RHODE ISLAND BAYS, RIVERS, & WATERSHEDS COORDINATION TEAM

Meeting of February 17, 2011

2-4 PM
Narragansett Bay Commission
1 Ernest Street
Providence, RI

FINAL Minutes

Coordination Team Members in Attendance: Guy Lefebvre, Sue Kiernan, Mike Walker, Paul Gonsalves, Jeff Willis, Tom Uva

BRWCT Staff: Ames Colt, Melissa Deciantis

Guests: Richard Ribb, Jane Austin

CT Administration

Meeting was called to order at 2:00 p.m.

Meeting minutes for the November 17, 2010 meeting were approved with one modification.

Chair Report

RI Climate Commission
The General Assembly is moving slowly on its legislative appointments, which will be the co-chairs of the commission. The NGO's are planning to try to get entities named to the commission who have seats to announce their appointments as soon as possible.

Northeast Sea Grant Consortium and the Northeast Regional Ocean Council
Sea Grant program has formed the Northeast Sea Grant Consortium to pursue regional research and outreach. A strategic partnership has been formed between the Northeast Sea Grant Consortium and the Northeast Regional Ocean Council (NROC). The Consortium invited Colt to participate on a pre-proposal review panel in March as NROC's representative.

BRWCT Revenue Account
Colt distributed a summary of the BRWCT Revenue Account. As of February 14, 2011, revenue collected is on course to reach $400,000 in net revenue for FY 2011.

The summary included the account's FY 2011 budget. Discretionary spending is capped at $195,000, although more funds are theoretically available. Colt filed paper work last fall to increase the spending cap. DEM's Terry Maguire informed him that it couldn't be considered until April.

The summary also listed the discretionary projects the BRWCT has invested in during FY 2011, including water quality and stream gage monitoring contracts with USGS and the Port Development Opportunities Study. Based upon a number of assumptions, Colt estimated a remaining discretionary project balance of about $40,000. DEM's Maguire has informed Colt that trying to bring in staff support via an employment services contract is not possible at this time.

Uva stated that although revenue projections are ahead of the prior years, there is always a boom in the last quarter because many residents and commercial establishments pump their systems before the holidays. Kiernan stated that the septage fee revenues collected to date could include some of the aftermath of the flood.

Kiernan stated that the caps are imposed by the state's budget process. The Legislation coupled with what the Department of Administration is willing to modify budget gaps, within a given year because of some circumstance that is usually reconciled in the supplemental budget. Basically the legislature, through the budget process, has said that this account cannot be used to spend more than $412,000 in FY 2011.

Walker asked what the budget request is for FY 2012. Is it 15% less than, or is it what the revenue is expected to be at because none of it is general revenue? They cannot do any more projects if it continues to decline. Walker expressed concern that if the account is allowed to build up a large cash balance, it's going to get swept. They need to spend it. If they don't propose it in the budget, then it won't get spent.

Colt reported that at his last meeting with Representative Naughton she said she would like to see the Coordination Team come forward with and utilize its authority to engage in multi-year budgeting via the SLP and the Implementation Plan. In terms of the USGS contracts, they could lay out a multi-year proposal, present it to Naughton as Deputy Chair of the House Finance Committee and see what happens.

<u>Chair Re-appointment</u>
Colt has had discussions concerning re-appointment with Chafee Administration officials. He's been told that the re-appointment review process will kick in gear around late February or early March.

Proposed BRWCT Project Coordinator Position
Colt distributed an updated position description for a BRWCT project coordinator, including two basic responsibilities: support for the BRWCT and support for a DEM Aquatic Habitat Restoration Coordinator. Colt also circulated a proposal for a DEM Restoration Coordinator that he drafted in order to establish how the BRWCT could provide staff support for such an individual. DEM has been talking about designating a current staff person to lead the agency on restoration project coordination and strategy development.

Given that contractual hires are not feasible, another possibility is to arrange a third-party partnership where the BRWCT provides about $39,000 annually for a fixed period of time for a third party to provide the desired staff services (possibilities include Save the Bay, the Nature Conservancy, and the RI Conservation and Development Council).

Ribb asked if the DEM aquatic habitat restoration coordination position is meant to support DEM restoration or other groups involved with watershed restoration. Colt answered that DEM has to make a decision. Kiernan suggested that instead of thinking of it as a position description, it could and might have to morph into a project that has an endpoint and produces a piece of work that facilitates coordination.

