



**Gulf Coast Counties and Parishes Meeting
Mobile County, Alabama
October 1, 2013
Minutes**

INTRODUCTIONS

The meeting was called to order by the de facto chair, Merceria Ludgood, Commissioner, Mobile County, Alabama at 10:00 a.m. Commissioner Ludgood gave brief remarks about the purpose of the meeting and then asked the participants to introduce themselves.

COUNTY AND PARISH ATTENDEES

Merceria Ludgood (Mobile County, AL), Sara Comander (Walton County, FL), Warren Yeager (Gulf County, FL), Jacques Molaison (Jefferson Parish, LA), Steve Gray (MAS), Chris Holley (FAC), Paul Naquin (St. Mary Parish, LA), Bob Shillinger (Monroe, FL), Lisa Tennyson (Monroe County, FL), Charlotte Randolph (Lafourche Parish, LA), George Neugent (Monroe County, FL), Theresa Hydrick (Harrison County, MS), Kelly Henderson (Harrison County, MS), David Rice (Monroe County, FL), Roman Gastesi, Jr. (Monroe County, FL), Michael Mangum (Jackson County, MS), Taylor Kirschemfeld (Escambia County, FL), Eric Poole (FAC), Deena Reppen (FAC), Jerry Carl (Mobile County, AL), Grover Robinson (Escambia County, FL), Connie Hudson (Mobile County, AL), Bill Meltou (Mobile County, AL), Tina Sanchez (Mobile County, AL), P.J. Hahn (Plaquemines Parish, LA), Marnie Winter (Jefferson Parish, LA), Connie Rockco (Harrison County, MS), Roland Dartez (Policy Jury Association of LA), Dennis Scott (Calcasieu Parish, LA)

OVERVIEW OF EXISTING NACo GROUPS

Julie Ufner – Associate Legislative Director, Environment, Energy and Land Use – National Association of Counties (NACo)

Ms. Ufner gave an overview of existing NACo caucuses, steering committees, ad hoc committees, and task forces within NACo in order to give a basis of understanding on how a new Gulf Coast group could be formed within NACo.

DISCUSSION – EXPECTATIONS OF A NACo CAUCUS

Discussions centered on how to craft a NACo Gulf Coast counties and parishes caucus including purpose, scope and goals; number of meetings, membership of caucus, leadership and/or decision-making structure. The counties and parishes worked on language for a draft set of potential bylaws. Ms. Ufner, NACo staff, promised to compile these ideas into a document and send it out to the group for comment.

Some of the discussion included:

- Potential names of the caucus
- Whether the group could form within NACo's Southern regional caucus
- Whether to keep the group small with only Gulf Coast county and parish representation or broaden it to include southern or coastal counties and parishes.
- Issues the groups would be focused – National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) and Oil Pollution Act (OPA). There was some discussion that there may be issues that are state specific, wondering if other states could weigh in, even if it didn't directly benefit from them and an acknowledgement if the caucus were under the NACo umbrella, the caucus would have to run policy issues through the steering committees before officially taking a position.
- Scope of the caucus – whether they would be a full service caucus with dedicated staff time or start small, doing work themselves when possible.
- Draft purpose of the caucus: *Promotion of clearer understanding of mutual problems of Gulf Coast counties and parishes and their citizens; single source of information, including advocacy, concerning county governments in the Gulf region to federal and state governments, all county officials, citizens, etc.*
- Leadership and/or decision-making structure: one person in each state would be named to the caucus leadership board, shared chairmanship that rotates
- Meetings for caucus: minimum of three meetings a year at NACo Annual and Legislative Conferences and state association to take turns hosting the meeting each year based on the current chair of caucus – MS, LA, FL, TX, AL to host in order
- There was some discussion about how to equalize voting since some states have more coastal counties than other states. One idea was to allow one vote per state to level the playing field.

SETTING UP A NACo CAUCUS

David Keen – Director, Finance – National Association of Counties (NACo)

Mr. Keen talked about the options, potential costs, how to get NACo recognition of a caucus, and next steps for the group. NACo has different levels of options based on needs of group, however the first step is to get the NACo Board of Directors to recognize the group. In order to request this, the group must create organizational bylaws.

