

Mobile Bay National Estuary Program Executive Committee Meeting
GoogleMeet Virtual Meeting
Thursday, May 27, 2021 10:00 am - 12:00 pm

Attendees:

Chris Blankenship, ADCNR
Jennifer Denson, Partners for Environmental Progress
John Driscoll, Alabama State Port Authority
Walter Ernest, Pelican Coast Conservancy
Mimi Fearn, Dog River Clearwater Revival
Leslie Gahagan, City of Foley
Patric Harper, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Helene Hassell, Dauphin Island Sea Lab Foundation

Amy Hunter, ADCNR
Patti McCurdy, ADCNR State Lands
Justin McDonald, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Eliska Morgan, Thompson Engineering
Chris Plymale, US EPA Region 4
William Puckett, Alabama Soil & Water Conservation Committee
Chris Thomas, US EPA Region 4
John Valentine, Dauphin Island Sea Lab

MBNEP Staff Present: *Roberta Swann, Christian Miller, Jason Kudulis, Tiffany England, Tom Herder, Kelley Barfoot, Madison Blanchard, Henry Perkins, Herndon Graddick, and Bethany Hudson*

1. **Introductions/Call to Order:** Ms. Swann asked that each person sign in using the chat box for attendance.
2. **Approval of Minutes:** Commissioner Blankenship asked for comments or revisions to the minutes from the February 2, 2021 meeting. Jennifer Denson made a motion to approve, Mimi Fearn seconded the motion.
3. **Director's Report**
 - a) EPA Workplan:

Ms. Swann discussed the budget for our annual EPA Workplan. Our year 4 EPA appropriation is \$700,000, which projected municipality match of \$435,600. She then gave an overview of the activities in each CCMP area that will be part of the coming year's funds.

 - Estuary Status & Trends: We are largely focused on our Coastal Monitoring Program and a new State of the Bay report publication. We will be funding 25% time of a Ph.D. scientist for SAC coordination efforts and also watershed monitoring costs.
 - Ecosystem Restoration & Protection: Most of our watershed planning and implementation funds come from external grants. We are funding another ADA beach access mat, which costs \$9,000 and an access point inventory for both counties.
 - Technical Assistance & Capacity Building: Last year we allocated \$50,000 for support of an oyster loan funding program, which has been covered through an AL Power grant of \$50,000. We allocated \$5,000 to workshops for hydrologic model education for municipalities and \$5,000 then green infrastructure retrofit planning (pervious pavement, bioswales, rain gardens) in some of our more developed areas.
 - Education & Public Involvement: Canoe/kayak tours, bi-annual Current Connection newsletter, watershed and park signage, and outreach materials. We will be hosting the Bays and Bayous Symposium next year, as well as sponsoring several area events like Creekfest, Birdfest, and Coastal Cleanup.
 - Program Delivery: Our year 4 program delivery and operation budget is \$987,072. We have hired an additional staff person and allocated money for another upcoming 5-year CCMP.

Helene Hassell made a motion to approve the budget, and Walter Ernest seconded. The motion carries.

- b) Ms. Swann and Herndon Graddick discussed the success we've had with our Social Media reach. We have focused on a new, mission-based, values-focused messaging strategy on social media that uses common values language and photos to elicit support across our coverage area. These stories have ranged from the installation of beach mats that allow people with mobility challenges to get out on the sand, to

conservation efforts in the Gulf Front Little Lagoon Watershed Plan, to using effective images to illustrate coastal erosion and sea level rise issues. We've also used very inexpensive microtargeted Facebook instruments to juice their algorithm to broadcast our content more broadly. At present, 90% of the content is organic and only 10 percent generated through paid placements. We've also made significant inroads with local media who have covered our latest work extensively. To put it simply, our work and mission is now reaching almost everyone in Coastal Alabama on a regular basis, building support and political capital for our future endeavors.

4. Committee Reports (MBNEP Management Conference Co-Chairs)

Science Advisory Committee

Dr. Amy Hunter reported on the SAC meeting from May 21, which continued to have great participation with almost 40 attendees. Co-chairs welcomed several new members to the SAC as part of our effort to diversify expertise of the SAC by including members of the social sciences. Co-Chairs, staff, and SAC members discussed the creation of an updated state-of-the-bay report to help inform either the update/extension of the current CCMP, or potential make clear the need for a new CCMP. SAC members heard updates on the NOAA RESTORE Decadal study and had the opportunity to ask questions or provide input on potential utility of models moving forward. Members engaged in mock sewage spill scenario to determine the utility of the Rapid Response Stressor Matrix developed over the past year.

