

# Executive Committee Meeting

February 13, 2024

1:00 – 2:30 pm

Zoom

## ATTENDEES

Richard Carey, Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP)  
Caitlin Chaffee, Narragansett Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (NBNERR), Chair  
Topher Hamblett, Save the Bay  
Allen Hance, Roger Williams University  
Sue Kiernan, Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM)  
Dave Monti, Vice-Chair  
Regina Lyons, US EPA Region I  
Heidi Ricci, Mass Audubon  
Courtney Schmidt, Narragansett Bay Estuary Program (NBEP)  
Caitlyn Whittle, US EPA Region I  
Darcy Young, Narragansett Bay Estuary Program (NBEP)

## MEETING OPEN

Caitlin Chaffee opened the meeting at 1:06p.

*DECISION: The EC meeting notes from December 7, 2023 were approved by a motion (Dave Monti) and a second (Sue Kiernan, RIDEM).*

Darcy Young began the [meeting presentation](#).

## NBEP QUARTERLY FINANCIAL REPORT

NBEP's current financial status (as of December 31, 2023) is very similar to the Steering Committee report presented in October 2023. NBEP has a significant amount of money available in personnel due to being understaffed. One mechanism to rectify this in the future, in addition to hiring for open positions (Watershed Outreach Manager and Staff Ecologist), is to underfund personnel in NBEP's FY24 EPA cooperative agreement.

## RESEARCH PLAN APPROVAL

Courtney Schmidt shared edits and updates to the Research Plan from both the SAC and SC. The Executive Committee provided additional comments which will tighten up language, create a stronger connection to management programs, and better articulate prioritization of tasks. The Research Plan will be an iterative process as the CCMP is developed and finalized to ensure that the Research Plan matches the goals and actions of the CCMP.

*DECISION: The Executive Committee recommends approval of the NBEP Research Plan, with revisions discussed during the February 13, 2024 meeting, to the Steering Committee by a motion (Dave Monti) and a second (Sue Kiernan, RIDEM).*

## FY2023 OUTREACH AND EDUCATION AWARDS

NBEP has \$57,573 available in the FY2023 320/SNEP budget to subaward for watershed outreach and education projects throughout the study area. NBEP recommends continuing support to the Blackstone River Watershed Council (direct award of \$10,000) because their work has been effective and unique. NBEP recommends subawarding the remainder to the Rhode Island Rivers Council to distribute among member groups. For FY2024, NBEP recommends subawarding outreach funds to the Rhode Island Environmental Education Association (RIEEA), which will work with Massachusetts and Connecticut to access groups in those states. Applicants do not need to be members of RIEEA to apply and access the outreach funds.

The Executive Committee noted that by funding the RIRC, Massachusetts-based organizations cannot receive outreach funds. This funding would also need topical boundaries to ensure that the money is truly used for outreach. The Committee raised concerns about the capacity of RIRC to receive and manage the funds. Suggestions for other groups with capacity include: RIEEA, Blackstone Watershed Collaborative, Taunton River Watershed Alliance, Taunton Wild and Scenic.

Darcy Young, Interim Director of NBEP, agreed to circle back with alternative ideas for distributing FY2023 outreach and education funds.

*No Action taken.*

## 320/SNEP AND BIL WORKPLAN IDEAS

### 320/SNEP WORKPLAN

NBEP will receive approximately \$1.15M (\$900k from 320/SNEP; \$250k SNEP) for FY2024. NBEP is requesting work plan ideas in February and March and will use an online poll to prioritize ideas in March/April prior to finalizing the workplan for the June Steering Committee meeting. NBEP will follow up with partners on ideas proposed for FY2023 that were unfunded. The budget will be similar to FY2023, with the caveat that we can underbudget personnel due to excess allocation in the current budget because of reduced staff. Without rebudgeting staff, NBEP has approximately \$275k for new subawards/contracts. The 320/SNEP workplan will include activities that are watershed-wide while the BIL funds (below) will be project-specific.

The Executive Committee noted the importance of supporting data synthesis to advance CCMP targets and Status and Trends Indicators. This includes synthesizing peer-reviewed information to share it widely.

