

# PARTNERSHIP FOR A RESILIENT APALACHICOLA BAY

## MONTHLY MEETING #17

Thursday, December 18, 2025 - 12 Noon to 3:30 PM EST  
Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve  
108 Island Drive, Eastpoint, Florida

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**Facilitator:** Betty Webb

**Members Present:** Ottice Amison, Ricky Banks, Cameron Baxley, Jim Estes, Anita Grove, Shannon Hartsfield, Ken Jones, Roger Mathis, Gayle Johnson, Grayson Shepard, Steve Rash

**Advisor Members & Visitors:** Grace Lawhorn, Betsy Mansfield, Alejandra Rios, Sandra Brooke, Carrie Jones, Joel Trexler, Adam Searles, Steven Cook, Jon Creamer, Kim Miller, Chad Hanson

**Online:** Andy Kane, Erika Burgess, Morgan Eason, Hannah Bleth, Portia Sapp, Jenna Harper

**1:00 - November/December Joint Meeting Welcome - Ottice Amison**

- Introduction of new members Adam Searles and Steven Cook
- Review Agenda - Betty Webb, Facilitator

**1:05 - Organization Business**

- Meeting Notes Approval Decision - October 29, 2025 Meeting
  1. Motion: Anita, Second: Grayson, minutes approved
- Other Organizational Business
  - Next meeting will be scheduled January 28, 2026

**1:15 - Erika Burgess, FWC**

1. Apalachicola Bay Opening for Oyster Harvesting Update  
(*Product Availability, Number of Approved AB License Holders, Workshops*)
- Team has been out in Apalachicola area trying to help people apply for oyster permits
    - Just over 200 applicants for each type of permit
    - Application closed on Tuesday for permits
    - FWC currently going through criteria checks, and disqualifying based on violations to be completed by tomorrow. Sending out informal approval or denials this week.
    - Monday: Morgan and Grace will be at FWC Law Enforcement office in Carrabelle next week to hand out the permit packages including tags for commercial folks, new SPL card, and information about the season. Staff will be available teaching how to use the reporting app.
    - 4,694 commercial bags 245 recreational bags. Just for Jan-Feb season
    - So far, 154 applicants have met the criteria for commercial permit, not including convictions. Final number should be ready tomorrow.
      - Violations looking at: Any convictions for Marine Fisheries Rule, Rule of oyster mal-harvest rule from 2012 to 2025. They are looking at the severity of violations when disqualifying.
    - Bag limit set based off Spring monitoring.
      - Annual monitoring will continue routinely every spring (April-June)
    - Harvest level for October season will depend on monitoring from Spring. Reefs open may change based on monitoring as well.
    - Law enforcement training workshops took place.
      - Language was gone through word by word. Talked about grey scenarios, went through all the rules, and emphasized education this first season so by the second season we are all on the same page.
    - Public training had to turn into the in person 1 on 1 that will take place Dec. 2-23 & Dec. 29-30.

- Staff will be available Monday-Fri for people to pick up their permits in person. Hannah Bleth will hold office hours and be in town once a week to provide any help.
- Commercial and Recreational packages will be similar. They will include tags, a quick guide and complete rule language available, coordinates for open reefs and coordinates for mandatory landing locations. Recreational package will have additional QR code with helpful links.
- Processors are not allowed to pick up the product from the harvesters, harvesters need to deliver themselves. Considering changing this for aquaculture product only. Concern changing with harvesting because they want to make sure things are properly handled with processor before going to
- Questions:
  - Is there a hard number yet for applications?
    - *Not yet, 154 met initial criteria and now will be looked at for convictions. Final number in the next day or two.*
  - Do any convictions disqualify you?
    - *FWC will look deeper into convictions to see specific violations from 2012-2025. Only looking for convictions, not violations with dismissal. Will be looking at different tiers for convictions - violations endangering human health is more serious than single fish violation. Need multiple single fish violations before you are disqualified for a permit.*
  - Has there been any more site monitoring since monitoring last spring? Current oysters are thing and not high quality that dealers would want to purchase.
    - *No more monitoring has happened since the spring.*

