



**Mobile Bay National Estuary Program  
Project Implementation Committee Meeting Minutes  
Thursday, February 20, 2020  
Five Rivers Delta Resource Center, Tensaw Theater**



**Attendees:**

LG Adams (Weeks Bay Reserve)  
Mark Berte (Alabama Coastal Foundation)  
Don Blancher (Moffatt & Nichol)  
Celena Boykin (Baldwin County Planning & Zoning)  
Evan Collins (U.S. Fish & Wildlife)  
Benji Elmore (Alabama Forestry Commission)  
Walter Ernest (Pelican Coast Conservancy)  
Mike Eubanks (Thompson Engineering)  
Carl Ferraro (Stantec)  
Rickey Fields (Alabama Forestry Commission)  
Sydney Forbes (3MC Partnership)  
Casey Fulford (AL Association of Conservation Districts)  
Christopher Grant (Thompson/Watermark)  
Judy Haner (The Nature Conservancy)  
Patric Harper (U.S. Fish & Wildlife)  
Rob Howell (Anchor QEA)  
Andrew James (Volkert)  
Timothy Jensen (3MC Partnership)

Jeremiah Kolb (ADCNR, State Lands)  
Nicole Love (Birmingham Audubon)  
Michael Lynch (Geosyntec)  
Michelle Melton (City of Mobile)  
Eliska Morgan (Thompson)  
Don Mroczko (USACE)  
Amy Newbold (US EPA – Gulf of Mexico Div.)  
Steve O’Hearn (Thompson)  
Amy Paulson (Environmental Science Associates)  
Greg Pierce (Geological Survey of Alabama)  
Chris Plymale (US EPA)  
Justin Rigdon (ADEM Water Quality)  
Eric Scheider (ESA)  
Gerald Songy (Moffatt & Nichol)  
Woody Speed (City of Orange Beach)  
Billie Jo Underwood (Baldwin County Commission)  
Memphis Vaughan (Tetra Tech)  
Lee Walters (Goodwyn, Mills & Cawood)  
Emma Witherington (Stantec)

**MBNEP Staff:** Christian Miller, Jason Kudulis, Madison Blanchard, Bethany Dickey, Katie Dylewski, Kelley Barfoot, Tom Herder, Farnaz Bayat (MBNEP intern), and Roberta Swann

**1. Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 2:10 pm by Patric Harper. Attendees went through a round of introductions.

**2. Approval of the Minutes**

Patric Harper noted that the minutes from the last meeting had not been sent out by Katie Dylewski and these minutes will be sent out via email next week to be approved at the following meeting.

**3. Watershed Management Plans Update: Christian Miller from MBNEP**

- Wolf Bay: had a steering committee meeting in February 2020 and now focusing on recommended management measures and conservation of priority parcels. Sandy Creek and Miflin Creek have also recently been listed for pathogens (livestock in the creek and “renegade” mobile home parks are contributing sources). So far, project recommendations include stream restoration projects, constructed wetlands (similar to what was suggested for Bon Secour), and area regional detention. The WMP draft date is March 2020 and will be out for public comment shortly thereafter, with the overall goal of completion by June or July 2020.

- Western Shore (Deer River, Garrows Bend, and Delchamps Bayou): GMC led the community meetings over the last few weeks in each of the HUC 12 watersheds to get community input on the WMP. The team is currently summarizing comments and suggestions from the community meetings. This complex includes 25 miles of shoreline and the Existing Conditions component of the WMP should be wrapped up once we have Dr. Bret Webb's contribution relating to the shoreline. More community meetings will be held later this year to present project ideas and findings from the WMP development process. Timeline for completion of the WMP is October 2020.
- Little Lagoon/Gulf Frontal: Geosyntec hosted a community meeting with 65 participants despite it being a rainy evening. The group discussed strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats within the watershed. A lot of the concerns expressed by the community were access and water quality related. Geosyntec is currently working on the Existing Conditions component of the WMP, which tends to be one of the more time-consuming tasks of WMP development. Timeline for completion of the WMP is December 2020.
- MTA Delta: Wood Group is under contract and MBNEP has met with the Wood Group to strategize on how to modify outreach for the WMP because this is such a unique watershed with diverse stakeholders. Timeline to completion is mid-year 2021.
- Fly Creek: The RFQ is currently out now and due by end of February 2020.
- In 2018, MBNEP and partners made a priority list for WMPs. Bayou Sara and Lower Chasaw are the next two on the schedule. Marlon Cook's schedule also must be considered, he is currently wrapping up MTA Delta sediment study and it should be finalized soon. His field work is complete for Deer River and Fly Creek sediment studies and he will begin synthesizing those data for report submittal.
- We may not need Marlon Cook to conduct a sediment study on Dauphin Island assuming we can get required information from the USACE, which would allow us to get started sooner rather than later.
- Future PIC meeting discussion may need to be how we move forward with prioritizing these WMPs.
- Geosyntec with Thompson Engineering got the contract for the D'Olive WMP update and we are currently in the scoping process. Timeline for completion of the updated WMP is December 2020.
- Judy Haner commented on how far we have come with these WMPs and how the engineering firms are working together on these now, showing a real partner/team effort.

