

**FINAL EVALUATION FINDINGS
WEEKS BAY NATIONAL ESTUARINE RESEARCH RESERVE**

April 2004 through March 2007



Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management
National Ocean Service
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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA) of 1972, as amended, established the National Estuarine Research Reserve System (NERRS). Sections 312 and 315 of the CZMA require the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to conduct periodic performance reviews or evaluations of all federally approved National Estuarine Research Reserves (NERRs). The review described in this document examined the operation and management of the Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (WBNERR or the Reserve) during the period from April 2004 through March 2007. The Reserve is administered by the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, State Lands Division, Coastal Section.

This document describes the evaluation findings of the Director of NOAA's Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management (OCRM) with respect to the Weeks Bay NERR during the review period. These evaluations include discussions of major accomplishments as well as recommendations for program improvement. The fundamental conclusion of the findings is that the State of Alabama is successfully implementing its federally approved NERR.

The evaluation team documented a number of Weeks Bay Reserve accomplishments during this review period. The Reserve has completed revisions to its management plan, updated its site profile, and converted all but one contractual position to state employee positions. All of the Reserve's sectors and programs are highly integrated. The Weeks Bay Watershed Program, in particular, functions to connect the Reserve's internal programs and also to link it to the citizens of the larger Weeks Bay watershed. It has developed and maintained many long-term partnerships and collaborations, is well served by an extremely active volunteer organization, and receives significant support from the Weeks Bay Reserve Foundation, particularly in the area of land acquisition activities.

The evaluation team also identified areas where the Reserve and its programming could be strengthened. The Reserve does have a large number of 'open' cooperative agreement awards, which adds to the administrative burden. To the extent it can, old awards should be closed as quickly as possible. The Reserve should also execute contracts and begin tasks that have been identified in the Baldwin County marine/estuarine education award so that needed educational assistant positions can be filled and the Reserve's web presence can be developed. The Reserve is urged to continue building its relationship with the Weeks Bay Reserve Foundation, particularly as it relates to strategic planning and prioritizing parcels for acquisition within the watershed. Finally, the Reserve needs to plan for and budget to replace its aging SWMP monitoring equipment.

II. PROGRAM REVIEW PROCEDURES

A. OVERVIEW

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) began its review of the Weeks Bay Reserve in December 2006. The §312 evaluation process involves four distinct components:

- An initial document review and identification of specific issues of particular concern;
- A site visit to Alabama, including interviews and public meetings;
- Development of draft evaluation findings; and
- Preparation of the final evaluation findings, partly based on comments from the state regarding the content and timetables of recommendations specified in the draft document.

The recommendations made by this evaluation appear in boxes and bold type and follow the findings section where facts relevant to the recommendation are discussed. The recommendations may be of two types:

Necessary Actions address programmatic requirements of the CZMA's implementing regulations and of the Weeks Bay Reserve approved by NOAA. These must be carried out by the date(s) specified;

Program Suggestions denote actions that NOAA's Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management (OCRM) believes would improve the program, but which are not mandatory at this time. If no dates are indicated, the state is expected to have considered these Program Suggestions by the time of the next CZMA §312 evaluations.

A complete summary of accomplishments and recommendations is outlined in Appendix A.

Failure to address Necessary Actions may result in a future finding of non-adherence and the invoking of interim sanctions, as specified in CZMA §312(c). Program Suggestions that are reiterated in consecutive evaluations to address continuing problems may be elevated to Necessary Actions. The findings in this evaluation document will be considered by NOAA in making future financial award decisions relative to the Weeks Bay Reserve.

B. DOCUMENT REVIEW AND ISSUES DEVELOPMENT

The evaluation team reviewed a wide variety of documents prior to the site visit, including: (1) Weeks Bay Reserve §312 evaluation findings dated 2005; (2) federally approved Environmental Impact Statement and program documents; (3) financial assistance awards and work products; (4) semi-annual performance reports; (5) official correspondence; and (6) relevant publications on natural resource management issues in Alabama.

Based on this review and on discussions with OCRM, the evaluation team identified the following priority issues:

- major accomplishments during the review period;
- status of Reserve staffing and needs;
- facilities development and/or land acquisition efforts;
- status of general administration of the Reserve and management plan revisions;
- status of implementation of the Reserve's research, monitoring, and education programs;
- the manner in which the Reserve coordinates with other governmental and non-governmental organizations and programs in the state and region; and
- the manner in which the Reserve has addressed the recommendations contained in the §312 evaluation findings released in 2005. The Weeks Bay Reserve's assessment of how it has responded to each of the recommendations in the evaluation findings dated 2005 is located in Appendix B.

C. SITE VISIT TO WEEKS BAY NATIONAL ESTUARINE RESEARCH RESERVE

Notification of the scheduled evaluation was sent to the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, members of Alabama's congressional delegation, and regional newspapers. In addition, a notice of NOAA's "Intent to Evaluate" was published in the Federal Register on January 3, 2007.

The site visit to the Weeks Bay Reserve was conducted from March 20 - 23, 2007. The evaluation team consisted of Ms. Chris McCay, Evaluation Team Leader, National Policy and Evaluation Division, OCRM; Mr. Matt Chasse, Program Specialist, Estuarine Reserves Division, OCRM; and Mr. Frank Lopez, Manager, Old Woman Creek (Ohio) National Estuarine Research Reserve.

During the site visit, the evaluation team met with Weeks Bay Reserve staff, staff from the ADCNR Division of State Lands and Coastal Section, other state agency staff, coastal researchers, educators, local government staff and officials, Weeks Bay Advisory Committee members, Weeks Bay Reserve Foundation staff and board members, and other non-profit organizations. Appendix C lists people and institutions contacted during this review.

As required by the CZMA, NOAA held an advertised public meeting on Wednesday, March 21, 2007, at 6:00 p.m. at the Weeks Bay Reserve Visitor Center Auditorium, 11300 U.S. Highway 98, Fairhope, Alabama. The public meeting gave members of the general public the opportunity to express their opinions about the overall operation and management of the Weeks Bay Reserve. Appendix D lists individuals who registered at the meeting. NOAA's responses to written comments submitted during this evaluation are summarized in Appendix E.

The Weeks Bay Reserve staff members were crucial in setting up meetings and arranging logistics for the evaluation site visit. Their support is most gratefully acknowledged.

III. RESERVE PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

NOAA's Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management designated the Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (WBNERR or the Reserve) in 1986. The lead agency is the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR), State Lands Division. The Reserve is administratively located within the Coastal Section of the State Lands Division.

Weeks Bay Reserve is located in Baldwin County, Alabama. It includes 6,525 acres that encompass the water bottoms of Weeks Bay, Fish River, Magnolia River, and a small portion of Mobile Bay, and encompasses over 1,600 acres of swamp, marsh, and upland areas. Weeks Bay is a small, shallow sub-estuary of Mobile Bay with approximately three square miles of open water that averages 4.8 feet deep. Weeks Bay connects to Mobile Bay by a narrow opening and receives fresh water input from both the Fish and Magnolia rivers.

