

Narragansett Bay Estuary Program
Blackstone Needs Assessment Meeting #1
Cumberland Public Library
1464 Diamond Hill Road, Cumberland, RI
December 11, 2019
10:00 am to 12:00pm

MEETING NOTES

ATTENDEES

Laura Blake, Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP)—via phone
Peter Coffin, Blackstone River Coalition
Pieter de Jong, Blackstone River Coalition
Paige Dolci, Mass Audubon
Marina Flannery, Blackstone Valley Tourism Council
Richard Friesner, New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission (NEIWGCC)
Jim Plasse, Blackstone River Watershed Association
Donna Williams, Blackstone Heritage Corridor
Julia Bancroft, Narragansett Bay Estuary Program (NBEP)
Mike Gerel, NBEP

INTRODUCTION

Mike Gerel welcomed the group and asked everyone to introduce themselves. He walked through today's agenda, which he noted will be heavy on getting initial feedback to kick-off this project. Later today will collect names of other organizations and people that should join this core group at future meetings to ensure we are inclusive of all who work on conservation issues in the region and have interest in participating.

WHY ARE WE HERE TODAY?

Mike next provided a short overview of the origins of this project. The idea to complete a needs assessment for the Blackstone River Watershed arose from the workshop that NBEP used in April 2019 titled, *The Blackstone River—Past, Present, and Future* and subsequent discussions with local stakeholders. While there are problems in the watershed and funding is available through a variety of state and federal programs that could address them, identification and prioritization of specific needs and resulting creation of pre-conditions to move from 'problem to solution' was viewed as a significant barrier to progress in the region.

Based on this information, Mike noted that he was able to reallocate some existing NBEP SNEP funding to bring local stakeholders together over at least (6) six meetings to complete a comprehensive needs assessment for the watershed. The goal is to enable local interests to identify and prioritize needs which, once addressed, can help accelerate linked environmental and socioeconomic recovery in the watershed. He also noted that NBEP has budgeted some of the funds to offer small capacity grants (\$1,000-\$5,000) to participants who are willing to complete specific support tasks for the project. Examples of support tasks included preparation for

meetings, outreach to new participants, hosting of public meetings, taking meetings notes, and drafting or editing written materials. Mike also stated that money is also set aside to hire consultants to create pre-project support documents (e.g., feasibility study, site assessment, 30% design) that can advance at least two on-the-ground projects called out in the assessment. He said the final deliverables for the project include materials from each meeting, a consensus needs assessment, and two project support documents.

Mike noted that the long-term goal is to create tools that empowers greater local coordination, prioritization, and implementation of actions that enhance the health and resilience of the Blackstone. He closed by saying that SNEP is excited about this project, viewing it as (1) a way to identify more high quality projects for funding in the watershed, and (2) a template for generating a consistent pipeline of projects and entities that can executive and maintain them in other watersheds in the SNEP region.

Peter Coffin inquired as to the timeline for the project. Mike noted that the project must be complete by March 31, 2021. Pieter de Jong asked when capacity funds would be available and who would be eligible. Mike responded that NBEP would like to solicit support and make awards around the next meeting of this group. He stated that any nonprofit, municipality, or other entity that can accept outside funding and is willing to commit to complete specific tasks Mike added that we are not going to pay folks just to attend meetings, although that will be perquisite for funding, but will compensate those that complete certain activities that support the effort. He promised to share more information on the capacity funding soon.

NEEDS BRAINSTORM

Julia Bancroft led the group in an interactive brainstorm activity, asking meeting participants to identify water, wildlife, and quality of life needs at the site, municipality, and regional scales. The goal of this activity was to tease out initial thoughts, capture those that stood out, and inform future meetings. The raw results of the exercise are provided in Table 1. Table 2 provides the most common needs identified.

Table 1: Blackstone Needs–Raw Results

Category	Site-Specific (Hyperlocal)	Municipality (Local)	Regional (Entire Watershed)
WATER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More LID (e.g., rain gardens) as educational opportunities • Failing septic along streams • Increase public river site access • Trash and continual pollution (e.g., Pawtucket Festival Pier) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Municipal capacity to pursue existing project funding (grant writing) • Improved local stormwater ordinance/manual compliance • Support adoption of Community Preservation Act (e.g., Worcester, Shrewsbury, Millbury) • Provide waterway signs to municipalities for installation at all road crossings • Seek sustainable waterfront access • Support local river cleanups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Water Quality</u>–Regional MS4/SMW and septic program to assist local implementation and long-term funding for action • <u>Watershed Coordination</u>–Strengthen network of those who care for Blackstone in region (bi-state), bring in entities have more diversity (e.g., environmental justice [EJ]), share resources across boundaries, and publicize the programs and “good things” happening • <u>Monitoring</u>–Support and sustain citizen water quality monitoring programs at a regional level (e.g., bacteria and DO data compilation and sharing, MS4 programs effective study, and river use survey) • <u>Education</u>– People need to better understand how land use changes impact water and habitat (canoe and kayak trips for schools and families, awareness of gateway cities) • <u>River Access</u>–Increase public recreation access in rural areas of the watershed (Uxbridge) and survey how people recreate on the river
WILDLIFE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dam Removal–first dam at Main St., Pawtucket and Thundermist dam are local priorities–eel passage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fish passage at the four lower dams in Pawtucket, RI 	
QUALITY OF LIFE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete bikeway at specific sites to connect to the whole system • Local bylaw review (training on updating) • Keep it local: ask and seek to understand how the Blackstone impacts residents, including EJ areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater river access at Woonsocket, Pawtucket, Central Falls, RI and Worcester, MA • Outreach surrounding Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) program as more communities are participating 	

