

May 3, 2005
Milton, Florida

The Marine Advisory Committee met on the above date with the following members present: Chairman Ken Johnson and members Robert Turpin, Dan Wakley, and Jeff Marker. Also present were the County Administrator (Hunter Walker), Public Works Director (Avis Whitfield), and Marine Extension Agent (Christina Verlinde). Chairman Johnson called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

Marker moved approval of the minutes of the April 6, 2005 meeting; Turpin seconded, and the vote carried unanimously (4-0).

Public Input – Marine Issues

Johnson welcomed everyone in attendance and gave a brief synopsis of what the Marine Advisory Committee does. He said public input is crucial. Johnson requested comments be kept brief allowing fellow residents an opportunity to speak also. Marker requested speakers include their telephone number on the speaker form.

Wastle Spears said he is concerned with access to the boat ramps on Escambia River. He said, as he understands it, IP (International Paper) has closed two of the boat ramps in Chumuckla. Spears said the Quintette boat ramp is flooded, and the citizens have a need to get to the water on Escambia River. He said he has discussed his concerns with Commissioner Salter, and Salter said the county is trying to work out an agreement with the Water Management District and IP. Spears said there is also a need for culverts in the road going to the Archie Glover boat ramp. He said every time it rains the road washes out.

Johnson said the county partners with the state on some of the boat ramps. He said the county is trying to workout some type of agreement to get the roadway going to Archie Glover boat ramp paved.

Walker said International Paper owns the roadway going to the Escambia River boat ramps, and they have some concerns with liability. He said off road vehicles are using the roadway and there have been some accidents. Walker said the county, Northwest Florida Water Management District, and International Paper are trying to work out an arrangement where the county will take over the liability and maintenance of those roads. He said Commissioner Salter is very much involved in a pro-active nature.

Fred Scheetz said there are approximately 30 to 40 homeowners on Indian Bayou. He said access to the bayou from Escambia Bay is only open during high tide. Scheetz said there is a small county park where boats are launched on Indian Bayou, but you can not get out into the bay to fish. Scheetz said the larger fish are restricted from coming into the Bayou, and it needs to be opened up so the tidal flow can keep the bayou clean. He asked if concrete debris from the Interstate 10 Bridge can be placed at the mouth of bayous to keep them from closing in.

Johnson said action will need to come from the state on this waterway. Turpin said often in areas where there is a water body the homeowners association will levy fees and hire for dredging. He asked the source of the blockage. Scheetz said prior storms destroyed trees and washed out the natural bank, but Hurricane Ivan filled the mouth of the bayou with all sorts of storm debris. Turpin said debris that was placed there by Hurricane Ivan can possibly be removed through two programs. He said the Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) program through Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) is a funding source that is shared by the county and the federal government. Turpin said another funding source is the State of Florida through the Water Management District and the Department of Environmental Protection. He said they are entering into an agreement whereby the Water Management District will oversee the removal of hurricane related debris from sovereign submerged lands and state waters.

Whitfield said the EWP funds made available to the county are for smaller waterways associated with the county's drainage system. He said, to his knowledge, these funds can not be used on larger water bodies such as Indian Bayou. Whitfield said projects such as Indian Bayou will be done through water management projects. Turpin suggested the homeowners association write a letter to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and the Water Management District.

Marker asked if there is an original channel in the waterway. Scheetz said there is a natural channel going beyond Avalon Boulevard, but one side was dredged where the public access dock is located. Marker said he has spoken to DEP concerning a similar issue, and there may be a possible permit exemption to dredge the existing channel. He said the homeowners may wish to consider a MSBU (Municipal Service Benefit Unit) to fund the dredging project. Marker suggested Scheetz investigate the options.

