

## PARTNERSHIP FOR A RESILIENT APALACHICOLA BAY

### MEETING #15

Wednesday, September 24, 2025 - 12 to 3:30 PM EST  
Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve  
108 Island Drive, Eastpoint, Florida

**Facilitator:** Betty Webb

**Members Present:** Ottice Amison, David Barber, Roger Matthis, Anita Grove, Grayson Shephard, Carrie Jones

**Advisory Members & Visitors:** Betsy Mansfield, Grace Lawhorn, Erik Lovestrand, Doug Brown, Kim Miller, Ross Ellington, Sandra Brooke, Capt. Mims, John Creamer, Dan Ellinor, Serena (WTVX ABC)

**Online:** Morgan Eason, Jenna Harper, Chad Hanson, Andy Kane, Kim Branciforte, Ken Jones

**12:55** *Call Meeting to Order and Welcome – Ottice Amison*  
*Introductions of new faces*  
*Review Agenda - Betty Webb, Facilitator*

**12:57** Morgan Eason, FWC Presentation on Proposed Harvest Rules

- Proposed Rule for Oyster Harvest in Apalachicola Review
  - o Changes by Commission at the August Meeting: Open season Jan 1- Feb 28, then fall harvest starting in Oct (go through to end of Feb 2027)
    - Commercial and recreational harvest
    - Threshold to open reefs = 400 bags/acre – figure based off of FDACS number used in the past
      - As of now, based off of 2025 monitoring – there are 4 reefs that will open in January
    - Of number of bags – 95% go to commercial and 5% to recreational
      - All intertidal harvest will go to recreational, but as of right now
    - Commercial harvest = Mon – Fri, Recreational = Sat & Sun
      - Recreational will likely be one bag per license per season
      - If there are more people wanting a license than available bags – lottery system
      - Recreational harvest can tong
      - Won't be able to get both recreational and commercial tags (must be one or the other)
    - Recreational reporting: on a web based app, either app or website on the phone, required for commercial and recreational, include times, harvest location and for commercial – the wholesaler you sell to, will have mandatory landing locations (these will not be just ramps), landing location list is subject to change but will be posted on the FWC website
      - Each recreational license will have an assignment of harvest, and reported location of harvest must match the reported harvested location

- Can't get half bags, once you report, that is one full tag, can't split them between days
- Reporting process will be the same for both recreational and commercial
- Commercial harvest – bag is 60 lbs. Anything over that counts as another bag
- Commercial harvest: AB endorsement = individual or crew SPL, bivalve endorsement, FL resident, have landed oysters in AB from 2012-2020 (have to have these before you apply for the AB endorsement)
  - Must have this to get the endorsement
  - Everyone who has this can get the endorsement and get tags
  - Then must land oysters within Jan-Feb of 2026 to qualify for renewing for the October season (doesn't matter the amount, just have to sell at least a bag to a wholesale dealer, don't have to fill all the tags for the first Jan season)
  - If you don't land in Jan-Feb, you forfeit your license and that license is put back into the lottery system
  - If folks have the license but don't have a boat, they can use someone else's boat and have multiple licenses/ tags used on the same boat, you just have to have the number of tags between the people on the boat for the bags you catch
  - If you have an AB endorsement, you cannot participate in the recreational fishery
- Recreational harvest: Must have a recreational saltwater harvest license, and be a FL resident
  - Going to be allotted by lottery assuming the number of applicants exceeds the number of available bags
  - During the application process, recreational harvesters can rank their preference for harvest location but no guarantee on location
  - Recreational harvester gets assigned a reef that they can harvest from
  - Apply every year, first year does not set the cap for the recreational harvest
  - Each license will get only one bag for the season
  - *Might not get many recreational harvesters as the investment cost might be too high for just one bag of oysters (tongs cost at least \$300)*
  - Intertidal reefs have been monitored, none met the threshold of 400 bags/ acre – currently being assessed the same as the subtidal reefs
  - No intertidal reefs open Jan. 1
- Proposing clutching program – if a reef is cultched, reef is closed for one year post-cultching for reefs to develop. Reefs will reopen once they can meet 400 bag/acre threshold
  - All reefs will not be cultched at once, do so a couple at a time with \$ availability and rotation of reefs

