

## **MBNEP MTA Steering Committee Meeting Report #: 1**

**Date/Time/Place:** September 24, 2020/10:30 am-12:00 noon/via Zoom

**Participants for MBNEP:** See below

**Participants for Steering Committee:** See below

### **Meeting Objectives:**

- a) Team Member/Committee Member Introductions
- b) Project Understanding
- c) Solicit Committee Input on Overall Direction of Project
- d) Establish Roles/Commitments of Committee

### **Summary: [Review in concert with PowerPoint presentation slides]**

1. Welcome and Introductions -- Participants
  - a) MBNEP
    - **Mobile Tensaw Apalachee (MTA) Watershed Management Plan Project Manager Jeanette Kelson, Wood Infrastructure & Environment Solutions** introduced herself and welcomed all participants. She called on the MBNEP staff to introduce themselves.
    - **MBNEP Executive Director Roberta Swann** welcomed the group and remarked about the great showing of 37 participants and the great Watershed Management Plan (WMP) project team that had been assembled.
    - **Christian Miller is the Watershed Management Coordinator** for the MBNEP. This is a large, complex watershed and he noted the MBNEP is looking forward to hearing from everyone.
    - **Kelley Barfoot is the Community Outreach Coordinator** and has been working closely aside Jeanette and Mary Mullins Redditt, the outreach coordinator for the Project Team.
    - **Herndon Graddick a consultant** with MBNEP.
    - **Henry Perkins is a recent addition** to the MBNEP team.
    - **Don Blancher/Moffatt & Nichol consultant** has worked with the MBNEP for a number of years. Put together the scoping document that outlines framework for the project. Has served in advisory role for MBNEP on legacy contaminants in the watershed for many years.
  - b) Project Team
    - **Jeanette Kelson and Crissy Mehle/Wood Environment & Infrastructure Solutions, Inc.**
    - **Dan Dumont/Alabama Forest Resources Center**

- **Rob Howell/Anchor QEA**
  - **Barry Vittor/Barry Vittor & Associates**
  - **Mark Bailey/Conservation Southeast**
  - **Lee Walters/GMC**
  - **Latif Kalin and Chris Anderson/Auburn University**
  - **Mary Mullins Redditt/MPACT**
- c) Steering Committee Members
- Mary to facilitate Steering Committee meetings, public meetings through Project Team's community outreach activities. Mary thanked members for commitment, invited Steering Committee members to share their name/org/interest and experience in the watershed:
  - **Dave Armstrong/Wildlife Freshwater Fisheries/ADCNR** interested in the fisheries and other wildlife. Been collecting data for 35 years.
  - **Katie Balzar/Coastal Conservation Specialist/The Nature Conservancy**. Everything that happens in this watershed trickles down to the coast so TNC is pretty integrated with the MBNEP and its work.
  - **Scott Bannon/Director of Alabama Marine Resources Division of ADCNR**, Resource Manager for saltwater species south of the interstate, so anything that happens in this Delta area impacts fisheries and, especially, oysters and clean water. Thanks for hosting.
  - **Gretchen Barrera/Alabama State Port Authority**
  - **Casi Callway/Mobile Baykeeper**. Baykeeper has been working on all the issues impacting the watershed for 22 years. Past two years, focused on coal ash issue, heavy industry. Personally, spends as much time on waterway as humanly possible.
  - **Ashley Campbell/City of Daphne**.
  - **Marl Cummings/Past President MCWCA and a 45-year-long Delta user**.
  - **Dennis Devries/Faculty Member Fisheries/Auburn University, Fisheries Aquaculture and Aquatic Sciences** working throughout the Delta for about 20 years.
  - **Walter Ernest/Pelican Coast Conservancy**. Land trust that holds conservation easements.
  - **Casey Fulford/Alabama Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts**. Work in both Mobile and Baldwin Counties.
  - **Patric Harper/USFWS, Coastal Programs**. One of the Project Implementation Committee Co-Chairs.
  - **Amy Hunter/Deepwater Horizon Restoration Coordinator/ADCNR**. Professionally, interacts with project because funded as part of oil spill. Office sits at Five Rivers at the bottom of the

watershed. Personally, a couple of weekends a month, rides around in John Boat in Delta.