Project Implementation Committee

Patric Harper reported on the May 20th PIC meeting, which had over 60 attendees. There were updates on our watershed management plans. The Western Shore draft will be released for comment the during the summer and the Gulf Frontal and D'Olive drafts should be released around by the end of summer. Further watershed baseline/sediment work was not needed for the Western Delta watersheds. These will be the next released via RFQ. Lower Chasaw likely as a stand alone, with the others grouped into one complex. We anticipate a late summer RFQ release. Sediment/baseline analysis work getting underway on the Eastern Delta complex. RFQ for that watershed management plan to be released later in the year. Additional monitoring work going on in Gulf Frontal and potentially Lower Chasaw for pathogens. Dr. Missy Partyka shared a shoreline project permitting/monitoring inventory. The goal is to continue to build out the inventory for resource managers to use when developing project monitoring plans to have consistency with other projects and for the science community to weigh-in on what is most important to monitor and what data exists/how to access by the larger research community. The PIC will hold their first off-cycle topical meeting; using a survey the committee was polled to narrow down interest – shoreline restoration was selected. Jason Kudulis gave project restoration updates on Deer River, Fowl River Spits, Lower Fish River & Marlow, Three Mile Creek, and D'Olive.

Government Networks Committee

Christian Miller presented on the May 27th GNC meeting, which had 22 participants. Chris Thomas and Brendan Held from EPA presented on unique ways to increase efficiencies in wastewater treatment and reduced nutrient output. There was an overview of watershed planning progress. The next meeting will be in person.

Community Action Committee

Mimi Fearn reported on the CAC meeting from April 13th, which continues to have better participation with the virtual meetings. Guest speaker Jennifer Haslbauer with ADEM Water Division gave a presentation on Citizen Water Quality Reporting including why, when, where and how citizens should report identified water quality issues. Other topics of discussion included examples of citizen reporting success stories and online resources available for informing citizens. Another guest speaker, Mai Fung, a Ph.D. student at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab, gave a presentation on her research on Eutrophication in Weeks Bay to solicit feedback from the CAC and understand what issues are most important to citizens living in the study area.

Business Resources Committee

Eliska Morgan reported on the BRC meeting from May 12th, which had 15 virtual attendees and focused on oysters. A meeting was organized 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. A subcommittee will be developing a platform to market farmed Alabama oysters. Initially, they will build out a website to target distributors and restaurants, both locally and nationally. They are waiting to hear back from Alabama Power about the Fisheries Fund grant status but should know in the next few weeks. An RFQ is ready to go to a few interested financial parties once that happens and we hope to issue the first loan this summer. A group of leaders involved in various oyster projects went out to the Grand Bay Oyster Park. Henry Perkins is getting input from each member of the BRC to determine their thoughts on the direction of the committee, to seek out ideas for new projects that are maybe less oyster focused, and to develop ideas for new tours. The next BRC meeting will be in person.

Community Resources Committee

Walter Ernest reported on the CRC meeting from May 25th, with virtual attendance of 10 members. The committee now has a co-chair vacant spot, as Ms. Callaway resigned her position to join local government. Members were surveyed to determine the committee's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. There was consensus that maintaining operation of the CRC has value. The next CRC meeting, scheduled in early August will determine a path for education and advocacy towards successful implementation of CCMP TAC and EPI strategies.

Finance Committee

Helene Hassell and Jennifer Denson reported on the FC meeting from April 16th. The committee discussed financial strategies, current funding & sponsorships, and goals & objectives. The Finance Committee has been revamped and members are excited about guiding the financial sustainability of the program moving forward.

5. Old Business

- We watched a presentation about using hydrologic modeling in the Dog River Watershed to help identify target areas for trash abatement for DRCR to incorporate into a trash strategy for the City of Mobile.

6. New Business

7. Other / Announcements

- Our Summer Social event is Thursday, June 3, 2021.
- Three Mile Creek Fest is scheduled for June 12, 2021.
- Our next meeting will be in person.

The meeting adjourned at 11:17 a.m.