

FRANKLIN 98

Protecting community, conserving the coast.

APALACHEE REGIONAL PLANNING COUNCIL AWARDED \$15 MILLION, FRANKLIN-98 LIVING SHORELINE PROJECT – Large-scale, nature-based solution to enhance the resiliency of HWY-98 and the ecology of Apalachicola Bay.

Tallahassee, FL – The Apalachee RPC was recently awarded more than \$15 million to implement a living shoreline project in Franklin County. This groundbreaking coastal resiliency project, dubbed “Franklin-98”, includes the establishment of nearshore reefs which will reduce wave energy and allow the creation of salt marshes to protect twelve miles of shoreline and U.S. Highway 98 between the City of Carrabelle and Eastpoint. The project will improve Apalachicola Bay's health and productivity with anticipated benefits to include:

- Twelve miles of shoreline habitat improvement and roadway protection
- Thirty acres of salt marsh formation
- Twenty acres of estuarine reef creation
- 3,000 community residents positively impacted

When asked about the project, Franklin County Commissioner Ricky Jones was quick to point out the positive impacts of this collaborative effort. “Both our community’s identity and economy depend heavily on coastal resources. The Franklin-98 project sets out to embolden the resiliency of an important stretch of our shoreline, which has potential to pay dividends to our region for generations to come”.

Phase I of Franklin-98, completed by ARPC staff earlier this year, involved several public workshops, testing of potential site materials, and gathering necessary data. As phase II begins, awarded funds will allow for further data collection, development of site plans, site material acquisitions, and construction.

Community engagement is welcomed and encouraged throughout the development and implementation of Franklin-98. The next public workshop will be held (virtually) on August 20th at 5 pm Eastern.

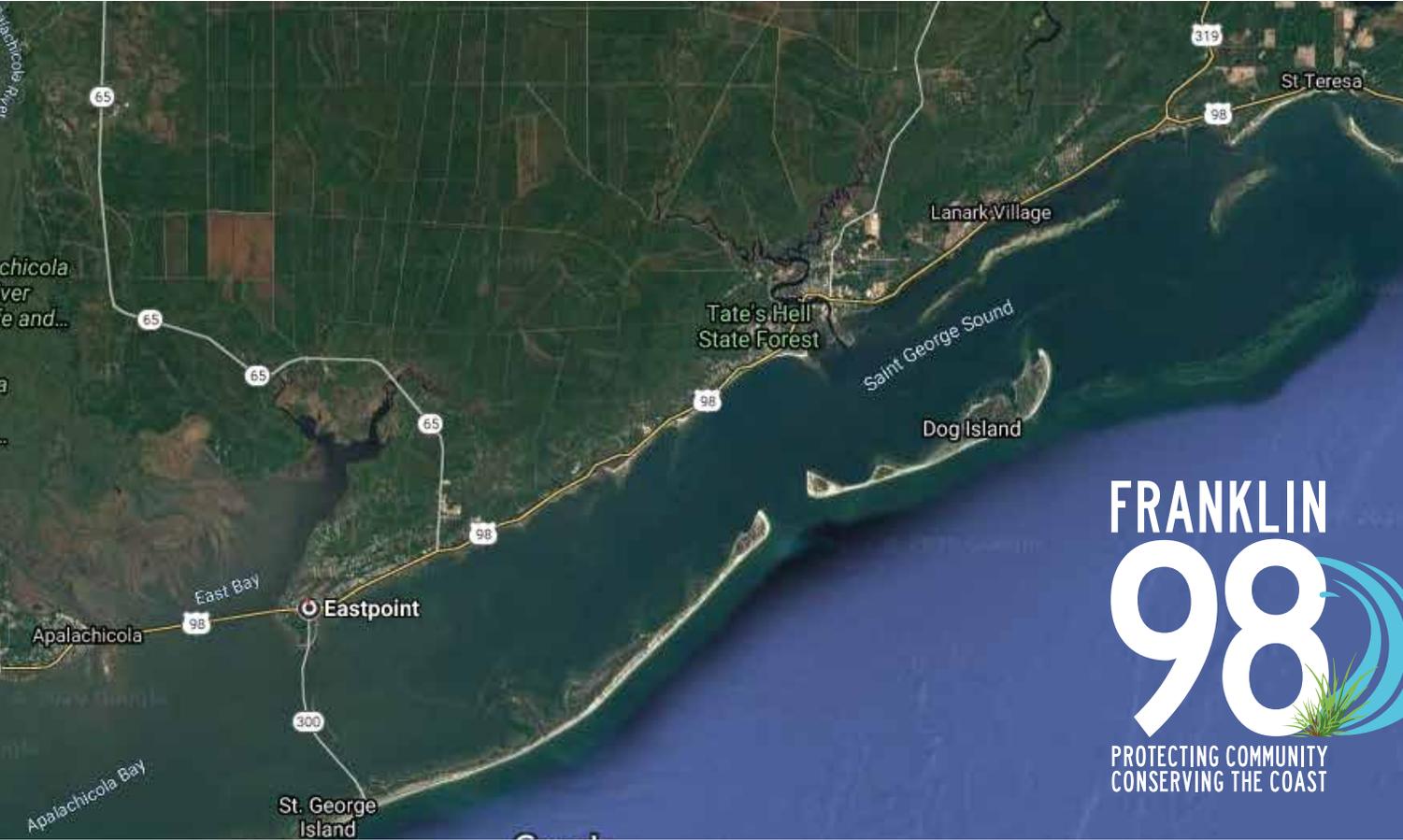
Registration and attendance: <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/3367253669245692174>.

