

Mobile Bay National Estuary Program Executive Committee Meeting
Original Oyster House Banquet Hall, Spanish Fort, AL
September 16, 2016, 10am-12pm.

Attendees – Chris Plymale US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA); Dr. LaDon Swann, Mississippi Alabama Sea Grant Consortium; Jimmy Lyons, Alabama State Port Authority; Leslie Gahagan, City of Foley; Amy Powell, Chris Thomas, EPA; Mimi Fearn, Dog River Clearwater Revival; Mark Berte, Alabama Coastal Foundation; Tammy Herrington, Conservation Alabama; Dr. Ruth Carmichael, Dauphin Island Sea Lab; Jenifer Denson, Partners for Environmental Progress; Patti Powell, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ACDNR); Eliska Morgan, ADCNR; Merceria Ludgood, Mobile County Commission; Judy Haner; The Nature Conservancy; Patric Harper, US Fish and Wildlife; Dr. Susan Rees, US Army Corps of Engineers; Dr. Bill Puckett, Soil and Water Conservation Committee; Darrelyn Dunmore, Strategic Wealth Specialists; Charles Gruber, Baldwin County Commission.

MBNEP Staff Present: *Roberta Swann, Amy Newbold, Tiffany England, Rick Frederick, Christian Miller, Kelley Barfoot, Renee Collini, Dixie Pomerat, Mareika Flatow, Jason Kudulis, Tom Herder and Ben Breener*

Call to order 10:09am

Ms. Powell requested around-the-table introductions. Then Ms. Powell asked for comments or revisions to the minutes from the previous meeting. None were made and Ms. Rees made a motion to approve, Ms. Haner seconded.

Ms. Swann welcomed new MBNEP staff – Jason Kudulis will serve as a Project Coordinator. His first charge is to create a volunteer monitoring manual and support and establish volunteer monitoring programs. Joannie Jomitol is a Community Solutions Fellow from Malaysia and will be here until December. She is focusing on community projects in lower Three Mile Creek and/or Toulmins Spring Branch. Best wishes and thanks were given to Renee Collini who will be joining Sea Grant and Amy Newbold who is joining the Gulf of Mexico Program. Ms. Swann updated the group on Finances, specifically noting budget to actuals on several projects. Then a review of projects relating to the CCMP were provided.

Estuary Status and Trends

- Fowl River biological monitoring associated with restoration projects
- A Mobile County soil survey ongoing, habitat mapping ongoing,
- A comprehensive SAV mapping project is complete. Tim Thibault from Vittor and Associates Inc. presented the data at the last SAC meeting.
- The West Fowl River and Fish River **sediment studies** are near completion. Fowl River and D'Olive monitoring are ongoing.

Ecosystem Restoration and Protection

- \$40,000 remains in external project delivery. MBNEP is examining the possibility of bringing project delivery in-house
- Three Mile Creek implementation continues. An Eight Mile Creek and Toulmin Spring Branch drainage study will be used by Mobile County to guide their “pay as you go” projects.

Technical Assistance and Capacity Building

- Mr. Miller discussed a Coastal Marine Planning grant that enabled Phase 1 water bottom surveys to map cultural resources along Mississippi Sound's priority oyster habitat. This will save money and resources for new parties wanting to establish more oyster farm operations.
- Volunteer monitoring continues to receive funds to restock supplies and establish new monitoring programs. Fowl River recently established a program and will serve as a pilot for future MBNEP assisted monitoring programs.
- Funds were distributed to expand Water Rangers capabilities. Water Rangers is a web-tool to enter and analyze water quality data, report pollution and engage with other monitors. The funded upgrades will include additional group and gamification functions and connecting the tool to Alabama Water Watch's database.
- Ms. Swann mentioned that Estuary Corps has completed their grant.

Education and Public Involvement efforts

- Outreach efforts for the Clean Water Future program continue. Ideas to improve outreach include: promotional items, special events, and video production.
- An external funding request was submitted to conduct engineering and design for a Fowl River spit WMP project, as well as a hydrological survey of the entire river and an intertidal marsh study.

