

1 GULF OF MEXICO FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

2
3 CORAL COMMITTEE

4
5 Omni Hotel Corpus Christi, Texas

6
7 August 20, 2018

8
9 **VOTING MEMBERS**

- 10 Tom Frazer.....Florida
- 11 Dave Donaldson.....GSMFC
- 12 Martha Guyas (designee for Jessica McCawley).....Florida
- 13 John Sanchez.....Florida
- 14 Chris Schieble (designee for Patrick Banks).....Louisiana
- 15 Andy Strelcheck (designee for Roy Crabtree).....NMFS

16
17 **NON-VOTING MEMBERS**

- 18 Kevin Anson (designee for Scott Bannon).....Alabama
- 19 Susan Boggs.....Alabama
- 20 Leann Bosarge.....Mississippi
- 21 Doug Boyd.....Texas
- 22 Dale Diaz.....Mississippi
- 23 Jonathan Dugas.....Louisiana
- 24 Phil Dyskow.....Florida
- 25 Paul Mickle (designee for Joe Spraggins).....Mississippi
- 26 Robin Riechers.....Texas
- 27 Greg Stunz.....Texas
- 28 Lt Mark Zanowicz.....USCG

29
30 **STAFF**

- 31 Steven Atran.....Acting Deputy Director
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- 33 John Froeschke.....Fishery Biologist-Statistician
- 34 Morgan Kilgour.....Fishery Biologist
- 35 Mara Levy.....NOAA General Counsel
- 36 Jessica Matos.....Administrative Assistant
- 37 Emily Muehlstein.....Public Information Officer
- 38 Ryan Rindone.....Fishery Biologist & SEDAR Liaison
- 39 Bernadine Roy.....Office Manager
- 40 Carrie Simmons.....Executive Director

41
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- 44 Eric Brazer.....Shareholders Alliance
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- 47 Rick Burris.....MDMR
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7 Peter Hood.....NMFS
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9 Lawrence Marino.....LA
10 Laura Picariello.....Texas Sea Grant
11 Clay Porch.....SEFSC
12 Dale Rankin.....Island Moon Newspaper, TX
13 George Schmahl.....Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary
14 Matt Streich.....TX

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17

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1
2
3 Table of Contents.....3
4
5 Table of Motions.....4
6
7 Adoption of Agenda and Approval of Minutes.....5
8
9 Action Guide and Next Steps.....5
10
11 Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary Expansion Update...6
12
13 Final Action Abbreviated Framework Action: Clarification of
14 Fishing in HAPCs.....22
15
16 Coral Reef Conservation Program Grant Update.....24
17
18 Adjournment.....31
19
20 - - -
21

TABLE OF MOTIONS

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13

PAGE 23: Motion to approve the Abbreviated Framework Action: Clarification of Fishing in HAPCs and that it be forwarded to the Secretary of Commerce for review and implementation and deem the codified text as necessary and appropriate, giving staff editorial license to make the necessary changes in the document. The Council Chair is given the authority to deem any changes to the codified text as necessary and appropriate. The motion carried on page 23.

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1 The Coral Committee of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management
2 Council convened at the Omni Hotel, Corpus Christi, Texas,
3 Monday morning, August 20, 2018, and was called to order by
4 Chairman Tom Frazer.

5
6 **ADOPTION OF AGENDA**
7 **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**
8 **ACTION GUIDE AND NEXT STEPS**
9

10 **CHAIRMAN TOM FRAZER:** We will convene the Coral meeting and what
11 will be Tab N in your briefing materials, and the first item on
12 the agenda is the Adoption of the Agenda. We have a motion to
13 adopt the agenda by John Sanchez, and is there a second?

14
15 **MS. MARTHA GUYAS:** Second.

16
17 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** We have a second by Martha Guyas. The next
18 item on the agenda is the Approval of the June 2018 Coral
19 Committee Minutes. Can I get a motion to approve those minutes?

20
21 **MR. DAVE DONALDSON:** So moved.

22
23 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** It's moved by Dave Donaldson and seconded by
24 John Sanchez. Okay. Moving on, we have a couple of items here,
25 and we only have an hour, and so we're going to try to move
26 fairly expeditiously through them, but we have the Action Guide
27 and Next Steps with Dr. Kilgour.

28
29 Then G.P. Schmahl is going to give us a presentation on the
30 Flower Garden Banks expansion, and then we have another action
31 having to do with an abbreviated framework, and that is
32 clarifying fishing in the HAPCs, and then, finally, we have
33 another presentation on the Coral Reef Conservation Program, and
34 so we're going to try to stick to the schedule as best we can
35 and move quickly, but, with that said, Morgan, if you want to go
36 ahead and bring us through the Action Guide and Next Steps.

37
38 **DR. MORGAN KILGOUR:** Most of today is for informational
39 purposes. G.P. Schmahl is here to present on the Flower Garden
40 Banks expansion and the progress that the sanctuary has made.
41 The one item that I am going to need action, possibly, from the
42 council is Agenda Item IV, which is that abbreviated framework,
43 but I will just make sure that I get what I need from you as we
44 go through the agenda, if that's okay with you.

45
46 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** All right. That sounds good, and so can we go
47 ahead and get G.P. to give the presentation?
48

1 **FLOWER GARDEN BANKS NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY EXPANSION UPDATE**

2
3 **MR. GEORGE SCHMAHL:** First, thank you very much for having me
4 here and inviting me back. It's been a little while since I
5 have talked to you about the Flower Garden Banks National Marine
6 Sanctuary proposed expansion.

7
8 I know there's been a few new members of the council here, and
9 I'm going to start off by giving a very brief background, to
10 bring a few people up to speed, but it's great to be back with
11 you today, and, just as a reminder, the Flower Garden Banks is a
12 National Marine Sanctuary, and it's comprised of three separate
13 areas, the East Flower Garden Bank, West Flower Garden Bank, and
14 Stetson Bank, off the coast of Texas and Louisiana.

15
16 Stetson Bank is about seventy miles offshore, and the East and
17 West Flower Garden Banks are about 100 or 110 nautical miles
18 offshore, and they are right along the edge of the continental
19 shelf break in the northwestern Gulf of Mexico, and the primary
20 reason it was designated as a National Marine Sanctuary back in
21 1992 was that it does contain a spectacular coral reef
22 ecosystem, turning out to be one of the healthiest coral reefs
23 in the entire western Atlantic and Caribbean region, which is
24 very significant, because, as you know, coral reefs in general,
25 throughout the world, are in trouble, and they are in decline in
26 most areas of the world, and especially in the Caribbean, and,
27 to have this gem of a coral reef in the northern Gulf of Mexico
28 is quite significant.

29
30 One thing is, from the perspective of fishery management, of
31 course, these areas provide nursery areas for a variety of fish
32 species of commercial and recreational importance. This
33 particular photograph, for example, is taken at Stetson Bank.
34 If you look at all those little minnow-looking fish, those are
35 actually juvenile vermilion snapper, and it's just kind of
36 indicative of the nursery function that it provides to the Gulf
37 of Mexico.

38
39 We were just out at Stetson Bank last week, and we saw dozens of
40 small scamp grouper, really cute little three-inch scamps,
41 running around, and so obviously a recruitment event that
42 happened there just in recent time.

43
44 However, the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary,
45 those three banks in the Sanctuary, are only three of dozens of
46 reefs and banks that occur along the edge of the continental
47 shelf in the northwestern Gulf of Mexico, and a number of these
48 areas are quite well known.

