

Mobile Bay National Estuary Program Executive Committee Meeting
Original Oyster House Banquet Hall, Spanish Fort, AL
Friday, March 13, 2020 10:00 am-12:00 pm

Attendees:

Scott Bannon, ADCNR Marine Resources
Chris Blankenship, ADCNR
Casi Callaway, Mobile Baykeeper
Greg Dansby for Ben Malone, USDA-NRCS State Office
Jennifer Denson, Partners for Environmental Progress
Troy Ephriam, Ephriam & Associates Consulting, LLC
Mimi Fearn, Dog River Clearwater Revival
Judy Haner, The Nature Conservancy
Patric Harper, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Amy Hunter, ADCNR
John Lehrter, Dauphin Island Sea Lab

Jimmy Lyons, Alabama State Port Authority
Ben Malone, USDA-NRCS State Office
Patti McCurdy, ADCNR State Lands
Justin McDonald, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Chris Plymale, U.S. EPA, Region 4
Ashley Henderson for William Puckett, Alabama Soil & Water Conservation Committee
LaDon Swann, Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium
Beth Thomas, Alabama Power
Chris Thomas, U.S. EPA, Region 4
Billie Jo Underwood, Baldwin County Commission
John Valentine, Dauphin Island Sea Lab

MBNEP Staff Present: *Roberta Swann, Christian Miller, Tiffany England, Jason Kudulis, Kelley Barfoot, Katie Dylewski, Herndon Graddick, and Bethany Dickey*

1. **Introductions/Call to Order:** Executive Committee Co-chair Chris Thomas called meeting to order at 10:15 a.m. The room went through quick introductions.
2. **Approval of Minutes:** Commissioner Blankenship asked for comments or revisions to the minutes from the September 20, 2019 meeting. Judy Haner made a motion to approve and John Lehrter seconded the motion.
3. **Director's Report**
 - a) **Key Accomplishments:** Ms. Swann went through our top accomplishments since the last meeting, based on each of the 5 CCMP Actions.
 - **Estuary Status & Trends-** MBNEP is joining forces with EPA Gulf Breeze and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for an Economic Impact Analysis.
 - **Ecosystem Restoration & Protection-** A Lower Fish River Restoration grant is in planning right now.
 - **Technical Assistance & Capacity Building-** The Three Mile Creek Partnership (3MC) has been established and hired an Executive Director.
 - **Education & Public Involvement-** We completed the Spring 2020 Current Connections newsletter, which focuses on "The Iconic Oyster".
 - **Management & Project Administration-** We are very close to completion of our cloud-based Project Management system through QuickBase.
 - b) **Taking Back our Gulf Coast:** We have a new partnership with WKRG to highlight our Create a Clean Water Future Campaign. A year-long campaign, beginning in April, a series of 15-60 second vignettes will air each day with messages about local governments combatting litter, the importance of clean water, and highlighting local access points and the investments in improving access.
 - c) **Management Conference Committee Leadership Changes:** We have had several changes in the leadership roles of Management Conference committees. For the Finance Committee (FIN), David England has completed his term, and the new co-chairs are Helene Hassell with the Dauphin Island Sea Lab Foundation and Jennifer Denson with Partners for Environmental Progress. Ms. Denson has stepped down from the Business Resources Committee (BRC) to fill the FIN spot and Darrelyn Dunmore has fulfilled her duties as co-chair as well. Eliska Morgan has agreed to be the new BRC co-chair, leaving a vacant spot for the other

co-chair. Dr. Tina Miller-Way with the Dauphin Island Sea Lab has fulfilled her duties as the Community Resources Committee (CRC) co-chair, leaving Casi Callaway with Mobile Baykeeper and a vacant spot as the co-chairs of the CRC.

- d) Barry Coal Ash Pond Closure Education Effort: The release of the 15-20-minute film is scheduled for April. A legal review and hydrologic review have been completed and the engineering review has been contracted to be completed by March. The script is nearly complete, and we have reached out to a few people about narration.
- e) Other: Our EPA funding total is about \$2 million, external funding is about \$6.4 million, and carryover funds (open external grants) are about \$3 million. So, we are working with about \$11.7 million right now.

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

Science Advisory Committee

Dr. John Lehrter reported on the January 24 SAC meeting. Committee members, co-chairs, and staff continued developing a conceptual model framework to evaluate stressors and their impact on the habitats and ecosystem services provided by coastal resources. At times, issues arise that need to be addressed within a shorter timeframe, and the SAC has a capable and diverse group of subject matter experts to assist in decision making. The framework will give the SAC a voice to advise MBNEP. A subcommittee was formed and met on March 11.

Dr. Lehrter then talked about a NOAA RESTORE grant that has been approved. This project explores how oyster, blue crab, and spotted seatrout populations respond to human and environmental changes with the goal of improving the management of these economically and culturally important species. This project will provide Mobile Bay decision-makers a process for evaluating various scenarios, management actions, and outcomes based on single and multiple thresholds for oyster, blue crab, and spotted seatrout populations. It will help identify what individual or combined stressors affect these economically and culturally important species plus evaluate how management actions may improve the resilience of these populations to environmental change. 5 years from now we'll be in a good position to rewrite the next CCMP based on the findings from this study.

