

Steering Committee Meeting

Zoom Meeting

March 17, 2022

12:30pm to 3:30pm

MEETING NOTES

Attendees

Regina Lyons, Chair, US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA Region 1)
Caitlin Chaffee, Vice Chair, Narragansett Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (NBNERR)
Colleen Brown, Town of Swansea, MA
Richard Carey, MA Department of Environmental Protection (MADEP)
Rachel Calabro, Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH)
Andrea Coates, MA Department of Transportation (MADOT)
Stefanie Covino, Blackstone Watershed Collaborative
Gina Demarco, Northern RI Conservation District
Richard Friesner, NEIWPC
Walter Galloway, RI Rivers Council (RIRC)
Ben Greenstein, Roger Williams University (RWU)
Allison Hamel, RI Department of Transportation (RIDOT)
Allen Hance, RWU
Rob Johnston, Clark University
Cristina Kennedy, MA Division of Ecological Restoration (MADER)
Sue Kiernan, RI Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM)
Hillary King, Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (MAEOEEA)
Dave Monti, No Fluke Fishing and Providence Journal
Bill Napolitano, Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District (SRPEDD)
John O'Brien, The Nature Conservancy, RI Chapter
Heidi Ricci, Mass Audubon
Karla Sangrey, Upper Blackstone Clean Water
Alexa Sterling, EPA Region 1
Nate Vinhateiro, URI Coastal Institute
Caitlyn Whittle, EPA Region 1
Donna Williams, Blackstone River Coalition, Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor
Mike Gerel, NBEP
Courtney Schmidt, NBEP

Meeting Opening

Regina Lyons with EPA Region 1, Chair of the Steering Committee (SC) called the meeting to order at 12:35pm. She welcomed members and asked everyone to introduce themselves. *DECISION: The notes for the December 16, 2021 meeting were approved by a motion (Sue Kiernan, RIDEM), and a second (Dave Monti, No Fluke Fishing).* Mike Gerel with NBEP noted that the [PPT](#) from today's meeting will be posted later today. Highlights from this presentation and the discussion at the meeting are provided in these notes.

NBEP Bylaws

Mike presented 7 changes to the bylaws since the December Steering Committee meeting (see [PPT](#)):

1. Swapped “**standing committees**” for Management Conference as NBEP has not used this Clean Water Act-derived term.
2. Added a **narrow exemption to term limits** designed to cover circumstances where there is simply no other person at a key stakeholder that can take a termed-out member’s seat. The exemption requires two-thirds majority vote of the SC to be executed.
3. Added a **clarification for when the SC would have to approve amendments to the workplan and budget**. “Major” amendment means new tasks not currently in the workplan or individual budget line items revisions that exceed 10% of the year’s CWA 320 allocation. This is to balance host primacy on personnel issues, appropriate committee oversight and use of their time, and flexibility for ED to make ready decisions
4. Added language that **defined the representatives to the Executive Committee** (EC) to include RIDEM, MassDEP, an NGO from RI and an NGO from MA.
5. Added a requirement that the **Science Advisory Committee meet at least three times** per year to ensure all standing committees are active.
6. Proposed **term limits waiver justification** that requires that circumstances justifying an exception for term limits must be document and submitted in writing to the SC for consideration prior to the end of the member’s term.
7. Proposed provision that if existing EC seat holders are unable to fill the Chair and/or Vice-Chair positions, a “**reserved**” seat can be converted to “**at-large**” seat for a given term to help fill a vacant officer position, by a two-thirds vote of the SC.

The SC felt the first six changes to the bylaws were workable, fair, and good for transparency within the organization. Term limits would begin at the expiration date of each SC member’s existing term, which are staggered from 2022 to 2024. The new waiver justifications will allow the Nominating Subcommittee to maintain a diverse board and allow members to step down if needed.

The only adjustment to the presented changes came with the “off ramp” (change 7) for EC officer seats. The SC proposed adding more seats to the EC rather than disadvantaging a reserved seat. They felt this would keep the intention of the EC in supporting the Clean Water Act-derived mission of NBEP and allow for key positions to be filled. The addition of a new EC seat would still require a two-thirds vote by the Steering Committee.

DECISION: The SC approved the final draft bylaws with specified with a motion (Bill Napolitano, SRPEDD) and a second (Dave Monti, No Fluke Fishing).

