

The Partnership for a Resilient Apalachicola Bay
Meeting #6
ANERR
November 13, 2024

David Barber – Call to order 12:50

Introduction from Visitors:

- Betty Webb – Facilitator
- Sandra Brooke – FSU
- Morgan Krause – FSU Student Researcher
- Charlie Wood – FWCLE
- Wayne Williams – Commercial Fisherman
- Cheryl Carr – Treasurer of Seafood Workers & Waterman’s Assoc.
- Doug Brown – Interested Citizen
- Betsy Mansfield – FSU Postdoc
- Jim Estes – Interested citizen
- Ginny
- James Hawthorn - Corps of Engineers
- Chris Mullins – Chief of Staff USACER

12:55 – Review Agenda

1:00 – ACF Water Management Operations Update – Mobile District US Army Corps of Engineers

- Basin updates
 - o Buford Dam Sluice gate – improves Dissolved Oxygen in the river through release of water from the gate
 - o Almost now rain days in October, has improved in the past two weeks
 - o In the entire ACF basin, we have received just over 1 in of rain in the last 30 days
 - o 2nd driest October on record over the past 130 years
 - o Jim Woodruff has the largest watershed but the least amount of storage
 - Benefits the Apalachicola river, because there is not a lot of storage
 - Can only provide stored water from three projects (West Point, WF George and Jim Woodruff)
 - o Storage numbers for projects are relatively low within the area for this time of year
 - o Outlook: for the next 30 days, equal, we may be above normal, may be below normal
 - Have plans if they enter a drought condition
 - Everything showing in the presentation, available on the website
 - o In order to compensate for the loss of storage at West Point they are storing at WF George
 - o As of yesterday Flint River providing 5,7000 cfs of required 10,500 cfs (54%)
 - Releasing slightly below the rate of inflow
 - Dec 1, min flow drops

- Tropical systems benefitted us in terms of water availability during the drier periods
 - Hurricane Rafael has provided rain systems and water availability benefits to the region even without making landfall
- Navigation Season
 - Navigation season based on not dredging
 - Set up navigation season when water is available (Jan – May)
 - Guarantee 7ft minimum
 - Basin benefit to refill those reservoirs
- West Spillway Gate Repair
 - Reduced capacity to release and store water
 - 90 day window for repairs
 - Tried to offset loss of storage by shifting storage to other locations
 - Gate is totally inoperable
- Sustainable River Program
 - Program to improve the health and life of rivers by changing operations of USACE water resource infrastructure to restore and protect ecosystems
 - Buford Dam (Lake Lanier)
 - Sluice gate installation to improve water quality
 - Woodruff lock & dam (lake Seminole)
 - Provide minimum flow releases, provide favorable conditions for fish spawning
- ACF Stay Agreement – Flow objectives
 - Agreement between Alabama and Georgia
 - 4 main objectives
 - Flow target at Columbus, Georgia (1,350 cfs)
 - Flow target at Columbia, Alabama (2,000 cfs)
 - 2 other targets dependent on days and times
- ACF Document Library
 - **Ongoing public review of Draft of ACF Operational Analysis**
 - **Public meeting on December 6, 2024 4-7 pm in Columbus, GA (Location TBD)**
 - **Expect to finish it at 12th of December**
- Done an analysis, and believe that they can adopt the 4 flow targets as permanent targets for the ACF basin
- Questions:
 - Lake Seminole – thought were maintaining rising levels? What’s different?
 - Key is the maintaining rising levels – keep a more consistent level fluctuation and also raise the level of the reservoir
 - Received feedback only from GA DNR on the Lake Seminole project?
 - No, received feedback from all three of the state management programs
 - Said you are looking at the improving conditions? What does that mean?
 - Going to do monitoring on the efforts to see if it is beneficial to the fish spawning and then consider adoption
 - STAY Agreement

- More consistent flow, coming down, slight increase during drought from Jim Woodruff

