



***ST. ANDEW ST. JOSEPH BAYS
ESTUARY PROGRAM***

***POLICY BOARD
MEETING 1***

February 25, 2021

DRAFT 3-21-21

*Report prepared by
The FCRC Consensus Center
The Florida State University*

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BACKGROUND

On February 25, 2021, the Policy Committee of the St. Andrew St. Joseph Bays Estuary held its first meeting by teleconference. The meeting served as the first of an initial series of three meetings intended to stand up the organizational structure of the estuary program. The objectives of the meeting were to:

- Introduce the Estuary Program
- Review assessment findings and recommendations
- Identify and discuss members' desired outcomes for the program as a first step towards developing draft vision and mission statements
- Review and refine position requirements and process for recruiting Executive Director

Approximately 35 Policy Board members, staff and members of the public attended. (A list of participants can be found in Appendix A). The agenda, as modified during the course of the meeting, was as follows:

1:00	Welcome, agenda review and introductions
	Overview of the St. Andrew and St. Joseph Bays estuary– Jim Muller
	Overview of assessment findings and recommendations – Bob Jones
	Sunshine
2:30	Break
2:45	Initial discussion of desired outcomes for the estuary and the Estuary Program – Where do we want the estuary and the program to be in 10 years?
	Review, refinement and approval of process and position requirements for recruiting Executive Director
	Public comment
4:00	Adjourn

This document summarizes key points of the presentations and discussions at the meeting.

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Irvin Clark, Associate Dean of Student and Strategic Initiatives for Florida State University Panama City, welcomed students. He thanked them for participating, and stated that FSU Panama City looked forward to hosting the Estuary Program and believed the program represented an opportunity to help address important needs in the region. He and FSU looked forward to working with the Policy Board and the Program.

Hal Beardall, facilitator, reviewed the discussion guidelines, teleconference protocols, agenda for the meeting, and workplan for the process. He thanked members for participating, and noted that today's

meeting would focus largely on organizational issues related to the initiation of the Estuary Program. Policy Board members and other participants then introduced themselves.

OVERVIEW OF THE ST. ANDREW AND ST. JOSEPH BAYS ESTUARY

Jim Muller, Bay County Restore Act Coordinator, presented an overview of the St. Andrew and St. Joseph Bays estuary, and of the purpose and characteristics of estuary programs. Key points of his presentation included:

- Definitions of estuary and watershed
- The Bays and watershed are a resource shared by all of the area's stakeholders, and the challenges the Bays face can only be addressed by the stakeholders working together
- He noted that estuary programs share the following characteristics:
 - Stakeholder driven, non-regulatory programs
 - Involvement of community stakeholders in the decision-making process
 - Measurable goals for water quality, habitat, living resource restoration
 - Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan (CCMP) – a long-term strategic plan, that identifies local prioritized action items
 - A science-based approach to developing and implementing the CCMP
- A brief review of other programs around the country
- Land cover in the watershed, and the effects of Hurricane Michael
- Impaired waters in the bays, including water quality issues related to bacteria, nutrients and dissolved oxygen
- Septic tank distribution in the watershed, and their contribution to water quality issues
- The history of efforts to establish an estuary program in the St. Andrew and St. Joseph Bays
- Other estuary efforts in the region, including the Pensacola/Perdido Bays Estuary Program and the Choctawhatchee Estuary Program. All three share a similar approach and are cooperating with other efforts in the area.
- Other efforts and projects addressing water quality issues in the area, including the Northwest Florida Water Management District Surface Water Improvement Plan, St. Andrew Baywatch Water Quality Monitoring efforts, St. Joseph Bay Aquatic Preserve.
- Project include University of West Florida and University of Florida efforts to study stressors which will help identify concerns and inform other projects, and research on loss of forest due to Hurricane Michael and other reasons in a study by Auburn University.