The final NBEP Bylaws are available [here](#). Thanks to everyone for your support in developing this important document.

Program Report

Mike and Courtney Schmidt with NBEP offered the following NBEP quarterly program report.

Financials

The discussion began by sharing details of the quarterly financial report. NBEP is in good financial health. Spending is slower than expected due to two staff departures, so currently have about 1 year of personnel time in the bank. All unspent money from NEIWPCC (~\$34K) has been subawarded to RWU and will be spent ASAP on personnel to ensure it is expended by its expiration date of September 30, 2022. NBEP also

plans to give away all our new [Bipartisan Infrastructure Law](#) (BIL) funding. We will use \$320 million to cover staff time to oversee the BIL award.

New Hires

Two NBEP positions have been announced: Geospatial Analysis and Design Manager to replace Julia Twichell, and a Watershed Outreach Manager, which will be a new higher-level position to replace Julia Bancroft. Thus far, we have 9 applicants for the GIS position and 15 for the outreach position. The interview panel is Mike, Courtney, Allen Hance (RWU), Regina Lyons (EPA), and Caitlin Chaffee (NBNERR) for the outreach position, and swapping Anne Kuhn (EPA ACESD) for Caitlin Chaffee for the GIS position. Interviews will be held in April, with hiring in May.

DEIJ Assessment

NBEP staff and our consultant, Impact by Design (IbD), continue work on NBEP’s [DEIJ Organizational Assessment](#). Building on [pre-survey interviews](#) in October, separate SC and community [surveys](#) were approved by EPA and released in November 2021. 17 out of 50 SC/Science Advisory Committee members [responded](#) and 182 community members [responded](#). Survey results show that access to waterways and safe spaces are the most important things to folks in underserved communities. This matches the results of the Vision 2032 survey. Results are available on our [website](#). IbD is completing follow-up interviews with NBEP committee members to help inform a culminating May workshop, which will share general research on DEIJ, our survey/interview results, and explore concrete actions NBEP continue or newly take to better address DEIJ. Mike noted that NBEP is not seeking to change its mission or services per se, we want to see how we can elevate and amplify DEIJ through our existing mission/workplan and those of our partners. Our use of BIL money is likely to require investments in disadvantaged areas, so this work is well-timed and will hopefully give us a leg-up in our forthcoming work planning and help bring more federal money into our study area. SC members are highly encouraged to attend the workshop.

GI Planning

NBEP has formally awarded \$649,000 to green infrastructure planning projects in the region. The final agreements between RWU and the subawardees should be in place by April. See the table below for a description of the awards. When final agreements are in place, NBEP will work with RWU to issue a press release and update the website with blurbs on each project.

Recipient/Location	Project Description	Funded Amount
Audubon Society of RI, Providence, R	Study effectiveness of GI practices.	\$73,000
Town of Barrington, RI	Complete grey drainage system geodatabase to inform GI install.	\$33,700
Town of Bristol, RI	Develop 10% concept designs for 3 GI projects.	\$70,818
Clark University, multiple locations	Create conditions for more GI in in Woonsocket and Worcester.	\$25,000
City of East Providence, RI	Build on NBEP/STB Hundred Acre Cove project to complete 75% design/permitting for 1 practice.	\$45,000
Groundwork Rhode Island, Providence, RI	75% design and public engagement for multiple GI projects.	\$92,099
Groundwork Southcoast, Fall River, MA	Create conditions for Resilience District model in Fall River that will create and maintain GI.	\$25,000
Narragansett Bay Reserve, Prudence Island, RI	Complete conceptual designs, plans, costs, and permitting for 4 GI practices.	\$50,015
Southern RI Conservation District, Westerly, RI	Develop a master plan, concept designs, and outreach for 3 GI strategies.	\$75,000
Town of South Kingstown, RI	Complete designs, permitting, and outreach for 4 GI practices on private land.	\$99,000
Woonasquatucket River WC, Providence RI	Undertake deep public outreach and 30% designs for GI practices.	\$60,410
		\$649,000

Despite heavy advertisement, NBEP received two applicants from MA. The word from follow-up discussions was that municipal/community group staff just didn’t have the capacity to develop projects and write grants, particularly with staff already working against [SNEP Watershed Implementation Grants](#) and [Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness](#) (MVP) RFP deadlines. With the upcoming influx of new money through the BIL, a growing concern across the study area is a lack of local capacity to compete for these funds. Our current plan is to help address this shortcoming with NBEP’s first year of BIL funds. More details below.

