

Lake Champlain Basin Program

Steering Committee Meeting

Wednesday, July 25, 2007

Grand Isle Lake House, Grand Isle, VT

Final Minutes

Members: John Sayles, Betsy Lowe, Daniel Leblanc, Randy Beach, Jason Shea, David Lane, Gina Campoli, Mario Delvicario, Larry Forcier, Ron Jackson, John Krueger, Pierre Leduc, Erik Beck, Bob Reinhardt, Mary Watzin

Staff: Bill, Jim, Colleen, Nicole, Molly, Kathy, Michaela Stickney, Mario Paula, Beth Card

Others Present: Bob Paquin, Kim Locke, Ethan Ready, Rich Wagner, Jenifer Thalhauser, Steve Mahoney, Seth Ausubel, Julie Moore

10:00 AM The meeting began with a welcome from John Sayles, Chair, designee for VT Agency of Natural Resources Secretary George Crombie. John Sayles also introduced NYS Department of Environmental Conservation Regional Director Betsy Lowe, designee for Commissioner Pete Grannis. Members and others present were introduced. Bev Watson, manager of the Grand Isle Lake House, gave a summary of the history of the Lake House since its construction in 1903. The Steering Committee approved the draft meeting agenda.

Action Item: *Ron moved to accept the draft minutes of the April 25, 2007 Steering Committee meeting, amended to reflect the participation of Sea Grant among the partners producing the 'Don't P on your Lawn' campaign. Mario seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous approval.*

Public Comments - None

Brief News from the Regions

Vermont - John Sayles described the restructuring of the Agency of Natural Resources from a three-department organization to a group of activity centers that will typically draw upon staff from more than one department. While the department identities will be retained, a more holistic teamwork is intended in addressing the agency mandate. Fourteen new Centers are being planned by task forces drawn from throughout the three departments. Julie Moore described the process of development of the Clean & Clear Center workplan to deal with cleanup of the northern part of the lake. This workplan will be presented to the Secretary for review in September. The Agency's perspective is that sustainable agriculture, the recreation economy and environmental quality comprise the highest three agency priorities. John Sayles noted that the Center will have about 10 employees drawn from both ANR and the Agency of Agriculture. John Sayles also reported that the Poultney river lampricide treatment tentatively scheduled for fall, 2007, is in the permitting stage now. Also a plan to treat the Missisquoi River is in development and the agency is working with Quebec concerning impact on the Quebec side of the border. The discovery of *Didymo* in the Connecticut River basin is a new and severe problem.

New York - Betsy introduced herself and briefly described her professional history with NYSDEC and the Wild Center. She has been aware of the LCBP and its role with state, provincial and federal partners since the program began in 1991. Betsy described current environmental challenges faced by New York and her commitment to a close involvement with the Steering Committee. She also described NYS

support for sustainable economy with a \$1 million smart growth initiative program; communities may apply for funds through September, 2007.

Quebec - Daniel reported that on June 4th Prime Minister Jean Charest announced a new \$12 million program for Quebec lakes and rivers, of which about \$1 million will be available for educational and restoration programs in the province. Additionally, about \$10 million in infrastructure developments will be made available for point source improvements in the Lake Champlain watershed. Daniel described a recent review showing that P-loading from point sources has decreased by about 22% (about 9 tons/year) since 1979, but that the load from nonpoint sources is holding steady (despite a small increase in the number of animals in the watershed). Pierre spoke about a new project with federal funding to target intensive farming area near mouth of Pike River close to Missisquoi bay. This is a 2-year program to establish 30- foot buffers along streams throughout the Quebec portion of the Missisquoi watershed. Sediment retention buffers will be established in 600 ditches during next year. The program provides compensation to farmers for taking the extra buffer zone out of production. Already, many farms have hay growing in buffers instead of corn.

US Federal Workgroup - Erik reported on recent Federal Partners Workgroup meetings. He distributed the latest issue of *Federal Actions and Opportunities (2007)*, documenting the specific ways that federal agencies assist in the implementation of *Opportunities for Action*. Federal agency partners have been discussing how they can support the Quadricentennial events of 2009, and are working with LCBP staff to design a legacy project detailing natural resource changes through the 400-year period. The partners wish to ask the Steering Committee to support the development of an LCBP traveling legacy exhibit showing changes due to cultural heritage and changes in land use. Steering Committee members discussed the proposed project and were supportive of including a line for this task in the Phase II EPA budget. They note that federal agencies would be contributing in-kind staff time as well as information, and that the heritage of natural resources and the link to lake water quality would be a feature of the project.

