



**Board of Directors
Meeting Minutes**

February 4th, 2026, at 1:30 p.m. CT

Gulf Breeze City Council Chambers

1070 Shoreline Drive, Gulf Breeze, FL 32561

Meeting Audio Recording Available Upon Request

Members Present

Colten Wright, Chair	Santa Rosa County
Vernon Compton	City of Milton
Steve Stroberger	Escambia County
Mike Kohler	Escambia County
Kerry Smith	Santa Rosa County
Woody Speed	City of Orange Beach
Tim Burr	City of Gulf Breeze
Ben Boutwell	Town of Century

Members Absent

Jared Moore, Vice Chair	City of Pensacola
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Interested Parties Present

Matt Posner	PPBEP
Whitney Scheffel	PPBEP
Samantha Pitts	PPBEP
Chasidy Hobbs	UWF
Mary Jane Bass	Beggs & Lane
Tyler Jacobs	Moffat & Nichol
Dillon Draughn	Moffat & Nichol
Naisy Dolar	Santa Rosa County

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 December 3rd, 2025, Board Minutes

Mr. Compton made a motion to approve December 3rd, 2025, meeting minutes. Mayor Boutwell seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Chair Wright welcomed Commissioner Stroberger to the Board and thanked Commissioner Hofberger and Mr. Norberg for their service.

6. Staff Updates

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

i. Operations Manager

The new Operations Manager, Sonya Negley, will start on February 23rd. Sonya has experience in operations management and scaling non-profit operations, most recently serving 8 years as both an Operations Manager and Executive Director for Metavivor, a non-profit focusing on metastatic breast cancer research, survivor support, and advocacy.

ii. Management Conference: April 8th, 2026

The 2026 Management Conference is set for April 8th at the Sanders Beach-Corrine Jones Resource Center. The Management Conference invites all partners and committee members together for a day-long event. New this year are partner presentation and bigger focus on sharing success stories from around the watershed. Detailed agenda and registration information will be available soon.

iii. National Estuary Program Designation Update

Matt Posner (Executive Director) received recent communications regarding the program's NEP enrollment. After confirming with leadership, EPA administrative staff will request a letter of support from the Governor Desantis' office, at which point the Administration should have what is needed to finalize enrollment into the National Estuary Program.

iv. 2026-2027 Legislative Budget Request

Representative Andrade (House) and Senator Rodriguez (Senate) are sponsoring the FY2026 Legislative Budget Request of \$990,000 and staff continue to work with the lobbying team to move the request through session.

v. Florida Legislation to Watch

Matt Posner (Executive Director) provided a summary of bills to watch currently moving through the legislature:

- *SB 1682 Local Administration of Vessel Restrictions*: authorizes counties and municipalities to administer laws relating to vessels at risk of becoming derelict, long-term anchoring permits, and derelict vessels within their jurisdictions. Local governments that elect to administer these laws must adopt ordinances and coordinate with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC).
- *HB 1035 Nature-based Coastal Resiliency*: creates several provisions related to using



nature-based methods to improve coastal resiliency, namely requiring FDEP to establish statewide permitting process and develop design guidelines and standards for using green or hybrid infrastructure.

- *SB 840 Land Use Regulations for Local Governments Affected by Natural Disasters:* amends provisions that were included in two sections of 2025's SB 180. SB 840 narrows the geographic area subject to the restrictions for 1 year after hurricanes make landfall. The bill also revises the restrictions to prohibit enforcement of moratoriums that delay repairs; requirements for repairs or reconstruction to comply with comprehensive plan or land development regulation amendments adopted after landfall; or the enforcement of procedural changes made after landfall that increase timeframes for final action related to development permits or development orders.
- *SB 0558: Standards for Stormwater Systems:* Requires stormwater systems owned by counties and municipalities, respectively, to comply with specified Department of Transportation standards; providing inspection requirements for such systems; specifying that certain local standards are superseded, etc. Effective Date: 7/1/2026

Chair Colten Wright also wanted Board Members to be aware of *SB 948 Local Government Land Development Regulations and Orders* which prohibits local governments from imposing regulations governing residential lots unless such regulations meet specified requirements and prohibits local governments from imposing certain regulations if a residential lot is connected to a public water system and a sewerage system.

Chair Colten Wright believes it is detrimental to home rule and growth management. Santa Rosa County is planning to address it at the next Commission meeting, and the City of Gulf Breeze is currently drafting a letter of opposition.

