

Partnership to Restore New Hampshire's Estuaries Meeting Minutes for 4/10/08

Attendees:

Ray Konisky, Mark Zankel (TNC), Sally Soule (NHDES), Jennifer Hunter, Derek Sowers (NHEP), Dave Burdick (JEL/UNH), Cheri Patterson (NHFG), Eric Derleth, Jed Brown, Tim Roettiger (USFWS), Kevin Lucey (NHCP)

Minutes:

I. MOU Update:

Considerable recent progress was reported on the MOU legal review, with USFWS and USDA-NCRS having submitted their requested language. Ray is working with UNH on a resolution to the question of an indemnification clause that is problematic to several partners. Once this issue is addressed, and after we hear from NHDES, a 'final draft' version of the MOU will be prepared by Ray and distributed to all. Partners will work toward a possible signing in June. Kevin noted that NHCP is having a signing ceremony for the invasive plant partnership, and we can see how well that works before deciding on the best approach for our partners.

II. Restoration Pilot Project Discussion:

Derek led a discussion continuing from our previous meeting on how the partnership might consider, plan, and initiate a pilot restoration project. The formulation of a multi-partner restoration pilot proposal has been clearly identified as a top priority for the team. Derek provided a sample matrix that identified about twenty sub-watershed estuarine sites in the state, and offered a set of assessment criteria that included categories for 1) historic habitat capacity, 2) current protection, 3) potential for stressor controls, 4) self-sustaining capacity, 5) logistical access, 6) existing baseline data, and 7) community visibility and support. Discussion followed.

Jed noted that the pilot should focus on multi-benefits, and Mark furthered that we need to organize our approach to help assess these multiple benefits. Dave thought this might be framed best as "risks and opportunities", and Cheri gave examples of how costs can become prohibitive and add substantially to overall risk.

Mark offered that we might combine categories into a two-tiered assessment of site-specific and project-specific factors. Eric cast this discussion more in the framework of 'do-ability', noting that projects must go through a process of feasibility, design, permitting, construction, and monitoring. We need to have a reasonable understanding of the complexity of a potential project before selection. Mark thought we might use an expanded assessment approach to address complexity issues through a ranking process.

Cheri pointed out that all of these sites are impacted, and that any pilot project would only address one or two of the more obvious problems as part of a bigger solution for watershed improvements. Eric and Mark agreed to the broader vision, but noted that we should assess areas in the context of what it would take to "fix" one or more problems.

Sally explained how NH DES must formally identify sites first as having impairment problems before on-the ground construction activities are begun for improvements.

Ray noted that we will quickly get into a question of scale in proposing potential solutions. Eric pointed out that, since water quality impairment is largely a function of cumulative impacts, we would need to carefully strike a balance between watershed-scale and creek-scale efforts to achieve measureable improvements. Further, some projects may not be suitable for pilots, especially those associated with dam removal, since they are very long-term, involve many trust resources, and require substantial outreach. Cheri gave the example of Taylor River, and noted that an important contribution of the partners would be to provide support during public meetings.

Dave spoke to the value of good maps associated with each of the potential sites, based at least partially on the restoration compendium findings. Mark expanded on the level of detail that might be best for each site, and proposed that, together with a map, each site should have a 1-2 page narrative that describes 1) potential restoration actions, 2) background location information, 3) monitoring datasets available, and 4) recognition in conservation planning documents and impairment registers. These narratives could then be shared among the partners for specific annotations, for example, to identify baseline studies, reports, and monitoring activities. Derek and Ray agreed to develop narratives and maps for at least some of the sites and distribute to partners before the next meeting.

III. Restoration Funding Roundtable

Ray announced that partners (UNH, TNC and NRCS) had secured a \$25K grant from NH Coastal Program to conduct a design assessment for possible fish passage and salt marsh restoration at Fresh Creek on the Cocheco River. In addition, TNC, UNH, and Sea Grant have a pending proposal to NOAA for investigational shell-planting and community conservation programs for oysters in Great Bay.

Jenn said that NHEP hopes to have \$40K available for partner restoration project funding in FY09-10.

Sally explained that NH DES has about \$800K annually available state-wide for water quality improvements, with about \$200K targeted to the coast. These funds are tightly regulated and must be used on impaired sites and in conjunction with a watershed plan. It appears that Fresh Creek, Varney Creek, and Caines Brook are already recognized as impaired but Sally would check on the entire list.

Eric described a large-scale USFWS granting program for regional work, with about \$1M annually available through a competitive process in the 13-state Northeast US region. This program targets migratory birds and fish, as well as endangered species. In addition, another substantial regional program is aimed at land protection/restoration. He cited local areas receiving past support that include Taylor River, Pickering Brook, Winnicut River, and Bellamy River.

Jed and Tim spoke about the USFWS fish passage program, with \$50-100K available annually in NH, MA, and RI for anadromous fish and community outreach. The NFWF program was also identified as a possible funding source.

Kevin noted the NH Coastal Program annual RFP, with an estimate of about \$30K available for potential project funding.

Dave mentioned the NH Charitable Foundation as a good source of private-capital funding and match support, on the order of \$25K per application.

Mark described the State Aquatic Resource Fund as a new potential pool for future restoration funding in NH.

V. Next Meeting

Thursday, June 5th, 2-4pm at the TNC office on 112 Bay Road, Newmarket