

The Partnership for a Resilient Apalachicola Bay
Meeting #3
Franklin's Promise Coalition
May 29, 2024
12:00 – 3:30 pm
Minutes

Facilitator: Betty Webb

Voting Members Present: Chad Hanson, Cameron Baxley, Ken Jones (Treasurer), Shannon Hartsfield, Roger Mathis, Anita Grove, Grayson Shepard, Ottice Amison (*President*), David Barber (*Vice President*), Bruce Millender, Donnie Segree, Erik Lovestrand, Steve Rash

Advisory Members Present: Jenna Harper, Joel Trexler, Portia Sapp, Dr. Andy Kane (University of Florida)

Others Present: Maddie Mahood, Gina Alvarez (FWC), Betsy Mansfield (Post-doc at FSU)

Voting Members Absent: Rickey Banks (*Secretary*), Jim Estes, Gayle Johnson

Advisory Members Absent: Sandra Brooke, Devin Resko

- 1) Networking Lunch – 12:00 – 12:45
- 2) Call Meeting to Order – called to order by Ottice Amison, President (12:49 pm)
- 3) Stakeholder Introductions – Meeting Participants and Agency Representatives
 - ** Name the main priority of why you are here today
 - a. Joel Trexler – Listen and Learn
 - b. Betty Webb - Start the networking/relationship building between stakeholders and get the Bay back open for Jan 1, 2026
 - c. Chad Hanson – Ensure a Resilient Bay
 - d. Ottice Amison – Work the best we can to get a viable Bay back
 - e. Grayson Shepard – Learn, help dispel rumors
 - f. Gina Alvarez – FWC to have in-person presence in discussions
 - g. Steve Rash – Help restore oyster reefs in Apalachicola Bay
 - h. Erik Lovestrand – Progress in the bay
 - i. Jenna Harper – Support different efforts in the Bay (outreach, research, restoration, etc.)
 - j. Cameron Baxley – Follow Through on Plan created for Restoration and Management of the Bay
 - k. Donnie Segree – Here to learn, get oystermen back in the Bay
 - l. David Barber – Here to learn, help out any way possible
 - m. Bruce Millender – Get Apalachicola Bay back in production
 - n. Roger Mathis – Get the Bay back
 - o. Andy Kane – Understand oyster health and oyster habitat health

- p. Ken Jones – Continue communication and relationship building between the Bay and its stakeholders
 - q. Anita Grove – Bay restoration and developing a Plan to keep it restored (once it is back, we need to make sure it stays back)
 - r. Portia Sapp – Support oyster aquaculture
 - s. Shannon Hartsfield – Want commercial oyster harvest back in the Bay
 - t. Betsy Mansfield – Here to observe, help restore cultural heritage
 - u. Maddie Mahood – Want to watch the community come together as one and restore the Bay’s ecosystem
- 4) Review Agenda and Opening Remarks (Betty Webb)
- 5) Bay Restoration Updates/Q&A – Gina Alvarez, FWC
- a. Restoration Pilot Study
 - i. 61% Finished
 - ii. 1 Acre Site –
 - iii. East Hole – ~31 acres at half a foot relief (drone deployed seed site)
 - iv. Scheduled for between June 4 - 14
 - v. Cat Point - ~30 acres at half a foot relief
 - vi. 24 acres of individual placement with two different reef heights
 - vii. 17/24 sites completed
 - b. See Appendix I “Comments on FWC Report”
- 6) Summary of ABSI/CAB Goals Process and Goal A – Dr. Sandra Brooke (presented by Dr. Joel Trexler)
- a. KJ - What do you want the outcome of this conversation to be?
 - i. Betty – Phase 1 – Familiarize and Comment on Goals (adjustments if needed)
 - ii. Phase 2 (starting October 1) - Decide on how to implement all this
- 7) Review and Evaluate ABSI Goal A
- a. See “Comments on ABSI Goal A” Appendix II
- 8) Organization Business
- a. Update – Not-for-Profit State Registration and 501(c)3 Submission
 - i. Still Need to Figure it Out
 - b. Update – Website/Logo
 - i. Add a Donations Button
 - ii. Maddie and Betty working on the placeholder text
 - c. Minutes – March 26 and May 1, 2024
 - i. Motion to accept the minutes – Anita Grove, Shannon Hartsfield seconds
 - d. Next Meeting Reminder – June 20th, 2024

9) Other Business

- a. The PRAB sent in the letter against the Clearwater Oil Drilling Proposal
- b. June 20th at 6:30 – State Senator Cory Simon will be in town to address the drilling proposal
- c. July 31st meeting will be the community meeting so that will probably be in a different location
- d. FWC has state wildlife grants for anyone doing restoration work. They will match the funding you already have.

