



**Mobile Bay National Estuary Program
Executive Committee Meeting
Mobile Area Chamber of Commerce
November 22, 2013**

In attendance:

Diane Altsman, Gulf of Mexico Program; Darrelyn Bender, Eastern Shore Chamber of Commerce; Casi Callaway, Mobile Baykeeper; Mike Dardeau, DISL; Randy Davis, Alabama House of Representatives; Jennifer Denson, PEP; Patric Harper, USF&WS; Phillip Hinesley, ADCNR-SLD; Bob Howard, Region IV EPA; Linda Ingraham, Chamber of Commerce; Commissioner Merceria Ludgood, Mobile County Commission; Jimmy Lyons, Alabama State Port Authority; Chris Miller, SARPC; Eliska Morgan, Office of Representative Jo Bonner; Mark Ornelas, ADEM; Patti Powell, ADCNR-SLD; Dr. Susan Rees, U. S. Army Corps of Engineers; Dr. LaDon Swann, MASGC/AUMERC; Beth Thomas, Alabama Power; Dr. John Valentine, DISL; Dr. Rusty Wright, Auburn University

Staff present: Roberta Swann, Tom Herder

1. Call to order: Patti Powell called the meeting to order at 1005 and committee members provided around-the-table self-introductions.

2. Approval of minutes: Ms. Powell asked if there were any comments or revisions to the minutes of the May 17, 2013 Executive Committee meeting. Hearing none, she called for a motion to approve the minutes. Casi Callaway made the motion, which was seconded by Dr. Susan Rees and carried unanimously.

3./4. Directors Report/Committee Reports: Roberta Swann

Ms. Swann presented a budget status report for activities being coordinated by the Program. She then reintroduced a strategy map developed at an Executive Committee retreat two years ago to demonstrate Management Conference committee roles within the overall strategy of the program. She followed with a slide showing the roles of each of the Management Conference committees in CCMP revision and then one that showed the six values or issue areas considered most important by lower Alabamians – Access to Water and Open Spaces, Coastlines (Beaches and Other Shorelines), Fish, Heritage and Culture, Environmental Health and Resilience, and Waters Quality.

Swann explained that the next CCMP methodology was based on developing baselines and measuring changes in estuary health; creating comprehensive watershed management plans for HUC12 watersheds, with preference to those that border marine waters or with tidal influences to focus restoration efforts; improving and restoring degraded systems identified in CWMPs; building the institutional and economic infrastructure necessary for long-term resource management and sustainability; and engaging the community in long-term stewardship.

Ms. Swann introduced draft five-year strategies for Ecosystem Status and Trends, Ecosystem Restoration, Capacity Building, and Stewardship Development that included initial ideas for goals, objectives, and outcomes to stimulate discussion as committee chairs provided reports.

Five-Year Strategy to Monitor Estuarine Health (under the purview of the **Science Advisory Committee**) SAC Chair Mike Dardeau explained the Healthy Watersheds Initiative. He reported that EPA HQs has engaged/hired a consultant, Cadmus, to look at subwatersheds throughout the Mobile Bay Watershed and employ an integrated approach to assess the 12-digit HUCs as healthy or in need of restoration, which should be useful to PIC efforts. A three-day meeting was held in Mobile in August to identify indicators. A final draft should be completed and out for review by the end of the year.

Dr. Valentine expressed that this was an opportunity to build long-term data storage, and wondered how that might be developed. Ms. Swann responded that one CCMP action recommendation arising from the November 30, 2012 summit was to develop a place and means to share data.

Five-Year Strategy to Restore Human Connections and Ecosystems (under the purview of the **Project Implementation Committee**) PIC Co-Chair Patric Harper reiterated that the protocol ensuring a good scientific basis for project prioritization/implementation is sediment analysis as a precursor to watershed management planning.

Dr. Rees commented on metrics, such as “X linear feet” or “X acres,” and wondered if there was some way to ensure quality in selection of metrics, a concern with which Mr. Harper agreed. Ms. Powell also agreed that quality is an issue and suggested that we tend to do easier things to achieve “numbers.” Dr. Wright expressed that metrics should represent “function.” Dr. Rees also felt that SAC concerns about environmental health were disproportionately concerned with water. She mentioned sediment and alluded to the importance of sediment quality. The discussion continued, and Dr. Rees said that we need to make sure that all of the expertise available must be included and integrated into ensuring environmental health. Dr. Swann explained that acres and linear feet are simply surrogates for ecosystem services, and that somehow ecosystem service provision has to be a key measure.

Dr. Valentine responded to Dr. Swann’s comments, noting that services are frequently represented by dollar values as an expression of return on investments. Dr. Swann said that they are more than just dollar values, also providing non-market services.

