

**FLOWER GARDEN BANKS NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY
Sanctuary Advisory Council Boundary Expansion Working Group
Meeting Minutes
May 11, 2017**

Meeting Attendance Roster:

Clint Moore	Oil and Gas Industry	Present
Shane Cantrell	Fishing – Commercial	Present
Natalie Hall	Diving Operations	Late - Present (webinar)
Jesse Cancelmo	Recreational Diving	Present
Scott Hickman	Fishing - Recreational	Not Present
Buddy Guindon	Fishing - Commercial	Present
Adrienne Simoes-Correa	Research	Not Present
Jacqui Stanley	Education	Not Present
Charles Tyer	NOAA OLE	Not Present
Randy Widaman	Diving Operations	Present
Jake Emmert	Conservation	Not Present

Total member attendance: 6 of 11 members (6 of 10 voting members)

Others in attendance:

G.P. Schmahl, Leslie Clift, Emma Hickerson, Bill Kiene, Joanie Steinhaus, Jeff Seinsheimer, Root Choyce

5:20 PM – Meeting called to order by Clint Moore.

Adoption of Agenda – motion from Jesse Cancelmo, second from Randy Widaman, no discussion, all in favor, motion approved.

Adoption of Minutes – Buddy Guindon moved to adopt minutes, second from Jesse Cancelmo, no discussion, all in favor, motion approved.

5:20 PM – Public Comment

Joanie Steinhaus – Currently Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary (FGBNMS) protects only three among dozens of reefs and banks scattered along the edge of the continental shelf of the northern Gulf of Mexico. As the Draft Environmental

Impact Statement (DEIS) states, the Sanctuary provides a wide range of habitat conditions that support several distinct biological communities, including the northernmost coral reefs in the continental United States. Sanctuary formations provide the foundation for essential habitat for a variety of species, including sea turtles, sharks and other important marine wildlife. The Sanctuary and proposed expansion areas represent an amazing array of biodiversity, ranging from tropical coral reefs to mounds of deepwater branching corals, and various communities in between. These ecosystems support fish and invertebrate populations of both significant ecological and economic importance. The threats to ocean habitats outside Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary are many. For example, from oil and gas development, threats include the physical impact of drilling, placement of structures on the seafloor (e.g., platforms, anchors, pipelines, or cables), discharges from rock-cutting during the drilling process, and intentional or accidental well discharges or release of drilling fluids. Sanctuary status would potentially protect a large area from these threats with little enforcement needed. Sanctuary staff members have documented fishing gear impacts to an extensive list of areas. Included in the Sanctuary regulations is a prohibition from taking any marine mammal or turtle within the sanctuary. Ideally, such prohibitions are backed by strong enforcement. However, it is likely that prohibitions such as this one would result in somewhat lesser harm to the ocean environment, even absent strong enforcement. Expanding the Sanctuary to the larger area in Alternative 5 can reduce fishing gear interactions and impacts. In closing, I support expansion of Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary and applaud NOAA's action to protect sensitive marine habitat areas.

Jeff Seinsheimer – The Galveston chapter of the Surfrider Foundation supports expansion of The Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary. We support the most broad and comprehensive expansion plan, Alternative 5. The Surfrider Foundation advocates for the conservation of coastal and ocean resources and the use of renewable energy sources over fossil fuels. The Surfrider Foundation is opposed to offshore oil drilling in new areas. Our nation's oceans, waves and beaches are vital recreational, economic and ecological treasures that will be polluted by an increase in offshore oil drilling. Instead of pursuing transient and environmentally harmful ways to meet America's energy needs, we should seek comprehensive and environmentally sustainable energy solutions, including energy conservation. Personally, I attended the University of Florida, diving the Florida keys dozens of times. Those dives were the best times and scenery of my life. I have also witnessed the unforgettable annual coral spawn at the Flower Gardens. We need to protect reefs for future generations; mostly oil platforms and a few wrecks around here (artificial reefs). Gulf fisheries are in trouble, especially snapper; compounded by a lack of bottom structure/overfishing. We need to protect their habitat.

