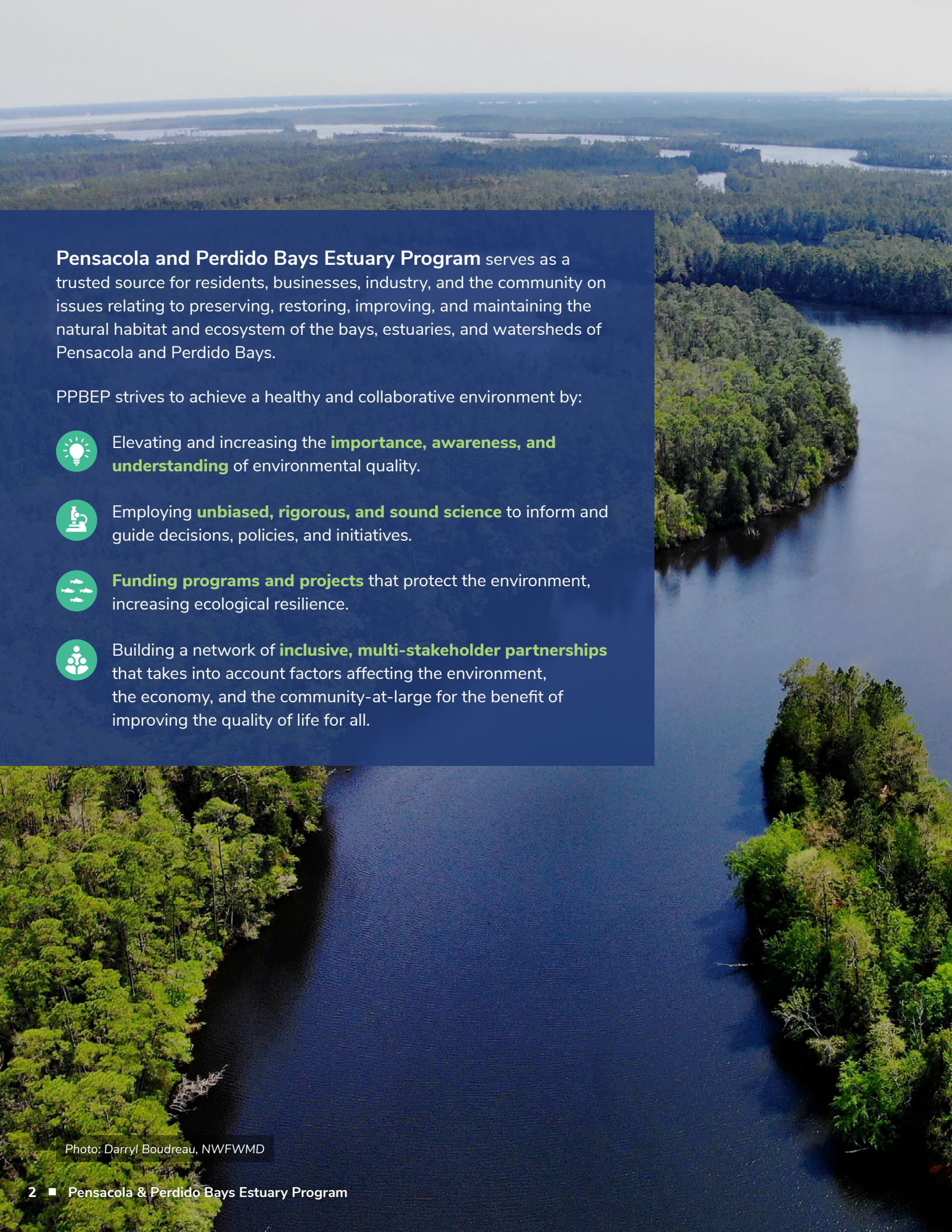




PENSACOLA  
& PERDIDO BAYS  
ESTUARY PROGRAM



ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT 2025



**Pensacola and Perdido Bays Estuary Program** serves as a trusted source for residents, businesses, industry, and the community on issues relating to preserving, restoring, improving, and maintaining the natural habitat and ecosystem of the bays, estuaries, and watersheds of Pensacola and Perdido Bays.

PPBEP strives to achieve a healthy and collaborative environment by:



Elevating and increasing the **importance, awareness, and understanding** of environmental quality.



Employing **unbiased, rigorous, and sound science** to inform and guide decisions, policies, and initiatives.



**Funding programs and projects** that protect the environment, increasing ecological resilience.



Building a network of **inclusive, multi-stakeholder partnerships** that takes into account factors affecting the environment, the economy, and the community-at-large for the benefit of improving the quality of life for all.

