

## Executive Committee Meeting

Zoom Meeting

June 6, 2022

10:00am-12:00pm

## MEETING NOTES

### ATTENDEES

Caitlin Chaffee, Narragansett Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (NBNERR)  
Allen Hance, Roger Williams University (RWU)  
Sue Kiernan, Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM)  
Heidi Ricci, Mass Audubon  
Caitlyn Whittle, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA—Region 1)  
Mike Gerel, Narragansett Bay Estuary Program (NBEP)

### MEETING OPEN

Caitlin Chaffee with NBNERR, Committee Vice Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:05am, and summarized the meeting agenda. *DECISION: The Executive Committee (EC) meeting notes from February 2, 2022 were approved by a motion (Sue Kiernan, RIDEM) and a second (Allen Hance, RWU).* Note that due to the timing of the next SC meeting (10 days away on June 16<sup>th</sup>), a Program Report was not offered at this meeting. The PPT for this meeting is available [here](#).

### PROPOSED WORKPLAN AMENDMENT TO ADD NEW TASK

Mike Gerel with NBEP described the proposed FY2021 Workplan amendment to the EC. The amendment will add a new task to support the [2022 Blackstone Expedition](#) via a \$15K subaward to RISD. The paddle will go from Worcester, MA to Pawtucket, RI from August 11-14<sup>th</sup> to raise awareness about opportunities to improve the Blackstone River. Funds will be used to pay speakers, printing, transportation, paddling and portage gear, and insurance. The public is invited to participate in the last four miles on Day 4 from Festival Pier Boat Launch Pawtucket to Gano Park Boat Launch in Providence. In response to a question as to why RISD was receiving the subaward, Mike noted that RISD had volunteered to coordinate and serve as the fiscal sponsor for the event. They are waiving their indirect fee and providing their time at no cost, so all funds are going to the paddle.

*DECISION: The amendment to the NBEP's FY2021 Workplan was approved by a motion (Heidi Ricci, Mass Audubon) and a second (Allen Hance, RWU).*

### BACKGROUND ON BIPARTISAN INFRASTRUCTURE LAW (BIL) AND JUSTICE 40

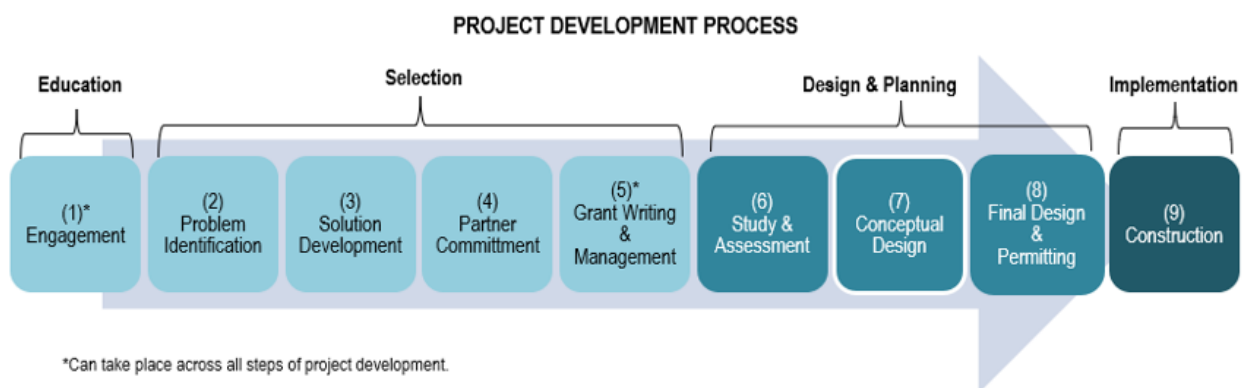
Caitlyn Whittle with EPA Region 1 offered a brief overview of the [Bipartisan Infrastructure Law](#) (BIL) and [Justice 40 Initiative](#). In short, BIL will provide \$909,857 in funding to NBEP annually over the next five years. Year 1 funds are already in Region 1. There will be a separate award from NBEP's typical "base" award of

Clean Water Act §320 and Southeast New England Program (SNEP) funds. Justice 40 will require 40 percent of the benefits from certain Federal investments in climate change and clean energy are accrued to disadvantaged communities. BIL funding is subject to Justice 40. The current expectation is that non-federal match will be waived for the first year of BIL funds. Years 2-5 match waivers may be tied to approval of individual NEP equity plans. Further, it appears that compliance with the 40 percent goal for NEPs can be met nationwide, in that individual NEPs do not necessarily need to meet the goal. Match waivers, means to comply with Justice 40, required metrics and tracking, and other specifics are pending until release of NEP BIL guidance and/or new Information Collection Request (ICR).

Mike noted that NBEP’s Draft BIL Workplan and Budget the Committee will discuss today were specifically crafted to meet existing and any expected BIL and Justice 40 requirements. However, we still need to come back to our committees for final approval. NEP BIL guidance is expected early this summer. The timing of the guidance release and capacity within EPA’s grants office will dictate when awards are made.

### NBEP BIL WORKPLAN AND BUDGET

Mike Gerel provided an overview of NBEP’s BIL funding plans for FY2022 (remember EPA “labels” funds based on the year they are awarded). We propose to utilize Year 1 BIL funding to cover eight direct subawards (non-competitive) to partners to help them develop projects. This is directly responsive to needs on the ground. Based on considerable outreach over the last year-plus, limited capacity at municipalities and community groups is the top barrier to development more projects. The pipeline of shovel-ready projects is quite limited. We plan to issue five subawards to support local staffing, two for planning and design, and one for education. Roughly 75% of the benefits from these subawards are expected to be delivered to disadvantaged communities. Note that NBEP and RWU staff oversight of these awards would be funded by §320 money. The primary metrics we expect to use are staff hired and “projects advanced.” Projects are actions that reduce pollution, restore habitat, improve climate resilience, and advance environmental equity. Projects advanced refers to moving a project at least one step forward in the 4-phased, 9-step process from problem to construction (see below).



