

Mobile Bay National Estuary Program Executive Committee Meeting
International Trade Center / Killian Room
Friday, March 31, 2023, 10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Attendees:

Scott Bannon, ADCNR, Marine Resources
Chris Blankenship, ADCNR
Bradley Byrne, Mobile Area Chamber of Commerce
Jennifer Denson, Partners for Environmental Progress
Mimi Fearn, Dog River Clearwater Revival
Leslie Gahagan, City of Foley
Judy Haner, The Nature Conservancy
Ashley Henderson, Alabama Soil & Water Conservation Committee
Amy Hunter, ADCNR RESTORE

Merceria Ludgood, Mobile County Commission
Justin McDonald, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Eliska Morgan, Thompson Engineering
Chris Plymale, U.S. EPA Region 4
Catherine Reaves, Alabama State Port Authority
Elizabeth Roney, Congressman Jerry Carl's Office
LaDon Swann, Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium
Beth Thomas, Alabama Power Company
Will Underwood, ADCNR
John Valentine, Dauphin Island Sea Lab

MBNEP Staff Present: *Shemika Brown, Tiffany England, Bethany Hudson, Marti Messick, Christian Miller, Blair Morrison, Henry Perkins, and Roberta Swann*

The purpose of the Executive Committee is to provide general guidance, direction, and support for the Program. Develop policies on issues and funding; review/approve work plans and budgets; evaluate the performance of the Director; and set financial goals for non-federal share.

1. **Introductions/Call to Order:** The meeting was called to order at 10:04 am. The group did a quick round of introductions.
2. **Approval of Minutes:** Chris Thomas asked for comments or revisions to the minutes from the December 12, 2022 meeting. Hearing no remarks, Eliska Morgan made a motion to approve, and Jennifer Denson seconded the motion.
3. **Committee Reports (MBNEP Management Conference Co-Chairs)**

Science Advisory Committee

Amy Hunter reported the SAC has an upcoming meeting on April 6. There were no other updates.

Project Implementation Committee

Judy Haner reported on the March 30 PIC meeting. The committee heard an overview of watershed plans, the CCMP re-write, discussed plans for the new Infrastructure dollars, and next steps for the PIC. Christian Miller gave an update of watershed management plans. Three plans are wrapping up and will be done in the next month or so- MTA Delta, Eastern Shore, and Dauphin Island. Three plans are currently in progress- Perdido, Western Delta, and Eastern Delta. The MTA Delta and Perdido plans will be out soon for comment and the Dauphin Island plan will be released this week. The Grand Bay WMP will be the last in this round of plans and should be completed within a year. Mr. Miller continued with an update on restoration projects:

- **D'Olive**
 - Canterbury construction- complete
 - Pine Run- on hold pending new ownership
- **Lower Fish River**
 - Marlow- completed; in warranty and maintenance
 - Magnolia River Watershed- on hold pending new ownership

- **Fowl River**
 - Took USACE and Alabama Historic Preservation Society on site visit- permit approval pending
- **Three Mile Creek**
 - 12-Mile Creek restoration- in warranty
 - Apple snail treatment continues
 - City of Mobile construction portion to begin soon
 - Remaining funds from RESTORE will be used on terrestrial invasives control
- **Deer River**
 - Pre-bid meeting today for construction

Government Networks Committee

Christian Miller reported on the March 31 GNC meeting. The committee reviewed the CCMP Technical Assistance and Capacity Building goals and objectives. Beth Lyons presented a 2023 legislative agenda review and Dr. Bret Webb shared an overview of critical issues for shoreline management.

Community Action Committee

Mimi Fearn reported on the March 22 CAC meeting. Mobile County continues to have good representation. The committee plans to focus more on program related agendas such as nature tours, community clean ups, collaborations with other committees, and water monitoring workshops. There is already a plan to visit the Graham Creek Nature Preserve and discussions with Dr. Bret Webb to present to the CAC.

Business Resources Committee

Henry Perkins reported on the March 22 BRC meeting. Committee members visited Admiral Shellfish Company's oyster farm at the west end of Fort Morgan. They learned more about the growing oyster industry and saw the one million oysters at the farm. MBNEP is working on a Private Sector Collaboration Analysis. We are looking at different groups around the country, especially other NEPs, and how they work with businesses and industry and the benefits of bringing those groups to the table.

Finance Committee

Jennifer Denson reported on the Finance Committee. Helene Hassell has stepped down as co-chair and we are looking at the process for re-filling that seat. Members met virtually with Ed Sherwood from Tampa Bay NEP about their interlocal memorandum of agreement process for their match requirements. Ron Cink, Baldwin County Administrator, suggested this would be a good way to secure longer-term investment with our local municipalities. We have a draft MOA that will be brought to the committee for vetting.

