



## Lake Champlain Steering Committee Meeting Minutes June 17, 2025

Hotel Champlain Burlington, Curio Collection by Hilton  
Lake Champlain Steering Committee: 9:30 AM – 3:30 PM

Lake Champlain Conference Room (Mezzanine/2nd floor), 60 Battery St.,  
Burlington, VT

### ATTENDANCE:

**STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS:** Julie Moore (Chair, VTANR), Stefanos Bitzakidis (Quebec MELCCFP), Joe Zalewski (NYS DEC), Pierre Leduc (Chair, Quebec CAC), Buzz Hoerr (Chair, E&O Committee), Neil Kamman (Chair, TAC), Susan Sullivan (NEIWPCC), Laurie Earley (USFWS), Anne Jefferson (Lake Champlain Sea Grant), Luis Aponte for Travis Thomason (NRCS VT), Brandon Olsen (NYS Empire State Trade Development), Phil Giltner (NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation), Laura Trieschmann (VT ACCD), Bryan Dore (EPA R1), Antony Tseng (EPA R2), Evan Nelson (USACE)

**STAFF:** LCBP: Eric Howe, Mae Kate Campbell, Kerry Crowningshield, Colleen Hickey, Lauren Jenness, Elizabeth Lee, Ryan Mitchell, Grace Palmer, Meg Modley Gilbertson, Sonya Vogel, Erin Vennie-Vollrath (LCBP NY Coordinator NYS DEC), Sarah Coleman (LCBP VT Coordinator, VT ANR), Sarita Croce (NEIWPCC), Jim Brangan, Anna Vold, Sonya Vogel, Fiona Bishop, Veronique Connolly (MELCCFP), Sophie Moffatt-Bergeron (MELCCFP), Daniel Tremblay (MELCCFP), Michele Fafette (EPA R2), Theresa Vander Woude (EPA R1), Karyn Hanson (NYSDEC), Guy Parenteau (MELCCFP), Edo Jakupovic (QC MELCCFP),

**GUESTS:** Tom Berry (GLFC), Rebecca Ellis (Sen. Welch's Office), Owen Doherty (Cong. Balint's Office), Janelle Hangen (GLFC),

**Teleconference and webinar open**

**9:30 AM**

**MEETING BEGINS**

**9:45 AM**

**INTRODUCTIONS:** Julie Moore, VT ANR, chaired the meeting. She opened the meeting with a round of introductions.

### Approval of Summary of previous meeting

**ACTION ITEM:** Approve Meeting Minutes from the **April 15-16, 2025**, Steering Committee Meeting

- Motion By: Laurie Earley
- Second by: Joe Zalewski

- Discussion on the motion: none
- Vote: All in favor
- Abstentions: **none**

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

**10:00 AM**

- **No public comments provided.**

## **CONGRESSIONAL UPDATES**

**10:15 AM**

- Rebecca Ellis (Office of Senator Welch) reported that Congress is currently working on the FY26 budget. The President's budget request for the Lake Champlain Basin Program (LCBP), released in May, was just under \$19 million. Senator Welch and the Vermont delegation have submitted a Senate request for \$27 million, compared to \$25 million appropriated last year. It remains uncertain whether a full FY26 budget will be passed; a continuing resolution remains possible. Rebecca noted that the Senate Finance Committee's budget includes cuts to Medicaid, and the pending Reconciliation bill may impact retirement benefits, which could indirectly influence staffing and retirement decisions. She also highlighted that congressional offices have posted earmark proposals publicly, though earmarked projects may not move forward under a CR. Senator Welch has 8–10 projects on his FEMA list, in addition to upcoming U.S. Army Corps of Engineers projects.
- Owen Doherty (Office of Representative Balint) added that Congresswoman Balint voted against the Reconciliation bill. Her office has also posted congressionally directed spending proposals on its website, including information related to staffing and spending concerns.

## **Great Lakes Fishery Commission Updates**

**10:30 AM**

Janelle Hangan, GLFC

- **NY Outreach Center Progress Report**
  - Janelle provided an update on the proposed outreach center in Plattsburgh, including themes, timeline, and possible locations. The project will begin with GLFC funding from FFY24 and FFY25, with a third budget line anticipated in FY26. Approximately \$400,000 in initial funds will cover property setup, staffing, and insurance. The long-term plan is for the center to be owned, maintained, and operated by a separate entity, with ongoing support from GLFC.
- **GLFC-NEIWPCC/LCBP relationship**

Janelle shared updates on ongoing discussions among GLFC, NEIWPCC, and LCBP regarding funding coordination and Quebec project support.

Julie raised questions about overlap between large and small grants, staff funding, and potential budget gaps. Eric explained that while staff sometimes charge time to both GLFC and EPA, projects are generally kept within one funding stream. GLFC typically

supports Quebec work and projects aligned with its mission.

