

FLOWER GARDEN BANKS NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY
Sanctuary Advisory Council
Meeting Minutes
September 14, 2011

Meeting Attendance Roster:

Frank Burek	Recreational Diving	Present
Jesse Cancelmo	Recreational Diving	Present
Cher Walker	Diving Operators	Present
Frank Wasson	Diving Operators	Absent
Clint Moore	Oil and Gas Industry	Present
John Hoffman	Oil and Gas Industry	Present
Irby Basco	Fishing - Recreational	Present
Matt Bunn	Fishing - Recreational	Absent
Joe Hendrix	Fishing - Commercial	Present
Mike Jennings	Fishing - Commercial	Absent
Will Heyman	Research	Present
Larry McKinney	Research	Present
Dale Loughmiller	Education	Absent
Jacqui Stanley	Education	Present
Ellis Pickett	Conservation	Present
Page Williams	Conservation	Present
James Sinclair	BOEMRE (non-voting)	Absent
Carmen DeGeorge	U.S. Coast Guard (non-voting)	Absent
Rusty Swafford	NOAA Fisheries (non-voting)	Present
Charles Tyer	NOAA OLE (non-voting)	Present
Vacant	EPA (non-voting)	-----
G.P. Schmahl	Sanctuary Superintendent (non-voting)	Present

Others in attendance:

Dan Mueller
Steve Truchon
7 TAMU students from Dr. Heyman's marine spatial planning course

A regular meeting of the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary (FGBNMS) Advisory Council was held on Wednesday, September 14, 2011, at 9:00 AM, at the FGBNMS Headquarters offices in Galveston, Texas. Council chair, Larry McKinney was present and presided over the meeting. Council vice-chair, Frank Burek, was also present. Larry called the meeting to order at 9:10 AM. Council members, staff, and members of the public introduced themselves for the benefit of all attendees.

Larry McKinney moved for approval of the meeting agenda. The motion was seconded and the agenda was approved without changes. Frank Burek moved to adopt the minutes of the April 2011 meeting. Jacqui Stanley seconded and the motion passed. The council requested that fewer acronyms be used in preparation of the minutes.

G.P. Schmahl, sanctuary superintendent, welcomed the council and the public and gave a brief “safety moment.” Larry McKinney announced the time of the public comment period and asked guests to sign-in.

G.P. Schmahl provided a sanctuary update. G.P. reviewed the following sanctuary highlights that have occurred since April:

- National Ocean Sciences Bowl (NOSB), April 28-May 1: This event was held in Galveston and FGBNMS was featured heavily, including Jacqui Stanley’s artwork and Emma Hickerson as a guest speaker.
- Beyond the Horizon Conference, Mote Marine lab, May 11-13: A symposium to discuss areas in the Gulf of Mexico that may need special protection in the future. Many parties were represented at the conference, including Clint Moore. Clint gave two presentations—boundary expansion and the future of oil and gas exploration.
- Redesign of the Texas State Aquarium FGBNMS exhibit, including touch screen videos and a Burek photo on the back of the tank.
- Scorpion fish photo taken by Emma Hickerson featured in Galveston Monthly magazine.
- FGBNMS signage to be installed along the seawall at Hampton Battery Park.
- Down Under Out Yonder (DUOY) teacher workshop provided by the Gulf of Mexico Foundation. Both Larry McKinney and Jacqui Stanley participated.
- Growth of FGBNMS FaceBook page: consider using this resource as an outreach tool for constituents.
- Vessel anchoring incident on Geyer Bank on July 16. John Stout reported a large freighter anchoring at that location. There are no restrictions on anchoring there, but this is evidence of the reason why Geyer Bank has been identified as in need of protection. The vessel was anchored in a No Activity Zone, but that zone only applies to oil and gas activities. FGBNMS hopes get to Geyer Bank with an ROV to determine if any anchoring damage occurred.
- Lionfish have arrived at FGBNMS on East Bank; the first official sighting was in July. An individual caught on August 3rd is now in a tank here to be used as an educational tool. A chronology of collections and sightings between July 20 and Sept 1 was presented.
- RV Manta field operations: a review of 12 cruises that have occurred since May 15. Those highlighted included: June 14 Whale Shark investigation cruise; Aug. 21-Sept. 2 Coral Connections cruise on NOAA Ship Nancy Foster—cruise to conduct baseline fish and benthic surveys of mesophotic coral reefs; Aug. 19-21 Coral Spawning cruise; and the Geyer/Sonnier Bank cruise to attempt to find Marbled Grouper aggregation. The council briefly discussed the status of fauna at Sonnier. G.P. discussed wasting disease in large sponges. Emma addressed manta tagging (none were tagged this year).
- Upcoming October 20 event to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Ft. Crockett.

