

**Minutes**

**Meeting Attendees:** Rosie Brown (NJDEP), Haley Burns (PDE), Elizabeth Butler (EPA R2), Karen Forst (PDE), Kathy Klein (PDE), Cathy Magliocchetti (EPA R3), Martha Maxwell-Doyle (PDE), Jason Minnich (PA DEP), Rachael Phillos (DNREC), Irene Purdy (EPA R2), Meghan Rogalus (PA DEP), Bob Schuster (NJDEP), Will Whalon (PWD)

**Hatchery Update**

- Earlier in the year, when a lot of uncertainty arose around federal funding, we put a 6-month hold on hatchery construction planning, with the understanding that both Bartram's Garden and PDE would continue fundraising efforts since both were about \$2.5-3M short for their portions of the building.
- In late May, PDE had a facilitated internal scenario planning session with a small group of staff and PDE past and current board members on the Hatchery Committee. The consensus was that everyone still wants to build the Hatchery at Bartram's, but given the funding gap and other circumstances, it is not clear if this is possible.
- PDE and Bartram's staff met briefly last week and provided updates on where each organization stands in general and each organizations' portion of the complex.
  - PDE does not have any foreseeable opportunities to raise more money.
  - If there are changes that can be made to reduce costs so we can build at Bartram's Garden, that is the preference (we are working on getting pricing for the entire building being one floor instead of two).
- A meeting is scheduled with Bartram's for September 3 that will include board members from each organization. For both organizations, funding that has been secured has expiration dates or could potentially be clawed back, so a decision about how to move forward with this project needs to be made soon.
- Year 5 of IJJA funding is still not a sure thing, though EPA Region 3 has advised us to submit a proposal this fall. The Steering Committee previously approved using \$700k of the year 5 funding toward hatchery construction. If the hatchery moves in a different direction, this \$700k may not be needed and could be reallocated to support other DELEP-related work.

**October Steering Committee Meeting Agenda**

- Regardless of what next steps are decided upon in September, an update/discussion about the hatchery will be necessary at the October Steering Committee meeting. It is important for the Steering Committee to understand what is going on with the hatchery and we can get their thoughts on moving forward.
- Kathy can also provide an update on where the National Estuary Program stands and what upcoming funding looks like.

**DELEP Communications**

- PDE produces a quarterly newsletter. Each year two are printed and mailed to over 22k people, and the other two are digital and sent to about 7k people via email.
  - We have been discussing the newsletter, associated costs, and the value of the printed version, and were curious about how other NEPs are communicating with constituents.
    - PDE previously shared the results of a questionnaire that was sent to other NEPs for input.
    - Only a few other NEPs still issue any printed issues of their newsletters, and most that don't have stopped doing so because of rising costs for printing and postage.

- Most other NEPs send their newsletters to a much smaller group of people than PDE does.
- PDE is not proposing any changes at this time, but we wanted to see how others are handling communications efforts as we are having different internal discussions about the newsletter and looking at everything we do from a budgeting and cost-savings perspective. Supporting our staff is the priority and there aren't many places in the pot of base funding where we can save money.
- Over the summer PDE released the RFP for the website redesign.
  - This is being funded with leftover Delaware River Watershed Initiative funding from the William Penn Foundation. Since that program was being eliminated, they allowed latitude with the final year of funding. This does mean there is a tight timeline, as the money needs to be spent by the end of the year.
  - Nine proposals were submitted. PDE staff has narrowed this down to two and is conducting interviews with the top two companies.
  - We built into the proposal having a monthly contract with the company to help maintain things from a technical standpoint.
  - PDE will share updates and options for input when possible (such as homepage design). If anyone would like to be more involved with this process let Kathy know.
  - We are also including on the new site a climate/resilience hub (exact naming TBD), which is something that came out of the Water Table Project. There is a need for one place to house all regional things related to recurring extreme weather events, climate resilience, etc. Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) will be helping to organize and populate content related to this hub.

### **Partner Updates**

- PDE:
  - The new Artist in Residence (AiR) RFP was released last week. Several people have reached out asking how much money was available (since we could not list it in the RFP), and in these cases Kathy has suggested that they provide different tiers/budget options in their proposals. The deadline for submissions is August 31, and PDE hopes to select an artist by Sept. 15.
  - Two new staff members recently joined PDE: Allison Hartman is the new Source Water Protection Manager, and Daniela Perez is the new Estuary Community Coordinator.
  - Events (let Kathy know if interested in attending/participating):
    - Mussel Release at Palmyra Cove: Friday, August 29
    - Delaware River Festival: Saturday, September 27 at Penn's Landing
    - Experience the Estuary Celebration: Thursday, October 9, at Vie in Philadelphia
    - NEP Tech Transfer meeting: November 11-13 in Mobile, Alabama
  - Funding/Grants:
    - NEPs are each funded at \$850k for FY26 (through the FY25 Continuing Resolution)
    - For FY27, NEPs are written into the FY26 budget at \$850k as well. The President requested an \$8M reduction in funding to EPA for the NEP, but it seems that Congress is looking to reinstate that to the full \$40M.
    - Some grants that PDE felt secure about in the budget have been very delayed, so things will need to be rebalanced to be sure everyone's time is covered.
    - There has been a lot of admin work for the grants team this summer, as some long-lasting projects are wrapping up. PDE is looking for new funding opportunities for late 2026 and beyond.
  - Fieldwork has been busy, though high heat indices and pop-up storms make scheduling the work difficult. There has also been an issue with the donated boat trailer, which is being addressed.

- DNREC:

- DNREC is also having a busy fieldwork season.
- The Coastal Management Program is setting up interviews for the manager position.
- The National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR) is in a similar position to the NEP- funding levels seem to be staying pretty level.
- NJDEP:
  - Some staff recently went to Burlington Island to assess the current conditions after a cleanup was done there years ago. They plan to return to clean up more debris in the fall or spring, which could be a public engagement opportunity.
  - NJDEP recently participated in a call set up by Monmouth University Urban Coast Institute that focused on how budget issues and uncertainty about the upcoming years are impacting the different sectors and, if funding is reduced, how to prioritize work and work together to get things done.
- PADEP:
  - Coastal Zone funding also appears to be secure/level in the proposed budgets.
  - Hopefully, the next round of grant applications will be out soon.

#### **Action Items:**

- Cathy, Kathy, and Karen will touch base about IJJA year 5 funding
- Haley will forward an ESP Advisors newsletter email in case anyone is interested in subscribing (*email sent 8/7/2025*)
- Haley will share the draft agenda for the fall NEP meeting in Mobile (*email sent 8/7/2025*)

#### **Upcoming Meetings and Events:**

- Mussel Release at Palmyra Cove: Friday, August 29, 2025
- Next EIC Meeting: Thursday, September 4, 2025, 10am-12pm, via Zoom
- Delaware River Festival: Saturday, September 27, 2025, 10am-4pm, Philadelphia and Camden
- Fall DELEP Steering Committee meeting: Thursday, October 30, 2025, 1-3pm, via Zoom
- Experience the Estuary Celebration: Thursday, October 9, 2025, 5-9pm, Philadelphia