



**Mobile Bay National Estuary Program  
Community Resources Committee Meeting Minutes  
Thursday, August 13, 2020  
Virtual Meeting through Zoom**



**Attendees:**

Carol Adams-Davis, Mobile Sierra Club  
Mark Berte, Alabama Coastal Foundation  
Casi Callaway, Mobile Baykeeper  
Elizabeth Englebreton, Gulf Coast Community  
Design Studio and Plastics Free Gulf Coast  
Walter Ernest, Pelican Coast Conservancy  
Debi Foster, Dog River Clearwater Revival/The  
Peninsula

Nicole Love, Alabama Audubon  
Tammy Monistere, Conservation Alabama  
Ilka Porter, Mobile Baykeeper  
Angela Underwood, ADCNR/Weeks Bay NERR  
Caitlin Wessell, NOAA  
Connie Whitaker, Weeks Bay Foundation

**MBNEP Staff:** Madison Blanchard, Herndon Graddick, Tom Herder, Bethany Hudson, Jason Kudulis, and Roberta Swann

**U.S. EPA Program Evaluation Team:** Romell Nandi, EPA HQ NEP Coordinator (nandi.romell@epa.gov); Chris Plymale, EPA Region IV NEP Coordinator (plymale.christopher@epa.gov); and Kathleen Hill, Deputy Director, Indian River Lagoon National Estuary Program (hill@irlcouncil.org)

**Meeting Takeaways:**

- 1) MBNEP provided a timeline presentation documenting organizational experiences related to trash abatement since 2001. Other CRC organizations are invited to provide similar presentations documenting their experiences.**
- 2) A presentation describing MBNEP's recent Ditch the Disposables initiative in Prichard stimulated conversation about branding and opportunities for collaboration in encouraging more sustainable alternatives to single-use packaging.**
- 3) Consensus was reached on goals and objectives developed for the CRC's Work Plan Subcomponent #2, Trash Removal. Goals and objectives for other subcomponents remain to be developed or discussed.**

**Minutes**

**1. Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 1030 am by Walter Ernest. Walter initiated self-introductions by CRC member participants.

**2. Approval of the Minutes**

Walter called for a motion to approve the minutes from the past meeting (July 15, 2020). Mark Berte made the motion, which was seconded by Debi Foster. The motion carried.

**3. Old Business** MBNEP Management Conference Committee Update: Tom Herder presented a summary (which followed the New Business presentation, due to technical difficulties) of Mobile Bay NEP

Management Conference activities, viewable at [http://www.mobilebaynep.com/who\\_we\\_are/management\\_conference/community\\_resources\\_committee](http://www.mobilebaynep.com/who_we_are/management_conference/community_resources_committee).

#### **4. New Business:**

- Prior to Madison Blanchard's presentation detailing the MBNEP's involvement and evolution through implementation of trash abatement activities, CRC Co-Chair Walter Ernest solicited similar presentations documenting the evolution of other CRC organizations to further inform the Committee as we pursue the issues of waterborne trash and marine debris. He directed members to contact Tom Herder to get your organization's presentation added to a CRC meeting agenda.
- MBNEP Trash Abatement Timeline and Ditch the Disposable Report. MBNEP Project Coordinator Madison Blanchard reviewed the MBNEP experience and evolution in trash abatement from 2001 as volunteers at Coastal Cleanup on the Causeway to the current grant-funded trash abatement strategies involving Litter Gitters with a report on the "Ditch the Disposables" initiative. The presentation can be found using the same link listed above for the Management Conference Committee Update.

With regard to the Ditch the Disposables initiative, Madison reported on what's been accomplished and next steps. She provided background, including the Three Mile Creek Watershed Management Plan objectives and data collection and assessments by Osprey Initiative, indicating that a significant portion of waterborne trash included Styrofoam and single-use plastic items from convenience stores and fast food restaurants. With funding from an EPA Gulf of Mexico grant, the initiative was one of the tasks undertaken with a purpose of improving water quality, a goal of reducing waste stream at the source by changing behaviors related to use of Styrofoam and single-use plastics, and an objective of gathering data about customer preferences. Ancillary benefits of the campaign were to raise awareness, educate community and business owners about more sustainable alternative products and practices, promote the use of these alternatives, and provide locally owned businesses with incentives to switch through data collection activities.

She introduced Big White Wings, a popular and busy restaurant in the target area of Prichard (indicated as a hot spot by Osprey assessment data). The owner, Maurice White, tired of litter and amenable to helping us investigate alternative packaging, was, at the time, only using Styrofoam packaging for take out items. MBNEP purchased a weeks supply of paper food packaging, including cups, straws, and various-sized take out boxes. Cashiers and servers were provided talking points about the campaign's purpose, and educational signage was placed on both interior and exterior walls of the restaurant.