10) Adjourn – 3:15 pm

APPENDIX I: Comment on FWC Report

- Shannon Hartsfield (SH) – They need to be planting from north to south rather than east to west and more inshore.
 - Tide is running east to west so the spat set would be better if the reefs ran north to south to catch the spat – suggest that they rotate the plot 90 degrees or so
- FWC – Cat Point has east to west orientation, so they are doing the East Hole the same way to be able to compare the two sites
- SH – ran 42 north to east, successful back in the day. The design makes a lot of different
- Ken Jones (KJ) – Suggests rotating, then could have 3 areas running along that area to compare between each
- Chad Hanson (CH) – If there is still the ability to reconfigure – have a call with some of the guys to reconfigure the layout and include FSU
 - SH – been saying this, but they aren't listening
 - FSU – has asked that the higher relief area be shifted to a place that reflects Cat Point reef orientation
- KJ – Suggests sitting down with a group to decide how to build a reef. D
- CH – There is a time element involved
- KJ: FWC seems to be making unilateral decisions about the oyster reef designs, but part of what the PRAB is and its goals are to design these projects and provide insights from users
- Betty Webb (BW): Folks went out and talked with the barge people, upset some folks around town, rock that is currently here is what is used on fishing reefs in Louisiana, and smaller rock used for oysters, different dynamics here, but there was miscommunication from the barge people and so it upset people
 - Recommendation: ask executive committee to create a work group that includes the oystermen to discuss with FWC about the projects and design, to build trust and develop an understanding
- SH: the rock size is a middle ground where it is harvestable, but big enough that people will cull it so it is not removed from the reef/ harvested because the oysters are sold by the pound
 - David Barber (DB): they throw out 30 pounds of rock a week that's just coming off in the wash – so the material is being removed from the reefs
 - Making it bigger will disincentivize just tonging up the material and putting it in bags
- Otlice Amison (OA): Back in Mobile they put out some of the bigger rocks and then had to go back and put smaller rocks because they had stronger voice
 - Whatever material goes out there, that's what we've got
- BW: Looking at the rock and seeing that barge – it can be startling for folks that haven't been in the meetings

- Especially for the guys whose oyster – it could be too big to tong in their minds
- Need to let the community know what is happening, have a strong and open message
- Steve Rash (SR): FSU is doing their own tests right? FWC is going ahead with placement without the results from FSU – aren't we putting the cart before the horse?
 - Joel Trexler (JT): FSU doesn't tell FWC what to do, and FWC is likely working on a timeline from the legislature
 - FSU has a few results – finds that reef height is more important than having a mix of rock and shell material
 - KJ: 24 1-acre plots are all a part of the original NFWF project to do pilot studies, but with State funding, they are doing bigger areas at half a foot
 - From my understanding, they are putting out as much as they can at ½ foot to build as much as they can to meet the recommendations of some of the community
 - \$16 million is then going to be used from NFWF to do more based on the results of the pilot study
 - 24 acres = NFWF money, collaboration between FSU, stakeholders and other collaborators
 - FSU and FWC on different timelines
 - Two big sites are just the \$10 million from the State
 - SH: FSU sites are out and the data has been collected, Sandra will likely present on this next time
 - Large rock doing better than the rock with shell, and the concrete is doing the best out of everything
 - Concrete is 9m x 9m areas (4 sites with 4 plots in each site)
 - SR: if concrete is doing so much better, why aren't they focusing on concrete
 - OA: They only started with the concrete right at the end of ABSI, so there is no data reported out yet
 - SH: Timing wise, if they don't put rock out now, they'll be putting rock out when the fishery is back open....
 - BW: FSU results are likely to inform future approaches – but the timelines are mismatched
 - JT: FWC's 10 million dollars – came from legislature last year, which has to be spent within the fiscal year (ends June 30) so FWC had to use this money and had to put the rock in the bay
 - Future work will be with concrete likely, but data is so new
 - SR: Well they keep putting rocks in the bay, and its not working, so people are questioning why spend the money, might lose interest, so we need data informed
 - SH: Previous rock placements were in areas where oysters never grew, which is why they didn't work

- FWC: The practitioners are learning from the successes and failures of previous studies
- CH: Would benefit from having someone from FWRI at these meetings as to not play telephone with folks who are conducting and designing the reefs and experiments
 - Recommendation: To develop outreach/ communication working group to connect with the community, address information disconnect, and respond to questions
- OA: In Pensacola Bay – what material was used for restoration over there?

