



# **Southeast New England Program Steering Committee Meeting 11/14/2022 10:00-12:30 Summary Notes**

## **Attendance:**

- Cape Cod Commission: Erin Perry, Kristy Senatori & Tim Pasakarnis
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 1: Adam Reilly, Ian Dombroski, Haley Miller, MaryJo Feuerbach, Margherita Pryor, Mel Coté, Matthew Stamas
- Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection: Padmini Das & Drew Osei
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Office of Research and Development: Laura Erban & Tim Gleason
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers: Larry Oliver
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Coastal Program: Suzanne Paton & Cynthia Corsair
- Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management: Sue Kiernan
- Massachusetts Division of Ecological Restoration: Hunt Durey
- Association to Preserve Cape Cod: Andrew Gottlieb
- Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council: Leah Feldman
- U.S. Geological Survey New England Water Science Center: Marcel Belaval
- Marthas Vineyard Commission: Adam Turner
- The Nature Conservancy: Alison Bowden
- Southeast Regional Planning and Economic Development District: Bill Napolitano
- Waquoit Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve: Tonna-Marie Surgeon-Rogers
- New England Environmental Finance Center/SNEP Network: Martha Sheils
- Restore America's Estuaries/SNEP Watershed Implementation Grants: Tom Ardito
- Massachusetts Coastal Zone Management: Adrienne Pappal
- Comprehensive Environmental Inc. (EPA Contractor): Emily DiFranco & Nicole Haggerty

## **Introduction/Welcome (10:00-10:05)**

- Mel Coté (Chief, EPA Region 1, Surface Water Branch) welcomed the Steering Committee (SC) members and provided a brief update:
  - Between this meeting and the last SC meeting in April 2022, EPA-SNEP had met with small sub-groups of the SC to develop priority topics for Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) funding and to meet SNEP's Environmental Justice (EJ) and Justice40 (J40) goals.
  - Tim Pasakarnis, of the Cape Cod Commission, accepted his nomination to serve as the Chair of the Monitoring Subcommittee.
  - Bryce Dubois, of the Rhode Island School of Design, accepted his nomination to serve as the Chair of the Ecosystem Services Subcommittee.
  - SNEP has brought on two new staff through the BIL: Matt Stamas and Haley Miller. A third staff person is expected by year end.
  - Barnstable County and the Massachusetts Alternative Septic System Test Center have been recently awarded a \$1.15M SNEP grant through BIL to pilot Responsible Management Entities on and near Cape Cod.
  - EPA is excited to celebrate the one-year anniversary of the BIL!





### **SNEP Budget and Meeting Purpose (10:05-10:15)**

- Goal of the meeting is to prioritize use of BIL funds and discuss approach to Justice40 targets.
- Base (regular annual appropriations) funding for Federal Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 is still unknown.
- \$2,411,000 is available to SNEP in FY23 BIL funding. Around this amount is expected each year through FY26 for around \$9.6M total.
- Justice40 sets the goal of directing 40% of federal funding and benefits to disadvantaged communities.
  - SNEP plans to direct \$1,250,000/year of BIL funds over the next four years (\$5M total) to disadvantaged communities.
  - SNEP plans to direct \$1,161,000/year of BIL funds over the next four year (\$4.6M total) to projects not necessarily specific to disadvantaged communities.
  - A question was raised about how disadvantaged communities would be defined.
    - SNEP is still waiting for official EPA guidance on the definition of these communities. For now, SNEP is relying on the definitions used by the states and National Estuary Programs within our operating boundaries.
- In April 2022, the SC developed four priority topics for BIL funding: (1) wastewater nutrient reduction, (2) habitat restoration and protection, (3) land use planning/acquisition & infrastructure, and (4) stormwater and green infrastructure.
  - Small subsets of the SC met between then and the current meeting to develop targeted sub-topics. Those are to be discussed during the breakout room portion of the meeting.
- Small subsets of the SC also met between April and October 2022, to discuss SNEP's approach to better inclusion and funding of disadvantaged communities and meeting its Justice40 targets.
  - The subset developed an approach that is to be discussed during the meeting.

### **Discussion on Priority Topics for Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Funding (10:15-11:35)**

- Members of the SC selected which of the two breakout rooms they wished to join.
- Members discussed the priority topics and associated potential funding opportunities in an attempt to determine 3-5 top funding opportunities.
- Members were also informed they could provide written comment until 11/25/22.

