

**APALACHICOLA BAY SYSTEM INITIATIVE (ABSI)
ABSI COMMUNITY ADVISORY BOARD (CAB)**

OYSTERMEN'S WORKSHOP SUMMARY

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2020



CONSENSUS CENTER



FACILITATED BY JEFF BLAIR AND ROBERT JONES

**APALACHICOLA BAY SYSTEM INITIATIVE (ABSI)
COMMUNITY ADVISORY BOARD (CAB)
OYSTERMEN WORKSHOP SUMMARY REPORT
DECEMBER 2, 2020 FACILITATOR’S WORKSHOP SUMMARY REPORT**

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Jeff Blair opened the workshop taking place at the Apalachicola Estuarine Research Reserve, welcoming the participants who introduced themselves. He reviewed the agenda and pointed out the workshop's purpose was to hear from oysterman on suitable locations and materials for restoration and on management alternatives. Blair noted that the Apalachicola Bay System Initiative (ABSI) was looking for oystermen's knowledge, ideas and input in formulating a plan from those who have made a living harvesting Apalachicola oysters. The workshop participants subsequently introduced themselves.

Sandra Brooke, ABSI Project Lead, Research Faculty, FSUCML, provided a presentation on the ABSI project which was supported with an investment by Triumph Gulf Coast Inc. and Florida State University. She addressed the question of why now by noting in 2013 Apalachicola Bay Oyster fishery was declared a federal fishery disaster, with a steep decline in the fishery since 2012. She suggested that the investigation into what happened revealed a number of potential causes including: reduced river flow; increased salinity along with an increase in predators and disease; increased mortality, especially juveniles; recruitment failure; shell removal and no re-shelling, all leading to a collapse in the oyster population. At this juncture she noted there are lots of unanswered questions with no definitive conclusion on causation.

Sandra noted the ABSI project seeks to gain insight into the root causes of decline of the Apalachicola Bay ecosystem, and the deterioration of oyster reefs. Ultimately, ABSI will help develop a management and restoration plan for oyster reefs and the long-term health of the Bay. The ABSI comprises four primary components: Research; Management; Community Engagement; and Oyster Reef and Bay Restoration. It is a complex system and comparing historical and contemporary data allows researchers to understand how physical and biological aspects of the system function and how they interact with each other. In terms of community engagement, ABSI convened the Community Advisory Board in October 2019, will be engaging in public workshops, is organizing a shell recycling program, building a hatchery, and providing opportunities for Hatchery Internships and volunteers.

Sandra then described the FWC/ABSI Restoration Experiments, noting that the fishery closure provides opportunity to test materials without fishing impacts, and will test different materials and configurations for restoration efficacy. The experiment's design will consider: Cultch material type: granite, limestone rock, fossilized shell, shell; Material size: large (18"), medium (12"), small (<4"), shell; Reef footprint: large (acres), medium (< 100 ft²), small (<50 ft²); and Reef height: low (1ft), medium (2-3 ft), high (4-5 ft). ABSI and the CAB will apply results of research to development of management plans, in collaboration with stakeholders and management agencies. Potential management options that will be reviewed by stakeholders may include: Seasonal Closures; Stock-based closures; Rotating harvest areas; Limited entry fishery; Sanctuary reefs; State Monitoring Programs; Enforcement; and Re-shelling programs.

During the Workshop the oystermen were asked a series of questions regarding the Apalachicola Bay oyster fishery. They were asked to provide their perspectives based on their observations and

experience as Apalachicola Bay oystermen and as key stakeholders in restoring the health of the Bay.

The first question was when from their experience did the Apalachicola Bay oyster fishery start to decline. All agreed that the System declined dramatically in 2012, and some suggested that the decline, although not as severe, began before then perhaps around 2007.

