

Mobile Bay National Estuary Program Executive Committee Meeting
Original Oyster House Banquet Hall, Spanish Fort, AL
Friday, May 29, 2020 8:30 - 10:30 am

Attendees:

Scott Bannon, ADCNR Marine Resources

Chris Blankenship, ADCNR

Casi Callaway, Mobile Baykeeper

Troy Ephriam, Ephriam & Associates Consulting, LLC

Walter Ernest, Pelican Coast Conservancy

Mimi Fearn, Dog River Clearwater Revival

Leslie Gahagan, City of Foley

Judy Haner, The Nature Conservancy

Patric Harper, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Amy Hunter, ADCNR

Chris Lee, J.L. Bedsole Foundation

Merceria Ludgood, Mobile County Commission

Ben Malone, USDA-NRCS State Office

Patti McCurdy, ADCNR State Lands

Justin McDonald, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Eliska Morgan, Thompson Engineering

Ashley Henderson for William Puckett, Alabama Soil & Water Conservation Committee

Elizabeth Roney, Representative Bradley Byrne's Office

Frank Smith, Wilkins Miller Wealth Management

LaDon Swann, Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium

Beth Thomas, Alabama Power

Billie Jo Underwood, Baldwin County Commission

MBNEP Staff Present: *Roberta Swann, Christian Miller, Tiffany England, Jason Kudulis, Kelley Barfoot, Katie Dylewski, Madison Blanchard, Ben Brenner, Herndon Graddick, Farnaz Bayat, and Bethany Dickey*

1. **Introductions/Call to Order:** We started with a quick roll call for attendees. Ms. Swann then introduced our newest committee co-chairs. Frank Smith has joined Eliska Morgan as co-chairs of the BRC and Walter Ernest has been voted as a new co-chair of the CRC.
2. **Approval of Minutes:** Ms. Swann asked for comments or revisions to the minutes from the March 13, 2020 meeting. Casi Callaway made a motion to approve, Judy Haner seconded the motion and the meeting officially started at 8:40.
3. **Director's Report**
 - a) Top Accomplishments:
 - **Habitat Trend Analysis:** Funded by ADCNR and completed based on the habitat mapping we did in 2016 and the HPP based on 2005 data. There has been an increase in Pine Savanna habitat and maritime forest. There's been a decrease in freshwater wetlands and intertidal marshes and flats, which were both identified priority habitats by the SAC in 2013.
 - **Habitat Conservation and Restoration Plan:** completed and vetted through USACE
 - **Implementation Review:** Completed in March. Every 5 years we are required to complete this report. EPA and another NEP Director comes down and meets with stakeholders and does project site visits. Due to COVID-19, we will be finding a way to do this virtually.
 - **Annual Workplan:** In development. We only report out on EPA funds and Match dollars, but we do discuss our external funding. Coal Ash related activities are not included in our EPA annual plan and are funded through a combination of Mobile and Baldwin county dollars and State appropriation. Our EPA funding for fiscal year 2021 is \$662,000, with budgeted match dollars of \$422,076 that we receive from municipalities, equaling \$1,084,076. Ms. Swann asked for an approval of the budget. Walter Ernest made a motion to approve, which Dr. Mimi Fearn seconded. The approval was unanimous. Ms. Swann discussed activities that we budgeted for fiscal year 2021, ordered by CCMP Action:
 - **Estuary Status & Trends:** Using the D'Olive Watershed Index to determine the most cost-effective metrics for evaluating trends in habitat condition. Developing a mechanism for communicating volunteer and other environmental monitoring to the general public.
 - **Ecosystem Restoration & Protection:** 12 Mile Creek construction, invasive species management at Helen Wood Park, and ADA Accessibility Beach Mats. We tried to get a mat on Dauphin Island, but had some issues on permitting, maintenance, and an existing conservation easement

at the location we identified. We'd like to bring together a small group to discuss how to get this done (ADCNR, Fish & Wildlife, TNC, etc.).

