

Steering Committee Meeting

Hybrid Meeting

March 9, 2023

10:00am-12:30pm

MEETING NOTES

MEETING MATERIALS

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

ATTENDEES

Caitlin Chaffee, Chair, Narragansett Bay Estuarine Research Reserve (NBNERR)
David Monti, Vice Chair, No Fluke Fishing, RI Saltwater Anglers Association
Molly Allard, Northern RI Conservation District
Walter Berry, Rhode Island Rivers Council
Rachel Calabro, RI Department of Health (RIDOH)
Richard Carey, MA Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP)
Stefanie Covino, Blackstone Watershed Collaborative
Richard Friesner, NEIWPC
Walt Galloway, Public member
Ben Greenstein, Roger Williams University (RWU)
Tophier Hamblett, Save the Bay
Allison Hamel, RI Department of Transportation (RIDOT)
Allen Hance, RWU
Rob Johnston, Clark University
Cristina Kennedy, MA Division of Ecological Restoration (MADER)
Sue Kiernan, RI Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM)
Hillary King, MA Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (MAOEEA)
Tom Kutcher, RI Natural History Survey
Regina Lyons, US Environmental Protection Agency Region 1 (USEPA R1)
Kate Michaud, Town of Warren
Eliza Moore, Narragansett Bay Commission (NBC)
Bill Napolitano, Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District (SRPEDD)
John O'Brien, The Nature Conservancy of Rhode Island (TNC-RI)
Mark Pereira, Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council
Heidi Ricci, Mass Audubon
Karla Sangrey, Upper Blackstone Clean Water
Steve Silva, Taunton River Watershed Alliance (TRWA)
Nathan Vinhateiro, URI Coastal Institute
Caitlyn Whittle, USEPA R1
Donna Williams, Blackstone River Coalition, Blackstone River Heritage Corridor
Mike Gerel, NBEP
Courtney Schmidt, NBEP
Mariel Sorlien, NBEP
Darcy Young, NBEP

MEETING OPEN

Committee Chair Caitlyn Chaffee, NBNERR, called the meeting to order at 10:07 am, led introductions, and summarized the meeting agenda. *DECISION: The Steering Committee (SC) meeting notes from December 15, 2022 were approved by a motion (David Monti, No Fluke Fishing) and a second (Eliza Moore, NBC).*

NBEP QUARTERLY REPORT

Mike Gerel with NBEP noted that the organization is in good financial standing. The financials table was edited to be simpler and more transparent. Looking forward, NBEP holds \$1.1M for its [FY2022 Section 320 and SNEP Workplan](#) and \$900k for the [FY2022-2023 BIL Workplan](#). Salary and fringe are available to cover 15 months of personnel time moving forward.

Mike walked through a table that showed the status of NBEP's 23 existing subawards, which span from capacity-building to planning, green infrastructure to habitat restoration, and affluent to underserved communities. Nearly \$2M is now under contract.

Darcy Young with NBEP shared an update on the Vision 2032 process. [CoastWise Partners](#) held conversations with 17 SC members in February 2023, and the "findings" report will be shared with the invitation for the next meeting. She thanked everyone for their help. The next Vision 2032 meeting will be April 12, 2023 10am-2pm. This will be last meeting before the draft Action Plans are developed. NBEP staff are set to create draft Action Plans, complete action-specific outreach, and begin working with [Orion](#) and [Kerri Arsenault](#) to hire writers. Vision 2032 is due to EPA in 2024.

Darcy also discussed upcoming [SNEP Network](#) funding events. RI has an upcoming webinar on Wednesday, March 15, 10am-12pm. MA held a webinar on February 15 and will hold an in-person event on Monday, March 13, 10am-12pm. The network has created an excellent compilation of funding opportunities in both states [here](#).

Courtney Schmidt with NBEP discussed NBEP's internship program. NBEP can support 4-5 interns per year. The current budget supports 3 interns from Roger Williams University and two contract interns from outside Roger Williams. See the table below for our current interns.

Current NBEP interns

Intern	Mentor(s)	Project Summary	Start Date	End Date
Ethan Howard	Lilian Jeznach (RWU)	Develop a plastic monitoring procedure for rivers and streams.	10/31/22	5/31/23
Nathan Silveira	Pamela Judge & Ahmet Akosman (RWU)	Develop soil erosion control mesh using 3D printed mesh made of soy-based ink.	3/6/23	12/20/23
Erica Meier	Caitlin Chaffee (NBNERR)	Develop communication strategy and outreach materials for NBNERR.	3/6/23	8/30/23
TBD (interviewing interns in next few weeks)	Joel Singley (RWU)	Research the impacts of habitat and water quality change with removal of Kickemuit dam.	TBD	TBD

Courtney gave an update on the [social science working group](#). The working group was convened in 2021 and has created a matrix of social science indicators to pursue, including public access, resilient municipalities, public health, and the watershed economy.

