

# *Estuary Exchange*

January 2026



**ST. ANDREW & ST. JOSEPH BAYS**

**ESTUARY PROGRAM**

*at* FSU PANAMA CITY

*Together for the Bays*



*January*



Hello, 2026! The St. Andrew and St. Joseph Bays Estuary Program is ramping up for a year of implementation as we expand our oyster recycling program, launch the “Bay Guardians” Water Quality Initiative, spearhead new research and restoration projects, and more!

This edition marks the debut of our monthly Steward and Board Member spotlights, kicks off our Spring 2026 Tides & Talks series, and explores the fascinating underwater sounds of our bays. We are thrilled to continue this journey of progress with you as we work *Together for the Bays!*

## ***Board Member Spotlight***

Our watershed thrives because of passionate individuals committed to its protection and

restoration. To honor these efforts, we're sharing our appreciation by highlighting the members of our Policy Board. Each month, we'll introduce you to those working behind the scenes to help strengthen our community and support the long-term well-being of our watershed.



### Policy Board Member Spotlight: Commissioner Pat Perno!

Commissioner Pat Perno, one of the original members of the SASJBEP Policy Board, has been a dedicated supporter of the program's goals and the long-term health of our bays and watersheds since the program's inception. He credits his initial involvement to Dr. Irvin Clark's encouragement and vision and was honored to be the first Lynn Haven Commissioner serve on the Policy Board. Commissioner Perno described the opportunity as "a rare chance to help create something from scratch that will exist for decades to come, which doesn't come around every day."

Perno's commitment to the Bays and watershed is rooted in his own experience. Having grown up near the Indian River Lagoon, he witnessed a decline over time, which made a lasting impression. "When you watch a watershed fail, it stays with you," he reflects. "It makes you appreciate how important it is to protect what we have before it's gone."

He values bringing people together and leading with care and sees the Estuary Program as an opportunity to represent "not just Lynn Haven, but the entire watershed's needs, which is bigger than one community". He is especially interested in advancing regional stormwater projects and supporting Lynn Haven's effort to relocate the wastewater treatment plant away from the water's edge to improve long-term resilience. One message he hopes more people will take to heart is the fragility of our bays: "What we see today could easily disappear and we can't take these waters for granted."

Commissioner Perno's favorite places around the Bay are close to home, especially anywhere along North Bay and when he isn't running his business or at City Hall, you'll likely find him enjoying a round of golf.

WHERE CONVERSATION STARTS  
AND STEWARDSHIP FLOWS

# Tides & Talks

Join us monthly for Tides & Talks, a community gathering featuring guest speakers on hot topics in our watershed. Engage in discussions, share your insights, and learn how to support our estuarine ecosystems.

01.15.26 FLORIDA & FLORA: LANDSCAPING WITH NATIVE PLANTS

02.12.26 REEFS & RECREATION: ARTIFICIAL REEFS

03.12.26 SEAGRASS SOLUTIONS: SEAGRASS AWARENESS MONTH

04.09.26 SHELLS & SAND HILLS: GOPHER TORTOISES

05.14.26 ECONFINA CREEK & SPRINGS

⌚ 2nd Thursday Each Month  
3:00-4:00pm CDT



Destination Panama City  
101 West Beach Drive



FOR MORE INFO GO TO:  
[WWW.SASJBEP.ORG/EVENTS/](http://WWW.SASJBEP.ORG/EVENTS/)  
[TIDESANDTALKS](http://TIDESANDTALKS)

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@ [ESTUARYPROGRAM@PC.FSU.EDU](mailto:ESTUARYPROGRAM@PC.FSU.EDU)



We are excited to announce the topics for the Spring 2026 Tides and Talks series! Here's what we have planned:

January 15 - [Florida-Friendly Landscaping](#)

February 12 - Reefs & Recreation: Artificial Reefs

March 12 - Seagrass Awareness Month: Seagrass Solutions

April 9 - Shells & Sand Hills: Gopher Tortoises

May 14 - Econfina Creek & Springs

Join us in person at Destination Panama City (101 W. Beach Dr, Panama City, FL) or tune in virtually! Register below to join.

