



Board of Directors Meeting

September 27, 2023 at 1:30 p.m. CT

Milton Council Chambers

[Meeting Recording](#)

Members Present

Woody Speed, Chair	City of Orange Beach
Colten Wright, Vice Chair	Santa Rosa County
Robert Bender	Escambia County
Vernon Compton	City of Milton
Cherry Fitch	City of Gulf Breeze
Mike Kohler	Escambia County
Kerry Smith	Santa Rosa County

Members Absent

Jared Moore	City of Pensacola
Mike Norberg	Okaloosa County

Interested Parties Present

Matt Posner	PPBEP
Whitney Scheffel	PPBEP
Logan McDonald	PPBEP
Haley Gancel	PPBEP
Molly McDaniel	PPBEP
Mary Jane Bass	Beggs & Lane
Darryl Boudreau	NFWFMD
Jerry Couey	Community Member
Elizabeth Major	LWV
Naisy Dolar	Santa Rosa County
Dave Murzin	First Place Partners

1. Call to Order

2. Roll Call

Matt Posner (Executive Director) called the roll. A quorum was present.

3. Approval of Board Agenda

Commissioner Colen Wright (Santa Rosa County) made a motion to approve the agenda. Mayor Cherry Fitch (City of Gulf Breeze) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

4. Approval of August 30, 2023, Board Minutes

Vernon Compton (City of Milton) made a motion to approve the minutes. Commissioner Robert Bender (Escambia County) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.



5. Staff Updates

a. Director's Update (*Matt Posner, Executive Director*)

i. **PPBEP Organizational Transition**

Banking services will be provided by Hancock Whitney and accounts have been established. Escambia County will complete a fund transfer of \$74,000 this week and a final fund transfer following closeout of FY 22-23 in October. A Purchase Order was issued to Carr Riggs and Ingram for accounting services and staff held a kick-off meeting last week. Financial reports will be generated for each finance subcommittee and board meeting. Staff will send out invoices for local government contributions by the end of the week.

ii. **Hiring**

The Community Outreach position closed and received over 30 applicants. Interviews are scheduled for next week for six applicants.

The additional positions established in the budget, including the Operations Manager, Project Coordinator, and Assistant Project Coordinator will be advertised in late October or early November.

iii. **Grant Updates**

Staff are working with NOAA to complete the final paperwork and ensure accounting systems are in place for the Program's grant awards. If a government shutdown occurs there may be an impact on the timeline of these awards. Staff expect to receive an update on the NOAA Regional Resilience Challenge LOI by the week of October 11th, pending any government shutdown. Staff are working with DEP and UWF to finalize FY23-24 state appropriation award agreements.

iv. **NEP Designation**

Staff has had promising discussions with Senator Rubio's Office on a path forward for National Estuary Program designation. Staff and the City of Orange Beach are working to ensure Alabama's senators co-sponsor the legislation.

v. **National Estuaries Week**

The Program led another successful National Estuaries Week celebration this year, including the 3rd annual Community Grant Symposium. M. Posner thanked staff for their efforts and acknowledged Senator Broxson's support and attendance at the symposium.

vi. **Evening for the Estuaries**

The Evening for the Estuaries Gala is scheduled for October 12th from 6:30pm to 9:00pm at the Coastal Arts Center of Orange Beach. Staff have obtained several silent auction items and requested that Board members assist with promoting the event to ensure a successful turnout.



- b. **Technical Update** (*Whitney Scheffel, Senior Scientist*)
- i. **Perdido Bay Restoration Initiative**
Staff participated in the kick-off meeting for the NOAA Perdido Bay Restoration Initiative at the City of Orange Beach. The Initiative includes several projects, including: the Living Shoreline Cost Share Program, the Perdido Islands Restoration, Lilian Swamp and Bronson Field Designs, and more.
 - ii. **Seagrass Monitoring and Trawling Surveys**
The Program will be continuing the Tier II seagrass monitoring and juvenile fish trawling surveys that were completed with the Gulf Coast Research Lab and Dauphin Island Sea Lab last year. Staff shared initial maps of the dominant seagrass species and noted that supplemental data will be added from the National Park Service along the Gulf Islands National Seashore.
 - iii. **Bays, Bayous, and Sounds**
Program staff provided assistance to the Escambia County Water Quality Lab for the Bays, Bayous, and Sounds Program that includes monitoring temperature, salinity, dissolved oxygen, pH, nutrients, chlorophyll-a, turbidity, and color. Quarterly sampling will occur at 11 waterbodies, sampling 40 sites per waterbody over 5 years.
 - iv. **Naval Air Station Pensacola Living Shoreline Seagrass Survey**
Program staff provided assistance to Escambia County Natural Resources to map seagrass beds at NAS that will serve as pre-baseline monitoring for the living shoreline that will be implemented at Sherman Inlet, Magazine Point, and White Island.
 - v. **Oyster Aquaculture Water Quality Monitoring**
Seasonal water quality monitoring wrapped up at the Grayson Bay Oyster Company Farm. Surface salinities fell into single digits for several weeks in July and into August. The water temperature reached 91°F and remained high for most of July and August. This site-specific information helps to identify stressors that may impact oyster farming success.
- c. **Outreach Update** (*Logan McDonald, Community Outreach Coordinator*)
- i. **National Estuaries Week September 16th – 23rd**
 1. **Alabama Coastal Cleanup**
Volunteers participated in a successful land and water cleanup of the Perdido River at the Seminole Boat Launch in Alabama as part of the Alabama Coastal Cleanup.
 2. **Lunch and Learn | Turtle Talk: Terrapins**
Attendees at the Turtle Talk – Terrapins Lunch & Learn learned about our



