

RESTORE ACT LISTENING SESSION

13 March 2013

Held at Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's Research Institute, St. Petersburg, FL
Notes (not a transcript) by E.M. Haubold

Opening by Dr. Perran Ross at 6:30pm. Ground rules and introduction of Panel.

Program opening with Gil McRae to provide welcome and background. Spent a lot of time looking back until recently. Tonight we focus on looking forward. Passage of RESTORE Act has created a unique opportunity. Florida's seat on the Council is a way to ensure that Florida's interests are represented. In planning for the future we will have opportunity to think regionally, look at watersheds. We share a common appreciation of how important the GOM is to Florida. Tonight we challenge you to be visionary, bring creative ideas, imagine what the GOM could look like in 20 years. GOM that is thriving.

Justin Ehrenworth, Dept. of Commerce. Thank you for being here. Bring greetings from Chair of Council. Public meetings are incredibly important to this process. Thanks everyone that has been involved. Final of a series of meetings across the Gulf, held in all the Gulf states. Great to be here and here with you. What we are here to do tonight is hear from you. That is the most important thing that has brought us (the Council members) here. See this as a unique and unprecedented opportunity. Of course it comes from a disaster. But we are trying to figure out how to set ourselves up for success. We are going to need your help and involvement to do that. Don't consider just coming here tonight. Please remain involved in the process. Ideas for the comprehensive plan have to come from the Gulf, not from DC which is why these meetings and your input are so important. We have learned a lot from these meetings and the comments we have received. Hope you will continue to stay engaged and share your thoughts. <See presentation, notes not taken during the presentation>. Three things to get your ideas on tonight: 1) What are the long term outcomes you would like to see from the work of the Council; 2) what are the type of projects the Council should consider; 3) what are the other ways to engage the public – how do we get your input? Looking forward to hearing your comments and hope you will stay engaged with the Council.

6:55 turned over to Kevin Claridge of DEP. Florida Projects for Restore Act Funding. Have been working with FWC, over next few months will develop comprehensive plan for Gulf Restoration with the Council. "Commercial" for Florida's Aquatic Preserves – 31 areas set aside by Legislature, important areas. New logo and tag line – waters that work, play, and live. <See Presentation notes not taken>

End at 7:10 move to the public program.

Public Input

Holly Greening (Executive Director Tampa Bay Estuary Program). Last August the three National Estuary Program (NEP) boards agreed to work together and develop one list of projects. Invited proposals. 280 projects vetted and ranked and prioritized the projects and approved the list last week. Coastal restoration, Land Acquisition, etc. more than 100 projects are included in the plan. Will submit plan next week. Provided searchable electronic database to the state this morning. The NEPs would like to offer continued service to the Council. Thank you and look forward to continuing to work with you.

Preston Robertson (Florida Wildlife Federation). Approx 60,000 members and supporters across the state, run the gamut of people who care about natural resources of Florida. Thanks the Council, really important stuff, large disaster and now we have the opportunity to do something about it not just for us but for the future for residents and visitors. Can do that by protecting what we have. State of Florida benefits as to the types of projects – have 23 years of looking at properties that need to be protected (through Florida Forever and its predecessor). Have a vetting process widely accepted. Think it is great we are focusing not only on ecology but economy and military bases. Let's protect the spaces around those facilities so they can continue to operate.

Mike Colby (Charter Captain in Pinellas county) Our fishermen and our associations view this with great interest. Have some experience participated in a workshop a year ago here at FIO. I relayed that what we came away with, options used for restoration goes from soup to nuts. The wish list is really really big. Realized that the wish list is really really big. Don't envy any one of you. I understand what you are going to go through to wrap our arms around what needs to get done to promote coastal resiliency. Need to concentrate on marine resources increasing Fisheries Dependent and Independent Monitoring, and focus on everything that was harmed the most. We killed a lot of fish with the spill. Need to see things happen for our fishermen to promote resilience.

Dave Howard (Board of Friends of Tampa Bay National Wildlife Refuge (NWR)). Have 3 NWRs in Tampa Bay. Want to speak to Egmont Key was 500 acres, now 270, Have 33,000 pairs of nesting birds, 50 sea turtle nests and numerous threatened gopher tortoises. A former pelican rookery in the bay is now gone now due to erosion – don't want that to happen to Egmont. ACOE has a plan to renourish the beaches and stabilize the beaches there. Need to get the stabilization in place before the next renourishment. That would help tremendously to preserve Egmont Key. Thanks for listening.