### **Breakout Session 1, Room 1: Wastewater Nutrient Reduction**

- Regarding holistic monitoring in embayments: some members felt that the lag time involved between wastewater improvements and water quality improvements precluded using funding for monitoring. Funds would be better spent on developing a consistent monitoring protocol.
- Regarding developing a linked water quality model: some members felt that while a model would be important, it's a time-consuming and expensive undertaking that might not be a good fit considering funding and timing limitations. Other members felt that if a model were to be funded, it would need to include predictions of how future land use changes and demographic changes would impact water quality.
- Regarding a supply chain analysis: some members felt that understanding the logistics needed to get Innovative/Alternative (I/A) septic systems scaled up in use would be a valuable undertaking.
- Regarding contaminants of emerging concern (CEC): some members felt that CEC removal rates for I/A systems are still unknown, and research could be useful especially in light of concerns around PFAS.
- A member expressed that any project undertaken should consider the human dimension of accepting and understanding different kinds of wastewater treatment (social understanding, public acceptance).





- A member expressed that the proposed project types were too heavily focused on decentralized wastewater and did not adequately consider options for centralized wastewater funding.
  - Another member expressed that there are other options for centralized wastewater funding.
- Some members expressed, and more agreed, that SNEP should focus on holistic approaches and development of holistic tools in general and should perhaps combine these wastewater topics with the other topic areas.

### **Breakout Session 1, Room 2: Habitat Restoration and Protection**

- Members felt that there was overlap between the habitat and stormwater Priority Memos and that SNEP should focus on combining the efforts.
- Members felt that the multi-benefits of habitat projects (ex. Social, environmental, ecosystem function) should be emphasized. Or projects that have both habitat and stormwater components.
- Some members felt that salt marsh restoration should be a priority. Specifically:
  - Assessing marshes to see if all regional marshes are facing the same or similar challenges, and if we are addressing them correctly.
  - Prioritizing which marshes need to be restored, conserved, more quickly than others given sea level rise and other factors.
    - Many members/partners have been working on similar projects. It would be important to understand the universe of these projects before pursuing such a grant opportunity.
    - Members also felt it was important to keep marsh migration in mind when thinking about any salt marsh or cranberry bog restoration project.
  - Streamlining the permitting process for non-traditional restoration techniques (i.e., thin layer deposition).
  - Habitat for saltmarsh sparrow.
  - Development of an overall (state by state) plan for salt marsh assessment, prioritizations, and recovery.
- Some members felt developing, or pursuing, a holistic/ecosystem approach to dam removal and salt marsh restoration would be beneficial.
- A member brought up recent work in Providence, RI, around restoring urban schools and including green infrastructure and other ecosystem elements.
- A member expressed that long term marsh/habitat monitoring and maintenance could be an important role for SNEP to play. Such monitoring/maintenance could ensure that projects are working as intended and could potentially be a source of training/jobs.
- A member expressed that SNEP could play a role in funding the assessment of new urban stormwater retrofit technologies.
- Members generally felt that urban stream restoration (in stream), urban orchards, and community gardens, should be de-emphasized from the list provided.
- Members generally felt that the follow topics should be emphasized: (1) ecosystem level approaches to salt marsh planning/restoration, (2) vulnerability assessments for salt marshes and dam removal, (3) addressing long term maintenance of habitat projects, and (4) long term monitoring of salt marsh restoration projects (i.e., post restoration monitoring).

### **Breakout Session 2, Room 1: Land Use Planning/Acquisition & Infrastructure**

- Some members felt that the projects covered in this Priority Memo were not in-line with the relatively small budget and SNEP may be better served focusing on small watershed projects and understanding their impacts or planning/design. To that end, some of the proposed coordination activities in the Memo may be better executed by SNEP staff than a grantee or contractor.





- A member expressed that any funded projects need to consider the human element, social science methods, and bringing the community to the table for decision making.
- Members felt that an emphasis on holistic approaches that combine some of the themes from this Priority Topic with others might be the most reasonable tactic.
  - Some members expressed that a good example might be using SNEP funds to enhance low-lying road restoration projects with green infrastructure components, culvert widenings, coastal buffer enhancement, etc. while leaving the broader infrastructure work to other organizations/funding sources.
- Some members felt that better understanding how we might accomplish “transfer of development rights” in the SNEP region could be useful (i.e., what legal/financial mechanisms).

