

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

Monday, May 20th, 2024
1:00 – 2:30 pm via Zoom

Approved Meeting Summary

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

Members absent: Jackie Bowen, Jane Gregware, Ricky Laurin, Charlotte Staats, Fred Woodward

Public Guests: Michele Fafette (EPA R2), Aude Lochet, Peter Hagar, Keith Provost

Presenters: Blake Lavia and Tzintun Aguilar-Izzo (Talking Rivers)

LCBP Staff: Katie Darr, Sue Hagar, Elizabeth Lee, Meg Modley

Meeting summary prepared by Katie Darr, Lake Champlain Basin Program

1:00 – 1:15 pm

1. Welcome and Introductions (5 min) – Walt Lender, Chair

2. Public Comments (5 min)

No public comments were made.

3. ACTION ITEM: Review and vote on Draft April 22nd meeting summary (5 min) – Walt Lender, Chair

Motion to approve by: Tom Metz

Seconded by: Jim Dawson

Abstentions: None

Discussion: None

Vote: All in favor, motion carried

1:15 – 2:00 pm

4. Rights of Nature – Blake Lavia and Tzintun Aguilar-Izzo (Talking Rivers)

Blake and Tzintun provided an overview of the rights of nature movement and Talking Rivers' work to protect rivers and watersheds in the North Country. Their presentation is available with the meeting materials ([here](#)).

Discussion

- Walt appreciated the artwork in the presentation and the rights of nature concept. He asked where they are located and if Talking Rivers is a formally organized nonprofit. Tzintun shared they are located in the Potsdam area and Talking Rivers is a formally organized nonprofit. They are going through processes to reflect the rights of nature within the organization's governance structure.
- Jim shared an earlier case about standing that took place between the Sierra Club and the New York City power company, Consolidated Edison (ConEd) in the 1960s. This case established the principle of standing in New York courts. He also shared he was involved in the Mineral King Disneyland Case as a student at UCLA which reaffirmed the principle of standing.
- Walt asked how Talking Rivers' work fits in with government regulators like NYSDEC or APA. Tzintun shared that their work is currently focused on the municipal level. There are efforts across the country that are working on these issues at a state level. Talking Rivers believes that local municipalities should

have some say over their physical environment and New York law allows for that. When it comes to different regulatory practices, more conversations are needed to figure out how rights of nature might work in those cases. More education on the rights of nature is needed to support these conversations.

- Laura asked what it might look like on a practical level to have Lake Champlain as a board member. Tzintzun agreed this was complicated, no other NGO has done this in the states yet. There are examples from the UK and the Netherlands. One individual or a group of individuals can be designated to speak for Lake Champlain and would have a set of clear procedures to follow to ensure they are speaking for the waterbody based on science, traditional ecological knowledge, and all different ways of listening to the ecosystem. It could look like an advisory body that advises the board from an ecological perspective. This has not been done yet in New York State. In Washington, there is a piece of a land parcel that now owns itself.
 - Laura asked how those people would be selected. Scientists can draw different conclusions from the same data. Tzintzun noted a process and criteria would need to be established. It would be a human-driven decision and there is always some degree of bias associated with that. It is a good idea to appoint multiple people to speak for different parts of the ecosystem rather than one person.
- Katie shared the Champlain-Adirondack Biosphere Network is working on two emerging leaders youth workshop series and she will be in touch to learn more about Talking Rivers' youth engagement.

2:00 pm – 2:15 pm

5. NY Resource Room Discussion – Eric Howe, Katie Darr (LCBP)

Eric shared that on March 14th, Congresswoman Stefanik sent a [letter](#) to LCBP and the Great Lakes Fishery Commission urging the establishment of offices near Lake Champlain on the NY side of the lake with a focus on public outreach and educational efforts. This has kicked off a lot of conversation between LCBP, GLFC, Congresswoman Stefanik's staff, and the Executive and Steering Committees. Currently focusing in on the Plattsburgh area and spaces that might receive a lot of foot traffic, as the primary goal is for this to serve as an outreach space/resource room to engage the NY public with Lake Champlain with secondary goals for desk and conference space for staff. GLFC has committed to allocate funding to support this endeavor for at least the first few years including start up costs to sign the lease on the space and fit it with interpretive exhibits. LCBP would contribute staff time through EPA funds. Currently, the ECHO Resource Room is staffed by volunteers and staff from LCBP, but they might explore a model that includes partner presence in the space. Outreach to contacts in Plattsburgh is ongoing, it is expected that in ~1 year from now or a little further that the space will be ready.

