

**Monitor National Marine Sanctuary (MNMS)  
Sanctuary Advisory Council Meeting  
Hatteras, North Carolina  
May 19, 2009**

*In Attendance:* Dave Alberg (MNMS Sanctuary Superintendent), Scott Boyd (Citizen-At-Large), Tim Brown (USCG), Jim Bunch (Recreational Diving), Tom Culliton (Office of NMS), Dave Dodsworth (MNMS IT Specialist), Jeff Gray, (Sanctuary Superintendent Thunder Bay NMS), Ron Grayson (VA Dept. of Historic Resources), Terri Kirby-Hathaway (Education), Anna Holloway (The Mariners' Museum), Joe Hoyt (MNMS Maritime Archaeologist), Jeff Johnston (MNMS Historian), Jay Kavanagh (Recreational/Commercial Fishing), Susan Langley (Archaeological Research), Richard Lawrence (NC Dept of Cultural Resources), Robert Neyland (US Navy), Joe Schwarzer (Maritime Museum), Wayne Smith (Conservation), Doug Stover (Alternate-National Park Service), Jim Sullivan (Office of NMS), Paul Ticco (Office of NMS), Mark Wilde-Ramsing (NC Dept of Cultural Resources), Shannon Ricles (Council Coordinator), and Ole Varmer (Office of NMS).

*Public Guests in Attendance:* Larry Murphy, Susan West, Don Ford, Alex Varouxis, Pat Murphy, Joe Poe, Amy Pieno, Aida Wilson, J. T. Barker, D. Farrow, Jr., Rich Hunting, Steve Wilson, Larry Cox, Scott Powell, Aaron Harmon, Jack Painter, John Pieno, Doug Jackson, Jason Carley, and Jim Harris.

*Absent:* Mitch Bowman (Heritage Tourism), David Conlin (National Park Service), Dave Krop (Alternate-The Mariners' Museum), and Joanna Wilson (Alternate-NC Dept of Cultural Resources).

**Table of Contents**

<b>Welcome.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>MNMS Superintendent's Report.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Resource Assessment Update .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Case Study: Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary (TBNMS).....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Public Comment Period.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Management Plan Review Update.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Seat Reports.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>National Council Coordinators' Meeting Update.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Election of New Officer/New Seat.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Swearing In of New Council Members.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Review of Working Groups and Committees.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Other Business.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Meeting Adjournment.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Appendix I (Letter from Alpena Mayor).....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Appendix II (Letter read during public comment period).....</b>	<b>12</b>

## Welcome

Joe Schwarzer, *Monitor* National Marine Sanctuary (MNMS) Advisory Council Chair, called the meeting to order. After Mr. Schwarzer's welcoming remarks, roll was called.

## **Monitor NMS Superintendent's Report**

Mr. Alberg, *Monitor* NMS Superintendent, provided an update to the council on a variety of topics, summarized below:

