

FLOWER GARDEN BANKS NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY

Sanctuary Advisory Council

Meeting Minutes

February 8, 2012

Meeting Attendance Roster:

Frank Burek	Recreational Diving	Present
Jesse Cancelmo	Recreational Diving	Present
Cher Walker	Diving Operators	Absent
Frank Wasson	Diving Operators	Absent
Clint Moore	Oil and Gas Industry	Present
John Hoffman	Oil and Gas Industry	Absent
Irby Basco	Fishing - Recreational	Present
Matt Bunn	Fishing - Recreational	Absent
Joe Hendrix	Fishing - Commercial	Present
Mike Jennings	Fishing - Commercial	Present
Will Heyman	Research	Absent
Larry McKinney	Research	Present
Dale Loughmiller	Education	Present
Jacqui Stanley	Education	Present
Ellis Pickett	Conservation	Present
Page Williams	Conservation	Present
James Sinclair	BOEMRE (non-voting)	Absent
Carmen DeGeorge	U.S. Coast Guard (non-voting)	Absent
Rusty Swafford	NOAA Fisheries (non-voting)	Absent
Charles Tyer	NOAA OLE (non-voting)	Present
Vacant	EPA (non-voting)	-----
G.P. Schmahl	Sanctuary Superintendent (non-voting)	Present

Others in attendance:

Paul Sammarco
Herb Leedy
John Embesi
Kelly Drinnen
Emma Hickerson

Michelle Johnston
Marissa Nuttall
Ryan Eckert
Shelley DuPuy

A regular meeting of the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary (FGBNMS) Advisory Council was held on Wednesday, February 8, 2012, at 9:00 AM, at the FGBNMS Headquarters offices in Galveston, Texas. Council chair, Larry McKinney was present and presided over the meeting. Council vice-chair, Frank Burek, was also present. Larry called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM. G.P. Schmahl, sanctuary superintendent, welcomed the

council and the public, gave a brief "safety moment", and made several brief announcements. He stated that vetting of new council members is still on-going so selections are not final, that the meeting minutes from November 2011 will not be available until the next council meeting, and that FGBNMS Sea Side Chats begin this evening at 6:30 PM at the Galveston Fishing Pier. G.P. introduced two invited guests—Dr. Paul Sammarco and Herb Leedy.

Larry McKinney asked for approval of the meeting agenda. Frank Burek moved to adopt the meeting agenda. The motion was seconded by Joe Hendrix and the agenda was approved without changes.

G.P. Schmahl provided a sanctuary update. He provided the following updates and reviewed sanctuary highlights that have occurred since November 2011:

- Final Management Plan, Environmental Assessment, and Final Rule. The final documents have moved through the clearance process that began in November. The final plan should be released in about a month. G.P. will notify the SAC if the clearance process drags on late into the spring.
- Boundary expansion. The recommendation for sanctuary expansion is in the management plan. Sanctuary staff continue to perform background work. Expansion is a federal regulatory action and will require an environmental impact statement (EIS). We will be moving forward with this action once the management plan is approved. The likely timeframe for completion of an EIS is two years. The timeframe will depend on any significant issues that may arise. Potential fishing regulations will be included in this action.
- R/V *Manta* field operations. The *Manta* suffered an engine failure again. Caterpillar will replace the engine under warranty. The new engine is expected to arrive in Galveston mid-February. Maintenance of water quality instruments will be the first cruise following engine installation.
- BOEM is in the process of a five-year lease sale—the first since the Deepwater Horizon incident. Whole and partial blocks within the boundaries of FGBNMS will not be released. This is a change from previous policy. This will prevent directional drilling from occurring within FGBNMS. Council members and staff engaged in further discussion on this topic. Clint Moore expressed his concern that such regulations could potentially cause the oil and gas industry to lobby against expansion of the sanctuary. Larry McKinney suggested that the council clarify their stance on this issue at the May 2012 SAC meeting.
- HI-A-389A platform. G.P. announced that the platform probably will be decommissioned within a short timeframe. Clint Moore added that John Hoffman has made a verbal intent to attempt to purchase the platform as a research facility for NOAA.

