

## City of Fort Walton Beach- NRDA BP Grant Proposal

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Project: Fort Walton Beach Shorewalk- Habitat Restoration and Education

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### **A. General Information**

Organization: The City of Fort Walton Beach

Contact: Robert T. Mearns, City Manager  
107 Miracle Strip Pkwy SW  
Fort Walton Beach, FL 32548  
(850) 833-9604  
[rmearns@fwb.org](mailto:rmearns@fwb.org)

City website: [www.fwb.org](http://www.fwb.org)

### **B. Project Information**

Project Name: Fort Walton Beach Shorewalk- Habitat Restoration and Education

Site Location: Fort Walton Beach, FL, U.S.A. – Along Santa Rosa Sound  
Okaloosa County  
Pensacola Bay Watershed HUC 03140105  
U.S. National Grid Coordinates: 16R EU 37208 63443 (Center)  
30 degrees, 24' 5.7" N, 86 degrees, 36' 8.9" W  
30.401603 N, -86.602478 W

Project Size: 2 miles

Affected Area: approximately 10 acres

### **C. Project Description**

The City of Fort Walton Beach desires to restore the estuarine shoreline of Santa Rosa Sound in Fort Walton Beach by installing native estuarine grasses, installing an artificial oyster reef, and constructing an interactive boardwalk along the Sound to promote environmental education. The proposed project aims to restore and protect habitat for many important waterbird and inshore species found in the Greater Fort Walton Beach area of Northwest Florida. The project is designed to achieve two basic objectives: (1) restore that natural estuarine shoreline utilizing “living shoreline” techniques; and (2) educate the public on the importance of shoreline habitat by installing an educational interactive waterfront boardwalk complete with bird viewing stations and signage. This project will connect pieces and phases of a larger initiative into one completed project that’s been in City plans for over 10 years. Goal E of the City’s Coastal and Conservation Element in the Comprehensive Plan as adopted in 2000 states that the City will “preserve,

protect, and when possible restore the resources of the city’s coastal protection area.” More specifically Objective E.1 states that “the City shall continue to protect, conserve, or enhance coastal wetlands, living marine resources, and wildlife habitats.” Certain portions of the planned project have already been implemented and completed. These include: installation of a portion of the Sound Side Boardwalk in 2006 and 2007; planting native emergent vegetation along Santa Rosa Sound at Sound Park Boardwalk in 2008; constructing an oyster reef in the Santa Rosa Sound in 2008, and installing a portion of the boardwalk with environmental education signage in 2010.

This project relies on sound scientific principles. Oysters are a keystone species in the ecosystem and native shoreline grasses provide habitat for many estuarine and marine species. The native shoreline grasses will help stabilize the shoreline and the plant genotype will be specific to the region. Community outreach and education are a significant aspect of this project. The boardwalk will have an ecological focus and incorporate birding stations complete with permanently placed high-quality, long-lasting binoculars and a water-resistant bird viewing guide. It will also contain permanently fixed metal signs with different topics. The signs will cover bird species native to the immediate area, their importance, their status, and their habitat needs. Additional signage will highlight project specifics as well as pollution prevention topics, estuaries as nurseries, and fish/marine mammal species native to the immediate area. The educational signage, bird statues, and birding stations are expected to engage and encourage appreciation of wildlife habitats beyond the typical audience since the Boardwalk will be located partially in the downtown waterfront area. This project also includes the continuation of the City’s partnership “Grasses in Classes” effort with the Bay Area Resource Council and Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance. The program includes educational materials to bring into local classrooms and native grasses species for student propagation and planting.

#### *Activities to be Completed*

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|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Finalize planning, design, and permitting (including easement acquisition)</li></ul>              |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Recruit and hire qualified conservation program manager and temporary project assistant</li></ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Hire qualified contractor</li></ul>                                                               |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Construct boardwalk and amenities</li></ul>                                                       |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Plan volunteer and environmental education activities</li></ul>                                   |

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|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purchase native plant materials and oyster reef materials</li> </ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Install native shoreline grasses at site location</li> </ul>         |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Construct oyster reef</li> </ul>                                     |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project Completion</li> </ul>                                        |

### *Expected Outcomes*

Short-term (life of project): 7200 sq. ft. of oyster reef habitat created, 20,460 sq. ft. of estuarine shoreline restored with native emergent vegetation, 10,206 sq. ft. of shoreline habitat protected from public foot traffic, increased public appreciation and awareness of coastal habitats and associated species

Long term: Increase in abundance, productivity, and species richness in Santa Rosa Sound estuary, including fish species, invertebrates, and birds (migratory and resident); increased nesting, feeding/foraging habitat for shorebirds and wading birds; increase in visitors to the Santa Rosa Sound Boardwalk which will bring stimulus to the retail stores, restaurants, and the rest of the business community on the other side of the boardwalk.

### *Benefits of the Project*

Coastal/estuarine areas, such as those found in the Santa Rosa Sound area, are nursery grounds for many recreationally and commercially important species. Seventy percent of commercial and recreational fish species rely on the health of Florida's waters and estuaries. This project will result in on-the-ground restoration and enhancement of fish and wildlife habitat. The unique benefit of this project is the opportunity to achieve habitat restoration while also greatly realizing local and regional economic development goals. The critical massing of ecological, culturally-enriching activity will be a draw for visitors to the area. Other benefits of this particular project include cost effectiveness through a collaborative partnership effort, completion of most preliminary planning/permitting, and the opportunity to engage the public in hands-on environmental education.

**D. Project Type(s)**

Restoration

Protection

Education

**E. Project Habitat(s)**

Marine/estuarine wetlands

**F. Resource Benefit(s)**

Birds, fish, shellfish, vegetation, water column, sediment, benthos, shoreline, human use

**Listed Species' benefited:** Brown Pelican (state listed), Little Blue Heron (state listed), Snowy egret (state listed), Osprey (state listed), Gulf Sturgeon (federally listed)

**G. Project Status**

Property/resource acquisition- IN PROGRESS

Project planning/design- IN PROGRESS

Project permitting- IN PROGRESS

Time to implementation: 3 months; Time to completion: 21 months

**H. Project Cost**

Estimated cost: \$3,880,000

Funding available: \$84,500

**I. Project Partners**

City of Fort Walton Beach- lead project manager

Okaloosa County

John Hofstad, Public Works Director (850) 689-5770

- In kind services and support (equipment, personnel)

Greater Fort Walton Beach Chamber of Commerce

Ted Corcoran, CEO (850) 244-8191

- In-kind services and support (marketing and agency coordination)

Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance

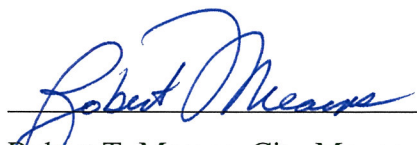
Alison McDowel, Project Specialist (850) 267-1888

- Assistance in educational outreach components

Choctawhatchee Audubon Society

Gary H. Parsons, President (850) 678-1461

- Assistance in design, planning

  
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Robert T. Mearns, City Manager

  
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Date