

Action Plans

3.1 Introduction

Action plans identify a series of steps to be carried out to address priority issues in FGBNMS over the next five years. They take on two different forms – issue-driven and program-driven. Issue-driven action plans focus on a particular concern, such as reducing conflicts among sanctuary visitors. Program-driven action plans are related directly to program areas of FGBNMS, such as research or education, and cross through the issue areas.

Action plans are a collection of strategies sharing common management objectives. The plans provide an organized structure and process for implementing these strategies over the next five years, including a description of the required activities and a schedule for implementation. This management plan, and the action plans contained within it, is not intended to be comprehensive in scope. Rather it is designed as a strategic document that will address those priority issues that can be realistically accomplished in a five-year time frame.

How were action plans developed?

Action plans arose from issues and concerns that were identified in the State of the Sanctuary Report and during the public scoping process in October 2006. After compiling and categorizing the areas of concern, FGBNMS staff worked with the sanctuary advisory council to evaluate and prioritize the issues. The council currently consists of 21 members: 16 non-governmental voting members and 5 governmental non-voting members. The 16 voting council seats represent a variety of regional interests and stakeholders, including: recreational diving, diving operations, oil and gas industry, conservation, education, research, commercial fishing, and recreational fishing. The governmental representatives include: Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, U.S. Coast Guard, NOAA Fisheries, NOAA Office for Law Enforcement, and Environmental Protection Agency. The council serves as a forum for consultation and deliberation among its members and as a source of advice to the sanctuary superintendent regarding the management of FGBNMS. The combined expertise and experience of these individuals are a valuable and effective resource for the sanctuary superintendent.

Six categories were selected as the top priority subjects for the sanctuary to address: boundary expansion, education/outreach, enforcement, fishing impacts, pollution discharge, and visitor use. Subcommittees were formed including members from the sanctuary advisory council and FGBNMS staff for each issue area. Additional issues, such as administration and performance evaluation, were addressed primarily by the sanctuary staff. Over the following two years, the issues were examined through subcommittee meetings and public workshops. As a result, some issues were repackaged or incorporated into other issue areas. The following list represents the final set of action plans contained in this management plan:

- Sanctuary Expansion Action Plan (SEAP)
- Education and Outreach Action Plan (EOAP)
- Resource Protection Action Plan (RPAP)

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- Research and Monitoring Action Plan (RMAP)
 - Visitor Use Action Plan (VUAP)
 - Operations and Administration Action Plan (OAAP).

How will they be evaluated?

With this management plan, FGBNMS is initiating a performance measurement process in order to establish a baseline of information that can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of site management over time. Implementation of each action plan will be evaluated through one or more performance measure(s). A table at the end of each action plan contains measures specific to the action plan strategies, though not all strategies will have an associated performance measure.

Ongoing and routine performance evaluation is an emerging priority for ONMS as part of an effort to improve overall management of sanctuaries. Both site-specific and national efforts are underway to better understand the FGBNMS staff's ability to meet stated objectives and to address the issues identified in this management plan.

Performance evaluation has many benefits, including:

- Identifying successful or less successful efforts of FGBNMS management;
- Keeping the public, Congress, and other interested parties apprised of FGBNMS effectiveness;
- Helping FGBNMS management identify resource gaps;
- Improving accountability;
- Improving communication among sanctuaries, stakeholders, the general public and partners in plan implementation;
- Fostering the development of clear, concise and measurable outcomes;
- Providing a means to comprehensively evaluate FGBNMS management in both the short and long term;
- Fostering an internal focus on problem solving and improved performance;
- Providing additional support for the resource allocation process;
- Motivating staff with clear policies and a focused direction.

Performance measures are the means by which the sanctuary staff will evaluate its progress towards achieving of the desired outcomes of each action plan. Measures provide information on results over time, from the near term (within one year) to the long term (over the span of ten years or more). FGBNMS staff will conduct routine performance evaluations over time using the performance measures. Sanctuary staff will determine their effectiveness by evaluating progress towards achievement of each action plan's desired outcomes and assessing the role or added value of those outcomes in the overall accomplishment of site goals and objectives.

Results from performance evaluation will also be analyzed and used to meet ONMS, National Ocean Service (NOS), or NOAA-wide performance requirements. Performance data may also be presented annually: identifying each measure, how it was evaluated, and describing the next steps. Based on this analysis, FGBNMS staff, in cooperation with the advisory council, will identify accomplishments and determine those management actions that may need to be changed to better

meet their stated targets or outcomes.

The targets themselves also may be analyzed to determine their validity (if, for instance, they are too ambitious or unrealistic). The public may have opportunity to comment on the sanctuary staff's perception of its performance, ways in which FGBNMS staff could be more effective, and methods for improving performance measurement.

How are they organized?

Action plans consist of a description of the issue, the goal and objectives of the action plan, and the particular strategies and activities that will be used to implement the action plan. A table that estimates the 5-year costs of implementing the strategies is included and connections to other action plans are identified. Finally, the relevant performance measures related to the action plan are posted at the end.

How are they prioritized?

The action plans in the FMP comprise a body of work that, to fully implement, would require resources well beyond what is currently available –and expected to be available – to FGBNMS. Cost estimates developed by FGBNMS staff for each action plan indicate FGBNMS would need an annual base budget ranging between \$1.88 and \$3.24 million in order to accomplish all of the work in the action plans. FGBNMS currently operates with an annual budget of around \$1.05 million, not including in-kind support from other NOAA offices or grants from NOAA or other agencies and organizations. The amount of in-kind support and grant funding FGBNMS receives each year varies greatly. All of the strategies in the action plans are important in helping FGBNMS meet its goals and objectives. However, given funding limitations, it was necessary to prioritize the strategies to show which are most likely to be implemented. As such, strategies in the management plan are rated as high, medium and low priorities for FGBNMS.

What are the requirements for implementation?

Sanctuary staff developed budgets for each action plan by evaluating the resources necessary for implementation. The cost estimates serve as a general guide and are based on many factors that are difficult to predict for a five-year time frame. Staff estimated the programmatic costs, materials, supplies, and travel-time required to address each activity. Labor estimates are incorporated in the Sanctuary Operations and Administration Action Plan and not included in the estimated costs. Some activities will require outside funding in addition to current estimated costs. A summary of the cost estimated for each action plan is included in Table 1.

**Table 1: Estimated Total Costs for the Flower Garden Banks
National Marine Sanctuary Management Plan**

Action Plan	Estimated Cost (\$000)					Total Estimate 5-Year Cost
	YR 1	YR 2	YR 3	YR 4	YR 5	
Sanctuary Expansion Action Plan	110	20	0	0	0	130
Education and Outreach Action Plan	54	108	150	97	134	543
Research and Monitoring Action Plan	534	634	626	773	669	3,236
Resource Protection Action Plan	2	2	52	52	52	160
Visitor Use Action Plan	35	85	110	140	165	535
Operations and Administration Action Plan	1,151	1,424	1,941	1,956	2,242	8,714
Total Estimated Annual Cost of All Action Plans	1,886	2,273	2,879	3,018	3,262	13,345