



## The BFA Fall 2017 NEWSLETTER

Hope everyone finds themselves and their loved ones doing well as the days grow shorter and the cooler temperatures of fall take over our region.

Please mark your calendar for our Annual Fall Fish Fry Picnic & Fundraiser

**Saturday, 11 November 2017**

**11:00 AM – 2:30 PM**

1615 East LaRua Street, Pensacola

During the past few annual picnic's, we've been pleased to host the Washington High School Marine Science Academy (MSA) Student Presentations. This year, we again welcome the newest MSA Students and their projects; and this year we welcome students from the new UWF Water Quality Sampling Academy (WQSA) some of whom began their studies with Washington High School MSA Program. UWF WQSA students will present their research on BFA water quality data or independent research utilizing BFA sampling stations.

Titles of presentations include:

- *Living Shorelines: Assessing Geomorphic Change and Water Quality in an Urban Waterway.* **Amber Huggins**, UWF Dept of Earth & Environmental Sciences;
- *Storm Event on Bacteria and Nutrients in a Pensacola, FL, (USA) Urban Bayou.* **Sierra Hobbs & Son Truong**, UWF Dept of Biology & UWF Dept of Earth & Environmental Sciences; and
- *An Online Analytical Processing Database for Environmental Water Quality Analytics.* **Delikarl Baptiste & Austin Adkison**, UWF Computer Science (Information Technology) & UWF Earth & Environmental Sciences

**Project Oyster**, a mission to improve local water quality; During the August 2017 BFA Meeting, guest speaker Donnie McMahon provided an update on his newest venture, the Pensacola Bay Oyster Company in which he is growing oysters in cages in Escambia and East Bays. Our heavy rains earlier this year negatively impacted his crop – but he has generously agreed to help the BFA with our water quality mission as well as offer a terrific opportunity for area schools, churches or individuals to participate in cleaning area waters using oysters (**little biological water filters**). Interested in sponsoring a local school, or participating but you don't live on the water? Not a problem, this project can be tailored to any level of interest. Read on...

The State of Florida has strict rules about what you can and can't put in the water, hang off a dock or place along the shore; so we are being very careful to follow the rules. The state requires us to host a meeting to teach interested folks the best location for placement of oyster cages and how to care for them. Local researchers and scientists are equally interested in observing growth rates of the oysters in cages versus different water bodies. To accommodate the state and the research component, we are busy developing a study design, while our BFA volunteers have been assembling oyster cages. We anticipate hosting a short workshop on oysters and their care in December, and will provide cages and baby oysters in early January 2018. Interested in helping? We welcome your help! There is a \$50 charge per oyster cage and 75 baby oysters. One adult oyster can filter up to 50 gal/day - under optimum conditions. For more on this, please send an email to [TheBreamFishermen@gmail.com](mailto:TheBreamFishermen@gmail.com) or call 850.384.6696, and we'll put you on the list.

**Sawfish** are amazingly odd creatures that can grow larger than a great white shark, and which use their long 'tooth'-lined 'saw' to hunt fish and fight off predators. Unfortunately, sawfish are also the most threatened shark or ray in the world! Florida is home to one of the largest populations of the small tooth sawfish (one of the five species of sawfish). Yet even in Florida, the number of sawfish has **declined by 95% over the last 100 years**. This is because of **habitat loss** and overfishing.

Scientists have discovered that previously collected saws can be useful in studying sawfish and in collecting tissue samples for genetic studies, especially as the rarity of these fish makes it difficult to collect this data from animals in the wild. As Florida is a sawfish 'hotspot', scientists have been searching for sawfish saws in this area and are asking for anyone with a sawfish saw to contact them and help with this project.

Pensacola and East Bay had populations of sawfish, which many of the old timers might remember. Over the years, I have been gifted several saw fish blades from folks who caught them in our large estuaries. If you or someone you know have a sawfish blade, you can help researchers by contacting [sawfishconservationsociety@gmail.com](mailto:sawfishconservationsociety@gmail.com). To learn more about these interesting elasmobranchs (i.e., sharks and rays) please visit the Sawfish Conservation Society website at <http://www.sawfishconservationsociety.org>.



