

Vermont Citizens Advisory Committee (VTCAC) on Lake Champlain's Future

May 15th, 2024
5:00 – 7:00 pm

Approved Meeting Summary View Recording [here](#)

Committee Members Present: Denise Smith (Chair), Karina Dailey (Vice-Chair), Sen. Randy Brock, Breck Bowden, Eric Clifford, Wayne Elliot, Bob Fischer, Lori Fisher, Mark Naud, Rep. Carol Ode

Committee Members Absent: Rep. Kari Dolan, Sen. Martine Laroque Gulick, Hilary Solomon

LCBP Staff in Attendance: Sarah Coleman (VTANR), Katie Darr, Eric Howe

Presenters: Gianna Petito (VTANR), Eric Howe (LCBP), Katie Darr (LCBP)

Public Guests: Kent Henderson, Colleen Miller, Andrew Milliken

Meeting summary prepared by Katie Darr, Lake Champlain Basin Program

1. Welcome and Introductions

2. Public Comments

Kent shared he was joining the call to listen in on Gianna's presentation.

3. ACTION ITEM: Review and vote on Draft April 15th meeting summary (5 min) – Denise Smith, Chair

- Motion to approve the meeting summary by: Breck Bowden
- Second by: Wayne Elliot
- Discussion: None
- Abstentions: Denise Smith
- Vote: All in favor

4. Update on the Clean Water Initiative Program – Gianna Petito, Clean Water Initiative Grants Supervisor, Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation

Gianna provided an overview of Vermont's Clean Water Board and budget including a history of the Clean Water Board and Vermont's commitments to clean water, the State FY2025 Clean Water Budget and Board updates, clean water budget line-item highlights, and clean water reporting. Her presentation is available with the meeting materials ([here](#)).

Discussion

- Breck asked how large the contingency reserve is and if it is sufficient. Gianna shared the contingency reserve was recently boosted to \$2.5 million. The goal in the guidelines is to keep the reserve at 10% of the full budget. It's not yet clear if this is sufficient as there has been so much change in the clean water

budget recently and the long-term predictability of the clean water fund is not known. Additionally, since the allowable uses of the funds has expanded, it is not yet clear if this funding is sufficient to cover those additional uses.

- Rep. Ode commented on the risks clean water funding faces and requested that the Clean Water Initiative staff flag when issues arise, so the program's funding is not impacted by requests in other bills. Gianna noted that the program's staff support and the Agency of Administration have discussed providing more clarity to the legislature about what the clean water budget is as proposed by the Clean Water Board. When the Governor integrates the clean water budget, the clean water line items get shuffled into the broader budget. The program is looking for opportunities to highlight the public comment process that informs the clean water budget.
- Wayne asked about how quickly funds need to be spent and if the funds are returned to the clean water budget if they are not spent. Gianna clarified that it depends on the program design and the funding source. For example, ARPA funds have a firm deadline, so the program is encouraging recipients to spend ARPA funds first.
- Breck asked for clarification about projects selected via block grant and those selected via clean water service providers. Gianna shared the water quality formula grants and water enhancement grants are administered by the Clean Water Initiative Program and are mostly designed to be in block grant format. By default, the clean water service providers also operate as a block grant, they work on DEC's behalf to solicit projects. The statute for clean water service providers is specific about how they go about soliciting projects. Breck asked how individual projects are coordinated between those programs. Gianna shared there is a strong need for coordination between those grant programs and beyond, including partners that fund nonregulatory projects. The Clean Water Service Providers meet with DEC monthly and all DEC funding program administrators meet biannually or quarterly. The watershed planning program is a technical advisory to the basin water quality councils and helps identify duplicative projects.

5:30 – 5:45 pm

5. Lake Champlain Basin Program Updates – Eric Howe, Director, Lake Champlain Basin Program

Eric provided an update on the LCBP FY24 budget that was approved at the April Steering Committee meeting. The total FY24 budget is ~\$35Million, which is approximately level funding from FY23. He reviewed the key functions, programmatic budget, and proposed new tasks including three new staff positions, research symposium, pre- and post- flood response sampling, and metrics reporting. His presentation is available with the meeting materials ([here](#)).