#### **4. Presentation:**

Kelley Barfoot with MBNEP introduced the Habitat Conservation and Restoration Plan for Coastal Alabama, which was funded through a NFWF grant. The purpose of presenting this information to the PIC was to walk the committee through the process of how the plan was developed and to get feedback from those that will use the plan to identify restoration projects for priority, especially related to WMP implementation. MBNEP is seeking comments for the draft Plan before finalizing it. The draft Plan represents the results of a mapping analysis to update priority patches for the 10 habitats identified in the CCMP. MBNEP worked in partnership with TNC, received support from Moffatt & Nichol for the mapping analysis, and formed a technical committee with 60 participants to help guide the planning process. The draft Plan focuses on land-based area to the water's edge and a marine plan will be developed later.

GIS analysis was conducted based on the selection criteria developed by the technical committee and the most recent habitat mapping conducted by Radiance Technology in 2016. These habitats were classified by several habitat types based on the Cowardin/Anderson classification scheme; outside assistance was sought to assist with grouping Cowardin Anderson classifications together to make up each habitat type. From that exercise, a table was generated that can be used for any future habitat classification or planning.

Kelley presented each habitat type, the selection criteria for priority patches within each habitat type, and the number of acres within each habitat type that fell within a priority patch. Kelley also shared the number and types of projects from WMPs that fell within these priority patches. There was a question regarding the 10 ft contour line priority selection criteria for beaches, dunes, and shorelines. Roberta Swann pointed out that it should be worded that it is inside the 10 ft contour line. Kelley showed a map of all the habitat priority patch areas with projects recommended in WMPs and projects funded by oil spill related grant funds for Mobile and Baldwin Counties, however, at this scale, it is hard to actually see the individual projects.

Kelley presented an extensive spreadsheet (that will be provided to the PIC for comment) showing all of the habitat types and projects that fall within these areas (inside or outside of a priority patch). Some columns are hidden that coordinate with the GIS dataset. The columns can be filtered by habitat type, HUC 12, project type, if it was in a priority habitat (e.g. the universe of all pine savanna habitat), if it was in a priority patch area, and the page number where the project can be found in the WMP is listed as well.

Kelley also asked that consultants that are developing WMPs name the projects recommended in the plan to match the name of the projects in the GIS dataset provided to MBNEP. The name of the dataset in the attribute table should match what is in the WMP. This will make it easier to get projects into the Habitat Plan and save time. Contractors should be provided with a data management guide that allows them to inventory their datasets and origin of datasets, which can help them keep track of project names to make sure they are consistent. An example given was that one WMP included 1544 polygons all with the same name, so when added to the Habitat Plan, although the coordinates are different, they all appear to be the same project. It's ok for projects to have the same name, but a number should be put behind the name to set them apart from one another.

Roberta Swann showed a chart created by USEPA as part of the Healthy Watersheds Initiative. The chart shows that you can have low vulnerability and low watershed health and high vulnerability and high or low watershed health, which can help partners determine which restoration projects should be undertaken. When this matrix is applied to our two coastal counties, we see that high vulnerability indicates an urban watershed. This helps explain why sometimes the science does not align with what projects are prioritized. An urban watershed may not rank high for restoration potential to restore ecological function. When MBNEP worked with partners to prioritize watersheds for WMPs, typically the urbanized watersheds were people's top priority because these are opportunities to reconnect people back to urban natural resources. People's top priorities for where they believe restoration work should be done frequently does not match where science indicates there is an opportunity to restore ecosystem function. The D'Olive watershed was used as an example because it was not ranked high for restoration priority and yet, it was in extreme need of stormwater facility instream structures to manage peak flows and reduce instream erosion and sedimentation. The purpose of the D'Olive projects was to protect SAV in D'Olive Bay and Roberta pointed out that if we were to do a Marine Habitat Plan it is likely that the D'Olive projects would fall in priority habitat and priority patch areas.

