



**Mobile Bay National Estuary Program
Business Resources Committee
May 12, 2021, 2:00 pm – 3:30 pm
Zoom Virtual Meeting**



Agenda

Meeting Objectives:

- a) Updates on status various oyster projects
- b) Determine new steps

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) Dauphin Island Oyster Project Update
 - a) Feasibility study
- b) Alabama Oysters Marketing Update
- c) Coastal Alabama Fisheries Fund Update
- d) Grand Bay Oyster Park Boat Tour

4. New Business

- a) Moving Forward
 - a) Other areas of focus
 - b) Next tour
- b) August Meeting in Person

5. Adjourn

In Attendance

Eliska Morgan, Thompson Engineering
Frank Smith, Wilkins Miller Wealth Management
Renie Kennemer, Thompson Engineering
Jennifer Denson, PEP
Liz Freeman, Long's Human Resources
Rusty Grice, Auburn University Shellfish Lab - Sea Grant
Helene Hassell, Dauphin Island Sea Lab
Beth Thomas, Alabama Power
Don Bates, Osprey Initiative
John Bender, Mc Fadden, Rouse & Bender, LLC
Herb Malone, CVB
Jimmy Lyons, Mobile Port Authority (retired)
Jeanette Kelson, Wood Engineering
Wiley Blankenship, Coastal Alabama Partnership

Staff

Henry Perkins

Takeaways

- The BRC has been updated on the status of various projects, including Alabama Oyster Marketing, the Dauphin Island Oyster Park Project, and the Oyster Revolving Loan Fund. The BRC approved of the direction of these projects.
- The BRC has been briefed on the success of the Grand Bay Oyster Park tour
- Creation of new subcommittees, new projects, and new tours were discussed to engage more of the BRC. BRC members will be reached out to directly for their thoughts and input.

Eliska Morgan called the meeting to order at 2:07. Frank Smith made a motion to approve the previous meetings minutes and Eliska Morgan seconded. The minutes were approved.

Old Business

Review of Dauphin Island Oyster Project

- Eliska Morgan updated the BRC on the Dauphin Island Oyster Project.
- Eliska with the MBNEP organized a meeting between Mayor Collier of Dauphin Island and Gene Fox of the Dauphin Island City Council with Bill Walton to comprehensively discuss the specifics and logistics of setting up an oyster park.
- A feasibility study is recommended to move the project forward, which the MBNEP may have funding for, though more research is required to determine how the study would be conducted.

Review of Alabama Oysters Marketing Subcommittee Activities

- Renie Kennemer described the activities of the Oyster Marketing subcommittee.
- Previously research was required to figure out ways to increase sales of all AL, farm-raised oysters.
- Subcommittee has met with more than half a dozen farmers. After several meetings the subcommittee settled on three potential marketing concepts.
 1. An umbrella brand business concept like French Hermit in MS. French Hermit makes selling oysters from small oyster farms easier by developing relationships with distributors. The French Hermit brand is the stand-out, but other small farm oysters are sold through or by French Hermit.
 2. A national PR campaign for Alabama farmed oysters. This concept would build on the success of the Eat Alabama Seafood campaign and use notable folks to promote AL oysters on a national stage. This campaign could help farmers of all sizes with recognition, but benefits would bend toward larger farmers who could satisfy national customers.
 3. A PR campaign focus, but on a local and regional scale. This required first building the brands of each individual oyster farmer, so it was most likely to help the small and medium size farmers. A second phase would include working with local organizations to promote eating AL farmed oysters.
- The subcommittee discussed the pros and cons, workload, budget, and resources and ended up with a new idea that is a hybrid version of the umbrella brand and PR campaign.
- The subcommittee recommendation is to work to build name recognition and trust in Alabama farmed oysters with a brand or label that all oyster farmers – small, medium, and large – can tie to their individual product. A lot of farmers told said they don't have time to develop a brand and relationships with restaurants/customers. A label could help kickstart those relationships.
- Tactics include a website that tells the AL farmed oyster story, earned media, or PR on a local and regional level to drive sales.

Review of Revolving Maritime Loan Fund

- Frank Smith updated on the status of the revolving loan program.
- A grant application has been completed and submitted to Alabama Power
- An RFQ has been completed and will be sent out to potential financial partners after we have heard on grant status from AL Power.
- Beth Thomas updated on the grant status: the Alabama Power Foundation committee will have reviewed it by the end of the month and is likely to make a decision with review.
- The Loan Fund is on track to launch this summer.

Briefing on Grand Bay Oyster Park Tour

- Henry Perkins briefed the BRC on the Grand Bay Oyster Park Tour.
- Tour took place on April 22nd and brought about 20 individuals out on the water.
- Those in attendance were involved with various oyster projects in the region, and were able to discuss these projects, network with one another, and learn more about the technical aspects of what they were engaged in as well as the broader picture of the industry.
- Bill Walton led the tour and demonstrated how oyster aquaculture works and provided samples of oysters for guests to taste.

New Business

- Henry Perkins discussed next steps for the BRC to take.
- New projects, subcommittees, and tours were discussed. Not anything specific, but in general these ideas were brought up to try and engage members of the BRC who had not been engaged via the many oyster projects.
- This idea was generally approved, though there was the most enthusiasm for additional tours.
- Frank Smith thanked everyone for attending.
- Henry Perkins added that he would be reaching out to the group to solicit opinions on potential next steps, new projects, new committees, etc. He also added he would be seeking one-on-one meetings with BRC members to discuss the direction of the BRC.

A motion to adjourn was made and seconded and the meeting ended at 2:39.