

***FLORIDA KEYS NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY ADVISORY COUNCIL***

**Hyatt Place  
1996 Overseas Highway  
Marathon, FL 33050  
Tuesday, December 12, 2017**

**FINAL MINUTES**

***SANCTUARY ADVISORY COUNCIL MISSION STATEMENT  
(adopted unanimously, December 6, 2005)***

**Council Members**

Boating Industry: Bruce Popham (Chair)  
Tourism – Lower Keys: Clinton Barras (Co-Chair)  
Citizen at Large – Lower Keys: Mimi Stafford (absent)  
Citizen at Large – Middle Keys: George Garrett  
Citizen at Large – Upper Keys: David Makepeace  
Conservation and Environment: Ken Nedimyer  
Conservation and Environment: Chris Bergh  
Diving – Lower Keys: Don Kincaid  
Diving – Upper Keys: Elena Rodriguez  
Education and Outreach: Martin Moe  
Elected County Official: George R. Neugent  
Fishing – Charter Fishing Flats Guide: Tad Burke (absent)  
Fishing – Charter Sports Fishing: Steven Leopold  
Fishing – Commercial – Marine/Tropical: Ben Daughtry  
Fishing – Commercial – Shell/Scale: Justin Bruland (absent)  
Fishing – Recreational: Ken Reda (absent)  
Research and Monitoring: David Vaughan  
South Florida Ecosystem Restoration: Pete Frezza  
Submerged Cultural Resources: Corey Malcom  
Tourism – Upper Keys: Andy Newman

**Council alternates (present)**

Citizen at Large – Lower Keys: David Hawtof  
Citizen at Large – Upper Keys: Suzy Roebling  
Conservation and Environment: Caroline McLaughlin  
Conservation and Environment: Jessica Dockery  
Diving – Lower Keys: Bob Smith  
Fishing – Charter Sports Fishing: Richard Gomez  
Fishing – Recreational: Bruce Frerer  
Fishing – Charter Fishing Flats Guide: Will Benson  
Research and Monitoring: Shelly Krueger  
Submerged Cultural Resources: Diane Silvia  
Tourism – Lower Keys: Joe Weatherby

Tourism – Upper Keys: Lisa Mongelia

**Agency Representatives** (present)

Florida Department of Environmental Protection: Karen Bohnsack

FWC Division of Law Enforcement: Capt. Dave Dipre

NOAA Office of Law Enforcement: Kenneth Blackburn

National Park Service, Everglades and Dry Tortugas National Park: Chris Kavanagh

U.S. Coast Guard (USCG): Mark King, CWO4 (BOSN), CDR Blanca Rosas

U.S. Navy: Edward Barham

Dry Tortugas National Park: Meaghan Johnson

**I. CALL TO ORDER, ROLL CALL, AND MEETING MINUTES APPROVAL OF AUGUST DRAFT MEETING NOTES**

**Pledge of Allegiance**

**Roll Call**

**MOTION (passed)**

A motion to approve the minutes was made by George Garrett and seconded by Chris Bergh. The minutes were approved. A motion to adopt the agenda was made by David Vaughn and seconded by Chris Bergh. The agenda was adopted without change.

**Opening Remarks**

Chairperson Popham welcomed everyone and acknowledged the video streaming through Co-Chair Barras and the work done by the FKNMS staff in preparing for and executing the meeting. Mr. Barras will be leading the afternoon sessions today, and is preparing to take over chair duties next year. Today’s meeting will address the impacts of Irma and the efforts to restore the community, the upcoming Blue Star Fishing Guides program, and a review of the council charter. There will be two public comment periods. There will be no formal action items today.

**Advisory Council Member Recognition – David Hawtof and Martin “Skip” Moe**

David Hawtof has held the citizen at large position in the Lower Keys for many years, and multiple council members wished to share their stories about his years of volunteerism, friendship, and passion, including the story of him voluntarily sailing to Cuba to help scientists understand how conch larvae travel through the Florida Keys. The council expressed appreciation for Mr. Hatwof’s time, passion, effort, and energy, and presented him with a plaque of appreciation for his years of service to the National Marine Sanctuaries.

Martin “Skip” Moe has been a long serving member of the advisory council, including serving as a chair for the education and outreach working group and sitting in the education seat for over a decade. From his work with marine ornaments and his groundbreaking research with sea urchins to his current passion for education and outreach, Mr. Moe has been dedicated to understanding and protecting the resources of the sanctuary. Many members of the council acknowledged his calming demeanor, vast knowledge, and incredible contributions to the community, and he was presented with a plaque of appreciation for his years of service to the National Marine Sanctuaries.

### **National Marine Sanctuary Foundation (NMSF), Kris Sarri**

Ms. Sarri began by acknowledging the members for volunteering their time to serve on this council. Over the last year, Ms. Sarri has been visiting sanctuary sites to introduce the Foundation and assess how they can best support each site. On the national level, the Foundation has been working to build stronger community connections to elevate the individual sites. On the local level, the Foundation has been advocating for funding from Congress to help restore corals and install buoys displaced from Hurricane Irma.

