

Minutes

Meeting Attendees: Haley Burns (PDE), LeeAnn Haaf (PDE), Kathy Klein (PDE), Megan Mackey (EPA R3), Cathy Magliocchetti (EPA R3), Martha Maxwell-Doyle (PDE), Jason Minnich (PA DEP), Rachael Phillos (DNREC), Chad Pindar (DRBC), Irene Purdy (EPA R2), Meghan Rogalus (PA DEP), Will Whalon (PWD)

Welcome and Brief Intros

- Jason Minnich, from the Bureau of Safe Drinking Water at PA DEP, is the new EIC rep from PA.
- Meghan Rogalus, who formerly worked for PDE and is now with the Bureau of Watershed Restoration and Nonpoint Source Management at PA DEP, also joined the call.

DELEP and Federal Updates

- Last Friday, PDE submitted the DELEP FY26 National Estuary Program (NEP) base funding workplan package. We do not yet know the level of funding but submitted it at the full \$920k to match FY25 levels (\$850k base + \$70k UWFP). We are currently hearing that the NEPs are in the EPA budget for the same amount of base funding as last year, but there are a lot of unknowns. It is unclear whether there will be any funding to support the Urban Waters Ambassador.
- PDE is finalizing workplan updates for IJIA Years 1-2, 3, 4, and FY24 and FY25 base funding. In order to request any changes to the budgets, the workplans must be updated to be consistent with new guidance and executive orders.
- After an assistance agreement is in place, PDE can draw down DELEP funding, on a reimbursement basis, from a bank account via ASAP (the web-based payment system used for federal funds). OMB recently changed the ASAP drawdown process to include a field requiring a description or justification of that drawdown. There was not much direction given but so far NEPs seem to be successful with this added step.
- The Artist in Residence Pilot program that is included as an addendum in the FY25 base funding workplan continues to evolve. Under the new administration, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) is no longer a partner and there is much less involvement from EPA HQ, including no new guidance, even though expectations/priorities related to the project have changed.
 - After previously releasing a HQ-approved RFQ and selecting 4 artists to participate in the program, EPA said the artists must be brought on as contractors rather than as sub awardees. This requires PDE to start over with a new RFP that cannot mention how much funding is available.
 - PDE has decided to look for one artist and to be much more prescribed in regards to final deliverables so that they can be used to benefit the Estuary Program even after this project has concluded. The goal is for the completed artwork to have an interactive element, like a paint-by-numbers mural, for community engagement at events in each of the four Urban Waters cities. This can hopefully also be tied into the 2026 Semiquincentennial celebration.
- A rescission package is expected to be submitted soon which could include cuts to the FY25 budget.
- The President's detailed FY26 budget includes a cut in funding for the NEP from \$40M to \$32M. EPA would determine how much of that cut actually impacts the programs, but each program could see as high of a cut as \$250k for FY26. Some say it is good that there is NEP money included at all, while others think if the NEPs were zeroed out there would be a better chance of having it fully reinstated.
- While there is no official word on year 5 of IJIA funding, it seems likely that it will not come through, however, PDE will still need to manage years 1-4 of funding for as long as those grants are open (at least several years down the road). Unused money from years 1-4 will likely need to be reallocated to cover the administration for the ongoing projects and grant reporting/closeout.

- There will likely be about \$11M available to award through the Delaware River Conservation Fund (\$7.5M through the Delaware River Basin Restoration Program and the remaining in FY25 IJJA funds). 62 applications were submitted totaling \$29M in requests.

