

NY-NJ HEP Water Quality Workgroup Meeting Notes

Date: 8/23/2016

Time: 10:30 am –2:30 pm

Attendees: Lisa Oberreiter (PVSC/NJHDG), Greg Alber (PVSC/NJHDG), Rick Winfield (EPA), Wayne Jackson (EPA), Jeff Myers (NYSDEC), Mick DeGraeve (GLEC/NJHDG), Dennis Suszkowski (HRF), Evelyn Powers (IEC), Rob Pirani (HEP), Andrea Leshak (NY/NJ Baykeeper), Dan Van Abs (Rutgers), Judith Weis (Rutgers), Sean Dixon (Riverkeeper), Marco Al-Ebus (NJDEP), Pilar Patterson (NJDEP), Roop Guha (NJDEP), Francisco Artigas (NJ Meadowlands Commission).

1. Welcome, Introductions and Overview of Agenda

- Dennis Suszkowski is continuing to act as chair of the group
- This group will be focusing on narrowing down our draft list of priorities during this meeting and discussing HEP's role in advancing these priority actions

2. Overview of the Action Agenda process was presented along with the water quality priorities matrix

- HEP is aiming for a final Action Agenda in spring 2017 – ideally we will have a final draft list of actions in December/January.
- The matrix is organized by sub-goal, overarching strategy and action. The overarching strategies are broad themes/categories to help organize our thoughts and actions and help communicate these to the public.
- Right now there are 21 actions and HEP is aiming for approximately 10 total. For each action item there are one or more examples that could help move the action forward as well as key partners.

3. Workgroup reviewed possible actions by sub-goal

- General feedback that HEP would like from the workgroup includes:
 - i. Are there any questions or clarifications on what we've included in this draft list?
 - ii. Is there anything missing from this list?
 - iii. Are there any actions that are already being addressed by others where HEP could collaborate or where our work will not add any value?
- Questions and thoughts related to **Messaging & Communication** raised by the Workgroup:

- i. This group should highlight problem areas to the public. HEP should communicate stories to the regional public (for example on the Bronx & Raritan). HEP and this group can discuss how incorporating green infrastructure will help improve water quality, but that reaching 100% compliance all of the time may not be possible. To get to 100% it would take a certain amount of money, which may not be feasible. This is a conversation we need to have amongst the agencies as well as with the public.
- ii. What should our communication tools be for communicating to the public? How can HEP use its new website? Can HEP have pages that change monthly depending on the most recent news? What about having tabs on the website for each waterbody?
- iii. HEP can communicate safe uses to people without being constrained by standards. People swim in certain places. HEP should therefore focus on communication for those areas i.e. Coney Island. NYCDEP currently has the “don’t use water” texting program in that area.
- iv. How HEP and this group should communicate this however isn’t clear cut. There’s temporal variation in the system – it is a wet-weather driven system and primary contact is wet-weather limited. Is our end goal just education? Or is this group looking to advance the conversation on this? The workgroup needs to decide how much of the story we want to tell.
- v. There is also the issue that there are standard differences (for pathogens) between NJ & NY in our shared waters and there are different goals & laws in NY & NJ. How can HEP communicate the standard differences when they’re not really explicable? This is a moving target.
- vi. The group and HEP need to be mindful of the fact that there is no one “public”. Most people focus on application (uses) & not the details of standards. People need something like a mobile phone app to show current monitoring & results. HEP could have a visual display to show if a particular area is safe to swim in for example.
- vii. HEP can get ideas for display/communication methods from NJDEP’s interactive websites for beaches and fish consumption advisories.

- The Workgroup made comments about how HEP can help advance priorities related to **Messaging & Communication:**

- i. Focus on general communication to the public on Uses & LTCPs and what the benefits of these will be. Let the public know what the agencies in the region are doing to get there, how much money is being spent and what the timeframe is.
- ii. Communicate the current status of toxics in the Estuary through fish advisories that are gradually improving.
- iii. Develop a formulation for public communication.
- iv. Specific focus on communication to private property owners is very much needed.

- Questions and thoughts related to **Collaboration with States & Utilities** raised by the Workgroup:
 - i. Perth Amboy has a beautiful beach but the numerous CSOs are a major issue. It should be a priority to get the beach recognized as officially swimmable as people are already in the water in this area. In order for it to be officially swimmable, it would have to meet the Beach Act requirements. Can Perth Amboy eliminate all of their CSOs? Can outfalls be consolidated in this area?
 - ii. In NJ, 202 out of 210 CSO outfalls have netting. The nets are ½ inch mesh size, so smaller debris can pass through.

- Comments from Workgroup about how HEP can help advance priorities related to **Collaboration with States & Utilities**:
 - i. Involvement with the NJ LTCP supplemental CSO teams/steering committees (the teams haven't been formed yet).
 - ii. Focus on the implementation of specific projects to help alleviate CSOs in target communities.
 - iii. Coordinate between NYC, NJ & NY on the design conditions for the LTCPs.
 - iv. Catalogue efforts related to debris removal/prevention and focus on debris hotspots.

- Questions and thoughts related to **Research and Monitoring** raised by the Workgroup:
 - i. The Science Advisory Board at NJDEP is working on DO issues & a report will be released shortly. DEP is looking into whether the marine DO criteria are suitable in the Harbor or if it needs to be site-specific. NJ's criteria are more stringent.
 - ii. Chesapeake Bay has a deep channel standard for aquatic life.
 - iii. The EPA REMAP data needs to be made available.
 - iv. How will ocean acidification play out in the Harbor? How will it affect the mobilization of sediments?
 - v. The NJDEP released a report from from the Science Advisory Board discussing the interaction of acidification & eutrophication. Locally generated CO2 is present in bottom areas so additional acidification intensifies the problem.
 - vi. There was recently a harmful algal bloom in the Passaic. Should HEP be tracking these or encouraging local groups to track them? The EPA uses an App called BloomWatch for citizens to enter info & photos on HAB events.
 - vii. In the Hackensack, there are high DIN loads because of STPs. Our manipulation of the systems to increase resiliency will result in changes in salinity & other variables, which may result in higher nitrous oxides & changed pathways. There is currently ongoing research on these topics.

- viii. Chemo-sensitive behavior is affected by ocean acidification and this has not gotten sufficient attention as this could be a major issue.
- Comments from workgroup about how HEP can help advance priorities related to **Research and Monitoring**:
 - i. Focus on microplastic contamination in shellfish related to effects on humans.
 - ii. Support the Billion Oyster Project.
 - iii. Prioritize science monitoring and tracking ongoing work.
 - iv. Involve citizen scientists in debris monitoring to target hotspots.

4. CARP II Update

- CARP II has been funded by NJ Dept. of Transportation to examine more specifically contamination in frequently dredged channels and berthing areas such that dredged material managers will have a scientifically sound tool to forecast the future quality of sediments and plan appropriate budgets for dredging them.
- The cost of the project is approximately \$4 million and is a collaborative effort with the Hudson River Foundation, Monmouth University, Manhattan College, University of Rhode Island, and HDR.
- The project is anticipated to start early in 2017.

5. Follow-up, next steps, and items for the group to think about: *Please forward any thoughts or ideas on these topics to Ariane*

- Invite Brett Branco to present on the Jamaica Bay database at the next workgroup meeting.
- Our next meeting will be held in October where we will continue to discuss and narrow down the draft list of priorities, following review of the rankings by the workgroup members and comments from the Management Committee. We will also meet in December to finalize the draft list.
- Please share any thoughts on topics/presentations that you would like to discuss and/or learn more about at the October and December meetings.