

**Mobile Bay National Estuary Program  
Project Implementation Committee Meeting  
Thursday, March 13, 2014  
Blakely Classrooms, 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center**

**Minutes**

**Attendees:**

Emery Baya (Thompson Engineering)	Mark Berte (Alabama Coastal Foundation)
Celena Boykin (Baldwin County)	Ashley Campbell (City of Daphne)
Stephanie Christenson (Mobile Baykeeper)	Carl Ferraro (ADCNR-SLD)
Judy Haner (The Nature Conservancy)	Patric Harper (USFWS-Coastal Programs)
Phillip Hinesley (ADCNR-SLD)	Bob Howard (EPA Region IV)
Teddy King (ADPH-Baldwin County)	Kara Lankford (Ocean Conservancy)
John Mareska (ADCNR-MRD)	Joyce Nicholas (MC SWCD/NRCS)
Larry Parson (U.S.A.C.O.E)	Sam St. John (ACF/Baykeeper)
Randy Shaneyfelt (ADEM)	Mike Shelton (WBNERR/ADCNR-SLD)
Suzanne Sweetser (Thompson Engineering)	Lee Walters (ACF/Goodwin Mills & Cawood)
Jason Wilkens, ADEM	

MBNEP Staff: Rick Frederick, Christian Miller, Roberta Swann, Tom Herder

**1. Call to Order**

MBNEP Director Roberta Swann called the meeting to order at 2:05 p.m.

**2. Approval of Minutes**

PIC Co-Chair Patric Harper asked for a motion to approve the minutes of the November 5, 2013 meeting. Tom Herder made the motion to approve the minutes, which was seconded by Sam St. John, and approved unanimously.

**3. Review of five-year Ecosystem Restoration Strategy, timeline, and expectations for first year work plan.** Roberta Swann, Director of the Mobile Bay NEP, reviewed the six values (determined to be of primary importance to coastal Alabamians) around which the 2013-1018 CCMP will be organized – Access to water and open spaces, Coastlines (beaches and shorelines), Fish, Heritage and Culture, Environmental Health and Resilience, and Water Quality. She shared a strategy map showing where each of the MBNEP Management Conference committees fit, another slide describing the CCMP methodology, an “In a Nutshell” slide that showed the basic roles of each Management Conference committee, and then she shared the components of the five-year restoration strategy, which was largely developed through the PIC.

Goals:

- ♦ Improve trends in water quality in priority watersheds with impairments that discharge into fishery nursery areas.
- ♦ Improve ecosystem function and resilience through protection, restoration, and conservation of first-line-of-defense habitats, including beaches, bays, backwaters, and rivers
- ♦ Restore and expand human connections

- Objectives:
- ♦ Restore conditions including hydrology from headwaters to intertidal zones in at least nine watersheds.
  - ♦ Install living shorelines along X linear feet of publically-owned bays, backwaters, and intertidal waterways
  - ♦ Install living shorelines along X linear feet of privately-owned bays, backwaters, and intertidal waterways
  - ♦ Plant X acres of sea oats to stabilize dune systems along Gulf-fronting beaches
  - ♦ Determine (implement?) hydrological restoration strategy for Highway 98 causeway and northern bays
  - ♦ Restore X acres of nearshore and intertidal marshes and flats
  - ♦ Create a minimum of 10 new access points, with at least seven in Mobile County
  - ♦ Protect/conservate X acres of priority habitats for public benefit through acquisition and conservation easements
  - ♦ Create trails on historical, ethnic, and religious themes to encourage eco-heritage tourism
- Outcomes:
- ♦ Less trash in area waterways
  - ♦ More fish
  - ♦ Cleaner water
  - ♦ Natural shorelines
  - ♦ Resilient beaches, dunes, and nearshore habitats
  - ♦ Restore hydrology in nearshore landscapes
  - ♦ Expand use of dredge material in restoration activities
  - ♦ More environmentally appropriate access to our coastal resources

She presented a timeline for finalization of the CCMP is as follows:

March 21, 2014	Finalization of five-year strategies by committees
March 28, 2014	Approval of final draft of CCMP by Executive Committee
April 30, 2014	Final draft released for public comment period
June 2, 2014	Submission of CCMP to U. S. EPA for review/approval

Ms. Swann noted that the CCMP is a “living document” and that we will work past today to develop performance measures and indicators.