1
2 They've been studied since the 1970s or so, when Dick Rezak and
3 Tom Bright did a series of groundbreaking studies that looked at
4 these areas and described and characterized most of these areas
5 along the edge of the continental shelf, as oil and gas interest
6 began to move out into this part of the offshore area of the
7 Gulf of Mexico.

8
9 These are also well known to the Gulf Council. Most of these
10 areas have been designated as habitat areas of particular
11 concern, and this was back in 2006, and these mapped areas, in
12 the blue boxes, are HAPCs. Most of them do not have specific
13 regulations associated with their designation, but there are
14 several that do, including the East and West Flower Garden Bank
15 and Stetson Bank and McGrail Bank, which have restrictions on
16 any bottom-tending gear and prohibitions on anchoring by fishing
17 vessels, and I will get into this a little bit more as we go
18 through, because this played in significantly with our process
19 as well.

20
21 Our expansion process actually started back in 2007, when we
22 looked at our existing management plan, and we're required
23 periodically to review and revise our management plan, as
24 appropriate, and, in that time period, it was brought up by many
25 members of the public and others that we should consider
26 expansion to expand the area and the protections that are
27 provided by the sanctuary to other reefs and banks in the
28 northwestern Gulf of Mexico.

29
30 In fact, our management plan, revised management plan, that
31 became official in 2012 included an action plan, a separate
32 action plan, on sanctuary expansion, and so what we are doing
33 now is an outgrowth from that action plan.

34
35 In 2015, we published a Notice of Intent to develop a proposed
36 action for expansion, and we developed a Draft Environmental
37 Impact Statement, and it was released in June of 2016, and it
38 had a public comment period that summer, through August of 2016,
39 and we also, at that time, entered into a formal consultation
40 with the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, as is
41 required under the National Marine Sanctuaries Act. In fact,
42 it's a specific section called 304(a)(5) of the National Marine
43 Sanctuaries Act, which outlines how we are required to work with
44 the appropriate fishery management council on any regulations
45 related to fishing.

46
47 The essential proposal was to expand the sanctuary by
48 designating a number of reefs and banks or other areas in the

1 northwestern Gulf of Mexico and to apply the existing
2 regulations that already existed in the existing sanctuary to
3 those new areas. We will get into the map portions of it in a
4 moment, but I just wanted to remind you essentially what those
5 regulations are.

6
7 The primary ones essentially have prohibitions on anchoring, and
8 there is no vessel anchoring of any type, although we do provide
9 mooring buoys for people to access the sanctuary and they don't
10 have to anchor.

11
12 It does restrict the fishing gear, the possession, or the use of
13 fishing gear, all fishing gear, except for conventional hook-
14 and-line gear, and hook-and-line gear with multiple hooks is
15 allowed, and the gear known as bandit rigs is an allowable
16 fishing gear in the existing sanctuary.

17
18 It essentially protects the bottom features, and so any
19 collection, injury, or damage to coral or coral reefs or other
20 invertebrates and possession of any invertebrates or fish,
21 except those caught by hook-and-line, are also prohibited.

22
23 We also regulate oil and gas activity in these areas, but we do
24 not totally prohibit oil and gas exploration and development in
25 the sanctuary, but we do restrict it to areas outside of the
26 preexisting no-activity zones that were established by the
27 Minerals Management Service, now BOEM, a number of years ago.
28 Those no-activity zones do come into play in a variety of ways,
29 including how it relates to the Gulf Council, as we'll see in a
30 few moments.

31
32 This is just another view of the existing sanctuary. The two
33 banks in the lower-right-hand corner are the East and West
34 Flower Garden Banks, and the very small area up in the sort of
35 upper left is Stetson Bank, and the lines and dots that you see
36 around in this image represent oil and gas platforms and
37 pipelines, as a reminder that this is in the middle of one of
38 the most highly-developed oil and gas exploration and
39 development areas in the world.

40
41 Essentially, what we proposed in our DEIS in 2016 as our
42 preferred alternative is shown on this map here. This was what
43 was designated in our DEIS as Alternative 3, and we had five
44 alternatives, from no action to a more geographically large and
45 expansive area, but this is our preferred alternative, and you
46 can see it has -- It incorporated a number of those areas,
47 reefs, and banks that were previously mentioned. Most of these
48 are also what are previously designated as HAPCs.

1
2 There are three exceptions though for HAPC, and I will go ahead
3 and mention that now. There is an area called Horseshoe Bank,
4 and that is a bank that is in between the East and West Flower
5 Garden Bank, and then there is two other banks. One is called
6 Elvers Bank, and one is called Parker Bank, and those are the
7 three areas that do not have associated HAPCs along with them.

8
9 Now, in the process, after we receive public comment from our
10 Draft Environmental Impact Statement, and we received over 8,000
11 comments, many that were strongly supportive of the action, but
12 there was some significant opposition as well, and quite a bit
13 of that came from the oil and gas industry in this region.

14
15 What we did after we received the public comment was to take it
16 back to our Advisory Council, and I will sit back and say that
17 all National Marine Sanctuaries have an advisory council, and we
18 have one as well. It's represented by a variety of constituent
19 groups, including fishing and including oil and gas and
20 conservation and education and research and recreational diving,
21 most of the groups that have active participation in areas in
22 and around the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary.

23
24 We felt that we -- Our Advisory Council is different than the
25 Gulf Council. It is truly an advisory council and not a
26 management council, and so we are not required to take their
27 advice, although obviously that advice is very important to us,
28 and a lot of weight is given to the advice that is given through
29 our Advisory Council group.

30
31 They entered into what turned out to be a very long and detailed
32 process. They created a Boundary Expansion Working Group, which
33 ended up having I think twenty-one meetings over the course of a
34 year-and-a-half or so, and they looked at each of these bank
35 features in great detail and tried to propose some revisions to
36 those boundaries that would be less impactive to constituent
37 groups, including fishing and including oil and gas activity.

38
39 I will mention that we have active participation from fishers on
40 our advisory council, including the Boundary Expansion Working
41 Group, and some of those folks you probably know. Shane
42 Cantrell was the co-chair of our Boundary Expansion Working
43 Group, and we had active participation from Scott Hickman and
44 from Buddy Guindon throughout the process as well.

45
46 What they came up with and the official recommendation from the
47 council at their May 2018 meeting was this, and I'm going to go
48 into -- I am going to pick out some of these specific banks to

1 show you in more detail, but, essentially, the purple line on
2 this map are the same lines as what is shown in yellow on the
3 previous map, and so that was the preferred alternative, and the
4 areas in white are the areas that were recommended by our
5 Advisory Council.

6
7 As you can see, it did -- All of the banks that we were looking
8 at were -- Pretty much all of the banks that we were looking at
9 in our Draft EIS were included in the Sanctuary Advisory Council
10 recommendation. However, the individual boundaries around those
11 features were reduced in size, sometimes a little bit and
12 sometimes quite a lot, and I will show you a little bit more
13 about that in a little bit more detail.

14
15 Essentially, if you're looking at the number, our existing
16 sanctuary is fifty-six square miles in size, and the proposed
17 expansion that we proposed in our Draft EIS would have added
18 fifteen additional banks, for a total of 383 square miles. The
19 Advisory Council recommendation that we just received in May
20 includes fourteen of those fifteen additional banks, for a total
21 area of about 206 square miles.

