

**Mobile Bay National Estuary Program
Project Implementation Committee Meeting
Thursday, February 18, 2016
Fourth Floor, International Trade Center**

Minutes

Attendees:

Carol Adams-Davis (Sierra Club)	Sherry Allison (Allen Engineering)
Doug Bangham (CH2M)	Michael Barnett (Tetra Tech)
Emery Baya (Thompson Engineering)	Mark Berte (AL Coastal Foundation)
Dan Bond (City of Gulf Shores)	Leah Bray (Anchor AEA)
Wade Burcham (Int. Science & Eng)	Casi Callaway (Mobile Baykeeper)
Joe Dalrymple (Louis Berger)	Dr. Bert Eichold (Mobile County Hlth Dept)
Camilla English (Bldwin County Hlth Dept)	Benji Elmore (AL Forestry Commission)
Mike Eubanks (Thompson Engineering)	Paige Felts (Volkert)
Carl Ferraro (ADCNR-SLD)	Ricky Fields (AL Forestry Commission)
Debi Foster (DR Clearwater Rev/Peninsula)	Leslie Gahagan (City of Foley)
Meg Goecker (Moffatt & Nichols)	Tracey Hall (Mobile County NRCS/USDA)
Chuck Greer (Payne Environmental)	Judy Haner (The Nature Conservancy)
Patric Harper (US Fish & Wildlife Service)	Bob Harris (Alabama State Port Authority)
Doug Heatwole (Ecology & Environment)	Byron Hinchey (AMEC Foster Wheeler)
Phillip Hinesley (ADCNR-SLD)	Scott Jackson (Ecology & Environment)
Andy James (Vokert)	Cade Kistler (Mobile Baykeeper)
Dina Knight (Dewberry)	Joey Koptis (USDA/NRCS)
Jason Kudulis (Mobile Baykeeper)	Kara Lankford (Ocean Conservancy)
Ken Leslie (AL Forestry Commission)	John Mareska (AL MRD)
Shannon McGlynn (ADEM)	Joyce Nicholas (Mobile County SWCD)
Steve O'Hearn (Thompson Engineering)	Jon Porthouse (NFWF)
Larry Parson (US Army Corps of Engineers)	Ray Richardson (City of Mobile)
Justin Rigdon (ADEM)	Kari Servold (Dewberry)
Sam St. John (Baykeeper)	Randy Shaneyfelt (ADEM)
David Stejstal (CH2M)	Mary Beth Sullivan (City of Mobile)
Dan Van Nostrand (NOAA)	Lee Walters (Goodwyn Mills Cawood)

MBNEP Staff: Roberta Swann, Amy Newbold, Christian Miller, Tom Herder

Takeaways

- With watershed management planning ongoing and ramping up as RESTORE-funded projects come on line, the Committee was generally in consensus over grouping HUC 12 watersheds for planning purposes based on proximity, geography, and common receiving waters to increase efficiency and maximize economy of scale.
- The Corps-facilitated Interagency Working Group has been successful at recommending and evaluating new and alternative strategies for sediment management in the face of federal Corps charge to manage the Mobile Ship Channel.
- The Alabama Barrier Island Restoration Study is a comprehensive collaboration between the Corps, the U. S. Geological Survey, and the State of Alabama to protect and restore over 200 acres of diverse barrier island habitat and the estuarine habitats they protect. This 3.75 year study will be funded through a \$4.2M grant from the NFWF Gulf Environmental Benefits Fund.

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 12:30 pm by Patric Harper.

2. Approval of the Minutes

Mr. Harper asked for any deletions, additions, changes to the minutes from November, 2015 and offered that those minutes still held the date of the previous PIC meeting. Tom Herder said he would correct that error. Hearing none other, he called for a motion to approve the minutes. Sam St. John made the motion, which Carl Ferraro seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Judy Haner offered brief remarks, noting that this first meeting of the year would be packed with information and hoping that it would alleviate some of the load of future meetings. Tom Herder expressed thanks to Goodwyn, Mills and Cawood who graciously provided lunch for Clean Water Partnership and PIC members.