A number of questions revolved around soliciting the oystermen's thoughts on where the best locations would be for fisheries restoration and non-harvest reefs. Using maps provided by the FSUMCL they marked locations and then discussed this as a group. There was general agreement on where the best locations are and the FSU Science team working with FWC, and in consultation with the oystermen, will evaluate the information going forward. In addition, the oystermen suggested that seagrass and other SAV, and wetland and riparian habitat should be restored concurrently to work synergistically with oyster habitat restoration to enhance restoration of the ABS.

The oystermen were asked to discuss their views on the best cultch material to use for oyster fishery restoration and for oyster ecosystem restoration. In general there was agreement that natural shell and "granite/rock" were good materials for spat to settle on. They also agreed that reef structure was critical and that the spatial configuration of reefs (height, width, contours, etc.), locations (existing reefs and hard bottom), use of larger rock to protect restored reefs from siltation and sedimentation from prevailing currents and storms should be considered in the design. They agreed there is a need to restore and create reef structures suitable for sustained oyster settlement and production for harvesting, and that accurate and up-to-date mapping is needed.

The remainder of the Workshop focused on discussing a range of possible management options/approaches for restoring the health of the Bay System and the oyster fishery. The oystermen were asked to evaluate a series of potential management options/approaches and to offer any others they felt were worth exploring. They discussed the pros and cons of the various options/approaches, and most agreed some had merit, but that the details of implementation would be critical and that they (oystermen) should be included in discussions for further evaluation and elaboration on potentially beneficial options for the health of the Bay and the oyster fishery.

The oystermen discussed the following potential management options, exploring pros and cons. There was no intent to seek agreement, rather to explore ideas that might be worth following-up with. Following are management approaches discussed by the oystermen during the Workshop:

- a. Seasonal (summer) closures
- b. Non-harvested spawning reefs (permanent closures)
- c. Rotating closures
- d. Managing harvest areas to prevent the concentration of effort in specific locations (open larger areas)
- e. Managing oyster reef harvest with a metric (e.g., 300 bushels per acre).
- f. Limited entry fishery (e.g., limiting licenses)
- g. Closures based on stock levels
- h. Reduced bag limits
- i. Bag tags
- j. Relaying oysters to better habitat (to accelerate restoration efforts)
- k. 5-day work weeks

1. Additional enforcement presence, and more oyster-specific law enforcement (including possibly, on-water check-point, checking wholesalers, etc.)

Another theme emerging from the Workshop was that oystermen should be employed to help with restoration efforts especially with the Bay closed to wild oyster harvesting for five years. The participants expressed that commercial fishermen should be included in discussions of and in helping to work on restoration design and implementation (locations, size, total coverage, clutching, etc.), establishment of permanent closed areas, shell recycling, shelling, oyster relaying, mentoring, and workforce entry development, etc.

Additional points discussed included:

- Drought impacts;
- Impact of storms on sand accumulation;
- The river nutrients and oyster health; and
- The impact of algae on oysters and the health of the Bay.

All agreed that it was critical to restore the Apalachicola Bay System so that commercial oystermen and fishermen can make a living off of a healthy Bay and sustainable fishery, and that preserving Franklin County's cultural heritage as a fishing community is critical. All agreed that moving forward quickly with restoration in the water was also critical to retain the Community's heritage. Most indicated that they desired to get back to making their livings as full-time oystermen and commercial fishermen in a healthy and restored Bay.

The Facilitator indicated a workshop summary report would be created and shared with the CAB and the workshop participants. The maps that the participants filled out and the discussions during the Workshop will be used to evaluate locations for the restoration experiments. Participants were asked whether they were interested in participating in additional workshops in 2021, and all participants indicated that they were interested in continuing to provide their input going forward.

