The mission of the Bay County Chamber of Commerce is to create superior value for all chamber members large and small, cultivate economic and personal development, promote and protect a competitive system of business, be a community leader, while embracing Bay County’s opportunities and challenges.
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Local and State Agenda
FY 2015 Bay County Chamber of Commerce  
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Gulf of Mexico Restoration Funding  

**Action Requested/Needed**  
As an advocate of the original RESTORE Act, the Chamber wholeheartedly supports the County Commissioners and the State of Florida in obtaining and distributing the settlement delegated to Bay County for economic development and environmental restoration. The Chamber will participate in the local RESTORE process, providing comment and potentially proposing projects.

The Chamber will also support efforts to obtain Pot 3 funds for Bay County’s economic and environmental projects.

The Chamber recognizes the importance of the Triumph Gulf Coast Board established by Florida’s Gulf Coast Economic Corridor Act. The Chamber will act to ensure the Gulf Coast Economic Corridor Act is implemented and will participate in the activities of the Triumph Gulf Coast Board.

**Issue**  
As a result of the Deepwater Horizon disaster, various sources of funds are available for gulf coast environmental and economic restoration. Some of these funds are reserved for Bay County; the majority is not. Bay County has the opportunity to influence how many of these funds are spent.

The RESTORE Act, signed in July of 2012, has the potential to provide 3.6 to 14 billion dollars for Gulf of Mexico environmental and economic restoration. This could lead to Bay County directly receiving 28 to 112 million dollars. The amount of money from BP and how it will be allocated depends on the court case or final settlement with BP. In addition, Bay County will receive 6.3 million dollars from a settlement that has been reached with Transocean.

The State of Florida has filed an economic damages claim against BP and Halliburton, and estimates the damages at about 5 billion dollars. The 2013 FL Legislature passed the Gulf Coast Economic Corridor Act, which reserves 75 percent of the funds from the lawsuit for the eight Disproportionately Affected Counties along Florida’s gulf coast, from Escambia to Wakulla. The legislation created Triumph Gulf Coast, Inc., a nonprofit corporation, to administer and invest the Recovery Fund, and to decide which projects to fund. The funds will be used for economic development projects that will give the best return on investment.
**Current Status**

**RESTORE funds**

The second phase of the federal BP Deepwater Horizon trial has ended. The third phase will begin in January 2015. Depending on the court case or a settlement, Bay County may directly receive between 28 and 112 million dollars to utilize for environmental, economic, and job-creating projects. If used wisely, this money could greatly aid in the economic development and diversification of Bay County.

In January 2014, the Bay County Board of County Commissioners established the RESTORE Act Advisory Committee to recommend projects to be funded with Bay County’s share of RESTORE Act funds (Pot 1) and to make recommendations about projects to be funded by other sources. In addition to representatives from Bay County Economic Development Alliance, Port Panama City, CareerSource Gulf Coast and Florida State University Panama City, each County Commissioner appointed a representative to the committee (http://co.bay.fl.us/restore/index.php).

In September 2014, the Commission approved goals and objectives for the county’s RESTORE program. The Committee accepted pre-proposals for projects through November 3, 2014. Proposals will be evaluated, and eventually the Committee will recommend projects to be funded with the county’s $6.3 million dollars from the Transocean settlement. The Commission makes the decision on which projects to fund. Funds are available to the County through a grant program established by the U.S. Department of the Treasury. Public comment is encouraged throughout the process.

The Gulf Consortium, 23 Florida gulf coastal counties and six ex-officio members, is preparing a State Expenditure Plan for the RESTORE Spill Impact Allocation funds (Pot 3). Bay County is a member of the Consortium. Both environmental and economic development projects are eligible. The Governor will review the plan.

**Triumph Gulf Coast**

The state’s economic damages lawsuit will not proceed until the BP Deepwater Horizon trial is complete. The Triumph board has not been active.
FY 2015 Bay County Chamber of Commerce
Local and State Legislative Agenda Item

Promoting Economic Development through Airport Capital Projects

Action Requested/Needed
We are requesting your support for the creation of an aerospace and aviation hub at the Northwest Florida Beaches International Airport. Once we have a major job creation project that is prepared to make a commitment to locate at the airport, we will be seeking further legislative support for the appropriate incentives, grant funding and financing tools in order to secure the project.

Issue
Bay County public and private sector leaders have a vision to establish an aviation and aerospace hub at the Northwest Florida Beaches International Airport for economic development purposes. In order to bring this vision to life, certain infrastructural improvements must be realized. Hangars, ramps, additional taxiways and an aerospace training center are required on site to accommodate the location of new and expanding companies and their resultant job creation and economic impact.

