

October 2, 2007
Milton, Florida

The Marine Advisory Committee met on the above date with the following members present: Chairman Jeff Marker, Vice Chairman Rick Harris and member Pasco Gibson. Also present were the County Administrator (Hunter Walker), County Engineer (Roger Blaylock), Public Works Director (Avis Whitfield), and Marine Extension Agent (Christina Verlinde). Chairman Marker called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m. Billy Kimbrough arrived late.

Harris moved approval of the minutes from the August 7, 2007 meeting; Gibson seconded, and the vote carried unanimously. (3-0)

Oyster Bed Restoration Update

Christina Verlinde said DOACS (Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services) division has placed 1,250 cubic yards of fossilized shell at two sites in East Bay. She said one site is a near shore reef site. Verlinde said the shell is being placed without any funds required. She said tomorrow DOACS is planning to plant about 500 cubic yards of shell on another undetermined site in East Bay. Verlinde said DOACS has done some monitoring at sites planted last year. Marker asked if the sites are marked. Gibson said yes. He said the sites are marked with pvc pipe. Gibson discussed the design of the sites. Verlinde said the sites in shallow water are going to be marked with Coast Guard buoys as soon as permits are obtained. There was discussion on where oyster shell beds are located. Harris said he is concerned with the shallowness of some of the oyster shell beds.

Marker asked Harris if he spoke with the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) about oyster shell being used as wave attenuation devices and near shore reef fish enhancement sites. Harris said no. Marker said he spoke with the DEP about partnering with Santa Rosa County for future oyster shell sites. He said he would like Harris to contact the DEP about possible sites for oyster shell attenuation devices and near shore reef fish enhancement since he is familiar with the waterways in Santa Rosa County. Harris said he can contact DEP. He suggested Gibson also speak with the DEP. Gibson said he would be glad to contact the DEP concerning possible sites. Marker said the DEP indicated a genuine interest in a partnership to address the issue. Harris said placing oyster shell anywhere in the water is going to be beneficial. There was discussion on the best sites for oyster shell beds.

Public Waterway Access Funding Alternatives

Marker asked if the County is allowed to charge a boat ramp fee at the Navarre Boat Ramp. Blaylock said he has not found any reason why a boat ramp fee can not be charged. He said there are other boat ramps that have received State funding and are charging boat ramp fees. Blaylock said he is waiting on a definitive answer from Fish and Wildlife. Marker asked how the Board of County Commissioners felt about boat ramp fees at the Navarre Boat Ramp. Blaylock said he is not sure how the Commissioners felt about boat ramp fees. He discussed enforcement issues at boat ramps.

Harris said he spoke with Robert McClure concerning boat ramp fees. He provided the committee with a list of questions that need to be addressed. Harris said Paul Hinson is working on getting information about how other counties handle boat ramp fees. He said he felt people are favorable to boat ramp fees if the fees are reasonable. Harris said people are going to want to see what is being done with money generated by a boat ramp fee. He said people are going to want improvements at boat ramps. Harris said money generated will add up after time and can be used to fix up boat ramp areas or purchase land.

Marker said he spoke with Robert Turpin about boat ramp fees in Escambia County. He said boat ramp fees were not implemented in Escambia County do to the lack of political support. Marker said current budget issues were not foreseen. He said he felt there needs to be a public forum to let the public know that boat ramp fees are being considered. Marker said people may not be interested in boat ramp fees because of other County fees and the increased cost of living in the County. Harris said he felt there may be some problems with enforcement, but the committee is taking a step in the right direction with this proposal. He said he felt deputies need to patrol boat ramps and enforce the rules. Harris said some people will not abide by the rules, but others will participate and follow rules to generate funds for the County. He discussed enforcement at boat ramps in other counties. Harris said the committee needs to find out how other counties are making boat ramp fees and enforcement work. Kimbrough said he is in favor of a public forum to discuss boat ramp fee issues. He said he has a problem with the same fee being set for all boats no matter the size. Harris said he felt boaters take up the same amount of space to launch no matter the size of the boat. Kimbrough said he is concerned that citizens will not support boat ramp fees.

There was discussion of deputies not patrolling boat ramps.