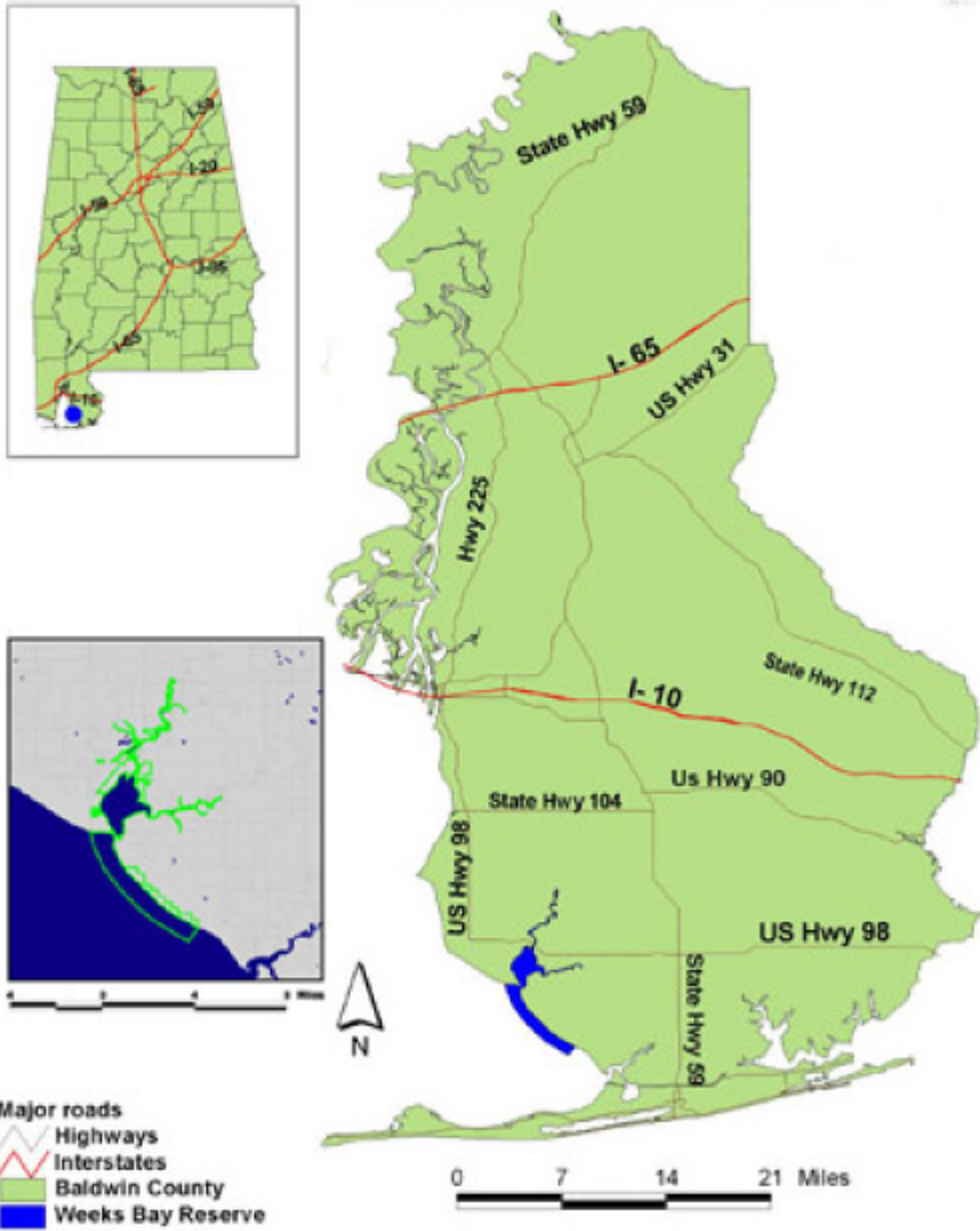
Much of the land surrounding Weeks Bay is forested wetlands and swamps; there is also some upland pine-oak forest. The primary forested wetland habitat is moist pine forest, which is dominated by slash pine. This habitat can contain a very dense understory of gallberry, wax myrtle, saw palmetto, and other species. Bay-tupelo-cypress swamps border the rivers and tidal streams of the watershed. Species composition varies with the amount and duration of flooding. The Reserve lands also support unique bog habitats. The shoreline of Weeks Bay supports fringing saline marshes that grade into brackish marshes upstream. One of the most abundant marsh species throughout the salinity range is black needlerush. Populations of submerged grasses border the shallow, relatively quiet shores of the bay. Populations of submerged grasses border the shallow, relatively quiet shores of the bay.

Weeks Bay's diverse habitats support a rich variety of animal life, including several species of special concern. Many resident, nesting, and wintering birds are found at Weeks Bay, and the area is especially important as a resting and feeding area to a large number of trans-Gulf migratory birds. Bottlenose dolphins occasionally are seen in the area. Approximately 19 endangered or threatened species have been identified at WBNERR.

Weeks Bay's aquatic habitats also support a myriad of fish and invertebrates. The estuary is a critical nursery for fish, crustaceans and shellfish that support large commercial and recreational fishing industries. Weeks Bay is a particularly important nursery ground for shrimp, blue crab, and fish such as spotted sea trout, red drum, croaker, and flounder.

In addition to commercial and recreational fishing, Weeks Bay historically has been an important area for a number of other industries. The Port of Mobile is a major contributor to the regional economy, and a high volume of commercial water traffic and maintenance dredging operations are associated with the port. Several chemical and energy related industries have developed around Weeks Bay. Baldwin County is Alabama's largest county and is experiencing rapid population growth, particularly along its southern coastal portion.

Weeks Bay Reserve, Alabama



IV. REVIEW FINDINGS, ACCOMPLISHMENTS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. OPERATIONS AND MANAGEMENT

1. Administration and Staffing

The Reserve is located administratively in the Coastal Section of the State Lands Division in the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR). There is close cooperation and coordination between the Coastal section and Reserve staff members. The two programs share a geographic information system (GIS) technician and a grants administrator. The two programs work collaboratively on facilities development, land acquisition, and programmatic initiatives. During the period covered by this evaluation, coastal program staff members were housed at the Reserve during the coastal program's lengthy transition to new facilities.

The staff is one of the Reserve's strongest assets. Throughout the site visit, everyone with whom the evaluation team met spoke highly of the staff's dedication, professionalism, and enthusiasm. Staff members have a very collaborative approach to the work they conduct and have developed a significant number of long-term partnerships. The Reserve is fully staffed with all core positions. Since the last evaluation and in response to a program suggestion, all but one of the Reserve contract employees have now been converted to state employee positions. This is a significant accomplishment because it should help to retain employees and to provide long-term staffing stability, which benefits the research and programs of the Reserve. It is also an indication of strong state support for the Reserve.

