

FLOWER GARDEN BANKS NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY

Sanctuary Advisory Council Meeting Meeting Minutes May 5, 2010

Attendance:

Council:

Charles Tyer
Page Williams
Frank Burek
Larry McKinney
Rebecca Nadel
Clint Moore
Jacqui Stanley
Dale Loughmiller
Matt Bunn
Joe Hendrix
Irby Basco
Darrell Walker

Staff:

G.P. Schmahl
Jen Morgan
Emma Hickerson
John Embesi
Tracy Hamburger
Steve Gittings
Kelly Drinnen
Shelley DuPuy

Public:

Jessie Cancelmo
Dan Mueller
Tim Gibson
Brandt Mannchen
Tom Bright
Cody Keesee
Brian McNamara
Matt Hensley
Kyle McCain
Marcus Sherrouse

The regular meeting of the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary (FGBNMS) Advisory Council was held on Wednesday, May 15, 2010, at 9:00 AM, at the FGBNMS Headquarters offices in Galveston, Texas. The council chair, Larry McKinney and council vice-chair, Frank Burek, were present.

G.P. Schmahl, sanctuary superintendent, welcomed the council and gave a brief "safety moment." He also pointed out the new window shutters in the ballroom.

Larry McKinney asked for changes or additions to the agenda. Frank Burek asked to add his name to constituent reports. Frank Burek moved to adopt the agenda. Rebecca Nadel seconded the motion. The motion passed. Larry asked the council to review the minutes of the February 2010 meeting.

G.P. continued with introductions of staff, council members, and public attendees. He gave a special welcome to Tim Gibson, a former SAC member. Tracy Hamburger announced that she will be departing this assignment in June and that her next will be on the NOAA ship Pisces in Pascagoula, MS.

Clint Moore requested that type-o corrections be made in the public comment notes from the previous SAC meeting. Clint then moved to adopt the minutes of the February 2010 meeting. Frank Burek seconded the motion and the minutes were adopted.

G.P. Schmahl reported on the state of the sanctuary in the 'Sanctuary Update' report. He noted that today's agenda is being overshadowed by what is happening in the gulf regarding the oil spill. He explained that the oil spill may or may not affect the western Gulf of Mexico depending on what happens with the loop current. G.P. showed an animation of the current and described how the Flower Garden Banks is influenced by large eddies that break off of the loop current. He added that right now there is no active spin-off eddies. Topics covered in the sanctuary update included: R/V Manta cleaning and maintenance; Galveston Art Walk on March 6 and April 13 at Island Divers featuring the work of Jacqui Stanley; the completion of the sanctuary highlights DVD by Ryan Eckert; Jacqui Stanley's selection as Volunteer of the Year and participation by her and the sanctuary in Capitol Hill Oceans Week—Oceans and Energy (CHOW) in June; the celebration of Jacques Cousteau's 100th birthday; and SAC seat vacancies.

G.P. explained that Rafael Calderon resigned from his conservation seat on the SAC due to his job relocation. The application deadline for this seat is May 28th. He also stated that Darrell Walker has tendered his resignation from the council as of today, and that we will post that seat opening shortly. G.P. said that Darrell is now under full contract to operate the R/V Manta and that he recently represented Flower Garden Banks at the small boat meeting in Seattle. Darrell provided comments and noted that he is looking forward to the research season during which about 85 days at sea are planned. Sanctuary staff will work in cooperation with other agencies and universities.

G.P. concluded the sanctuary update with comments on the oil spill. He stated that all NOAA vessels and operations have been put on alert for the oil spill and that sanctuary staff may be called to help. He has been contacted regarding the potential for using the R/V Manta. Sanctuary staff already have plans for work with Dr. DeMarco for dead-zone sampling, but that work may now also become monitoring for dispersants and hydrocarbons in the water.

Shelley DuPuy reported on Ocean Discovery Day (ODD). She reminded everyone that a year of ODD in 2009 was missed due to Hurricane Ike recovery. This, the 3rd time to hold this event, was a banner event! Shelley listed the booths and activities at ODD and described Science on a Sphere. Presentations of Science on a Sphere, a 6ft. diameter globe that makes ocean data come alive, were made available to groups in advance of ODD and reached roughly 200 people and make valuable connections and potential partnerships. The sphere was the highlight of ODD. The council asked questions related to cost, number of permanent installations around the country, and the types of data sets that can be displayed on the sphere.

