



Board of Directors Meeting Minutes

November 13, 2024, at 1:30 p.m. CT
Escambia County BOCC Chambers
221 Palafox Place, Pensacola, FL 32502

[Meeting Recording](#)

Members Present

Mike Kohler, Chair	Escambia County
Colten Wright, Vice Chair	Santa Rosa County
Vernon Compton	City of Milton
Cherry Fitch	City of Gulf Breeze
Jared Moore	City of Pensacola
Woody Speed	City of Orange Beach

Members Absent

Mike Norberg	Okaloosa County
Kerry Smith	Santa Rosa County

Interested Parties Present

Matt Posner	PPBEP
Whitney Scheffel	PPBEP
Logan McDonald	PPBEP
Haley Gancel	PPBEP
Bailey Walkinshaw	PPBEP
Paige Lansky	PPBEP
Zach Schang	PPBEP
Kate Dawson	Moffatt & Nichol
Dillon Draughn	Baskerville-Donovan Inc.
Thomas Derbes	FL Sea Grant

1. Call to Order

2. Roll Call (*Matt Posner, Executive Director*)

Staff called the roll. A quorum was present.

3. Approval of Board Agenda

Mayor Cherry Fitch (City of Gulf Breeze) made a motion to approve the agenda. Woody Speed (City of Orange Beach) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

4. Approval of September 24, 2024, Board Minutes

Commissioner Colten Wright (Santa Rosa County) made a motion to approve the September 24, 2024, meeting minutes. Woody Speed (City of Orange Beach) seconded the motion. The motion



passed unanimously.

5. Staff Updates

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

i. Introduction of New Staff Member

Staff welcomed the newest team member, Zach Schang, filling the Project Coordinator role.

ii. Restore America's Estuaries Summit

Staff served on three panel sessions at the Restore America's Estuaries (RAE) Summit in Washington, D.C. from October 6th-10th.

iii. National Estuary Program (NEP) Designation

Staff met with representatives while in Washington D.C. for the RAE Summit to discuss potential pathways for the NEP designation. The first two options would be passing either the independent bill or the bill as part of a clean water package by the end of the calendar year. If neither option passes before the end of the calendar year, then staff could pursue the designation as part of the reauthorization for the National Estuary Program in January 2025.

iv. Program Truck

The program truck arrived after being on order for ten months; the vehicle will be primarily used for field work and outreach.

v. Bronson Field Site Visit

Staff met with personnel from NAS Pensacola, The Nature Conservancy, and Moffatt & Nichol for an initial kick-off meeting to discuss the overall vision and options for Bronson Field. Staff anticipate plans to be finalized in 2026 and utilize the next 18-month period explore securing funds for implementation.

vi. Partner Organization Engagements

1. Staff serve on various workgroups and committees for partner organizations. The following are recent partner organization plans that staff are engaged with and both plans are aligned with the Program's CCMP goal areas:

A. Strive to Thrive Pensacola 2035

City of Pensacola's new 10-year strategic plan, which relates to quality of life and resilience.

B. Military Installation Resilience Review

Emerald Coast Regional Council adopted the Military Installation Resilience Review, which sets keys priority actions on and off installation for wastewater and stormwater improvements.



vii. Evening for the Estuaries Gala

The 2nd Annual Evening for the Estuaries Gala raised over \$28,000, which will go back to outreach and monitoring priorities. Staff thanked the Board for silent auction donations and support, as well as the Coastal Arts Center staff for their support with putting on the gala. Next year's gala will be held at the same location, the Coastal Arts Center of Orange Beach, on October 16, 2025.

b. Technical Update (*Whitney Scheffel, Senior Scientist*)

i. EPA Gulf of Mexico Program Understanding Water Quality Through Monitoring Activities

Staff are working with partners on a proposal for the EPA Gulf of Mexico Program on Understanding Water Quality Through Monitoring Activities for \$750,000 over three years. The data collected would be publicly accessible through a dashboard that staff are developing in collaboration with the Gulf of Mexico Alliance.

ii. Gulf of Mexico Data Dashboard

The Gulf of Mexico Alliance (GOMA) is expanding their Gulf of Mexico Open Data Platform to include publicly available data for all Estuary Programs and National Estuarine Research Reserves. There will be a webinar and discussion in December and a workshop in early 2025 for data dashboard development. Staff are working with GOMA to create a data dashboard for PPBEP.

iii. Seagrass & Juvenile Fish Monitoring

1. The Gulf Coast Research Laboratory at the University of Southern Mississippi conducted annual seagrass surveys across the Perdido and Pensacola Bay systems. Sea urchins were spotted in the Santa Rosa Sound and will be included in the 2025 State of the Bays Report along with the seagrass survey findings.

2. Staff went out with Dauphin Island Sea Lab for PPBEP's annual trawling survey in seagrass beds across Pensacola and Perdido Bay systems. The findings will be included in the 2025 State of the Bays Report.

iv. C-STARS Monitoring

Staff will be participating in the last quarter of 2024 C-STARS monitoring in Pensacola Bay with St. Andrew and St. Joseph Bays Estuary Program (SASJBEP) staff to assess living shoreline project effectiveness across the Florida panhandle. Staff will continue quarterly monitoring in Pensacola Bay with SASJBEP staff in 2025.

v. Future Engagements

1. Oyster Sub-Committee Meeting

Thomas Derbes (FL Sea Grant) and Chris Verlinde (Santa Rosa County)



were re-elected as the Oyster Sub-Committee Co-Chairs. Thomas Derbes (FL Sea Grant) gave a presentation on Farms for Aquaculture Research and Monitoring of Shellfish (FARMS) and Levi Blackmon (Santa Rosa County NRCS) gave a presentation on the Sandy Hollow Gully Restoration Design. Jacobs, the design lead for Pensacola Bay System Oyster Restoration Initiative, gave an overview of the design process, project schedule, and engagements.

