



The Rhode Island Rivers Council
c/o RI Water Resources Board
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Minutes of RIRC Meeting
Wednesday, June 12, 2019 Meeting – 4 pm
DEM Office of Water Resources – Conference Room 280C
235 Promenade Street, Providence, RI

ATTENDANCE:

A. Members Present:

Veronica Berounsky, Chair
Alicia Eichinger, Vice Chair
Charles Horbert
Walter Galloway
Rachel Calabro
Ernie Panciera
Eugenia Marks

B. Guests in Attendance:

Elise Torello, Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association
Michael Zarum, Buckeye Brook Coalition
Jennifer Paquet, RI DEM
Douglas Stephens, Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council
Michael Bradlee, Friends of the Moshassuck
Julia Bancroft, Narragansett Bay Estuary Program
Susan Kiernan, RI DEM
John Zwarg, RI DEM
Betsy Dake, RI DEM
Arthur Plitt, Blackstone River Watershed Council – Friends of the Moshassuck
Margherita Pryor, US EPA
Chelsea Glinna, VHB

Introductions: All attending board members and guests introduced themselves.

Prior to the start of the RIRC Meeting, representatives were available from RI DEM to provide a presentation and give the Watershed Councils an update on things they are working on. Updates were provided on multiple topics as follows:

RI Non-Point Source Management Plan:

- This is overseen by EPA, and is required by Section 319 of the Clean Water Act.
- The plan is consistent with the State's "Water Quality 2035" plan
- Plan elements were described
 - Water quality conditions (descriptive)
 - Management Framework
 - Rules
 - Statewide Priorities
 - Implementation
- It has a five-year planning horizon focused on RIDEM actions.
- Priorities include stormwater; OWTS, agriculture, road salt, turf management, pet waste, and "other" sources.
- Other acknowledged stressors include: wetland alterations; aquatic invasives, stream connectivity, water withdrawals, and climate change.
- Key action items were discussed, such as:
 - Updating the RI Stormwater Design & Installation Rules
 - Evaluating new technology
 - More emphasis on Low Impact Development & Green Infrastructure
 - Improve Operations & Maintenance for OWTS
 - Improve OWTS compliance & tracking
 - Continue to remove cesspools
 - Evaluate how local government assistance could help with OWTS
- The Plan is due to be finalized by the end of December

Watershed Planning Activities:

- Purpose was described
- Drives Section 319 grant money
- The general elements and criteria to be eligible for 319 grants was described
- There are 27 recognized Watershed Planning areas (based on HUC-12)
- Watershed Plans can be developed for any sub-watershed of concern
- There are currently only three watersheds in the state with an approved Watershed Plan:
 - Kickemuit
 - Nonquit Pond

- Palmer-Warren River
- Several new plans are under development, including:
 - Narrow River
 - Wood River-Pawcatuck River
 - Stafford Pond
 - Aquidneck Island
- Contractor assistance is being sought to assist in developing plans for:
 - Scituate Reservoir
 - Abbott Run River Watershed
 - Lake Management Plans
- Priorities are being given to drinking water supply watersheds, and other less-developed watersheds.

Ambient River Monitoring:

- DEM had stopped performing wadeable stream assessments for two (2) years due to a lack of funding. Funding is back for 2019 and the assessments are focusing on northern watersheds: Clear River, Branch River, Blackstone River, Moshassuck River, Woonasquatucket River and Ten Mile River watersheds.
- Are working to update the database, hopefully combining 2018 and 2020 data.
- DEM tailors sampling to try to get info on parameters that URI Watershed Watch does not. Nevertheless, the data DEM has been collecting has been pretty consistent over the last 10 years. (Jane Sawyers can be contacted for any data requests).
- DEM has also been surveying for aquatic invasives
- Cyanobacteria blooms have also been monitored, but only on a targeted, complaint-driven basis. DEM has limited capacity to do continuous monitoring, so when a bloom is documented, the Department of Health basically issues a no-contact warning until any other sampling can show the bloom has waned. Brian Zalewski is the DEM contact for cyanobacteria blooms.
- Other targeted sampling and efforts include:
 - Aquidneck Island: sampling as part of development of a TMDL
 - Buckeye Brook: reviewing comments on a draft TMDL
 - With SNEP, working with CT DEEP, studying Wood-Pawcatuck & Little Narragansett Bay
 - NRCS, National Water Quality Initiative-focusing on Tomaquog Brook (agricultural runoff)
 - City of Central Falls: major water chestnut invasion in Valley Falls Marsh & Pond. This is a tough site due to shallow water and a history of industrial contaminants.

