

FLOWER GARDEN BANKS NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY
Sanctuary Advisory Council
Meeting Minutes
September 24, 2014

Meeting Attendance Roster:

Jimmie Mack	Recreational Diving	Absent
Jesse Cancelmo	Recreational Diving	Present
Vacant	Diving Operations	-----
Vacant	Diving Operations	-----
James Wiseman	Oil and Gas Industry	Present
Clint Moore	Oil and Gas Industry	Present
Scott Hickman	Fishing - Recreational	Present
Keith Love	Fishing - Recreational	Absent
Shane Cantrell	Fishing - Commercial	Present
Mike Jennings	Fishing - Commercial	Absent
Will Heyman	Research	Present
Larry McKinney	Research	Absent
Karla Klay	Education	Absent
Jacqui Stanley	Education	Present
Ellis Pickett	Conservation	Present
Jorge Brenner	Conservation	Absent
James Sinclair	BSEE (non-voting)	Present
Matthew Johnson	BOEMRE (non-voting)	Present
Brandon Fisher	U.S. Coast Guard (non-voting)	Present
Rusty Swafford	NOAA Fisheries (non-voting)	Present
Charles Tyer	NOAA OLE (non-voting)	Absent
Ben Scaggs	EPA (non-voting)	Absent
G.P. Schmahl	Sanctuary Superintendent (non-voting)	Present

Total voting member attendance: 8 of 14

Others in Attendance:

Doug Peter (BSEE), Bill Roberts, Brandi Meeder (TPWD), Larry Young (TPWD), Luis Sosa (TPWD), Randy Widaman

Administrative Business & Announcements

9:05 AM Meeting called to order by Council Chair Jesse Cancelmo

G.P. Schmahl welcomed everyone. No webinar today due to staffing constraints. G.P. announced that Jen Morgan is no longer employed as the Advisory Council Coordinator. Her position had to be eliminated due to budget limitations.

Clint Moore offered to draft a resolution thanking Jen for her service.

Meeting Agenda: motion to adopt, James Wiseman; second, Scott Hickman; all in favor; the agenda was adopted.

April 23 Meeting Minutes: motion, Clint Moore; second, James Wiseman; discussion – James Wiseman reinforced need for webinar during meetings, Jesse agreed; all in favor; the April 23 minutes were adopted.

Sanctuary Update – G.P. Schmahl

Three items to be covered in more detail later in meeting:

- FGBNMS hosted a joint meeting of the Marine Protected Area (MPA) program Federal Advisory Committee and ONMS Sanctuary Advisory Council Chairs meeting June 2-4, 2014
- Sanctuary Nomination Process opened
- Updates on disposition of the HIA389A platform

Research Update – Michelle Johnston

- Stetson Bank Long-term Monitoring – 21st year of data collection, TAMUG student divers were graduates of specialty course
- National Coral Reef Monitoring Program (NCRMP) Dry Tortugas cruise – FGBNMS researchers participated with Florida Keys NMS and others
- East/West Flower Garden Long-term Monitoring (LTM) lateral growth station refurbishment – partnership with BOEM since late 80s, improved on design to ensure consistent photos
- East/West LTM – reduced cruise, 26th year of data collection, stable percent coral cover, increasing trend in algae growth
- Coral Spawning – hosted Oregon State University and University of Texas researchers, coral fragments on boat to spawn, collected gametes, placement of placozoan plates for TAMUG
- Catlin Seaview Project – Aquarius Reef Base in Key Largo, 3D imagery to create underwater Google “street view”
- Water Quality cruise – collect quarterly samples
- Lionfish Invitational – canceled due to rough seas, to be rescheduled early next summer
- Lionfish cruise with staff in September – focused on buoyed areas on each bank, counting fish and culling lionfish, 288 lionfish removed/372 sightings

Discussion:

- Scott Hickman: Yellowtail snapper catches have increased recently. Would like to use the data to assist fishery management decisions.
- GP: Our surveys are good for some species and not so good for other species. It is thought that platforms may have helped facilitate arrival of yellowtail snapper

Education/Outreach Update – Kelly Drinnen

- *Window in the Waves* documentary to air in October on Houston PBS station
- *Houston Matters* show and webpage about sanctuary
- Abby's Aquarium Adventures
- DUOY workshop and cruise (annual) - Nitrox course for DUOY participants; fish surveys; DUOY partners include GOMF, Conoco Phillips, TAMUG, Fling Charters
- Travelling Exhibit completed
- Aquarium & Zoo Association (AZA) conference – First Place booth award for travelling exhibit; ONMS participates in conference annually

