

New York Citizens Advisory Committee (NYCAC) on Lake Champlain's Future

Monday January 31st, 2022
1:00 pm – 3:00 pm

APPROVED MEETING SUMMARY

Committee Members Present: Vic Putman (Chair), Jackie Bowen, James Dawson, Steve Kramer, Walt Lender, Tom Metz, Hannah Neilly, Charlotte Staats, Bill Wellman, Fred Woodward

Committee Members Absent: Jane Gregware, Ricky Laurin

LCBP Staff: Katie Darr, Lauren Jenness, Eric Howe, Cynthia Norman, Meg Modley, Erin Vennie-Vollrath (NYS DEC)

Presenters: Jim Brangan, Mae Kate Campbell, Walt Lender, Erin Vennie-Vollrath

Public Guests: None

Meeting summary by Katie Darr, Lake Champlain Basin Program (LCBP)

1:00 – 1:15 pm

1. **Welcome and Introductions** (5 min) – Vic Putman
2. **Public Comments** (5 min)
3. **ACTION ITEM:** Approve meeting minutes from October 25th NYCAC and November 11th Joint CAC meetings
 - Motion by: Charlotte Staats
 - Seconded by: Fred Woodward
 - Discussion on the motion: None
 - Vote: All in favor
 - Abstentions: None

1:15 – 1:45 pm

4. **Grant Funded Projects Update**– NYS DEC, LCBP Staff, Walt Lender

Governor Hochul recently announced funding awards for state agency programs that participated in Round XI of the Regional Economic Development Council initiative. Erin Vennie-Vollrath provided an **overview of water quality-related projects in the Basin recently funded through DEC grants**. A summary of projects funded in the Basin can be found in the meeting materials. They include:

- [DEC's Water Quality Improvement Projects \(WQIP\)](#) - WQIP grants fund projects including municipal wastewater treatment, non-agricultural nonpoint source abatement, land acquisition for source water protection, salt storage construction, aquatic habitat restoration, and marine habitat restoration. Projects awarded within the Lake Champlain Basin totaled ~\$25.2M.
 - Fred asked if any town could apply and referenced a town struggling with salt storage. Erin noted that various categories of project types have different eligibility requirements. Many towns have received funding for salt storage through the WQIP.

- [DEC's Nonpoint Source Planning and MS4 Mapping Grant](#) - The program aims to get nonpoint source projects ready for construction and to apply for implementation funding; and encourages and supports cooperation among regulated MS4s to complete mapping of their stormwater system. Projects awarded within the Lake Champlain Basin totaled \$105,000.
- [DEC/EFC Wastewater Infrastructure Engineering Planning Grant](#) (EPG) - EPG provides funding to municipalities for engineering and/or consultant fees for engineering and planning services to produce an engineering report for the initial planning of eligible Clean Water State Revolving Fund water quality projects. Projects awarded within the Lake Champlain Basin totaled \$120,000.
- Vic asked what the local match requirements for these grants are. Communities potentially have to borrow a considerable amount of funding to make these projects happen. Erin clarified that each type of grant and project has different match requirements, wastewater treatment improvement projects have a 25% match, salt storage projects have a 50% match requirement.
- Hannah shared that these were all part of the Consolidated Funding Application. Based on the Essex County Office of Community Resources' experience, there appears to be a pattern that if an entity applies for funding for more than 3 projects in one category, at least one project does not get funded. There is a lot of competition between towns for this funding.
- Vic asked about Community Block Grant Funding. Hannah noted that the Community Block Grants are federally funded, and it is supposed to be considered last-resort funding. There is a new requirement that you must have a rejection letter REDC, but REDC is a loan program and does not really reject applicants which makes it more challenging to co-fund projects.

Jim Brangan provided an overview of the **Clean Water Act 50th Anniversary (CWA50) Projects** the Lake Champlain Basin Program staff are developing and projects that have been funded related to the anniversary. LCBP's website has a [dedicated webpage](#) to publicize the anniversary and related events occurring in the basin. You can submit events to add to the calendar of CWA50-related events. Please [register here to be added to the CWA50 Partner Team email distribution list](#) to receive updates and stay connected to the planning, hosting, and celebration of events and activities that commemorate the CWA50. Email Katie kdarr@lcbp.org if you would like a copy of the CWA50 logo.

