

## Executive Committee Meeting

Zoom Meeting

September 8, 2020

10:00am to 12:00pm

## MEETING NOTES

### ATTENDEES

Laura Blake, Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP)  
Caitlin Chaffee, Rhode Island Coastal Resource Management Council (CRMC)  
Richard Friesner, New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission (NEIWPCC)  
Sue Kiernan, Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM)  
Regina Lyons, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA—Region 1)  
Heidi Ricci, Mass Audubon  
Jonathan Stone, Save The Bay  
Caitlyn Whittle, EPA—Region 1  
Mike Gerel, Narragansett Bay Estuary Program (NBEP)

### INTRODUCTION

Caitlin Chaffee, our rotating Chair for this month, called the meeting to order at 10:05 am. She acknowledged those in attendance and walked through today's agenda. Caitlin also announced that she is leaving RI CMRC to lead the Narragansett Bay National Estuary Research Reserve starting on September 14<sup>th</sup>. She will continue to serve as Vice-Chair of our Steering Committee and Chair of the Vision 2032 Subcommittee.

### FINANCIAL REPORT

Richard Friesner provided an overview of NBEP's budget, remaining funds, projected expenditures, and details of subawards and contracts as of June 30, 2020. The financial report is provided as the first two pages of the PPT available here: <http://nbep.org/executive-committee/#1578587550097-2467e4ef-05f9>. He indicated that he would have final FY2020 numbers by mid-October. The program is in good financial shape overall. Award letters for \$320 and SNEP funds totaling \$912,500 have been received. Project spending for travel is less than expected due to COVID-19. In response to an inquiry from Sue Kiernan, Richard indicated that each contract includes project contacts, so they know where to go for questions. Richard is the contact for financials, while Mike or Courtney are the leads for programmatic issues. Sue also inquired whether NBEP is running into an internal capacity issues with the number of subawards/contracts in place. Mike indicated that staffing across NEIWPCC and NBEP is adequate to cover current workload and that expected to distribute the roughly \$400,000 budgeted for external parties in FY2021. Caitlyn Whittle asked that Mike provide a copy of the Financial Report prior to Executive Committee meetings so she can review in advance.

## PROGRAM REPORT

Mike offered a short program report via the PPT noted above. He shared that NBEP has been exceptionally productive this summer, and he is very proud of the hard work of the staff under difficult circumstances. Mike also pointed out that moving forward he will create a full written Program Report quarterly for Steering Committee meetings, while shorter PPT updates will be used for Executive Committee meetings. The intent is to reduce NBEP's reporting burden and make better use of staff time. The following nine topics were covered in the update, with some further details in the PPT:

1. EPA Cooperative Agreement finalization and submittal.
2. NBEP's Internship Program outcomes.
3. *Vision 2032* status.
4. Blackstone River Watershed Needs Assessment.
5. 2020 NBEP Quality Assurance Project Plan submitted.
6. New Science Working Group progress.
7. Preview of two new targeted research projects by Dan Codiga (as a follow-up to his recently released NBEP-funded report) and Sarah Schumann that will explore conditions and systems operating in Narragansett Bay.
8. Benthic Science Update—new Story Map here:  
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/3a3ae7c75b8944d787a6a0b49a5e4e77>.
9. New NBEP organizational website coming in November.

Laura Blake noted she would share Dan Codiga's newly finished work that led to his new contract with MassDEP staff that are looking at Mount Hope Bay.

## NOMINATING SUBCOMMITTEE UPDATE

Mike stated that NBEP's Nominating Subcommittee met for the first time on August 19<sup>th</sup>. This subcommittee will review nominees (both reappointments and new candidates) to serve on the Steering Committee. Mike noted that the Committee currently has 25 members and can have from 20 to 35 per the Guiding Principles. At the first meeting the group discussed the nominating process, a draft matrix of potential nominees, and identified expertise gaps, which included municipal, habitat/wildlife, fishing, business/finance, and environmental justice. Note that the nominee matrix was shared with the Steering Committee in June. Five members are up for reappointment and there are currently 18 top new candidates in the matrix. Mike encouraged the group to send any additional candidate ideas to him ASAP. He added that two members up for reappointment, the Taunton River Watershed Association and Narragansett Tribe, have not attended meeting since he started with NBEP in February 2019. Specific outreach to these members is planned to gauge their interest in continuing. Region Lyons noted that Michael Stover at EPA could help make some connections with tribal members in the region and that she would get in touch with him. Mike said the subcommittee plans to meet in September and October and have a final recommended slate of nominees ready for review by the Executive Committee on November 10<sup>th</sup> and approval by the Steering Committee in December.

## NBEP COLLECTION OF STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES FOR VISION 2032

Mike offered a 7-page presentation on the basics of the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA), its rules around use of federal funds for information collection and attendant Information Collection Requests (ICR), and how these issues intersect with NBEP's commitment to gather perspectives from diverse stakeholders for *Vision 2032*. NBEP and EPA have been exploring ways to collect community-based information for some time—in earnest since May. Mike noted that he is briefing the Executive Committee on this issue today to

gauge whether the Steering Committee should get involved in some manner to ensure the process move forward expeditiously. He presented four potential options for collecting desired information.

