

Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary
Sanctuary Advisory Council
Key Meeting Outcomes
May 9, 2012
Galveston, TX

Attendance

- Nine of the Council's sixteen voting seats were present (Recreational Diving-Jimmie Mack and Jesse Cancelmo; Diving Operators-Cher Walker; Oil and Gas Industry-James Wiseman; Recreational Fishing-Irby Basco; Commercial Fishing-Mike Jennings; Education-Jacqui Stanley; Conservation-Ellis Pickett and Page Williams).
- BOEM (James Sinclair), NOAA Fisheries (Rusty Swafford), and NOAA OLE (Charles Tyer) were present.
- The Sanctuary Superintendent was present.
- Public attendance varied from 1 to 6 people. Former council members Clint Moore and Frank Burek were also present and participated in the meeting.

Administrative Business and Announcements

- SAC meeting was held without the Chair or a Vice-Chair present. The council voted unanimously for Jesse Cancelmo to serve for today only as Chair pro tem.
- Superintendent G.P. Schmahl reviewed the recent council member recruitment. New members Jimmie Mack and James Wiseman were present and introduced themselves and provided information on their background.
- The meeting agenda was adopted with a minor change to page 2—the 2:45 pm presentation by Frank Burek was deleted, as he appears earlier on the agenda as well.
- The Nov. 30th minutes were approved with no changes
- The Feb. 8th minutes were approved with one minor change—a type-o on page 3.

Final Management Plan, Environmental Assessment, and Final Rule

- G.P. provided a PowerPoint presentation review of the management plan:
 - Management plan (MP) review began in 2006
 - Draft MP was released in October 2010
 - Final MP (all 3 components) was released on April 27th, 2012
 - The MP and the new regulations will go into effect on May 29th, 2012
- G.P. reviewed the 6 action plans and the comments received on the plan and rule. He highlighted the response to comments section (in the FMP and Federal Register Notice (FRN)), the summary of changes section, and the importance of the intent language in the preamble of the FRN.
- G.P. explained that sanctuary expansion is an action described in the FMP with a specific SAC recommendation. Sanctuary staff will now pursue expansion, guided by the NEPA process and a SAC working group. Further evaluation of expansion is needed as new information (Ewing Bank, Whale Shark Aggregations, Deepwater Horizon) has come about since the initial council recommendation. No opposition was heard from the council on the intent to proceed with expansion efforts. Sanctuary staff will continue with a public

- process to receive input on the expansion alternatives and will re-establish the working group.
- G.P. reviewed the regulatory changes associated with the plan: dive flag use, discharge, ray/whale shark disturbance, and technical corrections.

HI-A-389-A Decommissioning

G.P. presented the current information related to the decommissioning of the HIA389A gas platform owned by W&T Offshore. G.P. said that the platform issue is of high importance to ONMS due to the precedence that this action will set, its location within the sanctuary, the biological activity associated with it, and the fact that many would like to see it maintained. The council engaged in much discussion over the financial responsibilities and liabilities associated with a retired platform and the need for continued research on impacts of artificial structures, especially within sanctuaries. The artificial reef working group discussions will need to continue. Frank Burek reported in summary on the actions of the artificial reef working group over the past year(s).

Other considerations:

- G.P. and ONMS HQ came to an agreement that partial removal may be acceptable in this case (the usual preference is for total removal).
- John Hoffman and Black Elk Energy may be interested in purchasing the platform for alternate uses (research platform, or cut a 25ft. according to the Save the Blue model); John is in negotiations with W&T.
- Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE) requires a platform removal permit, and will have a strong influence on the outcome of decommissioning.
- Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council is currently debating about whether artificial reefs (platforms) should be considered Essential Fish Habitat (EFH).

Jesse Cancelmo proposed a SAC vote on a simple preference for either leaving all or part of the platform in place, removal and relocation, or complete removal. Clint Moore said that he felt that it was important for the SAC to leave today's meeting with a recommendation for a one-year moratorium on removal activities.

After drafting the following official position statement, the SAC voted in favor of leaving the platform in place. Mike Jennings moved to vote on accepting the statement. Jacqui Stanley seconded the motion. The motion carried with none opposed and none abstaining.

