

FLORIDA KEYS NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY ADVISORY COUNCIL

VIRTUAL WORKING SESSION

Tuesday June 16, 2020

DRAFT NOTES

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

Council Members

Boating Industry: Ken Reda
Citizen at Large – Lower Keys: Mimi Stafford
Citizen at Large – Middle Keys: George Garrett
Citizen at Large – Upper Keys: Suzy Roebing
Conservation and Environment: Ken Nedimyer
Conservation and Environment: Chris Bergh
Diving – Lower Keys: Joe Weatherby
Diving – Upper Keys: Elena Rodriguez
Education and Outreach: Jessica Dockery (absent)
Elected County Official: Michelle Coldiron
Fishing – Charter Fishing Flats Guide: Will Benson
Fishing – Charter Sports Fishing: Steven Leopold (interim)
Fishing – Commercial – Marine/Tropical: Ben Daughtry
Fishing – Commercial – Shell/Scale: Justin Bruland
Fishing – Recreational: *vacant*
Research and Monitoring: Erinn Muller
South Florida Ecosystem Restoration: Jerry Lorenz (absent)
Submerged Cultural Resources: Corey Malcom
Tourism – Lower Keys: Karen Thurman
Tourism – Upper Keys: Andy Newman (absent)

Council alternates (present)

Citizen at Large – Lower Keys: Stephen Patten
Citizen at Large – Middle Keys: Rachel Bowman
Citizen at Large – Upper Keys: Dave Makepeace
Conservation and Environment: Caroline McLaughlin
Fishing – Charter Sports Fishing: Richard Gomez (interim)
Research and Monitoring: Patrick Rice
Tourism – Upper Keys: Lisa Mongelia

Agency Representatives (present)

Florida Department of Environmental Protection: Joanna Walczak, Nicolas Parr
FWC Fish and Wildlife Research Institute: John Hunt
National Park Service, Everglades: Christopher Kavanagh

NOAA Office of Law Enforcement: Loren Remsberg
NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service: Heather Blough
U.S. Navy: Ed Barham
U.S. Coast Guard: Phil Goodman (auxillary)

Municipalities

City of Layton: Cynthia Lewis

I. CALL TO ORDER, CHAIRPERSONS COMMENTS

Superintendent Fangman called the meeting to order and thanked everyone for participating. She reminded webinar attendees that public comment would be accepted during the meeting via email, and would be shared with council members in advance of the next meeting.

Chairperson Barras thanked participants for coming together in this alternative format and thanked the staff for putting together the virtual meetings. He encouraged SAC members to lend their voices to several issues: 1.) The Trump Administration's attempts to open Florida's waters to oil drilling. 2.) The US Supreme Court case finding for an environmental organization in Hawaii regarding the risks of wastewater injection wells similar to those used in the Florida Keys. 3.) Petitions opposing license renewal for Florida Power & Light's Turkey Point Nuclear Generating facility.

Mr. Barras announced that this is his last SAC meeting as he is term limited. He said it has been his great honor and privilege. He thanked SAC members for their commitment to preserving the Keys environment and economy. Mr. Barras noted that while he will no longer serve on the SAC, he is continuing to focus on the marine environment as he runs for election to the state house.

II. MEETING GOALS, FORMAT ASSOCIATED MATERIALS

Ms. Fangman reviewed the main goals for the meeting, including the Restoration Blueprint SAC survey results, draft rule status and next steps, the seating of new members, election of chair and vice chair, and updates on the Water Quality Protection Program and Mission: Iconic Reefs.

To view this meeting's presentations and other related materials, visit <https://floridakeys.noaa.gov/sac/meetings.html>.

III. ADVISORY COUNCIL RESTORATION BLUEPRINT SURVEY: OUTCOMES AND NEXT STEPS

Beth Dieveney, Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary

Ms. Dieveney reminded members about the previous SAC meetings during and following the official Restoration Blueprint comment period, the discussion and input on SAC priorities and draft proposals, and the Restoration Blueprint SAC survey.

For the survey following the March and April meetings, 30 of 42 SAC members and municipality members responded. This survey does not reflect a full SAC response. SAC members have received the complete survey responses and the full report will be posted on the website.

