



Management Committee Meeting Minutes

December 17, 2020

Hudson River Foundation – Remote Meeting

Participants

Management Committee: Rick Balla (EPA), Pinar Balci (NYCDEP), Lisa Baron (USACE, RWG), Brett Branco (CUNY, WQWG), Liz Butler (EPA), Lisa Congiu (NJDEP), Fran Dunwell (NYSDEC), Jason Fagel (NYSDEC), Margaret Flanagan (Waterfront Alliance, PAWG), Ann Fraioli (BOP, NY-Educator), Lingard Knutson (EPA), Marit Larson (NYC Parks, RWG), Jim Lodge (HRF, STAC co-chair), Jessie Murray (NOAA), Rob Pirani (HEP), Evelyn Powers (IEC), Patti Rafferty (NPS), Clay Sherman (NJDEP), Shino Tanikawa (NYC SWIM, CAC), Judith Weis (Rutgers, STAC), Peter Wepler (USACE), and Cathy Yuhas (Hudson County Schools of Technology, NJ Educator)

HRF/HEP Office Staff and Guests: Karen Baumert (USACE); Helena Andreyko, Elizabeth Balladares, Rosana Da Silva, and Isabelle Stinnette Mark Lulka (USACE), Sara Powell (UWFP),

Minutes

1. Welcome and agenda review

Rob Pirani reviewed the agenda. Rick Balla welcomed Lingard Knutson as the new HEP coordinator from EPA and she will begin her role in January 2021.

2. “Engaging our Community” Conference Report and Next Steps

Elizabeth Balladares framed the conversation reflecting on prior DEIJ work that the CAC had been working on since 2019. Through a survey and CAC focused discussion, a DEIJ roadmap was developed. The roadmap includes making changes from within HEP/HRF as well as working externally with our partners through trainings/workshops. This year’s annual conference sought to directly address survey results, specifically three sessions: Everyone is Invited, Setting BIPOC Students for Success in Environmental Careers, and Fostering an Inclusive Climate within the Workplace. Isabelle Stinnette followed by summarizing the conference held on Whova. A total of 12 sessions were held in the morning, afternoon and evening, including a movie night and two trainings/workshops. HEP attracted 553 registrants, 88 speakers, and over half of our speakers were BIPOC representatives. There were a total of 1,200 views of the agenda [webpage](#) and HEP received a support video from Senator Cory Booker. Spanish translations were provided for a majority of the sessions and allowed HEP to provide Spanish recordings for the sessions. Only 55 participants responded to HEP’s conference evaluation survey. The responses found the conference a good use of their time and 34% of respondents were new to HEP.

HEP identified four objectives for our work going forward: 1. Advance DEIJ issues within the HEP collaborative; 2. Help partners incorporate and address BIPOC issues by offering trainings or tools; 3. Spotlight our current community partnerships and build bridges to new ones; 4. Attract BIPOC and student participants. These objectives will be the focus of HEP and CAC efforts going forward.

Rick Balla stated the event was great and congratulated the program staff. EPA was happy to participate and contribute to the conference. Fran Dunwell echoed that the sessions she attended were very informative and if there is an opportunity to collaborate with HEP on DEIJ efforts. Elizabeth Balladares concluded with several next steps including the development of a subcommittee between the CAC and the Harbor Educators to help HEP frame DEIJ discussions in larger meetings, development of a needs assessment, and allocating HEP/HRF resources to address gaps. Marit Larson shared the NYC Urban Field Station held a Brown Bag of interest yesterday with [Jordana Vasquez of the Women of Color Collective in Sustainability](#), addressing the problem, solutions and the long-term vision for women of color in sustainability.

Action: The DEIJ subcommittee will meet on January 27th, please email rosana@hudsonriver.org if you would like to participate. HEP staff is reviewing priorities identified in the Action Agenda to assess potential connections with the agendas of community based and EJ groups. HEP will also engage the states and EPA EJ offices to schedule a meeting to touch base on these issues.

3. Review and approval of minutes of September 2020 Meeting

Rob Pirani reviewed the September minutes.

Action: September 2020 minutes were approved, motioned by Rick Balla and seconded by Jason Fagel.

