



Policy Board Meeting Minutes

February 8, 2023, at 1:30 p.m. CT

Escambia County Commission Chambers

221 Palafox Place, Pensacola, FL 32502

[Meeting Recording](#)

Members Present

Woody Speed, Chair	City of Orange Beach
Colten Wright, Vice Chair	Santa Rosa County
Robert Bender	Escambia County
Ashley Campbell	Baldwin County
Mike Kohler	Escambia County
Cherry Fitch	City of Gulf Breeze
Kerry Smith	Santa Rosa County
Jared Moore	City of Pensacola
Vernon Compton	City of Milton
Benjamin Boutwell, ph	Town of Century

Members Absent

Mike Norberg	Okaloosa County
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Interested Parties Present

Matt Posner	PPBEP
Whitney Scheffel	PPBEP
Logan McDonald	PPBEP
Haley Gancel	PPBEP
Madi Ross	PPBEP
Molly McDaniel	PPBEP
Tucker Reynolds	PPBEP
Barbara Albrecht	BFA, UWF
Brian Underwood	CBEP
Charles Bare	City of Pensacola
Chips Kirschenfeld	Escambia County
Chris Verlinde	UF IFAS Santa Rosa County
Christine Angelini	UF CCS
Collin Ortals	UF CCS
Diane Reese	EPA
Elizabeth Major	LWV
Jeanette Kelson	Wood
Jerry Couey	Santa Rosa County Watershed Protection
Julie Espy	SAS
Kevin Coyne	Black & Veatch



Kristin Bennett	TetraTech Inc.
Lisbeth Childs	Atkins Global
Matt Dietch	UF
Naisy Dolar	Santa Rosa County
Paul Looney	WRA
Shelley Alexander	Santa Rosa County
Stephanie Gudeman	SAS
Tanya Linzy	Santa Rosa County
Taurai Gweshe	ECUA
Tricia Kyzar	UF

1. Call to Order

2. Roll Call

Matt Posner (Director, PPBEP) called the roll. A quorum was present.

3. Approval of Board Agenda

Mayor Cherry Fitch (City of Gulf Breeze) made a motion to approve the agenda. Woody Speed (City of Orange Beach) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

4. Approval of December 14, 2022, Policy Board Minutes

Commissioner Colten Wright (Santa Rosa County) made a motion to approve the December 14, 2022, Policy Board minutes. Mayor Cherry Fitch (City of Gulf Breeze) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

5. Action Items

a. Approval of Legal Counsel Services

Woody Speed (City of Orange Beach) made a motion to approve the Legal Services Agreement with Beggs & Lane. Mayor Cherry Fitch (City of Gulf Breeze) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

b. Approval of the PPBEP Special District Charter

Discussion was held on the PPBEP organizational transition and forming an Independent Special District. The Board recommended amending the voting requirement of a unanimous vote to a super-majority vote of seven members. Ashley Campbell (Baldwin County) requested clarification on in-person vs. virtual voting requirements. Policy Board members are required to be present in-person to vote per Florida statute. The Florida legislature is working on an amendment to allow for virtual voting in public meetings that must adhere to Florida Sunshine Law.

The Board directed staff to work with PPBEP's legal counsel and the Governing Parties' attorneys to review and revise the Special District Charter and bring the final Charter before the Board for approval at the next Board meeting.



c. **Approval of Resolution 23-01 Requesting Designation of PPBEP as a National Estuary Program**