- FGBNMS (G.P. and Emma) will partner with NASA to facilitate the NASA extreme environment mission operations (NEEMO). NASA will use deep worker one-man submersibles to simulate vehicles landing on near earth asteroids. NEEMO will also have a public outreach and education component.
- Upcoming Nov. 2 National Geographic workshop in Galveston to provide environmental information to people working in recreation fields.
- Mooring Buoy Maintenance and installation. FGBNMS contracted with the Spree to install anchors as Stetson.
- Budget remains an issue. The Manta has been operating with settlement money and the congressional appropriation funds are quite low.

Larry McKinney reported on the Harte Research Institute's (HRI) graduate student cruise to FGBNMS. This was the first of what they hope will be many future cruises. Marissa Nuttall participated along with Sylvia Earle. The cruise was featured in a front-page article of the Corpus Christi newspaper. G.P. added that he hopes this will stimulate ideas for research from the students. Also, Larry is working with Kevin Buch to establish a scientific diving program at TAMU-CC. Kevin participated in the HRI cruise as a dive safety officer.

Jacqui Stanley briefly provided interesting photos of work being done by Rod Stanley at the NASA International Space Station mock-up with the quantum dive suit. This dive suit can withstand incredible depths, has been used by the Navy, and has been used by BBC to film Humboldt squid.

Jacqui Stanley provided an update from the Youth Working Group Subcommittee. Larry noted that Jacqui took on a huge commitment to research options for youth involvement. Jacqui reviewed information presented at the last council meeting and the policies and guidelines regarding youth involvement from the SAC Handbook. She presented considerations and options and suggested the possibility of voting on this issue today. Cher Walker and Jacqui recommend a youth working group as an initial form of involvement. They would begin recruiting soon and then be ready to go ahead by May 2012; meeting each month from Sept 2012 – May 2013. Cher and Jacqui would take turns chairing the working group each month. Staff members could rotate each month to be present. After a brief discussion of budget and time commitment concerns Frank Burek moved to accept the recommendation. John Hoffman seconded the motion. The council then engaged in a more detailed discussion including frequency of working group meetings, recruitment, scheduling, eventual SAC seat creation, staff time, council member time, consistency, fundraising, and council charter amendments needed. Larry moved for a vote to establish a Youth Working Group. All present voting members voted in favor of establishing the working group.

Frank Burek provided an update of the HI-A-389-A Artificial Reef Working Group. Frank noted that this group has replaced the Platform Decommissioning Subcommittee that was in place for the last two years. He proposed that the next stage is to evaluate a number of artificial reef alternatives. Frank gave a presentation and asked for preferred alternatives. Jen Morgan asked for a point of clarification and wanted to know at what point did the name change from the Platform Decommissioning subcommittee to HI-A-389-A Artificial Reef Working Group.

She suggested that the name changes the flavor of the work of the subcommittee and that possible decommissioning options seem to have been removed. Clint Moore requested that we table this discussion until after John Hoffman's presentation which will suggest that a private trust could maintain hundreds of platforms—a hybrid approach to long term issues with platforms in the Gulf. Larry added that there is a strong group of people that think that leaving rigs in place is ocean dumping.

