurie Bauer presented an update on the marine debris survey work they have been doing to try to document accumulation rates and location. They have found that almost all debris is associated with ledge sites and that 2/3 of the debris was related to fishing. Greg McFall is organizing a team of volunteer divers – Team Ocean – to survey the marked sites on a quarterly basis and remove debris after training. Greg noted that the NOAA Diving Center is developing guidelines for working volunteer divers. Danny Gleason asked if it is possible to gauge longevity of the debris by growth of encrustaceans. There was no conclusion.

Spearfishing Activities

George Sedberry introduced the topic of spearfishing in Gray's Reef by reminding members that the management plan approved in 2006 called for a two-year study on socioeconomics of Spearfishing activities in the sanctuary. At present, NMSP Economist Rod Ehler – who was present – is conducting a survey of users along this coast. Rod explained that he is surveying dive charter businesses and getting detailed information on costs and location of dive trips to link the economic value to each of the diving sites. He is looking at the direct affect on business then linking to the larger economy for consumptive and non-consumptive activities.

Joe Kimmel asked about private vs commercial spear fishing impacts. Rod explained that he is also working with divers in clubs. He said that he has not done the analysis yet but have found that 3 of the commercial charter boats do not like to take folks to Gray's Reef. Clark Alexander mentioned that Island Dive Center based on St. Simons Island does not go to Gray's Reef anymore.

Public Comment

One individual was present from the public for the comment period. He chose to wait until the later comment period.

Research Area

Greg McFall gave an overview of the research area concept and deliberations that began in the Advisory Council's working group in 2004. Several meetings of the working group were conducted into 2005 when recommendations were developed for the full Advisory Council. The council then met in June 2005 for two days to thoroughly review the recommendations and GIS tool and information, and to develop their recommendations to NOAA Gray's Reef NMS. Those recommendations were approved by NMSP Director Dan Basta and Gray's Reef staff as a starting point for the full public process.

Matt Kendall and Laurie Bauer then gave a detailed presentation on the GIS tool and criteria developed to date for selecting boundary alternatives for a research area. Matt emphasized that additional fine-tuning is needed to take the tool the next steps to actually selecting optional scenarios for a research area in the sanctuary.

Public Comment

Three individuals attended the meeting at this point for public comment. One asked when a decision may be made on the research area. Becky Shortland stated that the process could last a minimum of 9 months to a year for a proposal to be developed for public comment. Discussion followed on the need for specific boundary options in order to get useful public comment and how Gray's Reef will get the information to the public. It was expressed that the users have a negative attitude; that they feel it won't matter what they say, they won't be listened to. Becky Shortland thanked those who do try to spread the word to their constituents and asked for meeting location and time suggestions. Ideas were discussed to have something more definite for the public to look at; perhaps an informal meeting with several maps and suggestions to invite people to give their input. One user responded that it would be a good start but make it friendly to the people with visuals. There was a request to more clearly identify the buoy and give coordinates.

Matt Kendall repeated that he did not use boat siting data that pertained to king mackerel season, but the times of the year when bottom fishing is most likely. Even so, the data shows bottom fishing and pelagic fishing all seem to be in the same area – an elliptical area over the highest ledges in the sanctuary. The marine debris surveys seem to validate these user areas.

Several suggestions were made to have fishermen outline on a map where they do or do not want a research area to be located. The request was also made to not split the fishing area in half. Again concerns focused on getting interested people out to meetings to gain the needed comments and information. There was general consensus that the sanctuary needs to have something specific to present in order to gather more input from the public. Becky Shortland reiterated the need for public input up front and not at the end of the process. Christi Lambert asked about fishing groups co-hosting a workshop or meetings and the suggestion was made to co-host a meeting with the Sapelo Saltwater Fishing Club again at Shellman Bluff and other clubs along the coast. Several suggestions were repeated for getting the word out including Coastal Outdoors, fish camps, Georgia Outdoor News, GRNMS webpage, public boat ramps, marinas, etc.

Matt Kendall emphasized that he believes the RAWG should first pick some sites that work to present as candidate sites. Doug Lewis suggested adding the data buoy on the map. Stan Kane asked that we also include the different sizes of sites and mark the SW ledge. Spud Woodward emphasized that the sanctuary must deal with downrigger and trolling lure use in any proposed research area. Woodward also reiterated his opinion that the research area should also be well marked.

The final suggestion was to consider the October 17-18 research area working group meeting be held at the Sapelo club starting at 6:00 p.m. Tim Tarver will look into availability of the club.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:00 p.m.