

**Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council
Public Meeting for Draft Initial Funded Priorities List**

Panama City, FL – Aug. 27, 2015

Principals:

Mimi A. Drew, State of Florida
Justin Ehrenwerth, RESTORE Council
Jessica Kondel, Department of Commerce
Gib Owen, U.S. Army, Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works
Gareth Leonard, Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP)
Under Secretary Robert Bonnie, U.S. Department of Agriculture
Karen Hyun, Department of the Interior
Hank Burch, State of Alabama
John Bowie, Environmental Protection Agency

Advisors:

Kendra Parson, RESTORE Council
Alyssa Dausman, RESTORE Council
David Elliott, RESTORE Council
Lisa Robertson, FDEP
Heather Thomas, FDEP
Kelly Samek, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Debbie DeVore, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

The meeting started at 6:31 p.m. and lasted approximately 2 hours. There were approximately 60 people in attendance, not including Council representatives, staff and support.

Introductory remarks:

Mimi A. Drew: Good evening. It's exciting to be here and see so many familiar faces. We had a public meeting in Tampa last night and we will continue our meetings all the way to Texas. There are many distinguished guests here tonight. We began this process years ago, we got a lot of ideas and a long list of projects, we are made up of five states and six federal agencies, bucket 2 is unallocated, we must reach a consensus which is a significant effort. We hope to finalize the proposed list of projects by the end of the year. We will then come back for more public comment. Please tell us what you thoughts and comments are. We are here to listen. We will factor that into our final list that will be adopted.

The public comment began at 7:16 p.m. and lasted about 1 hours.

Public comments (25 speakers):

- Mr. Richard Bryan, Lake Powell Community Alliance: Concerned about St. Andrews bay, it is a unique and important estuary system. Encourages the Council to do something for it.
- Mr. Kent Wimmer, Defenders of Wildlife: Happy that the Council is paying attention to habitat and resources. Feels the Council is on the right track, making a good first step with these projects, and encourages the Council to focus on land conservation and wetlands restoration. Should also focus on larger projects with gulf-wild significance.
- Mr. John Lewis, Retired Coast Guard: Would like to see projects in Callaway and more focus on St. Andrews Sound/St. Andrews Bay to restore fresh water flows.
- Mr. Eric Draper, Florida Audubon Society: Feels the Council did a good job. Would like to see water quality and habitat restoration with a better balance. Excited about the NEP in the panhandle, and feels conservation easements are needed to protect the watershed.
- Mr. George Willson, Self: Pleased with the Alabama study. Would like to see the Suwannee River Watershed Project and University of Florida Oyster Grant added to the list. Feels that if the Council only funds water treatment it is funding a symptom not the problem, which does not make much sense.
- Mr. Jim Muller, Bay County RESTORE Act Coordinator: Would like the Council to elevate its activities in the public eye. Encourages the Council to pick projects that will make a difference, leverage funds. Would like to get funding for St. Andrew Bay, and encourages the Council to pick an estuary location where the program will succeed. Would like the NEP to be placed in Bay County.
- Mr. John Hosey, The Corps Network: Supportive of the Conservation Corp proposed project.
- Mr. Joe Taylor, Franklin's Promise Coalition, Conservation Corps of the Forgotten Coast: Supportive of the Conservation Corp proposed project.
- Ms. Caci Wallace, Conservation Core of the Forgotten Coast: Works as a crewmember and enjoys her work. It is very positive work and enjoys contributing to the community with honest and purposeful work. Supportive of the Conservation Corps proposed project.
- Ms. Kendall Blake, Conservation Corps of the Forgotten Coast: The local conservation corp program has taken a positive effect on his generation because they can see and feel the program, which has completely changed his life. Supportive of the Conservation Corp proposed project.
- Mr. Holden Foley, Conservation Corps of the Forgotten Coast: Supportive of the Conservation Corp proposed project.
- Ms. Susan Murphy, Young American Conservation Corps: Supportive of the Conservation Corp proposed project.
- Mr. Bruce French, Gannett Fleming, Inc.: Appreciate the Councils efforts. Would like to see the draft FPL include an appendix with itemized damages, to help the public understand. Concerned about the SAV projects where the water quality may not have been resolved.

- Mr. Chip Kirschenfeld, Escambia County: Pleased to see Pensacola in the draft FPL. Pleased to see the estuary program in Northwest Florida. Would like the NEP in the Escambia County.
- Captain Rich Waker, Self: Would like more projects in Bay County.
- Mr. Norman Capra, Bay County Audubon: Appreciates the gulf-wide approach.
- Mr. Ted Corcoran, Ft. Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce: Supportive of the Northwest Florida estuaries and watershed projects.
- Mr. Darryl Boudreau, The Nature Conservancy: Appreciates the work done by the Council. Supportive of the estuary program, and would like to see it in the Panhandle.
- Mr. John Ackerman, Self: Would like the Bayou Chico changed to Grand Lagoon. Feels the Apalachicola project should be applied in Bay County, as well as all of the other proposed projects. Would support the estuary program in Bay County.
- Ms. Molly Allen, Self: Would like to see land acquisition in Bay County.
- Mr. Rick Hartcher, Self: Recommends the estuary program be in Pensacola Bay.
- Mr. Dylan Shoemaker, Self: Appreciates the St. Buffer Preserve being put on the list.
- Ms. Candis Harbison, Self: Would like to see projects in Bay County.
- Ms. Patrice Coucle, Bay County Watch: Supportive of the estuary program.

Summary of Comments: The meeting attendees expressed the following comments throughout the meeting:

- The comments were mostly positive, and expressed an overall appreciation of the work that went into publishing the draft FPL.
- Appreciate the Council using the watershed approach and focus on water quality projects; as well as support for the Conservation Corps.
- Would like to see more Gulf of Mexico Estuary Programs (GMEP) in the panhandle.
- Both Escambia and Bay counties would like to host the NEP.
- Would like more watersheds/estuaries to be included in future FPLs.