

New York Citizens Advisory Committee (NYCAC) on Lake Champlain Management

**Monday, December 4th, 2023
1:00 pm – 3:00 pm
Zoom**

APPROVED MEETING SUMMARY

Committee Members Present: Walt Lender (Chair), Jackie Bowen, James C. Dawson, Steve Kramer, Tom Metz, Colin Powers, Vic Putman

Committee Members Absent: Ricky Laurin, Jane Gregware, Laura Klaiber, Charlotte Staats, Fred Woodward

LCBP Staff: Mae Kate Campbell, Katie Darr, Colleen Hickey, Meg Modley, Grace Palmer, Erik Reardon (NYSDEC), Matthew Vaughan, Erin Vennie-Vollrath (NYSDEC)

Public Guests: Michele Fafette (EPA R2), Helen Polanco (NYSDEC), Jim Lieberum (Warren County SWCD), Zach Matson (Adirondack Explorer), Anita Deming (BRASS), Elizabeth Lee (Cornell Cooperative Extension)

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

1. Welcome and Introductions – Walt Lender

Walt welcomed attendees and led introductions.

2. Public Comments

No public comments were made.

3. ACTION ITEM: Review and vote on draft October 23rd meeting summary– Walt Lender

- Motion to approve the meeting summary by: Jim Dawson
- Seconded by: Vic Putman
- Discussion on the motion: none.
- Vote: All in favor
- Abstentions: None

4. Adirondack Lakes Alliance Spotlight – Scott Ireland, Executive Director (ALA)

Scott Ireland introduced the Adirondack Lakes Alliance's (ALA) organizational structure, mission, and call for board members and regional directors. His presentation is included with the meeting materials ([here](#)). ALA has six organizational working groups: government relations, membership, partnerships, marketing, fundraising, and events. Each of the 5 regions need 2 regional directors, currently there are 3 total regional directors and there are 7 vacancies for regional directors. The biggest need is in Essex County. Regional directors coordinate communications between member associations and ALA and are expected to hold an annual meeting with members. ALA hosts the annual Adirondack Lakes Alliance Symposium which brings together members and interest groups and shares knowledge and best practices. The next symposium is **August 9, 2024 at Paul Smith's College**.

- Walt alt asked how ALA functions with other lakes associations and other groups around the park. Scott clarified that ALA does not do the on-the-ground work that lake associations do every day. ALA brings lake associations together to share best practices through the symposium and website. ALA also works with the Adirondack Park Invasive Plant Program, Protect the ADKs, the Adirondack Council, and others to bring leaders together to identify shared goals and how they can best work together to achieve the shared vision.
- Walt added that a big value-add of ALA is bringing people together to share issues and information about how to address shared challenges. Scott agreed, the symposium is a great venue to bring together like-minded but not necessarily like-experienced people and continues to grow.
- Walt asked how the CAC can help. Scott shared the CAC can spread the word about ALA and open board positions, come to the symposium and bring people to the symposium. A full board is needed for better communications and execution of goals.
- Jim requested ALA share the invitation for the symposium with CAC members.

5. **Letting Streams Flow Freely: Aquatic Organism Passage in the NY Lake Champlain Basin** – Corrie Miller, AOP Restoration Specialist (LCBP)

Commented [KD1]: For Corrie's review

Corrie Miller provided an overview of why aquatic organism passage (AOP) matters and the work underway to restore it. Her presentation is included with the meeting materials ([here](#)). She also highlighted opportunities for the CAC to engage in AOP work including:

- Talk to local watershed groups or Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD) to understand what they're doing to restore AOP and what they need to do more.
- Talk to road crews to better understand what they're doing. What do they need? Tell them it is important to you.
- Talk to your neighbors- many bad culverts & derelict dams are on private property, there is funding that can help.

Contact Corrie at cmiller@lcbp.org if there is a site of concern or opportunity that might be an appropriate project for implementation funds.

- Tom suggested putting an article in the Press Republican, Sun News, and/or Lake Champlain weekly to increase awareness that there are funds to help improve dams and culverts on private property and who to contact.
- Erik asked if there are other signal species akin to brook trout. Corrie noted landlocked Atlantic salmon is also used as a signal species.
 - Elizabeth added freshwater mussels. Corrie noted some challenges with freshwater mussels. Over the short term, freshwater mussels can be negatively impacted by restoration projects, but there is a longer-term positive impact.
- Walt asked if there are concerns about opening up stream channels to invasive species. Corrie affirmed this is a valid concern. Opening up places to aquatic invasive and nonnative species is something we want to avoid, but we also want to restore habitat for native species. eDNA helps to be aware of what species are above and below a barrier. Thinking about Imperial Mill, the fish ladder may have less potential for spreading AIS than the removal of the dam would.