At this time staff is at maximum capacity in terms of the programmatic activities that the Reserve currently implements, particularly within its educational component. As is discussed in later sections of this document, funding is available for a short, fixed-period of time and will be used to hire additional staff for educational assistance. The Reserve is also planning to develop additional facilities. Maintaining current programming levels and adding the operational costs of new facilities into the Reserve budget will be a challenge for ADCNR and the Reserve.

ACCOMPLISHMENT: The Reserve has converted all but one of its contractual employee positions to state employee positions.

2. Grants Management

During this evaluation period, the Reserve has had a stable source of non-federal match dollars provided by the ADCNR for the Reserve's federal financial awards. It has a significant number of awards 'open,' some of which are related to construction and acquisition and which required an extension(s) beyond the initial award period. However, the number of open awards creates a burden for grants administration and timely performance reporting.

PROGRAM SUGGESTION: The Reserve should close out its older construction financial awards as expeditiously as possible and strive to close out awards, especially operations awards, within the original award period.

Senator Richard Shelby of Alabama was able to obtain federal funds for the state for Baldwin County education through congressionally directed NOAA funding. The Reserve and the ADCNR moved very quickly to identify much needed projects and tasks for this funding in Baldwin County. The monies will be used to expand marine/estuarine education at the Reserve with additional personnel, development of new curricula, and development of a Reserve website, among other activities. Now the Reserve and ADCNR should move as quickly as possible to execute the proposed contract with the South Alabama Regional Planning Commission (as part of the larger “Baldwin County Marine/Estuarine Education” award to the Reserve) so that two education assistant positions can be filled and other tasks initiated.

ACCOMPLISHMENT: The Reserve and ADCNR quickly identified projects and tasks for unanticipated congressionally directed NOAA funding for marine/estuarine education.

PROGRAM SUGGESTION: The Reserve and ADCNR should quickly execute a contract to award part of the Baldwin County Education funding so that two proposed education assistant positions can be filled and other proposed tasks regarding web site development can be initiated.

3. Management Plan

The Reserve’s management plan was last revised and approved in 1998. The Reserve contracted with the South Alabama Regional Planning Commission to update the plan, and a preliminary draft was made available for review and comment in June 2004. Work has progressed slowly since then in order to include a boundary expansion of over 300 acres and to include a revised Memorandum of Agreement following the administrative transfer (since the last management plan) of Weeks Bay to the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources from the Department of Economic and Community Affairs. The 30-day public comment period on the revised plan began just days after this evaluation site visit, and the management plan became effective in June 2007.

ACCOMPLISHMENT: The Reserve has successfully completed revisions to its management plan.

4. Facilities and Infrastructure

The Reserve’s Interpretive Center houses administrative offices, a small classroom, small laboratory, conference room, exhibit area, restrooms, and storage space. The research and education facility immediately adjacent to the Center provides an auditorium for educational

programs, additional office space, and housing for visiting researchers. These facilities are at capacity, but the Reserve has done some planning to address facilities needs.

The Reserve is adding an education/outreach building next to the public boat ramp and docks at the former site of a restaurant/bar. This facility is being funded through several NOAA construction awards that have been reprogrammed following Hurricanes Ivan and Katrina. The DCNR State Lands Division has built and opened a new “5 Rivers Delta Center,” which includes office and conference room space for the Coastal Section. The Center and its facilities, which are about 20 miles north of the Reserve, will be available for the Reserve to use free of charge. This will be particularly helpful for Coastal Training Program workshops and other outreach efforts that draw attendees from a larger geographic area.

The Reserve also would like to expand office and GIS space into the visiting researchers’ dorm area at the research and education facility. In order to do this, the Reserve is considering the development of dormitory/housing space at the Safe Harbor marina and RV park property. This tract was acquired by the Weeks Bay Foundation and then transferred to the State of Alabama. It provides the Reserve with areas for future facilities expansion.

Because of the large numbers of school classes that come to the Reserve, existing restroom facilities at the Interpretive Center are strained to the limit. Reserve staff would like to construct an outside restroom facility. Staff would also like to extend the existing boardwalk from the Interpretive Center to the docking facility where the new education/outreach building will be constructed. The Reserve manager indicated that developing a facilities master plan, which is an action identified in the revised management plan, will be useful to coordinate the Reserve’s needs and opportunities.

5. Coordination and Partnerships

One of the Reserve’s most striking coordination efforts is the internal collaboration and integration of Reserve programs and activities. Staff members make a concerted effort to integrate research, education, stewardship, CTP, and GIS activities. From the evaluation team’s perspective, however, these efforts seem smooth and unforced as staff members bring together assets and expertise that enhance and support each other’s programs. For example, the Weeks Bay Watershed Program coordinator is also the Reserve’s CTP coordinator, providing significant opportunities for collaborative activities. The GIS coordinator develops specific products for various sector programs, like displays for the education staff, stewardship and research maps, or marketing/outreach brochures for CTP workshops or outreach events. The education and stewardship coordinators collaborate to provide student labor and the development of school-based nurseries for emergent and sub-emergent plants (the ‘grasses in classes’ educational activities) for various restoration projects.

ACCOMPLISHMENT: The Reserve’s programs and activities are strongly integrated and support and complement each other.

The Reserve also coordinates with regulatory and enforcement partners in the ADCNR State Lands Division, Marine Resources Division, Wildlife and Freshwater Fish Division, and the

Marine Police; the Alabama Department of Environmental Management; and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. These divisions and agencies have various regulatory or enforcement powers within the Reserve, and all indicated to the evaluation team that Reserve staff members were very helpful in their agency outreach and communication efforts to property owners and the communities, helping the regulators develop relationships. Reserve staff members also serve as eyes and ears for the regulatory/enforcement authorities and have helped prevent potential violations and permitting problems.

The evaluation team was impressed by the depth and breadth of the Reserve's partnerships, many of which are longstanding relationships. Both Reserve staff and partners with whom the team met expressed how these collaborations are beneficial to each in terms of minimizing staff and financial resource expenditures while maximizing program exposure and outreach efforts. Some of these efforts are discussed in greater detail in later sections of this document, and the several that follow here do not represent an all-inclusive list.

The Grand Bay (Mississippi) NERR and Weeks Bay have collaborated on several coastal training program (CTP) workshops; each reserve's CTP coordinator serves on the other reserve's CTP Advisory Committee; and the two reserves have worked together on Gulf of Mexico Alliance meetings and co-hosted one of the Alliance's community workshops. During the period covered by this evaluation, the Weeks Bay Reserve assisted Grand Bay Reserve following Hurricane Katrina. The reserves have collaborated in the past, but following the loss of Grand Bay's weather station and four SWMP datasondes, Weeks Bay staff helped recover the SWMP monitors, get the weather station back up and running, and then processed the Grand Bay nutrient data and analyses for two years. In turn, Grand Bay staff helped Weeks Bay Reserve with the SWMP while Weeks Bay was without a SWMP technician for approximately six months.