- Explanation of the role that the sanctuary advisory council (SAC) plays in advising the superintendent.
- Overview of the history of the SAC and explanation of each seat represented on the SAC
- Introductions of each council member.
- Budget: FY09 budget just being finalized due to the change in administrations. FY2010 presidential markups are currently \$47,378 million for program. Within the MNMS budget, \$250,000 will go to the Graveyard of the Atlantic Museum (GAM) for development of museum exhibits. \$190,000 had been requested for GAM for FY10. Goal is to get the exhibit design completed and to begin to market the facility.
- Maritime Heritage Program (MHP): MHP held its annual conference in Alpena, Michigan. Proposal was made to NOAA leadership to seek designation in 2012 as a national "Maritime Heritage Year" to celebrate maritime heritage on a larger scale. There is support in Congress for the designation.
- ONMS Accomplishment Report and *Sanctuary Watch* featured the 2008 Battle of the Atlantic Expedition with the German U-boats.
- Conservation: Anna Holloway said that there is 210 tons of *Monitor* in conservation. The conservation team is working inside the turret to create molds of the unique features. The tank will be drained on Mondays and refilled on Fridays throughout July. Condenser is in the beginning stages of removal of concretion. In late July several organics will be completed. Every March they plan on rolling out new items for display. Dave Alberg also explained that several items will be coming to the Graveyard of the Atlantic Museum for display.
- Capitol Hill Ocean Week: Spent week on the Hill talking about program and conservation efforts. Also discussed reestablishing a MNMS presence in the Outer Banks of North Carolina. Several organizations are interested in assisting in the process, and it is hopeful that the sanctuary will have offices in the local area within a few years.
- Management Plan Review: Conducted five scoping meetings in North Carolina and Virginia from December 1-6, 2008. Scoping comments are online for viewing. There was much discussion on the establishment of an advisory council working group for expansion. The *Monitor* Advisory Council voted in 2008 to establish a working group to address questions and concerns about possible expansion, but to date that group has not conducted any work or met formally as a group. There were many blogs and comments made about its formation with many drawing unfounded conclusions. The sanctuary does not have any formal position on expansion at this time. Any expansion discussions would include a public process to gather comments and listen to the concerns of our stakeholders and constituents before forming a final position.

- Battle of the Atlantic 2009: The British Embassy requested that we survey and document the HMT *Bedfordshire* this summer. We will do a site assessment, site plan, and condition report. There may be remains exposed on the surface and this documentation will help the British government decide what to do with them.

### **Resource Assessment (RA) Update:**

Joe Hoyt explained that he has been working with Bruce Terrell with the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries to build a database to better determine what cultural resources are off the coasts of North Carolina and Virginia. He explained how the database is being built, and he also demonstrated some of the features of Google Earth with the database entries. Dave said that the database can be used to help tell the maritime story, and this would be a great opportunity to work with the dive community to document unknown wreck sites. Joe continued to explain that this database is a living document and can be updated and changed easily and quickly. It can also be used as an animated exhibit.

### **Case Study: Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary (TBNMS)**

Jeff Gray, Superintendent TBNMS, gave an overview of the TBNMS.

- Only freshwater sanctuary with a collection of shipwrecks. Great Lakes are very large with their own ecosystem and water highways.
- In 1825, there was an explosion of growth for 150 years. Shipping was critical, as our nation was being built, but storms and ice were responsible for the demise of so many ships. Thunder Bay is the convergence point with reefs, island, and weather converging to create very bad circumstances for ships. There are over 200 shipwrecks that are very well preserved by the cold fresh water.
- The focus of studying the wrecks was really to study the story of the people and the communities. There was a desire to preserve these stories for future generations. It is often difficult to balance the preservation of these fragile sites, while continuing to provide access to divers.
- In 1981, state set aside a small area of the bay for protection; and in 1988, NOAA started considering designation of the area as a sanctuary. There were many concerns expressed by the local community and much discussion was held. In 2000, the area was finally designated, but there continued to be a lot of controversy.
- In contrast, by 2007, boundary expansion was the number one request and was supported by the entire community and full Advisory Council. With unemployment high, the sanctuary has worked with the state to reclaim the waterfront, which provided jobs and funds to the community. The idea of resource protection through access was overwhelmingly accepted by all.
- TBNMS council's Chair is a dive charter owner and the fishing seat is the Vice-Chair, and they have testified to Congress on the importance of resource protection (see Appendix I). There was a buoy system installed on many of the wreck sites. TBNMS worked with the tourism office to promote sanctuary. They also worked with the Coast Guard and the local hospital to bring in a barometric chamber, which has had many added community benefits.
- Divers have been critical to helping with enforcement and protection of the sites. Every incident has been reported by divers.