Ms. Dieveney provided examples of Restoration Blueprint SAC survey responses including the SAC's support for the no discharge regulation for cruise ships and spawning season closures at Western Dry Rocks and the SAC's opposition to prohibiting anchoring in all of the Key Largo Management Area and limiting commercial access to specific Sanctuary Preservation Areas to only Blue Star operators.

Ms. Fangman commented on the limited entry proposal initially being met with confusion that required explanation that the restriction would apply only to commercial vessels, not personal vessels. However, what was made clear by the advisory council, partner agencies, and the public is the need to find better ways to address capacity issues at popular sites. The sanctuary is strengthening Blue Star programs and will work more effectively with commercial operators to reduce impacts to the fragile marine environment. FKNMS will continue to collaborate with the Tourist Development Council to raise awareness and appreciation by visitors.

FKNMS staff is working with all of the input received to determine proposals in the draft rule, which will include updated economic and environmental analysis, public comment opportunities, SAC input. It will be a single proposal with many elements. State and federal agency consultation will continue throughout the process. Once the draft rule is released, the state will initiate its rulemaking process. NOAA will respond to official comments received about the draft rule. There will be a final economic and environmental analysis and state review before implementation of final regulations, marine zones and management plan, including education/outreach and agency coordination.

IV. WELCOME NEW ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERS

Beth Dieveney, Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary

Chair Barras announced new members and invited them to introduce themselves: Dr. Erinn Muller of Mote Marine Laboratory as the research and monitoring member, Dr. Patrick Rice of College of the Florida Keys as the research and monitoring alternate, and Billy Litmer of Honest Eco as the boating industry alternate.

Other changes to membership are Ken Reda, MarineMax, boating industry member from recreational fishing member; Suzy Roebing, Upper Keys citizen-at-large member from alternate; and Karen Thurman, Marathon Hyatt Place, Lower Keys tourism member from boating industry alternate, and Dave Makepeace, Upper Keys citizen-at-large alternate from member. Elena Rodriguez, former dive shop owner, retained her seat as the Upper Keys diving member. Representing charter sport fishing, Steve Leopold, Leofish LLC, remains an interim member along with Richie Gomez, Captain Conch Charters, as an interim alternate.

Ms. Fangman recognized outgoing SAC members Dr. David Vaughan, Plant a Million Corals, and Shelly Krueger, Florida Sea Grant, in the research and monitoring member and alternate

seats, and Clint Barras, Two Oceans Digital in the Lower Keys tourism member seat and as vice chair and chair.

V. ADVISORY COUNCIL CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR ELECTIONS

Ms. Dieveney described the voting process by reviewing the roles of the chair and vice chair, eligibility, and terms.

Election results:

Chair - George Garrett, Citizen at Large - Middle Keys member

Vice Chair - Ben Daughtry, Commercial Fishing - Marine Life / Tropical member

Of the 22 eligible voting members present, 18 voted.

VI. UPDATE: WATER QUALITY PROTECTION PROGRAM

Karen Bohnsack, Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary

Ms. Bohnsack provided an overview of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Water Quality Protection Program (WQPP), including upcoming activities within the WQPP, brief highlights on water quality issues of community interest, and an update on FKNMS engagement with South Florida Ecosystem Restoration.

The WQPP was established as part of the legislation that created FKNMS, and was the first WQPP for a marine sanctuary in the country. Administered by EPA and DEP in cooperation with NOAA, the purpose of the WQPP is to identify and recommend priority actions to address point and nonpoint sources of pollution and restore and maintain a balanced population of corals, shellfish, fish and wildlife, and recreational activities in and on the water. The WQPP is designed to provide a mechanism for state and local government coordination and public participation on water quality issues, and includes a Steering Committee, Technical Advisory Committee, and Management Committee.

The WQPP works to achieve its mission through a combination of corrective actions, comprehensive monitoring, research and special studies, and education and outreach initiatives. For 25 years, the program and its partners have made great progress in reducing sources of pollution and improving water quality in the Florida Keys. A few examples of this include providing oversight of wastewater and stormwater improvements, eliminating vessel discharge via the no discharge zone and mobile vessel pumpout services, engaging in canal water quality improvements, and maintaining long term water quality, coral reef and seagrass monitoring programs.

