



Oyster Sub-Committee Agenda

Thursday, October 26th, 2023

1:00 – 3:00 PM CT

Santa Rosa County Extension Office
6263 Dogwood Dr., Milton, FL 32570

1. **Call to Order**
2. **Welcome and Introductions**
3. **Approval of March 30th, 2023 Meeting Minutes (Pg. 2)**
4. **Co-Chair Elections**
5. **Progress Recap**
 - a. Monitoring and Project Updates
 - i. Grayson Bay Oyster Co. monitoring
 - ii. Update from oyster farmers
 - b. Management Conference breakout session
 - c. Updated Restoration Vision Maps
6. **Discussion**
 - a. Stipend Program for restoration design and implementation
 - i. Expectations
 - b. Oyster Restoration Mentorship Program
 - c. Request for Proposals: Design and Engineering Services
 - i. Timeline
7. **Wrap Up and Future Planning**
 - i. Next steps
 - ii. Data gap filling
 - iii. Living Shoreline Cost Share Program
8. **Around the Room/Announcements**
9. **Adjourn**



Oyster Sub-Committee Meeting

Thursday, March 30th, 2023

5:30 – 7:30 PM CT

Santa Rosa County Extension Office
6263 Dogwood Dr., Milton, FL 32570

[Meeting Recording](#)

Supporting Materials

Attendees

Matt Posner	PPBEP
Whitney Scheffel	PPBEP
Molly McDaniel	PPBEP
Amanda Croteau	UWF
Barbara Albrecht	BFA
Becca Hatchell	FWC
Brandon Smith	Grayson Bay Oyster Co.
Chris Verlinde	Santa Rosa County
Christian Wagley	Healthy Gulf
Darryl Boudreau	NFWFMD
Erin Rasnake	DEP
Heather Hyde	Jacobs
Laura Geselbracht	TNC
Michelle Smith	FDACS
Mike Norberg	Okaloosa County
Robert Turpin	Escambia County
Shelley Alexander	Santa Rosa County
Ted Reese	ESA
Thomas Derbes	ECO
Zack Whalen	FWC

1. Call to Order

2. Welcome

3. Approval of January 31st, 2023 Meeting Minutes/Summary

Chris Verlinde (Santa Rosa County) made a motion to approve the January 31, 2023, Meeting Minutes. Heather Hyde (Jacobs) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

4. Chair/Co-Chair Elections

W. Scheffel reported that Chris Verlinde (Santa Rosa County) and Beth Fugate (DEP) had self-nominated for the co-chair positions prior to the meeting. W. Scheffel asked for other nominations; hearing none, she asked for a motion to approve the nominations for Chris and Beth.



Shelly Alexander (Santa Rosa County) made a motion to re-elect Chris Verlinde and Beth Fugate as co-chairs. Barbara Albrecht (BFA) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

5. **Oyster Round Table Event Debrief** (*Whitney Scheffel, Senior Scientist*)

The Oyster Round table was held at the Santa Rosa County Extension Office in Milton, FL on January 31st, 2023, and had more than 60 participants in-person and online. Program partners from Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS), Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), City of Milton, Emerald Coast Utility Authority (ECUA), and Pace Water presented on current projects and monitoring. Discussion focused on identifying collaborative solutions to reduce bacterial pollution in Pensacola Bay. For more details about the meeting, please see the [One Drive folder](#) for meeting summary, recording, presentations, and other supporting materials.

6. **Pensacola Bay Oyster Restoration Initiative Project Overview** (*Whitney Scheffel, Senior Scientist*)
(*Funding: NOAA Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act*)

PPBEP, TNC, Santa Rosa County, FWC, and DEP have requested \$11 million for the Pensacola Bay Oyster Restoration Initiative which will focus on the implementation of the Oyster Fisheries and Habitat Management Plan and related actions from the CCMP. It is a phased approach to fund the design and permitting for 600 ha (1,482 acres) of oyster habitat restoration over the next 10 years, with the implementation of up to 100 ha (247 acres) in the next 4-5 years. Restoration locations will be selected based on input from the Oyster Sub-Committee and the best available science. This project also includes funding for a sediment load assessment into the Pensacola Bay System, design and permitting for the restoration of Sandy Hollow Gully, and implementation of a Living Shoreline Cost Share Program. The final announcement of funding awards will be in the next few weeks.

