

**Franklin County Restore Act Committee (RAC)**  
**RAC Meeting Notes**  
**Franklin County Courthouse Annex, Apalachicola, Florida**  
**January 17, 2017, 5:00 p.m. ETZ**

**Attendees:**

\*Van W. Johnson Sr. – Mayor of Apalachicola  
\*Rose McCoy-Thomas – Citizen of Apalachicola, Former City Administrator (Retired)  
\*Brenda Lapaz – Mayor of Carrabelle  
Greg Kristofferson – Citizen of Carrabelle  
Robin Rickel Vroegop – Ecotourism Industry  
Bill McCartney – City of Apalachicola  
Elizabeth Wright – Citizen of Apalachicola and Wildlife Biologist  
Falan Goff – Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU) Cooperative Extension  
Dreamal Worthen – FAMU Cooperative Extension  
Victor Ibeanusi – FAMU, Dean, School of the Environment  
Joe Taylor – Franklin's Promise Coalition, Executive Director  
Holden Foley – Conservation Corps of the Forgotten Coast  
Alan Pierce – Franklin County RESTORE Coordinator  
Stella Wilson – Dewberry, Inc.  
Rick Harter – Ecology and Environment, Inc.  
Jade Marks – Ecology and Environment, Inc.

\*Denotes official RAC member

**Minutes:**

- A. Pierce opened the meeting at 5:10 p.m. (ETZ) by welcoming those in attendance and introducing R. McCoy and Mayor B. Lapaz, both of the Franklin County RAC. V. Johnson, a third RAC member joined the meeting a few moments later. A. Pierce noted that the full RAC was not in attendance, thus the meeting did not have a quorum and no votes would be made during the meeting.
- A. Pierce then introduced S. Wilson, who would discuss the approved Franklin County Needs Assessment, as well as the next step in the Multi-Year Implementation Plan (MYIP) process; the drafting of a Selection Criteria.
- S. Wilson thanked the RAC and public attendees and explained how the draft Needs Assessment had been vetted with the RAC, the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC), and the public. The Needs Assessment was posted on the Franklin County RESTORE website and the Dewberry team received feedback and public comments in person during the RAC meeting in October, the BOCC workshop in December, as well as via phone and e-mail.

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- Using these comments and the resources the community helped gather, the Dewberry team created a matrix of needs, which was cross-referenced and evaluated before additional needs were added to the Needs Assessment.
- This revised Needs Assessment was posted online for additional comment and was approved by the BOCC at their January 3, 2017 meeting.
- B. McCartney asked if the Needs Assessment was now considered final since the BOCC approved it.
- S. Wilson confirmed that the Needs Assessment is considered final, which allows the RAC to move on to the next step in the MYIP process.
- There was some discussion on whether the Needs Assessment was missing needs or information.
- B. McCartney presented S. Wilson with a 1987 Apalachicola Valley Conference document that proposed establishing three enterprise zones. He described the document as a multi-organizational group report that should be considered as a resource for the Needs Assessment.
- S. Wilson assured B. McCartney that the Dewberry team would look over the report. Also, she noted that similar, more recent planning documents had been utilized to write the Needs Assessment.
- E. Wright brought it to S. Wilson's attention that she did not receive notice of the posted draft Needs Assessment.
- S. Wilson reassured E. Wright that the Dewberry team would check the Alerts List and resolve that issue.
- E. Wright noted that there was no explicit mention of wildlife in the Needs Assessment. She went on to explain that shorebirds were adversely affected by the oil spill, particularly during the spill response efforts. The state received Natural Resource Damage Assessment money to restore 19 sites across the panhandle, but that money will eventually run out. For example, Oyster catchers eat oysters and are dependent upon the health of oyster reefs. They also nest on the beach and there is a lack of public education about shorebird nesting.
- S. Wilson explained that it's not possible to list every species in a document like the Needs Assessment, but by focusing on keystone species like oysters, many other species can benefit.
- E. Wright noted that nesting sites and beaches utilized by shorebirds are not included or clearly spelled out.
- A. Pierce commented that the Audubon Florida has a contract under the state for public education and that public education is not an eligible activity for funding under the RESTORE act.
- S. Wilson added that based on feedback they have received from the United States Treasury (Treasury), education is not eligible for funding with RESTORE funds. She gave the example of a proposed student-lead restoration project proposed in Walton and Okaloosa Counties by the Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance. For that project, Treasury indicated that the only fundable portion of the project was the actual restoration of habitat and not the educational activities associated with it.
- R. McCoy noted that the Needs Assessment did not list the Veteran's Park, the Gorrie Museum, or the Chapman Botanical Garden as existing assets.

