

The Partnership for a Resilient Apalachicola Bay
Meeting #4
Franklin's Promise Coalition
June 20, 2024
12:00 – 3:30 pm
Minutes

Facilitator: Betty Webb

Voting Members Present: Chad Hanson, Cameron Baxley, Ken Jones (*Treasurer*), Roger Mathis, Anita Grove, Grayson Shepard, Ottice Amison (*President*), Steve Rash, Gayle Johnson

Advisory Members Present: Jenna Harper, Joel Trexler, Carrie Jones (*alt. for Portia Sapp/FDACs*), Dr. Andy Kane, Erik Lovestrang,

Others Present: Maddie Mahood, Betsy Mansfield (Post-doc at FSU), Philip Clayton (TriRivers Water Development Assoc.), Jon Creamer (FWC), Wayne Williams (Seafood Work and Waterman's Association), Cheryl Carr (Seafood Work and Waterman's Association), Susan Anderson (Apalachicola Riverkeeper), Dan Hays (ACF Project), John Sizemore (FWC LE), Capt. Charlie Wood (FWC LE), Dan Ellinor (FWC, Division of Marine Fisheries Management), Scott Pearce (FWC LE Marine Law Administrator), Josh Adams (Franklin 98 Project)

Voting Members Absent: Rickey Banks (*Secretary*), David Barber (*Vice President*), Bruce Millender, Shannon Hartsfield

Advisory Members Absent: Sandra Brooke, Devin Resko, Portia Sapp

- 1) Networking Lunch – 12:00 – 12:45
- 2) Call Meeting to Order – called to order by Ottice Amison, President (12:42)
- 3) Stakeholder Introductions – Meeting Participants and Agency Representatives
- 4) Review Agenda and Opening Remarks (Betty Webb)
 - a. Introduction of Three Work Groups
 - i. Finance Work Group
 1. Headed by Ken Jones (Treasurer)
 - ii. Education and Outreach Group
 1. Headed by Chad Hanson
 - iii. Agency Communication (Bay Stakeholders)
 1. TBA
- 5) Guest Presentation/Q&A – Philip Clayton, TriRivers Water Development Association
 - a. “Intelligence is the ability to adapt to change.” – Stephen Hawking
 - b. What keeps him up at night:

- i. Average salary in the area is \$32k
 - ii. However, the cost of living is about \$51k
 - iii. This is a problem that leads to generational poverty and influences the degradation of social well-being within the community
 - c. The Apalachicola – Chattahoochee – Flint (ACF) River system comprises 5% of the navigable waterways in the US
 - d. Both spillways and locks lack upkeep along the waterway
 - e. Received \$101 million from Congress to repair the locks and the spillways
 - i. This repair would give navigation for 65-70% reliably for about half the year
 - f. Looking at dredging in a V shape rather than a rectangular/right-angled shape that is generally proposed
 - g. TriRivers wants to work with local contractors to develop solutions and get rid of the dredged sands
 - i. Would have navigation about 90% of the year with that dredging
 - ii. Never expect 100% on this system
 - h. When and if dredging happens, beneficial use MUST be included in the Scope of Work
 - i. \$101m is just for the fix, nothing for dredging currently
 - i. Schedule: Jun 2025 – Dec 2027
 - i. Corps maintenance schedule is aimed at every 10 years, but really the locks in the ACF have not been drained down since the 80s
 - ii. Want to avoid Lock failure
 - j. Economic Impact – developed by a Professor from Auburn University
 - i. Will see some shifts and closures, but there will be almost 30k jobs created and an 18:1 investment return
 - ii. Measures the output of 27 former users plus potential future uses
 - iii. Florida has the smallest number in terms of economic impact through jobs
 - 1. Low number of touchpoints for commercial navigation
 - iv. Georgia gets the largest share of the benefits, then Alabama in the middle
 - v. 35 potential users on the system
 - vi. Addresses possibility of potential point source pollution from certain users (such as liquid asphalt and biodiesel) – most other users are pretty benign
 - k. Number of trucks of the road for a single barge is pretty significant
 - l. For Q&A – See “Appendix 1: Comment on TriRivers Waterway Presentation)
- 6) Bay Restoration Updates/Q&A – Dan Ellinor, FWC
- a. 87% - 90% of the pilot study is done.
 - i. We moved the restoration sites back to their original sites.
 - b. The governor finally signed the budget.
 - i. Three oyster positions will be assigned.

