

**DRAFT** — May 3, 2021



## Choctawhatchee Bay Estuary Coalition

**April 29, 2021 - Regular Meeting**

**9:30 a.m., Central Time**

**Walton County Commission Board Room**

**Freeport Business Complex, Unit 118**

**842 State Highway 20 East**

**Freeport, Florida**

**Virtual:** <https://myokaloosa.zoom.us/j/93573047082?pwd=bkluczBSVUp3cUhRWVM4YXlvR2FVdz09>

### MEETING MINUTES

#### **Board Members Present or Attending Remotely:**

Mel Ponder - Okaloosa County Board of County Commissioners (remote participant)

Alan Bush – Washington County Board of County Commissioners

Alison McDowell - Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance

Lisa Harris – Choctawhatchee, Pea, and Yellow Rivers Watershed Management Authority

Randall Rowland – Eglin Air Force Base

#### **1. Call to Order**

Chairman Alan Bush called the meeting to order, and led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

#### **2. Directors' Minute**

No comments were provided during the Director's Minute

#### **3. Public Comment**

Public comment was solicited by Alan Bush, from both virtual and in-person attendees. No public comment was received.

#### **4. Approval of CBEC Meeting Minutes of January 28, 2021**

The minutes of the CBEC regular meeting of January 28, 2021 were presented for review and discussion. A motion was made by Lisa Harris to approve the CBEC meeting minutes from January 28<sup>th</sup>.

Second by: Alison McDowell

\*Motion carried unanimously

**5. FSU Grant Funded Research Proposal Collaborative Support**

Brian Underwood stated that Dr. Nasrin Alamdari from Florida State University has developed a research proposal concerning water quality which may be of benefit to the Estuary Program; Dr. Alamdari is seeking a letter of support concerning her project proposal. A motion was made by Alison McDowell to approve provision of the letter of support.

Second by: Mel Ponder

\*Motion carried unanimously

Board legal counsel Greg Stewart provided a follow-up comment indicating that Item 5. is on the agenda as the Estuary Program has not received a request for this type of support in the past. However, it may be possible to delegate discretion to the Executive Director to respond to future requests of this type. Alan Bush and Lisa Harris indicated that it is beneficial for the Board to be aware of requests for collaboration. Greg recommended that if it is acceptable to the Board, the Executive Director should be allowed to write letters of support. Chairman Bush stated that if any future request may be considered controversial, then the Board should be informed before correspondence is sent out. Greg Stewart advised that any future letters of support should pertain to projects which are relevant to the mission of the Estuary Program.

**6. FLRACEP Project Collaborative Support**

Brian Underwood referred to the proposed letter of support which had been requested by the Florida RESTORE Act Centers of Excellence Program's (FLRACEP) grant recipient project team. The Executive Director has drafted a letter authorizing the Estuary Program to collaborate with the University of West Florida and University of Florida team concerning an upcoming survey which will be administered to stakeholders within the watershed. A motion was made by Mel Ponder to approve providing the subject letter of support to the University of West Florida's project representative.

Second by: Alison McDowell

\*Motion carried unanimously

**7. Draft FY 2022 Program Budget**

Brian Underwood referred to the agenda packet items concerning the draft Estuary Program budget for 2022. Brian described that the Estuary Coalition's bylaws require that the Executive Director prepare an annual Program budget for provision to the Board by July 15<sup>th</sup> each year. This item is included as a follow-up to an agenda item on the January 28, 2021 agenda pertaining to the salary of the Executive Director. Brian referred to information in the agenda packet describing the salaries of the Executive Directors of the four National Estuary Programs within the state of Florida, as well as to the salary of the Director of the Pensacola and Perdido Bays Estuary Program. Brian

reiterated that this item is included on the Board meeting agenda as information only, per the previous recommendation by Counselor Stewart. Brian stated that a detailed draft Program budget would be provided in advance of the July 14<sup>th</sup> Coalition Board meeting. Brian also noted that the Subrecipient Agreement for the RESTORE Act Spill Impact Component (Pot 3) grant award, among Okaloosa County, the Gulf Consortium, and the RESTORE Council, describes allocations for specific budget cost centers. The funding from the RESTORE Pot 3 award, as referenced in the draft Program budget concerning the staff salaries and other cost centers, is in place for the Estuary Program through November, 2024. The draft 2022 budget, as reflected in the agenda packet, describes the proposed Program expenses as a total percentage of the Pot 3 grant award subrecipient agreement for each cost center category. Alison McDowell acknowledged that a good job was done in providing the comparable salary information for the other estuary programs within the state, as included in the agenda packet.

