

Narragansett Bay Estuary Program Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan Subcommittee Meeting

Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management

July 16, 2019

10:00am to 2:30pm

MEETING MINUTES

Attendees

Judith Swift, Coastal Institute, University of Rhode Island
Pieter De Jong, Blackstone River Coalition
Richard Friesner, New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission (NEIWPCC)
Walt Galloway, Rhode Island Rivers Council (RIRC)
Allison Hammel, Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RIDOT)
Rob Johnson, Clark University
Sue Kiernan, Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM)
Regina Lyons, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 1 (EPA)
Romell Nandi, EPA
John O'Brien, The Nature Conservancy, Rhode Island Chapter (TNC)
Heidi Ricci, Mass Audubon
Jonathan Stone, Save The Bay
Susan Sullivan, NEIWPCC
Caitlyn Whittle, EPA
Julia Bancroft, Narragansett Bay Estuary Program (NBEP)
Mike Gerel, NBEP
Courtney Smith, NBEP
Julia Twichell, NBEP

Introduction from the Chair

Judith Swift, Chair of the Steering Committee (SC) called the meeting to order at 10:15am. Judith welcomed the group and asked everyone to introduce themselves. She next offered some perspective on the past Comprehensive Conservation Management Plans (CCMPs) created by NBEP. Her main points were that the last versions were too long, mostly developed by only a few folks, and lacked focus. She wants this group to avoid creating something that is so comprehensive that its overwhelming and not useful. She also encouraged us to seek input and needs from many across the watershed and prioritize down to what can be done by the partnership in a decade.

Framing the Day

Mike Gerel walked through a PowerPoint that noted the agenda, handouts, desired outcomes for the day, and his approach to the CCMP update. The desired outcomes and initial tenets of the update are provided in Tables 1 and 2 below:

Table 1—Desired Outcomes

1. The Subcommittee clearly understands EPA's expectations for NBEP's 2022 CCMP Update.
2. Participants fully aware of NBEP's organizational goals and capabilities as of today.
3. Participants meaningfully engaged in beginning to define NBEP's own why, what, and how of the update.
4. Next steps are in place that get us closer to consensus CCMP development process moving forward.

Table 2—Mike’s Initial Tenets for the CCMP Update

• Science-based	• Consider triple-bottom line
• Collaborative	• Realistic
• Bottom-up	• Adaptive
• Inclusive	• On schedule!

EPA Expectations for CCMPs

Romell Nandi with EPA’s National Estuary Program Team in Washington next shared his thoughts on CCMPs. Romell handed out some example CCMP documents from the Tampa Bay Estuary Program, Partnership for the Delaware Estuaries, Long Island Sound Study, and the Indian River Lagoon Estuary Program. His input is compiled in the bullets below:

- What makes a good CCMP is subjective—there are certain elements that are required, but the final content should be based on feedback from the partnership. No perfect example—he tends to like certain parts of many plans.
- If the plan is done right, it can be the “bible” for NBEP and its partners.
- Suggested the document should be comprehensive but not so overwhelming it is not helpful. We want the reader who knows nothing about NBEP to get a basic sense of what we are trying to accomplish. Does not need to repeat the Status and Trends or be a new textbook on the estuary/watershed.
- Take the time to do it right rather than fast—NBEP is starting at the right time with three years to deliberately construct the document.
- Romell suggested thinking about the true purpose of NBEP from the outset, engaging new voices, considering what has/has not been done since the last update, and addressing key new/emerging issues.
- He shared the difference between a revision (minor changes) vs an update, which is the more substantial change we are pursuing here.
- He recommended looking at NBEP’s 2012 plan and seeing what was done and not done? What were the barriers to priority actions that were not done? Are these actions still needed? For those completed, what were the drivers for success? What has otherwise changed?
- NBEP’s plan to develop a Finance Plan and update its existing Communications Strategy in 2020 is good timing; adding concise restoration and monitoring plans (not textbook size) will also be useful.
- Romell noted four charges from EPA in NBEP’s 2018 Program Evaluation letter: (1) establish its own identity in region; (2) pursue greater stakeholder engagement and representation; (3) better communicate Program success (related to item #1); and (4) develop and implement a Finance Plan to diversify funding. It is his understanding that these items are considered in the FY Work Plan and initial discussions about the CCMP update.
- Some specific tips for the CCMP development process included:
 - Keep Romell and Caitlyn involved in process.
 - The planned 10-year time range is good.
 - Ensure actions are tied to Clean Water Act Section 320 mandates.
 - Make sure actions are ultimately tied to the chemical, physical, and biological health of the estuary.
 - Assure early engagement with stakeholders, especially those not engaged in previous work—give people something to look at along the way and avoid “late hits” the require NEPs to go back and pursue major revisions.