3. Old Business

A. Progress Reports/Updates on Watershed Management Planning – Christian Miller, MBNEP/AUMERC/CACWP

Christian Miller began his report with a summary of the Fowl River Watershed Management Plan (WMP) reporting it was completed and out in draft for comment on the MBNEP website. While the comment period closes on February 22, he felt the deadline would be extended for two additional weeks. He reported the WMP recommends a list of priority projects including one coastal project on a ~13-acre parcel owned by the Bellingrath Foundation with 2,200 feet of shoreline.

With regard to the Bon Secour WMP being developed by Volkert and managed by Leslie Gahagan, the scope, which originally also included Oyster Bay, has been modified to include Skunk Bayou, due to public input and geographical proximity and similarity. Outreach efforts have been strong, with targeted group meetings, two large community meetings, and septic tank workshops. Watershed characterization and field assessments are ongoing.

Goodwyn Mills Cawood is working on the Dog River Complex WMP, currently undertaking watershed characterization. Having experienced “issues” getting details from the City of Mobile, GMC is currently doing assessments in the field. A meeting with MAWSS on data related to sanitary sewer overflows is upcoming, along with recently completed targeted stakeholder meetings with builders, recreational users, and businesses. Completion is targeted for the end of 2016.

Thompson Engineering is working to develop the Fish River (or Weeks Bay) WMP including Upper, Middle, and Lower Fish River Watersheds, as well as Magnolia River. Joey Koptis of Baldwin County NRCS is working with the agricultural community and has conducted two meetings thus far. Thompson will expand the outreach effort, hosting a stakeholder workshop on March 2. Mike Eubanks pointed out Mr. Koptis represents the farmers, but they are seeking developers, municipalities and public works staffs, and environmental groups in the expanded effort. Focus group meetings are being initiated to identify problems, initiatives, and actions, and a literature survey is ongoing (with lots available from the Weeks Bay NERR).

Mr. Miller discussed the Bayou Le Batre WMP where municipal officials and south Mobile County farmers have been engaged by Dewberry and the Mobile County NRCS, respectively. As the watershed characterization is progressing towards a draft, Christian said Dewberry has been asked to delay completing this plan until MBNEP determines whether or not the scope can be expanded to include the two other Mississippi Sound watersheds with similar issues.

Mr. Miller then raised an issue for discussion: He commented on the need for flexibility in the pursuit of efficiency, economy of scale, and cooperation between NFWF and RESTORE Act funders. Related to the DI Barrier Island Study (a topic of later discussion), an NFWF-funded joint initiative being undertaken by ADCNR, the U. S. Geological Survey, and the U. S. Army Corp of Engineers Mobile District, Christian said the Corps asked if the MBNEP could partner to kick start a watershed management planning effort on Dauphin Island to provide the stakeholder engagement necessary for their study. Since the Corps has already collected much of the data necessary for such an effort, it makes sense to do this. The current strategy entails expanding Dewberry's scope to include the West Fowl River and Dauphin Island watersheds.

Ms. Haner expanded on this issue, noting it takes three months to contract a firm for each WMP. NFWF funding has accelerated the process, and beyond NFWF-funded projects, 19 more are slated for planning, all funded through the RESTORE Act. This work load demands efficiency.

Casi Callaway asked whether the decision to add Magnolia River to the Thompson Weeks Bay Complex was made from the outset, prior to bidding. Christian responded that adding Magnolia River made sense due to drainage, proximity, and geographic similarity. Skunk Bayou was added to the Bon Secour scope since many of the stakeholders involved in Bon Secour planning actually lived within the Skunk Bayou watershed. Economies of scale were also realized by this post-bid consolidation.

Dan Van Nostrand voiced support for this approach, and Leslie Gahagan voiced agreement. Randy Shaneyfelt, referring to the Mississippi Sound complex, noted that each of the included watersheds drained into common receiving waters. Ms. Callaway said that she does not disagree with the philosophy, but she encouraged consideration of consolidation before the bid process.

