

**Management Committee Meeting
Virtual Attendance (MS Teams)
April 17, 2025 – Meeting Summary (9 am to 12:30 pm)**

In Attendance: Nyman, Robert, EPA; Vlahos, Penny, UCONN/STAC; Harris, John, Mohegan; Ferlow, Nancy, FPAC-NRCS; Wright, Bessie, EPA; Laccetti, Kristen, EPA; Skenandore, Candice, Mohegan; Nyman, Robert, EPA; Ammerman, James, LIS; O'Brien, Kevin; UCONN; Yap, Kimarie V, DEC; Nelson, Esther, EPA; Bellucci, Christopher, CTDEEP; Begum, Shahela, RAE; Scantlebury, Samarra, DEC; Goldberg, Ben, NYSG; Deguise, Sylvain, CTSG; Tanzi, Elizabeth, EPA; Sullivan, Cayla, EPA; Hammond, Nicole, EPA; Lyons, Regina, EPA; Randall, Todd, USACE; Street, Jennifer, DOS; Cozens, Margaret, CTSG; Balla, Richard, EPA; Winter, Abigail, CTDEEP; Thompson, Brian, CTDEEP; Morrison, Jonathan, USGS; Argue, Denise (USGS); Bauer, Cassandra, DEC; Spencer, Evelyn, EPA; Drinkuth, Holly, CAC; DuMont, Alex, NEIWPC; Sullivan, Susan, NEIWPC; Yamalis, Harry, CTDEEP; Seligson, Nancy, CAC; Hunter, Timothy, CTDEEP; Cernadas, Sara, NYCDEC; Schechter, Sarah, CTSG; Sara Powell, Sara, NYSG; Mayer, Audrey, FWS; Lambert, DeAva, CTDEEP; Hornstein, Elizabeth, NYSG; Schaefer-Brown, Sarah, NYSG; Grondalski, Anya, LISS; Burg, Robert, LISS; Tachiki, Nicole, EPA; Bedan, Erik, CTDEEP; Paton, Suzanne, FWS; Kamath, Shauna, DEC; Stacey, Paul; Footprints In The Water; Duvall, Melissa, EPA; Coffey, Emma, CTDEEP; Friesner, Richard, NEIWPC; Lwiza, Kamazima, Stony Brook/STAC; Streich, Kelly, CTDEEP; Van Patten, Susan, NYCDEC; Eagler, Christopher, DEC; Shuford, Rebecca, NYSG; Knight, Kathleen, CTDEEP; Hagy, Jim, EPA/ORD; Beatriz Perez-Viscasillas, Jimena, NYSG; Desrosiers, Ashley, EPA, Alexander, Danielle, DEP; Kocek, Alison, FWS; Shin, Youngmi, EPA; Abibou, Deborah, UNCONN; Winter, Abigail, CTDEEP; Habersang, Steve; Kutschenreuter, Kathleen, EPA; Genovesi, Lillit, NYSG

Introductions: Regina Lyons and Bob Nyman kicked off the meeting around 9:00 am by having everyone add their name and affiliation in the chat. Bob opened the floor for modifications or additions to the agenda – no modifications were noted. Bob additionally opened the floor for staffing announcements. Regina introduced herself and shared that she is the manager for the Ocean and Coastal Protection Section in Region 1 and acting as the Surface Water Branch chief which will remain vacant while under a hiring freeze. Regina also shared that R1's deputy director, Thelma Murphy, will be retiring at the end of the month. Rick introduced himself sharing that he is the manager of the Watershed Management Branch in Region 2. Rick also shared that Bob will be retiring at the end of May and emphasized that the regions are working hard to provide temporary and long-term leadership. Rick also shared that Liz Tanzi will be leaving the EPA LISO in mid-June and her responsibilities will be transferred. Jon Morrison,

USGS Long Island Sound Coordinator, shared that today is his last day as a USGS employee and he will be retiring. Jon also shared that Denise Argue will be stepping in and backfilling his role.