- o **Technical Assistance & Capacity Building:** The BRC will be focusing on oysters this year through possible creation of a peer lending program and revolving loan funds. AUMERC will be heavily involved and Alabama Power has shown interest in setting up a loan fund.
 - o **Education & Public Involvement:** Continued support of education and engagement of the Management Conference, interpretive signage for heritage and environmental education, Current Connection newsletters, educational videos, Trash Mob execution, and community event sponsorships.
 - o **Management, Project Delivery, Administration:** salaries, fringe, operating costs, and indirect costs to DISL.
- b) **Budget vs Actual (as of 4-30-20):** Our EPA funding total is about \$2 million, external funding is about \$6.4 million, and carryover funds (open external grants) are about \$3 million. So, we are working with about \$11.8 million right now. Most of the \$2.2 million remaining in ERP is our watershed planning grant from State received Federal RESTORE dollars.

4. Committee Reports (MBNEP Management Conference Co-Chairs)

Government Networks Committee

Ms. Swann presented on the March 13 GNC meeting. Two public awareness campaigns were introduced: Embrace the Gulf 2020 and Take Back our Coast. ADEM provided an update on the State's Revolving Loan Fund. On May 4, Robert Snow presented his findings from the Structural Integrity Review of Alabama Power's Plant Barry coal ash pond closure plan. With these virtual meetings, participation has increased and members that can't usually come to the meetings are now able to join.

Business Resources Committee

Eliska Morgan reported on the April 28 BRC meeting. The oyster industry is the main focus for the BRC. The meeting focused on learning about the status of Alabama's oyster industry, with presentations from Jason Herrman (ADCNR-MRD), Bill Walton (AUMERC), and LaDon Swann (MASGC). Next steps include hosting a panel discussion with local oyster farmers to discuss their needs and how the BRC can help. MBNEP secured has funded a \$23,000 grant from Alabama Power pass on to MS-AL Sea Grant to purchase overgrown farmed oysters for restoration. Dr. Swann discussed in further detail.

Community Action Committee

Leslie Gahagan reported on the May 12 CAC meeting, which had higher participation as well. Don Bates presented on Litter Gitters and ETAP training. Dr. Tina Miller-Way presented on the CAMEO (Citizen's Archive for Mobile Bay Estuarine Organisms) Program. The purpose of the program is to develop long term datasets to analyze the impacts of changing conditions. Citizens can become involved by attending training and participating in boat trips with DISL staff. Upcoming meetings include invasive species, native plant species, and rain gardens.

Community Resources Committee

Casi Callaway reported on the May 27 CRC meeting. She welcomed Walter Ernest as the new co-chair. The committee refined the CRC Work Plan with potential activities and metrics geared towards trash, litter, and marine debris and grouped by action, policy/legislation, education & awareness, and enforcement. The committee will be targeting new potential members and organizations in order to execute their new Work Plan.

Science Advisory Committee

Dr. Amy Hunter reported on the May 22 SAC meeting. Committee members, co-chairs, and staff continued developing a conceptual model framework to evaluate stressors for pollutants of concern. Dottie Byron presented on monitoring parameters for the Center of Excellence. The SAC is planning an off-cycle meeting this summer to spotlight four different watershed modeling efforts such as the ACCP online tool (USACE). The

matrix subcommittee has been working hard and taken the stressor matrix to the next level and will help with the CCMP update in the next couple of years.