elusive estuary turtles, the community science effort that is underway to better understand our populations, and by-catch reduction device (BRD) requirements for Florida crab traps. Sea Grant Agent Rick O'Connor provided BRDs and a chance to meet two terrapins in person. The recording is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gVnGve-bDhg&t=2684s>

3. Community Grant Symposium

The 3rd annual Community Grant Symposium was a successful event with over 60 attendees. Participants learned about the work completed by the 22-23 Community Grant awardees and helped to celebrate the 23-24 grant recipients. Staff acknowledged Senator Broxson's continued support and attendance at the symposium.

4. Big Lagoon State Park Kayak Tour

To wrap up National Estuaries Week, staff led a guided kayak tour at Big Lagoon State Park on Saturday. Over 15 participants explored the estuary and learned about local habitats, restoration efforts, and wildlife.

ii. Trash Free Waters Update (*Molly McDaniel, Volunteer Coordinator*)

1. Monitoring

Monitoring has been ongoing for a two year period and over 250 individual volunteers collected over 6,500 lbs of trash during the duration of the project. The litter booms will transition to Keep Pensacola Beautiful and Santa Rosa County in November.

2. Litter Reduction

Staff have worked with City and County staff to identify site-specific litter reduction and prevention devices at each respective creek. Jones Creek will be provided with 45 concrete trash cans that align with park requirements. Pond Creek will be provided with solar powered trash contractors that reduce staff time for maintenance and will be wrapped with educational messaging. Carpenter Creek solutions are being finalized with City staff.

3. Clean Campus Program

West Florida and Gulf Breeze High School will receive educational signage, t-shirts, water bottle filling stations, re-useable water bottles and more to reduce single use plastics on their campuses.

4. Community Education Campaign

This campaign will engage a local film studio to spotlight each creek system and incorporate volunteer testimonials about the importance of



protecting the creeks.

6. Action Items

a. **Approval of a Contract with Carr, Riggs, and Ingram, LLC for Accounting Services**

Discussion was held on the statute of limitations period and the option to renew. Commissioner Robert Bender (Escambia County) made a motion to approve, and authorize the Executive Director to sign, a contract with Carr, Riggs, and Ingram, LLC to provide accounting services through September 30, 2024, with the option to renew for two additional one-year terms. Commissioner Colten Wright (Santa Rosa County) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

b. **Approval of a Contract with Beggs & Lane, RLLP for Legal Services**

The Board thanked Mary Jane Bass for her dedication to the Program's successful transition to an independent organization. Commissioner Colten Wright (Santa Rosa County) made a motion to approve, and authorize the Executive Director to sign, a contract with Beggs & Lane, RLLP to provide legal services through September 30, 2026. Commissioner Robert Bender (Escambia County) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

c. **Approval of the Pensacola & Perdido Bays Estuary Program Employee Handbook**

Discussion was held on PTO pay outs upon termination or resignation, annual PTO roll-over, work week hours, retirement options, and family members considered eligible for family medical leave. Additional terms will be revisited at the November Board meeting.

Commissioner Robert Bender (Escambia County) made a motion to approve the Pensacola & Perdido Bays Estuary Program Employee Handbook, holding Section 3.2, until a determination on enrollment in the Florida Retirement System is determined or a new plan is presented. Additionally, directing staff to revise Section 2.4.B.1.a to be brought back to the Board for approval. Commissioner Colten Wright (Santa Rosa County) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

d. **Approval of an Executive Employment Agreement with Matthew J. Posner to serve as Executive Director of Pensacola and Perdido Bays Estuary Program, Inc.**

Discussion was held on ensuring the cost-of-living adjustment provided to all other employees was also reflected in the Director's salary. The Board encouraged the Director to claim mileage reimbursement for work related travel. Chairman Speed will conduct the Director's upcoming annual evaluation.