Advisory Committee Reports:

Science and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) Update: Kamazima Lwiza provided the updates from STAC. There was a modification to the term of officers. Officers will be able to serve two terms for three years each. Additionally, STAC will have assistance from EPA Region 1 employee Nicole Hammond. During the last STAC meeting there were several presentations; Maria Rogers from North Carolina State presented on the impact of temperature and PFAS on fish health and Tom Hanner from Environment Climate Change Canada presented on atmospheric interactions. Kamazima suggested it would be beneficial to have additional stations to monitor how the Sound and atmosphere are coupled. Kamazima also noted there was a presentation from Youngmi Shin about the sediment quality index. Penny mentioned that Youngmi's presentation sparked an interesting conversation if resolution is poor. The consensus was that there was consistency over 20 stations so this will be an important priority for the management committee. STAC wants to prioritize open communication channels, and the goal is to have one annual meeting in partnership with the CAC to strength interactions with state representatives.

Paul Stacey mentioned that USGS put together a two-day webinar that had presentations featuring products and tools created for Long Island Sound Study. Paul requested that the links to the recordings be shared. Paul also requested that a presentation that was given to the STAC a be shared. Jon shared that Denise is working with IT to get the recordings released of the USGS webinars. Christopher Bellucci asked about the status of the modeling team and if it is a part of STAC. Kamazima shared it is not a part of the STAC, and it is not a workgroup but is being led by Melissa Duvall. Melissa echoed that is not a workgroup but a working team.

Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) Update: Nancy Seligson and Holly Drinkuth presented updates for the CAC. At the March 13 CAC meeting, members welcomed a new organization, the Alliance for Mystic River Watershed. Several important changes were made to the bylaws, including the addition of up to four new vice chair positions to strengthen leadership and support succession planning. Updates were provided on the budget and recent changes to the Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP), which led to a spirited discussion among members. While concerns were raised about aligning the CCMP language with the current administration, the group decided to defer taking a formal position, opting instead to have the Policy Subcommittee explore the issue further. The meeting also featured well-received presentations from Jacob Eislb on the NRCS Subaqueous Soil Survey and from Craig Tobias on ecological forecasting in Long Island Sound. A CAC advocacy trip to Washington, DC is planned during the week of July 14, with two days of meetings and foundation support available to help cover travel costs. All members and stakeholders were encouraged to attend. Nancy noted that the Long Island Sound Restoration and Stewardship Act has been reintroduced in both chambers of Congress, with strong support on the Senate side and hopeful momentum in the

House. The next CAC meeting will be held virtually in June, followed by a CCMP signing ceremony on June 20, and a joint meeting with STAC in September, likely at Avery Point.

Political Leadership Announcement: Regina Lyons noted that EPA Region 1 had recently appointed Mark Sanborn as Regional Administrator, bringing additional political leadership to both Region 1 and Region 2 (where Mike Martucci serves).

Transition to Work Plan and Budget Discussion: Most of the meeting centered on reviewing and discussing the FY25 budget and supplemental project proposals. Bob shared that we do not have our final FY25 Operating Budget, and it is not clear what FY26 may look like. Bob noted that the program has previously used incremental and forward funding options and that may serve as options for this year. He also noted that EPA in the following weeks will provide a summary funding memo that outlines allotments based on final appropriations and recipients will be notified and work plans will be due in June. It was noted that there is approximately \$41 million in total funding (\$850,000 of that from CWA Section 320). Base funding proposals were previously approved leaving about \$6 million initially unallocated for supplemental projects. Bob noted that, in the spreadsheet shared, the rows highlighted green were recommended for funding by the I-Team and the yellow highlighted rows are for further consideration.

Bob walked through each of the line items highlighted green to ask for feedback from the I-Team's decision. Kamazima asked about the line item that noted insufficient match and asked if there are plans to get that match. Bob noted that it would rely on overmatch from the states and, in this case, specifically Connecticut. Jim Hagy asked if the same answer applies to other projects that list insufficient, and Bob responded yes. Regina emphasized that aggregate match will be needed, and we will be looking to the states for that.

After walking through each project highlighted in green, there was no negative feedback or questions raised about the individual supplemental projects.

Regina added that as the line items in green are approved that leaves us with under \$3 million to discuss about allocating to the other supplemental proposals. She additionally noted that as things become clearer and given indications of potential budget uncertainties for FY26, the full funding does not necessarily need to be allocated. She emphasizes that for the projects highlighted red or yellow, EPA is looking for input and recommendations from the management committee. Bob noted that it would be best to identify the projects in yellow that we think are top tier and provide any initial thoughts/feedback for consideration.

