

October 7, 2008
Milton, Florida

The Marine Advisory Committee met on the above date with the following members present: Chairman Jeff Marker, Rick Harris, and Pasco Gibson. Also present were the County Administrator, Hunter Walker, the County Engineer, Roger Blaylock and the Public Works Director, Avis Whitfield.

Chairman Marker called the meeting to order at 5:05 p.m.

Request for Inshore Reef Deployment

Jeff Marker provided an overview of the Committee's progress and efforts on behalf of inshore reef deployments and opened the floor for comments.

Scott Mason of Diamond Street, Pace – Member of Pensacola Fishermen's Assoc.- Concurred with Jeff Markers comments. He stated the request for a public deployment area for reefs did not get approved. The Army Corp of Engineers is talking about 100% monitoring on each reef deployment.

Mason also said his group supports the oyster reef projects which are great for water clarity, food source and fish habitat.

Marker said oyster reefs may be the best avenue for our area and we may need to wait and see how Escambia County handles the hurdles with the Army Corp of Engineers before proceeding with regard to the Resolution to move permitting authority to Mobile. Not sure if our Commissioners will attend the November 6th meeting but will entertain a motion to bring it to their attention. Rick Harris asked Marker if he would draft a letter. Marker said the committee should do it but asked for further input.

Roger Blaylock gave a brief history on this subject stating that about twenty years ago we were a part of the Mobile districting agency. DEP wanted all of Florida under one permitting agency. Several State and Federal agencies, including the National Marine Fisheries, prefer it that way.

Marker asked which is most beneficial for Santa Rosa County. Blaylock responded that the County would prefer the Mobile district but since DEP lobbied to get all of Florida under one agency he thought it would be a difficult process. Walker agreed and he will advise the Commission of the meeting.

Ricky Harris made a motion to ask the Board of County Commissioners for a letter of support. Pasco Gibson seconded the motion. Hunter Walker said he would prepare a memo to the Board but needs information on the background. Jeff Marker said he would email Mr. Walker a memo after clarification from Robert Turpin.

Mr. Mason requested information on the Symphonia. Mr. Walker said that the case should be going to court in October and stated that he sent a letter to the State Attorney's office to ask that the boat be used as an artificial reef. Mr. Mason said that if the County receives the permit for the reef that a great location would be by the three barges. Marker said that would be something we could look at if it qualifies.

Marker restated the motion to draft a letter to the Board of County Commissioners asking for support for moving the Northwest Florida area back to the Mobile DEP district and the motion passed without objection.

Archie Glover dredging update

Roger Blaylock – The Board of County Commissioners has on its agenda for Thursday approval of a grant agreement from the State of Florida for \$122,000 to go toward this project. Road and Bridge has committed to the disposal of the dredge material and the Engineering Department has committed to all of the in house surveying and engineering. None of the work, until after that agreement is executed, will qualify as a match. Engineering will move forward on the permitting process when the Board takes action.

Harris asked where Road and Bridge would be disposing of material. Avis Whitfield responded at the Central Landfill.

Marker requested a report on construction at the Archie Glover dredge site. Avis Whitfield responded that inspections will be done during the winter tides. One pier appears to be in good shape and the other may need some work. Harris responded that one does need some work but that the County has been making an effort to keep the dock and ramp repaired. Whitefield said they will try to have a report by the next meeting. Marker asked if there were other ramps that need repair. Whitfield said they appear to be in good condition but will check and report during the winter season.

Navarre Beach Park and Pier update

Roger Blaylock – The Board will take a vote to release the State of Florida at their meeting on Thursday and everyone is invited to a ribbon cutting at the park on Friday. The contractor did a good job of putting the park back together with the money they had available. There are five restrooms, a pavilion and several hundred parking spaces.

Roger Blaylock – Pier update – Engineering has submitted a request for a permit and has received a Notice of Intent. The permit from DEP has been submitted to the Corp of Engineers and they are in full consultation with the National Marine Fisheries and believes Santa Rosa County is the first pier in the Gulf that has had to go through that process. In June, the County's consultant wrote the Biological assessment for the Marine Fisheries and forwarded it to the Corp. Engineering has received word that there is a 135 day turnaround and the pier project is behind the Martine Park project in the review process. The Corp will take the full 135 days for their review. The County is hopeful that sometime in November they will release the biological assessment and the Crop will issue the permit and the County can begin the bidding process for the pier sometime this winter. The consultant has advised that it is a 12 to 18 month construction time and if you hold a contractor to 12 months you will pay a premium. The County may bid it both ways.

Hunter Walker stated that Mr. Goodin will set a Town Hall meeting probably at Navarre High School around December 2nd to discuss the beach, and to some extent the pier. Once the pier is constructed the County would like to link it to the park area

and find a vendor but absent the pier there is not much of a draw. Marker asked if we have a Marine Advisory member from Mr. Goodin's district. Walker said no, Matt Hewatt resigned and he will remind Mr. Goodin that he needs to look into it.

Rick Harris said that he has received several calls asking if the Pass is opening at Navarre and wanted to know if anyone had any information on this issue. Mason replied that there is a group still interested. Marker asked about the berm on the beach and Blaylock responded that it was knocked down in one area on the western end.

Scott Mason asked about the Gulf Breeze fishing pier and when it may be knocked down and used as a natural reef and a new fishing pier established. Walker replied that Gulf Breeze is a separate political entity. Marker directed Mason to contact the City of Gulf Breeze for more information

Mason said we just need to help, as much as possible, to breed more fish which will bring in more tourists and money to our area. Marker noted that we need to use our Boater Improvement Funds for reef improvement projects but our hands are tied. We would support that change if possible.

Mason commented that any road improvement jobs where there are large chunks of concrete debris to dispose of would be appreciated by Escambia County for reef deployment. Whitfield replied that there are no projects ongoing at this time or scheduled for the future.

Mason also asked about oyster shells and Pasco Gibson replied that oyster shells are being used in East Bay in existing beds to reseed and that we are seeing more recreational oystermen using these beds. Marker asked if the beds are open to the public. Pasco replied that all our oyster beds are public beds.

Mark Griffith of Castlewood Street in Navarre asked to hear from the individual board members about where they stand on the issue of the Pass. Marker said he does not have a lot of history on that issue. Blaylock gave a brief history and Griffith asked if there was any environmental reason why the County hasn't moved forward. Blaylock replied that it never got to the environmental process. Griffith asked if the study addressed any environmental issues. Blaylock said yes, the study said the Gulf water should not interchange with the Sound. Griffith asked if the others had any opinions. Marker said he did not have enough information, but would not want to do anything to harm the fisheries. Walker said he thinks the Board is still on record as supporting the project but the sentiment is that we would not be able to get a permit. Gibson said that personally he had always wanted to see it but now understands that environmentally it would be harmful to our area and he doesn't see it happening environmentally. Marker said that if it impacts the sea grass he would not be for it and doesn't see the State of Florida or the Army Corp ever letting that happen. Harris said at one time he thought he would love to see it open but now after seeing what has happened to the sea grasses and the damage from the storms he has a better understanding and he thinks opening the pass would be a good thing economically but very bad environmentally. Griffith asked if the Committee had any idea how much a study would cost. Marker said that until that was brought up tonight that has not been on this committee's plate. The issue would need to be addressed by the Commissioners.

Other Business – none

The November 4th meeting is cancelled because of Election Day. The next regular meeting will be held in December with the date to be announced because of the Town Hall meeting.

There being no further business to come before the Marine Advisory Committee the meeting adjourned at 6:02 p.m.