Ms. Sarri also detailed the sources of funding for the Foundation, including federal and corporate funding streams, and explained how their board of directors help decide the allocation of those funds to different programs throughout the National Marine Sanctuary System.

### **II. HURRICANE IRMA RESPONSE AND RECOVERY FIELD WORK UPDATES: RAPID REEF ASSESSMENT AND TRIAGE STABILIZATION**

Jennifer Stein, The Nature Conservancy

Laurie MacLaughlin, Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary

To view these presentations visit: <https://nmsfloridakeys.blob.core.windows.net/floridakeys-prod/media/docs/20171212irmaassessment.pdf>

<https://nmsfloridakeys.blob.core.windows.net/floridakeys-prod/media/docs/20171212irmatriage.pdf>

Ms. Stein described the path of Hurricane Irma, and the lingering questions of underwater effects post-storm. A team of 14 divers spent ten days assessing the conditions of the reef tract, focusing on 57 high-value sites, which were those deemed to have ecological or economic importance. Surveys included benthic impact to corals or sponges, reef fish counts, and presence of debris or disease. Each site was then categorized based on the level of damage and the recommendations of potential coral stabilization: Tier 1 (14% of sites) being the highest priority and Tier 3 (53% of sites) being the lower priority. Injuries observed included dislodged corals, buried coral, and clogged sponges. Recommendations included cementing large corals and removing sand.

There was incredible variability in site disturbance geographically and by depth. Marine debris items were noted in many sites. Of the 57 sites visited, 14 were recommended for some level of coral stabilization, 13 of which are located within FKNMS.

Ms. MacLaughlin detailed the triage efforts performed at the 14 recommended sites by partners from NOAA, NPS, DEP, TNC, and other agencies and organizations. Twelve of those sites were visited by this team; the remaining sites the teams were unable to visit due to weather and currents. Divers from Force Blue, a non-profit team of special operations veterans, joined the partners to assist with stabilization efforts. Stabilization at the sites included using lift bags to upright large corals, cementing colonies in their original locations, and stabilizing coral fragments with epoxy.

Future work includes developing and implementing a plan to establish baseline monitoring at some of these sites, as well as continuing marine debris and derelict vessel removal, and monitoring the fate of the triaged corals.

### **Discussion/Comments:**

- A question was raised about the assessments of artificial reefs. Ms. Stein mentioned a site near Long Key that was monitored, but did not note any major damage. Joanne Delaney spoke for FKNMS, and detailed that the large artificial reefs are the responsibility of the permit holder, which could be the city, county, or an organization. FKNMS is reaching out to those partners to gather that information.
- There was an inquiry about any positive changes after the disturbance. Ms. MacLaughlin discussed the flushing that occurs when the sediment gets pushed around and could help cleanse the system of disease and algae; however, coral disease was still prevalent and opportunistic algae remained. She also mentioned that fragmentation is the natural form of reproduction for some coral species, which could redistribute corals and reseed the reef.
- Each of the 57 sites assessed were formerly long term monitoring sites with pre-existing data. This was important to note the effects of the damage.
- In response to a question as to whether or not the survey was representative of the whole reef, it was explained that this survey was not all encompassing. Due to weather conditions, there is a possibility that shallow sites or lower coral cover sites may not be as represented.

### **III. HURRICANE IRMA RESPONSE AND RECOVERY FIELD WORK UPDATES: MARINE DEBRIS WORKING GROUP**

Lisa Mongelia Working Group Co-Chair and Advisory Council Tourism alternate  
Elena Rodriguez, Working Group Co-Chair and Advisory Council Diving member  
Marlies Tumolo, Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary

To view this presentation visit: <https://nmsfloridakeys.blob.core.windows.net/floridakeys-prod/media/docs/20171212marinedebriswg.pdf>

The dive community in the Florida Keys has come together and expressed interest to help with marine debris issues after Hurricane Irma. To facilitate this effort, a Marine Debris community working group was established and will be made up of SAC members, community experts, and agency representatives.

The working group will be engaging Blue Star dive operators to identify and remove debris from Sanctuary Preservation Areas utilizing staff and customers trained in proper debris removal techniques. Resources and databases will be used to help train staff and identify marine debris include PADI's Dive Against Debris and Mote Marine Laboratory's C-OCEAN. Funding for these removal efforts will be requested from sources such as the NMSF and the NOAA Marine Debris grant program.

### **Discussion/Comments**

- Rainbow Reef Dive Center has been working through permitting requirements with FWC and FKNMS.
- The Marine Debris working group would like to engage the eco-tourism/kayak community to assist with mangrove debris; however, debris in canals will not fall under this group's efforts.
- A question was raised about the various traps along the reef. The working group will provide information and help facilitate individual dive operators to obtain permitted through FWC

and trained to do those removals. Generally, they will not be permitting the public to remove the traps. Captain Dipre clarified that you cannot remove private property (i.e. a viable trap); however, marine debris can be removed.

- There has been great public support of the dive shops that have assisted with marine debris removal efforts over the last few years. This working group will aim to coordinate these efforts with multiple dive shops.
- Captain Bill Kelly, Florida Keys Commercial Fishermen's Association, gave an update on lobster traps flyover maps and the similar pattern of trap debris in the water as debris on land. Of 300,000 displaced/lost traps, there have been 55,000 traps recovered. Hundreds more have been removed privately, and there is a large grant coming from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to assist with further removal.