Jean Dubey (pres Sarasota Audubon). Have a capital campaign underway to build a nature center. Involved in beach nesting bird protection. Imagine you are a snowy plover and compelled to breed on Siesta Key. Was named a top beach in 2001 which means 30% more visitors. Get 300,000 people per month on Siesta Key, now imagine being a nesting bird and all those feet coming at you, not to mention the predators and grooming machines. We walk in front of the machines to make sure the chicks get out of the way. We desperately need help. Have 50 or so volunteers, really need a management plan, designated funds, staff people to help us help the birds survive. With Nature Center next to restored wetland, we can educate children. Just had kids out doing ecology education. That is a way we can help the Gulf coast through Education.

Susie Fox (Director Anna Marie Turtle Watch). Use funds to purchase Rattlesnake Key in Terra Ceia Bay. This is one of the last remaining natural places in the area. On Forever Florida list but ran out of money before they could purchase it. This Key is crucial sensitive habitat for all wildlife. I speak for manatees, red snapper, pretty pink roseate spoonbills. I speak for my 50 volunteers. Need habitat for young sea turtles to grow up – grassy flats. Completing Terra Ceia preserve will help this. I am 55 and have spent 22 years working on this. I have never asked for anything as important as this.

Mark Alverson, Director of National Estuary Program in Sarasota. Thanks Mimi and Kevin for considering. Have 126 proposals for your consideration from NEP. Again thanks for your consideration.

Julie Wraithmell (Audubon of Florida) – Had Audubon members stand to see participation (significant number in the crowd). You will hear a few people speaking but there is an army of folks behind them. Invest in ecological protection and economic benefits will follow. Were impressed by interest in the oil spill. The people of Florida have spent a lot of time investing in preserving the natural resources of Florida. Appreciate your effort in making this effort transparent. Have some resources here for projects I will leave with you. Have organized our ideas around several key areas <didn't capture these for the notes>. Thanks so much for your time. You are like Air traffic control - please make sure we are keeping an eye on these projects working in tandem so that they are greater than sum of their parts.

Audubon – Alafia Bay project. A long time ago a warden was hired for the Alafia to stop the slaughter of water birds for feathers for hats. Alafia Bank is one of the top wading bird colonies in the state. Reddish egrets were just holding on, they came back to Alafia Bank. Source of colonies, sanctuary for the birds. This would be creating a living shoreline to control erosional forces. Would like your consideration when looking at the projects.

John Hudd (Florida director Audubon, director of Clearwater Audubon) Anyone want to buy a piece of property? 40 acres beach front on a barrier island. Property created when Big Pass filled in the 80s. Acts as a critical buffer in the Gulf. Globally important bird area. Critical area, Egmont Key has 33,000 nesting pairs of birds. Three Rooker Bar by itself has 6,000-7,000 pair. This piece of land will protect Gulf Islands Geo Parks from Clearwater beach where there is lots of disturbance. This 40 acres of property will create a buffer. It is cheap, less than \$10,000/acre. Turned in a map of the property.

Kathy Harrelson (Florida organizer for Gulf Restoration Network). Florida produces 1.3 billion pounds of seafood annually, support largest oyster harvest in world. \$9 million in wages, Healthy wetlands and barrier reefs protect the coast. Healthy and plentiful freshwater flow protects ecosystems. Projects selected must be transparent. Efforts focusing on ecosystem restoration have greater resiliency. Science based criteria must be used. We are all connected by water. Spirited and public debate about projects that get funded. Council should create a Gulf citizen advisory committee to provide input about planning and restoration. If we are successful, it will help motivate Congress to provide more funding. Economy of Gulf and Tourism all depend on healthy natural resources.

TJ Marshall (Ocean Conservancy). Thank you for the opportunity. Three points. Believe in strong partnerships. Florida Lodging and restaurant industry -- Just sent a letter to Secretary Vinyard. They stated that critical to our economy is protection of our natural resources. Want a long term endowment to ensure long term monitoring of Gulf resources. Another partner is the Destin Charter Boat organization. They hope there will be a serious focus on projects that will improve science and management of fisheries we rely on. Have been a Florida resident since 1983, need some prioritization for FL. Length of our shoreline and amount of lost use with size of closures is much greater than the other Gulf states. Keep FL in mind as you prioritize. Will give you the letters now.

