

Minutes

Meeting Attendees: Haley Burns (PDE), Elizabeth Butler (EPA2), Karen Forst (PDE), LeeAnn Haaf (PDE), Kathy Klein (PDE), Megan Mackey (EPA3), Martha Maxwell-Doyle (PDE), Jason Minnich (PA DEP), Rachael Phillos (DNREC), Chad Pindar (DRBC), Irene Purdy (EPA2), Meghan Rogalus (PADEP), Bob Schuster (NJDEP), Will Whalon (PWD)

Kathy opened the meeting with acknowledgement of Danielle Kreeger's passing. It would be great to find a way for DELEP to honor her memory – there are already some things in the works via other outlets – and any ideas we welcome.

IIJA Year 5 Work Plan Progress

- PDE has been working on the work plan this week, and meeting again this afternoon to work out some details.
- We listened to feedback during the last Steering Committee (SC) meeting and are working to frame things to align with the administration's priorities and the needs of the estuary program.
- A lot of big things are coming up over next few years, including CCMP revision, TREB and State of Estuary, which will be included in the work plan.
- PDE will send a draft to the EIC by the end of day next Monday (1/12).
- Megan noted that we are still way ahead of the EPA deadline of June 1, but IIJA money is in the region, and it is good to get things in early if possible.

Spring Steering Committee Meeting

- The DELEP SC typically meets twice a year, ideally once in person.
- This year is 30th anniversary of PDE, and PDE is looking for ways to celebrate that milestone. Kathy raised the idea of doing something in person with the SC in March or April, possibly around Earth Day, in order to celebrate accomplishments. This could be at a project site or even something like a bus tour to multiple sites.
 - Several members of the EIC expressed that the period around Earth Day is often very busy so a date would need to be decided soon.
 - Megan likes the idea of getting the SC out together, especially with several new members.
 - Rachel asked about doing something in September around National Estuaries Week instead. This can be a busy time as well but there would be more lead time to plan. There was support for this idea.
 - The Artists in Residence program will also be wrapping up in September, and there will likely be some kind of culminating event which could be an opportunity to engage the SC.
- We will move forward with the plan to do something in person in September, and still hold the spring SC meeting virtually. PDE will develop a timeline for completion of the FY27 base funding work plan and based on that find some time option for a SC meeting. The spring meeting can include some highlights about things happening around the 30th anniversary of PDE.

Artist in Residence (AiR) Program

- The artist, Eurhi Jones, was selected in October. During the contracting phase there was a roadblock with insurance, as Eurhi is an independent artist that does not have an LLC, and PDE required worker's compensation insurance which was difficult for her to get. Just before the holidays she was able to get the insurance and now the contract is signed.
- Eurhi has started to meet with some folks in local communities, and there will be more meetings in each of the three states. Once the implementation schedule is nailed down, Kathy said she will look for and share opportunities for the EIC to participate.

- There is a short time frame for implementation as the money for this program in the FY24 assistance agreement which ends 9/30/2026.
- Next week there is an AiR cohort call with other participating locations, during which artists/locations share what they are working on.

New Website

- The new website design is underway and starting to involve individual pages. The goal is to roll this out in March in conjunction with PDE's 30th anniversary.
- One new element of the new site is a climate resilience hub. Some partners from Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, Philadelphia Water Department, and Water Resources Association are helping to pull plans together. If anyone else is interested in being part of the conversation, let us know. Last year ideas were collected from partners about what they would like to see included, which will influence the layout and content.

NEP Meeting

- The spring EPA NEP meeting will be held the week of March 17 in Washington, D.C. EPA regional folks will be virtual rather than in person. If anyone is interested in attending, let Kathy know as there are some travel funds available.
- New program evaluation guidance is expected to come out, not sure if it will be rolled out at this meeting.

Partner Updates

- DNREC:
 - Yesterday DNREC released the [2025 update to climate action plan](#) that was originally published in 2021.
 - The [wetlands conference](#) is coming up end of month.
 - The Delaware National Estuarine Research Reserve will have a 2-day research symposium during national estuaries week – a save the date will come out this winter.
 - RASCL summit [registration](#) just went live.
- NJDEP:
 - NJ DEP is waiting to see if the commissioner will stay same or change after the recent election. The inauguration is a couple of weeks away.
 - They recently updated a state plan that deals with land use and the environment.
- PADEP: Growing Greener grants should be announced soon, no exact date yet.
- EPA3: Kelly Somers is back from maternity leave. Noemi Mercado has been the HQ coordinator for the NEP for many years and is transitioning out of that role. Tanja Crk is taking over the coordinator position.
- DRBC:
 - A December [Water Quality Advisory Committee meeting](#) covered designated use and other items. There is a [Toxics Advisory Committee meeting](#) next week.
 - The Commission is exploring the impact of data centers on water resources, tracking those proposed in the Delaware River Basin. There is a lot of concern out there but not a lot of facts about water and energy use so they are working to stay on top of the subject matter.
 - The sub-committee on source water protection is gearing up for tabletop exercise, tentatively scheduled for March, with a proposed spill location in the non-tidal part of the river.
 - DRBC is looking to fill the role of Manager of the Water Quality Assessment Section.
- PWD:
 - PWD submitted their [annual status report](#) to PA DEP at the end of year.

- PWD received the Watershed Restoration Leadership Award by the Pennsylvania Environmental Council for the Manayunk Canal project:
<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=w-l1NmJTORA>
- Science and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC):
 - At their December meeting, the STAC workshopped to develop the 2026 work plan, discussed ideas to improve STAC engagement.
 - A draft of the work plan and scheduling polls will soon be share with STAC members.
 - LeeAnn is going to confer with DRBC about what the 2027 TREB will look like and then will set up another TREB subcommittee meeting.
- PDE:
 - PDE is exploring a potential opportunity to build a hatchery in a different location. Not much can be shared yet, but updates will be provided when possible. Kathy said that she would like a decision to be made on the future of the hatchery by the end of June, as there are deadlines for some of the funding, and PDE is also potentially looking for a new office building.
 - PDE is currently fully staffed and will likely hire some science interns for field work in the spring/summer. Several staff members are expecting babies this year, so planning is underway for how to cover work.

Action Items:

- PDE will send the draft IIA Year 5 Work Plan to the EIC by COB Monday, January 12, with EIC feedback due by COB Monday, January 19.
- PDE will establish a timeline for completion and submission of the FY27 NEP base funding work plan. This will be used to identify some meeting time options for the spring virtual Steering Committee meeting, and Haley will send a poll for scheduling.
- Haley will work with Megan to update the NEP deliverables list/schedule and then share with the EIC.

Upcoming Meetings and Events:

- Next EIC meeting: Thursday, February 5, 2026, 10am-12pm, via Zoom
- RASCL Summit: March 5, 2026, Del-One Conference Center, Dover
- Spring NEP meeting: March 17-19, 2026, Washington, D.C., and virtual