



Lake Champlain Executive Committee

Meeting Summary

Tuesday, February 11, 2025 9:30AM – 12:30PM
(Via Microsoft Teams)

ATTENDANCE:

STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS: Pete Laflamme for Julie Moore (Meeting Chair, VTANR), Daniel Tremblay for Nathalie Provost (Chair, Quebec MELCCFP), Joe Zalewski (NYS DEC), Pierre Leduc (Chair, Quebec CAC), Denise Smith (Chair, VT CAC), Buzz Hoerr (Chair, E&O Committee), John Krueger (Chair, HAPAC), Susan Sullivan (NEIWPC), Jennifer Curran (USACE), Brian Steinmuller (NYS Dept. Ag & Markets), MaryJo Feuerbach (EPA R1),

STAFF: LCBP: Eric Howe, Mae Kate Campbell, Kerry Crowningshield, Katie Darr, Colleen Hickey, Lauren Jenness, Elizabeth Lee, Corrie Miller, Ryan Mitchell, Grace Palmer, Meg Modley Gilbertson, Matthew Vaughan, Sonya Vogel, Anna Vold, Erin Vennie-Vollrath (LCBP NY Coordinator NYS DEC), Sarah Coleman (LCBP VT Coordinator, VT ANR), Sarita Croce (NEIWPC), Jim Brangan, Beth Whitmore-Stolar (NEIWPC/LCBP), Bryan Dore (EPA R1), Theresa Vander Woude (EPA R1)

GUESTS: Tom Berry (GLFC), Rebecca Ellis (Sen. Welch's Office), Karyn Hanson (NYSDEC), Michael Laitta (IJC)

Teleconference and webinar open, networking

9:30AM

MEETING BEGINS

9:45AM

INTRODUCTIONS: Pete Laflamme, VT ANR Chaired the meeting.

- Eric noted that in September, the chair role for the Executive Committee will rotate to EPA.

Approval of Summary of previous meeting

ACTION ITEM: Approve Meeting Minutes from **January 21, 2025** Executive Committee Meeting

- Motion By: Buzz Hoerr
- Second by: John Krueger
- Discussion on the motion: None
- Vote: All in favor
- Abstentions: Joe Zalewski

PUBLIC COMMENT

9:55 AM

- None.

CONGRESSIONAL UPDATES

10:00 AM

Rebecca Ellis, representing Senator Welch's office, provided an update on recent federal actions affecting funding disbursements under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA).

- **Executive Orders & Funding Freeze:** President Trump issued 44 Executive Orders on his first day in office, including the "Unleashing American Energy" Executive Order, which called for a pause in IIJA/IRA disbursements. An Office of Management and Budget (OMB) memo subsequently instructed a freeze on all federal funding disbursements.
- **Legal Challenges & Court Rulings:** Legal challenges were filed, leading to two court-issued temporary restraining orders preventing enforcement of the funding freeze. Despite these rulings, reports indicate that Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and IRA funds are being sporadically dispersed, with some funding still held up, creating uncertainty for recipients.
- **NEIWPCC & EPA Response:** NEIWPCC issued a stop work order for BIL-funded projects, notifying grantees that payments remain contingent on federal funding availability. Meanwhile, the EPA has been working to unfreeze funds, but some barriers remain.
- **Recommendations:** Rebecca advised stakeholders to stay in close communication with legal counsel as the situation remains fluid.
- **Budget Outlook:** The federal government is currently operating under a continuing resolution. There are indications that Republicans may attempt to use the budget reconciliation process to fund the government through the rest of the fiscal year, requiring only 50 votes for passage. The implications of this approach remain uncertain.

NEIWPCC Federal Funding Update

10:15 AM

Susan Sullivan, NEIWPCC Executive Director

Susan provided an update on NEIWPCC's response to recent federal funding freezes and releases due to Executive Orders. While NEIWPCC was not directly involved in the legal challenges, they were impacted by the uncertainty surrounding federal funding.

- **Funding Freeze & Release:**
 - On January 27, NEIWPCC discovered that its federal funds were frozen.
 - After the pause, BIL funding remained frozen, then was later unfrozen, but payments could not be made for work not completed before January 31.
 - Staff members were unable to work on BIL projects during this period.
 - As of yesterday, funding was reported to be fully restored, and NEIWPCC received confirmation from the EPA to proceed with projects.
 - A stop-work order was issued during the funding pause, but contractors have now been notified they can resume work.

- Contractors are encouraged to submit invoices promptly as funding stability remains uncertain.
- **Budget & Future Considerations:**
 - 40% of NEIWPCC's funding comes from federal sources, making these fluctuations particularly concerning.
 - Susan met with the NEIWPCC EC&C to discuss how to proceed with pending contracts. She currently favors moving forward.
 - GLFC-related funding has not been affected by the Executive Orders, as funds were already appropriated through the State Department.
 - Susan emphasized the need to remain cautious with 2025 budget planning, particularly regarding programs that may face scrutiny under the Trump administration.
 - NEIWPCC will review contracts and agreements, especially those containing Justice40 elements, to assess potential risks.
- **Hiring & Staffing Implications:**
 - Given the uncertainty, Joe raised concerns about hiring decisions and the risk of future funding rescissions.
 - Susan acknowledged the concern but noted that workloads remain unchanged. She authorized hiring boat launch stewards with the caveat that positions are contingent on federal funding availability.
 - She reassured staff that they would receive ample notice if funding issues arose, as NEIWPCC typically maintains funding security.
- **Additional Discussion:**
 - Rebecca shared a [legal tracker](#) documenting lawsuits challenging the Executive Orders.
 - Multiple attendees expressed appreciation for Susan's transparency and efforts to manage funding challenges effectively.

