

Lamoille Basin Water Quality Council (BWQC)

Thursday, March 27, 2025

9:00 -11:00 AM

Remote /Zoom meeting

Meeting video posted at <https://youtu.be/d7Yn9sMZRxA>

**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), Meghan Rodier (Q), Brad Holden (Q), Peter Danforth (Q), Christine Armstrong (Q), Erin De Vries (Q), Brent Sheets (Q), Daniel Koenemann, Mel Auffredou, Ken Minck

Q= towards quorum

Staff: Dean Pierce, Cliff Jenkins, Nora Brown, Kyle Grenier

Others present: Peter's AI Notetaker, Alec Jones (LCPC), Karen Bates (DEC)

1. Welcome and introductions

Peter Danforth opened the meeting at 9:02 am as Chair.

A round of introductions was made.

2. Meeting protocols

Peter Danforth reviewed 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

No adjustments made.

5. Approval of minutes

Brad Holden motioned to approve the minutes. Erin De Vries seconded. Motion carried.

6. Public comment not related to items on agenda

No public comments were made.

7. Seating of members (if any)

No new members were seated.

8. Budget adjustment requests (if any)

No budget adjustment requests were made.

9. Application filed in response to round 7 “Call for Projects” (request made to table)

Dean Pierce shared that a request has been made to table discussion the one application received in this round.

10. Presentation: Prioritization of Transportation Projects

Alec Jones, GIS/Transportation Planner at the Lamoille County Planning Commission, and Kyle Grenier, Transportation Planner at the Northwest Regional Planning Commission, presented on VTrans’ project prioritization process. This presentation was made in response to BWQC members’ request for more insight into how roads projects are prioritized and developed to better understand opportunities and limitations for including water quality considerations in roads projects.

Alec shared that the VTrans Capital Plan has been on pause for several years due to recovery efforts from recent flooding events, so new projects are not being funded. While regional planning commissions like NRPC and LCPC create prioritization lists of transportation projects, with this pause in funding these lists are kept by RPCs as internal working documents. He also noted that towns do not typically consider water quality and natural resource impacts in transportation projects, as cost is often the primary factor.

Kyle added that VTrans does include resilience in its prioritization scores to account for flooding and extreme weather, but beyond that water quality isn’t typically a driving concern. He noted that RPC work in VTrans is relatively siloed, so it is possible that another part of the agency takes water quality more into account.

Dean Pierce asked whether a map of prioritized projects could be accessed, which he felt might be helpful for BWQC work in basins like the Lamoille, which overlap multiple regions and transportation districts.

Kyle and Alec both answered that they do not map their respective lists of prioritized projects.

Erin De Vries asked whether there is cause for concern with federal funding being rescinded in this area.

Kyle Grenier answered that since federal dollars come to RPCs indirectly, VTrans is better suited to answer that question.

Karen Bates of DEC noted that resilience planning is the major area of overlap between VTrans and the work of DEC Tactical Basin Planners like herself. She shared that VTrans has a resilience planning tool that can be used to view identified hazards and prioritized areas. She suggested the use of this tool as a future training topic.

11. “Training Time”

Nora Brown provided training on Operations and Maintenance. She went over the basic requirements for implementer organizations and recent updates to the Site Access License/Easement Agreement templates shared in October 2024 by DEC, which included the addition of a plain-language cover letter and a designated “landowner liaison” role.

Peter Danforth noted his organization’s upcoming required verification of the 10 Bends tree planting. Dean Pierce clarified that as he currently understands DEC’s policy, organizations that implement projects should not verify their own projects (due to conflicts of interest).

Brad Holden asked whether projects with site access easements have encountered issues with landowners’ mortgage holders being reluctant to grant these agreements in perpetuity. Dean Pierce shared that he doesn’t believe any easements have actually been implemented to date, but he offered to bring this issue to DEC staff.

Mel Auffredou asked whether the \$200,000 cost threshold for requiring an easement applied to all state funds or just CWSP funding and whether this rule applies to all phases of a project or just implementation.

Nora Brown clarified that Chapter 7 of DEC’s CWSP guidelines state that the \$200,000 threshold applies to all state funds but only applies to project implementation.

12. Project sharing (as time allows)

Cliff Jenkins shared project updates from the proposed BFA East stormwater project in Fairfax, for which he is taking on some project management duties. He shared that before she resigned as town manager, Sarah Hadd requested that excess funds awarded for the final design, which came in under budget, be re-allocated to the implementation phase. At the time, she believed an archaeological resource assessment wouldn’t be necessary, but this later proved not to be the case, creating a significant unforeseen cost. He added that the project team is considering turning the project into a gully restoration, as it would treat upstream flow.