Mayor Cherry Fitch (City of Gulf Breeze) made a motion to approve Resolution 23-01 for the designation request of PPBEP as a National Estuary Program. Commissioner Colten Wright (Santa Rosa County) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

d. **Election of 2023 Policy Board Chair and Vice Chair**

Commissioner Colten Wright (Santa Rosa County) made a motion to elect Woody Speed (City of Orange Beach) as Policy Board Chair. Commissioner Mike Kohler (Escambia County) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Commissioner Robert Bender (Escambia County) made a motion to elect Commissioner Colten Wright (Santa Rosa County) as Policy Board Vice-Chair. Woody Speed (City of Orange Beach) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

e. **Approval of the 2023 PPBEP Policy Board Meeting Schedule**

Mayor Cherry Fitch (City of Gulf Breeze) made a motion to approve the 2023 Policy Board Meeting schedule. Jared Moore (City of Pensacola) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

f. **Approval of PPBEP 2023-2027 Finance Strategy**

Commissioner Colten Wright (Santa Rosa County) made a motion to approve the PPBEP 2023-2027 Finance Strategy. Mayor Cherry Fitch (City of Gulf Breeze) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

6. **Guest Presentation:**

Northwest Florida Water Quality Improvement Project (*Christine Angelini, UF CCS*)

University of Florida Center for Coastal Solutions (UF CCS) provided an overview of a project funded by the Florida Legislature that aims to assess water quality and economic trends to inform future infrastructure improvement projects. The project's main objective is to create a comprehensive infrastructure improvement strategy, with an actionable, integrated funding roadmap to improve water quality in Northwest Florida. This includes a data-driven and stakeholder-informed prioritization of gray and green infrastructure solutions and a collaboratively (multi-state, multi-county) developed strategy to secure funding for high priority solutions.

Discussion was held on the anticipated timeline for when project outputs, like the septic to sewer conversion recommendations, will be accessible to local stakeholders and decision-makers. Policy Board members provided comments on the importance of building on projects that are already underway across the watersheds.

7. **Staff Updates**

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



i. Temporary Staff Addition

Grover Robinson has temporarily joined PPBEP to assist with the organizational transition into an independent entity. Grover will be onboard through June 2023 and will serve as the liaison to current host agency, Escambia County. Grover's employment is funded through Escambia County, with the support of the City of Pensacola.

ii. Estuary of National Significance

On January 26th, Senator Rubio released his Pro-Florida Agenda for the 118th Congress, which included the reintroduction of the Pensacola and Perdido Bays Estuary of National Significance Act. First introduced in June 2021, the legislation would direct the Environmental Protection Agency to formally enroll the Pensacola and Perdido Bays Estuary Program into the National Estuary Program as an "Estuary of National Significance".

iii. USEPA RESTORE Grant Extension

The Program received an extension of the EPA RESTORE Grant until April 2023 to allow for the remaining funds to be spent.

iv. 2023-2024 Florida State Appropriations

PPBEP has submitted a \$750,000 request for funds to Representative Andrade's office for the 2023-2024 Florida State Appropriation cycle. State Appropriations help fund the Program's Community Grant Program and will be designated for use in the implementation of the Oyster Fisheries and Habitat Management Plan for the Pensacola Bay System, and operational support.

v. Finance Sub-Committee Update

Mayor Cherry Fitch (City of Gulf Breeze) and Commissioner Colten Wright (Santa Rosa County) will join the Finance Sub-Committee. The 2023 Finance Sub-Committee meeting schedule will be drafted and sent to the members in the next month.

vi. Local Government Contributions

Commitments to local government contributions have been received from Escambia County, Santa Rosa County, the City of Pensacola, and the City of Orange Beach for this fiscal year. Staff are working with the remaining local government parties to secure contributions.

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

i. Project Updates

1. Assessing Restoration Success across Panhandle Estuaries



St. Andrew & St. Joseph Bays Estuary Program (SASJBEP) was awarded a \$1.2 million Florida RESTORE Act Centers of Excellence Program (FLRACEP) Grant to evaluate the effectiveness of multiple living shoreline restoration projects across three Florida panhandle estuaries, including the Pensacola Bay System. This project will quantify ecosystem services (e.g., shoreline protection, nutrient cycling, habitat creation) and assist in setting meaningful restoration targets. SASJBEP is partnering with PPBEP, Choctawhatchee Bay Estuary Program (CBEP), Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance (CBA), St. Andrew Bay Resource Management Association (SABRMA), and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) to complete this project.

