



**Board of Directors  
Meeting Minutes**

May 15, 2024 at 1:30 p.m. CT

Gulf Breeze Council Chambers

1070 Shoreline Drive, Gulf Breeze, FL 32561

Audio Recording Available Upon Request

**Members Present**

Mike Kohler, Chair	Escambia County
Colten Wright, Vice Chair	Santa Rosa County
Vernon Compton	City of Milton
Cherry Fitch	City of Gulf Breeze
Jared Moore	City of Pensacola
Mike Norberg	Okaloosa County
Woody Speed	City of Orange Beach

**Members Absent**

Kerry Smith	Santa Rosa County
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**Interested Parties Present**

Matt Posner	PPBEP
Whitney Scheffel	PPBEP
Logan McDonald	PPBEP
Haley Gancel	PPBEP
Bailey Walkinshaw	PPBEP
Mary Jane Bass	Beggs & Lane
Darryl Boudreau	Northwest Florida Water Management District (NFWFMD)
Kiersten Cavender	Dewberry
Thomas Derbes	FL Sea Grant
Naisy Dolar	Santa Rosa County
Dillon Draughn	Baskerville-Donovan, Inc.
Paul Looney	Water Resource Association (WRA)
Elizabeth Major	League of Women Voters Pensacola Bay Area (LWVP)
Rick O'Connor	FL Sea Grant

**1. Call to Order**

**2. Roll Call (Matt Posner, Executive Director)**

Staff called the roll. A quorum was present.



### 3. Approval of Board Agenda

Woody Speed (City of Orange Beach) made a motion to approve the agenda. Councilperson Jared Moore (City of Pensacola) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

### 4. Approval of March 20, 2024, Board Minutes

Commissioner Colten Wright (Santa Rosa County) made a motion to approve the minutes. Mike Norberg (Okaloosa County) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

### 5. Recognition of Robert Bender's Service to the Board

The Board and staff recognized former Escambia County Commissioner Robert Bender for his service as an Estuary Program Board Member over the past several years.

### 6. Staff Updates

#### a. Executive Director's Update (*Matt Posner, Executive Director*)

##### i. 2024 Management Conference

Staff held the third annual Management Conference Meeting in April. The purpose of the meeting is for all the Program's partners to come together to share ideas and collaborate. Judy Haner (The Nature Conservancy in Alabama) was the keynote speaker for this year and discussed the partnerships and progress that has been years in the making. The collective impact of the Estuary Program and the Management Conference partners includes \$84 million in grant funds secured to implement priorities of the CCMP, 43 of the 51 CCMP actions are underway, over 13,500 individuals engaged through outreach efforts and over 73,000 individuals reach through digital resources.

##### ii. NOAA Staff Visit

Estuary Program staff, Santa Rosa County staff, and the NOAA Technical Program Lead for the Pensacola Bay System Oyster Restoration Initiative visited Sandy Hollow Gully. Addressing the sediment load entering the Pensacola Bay from Sandy Hollow Gully upstream will help the Program's oyster restoration efforts by improving oyster habitat quality downstream.

##### iii. The Nature Conservancy Legacy Club Tour

Staff joined long-term The Nature Conservancy (TNC) donors for a tour of TNC projects. Part of the tour included visiting an oyster reef project in an area with higher concentrations of freshwater that had approximately 2.5-to-3-inch size oysters growing. The tour provided an opportunity to observe long term projects that will be similar to the Pensacola Bay System Oyster Restoration Initiative.

##### iv. Congressional Staff Perdido Bay Tour

Estuary Program staff met with congressional representatives, the City of Orange Beach, The Nature Conservancy Alabama, and the Northwest Florida Water Management District for a tour on the Perdido Bay to highlight the



partnerships and projects that are going on in the watershed and to push support for national designation for the Program.

**v. Pensacola Bay System Oyster Restoration Design RFQ Update**

Staff released the Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for the Pensacola Bay System Oyster Restoration Initiative last December and received seven firm responses which were shortlisted down to five. Interviews and ranking for the five shortlisted firms were held in mid-April, and Jacobs was selected.

**vi. Bronson Field/Lillian Swamp RFQ Update**

Firms for the Bronson Field/Lillian Swamp Request for Qualifications were shortlisted on May 13<sup>th</sup> and final interviews and ranking will take place on May 28<sup>th</sup>.

**vii. Oyster Shell Recycling Program and Living Shoreline Cost Share Program Updates**

Paige Lansky (Assistant Project Coordinator) has begun meeting with partners and is developing a work plan for the Oyster Shell Recycling Program, which is expected to roll out this fall with the Living Shoreline Cost Share Program. More information will become available as both programs are further developed and underway.

**b. Technical Update** (*Whitney Scheffel, Senior Scientist*)

**i. Management Conference Discussion**

Staff held breakout sessions dedicated to project development and policy recommendations. The Project Development Mixer was focused on having partners work together to prioritize projects for the watersheds. The Policy Recommendations session was segmented into four topics areas of interest: stormwater, riparian buffers, clear cutting and land disturbances, and zoning and development recommendations. Each topic area group was provided targeted questions looking at current policies. Staff are working on synthesizing information from the sessions but received overall positive feedback and informative discussion.