Despite these accomplishments, the WQPP recognizes the continuing water quality issues in FKNMS and has committed to reevaluating the program's priorities and identifying new opportunities to more strategically pursue water quality improvements in the future. A working group composed of Management Committee and Technical Advisory Committee representatives has developed a recommended set of priorities for the Steering Committee's review. Following their review and approval, more detailed action plans will be developed and implemented to

further advance the protection and restoration of Keys' water quality and associated marine resources. A Steering Committee meeting is tentatively being planned for August, and there is an interest from the WQPP in having this be a joint meeting with the Sanctuary Advisory Council. Brief updates were provided on three water quality topics of community interest: observed improvements in water quality during pandemic-related shutdowns, shallow injection wells, and the Monroe County mobile vessel pumpout service.

First, there were many anecdotal observations about improved water quality and clarity in March and April. While this may have been partially due to a reduction in marine activities, this period also corresponded with calm and dry conditions which are important contributors to water quality and clarity. Quarterly water quality sampling was completed in March with plans to resume in June. These data will help confirm any potential water quality improvements during this time and may help illuminate the specific factors that contributed to improvements.

A number of stakeholders have expressed concerns to DEP and the WQPP that wastewater effluent disposed into shallow injection wells (minimum depth of 90 feet vs. 2000 feet for deep injection wells) is migrating through the porous limestone and potentially impacting our nearshore waters. The City of Marathon has several municipal wastewater treatment plants with effluent disposal in shallow wells, and although these meet regulatory requirements for Advanced Wastewater Treatment, DEP and the WQPP Technical Advisory Committee are currently developing a monitoring plan to investigate to determine if the effluent is reaching nearby surface waters and contributing to water quality degradation.

The County's mobile vessel pumpout service is important for protecting water quality and supporting compliance with the no discharge zone. Funding from the State of Florida and Monroe County has allowed pumpout service to be provided free of charge via a contract with PumpOut USA. However, funding challenges may temporarily threaten the ability of this program to continue providing the same level of service, which may result in an increase in illegal discharges. FKNMS is working with the County and WQPP to identify long term solutions for ensuring continued access to vessel pumpout services.

Finally, FKNMS is also working to strengthen engagement on regional water quality issues, specifically with the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force, which oversees Everglades Restoration. NOAA holds a seat on the Task Force and is very supportive of continued recognition of the coastal systems as key components of the south Florida Ecosystem. FKNMS participates in monthly NOAA coordination calls on Task Force issues, and holds seats on the Working Group and Biscayne Bay Regional Restoration Coordination Team. Moving forward, FKNMS will continue efforts to strengthen engagement with local partners on Everglades Restoration issues and champion the importance of considering Florida Keys water quality and marine resources in regional restoration efforts.

Discussion

- Commissioner Coldiron noted that PumpOut USA has been an excellent partner with the county for several years. The Board of County Commissioners is meeting on June 17 and will discuss funding considerations and opportunities for renewing PumpOut USA's contract for the next fiscal year. Unfortunately, funding is currently only available to

cover approximately 75% of their contract. Superintendent Fangman noted the financial strains of the pandemic and the need for a long-term sustainable solution to maintain this work. Ms. Bohnsack added that the WQPP Steering Committee will be included in discussions on near-term and longer term solutions for maintaining these services.

