



Lake Champlain Steering Committee

APPROVED Meeting Summary

September 16, 2025 9:30AM – 3:30PM
(La Cache, Venise-en-Québec and via Teams)

ATTENDANCE:

STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS: Stefanos Bitzakidis (Chair, Quebec MELCCFP), Julie Moore (VTANR), Joe Zalewski (NYS DEC), Walt Lender (Chair, NY CAC), Pierre Leduc (Chair, Quebec CAC), Karina Dailey (Chair, VT CAC), Buzz Hoerr (Chair, E&O Committee), Neil Kamman (Chair, TAC), Susan Sullivan (NEIWPCC), Laurie Earley (USFWS), Anne Jefferson (Lake Champlain Sea Grant), Travis Thomason (NRCS VT), Phil Giltner (NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation), Laura Trieschmann (VT ACCD), Jenn Callahan (for Craig DiGiammarino VTrans), Ryan Patch (VT AAFM), Antony Tseng (EPA R2), Regina Lyons (EPA R1), Brandon Olsen (Empire State Development), Susan Evans McClure (Chair, HAPAC), Sylvain Dion (QC MAPAQ)

STAFF: LCBP: Eric Howe, Mae Kate Campbell, Kerry Crowningshield, Elizabeth Lee, Ryan Mitchell, Grace Palmer, Matthew Vaughan, Sonya Vogel, Erin Vennie-Vollrath (LCBP NY Coordinator NYS DEC), Sarah Coleman (LCBP VT Coordinator, VT ANR), Jim Brangan, Anna Vold, Emma Dannenberg, Emma Janson, Ali Jackson ; Sarita Croce (NEIWPCC), Karyn Hanson (NYSDEC), Bryan Dore (EPA R1), Michele Fafette (EPA R2), Theresa Vander Woude (EPA R1), Karyn Hanson (NYSDEC), Brian Duffy (NYSDEC), Daniel Tremblay (MELCCFP), Veronique Connolly (MELCCFP)

GUESTS: Tom Berry (GLFC), Janelle Hangen (GLFC), Rebecca Ellis (Sen. Welch's Office), Ahren Von Schnell (Cong. Stefanik's Office), Annik Drouin (Quebec MELCCFP), Todd Chaudhry (USGS), Guy Parenteau (MELCCFP), Evan Nelson (USACE), Aubert Michaud (OBVBM), Colette Ward (QC MELCCFP), Tony Hawke (General public),

MEETING BEGINS

9:45AM

INTRODUCTIONS: Stefanos Bitzakidis, Quebec MELCCFP, will Chair this meeting.

- **Welcome from Pierre Leduc, QC CAC Chair**
- **Introductions**
- **Approval of minutes from previous meeting**

Approval of Summary of previous meeting

ACTION ITEM: Approve Meeting Minutes from **June 17, 2025** Steering Committee Meeting

- Motion By: Joe Zalewski
- Second by: Neil Kamman
- Vote: All in favor

PUBLIC COMMENT

10:00 AM

STRATEGIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE UPDATE

10:15 AM

- Daniel Tremblay reported that the Steering Advisory Committee (SAC) has met biweekly since the June Steering Committee meeting to advance development of a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Steering Committee and NEIWPCC. The committee has held six meetings and completed substantial work both in and outside of meetings. The MOU is intended to clarify roles, responsibilities, and organizational relationships that have lacked formal definition as the LCBP has grown.
- Julie reported that the draft MOU—intended for circulation within the next week—provides a comprehensive overview of the Lake Champlain Steering Committee, NEIWPCC, and LCBP. It describes their origins, the purpose of the host entity structure, and services provided by NEIWPCC such as financial management, Human Resources, federal coordination, and legal and quality assurance support. Approximately 80% of the document codifies existing practices, while the remaining sections address previous friction points, particularly around operational decision-making and communication.
- A key proposal is the establishment of a Host Entity Advisory Committee, a small group mirrored after current Strategic Advisory Committee membership, which would support ongoing coordination, provide guidance to NEIWPCC, and create a more agile feedback loop as operational issues arise. This structure is expected to streamline governance and reduce redundancies with the Executive Committee.
- Questions were raised about how the Great Lakes Fishery Commission (GLFC) fits into the governance framework. While GLFC will continue coordinating with the Steering Committee, its funding will operate independently, and a separate document may eventually be needed to formalize that relationship. Additional discussion centered on the funding process, federal participation, and how the MOU aligns with EPA requirements under Section 120 of the Clean Water Act.
- Julie emphasized that the MOU reflects significant progress in clarifying expectations during a period of rapid organizational growth—from approximately \$5 million to \$35 million in scale. The Steering Committee will receive the draft for a 2–3 week review period, with at least two additional discussions planned before the December SC meeting, where the goal is to finalize or near-finalize the document.
- Members expressed appreciation for the collaborative effort and the improved communication and structure the MOU aims to provide.

