

**NH Estuary Restoration Partners organizational meeting
November 28, 2007**

Participants

Peter Wellenberger, Kathy Mills (GBNERR); Kevin Lucey (NHCP); Jennifer Hunter (NHEP); Ray Konisky (TNC); Dave Burdick (UNH); Susan Hoey (USDA NRCS); Eric Derleth (USFWS); Eric Hutchins (NOAA); Cheri Patterson (NHFG)

Agenda

1:30 Welcome and Introductions

1:40 Partnership Agreement, Charter, and Process (J Hunter, R Konisky)

3:00 Adjourn

Minutes

Ray welcomed all and expressed thanks for everyone's willingness to participate in the organizational process. In particular, it was appreciated that Susan Hoey, Cheri Patterson, and Eric Hutchins were all back representing their respective agencies for this important meeting.

Partnership Organization and Structure Discussion

Prior to the meeting, J Hunter, M. Zankel, and R Konisky (TNC) developed a draft Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) following examples provided by partner agencies. TNC legal counsel was also consulted for a cursory review. The resulting draft was distributed to partners about a week before the meeting.

J Hunter led the meeting with a discussion of process and timeline. Feedback will be solicited at this meeting and incorporated into a second draft to be distributed by email on December 7th. All partners will be asked to then forward the second draft to their respective authorities for specific feedback. It was requested that comments be returned by January 11, including identification of the signatory person. This timeline would allow us to turnaround a third draft by January 25th and possibly have a final MOU ready for signatures around February 29.

E Hutchins expressed concern about NOAA's ability to meet this timeline, but offered to immediately investigate experiences with other MOUs (noting Mass Wetlands) and to get the process started as soon as we were ready. E Derleth asked about the possibility and need for a signing ceremony; E Hutchins noted that it might be very advantageous for public relations purposes and we should try to set this up.

E Derleth noted that agencies such as USFWS had more than one program with a vested interest in NH coastal restoration, and questioned if the partnership could accommodate multiple voting partners from a single agency. After some discussion, it appeared that this situation might be more relevant to USFWS than others, but that the partnership should be able to accommodate these multiple program representatives. The focus should be on a more inclusive partnership.

P Wellenberger expressed difficulties at NHFG with current budget uncertainty and the pending director transition. As a result, NHFG (including the GBNERR) would not be signing into the partnership at this time but would revisit the issue following transition to the new director in April. Along with C Patterson and K Mills, continued NHFG and GBNERR support was offered for the partnership at a participatory (non-voting) level.

S Hoey explained how the partner MOU would be useful for NRCS for regional estuarine restoration priorities and funding allocations. E Derleth further indicated that an MOU would have value as leverage for continued USFWS programmatic support in NH estuaries, even if no funds were flowing directly into the partnership.

E Hutchins cautioned that commitment of staff time to the partnership might be equated to direct funding support and this might be viewed questionably at NOAA. S Hoey thought that the partnership would be helpful to maintain and even add to the current funding stream for seacoast work.

E Hutchins questioned the proposed structure of the partnership with two tiers of committees for steering and general assembly. This structure might not be necessary if we are flexible enough to accept new partners asking to get in, and it would result in a more streamlined, inclusive partnership. J Hunter pointed out that the proposed language would allow the addition of up to three new community-based members only, but E Hutchins and E Derleth suggested that we should be encouraging many other interested parties to participate. K Lucey supported the notion of many general participants, whether as partners or as a general assembly. After continued discussion, R Konisky suggested that a streamlined approach would be for signatories (partners) to simply allow any new partners in if deemed mutually beneficial.

E Hutchins asked about the need for a specified decision-making process in the MOU when it was not clear at this point what we might be voting on. E Derleth pointed out that other general MOU agreements that did not specify decision-making were now faced with formalizing the process after the fact. R Konisky noted that, even as there is no funding associated with the partnership, voting would be needed to add new partners and we should therefore keep the decision-making language.

E Derleth identified several specifics that USFWS would likely want to see in an MOU. First, it might be required to have a section to identify authority of agencies to enter the partnership. Second, other MOUs had a specific section to state explicitly that this was a non-monetary agreement. Lastly, the agreement might need to name those partner

representatives as a 'living' appendix to the MOU. J Hunter agreed to incorporate this feedback into the next draft.

E Hutchins was concerned about the communications section that identified the coordinator as the official spokesperson for the partnership. This might trigger an objection for NOAA reviewers since this might create potential conflicts with NOAA official communications.

J Hunter and R Konisky agreed to re-draft the MOU and Charter and redistribute to all via email by December 7th.

Given the importance of the MOU feedback and the extended time allocated at the meeting, there were no other agenda items discussed. A presentation on LIDAR by R Konisky will be done next time. Meeting adjourned at 3:00 pm.

Next Steps and Action Items

1. Any additional comments and feedback on the MOU and Charter should be forwarded to J Hunter and R Konisky as soon as possible.
2. J Hunter and R Konisky will re-draft and date a second release of the MOU and Charter for distribution on December 7th.
3. Following the December 7 release, partners will be asked to circulate the second release to agency authorities for comments, required language, and to identify signatories. We are asking for this information by January 11th.
4. A January meeting date will be set via email following progress associated with the MOU process.