- Lionfish. G.P. gave a presentation to the GPM Fishery Management Council on 2/2/2012 in Mobile, AL. He addressed the ecology, biology, and ecosystem threats of Lionfish, as well as response options.
- Additional case of ciguatera poisoning from a Grouper at FGBNMS. G.P. gave a reminder that the FDA advisory is still in affect.
- ROV purchase. Funds from enforcement settlements will provide for the purchase of a new ROV. FGBNMS will replace the old Phantom S2 ROV with updated technology with a 1000m inspection class.
- Sanctuary Superintendents and Regional Staff Meeting. The meeting was held in Galveston at the end of January. ONMS feels the need to increase people's knowledge and sense of awareness of the importance of the environment. ONMS is encouraging sanctuaries to engage in a new campaign to invigorate our program and engage business entities, oil and gas, fisheries, and communities using existing resources.

Jacqui Stanley provided an update from the Youth Working Group Subcommittee. She reviewed the details of her conversations with her contact at Moody Gardens regarding their SAYY (Society for the Advancement of Volunteer Youth) program. Moody Gardens staff has suggested that the FGBNMS council include their youth working group flyer in their recruiting packets for returning youth volunteers. In June or July 2012, Jacqui and Emma will give a brief presentation to students at Moody Gardens for our recruitment purposes. The goal is 20 students to start; beginning with the 2012-2013 school year. Jacqui emphasized that this is a pilot program for the working group and a way to make sure the council begins with students that have previously demonstrated an interest in marine science. In the future, it will likely be possible to draw from a greater geographic area.

Frank Burek provided an update of the HI-A-389-A Artificial Reef Working Group. He reviewed the objectives of the working group, including the reefing options, decision points, and recommendations needed. The current working group membership includes: Frank Burek (chair), John Hoffman, James Sinclair, John Embesi, Herb Leedy, Rebecca Nadel, Paul Sammarco, and an open seat for the platform owner/operator. Frank noted that the GOM Fishery Management Council (GOMFMC) recently passed a motion on artificial reefs. He also noted the recent issue surrounding rig removal and sea turtles. Frank invited others to join the working group. Those expressing interest included: Clint Moore, Mike Jennings, Ellis Pickett, Jesse Cancelmo, Joe Hendrix. Mike Jennings discussed the GOMFMC meeting during which a motion was approved to consider artificial reefs as essential fish habitat. He added that Shepard Grimes (legal counsel) said that this may affect fish stocks. Mike inquired about the legalities of moving rigs and wrecks. Frank Burek added that rigs as hard substrates can have a positive effect on fisheries.

Shelley DuPuy, Education and Outreach Coordinator, provided a 2011 Education Report. She emphasized that the Education Action Plan guides the FGBNMS education and outreach activities. Shelley covered the following topics: broadening public awareness; reaching previously underserved audiences; using print and broadcast media to increase public

awareness; working with informal education venues; improving understanding and enhancing k-12 education programs; increasing public support and stewardship; building a dynamic and up-to-date internet presence and emerging technologies; and evaluating effectiveness of education and outreach activities.

Emma Hickerson, Research Coordinator, provided a 2011 Research Report. Emma introduced the staff research team and the R/V Manta crew. Emma covered the following topics in the presentation: extensive use of the R/V Manta; number and scope of cruises; partners and associated scientists; long-term monitoring; Whale Shark tagging with Eric Hoffmayer; coral spawning cruise; additions to the Manta catalog and acoustic tracking of Mantas; lionfish invasion; submission of multiple abstracts and publication; proposal to coral program for mesospheric zone mapping and to BOEM for long-term monitoring refurbishment; and various science interpretation activities.

A public comment period was opened. Public comments were provided by Brett Casey and Mike Nugent.