Photo: Darryl Boudreau, NFWFMD

# Executive Director's Message

Friends,

On behalf of the Pensacola and Perdido Bays Estuary Program (PPBEP), I'm pleased to present the PPBEP Impact Report for Fiscal Year 2025. Amidst a year marked by change, the commitment to our mission from our local, state, and federal partners, and the communities we serve, has never been stronger. Our vision is quite simple – fishable and swimmable waters for all. In 2025, we charted a course to turn our vision into action.

In fall 2025, we finalized PPBEP's first Strategic Plan. A complement to our Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP), our ten-year roadmap for the restoration and preservation of our natural resources, the Strategic Plan ensures PPBEP is well positioned to realize our vision, execute our mission, and deliver transformational actions from our CCMP. The 2025-2030 Strategic Plan includes five areas of strategic focus to serve as our guideposts: **Impact, Culture, Operations, Innovation, and Engagement.** We encourage you to read the full plan and hope you will be as optimistic as we are about the future of our estuaries, the quality of life of our communities, and PPBEP's mission to protect what matters.

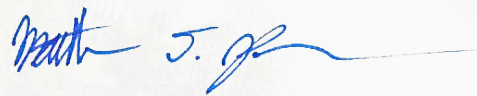
There was also reason for cautious optimism in 2025. This spring our team released our second biennial State of the Bays Report. Between 2023 and 2025, water quality and habitat indicators (i.e. seagrass coverage and nutrients) have stabilized across much of Pensacola and Perdido Bays. While still significantly impaired compared to historic conditions, it is a moment that should be celebrated. These conditions would not have improved without the intervention of local organizations and investments being made by local, state, and federal agencies to improve our infrastructure.

However, challenges remain: widespread bacteria impairments, critically degraded oyster habitat, and the loss of undeveloped lands.

In 2026, we must build on the foundation laid in 2025 and recommit our regional efforts to improve infrastructure, restore habitats, enhance community resilience, and thoughtfully plan for new growth to come. Fortunately, PPBEP and our partners are working on actions to ensure just that. In 2026, we will launch a Microbial Source Tracking project to identify sources of elevated bacteria levels in nine basins in the Pensacola and Perdido Bay watersheds. We will finalize design on the Pensacola Bay Oyster Restoration Initiative, our 10-year initiative to restore ~1,500 acres of oyster habitat to bring back our oyster fishery and ultimately support American Seafood Competitiveness. We will also continue to work with our local government partners to provide science-based support to inform growth management decisions, and work with the private sector to recognize growth and industry are part of the solution. This is just a snapshot of what our team will be working on in the new year.

In 2026, Pensacola will become the permanent home of American Magic, the U.S.'s premier high-performance sailing organization. With it, Pensacola Bay will receive national attention. It is imperative to support the region's blue economy that we continue to invest in actions that achieve fishable and swimmable waters for all. We invite you to join us in bringing this vision into reality. ■

Sincerely,



Matt Posner, Executive Director



Read the Strategic Plan:

[ppbep.org/about/  
mission-and-vision](https://ppbep.org/about/mission-and-vision)



## Chairman's Message

On behalf of the Pensacola and Perdido Bays Estuary Program Board of Directors, I'd like to thank our team, partners, committee members, and funders for another successful year.

We have seen tremendous advancement in implementing strategic actions that not only improve our natural resources, but improve our quality of life as well. Thanks to these collective actions, we are well on our way to ensuring fishable and swimmable waters for all.

Respectfully,  
Colten Wright, Chairman

## Be an Estuary Advocate!

**It's no secret** that the business of the Gulf Coast is—the coast! Whether it's protecting our community from hurricanes, drawing tourists to our pristine waterfronts or creating the quality of life that makes this a great place to live, a healthy coast and watershed is the bedrock of our community.

The Pensacola and Perdido Bays Estuary Program works to restore and protect these waters through science-based solutions and community education. We empower citizens and businesses to make choices that safeguard our creeks, rivers, bayous, and bays.

Your generous donation supports hands-on education programs for families and youth, ongoing efforts to restore Pensacola Bay oysters, and regional water quality monitoring to better address legacy environmental issues. Your gift is matched by state and federal grant programs that restore and protect our waterways. No matter the amount, we are grateful for your support!



Scan the QR Code and join us  
in protecting our bays today!

