



Technical Committee Minutes

August 15th, 2023, 10:00 – 12:00 CT

Virtual Meeting | [Meeting Recording](#)

Attendees

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|-------------------------|--|
| Matt Posner | PPBEP |
| Whitney Scheffel | PPBEP |
| Logan McDonald | PPBEP |
| Haley Gancel | PPBEP |
| Madi Ross | PPBEP |
| Molly McDaniel | PPBEP |
| Abdon Acosta | WRA |
| Amy Mixon | AECOM |
| Barbara Albrecht | BFA, UWF CEDB |
| Casey Fulford, Co-Chair | AACD |
| Chris Verlinde | Santa Rosa County |
| Daryl Coludrovich | WRA |
| Eric Schneider | ESA |
| Heather Griffin | ADEM |
| Jacqueline Lane | Friends of Perdido Bay |
| Jeff Helms | Moffatt & Nichol |
| Jessica DeCastro | WRA |
| Katie Baltzer | TNC (AL) |
| Matthew Miller | WRA |
| Mike Fazio | Santa Rosa County |
| Mike Norberg | Okaloosa County |
| Nicole Deycard | EPA GEMMD |
| Paul Looney, Chair | WRA |
| Rick O'Connor | Florida Sea Grant |
| Rob Holbrook | USFWS, East Gulf Coastal Plain Joint Venture |
| Ryan Johnson | WRA |
| Shelley Alexander | Santa Rosa County |
| Thomas Derbes | Florida Sea Grant |



1. **Call to Order**

2. **Welcome and Introductions**

New attendees Mike Fazio (Santa Rosa County) and Nicole Deycard (EPA GEMMD) introduced themselves to the Technical Committee.

3. **Approval of February 28th, 2023, Meeting Minutes**

Jeff Helms (Moffatt & Nichol) made a motion to approve the February 28th, 2023, Meeting Minutes. Rob Holbrook (USFWS, East Gulf Coastal Plain Joint Venture) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

4. **Partner Presentations**

a. **Amy Mixon (AECOM) and Paul Looney (WRA) – Update on the Bayou Chico Sediment Remediation Project**

A. Mixon provided updates on the progress of the Bayou Chico sediment remediation project lead by Escambia County. The project team includes representatives from the City of Pensacola, AECOM, WRA, Arc Surveying and Mapping, University of West Florida, and the Engineer Research and Development Center (ERDC).

The project entails a multi-phased approach which includes an initial data review and planning documents, data collection, conceptual site model development, remedial alternative analysis, design and permitting, and development of a monitoring plan. Some of the work that has been completed to date includes sediment thickness probing, bathymetric and geophysical surveying, sediment sample collection for contaminant evaluation, and a submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) survey.

Phase I and II sediment sampling results indicate that most of the contamination is within the first foot of sediment with contaminant levels decreasing significantly with depth. Most contaminants (e.g., metals, pesticides) were not detected or below detection limits at most sites. Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs) and Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons (PAHs) were generally below detection levels and were lower than those levels found in previous surveys. Levels of dioxins and furans were still in exceedance of regulatory limits and are similar to the levels that were seen in the 2005 survey.

The project team is working on conceptual designs and exploring remedial techniques and available properties to utilize as sediment management areas. The design and permitting is due to be complete in Spring 2024.



P. Looney provided an overview of the SAV survey of Bayou Chico that was conducted in October 2022. Based on bathymetry of the bayou and aerial imagery, fifteen acres of potential seagrass habitat were surveyed. The SAV transects ran parallel to the shoreline with a total of 764 sample points. Of the points that were surveyed, 100 had grass present, mainly composed of two species, wild celery (*Vallisneria* sp.) and widgeon grass (*Ruppia maritima*), located in the northern most arms of the bayou.

Question/Answer focused on considerations for new sediment inputs from feeder creeks following sediment remediation, existing methodology for sediment capping, and specific locations where grasses were located.

