

DRAFT — February 2, 2021



Choctawhatchee Bay Estuary Coalition

January 28, 2021 - Regular Meeting

9:30 a.m., Central Time

Washington County Commission Board Room, 1331 South Boulevard

Chipley, Florida 32428

Virtual: <https://myokaloosa.zoom.us/j/93903964871?pwd=bXJpNElhSDhpWWtLcEdYSWxoZ0pzZz09>

MEETING MINUTES

Board Members Present or Attending Remotely:

Mel Ponder - Okaloosa County Board of County Commissioners

Jeff Good – Holmes County Board of County Commissioners

Alan Bush – Washington County Board of County Commissioners

Alison McDowell - Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance (remote participant)

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

1. *Call to Order*

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

2. *Directors' Minute*

Brian Underwood welcomed participants to the Board meeting, and thanked the Washington County officials for hosting the January 28th CBEC Board meeting.

3. *Public Comment*

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

4. *Introduce new CBEC Board Members*

Brian introduced Commissioner Jeff Good, representing Holmes County, Commissioner Mel Ponder, representing Okaloosa County, and Commissioner William “Boots” McCormick, representing Walton County, as new Board members of the Choctawhatchee Bay Estuary Coalition.

5. *Nomination and Election of Officers of the CBEC Board for 2021*

Brian Underwood asked for nominations for the position of Chair of the Choctawhatchee Bay Estuary Coalition. Commissioner Mel Ponder nominated Commissioner Alan Bush for the position.

Second by: Lisa Harris

*Motion carried unanimously

Brian Underwood asked for nominations for the position of Vice-Chair of the Choctawhatchee Bay Estuary Coalition. Commissioner Jeff Good nominated Commissioner Mel Ponder for the position.

Second by: Commissioner Bush

*Motion carried unanimously

6. *Approval of Meetings Minutes of October 22, 2020*

The minutes of the CBEC regular meeting of October 22, 2020 were presented for review and discussion. A motion was made by Alison McDowell to approve the CBEC meeting minutes from October 22nd.

Second by: Commissioner Good

*Motion carried unanimously

7. *Proposed 2021 CBEC Board of Directors Meeting Schedule*

Brian Underwood referred to the proposed meeting schedule, including Board meeting dates of April 29th, July 15th, and October 14th. Chairman Bush recommended changing the dates of the July and October meetings to correspond to Wednesday mornings, due to the Washington County Board of County Commissioner meetings occurring on Thursday mornings. Following discussion, an amended schedule was described, including Board meeting dates on April 29th, July 14th, and October 13th. A motion was made by Lisa Harris to adopt the schedule for Board meetings during 2021, as amended.

Second by: Commissioner Ponder

*Motion carried unanimously

8. *Education and Outreach Committee Appointments*

Brian Underwood referred to the list of recommended Education and Outreach Committee participants, as compiled by Chelsea Conley. Brian provided a description of the need for the Committee to the Board members. Alison McDowell indicated the list of participants is very representative of individuals who would be beneficial for providing input to the Committee. She commended Chelsea for compiling the participant list. A motion was made by Alison McDowell to appoint the individuals referenced to the Coalition's Education and Outreach Committee.

Second by: Commissioner Good

*Motion carried unanimously

9. Compensation for Executive Director

Brian Underwood referred to the Bylaws of Choctawhatchee Bay Estuary Coalition provision which provides for the Coalition Board to conduct the performance review of the Executive Director annually and establish compensation. Brian referred the Board members to the summary of major accomplishments of the Estuary Program over the past year, as included in their agenda packets. Brian also indicated that the RESTORE Act financial assistance award from Pot 3 to Okaloosa County allocates \$92,000 annually for the salary of the Executive Director. This is a provision of the subrecipient agreement with the Gulf Consortium. Brian stated that the agenda item may be deferred to the April Board meeting to provide for additional reflection by the Board. Board Attorney Greg Stewart indicated that the interlocal agreement for the Estuary Coalition contemplates another evaluation in the spring, to be conducted by the Board Chair. He recommended that the subject of compensation be taken up as part of the budget process for next year. Data concerning the revenue sources and program funding will be assembled. Background information and data will be provided, and will support Chairman Bush in conducting an annual evaluation. In consideration of the additional information to be assembled and provided, Agenda Item 9. was continued until the April 29th Board meeting.

10. Guest Presentation

The AmeriCorps of Northwest Florida Environmental Stewards, attended by Rachel Gwin of the Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance, provided a presentation describing their role in supporting habitat and water quality protection within Choctawhatchee Bay. The Board thanked the AmeriCorps group for their attendance and presentation.

11. Program Updates**11.1**

Brian Underwood provided a visual presentation to summarize key Program accomplishments and initiatives during 2020, and described anticipated outcomes for 2021. A key objective for 2021 includes securing consultant services for drafting of the Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan, which is contingent upon award of RESTORE Pot 1 funds to Okaloosa County by the U.S. Department of the Treasury.

