

PREP Management Committee Meeting (Notes/Minutes)
December 12, 2023
Southeast Land Trust, Epping

In attendance:

Jon Balanoff, Acton Wakefield Watershed Alliance
Alaina Chormann, Maine DEP
Addie Halligan, Maine DEP (resigning after this meeting)
Regina Lyons, EPA
Erik Beck, EPA
Jim Chase, Seacoast Science Center
John Storer, City of Dover
Melissa Paly, Conservation Law Foundation
Brianna O'Brien, Town of Hampton
Dea Brickner-Wood, Great Bay Resource Protection Partnership
Cheri Patterson, NH Fish & Game
Peter Kinner, Great Bay Stewards
Erik Chapman, NH Sea Grant
Steve Couture, NHDES Coastal Program
Cory Riley, GBNERR/NHFG
Don Keirstead, USDA/NRCS
Russ Hilliard, Swell Oyster Co.
Rayann Dionne, Seabrook Hamptons Estuary Alliance
Brianna Group, TNC

And PREP Staff: Abigail Lyon, Trevor Mattera, Fay Rubin, Annie Cox, Chris Whitney. (Note that Kalle Matso, PREP Director, did not participate due to illness.)

9:00 – Welcome

Abigail welcomed meeting participants. Introduced Jon Balanoff as nominee for MC Chair. Jon departed the room as his nomination was discussed.

Discussion: Cory asked about length of Jon's term, which is 2 years. It was noted that per the bylaws, the Chair can serve for 3 consecutive terms. Question for EC/Kalle: Is Jon in year 1 of his term, or is he finishing the remaining year on Annie's term first?

Motion made and seconded to approve Jon as MC Chair. Unanimous vote of approval (18).

9:13 – Icebreaker/Roundtable

Jon returned to room and initiated roll call and self-introductions.

9:55 – Accept Previous Meeting Notes

Motion made, seconded, and unanimously approved to accept minutes from September, 2023 meeting.

10:00 – 2023 Reflection

Science Program (Abigail reporting on behalf of Kalle) - Overall, 2023 was a success. SOOE Report and Conference were successful. Kalle transitioning to more of a financial/administrative role. Two new

employees joined PREP staff – Annie and Chris (with Chris’ position supported by CDS). Highlighted importance of having data scientist on staff as we plan for last year of BIL funding in 2027.

Community Engagement (Abigail) – Reiterated importance of having Annie on staff. Over \$217k in PREPA grants were awarded in 11 projects. Completed many conservation/NRI-focused projects. Provided direct technical assistance to communities with 2021 Coastal Watershed Conservation Plan. Also reported significant success with SOOE Report and Conference. Held Community of Practice for DEIJA work, and that effort is catalyzing future work. Lastly, just completed advanced septic system panel with funding from EPA/DES.

Steve requested that Abigail describe a bit more about the large, \$28m NOAA Challenge opportunity. CAW is pursuing Track II funding. Proposal involves creating 16 positions, including staff at DES to help administer grant, 2 staff positions at CAW, 6 projects (culvert replacements/salt marsh mitigation, small grants program, housing navigator position, development of regional resilience plan with SRPC and RPC, working with Seacoast Public Health Network, etc.) Letter of intent was \$28m but will likely request a bit more funding than that. Proposal for 5-year effort is due in February.

Regina commented that this is an extremely competitive opportunity. All of the effort that is going into this proposal should be viewed as an opportunity to bring projects, positions, capacity into the watershed in the event that the proposal is not fully-funded. “Don’t lose the good work that is being done.”

Abigail recognized that there will be scopes and budgets that can be used to fund the projects through other avenues if NOAA funding is not awarded. Steve commented that all of the preparation work will constitute a 5-year work plan.

Habitat (Trevor) – also reported that 2024 was an exciting year. Program put out \$110K for projects, including support to SELT, to SHEA, and culvert replacement in Milton. Completed orthoimagery of salt marsh. Finished Piscataqua Watershed Data Explorer and invited feedback from users. Oyster and eelgrass restoration work was supported by \$1m grant from MAAM. Put in over 18K adult shoots of eelgrass as well 5K adult oysters. Worked with 30+ volunteers. Lastly, PREP is helping co-lead the NH portion of a \$16M NOAA transformational habitat restoration grant focused on eelgrass, with partners from NC up to Maine. Proposal was just submitted. As with NOAA Challenge grant, it positions NH to start thinking about how to approach eelgrass restoration in the future.

