

Executive Committee Meeting

Zoom Meeting

April 8, 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
Richard Friesner, NEIWPC
Sue Kiernan, Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM)
Regina Lyons, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA—Region 1)
Heidi Ricci, Mass Audubon
Susan Sullivan, NEIWPC
Caitlyn Whittle, EPA—Region 1
Mike Gerel, Narragansett Bay Estuary Program (NBEP)
Julia Bancroft, NBEP

INTRODUCTION

Regina Lyons, the Committee Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:03am and asked everyone to introduce themselves. *The Executive Committee meeting notes from the February 17, 2021 were approved with motion and a second from Caitlin Chaffee and Heidi Ricci, with one edit to remove the note about Jonathan Stone committee to join the Ad Hoc Host Subcommittee committee.* Regina welcomed Richard Carey with MassDEP, who has replaced Laura Blake as the DEP representative on the Executive Committee (EC). Richard is already a member of NBEP's Science Advisory Committee (SAC). Mike Gerel next reviewed the agenda for today's meeting.

NEW HOST UPDATE

Regina first shared this tentative timeline for host selection:

- April 8th—NBEP EC: finalizes Ad Hoc Host Subcommittee, review early draft RSOI
- Late April/Early May—Release RSOI
- Mid-June—RSOI closes
- Early-July—Hold host interviews
- Mid July—Host decision recommended to EC/Steering Committee (SC) for approval, make announcement
- July-September—Develop EPA Cooperative Agreement for FY21 grant award with new host
- By September 30, 2021—FY 21 award to new host

Heidi Ricci noted that the that the timeline is aggressive, but it has to be. Mike added that he had a good meeting with Richard Friesner and Caitlyn Whittle and there is agreement about the rough amount of funds that will remain at NEIWPC and those that will be transferred to the new host. The intent was to have a preliminary work plan and budget prepared as early as possible knowing the tight timeline. He noted highlights of both documents will be discussed in the next part of the meeting.

Regina next discussed the new host search process to date and requested input on some key next steps.

- Sue Kiernan with RIDEM, Bill Napolitano with the Southeastern Regional Planning & Economic Development District, and Stefanie Covino with the City of Worcester have agreed to serve on the Ad Hoc Host Subcommittee. She asked the group if 1-2 more members should be added. Heidi advised that it is wise to keep the ad hoc committee small due to the restricted timeline. *The EC approved moving forward with the current subcommittee.* Regina will confirm whether Jonathan intends to join the subcommittee.
- She also asked if the solicitation should be targeted, open, or a hybrid. Heidi suggested coordinating with the SC to get the word out to potential hosts. It was also offered by several members that some sort of public process be used to avoid any bias. *The EC decided a hybrid approach, where the subcommittee reaches out to specific targets and posts the solicitation publicly would be the best approach.*
- Finally, Regina sought input on logistics for the solicitation process. This includes the request for statements of interest (RSOI) format, who should send out/receive responses to the RSOI, and should responses be evaluated on a rolling basis or a strict deadline. She noted that EPA had drafted and shared an RSOI with the SC. Sue Kiernan asked if there will be an opportunity for people to ask clarifying questions prior to a formal submittal or interview. Caitlin Chaffee suggested appending questions to the RSOI so that all information is included in the formal process. Susan Sullivan followed that due to the time and effort to apply, it would be best to talk to/screen hosts before asking them to respond. She also suggested the letter should come from EPA to avoid potential conflicts of interests with Sue being on the subcommittee and RIDEM potentially seeking to be the new host. Susan then provided some edits to the RSOI, including changing office space to be match not in-kind and capitalizing 'Indirect Rate.' Mike noted that there are certain things that EPA wouldn't be able to require in a solicitation under their name, such as retention of existing staff, salaries, etc. It was mentioned that the EC officers could send out the RSOI and receive applications. *The EC agreed a letter with a deadline made sense but did not decide who should send/receive paperwork from potential hosts.* Regina asked the group to send any further feedback on the host selection process/RSOI to her for sharing with the new subcommittee.

FY21 WORK PLAN AND BUDGET PREVIEW

Mike offered a few slides as a preview of the FY21 work plan and budget that will need to be in place by October 1, 2021. He proposed the following six potential new tasks:

1. Revise NBEP Guiding Principles.
2. Develop a Finance Plan.
3. Create and submit three proposals to outside funders.
4. Host a new annual science event.
5. Hold an NBEP partnership retreat.
6. Develop and amend contracts (this will depend on the capabilities of the new host).

Sue noted that the SAC should be involved in any new science event, and Mike concurred that was the plan. Courtney will include this idea on the summer SAC meeting agenda for discussion. Several members noted the transition will likely create new work, so staff should be careful adding too many new tasks. Susan added that it is a burden on staff to come up with new tasks and the SC should vet and provide more input on new work. Mike noted that feedback on the new tasks shared today or other ideas would be welcome. The FY20 NBEP workplan is available [here](#) if EC members would like to consult it when thinking about new tasks. Mike followed that the draft work plan would be shared with the EC/SC for review before their meetings in June and will be discussed at those meetings prior to seeking preliminary approval. A final approval from both committees will have to wait until the new host is on board.