### **Breakout Session 2, Room 2: Stormwater and Green Infrastructure**

- Members thought adding an emphasis on impervious cover and pavement removal could be beneficial.
- Members felt adding an emphasis on non-structural stormwater control could be beneficial.
- Members generally felt there was overlap between this Priority Topic and others. All could generally be folded into a holistic approach.
- Members expressed that an emphasis on multi-benefit stormwater projects (i.e., that provide habitat/open space in addition to stormwater control).
- Members felt that emphasizing the planning and maintenance aspect of stormwater projects could be beneficial.
- Regarding a resource sharing program, some members felt it could be too difficult to implement. While others pointed to the success of the Mass Maritime Academy’s Illicit Discharge Detection and Elimination trailer program. Others felt that a resource sharing program may benefit from also funding a coordinator role.
- Members felt that adaptive management, monitoring, and project follow up would be critical to long term success of projects.
- Members felt generally that a single funding solicitation incorporating all four topics could encourage holistic, multi-benefit projects.
- A poll was taken by the members to gather their top priority around stormwater:
  - Development of multi-municipal equipment/resource sharing program (22%)
  - Green infrastructure and green roadway planning, design, and installation (22%)
  - Regional/municipal stormwater planning (11%)
  - Regional stormwater coordinator positions (11%)
  - Facilitating municipal use of the Opti-Tool, Flow Duration Curve, and Stormwater Retrofit Manual (16%)
  - Nonstructural management options (16%)
  - Pavement removal (0%)

### **Report Out (11:35-11:55)**

- Wastewater Nutrient Reduction
  - There is a need to understand the logistics and supply chain for I/A systems.
  - The lag time between wastewater nutrient reduction projects and environmental results may mean funding a plan for monitoring, rather than monitoring itself, could be a good use of funds in the short term.
  - Open-sourced link models may be too challenging, time consuming, and costly an undertaking for the limited funds available.



- Decentralized wastewater treatment may be over emphasized in the suggest priority topics.
- More information is needed on CEC removal by I/A systems.
- Habitat Restoration and Protection
  - Funding for ecosystem-level approaches for salt marsh restoration should be prioritized.
  - Funding for culvert restoration and dam removal/restoration assessment and prioritization should be prioritized.
  - Long-term monitoring for all habitat restoration projects should be emphasized.
  - Maintenance challenges for green infrastructure projects should be considered.
- Land Use Planning/Acquisition and Infrastructure
  - SNEP may need to realign goals under this Topic with the relatively small amount of funds available. Perhaps focusing on SNEPs existing niche would be best.
  - Funds may best be used for design and planning so that larger sources of funding could be used for implementation.
  - Facilitating coordinator between organizations may be best accomplished by SNEP staff, rather than a grant.
- Stormwater and Green Infrastructure
  - Stormwater and green infrastructure could be easily integrated into the other priority topics.
  - Green Infrastructure and green roadway projects should be prioritized.
  - Funding for expanding the use of stormwater tools should be emphasized (ex. Opti-tool, flow duration curves, recently released New England Stormwater Retrofit Manual).
  - Funding for the development of stormwater resource sharing programs should be prioritized.

#### **Environmental Justice and Justice40 (11:55-12:25)**

- As part of Justice40, SNEP is attempting to use 40% of its funding, starting with BIL funding, to benefit environmental justice communities. A subset of the SC met over the months before the November 2022 meeting to discuss options for an approach to meeting this goal. The following general approach was presented to the SC.
  - Part 1: Fund four regional coordinators to work at the local level, host community meetings, identify community needs for projects, help prioritize projects, and help communities with implementation of projects.
  - Part 2: each coordinator would have access to a pool of funds to execute technical assistance and implementation projects developed through community outreach and prioritization.
- Some members were concerned with the approach.
  - Would funding a coordinator cost too much overhead and limit the amount of funds actually getting to communities for projects?
  - Will coordinators have enough impact to warrant their costs?
  - Other programs have tried this approach and not had great results. The burden of managing the coordinator position may also be a consideration.
  - Will communities/municipalities/public works feel comfortable working with a coordinator? Is it just another layer of burden for them? SNEP should make sure it fully understands municipalities stances on this before attempting a coordinator-based approach.

#### **Next Steps and Next Meeting Topic (12:25-12:30)**





- Written comments on the Priority Topic Memos and EJ Approach are due by 11/25/22
- The next SC meeting will occur in January-March timeframe, a poll will be sent out soon to schedule.
  - Potential topics include continued discussion on BIL funding; discussion on use of base appropriations; overall SNEP Committee structure.

