

Title: Building a multi-partner Estuarine Restoration Team in the Big Bend Region: Big BERT

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Abstract: Statewide reports have documented the loss of oyster reefs, seagrass beds, and landward migration of salt marshes in the Big Bend region, one of the most undeveloped coastlines in Florida (and the United States). However, the area receives less scientific and public attention compared to other coastlines in Florida. Our goal was to build a multi-partner coordination team to establish a vision for the larger Big Bend region and facilitate collaborative, proactive conservation action. We solicited feedback for launching an Estuarine Restoration Team (ERT) which are informal groups of practitioners and habitat managers planning and implementing estuarine restoration in 5 regions around Florida. We invited one member per affiliated organization to serve on a steering committee to help with planning, organizing, and collaborating on this initiative. With support for a Big Bend Estuarine Restoration Team (Big BERT), the steering committee assisted in establishing an operational guidance document that outlines the goals and structure and helped plan engagement with Big BERT partners. The larger Big BERT membership will be open to anyone wanting to participate and targeted stakeholder groups have been engaged. The co-leads facilitated 3 steering committee meetings, utilized surveys and interviews, launched a google group (list serv) for information sharing, and are planning an annual meeting this summer.