

FLOWER GARDEN BANKS NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY

Sanctuary Advisory Council Meeting Minutes September 4, 2019

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	Absent
Clint Moore	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
Larry McKinney	Research	Absent
Brian Shmaefsky	Education	Present
Sharon Kamas	Education	Absent
Joanie Steinhaus	Conservation	Present
Jake Emmert	Conservation	Present
James Sinclair	BSEE (non-voting)	Present
Mark Belter	BOEM (non-voting)	Absent
Mark Zanowicz	U.S. Coast Guard (non-voting)	Present (webinar)
Rusty Swafford	NOAA Fisheries (non-voting)	Absent
Charles Tyer	NOAA OLE (non-voting)	Absent
Vacant	EPA (non-voting)	
G.P. Schmahl	Sanctuary Superintendent (non-voting)	Present

Total voting member attendance: 13 of 16 of voting members; 8 votes needed

Others in Attendance:

Leslie Clift, James MacMillan, Kelly O’Connell, Kelly Drinnen, Melissa Trede, Michelle Johnston, Will Heyman, Jeff Seinshimer, Andrea Stroymeyer, Sargent Mark McGaffey (Bolivar), Texas Senator Larry Taylor, Mark Williams, Texas Representative Mayes Middleton, Dale Shively (Texas Parks & Wildlife Department (TPWD)), Fred Brink (BSEE), Bill Jones, Costa Kouzounis, Johnny Walker, Greg Ball, Sang Jun Shin, John Back, Mike Purcell and David Headley (Project Healing Waters Flyfishing, Inc.), Greg Schmucker and Jeb Adame (Backline; audio).

9:10 Meeting called to order by Advisory Council Chair Scott Hickman. Scott welcomed TPWD Dale Shively to the Advisory Council.

9:12 Welcome and Announcements – G.P. Schmahl

Today’s meeting is being run through a webinar, and with a sound system.

9:21 Administrative Business – Scott Hickman

The meeting held a moment of recognition and silence for *The Conception* dive boat fire/accident off Santa Cruz Island in California, and in particular for one of the victims, Neal Baltz, a great friend of the Flower Garden Banks, an avid diver who worked for the M/V *Fling*, including serving as a divemaster on the 2018 FGBNMS lionfish invitational.

Adoption of Agenda – motion from Buddy Guindon, second from Brian Shmaefsky. All in favor, motion approved.

Adoption of Minutes – motion from Jake Emmert, second from Natalie Hall. All in favor, motion approved.

9:25 Bolivar & Jeep Weekend – Marine Debris – Joanie Steinhaus

Joanie Steinhaus with Turtle Island Restoration Network (TIRN) shared information on its sea turtle nest patrols coupled with the issues of trash on Galveston’s beaches (Texas ranked the highest (7 pounds of trash/mile) in an International Coastal Cleanup study). She reported sea turtle nest patrols on Bolivar’s beaches had to be canceled in May 2019 during the annual “Jeep Weekend” due to safety concerns for both people and sea turtles. During this event, which occurs during the nesting season for Kemp’s Ridley sea turtle, over 40,000 vehicles were on ~18 miles and 600 calls placed for emergency response. When the weekend was over, two 30-yard containers were filled with tent/canopy materials, while Galveston county staff filled eleven other containers with collected trash from the weekend.

Discussion followed. Texas Representative Mayes Middleton relayed information on HB 1628 which relates to the authority of coastal counties to adopt certain rules for island parks, beach parks, and public beaches (but only for unincorporated parts of counties). Texas Senator Larry Taylor also spoke on the bill which includes provisions for prohibiting alcohol, temporarily closing beaches to vehicular traffic, etc. Sargent Mark McGaffey who works beach detail on Bolivar peninsula, reported high tide on Bolivar prevented emergency response during Jeep Weekend. Sepp Haukebo offered to draft a SAC letter of support from the FGBNMS Advisory

Council for its approval to send.

10:30 Fish Spawning Aggregations in the Gulf of Mexico: Threats and Opportunities – Dr. Will Heyman (LGL Ecological Research Associates, Inc.)

Will Heyman shared information on Fish Spawning Aggregations (FSA): underwater locations where fish gather for reproduction, predictable in time and space, and usually with large increases in fish densities. Many spawn in aggregations at reef promontories in the tropics, and many transcend national and regional boundaries. Of the 800 FSAs estimated, those that are known are mostly either decreasing or are already extirpated (similar to cod fishery on the East coast). Will challenges fishers, "If you're interested in the sustainability of your fishery, then it behooves fishers to support management of FSAs." He recommends closing FSAs completely to fishing from surface to bottom, and suggested making one of the Flower Garden Banks a no-take area. Will added, "Make a smart and big investment for big results. Small investments will give small to no results."

