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RESTORATION WORK GROUP

Co-Chairs: Lisa Baron (Army Corps of Engineers),

Marit Larson (NYC Parks)

*www.hudsonriver.org/estuary-program*

**Meeting, August 19, 2020**

**9:30 – 12:00**

1. **Welcome/Attendance**

Attendance is at the end of this document.

1. **Minutes**

Approved minutes from the last meeting in May 2020.

1. **Habitat and Ecological Health Action Item Review**

Isabelle Stinnette reminded the group about the action agenda items that we are collectively working towards as well as the particular focus for staff time in HEP’s 2020 work plan. Please reach out to Isabelle or the group chairs with any new ideas on how to accomplish action agenda goals or relevant work that your organization is conducting.

1. **NJDEP Science Advisory Board Regarding Marshes and Sea-Level** **Rise**

Judith Weis presented to the group on the findings from this advisory board for that status of NJ marshes with respect to sea-level rise projection. They evaluated both the areal extent and accretion with the data that is currently available. It is difficult to determine how much from the marsh loss comes from development vs. sea level rise. There is not much change in Raritan Bay but we don’t know why. Two of the seven marshes in the meadowlands are keeping up with sea level rise (they’re both *phragmites* marshes). In other parts of the state the results are similar with some of the marshes keeping up but the majority are not. The committee also provided actions on what do about it including: protecting places for marshes to move inland (migration pathways), changing restoration practicing to not remove *phragmites,* sediment manipulation including thin-layer deposition and piling in creeks for natural dispersal and creating living shorelines.

1. **Diversity and Inclusion among restoration partners**

Liz Balladares, HEP Communication Associate and Passaic Urban Waters Ambassador, presented to the group about HEPs initiative towards better diversity, inclusion and equity. A survey went out to all the members of HEP’s work group prioritizing what issues in this realm they find the most challenging and could use help with. The survey results revealed that Incorporating and addressing BIPOC (black, indigenous, and people of color) goals, concerns and priorities into long term organizational goals and missions was the most needed challenge.

Billion Oyster Project is working on making waterfront spaces safe and equitable. HEP’s Public Access work group is also exploring related ideas. NYC parks is using some metrics of community composition in their project prioritization but say they plan to do more work in this realm and are engaging in listening sessions. Diversity, inclusion and environmental justice will be a key focus of HEP’s annual conference this November. Please contact HEP if you think the conference could line up with any of our agencies ongoing diversity, inclusion or equity initiatives.

1. **Results from the Restoration Activity Map Survey and Next Steps Discussion**

Isabelle presented six key findings from the survey that went out to the group regarding the Restoration Activity Map:

1. Most people surveyed have never used the map because they never knew about it or forgot about it.
2. The group thinks it is very valuable for the list to be comprehensive but is divided on whether the new sites should be vetted by the group or kept somehow distinct.
3. Only half of those surveyed were willing to spend any time updating the opportunities information.
4. The group finds the restoration progress information to be just as important as the restoration opportunities.
5. The group values details and ways to access more detailed information for both restoration opportunities and progress.
6. The results are somewhat mixed on who would value a prioritization effort. But the CAC is in favor.

The group decided that we do not want to invest more time and money into the current map because we cannot update it ourselves. The group agreed that it is more important to have the opportunity to keep the data up to date, and make corrections, with a map in an easier format, that may not have all the same functionality. We may also want to save large batch updates for once every 5 years of upon other updates to the CRP.

**VII.** **Best Practices in shoreline restoration that protects for horseshoe crabs (All, 10 minutes)**

The group discussed some recent cases of horseshoe crabs being stuck in restoration materials or new shoreline features in our region. John McLaughlin and Carl Alderson described known instances in Flushing Bay, Lemon Creek and Brooklyn Bridge Park. Isabelle Stinnette reported that the partnership for the Delaware bays national estuary program has also seen instances of horseshoe crabs getting stuck on the inland side of sills created to aid in wetland protection or other living shoreline features. In recent restorations they have created a break in the sill with a ramp that allows for the crabs to get back out. However they were unable to provide designs or photos of the structure at this time.

