

Missisquoi Basin Water Quality Council (BWQC)

Wednesday, December 4, 2024

11:00 AM -1:00 PM

Remote /Zoom meeting

Meeting video posted at <https://youtu.be/vZS23r5ZLaU>

**A VIDEO RECORDING OF THE MEETING IS AVAILABLE THROUGH THE
NRPC YOUTUBE CHANNEL (Link above).**

**THE WRITTEN MINUTES ARE A SYNOPSIS OF THE DISCUSSION AT THE MEETING.
MOTIONS ARE AS STATED. MINUTES WILL BE SUBJECT TO CORRECTION BY THE
COUNCIL. CHANGES, IF ANY, WILL BE RECORDED IN THE MINUTES OF THE NEXT
MEETING OF THE COUNCIL**

Council Members: Lauren Weston (Q), Ted Sedell (Q), Lindsey Wight (Q), Beth Torpey (Q), Kent Henderson (Q),
Allaire Diamond (Q), Dan Seeley (Q), Sarah Downes (Q), Bridget Butler

Q= towards quorum

Staff: Dean Pierce, Cliff Jenkins, Nora Brown

Others present: Jim's AI Notetaker, Josh Serpe, Jim Pease, Karen Bates, Chris Rottler, Chris Smith

1. Welcome and introductions

Lindsey Wight opened the meeting at 11:03 as Chair. A round of introductions was made.

2. Meeting protocols

Lindsey Wight reviewed the norms for meeting on Zoom.

3. Conflict of interest declarations, if any

No conflict of interest declarations were made.

4. Review/adjust and approve agenda

Dean Pierce clarified that there will not be a formal seating of a new representative to replace Barry Lampke.
This agenda item will be pushed to the next meeting.

Sarah Downes motioned to approve the agenda. Lauren Weston seconded. Motion carried.

5. Approval of minutes

Lauren Weston motioned to approve the minutes. Sarah Downes seconded. Motion carried.

6. Public comment not related to items on agenda

No public comments were made.

7. Report on budget adjustments, if any

No budget adjustments were reported.

8. Seating of new Representative to replace Barry Lampke

As previously mentioned, the seating of a new representative will take place at the council's next meeting.

9. Training Session: Requesting a Watershed Project ID

Cliff Jenkins provided BWQC members with a training on requesting Watershed Project IDs using DEC's online portal. He reviewed the application form used to request new project IDs as well as use of the Watershed Projects Database to find and monitor approved projects. He also provided an overview of the Clean Water Project Explorer tool, which provides users with a map view of water projects throughout the state, and a tool to use to search for projects by basin.

Lauren Weston asked Karen Bates to clarify best practices in terms of project naming and writing descriptions.

Karen Bates answered that guidance can be found on the N Form, but that in general specifics are helpful. Not a grant application, so don't need to explain why it's needed. A naming convention is useful and can be found on the N Form itself and includes a descriptor (Location and Action), Phase, and Town or Region.

Dean Pierce added that the list of project types on the N Form is the same list found in Appendix B, which outlines project types and their respective eligible funding programs.

Bridget Butler said she would appreciate training on Appendix B.

Allaire Diamond asked about filling out the project's priority and prioritization source, namely how important these fields are when they are not clear for many projects.

Karen Bates answered that prioritization source mainly refers to river corridor and stormwater plans, so selecting 'other' for projects not identified in this way is fine. Additionally, it is acceptable to leave the priority level blank. She also shared the guide for phosphorus accounting, a document she believed supersedes Appendix B.

Lauren Weston expressed frustration with navigating DEC's website to find documents like Appendix B. Chris Rottler responded that DEC's ECO AmeriCorps member is currently working on a website guide to help address this issue.

Bridget Butler asked whether videos of trainings on topics like this exist. She noted that trainings are especially helpful when experiencing turnover in staff, and that in-person trainings are preferable, as they offer the chance to ask questions and provide feedback.

Chris Rottler answered that DEC has heard feedback on the need for training and recognizes it as a top need.

10. Presentation by Chris Smith: Habitat Restoration in Vermont

Chris Smith of US Fish and Wildlife (USFWS) gave a presentation to council members about his work with the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program. The program provides financial and technical assistance for habitat restoration on private land to benefit Federal Trust species. Projects typically fall into three main categories: aquatic connectivity for aquatic organism passage, wetland restoration, and riparian restoration. The program partners with a variety of USDA farm bill programs, Vermont Agency of Agriculture Food & Markets, watershed organizations/NGOs, conservation districts, and landowners. He shared that the Partners for Fish and Wildlife program has funding available, which it can use to plug gaps in other funding to ensure projects can be completed at no cost to the landowner.