G.P. Presented information on the baseline monitoring project being conducted in anticipation of a possible research-only area. NCCOS and HBOI are partnering with FGBNMS on the 3-year project. To provide a broad idea of fish

population dynamics, the sampling design will be random and stratified among major habitat types. A design meeting occurred on March 24th. NOAA ship Thomas Jefferson will support our needs to map areas in and around FGBNMS. Although the sanctuary has been mapped previously, improvements in equipment and technology now allow us to very clearly identify and characterize habitats in and around the Sanctuary. G.P. reviewed the zones/communities found in the area and the various methods and design needed to sample those zones. He added that the diver surveys will be done off of the NOAA vessel Nancy Foster that will be here in July. However, there is talk that Nancy Foster might be pulled away for oil spill response. The R/V Manta may be used for diver surveys.

G.P. provided an update on the revised draft management plan for the advisory council. He explained that we are currently on hold and waiting for the completion of the clearance process, but that once it is released we will get busier with public hearings and taking public comment. He described the reasons for the delay, including the rule-making process that involves the attorney's review of the specific language of the regulations.

G.P. began a session on the Deepwater Horizon incident and oil spill. He explained that although he had some slides/visuals to share to facilitate the discussion, this part of the agenda is meant as an open discussion on the possibility of the spill affecting the Sanctuary (or FKNMS) and not a presentation. He added that he has talked with Clint Moore and that Clint may have information to add to the conversation. G.P. provided information and answered questions relating to the following: sanctuary staff support for response effort; incident information; current location of oil; threat to Alabama Pinnacle area; use of dispersants; need for overall risk assessment for the Sanctuary; area contingency plans; possible effects on wildlife; test burns; fishing closures; fishing displacement; possibility of oil reaching the loop current; mechanism of a blow-out preventer; bioremediation possibilities.

Following a lunch break, Page Williams provided a constituent report as one of the conservation seat holders on the Council. Page described herself as a senior citizen and displaced homemaker with a series of jobs to support her habit of volunteering with non-profits, including Audubon, Sierra Club, and Galveston Bay Foundation. Her latest concern is trash and the need for a bottle deposit. She explained that a "bottle bill" is to be introduced to the state house and senate. Page mentioned that Brandt Mannchen has taken over leadership on Ike Dike, which she feels has the potential for many mistakes.

Frank Burek, a recreational diving representative on the council, also gave a constituent report. He described his recent Amazon River trip. He learned that the pH of the "Rio Negro", which is a major tributary of the Amazon River, is 5.5 due to natural circumstances (tannic acid). The "Rio Negro" has its sources in the mountains of Columbia, Venezuela, and Guyana; it then drains a large area

of northwestern Brazil before joining the Amazon River at the city of Manaus. The river leads to and dumps into the ocean. This is interesting, given our recent discussions of acidification.

Rebecca Nadel gave a report for the Platform Decommissioning Subcommittee. She notified the council that W&T Offshore is investing in restoration and will continue production at HIA389A. Therefore, decommissioning discussions are on hold at this time. She hopes to give a future presentation on Shell's rigs to reef program. Rebecca gave an update on the TAMU student efforts in research on decommissioning options. Their recommendation is the simple approach of something like a ranger station. G.P. added that sanctuary staff and the council will want to fully think through options before HIA389A decommissioning is upon us. So, it will be worth talking about, not really the hotel option, but others. Clint Moore stated that he brought with him today a new block and pipeline map for the sanctuary provided by Infield.

Brandt Mannchen, of the Houston Sierra Club, was present for the public comment period. He made a statement that included the following remarks. He is pleased about the research study and baseline monitoring that is scheduled to begin this season. He thinks that it will be a positive thing and would like to encourage sanctuary staff to continue that effort for many years. He continued with comments on the oil spill. He stated that the Sierra Club hopes that NOAA and MMS and industry can look at what we can do better to reduce any possible risk, especially around the sanctuary. He would like to see even reduced chances of future incidents.

Texas A&M University students from Will Heyman's Geography 380 Course were in attendance to give a wrap-up presentation on their semester-long projects related to the management and education needs of FGBNMS. Students present included: Cody Keese, Brian McNamara, Matt Hensley, Kyle McCain, and Marcus Sherrouse. Project presentations included: a video created to support Sanctuary awareness; an analysis of oil and gas platform decommissioning options (with a recommendation to keep a platform in-place to use as a Sanctuary ranger station); use of GIS to map results from an analysis of "Reel Report" data (a resource producing a summary of key stakeholders by time and use); and use of GIS to map responses collected on a stakeholder contact card.

Clint Moore asked each of the students to respond to the question "what is the most important thing that you learned in this course?" The students stated that they learned about "ways to work around obstacles in creating something while working in a team"; "people's willingness to protect something they've never seen before"; "different organizations that control various data sets"; the "existence of FGBNMS and what a precious resource it is and how many people use the Sanctuary."

The meeting adjourned at 1:53 P.M.