- As much as possible be specific; avoid vague language that doesn't inspire action.
- Goals, objectives, actions, activities, etc. should all nest correctly together and make sense (see Tampa Bay and Long Island Sound examples); goals, objective, and actions can be higher-level, whereas activities should be specific with outputs and outcomes.
- Should include clear metrics for measuring progress with outputs/outcomes—only way to know what was completed, is the plan working, and where adaptation is necessary along the way (don't wait until year 10).
- Likes Indian River Lagoon example's flow of 'Mission to Goals to Indicators to Actions.'
- Connecticut River work calls out challenges and then solutions.
- Include clear leads for actions/activities.
- Give at least 60-days for public comment and use as many comms channels as possible to bring in new voices.
- How do you know you have the right partners—look at your goals for Program and document: increase diversity, non-traditional audiences are examples.
- Go to people—night meetings on their turf.
- Consider network analyses that can help identify missing entities.
- Set and stick to a timeframe.
- Track changes from last CCMP to this one—documenting what changed and why is useful.
- Create a public friendly executive summary; what would grab people, partners, potential funders (see DE partnership example)? —drive people to actually read (maybe even internalize) the document and otherwise get involved.

A rich discussion followed Romell's presentation and some highlights are provided below:

- Sue Sullivan asked what the report should look like, in terms of how comprehensive or detailed? She noted that NBEP has very limited funding and can't pursue all the actions in the plan. Her point was that we must keep resources in mind. Romell responded that the NBEP's CCMP should include the NBEP and the Management Conference, in other words, its partners, and any actions by new networks. The Partnership for Delaware Estuaries held regionally open house events to get input from non-traditional partners. It would be a good idea to figure out what category of partners you are trying to seek as you look to expand to new partners, so then you can decide how best to reach them (i.e., where to meet, who to meet, when to meet, etc.).
- Judith suggested avoiding the CCMP acronym as people don't know what means and it is not evocative of tangible actions. Others concurred with this thought.
- Mike indicated that he is still unclear whether the plan should be focused on what NBEP can/will accomplish or what is needed to heal the watershed/estuary? This is the "comprehensive but narrow" concept. He has seen a range approaches from other NEPs—from very comprehensive including all actions needed (including those that are aspirational) to narrower, focusing on just the NEP and its actions and operations. This will be an important decision we'll need to make soon.
- Pieter De Jong suggested a four-step process to engage with stakeholders from the bottom-up (in the weeds), which includes (1) initial engagement via a letter to selectmen for municipalities and conservation commissions, (2) contact and seek input from those that express interest, (3) develop and share out a draft document for comment, and then (4) complete a final document that can be publicized and used to compel action by politicians and other decision-makers. Different types of outreach will be needed at each step. Mike followed that a rough timeline with suggested milestone activities will be shared later in this meeting.
- Sue Kiernan shared her view that what NBEP is doing is making sure that the plan gets implemented—an informational and tracking role. She added that being clear about the lead is important if we want things to

get done. She responded to some concern expressed about partner commitment to actions included in the plan by saying that agency support is key. RIDEM would not support inclusion of something they didn't think they could get done; however, this may not be the case for suggestions brought forward by others, so we should be conscious of the accountability piece. Further, some things can happen now, while others depend on legislation, funding, or some other action. The ability to track process is also important (e.g., cesspool phase-out). The bottom line is that vetting should take place to ensure we only include actions that are reasonably *expected* to occur.