Ms. Powell moved to Committee Reports (MBNEP Management Conference Co-Chairs)

Science Advisory Committee

Dr. Carmichael presented the report. She discussed the project to catalog **ecosystem services** for future restoration projects. A subcommittee was formed and they are moving forward under the MBNEP mission. Another subcommittee for the D'Olive monitoring project met on August 25, and continue to move forward with efforts to document water quality improvements resulting from D'Olive restoration projects. Five automated monitoring sites are active in the watershed. The City of Daphne and the MBNEP are both expending resources on this project. Other monitoring and research efforts in the D'Olive watershed include a riparian buffer and stream monitoring index is being led by Michele Goodfellow, a graduate student from the University of West Florida. The SAC is discussing tweaks to this index and evaluating other indexes that exists. A committee for the State of the Bay report has outlined a timeline for publication. Roles and responsibilities were also drafted and working groups are proceeding to move forward. Expect a draft ready by third quarter of 2017 with a new Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan in 2018. At the last SAC meeting an overview of oil-spill sciences was provided by Sea Grant employee Larissa Graham. Sea Grant has a lot of oil-spill documents and resources for the public. The SAV mapping project funded by the MBNEP was approved by the SAC and a comprehensive synopsis of the findings was provided by Tim Thibaut with Vittor and Associates Inc. The data and report are available to the public. The first SAC meeting of 2017 will be in January 2017. Action items going forward – stream team ecosystems, and managing the departure of Ms. Collini. Dr. Carmichael was especially grateful for Renee's work in reengaging SAC members.

Project Implementation Committee

Ms. Judy Haner updated the group on several projects and restoration efforts. Specifically, efforts in Fowl River are moving forward – the Mobile County Commission passed a resolution in support of the Fowl River WMP. Watershed signage for Fowl River will be installed. The Mon Louis tip restoration is progressing. Ms. Haner noted we need press and public awareness of this project as it is a large and

important undertaking for the river and community. Northern Mon Louis Island breakwater construction complete. Crews are placing material behind the breakwater now, four acres of new marsh are to be created. The Fowl River navigation channel dredging/borrow replacement is scheduled for a mid-October completion. When complete the channel will be dredged to 11ft. In other watershed management plan updates, Bon Secour and Dog River Watershed Management Plans should be completed by the end of 2016. The Weeks Bay and Mississippi Sound Complex plans are coming together. In D'Olive, restoration projects are mostly complete and moving forward. Tiawassee Creek is substantially complete; Joe's Branch project very near completion; D'Olive Creek (I-10 to HWY 90) substantially complete; East side of CR-13 out for bid with start in Oct/Nov anticipated; West side of CR-13 at 30% design; South side of HWY 90 in design and scheduled for construction late 2016; A Lake Forest Lake bathymetry study was conducted by Dr. Bret Webb to better understand the current state of the lake and to determine future options for dredging. Mr. Herder reviewed D'Olive restoration in detail and provided video footage of the projects. Much of the work requiring heavy equipment has been completed and vegetation planting is forthcoming. Ms. Haner noted that communicating restoration is important as we move forward with future projects because it can look messy upfront but the finish product will be beneficial and lasting. Last, Ms. Haner updated the group on the Watershed Comparison Tool, noting that they have populated the platform with older data sets, as development in Louisiana continues. SAV distribution and high resolution habitat mapping will be added to the platform in the Spring.

Government Networks Committee

Commissioner Ludgood gave the report and remarked the committee may see a shift in membership of elected officials based on recent elections. Ms. Barbara Gibson then shared the concept of forming a Watershed Management Authority. Currently one exists in the Choctawatchee, Pea, Yellow River watersheds in southeast Alabama. This is a mechanism that could be used for intergovernmental watershed management to implement WMP. The committee also continues to interact with the Sea Grant Legal Program to review current regulations and ordinances across Mobile and Baldwin counties. The intent is to recommend changes to strengthen management of stormwater and natural resources. Legislative changes may be necessary to protect the work and resources the committee undertakes.

Community Action Committee

Dr. Mimi Fearn started her report by thanking Kelley Barfoot for her efforts working with the CAC. Jason Kudulis will now serve as the CAC representative and Ms. Barfoot the Community Relations Committee. The MBNEP continues to assist volunteer monitoring programs with staff support, equipment purchases and reimbursements. Recently, an effort to establish a volunteer monitoring program in Fowl River was led by the CAC. Eleven monitors were trained in September. Fowl River will be the pilot to replicate in other watersheds moving forward. Moving forward the CAC's focus will remain establishing/supporting monitoring groups and conducting meetings in target watersheds. Dr. Fearn recommended all Executive Committee attendees look at the volume of existing volunteer water quality data. This data can be our first line of defense and has value. With the CAC's endorsement, the MBNEP funded expansion of a web-tool for citizen science data. The tool, Water Rangers allows data entry and pollution reporting from a computer or phone device. Efforts continue to connect AWW and Water Rangers databases to communicate. When completed, Water Rangers will be marketed to volunteer monitors and the public. Ms. Powell thanked the CAC for their efforts and noted the importance of place-based meetings and supporting grassroots organizations.

