

**FLOWER GARDEN BANKS NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY**  
**Sanctuary Advisory Council**  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**September 14, 2022**

**HYBRID MEETING**

**Meeting Attendance Roster:**

Sepp Haukebo, Recreational Diving, Present  
Janavi Mahimtura Folmsbee, Recreational Diving, Absent  
Andy Lewis, Diving Operations, Present  
Kristen Maples, Diving Operations, Absent  
Ruth Perry, Oil and Gas Industry, Present  
Steve Hamm, Oil and Gas Industry, Present virtually  
Scott Hickman, Fishing - Recreational, Absent  
Robert Kirschner, Fishing - Recreational, Absent  
Shane Cantrell, Fishing - Commercial, Absent  
Harris “HD” Pappas, Fishing - Commercial, Present  
Adrienne Simoes Correa, Research, Present  
Michael Dance, Research, Present virtually  
Brian Shmaefsky, Education, Present  
Sharon Kamas, Education, Absent  
Joanie Steinhaus, Conservation, Present  
Jake Emmert, Conservation, Absent  
James Sinclair, BSEE (non-voting), Present  
Alicia Caporaso, BOEM (non-voting), Present virtually  
Adam Peterson, USCG (non-voting), Present virtually  
Rusty Swafford, NOAA Fisheries (non-voting), Absent  
Brooke Shipley, TPWD (non-voting), Present  
John O’Malley (NOAA OLE (non-voting)), Present  
G.P. Schmahl, Sanctuary Superintendent (non-voting), Absent

**Total voting member attendance:** 9 of 16 voting members

**Others in Attendance:**

Leslie Clift, Kelly Drinnen, Michelle Johnston, Ryan Hannum, Kelly Martin, Marissa Nuttall, Sam Davidson (volunteer), Chris Ahr, Frank Burek, Jesse Cancelmo, Duane Smith, Terry Palmer, Robert Baker, Matthew Walia, Tristan Baurick, Marilyn Brandt, Natalie Davis, Joshua Harvey, Tarice Taylor, Greg Whitaker (Moody Gardens), Tershara Matthews (BOEM), Ken Fountain, Annie Marie Kelm, Drew Martin, Michelle Nannen (BOEM), Mariana Steen, Cat

**10:00 Welcome and Announcements – Kelly Drinnen/Leslie Clift**

Today’s hybrid meeting, located at and hosted by Moody Gardens, is being run through a webinar and is not being recorded.

### **10:18 Administrative Business – Sepp Haukebo (Vice-Chair, Recreational Diving)**

Adoption of Agenda – Motion from Adrienne Correa (Research), second from Andy Lewis (Dive Operations). No objections on the draft agenda, motion approved.

Adoption of Minutes – Motion to approve minutes from April 13, 2022 meeting from Andy Lewis, second from HD Pappas (Commercial Fishing). One abstention from Ruth Perry (Oil & Gas Industry). No objections on the draft minutes, motion approved.

### **10:15 Member Recognition (Sepp Haukebo/Leslie Clift)**

The following advisory council members recently rolled off or have seats expiring soon, were recognized for their service, and were presented plaques:

- Natalie Davis (Dive Operations 2015-2021)
- Frank Burek (Dive Operations 2018-2022)
- Scott Hickman (Recreational Fishing 2013-2022, Chair 2019-2021)
- Ruth Perry (Oil & Gas Industry 2019-2022)
- Adrienne Correa (Research 2015-2022)
- Jesse Cancelmo (Recreational Diving 2011-2022)
- Buddy Guindon (Commercial Fishing 2015-2022)
- Sharon Kamas (Education 2019-2022)
- Robert Kirschner (Recreational Fishing 2019-2022)

### **10:30 Constituent Updates**

Andy Lewis (Recreational Diving) – M/V *Fling* appreciates mooring buoy maintenance offshore.

