

Steering Committee Meeting

Zoom Meeting
December 15, 2022
1:00pm-3:00pm

MEETING NOTES

MEETING MATERIALS

[Agenda](#), [PowerPoint](#)

ATTENDEES

Regina Lyons, Chair, US Environmental Protection Agency Region 1 (USEPA R1)
Walter Berry, Rhode Island Rivers Council
Joe Callahan, Taunton River Watershed Association (TRWA)
Richard Carey, MA Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP)
Rachel Calabro, RI Department of Health (RIDOH)
Caitlin Chaffee, Narragansett Bay Estuarine Research Reserve (NBNERR)
Stefanie Covino, Blackstone Watershed Collaborative
Richard Friesner, NEIWPCC
Walt Galloway, Public member
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)
Hillary King, MA Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (MAOEEA)
Tom Kutcher, RI Natural History Survey
Alicia Lehrer, Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council
John O'Brien, The Nature Conservancy (TNC)
Catalina Martinez, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)
Conor McManus, RI Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM)
David Monti, No Fluke Fishing, RI Saltwater Anglers Association
Eliza Moore, Narragansett Bay Commission (NBC)
Bill Napolitano, Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District (SRPEDD)
Heidi Ricci, Mass Audubon
Karla Sangrey, Upper Blackstone Clean Water
Nathan Vinhateiro, URI Coastal Institute
Donna Williams, Blackstone River Coalition, Blackstone River Heritage Corridor
Caitlyn Whittle, USEPA RI
Rich Batiuk, Coastwise Partners
Holly Greening, Coastwise Partners
Mike Gerel, NBEP
Courtney Schmidt, NBEP
Mariel Sorlien, NBEP
Darcy Young, NBEP

MEETING OPEN

Committee Chair Regina Lyons, EPA, called the meeting to order at 1:05pm, led introductions, and summarized the meeting agenda. *DECISION: The Steering Committee (SC) meeting notes from September 15, 2022 were approved by a motion (David Monti, No Fluke Fishing) and a second (Walt Galloway, Public). Joe Callahan, TRWA abstained.*

NBEP QUARTERLY REPORT

Mike Gerel with NBEP noted that the organization is in good financial standing. About \$443K of the money that moved from NEIWPC to RWU remains unencumbered. The use of these monies to cover personnel and a habitat/public access RFP will be discussed later today. Looking forward, NBEP holds \$1M for its [FY2022 Section 320 and SNEP Workplan](#) and \$1.8M for the [FY2022-2023 BIL Workplan](#). All required match for Section 320/NEP funds was received and Year 1 and 2 BIL funds do not require match. Thanks to everyone for your work to review and approve these this past summer.

Darcy Young with NBEP shared that FY2022 Workplans included 10 direct subawards (7 agreements in place; 2 pending signatures; 1 pending approval to provide an advance for working capital). NBEP created standardized guidance and templates to streamline the process, and will continue to modify materials as we go forward. The extensive paperwork required for federal awards remains time consuming. Meeting both federal financial requirements and Justice 40 goals is presenting challenges. Many of the groups with the local agency to develop projects lack the experience and/or the formal administrative paperwork needed to receive federal funding. NBEP and RWU will learn from these awards and adjust our processes as we are able next time. Regina Lyons with USEPA R1 noted that capacity building is vitally important for the region and it will take time (3-5 years or more) to develop “on-the-ground” projects.

Mike next offered that NBEP is scheduled for a 2023 Program Evaluation (PE). All National Estuary Programs (NEP) are evaluated every 5 years. Since our last PE was in 2018, this was not anticipated for this year, but we will persevere. Laura Blackmore with [Puget Sound Partnership](#) will be our ex-officio NEP Director. Laura leads a strong program, and hails from Grafton, MA, so we are pleased to have her on the team. A meeting schedule for the PE Team will be set in January, with the report due in April. We will do an on-site meeting and tour in concert with the June SC meeting. A final evaluation is due to NBEP in August. We expect the PE results to be positive and evidence of the partnership’s hard work since the last review.

Mariel Sorlien with NBEP presented on new data stories and tools she’s developed over the past quarter. She released a story map on the impacts of reduced pollution on [quahogging](#) in the Narragansett Bay. We are looking to highlight and celebrate successes, something the environmental community is collectively remiss in doing. She is also working with the City of Providence to create an Environmental Justice tool to help the city enact their [Climate Justice Plan](#). This work has served as a pilot and will be adapted to create NBEP’s own tool to support the Equity Plan it will be required to submit next summer to EPA as a condition of our BIL funding. This new tool will expand on [NBEP’s current EJ tool](#) by updating source data, increasing the number of criteria in the tool (adding environmental criteria, like air pollution), and enabling users to select the criteria they would like to use to define and map EJ areas in their community. The tool will be open source, with all data sources, metadata, and coding available so others can create their own tools.