The Workshop Concluded at 5:10 pm

ATTACHMENT 1
WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS AND ZOOM ATTENDEES

1. Michael Carmichael	Oysterman
2. Michael Dasher	Oysterman
3. Ronnie Gilbert	Oysterman
4. Shannon Hartsfield	Franklin County Seafood Workers Association and Oysterman, CAB Member
5. Brett Lolley	Oysterman
6. Roger Mathis	Oysterman and R.D.'s Seafood, CAB Member
7. Coy Shiver	Oysterman
8. Wayne Williams	Oysterman
9. Anita Grove	Apalachicola City Commissioner
10. Sandra Brooke	FSU ABSI Team Marine Biologist, FSU Marine Lab
11. Joel Trexler	FSU ABSI Team, Director FSU Marine Lab
12. Jeff Blair	FSU Consensus Center, Community Advisory Board Facilitator

WORKSHOP ATTENDEES ON ZOOM
COMMUNITY ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS/FSU TEAM & PUBLIC

MEMBER	AFFILIATION
Agriculture/ACF Stakeholders/Riparian Counties	
13. Chad Taylor	Riparian Counties Stakeholder Group/ACF Stakeholders/Agriculture
Business/Real Estate/Economic Development/Tourism	
<i>Chuck Marks</i>	<i>Acentria Insurance</i>
14. Mike O'Connell	SGI Civic Club/SGI 2025 Vision
<i>John Solomon</i>	<i>Apalachicola Chamber of Commerce</i>
Environmental/Citizen	
15. Georgia Ackerman	Apalachicola Riverkeeper
<i>Lee Edmiston</i>	<i>Retired DEP/ANERR</i>
16. Chad Hanson	Pew Charitable Trusts
Local Government	
17. Anita Grove	Apalachicola City Commissioner
<i>Ricky Jones</i>	<i>Franklin County Commissioner</i>
Recreational Fishing	
<i>Chip Bailey</i>	<i>Peregrine Charters</i>
<i>Frank Gidus</i>	<i>CCA Florida</i>
Seafood Industry	
<i>David Barber</i>	<i>Barber's Seafood</i>
18. Shannon Hartsfield	Franklin County Seafood Workers Association and Oysterman
19. Roger Mathis	Oysterman and R.D.'s Seafood
<i>Steve Rash</i>	<i>Water Street Seafood</i>
<i>Denita Sassor</i>	<i>Outlaw Oyster Company, Aquaculture</i>
<i>TJ Ward</i>	<i>Buddy Ward & Sons Seafood</i>
State Government	
20. Jim Estes/Mike Norberg	FWC Division of Marine Fisheries Management
21. Jenna Harper	ANERR/DEP
22. Alex Reed	FDEP Office of Resilience & Coastal Protection
23. Portia Sapp	FDACS Division of Aquaculture

<i>Paul Thurman</i>	<i>NFWFMD</i>
University/Researchers	
<i>Tom Frazer</i>	<i>UF/DEP Governor's Science Advisor</i>
24. Erik Lovstrand	UF/IFAS/Florida Sea Grant Franklin County

PROJECT TEAM AND FACILITATORS	
FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY	
25. Madelein Mahood	Outreach and Education
FCRC CONSENSUS CENTER, FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY	
26. Robert Jones	Community Advisory Board Facilitator

Members of the Public	
27. Doug Alderson	Apalachicola Riverkeeper
28. Ed Camp	University of Florida
29. Cheryl Carr	
30. Ross Ellington	FSU
31. Cole Scott	
32. Anthony Sogluizzo	
33. Betty Webb	City of Apalachicola

