



## **Technical Committee Meeting Minutes**

Tuesday, February 17<sup>th</sup>, 2026

1:30 – 3:30 CST

[Virtual Meeting Recording](#)

### **Attendees**

Whitney Scheffel	PPBEP
Chloe Ray	PPBEP
Haley Gancel	PPBEP
Paige Lansky	PPBEP
Matt Posner	PPBEP
Jerry Ackerman	EPA
Katherine Alexander	City of Pensacola
Shelley Alexander	Santa Rosa County
Darryl Boudreau	NFWFMD
Katie Bowes	Drummond Carpenter
Kayla Boyd	Mobile Baykeeper
Dottie Byron	Dauphin Island Sea Lab
Steve Collins	Black & Veatch
Kate Dawson	Moffatt & Nichol
Luis Del Val	WSP USA
Thomas Derbes	Florida Sea Grant
Jason Evert	JMT
Mike Fazio	Santa Rosa County
Richard Fulford	EPA
Heather Griffin	ADEM
Chasidy Hobbs	UWF
Jeanette Kelson	WSP USA
Russell Manley	WSP USA
William Mather	WSP USA
Jennifer Nunn	JMT
Kate Richardson	Tall Timbers
Tracey Schafer	JMT
Danielle Wallace	Estuary Program Volunteer
Irene Watts	Foth
Brandi Woolery	Dewberry
Chris Verlinde	Santa Rosa County

### **1. Call to Order**

Kate Dawson (Moffatt & Nichol) called the meeting to order at 1:31 PM CST on February 17<sup>th</sup>, 2026.

### **2. Welcome and Introductions**

K. Dawson asked for new Technical Committee (TC) attendees to introduce themselves. Luis Del Val (WSP USA), Kayla Boyd (Mobile Baykeeper), Chasidy Hobbs (UWF), Brandi Woolery



(Dewberry), Irene Watts (Foth), and Katherine Alexander (City of Pensacola) introduced themselves as new or returning members of the Committee.

**3. Approval of December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2025, Meeting Minutes**

Thomas Derbes (Florida Sea Grant) made a motion to approve the December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2025 meeting minutes. Michael Fazio (Santa Rosa County) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

**4. Partner Presentations**

**a. Luis Del Val (WSP) – TNC’s Oyster Habitat Restoration Project Update**

L. Del Val presented an overview of monitoring results from the Pensacola East Bay Oyster Habitat Restoration Project. Constructed oyster reefs spanning approximately six miles of shoreline demonstrated successful oyster recruitment and survival. Results indicate reefs are supporting ecological productivity and providing habitat benefits for fish, birds, and other marine species. Reduced wave energy behind reefs has created favorable conditions for planned seagrass restoration efforts led by Aquatech.

**b. Dr. Kayla Boyd (Mobile Bay Keeper) – Intertidal Oyster Reef Restoration**

Dr. K. Boyd provided an overview of the Alabama Oyster Planting Project, which aims to restore oysters throughout Mobile Bay. Dr. Boyd noted long-term declines in oyster populations, with 2025 representing the lowest harvest year on record. Initial steps included locating and evaluating current intertidal reefs, generating a Master Plan, and applying for permits to construct reefs. The initiative plans to deploy approximately 10 million oysters across 200 reef locations over five years (~50 total acres restored). The project includes intertidal oyster reef construction using cured oyster shells and live oysters. Monitoring efforts will evaluate oyster survival and larval recruitment.

**c. Thomas Derbes (Florida Sea Grant) – It Starts in the Water: Phytoplankton, Oysters, and Oyster South Symposium**

Thomas Derbes (Florida Sea Grant) shared updates regarding ongoing research related to oyster aquaculture in Pensacola Bay and throughout Florida, including the Farms for Aquaculture Research and Monitoring of Shellfish (FARMS) project led by University of Florida. Current studies include phytoplankton monitoring near oyster farms and investigations into Sudden Unexplained Mortality Syndrome (SUMS) that has impacted local and regional farmers. While multiple factors could be causing oyster deaths, including bacterial, viral, and environmental factors, the exact cause remains unknown. Updates were also provided on funding secured by the Florida Shellfish Aquaculture Association to support research and workforce development initiatives for the aquaculture industry. Additionally, Thomas recently attended the Oyster South Symposium in Houston TX, which brings together producers, gear suppliers, distributors, chefs, food writers, vendors, researchers, students and managers from the southeast and Gulf coast regions to discuss pressing issues and relevant, practical research on oyster aquaculture.

**d. Jason Evert (JMT) – Sedimentation Prioritization Action Plan for Pensacola Bay Watershed**

Jason Evert (JMT) and Steve Collins (Black & Veatch) introduced a project that officially kicked off in February that is focused on evaluating major sources of erosion and sediment loading in the Pensacola Bay watershed that will result in prioritized action projects for addressing identified issues. PPBEP contracted with JMT to lead this work, which is part of the larger Pensacola Bay Oyster Restoration Initiative. The team has



reviewed previous studies that have identified significant sources of sediment, including unpaved roads at stream crossings and severe bank erosion. The team also plans to conduct sediment fingerprinting to trace sources. The project aims to develop sediment reduction targets considering the significant impacts to oyster reefs, submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV), freshwater mussels, sturgeon, and other sensitive species.

