

# Tributary Connection Subcommittee of the Restoration Work Group

Chairs: Megan Lung and Laura Wildman



## Meeting Minutes

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**Meeting, November 4, 2022**

**2:00 - 4:00 pm**

**Virtual**

### **I. Welcome and Attendance**

The group was welcomed by Isabelle Stinnette, Megan Lung, and Laura Wildman. Attendance listed below.

### **II. Minutes Approval and Membership**

Minutes were approved from the April meeting.

### **III. Group Updates**

#### NYSDEC

Melissa Cohen expressed concern about the weir near Starlight Park on the Bronx River. She suspects that this structure likely is problematic for fish passage, especially at low tide. Isabelle will follow up with NYC Parks to see if they have previously assessed that structure and have any plans for removal.

#### Save the Sound

They were awarded a DEC grant to do a feasibility assessment to remove the first dam on Blind Brook in Westchester. The project would run from 2023 – 2024.

#### NYSDEC/ HR Estuary Program

- Wrapping up culvert assessment field season.
- Working with Westchester County Planning department on removing Maiden Lane Dam. Considering federal highways funding for this.
- Partnered on a StreamSmart training in December.

#### Montclair University

Presented and led a NAACC terrestrial training at the Northeast Transportation and Wildlife Conference.

### NOAA

Carl Alderson wanted to relay the announcement of a new grant released from the Federal Highways Administration for culvert removal and upgrade with BIL funding. It can be used for construction, design and feasibility studies. The grant is open through February 6, 2023.

<https://highways.dot.gov/newsroom/biden-harris-administration-opens-applications-1-billion-grant-program-protect-critical>

### NJDEP

They are removing three dams in the upper Delaware River Watershed in partnership with TNC.

### Rutgers University

Andrew from Julie Lockwood's Lab reported out that they are studying EDNA at the Island Weir fish ladder on the Raritan. In addition to getting baseline conditions, they did see positive EDNA hits when they spotted fish passage on the camera traps leading them to believe that this can be used as a substitute for camera trapping. You can also see the preference of where the fish are going at a confluence. They are formulating EDNA methodologies for this.

### NY-NJ HEP

- Held their annual conference, this year's theme was on restoring our urban shores. It included a showing of a documentary film called American River about the Passaic. More info on the conference can be found here:  
<https://www.hudsonriver.org/article/our-urban-shores>
- They are offering microgrants for American eel monitoring in New Jersey
- They wrapped up the second field season for culvert monitoring using the NAACC protocols as part of the NEP Coastal Watershed Grant. Fact sheets will be available this winter.

### NYC Parks

Continuing to work on the planning and design with the USACE on the Bronx River Dam removals project. They have altered the conceptual design slightly to consider the results of a recent bedrock survey. They are open to input from the group on the design.

## **IV. Open Grants for Barrier Removal**

The group updated our spreadsheet for open grants that can be used for barrier removal. The Federal Highways Grant and US Fish and Wildlife Grants were added. Please see the updated spreadsheet here and continue to add/edit as needed:

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/13mWHAPvzKq6-A2wUUu1YWDVE\\_rf85Vj2RpPDuenXElo/edit#](https://docs.google.com/document/d/13mWHAPvzKq6-A2wUUu1YWDVE_rf85Vj2RpPDuenXElo/edit#)

## **V. Tidal Restrictions Workshop Report**

Several members of the group attended a workshop EPA hosted, the goals of which were to develop an assessment protocol for tidal restrictions. Tidal restriction issues were not limited to fish passage but also included coastal flooding issues, wetland migration, hydrology, and wetland health. Feedback from the meeting included:

- It was good to get a lot of practitioners in the room
- Concern that EPA did not seem to want to take ownership of several steps of the process including data management.
- There did not seem any process of test assessments planned
- They seemed less sure of how they were going to assess tidal restrictions that were not NAACC-assessment based i.e. tide gates, tidal ditching.
- We hope that there are more meetings to come.