Discussion Surrounding Breaking Down Barriers Project: Sylvain Deguise commented on the distribution of funds across the themes, particularly that there is only one request from sustainable and resilient communities and four requests from informed and engagement public while the other proposals are focused on wildlife and clean water and healthy watersheds. That being noted, he would like to make a pitch to the fund the request for the breaking down barriers program. Sylvain also noted that the distribution for the program was broad and inclusive and there has been an increase in demand. The grant writing assistance program also has a well-documented return on investment. There has been an increase in demand for the planning support program by 53%.

Bob asked if there is funding in the base budget for this project. Sylvain noted that there is but the request for the supplemental is two-fold; the proposal indicates they are adding a NYC extension professional as interest increases and that there is a cost increase from \$200,000 to \$250,000 per region. Susan Van Patten asked if Sylvain could clarify the regional distribution. Sylvain clarified that they started with 5 extension professional (2 in CT and 3 in NY) and there was interest in adding another professional to cover NYC. The increase from \$200,000 to \$250,000 per year was a part of the initial five-year plan from the SRC work group and the increase demand from cities for the writing assistance program – the program provides up to \$10,000 for a grant writer to pair with a municipality to develop a proposal and implement projects on the ground.

Susan threw out the idea, because of budget limitations, that there is no increase in existing regions but \$200K is added for NYC. Sylvain noted that the idea would be better than no change but provided context that during the first year of the planning support program there were 28 municipalities expressing interest and next year that increased to 43 municipalities and they anticipate in the third year it will be even higher. He also emphasized this is the only request from sustainable and resilient communities.

Nancy stated that she would like to support the request because she echoes the increased interest from municipalities. She anticipates a greater need for the grant writing resource and that it will have a return investment with increased productivity. Rebecca (Becky) Shuford emphasized the benefit and impact as indicated by presentations from original recipients.

Brian Thompson asked about the grant writing assistance program and its demand. He specifically asked given the current landscape of grant fund availability if we anticipate a continued or higher level of demand. Sylvain and Becky emphasized that in recent workshops there was very strong support demonstrated for all levels of grants: federal, state, and non-governmental.

Discussion transitioned to CTDEEP’s climate risk scoping analysis: Kathleen Knight noted that NY and CT chatted and determined that it fits well with program needs and will decline from asking for funds for this project by incorporating the effort into work plans.

Discussion surrounding USGS projects: Jim Hagy brought up for discussion the USGS tools and noted the progress on the clearinghouse and emphasized that it could be a valuable tool for program partners to leverage. He also noted that there needs to be continued outreach and support for the project. Bob asked about the timeline for the project. Jon indicated that it is a two-year proposal and that USGS is working with the workgroups to structure the clearinghouse aspect so that it can be used for salt marsh monitoring programs. The project proposes to set up a curator so that as new projects come on there can be a template that individuals fill out to provide their information. Jon also noted that there will have to be continued maintenance funds to make sure the application is running and to assist as needed. James (Jim) Ammerman added and noted that we have a long way to go with data management efforts and added that continuing funds will be ended for basic maintenance but also continual improvement for the tool. Bob asked about the cost of maintenance and Jon shared the estimate cost would be around \$65k to \$75k

per year. Susan Van Patten asked how much money USGS is putting into the project(s). Jon noted that USGS is only able to put in in-house funding for items such as structuring websites because they are unable to provide match as a federal agency. Susan clarified that she was asking how much the states would put in for the project and Jon shared that the in kind would be \$25K. Esther Nelson shared that it would probably be more considering the multiplier and in interagency agreements the partner agency cover the benefits. Esther also shared that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife service expressed support of the clearinghouse because of their efforts focused on the marsh monitoring network.

Susan asked a few clarifying questions about the amount of money and its use. Jon emphasized that maintenance is \$65K-70K a year and the remaining ~\$30K is for updates across two years.

