

PARTNERSHIP FOR A RESILIENT APALACHICOLA BAY

ANNUAL MEETING & MONTHLY MEETING #24

Wednesday, July 22, 2026 - 12 Noon to 3:30 PM EST

Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve

108 Island Drive, Eastpoint, Florida

Facilitator: Betty Webb

Members Present: Ottice Amison, David Barber, Shannon Hartsfield, Anita Grove, Shannon Hartsfield, Roger Mathis, Bruce Millender, Grayson Shepard, Steve Rash, Ken Jones, Gayle Johnson, Cameron Baxley

Advisory Members & Visitors: Betsy Mansfield, Alejandra Rios, Grace Lawhorn, Sharon Cilano, Carrie Jones, Kim Miller, Morgan Eason, Faith Causey, Holden Foley, Jon Creamer, Doug Brown, Hannah Bluth, Matt Davis, Corbin Pritchard, Joe Taylor, Owen G., Joseph Page

Online: Bruce Ritchie, Cameron Jaggard, Chad Hanson, Sandra Brooke

1:00 - Call Monthly Meeting to Order - Ottice Amison, President

1:05 - Meeting Welcome

Introductions - New Meeting Participants, Agency Representatives, and Visitors

- Corbin Pritchard, community outreach and education coordinator for OysterCorps
- Cameron Jaggard, PEW charitable trust US conservation Southeast Team
- *Review Agenda - Betty Webb, Facilitator*

1:10 - Organizational Business:

1. *Meeting Notes Approval Decision - June 24, 2026 Meeting*
 - June 24th Notes approved – Motion: Shannon, Second: Bruce, Approved.
2. *Other Organizational Business*
 - County applying for funding to repair boat ramp seawall on St. George Island. Letter of support prepared on behalf of Partnership, signed by Betty
 - Motion to approve: Anita, Second: Grayson, Letter Approved.
 - Preliminary large map of AB prepared by Joel Trexler for reference during meetings - Committees will have a more in-depth look and provide feedback. Hopefully ready for final approval in August.
 - Suggestion to add historic vs. current oyster bed coverage to emphasize loss

1:15 - Franklin's Promise Coalition - Joe Taylor, Executive Director

Corbin Pritchard, Community Outreach Coordinator, Apalachicola Bay Region

Presentation: OysterCorps; How we started, Who we are, and Overview look at the work we are doing in the Apalachicola Bay Region

- Initial cohort formed in 2015
- FloridaCorps comprised of 2 separate programs: OysterCorps and a forestry program
- Recruit local youth (ages 18-25) to provide pathways to careers in conservation
 - Work on resume building, soft and hard skill development, professional certifications, etc.

- OysterCorps – Developed 2021
 - Dedicated to coastal restoration through oyster reef restoration, native plant propagation, living shoreline development, etc.
 - Living Shoreline Restoration
 - Sites: Indian creek, ANERR, Franklin 98, a couple sites on SGI
 - Oyster shell and concrete, prisms of jute and concrete, reef balls, oyster rag balls
 - POSH – Previous Oyster Shell Habitat
 - Concrete structures made with recycled oyster shells to create living oyster reefs
 - Form individual prism structures
 - Seeded in 3 months of SGI
 - VOG's Vertical Oyster Gardens -
 - Hang off people's docks for several months
 - Oysters grown used to seed other living shoreline projects
 - Spat recruitment method
 - Installed ~120 VOGs in AB
 - ~1,200 VOGs assembled by community members at outreach events with the public. Helps get people involved
 - (SUNS) Scaling Up Nature-Based Solutions
 - Regional coastal resilience initiative to identify and prioritize projects using natural ecosystems to protect Florida's wild
 - Identified over 200 projects that are now being narrowed down. Looking for feedback on what to prioritize
 - Suggested project is an Oyster Rag Pot project in AB
 - Oyster Rag Pots
 - Essentially just saturating rags in concrete to form structures
 - Easy to make, cost effective, and feasible for public involvement
 - Currently conducting site assessment for oyster rags
 - Looking at salinity, low sedimentation, low wave energy, and presence of other oysters
 - Project has been very successful in other parts of Florida
 - Since AB has relatively high spat recruitment, this would provide the substrate for the spat
 - Seeded in 3 months at St. George Island spots
 - Feedback/Questions:
 - Roger: Are ORPs for seed oysters or reef development?
 - More for reef development and recreation
 - Ken: Can we supplement existing shorelines with ORPs?

- Definitely possible; why they're developing different models for different environmental conditions/sites
- Shannon: This is the direction we need to go for Dry Bar to rebuild natural reef and protect juveniles from predators
 - Grayson: Jute prisms might be the perfect solution for this. Would guard juvenile oysters from snails, and after a high-energy event, the structure would break apart and we'd be left with an oyster bar
- Cameron: Is there capacity for long-term monitoring by OysterCorps?
 - Consistent monitoring with GIS to record and track data
 - Grant has specific deliverables that need to be addressed for monitoring and tracking, members are trained in these methods
- Motion to formally support idea of ORPs Project – Motion: Bruce, Second: Roger, Approved.