Commissioner Colten Wright (Santa Rosa County) made a motion to approve, and authorize the Chairman to sign, an employment agreement with Matthew J. Posner to serve as Executive Director of Pensacola and Perdido Bays Estuary Program, Inc., with a 4% COLA



increase at an annual salary of \$101,623. Commissioner Cherry Fitch (City of Gulf Breeze) and Vernon Compton (City of Milton) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

- e. **Approval of a Resolution Authorizing Carry Forward of Employee Leave Balances**
Discussion was held on carrying-over the Director's PTO accrued under Escambia County prior to serving as the Estuary Program Director, as the County's responsibility for that PTO payout. Commissioner Robert Bender (Escambia County) made a motion to approve, and authorize the Chairman to sign, a Resolution authorizing the carry forward of employee leave balances as amended in Section 2 to state "as accrued through time working as employees of the Pensacola and Perdido Bays Estuary Program." Vernon Compton (City of Milton) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

- f. **Approval of NOAA Cooperative Agreement No. NA23NMF4630079, in the amount of \$10,993,732, for the Pensacola Bay System Oyster Restoration Initiative**
Commissioner Bender recognized staff for their work and partnership building that made these funding opportunities possible. Chairman Speed and the rest of the Board echoed the sentiment.
Commissioner Robert Bender (Escambia County) made a motion to approve agenda action items F-J. Mayor Cherry Fitch (City of Gulf Breeze) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

- g. **Approval of Restore America's Estuaries Subaward No. NOAA-Gulf23-PPBEP, in the amount of \$351,759, for the Gulf of Mexico Community Based Oyster Recycling and Reef Restoration Network Program**
Commissioner Robert Bender (Escambia County) made a motion to approve agenda action items F-J. Mayor Cherry Fitch (City of Gulf Breeze) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

- h. **Approval of The Nature Conservancy Subaward No. AL-2024-PPBEP-09.07.23-A108984, in the amount of \$1,628,962, for the Perdido Watershed Habitat and Community Resilience Initiative**
Commissioner Robert Bender (Escambia County) made a motion to approve agenda action items F-J. Mayor Cherry Fitch (City of Gulf Breeze) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

- i. **Approval of a Contract with Dauphin Island Sea Lab, in the amount of \$14,881, to complete a Seagrass Fish Trawling Survey**
Commissioner Robert Bender (Escambia County) made a motion to approve agenda action items F-J. Mayor Cherry Fitch (City of Gulf Breeze) seconded the motion. The motion passed



unanimously.

j. Approval of a Contract with the University of Southern Mississippi, in the amount of \$36,903, to complete Tier II Seagrass Monitoring

Commissioner Robert Bender (Escambia County) made a motion to approve agenda action items F-J. Mayor Cherry Fitch (City of Gulf Breeze) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

k. Approval of an Agreement for Liability Insurance Coverage for Pensacola and Perdido Bays Estuary Program, Inc.

Staff encountered cross-state coverage limitations during discussions with the Florida Municipal Insurance Trust. Staff are working on obtaining final numbers for quotes from other providers. Commissioner Robert Bender (Escambia County) made a motion to drop the item. Mayor Cherry Fitch seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. The Board directed Chairman Woody Speed (City of Orange Beach) to sign liability coverage once obtained and agreed that that the policy would be ratified at the November Board meeting.

7. Committee Updates

a. Technical Committee

The next Oyster Sub-Committee will be held on October 26th to go over the Pensacola Bay Oyster Restoration Initiative restoration vision mapping, request for proposals for design, and stipends for oyster harvester and farmers.

b. Education and Outreach Committee

The EOC has not met since the last Board meeting.

c. Environmental Justice Committee

The Environmental Justice Committee met on September 26th. Co-Chair Ryan Kirby provided an update on Escambia County's new Air Quality Program and the committee discussed strategies for broadening engagement. The next meeting will be held on November 14th.

8. Board/Agency Updates

Vernon Compton (City of Milton) shared that Governor DeSantis and the Cabinet approved funding for the last purchase of Wolfe Creek Forest. This acquisition will protect 32 miles of streams flowing into the Blackwater River and help buffer Whiting Field.

9. Public Comment

10. Adjourned