

PARTNERSHIP FOR A RESILIENT APALACHICOLA BAY

MEETING # 12

Wednesday, May 28, 2025 - 12 Noon to 3:30 PM EST

Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve

108 Island Drive, Eastpoint, Florida

Facilitator: Betty Webb

Members Present: Anita Grove, Jim Estes, Chad Hanson, Cameron Baxley, Ottice Amison, David Barber, Kim Miller, Gayle Johnson

Advisory Members and Visitors: Betsy Mansfield, Aden Barksdale, Cassidy Manzonelli (FWC), Doug Brown, Joel Trexler, Sandra Brooke, Matt Davis, Ken Jones, Carrie Jones, Kim Branciforte, Andy Kane, Thomas Wheatley

12:53 – *Call meeting to Order and Welcome – Ottice Amison – President*

Review Agenda – Betty Webb, Facilitator

12:55 *FWRI Oyster Population Monitoring Protocols & Updates – Claire McIntyre*

- Updated monitoring to 2025 – determine location, density, health, and recruitment
- Health and recruitment is monitored monthly and year-round
- Prior to 2025, different protocols were used
 - o Scuba with ¼ meter ^2 quadrats
 - o Locations = historic & NFWF 2021
- 2025 surveys finished
 - o Moved to annually (apr-Jun)
 - o New minimum of 30 quadrats/location at NFWF and RESTORE
 - o Added RESTORE 2017 areas
 - o No longer includes volume, and now counts oysters over certain size
 - o Number of quadrats can vary depending on site size
- Locations of surveys are based on historical reef location
- Monitoring procedures are online
- Data analyses
 - o Mapping – most current and up to date
 - o Anything used in 2025 needed at least 10 legal oysters
 - o Each reef was separately analyzed
 - o Best fit was used with confidence intervals

- Results
 - Pre 2025 sampling had a good mean density of oysters in reefs
 - Still increased number of quadrats and spatial coverage to reduce variability
 - Detecting anything less than 50% in density change is not possible
 - Can't monitor in season
- Challenges in extrapolating densities
 - Since collapse, monitoring has been focused on finding the oysters, examining restoration materials, and monitoring success of restoration efforts
 - Variability of oyster densities within/among reefs
 - Extrapolating a density assumes homogeneity of density
 - Accuracy of acreage estimates – software and mapping
 - Same with reef loss
 - Lower end of confidence interval was used to overcome challenges/uncertainties
 - 2024 data showed that some reefs have a large range of high and low estimates of the number of bags of oysters on each reef
- 2025 monitoring data – reef area, total bags, and bags/acre
 - Bags per acre at locations is from 19 to 571
 - 4 have 400+
 - RESTORE Cat Point Spur, RESTORE Peanut Ridge, RESTORE Easthole, NFWF Cat Point
- Questions/Discussion
 - *Jim:* Do you have the total cumulative amount>
 - Total bags within the system = 82,280 bags
 - High variability per site
 - *Jim:* If that is about 80k, and say that it was decided 16% could be harvested, and the cost per bag is ~\$50, total would be \$640,000 – so there is not much money out there
 - *Office:* During the FWC workshop, that was something that was said. Just based on 10% of oysters allowed, with 10 participants, there is limited money if all folks harvested the same amount of oysters.
 - *Jim:* Public might have a different expectation of the money that can come in once the fishery reopens
 - *David:* Do not think there will be much oystering to the point where it becomes ones primary job, most would do it a couple days a week, most of them realize that. Won't be like it was, but still won't be much.
 - *Jim:* If PRAB can figure out how to communicate the expectations of reopening the bay, it would be key. Be clear that it is not at the level it was before.
 - *Anita:* Outreach is trying to communicate it, acreage is extremely thin, from 10,000 to 500. Put this out often, people are surprised to hear it.
 - *Office:* There has not been abundant material in the bay. People think its been restored, but it hasn't. People are thinking it is the restoration like it was after Kate and Elena (huge amount put in the bay)
 - *Chad:* A one time restoration event does not fix it forever, it should be constant. Is the 2025 sampling with the doubling the quadrats, is this a one time thing, or how monitoring will be approached going forward?

