

**FLOWER GARDEN BANKS NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY**  
**Sanctuary Advisory Council**  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**VIRTUAL MEETING**  
**November 18, 2020**

**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	Absent
Adrienne Simoes Correa	Research	Absent
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)	Present
Keith Edwards	U.S. Coast Guard (non-voting)	Present
Rusty Swafford	NOAA Fisheries (non-voting)	Absent
Charles Tyer	NOAA OLE (non-voting)	Present
Brooke Shipley for Dave Shively	TPWD (non-voting)	Present
G.P. Schmahl	Sanctuary Superintendent (non-voting)	Present

**Total voting member attendance:** 14 of 16 of voting members; 8 votes needed

**Others in Attendance:** John Armor, Leslie Clift, Emma Hickerson, Kelly Drinnen, Raven Blakeway, Irene Olivares-Arthur, Jimmy MacMillan, Marissa Nuttall, Kelly O’Connell, Sarah Stein (ONMS HQ), Brooke Shipley (TPWD), Lindsay Dubin (Defenders of Wildlife), Matt Harlan (J Connor Consulting), John Embesi, Douglas Peter (BSEE), Michelle Burt, Paul Sammarco, Ken Fountain

**9:13 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

**9:16 Welcome and Updates from ONMS HQ - John Armor**

Operational updates - 47 SAC meetings have been held throughout ONMS since March 2020, all of them virtual due to the pandemic. ONMS has also developed new virtual reality content.

Programmatic updates - sanctuary designations and expansions include Wisconsin Shipwreck Coast, Monitor - Graveyard of the Atlantic, FGBNMS, FKNMS - Restoration Blueprint, and Lake Ontario. Other programmatic updates include Condition Reports, Management Plans, and small boat planned acquisitions (Olympic Coast NMS, FKNMS mooring buoy boat, and new dive boat at Monterey NMS).

Budget update - FY20: \$55.5M for Operations and \$3M for Construction. Slight increases are requested for FY21.

Looking ahead - ONMS 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in October 2022, and a new strategic plan with renewed focus on: 1) justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion; 2) climate change; and 3) tribal & indigenous engagement. Goals for the 50<sup>th</sup> Campaign are: visibility, credibility, and effectiveness.

Discussion followed. Scott Hickman asked about the FEIS. John said the FEIS will be published first, targeting mid-December for publication, followed by publication of the Final Rule in mid-January. Jesse Cancelmo asked about ONMS future collaboration with Mexico, Canada, and Cuba, connected to ONMS 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. John responded it was a great idea, and ONMS Gonzolo Cid has been fostering international partnerships. Sepp Haukebo asked about the “30 by 30” (i.e 30% of US marine areas protected by 2030) initiative. John responded ONMS will be part of this campaign’s answer. Ruth Perry asked about the upcoming UN Ocean Decade, and asked if ONMS would be involved. John responded ONMS is engaged.

**9:50 Administrative Business – Scott Hickman**

Adoption of Agenda – Motion from Shane Cantrell, second from Frank Burek. No objections on the draft agenda, motion approved.

Adoption of Minutes – Motion to approve minutes from September 10, 2020 meeting from Natalie Davis, second from Charles Tyer. No objections on the draft minutes, motion approved.

### **9:57 Public Comment**

No public comment.

### **9:58 Artificial Reef Working Group Report - James Sinclair**

Within 10 miles of FGBNMS proposed expansion areas, James reported the following oil and gas activity: 53 active oil and gas structures; 5 proposed; 99 removed; 7 destroyed/removed (weather events). James scanned over a map of the FGBNMS, current and proposed, and showed the oil and gas infrastructure in those areas. His presentation was made available through the hand-outs in this meeting.

### **10:14 Life Under the Platform - Frank Burek**

Frank shared a slideshow of images he and his wife photographed over the last four decades from oil and gas platforms in the Gulf of Mexico. Discussion followed, including a question if Frank has seen changes at the platforms over the years. Frank responded some platforms are cleaned by the company that owns the structure, but remarked on the colorful marine life he usually sees. Scott Hickman said platforms with connectivity to pipelines are higher in diversity than mud bottoms with no structures that provide habitat.

### **10:30 Sanctuary Update - G.P. Schmahl**

Fernando Calderon Gutierrez is FGBNMS 2020 Volunteer of the Year.

NOAA remains under mandatory telework order for all staff. Public access to FGBNMS buildings are closed until further notice. Vessel operations and NOAA Diving are suspended except for mission critical activities. FGBNMS is currently planning a mission critical cruise. FGBNMS has moved out of Phase 0 to Phase 1, allowing for restricted staff access.