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- A. Pierce explained that these resources would be covered under “all museums” and “all parks.”
- R. McCoy also commented that “training” should be added to number five under “Workforce Development” and “Job Creation.” In particular, she noted that training should allow the County to update and build upon its existing assets (e.g., the airport).
- B. Lapaz inquired if the Needs Assessment included FAMU extension office resources.
- B. McCartney inquired if the reference to “reef” fishery resources could be clarified to specify Gulf of Mexico fish.
- S. Wilson said that the Dewberry team would continue to accept comments and questions on the Needs Assessment, but recommended moving forward to the Selection Criteria.
- B. Lapaz inquired if the Needs Assessment required a vote from the RAC to be considered final.
- A. Pierce explained that the RAC functions as an advisory committee and that ultimately the BOCC has the final say on the Needs Assessment.
- S. Wilson reminded attendees that over half of the resources in the Needs Assessment came from the RAC and public input that was received during the previous meeting.
- B. Lapaz asked if this year’s funding was coming from the TransOcean settlement and if another MYIP would have to be drafted for future years, or whether or not the current MYIP could be updated and changed.
- A. Pierce confirmed that the MYIP could be changed and updated, but would ideally serve as a framework for future years. A. Pierce added that this process was designed to get money into the community as quickly as possible. The County would be receiving a total of \$24 million over 15 years, but when this MYIP is completed, approved, and grant applications are submitted, the County will have \$5 million with which they can use for projects.
- B. McCartney noted that many of the disproportionately affected counties were using their BP money to complete projects for which there are few other funding sources, such as improvements in potable water, wastewater treatment, wastewater discharge, and stormwater infrastructure.
- S. Wilson explained that Pot 1 funding cannot be used for normal system upgrades that are normally funded through County programs, since Treasury considers those activities as regular maintenance.
- A. Pierce added that infrastructure upgrades could be funded if they could be demonstrated to address an environmental issue, such as water quality.
- S. Wilson explained that funding infrastructure upgrades require that a clear and direct nexus for environmental benefit be established, and the burden falls on the County to generate reports and documentation proving that the project meets that nexus.
- A. Pierce and S. Wilson assured the attendees that they would continue to receive suggestions via phone and e-mail concerning the County’s needs and existing assets.
- S. Wilson presented the RAC and attendees with an example of the Selection Criteria for Gulf and Walton Counties and explained that the Selection Criteria would build upon the Needs Assessment. The RAC would rank the Selection Criteria in order of importance; then the BOCC would do the same. The final Selection Criteria would be an average of the RAC and BOCC scores. S. Wilson noted that there were many different ways to assign a point system to the criteria. In Walton County, she explained, the point system was based off of 100 points, with a

certain number of points going towards each category. It is also possible to assign each category a percent priority and assign points for a number of sub-categories.

- S. Wilson explained that other counties have also included programmatic criteria, which will help the RAC and BOCC identify “shovel-ready projects” and projects that need to be prioritized based on the timing of leveraged funding sources.
- A. Pierce noted that it may be useful to adopt a scoring system with top values of 100 points or 100 percent.
- B. McCartney commented that the scoring system and the specifics of the “Tourism and Opportunities” section seem discretionary.
- S. Wilson explained that every project would be weighed against every criteria and every category, regardless of what its focus is. For example, an Environmental project would still receive scores in the Economic and Infrastructure categories, even if it only received 1 or 2 points out of the total. This comprehensive scoring promotes projects that provide the maximum benefit to the community. S. Wilson explained that most projects do receive at least a few points in every category.
- B. McCartney inquired if the scores would be raw or weighted.
- S. Wilson explained that weighting scores is something the RAC can discuss once the criteria are developed. However, in her experience almost every county had initially decided to use raw scores, but later adopted a weighted scoring system, largely to take timing into account during the scoring process.
- A. Pierce reminded the RAC that they will have the first cut on project scoring.
- S. Wilson remarked that the Dewberry team would assess all the projects for eligibility before turning them over to the RAC to prevent the RAC from wasting time on evaluating ineligible projects. She then showed an example of an automated scoring sheet that Dewberry developed to total the points for each eligible project.
- B. Lapaz asked how the scoring sheets would be presented (online vs. hard copy) and whether the RAC and the BOCC would be required to have their names placed on their scoring sheets.
- S. Wilson explained that both of those details were up to the RAC. She noted that other counties have asked the RAC and BOCC to “own their scores” by putting their names on them.
- V. Johnson agreed that the RAC and BOCC should put their names on the scores.
- B. Lapaz asked if the BOCC has the final say on the project scores and selection.
- S. Wilson confirmed that this was correct:
  - After the RAC agrees on a scoring system, the project portal will open.
  - Applicants will respond to every question in the portal and receive a total score based on all the criteria.
  - The portal opening and closing dates will be advertised on the Franklin County Restore website ([www.franklincountyrestore.com](http://www.franklincountyrestore.com)).
  - Once the portal closes, the Dewberry team will compile applications and supporting materials, conduct an eligibility review, and turn the list over to the RAC and BOCC, who will rank the projects according to the Selection Criteria.
  - These scores will be averaged and the final list will be presented to the BOCC, who can amend the list. One reason the board may choose to amend scores is to accommodate the timing of available matched or leveraged funds.