- Jonathan Stone added that NBEP is a good clearing house for data on the condition of estuary and watershed and acts as “conductor of an orchestra” divided into different sectors (partners) that have different capacities. Reflecting on the 2012 CCMP, we need to have tight bounds on the NBEP role and how it fits into the larger symphony. He also emphasized the importance of assigning responsibility and the accountability that comes with it as being essential for any action included in the plan. There needs to be specificity about the capacity that partners are bringing. He concurred with others that NBEP is well positioned to help track progress against actions/obligations via the conductor role.
- Heidi Ricci stated that we are dealing with a big watershed across two states that has complex issues to address. NBEP cannot be expected to address all issues by themselves. NBEP’s most important role is bringing people together to build the plan, call out leads for all actions, and undertake actions they committed to lead. A point of interest for her was how we make sure we have all the “right” partners at the table so a broad mix of interested parties can weigh in.
- Walt Galloway emphasized that the CCMP must be what “we” want it to be. There are going to be a lot of actions that NBEP cannot take on, but that’s what this is about—the plan needs to be comprehensive. He brought up the ARCI model—who’s accountable, who is responsible, who do we consult, and who do we inform. He offered that we cannot limit the plan. Further, he suggested asking existing partners to name other interests and individuals who should join us.
- Regina Lyons added some further thought about accountability by asking us to think about asking partners to sign the plan in 2022. This would signify their buy-in. This is not an easy lift, so we will need to decide who should sign the plan (Governors, committee members, etc.), what their signature means, and what processes/time is needed to obtain signatures? More to come on this important issue at a future meeting.
- She also added EPA used to ask NEPs to report on CCMP actions completed, but no longer does so. It is also important that NEPs figure out the resources (capacities) available to support the CCMP effort, identify roles (leads, cooperators, alliances), what actions are needed, and how progress will be measured. The Status and Trends and CCMP should communicate and complement each other, the work plan implements the CCMP, and quarterly reports and annual NEPORT report results.
- Romell noted he likes the outreach approach used by the City of Lancaster for their stormwater work.
- Judith felt the STAC of the EC4 group in Rhode Island (and related municipal and statewide councils) may be good sources of climate goals/metrics. She suggested sharing the names of any similar groups with Mike.
- Mike also said this group will need to determine the names of organizations and people who we should talk to and/or ask to join this subcommittee. Look around the room today and think about who is missing.
- Romell added that it will be important to emphasize what NBEP (and others) can offer to new partners as we look to broaden the tent for input and action. Data sets, mapping capabilities, and access to greater technical assistance and funding were examples. One benefit is that the inclusion of a partner’s priority action in the CCMP may help with their fundraising.
- Sue Kiernan asked if there was some way to guide NBEP toward the right level of detail, reasonable increase in partners, and issues upon which to focus? We need to think about logical places to limit how far

to go, while keeping the nexus to the Bay and its watershed. Bi-state climate adaptation is a space that makes sense for NBEP over the next decade.

- Jonathan offered that as NBEP considers new ideas, it should retain and tighten its linkage to core issues, like improving the health and resilience of the watershed in the face of climate change (e.g., WWTP protection, salt marsh migration). He worries that if we go too broad (into roads/bridges/basements for example), we get the “kitchen sink” approach where the plan (and NBEP) loses focus and its utility for the greater effort. There was nodding in the room that the last CCMP was a little too kitchen sink.
- Mike asked whether a multi-media version of the plan would be acceptable. Romell indicated that a “hard copy” version will be needed, but a corresponding web-based version would be acceptable. Mike noted that a few NEPs are using their web-based version as their primary public-facing work product.
- Mike closed the discussion by reflecting on some of his thoughts and what he heard from the group:
 - He felt the term “action plan” is preferable to CCMP—it’s simple and active.
 - The take home from EP was that it up to the Executive/Steering Committee to decide the content, format, and presentation of our CCMP *within appropriate bounds*. We are seeking *comprehensive but narrow*, and there is no perfect way to deliver this balance. We will have to feel our way to the right balance over the next few years.
 - Mike offered some criteria as potential bounds for what to include in the plan. They included (1) consistency with Clean Water Act 320, (2) capacity to realistically complete the included actions (with expected collective NBEP and partner resources within a 10-year period), and (3) accountability to meeting action (ability to measure progress, specific commitment to lead/support actions via signature). These criteria will be further explored at future meetings.
 - The form of the plan could begin by laying out big picture issues and needs, describing work by all partners, and then focusing in on what NBEP will address—sort of an upside-down triangle where the document builds to a point where NBEP-specific actions are covered in the most detail.
 - He really liked the metaphor for NBEP’s development and execution of this plan as the conducting of an orchestra. This is consistent and/or builds on NBEP’s existing elevator message of “bringing people and science together” and our reputation as a coordinator and clearinghouse. One caveat is there will be certain “instruments that NBEP will play” (NBEP can take actions that fill gaps and suit its current niche/staff expertise).
 - An approach that is inclusive and responsive to local needs is essential—people need to see themselves in the plan to care.
 - How you approach partners is especially important—go to them at the right time, at the right place, with the right information and tone—if you want to grow the network and drive progress and goals that are outside of NBEP’s control.
 - Connecting to others also points out leverage opportunities—we underestimate all that is going on, and what could go on with greater coordination and resources.
 - Completion of the Status and Trends in 2017, the EPA Program Evaluation and close out of the Corrective Action Plan in 2018, development of refreshed Work Plan backed by a full complement of NBEP staff, and the planned release of new finance and communications plans, makes now the right time to pursue the CCMP update.

