



## Board of Directors Meeting Minutes

July 30, 2025, at 1:30 p.m. CT

City of Gulf Breeze Council Chambers

1070 Shoreline Drive, Gulf Breeze, FL 32561

[Meeting Recording](#)

### Members Present

Colten Wright, Chair	Santa Rosa County
Jared Moore, Vice Chair	City of Pensacola
Ben Boutwell	Town of Century
Tim Burr	City of Gulf Breeze
Vernon Compton	City of Milton
Ashlee Hofberger	Escambia County
Mike Kohler	Escambia County
Mike Norberg	Okaloosa County
Kerry Smith	Santa Rosa County
Woody Speed	City of Orange Beach

### Interested Parties Present

Matt Posner	PPBEP
Whitney Scheffel	PPBEP
Bailey Walkinshaw	PPBEP
Mary Jane Bass	Beggs & Lane
Darryl Boudreau	NWFWMD
Kate Dawson	Moffatt & Nichol
Naisy Dolar	Santa Rosa County
Dillon Draughn	Moffatt & Nichol
Cherry Fitch	Community Member
Seth Helms	City of Gulf Breeze

#### 1. Call to Order

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

Staff called the roll. A quorum was present.

#### 3. Public Comment

None

#### 4. Approval of Board Agenda

Councilperson Tim Burr (City of Gulf Breeze) made a motion to approve the July 30,2025, meeting agenda. Commissioner Mike Kohler (Escambia County) seconded the motion. The motion passed



unanimously.

**5. Approval of May 21, 2025, Board Minutes**

Councilperson Jared Moore (City of Pensacola) made a motion to approve the May 21, 2025, meeting minutes. Mike Norberg (Okaloosa County) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

**6. Staff Updates**

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

**i. Florida Legislative Update**

Staff reported that the full legislative appropriation amount of \$975,000 was approved.

**ii. National Estuary Program Appropriation Update**

The U.S. House Appropriations Interior and Environment Subcommittee Report includes language encouraging the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator to finalize enrollment into the National Estuary Program.

**iii. Community Grant Program FY25-26**

The Request for Proposals (RFP) for the FY25-26 Community Grant Program is currently open and will close on July 31, 2025.

**iv. Florida Environmental Permitting Summer School**

Staff attended the Florida Environmental Permitting Summer School, which brought together approximately 1,500 practitioners, managers, and regulators. The event focused on permitting processes, regulatory compliance, best management practices, and the legislative outlook.

**v. Strategic Planning Update**

The strategic planning process is moving forward, with work completed on organizational structure, roles and responsibilities, and staffing needs. The next phase will involve developing areas of strategic focus, goals, and objectives.

**vi. Partnership with Yamaha Rightwaters**

Staff reported a potential new partnership with Yamaha Rightwaters, the sustainability arm of Yamaha Motors. Staff are hopeful to secure a donation of an engine for the Program's first vessel through this collaboration.

**vii. Evening for the Estuaries Gala**

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Evening for the Estuaries Gala will be held on October 16<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 PM CT at the Coastal Arts Center of Orange Beach. Staff expressed appreciation to the City of Orange Beach for hosting the event. The evening will feature networking opportunities, live music, an open bar, fresh-shucked oysters, and a silent auction. Tickets will go on sale August 4<sup>th</sup>.



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

i. **Gulf and South Atlantic Shellfish Conference**

Staff joined restoration practitioners, researchers, and shellfish farmers in Gainesville, FL for the Gulf and South Atlantic Shellfish Conference held from June 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup>. Conference sessions focused on regulation and enforcement, research, restoration, aquaculture, and hurricane impacts. Staff presented on the Pensacola Bay Oyster Restoration Initiative.

ii. **Seagrass Monitoring**

During July, the Program assisted partners with seagrass monitoring to look for Turtle grass flowers, fruits, and seeds to learn more about the reproductive ecology. Currently, there is very little information on the reproductive ecology of Turtle grass from Pensacola and Perdido Bays.

iii. **Living Shorelines Monitoring**

The Assessing Living Shoreline Project Effectiveness Across the Florida Panhandle project received an extension through 2026. Staff completed the third quarter of monitoring the week of July 21<sup>st</sup> and observed several species of interest including Speckled Trout, Gray Snapper, and Planehead Filefish. Quarterly homeowner reports have been prepared to provide homeowners updates on the monitoring along their property.

iv. **State of the Bays Report**

Staff are finishing the final details for the 2025 State of the Bays, and the new report will be released soon.

v. **Restoration Programming Updates**

1. **Pensacola Bay Oyster Restoration Initiative**

The University of South Alabama has completed one out of four deployments, and the Program and EPA have completed two tile exchanges. The University of West Florida and Dauphin Island Sea Lab are analyzing larval samples and tiles.