Current Status
NWFL Beaches International Airport (ECP) opened in May 2010 on an undeveloped site and is without some of the infrastructural assets that older airports have established over time. However, this clean slate provides the opportunity for the development of modern, state of the art facilities. Many of the state and federal programs that fund infrastructure for economic development projects are tied to a business making a commitment to locate at the airport and create jobs at high wages.

In economic development where businesses have a plethora of options regarding locations for their facilities, many will eliminate those communities that do not have the necessary assets in place to accommodate their operation. This can often result in a chicken and egg cycle.

Recently, Edge Aerodynamix, Inc, announced that they were going to make Bay County their World Headquarters and they were going to locate both on the airport and in other locations in Bay County. This was cooperative effort by the entire community and the turning point was the addition of a ramp that could be utilized by Edge for their operation.

Over the past 18 months, more than a dozen qualified aviation and aerospace companies have considered the airport as a location for their economic development project, but have located elsewhere in communities such as Dothan, Alabama. We believe there are several more of those projects that would ultimately locate at the airport, if the necessary infrastructure was in place.
Action Requested/Needed
Requesting that the Bay County Legislative Delegation coordinate with Bay County and key local stakeholders on any legislation impacting Florida’s Sector Planning statutes and any related growth management/public infrastructure provisions that may impact future changes to the West Bay Sector Plan.

Issue
The West Bay Sector Plan is a comprehensive, long-range land use plan that directs and balances growth and environmental-resource protection on approximately 75,000 acres of land surrounding West Bay. An expansion and update of the West Bay Sector Plan is being proposed which will add approximately 46,192 acres of land to the immediate west of the West Bay Sector Plan and an active adult, retirement community is being planned for a significant portion of the West Bay Sector Plan, including the expansion area.

Current Status
Sector Planning is a preferred method of planning large scale areas while balancing economic development with environmental and other community goals.

An active adult/retirement community will generate positive economic activity with minimal impact on community facilities such as schools and it will be an excellent complement to the existing military and tourism components in the current local economy.

The expansion of the West Bay Sector Plan will facilitate the coordinated planning and construction of regional infrastructure like the West Bay Parkway from US 98 in Walton County to SR 77 in Bay County.

Community open houses were held in December 2013 and early 2014 to inform the public and obtain their input on the expansion and update of the West Bay Sector Plan.

The formal application was submitted in April 2014, approved by the Bay County Commission and is now with the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity for analysis.
FY 2015 Bay County Chamber of Commerce
Local and State Legislative Agenda Item

Infrastructure: State Road 390

**Action Requested/Needed**
The Bay County Chamber of Commerce urges the state legislature to coordinate with FDOT on the approval of County Road 390 (CR 390) as a SIS roadway, FDOT take ownership of the CR 390 corridor and approve funding for the expansion of the roadway's typical section. Further, the Chamber continues to support the full funding of the 390 Corridor and encourages the adoption of state and federal funds to finance the projects should funding become available. This expansion of this roadway would allow for the continuity of the Port and its inland intermodal park as well as expedite both the transport of goods around the congested corridors of the community, contributing to the economic development of Bay County. Subsequently, this expansion would also increase the capacity allowed for hurricane evacuation.

**Issue**
While the funding is in place for the expansion (multi-laning) of State Road 390 (SR 390), which is owned by the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT); County Road 390 which is owned by Bay County is not included in the long range plan for FDOT. Portions of the County's corridor are heavily traveled and currently have a failing level of service. This condition may worsen as development along this corridor increases. Additionally, CR 390 will be inconsistent with the roadway segments to which it connects, SR 77, SR 231 and SR 390. These roadways include or will include four lane typical sections and six lane typical sections (respectively). Additionally this corridor (portion owned by Bay County) is inconsistent with the highway 390 corridor as it is not categorized as a Strategic Intermodal System (SIS). "The Strategic Intermodal System (SIS) was established in 2003 to enhance Florida’s economic competitiveness by focusing state resources on the transportation facilities most critical for statewide and interregional travel. The SIS is a statewide network of high priority transportation facilities, including the state’s largest and most significant commercial service airports, spaceports, deepwater seaports, freight rail terminals, passenger rail and intercity bus terminals, rail corridors, waterways and highways. These facilities are the workhorses of Florida’s transportation system. They carry more than 99 percent of all commercial air passengers and cargo, virtually all waterborne freight and cruise passengers, nearly all rail freight and 89 percent of all interregional rail and bus passengers. They also account for more than 70 percent of all truck traffic and 55 percent of total traffic on the State Highway System. It is FDOT’s goal to apply 75% of its discretionary funding to SIS categorized roads." [Prioritizing Florida's Highway Investments 2012-2013]. The sections at either end of the county's corridor, SR 390, SR 77 and US Highway 231, are categorized as part of the SIS, either as a SIS corridor or a SIS emerging connector. It is an adopted practice for transportation projects to be consistent in the expansion of corridors and road projects. To be consistent with
standard practice, this portion of CR 390 requires re-categorization as an SIS corridor as well as expanding its typical section. Additionally, CR 390 requires expansion or congestion may increase and impacts to economic development may occur.