He shared some highlights of the program budgets:

- Champlain Valley National Heritage Partnership: supporting grants to interpret and commemorate the semisecular centennial of the American Revolution.
- Clean Water: \$1.5M for clean water implementation, \$1M for research related projects, \$8M for Vermont TMDL funding (\$4M for Green School Initiative, \$2M for Wetland Acquisition, \$2M for enhanced agriculture implementation program)
- Healthy Ecosystems: \$1M for research related projects, LCBP is supporting year 2 of an AIS position within DEC (LCBP has agreed to fund the position for 3 years but beyond that it will be the responsibility

of the State to continue), \$7M through BIL funding to support aquatic organism passage, land acquisition, tree nursery conservation planting, and aquatic invasive species management

- Thriving Communities: \$3M primarily for organizational support, communities with disadvantages liaison grant program
- Informed & Involved Public: \$1.3M for outreach grants, artist-in-residence program, streamwise and lakewise landowner outreach, second round of public awareness survey

The next State of the Lake report will be released on June 5th. A release event will be held at the LCBP Office in Grand Isle at 11 am. RSVP at <https://form.jotform.com/241376749524162>.

Discussion

- Breck asked about the metrics position and how that will coordinate with the State's effort to quantify phosphorus reduction so two different estimates are not generated. Eric shared LCBP has started conversations with VTDEC about this to make sure reporting is done in a way that does not double count efforts and allows each funding source to take credit for the work they are supporting.

5:45 – 6:25 pm

6. Celebrating the *Biosphere in Your Backyard* in 2024 – Katie Darr, CAC & CABN Coordinator, Lake Champlain Basin Program

Katie provided an update on the work of the Champlain-Adirondack Biosphere Network and the plans to celebrate its 35th anniversary in 2024. Her presentation is available with the meeting materials ([here](#)). CABN recently hosted Meriem Boumarane, Chief of the Section on MAB Research and Policy: Ecology and Biodiversity at the UNESCO Paris Office. During her visit, initial discussions about the potential to expand the bounds of the biosphere region to include the Quebec portion of the Lake Champlain watershed started with US and Canadian partners. Katie and CABN Co-chair, Dr. Kelly Cerialo will represent CABN at EuroMAB, the biennial conference of European and North American Biosphere Reserves, the first week of June. CABN has funds through the Champlain Valley National Heritage Partnership to support two emerging leaders workshop series in the fall to support skill building and professional development of youth in the biosphere region. These workshops will be co-created with students and young professionals in the biosphere region.

Discussion

- Several committee members complimented Katie's work on CABN.
- Lori provided some additional historical context about the development of the biosphere region. She was part of the lobbying contingent to advance the application. At the time of the proposal, there were very few population biosphere regions. A lot of the impetus for applying for the biosphere region status was to seek more coordinated agency and partner efforts for Lake Champlain. One of the reasons it ended up not having as much prominence is because the Lake Champlain Basin Program was created and provided a greater platform with funding for the effort to zero in on coordination and management across the basin.

6:25 – 6:50 pm

7. June Retreat Planning – Denise Smith, Chair

The committee discussed potential agenda items for the June 13th retreat.

- Members were supportive of a legislative wrap up discussion to start the meeting to review the substantive actions toward each of the action plan priorities from the legislative session.
- Lori suggested a road salt/chloride presentation follow up from Matt Vaughan and Mae Kate Campbell. She also commented on the importance of working with partners to advertise the Action Plan release well in advance.
- Breck recommended the research priority discussion take place later in the day as that may be informed by the legislative presentations. Committee members were supportive of this approach.
- Wayne suggested a potential action plan/presentation topic related to municipal wastewater facilities and septic and sludge management now that beneficial reuse has ended. There are water quality effects associated with this issue. Bob and Breck seconded that this was an important topic.
- Breck commented on the intersection between the push around housing, wastewater treatment facility capacity, and stormwater management. Is there additional research needed to explore this capacity and the potential impacts?
 - Wayne added that related to the concerns around new construction, there is great concern about hardscapes and impervious areas.
 - Sen. Brock added that a bill was passed this session that was a combination housing and Act 250 bill. He encouraged the committee to look at that.

6:50 – 7:00 pm

8. Meeting Wrap-Up Discussion

The committee meets next for the annual retreat on June 13th from 9am – 3pm at the Gordon Center House (54 West Shore Rd, Grand Isle). In person attendance is preferred, but there will be a remote log-in option via Zoom.