ATTACHMENT 2
ABSI COMMUNITY ADVISORY BOARD WORKPLAN

UPDATED AS OF DECEMBER 2, 2020		
PHASE I—STANDING UP AND ORGANIZATION OF THE ABSI CAB		
ABSI Assessment Process	May- Aug. 2019 Report Sept. 2019	Assessment report based on interviews of over 60 stakeholders and agency personnel (May – August 2019) summarized key challenges and issues that should be addressed in the Apalachicola Bay System Initiative (ABSI) and by its Community Advisory Board (CAB); facilitators recommend members for the CAB.
ABSI CAB Questionnaire	Sept. 2019	Questionnaire report on the CAB members’ views on successful short and long-term outcomes and on critical ABSI challenges and issues.
Meeting I. Eastpointe FL	Oct. 30, 2019	Scoping and organizational meeting, review and refinement of overall project purpose, vision and goal framework. Presentation on the ABSI project’s four main components: research, management, community engagement, and oyster reef and bay restoration. Public comment.
Meeting II. Eastpointe FL	Dec. 18, 2019	Member-requested presentations on Apalachicola River Slough Restoration project, Oyster Fishery and Harvest Statistics, ABSI Research Update, and FWC Apalachicola Bay Oyster Restoration, Phase II. Review and refinement of vision themes and goal framework, and identification of key topical issues to inform the drafting of objectives. Public comment
Meeting III. Eastpointe FL	Jan. 8, 2020	Member-requested presentations on Oyster Ecology, Hydrologic modeling and Oyster Population Models. Review, refinement and adoption of five vision themes, goals, outcomes and objectives, and initial review of draft performance measures. Public comment
PHASE II—SCOPING OF ABSI ISSUES, IDENTIFICATION OF PERFORMANCE MEASURES & STRATEGIES		
Meeting IV. Eastpointe FL	Mar. 11, 2020	Member-requested presentations on current status of Apalachicola Bay, FDACS Aquaculture Leasing Program, Oyster Reef Management in Apalachicola Bay, and the Chesapeake Bay Oyster Futures Consensus Process. Review of Apalachicola Bay System Ecosystem-Based Management and Restoration Plan goals, outcomes, and objectives. Identification of initial draft strategies and related performance measures. Public comment.
Meeting V. Virtual Meeting	May 22, 2020	Member-requested presentations on FWC Overview of Oyster Management, FWRI Oyster Monitoring and Restoration Effects in Apalachicola Bay, MK Ranch Hydrologic Restoration, and TNC Lake Wimico project. Identification and evaluation of preliminary strategies and performance measures to achieve each of the five goals and objectives. Public comment.
CAB Strategies	June 2020	CAB Worksheet to identify potential strategies for each of the five goals.
Meeting VI. Virtual Meeting	July 16, 2020	Member-requested presentations. Decision support tools update & demonstration. Review and evaluation of the preliminary strategies by CAB member for Plan Goal. Public Comment.
Meeting VII. Virtual Meeting	Sept. 9, 2020	Member-requested presentations. Identification, evaluation and refinement of objectives, strategies and performance measures for Goals A-E. Public Comment.

Meeting VIII. Virtual Meeting	Oct. 15, 2020	Member-requested presentations. Review of strategies and identification, and evaluation of actions steps to achieve strategies. Evaluation of Performance Measures and categories. Public Comment.
Meeting IX. Virtual Meeting	Nov. 12, 2020	Member-requested presentations. Agreement on Apalachicola Bay System Ecosystem-Based Adaptive Management and Restoration Plan (Plan) framework. Public engagement on the Plan strategy discussion. Discussion of strategies and action steps to achieve Goals. Discussion of ecological and management goals. Public comment.
Oystermen's Workshop #1	Dec. 2, 2020	Overview of Project Scope, Purpose, and Status, and Oystermen's input on restoration experiment, suitable habitat for restoration, and management and restoration alternatives. In person meeting for Oystermen, virtual for all others.
PHASE III—BUILDING CONSENSUS ON CAB RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE ABS ECOSYSTEM-BASED ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT AND RESTORATION PLAN		
Meeting X. Virtual Meeting	Jan. 13, 2021	Member-requested presentations. Sub-committee reports. Discussion of estuarine metrics and management and restoration goals. Prioritization of Strategies. Public comment.
Public Workshop	<i>TBD</i>	<i>Schedule & format dependent on status of the COVID-19 pandemic.</i> Review and public comments on Plan Framework (Goals/Objectives/Strategies/Actions).
Meeting XI.	Feb. 24, 2021	Review of any public input on Draft Plan Framework. Review of scenarios and consensus rating of strategies and actions using decision-support tools relative to goals and objectives. Public comment.
Meeting XII.	April 21, 2021	Review of scenarios and consensus rating of draft strategies and actions using decision-support tools relative to goals and objectives. Public comment.
Oystermen's Workshop #2	Tentatively May, 2021	Review draft Plan with oystermen, and oystermen's feedback on management and restoration alternatives.
Meeting XIII.	June 16, 2021	Review of scenarios and consensus rating of draft strategies and actions using decision-support tools relative to goals and objectives. Public comment.
Meeting XIV.	Aug. 18, 2021	Continue review and consensus testing of Draft Plan and implementation strategies and actions, and agreement on Draft Plan for public comment. Public comment.
Public Workshop 2	<i>TBD</i>	<i>Schedule & format dependent on status of the COVID-19 pandemic.</i> Review and public comments on Revised Draft ABS Ecosystem-Based Adaptive Management Plan and implementation strategies.
Meeting XV.	Oct. 20, 2021	Review of public comment, agreement on recommendations for inclusion in the Plan. Public comment.
Meeting XVI.	Nov. 17, 2021	Complete Phase III of project. Recommendations for Management and Restoration for the Plan finalized.
PHASE IV—PLAN IMPLEMENTATION		
	TBD	Restoration Component