A survey was developed to provide data, and as an incentive for customers to participate in the survey, respondents were eligible to win a new, 50-inch TV, awarded by drawing one name at the end of the campaign. We were pleased that 279 customers completed the survey, which was constructed to determine customer preferences between Styrofoam and paper packaging, whether customers value sustainable packaging, and if the public is aware of issues caused by Styrofoam and single-use packaging.

Survey result indicated that almost 75% were paying attention to the type of packing they received, and over 90% were aware that litter bore environmental impacts and did not stay in place once on the ground. Forty percent of customers indicated a preference for paper, 33% expressed no preference, and 27% expressed a preference for Styrofoam. Significantly, 83% of customers expressed a willingness to pay at least a few cents more for eco-friendly products, despite the restaurants location in a low-to-moderate

income community. Challenges included familiarity and comfort with Styrofoam and perceptions of problem with paper packaging getting soggy. Successes included MBNEP's collection of valuable data, increasing awareness, and demonstration of feasibility of switching to more sustainable products. Big White Wings got some good publicity, had increased sales over the week-long campaign, and realized his customers see the value of alternative packaging.

Next steps include upstream supply-chain corporate engagement, for which more customer data is required. A Round Two at different local restaurants is in development, and data will be used to inform our strategy and educate business owners.

Walter referred to past efforts downtown by other CRC organizations, and noted costs and funding provide a big challenge. Madison acknowledged and strategized ways to address that challenge.

Elizabeth Englebretton reported that Plastics Free Gulf Coast is doing the same thing in the Mobile area and five Gulf states. She offered advice and collaboration and mentioned current relationships. She noted work with CRC organizations downtown. Walter made note of a CRC-approved MBNEP managed database to document CRC trash abatement initiatives to facilitate collaboration and avoid duplication of efforts. Roberta Swann asked Elizabeth for results and data gathered from her work. Or if any publications were available. She responded that nothing had been published yet and that a web site is ready for launching, but rather than a scientific approach, hers was more of a social and economic approach, without hard data. Roberta expressed our need for data and enthusiasm for collaboration. Debi Foster elaborated on her organization's collaboration with PFGC. Elizabeth discussed past and current efforts.

Caitlin Wessell referred to a NOAA-funded effort – Litter Free Mardi Gras Program – and asked Madison to add that to her timeline. Roberta responded that this was an MBNEP-centric timeline, noted that the Timeline was not all-inclusive of CRC trash abatement activities, and that other CRC organizations will hopefully present similarly at future meetings.

- Review of CRC Work Plan Action Items. Casi Callaway assumed the floor and shared the Work Plan. She reiterated that we've laid out a good "straw person" for how we, together, and pooling resources, we can make a bigger difference in the two coastal counties and Mobile Watershed, avoid duplication of labor, encourage support, and identify gaps in the education and awareness efforts (with including 9<sup>th</sup> graders as an example). She mentioned Roberta's suggestion to develop purposes, goals, and objectives for each of the Work Plan's seven subcomponents: #1 litter prevention, #2 litter removal, #3 increased recycling, #4 policy and legislation, #5 formal and informal education, #6 awareness, and #7 behavior changes.

**Subcomponent #1 Litter prevention goals** and objectives are in the works but were not ready for presentation or evaluation. Casi acknowledged the commitment of time necessary for CRC volunteers to pull this off on a short deadline, solicited help from interested persons, and encouraged taking additional time to get this important charge done.

Angela Underwood and Caitlin Wessell developed the following **Subcomponent #2. Litter Removal** goal and objectives:

**Goal:** Engage citizens in locating, removing, and disposing of marine debris and litter in coastal Alabama.

**Objectives:**

1. Support a minimum of three volunteer clean-up events each year (MLK, Earth day, AL Coastal Cleanup)

Metrics:

- Number of cleanup events
- Number of people participating
- Volume/weight removed

2. Create a database to track all coastal Alabama partner clean-up events each year.

Metrics:

- Number of cleanup events
- Number of people participating
- Volume/weight removed

3. Support the installation of trash collection devices.

Metrics:

- Type of device (in-water, interceptor)
- Number of devices
- Volume/weight removed

4. Identify and track brand data of littered items using the Gulf trash free list in the Marine Debris Tracker app.

Metrics:

- Number of brand data reports submitted through ETAP and the Marine Debris Tracker
- Top 5 brands littered in Coastal AL

Angela read their goal, four objectives, and metrics, that were developed “working backwards from the metrics previously developed.” The first objective, to support a minimum of three cleanup events each year got some attention. With several organizations individually hosting three cleanups annually, consensus developed that either “three” should be indicated as a minimum, or that the cleanups indicated in this objective are the “all-hands-on-deck” cleanups, like Coastal Cleanup and the MLK Day of Service. While individuals expressed hopes that ALL individually hosted cleanup would also be included in the database tracking CRC organization activity, at least to inform setting of CRC all-hands-on-deck cleanup objectives, collectively. Members seemed to agree that the CRC could come together in three, large-scale community cleanups, but that all cleanup events/activities should be recorded in the CRC database. The database will be helpful in identification of gaps – for instance where cleanups have not been undertaken – was also mentioned as an important consideration. A third large-scale cleanup mentioned was the PALS-sponsored Earth Day cleanup or the Keep America Beautiful cleanup in the spring. Several interesting suggestions were made for potential CRC cleanups.