**Current Status**

The multi-laning of SR 390, known as the SR 390 Corridor by FDOT, encompasses three separate projects, are included in the FDOT's tentative five work year plan for 2015-2019. The project is separated into three distinct projects and these are detailed below:

<table>
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<th>Limits</th>
<th>Work Program Year and Work Proposed (Cost in Thousands)</th>
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<tr>
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<td>2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SR 368 (23rd Street) to CR 2312 (Baldwin Ave)</td>
<td>ROW (10,428)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CR 2312 to Jenks Ave</td>
<td>ROW (3,053)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jenks Ave to SR 77</td>
<td>ROW (533)</td>
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</tbody>
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ROW = Right-of-Way Acquisition  
ENV = Environmental Study  
CST = Construction

As detailed in the included table (see above), the widening of the SR 390 corridor should be completed in 2019. Bay County has petitioned that the CR 390 corridor be designated a Strategic Intermodal System (SIS) and has requested that FDOT take ownership of the corridor from SR 77 to SR 75 (U.S Hwy 231). By adopting the SIS designation for CR 390, additional funding may be utilized to widen the existing roadway.
FY 2015 Bay County Chamber of Commerce
Local and State Legislative Agenda Item

Transportation Priorities for Bay County Chamber

**Action Requested/Needed**
Request that the Bay County Transportation Planning Organization and the Florida Department of Transportation acknowledge the following projects as priorities for the Bay County Chamber of Commerce:

1. FDOT Item-Segment 2178754, SR 390 (St Andrews Blvd), widen to 6 lanes from Jenks Av to SR 77
2. FDOT Item-Segment 2179102, US 231, widen to 6 lanes from US 98 to SR 20.
3. CR_SR 389 (East Ave), widen to 4 lanes between Baldwin Rd and Sherman Ave
4. FDOT Item-Segment 4244643, West Bay Parkway (HWY 388), widen to 4 lanes between SR 79 and SR 77
5. US 98/Panama City Beach Parkway (Back Beach Rd), widen to 6 lanes between Mandy Lane and Thomas Drive intersection

These projects would allow for the continuity of the Northwest Florida Beaches International Airport, the West Bay Sector Plan, the Port and its inland intermodal park, as well as expedite both the transport of goods around the congested corridors of the community, contributing to the economic development of Bay County. Subsequently, this expansion would also increase the capacity allowed for hurricane evacuation.
FY 2015 Bay County Chamber of Commerce
State Legislative Agenda Item

State Fisheries Legislation

Actions Requested
The first action requested is to go forward with the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) plan to collect recreational harvest data in Florida and implement our own research for stock assessments in Florida. Secondly, is to continue to go forward building a state-of-the-art artificial reef system throughout Florida. Lastly, the Chamber urges the state legislators and our Governor to continue supporting the vast majority of stakeholders, residents and tourists by advocating the reallocation toward Recreational anglers in the Gulf Council’s Amendment 28 and for Regional Management of our recreational gulf fishery in Amendment 39.

Issue
The FWC needs more discretion and more control over its fisheries in order to better serve its citizens and tourism needs as they protect our natural resources.

Current Status
Under current policy, the FWC must follow the limits and regulations set by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). Each year as key species’ annual catch limits are set by the federal government, Florida is asked to comply with the national season length and bag limits, which are not applicable to the state and greatly hurt Florida’s anglers and economy.

Florida has an opportunity to push Amendment 39 that is before the Council now. This measure will take Florida's allocation of Red Snapper for state and federal waters and allow the FWC to impose proper regulations, and collect, survey and harvest data from anglers through its new Gulf Reef Fish Survey. It will enable FWC to submit their own research to the NOAA Science Center for use in their gulf stock assessments.