- **Matthew Jones/Environmental Engineer/Mobile County** and also, as private citizen, helps City of Spanish Fort with some watershed issues. Working on both sides of the watershed. Appreciates being a part of this group.
- **Russell Ladd/landowner in the Delta**. Been frequenting the Delta since 1945, so know it pretty well!
- **Nicole Love/Alabama Audubon** connects to the watershed by connecting to the birds in the watershed. Focuses on coastal section of the watershed. As an organization, Alabama Audubon focuses on all of the state. They are interested in bringing the birds into the conversation, as well as all habitat, all wildlife.
- **Tammy Monistere/Conservation Alabama**, a statewide organization that has been working with coastal partners since 2010 and the BP Oil Spill. Very excited about this project.
- **Don Mrocsko/USACE, Mobile District Planning Division** (pronounced more-OS-ko). Works on Corps' coastal projects and on the Regional Sediment Management Team.
- **Joyce Nicholas/USDA**. [Joyce's microphone not working but joined the group via chat.]
- **Casey Rains/Environmental Manager, City of Spanish Fort**. Been looking at the watershed area for a while. This is oldest area of the City and they are excited to get started with this. City is on far Eastern side of watershed. Biggest impact on watershed is from some subdivisions.
- **Thomas Reddick/Director of Forest Management, The Nature Conservancy**. Offers any assistance for forest management and how forest management can impact the watershed.
- **Ray Richardson/City of Mobile, Environmental Manager**. Personally, has property in the Delta, so WMP is of even greater interest.
- **Jason Shaw/Maintenance Engineer/ALDOT**. Operate road and bridge assets across the Causeway and also involved in any permitting in area.
- **Steve Stewart/AM/NS Calvert** at north end of watershed on Tombigbee River. Steel manufacturer (formerly ThyssenKrupp). Manager for Projects as well as on Environmental Team. Appreciates being a stakeholder in this project.
- **Kelly Swindle/Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Deepwater Horizon Section, Coastal Restoration Specialist**. Grant manager working with MBNEP on "Bucket 2" -funded WMPs. Works with Amy Hunter.

- **Shannon Weaver/USDA, NRCS** works with private landowners for conservation from state office. Also works with Joyce Nicholas.
2. Anticipated Commitment Level/Role of Steering Committee
- a) Committee Purpose and Commitment Level
- Importance of Steering Committee—This large and diverse watershed intentionally reflected by large and diverse Steering Committee.
  - Expectation of Committee Members—Up to 10 Steering Committee. Meetings, not more than once monthly. Be consistent representative if at possible. Share expertise, represent constituencies.
- b) Meeting Logistics
- Meeting via Zoom virtually for foreseeable future re pandemic.
  - Schedule next call soon after each meeting. Two weeks, minimum, to set meeting date. One week, minimum, to send agenda.
  - Keep meetings to 1½ hours each to respect time.
  - Record meetings for internal notes.
  - Post agenda and presentation on MBNEP website after each meeting.
  - Consensus Based Meetings--Not formal; won't plan to vote.
  - Steering Committee member role to advise MBNEP and Project Team, provide input.
  - Will have different opinions and strong opinions.
  - Want to hear from everyone on every issue.
  - Listen openly and respectfully.
  - Want everyone to share and do so without dominating.
  - Will take consensus of the meeting.
  - Facilitator will touch base and repeat bottom line, making sure we are on track with consensus.
  - Hold one another accountable.
3. Introduction to MTA Watershed Management Plan
- a) Project Area Overview
- Downstream of Mobile Bay Watershed which is 6<sup>th</sup> largest in terms of drainage area and 4<sup>th</sup> in terms of drainage it receives
  - 6 HUC 12 sub-basins
  - D'Olive is just outside the WMP area and is being handled in separate WMP by MBNEP
- b) Project Goals and Objectives
- Aligns with goals of other WMPs.
  - Promote wise stewardship of Mobile Bay water quality and living resources, weaving throughout WMP process.