[pensacolaandperdidobaysestuary  
program-bloom.kindful.com](https://pensacolaandperdidobaysestuary-program-bloom.kindful.com)



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**Paige Lansky**  
Coastal Restoration Coordinator

**Chloe Ray**  
Environmental Technician



Photo: Darryl Boudreau, NWFWMMD

# State of the Bays

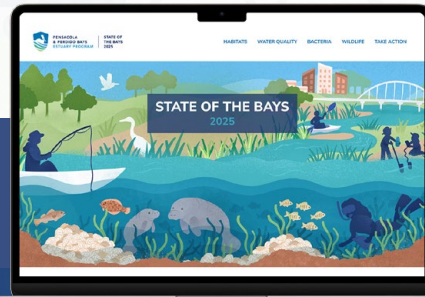
## Tracking Change, Guiding Action

**Our bays tell a story**—one of resilience, recovery, and the ongoing need for stewardship. Every other year, the State of the Bays assessment brings together the best available science to understand the health of the Pensacola and Perdido Bay systems. This collaborative effort, powered by multiple public datasets and partner contributions, helps us track environmental change over time and identify where restoration is working—and where challenges remain.

The 2025 findings reflect a system that is generally stable and, in many places, improving. Yet the data also highlights warning signs that will require long-term commitment, targeted investment, and community engagement.

## Looking Ahead A Clear Path Forward

The State of the Bays is more than a snapshot—it is a call to action. Stable conditions across much of the watershed demonstrate that restoration works. But the real message is one of responsibility: the choices we make today will shape the estuaries our children inherit tomorrow. ■



Dive into the  
State of the Bays:  
[StateoftheBays.org](https://StateoftheBays.org)



## Habitats

### Signs of Strength—and Areas of Opportunity

- Seagrass remains stable and, in many locations, is showing signs of improvement**, thanks to collaborative efforts and improving water quality.
- However, **habitat change across the region is trending downward**, reflecting the potential impacts of coastal erosion, storm events, and development.
- And the most urgent signal remains the condition of our oyster reefs: **Oysters are in critical condition across the Pensacola Bay watershed.**

To address this, PPBEP and partners launched the Pensacola Bay Oyster Restoration Initiative, which aims to restore **600 hectares of oyster reef over the next decade**. The project is designed to rebuild lost habitat, enhance water filtration, and ultimately support a thriving fishery and economy.



## Water Quality

### A Mostly Stable Picture With Local Improvements

- Across both bay systems, water quality indicators show a predominantly stable trend, with several positive signs—particularly in dissolved oxygen and nutrient patterns.
- In **Perdido Bay**, reductions in beach advisories and sanitary sewer overflows (SSOs) mark meaningful progress in public health protection. **Pensacola Bay** has also experienced a decline in SSOs, reflecting improvements in infrastructure and management.

While encouraging, our work isn't done. Even though conditions appear to be stable or improving in some areas, the pressures on our estuaries are only growing. Concerns about sedimentation and rapid development highlight the need for ongoing monitoring to support science-based decisions.



## Manatees and Wildlife

### A Positive Story Worth Celebrating

- Sightings continue to increase across the region, reflecting both improved reporting and potential shifts in habitat use.

The Panhandle Manatee Program has strengthened community awareness and contributed valuable data to sighting efforts.



## Fisheries

### A Growing Priority for Long-Term Investment

For the first time, the 2025 State of the Bays includes **fisheries** as a core indicator.

- In **Pensacola Bay**, data remains *undetermined* due to the lack of long-term, consistent monitoring.
- In **Perdido Bay**, the outlook is stable, supported by years of partner-led monitoring that track juvenile fish and estuarine-dependent species.

These findings reinforce a clear need for ongoing investment in fisheries monitoring to better understand population trends and support our local recreational fishing economy.

# Hope on the Half Shell

## Designing the Future of Pensacola Bay Oysters

**Oysters are integral** to our bays and way of life. Shell middens are proof of their central role in indigenous cultures, long before European settlers came to these shores. Oysters sustained Gulf economies—supporting watermen, fishermen, and countless hospitality businesses fueled by fresh oysters.

Over time, growing coastal populations and increasing demand for oysters took a toll on reef systems. Today, an estimated 70-95% of historical oyster reefs have been lost due to sedimentation, declining water quality, pollution, and the loss of suitable habitat. Heavy harvesting and changing environmental conditions worsened declines, and hotter, wetter summers now threaten surviving reefs. But, hope remains.

The Pensacola Bay Oyster Restoration Initiative (ORI) unites scientists, oystermen and oysterwomen, restaurants, and state and federal agencies under the common aim of bringing oysters back to Pensacola Bay. With big dreams and sights set on restoring 600 hectares of oyster habitat in the next 10 years, that vision is already moving from idea to impact.

With a \$10.9 million grant from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to restore oyster reefs, PPBEP staff and partners are working to restore the first 100 hectares anticipated to commence construction in 2027.



# Oyster Restoration in Practice

PPBEP and partners conduct **upstream sediment studies** to develop projects to protect new and existing oyster reefs.

The **Oyster Shell Recycling Program** puts discarded shell to good use, curing shell for use in future restoration projects.

Private docks host **Vertical Oyster Gardens**, empowering the community to take part in oyster restoration.