Roberta asked that PIC committee members look at habitat selection criteria to determine if we need to make any changes to these parameters since this plan will help guide us in prioritizing projects. The other part of this project was the development of a Coastal AL Restoration Tool (CART) and we have a beta version of it that was developed by the TNC. But the USACE also created a very robust version as part of State funded

project and now we have a few online visualization tools that we would like to have housed in a single location online. In 2009, MBNEP had a habitat online visualization tool but NOAA stopped supporting the platform, so it has since been shut down. We do not know yet who will maintain the online visualization tools, but we have been talking with USACE about possibly hosting it.

Questions/comments:

- Has MBNEP looked at proposed conservation acquisition projects to see where those overlay in the draft Habitat Plan? No, currently projects included are projects that were recommended in the WMPs. Roberta commented that MBNEP does have a map of all the projects that have been put in the portal and that we could easily overlay that layer to see where there might be overlap.
- Lee Walters commented on how beneficial this tool will be for future WMPs. Roberta commented on how pleased MBNEP was to see how many projects recommended in WMPs fall within priority patch areas.
- Did you use a National Conservation Easement Database when you showed conserved lands? MBNEP used a combination of data from the Alabama Chapter of the Nature Conservancy, GSA Coastal Resources, ADCNR-GSA, GSA GIS data, ADCNR State Parks, Forever Wild, ADCNR Natural Heritage Program, and Baldwin County. May consider using NCED in the future because it is frequently updated.
- Andy James commented that a lot of the D'Olive projects were implemented but they are not in priority habitats or priority patches.
- Amy Newbold commented that the Healthy Watersheds Matrix was based off the Recovery Potential Matrix, which also had a social component that made the size of the dot larger to indicate the social preference to restoration projects. This makes it easier to see where science-based restoration matches up with the public perception of what should be restored.
- Judy Haner pointed out that although urban restoration projects may not have a huge ecological lift on site, they may improve water quality to the extent that they prevent further problems downstream in our coastal habitats. She reasoned that we should still consider these restoration projects because we are restoring to some level of ecological service by improving water quality.
- Steve O'Hearn asked when the draft Habitat Plan would be complete. The draft plan has been vetted through the state of AL and the USACE. It has been sent to ADCNR and we are awaiting comments from them. We would like to give the PIC 30 days to review it from the time that it is emailed out.

##### **5. Funding Opportunities: Judy Haner**

- Since we don't usually meet until mid-Feb each year, many of the RFP deadlines have already passed by the time we meet so it may be helpful for us to discuss (briefly) at each meeting future RFP deadlines.
- The Portal is the way that the State collects their projects and that list is regularly reviewed. Project ideas can be entered any time of the year. Right now, they are not actively soliciting projects because they have NRDA projects planned. You can go to their website and get added to their list to get a notice when they are actively soliciting for project proposals.
- NFWF – the deadline is typically Feb/March for review. It is a lengthy process and they typically don't approve projects until November.
- Bucket 2: FPL A had a project in Louisiana and an acquisition on the Perdido River corridor for AL. FPL B list is currently being reviewed by the Gulf Council and once approved, the list will be sent out as a draft for public comment.