#### **IV. PUBLIC COMMENT**

Captain Bill Kelly, Florida Keys Commercial Fishermen's Association

I would like to talk about lionfish, and I have had the opportunity to discuss with this will you on several different occasions. Back in 2013, the State of Florida had a lionfish seminar in Cocoa Beach, the consensus of the nearly 70 people that were at that seminar suggested and agreed that a containment effort was viable, most likely through a commercial endeavor – we translate that into traps, which we call LCD's or lionfish containment devices. Fast forward, and we have been working on this for over four years, secured nearly a million dollars in projected investors to support a \$933,000 project. We have approval from the FWC, the South Atlantic Fisheries Management Council, Gulf of Mexico Fisheries Management Council, endorses Wildlife Commission, the program, and it is now under review of the Protected Resources division of NOAA. The biggest setback we have had is with the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. We are in the 14<sup>th</sup> month of trying to get a sanctuary permit to test 100 lionfish containment devices in the marine sanctuary. And when I saw lionfish containment devices, it is four different trap designs, 25 of each, a number of which are designed by R3 digital sciences. They are an optical camera recognition device, battery operated, where a lionfish swims up and the camera recognizes him, the funnel door opens and lets him in; if a pogy swims up, it will not let him in there. If a redfish swims up, it will not let him in; if another lionfish swims up, the camera recognizes him and lets him in. We already know that that works. Since 2013, our association has spent something like \$50,000 developing the concepts, and working on them, having meetings, etc. We have all of these endorsements and even have a request from Superintendent G.P. Schmahl to come out to Florida Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary if we cannot test here. But our rationale is this: this is the epicenter of the invasion, the stock here populates both coasts of the state of Florida, the Gulf of Mexico, the South Atlantic, and up to Long Island. We do not want to test for lionfish if we cannot do it in our own backyard. To paint a picture of how bad it is, we have a fisherman that since Hurricane Irma went through, he has caught 10,000 pounds of lionfish as bycatch in his lobster traps just southwest of the Dry Tortugas. Those 10,000 pounds of lionfish represent about 30,000 animals. We have over 30 fishermen who are catching over 10,000 pounds of lionfish every year as bycatch in their lobster traps – that is invasive. Female lionfish at one year of age are spawning 6 million eggs per year, per lionfish. All they need is a male to fertilize it, and there are not enough zeros to calculate how many lionfish are coming. Is containment possible? Yes, it is a very viable concept. If you look at these derbies in shallow water, the numbers pale in comparison to what is out deep in 200-300 foot of water. We have guys who catch more in one day pulling 500 traps than the best derby in the United States. This area has

become the breeding ground for all of North America. So, we want to do something about it, but this train is stalled around the permit for the sanctuary, and if it does not get rolling by mid-March then we are going to get off. We will continue to catch them as bycatch, but we find it mind-boggling that we cannot get approval to test 100 traps in a sanctuary that already has close to a million traps deployed annually with optically camera technology that would eliminate bycatch in our backyard. I would like the council to mull this over, discuss amongst the council, and with the management staff. The official pushback that we got was that we were trying to introduce a new water-based fish trap fishery in South Florida and the Keys, and that is not the case. This is a very legitimate scientific project and to take 14 months to get a permit is ridiculous. I have passed out some notices here with lionfish information, and I appreciate the extra time.

**Note:** Permit Coordinator Joanne Delaney commented on the experimental lionfish traps mentioned by Captain Bill Kelly, executive director of the Florida Keys Commercial Fishermen's Association. Ms. Delaney explained that staff from FKNMS and NOAA National Marine Fisheries are working together on jointly fulfilling the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which requires a full review. NOAA is conducting a NEPA analysis that is intended to cover this and future lionfish removal proposals as they come forward.

Joe Weatherby, on behalf of Coastal Conservation Association (CCA)

Hello everybody, I am speaking as the public today wearing my CCA organizational hat. I have not been a member of the CCA for very long, just a couple of years. I am here to announce to you that there is an event, a dinner, on January 11, at the Marriott Beachside. The CCA has not been very active here in Key West for a while, but I elected to join because of their new emphasis on habitat, and their revamped effort to bolster the conservation side of the Coastal Conservation Association. After working with these efforts for many years, I have found that the more reports and studies that come out is very good for all of us. There is an effort of the part of this organization to gather the data and examine the issues that are part of the solution. I brought some posters, and you can contact CCA for more information. Thank you.