22
23 I have circled this one area on this map, and it's a complex of
24 banks, actually three banks, and we call it the Bright Bank
25 Complex, and it includes Bright Bank, Rankin Bank, and 28 Fathom
26 Bank. I am just going to zoom in on this one, because it kind
27 of shows you the issues that have come up and came up through
28 the discussions in those working group deliberations.

29
30 What's important here is there is three banks, and one of the
31 main things that I wanted to point out is, first, the largest
32 rectangle area that's in kind of a whitish broad line is the
33 existing habitat area of particular concern boundary designated
34 in 2006. You can see the purple line, which overlies the HAPC
35 in some areas, is the boundary that we proposed in our Draft
36 EIS.

37
38 The lime-green areas are the no-activity zones, and these areas
39 were designated, like I mentioned, by the predecessor of the
40 Bureau of Offshore Energy Management, or BOEM, and they are
41 designated by depth contours, and, in this case, it is the
42 eighty-five-meter depth contour.

43
44 As you can see, when you trace a depth contour, it's quite
45 complicated, and it is a difficult shape to draw, especially as
46 an enforcement boundary, and that became a large part of the
47 discussions of our Boundary Expansion Working Group.

48

1 Essentially, what our Advisory Council did was reduce the sizes
2 of these polygons around these features to something very close
3 to the existing no-activity zones, and so, if you look at Bright
4 Bank, which is the one on the right, you can see that I have
5 shown the Sanctuary Advisory Council boundary recommendation,
6 and it's that black line, and it's a polygon that is drawn
7 around that irregular feature that is shown by the lime-green
8 area, which is the no-activity zone.

9
10 We had a lot of input from our enforcement people on our
11 council. Charles Tyre sits on our Advisory Council, and he was
12 an active member of our working group as well, and he reminded
13 us frequently that, for enforcement purposes, something -- The
14 more regular a boundary that you can have, the better, and, of
15 course, a square is always the best, from an enforcement point
16 of view, I guess, but, in this case, a polygon and try to reduce
17 the number of sides of a polygon, as much as possible.

18
19 That is essentially what the Advisory Council attempted to do,
20 to draw those boundaries around the no-activity zones and in a
21 way that would be enforceable and incorporate the areas that are
22 included in those no-activity zones. I might mention that the
23 no-activity zones, of course, do have very sensitive biological
24 features of importance, and that's why they were designated to
25 begin with.

26
27 The reason that we proposed larger boundaries in our
28 Environmental Impact Statement was that there are a considerable
29 amount of also very significant habitat outside of the no-
30 activity zones, and you can see some of those areas in this map
31 that are shown in red, the kind of stippled red areas, and those
32 are all significant outcrop features.

33
34 Typically, they are more than eight feet in relief, and they are
35 hard bottom, and, where there is hard-bottom outcrops, you have
36 attached organisms of all types, and this is primarily
37 octocorals, black corals, sponges, and, of course, a lot of
38 associated fish species, but our council focused on the no-
39 activity zones, and that is essentially what they came up with
40 in this particular case.

41
42 The other thing that I wanted to -- On the left-hand side, there
43 is two banks, Rankin Bank and 28 Fathom Bank, and, in that case,
44 they do have separate no-activity zones, if you look closely,
45 but, in that case, those were so close together that our
46 Advisory Council drew a line around both no-activity zones, to
47 incorporate it into one polygon, and so that was the general
48 process that they used to come up with their recommended

1 boundaries.

2
3 From that point, I will kind of remind you as well that, when we
4 entered into the consultation process with you, with the Gulf
5 Council, it did result in recommendations from this council and
6 a white paper that was developed in November of 2016, and one
7 reason that I was focusing so much on the no-activity zones was
8 because your recommendations also highlighted the no-activity
9 zones and recommended to us that we take a similar approach when
10 it came to fishing regulations as we had done with oil and gas
11 regulations and to make those most restrictive regulations apply
12 primarily to the no-activity zones, and the areas outside of the
13 no-activity zones would then be open to historical fishing
14 activities.

15
16 The two things that we are primarily talking about here, when
17 we're talking about historical fishing activities, are the
18 bottom longline fishery and the ability to anchor, and that is
19 primarily associated with the snapper grouper bandit rig
20 fishery.

21
22 I kind of summarized my interpretation of the Gulf Council
23 recommendations in a little bit different words, because I think
24 of it as applying the existing regulations of the Flower Garden
25 Banks to these no-activity zones, because, as I mentioned, our
26 existing regulations restrict all fishing gears except for hook-
27 and-line, and they prohibit anchoring, and the council
28 recommendation is slightly different wording. It's to establish
29 a no-bottom-impact gear zone and also establish a no-anchoring
30 zone within those areas.

31
32 As you can see, our Advisory Council kind of converged on a
33 similar approach that the Gulf Council took with the no-activity
34 zones, but, in this case, if we adopted the Advisory Council
35 recommendations, the sanctuary boundary would actually be that
36 area around the no-activity zone, and there would not be much
37 area outside of the no-activity zone that would still be in the
38 sanctuary.

39
40 Now, if you look closely though, as our council drew the
41 boundary lines, polygons, around the no-activity zones, there
42 are areas that are outside of the no-activity zone that would be
43 inside the sanctuary boundary, but, because of the way they have
44 drawn them now, that becomes a little bit more problematic, in
45 terms of enforcement of areas inside versus outside, and so I
46 think that's one of the issues that I assume that you all would
47 be interested in.

48

1 In this particular case, in my opinion, the way they drew the
2 polygon around this no-activity zone, it's very close to at
3 least the spirit of what the Gulf Council was recommending, in
4 terms of establishing restricted areas for certain gear types,
5 but there are some other banks that are not quite as consistent,
6 and I'm going to show you another one here, and it's called
7 Sonnier Bank.

8
9 It's off of Louisiana, a very popular spot both for fishing and
10 for recreational diving. It's one of the other ones that is
11 shallow enough for recreational diving to occur. In this case,
12 it's a little bit more complicated.

13
14 You can see, again, the green areas are the no-activity zones.
15 Again, they are established by depth contours, and so there is a
16 number of little peaks associated with this bank feature, and,
17 if you drew a line around each of those peaks, and we're at that
18 particular depth contour, this is what you come up with.

19
20 In this case, the Advisory Council looked -- They kind of
21 stepped back a little bit and looked at the entire feature and
22 did not try to draw individual polygons around each no-activity
23 zone, but they drew a single polygon around the cluster of no-
24 activity zones at Sonnier Bank, and so, in the case from a
25 fisherman's perspective, this might be a little bit more
26 problematic, because some of the areas that would be inside the
27 sanctuary boundary, in this case, if we took the approach that
28 all of the area within the sanctuary would be restricted, would
29 be more impactful than the case with the Bright Bank one that I
30 showed you previously.

31
32 This just reiterates the Gulf Council's recommendations, but I
33 am going to skip over that, because I think that's in your
34 background materials, and I think you are well aware of that,
35 but I just kind of wanted to make the point again that -- This
36 is showing a different bank. This is MacNeil Bank. This is
37 north of the East Flower Garden Bank.

38
39 The image on the left is actually from the white paper that the
40 Gulf Council submitted to us as part of their recommendations.
41 I apologize for the color differences, but I wanted to kind of
42 show you our scheme versus what you had used.

