

FLOWER GARDEN BANKS NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY
Sanctuary Advisory Council
Meeting Minutes
November 17, 2021

VIRTUAL MEETING

Meeting Attendance Roster:

Sepp Haukebo, Recreational Diving, Present
Jesse Cancelmo, Recreational Diving, Present
Natalie Davis, Diving Operations, Present
Frank Burek, Diving Operations, Present
Ruth Perry, Oil and Gas Industry, Present
Steve Hamm, Oil and Gas Industry, Present
Scott Hickman, Fishing - Recreational, Present
Robert Kirschner, Fishing - Recreational, Absent
Shane Cantrell, Fishing - Commercial, Present
Buddy Guindon, Fishing - Commercial, Absent
Adrienne Simoes Correa, Research, Absent
Michael Dance, Research, Present, late
Brian Shmaefsky, Education, Present
Sharon Kamas, Education, Absent
Joanie Steinhaus, Conservation, Present
Jake Emmert, Conservation, Present
James Sinclair, BSEE (non-voting), Present
Alicia Caporaso, BOEM (non-voting), Present
Adam Peterson, USCG (non-voting), Absent
Rusty Swafford, NOAA Fisheries (non-voting), Absent
Brooke Shipley, TPWD (non-voting), Absent
G.P. Schmahl, Sanctuary Superintendent (non-voting), Present
Total voting member attendance: 12 of 16 of voting members; 7 votes needed

Others in Attendance:

Leslie Clift, Emma Hickerson, Kelly Drinnen, Kelly O'Connell, Ryan Hannum, Justin Blake, Irene Olivares-Arthur, Michelle Johnston, Kaitlyn Brogan, Raven Blakeway, Marissa Nuttall, Justin Blake, Julia Goss, Matt Walia, Gary Carter, Bob Crimian, Duane Smith, James Reinhardt, Samantha Sprankle

9:00 Welcome and Announcements – Kelly Drinnen/G.P. Schmahl

Today's virtual meeting is being run through a webinar and is not being recorded.

Roll Call

9:15 Administrative Business – Scott Hickman

Call to order @ 9:15am.

Adoption of Agenda – Motion from Frank Burek, second from Ruth Perry. No objections on the draft agenda, motion approved.

Adoption of Minutes – Motion to approve minutes from April 21, 2021 meeting from Frank Burek, second from Brian Shmaefsky. No objections on the draft minutes, motion approved.

Election of Chair – Jake Emmert (Conservation seat) was nominated and elected unanimously. Election of vice-Chair – Robert Kirschner (Recreational Fishing) and Sepp Haukebo (Recreational Diving) were nominated. Citing other time commitments, Robert Kirschner withdrew his nomination. Sepp Haukebo was elected unanimously.

Scheduling of 2022 meeting dates – January 18, April 13, September 14, and November 15.

9:45 Public Comment

No public comment.

10:00 ONMS Climate Resilience Plan – Lauren Wenzel (NOAA's National Marine Protected Areas Center)

Lauren Wenzel shared an overview of the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS) Climate Resilience Plan. *Sanctuary Climate Change Impacts Profiles* have been developed for each national marine sanctuary site. The four goals of the plans are the following:

- Goal 1 – assess the current and predicted climate impacts to sanctuary resources.
- Goal 2 – identify and implement climate adaptation and mitigation strategies for sanctuaries
- Goal 3 – advance ocean and climate literacy through sanctuaries
- Goal 4 – implement actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from sanctuary facilities and operations

Lauren also summarized NOAA's International Blue Carbon Project, and the COP26 (United Nations Climate Change Conference) wherein the U.S. signed the "ocean pledge".

Discussion followed. Shane Cantrell asked for a focused discussion and exploration for a climate resilience planning working group on the agenda in January to address this complex issue

moving forward. Sepp Haukebo asked about other sites' actions, and Lauren responded ONMS will track progress.

10:15 "Return 'Em Right" - Reducing Post-release Mortality from Barotrauma in the Gulf of Mexico – Julia Goss (NOAA's Deepwater Horizon Restoration)

Funded in Nov 2019 at \$30 million over eight years, "Return 'Em Right" is targeted at the recreational angling community with a Gulf-wide focus across five states, and was designed to restore reef fish injured by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. Barotrauma is physical damage caused by the expansion of gas as a hooked fish is lifted from depth to the surface. Project goals of "Return 'Em Right" are to improve survival of reef fish experiencing barotrauma, improve health of reef fish fisheries, and improve anglers' experience with release gear. Objectives: 1) provide gear and training to Gulf of Mexico anglers to increase survival of reef fish; 2) measure changes in use of release gear (i.e. descending devices); and 3) conduct field studies to improve understanding of best release practices and release mortality. Phase 1 launched in September 2021, with initiation of publicity and training. The Education Module is a prerequisite to receive gear, and provides training on situational awareness, best release practices, and venting/descending fish. Progress on Phase 1: 72 federally permitted anglers have completed the Education Module, with the goal of 300 by April 2022 and 1,000 by end of project. Phase 2 will launch to private anglers in Spring and Summer 2022.

