



Water Quality Work Group Meeting

March 7, 2023

Location: Zoom (online only)

Minutes

Attendees: Liz Balladares (HEP/UWFP), Jessica Bonamusa (NYCDOHMH), Courtney Botelho (NEIWPC), Brett Branco (CUNY, STAC), Rob Buchanan (NYCWTA), Lisa Congiu (NJDEP), Mick DeGraeve (NJHDG/GLEC), Phil DeGaetano (IEC), Mike Dulong (Riverkeeper), Jason Fagel (NYSDEC), Mike Flood (EPA), Brent Gaylord (EPA), Biswarup (Roop) Guha (NJDEP, NJ acting co-chair), Siddhartha Hayes (HRPT), Paul Hauch (NJDEP), Wayne Jackson (EPA), Lingard Knutson (EPA), Michele Langa (NY/NJ Baykeeper), Jim Lodge (HRF), Keith Mahoney (NYCDEP), Kelly Mascarenhas (NJDEP), Rosana Pedra Nobre (HRF/HEP), Kaitlin Penner (NYSEFC), Robert Pirani (HRF/HEP), Clay Sherman (NJDEP), Shino Tanikawa (NYC Soil & Water Conservation District, NY co-chair), Dan Shapley (Riverkeeper), Isabelle Stinnette (HEP/HRF), Makini Valentine-Turton (EPA), Ryan Van Manen (EPA), Judith Weis (Rutgers, STAC), and Meiyin Wu (Montclair State University, STAC)

Next Meeting: Tuesday, June 6, 2023 on Zoom at 10:30 AM

1. Overview of Agenda, Introductions, and Minutes Approval

Shino Tanikawa opened the meeting and provided an overview of the agenda. November minutes were introduced and motioned for approval by Roop Guha and seconded by Shino Tanikawa.

Action: November 2022 minutes were approved.

2. Economic Study of the New York and New Jersey Harbor Estuary

Courtney Botelho provided an overview of the project NEIWPC and EPA have been working towards with HEP. The report, to be published in the next couple of months, estimates the economic value of improved water quality (willingness-to-pay) for four water quality improvement scenarios – two pathogen reduction to achieve primary and secondary contact recreation, an aquatic life focus, and a combined scenario of meeting primary, secondary, and aquatic life goals. The results for the water quality index were shared as well as the economic value in terms of willingness-to-pay which is aggregated for the NY and NJ estuary watershed. The remaining of the presentation focused on a preliminary draft of statements and graphs that will be used for a media kit for stakeholders to utilize in communication efforts. The following recommendations and discussions were held:

- Inclusion of paddling as an activity to swimming and boating. A recent mapping exercise indicated paddling as a significant method of recreation in the estuary.
- Clarification around the value and the 20 year timeline, whether costs are pro-rated over time.
- Concerns around the term willingness-to-pay and how the public may interpret it. The report is not indicating the willingness-to-pay for clean water but really the metric of what clean water would be worth to the household.

- Suggest refining the range that is being referenced, \$156M to \$1.4B is wide. Separating out the scenarios would be better to reduce the magnitude of the range. Also connecting these values with a time frame would be preferred.
- Contextualize the value. Is there another frame of reference such as education or parks that these values can be compared to?
- Suggested connecting one of the scenarios to the actual costs of implementing the LTCPs. A lay person may interpret willingness-to-pay as the costs of improvements and we need to be clear about what these dollar amounts represent. NYSDEC shared that for NYC, to eliminate CSOs would cost an estimated \$69B to be achieved by 2040. Costs did not include MS4 improvements and did adjust for inflation. It was cautioned that this cost was estimated on a model that may not have been feasible to implement.
- From advocates, the combined scenario would be preferred as that is the goal under the Clean Water Act and an aspirational effort. The challenge would be communicating our investments of X to meet swimmable goals in some areas is valued at Y. Members of the work group indicated that committed costs for the yet to be completed NYC LTCP is \$2.3B (does not include the City-Wide LTCP which is estimated at \$42M)
- Target audience, outside of the general public, should include elected officials.
- The message to convey with the study is about how people value clean water and while there are concerns around costs, this report gives us a rough indication of what that value is with some level of confidence. It helps to show the economic value of the harbor outside of its navigational channel and why, for example, treatment plants improvements are needed. As part of a media kit, the cost of investment will be a question asked and we should be prepared to answer that.