Discussion Regarding Reducing Redundancies Of Steering And Executive Committee Meeting Agendas

11:00 AM

The committee held a preliminary discussion—intended as a precursor to a more in-depth conversation in December—about opportunities to reduce redundancies between the LCBP Executive Committee and the Lake Champlain Steering Committee. Julie opened by observing significant overlap between the two bodies, noting that many actions taken by the Executive Committee must be repeated by the Steering Committee. She encouraged members to look for ways to streamline processes, potentially by reducing the Executive Committee meeting cadence, consolidating agendas, or delegating some decision-making directly to the Executive Committee. While changes to meeting frequency may require updates to *Opportunities for Action* (OFA), Eric clarified that the operating guidelines within the OFA's appendix could be revised and updated by the Steering Committee without triggering a full OFA review and signature process.

Committee members broadly agreed that as the Program has grown, the workload and complexity of governance have increased, making this an opportune moment to reassess roles and responsibilities. Several participants stressed the importance of clarifying where Executive Committee and Steering Committee responsibilities overlap, with Rebecca requesting a simple, written overview of each committee's function. Members also discussed the need to ensure participation opportunities are preserved while still making efficient use of Committee members' time.

Questions arose about Committee composition and whether rotating or redistributed membership could improve efficiency and workload balance. Some expressed interest in reviewing the forthcoming Host Entity Advisory Committee proposal—under development as part of the MOU process—before making structural changes to Executive and Steering Committee roles.

A recurring theme was the potential for expanded delegation to reduce bottlenecks. Examples included allowing the Executive Committee to make certain funding decisions without requiring Steering Committee re-approval or establishing decision thresholds based on dollar amounts. Members emphasized the importance of maintaining transparency, broad representation, and clear decision-making authority while improving operational agility.

EPA highlighted the value of increasing efficiency while ensuring that all partners have a voice and that terminology and committee functions are clearly defined. Participants also noted opportunities to streamline project approval workflows, bundle funding decisions, and accelerate the pace at which funds reach on-the-ground work.

Julie concluded by framing the discussion as an early step in a longer process. She noted that greater clarity will come once the group reviews the draft MOU and Host Entity Advisory Committee structure in December. Members expressed appreciation for the ongoing progress and a shared interest in improving governance efficiency without reducing inclusivity.

Steering Committee Updates

11:30 AM

Congressional Updates

- Rebecca Ellis (Sen. Welch): The federal fiscal year ends on September 30, and Congress has not yet reached agreement on the FY26 budget. A continuing resolution (CR) is expected to be proposed this week—similar to how FY25 has operated under a continuation of the FY24 budget. The CR would likely rely on Republican support and would still need Senate approval. Given recent political dynamics, the likelihood of a government shutdown is higher than in past close calls, and federal partners may become difficult to reach if that occurs.

Despite this uncertainty, several appropriations bills have advanced. The House passed the Interior bill with favorable funding levels, including \$25 million for LCBP, increased funding for CVNHP, and \$1.8 million for sea lamprey control. The Energy and Water bill also passed in September. While individual program numbers look positive, the broader federal budget outlook remains uncertain.

- Ahren Von Schnell (Rep. Stefanik): Ahren reported cautious optimism that Congress will pass a continuing resolution (CR) and ultimately reach agreement on the federal budget, noting that the Senate Environment Committee has advanced a \$25 million budget for LCBP. He added that, as an essential employee, he would remain available even in the event of a brief government shutdown.