## BIL

NBEP would like to develop a 2-year workplan for BIL Years 3 and 4. This workplan will total \$1.818M. [NBEP's BIL Long-Term Plan](#) notes that NBEP will use roughly half of each year of funding for direct awards (up to construction) and half for RFPs (potentially including construction). Recipients of funds from the first two years of NBEP BIL funding are currently contracting Year 2 funds, are ready for additional funds, or are completed. The Year 2 habitat and access planning projects are just getting started.

The Executive Committee agreed that an RFP will be the most transparent way to distribute funds, with the provision that the Grants Committee has proper reviewers and like projects are compared with each other (e.g. a planning project is not compared with an implementation project). They also suggested that NBEP work to develop linkages to other BIL funds to show that the planning projects funded by NBEP were implemented with BIL or other funds elsewhere.

Darcy committed to developing a general BIL workplan for approval in March.

## VISION 2034 UPDATE AND PLAN FOR MARCH SC MEETING

### VISION 2034 UPDATE

NBEP is reassessing the NBEP CCMP delivery timeline due to staffing issues and loss of writing contract. NBEP is seeking feedback on creating a Request for Proposals (RFP) for technical writer(s) (firms, or individuals) to produce text for the entire document. NBEP has approximately \$30k available and can re-budget from other areas. This RFP will be for technical writing only; NBEP has a separate contract executed with a designer for layout and graphics.

NBEP is seeking meetings with implementing partners to identify opportunities for Vision 2034 that can be written in as activities or tasks. Dave Monti offered to create a meeting of fellow fishermen from the region to learn about the NBEP, the issues, and incorporate fishers' needs and observations into the CCMP. The Executive Committee agreed that a hybrid of individual and group meetings will be needed to get partners to the table.

### MARCH 14 JOINT COMMITTEE MEETING

NBEP is proposing a full day meeting (10a-4pm) using a hybrid location (RIDEM Room 300) for the upcoming joint committee meeting. The meeting would open with the joint activity (Steering Committee and Science Advisory Committee) to discuss topics (objectives) for which quantitative targets would be most useful and timely. This activity will include discussing data availability, relevant partner goals, and plans. The objective is for the committees to choose topics and geographic extents, determine data, and research needs, and set out a rough timeline for establishing targets.

Lunch will follow the joint activity, and then the Steering Committee will meet to conduct business. Heidi Ricci, Mass Audubon, suggested that committee members should be invited to submit written updates prior to the meeting to be included in the notes. This would allow more time for business purposes on a very tight schedule.

## 2024 MEETING DATES

The 2024 meeting dates for the Executive Committee and Steering Committee:

	Executive Committee 1-2:30pm, Zoom	Steering Committee 10am-12:30pm, Hybrid	Proposed Meeting Business and Activities
Meeting 1	<del>February 13</del>	March 14  10am-4pm, joint with SAC	Vision 2034 Action drafts review, target topics development, FY2024 320 + SNEP workplan ideas
Meeting 2	May 14	June 13	FY2024 320 + SNEP workplan approval
Meeting 3	August 13	September 12	
Meeting 4	November 12	December 12	Steering Committee member elections

## NBEP BIMONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Reminder to sign up for NBEP’s project updates in bimonthly newsletter. The [January 2024](#) newsletter included an invitation to our inaugural Grants Webinar series, where NBEP highlights projects in progress or completed through its grants and direct awards programs. This webinar focused on the 2021 [Green Infrastructure Subawards](#). NBEP also updated the partnership on its Environmental Justice Map ([EJMap](#)).

## ACTION ITEMS

Action items for NBEP to complete ahead of the Steering Committee meeting or next Executive Committee meeting:

- Address comments for Research Plan and allow for additional review by RIDEM ahead of the Steering Committee meeting
- Approach RIEEA about administering the FY2023 Outreach Awards as well as FY2024
- Request workplan ideas from partners to be included in an online voting exercise ahead of the June 2024 Steering Committee meeting
- Develop scope of work for technical writer RFP with review by Executive Committee

Meeting adjourned at 2:38 PM.