

Executive Committee Meeting

Zoom Meeting
August 9, 2022
1:00pm-3:00pm

MEETING NOTES

ATTENDEES

Richard Carey, Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP)
Caitlin Chaffee, Narragansett Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (NBNERR)
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 (STB)
Mike Gerel, Narragansett Bay Estuary Program (NBEP)
Courtney Schmidt, NBEP
Mariel Sorlien, NBEP
Darcy Young, NBEP

MEETING OPEN

Regina Lyons with EPA, Committee Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:05pm, and summarized the meeting agenda. She led introductions, including new NBEP staff, Mariel Sorlien and Darcy Young. *DECISION: The Executive Committee (EC) meeting notes from June 6, 2022 were approved with edits by a motion (Heidi Ricci, Mass Audubon) and a second (Sue Kiernan, RIDEM).* The PPT for this meeting is available [here](#).

FINAL FY2022 BIL WORKPLAN AND BUDGET

On July 26th, the EPA released guidance for the [Bipartisan Infrastructure Law \(BIL\)](#) and [Justice 40 Initiative](#). In short, BIL will provide \$909,800 in funding to NBEP annually over the next five years. NBEP's provisionally approved workplan is consistent with the guidance. Given the timeline to release the guidance and funds, EPA is packaging Year 1 and 2 monies together (FY2022 and FY2023, using EPA language). No match is required for these funds. This required a change in NBEP's BIL workplan and guidance by adding a request for proposals (RFP) to subaward all Year 2 funds (\$909,800). The Year 2 RFP would award from \$50K-\$200K per project, 5-15 projects would be supported. The total budget for the BIL workplan is now \$1,891,600.

NBEP plans to track all projects developed through implementation. The anticipation is by Year 5, projects stemming from the Year 1 BIL workplan are moving towards construction. Depending on the topic, the proposed Year 2 RFP could be open to the same groups who received funds in Year 1, or new organizations and projects. NBEP would like to submit the document as soon as possible to raise the chance of receiving funding by December. We will seek approval of the BIL workplan via email from the Steering Committee

since their next meeting is September 16, 2022. EC members offered uniform support for this approach. *DECISION: The NBEP FY2022-2023 BIL workplan and budget were approved to be send to the Steering Committee for review and vote via email by a motion (Jonathan Stone, STB) and a second (Sue Kiernan, RIDEM).*

NBEP QUARTERLY REPORT

NBEP is in good financial standing. All the money left at NEIWPCC when we moved to RWU is now spent. Of the money awarded to RWU last year, we expect to have about \$700,000 remaining at the end of the fiscal year. Our initial plan is to re-budget these funds to half can be used for personnel costs and the other half subawarded to external projects. More discussion on this topic is planned to close this meeting.

NBEP's new staffers are on board. Mariel Sorlien is NBEP's Geospatial Analysis and Design Manager responsible for NBEP's data and visualization work. Darcy Young is NBEP's Watershed Outreach Manager who leads outreach, Vision 2032 drafting, and social media.

NBEP submitted its FY2022 Section 320 and SNEP workplan and budget (totaling \$1M). All required match was received for this workplan. As just discussed, the FY2022-2023 BIL workplan and budget (\$1.82M) are ready to go pending Steering Committee approval in December. Our hope is to receive both awards by the end of calendar year 2022.

On July 13th, NBEP hosted a Science Advisory Committee (SAC) meeting highlighting the work of two members: [Baylor Fox-Kemper](#) (Brown University) and [Candace Oviatt](#) (URI). Baylor shared his work on the most recent IPCC report, while Candace provided a discussion on nitrogen reduction in Narragansett Bay with a look towards the future and understanding the best mix of nutrients for a dynamic ecosystem. The SAC and EC discussions emphasized the need for a model that represents the system's hydrodynamics, has been validated with sufficient data, and is ultimately, useful to managers. The potential for NBEP staff to assemble people/data to compile the existing models, identify what we have and what we need, and then fund further research (hack-a-thon, hire a contractor) that advances the ball toward an open source user-friendly model was discussed.