7. **Discussion**

A robust discussion facilitated by Matt Posner (*Executive Director*) and W. Scheffel. followed the project overview.

(1) Spat on shell

- a. Oyster farmers provided input on whether spat on shell production would be a viable technique for oyster restoration in the Pensacola Bay System (PBS). Some aquaculture operators expressed interest and confirmed they would have the capacity at their current farms and would be open to growing oysters for restoration purposes. They expressed the need for support in terms of leases and the necessary gear to increase supply (e.g., cages, stringers, etc.).
- b. Discussion was held on the need for a hatchery to provide a local seed source. Several participants expressed the complexities of private and public hatcheries, potential setbacks, and other items to consider such as oyster nurseries.
- c. Questions arose on whether spat monitoring was occurring in the PBS. Staff reviewed ongoing monitoring efforts including FWC's Florida TIG funded project in Pensacola Bay that is currently monitoring spat at 10 locations (began in March 2022) and future work by PPBEP as part of the NOAA Bay Education and Watershed Training (B-WET) project being conducted this summer/fall.



(2) Restoration objectives

- a. Discussion was held on how much emphasis should be placed on restoring oysters for wild harvest. *Note: no oysters would be harvested during the project period (2023-2027).* Some participants expressed their opinion of the future of the oyster fishery moving
- b. towards aquaculture due to the declines in wild populations and lack of processing infrastructure to support the wild harvest industry. Other opinions were shared on the inclusion of recreational harvest versus strictly commercial.
- c. PPBEP staff asked participants for feedback on a strategy for balancing the full design of the three restoration objectives (i.e., fisheries, habitat, ecosystem services). Many participants felt that site suitability should be the leading driver in deciding where oysters should be restored and for which objective. Additional feedback on feasibility, source and size of restoration materials, restoration challenges, design considerations, and permitting concerns were received.

(3) Knowledge gaps

- a. Robust discussion was held on the justification for excluding Santa Rosa Sound (SRS) in future oyster restoration efforts. FDACS reiterated that SRS has not been classified for shellfish harvest and no official mapping efforts have been conducted, but that it may be considered for living shorelines and other restoration objectives other than wild harvest. W. Scheffel provided an update on Dr. Geoff Smith's (NWFSC) work through the Community Grant Program examining oyster abundance on non-reef, hardened structures across SRS and Bayou Grande. To learn more, see the write up in PPBEP's Pelican Post newsletter [here](#).
- b. Participants urged staff to consider several parameters when deciding on suitable areas for restoration including seagrass presence/absence, runoff, hydrodynamic modelling, sedimentation rates, water clarity, etc.

8. Upcoming Events

- a. SAVE THE DATE: Management Conference Meeting (*in-person*)
 - Thursday, May 4th (10:00 AM – 3:00 PM CT)
@ Sanders Beach-Corrine Jones Resource Center
Register [here](#)
- b. SAVE THE DATE: Humble Oyster Documentary Premiere
 - Tuesday, May 23rd (6:00 – 7:30 PM)
@ WSRE Jean and Paul Amos Studio
Register [here](#)

9. Around the Room/Announcements

- Staff reminded attendees of the recent launch of their Estuary 101 campaign and urged meeting attendees to take the pledge to do their part to protect and preserve our waterways. Please visit [Estuary 101 website](#) to learn more.
- S. Alexander shared that there is a plan to implement a 1,400 linear foot living shoreline at the Navarre Wastewater Treatment Plant site.
- C. Verlinde shared news about a group of homeowners that were able to successfully convert their neighborhood from septic to sewer after collaborations with the City of



Milton, Santa Rosa County staff, and local utilities. Read the story in PPBEP's Pelican Post newsletter [here](#).

10. Next Meeting

- a. Thursday, July 13

11. Adjourned