"The Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council endorses deferring removal activities of HIA-389-A until September 2013 to allow the sanctuary's Artificial Reef Working Group to gather further stakeholder input to make a recommendation to the council and sanctuary management. However, if removal activities commence prior to that date the Sanctuary Advisory Council recommends leaving all or a significant portion of HIA-389-A in place."

Jennifer Morgan will prepare for G.P.'s signature an advice acknowledgement form providing the carried motion and background context. The advice acknowledgement will be forwarded to Dan Basta.

Public Comment

Brandt Mannchen and Scott Hickman made public comments. These comments will be available in the meeting minutes.

Sanctuaries Campaign of Engagement

G.P. described the national effort to begin to build constituencies at the local level with the possibility for expansion to the national level. He encouraged the SAC to think creatively for ways to make FGBNMS and the sanctuary system relevant to the public.

Sanctuary Update

Okeanos Explorer Expedition

Bill Kiene reviewed the recent mission of the Okeanos Explorer. The NOAA Office of Exploration and Research used some of the latest technology to bring a live feed of the ocean floor to the public. Using the Internet, the public can get real time HD access to live feeds from the ROV on the Okeanos Explorer. This mission showed that there are some very beautiful and important areas in the Gulf of Mexico that were not known until this expedition. Bill showed video highlights of the ROV footage.

Presentation of FGBNMS Volunteer of the Year

G.P. announced that Clint Moore was selected as the sanctuary's Volunteer of the Year. G.P. recognized him for taking our perspective to the Beyond the Horizon Meeting, the State of the Gulf meeting, and other venues. Although he is not able to attend, Clint will be represented at a dinner during Capitol Hill Oceans Week.

Paint a Mural Activity

Emma Hickerson described the mural activity completed with the help of the public during Ocean Discovery Day. She said that the activity and a corresponding curriculum have been developed for use with schools, scouts, and camps. We hope to have the opportunity for a pilot project soon. Jacqui Stanley will present the activity at the NMEA meeting in Anchorage this summer. Next year's mural will be a kelp forest painting and we hope to bring a West coast educator with ONMS to assist.

Vice-Chair Nominations

Jesse Cancelmo opened the floor for nominations. Page Williams nominated Jesse Cancelmo. Irby Basco nominated Jacqui Stanley. Both members accepted their nomination. The council chair will soon give the opportunity via email for others to make nominations for the vice-chair position. Voting will happen at the beginning of the next SAC meeting in September.

Youth Working Group Subcommittee Report

Jacqui Stanley presented updates on the effort to begin recruiting students for participation in a working group. Flyers have been placed in volunteer packets. On June

14th Jacqui, Cher Walker, and Jen Morgan will attend a meeting at Moody Gardens to discuss the FGBNMS Youth Working Group with Moody Garden's student volunteers. The deadline for submission of student applications will be in August. The working group will meet monthly during the school year for a two-year period. G.P. encouraged the council members to get involved and to present current sanctuary issues to the working group. Not only is it an opportunity for the students to learn, but an opportunity for us to gain their perspective.

Guest Presentation: Mr. James Blackburn, Rice University SSPEED Center

The SPPEED Center is a research entity focused on severe storms. They have examined possible future storm conditions and vulnerabilities and solutions following hurricane Ike. Following Ike, a task force was put in place after to determine what to do with Bolivar. The Bolivar Blueprint was published in May 2009. It emphasized day recreation usage and development of the backside of the peninsula. This lead to the question of the possibility of developing a different economy—one based on use, appreciation and protection of our natural values. Mr. Blackburn described current trends in outdoor activities; paddling sports and birding are growing in popularity. Mr. Blackburn has proposed a Lone Star Coastal National Recreation Area. To establish a national recreation area (NRA), the area must be found to be a place of national significance, among other criteria. It is a benefit that this particular coastal area is proximate to a major urban area – important – need to start focusing on this. Governance of a NRA is by partnership. A study of potential economic impact has been completed. Public leadership involved includes Sec. James Baker and John Nau. We are still looking at how FGBNMS might fit into this idea. There may be interest in partnering with ONMS to include FGBNMS as an aspect of the national recreation area, if established.

Future Meeting Schedule

Wednesday, September 12, 2012

Wednesday, November 14, 2012