Who is NBEP Today?

Mike returned to the PowerPoint and noted NBEP’s current combined mission and vision statement and approach as included on the website. He also shared current organizational capacities. The approach and capacities are listed in Tables 3 and 4 below as they are germane to the preceding discussion. Mike noted that the Steering Committee may use a group process to revisit the vision, mission, values, approach, etc. at an upcoming meeting to ensure the

organization’s foundational elements are up to date and represent the consensus of the Management Conference before we being to compose the CCMP update.

Table 3—NBEP’s Approach from Website

- Promote a holistic approach that recognizes the watershed’s environmental, economic and social significance
- Ensure program structure and activities reflect the bi-state watershed
- Enhance collaboration among partners to enable collective action towards common goals
- Emphasize ecosystem integrity and sustainability
- Work with partners to identify information needs, and to acquire, interpret, and disseminate data to support informed, science-based decision-making
- Leverage additional resources and funding for the study area
- Provide technical assistance to partners on research and restoration projects, taking the lead when appropriate

Table 4—NBEP Capacities in July 2019

- 3.8 FTE at NBEP
- Program manager, operations support at NEIWPCC
- Expertise in freshwater and estuarine science, geospatial analysis and cartography, program grant management, and science communication
- 25-member Steering Committee, 8-member Executive Committee, and 15-member Science Advisory Committee
- Strong partnerships in place
- Consistent budget ~\$600-\$750K
- Plays unique, independent role as trusted information, coordinator, and catalyze for action in bi-state watershed

CCMP Input from June Steering Committee Meeting

Mike next summarized the excellent input regarding the CCMP update offered by the Steering Committee at their last meeting in June 2019.

- Start by defining what the CCMP is to EPA and then NBEP.
- Create and maintain sound development process.
- NBEP staff to develop text for Committee/partner/public review.
- Specify purpose, real value, and realistic goals for our CCMP.
- Clearly state NBEP role in implementing the plan—plan is to help guide all partners.
- Get to the point—create a concise, yet specific work product clear objectives and actions.
- Be strategic—prioritize actions that can be completed in 10-year period of plan: “comprehensively narrow.”
- Include inclusive and meaningful public engagement and review throughout development.
- Include climate change into each section—don’t break out this issue.
- Use visuals to help tell story.
- Take adaptive management seriously—build in flexibility for adaptation that responds to good and the bad.
- Don’t include routine actions; stick to truly additive actions.
- Don’t repeat the Status and Trends in this document.
- Consider other NEP CCMPs.
- Create a catalyst for things to happen—help create pre-conditions for future high-quality work.
- Follow timeline and meet completion date.

CCMP Subcommittee Input

NBEP staff next broke the Subcommittee into two groups to answer four questions that build on the work of the Steering Committee from last month. Each group reported out and the results are compiled in Table 5 below.

