

Steering Committee Meeting Notes

October 19, 2023

Old Colony Planning Council, 70 School St, Brockton, MA 03201 or Zoom
10:00am-12:30pm

MEETING MATERIALS

[Agenda](#), [PowerPoint](#)

ATTENDEES

Caitlin Chaffee, Chair, Narragansett Bay Estuarine Research Reserve (NBNERR)
Dave Monti, Vice Chair, No Fluke Fishing, RI Saltwater Anglers Association

In alphabetical order:

Molly Allard, Northern RI Conservation District
Walter Berry, Rhode Island Rivers Council
Joe Callahan, Taunton River Watershed Alliance
Richard Carey, MA Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP)
Walt Galloway, Public member
Ben Greenstein, Roger Williams University (RWU)
Topher Hamblett, Save the Bay
Allison Hamel, RI Department of Transportation
Allen Hance, RWU
Rob Johnston, George Perkins Marsh Institute, Clark University
Cristina Kennedy, MA Division of Ecological Restoration (MADER)
Hillary King, MA Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (MAOEEA)
Alicia Lehrer, Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council
Regina Lyons, USEPA Region 1
Caleigh McLaren, Blackstone Watershed Collaborative
Eliza Moore, Narragansett Bay Commission (NBC)
Bill Napolitano, Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District (SRPEDD)
Heidi Ricci, Mass Audubon
Karla Sangrey, Upper Blackstone Clean Water
Nathan Vinhateiro, URI Coastal Institute
Caitlyn Whittle, USEPA Region 1
Donna Williams, Blackstone River Coalition, Blackstone River Heritage Corridor

Joanne Zygmunt, Old Colony Planning Council
Courtney Schmidt, NBEP
Mariel Sorlien, NBEP
Darcy Young, NBEP

MEETING OPEN

Committee Chair Caitlin Chaffee, NBNERR, called the meeting to order at 10:11 am, led introductions, and summarized the meeting agenda. *DECISION: The Steering Committee (SC) meeting notes from June 30, 2023 were approved by a motion (Dave Monti, No Fluke Fishing) and a second (Ben Greenstein, Roger Williams University).*

BIL CAPACITY-BUILDING PROJECTS

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

Darcy Young reported on Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) Year 1 project development and capacity building. All BIL Year 1 funds are encumbered and all projects are progressing; some are complete. Darcy reviewed the project development arrow; NBEP's niche is project development and capacity building. Darcy also reviewed the projects that were developed and where they plan to finish.

GUEST SPEAKER: JOANNE ZYGMUNT, OLD COLONY PLANNING COUNCIL

Joanne Zygmunt said that Old Colony Planning Council (OCPC) is thrilled to have capacity and project development funds, since the region has a lot of issues and needs money for habitat restoration. OCPC was able to leverage the \$75,000 secured from NBEP to leverage an additional \$1.5 million.

The first project Joanne discussed was a grant application for a regional water study. The application was successful and brought in \$940k from the US Economic Development Agency and other sources. The study will look at water supply issues such as water use conflicts, climate change, PFAS, and cyanobacteria.

The second project Joanne discussed was an effort to raise awareness of nature-based solutions. They held a webinar and meeting.

The third project was an MVP grant application for the town of Avon, which is an EJ community. They were awarded \$1 million. They were able to acquire land and expand DW Field Park.

The fourth project was an application to EPA for brownfield remediation in Easton, East Bridgewater, and Whitman.

The fifth project focused on DW Field Park. The park is 600-700 acres of urban forest and has been underinvested in, which has led to problems with water quality and erosion. NBEP paid for OCPC to lead public engagement efforts to ask locals about their needs. Additional funding from NBEP would enable OCPC to assist with writing the park master plan.

The sixth project was an application to EPA for stormwater in EJ communities; the application was rejected, but OCPC will reapply next year.

Year 2 plans include supporting Abington for investment, reapplying to the EPA stormwater grant, and developing the Abington master plan.

Steering Committee members agreed that OCPC was very successful in forwarding projects with a relatively small amount of funding from NBEP. Heidi Ricci was thrilled about the work on water conflicts.

Topher Hamblett mentioned that Save the Bay was able to leverage NBEP funding for more restoration and climate projects.

YEAR BIL 1 REPORT

Darcy Young reported on how BIL Year 1 projects progressed from November 2022 to July 2023. 43 projects were identified across 8 organizations and 94 steps were advanced. The median start was step 2 (problem identification) and the median end was step 5 (grant writing).

The BIL funding leveraged ~\$2.5 million [*note: NBEP updated leverage figure in November 2023 after receiving all quarterly reports*], facilitated eight new staff hires, led to coordination among recipients for technical expertise, and built administrative capacity to seek and accept federal funds.