43
44 In red, on the left-hand image, is the no-activity zone, and
45 then, on the bottom-right-hand image, it is the lime-green area,
46 again, and you can see it's basically the same area, except, in
47 the case of the recommendation from the council -- You know, if
48 you went and drew, very precisely, a polygon around all of the

1 sort of nooks and crannies of that shape -- You can do it, but,
2 in this case, I counted about thirty-five or thirty-six
3 different sides to that polygon, which, from an enforcement
4 point of view, is difficult. This is versus what our Advisory
5 Council came up with for that same bank in the lower-right-hand
6 corner, and that is a polygon with twelve sides. It's still
7 fairly complicated, but at least something more regular than the
8 very complex one that is identified by the bathymetric depth
9 contour.

10
11 I think that's essentially kind of the message that I wanted to
12 show you. I have, in this PowerPoint, all of the banks, and I
13 don't think there's a reason to go through each one of them,
14 but, if you have a question about any particular bank, we can
15 certainly do that, but I think it may be more fruitful if we
16 opened it up for questions or discussion.

17
18 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Thanks, G.P. That was a really nice overview
19 of what you guys have been doing. A couple of things, I think,
20 that we need to talk about. I know that, the last time that we
21 went through this process, the Gulf Council provided essentially
22 a letter, right, and I'm assuming, again, that we would be
23 looking for a similar letter from the council on this latest
24 draft.

25
26 **MR. SCHMAHL:** Obviously we're interested in your views and
27 recommendations. It's not required. The process that we did
28 with the council was a formal consultation process, and there is
29 not a requirement to do further consultations unless something
30 significant had changed that would change the whole sort of
31 complexion of what the council recommended in the beginning.

32
33 Even though we have shrunk the boundaries, outer boundaries,
34 quite substantially, I think the core portion of your
35 recommendations would still apply, that you would be most
36 interested in applying those restrictions within the no-activity
37 zones, and that could still be done in either configuration, and
38 so, yes, we are interested in your recommendations, but, like I
39 said, it's not required.

40
41 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Sure. Okay. I will come back to that, but I
42 guess I want to give other folks around the table an opportunity
43 to weigh-in or ask questions on the presentation. Martha.

44
45 **MS. GUYAS:** Thank you for your presentation. Can you remind me
46 -- Are you anticipating funding for marking any of these areas?
47 How is that going to work?

48

1 **MR. SCHMAHL:** Funding, of course, is always an issue. There is
2 -- We were never anticipating actually marking the boundaries of
3 the area. We are absolutely anticipating providing mooring
4 buoys, especially in the areas that are frequented by the
5 fishermen and divers.

6
7 Some of these areas get quite deep, and, in our consultation
8 with the people that do fish in these areas, it's kind of
9 difficult to pick a specific spot and say this is your fishing
10 spot, because that obviously changes. Those conditions change,
11 and so, no, we're not planning on marking the areas or the
12 boundaries, but we are planning on putting out mooring buoys.

13
14 There is a potential for funding through the -- Actually through
15 the Deepwater Horizon, the Natural Resource Damage Assessment
16 process, which is ongoing, and it has been -- Marking these
17 areas as providing mooring buoys to provide protection from
18 anchoring has been identified as a strategy of the restoration
19 plan that you will see pretty soon, and we anticipate that
20 funding will be available through that process to do that kind
21 of work.

22
23 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Mara.

24
25 **MS. MARA LEVY:** Just a question about the current regulations
26 you have in the sanctuaries, and I'm not very familiar with
27 them, but, in the one slide where you had the current
28 prohibitions, it says fishing with or possession of fishing gear
29 other than conventional hook-and-line, and so, in those
30 particular areas where you have that prohibition, you're
31 basically saying no fishing and no possession of the gear on the
32 vessel, and is that correct?

33
34 **MR. SCHMAHL:** That is correct, and the full regulation does talk
35 about you can have it on your vessel as long as you are passing
36 through without interruption, but you can't stop, and that even
37 applies to using the mooring buoys, and that has been an issue
38 sometimes. Like a shrimp boat may, for example, think there's a
39 nice place to tie up, to this nice mooring buoy, but, because
40 they have what would be prohibited gear, technically that's a
41 violation, but they can certainly pass through without any
42 problem.

43
44 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Ms. Bosarge.

45
46 **MS. LEANN BOSARGE:** Hi, G.P. How's it going?

47
48 **MR. SCHMAHL:** Hi, Leann.

1
2 **MS. BOSARGE:** For those of you who weren't here the last time
3 that G.P. presented -- Dr. Schmahl, and I should call you Dr.
4 Schmahl, presented to us --
5
6 **MR. SCHMAHL:** No, actually I'm not a doctor, and so you don't
7 have to do that.
8
9 **MS. BOSARGE:** Okay. All right. So I can call you G.P.? Is
10 that okay?
11
12 **MR. SCHMAHL:** Yes.
13
14 **MS. BOSARGE:** All right. So I was so tough on him, and God love
15 him. He's such a sweetheart, and he comes to all of our AP
16 meetings, and he always interacts with our fishermen, and he
17 never gives up on the process, and he really is wonderful.
18
19 So, having said that, I have some questions, but I do not have
20 the Draft Environmental Impact Statement with me, and so surely
21 it's going to be better than last time. I am not going to be
22 quoting from that.
23
24 **MR. SCHMAHL:** I think I have one in my briefcase if you want it.
25
26 **MS. BOSARGE:** No, no. So would you back up a couple of slides,
27 G.P., and I think it's like two slides. No, go forward. It was
28 only one slide. Right there. Your proposal -- Our proposal
29 that the council sent over, which you can listen to or not
30 listen to and it's just our recommendation, but we proposed that
31 the no-activity zone essentially would be where there is no
32 activity, but, outside of that and within the boundaries of the
33 sanctuary -- Once you got outside that no-activity zone, our
34 historical fishermen could continue to fish there, except for
35 bottom-tending gear such as shrimpers. Shrimpers can't be
36 there. They have to be totally outside the HAPC or the
37 sanctuary or whatever.
38
39 The longline gear and all the rest of that, anything other than
40 that traditional hook-and-line gear, they will still be able to
41 use it outside of the no-activity zone and inside the sanctuary,
42 right?
43
44 Is that what you all are proposing, or are you all proposing
45 that that no-activity zone is only for oil and gas, right, and
46 that really pertains to them, and then, if you want to use
47 longlines or something like that, you have to get outside the
48 actual sanctuary boundaries? Like you can't use the longlines

1 and such outside no-activity but inside the sanctuary.

2
3 **MR. SCHMAHL:** I need to preface this first by saying that our
4 office actually hasn't come to an official decision on what our
5 revised proposed action is going to be. I can tell you that the
6 advice that we got from our Advisory Council is going to be
7 heavily weighted, and it will probably be something very close
8 to that, but let's just say, for the sake of argument, that we
9 adopted the Advisory Council's recommendation and we applied
10 their boundary suggestions.

11
12 In this case, there is two ways we could do it. One is to
13 establish the outer boundary, which in this case would be that
14 black line on the lower-right-hand image, and just apply the
15 fishing restrictions throughout the entire sanctuary. For us,
16 that would be the easiest thing to do, right, because that's
17 less complicated.

18
19 What the Gulf Council recommended was there are still areas
20 outside of the no-activity zone, but it would still now be still
21 instead the sanctuary boundary, and primarily, if you look on
22 that left-hand side of the no-activity zone, there is kind of
23 that embayment, or that indentation, there on the left. In the
24 case of our Advisory Council, we just kind of drew a line across
25 there, and so, historically, or in the Gulf Council's
26 recommendations, a fisherman could come into that small area and
27 utilize bottom longline gear and anchoring.