Rick Gerity (Executive Director of Environmental Protection Commission (EPC) of Hillsborough County) - Thank you for being here. Participated in S FL Gulf Restoration Plan. Water Quality and Sentinel Species monitoring to provide information for Florida's largest estuary is important. Encourage incorporating this plan into Florida's restoration plan. Was culmination of months of work and model of cooperation for resource management. The EPC strongly supports the SW FL restoration plan be incorporated in Florida's restoration plan.

Don McCormick (SW Florida rep to Charlotte Harbor Estuary Program) There is a public support face to the National Estuary Program plan. Vetted 120 vital restoration projects and urge you to support this.

Lauren Day (Conservation Fund). Handed out map of projects that represent watershed projects that are shovel ready. Have some general comments. Need to get the water right. Fundamental that quantity and quality are right. Keep ecosystems functioning. Need permanent projects. Haven't heard much about the Big Bend Coastline at these meetings. Pasco to Polk counties. One of Florida's wildest areas and one of least known. Just offshore are seagrasses – Big Bend Seagrass preserve. Second largest seagrass area, important nursery areas and foraging areas for many species manatees, seaturtles, dolphins, etc. Thank you, appreciate opportunity to comment.

Christine Smith (Anamar Environmental) Ixtoc in 1979 released 140 million gallons of oil, threatened as far away from 200 miles. Some oil formed asphalt like substrate on sediment surface. Deepwater Horizon released 30% more oil. Recently found oil on bottom near spill and dead shrimp. I propose a detailed geochemical survey of ground floor of the Gulf. Data can be statistically compared with sediment collected before the spill. Bioaccumulation analysis. Sidescan sonar can be used to search for oil. What happens out there matters out here.

Pete Plashes, (Collier Audubon Policy Advocate, Charlotte Harbor NEP and participated in project ranking, and Pres Caloosahatchee....<missed this affiliation>) Top three projects ranked – one project to move water from Charlotte flatwoods to reduce nutrient loads. Collier County to move water away from Naples Bay to 10,000 islands. Restore salinity balance. Have a billion dollar pink shrimp industry and fishing industries. These are projects that are dear to our heart. C43 reservoir is a top priority. Counties adjacent to Caloosahatchee voted to push for this project to be a top priority for RESTORE Act. Give attention to NEP rankings.

Robert Tran (Director Audubon. Here on behalf of Citrus, Hernando and Pasco County Audubon Societies). These 3 gulf counties important to Gulf. This part of the world is one community and particularly want to speak to the implications of the GOM research yet to come. Projects identified for FL have a larger scale effect dealing with restoration across the Gulf coast. Applaud Audubon for proposing these. Everglades and S FL Coast are iconic environmental treasures located in the panhandle and help to see the wild areas in these regions are headed to improved health. Use good science, have a deep understanding of environmental issues and avoid political pressures.

Brad Cornell (Collier County Audubon and Audubon of FL). You asked what outcomes we would like to see. I would suggest seeing a successful restoration sustainable gulf fisheries, healthy estuaries, healthy watersheds, vital beaches. Big picture ecological benefits that otherwise we wouldn't obtain in our

lifetime is a huge opportunity. Have several vital projects in W Everglades – C43 project. Need to see this project built. Tamiami Trail Bridging benefits FL bay. Both come in context of Everglades restoration. Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve watershed had a suite of projects benefiting estuaries. Estuaries are a big priority that should be included in the Plan.

John Fresci (staff of GOM Fishery Mgmt Council). The Council stands ready and willing to assist in restoration providing their expertise and guidance. Restoration priorities provided. Increase stock assessment funding, fisheries monitoring, decrease frequency of fisheries dependent reporting. More robust observer programs, oyster restoration, funding for monitoring, electronic data collection, barotraumas. What are benchmarks for something to be considered successful. Close with question. Interested in funding for TransOcean, curious about \$1billion, only indicated \$374million, where is difference?