The main lesson learned is that NBEP should work with recipients to find way to streamline reporting and focus on a handful of their most promising projects.

Steering Committee members discussed which metrics are the most important for measuring impact. Suggestions included capturing leverage, documenting how many projects become shovel ready, quantifying the number of people who respond to outreach efforts, and measuring the number of increased personnel and hours. Walt Galloway and Ben Greenstein suggested directly asking organizations questions such as “What were you missing before that you have now?” and “What were your bottlenecks and how did this help you?” Regina Lyons cautioned that the metrics need to be manageable and to consider how the metrics will be used before starting to track them.

FY2022-2023 BIL WORKPLAN & BUDGET REVISION

Darcy Young reviewed the long-term plan for BIL funds. In an effort to stay broad so NBEP can respond to timely needs, half the funding is allocated for RFPs and half the funding is allocated for direct awards.

For Year 2, \$527,500 has been allocated through NBEP’s summer 2023 habitat and access planning RFP and \$382,300 is left. NBEP is requesting approval to award the remaining BIL Year 2 funds through direct awards to continue supporting project development in organizations funded for capacity-building during Year 1.

DECISION: *The Revised FY2022-2023 BIL Workplan and Budget was approved by a motion (Dave Monti, No Fluke Fishing) and a second (Walt Galloway, public member). The motion passed unanimously.*

NBEP EQUITY PLAN AND EJMAP

EQUITY PLAN

Darcy Young reviewed the NBEP BIL Equity Plan. The plan includes a definition of underserved communities, the current baseline of investment in these communities, a numeric target (% of BIL funds) that will benefit these communities, and planned activities to meet that target.

Underserved communities are defined as census block groups that are at or above the 80th percentile for at least one social vulnerability indicator (people of color, low income, less than high school education, limited English speaking) or census block groups that score at least 80 out of 100 in the Environmental Burden Composite Index. The underlying data and static map defining underserved communities will be updated yearly.

The NBEP baseline (2017-2021) investment in underserved communities is 30%, although NEPORT counts it as 0% because it does not include green infrastructure projects or funds dedicated to planning. The Equity Plan set a numeric target of 50% BIL investments in underserved communities; 60% of Year 1 funds have been or will be spent in these areas, so NBEP feels confident that the 50% target is reasonable for the remaining BIL funds.

EJMAP

Mariel Sorlien provided a brief overview of [EJMap](#), an interactive tool that allows partners to select up to 31 indicators and generate a custom map of underserved communities. This is also the tool used to create and display NBEP's static map of underserved communities. The data behind the tool will be updated annually.

Karla Sangrey and Heidi Ricci asked for clarification of the "Wastewater Discharge" indicator and suggested that it may convey a negative impression of wastewater treatment plant operators, even if they are meeting their permits. Mariel clarified that the indicator is from EJScreen and measures pollutants in the water. The indicator includes combined sewer overflows, but is not restricted to output from wastewater treatment facilities.

Heidi Ricci requested an open space indicator.

Joe Callahan requested a water quality indicator be added to the tool, especially with PFAS. Mariel said this would be a challenge to add because she would need to find consistent data across three states.

Walter Berry expressed a desire for open space and water quality (fishable/swimmable) indicators. Molly Allard requested food desert data.

Allison Hamel said most federal grants require the use of their own EJ tool.

Caleigh McLaren acknowledged the large effort that went in to making EJMap and Regina Lyons applauded NBEP for creating a custom tool instead of using a national tool and checking a box.

Following the meeting, Mariel wrote a [memo](#) with additional information about EJMap; the memo is appended to the end of this document.

***DECISION:** The Draft NBEP Equity Plan was approved by a motion (Karla Sangrey, Upper Blackstone Clean Water) and a second (Joe Callahan, Taunton River Watershed Alliance). The motion passed unanimously. The Draft NBEP Equity Plan will be sent to EPA for full approval.*

NBEP EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SEARCH

Caitlin Chaffee and Allen Hance offered an update on the NBEP Executive Director search: the job description is finalized and is expected to be released in a week. A hiring committee needs to be formed and the finalists will be asked to present to the steering committee. Darcy's contract is set to expire in mid-January, but can be extended. EPA will need to sign off on the selected candidate. [Note: [the Executive Director posting is live on the RWU website](#) and the position remains open until filled.]