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- B. McCartney commented that Okaloosa County used an alternative scoring system in which 70 percent of the total score was numeric and 30 percent was based on subjective evaluation of each project.
- S. Wilson and A. Pierce explained that the Selection Criteria and scoring system are intended to be objective and quantitative.
- E. Wright pointed out that when you introduce subjectivity into the scoring system, you also introduce politics.
- S. Wilson agreed, but reminded the attendees that subjective scoring can come into play when availability of leveraged funds comes into play. For example, it would be wise to score a project higher if there are time constraints on the available leveraged funds; in other words “do it now or it doesn’t get done.”
- B. McCartney mentioned that some counties have simply added an additional fixed number of points for matching funds.
- S. Wilson confirmed this and noted that the same strategy could be used to evaluate timing as well. In Gulf County, she explained, there were three tiers for evaluating matched funds. The first tier included projects that were anticipated to receive funds, the second tier included projects that had a letter from the funding agency confirming the funds, and the third tier included projects with money currently in the bank.
- D. Worthen asked about matching funds from universities; specifically that universities are not allowed to leverage multiple federal grants.
- S. Wilson indicated that in this instance university funds from a federal grant can be used as for leveraging/match money, since RESTORE funds are not counted as federal funds.
- V. Ibeanusi asked about a beach ecosystem restoration project that would partner FAMU with the City of Apalachicola.
- S. Wilson advised that any program that provides vocational training is eligible, while education is not.
- V. Ibeanusi asked about the eligibility of a project to help local individuals work with the resources they have to start up businesses, including training on how to go about business start-up.
- S. Wilson advised that all applicants will have to think about what exactly the money will be spent on. For example, will it be spent on computers? To pay salaries? To buy [plant] starts? Treasury will follow every dollar, and those dollars must be spent on eligible activities.
- B. McCartney asked if it had been decided what entities can apply.
- S. Wilson explained that local governments including those of cities and counties, quasi-governments including utilities, and institutions of higher education area all eligible.
- A. Pierce expanded upon this by noting that the main criteria to be considered an eligible applicant is experience with managing grant money.
- E. Wright asked if non-governmental organizations are eligible.
- S. Wilson confirmed that non-profits with an active 501(c)(3) status are eligible applicants.
- A. Pierce added that the Treasury has discouraged projects from small non-profits because they often lack grant managing experience. He suggested that small non-profits partner with larger non-profits or other agencies with the organization and institutional capacity to manage grants.