- In terms of establishing densities, best to put effort into sampling April to June > Increase in quadrats applied, but monthly condition and settlement is occurring.
- Chad: Is the turn-around from a fall season to the monitoring enough time to get things measured and figured out to make quote or seasonal changes.
- Chad: Will this be ongoing? Will there be more funding? What was the level of uncertainty reduction
 - Range at some reefs is 90k for the confidence levels, now down to 15k
 - Spatial sampling over the reef has been helpful
 - State Funding: renewed annually, NFWF funding: intended for restoration/monitoring (contingent on results of pilot studies)
- Sandra: 319 acres of rock put down; restoration material has gone away. Public may be aware of those restoration projects that happened in 2016, but it is no longer there
- Ken: NFWF 2021, does that include 2024 material? Or is it different?
- Matt: It is different, only material put out in 2021.
- Kim: Monitoring protocol is online – how is that determined? And if changes are made, how does it work?
 - Can't speak to development, but established and used across FL so mapping is standardized.
 - When FWRI does updates, it updates every 5 years
 - SOP is a separate chapter, updates when necessary.
- Chad: the chapter now includes 2025 methods?
 - Does not but the sampling methods are similar, differences are count, number of legals, no volumes, and double the quadrats
 - Not a live update- but it is a technical report so it doesn't have to go to the commissioners
- Cameron: Sites are set and don't change monitoring?
 - Yes, historic sites are done for 15 quadrats, RESTORE has 30
 - More area=More quadrats – same number of quadrats than there are acres, but no more than 10/location within the site
- Cameron: FWC isn't collecting data where oysters are, according to some. But it sounds like there is an attempt at a grater spread
 - Yes, looking at locations where there are oysters, those are the mostly restored areas.
 - Sandra: When FSU does random/negative sampling, there are not really hidden areas, know where oysters are
- Major point as to why the lower end of conf. interval is used because of uncertainty in reef sizes. Gives better determination of reef size, increasing confidence.
- Chad: Is there ability to do extra monitoring if there is an observed mortality event
- Matt: We could, but there is still a fair amount of error, statistically impossible to get it low enough to have statistical confidence unless it is catastrophic and more than 50% change.
- Ken: How do you communicate that 80k bags does not mean 80k bags are able to harvest, only a %. Is it explained on the website?
 - Jim: Need to depend on FWC for that because of the public workshops. Communicate that issue with PRAB and Public

- Ken: May need to put a statement on the website on what a harvest means and what it would look like
 - Betty: Prime time for press release
- Ken: Did not hear anything surprising. It was consistent with what has been shown, it is nice that PRAB and FWC are on the same page as far as numbers.
- Claire: would not be a bay-wide opening, because of reefs not being at 400 bags/acre threshold.
- Sandra: One of the issues with spatial regulations is enforcement. Will it be enforced?
 - Many possible regulations on the table
- Anita: At the FWC meetings, they pace the audience members through the process and to weigh in on all the options and considerations and alternatives. Brings people in to the knowledge that it won't be wide open.
- Joel: At the last FWC presentation, someone asked about percentage of harvest allowed but have not heard an explanation about the methodology to determine the harvest percentage. What is the scientific/statistical backing of determining that percentage
 - There are several ways to do this. Other states found success, but have to understand that apalach will likely be different. Part of it may be determining the tolerance of risk – which is determined by both stakeholders and DMFM.
- Otlice: Earlier numbers, were they 2025 numbers?
 - Yes
 - Better numbers will elevate the economic output slightly. But not enough to support someone fulltime. At some point, depending on the number of people participating, the economic return would be more than owning a boat.
 - Suggest to Sandra that there might be an opportunity for a basic economic analysis on the ROI people would need for full time participation.
- Chad: Any idea about the harvest monitoring that will go on with an opening?
 - DMFM would do fishery-dependent monitoring through trip tickets. A fishery like this means check stations would be needed for real time data collection with an in season monitoring program
- Otlice: With trip tickets, are they all online now?
 - Should be all electronic by this year. So it does increase the time to data which is good, but it does require people to submit tickets. DMFM is workshopping ways for people to actively upload data. Multiple variables at play.