The **Oyster Restoration Initiative** will restore 1,500 acres of oyster habitat over the next 10 years.

An oyster restoration workshop at Bayview Community Center brought together over 50 stakeholders to co-develop designs and strategies for estuary scale restoration.

The ORI Project team used the data and feedback generated during the workshop to develop oyster reef “templates” which can be combined into a variety of restoration layouts to inform future restoration and simplify the permitting process.

Broadening our partner network, the Oyster Shell Recycling Program repurposes discarded shell from local restaurants for use in restoration. Vertical Oyster Gardens engage local homeowners in growing and monitoring oysters off their docks, bringing coastal restoration directly into people’s backyards. ■



# Living Shoreline Assistance Program

Restoring Habitats, Building Resilience

**Along the shores of Perdido Bay,** water is part of everyday life. For many residents, the shoreline is their backyard, their fishing spot, their gathering place, and their first line of defense against storms. Over the past year, the Living Shoreline Assistance Program (LSAP) focused on strengthening that connection, helping people care for their shorelines in ways that also restore habitat, improve water quality, and build long-term resilience for the community.

That work began by connecting with the people who live along the water. The LSAP team focused on creating a program that was clear, approachable, and grounded in local needs, offering homeowners straightforward information about living shorelines and how they can be used on private property. Through targeted outreach in priority areas, community presentations, open houses, and conversations at local events, residents were invited to learn more, ask questions, and explore whether living shorelines might be right for their property.

Those conversations soon moved to the shoreline. Throughout the spring and summer, LSAP staff met homeowners on their properties, walking the water's edge together to talk through erosion concerns, flooding risks, and habitat conditions. These site visits allowed the program to pair technical expertise with lived experience,



identifying practical, site-specific solutions while building trust and shared understanding.

With a clearer picture of shoreline needs across the watershed, LSAP began advancing projects with the greatest potential for lasting benefit. Select projects were chosen for direct implementation by PPBEP and OysterCorps based on environmental suitability and long-term impact, while additional landowners received cost-share assistance to help move their own shoreline restoration efforts forward. Each decision balanced protection of sensitive coastal habitats with support for residents who want to care for the places they call home.

As the year came to a close, the focus shifted to turning plans into action. LSAP staff worked closely with participating landowners to refine designs, navigate permitting requirements, and prepare projects for implementation in both Alabama and Florida. The program now enters the coming year with strong partnerships, engaged residents, and multiple projects ready to move from planning to on-the-ground restoration, bringing real, visible benefits to both the shorelines and the communities that depend on them. ■



PPBEP and OysterCorp staff with members of the Innerarity Island Preservation Foundation

## Community Outreach



**2,689 mailers**

sent to waterfront property owners in priority areas



**220 flyers**

distributed through local partners and community spaces



**4 open houses and webinars**

hosted across the watershed



**13+ community presentations,**

tabling events, and media engagements



**500+ individuals reached**

through in-person, virtual, and media outreach

## Project Implementation



**6 projects**

selected for Advanced Support (design, permitting, and installation)



**12 landowners**

conditionally approved for Basic Support (cost-share for plants and materials)



**100+ Oyster Reef Balls**

and 50 Permeable Oyster Shell Habitat (POSH) structures constructed for installation

## Landowner Engagement



**37 total applications**

received from waterfront property owners



**31 site assessments**

completed

# Building Resilient Watersheds

## A Regional Approach to Flood Risk and Adaptation

**PPBEP**, in coordination with Escambia County and Florida State University (FSU), is helping communities better understand flood risks and plan for a healthier, more resilient watershed. Together, we are laying the foundation for a Regional Watershed Adaptation Plan—a roadmap to protect ecosystem health while strengthening inland and coastal community resilience.

Flooding doesn't just damage property, it degrades water quality, increases pollution, and destroys fish and wildlife habitat. Addressing flood risk is critical to long-term resilience. Because flooding doesn't stop at jurisdictional lines, effective solutions must do the same. A key component of this effort is a shared, region-wide compound flood model, led by FSU. This model examines how rainfall, storm surge, tides, and wind interact across the Pensacola and Perdido Bay watersheds. By examining these factors together, we gain a

clearer picture of flood risk over traditional approaches. This shared understanding empowers local governments and partners to plan collaboratively and prioritize actions that benefit the entire watershed.

Over the past year, we've engaged key partners and stakeholders to gather data on community assets, fill data gaps, and establish a Steering Committee to guide the process. These efforts identified infrastructure, natural resources, and neighborhoods most vulnerable to compound flooding. Ongoing input continues to shape how flood risks are understood and future strategies are developed.