5. Staff Updates

a. Management Conference Breakout Session Overview (*Whitney Scheffel, Senior Scientist*)

The Program's 2nd Annual Management Conference meeting was held on May 4, 2023 at the Sanders Beach-Corrine Jones Resource Center and had more than 100 attendees. Dr. Dave Tomasko, Director of the Sarasota Bay Estuary Program, was the keynote speaker and we had four breakout sessions which included Environmental Justice, Education and Outreach Planning, Pensacola Bay Oyster Restoration Initiative, and Comprehensive Monitoring. The two breakout sessions most related to the Technical Committee discussed the following topics:

- Comprehensive Monitoring - Next steps for broad scale, cross-state monitoring implementation, partner needs, and indicators. Participant feedback included interest in PPBEP hosting a monitoring workshop to align goals, discuss capacity and commitment from monitoring entities. Partners also expressed needs for developing data comparability tools and a gap analysis.
- Pensacola Bay Oyster Restoration Initiative - Prioritizing suitable restoration locations for fisheries enhancement, habitat creation/expansion, and ecosystem services. Participants also discussed potential restoration materials and strategies.

b. Projects and Monitoring (*Whitney Scheffel, Senior Scientist; Logan McDonald, Community Outreach Coordinator; Haley Gancel, Environmental Scientist*)

i. NOAA Investment, Infrastructure, and Jobs Act (IIJA): Pensacola Bay Oyster Restoration Initiative

PPBEP, TNC, Santa Rosa County, FWC, and DEP had their first kickoff meeting in July (They call themselves the SPAT – Special Project Action Team) 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](#). The project has 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). The project team discussed the regulatory process, the design



RFP, construction, and community engagement. The official project start date is September 1st.

ii. **National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Bay Watershed and Education Training (NOAA B-WET): Pensacola Bay System Oyster REEF**

Staff provided an update on PPBEP's NOAA Bay-Watershed Education & Training (B-WET) Program grant. The project kicked off with a weeklong teacher professional development workshop in June where teachers from Escambia, Santa Rosa, and Okaloosa County high schools participated in hands-on activities, field trips, and guest presentations about the status of local oysters in the Pensacola Bay area.

Implementation of the oyster curriculum will begin in the fall for Pensacola, West Florida, Gulf Breeze, Navarre, and Fort Walton Beach high schools. The curriculum includes the incorporation of student investigations, field and lab experiences, local case studies, and student action projects.

After the 2023-2024 school year, a project evaluation for the students and teachers will be administered. This will allow for lesson refinement and the opportunity to distribute the lessons to other teachers and schools and submission to NOAA for inclusion in their educational resources portal.

iii. **Florida RESTORE Act Centers of Excellence, FLRACEP: Assessing Restoration Success**

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 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. The project will officially kick off this fall. SASJBEP staff is currently hiring a post-doc and a research technician to assist all partners with this project. The project team is currently finalizing sites. PPBEP will be evaluating 10 living shoreline project sites across the Pensacola Bay. Data collection will start Spring 2024.

iv. **Grayson Bay Oyster Company Water Quality Monitoring**

Brandon Smith (Grayson Bay Oyster Company) requested water quality monitoring support to assess the status of his oysters and changing water quality variables. PPBEP staff deployed continuous data loggers at Grayson Bay Oyster Company's farm in June. The data loggers are measuring surface and bottom conductivity and dissolved oxygen every 15 minutes. Data are download every 2-3 weeks. B. Smith is also collecting phytoplankton and water quality samples in partnership with UF/IFAS (data are available [here](#)).



- v. **Oyster Habitat Suitability Index Update for Pensacola Bay System**
PPBEP staff plan to update the Oyster Habitat Suitability Model (HSM) originally developed by TNC in 2020-2021. The updated model will incorporate new parameters (i.e., chlorophyll-a and turbidity) and update current layers with more recent datasets from the Water Quality Portal and Watershed Information Network. The updated HSM will be used to inform site selection for the Pensacola Bay Oyster Restoration Initiative. The model update is anticipated to be completed by fall 2023.

