

The Gulf of Mexico Marine Protected Area Network

Kick-Off Planning Meeting Summary

A meeting was held in April 2011 at the Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve in Naples, Florida with the goal of developing a draft framework for a Gulf of Mexico regional Marine Protected Areas (MPA) implementation plan. MPA managers from around the region met to discuss strategies for Gulf MPAs to increase communication, coordination and collaboration to maximize efficiency and effectiveness of addressing targeted issues of mutual concern to the community and the Nation. The draft implementation plan will serve as a catalyst for achieving a new level of regional ocean and coastal resource management.

The Gulf of Mexico Regional MPA Network Planning Meeting

Dates: April 18-19, 2011

Location: Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, Naples, Florida, U.S.A.

Funding: The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, National Marine Protected Area Center and Friends of Rookery Bay

Project

Coordinator: Ryan Young, Marine Protected Areas Specialist, Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve

Advisory

Committee: Billy Causey, Regional Director, Southeast, Caribbean, and Gulf of Mexico, National Marine Sanctuaries

Gary Lytton, Director, Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve

Bill Kiene, Associate Science Coordinator, Southeast, Caribbean, and Gulf of Mexico, National Marine Sanctuaries

Cliff McCreedy, Marine Resource Management Specialist, National Park Service

Tabitha Stadler, Coastal Training Coordinator, Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve

Lauren Wenzel, Acting Director, National Marine Protected Area Center

Bret Wolfe, Marine and Coastal Resources Specialist, US Fish and Wildlife Service, National Wildlife Refuge System

Meeting Attendees:

A total of 22 managers from MPA sites around the Gulf Coast attended the meeting representing various agencies including US Fish and Wildlife Service (USF&W), the National Parks Service (NPS), the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (NMS), the National Estuarine Research Reserve System (NERR), the National Marine Protected Areas Center, and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. Coming from Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Florida, Washington D.C., and South Carolina, these select senior staff members came together to discuss the formation of a Gulf Coast Network of Marine Protected Areas.

Name	Agency	Region
Cliff McCreedy	NPS	D.C.
Carol Clark	NPS	LA
Dusty Pate	NPS	LA
Jim Lindsay	NPS	TX
Anna Toline	NPS	SE Region
Bill Perry	NPS	FL
Billy Causey	NMS	FL
Mary Tagliareni	NMS	FL
Bill Kiene	NMS	TX
G.P. Schmahl	NMS	TX
Paul Tritaik	NWR	FL
Jennifer Sanchez	NWR	TX
Pon Dixon	NWR	LA

Name	Agency	Region
Kevin Godsea	NWR	FL
Joyce Palmer	NWR	FL
Debbie DeVore	USF&W	FL
Jayson Horadam	FL FWC	FL
Lauren Wenzel	MPA Center	D.C.
James Byrne	TNC	FL
David Ruple	NERR	MS
Gary Lytton	NERR	FL
Tabitha Stadler	NERR	FL
Jeff Carter	NERR	FL
Bridget Washburn	NERR	FL
Sarah Falkowski	NERR	FL
Ryan Young	NERR	FL

Draft Implementation Plan:

Vision

Develop a site-based network of coastal and marine protected areas using the ‘power of place’ to cooperatively conserve and restore a shared ecoregion, and to raise awareness of the value and importance of these areas to our quality of life, environment and economic vitality.

Mission

To improve coordination, cooperation, communication, and collaboration among Gulf coastal and marine protected areas by creating opportunities for collective environmental planning and response; information sharing; leveraging resources; and conveying a common message.

Goals and Objectives

I. Communication

a. Goals

- i. Use existing resources to create an efficient and cost effective communications strategy
- ii. Ignore geographic and institutional borders and focus on Gulf-wide issues
- iii. Educate managers about other network sites and the Gulf of Mexico as a whole

b. Objectives

- i. Develop working groups and/or steering committees for various issues being addressed by the Network
- ii. Create an accessible vessel for Network communication and information sharing (e.g. web site, webinars, conference calls)
- iii. Use the Gulf MPA Network to communicate with other organizations and networks

