

**Mobile Bay National Estuary Program
Government Networks Committee Meeting
Original Oyster House, Mobile AL
September 25, 2015**



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:

Guy Busby, Baldwin County Legislative Delegation; Marlon Cook, Geological Survey of Alabama; Charles 'Skip' Gruber, Baldwin County Commission; Merceria Ludgood, Mobile County Commission; Patti Powell, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources; Eliska Morgan, ADCNR; Tucker Dorsey, Baldwin County Commission; Dane Haygood, City of Daphne; Patsy Parker, Town of Perdido Beach; Bob Howard, EPA; Chris Thomas, EPA,

MBNEP Staff: Roberta Swann, Amy Newbold, Rick Frederick, Christian Miller

Takeaways

- Under RESTORE Act, comments on the state's list are due by September 28th and include \$28 million in proposed projects. The state has also decided to not yet spend any money from bucket one, in anticipation of more money becoming available to implement large-scale projects.
- The ongoing efforts to monitor pre and post restoration, and incorporate a monitoring framework into the WMPs, is critical to show successes and prioritize limited financial resources for coastal restoration efforts going forward.
- The demonstrated success of Joe's Branch, and other similar efforts, has shown the value of the watershed approach to stormwater management and will be used as a model going forward.

Commissioners Merceria Ludgood and Charles 'Skip' Gruber welcomed participants. The meeting was called to order at 8:01 a.m. by Commissioner Gruber who welcomed the group to the meeting.

Commissioner Ludgood moved to approve the minutes from the previous meeting.

Initial discussion centered on what could be done to encourage local elected officials to participate and attend GNC meetings going forward. Dane suggested that Friday meetings interfere with weekend travel plans, and look at scheduling future meetings more towards the middle of the week. Tucker noted that with RESTORE funding coming it is critical that others understand the importance of being involved with the MBNEP to help guide the process. Patti said it may prove beneficial to call a special meeting around a specific topic, such as the draft consent decree. Roberta mentioned that other topics could include other sources of funding, eg. State revolving funds that can be used for LID implementation projects. Tucker suggested that a lot of people are frustrated by the settlement (less money than was anticipated), the duration of the settlement, and perceived inability to do major projects. It illustrates the importance of working through the MBNEP to strategize how best to allocate these funds. Dane said that personal correspondence with representatives would help. Roberta said she would plan to meet individually with

mayors & assistants. Pasty indicated she would be willing to reach out to local mayors and encourage their participation, and offer to bring them with her to the next meeting.

Next, Patti Powell discussed the projects on the state's draft RESTORE list. Comments are due by September 28th and include \$26 million dollars of proposed projects for the State. Access to the money is anticipated by late spring of 2016. Eliska said that the AL council decided not to spend the bucket 1 money from the TransOcean fines, anticipating the BP settlement would make more money available to do large-scale projects.

Marlon Cook then presented an update on monitoring efforts in coastal watersheds. Marlon mentioned that NFWF's decisions on funding projects is related in large strong science-based evidence of impairments, so that is the process we have chosen to address in our monitoring program. The process involves monitoring the watersheds, the data is then fed into the comprehensive watershed planning process, and that is used to inform the recommendations of management measures in the plans. Marlon mentioned that even with the money available to the coast through the BP related pots, it's not enough to address all the issues in every tributary throughout all the watersheds. This monitoring process is what helps to focus on the areas where restoration efforts will have the most positive benefit for the dollars spent. Once the management measures are implemented, we come back to monitor the results in order to show the success of the restoration.

Marlon mentioned that although GSA has monitored streams all over the state, they are now focused in on the coast and using this as a model for the rest of the state. Marlon said collecting discharge data is very important, because it shows you exactly how much pollutants are coming downstream and what reductions need to be made. A lot of the prior work by ADEM and others did not include this discharge data. These studies also consider land uses within the watersheds and their impacts on the stream water quality, also included are assessments for nutrients (eg. nitrogen, phosphorus) and metals (lead, mercury, etc.) and sediment loading and transport. Marlon mentioned that the presences of wetlands is very important. Conserving wetlands improves water quality, reduces flooding, and provides critical habitat. As an example Marlon used the Fowl River Watershed, which still has a large number of wetlands and is one of the most pristine watersheds the GSA has assessed state-wide. The methodology is to monitor every subwatershed feeding the main stream and then further down into the main stream so they have an accurate picture of what is coming into the bay.