Jonathan Stone's view was that the Steering Committee would not care about the specific options and process used to collect information; rather they would be interested in the topics a survey will cover and how the information will inform decisions. Caitlin Chaffee concurred. Mike responded that based on the complexities and interpretations inherent to the PRA, EPA's decision-making process on this subject can be subjective and slow at times. EPA HQ was not responsive to Region 1's last ICR submittal. Further, a path for an NBEP survey has been illusive so far, so Mike felt NBEP Committee support may be needed to get the ball rolling. The urgency comes from NBEP's plan to begin drafting *Vision 2032* this winter, our vow to engage the community early and often in document development, and the pandemic's prevention of traditional in-person outreach. Jonathan suggested a letter of support from the Steering Committee for the NBEP staff's favored option would be appropriate if necessary, instead of a broader discussion of options.

Regina came forward to say that Region 1 had sent an email to Mike yesterday that recommended concurrent pursuit of both Option #3 (existing "Generic Citizen Science and Crowdsourcing ICR") and Option #4 (NBEP-Specific Fast-Track ICR). She said this was their view of the path forward. Mike responded that he did not read EPA's email as an approval to pursue those options but appreciated the clarification today. Caitlyn suggested that NBEP fill out and submit to her the paperwork for both options. With Regina's clarification and Caitlyn's directive, Mike concurred that Steering Committee engagement on this issue was not necessary and agreed the ball is in NBEP's court to submit the required paperwork. Mike thanked everyone for their patience with this messy topic and helping get us to a move forward plan.

#### **JUSTICE, EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION SUBCOMMITTEE**

Mike offered a short presentation that included some statistics and definitions related to environmental justice (EJ) in NBEP's study area. He noted that 78% of census block units in our study area include a portion that can be considered an EJ community. Sue inquired about what criteria were being used to identify EJ areas. Mike responded that NBEP used both a subset of census data related to race, poverty, and language, as well federal and state designated EJ areas. NBEP is has created an "EJ Dashboard," which it will release soon that clearly identifies these areas and some striking factoids about existing inequities in our study area. With that, Mike noted that with this EJ areas presence in our region, NBEP and *Vision 2032* must serve these areas if we are meet our mission in all our study area. To ensure we were all are on the same page at the outset of these discussions, Mike offered some definitions and graphic depictions of justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (or JEDI) adapted from the Avarna Group. Staff have built awareness of these matters via research, reading, and training over the last year plus, but are now interested in going deeper and building JEDI into the day-to-day operation of the program. Substance over gesture, actions over words, have ben our mantras. Mike suggested the best next step was for NBEP to form a subcommittee to guide the organization's JEDI work, with hiring a qualified consultant being the first action of the subcommittee. Thus, Mike sought concurrence from the Executive Committee to seek formal approval at the September 23<sup>rd</sup> Steering Committee meet to form JEDI Subcommittee.

Several members of the Committee felt the issue should be brought to the full Steering Committee first. Questions put forward included what type of training should be pursued, what would be the makeup of the subcommittee and what will its role be, what will the consultant do, and how this work would be integrated into *Vision 2032* and the larger program? Mike felt these were all good questions, yet ones he felt were best addressed deliberately by a smaller subcommittee with the assistance of a consultant. He expressed concern that these are delicate matters and beyond Catalina Martinez our staff and Steering Committee lack the expertise to ensure we pursue this work properly. The Executive Committee was firm in their view that it was best that Mike bring this issue first to the Steering Committee to discuss training, hiring a consultant, forming a subcommittee, and other concrete actions. Participants felt training for the Steering Committee would be a wise first step to develop common understanding before acting further.

There was clear consensus that a consultant should guide NBEP in this space. Mike noted there is money in the FY2021 budget for JEDI training, yet he was unsure how much training and a longer-term engagement with a consultant would cost. Per the advice of the Executive Committee, NBEP will forgo forming a subcommittee at this time and instead Mike will research potential consultants, conduct some screening interviews, and bring information on consultants to the next Steering Committee in December.

#### ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Jonathan reminded the group that the Restore America's Estuaries virtual conference is scheduled for September 29<sup>th</sup> to October 1<sup>st</sup>.
- Caitlin noted that NBEP will be holding an SAV Working Group meeting tomorrow. She shared the good news that funds for aerial imagery has been secured from CMRC, which will be used to create a regional baseline for future SAV restoration, monitoring, and other work.

#### ACTION ITEMS

1. Julia Bancroft will post the agenda and PPT from today's meeting on the NBEP website this week.
2. Laura Blake will share Dan Codiga's final report on his NBEP-funded work on DO, Chlorophyll a, and temperature to MassDEP staff studying Mount Hope Bay.
3. Committee members should send any potential Steering Committee candidates to Mike ASAP.
4. Regina Lyons will talk to Michael Stove to broker a connection between NBEP and the Narragansett Tribe.
5. Mike Gerel will submit the generic and fast-track ICR paperwork to Region 1 by November.
6. Mike will engage with potential JEDI consultants and update the Steering Committee at their December meeting.

#### UPCOMING MEETINGS

- Steering Committee: September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 10am-noon via Zoom.
- Executive Committee Meeting: November 10<sup>th</sup>, 10am-noon via Zoom.
- The next Vision 2032 Subcommittee scheduled for October 12<sup>th</sup> will be cancelled. Instead, NBEP felt it was more timely to hold the first Vision 2032 Focal Area Working Groups in October-November TBD.

Meeting ended at 11:56am