- Moffatt & Nichol contracted in 2017 to develop scoping document that laid groundwork for this WMP due to size and diversity of watershed. Will help guide process. Defined study area and helped find efficiencies.
- Need to synthesize and compile existing data.
- Identify data gaps and acquire additional data.
- More focus on habitat management, water conservation.
- Also focus on land management practices, invasive species, legacy contamination, hydrology.
- Has climate change/sea level rise component to better understand role of climate.
- Focus on private landowner education for best management practices.
- Increasing public access opportunities.

c) Project Element and Schedule Overview

- Wood contracted with MBNEP in January of 2020.
- Completion date of July 2021, 18 months.
- Project elements similar to other WMPs.
- Strong focus on community engagement.

d) Project Progress-to-date

i. Watershed Characterization

- Looking at data sources, data gaps.
- Lot of existing data we are looking at.
- Looking at physical characteristics.
- Huge GIS component.
- Limited field reconnaissance for characterization, but that being done by Barry Vittor & Associates.
- Diversity is incredible; this is North America's Amazon.
- Marshes, bogs all tie in.
- Estuary is mix of tidally influenced features.
- Large portion of commercial and industrial activity.
- Transportation industry, I-65, Causeway and I-10, Port of Mobile
- Management Measures really projects for restoration. Restoration funds available due to BP oil spill, can leverage additional funding sources.
- Other elements are habitat conservation and protection, and publicly- and privately-owned properties; land acquisition is a big part.
- Climate change and sea level rise, as well as, invasive species, protected species are all part of the characterization.
- Surface water is large consideration. So much surface water in this watershed, makes for busy map! 137 miles of named waterways, including main, big rivers, but also lot of tributaries and surface water not only from AL, but GA, MS and TN.

- Vast amount of wetland habitat already in watershed, including riverine and estuarine. In fact, 50% of project area is wetland and 15% is open water.
- Looking at land cover and land uses in area, including deciduous forests and evergreen forests, as well as woody wetlands. Developed properties show up in red mostly around downtown Mobile.
- Great diversity and tremendous amount of flora and fauna in watershed. Includes 1,345 plant species -- "off the charts" from what we see in other study areas. Data on diversity will all be in the study report.
- Looking at threatened and endangered species, including Federal and state designations. Critical in this watershed.
- Rich history and culture in this watershed, including story of last slave ship *Clotilda*, Indian Mounds, the Ghost Fleet.
- Many generations of people and families – some on this call -- getting out on the water, hunting fishing, bird-watching, crabbing, kayaking, airboat tours. Many just want to spend time on the waterways.
- Looking at public access to ensure adequate access in the waterway. Do have a large number accesses into this waterway, ways people can connect.

#### ii. Climate Vulnerability Assessment

- Separate designation from Climate Change and Sea Level Rise that will tie into Conditions Report.
- On Gulf Coast, we all understand flooding related to Hurricane Sally, other storms. In this watershed, also have water flowing from other states.
- Will model different scenarios with overlay of Sea Level Rise.
- If storm surge hits with sea level rise, we can see what impacts will be.
- This is tool that will help prioritize land protection. Also identifies restoration priorities, how to protect infrastructure, economic drivers.
- Looking at marsh migration. What may not be wetlands today may still be areas that need to be protected. Marshes may migrate into uplands.

#### iii. Watershed Conditions

- Barry Vittor & Associates taking lead on Watershed Conditions. Work in progress.
- Close to preliminary draft of report next week.
- Topics include those listed on PowerPoint slides.

iv. Community Engagement

- Mary Mullins Redditt is community engagement coordinator. May be unable to engage in traditional forms of in-person public meetings due to pandemic.
  - 1) Project website
    - Key tool at [http://www.mobilebaynep.com/the\\_watersheds/tensaw\\_apalachee\\_watershed/](http://www.mobilebaynep.com/the_watersheds/tensaw_apalachee_watershed/)
    - StoryMap to include reports just discussed.
    - Project Survey is critical. Please take, distribute short 10-question survey to constituents.
    - Will heavily promote through mid-November.
    - To date, support from area Chambers and some media coverage.
    - Virtual boat/drone tour on website is 14-minute experience to engage. Please take tour by Oliver Dorgan and Barry Vittor. Shows areas many unable to access, no matter how avid.
  - 2) Steering Committee
    - Who is not on the Steering Committee who should be?
  - 3) Stakeholder Identification
    - Will send out Stakeholders List next. Provide feedback on who is missing, how best to connect.
  - 4) Virtual Engagement Strategy
    - Thinking 'outside the box' to virtual engagement.
    - Are benefits to virtual engagement. Looking for Steering Committee Member feedback.
    - Will be engaging traditional media, social media.
    - Don't know about public meetings; may do through Zoom or small group meetings based on feedback and changing conditions.
    - May do up to 6 organizational type meetings.

e) Next up: 1) Identification of Critical Issues and Areas found in watershed, 2) Identification of Management Measures, including a regulatory review, 3) Advising on Adaptations to Improve on the Conditions of the Watershed, and 4) Implementation Strategies, including Financing Strategy.

