

**Executive Committee Meeting  
Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management  
235 Promenade Street, Room 200C1**

February 19, 2019  
9:30-11:30am

**MEETING NOTES**

**Attendees**

Judith Swift, Coastal Institute, University of Rhode Island  
Sue Kiernan, Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management  
Regina Lyons, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 1  
Heather Radcliffe, New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission  
Heidi Ricci, Mass Audubon  
Susan Sullivan, New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission  
Nick Wildman, Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game  
Caitlyn Whittle, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 1  
Mike Gerel, Program Director, Narragansett Bay Estuary Program

**Chair's Report**

Judith Swift, Chair of the Executive Committee called the meeting to order at 9:35am. She welcomed the committee, and the Narragansett Bay Program's (NBEP) new Program Director, Mike Gerel.

The minutes for the January 9<sup>th</sup> Executive Committee meeting were reviewed by the group. Heidi noted a typo in her thought about Harvard Forest. The minutes with this revision were approved unanimously. Judith summarized the schedule for upcoming committee meetings.

In response to a question from Mike, the committee indicated it is up to the NBEP to set future meeting dates for the Executive and Steering Committee. He indicated that he would work to set meeting dates and locations for the rest of the year in March.

**NBEP Going Forward**

Mike Gerel, the NBEP's Program Director offered his perspective on the current status of the program and his initial vision for 2019 and beyond. He noted that the program is currently on solid ground, having completed the 2017 Technical Report and otherwise advanced its mission, much to the credit of Heather Radcliffe with NEIWPC, the NBEP staff, and its committees. Staff are knowledgeable and committed, committees have remained engaged, and EPA and other partner organizations across the bi-state watershed support and value our work. Further, NEIWPC continues to be a strong host organization and governance and technical documents are in place to guide sound operation of the program.

Mike indicated that Eivy Monroy, NBEP's Watershed and GIS Specialist gave notice last week and would be leaving the organization to join MassDER. A suggestion was offered that the Environmental Data Center has GIS expertise that NBEP may be able to tap into in the interim. Mike committed to ensuring that Eivy's close-out with NBEP would be smooth, that steps would be taken to ensure existing staff are not overburdened in the interim, and that the position description would be evaluated for appropriate revisions, and the position filled efficiently.

Mike next highlighted his preliminary views of the needs and outcomes he sees for the program. What he felt was necessary immediately was steady leadership, continued engagement with partners, clear communication of NBEP's importance, affirmation of our commitment to science, crafting of forward-looking work plan, and

purusing concerted efforts to diversify funding. The long-term outcomes he foresaw as vital included that we assure that all key stakeholders clearly understand and value our role as the bi-state coordinator of best available science, back up this role with the right staff, infrastructure, and high quality work products, acquire at least one-third of our funding from non-Clean Water Act Section 320 (National Estuary Program) sources, establish an updated Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP) that is science-based, collaborative, and achievable develop clear metrics to track progress and adapt actions to implement the CCMP, and consider establishment of a “flagship” effort that is uniquely our own that we are known for across the watershed.

A wide-ranging discussion ensued among the committee members about Mike’s thoughts. It was reinforced that we must reengage with our critical partners with “post-Technical Report” efforts—to explain what we will do next. A perspective was also offered that NBEP should identify and remain aware of its target audience as it pursues its work—there is a “big tent” for our voluntary, non-regulatory work. Further, it was suggested that steps should be taken beginning with the next Steering Committee meeting to reinvigorate that group by establishing it as a place for open, strategic, and outcome-focused discussion of forthcoming NBEP efforts, especially the FY19 work plan/budget and funding opportunities that suit NBEP. We need to offer meaningful and exciting work to harness the expertise and energy of the group. MassBays NEP recently developed CCMP was put forward as a good example to review. It was also suggested that Mike talk to other National Estuary Programs (NEP) to get their funding ideas. Mike noted he was meeting with the New England NEPs next week and would be attending the national NEP meeting in mid-March.

There was good input about what a “flagship” effort for NBEP could be, with ideas including publishing of case studies, bringing people together to visit funded restoration work, or a bi-state canoe trip that gets people out in nature. All these efforts should take advantage of the “pride-of-place” that is associated with the local bi-state efforts we have been in the special position to support. Exchanging ideas should be continued.