- Closure for a year is for the standardization of the reefs
- Monitoring and discussion about selected reefs will occur before the material is out planted
- Shelling would happen in the Spring
  - *Monitoring needs to be done so that the clutching doesn't happen on reefs with lots of oysters and the shelling might cover up the living oysters*
- State-wide changes:
  - Anything 1 inch or larger needs to be culled on site
  - Undersized oyster allowance – converted from percentage to number, but ratio remains the same
    - 11 unattached oysters per bag
    - 33 attached oysters per bag
    - Hopefully will help with timing and enforcement speed
- FWC will hold workshops for further public comment
  - September 30, 6-8 pm, County Commissioner Meeting Room
  - October 7, 6-8 pm Chapman Auditorium
  - Potentially one closer to Cedar Key area on October 14<sup>th</sup>
- No recommendations to changes or new penalties or approaches on enforcement
- Permit handout will happen in person, information packets will be provided, and there will be FWC staff there to answer questions
- Person named on the license must pick up the permit and information
- *Question brought up about the uncertainty of knowing the weight of the oysters until they take them to the dealer – an oyster sack could have up to 80 pounds – but a bag is 60 pounds, so it could lead to harvesting more bags than expected*
  - FWC will think on it and clarify at the upcoming workshop
- Dan Elinor provided names to Betty for folks to write letters of support for the budgetary ask
  - Mention of wanting to highlight importance of protecting juvenile gag grouper populations that reside in AB as well. Restoration is for AB as a WHOLE, not just the oysters
- 30 million dollar ask for clutching and oyster program in Apalachicola Bay requested for the state budget
- **Next FWC Commission Meeting is Nov 5-6 in Clewiston, Florida**

**2:00 Break**

**2:28 FWC Information on Questions brought up last meeting**

- FWC answered questions that were brought up at last meeting about the proposed rule change and information to send out of the public
- Areas open for recreational harvest
  - Locations will depend on monitoring, monitoring thresholds are the same for both subtidal and intertidal bars

- For the 4 bars that meet the threshold, looking at 4,943 bags for harvest (247 bags for recreational, and 4,695 bags for commercial) – going by 225 oysters per bag and harvest 10% of harvestable bags
  - If there are more than 247 applications for a recreational license – there will be a lottery
- If the bay is closed to river height and no bags are harvested at all in Jan-Feb season, then will all license holders be unable to renew their licenses for the October opening?
  - Will be addressed as the situation arises
- Must you catch all tags given per season to renew to the next year or just catch one?
  - Nope, just need to sell one bag to be able to renew. This is for every season not just the first Jan-Feb season
- Have to have the SPL and Bivalve endorsement prior to applying for the AB endorsement
- For culling substrate – 1 inch or greater must be culled on site not at the dock or another location
- Mandatory landing sites – specific locations TBD, estimate that there will be at least 10 if not more landing locations for commercial and recreational
  - Likely 3 primary boat ramps (1 SGI, 1 Apalach, 1 Eastpoint)
  - Also any processor that has access to the water via a dock
  - Can pull boat out anywhere when you don't have oysters, but have to land oysters at specified sites

### **2:58 Organizational Business**

1. Meeting Minutes Approval for August 27, 2025 – Anita Motion, Shannon Second, Approved
2. Betty has secured \$5,000 from Duke Energy for the Partnership – cover costs of meeting expenses, insurance expenses, etc.
  - a. Need approval to open a bank account – Motion Shannon, Second Anita, Approved
  - b. Anita requests to buy a tablecloth and pop-up poster for outreach events.
3. US Corps of Engineers holding a public meeting Tuesday Oct 21, 6-8 pm, Coombs Inn
  - a. Updates on ACF dredging project including shoaling locations and potential placement areas
  - b. Part of the meeting will be updates about ongoing things that are happening in Apalachicola
  - c. Will also have a few field trips that folks can sign up for during the COE visit
4. Office talked with the Lt. Gov. and Gov. about the Bay, started the convo – hoping to have got a fit in the door for further conversation

### **3:13 Committee Updates**

- Technical Committee: No Meeting
- Communications Committee: No Meeting
- Education and Outreach Committee: Covered with FWC question and answer – will summarize and add to the document they hope to put out about the proposed oyster rules
  - Partnership approves releasing the questions asked by the Partnership to FWC and their answers
  - \*\* Highlight that SPL is needed before applying for AB

- \*\* Highlight that FWC is the place to get specifics about the rules themselves, Partnership is not releasing anything on details of that, only going to share the questions they posed, and the answers provided by FWC
- Finance Committee: have \$5,000 from Duke Energy

**3:17** *Meeting Adjourned*

**Next Meeting:** 5<sup>th</sup> Wednesday of the Month – October 29<sup>th</sup>, 2025