The presentation may be found on the Program Website site at: <https://pc.fsu.edu/estuaryprogram>

Participant Comments, Questions and Discussion

- No participant questions or comments

OVERVIEW OF ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

Bob Jones, Consensus Center Director, provided an overview of the stakeholder assessment conducted by the Consensus Center in preparation for initiation of the Estuary Program. The assessment consisted of interviews with over 80 stakeholders in the bays and their watershed. The interviews explored issues that should be addressed by the program, challenges the program will face, and the relationship of a variety of public, private and non-governmental stakeholders to the bays and estuary. The assessment laid the groundwork for convening the Policy Committee and developing a draft workplan for the process. Key points regarding the assessment findings covered in the presentation included:

Interview Themes

- Overall crosscutting themes: governance, watershed approach, resiliency/recovery, and funding
- Infrastructure challenges and approaches for healthy bays
- Coastal challenges and approaches for healthy bays
- Economic prosperity and a working bay
- The water-land interface for growth and development
- Research, public education and outreach
- Quality of life and heritage as a fishing community

Key Challenges

- Infrastructure challenges and approaches for healthy bays
 - Stormwater and flood protection
 - Wastewater- septic and sewer infrastructure and impacts on the bays
 - Transportation and the watershed
 - Natural infrastructure (living shorelines, restoration, conservation land acquisition, land stewardship)
 - Water supply
- Estuary challenges and approaches for healthy bays and watershed
 - Water quality issues and monitoring
 - East pass flushing and dredging
 - Fisheries and aquaculture
 - Bays marine habitat, wetlands preservation, aquatic preserves, seagrass, and Sea Level Rise
 - Intracoastal canal connecting bays systems

- Protected and Invasive Species
- Shoreline restoration, beach renourishment and sand dune restoration
- Red tides and algae blooms
- Economic prosperity and a working bay: business/tourism/military/industry
 - Economy/ economic development/business/tourism
 - Military missions and the economy
 - Industry and a working bay
 - The recreation economy
 - Workforce development and job opportunities in the estuary
 - Marine science/industry
- The water-land interface for growth and development
 - Growth/development/construction
 - Forestry, silviculture and urban trees
 - Conservation land acquisition, and land stewardship
 - Agriculture
- Research, public and leadership education and outreach
 - Public education
 - Studies of the bays and watershed
 - Marine science/industry education
- Community quality of life
 - Community values
 - Parks and recreation
 - Volunteering

Findings

- Water is the lifeblood of ecosystems and economies for Bay and Gulf Counties
- Funders committed to three-year development of a CCMP
- There is strong stakeholder support for establishment of the program and preparation of the Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan
- There is a broad range of factors affecting the watershed and the bays, including:
 - stormwater capacity and runoff,
 - nutrient loading,
 - wastewater and septic system impacts,
 - development practices, impacts to marine habitat and fisheries
 - upland and forest impacts on the health of the bay
- Communication and synergy with other efforts will be important
- Stakeholder strongly support sustaining military operations in the region
- Fishery and habitat agency support for establishing a program is strong

- Involvement of recreational and commercial fisheries is critical
- The land water interface is crucial
- Opportunities for public participation and engagement are crucial

The Assessment may be found on the program website at: <https://pc.fsu.edu/estuaryprogram>

Participant Comments, Questions and Discussion

- Facilitator: Are any issues missing?
- There are several initiatives in Lake Martin, including one with the Army Corp of Engineers. I'm assuming we will review those in the related work in the area. Also military base rebuilding.
- There is lots of interest in the East Pass but it has been pushed aside for study. It would be a mistake to wait two years for the study to be completed. From personal experience, if you open it and do it right so it will not fill back in, that will cure many of the problems you identified including water quality, fisheries, beach renourishment, and flushing the bay. The longer you wait the more expensive it will become.
- Has shoreline stabilization been highlighted as an issue?
- Yes.

REVIEW OF ASSESMENT REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

Bob Jones next presented the recommendations from the Assessment Report. The recommendations focused on the structure of proposed Estuary program. Key points of the presentation included:

- Convening of a Policy Board, Management Council and Advisory Committees
- Open and transparent process
- Communication with stakeholders
- Collaboration with other estuary programs in the Panhandle, and other conservation and restoration efforts

The Assessment may be found on the program website at: <https://pc.fsu.edu/estuaryprogram>

Participant Comments, Questions and Discussion

- Were stakeholders like anglers, crabbers, etc. interviewed? If not will they be interviewed?
- We interviewed recreational anglers but had difficulty getting more for interviews.

- Going forward, there are still many opportunities for additional stakeholder input. We would appreciate any help you can provide along those lines.
- I would be happy to help with suggestions.