Mr. Shaneyfelt asked why the Grand Bay Watershed was not included in the Mississippi Sound Complex. Ms. Haner answered that Grand Bay was distinct from the others, which were identified in the prioritization process as targets of restoration. Grand Bay rose as a watershed for acquisition and protection, rather than restoration.

Emery Baya briefly explained the process by which Magnolia Springs was added to the Fish River effort. He made an additional pitch to stakeholders for the upcoming focus group meeting to PIC members, hoping that anyone interested should get involved.

Mr. Miller said the next RFQ to be distributed would likely be Wolf Bay sometime in April. Joyce Nicholas asked where we currently stand on watershed plans identified in the prioritization effort. Ms. Haner responded that we have gone pretty far down the list. A status report is included:

Fish River	Ongoing
Tensaw Apalachee (Grand Bay, Basin)	NFWF Funded
Big Creek	Done
Bon Secour	Ongoing
Fowl River	Done/Draft
West Fowl River/Delchamps Bayou	WFR NFWF Funded
Dog River	Ongoing
Deer River	Federal
Grand Bay Swamp	Federal
Wolf Bay (Graham Bayou, Sandy Creek, Mifflin Creek, Hammock Creek)	NFWF Funded
Bayou La Batre River	Ongoing
Oyster Bay	Ongoing (Included with Bon Secour)
Dauphin Island	Federal
Little Lagoon	Federal
Upper Blackwater	Federal
Rains Creek	Federal
Halls Creek	Federal
Skunk Bayou	Ongoing (Included with Bon Secour)
Negro Creek	Federal
Cedar Creek	Federal
Bayou Sara	Federal
Lower Chasaw Creek	Federal
Garrow's Bend	Planned Federal (Added to Dog River Contract)
Lower Bay Minette Creek	Federal
Fly Creek (Yancey Branch, Gum Swamp)	Federal
Magnolia River	Ongoing (Added to Fish River)
Bridge Creek-Perdido Bay	Federal
Palmetto Creek-Perdido Bay	Federal

Christian responded that Apalachee-Tensaw presents certain challenges and we are still looking for the best way to tackle it. Ms. Nicholas expressed hopes that at the next meeting we can look at what remains. (See above)

Doug Heatwole asked who will take the lead in managing the Wolf Bay planning effort. Christian responded it has yet to be determined.

4. New Business

A. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Matters

1) Interagency Working Group Activities. Larry Parson's complete presentation is available on the Mobile Bay NEP website in pdf form. He reported the IWF was established for managing sediments, and especially those related to navigation projects. He noted on a map the 40-mile long

Mobile ship channel which the Corps, by law, is charged with maintaining. He noted challenges related to the last federal authorizations:

- Water Resources Development Act 1986 authorized widening and deepening of the Mobile Ship Channel, but required dredged material be disposed of in open water in the Gulf of Mexico, requiring expensive, relatively-inefficient use of hopper dredges.
- WRDA 1996 allowed consideration of alternatives to disposal of dredged material in the Gulf of Mexico, including environmentally-acceptable alternatives for beneficial uses of dredged material and environmental restoration.

A 2009-2010 Mobile Bay Regional Sediment Management Watershed Study made recommendations that included consideration and development of in-bay disposal strategies, utilization of cutterhead dredges, and establishment of an Interagency Working Group to develop a sediment management strategy. (Note: Establishment of this working group establishment was included in the 2013-2018 CCMP).

This IWG included a comprehensive list of state and federal agencies, research organizations, the MBNEP, and NGOs. Their charge included development of short- and long-term bay disposal strategies, using environmentally-favorable alternatives for beneficially using dredge material, and identifying, evaluating, and utilizing new and existing techniques and management measures to evaluate these options. Mr. Parson provided a slide documenting the progress and history of the IWG from February 2012 through December 2015.