- Oakland Beach: monitoring for bacteria
- Wetland Monitoring Program, RI Rapid Assessment Method; hundreds of wetlands have been assessed (Tom Kucher, RINHS & Carol Murphy, RI DEM)

Wetland Revisions:

- The DEM has been working for the last couple years to update the Wetland Rules as required by changes to the Act. A brief history was provided, including development of a task force that studied buffer zone issues, and helped draft legislation.
- Legislation requires DEM and CRMC to develop buffer standards for freshwater wetlands, that are intended to become a statewide standard. Once promulgated, cities and towns would no longer be able to enforce differing buffer standards for wetlands or OWTS.
- DEM is proposing to identify three major regions in the state, which will influence assigned buffers to some extent. The three regions are:
 - Region A: Least developed watersheds, within western portion of the state, where water quality is generally highest.
 - Region B: Suburban areas with more development, fragmented landscapes, water quality impacts
 - Region C: Urban core areas with greater than 26% impervious area coverage and poor habitat conditions.
- In addition to these regions, rivers and some ponds within drinking water supply watersheds will receive greater protection.
- All wetlands will receive some buffer designation, regardless of size. In most cases, protected buffer will increase. In some areas, the buffer protection will decrease, particularly in the urban Region C areas.

Funding Opportunities:

- An RFP for future 319 grants is going out soon. There will be adequate time to apply. This is limited to watersheds with an approved watershed plan.
- Some resiliency funding is available for wastewater treatment facilities
- Former Bay, River & Watershed Restoration Funding funds have all already been obligated.
- Under the approved Green Economy Bond, 3-5 million dollars was obligated for “resiliency projects”, but the rules for eligibility are still under development.
- SNEP, NBEP money has recently been awarded and additional SNEP RFP’s are anticipated.

- RI DOT also has money available for Water Quality infrastructure or treatment improvements in partnership with other NGO's (contact Alisa Richardson)
- RI Infrastructure Bank coordination may also be an avenue for providing some up-front money for grants that involve reimbursement of expended funds (in cases where an NGO doesn't have up-front funds available).

At this point, the DEM presentation was concluded, and RIRC Chair Veronica Berounsky called the RIRC Meeting to Order

Call to Order: Dr. Berounsky called the meeting to order at 5:30 pm

Review and Approval of May 8, 2019 meeting minutes: Motion made by Dr. Berounsky, seconded by Mr. Panciera to accept the minutes as presented. Motion passed.

Reports by RIRC Representatives on State Committees:

Narragansett Bay Estuary Program:

- Are currently working to fill a new scientist position
- Comprehensive Conservation Management Plans are coming
- More high-resolution maps are now available on the NBEP website in association with the Bay report.
- A steering Committee meeting was held today; Mr. Galloway suggested that the RIRC work more closely with the NBEP.
- Heidi Ricci is working on a new project for Integrating Ecosystem Services into Land-Use Decision Making in the Narragansett Bay Watershed. Heidi would like to give a presentation on this topic to the RIRC at a future meeting.

State Guide Plan Recreation Committee:

- Mr. Horbert reported that a draft Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) has been presented and is open for comment. A hearing will be scheduled for July.

Water Resources Board: Nothing new to report until after the end of the legislative session.

Bays, Rivers & Watersheds Coordination Team (BRWCT) Funds: No report was provided. As noted earlier by DEM, all funds are obligated.