2. **Carpenter Creek Restoration**

An internal project kick-off meeting was held on June 26, 2025. The draft Engagement Plan, Project Fact Sheet, and Site Acquisition Plan are all under review. Updates for the Carpenter Creek webpage are in development.

3. **Living Shoreline Assistance Program**

The Perdido Bay watershed received 30 applications, staff performed 30 site assessments, and six out of the 30 projects will be selected for implementation with OysterCorps. Selection will be made using a scoring rubric. Applications for the Pensacola Bay watershed will open on August 1, 2025, with outreach and open houses starting in early 2026.



- c. **Outreach Update** (*Bailey Walkinshaw, Community Outreach Assistant*)
- i. **Conference for Advancing Participatory Sciences**  
Staff attended the Conference for Advancing Participatory Sciences, held in Portland, OR, in May. Logan McDonald (Community Outreach Coordinator) presented on Teachers on the Bay: BWET Teacher Training, and Bailey Walkinshaw (Community Outreach Assistant) presented on Panhandle Manatee.
  - ii. **Seagrass Sleuths**  
Staff completed Summer Seagrass Sleuth programming for this June with a total of three events across Navarre, Gulf Breeze, and Pensacola.
  - iii. **Panhandle Manatee Radio Campaign**  
Staff ran a radio campaign for the first time on seagrass-safe boating and manatee awareness from 4<sup>th</sup> of July weekend through July 12<sup>th</sup> for Blue Angels airshow weekend. Discussion was held on exploring outreach with talk radio listeners, with the example of Pensacola News Talk “Ask the Experts” 30-minute radio segments given.
  - iv. **Kayak Tours**  
Staff held a World Oceans Day kayak tour at Big Lagoon State Park for Wounded Warrior families in June. In July, staff partnered with the Florida Public Archaeology Network to hold an additional Big Lagoon State Park kayak tour that was open to the public.
  - v. **VOG Volunteer Events**  
Staff partnered with OysterCorps on three vertical oyster garden (VOG) building volunteer events, which culminated in 48 volunteers building over 300 VOGs.
  - vi. **Upcoming Events**
    1. Staff are partnering with the City of Orange Beach, The Nature Conservancy, and Moffatt & Nichol for a volunteer planting along the lower Perdido Islands on July 31<sup>st</sup>.
    2. Staff are partnering with OysterCorps, Red Fish Blue Fish, and Florida Sea Grant for a National Oyster Day Celebration on August 6<sup>th</sup>. The event will be hosted at Red Fish Blue Fish, a participating restaurant in the Program’s oyster shell recycling program, and will feature oyster specials, VOG building, educational booths from Florida Sea Grant and Dune Defenders, and a showing of The Humble Oyster.



## 7. Action Items

### a. **Approval of Quarterly Financial Statements**

Commissioner Mike Kohler (Escambia County) made a motion to approve the FY24-25 Second Quarter Financial Statements. Commissioner Kerry Smith (Santa Rosa County) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

### b. **Approval of FY23-24 990 Form**

Woody Speed (City of Orange Beach) made a motion to approve, and authorize the Executive Director to sign, the FY23-24 990 Form. Vernon Compton (City of Milton) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

### c. **Approval of FY24-25 Mid-year Budget Amendment**

Woody Speed (City of Orange Beach) made a motion to approve the FY24-25 Mid-year Budget Amendment. Mike Norberg (Okaloosa County) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

### d. **Approval of Proposed FY25-26 Operating Budget**

Staff confirmed that the final budget will be at the next board meeting.