Dave Kanz, (St. Petersburg Audubon and Director of Audubon of Florida). Heard Gene Dubbey talk about volunteers walking in front of grooming machines. What if we had a way to fund conservation efforts for the long term. Create a coastal bird perpetual management fund. Would support grants to post nesting colonies, surveying and monitoring efforts. \$150-175 million invested in a fund and the proceeds reinvest to index for inflation then after that could get several million dollars annually. Could fund this program in perpetuity and have a lasting impact. Think long term in these efforts.

Karen Fraley (Roundabout Nature Tours, Small Environmental Education firm in Bradenton, Manatee County) Funded by NEPs and Audubon. Been around 14 years, impacted 40,000 school children. Education is a key here. Excited that Community Resilience outlines that. Want to be sure you stick with that. Informed public is key. Spoke to some adults and asked question what is a watershed and only 5 people of 60 raised their hands. Watershed is not well understood by the public. The bar that the five year old set, let's remember that. Communities that understand the importance of their resources will be more likely to preserve them.

Jessica Koelsch (National Wildlife Federation). Thank you it is obvious you are listening. Incorporated comments you heard in earlier sessions, thanks for listening. Restore Act priorities – projects that address restoring natural resources, habitat and coastal wetlands. Projects to make greatest contribution, in existing state plans, and restore long term resiliency. Numerous economic and environmental impacts. Bridging of Tamiami trail and C43 water basin. Driver of fisheries, huge value in S FL and FL bay. These projects directly address the four priorities in the RESTORE Act.

Deborah Davy (Trade wind island resort at St Pete Beach) 850 employees. Tourism is 20 percent of FL economy and \$60 billion impact. Fastest growing sector. Florida's brand is blue waters, sugary white sand beaches, sunshine and world's greatest fishery. Seafood water sports are all fundamental to Florida's image. Must choose projects that preserve the GOM to an even better condition than before the DWH Disaster. Thank you for your time.

Paul Johnson (coordinator FI Ocean Coalition) emphasizes implementation of ecosystem approach and important linkages between FL economy and resources. Represented by ...<didn't get all these> Supports goal of GCERT Council to restore gulf coast environments, economy. FL is a big state with a lot

of shorelines. Lot of people, diversity of habitats. Hope you recognize that in allocation of projects. Pleased to see what SW FL has done with NEPs. Other parts of FL have not had that luxury. Partnership and truly planning process. Will provide written comments. Quantifiable results on long term future of GOM. Look forward to reviewing project list.

David White (Director GOM Restoration for National Wildlife Federation). Thanks for your service on the Council. We are all here to help you as much as we can. Have a question. Task is to identify projects that if implemented quickly will restore the gulf ecosystem region. What projects have already been approved, don't want to reinvent the wheel. Approved by who, what were the parameters, have you made any progress in identifying these projects? Put them on your website so we can see them. Justin responded – important issue that Council is looking at, need help thinking through the issues, grateful RESTORE act is in place but has some ambiguities. Don't have final answer to your question tonight, have noted it down. That and every other part – we want to put on the website and get your comments on them. We are focused on this issue.

Jeremy France (Conservancy of SW FL in Naples) Echo comments of numerous speakers – use NEP plan that has been developed. Project selection process has percolated through a large number of submitted projects. The highest ranked projects affect all five of the goals. It is a great plan for you to use. Highlight two projects to address SW FL Gulf coast, nutrient laden freshwater discharges – 4000 acre aquisition project in Le county, connects Corkscrew and Estero Bay FL Forever projects. Important to maintain. North Golden Gates Flow-way restoration project, won't repeat everything already said, will affect 34 square miles.

Phil Compton (regional rep for Sierra Club) – tighten focus on restoring the environment and reject anything that doesn't. Tampa Bay Times cited some projects that don't meet that requirement such as parking lots and other infrastructure. Agree with Pinellas County Commissioner that a lot of thought wasn't put into it. Should fund Tamiami Trail Bridging Project and C43 reservoir to restore proper flow to the Gulf. Both will provide 1000s of jobs while restoring the environment. Will protect FL from sea level rise. Handed in comments on both of those projects.