Ms. Swann said that CWMPs assess and measure issues, identifying where problems are and what must be done to address them. Dr. Rees responded that in Joe’s Branch, the issue is sediment. She felt that metrics should not just describe the reductions in sediment but also how the environment responds to those sediment reductions. With regard to “conventional metrics,” she asked what do they mean and what do they mean to the taxpayers? That concluded the discussion on metrics tied to the Human Connections and Ecosystems Restoration Strategy.

Five-Year Strategy to Build Capacity (under the purview of the **Government Networks Committee**) Ms. Swann commented that “improving landowners’ attitudes towards public access near their properties,” was identified at the November 2012 meeting but she wasn’t sure quite where it fit. Phillip Hinesley felt that this outcome would be attached to education to address misinformation and to make the landowners aware of what is really going on. Dr. Swann

agreed that in his experience trying to develop a conservation easement for Dauphin Island, that they lacked the capacity to address the problem to which Mr. Hinesley referred. Mr. Hinesley elaborated on problems of perception, asking how, when access is supplied, we can convince neighboring property owners that the provision of public access won't impair or devalue their property.

Five-Year Strategy to Build Capacity (under the purview of the **Business Resources Committee**) Ms. Swann referred to the Business Networks Committee, a new Management Conference Committee that "is yet to get off the ground." She gave kudos to Linda Ingram who is voluntarily assisting with this group and Jennifer Denson and Darrelyn Bender, who are Co-Chairing that committee, and provided "initial" goals from a November meeting that are "all over the map."

Ms. Swann displayed a slide showing the various sectors whose input is essential to BRC success, and they included development/real estate, finance, fishing, industry, port, utilities, small business, and tourism. She displayed a spread sheet that included as-yet-undistilled objectives and outcomes and explained that we need to recruit members from the listed sectors to make the decisions necessary to distill them. Ms. Powell responded that the RESTORE Act makes very specific references to feedback from such sectors, suggesting that we "keep on plugging," and offered thanks.

Ms. Ingram said that it was great to have Ms. Swann provide a presentation to the Chamber of Commerce and to find that businesses are currently thinking along the same lines as she is.

Ms. Callaway talked about Baykeeper's place in the Management Conference, as former members of the BRC and currently on the Community Action Committee. She asked where commercial and recreational fishermen fit. Darrelyn Bender responded that there is overlap, and once objectives are developed, it would become clearer. Ms. Denson said that as we work to develop objectives, different players will be required, providing the example of having road builders on board as stormwater objectives are developed. Ms. Swann said that the idea is to determine and develop synergies. More discussion ensued.

Five-Year Strategy to Build Capacity (under the purview of the **Community Action Committee**) Ms. Callaway: "The CAC has been dormant for a while. We had a good meeting in January/February, but not another meeting until late summer. We formalized the CAC, had great attendance, and developed a plan. Our next meeting was in October and we went over a SWOT analysis of what organizations wanted and needed." Ms. Callaway and Leslie Gahagan of the City of Foley are Co-Chair the CAC.

Ms. Callaway said that the draft plan failed to include the Clean Water Future, Bay Buddies, and Muddy Water Watch Programs, currently in progress as outreach campaigns. Ms. Swann stated that she was presenting a skeleton in the hopes that the CAC could "put some meat on it."

Dr. Wright said that the Clean Marina Program and access provision approach point sources of pollution (related to litter). He felt that these are good places for emphasis, even if only to provide education. Bob Howard contributed that the CAC could support such drives by working with the school system.

Dr. Valentine reported that Mobile County School Superintendent has agreed to "roll out" an Institute for Coastal Studies at Alma Bryant High School sometime in December. Dr. Swann supported programs related to trash abatement, and named the marine debris programs, \$10

buckets, Stash Your Trash, onion sacks, etc. as examples. Dr. Wright added the monofilament recycling programs (like the one sponsored by Southeastern Wildlife Conservation Group and ADCNR-State Lands Division) as an example of another good program, since he feels that monofilament in the environment is a big problem. Ms. Callaway reported that this issue was discussed in the last CAST meeting and that April DePaola of the Coastal Conservation Association wants to engage in that effort.

5. Old Business: Ms. Swann reported that since the last EC meeting MBNEP has moved to the Commerce Building at 118 North Royal Street downtown. She invited Committee members to “come check us out.” She touted the convenience and walkability of the new location.

6. New Business: Eliska Morgan, currently working with ADCNR and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, explained that there are four efforts currently underway to provide compensation to States for damages resulting from the 2010 Deepwater Horizon Spill. She mentioned the NRDA process, which is not a grant program but a litigious process. The AL and Federal Councils, which are not yet funded, are making efforts to get processes in place, so that when funding becomes available, they will be ready to move. Ms. Morgan elaborated on the structure and funding related to the NFWF Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund and recommended the website: alabamacoastrestoration.org. She reported that the State of Alabama has funded three projects, two of which have been granted to MBNEP.

