



**Mobile Bay National Estuary Program  
Government Networks Committee  
August 14, 2020, 8:30 am – 10:00 am  
Zoom Virtual Meeting**



**Agenda**

Meeting Objectives:

- a) Management Conference Committee Status Review
- b) Provide status of NFWF GEBF & RESTORE funding and Watershed Planning
- c) Wrap-up Coal Ash project
- d) Discuss the value of the MBNEP
- e) EPA-NEP Program Evaluation Team Q & A

**1. Welcome and Introductions**

GNC Co-Chairs:

- Commissioner Merceria Ludgood, Mobile County
- Commissioner Billie Jo Underwood, Baldwin County

**2. Review and Approval of Minutes**

**3. Old Business**

- a) Management Conference Committee Status Review
- b) NFWF GEBF/RESTORE Update
- c) Watershed Planning Update

**4. New Business**

- a) Coal Ash wrap-up
- b) State and Local Investment in the MBNEP
- c) Value of the MBNEP
- d) EPA-NEP Program Evaluation Team Q & A
- e) Schedule next meeting

**5. Adjourn**

## Minutes

**In attendance:** Ashley Campbell, City of Daphne; Merceria Ludgood, Mobile County Commission; William Puckett, Alabama Soil & Water Conservation Committee; Tina Sanchez, Mobile County Commission; Rosemary Ginn, City of Mobile; Veronica Hudson, Saraland City Council; Scott Bannon, ADCNR-MRD; Margie Wilcox, AL House of Representatives; Lynn Battle, ADEM; Jeff Collier, Town of Dauphin Island; Billie Jo Underwood, Baldwin County Commission; Chris Blankenship, ADCNR; Joseph Abston, Washington County Commission; Chris Thomas, EPA Region 4; Tom Williams, City of Satsuma; Patty McCurdy, ADCNR-State Lands; John Valentine, DISL; Diane Burnett, SARPC; Newton Cromer, Saraland City Council; Three unidentified participants via phone.

**EPA-NEP PE Team:** Romell Nandi, EPA Headquarters; Kathy Hill, Indian River Lagoon NEP; and Chris Plymale, EPA Region 4

**Staff:** Roberta Swann, Bethany Hudson, Christian Miller

## Takeaways

- The NEP has wrapped up their coal ash project and we encourage all GNC members to take advantage of these resources and to communicate their effectiveness to colleagues and constituents.
- The State, counties, and local municipalities have been great supporters of MBNEP since its inception but more work is needed to strategize with the Finance Committee on long-term funding for the program.
- The counties and municipalities have realized great benefits from their participation with the MBNEP through leveraging of funds to complete priority projects and provision of educational materials supporting programs and meeting MS4 requirements.

Meeting began at 8:35 a.m. A motion was made to accept the minutes from the previous meeting by Commissioner Ludgood and seconded by William Puckett. The minutes were accepted.

NFWF/RESTORE update, Commissioner Blankenship

- The easiest way to get updates on approved projects is to visit the Alabama Coastal Restoration website. <https://www.alabamacoastalrestoration.org/>
- All but one of the Bucket 1 projects have been submitted and awarded by the Federal Council.
- All Bucket 3 projects are on track to be submitted to Federal Council by October. Still working with cities and counties to get required documentation together. Over half of these projects have been awarded.
- NRDA – Restoration plan three came out in December and included bird and recreational use projects. One of these is the renovations to the Gulf State Park fishing pier which should be wrapped up by the first of September. An elevated and handicapped-accessible observation tower will be on the end of the pier. Work started on the Ft. Morgan pier this week. Bird habitat projects are also underway. Region-wide TIG is working on Oyster, bird; marine mammal projects and a restoration plan draft should be available later this year.
- NFWF – Three projects are working through the process this year and will be announced in November and include construction money for projects that were awarded engineering and design funds in previous years.
- RESTORE – working on the next FPL which will be made public in October/November and awarded in April 2021 accounting for \$302 million gulf-wide. Working to get many good Alabama projects included.