- A member asked if there is a savings in this year's pumpout budget that could carry into the next year. While state funding does not carry over, Ms. Coldiron noted that staff are looking into this possibility for county funding.
- A member highlighted a white paper being prepared by the *Acropora cervicornis* Recovery Implementation Team's Eco-Toxicology Working Group. This document assesses the current state of knowledge on contaminants such as herbicides, microplastics, and other pollutants of emerging concern with a specific focus on stony corals, especially *Acropora*.
- A member suggested FKNMS use their seats on the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force Working Group and Biscayne Bay Regional Restoration Coordination Teams as a platform to continue advocating for projects that improve water quality in FKNMS and Florida Bay. If possible, Ms. Bohnsack should participate in the Biscayne Bay and Southeastern Everglades Ecosystem Restoration Project Delivery Team.
- Cory Malcolm highlighted the importance of public education/outreach. In addition to local Keys water quality improvement efforts, it is equally important to address outside sources of water quality stress.
- A member asked where to find water quality testing results. Ms. Bohnsack confirmed that 2018 is the last report posted here: <http://serc.fiu.edu/wqmnetwork/FKNMS-CD/index.htm>. FKNMS is working to improve accessibility to WQPP outputs, including better maintaining the website.
- Several SAC members voiced support for a joint SAC/WQPP meeting, and one suggested this should be conducted annually and include an evening component to encourage more public involvement.
- Via chat, a member asked about injection well depths, specifically between Rock Harbor and Sugarloaf, and if any parameters were tested in early March before the shut down and whether any testing occurred just before the reopening. Via email after the meeting, Ms. Bohnsack responded that the Florida Keys Water Quality Monitoring project measures the following at each station (surface and bottom at most sites), including during the March sampling event: salinity, temperature, dissolved oxygen, turbidity, relative fluorescence, and light attenuation. Water quality variables include the dissolved nutrients nitrate, nitrite, ammonium, and soluble reactive phosphorus. Total unfiltered concentrations include those of nitrogen (TN), organic carbon (TOC), phosphorus (TP), silicate (SiO₂) and chlorophyll a (CHLA). Gus Rios, Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), added that there are only a few DEP permitted injection wells in that area. In Sugarloaf, the only WWTP remaining was the Sugarloaf Lodge, but they just recently connected to the FKAA Cudjoe regional sewer and they abandoned the injection wells. South of Sugarloaf are the FKAA's Baypoint WWTP and the Big Coppitt WWTP which treats wastewater from Big Coppitt South to Stock Island. Both of these have been designed to meet the 2016 Statutory and the effluent is tested with monthly reports submitted to DEP.

VII. UPDATE: MISSION ICONIC REEFS

Jessica Levy, Coral Restoration Foundation and Andy Bruckner, Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary

Ms. Levy provided context about reef ecosystems as the oldest and most biodiverse ecosystems on earth having persisted for 500 million years. The economic impact to the Florida Keys amounts to \$3.38 billion in sales and income plus \$2.1 billion in spending with approximately 60% of jobs. Serious decline of the Florida Reef Tract began in the 1970s, affecting coral reef ecosystems services. Coral cover was 25% and is now down to as low as 2% in some areas.

The Florida Keys have a long history of coral restoration efforts from which to learn. Historically, restoration efforts were using few corals and few species spaced farther apart. Now, restoration efforts are investing in fewer sites with more corals and a greater variety of species, increasing resilience, improving survival, and supporting biodiversity. External efforts to reduce stressors include mooring buoys, wastewater treatment, the sanctuary's Restoration Blueprint, and Everglades Restoration.

Ms. Levy stressed that the harsh reality is that natural recovery is no longer an option and active population enhancement is a necessity. Mission: Iconic Reefs was announced in December 2019. The initiative was developed by NOAA's Restoration Center and Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary in association with the Coral Restoration Foundation, the State of Florida, Mote Marine Lab, Reef Renewal, Florida Aquarium, The Nature Conservancy, Nova Southeastern University, USGS, and Plant a Million Corals Foundation.

The mission targets seven of the most iconic and important reef systems in the Florida Keys: Carysfort, Horseshoe, Cheeca Rocks, Sombbrero, Looe Key, Newfound Harbor, and Eastern Dry Rocks. These sites were narrowed from a larger list compiled by the SAC. A cross-organization and multi-agency team of experts and resource managers will be using an internationally unprecedented strategy for complete reef restoration.

Phase 1 involves faster growing corals that are not susceptible to stony coral tissue loss disease. It is designed to increase coral cover from the current 2% to 15% in 7-10 years and up to 25% in the following decade in phase 2. The 20-year recovery plan will plant nearly 500,000 mature corals over 260,000 square meters.

The Phase 1 cost estimate of \$97 million breaks out to \$11.8 million for site preparation and maintenance, \$61 million for coral propagation and planting, \$7.4 million for grazer additions, \$8.2 million for research and monitoring, and \$8.9 adaptive management. The funding is expected to come from both public and private sources. Ms. Levy drew the analogy of that cost equating to a 1/4th the expense of producing an Avengers movie.

