

BISCAYNE BAY COMMISSION (BBC) MEETING – September 7, 2023

Agenda

MEMBERS PRESENT: Noah Valenstein – Chair | Adam Blalock - Vice-Chair | Dr. Thomas Reinert - Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission | Mayor Tim Meerbott – Cutler Bay | Commissioner Micky Steinberg – Miami-Dade County | T. Spencer Crowley III - Florida Inland Navigation District

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS: Chair Valenstein welcomed members of the Commission, attendees, and staff to the meeting. Reviewed agenda and stated that public comment would be held at the end of the meeting.

SUMMARY OF PRESENTATIONS

FLORIDA’S CORAL REEF WATER QUALITY DATA: COMPILATION, ANALYSIS, AND DECISION SUPPORT - Presented by: Dr. Luke McEachron, FWC Conservation Commission

- Dr. McEachron provided an overview of current water quality data collection practices. Many entities are collecting data and analyzing it for different purposes. Even within a region there isn't just one entity collecting all the data. We would like to bring many efforts together in a unified framework. This would create a nutrient monitoring master database allowing us to do apples to apples comparisons.
- Goal: Assess all possible nutrient monitoring programs to create a unified South Florida monitoring framework.
- Timeline currently identifying a database management structure. Seven total programs that are on-going (not just grant funded).
- Dr. McEachron showed [story map](#) a they created designed to show trends.
- For raw data, send email to Lucas.McEachron@MyFWC.com.

DISCUSSION:

- Recommendations to the Commission:
 - Geographic sampling sites should take place at 2km of distance to avoid overlap; samples taken within 2km are duplicative.
 - Most effective way to compare data is through a trend analysis.
 - Accounting for inconsistent name conventions, fields, units, min. detection limits and just basic formatting too. Need to create these standards but will take substantial manual effort.
 - Need minimum of 10 years of data to compare trends.
 - Mentioned Biscayne Bay Reef Observation, Interpretation and Prediction System (B-BROIPS); that effort more focused on real time response.
- Chair Valenstein asked for timeline of process. Dr. McEachron responded that they are in the third year of the project. They are in maintenance phase and building out the database. Biggest hurdle we face is the manual process – we need that effort to make the database long-term and sustainable.
- Vice-Chair Blalock asked if they are observing canal nutrient levels? Dr. McEachron stated that the coordination team will decide that.
- Commissioner Steinberg asked how can we help non-profits that are collecting data to bring them on board while making data sets more robust? Spencer Crowley agreed with that issue and requested that FWC send list of criteria for the data sets so that when we interact with non-profits and academic institutions, we can be sure they are using the right criteria and format for the data.
- Chair Valenstein asked about the Coral Working group and mentioned that the Aquatic Preserves started a group about three years ago for all stakeholders dealing with coral and that it's been a good outcome. Dr. McEachron said they had just started their coordination team, but that FWC works well with DEP. Chair Valenstein also asked if they were in regular communication with federal partners including DOD. Dr. McEachron was unsure of that. Chair impressed with the amount of energy and time being spent on coral restoration and protection.

OVERVIEW OF MIAMI-DADE COUNTY’S BISCAYNE BAY TASK FORCE ANNUAL REPORT - Presented by: Irela Bagué Chief Bay Officer, Miami-Dade County

- Ms. Bagué thanked the members for their service and welcomed everyone to Commissioner Micky Steinberg's District.
- Referring to the B-BROIPS slide stated that we are all committed to doing this and measuring success. Whatever data we are missing we should focus on. Hoping FWC can help us on this task especially important for the RAP and Watershed Plan.

- Ms. Bagué presented the highlights of the Biscayne Bay Watershed Management Advisory Board (BBWMAB) on behalf of Commissioner Cohen Higgins, and Mayor Levine Cava. The Advisory Board is required to provide the Board of County Commissioners with an annual report. This is a snapshot of some of our successes.
 - Three years ago, we called for unified collaborative approach to improving water quality. Getting the water right for Biscayne Bay is our primary goal. Mayor, BCC, Advisory Board - collective leadership we did that. Stepped up to target nutrient loads. We made governance a priority. We need to bring back the seagrass. Leadership is central to making the bold changes and holding ourselves accountable for the change we want to see in the watershed.
 - We successfully advocated for changes in state legislation so that we could access new sources of funding. Thank you very much to our legislative delegation and the Governor for this and for allocating additional funds for Biscayne Bay in this upcoming fiscal year.
 - Policy wins – Waster water grant; increased environmental fines, legislative highlights from BBTF, Plastic Free 305, Fertilizer Ordinance, and Biscayne Bay Economic Study, and of course education. One of the biggest challenges we face. Communities need to be invested and understand how the projects work to restore the bay.
 - Kicked off with the Aquatic Preserves, Friends of Biscayne Bay, and Volunteer Cleanup, the Biscayne Bay Friendly Campaign with a Ghost Trap Rodeo and first Biscayne Bay Friendly clean up. Small actions make a difference not just large-scale projects.
- The only thing that is not mentioned in the Annual Report, is that we will be undertaking a comprehensive Watershed Plan. We hope to receive funding soon to embark on that endeavor which will encompass not just the RAP but other issues the Bay is facing. This will be our One Water Plan
- Call to action: let's make Biscayne Bay Water Quality grants a recurring funding source. We would love our commissioners' support on that.