Watershed Planning Update

- Wolf Bay plan is out for public comment and available on the NEP Website. [http://www.mobilebaynep.com/the\\_watersheds/wolf\\_bay\\_watershed/](http://www.mobilebaynep.com/the_watersheds/wolf_bay_watershed/)

- Western Shore, Gulf Frontal, MTA Delta, D'Olive Update are all in progress. Fly Creek/Eastern Shore WMP is just starting.
- The next plans to get started will most likely be Dauphin Island followed by the Eastern and Western Delta watersheds. Watershed baseline sediment studies will be necessary in the east and west delta watersheds to feed data into the WMP but won't be necessary for the Dauphin Island plan.
- For regular updates on WMP status please visit the NEP website:  
[http://www.mobilebaynep.com/the\\_watersheds](http://www.mobilebaynep.com/the_watersheds)

Roberta gave an update on what MBNEP Management Conference Committees have been working on:

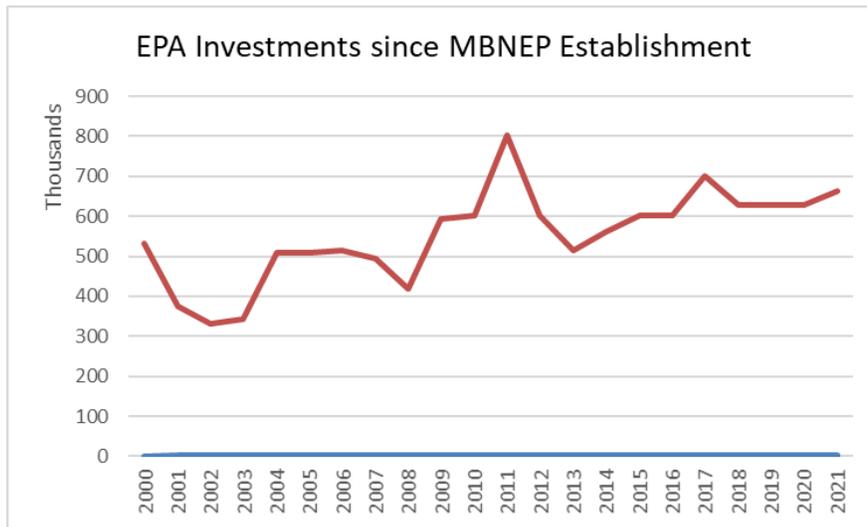
- **GNC:** Coal ash education, watershed planning status, and legislative activities
- **PIC:** Watershed planning, project implementation, and shorelines planning
- **FC:** Strategizing for the long-term sustainability for the MBNEP
- **SAC:** Stressor evaluation, watershed modeling, comprehensive ecosystem modeling for the greater Mobile Bay Watershed
- **BRC:** Oyster aquaculture/support for restoration, Marketing campaign for farm-raised oysters, access to capital for commercial fisheries interests
- **CRC:** Development of a work plan to address trash, litter, and marine debris
- **CAC:** Focusing on citizen science: WQ, flooding, SSOs, phytoplankton, DO, invasive and native plant species, and other data collection opportunities

