

FLOWER GARDEN BANKS NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY
Sanctuary Advisory Council
Meeting Minutes
April 21, 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, Present
Shane Cantrell, Fishing - Commercial, Present
Buddy Guindon, Fishing - Commercial, Present
Adrienne Simoes Correa, Research, Present
Michael Dance, Research, Present
Brian Shmaefsky, Education, Present
Sharon Kamas, Education, Present
Joanie Steinhaus, Conservation, Present
Jake Emmert, Conservation, Present
James Sinclair, BSEE (non-voting), Present
Alicia Caporaso, BOEM (non-voting), Absent
Adam Peterson, USCG (non-voting), Absent
Rusty Swafford, NOAA Fisheries (non-voting), Absent
Vacant, NOAA OLE (non-voting), Vacant
Brooke Shipley, TPWD (non-voting), Present
Vacant, EPA (non-voting), Vacant
G.P. Schmahl, Sanctuary Superintendent (non-voting), Present

Total voting member attendance: 16 of 16 of voting members; 9 votes needed

Others in Attendance:

Leslie Clift, Emma Hickerson, Kelly Drinnen, Kelly O'Connell, Matt Kendall, Mike McDonough, Irene Olivares-Arthur, Michelle Johnston, Marissa Nuttall, Justin Blake, Alice Roberts, Azul Hull, Ekaterina Paporotskaya, Ian Isaacs, Justin Powell, Ken Fountain, Lynn

Masellis-Cutini, Mariana Steen, Matt Harlan, Matt Walia, Pamela Sparks, Rachel Plunkett, Salman Raza, Susan Driggs, Tina Cheng, Xiang Zhang, Yvonne Fish

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 to approve agenda from Frank Burek, second from Natalie Davis. No objections on the draft agenda, motion approved.

Adoption of Minutes – Motion to approve minutes from January 27, 2021 meeting from Frank Burek, second from Sharon Kamas. No objections on the draft minutes, motion approved.

SAC Recruitment

Two seats are currently open and recruitment was announced in March 2021. The incumbents are Shane Cantrell (Commercial Fishing) and Joanie Steinhaus (Conservation). Applicant Review Panel: Robert Kirschner, Steve Hamm, Brian Shmaefsky

9:30 Environmental Impacts of Commercial Space Flight on the Gulf of Mexico - Dr. Brian Shmaefsky

Dr. Brian Shmaefsky sits on the American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) Committee F47 on Commercial Spaceflight. He presented an overview of upcoming commercial spaceflight programs, including location of the Gulf of Mexico Spaceports, launch strategies, and potential environmental impacts in the Gulf of Mexico, including propellants, spacecraft components (metals, rare earth elements, Kevlar, fiberglass, and various plastics), and payloads. Houston is considered a “low damage area” because of proximity to water (Gulf of Mexico).

10:00 Public Comment

No public comment.

Council members briefly discussed covid restrictions related to future Advisory Council meetings.

10:15 Characterizing Offshore Visitation at Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary and Thoughts for FGBNMS - Dr. Matt Kendall

Dr. Matt Kendall (National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science – NCCOS) reviewed background information on the offshore visitation study at Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary (GRNMS), detailed the methods to assess offshore visitation (satellite imagery, buoy camera pictures, on-water counts, hydrophone recordings, US Coast Guard Air Auxiliary overflights, and predictive modeling). Understanding the frequency, types, and spatial distribution of visitor use is perhaps the single most important information gap for GRNMS managers. Visitor statistics are vital for informing management decisions, though it's challenging to acquire this information due to the remote location of GRNMS and use by small recreational boats. The satellite data (~40 boat observations) showed the overwhelming majority of visitors accessed GRNMS on smaller, center console boats. Only 2 boats had AIS (Automatic Identification System).

Approximately 20-30 visits were recorded by on-water counts. The buoy camera acquires a photo every 20 minutes during daylight hours that are uploaded to the National Data Buoy Center (NDBC) public website every 2 hours during daylight. Three hydrophones were deployed at GRNMS to continuously record sound data in the 1-4 km range. Boat activity was inferred based on sound signature. Matt also shared his thoughts for a similar project for FGBNMS including pros/cons, logistics, costs, and analytical skills needed.

Discussion followed. Jesse asked if there is one method preferred over the other for data collection. Matt responded satellite images are handy, though sometimes obstructed by clouds. Discussion also included if the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS) should require visitors to identify themselves. Michael Dance said he has submitted proposals for this type of work in other areas in the eastern Gulf and have some ideas for how we might be able to implement something like this for FGBNMS. His focus has been on these buoy cameras, but he has several models that are relatively small and inexpensive that FGBNMS could use if there is interest.