In June 2022, NBEP released an update on water clarity in Narragansett Bay. The *State of Narragansett Bay and Its Watershed* included multiple types of data for water clarity. In 2020, NBEP formed a Water Clarity Working Group to explore how best to communicate and use these data. The update describes changes in water clarity, the reasons for the changes, and tools used to measure it. The [update](#) hopes to stimulate discussion about how to advance the use of water clarity in management and identify areas for research.

Mariel is working on a StoryMap that tracks the actions and resulting water quality improvements from 1995-2020 that led to the Providence River being opened for quahogging in 2021 for the first time 75 years. The aim of the map is to show real world results of water quality improvements. Mariel will have this update ready by late fall.

The addition of Darcy to the team and a desire to meet in-person has reinvigorated the Vision 2032 process. Sketch plans (the first 5 pages of our Action Planning Worksheet) for the 50 proposed actions are being drafted. The reboot meeting has been scheduled for [September 21st at RIDEM in Providence](#). Darcy has been reviewing materials and developing activities to hone the actions as a group and set the stage for NBEP staff to lead completion of the Action Plans this winter.

The Blackstone River Expedition 2022 will take place August 11-14th with a public portion on August 14th starting at Festival Pier in Pawtucket and finishing at the Narragansett Brewery in Providence. See the Blackstone River Commons [website](#) for more information.

Finally, NBEP staff have been busy conducting outreach, on-boarding the new staff, and showing up in the news! Check out an article on Courtney from the [GSO Alumni Magazine](#) and Mike and Stefanie Covino of the Blackstone Watershed Collaborative were interviewed for [EcoRI](#) about the Blackstone River Expedition.

COMMITTEE MEMBER UPDATES

Heidi Ricci, Mass Audubon—Mass Audubon is continuing projects (in-stream and salt marsh) and capacity building in the Narragansett Bay watershed.

Jonathan Stone, STB—RI had a good legislative season, including bond fund and \$4 million for environmental projects. He noted that these funds can help with NBEP match. STB's Newport aquarium is moving forward and they are looking for partner exhibits for spring/summer 2023. STB is finalized its strategic plan including more emphasis on restoration, including hiring of 4 people.

Sue Kiernan, RIDEM—Noted RI's legislation for PFAS requires surface water action levels by 2023. Freshwater wetlands rules went into effect July 1. They hired 3 people to help. RIDEM is taking input for the 2022 water quality needs survey.

Richard Carey, MassDEP—Promoted to Direct of Watershed Planning and currently looking to backfill Section Chief of Water Quality Programs.

Caitlin Chaffee, NBNERR—NBNERR submitted plans for NOAA BIL funds for restoration and will be hiring people through NOAA capacity building funds to help develop new projects. These are 3-year positions, but hope for 5-year terms. Kenny Raposa has been published in [Science](#). They are also gearing up for developing a Succotash Marsh restoration project with support from NBEP.

Regina Lyons, EPA—Regional Administrator David Cash is exciting to be participating in Blackstone paddle

FY2021 FUNDS RE-BUDGET

NBEP is projected to have approximately \$700K unspent at the close of the fiscal year on September 30, 2022. EPA is requesting that this unspent total be reduced. NBEP plans on holding \$350K for personnel costs and putting out \$350K as subawards to partners this fall. Splitting 50/50 provides a cushion for personnel costs to respond to any federal budget changes. The subawards could be provided directly or via an RFP process. We have a list of potential projects based several months of outreach, which includes mostly habitat planning, with some targeted capacity-building and research (idea for NBEP to facilitate or fund a Bay model was noted by the EC). NBEP is inclined to emulate the approach to Year 1 BIL monies and use direct subawards for projects that are ripe for development, and cast a wider request via an RFP to share the larger pot of Year 2 BIL funds we expect for 2023. Stay tuned as we seek input from the full SC in September on the best approach to sharing these extra funds.

ACTION ITEMS

1. Mike will seek email approval for the FY2022-FY2023 BIL Workplan and budget from the Steering Committee ASAP.
2. Executive Committee to bring project ideas to the September Steering Committee meeting.
3. The next Steering Committee meeting is September 15th from 1:00 to 4:00pm.
4. Vision 2032 Subcommittee meeting will be September 21st IN-PERSON at RIDEM, from 10am-4pm.

The meeting adjourned at 3:05pm.