After discussion, the group's consensus was that for the time being, they wanted to stay bare bones. They also are aiming to complete the draft bylaws by this December in order to ask the NACo Board of Directors to recognize them.

STATE UPDATES

Florida – RESTORE Act dollars flow directly to local governments (as opposed to most of the other RESTORE Act states). Florida's 23 counties are currently working on a plan, however, no funding has been released yet to complete plan. This is challenging, especially for smaller, more rural counties.

Florida also has concerns over U.S. Department of the Treasury [RESTORE Act proposed regulation](#) on how the dollars are allocated. Their 23 Gulf counties will meet on October 25 on proposed rules – they want to ensure that counties have some say in the process.

Florida urged other counties in other states to comment on the proposed Treasury RESTORE Act regulations. Comments are due by November 4. Florida Association of Counties (FAC) provided a summary of their concerns with the proposed regulations.

ACTION ITEM: *If counties and/or state associations plan to comment on Treasury's proposed rules, please share the letters with Julie Ufner, NACo staff, who will then share them with the larger Gulf Coast counties and parishes group.*

Louisiana – Louisiana parishes have limited input and authority under the RESTORE Act.

Lafourche Parish is going through the FEMA mapping process. They are prepping for a Louisiana Senate testimony at the end of October.

ACTION ITEM: *Lafourche Parish asked that if counties (and parishes) have actual examples of insurance rates going up drastically, to please share them with Charlotte Randolph or NACo staff.*

Louisiana has weekly conference calls on BW-12 on Fridays. Lafourche will send the information to the group.

One parish said they are working to develop a master plan in their county, however, the state is working on their own master plan with different goals.

Mississippi – State needs to determine which local projects will be funded through RESTORE Act funds. Some counties expressed concerns with NFIP Biggert-Waters changes, had additional concerns with wind insurance costs. General consensus was, people aren't going to want to build in areas where insurance is high.

After Hurricane Katrina, coastal zone designation expanded significantly inland, three coastal counties are now competing for dollars.

Last week, the state of Mississippi filed a lawsuit against FEMA to prevent the flood insurance rates to go up. The lawsuit asks that FEMA do an affordability study, as they promised, before rates are increased. The rate increases impact many low-lying areas where lower income populations live.

ACTION ITEM: *MS counties asked that other counties and parishes in other states ask their states to sign onto the MS suit. [Link](#) to story. Need link to suit.*

Alabama – Counties are also having challenges with wind insurance parameters. They are sending comments to the state so the state can convey concerns to FEMA. The counties are also trying to get information from the insurance companies on affordability. Within Alabama, the Gulf Coast Council is working on RESTORE Act plans.

General Discussion on NFIP Changes – Introduction of [H.R. 3218](#) by Representative Rich Nugent (FL) to delay increases in flood insurance rates until after FEMA completes a study on affordability and Congress addresses ways to make the rates affordable.

***ACTION ITEM:** Contact your member of Congress to sponsor/support H.R. 3218. If your county passes a resolution in support of H.R. 3218, please share with Julie Ufner, NACo Staff, and she will distribute it to the larger counties and parishes group.*

***ACTION ITEM:** Senator Shelby is not on board. Could someone contact him and educate why BW-12 is significant for counties and their citizens?*

There was some discussion about how counties are challenging FEMA elevation data. Is there any way to pool resources to hire the same survey to do the county studies? This led to a discussion about how counties who have gone through the mapping process can advise counties who are just starting the mapping process.

NEXT GULF COAST COUNTIES AND PARISHES MEETING

The next face-to-face Gulf Coast counties and parishes meeting will be scheduled for NACo's Legislative Conference (March 1-5, 2014) in Washington DC. It is likely the meeting will be scheduled for Sunday, March 2nd in the morning. NACo staff will confirm the date/time within the next month.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

Several groups who attended the meeting thanked the members for their engagement and interest in this complex issue.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Commissioner Ludgood adjourned the meeting at 2:30 p.m.