4. Steering Committee Input and Distribution – Website and Related Materials

- Reviewed items where Project Team needs Steering Committee input:

- a) Project Survey--Would like all members to take survey on website and distribute it to stakeholder groups and constituencies. Want to close out survey mid-November; need this input for Identification of Critical Issues and Areas.
- b) Subcommittee Development--Technical and Community Engagement Subcommittees? Discuss further.
- c) Steering Committee List—Need members review, input.
- d) Stakeholder List—After above, broader Stakeholder List to come. Need members to identify individuals or groups for this.

### **General discussion**

- Approach feedback by topics instead of subcommittees. Once Conditions Chapter complete, have series of Steering Committee meetings on this by topic to drill down. Those Steering Committee members interested in that topic can attend if agenda out in advance. Concept will evolve over time.
- Follow up with Gretchen Barrera/ASPA on public access point #1 on PowerPoint map. May be recently funded GOMESA boat ramp.
- Current funding for WMP development comes from NFWF Gulf Environmental Benefit and Restore Council Bucket 2. For future funding, have worked with Dan DuMont and Mark Bailey on ideas and strategies for outreach materials to put headwaters into conservation easements. State has Forever Wild funds. Don't focus on funding now; if end up with good projects, can figure out how to fund. To be captured in Financing Section of WMP. EPA just did audit of national estuary programs and MBNEP came through with flying colors. Had foresight to get WMP projects into portal for funding. Well laid out and detailed, helped to get them funded. Sometimes, one funding source can leverage funds from another source. Oil spill was horrible, but opened up dollars to fund projects that might not have been.
- Land acquisition topic needs to include land trusts With regards to mapping of conserved properties, the National Conservation Easement Database (NCED) [www.conservationeasement.us](http://www.conservationeasement.us) lists properties that have been protected with conservation easements in Mobile and Baldwin County. USFWS is also developing the strategic conservation assessment site. This website will contain mapping features and access to numerous existing management plans. MBNEP will do some research on that. Conservation easements are included in habitat land mapping by Kelly Barfoot with help of The Nature Conservancy.
- Ensure specific types of public access points labeled according to what they are.
- On topic of resiliency, one component is climate vulnerability assessment, however, WMP plans are iterative and focused on improving environmental management for watersheds. WMP won't be written from standpoint they fully protect Delta. Hope is to improve management for

Delta, set us on course for continual improvement in management of Delta.

- As reports begin to roll out, agendas for meetings become meatier, require more feedback. Meeting agendas and presentations will be sent out after the meetings and placed on the website.

## 5. Review of Action Items

- ***Complete and distribute survey***—Direct link to survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/mtawatershedplan>
- Casi agreed to share it with Baykeeper Network; Roberta asks all Steering Committee to share survey with constituencies. Walter suggests we share survey with Mobile United Natural Resources Committee;
- ***Review direct link to StoryMap and take Virtual Boat Tour:*** [http://www.mobilebaynep.com/the\\_watersheds/tensaw\\_apalachee\\_watershed/](http://www.mobilebaynep.com/the_watersheds/tensaw_apalachee_watershed/)
- ***Talk offline about labeling #1 in Public Access Map.***
- ***Develop topic discussion concept or subcommittees. Project Team will work on ideas.***
- ***Set up next meeting in coordination with next deliverables,*** likely last quarter of October. Two weeks lead time for date, one week lead time with agenda. Avoid school pick up (2-3 pm) and drop off times (7-8 am) and Friday afternoons. To be determined based on release of draft chapters.
- ***NCED database followup*** from Walter Ernest.
- ***Review of Steering Committee List*** and comments on needed additions.
- ***Review of Stakeholder List*** and comments on needed additions.
- ***Email Project Team with any questions or ideas.***

## 6. Adjourn

- The meeting was adjourned at 12:01 pm