Major accomplishments included:

- Development of a Mobile Bay Sediment Budget funded by the MBNEP and the US Army Corps of Engineers and developed by Mark Byrnes of Applied Coastal Research and Engineering. This study, which was reviewed by the SAC, shows sources and delivery of sediments into and out of Mobile Bay.
- Restoration of Brookley Hole using material delivered through the use of cutterhead barges with baffled-bottom delivery methodologies that beneficially use material to bring the hypoxic/anoxic former borrow site up to near-bottom grade, restoring biological productivity and saving \$8-10M. A link to an abstract of an Engineer Research and Development Center study is here ([http://acwc.sdp.sirsi.net/client/en_US/default/search/detailnonmodal/ent:\\$002f\\$002fSD_ASSET\\$002f0\\$002f1035800/ada/?ic=true&qu=Coastal+ecology+--+Data+processing](http://acwc.sdp.sirsi.net/client/en_US/default/search/detailnonmodal/ent:$002f$002fSD_ASSET$002f0$002f1035800/ada/?ic=true&qu=Coastal+ecology+--+Data+processing)) and Mr. Parson offered to provide copies of the study
- A heavily and continuously studied long term in-bay disposal protocol involving thin-layer disposal in specific targeted cells at four to six year intervals that offers significant savings in dredging costs and used as a demonstration to monitor and model behavior. (Details of studies are included in the presentation.)
- Proposed tidal marsh creation in upper Mobile Bay, to serve as a long-term beneficial use site. Hydrographic survey of upper bay, SAV survey and cultural resources surveys have been completed, leading to selection of a 1,200-acre project footprint. Phase 1 (Planning) has been approved from the RESTORE Bucket 2 Funded Priority List to include geotechnical investigations, determination of final footprint, preliminary design, environmental compliance and National Environmental Policy Act documentation, and regulatory permitting. Phase 2 (Construction) is not part of the initial funding but will

include construction of a containment feature and creation of an initial 100 acres of marsh. The project is envisioned to be implemented over a period of about 20 years.

Mr. Parson mentioned additional IWG recommendations, including restoration of Airport Hole and use of dredged material to fill historic oyster holes. Finally, he listed realized benefits resulting from IWG activities.

2) Dauphin Island Strategic Plan. Elizabeth Godsey, a Coastal Engineer and Technical Lead at the Corps Mobile District, opened by clarifying that the Alabama Barrier Island (essentially Dauphin Island) Restoration Study is not a Corps initiative but rather a partnership between the AL Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the U. S. Geological Survey, and the USACE, funded through the NFWF Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund.

Her presentation will be available on the MBNEP website in pdf format. She provided background, noting that DI is strategically significant, with over 200 acres of diverse barrier island habitat. DI protects a third of Mississippi Sound and various essential estuarine habitats, provides for 347 reported bird species, is an important tourist destination and the location of the State's marine education facilities, and supports a hub for recreational and commercial fishing and the oil/gas industry.

Ms. Godsey reviewed significant events impacting DI habitat and previous efforts to protect and preserve island features and noted that a comprehensive restoration plan does not currently exist. The study is a collaborative effort to investigate viable, sustainable restoration options that protect and restore the resources of Dauphin Island, including habitat and living coastal and marine resources, as well as protect the coastal resources of the Mississippi Sound/Mobile Bay and the southern portion of Mobile County including the expansive Heron Bay wetlands. The study's scope includes data collection and modeling to evaluate the most resilient and sustainable restoration activities and configuration in support of critical habitat and resources. The budget of \$4.2M covers a 3.75 year schedule with an interim report due in December 2016 and a final report by March 2019.

Key study tasks were listed and described and can be found in her presentation. They include a discussion of restoration alternatives that include alternative formulations and evaluations, development of a tool to assess alternatives, and provision of rough order-of-magnitude cost estimates for each reasonable restoration alternative. She noted that this discussion would not include recommendations of specific alternatives.

B Reports from the ADCNR-State Lands Division

1) Progress Report on Marsh Island Restoration Carl Ferraro reported that this project, funded through NRDA Early Restoration Phase I funding, went to bid in December with bid opening in January. A \$4.4M bid was submitted by 4H Construction of Mississippi, falling \$2.6M under Thompson Engineering's Opinion of Probable Cost. A slight modification to the Corps permit involves modifying wave attenuating materials between oyster break and rubble mound. With contracting and a notice to proceed pending, the State is looking to begin construction in the spring. Features include 3.2K feet of breakwater on the south side, 50 acres of salt marsh, and containment dikes cut by tidal creeks. Accretion of material is expected to offset sea level rise.