Project Implementation Committee

Judy Haner reported on the May 20 PIC meeting, which had over 70 participants. The meeting focused on the projects going on in Mobile and Baldwin Counties:

- **Lightning Point:** Construction for this project began in September 2019 and is anticipated to be complete in August 2020. Dredging is complete. Next steps involve marsh plantings, more surveys, and additional landowner agreements for additional four breakwaters to the east.
- **Point aux Pins & D'Olive Bay Dredging:** ADCNR gave the update. Point aux Pins will be awarded soon, and the contractor will complete the shoreline restoration work in 165 days after the award. The D'Olive Bay dredging will improve channel access at the only public boat launch in the City of Daphne. This is Daphne's first dredge project and is near completion. The channel is being dredged to a maximum of seven feet mean low water.
- **Dauphin Island Causeway & Bayfront Park:** Mobile county gave the update on these "sister" projects. The DI Causeway project will be restoring the shoreline to the 1917 shoreline and they are currently working on the design alternatives analysis. They are currently considering trucking beneficial use sediment from USACE to the site as this sediment will already be dewatered and pose less of a turbidity threat to nearby oyster reefs. A Master Plan is being developed for Bayfront Park, which is located on the Northern end of the DI Causeway Project. The park improvements will include increased recreational value and water access through a two-acre pocket beach.
- **Tiawasee Creek Stormwater Facility & Forever Wild D'Olive Acquisition:** The City of Daphne gave the update on two existing stormwater management facilities that are being redesigned to address water quality and water quantity, as the previous designs only addressed water quantity. They hope to begin construction in September of this year. City of Daphne also has purchased land with Forever Wild assistance in order to preserve and protect acreage on Valentine Island and along D'Olive Bay, totaling 310 acres. The City also hoped to acquire some additional parcels along the road and finalize that purchase by the end of the year.
- **Bon Secour Headwaters Restoration:** The City of Foley reported on this project. This project will implement a constructed stormwater wetland to catch diverted flow and treat nutrients, sediment, and collect floatables. This project was identified in the Bon Secour WMP as a top priority and it is great to see the WMP being put to good use.

A video was provided by MBNEP to update the PIC on the status of MBNEP watershed management plans, restoration projects, and the impact that COVID-19 has had on these projects. Most project timelines have not been seriously impacted by COVID-19; however, the pandemic has increased electronic communication, created a demand for virtual meetings and thinking outside of the box to engage stakeholders and project partners.

5. Old Business

- **Status of Coal Ash Education Effort:** We have completed legal and hydrogeologic fact sheets. We conducted a hydrogeologic assessment and the structural integrity analysis report will be finalized soon. We are hoping to have the film complete within the next few weeks. We will review with the co-chairs of the GNC as the request to undertake this project came from them and has been financially supported by both counties. We've already had an initial review with some representatives from Mobile and Baldwin Counties and the SAC co-chairs. We have not developed a release plan yet but will consider providing the Executive Committee with an opportunity to view the film before we release to GNC and management conference. (Note: The film was released to the entire management conference at once on the recommendation of the EC Co-Chairs- to ensure all had the access to the film at the same time).

Casi Callaway inquired as to whether the film will make a recommendation.

Ms. Swann stated the film provide a well-rounded perspective of what is planned for the Plant Barry closure and the factors related to both closure options outlined in the rule. It does not present opinions although it does encourage viewers to get involved in the watershed planning process underway. It is a synopsis of the research that we've done. MBNEP will include a disclosure stating, "The film is not a representation of the MBNEP Management Conference, rather a product of the MBNEP program."

6. New Business

- **Embrace the Gulf:** To highlight the value and the vitality of the Gulf of Mexico region, the Gulf of Mexico Alliance is implementing a Gulf-wide awareness campaign called "Embrace the Gulf" for the entire year of 2020. The awareness campaign will culminate in a multi-stakeholder, cross-sector celebration of the importance of the Gulf of Mexico. This campaign includes 365 Positive Gulf Messages posted daily through Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The campaign is also being supported through proclamations declaring 2020 as the year to Embrace the Gulf. Mobile County has already signed a proclamation supporting this campaign. MBNEP would like the Executive Committee to sign the proclamation. A motion to approve from Chris Blankenship, seconded by Leslie Gahagan. The motion carries.

7. Other / Announcements

The meeting adjourned at 10:30 a.m. after a motion by Amy Hunter and seconded by Casi Callaway.