Courtney Schmidt with NBEP gave a summary of the [Macro to Micro Plastics in the Bay](#) event NBEP held in October 2022. She shared that 75 people joined the event at RWU to hear from experts and discuss our relationship with plastics. Recordings of the presentations are now on the event page. Overall the day was very successful and has already sparked follow-up ideas for 2023, including an RWU student internship.

Lastly, Mike walked through a table that showed the status of NBEP’s 24 existing subawards, which span from capacity-building to planning, green infrastructure to habitat restoration, and affluent to underserved communities. Nearly \$2M is now under contract.

VISION 2032 UPDATE

Darcy shared an update on the Vision 2032 process. A September 2022 meeting created the “final” 4 goals, 14 objectives, and 39 actions. NBEP added the 4th goal: Assure safe and equitable access to and use of nature. Staff are creating Draft Action Plans and will pursue action-specific outreach early next year. NBEP hired [Coastwise Partners](#) to help with this process through 2023. Finally, NBEP will hire writers and a designer to share stories and create a format that is understandable (and enjoyable to read!). The graphic below shows the “layered” plan structure we will employ. We expect to hold the next subcommittee meeting in February 2023. NBEP will be done with the plan by January 2024.

Plan Structure		
Plan Part	Audience	Includes...
Story	Public	5 linked “feature” stories by environmental authors that open selected chapters of plan that are suitable for separate publication. “Illustrate the macro in the micro”
Action Plans	Partnership	39 2-page Action Plans
Appendices	EPA	“Box-checks”—Comparison to 2012 CCMP, Climate Vulnerability Assessment Table, etc. Raw Action Planning Worksheets

Holly Greening and Rich Batiuk with Coastwise Partners introduced themselves and shared some lessons learned from their 70 years in large watershed restoration.

The most successful large landscape restoration and management plans have numeric goals and track progress towards those goals. The goals are measured by members of the watershed partnership (in NBEP’s case, the SC) using a collaborative monitoring network to ensure all groups are using the same/similar methods and reporting results that can be compared. These networks are united under the goals, and keep the public regularly informed on progress. Successful partnerships are also united by an inclusive management structure for consensus decision-making. This includes an involved scientific community. The partnership regularly meets to use adaptive management – does the partnership need to adjust course to keep on track towards goals?

NEPs turn their small budgets and unique roles into big impacts. They facilitate (defining community-based, scientifically-sound measurable goals and objectives), convene (partners, agencies, communities, general public), synthesize (monitoring data, projects conducted in the watershed, progress towards goals), are an ‘Honest broker’ (unbiased source of scientific information, non-partisan), engage with the community (links science, management and policy with the public), and engage in education an outreach with partners and the community.

COMMITTEE MEMBER UPDATES

[Stefanie Covino, Blackstone Watershed Collaborative](#) – Working to host a parade along the Blackstone in the spring to discuss/elevate fish passage through the lower four dams on the Blackstone. Parade will include local partners, indigenous partners, and public. Event date is May 21st, tentatively. Separately, we’re working on a

pilot culvert assessment project and assisting two communities with MA Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) grants in that region (Uxbridge and Sutton, MA) working on dam removal on tributaries to the Blackstone.

John O'Brien, TNC – Continues to work on fish passage projects, with the lower four dams on the Blackstone being the largest one. This will be the largest, most expensive, and most complicated fish passage project in the northeast. Will be using RIDEM (state bond) and NBEP funding to work on plans, alternative assessments, and permits. Also working Saugatucket River fish ladders (in South Kingstown, RI)—we reworked the ladders and assessed performance of ladders using a new method that will be used throughout RI. Also partnering with RIDEM and WPWA to address cold-water streams and headwaters (1st and 2nd order streams) in the Wood-Pawcatuck.

Dave Monti, No Fluke Fishing – New England Saltwater Fishing show (March 2023) will highlight education and saltwater practices. Participating in windfarm discussions based on impacts to recreational fishing communities from the cables.

Hilary King, MA MVP – Work at MVP aligns with NBEP's work. The program has about \$20M to award annually, but does require a 25% non-state match from our municipal applicants (who can use funding from NBEP. Expression of Interest (EOI) for FY24 [MVP Action Grants](#) is currently open.

