

Watershed and Embayments Work Group Meeting Notes
Wednesday, November 9, 2022
Meeting conducted remotely via Microsoft Teams



Attendees:

Kelly Streich, CT DEEP (Co-chair)

Mary Arnold, NYSDEC/NEIWPC (Co-chair)

Jean Pillo, ECT Conservation District

Qian Lei-parent, UCONN

Jordan Bishop, NEIWPC

Mark Parker, CT DEEP

Dave Dickson, UCONN

Chet Arnold, UCONN

Kristin Kraseski, NYSDEC/NEIWPC

Elizabeth Hornstein, NYSG

Sarah Healy, NYSDEC/NEIWPC

Sue Van Patten, NYSDEC

James Ammerman, NEIWPC

Sarah Deonarine, Manhasset Bay

Eric Swenson, Hempstead Harbor

Lillit Genovesi, NYSG

Nikki Spiller, Earthplace

Mary Beth Hart, CTDEEP

Esther Nelson, EPA (EPA Lead)

Casey Abel, EPA (EPA Lead)

Leah O'Neill, EPA

Samarra Scantlebury, NYSDEC

Paul Stacey, Footprints on the Water

Heather Johnson, Friends of the Bay

Mark Tedesco, EPA

Sarah Crosby, Maritime Aquarium

Holly Drinkuth, TNC

Robert Hawthorne, NRCS

Jamie Vaudrey, UCONN

Sarah Schafer-Brown, NYSG

Cayla Sullivan, EPA

Introduction:

The meeting was called to order at approximately 10:00am in the teams meeting by co-chairs Mary Arnold and Kelly Streich.

Management Committee Updates:

Esther Nelson began discussions on the Management Committee meeting which took place October 19-20th in person in Port Jefferson.

Topics covered include:

- Overall, the budget has increased dramatically in recent years as a geographic program and an estuary program. In addition, \$20M was added to the budget in infrastructure funds. Funding has increased from \$15M to \$52M since 2019. Funds have been distributed to new and existing programs, increasing LISS staff and more.
- LISS Staff examined all 9 Workgroups workplans, identified their priorities and linked them back to the Ecosystem Targets. The committee reviewed current workgroup charges, functions, membership, and coordination. Co-Chairs will review current website content, enhance collaboration and coordination-membership lists, new members, clear commitment from current members, identify individuals who crossover and improve internal communication.
- Reviewed current data management issues, included commitment to entering WQ data in the portal, improve accessibility of WQ portal, USGS will lead development of a clearinghouse over the next two years.
- Reviewed and supported the new COE plan. Potential new rebranding and introducing an expedited process.
- Implement training & education ideas from needs assessment, roll out Breaking Down Barriers Program, work to address structural capacity and cross-communication & coordination issues.
- Schedule Executive & Policy Steering Committee meetings, finalize Governance document & post on LISS website

Projected use of \$25.6- \$32M of base budget allocated and roughly \$6.4M for supplemental available across workgroups. Supplemental budget requests will come from the workgroups primarily. WSWG priorities may fall under possible funding vehicles.

It is the Workgroup responsibility to coordinate new proposals once the MC highlights which outstanding program needs will be prioritized this year. This will include upcoming bioextraction projects and a bioextraction meeting. Collaboration with other workgroups on overlapping priorities and research projects, including Environmental Justice Workgroup, Water Quality Monitoring Workgroup and N Coordination Workgroup.

