

Steering Committee Meeting Notes

December 14, 2023

Narragansett Bay Commission and Zoom

10:00am-12:30pm

MEETING MATERIALS

All meeting materials are available on the [NBEP website](#).

ATTENDEES

Caitlin Chaffee, Chair, Narragansett Bay Estuarine Research Reserve (NBNERR)

Dave Monti, Vice Chair, No Fluke Fishing, Rhode Island Saltwater Anglers Association

In alphabetical order:

Molly Allard, Northern RI Conservation District

Catie Alves, Save the Bay

Walter Berry, Rhode Island Rivers Council

Rachel Calabro, RIDEM

Richard Carey, MA Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP)

Stefanie Covino, Blackston Watershed Collaborative

Richard Friesner, NEIWPC

Walt Galloway, Public member

Holly Greening, Coastwise Partners

Ben Greenstein, Roger Williams University (RWU)

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)

Tom Kutcher, Rhode Island Natural History Survey

Alicia Lehrer, Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council

Regina Lyons, USEPA Region 1

Eliza Moore, Narragansett Bay Commission (NBC)

Bill Napolitano, Old Colony Planning Council (OCPC)

Heidi Ricci, Mass Audubon

Scott Travers, Rhode Island Saltwater Anglers Association

Nathan Vinhateiro, URI Coastal Institute

Caitlyn Whittle, USEPA Region 1

Donna Williams, Blackstone River Coalition, Blackstone River Heritage Corridor

Courtney Schmidt, NBEP

Mariel Sorlien, NBEP

Darcy Young, NBEP

MEETING OPEN

Committee Chair Caitlin Chaffee called the meeting to order at 10:05 am, led introductions, and summarized the meeting agenda. *DECISION: The Steering Committee (SC) meeting notes from October 19, 2023 were approved by a motion (Dave Monti) and a second (Nate Vinhateiro). Stefanie Covino, Catie Alves, and Walt Galloway abstained.*

NOMINATING COMMITTEE

Darcy Young provided an update about Steering Committee membership ([current list available on the NBEP website](#)). All members with terms expiring in 2023 except Colleen Brown, Town of Swansea MA, expressed interest in reappointment for another three-year term (2024-2027). The Nominating Committee (Sue Kiernan and Walt Galloway) and NBEP recommend reappointing these members. Caitlin Chaffee and Dave Monti agreed to additional one-year terms as Chair and Vice-Chair, respectively.

Members Stefanie Covino, Allison Hamel, Hillary King, Alicia Lehrer, Conor McManus, Dave Monti, Karla Sangrey, and Topher Hamblett were approved for additional three-year Steering Committee terms by a motion (Eliza Moore) and a second (Dave Monti). Stefanie Covino abstained.

Committee members discussed opportunities for new members in 2024. Local government is a gap – in addition to losing Colleen Brown, Kate Michaud (formerly Town of Warren RI) is now the District Director for RI Congressman Gabe Amo. Stefanie Covino suggested that NBEP might find interested local government representatives through the Blackstone Watershed Collaborative or the Resilient Taunton Watershed Network. Cristina Kennedy offered to contact Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management to inquire about interest in joining. Caitlin Chaffee suggested that Rhode Island's new Chief Resilience Officer, Kim Koriath, might be interested in joining.

NBEP OUTREACH AND EDUCATION AWARDS

Darcy Young provided an update about plans for funding watershed and outreach projects with funds from NBEP's FY2023 320/SNEP Workplan. NBEP has about \$58,000 available to make subawards and is seeking feedback from the Steering Committee about priority topics as well as desired delivery mechanism (competitive RFP vs. direct awards).

NBEP has received a proposal from the Blackstone River Watershed Council / Friends of the Blackstone to expand ongoing work with the Narragansett Indian Tribe and the Hassanamisco Nipmuc Band to provide in-school education about the Blackstone River. The Rhode Island Rivers Council (RIRC) is also interested in building a proposal to fund various outreach and education activities that could be undertaken by many of Rhode Island's river councils. Walter Berry added that the RIRC specifically discussed funding for educational watershed models and watershed signage along roadways. Alicia Lehrer supported funding for additional watershed models as the Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council finds them invaluable for education.

