



## Board of Directors Meeting Minutes

December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2025, at 1:30 p.m. CT

Orange Beach City Council Chambers

4099 Orange Beach Blvd, Orange Beach AL 36561

*Meeting Audio Recording Available Upon Request*

### Members Present

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

### Members Absent

Ben Boutwell	Town of Century
Mike Kohler	Escambia County

### Interested Parties Present

Matt Posner	PPBEP
Whitney Scheffel	PPBEP
Samantha Pitts	PPBEP
Zach Schang	PPBEP
Paige Lansky	PPBEP
Mary Jane Bass	Beggs & Lane
Phillip West	City of Orange Beach
Darryl Boudreau	NFWFMD
Kate Dawson	Moffat & Nichol
Dillon Draughn	Moffat & Nichol
Mona Amodeo	idgroup
Jim Sparks	idgroup

### 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

With no objection, the Board accepted the agenda as presented.

#### 5. Approval of September 24, 2025, Board Minutes

Commissioner Ahslee Hofberger (Escambia County) made a motion to approve the September 24, 2025, meeting minutes. Mr. Mike Norberg (Okaloosa County) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

#### 6. Presentations

##### a. Perdido Islands Restoration Project (*Kate Dawson, Moffat & Nichol*)

Kate Dawson presented on the Lower Perdido Islands Restoration project, including the basis of project design, lessons learned and current status of various restoration areas. Preliminary project discussions began in 2018 and the project completed construction in early 2025; with several years of post-construction monitoring being implemented by various project partners.

##### b. Presentation of the PPBEP 2025 Strategic Plan (*Matt Posner, Executive Director and Whitney Scheffel, Sr Scientist*)

Staff gave a high-level overview of the PPBEP 2025 Strategic Plan, created in coordination with idgroup. The Strategic Plan is intended to serve as living document to guide the organizational growth of PPBEP through the next 5 years through clear, measurable goals within five Areas of Strategic Focus.

#### 7. Staff Updates

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

##### i. Welcome Samantha Pitts, Outreach and Education Program Manager

Matt Posner (*Executive Director*) introduced Samantha Pitts as the new Outreach and Education Program Manager. Samantha recently came from Escambia County where she spent 7 years as the Coastal Program Manager. At PPBEP, she will be responsible for overseeing the broader education and outreach strategy of the program.

##### ii. Evening for the Estuaries

The third annual Evening for the Estuaries raised \$24,300 for the program and featured nearly 40 Silent Auction items, fresh shucked oysters and animal ambassadors. Staff presented the Jessica Bibza partner of the Year Award (Rick O'Connor, Florida Sea Grant), Volunteer of the Year Award (Diane Bolter) and Project of the Year Award (Lower Perdido Islands, Moffat & Nichol, City of Orange Beach & The Nature Conservancy).

##### iii. Vessel Update

Staff picked up the new PPBEP vessel, a 24' Hanko, the Monday before Thanksgiving. The Yamaha Rightwaters Foundation will be donating the engine and Posner Marine will be donating the labor for installation. Staff expect the



motor to be delivered in early January, so the vessel should be ready for field work in early 2026. Mr. Norberg and Chairman Wright expressed interest in reaching out to Rightwaters Foundation to thank them for their donation and support of the program.

**iv. Operations Manager Position**

The PPBEP Operations Manager is currently open and posted on the program's website. The position will close December 21<sup>st</sup>.

**v. Association of National Estuary program (ANEP) Conference**

Matt Posner (*Executive Director*) attended the ANEP Conference in Mobile, Alabama. As an official NEP, PPBEP was invited to participate next year and look forward to bringing the full team to the next ANEP conference to collaborate with other NEP programs.

**vi. 2026-2027 Legislative Budget Request**

Staff received confirmation that Representative Andrade submitted the Legislative Budget Request of \$990,000 which will support the Pensacola Bay Oyster Restoration Initiative, Carpenter Creek Restoration, PPBEP Monitoring Program and Community Outreach and Education.