1:50 - 20 Minute Break and Networking

2:15 – Update on permitting process for Franklin's Promise SUNS Project – Carrie Jones

- FDACs Side: ACE general permit (SAJ99) for aquaculture and live rock activity on submerged lands – can add the project onto this permit
 - Have special mechanisms of management of areas that are not slated for commercial use but can be for restoration or education – strictly for nonprofits and restoration activities
 - Counties can have management agreements for these types of projects
 - Caveat for AB, cannot use existing bottom habitat in the area as it is protected Gulf Sturgeon breeding habitat- but can address this through using the caveat that there is permission for restoration projects to be placed in the footprint of historical existing bars
 - Need to survey habitat to permit sites for restoration, but shouldn't be a big deal as long as its not interfering with any other restoration projects
 - Need another state agency on board to oversee the project to avoid overlap with FWC work
 - SAJ99 permit only for cultch placement, ORPs are small enough for SAJ99 but the larger concrete modules are not. That would require an individual permit with the Army Corps.
 - DEP is working on inshore reef permit, but won't be ready until fall
 - Might be worth it to apply for permits for larger structures at Dry Bar to restore the height that used to be there

2:25 - Morgan Eason, FWC - UPDATES:

1. October-February 2026 Harvest Season

- Same three sites as last year will be open (NFWF Cat Point, Cat Point Spur, and Peanut Ridge). East Hole will not be open for October season.
- Commercial bags: 2,433 total, 126 qualified harvesters, 19 bag tickets each
- Recreational bags: 127 bags

- The number of bags per reef are almost exactly same as last season
- Recreational sign-up through the end of the month, July 31 2026

2. *Current Bay Restoration Project*

- New project is 12.4 acres total
- 13,000 cubic yards of concrete per site (2 sites)
 - Parallel rows just south of NFWF cat point, 50 yards apart
- Completed one base layer, working on the second
- Project complete hopefully by Sept. 1, but definitely before the season starts

3. *Funding - Plans? (State and NFWF)*

- \$25 million combined for the Bay
 - Need to figure out where/how to use this funding for ecosystem health and bay restoration ASAP
 - Goal for material in the water by next summer for at least one project
 - Commission meeting in 2 weeks to start these discussions
 - We need to start looking at West part of the bay
 - Need to get subcommittees to start meeting and discussing priority recommendations for spending this money
 - FWC will be doing work down in Gulf Co. in the lagoon if there are recommendations for that area

4. *Other Discussion Items*

- Matt Updates – Annual survey in May
 - Higher mortality on north side vs south side
 - RESTORE areas open to harvest had a lot of mortality
 - Sampled NFWF sites in June and found that almost everything other than spat was dead
 - Reviewed data, believe there were 2 separate mortality events for RESTORE (likely June 2025 – January 2026) and NFWF sites (likely Nov. 2025 – April 2026).
 - Oysters from RESTORE and Cat Point were collected to monitor for disease
 - Condition index looked the same for both areas
 - No drills, dermo present in both places but low levels
 - University of Florida will do a DNA profile on oysters from NFWF, RESTORE, East Hole, and RESTORE Cat Point on bacteria to look for the potential of disease and cause of death, will hear back in a few weeks
 - Timing does not align to indicate it was from harvesting
 - Areas that were harvested came back to similar numbers as last year so don't think it's the harvest
 - Shannon: Feb. is when they started seeing actively dying / recently dead oysters
- Commission meeting Wednesday, August 5th at 9am Central at Edgewater Resort in Panama City. Oyster staff report is second agenda item & they will be taking public comment

2:55 - Committee Updates

1. *Agency Communication Committee - Chair Shannon Hartsfield*
 - Will start talking about how to use funding, hoping to get more oystermen in the room
2. *Education and Outreach Committee - Chair Anita Grove*
 - Met July 21
 - Need to figure out how to keep up promo for partnership
 - Improve logo?
 - Purchase promotional items? Stickers? Coloring sheets? Other items?
To spread awareness and promote mission
 - Seafood festival, oyster cookoff upcoming
 - Wanting to do more hands-on activities at local libraries
 - Looking for a catchy tagline or saying for Partnership
 - Want to ask FWC to have a public meeting to talk about the restoration that's been done recently
 - Printouts to give to restaurants, oystermen, etc.
 - Chad: Put together a storyboard to tell the story of the bay using inspiration from other successful states to help
3. *Finance Committee - Chair Ken Jones (Friends of the Partnership)*
 - \$3,703 left from Duke Energy for the year – will re-apply in December
 - Need to set up the organization for Friends of the Partnership and establish 501c3 in budget committee meeting
4. *Technical Committee - Chair Chad Hanson*
 - Working on long term FWC restoration plan

3:10 - Other Business / Announcements / Comments from Board Members & Attendees

- Need to discuss memberships. Assuming we have 2 vacancies – Shannon recommends Huey Page, Ale and Anita recommend Holden Foley
 - Vote to approve 2 new members, Motion: Bruce, Second: Shannon, Approved.
- Ken: Apalachicola Rivers County Associations invited to discuss dredging with ACE
- Discussion on disposal issues and county involvement in managing dredging
- ACE out of funding to finish study, will submit an incomplete document to DEP that they hope will help them secure additional funding to finish study
- Adding language to WARDA that will require ACE to clean up messes that they've made in the past, do a study about slough connectivity, and feasibility study to pay for all cleanup
 - Meeting with Senator Scott tomorrow
- Where are we looking beyond NFWF funds for funding to keep restoration rolling?
 - Maybe need another subcommittee for small and large funding sources
- Bruce Millender: Before Katrina, there was a funded breakwater where base rock was placed but cap rock was sent to Bay Co., and there was never follow up. Permit is already in place (old) but is there someone we can talk to about restarting this?
 - Office and Betty will look into options on county side
 - Resilient Florida grant – applications close in sept.

3:35 – Meeting adjourned Next Meeting: August 26th, 2026