The Dauphin Island Sea Lab (DISL) and the Reserve have a longstanding partnership. Unlike many other marine labs, DISL has equally strong educational and research components and works with the Reserve in both those venues. The DISL's current director played a role in the Reserve's designation, and another DISL member is currently the chairman of the Weeks Bay Advisory Council. Several past and current Graduate Research Fellows (GRFs) have conducted research in Weeks Bay while at the DISL.

The Alabama Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) also has a longstanding partnership with the Reserve, primarily through the Weeks Bay Watershed Project (now Program) and management plan.

The Mobile Bay National Estuary Program (NEP), which is hosted by the DISL, has collaborated with the Reserve on EstuaryLive. The NEP and the Reserve have worked on strategic planning efforts and are collaborating on possible development and designation of a Baldwin County stormwater utility district. The NEP is extending the "grasses in the classes" concept to Mobile Bay using the Weeks Bay model in Baldwin County. The NEP is also restructuring its management conference and hopes to include the Reserve manager in the new conference structure.

The Alabama Public Health Department and the Reserve have developed a partnership to monitor harmful algal blooms (HABs) in Weeks Bay and vicinity. This relationship couples SWMP data with phytoplankton samples that are analyzed by the Public Health Department to measure how phytoplankton react within the Weeks Bay estuary. A recent 'red tide' event in Weeks Bay was monitored through this HAB partnership.

The South Alabama Regional Planning Commission (SARPC) has had a long relationship with the Reserve, working on the management plan and revisions, the CTP, and the Baldwin County Marine/Estuarine Education award.

The Baldwin County Board of Education provides the Reserve's Education Coordinator position. The Reserve, in turn, provides environmental workshops and educational resources for teachers.

ACCOMPLISHMENT: The Reserve has built and maintained a wealth of partnerships and collaborations with a wide range of organizations and agencies. These partnerships are mutually beneficial in minimizing staff and financial resource expenditures while maximizing program exposure and outreach efforts.

6. Volunteer Support and Weeks Bay Reserve Foundation Support

Volunteer Program: Weeks Bay Reserve benefits from a strong, motivated, and active volunteer program. The Reserve has a state employee position that serves as Volunteer Coordinator. The formal volunteer association operates under a constitution and by-laws, has a Board of Directors that meets quarterly, and holds an annual meeting of all volunteer members, which currently number over 100. The volunteer coordinator has established a volunteer training program and has organized volunteer opportunities and needs into 12 support teams. The job descriptions for the support teams (e.g., communications, water quality monitors, tour guides, research assistance) identify specific activities and any skills that are required or whether additional training will be provided.

Volunteers have assumed responsibility for maintaining the Reserve's herbarium, hold an annual plant sale to raise funds to support and supplement volunteer and Reserve activities, assist with stewardship, monitoring, and research projects and education programs, and help to staff and support the Reserve's facilities. Without the volunteers, the Reserve's programs would be significantly diminished.

ACCOMPLISHMENT: The Reserve has established a state employee position for a volunteer coordinator, who has done an excellent job in developing and maintaining the volunteer program. The Reserve benefits from a strong, motivated, and dedicated group of volunteers who provide significant support to the Reserve's programs and facilities.

Weeks Bay Reserve Foundation: The Reserve also benefits greatly from its partnership with the Weeks Bay Reserve Foundation, which was incorporated in 1990 as a non-profit organization in support of the Reserve. Coordination between the Reserve and the Foundation has grown

stronger since the last evaluation. The Foundation has hired a full-time executive director and has moved into a permanent office close to the Reserve's Interpretive Center. The Foundation's executive director serves as the friends' group sector representative to the NERRA Board of Directors. These occurrences have served to expedite and strengthen the Reserve and Foundation partnership since the last evaluation. Both Reserve and Foundation management mentioned the increased cooperation and coordination regarding priority activities and strategic planning since the last evaluation. OCRM urges the Reserve to maintain this very productive working relationship with the Foundation.

During the period covered by this evaluation, the Foundation funded an educational fellowship grant to provide an education assistant for the Reserve. It has provided research support and obtained U.S. Fish and Wildlife grants to assist with stewardship activities in the pitcher plant bog restoration. The Foundation's website contains and maintains information about the Reserve and its activities, as does the Foundation's quarterly newsletter "The Pelican Post." The Foundation was instrumental in developing the annual Alabama Coastal Birdfest and serves as the financial administrator of the event. Many of the Birdfest activities take place within Weeks Bay.

The Foundation's land trust activities have greatly benefited the Reserve. The Foundation has completed 10 land acquisition purchases since 2004 and has transferred six parcels to the state. These transfers include the former Safe Harbor Marina and RV Park, which now plays a significant part in the Reserve's plans for facilities and infrastructure.

ACCOMPLISHMENT: The Weeks Bay Reserve Foundation and the Reserve have strengthened their partnership. The Foundation's land trust activities have significantly benefited the Reserve, and the Foundation has supported the Reserve's educational, research, stewardship, and outreach activities.

PROGRAM SUGGESTION: The Reserve and the Foundation are urged to continue building their partnership, particularly as it relates to strategic planning and prioritizing parcels for acquisition within the watershed.

7. Advisory Council

The Weeks Bay Advisory Council was established during the initial stages of the Reserve's designation efforts to advise Reserve management, and it continues to do so today. The Council has 18 voting members: 12 representing local, regional, and statewide agencies and institutions; and six citizen representatives appointed by the Governor. The Weeks Bay Reserve Foundation president and the State Lands Division Coastal Section chief are non-voting members. The evaluation team met with the Advisory Council during the site visit and was impressed with the strong support the members expressed for the Reserve, its activities, and the role it plays in the community. Council members bring expertise from a broad range of areas to the Reserve. Several members have been involved in reviewing research applications and Graduate Research Fellowship applications at Weeks Bay. They also promote the Reserve's programs and mission to the public at large and bring community and stakeholder concerns and interests to the attention

of Reserve management.

8. Geographic Information System (GIS) Program

The GIS program assists the research, education, stewardship, and CTP components as well as administrative functions of the Reserve by supporting research data synthesis, developing mapping products, education and outreach materials, and training support. The GIS coordinator supports both the Reserve and the Alabama coastal management program. This helps to provide an accessible and unforced coordination and exchange of data and information between the two programs. The GIS coordinator currently shares a fairly small office with the research coordinator, so space is very limited. This is one of the situations that will benefit from expansion of Reserve facilities as discussed in the Facilities and Infrastructure section above.

