

December 6, 2011
Milton, Florida

The Marine Advisory Committee met on the above date with the following members present: Jeff Marker, Rick Harris and Scott Mason. Also present were the County Administrator, Hunter Walker; Public Works Director, Avis Whitfield; Marine Extension Agent, Chris Verlinda; and County Engineer, Roger Blaylock. Jeff Marker called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

The minutes of the October 4, 2011 meeting were approved.

DISCUSSION OF SHORELINE PROTECTION

Jeff Marker moved the Shoreline Protection issue to the top of the agenda and gave the gavel to Rick Harris for this issue. Jack Bonney of 817 Dolphin Road, Milton, requested the Committee to ask the Board of County Commissioners for a motion to protect all shorelines whether manmade or natural to be under Shoreline Protection of Article Twelve in the Land Development Code.

Jeff Marker noted that he has no issue with the current RV Park construction at Indian Bayou, however, the project has exposed a possible flaw in Santa Rosa County's Land Use Restrictions with regard to water quality and protection of our valuable waterways, canals and bayous. Mr. Marker made a motion to request the Board of County Commissioners to ask staff or the appropriate County agency or committee to review the current land use restrictions for all waterway areas and correct what appears to be a loophole under the current guidelines. The motion was seconded by Scott Mason and approved without objection.

GULF ISLANDS NATIONAL SEASHORE GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN

Mr. Marker asked Dan Brown, Parks Superintendent of the Gulf Island National Seashore to give a brief overview of the Gulf Islands National Seashore General Management Plan and to specifically address the issue of the likelihood of closing the fishing areas around the Gulf Island National Seashore. Mr. Brown explained that the general management process actually started in 2002. Every National Park Service Area has a master plan document called a General Management Plan. It provides general guidance and it plans forward for 15 to 20 years. The Gulf Islands National Seashore was established in 1971 and the first plan came out in 1978 and has been operating on that plan since that date. The plans have the potential to remain in place for a long time. They are time consuming and costly to prepare. The current one started in 2002 and public hearings began at that time. We get input from the public to prepare a draft or conceptual alternatives then we hold a second set of public input meetings and then refine those comments to present at the last round of public meetings, which we held in October and November of this year. There are four alternatives that are identified in the General Management Plan. The first is a "no change" alternative. The second calls for natural processes to predominate. For example, if a hurricane destroyed the facilities many would not be rebuilt under this alternative. On the other end of things under alternative four, it calls for considerably more additional development and commercial activity. The public made it clear they were not interested in either alternative two or four and alternative three is, in many ways, between the two. Alternative three has been identified as the preferred alternative and we are asking for public comment on these points. Facilities to be rebuilt if destroyed by storms. The most interest on this item are the roads to Ft. Pickens and Hwy. 399 between Pensacola Beach and Navarre Beach and the intent of the National Parks service is to rebuild those roads if they are destroyed by storms. We have added into 3 the language "if feasible." Which means that if a storm of such magnitude destroys the roads the decision to rebuild will be made by Congress. But the intent is to rebuild. The second intent of this alternative is to give greater emphasis to using the National Seashore as an outdoor classroom and educational programming such as snorkeling and scuba diving and things of that nature. Also greater emphasis to cultural and historical resources. The historic fortifications (Ft. Pickens and Ft. Barrancas and Ft. Massachusetts) with only one employee to care for the historic fortifications. (The plan does not come with any funding. It only identifies cost estimates for implementation.) The fourth item that the preferred alternative mentions is giving greater emphasis to our marine resources. From Cat Island in Mississippi to an area in Okaloosa County we have about 140,000 acres and about 83% of that acreage is water. Our boundaries extend about 1 mile south of the island into the gulf and north from the islands to the southern boundary of the intercoastal waterway. Those are the 4 major alternatives. The item that has generated the most interest is the zoning that exist in the plan specifically a zone that identifies where the sea grass beds are in the National Seashore. When we develop these plans we are required to use zoning. The zones are identified by what activities are allowed in the zone. The seabed protection zones identify where it is or where it could grow. It talks about the critical value of the sea grass beds were the fish spans and is protected. Gulf Island National Seashore has some of the only healthy beds in our area. The plan identifies some of the management tools that are available to us. We have always had the tools this plan just identifies them. There are about 8 different plans. One is closure. If the sea beds, for example, were to reach a point where they were being damaged and all of our efforts had failed closure to the public is one of our options. We have always had both the responsibility and authority to protect the National Parks for the enjoyment and safety of the public. There are no plans to close the waters around the National Seashore at this time.

Jeff Marker mentioned that there are some old silly rules that he has heard about and asked for clarification.

Mr. Brown clarified that you can only gather enough bait to use while you are fishing within the National Seashore. You cannot harvest bait to take with you or sell. Giggling is allowed in most areas. There are some areas where there are a lot of line and reel fishermen or scuba divers that are restricted but visitor user patterns change and they are looking into updating those areas.

Rick Harris asked if there will be an opportunity for public input in closures are being considered in the park. Mr. Brown said he could never envision it happening and catching anyone by surprise. There would be public education and opportunities for input because they will need public help. There would be extensive public education and signage.

Mr. Marker asked about long term closures to protect sea grasses and Mr. Brown explained that long term closures would have to go through the Federal Government and be based on Environmental studies.

Robert Turpin, Marine Resources Division Manager, Gulf Breeze. Present at original scoping meetings many years ago and was pleased with the public comments that have been implemented into the plan. Escambia County expressed similar concerns to those expressed here tonight. Mr. Brown directed me to pages 70 and 71 of the document which is the strategy management actions that could be taken if needed where there might be impacts to sea grasses. The bullets address the steps that would be taken and it would be unlikely that anyone could be surprised by an area that could be closed off. There is a lot of good will between the State and Federal Parks Service and the County and Escambia County will be entertaining a Resolution at their

meeting supporting the preferred alternatives and providing additional language such that the enhancing the natural resource management would provide maximum public access and limiting access only when all other alternatives have failed and as a last resort. The waterways guide is already in publication. FWRI is coming down in February and will work with the Marine Extension Agents in both counties to delineate those areas on the National Park Shoreline that have grasses and are sensitive and provide preferred landing sites. There is a lot of outreach and education available and a lot of other great stuff in the plan.

After further discussion Rick Harris made a motion that the Marine Advisory Committee recommended the Resolution to the Board of County Commissioners. The motion was approved without objection.

Avis Whitfield stated the permits for the Archie Glover project have been submitted and the Ball Alex seawall is complete.

PROJECTS / ISSUES UPDATE

Jeff Marker noted that the current Boat Registration Fees are \$236,434.

OTHER BUSINESS

No other business.

NEXT MEETING DATE

The next meeting is scheduled for February 7, 2012 at 5:00 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Committee at this time, the meeting adjourned at 6:05 p.m.