Very little is known about the location of FSAs in the Gulf of Mexico, though Will said potential FSAs (Scamp, Cubera Snapper, Marbled Grouper) have been identified at banks/reefs both in the current FGBNMS as well as the proposed sanctuary expansion area, and likely more exist and are undocumented. He offered three recommendations: 1) locate and characterize multi-species spawning areas; 2) prioritize them for protection of management; and 3) engage stakeholders to conduct cooperative research.

11:45 Sanctuary Update – G.P. Schmahl

G.P. provided a partial sanctuary update with the following topics:

- ONMS designation in July 2019 of a new national marine sanctuary (NMS) called Mallows Bay NMS. This NMS is the first designation in 20 years and is the first one located in an estuarine area.
- FKNMS release of Restoration Blueprint - public comments taken through January 31, 2020.
- FGBNMS expansion proposal is now in the OMB (Office of Management and Budget) for an inter-agency review. G.P. said he welcomes a discussion/ recommendation from the SAC on the requested public input in the Proposed Rulemaking.
- Mooring buoys – Over the last 5 years, there have been at least 3 buoys at EFGB, 2 buoys at WFGB, and 2 buoys at Stetson Bank at all times. Mooring buoys are part of management plan for expansion area. G.P. explained the limiting factor for additional mooring buoys is funding.
- HIA389A post removal assessment was conducted in June 2019, with a ROV trip planned for the investigation of deeper portions of the platform in September 2019.
- An Ocean Acidification (OA) monitoring buoy was installed in July 2019 at the East Flower Garden Bank. This project is funded by BOEM with support from Shell Oil.
- Manta ray tagging study was conducted in August 2019, with one juvenile manta ray tagged.
- Global Foundation for Ocean Exploration's live (telepresence) exploration on the R/V *Manta* occurred over 3 cruises in August 2019, on the seafloors at the current sanctuary and at proposed expansion areas.

During the update, Clint asked about the SAC recruitment process and made a motion to create a new SAC Member Applicant Review Process subcommittee to study and recommend a process by which SAC members become members of the annual Applicant Review subcommittee. Discussion followed. The Council voted 7 Aye; 6 Nay. **Motion Passed.**

G.P. continued his update with:

- Lionfish invitational at FGBNMS occurred in August 2019, resulting in some of the lowest removal rates since the invitationals began. Emerging ulcerative skin disease observed on lionfish may be reason why low numbers were caught.

12:30 Break for Lunch

1:10 Public Comment and Q&A Period

Mike Purcell and David Headley with Project Healing Waters Flyfishing, Inc. offered a plaque for their gratitude of the “Vet Into Your Sanctuary” event on August 4, 2019, wherein U.S. veterans were taken fly fishing at FGBNMS.

Greg Ball with Professional Boatman’s Association gave public comment on his participation in the Vet Into Your Sanctuary event, and also mentioned the Balloon Rodeo, whereby captains and boaters are challenged to pick up as many balloons as they see through the end of September.

Greg Schmucker – gave public comment on his desire to eradicate lionfish, including by spear in FGBNMS.

1:52 Revised Well Control Rule – Fred Brink, Chief of District Operations Support with BSEE

Fred Brink shared information on BSEE’s revised well control rule. After the Deepwater Horizon spill event, 14 investigations were conducted to determine the causes and to make recommendations to reduce the likelihood of a similar incident in the future. The first rule revision on well control rules was completed in 2016, but two Executive Orders and one Secretary Order prompted its review and publishing of a new rule, effective July 15, 2019, with compliance dates of April 2021 and May 2023. Real-time monitoring plan is now required when operating with a subsea BOP (blow-out prevention) or with a surface BOP on a floating facility. Other topics covered included shear rams, drilling margins, and ROV access panels on rigs. The biggest improvement after DWH and reflected in new regulations are that the shear ram designs have greatly improved. Materials that were not able to be sheared in 2011 (post-DWH event), can now be sheared.

2:00 Constituent & Working Group Updates

Clint Moore – continues to field questions from his industry re: expansion.

Robert Kirschner – has been communicating with recreational fishers and mentioned his concern about qualifications for Advisory Council seats.

Joanie Steinhaus – TIRN has been noticing wax in the water samples from Stetson, most likely from the oil & gas platforms’ “pigs” used to clean pipelines.

Adrienne Correa – has been involved in outreach about FGBNMS, giving talks at Moody Garden’s Rhapsody on the Reef and Houston Museum of Natural Science. Her latest fieldwork includes Moorea and the FGBNMS’ GFOE telepresence cruise.