- Research within the sanctuary has consisted of historical research, documentation of known sites, and life science research. TBNMS is constantly looking for new historical wreck sites, and they map the bay floor in the process. New sites, when found, boost the tourism for the area by bringing in divers from around the world. It also attracts researchers and the media. When studying the known sites, researchers use side scan sonar, which is also useful to the fishermen.
- Education and Outreach has been critical to the site. School groups participate in sailing and water activities. Internet and distance learning is used, and they have even broadcasted from underwater. The visitor center has between 60,000-100,000 visitors per year. The building is also a community building for community functions. It is environmentally friendly.
- TBNMS is working to help market the region for sustainable economic development and to rebrand the area. They are working with every branch of the government. A commercial was developed to advertise Alpena—*Pure Michigan*. Hockey Team is named the “Thunder Bay Wrecks,” and the kids travel to games and take the sanctuary brochures.
- Questions and Answers:
  - How can people see shipwrecks from the shore? Lake level dropped and some are now above the surface.
  - Is accessed restricted? No, there are panels in the visitor center that tell visitors where to go and what they will see. We are also working on getting a glass bottom boat for visitors who don’t dive. There are no sites that are off limits to divers.
  - What happens when you (NOAA) find a new site? Once the site has been properly documented, its coordinates are released to the public.
  - Can they dive any site without a buoy? Yes, the Sanctuary Program puts Buoys out on many of the wrecks and divers are required to use the anchor buoys, if there is an anchor buoy available. If there is not, they are still allowed to dive the wrecks as long as they can anchor in a manner that does not cause damage to the wreck. No site is restricted.
  - Do you need a permit to dive on the sites? No, there are no permits at all. It is truly open access.
  - Is fishing allowed? Yes.
  - If there is no immediate change, then why does NOAA want to expand the sanctuary? In the case of TBNMS, it was not NOAA, but rather the community, through the TBNMS Advisory Council, that wanted to expand the Sanctuary (See Appendix I). Dave Alberg explained that NOAA believes that some of the resources, beyond just the MNMS boundaries are of national historical significance and would be considered for protection. NOAA does not want to close access, but rather open it up, but under protection, so that artifacts are not taken. It would also allow MNMS to work with the dive shops and to put buoys on the popular sites. The *Monitor* is different because it is a national treasure, but even now we are at a junction where we are even looking at whether or not access permits used in the past are still necessary at the *Monitor*. The expansion working group will provide guidance to the full advisory council. *Monitor* is still a very valuable site with more than 80% of the ship intact and it remains a gravesite.

- What about the human remains of the two sailors that were found in the turret? Dave explained that they were treated exactly the same as any other service member. The US Navy recovered the remains of their sailors and handled the remains just as they would for any other unidentified sailor. DNA was collected and processed. Robert Neyland verified the standard Navy process.
- Discussion also pursued ties in the community for any future NOAA presence. Dave explained that \$1.7 - \$2 million have come to the Graveyard of the Atlantic Museum in the past. That a new data buoy was installed at the request of the fishermen and divers.
- Discussion was continued on fishing regulations within the MNMS boundaries and a comment was made that the inability to troll the area costs fishermen thousands of dollars.
- Comment was made that this process seems like Déjà Vu with the National Park Service and access to the beaches.

**Public Commenting Period:**

- Comment: Battle of the Atlantic project is predominantly displayed and that raised a red flag with some.
- Comment: Channel 13 news piece called divers looters. Why not charter boat instead of buying boat?
- Comment: “People out here have been burned by the National Park Service with restricted access. So even though you are trying to do good, how can you assure everyone and make them believe you?”
- Comment: “How did Thunder Bay assure the other 70% that the Sanctuary was going to be a good thing for the community?”
- Comment: There is a big difference between support and acceptance.
- Comment: Council you are charged with a great responsibility. Then go see these shipwrecks yourself. If you can’t dive, at least look at them.
- Comment: Johnny Pieno was lead on preserving the U-701.
- Question: If you shut down access, will you protect bottom fishing?
- Comment: Wrecks are falling to pieces, so not sure why you want to protect them.
- Question: When will you answer the questions asked at the scoping meetings? Dave Alberg said that they will be addressed in the draft management plan, which should be completed by late next year as a draft.
- Comment: You should be protecting the shipwrecks on the continental shelf that were sunk by the U-boats.
- Question: Will beaches be restricted in use? Dave Alberg, we don’t have any jurisdiction over the beaches.
- Comment: You have made your mind up, so isn’t this pointless?
- Comment: This should be more publicized [SAC /Sanctuary matters]. Please make sure the public knows. Maybe comment on the blogs. Make sure meetings are held in Kitty Hawk, Ocracoke, and Hatteras.
- Question: Has an economic impact statement been done? Dave Alberg explained that it has not been done. A DEIS will be done if expansion is pursued.

