

Long Island Sound Study Habitat Restoration Initiative Meeting Minutes
November 14, 2007, Mamaroneck, NY

Intern Projects

- organize the list and send it to the team for review; once finalized, these items will be added to the Workplan and will remain in the Workplan until they are completed. Realistically we do not expect all of them to be completed quickly, but the Workplan is the best place to keep this list.
- Heather would like to see an intern expand the historic eelgrass work previously done, focusing on Westchester County and NYC.
- Harry will try to get a copy of the 2006 LIS eelgrass survey GIS files and share them with Mark Johnson, Tessa Getchis, and Jamie Vaudrey (and anyone else who might be interested).
- Some new projects proposed at the meeting are to have interns mine the files of CT's and NY's shellfish commissions, as well as to look through John Volk's files at CT Bureau of Aquaculture. Interns can also talk with the State Archaeologist and Native American tribal historians for relevant historic shellfish bed info.

Database

Dan Rothenberg of Yankee Planning Group announced that the contract had been signed and work on the database has officially begun. Dan expects his crew to be contacting the database team soon to schedule meetings where we can help steer the project in the right direction, as well as to test the functionality.

At an earlier meeting, 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. Ron had suggested that maybe interns could work on this once the database is ready.

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

GPRA Reporting

Since the signing of the 2006 habitat restoration MOU, we are now to track and report on acquisition of properties within the LISS project area; properties that qualify are those protected from development. Acres from these acquisitions would count toward the new goals as stated in the 2006 MOU.

These are generally hard to track, as nobody is required to inform CTDEP or NYS DEC about these real estate transactions. A few good sources of info in CT are CTDEP's Open Space / Land Acquisition group, The Nature Conservancy, CT Dept. of Agriculture, and the loosely organized CT Land Conservation Council (CLCC) for acquisitions by Land Trusts. In NY there is no central repository for open space acquisitions or easements.

- Louise suggested that Heather and Harry should contact Land Trusts, TNC, etc, every year around late January to February for their acquisitions from the previous calendar year.

- brief discussion on reporting miles and acres acquired (and thus, protected):

- Do acres acquired count toward both the 300 acre 5-year goal, and the 2000 acres by 2020? Or are the 2000 acres still purely habitat restoration? This may be open to further discussion, but Harry will send email to Mark Tedesco for clarification. UPDATE: open space acquisition acreage will count towards the 300 acre 5 year goals, but the original 2000 acres of habitat restored is still just counting restored acres.

- What about river miles from streams running through purchased property? The goal states that miles opened to diadromous fish will be counted toward the 50-mile goal. Streams can still be included in the acreage of the surrounding property that was purchased. There won't be any new dams built in CT waterway. As far as new developments ruining stream water quality, again, those streams can be counted with the acreage of the surrounding property.

-What about submerged lands? These areas are already protected from development in both CT and NY. Not sure about areas that may possibly become permanently closed to shellfishing, dredging, and/or other related in-water activities that could potentially degrade coastal habitats. Adam at TNC has an intern who is charged with gathering information of all privately owned submerged lands for about 10 coastal towns in CT. This information will eventually be used to develop a GIS database of privately owned submerged lands. The idea would be to then augment the existing CT DEP GIS database for all leased shellfish beds, recreational, and natural beds resulting in a more comprehensive database of submerged lands in CT.

-from Tom: The original 10-year goal of restoring 2000 acres beginning in 1998 was determined by looking at the number or acres restored up to that point in time. Had restoration continued at the same pace, 2000 acres may have been attainable, but a few years in to the program it was determined that all the "easy" projects had been done and only the most complicated and expensive ones remained. The purpose of setting these goals and trying to reach them is so that Congress can quickly see if work is getting done in a satisfactory manner and decide whether to keep funding the program - in our case, the Long Island Sound National Estuary Program.

-from Tessa: Sea Grant submitted a proposal to the CT Dept of Ag to provide GIS training and conduct field application trials with municipal shellfish commissions and other shellfish practitioners statewide. This would be a collaboration with the Dept of Ag / Bureau of Aquaculture.

How pure is restoration?

Lengthy discussion to help us determine whether future eelgrass and oyster bed restoration projects will need to be done within the exact footprint of where they were found historically in order to truly qualify as restoration (as opposed to habitat creation or species enhancement). Tom stated that the USFWS would approach it this way: highest priority would be given to restoration sites within the original footprint; next would be for areas that could support oysters (or eelgrass) but is already a functioning soft-bottom habitat. Is there currently enough of this soft-bottom habitat to justify converting some of it to something else (ie, oyster or eelgrass bed)? This discussion will have to be continued at another meeting.