Business Resources Committee

Ms. Jenifer Denson provided the report. The BRC continues to increase partners and diversify their membership. The Clean Water Future campaign remains the committee's focus. They are working to get members further engaged. MBNEP staff and the BRC are refining what they can do/offer to assist CWF members in promoting and participating in the campaign. It was mentioned that work some of the other committees are doing (volunteer monitoring, stream assessments, etc.) is applicable also and should be incorporated if possible. Mr. Rick Frederick remarked on the newly revised CWF website (www.cleanwaterfuture.com). The website has content for a wide audience including teachers, children, restaurants, and businesses. Content will continue to be updated and added. The website also has resources on it to direct businesses to goods and materials they can purchase to reduce their impact. Information for boaters and government resources is on tap for inclusion as well. Furthermore. A CWF packet has been created to welcome new members and highlights a number of options members can undertake to participate in the campaign. New campaign partners or volunteer opportunities that CWF members want publicized should be sent to Mr. Frederick for inclusion and recruitment. In finishing, an update on the small stream litter traps designed by Thompson Engineering was provided. These traps might be a cheap, effective method to trap litter in non-navigable streams. They are currently in the testing phase.

Community Resources Committee

Mr. Mark Berte provided a report. The new committee held their first meeting in July. Their members took a survey to help shape their focus moving forward. The CRC continues to recruit relevant members to the group. It was decided the committee will have two main working groups – education and advocacy. The education subcommittee had their first meeting in August. They discussed pooling resources and synergizing to accomplish CCMP goals. The advocacy subcommittee will have their first meeting September 20. The advocacy subcommittee will discuss what they can do to aid CCMP and WMP efforts. Ms. Tammy Herrington thanked the Executive Committee for establishing the CRC and noted before the end of 2016 the entire group will establish a work plan for 2017-18

Finance Committee

Ms. Roberta Swann reported on behalf of Mr. David England. The committee will meet next week to discuss long-term financing for the NEP through the development of a finance strategy. Ms. Eliska Morgan noted that to get buy-in/funding from local municipalities a body of work was needed to show the NEP's value. The multitude of projects being led by the NEP now documents said value for groups to observe and invest in.

Old Business

Ms. Swann led a discussion on bylaws changes. The proposed changes were provided to attendees and discussed. Any comments on bylaws are due by October 31. A final draft will be distributed in November. Expected to have the document completed by the Annual Meeting, December 8. Ms. Swann also shared information about a potential grant to conduct a vulnerability study. Ms. Powell provided a Federal RESTORE update. Regarding the FPL that was announced in December 2015, the federal RESTORE council is still trying to finalize the grant process for projects. Expectations being that funds will move when that process is complete. Ms. Powell stated that once this initial process is well established future funding round can be distributed in a timelier manner.

New Business

A NFWF project to establish an MLK Conservation Corps was awarded \$250K and includes matching and partner gifts. The project will work in the underserved Lower Three Mile Creek area and hire local to youth to work full time carrying out restoration and invasive removal projects. Shifting gears, an ADEM

funded project proposes to install two USGS gauges near existing NEP funded D'Olive monitoring equipment. Details are still being worked out at this time. There has been some discussion at ADEM and the SAC about side-by-side gauges and current data recordings in the watershed. A reminder was given about the NEP Annual Meeting, Thursday December 8. The question was posed; do we cover the cost or do we seek sponsors? Mr. Lyons recommends getting sponsors and offered to be a principal sponsor. Ms. Denson mentioned selling tables to businesses, or setting a deadline and requesting payments to discourage no-shows.

Before adjourning the meeting, a call for announcements was made. Mr. Berte mentioned Green Drinks and GreenEd Drinks events as well as a 2017 Sustainability Summit at the University of South Alabama to be held in January. They are currently accepting abstracts for the summit. Mr. LaDon Swann informed the group about the Bays and Bayous Symposium upcoming November 30 – Dec 1. Noting they have received greater than 150 abstracts. Ms. Morgan discussed a community assessment the USACE, Sea Grant and NEP created to receive feedback and measure priorities for the ACCP. It will be sent out to the Management Conference and then will be dispersed to others through those channels.

Ms. Rees made a motion to adjourn, Ms. Denson seconded. 12:01pm