The FWC has an excellent record in rebuilding and protecting species of fish and other wildlife within the state, all while shielding its citizens from economic hardship. However, Florida has not been able to do this in recent years due to the restrictions of federal regulation and recent legislation that is unrepresentative of the state’s interests. For example, in 2008 the NMFS imposed a regulation banning federally permitted citizens from fishing in state waters while federal waters were closed (Amendment 30B to the Fishery Management Plan). As a result, Florida’s and the Gulf’s for-hire industries have been trying to survive with shorter seasons, but many jobs have been lost. This is a common example of Florida’s rocky relationship with the NMFS, in which Florida is forced to follow questionable regulations or risk shortening their anglers’ fishing seasons, and having reduced access to a thriving fishery.

Amendment 28, another proposed change in the NOAA fishery management plan for anglers, is referred to as the 'rereallocation' amendment, proposing options to change the allocation between
commercial and recreational sectors. According to the Magnuson-Stevens Acts' National Standard 1 guideline, NOAA is to 'prevent overfishing while achieving, on a continuing basis, the optimum yield from each fishery for the United States fishing industry'. While National Standard 2 guideline is 'Conservation and management shall be based on the best scientific information available'. The most recent economic studies presented to the Gulf Council confirm the present allocation's disparity toward the recreational sector. Option 5 is the preferred option of the Council, changing any increase in the current allocation between sectors to 25% commercial and 75% recreational. With recent moves toward catch shares and the continuing push to reduce access to recreational anglers, the economic study supports a more generous change, possibly 100%, of the increase in the current allocation going to the recreational sector.

The NMFS and federal agencies affect legislation on a state level, hindering Florida’s ability to make the best decisions in the interests of both the fishing industry and the environment.

In August, the 2012 Gulf Council met on the issue of Sector Separation and was going to vote according to public comments received on the issue. There was an overwhelming response to opposing catch shares and sector separation. All governors across the Gulf Coast region had previously written letters opposing catch shares, in addition to 4,000 written comments sent in and public comments from the stakeholders. Of all the comments presented at the Gulf Council meeting, more than 95% opposed sector separation and catch shares. The vote was tabled.

The Gulf Council continued to implement even more strict regulations on this growing fishery and environmental groups lobbied hard to those charter and headboat operators who were so desperate for regulatory relief. Some of them later relented in the end, with about 200 of the 1250 for-hire operators opting to agree to sector separation and catch shares for the Recreational Sector. In the meantime, all Gulf State agencies voted against the measure of Sector Separation (Amendment 40) at the October, 2014 meeting. In the final vote, the three Florida council members did not vote with the FWC or in favor of the Governor’s request and Amendment 40 was passed with a 3 year sunset provision.

With Florida being almost surrounded by water, the state has much invested in its ability to access and preserve our fisheries and fishery habitat. Florida’s solution would advocate growing the fisheries through artificial reefs rather than limiting who can fish. Growing the fishery to meet the demands of a growing recreational angling public makes good economic and environmental sense for Florida.

We want to thank the FWC and our legislators who approved the actions to go forward with the new Florida Gulf Reef Fish Survey.
Federal Agenda
Opposition to Offshore Drilling in Federal Waters off the Gulf of Mexico

Action Requested/Needed
As the issue to expand into protected areas comes up every year, the Bay County Chamber of Commerce continues to strongly oppose any action expanding drilling in the Gulf of Mexico within or east of the Military Mission Line, as it would disrupt the planning area already established by the Department of Interior’s Mineral Management Services and the Department of Defense. The Chamber requests the moratorium established in the Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act be respected as movements are underway to expand offshore drilling in the Gulf of Mexico.

Issue
Considering increasing attention paid to expanding offshore drilling in the Eastern Gulf of Mexico, there is concern the federal government will overturn the moratorium established by the Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act of 2006. The military testing and training areas in the Gulf of Mexico, both above and below the surface, could be threatened.

Current Status
The oil industry has over 7,700 leases on the Continental Shelf, but only about 20% are active. It is imperative we avoid any further drilling in areas that would threaten the Military Mission Line, which is critical to Department of Defense testing and training.

