



MEMORANDUM

TO: Town Council

FROM: Stan Rogers, Chair, May River Watershed Action Plan Advisory Committee (WAPAC)

RE: WAPAC 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

DATE: APRIL 27, 2023

CC: Stephen Steese, Town Manager
Heather Colin, Assistant Town Manager
Kim Washok-Jones, Director of Projects & Watershed Resilience
Bill Baugher, Watershed Management Division Manager
Beth Lewis, Water Quality Program Administrator

REQUEST:

The WAPAC recommends that Town Council include in the FY24 budget an update to the 2004 report "A Baseline Assessment of Environmental and Biological Conditions in the May River, Beaufort County, South Carolina" completed by the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR), the U.S. Geological Survey, South Carolina District (USGS), and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

BACKGROUND:

The Town of Bluffton commissioned the Marine Resources Research Institute of the SCDNR, the USGS, and NOAA'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 2002-03 and provide a comprehensive database of these conditions prior to any major development activities in the watershed.

It has been almost 20 years since this study was conducted. The May River is designated an Outstanding Resource Waters (ORW), however in 2009 shellfish harvesting was restricted. It is imperative that the Town update this study in FY24 and on a more frequent basis going forward.

This is also a recommendation from Blueprint Bluffton Section R2.11.

At the February 10, 2022, WAPAC meeting, WAPAC unanimously voted to recommend a list of Strategic Plan priorities. WAPAC Strategic Plan Priority Two (2), is to update the assessments of current environmental health status of the Town's May River watershed compared to historical conditions which will help inform management opportunities, e.g. 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.