

Minutes

Meeting Attendees: Haley Burns (PDE), Elizabeth Butler (EPA R2), Karen Forst (PDE), LeeAnn Haaf (PDE), Kathy Klein (PDE), Cathy Magliocchetti (EPA R3), Jason Minnich (PA DEP), Rachael Phillos (DNREC), Chad Pindar (DRBC), Irene Purdy (EPA R2), Meghan Rogalus (PA DEP), Bob Schuster (NJDEP), Will Whalon (PWD)

Hatchery Update

- Yesterday, members of PDE's leadership team, along with several current and former Board members, met with staff and board members from Bartram's Garden for a facilitated discussion about the future of the Freshwater Mussel Hatchery and Ecosystems Education Center at Bartram's. This came after several months of looking at ways to further cut costs that still did not get us down to amount of funding available.
 - A decision was made to explore the possibility of forgoing one joint building and instead building two separate buildings on the same basic footprint. PDE's hatchery would be smaller (1-story) and use less expensive materials.
 - Next steps are to determine if it is possible to get what is needed to do what is needed, within a smaller 4,500- 6,000 sq ft footprint, and if it can be done with the available funding. PDE has raised \$5.5M for construction and does not have capacity to continue fundraising for this project.
 - At the same time, PDE will be looking at other possible sites for a hatchery in Southeastern PA. Building from scratch is less desirable than buying and renovating/retrofitting an existing building. PDE has asked EPA about the possibility of using IJA funds to purchase a building, and the answer wasn't a hard "no" but there are still things to figure out.
- PDE needs to make a decision on how to move forward, hopefully, by the end of September and prior to the Steering Committee meeting. The decision will inform how to budget the last year of IJA funding.
- If anyone knows of any land/building available (must be in PA due to PennVest funding), or partners that might be interested in involvement, please let Kathy know.

October Steering Committee Meeting

- The plan is still to focus on the hatchery during the Steering Committee meeting.
- When PDE gets a little further along in the decision-making process it will become clearer as to what needs to be discussed at this meeting.
- What happens with the hatchery will determine how to approach the year 5 IJA work plan, which will be addressed with the Steering Committee.
- Kathy will be meeting with the new EPA Region 3 Administrator in October, in advance of the Steering Committee meeting, to provide an introduction and overview of the Delaware Estuary Program.

October Joint EIC/Science and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) Meeting

- The annual joint EIC/STAC meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, October 15, 10am-1pm.
- This usually involves a report-out from the EIC on recent or current activities. Kathy will be away but will work with her team to prepare an update.
- The STAC had a meeting last week, and there are a number of new members that are doing very interesting work. The committee started conversations about what the estuary needs in terms of white papers, and soon a preliminary TREB (Technical Report for the Delaware Estuary and Basin) subcommittee will be established.

Partner Updates

- PDE:
 - Events
 - Last week Kathy joined other PDE staff and partners for a mussel release in New Jersey. Close to 2,000 mussels that PDE had been growing out were returned to the Delaware River to support and expand the existing population there.
 - Schuylkill River Restoration Fund (SRRF)/Schuylkill Action Network (SAN) Press Event and Bus Tour: Friday, September 12, 2025. This is the 20th Anniversary of the SRRF.
 - [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 12-14 in Mobile, Alabama
 - Funding/Grants
 - Fall is a big time for grants. PDE is currently working on applications for PA Coastal Zone Management and round two of NJ DEP's Natural Climate Solutions grants, and is looking into PA DEP's environmental education grants, several recently released William Penn Foundation RFPs, and some smaller foundation grants.
 - PDE is waiting for the assistance agreement from EPA for FY26 NEP base funding and will begin work on the year 5 IJA work plan once more information is available.
 - Although there were plenty of challenges with fieldwork this summer, PDE staff were able complete a lot of monitoring and assessment work and worked on oyster recruitment for a possible future living shoreline in Lewes, DE. For the fall, the team is gearing up for living shoreline work, primarily in New Jersey.
 - Haley just submitted the FY25 habitat and leverage project data through NEPORT. (Thanks to the DELEP partners for contributing project information!) PDE recently received information about reporting on IJA projects through NEPORT – the first round of reporting, for projects completed in federal FY25, is due at the end of October. PDE has some questions about what projects count as completed and how to report on ongoing initiatives with no scheduled end date. They will work with EPA to resolve these questions so they can submit whatever information is relevant and available.
- PADEP:
 - Coastal Zone funding for FY25 was approved.
 - The [Coastal Zone Grant](#) application period is now open.
 - PA DEP recently released a [booklet](#) about water programs in PA. Deputy Secretary of Water Programs Jill Whitcomb spearheaded this effort.
- DNREC:
 - Delaware Coastal Zone and National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR) funding awards were released. Still, there were cuts to NOAA in congressional budget lines and some projects have been cancelled.
 - Delaware's 38th Annual Coastal Cleanup is taking place on Saturday, September 13.
 - Delaware's [Climate Action Plan](#) is being updated. Final public engagement sessions are taking place this month, with one in each county.
 - The Coastal Management Program is setting up interviews for the manager position and hopefully someone will be in place in October/November.
- EPA R3:
 - The region is down grant specialists which is contributing to delays in grant processing.
 - IJA money is expected in the Region in October.
- PWD:

- The Fairmount Water Works Hatchery wrapped up a propagation season in which they propagated over 30,000 juvenile mussels, a new record.
- PWD has been conducting post-flow-reintroduction monitoring at the Manayunk Canal and so far, it seems to have been successful.
- DRBC: There is a [Water Quality Advisory Committee](#) meeting on September 15. The agenda has not yet been released but it will likely be focused on recreational use.
- EPA R2: Region 2 has not yet heard any news on Urban Waters funding, but, in general, briefings with leadership on Urban Waters and the National Estuary Program have been going well.

Upcoming Meetings and Events:

- Delaware River Festival: Saturday, September 27, 2025, 10am-4pm, Philadelphia and Camden
- Next EIC Meeting: Thursday, October 2, 2025, 10am-12pm, via Zoom
- Experience the Estuary Celebration: Thursday, October 9, 2025, 5-9pm, Philadelphia
- Joint EIC/STAC Meeting: Wednesday, October 15, 2025, 10am-1pm, via Microsoft Teams
- Fall DELEP Steering Committee meeting: Thursday, October 30, 2025, 1-3pm, via Zoom