

Estuary Implementation Committee Monthly Meeting

Thursday, December 4, 2025

10:00am – 12:00pm

Meeting Attendance: Kathy Klein (PDE), Martha Maxwell Doyle (PDE), Karen Forst (PDE), LeeAnn Haaf (PDE), Will Whalon (PWD), Meghan Rogalus (PA DEP), Chad Pinda (DRBC), Jason Minnich (PA DEP), Rachael Phillos (DNREC), Liz Butler (EPA R2), Irene Purdy (EPA R2), Megan Mackey (EPA R3)

Hatchery Update

PDE officially separated from Bartram's as the site for hatchery construction. A joint statement was sent out last week to project funders and supporters. While it is a disappointing development, PDE is confident that it was the right decision given the widening funding gap. Kathy has been keeping Rebecca at PennVest updated. PennVest wants to see a plan for alternative sites/partner(s). PDE talked with PWD about the potential of partnering on the hatchery, and PWD is having internal conversations about possible sites.

PDE needs a partner that can help with ongoing operational expenses. A financial analysis was conducted by a PDE board member. Results showed a deficit of \$3.5M over 12 years, including PennVest operational funds for the first 3 years, and the sale of mussels, compared with the annual cost of operation. Annual operating is estimated to be about \$400-\$500K/year.

Chad asked if any settlement money from the Conowingo Dam could help support PDE's hatchery? Kathy explained that there are now plans to build a hatchery in Maryland, making settlement money for the PDE hatchery unlikely.

PDE is also talking with EPA about the possibility of using some of the IIJA funding originally budgeted for the hatchery to be reallocated toward the purchase of an office. PDE has identified a location in Wilmington and is investigating this site further. Once feedback is confirmed from EPA regarding the use of the funds for office space, PDE will bring this back to the EIC for EIC and Steering Committee approval.

Rent currently costs PDE about \$150,000 annually, so purchasing a permanent location could provide additional financial stability. However, Rachel and Chad cautioned that facility upkeep needs to be factored into PDE budgets - large expenses can come up with little advanced warning, leading to financial challenges for necessary upkeep and maintenance as well as capital improvements like HVAC or roof repairs.

Year 5 IIJA Work Plan Update

PDE provided the EIC with a revised timeframe for preparation and submittal of the Year 5 IIJA Work Plan application.

Proposed adjusted timeframe:

PDE to prepare draft work plan	December 2025/ Early January 2026
PDE to send draft work plan to EIC for review	Monday, January 12, 2026
EIC feedback due to PDE	Monday, January 19, 2026
Year 5 Work Plan sent to Steering Committee for review	Friday, January 23, 2026
Steering Committee feedback due to PDE	Friday, February 6, 2026
PDE to send revised Work Plan to Steering Committee for final approval	Friday, February 13, 2026
Final Steering Committee approval due to PDE	Friday, February 27, 2026
PDE to submit IIJA Year 5 Work Plan to EPA	Friday, March 6, 2026

The EIC expressed support for this revised timeline. The NEP IIJA Year 5 funding will have a 5-year time frame, bringing the end date to roughly mid-2030.

PDE also shared that there are some elements of the Year 3 IIJA Work Plan that will not be happening, and therefore funding will need to be reprogrammed to support other elements of the Work Plan.

Partner Updates

PDE –

- **ANEP Meeting Highlights**

- Martha and Kathy attended the fall 2025 ANEP meeting in Mobile, AL in November.
- One of the NEPs presented on their recent IIJA audit. Takeaways included the NEPS need to very closely track subawards. The presenter discussed how the auditors expected the NEP to be auditing the subawardee's finances, which seems to be a very unrealistic expectation.
- There was discussion about the 40th anniversary of the NEPs, which will be in 2027.
- Kathy will send out the slides from the ANEP meeting.

- **PDE Website**

- Kathy shared a preview of the new PDE website. The layout and design is fairly well established. The goal is for the new website to go live in March 2026, which aligns with PDE's 30th anniversary.
- The new website will provide a feature encouraging people to get out and "experience the estuary", and will highlight places, species, and events that are important to our region.
- The company designing the website has created websites for other NEPs, and they have a strong focus on marketing, which will be very beneficial to PDE.

DRBC –

- Chad provided link to DRBC's WQ Advisory Meeting happening later today: https://www.nj.gov/drbc/library/documents/WQAC/120425/agenda_draft.pdf.
- The meeting will not be recorded, but slides will be posted after the meeting.
- John Yagecic is retiring at the end of December.

DNREC –

- Delaware's Climate Action Plan is close to being released.
- Sarah Bouboulis has come on as the new CZM Program Manager and is in the process of getting up to speed.
- The NOAA DC meeting is being held from March 3-5 this year.

PADEP –

- The draft Integrated Water Quality Report has been posted and comments are due by January 27th, 2026. Please see links below for the Draft Integrated Report and the posting in the PA Bulletin:
<https://www.pa.gov/agencies/dep/programs-and-services/water/clean-water/water-quality/integrated-water-report/integrated-water-quality-report-2026>
<https://www.pacodeandbulletin.gov/Display/pabull?file=/secure/pabulletin/data/vol55/55-48/1612.html&search=1&searchunitkeywords=integrated,report>
- PA Coastal Program has announced the 2025 grant awards. PDE received 2 awards for coastal resilience planning along northern Philadelphia shorelines and for River Festival 2026.
<https://www.pa.gov/agencies/dep/newsroom/2025-12-02-shapiro-administration-awards-funding-to-protect-delaware-estuary-coastal-zone>
- Growing Greener expects to have award announcements released in January.
- PA DEP shared information about several upcoming public meetings -
 - December 11 – PA Agricultural Advisory Board <https://www.pa.gov/agencies/dep/public-participation/advisory-committees/water-advisory-committees/agricultural-advisory-board>
 - December 16 – PA Climate Change Advisory Committee
<https://www.pa.gov/agencies/dep/public-participation/advisory-committees/climate-change-advisory-committee-ccac>
 - December 18 – PA Sewage Advisory Committee
<https://www.pa.gov/agencies/dep/public-participation/advisory-committees/water-advisory-committees/sewage-advisory-committee>
 - January 14 – PA Coastal Zone Advisory Committee Meeting Agenda:
https://files.dep.state.pa.us/PublicParticipation/AdvisoryCommittees/AdvCommPortalFiles/czac/2025/01-15/Jan-15-2025_CZAC_Agenda.pdf

EPA R3 –

- The annual 2026 NEP Meeting in DC will be held from March 17-19.
- EPA Regional staff will be attending virtually.