

Lake Champlain Basin Program
Steering Committee Meeting
Wednesday, June 29, 2011
ECHO Lake Aquarium & Science Center, Burlington, VT
APPROVED MINUTES

Members: Marilyn Stephenson (for Astor Boozer), Laura DiPietro, Ron Jackson, Buzz Hoerr, John Krueger, Dave Tilton, Bob Kiss, Kip Potter (for Vicky Drew), Betsy Lowe, Erik Beck, Eugene Brickman, Louis Hak, Catherine Brooks, Réal Pelletier, Daniel Leblanc, Justin Johnson (for David Mears) *On phone:* Breck Bowden, Mark Hohengasser, Mike Latham, Mario Paula (for Mario DelVicario) **Staff:** Meg Modley, Emily Bird, Eric Howe, Ryan Mitchell, Martin Mimeault, Beth Card, Fred Dunlap, Colleen Hickey, Bill Howland **Guests:** Phelan Fretz, Wayne Laroche, Dave Borthwick-Leslie, Eric Smeltzer

Meeting Begins: Phelan Fretz, Executive Director of ECHO welcomed everyone. The Leahy Center for Lake Champlain is unique to have active partners in LCBP, ECHO, and UVM's Rubenstein Lab all in the same location. Fundamental to sustaining this is the support from US EPA. There are 22 staff here at ECHO. For ECHO, in addition to the partners meeting here today, LCBP brings its management and monitoring experience - and staff - to run the Resource Room upstairs. The Resource Room is extraordinary and sees 20% of all visitors to the building. This is wonderful for our guests, and also for our teachers, our staff, and the public. We call it the Library of Congress of Lake Champlain! This makes us unique and special. Phelan thanked LCBP for the continuing support in the Resource Room.

Welcome and Introductions: Justin Johnson – Deputy Commissioner for VT DEC, welcomed the group and chaired the meeting. The Committee will review the meeting minutes right after the Manager's Report.

Public Comments & Dialogue: Mr. Laroche commented about Lake Champlain International's interest in removal of the causeway in Malletts Bay. He suggested that removing part of all the causeways might assist reducing the pollution problems in the lake.

Updates from Jurisdictions:

Quebec - Daniel reported that the government of QC has developed a new regulation about atmospheric pollution. The 2010-2011 Missisquoi Bay Action Plan was released last week and included many P reduction tasks. QC spent \$3M in Missisquoi watershed last year in the application of BMPs on farms and also on enforcement of wastewater requirements for residences and commercial treatment facilities. Martin stated that Marc Simoneau managed the monitoring program for the Pike River and found there is a decrease in the phosphorus loading trend. The Missisquoi N., Sutton River, Well, and Rock River all have improved phosphorus load before entering VT waters.

New York – Betsy reported that they have seen some 500-year floods in tributaries on the NY side of the lake. There are a number of bridges that had to be replaced. In general, NYS DEC is

ready for the public for the summer, though there are delayed openings at Ausable State Campground and a few roads are still closed. NYS offered relief from open burning regulations to handle the excess woody debris in the post-flood period. The Federal government has declared 21 counties as federal disaster zones, including areas in the Lake Champlain Basin. The ADK chapter of TNC sent a letter to NYS DEC to request that we examine the flooding in the context of climate change. 2011 is the international year of the forest and NYS DEC is focusing on the value of forests in our watershed.

Vermont - Justin reported that for VT the flooding has been a big issue. VT DEC has a website link to all the flood information assembled through the rivers programs and the Department of Health. We did not add new information, but made existing information more accessible, thinking of the huge educational opportunity. There is a danger of *flood amnesia*, that the lessons from the flood might not be learned. The *E-coli* testing on the lake has returned good results and DOH does not see the need for sampling to continue - the message is that it really is okay to come back and be in the water now. Our ecosystem restoration grants (formerly Clean and Clear) will offer \$2.5M in grants; proposals are due July 15th. Water Chestnut harvesting will begin in the next few weeks.

Federal Partners – Kip reported the group just met on Monday and there was good representation from federal partners. USFWS is gearing up for a landlocked salmon river run restoration project; Secretary Salazar has signed the CVNHP Heritage Area Management Plan. NRCS was awarded \$1M for a strategic action plan initiative to support 8 positions for 3 years in the basin. At the last partners meeting, there was a Lake Champlain flooding discussion led by Bill Howland. The Farm Bureau is supporting flood clean up, and NRCS in both VT and NY are implementing emergency watershed programs. FEMA attended the last partners meeting and has been very active in disaster assistance. FEMA also has started a high water mark project in the basin with USGS to identify high water marks and to assist in future planning and construction.

Updates from Advisory Committees

VT CAC – Buzz reported the VT CAC met in May at Highgate at the Tyler Place to go over action plan highlights. The committee will restart meetings again in a couple of months. Julie Moore was added to the CAC. Buzz reported that last weekend there were 60 people from Rotary club volunteering to clean up the shoreline in Colchester. The first stage of this was difficult. People came forward and donated a lot of time. In Quebec there were 4,000 volunteers to aid in clean up. It is a very remarkable thing that happened. People were helping on private land, not just on public land. There is a great human story and it is about how people responded as the lake fluctuated. The story was far bigger in Quebec. People are hustling to get things done for future flood defense.

NY CAC - Ron reported the NY CAC had a small meeting yesterday; the flood is still the major topic of concern. When repairs go from temporary to permanent the required permitting process can be an obstacle. The CAC is looking for ways to reduce future flood damage and there is a need for increased flood insurance. In South Bay, there are 2 quarter-mile “islands” of marsh

plants floating around - due to shoreline erosion. The CAC is more concerned with the long term effects of the flooding - and sees the need to leave places for the river to flood.