APPENDIX II: Comments for Goal A Evaluation

Strategy 1 and Actions:

- CH: Keep in mind, that it took us 4 years to get here, so a review is necessary
- Grayson Shepard (GS): Location
 - Moving the restoration more inshore
 - The thicker we create the reefs, the better it is (to a certain point). 1 foot should be a stack of 4 rocks at least.
 - North-south orientation – catch more of that spat as it's raining down
 - The current is going east-west – if you drop spat in from a drone, that spat is going to disperse fast.
- Anita Grove (AG): Feedback loop
 - A second layer of feedback –
 - Once we are incorporating the knowledge gained from researchers, oystermen, stakeholders, etc., we need to be able to take a minute to get feedback, review, and take that feedback into account.
 - More communication during the process instead of just before and after
 - Feedback internally (in the Partnership) and within the community
- Jenna Harper (JH):
 - Strategy A is really about the data and the information that is out there.
 - Anita hit the nail on the head where not everyone is sharing and not everything is in place.
 - If every agency had everything in one place, then we would be able to coordinate and see how it all fits together.
 - It could start with the Partnership and then hopefully grow beyond – everything should be made public
- GS: We got two carts and two horses – if we put everything in one cart and use both horses, we are going to go a lot further
- CH: Hopefully will have a workshop between the modelers, agencies, etc. to begin to map out what is going on and what we can do differently in the Bay
- AK: The word repository – the idea that data is coming from different groups and different agencies and into one place. It all must be consensus-building.
 - An Education and Outreach subcommittee group – is really important to move forward.
 - We have a lot of data – what we need now is to figure out how to bring them together.
- SH: Unless we can talk to the people who are making the decisions in the Bay, we aren't getting anywhere. We are just playing ping-pong. I'm getting tired of playing ping-pong. If we can't get up the chain and talk to people making the decisions, then we are wasting our time.
- KJ: This strategy and its actions are word-heavy, but I've tried to make it more concise.

- How do we build an oyster reef?
- Where do we build an oyster reef?
- How much do we need to build?
- How do we do studies to know where to keep going?
 - Sustainability – how do we monitor and start discussing metrics to keep the reefs?
- Is this something we tell FWC? Or do we do the work ourselves? We don't have the resources to do so.
- Cameron Baxley (CB):
 - When I worked with FWC, people would also come up to me on the ramps and talk about everything we were doing wrong.
 - While I was happy to hear about it and pass along what I could, I wanted to encourage people to talk to the people making the decisions.
- Gina Alvarez, FWC (GA):
 - FWC has about 40 people managing 300 species or so
 - It's very common to work in teams that are formed of people at the bottom of the rung and going up the ladder. We are constantly having internal meetings.
 - Devin will talk about everything that is talked about at The Partnership –
 - Are you tired of playing the telephone or do you think Devin is not conveying your thoughts correctly?
- BW: They are trying to find out the most effective way to get our thoughts to the actual decision-makers. How do we know that the decision-makers are listening to us.
- SH: We gotta have the one or two people that are actually making the decisions. Biologists and researchers are fine to include, but they don't have the power to actually change the process. We need a seat at THAT table.
- CH: A few of us had a meeting with FWC to meet with leadership, but I'm hoping it's not a one-off

Strategy 2 and Actions:

- Do oystermen agree to be a part of this?
- We need 4 or 5 more oystermen in this group/on this committee.
- Roger Mathis (RM): Cat Point wasn't 500 yards long and not even 100 yards wide. Get on top of those rocks. If you're growing oysters, put a reef right along it/behind it, and then
 - The decision-makers are busy and we need to climb up the ladder and they need to climb back down – meet in the middle.
- Bruce Millender (BM) – Oysters are never stationary, the more you cull the Bay, the more you spread that spat out.
- SH: What the decision makers are doing isn't making any sense to us, so we are just confused as to why they aren't using our knowledge and data provided with oysters

- JH: Moving the East Hole restoration site – I don't think anyone in this room knew about it, so that is a good example of how FWC agencies are acting without any input.
 - I think it's important to put a timeline on this because in 6 months, we are going to start seeing results on these experiments, so we need to come back in October and see what has worked and what hasn't, to allow for a change in restoration design.
- CH: The stuff in strategy 1 and 2 is mostly research, so we need to keep everyone at the table.
- GA: Research and management are working together on every single aspect of this, but I'm not undermining the need for more communication.

