



Mobile Bay National Estuary Program Project Implementation Committee
Five Rivers Delta Resource Center – Blakeley Classrooms
Tuesday, November 5, 2013 at 2 p.m.

Agenda

- 1. Call to Order**
- 2. Approval of Minutes: August 8, 2013**
- 3. Review of the process leading up to development of a five-year Ecosystem Restoration Strategy**
- 4. A Draft Ecosystem Restoration Strategy 2013-2018 –vetting goals, objectives, activities timeline, and metrics.**
 - **Data needs:**
 - **Current habitat areas in two-county area – salt marsh and dune habitat**
 - **Inventory of publically-owned shorelines on bays, backwaters, and intertidal waterways.**
 - **Other**
 - **Guidance for Reporting Watershed Improvement under Measure SP-12 – from EPA Region IV, Gary Davis/Bob Howard**
- 5 New Business**
- 7. Adjourn**

**Mobile Bay National Estuary Program
Project Implementation Committee Meeting
Tuesday, November 5, 2013
Tensaw Theater, 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center**

Minutes

Attendees:

L. G. Adams (ADCNR/Weeks Bay NERR)	Emery Baya (Thompson Engineering)
Celena Boykin (Baldwin County)	Robert Bendick (The Nature Conservancy)
Ashley Campbell (City of Daphne)	Stephanie Christenson (Mobile Baykeeper)
Kellyn Garrison (The Nature Conservancy)	Judy Haner (The Nature Conservancy)
Phillip Hinesley (ADCNR-SLD)	Kara Lankford (Ocean Conservancy)
John Mareska (ADCNR-MRD)	Joyce Nicholas (MC SWCD/NRCS)
Larry Parson (U.S.A.C.O.E)	Jennifer Robinson (Mobile County)
Sam St. John (ACF/Baykeeper)	Randy Shaneyfelt (ADEM)
Lee Walters (Goodwin Mills & Cawood)	

Bob Howard and Gary Davis, (EPA Region IV) – remotely via Webex and conference call
MBNEP Staff: Christian Miller, Roberta Swann, Tom Herder

1. Call to Order

PIC Co-Chair Judy Haner called the meeting to order at 2:05 p.m.

2. Approval of Minutes

Ms. Haner called for a motion to approve the minutes from the August 8 meeting. Phillip Hinesley made the motion, which was seconded by Larry Parson and unanimously approved.

3. Review of the process leading up to development of a five-year Ecosystem Restoration Strategy. Tom Herder reviewed the process leading up to strategy development, including the following efforts:

1. Overview/Citizen Input- Roberta Swann described a 2002 CCMP evaluation, a community attitudes assessment and a series of community meetings that led to the identification of six values – *Access (to water and open spaces), fish, beaches and shorelines, heritage and culture, resiliency, and water quality – and biggest concerns – public indifference and stormwater*

2. Science Advisory- Mike Dardeau of the Dauphin Island Sea Lab described the SAC efforts and explained that SAC-recruited researchers assessed a suite of 13 stressors impacting provision of 14 potential ecosystem services by ten coastal habitats on a scale of one to three, with one reflecting no impact and three reflecting the most severe impact. From this process, it was determined that intertidal marshes and flats, rivers and streams (and associated riparian areas), and freshwater wetlands were the habitats under most stress in coastal Alabama.

3. Towards developing the ER Strategy, Jeff DeQuattro suggested possible protocols, before the PIC agreed to develop a Watershed Prioritization Subcommittee to begin a process to identify coastal watersheds in most need of project implementation.