Marker asked the Tax Collector's fee for implementing a boat ramp fee sticker system. Harris said the Tax Collector is working on the cost. Marker said people are going to want to know where funds will be spent. He said there was discussion at the last Marine Advisory meeting on using part of the boat ramp fees for land purchases and part of the fee for boat ramp maintenance. Marker asked if Santa Rosa County is sufficiently funded to maintain current boat ramps in the County. Whitfield said any major modifications to boat ramps are funded through the boater registration fund. He said there is adequate funding for maintenance for boat ramps, but taking the funds out of boater registration is taking funds away from possible future land purchases. Whitfield said the County has not had to do a lot of maintenance lately.

Marker said he is not sure how many boat ramp fee decals are needed to sell or how much funds are going to be generated from the sale of the decals. He said the committee needs to come up with a recommendation on the cost of the decals. Harris asked the number of registered boaters in the County. Walker said there are currently 14,200 registered boaters in Santa Rosa County, but the number fluctuates. There was discussion on registered boater information obtained from the Tax Collector's Office and possible revenue generated from boat

ramp fees. Harris said the committee may need to postpone discussions on boat ramp fees until cost information is received from the Tax Collector's Office and information is received on how other counties are operating a boat ramp fee system.

Walker said a local option tax may be a possible funding source. Marker said he does not want to add any additional taxes or raise registration fees. He discussed why he is against raising boater registration fees. Marker agreed the committee should wait to receive information from the Tax Collector's Office and other counties before proceeding with boat ramp fees. There was discussion on scheduling a public forum in the spring to discuss boat ramp fees.

Other Business

Marker asked if there are any plans for adding a plant growth buffer at Oriole Beach to dress up the area. He asked how port-a-lets are being disguised at Woodlawn Beach and when port-a-lets need to be removed from boat ramps. Whitfield said the County has planted Crepe Myrtles along Bay Street at Oriole Beach as a buffer. He said the only problem with vegetative buffers is maintaining them. Whitfield said he has not received any complaints about the current conditions at Oriole Beach. He said there are no current plans to add additional buffering at Oriole Beach. Whitfield said the County can consider adding buffering at Oriole Beach if the Marine Advisory Committee wants the issue looked at, but he reminded the committee of the additional cost of maintaining the buffer. He said the County workforce is being reduced which is going to make maintenance harder. Whitfield said port-a-lets at boat ramps are used quite frequently by boaters and non-boaters. He said he felt some consideration should be given to leave port-a-lets at boat ramps year-round. Harris agreed with Whitfield. He said he felt there is enough use to warrant leaving the port-a-lets in place year-round. Marker said the Marine Advisory Committee placed a deadline on port-a-lets at certain boat ramps being funded with boater improvement funds at a previous Marine Advisory meeting. He asked how port-a-lets are going to be funded in the future. Marker said the County placed all port-a-lets out for bid, and the County ended up saving a significant amount of money. He asked if the Marine Advisory Committee is going to be asked to fund all port-a-lets. Whitfield said part of the cost for port-a-lets is funded with Boater Registration Funds and part is funded with County Recreation Funds. He said he can get the percentage of costs funded by boater registration funds and recreation funds.

Blaylock said the cost associated with dredging Archie Glover Boat Ramp is between \$200,000.00 and \$300,000.00 based on quantities excavated in 1998. He said the cost is going to be higher if a suitable spoil site can not be located. Marker asked if there is any funding available for the project. Blaylock said some canals and channels have been dredged using MSBUs. He said the question is if residents along the waterbody should be charged for the dredging. Blaylock said he felt an equitable solution is to have the County contribute. Marker asked if there are any grants available. Blaylock said he is not aware of any grants but said he can check with Sharon Marsh, Grants Coordinator. There was discussion on the Interstate 10 Bridge construction causing the need for dredging of the Archie Glover Boat Ramp area. Whitfield said the State determined the Interstate 10 Bridge contractor is not responsible for dredging at the Archie Glover Boat Ramp.

Adjournment

The next scheduled meeting of the Marine Advisory Committee will be on Tuesday, November 6, 2007 at 5:00 p.m.

There being no further business to come before the Marine Advisory Committee, the meeting adjourned at 5:40 p.m.