#### Coal Ash wrap-up

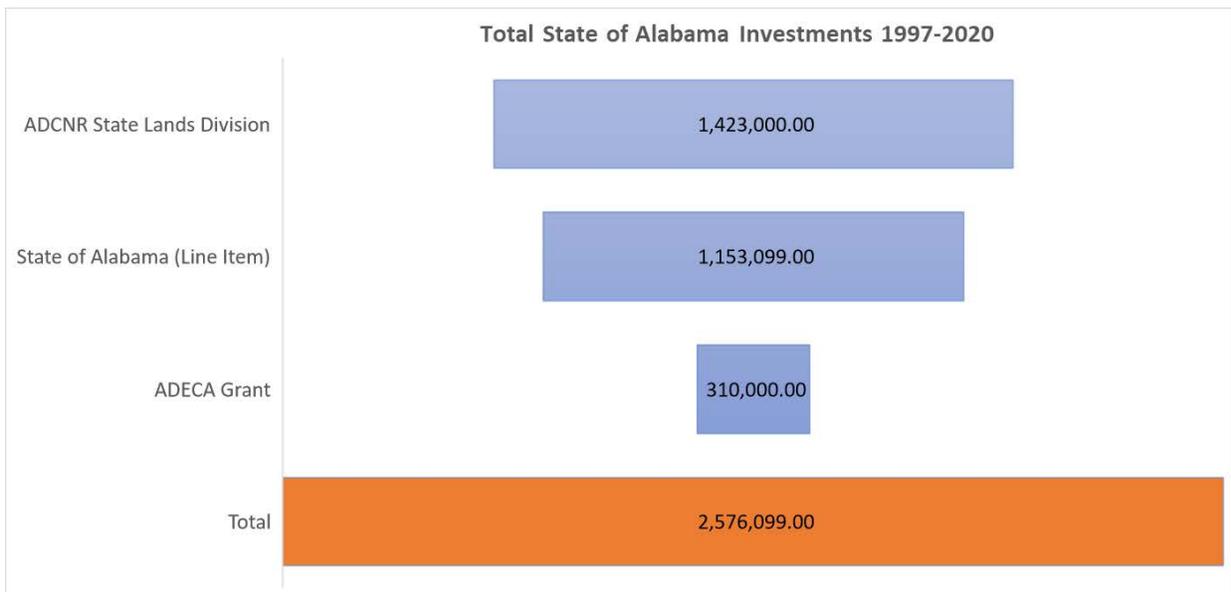
- Over the last year we have heard from third-party experts from across the country on the subject of coal ash.
- This committee has heard presentations from Marlon Cook on the hydrogeologic factors influencing the closure as well as Bob Snow's structural integrity review of the ash pond closure plan.
- Coal ash resources, including the movie *the Unintended Consequences of Convenience* are available here:  
[http://www.mobilebaynep.com/index.php/the\\_watersheds/tensaw\\_apalachee\\_watershed/coal\\_ash](http://www.mobilebaynep.com/index.php/the_watersheds/tensaw_apalachee_watershed/coal_ash)
- Please pass this information on to anyone who asks or would benefit from watching it.
- Commissioner Ludgood stated that that the film was what she had hoped for and that it gives enough information to draw your own conclusions about what works best.
- Commissioner Ludgood represents the area affected by the ash pond closure and has not received concerns from constituents in the area regarding the ash pond and has encouraged them to watch the film.
- Commissioner Underwood has spoken with people in Baldwin County who have viewed the film and said the response she has received has been positive and the film provided an objective overview of the issue.
- Margie said the film is a useful tool and appreciates MBNEP providing the information.
- Newton said he thought the information was very objective and fairly presented.

#### State and Local Investment in the MBNEP

- From 2000 forward the EPA has invested over \$12 million in the MBNEP and in projects that it has undertaken. Over time this funding has been used to sustain the MBNEP while we have sought to acquire extramural funding for projects. The MBNEP's Finance Committee must strategize and consider how the EPA and State and local funds are best invested going forward.



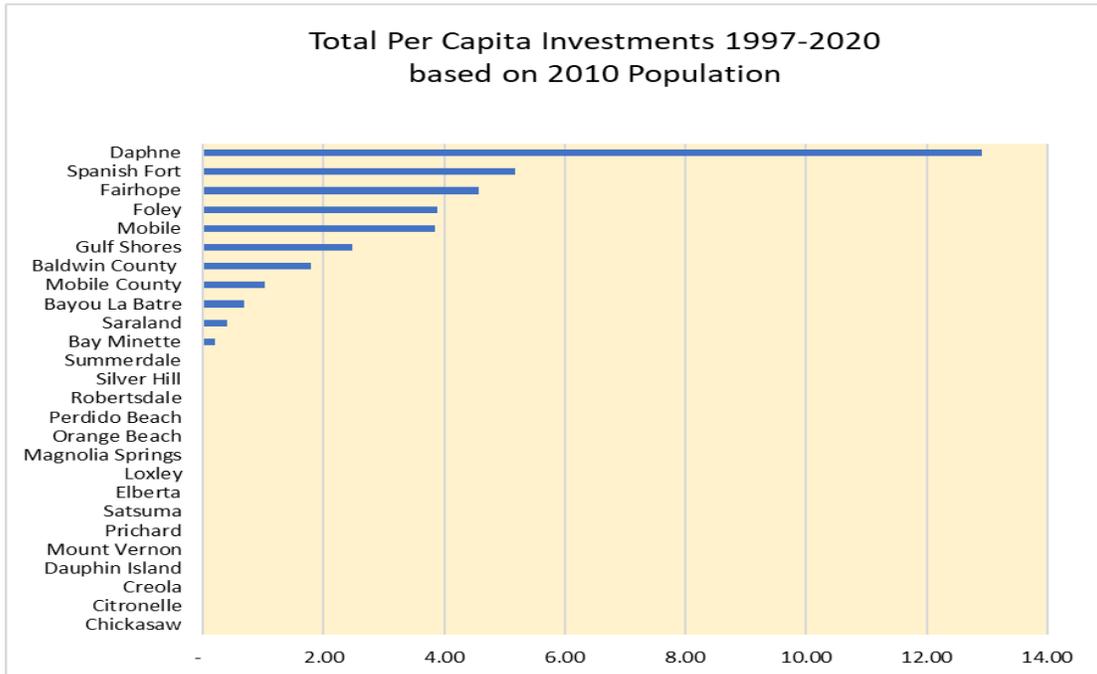
- State funding in the MBNEP has been very robust. Not all NEPs enjoy this level of state support. ADECA provided initial funding which shifted to ADCNR/State Lands in 2002. This funding has been steady and has increased since 2014 as BP spill money has come online and MBNEP has helped getting this funding on the ground. In 2008 the coastal legislative delegation succeeded in establishing a State line item through the education trust fund as part of DISL’s appropriation specified for the MBNEP.
- A total of over \$2.5 million dollars has been provided by the State of Alabama for which the MBNEP is thankful. An impressive investment by the State.