B. RESEARCH AND MONITORING

1. Research Activities

The entire watershed of Weeks Bay is located within a single county and drains approximately 198 square miles. For many researchers (as well as educators, social scientists, and conservationists), its relatively small size allows it to serve as a model for larger systems. In the five years prior to 2006, at least 20 research institutions have had researchers conducting projects and studies within the Reserve. Many of these institutions have longstanding relationships with the Reserve; the University of South Alabama alone has had over 20 students conduct research in Weeks Bay. The NERRS Graduate Research Fellowship (GRF) Program has funded approximately one dozen fellows to conduct research projects at Weeks Bay Reserve since the GRF Program's inception. All of this is a result of the strong, long-term partnerships the Reserve has developed throughout the region. It is also a result of the respect and esteem in which Reserve staff are held by researchers and institutions. Numerous researchers with whom the evaluation team met during the site visit acknowledged the open nature of research in the Reserve, the logistical support, sharing of resources, availability of background data and field collections, and education and outreach opportunities that the Reserve freely offered. As is noted elsewhere in this document, research projects are well-integrated with educational and stewardship activities, which is a strength of the Reserve.

During the period covered by this evaluation, the Weeks Bay Reserve was significantly affected by several tropical storms and hurricanes, so some research has been conducted on various aspects of hurricane and storm-related impacts to natural resources. Other research projects have been directed toward better understanding or quantifying the effects of rapid growth and development upon the resources of Weeks Bay. Baldwin County, in which the entire Weeks Bay watershed is located, is experiencing rapid population increases and urban growth. Row-crop agriculture is being converted to sod farming or suburban development to serve a growing population. Urban or developed land in the watershed increased by almost 100% between 1990 and 2000. Examples of research conducted during the period covered by this evaluation include, but are not limited to:

- Hurricane Ivan-induced changes to Weeks Bay bottom sediment
- Short-term effects of Hurricane Ivan on coastal landscapes at Weeks Bay Reserve
- Construction and monitoring of alternative on-site treatment systems in Weeks Bay watershed
- Harmful algal bloom monitoring
- Assessment of essential fish habitats as nurseries for economically important fishes: tools for management and conservation
- Understanding aspects of the human dimensions of the Reserve and how they apply to effective management of essential fish habitat
- Investigation of the benefits of best management practices in controlling nonpoint source pollution in Weeks Bay watershed

ACCOMPLISHMENT: The Reserve has built a strong, well-integrated research program. It is actively mentoring the next generation of researchers and has established a wide-ranging regional network of institutional partnerships.

As part of the Reserve's 20-year designation anniversary, the Weeks Bay Reserve and its Coastal Training Program sponsored and held a research symposium in 2005 that featured presentations and poster displays about research findings in the watershed. Following the symposium and based partly on the presentations and displays, the Reserve published a history of research within the Reserve boundary. This document serves as an update to the Weeks Bay site profile, originally published in 1996.

ACCOMPLISHMENT: The Reserve has updated its site profile.

2. Monitoring

As part of the NERRS System-wide Monitoring Program (SWMP), Weeks Bay maintains a weather station and dataloggers at four permanent sites to obtain baseline data to help identify and track short-term variability and long-term changes in estuarine systems. Continuous water quality data is collected for dissolved oxygen, pH, conductivity, salinity, temperature, turbidity, and depth. Dataloggers at the mouth of Fish River and near the mouth of Weeks Bay have been monitoring continuously since October 1995. The Reserve added two monitoring sites at the mouth of the Magnolia River and at a mid-bay site near the confluence of the Fish and Magnolia channels in 2003. A weather station near the mouth of the Fish River was established in 2001. In 2003 nutrient data collection began at all four datalogger monitoring sites, and the same nutrient parameters are also collected monthly over a tidal cycle at one of the sites. Data from Weeks Bay and all the other reserves is submitted to the Centralized Data Management Office (CDMO) at the Belle Baruch Laboratory in South Carolina for inclusion in the national NERRS database.

During the period covered by this evaluation, there were some water quality monitoring and data collection problems and problems with the quality of monitoring data submitted to the CDMO. The Reserve was without a SWMP technician for a lengthy period of time. The Grand Bay (MS)

Reserve helped Weeks Bay with the SWMP during that time. Weeks Bay does have a SWMP technician now and the quality of data it submits to the CDMO is acceptable, but the Reserve should work to keep that position filled. Another problem with which the Reserve is grappling is the age of its datasondes and probes. Maintenance is becoming increasingly frequent, more difficult, and less cost-effective. The Reserve needs to plan and budget for the replacement of its aging SWMP monitoring equipment over the next several years.

PROGRAM SUGGESTION: The Reserve should plan and budget for the replacement of aging SWMP monitoring equipment over the next several years.

C. EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

1. Education and Outreach Programs

The Reserve offers extensive educational activities and programs for students within Baldwin County and, to a lesser extent, students in Mobile County as well. The education coordinator position is filled by an educator provided through a unique partnership with the Baldwin County Board of Education, which funds the 10-month position. The Reserve offers various day programs for school groups during the regular school year; teacher training programs during the summer; resource boxes focusing on a significant environmental issue for educators to use in their classrooms; and has involved six of Baldwin County's seven high schools in the 'grasses in the classes' program. All of these programs are very popular, and demand exceeds supply. The Mobile Bay National Estuary Program is extending the 'grasses in the classes' concept throughout Mobile Bay by modeling it after the successful Weeks Bay program. Several Reserve stakeholders, partners, and interested citizens expressed great satisfaction and enthusiasm for the educational activities and mentioned an interest in summer classroom programming, which is not currently offered. The Reserve effectively uses NERRS-wide initiatives such as EstuaryLive and is integrating SWMP data into educational activities like 'grasses in the classes.' The grasses in the classes program also provides assistance to several researchers with projects related to restored emergent vegetation, while providing the students with adult role models in the scientific community and working world.

ACCOMPLISHMENT: The Reserve's educational programs are extremely popular, well received, and in great demand. Educational activities are strongly integrated with the other Reserve programs.

The Education Coordinator currently has no assistants, so the education programs are supported by all of the other Reserve staff and rely heavily on volunteers for assistance. In essence, the Reserve's educational programs have reached their operational limits and are now limited by funding and available staff. Limited onsite restroom facilities for students to use during classroom visits are also a limiting factor. The visitor center and classroom are both in the

interpretive center building, where the one men’s restroom and one women’s restroom must serve the general public, staff, and classes of students. Summer offerings would require funding for teachers to accompany students, buses for transportation to and from the Reserve, and liability insurance to cover students and others.

As was noted in an earlier section of this document under “Operations and Management,” Senator Richard Shelby of Alabama was able to obtain federal funds for the state for Baldwin County education through congressionally directed NOAA funding. The Reserve and the ADCNR moved very quickly to identify much needed projects and tasks for this funding in Baldwin County. The monies will be used to expand marine/estuarine education at the Reserve with additional personnel, development of new curricula, and development of a Reserve website, among other activities. Now the Reserve and ADCNR should move as quickly as possible to execute a contract with the South Alabama Regional Planning Commission (as part of the larger “Baldwin County Marine/Estuarine Education” award to the Reserve) so that two education assistant positions can be filled and other tasks initiated. A Program Suggestion under the “Operations and Management – Grants Management” subsection addresses this urgency. This should provide much needed help for the Education Coordinator and the educational programs and activities that are in such great demand. The two education assistant positions will also help the Education Coordinator in implementing NERR system-wide programs such as TOTE (Teachers on the Estuary), Estuaries 101, and KEEP (K-12 Environmental Education Program).

