

Policy Committee Meeting Minutes (DRAFT) May 5, 2020

Participants

Policy Committee: COL Thomas Asbery (USACE), Chris Daggett (HRF, Chair), Bruce Friedman (NJDEP-alt), Javier Laureano (EPA-alt), Angela Licata (NY Local Government), Peter Lopez (EPA), Debbie Mans (NJDEP), James Tierney (NYSDEC-alt), Phyllis Reich (NJ Local Government-alt), Charles Warren (CAC), Judith Weis (STAC).

Management Committee: Pinar Balci (NYCDEP), Lisa Baron (RWG, Chair), Jason Fagel (NYSDEC), Margaret Flanagan (PAWG Chair), Biswarup Guha (WQWG, NJ-Chair), Paul Higgins (PANYNJ), Marit Larson (RWG, Chair), Tom Laustsen (NJHDG), Jessie Murray (NOAA), Rob Pirani (HEP), Evelyn Powers (IEC), Patti Rafferty (NPS), Clay Sherman (NJDEP), Peter Wepler (USACE)

Others in attendance: Peter Brandt (EPA), Fran Dunwell (NYSDEC), Joe Seebode (USACE), Shino Tanikawa (CAC), Melissa Sinisgalli (NJHDG), Lingard Knutson (EPA), Amy Tarreto (EPA), Elizabeth Butler (EPA), Dennis Reinknecht (NJDEP), Greg Alber (NJHDG), Jodi McDonald (USACE), Beth Soltani (EPA)

HRF/HEP Office Staff: Helena Andreyko, Elizabeth Balladares, Rosana Da Silva, Clay Hiles, James Lodge, Isabelle Stinnette

1. **Introductions and Agenda Review**, Chris Daggett, HRF

Chris Daggett chaired the meeting and the agenda was reviewed. Chris announced today is COL Thomas Asbery's last meeting as he transitions to his next assignment to NATO in Germany as the Engineer Branch Chief. COL Asbery's last day is June 25th. The Policy Committee thanked COL Asbery for his dedication and support over the years to the shared mission at HEP. The new District Commander, COL Matthew Luzzatto will be joining us from the Charleston where he served as District Commander and prior he was the Chief of Host Nation Construction for U.S. Forces Japan.

Rob Pirani conducted a roll call of all participants.

2. **COVID-19 Discussion and Update**

EPA, USACE, NJDEP, and NYSDEC provided an overview of actions that have been put into place to address COVID-19. Pete Lopez highlighted efforts by the EPA and CDC to provide information on drinking water and wastewater guidance as information becomes available (<https://www.epa.gov/coronavirus>). In addition, efforts to continue the Superfund program are ongoing and funds are being made available to aid EJ communities.

COL Asbery discussed the rapid response and construction needed in NY to respond to COVID-19 over the last 8 weeks. In other news, USACE conducted its first virtual bid process and has awarded a \$14 M contract for the Rockaways (Sandy-related effort).

Debbie Mans shared NJDEP's COVID-19 response website (<https://www.nj.gov/dep/covid19regulatorycompliance/>) and noted that state parks had opened over the weekend. As for compliance, NJDEP is expecting full compliance but understanding the limitations to sites or access to labs may make this difficult and are willing to work with permittees to have flexibility. LTCPs that were initially due June 1 have been extended to October 1st. Limiting water shut offs, and other initiatives have been worked on by the Commissioner.

Jim Tierney indicated that NYSDEC is hopeful that clean infrastructure funding is a part of the next stimulus package. Jim also discussed the 11 LTCPs where Jamaica Bay and East River/City-wide LTCPs are under review and that through the Revive Mother Nature, the state has a chance to pass a \$3 M bond act to support implementation of projects like those in the CRP.

Rob Pirani discussed HEP's efforts through the various workgroups to respond to COVID-19 – developing an online catalog of STEM resources; helping work group get information and otherwise address concerns on water quality and public access; and helping address current and prospective funding needs of smaller community stewardship organizations during this crisis. The Foundation has received an out-of-cycle funding request to investigate the presence of SARS-CoV-2 in the environment through CSO events and aerosols. This is now being considered for funding and staff are discussing with relevant agencies.

Action: Members were asked to consider any additional COVID-related needs the HEP collaborative might help address going forward and communicate these to HEP staff.