Conversation transitioned to the proposal surrounding CWHW staff request: Timothy Hunter noted that the support is needed to support the actual workgroup as it has expanded in its scope and the need is high. Susan added that dedicated staff is needed and allocated to LISP full time that way work can be accomplished in a timely fashion. Susan emphasized that herself, Michelle, and others are not paid by LIS funds and that the CWHW goal is the largest goal with the most amount of work to be done. Susan noted that the person in this role would be key to identify gaps and implement actions to fill those gaps. Bob noted that EPA is looking at existing staff and shifting responsibilities to provide support across the board. Susan emphasized that it would be more efficient to have somebody in the state doing the work rather than someone in the federal government. Cayla asked if the new person would take the lead on coordinating and creating a plan for the subtopics under the objectives. Susan clarified that the person would work on the subgroup's pathogens, toxics, and marine debris. This individual would account for what work is being done on the topic, form the necessary connections, and coordinate across state lines for the program. Cayla and Susan agreed that it would be more effective for the person to develop a 5-year plan rather than a contractor and contribute to executing the plan. Susan noted that they are also backfilling Chris Eagler's position and will be interviewing soon and emphasize that his role was essential in developing the CCMP. Bob asked about timing and if it is an immediate need. Susan answered yes and no – if awarded, it would still take until the first of year to hire and onboard the person. Susan noted that the three areas may be neglected as watershed health and nutrients may end up taking precedence. Holly echoed a lot of what Susan said and that it will take someone leading that work to execute the 5-year plan.

Regina noted the conversations occurring with realignment of work plans with the CCMP and shifting of staff roles. Esther echoed what Regina said and additionally added that there has been major reorganization of the CWHW Work Group with the merging of several other workgroups.

Transition of Discussion to other NYDMR Proposals: Cassandra Bauer recommended the passive acoustic monitoring proposal for funding. She noted there was discussion at the I-Team meeting about funding it through Futures Fund or through the RWSC. She believes that it is not appropriate to funnel through those channels. NYSDEC will cover staff and boat time, and Cassandra noted that partnering will probably increase the cost of the current proposal that covers two years of monitoring and analysis. Cassie also noted this has potential to relate to

informed and engaged public. Bob asked what RWSC stands for, which is the regional wildlife science collaborative, and Cassie noted that there is not much data to understand the presence of cetaceans in LIS. Sylvain asked about outside acoustic analysis and who is contributing, and he also asked about the aerial surveys. Cassie shared the aerial surveys are done in New York and the proposal is for acoustic receivers at 3 locations in the west, central, and eastern LIS. Samarra Scantlebury added that the analysis could be done by the natural heritage program, Stony Brook, or there may be internal options but that was not included in the proposal. Cayla brought up her concerns related to this proposal potentially being a better fit for Futures Fund. She is not sure if it is appropriate for CWA funds or may be under the jurisdiction of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or NOAA. Samarra asks for clarification to Cayla's question and if it was funded by Futures Fund would it have the same concern. Cayla added that if it was funded by Futures Fund then it would be framed more as public education and outreach. Bessie echoed that this could be a potential education and outreach project rather than thriving habitat and abundant wildlife if framed differently. Samarra questioned whether these concerns would still apply even under the Futures Fund, since data collection on cetaceans remains central to the project. Cayla clarified that the intent and framing differ while data collection remains, the objective under the Futures Fund would be communication and outreach, not regulatory or habitat assessment. Bessie Wright supported the potential for the project to function as a valuable education and community engagement tool. She mentioned potential connections to the Shinnecock Nation's cultural perspectives on cetaceans. Cassie and Samarra reaffirmed the project's primary goal is scientific data collection—installing receivers to record cetacean presence, with education and public engagement being a secondary outcome. Cassandra highlighted the ecological rationale: cetacean presence indicates a healthy food web and improved habitat, making this a logical *habitat-related* project, not merely outreach, and emphasized the data would also be used to inform future management decisions, such as time-of-year construction restrictions, vessel speed regulations and environmental assessments tied to offshore projects.

Sara Cernadas emphasized the proposal's strong alignment with the revised CCMP, which now more intentionally includes wildlife-specific actions. She expressed full support, stating the presence of whales and dolphins is a proxy for ecosystem health.

Regina noted all proposed work plans must now be carefully checked to ensure they align with EPA statutes and have appropriate funding mechanisms. Regina emphasized that everyone should keep this in mind as they move forward with budgeting and awarding grants.

