



**Mobile Bay National Estuary Program
Finance Committee Meeting Minutes**
International Trade Center, Killian Room
Friday, April 16, 2021 10:00-11:30 AM

In Attendance: Roberta Swann, Henry Perkins, Tiffany England, Jennifer Denson, Helene Hassell, Chip Brown, Lynne Chronister, Dana Foster-Allen, Ralph Hellmich, Patti McCurdy, & Beth Thomas

The meeting started at 10:04.

1. Welcome and Introductions

Helene Hassell & Jennifer Denson introduce themselves as Co-Chairs of the Finance Committee, respectively. All other members present introduced themselves.

2. Presentation

Roberta Swann began a presentation to cover an overview of the financial strategies of the MBNEP and discuss next steps.

Roberta mentioned that the EPA requires the Financial Committee to exist, then went into the background of the MBNEP, discussing:

- The creation of the program through amendments to the Clean Water Act in 1987.
- The organization is 26 years and growing.
- It is a non-regulatory organization, and that it's approach to environmental management is through a collective impact model, bringing people together for community goals.
- The base funding of the organization comes from US EPA, authorized through 2026 at \$1 million per NEP per year; However, current appropriation is at \$700,000 for 2021-2022.
- The vision is to achieve collective impact in environmental management across all sectors.

Roberta then discussed the collective impact of the MBNEP and gave a broad view of the management conference.

- The members of the conference and the various committees come from various backgrounds, industries, and institutions but work together for a common agenda with a shared vision for change.
- Shared measurement makes it easier to collect data and measure results.
- Mutually reinforcing activities and leveraging of partners.
- Continuous communication to build trust.
- Backbone support to catalyzes and coordinate between the various groups Roberta then discussed who the MBNEP traditionally works with, these groups include: Federal, State & Local governments, Academia, Business/Utilities/Industry, Place Based Citizen Groups, and NGOs, all of whom make up MBNEP's management conference.

- Important in this group are non-federal sources of funding, such as local governments, NGOs, etc.

Roberta then discussed MBNEP's focus, through each subcommittee.

- Ecosystem Status and Trends is handled by the science advisory committee, through research, assessment, monitoring, and reporting.
- Ecosystem Restoration and Protection is the focus of the Project Implementation Committee, through watershed planning and implementation, shoreline management and restoration, invasive species control and waterfront access.
- Technical Assistance and Capacity Building is the focus of the Government Networks Committee, the Business Resource Committee, and the Community Action Committee through focus on fisheries, Business and Industry, Local Governments, Communities/Grassroots Groups.
- Education and Public Involvement is the focus of the Business Resource Committee and Community Action Committee by a focus on Awareness Campaigns/Materials, Outreach & Public Involvement, and Citizen Monitoring.
- Mentioned specifically was the work the ERP was doing to control apple snails in Langan Park, the tools and workshops TAC was providing, the EPI cleanups and special events.
- Roberta discussed the MBNEP's average annualized costs, giving specific budget numbers.
- Average activity budgets per year: \$5,664,092
- Average yearly MBNEP Program Delivery: \$ 934,347/ 16%
- Average yearly Dauphin Island Sea Lab overhead: \$ 357,567/ 6%
- DISL Indirect Charge: 43.8%, discounted for base EPA grant to 15%. This is paid because the MBNEP is part of DISL, they manage several accounting and administration functions and are liable for all external awards and ensuring the MBNEP is reporting appropriately.
- MBNEP's budget expanded after the BP oil spill, and the MBNEP has a strong grant team which also grows the budget.
- Program delivery is managed and catalyzed by the MBNEP, but if another entity is a better choice for accomplishing a specific program, the MBNEP will assist that entity in carrying out the deliverable. Results are the most important aspect.

Finance Committee Charge: Develop dedicated and diverse sources of funding to implement the CCMP

Current CCMP Related Funding

- Federal- EPA, Other Competitive Grants (NOAA, DOI)
- State- Education Trust Fund (DISL), ADCNR, ADEM
ADEM is competitive but securable
- Local- Mobile and Baldwin counties, Mobile, Daphne, Spanish Fort, Fairhope, Foley, Gulf Shores
Local governments are regularly engaged, instead of traditional fundraising
- National Organizations- National Fish and Wildlife Foundation

- Private- (Project Based) Alabama Power Foundation
Alabama Power gives money on a project-by-project basis, with a recent interest in various oyster projects.