PROGRAM SUGGESTION: The Reserve is urged to ensure that the two education assistant positions proposed in the Baldwin County Marine/Estuarine Education award to the WBNERR are filled as quickly as possible to begin providing needed assistance for the Reserve’s education programs.

One of the other major mechanisms for outreach to the general public is a Reserve website. Weeks Bay does not have its own dedicated web presence. Some of the Reserve’s activities and functions are discussed on the Weeks Bay Reserve Foundation website, which was being redesigned at the time of the site visit to provide even more exposure for the Reserve. Nevertheless, a shared presence with the Foundation does not strengthen the Reserve’s separate identity, nor is the Reserve in control of the content. The South Alabama Regional Planning Council website contains the Reserve’s management plan, which is not accessible anywhere else. The Coastal Training Program has a stand-alone web presence that is difficult to find and that has no links to the Reserve. The Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources has a link to the Weeks Bay NERR that contains no content at all.

The State Lands Division, Coastal Section, and Reserve management all acknowledge the lack of a web presence. The proposed contract with the South Alabama Regional Planning Commission, which is part of the larger “Baldwin County Marine/Estuarine Education” award to the Reserve, contains funding and tasks to design, maintain, and host a dedicated Reserve website. The OCRM urges the Reserve and ADCNR to execute this contract as quickly as possible, as already noted in a Program Suggestion.

PROGRAM SUGGESTION: The Reserve is urged to ensure that tasks involving the Reserve’s website proposed in the Baldwin County Marine/Estuarine Education award to the WBNERR are initiated as quickly as possible.

The challenge for the ADCNR and the Reserve will be to maintain the assistance for education programs and the website at the conclusion of funding from the Baldwin County Marine/Estuarine Education award.

2. Coastal Training Program (CTP)

During this evaluation period there was a change in CTP coordinators. The new CTP coordinator was, and now still is, the Weeks Bay Watershed Program coordinator. Both programs have had a long partnership at Weeks Bay, with similar target audiences and regular collaboration on numerous events and workshops, so the transition to a single coordinator for both programs appears to be working seamlessly and to be beneficial for both programs. The transition also resulted in the conversion of the CTP coordinator from a contractual position to a state employee position. The Weeks Bay CTP is currently meeting the system-wide performance requirements for coastal training programs.

During the time period covered by this evaluation, the Weeks Bay CTP collaborated with other partners to offer regional training pertinent to audience needs. For example, the Grand Bay (MS) and Weeks Bay CTPs offered an “ARCHydro” GIS tools workshop and a workshop on managing the impacts of residential docks and piers in Mississippi and Alabama. A two-day workshop on managing visitor use in coastal areas involved presenting partners from federal and state agencies, local governments, business, and academia.

The Coastal Training Program also developed and sponsored the Weeks Bay Reserve 20th anniversary research symposium (discussed under the “Research Activities” section above), which offered a chance for both researchers and coastal decision-makers to learn about research projects in the Reserve and watershed.

Because of the close partnership between the CTP and the Weeks Bay Watershed Program, many of the workshops addressed watershed issues, including:

- Soils, Stormwater and Watershed Protection: Tools for Managing Erosion
- Community Leader Training: Wastewater Management Alternatives - Functional Models and Infrastructure Costs
- Community Leader Training: Understanding the New Health Department On-site Sewage Treatment and Disposal Rules
- 2006 Stormwater Runoff, Watershed Management and Nonpoint Source Pollution Workshop: Helping Communities with Permit Compliance, Saving Local Funds, and Protecting Watersheds from Stormwater Pollution

ACCOMPLISHMENT: The Reserve’s Coastal Training Program has collaborated with a large number of regional and local partners in its workshop and training programs.

D. STEWARDSHIP AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Within the NERR system, many reserves conduct or accomplish programs or activities related to land acquisition, enforcement, restoration, restoration science, technical advice and support, and community education under the general rubric of stewardship and resource management. Because the Reserve has so successfully integrated its research, education, and stewardship components, elements of stewardship and resource management are identifiable in almost all of its activities and programs, as can be seen in many of the discussions in other sections of this document.

The Weeks Bay Watershed Program (WBWP) is a significant part of the Reserve's stewardship and resource management activities. The WBWP was originally begun in 1994 at the Reserve as the Weeks Bay Watershed Project with Section 319 Nonpoint Source Pollution funds from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The EPA approved the WBWP management plan, and a citizens advisory committee (CAC) funded by the Baldwin County Soil and Water Conservation District was established to guide implementation of the plan. The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service district conservationist serving Baldwin County played a significant role in creating the CAC and acts as a technical advisor to the CAC. Rapid changes in land use within the watershed were and still are a driving force in the development of the management plan and its implementation.

The WBWP developed one of the first watershed management plans in Alabama and has served as a model for other watersheds. It has always had a strong emphasis on education and outreach, which has strengthened its ties to and integration with the Reserve's CTP and education and outreach activities. The watershed program and the CTP have co-sponsored numerous training workshops. The CAC members have strong connections to the local municipalities and have taken on an advocacy role for the watershed and bay. Some people who have received training through the WBWP and CTP workshops are serving as code enforcement officers in various municipalities, and through their work as well as that of CAC members, more people have become aware of and exposed to the Reserve's work and efforts.

Through the WBWP, the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Reserve are jointly funding and collaborating on the Baker Branch project. Baker Branch is a small subwatershed in the Weeks Bay watershed that is affected by a range of water quality and development issues common in coastal Alabama. The project is an attempt to restore the subwatershed's hydrology while building stakeholder involvement and capacity to manage the watershed. If a functioning riparian buffer can be re-established along Baker Branch Creek, the creek might be de-listed from the Clean Water Act Section 303(d) water quality limited segments list (the "impaired list").

Land acquisition is another aspect of the Reserve's stewardship activities. Because of the strong partnership and collaboration with the Weeks Bay Reserve Foundation discussed in an earlier section of this document, the Foundation has been able to acquire parcels of land within the watershed and subsequently transfer several of them to the state. Such outright acquisition prevents development that is negatively affecting the watershed and its natural resources.

Other stewardship activities at the Reserve involve invasive species removal and habitat restoration or improvement projects. The Reserve has a pitcher plant bog within its boundaries. The habitat has been restored over the years, and now periodic controlled burning is necessary to maintain the bog. Nature trails and boardwalks are maintained. Staff is conducting surveys of the extent of aquatic and terrestrial invasive species throughout the Reserve. Volunteers, Reserve staff, and Reserve Foundation members are involved in various bay and river clean-ups within the watershed.