DISCUSSION:

- Mayor Meerbott made a motion in support of the Watershed Plan.
- Chair Valenstein asked for comments before voting on the motion.
- Spencer Crowley expressed concerns about embarking on another plan when we already know what harms the bay. The two main areas are stormwater retrofits and septic to sewer conversions. It's frustrating that we're not seeing more activity in these two areas and what about the RAP.
 - We as Biscayne Bay Commission need to be monitoring the money coming from the state to the county and monitoring outcomes and how the money is being spent. Projects more theoretical in nature we should be more critical of those to be sure funds are deployed for the most impact.
 - County has done a really good job on public outreach. Certainly, the municipal partners in the county are more aware of efforts to restore the bay and this is impacting local government actions which is a good thing. Regulating things like fertilizer – feels good but nobody is monitoring it.
- Vice-Chair Blalok –On Biscayne Bay specific water quality funding the vast majority is going to septic to sewer and stormwater improvements. One benefit of the RAP that makes it different from other plans it is more of a regulatory plan and puts teeth into the initiatives that are included there. Provides specific load reductions that the county and cities have to achieve. . Expansion of wastewater grant program being able to cover more areas than previously is a big win. At DEP we prioritize what will give biggest nutrient reduction the quickest.
- Chair Valenstein – the Commission does not stand in the way of how DEP manages the grant dollars. But we do have the ability to express our opinions on where that focus should be. Two thoughts: county asked for more flexibility to go after septic to sewer dollars; and I think I have similar concerns regarding stormwater improvements. Impatience is good. DEP working where there is hundreds of millions of dollars every year and allows for longer term projects with bigger impact. Amount and certainty of funding can catalyze folks to come to the table thinking bigger. Recurring funding has shown results elsewhere.
- Ms. Bagué – the RAP is now extended to entire watershed. Need to identify additional funding and procure consultant to cover the entire Bay. This means working with all 34 cities and engage with them as we have done with the northern Bay cities. Explained relationship between the RAP and watershed plan.
 - Every major estuary has a watershed plan in the country including Lake Worth Lagoon. The Watershed Plan is part of the BBWMAB's enabling legislation. RAP addresses nitrogen and phosphorus only while the Watershed Plan will address bacteria, recreation use, land use, including land encroachment into federal everglades restoration project areas.
 - Watershed Plan will be a living document. We now have governance, and all the tools are in the toolbox with funding. All of us who have been advocates for 20 years are impatient, but we should not be frustrated. With those tools and leadership, we can move the dial quicker.

- Dr. Reinert - How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time. I believe that small things over time will add up to the big results.
- Chair Valenstein – we want to make sure the unmet needs are relayed to DEP and agencies to make sure they consider. Let’s continue to get updates on the RAP. This year the county and cities have access to the \$20m and now we have \$200m in addition to that will make a difference here. Deadline extended to Sept. 14 due to hurricane.

BISCAYNE BAY COMMISSION STRATEGIC PLAN DEVELOPMENT - Presented by: Mollie Sinnott, SE Florida Restoration, FDEP

- Ms. Sinnott presented the statutory requirement of the Strategic Plan for the Biscayne Bay Commission.
 - State Legislature directed the BBC to consolidate existing plans including the Biscayne Bay Task Force (BBTF) recommendations into a coordinated strategic plan for the improvement of water quality in Biscayne Bay.

DISCUSSION:

- Vice-Chair Blalock – Good that the plan addresses data gaps. Our plan is not meant to be new but to consolidate existing plans and programs and identify what’s missing and especially what requires additional funding. We need one consolidated plan for the Legislature. Also, reflect data sampling done by NGOs and reflect that in our report including the format and criteria required by FWC so that others can follow it.
- Chair Valenstein - Please reflect that the BBC is a clearinghouse and all the work we are doing to bring teams together for coral reefs and other habitat restoration.
- Ms. Sinnott - We can address that by going back to the project tracker and highlight those addressing habitat and restoration.

PUBLIC COMMENT HIGHLIGHTS

Dave Doebler (*BBWMAB, VolunteerCleanup.org*) – discussed need to review strategy regarding marine debris specifically the management of the Spoil Islands. Attended cleanup sponsored by Commissioner Steinberg at Sandspur Island, which is DEP owned, and collected 1500 lbs. of trash. Mixed messages between “Pack it in / Pack it out” and garbage cans on the islands. People leave their trash on the island and there isn’t enough capacity to empty them before they overflow, and trash ends up in the bay. Recommends adding dumpsters to the marinas and trash cans on the land and remove trash cans from the islands to make the message clear. Please add maintenance of Spoil Islands to the strategic plan. Also, need enforcement of illegal jet skis on the Bay especially the area along the Julia Tuttle Causeway.

Rachel Silverstein (*Miami Waterkeeper*) - Flagging for the Commission the fact that over 7 years ago USACE dredging of Port Miami resulted in massive damage to coral reef in the Bay. This impact has still not been restored and we are looking to DEP to enforce the damage via impact assessment. NOAA released their impact assessment and found that at least 278 acres of reef severely impacted by dredging. Urges the state to fix the damage and suggests a mitigation investment can be made to restore the coral.

Other members of the public commented on the data sharing project and were encouraged to see the effort.

COMMISSIONS ITEMS DISCUSSED FOR NEXT MEETING

- Mayor Meerbott – I would like to support recurring funding and an increase in the amount as the annual \$20m is not enough for all the projects we need to fund.
- Vice-Chair Blalok – Would like to hear more about the county data project at the next meeting agenda.
- Spencer Crowley – Asked that FDOT make a presentation regarding their causeway and roadway projects and how they plan to address water quality issues. Would also like to see the Public Access study completed by Miami-Dade Parks with funding from FIND.
- Chair Valenstein – Askes that we include federal partners in our next meeting as that is part of statutory requirement of the Commission. Please invite someone from Biscayne National Park to meet with us.
- Reminder next meeting (8th meeting) tentatively scheduled for December 7 at Cutler Bay Town Hall.

MEETING ADJOURNED