

# Lake Champlain Basin Program Steering Committee Meeting

Wednesday, September 24, 2014  
Valcour Conference Center, Peru, NY

## Approved Minutes

**Members:** Caitlin Lecker (for Rosanne Murphy), Daniel Leblanc, Lynn Hamjian, Renee Rouleau, John Kruger, Tom Berry, Dave Tilton, Bob Stegemann, Mike Winslow, Greg Kist, Julie Moore, Bob Brower, Buzz Hoerr, Vicky Drew, Kari Dolan; *by phone:* Mario Paula, Catherine Brooks.

**Staff:** Jeanne Voorhees, Dennis DeWeese, Meg Modley, Ryan Mitchell, Elizabeth Lee, Colleen Hickey, Stephanie Castle, Eric Howe, Clair Ryan, Bill Howland, Martin Mimeault, Fred Dunlap, Michaela Stickney, Jim Brangan. **Guests:** Therese Lacombe, David Borthwick-Leslie, Phelan Fretz, Tim Mihuc, Ron Jackson

### 10:00 Meeting Begins –*Bob Stegemann, Chair*

- Welcome and Introductions – Bob suggested group photo at lunch
- ***ACTION ITEM:*** Mike moved to approve the June, 2014 meeting minutes, motion was seconded by John. Two edits were made; the motion to approve corrected minutes passed with unanimous approval.

**Public Comments** – there were no public comments

### Brief Updates

- **Quebec** – Last June QC adopted a modification of regulations on water quality, with two changes: 1) each municipality is required to identify and evaluate risks and potential sources of pollution and establish restoration plans, and 2) municipalities must evaluate the potential effects of drilling on water quality, based on hydrological studies. The new regulations are on the ministry website. Also, the US and Canadian Governments have sent a reference to IJC about flood resiliency and the IJC will convene a workgroup. The Canadian government is considering how to contribute to the workgroup. This project will assemble new data on water retention, bathymetry, flood mapping, aquatic vegetation, etc.
- **New York** – Governor Cuomo signed the Community Risk and Resiliency Act for climate change infrastructure. He also signed the *Clean, Drain, Dry* legislation pertaining to all boats and equipment at all launches in the state. New York has identified regulated species that are illegal to possess, transport, introduce, or sell, etc. This will also help in AIS spread prevention. Improvements of \$6.3M to Lake George beaches and boat launch areas is under way, using porous pavement to reduce stormwater runoff; one improvement includes a new a boat wash station installed.
- **Vermont** – Vermont is engaged in the LC TMDL revision process and is meeting with stakeholders to raise awareness of the developing TMDL. The state is about to release a second round of Ecosystem Restoration grants and anticipates 3 rounds in the coming fiscal year. State leaders are seeking additional federal assistance for Lake Champlain basin water quality clean up. Vermont hopes to participate in a joint proposal for RCPP program – a 5-year \$20M proposal to assist in agricultural runoff management. Secretary Vilsack announced an initiative with NRCS for \$46M in assistance to support agricultural runoff in Lake Champlain. Agency of Agriculture Secretary Chuck Ross recently announced targeted resources toward St. Albans Bay and assignment of

additional field staff for inspections in Franklin County. VT has been finding discharges from some larger farms and fines issued to date amount to \$73K.