Douglas Hattendorf, Mama Ocean

I started Mama Ocean a few years ago; it is a non-profit helping with plastic and styrene on the shoreline. I have been commercial here since 1991, I am still a commercial marine life collector, I was a trapper, a lobster diver, but now I hunt plastics for the last three years. This storm helped wake everyone up, there has been plastic coating the shoreline for twenty years, and now it is in everyone's yards and the shoreline is the cleanest it has been in years. But to focus now on the traps, the other day I counted 100 of them within a half mile within three foot of water on the shore, the mangroves have 15 foot tall rope like cobwebs, and this cannot wait until June. I am starting tomorrow. I will bring them in, and I know half the trappers so they can go back to their owners and they can go back to work. The traps on the shore are not damaged, 90% of them are fine. But having 50 foot of rope in three foot of water... Over 20 years we have brought in probably 40 turtles, and half of them are tourniqueted with trap rope. So June is way too late, and the money is tied up, so we are starting it. I do not know what the legalities are, but my neighbor is law enforcement, and I know the trappers so they can go back to where they belong and stop killing things. Let's not wait until June. We are starting tomorrow, I have been commercial here, my family fishes here, and I have been finding gear 25 miles offshore. People had 100 traps, and lost 60 of them, we are finding 15 in a ball out there. The bay is dead and smells like the Mississippi River, the traps are coated in barnacles; the lobsters

are coated in barnacles. There is no talk of that bay water offshore and the west wind is pushing it all back. Something needed to happen yesterday, so we are starting tomorrow. We will bring the traps that are in four foot of water to White Sands Resort where all the trapper from Conch Key and Grassy Key go, and I know half of them – so we are starting tomorrow.

Barry Wray, Florida Keys Environmental Coalition

I am Barry Wray, the executive director for the Florida Keys Environmental Coalition, I'm sure most of you remember me getting up to speak at the last meeting and we talked a lot about debris and volunteer tourism too. The largest organization for volunteer tourism in the industry has contacted us, and in May, they will be bringing 350-400 tourism professionals here to volunteer. They want to learn whatever they need to, whether that is taking a kayak tour to learn about our ecosystem, cleaning up the mangroves, and bringing back debris. They want to help. So, I am reaching out to all groups, whether it be the sanctuary, Mote, Coral Restoration Foundation, and The Nature Conservancy, whoever needs volunteers. Let's put our thinking hats on and think about the best way to use these volunteers. Some will be dive qualified and we should use them where we can. They will be here and do work for one or two days. And the benefit here, is if we teach them some things and they fall in love with this place that we love, they go back and help evangelize this and become a complement to our tourist initiatives here. Our purpose here is to change the face of tourism, to draw in people who care about this place, not those who want to come and love it to death. To come down and help us make it sustain, make it better each year. That is what we want. I will reach out to the TDC and districts, to help us welcome these people and teach them that this is the most wonderful place to be. Thank you.

Elizabeth Jolin, Florida Bay Forever

Hello I am Elizabeth Jolin with Florida Bay Forever and I want to update you on an important meeting we had on Friday: the Florida Bay roundtable discussion with a nice cross section of the community, including some at this table, community leaders, and chambers of commerce trying to answer the question of how do we prioritize everglades restoration at the county, state, and federal level. It was an interesting conversation and we left with some action items, and I will be happy to keep you informed of how we progress as a group. Thank you for your time and for your work.

Andy Newman, Tourist Development Council (TDC)

I wanted to make the council aware that I have been chatting with the folks up at Navionics, and they are launching a sort of campaign in mid-January to provide updated charts of the area to remap some of the shorelines that have shifted or the shallow areas that have shifted, or deeper areas that have become more shallow, and of course the debris. Essentially they are working to update charts with these hazardous areas to making boating more safe and less impactful, and the TDC will help them from a promotional standpoint.

## **V. FLORIDA REEF TRACT CORAL DISEASE EVENT**

Karen Bohnsack, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Florida Coastal Office

To view this presentation visit <https://nmsfloridakeys.blob.core.windows.net/floridakeys-prod/media/docs/20171212coraldisease.pdf>

Ms. Bohnsack described that the first warning signs of a coral disease outbreak began in Miami Dade County in 2014 when several species of stony coral were observed with tissue loss lesions. The

disease progressed rapidly north and slowly crept south toward the Florida Keys. This progression is now seen as far south as the Middle Keys and as far north as Martin County. This is an unprecedented coral disease event.

Disease is a natural part of coral populations, generally at a background prevalence of 2-3%. The current outbreak has shown prevalence of 66-100% of some species diseased, although disease impacts are variable. Video footage shows us the prevalence of disease and the impact of disease outbreak on healthy tissues. Beyond five early indicator species, nearly half of the reef building corals are thought to be affected by this disease.

Unfortunately, the trends have shown that if this disease affects a coral, mortality is highly likely. In some cases the disease progresses very quickly and can kill an entire colony in under a month. One large coral in Broward County, determined to be 330 years old, was documented to be very healthy in fall 2015. By the end of 2015, only 5% of tissue was remaining after being swept by this disease.

Three years after the outbreak, the disease is still moving through the reef. Over half of the Florida reef tract has been affected. This disease is causing changes in populations of reef building corals, which could affect the residents and visitors of the Florida Keys, since we rely on these reef ecosystems in a number of ways. Many partners and agencies have worked to respond to this event – from data collection and sampling to funding and management interventions.

