

PARTNERSHIP FOR A RESILIENT APALACHICOLA BAY

MEETING #13

Wednesday, July 23, 2025 - 12 Noon to 3:30 PM EST

Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve

108 Island Drive, Eastpoint, Florida

Facilitator: Betty Webb

Members Present: Ottice Amison, Shannon Hartsfield, Roger Matthis, Ken Jones, Anita Grove, Grayson Sheperd, Carrie Jones, David Barber, Cameron Baxley, Gayle Johnson, Steve Rash, Ricky Banks

Advisory Members & Visitors: Erika Burgess, Aden Barksdale, Betsy Mansfield, Doug Brown, Glen, Garrett, Niamh, Erik Lovestrand, Capt. Mitchell Mimms, Cassidy Manzonelli, Kim Branciforte (in Proxy for Chad Hanson), Kim Miller

Online: Andy Kane, Jenna Harper, Sandra Brooke, Morgan Eason

12:44 *Call Meeting to Order and Welcome - Ottice Amison, President*

Review Agenda - Betty Webb, Facilitator

12:55 *Organizational Business*

1. Meeting Minutes Approval for May 28, 2025 – Shannon Motion, Anita Second, Approved
2. Schedule future meetings
 - a. October has a concern with the joint ACFS meeting on the 22nd (will need an update from a Partnership perspective for that meeting, but lots of board members gone) → Proposed to move to **October 29**
 - i. Motion Gayle, Anita Second, Approve
 - b. November = day before Thanksgiving
 - i. FWC final decision meeting is Nov 5-6
 - c. December = Holiday Time
 - i. Proposed to merge Nov and Dec meetings – Proposed to move to **Thursday, December 18 (tentative)**

12:52 *“Futures in the Bay” – Morgan Krause*

- Self-introduction
- Summary of proposed research on the future of the Bay due to the decline in oysters for a broad network of stakeholders
- Soliciting feedback and interview interest for her project – especially with the younger generation, community leaders, and restoration leaders
- People can email to set up an interview, or connect her with o

1:10 *The Economic Impact of the Apalachicola Bay Oyster Collapse and Restoration – Econ MS Students from FSU*

- Presenting their research this week for their final, want to present and receive feedback from community
- 50% increase in harvest in the 2 years before the closure, paired with relaxing of harvest regulations

- Severe drought conditions in 2007 and 2011
- As of 2025, reduction of viable oyster reefs to under 400 acres
- The Bay's future – minimum of 200 bushels per acre, Harvest rate of only 5% of legal sized oysters can be commercially harvested → will be nothing like it was a decade prior
- What was the economic impact of the Apalachicola Bay oyster fishery collapse on Franklin Co?
- What are the potential economic benefits of restoration of the oyster reefs?
- Evaluated econ loss, calculate loss per acre, measure recreational fishing growth from 2012-2021 for the benefits of artificial reefs
- Created a statistical analysis of a 'synthetic county' as if there had not been the collapse within the region
 - o Looked at migration out of Franklin Co. – in 2020 est. ~500 people or 12% of employed people in the county
 - o Real GDP – divergent path from the synthetic and reality, in 2023 FC GDP is ~25% lower than if the collapse had not happened (~\$75 million in losses)
 - o Per acre - \$66,000 loss per acre due to the decline
- Benefits of the infrastructure provided by a restored oyster reefs
 - o Used an input-output model
 - o Input – Recreational fishing expenditures, Output - \$ spent in FC
 - o Looked at Onshore, Private and Charter expenditures
 - o Over \$6 million increase in the recreational fishing outputs from 2012 to 2021
- Based on analysis, restoring 5% of the oyster reefs provides economic benefit to the community
 - o If restore 500 acres for less than 35 million dollars, there is an economic net benefit to the community
- Presenting everything as of, 2024, may change in the future
- Looks at economic activity, not necessarily an income
- Presenting this to the majority of the Economics department, other social science members of FSU, and potential employers
- Want to open the door for more efficient and robust analysis – for other students to further explore this question in the future with more understanding of the investment and time for benefits to accrue from restoration efforts

1:42 FWC Workshop Progress, Bay Restoration and FY 2025-2026 Funding – Erika Burgess

- Devin's replacement = Morgan Eason, just hired
- Overarching goal = restore 2,000 acres by 2023
 - o Re-establish oyster fishery with long term clutching program
- Path forward
 - o Limited opening of the fishery, conduct restoration (contingent on funding), continue to keep some areas closed, continual funding for restoration efforts needed and budgeted (\$30-55 million annual budget)
- Rule-making → old harvest rules do not match with what is needed
- Proposed Rules
 - o Create a new management framework
 - o Establish ecological thresholds
 - o Allow conservative harvest levels