**There's still time** to participate in the next BFA sponsored **Water Quality Sampling Class on Saturday, 28 October 2017**. The class begins at 9:00 AM and will finish up around 2:30 PM. FL Dept of Environmental Protection (FDEP) scientists will present the regulatory scope of proper sampling procedures, accurate documentation, field planning and an opportunity to practice hands-on sampling procedures. Interested citizens and students are encouraged to attend and hopefully will participate in the BFA monthly water quality monitoring program. For more information, please call 850.384.6696.

**Speaking of Water Quality**, there is hope for the Pensacola and the Perdido Bay Systems on the horizon. The USEPA has selected our two large northwest FL bays for the next **Estuary Program**, which is a really big deal! This program will shine a spotlight on each of these two large and very impaired water bodies to restore these complex systems back to a healthy and functioning ecosystem with good water quality and habitat conditions. Once water quality is achieved, there is a hope that the **important keystone species**, namely the important seagrass beds will become re-established. Once the habitat is restored, we will likely see a return of **natural recruitment for our fishery** including scallops, shrimp, crabs, and a host of commercially important species like snapper, sea trout, flounder, etc.

**KUDOS** go out to members of the Bay Area Resource Council (**BARC**) Technical Advisory Committee (**TAC**), the Tampa Bay, Indian River Lagoon and the Mobile Bay Estuary Programs & Escambia County personnel for working diligently for weeks to polish the proposal and bring it to our area. That said, our neighboring estuaries, namely Choctawhatchee Bay and St Andrew Bay are still candidates for Estuary Programs, and we hope they receive one in each system in the near future. For more information on Estuary Programs, visit <https://www.epa.gov/nep/overview>.

Spotlight on: **Guy Morrell Bradley** (April 25, 1870 – July 8, 1905) was an American game warden and deputy sheriff for Monroe County, Florida. Born in Chicago, Illinois, he relocated to Florida with his family when he was young. As a boy, he often served as guide to visiting fishermen and plume hunters, although he later denounced poaching after legislation was passed to protect the dwindling number of birds. In 1902, Bradley was hired by the American Ornithologists' Union, at the request of the Florida Audubon Society, to become one of the country's first game wardens.

*Tasked with protecting the area's wading birds from hunters, he patrolled the area stretching from Florida's west coast, through the Everglades to Key West, single-handedly enforcing the ban on bird hunting. Bradley was shot and killed in the line of duty, after confronting a man and his two sons who were hunting egrets in the Everglades. His much-publicized death at the age of 35 galvanized conservationists, and served as inspiration for future legislation to protect Florida's bird populations. Several national awards and places have been named in his honor. (Wikipedia)*

For those of you who attended our May 2017 Membership Meeting at Duh, and met the author of **The Gulf, the making of an American Sea, Jack Davis** – you might have picked up on the many abuses our Florida Landscape has been subjected to over the last 100-200 years. We all make mistakes; clearly ditching the Everglades to lower the water table and develop the swamp was a brilliant idea – at the time. Today, we know what a tremendous mistake that has had on the hydrology of south Florida and

how it altered the entire Florida Bay Ecosystem. The point is we should **learn from our mistakes so that we don't repeat them, inadvertently.**

**Florida has always had good laws** (protecting our natural resources) **on the books; but never has had good enforcement of the laws.** Seems like some things never change...

**Indian Bayou**, which was discussed in the Jan 2017 Newsletter, continues to suffer while agencies charged with oversight and protecting our nature resources from impacts are achieving nothing fast. As our state grows, and we are currently the 3<sup>rd</sup> most populous state in the nation with 20M residents and 100M tourists, we are putting more and more pressure on the ecosystem and the natural resources which serve to attract these visitors and year-round residents.

Much of the influxes of new residents are from regions unfamiliar with our climate and humidity, rainy seasons, low-lying areas and the **ecology**. In a nutshell, Living in Florida is a new experience for them, a land full of wonder and lots of water, where a small tropical system in the Gulf of Mexico can turn into a Category 4 hurricane overnight. Welcome to low-lying Florida where a pop-up rain shower can dump 2-3" of rain in an hour (locals call that a *Frog Strangler*) followed by sunshine less than an hour later; your geographic address is now the Coastal Plain.

While our **population continues to grow**, and is being encouraged to grow by city, county and state governments as illustrated by our state motto 'We're open for business', we are doing a tremendous disservice to the next set of generations if we don't take a moment to pause and consider where this growth can safely occur without putting citizens, their property, our community, economic health and infrastructure in harm's way.

