

**Mobile Bay National Estuary Program
Project Implementation Committee Meeting
Thursday, June 12, 2014
Blakely Classrooms, 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center**

Minutes

Attendees:

Emery Baya (Thompson Engineering)	Mark Berte (Alabama Coastal Foundation)
Mike Dardeau (DISL)	Bradley Williams (NRCS)
Lee Walters (GMC)	Carl Ferraro (ADCNR-SLD)
Judy Haner (The Nature Conservancy)	Patric Harper (USFWS-Coastal Programs)
Sam St. John (ACF/Baykeeper)	Bob Howard (EPA Region IV)
Teddy King (ADPH-Baldwin County)	Casi Callaway (Mobile Baykeeper)
John Mareska (ADCNR-MRD)	Joyce Nicholas (USDA/NRCS)
Larry Parson (U.S.A.C.O.E)	Sandy Gibson (USACE)
Gretchen Barrera (Payne Environmental)	LG Adams (ADCNR)
Will Underwood (Grand Bay NEER)	Nikelle Stoll (Mobile Baykeeper)
Denee Edwards (Mobile Baykeeper)	Doug Cote (MAWSS)

MBNEP Staff: Roberta Swann, Linda Sierke

1. Call to Order

MBNEP Director Roberta Swann called the meeting to order at 2:13 p.m.

2. Approval of Minutes

PIC Co-Chair Patric Harper asked for a motion to approve the minutes of the March 13, 2014 meeting. Sam St. John made the motion to approve the minutes as written, which was seconded and approved unanimously.

3. Update on existing plans-D'Olive, Fowl River, and Three-Mile Creek.

- **D'Olive Watershed:** Roberta Swann, Director of the Mobile Bay NEP, began the update by talking about the first round of NFWF Gulf Benefit Fund money pointing out the restoration of the first leg of Joe's Branch held up very well through the recent flooding. NFWF visited the site after the event and was very pleased with how well the restoration managed the storm. She also stated the other areas of Joe's Branch slated for restoration would likely need additional funding of approximately \$500,000 due to the impacts of the storm event and she is currently in conversations with NFWF about additional funds needed. The MBNEP has issued a RFQ to pre-qualify engineering firms so we have a short list of firms in order to undertake the restorations in quicker order. The RFQ is on the street and due by the end of the month. Bob Howard of EPA Region IV asked about the funding for the other D'Olive projects. Ms. Swann stated we are focusing only on Joe's Branch at this point, but the RFQ is to line up engineering and construction firms when we are ready to undertake the other areas of the D'Olive Watershed and we do have money in place for those activities.
- **Three-Mile Creek:** Ms. Swann continued the update with discussion of Three Mile Creek and stated we are in the final stages of completing this Watershed Management

Plan. Ms. Swann further discussed the initial implementation recommendations listed in the Plan, noting these are draft recommendations and there will be a thirty day “scrubbing” period to figure out how we want to go about implementation. The City of Mobile has indicated they are planning to initiate an aggressive, comprehensive trash strategy by using several methods, one being the purchase of a trash boat. There seems to be much excitement about restoring Three Mile Creek and making it Mobile’s waterfront. The MBNEP gets calls almost daily about it.

- **Fowl River:** Ms. Swann began the Fowl River update mentioning the RFQ for the Fowl River Watershed Management Plan was put out on May 27, 2014 and proposals are due June 27, 2014. The sediment analyses will happen in tandem with the watershed management planning process. Ms. Swann discussed the goals of the watershed planning process which are basically that we want to make sure people can do what they have always done on the River. This speaks to the heritage and culture values stated in our new CCMP. The MBNEP will be putting together a review committee by the end of the month to review the proposals for this Watershed Management Plan. We hope to have it ready for implementation by July 31, 2015. Ms. Swann then asked Emery Baya of Thompson Engineering for an update on the Mon Louis Island restoration. Mr. Baya stated he has delivered a draft alternatives report to MBNEP with 3 options, offering different levels of alignment, reclamation, and cost variations. He stated the original plan was to use the fill material from the Fowl River channel dredging, but found the sediments are very fine and will not be suitable. There was discussion of other options for fill material, as well as the challenges of handling and transporting of the fill material and the cost associated with that.