Frank Burek – continued work with the FGBNMS Advisory Council’s Charter Subcommittee. He also reported TGCC awarded 2 scholarships to students and gave information on the Houston Underwater Film Festival (HUFF) and contest (deadline January 10, 2020; no fee).

Jake Emmert – has been collaborating with the Florida Reef Tract Rescue Project through Moody Gardens’ Coral Rescue Lab which currently is housing ~12 dozen coral specimens. He reported Moody Gardens supported 6 FGBNMS research cruises (41 divers days) for 2019. He will be speaking at the American Zoo Association (AZA) conference next week and will be presenting on the partnership between FGBNMS and Moody Gardens. Recent fieldwork includes working with Josh Voss on connectivity and deeper water (tech diving) to look for Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease in the Dry Tortugas area.

Natalie Davis – reported the Harte Research Institute hosted Shark Week >1,000 visitors at Brewster’s Street Icehouse in Corpus Christi, Texas. She also reported on the Red Snapper Catch and Reward, wherein 1,000 red snappers were tagged and if caught, fishers can mail in the tag and receive \$250-500 reward. Lastly, Natalie reported HB1300 will allow oyster aquaculture.

Scott Hickman – explained how the SeaQuilizer device helps descend fish down to depth. He reported the Professional Boatman’s Association requires members to use SeaQuilizers if catching and releasing fish.

Brian Shmaefsky – his recent education/outreach engagements include Nature Fest, National Science Teaching Association workshop for teachers on aquatic vegetation and coral reefs, and helping Lone Star College students design a water quality exhibit (from source to stream). Brian will be participating in an upcoming educators conference in Galveston. He serves on 2 committees regarding water quality.

Buddy Guindon – requested access for commercial fishers in expansion areas that have been historically fished. He will be working with GMFMC and FGBNMS on this topic.

James Sinclair – Stetson Bank long-term monitoring, sponsored by BSEE, completed its first 5 years of Interagency Agreement between BSEE and FGBNMS. As part of this agreement, a report of all historical data on Stetson Bank by FGBNMS research team is now available.

Jesse Cancelmo –gave a presentation in June to LunarFins Society on coral spawning; and one in July to CHUM dive club in Houston titled, “Diving & Photographing FGBNMS”, with focused conversation on decontamination of scuba gear. Jesse made two trips on the M/V *Fling*, and took a mural artist diving with him at FGBNMS. She took photographs and will have an art showing in early 2020 showcasing FGBNMS.

Dale Shively – reported two potential oil & gas platforms in proximity of FGBNMS may be

decommissioned soon. Concrete railroad ties may be added offshore to a reefing area, with 1,000 tons already placed at the Rio Grande site and another 1,000 tons at the Corpus Christi site. The material will be pushed together to create ten-foot tall habitats underwater. Next summer, 200 concrete pyramids will be placed underwater near Sabine.

Shane Cantrell – reported captains during the ongoing Balloon Rodeo see an average of 6-8 balloons per day per fisher. Scott Hickman captured 31 balloons the day BEFORE the rodeo started. Shane picked up balloons up to 91 miles offshore, near FGBNMS. The contest runs until the Galveston Fishing Rodeo.

Mark Zanowicz– reported USCG has three new fast response cutters that will be commissioned by May 2020. These vessels will be based in Galveston with FGBNMS as one of their priorities. Also, USCG overflights will start in Fall 2019.

Sepp Haukebo – thanked FGBNMS staff, ONMS Director John Armor, Galveston Professional Boatman's Association, and Project Healing Waters Flyfishing, Inc. for all of their time and commitment to make the Vet/Get Into Your Sanctuary event happen. Next steps will be a full length article in the *Coast* monthly magazine. John Armor also wrote an article for the American Airlines in-flight magazine, *American Way*.

Working Group updates

No update from Visibility Working Group or Visitor Permit Working Group. Jesse will email the Advisory Council the update from the Underwater Webcam Working Group. Dale Shively from TPWD was added to the Artificial Reef Working Group. For the Visitors Center Working Group, Clint handed out a 2-pager on Monterey Bay NMS exploration center.

Charter Renewal Subcommittee

The 5-yr renewal of the FGBNMS Advisory Council's charter has been accomplished. One non-voting governmental seat was added for TPWD Dale Shively. This subcommittee will continue to develop a description of the FGBNMS section of the charter. Their recommended workplan for a charter revision to that section and the ONMS section is planned to be presented to the Advisory Council after the Final Rule on FGBNMS expansion is issued.

3:38 New Business

No new business

3:40 Meeting Adjourned – Buddy motioned to adjourn, seconded by Shane. All in favor. Approved.

Next SAC Meeting scheduled for Thursday, November 7, 2019.