Officer Reports, Financial Reports:

- No change from previous financial report

Written Reports of Activities Received from Designated Local Watershed Councils:

Note that due to time constraints, no verbal reports were provided.

Narrow River Preservation Association – Written report submitted by Alison Kates. Narrow River Oyster Study Under Way

NRPA has recruited nearly 20 volunteers with docks on Narrow River to participate in a study led by Will Helt at The Nature Conservancy Rhode Island (TNC) throughout the summer 2019. Participants will hang a 12" x 12" tile in the water off of their dock and check it monthly for oyster growth. TNC and NRPA will use the information to monitor the health of the oyster population and identify oyster restoration sites.

Narrow River Road Race

On Saturday, May 18, Narrow River Preservation Association (NRPA) hosted the 32nd Annual Narrow River Road Race. 235 people walked and ran the 5k or 10k course along Narrow River. Many volunteers made the day a success.

This year, NRPA chose a bobcat as our featured animal. We developed and printed an informational poster about bobcats, pictured the bobcat in the race logo and displayed a bobcat mount at the check in and awards area at Narragansett Town Beach.

Salt Marsh Restoration in Lower Narrow River

Throughout May and into June 2019, NRPA has been recruiting and managing volunteers to help restore salt marsh in lower Narrow River. The project, led by US Fish and Wildlife Service, is expected to be completed this week. In all, 30,000 salt marsh grass seedlings will have been planted.

2019 NRPA Events

All are welcome to attend NRPA's 2019 events.

June 15, Saturday – What Lives in the River, 9am – 1:30 pm, Middlebridge Preserve

June 22, Saturday – 14th Annual Narrow River Turnaround Swim

July 19, Friday - 12th Annual Pettaquamscutt Paddle (rain date Saturday, July 20)

August 3, Saturday – Art on the River, 9-11 am, Middlebridge Preserve

September 14, Saturday – 'Gansett Days What Lives in the River, 9-11 am,
Middlebridge Preserve

September 27 & 28, Friday evening and Saturday all day – Kayak Fishing Challenge on
Narrow River

October 3, Thursday - NRPA's 49th Annual Meeting, 7:00 pm, URI GSO Bay Campus
Auditorium

www.narrowriver.org

Salt Ponds Coalition –Written report submitted by Alicia Eichinger:

SPC has joined forces with members from the Harbor Island Improvement Association and the Town of Narragansett to plan for improvements along the Foddering Farm Causeway. We were able to raise funds through a grass roots effort and have been in contact with a local engineer about starting the project.

SPC has published its summer calendar of events; it is currently on our website (joinsaltponds.com or saltpondscoalition.org). We will be hosting multiple salt pond safaris throughout the summer, as well as paddle trips on Quonochontaug and Green Hill Ponds. Our annual meeting will be in August, and our summer fundraiser is in July.

Field Trip Season has come and gone. This year we did field trips for 4 different schools (Orchard Farms Elementary, Chariho Middle, Blackstone Valley Elementary, and Glenn Hills Elementary). Field trips were a success and we had positive feedback from the new schools that we worked with. We couldn't have done these field trips without some amazing volunteers. For all field trips (other than Chariho), this was the first time that SPC coordinated the entire trip and did activities that we have not previously done with other groups.

SPC was able to help Quonnie Project partners Save the Bay and CRMC recruit volunteers for planting days on Quonnie Marsh. Volunteers including Chariho students came out and helped to complete the marsh planting.

www.saltpondscoalition.org

Ten Mile River Watershed Council –No written report submitted.

<http://www.tenmileriver.net/>

Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council – No written report submitted.

<http://www.wpwa.org/>

Blackstone River Watershed Council/Friends of the Blackstone – No written report submitted.

www.blackstoneriver.org/blackstone/

Buckeye Brook Coalition – No written report submitted.

<http://www.buckeyebrook.org/>

Friends of the Moshassuck- No written report submitted.

www.themoshassuck.org

Kickemuit River Council – No written report submitted.