Expected outputs of this funding are more local staff time, 50 quality projects advanced, and plans and advocates developed for two high priority projects. The leading outcome is conditions in place to bring more federal funds and implement more projects to the region. The timing for formal award of these funds is unknown at this time, but hopefully by the fall.

A comment was offered that ensuring local commitment (from municipalities mostly) will be a priority to ensure projects are actually advanced. Another related comment was to assure local engagement early to build municipal staff and stakeholder support for projects. It was also noted that the Workplan should be

more specific about desired outcomes, especially the timing of their attainment. A final comment was that forgoing a request for proposals and using the direct award approach made good sense based on the capacity issue we are responding to, but NBEP should make sure that the process is transparent, that is, those who may be interested in funding are aware of the opportunity. EPA noted that competition is not required, so doing so is up to NBEP.

Mike concurred with these insights and promised to revise the Workplan accordingly. He especially agreed with the note about ensuring folks in need of funding know about our opportunities. Mike noted the program has and will continue to get the word out through partners (and their groups like RTWN, the Blackstone Collaborative, and RI Rivers Council) and one-on-one contacts, and will also add a band at the top of the NBEP website regarding funding availability moving forward. NBEP expects to have about ~\$350K of FY2021 monies to re-budget (due to having only two-staff for 9 months and the delay in Vision 2032 contracting), and will have base and BIL funding coming next year. Thus, for each new pot of money the program decides to share externally, we will need to decide as a partnership whether to use direct awards or a competitive process.

*DECISION. The BIL Workplan and Budget with revisions responsive to today's EC comments was advanced to the SC for provisional approval with a motion (Allen Hance, RWU) and second (Sue Kiernan, RIDEM). When EPA NEP BIL Guidance is published and reviewed, Mike will bring the final Workplan and Budget back to this committee.*

#### **NBEP §320 AND SNEP WORKPLAN AND BUDGET**

Mike next shared plans for NBEP's FY2022 base year award of \$1,000,000 (\$750K from §320, an increase of \$50K, and \$250K from SNEP). 1:1 non-federal match is required for these funds. NBEP has proposed a Workplan, which covers §320 and SNEP funds, with 4 objectives and 15 tasks, which is very similar to last year. The only new task is completion of a tribal land acknowledgment. The budget includes a year's-worth of personnel time, along with a mix of external subawards and contracts. Note that in past years the budget included more than one-year of personnel time, but with considerable personnel budget left unspent from FY2021 and secure BIL funds looking forward, we went with one year for FY2022. Two direct subawards totaling \$250K are proposed, one to NBNERR to advance a sediment placement project at Succotash Marsh and another to Clark University to continue support for the new Blackstone Watershed Collaborative. Further, a suite of contacts totaling roughly \$100K are included to support Vision 2032, the land acknowledgment, and outside interns.

Mike closed with a plea for match. As of the meeting date, we only had \$191K of committed match from TNC, leaving a need of \$809K. Several committee members noted that their match forms would be forthcoming prior to the next SC meeting on June 16<sup>th</sup>. Like past years, these funds should be available by October 1<sup>st</sup>.

The committee voiced support for the Workplan and Budget. Caitlin Chaffee offered some history and perspective on the proposed Succotash Marsh work. Sue Kiernan suggested that staff ensure the Science Advisory Committee (SAC) is asked to review the Vision 2032. Mike noted that the SAC has so far been integrated via the existing subcommittee/working group structure dating to 2019, and their input so far in the brainstorming/process-heavy stage has been fairly modest. Moving forward, SAC input will be sought on individual Action Plans in their area of expertise. All committee members, including the SAC, will have the opportunity to review the final drafts before it goes out to public comment/peer review next year. Our general thinking is that the best approach (and use of SAC members time) is to seek their review of written materials once they are in solid draft form.

*DECISION. The §320/SNEP Workplan and Budget was advanced to the SC for approval with a motion (Allen Hance, RWU) and second (Heidi Ricci, Mass Audubon).*

#### COMMITTEE MEMBER UPDATES

Heidi Ricci—As a follow-up about our plans to fund the 2022 Blackstone Expedition, she shared the link to a video about the Zap the Blackstone event in 1972: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=dpYtjdfAYro](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dpYtjdfAYro).

Caitlyn Whittle—Suggested that NBEP look at EPA’s Environmental Justice Capacity-Building Grants to help identifying outputs and outcomes (many long-term) from the type of work we expect to support with BIL dollars.

Sue Kiernan—Noted that RI’s new freshwater wetlands rules will be effective July 1, 2022.

#### ACTION ITEMS

1. Mike will revise the BIL Workplan per comments received today and share with the SC next week.
2. Committee members should submit their match forms to Mike ASAP.
3. EPA Region 1 will share the NEP BIL Guidance as soon as it is published.
4. RWU will formally submit the paperwork for the FY2022 Base Cooperative Agreement shortly after the next SC meeting.
5. RWU will submit the paperwork for the FY2022 BIL Cooperative Agreement once the guidance is published, submittals updated, and EC/SC have issued approval.
6. The next Steering Committee meeting is June 16<sup>th</sup> from 1:00 to 4:00pm.
7. The next Executive Committee meeting is August 9<sup>th</sup> from 10:00am to 12:00pm.

The meeting adjourned at 12:09pm.