BRIEFING ON SUNSHINE LAW REQUIREMENTS

Craig Miller, Assistant General Counsel at FSU, reviewed the requirements of Florida Sunshine Law as they apply to the Policy Board, and as they will apply to other bodies established by the Estuary Program. Key points of his presentation included:

- A review of the requirements of the Florida Sunshine law
- The Policy Board, as a recommendation making body, is subject to the requirements of Sunshine
- The Management Council and Advisory Committees, to the degree they advise the Policy Board, are also subject to the Sunshine. Only bodies that limit their activities to fact-finding would be exempt from Sunshine requirements.

The presentation on Sunshine may be found on the program website at:

<https://pc.fsu.edu/estuaryprogram>

Participant Comments, Questions and Discussion

- We may need further advice when we develop by-laws
- This clearly applies to Policy Board. We will discuss at next meeting the role of the Management Council and any sunshine implications. You will have to decide whether the Policy Board develops recommendations based on Management Council fact finding or receives recommendations developed by the Management Council.
- Fitting into fact finding is difficult. It can be done but most sub-boards are in the sunshine.
- We can bring examples from other estuary programs in the state on how they handle the issue.

INITIAL BOARD DISCUSSION OF DESIRED PROGRAM OUTCOMES

Participants considered the following scenario, posed by the facilitators as a prompt for discussion of desired outcomes for the program.

Think about the St. Andrew and St. Joseph Bays estuary and the surrounding watershed as they are now.

Now imagine it is the year 2031. You have been asked to write a guest column in the Panama City News Herald about the bays and their watershed and how they have changed since 2021.

What do you say in the column?

What role did the Estuary Program play in those changes?

Participant Comments, Questions and Discussion

Participants offered the following responses:

- Want to be able to say we eliminated half the septic tanks in the watershed. Panama City is trying to move the treatment plant off the waterside. We are fortunate not to have had a flooding or surge event. I also think we need the East Pass for flushing. It is needed there is no reason not to do it. I've been here 55 years and remember when it was open. Pass is open, treatment plant moved and septic tanks eliminated.
- By 2031 want to be able to say we have updated our management plan – goal to improve water quality in the SA Bay. Also the return of sea grass naturally and through planting programs. Success will support eco-tourism too.
- I agree about eliminating septic tanks, but #1 is to open the East Pass. That goes hand in hand with improving flushing of the Bay. We also need to eliminate pollutants coming in from stormwater off of roads -- clean the outfalls of water before it reaches the Bay. I believe there is low hanging fruit we can do now. We can take actions that will have results without waiting three years. I would like to see this geared toward results and less towards discussion. I want us to move forward with projects, not just talk about a great plan.
- Septic tanks and East Pass are the thing – let's do more, not talk.
- Establish this as a national estuary program. We must engage the business community I agree with taking action based on the plans such as Mill Plant plan, and support regional projects to shift reuse water to meet demand. Also regional efforts to address stormwater with better treatment and amenities for the community. The program offers a forum for collaboration.
- I am happy and pleased to see support for East Pass. I agree with addressing septic tanks too. Tie in getting stormwater to treatment before it flows into Bay. If we don't, imagine the dead Bay and the reaction from the public. How many studies and little action. The longer we wait on East Pass the more East Bay fills in. We cannot wait 3 or 4 years or it will not be economically feasible.
- I agree that we need to limit the impact of runoff. We acquired property to improve treatment. Also passed an ordinance for septic tanks -- if land resells we are requiring tie into the wastewater system.
- I would like to see engagement and education on programs to increase understanding of the value of the Bay and a sense of ownership. – serve as a forum for development of tools and resources – identify where living shorelines might be appropriate.
- By 2031 we have moved to living shoreline techniques and where nature-based solutions may be appropriate. Invasive species control around the watershed with buffer lands around watershed. By then we have limited septic tanks – even reduced them by 80%.