An online tool to assess the health of local watershed – Chet Arnold, Dave Dickson, Qian Lei-Parent, UCONN Clear:

- Examined a Connecticut basin over the years of the Long Island Sound Study to view land cover uses as an indicator for water quality. Project Catalyst #1: Utilizing the advancements NOAA data resolution to explore the land cover-watershed health relationship at a level of geographic resolution that was previously impossible. Project Catalyst #2: The importance of riparian land cover; services include slow run-off, protect shorelines from erosion, flood control aid, filter/trap pollutants, provide wildlife habitat and corridors, shade waters, first line of defense against impacts of development. Simplified the land cover classes: Impervious, Ag and Ag like, Natural. Metric created for this team Combined Condition Index (CCI) describes the probable health of a watershed based on land cover.
- Users of the tool can manipulate and simulate the result of land cover changes and the impact, if any, it will have on the watershed condition.
- The tool, video, and presentation slides can be accessed at: [A New Tool to Assess Watershed Health in CT | Center for Land Use Education and Research \(uconn.edu\)](#)

Questions

Mark Parker: Project was funded through Connecticut DEEP in FY19 Project Workplan. In the example simulation you took out 2 acres of agriculture out, but your index showed a lower number which infers it made it worse, intuitively if you removed agricultural land you would think you are removing nutrients going into the watershed.

Qian Lei-Parent: In that example scenario I decreased agriculture and increased 20 acres impervious surface in the upper watershed, which means the watershed value lowered, but it was high enough to remain in the conservation category. It's a slightly decreased watershed condition.

Chet Arnold: Added to Mark's question. Many ways to use the tool, how and why it was used, if it worked for what they were looking for or not. Asking for feedback, and users to play around with it.

Sarah Deonarine (via chat): Does the tool have teeth, i.e., can it be connected to regulations?

Paul Stacey: It is difficult to visualize a scenario where those mitigation watersheds could be brought up to a desirable level of health given the zoning laws and such. Particularly impervious cover, even in a buffer. With every new acre that's developed or converted from a natural condition, we struggle to find the balance.

Qian Lei-Parent: Added that in the scenario builder, you can add data like zoning, conservation, open space, TMDL, etc. You can add it to overlay on the map with CCI data, to get more information and help with decision making.

Dave Dickson: Hopeful that on a local level communities can utilize to discover area they need to improve on like riparian are. Provide communities tools to assist in there planning and development.

Mark Tedesco: Are there applications where it can be used on a larger planning level? For example, NRCS outreach and agricultural land, maybe opportunities for repairing buffer restoration where it had been unsuccessful?

Paul Stacey: That is what they designed the tool for, using the Norwalk River Watershed as an example.

Chet Arnold: Added: Looking at this in the context of Ag programs is a good idea. Worry the agricultural community are not going to be so happy about it. A meeting to talk about how the tool could be used in a positive way for the Ag community, and that answer could be the riparian restoration aspect.

Elizabeth Hornstein: Concerned about bringing it to NY, particularly Suffolk County Long Island, the ag community is sensitive to being blamed for pollution and reducing agricultural lands. The Ag community is very involved in reducing pollutions. Has connections to the Long Island Farm Bureau, if interested.

Paul Stacey: Nobody wants to be told what to do and it is all about balance. There is plenty of room for agriculture, which has much less impact than impervious cover on water quality, removing Ag like cover is more of a wasteful use of land. The tool is not to target anyone, instead to find the acceptable balance between human and natural land uses.

Mark Tedesco: Recognizing the challenges of advancing riparian buffer protection, we need to connect this to where there might be opportunities with funding assistance and building partnerships.

Dave Dickson: Responding to chat of what it would cost to bring to NY? They don't have it for New York or plans for it, but if there was funding NOAA would be able to obtain data to do it. Estimated may be about \$100-200k. NOAA is attempting to do it across the country but will be looking to start where funding relationships exist. Currently only a few areas nationally.

Sue Van Patten (via chat): What about Suffolk and Nassau Counties?

Dave Dickson: Would have to circle back and talk again with NOAA. The \$100-200k guestimate was for the watershed.

- Mary Arnold and Dave Dickson will schedule time to continue conversation for the NY idea.

Next Meeting & Adjournment – Mary Arnold

- Meeting was adjourned at 11:59pm.
- 2023 Meetings: February 8th, May 10th, August 10th, November 8th.