

**MEETING SUMMARY OF THE
ESTUARY HABITAT RESTORATION COUNCIL
NOAA Headquarters
1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD
June 12, 2013**

The meeting convened at 1:00 pm, with the following members and participants:

Council Members:

- **Mr. Samuel Rauch**, Acting Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)
- **Mr. Paul Cough**, Director, Oceans and Coastal Protection Division, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
- **Ms. Ellen Cummings** for Assistant for Environment, Tribal and Regulatory Affairs, Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works)
- **Mr. Astor Boozer**, Acting Deputy Under Secretary, Natural Resources and Environment, U.S. Department of Agriculture for Ann Mills, Acting Under Secretary, Natural Resources and Environment, U.S. Department of Agriculture
- **Mr. Jeff Rupert**, Chief of the Division of Natural Resources and Conservation Planning, National Wildlife Refuge System, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for Cynthia Martinez, Acting Assistant Director, Deputy Chief of National Wildlife Refuge System

Work Group Members:

- Julia Royster, NOAA
- Ellen Cummings, U.S. Army Corps
- Noemi Mercado, EPA
- Chris Eng, USFWS
- Barbara Watkins, USFWS
- Craig Goodwin, USDA/NRCS

Other Participants:

- NOAA – Buck Sutter, Perry Gayaldo, and Julie Nygard
- Chesapeake Bay Foundation - Alexandra Hostetter
- City of Gulf Breeze - Heather Reed
- Delaware Center for Inland Bays - Eric Buehl
- Ducks Unlimited - Caroline Brouwer
- Ducks Unlimited - Jeff McCreary
- Elkhorn Slough NERR - Monique Fountain
- Janicki Environmental - Mike Wessel
- Palm Beach County Department of Environmental Resources Management - Julie Mitchell
- Pacific Northwest National Laboratory - Lara Aston
- The Nature Conservancy, Alabama - Judy Haner

1. Welcome and Introductions

Sam Rauch provided background on the meeting and asked attendees to introduce themselves.

2. Council Chair Election

NOAA nominated the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) to serve as Council Chair for the next three year period. FWS accepted the nomination. With no objections from the Council members, FWS was elected Chair of the Council. Mr. Rupert (FWS) assumed the duties of Chair immediately.

3. ERA Updates

The members of the interagency working group presented status updates on current workgroup priorities, including the Estuary Restoration Act, Estuary Restoration Habitat Strategy and Action Plan, and the National Ocean Policy. The Estuary Restoration Council Meeting Update is attached to this meeting summary (Attachment A). The Council requested that the schedule in the Action Plan be updated. Council members asked to review the Congressional Report prior to its official submission to the Secretary of the Army for final approval.

4. Status of Previously Funded Projects

Ellen Cummings (USACE) provided a status update of Corps funded ERA projects, updating the group on the status of the projects including project terminations. Julia Royster (NOAA) provided a similar update for the NOAA funded projects. Sam Rauch noted that it was important for the Council to understand why projects are terminated so that they can consider those factors in selecting the most viable projects in the future. There is continued concern regarding ways to reduce the likelihood of terminations and other issues delaying implementation of projects. One issue is land ownership and O&M responsibilities. The work group noted that the most recent solicitation was a major revision and did highlight several potential issues. The Corps has different requirements than the other agencies have with regard to funding projects of this type. The Council members also raised the issue of identifying additional performance metrics in addition to acres. A table providing a summary of the Status of Estuary Habitat Restoration Projects is attached to this meeting summary (Attachment B).

5. FY 2013 FFO Highlights and Review of Ranked Project List

The primary business for the meeting was the approval of a prioritized list to be recommended to Army for consideration of funding (see Attachment C). The Corps is the only agency with funds available for projects in FY13 although the other agencies have the authority to request appropriations for this program. The work group presented information on 12 projects and the Council approved that list. The Chair will send the list to Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works) who will then approve projects for funding. The list contains more projects than the Corps can currently fund. The Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works) will make final selection of projects to be funded. The additional approved projects provide the Corps with the ability to fund additional projects if funds became available. The Corps estimates they have funds for no more than nine of the projects on the list.