- Comment: I'm not seeing the environmental and economic benefit, but could see a huge benefit to artificial reefs. Dave Alberg explained that the sanctuary is supporting the artificial reef effort in NC and has sponsored Discovery Dive Shop's efforts.
- Question: Have you met with the Governor? Dave Alberg explained that he has met with the Secretary of Cultural Resources and gave her the history and a basic outline of the management plan review process. He also addressed the concerns held by many, and he asked her office to participate in the working group.
- Comment: There are many divers who are already working to protect the shipwrecks.
- Comment: Letter from Ms. Renate Eichinger read during public comment period. (see Appendix II)

### **Management Plan Review Update**

Paul Ticco, Office of National Marine Sanctuaries, explained that management plan review (MPR) is normally about a two to three year process. He gave an overview of the process and said that we estimate that in July 2011 we will have a management plan. He further explained that the working groups will engage all constituents and work with academic partners, federal and state agencies, local governments, NC Secretary of Cultural Resources, and Congress. The working groups will make their recommendations, and then the site writes the plan, but with input from all groups and the public. The draft plan will go through review at headquarters, and it will go through the public scoping process. Shannon Ricles and Dave Alberg are the leads on the MPR, but each staff member will head a working group. All comments will be addressed, just maybe not individually, but collectively.

### **Seat Reports**

**Citizen-At-Large**—Scott Boyd explained that the citizen-at-large seat is very broad in scope. He makes numerous presentations on the Battle of Hampton Roads and always mentions the MNMS, as well as giving the link to the data buoy. He also makes sure to print any MNMS news in the Civil War News. Scott also explained that he speaks to various public groups to explain NMS program. He is always surprised by how many people don't know about the sanctuary system. He wants to pursue more public awareness through video and/or television.

**Education**—Terri Kirby-Hathaway explained that she works with classroom teachers and informal educators to bring information about the sanctuary program and our ocean to students. Terri also explained that she writes a newsletter, *The Scotch Bonnet*, three times a year. In the newsletter, Terri says that she tries to include the MNMS as often as possible. The newsletter will go to an online version only next fall. She is also a member of the Coastal Environmental Educators Network (CEEN), an Outer Banks group, where she brings the sanctuary message when appropriate. Terri also said that she hands out the data buoy cards for teachers to use for real-time data with their students. She works with the NC Aquarium for outreach and again, always includes the *Monitor*. Terri explained that teachers want curriculum and that she wants to work with the MNMS on writing grants to support curriculum development and writing.

### **National Council Coordinators' Meeting Update**

Shannon Ricles gave an overview of the National Council Coordinators' meeting held in Alpena, Michigan. She told how each of the sanctuary sites sends their council Chair and coordinator to the meeting once a year. The purpose of the annual meeting is to give Chairs and coordinators time to come together, so as to better understand the diversity among the sites and to foster communication among councils. During this year's meeting, climate change and ocean acidification were high on the agenda. Monterey Bay NMS council has conducted research on the effects of ocean acidification on marine life and sent a resolution to Dan Basta on the importance of further study of ocean acidification. Dan Basta challenged each sanctuary to take the issue of ocean acidification back to their councils to pass similar resolutions.

