



Technical Committee Minutes

February 28th, 2023, 10:00 – 12:00 CT

Virtual Meeting | [Meeting Recording](#)

Attendees

Matt Posner	PPBEP
Whitney Scheffel	PPBEP
Logan McDonald	PPBEP
Haley Gancel	PPBEP
Molly McDaniel	PPBEP
Tucker Reynolds	PPBEP
Amanda Croteau	UWF
Brandon Smith	Grayson Bay Oyster Company
Brian Underwood	CBEP
Casey Fulford, Co-Chair	AACD
Chris Verlinde	Santa Rosa County
Christian Wagley	Healthy Gulf
Christopher Plymale	EPA Region 4
Darryl Boudreau	NWFWMD
Eric Schneider	ESA
Erin Reschke	EPA GEMMD
Jacqueline Lane	Friends of Perdido Bay
Jeannette Kelson	WSP
Justin Bousquin	EPA ORD
Katie Baltzer	TNC (AL)
Kelly Hagan	Mayor's Environment Transition Team Member
Kyle Buck	EPA ORD
Paul Looney, Chair	WRA
Ryan Kirby	Escambia County
Shelley Alexander	Santa Rosa County
Tanya McKay	NASDA
Ted Reese	ESA
Thomas Derbes	Emerald Coast Oyster Company
Zackary Black	EPA ORD



1. **Call to Order**

2. **Welcome and Introductions**

3. **Approval of October 25th, 2022, Meeting Minutes**

Christian Wagley (Healthy Gulf) made a motion to approve the October 25th, 2022, Meeting Minutes. Brian Underwood (Choctawhatchee Bay Estuary Program) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

4. **2023 Chair Nominations/Election**

Chair Paul Looney (WRA) asked participants for their chair and co-chair nominations. He highlighted some of the key roles and responsibilities of the committee leadership positions. Chris Verlinde (Santa Rosa County) suggested that P. Looney and C. Fulford remain in their positions as Chair and Co-Chair.

Chris Verlinde (Santa Rosa County) made a motion to elect Paul Looney and Casey Fulford as Chair and Co-Chair of the Technical Committee for 2023. Jeanette Kelson (WSP) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

5. **Partner Presentation**

a. **Christian Wagley (*Healthy Gulf*) and Kelly Hagen (*CNAPP*) – City of Pensacola’s Mayoral Environmental Transition Team outcomes and priorities**

- C. Wagley and K. Hagen presented their recommendations from Mayor Reeves’ Environmental Transition Team (29 members), outlined in the [City of Pensacola’s Mayoral Transition Committee Report](#) that was released in January 2023.
- The environmental report was divided into observations and recommendations.
 - C. Wagley:
 - Observations
 - Climate change is the biggest threat to the City of Pensacola
 - All environmental problems fall into the following categories: air pollution, habitat loss, climate change, and water pollution.
 - Recommendations
 - Expand form-based development standards – build cities for more pedestrians than car traffic.
 - Set renewable energy goal of 100% by 2040.
 - Empower a sustainability plan.



- K. Hagen:
 - Observations
 - Two main reports were analyzed for recommendations:
 - [City of Pensacola's Climate Mitigation and Adaptation Task force, 2018](#)
 - [City of Pensacola Mayoral Transition Committee Report 2019](#)
 - Poor communication among departments, compliance issues, and no long-range planning
 - Recommendations (long- and short-term)
 - Appoint a Chief Resilience Officer (long-term)
 - Create an environmental initiatives pilot project program (short-term) – create a platform for local groups to come together to get projects done.
 - Streamline tree-planting (short-term) – tree planting has many challenges including who maintains them and where the funding comes from
- Question/Answer focused on plans for the old wastewater treatment plant site in Pensacola and the concepts to develop that property and include stormwater retention/park space in the east/southeast part of the property that is lowest and most flood prone.