<http://www.kickemuitriver.org/>

Pawtuxet River Authority and Watershed Council –Written report submitted by Chuck Horbert:

We've just submitted our annual reports to each of the five cities and towns that are represented on our Board, along with invoices for their annual contributions. This will replenish funding for the upcoming fiscal year.

After participating in a cleanup with the Town of Coventry earlier in May, we met at one spot on the South Branch, owned by Colbea, that was particularly nasty and still needs attention. We met with both the Town DPW director and a representative from Colbea to agree on a plan of action to better remove trash and better maintain it in the future. We hope to move on this soon.

It came to our attention that the Flat River Reservoir Dam and a large area of adjacent property is up for sale. This is something that bears monitoring.

We participated in the Gaspee Days Parade Saturday, June 8th, and received a lot of cheers and positive feedback from spectators along the route.

More cleanups and property maintenance is in our future.

We have recently appointed a liaison to the Pawtuxet Valley Preservation Society. They have a lot of relics and publications about the rivers in the watershed and have a pretty good newsletter.

We have received a NBEP grant of \$22,500 to fund a feasibility study for fish passage and flood resiliency improvements at the Pontiac Dam in Warwick. We will be obligated for a \$7500 match. We are also exploring with DEM the possibility of using leftover funds from the Pawtuxet Dam removal project to help fund boat ramp improvements at the Rhodes on the Pawtuxet property, which are needed to allow DEM to be able to launch their electrofishing boat into the river to properly assess the success of that fish passage improvement.

We are also going to explore the possibility of arranging a community bike ride along the Washington Secondary Bike Path.

<http://www.pawtuxet.org/>

Ten Mile River Watershed Council - No written report submitted.

<http://www.tenmileriver.net/>

Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association – Written report submitted by Kassi Archambault:

Wild and Scenic Rivers

Wood-Pawcatuck Wild and Scenic Rivers Stewardship Council enjoyed a packed room on their first kick-off meeting on 5/22. All 12 towns made appointments in time. At the 6/26 meeting, the Stewardship Council will go over what Wild and Scenic designation means by law and begin formalizing a charter.

Organizational Development

The WPWA Board of Director's is actively seeking new members. If you have a passion for the watershed and are interested in serving with a focus on Governance and Fundraising, please contact Alan Desbonnet (Pres.) at aland@uri.edu

<http://www.wpwa.org/>

Committee/Legislation Reports: No reports provided.

Chair's Reports:

- The summer meeting still needs to be scheduled. Dr. Berounsky indicated that this would likely be in August, and located at the Ten Mile River Watershed office.
- Keith Gonsalves of the Ten Mile River Watershed Council is hoping to get a group together August 3rd for a "ClearCurrents" event at WaterFire in Providence. This is a paddling event where canoes and kayaks are equipped with lighted fish and paddle up and down the river during WaterFire.
- Attendees were reminded that any announcements of interest to Watershed Councils could be sent to Ernie Panciera for distribution on the ListServe.
- Saturday, July 13, 2019 is the Environmental Day at Narragansett Beach. Volunteers are needed for the RIRC display and table.
- RIRC has been asked to submit a proposal for a legislative grant by Representative Hagen-McEntee. We will use funds, if awarded, to help upgrade our website. Bruce Hooke has been contacted to do this work and provided a good price.

- The Senate Hearing to appoint new members could be happening at any time. After this, we still do have two vacancies.
- Motion made by Ms. Marks, seconded by Mr. Galloway, to provide \$200 towards the cost of the memorial stone for Guy Lefebvre that the Pawtuxet River Authority is obtaining. Additional donations were encouraged.
- It was mentioned that a very interesting display on water-related issues is currently available and open to the public at the State Archives facility. Free parking for 1-2 hours is available with a validated ticket.

Audience Discussion:

- Mr. Zarum mentioned that, due to a lawsuit brought by the Natural Resources Defense Council against the National Marine Fisheries Survey, river herring are under consideration for relisting as endangered. A decision on this is due soon.

Adjournment: A motion was made by Mr. Horbert, seconded by Ms. Eichinger to adjourn. Motion passed, and the meeting adjourned at 5:55 pm.