



**Mobile Bay National Estuary Program
Business Resources Committee
February 11, 2021, 2:00 pm – 3:30 pm
Zoom Virtual Meeting**



Agenda

Meeting Objectives:

- a) Updates on status of Truck Bed Trash Can Competition and various oyster projects
- b) Strategize the creation of a working committee for the Revolving Maritime Loan Fund

1. Welcome and Introductions

BRC Co-Chairs:

Eliska Morgan, Thompson Engineering

Frank Smith, Wilkins Miller Wealth Management

2. Review and Approval of Minutes

3. Old Business

- a) Truck Bed Trash Can Report
- b) Alabama Oysters Marketing Update
- c) Dauphin Island Oyster Project Update
- d) Revolving Maritime Loan Fund Update

4. New Business

- a) Revolving Maritime Loan Fund Committee

5. Adjourn

Minutes

In Attendance

Eliska Morgan, Thompson Engineering
Frank Smith, Wilkins Miller Wealth Management
Renie Kennemer, Thompson Engineering
Jennifer Denson, PEP
Casey Williams, Eastern Shore Chamber of Commerce
Liz Freeman, Long's Human Resources
Rusty Grice, Auburn University Shellfish Lab - Sea Grant
Beth Walton, Oyster South
Helene Hassell, Dauphin Island Sea Lab
Colette Boehm, Freelancer
Beth Thomas, Alabama Power
John Arendall, 22nd State Bank
Don Bates, Osprey Initiative

Staff

Roberta Swann
Henry Perkins
Bethany Hudson
Herndon Graddick

Takeaways

- The BRC has been updated on the status of various project, including Truck Bed Trash Can Competition, Alabama Oyster Marketing, Dauphin Island Oyster Park Project, and the Oyster Revolving Loan Fund
- A sub-committee was formed to address specific needs of the oyster revolving loan fund.

Eliska Morgan called the meeting to order at 2:06. A roll call was conducted in the chat and Henry Perkins introduced himself and his role within the MBNEP.

Frank Smith made a motion to approve the previous meetings minutes and Renie Kennemer seconded. The minutes were approved.

Old Business

Review of Truck Bed Trash Can Competition

- Henry Perkins updated on the Truck Bed Trash Can competition. The pitch competition was to encourage entrepreneurs' creation of devices to hold litter in truck beds and reduce littering.
- The competition was held in partnership with Dog River Clear Water Revival as part of their trash abatement program, with PEP and Mobile Baykeeper assisting and was hosted by WKRG and produced as a Shark Tank style show.
- Roberta Swann recognized Don Bates and Renie Kennemer as members of the BRC who helped judge and advise on the competition.

- The MBNEP is exploring the possibility of getting a patent on the winning design and bringing the product to market. This may become a future BRC project.

Review of Alabama Oysters Marketing Subcommittee Activities

- Renie Kennemer described the activities of the marketing subcommittee, where research is still needed to create a marketing strategy that is smart and helpful for Alabama oyster farmers.
- What is needed still is identifying resources and people who already have functions in place to assist in marketing, such as Sweet Grown Alabama and Chris Blankenship.
- Next steps are to meet with oyster farmers, explain what the BRC is and why and how we want to help, and ask questions to determine what they really need.
- The marketing sub-committee will then develop a strategy or tactic to support the industry.
- Roberta Swann added that this issue was specifically highlighted as a need by four oyster farmers in previous meeting.

Review of Dauphin Island Oyster Project

- Eliska Morgan updated the BRC on the Dauphin Island Oyster Project.
- Entry to oyster farming is difficult for people who don't own waterbottoms.
- Dauphin Island received land from Delaney family of the north side of Dauphin Island's west end. The deal was closed early this year.
- Mayor of Dauphin Island and Gene Fox of the Dauphin Island City Council are ready to move forward with the project; Bill Walton and Jimmy Lyons are assisting.
- Dauphin Island will need to develop plats; parcels of waterbottom for growing oysters.
- Efforts to link the oyster park with developing project at Aloe Bay are ongoing.
- Roberta Swann added that this is a longer-term project and much of what is happening is outside of the BRC's control, and that we will want to keep this project on the blackboard as we move forward.

Review of Revolving Maritime Loan Fund

- Henry Perkins updated on that status of the Revolving Maritime Loan Fund.
- A market analysis has been created and was offered to the BRC for their interest.
- The state of the oyster aquaculture industry is poor after COVID adversely impacted half-shell market and a series of hurricanes did physical damage to equipment.
- Small loans are needed for a variety of reasons and are difficult to access from traditional sources.
- There is a need to provide ancillary services for borrowers, they may not have a wide range of business skills and could need the assistance (business planning, accounting, legal, etc.)
- The vision involves a community aspect; the loan approval committee should be comprised of individuals from the oyster farming community, as they know better where money needs to go and can form a tighter-knit coastal community of mutual support.
- The long term vision is a thriving and vibrant coast, this model can be transplanted to other industries if the BRC can develop proof of concept here.

- The BRC is working with the Alabama Power Foundation and 22nd State Bank currently to make these loans a reality. The BRC is in a due diligence process with Alabama Power to secure further capitalization.
- The target to issue the first loan is June/July 2021, with \$100,000 in loan fund.
- Frank Miller added thanks to John Arendall and the Alabama Power Foundation for help in this.

New Business

Developing the Revolving Maritime Loan Fund Subcommittee

- Henry Perkins presented the need for a Revolving loan fund subcommittee to facilitate next steps and flesh out specifics of the fund.
- There is a need to engage with oyster farmers one-on-one, identify precise needs of oyster farmers, identify and recruit ancillary services, and manage the fund approval process temporarily.
- Long-term fund approval will be handled intra-community, and BRC will act as a stop-gap approval group as a community committee is gradually built.
- Volunteers for subcommittee were solicited. Roberta Swann nominated Beth Thomas and John Arendall. Eliska Morgan nominated Jimmy Lyons. Beth Walton volunteered. Rusty Grice will help but is unsure if he needs to be on committee. Frank Smith volunteered.

Next Steps

- Henry Perkins discusses next steps for the BRC to take.
- The BRC will compile resources and create marketing and loan packages, strategize a marketing campaign, and prepare to issue loans.
- The BRC will identify candidates and formalize relationships with partner organizations and ancillary service providers.
- The BRC will continue assistance with Dauphin Island Oyster Project.

A motion to adjourn was made and seconded and the meeting ended at 2:45.