Table 5—CCMP Subcommittee Thoughts

Question	Group #1 Input	Group #2 Input
<p>1. What is the value of the CCMP?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Rare opportunity to create an action plan that is measurable, prioritized, trackable, and accountable—this is currently absent watershed-wide ● Serves as glue that holds partners together ● Help catalyze new action ● Chance to engage new voices ● Helps with communicating and engaging with the public so they can take/support action ● Revisit 1992 CCMP to see if sections and actions are still valid to inform new plan ● Help with NBEP branding/identity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Allows us to decide and express what we want it to be ▪ Why NBEP was first selected in EPA Appropriation bill in 1987—go back to proposal inform value of NEP and its plan ▪ Offers road map with shared vision for this region ▪ Serves as a “call to arms/action”—reason for people to come together, something to rally around, reason to gather ● Can create a personal connection to the watershed—personal actions impacting personal lives ▪ Opportunity to share information with broader community who we are and what we do ● Must inspire ● Look back on results, needs, accomplishments—use past and present as perspective for future ▪ Assists with fundraising for actions in plan ▪ Opportunity to rethink our identity (mission, vision, core values and what we offer (niche, programs)) ▪ Place to identify what NBEP/partners will take on ● Chance to tell a story
<p>2. What guiding principles inform the plan?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Personal connection brings personal actions ● This is for all of us/must matter to all ● Measurable impact ● Collaborative ● Consensus approach ● Be concise ● Willingness to fail—be open and think big at the beginning (don’t set limits) and then narrow focus (upside down triangle) ● Be flexible/adaptable ● Science based but translated to broader audience ● Thoughtful stakeholder/public engagement process ● Solicit and consider environmental justice/vulnerable community priorities ● Must tell an inspiring story to document will be read 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Action-oriented ● Bottom-up ● Use best available science ● Specific ● Use ecosystem-based management (consider wildlife and human communities) ● Collaborative ● Inclusive—real, meaningful engagement with existing and new stakeholders ● Comprehensive, yet narrow—have criteria to guide ● Meeting different audience needs—not just NBEP ● Set clear development process up front
<p>3. What process will we use to develop the plan?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Establish why we are here and doing this plan up front ● Create conditions for participants to put all cards on the table 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Set process/rules for developing document on Day #1 ● Seek buy-in on process and outline from internal committees at outset, then gradually go broader

Table 5—CCMP Subcommittee Thoughts

Question	Group #1 Input	Group #2 Input
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking process to the people → right place, venue, time, tools to reach broad audiences • Engage new constituencies—businesses, forests/land trusts, municipalities, EJ community, fisherman, tourism, chambers of commerce, DPH/DOH • Collect new information and input • Create concise materials/message along the way that people will read • Prioritize issues/actions (narrowing) • Establish process to Track actions to ensure accountability—what was done, what worked, didn’t work • Include stakeholder signatures to assure buy-in and accountability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set approach to vetting and prioritizing actions/activities (scores, voting, prioritizing, etc.) • Be flexible and not too prescriptive—stick to big picture enable partnership to add specifics and milestones for adaptive management (respond to the ground) • Start where we have existing connections and then build out to fill gaps by tailoring approach to those you want to engage (local champions, local groups that may not focus on only conservation, etc.) • Build in meaningful public engagement throughout development • Use multimedia approach
<p>4. What issues should be our focus?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider current regulations vs what can be fixed without regulation • Pick issues that can be addressed with current capacity in 10-years • Impacts of new development should be big focus • NBEP should embrace its trusted gatherer of people and data role and pick corresponding actions to focus upon to help build our brand • Build in plan for sharing results via dashboard 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pick issues/actions that people care about/should care about • Set stage by sharing purpose and outline of document to preview scope, narrowing, etc. to help identify and prioritization actions at beginning • Be mindful of what is required per CWA 320 (founding documents, work plan, case statement, etc.) • Stormwater—create preconditions for local implementation • Use technical report as guide to focus areas/issues—respond to trends, gaps, new finding, high priority issues/concerns to help “narrow” the focus and create “buckets” of actions that respond to findings. • Learn from 2012 CCMP document. • What can get done in 10-years • Consider a focus on key habitats (invasives) that are appropriately addressed in a bi-state/watershed-wide manner