Mariel Sorlien with NBEP presented the environmental justice map created for the City of Providence and discussed plans to build a watershed wide tool that cities and other organizations can use to build custom, local environmental justice maps. There was a great discussion about ways to make the tool more accessible, such as hosting a training event.

Mariel also presented the Blackstone water quality data tool, which organizes and presents Blackstone water quality data as an interactive map and downloadable report card.

Finally, Mike presented a long list of priority tasks NBEP staff will be pursuing from March through June. The timeline included writing for Vision 2032, the EPA Program Evaluation, the next Science Advisory Committee meeting, release of the Habitat Planning RFP, the 2023 §320/SNEP Workplan and Budget, the BIL Long-Term Spending Plan, the BIL Equity Plan, and several committee meetings.

COMMITTEE MEMBER UPDATES

Stefanie Covino, Blackstone Watershed Collaborative – The Woonsocket wastewater treatment plant (WWTP) had another spill. There is an issue with solids capacity. Sue Kiernan with RIDEM added that Woonsocket plans to bring in more equipment to handle solids while developing a more permanent solution. Kate Michaud with the Town of Warren added that Woonsocket takes solid waste for 29 out of 39 Rhode Island cities plus Massachusetts and Connecticut. (60% RI, 40% others), so the impact goes beyond the city.

David Monti, No Fluke Fishing, RI Saltwater Anglers Association – New England Saltwater Fishing Show (March 2023) will be a three-day event and expect to have 1500 people. The recreational fishing community is trying to bring attention to climate impacts, access, use conflicts, and wastewater concerns.

Karla Sangrey, Upper Blackstone Clean Water – Developing a regional biosolids master plan with Springfield, MA and NBC. Trying to come up with a long term, sustainable plan, but running into issues with disposal due to some states banning the land application of biosolids due to PFAS contamination.

Topher Hamblett, Save The Bay – In response to the discussion of the Woonsocket WWTP spill, he stated that it is unacceptable that these discharges continue to happen. He called for strong enforcement actions and increased and more timely transparency on the problem, decision-process, and enforcement actions.

Richard Friesner, NEIWPC – Noted that NEIWPC are working with partners on how to deal with biosolids in the region.

Heidi Ricci, Mass Audubon – Studying solar siting in Massachusetts with Harvard Forest. Monitoring offshore wind systems and attendant transmission to reduce land-based lines. Also working with SNEP on salt marsh restoration and permitting process. Alex Hackman is now heading wetland restoration at Mass Audubon.

Cristina Kennedy, MADER – Hiring several positions, both techs and new positions. The High Street dam removal is under construction and to be completed this summer/fall. The MA Hazard Mitigation and Climate Adaptation Plan is to be released in December.

John O'Brien, TNC-RI – Fuss & O'Neill is under contract with TNC (supported by RIDEM and NBEP) to create designs for fish passage across the four dams on the Lower Blackstone River in RI. They are two weeks from starting geotechnical and engineering at Main Street and Slater Mill Dam dams. Next will be alternatives for the next two dams, Elizabeth Webbing and Valley Falls dams. When completed this project will be the largest fish passage project in the northeast. Stefanie Covino noted that a [Fish Migration Parade](#) will be May 21st at

Slater Mill, hosted by the Narragansett Tribe. John O'Brien added that Bryce Dubois from the College of the Holy Cross is leading an environmental science class studying the project. Finally, TNC-RI and the RI Division of Marine Fisheries and Division of Fish and Wildlife are hosted meeting on March 2nd to highlight their fisheries and ecosystem monitoring partnership. NBEP and NBNEER were invited to attend.

Steve Silva, TRWA – TRWA is working with Save The Bay to advocate for new WWTF permits for the Somerset and Fall River facilities. The Taunton had a big herring run, which is very promising, responding to dam removal on the tributaries, with the fish spreading across tribs Events on their [website](#) include the April herring fest and June Taunton River fest.

Sue Kiernan, RIDEM – RIDEM is working with Tiverton to complete their wastewater sewerage project. Also working on an implementation project for the Mount Hope Bay TMDL, which will address remaining failing septic systems and cesspools.

Walter Berry, RIRC – RIRC has been very active. Saugatucket is spearheading nip collection, and Warren is planning an event. A bottle bill is once again before the RI General Assembly.