ACCOMPLISHMENT: The Weeks Bay Watershed Program continues to be a strong component of the Reserve, well integrated with all the other Reserve program components. It serves as a strong connection between the Reserve and the citizens of the larger Weeks Bay watershed.

V. CONCLUSION

For the reasons stated herein, I find that the State of Alabama is adhering to the programmatic requirements of the Coastal Zone Management Act and the regulations of the National Estuarine Research Reserve System in the operation of its approved Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve.

The Weeks Bay Reserve has made notable progress in: Administration and Staffing; Grants Management; Management Plan; Coordination and Partnerships; Volunteer Support and Weeks Bay Reserve Foundation Support; Research Activities; Education and Outreach; Coastal Training Program; and Stewardship.

These evaluation findings also contain six (6) recommendations. All of the recommendations are in the form of Program Suggestions. There are no Necessary Actions. The Program Suggestions should be addressed before the next regularly-scheduled program evaluation, but they are not mandatory at this time. Program Suggestions that must be repeated in subsequent evaluations may be elevated to Necessary Actions. Summary tables of program accomplishments and recommendations are provided in Section VI.

This is a programmatic evaluation of the Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve that may have implications regarding the state's financial assistance awards. However, it does not make any judgment about or replace any financial audits.

/s/ David M. Kennedy
David M. Kennedy
Director, Office of Ocean and Coastal
Resource Management

7-11-07
Date

VI. APPENDICES

Appendix A. Summary of Accomplishments and Recommendations

The evaluation team documented a number of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources' and Reserve's accomplishments during the review period. These include:

Issue Area	Accomplishment
Administration and Staffing	The Reserve has converted all but one of its contractual employee positions to state employee positions.
Grants Management	The Reserve and ADCNR quickly identified projects and tasks for unanticipated congressionally directed NOAA funding for marine/estuarine education.
Management Plan	The Reserve has successfully completed revisions to its management plan.
Coordination and Partnerships	The Reserve's internal programs and activities are strongly integrated and support and complement each other.
Coordination and Partnerships	The Reserve has built and maintained a wealth of partnerships and collaborations with a wide range of organizations and agencies. These partnerships are mutually beneficial in minimizing staff and financial resource expenditures while maximizing program exposure and outreach efforts.
Volunteer Support and Weeks Bay Reserve Foundation Support	The Reserve has established a state employee position for a volunteer coordinator, who has done an excellent job in developing and maintaining the volunteer program. The Reserve benefits from a strong, motivated, and dedicated group of volunteers who provide significant support to the Reserve's programs and facilities.
Volunteer Support and Weeks Bay Reserve Foundation Support	The Weeks Bay Reserve Foundation and the Reserve have strengthened their partnership. The Foundation's land trust activities have significantly benefited the Reserve, and the Foundation has supported the Reserve's educational, research, stewardship, and outreach activities.

Research Activities	The Reserve has built a strong, well-integrated research program. It is actively mentoring the next generation of researchers and has established a wide-ranging regional network of institutional partnerships.
Research Activities	The Reserve has updated its site profile.
Education and Outreach	The Reserve's educational programs are extremely popular, well received, and in great demand. Educational activities are strongly integrated with the other Reserve programs.
Coastal Training Program (CTP)	The Reserve's Coastal Training Program has collaborated with a large number of regional and local partners in its workshop and training programs.
Stewardship	The Weeks Bay Watershed Program continues to be a strong component of the Reserve, well integrated with all the other Reserve program components. It serves as a strong connection between the Reserve and the citizens of the larger Weeks Bay watershed.

In addition to the accomplishments listed above, the evaluation team identified several areas where the program could be strengthened. Recommendations are in the forms of Program Suggestions and Necessary Actions, although there are no Necessary Actions from this evaluation. Areas for improvement include:

Issue Area	Recommendation
Grants Management	PROGRAM SUGGESTION: The Reserve should close out its older construction financial awards as expeditiously as possible and strive to close out awards, especially operations awards, within the original award period.
Grants Management	PROGRAM SUGGESTION: The Reserve and ADCNR should quickly execute a contract to award part of the Baldwin County Education funding so that two proposed education assistant positions can be filled and other proposed tasks regarding web site development can be initiated.
Volunteer Support and Weeks Bay Reserve Foundation Support	PROGRAM SUGGESTION: The Reserve and the Foundation are urged to continue building their partnership, particularly as it relates to strategic planning and prioritizing parcels for acquisition within the watershed.
Monitoring	PROGRAM SUGGESTION: The Reserve should plan and budget for the replacement of aging SWMP monitoring equipment over the next several years.

Education and Outreach	PROGRAM SUGGESTION: The Reserve is urged to ensure that the two education assistant positions proposed in the Baldwin County Marine/Estuarine Education award to the WBNERR are filled as quickly as possible to begin providing needed assistance for the Reserve's education programs.
Education and Outreach	PROGRAM SUGGESTION: The Reserve is urged to ensure that tasks involving the Reserve's website proposed in the Baldwin County Marine/Estuarine Education award to the WBNERR are initiated as quickly as possible.

Appendix B. Response to Previous Evaluation Findings Dated 2005

Program Suggestion: NOAA encourages WBNERR to continue to pursue conversion of contract employees to state employees, as practicable.

Response: All contract employees except one have been converted to state employees. The Coastal Training Program (CTP) Coordinator position is now filled with a state employee in the classification of a Natural Resource Planner. This position also coordinates the Weeks Bay Watershed Project at the Reserve. The Volunteer Coordinator position is now filled with a state employee in the classification of a Biologist Aide I/II. The one contract position remaining at the Reserve is the part time Watershed Assistant position which is currently filled by Mr. Richard Coram. He has assisted the watershed program for many years “in his retirement” and will continue in this capacity for the foreseeable future.

Program Suggestion: NOAA encourages WBNERR to strengthen coordination with the Weeks Bay Reserve Foundation in order to increase the emphasis on promoting the reserve.

Response: The Reserve and the Foundation work closely in pursuing the goals of the Reserve. The Foundation has established the position of Executive Director. Walter Ernest is currently in this position and he is in at the Reserve on a daily and weekly basis. The Reserve has strengthened coordination with the Foundation very much over the last several years.

Program Suggestion: NOAA encourages the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources to provide training in agency procedures to ACAMP [*Alabama Coastal Area Management Program*] and WBNERR staff. NOAA also encourages ACAMP and WBNERR to work with all points along the Department’s chain of command so that there is a consistent and clear understanding of the scope, mission and unique features of each program.

Response: There has been much progress in the level of knowledge and coordination among staff that work for the benefit of the Reserve within the Lands Division of the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. The Coastal Section of Lands has positions in place that assist the Reserve in many facets of ongoing procedures and coordinating with all levels within the Department.

