

Mobile Bay National Estuary Program Executive Committee Meeting
Zoom Virtual Meeting
Tuesday, March 15, 2022, 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 noon

Attendees:

Judy Adams, Alabama State Port Authority
Chris Blankenship, ADCNR
Jennifer Denson, Partners for Environmental
Progress
Troy Ephriam, Ephriam & Associates Environmental
Consulting, LLC
Leslie Gahagan, City of Foley
Judy Haner, The Nature Conservancy
Patric Harper, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Ashley Henderson, Alabama Soil & Water
Conservation Committee

Amy Hunter, ADCNR RESTORE
Merceria Ludgood, Mobile County Commission
Ben Malone, USDA-NRCS
Patti McCurdy, ADCNR State Lands
Eliska Morgan, Thompson Engineering
Chris Plymale, U.S. EPA Region 4
Bill Puckett, Alabama Soil & Water Conservation
Committee
Beth Thomas, Alabama Power
Chris Thomas, U.S. 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, Melissa Partyka, 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 August 27, 2021 meeting. Judy Haner noted that the minutes showed “SAC” instead of “PIC” in the Project Implementation Committee section. *Item was fixed.* Eliska Morgan made a motion to approve, Judy Haner seconded the motion.
3. **Director’s Report**
 - a) **Infrastructure Bill:** MBNEP has tentatively received the amount that will be received each year for the next five years. The total is \$909,800 per year, and once we take out the 15% indirect charge for the Dauphin Island Sea Lab it brings that down to \$790,130, give or take, each year for projects. Funding can be carried forward through the 5 years. We anticipate the first-year funds sometime this summer. EPA would like to see “Transformational” projects early. We are going to focus on projects dealing with infrastructure and climate resilience. We will explore the status of watershed plan implementation, project prioritization, and the needs in “environmental justice” communities.

We are working on a draft plan for expending the infrastructure funds. Our planning at this point includes a Living Shorelines Matching Fund, Green Infrastructure/stormwater management in underserved/public housing communities, and a Watershed Management Plan Update for Eight Mile Creek, but we anticipate possible changes as EPA guidance evolves. As part of the Western Shore Watershed Management Plan the number one priority was shoreline stabilization on the western shore of Mobile Bay. We’ve had one meeting so far with those residents (over 65 attendees) and continue to explore the best path forward for establishing a fund for shoreline stabilization, multiple property lengths at a time. We are working with Dr. Bret Webb from the University of South Alabama to cost share a project manager focused on shoreline management/monitoring.

Another area of consideration is stormwater management/green infrastructure installations in underserved communities/public housing sites. As public housing is either modernized or significantly renovated, there is an opportunity to couple HUD investments with Infrastructure improvements promoting environmental protection.

The Eight Mile Creek Watershed was not included in the original list of watershed plans for our RESTORE funding because there was already one in place, but it is dated. We are currently seeking funds from the State CZM, local match, and ADEM funds and would augment what is raised with Infrastructure funding.

This information is provided to give members a sense of our direction. A full plan will be presented at a later date.

Amy Hunter asked about the indirect rate percentage. The correct rate is the 15% as noted. Dr. Hunter also asked about a map of the EJ areas in both counties. Links to two different tools: [CEQ Climate Change and Economic Justice Tool](#) ; [EPA's EJ Screen](#).

- b) Ms. Swann showed the progression of attendance to our Annual Breakfast meeting, with a small drop in post-COVID 2021. We look forward to continuing the growth for the meeting this year.

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

Science Advisory Committee

Dr. Amy Hunter reported on the SAC. The first SAC meeting of the year was held virtually on February 25, 2022, and the plan is to hold the next meeting on May 20, 2022, in-person. SAC members were asked to complete an updated version of the Stressor Matrix Evaluation that was used to help guide the 2013 CCMP priorities. Low turn-out necessitated reaching out into the scientific community of the coast and asking them to indicate willingness to participate in the stressor matrix and potentially join the SAC. 11 respondents indicated interest and were sent personalized versions of the matrix. SAC members engaged in an exercise to help prioritize future monitoring of habitats, ecosystem services, stressors that were highlighted in the current CCMP.