- Provide commercial and recreational harvest opportunities
- Sketch out proposed management framework
 - Establish Commercial Apalachicola Bay endorsement – Individual or Crew SPL, Shellfish (BV) endorsement, FL resident, prior landings (year 1 only)
 - Threshold for harvest rec = 400 bags per acre
 - Based on 2025 monitoring, there are 4 reefs that meet this threshold
- Proposed Rule Hearing August 13-14 at the FWC Commission Meeting in Havana, FL
- Cameron: No differentiation between counties for recreational fishing? (between Gulf and Franklin)
 - *FWC doesn't use county lines for AB, proposing that there be some rec harvest off subtidal reefs, looking at intertidal reefs in both counties based on the 400 acre threshold.*
- Kim: How would rec be enforced?
 - *Same as all other fisheries enforcements*
- Ken: So the green dots are the ones that you could harvest today?
 - *If less than 2,000 bags available, then recommending there is not recreational fishing on those reefs. If there are 2,000 bags on a reef – 5% of the bags would be allotted for recreational fishing. Where you could fish would be determined each year. If the commission approves the option for intertidal recreational harvest, will monitor the intertidal bars*
- *Get a tag that specifies where you can fish and which bars. Looking at Indian Lagoon opening if it reaches that threshold*
- Shannon: In sampling, some of the folks monitoring are sampling in areas where there is supposed to be material, you have some areas missing on the current map that are doing well.
 - *Compared the areas monitored to Sandra's and they are within the margin of error*
 - There are areas that are being sampled where there isn't material, but if you sampled where there is material, there is oysters
 - *Trying to figure out the density for the whole reef, so you might find some areas that have a lot and others, so looking at the rate*
 - Folks are being punished for the folks who put the material out, and if they didn't put material out where it was supposed to go, there won't be oysters. The material that is supposed to be planted in certain locations,
 - Don't support planting any more in the Bay, people are damaging their boats every day. You can't tong out the oysters on the material that has been planted
 - *Has a problem with the company and the people hired to put the material out
 - *Contract monitoring is needed, and there needs to be accountability
- Ricky: A lot of tourists/ Boat rentals are hitting the rocks – can't fix that. But folks who have lived in this area are also hitting the rocks. In the contract – it says no nautical hazards, shouldn't have any hazards – should be able to run the Bay like he did when he was young
- Otice: A lot of the material is above where was specified in the contract, it wasn't actually deployed the way it should have been deployed
 - Some places are too high, like on Cat Point

- Shannon: There are some good oysters on the material, and it's getting poached. Propose – don't open it up for commercial, just open it up for recreational. Only place that is going to open is the place where stuff got placed in 2017.
 - o Ottime: There are powers that be in Tallahassee that don't want it open at all. If we don't open something, we might never get it open
 - o Ricky: The economic analysis and the goal here isn't to open the fishery back to like we used to, it's more of a focus on building up the fisheries and the water quality, etc. That's the bigger picture.
- Ottime: At this point, open it up so that people can make money, doesn't matter the number, just open it up so people can make some money.
- Kim: Looking at the proposed management framework what does it look like moving forward past year 1
 - o *Both options would fix the number of participants moving forward – would have to propose another rule if you wanted to increase the numbers – It would be a use it or lose it endorsement, they have to be on the boat when fishing*
 - o *Any reef in the bay that is open to shellfish harvest will be monitored, and any that meets the threshold will be open to harvest*
- Ken: How do you determine the number of individuals? Is it based on the resource or number of bags?
 - o *Options decided by the Commission – either fewer or more people, this will also be influenced by public comment, so expressing support for one or the other option can help influence the decision*
- *Things heard at the workshop – Saltwater endorsement requirement not popular, 5% harvest limit not popular, so reworking*
- Shannon: How are you determining what
 - o *Rule is 2 5 gallon buckets, 1 10 gallon bucket or 60lbs and not going to change it*
 - o But if you have the numbers by quadrat, how are you inputting it into the calculation?
 - *Not sure, would have to ask Matt*
 - o *** propose that you're going to have to set the number of oysters per bag, need a definition of what a bag/ bushel of oysters means*
- Ken: Group has talked a lot about the value of doing it per count versus per bag. Is there an inherent reason to do it by bag versus by count?
 - o *Would folks be willing to count all the oysters?*
 - o Ricky: If you got the same amount of money for a 100 count as a 60 pound bag that would be 250-300 oysters then that would be popular
 - o Ottime: This decision would affect all the shellfish harvest in the State. FWC isn't going to base their decision on this Bay for the whole state.
- *Hoping that the culling rule will help – proposed that bags have to be culled, and culled on site so the rock and small oysters go back on the bar*
- *Proposing size limit tolerance rather than percentage (max 5 undersized oysters) – would speed up enforcement stops*
- *Mimms: Whenever opened up, there will be extremely strict enforcement due to how delicate the fishery is. Strict tolerance, not much leeway at all, priority by Franklin and Wakulla officers, resources dedicated daily. Not hiring more guys, but will prioritize*

existing staff. Doesn't matter to FWCLE on count versus bag whatever is best for the industry