1. One in Franklin County, one in Tallahassee, and one in Crystal River
 - ii. Dan Ellinor – gave the members his phone number and email. Happy to help out and answer questions 24/7.
- 7) Review and Evaluate ABSI Goals B and C
 - a. See “Comments on ABSI Goal B” Appendix II
- 8) Organization Business
 - a. Update – Not-for-Profit State Registration and 501(c)3 Submission
 - i. We are an official Not-for-Profit Registration
 1. Once we get our 501(c)3 Submission, we can add a donate button.
 - b. Update – Website
 - i. Need some pictures of the members! Send any to Maddie.
 - c. Minutes – May 29, 2024
 - i. Motion to approve Minutes and attach Sandra’s comments – Grayson Shepard motions to approve, Cameron Baxley seconds it.
 - d. Next Meeting Reminder – July 31, 2024
 - i. Hold it at ANERR for a bigger area
 - ii. Think about what the agenda needs to look like – who will be a part of it, who will present, etc.
 - iii. It’ll be later in the afternoon, time TBA
- 9) Other Business – N/A
- 10) Adjourned at 3:37 pm

APPENDIX I: Comment on TriRivers Water Presentation

- Jim Estes (JE) –
 - Is an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) necessary for the dredging?
 - So there are 27 historical uses for barges?
 - The River has been starving for sand. The River has been deepening itself.

- Chad Hanson (CH) –
 - What's the time period?
 - If the locks are fixed in the 48 months you have allotted, what percentile of the slough will naturally fix themselves with the fixed locks?
 - Answer: Regardless, the industry wants reasonable insurance that they can get an order delivered and that they can ship it. Getting more water into the floodplain will help keep our rivers up for shipping and other things.

- Ken Jones (KJ) –
 - Phil really thinks out of the box. I (Ken) am a positive supporter of allowing transportation on the River.
 - I understand how you generate economic development with the limited resources you have,
 - I pulled the DEP permit denial document – I think it's worth everyone reading that document and appreciating kind of the bad character of the Corps of Engineers at the time – they had a permit to remove the sand, they had a permit to remove 27 sloughs.

- Betty Webb (BW) –
 - We invited Phil hear as an opening to see how transportation and navigation will affect the Bay ecosystem and oystering in the future.

Miscellaneous Comments –

Navigation, dredging and flow are not the same – three different topics that need to be addressed independently, but considered collectively

Need to think about how dredging will affect the bay

APPENDIX II: Comments on Goal B

- a. Roger: Quit at 2 bags/ day, 4 days a week, anybody that had any good sense would come in early and work another job, when it was the end, it was limiting on its own by the lack of income made

Goal B Strategy 1 and Actions

Action 1A

- Chad Hanson (CH)
 - Goal B is interconnected with Goal A. We need to help the ecosystem to then get to sustainable management. There is some redundancy, but it's because it's all connected. Goal A is about the habitat, Goal B is about the fishery.
 - The term "limited entry" has certain connotations – but I think it's trying to say we need to match the amount of effort with the available resources.
- Wayne Williams (WW)
 - Limited entry is very unnecessary. It's really based on how good of a spat fall we have. At any given time, about 90% of the oysters are unmarketable (too small, not ready, etc.)
 - Leave everything flexible as the resource changes – because this didn't happen from overharvest, but it's going to fluctuate.
 - Limited entry limits the amount of money we can put back into the economy
- Grayson Shepard (GS)
 - Balancing harvest with sustainability
- Jim Estes (JS)
 - The concept was that we didn't know how much effort or how much harvest we could stand. Culturally, it would be nice to have some people make a living doing this. We may not be able to have 200 people making a living harvesting like we used to, but if we could have some people, that would be great
- Anita Grove (AG)
 - Either going to have a handful of people making a good living or a lot of people making a little
 - We also discussed; how would we even do this. We need to come up with a term or phrase that encompasses all possible management scenarios that makes sure the harvest is sustainable
- Roger Mathis (RM)
 - Quit at 2 bags/ day, 4 days a week, anybody that had any good sense would come in early and work another job, when it was the end, it was limiting on its own by the lack of income made
 - In the summer, when I used to harvest, you aren't harvesting for 15 hours, but it's limited with how many bags you can get and when.
- Ken Jones (KJ)

- I took this as limited entry including bags, how long you can be in, etc.

Action 1B

- Ottice Amison (OA)
 - If we do this, it's going to shut down complete sections of the Bay at some
- RM
 - In the winter you could oyster it all, but the summer was limited.
- Jenna Harper (JH)
 - We need to look at changing the areas for when it's open

Action 1C

- No discussion

Action 1D

- Betty Webb (BW)
 - 1C and 1D means we need to dig into the details of this in the future

Action 1E

- No discussion

Action 1F

- Evan Blythe (EB) –
 - Going to be cost-prohibitive of the folks that want to harvest, isn't?