**ii. FWC Marine and Estuarine Sub-Section**

Staff presented on the Pensacola Bay System Oyster Restoration Initiative at the FWC Marine and Estuarine Sub-Section held at Camp Helen State Park on May 2<sup>nd</sup>. There were multiple partner agencies present and a mix of engineers with varying backgrounds, providing a good opportunity for staff to engage with groups interested or not as familiar with the Estuary Program's work.

**iii. Mobile Bay National Estuary Program (MBNEP) Workshop**

Staff attended Mobile Bay National Estuary Program's two-day workshop held at Dauphin Island Sea Lab. The first day focused on MBNEP's efforts to update



their 2008 State of the Bays report. The second day was on comprehensive monitoring and had participants discuss how to do comprehensive monitoring on a broader scale, involving state and other agencies that collect similar information, and holistic storytelling for the watershed. Staff discussed that the Estuary Program can help fill in with the Perdido Bay knowledge gap. MBNEP anticipates releasing their updated report by the end of this year. Staff reported that the workshop was a good opportunity to connect with the Program's Alabama partners.

**iv. NOAA RESTORE Science Program**

Staff are partnering with FWC Research Institute, the University of South Alabama, and St. Andrews and St. Joseph Bays Estuary Program (SASJBEP) to submit a Letter of Intent for a new funding opportunity to establish a Fisheries Independent Monitoring program. Pensacola Bay and St. Joseph Bay are currently knowledge gaps for fisheries monitoring, and local regulatory decisions must use adjacent areas for making management decisions. The Fisheries Independent Monitoring program would look at additional water quality and habitat monitoring, along with fishery community changes which will help with local regulatory decision making. It is a five-year funding opportunity; however, high performing projects will have the opportunity for a non-competitive five-year funding renewal, meaning this could be a 10-year funding opportunity. Mike Norberg (Okaloosa County) shared his experience and support for fisheries monitoring.

**c. Outreach Update** (*Logan McDonald, Community Outreach Coordinator*)

**i. Restoration Ramble: Jackson's Creek**

Staff held the last Restoration Ramble for this spring at Jackson's Creek with guest presenter Samantha Pitts from Escambia County Natural Resources Department leading the tour. Participants were able to see Escambia County's efforts firsthand for restoring the floodplain. Staff received positive feedback from participants and Restoration Rambles will resume in the fall.

**ii. ACA Kayak Instructor Training**

Staff participated in a week-long ACA Kayak Instructor Training course in April at the Wind and Water Learning Center in Orange Beach. The course provided staff with valuable training and skills for leading future kayak tours for the Program.

**iii. Fundy Bayou Kayak Tour**

Staff led the Program's first kayak tour for the summer at Escribano Point Wildlife Management Area in partnership with the City of Pensacola Parks and Recreation. Participants paddled in Fundy Bayou and along the shoreline of Escribano Point.



- iv. Hurricane and Disaster Preparedness Trivia Night**

Staff held a hurricane and disaster preparedness-themed trivia night at Doc's Hop Shop during national Hurricane Preparation Week to share educational information and best practices for entering the 2024 Atlantic Hurricane Season.
- v. Earth Day Celebrations**

The EPA Lab in Gulf Breeze invited staff to participate in their two-day Earth Day celebration where local elementary and middle school students visited the EPA Lab and rotated through educational booth. Staff brought the traveling observation tank and Critter Catcher volunteer support to share local estuary fauna with the students. Kyna Finley (Panhandle Manatee Intern) attended the Pensacola Earth Day celebration at Bayview Park, representing Panhandle Manatee.
- vi. Manatee Ambassadors**

Kyna Finley (Panhandle Manatee Intern) has kicked off the 2024 Panhandle Manatee outreach season so far with 716 engagements, 45 volunteer hours, and visited over 14 events and locations so far this summer.
- vii. Summer Seagrass Sleuths**

Summer Seagrass Sleuths is a new program that will be held one Friday per month during the summer and rotate locations throughout the watersheds. The first Summer Seagrass Sleuth will be held at Shoreline Park in Gulf Breeze on May 24<sup>th</sup>. This is a family-friendly program that will allow participants to try seining and teach basic fish and invertebrate identification. Staff are exploring potential locations and will announce details for future dates soon.
- viii. WKRG Growing the Gulf Coast Feature**

WKRG reached out to staff about the \$50 million of Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) funding coming to the area and wanted to feature one of the projects. Matt Posner (Executive Director) and the City of Pensacola were interviewed about the upcoming Microbial Source Tracking NRDA project.
- ix. Community Grants**

Staff provided updates on all the FY23-24 Community Grant projects, which will be wrapping up at the end of May. Staff are waiting for the final budget to be signed by the governor before sharing the upcoming cycle's information but are anticipating advertising for FY24-25 Community Grant applications in late June or early July.