Harold Marcus Jr. said his concern is with the area called Paradise Island on Blackwater River. He said with all the recent rainfall the water is very high and fast. Marcus said there is no policing authority to control the speeding boats. He said the problem is with the wake the boats are creating. Marcus said he does not think the boaters understand they are responsible for the wake their boat creates. He said the Florida Marine Patrol used to be the policing agent, and he thinks it was turned over to Fish and Game. Marcus said occasionally a Sheriff Department's boat is in the area. He said policing is very slender. Marcus suggested posting signs at the boat ramps informing boaters they are responsible for their own wake, to have care and consideration while going through populated areas, and to respect other people's property.

Johnson discussed the policing authorities, and said this committee can address signs at the boat ramps. Johnson suggested Marcus contract the City of Milton to have a sign posted at Carpenter's Park. He said the Marine Advisory Committee is very much involved in educating boaters.

Marker said at the last meeting the committee agreed to not respond to public input tonight but to obtain public ideas and comments to help with the development of a Waterway Management Plan. He said the committee plans to have a series of public hearings to gather information to be discussed and considered for the Waterway Management Plan. Marker requested the Board not respond to public concerns at this time.

Charles Jabaly, Department of Environmental Protection, Northwest Florida Aquatic Preserves, asked what projects the county has planned to remove hurricane related debris and abandoned vessels from the waterways. Walker said the only projects the county currently has are the EWP projects through NRCS. He said the county does not have any plans for the waters of the state. Walker said there certainly is a need for the two counties. He said after Hurricane Opal the Department of Environmental Protection removed debris from the sound.

Turpin said the Water Management District and the Department of Environmental Protection are working towards debris removal. He said the Water Management District will prioritize those projects and oversee the contractors.

Whitfield explained the EWP projects the county is currently undertaking. He said he has heard the Water Management District is looking at doing a project for the larger bodies of water.

Marty Stokes discussed the need for additional boat ramps in the south end of the county. He proposed a boat ramp be installed at the county maintained West Navarre Park on Blue Tip Drive. Stokes said there is a 98' easement which was designated a county park in the 1930's. He said the local fishermen have always used this park to launch their boats, and he discussed the history of the easement. Stokes said recently hurricane debris was dumped at the waters edge closing the easement. Stokes requested a small boat ramp be installed to accommodate the local fishermen.

Johnson said Stokes's request will be discussed during the next regular monthly Marine Advisory meeting. Wakley asked if this area is on the same street as Navarre Marina. Stokes said yes. Wakley said he is familiar with the area and will check it out.

Deborah Branning said she requested assistance in 1991 for this same issue. She discussed the West Navarre Park that currently has no trespassing signs posted. Branning said her son and Stokes's son are national windsurfing champions. She said their sons use the park to enter the sound. Branning said these parks are very important to sailors, kayakers, or anyone who wants to use a boat that is not motorized. She requested a picket fence, picnic table, and trash receptacle at the park.

Buddy Harvell said he is a commercial and pleasure fisherman in Navarre. He said currently there are only two boat ramps in the Navarre area that lead into the sound. Harvell said one ramp was damaged by the hurricane. He said the property the other boat ramp is located at was sold, and the new property owner has blocked usage of the ramp. Harvell asked if an agreement can be made allowing use of the privately owned boat ramp until the Navarre boat ramp is repaired and reopened.

Wakley said he spoke to Mr. Pullum, the previous property owner, and Pullum is contacting the new property owner to request public access to the private boat ramp for 60 days. He said hopefully the Navarre Beach boat ramp will be reopened by July 1, 2005.

Harvell said previously there was a boat ramp behind the Butterfly House and asked if that ramp can be restored. He also discussed other locations for boat ramps. Harvell said the night light at Woodlawn boat ramp is not working and requested the night light be repaired. He said he does not agree with the fee Gulf Breeze is charging to use the Shoreline Park boat ramp. Johnson said the county does not have authority over the City of Gulf Breeze.

Whitfield said the old Navarre Park behind the Butterfly House used to have a boat ramp, but that ramp was discontinued due to the high maintenance demands with dredging. He said he did not feel it would be feasible to reopen a ramp in that area when a good boat ramp is accessible across the bridge.