Susan, Janelle, Bryan, Tom, and others discussed options for maintaining support for Quebec activities, including covering hotel costs and ensuring partner funding flows smoothly. GLFC funds were noted as more flexible than EPA funds, though differences in terms and conditions could complicate communication with applicants. The group emphasized the importance of transparency and avoiding competition between funding sources.

Eric, Meg, and Neil discussed how applicants might perceive different funding terms. It was agreed that projects would continue to be selected first, with funding sources determined afterward to minimize confusion and ensure fairness.

Other key points:

- GLFC will continue supporting Quebec partners, with direct funding options available.
- The 5% overhead rule and other GLFC funding details are still being clarified.
- Existing work in Quebec (e.g., barrier operations by FWS staff) will not be impacted.
- Updates will be provided at the September meeting, with potential adjustments for FY25 and recommendations for FY26 to the Steering Committee.

#### **Jurisdictional and Advisory Committee Updates**

**11:00 AM**

- Joe Zalewski: NYSDEC has 2 grant opportunities currently available - Water Quality improvement projects and Non-Ag, NPS planning and MS4 mapping programs. Our NY HABS system is now active; it allows the public and trained community members to submit HAB reports. Reports are reviewed by DOH staff and posted to the website, allowing for near real-time information on HABs. eDNA and electrofishing surveys on the Champlain Canal have continued, and no detections of round goby above Lock C1 have been detected. See written updates for more information.
- Sophie Moffatt-Bergeron (QC Ministry of the Environment): We continue working with OBVBM and have provided funding over the past 3 years for implementation of their action plans. The 2025-2026 report will reinforce the integrated management of water resources and phosphorus (P) reduction in Missisquoi Bay. We continue to work with wastewater plans for municipalities to reach effluent P target thresholds for a priority water body. We are working on nonpoint P sources to the Pike River and will ask our partners to present on that project at a future Steering Committee meeting. The Ministry recently announced new standards for floodplain classifications.
  - Veronique Connolly added: Quebec's Ministry launched a rabies vaccine campaign after raccoon detections near the border and is also monitoring spiny softshell turtles. eDNA sampling for early detection of round goby and grass carp is planned for late summer and fall. Julie asked about coordination with Vermont on rabies bait drops; Veronique will follow up, and Julie will check on the Vermont side.
- Julie Moore, VT ANR: Our legislature adjourned last night, about a month behind schedule. The budget was approved at just under \$46 million for our Clean Water fund. The legislature and governor did not make any changes from what was proposed by the Clean Water Board in the fall. We are working on guidance on removal of sediment for dam removal projects - ensuring we are appropriately disposing of those materials and not contributing to downstream pollution. We are moving forward with work (partially funded through LCBP) to expand private

road erosion inventory protocols to forest roads. Efforts around wood additions and ensuring we are effectively accounting for that in our P tracking and accounting are ongoing.

- Bryan Dore, EPA R1: EPA reminded partners of the July 1 grant deadline and encouraged coordination with project officers given current capacity constraints. The annual review of the Lake Champlain TMDL will be released this afternoon, with approvals for Otter Creek and Northern Lake report cards, as well as interim report cards for Missisquoi Bay and the Lamoille River. While final FY25 budget numbers are not yet available, totals have been approved internally and should be shared soon.

Staffing changes were highlighted, including the retirement of MaryJo on June 13 after more than 30 years with EPA, leaving a significant gap, and the departure of Eric Beck, a former program liaison. Region 1 has seen a large exodus under deferred resignation, with roughly 100 staff leaving—an estimated 20% of the region and about 30% of the water division. EPA is planning future opportunities to recognize retirees. Regina Lyons will be stepping in for MaryJo Feuerbach, who retired last week. Regina has a similar position in the Oceans and Coastal division and has been very engaged with Long Island Sound Study.

- Antony Tseng, EPA R2: In EPA Region 2's water division, about 22 of 80 staff opted for retirement, with the first wave occurring last week. Final numbers are still being confirmed, and positions will not be backfilled, which may lead to divestment in some program areas. EPA thanked NYSDEC for submitting its grant application, which is being expedited. MaryJo's retirement is also being felt in the region.
- Luis Aponte (NRCS): Thank you to our partners at EPA for discussing the deferred resignation program. We are feeling the same strain; we are doing what we can with the staff we have left. NRCS introduced new Chief Aubrey Bettencourt and announced several updates: a regional partnership funding opportunity is expected later this year, a current Farm Bill funding opportunity is open for producers, and soil screenings and committee meetings are upcoming. The water quality partnership project with DEC will continue under changes to the RCPP.

Neil and Luis discussed RCPP funding: current opportunities apply to existing programs with an August deadline, while new funding opportunities will open at the end of the calendar year.