2. Oyster Restoration Workshops

Staff are planning two half-day stakeholder planning workshops for the Oyster Restoration Initiative. The workshops will include stakeholders with varied backgrounds, oystermen, biologists, permitting experts, etc. to discuss and finalize areas for conceptual oyster habitat design templates.

c. Outreach Update (*Logan McDonald, Community Outreach Coordinator*)

i. National Estuaries Week

1. Trivia Night

Staff held a nature-themed trivia night at Alga Beer Co. with their trivia host, Ranger Brandon. Staff collaborated with Ranger Brandon on the trivia questions and tabled during the event.

2. Pensacola Seafood Festival

Staff tabled at the Pensacola Seafood Festival and were joined by OysterCorps crew members to highlight oyster shell recycling and vertical oyster gardening.

ii. Taste of the Beach

Staff and OysterCorps crew members tabled at Taste of the Beach to discuss the oyster shell recycling program and engage attendees in building vertical oyster gardens.

iii. The Florida Channel: Florida Crossroads

Staff were invited by the Gulf Islands National Seashore to be part of their segment on The Florida Channel: Florida Crossroads to feature some of the Estuary Program's work and to discuss the importance of our local ecology and watershed.

iv. Realtor Training

Staff were invited to give a presentation at Levin Rinke Realty on resources and information that realtors can share with their clients, such as septic and lateral line maintenance, bay friendly landscaping, and water quality reporting websites. Staff are looking to expand the Program's reach by creating informational packets that cover similar topics and can be used as resource



guides for realtor clients or for people that are new to the area.

v. Restoration Rambles

Staff recently held the first Restoration Ramble of the fall season this past month at Escribano Point Wildlife Management Area with partners The Longleaf Alliance and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. Restoration Rambles runs from November to April and occur once a month across the Pensacola and Perdido Bay watersheds. The next Restoration Ramble will be a boat tour of the lower Perdido islands and in collaboration with The Nature Conservancy in Alabama and the City of Orange Beach.

vi. Community Grant Symposium

The Community Grant Symposium was rescheduled for November 14, 2024, at the Bayview Community Center. The symposium will cover presentations from the 2023-2024 Community Grant recipients and announce the 2024-2025 awardees.

vii. Mountain Film on Tour

The Estuary Program was picked alongside Healthy Gulf as a recipient for the proceeds from this year's Mountain Film Fest on Tour at Pensacola Little Theatre.

viii. Creek Fest 2024

Staff were invited by Chief Dan "Sky Horse" Helms to have a booth at the Santa Rosa Creek Band Creek Fest '24 in Milton, Florida and will table on Saturday, November 22nd and Sunday, November 23rd.

6. Action Items

a. Approval of the 2025 Holiday Schedule

Vernon Compton (City of Milton) made a motion to approve the 2025 Holiday Schedule. Councilperson Jared Moore (City of Pensacola) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

b. Approval of the 2025 Board Meeting Schedule

Councilperson Jared Moore (City of Pensacola) made a motion to approve the 2025 Board Meeting Schedule. Commissioner Colten Wright (Santa Rosa County) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

c. Approval of the 2025 Travel Schedule

Commissioner Colten Wright (Santa Rosa County) made a motion to approve the 2025 Travel Schedule. Mayor Cherry Fitch (City of Gulf Breeze) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.



- d. **Approval of FY24-25 Florida Legislative Budget Request and Legislative Priorities**
Vernon Compton (City of Milton) made a motion to approve the FY24-25 Florida Legislative Budget Request and Legislative Priorities. Commissioner Colten Wright (Santa Rosa County) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

7. Discussion Items

- a. **Executive Director's Annual Evaluation**
Chairman Kohler spoke positively regarding the Executive Director's annual performance. Future goals included focusing on organizational vision by developing a strategic plan, lowering administrative costs, securing a rainy-day fund that could cover one year of operating costs, and funding additional staff professional development trainings. The rest of the Board gave positive feedback to M. Posner and to the staff. M. Posner thanked the Board for the feedback and acknowledged Program staff.

8. Committee Updates

- a. **Education and Outreach Committee** (*Thomas Derbes, FL Sea Grant*)
Thomas Derbes (FL Sea Grant) and Shannon McGlynn (ADEM) were elected as committee Co-Chairs. Ryan Kirby (Escambia County) gave a presentation on Escambia County's Air Quality Monitoring Network and how to access the portal and interpret conditions.
- b. **Oyster Sub-Committee** (*Thomas Derbes, FL Sea Grant*)
Staff covered the Oyster Sub-Committee update under the Staff Technical update; Thomas Derbes (FL Sea Grant) reiterated that he and Chris Verlinde (Santa Rosa County) were re-elected as the Oyster Sub-Committee Co-Chairs and offered to answer any questions for the Board on the FARMS presentation that he gave during the Oyster Sub-Committee.
- c. **Technical Committee** (*Kate Dawson, Moffatt & Nichol*)
Kate Dawson (Moffatt & Nichol) and Paul Looney (WRA) were elected as committee Co-Chairs. Staff provided debriefs from the Monitoring Workshop and Oyster Sub-Committee meeting, as well as a save the date for the upcoming Oyster Restoration Workshops in February 2025. Kate Dawson (Moffatt & Nichol) gave an overview of the Perdido Watershed Initiative to the Technical Committee on behalf of The Nature Conservancy in Alabama.

9. Board Updates

None

10. Public Comment

None

11. Adjourned