On February 21, the PIC convened a public meeting and presented maps with data used to prioritize watersheds, including :

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| ♦ Priority Restoration Watersheds | ♦ Priority Conservation Watersheds |
| ♦ Priority Freshwater Wetlands | ♦ Priority Intertidal Marshes and Flats |

- ♦ Priority Areas for Acquisition
- ♦ Outstanding Alabama Waters
- ♦ TMDL Waters
- ♦ Protected Lands
- ♦ Impaired Waters
- ♦ Point Source Discharges (NPDES Permits)
- ♦ % Urbanization
- ♦ Toxic Release Inventory Sites
- ♦ ADEM Surveys
- ♦ GSA Sediment Studies Completed
- ♦ ADEM Long-term Monitoring Stations
- ♦ Watershed Management Plans (old)
- ♦ Watershed Management Plan (current)

Meeting participants evaluated each of 21 watersheds on a scale of one to five, with five representing the highest priority, and the results were used to designate initial prioritization. Results of this prioritization effort are presented in the table below:

Watershed	1	2	3	4	5	Total Responses	Point Total	Mean Response Value
Fish River	1	0	3	21	31	56	249	4.45
Tensaw Apalachee	1	4	3	17	32	57	246	4.32
Big Creek	1	3	8	12	31	55	234	4.25
Bon Secour	0	1	7	26	22	56	237	4.23
Fowl River	1	4	7	15	30	57	240	4.21
West Fowl River	0	5	8	18	26	57	236	4.14
Dog River	3	4	10	15	26	58	231	3.98
Deer River	1	4	11	21	18	55	216	3.93
Grand Bay Swamp	0	4	8	22	11	45	175	3.89
Graham Bayou	3	7	17	15	13	55	193	3.51
Bayou La Batre River	1	7	22	19	8	57	197	3.46
Oyster Bay	1	6	26	15	9	57	196	3.44
Hammock Creek	3	9	18	11	14	55	189	3.44
Dauphin Island	6	6	18	10	15	55	187	3.40
Little Lagoon	4	11	14	12	12	53	176	3.32
Upper Blackwater	2	8	23	18	5	56	184	3.29
Rains Creek	4	12	19	14	7	56	176	3.14
Halls Creek	9	9	19	11	9	57	173	3.04
Skunk Bayou	6	16	16	13	7	58	173	2.98
Negro Creek	4	17	26	5	2	54	146	2.70
Cedar Creek	9	19	18	9	1	56	142	2.54

4. The PIC reconvened twice (June 6 and August 8, 2013), using the list of 21, and inventoried “resources and needs” for each. The results of these efforts were used to develop the draft strategy that is being considered by the PIC today. Mr. Herder concluded with a mention of submerged aquatic vegetation, not identified as one of the most stressed by the SAC by commonly the focus of CCMP activities in other Gulf NEPs. He pointed out that while SAV has not been a direct focus of this restoration strategy, it would directly benefit from project implementation prescribed under the developed ecosystem restoration strategy which would address impacts that have impacted its distribution.

Judy Haner reminded the group of the protocol that was approved at the August 8 meeting that prescribed 1) a GSA sediment loading analysis as a precursor to watershed management planning, 2) a comprehensive watershed management plan as a precursor to project implementation, and then 3) project implementation prioritized and prescribed by a CWMP conforming to the EPA’s nine key elements.

She also explained the “opportunity caveat,” which expresses that in some cases, funding or other opportunities will present themselves outside of the approved protocol that will lead to project implementation.

Ms. Haner described how Ecosystem Restoration Step 1’s goal to “**improve trends in Water Quality in priority watersheds with impairments (either 303(d)-listed or those with approved TMDLs) that discharge into priority fishery nursery areas.**” This step, with the objective to “restore conditions, including hydrology, from headwaters to intertidal zone in five watersheds” includes actions related directly to the above-described protocol.

Bob Howard expressed his opinion that SAV should be included, at least as an objective, in the five-year restoration strategy. Ms. Haner responded that the focus for the next five years was in improving conditions that would ultimately translate into an outcome of increasing acreage of SAV. Mr. Howard continued to make the case for attention to SAV and Ms. Haner responded that his points were duly noted.

Activities under ER-1 included developing three new sediment analyses, updating two outdated or obsolete CWMPs, developing three new CWMPs and implementing projects from either the existing four CWMPs (Eight Mile Creek, D’Olive Creek, Fish River, Three Mile) or the additional five to be updated/completed.