6. Staff Updates

a. Oyster Round Table Meeting Summary (*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. 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), Pace Water, presented on current projects and monitoring efforts. Discussion centered around identifying collaborated solutions to reduce bacterial pollution in Pensacola Bay. Those interested in being a part of the Oyster Sub-Committee, email W. Scheffel (wascheffel@ppbep.org). For more details about the meeting, please see the [One Drive folder](#) for meeting summary, recording, and supporting materials.

b. Funding – Proposals and grant award updates (*Logan McDonald, Community Outreach Coordinator and Whitney Scheffel, Senior Scientist*)

i. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Bay Watershed and Education Training (NOAA B-WET) Program

A teacher professional development opportunity will be held June 5-9, 2023. High school teachers throughout the watersheds are eligible to apply. [Applications](#) are due March 19th, 2023. The training will focus on



the cultural, economic, and environmental importance of Pensacola Bay System oysters as a fishery industry and as habitat. This funding will also support field trips throughout the 2023-2024 school year.

ii. Florida RESTORE Act Centers of Excellence, FLRACEP

St. Andrew & St. Joseph Bays Estuary Program (SASJBEP), PPBEP, Choctawhatchee Bay Estuary Program (CBEP), Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance (CBA), St. Andrew Bay Resource Management Association (SABRMA), and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) were awarded a three-year, \$1.2 million Florida RESTORE Act Centers of Excellence Program (FLRACEP) grant to evaluate the effectiveness of multiple living shoreline restoration projects across three Florida panhandle estuaries, including the Pensacola Bay System. This project will quantify ecosystem services (e.g., shoreline protection, nutrient cycling, habitat creation) and assist in setting meaningful restoration targets.

iii. Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Florida Priorities List 3b

PPBEP, in partnership with Escambia County and City of Pensacola, was awarded a five-year, \$2.1 million grant for planning, design, and permitting of the restoration of a 2.5 mile stretch of Carpenter Creek. The project goal is to restore water quality and quantity by reducing sediment and nitrogen loading and restoring 20 acres of wetlands.

iv. National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, NFWF

The City of Orange Beach, in partnership with Moffatt and Nichol, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) Alabama Chapter, and PPBEP was awarded a three-year, \$367,900 grant to remove large marine debris left over from Hurricane Sally. The project will also work to restore marsh habitat, develop a Best Management Practice guide for coastal landowners and contractors, and host volunteer clean up and planting events at the Orange Beach Coastal Arts Center and Public Library.

v. NOAA Investment, Infrastructure, and Jobs Act (IIJA)

- **Pensacola Bay Watershed**

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, with the implementation of up to 100 ha (247 acres). Restoration locations will be chosen based on input from Oyster Sub-Committee participants. This project also includes a sediment load



assessment of the Pensacola Bay System, design and permitting for restoration of the Sandy Hollow Gully, and implementation of a Living Shoreline Cost Share Program.

- Perdido Bay Watershed
PPBEP, City of Orange Beach, Troy University, University of South Alabama, Mississippi State University, Dauphin Island Sea Lab, Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, and Moffitt and Nichol requested \$12.8 million to update and expand an existing Living Shoreline Suitability Model (LSSM) for Perdido Bay, implement education and outreach campaign(s) and a Living Shoreline Cost Share Program, and planning and implementation for restoration projects at the Orange Beach Waterfront Park, the lower Perdido Islands, Lilian Swamp, and Bronson Field.

vi. **National Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA)**

- Santa Rosa County in partnership with PPBEP, Town of Jay, City of Milton, and the utilities of Gulf Breeze, Holly Navarre, and Pace requested \$22.5 million to complete several priority Septic to Sewer conversion projects. This multi-jurisdictional collaborative project would support the design, engineering, and construction of 23 prioritized locations for sewer expansion, septic abatement and conversion, in addition to the development of a Master Plan for an additional 6,000 conversions in the East Milton area. The project will include water quality monitoring and data collection conducted in collaboration with PPBEP.
- PPBEP, Escambia County, Santa Rosa County, Emerald Coast Utilities Authority (ECUA), and the City of Pensacola requested \$8.8 million for a two-phased approach to identify and address bacterial impairments in nine sub-watersheds of the Pensacola Bay watershed. The first phase would identify bacterial sources in impaired waters following the protocol outlined in [DEP's Fecal Indicator Toolkit](#). The second phase would fund planning and implementation of large-scale projects to remediate recurring bacterial issues to improve overall water quality.