Eric asked about federal funding for aquatic plant control—an item on the day's agenda due to recent funding losses—and asked Susan Sullivan to explain to the Committee how LCBP operations would continue during a shutdown. Susan explained that the program can rely on prior-year ("old") funds and therefore would not halt work, though EPA's FY25 LCBP funding has not yet been received.

Anne and Regina sought clarification on the status of EPA's FY25 funds. Regina confirmed that EPA Region 1 has FY25 funding ready for award. Some awards have moved forward (VT DEC and NYSDEC), but NEIWPCC and IJA awards have been delayed due to staffing turnover and a required restructuring related to a direct SUNY Plattsburgh award. These adjustments slowed the finalization of NEIWPCC grant documents, but the region remains on schedule, with the expectation of completing awards early in FY26.

Participants noted that concerns about FY26 funding are still premature. Tom closed by acknowledging the substantial effort required to secure level funding despite the uncertain federal budget environment.

Jurisdictional Updates (States, Provincial, US Federal)

- Julie Moore (VT ANR): An updated report has been added to the meeting folder. Key highlights include the appointment of Sarah Coleman as manager of the Clean Water Initiative Program, which oversees the state's \$40–50 million commitment to clean water

initiatives. The agency has also started early work on the SFY27 budget to allow ample time for public input. The state expects to receive approximately \$45 million for clean water, with an estimated two-thirds anticipated to support work in the Lake Champlain Basin. Additional updates are included in the full report.

- Joe Zalewski (NY DEC): Joe deferred to the NYS DEC written updates focused on funding opportunities.
- Stefanos Bitzakidis (QC MELCCFP): On September 10 we now have a new Minister of the Environment, also a publication of a report on all aspects on water resources that has just been published.
- Veronique Connelly also reported on an outbreak of raccoon rabies in two regions, 51 cases. The Ministry has launched a plan that increases surveillance, and relocate raccoons, skunks, and foxes. Mass vaccination campaign in 180 municipalities. Cross-border collaboration to address this outbreak. AIS work on round goby and grass carp continued through the summer, with one positive detection of grass carp in the upper Richelieu river. Further monitoring will be done this fall. The Ministry is planning to transfer glass eels in 2026, preceded by a study of impact. Working with others in the Lake Champlain basin on this project.
- Sylvain Dion (QC MAPAQ): Quebec's new minister continues to advance a strong sustainable agriculture agenda. Over the past five years, Quebec invested more than \$8 million in identifying and addressing agricultural sustainability needs, and an additional \$100 million is being added for climate-related work. Since 2024, \$12 million has been invested specifically in this watershed. The program has held 19 forums and now includes 561 participants—representing about 25% of all farms in the province, with significant participation from this watershed.
- Regina Lyons (EPA R1): The FFY26 budget is advancing in the House, including language that may direct EPA to review the Lake Champlain program and its host entity. Regional Administrators in Regions 1 and 2 have been actively engaged with LCBP and supportive of recent organizational improvements, and they are interested in further evaluating the program to ensure it is positioned to manage continued growth—potentially even before a final appropriations bill is passed.

The agency has also experienced several retirements through the deferred resignation program, including MaryJo Feuerbach and Rick Balla, along with other staffing shifts in wetlands and water programs. EPA-LCBP staffing has remained stable, with Bryan Dore assuming MaryJo's former role in September and Regina providing interim support.

- Antony Tseng (EPA R2): Nothing further to add to Regina's updates.
- Travis Thomason (NRCS-VT): Written report is available. The new chief's priorities include supporting farmers, promoting locally led initiatives, and making programs easier to access. This focus will strengthen work on water quality and soil health, alongside growing interest in regenerative agriculture and continued commitment to protecting water quality.
- Laurie Earley (USFWS): See written updates. The new USFWS, Brian Nesvik is being briefed on agency priorities, including sea lamprey work. The Missisquoi National

Wildlife Refuge is experiencing very low water levels, which are affecting waterfowl habitat, though water chestnut levels are lower than in previous years. Partners report increased establishment of riparian buffers. The Sea Lamprey Program has fall plans that depend on water levels and has collected samples in the Pike River. Work is underway to install a barrier in the Bouquet River to improve Atlantic salmon collection, but low water levels are creating challenges.