- Colin asked how human impacts are scored in the grant or if it is solely focused on AOP. Corrie noted the focus is slightly different for competitive grants and the implementation projects. The human benefits (flood resilience, etc.) are co-benefits, but the funding is primarily to support AOP. If a culvert isn't a barrier to AOP then it likely would not rank highlight. However, if it is a moderate barrier to AOP and has those co-benefits, it would likely score well.

6. USGS Streamgaging Network in NY-LCB – Mark Klotz, Hydrologist (USGS)

As a follow-up from the January 2021 NYCAC meeting, Mark provided an update on the status of the USGS streamgaging network in the NY Lake Champlain Basin. His presentation is available with the meeting materials ([here](#)). The USGS Water Science Centers receive a small amount of federal funds and rely on cooperator funds. Cooperators receive the benefit of the data validation and accessibility work of USGS. There are 11 streamflow gages, 4 groundwater wells, 1 precipitation gage, and 1 temperature gauge in the NY Lake Champlain Basin. National Weather Service takes data from gages and applies it to its advanced hydrologic prediction system to estimate flood inundation. Further, streamflow information is key to the successful design of bridges. New York State's Hazard Mitigation plan estimated ~\$130M of loss from flooding, just one hour of advanced notice can save up to 10% in flood damages.

The gage network evolved as a piecemeal approach where a particular party/interest/event caused a gage to be in a particular spot. Across New York, only 40% of watersheds are fully gaged. In the Lake Champlain Basin, only 2 out of 30 watersheds are fully gaged. There are additional opportunities to improve the gage network including rain gages, water-temperature, specific conductance (this would be useful for understanding the impacts of deicing materials), water quality sensors at critical locations, climate indicators, and LSPIV cameras. USGS is in discussion with the NYSDEC Climate Office about what information would be helpful to better understand climate impacts. The LSPIV cameras are being piloted and may be a way to replace some of the in-water equipment. Operation and maintenance of gages is a challenge, capital money is often easier to obtain, but it takes a lot to cover operation and maintenance over the long term.

The gage network is in place, but not providing a full picture of what is happening in the NY side of the basin. There are lots of streams without gages and it is hard to get accurate data about pollutants, flood inundation, etc. More gages would allow the National Weather Service to develop stream height prediction and flood inundation mapping. Climate change is making this type of monitoring more necessary.

- Erin asked who typically pays for the operation and maintenance of gages around the state. Mark shared it depends. There are lots of different cooperators, NYSDEC contributes ~\$2.5M/year. DOT, NY Power Authority, and local governments also fund gages.
- Colin shared he consulted the Boquet River gage this morning. He asked about the cost of the gages and sensors, specifically if water temperature, specific conductance, etc. are add-ons to the base-level gage price. Mark confirmed that interpretation was correct. Once a gage is established, the infrastructure is there to connect to satellite, etc. Cost also comes down to the individual siting of a gage, if there is sufficient access to a location and if it is adequate for a gage. It is easier to add to an existing site than to add a new one.
- Colin noted the Boquet gage is only on the mouth of the river, tributaries are not being monitored. By the time floodwaters reach the gage at the mouth, the flood is underway

upstream. The cameras look relatively affordable and if they make accurate flow measurements, they could replace at least one component of data we currently rely on conventional gages for. Mark shared USGS is piloting about 50 cameras right now as back up to existing gages. The goal is to see if we can get those to replace some of the stream gauge equipment. If we can do that, we will likely be able to reduce operation and maintenance costs.

- Walt asked who owns the gages. Mark confirmed USGS owns all of the gages.
- Jackie asked if USGS had received a verbal commitment from the NYSDEC Climate Office to develop this across the North Country of NY? Mark noted they were interested in learning what the possibilities were, there was no commitment made.
- Jim asked how many stations were monitoring Lake Champlain levels. Matt shared there are 4 USGS stations on Lake Champlain: Port Henry, White Hall, Burlington, and the outlet at the Richelieu River.
- Vic noted the Boquet and Ausable Rivers are two of the steepest rivers in the state, their watersheds do not have a lot of gage coverage. As a climate indicator criteria, those two watersheds might provide important information on flood resilience for local communities.
- Zach asked if USGS has lost gage sites due to inability to keep up with operations and maintenance? Mark confirmed that has happened a lot over time. Long-term operation and maintenance becomes difficult as we can't rely on grants that and need a continuous funding stream. USGS and cooperators could do a better job communicating the importance of an individual gage. USGS is trying to have discussions with different entities about ways to reduce costs (like with the cameras). Recently, he spoke with NEIWPC commissioners about gages in New England states, where everyone winds up with a couple less gages/year.
- Walt asked if there is a certain timeframe cooperators commit to. Mark shared they utilize 5-year contracts.
- Zach asked if particular sites are prioritized to maintain because they have such longevity? Mark noted USGS tries not to prioritize that way, in our view every one of the gages is a priority because continuous data is needed to compare over time and run models on.
- Colin asked if BRASS were to come up with a funding stream to install/maintain a gage how would that fit into the network? Mark noted all gages are owned by USGS, but USGS develops an agreement with cooperators about costs to install and maintain. There are some situations where USGS can provide some federal funding (~10% fed funding vs the 90% needed from the collaborator).
- Meg added that LCBP has funded gages in the past.
- Elizabeth noted the data from gages makes excellent teaching material for high school students. Partnerships with schools might support local stewardship of gages.
 - Jackie added they are useful for communicating with policy makers as well.