Table 2: Most Common Needs Recorded

<p>1. Greater Watershed <u>Coordination</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create an inclusive network—existing and new partners • Help with technical transfer • Enable resource/capacity pooling
<p>2. Additional and Flexible <u>Capacity Funding That Works</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For town/regional planning—wastewater, stormwater • For student education programs • For capacity for the many small local NGOs—outreach and monitoring programs
<p>3. Completion of More <u>On-the-Ground Projects</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement more and prioritized restoration work <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Stormwater BMPs ○ Septic repair/replacement ○ Fish and eel passage/dams’ removals ○ Remove trash in and around waterways ○ Improve bikeway/public access • Pursue permanent land protection <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Easement/purchase of riparian lands and new public access
<p>4. More Strategic <u>Outreach</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational signage at road/river crossing and public access points • Family educational programs for kids and adults—river adventures • Celebrate and share the good
<p>5. More Coordinated <u>Monitoring</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baseline monitoring • More monitoring at small tributaries • More citizen data submitted under MA QAPP that can be added to 303d • Effectiveness of existing stormwater/MS4 efforts—is it working • Monitoring targeting—DO and bacteria are priority

WHO ELSE SHOULD JOIN US?

Julia next used a map of the watershed to ask participants about organizations and individual from across the geography who are not represented today who should be invited to participate in this project. Table 3 below provides the results.

Table 3: Potential New Project Participants

Organization	Location	Category	Contact
Clark University	Worcester, MA	Academic	Rob Johnson
Worcester Polytechnic Institute	Worcester, MA	Academic	Paul Mathisen
College of the Holy Cross	Worcester, MA	Academic	Susan Luria
Bryant University	Smithfield, RI	Academic	Dan McNally
RI Institute of Design	Providence, RI	Academic	Bryce DuBois

Table 3: Potential New Project Participants

Organization	Location	Category	Contact
RI College	Providence, RI	Academic	Jim Murphy
Town of Central Falls	RI	Municipality	Thomas Deller
Town of North Smithfield	RI	Municipality	Michael Phillips
Town of Woonsocket	RI	Municipality	Kevin Proft
Town of Auburn	MA	Municipality	Adam Menard
Town of Mendon	MA	Municipality	Ann Mazar
Town of Millbury	MA	Municipality	Laurie Connors
Town of Northbridge	MA	Municipality	Gary Becktholdt
City of Worcester	MA	Municipality	Stefanie Covino
Upper Blackstone Clean Water	MA	WWTF	Karla Sangrey
Narragansett Bay Commission	RI	WWTF	Tom Uva
U.S. House of Representative	MA	Elected Official	Jim McGovern
National Park Service	MA	Federal	Jennifer Smith
MA MVP	MA	State	Hillary King
RI Municipal Readiness Program	RI	State	Shaun O'Rourke
Central Mass Regional Planning Commission	MA	State	Trish Settles
MA Division of Ecological Restoration	MA	State	Nick Wildman
MA Fish and Wildlife	MA	State	Adam Kautza
MA Dept of Conservation Restoration	MA	State	Jodie Madden
MA Dept of Conservation Restoration	MA	State	Molly Cardoza
MA Dept of Environmental Protection	MA	State	Terry Beaudoin
RI Dept of Environmental Management	RI	State	Sue Kiernan
RI Dept of Transportation	RI	State	Mark Nimiroski
Blackstone River Watershed Association	MA	NGO	Joanne Holahan
Save The Bay	RI	NGO	Kate McPherson
Worcester Tree Initiative	MA	NGO	Ruth Seward
Greening Gateway Cities	MA	NGO	Allison Smith
MA River Alliance	MA	NGO	Julia Blatt
MA Stormwater Coalition	MA	NGO	Ed Himlan
Manchaug Foundation	MA	NGO	
Regional Environmental Council	MA	NGO	Steve Fischer
Trout Unlimited–Northern RI	RI	NGO	John Fischer
Trout Unlimited–Central MA	MA	NGO	Pete Sterndale
Greater Worcester Community Foundation	MA	Foundation	Barbara Fields
EPA SNEP Clean Water Network	RI/MA	Private	Kim Groff

WHAT'S NEXT?

1. NBEP to schedule a next meeting in in February/March 2020 that will seek to include the suggested participants noted in Table 3.
2. NBEP to share meeting notes prior to the next meeting and request edits from today's participants.
3. Mike Gerel to share a copy of the Request for Support for this project when available.

Mike thanked the group for staying for an extra 45 minutes and adjourned the meeting at 12:45pm.