



Lake Champlain Executive Committee

APPROVED Meeting Summary

Tuesday, March 18, 2025 9:30AM – 1:30PM
(Via Microsoft Teams)

ATTENDANCE:

STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS: Joe Zalewski (NYS DEC), Pete Laflamme for Julie Moore (VTANR), Pierre Leduc (Chair, Quebec CAC), Denise Smith (Chair, VT CAC), Buzz Hoerr (Chair, E&O Committee), John Krueger (Chair, HAPAC), Neil Kamman (Chair, TAC), Laurie Earley (USFWS), Brandon Olsen (NYS Empire State Trade Development), Daniel Tremblay (Quebec MELCC), MaryJo Feuerbach (EPA R1), Bryan Dore (EPA R1), Antony Tseng (EPA R2), Michele Fafette (EPA R2), Theresa Vander Woude (EPA R1)

STAFF: LCBP: Eric Howe, Mae Kate Campbell, Kerry Crowningshield, Colleen Hickey, Ryan Mitchell, 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

GUESTS: Tom Berry (GLFC), Ethan Hinch (Sen. Sanders' office), Todd Chaudhry (USGS), Karyn Hanson (NYSDEC), Karen Stainbrook (NYS DEC), Michael Laitta (IJC)

Teleconference and webinar open, networking 9:30AM

MEETING BEGINS

9:45AM

INTRODUCTIONS: Pete Laflamme, VT ANR Chaired the meeting. Pete started the meeting with a round of introductions.

Approval of Summary of previous meeting

ACTION ITEM: Approve Meeting Minutes from **February 11, 2025** Executive Committee Meeting

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

PUBLIC COMMENT

9:55 AM

- None.

CONGRESSIONAL UPDATES

10:00 AM

Ethan Hinch (Sen. Sanders) reported that a government shutdown was narrowly avoided with the passage of a continuing resolution for the remainder of FY2025. Senator Sanders opposed the resolution due to the absence of a Congressional explanatory statement, which typically provides essential guidance for funding allocations—particularly for geographic programs like the Lake Champlain Basin Program (LCBP). Without this statement, the administration has wide discretion in allocating funds, leading to considerable uncertainty.

Implications for Geographic Programs

- Tom Berry (GLFC) emphasized that the absence of a detailed report leaves programs such as LCBP, the Great Lakes Fishery Commission (GLFC), and the International Joint Commission (IJC) without clarity regarding funding. Ethan acknowledged the uncertainty and noted that field staff and Congressional staffers may receive updates simultaneously as information becomes available.
- MaryJo Feuerbach (EPA R1) noted that without the explanatory statement, there are no specific allocations for programs such as the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) or Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS). She confirmed that only a general paragraph regarding EPA programs was included in the resolution, without detailed information for geographic programs.
- MaryJo also mentioned that internal communications suggested geographic programs would be level-funded, and the Steering Committee has the authority to allocate funds as deemed appropriate. However, there is no official guidance from the administration on its intentions. Antony confirmed he had heard similar reports about level funding.
- Neil Kamman (TAC Chair) referenced language in the New York Times suggesting agencies were directed to deploy funds within 30 days, and inquired whether EPA had received such instructions or was expected to operate at last year's funding levels. Both MaryJo and Antony Tseng (EPA R2) confirmed that no direction had been received. Tom added that the legislation requires agencies to submit a spending plan within 45 days of the resolution's passage.

Quebec Representation Update

Daniel shared that Nathalie Provost has resigned from her position at MELCC as of last Friday to pursue personal projects. She will no longer serve as the Quebec representative, at least temporarily. Stephanos Bitzakidis has been appointed as her interim replacement. Daniel noted that Nathalie's departure happened quickly, and she may return in a few months. MaryJo expressed that Nathalie will be missed.

Recent Grant Awards – Alignment with current administration

10:20 AM

- Eric: In the context of aligning our programs with recent EOs, we felt it was important to have the Executive Committee reconsider some awards that required more than just minor adjustments for alignment. Given that some recipients have not been notified and others are not aware we are discussing these changes, the Committee should discuss these projects in Executive Session.

Motion: To enter Executive Session for the purpose of discussing grant awards

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

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Exit Executive Session

ACTION ITEM: Approve updates to proposals and workplans to align with current administration goal

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

FY2025 Budget Preparation

11:00 AM

Vermont TMDL Funding updates and FY2025 Funding request:

Sarah Coleman (VT DEC) presented updates on the Vermont TMDL (Total Maximum Daily Load) projects and outlined proposed initiatives for Federal Fiscal Year 2025. A key point of discussion was the future of funding for the Green Schools Initiative.

- **Green Schools Initiative Funding:**
 - MaryJo raised a question regarding the rationale for extending Green Schools Initiative funding, noting the significant proposed increase and that the initiative has been funded for many years and is now nearing completion.
 - Sarah explained that while the Green Schools Initiative has historically received requests near the \$4 million mark, starting in FY23 the team began considering how that funding could also support broader "3-acre" stormwater projects in regulated communities. Sarah noted that the initiative is likely approaching full funding, though additional needs may remain.
- **Agricultural Space Funding:**
 - Neil provided context on the state's funding priorities in the agricultural sector. He noted that Vermont has committed \$13 million from the Clean Water Capital Budget this year, with statutory requirements to fund agriculture at the highest priority and 3-acre stormwater projects at the lowest.

