

Meeting Briefing Packet Addendum

Habitat Conservation Subcommittee

Assessing the Impacts of Human Activities to the Marine Habitats of the Gulf of Maine: A Research Project of the Gulf of Maine Council on the Marine Environment

Justification: Currently there is a great deal of public discussion and research regarding the health of marine habitats in the Gulf of Maine and the impact of human activities on those habitats. As the GOM Council proceeds in its work to promote marine habitat conservation and protection it is essential for it to have a baseline understanding of what activities actually threaten marine habitats, the impacts of those activities on marine habitats, and the state of the science in understanding these impacts. In addition, in order to promote effective marine habitat management, it is necessary to understand the current suite of legislative and regulatory tools for marine habitat management and their varying effectiveness. This information would contribute greatly towards The Councils work as well as marine habitat conservation activities throughout the region.

The proposed project is responsive to the Marine Protected Area Executive Order, Section 4, A (4) (5) (6) and (8), which highlights the need for identification and “assessment of threats and gaps in the levels of protection...” This information will also help address concerns expressed at the NOAA funded MPA Workshop in Portland Maine in 2001, where many participants expressed the concern that Marine Protected Areas were a solution in search of a problem. In other words, some stakeholders were not convinced that there is a problem with marine habitat that warrants marine protected area designations. The final report from this project will provide a solid foundation for understanding the impacts that humans are having on marine habitats in this region. With this knowledge, managers from across the region can advance appropriate management measures including, perhaps, marine protected areas.

Timeframe: Three year project culminating in GOM Council Marine Habitat Conservation Strategy to present findings and make recommendations regarding science, policy and management approaches.
Project Start: Fall 2003

Phase 1: (estimated budget - \$65,000/timeline: Fall 2003 – Fall 2004)

- Identify primary impact to marine habitat health (for example dredging, fishing, laying of pipelines and cables, dock building, aquaculture sand and gravel mining, etc.) (Gulf of Maine Marine Habitat Conservation Subcommittee)
- Coordinate the development of a national methodology for project.
- Conduct literature search on the science and management of these threats. Produce annotated bibliography for each of the identified threats.
- Prepare preliminary report.
- Develop Peer Review Team

Phase 2: (estimated budget - \$65,000/timeline: Fall 2004 – Fall 2005)

- Present preliminary results for discussion at the GOMC Summit (October 2004)
- Synthesize information on science and management in a series of white papers on each impact
- Identify regulatory tools, management approaches and monitoring tools to manage and protect habitat from impacts
- Undertake gap analysis for research, data, technology and management tools
- Quantify impacts – how widespread are impacts occurring in the region
- Complete report

Phase 3: (estimated budget - \$100,000/timeline: Fall 2005 – Fall 2006)

- Hold conference to present report and develop strategies regarding legal and regulatory mechanisms to enhance state, provincial and federal habitat protection efforts.
- Incorporate strategies into report and have report peer reviewed.
- Develop implementation teams to move recommendations forward.

Habitat Conservation Subcommittee Workplan

1. Issue: approve new Habitat Conservation Subcommittee Terms of Reference, Guiding Principles, and definitions.

Key Message: The Habitat Conservation Sub-Committee will focus on activities that assist in maintaining the integrity of coastal zone ecosystems from the landward extent of coastal watersheds to the furthest marine boundaries of the Gulf of Maine. These activities will include developing information and tools to assist managers, the public, and the scientific community in maintaining these ecosystems. It will also involve creating partnerships to encourage conservation of the coastal zone. Subcommittee guiding principles include a focus on: 1) ecologically sustainable development; 2) use of science for decision making; 3) regional, ecosystem-based planning and management; 4) public information and participation; and 5) technology innovation.

Background: formation of this new subcommittee involves discussion and approval of these planning documents. The first subcommittee conference call reviewed and approved the Terms of Reference.

Recommendation: approve Habitat Conservation Subcommittee planning documents.

2. Issue: inventory marine conservation tools to build an information clearinghouse for a GOM habitat conservation website.

Key Message: the inventory will focus on projects and organizations that have an active or long-term commitment to habitat conservation in the Gulf. This project is an information gathering exercise to help the subcommittee determine who is doing what in the GOM and to identify gaps related to habitat conservation. Ultimately, the web product will be a useful information clearinghouse for the public to learn about ongoing activities in the GOM.

Background: This project was begun by the Habitat Conservation Task Force and is being carried out by the new Subcommittee. The Conservation Law Foundation is committing time/resources of an intern to work with subcommittee co-chairs and Peter Taylor to compile short summaries/links needed for the website.

Discussion/Questions:

- Should the inventory focus only on defined products and “tools” (i.e., maps, research results, innovative management strategies, etc) or also include a description of organizations and initiatives that might not have a useful “product” to identify?
- Should the subcommittee extend the inventory’s focus beyond GOM borders?
- Who do we see as the primary audience?
- What is a good format for gathering the information?

Recommendation: have the Habitat Conservation Subcommittee co-chairs work with the CLF intern and Peter Taylor to build a new component of the GOM website.

3. Issue: Assess the Impacts of Human Activities to Coastal and Marine Habitats in the Gulf of Maine.

Key Message: this project will compile new information and synthesize existing reports to evaluate human activities and their threats to the GOM (see attached scope for examples). This information will be presented for discussion at the Fall, 2004 Gulf of Maine Summit where needs, opportunities, challenges, and next steps will be discussed.

Background: a scope for this project has been submitted to the MPA Center, which has shown



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interest in providing funding. If MPA Center funding is secured in Fall, 2003, the goal is to have an intern/consultant compile new and existing information on priority habitat stressors. Draft white papers will be presented at the 2004 Summit for discussion. These papers will summarize: 1) how habitats are threatened, 2) related research, 3) management (including legal and regulatory authorities and tools), and 4) mitigation measures.

Discussion/Questions:

- Do people agree on the need for this study?
- What existing studies should be targeted? (i.e., GOM "stressors" conference, 1995)

Recommendation: approval of the project scope.