- Mobile and Baldwin counties and the City of Mobile have been staunch supporters of the MBNEP since its inception. MBNEP receives \$660,000/year from EPA which must be matched 1:1 from local monies. The counties, along with the City of Mobile, have been great supporters. Daphne has also provided a tremendous amount of funding which tells the story of the value of watershed planning.
- Saraland and Bay Minette also provided initial Program funding and we look forward to going back into those communities as we commence watershed planning in those areas.
- Daphne and Spanish Fort have been great supporters of the MBNEP and have also realized the greatest benefits of investments due to their involvement in the watershed planning and implementation process.
- In relation to added value, Merceria mentioned that she was talking to a constituent about an ongoing project that was the result of a drainage study funded by MBNEP. As a result of that initial \$50K investment by MBNEP, four bridge projects and associated infrastructure projects had materialized. The first bridge project is ~\$800K and the others are significantly more. The people

that live in those areas that have been subjected to flooding and SSO's have greatly benefited and appreciate the investment.

- Newton mentioned that Saraland has experienced a lot of flooding issues which are due to runoff and sedimentation. The communities have benefited from a lot of studies undertaken by USACE and MBNEP and we appreciate the hard work of Commissioner Ludgood who has championed the



efforts to support our communities. The efforts of MBNEP to provide data to support local investments in our communities are appreciated.

- The Finance Committee has been reestablished to work on long-term funding strategies. There is a potential that Federal dollars get cut. The future of Federal monies is uncertain. This is why we continue to ask how MBNEP provides value to you and what we can do to increase this value.
- At some point the question should be asked of whether or not to shift to using local dollars for our operational budget and use EPA dollars to support community projects. State and local dollars = ~\$300K while MBNEP's operational costs are ~\$800K.
- MBNEP doesn't do fundraising projects. We rely on our state and local governments to provide funding. We hope to recruit several of our GNC members to participate on our Finance Committee so that we can better communicate the MBNEP's value to local communities.
- Billie Jo stated Baldwin County is in budget deliberations and will be debating miscellaneous funding soon. There are three new Commissioners (including myself) that may not understand the importance of the work done by MBNEP. My participation on the GNC has helped me understand the importance of the work of this organization and the environmental issues facing Baldwin County. This will continue to be a learning experience for the new Commissioners to ensure we are making the best investments for Baldwin County.
- Mayor Collier spoke highly of the Trash Blows campaign which started several years ago in conjunction with the DI Deep Sea Fishing Rodeo. Banners along the roadways and educational materials at the Rodeo site (provided by the Mobile Jaycees) highlighted the importance of stowing trash in boats and trucks and anecdotally we think there has been a reduction in trash on local roadways.

#### Value of the MBNEP

- Tina said that Mobile County has through time, starting with CIAP funds, prioritized conservation and land acquisition and was pleased to assist with the conservation of priority bottom land hardwood wetland parcels in the Dog River Watershed along Halls Mill Creek. We are waiting on the funding agreement from NFWF and will have more information as we move forward with this ~\$2.5 million project.

