



Barnegat Bay Partnership
Communication and Education Committee (CEC) Meeting Minutes

Date: April 15, 2026

Location: Virtual

Attendance: Joel Mott, Nina Sassano, Rebecca Laboy, John Wnek, Chris Claus, Amy Plantarich, Barbara Spinweber, Caroline McFarland, Shari Kondrup, Wes Dalzell.

Call to Order and Approval of Minutes

- The meeting was called to order by Joel Mott. The group reviewed the previous meeting minutes from February. Rebecca Laboy noted an error, clarifying that Shari Kondrup should be listed as representing BTMUA instead of the Ocean County Soil Conservation District. Nina Sassano noted the correction.
 - **Motion to approve with change:** Rebecca Laboy
 - **Second:** Joel Mott

Barnegat Bay Partnership Outreach Report

- Nina Sassano provided updates on current Barnegat Bay Partnership (BBP) initiatives:
 - **Volunteer Master Naturalist Program:** Currently 2.5 to 3 weeks into the program with 14 engaged participants. Former citizen representative Murray Rosenberg is leading a session on coastal geology. Multiple participants have already expressed interest in the open CEC Citizen Representative positions.
 - **Art and Science Series:** The second annual workshop series, a collaboration with Jacques Cousteau National Estuarine Research Reserve (JC NERR), kicks off this coming Saturday at the Kean Ocean Campus. The first workshop focuses on marine debris and features local artist Eduardo Jimenez. Registration for the first two workshops is nearly full, but the final two (basket weaving and printmaking) still need participants. Amy Plantarich and Nina will coordinate distributing flyer PDFs to partners (including Chris Claus and Rebecca Laboy) for physical posting and social media cross-promotion.
 - **Personnel Changes:** Andrew McGowan has officially started his first full week as the new BBP Director following Stan Hales' retirement.
 - **State of the Bay Report:** The draft has been approved by the Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) and is currently undergoing review by the Advisory Committee (AC). A polished print and online version will be available once finalized.
 - **Fellowship Exploration:** BBP is looking into establishing a graduate-level cost-share fellowship program. Partners shared potential avenues for research: Rebecca suggested reaching out to Christine at the Soil District regarding employee-sharing models with NRCS, and Kaitlin Gannon highlighted the Margaret A. Davidson Fellowship program used by the reserve system.

Jersey Friendly Yards (JFY) and Barnegat Bay Blitz Updates

- Caroline McFarland shared operational updates regarding local education and cleanup efforts:
 - **JFY Certification:** Whiting Elementary is nearing certification completion, with a pollinator blitz presentation scheduled for their Earth Day event on April 30th. Jackson Middle School and Pine Beach Elementary are joining the program, with an introductory meeting at Jackson Middle School set for May 13th alongside liaison Shana Browne.
 - **Virtual Lesson Series:** BBP filmed a soils lesson in collaboration with the Ocean County College TV studio, featuring an activity segment led by Rebecca Laboy.
 - **Barnegat Bay Blitz:** The annual cleanup is in full swing through April 26th. There are 55 cleanup sessions scheduled, with 7 completed so far (including a site in Lakewood managed by Chris Claus). A new quality control volunteer initiative has been deployed to assist with data collection and photography. Participating sites have documented a collective removal of 1,256.7 pounds of trash so far, excluding pending data and an upcoming staff cleanup at Cattus Island.

Citizen Representative Recruitment

The committee reviewed two formal applications submitted for the vacant Citizen Representative roles:

- **William (Bill) Gwyer:** A long-time Friends of Island Beach State Park volunteer, environmental educator, and former commercial diver.
- **Cliff Bartlett:** A sailing enthusiast, six-pack captain, tech background professional, and current Master Naturalist student.
- **Motion:** To have Nina Sassano formally offer a joint venture/shared role commitment to both Cliff Bartlett and Bill Gwyer, and subsequently advance their resumes to the AC for final approval.
- **Second:** Rebecca Laboy

Co-Chair Transition and Charter Review

- Becky Laboy announced her upcoming relocation to Raleigh, North Carolina, noting she expects to step down from her position as CEC Co-Chair by the end of June or early July. She confirmed she will still participate in the upcoming roundtable and the New Jersey Envirothon. Christine will ensure the Soil District maintains general member representation on the committee.
- The committee discussed succession protocols. Historically, the Co-Chair transitions into the Chair role every two years. Joel Mott's term as Chair concludes this June, though he expressed a willingness to extend his term by a year if necessary to facilitate a smoother transition.
- The group decided against an immediate internal vote to allow absent members a chance to participate. Instead of a general public announcement at the upcoming roundtable, the committee determined the best path forward is to address the opening internally via a nomination process. Nina Sassano volunteered to create a informational flyer highlighting the CEC to place on partner tables during the educator roundtable to encourage new general member enrollment.
- Following suggestions from Barbara Spinweber and Shari Kondrup, the committee agreed to formally evaluate its governance.

Action Item: Nina Sassano will distribute the current CEC Charter to all members. Reviewing the charter, evaluating membership limits (currently capped at 15), and auditing inactive members will be added to the June meeting agenda.

Partner Updates

Next Meeting

The committee agreed to hold the next regular meeting virtually in June to address the charter review. Future meetings in late summer or early fall (August/October) will be scheduled for an in-person format at a partner organization site to welcome incoming members.

