



**PENSACOLA  
& PERDIDO BAYS  
ESTUARY PROGRAM**

Media Contact: Matt Posner

Phone: 850.595.0820

E-mail: [info@ppbep.org](mailto:info@ppbep.org)

*FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE*

## **Estuary Program Awards \$250,000 through Community Grant Program**

**October 1, 2025 – PENSACOLA, FL.** The Pensacola and Perdido Bays Estuary Program (PPBEP) is pleased to announce the award of \$250,000 to local educational institutions, non-profits, and local governments to support action projects to help restore and protect our waters. Seven recipients received awards ranging from \$10,000 to nearly \$55,000 at the 2025 Community Grant Symposium on September 25<sup>th</sup> at the Bayview Community Center. PPBEP has surpassed \$1.3 million in grants awarded to 48 community projects over the past six years.

The awarded projects include:

- Development of a stream restoration plan for a stream draining to the Blackwater River at Carpenter Park.
- Expansion of acoustic telemetry monitoring across Escambia, Santa Rosa, and Okaloosa counties to advance the understanding of species migration and habitat utilization to inform natural resource management.
- Restoration of a greenhouse to produce native vegetation for shoreline and upland restoration projects at the Creek Heritage Center at the Jones Swamp Wetland Preserve.
- Hosting an environmental science day with hands-on experiences for 4<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade Girl Scouts at the Girl Scouts of Gateway Council's annual STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) Camp.
- Creation of an outdoor classroom at the Creek Heritage Center at the Jones Swamp Wetland, deepening the understanding of the Pensacola and Perdido Bay watersheds while integrating Creek traditional ecological knowledge.
- Assessment of created and restored salt marsh habitat in the Pensacola and Perdido Bay watershed to assess marsh health to inform future restoration project methods.
- Transformation of the Wildlife Sanctuary's shorebird enclosure into a naturalized habitat, enhancing the community's understanding of the ecosystems that sustain them.

**A full summary of awarded projects can be found below.**

The Community Grant Program is made possible through the support of the Florida Legislature. The Estuary Program extends their deepest appreciation to the Northwest Florida Legislative Delegation for their support, specifically Representative Andrade for sponsoring the Program's legislative funding request the last six legislative sessions.

"The Pensacola and Perdido Bays Estuary Program is thrilled to support these Community Grant Program recipients, advancing much needed restoration, monitoring, and outreach opportunities across Pensacola and Perdido Bays," said Matt Posner, Estuary Program Executive Director.



**Awarded Project Summaries**

Project Name	Applicant	Award
University of West Florida and City of Milton Water Quality and Stream Remediation Partnership	City of Milton	\$47,932.50
<p><b>Summary:</b> The City of Milton, in partnership with the University of West Florida, will develop a restoration plan to restore and enhance a stormwater connected tributary and stream system feeding into the Blackwater River, an Outstanding Florida Water. The project will address severe sedimentation, stormwater runoff, and a degraded wetland, which are degrading water quality and increasing direct untreated discharges into the river. By leveraging academic expertise, local knowledge, and a science-driven approach, the project aims to identify sources and pathways of sediment, perform comprehensive water and soil quality assessments of the stream, and develop a community-supported remediation and restoration plan for the Blackwater River associated stream at Carpenter Park.</p>		

Project Name	Applicant	Award
Multi-Species Monitoring Through Acoustic Technology	Escambia County	\$54,170.66
<p><b>Summary:</b> Escambia County, in partnership with the United States Geological Service and Florida Sea Grant/IFAS Extension, will expand acoustic telemetry monitoring in Escambia, Santa Rosa, and Okaloosa counties to advance the understanding of species migration and habitat utilization. The Northwest Florida region offers a variety of ecosystems to serve as habitats for many threatened and endangered species and species of special interest.</p> <p>Multiple institutions have active research and monitoring projects to answer questions regarding population status, habitat use, ecosystem health, and movement ecology in this region. Understanding species movement ecology through telemetry monitoring can fill data gaps regarding habitat use, connectivity, population status, and provide insights into diet and ecosystem health. Acoustic telemetry projects are ongoing in Northwest Florida. Acoustic receivers have been deployed in multiple waterways as single receivers or as arrays for fine-scale monitoring. Despite the ongoing telemetry efforts, there are still significant gaps in the acoustic arrays for this region. A larger acoustic array will support multi-species projects, including the diamondback terrapin monitoring efforts. Continued efforts are needed to assess population status, habitat use, and movement ecology of diamondback terrapins. Monitoring efforts will be expanded through routine trapping stents for mark and recapture studies, genetic sampling, and telemetry tagging of terrapins. These efforts will continue to fill critical data gaps in the status of diamondback terrapins in this region.</p>		

