

Steering Committee Meeting Notes

Hybrid Meeting
June 30, 2023
10:00am-12:30pm

MEETING MATERIALS

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

ATTENDEES

Caitlin Chaffee, Chair, Narragansett Bay Estuarine Research Reserve (NBNERR)
Dave Monti, Vice Chair, No Fluke Fishing, RI Saltwater Anglers Association
Molly Allard, Northern RI Conservation District
Laura Berman, US Environmental Protection Agency Region 1 (USEPA R1)
Walter Berry, Rhode Island Rivers Council
Laura Blackmore, Puget Sound Partnership
Colleen Brown, Town of Swansea
Rachel Calabro, RI Department of Health (RIDOH)
Richard Carey, MA Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP)
Walt Galloway, Public member
Ben Greenstein, Roger Williams University (RWU)
Topher Hamblett, Save the Bay
Allen Hance, RWU
Cristina Kennedy, MA Division of Ecological Restoration (MADER)
Sue Kiernan, RI Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM)
Hillary King, MA Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (MAOEEA)
Kathleen Kutschenreuter, US Environmental Protection Agency Headquarters (USEPA HQ)
Regina Lyons, USEPA R1
Caleigh McLaren, Blackstone Watershed Collaborative
Connor McManus, RIDEM
Kate Michaud, Town of Warren
Eliza Moore, Narragansett Bay Commission (NBC)
Bill Napolitano, Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District (SRPEDD)
John O'Brien, The Nature Conservancy in Rhode Island (TNC-RI)
Mark Pereira, Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council
Heidi Ricci, Mass Audubon
Karla Sangrey, Upper Blackstone Clean Water
Steve Silva, Taunton River Watershed Alliance (TRWA)

Nathan Vinhateiro, URI Coastal Institute
Caitlyn Whittle, USEPA R1
Donna Williams, Blackstone River Coalition, Blackstone River Heritage Corridor
Mike Gerel, NBEP
Courtney Schmidt, NBEP
Mariel Sorlien, NBEP
Darcy Young, NBEP

MEETING OPEN

Committee Chair Caitlin Chaffee, NBNERR, called the meeting to order at 10:06 am, led introductions, and summarized the meeting agenda. *DECISION: The Steering Committee (SC) meeting notes from March 9, 2023 were approved by a motion (Dave Monti, No Fluke Fishing) and a second (Walt Galloway, public member).*

FY2023 BASE WORKPLAN AND BUDGET

Mike Gerel, NBEP reviewed the [Draft NBEP FY2023 Section 320 & SNEP Workplan](#) (“base” workplan). Changes from last year include recategorizing NEPORT reporting under Program Leadership and moving funding for the Blackstone Initiative to the BIL workplan. Mike went over five new tasks: Task 1e, Subaward and Contract Management; Task 2c, Regional Plans; Task 4a, Small Education and Outreach Grants; Task 4b, RIDEM Ecological Data Analyst; and Task 4c, Rhode Island Natural History Survey Biodiversity Database. Overall, NBEP is working to move away from “planning” toward “doing”.

Next, Mike went over the [Draft NBEP FY2023 Section 320 & SNEP Budget](#) (“base” budget). The budget for the Ecological Data Analyst is for a year; Connor McManus wants the funding as a catalyst for a new position, and is working to secure permanent state funding for indefinite support. Molly Allard wanted to know if the NBEP Ecologist and RIDEM Ecological Data Analyst were different positions; Mike clarified that they are different positions and he wants the NBEP Ecologist to work with all of these groups in order to maintain momentum. Mike also mentioned that the indirect rate that RWU charges has changed (to 16.2% on all subawards instead of 20% on salaries) and is slightly higher than before, but still low. Regina Lyons said the indirect rate is federally negotiated and comparable with other NEPs. Mike said we need \$419,701 more non-federal match for the FY2023 funding and requested that partners submit completed forms as soon as possible. John O’Brien, TNC-RI and Steve Silva, TRWA asked for clarification on eligible activities for match; Mike said he was looking for future activities taking place from October 1, 2023 through September 30, 2023.

The Executive Committee voted to send the workplan to the Steering Committee on June 8, 2023 with minor edits and comments. *DECISION: The FY2023 base workplan and base budget were*

approved by a motion (Dave Monti, No Fluke Fishing) and a second (Sue Kiernan, RI Department of Environmental Management). Conor McManus abstained.