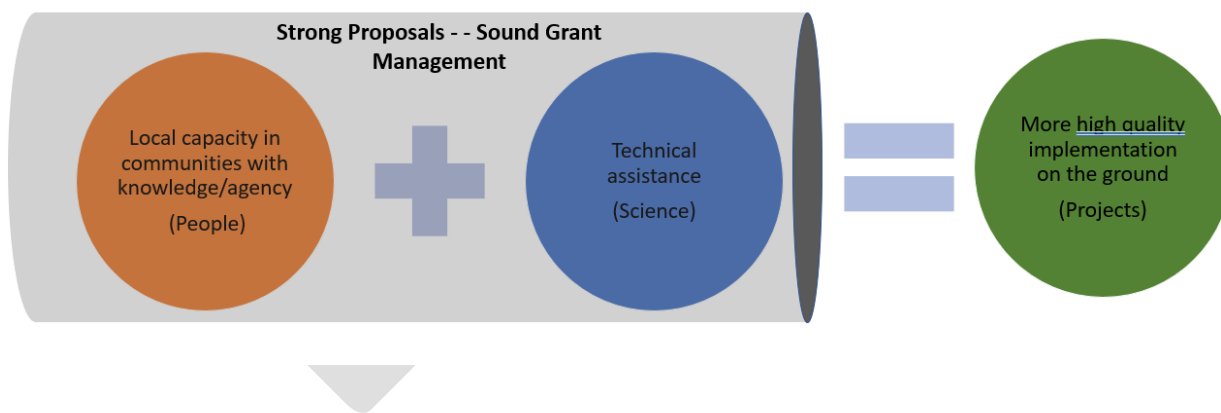
Plastics Event

NBEP is planning a September event on plastic pollution in the region with a broad focus – macro to micro plastics, cradle to grave discussions. This will be an information-sharing event intended to set the stage for future research, regulation, and advocacy. Karla Sangrey with Upper Blackstone Clean Water noted that NBEP staff should talk to her regarding their work on microplastics and wastewater facilities.

BIL Funding

Regina Lyons with EPA noted that BIL funding arrived at EPA Region 1 on March 9th with NBEP to receive \$909,857 each year through 2026. RWU/NBEP will prepare and seek approval of BIL Annual Workplan and Budget by July 1st. Note that a separate workplan and budget will be required for §320 and SNEP funds (a total of \$1M expected for next fiscal year). BIL guidance is in draft, so rules and timing are pending (hopefully non-fed match is waived, at least in the first year). Eligible projects will span water quality (e.g., nutrients, legacy contaminants, stormwater), restoration/protection of habitat (e.g., invasives, fish habitat), climate resilience, and providing opportunities for disadvantaged communities to participate in ecosystem restoration, access to urban waters, and otherwise benefit from environmental work. Please see meeting [PPT](#) for more details.

Mike noted that NBEP is in the fortunate position to be able to re-grant all BIL funding this year. The desire is to give away most of the BIL money each year and focus on fewer/bigger awards that really advance project development. As noted earlier, the biggest need is funding to help municipalities and community groups build a pipeline of construction-ready projects. The lack of capacity for problem/solution identification, proposal writing, and grant management are at the top of the list. Our current thinking is to use direct subawards to support both local capacity and outside technical assistance to help develop new projects. The graphic below describes the concept, and the table on the next page shares some ideas for subawards. NBEP will continue outreach to SC members and other to confirm the best use of BIL funds, and plans to have a draft BIL Workplan and Budget for EC review in May and SC review and approval at their June meeting.