4. Pre-Proposal Update: Ms. Swann quickly went over the pre-proposal information which included habitat mapping for both coastal counties as well as SAV mapping. Ms. Swann stated “so far so good” with all of this. Watershed Management Planning for Tensaw-Apalachee, West Fowl River, Wolf Bay, and Dog River have been submitted. NFWF came back and asked specifically about Bon Secour and Bayou La Batre. Ms. Swann has sent them the list of the prioritized watersheds and the process used to get there. She wanted them to know that our homework has been done. We plan to work with SARPC to apply for an ADEM grant to augment the Watershed Management Plan for Fish River, being the highest priority watershed.

After Ms. Swann completed her presentation, Judy Haner PIC Co-Chair (TNC) mentioned we did not to do introductions at the beginning of the meeting. Ms. Swann introduced Linda Sierke as MBNEP’s new Restoration Project Coordinator. She will be working on the D’Olive and Fowl River restorations and Tom Herder will be pulling back and doing more of the technical writing and science indicator development. Introductions continued around the room.

5. Evaluating needs for upcoming Watershed Management Plans: Judy Haner took the floor and began the discussion by refreshing everyone’s memory about a few things missing on past WMP. The three things to add are: 1) conservation priorities 2) climate change 3) shoreline assessments. The goal is to not only incorporate these things into existing plans, but to also include in future plans. She stated that the D’Olive WMP has set the template for how we want our plan to be laid out. She and Patric Harper went through the major headers of the D’Olive WMP and asked the group to think about what things may be missing. The group was encouraged to look closely at the big headers and determine if there is anything beyond these

three components that may be missing. Ms. Haner stated the importance for these plans to look alike, to have similar components and elements, even though each will have specifics relative to the individual watersheds. Bob Howard of EPA Region IV wondered if we may want to look at the immediate area where the tributary discharges into Mobile Bay. Ms. Haner agreed this is a very important component to add. Ms. Swann pointed out that NFWF is our main source of funding right now, and they care about intertidal watersheds having a nexus to those resources that could have been impacted by the oil spill.

6. Review of issues, needs, and resources: Ms. Haner continued the discussion by asking the group to remember from last year the issues, needs and resources regarding the four priority watersheds (Fowl River, Tensaw-Apalachee, Dog River, and Wolf Bay). She then reviewed the slides for each. She asked the group to consider if we have all the resources to meet the needs for these watersheds.

- Ms. Haner stated that she and Mr. Harper hoped the group could now begin looking at the smaller parts of the plan. The things that will fall under these big headers-the meat on the bones! Casi Callaway of Mobile Baykeeper stated we want to figure out what is generic to all by creating an excellent template. Ms. Haner agreed and noted we do not have a template for these new components specifically and to think about the diversity of the four watersheds we will be focusing on. Mr. Harper stated there will be differences with every watershed and to think of specific things for each one. We will need this if asked to submit a full proposal.
- In looking at the three headers, Mike Dardeau (DISL) pointed out perhaps conservation priorities should fall as a subheading of management measures and things like setting up a fund for conservation easements would be an implementation strategy. Roberta Swann asked Emery Baya to speak briefly on the process his firm went through in developing the D'Olive Plan. Mr. Baya agreed with Mike's thoughts on the categories and stated that conservation was not the main focus of the D'Olive Plan, but there are recommendations for riparian buffers, etc. He felt this would be applicable to any watershed, but some more than others. Addressing how growth occurs was part of it as well.
- Bob Howard suggested it may be important to know who is doing what with conservation, and who has already done something in each specific watershed. Possibly knowing what practices have been used in a particular watershed.
- Sam St. John expressed his thoughts of a watershed plan by saying he felt it must be expressed with great detail-to know what the problems are and how we will fix them. He felt we should at least begin to identify all the measurable parameters and determine what the problems are that are fundable. Ms. Swann responded using the Joe's Branch project as an example of knowing we needed to do something, but did not have the money to hire an engineering firm to help figure out exactly what, at that stage. She stated there was criticism on the D'Olive plan because we were not specific enough. Ms. Swann expressed there is a fine line to walk with the WMP between defining exactly what needs to be done vs. giving a category of what needs to be done. There is not enough money typically to know what exactly needs to be done until you can begin digging in to the project. Ms. Swann expressed that we need to be able to go to NFWF and show them where the problems are occurring and the restoration project we want to do. Ms. Swann added that the Watershed Management Plans will aid in other sources of funding as well.