Commissioner Kohler wanted to thank the Escambia County Marine Advisory Committee and Natural Resources Management Department staff for their work on SB 1682, which was a direct result of derelict vessel issues in Bayou Chico.

vi. Evening for the Estuaries

Please save the Date for the 4th Annual Evening for the Estuaries Gala, on Friday, October 16th, 2026. This year, the gala will take place at the Pensacola Yacht Club. Staff thanked the Coastal Arts Center in Orange Beach for hosting the event in past years and staff plan to rotate the event between Orange Beach and Pensacola for future years.

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

i. ADEM Non- Point Source Conference

Whitney Scheffel (Senior Scientist) and Chloe Ray (Environmental Technician) attended the ADEM Non-Point Source Conference in Wetumpka, AL. It was a great opportunity to connect with partners from the northern and Alabama side of the watershed and discuss upcoming projects.



- ii. Microbial Source Tracking**

PPBEP will be partnering with Escambia County to monitor 9 sub-basins across the Pensacola and Perdido Bay watersheds for bacteria and nutrient sources. Other project partners include utilities, state and federal agencies. Staff are currently compiling an existing Data Analysis report, which should be completed in May and scouting future sampling locations. Commissioner Kohler requested the data analysis report once completed.
- iii. Seagrass Mapping**

Project partners University of Southern Mississippi collected aerial and satellite imagery in November 2025 to determine the best method for assessing seagrass extent in the bay systems. Staff will be working with USM researchers to assess the imagery and update seagrass maps.
- iv. UWF Larval Sample Processing**

Staff visited Dr. Amanda Croteau's lab at UWF to view plankton tow samples collected during the 2025 Oyster Spat and Larval sampling event in East Bay. Dr. Croteau's lab analyzes concentrated samples of the biomass collected under microscopes and calculates the volume of bivalve larvae within each sample. Once complete, the data will help inform design for the Oyster Restoration Initiative.
- v. Vibrio Round Table Event**

Staff and Technical Committee members are developing a Vibrio Round Table event for late April/May to provide current science-based information, address misconceptions, and listen to public concerns. Staff held a similar event with the Oyster Sub-Committee that was very successful and produced several project ideas. Staff will share the agenda and date once confirmed.
- vi. Carpenter Creek Restoration**

PPBEP staff and Moffat and Nichol continue to seek access agreements from property owners along the creek. The team has employed ORC, a real estate firm, to help obtain access agreement from corporate owners and other unique owners. The team also held the first Creek Stewardship Committee meeting in December and look forward to future engagement with that group. A Creek Recon data collection event is tentatively scheduled for early March, with an additional Open House planned for March 19th at the Tryon Library from 5:00-6:30pm.
- vii. Oyster Restoration Initiative**

Staff and Jacobs Engineering have been working on the permitting and design approach to help set the project up for long-term success. Primary construction materials and reef configurations have been decided, with placement decisions to be guided by hydrodynamic modeling. Staff and Jacobs are now preparing for pre-application meetings with state agencies.



With the closure of Pensacola Bay Oyster Hatchery, staff need to evaluate other sources of oyster larvae and have had several conversations with other oyster restoration groups about the feasibility of developing an oyster hatchery for long-term restoration success.

- viii. **Living Shoreline Assistance Program** (*Paige Lansky, Coastal Restoration Coordinator*)
Staff are moving forward with Open House events for the Pensacola Bay phase of the project. The January Open House was well attended at the Sanders Beach-Corrine Jones Resource Center. Staff will host another workshop in February at the same location and a March Open House at the Bagdad Community Center. Site assessments are underway for eligible Pensacola Bay properties and installation of Perdido Bay sites is expected to begin later this Spring.
- c. **Outreach Update** (*Samantha Pitts, Outreach and Education Program Manager*)
- i. **Pensacola Bay Oyster REEF**
Staff hosted a Teacher Refresher Workshop on January 21st for teachers interested in participating in the Pensacola Bay Oyster REEF project, representing 4 schools in Escambia and Santa Rosa County. Staff and teachers will be working to implement curriculum in the classrooms this spring with additional teacher outreach and curriculum development to follow later this year.
- ii. **Spring Outreach Events**
Staff have a series of public events planned for the spring months including:
- February 15th: Mardi Gras Tree Bead Clean Up with Ocean Hour
 - February 20th Restoration Ramble: Tot Trot at Shoreline Park
 - March 7th: West Florida Fire & Nature Festival
 - March 19th: Carpenter Creek Open House
 - March 20th Restoration Ramble: Carpenter Creek Headwaters Park
 - April 10th Restoration Ramble: Lower Perdido Island Projects
 - April 17th: Santa Rosa County Bay Day
- iii. **Education and Outreach Look Ahead**
Outside of public programming, staff will be working on reviewing the Education and Outreach strategy for future updates and will be planning volunteer training sessions for Panhandle Manatee Program, Critter Catchers and the new community science program Eyes on Seagrass.