II. Disaster Response

a. Goals

- i. Identify the kinds of data needed for damage assessments and protocols for collecting them
- ii. Convey the value of MPAs to response agencies, county leaders, and new agency leads
- iii. Involve MPAs in planning discussions for pre and post disaster response protocols and increase communication with the restoration task force
- iv. Increase MPA knowledge of incident command structure and act liaison with NRDA and incident command
- v. Develop MPA contingency response plans

b. Objectives

- i. Gather and develop maps of Gulf Coast MPAs that highlight sensitive resource areas, prioritizes them, and includes an economic valuation
- ii. Develop a database including contact information, skill sets, and chain of command including a lead contact from each Gulf agency
- iii. Increase communication with the Coast Guard, NRDA, and incident command and work to incorporate MPAs into area contingency plans

III. Climate Change

a. Goals

- i. Address climate change as a network by identifying decision support tools and working together to look at the broader impacts of Sea-Level-Rise to make management decisions and policy recommendations
- ii. Characterize climate change impacts on Gulf habitats and keep sites and site users informed and ready for these impacts
- iii. Develop a shared message on climate change and coordinate the communication of this message to MPA managers, the public, and decision makers to ensure belief in and knowledge of climate change

- iv. Identify research that is needed, develop coordinated research initiatives, and communicate science to management, the public, and decision makers.
- b. Objectives
 - i. Create climate change visualization tools by identifying gaps, pooling data, and creating a web based resource to relay information (e.g. sea-level-rise, temperature change, storm activity, species shifts, coral reef changes) to the public in order to show the big picture for near and offshore climate change impacts to the Network.
 - ii. Create a database of climate change efforts and science around the Gulf including expertise and contact information posted in a central web based location and inform academia of the best available science.
 - iii. Create contingency plans/climate adaptation plans for listed species and critical habitats by looking at existing contingency and using the USFWS model
 - iv. Increase communication and coordination with local and regional partners such as SeaGrant
 - v. Get climate change adaptation and communication training for educators

IV. **Education and Outreach**

- a. Goals
 - i. Educate coastal managers, the general public, and civic leaders in the Gulf region about what MPAs are, what they do, and why they are valuable, etc.
 - ii. Define the economic valuation and the aesthetic/cultural valuation of Gulf MPAs for the understanding of the general public and decision makers
 - iii. Connect and develop relationships with grassroots organizations locally (NGOs) and educate NGOs on the importance of MPAs
 - iv. Share resources and develop a shared message on climate change among Gulf MPAs
- b. Objectives
 - i. Identify the audience and perform a KAP Study (Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices)
 - ii. Identify benefits and values (economics, etc.) of MPAs and what lives there by creating and sharing site-specific economic study reports
 - iii. Educate politicians about MPAs and plan site visits hosted by the network in order to bolster appreciation and understanding of the value of MPAs.
 - iv. Establish Gulf MPA sub-regions defined by resources
 - v. Educate the general public on the extremes of climate change and connect them to the change rather than the cause of that change
 - vi. Convey MPA benefits through social media and create and share stories of economic indicators in a central repository
 - vii. Educate ourselves and management by giving input on each other's management plans

Next Steps

Additional funding has been awarded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to implement the key elements of the newly created Gulf of Mexico Regional MPA Plan focusing on managing climate change, catastrophic event response, and outreach/training about the value of MPAs. The continued funding of the Project Coordinator will allow for the development of a regional framework and coordination mechanisms to better respond to catastrophic events, collaboration on a regional stewardship strategy to support science and training related to climate change, and the creation of training and awareness programs targeting protected area managers and stakeholders within Gulf Coast to increase the understanding of MPAs and encourage participation in the National System. The next steps identified in the meeting included emphasis on the creation of a communications strategy for Gulf MPA's. This strategy will allow for the sharing of information, expertise, and opportunities between MPAs of various agencies, and strengthen access to information and buy-in among MPA staff, partners and stakeholders. Identifying functional structure for the network is also a priority. Working groups will be created for each focus area and they will begin to develop sustainable work plans with the intention of creating a lasting framework.

Acknowledgements

This meeting would not have been possible without generous funding from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the Friends of Rookery Bay for managing the funds and supporting the Coordinators position. Constant support and guidance was provided by Rookery Bay staff Gary Lytton and Tabitha Stadler, who designed the facilitated sessions for the meeting. Thank you also to Sarah Falkowski, Bridget Washburn and Tabitha Stadler for facilitating the breakout sessions and especially to Jessica Lukacs who organized much of the logistics. A final special thanks for the support, enthusiasm, guidance, and expertise of the Gulf of Mexico MPA Network Advisory Committee, and all of the participants in the Gulf of Mexico MPA Network Planning Meeting who are helping to make this dream a reality.