Currently, all the area east of the Military Mission Line is part of the Eastern Gulf of Mexico Planning Area and is under a special protective lease by the federal government known as a moratorium. This lease, established in the Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act of 2006 (GOMESA), holds that offshore drilling should be prohibited in these areas until 2022. The Department of Interior proposed drilling plan for 2012-2017 respects the boundaries established by GOMESA. Over 50 counties, cities, chambers, and other local organizations in the state of Florida have advocated against drilling within those boundaries.
Reforming the Magnuson-Stevens Act and Catch Share Program

Actions Needed/Requested:
The Magnuson-Stevens Act is approaching reauthorization. It is imperative that vital changes are made in order to prevent further depletion of participants in the fishing industries. The Hastings Bill (H.R. 4742) in the House covers the measures that will protect the fishery while causing less economic harm to the industry. Several other items should be accomplished:

- Rescind the non-scientific rebuilding deadlines, as long as the fishery is trending toward the rebuilding goals, so that excess regulations are averted.
- No intersector trading between commercial and recreational sectors, not for-hire and private angler sectors. According to economic studies, the economically designated as “best for the Nation”, should be updated every 4 years in order to determine quota allocations to the sectors.
- Referendums must be conducted on all the Amendments or changes in the current regulations by including ALL permit holders, regardless of catch history or quota allocation.
- Benchmark stock assessments should be assessed every 3 years on key economic species in the Southeast Region to include Gag Grouper, Red Grouper, Red Snapper and Amberjack.
- A fair referendum system must be designed for Amendments affecting the private anglers, or their sectors, so they may be included in decision-making on fish tags, privatization of their fishery and other access-reducing measures. Notices to private anglers need to be more widespread.
- Stop further catch share programs.

Issue
The reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Act of 2007 increased the federal government’s control over fisheries management. Environmental groups instrumental in passing extreme measures in the Act are pushing to limit access to Florida fisheries for commercial and recreational anglers through the Act and catch shares programs. The catch shares program privatizes Florida’s and the Gulf’s natural fisheries and causes job losses among fishermen and related industries.

Current Status
The Magnuson-Stevens Act of 2007 was enacted to consolidate fisheries control over territorial waters and fish stocks. It established eight regional councils, which in 2009, through the organization of the Catch Shares Task Force, are charged with implementing catch shares. The program-works similar to a cap-and-trade system, where a limited amount of fishing permits are issued and businesses can trade access to territorial waters. The catch share program is based on
the idea that overfishing is caused by an overabundance of fishing vessels, and aims to reduce overcapacity rather than focusing on rebuilding and expanding existing fisheries. The current Secretary of Commerce and the NOAA Administrator have upheld that the catch share program is the solution to reducing this perceived overcapacity and is top priority for NOAA. However, the catch share program fails to either rebuild the affected fisheries or improve data collection for fishery managers. Rather, it has resulted in drastically reducing the number of fishing vessels.

Recreational Fishing in the Gulf is a $16.5 billion industry; it is almost $12 billion in Florida alone. Food and Water Watch, an environmental watch-dog organization, has thoroughly documented catch share programs both internationally and domestically, and has found them to be harmful to fishermen, the environment, and the economy. All the while the key species in the Gulf are being singled out for this program. Red Snapper, has grown from 15 million fish, 2 pounds or greater (avg size 2 pounds), to 30 million fish, 5-7 pound average. This relates to a growth from 30 million pounds of Red Snapper to a minimum of 120 million pounds of the species, 2 pounds each or greater. Meanwhile, anglers' access has continued to decrease substantially.

Commercial fishermen have been hit hard by their catch share program in the Gulf. In 2010 a fisherman could get $3.75 per pound for Red Snapper, while the cost to buy a permanent share was four times more, permit shares are now $30-35. Most small scale fishermen simply cannot afford to buy permanent shares, while large shareholders continue to buy excess shares as people drop out of the industry. This disadvantages small-scale fishermen who must lease shares from the large shareholders at inflated prices, reducing their profit margins significantly.

As of 2010 the number of permit holders dropped to 425, a reduction in the fleet of 44%. This translates into job losses between 1,000 and 1,700. The large 16 shareholders who own over 90% of the Gulf's Red Snapper commercial quota, benefited from the catch share program and the program is unrepresentative of all shareholders. Only 167 of 800 permit holders were allowed to vote due to the tiered system that was enacted. Powerful advocates for the catch share program are affluent enough to fund front groups that lobby extensively for expanding the program. For example, the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF), Ocean Conservancy, National Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and the Walton Family Foundation mobilize and fund groups that state they speak on behalf of all fishermen and lobby on Capitol Hill for support of funding and expanding the catch share program. Fewer than 10% of fishermen in the Gulf are associated with these front groups. Furthermore, local fishermen cannot afford regular trips to Washington D.C., to Council meetings in the Gulf States, and to the advisory panel meetings in Tampa to defend their business and industry.

The Gulf Council, having recently passed the Sector Separation Amendment 40 which divides the Gulf's recreational sector between for-hire and private anglers, is certain to embolden the advocates of this economically harmful policy.
{END OF REPORT}