Discussion followed. Scott spoke in favor of the program, and also brought up the question about the differences in return rates from the western Gulf of Mexico where the nepheloid layer is ubiquitous.

11:15 Sanctuary Update - G. P. Schmahl

The previous scheduled advisory council meeting for Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary (Flower Garden Banks NMS; FGBNMS) was canceled in September due to Hurricane Nicholas. No damage was incurred to facilities or operations, but power was lost to parts of the Galveston area in the days after the storm.

NOAA COVID-19 protocol and guidelines – Flower Garden Banks NMS remains at Phase 0, with the office still closed. NOAA is considering a “phased” reentry process. Vessel operations have been greatly restricted because of the extended duration of cruises and enclosed spaces of accommodations on the R/V *Manta*.

Dr. Richard Spinrad (former Chief Scientist for NOAA) was confirmed as the Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere, also known as the NOAA Administrator.

ONMS released its new logo, in association with the 50th anniversary (1972-2022) celebration in 2022. A variety of events are being planned. FGBNMS will also be celebrating its 30th

anniversary (1992-2022). The tagline, “Save Spectacular,” will be used throughout the celebration.

The National Marine Sanctuary System is growing with the Wisconsin Shipwreck Coast NMS officially designated in June 2021, and also with two new proposed designations, Lake Ontario and Chumash Heritage, with a Notice of Intent recently released (November 2021) for Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary in the Pacific Northwest.

FGBNMS Personnel Updates – Ryan Hannum, Research Operations Specialist, was welcomed as a new staff member. Two long-term staff are departing, Shelley Du Puy (Education & Outreach Coordinator, August 2021 retirement) and Emma Hickerson (Research Coordinator, December 2021 separation).

SAC Recruitment

Four current seats expired in June 2021:

Recreational Diving – Jesse Cancelmo

Commercial Fishing – Buddy Guindon

Diving Operations – Frank Burek

Diving Operations – Natalie Davis

Applicant Review Panel – Michael Dance, Sepp Haukebo, Sharon Kamas

G.P. thanked Buddy, Frank, and Jesse for their service, as these council members either chose not to re-apply or were term-limited.

A new video for the recruitment of advisory councils for ONMS was recently released (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hmVHmZE_9rY).

Research and Monitoring

- G.P. recognized the M/V *Fling* and staff who conducted selected mooring buoy maintenance operations for Flower Garden Banks NMS during COVID restrictions in 2021.
- In 2019, an ocean acidification buoy was installed at Flower Garden Banks NMS, anchored in a sand patch by a block constructed of three railroad wheels. An instrument package was also anchored to the seafloor near the ocean acidification buoy. In 2020, two hurricanes (Hurricane Laura in August and Hurricane Delta in October) passed directly over Flower Garden Banks NMS. No offshore cruises were conducted in 2020 due to COVID. In June 2021, Flower Garden Banks NMS conducted a research/mooring buoy cruise and reported the loss of the ocean acidification buoy, extensive damage to the instrument package, and movement of the anchoring system across the seafloor.
- The new vessel for Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, *Captain Murchison*, visited Flower Garden Banks in June 2021.

- In 2021, four research cruises were supported: 1) July - Dr. Josh Voss (FAU/HBOI) mesophotic reef study regarding connectivity between deeper and shallower reefs; 2) August - East Flower Garden Bank coral reef monitoring; 3) September - Stetson Bank monitoring; 4) water quality/West Flower Garden Bank coral reef monitoring – November. Reef report – looks good though with some bleaching reported during the last research cruise. When bleaching has occurred at Flower Garden Banks NMS, it's typically late in the year. Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease was not observed.
- G.P. announced an upcoming study, “Determining Habitat Requirements and Connectivity for Reef Fishes in the Gulf of Mexico” with Dr. Jay Rooker (Texas A&M University at Galveston) as the principal investigator. The \$740,620 study will be conducted over 2021-2025, with acoustic transceivers installed at various reefs and banks in Flower Garden Banks NMS, with a concentrated acoustic array at East Flower Garden Bank. FGBNMS Advisory Council Michael Dance also is an investigator on this project.

