PENSACOLA & PERDIDO BAYS ESTUARY PROGRAM

Paul Looney, Chair
Casey Fulford, Co-Chair

Technical Committee Minutes

November 28th, 2023, 10:00 – 12:00 CT
Virtual Meeting | Meeting Recording
Supporting Materials

Attendees

Matt Posner	PPBEP
Whitney Scheffel	PPBEP
Logan McDonald	PPBEP
Haley Gancel	PPBEP
Bailey Walkinshaw	PPBEP
Molly McDaniel	PPBEP
Barbara Albrecht	BFA, UWF CEDB
Shelley Alexander	Santa Rosa County
Anne Birch	TNC FL
Darryl Boudreau	NWWMD
Justin Bousquin	EPA GEMMD
Jane Caffrey	UWF
Kate Dawson	Moffatt & Nichol
Thomas Derbes	Florida Sea Grant
Naisy Dolar	Santa Rosa County
Casey Fulford, Co-Chair	AACD
Tanya Gallagher	Jacobs Engineering
Dara Hartigan	Save our Soundside
Jeff Helms	Moffatt & Nichol
Tina Hendon	Ecosystem Planning & Restoration (EPR)
Brandon Jarvis	EPA GEMMD
Jeanette Kelson	WSP
Chris Lambert	Jacobs Engineering
Jacqueline Lane	Friends of Perdido Bay
Paul Looney, Chair	WRA
Russell Manley	WSP
Elizabeth Major	LWVPBA
Jenny Paul	EPA GEMMD
Ted Reese	ESA
Erin Reschke	EPA GEMMD
Eric Schneider	ESA
Carrie Stevenson	UF|IFAS
Chris Verlinde	Santa Rosa County
Lee Anne Winchester	BWFP
Brent Wipf	Escambia County
Carley Zapfe	Mississippi Sound Estuary Program

1. **Call to Order**

2. **Welcome and Introductions**
   Whitney Scheffel (Senior Scientist) introduced PPBEP's newest staff member, Bailey Walkinshaw (PPBEP Community Outreach Assistant). Bailey earned her B.S. degree from UWF and was born and raised in the Pensacola area. In her new role, she will be supporting the Community Grant Program, assisting with events and outreach, and implementing educational programs. Molly McDaniel (PPBEP Volunteer Coordinator) announced she accepted a position with EPA GEMMD Gulf Breeze and will be wrapping up her time with PPBEP at the end of this year to start her new position in January 2024. We wish her the best of luck in her new role!
   New attendees Carly Zapfe (Mississippi Sound Estuary Program, Education Coordinator), and Russell Manley (WSP) introduced themselves to the Technical Committee.

3. **Approval of August 18th, 2023, Meeting Minutes**
   Jane Caffrey (UWF) made a motion to approve the August 15th, 2023, Meeting Minutes. Jeff Helms (Moffatt & Nichol) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

4. **Committee Chair/Vice Chair Elections**
   W. Scheffel reported that Paul Looney (WRA) and Casey Fulford (AACD) had self-nominated for the chair and co-chair positions prior to the meeting. W. Scheffel asked for any other nominations; hearing none, she asked for a motion to approve the nominations for Paul and Casey.
   Chris Verlinde (Santa Rosa County) made a motion to elect Paul Looney and Casey Fulford as chair and co-chair. Jeff Helms (Moffatt & Nichol) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

5. **Partner Presentations**
   a. **Dr. Jane Caffrey (UWF) – A historical perspective on seagrass beds in western Santa Rosa Sound**
      J. Caffrey provided a synthesis on historical seagrass coverage in Santa Rosa Sound and current observations from citizen science seagrass monitoring in the Sound. Seagrass coverage has remained relatively stable since the 1980s. Citizen science seagrass monitoring in Big Lagoon and Santa Rosa Sound began in 2017 to provide data on the health of seagrasses. Volunteers monitor seagrass monthly from May through October and collect data on percent cover by species, drift macroalgal cover, and water samples for water quality analysis. In general, seagrass beds appear to be healthy, but some locations at certain times of the growing season have heavy macroalgae loads and hydrogen sulfide in the sediment due to decomposition of organic matter. This is an ongoing area of study.
      For more information on the results of the Citizen Science Monitoring Program, see the 2022 report.

b. Barbara Albrecht (BFA/UWF AIMS) – What can oysters reveal about the influences of landscape changes on sedimentation in the Carpenter Creek-Bayou Texar watershed?