3. Hudson Raritan Estuary Ecosystem Restoration Feasibility Study, COL Tom Asbery

COL Asbery announced the good news that the Chief's report will be signed and approved this week. Building on decades of work and the number of organizations, the Feasibility Study documents the need for and outlines conceptual plans for 20 restoration projects on 709 acres throughout the estuary. Charles Warren congratulated the Corps for all of the terrific work completed in the estuary over the years and echoed the important projects outlined in the "Placemat". Pete Lopez reflected on all of the restorative work and rapid response the Corps has provided to make them a change agent in the estuary, having meaningful impact.

Action: Approval by the Chief will allow authorization in the 2020 WRDA, now being considered by Congress.

4. Program Director Report, Rob Pirani, HEP

Rob Pirani presented a report on HEP's progress and proposals for the coming federal fiscal year. The EPA 2019 Program Evaluation letter noted that HEP was making significant progress and identified three key goals moving forward: Better targeting of shared environmental metrics, especially for water quality (a known challenge over the years); better reporting and communication on progress towards those metrics; and increasing financial resources to

support the shared mission. Of the 40 actions outlined in the 2017-2022 Action Agenda, the staff and partners have been able to complete or make significant progress on 29 of them.

Rob presented the proposed FY21 workplan to the committee with a current budget estimate of \$662,500. The workplan will help address key challenges identified in the recent EPA evaluation letter as well as several outstanding Action Agenda priorities. An additional ~\$230,000 of funding has been requested to support the Passaic and Bronx/Harlem River Urban Waters Ambassador positions as well as a variety of specific projects. Chris Daggett noted the immense amount of coordination led by HEP and the engagement of all the partners that make progress possible. Pete Lopez applauded the HEP staff and all the partners for advancing the shared mission.

Action: FY 21 Workplan was approved on a motion made by James Tierney and seconded by Col Thomas Asbery, subject to any adjustments to the budget based on successful grant applications.

5. Water Quality Report, Rosana Da Silva, HEP

Rosana Da Silva shared the progress being made on the Harbor-Wide Water Quality report, based on data and analyses prepared by our consultant, Great Lakes Environmental Center, and discussion with the Water Quality Work Group. The project began in 2018, and its goal is to help the public better understand water quality and the complexities of water management. The report will identify water quality goals both at a regional and waterway level and tie into future efforts of the proposed paddling guide update and LTCP efforts by both states. Building upon the Program Evaluation Letter, this report will be a springboard for the Water Quality Work Group to consider how it will approach the vision of shared metrics on shared water standards. Pete Lopez asked how the Long Island Sound Study (LISS) model will aid in engaging “what if” scenarios for water quality initiatives in the Harbor Estuary. Rosana noted that its use in the Harbor will require additional data and support. Rob Pirani noted and thanked NYC DEP and EPA for helping ensure that the LISS model can be used to help advance knowledge of the estuary.

Action: The final draft will be sent to the Management Committee for approval at their next meeting in June, after a 30-day review process with the work groups and STAC.

6. State of the Hudson Report, Isabelle Stinnette, HEP

Isabelle Stinnette presented on the draft State of the Hudson Report in collaboration with the NYS Hudson River Estuary Program. Building upon the structure and methodology used in the State of the Estuary report, the State of the Hudson report will include additional indicators and areas of interest such as a Climate Change chapter. Trends are assessed for environmental impact and do not necessarily reflect the value of the data. For example, Habitat reflects insufficient data but that means we do not have enough data to see a trend, but there is very good baseline data. Chris Daggett asked whether the implementation of the USACE’s HRE projects will impact results and Isabelle indicated their construction will impact the indicators. The development of the report has benefited from the technical expertise at NYSDEC and the Hudson River Estuary Program staff as well as great photography throughout the chapters. Fran Dunwell thanked Isabelle for her management of the project and for dealing adeptly with the various DEC divisions and approaches to the data. As the May 15th conference has been

cancelled, Fran informed the Policy Committee that the report would be released virtually at the next advisory committee meeting on June 4th, or in September. Rob Pirani echoed the partnership between the estuary programs as a success and a step towards a consolidated report in 2025.

Action: The final draft will be sent to the Management Committee late this month.

7. Other Updates

Chris Daggett touched upon the impacts that COVID-19 has in the NGO community. Their support may be compromised and we should be keeping in mind how best to support them moving forward. Debbie Mans agreed that NGOs are struggling in balancing messages with a public health crisis.

In adjourning the meeting, Chris Daggett thanked COL Asbery again for all his hard work, and the committee wished him luck on his next assignment.