Project Implementation Committee

Judy Haner reported on the February 20 PIC meeting, which focused on the Habitat Conservation & Coastal Restoration Plan. Kelley Barfoot created an extensive spreadsheet tool showing all the habitat types and projects that fall within these areas (inside or outside of a priority patch areas) and page numbers for where these projects can be found in the WMPs is provided. This can help us prioritize projects based on whether they fall within priority patch areas. We are working on getting feedback from those that will use the plan to identify restoration projects for priority, especially related to WMP implementation. MBNEP is seeking comments for the draft Plan before finalizing it and PIC has been given 30 days to review the draft Plan and submit comments to MBNEP. Using a chart developed by the U.S. EPA as part of their Healthy Watersheds Initiative, we discussed the paradigm of how people's top priorities for where they believe restoration work should be done frequently does not match where science indicates there is an opportunity to restore ecosystem function. An urban watershed may not rank high for restoration potential to restore ecological function. When MBNEP worked with partners to prioritize watersheds for WMPs, typically the urbanized watersheds were people's top priority because these are opportunities to reconnect people back to urban natural resources. Funding Opportunities and project collaboration was discussed. Each upcoming PIC meeting will mention upcoming funding opportunities.

Christian Miller gave us an update on Watershed Management Plans:

- Wolf Bay: had a steering committee meeting in February 2020 and now focusing on recommended management measures and conservation of priority parcels. Sandy Creek and Mifflin Creek have also recently been listed for pathogens (livestock in the creek and “renegade” mobile home parks are contributing sources). So far, project recommendations include stream restoration projects, constructed wetlands (similar to what was suggested for Bon Secour), and area regional detention. The WMP draft date is March 2020 and will be out for public comment shortly thereafter, with the overall goal of completion by June or July 2020.
- Western Shore (Deer River, Garrows Bend, and Delchamps Bayou): GMC led the community meetings over the last few weeks in each of the HUC 12 watersheds to get community input on the WMP. The team is currently summarizing comments and suggestions from the community meetings. This complex includes 25 miles of shoreline and the Existing Conditions component of the WMP should be wrapped up once we have Dr. Bret Webb’s contribution relating to the shoreline. More community meetings will be held later this year to present project ideas and findings from the WMP development process. Timeline for completion of the WMP is October 2020.
- Little Lagoon/Gulf Frontal: Geosyntec hosted a community meeting with 65 participants despite it being a rainy evening. The group discussed strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats within the watershed. A lot of the concerns expressed by the community were access and water quality related. Geosyntec is currently working on the Existing Conditions component of the WMP, which tends to be one of the more time-consuming tasks of WMP development. Timeline for completion of the WMP is December 2020.
- MTA Delta: Wood Group is under contract and MBNEP has met with the Wood Group to strategize on how to modify outreach for the WMP because this is such a unique watershed with diverse stakeholders. Timeline to completion is mid-year 2021.
- Fly Creek: The RFQ is currently out now and due by end of February 2020.
- In 2018, MBNEP and partners made a priority list for WMPs. Bayou Sara and Lower Chasaw are the next two on the schedule. Marlon Cook’s schedule also must be considered, he is currently wrapping up MTA Delta sediment study and it should be finalized soon. His field work is complete for Deer River and Fly Creek sediment studies and he will begin synthesizing those data for report submittal.
- We may not need Marlon Cook to conduct a sediment study on Dauphin Island, assuming we can get required information from the USACE, which would allow us to get started sooner rather than later.
- Geosyntec with Thompson Engineering got the contract for the D’Olive WMP update and we are currently in the scoping process. Timeline for completion of the updated WMP is December 2020.

Katie Dylewski gave project updates:

- 12 Mile Creek: 1,800 linear ft. stream restoration from Dickens Ferry Rd. to Foreman Rd. The main concern is managing stormwater velocity. The goal is to reestablish floodplain connection to slow down stormwater and sediment loading. This project is RESTORE funded. The planning phase was completed in September 2019, and the implementation funds have been applied for and expected in May 2020. We hope to go to construction in November 2020.
- Invasive Species Control Plan: The Plan was completed last year, and we have already started implementing it in five priority areas identified in the Plan. We’ve had partners come forward that wanted to go ahead and start helping to implement the Invasive Species Control Plan. A group of AM/NS associates pulled 3,200 privet seedlings and plants on the USA campus. We are working with a student service learning group through a USA Conservation Biology class. They set up 30 monitoring plots and calculated relative percent cover for every species in each plot. A GulfCorps group has done privet management and a heavy trash cleanup.
- Deer River: The project includes about a mile of shoreline and 275 acres priority coastal salt marsh. We hope to repair breach in marsh fork. A GEBF funded grant, we are currently in E & D with Thompson Engineering. Property access has been secured, field surveying is complete, and waiting for reports on the existing conditions, SAV, and archeologic reports. We are on track to be at 30% design by the end of March, 60% by the end of summer, and 100% design by the end of November 2020.

