

Minutes

Meeting Attendees: Haley Burns (PDE), Elizabeth Butler (EPA2), Karen Forst (PDE), LeeAnn Haaf (PDE), Kathy Klein (PDE), Megan Mackey (EPA3), Cathy Magliocchetti (EPA3), Martha Maxwell-Doyle (PDE), Rachael Phillos (DNREC), Chad Pindar (DRBC), Irene Purdy (EPA2)

IJA Year 5 Work Plan

- The deadline for approval and/or feedback is tomorrow.
- Unless there are significant edits to be made, we won't send the draft out for another round of review.

FY27 Base Funding Work Plan

- Reviewed proposed timeline for preparation, review, and submission of base funding work plan.
- The allocation for National Estuary Programs (NEPs) is once again \$850k. This was included in the Department of Interior minibuss that was recently approved in congress. While this is good news overall, it will be the third year without any increase. The Association of National Estuary Programs (ANEP) is discussing how to message the challenges presented by the lack of funding increase in combination with an increase in requirements from EPA.
- Compared to other years, the only potential change that PDE anticipates in the base funding work plan is to include some money to pay for a portion of the ANEP dues now that they have increased.
- Guidance is needed from EPA on how to handle the Urban Waters Federal Partnership (UWFP) addendum. It was included in the current work plan but there was no funding for it in the assistance agreement.
 - Megan shared the good news that \$70k was sent to the region and she requested it be reprogrammed to PDE for Urban Waters. She recommended including the addendum again for FY27.
 - Only UWFP programs co-located with NEPs will get funding for FY26, but most if not all that are getting funding will receive the full amount that they asked for.
- The EIC did not have any objections to the initial timeline and plan as shared.

Spring Steering Committee (SC) Meeting

- A poll was sent out to schedule the SC meeting, with tomorrow as the deadline. We are still waiting on responses from a number of partners.
- The dates provided in the poll were selected because they fall within the timeframe that the FY27 base funding work plan will be out with the SC for review, potentially providing an opportunity to answer questions or address any concerns before that review period is over.
- Based on current responses there is not much shared availability, so we may need to do a new poll with new options.

Rescheduling March EIC Meeting

- The March EIC meeting needs to be rescheduled since there is a PDE Board Meeting on March 5. This is also the day of the RASCL Summit and the rescheduled Delaware Wetlands Conference.
- A new EIC meeting date/time was chosen: Tuesday, March 10, 9am-11am. Haley updated the calendar event.

Federal Funding Update

- As mentioned earlier, FY27 allocation for NEPs is \$850k.

- There is the potential for a few (2-3) new programs added to the NEP.
 - Rubio directed some funding from a spill in the Gulf to several Florida entities interested in being NEPs, and they used the money to develop CCMPs. Congress approved a bill to allow the program's expansion, but ANEP has sent clear signals that if new programs are added, the pot of money has to increase so as to not take money from existing programs to give to the new.
 - Now that there is some movement on these few potential programs there are a bunch of other locations also interested, so there are many questions around how this would work.
 - Megan said that in a regional check-in with HQ, she asked about new NEPs and HQ said that there is currently not even an approval process in place to have programs added. Liz said that she heard similar on a managers call, but also that the politicals in HQ are very interested in expanding the NEP. 1 out of the 3 potential new programs are written into statute so far but not yet funded.
- Two years ago, PDE submitted a congressionally designated spending (CDS) proposal to Senator Coons for \$500k to do work in Delaware. This was included in the FY25 budget, but due to the continuing resolution no earmarks were funded last year. PDE was invited to resubmit the request for FY26, and since the minibus recently passed, that money will be awarded. PDE can share a list of what all was included in the proposal, but it touched most aspects of the work being done through both science and engagement - mussel maintenance, living shorelines, resilience work, clean water education, etc. This money will come through U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), so they should contact PDE about contracting. This could take a while, so PDE may not start spending the money until 2027.
- The Delaware Watershed Conservation Fund is funded at \$12M, and they just put out the RFP.
- The NEP and Delaware River Basin Conservation Act (DRBCA) are both up for reauthorization.
- Kathy, Martha, and John are going to D.C. for the NEP meeting the week of March 17. John will be participating in CDRW's Hill Day taking place that same week. PDE has a joint meeting set up with Center for the Inland Bays and the Delaware delegation, and PDE will try to set up a few other Hill visit meetings as well.

