



**Mobile Bay National Estuary Program
Executive Committee Meeting
International Trade Center, Mobile AL
August 10, 2012**

In attendance:

Dr. Susan Rees (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers); Mike Dardeau (DISL); Charles 'Skip' Gruber (Baldwin County Commission); Merceria Ludgood (Mobile County Commission); Scott Brown (ADEM); Lance LeFleur (ADEM); John Hankinson (Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Task Force); Phillip Hinesley (DCNR); Win Hallett (Mobile Area Chamber of Commerce); Dr. Russell Wright (Auburn University); Judy Haner *for* Jeff DeQuatro (TNC); Beth Thomas (Alabama Power); Eliska Morgan (Congressman Jo Bonner); Dr. LaDon Swann (Sea Grant); John Bowie *for* Ben Scaggs (U.S. Gulf of Mexico Program); Ray Mayhall, Donna Jordan *for* Casi Callaway (Mobile Baykeeper); Bob Howard (U.S. EPA Region IV); Teddy King (DDPH-Baldwin); Dr. John Valentine (DISL); Bob Harris *for* Jimmy Lyons (Alabama Port Authority); Darrelyn Bender (Eastern Shore Chamber of Commerce); Judy Adams (Alabama Port Authority); Patti Powell *for* Gunter Guy (ADCNR)

Staff present: Roberta Swann, Brenda Lowther, Kathy Eddy, Kelley Barfoot

Call to order: Patti Powell called meeting to order at 10:11 a.m.

Approval of minutes: Approval of May 11th minutes. Ms. Bender motioned and Ms. Ludgood seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Committee Reports

Financial Report: Roberta Swann

1. Ms. Swann gave an overview of the current financial status. Graduate student Ashley MacDonald will be working with the Science Advisory Committee on a two year research project to evaluate the ecosystem enhancements associated with three different restoration projects- Mon Luis Island, Helen Wood Park and Dog River Park. Ms. McDonald's work will inform the SAC's efforts in developing a suite of biological indicators for ecosystem function.
2. Ms. Swann stated that the Mon Louis Island Project has been delayed due to needed modifications to State regulations to allow for placement of fill for living shorelines purposes. She stated that this process has already been initiated with the State Lands Division and we still anticipate construction by the end of November, 2012.
3. Ms. Swann discussed the ADCNR Section 309 grant. She stated they have put together a habitat restoration team/steering committee to update the Gulf Ecological Management Sites, and fact sheets regarding those sites will be developed by March, 2013.
4. Ms. Swann gave an overview of the Three Mile Creek restoration presentation that she delivered to the MAWSS board members. She stated that MAWSS has committed \$50k to a watershed management plan and is evaluating taking a much larger role in the watershed

restoration program. She stated that the next step will be to put together a technical team to flesh out the scope of work and an outreach team to develop a citizen's vision for the area.

5. Ms. Swann gave an overview of the Joe's Branch restoration project. She stated the project will go out to bid on Friday, August 17, 2012 with plans to begin construction in October, 2012.
6. Ms. Swann discussed the Community Action Committee and its efforts to develop a stormwater education campaign. The NEP has contracted with Mobile Baykeeper to coordinate the campaign and they have hired Good PR out of Atlanta GA to develop a comprehensive program, including TV, radio, billboards, etc.
7. The NEP has received a Supplemental Environmental Project grant from Gulf Coast Asphalt to support Three Mile Creek watershed planning, the Stormwater Education Campaign, and implementation of actions to reduce trash in Three Mile Creek during watershed plan implementation.

Susan Rees asked if the NEP had obtained permits for the Mon Louis Island and Joe's Branch projects. Ms. Swann stated that the Joe's Branch permit is in hand, and the Mon Louis Island permit is pending the state regulation modification. Ms. Powell asked if there were objections or comments regarding the information given in the financial reports. No comments were made and the financial status report was accepted as delivered.

Presentation: John Hankinson

Mr. Hankinson gave an overview of the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Task Force and the varying departments, states and councils that are involved. Mr. Hankinson presented to the committee a PowerPoint that showed the current issues that are affecting the Gulf Coast: loss of wetlands, erosion of barrier islands and shorelines, loss and degradation of coastal estuary habitats, imperiled fisheries, hypoxia and climate change. He discussed the major concerns and strategies. He then discussed the effects of poor water quality in the Gulf of Mexico and its relationship to areas well north of the Gulf. Mr. Hankinson stated that the Task Force has been working with farmers and agricultural producers in seven states to help improve run-off into the Mississippi and its tributaries, which carry runoff ultimately to the Gulf.

Ms. Powell asked for a status update on the development of the new CCMP. Ms. Swann stated that the CCMP Evaluation was complete and included a list of over 100 recommendations from a group of commentators as well as existing gaps in the current CCMP. The commentators were asked to give their opinions at the beginning of each section of the CCMP Evaluation as to whether or not they thought the CCMP achieved what it set out to accomplish. Each commentator had been very involved with the development of the first CCMP.

Ms. Swann stated the SAC had identified where the stresses are in the system and the information had been handed off to Project Implementation Committee to determine where restoration of those habitats will be most feasible.

