

Board of County Commissioners

Agenda Request

Date of Meeting: March 1, 2010

Date Submitted: February 19, 2010

To: Honorable Chairman and Members of the Board

From: Benjamin H. Pingree, County Administrator
Jennifer Langston, Special Projects Coordinator

Subject: Request Board Approval of a Resolution in Support of Wakulla County's Seafood Industry Workers

Statement of Issue:

This agenda item requests Board Approval of a Resolution in Support of Wakulla County's Seafood Industry Workers (Attachment #1).

Background:

The Wakulla County Board of County Commissioners has expressed concern for the Wakulla County Seafood Industry Workers that are currently facing economic hardship due to above-normal levels of rainfall and freezing conditions. Senator Lawson has requested the adoption a formal resolution in support of seafood industry workers residing in Wakulla County

Apalachicola Bay is an oyster harvesting area of significant regional concern. Many oystermen who harvest in Apalachicola Bay reside in Wakulla County. The oystermen have been substantially impacted as a result of the closure of the Bay to harvesting for significant periods of time in December 2009 and January 2010 by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (DACS), Division of Aquaculture.

On January 29, 2010 the Franklin County Board of County Commissioners held an emergency meeting during which a local state of economic emergency was declared, due to the continuing closure of Apalachicola Bay. In addition to this declaration, a Resolution of Assistance was passed to seek assistance from the DACS. The resolution asked DACS to re-direct Emergency Disaster Assistance Recovery Program Funds to re-shelling and re-seeding programs in Apalachicola Bay, a program operated by the Division of Aquaculture in the DACS.

Re-shelling and re-seeding programs utilize the depositing of processed oyster shells on depleted oyster reefs and suitable bay environments in order to mitigate resource losses, enhance oyster productivity, and contribute to the economic well-being of the oyster industry. Florida's re-shelling program is located in Apalachicola Bay and is responsible for re-seeding 250,000 bushels of shucked shells every year since 1999, and over 10 million bushels since the beginning of the program.

In addition to the requests made by Franklin County, the Big Bend Coalition of Organizations Active in Disaster (BBCOAD) has undertaken community-based efforts to support the oystermen significantly impacted by the closure of Apalachicola Bay. As of February 5, 2010, the BBCOAD and twelve other community organizations have been assisting oystermen with financial assistance, food stamp applications and prescription medication assistance.

Analysis:

On February 9, 2010, during the Local Congressional Delegation visit to Wakulla County, the Delegation was made aware of the Board's interest in supporting their seafood industry workers during economic hardship. Senator Lawson requested a formal Resolution of Support.

Since that time, staff has contacted DACS to inquire about providing funding assistance to seafood industry workers in Wakulla County. However, funding assistance is not currently available from DACS. DACS staff communicated that they would work with Wakulla County to explore alternative options for relief. Staff and the Extension office recently met to discuss additional relief options and will continue to do so.

Should the Board approve the resolution; a copy will be forwarded to the State to serve as official notification of assistance for seafood industry workers being requested by Wakulla County.

Options:

1. Adopt the Resolution in Support of Wakulla County's Seafood Industry Workers.
2. Do Not Adopt the Resolution in Support of Wakulla County's Seafood Industry Workers.
3. Board Direction.

Recommendation:

Option #1

Attachment(s):

1. Resolution in Support of Wakulla County's Seafood Industry Workers