Data collection has occurred through the Florida Reef Resilience Program (FRRP) and Coral Reef Evaluation and Monitoring Project (CREMP) surveys, both of which help document the outbreak; and through targeted surveys to determine the location of the disease front. Citizen science efforts also help determine and document impacts. Samples of diseased and healthy corals are being analyzed in the lab for pathogens, and early evidence has shown that this is an infectious disease, transmitted by touch and through the water column. There have been rescue efforts to transfer healthy corals to nurseries, where they can eventually be outplanted back to reef, or utilized in laboratory experiments to understand disease progression.

Future work includes continued disease investigations to help identify the pathogen(s) responsible. From there, implementing management strategies to help slow or stop the disease spread is key, and any partnering agency can help with this effort.

**Discussion/Comments:**

- A member asked about Acropora corals, and Ms. Bohnsack described that although there have been some isolated observations of tissue loss on those species, it is believed that they are not among those impacted by this larger disease event.
- The cause of this disease is unknown, and is likely a combination of stressors. The best available information indicates that this disease outbreak is unprecedented; this has not been observed elsewhere in the Caribbean. It is possible this disease is caused by a new pathogen, or a morphed pathogen, which is opportunistic under the current environmental conditions.
- Identifying disease-resistant genotypes of these corals will be important to prioritize growing in nurseries to replant back on the reef in the future.

## **VI. BLUE STAR FISHING GUIDES PROGRAM UPDATE**

Captain Will Benson, Advisory Council Recreational-Charter Fishing Working Group Chair and Charter Fishing Flats Guide alternate

Nicole Uibel, Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary

To view this presentation visit <https://nmsfloridakeys.blob.core.windows.net/floridakeys-prod/media/docs/20171212bluestarfish.pdf>

Captain Benson explained that more than a year ago, the council endorsed the idea of moving forward in developing this program. As part of the process, meetings were held with fishing guides to seek input and discuss program details. Captain Benson is looking forward to introducing the program to the Lower Keys Fishing Guides Association annual meeting in 2018. He will also be promoting the program to other groups and at tournaments, etc.

The primary mission of the Blue Star Fishing Guides program is to support responsible angling practices and the main goal is to develop a voluntary endorsement program for charter fishing operators that engage in responsible angling practices. All occupationally licensed captains, guides and businesses conducting for-hire charters in FKNMS will be eligible to participate. The program will start certifying and recognizing guides in 2018.

Participating guides will be required to implement best angling practices and participate in education/outreach activities, including conducting one conservation activity and attending one continuing education training per year. Periodic evaluations and trainings will be offered to participants and a variety of incentives will be in place to recognize the program. At this time, agency staff are in the process of finalizing the program framework, creating outreach materials and developing the marketing approach. Funding has been provided by the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation and FishFlorida.

**Note:** Council members expressed support and interest in this program.

## **VII. ADVISORY COUNCIL BUSINESS: RECRUITMENT (UPDATE) AND CHARTER RENEWAL**

Beth Dieveney, Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary

To view this presentation visit <https://nmsfloridakeys.blob.core.windows.net/floridakeys-prod/media/docs/20171212sacadmin.pdf>

Ms. Dieveney described that the process of advisory council member recruitment is on hold until the notice can be published in the Federal Register.

The advisory council charter expired in November 2017; however, an extension was given until February 2018. To date, the council charter sub-committee made edits to the charter in August 2017, and the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS) have reviewed those edits. There were a few questions/comments raised in August which staff are now seeking input from the council:

1. To add a seat to the council, approval is required from the Director of ONMS.
2. If a member would like to serve longer terms, there is a waiver available.

3. How to decide tiebreakers when voting on officer selections or action items?
4. Public comment can be any topic of interest, and does not need to pertain to the agenda.
5. To request an agenda item, members should reach out to the chair, the superintendent, or the SAC coordinator with their suggestion.
6. Changes made to the council charter are intended to ensure consistency with other sites.
7. The advisory council member will need to alert the chair if the alternate will serve in a member's capacity at a meeting.
8. How many meetings can a member be absent?
9. Should the council consider the addition of a secretarial position?
10. Can the council vote on items that are not on the agenda if there is an important item of action, or are action items required to be on the agenda to inform the public ahead of the meeting?

The members are encouraged to send thoughts and notes to the SAC coordinator before the holidays. The final updated charter will be reviewed at the February advisory council meeting and will then be sent to ONMS for signature.

The meeting schedule for the following year was set as the third Tuesday of the month, to be held in Marathon, FL.

## **VIII. PUBLIC COMMENT**

There was no public comment at this time. An advisory council member inquired about the date of release for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS).

### **Superintendent Fangman's comments**

Superintendent Fangman explained that at the last council meeting, the question was posed as to what Hurricane Irma means for the DEIS release date. Council members indicated that the effects of Hurricane Irma should be considered before moving forward, but should not slow down the process. Since then, FKNMS has been evaluating the latest information and options and is moving forward with the process, but a release date is not yet known.

## **IX. MEMBER UPDATES OF NOTE**

### **Boater Education Course**

Beth Dieveney shared news from Caroline McLaughlin regarding the funding provided for an online boater education course that will be developed by Eppley Institute for FKNMS boaters. Eppley Institute developed the Eco-Mariner's Course for Everglades National Park. As this process moves forward, FKNMS may reach out to engage members of the council in developing the scope of that program. Ms. Dieveney explained that the DEIS will have the analysis regarding a mandatory or voluntary courses for sanctuary boaters.