Science Advisory Committee (SAC): Mike Dardeau

Mr. Dardeau described the main tasks of the Science Advisory Committee. He then discussed the stressors that are currently acting on the ecosystem. Mr. Dardeau described the Biological Condition Gradient (BCG) and how the SAC will use it to communicate estuary health to the public. Ms. Swann added that the SAC has received the assistance of EPA headquarters and Susan Jackson has offered the time of an expert at EPA to help with building the BCG framework.

Mr. Dardeau discussed how, in addition, EPA will be conducting a healthy watershed assessment using 12 digit HUC sub-watershed units for the entire state, including portions of Georgia and Mississippi to capture the entire Mobile Bay Watershed. He stated existing data will be used to reflect the state of health on those geographic units.

Ms. Swann stated that each one of the 12 digit HUCS will be graded based on indicators developed by the project team. Dr. Swann asked if thought had been given to how this information will be communicated to the public. Mr. Dardeau stated the SAC considered using a red, green and yellow format for the graph. He said the SAC has agreed they are not comfortable having six different levels of stress measurement and that they would be more comfortable with three levels, good bad and something in between based on best professional judgment and not scientific conclusion. Dr. Wright stated the information will need to be presented in a way that is meaningful for the community and offers room for improvement.

Dr. Rees stated that knowing the status is not enough. She stated the need to consider the trends over a reasonable time frame and the effective display of those trends to the public.

Ms. Swann suggested we focus on the indicators and bring in marketing and graphics consultants to assist with how the information is communicated.

Bob Howard pointed out there is no one system for presenting indicators and each NEP presents the conditions report differently. He stated there is no exact right way to do it and it just needs to make sense to the community to show the areas that are stressed and the areas that need restoring. The Healthy Watershed Initiative is unique because it identifies conditions and current levels of stress. It also shows where it is degraded and where it is still under high stress. Mr. Howard thinks that this system will be very valuable to the NEP.

Judy Haner felt the PIC meeting was a great example of everyone coming together to focus on restoration of the estuary, while leaving their individual baggage at the door. She noted that she received quite a bit of positive feedback from the meeting and the PIC workgroup's efforts to develop criteria for targeting restoration will be incredibly useful in deciding how to prioritize projects. Ms. Swann stated that the PIC's work is focused on restoration by watershed not just by a stream or river.

Government Networks Committee (GNC): Charles Gruber

Mr. Gruber stated that the GNC had a very productive meeting and that information will be sent out to the attendees regarding their feedback of the meeting and how they would like to help.

Ms. Powell thanked everyone for their participation. She stated that it is important that everyone sits down together to discuss on the front end what is going on and what needs to be addressed. Ms. Powell thanked Mr. Gruber and Ms. Ludgood for their participation at the GNC meeting.

Community Action Committee (CAC): Roberta Swann

Ms. Swann stated that the CAC is a committee that brings all grassroots groups together. Casi Callaway with Baykeeper has agreed to chair the CAC. Ms. Swann stated that the NEP has contracted with Baykeeper (\$35,000) to coordinate this stormwater campaign. She stated the NEP has an additional \$75k to put towards PSAs, billboards, etc. as part of this campaign. The NEP, Baykeeper and several other individuals and groups met a few weeks ago with Good PR, a public relations firm, to get an idea of how to communicate this campaign to the public. Good PR will come back and present to the CAC their recommendations.

With the successful implementation of the other MBNEP committees, Ms. Swann stated it was time to resurrect the Community Resources Committee and indicated to Darrelyn Bender, Beth Thomas and Win Hallett that she would be reaching out to them soon to move that committee forward.

Ms. Powell stated that it is sometimes difficult when you have so many different chambers or groups presenting ideas so it is helpful when groups are in agreement.

Old Business: Roberta Swann

Ms. Swann gave an overview of the Stormwater Perspectives meeting. Elected officials, developers, bankers, realtors, engineers and contractors were brought together to discuss the issues of and possible improvements to stormwater management. Ms. Swann suggested members of the meeting look for ways to address issues without regard to the RESTORE Act. She indicated the group was very interested in the Fish River watershed model and its ability to manage volume and velocity along the course of the river. Some in the audience recommended that if both counties had that information for each watershed, the developers could abide by that and the reduction in cost for developing plans could be used to implement additional low impact development measures. Ms. Swann stated that she would like to have a stormwater symposium by the beginning of next year to highlight best management practices. She suggested bringing in communities who have tackled the problems already.

New Business

Phillip Hinesley announced Sept. 15, 2012 as the date for the 25th annual Coastal Cleanup.

Ms. Swann stated that the NEP and Auburn University have been going out on boat trips into Three Mile Creek. She stated that if anyone is interested in taking a trip out into TMC please let the NEP know.

Mr. Howard stated that on August 15, 2012 the implementation plan will be announced to initiate the National Estuary Policy.

Ms. Powell called for any questions or comment.

Motion to adjourn meeting was called at 11:37 a.m. by Ms. Bender. Seconded by Mr. Hinesley, the motion carried unanimously.