28
29 We could still take that approach and try to designate a no-
30 activity zone within this reduced sanctuary footprint, but, at
31 some point, you still have to draw a polygon around it, because
32 at least we've been advised that we cannot establish a
33 regulation that's based simply on a depth contour, and so we
34 actually have to draw a line, a series of points, and so, if we
35 were to take the strict no-activity zone approach, it would be
36 many, many points to try to draw that polygon around that
37 amorphous kind of area that is described by the depth contour.

38
39 I believe, in this particular case, that what our Advisory
40 Council did was a pretty good attempt to do that, and there are
41 very small areas that would be sort of not consistent with what
42 your council recommended, but, again, we would still have to
43 draw that polygon somehow, and that was -- In my opinion, this
44 is a good attempt to do that.

45
46 The answer to your question is yes. I would recommend that the
47 fishing restrictions would now apply to the entire sanctuary
48 boundary, knowing that it is only slightly larger than the no-

1 activity zone, and there would not be the tiered approach that
2 you all had recommended previously, because the area that would
3 be affected by that tier is so small and difficult to enforce
4 that it would be kind of contradictory.

5
6 **MS. BOSARGE:** Okay, and I think I used the wrong term. When I
7 said no-activity zone, I was completely fine with those black
8 lines that your Sanctuary Advisory Council came up with. Like
9 you said, they took that no-activity zone and kind of tried to
10 make it a polygon.

11
12 **MR. SCHMAHL:** Yes.

13
14 **MS. BOSARGE:** The black lines. Now, when you get out to that
15 purple line that is outside of that, that is where I start to
16 have some hesitation, because, if you look in that top box, in
17 the top-left corner, all that green shading behind that no-
18 activity zone, that is where our reef fish fishermen -- That's
19 their VMS pings, and it's a high rate of pinging, and so that's
20 a heavily-fished area that we would be kicking them out of if we
21 went with the purple lines.

22
23 If your plan is to go with the Sanctuary Advisory Council
24 recommendation and those black polygons that they drew that
25 really tightly mirror that no-activity zone and have that be the
26 sanctuary, I mean, I think that would kind of follow what the
27 council had recommended.

28
29 **MR. SCHMAHL:** In that case, the purple line goes away. I just
30 put the purple line on there because that was our original
31 suggestion, but, if we adopted our Advisory Council's
32 recommendation, the purple line is irrelevant, and it would not
33 have any effect at all.

34
35 **MS. BOSARGE:** Right now, does your organization still adopt that
36 Alternative 3 that has the purple lines or --

37
38 **MR. SCHMAHL:** No, and where we are in the process is that we are
39 taking in all the advice and that we are now going to come up
40 with a revised proposed action, or a revised preferred
41 alternative, and what's kind of going on internally right now is
42 the decision of whether or not that is a big enough change to
43 warrant a supplemental Draft EIS, which I kind of hope is not
44 the case, and so that's sort of what is -- That's why I can't
45 really say what our revised preferred alternative is, but say we
46 went with the Advisory Council's recommendation. Then, yes,
47 that would become our new preferred alternative.

1 We would come out -- The next step would actually either be a
2 supplemental DEIS with this new boundary or, if our General
3 Counsel says that it's not required under NEPA to do a
4 supplemental, because it is still within the kind of range of
5 alternatives that were considered in the original DEIS, then the
6 next step would actually be a proposed rule, which would
7 establish these boundaries and regulations. Of course, there
8 would be a public process related to that.

9
10 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Are there any more questions from the group?
11 Okay. So, a couple of things, I guess. Since you're not
12 finalized at this point in the process, I'm not sure it's
13 appropriate for us to weigh-in with any recommendations
14 necessarily at this point, but one of the things that we have
15 done in the past with regard to the -- For Coral Reef Amendment
16 9, for example, we looked at these various areas individually to
17 get a better idea of what fishing activities might actually be
18 taking place.

19
20 Perhaps in the interim, between now and the October meeting, if
21 it's okay, we can take a look at the fishing activity in each of
22 these areas that are proposed here, and would that be all right?
23 Okay. If there is no more questions, G.P. -- Hold on. Dr.
24 Mickle.

25
26 **DR. PAUL MICKLE:** Just real quick, when you say fishing
27 activity, that's fishing type of activity, right, and is that
28 what your request would be, to show the different fleets and
29 everything and not just activity as a whole, but categorized?

30
31 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Correct.

32
33 **DR. MICKLE:** Thank you.

34
35 **MS. BOSARGE:** G.P., is there a public comment period open or
36 going or anything that, if we wanted to send you a letter, once
37 we look at the fishing activity, that we would need to send it
38 by a certain date?

39
40 **MR. SCHMAHL:** No, there's not. There's not an official public
41 comment period right now, but, obviously, you could provide us
42 input and recommendations essentially at any time, certainly as
43 a follow-up to the 304(a)(5) consultation that I mentioned
44 previously, and that would be totally appropriate.

45
46 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Okay. Go ahead, Doug.

47
48 **MR. DOUG BOYD:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. G.P., I've got a

1 question. I'm not on this committee, but I do have a question.
2 The tightly-drawn box, which is your AP recommendation, how much
3 distance is there? I can't see the scale, and how much distance
4 is there between the purple line and the black line and then the
5 square, or the rectangle, that goes around the entire bank
6 there?

7
8 **MR. SCHMAHL:** I don't know the answer to that right off, because
9 the scale is a little bit different on each of the maps, and so
10 I can't read it very well, but we're talking about between say
11 the no-activity zone, which is in green on the right map, out to
12 where the Sanctuary Advisory Council's black line -- That's only
13 on the order of a hundred meters or so. Out to the outer purple
14 line, I would have to go back and look, but we were dealing with
15 trying to provide some -- Well, it's on the order of 100 to 200
16 meters.

17
18 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Did you have a quick follow-up, Doug?

19
20 **MR. BOYD:** Yes, thank you. A question. I'm not familiar with
21 how accurate the fishermen can be. Are you confident that, if
22 you take the recommendation of the panel in that tight box in
23 the no-fishing area, that they can fish and not hurt the coral
24 with working that close to it?

25
26 **MR. SCHMAHL:** Well, certainly the areas that are inside the
27 boundary would be definitely protected. As I mentioned, there
28 are coral areas outside of that area that are still vulnerable.
29 However, the primary areas have been encapsulated in these
30 areas, and so we were also -- In terms of the fishermen that we
31 worked with, the resolution of their depth finders and bottom
32 finders, they can see where those ridges and scarps are.

33
34 I believe they can avoid most of those areas most of the time.
35 I can't say that there would never be injury to some of those
36 features, but it would certainly protect the primary area and
37 reduce impact, to a significant extent.

38
39 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Andy.

40
41 **MR. ANDY STRELCHECK:** As a follow-up to Leann's question about
42 providing input, do you have a general timeline at this point as
43 to when you would expect to complete the Final Environmental
44 Impact Statement and when the council, if they're going to
45 weigh-in, when that should be?

46
47 **MR. SCHMAHL:** We're looking -- We are trying to shoot for the
48 end of this year, or early 2019, and it would actually be -- The

1 proposed rule would be the next step, and then the Final EIS
2 would follow that.

3

4 There is another process that I haven't mentioned yet, but there
5 was a Presidential Executive Order that was put in place in 2017
6 that required the National Marine Sanctuary Program, before they
7 considered any new designation or any expansion, to have a
8 detailed analysis done by BOEM of the impact to the offshore
9 energy industry by whatever proposal is being put forward, and
10 so, as soon as we have agreed upon what our revised preferred
11 alternative will be, we're required to send that over to the
12 Department of Interior, to BOEM, and they have a sixty-day time
13 period for which to provide that analysis.