Root Choyce – supports expansion of the sanctuary. The more area we can protect from overfishing and the hazards from the oil and gas industry, the better. Supports Alternative 5.

G.P. explained the timeframe for DEIS, public comment period, and Final EIS.

5:32 PM – Regulatory Framework Review (and rolled into Economic Impact Analyses Review)

The group discussed the use of mooring buoys in the expanded sanctuary. Randy Widaman requested to install buoys at Geyer, Bright, and Sonnier Banks for divers. Jesse added a request to add a buoy at McGrail to the list for technical divers. Randy reported that he has visited five of the local dive shops and they all support the expansion, especially Bright and Geyer. Clint asked about any new regulations associated with mooring buoys. G.P. responded that the DEIS calls for applying current regulations to the expansion areas (no anchoring, vessels 100 feet or less may use mooring buoys). Clint asked if the fishermen would use the buoys for fishing. Buddy responded that the buoys are sometimes used, if conditions are right. Fishermen would want buoys near the edges, whereas the divers would want buoys near the highest peaks. The Sanctuary is supportive of mooring buoys and intends to install new mooring buoys in the expanded areas as funding allowed. Potential future funding sources were discussed.

The spearfishing community has requested access to breath-holding spearfishing at any new areas, but especially at Geyer Bank. G.P. stated that NOAA would not be supportive of removing the existing spearfishing regulation within the existing sanctuary (East and West FG and Stetson Banks). Therefore if spearfishing was allowed in any new areas, then the sanctuary would have different tiers of regulations. G.P. would like to learn more about which specific locations the spearfishers are targeting and see if they are within or outside of the areas proposed by GMFMC as no anchor/no bottom impact gear zones.

Clint discussed lionfish traps and asked about their placement in the existing sanctuary and new proposed areas. G.P. said existing sanctuary regulations prohibit fish traps. FKNMS is proposing to allow lionfish traps through a research project, with permits. FGBNMS could follow suit, with permits for research. It would not be allowed as a fishing method in the existing sanctuary, without a change to the existing regulations.

6:30 PM – NCCOS (National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science) Review

Randy Clark with NCCOS at the Biogeographic Branch at NOAA received official approval for the project, with \$75,000 in funding for travel, work, and contract support to the Boundary Expansion Working Group (BEWG). They now have to wait for the budget approval.

Clint asked if Randy has developed a process for the BEWG. Randy replied he has been reviewing the data, communicating with the contractor, and tracking down other data. Shrimp logging data, Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) data for bottom long-line fisheries, geo-database of inventory of multibeam products in the Gulf of Mexico. NCCOS could move forward hand-in-hand with BOEM's update/review of NAZs. NCCOS will continue communicating with BOEM. G.P. added the information on archeological resources is usually regarded as highly sensitive. NCCOS would like the Pascagoula NMFS lab with reef fish data, as well as oil and gas information,

recreational fisheries, commercial fisheries, shape files of the oil and gas fields, and the diving industry.

After presentations and work plan development, NCCOS will need to work with the working group to develop quantitative criteria. This will also depend on the data available and what the working group decides to include in the ultimate analyses. The work plan could be developed quickly if the working group has specific objectives that it wants NCCOS to achieve.

6:30 PM – Assessment Matrix

The original ranking criteria for topographic features of the Northwest Gulf of Mexico were originally developed by BLM (Bureau of Land Management) to protect the resources. Clint requested G.P. for the adapted assessment matrix that was used for the DEIS. Emma responded that they looked at the additional banks, using the same criteria, but with new information that had been collected. G.P. added that in 2007, banks such as Bouma, Rezak, and Sidner received a low ranking because of the lack of data. Since that time and with new data, the ranking of these banks became elevated.