Captain Brett Casey of the PA Boatmen's Association made the following comments: I'm harbor trash and live on a boat. I've been in the oilfield most of my life, born in Mobile, been near ocean since kid. In the past few years terrible things are happening. I have sent out several emails

We have oil and gas platforms, I've been working on them all my life. I've been diving since I was 16 years old. We are losing habitat at an alarming rate. Clint asked Mike and I to come up and share some info with all of you. We are in the Corpus area. For some reason our area is being targeted for platform removal. It is being told that platforms do not provide habitat. I beg to differ. Underneath a platform I witnessed a beautiful thing. One afternoon a sow snapper came to the surface and they were in a trance.

Eventually they started to release their eggs. There was an oil smell. The small males came to join the sow snappers within a matter of minutes the water turned snow white. In a matter of minutes it was over. We have witnessed this and I have witnessed it with African Pompano on a platform. There are 27 platforms to be removed from the area. We are taking people to the platforms and they are amazed.

We have coral that is going extinct. Thanks to the Flower Gardens we have coral – when it blooms the spores head down south. The turtles use the platforms as refuge – they offer food, they offer shelter. They fly over to make sure turtles aren't around a platform. When you fly in a helicopter there is a mirror effect and you can't see more than 8 feet underwater. You can't spot turtles that way. I have commercial dive friends and it is a taboo to talk about what takes place. There was a time when they used to take the tops off but now they use explosives; but it's cheaper. They kill everything within 1/8 miles of the explosion. Coral is the lifeline of the ocean – without it...no turtles. These turtles go for cover in these platforms. I know for a fact, it kills every living thing when a charge goes off. Only 16% of the fish float after an explosion. [Capt. Casey passed around pictures of a fish kill]. A marine biologist talked to me...and broke taboo. The fish are 4 to 8 ft deep thick on the bottom. Turtles are smart enough to leave (joking). Turtles were falling out of the platform – workers at the dock say it happens all the time. There are people that say that big mature turtles are found dead a week after a removal. We have got to stop the destruction. It doesn't just kill turtles, it kills breeders, it kills

everything. Why does Alabama have the largest snapper and grouper population with just a small coastline? It will be a desert at the end of the summer if this keeps happening. I make my living taking people fishing now. I am just trying to get the word out. If you love your ocean – if you love your Gulf – the corals are going extinct – they're alive – and after a charge – they're are dead. Once they are gone, it is going to take another 50 years. What is the big deal? Why can't we leave these structures. They are a home – they are not hurting anything. We need an injunction to get this stopped until it can be researched further. Following questions and some discussion, Capt. Casey added that commercial divers collect dead turtles and fill in the blast holes with mud. He is hoping that testimonials will come from the commercial divers.

Mr. Mike Nugent, President of the PA Boatmen's Association, contributed the following comments:

In 2001 or 2002 I was on the Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) advisory council in Tampa. When I made the motion that oil and gas structures should be EFH, me and Bob Ship (?) were the only supporters. The problem with the oil and gas structures is the addendum in 2009. I will leave you a couple of handouts. We went to the Texas people and Herb talked to us. If it was San Antonio and not Austin then, I would of thought it was the Alamo.

Mike Jennings added that he sees this as a FGBNMS issue. If I am going to buy into the islands in the stream concept, then I need to buy into it both ways. The loss of structure has an impact on the larger system. The SAC can get the word out or influence the decision. We are talking about expanding the sanctuary and whether or not they going to lose their place to fish. The comments lead to further discussion of the artificial reef topic amongst council members.

Following a lunch break, G.P. introduced Paul Sammarco, guest speaker. Dr. Sammarco presented information on coral abundance in the Gulf of Mexico and their relationship with FGBNMS. He described how oil and gas platforms provide substrate from seafloor to surface and attract and "produce" wildlife. Dr. Sammarco presented his research questions which center around coral colonization on platforms, coral abundance, distribution and diversity on platforms, genetic affinities, and differences between coral communities on toppled versus standing artificial structures. He described his research methods and results. The presentation generated council questions and discussion. Dr. Sammarco stated that possibly 25% of all platforms have coral, but with low coral cover. He also stated that the shallow portion of a platform is the most productive.

Frank Burek reminded the council that his second term as council vice-chair was coming to an end. An officer election will need to occur soon.

Jacqui Stanley motioned to adjourn the meeting. Clint Moore seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 2:05 PM.