Colt agreed that the BRWCT could look at some of the tasks assigned to the DEM coordination and fold them into a project proposal to be shopped around for a partner to help them with it.

Uva suggested that BRWCT must focus more on establishing statewide priorities for restoration, such as wetlands, or how nutrients management and control may affect fisheries. Uva said he did not know what the priorities should be, and suggested that someone be hired to look at these issues.

Walker asked if DEM had a list of completed habitat restoration projects that could potentially mitigate damage to aquatic habitat from current or future development, a mitigation bank. Or if aquatic habitat damage or diminishment increases the risk of damage downstream of a important coastal habitat (during eg., a major flood) that now requires restoration. If some of this restoration prioritization was accomplished, could the state establish an inventory of key restoration projects? Walker emphasized the fact that the BRWCT's mission is to coordinate on such matters. If the DEM aquatic habitat restoration coordinator position is primarily about DEM "self-coordination" instead of multi-jurisdictional coordination, then it shouldn't be on the table.

Kiernan stated DEM felt the need to focus on statewide, inter-jurisdictional coordination; for example, there is a lot of information located in disparate places within the state government and the federal agencies and the connections between different restoration programs have not been tight enough to have confidence that restoration work is producing optimal benefits. For example, millions of dollars have been spent to deal with flood plain vulnerabilities on the Pawtuxet River and there are restoration opportunities there that have not been sufficiently specified.

Walker said that he would not want to replicate the Environmental Monitoring Collaborative's monitoring priorities list. That would be all too consuming and not priority-focused. They have set a priority for habitat restoration for all of the things that Tom explained the benefit and the purpose of and potentially a multiplier of benefits for dollars spent, but they don't know where to start and realize the multiplier from the beginning. The second question would be: of all those catalogues and inventories, can someone reasonably collect and synthesize it so you don't need a Ph.D. to read and understand it?

Kiernan stated that she did not disagree with Walker's characterization, but in some areas it is more advanced. She mentioned a very specific prioritization of the fish passage that's been done by the fisheries commission that ranks the type of value you will get if you do a passage based on the species and the length of the river. It's well organized and detailed, including eel-grass mapping, and salt marsh (which there was only a thousand acres on the estate). What was missing in the middle was larger wetland and aquatic-related riparian buffers in general. What do they want to accomplish for restoration along river ways that's going to benefit water quality, flooding and other things? What they are finding is that there is information in DEM, land acquisition and land trust records, about what should be done on the property. There is also information at the RI Emergency Management Agency on flooding risks that might be reduced by a restoration project investment.

BRWCT Port Opportunities Development Study
Colt hoped to pull together the Economic Monitoring Collaborative as a follow-up to the release of this study to facilitate public/private sector discussions regarding the Providence industrial waterfronts and port facilities.

Martin Associates plans to provide the first draft for review next week. Colt has a panel of four or five experts, including Dan Goulet at CRMC, standing by to review the draft and make comments. Then the report will come to the BRWCT for final approval in April and then be presented to the Port Facilities Commission.

Northeast Great Waters Coalition
Work on establishing a RI Great Water continues, as well as a Northeast Great Waters Coalition. Congressional staff recommend synthesizing the ask into a single Northeast Coastal Great Water, including Gulf of Maine and Southeastern New England waters. Colt plans to work with Save the Bay's John Torgan, National Wildlife Federation's Pete Alexander and others. Janet Coit expressed reservations about that the fact that the states are fighting to keep what they have in terms of federal support.

With regard to Rhode Island's participation in this project, Walker asked what is the expected payback? Colt answered that the goal is to acquire federal funding for Rhode Island projects through a regional initiative similar in scope and approach to the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. Walker expressed some concern and wondered how this would benefit and enhance Rhode Island. Colt answered that he needs to feedback on whether or not it's worth his time to pursue this. It corresponds with the SLP Implementation Priority 6: *Develop funding sources to meet the state's estimated $1.36 billion worth of wastewater infrastructure needs*.

Uva said that with current federal funds coming to Narragansett Bay, are we going to risk losing some of that support if distribution of federal funding is regionalized? Walker said that if they're going to collaborate on planning for future needs, that's one thing; but Colt could be spending a lot of time on something that is potentially a non-starter, or could even be detrimental to current programs. If the Initiative enables RI to be more competitive in the federal arena for limited resources because they collaborate with others and there are some synergies of the work they do that creates a benefit. If the BRWCT can support the lobbying efforts of the NGO's without hurting its own interests, then it makes a lot of sense. But if they are being thrown into the "fish bowl" primarily to develop RI Congressional delegation support, then it could end up competing with other BRWCT agency requests.