Strategy B2 and Actions

- BW
 - A lot of Strategy B1 is tied into B2
- CH
 - Managers of FWC, FWRI, and the modelers – we are trying to have a workshop with all these people so we can define the thresholds that are needed and then how do we develop management off of that.
- WW
 - The gear being used is mostly the traditional oyster tongs, which is what I think we need to stick with.

Strategy B3 and Actions

- BW
 - This is where we need continual updates from FWC and everyone else doing assessment in the Bay.
- JE
 - I don't know that everyone has a good understanding of what a stock assessment is. We need to be on the same page as to what that means.
 - To me a stock assessment is the resilience of the population to resist harvesting.
 - We need to be clear to the modelers as to what it is that we want and need
- KJ

- To me, this strategy is an ask to FWC, right? How do we frame this up to where we make this an official ask, if that's what the group wants, to make it a real game plan.
 - BW – Yeah, we are not the ones doing the monitoring, but we need to stay ontop of people that are doing it.
 - AG – We need to know who is going to do it, when is it going to be done, and how are we going to get the information to this committee?
 - KJ – What are we going to do if an agency comes back and says we don't have the money to do 'xyz.'
- CH
 - Collaboration between us and the agencies, but some of this language is written so that some of this can be lifted and put into the state management plans. To keep it all cohesive.
 - BW – so we want to write this and put it in a way so that the agencies can understand the ask and also use it for their own resources
 - It might be helpful to bring someone in from FWRI to have them walk us through what they are doing on the water.
 - Dan Ellinor (DE) – I'm just waiting on y'all to tell me when!
- Steve Rash (SR)
 - Where can we find a copy of the state's current management plan?
 - DE – Will send a copy to Betty who will distribute.
 - I read a while back that the plan had certain parameters needed for harvesting/sustainability.

Strategy B4 and Actions

- BW
 - FWC is here! Law Enforcement!
- Capt. Charlie Wood (Capt.)
 - We are still patrolling the Bay
 - I have 9 officers and one captain from Franklin County who try and manage the whole area. We always have someone on the Bay.
- Scott Pearce (SP)
 - We don't establish the penalties
 - The fine amount is from the state attorney's office and is signed by a judge. It's up to the court and it's established as a misdemeanor, so it can't go beyond \$500 unless we get more criteria for the crime.
- KJ
 - There was some discussion on the poaching that was going on. Are there any developments on that?
 - Charlie Wood – if you see something, say something. We need help because we just don't have the manpower. I get being afraid to say names, but you can describe what you saw that gets us a lot further.
- EB

- I got some seeded material nicked off of the Franklin 98 projects in front of the Franklin High School. 10 bags went missing. I did call and report it.
- JH
 - Didn't you bust someone poaching on a paddleboard?
 - John Sizemore (JS) – yes we did. We just can't be everywhere.
- SP
 - There are poaching cases in which officers are working. FWC mandates that we put a certain number of patrols into the area annually, and we have been far exceeding that number even with the Bay shut down. We need the extra support from the community to help us.
- BW
 - This is a perfect opportunity for the outreach and education community to get the word out to the community to “see something, say something”
 - A good emphasis to explain how poachers affect the health and recovery of the Bay
- AG
 - A lot of B4 is all about changing policies, but based off of what Capt. Wood and Scott Pearce have said, maybe there aren't things we can change. So we need to figure out what it is that we can do
- OA
 - Do you have any drone programs going on?
 - Capt.– We do, it's just getting off the ground (past 12-14 months). Until that's fully operational, we have one of the largest aviation fleets of any state Florida agency.
 - People are poaching from pilot study areas which makes it difficult since we are relying on those areas to get us more funding and opportunity.
- SR
 - The only real issue that dealers face is that you were back and expecting
- OA
 - FWC can't go out and check every single boat or every single bag because of lack of manpower. But the checkpoint houses were always good because 75% of regulation was better than none
- AG
 - Action 4J should include a Community Workshop as well.
- CH
 - As we get into prioritization, 4J may actually clarify a lot of the other actions here, especially if we incorporate them in the Community Workshop here.
- GS
 - The clock is ticking – Jan 1 2026 is in a year and a half.
- BW
 - To Carrie (FDACS) and FWC – it is important to start thinking about a Community Workshop. Who will be there, how often should they be held, etc.