With regard to Objectives 2 and 3, Objective 2. Angela and Caitlin explained the broad scope of “supporting.” While “in-water” trash collection devices were indicated, marine debris interceptors were

mentions as also important, so the group agreed to remove “in-water” from this Objective to include devices installed at stormwater drains along Mardi Gras parade routes and elsewhere.

With regard to Objective 3, regarding “brand data,” protocols were discussed. Brands versus types of litter were discussed, giving rise to consideration of apps used to track and characterize litter. ETAP is being used widely in coastal Alabama, and promotion of the use of ETAP (the EPA’s Escaped Trash Assessment Protocol) was mentioned. Litteratti was mentioned as an app used by people walking in their neighborhoods. Advancing ETAP as an app by EPA would be desirable. Romell responded that his Trash Free Water teams developed ETAP, and a modified Beta version is used by Don Bates and Osprey. He mentioned data cards, which, when used, ensure things are characterized consistently, resulting in homogenization of data. An EPA objective is to have litter characterized using ETAP, and he mentioned the Trash Free Gulf Initiative under development by Chris Plymale and others.

Chris responded that they are working with Calista Mills who is working to provide an ETAP app to the Trash Free Gulf Initiative where one could use their phone rather than cards. More to come... Romell added that within the Marine Debris Tracker app, one could incorporate ETAP characterization without cards. With regard to questions about educating citizens on use of apps and data cards, we were guided back into the litter removal track rather than venturing into education or awareness.

With time short and progress made, work plan development was suspended to allow the Program Evaluation Team time for questions and answers.

➤ EPA NEP Program Evaluation Team Questions and Answers. Romell, more formally introduced the team, including himself, the EPA Headquarters Coordinator for the National Estuary Program and Trash Free Waters Coordinator. Kathleen Hill is the Deputy Director for the Indian River Lagoon National Estuary Program, standing in for Director Duane De Freese, who’s dealing with health issues. Chris Plymale is the Region IV NEP Coordinator out of Atlanta. He reported that the PE team will recommend pathways for the Program to explore. The team will attend virtual meetings of all MBNEP Management Conference committees. On August 26, the team will forward a letter with formal findings.

He looked over prepared questions before commenting to Madison Blanchard about the expansion of the Ditch the Disposables campaign, recommending the collaboration with Elizabeth and Plastic Free Gulf Coast. He noted the existence of lots of restaurant guides and volunteered to send a list of these to help us understand what’s already been done.

His first question involved the Create a Clean Water Future (CCWF) campaign, which enjoys some brand recognition and the emergence of Ditch the Disposables. He asked Madison whether these two initiatives were being co-branded. She replied affirmatively that they are being co-branded, since Ditch the Disposables falls squarely into line with the mission of CCWF. Roberta added that CCWF started as a public awareness campaign focused on elements related to stormwater runoff and trash. It provided an overarching campaign useful to municipalities, and it has become more of a brand. Casi mentioned Baykeeper’s Reduce the Use campaign, similar to MBNEP’s Ditch the Disposables, noting that it, too fit under the CCWF brand. She expressed that CRC is a group that needs to “take seven taglines and reduce them to two or three, since uniform use of names will help with education and awareness. Romell agreed that branding conflicts are gaining the attention of Trash Free Waters.

Chris Plymale had no questions and handed off to Kathy Hill, who had only a single question. Regarding Big White Wings, she noted that a great job was done soliciting public interest and generating survey results, she wondered if any other restaurants had come forth with requests. Madison responded that what we did with Big White Wings was not publicized. She said several restaurants had been surveyed, and others were interested, but as a pilot, we went with Big Whit Wings, due to their stature in the community and their business volume. Maurice White was instrumental in the success of the project since he had the time to help with marketing the project to his customers.

Debi commented that what the MBNEP did in Prichard and Baykeeper and PFGC did at the OK Bike Shop spurred the Dog River Clearwater Revival to engage Dog River Watershed businesses.

Kathy suggested that there are advantages to numbers, including the potential for group purchasing, regionalization of the trash message (with recycling bins that look distinctive and similar), and standard trash receptacles with covers @ restaurants near the water.

Romell expressed a willingness to follow up with CRC members with any additional questions, indicating that most of the PE team's were answered. Walter offered his compliments to the team and Casi complimented the Trash Free Waters, not only from the environmental standpoint, but also for community pride and economy.

➤ Scheduling of next meeting. Tom indicated that the next CRC meeting is tentatively scheduled for **September 16**. Romell told CRC members to feel free to email him and to copy Chris Plymale (or vice versa) at any time.

## **5. Adjourn**

The meeting was adjourned at 1210.