G.P. introduced the FGBNMS Advisory Council's newest member, Steve Hamm with W&T Offshore, who represents one of the two Oil & Gas Industry seats and took a few minutes to share some of his background. Two seats will be expiring in December 2020 - Commercial Fishing (Shane Cantrell) and Conservation (Joanie Steinhaus). G.P. requested Shane and Joanie to continue in their seats until the recruitment and selections are finalized. Also, another Applicant Review Subcommittee will be needed.

November is Native American Heritage Month. Some ONMS sites have begun to incorporate statements at the beginning of meetings for the purposes of land recognition/acknowledgement of First Nations and First People. G.P. mentioned the Karankawa of coastal Texas as the primary First People tribe, first noted by Cabeza de Vaca/Narvaez Expeditions in 1528, when they were shipwrecked on or near Galveston Island, which they named the "Isla de Malhado" (Isle of Misfortune).

Hurricane season 2020 was and continues to be very busy, with several tropical weather systems passing over or near FGBNMS (e.g., Hurricane Delta in October).

A new species of black coral from Elevers Bank, *Distichopathes hickersonae*, was named after FGBNMS Emma Hickerson. The research cruise that discovered this new species was also recently highlighted in a NOAA web story for its inclusion of underrepresented minorities

through ocean exploration.

Two recently released reports at FGBNMS: 1) *Flower Garden Banks*; and 2) *Coral Reef Condition: A Status Report for Flower Garden Banks* (scored as in “good condition”).

Texas now has five NOAA Ocean Guardian Schools for the 2020/2021 school year: Oppe Elementary, Austin Middle School, Ball High School, Yorkshire Academy, and Dickinson High School. Two of the schools participated this year in the “Unwrap the Waves” project, whereby candy wrappers from Halloween are collected, counted, and recycled. Oppe Elementary won first place.

With money not spent on research cruises and in consultation with BOEM, a small Remotely Operated Vehicle (ROV) was purchased by FGBNMS: Oceanbotics “SRV-8”.

The NOAA ship *Thomas Jefferson* completed its Gulf of Mexico Mapping Project 2020, with topographic features mapped at the request of BOEM/FGBNMS.

G.P. provided an update on the proposed sanctuary expansion, with FGBNMS in its final step for the designation of boundaries. After expansion is finalized, FGBNMS will begin a process to review and revise its management plan, last updated in 2012. This process will begin by updating the FGBNMS Condition Report.

Discussion followed. Jesse Cancelmo asked if all bouys (mooring, ocean acidification) survived the tropical weather system season, and if the design could be improved to withstand the waves (e.g., use cone-shaped buoy instead of spherical). G.P. welcomed suggestions on buoy design. He added FGBNMS has no first-hand knowledge because of the pandemic’s halt on operations, and is relying on information provided by the M/V *Fling* that has reported lost mooring bouys. Each of the three sanctuary areas still have at least two mooring bouys.

In preparation for future discussions regarding the development of a new FGBNMS Condition Report, G.P. defined the phrase “Ecosystem Services” that includes Cultural (non-material benefits: sense of place, non-consumptive recreation, consumptive recreation, science, education, heritage), Regulating (coastal protection), and Provisioning (material benefits: biotechnology, ornamentals, commercial harvest, subsistence harvest, water, energy).

G.P. shared the doodle poll results of Council members for 2021 Advisory Council meeting dates: January 27 (Sepp not available), April 21 (Sharon not available), September 15 (Frank and Sharon not available), and November 17.

### **11:30 Baseline Ecological Assessment of HIA-389-A: Pre- and Post-partial Structure Removal - Michelle Johnston**

Published in August 2020, the report was the product of an interagency agreement between BSEE and with John Embesi as the Project Manager. HIA389A was installed in October 1981, located outside the NAZ at EFGB. The sanctuary was not in existence at the time of the oil platform installation. The ownership of the platform changed several times, but W&T Offshore

acquired the platform in 1999. Production of natural gas ceased in 2012. Removal of the deck and top portion of the platform was completed on July 25, 2018. FGBNMS monitored fish, benthics, and acoustics (fish) pre- and post-removal. Prior to removal, algae, hydroids, and sponges were the most abundant. Post-removal, the communities along the horizontal structures changed with the hydroids being the main component of that change (decrease after post-removal). In general, the most common coral species was the invasive orange cup coral, *Tubastraea*. Only 27% of corals observed were native, with the remainder being *Tubastraea*. For vertical pilings, sponges represented the significant driver of change from pre- to post-removal.