Lefebvre added that the Obama Administration is working on restructuring a federal government, and having a regional program/plan ready is a good idea. They should be ready to have conversations with Curt Spalding and other federal officials.

Colt said he would take some of these thoughts back to the Great Waters Coalition as well as have a conversation with John Torgan. He will also continue to talk to Janet Coit and check with the congressional delegation.

NBEP CCMP Update
There is a Sustaining Narragansett Bay Region Draft released dated February 10th with some additions. Colt is meeting next week with Chris Deacutis to review the draft, which will include some public stakeholder meetings later this year, upwards of five. There is an Estuary Program Policy Committee meeting on March 4th, which Ribb is helping to get this draft ready for.

Colt expressed concern over the multiplicity of strategic plans for water resources management in the state and the region. For example, CRMC is technically due to update their Marine Resources Development Plan in 2011, DEM is undertaking "Section 319" watershed planning, and relevant State Guide Plan elements are being revised. Plans are often created in response to federal funding mandates, thus often don't acknowledge sufficiently other overlapping plans.

He suggested that BRWCT could provide some guidance on why these all these plans exist and what their respective roles are in relation to each other. This could entail a brief description of each plan, its purpose, niche, and history of implementation and evaluation. Colt distributed a handout entitled the Four Orders of Outcomes in Eco-system Based Management, suggesting it could help the BRWCT develop a framework for reviewing multiple water resources management plans.

SLP Implementation Strategy

Colt's spring intern has been requesting data and information from the BRWCT agencies for to facilitate further SLP Implementation Strategy development. The intent is to acquire information about where the key agency programs are in terms of outputs and accomplishments, deadlines met, products distributed, etc.

Kiernan suggested that more attention be given to SLP Priority 5: *Significantly enhance stormwater control and management state-wide*, as this was a good story about coordination.

Walker stated that the BRWCT agencies coordinate with each other continuously. For example, EDC has been working with Statewide Planning on land use and economic redevelopment. The BRWCT was formed in order to help the agencies coordinate with each other, not to write and assess implementation of a strategic plan. Its mission is about agencies coordinating and coordinating resources so that their efforts wouldn't be duplicative. The BRWCT has instead morphed over time to being focused on a plan instead of actual coordination.

Colt said he is trying to focus the SLP Implementation Strategy on activities and outputs that have multiple agency engagement and the input on the Strategy that the agencies provide him with should reflect this theme.

Uva stated that, with development of the SLP, long-term management and development priorities had been delineated for the State of Rhode Island. The next step was to drill down further to ascertain the causes of beach closures and the economic benefits of correcting them. He asked if it was Colt's intent to get to that level in the SLP Implementation Strategy.

Colt expressed concern about going into that level of detail in the Implementation Strategy; but that the Coastal Institute's Indicators Project is proposing as one of its first indicators beach closures. Doing so will hopefully inspire more of a focus on causes of the beach closures and to determine what coordinated efforts are needed to address them.

Uva commented that, given the economic climate of the state, with 40% of the town revenues going to municipal pension plans, it is unlikely that they will be investing heavily in stormwater in the years to come.

Colt replied that part of the value of implementation planning is that priorities do change and those changes need to be noted and explained in order to provide guidance on how to respond to such impediments adaptively.

Lefebvre mentioned the value of adding graphics to the SLP. Graphics aren't just something to break up the visual presentation, they are essential to assist the reader with understanding the text.

Kiernan said that when Colt requested information on what they have done in terms of the Implementation Plan, she took it as meaning fairly recently and expressed concern over being asked to forecast things that are fairly far into the future.

Colt said that he would like to see information on outputs to date and hoped that it would not be too difficult to delineate agency priorities in FY 2012 and FY 2013. Relative to the next budget year, he urged the BRWCT to take the stream gage monitoring support, other baseline monitoring needs, and possibly one or two other needs and package and submit into the agency budgeting process as quickly as possible.

Indicator Development Project
This is really being led by Judith Swift, Meg Kerr and other folks. They are planning a State House event for April 27th which will highlight four proposed indicators. Colt distributed previously the indicator workshop reports. Some of the proposed indicators aren't developed yet. Colt encouraged input from the agencies on development and application of these indicators.

Meeting adjourned at 4:00.