Committee Reports and Updates

Executive Committee- Betsy reported that the main item of business of the last Executive Committee meeting was the Phase 1 budget discussion, which relates to staffing and staff-supported programs. Executive Committee has agreed on a draft Phase I budget for FY2008 to forward to the Steering Committee for approval.

Advisory Committees - Advisory committee reports were circulated as handouts, and committee chairs fielded questions. Additionally, Mary described the new Lake Steward project at four boat launches in NY and VT. Ron spoke of the need for another federal congressional staff at LCBP meetings to discuss infrastructure needs on both sides of the Lake. Pierre noted that the Minister of MDDEP is touring waterbodies affected by bluegreen algae, and will be visiting Missisquoi Bay. John Krueger thanked LCBP staff for a very successful conference on June 13th at St Michael's College, at which 240 stakeholders were able to meet and discuss how to develop quadricentennial programs. Buzz described the Champlain Basin Education Initiative program, which is now in the midst of an 11-day intensive teacher- training and curriculum development program.

US Legislative Update - Bob Paquin gave an update on the current state of appropriations pertaining to Lake Champlain, listing the requested FY 2008 lines. Bob reported that \$2.75 million for EPA is the soft number for LCBP, and ECHO would receive \$750,000. The USGS funding appears to be safe at \$250,000 and NOAA/ research consortium would receive \$250,000. NOAA/Emerging Threats line would receive \$500,000, the Army Corps Lake Champlain initiative \$2,500,000, USDA alternative manure management \$250,000 and cormorant control would receive \$148,000. The Great Lakes Fisheries are slated to receive \$7,000,000 and the IJC/LCBP line is for \$500,000.

A bill scheduled to be voted very soon would authorize the Federal Champlain Quadricentennial Commission's at \$500,000 per year for four years, with a similar amount for the Hudson

Quadracentennial. Although LCBP only controls the EPA funding at this time, Senator Leahy feels that the LCBP has authority on all programs concerning Lake Champlain, and intends to maintain the Basin Program's involvement and lead in these programs. Bob noted the Senator's hope that senate colleagues from NY will be supportive of the Lake Champlain initiatives.

Kim Locke, formerly an LCBP employee, and now working for Sen. Sanders, is working with Ethan Ready to handle environmental issues, replacing Tom Berry. Kim also is the Senator's scheduler. Ethan thanked LCBP staff and everyone involved in the success of the Quad workshop at St. Mike's.

Manager's Report – Bill reported on the preliminary preparations for the Steering Committee's review, at its fall meeting, of the revision of *Opportunities for Action*, to be released in 2009. The plan for the October meeting is to spend one full day determining the scope of that effort.

Bill distributed handouts of a press announcement requesting Letters of Interest for Army Corps of Engineers support under WRDA Section 542. A workshop for interested applicants will be held on Aug 23rd at the LCBP office. A public meeting will be held on August 11th in North Hero, VT, hosted by the VT CAC, working with the LCBP and the North Lake Citizens Advisory Committee. This will be the first of several public meetings we will schedule throughout the Basin for public involvement in the budgetary and plan revision processes.

FY'08 Phase I EPA draft budget

The proposed Phase-I budget includes staff and office operations and a number of staff-driven tasks that need to be done each year. By approving the Phase-I budget in summer, the grant process may be advanced so that when FY'08 funds are made available, EPA is already to issue a new or amended grant. In January, when the FY'08 appropriation is known, the Steering Committee will consider additional projects to be funded in Phase-II of the budgeting. The Phase-I budget considered shows an increase of 5% for staff lines over FY'07 lines (for grade and step increases), and continues staff support through August of 2008, as an austerity measure. The budget narrative shows the task descriptions. New in 2007 is a \$15,000 lease for the LCBP office at the Gordon Center House.

Executive Committee recommendations for the EPA Phase-I budget for FY'08 were discussed by the committee. At the recommendation of partners for New York, the Steering Committee did not continue the NY AG BMP tracking line because the position has not been filled and retains some unspent funding from 2006. If the projected \$2,750,000 in EPA funds is appropriated, the funds remaining for Phase-II will amount to \$1,242,000 for other projects. Phase-I includes Cultural Heritage and Recreation support of \$84K, with the understanding that when adequate funds are appropriated through the National Park Service, some or all of these funds may be released back to other tasks. Mary noted that the draft projections of Phase-II expenditures indicated on the bottom of the Phase-I spreadsheet need further discussion and did not need to be part of the motion to approve Phase-I budget

