

# PARTNERSHIP FOR A RESILIENT APALACHICOLA BAY

## MONTHLY MEETING #20

Wednesday, March 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:** Ottice Amison, Shannon Hartsfield, Grayson Shephard, Ken Jones David Barber, Cameron Baxley, Steve Rash, Anita Grove Jim Estes, Chad Hanson, Gayle Johnson, Roger Mathis

**Advisor Members & Visitors:** Matthew Davis, Steven Cook, Caitlin McCauley, Kim Miller, Dan Ellinor, Justin Wallheiser Grace Lawhorn, Betsy Mansfield, Alejandra Rios, Doug Brown

**Online:** Jennifer Harper, Morgan Eason, Andy Kane

**1:00** – Annual Meeting & Monthly Meeting Welcome – Ottice Amison, President

- Introductions - New Meeting Participants, Agency Representatives, and Visitors
  - Introduced Caitlin, new outreach person for OysterCorps
  - Review Agenda - Betty Webb, Facilitator

**1:05** – Call Annual Meeting to Order

- Confirmation of Officers – Two year terms (2026-2028)
  - Chair – Ottice Amison
  - Vice Chair – David Barber
  - Secretary – Rickey Banks
  - Treasurer – Ken Jones
- Confirmation of New Year Meeting Schedule
  - Meetings will continue to be the fourth Wednesday of each month
  - Proposed **THURSDAY Nov. 19** will be a combined November and December meeting - Approved
  - Ideas for presentations that were proposed at the end of 2025 will be incorporated into upcoming 2026 meetings
- Other Annual Business
  - Annual Registration
  - Need to register with FDACS to receive donations as a nonprofit org.
- Adjourn Annual Meeting

**1:18** – Call Monthly Meeting to Order

Organization Business:

- Meeting Notes Approval Decision – Feb. 25, 2026 Meeting
  - Minutes Approved
  - Next Meeting: April 22, 2026

**1:25** - Matthew Davis, M.A., FWC, Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI) Presentation: *The Current Status and Future of Apalachicola Oysters/Q&A*

- Subtidal oyster population survey
- Remove surface material, put it into a catch bag, and analyze sample
  - Substrate weight
  - Number and size of live oysters
  - Number of recently dead oysters
  - Number of legal-size oysters

- Number of oyster drills
- Shell height of first 50 oysters they encounter
- 2025 standardized sampling to take place annually between March-June
- April & May 2025 surveyed 24 reefs - 14 Historic uncultched reefs, Seven RESTORE-2017, Three NFWF-2021 reefs
  - Historic uncultched have had very low substrate, pretty much just shell hash
  - NFWF and Restore have a lot more material on them
  - Very low oyster densities at historic reefs, but higher densities on NFWF and Restore reefs
  - Historic reefs had very small oysters, mostly spat, NFWF and Restore had larger size classes
  - Out of 24 reefs, only 7 reefs met and exceeded the threshold of 400 bags/acre, and only 4 had mean confidence intervals above threshold
  - These 4 reefs were open for 10% harvest of legal-sized oysters
  - Not able to compare historic samples because sampling methods changed so much over the years and when the oysters were so abundant there wasn't careful data recorded
  - 2006 mapping suggests at least 12,000 acres of potential habitat, and by 2019 only about ~600 acres remained
  - FWC seeking funding to reestablish cultching program
  - Next round of monitoring will take place April-June

**2:12 - Morgan Eason, FWC - UPDATES:**

1. 2026 Apalachicola Bay Opening Status/Reporting Updates
  - a. Going through and trying to confirm bags reported with those that were harvesting
  - b. Sending notifications now to anyone who had incomplete reports, either blank or incomplete reports, urging them to call and correct those reports by April 30th. This will give us more accurate reporting
2. 2026 Bay Restoration Funding Request Status
  - a. Reconvene April 20th for special session - Budget will be either the week before or week after
  - b. We need to talk about how much money FWRI needs
3. Shallow Areas of Bay Status (Permit/Markers)
  - a. Putting signs out on boat ramps to mark shallow areas from restoration projects in the next few weeks
  - b. Will the shallow spots be marked out in the water?
    1. No, no signage will be out in the water. Things in the bay change quickly and it's hard to get things in the water to stay in the water

**2:18 - 15 Minute Break and Networking**

**2:36 – Committee Updates**

1. *Education and Outreach Committee - Chair Anita Grove*
  - Looked over the plan for upcoming year this week
  - Estuaries day and FSUCML Open House upcoming
  - Need to come up with some print materials to start distributing at these outreach events
  - Need to have more communications with people further North who seem to not know we're in a drought
2. *Technical Committee - Chair Chad Hanson*
  - **April 10th at 10AM:** workshop with FSU crew to go through all their new modeling and information. Talk about how to use data to create a restoration plan
3. *Communication Committee - Chair Shannon Hartsfield*
  - The two proposed restoration bars will hopefully grow to join into one bar

- Need to let oystermen work on scattering some of those oysters along the edges because there's so much material on the reef
  - Concerned dealers are not going to want thin intertidal-looking oysters
  - Concerned about large size of the material
  - Can we use a barge to redistribute the material to make deeper, larger reefs for the 10 NFWF plots?
    1. The material is so dense, probably hard to use a barge
  - What can we do as a group to stress the impact of the drought?
    1. Kim will get together salinity resources
  - Request Matt to take note of presence of boring sponge during their next sample season
4. *Finance Committee - Chair Ken Jones*
- Nothing major has changed
  - Friends of the Partnership idea - Approved
    1. Need to come up with levels to join and informational documents
    2. Will create formal proposal to present
- 3:33** – Adjourn Other Business/Announcements
- Cameron offering to take public out on boat rides to see slough work completed by Riverkeepers - reach out to her if interested

Meeting Adjourned