Education

- A new mesophotic habitat webpage was recently posted on the FGBNMS website: <https://flowergarden.noaa.gov/about/mesophotic.html>.
- Get Into Your Sanctuary for Flower Garden Banks NMS featured an online Photo Safari Scavenger Hunt.
- Joselyn Hook, the newest Virtual Student Federal Service (VSFS) intern with Flower Garden Banks NMS, has been working on social media posts for the sanctuary.
- NOAA's Ocean Guardian School program in Texas consisted of 5 regional schools for the 2020/2021 school year, and 4 schools for the 2021/2022 school year.
- Recent “Turn the Tide” teacher workshops provided education on climate change.
- The WAVES Project (<https://www.wavesproject.org/>), a program that uses wounded veterans who dive, continues plans for a Lionfish Removal Cruise at Stetson Bank using Tre Charters (Galveston).
- A Flower Garden Banks NMS History Project is being conducted by volunteer Alan Wilde.

Management

Funds obtained from the settlement of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill are being used to provide restoration to injured Mesophotic and Deep Benthic Communities (MDBC). Projects include:

1. Mapping, ground-truthing and predictive habitat modeling project
2. Habitat assessment and evaluation project
3. Active management and protection project
4. Coral propagation technique development project

G.P. has been involved in the Active Management and Projection project (#3 above). Estimated duration of this phase is 7-8 years with estimated budget of \$20.6M. Several FGBNMS Advisory Council members participated in a mapping exercise to spatially prioritize mesophotic and deep

benthic communities in the Gulf of Mexico.

Following an updated Condition Report for Flower Garden Banks NMS, the next step will be updating the 2012 Management Plan. Key areas of focus of the 2012 plan included input from Advisory Council working groups in the following areas: sanctuary expansion, education and outreach, research and monitoring, resource protection, visitor use, and operations and administration. The FGBNMS Condition Report, an assessment of the status and trends of sanctuary resources, will be finalized prior to the next management plan review and has progressed with various meetings and data gathering. Future workshops will be scheduled, anticipated in April 2022, including with advisory council member participation.

November is Native American Heritage Month. In recognition of this, G.P. offered the following indigenous land (and waters) acknowledgement. This acknowledgement was modified from one obtained by Leslie Clift from an Indigenous Peoples Day ceremony at Armand Bayou Nature Center in October 2021:

We invite you to join us in quiet reflection as we acknowledge that the land that we now call the upper Texas coast was once the original homeland of countless groups of Indigenous peoples. Whenever you walk on this land or use the coastal waters, you are moving through areas where they lived in harmony with nature, undisturbed, thriving with one another, worshipping together. We recognize the very necessary act of acknowledging the Native communities who were the longest serving stewards of this land and these waters; to recognize people that were introduced to pathogens that stressed their survival; to recognize people that were pushed out and away from their homes or assimilated. As we work to preserve and protect the waters to which we have been entrusted, we believe it is crucial to also recognize this history in order to create a more inclusive and open culture now and into the future.

11:51 SAC Charter - Brian Shmaefsky and Frank Burek

Brian Shmaefsky shared a slideshow presentation of recommendations from the advisory council's Charter Subcommittee, co-chaired by Brian and Frank Burek. Changes to the charter included: 1) Updated language to be consistent across the National Marine Sanctuary System regarding the ONMS description, policy, vision, and mission statements; 2) Updated the FGBNMS description, following the sanctuary's recent expansion process; and 3) Added a new section on duties and responsibilities for voting members under Council Roles. **All recommendations were approved unanimously.**

Discussion followed. Frank recommended the Charter Subcommittee remain a standing group. Jesse Cancelmo asked the Charter Subcommittee, or a working group be formed at the next advisory council meeting in 2022, to develop a concise guide to rules for conducting meetings and making decisions as a group.

1:24 New Business

No new business.

1:27 Meeting Adjourned

Frank Burek motioned to adjourn, seconded by Scott Hickman. All in favor. Approved.

Next SAC Meeting scheduled for Tuesday, January 18, 2022.

