

**Mobile Bay National Estuary Program  
Government Networks Committee Meeting  
Original Oyster House, Mobile AL  
March 6, 2015**

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*The Mobile Bay National Estuary Program Government Networks Committee was established to bring State agencies and regional government administrators together with local officials of Mobile and Baldwin counties to more effectively communicate local needs/understand State agency functions and priorities. The goal of this committee is to articulate innovative ways to improve communications and management of our coastal environment.*

In attendance:

Joseph Abston, Washington County Commission; Guy Busby, Baldwin County Legislative Delegation; Jeff Collier, Mayor Town of Dauphin Island; Marlon Cook, Geological Survey of Alabama; Tucker Dorsey, Baldwin County Commission; Charles ‘Skip’ Gruber, Baldwin County Commission; Dane Haygood, Mayor City of Daphne; Scott Hughes, Alabama Department of Environmental Management; Keri Coumanis, City of Mobile; Merceria Ludgood, Mobile County Commission; Eliska Morgan, Alabama Gulf Coast Recovery Council; Patti Powell, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources; Valerie Day, Senator Jeff Session’s office; Randy Davis, Alabama House of Representatives; Brett Dungan, City of Bayou La Batre; Wanda Overstreet, City of Bayou La Batre; Elizabeth Roney, Congressman Bradley Byrne’s office; Lance LeFleur, Alabama Department of Environmental Management

MBNEP Staff: Roberta Swann, Tiffany England, Rick Frederick, Christian Miller

**Takeaways**

- Under RESTORE Act, a draft list of recommendations will be completed by June 2015 and sent out for public comment.
- The committee members feel that an opt-in/opt-out approach is best for the GNC, and they should use this forum as an informational/networking opportunity, making recommendations for the MBNEP’s Executive Council to vote on.
- The Resolution of Support for HHII was approved and will be reviewed by the MBNEP’s Executive Committee and then (pending approval) sent to Gov. Bentley.
- ADEM Director, Lance LeFleur, gave a status update on the Department and spoke to the group about the importance and interconnectedness of Business/Industry and the Environment in southwest Alabama and asked the committee to support his efforts to have a new ADEM coastal field office built with RESTORE Act funds.

Commissioners Merceria Ludgood and Charles ‘Skip’ Gruber welcomed participants. Speakers included Patti Powell, Eliska Morgan, Lance LeFleur and Christian Miller. The meeting was called to order at 7:55 a.m. by Commissioner Gruber who welcomed the group to the meeting. Commissioner Ludgood moved to accept the minutes from the previous meeting, which was seconded by Marlon Cook.

Ms. Patti Powell and Ms. Eliska Morgan gave an overview and update regarding the RESTORE Act. Patti explained that Steering Committee recently met in Pensacola for a work session to review and evaluate the 50 proposals in the portal (totaling \$800 million). The review is complete.

Projects were submitted by the Corp of Engineers, EPA, and numerous organizations. The projects include beneficial uses, land acquisition, sea grass replacement, etc. A draft list of recommendations will be compiled by June 2015 and sent out for public comment. There is approximately \$180 million in Bucket 2.

Eliska Morgan stated that the committee has drafted a competitive selection process that was sent out for 30 day public comment. The public comment period is now closed. Bucket 1 is \$56 million which includes infrastructure and economic projects. No deadline has been set for deadline of official call for projects.

For NFWF Phase 3:

Eliska stated that the state's deadline to submit to the portal is Monday March 9<sup>th</sup>. Projects are due to NFWF in April and will be awarded in November 2015. Eliska also reported that NFWF is launching a new grants program for the Gulf to complement work under the Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund. This new program is intended to help fill gaps that might not otherwise be expected to be funded under GEBF, RESTORE, NRD or other DWH funded programs. It also provides an opportunity for NFWF to pool and leverage various funding sources and partnerships (e.g., Shell, Southern Company) that are outside GEBF – and hopefully expand those partnerships as this program evolves.

The program link is:

[www.nfwf.org/gulfconservation/Pages/home.aspx](http://www.nfwf.org/gulfconservation/Pages/home.aspx)

Next on the agenda, Christian Miller discussed the MBNEP member agreement and by-laws pertaining to the GNC. Roberta Swann explained the history and need for membership agreements expressed from other committees related to consistency and conflict of interest. Merceria Ludgood and Jeff Collier expressed desire to keep this committee informal as a sharing of knowledge/networking opportunity. Commissioner Ludgood did not think an agreement was necessary and was afraid it might alienate some potential members. Patti Powell suggested that each of the committees making up the management conference decide individually if an agreement is appropriate (i.e. SAC probably needs one to identify who is making decisions and policies). Patti Powell and Merceria Ludgood again expressed a primary use of this committee being networking and spreading of information.

