

Communications, Outreach, and Engagement Work Group

Meeting Notes

Wednesday, October 11, 2023



Attendees (In-Person and Virtual):

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| Braden Lynn | CT DEEP |
| Bridget Cervero | The Maritime Aquarium at Norwalk |
| Casey Abel | EPA |
| Chad Seewagen | Great Hollow Nature Preserve |
| Christian Alexander | Greenwich Audubon Center |
| Christine Suter | Friends of the Bay |
| Claire Wegh | Housatonic Valley Association |
| Diana Nguyen | The Nature Conservancy |
| Diana Payne | Connecticut Sea Grant, University of Connecticut |
| Elizabeth Schrang | Northwest Connecticut Land Conservancy |
| Emily Lavin | The Maritime Aquarium |
| Emma Coffey | CT DEEP |
| Hannah Vagts | Fishers Island Seagrass Management Coalition |
| Henry Jordan | The Bronx is Blooming |

| | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Jes Parker | Westchester Land Trust |
| Jimena Perez-Viscasillas | NYSG |
| John Vallacchi | The Bronx is Blooming |
| Larissa Graham | Connecticut Reserve |
| Lilli Genovesi | NYSG |
| Maggie Cozens | CTSG |
| Megan Granato | Town of Groton, CT |
| Meghan Marrero | Mercy University |
| Nancy Seligson | LISS CAC, Town of Mamaroneck |
| Nicole Tachiki | EPA |
| Robert Burg | NEIWPCC |
| Rodrigo Pinto | Housatonic Valley Association (HVA) |
| Sally Connolly | City Island Oyster Reef (CIOR) |
| Samarra Scantlebury | NYSDEC |
| Sarah Schechter | CTSG |

Meeting site: [Great Hollow Nature Preserve and Research Center](#) in New Fairfield, CT

Co-Chair and Zoom host – Lillit (Lilli) Genovesi, NYSG

CT co-chair – Maggie Cozens

Introduction:

The hybrid portion of the meeting was preceded by a guided walk around Great Hollow Nature Preserve with Maggie Cozens.



After this, Lillit Genovesi called the meeting to order at approximately 1:00 pm with a brief introduction from Maggie Cozens and an orientation for the overall agenda for the afternoon by Lillit Genovesi.

Presenter: Nancy Seligson – NY Co-Chair of the Long Island Sound Study's Citizen Advisory Committee

Nancy Seligson started us off with a review of the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC)/Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) joint meeting and the outcomes of the meeting, including [recommendations from members for the upcoming Long Island Sound Study's \(LISS\) Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan \(CCMP\) revision](#).

These outcomes included: a general call for the simplification and streamlining of the CCMP, emphasizing the need for a dynamic document, ensuring that the SMARTIE framework (strategic, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound, inclusive, equitable) is applied to CCMP goals, and establishing environmental justice, resiliency, and sustainability as major facets of the next revision. Nancy also iterated the need for compelling environmental storytelling in communicating the goals and overall vision of the CCMP.

Before launching into lightning talks, Lillit shared with the group that Diana Nguyen is leaving her position at The Nature Conservancy (TNC). Diana expressed gratitude for her time at TNC and communicated her plans to stay in touch.

Lightning Talks:

1. [Hannah Vagts](#) - [Fisher's Island Seagrass Coalition](#) (FISMC). Hannah walked the group through the Save the Seagrass movement currently delivered by FISMC. The coalition is communicating the program through a variety of means, including stickers/slogans, keychains for boaters, information checklists, and brochures and maps on topics focusing on careful boating to protect the seagrass and [eco-conscious landscaping](#). They have also launched an environmental narrative: "Elly's Adventures", to further engage with different populations within the community. Hannah identified a current outreach gap in connecting with the mainland community and creating contacts outside of Fishers Island. She also encourages folks to join the FISM Coalition Meetings and direct any questions to FishersIslandSeagrass@gmail.com.
2. [John Vallacchi](#) - [The Bronx is Blooming's](#). Bronx is Blooming is a community organization based in the South Bronx. John shared details about their program, "Saturdays on the Sound", which is a community stewardship-based project encouraging Urban Canopy Restoration. The organization engages and educates community volunteers in carrying out this work. "Saturdays on the Sound" is primarily focused on invasive plant removal, tree planting, and native shrubs and perennials planting in Soundview Park, which was previously a landfill. Every Saturday from March-November the organization and community volunteers work for three hours to transform this park. You are invited to join their planting and invasive removal efforts on Saturdays with the [next event coming up on October 28](#).
3. [Jes Parker](#) – [Westchester Land Trust](#) (WLT). WLT preserved [Otter Creek Preserve](#) in Mamaroneck. 90% of the remaining salt marsh in Westchester. Acquired in 2015, Otter Creek Preserve is the largest privately-owned tidal wetland designated as a nature sanctuary in Westchester County. Jes spoke about the

passive recreation opportunities available there including hiking, paddling, and birding. She identified sea level rise and invasive species as ongoing challenges. Westchester Land Trust has partnered with Groundwork Hudson Valley Green Team, a Yonkers-based program which engages young people in environmental stewardship work. Jes emphasized that this group has been instrumental in the effort to steward Otter Creek Preserve.