14

15 Now, my expectation is, if we go with these recommendations,
16 that analysis will show that there will very little impact to
17 the offshore oil and gas industry, because of those areas are
18 essentially already restricted, but there's that sixty days that
19 kind of has to be built into the process too, and so, as we've
20 seen, this process has gone on a bit longer than I anticipated,
21 but, again, we're shooting for early 2019 for the proposed rule,
22 and the FEIS would follow, I would say, in the spring, if
23 everything worked out all right.

24

25 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Okay. I'm going to try to keep us a little
26 bit on track, because we've got some things to carry on, and so,
27 G.P., I really appreciate the presentation today and taking all
28 the questions and the answers that you provided. Thank you.

29

30 I guess, for Morgan, I think, based on the discussion, I think
31 we have some time, and if we can come back at the next council
32 meeting and actually look at those areas individually, with
33 regard to fishing activity by the various sectors, that will be
34 helpful, and it will help us inform, I guess, an opinion moving
35 forward.

36

37 All right, and so, looking at the agenda, I'm not sure, to be
38 honest with you, that we're going to get to the Coral Reef
39 Conservation Program Grant. Do you think we will? We have two
40 hours? I thought we had an hour. My bad. G.P., come on back
41 and talk all you want. No, I'm joking. All right. Then cool.
42 Then we'll move on to the Final Action Abbreviated Framework
43 Action.

44

45 **DR. KILGOUR:** Maybe we'll get done early.

46

47 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** I strive for that.

48

1 **FINAL ACTION ABBREVIATED FRAMEWORK ACTION: CLARIFICATION OF**
2 **FISHING IN HAPCS**

3
4 **DR. KILGOUR:** In your briefing book, it's Tab N, Number 5, and
5 it's the abbreviated framework based on the discussion at the
6 June council meeting. The council wanted some clarification
7 written in that it wasn't a prohibition on actual fishing gear
8 being in an HAPC, but just the deployment of gear, and so this
9 is a very brief abbreviated framework that would be final action
10 today, or final action at this council meeting, and I apologize,
11 on clarifying that.

12
13 This is the letter, and it's a whopping two paragraphs. It is
14 stating that this prohibition of fishing with bottom-tending
15 gear is specific to the deployment of gear.

16
17 If you look at the codified text, it has made this amendment to
18 all of the HAPCs and not just those included in Coral 9, but all
19 of them in 622.74, with the exception of the Tortugas National
20 Marine Reserve, because that's a different animal. If you look
21 through on 622.74, the codified text, which is generally not my
22 -- Is it okay if I go through it, Sue? Okay.

23
24 I will just go through the first one, which is the Florida
25 Middle Grounds. You will see that, instead of fishing with --
26 Now it says the deployment of bottom longline, bottom trawl,
27 dredge, pot or trap, and, if you look just above that, it says,
28 for the purposes of this section, fishing gear is deployed if
29 any part of the gear is in contact with the water.

30
31 These were made throughout the codified text, with the exception
32 of there were two areas in Coral Amendment 9 that had specific
33 exemptions, and one was Pulley Ridge South Portion A, which had
34 an exemption for bottom longline, and so that wouldn't be
35 included in the deployment of, and then Viosca Knoll 862/906 had
36 an exemption for royal red shrimp fishermen with a royal red
37 shrimp endorsement.

38
39 Again, this is final action. If you've had a chance to read
40 through the letter, you can let me know if that encompasses what
41 the thoughts of the council were. We will transmit this with
42 Coral Amendment 9, and it will be one part, one rulemaking
43 package, so that there isn't any confusion, and so this will all
44 go forth at the same time.

45
46 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Sure. Thank you, Morgan. Go ahead, Leann.

47
48 **MS. BOSARGE:** Well, since I was the one that brought it up, I

1 guess I will give you some feedback. Yes, I think that
2 addresses my concerns, as far as from the perspective of the
3 shrimp industry, just for the group.

4
5 One of the features that we're going to encompass with an HAPC
6 is called the Florida Wall, and so it's a long, skinny box that
7 kind of mirrors and parallels the coastline of Florida, but
8 offshore, and so one of my concerns was, as we create more and
9 more of these, if there are fishermen out there that need to
10 cross this area and not go all the way around it to get to
11 shore, how do they make sure they're in compliance and they're
12 not going to be considered fishing if they have shrimp gear on
13 the boat and shrimp in the hold, and do you see what I'm saying?
14 How do they prove that they weren't fishing there?

15
16 I think this addresses my concerns. The definition of
17 "deployed" is if any part of the gear is in contact with the
18 water, and so we can definitely do that, and so I'm okay. Now,
19 I don't want to speak for the reef fish fishermen, but, from the
20 shrimp perspective, I think this works.

21
22 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** I am looking around the table. Does anybody
23 else want to weigh-in on that? Okay. Well, I would agree,
24 Leann. I think that the wording change is -- It's pretty
25 simple, but it's pretty commonsense and pretty straightforward,
26 and so I think it's an easy thing to incorporate into the text,
27 and so I guess, at this point, if somebody on the committee
28 might want to make a motion. Go ahead, Martha.

29
30 **MS. GUYAS:** I will make a motion to recommend that the council
31 submit the abbreviated framework to the Secretary and then -- I
32 don't know if we do the codified text now, but I'm sure, if we
33 can get the boilerplate motion up here, and I don't know if we
34 need to deem the text as well, and that's at Full Council, but -
35 -

36
37 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Sure, and we'll just give staff a minute to
38 put it up on here, and we'll relax for a second. All right.
39 We've got a motion on the board.

40
41 Do we have a second for the motion? Seconded by Dave Donaldson.
42 Is there any further discussion on the motion? **Seeing none, is**
43 **there any opposition to the motion? Seeing no opposition, the**
44 **motion carries.**

45
46 The next thing on the agenda is the Coral Reef Conservation
47 Program Grant Update, and we have here a final report. John
48 Froeschke.

1
2 **CORAL REEF CONSERVATION PROGRAM GRANT UPDATE**
3

4 **DR. JOHN FROESCHKE:** Good morning, everyone. I am just going to
5 give you a brief update on the report that we completed early
6 this year describing some of our work that we have completed as
7 part of the Coral Reef Conservation Program Grant, which we have
8 participated in as council staff since 2011. Prior to that, we
9 mostly passed through money to various universities to support
10 research.

11
12 Since 2011, we have done this work in-house. A big focus of
13 this has been the development of an online data portal, and we
14 call it the Coral Portal now. The aim of this was to provide
15 public access to coral and habitat-related information in the
16 Gulf that was documented and could be distributed and was
17 available to both technical and lay users alike.

18
19 Over the past six, now seven, years, we have continued
20 development of this. It has had numerous improvements, both in
21 content and technology and things. It has changed a lot in that
22 period. In general, the CRCP programs are awarded in three-year
23 blocks, and so, again, in 2011 and in 2014, we submitted another
24 application, grant application, for this, and we were awarded
25 funding, and we're currently on the third iteration of that,
26 which Morgan will talk just briefly about what we've done on
27 that to date.

28
29 We work on this in-house, and we support one fulltime employee,
30 which is now Dr. Basher, who Carrie just introduced, and, the
31 work that I'm going to describe briefly today, we sort of have
32 three themes, if you will, and tasks under that, in grant-speak,
33 but, really, the aims of this was to provide, again, some
34 comprehensive information about coral, ecological data,
35 associated habitats, to make it available in a single place, as
36 best we could, and to update that with new information as it
37 became available.