Katie added that the Resource Room at ECHO is a space for all ages. There are a variety of books, activities, puzzles, toys, and coloring sheets that highlight the resources, ecosystems, and challenges of the Lake Champlain Basin. There are two microscopes that give visitors the opportunity to take a closer look at local specimens. ECHO hosts 2 live animal tanks in the Resource Room. Geared towards students and adults, there are many research and management resources as well.

Discussion:

- Walt was supportive of this space and noted it seems like a natural expansion of the Lake Champlain Basin Program. He added that several committee members are from the Plattsburgh area and may be able to help find suitable locations. He asked about the VT Resource Room's current audience. Eric was not sure of the breakdown between locals vs out of town visitors, he anticipated that the audience in Plattsburgh would likely be different. The initial plan would be to copy over the current resources and tailor interpretive resources to focus on the State of the Lake and Lake Champlain Basin issues.
- Walt asked if it would make sense to look at existing destination like Fort Ticonderoga or Ausable Chasm, though that would primarily target visitors not locals who have more of a stake in these issues. Eric noted that Fort Ticonderoga was one of the locations they were looking into, as well as other areas

on the NY shoreline. The conversations have centered on Plattsburgh so far as that is where the most people are. There may be other opportunities to reach other parts of the basin with this information.

- Tom commented that the mall might be more flexible. He strongly suggested the mall as opposed to downtown on Margaret Street, there is foot traffic in both areas but with different audiences. The mall has a lot of families with children moving through it, there is a large kids entertainment area. There is also a mall walking group. Eric confirmed that the Champlain Centre Mall is being seriously considered. The mall has been a great partner over the last several years with the World Water Day event. The initial reactions from them are supportive. The team will need to figure out square footage and space needs and ensure the space has the appropriate amenities.
- Jim was also supportive of the mall and mentioned additional location possibilities including the old federal building (now an arts center), potentially the Clinton Community College Campus, Essex County Fair property in Willsboro. Ticonderoga just received a big grant to re-do downtown and might have space there.
- Laura suggested the Oval along the lake, there is a lot of recreation down there and appropriate advertisement could promote foot traffic. Eric confirmed this was another space that was brought up in the brainstorm.
 - Jim added it's a huge space, but it needs a lot of work.
- Pete shared John Ruff, recently retired engineer at the wastewater treatment plant, would be supportive of a meeting facility/public destination at the wastewater treatment plant.
- Tom suggested setting up at some Farmers Markets initially to drum up interest. As the project proceeds and moves into a more year-round operation that interest could follow. He also suggested connecting with Miner Institute.

2:15 – 2:30 pm

6. Updates – Walt Lender, Chair

LCBP

- State of the Lake release will happen on Wednesday, June 5th from 11 – 12:30 at the LCBP office in Grand Isle, VT. RSVPs appreciated <https://form.jotform.com/241376749524162>

Miner Institute

- Hosting a horse show May 25th and 26th.

Other Updates

- Jim attended the Adirondack Research Consortium Conference which included an interesting series of presentations on harmful algal blooms and a showing of Mountain Lake PBS' [Adirondacks for All](#) documentary.

2:50 – 3:00 pm

7. Meeting Wrap Up – Walt Lender, Chair & Katie Darr (LCBP)

The next NYCAC meeting is scheduled for **June 24th from 1-3 pm in person at the Silver Bay YMCA** with an optional pre-meeting lunch for members at 12:30.