4. [Shahela Begum](#)– [Long Island Sound Community Impact Fund](#) (LISCIF). LISCIF is a partnership between Restore America’s Estuaries, EPA, and LISS which seeks to provide technical and financial assistance to EJ communities on LIS. Some program highlights are listed below:
 - a. LISCIF 2024 RAE will award up to 1.5 million in federal funds
 - b. Typical awards will range from \$5,000-\$100,000
 - c. Annual learning exchange opportunities, including stipends to attend
 - d. Investment in training programs and grants

Letters of intent are due December 1st, and more information regarding the timeline can be found at the [LISCIF website](#). Shahela also shared that LISCIF is also providing webinar trainings.

5. [Braden Lynn](#) – [CT DEEP and Sound Outlook Newsletter](#). Sound Outlook is an electronic newsletter published three times each year by the DEEP Bureau of Water Protection and Land Reuse. The newsletter addresses the water quality, coastal resources, and coastal uses of Long Island Sound, and spotlights an individual from the environmental community in every issue. Braden invited attendees to make submissions and shared that there are approximately 5,000 people on the newsletter email list.

At this point, Lillit brought a proposal forward to the group. Braden has offered to do a photography workshop at one of the COE workgroup meetings, which was met with a great deal of interest from attendees (51% were interested in this type of future workshop).

Presentations:

Long Island Sound Schools Network – Diana Payne, CTSG and Meg Marrero, Mercy University.

Diana introduced the [Long Island Sound Schools Network](#) to the group. Based on Europe’s Blue Schools Program, The Long Island Sound Schools Network invites schools to make a commitment to protect and conserve local watershed and LIS. The school designates two teachers, proposes a school or community-based project, and creates a plan to increase ocean literacy by engaging students, families, and community members.

Any school within the Long Island Sound watershed can apply. The program will begin with five schools (from each state) for the upcoming 2024 program year. [More information about the project and how to get involved can be found here](#). Diana and Meg ask that we spread the word!

Timeline

Nov 30: Applications Due

December 15 2023: Selected Schools Notified

December 22nd: Selected Schools Return Contracts

January 4th: Kick off/Orientation Meeting

January 15-August 15: Schools Implement Project

June (TBD): Student Symposium (virtual)

September (TBD): Teacher Retreat



Following the presentation, there was a question about whether the Long Island Sound Schools Network will aid or support with project creation/ideas. Meg answered that there will be a resource list available online, as well as past project examples, but emphasized that school is encouraged to determine a project that works best for their specific community.

There was also a question about the extent of the watershed included in program and whether schools in the upper watershed would be permitted to apply. Diana emphasized that all schools within the Long Island Sound watershed (indicated by the green shaded area in the map left) are eligible for the program.

Long Island Sound Study Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan (LISS CCMP) – Casey Abel, EPA

The CCMP revision process is underway for the LISS. Casey introduced the CCMP to the group by reviewing the previous revision timelines and the general overview of the plan. Casey shared that the CCMP's visions, goals, principles, and implementation actions are major emphasis for the current revision.

Facilitated discussions will begin in January to focus on various aspects of the CCMP, including outreach and education. Public comments and engagement will be collected in 2024. Casey asked that folks direct applicable comments to breakout group leads. The outreach and education workgroup is being led by Robert Burg (NEIWPCC), Jimena Perez-Viscasillas (NYSG), and Maggie Cozens (CTSG).

Breakout Rooms:

Lillit then invited attendees to participate in breakout rooms, (two in-person, and two online). During breakout room discussions, participants were asked to answer the following questions.

- 1) Who are your priority audiences and priority concerns?

2) How do you measure success in your program, both qualitatively and quantitatively?

Group 1

Casey's group discussed the following priority audiences and concerns:

Students, both k-12 and college students

Seniors

Individuals without social media access.

Metrics: volunteer tracking, program turnout tracking, assessing the environmental impact of sites, evaluating what people want from their community spaces and parks, and how to make those spaces accessible to different users.

Group 2

Lillit's group identified the following priorities:

People who are directly connected to Long Island Sound

Students and teacher, especially those with limited exposure or knowledge of LIS

Newly established groups and organizations

The public

Metrics: social media tracking, event sign-ups/registrations, number of donors, pre and post student assessments, public perception surveys, program tracking (# of participants engaged in lawncare practices, for example), needs assessments

of people trained on improved sustainable lawn-care practices, or # of people who adopted improved sustainable fisheries practices

Improved security of rights over lands, waters, or resources (# of people)

Increased and/or improved sustainable, place-based economic opportunity (# people)

Group 3

Maggie's group identified the following priorities:

Coastal homeowners,

Recreationists, especially boaters

Homeowners in the upper watershed

Kids/families, with a need to fill an outreach gap with older children and teenagers.

Coastal public access was identified as a concern, as was sensitive resource conservation and restoration.

Metrics used: transects, social media analytics, participant tracking, and stakeholder surveys, pre and post program assessments.

Group 4

Jimena's group identified the following priorities:

Volunteers

Schools

Families

Boaters

Disadvantaged communities

Spanish- speaking communities

The fishing community

Indigenous communities.

Priority concerns included working with municipalities to communicate needs in watershed and raise awareness on further opportunities for involvement. Other concerns included marine debris, oyster restoration, water quality, education curriculum integration, and the development of watershed plans with input from the community (not just municipalities).

Metrics: program participant qualitative data, assessing student comprehension, inviting people to share meaningful watershed experiences. This group acknowledged their tracking of quantitative metrics to include number of attendees, number of program hours attended, and number of students reached. However, they communicated an interest in including more qualitative metric tracking moving forward.

The meeting ended with the following announcements:

The next COE meeting is scheduled for January 10th, 2024, and will be virtual.