4. Updates: Water Quality Report, State of the Hudson, and Economic Analysis

Isabelle Stinnette noted that the State of the Hudson Report is completed and we are waiting for NYSDEC's release date. Fran Dunwell informed that the report text has been approved and is hopeful for an early 2021 release. Both noted that working together was great and that we have a good foundation to move forward with a joint State of the Hudson and Estuary Report in 2025. Isabelle identified initial data gaps which include nearshore pathogen monitoring, RIBS nutrient data, eel surveys along more tributaries, SETs in tidal marshes along the Hudson, stream biomonitoring unit data, regular broad sampling for contaminants in the main stem Hudson, sediment monitoring like REMAP, resampling cadmium in blue crabs in Foundry Cove, refining publicly owned waterfront dataset. Jason Fagel indicated he would aid with tributary and stream biomonitoring data and shared that USGS is interested in pathogen monitoring, but DEC needs to identify funding. Fran indicated that the Hudson River Estuary Program could find a way to budget and will further discuss with Jason in how to support it. Judy Weis raised that SETs would be important to do in many of the marshes if funds are available. Fran indicated that NERRs and Isabelle noted NYC Parks have SETs, but that it is sporadic throughout the Hudson. Peter Wepler indicated USACE have SETs for a couple of the marsh islands, though they are a few years old.

Rob Pirani updated the group on progress on the current economic analysis study. With EPA funding, NEIWPCC has released an [RfP](#) which will close on January 6th. We anticipate selecting a contract in mid-February and start mid-March. At the next management committee meeting will go into this more in depth, but the survey completed identified enterococcus and dissolved oxygen as key indicators. The contractor will look at these indicators on how it relates to public access and habitat, but also leaving the door open for economist to also explore. Rick Balla thanked Rob for working with NEIWPCC on this important initiative.

Rosana Da Silva is reviewing final comments on the Harbor-wide Water Quality Report and we are anticipating a January 2021 digital release. A poll was completed during the meeting to inform HEP on a printing, with 56% of attendees suggest printing just the waterbody summaries, 28% the full report, and 17% for both the full report and individual summaries. This is consistent with the results received from the CAC poll.

5. Harbor Deepening Channel Improvements Navigation Study

The USACE and PANYNJ have released the [New York & New Jersey Harbor Deepening and Channel Improvements Draft Feasibility Study](#). The public review is period is open until January 19th, a 75-comment day period. HEP has been working with USACE and other partners to facilitate community engagement, discuss environmental impacts, and identify opportunities for beneficial use of any dredged material and other related restoration opportunities. Karen Baumert from USACE presented the current study. Initial report found that Port is being called upon by larger vessels much sooner than originally planned for. There are a number of internal and external reviews to bring together all the comments to determine the best plan forward. The goal is to have a Chief's Report by May 2022 in preparation for Congressional approval, then followed by a pre-construction engineering and design effort. The effort is to improve existing configuration of the channel to reduce the inefficiencies (i.e., need of more tugs and pilots, slow moving) due to the depth and width of the channels. End result is looking at deepening by up to 5 feet at the Port Authority Marine Terminal and Port Jersey to create a 55 foot channel.

Peter Wepler detailed the tentatively selected plan's potential impact to shallow water and other habitat. USACE takes a value to value, not acre to acre approach. The habitat assessment model is being reviewed by USACE National Ecosystem Planning Center of Expertise. USACE will create/enhance/restore an equal or greater quantity and quality of habitat to the region. The CRP will be the strategy used as a talking point for potential sites. Potential for blasting is a point of concern, particularly in Staten Island and Bayonne. USACE is looking to improve blasting to reduce impacts based on more modern methods. Construction tentatively to begin October 2024-2038.

Rob Pirani asked if the USACE would need to access EJ cumulative impacts, a law passed by NJ and how this effort relates to Port Authority's master plan? Karen clarified that master plan is a parallel effort and does not impact USACE's deepening. The Port Authority's master plan is looking at

warehouses, trains, spaces, etc. Peter also indicated that the USACE follows executive order or federal law and can consider what the state's regulations are but do not necessarily have to follow it. Lisa Congiu indicated her understanding regarding the new NJ EJ regulation, although it is not her area of expertise, covers certain [permitting activities](#). Lingard Knutson noted that according to the Port Authority representative, Beth Rooney, this port would have to raise the Bayonne Bridge again, and even the Verrazano might be too low, though this has not been written.

