

Testimony for Shannon Hartsfield
U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
Field Hearing, August 13, 2013
Franklin County Courthouse Annex
Apalachicola, Florida

“The legal history of the water flows into Apalachicola Bay”

As a commercial fisherman who has over 30 years of experience on Apalachicola Bay and the Gulf region, I have worked in every sector of the industry except for the recent clamming aquaculture leases in Alligator Harbor. In 2011 I started to rebuild the Franklin County Seafood Workers Association as the newly elected President. With that I became the representative for the organization on the Apalachicola Chattahoochee Flint Stakeholders, where I learned how the Corp of Engineers allocates how much water is released below the Jim Woodruff Dam. In 2000, we began to notice the impacts of lower flows. Since then in 2007, we felt the first significant effects of the lack of fresh water and the abundance of predators in the bay. Prior to the last drought, the Corp reduced the freshwater flows resulting in the collapse of the oyster industry in Apalachicola Bay.

“The impacts these flows have had on the surrounding community and ecosystems”

The impact on the community from the failure of the seafood industry is the economic loss caused by the loss of income from seafood harvesters which has a ripple effect throughout the community. The lack of available jobs in our county leaves no safety net for those who once made their living solely on the bay. The impact of the \$1.4 million dollars pumped into the economy from the NEG shelling grant created new as well as sustained many existing jobs. With 1,800 saltwater product licenses in a county with 11,000 people it is not hard to do the math. Sixteen percent of our population has directly felt the negative financial impact of the fisheries failure. Add to that our dealers, our restaurants, grocery stores, and others that have experienced reduced sales due to the lack of income of those who rely on the bay for a living and you can see the problem probably impacts one third of our community members. Reduction of water flows has magnified the lack of product from Apalachicola Bay, reducing personal income and eliminating re-investment in the industry. Currently, people have had to leave their homes to find work, they have had to accept outside help to survive and many have had to find any way they can to make a living.

The ecosystem has suffered because the bay has a higher salinity rate, which increases the devastation caused by predators. Also with higher salinity, oyster growth is stunted. The natural flow of the river, with the proper fluctuation brings the nutrients that are needed for the bay to function. The reduced flows have kept the nutrients from reaching the bay where they are needed. We understand that this reduction in flow of the river has also affected the tupelo forest in Wewahitchka, greatly depressing the honey industry there.

"Thoughts on the State and Federal efforts to address the impacts of those flows"

I do not see any results from the political or legal processes that we have experienced. I would ask leaders to compromise on the wording required to get legislation passed and support minimum flows that will allow the bay to survive. In the process I think we are actually receiving less water over the last 13 years.

As a response to the oyster crisis that began in September, we are pleased with the support that the Gulf Coast Workforce Board has given with the state and federal funding. The seafood industry appreciates the grants that have funded bay restoration (putting shell back in the bay to provide the foundation for new spat) and the employment of the displaced seafood workers.

"Any short- and long- term solutions local, state and federal lawmakers should consider to balance water management priorities appropriately"

Support the efforts of the ACF Stakeholders as they work to find solutions to the equitable sharing of water resources in the basin.

Pass legislation which fairly distributes water along the ACF system.

It seems that our government gives a lot of support to our farmers and those who provide food for Americans. We would like to have that same level of support for our seafood harvesting industry. We know that American seafood is far safer to eat than those being imported from other countries. We hope that you will protect it.

Prepared on this day, 9th day of August, 2013 as my sworn testimony and respectfully submitted,



Shannon Hartsfield
Franklin County Seafood workers Association, President
SMARRT, Founding Member

Also, I represent the seafood industry on ACF Stakeholders

Contact information:
376 State Street
Eastpoint, Florida 32328
850-653-5190
shannonaber@yahoo.com