

LIS HRI Meeting Minutes
3-22-2007 East Setauket, NY

At the start of the meeting, the work group attended a short presentation by a NYS DEC intern on the historic distribution of eelgrass along the north shore of Long Island. The project was created in ArcGIS and has links to scanned (PDF) files where evidence for each historic sighting was documented. Documents included in this project date back to the 1800s, and the degree of confidence in the reliability of the information contained in these documents varies greatly. There is no indication of the reliability of each document in this project – it was created so that the reader can make his or her own determination.

Mark Tedesco introduced Louise Harrison to the work group. Louise is the new USFWS Liaison to the EPA Long Island Sound Study, filling the position vacated by Jane MacLellan last August.

Database

The database team (a subcommittee of the work group) met at University of Connecticut in Groton, CT, on Jan 11, 2007, to discuss database fields, functions, and outputs. Ron handed out lists of the various field names and possible entries into those fields (habitat types, restoration activities, etc) to the work group for review. The team is still working on specifics regarding database functions and outputs, but in the interim we have decided how to go about incorporating multiple factors, such as when there is more than one cause of degradation. This idea, as well as others, will need to be reviewed by the LISS consultant Dan Rothenberg (hired through NEIWPC) for feasibility. The database also will need to track funding sources (federal vs. non-federal) for each restoration project for the purposes of tracking match requirements. We may also want to include post construction monitoring fields.

Heather discussed the possibility of linking our web-based database to online maps provided by Google Maps. This link is a free service as long as the data are available to the public free of charge. Our consultant will need to look into the specifics of making this connection to Google Maps work.

Next steps are to coordinate an April meeting between a few members of the database team and the consultant to bring him up to speed. Once Dan (the consultant) has had time to review our requirements, we will set up either a conference call or another meeting with the full database team to discuss outputs and functionality, as well as the feasibility of all that we have proposed.

The database team includes Harry, Heather, Ron, Lisa, Tom, Kimberly, Louise, and Kevin O'Brien of CTDEP-OLISP.

Climate Change Document

Ron handed out a draft document on climate change and impacts to LIS, particularly with respect to coastal habitat restoration. A discussion followed and Ron asked the group to forward comments and suggestions to him by the end of April. One suggestion was to add scientific references to the paper. The goal of the document is to represent the LISS Habitat Restoration Initiative's (the work group's) official position on global climate change. Some things to consider were whether we should stop tidal wetland restoration entirely, given the risk of sea level rise of catastrophic proportions (worst case scenario, melting of polar ice caps will not likely take place for 100s+ years), or focus our TW restoration efforts on marshes that have the ability to migrate landward (i.e., no seawalls/other development blocking their path)? Some in the group expressed their interest in continuing wetland restoration as we have been doing all along – even if a restored marsh lasts just 30 years before losing functions and values to sea level rise. This option is ecologically better for the habitats and the species that use them than not having those functions and values for those 30 years. Karen suggested that we provide recommendations for all 12 priority coastal habitat types identified by the LISS, beginning with a document focused on impacts to tidal wetlands. The LISS Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) Synthesis Workshop, May 14-16, includes as a focus the potential implications on the LIS ecosystem

from climate change. The work group agreed to try to provide a draft of the write-up to the STAC to support its discussion and to finalize the write-up for the October 17-18 Management Committee meeting.

Annual Reports

Full drafts of the 2001-2004 annual reports are completed, and were handed out to the work group. Some of those not in attendance will receive copies of the drafts by mail on CD-ROM. Please read through these reports and send comments to Harry by the end of April. If additional completed sites not in these reports are brought to his attention, he will add them and update the restoration totals before finalizing the reports. If additional projects are located, the acreage will be added to the correct year with an explanation in the latest annual report as to the difference. Harry and Heather will take the lead in finishing 2005-2006, and will hopefully have full drafts ready for review by the July meeting.

Once these reports are finalized, they will be converted to PDF and posted on the LISS website for download. Post cards will be sent to those who have received a copy of the Habitat Restoration Manual (in the 3-ring binder) and other interested individuals/groups so that they can add these reports to their library. Reports are formatted so that they can be printed and punched to fit 3-ring binders.

HR Manual

RMC chapter- outline has comments; Harry will begin writing out some sections and will have something to hand out for review at the July meeting.