-Adam asked if we are ultimately trying to restore an ecologically well-managed Sound, or just a few parcels of various shallow water habitats. He stated that we are ultimately trying to restore an ecologically well-managed Sound, and that all funded projects should have that objective in mind even if they are focused on select areas or habitats. Basically, are the parts (projects) adding up to a better whole (Sound)?

-Juliana asked if we could create a broader definition of habitat restoration, but any definition would have to be consistent with the CCMP.

-Is the current definition of habitat restoration, as stated in the Habitat Restoration Manual and Guidance Document, consistent with the CCMP? After the meeting, Heather read through much of the CCMP, and Harry quickly flipped through the introductory and 'Management and Conservation of Living Resources and Their Habitats' sections and neither of us could find an actual definition for habitat restoration. The electronic scanned version is not word-searchable. The working definition as seen in the Manual may have been created for that document.

- from Adam, regarding the HRI team's operating definition of restoration in particular the term site. I think that if applicants are able to be more flexible the eventual successes will be greater, particularly for eelgrass and shellfish. It brings up the idea of adaptive response between species and habitats - flexibility to allow the organisms define the best place. So, if you were looking to establish eelgrass the applicant would be able to state in the application "within Yamalis Bay" vs. choosing a specific location within that Bay. Test plots would be allowed at a handful of locations in Yamalis Bay with apparent optimal conditions - the eventually established locations would then become the sites for a larger-scale eelgrass restoration project.

-Louise asked if we could edit the existing definition to have a clearer definition for each habitat type. With a new “Long Island Sound Agreement” approaching in 2008, maybe the time to make any adjustments to the definition would be soon.

-Tessa recommended that we try to include a “habitat enhancement” or “improvement” component into a new definition. Suggested we should include a link to Habitat Restoration Map from websites of grant programs such as LISFF.

Habitat Restoration Guidance Document(s)

The team agreed to leave the list of 12 priority habitat types intact for this document. Eight of them have small summaries that applicants can read for background purposes, and 4 do not – although if anyone wishes to write up a couple sentences or even a couple of paragraphs on any of these 4, that would be greatly appreciated. Regarding the statement about purchasing/transplanting only LIS-native genetic stock, the team also decided to leave that one as is. Further comments from the team include:

-editing the opening paragraph so that it sounds less sympathetic to the grant reviewers, and more instructional to the applicants.

-second paragraph under the Molluscan Reefs section should be eliminated.

-Mark Johnson pointed out Phragmites control is discussed in the Tidal Wetlands chapter, but is also listed as one of the activities not recommended for funding. He also pointed out that invasive species control was one of the categories in the LIS Futures Fund program. Harry indicated that invasive species control is encouraged in some situations, but not all, and Phrag control is generally an on-going maintenance issue. A few exceptions could be made for areas with new small Phrag infestations, where there is potential for complete eradication.

-it was also recommended that the document should consistently tell applicants to call the habitat restoration coordinators, and not a choice of either the coordinators or permit review staff, or local planning & zoning, etc.

-New names proposed for the “Ecological Restoration Plan” include the following

- Habitat restoration strategic plan (this option was quickly eliminated)
- How to develop a successful habitat restoration application
- Elements of a good habitat restoration plan

-Heather reviewed this document and took out much of the bulk, as it was very “tidal wetlands heavy.” This document should contain a list of items that need to be addressed for a good/complete application, along with a brief description of the kind of response that is expected. Harry will make a sample available to applicants upon request. Much of the background text removed by Heather will likely end up in the Guidance Document, but probably not until next year as we need to finalize both documents quickly to make them ready for the next LISFF cycle.

-Tom offered to take a cleaned-up, final version of the “How To” plan document and show it to Lynn Dwyer at NFWF to see if she can incorporate it into the actual application for LISFF, and possibly other grant programs. Tom stated that the items to be addressed in the questionnaire-style “how to” document are exactly what we, as reviewers, need to know to thoroughly review an application. Harry will try to make it part of the LIS License Plate grant fund, for habitat restoration grant applications only.

-We expect that this will also be a stand-alone reference document, as well as hoping to make it a part of several grant applications. We still need to work out how we make people aware of this document if it is not incorporated into a grant application. Also - if we attach this to the end of the Guidance document, applicants may end up with 2 copies if this does indeed become incorporated into grant applications.

Next Meeting Dates

March 26, 2008 (Wed) Connecticut, most likely in Bridgeport
July 16, 2008 (Wed) in New York
November 19, 2008 (Wed) in Connecticut

In Attendance

Juliana Barrett - CT Sea Grant
Tessa Getchis - CT Sea Grant
Tom Halavik - USFWS
Louise Harrison - USFWS Liaison to EPA
Mark Johnson - CT DEP

Vicky Ruzicka - NYC Parks/Natural Resources
Tim Wenskus - NYC Parks/Natural Resources
Adam Whelchel - CT TNC
Harry Yamalis - CT DEP
Heather Young - NYS DEC