

TOWN COUNCIL

STAFF REPORT

Projects and Watershed Resilience Department



MEETING DATE:	May 9, 2023
PROJECT:	May River Watershed Action Plan Advisory Committee (WAPAC) Recommendation to Update the 2004 "A Baseline Assessment of Environmental and Biological Conditions in the May River, Beaufort County, South Carolina" (Fiscal Impact – \$155,000)
PROJECT MANAGER:	Kimberly Washok-Jones, Director of Projects and Watershed Resilience

REQUEST: The May River Watershed Action Plan Advisory Committee (WAPAC) requests Town Council consider a recommendation to update the 2004 study "A Baseline Assessment of Environmental and Biological Conditions in the May River, Beaufort County, South Carolina" (henceforth Baseline Assessment) as outlined in the attached Memorandum (Attachment 1).

The total cost to update the Baseline Assessment is \$155,000. Staff has proposed the Consolidated Municipal Budget for Fiscal Year 2024 (FY24) include the cost to update the Baseline Assessment.

BACKGROUND: The Town of Bluffton commissioned the Marine Resources Research Institute of the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR), the United States Geological Service (USGS), and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Center for Coastal Environmental Health and Biomolecular Research (NOAA-CCEHBR) to undertake a multidisciplinary study of the May River. The study was conducted to assess the water, sediment, and biological quality of the entire riverine system in 2002-2003 and provide a comprehensive database of conditions prior to any major development activities in the watershed. In 2004, a final report was delivered to the Town.

At the February 10, 2022 meeting, WAPAC voted to recommend a list of Strategic Plan priorities for Town Council's consideration to include in the Strategic Plan FY 2023-2024. Staff provided Town Council with a Memo summarizing these recommendations at the February 15, 2022 Town Council Strategic Planning Workshop. Council agreed to add the Memo of WAPAC's recommendations into the FY 2023-2024 Strategic Plan and will consider each recommendation once prioritized and fully developed by WAPAC.

At the June 23, 2022, WAPAC meeting, WAPAC Strategic Plan Priority 2 was identified as: Update assessments of current environmental health status of the Town's watersheds compared to historical conditions to inform management opportunities. Thus, WAPAC's recommendation is to update the 2004 report "A Baseline Assessment of Environmental and Biological Conditions in the May River, Beaufort County, South Carolina" to compare current environmental and biological conditions to the baseline.

At the April 27, 2023, WAPAC meeting, the committee recommended Town Council update the 2004 Baseline Assessment as outlined in the attached Memorandum (Attachment 1).

NEXT STEPS:

- Town Council considers WAPAC's recommendation defined in the attached Memorandum - "Recommendation to Update the 2004 Baseline Assessment of Environmental and Biological Conditions in the May River as part of the Town's Fiscal Year 2024 (FY24) Budget."
- In FY23: Town Council considers including \$155,000 for the Baseline Assessment Update in the FY24 Consolidated Municipal Budget.
- In FY24: Town Council considers authorizing the Town Manager to execute a proposed contract with SCDNR to conduct work for the Baseline Assessment Update.

SUMMARY: This project originated from the 2023-2024 Strategic Plan and WAPAC recommendations. It is supportive of the following guiding principles of the Town:

- May River & Surrounding Rivers and Watersheds Guiding Principle #1. Support initiatives, such as the May River Watershed Action Plan, to improve water quality of the May, Okatie/Colleton and New Rivers and their watersheds.
- May River & Surrounding Rivers and Watersheds Guiding Principle #2. Seek collaboration and partnerships that protect and improve the May, Okatie/Colleton and New Rivers and their watershed.

Consistent with these Guiding Principles, WAPAC is recommending Town Council include \$155,000 in the FY24 Consolidated Municipal Budget to conduct the Baseline Assessment

ATTACHMENTS:

1. WAPAC Memorandum "Recommendation to Update the 2004 Baseline Assessment of Environmental and Biological Conditions in the May River as part of the Town's Fiscal Year 2024 (FY24) Budget."
2. Proposed Motion