Ms. Callaway asked whether the Foundation would meet again before the end of the year. Ms. Morgan responded, “hopefully.” Ms. Callaway asked whether comments would be shared. Ms. Powell explained that the State is looking at ways to share. She said that NFWF selected “pilot projects,” not to be confused with “demonstration projects” (generally used to demonstrate a new restoration technology), but these were projects selected to pilot “the process” – quick, but ready and worthy projects. The State requested input on these specific, vetted projects for use to “pilot” the process. Ms. Powell said that she was excited and proud, but this is not how we envisioned project selection. This was an early step that will help refine the process with projects that demonstrated planning and merit.

Ms. Swann explained that she was approached and asked what project she would put forth if she could. She said that D’Olive restoration was an easy answer. Ms. Powell came back and asked for a Mobile County counterpart, with a focus on “edge habitat.” Ms. Swann discussed the Fowl River project, which included emergency restoration on the northern tip of Mon Louis Island/mouth of Fowl River, a GSA sediment analysis, and a comprehensive watershed management plan. She discussed the history of degradation on the northern island and the potential for beneficial use of dredged material. She noted that Fowl River is closer to a “conservation” watershed than a “restoration” watershed. Ms. Powell explained the cost benefits of approaching the Fowl River project now, rather than waiting for later, and noted that this required very quick work by the MBNEP.

Ms. Callaway said that the Fowl River project was a big issue for the Baykeeper board and membership. Ms. Denson asked if the single property owner would retain ownership. Ms. Swann responded that it would be placed in conservation easement, but much of the restoration target is currently State water bottoms, so it will remain the property of the State.

Dr. Swann asked how the Fowl River project would be monitored. Ms. Swann said that Thompson and the MBNEP have already discussed monitoring the north end of MLI. Dr. Swann asked about the previous (2005 by ACF) restoration of northern MLI. Mr. Hinesley asked about

the upstream islands and reported erosion problems there. Ms. Swann responded that a sediment loading analysis and CWMP will prescribe appropriate actions.

Ms. Callaway said that Sam St. John and Dr. Just Cebrian looked at the islands and quickly pulled together a list of which are most impacted/threatened. Ms. Swann contributed that the islands may have been largely degraded by boat wakes and analysis might stimulate some regulatory action. Dr. Rees asked whether sea level rise will be considered, because she suspects that the erosion of those islands is more than just boat wakes.

With regard to the D'Olive Project, Ms. Swann said that with both Spanish Fort and Daphne mayors on board, we would start by finishing issues within the Joe's Branch subwatershed, with preplanning scheduled for December 9. Next steps are less certain, with two locations within the D'Olive Creek subwatershed and locations in Tiawasee Creek subwatershed. Ms. Swann said that what made this proposal particularly strong were the CWMP and the Intergovernmental Task Force, which meets monthly to address CWMP implementation. She reported that Daphne has instituted stronger subdivision regulations and that Spanish Fort intends to use those as a template for establishing their regulations.

One problem, she noted, for NFWF in reviewing the D'Olive project was that Lake Forest Lake retains some capacity to hold additional sediment. However, after extensive education about the system, NFWF agreed to fund the entire project.

Dr. Valentine noted that Judy Stout did a project to restore *Vallisneria*, and said that if SAV is the prescribed "deliverable," that might be a good place to start.

Another bit of old business was the November 13-15 ANEP Tech Transfer Meetings. Ms. Swann reported that the MBNEP hosted the fall meeting and credited her staff, and especially Tiffany England, for what was an incredibly successful three-day meeting that our visitors called "the best meeting that they had ever attended." She explained a voucher system developed by Ms. England, by which MBNEP gave participants \$10 vouchers for lunch at various restaurants in the downtown area and reimbursed the businesses later. Jennifer Denson was very complimentary and felt that such an idea would be most welcome by area businesses. Diane Altsman reported many positive comments about both our landscape and successes. Bob Howard said that he's been to many such meetings in many lovely places, and this was certainly one of the best.

Ms. Callaway asked whether there would be opportunities for non-profits to seek NFWF funding. Ms. Powell responded that NFWF is willing to entertain proposals from agencies with project implementation experience that meet State comfort levels. Jimmy Lyons had questions about implementation and asked if there would be a competitive bid component. Ms. Callaway asked if there were plans to break activities up. Ms. Swann responded there will be Requests for Proposals issued for several of the activities, although the Intergovernmental Task Force was in agreement that Thompson should finish the work in Joes Branch. Other project components will be subject to bids for engineering and design, but the design/build concept appears to be problematic. Ms. Callaway asked about outreach and education and whether MBNEP would go out to bid for that. Ms. Swann responded affirmatively.

Mr. Lyons asked how far \$6M would go in the D'Olive Watershed. Ms. Swann said that it would "stop the bleeding" and allow us to address the main problems. Dr. Swann commented that some are policy and land use-related.

Ms. Powell said that, hopefully, good work at D'Olive will inspire other communities to seek funding to continue these efforts.

Noting the time, Ms. Swann thanked committee members and Chairs.

8. Adjourn Ms. Powell adjourned the meeting at 1205.