- Evan Nelson (USACE): The potential continuing resolution or government shutdown will not affect the WRDA 542 program because it has sufficient carryover funds, though impacts on the military side are unclear. A report proposing an expansion of the aquatic plant control program is nearly finalized; \$1.6M has been requested, pending federal approval. Planning for Phase 2 of the Champlain Canal barrier is underway. The Swanton, VT wastewater treatment plant has requested funding support, but there is currently not enough federal funding to proceed. A flood risk management study for the Winooski River is included in the FY26 request. Another future project involves addressing deteriorating stormwater infrastructure at the former Plattsburgh Air Force Base, with likely need for Section 542 support. Neil noted that Vermont may be able to act as a funding sponsor for the WWTP work, and Evan highlighted that the program supports economically disadvantaged communities as defined in the last WRDA.
- Anne Jefferson (Lake Champlain Sea Grant): Written updates available. Sea Grant completed its site review and has been renewed for 2029–2032, with appreciation expressed for partners' support. Five new research projects have been selected, pending FY26 funding, and applications are being reviewed for the early-career fellowship program. Summer work has been strong, with thanks to LCBP for its contributions. However, OMB released only partial funding this year—two programs received just 60%, leaving no remaining funds. Some funds held back for regional needs may eventually be restored through backpay, but it is unclear how this will affect Lake Champlain Sea Grant in FY26. Further updates will be provided as more information becomes available.
- Janelle Hangen (GLFC): GLFC has been working to advance the New York outreach center, working closely with Rep. Stefanik's office and the City of Plattsburgh to secure a location for this concept on the Plattsburgh waterfront. Janelle has been working Kerry Crowningshield and Jim Brangan to draft our process for new grants that will be routed through GLFC. In December, Meg and Eric will join Janelle for Great Lakes Day in Ottawa.
- Susan Sullivan (NEIWPC): Written comments provided.

LUNCH BREAK (60 minutes)

12:00 PM

Remaining Steering Committee Updates

1:00 PM

CAC (NY, Quebec, VT), E&O, HAPAC, TAC

- TAC: Neil Kamman shared that TAC has met once since the June Steering Committee. Provided an overview of projects in progress or approved: Lake Champlain fish community monitoring, Soil Health Missisquoi Bay diagnosis, upcoming research priorities. Upcoming TAC work includes: Lake Carmi alum treatment follow-up, dam

removal impacts on sediment, wetlands protection projects upstream/downstream of dam removal.

- The Lake Carmi alum treatment (~\$3M investment) is expected to reduce phosphorus release from sediments and improve algae control for 20+ years, while continuing watershed nutrient reduction work. TAC discussed suitable water bodies for alum treatment (stable mixing, controlled external nutrient input). Lake Carmi noted as ideal.
- Neil highlighted internal vs external phosphorus dynamics in Lake Carmi (internal loading now accounts for ~60% of summer P input).
- Ryan: Written updates in meeting files. Colleen Hickey retired; Ali Jackson joined with experience and new ideas; Emma Dannenburg now full-time E&O steward. Two new “Meet the Scientist” videos completed (Laurie Earley and Matt Vaughan). Ali highlighted a new outreach effort developed by Beth Whitmore-Stolar at the Essex County Fair; materials available for others.
- Susan Evans McClure (HAPAC): Introduced herself, replacing John Krueger. Noted upcoming CVNHP summit with field trip and summit sessions. Updates on grants: RFP for CVNHP conservation/community grant closed; artist-in-residence grant closes Oct 13. CVNHP RFP open for 2027 projects; helps Steering Committee plan next year’s work for the Heritage area. Susan emphasized importance of sustained funding for cultural organizations and congressional support.
- Pierre (Quebec CAC): Professional mediation with farmers union nearing agreement. Organic vegetable project: reduced-P fertilizer purchased in bulk to improve crop quality, reduce phosphorus use, and save money. Updates on wastewater treatment plants: one funded for completion in 2026; another pending funding, potentially 2027.
- Walt (NY CAC): See updates in packet. Planning to have next meeting in a couple of weeks. Continue to spread word and outreach in terms of basin program and grant resources that are out there. Moving forward with their normal work.
- Karina Dailey (VT CAC): New to chair of CAC as of June. Denise Smith, the former Chair, is now the vice-chair. Drafted action plan for legislative session; meetings 2nd or 3rd Monday monthly. The CAC heard a presentation from Responsible Wakes for VT lakes; planning meetings with Secretaries Moore and Tebbets. Preparing public meeting in December following action plan completion.