**4. Overview of Watershed Planning Process for greater Fish River Watershed** Mike Shelton, Coastal Training Program Coordinator at the Weeks Bay NERR, reviewed watershed management planning efforts for the Fish River Watershed. He began with a slide that reviewed current activities.

Mr. Shelton said that the recently completed TMDL would be useful in guiding implementation as well as opening doors to funding. In terms of Data Needs, he noted that the PIC Assessment of Resources and Needs would have value. He hopes to derive monitoring data from MS4 reports, but is not sure that it will be available, since Fish River is east of Highway 181 and outside of the MS4 area. Other needs include adding Weeks Bay Citizens Advisory Committee members and stimulating watershed residents into active advocacy.

He showed a map of the greater Fish River Watershed (including four HUC-12s: Lower, Middle, and Upper Fish River as well as Perrone Branch), as well as a (beat up) Fish River Watershed road sign.

With regard to point sources, he showed a table that described the four water treatment plants and three industrial permittees and commented that any problems related to the industrial facilities were actually related to polluted stormwater runoff, rather than industrial effluent.

**5. State of Coastal Watershed Management Planning** – Christian Miller, AUMERC/CACWP Facilitator/MBNEP Nonpoint Source Pollution Specialist, provided a status report on comprehensive watershed management planning in the MBNEP study area. He noted that current plans have been completed for D'Olive and Tiawasee creeks and Joe's Branch (the urbanized, eastern portion of the Apalachee-Tensaw Watershed), Eight Mile Creek, Big Creek Lake, and Volanta Gully (a subwatershed of Fly Creek in Fairhope). As Mike Shelton reported, a Fish River WMP is in development, as is one for Three Mile Creek. An RFQ is being developed currently for a Fowl River Watershed.

He explained that to be eligible for 319 funding, a WMP (usually for a 12-digit HUC) had to address the EPA's nine key elements, which he displayed on a slide (crediting Dr. Eve Brantley of ACES).

He reviewed the issues included in the PIC watershed prioritization effort of February 2013 for the Eight Mile Creek, Fowl River, Big Creek Lake, Three Mile Creek, and Fish River watersheds and added similar information from the D'Olive and Volanta Gully watersheds. To explain the that prioritization process, he reviewed the Science Advisory Committee effort to determine which critical coastal habitat is most impaired in provision of ecological services by a suite of anthropogenic stressors. Through this evaluation by over 30 scientists, freshwater wetlands; intertidal marshes and flats; and rivers, streams, and their riparian borders were determined to be the most stressed coastal habitats. Their presence was considered an important factor in the watershed prioritization process, and any watershed that contained patches of at least two was among those prioritized, as shown in a map he presented. Mr. Miller shared a slide that showed all 17 criteria used to evaluate the watersheds for planning, and then a slide which showed the 10 determined to be of the highest priority for planning: Fish River, Tensaw-Apalachee, Big Creek Lake, Bon Secour River, Fowl River, West Fowl River, Dog River (actually Lower, Upper, and Halls Mill Creek), Deer River, Grand Bay Swamp, Graham Bayou, and Bayou La Batre River.

Towards prioritizing future watershed management planning efforts, Mr. Miller stressed the importance of tidal influence (versus non-tidal watersheds), grouping (when it makes sense – with Dog River as an example, along with Wolf Bay's Sandy Creek, Miflin Creek, and Graham Bayou with similar geography, issues, and demographics; and Fly Creek (which comprises ADEM's Yancey Branch, Fly Creek, and Gum Swamp watersheds). He mentioned other factors for consideration in watershed planning, including precedent sediment analyses by GSA, shoreline characterizations, and access characterizations as recommendations for future planning efforts.

He concluded with a slide showing 12-digit HUCs within Mobile and Baldwin counties with existing current plans, tidal influences, possible tidal influences, and priority designations from the February 2013 effort.

Eliska Morgan, the Executive Director of the Alabama Gulf Coast Recovery Council working with ADCNR-SLD, was asked to clarify the importance of tidal influences on watersheds with regard to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund. She explained that this fund is directed towards projects that remedy harm to natural resources (habitats and species) impacted by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill and that projects must occur within the Gulf Coast states and waters within reasonable proximity to where the injury occurred, as appropriate. She provided some examples and explained the challenges of demonstrating the nexus to the DWH spill. D'Olive Restoration received the largest funding outside of Louisiana, but there was initial consternation over the Lake Forest Lake, and it was loss of SAV, thought to be related to sedimentation, which provided the supporting evidence of a connection. She also mentioned the funded Fowl River project, noting that NFWF was concerned over a balance between restoration (D'Olive) and conservation (Fowl River).