38
39 A second theme of this, sort of in the blue middle tab, is
40 enhancing stakeholder engagement. What this aimed to do was to
41 provide not only just the data, but some synthesized tools,
42 perhaps, to online web maps or things that -- We call them
43 learning modules or storyboards now, but provide more of a
44 friendly introduction that is appropriate for stakeholders or
45 wide audiences about things relevant to coral or reef fish
46 management things in the Gulf.

47
48 Finally, a smaller part of this program is we have remained

1 aware of, obviously, coral management issues in the Gulf and
2 tried to review and supplement those activities as best we could
3 within the objectives of the grant, and so I will just kind of
4 go through some of the highlights. This is not an exhaustive
5 list. The website is portal.gulfcouncil.org, and so I encourage
6 you to go and look at that, but we have undertaken numerous
7 things.

8
9 Some of the things, for example, is we have online portals now
10 where anglers can report either lionfish observations or
11 collections or black grouper sightings, or when they caught one,
12 with the idea that these could be used to support management,
13 and we're interested in collaborating with FWC and all the
14 others to make sure that we have all the data in the right forms
15 and can make something that is useful and give the public an
16 opportunity to participate in the science and management
17 process.

18
19 This is just a screen capture of the Coral Portal as we have it
20 right now. It's kind of cut off on the bottom, but there are
21 three tabs down there. On the map, there is essentially the map
22 and the discover, the second one, but, essentially, what this
23 is, the green box is our web mapping applications, the yellow
24 box there houses some of our decision support tools, and then
25 the purple box houses some of our learning modules and blogs
26 about habitats and linkages and things.

27
28 Morgan will describe some of the updates that we have applied
29 recently in the current work, but that's generally how it's laid
30 out. I will just hit a couple of highlights of things that we
31 have done, as far as linkages. The linkages and what that means
32 is understanding the connections between associated habitats,
33 seagrasses and mangroves and estuaries, and how the health and
34 location and abundance of those systems directly affects both
35 corals and reef fishes and associated species on corals, and so
36 we've tried to do that.

37
38 What these panel maps here summarize is an exercise we had
39 looked at before, and it's called Predictive Modeling: The MSEs,
40 or Management Strategy Evaluation. Essentially, what we did is
41 we looked at the distribution of deepwater corals in the Gulf
42 and, thinking about the place-based management strategies that
43 were being considered in Coral 9, the questions we asked were
44 thinking about things that might affect where you place
45 management areas, or things like where the coral is and what
46 other activities might be affected by those placements, for
47 example commercial fishing, and so we used this as a process to
48 identify these areas.

1
2 These maps are, on the bottom, are, if, for example, you were to
3 specify conservation, and say we want 10 or 20 or 30 percent of
4 the Gulf to be designated as some area for management based on
5 criteria, these are some areas that might meet those rules, if
6 you will.

7
8 We sort of found that the value in this wasn't necessarily that
9 this is where you should do management, but it's that it
10 requires an explicit understanding of what you value, from a
11 management perspective and fishing and coral and where the
12 habitat is and all these things, and it was an interesting
13 exercise in that regard, and sort of what we learned is that, in
14 order to make use of this, you really -- It brought to light a
15 number of things that you ought to consider, and we could bring
16 those ideas to management, if that were requested of us.

17
18 This is just a brief table of some of the kinds of data that you
19 might find on the portal. We have lots of habitat information
20 on corals and various things, and we have worked with numerous
21 providers and colleagues in the Gulf to make these data
22 available.

23
24 This section is just a little bit about some of the linkages.
25 This is a series of blogs that Claire Roberts developed when she
26 was here, and what they are intended to do was be a user-
27 friendly introduction explaining the relationship of how these
28 habitats contribute to the health and well-being of coral areas,
29 if you will, and so it's very readable. It's digital, and it
30 has some online things, and it's meant to serve a wide audience,
31 and I think we were pleased with how those came out.

32
33 The second part of this called enhancing stakeholder engagement,
34 and this is what -- I previously called them learning modules,
35 but we don't say that anymore. We now call them storyboards,
36 but, essentially, what these are is a digital tool that is user-
37 friendly, and it can contain content and maps and all kinds of
38 information, and we try to pick a topic that is relevant.

39
40 We have done things about goliath grouper and the status and
41 trends of corals in the Gulf and lionfish. Morgan did one about
42 a research cruise that she participated in, and we've done
43 things on ecosystem management, but it's not intended to be an
44 exhaustive review of the topic. It's more of a factual kind of
45 summary of these things that includes some basic information
46 from a fishery management perspective as well as where you might
47 go to learn more.

48

1 The bottom panel there is sort of some of the management
2 resources that we have developed, either to support management
3 or to describe management actions that have occurred, and so the
4 coral HAPC viewer was sort of the first one we did, and you can
5 see it on the bottom-right panel there. We used this both to
6 illustrate the locations of management areas already in place,
7 and then we sort of updated this to mirror things as the council
8 was going through the Coral 9 development process, just to allow
9 the council and stakeholders and even staff to just kind of keep
10 track of where things were.

11
12 As Coral 9 is wrapping up, we're going to update this to mirror
13 what is done once the amendment is implemented, and we have also
14 done several other ones. With spiny lobster, we have some
15 closed areas there, and we have some regulations, and just a
16 number of different things on that.

17
18 Sort of the third tier of this presentation, or at least of this
19 work, was the supporting the transition to ecosystem-based
20 fishery management. Part of this, we did try to support Coral 9
21 and the things that were happening there, and that wasn't the
22 focus of the work of this grant, but we did develop some
23 outreach materials and things to support the public hearings.

24
25 A larger part of this was attending and participating in
26 ecosystem-based management efforts. As you all know, it's a
27 slow-moving train that's been going for a long time, and I don't
28 think we proport to be the leaders of the movement, but we
29 certainly do want to be involved, and we have attended and
30 participated as we can, and we make sure that the council's
31 perspectives and things are heard as part of the process, and we
32 developed some storyboards and things to try to make it
33 introductory material to the masses that captures the current
34 and important things.

35
36 That is a brief summary of what we've done to date. As I
37 mentioned, Dr. Basher is leading this effort now, and he's got
38 some interesting and exciting ideas, I think. If you're
39 interested in going to the website, it's portal.gulfcouncil.org.
40 We do try to maintain that and update it as best we can, and so
41 there's some static content, as far as the maps and things, but,
42 some of the more decision and management things, we are adding
43 content continuously. If you have feedback, we would love to
44 hear it. If you have something that you would like to see more
45 of or less of, we would like to hear that, too.

46
47 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Thanks, John, for the update. Any questions
48 for John? I've got a couple of real quick ones, John. So, I

1 mean, the funding, you apply for this, and they're three-year
2 block grants, essentially, right, three-year awards?

3

4 **DR. FROESCHKE:** Yes.

5

6 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** The next one expires in 2019, and is that
7 right?

8

9 **DR. FROESCHKE:** Yes.

10

11 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Do you guys intend to do another one, and what
12 might the focus be? Maybe that's for Carrie.

13

14 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CARRIE SIMMONS:** Since we have hired Dr.
15 Basher, we haven't talked about that just yet. He's just been
16 in the role for about a month-and-a-half now, but that is the
17 intent, to apply for another grant, but we'll be working on that
18 in the next year, and so he just got onboard, but, I mean, that
19 will be one of his main things to do after he gets up-to-date on
20 the new grant. We're a little bit behind, and Morgan is going
21 to go over that next.