- vi. **UF Center for Coastal Solutions (CCS)/SAS Northwest Florida Water Quality Improvement Project**
During 2022-2023, University of Florida Center for Coastal Solutions (UF CCS) was the lead for the SAS project sponsored by Senator Broxson. UF CCS developed a variety of tools for stakeholders in the Panhandle region to inform projects related to large-scale water quality improvements, including septic to sewer optimization and land conservation. On June 14th, UF CCS, CBA, Florida Sea Grant, and PPBEP hosted a living shorelines workshop in Destin, FL to discuss implementing a region-wide living shoreline strategy. Discussion was held on priority locations for living shorelines and policy changes to the permitting language to overcome barriers.

c. **Request for Proposals** (*Whitney Scheffel, Senior Scientist*)

PPBEP will be announcing two Requests for Proposals (RFPs) in fall 2023 for two projects, which include:

- Pensacola Bay Oyster Restoration Initiative: Full design for 600 ha and implementation of up to 100 ha of oyster reef restoration, modeling and surveying, monitoring, permitting, project coordination, and community engagement.
- Carpenter Creek Restoration: Design for wetland (~20 acres) and creek (2.5 mi) restoration, assessment and surveys, land acquisition, permitting, utility coordination, and community engagement.

Stay tuned for more information.

6. Discussion Items

a. **Comprehensive Monitoring Implementation Workshop** (*Casey Fulford, AACD; Whitney Scheffel, Senior Scientist*)

Committee chairs and PPBEP staff led a discussion regarding a future workshop focused on the implementation of Comprehensive Monitoring throughout the watersheds. There were a series of guiding questions that were presented to the committee that would provide insight on overall interest and future planning.

i. **Does the Committee prefer the Monitoring Workshop to be virtual or in-person?**

Poll results indicated that a majority of the committee didn't prefer in-person or virtual. Further discussion was held on the positives and negatives of each meeting format. Some voiced opinions that there would be missed



opportunity for discussion and exchange of ideas in a virtual meeting space. Other TC participants suggested virtual may be a good option due to the time of year and travel restraints for some partners. PPBEP staff also presented the option for a virtual workshop in November followed by an in-person TC meeting in February, which had support from some participants.

ii. What key topics should be discussed?

TC members stressed the need to make this monitoring strategy one that others can take and implement in their respective regions. TC members are interested in the land use changes and habitat issues in the upper reaches of the watershed and developing a standardized way of reporting information. TC members voted to have breakout sessions to facilitate the discussion.

iii. What items are needed in advance?

It was suggested that information be sent out two weeks in advance for review, which gives everyone ample time to digest the information before the workshop. PPBEP staff offered to prepare some supporting materials (e.g., maps, tables, etc.) in advance of the workshop, similar to the indicator workshops that were hosted in 2021.

b. Future Technical Committee Engagement: 2024-2025 priorities (*Paul Looney, WRA; Whitney Scheffel, Senior Scientist*)

P. Looney suggested that future TC meetings should focus on identifying and discussing the problems and the improvements across the watersheds and future restoration target setting. Regarding the future development of a data dashboard for Pensacola and Perdido Bay watersheds, the committee voiced the importance of deciding the main goal of the dashboard before moving forward with design. Since the committee only meets quarterly, there was interest in having a combination of 2 virtual meetings and 2 workshop style meetings.

7. Around the Room/Announcements

No announcements.

8. 2023 Meetings & Events

- a. September 22nd: Community Grant Symposium (Bayview Community Center)
- b. October 12th: Evening for the Estuaries Gala (Orange Beach Coastal Arts Center)
- c. October 26th: Oyster Sub-Committee (Santa Rosa County Extension office)

9. Next Meeting

- a. November 28th, 2023 (Comprehensive Monitoring Workshop – location and time TBD)

10. Adjourned