7. Action Items

a. **Election of 2026 Chairman and Vice Chairman**

Councilman Tim Burr made a motion to elect Colten Wright as Chair. Vernon Compton (City of Milton) seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Commissioner Kerry Smith made a motion to elect Tim Burr as Vice Chair. Commissioner Mike Kohler seconded. The motion passed unanimously.



Matt Posner, Executive Director, explained that 2025 elections were delayed due to the January Snowstorm, so terms were slightly shortened. The new Chair and Vice Chair terms would begin at the March meeting. Chair Wright thanked Councilman Moore for his service on the Board.

b. Affirm 2026 Bank Signature Authority

Vernon Compton (City of Milton) made a motion affirming calendar year 2026 signature authority for the Chairman, Vice Chairman, and Executive Director for the Program's Hancock Whitney Bank accounts. Commissioner Mike Kohler seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

c. Approval of a Subaward Agreement with Santa Rosa County, in the amount of \$341,077, for the Santa Rosa County Septic to Sewer Conversion Project

Councilman Tim Burr made a motion approving and authorizing the Executive Director to sign a Subaward Agreement with Santa Rosa County, in the amount of \$341,077, for the Santa Rosa County Septic to Sewer Conversion. Vernon Compton (City of Milton) seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

d. Approval of National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Grant Award No. 0318.26.088194, in the amount of \$1,380,000, for the Carpenter Creek Restoration Project

Commissioner Mike Kohler made a motion approving and authorizing the Executive Director to execute the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Grant 0318.26.088194, in the amount of \$1,380,000, for the Carpenter Creek Restoration Project. Mayor Ben Boutwell seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

e. Approval of a Letter to the Florida Legislature Regarding PPBEP's Legislative Budget Request

Commissioner Mike Kohler made a motion approving transmittal of a letter to the Northwest Florida Legislative Delegation, and the House and Senate Appropriation Committee Chairs, urging them to support PPBEP's Legislative Budget Request. Councilman Tim Burr seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

8. Committee Updates

a. Technical Committee (Chasidy Hobbs, UWF)

The next Technical Committee meeting will be February 17th and will focus on improving committee engagement and recruiting new committee members. PPBEP and UWF are working to bring a Student Poster Session to the Management Conference to highlight student-led research. Staff will also begin seeking silent auction items for the Gala and Ms. Hobbs urged the Board to think of potential donors or sponsors for the event.

b. Education & Outreach Committee (Samantha Pitts, PPBEP)

The Education and Outreach Committee will meet on February 12th and will also focus on growing committee engagement and providing meaningful engagement for existing partners.



9. Board Updates

- Chair Colten Wright thanked Matt Posner (PPBEP) and Naisy Dolar (Santa Rosa County) for their work in submitting a grant application on a tight timetable that support acquisition of the 27-ac acquisition Soundside Drive parcel in Midway. Private citizens raised \$150,000 and the County was able to match with \$850,000 to purchase the property for permanent conservation and passive recreation. Naisy thanked the Save our Soundside and Bream Fisherman Associations for their support and background information that greatly aided in developing the grant application.
- Commissioner Mike Kohler highlighted a recent Brownsville Town Hall regarding septic-sewer conversion that was well attended and provided great feedback to county staff. Escambia County will be making a DC trip and Commissioner Kohler expressed a desire to help with NEP Designation if possible. The Pensacola Bay Living Shoreline Project is wrapping up and will feature a volunteer White Island Planting event in coordination with PPBEP.
- Vernon Compton (City of Milton) thanked Chasidy and her staff at UWF for their assistance in developing the Fire and Nature Festival which will be taking place at the UWF Edward Ball Nature Trail on March 7th. He made the Board aware of the newest state park, Shoal River Headwaters State Park, just west of Defuniak Springs, which feeds into Yellow River and eventually Pensacola Bay.
- Woody Speed (City of Orange Beach) announced the City has recently passed a new wetland ordinance due to nuisance flooding from recent development. The new ordinance is more stringent than state and federal standards. The City is also exploring a Land Acquisition and Conservation ordinance to support habitat and land conservation programs.

10. Public Comment

None

11. Adjourned