LCBP Updates

Eric Howe (LCBP): See extensive written updates in meeting folder. Multiple RFPs are open, recently closed, or upcoming. FY25 funding agreements submitted to EPA for Section 120 and IIJA; NPS funds executed. SUNY partner changes noted (details covered by Susan). Eric worked with Sarita Croce to close out fiscal year agreements that ended with FFY25.

NEIWPC Updates - Susan Sullivan and Sarita Croce

1:15 PM

NEIWPC provided an update on operations since October 1, 2024. Approximately 30 staff are currently engaged in Lake Champlain Basin work across Grand Isle, New York, and Lowell offices. Since June 1, roughly \$47.5 million has been available to support LCBP activities, including GLFC funds, and \$12.7 million in FY25 agreements have been executed, with FY26 submissions already underway.

A key challenge this year involved Section 120 funding and the long-term monitoring contract with SUNY, which went unsigned in March and was only finalized in August. SUNY has requested to manage future contracts outside of NEIWPCC, prompting EPA Regions 1 and 2 to consider issuing a direct award. This shift raised concerns about precedent, contract management efficiency, and the potential impact on NEIWPCC's role. Participants emphasized the need for Steering Committee guidance moving forward.

NEIWPCC also highlighted internal team-building activities, performance reviews, and progress updating standard operating procedures, including HR, travel, and contracts chapters. NEIWPCC supported 46 LCBP-related meetings over the past year and continues lease work for the Gordon House office.

Much of the discussion focused on contracting timelines, process bottlenecks, and strategies to improve efficiency. Delays often stem from workplans requiring significant development after award decisions, during which recipients are not compensated. Participants noted the resource burden on both recipients and NEIWPCC staff, the growing volume of contracts (rising from \$2.7 million in payments in 2021 to \$6.5 million in 2024), and the need to examine potential reforms.

Suggestions included exploring task group formation to recommend improvements; considering block grants or streamlined processes; involving recipients directly in process-improvement discussions; and potentially compensating certain pre-award tasks such as QAPP development. NEIWPCC and LCBP staff described increased communication and staffing adjustments intended to reduce delays ahead of the next contracting cycle.

Additional topics included the distribution of Section 120 funds among state and federal partners, the status of support for state CACs, and questions about aligning budget-setting schedules with the timing of federal awards. Participants identified opportunities to better align field-season project needs, award timing, and workplan preparation.

Overall, the conversation underscored strong appreciation for staff efforts amid rapid program growth, coupled with a clear desire to modernize contracting workflows and strengthen coordination among NEIWPCC, EPA, partners, and award recipients.

OFA And State Of The Lake 2027 Publications

1:45 PM

Eric proposed shifting the publication schedule for two major LCBP documents—the State of the Lake (SOL) report and the Opportunities for Action (OFA) management plan—to avoid simultaneous production. SOL is published every three years and is widely used by partners, while OFA is updated every five years and guides strategic direction but is not public-facing. Producing both in the same year places a heavy burden on staff.

Eric recommended publishing SOL in 2027 and delaying OFA until 2028 or 2029, with a preference for 2029 to allow adequate time for analysis, writing, partner engagement, and staff workload balance.

Committee members generally supported staggering the documents. Susan and Regina emphasized that separating the cycles aligns with practices in comparable programs and improves the link between data (SOL) and strategic planning (OFA). Members agreed the two documents serve distinct purposes and should not be combined.

Neil noted Section 120's five-year requirement for reviewing the plan and suggested a public step affirming the intent to revise OFA. Travis supported a delay of up to two years. Susan added that OFA guides NEIWPCC's EPA workplans, so relevance must be maintained.