### **Power Boat Race/Tarpon Migration**

Captain Will Benson brought attention to the fact that a power boat race is scheduled to be held in the harbor in Key West during peak spawning time for migrating tarpon. He would like the boat race

moved to an alternative time to avoid affecting the tarpon. Other members recalled that this topic came up about 10 years ago at a council meeting. Ms. Dieveney agreed to search for the meeting notes that pertain to the discussion held by the council in the past about this same issue.

### **Water Quality Protection Program**

Chris Bergh gave an update on the Water Quality Protection Program meeting held on December 6, 2017. The EPA budget calls for level funding for the WQPP for the upcoming year. Florida DEP and EPA call for the WQPP in the legislation that created FKNMS and is co-managed. The WQPP Special Studies selected four projects for funding for FY12: online boater education course for FKNMS (Eppley Institute); benthic monitoring for Florida Keys Canal Water Quality Remediation Projects, investigation of “white blotch” coral disease; and freshwater discharges and disease impacts on coral reefs. Other funds support ongoing monitoring of water quality, seagrass beds and coral reefs.

The WQPP steering committee tracks the wastewater upgrades in Monroe County. Municipal wastewater projects in the county are nearly complete. Monroe County has hired DRC Environmental Services (DRC) to clean-up debris in canals (vessels were removed by EPA). They expect to get some FEMA money for this effort. Some canal restoration equipment, such as aerators, were damaged during the storm and need to be replaced. Scientists at the WQPP meeting also reported on coral disease, hurricane impacts to seagrass beds and to sponge restoration nurseries.

## **X. AGENCY REPORTS: SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT AND AGENCY REPORT HIGHLIGHTS**

### **Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, Superintendent Sarah Fangman**

Superintendent Fangman thanked Bruce Popham and the Sanctuary Friends for providing lunch today. She acknowledged the commitment of this council to getting things done and recognized that members do more than give advice and are very engaged in sanctuary-resource related projects and issues. Other announcements included the following:

- New employee Marlies Tumolo was introduced to the council. Ms. Tumolo is based in the Key Largo office. Ms. Tumolo was on the Education/Outreach team at headquarters for three years before moving to the Keys. In the past, she lived in Key West where she worked for a local dive operator.
- New employee Matt Lawrence was introduced to the council. Mr. Lawrence worked at Stellwagon Bank NMS for 17 years in maritime heritage and will be working with Brenda Altmeier in the Key Largo office. Mr. Lawrence offered his assistance on topics related to archaeological resources.
- With regards to the vacant FKNMS Research Coordinator position, a list of qualified candidates has been developed. A selection will be made in January for this position.
- The sanctuary system has merged the Southeast Atlantic, Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico Region with Northeast Great Lakes Region to create an Eastern Region. Matt Brookhart will be acting regional director for the combined region.
- Superintendent Fangman will be meeting with Mr. Brookhart about the new Eastern Region and about the budget for FY-18-19. They will be using a zero budget approach when

determining the budget.

**Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Karen Bohnsack (for Joanna Walczak)**

- **John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park**
  - John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park is offering all services again, and are working on replacing markers, buoys, and mooring balls within the Park.
- **Florida Coastal Office**
  - United States Coral Reef Task Force:
    - The 38th United States Coral Reef Task Force (USCRTF) Meeting, co-hosted by the FCO's Southeast Region, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the Department of the Interior (DOI), provided increased coordination and inspired productive discussion on coral reef conservation efforts and objectives. The nearly 300 attendees across the week-long meeting participated in workshops, working group meetings, and site visits, all culminating into the formal Business Meeting that focused on the week's theme: "Healthy Reefs for a Healthy Economy."
    - During the Business Meeting, attendees learned about the economic and ecological importance of the Florida Reef Tract to local economies, the coral disease outbreak and current investigation and response activities, the challenges of balancing heavily populated urban areas next to sensitive reef systems, and finally, the importance of day-to-day stakeholder engagement and stakeholder engagement processes in conservation efforts.
    - Some exciting announcements were also made during the Business Meeting. The Florida legislature allocated \$1 million in funds for water quality monitoring efforts and coral disease research, the Environmental Protection Agency announced it will be awarding the state an additional \$400K to develop a Coral Disease Prevention and Response Program for the Florida Reef Tract, and FDEP and USCG announced the reconfiguration of the Miami Commercial Anchorage resulting in the reduction of over 700 acres of direct impacts to coral reef habitat.
  - Follow-up from issues raised during the last meeting:
    - **Marine Debris:** (Report covered by Chris Bergh during his updates from the WQPP Steering Committee meeting).
      - DEP is setting up a Mutual Aid Agreement with Monroe County and local contractor DRC to remove non-vessel canal debris. Similar agreements are being entered into with DEP, DRC, and the municipalities.
      - A canal prioritization list is being provided by the County – Canals are classified and prioritized based on High, Medium and Low impacts (determined using the aerials flown immediately after the storm), as well as follow up site visits by Monroe County Staff. Canals with restoration demonstration projects will be prioritized for