Judith Weis noted that the last deepening project, the USACE had to get into the bedrock and will likely mean that this project will need to do more blasting. She asked that, in addition to the human impacts, what are the effects to marine life and is the USACE considering this? Will the widening be at the expense of salt marshes? Peter noted that the last study did look at impacts of blasting and provided guidance to help minimize the impacts to marine life, though of course there will be impacts. As for the widening, the impacts are largely to the shallow habitats. He noted that shoreline erosion has also been raised as an issue; it is not a concern because larger ships move more slowly, and will be less frequent than smaller ships. Another question that was raised by the public is about the impact of larger channels on storm surge. According to past reports (e.g. Jamaica Bay) the modeling does not indicate any increase in flooding. Lingard Knutson asked whether the Final EA include a section with the public comments and responses to those comments? USACE said that they would. Shino Tanikawa asked whether we have a sense of how large the ships will be in 2038 when this project is expected to be completed? Do we anticipate starting the whole process again the minute we finish this one because the ships get bigger in the next 15+ years?

Action: The CAC will be submitting questions and possibly comments via a letter to the USACE. The RWG will be discussing potential opportunities for beneficial use of dredged material and other related restoration opportunities.

6. Progress Report on 2017-2022 Action Agenda

Rob Pirani provided an overview on HEP's budget initiatives and remaining actions of the Action Agenda.

Sara Powell, the Bronx & Harlem River Ambassador, will be bought on as an HRF employee. HRE CRP was included in WRDA 2020 to be reported out by the Senate hopefully this week. ANEP reports that the NEP reauthorization was included in the Senate bill, while reauthorization was taken out through reconciliation with the House Bill, there is still a possibility of a standalone bill passing in this Congress. Lisa Baron also noted that there were 21 restoration projects that have been authorized for construction from the CRP and that, separately; Hudson River restoration projects were authorized in WRDA.

Rob shared the rough timing of next iteration of the Action Agenda, which has us begin compiling data by 2022 and begin drafting the State of the Estuary in 2024-2025 with a final report and Action Agenda in 2025. This would also align the Action Agenda at the scheduled five-year program

evaluation with EPA. Rob shared several actions that HEP staff have identified will need to start addressing and thinking about in the next few years to be able to report on progress. These include: WQ-B-4: CSO EVENT NOTIFICATION; H-B-3: RECONTAMINATION; H-D-2 BUYOUT RESTORATION; PA-C-1: SAFETY OF DIRECT CONTACT; and MA-B-1: DREDGING WINDOWS.

Peter Wepler indicated that Sea Grant hosted a webinar regarding dredging windows that may have good results to review and Rob noted that HRF seminars will also be focusing on fisheries issues next year, which could help.

Rob noted that the Policy Committee meeting will be scheduled for April. The main agenda item will be review of the FY21-22 budget.

Action: Please review the Tracking Table at <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1a04ZdiuSxuuwGFyFV1sAcVZaatE7DfNUmEApZwQs61l/edit?usp=sharing> and let us know of any edits/missing activities that you are conducting. Staff will be assessing outstanding Action Agenda priorities and opportunities for addressing them with partners. Also please let Rob know about any potential agenda items for the Policy Committee meeting.

7. Updates from Work Groups and Committee Chairs

- Restoration Work Group: Marit Larson noted that the next meeting is later this month and will be focusing on questions regarding the deepening study, restoration efforts and CRP updates, and the outcomes from the blue carbon workshop.
- Water Quality Work Group: Rosana Da Silva shared accomplishments for this year including approval of bylaws with two co-chairs, establishment of a continuous monitoring subcommittee with IEC, resource sharing regarding COVID-19, and the publication of the WQ Report. Next year, the group looks to build on the report to address the next action on water stories.
- Public Access Work Group: Maggie Flanagan informed us that the group will be updating the paddling guide, last updated in 2011, and participating in a feasibility study on the northeast shore of Staten Island to inform public access and activities led by the Waterfront Alliance.
- Citizen Advisory Committee: Shino Tanikawa shared that the CAC meeting held much of the same conversations as today and will plan to continue DEI efforts.
- Urban Waters Federal Partnerships: Sara Powell shared the partnership held a meeting on Dec. 1st. The [Harlem River Watershed Plan](#) has been completed and finalizing the workplan. Elizabeth Balladares shared the Partnership will be putting together first info session regarding lower Passaic River cleanup and the efforts to connect with landowners to advance shoreline planning.
- Harbor Educators Work Group: Rosana Da Silva shared the group has been meeting monthly to provide support and sharing best practices though COVID-19. The next meeting will be held in January.