



Lake Champlain Steering Committee Meeting

Draft Meeting Summary - June 6, 2024

Lake Champlain Steering Committee: 9:30 AM – 3:30 PM

IN PERSON/HYBRID Teleconference

Location: 455, rang de l'Église Sud Saint-Ignace-de-Stanbridge, QC J0J 1Y0

9:00 AM Arrival, networking

9:30 Teleconference and webinar open

9:45 Meeting begins

- **Introductions.** Nathalie Provost, MELCCFP, Chaired the meeting. She began the meeting with a round of introductions.

Pierre Leduc welcomed everyone to the meeting on behalf of the mayor of Saint-Ignace-de-Stanbridge. He also thanked LCBP for supporting many local projects over the years and brought flowers for Colleen.

- **Approval of minutes from previous meeting**

ACTION ITEM: Approve Meeting summary from April 16-17, 2024 Steering Committee meeting

- Motion By: Buzz Hoerr
- Second by: John Krueger
- Discussion on the motion: none
- Vote: All in favor
- Abstentions: Nathalie Provost (was not present)

10:00 Public Comment - There was no public comment.

10:05 Brief Updates

- **Congresswoman Balint's Office:** Owen congratulated the LCBP team on the State of the Lake release. He shared that the Congresswoman has been working on FY25 appropriations and submitted a letter of recommendation in support of the Lake Champlain Sea Grant. They are working on three projects for wastewater treatment facility updates. They also recently worked on a mental health and community disasters bill which would put mental health resources on the ground following disasters to ensure mental health and infrastructure needs are addressed through FEMA.
- **VTCAC:** Denise shared that the annual CAC retreat is next week. They recruited new members to the committee and are waiting on the governor's approval. They are hoping to release their annual action plan in early fall and hold a public release event in preparation.
- **NYCAC:** Walt shared that the NYCAC are meeting in person this month in Silver Bay. They are looking forward to hearing updates on the Lake George septic inspection program and advancing more outreach for the New York side of the lake.
- **QC CAC:** Pierre shared that OBVBM updated their plan and provided it to the Ministry of the Environment for approval. The plan outlines priorities and includes measurable objectives to measure progress. He noted they are level funded for the 7th year in a row, which can present challenges with maintaining staffing. They just signed a 3-year contract with the Ministry and

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shared that they are coordinating the action plan for phosphorus reduction in Missisquoi Bay. Next week they have the annual general meeting and are holding a celebration for their 25th anniversary. Their boat launch steward began their monitoring season that morning.

- E&O Committee: Buzz shared his excitement about our work and potential new hiring at ECHO.
- Colleen shared they are in the process of hiring to fill in the position that Laura Hollowell vacated upon her retirement last month. She said it was their busy season for outreach and staff are working hard to share Lake and watershed messaging.
- HAPAC: John shared important news that we are approaching the 250th anniversary of Spitfire going to the bottom of Lake Champlain. There was Interest from Congresswoman Stefanik's office in this project, namely suggesting getting the Navy involved. John provided an update on work being done by the Lake Champlain Maritime Museum in preparation of the semiquincentennial.
- TAC: Neil shared that TAC met once since the last the last Steering Committee meeting and have not taken the steps yet to advance recommended projects to workplan stage which will begin in the fall. They learned about ongoing programs, including the RCPP work in coordination with the NRCS, and Fish and Wildlife Service's ongoing work to restore aquatic connectivity on the Saranac River. They also approved core project workplans. The TAC put a lot of advice and work in on the State of the Lake graphics and in the recently released report. Matt Vaughan updated the members about deploying water quality monitoring buoys in Malletts Bay, Missisquoi Bay, and St. Albans Bay. The buoys were deployed over the last 2 weeks and the Lamoille River buoy is being launched next week. He shared that the RFP for Land Conservation and Acquisition is still open and will close in mid-July.
- VT ANR: Julie Moore directed the committee to see her longer written update. She highlighted that S213 was passed. The "Flood Safety Act" will direct development of the state-led river corridor permitting program. About 45,000 parcels around Vermont will be subject to the requirements enacted over the next several years. It includes a significant investment in dam safety, including the creation of a revolving loan fund. The first chloride TMDL in Vermont has been completed for Sunny Side brook in the town of Colchester. It's been submitted to EPA and is awaiting their review. There is ongoing work on Lake Carmi; they decided to continue the aeration system since it has not had the intended outcome. They're working on a feasibility study for alum treatment.
- NYSDEC: Yuan shared that NYSDEC announced their 2024 round of WQ implementation and planning grants. This week is their annual invasive species awareness week to educate the public about risks and ways to prevent their spread.
- Quebec MELCCFP:
 - Jean-Francois provided the fisheries and AIS update for the Ministry. He shared that at the end of May, they received a call from a fisherman who reported seeing grass carp. The field team was able to catch 3 grass carp, but this is the 4th time they've had an incident. Tissue from the carp that were collected was sent for analysis to determine if they were sterile. Efforts are ongoing, including releasing information to the fishing community to raise awareness about this issue. They are working downstream of St. Ours dam as positive eDNA results for grass carp were detected in that region. They are coordinating a visit on June 18th to the St. Ours dam. Copper redhorse assisted reproduction effort is continuing for the 20th year. They completed a project to improve areas for the spiny softshell turtle and will be evaluating project success this year.
 - Nathalie provided a water quality update for MELCCFP, and for extended a bravo to the LCBP team for the State of the Lake release. They are planning for a future meeting to have an overview of QC Ministry policies and practices. They are reviewing the agricultural operations regulation; it has not been reviewed for the last 20 years. She will provide updates on its modernization. After the floods of 2017 and 2019, the