### **Election of New Officer/New Seat**

Shannon Ricles explained that the NC Maritime Museum Seat term expired in August 2008. The seat was re-advertised in the Federal Register and through a press release to the local media outlets. The application deadline is May 29, but no applications have been received thus far. Joe Schwarzer indicated that he was willing to continue in the seat. Dave Alberg stated that Joe needed to send a letter indicating that he wanted to remain in the seat to serve another term. Shannon also introduced LCDR Timothy Brown, who represents the US Coast Guard in the new Coast Guard seat. Finally, discussion was held on the possibility of adding other seats to the council in the future. Suggested seats to be added were a higher education seat and an additional fishing seat.

### **Swearing In of New Council Members**

Dave Alberg gave the oath of office to Jay Kavanagh (Recreational/Commercial Fishing), Ron Grayson (VA Dept. of Historic Resources), and LCDR Timothy Brown (US Coast Guard).

### **Review of Working Groups and Committees**

Dave Alberg explained the purpose of a working group and the necessity of their creation to aid in the management plan review process. He suggested the following working groups be formed for MPR: expansion, education and outreach, human remains, future archeology and excavation, permitting/access/enforcement, monitoring/research (to include biological resources), and facilities. Joe Schwarzer made a motion to form the working groups, Susan Langley seconded the motion and all council members concurred. Members volunteered for the working groups as follows:

- Education and Outreach: Scott Boyd, Terri Kirby-Hathaway, Anna Holloway, and Doug Stover
- Archaeology: Scott Boyd, Ron Grayson, Anna Holloway, Susan Langley, Richard Lawrence, Joe Schwarzer, and Mark Wilde-Ramsing
- Human Remains: Scott Boyd, Ron Grayson, Anna Holloway, Robert Neyland, and Wayne Smith
- Permitting/Access/Enforcement: Tim Brown, Jim Bunch, Jay Kavanagh, Larry Murphy, and Jeff Gray
- Monitor/Research: Richard Lawrence, Larry Murphy, Robert Neyland, and Wayne Smith

- Facilities: Joe Schwarzer and Doug Stover
- Expansion: Jim Bunch, Jay Kavanagh, Susan Langley, Richard Lawrence, Larry Murphy, and Joe Schwarzer.

Each working group was encouraged to add additional members on their working groups who could provide expertise and input. Dave Alberg suggested that there be a liaison between the council and the current conservation working group that was formed through The Mariners' Museum. Richard Lawrence made a motion for Wayne Smith to act as the liaison, Ron Grayson seconded it, and all were in favor.

Jim Bunch also commented that he wanted to establish a measurable growth of divers coming to the Outer Banks to dive. He said that in 2008 there were about 8,000 new divers in the state of North Carolina. And according to PADI, since 1980, 80,000 people have been certified in North Carolina. Jim also said that he is the middle man and wants to be the communicator between the divers and NOAA. He has contacted major operators throughout the state and has listened to their concerns, and he wants to begin thinking about how to reach divers in New Jersey.

#### **Other Business**

- Jay Kavanagh thanked the MNMS for the new buoy.
- Dave Alberg asked to table the decision on the next SAC meeting, which is due to occur possibly in July.

#### **Adjourn**

Terri Kirby-Hathaway motioned to adjourn the meeting. Susan Langley seconded it.

## APPENDIX I

STATEMENT OF  
CAROL SHAFTO, MAYOR  
CITY OF ALPENA, MICHIGAN

before the

COMMITTEE OF NATURAL RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
FISHERIES, WILDLIFE AND OCEANS

UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
OVERSIGHT HEARING ON THE NATIONAL MARINE  
SANCTUARIES ACT

June 18, 2008

Good afternoon, Madam Chair and members of the Committee. My name is Carol Shafto. I am the Mayor of Alpena and I have been a Sanctuary Advisory Council member for twelve years, nine of those serving as the Council Chair. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this oversight hearing on the reauthorization of the National Marine Sanctuaries Act.