Councilperson Tim Burr (City of Gulf Breeze) made a motion to approve the proposed FY25-26 Operating Budget. Commissioner Mike Kohler (Escambia County) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

### e. **Approval of Health Insurance Coverage Renewal with the Florida League of Cities**

Vernon Compton (City of Milton) made a motion to approve of health insurance coverage renewal with the Florida League of Cities. Woody Speed (City of Orange Beach) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

### f. **Approval of a Professional Services Contract with Arrow Group, LLC for Lobbying Services**

Discussion was held on staff providing board members a statement that can be given to city and county lobbyists to amplify efforts for the Program. The Board requested monthly and/or quarterly updates from the lobbying team.

Woody Speed (City of Orange Beach) made a motion to approve a contract with Arrow Group, LLC for strategic consulting and lobbying services on a month-to-month basis at a monthly rate of \$1,000. Commissioner Mike Kohler (Escambia County) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

### g. **Approval of Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Purchase Order C5E6CC, in the amount of \$98,000, for the 2025 Seagrass Mapping Project Cities**

Councilperson Tim Burr (City of Gulf Breeze) made a motion to approve and accept Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Purchase Order C5E6CC, in the amount of \$98,000, for the 2025 Seagrass Mapping Project. Mike Norberg (Okaloosa County) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

### h. **Ratifying approval of an Agreement with Orange Beach, AL, in the amount of \$35,000 for**



**the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Marine Debris Project**

Woody Speed (City of Orange Beach) made a motion to ratify approval of an agreement with Orange Beach, AL, in the amount of \$35,000, for the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Marine Debris Project. Vernon Compton (City of Milton) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

- i. **Approval of a Contract Amendment with the University of Southern Mississippi, in the amount of \$38,884, to complete the Annual Tier II Seagrass Monitoring**  
Mike Norberg (Okaloosa County) made a motion to approve, and authorize the Executive Director to sign, a Contract Amendment with University of Southern Mississippi, in the amount of \$38,884, to complete the Annual Tier II Seagrass Monitoring. Councilperson Jared Moore (City of Pensacola) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

**8. Committee Updates**

- a. **Technical Committee** (*Kate Dawson, Co-Chair*)

At the last Technical Committee meeting held on July 15<sup>th</sup>, Dr. Jane Caffrey (University of West Florida) presented on a water quality and sediment monitoring project. The study focuses primarily on the Pensacola and Perdido Bay areas, which are of particular interest to the committee. The project aims to identify sources of bacteria using microbial source tracking. Kate Dawson (Moffatt & Nichol, Technical Committee Co-Chair) presented on the Bronson Field, Lillian Swamp, and Tarklin Bayou projects, providing an opportunity for committee members to offer feedback. Additionally, staff provided updates on the Oyster Restoration Initiative and the Microbial Source Tracking projects.

**9. Board Updates**

- a. Councilperson Tim Burr (City of Gulf Breeze) raised the topic of septic-to-sewer conversions and their impact on water quality. He inquired whether there is a state mandate requiring homeowners to convert and requested guidance from Mary Jane Bass (Beggs & Lane) regarding the applicable laws. He also asked the Board whether there is a way to provide unified guidance on the issue. Commissioner Colten Wright (Santa Rosa County) noted that while a state statute does exist, the likelihood of receiving grant funding for septic-to-sewer conversions decreases if the local municipality has not adopted an ordinance mirroring the state's requirements. There was general agreement on the importance of encouraging the legislature to strengthen related policies.
- b. Vernon Compton (City of Milton) commended Santa Rosa County for receiving the Sabal Innovative Partnership Award from the Florida Wildlife Corridor Foundation for the Wolfe Creek Forest Project, recognizing the collaboration among The Longleaf Alliance, Trust for Public Land, Florida Forest Service, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Santa Rosa County, and Naval Air Station Whiting Field. Vernon Compton (City of Milton) also recognized the Soundside preservation effort, where Santa Rosa County purchased 27 acres of wetland and salt marsh property directly south of the Gulf Breeze Zoo. This land serves as a buffer for the zoo and surrounding neighborhoods. Discussion was held on the ecological value and diversity.



**10. Public Comment**

- a. Naisy Dolar announced that the Multi-Year Implementation Plan, Amendment #3, is currently open for public comment on the Santa Rosa County RESTORE Act webpage. She also recognized the City of Gulf Breeze for its septic-to-sewer project along Soundside Drive, which is 95–99% complete.
  
- b. Cherry Fitch expressed her appreciation to the Board and staff for their continued dedication and hard work.

**11. Adjourned**