

Ocean SAMP Stakeholder Meeting #4 Notes, February 10, 2009 URI Coastal Institute, URI Bay Campus

Purpose of the Meeting:

- Present a preliminary analysis for the Ocean SAMP
- Provide clarification

Welcome and recap of the Ocean SAMP process – Ken Payne, URI

The facilitator reminded the group that the SAMP is primarily an ocean spatial planning tool, although the “elephant in the room,” the potential for windfarm proposals, must be acknowledged. Payne said that transparency and fairness are both critical elements of the stakeholder process, and that mutual respect and “constructive skepticism” are important for the process to work as efficiently and effectively as possible. He said that in terms of process, a SAMP science advisory panel to guide and review technical information was getting started, with URI’s Dr. Scott Nixon at its head, and that the stakeholder group would be apprised of the technical group’s work.

New Ocean SAMP Developments – Grover Fugate, CRMC

Fugate gave an update on how the federal government is working to come up with guidelines to permit offshore renewable energy projects in federal waters and that “the new (presidential) administration is going to be going hard on wind and will be working with MMS to get moving on this intensifying situation.”

Review of Ocean SAMP process – Jennifer McCann, URI

McCann gave a presentation on the comprehensive SAMP process, and how a SAMP by its very nature addresses comprehensive ecosystem issues with the recognition that people are a critical part of the plan. She said a SAMP makes use of the best available science and honors existing activities within the plan area. CRC and Sea Grant have been developing SAMPs for more than 30 years for coastal communities locally and around the globe, and all the plans have depended on a “fair and transparent process,” said McCann. She said that it is important for the SAMP process that everyone’s voices are heard, and that the SAMP team “wants to hear your thoughts and issues.”

To describe what the Ocean SAMP may be able to do, McCann pointed out all the different data layers that are being gathered and said the SAMP will “basically be a zoning map that can help CRMC and municipalities and individuals work together to determine how are we going to manage fisheries and fish habitat,” although it is true that there are “lots of unknowns right now.” The smart thing about a SAMP, she said is

that “it’s never done.” She described the Integrated Coastal Management Policy Cycle that CRC uses to develop coastal management plans for coastal communities, and that a critical part of the policy cycle is obtaining and reflecting on public input. “The SAMP is an opportunity to give the public a voice,” she said. “If we have an idea about what we want, CRMC can open up the SAMO document and say, no we don’t want this here, and this is why.”

McCann also reminded the group about the 2009 Rhode Island Natural History Conference on April 23 – “Rhode Island’s Off-Shore Marine Ecosystem and the Potential Impacts of alternative Energy Development – (which is being sponsored in part by the SAMP). She also introduced Dr. Nixon and asked the group about room preferences for future stakeholder meetings.

Questions and Answers

Q. How is data being collected, and how are more subjective kinds of data, including visual aesthetics information, being gathered and processed appropriately? Answer (McCann): Some topics are indeed more subjective than others, but even those topics, like the visual aesthetics and archeology (shipwrecks, for instance) include a research angle and information from studies.

Q. How is FERC involved in permitting the SAMP? Answer (Fugate): FERC largely does wave power, so that agency is thus not involved much with this SAMP because this is wind power.

Q. Are data layers prioritized? Answer (Payne): Yes – in terms of availability.

Q. Who’s involved with this regionally? Answer (Fugate): We are keeping Massachusetts and Connecticut apprised of the SAMP, and New York has indicated interest as well.

Q. What’s the relation between what’s being done in Cape Wind, and the Ocean SAMP? Answer (Payne): Cape Wind is at a stage that requires a “finer grain” in terms of data collection. He said that SAMP is a spatial plan which covers more area, so while fine grain work will likely be needed for Rhode Island, it would happen during a more intensive federal process; not during the SAMP.

Preliminary Screening Analysis for the Ocean SAMP – Dr. Malcolm Spaulding, Ocean Engineering, URI – “One portion of SAMP”

Spaulding provided a presentation (see <http://seagrant.gso.uri.edu/oceansamp/publications.html>) on the engineering study being used to rule out some ocean areas for potential windfarm projects, and to identify other areas that might be considered suitable for such projects. The study uses an equation or index to determine site suitability based on factors such as ocean floor

composition, wind speed, the volume of some marine transportation, and visual impact projections. The study, which is approaching a second phase, has produced a map depicting both appropriate and unsuitable for a wind farm. Additional research is being conducted to input fisheries activities and other use information into the index.

Post-presentation discussion:

Several attendees noted after the presentation that the study appears to be well thought out and highly useful to the SAMP process. Several fisheries representatives said they still want to see the SAMP incorporate more fisheries data. One representative said the SAMP should consider working more closely with developers and share data to achieve a broader information base. There were also several questions related to the timing of research (how can we estimate sites without having conducted all the research yet?) and to the relationship of the SAMP to the Governor's ongoing contract with a specific developer, Deepwater Wind. Fugate indicated that he cannot speak for the Governor's office, but that the intent of the SAMP is to move along its course of gathering and analyzing data, and making recommendations about spatially planning for ocean uses, including the possibility of offshore renewable energy projects, to the CRMC council. Payne pointed out that while anybody can propose building anything anywhere – say, putting a house in a cemetery – there's no assurance that such a proposal would be passed.

Other kinds of questions:

Q. What kind of flexibility does the index have in terms of accommodating different scenarios? Answer (Spaulding): Model has great flexibility and can be used to produce an analysis using any number of factors or information sources.

Q. What if there are no acceptable sites found? Answer (Spaulding): That's not likely; if you look at the Crown Estates, it's all a trade off and about finding balance.

Q: Will preference be given to users or developers? Answer (Fugate): We are working to get information about uses. Endangered species would have been in the index if we had the information. Habitat and fisheries are important, and there will be a weighting preference for these. Have to figure out overall pattern, and we are looking at the overall area so we can have those discussions.

Q. What would the cabling likely look like? Answer (Fugate): Cable would probably go to Block Island and then to the mainland along existing routes.

Q. How will it be determined which SAMP information layers need the most detail? Answer (Payne): One of the areas where the SAMO can definitely be specific is in determining what the norms should be for an applicant considering submitting a project falling within the Ocean SAMP area.

Next meeting: March 19, 2009, 6 – 9 p.m. (to take place at the Corless Auditorium at the URI Bay Campus, with meetings also scheduled for April 7, 2009, May 5, 2009, and June 30, 2009. These three meetings are 6 – 9 p.m., and will be held in Hazard Rooms A & B at the URI Bay Campus.