Allison Hamel, RIDOT – RIDOT is ready to submit latest watershed stormwater [plans](#) (Hunt River and tributaries; Pawtuxet River and tributaries). Working on Pocasset, Providence, Seekonk, and Barrington-Palmer Rivers for 2023. RIDOT can be a good funding source if RIDOT can get water quality credit for its consent decree. She noted that BIL money is also going to RIDOT and has environmental component.

Rachel Calabro, RIDOH – Updating a climate dashboard that will be available for viewing in January. It will compliment an EC4 climate dashboard, with RIDOH's focus on environmental data.

Heidi Ricci, Mass Audubon - Planning another workshop for bylaw review for climate resilience with the [SNEP Network](#) and SRPEDD; working to launch a new initiative to streamline wetlands restoration across MA. Need to address capacity and regulatory issues that folks are coming across when using innovative technologies. If anyone has examples of wetland restoration projects where the permitting process either worked well and could be a model, or where inefficiencies in permitting drove up costs and delays, illustrating the need for improvement, she is interested in receiving that information.

Caitlin Chaffee, NBNERR – The [RI Coastal and Estuarine Habitat Restoration Trust Fund](#) grants process is underway for this year with full proposals due in January. NBEP-funded planning and design effort for Succotash Marsh project officially kicks off in January but monitoring team has met and design team having a pre-kickoff meeting next week. Municipal/land trust outreach related to coastal land acquisition for marsh migration pathway protection with URI Environmental Data Center. Awarded a \$500K America the Beautiful grant to support similar efforts at five other NERRs from FL to ME.

Joe Callahan, TWRA – River monitoring going well, and want to expand into upper watershed (near Brockton). They are looking for intern to help analyze/synthesize data and upload into MassDEP database. It was a moderately successful breeding/nesting program for diamondback terrapin. TRWA is looking to train volunteers to properly handle hatchlings.

Cristina Kennedy, MADER - DER is [hiring](#) for more positions! See the link for newly posted Restoration Technical Services Branch Manager and Restoration Capacity Building Branch Manager. These are both new positions within DER as part of their expansion plan.

STEERING COMMITTEE MEETINGS IN 2023

Mike suggested that the SC continue to have meetings on the second Thursday of March, June, September, and December in 2023. His preference is to have four-hour meetings (10a-2p) in person (2 in RI and 2 in MA), with lunch provided. He asked members to do their best to send an alternate if they cannot attend or must

arrive late/leave early. Some members noted that time and travel approvals make hybrid meetings more viable. It was noted that technology is available make hybrid meetings more effective, including [Owl](#) technology. It was offered that successful hybrid meetings depend on the meeting space, advanced planning, and how they are run. It was also noted that hybrid meetings are more inclusive. Mike noted the feedback and indicated that SC meetings will be hybrid in 2023. He told members to expect Outlook meeting invites early in January.

FY2021 FUNDS RE-BUDGET DISCUSSION

Mike shared that in October 2021, \$1.78 million was shifted from NEIPWCC to RWU. NBEP has spent much of this money, but as noted early in the meeting still has a balance of \$443K unencumbered funds. Staff are suggesting holding back \$218k (covers roughly 5 months of staff salary) and reallocate the remaining \$225k for habitat/access planning subawards. NBEP would like to use an RFP to subaward funds because there are too many viable projects to just pick a few. Responding to comments about the size of the RFP, we'd like to add \$450K of Year 2 BIL funds already awarded to NBEP and approved for this use in our FY2023 BIL Workplan. The proposed RFP will be released in first quarter of calendar year 2023. *DECISION: The SC approved the proposed re-budget of unencumbered FY 2021 funds to fund five months of staff time and an RFP for habitat/access planning with a motion by Walt Galloway with the Public and second by Caitlin Chaffee with NBNERR.*

STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP APPROVAL

Mike updated that group that the NBEP bylaws empower a nominating subcommittee to meet annually to discuss new members and reappointments to the Steering Committee. The subcommittee consists of Walt, Sue Kiernan with RIDEM, and Kate Michaud with Warren RI. They met on October 24th to consider reappointing nine members whose term were expiring in 2022, not reappointing four members, adding two replacements for members moving on, and new officers. On November 9th the Executive Committee (EC) sent the slate of members in the first table on the next page to the SC for consideration today. After this EC meeting, Caitlin Chaffee and Dave Monti confirmed they were interested in serving as the new Chair and Vice Chair, respectively. *DECISION: The SC approved the proposed slate including chair and vice chair of SC members and officers with a motion by Bill Napolitano with SRPEDD and seconded by Stefanie Covino with the Blackstone Collaborative. Caitlin Chaffee and Nate Vinhateiro abstained.*