**vii. EPA Awards \$750,000 for the Water Quality Monitoring Collaborative**

The EPA has awarded a \$750,000 grant to PPBEP to establish the Water Quality Monitoring Collaborative, which will establish monthly water quality stations at 30 locations across the Pensacola and Perdido Bays Watersheds. Staff are planning a kick-off meeting with partners before the holidays, with data collection beginning in 2026.

**viii. NFWF Awards \$1.3 million for Carpenter Creek Restoration**

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation National Coastal Resiliency Fund awarded the PPBEP \$1.3 million to fully fund final design of the Carpenter Creek restoration project.

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

**i. Fall Monitoring Events**

Staff conducted the final C-STARS Living Shoreline monitoring event of the year and have received an extension for a third year which will also include SAV extent at applicable locations. Staff also finished the Spat and Larval Monitoring for the year, which has included collecting 140 plankton samples, 441 water samples and 470 spat tiles over 7 deployments. Staff, with support from Zach Darnell, EPA Gulf Coast Research Lab also conducted juvenile fish trawls and seagrass surveys. PPBEP staff will be leading the surveys now that a vessel has been procured.



**ii. Seagrass Mapping**

PPBEP will be partnering with the University of Southern Mississippi to collect additional aerial and satellite imagery of seagrass extent throughout the watershed. This is an update to previous effort conducted in 2022.

**iii. CERF 2025**

Select staff members attended the Coastal and Estuarine Research Federation Conference in Richmond, VA which provided a great opportunity to connect with other estuary program staff from across the country and how traditional and tribal ecological knowledge can be incorporated into more traditional scientific restoration efforts.

**iv. Carpenter Creek Restoration** (*Zach Schang, Restoration Coordinator*)

Staff and Moffat and Nichol have been working to secure access agreements from 273 individual owners to conduct data collection along the creek corridor. The Project team conducted two rounds of door knocking, held a Property Owner Open House and continued to engage the community about the project and to secure access agreements. A Creek Stewardship Committee has been established which will help guide the planning process over the next three years. Staff thanked Rand Hicks and community advocates like him who have been integral into engaging local owners and connecting them to the project team.

**v. Oyster Restoration Initiative** (*Zach Schang, Restoration Coordinator*)

Staff and Jacobs Engineering have been working on the permitting and design approach to help set the project up for long-term success. Staff are currently developing design “templates” with the necessary construction specifications that can be combined into various layouts to design impactful restoration designs based on current modeling and data.

**vi. Living Shoreline Assistance Program** (*Paige Lansky, Coastal Restoration Coordinator*)

Staff provided an update on the Living Shoreline Assistance Program (LSAP). Since the last Board meeting presentation, staff have narrowed their interested property list down to 6 full-implementation sites and provided basic support for an additional 18 sites in the Perdido Bay watershed. The federal shutdown delayed permitting approval; however staff will be moving forward with permit submittal in early 2026 and hope to begin construction in Spring 2026. Staff will also be moving into the Pensacola Bay phase of the project, with the first Open House scheduled for late January in Pensacola.

Staff and the Board had discussions about easing DEP permitting requirements



for living shorelines projects and the impact of public perception of Vibrio on living shoreline and oyster restoration projects, and what the role of PPBEP could be in addressing this issue.

c. **Outreach Update** (*Samantha Pitts, Outreach and Education Program Manager*)

i. **National Estuaries Week**

Staff hosted a series of extremely successful events for National Estuaries Week, including: a Vertical Oyster Garden (VOG) event with OysterCorp at Gary's Biergarten, "Bringing Back the Bayou" Lunch and Learn with Florida Sea Grant and local Extension agents that focused on water quality; and the Community Grant Symposium where the 2024-2025 awardees presented on their projects and staff announced the 2025-2026 slate of awarded grants.

ii. **Fall Outreach Events**

The November Restoration Ramble took place on the Rainwater Perdido River Preserve and was well attended, despite being reschedule from an earlier date in April. Staff also presented at the Escambia County Marine Advisory Committee Annual Water Way condition report on the 2025 State of the Bays report, Carpenter Creek, Oyster Restoration Initiative, the Living Shoreline Assistance Program and the Panhandle Manatee program.