Discussion followed. Jesse asked Michelle if she could comment on loggerhead sea turtles and sharks, and if both were observed pre- and post-removal. Michelle responded no sea turtles were observed, and most sharks stayed out of the survey areas and were not captured in the data. G.P. added loggerhead sea turtles have been anecdotally observed. Scott asked about *Tubastraea* and why it was so common on the platform, perhaps because of the metal substrate. Michelle responded this species was not present on the vertical pilings, just the horizontal structures, and added more research is needed on this species.

### **12:10 Future Patrols at FGBNMS - Scott Hickman**

Scott Hickman suggested enforcement patrols at FGBNMS should occur in late January/early February. Shane Cantrell agreed January and February are popular times to catch amberjack, vermilion snapper, deepwater groupers, and wahoo at Geyer Bank, East Flower Garden Bank, and West Flower Garden Bank. Wahoo has no federal bag limit currently, but a \$25 Highly Migratory Species (HMS) permit is required before going offshore. Scott asked if patrols could visit FGBNMS during good weather days. Keith Edwards said their patrols are planned in advance. Charles Tyer said NOAA OLE coordinates with TPWD, and plans a specific number of patrol days during a certain operational window which allows flexibility for weather. Scott reminded everyone of the new requirements for charter boats to have VMS in January 2021. Shane added he is really looking forward to the educational component that patrols will have. Steve Hamm suggested several platforms in the area of FGBNMS could be called ahead of time by enforcement to receive a visual assessment of use. Joanie Steinhaus added information on the efforts to reduce sea turtle bycatch in commercial fisheries through enhanced training and outreach to the fishing communities, and through enhanced state enforcement efforts to improve compliance with existing requirements. Emma asked about how wahoo could be a managed species through GMFMC. Scott responded the need is apparent, but the GMFMC's agenda is really full. Scott recommended research focused on the wahoo aggregation. Michael Dance suggested his lab could do a long-term tagging research project. Scott shared news the Gulf Fisheries Research Foundation (part of Charter Fishermen's Association) was just awarded a NFWF grant (~\$800,000) for a remote electronic monitoring project with ~14 Gulf charter fishers. Emma asked if commercial fishers target the wahoo aggregation. Shane replied his trips opportunistically catch wahoo, but his efforts are focused on other species. Scott said even though wahoo are recreationally caught, they can be sold to fish houses. Charles said very few regulations exist for wahoo currently. Sepp suggested bringing this topic back up again during a future FGBNMS Advisory Council meeting, and invite an expert on wahoo. Lastly, Charles Tyer announced his imminent retirement in December 2020, having been involved with FGBNMS since 1995, and on its Advisory Council for 11 years.

### **12:54 Proposed SAC Charter Amendment - Frank Burek**

Frank Burek motioned to approve the new sections (highlighted in red below) for the FGBNMS Advisory Council's charter to be added when the charter is revised after sanctuary expansion is finalized, seconded by Jesse Cancelmo. Discussion followed. Scott asked G.P. if this additional language should wait to be added until after the expansion is finalized. G.P. responded he liked the additional language, but the mechanics of revising the charter takes time and recommends waiting on charter revisions until after the expansion is finalized. **Shane Cantrell amended the motion as follows: to approve the following recommendations to the FGBNMS SAC Charter as advised and recommended:**

**A new section - inserted on page 3, after the COUNCIL ROLES section. Inserted before the MEMBERS, ALTERNATES, AND OFFICERS section with the following:**

#### **SANCTUARY ADVISORY COUNCIL (SAC) VOTING MEMBERS – DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

- 1. Attend and participate electronically or physically at SAC meetings.**
- 2. Adhere to the proper rules of order during the meetings.**
- 3. Represent your constituency group - present its views and concerns to the SAC and FGBNMS Superintendent.**
- 4. Represent and present the SAC and sanctuary's views, concerns and activity information to your constituency group.**
- 5. Attend and participate in the SAC's Subcommittee and Working Group process.**
- 6. Respect the views and opinions of other members of the SAC and sanctuary employees.**

**No objects, motion passed.** Frank asked for additional volunteers for the Charter subcommittee, as previous Advisory Council members have rolled off due to term limits.

### **1:15 New Business**

Robert Kirschner, Steve Hamm, and Brian Shmaefsky were selected to be the next Applicant Review Subcommittee.

**1:17 Meeting Adjourned** – Frank motioned to adjourn, seconded by Robert. All in favor. Approved.

Next SAC Meeting scheduled for Wednesday, January 27, 2021.