

**Partnership to Restore New Hampshire's Estuaries
Meeting Minutes for 02/18/09**

Attendees:

Ray Konisky (TNC), Sally Soule (NHDES), Derek Sowers (PREP), Dave Burdick (JEL/UNH), Gregg Moore (JEL/UNH), Eric Derleth (USFWS), Tim Roettiger (USFWS), Kevin Lucey (NHCP), Ted Diers (NHDES), Peter Wellenberger (GBNERR), Brooke Smart (USDA/NRCS), Frank Richardson (NHDES); Call-in Participants: Eric Hutchins (NOAA), Mark Zankel (TNC)

Minutes:

I. MOU Update and Signing:

Ray K described the progress with the MOU agreement since the last meeting. Eric H reports that the NOAA Restoration Center has completed the legal review and is preparing to sign following correction of minor edits. Ray K asked all the other partners to also secure their readiness to sign. Peter W said that NH Fish and Game appears willing to sign if the state Attorney General's office approves the language. Eric D noted that Graham Taylor from the Parker River/Great Bay Refuge is also interested to join as a partner, and that he would follow-up to identify all USFWS signatories and contacts. Other partners indicated that legal review was complete. The following action items are therefore requested prior to Ray K preparing a final signature-ready document:

- Eric H will send in minor typographical edits (**rec'd**)
- Eric D will confirm the Refuge's interest and identify USFWS contacts
- Peter W will confirm the signatory agent and contacts for NH Fish & Game
- Ted D will advance the MOU to the state Attorney General for review
- Brooke S will check on any issues and confirm contacts for NRCS
- All others will confirm their readiness, signatory agents and contacts

Partners discussed the opportunity of a signing ceremony to highlight the work of the partners. Ideas were shared about the potential timing and location of an event. Ray K said that we should know by mid-April about any large-scale restoration grant submissions for stimulus funds, and this might factor into our plans. All agreed that a signing event in conjunction with a gathering of partners and/or an on-the-ground restoration project work would be ideal. We brainstormed about possible opportunities: Eric H spoke about the Winnicut dam removal project; Eric D asked about the Oyster River shellfish restoration site; Dave B mentioned the Awcomin Marsh restoration project; and Peter W spoke about National Estuaries Day on Sept 26th with NOAA. Derek S described plans for the 2009 State of The Estuaries conference on October 16-18 in Somersworth or UNH, and, upon discussion, all recognized that this venue added obvious synergy to the overall intent and focus of the partnership. Ted D and Kevin L shared their experience with the Coastal Invasive partnership, and reminded all that six-months of lead time is needed for a well-coordinated and attended event. Mark Z and Eric H further endorsed the idea of leveraging State of the Estuaries as an appropriate

target. Ray K concluded the discussion by asking everyone to consider options between now and our next meeting in late April, and to be prepared to advance a plan at that time.

II. Stimulus Bill Opportunity for Priority Projects

Eric H and Eric D both shared basic information about the increased restoration funding as part of the recently-signed stimulus bill. Project funding will be a competitive process, with no firm match requirements, but also with substantial costs/objectives and accelerated implementation timelines. Eric H expected the NOAA RFP to be on the street by March with a 30-day turnaround for submissions. Eric D explained that the USFWS funding process would likely have an expanded timeframe.

Partners shared ideas for NH estuarine projects that might be considered. Ray K described a possible estuary-scale expansion of the Oyster River shellfish restoration project. Derek S offered the idea of a consolidated culvert-replacement package that would fix problem culverts already identified in the Oyster, Winnicut, and Exeter watersheds. Ted D noted that his office has been soliciting similar project requests from around the seacoast, but only those projects with local buy-in and design/permitting progress would be fast-tracked. Mark Z suggested that TNC could provide a stream network analysis to target culvert replacements that maximize fish habitat re-connectivity. Derek S inquired about “no-regret” fish ladder opportunities that might also be considered, such as the Reservoir Dam on the Oyster River and possibly Fresh Creek on the Cocheco River. For Fresh Creek, Gregg M and others believe that culvert replacement is the goal for improved upstream water quality, but logistics are difficult. Dave B described a multi-faceted restoration project at Hodgson’s Brook in Portsmouth that would daylight the tidal portions of the stream, improve local stormwater controls, remove invasive plants and fill, and address brownfield contaminants. He also noted that Great Bog in Portsmouth remains a possibility for extensive invasive controls. Ted D concluded by observing that even if worthwhile projects are not stimulus-ready, the reduction of projects in the pipeline is good news for future restoration funding.

III. Dam Removal

Derek S reported that the Wiswall Dam fish passage project on the Lamprey River was in review through the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Comments may be due to NRCS as soon as February 27th, but the process appears focused on a fishway and may not be fully considering dam removal as an alternative. He offered to send a brief summary of the situation to partners for rapid turnaround of support letters. The possibility of a partnership letter was also discussed as a future capability under the executed MOU. Mark Z suggested that we should think about current dam removal opportunities as test cases for partnership endorsement of important projects.

Derek S and others described a recent pre-meeting ahead of a March 4 public hearing in Durham regarding the need for repair/removal of the Mill Pond Dam on the Oyster River. Again, vocal support of partners is needed to ensure that removal is fully vetted as an alternative and that ecological costs of the structure are being considered.

Ray K noted that Cheri Patterson at NH Fish and Game strongly encourages all partners to individually submit letters and to show vocal support for these projects.

IV. Salt Marsh Restoration Projects

Kevin L and Brooke S led the discussion about two projects in the seacoast area. The southwest section of Awcomin Marsh in Rye contains a large berm and fill area from dredge-spoil deposits. Previous excavation and planting efforts at Awcomin have returned tidal hydrology to much of the marsh, and work now is being done for the remaining impacted area. The project includes excavation, re-grading, and planting to restore tidal connectivity and marsh habitat. Work is on-going and expected to continue through April.

Little River Marsh in North Hampton is another large restoration site that requires further reconnection of tidal hydrology. The northwest section of the marsh complex remains disconnected from regular tidal flows and lacks full function as a healthy salt marsh. Project activities will include restoration of tidal flows through excavation of an expanded tidal creek system. This project is now in permitting and planned for later in 2009.

V. Next Meeting: April 30, 2009 2-4pm