Before a formal vote, Neil asked to review statutory language and ensure agencies have time to consider implications. The group agreed to proceed with "option one": a motion to approve the revised schedule pending EPA review and confirmation. Regina requested time to consult internally, and Eric agreed that the team will operate on the proposed timeline while final confirmation is obtained.

Motion: To approve the publication of the next OFA in 2029 pending EPA review and approval

By: Laurie Earley

Second: Buzz Hoerr

Discussion: None

Vote: all in favor

Abstentions: none

Fy2026 Budget Process

2:00 PM

FY2026 Budget process and schedule (Eric Howe)

- Eric provided an overview of the FY26 budget process and introduced presenters (Matt Vaughan, Neil Kamman, Ryan Mitchell and Buzz Hoerr)

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

- Matt provided an overview of the Research RFPP process and priority identification process for tracks in the RFPP. The TAC uses an ongoing process to update priorities: completed items drop off, ongoing needs remain, and new issues are added. TAC also screens out proposals they do not recommend advancing.

Comments on the specific tracks were as follows:

Track 1: General OFA priorities - no specific comments.

Track 2 – Nutrients and Contaminants

Members discussed refining language to highlight understudied areas without implying differences between NY and VT. There was strong interest in better understanding landforms, soils, and nutrient release from buffers and cover crops, including incorporating knowledge from other regions. Additional interest areas included data to inform fish consumption advisories and mercury impacts from wildfires.

Track 3 – Native Species and Habitats

Support voiced for priorities on Esocidae and cyanobacteria. Members emphasized focusing on taxa-level research rather than large-scale climate modeling already done elsewhere. There is interest in filling gaps on rare fish and mussels, particularly in NY. The group also discussed how far terrestrial species (e.g., birds, turtles) could be included when connected to Lake-related habitats. Drought impacts and wood-loading concerns were added or refined.

Track 4 – Invasive Species

Members supported including management or containment strategies for hemlock woolly adelgid, with language expanded to “management interventions to preserve forest quality.”

Track 5 – Aquatic Organism Passage and Dam Removal

Interest noted in improving understanding of dam-removal effects on fish, especially in Québec. Members agreed that case-specific studies are more useful than broad, basin-wide generalizations.

Track 6 –Recreation

The group suggested splitting or simplifying the combined access-and-conflict language. There were differing views on adding recreation-focused research, but the consensus was that existing research on game fish is robust, and the native-species track fills more relevant gaps.

Track 7 – Riparian Forest Health

Members recommended narrowing the focus to riparian forests rather than all forest lands. Some questioned whether this topic overlaps with “understudied P sources,” but all agreed forest and drought-related dynamics are important, especially given TMDL requirements.

Informed and Involved Public – Large grant priorities (Ryan Mitchell, Buzz Hoerr)

Ryan reported that the Education and Outreach committee recommended eliminating priorities for the E&O Large grants. The Education Outreach RFP does not offer points based on how the current priorities are addressed. The committee felt it would be best to keep it simple. The Committee requested that criterion in the RFP address community needs and ensure the criterion is tied to OFA goals.

ACTION ITEM: Approve FY2026 Research RFP priorities

- Motion By: Neil Kamman
- Second by: Julie Moore
- Discussion on the Motion: none
- Vote: All in favor
- Abstentions: none

ACTION ITEM: Approve FY2026 Large E&O RFP priorities

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

IIJA Support For 2026 Water Chestnut Management Field Season – Eric Howe and Meg Modley Gilbertson **2:45 PM**

Eric requested formal reallocation of funding from IIJA to support the 2026 field season for the water chestnut management plan. There was not enough time for the Committee to discuss this request and the Committee authorized the LCBP Executive Committee to consider and approve this request in an upcoming meeting.

ACTION ITEM: Authorize the LCBP Executive Committee to approve IIJA support for water chestnut management for the 2026 field season

- Motion By: Julie Moore
- Second by: Laurie Earley
- Discussion on the motion: none
- Vote: All in favor
- Abstentions: None

Conflict Of Interest Guidelines – Eric Howe and Bryan Dore

3:00 PM

- Tabled due to lack of time.

ADJOURN

3:30 PM

Attachment A: Summary of presentations and comments offered during the Missisquoi Bay Public Meeting.