

## Executive Committee Meeting

Zoom Meeting

November 17, 2021

10:00am to 12:00pm

### MEETING NOTES

#### ATTENDEES

Richard Carey, Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP)  
Caitlin Chaffee, Narragansett Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (NBNERR)  
Allen Hance, Roger Williams University (RWU)  
Sue Kiernan, Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM)  
Regina Lyons, U.S. 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)  
Courtney Schmidt, NBEP

#### MEETING OPEN

Regina Lyons with EPA, Executive Committee Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:04a, asked everyone to introduce themselves, and summarized the meeting agenda. *Regina called for a vote to approve the Executive Committee meeting notes from June and August. Caitlin Chaffee with NBNERR offered a motion to approve the notes, with a second from Sue Kiernan RIDEM.*

#### PROGRAM REPORT

##### Financials

Mike Gerel with NBEP noted that the final report has been simplified, now just showing two categories of funding—those overseen by NEIWPC and RWU. He noted that RWU provides up to the current day reporting on expenditures, while NEIWPC through provides number that are usually not as current. Mike will always state the reporting date for all financials. He also shared that NEIWPC holds older FY18 and FY19 money that will likely require submission and approval by EPA of an amendment to assure they can be spent in accordance with the most current Work Plan. See the meeting PPT [here](#) for detailed financials.

##### Host Transition

Mike next noted that he and RWU staff across many departments have been very busy since NBEP joined the university on 9/27/21. Staff have been on-boarded, press release announcing partnership released, most IT and computer set-up completed, and RWU has designated staff to serve on NBEP committees. The main issues still pending are payment of all NBEP staff and contractor expenses/invoices, turning on NBEP office phones, finalizing the RWU/RIDEM office space agreement, and approving NBEP bylaws. Both Allen Hance with RWU and Mike thanked the staff and committee for being patient with the transition.

### Blackstone Initiatives

Mike shared that the final meeting of the Blackstone River Watershed Needs Assessment Project was held on [9/28/21](#), where 100 copies of the final report were made available. The [Blackstone Watershed Collaborative](#) published its website and held its first meeting on 10/16/21. NBEP led productive meetings of the Lower Blackstone Fish Passage Project on [9/30/21](#) and [11/9/21](#), which established project purpose, defined 12 priority needs, and began to identify solutions. Key meetings are scheduled with RIDEM, US National Park Service, Old Slater Mill Association, and US Army Corps of Engineers to discuss top priority land control and design needs. Expect next meeting in January-February based on outcomes of these meetings. Very optimistic we can have a consensus plan to meet the purpose by this summer.

### Vision 2032

Mike announced that NBEP has decided to pause work on Vision 2032 until January-February 2022 and seek an extension to complete the plan until June 2023 due to the need to meet in-person to complete the next phase of the project and the program being short two staff. Staff feel strongly they have done all they can with on-line only meetings over the last 18 months.

### Green Infrastructure RFP

NBEP released an [RFP](#) on November 8, 2021 that offers \$650K for green infrastructure planning projects. It requires a streamlined proposal format and includes new scoring and risk assessment forms. Committee members are asked to share the RFP with their networks.

### DEIJ Assessment

Mike updated the group that pre-interviews are complete, an internal and external survey was approved by on 11/5/21, with a deadline for survey completion of 11/24/21. Please complete the survey when you receive it from Lauren Watkins with Impact by Design. The plan is to release a final work and host a workshop to share results in early 2022.

### NBEP Science Updates

Courtney Schmidt with NBEP next offered updates on NBEP's science efforts:

- The Fisheries Ecological Knowledge (FEK) project draft report is complete, an advisory panel of fisherman, researchers, and resource managers has been formed to help finalize the report, and a culminating workshop is planned for 12/9/21 from 4-6:30pm via Zoom to share the results and begin to map out next steps. Feedback on the report and the effort in general has been universally positive.
- The work of NBEP's Water Clarity and Social Science Working Groups is explore how to deploy these factors is progressing. Both groups have defined potential indicators for clarity (e.g., compare if better or worse than pre-2012 levels) and social science (public health, economy, public access) for inclusion in NBEP's next status and trends report and use in management decisions. Courtney is working with NBEP's contact facilitator, Emily Shumchenia, through the end of the year to document findings and next steps.
- NBEP will host a signature annual event in spring 2022 at RWU titled "Innovative Solutions for Restoring and Sustaining Salt Marshes". This workshop was strongly supported by the Science Advisory Committee, the Salt Marsh Restoration Assessment and Monitoring Program (RAMP) Working Group, and other partners. An event subcommittee has been formed and will begin organizing the details of the meeting.