1:30 – Funding overview

- Repairs and upkeep of dams are ongoing, constraints are not related to money for projects currently
- Repairs need to be sequential to allow for continue operation which stretches out the timeline of projects
- Woodruff – 24M Spillway Rehab, 15M Lock Dewatering, 1.08M Invasive Species Management
- Woodruff repair – a lot of things TBD, funding not adequate to replace all vertical lift gates and install new gate machinery
 - Sept 2025 – receive final info
- Questions:
 - When the Locks are complete, have you decided how you are going to man them and how they are going to be scheduled for use?
 - Asking about remote operations? Or M-F management?
 - Don't see it changing, see operations of the Lock returning to what it was pre-BIL. Currently everything classified as low use, since classified as low use – funding is limited as to how they can staff the locks
 - Previously opened and closed the locks previously to make sure they worked, and could schedule to open if needed, but nothing more than that
 - Some discussion about enhancing ability to use the locks to improve recreational use of the area, any consideration on that?
 - Not to their knowledge currently
 - *Missed question from Chad – Sorry!*
 - In Bainbridge, did anything come up about a primate facility opening up and would use thousands of gallons of water to run a day. Updates?
 - USACE unaware about this
 - Cameron: Company well known for failing water quality inspections and run-off issues
 - USACE doesn't have a lot of authority on the Flint River – that is on the State of GA
 - Invasive aquatic plant management, what is used, when?
 - Approach multiple ways – mechanically, and an approved herbicide, typically in the fall
 - Recently in the past couple of years, they supported an environmental assessment to do more of a mechanical approach
- Open invitation to come to the Mobile USACE office to sit alongside the folks to watch them in the day-to-day work
 - Not a black box on making the decisions
 - Use many tools in their toolbox
 - Informal setting and opportunity to answer questions and see how things are happening
- Betty had this group come in to learn about how the Apalachicola Bay gets the freshwater to the Bay and how the water comes down and flows

- How do we interact with USACE so folks are a part of the scoping process?
 - o Have a line item on the budget for dredging in the ACF basin, working internally on assessing how to do that – permitting, assessment, engagement, etc.
 - o Efforts are focused on defining what the process looks like, and it will be a public process to do
 - o Plan on engaging with local NGOs to lay out the possible impacts and hear considerations from communities
- Always talked about increasing freshwater flow when spat and oysters need it, talked about how can we work with the Corps to have periodic releases to flood the floodplain and have the freshwater releases that might have a beneficial impact on the oysters and the Bay. (just a summary statement of the hopes of the Partnership)
- Florida, GA, and AL have to get together and agree on something that will work for everyone and be comfortable for everyone → Florida won't be able to advocate for change on their own without the other states stepping in
- Over the years the Bay is being covered up with yellow sand, effecting a lot of fisheries, where is it coming from? And how is it getting down here?
 - o Haven't done the evaluation, so unable to answer the question, sounds like there is need for future analysis for that
 - o Can only do what they are directed to do and funded to do
 - o USACE put it on the list of things to look in to

2:15 – Fisheries Perceptions and Fluctuations with Multiple Data Sources

- Betsy Mansfield, Postdoctoral Researcher at FSU Coastal & Marine Lab
- Proposing a grant to understand recreational and guide fishers experiences with fisheries fluctuations using data from FWC along with historical photographs
- Interested in creating a citizen science reporting opportunity using fish board for passive reporting of catch
- Collecting experience and knowledge from charter fishers about fluctuations of catch throughout time
- Discussion amongst participants about the changes in gear efficiency, regulations, and fishing methods may impact information gathered
- Betsy to reach out to FWC and local fishers for more discussion a

2:50 – FWC Apalachicola Bay Oyster Restoration – Devin Resko

- All deployment of restoration pilot study is complete
 - o 24 sites of high and low relief
 - o Leftover funding used for a few additional sites
- Post restoration monitoring started
- A lot of mapping done, but still blind spots done within the data, but project ha been completed
 - o Few small points that may be hazards at low tide, some marked with buoys, once the wind calms down, more investigation and corrective action will be taken
- Working on monitoring protocols, will provide updates as progress
- Total acreage ended up being about 75
- Shannon: Looks really good, looks to be growing good oysters
 - o When knock down the high spots, do you just knock it down to the edge?

