



September 17, 2009

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Research

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Education

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Conservation

Rafael Calderon/Page Williams

Minerals Management Service

James Sinclair

U.S. Coast Guard

LCDR Carmen DeGeorge

NOAA Fisheries

Rusty Swafford

Daniel J. Basta, Director
Office of National Marine Sanctuaries
1305 East-West Hwy., N/ORM-6
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dear Mr. Basta,

At the most recent meeting of the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary (FGBNMS) advisory council, several members raised an issue of great concern during our concluding open discussion session. This was in regards to operational support for the various activities necessary for sanctuary staff to meet their management obligations. The result of that very intensive discussion was to prepare a letter outlining that concern and direction to forward it to you as soon as possible. The content of the letter was crafted by the Sanctuary Advisory Council (SAC) acting as a committee of the whole and adopted by unanimous vote.

While the letter expresses the SAC's specific concerns about the Flower Garden Banks, I want to emphasize that it reflects a more broad concern about the overall level of funding provided to the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries to accomplish its mandated mission. We recognize that all federal agencies are facing fiscal constraints and are trying to make sure that available funding is matched to the highest priorities for which they are responsible. However, the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries has been given considerable additional responsibilities without adequate funding and that inequity is increasingly impacting the program's ability to accomplish its core mission. I am sure that concern is reflected throughout the sanctuary system and is a common concern of all advisory councils. Please find below the specific concern of the FGBNMS advisory council:

RE: Input on ONMS allocation of funds for upcoming fiscal year to provide support for R/V MANTA in order to provide continuous protection of Sanctuary resources.

Since 2005, the FGBNMS budget has remained basically static. The R/V MANTA represents a considerable taxpayer investment (\$3.8M) to help further the work of the program (outreach, research, monitoring, and enforcement). At the current funding level, the R/V MANTA is under threat of dry-stack storage. No additional funding to support the program's initiatives has been forthcoming.

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<http://flowergarden.noaa.gov>

The Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary cannot continue to provide the basic services (mooring buoys, ship time, and research) that it has provided since 1992 at current levels of funding. Additional funding sources must be identified to fund the current mission of the FGBNMS.

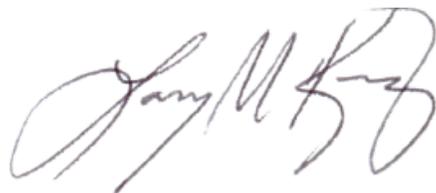
FGBNMS advisory council respectfully requests that the upcoming ONMS budget be prioritized at the national level, separate from the existing and upcoming FGBNMS budget to provide sufficient funding to operate the R/V MANTA on an annual basis, consistent with the intent of building this vessel in support of the mission of FGBNMS.

The SAC recognizes the efforts of the staff at the sanctuary, regional and national levels to continue to find ways to adhere to the mission of the program. Hopefully, this expression of our concerns will be a constructive tool in securing adequate funding to meet mission objectives.

The national marine sanctuary system can make a significant contribution to addressing issues of climate change, ocean acidification, marine spatial planning, etc. They are our nation's most important *sentinel sites*, reflecting the impact of these challenges in ways that the public can both understand and appreciate. They should be focal sites for both research and outreach. The system can, and should be, integral to NOAA's broad efforts to address these critical and global issues. However, without adequate funding they cannot fulfill this promise. I assure you that you have our support in your efforts to meet this challenge.

The council is an advisory body to the sanctuary superintendent. The opinions and findings of this letter do not necessarily reflect the position of the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Larry McKinney". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "L" and "M".

Larry McKinney, Chair
Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council