Capacity-Building
<p>Providence Racial Environmental Justice Committee (One Square World) Providence, RI ~\$100K for REJC to hire FTE to help the community lead implementation of the Providence Climate Justice Plan</p>
<p>Groundwork Southcoast Fall River, MA ~\$75K to help hire a dedicate staffer to build the planned resilience district in Fall River to drive new projects (emulates the existing district operating in New Bedford, MA)</p>
Technical Assistance
<p><u>Circuit Riders</u> Save The Bay RI and MA ~\$100K to help STB hire new staff to support development of local projects (modeled after Wenley Ferguson’s role, NFWF circuit-rider/liaison program)</p>
<p><u>Targeted Planning</u> The Nature Conservancy of Rhode Island Pawtucket and Central Falls, RI \$300K to augment existing state bond funds and help pay for fish passage design for the four lower dams on the Blackstone River</p>
<p><u>RFP</u> ~\$335K to solicit habitat restoration and preservation planning projects in RI and MA</p>

The SC agreed that this new money can be a significant boost for CCMP and related plan implementation, and that the need for capacity building and technical assistance is high in the region. Members shared that this type of funding can create the local champions and help organizers access and leverage more and larger pots of money for not only capacity but project identification and implementation. Caitlin Chaffee shared how NOAA is rolling out their portion of BIL funding through NERR competitive grants to grow capacity at NERRs and coastal zone management agencies. NBNERR and CRMC are working together to fund new personnel to pursue habitat restoration and land acquisition, which would compliment new NBEP supported staff capacity. MADER has a new [Regional Restoration Partnership Program](#), led by Jenny Sanders, that is seeking to build local capacity for restoration work.

These discussions sparked additional ideas to be explored as EPA/federal guidance becomes clear:

- Create a Groundworks Blackstone program, based on the model of [Groundworks Rhode Island](#) and [Groundworks Southcoast](#), which would focus on the social and justice side of environmental justice work.
- Add more circuit rider staff—perhaps at regional planning agencies—to help municipalities pursue stormwater and resilience infrastructure projects, including understanding and modifying municipal regulations/plans to encourage nature-based solutions.
- Use [critical Linkages](#) throughout the region to identify [culvert replacement priorities](#) through ground-truthing the results, seeking key partner commitments to act, and pursuing the most ripe/priority projects based on the results.
- Explore further funding the [Blackstone Watershed Collaborative](#) as a working example of what can happen when a region has greater capacity support.

Committee Member Update Round Robin

Regina Lyons with [EPA Region 1](#) noted that, with the passing of the Federal Omnibus Bill in March, all National Estuary Programs (NEPs) will get \$750,000 for base §320 allocation for FY2022 (EPA award year that begins

October 1, 2022). She also noted that [David Cash](#) is new Regional Administrator and is well-versed in the issues we've been discussing today

[Dave Monti](#) with [No Fluke Fishing](#) shared that the recreational fishing season is about to start in the region. New England Salt Water Fishing Show took place last weekend (had Terry Gray and Janet Coit open the show with airhorns). Successful show with 300 booths, but ~25% less attendance due to COVID and supply chain issues. 2022 Baird Symposium will be on climate impacts of recreational fishing and boating at the end of [March](#). He also noted that NOAA is having a recreational fishing summit on March 29-30.

[Heidi Ricci](#) with [Mass Audubon](#) noted that they partners with the SNEP network for [webinar](#) on their bylaw review [tool](#). More in-depth trainings (in person) will happen later this year.

[Hillary King](#) with [MAEOEEA](#) noted that the MVP program is accepting applications right now. They are supporting both planning and action grants, though most communities in our region have completed planning.

[Stefanie Covino](#) with the Blackstone Watershed Collaborative shared that the "Zap the Blackstone" events will begin in April. The collaborative has received great [press](#) regarding Zap. She also shared that they are looking to create an "Expedition 2022," which will emulate Expedition 2000 when Donna Williams and others paddled the Blackstone River from top to bottom over 4 days and camped along the way. The Blackstone River Watershed Coalition/Friends of the Blackstone are also hosting an event titled, "[Kittacuck Speaks](#)," on April 22 in Cumberland, RI, which will provide an opportunity to learn perspectives on the river from indigenous people.

[Donna Williams](#) with the [Blackstone River Coalition](#) shared more information about "Expedition 2000," and the number of people who spoke about issues facing the river and their shared vision for the future. This was the start of the Blackstone River Coalition. She added that the official Zap the Blackstone Day is August 26th, where they are aiming to have 10,000 volunteers attend a river clean up. A celebration will also be held on September 10th at Old Slater Mill.