Committee feedback on this new work was very positive, including some excellent suggestions for keynote speakers and resources to make the new science event successful.

## DRAFT NBEP BYLAWS DISCUSSION

Mike Gerel noted that a condition of the grant agreement between EPA and RWU is that NBEP formally approve bylaws by 12/31/21. The bylaws will replace the existing Guiding Principles that current as of 2/7/18. The initial plan this summer was to hire a consultant to help us develop them, but due to the short December deadline, RWU and the NBEP Director went ahead and created a first draft that is currently under review by RWU legal. The plan is to bring the next draft to this committee for review and comment ASAP, with the end of year deadline in mind. Mike next shared a short presentation to kick-start thinking on the bylaws by highlighting seven key Articles of the draft, comparing it to the Guiding Principles where appropriate, and noting any important questions. Committee feedback was as follows:

- Instead of a three-year term with the ability to seek an additional year, it was suggested that reappointment for an additional term or two terms be allowed.
- It was agreed that staggering cohorts was wise to protect against whole sale member turnover. Mike noted that all current members have staggered ends to their terms, so we can continue that practice with reappointments and replacements.
- It was agreed that terms limits apply to the individual, not the organization.
- There was support for retaining required seats for state resource agencies for the Executive Committee due to the bi-state nature of the program.
- It was agreed that the changes to make the host provisions applicable to any host were sound.
- It was agreed that the grant writing and fundraising language was helpful to adhere to new EPA guidance.
- It was agreed to add the new section to be permissive about legislator education and letters of support. In response to concern from a committee member about the work load associated with letters of support, Mike acknowledged they can take time and will appreciate the committee's keeping an eye on this issue, he will manage NBEP staff time on such letters like he does other aspects of the Work Plan.
- There was support for certain people signing/certifying the bylaws, such as the Chair and NBEP Director, on behalf of the Steering Committee.

After some discussion of the 12/31/21 deadline for approving bylaws, EPA and RWU agreed that formal action could be pushed until January to avoid rushing and to ensure NBEP's committees are a full partner in their development. Mike suggested that he send the draft bylaws to the Executive Committee by the end of November, with comments due prior to their next meeting on 12/16/21. The draft can be introduced to the Steering Committee at their meeting that same day, with plans to convene a special meeting of the Steering Committee to approve the final bylaws in January.

## COMMITTEE MEMBER ROUND ROBIN UPDATES

Caitlin Chaffee with NBNERR announced that the RI Habitat Restoration Trust Fund [RFP](#) is open, with pre-proposals due 12/2/21. NBNERR also expects to receive money for habitat restoration from NOAA through the federal infrastructure bill.

Sue Kiernan with RIDEM announced that an [RFP](#) for nonpoint source pollution projects will be released soon. RIDEM also adopted freshwater wetlands regulations which are stricter than before that will be effective 7/1/22.

Jonathan Stone with Save The Bay shared his appreciation for those who participated in their strategic plan focus groups. Also, Save The Bay is designing the new Newport facility and using the space for a traveling exhibit focusing on partners and human connections to the Bay.

Heidi Ricci with Mass Audubon shared that they have a position [open](#) related to its “billion dollars for nature” campaign.

Regina Lyons with EPA noted that NEPs will be receiving an additional \$900K for the next five years through the infrastructure bill. EPA is exploring how to waive the match requirement for the NEPs.

#### **PLAN FOR DECEMBER NBEP COMMITTEE MEETINGS**

This session did not take place because NBEP had decided prior to today’s meeting to host the December 16<sup>th</sup> meetings fully virtually due to COVID-19 conditions.

#### **ACTION ITEMS**

1. Committee members to share link to NBEP’s RFP with their networks: <https://www.nbep.org/projects-we-fund#grant-opportunities>. Proposals are due 12/22/21.
2. Committee members to complete NBEP Steering Committee DEIJ Survey by 11/24/21: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/EnvironmentalJusticeSurvey>.
3. Mike Gere will share the draft NBEP bylaws with Committee members by 11/30/21, with comments due by 12/13/21.
4. Mike will send a revised invite out for the virtual December 16<sup>th</sup> Executive and Steering Committee meetings ASAP.

Meeting adjourned at 12:05pm.