Early findings highlight priority areas where flooding, ecosystem health, and community needs overlap. These insights will guide the upcoming Adaptation Plan, focusing on practical, region-wide strategies that improve watershed health, reduce flood risk, and align with existing plans and investments. ■



### Santa Rosa County Land Development Code Task Force

In spring 2025, PPBEP joined the Santa Rosa County Land Development Code Task Force, charged by the Santa Rosa County Board of County Commissioners to recommend improvements to the Land Development Code related to erosion, sedimentation, clear cutting, and subdivisions. These areas significantly impact natural resources within the Pensacola Bay System. While PPBEP is a nonregulatory organization, we provide scientific support and recommendations to inform policy decisions. The Task Force proposed common sense solutions to close gaps in the Land Development Code. If adopted and enforced, these changes should reduce sedimentation impacts, a key factor in restoring the once thriving oyster fishery. ■

# Carpenter Creek Revival

## Restoring the Heart of Pensacola

**Carpenter Creek** meanders through the heart of Pensacola, out of sight for most of the city's residents. This small, sandy creek was once the lifeblood of Pensacola; a gathering place, a swimming hole, a spiritual haven. But years of urban development have forced the creek into the background, left to meander behind parking lots and busy shopping centers, squeezed under road crossings and through an ever-shrinking floodplain.

But that's about to change. The Carpenter Creek Restoration Project is a transformative project to improve water quality and restore vital wetland habitats along a key stretch between I-110 and 12th Avenue, as identified in Escambia County's Carpenter Creek and Bayou Texar Watershed Revitalization Plan.

Funded by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection RESTORE program and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, PPBEP is partnering with Moffat and Nichol, Black and Veatch, and Waggoner and Ball to develop a series of restoration projects to improve water quality, stabilize eroded creek sections, and restore wetland habitat.

But this project is about more than restoration—it's about reconnecting our community to the creek. The project team will explore ways to enhance public access and honor Carpenter Creek's cultural and historical legacy.



Community collaboration is key. With 140 unique landowners along the creek channel, project success depends on strong coordination with landowners, community members, and municipal and utility partners. Phase 1 includes data collection, feasibility studies, and development of key conceptual projects. Phase II advances projects from conceptual to final design, based on stream conditions and property owner permissions.

Together, we're not just restoring a creek—we're revitalizing a piece of Pensacola's natural and cultural heritage. ■

### Want to learn more?

Engagement with those who live, work, or play along the Creek is key for project success.

Scan the QR code to find the project page where you can view project information, sign up for key updates and find opportunities to get involved.



# Tracking the Bay's Vital Signs

## Monitoring Update



### C-STARS

#### Tracking the Benefits of Living Shorelines

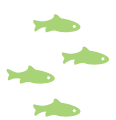
- The Collaborative Science to Assess Restoration Success (C-STARS) is a multi-year collaborative project to evaluate the success of living shorelines across Northwest Florida, in partnership with St. Andrew & St. Joseph Bays Estuary Program, St. Andrew Bay Watch, and Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance.
- This monitoring evaluates living shoreline performance by tracking shoreline change, vegetation cover and composition, oyster growth and density, fish communities, water quality, and reef height.
- These data help demonstrate the benefits and ecosystem services provided by nature-based solutions and encourage broader adoption of these practices.
- C-STARS continues to build one of the most comprehensive datasets in the region demonstrating the effectiveness of living shorelines—one project, one shoreline, and one community at a time.



### Larval and Spat Monitoring

#### Understanding Oyster Recovery Potential

- In 2025, PPBEP launched an oyster larval and spat monitoring program to better understand how oyster populations reproduce and disperse in the Pensacola Bay System. The team sampled 10 sites across Pensacola, Escambia, and East Bays, monthly from June through October.
- At each site, the team collected information on spat settlement, environmental conditions, and plankton communities at multiple depths.
- Preliminary results indicate that spat began settling in early fall and lower-bay sites supported higher concentrations of larval bivalves, suggesting that spawning activity may be strongest closer to the pass.
- These baseline data will feed into the design of the Pensacola Bay Oyster Restoration Initiative—helping determine ideal reef heights, optimal restoration locations, and how to maximize larval connectivity.



### Trawling for Answers

#### Tracking Changes in Seagrass Beds and Juvenile Fish Communities

- PPBEP conducted annual seagrass monitoring and juvenile fish trawling surveys in partnership with University of Southern Mississippi's Gulf Coast Research Lab and the Dauphin Island Sea Lab.
- These surveys allow staff to track status and trends of these communities over time; as both are indicators of overall ecosystem health.
- Over 100 stations were sampled as part of seagrass survey and fish trawls yielded 8,600 fish with 25 distinct species, including Emerald Parrotfish!



# Cultivating Coastal Stewards

## Education & Outreach Updates

### Panhandle Manatee Program

Manatees, once considered rare, are becoming regular visitors to our local waterways. Docile and slow moving, manatees are content to bask and snack in shallow waters. Their gentle ways, however, make them vulnerable to boat strikes and other vessel impacts.