Sanctuary Update – G.P. Schmahl

- Thunder Bay NMS expansion process completed – expanded by 10 times
- Gulf of the Farallones/Cordell Bank published draft EIS for expansion in April, taking comments
- NCCOS report – 3-year baseline survey of fish communities of sanctuary, detailed report in November
- Status & Trends of Caribbean Coral Reefs, 1970-2012 released – drivers of decline in coral reefs: too many people, overfishing, coastal pollution, ocean warming, invasive species; overfishing part focused on fishing for herbivores (i.e. parrotfish); FGBNMS bucks the trend
- Bring Back the Gulf published – different perspective on oil/gas platforms as artificial reefs
- Ocean Acidification data buoy to be installed at FGBNMS - BOEM funded; contract awarded to TAMU Niall Slowey. These kinds of buoys are already in FK and GRNMS
- Additional coral species listed as threatened – listed *Orbicella* species are most common component of sanctuary coral cover, about 32%. Not likely to see changes since we already closely regulate any work in sanctuary; working to get permit of our own under the listing; possibility of us being a source population for mitigation in other areas
- Seeing a lot more sharks lately (personal observation over 15 years)
- Macro algae density at all banks is a high concern
- Increase in *Diadema* at Stetson Bank – one of most important organisms on coral reef for algae control
- Seeing *Tubastraea* more on natural substrates at all 3 banks

Vessel Operations Update – Jamie Park

Projects we've been supporting this summer:

UT Marine Geology class – day trips out of Galveston, how to use equipment in the field
Tim Dellapenna (TAMUG) – bathymetric mapping between Galveston & Freeport
Steve DiMarco (TAMU) – hypoxia studies in NW Gulf, seismic equipment, water sampling, deployment and recovery of Slocum gliders

Jay Rooker (TAMUG) – MOCNESS (multi-level plankton net), interested in pelagic fishes

Joint Resolution of FAC/SAC – G.P. Schmahl

- Call to Action - Destination Marine Protected Areas: Sustaining America's Most Treasured Ocean Places for Recreation and Stewardship, June 2014 –“ collective commitment to ensure proactive management of growing ocean recreation in these special places in order to sustain the natural and cultural assets that we treasure.”
- Dan Basta asked councils to discuss and sign on for support by early September. FGBNMS SAC conducted the discussion and voted via email due to time limitations. Jesse signed and submitted.

Discussion:

- Will Heyman– didn't support this as written; what good is an MPA if it doesn't protect; nothing in document about protection
- Jesse – trying to correct mindset that MPA means closed area
- GP – also has concerns about protection especially in terms of coral reefs; too much visitation is a problem; but resolution gets at perception of MPAs as unfriendly places
- Clint Moore – this is first step to highlight the existence of 1400 MPAs around country and generate some enthusiasm and encouragement for these places instead of just a listing; enhance awareness and utilization
- GP – MPA Center does not have regulatory function; their role has been misunderstood; MPA Center is now located administratively in ONMS; Dan Basta trying to better define their function
- Shane Cantrell – concerned about National Park analogy for MPAs; no commercial industry in NPs; potential for this to go awry
- Scott Hickman – shares Will's views; would like to see statement a little bit stronger; we're going to have to have some places that are protected as number of users increase
- Will – making some areas that are really protected would have more benefit
- Jacqui Stanley – resolution creates awareness that these places are there and they are important; otherwise, MPAs are seen as off-limits
- Brandon Fisher – MPAs are enforced by Coast Guard, et al; difficult to make public aware of rules because there are so many different ones; anything that is a good strategic statement is a start in the right direction
- James Wiseman – isn't worried about a lot more people visiting the sanctuary because of where it is

Sanctuary Nomination Process – G.P. Schmahl

- G.P. provided an overview of the newly published process to nominate and designate new National Marine Sanctuaries

- Additional sanctuaries are important in order to provide more protection for this nation's significant marine resources; it will also raise awareness to gain more public support for the program
- Sanctuary congressional caucus in DC is very small; if more districts had sanctuaries that would give caucus more weight
- Many communities see value of NMS and want one in their area
- Top down method often ran into roadblocks because there wasn't public support
- Idea behind new process is that those areas that want a sanctuary are those that we want to look at, rather than the other way around
- Requires nomination to come from community (broad term), submits to NOAA, gets reviewed and may be added to inventory
- First application has been received by NOAA from northeast FL; know of several others in the process of being put together
- Alpena has embraced their sanctuary and use it as a tool to drive tourism
- No specific direction yet on how new sanctuaries will be selected or managed. Small additional sites would make sense to manage from existing sites, depending on geography. Larger areas might need new offices
- Talk of putting together "pre advisory councils" as part of the process to develop designation packages