#### **8. Guest Presentation**

Brian Underwood introduced Dr. Matt Deitch, University of Florida, to provide an update concerning their Florida RESTORE Act Centers of Excellence Program project which is providing support for the three Panhandle Estuary Programs including the Choctawhatchee, Pensacola and Perdido, and the St. Andrew - St. Joseph. Dr. Deitch continued with delivery of his virtual presentation.

#### **9. Program Updates**

##### **9.1**

Brian Underwood provided information concerning current and upcoming activities of the Estuary Program. Coordination with the Okaloosa County Purchasing Department was described, in consideration of the anticipated posting of a Request for Proposals (RFP) seeking consultant services for drafting the Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP). Brian indicated that the RFP will tentatively be posted on the Okaloosa County website, Purchasing Department page on May 17<sup>th</sup>, and accessible to the public for a total of thirty days. Also, Brian stated that an item will be on the agenda of the Okaloosa County Board of Commissioners on Tuesday May 4<sup>th</sup> seeking to add additional representation to the Okaloosa County Purchasing Department's Proposal Review Committee, specifically for review of proposals received for the CCMP project, including Brian Underwood from the Estuary Program and Melinda Gates from Walton County. Brian referenced the proposed Scope of Work which will support the CCMP drafting project, as included in the agenda packet. He acknowledged that the Technical Advisory Committee has participated in reviewing and developing the scope of work for the upcoming solicitation process. The current scope also reflects the U.S. EPA's guidelines for content of CCMP documents, as relied upon by the National Estuary Program. Brian also referenced the anticipated elements which are typically included in CCMP's for Estuary Programs. Associated deliverables to be developed through the consultant scope of work were also described.

**9.2**

Brian Underwood referred to the work of the Technical Advisory Committee in developing goals and objectives corresponding to each of the six Estuary Program Focus Areas. He acknowledged the significant contributions and efforts of the Technical Advisory Committee and other stakeholders in the continued development and refinement of the draft Strategic Plan Goals and Objectives document. Currently, seventeen Objectives and fifty-nine action items have been described which correspond to the six defined Focus Areas. Brian also stated that Chelsey Conley will be leading the Education and Outreach Advisory Committee in the refinement of the draft goals and objectives for the Education and Outreach Focus Area.

Brian Underwood presented the tentative procurement schedule to be relied upon for seeking consultant services, as developed in coordination with the Okaloosa County Purchasing Department. He described the current RESTORE Act Direct Component grant funds in the amount of \$437,500 which are sought from by Okaloosa County, for drafting the Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan. Brian reiterated that the described schedule is tentative, and fully contingent on Okaloosa County's receipt of Pot 1 funds from the U.S. Department of the Treasury.

**9.3**

Brian Underwood described the collaborative partnership which was formed to submit a grant application to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP). The Estuary Program has recently collaborated with the City of Fort Walton Beach and the Emerald Coast Science Center to develop and submit the grant application, seeking funds for a green stormwater infrastructure project. The project would include replacement of the existing asphalt at the Emerald Coast Science Center with pervious asphalt, to provide stormwater treatment as a low impact development alternative. Notification from FDEP regarding the potential for award of a grant in response to this collaborative project grant application is expected in June.

**9.4**

Brian acknowledged the House Bill 3631 seeking \$250,000 from the Florida State Legislature for the Choctawhatchee Bay Estuary Program, and thanked Representative Williamson for his consideration and sponsorship of the House Bill. Brian stated that if the state appropriation is received, the funds may potentially be used to leverage opportunities for additional funding sources, which may provide for beneficial projects within the watershed.

**9.5**

Brian Underwood referenced the convening of the Technical Advisory Committee by the Board in 2020, consistent with the National Estuary Program management conference model, and also the convening of the Education and Outreach Advisory Committee in January. The Citizen's Advisory Committee will include representatives from the general public within the watershed. Brian will begin drafting a list of potential committee members for future consideration by the Board, and will seek the Board members input concerning representation on the Citizen's Advisory Committee, prior to the October Board meeting.