The Panhandle Manatee Program was launched to help collect manatee sighting reports and educate boaters on how to spot and protect manatees while on the water. The Jessica Bibza Manatee Outreach Internship carries on Jessica's legacy and supports the Panhandle Manatee Program. ■



It always felt worth the effort when someone came off a boat, excited that they saw a manatee, and ready to go report the sighting. **I felt the work I put in, along with the dedicated volunteers, genuinely made a difference.**

— Kyna Finley, 2024 Manatee Outreach Intern



**2,691 people** engaged through in-person events and community festivals



**220,000+ people** reached through digital platforms



**48 volunteers** invested 242 hours in the community and environment, a \$7,701.53 value!

### Seagrass Sleuths

Sunny skies, big smiles, and the thrill of discovery. The Seagrass Sleuth Summer Program Series immerses families in our seagrass habitats. They learn how to pull a seine net through seagrass beds before transferring their catch to observation tanks to discover more about who resides in these underwater meadows. Families connect with each other and nature, forging the next generation of environmental stewards. ■



It's incredibly rewarding to watch a child go from hesitating at the edge of the seagrass to wading confidently in the water, searching for critters with wide-eyed curiosity. I'm grateful we can host our Summer Seagrass Sleuths events—they truly inspire a love for our estuaries and **foster a connection to the natural world that lasts long after the day ends.**

— Bailey Walkinshaw,  
Community Science Coordinator

### Kayak Tours and Restoration Rambles

Let's Ramble! Smoke drifting through the pines. Blue skies and cordgrass waving in the bay breeze. Sunlight shining on a sandy creek bank. These are just a small snapshot of the sights attendees are treated to when participating in one of our free guided nature programs.

Whether a leisurely stroll through the woods or a guided paddle on the bayou, these free, low barrier programs help connect residents to our local environment, fostering health and well-being, and increasing visibility of partner restoration efforts. ■



# Annual Awards



## 2025 Volunteer of the Year Diane Bolter

The Volunteer of the Year Award recognizes the outstanding service of an Estuary Program volunteer. Estuary Program volunteers help make our education and outreach programs possible and are central to implementing our mission. Diane Bolter serves as one of our dedicated Manatee Ambassadors, supporting the Panhandle Manatee Program, which educates the public about manatees, encourages sighting reports, and promotes seagrass-safe boating practices.

Diane has long been a consistent and enthusiastic presence. When PPBEP took the reins from National Wildlife Federation in 2024, Diane didn't miss a beat. She continued showing up, weekend after weekend, alongside our Manatee Outreach Intern at boat ramps, festivals, and watershed events, all under the blazing Florida sun.

But what makes Diane truly stand out is not just her dedication—it's her heart. She goes above and beyond to support new interns, connect with community members, and share her love of manatees with anyone willing to listen. Her warmth and authenticity make her a joy to work with, and she inspires those around her to care more deeply for the environment. Diane embodies what it means to be a steward—not only through her actions but through the genuine connections she fosters within our community. ■



## 2025 Jessica Bibza Partner of the Year Award Rick O'Connor

Jessica Bibza was akin to the Energizer Bunny, she just kept going. Jessica dedicated her life to environmental conservation, ranging from Gulf Coast restoration to manatee research and awareness campaigns to environmental policy. The Jessica Bibza Partner of the Year Award recognizes the outstanding dedication and passion of one individual that has had an immeasurable impact on our community by bringing people together to ensure a better tomorrow for all.

Rick O'Connor is someone who embodies the same Energizer Bunny spirit as Jessica. Whether it's bringing together community partners, leading citizen science initiatives, giving a presentation, getting people out in the field, or supporting a partner's work—Rick is there. His presence in the community is felt deeply because of his unwavering

dedication and passion for environmental stewardship. He's also the kind of person who brings others into the conversation and has advocated for the Estuary Program time and time again.



Rick has been involved with the Estuary Program since the very beginning, and we've had the privilege of working alongside him for many years. He leads a wide range of initiatives and is always lending his expertise—and his time—to others. Despite his tireless work and dependability, Rick never seeks recognition. And that's exactly why we're proud to recognize him. ■



## 2025 Project of the Year Award Lower Perdido Islands Restoration Project

The Project of the Year Award recognizes the completion of an outstanding project that stands out for their excellence in completing a conservation, restoration, and/or outreach project, fostering collaboration and community engagement, and building on or establishing new partnerships.