Project Name	Applicant	Award
Jones Swamp Creek Heritage Center Greenhouse	Escambia County	\$27,968
<p><b>Summary:</b> Escambia County, in partnership with the Santa Rosa Lower Band of Muscogee and Franklin’s Promise Coalition, will restore a native plant greenhouse and construct an outdoor planting area to support shoreline restoration and native plant propagation. Located at the Creek Heritage Center operated by the Santa Rosa Band of the Lower Muscogee at the County’s Jones Swamp Wetland Preserve, the greenhouse will be used to grow native vegetation for use in the Pensacola and Perdido Bay watersheds. Franklin’s Promise Coalition, a regional AmeriCorps partner, will</p>		



**PENSACOLA  
& PERDIDO BAYS  
ESTUARY PROGRAM**

contribute labor, materials, and technical support. Through the Opportunity Youth Service Initiative, youth trained in plant propagation and ecosystem restoration will lead hands-on efforts in plant care and construction. The project will produce 10,000 native plants for the County over three years, with 2,000 plants produced in 2026. The greenhouse initiative will promote ecological resilience, environmental education, and workforce development across the region.

Project Name	Applicant	Award
STEM in the WILD!	Girl Scouts	\$10,000
<p><b>Summary:</b> Girl Scouts of Gateway Council will deliver a full-day, immersive environmental STEM experience for 50 girls in grades 4–8 during their annual regional STEM Camp. This hands-on program invites girls to step beyond the classroom and into nature, where they will explore local ecosystems, investigate environmental issues, and engage with real-world science through a series of interactive learning stations.</p> <p>Through a structured rotation of activities led by STEM professionals, participants will examine the biological adaptations of native plants and animals, conduct water quality testing, observe estuarine habitats, and explore the interdependence of living systems. This experiential learning brings key scientific concepts to life, while deepening understanding of local conservation challenges and the role healthy ecosystems play in community well-being.</p> <p>By the end of the day, girls will have developed a broader understanding of ecology, biodiversity, and human-environment interactions, as well as personal insight into how they can contribute to conservation in their own communities. Girls will complete a field journal, earn a STEM badge and patch, and walk away inspired to care for—and protect—the natural world around them.</p>		

Project Name	Applicant	Award
The Creek Heritage Center Nature Walk and Learning Grove	Santa Rosa Band of Lower Muscogee	\$15,730
<p><b>Summary:</b> The Santa Rosa Band of the Lower Muscogee will create an immersive outdoor educational experience at the Creek Heritage Center at the Jones Swamp Wetland Preserve. Designed for school-aged children, the project will deepen understanding of the Pensacola and Perdido Bay watersheds, a watershed sacred to Creek ancestors.</p> <p>Grant funding will support the design and installation of interpretive signage, benches, native plantings, a walk-over bridge, and an outdoor classroom known as the Learning Grove. A split rail fence will be installed around the pond to ensure the safety of students and visitors while maintaining the site’s natural aesthetic.</p> <p>The Nature Walk will illustrate the interconnectedness of humans and the estuarine ecosystem, emphasizing how plants and animals sustain both environmental and human health. Culturally relevant signage will integrate Creek traditional ecological knowledge, tracing the historical shift from sustainable use to overexploitation and today’s efforts to restore resilience and balance. The Learning Grove, shaded by majestic Oaks, will host guided tours, cultural demonstrations, and hands-on conservation activities. Students will engage with native plants, wildlife, and watershed processes, reinforcing Creek values of respect, reciprocity, and care for land and water.</p>		