Eight grants totaling \$135,000 were awarded to mark the anniversary. In the New York side of the basin, these projects include:

- Hubbard Hall Center for the Arts and Education will develop and implement new interpretive signage in the Cambridge Historic District
- The Lake George Historical Association will upgrade and expand its Called by the Water exhibit
- The Center for the Study of Canada at SUNY Plattsburgh will develop a book about the Clean Water Act and the Lake Champlain Basin
- PRIDE of Ticonderoga will improve their interpretive walk on the LaChute River
- Paul Smith's College Adirondack Watershed Institute will engage the public in actions that commemorate the Clean Water Act and honor the natural and cultural heritage of the region, including developing bilingual materials for aquatic invasive species spread prevention, interpretation of water through fiber arts, and a signature event hosted in Lake Placid in August
 - Fred shared that there is an International Antique Boat Show taking place on September 5th, which may be a good outreach event. He will share the contact person with Jim.

The LCBP is still seeking Boat Launch Stewards for the 2022 season to be stationed in the Plattsburgh area or North. This is a paid position. Stewards deliver interpretive invasive species spread prevention messages to boaters on Lake Champlain and inspect and decontaminate vessels as appropriate. **More information on the position and how to apply is available [here](#).**

Bill Wellman shared an update on the Champlain Hudson Power Express proposal to construct a powerline extending from the New York/Canada border to Queens. There is currently a proposal to increase funding to the Hudson River and Lake Champlain Habitat Enhancement, Restoration, and Research/Habitat Improvement Project Trust, which funds environmental protection programs, from \$2.5 million in the first four years between construction and the start of commercial business to \$15 million. Bill encouraged the NYCAC members to **submit public comments to support the proposed increase by February 15th (Case 10-T-0139)**. The notice soliciting comments is included with the meeting materials and can be found [here](#).

- Tom asked where the additional funds would be coming from. Bill shared that the funds are already available to the Champlain Hudson Power Express through Blackstone Partners.
- Meg added that the Champlain Canal Corridor and threat of AIS through the canal corridor is part of that funding source. There will be a submission from LCBP to consider funding the next phase of Champlain Canal Barrier Study and an Aquatic Invasive Species Outreach Specialist focused on outreach along the Champlain Canal Corridor with the increased threat of invasion by round goby through the Champlain Canal system.

Mae Kate Campbell provided an overview of the recently funded **Lake Assessment and Watershed Action Planning for New York Lakes project led by Paul Smith's College Adirondack Watershed Institute (AWI)**, the workplan is included with the meeting materials. This project will collect water quality data on unassessed or under-assessed waterbodies on the N.Y. side of the Lake Champlain Basin and develop watershed action plans for a subset of priority water bodies. There are 194 lakes and ponds on the New York side of the Lake Champlain Basin that are part of the Waterbody Inventory. 148 have not been assessed in the past 20-years, and 30 are unassessed. The project's goal is to increase citizen monitoring on the New York side of Lake Champlain to a total of 52 lakes (27%) and use AWI staff to conduct assessments on an additional 30 lakes, bringing the total number of lakes with recent assessments to 82 (42%). A project advisory committee has been formed and will review different steps of the project, including the prioritization scheme that AWI is planning to use and the Quality Assurance Project Plan (QAPP) outlining the standards for data collection. The assessments will begin this field season and run through the 2023 field season with some additional analysis following the field season. Following data collection and analysis, watershed action plans will be developed for three priority lakes. Once there is more data, this could be an interesting topic for a future meeting. More information on the Lake Champlain Basin Volunteer Monitoring Program can be found [here](#).

Walt Lender shared an overview of the LCBP-funded **Lake George Floating Classroom**, the presentation is available in the meeting materials. The Floating Classroom is an on-water education system that has been operating since the 1990s. In 2010, they purchased a 40-foot catamaran to conduct educational programming for school groups, generally grades 5-7, in the spring and fall. The Floating Classroom typically hosts ~2,200 people during the school year and 500 more through a summer program aimed at families. These numbers have been impacted by Covid-19. In a normal year, they will conduct 90 trips. Last year they conducted 30. They host every school district in the Lake George watershed as well as schools that are willing to travel. Topics include water clarity, food webs, invasive species, and others

with lessons focused on hands-on experiences for students. The school programs are subsidized, there is a fee for the summer programs.