2. Santa Rosa County Septic to Sewer Conversion Program

Santa Rosa County requested \$22.5 million over four years from the Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) Program to complete several priority Septic to Sewer conversion projects. This multi-jurisdictional collaborative project would support the design, engineering, and construction of 23 prioritized locations for sewer expansion, septic abatement and conversion, in addition to the development of a Master Plan for an additional 6,000 conversions in the East Milton area. The project will include water quality monitoring and data collection conducted in collaboration with PPBEP. Santa Rosa County will complete this project with the Town of Jay, the City of Milton, and utility services from Gulf Breeze, Holley Navarre, and Pace.

3. Microbial Source Tracking

PPBEP requested \$8.8 million over five years from the Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) Program for a Microbial Source Tracking Project that will address bacterial pollution issues throughout Escambia and Santa Rosa Counties. This project will use a two-phased approach for identifying and addressing bacterial impairments using DEP's Fecal Indicator Toolkit in nine sub-watersheds that show impaired or reoccurring bacterial issues. PPBEP will partner with Escambia County, Santa Rosa County, ECUA, and the City of Pensacola to complete this project.

4. Pensacola Bay Oyster Restoration Initiative

PPBEP requested \$11 million over four years from NOAA's Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) funding opportunity for the Pensacola Bay Oyster Restoration Initiative Project, which ultimately aims to restore up to 600 hectares of oyster habitat in the Pensacola Bay System over the next 10 years. This project will use a four-phased approach, which includes oyster restoration design and permitting, implementation (up to 100 ha), sediment load assessment, Sandy Hollow Gully restoration



design and permitting, and implementation of a Living Shoreline Coast Share Program. PPBEP will partner with The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Santa Rosa County, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), and local stakeholder groups to complete this project.

5. Perdido Watershed Initiative

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) requested \$12.8 million over five years from NOAA's Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) funding opportunity for the Perdido Watershed Initiative Project. This project includes an update to the existing Living Shoreline Suitability Model (LSSM), education and outreach campaign(s), implementation of a Living Shoreline Cost Share Program, and planning and/or implementation of restoration projects at the Orange Beach Waterfront Park, the lower Perdido Islands, Lilian Swamp, and Bronson Field. TNC will partner with PPBEP, City of Orange Beach, Troy University, University of South Alabama (USA), Mississippi State University (MSU), Dauphin Island Sea Lab (DISL), Alabama Department of Coastal Natural Resources (ADCNR), and Moffatt & Nichol to complete this project.

ii. State of the Bays

PPBEP staff is working on the first State of the Bays report and will launch the digital platform in late spring 2023. The report will provide an overview of how conditions have changed over time, the current condition of the bays, and the efforts that are underway to improve the condition of the bays. The four main indicator groups are water quality (dissolved oxygen, chlorophyll-a, total nitrogen, total phosphorus, turbidity), habitat (oysters, seagrass, wetlands, longleaf pine forests), bacteria (beach advisories, sanitary sewer overflows), and wildlife (manatee sightings). The scale for ecosystem health is categorized as improving, stable, declining, critical, and undetermined. Additional indicators and metrics will be added in future iterations of the State of the Bays Report.

c. Outreach Update (*Logan McDonald, Community Outreach Coordinator*)

i. B-WET Pensacola Oyster Discovery

B-WET is a professional development opportunity for teachers funded by the NOAA's Bay Watershed and Education Training (B-WET) program. The purpose is to support locally relevant, authentic experiential learning through Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences (MWEEs), which include learning in the outdoors and in the classroom to increase understanding and stewardship of watersheds and related ecosystems. In the workshop, teachers will explore the cultural, economic, and environmental importance of Pensacola Bay System oysters as a fishery industry and as habitat and use of



recent investments in research, restoration, and aquaculture to serve as local case studies for student-led inquiries into complex watershed issues to increase stewardship of the bay. High school teachers within the Pensacola and Perdido Bays watersheds are encouraged to apply.