government announced new efforts including a regulation launched in 2022 that has to be implemented by municipalities concerning riparian buffers.

- EPA R1: Mel Cote shared he was retiring at the end of this month. He noted his involvement has been a great experience and he would be watching from afar. He appreciated being at the meeting and the hospitality of the Quebecois. Bryan Dore shared that the deadline for submitting applications to EPA R1 is July 22nd. He suggested everyone to work with their coordinators to ensure workplans are streamlined. MaryJo Feuerbach added that they have some grant updates later in the agenda to touch on.
- EPA R2: Antony thanked LCBP for facilitating an informal site tour, including the Indian Rapids dam and the Otis Brook culvert project. They spoke with representatives of organizations serving disadvantaged communities. Also thanked DEC for helping R2 connect with community contacts.
- NRCS-VT: Travis directed committee members to the report on file. They hired a water quality specialist and that person will serve on the TAC for NRCS (it has been vacant for several years). Joe Bonne is the new staff person.
- USACE: Jennifer said she did not have many updates, aside from that the Winooski River study would likely be authorized in FY25.
- Lake Champlain Sea Grant: Anne said they received new, 4-year omnibus funding and is excited to be transitioning into that 4 year period. They are launching 5 new research projects for that period.
- GLFC: Janelle shared she is a deputy working for Tom Berry this summer and is standing in for him today. She was interested in research projects GLFC is funding and how they complement each other, and possibly understanding and describing research overlap or gaps. She would be reaching out to different research groups to better understand this. She is leading an effort to compile social impact work that GLFC is supporting and would reach out to Committee members to learn more about how LCBP is working in this sector.
- NEIWPCC: Sarita provided updates on contract discussions with the EPA and universities, noting that universities have been hesitant to sign contracts with NEIWPCC due to specific concerns. A new contract template, aligned with those used by other organizations, has been developed and is progressing. She also mentioned that NEIWPCC is conducting a program evaluation of the LCBP, focusing on standard operating procedures (SOPs), fiscal management, and staffing needs. Interviews for the Assistant Scientist position are scheduled, but filling two additional staff positions will be delayed until after the evaluation.

Nathalie expressed surprise at not being informed about the evaluation, emphasizing the importance of transparency, especially for MOU signatories. She requested more clarity on the process and raised concerns about the alignment with the MOU signed by Vermont, New York, and Quebec. Neil said that he was aware of the discussion from this table about prospective additional staff, and the SC took the action to add those positions. The Steering Committee did approve two new administrative staff positions to advance significant new funding. He understands the intention to evaluate processes, but imagined these 2 processes could progress in tandem. Sarita acknowledged the concerns and suggested further discussion in a separate meeting. Denise sought clarification on the planned follow-up to be off-line, to which Sarita explained that separate meetings with Steering Committee members, starting with the chairs, are planned to discuss these matters in more detail. Nathalie said she was surprised at that process, adding that it was not in alignment with the MOU that was signed by Vermont, NY, and QC.

- LCBP: Eric highlighted the release of the *State of the Lake* report, which is now available online at sol.lcbp.org. He expressed pride in the team's efforts and thanked those who participated in the launch event. Media coverage followed, and LCBP is engaging with contacts for further outreach. He noted that summer outreach and boat launch stewards (23)

are active around the lake, covering public boat launches. Eric also attended Great Lakes Day at the Canadian Parliament in May, discussing water quality efforts, and Meg and Jim attended the Great Lakes Fishery Commission (GLFC) annual meeting yesterday, where they noted the similarities between GLFC and LCBP's work. Eric added that a Canadian Parliament member is interested in visiting the Lake Champlain watershed, particularly to learn more about the ECHO center.