Marlon then showed some data from the Fowl River assessment looking at land uses and impacts on the watershed, and then showed how these inform project prioritization within the subwatersheds. Marlon then showed normalized data from sediment assessments completed in coastal watersheds (Bon Secour, Dog River, Fowl River, and D'Olive). Marlon showed the impacts from the installation of the step pool at Joe's Branch, and an order of magnitude decrease in total sediment coming down stream (a 97% reduction).

Skip expressed the need to spread the word about the success at Joe's Branch. Merceria indicated that the Municipal Association (Mobile County) meets on the third Thursday of the month (organization includes Mayors, County Commissioners, Sherriff, other municipal officials) and would be a great opportunity to speak of the good work being done through the MBNEP. Dane indicated that Baldwin County has a

Mayor's Association that meets on an as-needed basis that would also be a good forum for the MBNEP to speak to.

Mayor Haygood spoke about the importance of the D'Olive Intergovernmental Task Force in implementing the recommendations of the WMP. The MBNEP provides leadership and facilitates the necessary discussions to put projects on the ground. It takes a collaborative effort to affect change on a watershed scale. Dane said the talking point should be the 97% reduction in sediment from Joe's Branch and what that means for the health of the Bay. This should be the model for all of us. Chris Thomas said that one of EPA's metrics is success stories, and that the Joe's Branch project will be one success story that is reported to Congress. It is very important to get monitoring data both prior to and post-construction in order to demonstrate these successes.

Roberta then gave an update on the status of the MBNEP and funding related to coastal watershed planning and implementation. The issue is balancing the environmental health of the estuary and the economies that profit from its health. The current CCMP identified six values that people living on the coast most valued: Access, Coastlines, Fish, Heritage & Culture, Environmental Health and Resilience, and Water Quality. The SAC also identified coastal habitats that were most under threat from human impacts: Freshwater Wetlands, Intertidal Marshes and Flats, and Streams, Rivers, and Riparian Buffers. Through the Project Implementation Committee, it was decided the best process to address these issues was the development and implementation of comprehensive watershed management plans for coastal watersheds at the HUC 12 level. Through the PIC, all coastal watersheds were prioritized and then funding was sought to begin the development and implementation of these WMPs.

Roberta then showed a map of the coastal HUC 12 watersheds with WMPs that are implemented, in process, or funded and yet to commence. The watershed approach was discussed and how this is different from the traditional way to manage stormwater which was to move the water off site as quickly as possible. Roberta highlighted how the increase in development and the associated land use change impacts water quality in the D'Olive Watershed. The WMP process was critical for identifying the causes of the sediment entering the watershed (not Bass Pro, instead rapid land use change throughout the watershed). Roberta then highlighted the success of Joe's Branch restoration and then talked about the remaining projects that will be soon underway in D'Olive Creek, Tiawasee, and the remainder of Joe's Branch. The costs of these projects doubled due to the April 2014 storms, and the demonstrated success of Joe's Branch allowed us to go back to NFWF and get the additional funds necessary to complete these restorations.

Next Roberta talked about the efforts to engage the community in the implementation of the Three Mile Creek WMP. The greenway/trail component was the main factor that coalesced the community in this effort. A grant was recently awarded to begin the first leg of this trail and installation of a kayak launch. Work is also under way on the USA campus to install LID. MAWSS is working to address SSOs. Fowl River is a largely pristine watershed, with urbanizing headwaters and potential between agricultural landowners and waterfront property owners. The restoration of the tip of Mon Louis Island is a project that has come out of this process. The project involves dredging the channel at the mouth of Fowl River and restoring the northern tip of the island. Working with the Army Corps has been a major hurdle and is a problem what will need to be addressed going forward for other projects. Working through the

permitting process is challenging. Watershed planning is also underway in Bayou La Batre. Outreach has been a challenge but very successful in what is a very culturally diverse watershed. There is a large Asian community that is being addressed with small face-to-face meetings and the agricultural community in the upper watershed is also being reached in this fashion. One of the primary interests in the Bayou is increasing access to the waterways. Addressing access and community resiliency will be a key component of this WMP. The Bon Secour WMP is just underway, and one of the first outreach events was the establishment of a Coastal Clean-up site for 2015. Volkert has this contract, and we are discussing adding Oyster Bay and Skunk Bayou to this planning process since the stakeholders and issues are very similar.

Meeting adjourned at 9:05 am.