Stewardship is a major component of Mission: Iconic Reefs by enlisting support from the Keys community in two working groups for creation of site preparation and maintenance, and volunteering with collaborators. The plan is available at <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/southeast/habitat-conservation/restoring-seven-iconic-reefs-mission-recover-coral-reefs-florida-keys>.

Andy Bruckner thanked Coral Restoration Foundation for all its efforts in restoration, its leadership worldwide and its participation in this mission.

Discussion

- A member commented that as a partner in the mission, Mote Maine Laboratory recognizes the return on investment considering what the reef means to the Keys economy. Mote's work involves expanding sexual reproduction and resilience testing. A member applauded Mission: Iconic Reefs for using adaptive management.
- A member inquired about funding sources and encouraged collaboration with the boarder environmental community to gain support and funding. Ms. Levy highlighted the United Arab Emirates donation of \$3.5 million to the United Way that involves restoration and education/outreach. Dr. Bruckner noted that NOAA is providing some funding through various grant programs, many with matching requirements, and that private partnerships will be key to moving this forward. Chairperson Barras noted that the Tourist Development Council assigns 25% of its bed tax revenue toward capital projects including more \$3 million awarded in the last several years for coral restoration.

VIII. AGENCY REPORTS:

FKNMS Superintendent's Report

- FKNMS staff continue to be on mandatory telework, as per NOAA directives, however plans are being made to return to operations in a phased manner. Our buoy team has been given exception to conduct some buoy maintenance activities and have been on the water repairing and replacing lines and buoys. The Eco-Discovery Center is still closed, however we are using this opportunity to plan a major refresh of the exhibits.
- A coral disease workshop was held virtually over five days, allowing for a broader level of participation including representatives from every country or territory that has reported stony coral tissue loss disease.
- Staffing note: Nancy Diersing, who has worked for the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary since March 2000, is retiring in August. She has been a tremendous asset to the sanctuary (and the Sanctuary Advisory Council) and will be greatly missed!
- The Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary will celebrate 30 years on November 16, 2020. Plans are developing to recognize this important milestone.
- Flower Garden Banks National Sanctuary has released a proposed rule for sanctuary expansion and is taking public comment until July 3, 2020. The proposed rule for expansion would take the sanctuary from its current 56 square miles to 160 square miles to protect 14 additional reefs and banks in the sanctuary. More information is available at flowergarden.noaa.gov

Florida Department of Environmental Protection

DEP Updates:

- On behalf of the Department, we hope you all are well in these tough times. Throughout the last few months, the Department is proud to have maintained our mission critical level of service to the public while also ensuring the safety of our teams.

- As co-managers for the FKNMS, we have been listening to your comments on the Restoration Blueprint, meeting with stakeholders, and working behind the scenes with NOAA and FWC to ensure the agency's comments reflect the actions we believe will make a difference in management of these important resources.
 - DEP's leadership has heard you – especially as it relates to water quality. The department is the state's principal environmental agency, created to protect, conserve and manage Florida's environment and natural resources including the enforcement of federal and state environmental laws, protection of Florida's air and water quality, cleanup of pollution, regulation of solid waste management, and promotion of pollution prevention.
 - Through its Coral Reef Conservation Program and co-management of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary and through its roles in the US Coral Reef Task Force and US All Islands Coral Reef Committee, the department leads national and state-wide coral reef-related policy, management, and stakeholder engagement actions.
 - We commend NOAA's acknowledgement of the importance of water quality by creating Karen's position – and we commend the important work that Karen is doing, not just because she used to be part of the DEP Coral Team, but because she is excellent at taking a problem and working with everyone to create tangible solutions.
 - DEP is committed to working with Karen, Sarah, and the rest of the FKNMS and WQPP teams to provide more awareness on the efforts already underway and to identify and implement actions to fill any gaps.