**9.6**

Brian Underwood referred to the Choctawhatchee Bay Estuary Coalition website, seeking general input from the Board concerning whether the existing website should use Estuary Coalition or Estuary Program as the logo focus for the website. He indicated that \$5,000 will be proposed for inclusion in the 2022 Program budget for developing a new website to be hosted by third-party vendor. The current website is hosted through Okaloosa County. Alison McDowell recommended that the landing page would provide better consistency if the focus is on "Estuary Program." We are modeled after the National Estuary Program and the community is familiar with the name "Estuary Program." Lisa Harrison asked whether our Estuary Coalition letterhead could transition to Estuary Program letterhead, for future correspondence. Chairman Bush recommended that emphasis be placed on one name or the other. Alison reiterated that the general focus of our efforts should reference "Estuary Program." Chelsea Conley indicated that the Coalition Board of Directors, and organizational information for the entity, could be referenced on a sub-page within a forward-facing, Estuary Program website. Greg Stewart followed up concerning whether the organization's name may need to officially reference Choctawhatchee Bay Estuary Coalition, doing business as Choctawhatchee Bay Estuary Program, and stated that the legal name could be changed to a "DBA" at some point. The interlocal agreement among the four member counties uses the term "Coalition," and will need to be amended in the future. At that point in time, the organization's name may be formally changed.

**9.7**

Brian Underwood mentioned that the next Coalition Board meeting will be held Wednesday, July 14<sup>th</sup>, 9:30 a.m., in Okaloosa County. Information will be forthcoming regarding the specific location for the July Board meeting.

**9.8**

Melinda Gates provided an update on the status of the Walton County RESTORE Grants projects within the watershed. Importantly, the Mack Bayou Road stormwater improvement project has been completed. The Old Town of Santa Rosa stormwater planning process will be initiated through a consultant team. A stormwater master plan, as well as a phase I project design, will be developed through the consultant scope of

services. Melinda indicated that the Western Lake stormwater improvement project has been completed. Also, a water and sewer expansion project for the area along U.S. 331 south of DeFuniak Springs has been initiated, supporting both environmental and economic development purposes. This initiative is funded through both RESTORE Pot 1 and Triumph funds. Other projects are also proposed for 2021, pending award of Pot 1 funds from the U.S. Department of the Treasury.

Melinda described ongoing NRDA funded projects, as well as the ongoing NFWF-funded projects within Walton County. The Coastal Dune Lake restoration is relying on BP Deepwater Horizon penalty-related funds. It includes habitat restoration in the Deer Lake State Park. The NFWF sediment project in Holmes, Washington, and Walton Counties is ongoing; permitting is underway with FDEP for this initiative. The ongoing Florida FWC dune restoration project was also referenced. A septic to sewer project is currently underway in Walton County's Coastal Dune Lakes area.

#### **9.9**

Jane Evans provided an update on Okaloosa County's RESTORE Direct Component (Pot 1) and Spill Impact Component (Pot 3) grant status, on behalf of the Estuary Program. Jane will present a sub-award agreement to the Estuary Coalition for consideration, once Treasury has awarded funds and Okaloosa County Commission has approved acceptance.

#### **9.10**

Chelsea Conley provided an update on upcoming stakeholder outreach opportunities. Social media accounts and newsletters have been launched since the Coalition Board meeting in January. View rates on social media accounts have been monitored. Recipients should mark our media as received from a "safe sender" to avoid the Newsletter being directed to the spam folder. Chelsea mentioned the work of the Education and Outreach Advisory Committee's input. Many of the planned outreach activities have been postponed or cancelled due to unfavorable weather conditions. Other events are on schedule for the coming months. Chelsea will also be coordinating with our UF/UWF FLRACEP project team concerning promotion of the public values survey.

#### **9.11**

Chelsea Conley described coordination with IFAS Extension Agent Laura Tiu, and the opportunity to use IFAS kayaks for a Board outing in Holmes County in October, following the CBEC Board meeting on the 13<sup>th</sup>. Chairman Bush asked where we would potentially go for the outing. Chelsea indicated that an "easy paddle" would be considered, in a scenic creek in the watershed. Brian Underwood again referenced our upcoming public virtual stakeholder workshops on May 4<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup>, and encouraged public participation.

**10. Board Member Comments**

There were no follow-up comments from the Board. An in-person attendee asked that the zoom chat-box be checked for comments prior to the meeting being adjourned. A stakeholder asked for the location of the agenda packet for the April 29<sup>th</sup> Board meeting. Brian acknowledged that it had been provided within the most recent newsletter which Chelsea had provided to our Program contact recipients. Chelsea will also include a copy of the agenda packet in the next newsletter to be sent out to recipients soon.

**11. Adjourn**

Chairman Bush adjourned the Board meeting.

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