



## Management Committee Meeting Minutes

March 11, 2021 (DRAFT)

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), Meredith Comi (NY/NJ Baykeeper, CAC), Lisa Congiu (NJDEP, WQWG), Chirs Daggett (HRF), Fran Dunwell (NYSDEC), Jason Fagel (NYSDEC), Allison Fitzgerald (NJCU, CAC), Margaret Flanagan (Waterfront Alliance, PAWG), Lingard Knutson (EPA), Marit Larson (NYC Parks, RWG), Tom Laustsen (PVSC/NJHDG), Jim Lodge (HRF, STAC co-chair), Patricia Lopes (PVSC/NJHDG), Jessie Murray (NOAA), Rob Pirani (HEP), Evelyn Powers (IEC), Patti Rafferty (NPS), Carrie Roble (HRPT, CAC), Clay Sherman (NJDEP), Melissa Sinisgalli (PVSC/NJHDG), Shino Tanikawa (NYC SWCD, CAC), Judith Weis (Rutgers, STAC), Peter Wepler (USACE), and Cathy Yuhas (Hudson County Schools of Technology, NJ Educator)

**HRF/HEP Office Staff and Guests:** Helena Andreyko, Elizabeth Balladares, Rosana Da Silva, Clay Hiles, Jonathan Kramer, Sara Powell, and Isabelle Stinnette

### Minutes

#### 1. Welcome and agenda review

Rob Pirani welcomed the committee and reviewed the agenda.

#### 2. Climate-Ready Culverts

Isabelle Stinnette shared an update on the Aquatic Connectivity Through Climate-Ready Infrastructure project which seeks to improve road-stream crossings at bridges and culverts for habitat and stormwater management. Project locations included the Lower Passaic and Lower Raritan (2019), a limited effort in the Upper Passaic (2020), and the next two years, HEP will expand further into the Lower Raritan and South Rivers with the recent award of the National Estuary Program Coastal Watershed Grant to HEP and Rutgers University (\$112,000). Results of the Great Swamp (Upper Passaic) showed great passability, but issues with hydrology. Although culverts were sized correctly, the small dams and the assessment of the NAACC recommend other management strategies to address hydrology. Several members congratulated Isabelle on the award. Fran Dunwell shared that NYSDEC is doing similar work and have begun working directly with municipalities to access additional funds/planning efforts to incorporate NAACC recommendations. Lingard Knutson commended the effort with NYS DOT that have taken/used the NAACC recommendations. Lingard and Isabelle are working to engage NJ DOT to do the same. Fran shared the Nature Conservancy helpful in engaging NYS DOT.

### 3. Review and approval of minutes of December 2020 Meeting

Rob Pirani reviewed the December minutes.

**Action:** December 2020 minutes were approved, motioned by Rick Balla and seconded by Judy Weis.

### 4. Management Committee Membership

Rob Pirani and Elizabeth Balladares announced the newly elected NJ co-chair of the CAC, Dr. Alison Fitzgerald. Alison, an assistant professor at the New Jersey City University and the NY oyster program coordinator at NY/NJ Baykeeper, has been long involved with the CAC and is looking forward to take on this leadership role. In regards to other open seats, HEP staff have continued to approach candidates for the open EJ seats and engaging a new NJ Local Government. Rob also introduced Jon Kramer, who will be the new Executive Director of HRF starting April 1<sup>st</sup>. Clay Hiles will continue to serve as an advisor to HRF and will likely continue to participate in HEP meetings. Clay thanked Rob and the rest of the HEP staff for the program's success at the Foundation. Rick Balla extended his thanks to Clay for all his efforts in taking HEP and the transition of the program to the Foundation.

### 5. Project Updates: State of the Hudson/Water Quality/Eco Value

- Isabelle Stinnette shared that the [State of the Hudson](#) has been released. The report documents data and stories on water quality, habitat, community engagement, public access, contamination, and a new chapter on climate change. The report was developed in partnership with NYSDEC Hudson River Estuary Program. Fran Dunwell shared that the report would not have been possible without HEP, utilizing the framework that was developed for the State of the Estuary, as well as the 40 individuals through DEC, Cary Institute, and others who contributed to the report.
- Rob Pirani announced that EPA, NEIWPC and an advisory committee has selected a contractor for the Economic Value study on the benefits of cleaner water in the estuary. ICF and Dr. Rob Johnson from Clark University have been awarded the project and we anticipate a focus on targeted watersheds and next steps at the upcoming WQWG, CAC, and MC meetings.
- Rosana Da Silva announced the Harbor-wide Water Quality Report will be released this spring and is currently going through its' [draft review](#). Rosana shared largely comments addressed grammatical or clarity requests, with one change to the waterbody summaries to display discreet samples that exceed standards. Pinar Balci raised whether the [NYSDEC proposed amendments](#) to the criteria would be included or at a minimum, a comment included as the release of the report follows the public hearings taking place. Jason Fagel noted that as the rulemaking is proposed, it should not impact the report. Rosana will work with Jason and Pinar to come up with an agreeable sentence that can be introduced before the waterbody summaries to clarify proposed amendments. Rob announced that we will be discussing next steps as part of the April Policy Committee.