Mr. St. John then asked if there is any monitoring done during or prior to development, how can you say there is impairment without measuring it? Ms. Swann responded by saying it depends on what the impairment is, and used Joe's Branch and Fowl River as examples. She expressed we will get recommendations out of the WMP.

- Bob Howard suggested a vulnerability assessment must also be done. All the information is already out there it just has to be compiled and made watershed specific. This will need to be communicated to the community.
- Judy Haner then began the discussion of shoreline assessments. She asked the group to consider what we want the components to be on these shoreline assessments. Mr. Howard expressed the need to characterize the shorelines of these watersheds, where we are seeing serious erosion, invasive species, and loss of littoral zones. He stated it is an important component where you have the land/water interface. This is where the most important biological productivity often occurs. He spoke of the volunteer effort in Charlotte Harbor, and every 2-3 years they do a complete shoreline survey of the entire estuary. With photo documentation they can track changes over time. Ms. Swann responded that would be a possible citizen engagement activity and they can be trained to do shoreline assessment. Ms. Haner said GSA has done a good assessment and could be a good base for a lot of what we do. Patric Harper suggested getting a group such as Dog River Clearwater Revival on board should be easy. Mike Dardeau thought we should characterize the receiving body of water, both good and bad. He further stated that D'Olive Bay will change due to the restoration-will it change for the better or worse? All these things are connected and we have to follow the flow.
- Will Underwood with Grand Bay NERR stated that sea level change is not climate change, and to be careful not to lump the two. He offered examples where there has been habitat loss due to salt water intrusion. Sam St. John asked what will we say about climate change? Ms. Swann responded by saying one of the things we looked at with Three Mile Creek is a SLOSH Model which looks at storm surge. She continued by pointing out we can also arguably say one of the things occurring with the changing climate is having hundred year weather events more often. Mr. St. John suggested we try not to use the term climate change and instead use terms such as sea level rise, preparing for heavier rain events, etc. He felt we may get more community engagement that way.
- Casi Callaway stated photo documentation would be very important for the shoreline assessments. Ms. Swann responded that would be part of what we would get with the habitat mapping.
- Ms. Swann then asked everyone get there head wrapped around these Watershed Management Plans. They are not the NEP's Watershed Management Plans. The PIC is "driving the bus." The hired firms will be required to report out to the PIC, and will have ample opportunity to guide, question and review the work that is done. This is a departure from what has been done in the past. Ms. Haner then pointed out the importance of having these communities and all the players within the communities engaged. Ms. Swann stated that in the RFQ they are not only reporting to the PIC but also the community and we are not going to do this in a vacuum.
- Ms. Swann then asked if we are missing anything from the Corps perspective. Along those lines, Ms. Haner thought perhaps we should put something in each Watershed Management Plan concerning beneficial uses for the spoil. Mr. Harper pointed out that Sandy Gibson (USACE) has spearheaded the living shoreline general permit for the last several years. Ms. Gibson talked about the smaller dredge projects with property owners

and perhaps there is a way to connect some of these smaller projects with some of the larger projects. This may eliminate the need for so much double and triple handling of the material by getting the homeowners involved. This may allow for the material to be moved closer to the site and better utilized with less expense. Mr. Howard thought if we can capture what activities the Corps has had, where they have disposal populations, and what kind of material it is, would be a useful thing to know. Sam St. John mentioned that when you engage the community you will have lots of resources for that type of information, because everyone knows what has been going on in their particular community for years.