The Council was impressed with the projects on the ranked list and briefly discussed criteria used to evaluate the proposals. The work group described the criteria including ecological impact, feasibility, and cost-effectiveness.

6. Public Comment

This was a public meeting and Ducks Unlimited was represented in person and several others called in. There were several opportunities for public comment but there were none.

DECISION: The Council elected FWS as Chair for three years.

DECISION: The Council recommended the ranked 2013 project list move forward to the Secretary of the Army.

ACTION: The Work Group updated the schedule in the Action Plan.

The meeting ended at 2:30 p.m.

Attachment A:

2013 Estuary Restoration Act Update

- **Estuary Restoration Act**
 - Estuary Restoration Act appropriations were authorized from 2008 to 2012.
 - In 2013, the ACOE received an ERA appropriation of \$1 M under a CRA for 2013.
- **ERA Strategy**
 - **Purpose:** ensure a comprehensive approach to maximize benefits derived from estuary habitat restoration projects and to foster the coordination of Federal and non-Federal activities related to restoration of estuary habitat.
 - Revised in 2012 and approved by the Council in November 2012.
 - Available on agencies' websites.
- **ERA Action Plan – see Table 1 for status of all milestones**
 - **Background Purpose of key milestones:**
 - **Minimum Data Standards:** develop standard data formats for monitoring projects, along with requirements for types of data collected and frequency of monitoring.
 - **Congressional Report:** report on federal estuary restoration performance and analytics (e.g., acres and partners), estuary restoration monitoring database, and restoration techniques.
- **National Ocean Policy**
 - ERA workgroup is engaged with the National Ocean Policy, specifically contributing to the restoration monitoring activities.
 - **Original recommendations** for *Improving the effectiveness of coastal and estuarine habitat restoration projects* included:
 - Review of existing monitoring data standards; revise and approve minimum ecological monitoring data standards for coastal and estuarine habitat restoration projects;
 - Make project information available for projects using the existing minimum monitoring standards available to the public via an estuary restoration act website; and,
 - Implement the revised ecological monitoring standards for restoration projects where project monitoring is required.
 - **Current implementation language** is review, revise, and approve minimum ecological monitoring data standards for coastal and estuarine habitat restoration projects.

Table 1: ERA Action Plan Milestones with the original proposed timeline by major Strategy section are listed with their status as of June 2013

Action Plan Milestone	Timeline	Status
Implementation		
Federal Funding Opportunity	Annual	FY13 Completed
Fund Projects	Annual	FY13 Completed
Finalize Project and Monitoring Plans	Annual	FY13 Completed
Monitoring - Minimum Data Standards		
Interagency review of existing ecological parameters	Q4 FY12	Completed
Begin review of potential socio-economic parameters	Q4 FY12	Completed
Revise existing standards for ERA and non-ERA funded projects.	Q1 FY14	Working to draft revised data standards.
Convene workshop to discuss with federal and non-federal entities.	Q2 FY14	Decided to conduct after developing a draft revision based on parameters identified within the work group.
All five ERA Council agencies approve data standards for ERA and non-ERA funded projects.	Q4 FY14	On schedule
ERA Council agencies implement standards for restoration projects where implementation and biological monitoring is required.	Q2 FY15	On schedule
Project Tracking		
ERA Council agency commitments to make estuary restoration project information publicly available in a coordinated manner.	Q2 FY12	Completed
Coordinate efforts and implement a mechanism to make estuary restoration project information from agency databases available to the public.	Q1 FY15	Not completed - 2nd tier priority
Report to Congress every other year.	Q4 FY13	Anticipated September 2013

Q1 - October 1 - December 31

Q2 - January 1 - March 31

Q3 - April 1 - June 30

Q4 - July 1 - September 30