Ruth Perry (Oil & Gas Industry) – no active lease sale has occurred in the Gulf of Mexico in ~2 years, but activity should be picking up in March 2023 with a lease sale. Offshore wind is rapidly progressing with lots of interest. Potential collaboration with the sanctuary includes buoys, new sensors, and monitoring related to offshore wind. Lots of interest in the shallow geologic features for offshore carbon capture.

Steve Hamm (Oil & Gas Industry) – reported the Inflation Reduction Act expanded tax on methane release, which could lead to reductions in methane releases.

Brooke Shipley (Texas Parks & Wildlife) – reported on the recent decommissioning of HIA370.

Joanie Steinhaus (Conservation) – Turtle Island Restoration Network (TIRN) had a busy summer with 34 clean-ups. TIRN is conducting a microplastic study of seawater in conjunction with FGBNMS to understand impacts on marine wildlife and humans, and hopes to publish 5-year report in 2025. A record number (300+) of loggerhead sea turtles have stranded, cause unknown but underweight and lethargic. TIRN is working on a state-wide ban on balloon releases, similar to Galveston's ban. Sea turtle nests on Texas coast: 38 Kemp's Ridley nests and 39 green sea turtle nests. 44 beach clean-ups were conducted with 1,266 pounds of trash collected including 176 balloons and almost 25,000 cigarette butts. TIRN has a new office building.

Sepp Haukebo (Recreational Diving) – Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) reorganized/restructured with our major focus on climate ready fisheries. Along the East and

West coasts, many fish stocks are shifting further north. In the Gulf, the jury still seems to be out on how our fish stocks will be impacted, many predict that fish will move further offshore to find cooler waters. Some species ranges from the Caribbean may actually expand into the Gulf and may benefit from the impacts of climate change. Right now, it is incredibly important for the research and management community to address shifting stocks and transboundary issues caused by climate change while continuing to meet the social and economic objectives of fisheries. A Gulf of Mexico workshop on Best Practices in Ecological Resilience was recently held. Sepp discussed with Dr. Jay Rooker at Texas A&M University Galveston to better understand his project looking at how reef fishes use different banks in the Gulf of Mexico and if any of that work can help predict shifts in fish assemblages at the banks based on predicted changes to the reef ecosystem from climate change.

Adrienne Correa (Research) – has noticed increased trend in expert research in Gulf of Mexico and Flower Garden Banks NMS. Encourages collaboration between sanctuary and research. Difficulty in accessing sanctuary due to distance and research vessels. Adrienne is very concerned about Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease (SCTLD) and response due to remoteness of sanctuary. Adrienne noted the involvement of sanctuary advisory council with Condition Report and Climate Vulnerability Assessment workshops. Adrienne mentioned the new release of Rates of Future Climate Change in Gulf of Mexico & Caribbean Sea.

Michael Dance (Research) – reported on his joint project with Dr. Dan Holstein and Dr. Jay Rooker, looking at connectivity of reef fishes across the Gulf of Mexico. Currently, 20 offshore banks have equipment installed related to this project. At East Flower Garden Bank, fine-scale movement (~1 meter) is being researched for several fish species (e.g., gray snapper, yellowmouth grouper, scamp, lionfish, and a couple of shark species). An upcoming fish tagging trip at expansion banks will happen soon.

HD Pappas (Commercial Fishing) – reported fishing during the busy summer but with high fuel costs and having to go further offshore (double the distance) to catch same amount of fish.

Question from Sepp: I've heard reports from around the Gulf that this was a hard summer for commercial reef fishermen in the Gulf, lots of reports of localized depletion, some growth overfishing.

HD: That was also the case for us. There's definitely localized depletion of the areas we fish on the Texas coast.

John O'Malley (NOAA OLE) – Assistant Special Agent in Charge – Corpus Christi to Panama City, Florida investigations, will be presenting later today.

Adam Peterson (USCG) – reported an increase in violations offshore of Florida. NOAA has not recommended catch seizures, federals are aware of the increase but not if it's expanding to FGBNMS. Contact 281-464-4583 for violations in Gulf of Mexico.