c. **Estuary 101 Campaign** (*Logan McDonald, Community Outreach Coordinator*)

The Estuary 101 Campaign will launch March 2023. The campaign includes information on estuarine habitats and wildlife, how businesses, organizations, and individuals can advocate for the estuaries, and locations for community members to explore. Please let Logan McDonald (lmcdonald@ppbep.org) know if you have any suggestions about interested donors.



d. **Events** (*Logan McDonald, Community Outreach Coordinator*)

i. **Humble Oyster Documentary Premiere**

The recently completed Humble Oyster documentary explores the past, present, and future conditions of oysters in the Pensacola Bay System. A premiere and panel discussion event will be held with WSRE.

SAVE THE DATE:

Thursday, May 23, 2023

Evening (Time TBD)

Jean & Paul Amos Performance Studio

Kugelman Center for Telecommunications

1000 College Blvd. Pensacola, FL 32504

ii. **“Hope on the Half Shell” Social**

PPBEP is partnering with Thomas Derbes, Emerald Coast Oyster Company, to host an oyster social. The event will promote locally reared Pensacola Bay oysters and educate the community on the importance of oyster habitat. Stay tuned for more details on the first event in April-May!

7. **Discussion Items**

a. **State of the Bays** (*Haley Gancel, Environmental Scientist*)

H. Gancel provided an overview of the 2023 State of the Bays report, including indicators selected, methods for data compilation and synthesis, and the condition scale developed for ecosystem health. The report will provide an overview of how conditions have changed in our watersheds over time, identify data gaps, and highlight opportunities for improving the health of our bays. The four main indicator groups are water quality (total nitrogen, total phosphorus, chlorophyll-*a*, turbidity, dissolved oxygen), habitat (oysters, seagrass, wetlands, longleaf pine forests), bacteria (beach advisories, sanitary sewer overflows), and wildlife (manatee sightings). The scale for ecosystem health is categorized as improving, stable, declining, critical, and undetermined.

The Technical Committee was asked to provide feedback on the condition of select indicators (habitat change, longleaf pine forests, and wetlands), other ways to present and visualize data, and future indicators of interest for future State of the Bays report updates.

Suggestions provided by participants:

Habitat Change and Wetlands

- Participants asked questions regarding the condition assessment and whether the determination was made based on overall quality of the habitat or extent only. Staff clarified that the condition indicator was selected based on overall extent for wetlands and percent change in development over time for habitat change.
- Discussion was held on the lack of data available to assess habitat quality at large scales. There were suggestions to include a map of



protected/conserved lands, add percent forest cover change, to display development per unit population to better understand the effects of urban sprawl, and to add trend line graphs where there are longer periods of change.

Longleaf Pine Forests

- There were suggestions for adding data layers for conservation and management activities (e.g., controlled burns).

New Indicators for Future State of the Bays

- There were suggestions for adding indicators to future updates including population/economy, biological recruitment (e.g., Hester-Dendy samplers), oyster recruitment, and fish community composition.

b. Comprehensive Monitoring Strategy (*Whitney Scheffel, Senior Scientist*)

W. Scheffel provided an overview of the Comprehensive Monitoring Strategy. The Strategy will assist in filling data gaps, standardizing monitoring across organizations, identifying restoration targets, and tracking CCMP progress. The Strategy will focus on monitoring questions that PPBEP aims to answer in a 5-10 yr. period (the lifespan of the CCMP). Additional feedback on specific elements of the implementing the Strategy can be provided at the Management Conference on May 4th, 2023.

Discussion was held on types of monitoring and specific metrics to include in the Strategy. Suggestions included focusing monitoring on waterbodies that have Alternate Restoration Plans identified by DEP (e.g., BMAPs), expand biological monitoring (e.g., fish, benthic, and larval communities; Stream and Larval Condition Indices).

8. Around the Room/Announcements

No announcements.

9. 2023 Meetings & Events

- March 30th: Oyster Sub-Committee
- May 4th: Management Conference
- August 15th: Technical Committee

10. Next Meeting

- May 4th – Management Conference

11. Adjourn