You perhaps know of the importance of national marine sanctuaries to the nation. I am here today to share their significant positive impact on local communities. Alpena, a very rural area 100 miles from the nearest freeway, is today a different place, a better place, since NOAA designated the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary eight years ago. NOAA's mission is to protect a nationally significant collection of shipwrecks, superbly preserved in the cold fresh water of Lake Huron. In so doing NOAA has also helped protect our local heritage, our tourism, our economy. The sanctuary has brought enhanced recreational opportunities, educational initiatives, research capabilities and economic development to us and all of northeast Michigan.

Today, the City of Alpena is in a trusted partnership with NOAA. It didn't start off that way when NOAA first proposed a sanctuary more than a decade ago and "Say No to NOAA" buttons were proudly worn around town. We innately distrust hierarchy and the federal government is as far away as you can get in the continuum that has Alpena at one end and Washington, DC at the other. I don't intend to dwell on the past, but you need to know where we started to truly understand how far we have come in embracing the National Marine Sanctuary Program. What began as distrust and fear – of the unknown and change - has turned into the question, "Where would we be today without the sanctuary?" It is truly difficult to imagine Alpena not being part of a system that protects some of the most spectacular resources in the country. From fishermen to the Chamber of Commerce, everyday citizens of Alpena have been integrally involved in the designation, growth and development of the sanctuary, every step of the way. We went through a process that established the trust that now runs deep. Federal staff are now our neighbors. They volunteer

at our local functions, send their children to our schools, attend our churches. At all levels, NOAA is integrated into the fabric of local life.

National marine sanctuaries have positive economic impacts on communities. This past weekend, the Thunder Bay sanctuary held the grand opening of the new exhibits in NOAA's Great Lakes Maritime Heritage Center which opened in 2005. The significance of this event goes beyond the opening of a visitors' center. Just three months after the Thunder Bay sanctuary was designated, the Fletcher Paper Mill closed after 100 years of operation. Jobs were lost and hopes were dashed. Now that piece of property holds a different hope for Alpena. The sanctuary is the anchor of a major adaptive reuse development that attracts tens of thousands of visitors as well as bringing relatively invisible underwater heritage to the awareness of the local people. The redevelopment of this old paper mill complex has begun a shift from an industrial community, reliant on our deep-water port and the industry that surrounds it, to a more stable diversified economy bringing a sense of optimism for the future. Alpena, not on the way to anywhere, is now a national treasure – a true maritime heritage destination. By putting us on the national map, NOAA has helped us look at ourselves with brighter eyes.

Local sanctuary advisory councils are an integral part of every national marine sanctuary. It is easy for agencies to give lip service to these types of councils – and they rarely have much influence. From the beginning, the Thunder Bay Sanctuary Advisory Council's recommendations were taken seriously by NOAA. As chair of the Council, I've had the opportunity to attend national meetings of the Council chairs from every sanctuary around the nation. From this experience, it is clear to me that across the board, sanctuary advisory councils are making a difference. This doesn't happen without a commitment from the federal agency. Time after time, NOAA has demonstrated that it understands how important it is to have local stakeholders as partners. NOAA implements system-wide policy and core mission values while incorporating local autonomy, community character and pride.

Thunder Bay Advisory Council recently recommended that NOAA expand the boundaries from 448 square miles to 3,662 square miles. Endorsement for such a boundary expansion would have been inconceivable even five years ago. Today there is broad support for this expansion from all of the local units of government in the affected region. Why expand? We know that ships do not sink along artificially drawn political boundaries. We want to redraw the dotted lines on the map to protect deep, intact shipwrecks that are some of the best preserved in the Great Lakes. And why now? Because we have integrated the mission of management and protection as our own. Here, and wherever sensitive national treasures are at risk. Senator Carl Levin recently introduced a bill in the Senate for Thunder Bay expansion and Representative Bart Stupak has now done the same in the House. Without a doubt, the support of the Advisory Council has opened this door of possibility.