Alicia Caporaso (BOEM) – mentioned the Environmental Impact Statement released later this month for oil lease sales; 2 presentations today from BOEM; Phase 3 of Information Transfer Meeting for Gulf of Mexico with FGBNMS presentations will occur this afternoon.

Brian Shmaefsky (Education) – reported school outreach has begun again after the pandemic, targeting elementary and middle schools with education/outreach re: FGBNMS; participated in and gave presentations for recent Nature Fest; one of his graduate students partnered with TIRN to build a watershed table that demonstrates flooding/drought and overall water flow in the greater region; continues to be environmental compliance representative for Space Port operations including space flights to deliver commerce. Brian recently connected with Children’s Climate Literacy Foundation and is working to get place-based teachers involved through collaboration with Baylor and University of Arkansas.

### **11:15 Sanctuary Update – Kelly Drinnen and Dr. Michelle Johnston (FGBNMS)**

Staffing changes – Michelle Johnston as new Research Coordinator, Kelly O’Connell as Research Specialist (Stetson Bank LTM & marine debris) and Oliva Eisenbach as Research Specialist. Summer seasonal divers – Donavon French, Jacque Emmert, Jessica Lee. Mesophotic and Deep Benthic Communities Project staff – Kelly Martin and Sasha Francis.

SAC Recruitment – 5 seats: Education, Oil & Gas Industry, Recreational Fishing, Recreational Diving, and Research. FGBNMS received 10 applications. Appointment announcements will be made before the next advisory council meeting. Thank you to those advisory council members who extended their service so that recruitment could be realigned to occur once each year.

Cheers to 30 Years! – 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary events for FGBNMS were conducted through summer community charity events with Bakfish Brewery’s Un-Be-Reef-able craft beer brewed specifically for the sanctuary. Events were held at a local farmer’s market and at Penny’s Beer Garden in Dickinson, TX. Some proceeds (\$~500) went to the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation. Also conducted 3 fish identification classes (two in-person classes and one online) wherein Reef Environmental Education Foundation (REEF) survey kits were distributed to participants for surveying underwater fish populations at FGBNMS. New outreach products include: logos, tents, playing card deck with FGBNMS fish, sea fans, recycled and recyclable aluminum cups, and customized bean bag toss game.

Instagram was approved for FGBNMS (@flowergardenbanksnms) – June 24 was first post with 166 followers already. Instagram posts mirror most posts from Facebook.

New additions to sanctuary’s website include:

- Updated “About The Sanctuary” webpages with high resolution bathymetry of the sanctuary’s banks and reefs;
- Long-term monitoring reports for 2020;
- 2021 Annual Report for East and West Flower Garden Banks;
- 2021 Research Report; and
- Conditions Dashboard (geared for visitors (not navigation) as it’s only satellite data).

Art Exhibits:

- Art installation by Eepi Chat at Seawolf Park in Galveston about FGBNMS;
- Sea Grant 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary exhibit of FGBNMS at Bush Library in College Station; and
- Janavi Mahimtura Folmsbee’s art installation at Houston’s Intercontinental Airport.

The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of sanctuary system has featured a series of web stories, and has created a series of posters for each of the national marine sanctuaries (projected November for FGBNMS) and stamps for each site in the National Marine Sanctuary System.

### Research & Monitoring

The annual boatyard period ensures R/V *Manta* is properly maintained which increases performance and longevity. The vessel went into the shipyard in May (much later than usual) and came out in July. In addition to being late out of the shipyard, the vessel is also trying to catch up on postponed research due to the pandemic. As a result, this field season will now continue into October. Thank you to NOAA Corps Officer Kait Brogan who is restructuring the boatyard period so that it occurs in the winter, and is navigating this change through budget planning.