7. NYCAC Year in Review – Katie Darr, Walt Lender

The committee reviewed its 2023 accomplishments and outlined some goals for 2024, the presentation is available with the meeting materials ([here](#)).

- Jackie asked if anyone has explored a rights of nature designation for Lake Champlain? It is legally complex, but it could be good for the committee to organize a presentation about this to learn more.

- Walt asked for more details. Jackie shared it gives species and natural areas legal rights. If violated people can sue on behalf of those natural systems.
- Elizabeth shared some resources in the chat:
 - <https://www.rightsofrivers.org/>
 - <https://e360.yale.edu/features/should-rivers-have-rights-a-growing-movement-says-its-about-time>
 - <https://rewilding.org/the-north-country-rights-of-rivers-movement/>
- Tom asked if DEC has anything like this in the works.
 - Jackie shared the NYS Bill of Rights was amended for human's rights to clean air and water, but was unsure about DEC.
 - Erin will ask.

8. Updates – Walt Lender, Katie Darr

LCBP

- LCBP is hosting an information session on December 13th from 2-4 pm about the US Army Corps of Engineers Watershed Assistance Program (**more information available [here](#)**). The meeting will be held at the LCBP office at 54 West Shore Road, Grand Isle, Vermont. In-person attendance is encouraged, but there will be a virtual log-in available. Please RSVP to Kerry Crowningshield at kcrowningshield@lcbp.org.

AIS

- To date, there have been detections of round goby below lock C1 in the Champlain Canal and above the St. Ours dam, about 1/3 of the way upriver from the confluence between the St. Lawrence and Richelieu Rivers. Sampling is ongoing. There have been recent investigations into grass carp, which are certified for stocking use in NY but are fixed/unable to reproduce. A few carp were seen in the viewfinder in Quebec and after launching an investigation they were unable to find the specimens. To date, only one grass carp has been caught in Lake Champlain by an angler. Analysis is underway to identify the source of that carp. Phase 2 of the Champlain Canal Barrier study is close to execution. Once an all-taxa barrier approach is identified, Congress will be approached for funding. NY Canals is working on interim stop-gap methods beyond the current double flushing and scheduled lock openings.
- Erik added he is continuing to work with different fishing and angling groups in NY State to promote the message of wise use of live bait and following all state regulations, with an emphasis on making sure the angling community can identify round goby and knows not to move/use them as live bait. There was a major bass fishing tournament on Lake Champlain in August, he put out messages about the importance of keeping round goby out of Lake Champlain. It was a great opportunity to reach a constituency with common misconceptions about the impact of round goby. Hoping for an ice fishing season this year to incorporate outreach to those audiences.

Grants

- Award letters for the Clean Water and Healthy Ecosystem grants will be going out shortly. The tree nursery BIL funding was awarded to several projects on the NY side, LCBP can provide a briefing on that once projects begin.
- LCBP's Education and Outreach, Streamwise, Organizational Support, and New York Organizational Support and Workforce Development grant categories are accepting proposals **more details [here](#)** (deadlines vary December 13th – January 5th).

- **SEEKING GRANT REVIEWERS:** If you are interested in serving as an anonymous reviewer for Education and Outreach or Organizational Support grants, please reach out to Katie at kdarr@lcbp.org.

9. Meeting Wrap-up Discussion – Walt Lender, Katie Darr

The next NYCAC meeting is scheduled for **January 22nd from 1-3pm via Zoom**. Stephanie Facchine and Madeline Silecchia (NYSDOH) will provide an update on the Lake Champlain Source Water Protection Plan. LCBP will provide an update on the boat launch steward program. Meg added they are already hiring for next season's stewards, in New York there is need for coverage in Point Au Roche, Wilcox, and Chazy Landing (job description [here](#)).

Walt thanked the presenters and wished everyone a great holiday.