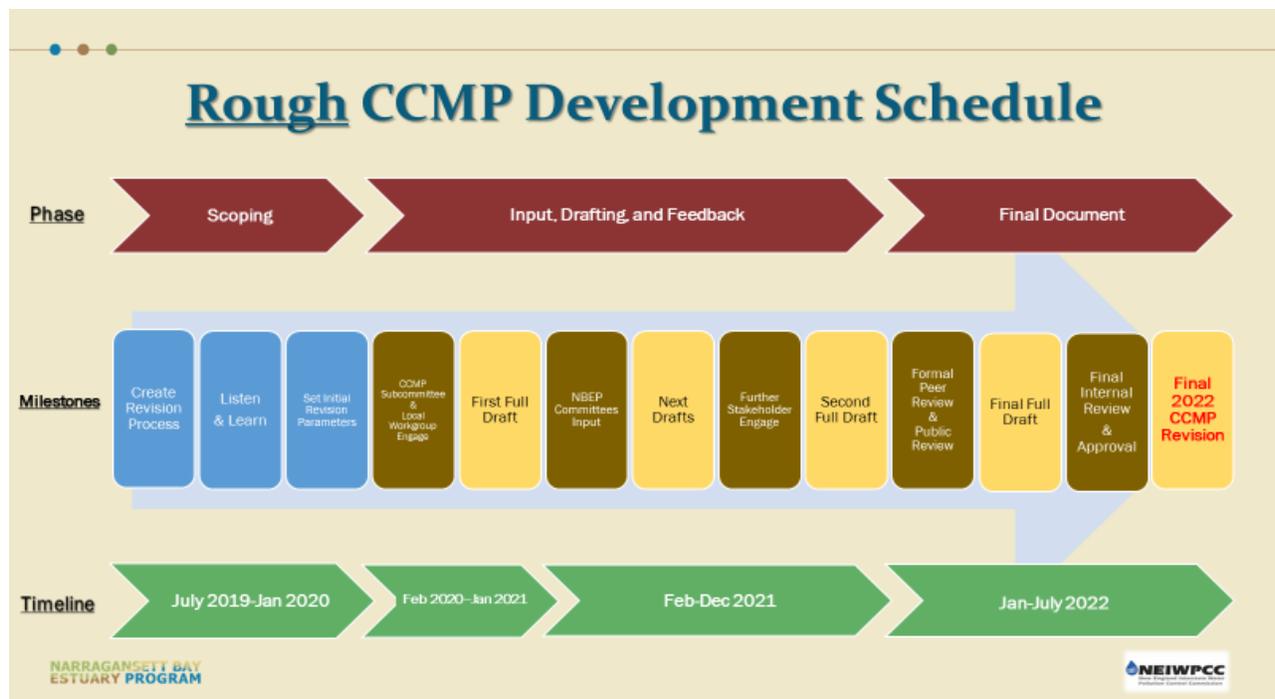
At the close of this session Mike reflected on CCMP input by saying that some of the same principles, themes, and ideas are rising again and again as we pursue these discussions. We are getting to “saturation” where the will of those that have participated is becoming clear. This will surely be refined as we get into more specifics and new interests join the discussion, but these concepts for a nice base to build upon. Table 6 highlights **18 take-aways** for the process and the document from discussions across NBEP’s committees to date.

Table 6—CCMP Update: Common Take-Aways from NBEP Committee Input

PROCESS PRINCIPLES	DOCUMENT FORMAT AND CONTENT
Define purpose of CCMP Update at outset	Useful/readable
Define and stick to a plan development process	Comprehensive but focused per criteria and needs
Look to NBEP CCMPs and work of other NEPs	Concise sharing of information
Use collaborative/consensus-based decision-making	Specific/measurable goals, objectives, actions
Harness personal connections to place	Actions assigned to specific leads
Seek out input from new constituencies early and often	Based in best available science
Include actions per CWA 320 mandates, existing capacity and timeline, and obligations from implementing entities	Enables tracking and sharing of progress
Uses holistic ecosystem-based management approach	Flexible/adaptive
NBEP role/actions in line with our niche and strengths	Serve as a “call to action” for the watershed in 2022

CCMP Development Schedule

Mike closed the CCMP discussion by sharing a rough document development schedule. It called out three phases—scoping, drafting, and final document. A full three years is allowed in the schedule; however, it will become more specific. He highlighted the multiple times input will be sought from different constituencies. The consensus in the room was that three years was needed and that the milestones and timeline were sound to start.



Next Steps

1. **Mike** will send out meeting notes within the next month.
2. **Subcommittee members** should review the notes and provide any edits to Mike ASAP.
3. **Each subcommittee member** should share with Mike the name of at least one NEW individual, working group, and organizations that could inform/join this effort prior to the next meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 2:05PM