Lauren Weston asked whether USFWS ever envisions coming to CWSP for funds.

Chris Smith answered no, collaboration with the CWSP would be from a technical and financial support angle.

Dean Pierce clarified that USFWS cannot ask for CWSP funds, but since they would not claim phosphorus credits from funded projects, there is essentially no downside to receiving their funding from the CWSP's perspective.

Kent Henderson asked about USFWS's experience interacting with the Army Corps of Engineers on berm removal projects, particularly those involving regrading.

Chris Smith shared that the Army Corps' main concern is where fill goes following removal, so identifying an upland site and ensuring no invasives are moved as well has generally helped get their approval. Implementers may also want to consider removing sections rather than the entire berm if it is vegetated for floodplain access.

Allaire Diamond asked whether USFWS has experience working with private road culverts.

Chris Smith shared that USFWS has struggled with private road crossings, particularly driveways. Farm or forest road crossings can be much cheaper fixes, so USFWS has only done private road culvert work on case-by-case basis. He shared that working with NRCS on these projects in the past has worked to streamline their process by sharing technical expertise.

Members should reach out to Chris to discuss partnering with USFWS on projects.

11. Round Table: Status of projects

Bridget Butler provided an update on FNLC's Shipyard Road rain garden and potential seawall removal project, which they found to be non-viable and are currently wrapping up. She explained how, following the final design phase, a dispute over site ownership between the town of Highgate and a neighboring landowner prevented implementation, since the party responsible for operations & maintenance couldn't be identified. She stressed the importance of developing a relationship with the landowner early on to prevent this kind of issue.

Another issue encountered in this project was that DEC doesn't allow seawall removal be used to calculate phosphorus reduction. This meant that the amount reduced (0.12kg) was too low to be viable in the CWSP's

eyes. Additionally, a requirement for archaeological assessment came into effect after project design had been completed, for which FNLC couldn't secure funding, given the low amount of phosphorus reduction.

Allaire Diamond shared that she has encountered similar road blocks in her work with rules changing. She expressed concern with the amount of money and resources being wasted here, as this shouldn't be what it costs to learn something.

Jim Pease shared that, based on his prior experience at DEC, he didn't believe that a landownership dispute should stop a project if both the town and landowner were in support, as the state is mostly looking to identify a party responsible for maintenance going forward.

Dean Pierce pointed out that the issue of O&M documentation, which must be used for CWSP-funded projects, as they require a landowner's signature.

Lauren Weston shared updates from multiple projects that received CWSP funds. Updates are as follows:

- Lake Carmi Riparian Buffer Project Development
 - o Completed
 - o Identified 5 sub-projects:
 - One shoreline bioengineering project has completed 30% design and is meeting with landowners for its final design.
 - One buffer planting planned for spring 2025, using PUR grant because doesn't meet DEC standards.
 - One buffer planting implemented.
 - Floodplain restoration project completed preliminary design
 - Final sub-project likely won't be moving forward.
- Marsh Brook Floodplain Restoration
 - o Engineering and cultural resources review contractors hired
- Sandy Bay Floodplain Restoration/Process-Based Design
 - o Contract with CWSP executed
- Tree Planting Scoping in Missisquoi Basin
 - o Experiencing setbacks because FFI tool didn't work as expected, but have identified priority sites and checked with partners for duplication
 - o Able to get a couple of low hanging projects done and planted in 2024
- Trout Brook Reservoir Dam Removal Final Design
 - o 60% design complete, final design in progress
 - o Historic preservation review & archaeological assessment completed
 - o Working on funds for implementation and monitoring/research and permitting
- Branch Floodplain Restoration
 - o Engineers and cultural resources consultant hired

Dean Pierce asked for clarification on how the FFI tool didn't work as expected for FCNRCD, which Lauren Weston explained was because the FFI tool isn't suited to finding new potential projects.

12. Updates/Announcements

Dean Pierce notified council members that DEC is working on a document called the Action Plan to address some issues with the BWQC model, which he would share when it is completed. He also reminded members of their upcoming quarterly reporting and invoicing responsibilities.

13. Future meeting topics

The next meeting will take place on February 5, 2025. This meeting will include a review of applications submitted for the current funding round, which closes on December 18. It will also include an update on NRPC's new Public Participation Policy and trainings from Nora Brown and Maddie Yadow.

14. Conclusion

Allaire Diamond motioned to adjourn. Kent Henderson seconded. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 12:50pm.