**PENSACOLA  
& PERDIDO BAYS  
ESTUARY PROGRAM**

Project Name	Applicant	Award
Tracking Marsh Health with DNA: A Framework for Science, Education, and Coastal Resilience	University of West Florida	\$44,528.50
<p><b>Summary:</b> The University of West Florida will assess the health of created and restored salt marsh habitat in the Pensacola and Perdido Bay watersheds to inform future restoration projects.</p> <p>Salt marshes are essential to coastal health, supporting wildlife, protecting shorelines, and filtering water. While restoration projects are expanding across the Pensacola and Perdido Bay region, a key question remains: to what degree do restored marshes mirror the biodiversity and resilience of natural systems? This project will use cutting-edge DNA techniques to evaluate how well restored salt marshes compare to natural ones. By studying tiny sediment-dwelling organisms like marine worms and clams who are important indicators of ecosystem health, the project team will assess biodiversity and identify signs of functional recovery. Both traditional and DNA-based methods will be used to analyze community structure and identify species that can serve as long-term indicators for restoration success. In addition to generating data that can improve wetland monitoring and management, this project will engage the public through education and outreach. By combining innovative science with education and outreach, this project supports data-driven restoration and builds public understanding and stewardship of our coastal ecosystem.</p>		

Project Name	Applicant	Award
The Shorebird Shelter: A Safer Space to Roost	Wildlife Sanctuary of Northwest Florida	\$49,670.34
<p><b>Summary:</b> The Wildlife Sanctuary of Northwest Florida will transform the shorebird enclosure into a naturalized habitat, enhancing the community's understanding of the ecosystems that sustain them. Our shorelines tell stories of resilience, renewal, and the delicate balance between people and place. At the Wildlife Sanctuary, a small group of permanently injured native shorebirds, including Brown Pelicans and a Great Blue Heron, serve as storytellers and ecosystem ambassadors.</p> <p>This project will expand and restore the enclosure to better reflect the coastal environment these birds once called home. Native plantings will provide shelter, enrichment, and a living demonstration of the role native vegetation plays in shoreline health and estuarine resilience. The habitat will become a year-round teaching tool and public-facing restoration effort that fosters environmental literacy and inspires stewardship.</p> <p>In addition, this investment will support the removal of invasive tilapia from the pond adjacent to the enclosure, a section of Bayou Chico isolated by a weir. Volunteers will humanely remove the fish using cast nets, with samples sent for toxicology testing to determine suitability as a supplemental food source for the sanctuary's resident birds. This effort restores ecological balance, enhances sustainability, and deepens the project's relevance to watershed health.</p> <p>Rooted in sound ecological practices, this project supports PPBEP's mission by restoring habitat, removing invasives, and connecting the community to the science and story of estuarine systems.</p>		



**PENSACOLA  
& PERDIDO BAYS  
ESTUARY PROGRAM**

The mission of the Pensacola and Perdido Bays Estuary Program is to restore and protect the Pensacola and Perdido Bay watersheds through restoration, education, and unbiased monitoring of the health of our bays, estuaries, and watersheds.

The Pensacola and Perdido Bays Estuary Program serves as a trusted source for residents, businesses, industry, and the community on issues relating to preserving, restoring, improving, and maintaining the natural habitat and ecosystem of the bays, estuaries and watersheds of Pensacola and Perdido Bays. PPBEP strives to achieve a healthy and collaborative environment by:

1. Elevating and increasing the importance, awareness and understanding of environmental quality.
2. Employing rigorous, unbiased, and scientifically sound science to inform and guide decisions, policies, and initiatives.
3. Funding programs and projects that protect the environment, increasing ecological resilience.
4. Building a network of inclusive, multi-stakeholder partnerships that takes into account factors affecting the environment, the economy, and the community-at-large for the benefit of improving the quality of life for all.

Dive in at [ppbep.org](http://ppbep.org) or follow us @ppbepfla on Facebook and @pensacolaandperdidobaysprogram on Instagram.

###