Andy Houston (City Manger for Crystal River, heart of nature coast). City was part of coalition that acquired 3 Sisters Springs. Major source of water for King's Bay. Important sanctuary for manatees during cold weather. Largest natural warm water spot for manatees in world. Successful in acquiring property now seeking funding to make improvements they are required to do such as providing parking and a visitor center. Don't want these to impact the natural resource. Want to move visitors center off site on the highway to minimize impacts to the site. Council please provide funding to match the local effort.

Chip Christenfeld (Pensacola FL, work with Escambia County managing water quality and land mgmt division). Brought letter from Chairman Grover Robinson to deliver to you. And have my own comments. Heard several people talk about the value of FL and encouraged you to take into consideration the value of FL compared to our neighbors. \$11 billion in fishery sales in FL is more than the other 4 states combined. Receives less than 4% of oil and gas revenue of the other states. Could say

those states have already received their benefits from that revenue. Give a priority to FL for the projects and the funding that is available. Escambia County has two Bays/Estuaries. Pensacola has largest drainage of any estuary along the Gulf Coast. 14 years ago, watershed group developed map, have updated map with additional projects we will share with you.

George Wilson – good traveling shows. As you make your investments appreciate your looking at watersheds. Won't find a harder working village than Crystal River – partnered on critical manatee habitat, great effort in working with federal agencies. Good example of community working on natural resource issues. When electroshocking on American eel started in Atlantic, realize what the rivers do to the web of life of our streams. Determine whether fish spawn. As we lose our rivers, the quality of water is determined by flow. Large private working landscapes, best bang for the buck. Important to local communities also.

James Metro (Tradewinds Island Resorts) Reiterate what Deborah said earlier about FL 's brand. Must restore GOM and even more importantly to better than before DWH. Need to permanently correct problems. Solid and healthy GOM must be first priority. There are other important needs such as infrastructure and roads. Easy to forget economic losses sustained during the DWH. Need to ensure future of FL number one industry – tourism.

Jim McFarland (Reef Ball Foundation) Spoke with you before, support everything he has heard except doing more research before we do anything else. Welcome to St. Pete. Need a long term outlook. What have we got, where are we going. Looking at Water quality to make sure it is better than what it was. Number of reef ball projects here in Tampa Bay, oyster reefs have helped improve Tampa Bay. Clearwater Beach isn't too far away, people don't remember the days when it was clear water. They need to get that water clear again. Look at materials that are sustainable that can restore oysters and reefs. Our materials are sustainable and will grow corals.

Lisa Van Houghton –(SW FL Regional Planning Council) Caloosahatchee water shed basin. USDA receives funding every year to match money of private landowners to install culverts to improve water quality and clean up the canals. Contact for USDA said they can't spend their money because the private landowners don't have the match. Please provide the match for these funds for private landowners. This would clean up the water and rivers for years to come.

Rebecca Falkenberry (Travel Agent). Have heard about the impact on the economy. I bring clients from all over the world. They want to see the real Florida (not Disney). Won't repeat all that you have heard about tourism. Oil is a natural resource that came from nature. Every decision you make needs to go to fixing, preserving, restoring the nature, the brand of FL. That is why so many people come to visit. Buy land while it is cheap and preserve land, preserve habitats, ecosystems. Have a comprehensive plan to preserve FL. Real FL should be better when this plan is finished.

Laurie McDonald (FL Director, Defenders of Wildlife) – thank you for the listening sessions. 75,000 members in FL. All projects should result in ecological benefits, even those for economic benefit. Land Acquisition and easements are highest priorities among your tools, enduring tools that will give long term benefits. Climate change should be taken into consideration in all the projects. And looking at

connections between marine, coastal and upland environments. Projects – Defenders of Wildlife and the National Wildlife Refuge NWR association report was done for NRDA about land acquisition projects. This report is quite applicable now and we will continue to add to this. Will be a great benefit to everyone and all living things. Important to all living people, their health and the economy. Report submitted to the Council.

Doug Robison (Atkins) – Fifth goal added to restore economy. Recognize that you will be under a lot of pressure to fund general infrastructure. Those projects such as highway widening and harbor deepening. Require these projects, if prioritized and funded, to not be inconsistent with the other goals and be a direct improvement, not just mitigation. SWFL NEP's worked hard on their plan, urge you to use this list effectively. Thank you.