- Moving back to the shoreline assessment discussion, Mr. St. John asked if we ever assess what “creatures” exist in a body of water. Is that ever a part of the Watershed Management Plan? Mr. Harper stated we would like to have pre and post monitoring and that may be covered under monitoring heading, but is something we could put in.
- Bob Howard brought up hydrologic alteration as a topic we have not discussed. He stated this is a big issue in some other areas and could be here as well. He continued by saying you will often see historical changes that have dramatically changed that watershed. He mentioned there are things you can potentially do to bring the watershed hydrology back to what normal and natural conditions were. This may solve a lot of problems you may otherwise try to fix after the fact, instead of fixing it upstream. Ms. Haner responded this is captured under our regular plan but cannot be over emphasized. Mr. Harper noted it is in fact captured in 2 places in the D’Olive Plan.
- Ms. Haner asked the group if there was anything else that we are missing. It was stated the invasive species sub category should go under climate change. She felt we will have more time for input once we get into the individual watersheds and begin really developing those plans. She expressed how the brainstorming really helps, and feels these plans will set us up for success down the road. She is very excited about getting this rolling!
- Roberta Swann mentioned one thing we have not discussed is NRCS and farmers. Joyce Nichols (USDA NRCS) told the group she met with NFWF shortly after Ms. Swann did, and took them to a couple of sites, showing them possible easement type situations. Bob Howard asked if it would be good to know who is participating in conservation practices on agricultural land within each watershed. Ms. Nichols said she thought she could probably give a generalization for each watershed, but may not be able to be specific due to the privacy act. Mr. Howard then asked if she could give a characterization of what kinds of practices have been instituted in the watershed, to which Ms. Nichols responded she could if she had about 3 more people on staff! She mentioned she would have to check with her state office to find out what kind of data she could provide. She also noted there are a lot of people that do not participate with her and she can only do so much. Mr. Harper suggested perhaps it could be part of the community outreach.
- Ms. Haner resumed the floor to close the meeting and let everyone know they will be kept updated as the proposal process moves forward.
- Mark Berte (ACF) announced an upcoming Wetlands Regulations and Compliance Workshop, one in Mobile at the Mobile Area Assoc. of Realtors on July 31, 2014 and the other in Fairhope at Weeks Bay NEER Resource Center in Fairhope on August 19, 2014.
- Mr. Harper then asked everyone to go through the D’Olive Table of Contents-to look at all the headings and subheadings and see if anything jumps out. Think of other things that may be specific to these four watersheds and to send it in.

- Bob Howard added one last comment having to do with generating what the options are to address issues we find in a watershed management plan. He feels we should be thinking about coming up with a good, fleshed out listing and understanding of the various options that may be available to us from all the players who have done this and understand it. We do not want to “recreate the wheel” every time by trying to come up with ideas. His hope is that we will begin spending some energy to try to capture what really makes sense. Judy Haner added that there is a master list to look at for any of the watersheds, some could be broadly applied, but some will be very watershed specific.
- Mike Dardeau brought up one last point by expressing concern that with several Watershed Management Plans coming to life over the next 10 years, we probably need a group (maybe the PIC) to meet annually and review those watershed plans and decide the status of each. To offer some kind of evaluation of where the plans are. He stated it would be nice if whoever is doing it had the authority and resources to move them forward if they are not going anywhere. Ms. Haner explained that one of the things we are planning to do is to have report-outs once a year from each of the Watershed Plans, knowing what the priorities are for each, given differing amounts of money. She agreed with Mr. Dardeau’s concerns and expressed the importance of staying on top of these plans, because we do not want them to gather dust and we do want them to be dynamic.
- The meeting was adjourned at 3:56.
- **Next Meeting: Sept. 11, 2014 at 2:00p.m. at Five Rivers Delta Center, Blakeley Classrooms**