22

23 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** All right. Any other questions? Thanks,
24 John. Go ahead, Morgan.

25

26 **DR. KILGOUR:** I am going to give the quick-and-dirty of what
27 we've done so far on this current three-year grant. As John
28 said, and Carrie, we've just hired Dr. Basher, and so we've
29 thrown him into this, and he has risen to the occasion, but we
30 have several -- We have divided the grant into three different
31 tasks.

32

33 The first task will focus on the Endangered Species Act listed
34 species in the Gulf of Mexico, and we have a collaboration right
35 now with some colleagues at NOAA, and they have put together
36 this extensive database, but they don't have a way to publicly
37 serve it, and their funding has run out, and so we will be
38 serving that Endangered Species location database on the portal.
39 To what level of resolution is still to be determined, and we
40 have to talk to data providers, and that's one of the first
41 tasks that Dr. Basher is working on.

42

43 The next task will be to look at forecasting climate change
44 effects on habitat and distribution of corals, and the last task
45 is focusing on deep-sea corals and kind of highlighting what
46 specific deep-sea corals are in the Gulf of Mexico, management
47 efforts on those deep-sea corals, and one of the tasks, or one
48 of the key things, was to look at the effects of fishing, in

1 particular bottom anchoring, and so we're going to try and dig
2 through the literature to kind of answer this question.

3
4 A lot of times, I get questions on, well, what damage does an
5 anchor do to these coral reefs, and there was the intent to help
6 fund a study, but the timing just wasn't right for this
7 particular thing, and so now we're doing an extensive literature
8 review and seeing what we can get in the gray literature and
9 things like that to talk about effects of fishing on these coral
10 habitats.

11
12 One of the major things that we accomplished in the first six
13 months of this grant is we did a facelift for the portal, and so
14 Claire spent a lot of time making it better to look at, and so,
15 right now, we have the map, manage, and explore, and we also
16 hired Dr. Basher, and so those were two of the major things that
17 we have completed to date.

18
19 We have also developed those collaborations and conversations
20 with the NOAA for the ESA database, and it will be converted to
21 a web map with downloadable data, but, again, we have to get the
22 data providers to release that data to us, so that we can make
23 it publicly available, and so that's going to be quite a lot of
24 legwork, and I am glad to pass that off to Dr. Basher.

25
26 We have also conducted an extensive literature review on
27 threatened corals, and a life history and climate change
28 storyboard is underway, and it should be published well before
29 the September due date of the report.

30
31 We are starting on species profiles for deep-sea corals. We're
32 supposed to have four per year. *Lophelia pertusa*, one of the
33 major stony corals in the deep, is already to go and be
34 published on the portal, and one other related item that I am
35 kind of proud of is some collaborations with the Southeast
36 Fisheries Science Center to do these types of ecosystem
37 infographics for reef fish as the stock assessment is produced,
38 and so, right now, this has the life history of gray snapper,
39 some of the key ecosystem or abiotic factors that influence the
40 stock, current regulations, and just trends that are all on one
41 page, so that, when you have the stock assessment, you can also
42 look at this one little page, and it kind of distills it all
43 down on where are the landings, what influences the stock.

44
45 At the bottom-right-hand corner, there is kind of a graph
46 showing the differences in red snapper versus gray snapper
47 landings, and it seems to be inversely correlated, and so it's
48 just an interesting little infographic, and we've gotten a lot

1 of good feedback on this, and so we are hoping to partner with
2 the Southeast Fisheries Science Center again for the next reef
3 fish stock assessment that's coming down the pipe.

4
5 Upcoming projects are to complete the Endangered-Species-Act
6 related items, to begin the data crunching for that forecasting
7 of climate change and how it affects deep-sea corals, and to
8 provide information for coral management in the future and the
9 species-specific learning modules and brainstorming for projects
10 on fishing effects, and that is it. Again, if you want to
11 contact Dr. Basher with any questions, concerns, or comments,
12 you are welcome to do that, or you can contact me as well.

13
14 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Thanks for that update as well. Is there any
15 questions there? Kevin.

16
17 **MR. KEVIN ANSON:** Not a question specific to that, but I just
18 reviewed the coral portal, and I'm just wondering if, on the
19 banner, the thing that comes up, if you can maybe put an issue
20 up there about the coral bleaching that is currently going on in
21 the Keys and kind of highlight that. You have the link up in
22 the upper-right-hand corner to the NOAA network, and, when you
23 click on that, you can get to it kind of through that, but it
24 might be better just to have it up on the banner too, something
25 to guide them to another website. Thank you.

26
27 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Thanks, Kevin. I think that's a good idea,
28 and it's pretty timely, actually. Martha.

29
30 **MS. GUYAS:** My question was about the ESA-related items, and so
31 there's a lot of those that are really on the South Atlantic
32 side, and is this like a comprehensive database, or is it Gulf
33 focused?

34
35 **DR. KILGOUR:** The intent was to have it Gulf focused, but that
36 ESA database that NOAA has produced is actually throughout the
37 Caribbean, South Atlantic, and Gulf, and so it's not much more
38 work on our end to keep all of that information available, since
39 they're all linked, and it seemed appropriate to put all of that
40 on the portal.

41
42 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Ms. Bosarge.

43
44 **MS. BOSARGE:** Just one more idea, as far as moving forward and
45 what the priorities will be for using these grants, especially
46 if we pursue the next one, like you were talking about, but the
47 Florida Keys Sanctuary has an expansion process that has been
48 ongoing for quite some time, but I think it's starting to pick

1 up steam at some point here in the near future, and I know that
2 Morgan, and I want to give you a kudos.

3
4 For the Flower Gardens Sanctuary expansion, Morgan attended most
5 of those meetings via webinar, and those meetings were from 6:00
6 to 9:00 in the evening, and so these were after hours, and she
7 is logging in via webinar and trying to take notes, and she's
8 got two young kids, and so that's a struggle, and so thank you
9 for doing that.

10
11 Now, having said that, as we now have another dedicated coral
12 person onboard, maybe we can look at having him attend those
13 meetings via webinar and make sure that the Gulf Council's voice
14 is being heard and bring back to us what they are really looking
15 at and what their proposed plans are, because that's been
16 something that has kind of been tough for us to get a grip on
17 with that particular expansion project.

18
19 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Morgan.

20
21 **DR. KILGOUR:** As a follow-up to that, the Florida Keys National
22 Marine Sanctuary has a new superintendent, and she actually came
23 to the Gulf Council office with some of her staff, including
24 Beth Devaney, who has been in contact with me throughout this
25 expansion process, and I think we're going to see a lot more
26 transparency than maybe you were anticipating. They seem to
27 really want to come and kind of mimic what G.P. has done and
28 provide the council with information and updates, and so we've
29 got our finger on that pulse, and we've established those
30 relationships, to make sure that the council is informed, moving
31 forward.

32
33 **CHAIRMAN FRAZER:** Just to follow-up, one of the things that I
34 learned, obviously, in Amendment 9 is that participation is
35 pretty important and engaging all the stakeholders, and so
36 that's a good comment, for sure, but, before we move on to Other
37 Business, one of the things I wanted to make sure is do you have
38 enough information for us to move forward before the next
39 meeting? All right. Perfect. Is there any other business?
40 Okay. Seeing none, I guess this concludes the Coral Committee
41 meeting, early.

42
43 (Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on August 20, 2018.)

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