## 2. 2026 Bay Restoration Funding Updates

- Governors proposed budget released a few weeks ago.
- \$25 million for Bay restoration and management with 5 year time window to spend the \$25 million.
  - Just a recommendation, House and Senate will need to agree on joint budget
  - Reach out to our representatives and let them know you support the funding to restoration in Apalachicola Bay
    - Want to get feedback by the Spring from local government, harvesters, non profits, and other non-partnership individuals.
  - Want to create game plan for multiple years so they are ready when funding becomes available. Would guide all the various pots of money they could receive
    - Would support cultching program
  - Emphasize the planning and work going in
  - Put together fact sheet on the value of oysters that we can repurpose for the Partnership and use as a starting point for an educational sheet. Important to get that message across about the importance of oysters.

## 3. Other Discussion Items

- Shannon: Our focus has just been to create habitat. Shared photos of oysters harvested at cap point and East hole from new material. Oysters are thin and bad quality, not harvestable. No one will want to buy them, they can only be used for habitat. Afraid things have changed drastically since spring with some areas not looking very good.
  - Shannon offering to go out end of January and bring back oysters so FWC can see real-time what oysters are looking like. Wants this data for management down the road.
  - Difference between full blown monitoring that takes months to analyze. Quantitative data that is quicker, done on the water. Need a mixture of both especially as harvesting expands.
    - Supplemental management
  - Especially in drought conditions with such a high salinity, conditions have changed drastically.
- Need to discuss with county lobbyist. We need the extra funding to continue restoration
- Back and forth to finalize

- Lime rock, Concrete , mixed layer concrete (bottom layer average 12 inches, top average 4 inch layer)
- FWC does not take them out for public comment. Took the Partnerships recommendations and incorporated them into design. There was not enough time to take more comments and more recommendations. Working in a very tight window between receiving funding and when material needs to go in the water.

**2:20** - Break

**2:38** - *Committee Updates*

1. Education and Outreach Committee - Chair Anita Grove
  - Seafood Festival partnered with ConservationCorps.
  - Created a big banner, building up the ability to go to events and create more promotional materials
  - Pushing out regulations for the opening through Facebook
  - Want to get out and take pictures of people oystering on the first day. Put out a press release
    - It is difficult to move quickly and come to a cohesive message. Don't want to seem like we are promoting the opening of the fishery. Press release should just be visual and factual not including our opinion.
2. Technical Committee - Chair Chad Hanson
  - Pulled out excerpts from document put together by CAB through ABSI.
    - 5 Plan Goals with strategies and actions
    - Might help to put together a new planning document for allocating the potential 25 million in funding. Want to be prepared before money comes.
    - Strategy for spending the funds would need to be together in the next couple months (2-3).
    - Would have a more flushed out version in 6-8 months
3. Communication Committee - Chair Shannon Hartsfield
  - Feeling like this opening is going to be set back, hard to plan for the future when we have no indication of what is going to happen in the next few months
  - Should figure out HOW we want to start communicating as a group rather than posting things and having people react after the fact.
4. Finance Committee - Chair Ken Jones
  - \$5,000 will be coming in soon, will figure out spending in the new year
5. Recommendation - Set Up New Organization Membership Committee
  - Most nonprofits have a plan to get paid membership. Are we there yet? Might be time to start planning for this in the future
    - Would be like 'The Friends of The Partnership'
  - Potential to help increase volunteers for outreach events

**3:08** - *Organizational Planning Session*

- Ideas for presentations:
  - Adam Alfasso, Pensacola Bay Estuary Program, Ed Camp, Aden Domen, Lauren Rice (Reproduction)
  - Florida Conservation Corps
  - Jim Moran – public presentation?
  - Specific workshops?
- Invite other agencies/stakeholders:
  - Coastal Conservation Association
  - Bay Savers?
- Project List/Grant Applications:
  - Franklin County
  - Monitoring program to make data available to the public
  - Opportunity for education for public

- Continue implementation for ABSI goals, additional goals/targets?
  - How do we increase reach and capacity? Experimental areas?
- Anything else you would like to see happen in 2026?
  - Expand communication
  - How can we increase membership? Broaden our presence or we become stagnant
  - New voices to the committee?
  - Re envisioning what the oyster industry might look like moving forward

**4:00** - *Meeting Adjourned*