11:14 Sanctuary Update - G. P. Schmahl

G.P. Schmahl shared information regarding the ONMS budget and personnel changes within the Department of Commerce and FGBNMS (farewell to LT Melissa Trede and welcome to ENS Kaitlyn Brogan; farewell to FGBNMS Research Specialist Jimmy MacMillan, FGBNMS Education & Outreach Coordinator Shelley Du Puy (Summer 2021), and FGBNMS Research Coordinator Emma Hickerson (Dec 2021)).

The effective date for FGBNMS expansion was March 22, 2021. G.P. displayed the FGBNMS "Story Map" located on the first page on the FGBNMS website, and demonstrated how to use the "Explore" tool for a variety of map options. G.P. showed the areas designated as Coral Habitat Area of Particular Concern (HAPC) by the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (GMFMC), explained their associated activity restrictions and how they relate to FGBNMS

regulations. The next step for FGBNMS is to revise its management plan, last updated in 2012. This process begins with the development of the FGBNMS Condition Report (currently underway) to assess the status and trends of sanctuary resources following the “DPSER” process (Diving Forces, Pressures, State, Ecosystem Response, and Response).

G.P. detailed other recent FGBNMS events including education presentations by FGBNMS staff and the annual “Seaside Chats” program in February 2021 with its overall attendance of 1,194 people. The highest attendance was 626 attendees for the presentation on manta rays by Dr. Josh Stewart. Aquarium-Sanctuary partnerships were briefly discussed with 3 FGBNMS partners: Moody Gardens (Galveston), Tennessee Aquarium (Chattanooga, TN), and Texas State Aquarium (Corpus Christi).

The FGBNMS 2020 Research and Monitoring Report was highlighted, as well as a FGBNMS response plan in case the presence of the Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease (SCTLD) is detected in the sanctuary. The Stetson Bank Long-Term Monitoring: 2015-2018 Synthesis Report was recently published, as well as articles by Adrienne Correa, Amanda Shore, et al. regarding the anthropogenic impacts following extreme storms, such as hurricane Harvey, on the sponge health and bacterial communities of FGBNMS. FGNMS Raven Blakeway recently published an article on lionfish research with the oldest lionfish measuring 15” long and aged at 10 years.

National Marine Sanctuary Foundation is hosting the annual Capitol Hill Ocean Week (CHOW) in early June.

11:51 East Flower Garden Bank and Geyer Bank - Frank Burek

Frank Burek shared a slideshow presentation of underwater images he and his wife took at East Flower Garden Bank and Geyer Bank over the years of diving and photographing together. He also shared a shorter presentation of orca whales in the Pacific Northwest, given that a pod of ~100 were recently sighted in the Gulf of Mexico.

12:15 Louisiana Artificial Reef Program - Mike McDonough

Mike McDonough with Louisiana’s Department of Wildlife and Fisheries shared a presentation on Louisiana’s Artificial Reef Program including its existing reefs, its development program, and an overview of the types of removals for oil and gas platforms after they are decommissioned. In total, 70 established offshore artificial reef sites exist within 48 Planning Area Reefs, 19 Special Artificial Reef Sites, and 12 Deepwater Reefs. Additionally, 407 platform jackets, 8 drill rig legs, 40 armored personnel carriers, and a few other structures have been converted into artificial reefs. Total number of platforms for R2R totals 59 (44 permitted; 15 in permit process). Louisiana has installed 13 Nearshore Artificial Reefs (with more permitted and proposed) and 33 Inshore Artificial Reefs. Due to COVID-19, only one structure was deployed in FY 20/21. A brief discussion with a few questions from Advisory Council members followed.

12:35 New Business

Joanie Steinhaus reported on two initiatives with Turtle Island Restoration Network (TIRN): 1) working with Texas A&M Sea Grant to assess sea turtle distribution whereby individuals using the “iSeaturtle” app can report seeing a healthy sea turtle swimming anywhere coast-wide Texas; and 2) partnered with Dr. Nathan Putnam on a grant to complete modeling work on sea turtle distribution, using this data to concentrate outreach to recreational anglers on what to do if sea turtles are accidentally caught. Scott Hickman spoke favorably on these cooperative research efforts, and urges more of the same in the future.

Selection of Summer 2021 Recruitment Review Panel

Expiring seats in July 2021:

- Recreational diving (Jesse Cancelmo)
- Commercial Fishing (Buddy Guindon)
- Diving Operations (Frank Burek)
- Diving Operations (Natalie Davis)

The following procedure (established January 2019) details the process to select Advisory Council members for a Review Panel Subcommittee:

- Identify the names of all current SAC members.
- Remove the names of members whose term are expiring and whose seats are being filled (incumbent wishing to re-apply).
- Remove the names of the members who participated in the last candidate review process.
- Randomize the remaining names and assign a unique number to each name, starting at 1 and up to the total number of qualified participants.
- Those members with numbers from 1 to 4 and depending on member availability, are assigned to the Review Panel Subcommittee.