Motion to adjourn: John Wnek

Second: Joel Mott



Barnegat Bay Partnership
Communication and Education Committee (CEC) Meeting Minutes

Date: February 18, 2026

Location: Virtual

Attendance: Joel Mott, Nina Sassano, Stan Hales, Murray Rosenberg, Barbara Spinweber, Kaitlin Gannon, Shari Kondrup, Toni Heater, Chris Claus, Caroline McFarland

Call to Order and Approval of Minutes

The meeting was called to order by Joel Mott. The group reviewed the previous meeting minutes. Nina Sassano clarified that the most recent version included updated edits and the correct November date.

- Motion to approve: Nina Sassano
- Second: Joel Mott
- Outcome: Approved without objection

Citizen Representative Update

Murray Rosenberg shared that he has transitioned out of the Citizen Representative role and will remain involved as a guest. The committee expressed appreciation for his continued contributions.

Nina Sassano reported that no applications have been received for the open Citizen Representative position despite outreach through the website, social media, newsletters, and direct engagement.

Discussion focused on strategies to increase interest:

- Reach out to past applicants directly
- Review and simplify the role description if needed
- Increase targeted outreach through partner networks and events
- Identify opportunities for in person recruitment and engagement

BBP Program Updates

Nina Sassano provided updates on several ongoing initiatives.

Annual Report

- Final edits are underway
- Will be available in print and online

State of the Bay Report

- Currently in development
- Expected publication later this year
- Represents a five year assessment of bay conditions

Art and Science Series

- Relaunching with the Jacques Cousteau Reserve
- Four part series pairing scientists and artists
- Small registration fee will be introduced to improve attendance consistency

Volunteer Master Naturalist Program

- Planning underway
- Members invited to participate as guest instructors

Immersive Institute

- New program in partnership with Ocean County College
- Scheduled for Labor Day week
- Focused on engaging non traditional students in environmental careers
- Members invited to participate as speakers or contributors

Outreach Updates

Caroline McFarland shared updates on Jersey Friendly Yards.

- Educator coordination meetings are in progress
- Program expansion into central New Jersey is underway
- Upcoming presentation at the Pinelands Short Course

Director Update

Stan Hales announced his retirement effective April 1 and reflected on his twenty years with BBP. Ocean County College has proposed Andrew McGowan as his successor, with partner feedback largely positive.

Stan emphasized the importance of continued growth in communication and public engagement efforts moving forward.

CEC Membership and Engagement

The committee discussed opportunities to expand and strengthen participation.

Key ideas included:

- Recruiting educators and adjusting meeting times to better accommodate them
- Engaging college students and early career professionals
- Hosting an informational session to introduce the public to CEC and BBP
- Increasing outreach at festivals, workshops, and community events
- Reestablishing connections with partner organizations and agencies

Several potential contacts and organizations were identified for follow up.

Meeting Format Discussion

Nina Sassano proposed reintroducing in person meetings on a quarterly basis to strengthen collaboration.

- General support for hybrid format

- Need to consider travel limitations
- Opportunity to pair in person meetings with public engagement events

Funding and Administrative Updates

Stan Hales and Barbara Spinweber provided updates on funding and planning.

- All NEP and IJA funding has been received
- Environmental Monitoring Plan is under review
- Communication Plan is nearing final approval
- Funding for the next fiscal year is expected to remain stable

Partner Updates

Joel Mott, Pinelands Commission

Joel shared that the Pinelands Short Course is scheduled for March 7, with strong registration numbers. Several courses have already filled, including the eel monitoring session. Jersey Friendly Yards programming continues to be well attended. A summer short course is planned for July 18 at Stockton University's Kramer Hall, which will include both indoor and field based sessions. Joel also noted an upcoming summer speaker series featuring programs on box turtles and owls.

Kaitlin Gannon, Jacques Cousteau National Estuarine Research Reserve

Kaitlin reported that eel monitoring season is beginning, with volunteer trainings scheduled in the coming weeks. The program has also applied for funding to evaluate volunteer impact through focus groups and engagement assessment. A new volunteer learning series has been launched, offering both skill based trainings such as fish identification and broader educational sessions. Kaitlin also noted that surplus coir logs from a terrapin nesting project are available and may be repurposed for restoration efforts.

Shari Kondrup, Brick Township Municipal Utilities Authority

Shari shared that a rain barrel workshop was held at Echo Lake Park on January 17 with full attendance and all materials distributed. Upcoming events include participation in the Brick Township birthday celebration with a focus on water conservation, a workshop at the Barnegat Bay Educators Roundtable on plastic pollution, and outreach at the Forest Resource Education Center Forestry Festival in May.

Chris Claus, Ocean County Parks and Recreation

Chris reported that the Borrow a Naturalist program is fully booked through June, with strong demand from schools across Ocean County. He also shared details about the Ocean County Fair, scheduled for July 15 through 19 at the Robert J. Miller Airpark. Chris invited partners to participate in outreach under the county tent and noted that attendance can exceed one thousand visitors per day during peak times.

Murray Rosenberg

Murray shared that he will be leading several upcoming presentations and field trips for the Volunteer Master Naturalist program, including sessions with Toms River East High School and the Garden Club of Brigantine. He plans to incorporate Jersey Friendly Yards messaging into these presentations.

Adjournment

- Motion to adjourn: Toni Heater
- Meeting adjourned