Next Steps:

- Continue monitoring federal funding developments and legal challenges.
- Encourage contractors to submit invoices promptly.
- Exercise caution in budget planning for 2025, particularly for programs that may face scrutiny.
- Review contracts with Justice40 elements to determine next steps.
- Maintain open communication with stakeholders and legal counsel.

Review Public Waterfront Access Improvement RFP Priorities

10:45 AM

Sonya provided an update on refinements to the RFP priorities based on feedback from the January discussion. The team worked to ensure differentiation from existing RFPs, particularly the Education & Outreach (E&O) program, and made adjustments such as:

- Clarifying how the E&O priority differs from other E&O initiatives.
- Removing references to communities with disadvantages.
- Strengthening the focus on co-benefits to clean water and healthy ecosystems.

Discussion Highlights:

- **Differentiation from E&O:**
 - Sarah asked for further clarification on how this scope of work differs from existing E&O programs.
 - Sonya provided an example of a proposal aimed at extending the season for waterfront recreation for youth, emphasizing that the focus on on-water recreation makes this RFP distinct.
 - Sarah suggested identifying potential overlaps through structured tracks in E&O.
 - Sonya noted the need for further discussions with the E&O team.
- **E&O Coordination:**
 - Pete asked for insights on how this work aligns with E&O efforts.
 - Colleen provided historical context on past recreation access funding and the role of E&O grants in filling gaps after dedicated funding ended.
 - Colleen noted that while some recreation programs have received E&O funding the emphasis of this RFP under discussion will focus on expanding seasonal access to on-water recreation, which is distinct from other LCBP outreach programming efforts.
- **Next Steps & Endorsement:**
 - Pete raised the question of whether to move forward now or further refine the connection with E&O. While much progress has been made, uncertainty regarding potential overlap remains.
 - Eric emphasized that this is a new funding area (at least in the past 20 years) and requested endorsement from the Executive Committee to advance the program, confirming alignment with the priorities set aside in the FY23 budget.
 - Sonya will continue discussions with the E&O team to clarify overlap and potential coordination, and finalize the RFP language to ensure clear differentiation from existing programs.

ACTION ITEM: Motion to approve the priorities for the RFP For Public Waterfront Access Improvement and publish the RFP for this initiative.

- Motion By: John Kruger
- Second by: Buzz Hoerr
- Vote: All in favor

FY2025 Budget: CVNHP Full Proposals (FY25 NPS, GLFC) and Grant Award Decisions

ACTION ITEM: Motion: To enter executive session to consider proposals for the following items:

- CVNHP Full Proposals (FY25 NPS, GLFC)
- Education and Outreach Large Grants: (FY25 EPA, GLFC)
- Basin-wide Economic Assessment (FY23 EPA Section 120)
- Community-level Economic Assessment (FY23 EPA Section 120)
- LCBP Organizational Support Program (FY24 EPA, GLFC)

- Motion By: Buzz Hoerr
- Second by: John Kruger
- Discussion on the motion: none
- Vote: All in favor
- Abstentions: none

EXECUTIVE SESSION.

Exit Executive Session.

GRANT AWARD DECISIONS:

ACTION ITEM: Consider re-issuing E&O Large (FY25 EPA, GLFC appropriations), CVNHP full proposals (FY25 NPS, GLFC appropriations), and organizational support (FY24 EPA, GLFC appropriations) RFPs to remove any components that conflict with the recent Executive Orders.

- Motion By: Buzz Hoerr
- Second by: John Krueger
- Discussion on the motion:
- Vote: All in favor
- Abstentions: Pierre Leduc

ACTION ITEM: Conditionally approve the Basin-wide Economic Assessment Record of Decision

- Motion By: John Krueger
- Second by: Buzz Hoerr
- Discussion on the motion: none
- Vote: all in favor
- Abstentions: none

ACTION ITEM: Consider re-issuing the Community Level Economic Assessment (FY23 EPA) and the NY Organizational Support and Workforce Development RFP (FY24 EPA, GLFC appropriations) to comply with the Executive Orders of the current administration and remove any components that conflict with the Orders.

- Motion By: Buzz Hoerr
- Second by: John Krueger
- Discussion on the motion: none
- Vote: All in favor
- Abstentions: none

Eric proposed expanding the community-level RFP to include the entire watershed rather than limiting it to shoreline communities. Given the upcoming reissuance of the RFP, he encouraged the EC to consider broadening its scope.

- **Impact of Expansion:**

- MaryJo raised concerns about whether including interior communities would make it more difficult to maintain a strong focus on the economic benefits of Lake Champlain.

- Eric acknowledged that moving further from the lake introduces more confounding variables and noted uncertainty regarding applicable social science methods.
- Katie mentioned outreach from groups focused on Mirror Lake and Lake Carmi, highlighting broader interest in understanding the economics of other lakes within the basin.
- **Alternative Approaches:**
 - Eric emphasized the need to keep the study focused on Lake Champlain's value while ensuring strong outreach to shoreline communities.
 - MaryJo suggested the possibility of broadening the RFP to allow for multiple communities within a region, to which Eric confirmed that the original scope already allowed for this.
 - Pete expressed interest in using the study's methodology to analyze other lakes in the future with separate funding.

Next Steps:

- Review the RFP to ensure compliance with Executive Orders.
- Reissue the RFP with refined language and outreach strategies.
- Maintain focus on Lake Champlain while considering potential future applications for other water bodies.

ADJOURN

12:30 PM