## **VI. Funders Letter Results**

This letter advocating for fair funding for our region was drafted by our group and was distributed widely to federal and state funders. A spreadsheet of where the letter was sent and some of the responses can be found here:

[https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1xEeCaGAasTO8-0VW0TZyv\\_WjCU9gUAu1ToIOBVCJLIE/edit#gid=0](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1xEeCaGAasTO8-0VW0TZyv_WjCU9gUAu1ToIOBVCJLIE/edit#gid=0)

The most notable result of this outreach was that HEP and the group chairs participated in a cross-federal series of workshops that focused on how the federal agencies can work together to make progress on fish passage. Our focus session was on inclusion in grantmaking. The summary of recommendations from this inclusion committee was distributed to the workgroup.

- There was a concern that all the salient points from the inclusion committee were not comprehensively adopted into the final report from all the committees. Isabelle pushed back about this at the summary meeting and was told that some of the inclusion information seemed to granular.
- Megan suggested that we may want to create a one-pager for distribution to summarize our main points. We need to keep being the squeaky wheel.
- Rob Pirani mentioned that all the federal agencies are going to be designing how they are meeting the justice 40 goals. Carl Alderson admitted that NOAA is still figuring out how to best hit these goals and a new committee has been formed that may adjust the grants from the last grant cycle. We will make sure that this group has a summary of the notes from the inclusion committee.

## **VII. Priming for Infrastructure Funding: Task Determination and Role Assignment (25 minutes)**

The group addressed the goals outlined in our action items tracker, here:

[https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/167-](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/167-R_OXoOYpyrSnGWSx3HjbtBfev4W2M/edit#gid=1665080857)

[R\\_OXoOYpyrSnGWSx3HjbtBfev4W2M/edit#gid=1665080857](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/167-R_OXoOYpyrSnGWSx3HjbtBfev4W2M/edit#gid=1665080857)

1. Communicating the challenges of NY/NJ based projects (high cost, lower stream mileage) to federal funders and the public

- Laura will put together the research from the RS means and Construction Cost Index from the Engineering News Record regarding costs and inflation.
- Jackie, Lingard, Katie, and George are going to work on putting together a pitch for the USACE to work on a research project about the higher cost of restoration in our region, the increased benefits because of the population density and any data gaps we need to advocate for our case. Resources and more details are available in the tracking document.
- Isabelle will check in with Kyle on the USGS database on dam removal costs that he mentioned at a previous meeting.
- Laura noted a concern that the Federal Highways grant lists language about endangered species, which does not favor our region. Carl noted that there are other categories included, such as prey fish and important diadromous species and an opening greater than 200m.

2. Partnership Opportunities

The group was encouraged to update our document on what our needs are and what we can offer to each other through partnerships on projects. Update here:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1P5MUqELWKzkgozFYrlwVvvA7Q76sll23lgXYpNRuXOs/edit#gid=0>

We need ideas on next steps on how to get from this list to actually partnering on grants.

- Laura suggested we could take some time during a meeting to go through what we offer.
- Katie suggested that inform each other when we're working with large landowners so we can share contacts, best practices and MOA/MOUs.
- Megan suggested that the HR Estuary Program may have capacity to help partners with grant writing, mapping, technical support.
- Rob noted that HEP has BIL funding for project design/assessment/feasibility etc. We are considering \$50 K grants for 2023.
- Laura notes that similar funding is available through CTDEEP: <https://portal.ct.gov/connecticutclimateaction/executive-order/deep-climate-resilience-fund>
- The group is wondering who is updating the Hudson River Comprehensive Restoration Plan. It hasn't been updated since 2018.

### **3. Attendance**

Laura Wildman, Save the Sound (chair)  
Megan Lung, Hudson River Estuary Program/NYSDEC (chair)  
Carl Alderson, NOAA  
Eric Boehm, NJDEP  
Melissa Cohen, NYSDEC  
Katie Friedman, Save the Sound  
David Hsu, Montclair  
George Jackman, Riverkeeper  
Alex Kisurin, Rutgers  
Lingard Knutson, EPA  
Jamie Ong, NYC Parks  
Rob Pirani, NY-NJ HEP  
Isabelle Stinnette, NY-NJ HEP