1. **Update on Restoration of Buyout Properties on Staten Island (Isabelle Stinnette, 5 minutes)**

Isabelle Stinnette updated the group on a call she had with the Governor’s Office of Storm Recovery. They have many properties on Staten Island as part of the Oakwood Beach buyout for which they are looking for organizations to take on the management. NYC Parks had worked previously with the Nature Conservancy to look at the restoration potential of this area. They plan to take on ownership of many of the properties but the process has not gone as smoothly as hoped with GOSR, possibly due to Parks need for certain site assessments and restrictive development covenants existing prior to taking on ownership.

1. **Coney Island Ferry Landing CRP Letter**

In previous RWG meetings HEP discussed with the group the idea of providing letters to regulatory or decision-making agencies with regards development or land-use issues in CRP site locations. While HEP’s management committee did not feel like it is a good idea to present direct objection letters, they are ok with letters that state that a certain project is happening in an area that has ecological value (or potential value upon restoration). Rob Pirani suggested that the group send out a letter on the new proposed ferry site in Coney Island Creek. The group agreed that a letter was appropriate here and suggested stronger language about considering the ecological value of the area.

1. **RWG Member Updates**

HEP

* Bart Chezar’s eelgrass projected is going well using the new seeding method and he is seeing flowering on his eelgrass plants. He is starting a new installation on Staten Island with Interstate Environmental Commission.
* We heard from someone who runs an organization that creates oyster restoration structures out of recycled hockey sticks. Contact Isabelle if you know anyone who is looking for free oyster restoration materials.

NOAA

Carl reports: my team finished the Cornell Dubilier Superfund Restoration Plan EA and it's now in management's hands. It may go out to a 30 day public review as early as October 1. That's $28 million plugged directly into the full Raritan watershed. That's more money than the Restoration Center gave out nationally this year in habitat grants. That's $13M if you were wondering. (None of it to NY, NJ, PA or DE by the way).  This is our 2020 windfall - we plan to spend wisely.

NYC Parks

Have had some capital projects that were supposed to be implemented this summer but they are on hold due to budget constraints. Two salt marsh mitigation projects in construction were substantially completed and planted: PA NY/NJ mitigation for LGA runway at Pugsley Creek Park (~5 ac salt marsh and upland) and NYC Parks at Ferry Point Park (~ 2 ac), both in the Bronx. Fish and terrapin monitoring is underway in salt marsh creeks at W.T. Davis and Idlewild Preserves for a connectivity research project funded by HRF. Rapid field verification to update NYC’s freshwater wetland maps is continuing.

USACE

* Submitted the Hudson River Habitat Restoration Final Integrated Feasibility Report and Environmental Assessment (FR/EA) on August 7, 2020. The report recommends three projects including restoration of wetlands, side channel, living shorelines along with dam/barrier removals for total cost of ~$42 million. A Chief’s Report is scheduled in December.
* The HRE Final FR/EA was reviewed by the Office of Assistant Secretary of the Army of Civil Works (OASA(CW)) and the District addressed comments in August.
* Liberty State Park Restoration Project—Team is advancing the 60% designs and NJDEP plans to hold public outreach in September/October. See NJDEP updates for more information.
* District Public Affairs office may be reaching out to some of the partners to obtain remarks associated with successful restoration projects and critical partnerships.

NYC DEP

* With the pandemic, the focus for DEP is on maintaining wastewater and drinking water so funding implementing other projects not related to those critical functions has been challenging.

USEPA

The new 401 Water Quality Certification Rule that goes into effect this Friday September 11. Today is the 2nd of three state and tribal webinars hosted by EPA HQ regarding the rule. We had our federal webinar on August 26. If anyone has any questions about it please feel free to reach out to Marco Finocchiaro.

**Attendance (all virtual via webinar):**

Lisa Baron, (chair), USACE

Marit Larson, (chair) NYC Parks

Carl Alderson, NOAA

Liz Balladares, HEP

Dan Birkett, USEPA

Rosana Da Silva, NY-NJ HEP

Terry Doss, NJSEA

Marco Finocchiaro, USEPA

Clay Hiles, HRF

John King, NJDEP

Jim Lodge, HRF

Susan Maresca, NYSDEC

John McLaughlin, NYCDEP

Katie Mosher, BOP

Kaitlyn Parkins, NYC Audubon

Robert Pirani, NY-NJ HEP

Clay Sherman, NJDEP

Isabelle Stinnette, NY-NJ HEP

Rebecca Swadek, NYC Parks

Judith Weis, Rutgers and STAC

Jaclyn Woollard, USEPA