Roy Wolfe said he is representing the Marquis Basin homeowners. He said the homeowners have addressed the Marine Advisory Committee before to get the inlet open to allow the basin to flush out. Wolfe said the property owner was hit hard by the hurricane, and the property is for sale. He asked if any progress has been made. Johnson said it is his understanding the property owner was trying to mitigate and that process has now stopped. He said the property is privately owned so the county will not move forward with the issue. Wolfe said the property owner was supposed to restore the area to its natural state. Walker said that will be a state issue.

Brenda Stokes discussed a need for parking at the two boat ramps in the Holley area. Whitfield said both ramps only have road rights of way to the water. He said these two ramps were originally designed as neighborhood type ramps. Whitfield said the only way to add parking will be with land acquisition. He said there may be wetland issues associated with developing parking lots. Whitfield said the county is looking at some possible land acquisition on some of the ramps. Walker said there are a number of boat ramps that only have road rights of way. He said one of the benefits of this process will be to come up with a plan and orderly procedure to improve the boat ramps.

Stokes asked if there are any community parks in the Holley area. Wakley said this committee will be looking at possible land acquisition. Whitfield said the pier destroyed by Hurricane Ivan at the Live Oak ramp will be rebuilt in the near future.

Ernest Rivers discussed the International Paper (IP) property on the east side of Escambia River. He said citizens are about to lose all the boat ramps on Escambia River. Rivers said the 4-wheelers are destroying the roads. He said the Sheriff's Department can not get down the road to enforce the law. Rivers said in the last three years IP has spent \$40,000.00 trying to maintain the road. He said the problem is no law enforcement. Rivers said IP has now installed fences blocking the roads. He discussed ongoing problems with the 4-wheelers. Rivers said a small group of people are causing the problem, and the rest of the citizens in Santa Rosa County are suffering by not being able to launch a boat to fish. Whitfield said there are ongoing discussions to make the roadway itself a management area, allowing better law enforcement. He said all parties are trying to work out an agreement, and this agreement will probably be ready by next year's fishing season.

Raymond McQueen, Santa Rosa Shores Homeowners Association Board of Directors, said an application was submitted a few years ago to DEP (Department of Environmental Protection) to maintenance dredge the canal and reduce the amount of scaring in the grass beds. He said a mitigation plan was developed but so far their efforts have been unsuccessful with DEP. McQueen said the next step will be to push denial so an administrative hearing can occur. He said the county made the application to DEP saving the homeowners association a tremendous amount of money. McQueen said without some type of activity from the county, the homeowners can not go forward with an administrative hearing. He said the homeowners association has spent nearly \$200,000.00 to meet DEP requirements. McQueen said shoaling has taken place in the canal, and the homeowners wish to have access to the intercoastal waterway.

Walker said the Board was briefed on this project about a year ago and adopted the plan. He said the county attorney and county engineer are working on this project, and he will check on the status of the project. Marker said he spoke to Eric Schneider with DEP today about this issue. He said at this point in time everything is evolving around Hurricane Ivan. Marker said he is concerned that the MSBU fund for \$700,000.00 is dwindling down, and the project is not getting done. He requested all parties meet to obtain the current status of the project. Marker said he will be glad to assist in any way he can.

McQueen said the canal committee will be meeting Thursday evening at the fire department to plan an open meeting at Oriole Beach School for waterfront homeowners involved with the MSBU. He welcomed Marker to attend both meetings. McQueen said the boat docks at Woodlawn and Oriole Beach boat ramps face the same type of shoaling.

Wilber Courtney discussed the health of the water. He mentioned Pond Creek and a study to find out why Pond Creek is so polluted. Courtney said he never heard the results of this study. He said Floridatown is unacceptable and the condition of Blackwater River is declining. Courtney named the unacceptable waterways identified in 1998. He asked when Milton is going to get the sewer out of Blackwater River.