**Action:** Anticipate a March 19<sup>th</sup> email with the final Harbor-Wide Water Quality Report and email approvals requested by March 26<sup>th</sup>.

## 6. Draft FY 2021-2022 HEP Workplan

Rob Pirani shared efforts that HEP will be looking at between addressing current action agenda priorities, including monitoring and EJ needs. Rob indicated that in 2022 HEP will begin to work on efforts to collect monitoring data and challenges in preparation for a 2025 State of the Estuary and Action Agenda, and HEP's Five Year EPA Evaluation. Based on Congressional appropriations, FY starting October 1, 2021 base funding totals \$700,000. This does not include possible funding for the two UWFP Ambassadors that has been requested by EPA R2. Rob thanked EPA for their assistance in helping secure funds for these efforts.

Rob provided an overview of the focuses of the proposed FY 2022 Work Plan.

- **Water Quality:** working with the states and municipalities on thinking about consistent standards or designated uses and what are the appropriate goal posts for the region, recognizing the accomplishments of the submitted LTCPs; continue to support green infrastructure and prioritize efforts in EJ communities; and pending on proposals in the Lower Passaic and Weehawken Cove, trash free water efforts may be significant time that Rosana dedicates next year. Pinar Balci announced NYCDEP has expanded their GI program with an award to a public-private incentive contract to retrofit GI in private property. NYCDEP is seeking support and welcome opportunities to collaborate to advance this effort. Clay Sherman announced NJDEP's updated stormwater rules encourage the use of GI for new and redevelopment projects.
- **Habitat and Ecological Health:** continuing the climate ready culverts project and look at prioritizing restoration projects in EJ communities. The RWG is beginning to question the recontamination of restored sites where new data would advance these discussions and risks; will look at buy-out programs and where we can begin to advance restoration efforts. Peter Wepler cautioned that as the MC, we should frame this in a way that can help us advance the efforts we want to accomplish and not halt efforts. Defining what is urban clean and not could get us into Superfund that would impact a number of waterfront sites in NYC and NJ. Judy Weis suggested integrating the floodplain buyout programs with marsh migration pathways to remove structures and give room for marshes to go. Isabelle Stinnette commented the RWG is working on a survey to formulate how to tackle this action agenda regarding concerns about recontamination and are in line with Peter's concerns. Isabelle also noted that marsh migration is a consideration for NJ's Blue Acres program.
- **Public Access and Stewardship:** building on the success of the Passaic and Forest Service partnership to increase public stewardship in higher need areas by supporting local efforts. HEP will continue to provide small grant funding to In-Your-Neighborhood events for City of Water Day.
- **Port and Maritime:** continuing efforts through CARP modeling of the sources and sinks of contaminated sediments. To help address dredging windows, we will build on the work of the HRF/HRES workshops and further assess climate change impacts to fisheries.
- **Community Engagement:** continuing the work that we are doing to advance consideration of DEIJ and through the UWFP.

Rob shared that by April 2<sup>nd</sup>, a full Work Plan will be shared with the committee to provide time to work with Policy Committee reps to approve the Workplan during the PC meeting on April 21<sup>st</sup>.

Also on the agenda for the Policy Committee: HEP will be sharing the Harbor-Wide Water Quality Report, and begin high level discussions on where we go from here regarding a shared understanding of where we are in terms of meeting fishable/swimmable goals. HEP will be following up with agency leadership for one-on-one conversations in how best to do this.

#### **7. Existing/Potential New Resources for Action Agenda Implementation**

Rob Pirani provided an overview of new resources for advancing our priorities, including the Hudson Raritan Estuary Feasibility Study and pending grant proposals, and discussed prospects for advancing these. The shared PDF details the different sources and opportunities that could help us implement several actions. Peter Wepler suggested coordinating [Debris Removal](#) efforts with the Corps who could use funding recharge and in the [NY Harbor](#). We are looking to advance appropriations for the recent WRDA authorizations of the Hudson Raritan Estuary Ecosystem Restoration Feasibility Study and Spring Creek South. Authorization of the Hudson-Mohawk-Raritan Watershed Protection Act may be reintroduced later this year and working through ANEP, we are identifying shovel ready projects for support of the infrastructure bill. EPA Coastal Watersheds Grant will have a second round with potentially additional funds, and HEP encourages partners to apply.