Ecosystem Restoration Step 2’s goal to “**improve ecosystem function and resilience through protection, restoration, and conservation of habitats, including beaches, bays, backwaters, and rivers**” includes objectives to “install living shorelines along publically owned bay, backwater, and intertidal waterways,” “install _____ linear feet of living shorelines along privately owned bay, backwater, and intertidal waterways,” “Plant _____ acres of sea oats to stabilize dune system along Gulf-fronting beaches,” “Remove HWY 98 Causeway at Chocolatta Bay/John’s Bend/Justin’s Bay,” and “Restore _____ acres of nearshore and intertidal marshes and flats.” Each of the first three objectives included five as-yet-to-be-determined projects along with monitoring. The Causeway removal objective prescribed actions that included feasibility study/monitoring, design and permitting, construction, and monitoring. The marsh and flats restoration objective included actions to identify priority areas for salt marsh restoration, evaluation of availability of dredge materials, implementation of restoration in areas where beneficial use of dredge material is possible, and monitoring.

Ms. Haner then turned PIC attention to the goal of Ecosystem Restoration Step 3 which is “**to restore/expand human connections to our natural resources**”, with initial goals:

- Create 10 new access points (with at least seven in Mobile County) that couple access with demonstration of restoration techniques,
- Protect and conserve priority habitats for public benefit and access through acquisition and conservation easement, and
- Create driving/walking/biking/canoe-kayaking trails on historical, ethnic, and religious themes to encourage eco-heritage tourism around and on the estuary (native American, African-American, Civil War, etc).

As the PIC considered developing activities for those objectives, some discussion on human connections ensued. Sam St. John iterated that environment and economics are the same here in coastal Alabama where tourism and quality of live drive economies. Roberta Swann agreed and cautioned that projects should not be evaluated by the number of jobs created due to the temporary nature of many jobs related to implementation of environmental projects. She suggested a better measure might be changes to ecosystem service provision which would

require thought about what services we aimed to restore in the planning phase. Stefanie Christiansen agreed, referring to seafood and commercial fishing industries as beneficiaries to the latter measure. John Mareska commented that “if you build it, they will come,” but asked, “Who will come?”

Ms. Swann suggested that an initial activity might be to conduct a public needs/wants assessment. She suggested developing a committee to flesh out “public access” issues related to ecosystem restoration strategy development that included John Mareska, who agreed to participate. Tom Herder, Sam St. John, Judy Haner, and Phillip Hinesley were suggested and agreed to participate.

Ms. Haner turned the conversation to attaching metrics to objectives. Lee Walters brought the committee’s attention to monitoring, which Ms. Swann responded was included in the nine CWMP implementations under ER-1. Emery Baya pointed out a discrepancy between the ER-1 objective, calling for restoration in five watersheds, and activities, calling for implementation of nine CWMPs and Tom Herder agreed to make those numbers match.

Ms. Swann considered how we can best document improvements in water quality or habitat, since improvements must be demonstrable. Bob Howard was asked to introduce EPA strategic plan measures that provide credit for measureable, statistically-significant improvements in water quality in impaired water bodies, and he shared slides that illustrated how the Sarasota Bay NEP pursued SP-12 recognition of water quality improvements in Sarasota Bay tributaries.

SP-12 is a protocol that recognizes improvements in water quality conditions that fall short of meeting use criteria but demonstrate statistically significant improvements in the concentration of causes of impairment. He explained the process by which water quality improvements achieved through watershed approaches can be documented and credited as having occurred.

One last suggestion towards measureable metrics was to compare lengths of shoreline in natural versus armored states. With metrics remaining to be resolved or generated, PIC members were charged with considering the Ecosystem Restoration Strategy to add comments, metrics, and caveats as each member sees fit. An additional PIC meeting in the near future was considered, and will be scheduled.

At 3:45 p.m., John Mareska made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Randy Shaneyfelt, and approved unanimously.