Jars Pamoni <name not correct> (FIO) – need a much larger vision for the GOM, inter-disciplinary observing system from shallow water to the deep. Can't predict the loop current even after two weeks. This is what caused the economic loss because of fear of where the oil was going during the Spill. This monitoring system would put the GOM ahead of the rest. Could monitor fisheries, help predict hurricanes, etc. This would be your lasting legacy for the GOM.

<didn't capture name> Good evening and thanks for your time. Former county commissioner, board for Audubon and other state and national commissions – concerned about the future of FL. Decisions you have to make are very important. Consider 2 major things – get politics out of it, and make decisions based on science. Nobody has a clue what is going on with the benthic population. Base decisions on restoring the Gulf. You have an opportunity to reverse some very strange thinking in state legislators who want to sell our conservation lands. Use your decision making to help protect our springs, restore GOM, restore Florida Forever with partnership that looks not just at today but future for our children.

Larry Vegs – (Reef Ball Foundation) Thank you. Reef ball foundation, been around over 15 years, worked in many countries. We are here to help you. Anything you want to do in the restoration area, work with our fellow NGOs. We are still here, standing by, available for anything you might need. Specialties range from mangroves to off shore reefs. Have a world-wide network of volunteers and contractors and can bring in to do whatever work is necessary. More than willing to help you. Standing here to do that. You have a big task ahead of you. You already know it isn't one project or one area. It is like school system – compared ecosystems to school system. They all connect and thrive from each other. Thank you and everyone here.

Joe Guthrie (Wildlife Biologist). In 2012, I and 3 conservationists hiked 1000 miles in 100 days from Florida Bay to Okefenokee in GA. This was to highlight the Green Corridor that connects FL to North America. 55 days were spent in Everglades watershed – Caloosahatchee and Kissimmee River. Privately owned and much still in need of protection. Here representing an alliance of ranchers and sportsmen who are engaged with USFWS, FWC, NRCS, and other non-profits in trying to protect the landscape which supports clean water for 9 million Florida. Consider protecting portions of Everglades Headwaters using Land Acquisition, Fee simple, and Conservation easements. This is a huge economic motor in this state.

<name missed> and Jean Wade (citizens). At first it seemed people weren't hitting nail on the head but the larger marine life that we pay attention to the most - -the fish. It is the roots of the problem, estuaries, grass beds, invertebrates all crucial to all of this. All of you biologists, scientists need to take a look == you have laid out a good plan. Preservation of land is crucial. It is becoming hard to protect what is protected. We appreciate what you are doing. Need to attack development. Development in FL is running on an old track. You as a committee ought to reach out to Developers and ask for a plan to redevelop areas instead of building on land. Every community half empty and continue to build. Development is the head of the snake in FL. This is why we are asking to save FL. Approach college students. Get federal funding, private funding – can combine that funding with the funding you are getting, use these professors and students for your programs and you get more bang for your buck. They want to be involved. FL has a lot of semi-residents and immigrants. Not their fault they don't understand that we are a sensitive environment. Get more signs out to advertise to people coming into the communities, don't trash FL.

End Public Comment at 8:45.

Closing Comments by Mimi Drew – Little over 3 years ago, got a call from my boss, Mike Sole and he told me “GO TO ROBERT”. He was at Emergency Operations Center. I learned Robert isn't a person, but a place in LA. He told me “Go home, pack, and stay.” Coast Guard has created an Incident Command Center. It was Interesting because FL had never faced anything like this. Became exposed to the other states who acted like it was no big deal – they respond to events all the time. Florida, we were horrified, terrified, very scary experience. Spent the next months between Robert and Mobile. I was given the opportunity to come back and be a part of this council. Common themes – what keeps me going and really inspires me is you guys – you volunteer for turtle watch, for bird watch. Thank you for that. Common themes with other listening sessions – We are listening – the breadth of projects, it helps us to hear from you. Here are some things I have heard so far -- Please use existing plans and projects, existing land acquisition programs, combine things with military bases, fishery enhancement, habitat protection, healthy ecosystems, Partnerships are important, concept of an endowment or comprehensive monitoring plan, importance of estuaries, education, heard about sustainability, people who want to focus on keeping FL the way it is (natural). Again, thank you for your input, appreciate you giving up your evening to come talk to us. Will do our best to keep in touch. Council will have a lot to talk about when they get together again. Thanks so much and have a good evening. END 8:52.