Mayor Haygood said we must decide whether or not the goal of this committee is purely informational or are we going to take action, and he stated that an opt-in/opt-out approach could be taken. Scott Hughes said ADEM also sees this committee as a networking/share ideas group. Commissioner Dorsey recommended no official votes arrive from this core group, but use it to learn and share ideas and provide opinions/information to the Executive Committee who could then vote on GNC recommendations. Roberta reminded the group that part of the GNC five-year strategy was to give government more authority to implement programs and projects.

Next on the agenda was approval of the HHII Resolution of Support:

Tucker Dorsey stated he still feels strongly that insurance and environmental restoration are two separate items with no overlay. Commissioner Dorsey made a motion to approve the resolution. The motion was seconded by Skip Gruber. The resolution will be presented to the MBNEP Executive Committee and (pending their approval) then sent on to Gov. Bentley.

Next, Lance LeFleur, Director of the Alabama Department of Environmental Management gave an update to the group on the status of the department and touched on examples of why it is important for business and industry to work in concert with environmental interests in southwest Alabama.

Lance gave an overview of the history of ADEM and stated that their mission was to: *Assure for all citizens of the state a safe, healthful and productive environment.* He then stressed that ADEM was a low cost provider of high quality service, ranking 49<sup>th</sup> in terms of state funding allocated to its mission. Lance then said that federal regulators rank ADEM as a top tier organization in relation to other state environmental agencies. ADEM is also rated as a business-friendly regulator.

Next Lance stressed the importance of southwest Alabama to the state overall in terms of environmental and quality of life assets:

- Water related- Mobile Bay estuary, Mobile Bay and it's adjacent tributaries, Gulf of Mexico
- Ecological Diversity
- Quality of Life- Recreation and scenery

Lance then stressed the importance of southwest Alabama to the state overall in terms of economic assets:

- Tourism-Gulf beaches, ecosystems, retail, historical, nature, resort
- Industry- Aircraft, chemical, steel, seafood, shipbuilding, oil & gas
- Shipping- Inter-coastal, Port of Mobile, Tenn-Tom waterway

Lance then relayed that water quality has dramatically improved in the last 20-30 years:

- Less untreated sewage entering the watershed
- Discharges from ships are controlled
- Wastewater discharges are controlled throughout the watershed
- Nonpoint sources continue to be addressed

Although overall water quality has been improved, there are still problems with the primary cause being uncontrolled stormwater:

- Water clarity is not ideal
- Erosion and sedimentation is a major issue
- Areas of low dissolved oxygen
- Litter is a major problem

Lance then spoke to the interconnectedness of the environment and the economy in southwest Alabama:

- The BP spill showed this link
- Environmental problems =tourism problems
- Tourism problems = economic problems
- Environmental problems = quality of life problems

- Quality of life problems = economic problems
- Impaired waters = tighter restrictions on industry
- Tighter restrictions = competitive disadvantage = economic problems

Lance then praised the level of cooperation between business/industry and environmental interests on the coast, and said that it was unique to the state. This cooperation has led to many accomplishments: litter control, county stormwater master plans, roadmap to resilience, 100-1000, Joe's Branch, Three Mile Creek. Lance then talked about the future of coastal plans, including efforts to continue to improve the environment while promoting development. He mentioned the coming Mobile Bay Model and implementation of stormwater masterplans. He also talked about the possibility of getting the US NAVY Seabees involved in the restoration of Three Mile Creek and the impending impact of RESTORE funding.

Mr. LeFleur wrapped up by talking about the deplorable condition of the ADEM field office in Mobile. He stated he had commitments from many of the RESTORE council members to fund a new ADEM field office, at a cost of ~\$8 million, when the time comes. Lance said it's critical to make sure we have the capability to monitor and protect the good work being done on the coast, and asked the committee to support the building of this new facility.

With no further comments, Commissioner Ludgood asked that a copy of Mr. LeFleur's presentation be distributed to the committee and adjourned the meeting at 9:05 a.m.