Disposition of HI A389A Platform – G.P. Schmahl

- First steps, still a lot of issues that have to be worked out
- So far W&T Offshore is submitting request for partial removal (cut off at depth between 72 and 85 feet), mechanical cuts (no explosives), no anchoring within the No Activity Zone
- Remaining structure would be artificial reef administered by TPWD Rigs to Reefs program
- Earliest possible removal is next summer
- Jesse/Clint – successful collaboration between SAC, FGBNMS, W&T Offshore
- Good bit of discussion about conductors; W&T seems inclined to remove them below mud line; FGB would like to see them above mud-line for monitoring; nothing resolved
- Aid to Navigation Buoy would not be required long-term if cut at 72 feet (per USCG); initial period may require a buoy until properly charted

Regional/International Update – Bill Kiene

- MPAs Declaration – developing pride in offshore areas similar to national parks
- Lone Star National Recreational Area – FGBNMS has been incorporated into effort
- Proposed Gulf of Mexico Sister Sanctuary Network – to establish partnerships with sites in Mexico; there are ecological connections between these sites; proposals will pair some sites in Mexico with the FKNMS and some with FGBNMS
- Gulf of Mexico Sister Sanctuary Summit Miami October 2014
- Bill would like a voyage of discovery around the Gulf

Public Comment Period

- Randy Widaman had signed up for comment but had to leave early
- Bill Roberts – offshore fisherman and diver in Gulf for long time; heard about council, interested in seeing what they do, what is going on at FGB and Stetson; has realized how special this spot is and it's important that we take care of it; may apply for council position

Agency Update – Matt Johnson (BOEM)

- Long-term Monitoring (LTM) abbreviated sampling in 2014 due to difficulties in transferring funds from BOEM to FGB, done strictly from FGB funds this year - now on a more appropriate funding cycle and recently designated money will be used next year
- External Review of LTM Program – contract awarded to Hawaii International Environmental Services Inc. (HEIS); analysis should be complete in 12-15 months
- BOEM revising footprint for all topographic features – original footprints were established using mapping that was not as accurate as what we now have; some things may be shifted a bit

OCS Leasing as it Relates to Proposed Expansion – Matt Johnson (BOEM)

NMS Proposed Area Expansions, Outer Continental Shelf, Gulf of Mexico:

- Alderdice – 5,196 acres, about 5 OCS blocks
- EFGB – 63,896 acres, about 24 lease blocks; adding in Horsehoe Bank; 1 additional platform and 2 active pipelines
- Geyer – 10,215 acres, 7 blocks
- MacNeil – 4,736 acres, 5 blocks
- McGrail – 7,615 acres, 8 blocks, 3 active pipelines, 8 abandoned pipelines
- Rankin/28 Fathom/Bright – 53,246 acres, 26 blocks, 1 platform, 1 active pipeline, 5 abandoned pipelines
- Sonnier – 3,355 acres, 3 blocks, 1 active pipeline
- Stetson – 3,355 acres, 2 blocks, 1 active pipeline
- WFGB – 29,822 acres, 12 blocks, 1 platform, 2 active pipelines, 9 abandoned pipelines
- Learning toward allowing directional drilling underneath features – still questions the lawyers are hammering out; whether expansion is considered a new sanctuary or an expansion; if new, special provision will have to be added; work in progress
- Companies that want to directionally drill contact BOEM and then they pursue the issue - spurring BOEM to take an official position for a separate feature; will help resolve issue for expansion

Sanctuary Expansion Proposal – G.P. Schmahl

- Sanctuary Expansion Action Plan in revised Management Plan of April 2012 – actual expansion would require a separate process
- Original working group identified core biological areas and added 500m buffer for recommended boundaries
- Most areas of interest are already HAPCs, but most lack any specific regulation other than coral HAPC; those regulations that do exist only apply to fishing activity
- Conflict between FGBNMS regulations allowance for drilling inside sanctuary but outside No Activity Zone (NAZ) and Presidential memorandum that says leasing cannot take place in sanctuaries.
- NOAA/BOEM coordination meeting in August 2014 to discuss leasing issues
 - Memo states that those areas of OCS designated as of July 14, 2008 are not eligible for leasing, but there are questions how this would affect areas added to existing sanctuaries.
 - BOEM Solicitor confirms interpretation of memo that sanctuary areas added after July 2008 would not be subject to leasing withdrawal
 - Established a BOEM/ONMS working group to explore issues associated with directional drilling
 - BOEM would like to give notice to industry that ONMS is considering sanctuary expansion for FGBNMS in the EIS for next Central Planning area lease sale (March 2015)
 - To be included in BOEM EIS, ONMS will need to publish Notice of Intent (NOI) for boundary expansion by November 2014.
 - Scheduled internal briefing at NOS level in early October (critical step to publish NOI in November)
 - Sanctuary Expansion does not require Congressional approval
 - Proposed rule would include regulations for expansion areas. Assumption is that current regulations would also apply in expansion areas; doesn't have to be that way, could be bank by bank; fishing regulations may be addressed this way; this is part of the public process
- Original NAZs were designed to protect seafloor features, not sub seafloor.
- As far as ONMS is concerned, directional drilling is allowed inside sanctuary, but the crinkle is the leasing withdrawal because without a lease you can't drill into adjacent areas.
- How deep beneath the seafloor do sanctuary boundaries go? FGBNMS regulations include "submerged lands," but don't define what that means.
- Sanctuary drafted a large portion of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) during MPR process, but nothing official yet; would like to see BOEM/BSEE as cooperating agencies in this new process.
- Expansion proposal will start with preferred list; SAC can make a recommendation at any time
- Draft EIS is will include a range of alternatives; SAC will be involved in recommending alternatives
- Clint Moore – feels we should keep this boundary expansion to original intent, get it completed then perhaps consider another expansion later; subterranean is term for anything below seafloor (submerged lands means touched by water)