- Yeah, just put it back down on the edge of the reef section
 - Hopefully you'll see some good results on the concrete
 - Yeah, should see results soon
- Sandra: See a lot of oysters growing under the rocks in the large gaps, will include some of those sites in the monitoring into the future
- Anita: Where do we go from here? What is the time period for monitoring? When will more restoration occur?
 - Did have some key departures in FWC, so shook up the timing on the operations, will let you know soon. Working on hiring right now and then will readdress the approach and the timeline
 - Still other pots of money for restoration
- Wayne: The size of rocks, it makes a lot of difference in the quality of oysters they will produce. A smaller rock will produce a prettier oyster, and a larger rock more scissorbill. Don't go any larger than 3 in than that, we shouldn't have a problem. Really don't see the size of the rock, as one lasting longer than the other through storms. Don't think that it would matter if it was a boulder, six inch, one inch, if there was a bad storm – it would be washed away. We need a good sized rock that is harvestable, produces a good oyster, etc.
 - Heard a lot of feedback on size of rock for various sizes, using larger rock provided several things: more height for less rock to build up the reefs, more interstitial space for oysters to grow, the larger rock will be culled on site so it will not be removed from the Bay
 - Dan: Devin is the new State-wide oyster manager (analysis and rulemaking section)
 - Will have 2 BSVI focused on oysters – 1 in Apalach, 1 in Crystal River
- No decisions made as to how the Bay will be re-opened, nothing finalized. Hiring a new position, will gather historical data and information to present to the Commission
 - Discussions being held, but no decisions have been made
 - Lots of external and internal factors to consider
 - Very involved process, takes a lot of work
 - Completing all the hires to get to full strength – once have everyone hired will look at timelines and management
 - Then will have community meetings early 2025
 - Will be bringing a lot of oyster topics to the 2025 commission meetings
 - Will bring a proposal to the commissioners, they provide feedback, feedback cycle through 1-2 meetings, and then final management proposal to the commissioners
 - Proposed rule will occur in May 2025 (location TBD)
 - Final rule will be in August 2025 (location TBD)
 - Between all those, continue stakeholder outreach and engagement, everything will be publicly available for comment and consideration
- Betty: What process are you going to use to reach out to stakeholders?
 - Probably community workshops
 - Have been meeting one on one with folks, happy to do that, folks can reach out to schedule that, doing it once a month, for one full day to meet with folks
- Morgan: How are the workshops being advertised?
 - Put it in the newspaper, on the radio, Florida Register

- Will send it to Betty as well
- Counting on the Partnership to get folks there as well
- Chad: Have this partnership standing ready to help develop proposals, missing link that he's not hearing, is how to use the Partnership to develop proposals before they go out to the public or to others?
 - FWC does have questions that they have for the Partnership for the management that they would like to ask to get answers to to help develop the proposal
 - Dan thought the Partnership was going to be developing a proposal to give to FWC on its idea/ scheme for management – Start looking at a 5-10 year plan, what are you gonna do when the money runs out
 - Chad suggests that a day or half day might be needed to commit to start sketching this out to develop something
 - Consider monitoring needs and the development can't happen in a vacuum
 - Dan: Bigger picture for this bay is gonna need to be thought about
 - Shannon: It's gonna be a big change, it's not gonna be the way it was
 - Wayne: Can't come up with a management plan on the way it is now, can't base it off the worst it has ever been, we have to treat it as resources fluctuate, can't write anything in stone, no limiting license
 - Betty: Communication meeting had meeting with FWC and put things on the table but were told they weren't ready for it, need more guidance on what is needed and how to approach things

3:20 – Dr. Kane – Presentation pushed to next month

3:22 – Motion from Bruce to approve the minutes, Seconded by Anita, approved

3:23 – Board of Directors Membership

- 15 member spaces, currently have 14 → think about it for next month
- Committee membership – Communication, Finance, Education/Outreach
 - Education/Outreach – spearhead moved from Chad to Anita
 - Need more people on Ed/Outreach and Finance
- Want approval for a Technical Oversight Committee – Chad has offered to spearhead that group with Ken, Sandra, Dr. Kane, and Shannon proposed as members

3:26 – Phase II Discussion

- Is the last Wednesday of the month good for scheduling for 2025?
 - All in agreement
- Next meeting: December 18th 2025

3:28 – 501c3 approval

- Betty submitting the 501c3 documentation
- Bruce made the motion, Shannon seconded, approved
- Betty can submit the documentation now as the representative for the group for the 501c3 documentation

3:30 - Adjourned