In my capacity as the Sanctuary Advisory Council chair, I have visited the Florida Keys, Grays Reef, Monterey Bay, and Channel Islands sanctuaries – all on our two great oceans. Thunder Bay is the only freshwater sanctuary. We sit on the shores of the sweetwater sea with a new appreciation and affinity for the oceans. We are connected in the mission of resource protection. We fight for the survival of things we have never seen, in places we will never visit. We are a part of a national system of something so much bigger than us – or of any single sanctuary. The physical setting may change and the specific issues different from site to site, but we are one system, working together, sharing a common responsibility for protecting nationally significant resources across the United States.

Eight years ago at the Thunder Bay designation ceremony three levels of government - federal, state and local came together in partnership. Representing local government I said, "For the people of Alpena, the waters of Lake Huron are more than a sanctuary. They are our home, our recreation, our livelihood, our quality of life. In entering into partnership with state and federal governments for the management of the shipwrecks in the bay, we shake hands with strangers who hold our future in their hands. We do this with welcome, with friendship, and with trust that you will continue to safeguard not only the shipwrecks but the well-being of those for whom Thunder Bay is a way of life." I am gratified to report to you today that this trust has been honored and our partnership is not only intact but strengthened for the future of Alpena and the National Marine Sanctuaries Program. I offer our unwavering endorsement of the reauthorization of the National Marine Sanctuaries Act. Thank you.

## APPENDIX II

Dear MNMS Advisory Council members,

May 18, 2009

Although we are not able to be there in person, please accept these words in lieu of our attendance. We, Atlantis Charters, speak not only for ourselves, but also for tens of hundreds of recreational divers who have dedicated countless hours to discovering, researching, and/or repeatedly visiting the shipwrecks off the coast of North Carolina.

Please be sure that this letter is read during the public comment period, and thank you for including the complete text in the official meeting minutes.

It is frustrating that:

1. MNMS meeting agendas are not posted on the website in advance of the meetings.
2. MNMS meeting minutes can take 10 weeks to post on the website.
3. NOAA/MNMS meetings are held on weekdays, often in remote locations. This leaves far too many interested parties unable to attend and be heard.
4. Comments from the public seem to be valid only when made at 'official' meetings.

For example:

- -At the October 22, 2008 'informational' meeting: many people voiced strong opposition to any imposition of the government into recreational diving activities. Where was that strong opposition documented?
- -Multiple direct individual comments (by phone) have been made supporting the status quo of NC diving. How have those comments been documented?
- -Individual divers and dive operators who visit the NC wrecks (and who stand to be most affected by the idea of sanctuary expansion) are not being represented adequately at official NOAA meetings. The average citizen: who will never dive these wrecks and will never be directly affected by government regulation of dive sites is being over-represented, while it appears that local and regional diver opinions are minimized.
- -NOAA evidenced a clear bias by releasing a series of press releases in 2008, which were unreasonably disparaging to the NC recreational diver. That method of influencing public opinion is neither impartial nor fair to all parties involved. Frankly, it reflects rather poorly on the tactics of a government entity. Even after repeated questions as to the intent or retraction of the published words, NOAA has yet to formally address their informal claim that their press releases were enhanced/alterd by the media.

**There are tens of hundreds of recreational divers who are against any change to government involvement in their diving activities off the coast of NC. Those people would like to know how their voices could be heard. They do not wish to discuss the actions, plans, or lack of plans for NOAA to expand the MNMS boundaries. They simply wish for the Monitor Sanctuary to remain as-is, and for their tax dollars be spent on matters of greater importance to the future of the United States.**

There is nothing about the activities of recreational divers off the NC coast that can't be improved by a simple grassroots effort of communication/education at the diver level.

Please let these comments (and any subsequent discussion) be made a permanent part of the official MNMS Advisory Council meeting minutes.

Thank you,  
Renate Eichinger, for Atlantis Charters, et al. (Morehead City, NC)