2:04- Devin Resko (FWC) – read by Betty

- Updates: FWC workshop progress, bay restoration, and FY '25-'26 funding
 - New captain Mitchell Mims in place of Charlie Wood
 - Info gathered at workshops in April and May was good for developing management plan
 - Next workshop: June 3rd, Chapman Auditorium. Virtual: June 5th 6-8
 - FWC says funding is imperative
 - No funding updates at this time

- Partnership sent letters to legislatures early May and last week, the city sent letters as well.
- Signature of the letter was under Office as President of The Partnership.

2:25 Break

2:28 – Organizational Business – Office Amison/Betty Webb

- Approve minutes from last meeting
- Jim motion , Gayle Second
- Re- review of Partnership recommendations document for FWC
 - Mission statement/purpose
 - Added focus on the Bay as a whole
 - Betty will email it after meeting
 - Ready to share w/ commissioners? City? Waterman's Assoc.? FB and website?
- Andy: Put names to the document, both for technical committee and for whole doc.
- Other Business:
 - Cameron: Status on oil drilling - Bill is on Governor's desk. Ultimately up to DEP to make recommendation, judge did give recommended order.
 - Betty: Coastal zone soil survey. We want them to continue and support riverkeepers on this issue.
 - Need to contact federal reps for continued funding to the NERR programs
 - Betty – new 2025 workplan review. Updates entered month by month.
 - Betty - New communication plan – Education and Outreach will implement media as well as relevant news on social media and local media outlets.
 - Chad: Outreach to the community about our thoughts and recommendations is very important for the future. Would be helpful to the community.

2:45 ABSI Goals and Strategies

- Betty reviewed spreadsheet she created, outlining ABSI goals and objectives, as well as strategies that will be used to accomplish these goals
- Different committees tasked with accomplishing different goals
- This is Phase 2 – Implementation (Phase 1 – Review and Familiarization – complete)
 - Review of the goals and see what can be accomplished in 2025
 - Need to work on pursuing funding. But will see what can be done without it for now.
 - Each committee can discuss what funding they need/how they can get it
 - May not be implemented directly to The Partnership, but can provide support to other agencies or groups to conduct the activities
- For the funding, are we going to determine what type of funding is needed? Capacity building, outreach funding, research funding, restoration dollars, etc.
- Add a column to the spreadsheet that outlines the role of The Partnership in each strategy/goal

- Meeting with committee chairs to look at what we currently have, and review of the document to determine what can be done this year, then look ahead to prioritizing for the future.

3:15 Committee Updates

- Chad Hanson – Technical
 - o Not met yet
 - o Asked Ed Camp from UF for economic contribution of oyster reef associated species
 - Hopes Ed presents at a near future meeting
- Shannon Hartsfield – Communication
 - o Not present
- Anita Grove – Education and Outreach
 - o Sustainable rivers program, met with Don Tonsmiere, TNC and PEW are developing projects. Partnership won't apply this year, but in the future – need to develop what the project would be
 - o Doug put up mission and purpose along with FWC workshops on Facebook
 - o Need to share the call for letters to the state regarding funding for FWC for oysters – need others to post and get in contact
 - o FWC next Meeting on 6/3, Chapman Auditorium
 - o Have a running list of messaging and communication for public engagement
 - o How to counter poaching (discussion on how to get message out)
 - FWC tip line awards money, could be an option
 - Catchy taglines maybe
- Ken Jones – Finance
 - o Outreach and capacity building are important. Need to figure out how to get some money for both – county could be an option, city could be an option.
 - Office: Commission is coming up on a budget session, and get requests from NGOs all the time.
 - o Funding is in place through ANERR to pay for facilitator, also funding for an outreach person to do some of the work that is needed for education and outreach.
 - o Need to talk about Directors and Officers Insurance

3:37 Other Business

- Office in Orlando the last week of June, VP will need to cover meeting.

3:38 Adjourned

Next Meeting: 4th Wednesday of the month- 25th of June, 2025