FGBNMS Advisory Council

Constituent Updates and Updates from FGBNMS Working Groups and Subcommittees

Jake Emmert (Conservation)

The Moody Gardens Scientific Dive Team recently supported the Voss Lab that completed a 5-day research expedition to Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary (FGBNMS) as part of a collaborative NOAA CYCLE project with Dr. Santiago Herrera. The overall goal of this project, funded by NOAA's National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science and Office of Ocean Exploration and Research, is to investigate connectivity of coral, sponge, and fish species between shallow and mesophotic coral ecosystems of FGBNMS including the new sanctuary expansion areas. For this trip we were limited to only 5 divers due to COVID-19 safety protocols. The divers consisted of PI and executive director of the Cooperative Institute for Ocean Exploration Research and Technology (CIOERT), Joshua Voss, Voss Lab graduate students Ryan Eckert, Alexis Sturm, and Ashley Carrerio, and long-time collaborator and colleague, Moody Gardens Dive Safety Officer Jake Emmert. Despite being short on science crew, during 5 days aboard R/V *MANTA* we collected more than 300 coral (*Stephanocoenia intersepta*, *Orbicella faveolata*) and sponge (*Xestospongia muta*) samples from shallow and mesophotic depths over 19 shallow and technical Trimix SCUBA dives. These samples will be combined with samples collected in 2018 to determine the levels of vertical and horizontal connectivity between coral and sponge populations in the northwest Gulf of Mexico using single nucleotide polymorphism (SNP) genetic markers as a part of Ryan Eckert's (former FGBNMS scientist) dissertation research. [Link](#) for photos and original post.

Reciprocity agreement between Moody Gardens and NOAA for working and scientific diving was renewed for a 5-year term.

Planning continues for hosting 2022 American Academy of Underwater Sciences Annual Symposium

Frank Burek (Dive Operations)

Spent some time on several trips doing nature photography and coordinating with the FGBNMS Staff. Coordinated the work of the SAC's Charter Subcommittee and Artificial Reef Working Group. Provided information on the Sanctuary activities to Houston Underwater Photographic Society (HUPS) and the Texas Gulf Coast Council of Diving Clubs (TGCC) clubs. Chaired 3 TGCC meetings and covered various Sanctuary topics. Elected President and Acting 2nd Vice President (Regulatory) for TGCC for 2022. The TGCC is currently planning a club awards luncheon for January 29, 2022 at Bayland Community Center. The 2020 Houston Underwater Film Festival (HUFF), held June 26 & 27, 2021 was a success. HUPS has also scheduled its second Houston Underwater Film Festival (HUFF) – April 2 & 3, 2022 at MATCH. For 2021, TGCC continues a 28-year tradition of offering support to members and their families with a dive community memorial college scholarship program. This year's \$500 award went to William Moran. This award is in memory of Jack Allyn, Greg Grimes, Jean Himes, Anne Millioud, Clint Moore, John Petty, Michael Szewczyk, Randy Widaman and Dick Zingula. Please note that 3 of these 9 members (Clint, Randy and Dick) are past SAC members.

Dr. Brooke Shipley (Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's Artificial Reef Program)

A few platform decommissionings are in process in the offshore regions of the High Island region. The projected completion of these projects is in November 2021. A single platform was recently deployed in the Padre North region. The 8-pile PN-956 B was towed and deployed at the PN-A-42 reef site.

Emma Hickerson recently notified TPWD that the buoy at the HI-A-389 platform is missing. TPWD has notified the USCG about the missing private aid to navigation. Upon contracting a vendor for buoy maintenance and installation, the HI-A-389 buoy will be replaced. TPWD is unable to predict when the contract and installation may occur.

Artificial Reef Working Group

The team has compiled a list of 19 AR related subjects. These will be developed and researched further for future discussions with the SAC. Dr. Paul Sammarco's planned 45-minute presentation for the November 17, 2021 SAC meeting was moved to 2022. Dr. Ruth Perry will now chair this Working Group, with Frank Burek's departure on the advisory council.

Visitor Permit Program Working Group

Natalie Davis and Sepp Haukebo (chair and co-chair of the visitor permit working group) had a phone call with Matt Kendall, the author on the study regarding visitor use at Gray's Reef. We discussed how different technologies (especially acoustic and photo/video monitoring) could make for a compelling study at FGBNMS. Currently we do not have any record through NOAA how many visitors are utilizing the sanctuary. We have learned from other studies including ONMS' Sanctuary Soundscapes Program, that additional environmental information could be gleaned from hydroacoustic monitoring including detection of sound producing marine mammals and fish (including detection of pre and intra-spawning behavior). We are also hoping to learn more about the research between TAMUG and FGBNMS staff on the acoustic research that is underway, of which would be a great topic of discussion at a future SAC meeting. Lastly, we wanted to ask the rest of the SAC and GP if there are any additional thoughts on how these concurrent efforts can help inform the direction, objectives, and timeline of the working group.