

Bay State Council of Divers

Meeting Minutes for May 3, 2006

Meeting held at the South Shore Neptunes' Clubhouse, Quincy.

Meeting called to order at approximately 8:05 PM. (Minutes taken by Mary Howard)

Topic 1: Guest Speaker from SBNMS

Angelo introduced Matt Lawrence, Maritime Archeologist, and Dede Marx of the Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary. Matt gave a PowerPoint presentation on the Sanctuary, including some of the history, and the ongoing Management Review Process.

The Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary is one of 12 national marine sanctuaries, and the only one in New England. It is 842 square miles, and is in federal waters. About a quarter of this area is less than 130 ft. deep and therefore within the “recreational” diving limits. Maximum depths of the Sanctuary are ~600 ft; minimum depths of the Sanctuary are about 65 ft.

The Management Plan Review Process is ongoing, and was begun in 2002.

Working Group Action Plan to protect and manage the Sanctuary consists of the following:

- Discovery
- Public Access Sites – need to be stable and durable
 - Notification
 - No grappling
 - Example: Paul Palmer is in a sandy area and now has sea life on/around it
- Restricted Sites – more fragile, potential National Register of Historic Places sites
 - Example: SS Portland
- Other diving related aspects of public access sites:
 - Partnerships for site monitoring
 - Potential for moorings
 - Concessionaire system for dive boats
 - Volunteer groups of divers
 - Improve information sharing

Draft Plan will be released for public comment (probably this summer). Comment period to be 90 days. After the public comment period, regulations will be created to carry out Management Action Plans. A similar process will be followed as above for creation of final regulations and impact statements. (Give your email address to Matt Lawrence or check the website at www.stellwagen.noaa.gov to find out the dates of the public comment period.)

Currently there are no prohibitions on diving in the Sanctuary, except for those against damaging historical resources.

Questions & Answers, Comments:

Comment made that once a law/regulation is in effect, the laws can be made more stringent without any input or notification to the public. Matt does not believe regulations can be changed/modified without a public notice period.

Restricted sites around protected sites are 1 square mile (like the Portland).

Dave Caldwell: Very few divers are diving out there. What evidence has been put forth that these regulations against diving need to be put in place? We know fishing is bad for wrecks, but no proof about divers.

Wally: Divers are preserving wreck artifacts. Without them all artifacts would be lost.

Jim: It is too deep at the Portland for divers. Damage is not by personal fishing gear, mostly done by commercial fishermen. Better to solicit help of divers and private fishermen.

Bruce: Are there plans for protecting the marine environment? Vin Malkoski answered that ship strikes and water quality are being looked at. He noted that allowing fishing was “enabling legislation” when creating the Sanctuary.

Vic Mastone made the comment that the 1 square mile restriction is to make it easier for enforcement of the rules by the Coast Guard and Fisheries.

Angelo questioned whether diving access is expected to accelerate the rate of decay of wrecks. If not, why make any restrictions? Matt answered that human impact DOES affect rate of decomposition.

Blackie: We need to go to the meetings for public comment and speak up, go by the rules. Divers are not the “bad guys” here.

Paul: Will the NOAA website publish the criteria for restrictions?

Topic 2: The Bay State Council Treasure Hunt Dive is scheduled for May 21 at Stage Fort Park.

We need to email information about this dive to the MetroWest Dive Club. (Done 5/11/06)

Topic 3: Introducing SCUBA Diving to Young People

The SCUBA industry and recreational dive clubs are going through a period of attrition. We need to get involved with school children to encourage/introduce SCUBA Diving to encourage new divers.

Angelo spoke with Paul Adler (of Aggressor Fleet?) at Sea Rovers. He is involved with the Oceans for Youth Foundation (www.oceansforyouth.org, info@oceansforyouth.org). The Foundation is “designed to encourage underwater education for youth”. There is a DVD that is available from this foundation to those who will use it to show to kids to encourage interest in the oceans. Angelo has one of these videos and showed parts of it to those attending the meeting. He asked if there are divers who would be willing to show (parts?) of the video at schools, targeting middle schools, primarily grade 8. Noting that it might be difficult to get actual school time (both because of work obligations and school restrictions), this might be done after school, during after school programs, or through clubs, Boy Scouts, the Y.

Topic 4: Updates from Vin Malkoski

- It is time to make applications for the Frank Scalli Scholarship, so tell any high school seniors/college freshmen who might be interested. Information available at www.searovers.org.
- LNG proposal for the Outer Brewsters is tabled for the time being, but likely not dead.
- 4 Windmills are proposed for Harding's Ledge. There is a proposal for 100 Windmills in Buzzards Bay.
- The Boston Conservation Commission is planning on mining cobble for Winthrop Beach
- Eel grass project update: The places that were hand-planted are doing well. The season is just beginning.
- Pipeline mitigation project: Cobble reef had been deployed.

Topic 5: New Bedford Aquarium

John Blackadar: There is a proposal for a small aquarium in New Bedford. It looks as though it will be able to go forward. An old bank building has been donated. Plans are to start small. It will be geared towards children.

Topic 6: Artificial Reef Surveys

Blackie and Jim are planning to do some video surveys of the area around the Pinthas. They will be in touch with the Coast Guard and others for use of equipment. Will not do anything without notifying Vin so he can accompany them.

General:

Angelo: United Divers is having a sale on 5/20/06.

The Props from the U853 are at Aquidneck, near Hammersmith Farm, in a field.

Bay State Council dues are still \$5. Maybe we should put out a newsletter.

Next Meeting:

Scheduled for June 21, 2006. 7:30 at the Neptunes' Clubhouse in Quincy.