- **Federal Partners** – Jeanne and Lynn reviewed the VT TMDL development progress – they have been meeting weekly with VTDEC and internally. EPA will soon start an independent review of all the TMDL models prepared by contractors, and aims to be finished in the end of October. EPA then plans a response to the state of VT by mid-November, and public meetings in December. There will be another round of public meetings in February, after the final TMDL has been issued. Bill noted that LCBP has agreed to facilitate and coordinate those meetings.
  - Ryan has been working on the video to highlight the work that the federal partners do to improve water quality, the lake ecosystem and habitat, in the Champlain Basin. He has new footage of USGS work in the Ausable River and NRCS and USFWS work on wetland restoration in Leicester, VT.
  - EPA will be taking comments on the new definition of public waters until October 20<sup>th</sup>.
  - Lynn will take another EPA position soon, and Johanna will likely take over Lynn’s work with the LCBP.
  - Tom noted that a significant Lake Champlain event is scheduled for October 10<sup>th</sup> when Sen. Leahy and EPA Administrator McCarthy will convene a meeting to recognize the work of federal partners on Lake Champlain and hope to revitalize and support that partnership. USFWS and VTANR have organized a symposium on the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Endangered Species Act at ECHO on October 23<sup>rd</sup>. There also will be a 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the Wilderness Act put on by the USFS and partners (including LCBP) on the Middlebury College campus at Breadloaf, VT. Secretary Vilsack was in Burlington to announce \$46M for Lake Champlain, primarily for nonpoint source work in VT.
  - Vicky welcomed Greg Kist, the new NRCS state conservationist for NY. Greg described a new NRCS division in NY, called the soil health division. Cornell Cooperative Extension will work with soil health specialists to help get more cover crops and other soil-health practices on the ground.
  - Mario reported that last week EPA Region 2 issued a grant to NYSDEC to fund the EPA portion of the LCBP budget for work to be done in NY.
- **QC CAC** – BGA is a priority topic in Quebec after a difficult summer. Martin will share with LCBP how QC deals with BGA monitoring and reporting, including the sampling and thresholds set.
- **VT CAC** – The CAC set its 2014-2015 meeting schedule and is building an action plan for the annual report to the legislature. The CAC has discussed permits for gravel roads, green infrastructure, and continuing concerns about BGA blooms.
- **NYCAC** – The CAC will meet next week and will be reviewing potential new members. The issue under study is nonpoint source pollution at the sub-watershed level.
- **TAC** – TAC has reviewed and adapted the structured decision making process for budget development criteria. Under the current proposal the Steering Committee will get, for each proposed task, a summary ranking number from the TAC. Lynn noted that TAC recommendations are too important to simply be reported as a rank number, and that more information about TAC’s assessment of tasks should be available. Mike agreed to provide both the ranked list and the criterion scored that lead to the ranking.
- **E&O** – The committee has met a few times, including a mini future-visioning exercise in Plattsburgh that helped new and previous members better understand the issues and get to know each other better. The committee liked the structured decision scoring rubric and will use it in budget development. The CBEI teaching program continues, staff provided 14 programs last week alone, LCBP was represented at field days, the video development for federal partners is under way, the Lake Champlain Atlas revision is well underway, some special purpose interpretive videos have

been put on the LCBP website, interpretive signs redesign and replacement has been ongoing, and the LCBP resource room has been very busy (with a record 418 visitors in one day). There will be an annual LCBP local watershed group workshop on Oct. 19th.

- **HAPAC** – Jim has shared the list of candidate task proposals with organizations throughout the heritage area for input and task development. HAPAC has used the structured decision making process to refine and prioritize the task list to be proposed for FY2015. We have participated in the Plattsburgh bicentennial celebration of the Battle of Plattsburgh, a very important victory in which the Americans changed the military control of the Lake.

### **Legislative Update**

Tom reported that last week US House passed the National Wild and Scenic River bill, and lots of credit goes to Congressman Welch for this success. Now Sen. Sanders and the full delegation will push ahead for Lake Champlain on the appropriations front. We have a CR through December 11th so there will be no shut down within that period. The EPA geographic areas appropriation, where we took a serious hit last year is at \$5M for FY15 in the Senate, but it is not clear how it will come out of the House. GLFC is strong at \$3.5M for Lake Champlain work.

### **Long-term patterns in plankton in Lake Champlain: what do we know after all this monitoring?**

*Dr. Tim Mihuc, SUNY Plattsburgh/Lake Champlain Research Institute*

Dr. Mihuc provided a brief review of the Lake Champlain Long-Term Monitoring Program and some recent results from analyses of data collected through this program, including a brief review of the monitoring for spiny waterflea in Lake Champlain.

### **Manager's Report - Bill**

- Summer BGA blooms were severe in Missisquoi Bay, St. Albans Bay, and the eastern margin of the inland sea (Georgia shore). There has been lots of citizen mobilization in St. Albans to push for increased action to improve water quality.
- LCBP will have a strong Local Grants Program. We were able to redirect some remaining unused project funds and added them to existing EPA funds for small grants. Also, for the past couple of years, NEIWPC indirect has been 12.5%, down from the 18 % that existed when earlier budgets were set. So the difference has resulted in a savings over that past two years, and we have added those funds to the Local Grants category. With budgeted and residual funds together, we will be able to offer about \$650k in awards (for all small grant categories).
- LCBP and NEIWPC have completed an SOP document covering nearly all LCBP operations.
- IJC work on Lake Champlain now is supported by \$650k combined funds from the US and Canada for pulling together topographic data and developing a real time hydrologic model to predict river and lake stage elevation models. IJC issued an RFP for assistance in this task. LCBP applied for the support and received the award; we will have \$50k to facilitate the IJC workgroup that will get this project going.
- Champlain Canal Barrier– LCBP has held \$200k in GLFC funds for several years, intending to provide the nonfederal match for a feasibility study for the Champlain Canal ANS barrier. The NYSCC is now finalizing an agreement with USACE to initiate the program. USACE and NYSCC have agreed on the work plan and we have signed an agreement with NYSCC to transfer the funds to the USACE when the NYSCC and the USACE sign their agreement. NEIWPC has provided creative, prompt and adaptive contracting support for the provision of this match, keeping these painfully long negotiations on track and positive.
- There are many strong vectors for SWF and other AIS to get to Lake Champlain so we can't say that a canal barrier would have prevented them from coming in. We also are anticipating the redirection of the continual flow from the Glens Falls Feeder Canal towards the Hudson drainage.