- Neil emphasized the need for additional support for 3-acre projects, which are more difficult to fund and represent the next major challenge for many communities, especially those that may be disadvantaged.

FY2025 Vermont, New York TMDL Project Requests

Erin Vennie-Vollrath (NEIWPCC-LCBP/NY DEC) presented a detailed proposal for New York's Line Item request to support the Lake Champlain Watershed Implementation Plan. The proposal builds on the \$1.5 million received in FY2024, much of which has been allocated. The remaining funds will support WQIP (Water Quality Improvement Project) programs in FY2025.

- **FY2025 Funding Request:**
Erin is requesting \$2–3 million for projects targeting agricultural, forested, and urban source sectors. Projects will be prioritized based on their geographic location within subwatersheds. She provided a preliminary list of project types for each sector.
- MaryJo questioned the exclusion of wastewater projects. Erin explained this was a deliberate choice based on previous group discussions and lack of support for funding wastewater work. Joe Zalewski (NY DEC) added that wastewater projects are costly and could consume the entire budget. Since alternative funding sources exist, they chose to focus on other sectors.
- **Agricultural Sector Leadership:**
 - MaryJo asked if Myra will lead agricultural project efforts. Erin said Myra will be involved as needed, depending on the project. **Joe** clarified that Myra primarily supports small farms, while state staff works with regulated farms.
 - MaryJo inquired about a budget for Myra's work. Erin confirmed her budget is included in the broader Core budget discussion. **Eric** reminded the group that Core project discussions were tabled in December and suggested bringing them forward at the April Steering Committee meeting. MaryJo expressed interest in hearing from Myra directly. Eric offered to invite her to present or submit a written update at the April meeting.
 - Neil commended the equity-focused approach of New York's stormwater planning and praised the quality of the proposed initiatives.

ACTION ITEM: Advancement of FY2025 VT & NY TMDL projects to the Lake Champlain Steering Committee for approval in the FY2025 LCBP/CVNHP budget

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

Motion: To enter Executive Session to discuss grant awards for the Quebec Artist-in-Residence and the FY2025 Clean Water and Healthy Ecosystems Research Proposals,

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

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Exit Executive Session

ACTION ITEM: Approve Record of Decision for Quebec Artist-in-Residence program (FY2024 GLFC funds)

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

ACTION ITEM: Advancement of FY2025 Clean Water and Healthy Ecosystems Research Proposals to the Lake Champlain Steering Committee for approval in the FY2025 LCBP/CVNHP budget

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

1. Voting Requirements for Budget Items:

- Eric addressed a question from Neil regarding whether the Executive Committee needs to vote to advance budget items to the Steering Committee.
- Current guidance is unclear on the necessity of a formal motion for budget advancement but does require a motion for appointing new committee chairs.

2. Upcoming Meetings and Locations:

- The April 15–16, 2025 Steering Committee meeting will be held in Plattsburgh, NY, at the West Side Ballroom. If FY2025 appropriations remain uncertain due to a continuing resolution, adjustments may be required.
- For the June Steering Committee meeting, members agreed it would be best to host this meeting in Vermont given the current ban on international travel for federal employees. Eric proposed planning for the September meeting to be held in Quebec, barring a continuation of the current travel ban.

3. Subaward Contract Requirements:

- Sarita confirmed that all federal requirements are embedded in the streamlined subaward and purchase order contracts.
- 4. **CVNHP FY2025 Projects Review:**
 - A letter from NPS indicated no issues with awarding these proposals regarding compliance with recent Executive Orders. Eric confirmed the slate of FY2025 CVNHP projects will be reviewed at the April Steering Committee meeting. John noted the fast pace of the Executive Committee review and requested sufficient time at the April meeting to speak to each project.
- 5. **Colchester Watershed Concerns:**
 - Buzz shared a local observation regarding significant debris and sediment accumulation at the river delta in the Colchester area. He warned of potential future water quality issues, especially given increased residential development and existing pollutant levels entering Lake Champlain.
- 6. **Acknowledgements and Coordination Efforts:**
 - Eric thanked Mary, Sarah, and Erin V-V for their efforts coordinating the NY and VT Citizens Advisory Committees.
 - MaryJo proposed formally recognizing Nathalie for her contributions to the committee.
 - Eric suggested preparing a draft resolution of appreciation, to be presented at a convenient time. Daniel pointed out that Nathalie may be back in a few months and suggested waiting until we know for certain.

Next Steps:

- Eric will finalize the April Steering Committee meeting agenda to ensure adequate time for project reviews.
- Eric will begin location planning for June Steering Committee meeting in Vermont and tentatively for September in Quebec.
- Eric will draft a resolution recognizing Nathalie for her service to the Steering Committee, LCBP, and Lake Champlain so that it is prepared, if needed.

Meeting adjourned.