11:00 LCBP Guiding Principles review (EPA)

Bryan provided an update on the status of the EPA Program Guidance for the LCBP, and discussed the need to review and update the LCBP Guiding Principles, which serve as a framework for various program management aspects. He emphasized that recent contracting issues, including delays, unclear language, and increased insurance requirements, had been reported by several partners, including Representative Stefanik's office, and were impacting projects like Arrowwood's BIL project. Sarita acknowledged the concerns and noted that some issues were related to communication and workload increases.

Nathalie raised concerns about the high-level nature of the current guidance in relation to the increased workload and capacity needs, which Bryan affirmed. Bryan also discussed feedback from other funding agencies that echoed similar issues, such as SUNY's insurance cost increases and the Long-term Monitoring Program's contract delays. He stressed that gaps in the program's guiding documents were impacting contracts, funding efficiency, and the program's reputation.

Bryan outlined the need for the Steering Committee to address these issues by aligning the Guiding Principles with other documents, such as the MOU and EPA regulations, to clarify roles and responsibilities. He also suggested establishing criteria for new Steering Committee members and leadership roles to improve oversight, as the program's growth requires more structured management.

A discussion followed on Program Evaluation. The EPA plans to conduct an evaluation, and Bryan proposed combining efforts with NEIWPCC's ongoing evaluation. MaryJo from the EPA noted that program evaluations would be conducted every 4-5 years to assess outcomes and processes, while Nathalie suggested combining the evaluations for a more streamlined approach, possibly with the help of a third-party evaluator.

Sarita agreed with the need for evaluation, citing system-level issues such as delays in contracting and the strain on resources due to program growth. She emphasized that reevaluating the flow of work between offices was critical to ensuring timely project execution and suggested that regular communication between EPA, NEIWPCC, and partners would enhance program effectiveness.

During the discussion, Nathalie encouraged concise contributions due to time constraints and invited comments before the next meeting to be tracked. John highlighted a concern about travel restrictions for long-serving members. Pierre suggested refining Guiding Principles and clarifying roles to improve processes. Anne praised LCBP staff and also noted delays in grant funding processes, echoing others' concerns about contracting inefficiencies affecting small grants.

Several members, including Laura, Neil, and MaryJo, emphasized the need for clearer roles and streamlined contracting to handle program growth, with support for forming workgroups to address these issues. There was a consensus on the importance of preserving LCBP's reputation while adapting to increased responsibilities. A project charter to address concerns will be prepared for the next meeting, and Eric will coordinate further discussions.

12:00 PM Lunch Break

1:00 PM LCBP Educator Mini-Grants and Professional Development program update – Table to a future meeting.

1:20 FY2025 Budget process

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- FY2024 Budget update (Eric Howe)

Eric presented the [FY2024 Budget update](#). EPA Section 120 funds were lower than anticipated during the April Steering Committee budget meeting. Eric reduced some staff time, etc. to compensate for the gap. BIL funding was also lower than anticipated so the budget was adjusted to compensate for this reduction.

- There are a few GLFC adjustments that need to be made, including moving funding across five CVNHP projects to GLFC to contract directly with Winooski Valley Park District under an existing agreement. Eric also proposed moving funding for two new UVM research projects to GLFC to contract directly with University of Vermont under an existing agreement they hold with the University. Staff will continue to serve in their typical project officer role for those projects. He noted that \$200,000 has been added for support for the New York-based Resource Room space.
- Eric said that the CVNHP is level-funded for the NPS this year at \$500,000. One of the CVNHP projects proposed in the April Budget meeting was a climate atlas, via SUNY ESF. The professor who was going to do that work is moving on to another university, so the project will not move forward and Eric proposed that the funds set aside for the climate atlas should be redirected to the CABN Biosphere in Your Backyard program and to Conservation and Community grants.
- Neil asked if GLFC funds usually go through NEIWPC. Eric said yes. In this case, they are taking advantage of existing GLFC agreements in place with the contractors, and at a reduced indirect rate the GLFC has with their agreement at UVM.
 - ACTION ITEM: Updated FY2024 budget
 - Motion By: Denise Smith
 - Second by: Walt Lender
 - Discussion on the motion: none
 - Vote: All in favor
 - Abstentions: none

- FY2025 Budget schedule (Eric Howe)

Eric said that the September Steering Committee meeting will be held at Silver Bay, NY, at Silver Bay YMCA. They will review Technical RFPP and E&O RFP priorities for FY2025 at that meeting.