B. Albrecht provided an overview of an ongoing BFA oyster project funded by the Bayou Texar Foundation with additional support from UF and the Satori foundation. The project builds off the BFA Pensacola Oyster Project (POP) conducted in 2018. BFA is studying the effect of oysters on water quality improvement in Bayou Texar, which has known sedimentation and water quality issues from surrounding development. Currently oysters exist only in the lower half of Bayou Texar due to salinity tolerances. Surface and bottom oyster cages with triploid oysters will be deployed off homeowner docks and growth, survival, and weight will be monitored. Students from the Trinitas Christian School have volunteered to make oyster cages for the lower bayou study and oyster strings for use in the upper bayou to monitor other organism settlement.

6. Staff Updates

a. Organizational Update (*Matt Posner, Executive Director*)

M. Posner announced that effective October 1st, 2023, the Pensacola and Perdido Bays Estuary Program formally transitioned to an independent organization. Since its formation in 2018, the Program has been hosted by Escambia County. This transition represents a significant milestone for the Program that has long been part of our long-term operational plan. Pensacola and Perdido Bays Estuary Program, Inc. (our formal name) is a not-for-profit corporation serving as an instrumentality of government.

b. Manatee Slow Ride (*Matt Posner, Executive Director*)

PPBEP co-hosted a Manatee Slow Ride with Bike Pensacola on November 18th, 2023, to honor Jessica Bibza. The ride had over 100 participants and raised over $800 to support the Panhandle Manatee Internship Program to honor Jessica's legacy. The ride was sponsored by Susan Bastajian (Realtor, Keller Williams).

c. Projects and Monitoring (*Whitney Scheffel, Senior Scientist)*

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

1. Oyster Sub-Committee Meeting

The Oyster Sub-Committee met on October 26th, 2023 at the Santa Rosa County Extension office to discuss the stipend and mentorship program components of the Pensacola Bay Oyster Restoration Initiative led by PPBEP in partnership with The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Santa Rosa County, Sea Grant, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). Oyster aquaculture operators provided updates on their farm and/or hatchery operations from 2023 and provided a glimpse into the future. Committee members provided input on guidelines for the stipend and mentorship programs. Sub-Committee meeting minutes can be viewed here.

2. Permitting

The SPAT (Special Project Action Team) met on October 31st, 2023, to discuss the process for permitting reefs for the Pensacola Bay Oyster Restoration Initiative. Pre-pre application meetings with regulatory agency representatives and pursuing an individual versus general/conceptual permit were discussed as options to permit a restoration effort this large. The design and engineering RFP will be posted on PPBEP's website next week, which includes solicitation for the 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.

ii. Florida RESTORE Act Centers of Excellence (FLRACEP): Assessing Restoration Success Across Three Panhandle Estuaries

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. SASJBEP staff is currently hiring a post-doc to assist all partners with this project. The project team is in the process of conducting site characterizations and scouting. In 2024, data compilation and synthesis will begin, and the first quarterly sampling event will be conducted in February/March 2024.

iii. Seagrass Mapping and Monitoring

PPBEP funded the Dauphin Island Sea Lab (DISL) to conduct Tier I seagrass mapping to estimate total coverage across Pensacola and Perdido Bay Systems. Aerial and Planet Scope satellite imagery were collected and used for a methods comparison study conducted by researchers at Old Dominion University. Extent differed between the two methodologies, but satellite imagery captured >95% of seagrass that was identified in aerial imagery. PPBEP also funded the University of Southern Mississippi's (USM) Gulf Coast Research Laboratory (GCRL) to conduct another year (2022, 2023) of Tier II seagrass monitoring to collect data from 145 stations on percent cover, species distribution, canopy height, and water quality. The dominant species found were *T. testudinum* and *H. wrightii*, mostly at densities greater than 50% cover.

iv. Juvenile Fish Trawling Survey

PPBEP funded DISL to conduct a juvenile fish trawl survey within seagrass habitats. A total of 13 sites were surveyed in October 2023 across the Pensacola and Perdido Bay Systems. Based on historical catch estimates, catch per unit effort (CPUE) is variable across sites and years, but seems

to be decreasing over time. W.Scheffel presented a site map and preliminary 2023 data from the nine sites across Santa Rosa Sound. A variety of fish species were caught during the survey, including Emerald Parrotfish, Planehead Filefish, Southern Pufferfish, Striped Burrfish, Scrawled Cowfish, Gulf Flounder, and Chain Pipefish, just to name a few. A greater diversity of fishes were caught in 2023 compared to 2022 and more fish were found in sandy bottom habitats compared to muddy/silty bottom habitats.