Applications are due March 19, 2023.

ii. Oyster Documentary

The Humble Oyster documentary that explores the past, current, and future conditions of oysters in the Pensacola Bay System was completed. A premiere and panel discussion event will be held with WSRE.

SAVE THE DATE:

May 18, 2023

Time, TBD

Jean & Paul Amos Performance Studio

Kugelman Center for Telecommunications

1000 College Blvd. Pensacola, FL 32504

iii. Estuary 101 Campaign

Staff continues to work with Impact Campaigns and Hatchmark Studios to finalize the Estuary 101 Campaign. The campaign includes information on estuarine habitats and wildlife, how businesses, organizations, and individuals can advocate for the estuaries, and locations for community members to explore. The Estuary 101 Campaign will launch on March 1, 2023.

iv. Community Grant Program Updates (*Madi Ross, Community Outreach Assistant*)

1. Escambia County Coastal Landscaping Workshop and Native Plant Giveaway

Starting in March, the Escambia County Community Grant will host Coastal Landscaping Workshops in Pensacola and Perdido to educate homeowners on best practices of coastal landscaping.

[Escambia County News Article: Escambia County to Host Coastal Landscaping Workshops, Plant Giveaways](#)

SAVE THE DATE:

Perdido Key Coastal Landscaping Workshops



- [February 28, 2023, at 6:00 PM](#)
- [March 3, 2023, at 11:30 AM](#)

Perdido Key Community Center
1500 Perdido Key Dr. Pensacola, FL 2507

Pensacola Beach Coastal Landscaping Workshops

- [March 7, 2023, at 6:00 PM](#)
- [March 10, 2023, at 1:00 PM](#)

Gulf Breeze Community Center
800 Shoreline Dr. Gulf Breeze, FL 32561

2. UWF Zooplankton Ecology and Water Quality Monitoring of Perdido Bay

Researchers led by Dr. Amanda Croteau from the UWF Center for Environmental Diagnostics and Bioremediation have been collecting monthly water quality and zooplankton bioindicator data across Perdido Bay. The research team is monitoring 20 sites, including Tee Lake, Elevenmile Creek, and Soldier Creek.

3. UWF Streambank Erosion Monitoring of the Pensacola Bay and Perdido Bay Watersheds

UWF Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences researchers in Dr. Lieben's lab have been collecting data across the watersheds to evaluate streambank erosion. This information is crucial for the management of sediment issues in watersheds, including restoration efforts, because bank erosion has been shown to be a major source of sediment in many fluvial systems. This data will provide insight into erosion's severity to inform future stream and restoration projects' management. Researchers have completed 10 out of 20 streambank surveys at sites across the watersheds, including Perdido River, Blackwater River, Hollinger Creek, McCurtin Creek, Joe's Creek, Cowpen Creek, Brushy Creek, and Bellefontaine Creek.

4. Blackwater Soil and Water Conservation District No-Till Seed Drill Rental Program

In January 2023, the Blackwater Soil and Conservation District acquired the No-Till Seed Drill for their Rental Program. Their team is currently drafting the rental agreement to initiate the program. This project will be renting out the drill to local farmers as a low-cost rental to aid in cover-crop plantings to lower sedimentation inputs from unplanted fields during the off-season. A release ceremony will be announced soon.



v. Trash Free Waters Lesson Update (*Madi Ross, Community Outreach Assistant*)

The updated Trash Free Waters curriculum has been presented to three schools in Escambia and Santa Rosa Counties. Approximately 400 students have been engaged, including the implementation of the Clean Campus High School Case Study at Gulf Breeze High School. Three more schools have signed up for future Trash Free Waters classroom presentations with the inclusion of another Clean Campus High School Case Study at West Florida High School.

vi. Outreach Events (*Madi Ross, Community Outreach Assistant*)

Staff participated in the Pea Ridge Elementary Science Night with an Observation Tank of local critters from Escambia Bay. Approximately 75 children and parents were engaged.

vii. Volunteer Events

1. Mardi Gras Bead Tree Cleanup (*Madi Ross, Community Outreach Assistant*)

PPBEP will be hosting the 2nd Annual Mardi Gras Bead Tree Cleanup of Palafox and Garden Streets to recover leftover beads from the Downtown Mardi Gras Parade and reduce the number of beads that will enter the waterways.