13. Updates

Oxbow Park Public Forum

Peter Danforth shared that LCNRCD is organizing a community forum resilience workshop for Oxbow Park in Morristown on May 3rd. They aim to educate the public about floodplain restoration and flooding in general and the relationship between development patterns and natural resource resilience. They aim to build consensus on what steps can be taken to address the park’s frequent flooding. They also intend to host a follow-up meeting involving hands-on projects, such as a stream cleanup.

Erin De Vries shared that VRC is undertaking project scoping work in the Lamoille basin which will also involve public meetings and expressed a hope to collaborate.

Lamoille River Modeling Study

As a follow up to Erin's comments about VRC's project scoping work, Dean Pierce shared information about an ongoing effort to expand modeling of the Lamoille River, building on previous work done by SLR Consultants that was organized by LCPC. This study will include a strong economic development aspect, such as resilience plans for businesses. Shaun Coleman is the lead on this work at NRPC.

Meghan Rodier elaborated that this study will also include areas left out of previous work and run scenarios based on projects in process to refine modeling.

Cost Effectiveness Thresholds

Dean Pierce also shared that NRPC is about to formally adopt cost effectiveness thresholds projects in both of its basins. These thresholds are \$50,000/kg for stormwater projects and \$30,000/kg for all other project types. He noted that this policy is in response to a DEC request intended to help guide where applicants seek funding, whether from the CWSP or another source. This policy would allow for both partial funding and special exceptions in exceptional circumstances.

Meghan Rodier noted that she has found floodplain restoration projects to be even more expensive than stormwater projects and asked for the reasoning behind setting a higher threshold only for stormwater projects, given the greater benefits of floodplain restoration work.

Dean Pierce shared that these thresholds were informed in part by thresholds established by other CWSPs, one of which chose to adopt a higher threshold for stormwater projects. DEC data that has shown that stormwater projects are more expensive than other project types, including floodplain restoration.

Meghan Rodier asked whether this policy might be revisited once more floodplain restoration projects have been implemented, given the large increase in costs that organizations like LCPC have seen even in the last two years.

Dean Pierce agreed that is likely, as policies—which are not laws—are meant to assist decision making. He noted that river projects have good phosphorus reduction, so while they may be expensive, they may still be considered efficient.

CWSP Re-Assignment

Dean Pierce then turned council members' attention to a recent DEC memo summarizing the evaluation process recently undergone by Addison County RPC ahead of its renewal as Otter Creek CWSP. He noted that all CWSPs must undergo this process before their assignments expire in June 2027, but this process has been staggered, and NRPC's re-assignment will take place in roughly one year.

CWSP Communications Working Group

Nora Brown provided an update on the CWSP communications working group that she is participating in, including the group's plans to create fact sheets for use by watershed organizations to familiarize landowners with the funding program. Meghan Rodier requested that materials include information on cost effectiveness thresholds as well as the FFI tool and interim phosphorus calculator.

State of P Crediting

Ken Minck requested an update on the CWSP's progress in meeting its phosphorus reduction target and expending its funds. Dean Pierce shared that the CWSP is still in its first funding year and has funded projects with good P numbers. However, these P credits are not yet in the CWSP's "bank," as they are still estimates

rather than proven reductions from implemented projects. Overall, he said the CWSP is doing well due to a few strong projects.

Lauren Weston asked about how crediting works if the CWSP funds project design but the sponsor intends to seek other funds for implementation. Dean Pierce responded that task awards include a line about the CWSP and the subgrantee working together when funding is sought for implementation: “by accepting the sub grant award, partner agrees to work with the CWSP to identify the most appropriate source of funds for project implementation and or operations and maintenance.” This is not the same as a right of first refusal, which some at DEC have suggested that CWSPs have the ability to require, but is aimed at preventing phosphorus reductions associated with projects in which a CWSP has invested from being lost. Lauren Weston later indicated she had not interpreted the previously mentioned line award as prioritizing CWSP funding for implementation.

Meghan Rodier asked about whether partial P credits can be claimed if the CWSP funded design. Dean Pierce answered he is unsure but he will investigate. The amount of partial credits could be small, although if shared with a non-reporting agency, then the CWSP could claim all credits. He added that when it comes to project adoption, a limited percentage of overall credits can come from project adoption.

Meghan Rodier also felt that this line indicates “most appropriate source,” but this could be different depending on the project. Design applications include questions about where implementation funds might come from, and for larger projects applicants usually note that they will need to seek other sources of funding.

14. Conclusion

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, May 22 from 9-11am. Funding round 8 will be open from April 3 to May 8.

Dean Pierce reminded members that the CWSP is still looking for second representative from a Watershed Organization.

Peter Danforth noted that an upcoming VACD board meeting is also scheduled for the morning of May 22, so he suggested rescheduling the BWQC’s meeting for later that same day. Dean Pierce shared he would follow up with a poll to members to find a new meeting time.

Dan Koenemann motioned to adjourn. Erin De Vries seconded. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 10:47am.