

# PARTNERSHIP FOR A RESILIENT APALACHICOLA BAY

## MONTHLY MEETING #19

Wednesday, February 25, 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:** Ken Jones, Anita Grove, Ottice Amison, Shannon Hartsfield, Rickey Banks, Grayson Shephard, David Barber, Cameron Baxley, Steve Rash, Jim Estes, Gayle Johnson, Bruce Millender, and Chad Hanson (virtual)

**Advisor Members & Visitors:** Grace Lawhorn, Betsy Mansfield, Alejandra Rios, Sandra Brooke, Joel Trexler, Kim Miller, Carrie Jones, Officer Steven Cook, Doug Brown, Morgan Eason, Hannah Bleth

**Online:** Chad Hanson, Jennifer Harper, Jon Creamer, Andy Kane, Portia Sapp, Kim Branciforte

**1:00 - Welcome - Ottice Amison**

- Introductions - New Meeting Participants, Agency Representatives, and Visitors
- Review Agenda - Betty Webb, Facilitator

**1:05 - Organization Business:**

1. Meeting Notes Approval Decision - January 28, 2026 Meeting
  - Minutes Approved
  - Next Meeting: March 25, 2026.

- March meeting will be our annual meeting, and we will be voting on new officers

**1:10 - Betsy Mansfield, Betsy Mansfield, Ph.D., Postdoctoral Researcher, FSUCML Presentation - *Defining Oyster Restoration Success: Current Approaches, Targets and Priorities for Florida's Gulf Coast***

- Recent shift in restoration goals from fisheries enhancement to holistic ecosystem recovery
- Emphasized importance of thresholds or endpoints to assess success in restoration projects
- 4 standardized monitoring recommendations for oyster reefs: reef area, reef height, oyster density, & size-frequency distribution
  - Monitoring is key during & after restoration efforts
- Co-developing goals for restoration & establishing success thresholds are key for restoration projects.
- Apalachicola Bay priorities: increasing oyster abundance, increasing reef dimensions (height specifically), and improving water quality
- Interesting to analyze: Were people more interested in less people with licenses able to take more bags OR more people with licenses able to harvest fewer number of bags
- Shannon emphasized difficulty in convincing people that oysters aren't abundant everywhere, just in the locations where restoration took place.
- Opportunity to connect with FSU School of Communications to make some video records of the bay and fishery opening – Joel & Sandra in beginning stages of talking to Comm. School
- Ottice & Shannon emphasized need for local support of putting material out into the bay

**1:53 - Morgan Eason, FWC - UPDATES:**

1. Shallow Areas of Bay (Markers)
  - Working on permitting the buoys before they can be put back out on the site. Working with Sandra and Shannon to see if there are any other shallow water areas that need to be marked as well.
2. 2026 Apalachicola Bay Opening Status
  - Overall success, will be working in coming months on appeals from those who were denied
3. 2026 Bay Restoration Funding Request
4. Spring Restoration Project Work Update
  - Gone out to bid, bid closes March 25th. Strict deadline to have material in the water by September. Two different materials: lime rock and concrete. Two different options for layout as well, but both have a top layer that is tong-able.

## 5. General Questions for Morgan

- Have there been any changes in the budget deliberations?
  - Senate recommended \$15 million, house recommended \$2.1 million. Governor's recommendation was \$30 million.
- Any harvest updates?
  - Don't have any final numbers yet, as of today 3,100 bags were used commercially and 30 recreational tags used. There are 129 recreational tags still sitting in law enforcement office that were never collected.
  - Anyone who did not report this season will be contacted and FWC will assist them in reporting. If they didn't fish, they can't apply to renew for next season.
- What is your sense of success of this program?
  - Some people are really happy to just be out there in the bay, and some people still aren't happy without unlimited access to the bay. Overall, people seem pleased with the hard work FWC has put into this
- Will the reporting app be improved before October opening?
  - Tweaks and small updates will be made as time allows
- What adjustments will be made for tags for next season?
  - The caps are set until they are able to go through the rulemaking process again, likely in a couple years
- At Cat Point the larger material seems to be ending up on top. Can we have volunteers go out and transplant the oysters to the edge of the bar?
  - There may be hurdles, but it's something FWC can look more into

### 2:25 - 20 Minute Break and Networking

### 2:40 - Grayson Shepard, Representing Apalachicola Reef Association

#### Presentation - *Apalachicola Reef Area and History, Upcoming Funding Request*

- Working with OAR (Organization for Artificial Reefs) in Tallahassee. Picked site about 30 miles offshore between Apalachicola and Carabelle. Idea is that everyone in the County can get to it.
- Avg. depth will be 104 ft with a 477 acre area.
- Goal is to get \$120,000 for the structures, will cover 6 structures.

### 3:00 - Committee Updates -

1. Education and Outreach Committee - Chair Anita Grove
  - Sent out plan for 2026 to Education Committee
  - Need support for creating video or getting the word out there
  - Letter from the City sent to agricultural committees supporting \$19 million for bay restoration
  - Upcoming booth at FSUCML Open House on April 25
  - Estuaries Day at ANERR on May 1
  - Reach out to media sources to get more bay coverage
2. Technical Committee - Chair Chad Hanson
  - Haven't had time to regroup this month, hopefully will catch up in early March
3. Communication Committee - Chair Shannon Hartsfield
  - Need to have a March meeting with Morgan to discuss where and how they're planning on putting down material.
4. Finance Committee - Chair Ken Jones – no additional activity

### 3:20 - Other Business / Announcements / Comments from Board Members & Attendee

- Want letters from Riverkeepers and anyone else in support of restoration in the bay.

### 3:25 - Adjourn