Mooring Buoys – The M/V *Fling* helped with mooring buoy maintenance at FGBNMS. All moorings have now been inspected by FGBNMS, with some equipment replacement. Number of buoys currently: East Flower Garden Bank– 4 buoys, West Flower Garden Bank – 3 buoys, Stetson Bank – 2 buoys. Recent additional mooring cruise for drilling was postponed to early October due to SCTL D emergency response plan. Drilling certifications have expired for FGBNMS staff so research divers will get re-certified first before new moorings can be drilled.

Mesophotic and Deep Benthic Communities – an offshore cruise was conducted with new equipment when the remotely operated vehicle (ROV) *Beagle* was used. Mesophotic corals, species impacted from Deepwater Horizon oil spill, were collected for rearing at NOAA’s Galveston Lab and are thriving.

Long-term monitoring for Stetson Bank was recently conducted.

Tagging and acoustic tracking of reef fish at FGBNMS occurred recently through the Reef Fish Connectivity Project, wherein underwater acoustic receivers were deployed and several fish species were tagged via underwater fish surgeries. Some lionfish were also tagged (not removed).

The Lionfish Invitational resumed with a trip in June 2022: 228 lionfish removed, 3 tagged. A new state record of a lionfish measuring 445 mm (17.5 in.) was caught by Alex Fogg which indicates a size class explosion during covid when removals were halted. These lionfish will be dissected later this year including at Galveston College. Unfortunately, the second Lionfish Invitational in September was canceled due to mechanical difficulties on the M/V *Fling*.

The National Coral Reef Monitoring Program (NCRMP) collects data at FGBNMS every few years. FGBNMS and NCRMP are trying to sync monitoring efforts between NCRMP and methods using by FGBNMS. Researchers will conduct a comparison study of transects using NCRMP monitoring protocol and FGBNMS monitoring protocol. FGBMS will move to random stratified design, while continuing with long-term monitoring sites. Of special note: during the first NCRMP cruise during the week of August 30-September 2, 2022, no signs of lesions on corals (SCTL D-like (Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease) were observed. However, coral lesions were reported during the second NCRMP cruise.

Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease - FGBNMS finalized its SCTL D Response Plan last year in 2021. In September 2002 when coral lesions were observed at East and West Flower Garden Banks, this emergency response plan was activated with key partners from Moody Gardens, Florida Atlantic University (FAU), and Rice University. The Response Plan first calls for action within FGBNMS study sites (100m x 100m; treatable by 10 divers). SCTL D tends to present first in highly susceptible species such as brain corals and star corals, which were both impacted with coral lesions at FGBNMS. During the 4-day SCTL D cruise, 141 samples were collected including mucus samples for probiotic screening, samples for RNA extraction, and samples for Blake Ushijima at the University of North Carolina Wilmington who is trying to develop a probiotic treatment. Reports of SCTL D-like lesions are currently mostly small and patchy. The progression of treated corals within study sites will be monitored. Approximately 120 coral colonies were treated at East and West Flower Garden Banks with hand-held syringes containing an antibiotic putty paste supplied by FAU. Scooter surveys were completed for visual counts (density). Random transects suggest disease is widespread throughout the reef across the coral cap. Benthic photo surveys were conducted for monitoring. Additionally, 10 coral colonies were collected and brought to Moody Gardens for rearing for genetic banking, with more to come in the next few months. Lionfish invaded in 2011 but FGBNMS has shown resilience through its healthy fish populations, and the hope for resilience is the same for this coral disease outbreak.

Discussion followed. Sepp asked about SCTL D treatment success. Michelle responded treatments have been shown to stop the disease progression, but lesions have popped up elsewhere on the same coral head. Sepp asked what advisory council members can do. Michelle responded divers will be needed to help treat and that she foresees training divers on treatment. She added if this outbreak is not SCTL D, the treatment will not hurt corals. Adrienne is investigating mechanisms for rapid response through the National Science Foundation to fund research to understand fate of corals over time, histopathology, and genomic response. She added it has been difficult to identify the causative agent of SCTL D. The Dive Safety Officers at Texas State Aquarium and Audubon will soon become involved in the response. Joanie asked about treatment protocol for consecutive treatments on the same coral head. Michelle responded a couple of weeks, but FGBNMS is remote with high fuel costs.