Johnson said a lot of these issues do not come under the Marine Advisory Committee. He said they are city, state, or federal issues.

Wastke Spears requested enlarging the parking area at Quintette boat ramp. Marker said Verlinde has applied for a grant to improve the parking and the ramp.

Stacia LaDue said the notice for this meeting was awesome. She said she hopes something can be done with the road going to Archie Glover boat ramp. Marker said everything evolves around funding, and this area has been discussed at great length over the past few months.

Wakley thanked everyone for their attendance. Johnson said this is one of many steps to improve boat ramps and waterways. He said he appreciates the input. Turpin thanked the public. He said when categorizing the concerns; access, safety, health, and debris seem to be the main issues. Turpin said it is important to get public input, and this committee acts as a liaison between the public and the commissioners. He encouraged the public to continue to participate to help Santa Rosa County waterways become more accessible and safer.

Navarre Beach Pump Out Station

Wakley said Verlinde has received information from the Florida Clean Vessel Act. He said they have grant funds available and are ready to fund a pump out station. Wakley said a decision needs to be made on what equipment will be purchased. He said the total cost for the system should be less than \$25,000.00. Wakley said the grant is a 75/25 split and the 25% county portion can come from the Boating Improvement Fund. He said this funding will provide for an installed pump out station at the Navarre Beach boat ramp with a one year guarantee. Wakley said maintenance expenses after the first year and signage for use of the pump out station will be a function of the Boating Improvement Fund. He said initially there should be no cost to the public to get them used to using the station.

Marker asked who will staff the station. Wakley said there will be no staff. He said the station can be monitored daily by the Navarre Beach administration, and the owner of Sailor's Grill said he will have no problem watching the station and calling if there is a problem. Marker said he is concerned with high maintenance after the first year and correct usage. He said from past experience, with another pump out station, there were problems with a tremendous amount of maintenance after the first year due to the chemicals, salt, and inexperienced operators. Wakley said currently there are no pump out stations available. He said he can not think of a better way to use the Boating Improvement Fund than to protect the waters and help out the boaters.

Turpin said he shares some of Marker's concerns. He encouraged selecting a system that has the most reliable materials and a very good record of requiring very little maintenance. Turpin suggested a system that Santa Rosa County will check on no less than once a week in the summer months and once a month in the winter months. He said the health of the waterways depends on the proper use of the waterways.

Wakley said county staff will choose the best system. He said he is hopeful the station will work out to benefit the boaters. Wakley said if need be, a fee can be charged. He said Sailor's Grill has shown an interest in staffing the station. There was further discussion with regards to charging a fee and staffing the pump out station. Johnson suggested letting county staff decide on the best way to operate the station.

Wakley moved approval for Santa Rosa County to purchase and install a boat sewage pump out station at the Navarre Beach boat ramp; Turpin seconded, and the vote carried unanimously (4-0).

Oyster Restoration Project

Verlinde discussed the partnerships the county has formed to show the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services that our county supports their oyster restoration project in East Bay. She said one partnership is with the school board to develop an oyster curriculum and possibly an experimental education project in East Bay. Verlinde said she is currently working with the science coordinator to develop the curriculum.

Boating Registration Update

Walker discussed the boater registration fees collected and the portion the county receives. He said the county has the ability to impose a local option tax of up to 50% of the state registration fee. Walker said Leon County has a local option tax that has had an adverse affect. He said the public goes to the neighboring counties to register their boats for a lesser fee. Walker discussed the funds generated from each class of vessel with the average county revenue \$70,000.00 per year. Johnson said he is against the local option tax.

Marker said he asked for the local option tax information. He discussed his concerns with the smaller vessels, such as jet ski's. Marker said they are not making any contribution. He requested information on the impact of collecting a registration fee for motorized vessels less than 12'.

Other Business / Adjournment

The next meeting is scheduled on Tuesday, June 7, 2005 at 5:00 p.m.

There being no further business to come before the committee at this time, the meeting adjourned at 7:00 p.m.