

FLOWER GARDEN BANKS NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY
Sanctuary Advisory Council Meeting
Meeting Minutes
September 2, 2009

The regular meeting of the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary (FGBNMS) Advisory Council was held on Wednesday, September 2, 2009, at 9:00 AM, at the FGBNMS Headquarters offices in Galveston, Texas. The council chair, Larry McKinney and council vice-chair, Frank Burek, were present.

Larry McKinney called the meeting to order and asked for the introduction of public attendees and others including Rod Ehler and Carmen DeGeorge.

G.P. Schmahl, sanctuary superintendent, welcomed the council and the public and gave a brief "safety moment."

Larry McKinney asked for a motion to adopt the agenda. Irby Basco asked to add a discussion of recreational users of the sanctuary. This topic was added to the draft management plan update. Page Williams also requested five minutes to address the Ike Dike and possible affects on marine life in the Gulf of Mexico (GOM). This topic was added to the Blue Seas/Green Communities report. Frank Burek moved to adopt the amended agenda. The motion passed. Larry McKinney asked for a motion to adopt the minutes of the April 15 council meeting. Frank Wasson moved to adopt the minutes of the previous meeting. The motion passed.

Karen Raine, GC NOAA OLE, reported on notices of violation and assessment on two anchoring cases.

Carmen DeGeorge, U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) representative to the sanctuary advisory council, was present for the first time and spoke briefly about his background. Carmen is the deputy enforcement chief in district 8 of the USCG. He also serves on the GMFMC and hopes to be a conduit for enforcement questions and issues. He noted that although the coast guard tries to spread out their presence in the GOM in times of limited resources, he would work to have a presence in the sanctuary.

G.P. Schmahl reported on the state of the sanctuary in the 'Sanctuary Update' report. Topics covered included: first full season for the R/V Manta; partner projects with UTMSI, TAMUG, TAMU GERG, and USGS; marine debris survey and removal project; long-term monitoring program; receipt of DOI Partners in Conservation Award with MMS; manta extravaganza at East Flower Garden Bank in August 2009; documentation of tagged whale shark from the Caribbean using areas in the northwestern GOM; Industry/Government Expedition (IGE) cruise; and a review of the biology and broadcast spawning of three species of Montastrea.

G.P. recognized George C. Hanks, Jr. (not present) as the FGBNMS volunteer of the year. G.P. also presented to Capt. Frank Wasson an award for recognition of his help on the R/V Point Glass (originally intended for presentation at the vessel's decommissioning ceremony in 2006).

Jen Morgan presented information regarding preparation of the draft management plan. She reviewed the progress since kick-off of the process in 2006 and showed visuals used during the case study presentation at the SAC Summit.

Irby Basco presented his ideas for gathering further information about recreational fishing in the sanctuary. He is interested in developing a web site or survey gather voluntary information. This topic generated much discussion and resulted in the formation of a recreation users subcommittee. Irby Basco, Will Heyman, Frank Burek, Frank Wasson, Mike Jennings and Darrell Walker volunteered to serve on the subcommittee. Emma Hickerson or Jen Morgan will participate as the staff member on the subcommittee.

Chris Caldwell, Fish Ecologist with NOAA's National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science (NCCOS), Center for Coastal Monitoring and Assessment (CCMA) gave a presentation on the biogeographic characterization of fish communities and benthic habitats within the Sanctuary. Chris has been involved with several assessments for the ONMS and his work with FGBNMS began in 2006.

Clint Moore, Chair of the Charter Revision Subcommittee, addressed the council charter amendment on the table regarding transparency. Clint moved to adopt the language in the amendment as written. Following discussion and a vote, the amendment was adopted unanimously. Frank Burek recommended that the Charter Revision Subcommittee be a standing committee. The committee will stand.

Page Williams provided an update for the Blue Seas/Green Communities Subcommittee. She provided an example of storm drain labels that could be used by the sanctuary staff and briefly discussed the "Ike Dike".

Darrell Walker, Frank Wasson, and Larry McKinney presented constituent reports. Darrell Walker discussed the impact of the current economy on dive shops and how that in turn affects the public's ability to value and experience the sanctuary. He also highlighted a partnership with a National Geographic diver and his new vessel's capabilities.

Frank Wasson also noted the attrition in the dive business, but explained that the number of research trips have increased for his business in Florida. He expressed concern over current sanctuary budgets and encouraged the council to consider writing a letter addressing this situation.

Larry McKinney provided an overview of the mission and vision of the Harte Research Institute and their current partnerships and projects. He also discussed current challenges for work in the Gulf of Mexico.

Following the constituent reports, names of volunteers for reports for the November council meeting were taken. Rebecca Nadel and Clint Moore volunteered.

Brandt Mannchen of the Houston Sierra Club provided public comment on funding and realistic budgets for the draft management plan, collecting data about sanctuary users, praise for Karen Raine and NOAA OLE, and the need for a T.V. documentary on the Sanctuary.

Larry McKinney briefly reviewed the National SAC Summit, describing it as a useful opportunity to interact. He noted the emphasis on regional organization and the opportunity for councils to work together on larger issues, like ocean acidification.

Darrell Walker and other council members inquired about the timing of the decommissioning of platform HI389. G. P. Schmahl explained the possibility of drafting an options paper to provide recommendations. This item will be added to the November 18 council meeting agenda.

Larry McKinney provided an introduction to ocean acidification and reviewed resolutions on ocean acidification from other councils. Following discussion on the purpose and important components of such a resolution, the council requested that Larry draft a resolution for consideration at the next council meeting.

The remainder of the meeting was used as a working session to draft a letter to be forwarded to the ONMS Director regarding the ONMS and Sanctuary budgets and the need to maintain R/V Manta operations. Following the work session, Clint Moore moved to accept the draft letter. The motion passed with no opposition.

A suggestion was made to coordinate the 2010 FGBNMS council meeting schedule with that of FKNMS, GRNMS and the GMFMC.

The meeting adjourned at 3:15 pm.