SAVE THE DATE:

February 19, 2023

9:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Ferdinand IV Plaza

Palafox St. Pensacola, FL 32502

2. Volunteer Training Days

Staff is hosting volunteer trainings in March to train dedicated community members to serve as Bay Ambassadors and Critter Collectors. Bay Ambassadors will assist staff at festivals, events, and provide community presentations. Ambassadors will receive training on PPBEP's mission and work, the State of our Bays, and communication.

SAVE THE DATE:

Bay Ambassador Trainings

[March 4, 2023, from 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM](#)

[March 9, 2023, from 6:00 PM – 8:00 PM](#)

PPBEP Office, Seville Towers, Floor 5

226 S. Palafox St. Pensacola, FL 32502

Critter Catchers will receive training in seine-net procedures, critter



identification, general observation tank activity set-up, and communication skills to help staff with festivals, events, and classroom presentations across the watershed.

SAVE THE DATE:

Critter Catchers Training

[March 11, 2023](#)

[March 18, 2023](#)

9:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Shoreline Park Pavilion

Shoreline Dr. Gulf Breeze, FL 32561

viii. Resilience Survey Update (*Molly McDaniel, Resilience Intern*)

The Resiliency Survey period closed on December 31, 2022. This survey is Phase 1 of the NOAA Climate and Resilience Community of Practice Grant. Phase 2 is the implementation of a Pilot Project within the City of Pensacola to enhance community resiliency. Staff is in the process of analyzing survey results.

8. Committee Updates

a. Technical Committee

i. Oyster Subcommittee (*Whitney Scheffel, Senior Scientist*)

On January 31, 2023, over 60 stakeholders including community members, oyster farmers, academics, local utilities, and state representatives joined staff to discuss ways to improve water quality in the Pensacola Bay System to bring back the once thriving oyster industry. The goals of the meeting were to:

(1) share the latest information on the status of current and future projects addressing wastewater infrastructure, bacterial pollution, and monitoring

(2) develop a list of next steps for addressing concerns and root causes of water quality issues.

Partners from the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS), Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), Emerald Coast Utilities Authority (ECUA), Pace City Water, Inc., City of Milton, Florida Department of Health (FDOH), and PPBEP provided updates on current and future projects and programs addressing issues across the watershed. Discussion was focused on identifying potential solutions across several categories including stormwater management, septic maintenance and sewer conversions, code enforcement, land development code revisions, and bacterial source tracking. Participants provided feedback on their top priority short and long-term actions for resolving these issues. PPBEP staff will be synthesizing the feedback from the meeting to incorporate into collaborative solutions projects with partners.



b. **Education and Outreach Committee** (*Logan McDonald, Community Outreach Coordinator*)

Nominations for Chair and Co-Chair will be held at the upcoming February 16, 2023, Education & Outreach Committee Meeting. The Committee will review the Estuary 101 Campaign website and the State of the Bays Report Card to provide insight into the functionality and understanding of key concepts delivered on each platform.

c. **Environmental Justice Committee**

The Environmental Justice Committee (EJC) 2023 Meeting Schedule has been finalized. The next EJC Meeting will be held virtually on March 14, 2023, at 6:00 PM.

9. Policy Board/Agency Updates

Commissioner Colten Wright (Santa Rosa County) provided an update on the submission for Conservation and Agricultural easements in rural Santa Rosa County for protection and guidance on development practices. Santa Rosa County will be increasing capacity with new staff to aid in code enforcement and site inspections to prevent sediment loading into local waterways. Contracted services are being pursued to address sediment loading issues in Santa Rosa County, Allentown area.

10. Public Comment

Jerry Couey (Santa Rosa Watershed Protection) commented on the need to increase enforcement and fines of illegal discharges into the watersheds.

11. Meeting Adjourned