Erik commented on an effort in MA to package R tools that facilitate working with STORET.

Chris introduced himself as a resource for partners who have questions about working with data.

Abigail re the network project update and handout – vision is that more communities in the watershed recognize their role in improving watershed health. Intent is to work with “hubs” – partners who talk with the public directly, with a particular focus on stormwater initially. How do we identify those hubs? Plan is to start this work early in 2024, with Annie/Kalle working on pilots.

Cory trying to understand how this is different from other efforts that are ongoing, including GB2030. Advised us to use the capacity and energy to broaden some of the ideas that are already out there.

10:20 – Break

10:30 - Planning for 2024/2025

Science (Trevor on behalf of Kalle) – significant carryover in science programs from 2023 into 2024.

Habitat (Trevor) – similarly, a lot of direct funding will continue into 2024/2025 (SHEA, SELT, etc.) Will be moving into softshell clams and HSE clam flats. Looking at starting a public participation process, including involving recreational users. Entering year 2 of MAAM grant focusing on eelgrass. Helping to Co-Chair Habitat Restoration GB2030 workgroup (with Brianna Group) and working on place-based, ecosystem-based initiatives.

Cory asked what biggest change is in habitat work going forward and what she should focus on.

Jim commended the integrated budget that was presented.

Regina making sure people understand that these budgets are for both base funding and infrastructure (BIL). Noted that the latter requires additional reporting. Indicated that PREP is investing more than other NEPs in the region on science projects, and cautioned that this makes it more difficult to meet Justice40 requirements. More of a challenge than it would be if we were to invest in “on the ground” initiatives. Finally, cautioned us to watch administrative costs so that we can support them post-BIL and advised that we look at other sources for funding.

Steve recognized that there is still a “Great Bay nitrogen hangover” relative to science initiatives. Are there other things PREP could be using its dollars on that would have a great impact?

Cory indicated that Kalle is trying to use this timeframe to tighten up the science. And from her perspective, there are a lot of groups that do community engagement, habitat, etc. and its important that PREP continue to maintain the indicator data that no one else is doing.

Abigail noted that new communications coordinator will help to make sure the science work is well distributed.

Jim questioned whether some positions are tied to specific end dates associated with grant funds.

Community Engagement (Abigail) – will be pulling back a little on the PREPA grants due to capacity issues – likely to \$100K and ~17 projects. Will be hiring a communications coordinator, who will help determine what PREP should really be tracking.

Regina encouraged PREP to think about the critical habitat/conservation projects that partners are engaged in that rely on PREP data, and to ask partners to acknowledge PREP when appropriate. This can be used to support our use of BIL funds for science.

Don commented that what is sometime missing in communications efforts is basic strategy development. Instead of focusing on glossy products – need to figure out how to put strategies into motion.

Melissa commented that we are in an environment with lots of partners and stakeholders doing related work; advised that PREP be very intentional about what our communications person will be doing and what audiences they will target. Avoid redundancy/competitive efforts. Also reiterated Cory’s point that

the one thing that PREP does that no one else does is to compile data and assess the health of the estuary.

Trevor noted that PREP is constantly thinking about the fact that funding levels will be reduced in the future, and that we are using the science to help re-prioritize for the future. Intentional view of bringing on value now with an eye towards re-prioritizing when funding is reduced in the future.

10:50 – Changes in MC Membership – Erik

Acknowledged that Addie H. is stepping down and Alaina C. is stepping in.

Two new members have been proposed – Kristen Murphy and Chris Meaney. Both will be filling current gaps in the MC.

Motion made, seconded, and unanimously approved to welcome both Kristen and Chris to MC.

10:55 – EPA Update – Regina

In the budgeting cycle now with estuary programs. Also noted that there are a lot of other funding EPA opportunities through BIL and Inflation Reduction Act (on greenhouse gas reduction). Noted marine carbon dioxide removal projects and new permitting requirements. Nathan Chien announced as Water Quality Specialist/303D Coordinator.

Actively working with the PREP team to approve CCMP and expects to have good news in the new year. Same thing with the equity strategy. These will be important to consider when evaluation process starts next year.

Erik also mentioned non-point source funds and work with Environmental Finance Center in southern Maine.

11:00 - Adjourn