- Ellis Pickett – Hatteras & Monterrey shipwrecks seem like low-hanging fruit to consider in expansion
- Clint – agrees about shipwrecks being part of sanctuary at some point, but more concerned with getting this expansion over the finish line; doesn't want to cause delays; don't rush to add stuff this time through
- Jesse Cancelmo – process accommodates input and choice to remain with original recommendation

Expansion Process (suggested timeline):

- NOAA publishes NOI (Nov 2014)
- NOAA opens public comment and hold public scoping meetings (Nov/Dec 2014)
- SAC Working Group meets to consider public input (early/mid 2015)
- FGB prepares DEIS for expansion (late 2015)
- NOAA publishes DEIS and proposed rule with public input period (early 2016)
- SAC Working Group meets to consider public input (mid 2016)
- NOAA responds to public comment releases final EIS and rule (late 2016)

Agency Reports:

Brandon Fisher (CG) – 2 patrols at FGBNMS each quarter; no boardings; no observed violations; overflights during transits to Corpus Christi multiple times per week

GP for Charles Tyer (OLE) – money just identified in “Joint Enforcement Agreement” (JEA) for TPWD to patrol FGBNMS, about 12 patrols over next year

- Will Heyman – Can patrols and overflights record data on vessels/activity in the sanctuary?
- Brandon Fisher – JEA reports include that info, USCG do not; GRNMS folks ride on helicopters to take own observations; lots of options and they do have a mechanism to get data we need

James Sinclair (BSEE) – Plans in place to start cooperative funding with sanctuary for Stetson Long Term Monitoring and include deep monitoring on the Stetson Ring. BSEE is also looking at funding for pre- and post-monitoring at HIA389A by FGBNMS.

Socioeconomic Study of Users of FGBNMS – Will Heyman

- Analysis of socio-economic impact related to sanctuary expansion is necessary
- Working with Bob Leeworthy (NOAA) to get a draft report out by the end of 2014
- Sample size was small, all participants were promised anonymity
- The information will be available to FGBNMS and SAC for review, but probably not public due to small sample size.

Spawning Aggregations Predictions and Verifications in the Gulf of Mexico – Will Heyman

- Fall 2014: Interviewing fisherman and divers, scientists to compile information
- Spring 2015: Field verification of findings

- Gulf of Mexico is the least well-known in terms of aggregation/spawning when compared to the Caribbean and South Atlantic
- Collaborative approach using all available parties
- Scott Hickman – How are we reaching recreational fisherman? Can we put information on the mooring buoys to report catches, etc.?
- Will Heyman - Can we make a motion to re-evaluate visitor use?? G.P. will put it on the November agenda.

New Business

- Jesse - 2015 SAC Dive Trip to FGBNMS; deposit in place for FLING; 22 people from SAC and FL are interested in going; Jesse needs people to reconfirm if they are wanting to go; deposit saves your spot
- Jesse - Underwater Photo Contest is in the works; Dennis Davenport, CHUM, Capt. Randy (Widaman); late summer 2015 UW Photo trip on FLING; Categories and Prizes; date will be set in time for DEMA
- Jesse - Virtual Aquarium in Shanghai, China; www.team-lab.com/sketchaquarium; Chad Stanley interested in traveling and investigating possibilities of recreating
- Jesse – underwater webcam; www.ustream.tv/channel/explore-cams-1; transmit via cable to surface then to Fieldwood HI376 platform and onto the internet; too much info to send to satellite and be cost effective; has requested support from Fieldwood
- Clint – read draft of thank you letter to Jen (discussed earlier);

Motion to accept letter to Jen Morgan as written, Scott Hickman; second James Wiseman; discussion to amend dates of service; all in favor; motion passed.

3:30 PM Meeting Adjourned

Next SAC Meeting scheduled for November 19, 2014.