- debris removal, as well as canals where debris is affecting commercial businesses (e.g., vessels cannot get in and out).
- Homeowner outreach is also being considered in the prioritizing – Rhonda Haag is accepting direct recommendations: (305) 453-8774; [Haag-Rhonda@monroecounty-fl.gov](mailto:Haag-Rhonda@monroecounty-fl.gov).
- **Water Quality:** Regarding concerns about water quality following Hurricane Irma, specific to the bacterial content and if it was safe to swim, there was no additional active monitoring conducted, but there are a few resources available.
    - The Florida Department of Health performs water quality testing for enteric bacteria at 11 beach locations in the Keys every 2 weeks – this includes:
      - Key Largo: 2 sites (John Pennekamp State Park, Harry Harris County Park)
      - Islamorada: 1 site (Founders Park)
      - Marathon: 1 site (Sombrero Beach)
      - Big Pine Key: 3 sites (Bahia Honda Bayside, Oceanside, and Sandspur Beach)
      - Key West: 4 sites (Ft. Zachary Taylor State Park, Higgs Beach, Smathers Beach, South Beach)
      - For more information, contact the DOH Monroe County Beach Information Hotline: 877-892-9585 or 305-293-1653.
      - To access the data, go to the following website, <http://www.floridahealth.gov/index.html>, click “Environmental Health”, select “Beach Water Quality”, the Florida Healthy Beaches Program opens, scroll to the bottom of the page and select Monroe County, and click the “Go to County Beaches” link next to See Results.
    - Citizen Science Bacterial Contamination Testing: FIU Center for Aquatic Chemistry and Environment is working on a tool for a citizen science project that would allow members of the community to test their local waters for bacterial contamination.
      - This was mentioned during a recent presentation to the Technical Advisory Committee of the Southeast Florida Coral Reef Initiative.
      - They are currently validating the plates and standardizing the process, and hope to have them available during the first quarter of 2018.
      - The lead on this project is happy to talk to anyone who is interested in this, and will keep us posted as they get close to implementation.

## **NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service, Heather Blough**

- **Irma Update**
  - NOAA Fisheries has completed our rapid assessment of Irma’s impacts on the fishing industry, which we conducted in collaboration with the FWC. Over 1,700 businesses and individuals provided input through in-person, telephone or online surveys. NOAA Fisheries expects to issue a summary report within the next few days. The Secretary of Commerce’s decision on Governor Scott’s (Oct 2) requested fishery disaster determination is still pending.
- **Council Update**
  - Gulf Council
    - The Gulf Council has approved new coral conservation measures for public hearings. Their current preferred options would designate 22 new Habitat Areas of Concern (HAPC) throughout the Gulf, establish fishing restrictions in 14 of those areas, and expand the amount of area within the Pulley Ridge HAPC where bottom-tending gear is prohibited – except for a bottom longline allowance. They will set the date and location of the Key West hearing on that proposal at their January meeting in New Orleans.
    - The council also remodeled their Coral Portal website, which features new interactive maps, decision tools, and educational resources, including information on the current proposed coral HAPCs.
  - South Atlantic Council
    - Last week in Atlantic Beach, the South Atlantic Council continued discussing a number of regulatory changes for both commercial and recreational snapper grouper fisheries to address stakeholder input solicited through their visioning initiative. They tentatively plan to identify proposed measures for public hearings at their March 2018 meeting in Jekyll Island, Georgia.
    - The council approved significant reductions in commercial and recreational red grouper quotas to address concerns about poor recruitment in recent years.
    - The council has an outreach initiative underway to help federally permitted charter captains better understand new proposed weekly electronic reporting requirements, including a series of webinars, training sessions on how to access and use the pilot system, and assistance setting up user accounts.
    - The council is in the process of transitioning to a new mobile app for communicating fishing regulations in the South Atlantic and are asking everyone who uses the current app to download the new app, called “Fish Rules”, before January 1. Until then they will continue to update both apps. The new app also hosts state fishing regulations but, currently, only includes recreational information. They are still working with the app developers to incorporate commercial information.
- **Protected Species**
  - NOAA Fisheries announced our intent to initiate a status review of the leatherback

turtle in response to a petition we received from the Bluewater Fishermen's Association to identify the Northwest Atlantic subpopulation as a Distinct Population Segment and down list that subpopulation from endangered to threatened status. They are asking the public to provide information to support that review through February 5.

- Protected species has listing decisions pending on the oceanic whitetip shark and the giant manta ray.
- On January 12, our Highly Migratory Species Division will be holding a workshop at the Holiday Inn Key Largo on protected species identification and safe handling techniques for shark and swordfish limited access permit holders who fish with longline or gillnet gear.
- **Lionfish**
  - Finally, they are continuing the review of several applications received for exempted fishing permits to study the effectiveness of alternative fish trap devices in harvesting lionfish throughout the Southeast Region. They expect to present our proposed path forward to the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils at their first meetings in 2018.

