



Science and Technical Advisory Committee Meeting

June 9th 2022

9:00 am

Draft Minutes

Attending STAC Members: Dr. Elizabeth Lacey (Stockton University), Barbara Spinweber (USEPA), Robert Karl (BTMUA), Dr. Swarna Muthukrishnan (COA), Gregg Sakowicz (JCNER), David Steinman (USDA-NRCS), Charles Caruso (PPA), Bill Walsh (RCTB), Vicki Pecchioli (OC Planning), Mark Villinger (OC Planning), Kristen Adams (OCSCD), Robert Shertenlieb (OCUA), Keith Marcoon (OCUA), Christine Weiben (USGS), Jessie Murray (NOAA), Dr. Steven Yergeau (RCE), Dr. Jim Vasslides (BBP)

Attending Guests: Sheri Shifren (NJDEP), Danielle McCulloch (USFWS), Brittany Moore, Jessica Pinto (OCSCD), Doug Janiec (Sovereign Consulting)

Staff Member in Attendance: Ceili Pestalozzi

Welcome and introductions–E. Lacey

The meeting was called to order at 9:07 AM and call-in attendees made introductions.

Review of April 14th Meeting Minutes and draft agenda–E. Lacey

There were no changes to the draft agenda. There were no changes or corrections to the April 14th meeting minutes. The minutes were accepted by consensus, with Barbara Spinweber and Swarna Muthukrishnan abstaining as they were not present at the April meeting.

Dr. Vasslides indicated that in response to a request at the Advisory Committee level, the Program Office will be endeavoring to send meeting minutes out for review within the two-week period following the meeting rather than a week in advance of the subsequent meeting.

BBP Programmatic Update–J. Vasslides

Since Dr. Hales was not available for the meeting, Dr. Vasslides provided the following update:

Memo of Understanding (MOU) – The final version of the MOU will be sent out to Advisory Committee members for their approval before the end of next week.

BBP FY23 workplan request – The tentative workplan was approved by the Policy Committee, and Dr. Hales is reviewing a final edit before it is sent to EPA for approval.

BBP BIL funding- At this time the Program Office has still have not received final guidance from EPA regarding allowable use of the funds. The tentative workplan was approved by the Policy Committee pending issuance of the final guidance.

Lighthouse Center shoreline restoration project – Mr. Doug Janiec, Sovereign Consulting

Mr. Janiec provided an overview of the history and current status of the Lighthouse Center shoreline restoration project. The current construction is considered Phase 1 of the total project area, and consists of the shoreline restoration and some salt marsh. Future restoration will include the salt marsh, freshwater marsh, and finally the wooded areas of the site. Mr. Janiec explained the techniques being used for shoreline stabilization/restoration,

including WADs, and provided photographs of the installation process and completed phase 1. There will be ongoing monitoring of the project over the next several years.

2021 State of the Bay Report – J. Vasslides

Dr. Vasslides informed the STAC that the 2021 State of the Bay Report was released concurrent with Policy Committee meeting in May, and that the digital version of the report is available on the BBP website. A limited number of hard copies of the report are available, and anyone interested in a copy should reach out to Karen Walzer.

After much consideration it was decided to postpone any SOTB event until National Estuaries Week in September. While the event will occur before the next STAC meeting, we will keep the STAC apprised through email. The current intention is to maintain the technical aspect to the event, but have it be more forward looking rather than strictly a recap of the trends.

Working Groups' Updates – E. Lacey

- a. Estuarine Habitats (E. Lacey) – The group last meet on April 27th, and similar to the STAC will not meet again until October due to field scheduling conflicts.
- b. Pathogen (Shifren) – The bathing beach season is underway, and pathogen sampling starts two weeks before a location is scheduled to open for the season. In addition to the currently open bathing beaches, the Department conducts regional/environmental sampling at select locations on a rotating, multi-week basis. At this time there have been no beach exceedances along the Toms River, Metedeconk River, or in the bay. Dr. Muthukrishnan also provided an updated on the Rally for Barnegat Bay project: the part of the study utilizing the pathogen sniffing dogs has been completed, and the project team shared their initial reports with the towns. A wet-weather sampling event was also completed in April. The community science-based portion of the project started again in May, with community scientists sampling 28 locations. This will conclude in Oct/Nov and will lead to the next phase where solutions are moved forward.
- c. Stormwater (Caruso/Pestalozzi) – The working group submitted a comment letter on the NJDEP Pre-draft MS4 permit renewal in April 2022. Among many things, the letter expressed support for the Watershed Improvement Plan requirement that would be new to the MS4 permit if included in the final version. At the April meeting, the working group began an effort to pull together a list of potential stormwater projects that could be implemented in the watershed. The members also reviewed an NJDOT basin report on stormwater basins that serve the major roadways in the watershed. At today's meeting the group will continue working on the project list and discuss the upcoming request for proposals from NJDEP for stormwater infrastructure projects.
- d. Shellfish (Vasslides) – The Shellfish Work Group has not convened since the last STAC meeting, and are not likely to meet again before October.