For additional information, please contact Evan Blythe at 850.481.9979 or EBlythe@arpc.org.

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The Apalachee Regional Planning Council provides technical assistance to our member local governments. This includes the counties of Calhoun, Franklin, Gadsden, Gulf, Jackson, Jefferson, Leon, Liberty, and Wakulla and their municipalities. The Council focuses its assistance efforts primarily in the areas of economic development, emergency planning, environmental planning, housing, geographic information systems, transportation, and quality of life. The Council often takes on additional state/local programs and projects as necessary to meet the needs of the Region.





PROJECT HISTORY

The Apalachee Regional Planning Council (ARPC) has recently been awarded over \$15 million grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation for a coastal restoration project that will increase ecological productivity and resiliency along a 12-mile stretch of roadway in Franklin County. The project, Franklin-98, aims to create 20 acres of offshore reef and 30 acres of emergent saltmarsh. The location and suitability of Franklin-98 stemmed from other studies that the ARPC has completed, including a highly detailed analysis of existing conditions of Apalachee Bay through Alligator Harbor. Intrinsic to the project are partnerships that have developed out of public outreach and consensus building. These include the County Commission, the Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the Florida Forest Service, Conservation Corps of the Forgotten Coast, and Franklin County Seafood Workers Association, among others. Community engagement and relationship building will remain a central focus throughout the project.



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Living shorelines, resilient shorelines, and green infrastructure are all phrases that have been used lately that describe a common theme: utilizing native vegetation and augmenting physical interactions to produce increased habitat and ecologi-

cal function while offsetting and reducing damage from environmental hazards. This process looks different depending on the study area. For example, vegetated coastlines along central and southern Florida are dominated by various species of mangroves; in these areas, living shorelines utilize the expansive mangrove root structure to help lock coastal marine sediments in place and reduce erosion. Green infrastructure in terms of stormwater management takes bare retention and detention facilities and incorporates freshwater marsh species to help reduce nutrient loading and erosion while creating a more aesthetically pleasing facility (think Cascades Park in Tallahassee).

The species for the Franklin-98 living shoreline will likely incorporate the most dominant species in the area smooth cordgrass, *Spartina alterniflora*. This is a function of spartina

being able to tolerate a variety of water heights, and its ability to trap sediments along the shoreline, helping to stabilize the shore. The grass will be able to establish only if there is a physical barrier to the waves in place. This barrier will be a hardbottom reef. Different materials, limerock, granite, oyster shells, and Oystercatcher™ materials are being considered for reef construction. The reef configuration is still to be determined, but initial observations provide evidence that structures will likely need to be sub-tidal, and range between 50 and a few hundred yards offshore. Once installed, the reefs will be colonized by invertebrates, with the potential to include oysters. The combination of the emergent vegetation

and hardbottom reef constitute estuarine habitat, a nursery, for juvenile marine life, increasing the overall productivity of the ecology in the area. Over 90% of the southeastern USA commercial fish are estuarine dependent. In addition to the habitat creation, the establishment of reefs will reduce wave energy, and the establishment of spartina beds will lock sediment in place, contributing to a more stable shoreline. This has the potential to decrease storm impacts to the coastline. Franklin-98 follows-up on two other project ARPC worked on to analyze the viability of living shorelines Apalachicola Bay. The first was the Shoreline Habitats and Resilient Coasts (SHaRC) project from



FDEP (\$74,000). SHaRC looked took publicly available spatial data and created a model that first assessed the existing physical conditions (topography, bathymetry, habitat characterization, etc.) and infrastructure (roadways, schools, utilities, etc.) to create a prioritized list of areas that would benefit the most from habitat creation and enhancement. The Franklin-98 study area, between Eastpoint and Carrabelle, was selected by aggregating the highest ranked areas. Building on lessons learned from other projects, the ARPC then engaged in Phase I of the Franklin-98 project, completing a series of stakeholder meetings, permitting, and constructing three test sites between Eastpoint and Carrabelle (FDEP \$125,000). The results of these tests sites will contribute to the final design of the project and provide an empirical basis for which to base our project design guidelines. It was important to have heavy stakeholder engagement and input early in the project, to assess the acceptability of the project, and learn about local sentiment for the project. With this covered in the early stages, and with planning additional engagement opportunities throughout the project, the ARPC hopes to provide plenty of opportunity for input and feedback on the progress of the project.





Alongside ARPC work, Florida Fish and Wildlife received \$20 million dollars to help revitalize the oyster population in Apalachicola Bay from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. The FSU Coastal and Marine Laboratory also received \$8 million in Triumph dollars to help establish the best areas for new oyster beds and create 1,000 acres of productive reef. These projects, although independent of one another, will contribute to a better understanding of Apalachicola Bay, and its productivity.

In addition to the ecological benefits that the project has to contribute, there could be local economic benefits. The first being opportunities for local residents to be employed directly by the project. There will be a need for individuals working in and around the water for materials installation as well as assembling reef materials. Once established, the project could help boost bay productivity, leading to a more robust fishery for commercial and recreational fishing.

The result of the Franklin-98 project will give us a better understanding of the feasibility of additional living shoreline solutions in the panhandle. This will be one of the first large-scale projects of its kind in the Apalachee area.