## **7. Action Items**

- a. Ratifying Approval of Subaward Agreement No. NOAA23-09 to the Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance, in the amount of \$65,500, in Support of the Gulf of Mexico Oyster Shell Recycling**



### Network

Commissioner Colten Wright (Santa Rosa County) made a motion to ratify approval of Subaward Agreement No. NOAA23-09 to the Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance hosted by Northwest Florida State College, in the amount of \$65,500, in support of the Gulf of Mexico Oyster Shell Recycling Network. Mayor Cherry Fitch (City of Gulf Breeze) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

**b. Approval of Subaward Agreement No. NOAA23-03 to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, in the amount of \$96,065, in Support of the Pensacola Bay System Oyster Restoration Initiative**

Woody Speed (City of Orange Beach) made a motion to approve, and authorize the Executive Director to sign, subject to legal review and approval, Subaward Agreement No. NOAA23-03 to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, in the amount of \$96,500, in support of the Pensacola Bay System Oyster Restoration Initiative. Councilperson Jared Moore (City of Pensacola) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

**c. Approval of Subaward Agreement No. FLRACEP-FY24-01 to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, in the amount of \$40,000, in Support of the Collaborative Science to Assess Restoration Success Project**

Woody Speed (City of Orange Beach) made a motion to approve, and authorize the Executive Director to sign, subject to legal review and approval, Subaward Agreement No. FLRACEP-FY24-01 to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, in the amount of \$40,000, in support of the Collaborative Science to Assess Restoration Success Project. Mike Norberg (Okaloosa County) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

**d. Authorization of the Executive Director to Negotiate a Contract with Jacobs Engineering Group Inc. for P2324-01 Pensacola Bay System Oyster Restoration Initiative Design and Permitting Services**

Commissioner Colten Wright (Santa Rosa County) made a motion to authorize the Executive Director to negotiate a contract with Jacobs Engineering Group Inc. for P2324-01 Pensacola Bay System Oyster Restoration Initiative Design and Permitting Services, and authorize the Executive Director to execute the contract, subject to legal review and approval, and ratification at the July 2024 Board Meeting. Vernon Compton (City of Milton) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

**e. Approval of FY23-24 Second Quarter Financial Report**

Mike Norberg (Okaloosa County) made a motion to approve the FY23-24 Second Quarter Financial Report. Vernon Compton (City of Milton) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

**f. Approval of FY23-24 Mid-Year Budget Amendment**

Mayor Cherry Fitch (City of Gulf Breeze) made a motion to approve the FY23-24 Mid-year



Budget Amendment. Commissioner Colten Wright (Santa Rosa County) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

**g. Conceptual Approval of Proposed FY24-25 Operating Budget**

Discussion was held on the changes in the operating budget and that the Board of Directors will have three opportunities to review the FY24-25 Operating Budget: this meeting for conceptual approval, the July board meeting for full proposal, and the September board meeting for final approval.

Vernon Compton (City of Milton) made a motion to conceptually approve the FY24-25 Operating Budget. Councilperson Jared Moore (City of Pensacola) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

**h. Approval of Local Government Contribution Requests for FY24-25**

Commissioner Mike Kohler (Escambia County) made a motion to approve the FY24-25 local government contribution requests. Woody Speed (City of Orange Beach) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

**8. Committee Updates**

**a. Technical Committee (Paul Looney, WRA / Technical Committee Chairman)**

The 2024 Management Conference Meeting was held on April 3<sup>rd</sup> and focused on partnerships and collaborations. There was a Project Development Mixer that encouraged attendees to come up with projects across partners that further the Estuary Program's CCMP goals. The mixer helped share a united vision for the Pensacola and Perdido Bay watersheds with the attendees.

**b. Education and Outreach Committee (Rick O'Connor, FL Sea Grant / Education and Outreach Co-Chairman)**

During the outreach-focused break-out session at the 2024 Management Conference Meeting held on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, attendees drafted application material criteria and prioritized messaging for the Living Shorelines Cost Share Program and discussed key messages for the Oyster Shell Recycling Program.

**c. Oyster Subcommittee (Thomas Derbes, FL Sea Grant / Oyster Subcommittee Co-Chairman)**

Both Co-Chairmen, Chris Verlinde (Santa Rosa County) and Thomas Derbes (FL Sea Grant), were a part of the Pensacola Bay System Oyster Restoration Initiative Request for Qualifications interview and selection process in an advisory capacity. The Oyster Subcommittee meetings and engagements are planned to resume when the preliminary design process starts in the next couple of months.

Additionally, the Pensacola Bay Oyster Company has relocated their hatchery to Garcon Point and recently had their first successful spawn with over 500 million oyster larvae.



**9. Board/Agency Updates**

- a. Mike Norberg (Okaloosa County) shared that Okaloosa County Tourism and Development is expanding to the north end of the county and recently hired a Land Resource Coordinator that will be based in Crestview.
  
- b. Vernon Compton (City of Milton) shared the City of Milton is incorporating stormwater and flood protection fact sheets on billing materials, and that this is a good way to send out educational materials while utilizing existing materials that are already mailed out to residents.

**10. Public Comment**

No comments were made.

**11. Adjourned**