Transition to Bioextraction Proposals: Kimarie Yap provided an overview of the bioextraction work and proposal from NYSDEC. She emphasized the importance of ribbed mussels for removing nitrogen from impaired waters in Long Island Sound. Because they are not commercially harvested, they are ideal for bioextraction, but hatchery methods do not yet exist due to lack of funding. A successful first-phase project developed a new spawning method, and phase two aims to improve mussel survival rates. The goal is to create a hatchery guide to

support large-scale production for environmental projects and offer new opportunities for hatcheries. Demand is high, noting similar projects needing up to 10 million mussel seeds. Bob asked if this is a two-year project and Kimarie confirmed that it is. Gary Wikfors strongly supported the ribbed mussel bioextraction project, noting that about 20 years ago, Long Island Sound Study research confirmed ribbed mussels' effectiveness at removing nitrogen. Gary emphasized two bottlenecks: lack of seed mussel supply and the need to develop better technology to separate mussel meat from shells for uses like aquaculture feed.

Esther also noted that there may be space for knowledge sharing with other estuary programs, particularly in Delaware, that have similar interest in shellfish.

Break 10:41 am to 10:51 am

National Audubon Society Proposal: Alison Kocek is present on behalf of Vicki O'Neil from the Audubon Society. Alison noted concerns about the high cost of the project and the fact that it will take a long time to become a fully functional marsh ecosystem. The main issue raised was that the site is not currently marshland, so ecological benefits will be delayed.

Evelyn Spencer added that while the project is laid out in three phases, there is flexibility to focus on just one phase, with additional funding sought elsewhere. They do not expect to rely entirely on Long Island Sound supplemental funds and are exploring other sources like New York Statewide programs and the Futures Fund.

Bob asked whether the \$2.5 million project could be partially funded in a meaningful way or if it would need to be fully funded all at once. Evelyn mentioned that phase one of the project, costing about \$2.3 million, is the top priority because later phases depend on its completion. It was noted that New York State has been involved from the beginning, and there was a suggestion to discuss the possibility of funding the project through the state rather than a separate award to National Audubon.

Cassie and Evelyn discussed the possibility of routing project funding through NYSDEC instead of National Audubon directly, given the project's high cost and insufficient match. Cassie noted this approach might cause delays due to contracting challenges and suggested the project might better fit the Futures Fund for competitive habitat projects. Cassie also noted potential funding from New York State's Bond Act or WQIP grants, although WQIP would likely not cover the full \$2.5 million. Bob Nyman suggested getting input from the New York Department of State to explore funding options further. Cassie will reach out to Jeremy Campo about the Bond Act. Cayla noted the current allocated funds at \$5.5 million and an unallocated balance of \$6.3 million. If they choose to fund the request, it will push the total above the unallocated amount, meaning some decisions would need to be made. Cayla also notes that Evelyn mentioned that the \$2.5 million for phase one cannot be broken out.

Bob mentions that we have not officially confirmed the items marked in yellow with dollar signs as definite but are now considered a higher priority for consideration. It is noted that further discussions can be held regarding forward funding and incremental funding.

General Discussion Around Funding: Sylvain asked if there are specific criteria for determining whether a proposal is better suited for Future Funds or other sources of funding. He suggests that if no criteria exist, it might be helpful to develop them for future funding decisions. Becky added that Sylvain's suggestion was not about specific criteria for each fund but about creating criteria to help assess which proposals are best suited for supplemental, Future Funds, or the research grant program. It is noted that having clear criteria for each type of funding would be helpful, especially since some proposals may be more appropriate for the research competition.

Holly added that, in addition to the need for a defined match for future sponsors or supplemental funding, there may also be criteria regarding who is eligible to apply for supplemental funding versus Future Funds, which should be considered in the decision-making process.

Bob asks what the match requirements are for Futures Fund. Bessie mentions that for match 50% of funding is needed for education and outreach, while 60% is for other areas. They are checking the RFP to confirm this and note that a recent waiver passed by Congress may allow adjustments to the overall match requirement in the future, though it is still being clarified.

Bessie noted that Esther asked if states could apply for Future Funds. The response indicates that states like New York and Connecticut, which have people on the review board, are not eligible to apply directly. However, projects in these states may be supported in other ways. Massachusetts also likely cannot apply directly, but Vermont and New Hampshire may have eligibility, particularly New Hampshire since it is not involved in decision-making for the program.