2023 EPA PROGRAM EVALUATION RESULTS

Kathleen Kutschenreuter, USEPA thanked the Steering Committee and NBEP for welcoming the Program Evaluation (PE) team. She highlighted the challenges of doing a Program Evaluation, but said it is a good time for NBEP to celebrate. She discussed the site visit tour that NBEP organized for the PE Team and showed a video she created with photos from the tour. Next, Kathleen introduced the PE team: Laura Blackstone, Puget Sound Partnership and Caitlyn Whittle, USEPA R1.

Kathleen explained that the purpose of the PE is to ensure adequate progress is being made in the CCMP, highlight successes since the last PE, and determine what should be worked on for the next PE. The evaluation has three evaluation sections: key NEP areas (healthy ecosystems, clean water, strong communities), program implementation, and NEP ecosystem and community status.

The overall findings for the 2023 PE were that there was a smooth transition to the new host, NBEP is seen as a leader in watershed management, and there has been commendable leadership.

Kathleen went over progress addressing challenges identified in the 2018 PE. NBEP has successfully established an identity and improved outreach. Financial management has improved, and NBEP will develop a finance plan. Mike Gerel and Courtney Schmidt pointed out that NBEP funds a lot of planning, but that NEPORT only captures finished projects; they requested that SC members report finished project results. The final challenge identified in the 2018 PE was tech transfer; NBEP is working better with place-based programs, including SNEP and ANEP.

Next, Kathleen reviewed NBEP's strengths as identified in the PE. For clean water, NBEP has done well with studies, events, and working with the community. For healthy ecosystems, Kathleen highlighted the working groups, fish passage, and work on salt ponds and salt marshes. For communities, NBEP has worked hard on partner expansion and diversification, including conducting a DEIJ assessment and sharing information.

Areas for improvement and opportunity include celebrating success, completing the CCMP with all related plans, and using BIL funds.

The PE team recommends a "proficient rating." Next steps include writing a draft PE letter, getting feedback on the letter, and final approval. The next PE will take place in 2028.

COMMITTEE MEMBER UPDATES

Kate Michaud, Town of Warren – Town is very vulnerable to sea level rise, working on managed retreat coupled with a development program (Market to Metacom). Collaborating with Warren Health Equity Zone to extend outreach. Listening sessions will be hosted by Elizabeth Rush.

Heidi Ricci, Mass Audubon – Working on legislation for voluntary buyout, expanding ecological restoration program. Working on cranberry bog and stream restoration. Hired Alex Hackman as Director of Ecological Restoration. Working on streamlining permits for restoration.

John O'Brien, The Nature Conservancy in Rhode Island – Seine sampling is taking place in the Providence River; please reach out to John if you are interested in volunteering.

Dave Monti, No Fluke Fishing, RI Saltwater Anglers Association – RI Saltwater Anglers Association has a new executive director, Scott Travers. Fishing camp was postponed due to poor weather. Fishing season started early and is off to good start but warming waters mean season may end early. Fish are hanging out in the lower bay.

Rachel Calabro, RI Department of Health – The Executive Climate Change Coordinating Council (EC4) has state budget funding for the first time (\$3 million) and is drafting a spending plan.

Caitlin Chaffee, Narragansett Bay Estuarine Research Reserve – Governor reinstated Chief Resiliency Officer (housed with DEM); will support EC4, MRP, OSCAR fund. NBNERR is playing role in project development. Hired project coordinator, Mary Schoell.

Sue Kiernan, RI Department of Environmental Management – Focusing on water sampling in Pawtuxet River and watersheds near CT. Commended the Narragansett Bay Commission for sourcing 80% of its energy needs from renewable sources.

Connor McManus, RI Department of Environmental Management – Sampling in field this summer. Changed striped bass regulations in response to stock being overfished. Collecting data on endangered right whale. Two offshore wind farms are being developed nearby.

Bill Napolitano, public member – Retired from SRPEDD but staying on Steering Committee. In context of the PE, Bill thanked NBEP for focusing on the human side of conservation.

Eliza Moore, Narragansett Bay Commission – Discussed Phase 1 of the combined sewer overflow project. Phases 1-3 are the largest public work project in RI history.

The meeting adjourned at 12:32 pm.