Following Mr. Underwood's presentation, Commissioner Bush asked if Chelsea and Brian have plans to attend any of the other Estuary Coalition meetings, like those of the Tampa Bay Estuary Program? Mr. Underwood indicated that he and Chelsea join the Pensacola and Perdido Bay Estuary Program virtual Technical Committee and Policy Board meetings, and that participation is beneficial. He will also plan to join the virtual Board meetings of the National Estuary Program.

Commissioner Bush encouraged virtual participation as well, to understand what has worked for other estuary programs. Commissioner Bush asked where to direct interested parties regarding questions about the Estuary Program. Brian mentioned that the Estuary Program has an office on Okaloosa Island, and recommended the Coalition Board website. A brochure for the Estuary Program is also available. Chelsea Conley followed up stating that she sends out virtual newsletters, can receive email to address any questions, and can set up meetings to discuss. Social media accounts are also in place. Chelsea is also interested in contacting officials with the local schools to provide educational information concerning the estuaries. Lisa Harris indicated that we are welcome to contact her for possible assistance and information regarding our ongoing watershed management planning.

Brian Underwood asked the Board for provision of contact information for any additional stakeholders, as may be available, to expand Program outreach. Chelsea Conley mentioned that if anyone has information concerning upcoming public events in the watershed, the Estuary Program can get involved through participation. Lisa Harris referenced an upcoming waterways exhibit by the Smithsonian Institution, which will be in Elba, Alabama during 2022. There will be an opportunity for the Estuary Program to participate in this event.

Commissioner Ponder asked if Program staff had contacted and engaged with Northwest Florida State College; their funding sources may be more flexible, and they may be interested in partnering for outreach. He recommended contacting Dr. Stevenson. Chelsea Conley mentioned she is planning to meet with Jennifer Hathaway at the State College regarding partnering on outreach and education. Commissioner Ponder also referred to the 2006 HAAS Center economic analysis, and indicated it may be beneficial to contact them to see if an update is possible through a partnership. Alison McDowell indicated it would be desirable for the NWFSC to add for-credit courses focusing on the environment and fostering public involvement.

11.2

Brian Underwood introduced Chelsea Conley, Public Outreach Specialist for the Estuary Program. Chelsea was previously employed by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and will lead the Program's public outreach and education initiatives.

11.3

Melinda Gates provided an update concerning the NFWF-funded sediment rate index prioritization project. JMT has been contracted by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection through a NFWF funded project in Washington, Holmes, and Walton Counties, to assess stream crossings by roadways, at locations where sediment may be entering streams, affecting gulf sturgeon habitat. One-hundred sites were assessed, which were subsequently prioritized to focus on the top fifteen sites.

The NFWMD and FDEP regulatory divisions have been contacted concerning permitting of remediation projects for the top fifteen priority sites. Permit applications may be submitted to the agencies by March or April of this year. FDEP will subsequently pursue implementation funds for these priority sites, once they are shovel-ready.

11.4

Melinda Gates provided an update concerning the Walton County RESTORE grant project status. RESTORE-funded stormwater projects were mentioned, as well as a septic to sewer project on the Coastal Dune Lakes.

11.5

Jane Evans provided an update concerning the Okaloosa County RESTORE grant project status. She also acknowledged that The Nature Conservancy's grant funding to Okaloosa County had been completed and is officially closed. Jane referenced Okaloosa County's Pot 1 application submittal to the U.S. Department of the Treasury on December 17th, and the upcoming Treasury/stakeholder call on February 4th.

Jane Evans presented an idea of pursuing the environmental education portion of the RESTORE Pot 3 requirement through a sub-award to the Northwest Florida State College (NWFSC). Alison responded by asking for additional details. Jane described that a portion of Okaloosa County's RESTORE funds could conceptually pass-through to NWFSC for education-related positions specific to the Choctawhatchee Bay. Alison described an alternative whereby a portion of Okaloosa's RESTORE grant could pay the match to NWFSC for the AmeriCorps Northwest Florida Environmental Stewards program. This action would expand environmental education objectives. Alison will describe in writing and provide to Jane for discussion with the U.S. Department of the Treasury.

11.6

Brian Underwood referenced the draft Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan development draft scope of work, as included in the agenda packet.

11.7

Brian Underwood referenced the revised draft Strategic Plan Goals and Objectives, as included in the agenda packet.

Brian Underwood sought additional comments or discussion from the Board and from the virtual participants. Alison welcomed the new Board members to the Coalition. Brian mentioned that the next Board meeting will be April 29th, 9:30 a.m., at Freeport, Walton County Commission annex Board room.

12. Adjourn

Chairman Bush adjourned the Board meeting.