Barnegat Bay Submerged Aquatic Vegetation Monitoring – Dr. Elizabeth Lacey, Stockton University

Dr. Lacey provided an overview of the submerged aquatic vegetation monitoring program that she has engaged in with the BBP since 2015 and provided the results from the 2021 sampling season. She also discussed the changes she is interested in making to the program moving forward.

BIL FY23 Submerged Aquatic Vegetation RFP – G. Sakowicz

Vice-Chair Gregg Sakowicz led the following discussion as Dr. Lacey and the Program Office recused themselves to avoid any appearance of conflict.

As described by Dr. Lacey during the preceding presentation, the BBP has supported Stockton's seagrass monitoring efforts in the bay through operational funds (approximately \$15,000 biennially), but is unable to do so for the 2023 sampling season due to additional programmatic costs. The STAC, AC, and Policy Committee have all tentatively approved the use of approximately \$225k in BIL FY23 funds (pending EPA guidance) to release a Grant Funding Opportunity for a submerged aquatic vegetation mapping and monitoring project(s). The Program Office would like the STAC's considered opinion as to whether it makes sense from a scientific and programmatic standpoint to set

aside a portion of the FY23 BIL funds currently identified for the SAV mapping/monitoring GFO to directly fund Dr. Lacey's monitoring program in 2023, or to dictate within the GFO that a component of the proposal must be to replicate that demographic data collection in order to ensure a continuous data set.

A discussion ensued regarding the importance of collecting long-term data in a consistent manner for understanding environmental change. One partner also brought up the fact that it may be the case that a very strong SAV mapping proposal might have a weak monitoring component, and it would be in the program's best interest to separate the tasks to ensure that high quality products are received on both sides. After several minutes of discussion, it appeared that the group was generally in favor of revising their FY23 BIL funding recommendation to reduce the SAV mapping GFO to \$210k and include \$15k to be directed to Dr. Lacey of Stockton University to conduct SAV demographic monitoring in 2023. The STAC also agreed that this was specific to the FY23 funding only, and that funding for any future SAV monitoring should be discussed as part of the BIL funding 5-year plan.

The following motion was made by Charles Caruso and seconded by **XX**. The motion passed unanimously. *The STAC recommends that the Advisory Committee approve a change to the FY23 BIL funding workplan to reduce the proposed Submerged Aquatic Vegetation Mapping and Monitoring GFO from \$225,000 to \$210,000 and add a new workplan item, Submerged Aquatic Vegetation Demographic Monitoring, in the amount of \$15,000, to be conducted by Dr. Elizabeth Lacey.*

Partner Updates

- **JCNERR:** The Jacques Cousteau NERR will be collaborating with the NJDEP- specifically Brittney Wilburn and Matthea Jeppsen- in early August on a multispectral drone survey of select zones of the Tuckerton Peninsula. The purpose of this work was to gather information that will allow us to rapidly and accurately distinguish between high and low marsh habitat based on vegetation communities and develop a predictive model that can detect signs of plant death due to increased SLR, salinity, over-flooding, etc. and guide intervention and restoration decisions.
- **PPA:** Charles Caruso gave an update on PPA's recently-launched Fix Our Parks campaign. The campaign deals with all state-owned natural lands and the goals are to ensure projects can be completed more easily, establish a state or regional friends organization, and ensure enforcement against illegal activities like ORV use and dumping. He also said he would share a report on problems on state lands completed as part of the campaign. More information is available here <https://www.fixourparksnj.org>.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 11:04 am.