Eric then reviewed the proposed [FY2025 Budget](#) schedule, which closely mirrors the FY2024 budget schedule.

- Clean Water and Healthy Ecosystems research priorities discussion (Matthew Vaughan, Neil Kamman)

Matthew Vaughan and Neil Kamman led a discussion on Clean Water and Healthy Ecosystems research priorities. Matt requested SC members consult with their teams on clean water needs and report back by August 15th to help guide research project priorities. The findings will be synthesized and presented at the September TAC meeting, with recommendations made to the SC.

During the discussion, Pierre raised concerns about legacy sediments in Missisquoi Bay, to which Matt responded that the outreach component would be completed by June. Neil added that while knowledge gaps may be addressed, funding remains the

primary challenge. Denise inquired about sharing project results with the TAC or CAC, and Matt and Neil expressed willingness to present the findings.

Sarah suggested creating a synopsis of ongoing research to prepare for next year's focus, which Matt agreed to do, as done in the previous round. Neil discussed TMDL implementation and the need for comprehensive accounting of clean water efforts in VT and NY. Antony expressed interest in enhancing LCBP's storytelling and reporting, drawing inspiration from the Chesapeake Bay's communication strategy. Neil clarified the possibility of using VT's tools for tracking in Quebec and stressed the importance of aggregating data regardless of funding sources.

2:00 Informational Presentation: OBVBM Action Plan for the Missisquoi Bay Basin: How about turning the tap off? (M. Louis Robert, agr. OBVBM)

M. Robert reviewed typical agricultural practices in the Missisquoi Basin, specifically addressing application of fertilizers. Buzz initiated the discussion by asking why farmers continue to purchase and apply phosphorus (P) when it is not needed. Louis responded that farmers are often influenced by aggressive marketing from fertilizer companies. Pierre noted that the presentation would address this in more detail later.

Nathalie inquired about the term "animal husbandry," which Louis explained as the care and feeding of animals. Buzz then questioned the relationship between unions and P companies, implying potential collusion. Louis acknowledged that historically, there has been close collaboration between unions and industry, driving their own interests in fertilizer and feed markets.

Nathalie also asked about "soft solutions," to which Louis replied that they involve tailoring fertilizer recommendations to the actual needs of crops. Pierre questioned the willingness of agronomists to make these recommendations, and Louis estimated that 150-200 agronomists were involved in developing nutrient plans.

Sarita asked if fertilizer companies could shift to selling other profitable products besides P. Louis agreed but said it is difficult for companies to develop new, effective products. Jean-Francois asked if farmers pay for manure or are paid to supply it. Louis explained that there is rarely an exchange of money, except for chicken manure, which is marketable.

Neil expressed interest in the phosphorus cycle for chicken farms, which Louis explained often operate in excess, with most not growing their own crops. Sarita asked if cooperative application rates were possible, but Louis doubted it, stating that different interests drive the industry.

MaryJo asked about Louis' success in working with farmers and how he convinces them to change. Louis said it's a sociological challenge, as gaining trust is difficult, despite ample research supporting better practices. Pierre concluded that while the situation is complex, research consistently shows that P is being over-applied.

2:30 Executive Session: Community Liaison Grant Awards

Open Session:

ACTION ITEM: To approve the first three DEI Community Liaison Grant projects presented and apply remaining funds to the Organizational Support Grant program issued in Fall 2024.

- Motion By: Antony Tseng
- Second by: Neil Kamman
- Discussion on the motion: None
- Vote: All in favor
- Abstentions: None

Nathalie said that in conclusion of the meeting, she proposed that she wants to coordinate efforts between all parties to address issues related to what was discussed during the morning session. She wanted to call a meeting between the SC chairs and Eric to better understand what was going on. They would also like to meet with the EPA and NEIWPCC. After those discussions, the SC chairs will draft a project charter to have ready to share with SC members by the September 10th meeting.

Eric then shared the Annual Report of Activities with Bryan and Michele. It completely summarizes all of the project activities that occurred during the fiscal year 2024. Each page represents a discrete project. The last 50 pages account for projects provided directly to the States.

Colleen noted that Elizabeth Lee is the staff person who prepares the report. Many thanks for her hard work.

3:30 Adjourn

Outputs for this meeting include:

1. Approval of Meeting Summary from April 16-17, 2024 Steering Committee meeting
2. Approval of LCBP Community Liaison Award decision
3. Committee updates