FY2023 WORKPLAN

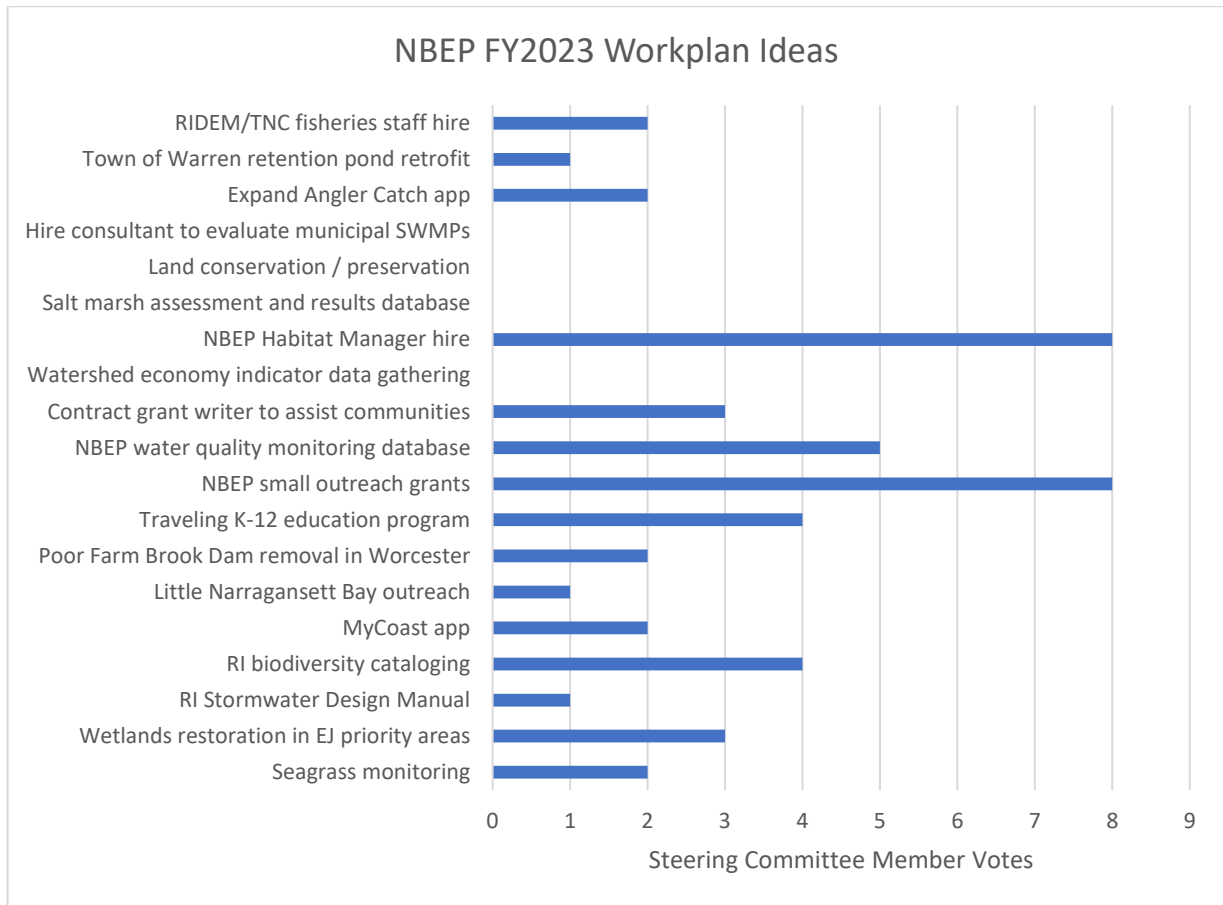
NBEP expects to receive \$1.1M in “Base” funding (\$320 and SNEP funds) from EPA by October 1, 2023, which *is in addition* to the budget shared earlier. Each year we consider new ideas (new hires, tasks, subawards). This year, we have about \$400K that could go to new ideas.

Darcy Young with NBEP next led an exercise to capture ideas, rough costs, who would lead the work (NBEP or fund a partner), and identify those with the most support for the next workplan. A document was shared that was seeded with some ideas that have been provided to date. Feedback was sought on existing ideas, as well as new ideas. Some highlights of the discussion are provided below:

- NBEP Ecologist Hire – John O'Brien said the region needs to expand capacity for facilitation and field work for habitat restoration. Mike Gerel said that the new position would work with partners—across states—to help prioritize habitat restoration projects and monitoring, akin to the role of the RI Habitat Restoration Team that NBEP helped lead a decade ago. A job description that maps out specifics would be drafted and shared with partners for comment if this idea goes forward. Heidi Ricci said the position sounds a lot like the role MADER serves in MA, and having someone to help standardize projects and share information across the states, especially monitoring data, would be a good idea. Tom Kutcher with RINHS emphasized that the hire should be complementary and not redundant with existing staff, with an expectation that it's duties could be transitioned to a future RIDER staffer. Stefanie Covino said this position would be helpful for coordinating efforts along the bi-state Blackstone River.
- NBEP Small Education and Outreach Grants – There was strong support for this idea. It was noted that this approach will only be worthwhile for NBEP and those applying if standard federal paperwork can be reduced. Darcy noted that the program has learned a lot over the last year, and has some standard templates and processes that streamline things as much as possible.
- RI Biodiversity Cataloging – Mike Gerel noted that such a catalog would require a significant investment to get from its current partial draft to a working form, yet is unlikely to be competitive for existing habitat restoration pots. Caitlin Chaffee followed that RINHS applied for RI Habitat Trust Fund dollars, but was not funded, despite the review committee feeling it was a much-needed effort. Several people suggested that ultimately any new index should talk/be linked to databases in Massachusetts and Connecticut.

- Seagrass Restoration – The five New England NEPs (especially Mass Bays) are exploring a regional eel grass seeding effort. The view from Narragansett Bay folks is that more monitoring data on extent and health of grass in our region is needed prior to any seeding. Tier 1 (aerial photography) and Tier 2/3 (diver assessment) is needed. The cost for Tier 1 monitoring exceeds what NBEP could cover this coming, and expertise who could complete dives and inform a seeding program is limited in our area at this time.
- RIDEM Modeler Hire –John O’Brien noted that RIDEM and TNC-RI partner on a robust fishery monitoring program, but there are capacity gaps that inhibit data organization, analysis, and use for decision-making. Mike noted that based on the March 2nd RIDEM/TNC-RI meeting he attended, and experience with RIDEM staff in the Blackstone River, there is a significant gap in expertise to run and develop models to access fish/shellfish stocks, ecosystem change, and appropriate adaptation. RIDEM fisheries folks have said a full-time staffer is needed.
- MyCoast App Expansion – The [MyCoast](#) app is a community science tool that enables collection and analysis of photos of shorelines in RI to capture the impacts of flooding. Photos, linked to data about weather and tides, create reports that help stakeholders to understand shoreline change and make more informed decisions. RI CRC is seeking funds to expand the app.
- Little Narragansett Bay Outreach – NBEP would like to expand its work in Little Narragansett Bay. RI and CT are assessing data to determine whether a nutrient TMDL is needed. Targeted outreach, and perhaps a needs assessment similar to what was created for the Blackstone, has been discussed. Mike noted the small outreach grants discussed earlier may be a way to build connections in this area.
- Expand Angler Catch App – This is a volunteer science app for recreational saltwater fishermen that gathers data, with an emphasis on discards, which is a current data gap. Dave Monti brought this effort to NBEP’s attention. The group working on the app (Harbor Light Software, RI Salt Water Anglers Association, RIDEM) are seeking funds to pursue further development and outreach to expand its reach in the region.
- NBEP Water Quality Monitoring Database – It was suggested that NBEP develop a database that rolls up water quality data from across the region. The view was that this would make tracking against NBEP’s indicators and other goals more possible. Tom Kutcher stated that a having a single organization or place that standardize and houses data would be useful. Sue Kiernan suggested the need for a regional data management plan, which describes existing data, its use, and accessibility. Mike Gerel added that the relatively dormant RI Environmental Monitoring Collaborative would be a good place to take these conversations, with the goal of expanding coordination and prioritization in RI, and then expanding to MA and CT.
- Watershed Economy Indicator – It was offered that this is a complex task, which would need a clear plan and sufficient funding. NBEP’s Social Science Working Group and the Coastal Institute [2019 economic report](#) are a start, but more work is needed.
- RI Stormwater Design and Installation Standards Manual – Sue Kiernan suggested that the state’s 2015 [stormwater manual](#) needs to be updated. A revision would be informed by recent work by MADEP and the SNEP network.
- Land Protection – Molly Allard with NRICD said increased coordination and capacity is needed to permanently protect land in RI. Courtney Schmidt with NBEP suggested creating a tool to identify priority areas for protection, which could span state lines.

Darcy compiled all ideas discussed and asked Steering Committee members to vote for those they felt NBEP should pursue this coming year. The results were as follows:



Mike Gerel closed the discussion by noting that NBEP staff will take this feedback into consideration when drafting the FY2023 Workplan (and budget) that will be presented to the Steering Committee for review and approval in June.

UPCOMING MEETINGS

- Vision 2032 Subcommittee, April 12th 10a-2p in-person at RIDEM in Providence.
- Science Advisory Committee, April TBD.
- Executive Committee, May 9th, 2023, 1-2:30 pm via Zoom.
- Steering Committee, June 9th, 10a-1p hybrid from NBC in Providence.

The meeting adjourned at 1:18 pm.