## **LUNCH**

### **1:10 BOEM's Offshore Wind Program in Gulf of Mexico – Tershara Matthews (BOEM)**

Tershara Matthews (BOEM, Chief, Emerging Programs, Gulf of Mexico Regional Office) provided an overview of BOEM's Renewable Energy Process in the Gulf of Mexico beginning with Louisiana Governor Edwards requesting a Task Force in October 2020. In December 2020, the Gulf of Mexico responded, holding an inaugural Gulf of Mexico Regional Task Force meeting in June 2021. An advantage identified in the Gulf of Mexico is the potential to leverage existing capabilities due to the proximity of the oil and gas supply chain. A challenge identified is major hurricanes could increase turbine and substructure costs. Currently, the Renewable Energy Process is focused on pre-lease activities. BOEM issued a Request for Interest (39 public comments received including 10 from industry) and a Call for Information Area (40 public comments received, including 8 from industry). Due to comments, BOEM moved the study area to 400 m water depth from 1300 m, with another public comment period. Some major comments

received on the Call for Information Area include: request for 20 nm Coastline Buffer for Migratory Birds, as well as for Menhaden Fisheries for flyovers; request for 100-400 m Buffer for Rice's Whale; request for exclusion of high shrimping areas. Areas off Mississippi will be considered separately since comments came in after the period closed. The three types of offshore wind turbine structures are monopiles, jackets, and floating substructures (> 60 m). BOEM scheduled many stakeholder engagement meetings included fishery meetings, industry meetings, state agency meetings, and migratory bird coordination meetings. An Ocean Planning Model is being developed that weights locations relative to each other based on a given criteria. This model also includes a Deconflicting Process. As a result, a total of 2 million acres were identified as Wind Energy Area (WEA) Options, representing 13 deconflicted areas. WEA Option I (Galveston) is 546,645 acres. WEA Option M (Lake Charles) is 188,023 acres. Tershara shared the milestones of the Gulf of Mexico Offshore Wind Energy Leasing, including the release of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement in July 2022. The public comment period was extended and closed Sept 2, 2022. Next steps include releasing the final Environmental Assessment with a Proposed Lease Auction slated by end of 2023.

Discussion followed. Sepp asked about WEA proximity to FGBNMS. Tershara responded BOEM excluded no-activity zones and also all banks and reefs of FGBNMS. Sepp asked if offshore wind energy development would create a lot of artificial reef structure and questioned what the structures would look like. Ruth and Tershara responded monopiles or jackets – steel structures with scour protection to protect cables and bases. Ruth added the Gulf of Mexico is expected to have a lower yield than the East coast, with potential distances between structures of 1.5nm. Depending on sizes of leases, BOEM is targeting 1-2 GW with 60-90 turbines to be commercially viable. Jesse Cancelmo asked if historical shipwrecks will be disturbed. Tershara responded shipwrecks will be excluded and that site analyses will be used to assess hazards before structure is placed. Michael Dance asked if these sites will be accessible to recreational anglers. Tershara responded BOEM will not restrict access, though operators might. Ruth Perry said the industry recommends a 500 m buffer. East coast has no restrictions except during construction. Thus, Gulf of Mexico Wind Energy Areas will likely also be open to recreational diving and fishing. Joanie asked about birds. Tershara responded BOEM is working with groups on buffer zones (e.g., 20 nm buffer off coastline to reduce traffic). Additionally, radars are being added to the turbine, turbines will be turned off during peak migration flyovers, structures will be painted specifically for bird avoidance.

