

# PARTNERSHIP FOR A RESILIENT APALACHICOLA BAY

## MONTHLY MEETING #18

Wednesday, January 28, 2026 - 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:** Roger Matthis, Ken Jones, Anita Grove, Ottice Amison, Shannon Hartsfield, Grayson Shephard, David Barber, Cameron Baxley, Steve Rash

**Advisor Members & Visitors:** Grace Lawhorn, Betsy Mansfield, Alejandra Rios, Chad Hanson, Joel Trexler, Kim Miller, Carrie Jones, Capt. Michael Mimms, Doug Brown, Karen Duherst, Jim Duherst, Jeff Silverstein, Svetlana

**Online:** Sandra Brooke, Jennifer Harper, Morgan Eason, Jon Creamer, Jim Estes, Andy Kane

### 1:00 - Welcome - Ottice Amison

- Introduction- New meeting participants, Agency Representatives, and visitors
  - New visitors – Jeff and Karen, docents from the Nature Center wanting to be able to engage more with the public. Svetlana, new adult programs coordinator at ANERR.
- Review Agenda - Betty Webb, Facilitator

### 1:03 - Organization Business

1. Meeting Notes Approval Decision – December 18, 2025 Meeting
  - Motion: Grayson, Second: Anita, minutes approved
  - Next meeting: Feb 25, 2026
2. Conservation Corps Intern
  - Grant from conservation corps for ANERR to hire an intern over the summer to collect data on success of living shorelines. The intern will be a Corps member.
  - Asking the Partnership to provide a letter of support for the application – Motion: Chad, Second: Anita, approved.
3. Opening of the fishery
  - Photos shared from bay opening
    1. Shannon: People were really excited; the county came alive in the first two weeks. Could really feel the excitement from everyone. A lot of younger guys who seemed surprised at how good the tonging was, couldn't believe it had ever been better. Oysters from Cat Point were bigger than he had ever seen. 10 gallon bucket ~ 74 pounds. May-October saw more dead than ever before. Good amount of boring sponge covering oysters.
    2. Roger: Huge oysters from Cat point. Oysters were covered in grass, haven't seen that in years. A lot of the oysters were dead at East Hole (70%).
  - 10 gallon bucket ~ 74 pounds.
  - Our salinity has been very high this year, leading to growth on the oysters
  - Want FWC to look at populations again ~a month before the bay opens to get a better idea of the health of the bars
  - Betty has heard very positive comments from public regarding FWC law enforcement.

- Each person got 31 tags, that went to 152 commercial. 215 people got recreational tags, only 13 used so far.
- Morgan: Can keep commercial bags, just need to be sure you report it as kept. Have to make sure you sell at least 1 bag to renew your permit for next season.
- Oysters have been very popular with the public at restaurants. A lot of people are asking for them.
- As of 1/23, 2,534 bags sold to processors – not including number of bags kept by commercial harvesters.
- Doesn't seem to really be competition between lease oysters and wild caught

### 1:15 – Morgan Eason, FWC Updates

#### 4. Successful 2026 Apalachicola Bay Opening - FWC/Partnership Members

- Number of reported tags is still up in the air. Spending a lot of time correcting information that has been reported incorrectly or incompletely.
- FWC number as of 1/13 was just under 2,000
- Going to be updating the reporting process for next season. The app is having trouble and is hard to use on the phone, especially out on the water. Text color is difficult, buttons aren't working, etc.
- Shannon will meet with Morgan to provide feedback on the app function
- Capt. Mimms: No real issues other than some problems with undersized catch the first couple weeks but that seems to have subsided. Highlighted the hard work that FWC put into making this opening happen and keeping it organized.
- Questions for Morgan:
  1. What about distributing the denial justification letters. When will they go out?
    1. The denial letters were sent last week. According to tracking they haven't all been delivered. They're sent through certified mail so you need to be there to sign, if not they'll get sent back. Once they fill out paperwork for appeal, they have 21 days to get that paperwork back to FWC. They'll get a phone call to talk 1 on 1 about why they're appealing and get to argue their case.
  2. What will happen now-October?
    1. FWC staff will be down doing in-person training on the app once improvements are finalized. No changes on rules for the next season, they're already in statute.
    2. Betty has allocated time in June to have a public workshop to work out any issues and get feedback

#### 5. 2026 Bay Restoration Funding Update

- 2025-2026 funding project is with contracts now, open to bid in February. On track to have material going in the water spring/summer.
- The FWC requested 30 million for AB, the governor is recommending 25 million. Won't know any more until the session is over.
- Nifwit money will be released this summer (\$17 million)

### 2:10 – 15 Minute Break and Networking

### 2:50 - Committee Updates

1. Education and Outreach Committee - Chair Anita Grove

- Doug has been very active on social media about bay opening
  - Anita invited to talk about partnership to Civic Club. Gave them recommendations for who to contact for funding.
  - Very successful table at the oyster cook-off
  - Request to speak with Eastpoint civic association
2. Technical Committee - Chair Chad Hanson
- Met before the holidays to discuss putting together a restoration plan.
  - Subgroup of the committee to come up with restoration plan. Putting together conceptual budget outline over the next few months. Hopefully by march meeting there will be a more concrete version to walk through. Our plan for how to spend restoration money, and plan for advocacy when other funding opportunities come up.
  - Conversations with FWC about collaborating
  - Added FWC members to technical committee
  - Anita: Should we be deploying more testing areas so we can see what's going on in other places over the long-term? We can give recommendations to FWC, but should the Partnership be doing some monitoring and experimenting of their own?
    - We need to do this in conjunction with FWC because we don't want to do things that aren't valuable. We might be more helpful in securing funding and then working with FWC on actual experimenting.
1. Communication Committee - Chair Shannon Hartsfield
- Hopefully will get together with FWC next month to give recommendations for October.
  - Need to get ourselves invited to these meetings with decision makers who are deciding where to plant material.
1. Finance Committee - Chair Ken Jones
- Bank account created with Office and Betty on the account. No plan for the money so far other than meeting food.
  - Purchased an outreach banner.

### 3:35 – 2026 Organizational Planning Session

- New outreach/education plan for 2026 that is required under the grant. Will be reviewed next month.
- March is our 2nd year annual meeting. We will need to look at new officers potentially if anyone does not want to continue their position.

### 3:40 – Other Business: Comments from Board Members and Attendees

- Carrie Jones, FDACS - ACOE will begin dredging Jan. 31, chance parts of the bay will close, but unlikely they'll reach Cat Point by end of February.

### 3:43 - Meeting Adjourned