Office of Resilience and Coastal Protection:

- Florida's Coral Reef Campaign – FloridasCoralReef.org
 - Continue to build on collective brand to raise awareness of the importance of Florida's Coral Reef to our local communities, state, and nation.
 - A set of new public service announcements are being produced and will be aired for the rest of the year.
- 20th anniversary of the US Coral Reef Conservation Act (CRCA) of 2000 – 2 bills currently in congress that propose reauthorization.
 - The Restoring Resilient Reefs Act (S 2429) recognizes that the building of capacity in the US coral reef jurisdictions in partnership with Federal Agencies and investing in people are major need if conservation policies have any chance of being implemented effectively.
- Coral Disease Workshop
 - At the end of May, the DEP, FWC, NOAA, and NPS hosted a 5-day coral disease workshop online.
 - The focus on this annual workshop was to further develop and identify priorities related to the Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease outbreak.
 - In addition to 2-days of updates provided by Disease Advisory Council leads, days were set aside to discuss Research/Epidemiology, Reconnaissance/Intervention, and Communications/Outreach Team, and Caribbean Cooperation.
 - The outcomes of this workshop will help shape the next phase of the ongoing coral disease response efforts in Florida.

- Clean Boating
 - The state's Clean Boating Program continues to work with marina facilities and boaters to encourage environmental stewardship and best practices including resilient measures. Marina and boating facilities install pumpouts through the Clean Vessel Act Grant Program and serve the boating public. Boaters can sign a Clean Boater Pledge and marina facilities can achieve designation as a Clean Marina. Marinas can also achieve a higher distinction as a Clean and Resilient Marina. Contact Octavio.Franco@FloridaDEP.gov for more information on proposals for Monroe, Miami-Dade, Broward, Palm Beach, and Martin counties.

Division of Recreation and Parks:

- John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park
 - Last month the Florida Park Service finished the final phase of the fill project for the Port Bougainville Marina basin at Dagny Johnson Key Largo Hammock Botanical State Park. The final phase consisted of placing a grading 24,639.80 tons of clean fill in the entrance canal of the marina basin.
 - They also were able to add 5,806.9 tons of clean fill at the Carysfort Marina basin moving that restoration project closer to completion.
 - Since being chartered at the beginning of the year, the Friends of John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park & Dagny Johnson State Park officially launched after receiving a donation to restore and add mooring balls along the reef as a way to preserve it. The Ocean Reef Club, the Ocean Reef Community Association, the Ocean Reef Conservation Association and the Ocean Reef Rod and Gun Club donated \$81,000 to the project.

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Fish and Wildlife Research Institute

- FWC submitted comments on the Restoration Blueprint, and support DEP's comments about the importance of water quality.
- FWC remains in maximum telework state, though some field operations have been approved including two coral rescue cruises in May in the Dry Tortugas region. Between these cruises, 450-500 susceptible corals were collected and distributed to various AZA facilities. The coral team did not observe any Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease in that region.
- At the recent Commission meeting, the FWC approved the development the Florida Reef Fish Survey. Also, a review and discussion regarding possible stone crab regulations occurred.

NOAA Fisheries Southeast Region

- COVID-19 impacts on agency operations
 - Southeast Regional Office transitioned relatively seamlessly to full time telework and has been able to continue most work uninterrupted, although in some cases at a slower pace or with workarounds.
 - Southeast Fisheries Science Center experienced some greater challenges related to maintaining their independent survey work, port sampling and observer coverage, and data processing activities.
- CARES Act funding/spend plan/schedule