- Laurie Earley, USFWS: The agency reported that about 19% of staff retired under the deferred resignation program, and leadership remains under an acting director pending confirmation. Updates included: contracts issued for grassland and native species work at the Missisquoi Wildlife Refuge (including water chestnut removal); completion of a thiamine study at the White River Fish Hatchery; and field training at the Lake Champlain office on BMPs for tree establishment, with materials posted online. Sea lamprey trapping operations are concluding, and fisheries assessments with NYSDEC are underway, including collection of landlocked Atlantic salmon from the Bouquet River. Seasonal staff have been hired, though fewer than in past years.

- Evan Nelson, USACE: Like the other federal agencies, The USACE has seen a reduction in force. Regarding the Canal Barrier Phase 2 project, the USACE is still working with NYSDEC to execute the design agreement.
- Anne Jefferson, Lake Champlain Sea Grant: We are operating without access to our full year funds as we wait for the national office to receive their funds. We are in a better position than other Sea Grants and are cautiously optimistic we will receive our full funding before the end of the fiscal year. We have our Site Review next week and have over 70 individuals from partner organizations participating.
- Susan Sullivan, NEIWPCC: NEIWPCC's indirect rate for the upcoming fiscal year was approved at 16.5%, a 2% decrease from last year. Recent staff trainings have covered terms and conditions, contracts, purchase orders, and invoicing, with thanks expressed to the team for prioritizing these efforts. SOP updates are underway, and annual performance appraisals will be completed in the coming months. Discussions are ongoing about office space needs in Grand Isle, and planning is underway with Eric and EPA Region 2 for New York site visits with Congressional representatives.
- Sarita Croce, NEIWPCC: Since April 1, 40 new agreements, 8 no-cost extensions, and 14 advanced amendments have been executed. Average contract processing time has dropped to 33 days, even with longer land acquisition contracts included. Six of the new agreements are streamlined subawards, which are progressing quickly.
- Neil Kamman, TAC Chair: TAC advanced core projects and final reports. Of note, the Missisquoi Bay Binational Phosphorus mass balance project concluded and has a great report. They note a significant imbalance between P imports and exports. The project evaluated a number of scenarios, and was very well done. TAC approved the project pending edits with the project team. We will discuss prospective new TAC members in Executive Session later in this meeting.
- Colleen Hickey, LCBP/NEIWPCC: The E&O committee has not met since the last SC meeting but will meet in July and will work on leadership transition. Our monthly newsletter has been released. We hired 2 new summer stewards - Fiona and Emma, and extended the timeframe for our spring steward, Mia. Staff produced a State of the Lake newspaper insert summarizing the report. ECHO visitation numbers have been good. Staff have worked on field days, school visits, hatchery events. Sue Hagar completed her last day with us last week. Grace has completed interviews with Boat Launch Stewards. The 2024 Annual Report has been completed since we last met.
- Pierre Leduc, Quebec CAC/OBVBM: The OBVBM boat launch steward started 2 weeks ago. Our annual general meeting will be Thursday evening and we will be adding 4 new positions to our board, including a First Nations representative for the first time. The meeting will feature several informational presentations. OBVBM is participating in a professional mediation process with the Farmers Union to work on improving collaboration.
- Erin Vennie Vollrath, LCBP/NEIWPCC/NYS DEC: The NYCAC has met twice since the last Steering Committee meeting. We heard a presentation from the LC-LGRPB on their update to NPS plans, from Essex SWCD on a recently completed stream study, and from LCSG NY staff on recent projects. Our annual in-person meeting will be held on June 30th at the Miner Institute.

- Sarah Coleman, VT DEC: VTCAC is meeting tomorrow for their annual retreat. Goals of the retreat are to reflect on the last year and look ahead for priorities for the next year. We will hear presentations from LCBP and VTDEC staff.
- Edo Jakupovic, Quebec MELCCFP: Edo was selected by the Steering Committee to facilitate the Strategic Advisory Committee meetings. The first meeting was held on April 11th and we committed to meeting regularly; we've met 5 times so far and will meet again tomorrow afternoon. In addition to formal meetings, members have been completing work between meetings. One of the first acknowledgements is that this kind of forum was long overdue and a first achievement has been opening up a constructive dialog. While conversations can be challenging at times, members feel progress is being made. Much of what is discussed in the meetings is confidential. The overall goal is evolving the work environment to support achievement of the approved budget and plan of work for the LCBP. Some solutions are being implemented in the short-term, but others will take more time. Another significant piece of work is a draft MOU between NEIWPC and the Steering Committee to clearly define roles and responsibilities. The MOU is in the early review stages and will be presented to the Steering Committee for discussion once this review process has been completed. This MOU is on track to be reviewed with the Steering Committee in September.
- Eric Howe, LCBP/NEIWPC: LCBP has been busy with staffing transitions we will review later this afternoon. Eric echo'd support for Congressional delegation and their efforts to secure our funding. The Steering Committee meeting schedule for the next fiscal year has been reviewed with the Chairs and Susan Sullivan; we are currently planning meetings in NY and VT only due to travel bans for US federal employees. The September Steering Committee meeting will feature a focus on MQ Bay P reduction efforts. The next Lake Champlain Research Conference has been announced and will take place in January 2026.

