

Long Island Sound Inventory and Blue Plan Advisory Committee

March 16, 2017

10:00AM – 12:00 PM

Meigs Point Nature Center, Hammonasset State Park

Madison, CT

MINUTES

Advisory Committee Attendance:

Robert Klee, Commissioner, Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, Chair

Sylvain De Guise, Connecticut Sea Grant

Catherine Finneran, represented by Robert Deptula, Eversource, Gas and electric distribution industry representative appointed by Governor Malloy

Nathan Frohling, The Nature Conservancy

David Carey, Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Aquaculture

Christine Nelson, Town of Old Saybrook Town Planner

Evan Matthews [ABSENT], Connecticut Port Authority, Commissioner Redeker's designee

Jason Bowsza, Connecticut Department of Agriculture, Commissioner Reviczky's Designee

Garrett Eucalitto, represented by Eric Lindquist, Connecticut Office of Policy and Management, Secretary Barnes' Designee

Melanie Bachman [ABSENT], Connecticut Siting Council

Leah Schmalz [ABSENT], Connecticut Fund for the Environment/Save the Sound

William Gardella, General Manager and Dockmaster, Rex Marine Center, Norwalk

Bruce Beebe, Beebe Dock and Mooring Systems, Madison

Mike Theiler [ABSENT], Commercial finfish industry representative

Alicia Mozian, Town of Westport Conservation Director

Sid Holbrook [ABSENT], Westbrook, recreational fishing/hunting community representative

Other attendees:

Peter Auster, Mystic Aquarium

Tom Robben, CT Ornithological Assn.

Shannon Andrew, US Coast Guard

Katherine Linnick, US Coast Guard

Ben Goetsch, East Coast Shellfish Growers

Eric Thal

Kevin Coughlin

Jennifer Turiano, Greenwich Time

Anthony Morales, independent scientist

Ian Yue, CT Sea Grant

David Blatt, DEEP

Mary-beth Hart, DEEP

Kevin O'Brien, DEEP

Brian Thompson, DEEP

Deb Pacileo, DEEP

Jacque Benway, DEEP

Welcome and introduction

Robert Klee, Commissioner, CT Department of Energy & Protection (DEEP)

Commissioner Klee welcomed the Advisory Committee members and others present to Hammonasset and the Meigs Point facility. Klee began by addressing the recently announced federal budget proposals of the Trump Administration, which would cut 44% of EPA's assistance to states and eliminate funding for Sea Grant and the Long Island Sound Study. He described the proposed budget as an assault on the environment and the science of climate change, but stated that it was only a proposal and that DEEP would continue doing its work as best it could.

Brian Thompson noted that the Blue Plan would continue since it did not rely on federal funds. DEEP's complementary effort to establish a National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR) could be de-funded at the federal level, but for now the site selection process continues. <http://www.ct.gov/deep/nerr>. In addition, the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic Regional Ocean Plans continue to be implemented, as RPB work groups and planning bodies are still meeting, and renewable energy proposals are still emerging. <http://neooceanplanning.org/plan/> and <http://midatlanticocean.org/ocean-planning/updates>.

Mary-beth Hart introduced a draft Blue Plan logo (Attachment 1) which was produced by a graphic designer under contract to Sea Grant. The appearance and use of the logo was discussed, and the Advisory Committee will send any suggestions to Hart.

Vision and Goals

Nathan Frohling discussed the current draft vision and goals statement that had been updated after comments from the Norwalk event, and offered another opportunity for the Advisory Committee to provide input. So far no fundamental problems or concerns have been raised, although additional efforts are needed to reach stakeholders in New York. We have had input from NY DEC, but not from NY DOS. The comment deadline will be two weeks before the June Advisory Committee meeting, and the latest draft will be posted on the Blue Plan website.

Subcommittees and Work Teams Update

Leaders of the Subcommittees and Work teams provided updates and led discussions of the work of their respective groups. Sylvain De Guise described the work of the Inventory and Science Subcommittee, showing some slides depicting a high-level process for assessing and reviewing data (Attachments 2 and 3). The discussion concerned whether we should focus on obtaining the most data for a few sectors or raise the level of available data for all sectors. A certain level of data quality is necessary for stakeholders and experts to review, and once the datasets are verified as credible, they can be incorporated with narratives and map products to comprise the Inventory section of the Blue Plan. However, some areas have data gaps—should we build on success or seek good data across the board? Commissioner Klee noted that it may be useful to use certain areas as a template, and De Guise noted that map products would help represent data to stakeholders in terms of representing what they know, and whether there is a better way to depict the information. There was a discussion of data availability for different parts of the Sound, particularly pilot areas of the seafloor mapping project.

The next steps will be to seek input from identified experts and stakeholders; the Commissioner has sent emails to these “interested parties” regarding ecological characterization, and received a very positive response. At some future point ad hoc teams will form for specific purposes, moving toward the designation of ecologically significant areas and significant use areas, but it will be a busy spring in hopes of drafting a Resource and Use Inventory by fall 2017.

At this point De Guise and Nathan Frohling discussed some additional funding resources that have become available for the Blue Plan. A LISS Futures Fund grant allowed Sea Grant to hire Ian Yue part-time, and a Yale Environmental Protection clinic project has a number of students conducting outreach to the shellfish community for ecological characterization and human use coordination. Also, DEEP is seeking to secure a NOAA Coastal Fellow to start in August, and The Nature Conservancy has obtained a summer intern to work on outreach tasks.