NBEP UPDATES

Darcy Young reviewed NBEP's finance report. The FY23 budget is for five FTEs (including Executive Director and Ecologist hires) and RWU interns; NBEP still has 8 months of salary in the bank. \$102,000 is available for contracts with \$65,000 of that amount intended for Vision 2034. The remaining amount in contracts is for non-RWU interns, community engagement, and payment to the Association of National Estuary Programs. NBEP is managing 28 active subawards.

NBEP received a "proficient" rating in its EPA Program Evaluation Letter and is eligible to continue receiving Section 320 funding through EPA. The next program evaluation is in 2028.

NBEP held a "Wild Things in the Narragansett Bay Region" symposium on October 6, 2023 at Roger Williams University. There were 15 speakers and approximately 100 attendees.

Courtney Schmidt is working on two science updates; one on solar fields and one on seagrass.

Mariel Sorlien has been working on maps for Save the Bay's new aquarium.

Vision 2034 is continuing to progress. Contracting is ongoing for technical writing, story development, and design. NBEP has built a partnership with RI Sea Grant's 41N Magazine, with a joint issue to be released June 2024. Vision 2034 is on target to be completed June 2024.

Upcoming meetings include an Executive Committee meeting during the week of December 4 and a Steering Committee meeting on December 14.

COMMITTEE MEMBER UPDATES

Heidi Ricci, Mass Audubon – Mass Audubon recently released a report called "Growing Solar, Protecting Nature." Working with Harvard Forest, they analyzed current and potential new scenarios for siting solar projects. They found that Massachusetts can deploy the necessary solar while also protecting nature. [The report is available on Mass Audubon's website.](#)

Dave Monti, No Fluke Fishing, RI Saltwater Anglers Association – The recreational fishing season is winding down. Bait fish are abundant and whales, bluefin tuna, and thresher sharks have moved closer to shore. It is moving towards the winter season. Continuing to advocate for access and sustainable fishing.

Alicia Lehrer, Woonasquatucket River Watershed Association – There was a large press event about WRWC’s recently-completed green infrastructure and greenway project between DeSoto Street and Atwells Avenue in Providence. NBEP supported the project with funding for community participation in the Campiones de Combate Climático (Climate Champions) program.

Caitlin Chaffee, Narragansett Bay Estuarine Research Reserve – RIDEM has submitted a proposal to the NOAA Climate Resilience Challenge for \$58 million. The proposal made it to the second round and a full proposal is due on February 13.

Walter Berry, Rhode Island Rivers Council – Veronica Berounsky stepped down as chair. Alicia Schaffner is the new chair and Rachel Calabro is the new vice chair.

MEETING CLOSE

The meeting adjourned at 12:35 pm.

MEMO - CLARIFICATIONS ON EJMAP

TECHNICAL DOCUMENTATION

The beta version for [EJMap](#) can be found online.

The [EJMap technical documentation](#) has in depth information on data sources and how scores are calculated. Most of the data is taken from [EJScreen](#); the [EJScreen technical documentation](#) has in depth information on how indicators are measured.

As an open-source tool, all of the [EJMap code](#) (including the [code used to compile data](#)) is available online. NBEP strove to keep the data as easy to copy and modify as possible, should anyone with sufficient technical know-how wish to build their own version of the tool.

CURRENT INDICATORS

Wastewater Discharge

The “Wastewater Discharge” indicator quantifies risk of exposure to pollutants in downstream water bodies. It measures permitted discharges and models how pollutants travel downstream, with more toxic chemicals given higher weight. **This indicator will be renamed “Water Pollution”** to make it clear that it measuring pollutants in the water and *not* facility locations.

Hazardous Waste Proximity

The “Hazardous Waste Proximity” indicator quantifies proximity to hazardous waste facilities. This includes Treatment, Storage, and Disposal Facilities (TSDF) and Large Quantity Generators (LQG). TSDF covers facilities that treat, store, or dispose of hazardous chemicals and waste. LQG covers facilities that either generate 1,000 kg per month of hazardous waste or 1 kg per month of acutely hazardous waste. Together, [this indicator captures a large variety of facilities](#). **This indicator will be renamed “Hazardous Waste Facilities.”**

NEW INDICATORS

Parks and Open Spaces

Although this is a useful indicator and NBEP has seen it used in other EJ tools, compiling data on parks for Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island requires a significant time investment, especially if NBEP wishes to capture small, urban parks. Should NBEP decide to develop open space as a status and trends indicator, then those data can be added to EJmap.

Although it as in imperfect match, “Lack of Trees” can be used as a proxy indicator.

Impaired Waters

NBEP is unable to add impaired waters as an indicator because Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut use slightly different criteria and all data must be consistent across state lines.

Once again it is an imperfect match, but “Wastewater Discharge/Water Pollution” can be used as a proxy indicator.