Jesse summarized the BEWG would make a recommendation would be between Alternative 2 and 3. Clint disagreed and said Alternative 1 is possible, or even something larger than Alternative 3. Clint and Jesse see the value in updating the 2007 assessment matrix with the new information and publish the final ranking criteria. G.P. responded that if the BEWG updates the 2007 assessment matrix, the criteria categories should first be reviewed.

Shane noted another element, Ecological Connectivity, needs to be added to the criteria ranking. He added that the new information from multibeam and ROV surveys would shift the biological, structural, and ecological connectivity rankings from 2007. Information on fish aggregations and fish spawning aggregations could be entered into the criteria ranking. The group discussed developing new values for the ranking criteria instead of “1, 2, and 3” and could instead be a weighted or additive process. Shane suggested looking at the ranking criteria but also consider access (i.e., is the bank too deep to access for divers?) Jesse and Shane suggested the following weights: Zone Priority Index (40% weight), Structural Connectivity Index (20%), Biological Connectivity Index (20%), Threat Index (10%), and Public and Sanctuary Priority (10%). G.P. asked the BEWG to review if any new categories need to be added, or if any categories need to be adjusted/deleted. G.P. added the designation at other national marine sanctuaries have considered other criteria such as Partner Commitments, Research Opportunities, Heritage Resources, and Community Support (Appendix A pages 6-8). Emma will send this table to Leslie, who will distribute the table to the BEWG.

Emma Hickerson's thesis on sea turtles was provided and discussed during the 2007 BEWG activities, in relation to development of buffer zones. During her research, Emma captured and tagged 5 large subadult loggerhead sea turtles, and attached radio and satellite tags to their carapaces. Emma was able to determine core and home ranges for them. Core ranges: within which there is a 50% probability that a point will fall. Home

ranges: within which there is a 95% probability that a point will fall. The turtles all exhibited high site fidelity - i.e. an animal that was caught on the West Flower Garden Bank had a tight core and home range around WFGB.

Stephanie Stefanski, Duke University, gave a brief summary to the BEWG in response to the critique provided by Clint Moore on her paper entitled "Valuing Marine Biodiversity in the Gulf of Mexico: Evidence from the Proposed Expansion of the FGBNMS". The main point she wanted to emphasize is that this article was peer reviewed for the leading academic journal specializing in marine resource economics. The paper was reviewed by two expert editors and three PhD economists with interests and expertise related to the study, and the choices in the analysis represent the state of the art methods in survey design, implementation, and data analysis.

Stephanie and her co-author also believe the commentator misunderstands the study. Stephanie and her co-author did not drop any individuals from analysis based on their responses. The survey contractor, Qualtrics, recruited 2,183 respondents from a national panel under the specification that the final sample be nationally representative and greater than 1000 respondents. 1,867 of these reached the end of the survey and 1,550 completely answered all willingness to pay question questions. After removing surveys with missing answers, their final sample size was 1,526. The results in the paper use the entire survey sample. Protest No's and those misunderstanding the payment question were included in this estimation, as are all other individuals who completely answered the survey questions, regardless of their responses.

They have additional, online appendices where they re-calculated WTP (willingness to pay) after dropping certain responses. Only 244 individuals of the total sample (not 1277, as asserted by the commentator) gave a "protest no" response. Only 305 respondents of the total sample (not 1226 as asserted by the commentator) misunderstood the payment vehicle. However, when they dropped these respondents, average WTP remained within 10% of the main estimates and significant determinants of WTP remained unchanged.

The survey collected data on party affiliation including democrat, republican, and independent. It is not statistically valid to include an indicator for all options for categorical variables in regression analysis. Even though it is included as a covariate, party affiliation was not a statistically significant determinant of willingness to pay in the study, which means the effect is not statistically different from zero on the final WTP value. Therefore, the data are in no way cherry picked, and all sample selection and statistical methods follow the state of the art in the peer-reviewed literature.

Next date for BEWG is tentatively May 23rd, and the BEWG will be sent a Doodle poll.

8:00 Jesse motioned to adjourn, Randy seconded. Meeting adjourned.