Nathan Frohling described the work of the Stakeholder Engagement Subcommittee, including the draft Stakeholder Engagement Plan, which recommends a number of engagement techniques. These include basic efforts such as the website and listserv, as well as public meetings and events, topical calls and meetings, and ad hoc working groups with specific tasks. There was discussion about the uses of webinars and the necessity of engaging New York stakeholders, as well as a recap of the Branford Land Trust presentation by Frohling and Brian Thompson on February 22, 2017. The Branford event attracted considerable public interest, and it is hoped that the upcoming event at UConn Avery Point on April 25, similar to last year’s Norwalk Aquarium event and also including a screening of the most recent Ocean Frontiers film, will generate similar interest.

David Blatt discussed the recent conference call of the Human Use Characterization Work Team, at which members agreed that designating Significant Use Areas, equivalent to Ecologically Significant Areas, would be an important step. Members will also be working towards distilling the 400+ names of user groups into a smaller list of individual contacts who could be engaged to review human use data and data gaps, and provide additional insights, following the pattern of engaging the Ecological experts described above. Kevin O’Brien reported on the work of the Data and Mapping Work Team, which is working on a template to produce map products for approximately 300 data layers. Brian Thompson noted that interns from the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies may be available to work on data topics over the summer, particularly in areas of resource economics. Economic analysis could help with balancing resource decisionmaking and in enhancing non-mappable data with narrative products, particularly in Significant Use Areas. The Ecological Characterization Work Team described how they were organizing identified experts into the process of characterizing Long Island Sound ecologically, using available data and with significant participation from New York experts. Based on the experiences of the Work Teams Commissioner Klee inquired about whether the Subcommittees were keeping pace with the Blue Plan timeline. While the Policy Subcommittee is running behind, the Stakeholder Engagement and Inventory and Science Subcommittees are roughly on schedule, although a big effort will be needed to complete a draft Inventory in the fall. Capacity to conduct this work remains a continuing issue.

Public Comment Period

Ben Goetsch of East Coast Shellfish Growers expressed several concerns regarding the role of the shellfish industry in the Blue Plan process. While he has spoken to the Yale student group and attended the Branford meeting, he is worried that the process is biased in that the Department of Agriculture essentially has two seats on the Advisory Committee. He was dismayed that the Governor appointed David Carey instead of an industry representative or local shellfish commissioner, leaving those sectors out. In addition, Goetsch criticized the Department of Agriculture's purchase of local shellfish grounds in Branford to run an incubator program, and expressed concern about the role of the state in town jurisdictional waters. Peter Auster suggested that the Vision & Goals statement account for climate change, and that the Yale interns should model ecological goods and services as a way of addressing tradeoffs. He pointed out that even spatially restricted datasets could be useful. Deb Pacileo of DEEP Fisheries noted that Fisheries held a lot of data that was not displayed on any data portal; Nathan Frohling assured her that the Blue Plan partners were well aware of this and were working towards getting this data on the NY DOS Gateway, although time and resources were limited. Tom Robben asked about a process for integrating subject matter expertise that is not available on any map. Sylvain De Guise stated that we would try to create such a process, and also responded to Jennifer Turiano that anyone with datasets or information should contact the DEEP.BluePlanLIS@ct.gov email. Nathan Frohling then responded to Ben Goetsch stating that it was very important to include the perspective of shellfishermen in the Blue Plan process, and welcomed them to participate in appropriate Work Teams and Subcommittees.

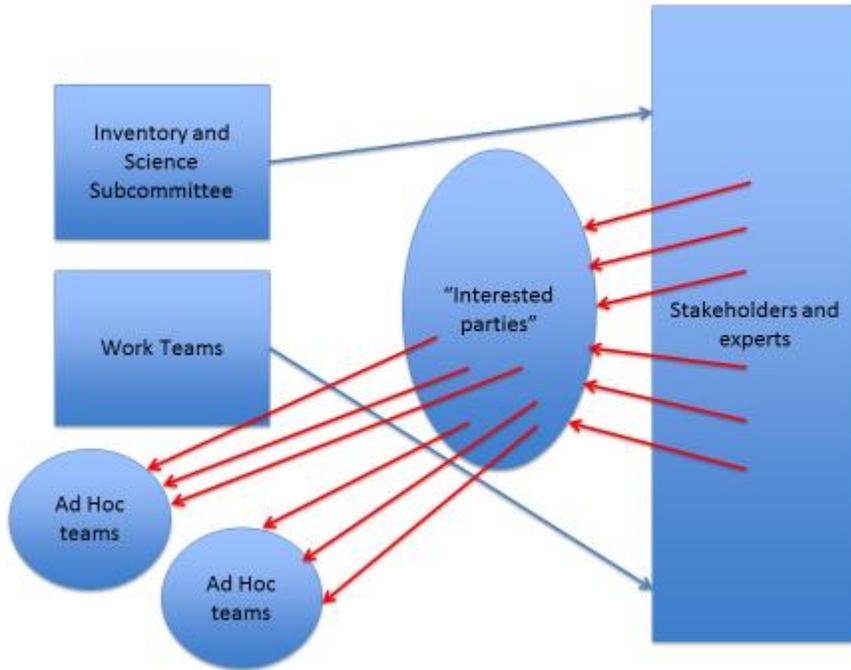
The meeting adjourned at 12:05 pm.

<http://www.ct.gov/deep/lisblueplan>

Attachment 1 Proposed Blue Plan Logo



Attachment 2



Attachment 3