Action: Courtney will be presenting a draft to the CAC and the Management/Policy Committee in April. Please provide any feedback directly to Courtney at cbotelho@neiwppcc.org, ideally prior to April 5th for inclusion at these upcoming meetings.

3. Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Updates

Kaitlin Penner, NYS Environmental Facilities Corporation (EFC), provided an overview of the intended use plan and the different funding sources that were assigned for 2023. One area to note is that there are not many NYC projects largely due to the eligibility requirements however, EFC is working with NYCDEP to get funding through the hardship policy for disadvantaged communities. A question was asked whether there have been any changes to NYC becoming eligible through BIL. Kaitlin indicated that they're hopeful projects will be eligible through the environmental justice portion. It was suggested to separate NYC boroughs so that areas would qualify for hardship funding, the challenge is a billing system issue and EFC is working with NYC to work through this to increase their access to state revolving funds. Projects under the 2023 Intended Use Plan (IUP) will be receiving a waiver for Build America, Buy America (BABA), which replaces an existing program, as more information is still being outlined for this requirement. EFC is wrapping up their clean watershed needs assessment survey and results will be shared later. A discussion around contaminants of emerging concern was held, specifically at micro and nano plastics where there have not yet been any projects submitted but some research has identified best methods for removal.

Paul Hauch, NJ Department of Environmental Protection, provided an overview of NJ's state revolving funds (SRF) which are housed at the NJ Water Bank. Paul indicated the main different from NYSEFC is that projects are submitted to the IUP on a rolling basis. Between the standard SRF and BIL, NJ will have \$900M available for project funding each year over the 5-year appropriation period. An



additional \$300M was added through the Governor's Office and will need to be distributed by December 31, 2026. For the first 5-years of the LTCs, a number of communities need significant assistance. The NJ Water Bank will have an 80% principal forgiveness to push for the distribution deadline. Paul shared projects on the IUP which fall within the Harbor Estuary area and a total of \$336M of funding being requested with more projects being submitted monthly.

Rosana Pedra Nobre, HEP, provided a more detailed overview of the water quality focused projects HEP will be advancing using year 1 and 2 of BIL funds. \$250,000 will be dedicated to green infrastructure and \$400,000 will be dedicated towards providing grants to support engagement of disadvantaged communities in climate resilience initiatives. In addition, there are two grants to support a pilot monitoring program in the Arthur Kill as well as an effort to work with the STAC in identifying parameters and possible monitoring programs to assess climate change impacts.

Action: Contact Rosana with project ideas or suggestions for FY 2024 (year 3) funds of BIL through HEP.

Partner Updates

- Judith Weis shared, with the support of several people on the work group and others, a proposal was submitted to Silvia Earle's Mission Blue Hope Spot. Judith shared that the Harbor Estuary has been designated a Hope Spot! The official announcement will be made this April and details will be shared with all of HEP partners. Judith encouraged everyone to share in this celebration and help highlight the press release once it's ready to be distribute. Designation as a Hope Spot brings international attention to our Harbor Estuary and will help raise the awareness of the importance of the estuary.
- Roop Guha thanked the outgoing co-chair, Lisa Congiu for all the coordination and leadership during her time as co-chair. The work group thanked Lisa for her leadership as the 2021-2022 NJ co-chair.
- Edward A. Ames's Seminar will be held on March 28th for the "Distribution of microplastics and associated pathogens and pollutants in NYC waterways." Details to register are available [here](#).
- EPA Region 2 announced a Virtual Listening Session on PFAS Strategic Roadmap for March 30th via Zoom from 6-8pm. To attend, please visit: <https://pfascommunityengagement.org/register/>
- NEERS Conference will be held on April 17-29th at Brooklyn College. Learn about estuarine research and management in the heavily urbanized waterways of New York City, explore the culture of Brooklyn and meet new colleagues from the wealth of academic institutions, government agencies and non-governmental organizations from the Big Apple. For details please visit: <https://newenglandestuarineresearchsociety.wildapricot.org/MeetingOverview/>.
- RAE 2023 Coastal Watersheds Grant RfP is out and LOIs due May 5th. The request for proposals for the 2023 National Estuary Program Coastal Watersheds Grant is now available. RAE will select grantees through a two-step process: 1) letters of intent (LOI); and 2) full proposals by invitation only. Both steps are competitive and a request for full proposal does not guarantee funding. Additional details available here: <https://estuaries.org/coastal-watershed-grants/2023-coastal-watersheds-grant/>.