## LUNCH

The Steering Committee recognized Ron Jackson and presented him with a token of appreciation for his years of very effective participation as Chair of the NY Citizens Advisory Committee.

### **Emerging Issues and Priorities for FY15 – Bill, Eric**

#### *Applying the Structured Decision Making Process – First Steps in the FY15 Process*

(1) From the Structured Decision project and Robin Gregory's work with the SC at meetings in February and June we will take a small part of the SDM method to apply to our budget decision making process this year. Eric reviewed the SDM model and how it applies to the SC budget process. A table

- The SC will decide how many and which criteria to score tasks on. The final result will be the sum of scores for each criterion, resulting in a rank or priority number that – as always - reflects the input of all Steering Committee members. The structure allows the decision to be systematic and transparent, and it provides a clear justification for the final results. The Executive Committee will use the structure set by the Steering Committee, in preparing its recommendations for Steering Committee review and action, on a task-by-task basis.
- TAC went through this exercise and settled on 4 categories. Education and Outreach Committee went through the same exercise with 7 criteria. The Heritage Area Partnership Advisory Committee also went through this process with 5 criteria. Each advisory committee will use these criteria (perhaps with changes) in proposing and ranking tasks later in the fall.
- Eric reviewed a draft structured decision matrix for Steering Committee discussion. Key points:
  - The urgency of the task should be evaluated; if funding is limited can funding be deferred?
  - Scoring on basis of the Steering Committee member's sense of priority is important
  - The suitability of a task for LCBP funding is a key criterion (our federal authorization requires it be consistent with *OFA*). For some tasks that are important, LCBP should not be the funding source, or perhaps should fund only for a short time.
  - The Steering Committee needs to value the advisory committee work in defining and ranking the tasks, while retaining the final authority for the Steering Committee in setting the budget.

(2) The Steering Committee charge is to provide specific guidance to the advisory committees working on the design of tasks for the budget development process. The discussion included:

- The LCBP budget and workplan should, in addition to water quality tasks, include work in other areas of *OFA*, too, such as *AIS*, wildlife habitat conservation, toxic substance management and flood resilience.
- LCBP has a unique ability to design and initiate important tasks that other partners are unable to start, although they might be able to pick up support for those tasks in subsequent years.
- The Steering Committee needs to discuss and reach a clear decision about how many years the LCBP will support a new task (such as the agronomists) before it must be picked up by another partner.
- There is a need for more information on how to prevent the spread of *SWF* to other water bodies in the LC Basin, and where to target boat wash stations.
- The tracking of tasks by many agencies needs to be continued through the Partner Database being initiated with FY2014 funding.
- There is some interest in continuing support for the *BGA* monitoring in the lake.
- We need a better understanding of the effects of P, N, and water temperature on *BGA* blooms.

- There was a strong interest in improving LCBP's virtual meeting capability to include video conferencing
- Tile drainage is still a big issue because the spatial extent of tiling and the nutrient load from tiling remains poorly understood. Adding to that problem, the installation of tile is accelerating in the VT sector of the drainage basin, and has been extensive in the NY and QC sectors for many years.
- Updating the land use/land cover information for the basin is greatly needed; our present information is seriously outdated.
- Agricultural engineering capacity-building is a persistent need in the basin.
- Direct action to lower the P levels in the lake must be a priority, a strong local grants program is a time-tested way to do this. Also, pollution reduction tasks that LCBP does directly should be supported.
- Programs that support green infrastructure at schools should be helpful. Many schools have lots of impervious surface and kids could get involved through rain gardens and other programs to reduce runoff and to increase awareness in the next generation.
- Water chestnut management is very important and we are making progress – so it is really important that the progress continue.
- We need to recognize the high economic cost of aquatic invasive species. This has been made clear in Lake George so if there is a way to keep energy behind these issues then keep it.
- The 2015 budget will need funds for the production, printing and web presentation of *OFA-2016*.

**3:35 Adjourned**