Action Item: *Randy moved to adopt the proposed Phase-I budget, but not to include funding for the NY Ag BMP task and not including suggested allocations for Phase-II tasks. The motion was seconded by Ron. The motion was passed by unanimous approval.*

Recognition of Partners – At a lunch ceremony, the Steering Committee recognized Tom Berry for his long service to the cause of a cleaner Lake Champlain as a member of Senator Jeffords' staff, and more recently with Senator Sanders. Tom's care for the environmental stewardship of the Lake Champlain Basin and for the cultural heritage of the Champlain Valley was vital in the passage of several legislative actions supporting the LCBP partnership in implementing *Opportunities for Action*. The Steering Committee and staff thanked Tom and offered their congratulations on his new job directing the Lake Champlain programs of The Nature Conservancy.

Emerging Technical and Scientific Issues - Mary distributed a handout summarizing emerging technical and scientific issues and described each. Among the most pressing current issues are

- improved accountability for management programs and information on what they are achieving;
- an effective phosphorus accounting system;
- improved understanding of phosphorus and blue-green algae in the north lake;
- the causes of reduced oxygen levels in the northern Inland Sea.
- moving forward aggressively with a rapid response plan for invasive species.

Mary noted that phosphorus reduction is a highest priority, and we need to get greater results. A related question is: are our expectations realistic? We need to better understand how individual improvements accumulate across space and time. We also need to know the thresholds of change on the farm and at the landscape scale. Decisions about where to place improved practices in the watershed and the sequence of needed actions need to have a systematic basis. While monitoring tells about the past we should use modeling to predict the future. We also need to agree on the desired outcomes and develop our plans to achieve those outcomes. We need to know more about how to share information among partners, and how to modify our management if progress is unacceptable.

TAC has concerns about the implications of policies, such as increased support for biofuels. What does an increase in acreage in corn crops mean to Lake Champlain? What would an increase in agricultural tile drainage mean to Lake Champlain? What real incentives are there to help farmers operate in a more environmentally friendly manner? TAC also registered its concern about the protection of biodiversity, and the increase and spread of VHS. With the increase in fishing derbies, there are changes in the likelihood of introductions of aquatic nuisance species - what are the implications? TAC also is concerned about the biodiversity implications of global climate change, in the context of the Lake: fisheries, algae blooms, nonpoint source loading.

The Steering Committee discussed these emerging issues. John Sayles noted that to deal with emerging issues requires better attention to existing issues. Larry noted the diversity of the Steering Committee and the need to bring these issues before it for the group to discuss as a whole, so that political or academic group working alone don't become the drivers of future policies. John noted that an important part of the approach taken by the Center for Clean and Clear is to not have the focus be who caused the problem, but rather how can we all work to find a solution. Bob Reinhardt noted the need to take into consideration the other issues like governmental perspectives, farmer views, land use changes, and not just the technical approach to the problems. Mary agreed that there is a need to frame the outcomes we want, the state of lake we want, and what is it costing everyone to maintain the negative qualities of the Lake. Where to put funds and what to leave out is a social decision based on the amount of money we have and what we want most to do. We need to make some of those hard decisions when we revise *Opportunities for Action*. Bob Reinhardt noted that LCBP should look at our role of how we can better coordinate the partners as a whole basin, without supporting the duplication of efforts.

Pierre noted that agricultural lands are nonrenewable resources needed for food production, and need to be protected.

October Steering Committee Meeting (Quebec) Agenda Priorities:

The Steering Committee discussed potential agenda priorities, including:

- 1) A review of the status of the State of the Lake and Ecosystem Indicators Scorecard publication to be released in summer 2008. Mary noted that draft materials will be ready for the October meeting showing topics for which we have been able to put information together for the scorecard.
- 2) Updating of *Opportunities for Action* for release July, 2009 – The plan needs to be more updated to be a more effective umbrella plan, including by reference a number of more detailed plans that the states and province use to address priorities such as ANS management, TMDLs and the Heritage Partnership plan that will need to be developed. It should be the focus of a one or two day meeting to discuss what needs to be included and what we need to do to make it happen.

Mary noted that the topical areas in the plan areas will not need to change much, but there are some actions in the present version that we have not done since 1996 when first plan came out. When the plan was revised in 2003 the Steering Committee took out or added some tasks and we now need to really look closer this time around and prioritize the issues better. It would be better to be more specific, get partners to actually commit to do certain work, and to mention what the partners are doing now.

Betsy noted the need to have a good process for stakeholder and public involvement in the revision project. Rich noted that the three Citizen Advisory Committees work with the LCBP to ensure a process of public involvement.

Adjourn: The meeting adjourned at 2:30 pm