Michael Dance, Sharon Kamas, and Sepp Haukebo were randomly selected from the pool of eligible Advisory Council members to serve on this next Recruitment Review Panel for FGBNMS.

Nominations for SAC Chair

Scott Hickman nominated Jake Emmert (Conservation). A brief discussion followed regarding Jake’s accomplishments and service as a FGBNMS Advisory Council member. Joanie Steinhaus nominated Robert Kirschner (Recreational Fishing) for vice-Chair, who accepted. Scott also nominated Sepp Haukebo (Recreational Diving) for vice-Chair, who accepted. Voting for Chair and Vice-Chair will occur at the beginning of the September meeting.

12:58 Meeting Adjourned

Frank Burek motioned to adjourn, seconded by Natalie Davis. All in favor. Approved.

Next SAC Meeting scheduled for Wednesday, September 15, 2021.

FGBNMS Advisory Council

Updates from Constituents and Working Groups/Subcommittees

Jake Emmert (Conservation)

Progress has been made on Aquariums-Sanctuary partnership support through field efforts.

Jesse Cancelmo (Recreational Diving)

- Notified my constituency contacts of the FGBNMS expansion becoming official and urged them to spread the news via newsletter, websites, and social media sites.
- Submitted a feature article to a major scuba diving magazine highlighting the FGBNMS as a U.S. diving destination like no other - its amazing health, manta rays and nursery identification, annual mass coral spawning, and so much more. Publication expected in early June.

Joanie Steinhaus (Conservation)

Turtle Island is partnering with Texas Sea Grant to promote the iSeaturtle App, to report healthy sea turtles in Texas water. The app and website will be updated to reflect the entire Texas coast, and we hope to push it out by the end of April. This information will be useful to natural resource managers, identifying future and additional entanglement netting sites for direct capture surveys and potential interaction with sea turtles and recreational anglers. Please share any contacts with recreational angler associations, publications or anyone who may help us amplify our effort in reaching anglers. <https://texasseagrant.org/programs/iseaturtle/index.html>

Brooke Shipley (TPWD)

Five donation agreements have been completed for materials to be deployed in the following offshore Outer Continental Shelf lease blocks: HI-A-330 and HI-A-555. The 8-pile EC-330 B structure will be towed to the HI-A-330 reef site that is over 2 nautical miles from any natural banks. Four 8-piles (HI-A-489 B, HI-A-531 A, HI-A-536 C, and HI-A-537 B) will be towed to HI-A-555. This reef site is over 10 nautical miles from any natural banks. The TPWD online interactive map has been updated and can be accessed here:

<https://tpwd.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=644a45d5b75b4881b1fbb6c42bdd09d4>

Brian R. Shmaefsky (Education)

Participated in several meetings with the ASTM Commercial Space Flight standards committee to make environmental safety and space communications standards for interests in the Gulf of Mexico and other areas with projected environments. Provided FGBNMS literature at NatureFest held at Jesse Jones Park and Nature Center in May. Partnering with the Texas Children in Nature (TCiN) on doing environmental education programs about coral reefs and FGBNMS.

Represented the interests of the FGBNMS at the Houston Galveston Area Council Natural Resource Advisory Council and the Bacterial Implementation Group committee.

Natalie Davis (Diving Operations)

Continued sharing information on social media, in person, and to specific groups regarding boundary expansion updates. Recently moved back to Houston, but continue to work for Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies on a part time basis with their data repository group.

Visitor Permit Working Group

Now that the boundary expansion has been approved, the visitor permit program is beginning to ramp back up.

Steve Hamm (Oil & Gas Industry)

No updates.

Frank Burek (Dive Operations)

Coordinated the work of the Charter Subcommittee and Artificial Reef Working Group. Continued education/outreach with local diving and underwater photography clubs regarding FGBNMS including the approved expansion. Dates for Houston Underwater Film Festival (HUFF) have changed again – now June 26 & 27, 2021. The next HUFF has been scheduled for April 2 & 3, 2022. For 2021, Texas Gulf Coast Council of Diving Clubs (TGCC) continues a 28-year tradition of offering support to members and their families with a dive community memorial college scholarship program. This year it's offering a \$500 award 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 FGBNMS Advisory Council members.

Charter Subcommittee

Reviewing alternative descriptions for post expansion FGBNMS.

Artificial Reef Working Group

Dr. Paul Sammarco is preparing a 45-minute presentation for the FGBNMS Advisory Council meeting on November 17, 2021 about several of the items on this working group's research list.