- Commerce Secretary announced state allocations of fisheries assistance funds provided by CARES Act last month, and Florida's slated to receive a little over \$23.5M or just under 8% of the \$300M total
- NOAA Fisheries is working with Commerce Department and our interstate marine fisheries commissions to distribute funds as fast as we can consistent with Congressional direction
- Florida's award will be processed through the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission after the state submits a spend plan that is approved by NOAA
- There are more details about that process on NOAA Fisheries' national website
- South Atlantic Fishery Management Council met last week via a virtual webinar
 - They're continuing to explore potential changes to dolphin regulations, including increasing catch limits and reallocating catches or adjusting catch accountability measures or vessel limits to try to avoid in-season closures in the Keys
 - They heard comments from private anglers and for-hire captains in South Florida and the Keys expressing concerns about the status of the dolphin fishery. They intend to organize a series of workshops in the area in late summer to gather information from fishermen on major factors affecting the dolphin and wahoo fisheries; additional information on those workshops will be posted on the council website when available
 - Also, the Council reviewed a number of suggestions they received from the public for regulatory relief to help offset COVID-19 related impacts; ultimately deciding to:
 - Request an emergency rule to increase vermilion snapper commercial trip limit to 1,500 pounds
 - Ask us to delay the effective date of their new electronic reporting requirements for the for-hire fleet until early next year if the Gulf Council agrees to that during their meeting this week – both the South Atlantic and Gulf Council requirements are currently scheduled to take effect September 1
 - Send a letter to the Commerce Secretary about their desire to maximize access to the recreational red snapper fishery and the importance of evaluating the impacts of their new bycatch mortality reduction requirements on red snapper and other species.
 - The recreational red snapper fishery is currently scheduled to open four days next month
 - The new bycatch requirements will take effect July 15; those will require snapper-grouper fishermen to carry descending devices on board their vessels and to use non-stainless steel hooks when fishing with hook-and-line gear and natural bait in the Keys
 - They also teed up discussion of some additional emergency actions for their September meeting
- Gulf Council meeting this week via virtual webinar
 - They're considering increasing lane snapper catch limit in response to new scientific information and revising accountability measures to address recent quota overages

- They'll review the vermilion snapper assessment; hear information on how various red grouper reallocation alternatives would impact recreational fishing season length; and discuss potential response to COVID-19 related impacts
- Their virtual public comment session is scheduled from 1:20 - 3:30 PM tomorrow for those of you who would like to listen in or participate

National Park Service, Everglades

- Everglades & Dry Tortugas National Parks did shut down for a period due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The marine areas of the Everglades NP (Florida Bay and Gulf Coast) remained open for use by the public during this time. Currently the SoFL Parks & Preserve are open at different phases based upon county. Monroe and Collier County districts are at Phase 2 with mixed telework and office openings. Miami-Dade areas of Everglades National Park are still at Phase 1.
- The Dry Tortugas NP is currently short-handed in the Natural Resources division and is in the process of filling the marine ecologist and marine technician positions.
- Seasonal Projects and Facilities are being reviewed for opening to allow activities to resume, including dormitory support for partners. The situation with the pandemic has disrupted many activities for 2020, including: sea turtle monitoring, Creel dockside angler interviews, and support for seasonal research and monitoring by partner agencies.
- We have continued WQ monitoring efforts throughout the first two quarters in 2020. Current conditions in Florida Bay:
 - Water quality 2020. Water clarity throughout FB has been clear to bottom for the second quarter 2020. This is a major change from one year ago (in terms of turbidity and chlorophyll-a content). Initial seagrass recovery has been documented in areas of central Florida Bay (trouble areas are the coastal bights and Johnson Key basin). Along with the clear water we had progressively hypersaline water during the dry season. Much needed rains in late May & June 2020 have reversed severe hypersalinity throughout central & eastern Florida Bay.
 - Fishery report. Last calendar year (2019) fishing in Florida Bay and the Gulf Coast showed large increases in catch and CPUE (Catch per Unit Effort) for Snook, Red Drum and Tarpon. Snook CPUE reached the highest level in the 60-year period of record. The snook and red drum catch have consistently been undersized (below slot). These population shifts may be a biological response to hurricane Irma. Numerous observations of schools of fingerlings were reported throughout coastal waters in the season following the hurricane. Spotted seatrout CPUE has remained steady.

U.S. Navy

- Teleworking continues
- Most natural resource surveys and projects have been delayed due to COVID-19
- Sea turtle and tern nesting surveys being conducted by in-house personnel

IX. CLOSING REMARKS

Chairperson Barras closed with a philosophical perspective about individual actions and the ramifications if more individuals did the same thing. It's important that we know that nothing is too big for our individual actions and that together we can make a difference. All our actions cumulatively make a difference. Continue doing the great work.

Superintendent Fangman thanked Barras for his service and welcomed George Garrett as the new chair.

X. PUBLIC COMMENT

Note: no public comment was received for this meeting.

DRAFT