

PPBEP COMMUNITY GRANT FINAL REPORT FORM

Agreement No.:	2202-07		
Grantee Name:	Escambia County Natural Resources Management Dept		
Grantee Address:	221 Palafox Pl, Pensacola FL 32507		
Grantee's Representative:	Samantha Bolduc	Telephone No.:	850-595-3460
Project Title:	Perdido Key Coastal Demonstration Garden		
Please submit any high-resolution photos related to the project, if available (include photo credit for possible use by PPBEP for use in our e-newsletter, annual report, social media, or website) with your report as image files to lmcdonald@ppbep.org .			

RESULTS: Describe the progress made toward the goals and objectives as stated in the funded grant application.

The Perdido Key Coastal Demonstration Garden was successfully completed in Spring of 2022. A final garden design and Perdido Key Coastal landscaping brochure are attached as deliverables with this report. A webpage for the garden is hosted as part of the Escambia County website and can be seen [here](#). Additional garden projects and updates will be posted here and on the Natural Resources Management Facebook page.

40 volunteers assisted project staff in January 2022 to remove dead and dying vegetation and prune remaining landscaping areas to improve the aesthetic of the main Visitor center entrance. Approximately 200 lbs of vegetative debris was removed by staff and volunteers, later mulched by Escambia County Road Department. In February/March 2022, County Parks and Recreation and Road departments assisted staff in removing twelve non-native palm trees and sod from the garden area and replacing substrate with approved barrier island sand.

25 volunteers joined staff on Earth Day weekend in April 2022 to install over 300 native plants in the garden. Approximately ten volunteers continued to assist with watering and maintenance activities through May and June, including installation of garden signage, additional sand placement and general maintenance.

The Garden held its grand opening at the Perdido Key Area Chamber of Commerce's World Ocean Day event in June 2022 and hosted tours of the garden for over 50 visitors. The garden was also featured as UF-IFAS Extension's [May Science Hour](#) topic, streamed live on Facebook.

The plants are thriving, and many have already begun to produce flowers and seed heads. Project staff plans to coordinate future garden workdays in the fall and winter months to ensure plants survive their first winter and maintain volunteer interest in the garden.

IMPACT: Summarize the organization’s key evaluation results related to the funded grant (number of people reached, samples taken, etc.):

- 1500 square feet of landscaped area was pruned and replaced with native species and substrates to improve wildlife habitat, reduce non-native species cover and improve efficiency of regular maintenance. 90% of plants installed were successfully established.
- The project recruited 40 volunteers to assist in site preparation, non-native removal and installation of native species. Volunteers were a mix of Perdido Key homeowners, interested community members from other neighborhoods and local Scout troops. A smaller number of these volunteers remain “regulars” who assist with garden maintenance, such as watering and weeding.
- Landscaping brochures are available in print and digital copies, free of charge. To date, 100 copies have been distributed to residents, visitor centers and relator offices, with additional copies in reserve.

SUCSESSES AND CHALLENGES: Describe the significant successes and challenges the organization experienced related to the funded grant.

Challenges were few, and successes were many. In just the short time plants have been installed, numerous visitors and guest have expressed an interest in the species used and where they can purchase them for their own homes. Project staff have been able to direct perspective owners and those currently constructing homes under a Beach Mouse permits to the garden to provide tangible examples of approved landscaping. The garden also serves to educate people about the Perdido Key Beach Mouse and importance of preserving our coastal habitats, with passive education provided by educational signage throughout the garden.

Volunteer engagement remains high; with several regular volunteers assisting in watering and weeding activities. Their efforts have been invaluable in ensuring plants were successfully established and continue to thrive through the first heat waves of the summer.

One persistent challenge remains the availability of species used. Coastal species, and particularly those native to the Florida panhandle, can be difficult to find commercially. They are often grown by select contractors for specific projects and sold in bulk quantities. This presents a barrier to the average homeowner, who must work through a middleman to obtain plants, often at a much higher cost.

Project staff was able to source select species from local nurseries, but core species (sea oats, beach elder, etc) remain special order items from nurseries in central and south Florida. As the garden matures, regular thinning/seed collection may provide starter plants for interested homeowners, but this will not adequately meet the need for a local coastal nursery in our region. This is an overarching programmatic issue that will not be solved by as single entity, but staff is committed to working with local partners to address this issue.

LESSONS LEARNED: Describe what the organization learned based upon the results, successes, and challenges reported. Address programmatic, evaluative, or organizational changes that will be made based upon these lessons learned.

Conversations with homeowners indicated there is a lack of technical knowledge and assistance available to homeowners who wish to improve/enhance natural dune features on their gulf-frontal lots, which in addition to requiring additional permitting, deviates from standard landscaping practices. This need could be filled with an expansion of the landscaping guide to provide additional assistance with permitting and project design for single-parcel dune restoration/enhancement.

Since the garden's installation, several residents have expressed an interest in using the space for outdoor wellness classes and other community events. As staff continues to work towards a fully realized Preservation Park, this provides valuable insight into the type of amenities/services residents wish to see. There is a noticeable lack of free, public amenity space on Perdido Key, both for beach access and other forms of outdoor recreation. Though limited in scope, Preservation Park may provide such a space; allowing residents and visitors to gather and enjoy the landscape around them.

This also informs staff as to what amenities residents and visitors might wish to see as part of the future County education center, which will replace the current Community Center. This is a long term goal of the Perdido Key Habitat Conservation Plan and supports the County's mission to educate visitors and residents about the importance of protecting our natural coastal habitats and the benefits they provide to our communities.

This report is submitted in accordance with the reporting requirements of Agreement No. 2022-07 and accurately reflects the activities associated with the project.

Samantha Bolduc

Signature of Grantee's Representative

6/15/2022

Date

Samantha Bolduc, Community Outreach Specialist

Print Name and Title