

Ocean SAMP Stakeholder Meeting #15
Notes, May 4, 2010, 6 – 9 p.m.
Hazard Rooms A and B, URI Bay Campus

Purpose of the Meeting:

- 1) Present a summary of the Ocean SAMP Fisheries Resources and Uses draft chapter for discussion.
- 2) Present a summary of the Ocean SAMP Effects section of the Renewable Energy draft chapter for discussion.
- 3) Update Stakeholders on Ocean SAMP research, outreach and policy activities.

Welcome – Ken Payne, moderator

Payne indicated to the approximately 55 attendees that the Ocean SAMP is moving toward document completion and that it is extremely important as chapters are prepared that the stakeholders and the public read them and weight in with input.

New Ocean SAMP Developments – Grover Fugate, CRMC

Fugate indicated that there has been a record of decision for Cape Wind and that there is going to be an appeal in federal court. Also, the Atlantic governors are going to be entering into a Memorandum of Understanding with U.S. Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar to look at the East Coast's energy needs and determine how to expedite permitting for energy. Fugate said the U.S. Minerals Management Service is forming a separate subtask[TCS1] force on the issue. He also indicated that Rhode Island and Massachusetts continue discussions regarding assignment of federal lease blocks in ocean waters, and that while Delaware's blocks are already in the Request for Interest process, no SAMP-like research has been done there yet, so Rhode Island is still in an advantageous position in terms of attracting the East Coast's first offshore wind farm.

Update on Ocean SAMP Chapters – Jennifer McCann, URI

McCann said that in terms of the Ocean SAMP timeline, the Ecology, Existing Policies and Climate Change chapters had been put out for public comment and were scheduled for a May 20 CRMC public workshop. On May 28, the public comment period ended for these chapters. On May 6, two more chapters – renewable energy effects and cultural and historical resources [TCS2] – were to be put out for public comment. McCann said both chapters are informative and interesting. She said it has been very productive to have the Narragansett Indian Tribe taking part in the cultural and historical resources chapter and providing the Narragansett perspective on the SAMP area.

Fisheries Resources and Uses Draft Chapter – Dave Beutel, CRMC; Sarah Smith, URI; Tiffany Smythe, URI

Smythe opened the presentation by reviewing the main portions of the chapter (Objectives, Key Findings, Methodologies, Highlights and Policies and Standards) and reviewing major findings. The major findings are that commercial and recreational fishing are both critical in terms of the economic, social, and cultural value that they provide to the state. These activities are dependent on key finfish, shellfish and crustacean resources and their habitats. Also, all parts of SAMP area are used for these activities. As such, existing and future uses in the area may have effects, so mitigation is critical.

She said the Ocean SAMP approach to fisheries is to manage ocean space, manage existing resources and uses within the context of potential future uses, summarize the best available data and information on resources and uses in the SAMP area, and address the issues and concerns of stakeholders and users to the extent possible. She then gave a brief overview of the sections of the chapter that deal with fish species and fish habitat. In addition, Beutel provided an overview about the qualitative and quantitative fisheries activity mapping activities that were undertaken during the SAMP process, and indicated that the work has enabled the SAMP team to start getting a handle on how fishermen are using the ocean waters in the SAMP area. Smith spoke about the economics of local commercial and recreational fisheries; local ~~places-ports~~ such as Point Judith are important nationally in terms of landings, and more people are fishing in the SAMP area, so the overall economic importance of fisheries activities is expected to remain high for Rhode Island.

Group discussion after the presentation focused on habitat protection, protection for migratory fish, and how climate change could impact and potentially change Rhode Island fisheries. Fugate indicated that due to climate change, and because we are on the edge of two major ecosystems, we are becoming more like a mid-Atlantic fishery. He said at the Ocean SAMP will help over time to provide a policy framework to help address a changing fishery.

Effects Section of the Renewable Energy Draft Chapter – Michelle Armsby, URI and Sarah Smith, URI

Armsby provided the first part of the presentation on the potential effects of offshore renewable energy. She opened by saying that the effects section, Section 850, is one part of the overall renewable energy chapter, and is a synthesis of all the worldwide known potential effects on offshore renewable energy. She said the section is meant to provide a general overview of the potential effects, and as every project is different, so too will be the various effects exhibited for a particular project. Armsby said it is important to note that all the research gathered for the chapter will serve a critical role as baseline data for any project in the Ocean SAMP area.

Smith spoke about how development related activities during construction, operation, and decommissioning could potential impact the sea floor, associated habitat, and the fish, birds and marine mammals that use these resources. Research has shown that these organisms react to development activities, but the reactions differ by species and place, and that the reactions are generally temporary and sometimes permanent. This means that some animals may change how or when they use an area, and this can mean changes in terms of how humans use resources, such as commercial and recreational fishing stocks, for example.

After the presentation, the group talked about how the Ocean SAMP can ensure that development projects are supported by mitigation and research, to try to bring the least amount of disturbance to the Ocean SAMP area. CRMC Councilman Don Gomez said it is important for CRMC to be rigorous with these steps to be sure that wildlife habitat is protected to the best extent possible through the SAMP. The group also talked about whether fishermen will be able to fish near or off of development infrastructure. Fugate indicated that the U.S. Coast Guard has not said it intends to keep people out of a potential development zone or area. Payne said the purpose of the SAMP is to get as much information as we can and then go through the regulatory process and use it so that it optimizes outcomes – so people who are affected are recognized and the effects are mitigated. Fugate said that Rhode Island is in good shape because through the SAMP a lot of data has been gathered SAMP wide, so we have a better understanding of these issues and the animals and fish and birds that can be impacted. Fugate also thanked the chapter team and the stakeholders for their work and input.

Next Meeting: June 2, 2010