The population growth in Florida is predicted to reach 26.4M by 2030 and 32.9M by 2050 (FDOT population projections), all the while our (physical) landscape will not be growing; however, the competition for our resources will be fierce and potentially disastrous without smart strategic growth and planning. **As the existing water problems are prolonged, new problems are emerging as a result of this continued and accelerated growth.** Without smart planning and the implementation of new technologies, the retreat from low-lying areas and addressing the aged infrastructure of our 100+ year old region, we will continue doing a disservice to our remaining resources and our future heirs.

While many folks might think less government and oversight is good, the 2011 decision by FL Governor Scott to dismantle the **Department of Community Affairs (DCA)** was a shot in the foot for our citizens, counties and the state. This agency provided oversight to development and growth, and would have prevented many of the current developments in low-lying areas. The agency steered development away from flood-prone areas, which served to mitigate the destruction of property and essential infrastructure while protecting the isolated wetlands, riparian zones and important flood plains.

While agencies like the **FL Dept. of Environmental Regulation (FDEP)** and **NW FL Water Management District (NFWMD)** are **charged with protecting the natural resources**, the DCA provided valuable insight and assistance in keeping development out of harm's way. With the present upturn in the economy, coupled with the reduction of many state agencies and the unbridled growth currently occurring in the panhandle, our remaining resources are under an accelerated threat. Today, the high-density cookie cutter development projects and subdivisions popping up like mushrooms in many low-lying areas directly contribute to stormwater impairments, sedimentation, and the loss of vital habitat not to mention the spread of waterborne diseases.

**If any of this sounds familiar**, it's because we've been down a similar path before. In 1999, a Special Grand Jury convened in Escambia County, FL, and focused their efforts on the condition of Air and Water Quality. Their findings included the following:

- Pollution has impaired surface waters, destroyed fish and wildlife habitat, and reduced the number and diversity of aquatic species;
- Pollution has contaminated the groundwater and many of our public and private wells which are used for drinking, irrigation, and other needs;
- Air pollution has imposed risks to our health, restricted outdoor activity, and added to the impairment of surface waters.
- These circumstances threaten the overall health, safety and welfare of the citizens of the community and the natural resources essential to a good quality of life.

During the last few weeks, **PNJ reporter Anne Delaney** has been writing about 'red clay in Indian Bayou' which residents along Monterey Shores in Santa Rosa County have been observing after each significant (greater than 2") rain event since July 2016. This small community has done everything imaginable to get the attention of their local, state and regional agencies to meet with them to help protect their bayou. What they have received in return is a lot of finger-pointing and diversion to other agencies, a lack of general ownership of the problem and no opportunity to sit down with their elected officials and all the decision makers of the agencies charged with protecting the resources. In the words of one state representative, **'we can kick this can down the road for so long, we'll be 5 miles down the road before you know what's happened'**.

This is 2017 and we are still 'stuck in a rut' and behaving the same way we did in the 1990s. Perhaps it's the big influx of new people, or maybe it's a form of **collective amnesia** in northwest Florida, either way in the nearly two decades since the Grand Jury released their report not much has changed.

**The 1999 Grand Jury Investigation found the following:**

- The Northwest District of the Department of Environmental Protection failed to properly implement and enforce the environmental laws, rules and regulations. The district office

succumbed to political, economic, and other pressures, allowing regulated business, industries and individuals to pollute the area's air and water.

- The district director and others acting on his behalf ignored and concealed environmental violations against the sound advice of staff employees. Consequently, the director thwarted the well-intended efforts of many staff employees to perform their lawful duties. In several instances, he and/or others acting on his behalf, disciplined or threatened to discipline DEP employees who tried to implement and enforce environmental laws.
- Further, we find that local government officials were too often more interested in promoting and protecting the current interest of industry and business, especially the homebuilders, without any attempt to fit those particular interests into a community plan that allows for rational and sustainable development. In doing so, they do not seem interested in conserving or protecting the area's natural resources and have scoffed at those who do. **This failure by those who were elected and appointed to represent the public interest has resulted in the formation of citizens groups which try to fulfill the proper role of government.**

After the Grand Jury findings were published, the Governor removed much of the oversight from FDEP and gave the responsibility, permitting and general oversight to the NFWFMD. Sadly, 18 years later we see that this is a **chronic problem from the top down** as evidenced when there is little oversight.