- NOAA Science Program deadline is November. They solicit projects every year and look for synthesis of projects or collaborations on additional water quality data needed.
- GOMESA RFP just closed. Coastal protection, including conservation, coastal restoration, hurricane protection, and infrastructure directly affected by coastal wetland losses; Mitigation of damage to fish, wildlife, or natural resources; Implementation of a federally approved marine, coastal, or comprehensive conservation management plan; Mitigation of the impact of outer Continental Shelf activities through the funding of onshore infrastructure projects; Planning assistance and the administrative costs of complying with this section.
- ACAMP – deadline Mar 27; Government Coordination and Local Government Planning; Coastal Hazards and Resilient Communities; Improving Public Access to Coastal Resources; Coastal Habitats, Wetland Protection and Coastal Resource Stewardship; Coastal Nonpoint Source Pollution Control; Public Access to Coastal Resources: Construction and Land Acquisition
- NFWF Resilient Communities closed Feb 18. Adaptation through conservation projects; Community capacity building and demonstration projects; Adaptation focused on affordable housing and small businesses
- MS-AL Sea Grant –
  - Aquaculture funding opportunity: Addressing economic and market needs of the U.S. aquaculture industry – Letter of Intent deadline Feb 26.
  - Climate and Resilience Community of Practice 2020 Small Grant Award Competition - Coastal communities to participate in climate adaptation projects that will serve as local examples for other Gulf communities – deadline Feb 28.
- USFWS – must address species to be considered, up to \$100k
  - Partners for Wildlife - Technical and financial assistance to landowners interested in restoring and enhancing wildlife habitat, deadline is Dec, but take applications year-round.
  - Coastal Program - Restore or enhance degraded coastal wetlands and uplands, estuaries, and riparian corridors – deadline is Dec, but take applications year-round.
  - National Coastal Wetlands Program - Protect, restore and enhance coastal wetland ecosystems and associated uplands – deadline is June.
  - North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) Standard Grants - Protect, restore and enhance coastal wetland ecosystems and associated uplands – deadline is Feb 21.
- ADEM S. 319(h) - Nonpoint source related in an impaired watershed (category 5) or category 4 waters, for municipalities, nonprofits, universities, federal or state agencies, match is 60:40 of total project cost (can't match with federal \$), typical amount awarded is \$250k, funding awarded in Oct. of following year
- All of these funding opportunities will be added to a spreadsheet Patric Harper has already started and MBNEP can house this spreadsheet on the PIC webpage. When updated online, MBNEP will email PIC to alert them.
- Judy will update the spreadsheet prior to the next meeting and we will send it out to PIC members with the minutes then she can highlight the big ones at the meeting.
- PIC is a good place for us to talk about what worked for projects, what didn't work, hurdles, and upcoming ways to collaborate.

## 6. Meeting Frequency Discussion

- Focus groups or sub-groups that want to meet on particular topics were suggested. Groups suggested were Restoration and Watershed Management Planning.

- Christopher Grant: Funding opportunities are included in every WMP and determining those as a group would cut down on costs of having to find those for every WMP.
- Carl Ferraro: quarterly meetings are good and if there are lots of projects to share, we could make the meeting 3 hrs. Also suggested webinars as an option.
- We have so many project updates that we can't fit it all into one meeting. How do we communicate the progress that we are making?
  - Steve O'Hearn: quarterly, concise meetings are best, 2-3 hours each.

#### Upcoming Meeting Topics:

- 2<sup>nd</sup> PIC meeting of 2020 will be project updates, 1 min updates for all projects then select a few projects for 10 min updates with lessons learned.
- A survey will be sent prior to the next meeting to identify five projects to be presented at the May 2020 meeting. Purpose, goals, and objectives will be presented so these presentations are standardized and consistent. Five slides per project.
- 3<sup>rd</sup> PIC meeting of 2020 will be project metrics
- Eliska suggested that once a year we plan a site visit to visit an installed project such as Lightning Point. Or we can show drone fly over videos.
- Next Meeting: tentatively set for May 20 at 2 pm. Will confirm with a survey.

#### 7. Announcements

- Don Mroczko just took over for Larry Parsons at USACE in Planning. He will be working on Regional Sediment Management and beneficial use dredge material.
- Justin Rigdon shared that the draft for the de-listing of Joe's Branch has been written by the ADEM Water Quality Branch. It was on the 303(d) list for 14 years.
- Chris Plymale commented that they just received their FY 2019 report (which is compact at 25 pages) and that MBNEP had almost a full page for the GEBF Three Mile Creek projects. Region 4 has hundreds of programs and in their reports, most of those programs are rarely mentioned (maybe only 5% of programs they work with are mentioned) so MBNEP getting a full page is quite a success story!
- Mark Berte announced that ACF has plenty of volunteer opportunities right now as well as annual reports he can share. Wetland Compliance workshop for lawyers, developers, and planners is planned for June and CEUs will be offered.
- Carl Ferraro needs a short-term environmental intern. Thirty to 90 days of work available for a college student, conservation corps, or biology student, and needs to be handy with technology such as GPS unit and turbidity meter. Unknown start date but likely this spring, 8 hrs on a boat for about 3 months. Please have them email him their resume. Two new hires, Emma and David, just started with the Stantec Pensacola office.
- Justin Rigdon announced that the 303(d) list for 2020 is out for public notice.
- MRD just hatched their first crop of flounder and they have been posting photos on facebook as they metamorphosize.
- MBNEP newsletter will be out in about a week.

#### 6. Adjourn

There was no motion made to adjourn the meeting.