### **1:40 Gulf of Mexico Renewable Energy Lease Issuance Draft Environmental Assessment – Michelle Nannen (BOEM)**

Michelle Nannen, (BOEM, Environmental Scientist, New Orleans Office) presented an overview of the Gulf of Mexico Renewable Energy Lease Issuance of a Draft Environmental Assessment (EA), a programmatic assessment of the impacts of issuing leases and the associated site assessment and site characterization activities. The EA did not include cable routes for specific projects or visual impacts of a project, and differed from Atlantic wind energy lease issuance EAs. Activities within the Proposed Action of this EA do not include the installation of meteorological (“met”) towers, as this technology is outdated. The Call Area extends off Texas and Louisiana to a water depth of 400m. Up to 18 leases will be issued in the Call Area, with no more than 6-8 leases issued per lease sale. BOEM just completed a draft environmental impact statement of Site Characterization (e.g., temporary placement of meteorological buoys and

oceanographic devices) and Site Assessment Activities (e.g., geophysical, geotechnical, biological, and archaeological surveys). Non-routine events (e.g., strikes/collisions, unintentional releases into the environment, and response activities) were also analyzed, as were physical, biological, and social resources. Resources eliminated from further consideration because of anticipated Negligible impacts include the following: water quality, pelagic communities and habitats, birds, bats, land use and coastal infrastructure, commercial fisheries, recreational fishing, recreation, environmental justice, and demographics and employment. Resources anticipated to have Minor or greater impacts from Impact-Producing Factors (e.g., noise, bottom disturbance, unintentional releases, strikes and collisions) include the following: air quality, coastal communities and habitats, benthic communities and habitats, fish and invertebrates, marine mammals, sea turtles, and cultural, historical, and archeological resources. The application of protective measures can reduce or eliminate the potential impacts to some resources. All available blocks within the Call Area may be offered with the exception of whole and partial blocks located within Flower Garden Banks NMS. Alternatives range from Alternative A (“No Action”) to Alternative B (lease issuance) to Alternative C (lease issuance except whole or partial Topographic Features Stipulation Blocks). BOEM is currently developing Gulf of Mexico-specific lease stipulations and Standard Operating Conditions through regulations and ongoing consultations with appropriate resource agencies. BOEM is currently in the 30-day comment period with an extension granted until Sept 2, 2022 (45-day period). BOEM’s next steps are to publish the final EA and Final Sale Notice, with an expected sale date of early 2023.

Discussion followed. Michelle Nannen clarified that assessments for bird impacts are not addressed at this point in the process. Once the sale is approved for the lease, that assessment would then take place.

#### **1:45 FGBNMS Condition Report – Dr. Michelle Johnston (FGBNMS)**

Dr. Michelle Johnston provided an update on the status of the updated FGBNMS Condition Report. Last conducted in 2008, new questions were added to assess Ecosystem Services (e.g., Sense of Place, Heritage, Commercial Harvest). Workshops were held in April and May with multiple advisory council members and other experts. Rating scheme ranged from Good to Poor and trends were also assessed. Expert “Confidence” was also captured for the first time. Questions were first addressed for East and West Flower Garden Banks & Stetson, and then again separately for the newly expanded areas. Data were presented to workshop participants for each of the questions (e.g., benthic cover, water quality, density estimates). Afterwards, participants anonymously voted on a status rating. For the most part, the sanctuary is in good shape with most ratings of Good, and Good/Fair. Risk to Human Health was rated as Fair due to elevated levels of ciguatera in fish tissue. Ecosystem Service expert ratings ranged from Good to Good/Fair. Commercial harvest data was difficult to obtain, and thus its rating was uncertain. The next step is the report-writing phase with a draft expected in mid-2023.

Discussion followed. Sepp asked about adding into this report regarding the recent development of seeing SCTL-like symptoms at East and West Flower Garden Banks. Michelle responded aspects of the report will be added as we move forward in understanding SCTL in our sanctuary.