G.P. introduced Paula Whitfield, a Research Ecologist with NOAA CCFHR, Beaufort Lab. He explained that staff met with her yesterday to discuss management actions for invasive Lionfish, as we are very concerned about their presence in the sanctuary. Paula provided a background presentation on lionfish. Paula explained that there are pulses of recruitment of small commercially important fish at FGBNMS. Lionfish have the potential to reduce these populations—and this is problematic. Some research shows a phase shift to algal dominated communities and huge loss of fish species after introduction of lionfish. Some approaches that have been used other places include derbies, removal, and an eat lionfish campaign (a fishery to promote consumption – even NOAA has promoted this). It is unlikely that in the long run any of these will be the answer over the larger range of the Lionfish. The number of divers at FGBNMS is not very high and they only dive near buoys. Would take a huge effort and more divers to use removal as control mechanism. G.P. added that FGBNMS has issued permits to the Fling and Spree, permitting specific individuals on the boat to remove lionfish. The sanctuary has talked about revising regulations, even implementing emergency regulations, to allow taking of Lionfish. However, the sanctuary is nervous about writing an exception for spear guns due to enforcement issues.

G.P. asked the council to consider a proposal: To implement a temporary emergency fishing closure within all or part of FGBNMS to enhance the control of the invasive Lionfish through natural ecosystem processes. The closure could include the entire sanctuary or could be set up as an experiment. G.P. asked for advice and recognized that it is a controversial issue and would need to be worked through the GOMFMC. The council engaged in a detailed and lengthy discussion of the potential benefits and possible controversy over a closure. Topics addressed included: experimental design, size of FGBNMS may allow control, lack of similar studies, length of closure, opportunity to demonstrate that a closure could help a healthy reef ecosystem, fishing pressure (heavy or not), enforcement issues, general MPA benefits, good baseline data at FGBNMS. At the close of the discussion Joe Hendrix, Larry McKinney and Rusty Swafford recommended that G.P. approach the Habitat Committee of the GOMFMC to make an initial presentation and request.

Larry McKinney briefly reviewed the National SAC Summit. He explained that Coastal and Marine Spatial Planning and the National Ocean Policy were discussed from the sanctuary perspective and were a focus of the meeting. FGBNMS expansion and the sanctuary's relationship with the oil and gas industry were discussed during case studies. Other Summit topics included NMSA Reauthorization, the Site Evaluation List, and artificial reefs.

John Hoffman gave a presentation on his Save the Blue initiative which proposes to supplement Federal law on Rigs-to-Reefs in order to allow artificial reefing of petroleum platform jackets "in place". He presented information about the communities that have settled

on the hard substrate of the platforms and suggests that we would eliminate the possibility of further research by destroying the platforms and would eliminate fishing when removing the structures. John has started a 501c3 called "Save the Blue" to encourage this movement. He has implemented education, outreach, and research components. John described the process of rig decommissioning as highly destructive. John provided an invitation to the Save the Blue kick-off at the New Orleans Aquarium where Sylvia Earle and Paul Sammarco will speak. This will begin the dialogue between stakeholders about what can be done to save the platforms. Following the presentation the council engaged in discussion of the benefits and concerns of such a program.

Council members set the meeting dates for 2012. The schedule is: February 8, May 9, September 12, and November 14. The second Wednesday of the stated months has been the standard schedule. It was suggested that a meeting could be moved to the first Wednesday of the month if a conflict arose.

Irby Basco and Joe Hendrix asked questions of G.P. regarding funding for the Manta, the cost of operating the boat, and other sanctuary funding issues.

Frank Burek re-introduced the tabled discussion of the artificial reef working group. Joe Hendrix moved to change the subcommittee name to Artificial Reef Working Group. Page seconded the motion. During a brief discussion, Joe stated that this does not eliminate decommissioning as an option. The HIA389A platform was installed in 1981 and so is not that old. Frank pointed out that decommissioning comes up every once in a while depending on what company owns it and that John Hoffman offers some good ideas. The council voted to change the name of the working group and none were opposed.

Larry adjourned the meeting at 3:05 P.M.