Ms. Goecker asked whether the funding balance could be applied to Monitoring. Mr. Ferraro responded that five years of monitoring (including plant density) is currently planned and his intention is to hold back the balance for potential adaptive management over the five-year period.

2) RESTORE Bucket #2 Projects, NRDA, etc. Mr. Ferraro began by listing NRDA Early Restoration Phase IV projects, including:

- \$45K to install and monitor osprey platforms in coastal AL with five years of monitoring.
- Two living shorelines projects. The State is currently working through the details and contracting.
 - The northeast shoreline of Point Aux Pines where DISL put oyster breakwaters. The gap will be filled with 2,500 linear feet with some wave attenuation.
 - Shell Belt/Coden Belt roads (currently bulkheaded with riprap). Wave attenuation units will be installed 100 feet south of the bulkhead and marsh will be created.

He also listed **RESTORE Bucket #2 projects**, including:

- MBNEP Projects (Three Mile Creek restoration to reduce sediment delivery to Langan Park and TMC Invasive Species Control Plan and Implementation).
- Corps of Engineers/IWG Salt Marsh Creation Phase 1
- AL Living Shorelines Program
 - Boggy Point Boat Ramp – Orange Beach
 - Study for southeast side of Coffee Island at the TNC reefs (further restoration protection)
 - Pt. Aux Pines Living Shoreline project south of the canal to tie into the NRDA project
- Comprehensive Living Shorelines Monitoring program to monitor 11 living shorelines projects (including Pt. Aux Pines, Helen Wood Park, AL Port, Swift Track, etc.) using one set of monitoring parameters for a five year period to recommend adaptive management measures.
- AL SAV Restoration and Monitoring Program
 - Seagrass Protection/Restoration in lower Perdido Bay around Robinson Island and Old River, including signage, bird stakes, no motor zone over five years.
 - Upper Mobile Bay/Lower Tensaw Delta SAV Protection Program. Employing Dr. Heck's ideas of growing *Vallisneria* from seed, including using nursery setting to develop plugs for planting.
 - SAV Mapping with MBNEP. Continuing this effort for three additional efforts.
- Mr. Van Nostrand added the NOAA Hydrologic Restoration Project involving restoration in dead-end canal sites near Weeks Bay NERR, Meadows Tract, and County Road 4.
- Beneficial use of dredge material at Denton Reef with shell plantings. Investigating the feasibility of using dredge material beneficially to raise the bottom to more productive levels.
- Mississippi Sound Back Bay Restoration Feasibility Study to investigate restoration of Grand Batture Marsh Island, Isle Aux Dames, and South Pt. Aux Pines. If feasible, move on to design and regulatory compliance.
- Lower Perdido Bay Hydrological Model and Sediment Transport Study, the first ever to be undertaken in the vicinity of Perdido Pass in part to identify beneficial use opportunities. Justin Ridgon said that hydrologic data is available for lower Perdido, but not at high resolution. Mr. Ferraro expressed hopes that he would like them shared when things get moving.

Ms. Goecker commented on whether or not the living shorelines project is necessary if the Pt. Aux Pines study reveals feasibility. Mr. Ferraro responded that things are moving at a measured pace in part with that in mind.

Carol Adams Davis expressed hopes that volunteer opportunities might be available with upcoming projects, and Mr. Ferraro responded that the larger scale projects would not include volunteer opportunities due to safety issues but that everyone was in favor of these opportunities when feasible.

