

Executive Committee Meeting Notes

June 8, 2023
10:00am-11:00am
Zoom Meeting

Attendees

Richard Carey, Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP)
Caitlin Chaffee, Narragansett Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (NBNERR), Chair
Sue Kiernan, Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM)
Dave Monti, Vice-Chair
Regina Lyons, US EPA Region I
Heidi Ricci, Mass Audubon
Jonathan Stone, Save the Bay
Caitlyn Whittle, US EPA Region I
Mike Gerel, Narragansett Bay Estuary Program (NBEP)
Darcy Young, NBEP

Meeting Open

Caitlin Chaffee, NBNERR, Chair called the meeting to order at 10:03am, summarized the meeting agenda, and asked for feedback on the February 2023 Executive Committee (EC) meeting notes. *DECISION: The EC meeting notes from February 14, 2023 were approved by a motion (Dave Monti) and a second (Sue Kiernan, RIDEM).*

The presentation for this meeting is available [here](#).

Jonathan Stone, Save the Bay announced that Save the Bay still seeks applicants for its Executive Director position and asked for help in spreading the word.

NBEP Quarterly Financial Report

Mike Gerel, NBEP walked through the NBEP Quarterly Financial Report, which has been simplified to track by source of funds rather than by funding year. NBEP's financial standing remains solid. FY2023 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) funds for EPA FY2023 (which start October 1, 2023) have already been received, and FY2023 base (320 + SNEP) funding is expected to total \$1.1M with \$850,000 from EPA 320 and \$250,000 from SNEP. Note that the FY2023 base funding is not shown in the budget slide as the funds have not yet been received. NBEP has \$1.9M available to spend, but most of that amount is actually already allocated. By the end of this fiscal year, NBEP will have 8 months of salary reserves.

NBEP FY2023 Base Workplan and Budget

Mike next presented the FY2023 base (320 + SNEP) workplan, totaling \$1.1M, with four objectives and several tasks. The workplan is substantially similar to the FY2022 base workplan, so Mike provided details only on the

new items, noting that each received significant support during the March Steering Committee exercise to gather ideas for the workplan. The new items include:

- Subaward (\$75,000) to RIDEM Fish & Wildlife for a new hire to complete data analysis
 - Heidi Ricci, Mass Audubon asked about the possibility for this hire to coordinate with Massachusetts, especially on shellfish restoration. She suggested that NBEP/the new hire reach out to Mass DEP, Mass Wildlife, Massachusetts' Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program, Massachusetts Inland Fisheries, and Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries. Heidi offered to make introductions if needed.
 - Caitlin Chaffee asked why analysis of bird populations was included in the scope of work for the subaward. Mike speculated that including language about bird population analysis was likely included to open up other funding avenues for the position (as NBEP's subaward will not cover the entire cost of the hire). Caitlin noted that NBNERR seeks a statistician and that may be a way to cover the additional funding needed for the position.
 - Dave Monti expressed support for the position, noting that there is a need to investigate climate change impacts on bait profiles, which have shifted and now bring in different predator and forager species. Dave highlighted that it is especially critical for this analysis to cross state lines.
 - Richard Carey, MassDEP asked about funding sustainability for this position. Mike responded that the position would be hired through the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission and that NBEP hopes to partially fund the position for 2-3 years until RIDEM decides to create an FTE for the position.
 - Sue Kiernan, RIDEM requested to be included in the conversation about match for this subaward because Water Resources might be able to contribute. may be able to help SNEP narrow down their list of suggested ecological metrics.
- Subaward (\$100,000) to the Rhode Island Natural History Survey (RINHS) to further development of the new BORIS2 biodiversity database, which will be a more complete and useable index of species, observers, dates, locations, and evidence in Rhode Island.
 - Caitlin Chaffee, who sits on the board of RINHS, noted that this activity has been ongoing for a while with very small amounts of funding, and that the NBEP subaward would allow work to proceed much more quickly. She also noted that RINHS has coordinated at least one end-user meeting for the database. Mike clarified that the deliverable for the subaward will be a useable, working database prototype for at least some species, if not all.
- Funding (\$57,573) for targeted outreach and education subawards to various recipients
- NBEP Ecologist Hire to help prioritize habitat restoration around the region and manage habitat-related subawards going out from NBEP.
 - Sue suggested adding language to the Ecologist description that would encourage coordinating with SNEP through their monitoring and ecosystem services committees.

Mike noted that RWU will charge a new indirect rate to the FY2023 base funds. Rather than charging 20% on salary alone, RWU will charge 16.2% on various budget items including subawards. Mike predicts that this will result in slightly higher indirect costs.

Mike noted that the workplan for FY2023 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funds was already approved by the Steering Committee in 2022. Half of the FY2023 BIL funds will be awarded through NBEP's Freshwater and Estuarine Habitat and Public Access RFP this summer/fall. NBEP expects to request approval from the SC to allocate the remainder of the FY2023 BIL funds to direct capacity-building awards. Sue Kiernan asked how NBEP staff are handling the subaward workload. Mike responded that staff are juggling the many subawards

well, but that it has been a pinch to add in the expectations of several EPA-required plans, including the Equity Plan and the Program Evaluation.

Mike requested that partners submit forms to document non-federal match for NBEP's FY2023 base funding by June 13. To date, NBEP has received only one form.

DECISION: The EC recommends sending the FY2023 base workplan and budget to the Steering Committee. Moved by Dave Monti, seconded by Sue Kiernan. The motion passed with unanimous approval.

NBEP Program Updates

Program Evaluation

Mike provided brief updates on NBEP's upcoming EPA Program Evaluation (PE), which is required for continued funding. NBEP prepared a narrative of accomplishments from October 2017-September 2022. The site visit will take place between June 28-30. Regina Lyons, EPA Region 1 thanked everyone in advance for participating in the PE and noted that NEPs can no longer fail PEs.

Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Long-Term Plan

Mike gave a short description of NBEP's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Long-Term Plan, which is a broad, eagle's-eye view of how NBEP will allocate BIL funds. EPA Region 1 will approve this plan; it does not need to go to EPA Headquarters for approval.

Equity Plan

Mike described progress on NBEP's Equity Plan, which is an EPA-required document that lays out how NBEP plans to meet Justice40 requirements on BIL funds. Meeting or exceeding Justice40 requirements will qualify NBEP for a match waiver on BIL Year 3-5 funds (note that NBEP already has Years 1 and 2 and match was not required). NBEP has completed the static map that delineates Environmental Justice Areas for the purposes of NBEP BIL funds. The interactive tool, which will allow communities to build their own maps based on parameters that matter to them, will be complete soon. NBEP is working on a narrative document (the Equity Plan) to accompany the map. We will request SC approval for the Equity Plan in the fall and then submit to EPA.

Upcoming Meetings

The Steering Committee will meet on June 30 at 10:00am at the Narragansett Bay Commission.

NBEP requests that the date of the next Executive Committee meeting, currently scheduled for August 8, be pushed to the fall to allow EPA to weigh in on NBEP's draft Equity Plan. Mike will follow up for scheduling.

Action Items

None. The meeting adjourned at 11:09am.