Project Implementation Committee

Judy Haner and Patric Harper discussed the PIC. Two meetings were held on September 30, 2021, and March 10, 2022. The committee is interested in having themed agendas to drill down on specific topics or watershed. In September the PIC learned about several invasive species management programs and the March meeting focused on partners actively working in the Perdido Watershed. The committee will continue to offer off-cycle topical meetings in the field. Members will visit D'Olive stream restorations next and then move to Orange Beach to see how the City manages their diverse natural resources, balancing growth and tourism pressure.

Next, MBNEP staff Christian Miller and Jason Kudulis gave updates on restoration activities. Mr. Miller gave the status of watershed management plans. Western Shore, Gulf Frontal, and the D'Olive Update are all complete. MTA Delta, Eastern Shore, and Dauphin Island plans will be completed in June and July. Western Perdido, Western Delta, and Eastern Delta plans are newly started. Grand Bay will be the last plan of this group.

Mr. Kudulis gave an update on restoration projects. D'Olive's Pine Run emergency repair is underway and Canterbury construction begins April 1, 2022. Three streams in Lower Fish River have been selected for engineering and design at Magnolia River, Marlow construction begins at the end of March and the pre-proposal for Phase II has been submitted. Fowl River 60% design and permitting are ongoing and NFWF has awarded Phase II funding. In Deer River we are conducting supplemental field work to inform additional restoration alternatives. Phase II and NCRF funding has been awarded.

Government Networks Committee

Christian Miller presented on the GNC, who's meeting was the Friday before today's EXC meeting. EPA Region 4 provided an overview of State Revolving Fund provisions in Infrastructure Investment & Jobs Act. ADEM discussed upcoming coastal trash abatement program and Mary Beth Sullivan with Moffatt & Nichol gave an overview of Alabama State Port Authority's Upper Mobile Bay beneficial use wetland creation project. Commissioner Ludgood commented that the GNC meetings have been doing a great job of bringing

in speakers who give relevant information that members can take back to their communities. We have produced a 5-minute video that shows an overview of the collective efforts trash efforts from 2011 to present. The video would not play properly, so we sent out the link to the video to everyone after the meeting. <https://www.mobilebaynep.com/videos/altering-the-course-a-journey-toward-trash-free-waters-along-the-alabama-coast> .

Community Action Committee

Leslie Gahagan reported on the CAC meeting from February 8, 2022. The topic was strengths and weaknesses related to growing and retaining their memberships. Details on methods and strategies proven to be successful were discussed: Recruiting and retaining the members of individual Grassroots organizations; Keeping members engaged; Increasing the communities' awareness of the organization; Involving members in local volunteer programs and activities. The next meeting will be on May 10, 2022, where the CAC will discuss the needs of individual volunteer water quality monitor groups for the purpose of increasing the monitoring network across Coastal Alabama.

Business Resources Committee

Eliska Morgan reported on the February 8, 2022 BRC meeting. The Coastal Alabama Fisheries Fund has issued its first loan, with which the farmer has purchased enough new cages to double his production and create two full time jobs. MBNEP is co-hosting an oyster industry meeting with Organized Seafood Alliance as an outreach to oyster catchers and farmers to engage the community in the loan fund, restoration work, and water quality monitoring.

Finance Committee

Jennifer Denson reported on the FC meeting from February 14, 2022. The committee discussed the Infrastructure Bill spending regarding exploring match funding with partners to stretch funds, strategically investing in environmental management to create projects that can sustain funding, especially through public housing and development, and how to create these impacts within a 5-year period. The FC is also developing a long-term financial plan for MBNEP sustainability.

5. Old Business

6. New Business

The Bays & Bayous Symposium is scheduled for January 23-25, 2023, at the Mobile Convention Center.

7. Other / Announcements

The next meetings will be held May 26, August 26, and December 2.

The meeting adjourned at 10: 54 a.m.