C. Report on NFWF Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund Projects

Eliska Morgan began her presentation with NFWF GEBF Phase 1 projects:

- Restoration and Enhancement of Oyster Reefs. Marine Resources Division is managing a \$3.75M grant to increase oyster populations by ~30% in 600 acres of Mobile Bay, Mississippi Sound, and Bon Secour Bay.
- D'Olive Watershed Restoration. Ms. Morgan noted that after the April 2014 storms, the budget to restore impacted streams to “stop the bleeding” of sediment from erosion-impacted D'Olive Watershed almost doubled. She asked Tom Herder to review progress on implementation of this \$12.5M grant.
 - He mentioned a recent, very successful D'Olive Watershed Restoration Technology Workshop in which engineers, contractors, and consultants collaborated and shared technical information, methodologies, and data in this high-profile restoration initiative.
 - Mr. Herder reported that on the tail of a 319-funded step pool restoration and the initial NFWF-funded restoration of JB Phase II, Marlon Cook reported 90-99% decreases in sediment delivery downstream.
 - Thompson Engineering has completed plans for remaining Joe's Branch restoration work, including three stream segments and two stormwater retention facilities. Southern Excavating has received a Notice to Proceed and are mobilizing to begin construction.
 - North State Environmental is in the process of implementing a Goodwyn Mills Cawood design to restore Tiawasee Creek in Daphne. The City is managing the grants – with about half of the funding through CIAP and half through an MBNEP NFWF GEBF grant with some State 319 funding.
 - Goodwyn Mills Cawood is nearing completion of the design for restoration of D'Olive Creek tributary D4-D6 between I-10 and US Highway 90. ALDOT is currently completing sheet pile work near the I-10 culverts designed by Volkert, and the project will go to bid and construction later in 2016.
 - Volkert is involved in designs to restore D'Olive Creek tributary DA3 on Malbis Plantation property east of Highway 13. Designs are expected to be completed later in 2016.
 - AMEC/Foster Wheeler is developing a design for restoration of D'Olive tributary DAE just south of Highway 90 in Daphne. Designs are expected to be completed later in 2016.
 - Hatch Mott MacDonald is completing surveys of an additional degraded tributary associated with D'Olive tributary DAF west of Highway 13 and downstream of DA3.
- Ms. Morgan continued with the Fowl River Restoration, a \$2.9M grant to fund a sediment study (completed), a watershed management plan (currently in draft form), and the

restoration of erosion-impacted northern Mon Louis Island, for which an engineering design is complete but Corps permits are still pending.

Phase II projects include:

- AL Barrier Island Assessment, a \$4.2M grant (discussed earlier by Ms. Godsey).
- AL Marine Mammal Conservation and Recovery Program, a \$1.3M grant managed by the Dauphin Island Sea Lab.
- Coastal Habitat Restoration Planning Initiative (including SAV and High Resolution Habitat Mapping and Watershed Management Planning), a \$2.84M grant managed by the MBNEP.
- Enhanced Fisheries Monitoring in AL Marine Waters, Phase 1, a \$1.8M grant managed by the AL Marine Resources Division.

Phase III projects include:

- Enhanced Fisheries Monitoring in AL Marine Waters, Phase 2, a \$2.2M grant managed by the AL Marine Resources Division.
- Grand Bay Acquisition (of 6.47 acres), a \$1.7M grant.
- Mobile Bay Shore Habitat Conservation and Acquisition Initiative – Phase 1 – a \$300K grant to the City of Mobile to undertake due diligence for potential acquisition of parcels near Perch Creek, Helen Wood Park, and lower Three Mile Creek. The study will investigate estate issues, habitat, natural resources, costs, willingness of sellers, what is currently protected, and cost/benefit analysis.
- Mobile County Conservation Acquisition, a grant for \$4.2M, which “rose to the top” due to an existing appraisal and willing seller for property near Saltaire.
- AL Artificial Reef and Habitat Enhancement, a \$12.5M grant to fund offshore and nearshore artificial reefs. Grant will fund long-term monitoring will locations will remain unknown to enhance scientific inquiry.

Total NFWF Provision is State of Alabama is \$49.6M, thus far. Next round (IV) preproposals are due at the end of March. State deadline is March 1. WMPs will be used to guide funding for implementation in the future, considering the largest/most onerous stressors and not limited to a single watershed.

Mr. Van Nostrand commented that another NRDA-Phase III Early Restoration project is going to bid tomorrow for construction at Swift Tract.

5. Adjourn With no other new business, Mr. Harper asked for a motion to adjourn. Sam St. John made the motion, which was seconded by Mr. Ferraro and unanimously approved at 4:00 pm.