Shellfish reefs- Heather presented an update to her chapter outline. A lengthy discussion followed, on the topic of whether the workgroup should identify locations of historic natural beds prior to moving forward with the chapter. We decided to move forward with the chapter first, and agreed that the location/size/range of an historic natural bed, if left alone for the last 150 years and without the impact of marine aquaculture/harvesting, may have changed (expanded in range, increase or decrease in size, or migrated in some direction) – similar to what eelgrass beds do over time. This would allow the restoration of molluscan reef habitat even if the exact location of an historic reef is found and determined to be currently unsuitable to supporting shellfish. Ron stated that the work group needs to enter the historical records of shellfish beds into a database, and also outlined the importance of drafting a “white paper” summarizing the facts and misconceptions of oysters in LIS – perhaps this could be worked into the Molluscan Reefs chapter. The work group also decided that it would be best to draft guidance for a pilot project in LIS. The group also discussed what HRI will consider restoration, whether we base it on abundance of oysters or whether we base it on the habitat provided; no decision was made and the discussion will continue at another meeting.

Estuarine Embayments- Ron stated that the chapter outline is about half done so far.

Habitat Restoration Guidance

In response to the need to increase the quality of proposals and educate applicants, Harry handed out 3 draft documents aimed at helping habitat restoration grant applicants (and others who want to carry out coastal habitat restoration) write better proposals. The first is a breakdown of the requirements that make a good proposal – this lists the information needed by habitat type; the second is the “habitat restoration plan” as adapted from the Society for Ecological Restoration, Inc., website; and the third document outlines what is needed to obtain a coastal permit in Connecticut to carry out any activity below the high tide line. Project plans for restoration projects that have impacts below the high tide line should meet these minimum standards so that applicants can avoid the need to create 2 or more sets of project plans. Harry asked the work group to review the documents and provide comments by the end of April. Ron suggested placing the “habitat restoration plan” back into the original document (the first of the 3 documents). Harry may take this another step forward creating one complete document for each of the 12 priority habitat types identified by the LISS. These documents will be made available on the LISS website – it may be wise to post hyperlinks to endangered species maps/lists for CT and NY as well.

LIS Eelgrass update

Tom Halavik gave an update to the 2006 aerial eelgrass survey; after ground-truthing the sites whose photographs had eelgrass signatures, the survey indicated an increase of 298 acres more than what was found during the 2002 survey. 2006 total acres of eelgrass in LIS was 1896 acres. Most of the 298 additional acres were found between Rocky Neck and the RI state line. Niantic Bay had 130 more acres of eelgrass in 2006 than in 2002.

LISS – HRI 2007-2009 Work Plan

This will be updated by Harry and Heather, then distributed by email to the work group for comments.

Membership

The workgroup briefly discussed the issue of official membership for the purposes of voting, Karen and Ron will discuss membership criteria further. Meetings are open to the public, anyone can attend and take part in discussions.

MISCELLANEOUS announcements

- NY's Dam Safety Unit will hold a workshop on Long Island concerning fish passage projects on May 2.
- The February SAV meeting in NY was postponed to May 22
- An international conference on horseshoe crab biology, ecology, & conservation will be held at Dowling College (Oakdale, NY) on June 11-14, 2007
- No update on CTDEP's Wildlife Division's proposal to create a Coastal Sandplain Habitat Restoration Team

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) update

There was no formal discussion of the MOU at the meeting, but Harry still is waiting for USFWS to sign page 2 and send it back. The update from our previous meeting in Nov 2006 is as follows:

First page of MOU was signed at the Policy Committee Meeting in September. Moriatory is the first signature on page 2 and he is waiting to sign. Page 3 of the MOU is on its way to NY's Sect. of State for signature. Page 4 is on its way to NY to be signed by Jack Mattice.

Next Meeting Dates

7.25.07- Connecticut (most likely in Bridgeport) - Possible site visit to Stratford tidal wetland restoration sites
11.14.07- New York

In Attendance

Juliana Barrett - CT Sea Grant
Lisa Cavallero (by phone) - NMFS
Karen Chytalo - NYS DEC
David Gumbart - CT TNC
Tom Halavik - USFWS
Louise Harrison - USFWS Liaison to EPA
Johanna Hunter - EPA New England

Mark Johnson - CT DEP
Robin Kriesberg - Save the Sound
Ron Rozsa - CT DEP
Mark Tedesco - EPA LISO
Harry Yamalis - CT DEP
Heather Young - NYS DEC
Kimberly Zimmer Graff – NY Sea Grant