Partner Updates

- PDE:
 - PDE hired a new Source Water Protection Manager, Paula Wasilczuk, and is bringing on two summer science interns. They are interviewing for the open Science Coordinator position and soon for the Delaware Community Coordinator position.
 - PDE has worked closely on a contract with PWD for many years, and every 5 years PWD must compete for this work. This time around, the work was split into two RFPs, one for Schuylkill Action Network (SAN), Delaware River Improvement Partnership (DRIP), and freshwater mussel education work; and another for education and engagement related to NPDES and MS4 permit requirements. PDE was recently awarded both of these contracts and is excited to continue this work. The technical freshwater mussel work was not included this time around and instead will be part of a separate RFP related to efforts to develop models for ecosystem services and quantifying the benefits of freshwater mussels and other infrastructure toward clean water goals.
 - The hatchery remains on hold. There is less concern about losing already awarded money than there was earlier in the year, but there is still not enough funding to start construction and costs are likely to continue to rise. PDE is planning to meet with John Bartram's Association (JBA) over the summer to figure out how best to move forward. There was recently a facilitated scenario planning meeting of PDE's board members from the Hatchery Committee, and it was agreed that a decision/direction needs to be determined by the end of summer.
 - Resilient and Sustainable Communities League (RASCL) funding from DNREC is increasing from just under \$30k to \$60k and PDE is very appreciative of this support.
 - PDE was recently awarded a grant that has been in the works since 2022. This is NJDEP RGGI funding to expand work at Matt's Landing in partnership with Rutgers' Haskin Lab.
 - Delaware Community Foundation is offering \$20k Meet the Moment Grants. PDE is applying for funding to hire a consultant to help figure out how to better diversify funding sources to cover costs. This is especially important not only considering federal funding uncertainty, but as administrative costs continue to climb and the possibility of the negotiated indirect rate being replaced by a 15% de minimus that would not cover all of PDE's costs).
- EPA 3:
 - Region 3 is losing two NEP project officers, and while they are not assigned to DELEP, program support will need to be spread across the remaining project officers.
 - They anticipate a hiring freeze and there is potential for another reduction in force following the recent deferred resignation program.
 - Grant specialists are leaving the region which, unfortunately, is likely to lead to backups in August when it comes time to process grant awards.
- DRBC:
 - There is a [second quarter business meeting](#) next week. Commissioners will evaluate whether or not to terminate the current drought emergency. They will also consider the 3-year work plan.
 - There will be a second deployment of mussels (provided by PDE) into the Bushkill in late June.
 - <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/once-in-dire-straits-atlantic-sturgeon-are-staging-a-comeback-on-the-east-coast-180986664/>

- DNREC:
 - NOAA is experiencing similar situations to EPA, and Rachael has lost multiple liaisons in the past few months.
 - While no funding numbers have been authorized, NERRs were told to plan for level funding.
 - There will be some upcoming public engagement sessions pertaining to the update of Delaware's [Climate Action Plan](#). More info to come.
 - DNREC is also seeking public comment related to [regulatory review](#).
 - June is World Ocean Month. To celebrate, DNREC collected stories of people's connection to the ocean. These were compiled into a story catalog, [Voices of the Tide](#).
 - The [Delaware Wetlands Conference](#) will be at the Chase Center in January 2026. Abstracts are currently being accepted.
- STAC:
 - There are a number of new nominees for the Science and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC). Nomination packets will be shared with the STAC on June 10 for electronic voting through the 25th.
 - After the election there will be an in-person STAC meet-and-greet meeting, including presentations from new members. There will likely be a hybrid link so others can join as well.
- PWD:
 - The Schuylkill River Restoration Fund advisory committee met recently to review proposals. Just under \$500k will fund 8 projects in the watershed.
 - There will be a ribbon cutting ceremony for the [Manayunk Canal reopening](#). (Flow was restored to the canal after 75+ years, already resulting in DO improvements with additional water quality improvements expected.) There are freshwater mussels in the canal so as part of the public celebration, there will be a plug for the freshwater mussel program.
- PADEP:
 - Applications for the Growing Greener Grant Program will be accepted through June 20. So far, application numbers are comparable to prior years.

July EIC Meeting

- The July meeting is currently scheduled for Thursday, July 3. Since this is just before a long holiday weekend, a question was raised about whether this should be kept, rescheduled, or cancelled.
- The EIC agreed to reschedule an abbreviated meeting for July 10 at 10am.

Upcoming Meetings and Events:

- Next EIC Meeting: Thursday, July 10, 2025, 10am-11am
- Delaware River Festival: Saturday, September 27, 2025, 10am-4pm, Philadelphia and Camden
- Experience the Estuary Celebration: Thursday, October 9, 2025, 5-9pm, Philadelphia