

LISS Habitat Restoration Workgroup
Meeting Minutes, August 10, 2006
East Setauket, NY

The meeting commenced at 10am. In attendance were:

Tom Halavik, USFWS
Roselle E. Henn, US ACE
Robin Kriesberg, Save the Sound
Robert Kurtz, US ACE
Jane MacLellan, USFWS

Ron Rozsa, CT DEP
Tim Wenskus, NYC Parks & Rec
Harry Yamalis, CTDEP
Heather Young, NYS DEC / NEIWPCC

LISS Habitat Restoration Workgroup meetings

There was a brief discussion on how we may be able to improve attendance at future bi-state Workgroup meetings. The first hurdle was easy – many of the HR Workgroup members cannot attend all-day meetings on Mondays, Tuesday, or Fridays. So we will limit our future meetings to Tuesdays or Wednesdays unless there is a pressing need to deviate.

The next hurdle is providing sufficient notice to the workgroup members. One way to facilitate this is to standardize the meeting schedule. It was decided that Workgroup meetings will be held 3 times per year. It was agreed that meetings will be held in March, July, and October, in advance of several key deadlines, such as those for finalizing the annual Workplans, or before the annual GPRA reports are due.

**The next meeting of the HR Workgroup will be held on
Wednesday, November 29, 2006. Mark your calendars.**

Memorandum of Understanding

No more edits were submitted for the MOU so the text was finalized. A new format for the MOU was proposed and accepted. This new format distributes the signatures over four pages. The MOU text appears at the top of each page, and the bottom of each page has 3-4 different signatures. Page one has the signatures of the Policy Committee members: Denise M. Sheehan, Commissioner of NYS DEC; Gina M. McCarthy, Commissioner of CT DEP; Robert W. Varney, Regional Administrator of US EPA - New England Region; and Alan J. Steinberg, Regional Administrator of US EPA - Region II. There will be 15 signatures in all.

Mailing of hard copies to signatories not attending the September 28, 2006 Policy Committee meeting will begin on Monday, August 14.

One of the Habitat Restoration goals from the previous MOU signed in 2000 was to open up 100 miles of Riverine Migratory Corridors to anadromous fish. That goal was surpassed in July 2006 with approximately 18 months left in the 10-year window. Although signed in 2000, the goal was retroactive to projects completed in 1998, and the window of opportunity for applicable restoration projects concludes at the end of 2007.

National Fish & Wildlife Foundation – LIS Futures Fund RFP

2006 marks year 3 of the Long Island Sound Futures Fund program, created by a partnership between EPA-LISS, NFWF, and other agencies/organizations. The LISFF awards grants in the form of federal funds already leveraged with the appropriate non-federal match, including both private dollars and settlement money.

The next LISFF RFP will be released in September 2006. Shortly afterwards, NFWF will hold a workshop for interested applicants to receive help on creating better proposals. The maximum grant award will once again be \$75,000, however, 2-year grants may be awarded to certain habitat restoration projects for a maximum of \$150,000.

As discussed at the last work group meeting, the Habitat Team recommended better language in the next RFP to ensure that applicants submit the detailed information necessary to adequately review the proposal. Sometimes a well-written proposal ends up rejected for funding because the habitat restoration project that was proposed is not really habitat restoration. A better RFP should also discourage these kinds of poor habitat restoration proposals by clearly making them ineligible. As a result, Jane MacLellan drafted revised text and circulated this new language for review by the work group.

Some of the new language in the 2006 RFP was modeled after the LIS License Plate program. It was stated that many applicants cannot assemble a good proposal, even if it is for an otherwise good project. To help remedy this problem, contact information for the NY & CT Habitat Restoration Coordinators was inserted into the RFP so that prospective applicants can discuss topics and ask questions before submitting an application.

It was suggested that the new RFP should include a list of eligible projects and ineligible projects along with project details and an explanation of why that project was eligible or not. [Note: In discussions held after the meeting, it was agreed that this and other additional information for applicants would be posted on the habitat restoration page of the LISS website rather than be included in the RFP. Ron will take the lead on drafting this additional information and will circulate it to the work group for review. This additional information will be posted in mid-September, before the release of the RFP.]

Permitting requirements, requirements & guidelines for invasive species control projects as well as many other details of the new RFP were discussed at length. These details are available in the draft / proposed RFP language distributed by Jane MacLellan. [an updated version of this language was emailed to the workgroup after the meeting].

There will be a press event held during September 2006 to publicly announce the awards of the 2005 LISFF grants.