1:45 – 2:00 pm

5. IJC Lake Champlain-Richelieu River Flood Study Update – Mae Kate Campbell, Katie Darr

Seven NYCAC members were able to participate in the joint stakeholder meeting that occurred on January 10th. The Study Board has updated the draft recommendations based on feedback received at the stakeholder meetings, particularly related to watershed storage and wetlands. The Study Board is adding more information to the floodplain management and land use recommendations. These updated recommendations will be posted to the [IJC website](#) soon. They will also be presented at **two upcoming public meetings on February 8th, register [here](#)**. One meeting will be held from 10 am- 12 pm, the other meeting will be held from 7 pm - 9 pm. The presentation will be delivered in both French and English with simultaneous translation available. Following the February 8th meetings, the Study Board will publish its initial version of the final report which will feature key findings and updated recommendations. **A formal public comment period will run from February 8th to March 4th.** The Study is working to get reports published to its website, they can be found [here](#).

- Jackie asked for clarification on the Study's goals and outcomes. Mae Kate clarified that the Study was commissioned at the request of the US and Canadian governments. The study's mandate was to examine different topics around flooding and recommend solutions to avoid or mitigate future damages. The Study results and recommendations will be presented to the governments, it will be their decision whether to act on the recommendations or not. As a by-product of the Study, there have been many advances in science for flood modeling and mapping and the creation of additional resources that may be scientifically useful. After the Study concludes in March, they will look to share these data products with interested organizations. Jackie noted there is a lot of synergy between the Study and the NYS Climate Scoping Plan.

2:00 – 2:20 pm

6. Member Updates

Vic asked if the LCBP grants have been processed. Eric shared that some grants are still being reviewed, once those are awarded LCBP will distribute a press release that lists all of the awarded grants, project titles, and amount of funding received.

The Lake George Park Association had its 2nd highest year for boat inspections with 34,000 boats inspected coming from 555 distinct waterbodies, a record number. Boats are still coming with visible plant matter and invasives are still being removed. Last season was the most robust season for milfoil management with dive crews harvesting 68 tons of milfoil.

LCBP is working on summarizing the LCBP Boat Launch Stewards data. Available highlights include: 11,612 surveys conducted; over 12,000 watercraft inspected; stewards interacted with 26,200 people; increase in decontaminations; 1,600 interceptions of aquatic organisms, with the majority on retrieval from Lake Champlain; 76% of watercraft owners seem to understand some component of the clean drain and dry message

- Vic asked whether the Chinese Mystery Snails were in Lake Champlain yet. Meg shared that they do not appear to be in Lake Champlain yet, they are recognizable once they take over a system.

It tends to fall lower on the priority list as it tends not to interfere with recreational experiences. The USGS [Nonindigenous Aquatic Species tracker](#) is a good resource to learn more. Walt added that populations in Lake George have not exploded and do not appear to have much of an impact.

NYSDEC has a Draft 2020-2022 Clean Water Act Section 303(d) List of Impaired/TMDL Waters for public comment. **The public comment period has been extended and now closes on February 11, 2022.** There are 37 listings in the Lake Champlain Basin. Information on how to submit comments can be found [here](#).

2:20 – 3:00

7. NYCAC Discussion “Where Do We Go from Here?” – Vic Putman, Katie Darr, and Erin Vennie-Vollrath

Katie shared a presentation outlining 2021 NYCAC accomplishments and goals for 2022, the presentation is available in the meeting materials. The Committee discussed additional goals and priorities for the year ahead:

- Strengthen the engagement between NYCAC and LCBP
 - Share [Steering Committee minutes](#), [Technical Advisory Committee minutes](#), and meeting announcements for other LCBP advisory committees
- Host an in-person NYCAC in the Spring and invite Legislative officials to attend (Covid-19 dependent)
- Explore options for a semi-regular column in local newspapers (Lake Champlain weekly, Sun, Adirondack Daily Enterprise)
 - Colleen noted that these papers all receive LCBP press releases, but LCBP has not written dedicated articles for them
- Host a meeting focused on the [NYS Climate Scoping Plan](#) and invite the VTCAC and QCCAC
- Future meeting topics: DEC Draft Watershed Implementation Plan, Stream Wise Program Update in the spring, update on septic system outreach from the Lake George Park Commission
- The Committee was supportive of creating an updated NYCAC Focus document

The NYCAC meets next on **February 28th from 1-3:30 pm** via Microsoft Teams. The meeting will feature a presentation on Round Goby and the Champlain Canal and a discussion about the LCBP’s draft updated management plan, Opportunities for Action (current version [here](#)).