

FOWL RIVER MARSH SPITS STABILIZATION PROJECT

COMMUNITY REPORT



#1: MAY 2024



Credit: Sam St. John

On Tuesday April 9, 2024, the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program (MBNEP) hosted a Public Meeting at the Fowl River Community Center with more than 50 people attending. The meeting's purpose was to provide an update on completed engineering and design activities and forthcoming construction activities related to the Fowl River Marsh Spits Stabilization Project. The purpose of this project is to protect key marsh spits from further degradation. These natural features are important ecological and cultural parts of Fowl River. This report provides answers to the many questions posed at the meeting to keep the community abreast of construction activities as they unfold.

What is the anticipated life of the project?

A minimum of 10 to 15 years. Premium marine construction materials will be used to maximize project expected life, and monitoring will occur during the two construction phases to ensure project integrity. This monitoring will occur for a period of 5 years post-construction.

Our commitment to project success is steadfast; however, we welcome news from the community who use and enjoy the river. If you see something, take a photo, and let us know.

Has funding been secured for maintenance?

Yes and No. At this time, long-term maintenance and replacement costs beyond the 2-year warranty and maintenance period have not been determined, but MBNEP will proactively seek any additional funding needed maintain the project.

Should residents be concerned about the space between fences and spits and jet skiers misusing the project site?

Yes, maybe. Timber wave screens will be installed at the 3-foot contour and will, in most places, be close to the shoreline, inhibiting motorized vessel access behind the screens. MBNEP will be installing visible Hazard signage on the fences to further deter boat traffic within the project area.

It is important we collectively dissuade any irresponsible use of vessels that could damage the restoration areas and cause unnecessary safety risks. Please alert ALEA of any misuse.

What are the benefits to the wave screens?

Protection of important fish nursery areas. By reducing wave energy behind the screens, safe cover will be expanded for marine life and vegetation. The submerged grass habitat between the wave screens and the shoreline is vital to the health of the river and all the wildlife in it.



This project is funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund in partnership with the State of Alabama.

For the latest information please visit the project website at <https://www.mobilebaynep.com/fowl-river-watershed> or contact us at mbnep@mobilebaynep.com; 251-431-6409.

Many of the areas behind the wave screens have relic tree stumps. These already present a hazard to navigation. By having the wave screens in place with safety markings and signage, users will have indicators to avoid these areas.

Does the contractor carry insurance?

Yes. MBNEP’s contractor, Fish Tec Inc., and their subcontractors all have required appropriate insurance. The policies also list participating landowners as additionally insured.

MBNEP asks for patience and caution when navigating around construction activities in the river. This will ensure the safety of workers and the public.

What will the equipment look like?

Medium-size flat barges or other medium-size vessels will be used. Expect two crews working along the river with one crew placing material on the marsh using a conveyer system and an excavator, the other installing pilings and building the wave screens.

What you will not see is heavy equipment working in the marshes and no large gulf fairing barges upstream of the Fowl River Bridge.

MBNEP will have representatives on site daily to actively monitor construction activities.

Has any analysis on wave screen energy reductions been completed to compare the design versus a bulkhead or other hardened structure?

Yes. A comprehensive Design Alternatives analysis was completed with wave screens being the most viable option considering the presence of sea grasses, permitting, cost, impact, and other factors. Modeling was not required for permit approval. These screens were chosen as an innovative technology to dissipate the energy of waves or wakes while allowing for water exchange from the shore to the river. These are permeable and not solid like a bulkhead.

Wave tank testing has shown timber wave screens can reduce the wave energy transmitted by 60%–80% (Thomson, 2000). This reduction in wave energy is comparable to a riprap breakwater at 60%–90% (Seeling 1980).

This is different from a seawall or bulkhead where all the energy is reflected, no water or wave energy is allowed to move behind the wall, and no mixing occurs in the water column. As the water in the river rises, these screens will slow the impact of the water on the shore while also allowing the water to move back through the screens into the river, reducing the erosive impact on these sensitive shorelines.

The openings in the screen will allow highwater to return to the main river flow through the entire length of the structure rather than only at designated breaks in the structure as is the case with bulkhead or riprap. (Rogers Jr. 2017).

Do you have a hurricane plan?

Yes. The Construction Contractor will remove equipment from the construction area and away from residences in the event of a forecasted hurricane.

What if I want to add wave screens to my property in the future?

MBNEP has timber wave screen plans and specifications and possibly other resources that may aid a landowner. Interested parties would have to coordinate with applicable regulatory agencies (Alabama State Lands Division, Alabama Department of Environmental Management, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers). We would be happy to discuss the matter.

How can I receive project updates?

The [Fowl River Watershed webpage](#) will house project updates and allow you to sign up for email updates and leave feedback. www.mobilebaynep.com/fowl-river-watershed; if you prefer traditional mail delivery please contact us.