Mike next shared the table below that highlights some proposed subawards and contract expenditures under the next work plan that represent notable or new expenditures.

Expenditure	Est. Amount	Description
Subawards		
Watershed planning RFP	\$300,000	Subward of \$200K SNEP and \$100K NEP funds. <i>Want to put out single RFP with FY20 subward money also.</i>
Contracts		
Blackstone Coordinator position	\$30,000	Contract for additional funding to support this position.
Guiding Principles revision	\$5,000	Contract with Coastwise Partners to guide GP revision.
Annual Science event	\$10,000	Contracts to support in-person event.
Vision 2032 economic study	\$40,000	Contract expert(s) to assign value to Vision 2032/actions.
NBEP retreat	\$5,000	Travel, lodging, food, speaker stipend cost.
Other		
Cover unfulfilled FY20 budgeted obligations to staff	\$24,000	NEIWPC staff must be employed on 12/31/21 to receive this year's 10% 403(b) annual employer contribution. This amount was built into NBEP's approved FY20 budget fringe rate for staff. Because NBEP will go to a new host on 10/1/21, staff understand they are not eligible to receive this contribution. However, staff seek compensation in FY21 from the new host equivalent to the employer contribution for the 9 months they worked under the FY20 budget. Staff would be able to invest these funds in their retirement (taxes would apply). <i>The process for pursuing this action per rules needs to be discussed the appropriate NBEP committee, EPA, and the new host.</i>

Susan expressed concern about the inclusion of the retirement employer contribution in this budget. She reiterated that staff must be employed at NEIWPC as of 12/31/21 to receive an employer contribution and felt such a payment as described would be illegal. Mike disagreed, responding that this is an issue that arose with staff and was a post-10/1/21 transition-related matter that was worthwhile for the SC, EPA, and the new host to consider with appropriate experts. Susan offered that there is no guarantee that staff have a job at the new host, so she was concerned with this budget item. Heidi said that perhaps this is something the host subcommittee should discuss, as it is important that the program comply with federal requirements and look out for the interests of staff.

Mike next provided the following funding projections:

- FY20 funds to be transferred to new host by 9/30/21: \$800K
- FY21 award to new host by 9/30/21: \$950K
- FY21 funds expected to be unspent as of 10/1/22: \$360K (equates to 9 months of salary/fringe)

Susan stated that NEIWPC would expect to transfer NBEP funds they are not keeping to the new host in January 2022 when their 4th quarter books close. Caitlyn Whittle noted that the EPA Budget Office said that funds must be reallocated by 9/30/21 or they will be lost. Thus, she said any NBEP funds must be moved from NEIWPC to the new host by the end of September.

MASS AUDUBON OVERVIEW

Heidi Ricci gave a presentation titled, "Priorities for Mass Audubon from 2021-2025," which will roll out to the public next month. She shared their new vision statement, and several folks said they liked the use of the phrase "profoundly engage" when describing their connection with people on the ground. Their Resilient Landscape goals are most connected to NBEP through their desire to protect and steward the land across MA watersheds. There is also a focus on helping staff gear up across the organization for more advocacy work. A copy of Heidi's presentation will be posted on the webpage for this meeting when it is released to the public.

Sue asked about the state of their species composition data for MA and if it was public. Heidi said she would ask their Science Department. Following the presentation, Mike put a call out to members to talk about their work at future EC meetings.

MEMBER UPDATE ROUND ROBIN

- Richard Carey, MADEP: MADEP has two new job postings - Section Chief for TMDLs and Director of Watershed Program.
- Julia Bancroft, NBEP. Julia announced that she had completed a new Story Map in partnership with the Salt Ponds Coalition titled, [Locals Protect Rhode Island's Unique Coastal Ponds](#).

ACTION ITEMS

1. [Regina Lyons](#) will confirm whether Jonathan Stone intends to join the Ad Hoc Host Subcommittee.
2. [EC members](#) should send any further feedback on the host selection process/RSOI to Regina ASAP.
3. [Mike Gerel](#) will share a draft of the FY21 Work Plan and Budget prior to the June 17th EC meeting.
4. [Members](#) should reach out to Mike if they would like to speak at a future EC meeting.

UPCOMING MEETINGS

- Blackstone Needs Assessment Meeting, Wednesday, April 14, 2021 from 1:00-3:00pm.
- Executive Committee, Thursday, June 17, 2021 from 10:00am-12:00pm.
- Steering Committee, Thursday, June 23, 2021 from 10:00am-1:00pm.

Meeting adjourned at 12:00pm