- The County appreciates the framework provided through the CCMP which demonstrates public value for access which we have been using to justify GOMESA funding to provide additional access points throughout the County.
  - The NEP and the County have partnered on a large and complex shoreline restoration project along the DI Causeway that focuses on increasing community and habitat resilience. This project protects critical habitat and the only transportation route on and off Dauphin Island.
  - Commissioner Blankenship stated that this project is very important to Dauphin Island and we have been promoting its importance to funders in Washington DC. We appreciate the County and MBNEP taking on this challenging project and once complete will be a testament to the great cooperation between the County and the NEP.
  - Rosemary Ginn, Stormwater Manager with the City of Mobile, stated that the City appreciates the partnership with the NEP and all the efforts they have been a part of including the Create a Clean Water Future program and watershed plans for Three Mile Creek and Dog River.
  - The City recently received an EPA Trash Free Waters grant which would not have been possible without the partnership and hard work of the NEP. The Litter Gitters have been very effective at capturing trash in the TMC Watershed and we've been able to leverage this initial partnership to sustain and expand the program.
  - In 2019 the City was able to pass a stormwater utility fee that has enabled us to do more, but that initial funding through the NEP was critical to stand up and help sustain the City's MS4 programs. This work garnered the attention of EPA Region 4 administrator Mary Walker, who visited Mobile to see the good work going on. It was nice to be acknowledged for something positive.
  - There are several capital projects implementing the TMC WMP underway including: 12 Mile stream restoration (2 separate projects), Langdan Park Lake dredging, invasive species management (mainly vegetative), and the TMC trail project.
  - Ashley Campbell with the City of Daphne said the NEP was there from the beginning in 2007 when there was a struggle to get a handle on the issues which resulted in the initial D'Olive WMP. This WMP delivered the scope of the problem and provided a solution to fixing it. We are now ten years into implementation and are realizing the benefits of our partnership with MBNEP.
  - The Clean Water Future campaign has been a very valuable tool for educating elected officials, staff, and citizens. These materials are available to anyone for free and are a huge benefit to Daphne and other cities around the State.
  - The various management conference committees (PIC and SAC) have provided opportunities to solve problems and are a great benefit.
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- Working through the Intergovernmental Task Force that was established during the WMP has allowed the cities of Daphne, Spanish Ft, and Baldwin County to come together and solve shared problems under the leadership of the NEP. Through these efforts we have been able to restore Joe's Branch. This project received a lot of recognition, won several awards, and withstood the major rain event in spring of 2014. This success led to additional funding through NFWF to restore additional streams, and this year Joe's Branch was able to be de-listed from the State's impaired waters list. We are proud to support the NEP and we have seen that for every \$1 invested by Daphne into the NEP has returned \$86. We are a proud partner with MBNEP.

#### EPA-NEP Program Evaluation Team

- Romell asked about the efforts, in general, by the GNC and members to support watershed planning. Billie Jo said that Baldwin County doesn't have an environmental planner and that is something we need at the County. Billie Jo appreciated hearing from Ashley and learned a lot from today's program. The NEP has helped to fill this need for the County. Merceria said that when she first became an elected official environmental issues were near the bottom of her list in terms of

importance. It was only after becoming involved with the NEP that she became aware that the sources of a lot of the County's problems were related to stormwater management and other environmental issues. The GNC has enabled elected officials from across lower Alabama to be more effective managers and stewards of the environment. Bill Puckett said he has appreciated the NEP and being able to work on the various committees on agricultural issues through the watershed planning process. Margie Wilcox stated that she appreciated the NEP and all their efforts in passing the litter legislation. Margie also stated that she would like to help the NEP at the State level on budgeting/funding issues.

- Kathy said she understood there to be some constitutional barrier that prevents counties from working cooperatively to solve watershed issues. Roberta said that the lack of home rule hasn't really prevented this work and the NEP has served as a conduit to get a lot of this work accomplished. Merceria said that Randy Davis had passed some legislation in the past that helped make this process easier and working through the NEP doesn't violate the constitutional prohibition. Romell said this is very good value-added for the NEP to be able to allow this type of cooperation.
- Romell asked if the GNC has worked to improve stormwater management plans to combat litter and trash. Roberta said there is a tremendous amount of effort locally to deal with litter. The GNC has worked with Margie to help pass state-wide legislation to strengthen litter regulations.
- Romell asked what type of information is needed at the State and local levels to help argue for sustained investment in the NEP. Ashley said that the return on investment information is very important to be able to show her City Council and justify the continued investment in the program. Roberta said that it is common practice to provide a return on investment information with funding requests to cities and counties. Merceria said it's important for those of us that are involved with the NEP to consistently share our information with our colleagues who are unaware of the importance of environmental issues. Patty said the NEP has been instrumental in helping to leverage multiple funding sources to get projects on the ground.

Meeting was adjourned at 10:20 a.m.