ATTACHMENT 3

ABSI PROJECT DESCRIPTION

APALACHICOLA BAY SYSTEM INITIATIVE MISSION STATEMENT. The Apalachicola Bay System Initiative (ABSI) seeks to gain insight into the root causes of decline of the Bay's ecosystem and the deterioration of oyster reefs. Ultimately, the ABSI will develop a management and restoration plan for the oyster reefs and the health of the Bay.

APALACHICOLA BAY SYSTEM INITIATIVE COMMUNITY ADVISORY BOARD GOAL STATEMENT. The overarching goal of the Apalachicola Bay System Initiative Community Advisory Board is to develop a package of consensus recommendations informed by the best available science, data, and stakeholders' experiences for the management and restoration of the Apalachicola Bay System, and to ensure there is a reliable mechanism and process for the monitoring, funding, and implementation of the Apalachicola Bay System Ecosystem-Based Adaptive Management and Restoration Plan.

A critical component of the management plan is oyster reef restoration with full consideration of factors affecting the biology, ecology and sustainable management of the resource. Restoration related actions, as indicated above, should be informed by the best available science and shared stakeholder values, that in turn, result in an economically viable, healthy, and sustainable Apalachicola Bay System.

The process will be designed so that members can explore and evaluate oyster fishery practices and management options, and restoration policies in the Apalachicola Bay System. The Community Advisory Board's consensus recommendations, in the form of an Apalachicola Bay System Ecosystem-Based Adaptive Management and Restoration Plan, will be directed to the Apalachicola Bay System Initiative project team, natural resource managers and environmental regulators, and other agencies/entities as appropriate.

PROJECT SUMMARY. In response to the rapidly declining health of the Apalachicola Bay System (ABS) and the collapse of the oyster fishery and reefs therein, Florida State University sought and was awarded a grant from Triumph Gulf Coast Inc. to undertake a series of scientific approaches intended to aid in the development of an ecosystem-based oyster management and restoration plan for the Apalachicola Bay System. The plan will be informed by science while involving representative stakeholders and the public in its creation, development and implementation by state and federal management agencies. Developing such a plan will help the state agencies responsible for marine resources improve the overall health and the rich biological diversity of the bay, including that of other ecologically and economically important species. Because oyster populations are declining in estuaries across the Florida panhandle, ABSI project leads will work with scientific, non-profit and governmental entities working on similar issues throughout this region to develop a consistent oyster management framework.

The vitality of Apalachicola Bay is key to the socio-economic prosperity of Franklin County and the surrounding area. Specifically, as the bay's health has declined, so has the area's once-booming oyster industry, resulting in widespread job loss and increased economic insecurity for many Franklin County residents whose livelihoods are tied to the Bay.

Florida State University through its Coastal and Marine Laboratory will investigate what precipitated the dramatic decline of the Apalachicola Bay System, and working with the ABSI Community Advisory Board (CAB) and Science Advisory Board determine a viable course of action for improving its condition.