### **Program Report Highlights**

Mike next walked through the February Program Report provided to the Committee. Some key comments from the Committee are provided here. Readers are directed to the Program Report for further specifics.

Heather provided a few edits to the numbers included in the table that summarized open EPA cooperative agreements. She noted that JCC 318 was remaining open to cover contractual obligations and that JCC 326 would be spent down soon.

Judith noted that this Committee has used an ad hoc nominating subcommittee to fill open Committee seats, but that in this case MassDEP would assign their own member. It was stated that Lealdon Langley at MassDEP would coordinate appointment of Kim Groff’s replacement. Sue Sullivan offered to speak to Doug Fine at the upcoming Commission meeting to remind him of need for a new MassDEP member. Further, in response to Mike’s specific inquiry about his own priorities, the Committee indicated that the FY19 work plan/budget and response to RAE’s SNEP funding opportunity should be moved up near the top of the list to help activate Mike’s initial ideas.

In the context of discussion of the Grants Subcommittee activities and grant writing needs, Judith noted that in addition to diversifying funding, we can seek masters and other students with the ability to complete white papers, analysis, and other supports. Art Gold, Peter August, and Drew Young were suggested as contacts to pursue. Mike indicated Peter would be at the NEIWPCC all staff meeting in late March. It was also suggested that the Steering Committee would be a good place to brainstorm and vet funding opportunities. Around the Finance Committee, Sue Kiernan reminded Mike that Jonathan Stone was willing to help with the Finance Plan, and that Finance Subcommittee was envisioned by this Committee, but not filled out with members to date. Mike noted that he would be meeting with Jonathan next week, was planning to work with him to create a solid draft, and then discuss with this group the need for engaging a subcommittee.

Mike shared NEIWPC staff were going to pursue sponsorships for the Blackstone Workshop using non-320 funds and leads provided by NBEP and partners in the basin.

Heather noted that the local mapping desired by TNC noted in the Habitat Restoration and Protection Mapping tool update was for the Taunton watershed. This led to a broader conversation about the inclusion of the term “protection” in the tool, and more broadly, in the context of NBEP’s work. There was consensus among the Committee members that NBEP was more focused on restoration, not permanent easement, purchase, or other protection tools, so the term should not be emphasized. Mike noted that protection could be viewed as just one “restoration practice.” Mike promised to further review this tool and the role protection plays in our work and the health of the watershed and come prepared to discuss further at a future meeting.

There was lots of Committee interest in the International League of Conservation Photographers RAVE idea. Judith noted the RI Committee for the Humanities could be involved. There were several suggestions to consider focusing on all of New England or Southern New England, which may be a way to make the ask more attractive. It was suggested that an endorsement letter signed by a long-list of partners could be created. Mike said he would reach out to his colleagues at the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, as well as RAVE to further explore.

In the context of Mike and Courtney’s conversations with MA around their NPS Plan update, CWA 319 funding, and municipalities development of local watershed plans, it was noted that MA has a tool from Geosyntec to assist with plan-building. Next, Sue provided a quick overview of where RI stands as the state is taking the lead in updating their plan.

In response to Mike’s specific question in the Program Report about what was meant by notations he has read in NBEP documents about “seeking an expanded role in on-the-ground projects,” the EC stated clearly that with NBEP’s mission and capacity, boots on the ground work should not be the focus. The convening, data management and analysis, and technical transfer ‘buckets’ that enable boots on the ground projects was appropriate—both for NEPORT dollars and acres restored reporting and for maximizing NBEP’s impact on improving the health and resilience of the watershed. NBEP is thinking “big-picture” to maximize leverage. It was noted that specialized on-the-ground efforts (e.g., invasives combat team) that fill an existing gap could be pursued by NBEP if project *and* capacity dollars are acquired.

In response to Mike’s specific question about best practice for grant writing, NBEP was encouraged to investigate and cultivate opportunities, coordinate closely with EPA and partners on those that show promise, and then bring funding ideas to the Committee for discussion.

### **Announcements**

Mass Audubon has recently made several new hires to assist their work.

### **Action Items**

1. Committee members to review the February Program Report and provide Mike any revisions or questions.
2. Mike will learn more about the Habitat Restoration and Protection tool, our involvement to date, and work with staff and the SAC to consider its applicability to our work moving forward.
3. Mike will explore the RAVE photography opportunity with CBF, RAVE, and others.
4. Committee members should share SNEP ideas with Mike.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:46am.