**e. Dr. Kate Richardson (Tall Timbers) – Passive Acoustic Monitoring for Black Rails in the Florida Panhandle**

Dr. Kate Richardson, Director of the Stoddard Bird Lab, presented a new Black Rail monitoring initiative funded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Coastal Program. The project will deploy acoustic monitoring equipment at approximately 14 sites across Walton, Escambia, and Okaloosa counties during the breeding season (March–July). Monitoring will focus on high marsh habitats dominated by *Spartina* species. Site selection and permitting are currently underway.

**5. Discussion**

**a. Partner Presentation Q/A and Discussion**

Following partner presentations, participants were invited to ask questions of the presenters. There was discussion on oyster and SAV restoration and participants provided location recommendations for black rail acoustic monitoring.

**b. Technical Committee Planning**

Updates were provided regarding planning for the July 21<sup>st</sup> quarterly Technical Committee meeting. Partners were encouraged to submit presentation ideas and provide feedback on preferred meeting times. The TC participants did not prefer morning or afternoon meetings.

**c. Management Conference Update**

C. Hobbs shared updates on Management Conference planning, including the addition of a student poster session and expanded partner engagement opportunities. The conference theme will focus on strengthening partnerships for healthier bays. A reminder was provided that the Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP) update process will begin soon and will require support and participation from the TC.

**6. Staff Updates**

**a. Evening for the Estuaries Gala**

W. Scheffel announced that the 2026 Evening for the Estuaries Gala will be held at the Pensacola Yacht Club on Friday, October 16<sup>th</sup>, 2026 at 6:00 PM. Tickets will go on sale in August.

**b. Management Conference**

W. Scheffel announced that the theme of the Management Conference is “Stronger Together: Building Partnerships for Healthier Bays”. The conference will be held at Sanders Beach-Corinne Jones Resource Center on April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2026 from 10:00am-3:00pm. Register [here](#).

**c. Project Progress and Monitoring updates**

**i. Pensacola Bay Oyster Restoration Initiative**

**ii.** W. Scheffel provided an update on the Oyster Restoration Initiative, including current and future data collection and design/engineering progress. The team is advancing plans for Phase 1 locations and preparing for permit submissions.



- iii. **[Living Shoreline Assistance Program \(LSAP\)](#)**  
LSAP is now accepting applications in the Pensacola Bay watershed. The first open house was held at Sanders Beach in January, and two more are planned for February and March. Site assessments are ongoing for potential living shoreline site projects.
- iv. **[Carpenter Creek Restoration](#)**  
The Carpenter Creek Restoration Project team continues to make progress on acquiring property access agreements and expanding coordination involving approximately 264 properties. The Creek Stewardship Committee met in December and a series of engagements are being planned for spring and summer, including an open house on Thursday, March 19<sup>th</sup> from 5:00pm-6:30pm at Tryon Library. PPBEP and NWFAEP will also be hosting a Creekside Social at Miller's Ale House on Friday, March 27<sup>th</sup> at 5:30PM. If you plan to join, please register [here](#).
- v. **[Microbial Source Tracking \(MST\)](#)**  
C. Ray (PPBEP) is lead coordinator for the MST project in partnership with Escambia County's Water Quality and Land Management Division. Existing MST and related water quality datasets have been compiled and synthesized. The data review report is being drafted and will support Maps on the Table and Walk the Watershed community engagement events planned for 2026-2027.
- vi. **[SAV Mapping – Pensacola and Perdido Bays](#)**  
PPBEP partnered with the University of Southern Mississippi's Geospatial Center to acquire aerial and satellite imagery for updated SAV maps for Perdido and Pensacola Bay Systems. Imagery was collected in November 2025, and imagery processing and map production are underway. Ground-truthing was completed in collaboration with USM's Coastal Ecology/Seagrass Lab to support benthic habitat map production.

## **7. Around the Room/Announcements**

- a. W. Scheffel made an announcement on behalf Jackie Lane (Friends of Perdido Bay) who could not attend the meeting. Friends of Perdido Bay are continuing to collect phytoplankton samples along with additional water quality data in the Perdido Bay watershed. Results may be shared at a future meeting.
- b. C. Hobbs announced that UWF, Longleaf Alliance, and the U.S. Forest Service will be hosting their first annual [West Florida Fire & Nature Festival](#) on Saturday, March 7<sup>th</sup> from 9:00am to 3:00pm.
- c. T. Derbes announced that Florida Sea Grant will be hosting the [Florida Master Naturalist Coastal Systems program](#) beginning Tuesday, March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2026.

## **8. Adjourned**