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- S. Wilson also reminded attendees that the County ultimately receives all the money, regardless of who submits the project or executes it.
- A. Pierce also added that Treasury has placed a three percent cap on administrative costs, which includes implementation and grant management, etc. As such, large projects are easier to facilitate as many small projects require more administrative costs.
- B. Lapaz clarified by giving the example of the Carrabelle History Museum; if the Museum's project was funded, the money would not go directly to the applicant. Instead, it would go to the County and the County would administer the funds on behalf of the Museum.
- J. Taylor asked if A. Pierce or the Dewberry team could help pair people and foster partnerships using their accumulated knowledge of ongoing projects in the region and what type of projects are currently being funded.
- S. Wilson explained that the RAC could not put partnerships together, but in Escambia and Gulf Counties, the Dewberry team has facilitated workshops to bring potential partners together.
- B. Lapaz inquired whether these workshops would come out of the County's Pot 1 funding or the County's three percent allocated to administrative costs.
- S. Wilson and A. Pierce explained that hosting a workshop was already built in to the County's contract with Dewberry for MYIP development.
- D. Worthen noted, that in the academic world, a researcher's intellectual property is important, and is one basis on which researchers are evaluated. Some university researchers may have portions of their projects that are considered proprietary. She asked S. Wilson to share her thoughts on this aspect of a workshop where everyone comes to share ideas.
- S. Wilson said that the hope for a community-oriented project such as this is that everyone will work together. She assured D. Worthen that the Dewberry team and the County would not give away anyone's project information, but that all applicants should be aware of the state's public domain laws. Projects that are submitted to the MYIP portal are public record and available to anyone who request information.
- A. Pierce noted that the RAC should consider the immediate challenge of drafting a Selection Criteria and seeking and encouraging qualified applicants that Treasury will also approve.
- S. Wilson reminded the RAC and attendees that the development of Selection Criteria is required by Treasury.
- A. Pierce also noted that all projects would be held to the standard of being based upon the "best available science" and that it was up to the County to prove to Treasury that the projects they select are making use of the best available science. This can be a logistical hurdle because it requires a fair bit of research, documentation, etc.
- S. Wilson gave the example of a seagrass restoration project that was presented to Treasury. The National Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) are currently working on a study called *Roadblocks to Seagrass Recovery*. In this case, the best available science is still being developed.
- A. Pierce explained that it was up to the County to gather the best available data and prove that to the Treasury.
- R. Harter explained that the best available science includes published, peer-reviewed documents.

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- E. Wright asked if “grey literature” such as state reports are also considered.
- S. Wilson confirmed that grey literature is also considered part of the best available science and should be cited in project proposals. S. Wilson also commented that Treasury’s rules are still developing and that the Dewberry team is working to keep the County up-to-date on those developments.
- A. Pierce added that the County hired Dewberry because their experience with other counties helps them to be as efficient as possible. That being said, this is Franklin County’s criteria, points, and process, which means that we [the County] have the ability to change it.
- S. Wilson added that one of the Treasury requirements is that the MYIP process include milestones and specific dates of accomplishment that have to be reported, such as when the Needs Assessment is complete and when the drafting of the Selection Criteria begins. These are metrics that must be reported to Treasury.
- B. Lapaz asked if it is possible to have projects in the MYIP that Treasury will not approve.
- A. Pierce explained that as long as a project is eligible, Treasury will not remove it. However, the County might choose to take a project out.
- S. Wilson added that once the MYIP is developed and approved, that initiates the grant application process.
- B. McCartney asked about the grant application process and if there was a point of contact for the state of Florida, so that the County would not compete with other states, such as Alabama, for processing.
- A. Pierce confirmed that there was a single point of contact for the State of Florida, but that individual was in charge of all 23 impacted counties in the state.
- A. Pierce then took a moment to explain that the Triumph fund, which offsets economic damages, is distributed differently. The governor appointed five members to the Triumph board, and additional individuals have been appointed to oversee the governor’s appointments.
- A. Pierce explained that the Triumph fund allocates \$400 million to Florida, of which 75% will go to the eight disproportionately affected counties. Anyone (cities and counties) can apply for Triumph funds, but the rule of the Triumph fund is “we don’t want our money to be the first or the only money,” which is why a one-to-one match from a private institution is required.
- As an example, S. Wilson explained that a good candidate project for Triumph funding is upgrading the railway. The economic importance of the railway has been outlined in several recently published economic studies. This project would reestablish a railroad-airport-Interstate 10 connection and utilizes the port assets.
- The attendees then discussed timing for the next RAC meeting and the date and time of Tuesday, February 21<sup>st</sup>, at 5:00 p.m. ETZ was agreed upon.
- S. Wilson stated that the Dewberry team would have a draft Selection Criteria for the RAC to comment on by the next meeting.
- The meeting concluded at 6:25 p.m. ETZ.
- The presentation provided to the RAC has been posted at [www.franklincountyrestore.com](http://www.franklincountyrestore.com), the Franklin County website, and is available to the public.