## **2:00 Climate Vulnerability Assessment – Sara Hutto and Leslie Cliff**

Sara Hutto (Climate Change Coordinator, Greater Farrallones NMS) and Leslie provided an update on the rapid Climate Vulnerability Assessment for Flower Garden Banks NMS. This process, used elsewhere in the National Marine Sanctuary System, serves to: 1) Allow managers to engage with science of climate change as pertains to their concerns; 2) Encourage creation of adaptation strategies; and 3) *Long-term*: empower managers to regularly consider implications of climate change. Workshops were conducted July 27-28, 2022, with objectives to: 1) Provide information about current and projected priority climate conditions for FGBNMS and apply this knowledge to key habitats and species to determine their vulnerability to changing conditions; 2) Generate a vulnerability score for key habitats and species; and 3) Use workshop material to draft a FGBNMS Climate Vulnerability Assessment, which will be an important resource to accompany the Condition Report and help guide the next FGBNMS Management Plan. The three climate stressors analyzed were sea surface temperature, ocean acidification, and storm severity. Workshop participants were distributed into break-out groups to evaluate habitats (mesophotic and shallow water) and wildlife (invertebrates and fish). Adaptation strategies were also identified and discussed. One adaptation strategy identified (issuance of permit for lionfish removals by M/V *Fling* divemasters) was immediately implemented after this workshop, highlighting an example of dynamic management.

## **2:30 Enforcement – John O'Malley (NOAA OLE)**

Office of Law Enforcement (OLE) is the enforcement element of NOAA and the only Federal agency dedicated full time to the protection and conservation of our nation's living marine resources. OLE Special Agents and Enforcement Officers conduct complex criminal and civil investigations, board vessels fishing at sea, inspect fish dealers and processing plants, review sales of wildlife products on the Internet and conduct patrols on land, in the air, and at sea. Prosecution of violations occur civilly and criminally. Violators face fines, loss of fish, prison, forfeiture of assets, and permit sanctions through civil and criminal prosecution. OLE agents and officers work with agents and officers of many different federal and state agencies to conduct investigations and patrols. OLE Special Agents and Enforcement Officers are stationed along the coast throughout the US, including Puerto Rico and USVI; Guam, American Samoa, and the Solomon Islands. OLE has 5 divisional offices with headquarters in Maryland. The Southeast Division has 18 Special Agents and 18 Enforcement Officers. Chris Ahr is one of Texas' Special Agents and is located in League City. OLE can enforce fisheries regulations and wildlife laws on US fishing vessels anywhere and on any vessel in federal waters from 3 miles to 200 miles offshore at the EEZ boundary line. Agents investigate illegal seafood importation of the US, and commerce of unlawfully harvested aquatic resources. Specifically, for the Gulf of Mexico, OLE investigates the unlawful harvest and/or sale of Red Snapper. OLE investigates violations of the ESA involving sea turtles, as well as violations of the Marine Mammal Protection Act involving whales and dolphins. OLE, along with Texas Parks & Wildlife Department and U.S. Coast Guard, patrol FGBNMS. Potential sanctuary issues: unlawful harvest/take of sanctuary resources, corals/live rock may be taken for personal use or the aquarium trade; tropical fish for home aquariums; and out of season harvest.

FY2022 Quarter 3 Enforcement Overview Snapshot for Gulf of Mexico: 192 opened incidents, 7 cases referred to General Counsel at the US Department of Justice, and 30

summary settlements. OLE had 51 overall enforcement referrals from Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council enforcement patrols. Enforcement highlights include targeted patrols in Florida and Texas regarding dolphin interactions with a recent successful removal. Dolphin was deemed to not be releasable back into the wild due to injuries associated with human impacts. OLE also conducts port inspections. Special Operations/Patrols were also conducted regarding inspections of turtle exclusion devices (TEDs), as well as gag grouper and mutton snapper spawning aggregations. Current spotlights are on outreach and enforcement, unpermitted charter operations, TED requirements, and dolphin feeding/harassment issues. The Fish Rules app covers state and federal regulations including FGBNMS special notes (under commercial app, not recreational).

**3:00 Public Comment**

No public comments.

**3:15 New Business**

None

**3:25 Meeting Adjourned**

Brooke Shipley motioned to adjourn, seconded by Joanie Steinhaus. All in favor. Approved.

Next SAC Meeting scheduled for Wednesday, November 15, 2022.