7. **Discussion**
   a. **Data Dashboard Development** (*Paul Looney, WRA*; *Whitney Scheffel, Senior Scientist*)
   Committee chair and PPBEP staff led a discussion on what elements/functionality the TC would like PPBEP's future data dashboard to have and what the intended audience of the dashboard should be.
      i. **Examples of existing dashboards by partner agencies and Estuary Programs**
      PPBEP will develop a data visualization dashboard in support of PPBEP's CCMP Goal 1 Action Plan to be a source of watershed related information (CCMP). PPBEP staff view this dashboard as being a connector dashboard that pulls data from other repositories to lessen data storage and management requirements.
         i. **TBEP – dashboard example**
         Tampa Bay Estuary Program developed an open science data dashboard that performs data analysis, including summary statistics and trends through time. This dashboard also creates 2-page reports for visualizations. The underlying structure of the platform is an R-coded platform.
         ii. **Gulf of Mexico Open Data Platform – dashboard example**
         The Gulf of Mexico Open Data Platform is a data connector dashboard where raw data is not stored locally on the website, but instead pulls data from other sources. The dashboard itself is an ArcGIS online platform and mainly pulls spatial data. They are currently working on adding several water quality parameters to the theme map.
         iii. **DEP's Florida Springs Watersheds Dashboard and Prioritization Tool – dashboard example**
         DEP's Florida Springs Watersheds Dashboard and Prioritization Tool is an ArcGIS online platform that houses summary statistics for the springs in Florida.

      Other platforms discussed/recommended as examples of dashboards.
      - EPA's How My Waterway
      - National Estuarine Research Reserve System Centralized Data Management Office dashboard

- Escambia County's Water Quality Data Viewer
- EPA's Water Quality Portal

Discussion was held on data comparability among data sources (e.g., data in EPA's Water Quality Portal or DEP's Watershed Information Network) and developing acceptance criteria for inclusion in the dashboard. TC members discussed the challenges with visualizing continuous versus discrete datasets in maps and how those will need to be used separately in trend analyses. Similarly, concerns were raised on the standardization of methods (e.g., differences between salinity measurements with refractometer versus probe/sonde measurements). Development of acceptance criteria is necessary for filtering and standardizing data.

There was discussion on the types of visualizations to highlight on the dashboard. TC members suggested that a hierarchical approach may be ideal depending on the intended audience. Attendees recommended grouping data by bay segment or including multiple layers of information that could be turned on and off for easier viewing. Participants expressed that summary graphics and definitions may be a good way to get community groups and other public audiences to utilize at the dashboard and take away key messages. If the user is interested in the raw data, there should also be a data download or database redirect function. There were also questions regarding linkages to major natural disasters and human impacts, such as hurricanes and implementation of restoration projects. Additionally, participants noted that this dashboard would be a great place to highlight or upload PPBEP Community Grant project data.

PPBEP staff asked for the committee's input on the intended audience of the dashboard. TC members discussed creating a less technical dashboard to suit broader needs. For example, participants indicated the dashboard should be tailored for local decision and policy makers and/or local community groups. PPBEP staff will ensure that the data dashboard complements but is not duplicative of the State of the Bays report. A recommendation was made to get feedback from the Education and Outreach Committee.

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

Technical Committee engagements in 2024-2025 will focus on the development of the data dashboard, implementing the Comprehensive Monitoring Strategy, the 2025 State of the Bays report update, project development and restoration design, and restoration target setting.

8. **Around the Room/Announcements**
   There were no around the room announcements by TC participants.
   W. Scheffel announced that PPBEP is hiring an Operations Manager – closes December 4th, 2023.
   Project Coordinator and an Assistant Project Coordinator – both close on December 15th, 2023.
   Please visit the career page on the PPBEP website for more information.

9. **2024 Meetings**
   a. February 29th: Comprehensive Monitoring Workshop
      i. Bayview Community Center, Pensacola, Florida

10. **Adjourned**