#### **AIS Updates, as time allows (Meg Modley Gilbertson)**

**11:30 AM**

Meg reported on aquatic invasive species (AIS) in Lake Champlain, noting 51 non-native species identified to date, with the golden/basket clam expected as the 52nd. Work is underway to expand the AIS control program statewide, improve water chestnut management, and advance the Champlain Canal watershed feasibility study (phase 2 pending signatures).

Current monitoring includes eDNA, trolling, and electrofishing for round goby and grass carp, with negative results so far. Other efforts include collaborations with VTFWS (via GLFC funding), Dartmouth's mercury-in-fish study, and increased watercraft decontaminations.

The BLS program will deploy 24 stewards in 2025, with frogbit and water chestnut harvesting planned. New educational materials were created for decontamination stations. Additional updates covered Champlain Canal fisheries studies, Champlain Power Express program impacts, and preparations to present at the World Canals Conference in September.

In discussion, Meg clarified that more sampling is needed to confirm establishment of new species, as a single detection does not constitute an established population.

## **LUNCH BREAK (1 HOUR)**

**12:00 PM**

### **Executive Session for LCBP Staffing Discussion and TAC Membership Appointment**

**1:00 PM**

Exit Executive Session.

#### **Motion to rename the Lake Champlain Resource Room in honor of Colleen Hickey**

- Motion by: Laurie Earley
- Second by: Anne Jefferson
- Discussion on the motion: none
- Vote on the motion: all in favor
- Abstentions: none

#### **Motion to Appoint Brian Duffy, NYS DEC, to a three-year term to the LCBP Technical Advisory Committee**

- Motion by: Neil Kamman
- Second by: Laurie Earley
- Discussion on the motion: none
- Vote on the motion: all in favor
- Abstentions: none

Susan Sullivan shared a resolution on behalf of Colleen and her retirement. Buzz also shared remarks to recognize Colleen.

Eric shared that Ryan Mitchell has been hired as the new Education and Outreach Program Manager, effective August 4th.

#### **Conflict of Interest Guidelines 2025 Update review and approval**

**1:30 PM**

Eric presented updates to the LCBP Conflict of Interest (COI) Guidelines, last updated in 2017. Key changes reflect program growth, more grant programs, and increased potential for COI, especially among proposal reviewers with personal or professional connections to applications. The proposed definition of COI includes situations where members or reviewers may benefit from a decision or have current/former relationships affecting judgment.

Discussion points and concerns included:

- The COI definition currently feels too broad, especially regarding “former” relationships and participation of state agency representatives.

- Distinction between personal/professional conflicts versus financial conflicts; financial conflicts were noted as higher priority to avoid.
- Ensuring SC members' expertise remains available without unnecessary recusal; SC members are generally exempt except in limited situations. Advisory committee members may be recused or use a waiver.
- Implementation challenges, including annual COI forms, tracking, and timing before reviews/award decisions; concerns about administrative burden and audit risk.
- Need for clarity on when SC members should recuse themselves and the scope of what constitutes a funding organization.

Consensus: The group agreed more time is needed to review the full draft, understand implementation workload, and discuss examples. The discussion was tabled for a future meeting, with a request for feedback from SC members and supporting staff prior to moving forward.

### **Former Steering Committee member resolutions**

**2:00 PM**

Eric shared two resolutions, one for Nathalie Provost and the other for MaryJo Feuerbach, in recognition of their work for Lake Champlain on behalf of the Lake Champlain Steering Committee. Julie signed both resolutions on behalf of the Steering Committee.

### **CVNHP Updates**

**2:15 PM**

Jim provided an update on CVNHP activities. This update can be accessed via this link: [CVNHP SC Update June 2025.pptx](#)

### **Informational Presentation: Education & Outreach**

**2:30 PM**

- Colleen Hickey shared the Jeopardy game with the Steering Committee that was developed for her last Love the Lake program, in May. Colleen then shared some parting remarks with the Steering Committee, as she will be retiring on August 1.

### **ADJOURN**

**3:09 PM**

### **Anticipated Outputs for this meeting include:**

1. Approval of Meeting Summary from April 2025
2. Approval of updated Conflict of Interest guidelines
3. Resolutions recognizing former Steering Committee members
4. TAC Membership appointment