



**Mobile Bay National Estuary Program
Business Resources Committee
August 11, 2021, 2:00 pm – 3:30 pm
Zoom Virtual Meeting**



Agenda

Meeting Objectives:

- a) Updates on status of various oyster projects
- b) Review “Ditch the Disposables”
- c) Review Eco-Tourism
- d) Establish New Sub-Committees

1. Welcome and Introductions

BRC Co-Chairs:

Eliska Morgan, Thompson Engineering

Frank Smith, Wilkins Miller Wealth Management

2. Review and Approval of Minutes

3. Old Business

- a) Alabama Oysters Marketing Update
- b) Coastal Alabama Fisheries Fund Update
- c) One-on-One Meetings Findings

4. New Business

- a) Ditch the Disposables
 - a) Presentation by Madison Blanchard
- b) Eco-Tourism
- c) Establish New Sub-Committees

5. Adjourn

Minutes

In Attendance

Eliska Morgan, Thompson Engineering
Frank Smith, Wilkins Miller Wealth Management
Renie Kennemer, Thompson Engineering
Jennifer Denson, PEP
Helene Hassell, Dauphin Island Sea Lab
Beth Thomas, Alabama Power
Don Bates, Osprey Initiative
Phillip Hinesley
Beth Gendler, CVB
Jeanette Kelson, Wood Engineering

Staff

Roberta Swann
Henry Perkins
Madison Blanchard

Takeaways

- The BRC has been updated on the status of various projects, including Alabama Oyster Marketing the Coastal Alabama Fisheries Fund.
- The BRC has been briefed on the Ditch the Disposables work Madison Blanchard undertook this summer.
- New subcommittees were created, one focused on Alternative Packaging and another on Ecotourism, were created.

Henry Perkins called the meeting to order at 2:04. Frank Smith made a motion to approve the previous meetings minutes and Eliska Morgan seconded. The minutes were approved.

Old Business

Review of Dauphin Island Oyster Project

- Henry Perkins updated the BRC on the oyster marketing project.
- A website has been developed to better market local oyster farms
- Oyster farmers have been contacted and there has been a positive response
- The website is being populated

- A strategy will be developed to market Alabama oysters using this website as a base

Review of Coastal Alabama Fisheries Fund

- Henry Perkins updated on the status of the revolving loan program.
- A grant of \$50,000 has been awarded by Alabama Power to this project
- An RFP has been released and is due to be submitted next week. Three banks have expressed interest and stated that they are completing the RFP for this project.
- An RFP review committee is being put together to judge the submitted RFPs.

Briefing on One-on-One Meetings

- Henry Perkins thanked members of the BRC for engaging in one-on-one meetings with him.
- These meetings were productive in clarifying interests of members, and resulted in an understanding that there was general interest in an anti-litter project as well as an ecotourism project.

New Business

- Madison Blanchard gave a presentation on the Ditch the Disposables work she undertook this summer
 - She gave background info on litter reduction in the Three Mile Creek Watershed Management Plan, and well as in the EPA/Gulf of Mexico Program Grant
 - To efficiently and effectively improve water quality, styrofoam was targeted
 - Business selected to target were located within Mobile County, popular, locally owned, predominantly take-out establishments, and served food in styrofoam or biodegradable packing
 - Partnered business were Big Whites Wings in Prichard, Miguel's Beach 'n Baja in Dauphin Island, and Mary's Southern Cooking in Mobile.
 - Customer surveys were conducted at these sites to collect data on packaging preference, awareness, and elasticity.
 - MBNEP provided biodegradable packing to these restaurants during this survey period so customers could experience the alternative packaging, and restaurant employees were provided with talking points to increase survey completion rates.
 - Collected data show that 91% of customers are aware that litter on streets and parking lots goes into waterways, and 30% did not notice that there food was in biodegradable packing.
 - Packaging preferences among customers were paper/biodegradable 54%, styrofoam 20%, and no preference 24%.
 - 14% of customers were not willing to pay more for biodegradable packing, which 20% would pay 5 cents more, 22% 10 cents, 25% 25 cents, and 20% 35 cents.

- There were logistical challenges to completing the survey, and some issues with customers perceiving biodegradable packing as inferior (believing they would have a soggy container)
 - Over 300 surveys were collected, and awareness of the issue was raised. Partnered restaurants gained valuable insight into their customers preferences and the tools with which to switch to biodegradable packing.
 - Next steps include continued data collection and using that data to inform the next phase of the campaign, educate business owners and community members to make the switch, and advocate for regulations on single use items.
- Roberta clarified that this is a bi-county effort, as Casey Gay Williams has expressed interest in expanding this project to Baldwin County, especially to Fairhope.
 - Henry asked if alternative packaging was readily available from distributors.
 - Don Bates said it is, but it's more expensive, and made the point that restaurants would switch if their customers demanded it.
 - Jeanette Kelson indicated that she would like to be involved with an Alternative Packaging subcommittee.
- Henry Perkins gave a quick overview of ecotourism, and discussed ongoing regional efforts to develop the industry.
 - Of note is that Costas Christ has been consulting for Coastal Alabama Partnership to develop our regions ecotourism and
 - Matt Leavell is coming to Gulf Shores to speak on sustainable travel and tourism as part of the Governor's Conference on Tourism.
- Henry Perkins proposed to creation of two new subcommittees, one to focus on alternative packaging and the other to focus on ecotourism.
 - Eliska Morgan asked if ecotourism was an option because Costas Christ was working here
 - Henry responded that it was brought up at several different one on one meetings, and may have been inspired by that fact but was not due to his work
 - Don Bates agreed to work in the alternative packaging group
 - Phillip Hinesley agreed to work in the ecotourism group
 - Henry said he would reach out via email to other members and recruit them to these two groups.
- Henry Perkins thanked everyone for attending.

A motion to adjourn was made and seconded and the meeting ended at 2:50.