While there is a tendency to look the other way with environmental problems or promises to address these issues later down the road; these agencies are doing a greater disservice to the citizenry, tax payers and the future generations by not taking action today. In the case of Indian Bayou, the problem stems from accidentally fragmenting a wetland system in the early 1970s when the interstate system was built. **We didn't know then what we know now...but now that we know what we know, we should act accordingly.** The fix might have been as simple as adding a small spanning bridge over the fragmentation and allowing the wetland, which appears to be tidally influenced to flow naturally. Instead, the effort and amount of time spent on in-action, diverting blame, placing silt fences, hay bales, and turbidity curtains (mere band-aids at this point) have also fed into frustration with Local County and state governments' representatives.

While this is strictly an environmental impact (which could have been avoided), how about all the new developments occurring in low-lying areas? As with what is unfolding in Houston, TX, Puerto Rico, South Florida and the many Caribbean Islands during the recent hurricanes, development in these low-lying wetland and flood prone areas plus a storm equals a disaster, **an avoidable disaster**. Too much water results in flood-related loss of life, destruction of property and essential infrastructure. Water of the wrong quality can result in pathogenic diseases for our human population and as we have often observed can have catastrophic impacts on our fisheries and their important habitat, which are considered both economic and environmental concerns.

**Our federal, state, local counties and cities can do so much better than this**, and the citizenry that supports this government (through taxes) has every right to expect that our laws and rules which have been developed by credible scientists should be enforced. In fact, I'd like to think that our local county and city governments would consider raising the bar over the state and federal standards, since we know one size doesn't fit all.

While funding is always an issue, the reality is this – **addressing a problem today will always be cheaper than addressing the problem tomorrow**. The Citizens of FL understood that concept too and proved it in 2014 they overwhelmingly passed the FL Water and Land Initiative with 75% of the vote.

**The Land Acquisition Trust Fund** was developed to acquire and improve conservation easements, wildlife management areas, wetlands, forests, fish and wildlife habitats, beaches and shores, recreational trails and parks, urban open space, rural landscapes, working farms and ranches, historical and geological sites, lands protecting water and drinking water resources and lands in the Everglades Agricultural Areas and the Everglades Protection Area. The fund was designed to **manage and restore natural systems** and to enhance public access and recreational use of **conservation land**. Maybe if the funds had been utilized for what they were intended, we wouldn't have such pressing issues today.

One thing is certain, the tools and technology available today are far superior to what was available two, three, even four decades ago, but there appears to be little application of this technology to the current environmental landscape. **Currently we have federal, state and local county/city laws and ordinances which are not followed or imposed, and frankly, the citizens cannot rely on laws that are not enforced.**

Perhaps it's time for an overhaul and **moratorium on all aspects of development** until we can move forward sustainably without harm to human and environmental communities. We have a better understanding of the role of isolated wetlands (Tiburón Subdivision, Pace, FL 2017); we know that building over small tributaries can morph them into raging rivers of sediment (Piedmont Street, Bayou Texar Watershed, in Pensacola during the 2014 Flood event); we have seen the effects of subdivisions built in a flood plain after a flood (Bristol & Asbury Park Subdivisions, Eleven Mile Creek Watershed, Escambia County during the 2014 Flood event); We can point to areas that never flooded and are now flooding because of new nearby high density developments (Florida Town, Pace, 2017).

**Will our elected officials step up and take the challenge to address these complex issues or will we continue to kick this can down the road and let the next generation inherit these issues?**

**Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it. -George Santayana**

**Also, as much as we hate to do it, inflation has caught up to us. Annual dues are \$10 thru 2017 but will be increasing to \$20 for non-students beginning in 2018.**

**The Bream Fishermen Association** is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to the promotion of the conservation responsibilities as well as the recreational enjoyment of fishermen, hunters, campers and related outdoorsmen. It is the objective of the BFA to support, develop, and implement programs that will:

- 1) Improve the quality of our environment;
- 2) Protect and maintain our present wilderness type lakes, rivers, swamps, marshes, bays, forests, and beaches in their natural undeveloped state;
- 3) Advance the causes of plant, marine, and wildlife preservation; and
- 4) Environmental outreach and education.

Membership is open to all individuals who support these objectives. Please join the BFA by sending us your contact information (name, mailing address, phone, and email) be sure to notify us if you prefer to receive notices and announcements by mail or email, and \$10 annual dues to our mailing address:

## Bream Fishermen Association

*1203 N. 16th Ave, Pensacola, FL 32503*

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