She provided a schedule for GEBF funding for each of the five States, with \$22.12 M announced in April 2013 and an additional \$49.42M in February 2014 with \$356.16M ultimately directed to the State of Alabama. Pre-proposals for the next funding round are due in April.

Ms. Swann commented that Ms. Morgan's presentation illustrated the importance of watershed planning, since D'Olive's WMP is in place and Fowl River's WMP development is a component of that funded project. Ms. Morgan added that MS will use NFWF funding to establish a framework for the development of nine watershed plans, albeit not conforming to EPA guidance.

PIC Co-Chair Judy Haner assumed the floor. Referring to the NFWF funding timeline, she said that with money coming down the pike, we need to be more shovel ready. As the April deadline approaches for pre-proposals for the next round of NFWF funding, we have a good record of watershed management planning, and we can make a good case for seeking funding for comprehensive funding around the Bay. She suggested developing a menu of five WMPs for \$X, or ten for \$X. Ms. Swann suggested that the pre-proposal seek in the neighborhood of \$3M to undertake 10 WMPs over the next five years, with three the first year, three the second year, and perhaps four the third year, with implementation of projects immediately succeeding plan development, using the "row, row, row your boat..." schema. Such a protocol would provide NFWF documentation of WHY funds would be requested to implement projects, since the \$3M would not fund subsequent project implementation.

Ms. Haner again projected Mr. Miller's slide containing the EPA's nine key elements as a framework for WMP development. Tom Herder reminded her that we also want to include shoreline assessments and access recommendations in comprehensive WMPs.

Phillip Hinesley asked Bob Howard about EPA key element #4 – "Estimate technical and financial assistance needed." Bob elaborated, adding that this is not purely to restore impaired waters but also to protect high quality waters. Ms. Swann asked Emery Baya to elaborate on this element with regard to the D'Olive WMP. Mr. Baya responded that the WMP:

- Provided a geomorphological assessment of areas most critical and threatened

- Identified management measures to address those areas
- Explained that D'Olive is "on the cusp" of 25% impervious cover, the point at which degradation is irreversible. It included rough order-of-magnitude cost estimates for measures and recommended low impact development for as-yet-undeveloped areas.
- Identified the biggest and most difficult approaches to retrofitting LID in areas that are already developed, which is much more costly.

Mr. Baya said that Thompson felt that a well-established D'Olive Working Group allowed them to get right at the technical aspects of planning. Ms. Haner summarized that the process provided a common idea of tasks and costs. She asked the committee if we were ready to follow up on the suggested pre-proposal to undertake comprehensive planning for prioritized coastal watersheds.

Ms. Swann reported a previous conversation with Baykeeper's Casi Callaway in which they discussed whether WMP outreach components should be lumped into the planning contract or if they should be separated and allow outreach/engagement to be addressed by the MBNEP Community Action Committee.

John Mareska of the Marine Resources Division was asked if this approach adequately addressed fisheries. He expressed support, asking how such an approach could be anything but helpful to fishery resources. Bob Howard suggested linking this type of activity to the monitoring of fishery resources as part of the NRDA process. He felt that the approach would open "so many doors to potential funding."

Ms. Haner mentioned metric development and a TNC Oyster Metric document that provided a potential tool that might contribute in some cases. She wondered aloud how much habitat restoration would be necessary to effect positive changes in fishery resources. She said that she was comfortable with leaving some metric determination unresolved, especially with so much planning as-yet-undeveloped. Ms. Morgan asked about the timeline for pre-proposal submission, to which Ms. Haner responded, April 19.

Ms. Swann asked for a motion to have Ms. Haner develop a pre-proposal to seek funding for comprehensive watershed management planning for priority coastal watersheds, which was provided by Sam St. John. Ashley Campbell seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

As for another motion to approve the five-year CCMP restoration strategy, Mr. St. John again made the motion which was seconded by Lee Walters and carried unanimously.

Joyce Nicholas asked if the PIC would see funding for project implementation on the tail of completed WMP development. Ms. Haner responded emphatically and positively, adding that NFWF will have greater confidence in projects recommended by NFWF-funded planning efforts.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:30 p.m.