**US Coast Guard, Mark King CWO4 (BOSN) (for LT. Quentin Long), Sector Key West**

- Sector Key West has responded to 23 non-Irma related pollution reports in FY18 and opened one Federalized case.
- There have been 121 Irma related pollution reports made to Sector Key West and sent to the ESF 10 Florida Keys Branch for further investigation.
- ESF 10 reports 1,810 displaced vessels due to Irma, 413 removed through ESF 10 funding with 166 still needing to be assessed. Owners and insurance companies have removed in excess of 1,000 vessels.
- ESF 10 Mission Assignment is currently funded through January 29, 2018 with \$40 million allotted to the Florida Keys.

**Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Captain Dave Dipre**

- FWC has primarily been working on vessel recovery associated with Hurricane Irma. They have had some resource cases.
- To address the workload created by the hurricane, FWC has been bringing 12 officers to the Keys from other areas every ten days. The additional officers work with 8-10 local officers on vessel removal. USCG and EPA have been doing a fantastic job. FWC was charged with finding sites for disposal of the vessels. They have located a number of sites throughout the Keys.
- Most of the recovered vessels are not salvageable at this point because they were in the water too long. Most boats will be destroyed, but only after the paperwork is done. FWC is required to look for the owners of recovered boats. If needed, they allow owners to finish the insurance/FEMA process. Owners of boats that cannot be salvaged can sign waivers allowing FWC to destroy them. The process has been going smoothly, even though there is much work to be done.
- FWC does not have the authority to remove vessels from private properties. Private property owners have to work with the owner of the boat and insurance companies. If the vessel is a hazard to navigation or an environmental hazard, the vessel may be removed. (USCG does not have the authority, either.)

- USCG has been using orange stickers to identify boats that are hazards to navigation or the environment. In some cases, floating structures have received stickers. Floating structures are not considered boats, but Garrison Bight is asking these structures to register. It might be that these structures become marine debris over time and assistance may be available for recovery.
- Local private contractors are now more involved in the recovery of vessels. Other contractors were involved in the initial removal.

### **National Park Service, Dry Tortugas and Everglades National Park, Meaghan Johnson**

- **Dry Tortugas National Park**
  - The Dry Tortugas National Park's ship, MV Fort Jefferson, is returning to Key West this Thursday. The ship and crew have been assisting with hurricane recovery efforts in the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico since September. The first trip back to the park will be December 19-21.
  - The Garden Key main dock maintenance project will begin in January and continue through the spring.
  - Harper's Ferry Center is at the park this week doing a preliminary visit to create a Master Sign Plan.
  - Dry Tortugas National Park received a grant from the South Florida National Parks Trust to begin a marine debris removal program, focusing on beach clean-ups prior to bird and turtle nesting season.
  - This year has been a record year for turtle nesting in Dry Tortugas NP with 827 known nests park-wide.
  - Staff and interns from May-October 2017 removed over 600 lionfish. This number is much higher than in previous five years.
- **Everglades National Park**
  - Recovery from Hurricane Irma is ongoing at Everglades National Park. The park is open for visitation, but because of infrastructure, damage is only partially open at Flamingo, Everglades City and there is an excess of water at Shark Valley.
  - Florida Bay's water quality has been very poor since the storm due to turbidity and green water. Eastern bay basins are improving. Central bights are still extremely poor. Southern basins and western basins are declining due to green water moving out of the central bights.
  - Removal of displaced vessels and marine debris in the park is moving slowly, partially due to inclement weather in October and November.
  - Cape Sable beach debris cleanup being planned for January and February 2018.
  - Everglades National Park celebrated its 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary last week.

### **US Navy, (Naval Air Station Key West), Ed Barham**

- Following Hurricane Irma, the Navy completed vessel salvage operations on December 2. Eighty boats were recovered by Navy contractors (28 boats retrieved by owners/insurance; 52 boats loaded onto barges for transport to disposal location).
- Sigsbee Causeway (road connecting Sigsbee Annex to Key West's North Roosevelt Avenue) elevated 6-inches in order to mitigate road flooding during King high tides and storm events.
- NASKW participates in the statewide Beach Survey, which documents the distribution, seasonality and abundance of sea turtle nesting in Florida. NASKW worked with 25

volunteers in 2017, surveying the beaches on Truman Annex for sea turtle nests and hatchlings, we reported two nests and 11 false crawls in 2017.

- NASKW completed construction of an elevated nesting platform just prior to the start of 2017 shorebird nesting season. Surveys revealed 13 least tern pairs nested on the platform and at least 14 fledglings were observed.

## **XI. UPCOMING MEETING AND CLOSING REMARKS**

Chairperson Popham noted the contributions made by the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation. The Foundation supports the FKNMS and its mission in many ways, including providing funding for five positions at FKNMS that would not otherwise be possible. He encouraged people to continue to support the Foundation.

Chairperson Popham recognized Superintendent Fangman in her new position and recognized Chris Bergh for recently giving a presentation *Marine Zoning Works for Me* to members of Last Stand. Chairperson Popham will be attending the annual Sanctuary Advisory Council national chairperson's meeting, which will be held in conjunction with the Marine Protected Area Federal Advisory Council.

Chairperson Popham thanked everyone for participating and adjourned the meeting.

**Meeting Adjourned.**