INTERN/EXTERN IDEAS BRAINSTORM

NBEP has \$23k budgeted for interns (both RWU and other schools) and would like to place interns with NBEP or partners throughout the watershed. For example, NBEP has hired an RWU student to work with RWU faculty on plastics. NBEP needs help to identify more projects, people, and groups who needs interns. The group participated in a short exercise to capture potential inter needs. The second table on the next page provides the input received.

Proposed 2022 Appointments

Member	Organization	Status	Notes	Decision
Catalina Martinez	NOAA	Reappointment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has attended very few meetings Would like to join DEIJ work 	Do not reappoint Shift to DEIJ Subcommittee
Eric Boettger	NRCS	Reappointment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has attended very few meetings No response to inquiry about continuing 	Do not reappoint
Andrea Coates	MADOT	Reappointment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has attended very few meetings Decided she is too busy to continue 	Do not reappoint
Heidi Ricci	Mass Audubon	Reappointment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Would like to be reappointed 	Reappoint
Caitlin Chaffee	NBNERR	Reappointment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Would like to be reappointed 	Reappoint and Elect as Chair
Walt Galloway	Public	Reappointment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Would like to be reappointed 	Reappoint
Sue Kiernan	RIDEM	Reappointment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Would like to be reappointed 	Reappoint
Kate Michaud	Warren, RI	Reappointment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Would like to be reappointed 	Reappoint
Rachel Calabro	RIDOH	Reappointment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Would like to be reappointed 	Reappoint
John O'Brien	TNC	Reappointment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Would like to be reappointed 	Reappoint
Nate Vinhateiro	URI	Reappointment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Would like to be reappointed 	Reappoint
Donna Williams	Blackstone Coalition	Reappointment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Would like to be reappointed 	Reappoint
Shaun O'Rourke	RIIB	Consider other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moved to VT 	Remove from committee
Joe Callahan	Taunton River Watershed	Consider other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has attended very few meetings Suggested replacement from Board 	Keep Joe Callahan for now with Steve Silva as back-up
Gina DeMarco	Northern RI RCD	Consider other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has taken new job at District Suggested replace with District Manager 	Appoint Molly Allard
Dave Monti	Saltwater Anglers	Consider officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expressed willingness to be Vice Chair 	Elect as Vice Chair
Walter Berry	Public	New	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Serving as new liaison to RI Rivers Council 	Appoint Walter Berry as new member

2023 Intern Ideas

Idea	Suggested By
Communications intern to assist the RI Saltwater Anglers Association ED to share news, offer education, and host events on offshore wind farms.	Dave Monti
Blackstone Paddle Event.	Stefanie Covino
Incorporate RI beach data into status and trends report or do other work analyzing beaches data.	Rachel Calabro
Create new website for Blackstone River Coalition that can present water quality data.	Stefanie
CSO water quality research and data entry.	Gloria Bancroft
Work with Erica Meier at URI Sea Grant on outreach strategies for NBNERR programs.	Caitlin Chaffee
Create a synthesis of NBC monitoring data—historical trend analysis, support for CSO phase 2 report, evaluating efficiency of GI, and data entry/database building, web-app development for data sharing.	Eliza Moore
Help create Woonasquatucket River assets map in GIS.	Alicia Lehrer
Climate change outreach on extreme heat during the summer, like tabling events.	Rachel
MESM student projects coming from Michelle Peach or Brett Still	Mariele Sorlien
Organize and run spring anadromous fish count.	Alicia
Salt marsh monitoring (RAMP) at upcoming expanded network of sentinel sites.	Tom Kutcher
Help Friends of the Blackstone (FOB) with the spring parade and creation of educational materials on Blackstone ecosystems and indigenous cultures.	Stefanie
Support other RI river council outreach efforts.	Walter Berry
Develop portal for NBEP partners to upload project summaries (non-NBEP funded) to help track project implementation in the Study Area.	Darcy Young/Mariele
Gathering public access information (coastal and rivers).	Mariele/Stefanie

ACTION ITEMS

1. NBEP to send calendar invites of days/times and the state location of 2023 SC meetings.
2. NBEP to follow up with organizations to discuss internship ideas.

The meeting adjourned at 4:00pm.