Program Suggestion: NOAA strongly encourages ACAMP and WBNERR to address issues hampering the timely completion of grant tasks as soon as possible.

Response: The Reserve has made every effort to complete grant tasks in a timely manner. Many procedural matters are more streamlined and coordinated resulting in accomplishing tasks on time. In the last several years hurricanes have interrupted grants management beyond normal controls and every effort has been made to bring this back to an operational level.

Program Suggestion: NOAA strongly encourages ACAMP and WBNERR to place a stronger emphasis on communication and coordination regarding permitting issues. ACAMP and WBNERR should work closely with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to ensure that the reserve's special area management guidelines are incorporated in the next round of the Corps' General Permits. NOAA also strongly encourages the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, ACAMP and WBNERR to improve follow-up and feedback regarding program comments on permit applications.

Response: Current communication and coordination regarding permitting issues has occurred within the Coastal Section providing comments to the Lands Division for Departmental communication to the Corps.

Appendix C. Persons and Institutions Contacted

U.S. Senators

Honorable Richard C. Shelby
Honorable Jeff Sessions

U.S. Representatives

Honorable Jo Bonner

Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

Jim Griggs, Director, State Lands Division
Phillip Hinesley, Chief, Coastal Section, State Lands Division
Janis Helton, Coastal Section, State Lands Division
Collin Roberts, Lands Stewardship Officer, State Lands Division
Jeff Jordan, State Lands Division
Roger Clay, Wildlife and Freshwater Fish Division
Lt. Ryan Bennett, Marine Police

Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve

L.G. Adams, Manager
Scott Phipps, Research Coordinator
Eric Brunden, Stewardship Coordinator
Margaret Sedlecky, Education Coordinator
Mike Shelton, CTP/Watershed Coordinator
Maureen Nation, Volunteer Coordinator
Sarah Johnston, GIS Technician
Richard Coram, Watershed Project Assistant
Tim Lankford, Research Assistant/SWMP Technician
Mark Cooper, Maintenance Supervisor
Keith Waites, Seasonal Laborer
Dianna Quinn, Laborer
Sue Kimsey, Receptionist

Weeks Bay NERR Advisory Committee (only those in attendance at meeting during site visit)

Lloyd Scott, Environmental Studies Center, Mobile County Board of Education
Roger Clay, ADCNR Wildlife and Freshwater Fish Division
Leslie Hartman (for Kevin Anson), ADCNR Marine Resources Division
Carey Bentley, Citizen Representative
Larry Morris, USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service
Walter Ernest, Weeks Bay Reserve Foundation
Phyllis French (for Peggy Duck), Baldwin County Board of Education
Rick Wallace, Auburn University Marine Extension and Research Center
Mike Dardeau, Dauphin Island Sea Lab
Randy Shaneyfelt, Alabama Department of Environmental Management
Jo Ann Flirt, Historic Blakeley State Park
Randy Roach, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Federal and State Agency Representatives

Joy Earp, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Randy Roach, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Larry Morris, U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service

J. Scott Brown, Alabama Department of Environmental Management

Tim Connole, Alabama Department of Environmental Management

Patti Hurley, Alabama Department of Environmental Management

William L. Smith, Alabama Department of Public Health

Carol Dorsey, Alabama Department of Public Health

Academic/Educational Representatives

John Borom, Faulkner State Community College

George Crozier, Dauphin Island Sea Lab

Andy Canon, University of South Alabama and Dauphin Island Sea Lab

Lucie Novoveska, University of South Alabama and Dauphin Island Sea Lab

Hugh MacIntyre, Dauphin Island Sea Lab

Doug Haywick, University of South Alabama

Just Cebrian, Dauphin Island Sea Lab

Megan O'Neill, Fairhope High School

Janie Lloyd, Robertsdale High School

Carolyn Anderson

Weeks Bay Reserve Foundation

Walter Earnest, Executive Director

Carey Bentley, Board of Directors

Gaye Lindsey, Board of Directors

Tommy Harris, Board of Directors

Other Organizations and Representatives

Paul Dowsey, Weeks Bay Watershed Citizens Advisory Committee

W.R. Miller, Weeks Bay Watershed Citizens Advisory Committee

Christine Walters, Grand Bay (MS) National Estuarine Research Reserve

Tina Sanchez, South Alabama Regional Planning Commission

David Yeager, Director, Mobile Bay National Estuary Program

Appendix D. Persons Attending the Public Meeting

The public meeting was held on Wednesday, March 21, 2007, at 6:00 p.m. at the Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve Visitor Center Auditorium, 11300 U.S. Highway 98, Fairhope, Alabama. The following attended the meeting:

Dennis Frodsham
Jackie Frodsham
Dan Perkins
Carmen Perkins
Randy Roach
Walter Ernest
Carey Bentley
Tera Johnson, Senator Richard Shelby's Office
Sarah Johnston, Weeks Bay Reserve
L.G. Adams, Weeks Bay Reserve
Phillip Hinesley, ADCNR State Lands
Janis Helton, ADCNR State Lands

Appendix E. NOAA's Response to Written Comments

NOAA received written comments regarding the Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve. Each of the letters is part of the official record of the evaluation and is briefly summarized below, followed by NOAA's response.

Barbara Adams
Baldwin County Home Educators' Association
Fairhope, Alabama

Comment: Ms. Adams expressed appreciation, both for herself and on behalf of the Baldwin County Home Educators' Association, for the excellent work done by all of the Reserve staff. She and other Association members regularly schedule field trips and nature hikes to Weeks Bay, and they are impressed with the facilities, the Weeks Bay natural resource itself, and the enthusiastic, knowledgeable, and dedicated staff.

NOAA's Response: No response necessary. The evaluation team thanks Ms. Adams for her comments.

John Brown

Comment: Mr. Brown asks that gasoline be available for boats somewhere in the Weeks Bay area.

NOAA's Response: One of the parcels acquired by the Reserve used to have a bait shop and gasoline available for purchase by boaters. The Reserve is doing some planning with regard to current and future facilities for this and other parcels. Whether gasoline for boats will be made available on Reserve property is not yet determined.

Yvonne Weaver
Lowell, Indiana

Comment: Ms. Weaver visits Weeks Bay at least twice a year and considers it a 'must see' spot. She is impressed by the beauty of the Reserve and enjoys the boardwalks. She also acknowledges the friendly staff who are ready to answer all questions.

NOAA's Response: No response necessary. The evaluation team thanks Ms. Weaver for her comments.

Ed and Marlene Larsen
Magnolia Springs, Alabama

Comment: Mr. and Mrs. Larsen are winter visitors from Wisconsin and enjoy the Reserve, particularly the pitcher plant bog and the boardwalk. They are impressed with the knowledgeable and friendly staff members.

NOAA's Response: No response necessary. The evaluation team thanks Mr. and Mrs. Larsen for their comments.