The Lower Perdido Islands Restoration project was a collaborative effort between the Nature Conservancy in Alabama, the City of Orange Beach, and Moffatt & Nichol, which addresses the long-term degradation of Robinson and Walker Islands caused by storm damage, boat wakes, and the Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

Though small in size, these islands contain significant biodiversity. They support nesting and foraging grounds for osprey, herons, pelicans, and migratory shorebirds, while nearby seagrass beds serve as nursery habitat for commercial and recreational fisheries. Thanks to funding from

NOAA and the support of many partners, 30 acres of critical habitat were successfully created and restored on Robinson and Walker Islands, while providing dedicated space for recreation and public access.

While the islands remain vulnerable to storms and beach traffic, the restoration has improved their resilience. The completed project means there is more room for wildlife to feel at home, and for people to visit this Gulf Coast jewel long into the future. ■



# Growing Connections, Growing Impact

## Community Grant Program Highlights

**Community collaboration** is at the heart of the Estuary Program. The PPBEP Community Grant Program funds action projects that serve to restore, preserve, connect, inform, and educate.

The 2025-2026 Cycle features a revamped Community Grant Program. A new voluntary Pre-Application process allows interested applicants to receive feedback from staff on proposed project ideas ahead of the full application period. The award period was expanded from 8 to 13 months and the application period now extends from March to July. We're excited to continue to grow our Community Grant Program and together, grow the impact made in our region. ■



The Community Grant Program is made possible through the support of the Florida Legislature. The Estuary Program offers their deepest appreciation to Senator Rodriguez and Representative Andrade for sponsoring the Program's legislative funding request.



### \$200,000 awarded

for six Community Grant projects that are working to:

- **Fill data gaps on fish communities** in rivers within the Pensacola and Perdido Bay watersheds and tidal creeks in Santa Rosa Sound
- **Expand efforts to study and conserve Diamondback Terrapins**, the only turtle species that spend their whole life in our estuaries
- **Create a native plant garden** that will serve as a living classroom, promoting awareness of the ecological importance of native plants while celebrating the region's cultural heritage
- **Provide hands-on marine science education** for local elementary school students
- **Quantify fish habitat benefits** from coastal restoration projects through underwater video surveys and communicate findings through an interactive website



## “Heritage Roots” Garden, University of West Florida Project Highlight

The “Heritage Roots: A Native Plant Garden Celebrating Cultural and Ecological Diversity” project at the University of West Florida Archaeology Institute aims to create an enriching educational space that showcases native plants of the Pensacola and Perdido Bays watersheds and highlights their cultural significance. At a quarter-acre in size, this ethnobotanical garden features native flora used by the many cultures that have called Northwest Florida home, with interpretive signage in both English and the Mvskoke language. The educational signage offers insights into the historical significance and contemporary relevance of the garden’s flora, highlighting how the local watershed supports critical ecosystem services. By integrating natural and cultural history, the “Heritage Roots” garden will foster community engagement, support environmental education, and serve as a contemplative space for all visitors to UWF. ■



When we first envisioned the UWF Heritage Roots garden, our goal was to create an outdoor educational extension of the Archaeology Institute museum. Through our partnership with tribal partners, community organizations, local businesses, and students, the project grew into something far more meaningful: **a vibrant space for learning, reflection, and connection that links the cultural traditions of Northwest Florida with the ecological resilience of native plants.** We are especially grateful to the Pensacola and Perdido Bays Estuary Program for their support at every step of the project’s implementation. Broad collaboration made this space possible and I am proud of what this project represents for our campus and our community!”

– Nicole Grinnan, UWF Archaeology Institute



The Heritage Roots Garden was a truly collaborative project that highlights the **cultural significance of native plants in our community, and the important roles they play in our watershed.** The partners involved brought many different areas of expertise and were passionate about seeing the project through from start to finish. It’s an incredible addition to the campus and the community, and I couldn’t be more proud to have played a role in it.”

– Mike Thomin,  
Florida Public Archaeology Network



Visit the garden,  
located outside of the UWF  
Archaeology Institute Museum



# Financials

Fiscal Year 2024–2025

## Revenue

Item	Amount	
Government Grants and Contracts	\$1,716,000	
Membership	\$339,000	
Donations	\$56,806	
In-Kind Donations	\$42,000	
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$2,153,806</b>	

### Annual Contributions

City of Gulf Breeze	\$10,000
City of Milton	\$15,000
City of Orange Beach	\$20,000
City of Pensacola	\$30,000
Escambia County	\$126,350
Okaloosa County	\$5,000
Santa Rosa County	\$86,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$292,350</b>

Local government contributions serve as match for implementing PPBEP’s mission, allowing our team to leverage state, federal, and private sources. Suggested contribution rates from our interlocal government partners are based on population size.

## Expenditures

Item	Amount	
Programmatic	\$1,716,000	
Administrative	\$460,400	
Fundraising	\$12,000	
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$2,188,400</b>	

Program staff includes dedicated **scientists, educators,** and **project managers** that implement critical CCMP goals.