Current sources of Management Conference Sponsorships

- PEP, Nature Conservancy, Alabama State Port Authority, local engineering firms

Goals of the Finance Committee

- Educate local, state, and federal government agencies about value and accountability of the MBNEP in delivering results – important to do this on a Federal level.
- Cultivate engagement of local, state, and federal government and private interests in specific projects to demonstrate how MBNEP works – the more these entities know about what the MBNEP does, the more they support they give.
- Secure long-term investment from local, state, and federal government and private sector interests in overall program operation - Jimmy Lyons felt strongly at the last meeting that more private fundraising should be a goal, and that business and industry should be engaged directly, and asked the financial committee to please consider.

Objectives of the Finance Committee

Target

- Target key stakeholders to educate about the MBNEP and its successes and needs – How far up the estuary do we go? Which state agencies do we target? Do we target agriculture, which other industries?

Secure

- Secure community investment equivalent to a minimum of 10% of project costs – is this a realistic number?
Dana Foster Allen with the county said we should ask for what we want from the county, and indicated that commissioners also have discretionary funds for special projects. She suggested cultivating a relationship with Commissioner Dueitt, indicating he enjoys field trips, so it may be in our interest to invite him to the field to see some of our projects.

Roberta proposed a field trip with Randy Dueitt and Chip Brown.

Grow

- Grow annual program investments for the next five-year period from at least 5 new communities
The challenge for this is going to cities we are competing directly against food banks, homeless services, etc. The pitch is that this is not a charitable donation, but an investment.

Mayor Ralph Hellmich said the MBNEP could very well show the value its projects bring.

Roberta said to Dana Foster Allen that Baldwin County gave us \$75,000 after we completed a project they didn't want to touch.

Patti McCurdy suggested GOMESA as a source of potential funding.

Expand

- Expand annual program investments by 30% from existing communities where WMP implementation is under way

Roberta explained the need for non-Federal dollar matching, for both the EPA funds and other federal grants.

Establish

- Establish a restoration fund of \$100,000 within 3 years for providing non-federal match with a focus on the private sector

Lynn Chronister asked if Roberta had considered starting an endowment. Roberta suggested we might go through the Dauphin Island Foundation for that path, and Helene said yes that would be possible.

Build

- Build a revolving loan fund to support private sector investment in best management practices for reducing stormwater runoff and/or supporting local fishing interests

This project is currently underway, called the Coastal Alabama Fisheries Fund focused on oyster farmers to help them access low interest loans, which there is a need for especially after Covid. Henry Perkins at the MBNEP is managing the project.

Actions to Garner New Resources

Target

- Who?

A further discussion on municipalities took place.

Mayor Hellmich said the City of Foley would increase their funding.

Chickasaw, Saraland, and Satsuma are not giving any money. The MBNEP should demonstrate their value in that region first, then approach with an ask.

Mayor Hellmich suggested that even small cities should give even a small, symbolic amount, so that they are invested.

Dana Foster Allen mentioned that now is a good time to ask, as everyone is receiving American Rescue Funds which will be defined on May 10.

Roberta asked how we can get more money from the state?

Randy Davis and Alabama Power in 2006 and 2008 were able to get the MBNEP added as a state line item, originally \$250,000 but through budget cuts, now at \$76,088.

Chip Brown has a good relationship with Bill Poole, who may be able to help us increase that funding. We should work towards a tour/trip to show Bill Poole our projects. Maybe through a combined effort with the DISL.

- How can we increase federal legislative support for EPA dollars?

Florida NEP delegation pushing to increase EPA appropriations to \$1mil. Maintaining this funding long term though is concerning, a new administration could slash the EPA budget at any point in time, throwing out program. MBNEP needs to be sustainable.

Tactics for approaching lawmakers should include communicating that Alabama Power and other businesses support the MBNEP, especially the Port Authority, and we should be diplomatic with use of the term climate change, i.e., describe it in less direct terms.

What are possibilities for and how would we go about expanding support from other State agencies and which ones?

- Which local communities should we prioritize for soliciting investment?

We provide our highest value to local governments and can communicate that.

Communicating the inconsistent requirements between areas is a challenge but necessary; geography changes from place to place.

- Existing- Mobile, Spanish Fort, Daphne, Foley, Fairhope, Gulf Shores
- Next Steps:

Present plan for Non-Federal Investments 2021-2022: USEPA= \$700,000 (Workplan due June 1)

Jennifer Denson - We should add new communities as targets, develop the economic investment pitch.

Dana Foster Allen says we need to determine what the American Rescue Fund can be used for, but as she knows it's very loose, can even be used for revenue replacement.

This is the year to go ask for money, go big or go home.

Lynn Chronister asked if we had spoken to Terri Sewell, said she might be very supportive.

- Meeting frequency:

Monthly meetings were agreed on, Fridays at 10 or 11.

3. Adjourn

The Co-Chair adjourned the meeting.