8. **Action Items**

- a. **Approval of an Agreement with Johnson, Mirmiran & Thompson, Inc. (JMT), in the amount of \$322,048.06, for RFQ P2425-02 Sediment Reduction Prioritization Action Plan**  
Councilman Burr made a motion to approve the Action Items 8a-8g. Commissioner Hofberger seconded. The motion passed unanimously.
- b. **Approval of an Agreement with the University of Southern Mississippi, in the amount of \$112,609, for RFP P2425-03, for submerged aquatic vegetation mapping of Pensacola and Perdido Bays**  
Councilman Burr made a motion to approve the Action Items 8a-8g. Commissioner Hofberger seconded. The motion passed unanimously.
- c. **Acceptance of EPA Notice of Award Number 05D42125, in the amount of \$750,000, for the Water Quality Monitoring Collaborative**  
Councilman Burr made a motion to approve the Action Items 8a-8g. Commissioner Hofberger seconded. The motion passed unanimously.
- d. **Approval of a Contract with Jacobs Engineering Group, in the amount of \$24,982, for Compound Flood Model Technical Review Support**  
Councilman Burr made a motion to approve the Action Items 8a-8g. Commissioner Hofberger



seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

**e. Approval of the 2026 Holiday Schedule**

Councilman Burr made a motion to approve the Action Items 8a-8g. Commissioner Hofberger seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

**f. Approval of the 2026 Board Meeting Schedule**

The March 18<sup>th</sup> Board Meeting conflicts with Spring Break. Staff will reschedule the March meeting accordingly.

Councilman Burr made a motion to approve the Action Items 8a-8g. Commissioner Hofberger seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

**g. Approval of the 2026 Travel Schedule**

Councilman Burr made a motion to approve the Action Items 8a-8g. Commissioner Hofberger seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

**9. Discussion**

**a. Executive Director Annual Evaluation & Evaluation Process**

Chairman Wright recently completed the Executive Director's Annual Evaluation. There has never been an established protocol but requested the Executive Director to develop a formal, written policy for a streamlined and transparent process. A form was developed for the 2025 evaluation which was used and provided to the Board under separate cover.

Chairman Wright expressed a desire for more of the Board to participate in the evaluation for a more balanced process. Councilman Burr suggested that several Board Members are charged with evaluating the Director and individual evaluations would be compiled into an aggregate evaluation to be finalized by the Chairperson. Mary Jane Bass, PPBEP counsel provided input on the Sunshine Law requirements and how to incorporate individual feedback while remaining compliant.

Chairman Wirght made a motion to establish an Executive Committee comprising of the Chair, Vice Chair and two appointees at the September meeting annually with the purpose to conduct the annual Executive Director evaluation. Councilman Tim Burr seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

**b. Organizational Policy on Taking Legislative Policy Positions**

Chairman Wright made a motion to approve the policy as presented. Councilman Burr seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

**10. Committee Updates**

None

**11. Board Updates**



- a. Councilman Burr: Gulf Breeze has 5 sailboats anchored within a seagrass bed off Gulf Breeze, some that appear to be derelict, and would like guidance from the program for how to be deal with the issue. Staff will bring back a policy brief for derelict vessels and local government roles and responsibilities.
- b. Mr. Compton: UWF, the Long Leaf Alliance and Florida Forest Service are hosting a West Florida Fire and Nature festival on the UWF Edward Ball Nature Trail on March 7<sup>th</sup> 2025. He congratulated Kerry Smith and Colton Wright of the Santa Rosa County Commission for receiving the Civic Con Environmental Award for their East River Nature Preserve establishment.

**12. Public Comment**

None

**13. Adjourned**