Strategy 3 and Actions

- GS: This strategy is very research-heavy, but oystermen need to give serious input
- KJ: Is this something that we ask FWRI for, or a specific research request? Is a viable fishery 1,000 acres, 2,000 acres, we don't know. We need those questions and firm answers to create goals to react to.
- BW: What was the intent of this strategy, to update maps?
- GA: Has FWRI ever presented to you on monitoring and what they do? If not, that would be a good one to showcase what's going on.
- SH: In 2017/18 they started planting restoration material – offshore Peanut Ridge. 2 acres were planted, and only ½ acre left in just the few years it's been there.
 - It may grow oysters for a short time, but it will become sand again.
- AG: Can we build in regular reports on these items? From FWRI or elsewhere? To get quarterly updates on what is going on out there?
 - KJ: I agree.
- SH: FSU goes to the same area to monitor all the time and they do not move to look at other areas.
 - KJ – yes, but are they doing enough? Do they need to monitor more? These are the questions we need to ask.
- BW: I would request a written report, not just a presentation.
- KJ: We need to follow all things and decisions made with a written component, to keep a record and have it in the record so people know how things have changed and how decisions were made.

Strategy 4 and Actions

- AG: Does FWC and other agencies know what we are asking of them?
 - GA: Yes, FWC knows about this Plan and all the data points that are in it.
- KJ: How do we help the agencies move forward with this Plan? Not just pass the baton, but how do we help support this to work? Whether it's funding or personnel, etc.
- SH: We kept playing in the politics side and telling the media that something is going on in the Bay but we aren't getting anywhere now.

- CB: One-pagers are so smart. Short, sweet, to the point on what's going on. From us, from agencies, it would be good to implement this.

Strategy 5 and Actions

- KJ: FSU and RCSC recently wrote a grant that covers 5A.
 - If we get past phase 1, then we will involve The Partnership.
- GS: In Action 5D – use models? Why? Why not go to the oystermen and guys that have 500 years of experience where oysters historically have always been.
- SH: The SMAART Group – picked 9 out of 16 sites NFWF used previously and all but one worked well.
- AK: I think we need to reword some of these strategies and actions to put the subject matter first in each of these items
 - For example: 5B – “ Forecast and analyze” should be first rather than incorporated.
 - GA: I agree with the re-wording. FWC had a hard time figuring out what the “ask” was.

Strategy 6 and 7 Actions

- KJ: We need to be a part of the discussion, but not necessarily collect the data or write the grants
- AG: We need to be a part of the restoration/conservation of the ecosystems that are around.
 - It would be valuable to monitor the projects that come up in the Bay and figure out how it will affect everything else around us.
- BM: The Bay changes every day/every year, East Bay is completely covered up with sand where it used to be mud. I think we need to figure out where the sand is coming from, and there might be a grant in that.
 - KJ: RCSC is pursuing a sand source study, but trying to get the funding for it. Andy Kane and Dan Tonsmeire.
 - BM: I think it's detrimental to the Bay, this addresses that.
 - GS: Locks in Apalachicola could also affect it
 - BM: It's a freshwater problem. You can see the water coming out of the water, right out of the cut. The only way to control that is a lock on the north side. That would have no impact on commercial harvesting or fishing. It would also help with the erosion at the Plantation.
 - KJ: It would be cheaper to fill it in instead of a lock
 - BM: But you would have to maintain it at the West Pass

BW General Comments –

- We need to rewrite some of the actions to make the *intent clear* from the CAB
- We need to update the agencies, groups, and organizations that are working on these goals and strategies.
- We need to make a list of things that are not addressed in the Plan

- Ex: the sand source study
- We need to create a repository for all data
- We need to come up with a format to figure out how to give feedback