Heidi Ricci emphasized that outreach and education funds should be shared equally with Massachusetts projects.

Stefanie Covino expressed support for assisting local watershed groups with creating municipality-specific water quality report cards to inform decision-making. This effort could build upon Mariel Sorlien's upcoming project to assist watershed groups with displaying water quality data online. Donna Williams seconded this idea.

Molly Allard suggested keeping some funds available for a small competitive program so that groups that are not currently "in the know" have an opportunity to apply.

The committee discussed opportunities for improving roadside signage that names waterways and watersheds. Allison Hamel offered that she would be willing to work with RIDOT and NBEP to explore signage possibilities.

In sum, the Steering Committee suggested that NBEP conduct outreach to various organizations to assess funding needs. NBEP committed to creating and sharing an online form to gather ideas.

VISION 2034 (CCMP)

Darcy Young provided an update about NBEP's progress on Vision 2034, the Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP) revision.

Holly Greening introduced a potential framework that NBEP could use for establishing shared regional ecosystem targets. Darcy directed participants to look at the [Vision 2034 Goals and Objectives handout](#) and stated that the listed objectives would be the potential *topics* for setting targets over the next 5 years.

Darcy asked the Steering Committee to reflect on whether shared regional targets would be helpful in their work. Stefanie Covino noted that targets would be helpful references for contextualizing local projects when applying for federal grants. Eliza Moore noted that shared regional targets would be useful in conversations with Narragansett Bay Commission board members when talking about benefits of ongoing and potential water quality improvement projects. Ben Greenstein supported the

framework, stating that it was similar to those used in higher education to codify strategic planning.

The committee discussed specifics about target-setting. Darcy Young clarified that targets could be outcome-based (e.g. acres of habitat) or action-based (e.g. number of habitat restoration projects). Catie Alves asked about data availability for calculating target baselines. Courtney Schmidt responded that the 24 indicators in NBEP's 2017 State of the Watershed Report are a starting point for baseline-setting but that the discussion about targets would inform future development of indicators.

Committee members discussed the availability of data and tools in Massachusetts and Rhode Island. Hillary King cited the new Narragansett Bay Dam Atlas as an example of a tool that could help with tracking a connectivity target.

In sum, the Steering Committee expressed support for a March 14, 2024 joint workshop with the Science Advisory Committee to kick off a discussion about potential topics for target-setting within the Vision 2034 Goals and Objectives Framework.

NBEP RESEARCH PLAN

Courtney Schmidt presented the draft NBEP Research Plan for Steering Committee feedback. Stefanie Covino suggested considering Worcester as a focal location for the plan. Caitlyn Whittle suggested making official links to EPA Region 1's Urban Waters Program.

COMMITTEE MEMBER UPDATES

Caitlin Chaffee announced that the wind development company Orsted has approached NBEP about managing funds for an RFP to fund habitat restoration projects in support of Orsted's net-positive biodiversity commitment. Caitlin invited Steering Committee member feedback on this opportunity during and after the meeting.

Stefanie Covino announced the Second Annual Fish Migration Community Parade at Slater Mill in Pawtucket, RI on Sunday, May 19 from 1-4pm. More information: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/fish-migration-community-parade-2024-tickets-816847602167>

Molly Allard mentioned that the Northern Rhode Island Conservation District has worked with the USDA NRCS Emergency Watershed Protection Program to purchase and place easements on twelve flood-prone properties in the Runnins River watershed in East Providence, RI.

Dave Monti reported that the Rhode Island Saltwater Anglers Association recently visited legislators to advocate for better monitoring of recreational fishing. The New England Saltwater Fishing Show is March 8-10 at the Rhode Island Convention Center in Providence.

Cristina Kennedy noted that MA DER continues to hire new staff.

Allen Hance and Caitlin Chaffee asked for assistance in circulating the position description for the NBEP Executive Director. The search committee is hoping to receive more applications.

MEETING CLOSE

The meeting adjourned at 12:50 pm with a motion by Stefanie Covino and a second by Dave Monti.