#### **8. NYC Wetlands Management Plan**

Marit Larson provided an overview of NYC's Wetlands Management Framework with Natural Areas Conservancy. NYC Parks has been assessing Parks' wetland conditions and wanted to emphasize the interconnections of aquatic resources and watershed connection in the context of climate change. Goals outlined in the report include strengths and weaknesses of policy and regulations. The framework utilizes the last 10-years of data to summarize high/low health and relative conditions in the city. Recommendations include engaging communities, monitor habitat, manage stormwater, remove trash and debris, manage invasive species and buffers, remove historical fill and increase connectivity. In salt marshes and tidal wetlands, transferring lands to parks (buyouts), place sediments to elevate drowning marshes, modify flooded hard surfaces, and reconstruct eroded marsh. Next steps include outreach between agency and NGO stakeholders to improve stewardship. Marit anticipates working with the RWG and the CAC to implement next steps. Peter Wepler suggested connecting Marit to a representative in LBI that has done similar work.

#### **9. USACE Harbor Deepening and HATS**

Pete Wepler noted that there has been no further work on HATS since the project was suspended, though it had a significant interest regarding the information that had been collected. [WRDA listening sessions](#) have been scheduled to receive input before the Corps develops the Implementation Guidance. Listening sessions start March 16<sup>th</sup> through April 13<sup>th</sup> on every Tuesday from 1-3pm and are broken do into missions: navigation (inland and coastal), flood risk, coastal risk storm damage, ecosystem restoration and nuisance species, water supply, and hydropower.

Regarding the Harbor Deepening Channel Improvements study, the Corps are still working through comments, identifying priority and significance, and plan is to respond to each. Higher authorities

have been reaching out to EJ communities and they will be posting FAQs. April 14 is the agency decision milestone.

Peter briefly spoke about the two drift removal programs (floatable drift pick up within the Harbor and one in the mudflats) that if looking for funding, the Corps could participate.

## 10. Updates from Work Groups and Committee Chairs

- Public Access Work Group: Maggie Flanagan share the group is making progress on updating the paddling guide. Thanks to everyone, the work group has been able to create a database of paddling sites. A draft will be reviewed on March 31<sup>st</sup> and anticipate a final product by Memorial Day for boathouses that are looking to be open this summer
- Water Quality Work Group: Lisa Congiu shared the work group's new monitoring efforts with IEC looking at DO in the Kills, NJDEP coastal monitoring in the Bayshore area, HREP seeking to identify opportunities in the mid-Hudson, and the work group is looking forward to hearing about REMAP. The work group kicked off a Frontiers for Monitoring, Modeling, and Management series to bring in experts to learn about new technologies and the group is starting to work on Waterbody stories.
- Restoration Work Group: Lisa Baron share that the group has been updating the CRP, looking at beneficial use of dredged materials and began creating a database. WRDA 2020 authorized 20 restoration projects. The group has concerns on Graniteville Swamp, a CRP site, and will likely write a letter outlining concerns. In October, HEP co-hosted a Blue Carbon workshop where tools/models were shared. The group welcomed a new member, the NJ Nature Conservancy.
- Harbor Educators Work Group: Rosana Da Silva shared the group has moved from monthly to bimonthly meetings with the last meeting in January. The group discussed the pros/cons of turning A Day in the Life of the Hudson into a virtual setting, sharing new resources, and adjusting resources to fit the needs of hybrid settings.
- Citizen Advisory Committee: Liz Balladares shared that the latest CAC meeting was dedicated to comments on the USACE Deepening Project, electing a new co-chair, and working towards identifying priorities for this year.
- Urban Waters Federal Partnerships: Liz Balladares had reached out to land owners to attend an information session regarding their poor conditioned shoreline. Liz plans to follow up with land owners based on their questions and connect them to resources for shoreline improvements prior to the Passaic River remediation. Sara Powell announced NYC Parks' [Harlem River Watershed and Natural Resources Management Plan for the Bronx](#) and will be assisting in outreach for the plan. Sara is also working on launching the nature based resiliency features monitoring project this year and will be working with CUNY student interns to implement the framework.

## 11. Partner Updates

- Rick Balla shared that [Michael Regan](#) was confirmed by the Senate yesterday and will be the new administrator for US EPA. Walter Mugdan continues to be the acting administrator until an appointment is made, likely the fall. Climate, Environmental Justice, and inclusion issues will be a focus for EPA and will look to continue to work with HEP. EPA R2 was pleased about the

increase of base funding for HEP's FY 2022 and are hopeful that funding will be made available to support UWFP.

- Lisa Baron announced for the committee to save the date - April 27<sup>th</sup> USACE will be able to host a virtual Harbor Inspection (1:00-4:30 pm) where updates and core projects will be provided. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oH6IH01K9qo>