[Sue Kiernan](#) with [RIDEM](#) noted that the process for accessing the [State Revolving Funds](#) requires folks to get on the Project Priority List. It's a 1-page form, which doesn't lock the submitter to the project, it just indicates they are interested to pursue it. Generally seeking larger projects—above \$200,000. The deadline for submittal is March 25th. Also, there is a workshop on new freshwater wetland [rules](#) on March 30th, and RIDEM will be continuing to offer training to municipalities. Finally, RI's 303d list was approved by EPA.

[Cristina Kennedy](#) with [MADER](#) shared that the Buzzards Bay Coalition is hiring a [Restoration Coordinator](#). She asked that members share the announcement widely.

[John O'Brien](#) with [TNC-RI](#) shared that that they are hiring an [Municipal Resilience Program Coordinator](#). This is a great position which will mirrors Hillary's in MA and will help expand the RI program. Please share far and wide.

[Richard Friesner](#) with NEIWPC shared NEIWPC's state summaries, which highlights their work in each state over the last year. They are available [here](#).

[Nathan Vinhateiro](#) with the [Coastal Institute](#) offered that they are hosting the 8th annual Scott Nixon Lecture on Thursday April 7th from 3:30-5:00 pm in-person and via Zoom. Register [here](#).

Steering Committee Appointments

NBEP's Nominating Subcommittee met on February 2nd. This meeting was delayed from its usual early winter timing due to our onboarding with RWU. The EC discussed and agreed to subcommittee recommendations on February 8th, which include:

- Remove Dave Janik with MACZM from SC as he retired last fall.
- Recommend the following 7 members for reappointment:

- Richard Carey, MassDEP
 - Robert Johnston, Clark University
 - Bill Napolitano, SRPEDD
 - Cristina Kenney, MADER
 - Tom Kutcher, RINHS
 - Richard Friesner, NEIWPC (to replace Susan Sullivan)
 - Eliza Moore, NBC (to replace Jim McCaughey)
- Notify Cassius Spears, Sr with the Narragansett Tribe that his term has expired, thank him for his service, and note our desire to engage with the tribe in the future.
 - Do not add any new members at this time—wait until annual cycle in late 2022.

Mike offered some additional context on Cassius. When his term expired in 2020, he had been out of the touch with the program for several years. Partners in touch with the tribe suggested we give it another year to see if we could connect with him or other members of the tribe. Mike made some contacts with the tribe during COVID times, but not sufficient to find a replacement. The Nominating Subcommittee and EC concurred that the approach recommended above. NBEP will continue to build relationships with the Narragansett and other indigenous people in the region in the context of equal two-way learning. With NBEP having Narragansett in its name, and Roger Williams as host, it may provide a unique opportunity for NBEP to offering a learning space in the region. Mike noted he would like NBEP to pursue a Tribal Land Acknowledgment in its §320 Workplan as a next step.

DECISION: The Steering Committee approved the seven reappointments with a motion (Stefanie Covino, Blackstone Watershed Collaborative) and second (Walt Galloway, Citizen).

DECISION: The Steering Committee approved the proposed approach to Cassius Spears, Sr., and the Narragansett Tribe with a motion (Bill Napolitano, SRPEDD) and a second (Sue Kiernan, RIDEM).

Closing

Regina and Mike expressed their thanks for all the hard work by NBEP committees in completing the bylaws and updating the SC membership. Mike asked folks to please consider taking on the Chair or Vice-Chair role as Regina has been serving for well over a year and it would be unfair to ask her to continue much further. Mike noted that the year's remaining SC meetings will be held June 16th, September 15th, and December 15th from 1-4pm.

Action Items

1. NBEP to send link to final NBEP bylaws to SC.
2. NBEP to update website with new SC members.
3. SC members are encouraged to send comments or questions on the BIL and NBEP's proposed BIL plan of work to Mike by early May.
4. NBEP to send draft BIL and §Section 320/SNEP Workplans and Budgets to the EC/SC a week prior to their next meetings.

Upcoming Meetings

- Executive Committee—May 10th, 2-4pm.
- Steering Committee—June 16th, 1-4pm.
- DEIJ Assessment Workshop – May TBD.
- Vision 2032 Subcommittee Meeting reboot – July TBD.

Meeting adjourned 3:28pm