Jason Kudulis gave project updates:

- Maintenance on the D'Olive projects that had stability issues was done at the beginning of the year
- Tiawasee Montclair: construction complete 750 linear ft. in Lake Forest neighborhood.
- Tiawasee TC1 & TC2: 366 linear ft. under construction and almost complete
- We have about \$1 million left in the D'Olive grant. We are having meetings with Spanish Fort & Daphne to identify projects that could use implementation.
- Fowl River Spits: in the E & D phase, meeting to discuss preliminary alternatives, expected 30% design by the end of the March. There are thoughts of adding the Bellingrath spit to this project.
- Litter Abatement: TMC has been our focus with the GOMP grant, which we are wrapping up. Osprey Initiative removed 9,000 lbs. of litter from March 2018 to December 2019, over 185% of the projected amount.

Ditch the Disposables: a campaign created from the data collected in TMC. We know that the majority of litter in Three Mile Creek is single-use plastic from restaurants. We partnered with Big White Wings and surveyed their customers on opinions of sustainable packaging and eliminating single-use products. After a week long campaign, we had 279 completed surveys and 83% of customers said they'd be willing to pay a little more for sustainable packaging. Phase 2 is being funded by a grant from Tampa Bay Estuary Program. We will take what we've learned in this campaign and take it to a different area. Chris Plymale mentioned that our accomplishments are noticed by EPA. EPA headquarters has a quarterly newsletter and we have been on the front page 3 times. The Region 4 EPA 2019 Annual Report, which is only 6 or 7 pages and MBNEP projects got 2 pages.

- Rain Barrel Program: partnership with Alabama Power Service Organization, Greif Packaging/Soterra, Ephriam Environmental, and Prichard Housing Authority. 150 barrels have been installed at 62 homes in the Toulmins Spring area. With our new partnership with Prichard Housing Authority, we are installing barrels in a 53 home residential community (4 barrels per home).

Government Networks Committee

Commissioner Billie Jo Underwood reported on the GNC meeting from March 13. The group heard an update on the Barry Coal Ash Pond Closure Review and the "Take Back our Gulf Coast" campaign. Commissioner Ludgood presented on the "Embrace the Gulf 2020" campaign, and Scott Hughes with ADEM presented on the State's Revolving Loan Fund.

Community Action Committee

Dr. Mimi Fearn gave the CAC update from the February 11 meeting. Attendance has always been an issue since most of the members are volunteers. This year, there will be guest speakers and a different theme each meeting. The first meeting was about water quality and data analysis. All the meetings for 2020 have been scheduled already. The guest speakers and their presentations were:

- Cade Kistler, Mobile Baykeeper: Mobile Baykeeper's Sewage Spill Explorer Tool allows citizens to look up information about recent and past sewage spills, such as the location, how many gallons were spilled, what caused the spill, and what waterbody(s) were affected, and is available on their website.
- Mimi Fearn, Dog River Clearwater Revival: Alabama Water Watch Monitoring Parameters- temperature, pH, alkalinity, dissolved oxygen, and turbidity.
- Dennis Hatfield, Little Lagoon Preservation Society: Little Lagoon Preservation Society's phytoplankton monitoring alerts members of potential for HABs, Red Tide, and health risks to humans and wildlife. Their success is attributed to sharing information with local entities for the purpose of collaborative research.
- Mike Shelton, Weeks Bay NERRS: Weeks Bay has started a new flood monitoring program to determine if it's flash flooding or high tide flooding and is seeking volunteers to participate.

Business Resources Committee

Jennifer Denson spoke about the changes to the BRC. Eliska Morgan is taking over as co-chair and Ms. Denson is moving to the Finance Committee. There is a vacant spot for the other co-chair. The new focus for the BRC is oysters!

Community Resources Committee

Casi Callaway presented on the CRC. Dr. Tina Miller-Way completed her services as co-chair and her replacement will be voted on by CRC members. The committee agreed to focus on Aquatic and Marine Debris through Action, Education, Policy Change, and Enforcement. A work plan is being developed for these outcomes: Trash Reduction, Litter Removal, Recycling, Policy and Legislative Action, and Educational and Awareness Activities.

5. Old Business

6. New Business

- Bays and Bayous, hosted by MS-AL Sea Grant, will be December 1-3, 2020 at the Golden Nugget Hotel & Casino in Biloxi, MS. There will be the opportunity of workshops this year. Be on the lookout for the Call for Abstracts.
- Dr. Fearn announced that a Hazardous Waste Disposal Guide has been completed for both Mobile & Baldwin Counties.

7. Other / Announcements

The meeting adjourned at 11:29 a.m. after a motion by Jennifer Denson and seconded by Commissioner Blankenship.