- Betty: If whatever rules are passed in November, what is the timeline for permitting and education?
 - o *There would be follow-up engagement, a website with all the rules, have a biologist that spends time here to communicate, permit package goes out to everyone and will be picked up in person. Application time for permits would be April 1-30. If you get it, have to renew it by June 30th. Recreational app would be made available in August. If you receive the commercial endorsement, recommending that you can't receive the recreational*
- Steve: At what point is the state going to assess the money spent to manage such a small fishery. Spending money to restore it is one thing, but if the fishery doesn't grow the State might see it as a waste of money.
- Ricky: Thinks the lottery system is unfair. But with the lottery system, have they talked about doing a license buyback program? Fairness of folks who have historically fished oysters versus folks who came just before the crash.
- Shannon: So the years to be considered is 2016 to 2020?
 - o *They are looking back to 2012 to be considered for a permit*
- Office: Is there a bag limit proposed?
 - o *The proposed idea is you would get your total bag tags for the whole season, and then folks can fish for their limits as they want to, all at once or spread out, etc.*
- Office: In October is there a time limit for the day? As there are some questions about the time limit for time you have to get back to the dock.
 - o *April-June is when monitoring occurs, and consistently heard the preference for a Fall season*
- Roger: The commissioners are gonna have to make the decision about the number of fishers that are allowed. The way it's regulated, no one is gonna make a pile of money. People are gonna be aggravated that they can't get a license even when they've oystered all their lives.
 - o *Option 2 – anyone who is eligible for a license based on the qualifications can get one*
- Office: On option 2, how does that open the door for future generations?
 - o For both options, you only have to have previous landings to qualify for year 1. You maintain that license so long as you have all of the required qualifications and you use it. If the endorsement lapses, then it returns to the pool of availability and there is a lottery
- Gayle: How many violations would it take for someone to lose their license?
 - o *It depends on the violation and the severity*
 - o *Everyone has the option for due process, if your license is revoked you have the chance to appeal*

2:53 Committee Updates

1. Communication – No Updates
2. Technical – No Updates
3. Outreach & Ed – Met in June, updating the Facebook page with FWC and Partnership updates, talked about the Communication Plan, developed a Google doc to record

messaging outputs and reach, Anita attended an event at the Apalachicola Yacht Club to promo the Partnership

4. Finance – Out there trying, Andy and Ken tried get a grant to look at reef structures and protective structures, Grant with Sandra was not funded – got good reviews on it, Sediment dredging project – went to Triumph, kicked it back, working with the county to re-package looking at Blue Crab habitat, looking at sustainable rivers for next year, no dollars currently
 - a. Look at Bonefish, Tarpon Trust, CCA – not interested in oysters, but interested in artificial reefs

2:45 *ABSI Goals and Strategies – 2025 Implementation Review & Discussion*

- Outline of the ABSI Goals with identified needs from different committees in relation to implementation and funding
- Identify which committees need to focus and commit to, with a section for updates on developments and status
- Phase 2 of the Goals and Strategies Plan – Implementation
 - o Review of the goals and see what can be accomplished in 2025
 - o Need to work on pursuing funding
 - o Need to have a starting point, to break up in bite-size chunks to be able to tackle it piece by piece
 - o Each committee head will review the needs for implementation and identify what can be done, what money or other things are needed
 - o May not be implemented directly by the Partnership, but can provide support to other agencies or groups to conduct the activities
- For funding, need to determine what type of funding is needed – capacity building, outreach, research, restoration, etc.
- Adding a column for the role of the Partnership versus other orgs/partners
- First thing – committees review the doc and 1) comment if they have identified additional committee involvement, 2) identify existing activities by outside orgs/partners, 3) identify activities that can be accomplished by the end of the year
- After figuring out what can be accomplished this year, look at prioritization of the remaining goals/strategies
- Betty will have a meeting with the committee chairs to look at what we have now, and review the doc → will talk about timeline at that meeting

3:37 *Other Business*

- Anita will not be running again for City Commission again for Apalachicola, term ends in September
 - o Need to discuss reaching out to the City to ask if they are ok with Anita still representing the City Commission on the Partnership
- Next FWC commission Meeting – oysters will be the 2nd day, if changes, Erika will let Betty know (August 13 and 14) – Bears will be on the docket so it will be busy
 - o Havana, FL – Florida Public Safety Institute

3:38 *Meeting Adjourned*