QC CAC - Réal reported on the QC CAC's recent meeting. During the flood cleanup there was a great flood presentation concerning the past 5 years of sediment loads in the lake and what has been done to reduce loading. More online references have been made available to citizens now on the web site. Réal's community built a dike during the flood - saving the treatment plant. No waste was released into the lake. The Union of the farmers in Quebec is working on a strategic plan to improve water quality and irrigation efficiency. This eventually will be a presentation for the Steering Committee. They are going through every aspect of water usage and how to share the water in their community. The farmers are aware of the water quality concerns and would like to help.

TAC - Breck noted some concern about the impact of the flood on the success of an LCBP project to evaluate the littoral habitat, a project that focuses on Malletts Bay but that will be relevant to the whole lake. He also noted the importance of the USGS gage network, which may need significant funding in FY12. The Water Chestnut management program is on track for this year, but funding for FY12 is insecure. TAC had a presentation from Laura Moore & Bud Harris about efforts to develop a P TMDL in Wisconsin.

E&O – Buzz reported that Colleen just presented the last farm award to Ferme Gilles et Sylvie Godin Enr. E&O Committee will meet later in the summer.

HAPAC- John reported that over half of the CHRAC members who moved onto the HAPAC and the new members all were carefully recruited. John circulated the preliminary cut of emerging issues identified by the HAPAC at recent meetings. However, in order to release agenda time today, the specific recommendations of attention in the budget for 2012 will be discussed in the September meeting, when TAC and E&O also report on issues.

Manager's Report – Bill reported that Nicole Grohoski has moved on to work with the Northern Forest Canoe Trail for the summer. We enjoyed her presence in the office, wish her well and hope we cross paths again. We are in the process of hiring an environmental analyst with GIS skills. We are implementing the FY10 task list and we are getting work plans, QAPPs, and contracts approved and executed. The flood has been a major public outreach opportunity. Our next big task will be SOL 2012. We are developing the FY11 budget. We have great news that the EPA will support LCBP with \$3M instead of \$1.44M; the budget is an agenda item later in the day.

State of the Lake 2012 Report Planning - We assume that the Committee wants an additional section on flooding impacts, and are revising the report outline to reflect that.

Action Item: Buzz moved to approve the April 13, 2011 minutes, with a correction that Fred was at the meeting and to include a modification about the update from QC about the Streamside Report and the Phosphorus Report. Ron seconded the motion. The motion was approved by unanimous vote.

ECHO update and brief tour – Phelan Fretz noted the *State of the Lake* is a very valuable document, and ECHO core staff all train and use the document daily. Phelan reviewed the development schedule for ECHO, noting the years of leadership of Buzz and the rest of the Board. ECHO has about 150,000 visitors each year. There also are web opportunities for outreach, including *Voices for the Lake* involving personal stories, writings, drawings, that share people's connection to the lake. Using an LCBP grant, ECHO now provides a *Conservation Correspondent* who develops stories for WPTZ on Thursday nights, complementing the Monday *Champlain Connection* program.

ECHO is now expanding its facility to enclose the entire porch and include it in operational space to develop capacity for 250-seat events. This expansion includes the Discovery Space upstairs, which will be re-themed as a Native American village. The expansion also will create new space for teens and adults, including the Lake Lab and coffee house. A total of \$4M investment will be required, and ECHO is at the \$3.7M mark in fund raising at this point. Phelan took the Committee on a tour of the building.

Asian Clams: Meg provided a powerpoint presentation updating the Committee on the status of the Asian Clam Rapid Response program in Lake George.

2011 Flood Review: Bill provided a powerpoint presentation updating the Committee on the spring 2011 Lake Champlain flood and the initial evidence of impacts.

Daniel noted that more than 3,000 homes have been affected and 1,000 people have been evacuated in the Richelieu River valley. There has been assistance by Canadian Forces and local volunteers. In QC there is a special compensation for those homes most affected, providing up to \$150K. The latest estimate of flood damages is \$100M.

QC wishes to investigate causes of the flood event and how to improve construction, perhaps through zoning, to minimize future damage from flooding. He noted the agreement between NYS, QC and VT, and the Premier's interest in a joint review of the flooding problem by all three jurisdictions. Premier Charest is interested in exploring a joint letter to the two federal governments to refer to the International Joint Commission a detailed review of the causes of flooding and the steps that can be taken by all parties to reduce flooding impact.

Legislative Update: Tom noted that the Basin Program is uniquely positioned to take the lead in a meeting to address Lake Champlain flooding. He also reported that despite the many budgetary trainwrecks of 2011, Senator Leahy has worked to ensure that several key appropriations for Lake Champlain management are relatively well funded, including the Great Lakes Fishery Commission.

LCBP Budget Updates: Bill reviewed the line item allocations of the \$3M EPA allocation for LCBP. The funds to be provided will support most of priority tasks identified by the Committee in January and April.

Committee Appointments:

Action Item: The Committee entered **Executive Session** in order to consider appointments.

The Committee returned to **Open Session** by order of the Chair.

Action Item: Ron moved to appoint Bob Brower to the TAC; Erik seconded the motion. The motion passed by unanimous vote, with Mike Latham abstaining.

Action Item: Dave Tilton moved to adjourn; the motion was seconded by Marilyn Stephenson and passed by unanimous vote.

Justin Johnson thanked everyone for a good meeting.

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