## Business Sponsors

### Guardians of the Gulf – \$10,000

Great Southern Restaurant Group  
International Paper

### River Giver – \$2,500

Moffat & Nichol  
Arrow Group

### Creek Keeper – \$1,000

WSP  
Friends of Perdido Bay  
Stantec  
Baskerville-Donovan  
WRA  
Dr. Noah Barnes

## Individual Sponsors

### Pelican Level – \$1,200

Toshiya Miyatsu  
Holly Benson

### Redfish Level – \$240

Amy Nitti  
Chery Fitch  
Kathleen Rothwell

### Oyster Level – \$120

Dawn Hester  
Emily Veal  
Nancy Smith  
James Brinson  
James Safko

### Seagrass Level

Ann Robinson  
Chris Verlinde  
Jaimee Vandenboogaard  
Janice Orourke  
Matthew Kalishman  
Scott Westmark  
Stanley Radominski  
Suzanne Blankenship  
Madelle Lenzen  
Andrea Skatrud  
Cathy Furtado  
Cindy Freyman  
Gayle Shoultz  
Joann Safko  
Robin Anderson



**\$13,275,000**

in grant awards received



**\$3,348,000**

dedicated to partner  
Project Support

# 2026 Outlook

## 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Evening for the Estuaries Gala

Our 4th Annual Evening for the Estuaries Gala is coming to the Pensacola Yacht Club! Join us on Friday, **October 16<sup>th</sup>, 2026** for an evening of live music, hors d'oeuvres, drinks and, new this year—a live auction. Proceeds support public education programs, restoration initiatives, and monitoring efforts that help protect the waters we call home. ■



## Water Quality Monitoring Collaborative

The Water Quality Monitoring Collaborative will bring together regional partners to build a consistent and comparable monitoring network across the Pensacola and Perdido Bay watersheds. The collaborative will support partners in making monitoring data more accessible to the public, enhancing transparency, and strengthening community trust in local water quality reporting. ■

## Microbial Source Tracking: Walk the Watershed

Walk the Watershed events in Escambia and Santa Rosa counties will bring together scientists, agency staff, and other partners to ground-truth existing microbial source tracking (MST) data and identify the most effective sampling locations based on local expertise. These events will help pinpoint likely sources of contamination and guide future restoration and infrastructure decisions. ■

## Regional Watershed Adaptation Plan

Staff will be completing the regional vulnerability assessment, which will feed into development of the Regional Watershed Adaptation Plan. Continued mapping will highlight where flooding most affects communities, infrastructure, and watershed health, while a series of community workshops will share results and communicate flood risks in clear, accessible ways to reduce flood risk, protect natural habitats, and improve regional resilience. ■



Photo: Darryl Boudreau, NFWFMD

## Oyster Restoration Initiative Design and Permitting

In early 2026, PPBEP and Jacobs will be working closely with the Special Project Action Team (SPAT), the Oyster Subcommittee, local watermen and women, and other stakeholders to advance design templates and layouts in priority locations in a collaborative and science-driven process. Several small-scale, community-based, near-shore oyster reef projects will be installed to raise awareness for the Oyster Restoration Initiative. ■

## Pensacola Bay Living Shoreline Assistance Program (LSAP)

The Living Shoreline Assistance Program will be opening applications within the Pensacola Bay Watershed with a series of spring open house events and project design and permitting review. Perdido Bay projects are expected to begin installation and implementation, following final design and permitting. ■

## Carpenter Creek Design

The project team will continue to pursue access agreements to conduct creek reconnaissance and assessments on six segments along Carpenter Creek from I-110 to 12th Avenue. Data Collection and community engagement efforts will directly inform the development and advancement of conceptual restoration designs throughout 2026. ■

## Pensacola Bay Oyster REEF Curriculum Coming to Local High School Classrooms

High school students across the watershed will dive in with the Pensacola Bay Oyster REEF curriculum in Spring 2026. This hands-on curriculum empowers students to explore complex environmental issues through the lens of Pensacola Bay Oysters, thanks to funding provided by NOAA's Bay Watershed Education and Training Grant Program (BWET). ■

## Eyes on Seagrass

Formerly operated through Florida Sea Grant and UWF, Eyes on Seagrass is a citizen science initiative that invites community members to help monitor seagrass beds in Santa Rosa Sound and Big Lagoon State Park from March through September. PPBEP will lead Eyes on Seagrass while expanding new citizen science opportunities that encourage hands-on learning, deeper connection to local waters, and long-term stewardship. ■



**PENSACOLA  
& PERDIDO BAYS  
ESTUARY PROGRAM**

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**SAVE  
OUR BAYS**