Partner Updates

- PDE:
 - On the first day of the NEP meeting there will be an Artist in Residence session. The six locations participating in the program were originally told their artists had to come, and our artist, Eurhi, will be there in person, though some artists will be participating virtually. They are still figuring out what the session will look like. PDE will share the link for anyone who wants to participate in the meeting virtually.
 - Hatchery:
 - After deciding not to build the hatchery at Bartram's Garden, PDE started having discussions with PWD, who has been partner in hatchery work for a long time. PDE made it clear that they were looking for a partner, or partners, who could help cover operating costs once a hatchery was constructed. PWD expressed interest in this model and identified a potential location at Pleasant Hill Park in Northeast Philadelphia. It is a Philadelphia Parks and Recreation property behind the Baxter drinking water plant. In the past it was a fish hatchery, and still has ponds as well as a historic hatchery building in disrepair.
 - PWD, Parks and Recreation, and Riverfront North are all interested in the possibility of doing something, and met at the site earlier this year. After the on-site visit, PWD did a thorough flood risk assessment study, which showed two locations on the property where you could build outside of the floodplain. PDE met with these partners again earlier this week and narrowed those possible locations down to one. Parks and Recreation staff are going to talk with their leadership to see if they are

interested in moving forward. They want to protect the historic brick building which would require moving it and are also interested in building new bathrooms and community space. Riverfront North is interested in office space at this location. Everyone is exploring what this could look like.

- The main questions are whether Parks and Recreation is interested, and if we have enough money to build at this site since it should be less complicated than the Bartram's location. Parks and Recreation is also looking into whether the lease with Bartram's, which took a long time to get, could be amended to avoid repeating the whole lease process. If amending the lease is not an option, then this will most likely not be a viable option for the hatchery.
- PDE told PWD that they would need them to cover operating costs moving forward. This would take the burden off of PDE having to raise money every year to manage the hatchery, which PWD seemed open to doing.
- A decision needs to be made by the end of June.
- PDE is still looking at potential office space, and unfortunately there is not much on the market to buy in north Wilmington right now. Kathy recently put out a call to partners to see if anyone has any leads.
- New website:
 - Staff are digging into the site map and content/format of specific pages.
 - For the DELEP page, which will include information about the DELEP committees, PDE proposed including the latest meeting minutes under the EIC information, with all prior meeting minutes housed in the Library section of the website. (Currently all EIC minutes are posted in a table on the EIC page.) The EIC generally supported this approach, particularly if under the latest meeting minutes there is a link that would take folks directly to EIC historical minutes in the Library (rather than having to sift through all kinds of different documents). If this direct link is not possible, then it was suggested that more be included on the EIC landing page, possibly those from the past year.
 - Chad shared an example of how DRBC posts some files with a matrix option to eliminate scrolling https://www.nj.gov/drbc/about/advisory/WMAC_index.html.
- The American Water Resources Association (AWRA) is having their national meeting in Philadelphia in November. The Delaware Chapter (former PDE board member Juni Alum is currently their President) has invited PDE to plan an interactive activity for the social event taking place one night of the conference at Independence Seaport Museum. This will be a good opportunity to highlight DELEP.
- PDE is starting to look at different venue options for the Summit, including another location in Delaware, the DuPont Country Club. The Chase Center has not yet responded to inquiries.
- DRBC:
 - DRBC is coordinating efforts connected to ice in the main channel, intakes being impacted, and emergency actions by utilities. There is the surface ice issue as well as frazzle, which is related to submerged intake issues with ice forming quickly.
 - Data centers pose a new water resource issue in the basin. They impact water use but also create significant potential for the expansion or addition of power generation. The vast majority of proposed centers seem to be relying on public water supply rather than having their own intakes. Based on several coordination calls in PA, it seems that in some cases centers were developed without a tenant identified, which makes it tough to answer question about their water footprint. There are already 60+ centers operating in Basin.
 - The presentation that DRBC gave related to this in October can be found here: https://www.nj.gov/drbc/library/documents/WMAC/101525/Thompson_DataCenters.pdf

Action Items:

- PDE will share a list of activities included in the CDS funding.
- PDE will share information about virtual attendance at the NEP meeting.

Upcoming Meetings and Events:

- RASCL Summit: March 5, 2026, Del-One Conference Center, Dover
- Next EIC meeting: Tuesday, March 10, 2026, 9am-11am, virtual
- Spring NEP meeting: March 17-18, 2026, 12:30-5pm, Washington, D.C., and [virtual](#)
 - Teams Meeting ID: 231 736 271 602 19
 - Passcode: iS6kr33M