4. Director's Report

a) Status of Activities 12/31/22:

- *Annual Meetings:* From 2014 to 2022 the attendance has increased each year. Should we charge for breakfast? The question will be brought to the finance committee. We have been very successful in sponsorship recruitment each year. The Fiorito brothers from Blankets of Hope in Brooklyn did a great job at the 2022 meeting and all the blankets with notes written by breakfast attendees went to Penelope's Closet and a ministry in Mobile County.
- *Bays & Bayous:* The Symposium was very successful this year. Because the 2020 Bays & Bayous was virtual, comparison numbers were based off the 2018 conference. Total attendance increased by 7.4% with students increasing by 16.8%. There was a 25% increase of the number of states that were represented through the 465 total attendees. Costs of the Convention Center were increased more than we anticipated, but working with the new management and current staff was incredibly accommodating. Sponsorships totaled about \$80,000, which made up about 51% of the revenues. A final report will be published and sent out soon.
- *Grants Pending:* From the August 2022 meeting, several pending grants were discussed. Here are the updates:

- Coastal Resilience Fund: Western Shoreline Management Plan \$575,000- award notification received
- NFWF- GEBF: Lower Fish River Watershed Restoration Phase II \$9,002,959- grant notification received
- ADCNR ACAMP: Eight Mile Creek Watershed Planning \$30,000- grant awarded
- NFWF-ATB: Comprehensive Watershed Restoration Wolf Bay \$4,469,372- not awarded; NFWF is spending money in other states
- NOAA Transformational Habitat Restoration: Perdido Watershed Restoration- not invited for full proposal

5. Old Business

Director Evaluation Status Report: There is a need for a clarified process on evaluation process. The current Bylaws need to be updated to reflect this process and other changes to the management conference structure since 2017. The Management Conference still operates under the Bylaws that were completed in 2017. The report will be sent out with these meeting minutes. Here are the action items:

- 1) The Executive Committee Co-chairs form an ad hoc committee that can review and improve the current MBNEP Director's evaluation process.
- 2) In the future the ECCC appoint representative Executive Committee Chairs in time (e.g., Spring-early Summer) to prepare for the next annual review.
- 3) Annual committee surveys be conducted within each committee to determine needs, challenges, and focus for the respective committees. This should be developed by the NEP staff in consultation with the future Personnel Committee members. Results should be provided to the PC and the MBNEP Executive Director in a timely manner such that they can be used during the annual review of the MBNEP Executive Director and their review of the proposed Program Manager.
- 4) Alternatively direct the DISL Executive Director to select members of the Executive Committee to participate in the MBNEP Executive Director's Annual Review.
- 5) Reaffirm the MBNEP's engagement with the scientists, and the importance of the SAC in developing the new MBNEP CCMP. The MBNEP Director should clarify the future goals and objectives for the SAC with active participation by SAC members in the process prior to launching the CCMP listening sessions.
- 6) Develop greater transparency during the development and selection of competitive MBNEP awards. This will help resolve perceptions of preferential selection raised during the surveys.
- 7) Conflicts of Interest should be identified and addressed early in award processes, including clear paths between MBNEP and DISL financial reviews and approvals and voting on the Executive Committee priorities.
- 8) Improve MBNEP collaborations with other NEPs in adjoining coastal states to maximize project and program impacts on the environment.
- 9) Implement the proposed office management plan to maximize staff organization and development.
- 10) A revision of the MOU between MBNEP and DISL and the associated Bylaws should be completed through a multi-party and transparent process that includes the sponsoring entity (DISL), Mobile Bay NEP Executive Director, and 2 members, appointed by the ECCCs, of the Executive Committee. This will include clarification on the responsibilities, liabilities, and employee policies of the DISL and other entities such as the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Alabama Department of Natural Resources (conference co-chairs) regarding the review and management of the NEP director.
- 11) DISL Executive Director sign off on all personnel reviews for NEP staff?

6. New Business

Organizational Structure Workshop: Part One: Mary Mullins facilitator: In preparation for the new CCMP, we thought it would be helpful to pause, take a look at where we've come, get feedback, assess trends in the program and how its role has changed or needs to change so that we can be most successful in accomplishing the mission ahead. The first CCMP was published in 2002 and in 2005 a strategic planning and

organizational assessment was completed to make sure we were in the best position to help support implementation of the CCMP and a new committee structure was initiated at that time. Part One of this exercise is getting Executive Committee input on the same key questions that the Management Conference was asked in 2005. We can then compare responses to see where we have come and to set trendlines that will help us in evaluating any changes that are needed in our organizational structure for the work ahead. In Part Two, we would like to push this same survey out to the entire Management Conference and perhaps even some other key constituents who do not serve on the Management Conference. Responses will be segmented so the results will best inform our review of our structure.

Mary asked members to participate in live polling. The survey consisted of yes/no questions as well as open-ended questions with 1-5 words answers. An analysis of the yes/no questions that were asked were compared with what the full Management Conference told us in 2005. The yes/no survey questions were:

1. In your opinion, has the MBNEP been successful in their role?
2. Do you attend Management Conference meetings on a regular basis?
3. Does the Management Conference represent the broad diversity of stakeholders within the community?
4. Is the MBNEP credible with regulatory and government agencies?
5. Is the MBNEP credible with environmental groups?
6. Is the MBNEP credible with the public?
7. Does working with the MBNEP on projects help or hinder project success?
8. Does the MBNEP give your organization sufficient support to educate the Management Conference and public about your contributions?
9. Does the MBNEP give your organization sufficient networking opportunities?
10. Are you familiar with the strategies in the CCMP?
11. Does the MBNEP adequately communicate successful implementation of the CCMP?
12. Does the MBNEP do a good job of sharing credit for CCMP successes with its partners?

The Q & A discussion included:

- What additional questions should we be asking?
- What are the best ways to push out the survey to your committees to ensure maximum participation?
- Who are some key constituents outside the Management Conference we should be polling?

7. Other / Announcements

The meeting adjourned at 12:54 pm.