Strategy B5 and Actions

- AG
 - I think that's the goal right? To have interagency coordination?
- BW
 - 5B – we can't tell them to make the Oyster Advisory Committee, but we can recommend it to FWC
 - Dan Ellinor – I see a lot of things that are good and a lot of things that are affected by funding. It's going to take groups like this one to push the local representatives, senators, etc. to try and get this funding. In my opinion, it's ripe for picking now.
 - DE – I'm an idea guy – I would like to do everything but we need the funding to do so.
 - CH – I think it's good because having a two-way conversation is necessary. We need to work together with FWC to figure out what's needed and how can we help. They can't do it all and we can't do it all.

Strategy B6 and Actions

- AG –
 - This is a national issue, a shell shortage
- DE
 - I think this has already started at the capitol level now, to start with shell recycling programs and such.
- CH
 - Sandra has done a report on shell recycling programs, that The Pew Charitable Trusts paid her to do.
 - Sandra should give presentation on this.
 - Maddie will send the report to Betty.
- DE
 - We met with Alabama and the gulf states to figure out shell recycling programs.
- OA
 - Most of the oysters leave here in the shell, and we don't shuck them here. Which is why we don't have nearly what we need.
 - If the oyster has been cooked or baked it breaks down the shell and then those aren't good anymore so you run into a lot of problems.

Strategy B7

- GS
 - Create spawning reefs that are incapable of being tonged. To me, that is a good use of all the recycled concrete we have.
 - OA – you're talking about areas that may be closed for harvest anyways

- If I'm right, we have some of those that are closed for water quality, right?
 - Carrie Jones – yep, that's right
- KJ
 - One of the reasons we would think about larger rocks, is because of the currents and storms in the Bay that spread them out. Maybe we should only use the larger rocks along the edges as a form of breakwaters, and then you're building these reefs on the inside of these things. They are protected by these larger features that are actually breaking the waves and keeping the materials inside this large areas.
- RM
 - The rocks FWC has put down now are pretty big. It's going to take it all out of a man to tong up what's there now.
- WW
 - We never had a problem with the spawn, we always had our intertidal reefs and our areas that would never be harvested. And you got a lot of deep water out there. We usually use around 12 foot handles to do the work. We had so much spawn that one time it was actually a nuisance. And that changed over the Bay. Just in my mind, if we could restore some of those intertidal reefs, that will get it back to what it was before. Not only that spawn, but also the fish and everything else.
 - I think it's unnecessary to have any permanently closed areas.
- Andy Kane (AK)
 - Are there any sanctuary areas in habitat? It's just a non-harvestable area, but a lot of fisheries employ sanctuary areas to allow them a chance to restore the habitat.
 - KJ – you have to keep track of scale – we aren't talking 40% of the reef system, we are talking a couple %.
 - BW – it's like supportive reefs to support the habitat.

Strategy B8 and Actions

- BW
 - It seems like to me it's just a lot of coordination with FDACS
- Carrie Jones
 - We developed an interactive map that includes oyster bars, seagrass, and other layers as well as water quality. All that is available online.
- JE
 - FDACS always sends FWC new leases with public comment availability. It's a 30 day comment period that's put out in the public paper. We also set up some interest groups to find out where to go and when to go.

Strategy B9 and Actions

- BW

- ABSI folks – did you identify an agency that would do Action 9A?
 - AG – FSU was doing that.
- 9A and 9B were also supposed to be Ed Camp from UF
- Susan Anderson
 - The market demand for those size oysters that our Bay is producing is exploding – is our Bay capable of sustaining this new huge demand for oysters?
 - AG – we need to determine the limit – is it 400 bags? Is it less?
 - OA – we need to understand what the Bay itself is capable of sustaining.
- Joel Trexler –
 - No one has been able to get a solid explanation of where this came from (the 400 bags/acre) so we put it there to figure out what’s a realistic number.

Miscellaneous Comments

Grayson Shepard –

Q: Wayne, how many oystermen do you think will actually come back?

A: I think the most boats I saw towards the end of 22 boats in one day – average was about 15 – 18 boats/day. We had a wildfire come through and wipe out everything and a lot of people lost their boats. A lot of people have gone and found other jobs.

It’s not going to be that many oystermen coming back.

Roger Mathis – it takes a lot of money to get rigged up – and with the boats out of use for several years, a lot of stuff is rotted and gone. If they already have a job, most people are going to be stupid to come back and we got paid by the bag, whereas aquaculture gets paid by the oyster.

Gayle Johnson – the smallest amount we sell is 50 lb bag.

Roger Mathis – We would get 60 lbs in the wild, but maybe it’s only 45 lbs of usable oysters.

Grayson Shepard – will there be a difference in price with aquaculture vs wild oyster.