Register

## Science Corner



*Grass Shrimp. Tristan Packard*

### Soundscapes

Ever hear snapping, crackling, and other noises underwater? These noises are part of the underwater soundscape, and individual critters often have unique sounds and researchers all over the world are working to link sounds with their specific creature. This information can be used as a method of monitoring habitat use, noting species presence even if not visually documented. Species such as spotted seatrout, Gulf toadfish, and snapping shrimp are three species whose sounds may be used to assess ecosystem status and have unique sounds. The detection of spotted seatrout or Gulf Toadfish chorusing and snapping shrimp popping may indicate that habitat quality is sufficient to support these species. Understanding these underwater voices helps researchers better track ecosystem health and the creatures that call our bays home.

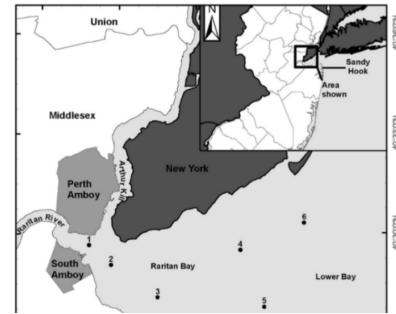
Fournet, M. E., Stabenau, E., Madhusudhana, S., & Rice, A. N. (2022). Altered acoustic community structure indicates delayed recovery following ecosystem perturbations. *Estuarine, Coastal and Shelf Science*, 274, 107948.

Butler, J., Butler IV, M. J., & Gaff, H. (2017). Snap, crackle, and pop: Acoustic-based model estimation of snapping shrimp populations in healthy and degraded hard-bottom habitats. *Ecological Indicators*, 77, 377-385.

## *Recent Relevant Research*

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*Click the images to view articles.*



Habitat conversion by native spartina highlights the importance of wetland restoration design relative to site-specific vertical range of vegetation.

Machine learning and adaptive monitoring for harmful algal bloom management

## *Find the Estuary Program*



February 7th, 2026

### Winter Bay Day Celebration

When: February 7th, 9:00am - 3:00pm EST

Where: St. Joseph Bay Buffer Preserve



February 18th, 2026

### Florida Oceans Day

When: February 18th, 10:00am - 3:00pm EST

Where: Florida Capitol - South Plaza



March 6th-8th, 2026

### Emerald Coast Boat Show

When: February 6th - 8th



April 11th & 12th, 2026

### Gulf Coast Salute Air Show

When: April 11th & 12th, 9:00am - 3:00pm CT

## Community Events

Click the images to explore upcoming events throughout the St. Andrew Bay Watershed!



Events in Panama City



Events in Panama City Beach



Events in South Walton County



Events in Gulf County



Events in Mexico Beach



Gulf County Chamber of  
Commerce - Events

## Upcoming Meetings

### Policy Board Meeting

+

February 25th, 2026

1:00pm-3:00pm CDT; Room A301 Deans Conference Room; FSU PC Holley Building  
Meeting ID: [987 9409 5234](#)

[Join Zoom](#)

### Management Council Meeting

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February 6th, 2025

10am-12pm CDT; Room A301, Deans Conference Room; FSU PC Holley Building Join Via

[Join Zoom](#)

## Science and Technical Committee Meeting +

February 19th, 2026

1:00 - 2:00 PM CDT; Admin Services Conference Room 108

[Join Zoom](#)

## Stormwater Working Group +

February 11th, 2026

10am-11am CDT; Virtual only.

## Community Action Committee Meeting +

Date TBD

Next meeting date to be determined.

## Teen Outreach Committee Meeting +

January Meeting Date TBD

10 am - 11:00 am CT

[Join the TOC](#)

To access all past meeting materials, notes, and presentations, visit our Library of Resources page on our website. Link directly by clicking below!

[Library of Resources](#)

## Volunteer Opportunities



The SASJ Bays Volunteer Network connects organizations with passionate members of the community that are interested getting involved. Join the email list to receive updates on upcoming volunteer opportunities from across the partners across the watershed and share organized events with others!

[Join the Email List](https://lists.fsu.edu/mailman/listinfo/volunteer-sasjbep)

## Job Opportunities

University of Northwest Florida

- [Assistant Professor of Biology, Coastal Ecologist](#)

Choctawhatchee Basin Alliance

- [Ecology Technician](#)
- [Education and Outreach Specialist](#)

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

- [Fisheries and Wildlife Biology Scientist III](#)

**Contact us at** [estuaryprogram@pc.fsu.edu](mailto:estuaryprogram@pc.fsu.edu)



St. Andrew and St. Joseph Bays Estuary  
Program

4750 Collegiate Drive  
Panama City, FL 32405

[estuaryprogram@pc.fsu.edu](mailto:estuaryprogram@pc.fsu.edu)

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