- I would hope by then that land use planning gives us a better handle on development and ensures existing and new both adhere to green principles and connect to central sewer. Stormwater and sewer are improving and limiting runoff into the Bay.
- Ecotourism is on the rise, need to protect our natural resources. Concerned about aging infrastructure and runoff into the Bays. Only a regional approach will work. By then also educational programs teach people the value of the Bay and the many things that impact the quality of the water
- I'll leave it up to the voting members to guide the effort. We want to advance the goals of the clean water act, and we'll look to the voting members as to the goals and objective on how to best achieve that.
- In 2031 this is one of the top places to live in terms of quality of life because of the health of the estuary and Bays. Improved management of the watershed
- I'm the ACOE liaison and a non-voting advisor. I would hope to bring education on what we do on the civilian works side to maximize resources – currently working with Mexico Beach on a study that potential would help the group – make sure our work is well understood
- Caitlin – estuary program is able to enhance resilience from sea level rise and storm impacts – key piece of the plan is the long term preservation of the estuary from climate change

Additional Discussion

- As we move forward would it be possible to work with some type of hybrid of Zoom and in person meeting? Zoom is limited. It would be better to have discussions in person.
- We can explore that format. The next meeting will probably still have to be on zoom, but it may be possible after that.

BRIEFING ON EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR POSITION DESCRIPTION AND SEARCH

The facilitators outlined the search process for filling the Estuary Program Executive Director position. They noted that the position would be hosted by FSU and would therefore be an FSU employee. Next steps, consistent with FSU's guidelines for positions searches, included:

- Finalization of the position description and FSU go-ahead to start search
- Posting the position announcement
- Establishment of an FSU Search Committee to review applications and develop a short-list
- Candidate interviews with Search Committee and potentially with Policy Board
- Final Committee deliberations

- Search Committee hiring recommendation to FSU

The facilitators noted that it would be important to have Policy Board representation on the Search Committee.

Participant Comments, Questions and Discussion

- No participant comments or discussion.

NEXT STEPS

The facilitators noted that the Policy Board was scheduled to meet monthly through April, and less frequently after that. The facilitators will reach out to members after today's meeting to solicit feedback on the meeting, answer any questions they might still have about the process, and explore scheduling possibilities for upcoming meetings.

PUBLIC COMMENT

- I am commenting today as a resident with background in marine science. Regarding that slide on what we want in ten years – improved water quality is paramount. A comprehensive watershed management plan with dedicated funding, including federal funding is essential. That is the key for results and for the region to make progress. I would like to see scallops return to the Bay. Wand would like to see an expansion of Class 2 water bodies.
- I am the Executive Director of the Pensacola-Perdido Bay program. We look forward to working with you and Choctawhatchee. This sets the stage for improving water quality and aquatic system health in the region.
- You have covered a lot of ground today. Good work.

APPENDIX A – PARTICIPANTS

√ Indicates participation at this meeting

MEMBER	AFFILIATION
Local Government Elected Officials, Voting Members	
Greg Brudnicki √	Mayor Panama City
Rich Buzzett	Mayor Port St. Joe
Phil Chester	Councilman, Panama City Beach
Bill Dozier √	Commissioner, Bay County
Ralph Hammond √	Mayor, Springfield
Darrell Key	Councilman, Mexico Beach
Frank Mancinelli √	Commissioner, Callaway
Rich Musgrave √	Mayor, Parker
Doug Moore √	Commissioner, Bay County
Pat Perno	Commissioner, Lynn Haven
Sandy Quinn	Commissioner, Gulf County
Regional, State and Federal Agency Non-Voting Members	
Angela Bradley √	Emerald Coast Regional Council
Darryl Boudreau √	Northwest Florida Water Management District, Regional Policy Manager
Jonathan Brucker √	Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Division of Water Resources Management
Katie Konchar √	Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission, Biological Scientist
Jeremy LaDart √	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Mobile District, Chief, Planning and Environmental Division,
Bryan Phillip √	Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission
Barbara Powell √	Bureau of Community Planning and Growth, Florida Department of Economic Opportunity
Thomas McGill √	U.S. EPA Region 4, Water Division, Chief, Ocean, Wetlands & Streams Protection Branch
Melody Ray-Culp √	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Coastal Program Coordinator
Kent Smith √	Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission, Biological Administrator
Caitlin Young √	NOAA RESTORE Science Program, Science Coordinator
COORDINATION TEAM AND FACILITATORS	
Irvin R. Clark, EdD √	Associate Dean, Student & Strategic Initiatives, FSU Panama City
Jim Muller √	Bay County RESTORE Act Coordinator
Robert Jones √	Estuary Policy Board Facilitator, FCRC Consensus Center
Hal Beardall √	Estuary Policy Board Facilitator, FCRC Consensus Center
Rafael Montalvo √	Estuary Policy Board Facilitator, FCRC Consensus Center
OTHER PRESENTERS	
Craig Miller √	Deputy General Counsel, FSU