

Minutes from NH Estuary Restoration Partners organizer meeting on Aug 23, 2007

Present: Peter Wellenberger, Kathy Mills (GBNERR); Beth Lambert (NHCP); Phil Trowbridge (NHEP); Ray Konisky, Mark Zankel (TNC)

I. Review of Focus-Group Meetings

Ray reported on the eelgrass focus group meeting attended by Alan Ammann (NRCS), Dave Burdick (UNH), Eric Derleth (USFWS), Ray Konisky (TNC), Kathy Mills (GBNERR), Fred Short (UNH) and Phil Trowbridge (NHEP) on August 16, 2007. Following a review of habitat extent, health, and threats, the discussion focused on needed recovery of river and Little Bay beds to re-create a habitat corridor for fish. A pilot project that worked on dual tracks of “in-the-watershed” controls for stormwater and nutrients and “in-the-water” restoration activities would demonstrate the capability to reverse degradation trends and serve as the basis for scaling up.

Ray reported on the saltmarsh focus group meeting attended by Alan Ammann (NRCS), Dave Burdick (UNH), Eric Derleth (USFWS), Ray Konisky (TNC), and Kathy Mills (GBNERR) also on August 16, 2007. Following a review of habitat extent, health, and threats, discussion focused on the on-going need for removal of invasive species (i.e., *Phragmites*) and the long-term threat of sea level rise for marshes with landward features that inhibit migration. Project work should also continue to address some of the larger tidal restrictions remaining, and investigate LiDAR as a tool for identifying migration pathways.

Group discussion of partnership goal-setting followed, with agreement that water quality concerns prohibit wide-scale restoration at this time. A pilot watershed-scale approach, however, would demonstrate local capabilities and offer more achievable possibilities. The merits of several smaller Great Bay watersheds as pilot sites were discussed, including the Bellamy and the Oyster Rivers. In terms of restoration habitat goals, targets were articulated but in more generalized terms (i.e., connectivity of eelgrass beds from ocean to bay, and no net loss of saltmarsh habitat). Goals stated in these broad contexts would be useful for initial scoping of the partnership activity plans, with more quantified goals developed later on a project-by-project basis.

II. Partnership Organization and Structure

An initial proposal for partnership functions, structure, and roles was introduced. As discussed, the partnership interests would extend across all New Hampshire estuaries, with broad directives to assess current conditions, engage stakeholders, coordinate ideas and opportunities, fundraise, and develop projects. The partnership should be a formal entity with an agreement, such as an MOA, underscoring partner commitment even though fiscal considerations were not expected. To start, a consensus set of bylaws might be adequate for initial participation.

The partnership would operate on two tiers, with a larger General Assembly and a smaller Steering Committee. The Steering Committee would consist of representatives from ten lead organizations and be responsible for operations and decisions of the partnership. TNC has offered support for a coordinator position in recognition of the substantial roles of the Steering Committee and the need to meet at least quarterly.

The larger body, as a General Assembly, would be more informal and open to all stakeholders, interested parties, and strategic partners (i.e., Army Corp of Engineers, EPA, etc.). The General Assembly would likely convene only once a year for an annual meeting.

General consensus around these guiding principles for partnership organization will help us move forward with formation of an initial Steering Committee.

III. New Business

A fine-scale habitat mapping and classification initiative was being considered for NERR lands in the Great Bay estuary. This information would be valuable for baseline understanding and measures of habitat extent in the system.

IV. Next Steps

1. Representatives were identified for the following 10 agencies for initial formation of the partnership: GBNERR, NH Coastal Program, NH Estuaries Program, NH DES, NHFG, NOAA, TNC, USDA/NRCS, UNH, USFWS. Ray will contact representatives and coordinate an initial meeting on either Sep 27, 28, or Oct 1.
2. Phil will forward NHEP bylaws to the group for review.
3. Ray will continue to meet with focus-groups for diadromous fish (Aug 27) and oysters (Sep 6) and report results to all.