NY & CT HabRes Coordinators will get the 2006 RFP out to the appropriate groups early – immediately after the RFP is released. Once released, the URL for the online RFP will be emailed to these groups by the appropriate coordinator (depending upon state). This email should include a short message containing the following info: who is eligible for funding; what kinds of projects are eligible for funding; and that projects must be within the LISS Project Boundary (anadromous fish passage projects are exempt from this limitation). If prospective applicants are unsure of eligibility they can simply contact their state's HR coordinator to find out.

Eligible groups include State & Municipal agencies, and non-profit groups. Federal agencies are not eligible for funding, but many federal agencies have "friends" groups associated with them – which are eligible for funding. For restoration projects proposed on federal lands, a "friends" group would be the most appropriate applicant.

Restore America's Estuaries conference

Robin Kriesberg (Save the Sound) will give a presentation on fish-passage restoration projects at the upcoming RAE conference, Dec 11-13, 2006 in New Orleans.

Habitat Restoration Online Database Content

The LISS web designer, who is also our database designer, proposed a smaller-scale online database for our HabRes projects. It will lack the interactive Internet Mapping Service (IMS) capability we had considered when this discussion began. An alternative to IMS was proposed – Google Earth allows some of this, and work created by individuals can be saved. The problem is, although Google Earth is a free download to individual users, government agencies as well as other organizations will most likely need to purchase a license for each user. Heather Young will look into this further.

Although this will be a massive database with many fields and many different kinds of data, only a portion of it will be made available to the public. The entire database will be available to the HR Workgroup through a log-in process, and edits could be made to the database perhaps using a separate log-in process. For example, some financial details will be available by log-in only, while the general public will be able to see things like project description and information on restoration techniques used. The database will be designed so that data necessary for federal (and other) reporting programs can be easily entered and extracted (ie, GPRA, HabITS, Save the Sound reporting requirements to NOAA, etc). Viewing these areas may be by log-in only. The NY and CT habitat restoration coordinators will share the responsibility of data entry.

We will schedule a follow-up meeting with interested members of the HR workgroup in early September to begin discussion on database design. Choosing fields is only a small part of database design. Although selection of the most necessary fields will be simple, there is much more to database design than just choosing fields. The database functionality and interface must be well planned out ahead of time to avoid running into a dead end – if it is designed in a specific way, some additional options we may want to add that we didn't think of in the beginning may be impossible without starting over.

There are several good habitat restoration databases and websites that we can take a look at for ideas, determine what we like and don't like, and to see what might work for us. Harry will send links to some of these to the workgroup next week, and will ask for feedback on them.

Our database will be designed in MS Access. Some fields will need to be large enough to contain an executive summary (memo field). Fields to track federal funds as well as their match requirements are required, and it should be designed to demonstrate whether matching requirements have or have not been met. Sometimes matching funds will span 2 or more projects. It was recommended that the database include Potential Restoration Sites component. Many "potential" sites were nominated to HRI yet many of these sites have not been verified with regards to their appropriateness for habitat restoration

Habitat Restoration Program Brochure

Many edits have been sent to LISS office, and most were applied to the latest version of the brochure, which was circulated to the work group in advance of this meeting. The work group discussed the brochure at length and suggested additional edits or revisions to refine it. Jane MacLellan will provide the changes to Robert Burg, the LISS Communications Coordinator, who will then circulate a revised version to the work group for final review.

Shellfish Reefs chapter outline

Heather presented her initial draft outline for the Shellfish Reefs chapter of the LIS Habitat Restoration manual.

Ron suggested that Heather contact Peter Auster at UConn who may know the locations of natural oyster beds/reefs (and mussel beds?) in LIS that were never harvested or managed as a fishery. More of Ron's comments: What are the Functions and Values of these natural reefs that are not being managed for harvest (or

aquaculture)? Be wary of references in historical documents to the effect of “plentiful oysters” or “you can walk across this river on the backs of striped bass” as they were exaggerated or completely made up to get people to move to that city / town from the Old World.

Ron and Harry will try to find some issues of the CT Shellfish Bulletin (not 100% sure of name – old historical document) and send them to Heather. Heather will circulate her outline to the full workgroup for review and then will revise the outline.

Harry presented Mark Johnson’s latest outline for the Riverine Migratory Corridors chapter of the LIS Habitat Restoration manual. The outline was accepted as final, but we may add a section for Atlantic salmon. It has been hypothesized that rising water temperatures are acting as a true physical barrier to Atlantic salmon. They cannot survive in these warmer waters, therefore they stay to the north the LIS area. Historically they were common in LIS and the rivers connected to it. Harry will begin work on writing the chapter, relying on Mark Johnson, Tom Halavik and others for technical guidance.

Ron will try to draft an outline of the Estuarine Embayments chapter for the next meeting (November 2006). Potential reviewers for this outline include Jim Kremer and Robert Whitlatch at UConn.