Transition to Discussing Proposal on LIS Education Resource Guide and Toolkit: Margaret (Maggie) Cozens provided an overview. The project aims to update the 2006 Long Island Sound Curricular Resource Guide and create digital materials to assist both formal and non-formal educators in bringing students to Long Island Sound. There were some requested edits to the proposal from the I-Team meeting, and, after discussing with Nikki, it was confirmed with the EPA that the Paperwork Reduction Act would not be triggered. Maggie also adds that the proposal would be closer to \$96,557 instead of \$72,000. Teachers have expressed a strong desire to bring students to Long Island Sound but face challenges with facilitating outdoor lessons and due to a lack of necessary supplies. The project aims to bridge this gap by using both formal and non-formal educators to create a relevant and helpful guide. Sylvain noted it is a nice compliment to the mentor teacher programs that is deployed in CT and NY with good success; it is a low cost, high impact proposal.

Transition to Discussing the Save the Sound Proposal: Holly was curious if anyone asked for clarification on what success looks like. Cayla noted that Liz Tanzi may have followed up, but she is out sick. The team will follow up with feedback. Holly highlights, as a member of the network, that the project aims to build local capacity for implementing stream connectivity projects, focusing on on-the-ground implementation and habitat reconnection.

Robert and Holly discuss the importance of training community members or staff for stream connectivity projects, focusing on project management and design skills, such as stream simulation. Cayla adds that the project aims to create an apprenticeship program to train new

staff for future projects, with the overall goal being to build more capacity for stream restoration. The question of what the next phase will look like after the one-year is also raised.

Bessie Wright follows up on Cayla's point, asking whether the project is focused on increasing staff or building institutional capacity through apprenticeships, and whether the apprentices will be new or existing staff. She also clarifies the eligibility for state government agencies according to the RFP, noting that reviewers cannot be involved in the development of applications. Holly responds that the apprenticeship program will train individuals from network partners, building staff capacity for future project management, and highlights potential bipartisan support for funding related to road crossings, flood risk, and stream habitat connections. Nancy inquired about the possibility of creating a unified water study with municipalities. Holly notes that the partnership is working on ranking criteria for stream crossings and jam removals, helping municipalities prioritize investments.

Christopher Bellucci expresses support for stream burial removal but suggests prioritizing the New York proposal for additional staff over this one. He believes the New York position should take precedence due to the state's workload and the need for additional staffing, though he acknowledges that the stream burial removal project is still a good idea.

Next Steps

Bob suggests that EPA now has a clear sense of what the management committee wants, and the next step is to evaluate the numbers and timing of the proposals. He proposes having another call in the coming weeks, followed by a letter from Leah regarding the allocations. Regina adds that there is almost \$3 million in funding to allocate and presents two options: one is to reserve some of the funding to forward fund the states into FY 26 due to budget uncertainty, and the other is to fund a subset of the proposals by June and possibly reserve additional funding for later decisions. She seeks input on these options and the path forward.

Nancy asked what if we were to fund all the projects here that have received support. Regina notes that we would have blown our budget with a total of nearly five million worth of projects while only having less than three million to spend. Bob actually notes if we were to fund everything that people showed support for, as well as the green items that were recommended, we would be at \$5.5 million.

Bessie did note that, typically in recent years with recent funding levels, we have been keeping a reserved \$200,000 just in case. Nancy suggested, given the budget uncertainty, she thinks we should commit all of it and not leave any because that is what was given and should be used.

Kamazima seconds and agrees.

Bob suggests an additional option to include proposals in the work plans without fully funding them upfront, allowing for quick decisions if funds become available. In this case, a proposal might request \$5 million but initially receive only partial funding, with the remainder incrementally funded in the future, avoiding the need for a new application.

Sylvian supports Nancy's proposal to use the available funds now, noting that keeping funds in reserve would not significantly impact the base budget. They emphasize the importance of timely action to initiate projects, as delays could push decisions even later in the year. Susan prefers

holding back some money as a precaution, while still moving forward with key projects now and testing the waters in June. They support being cautious and frugal, suggesting that holding back 5-10% could be wise while waiting for more information to make a more informed decision.

Regina reassures the group that the funds are committed to the protection and restoration of Long Island Sound, and the issue is the timing of when to release the funds, given uncertainty about the FY 2026 budget. Bessie adds that EPA has longer review processes, highlighting the internal logistical challenges and delays in getting awards processed.

Becky Shuford expressed support for moving forward with funding decisions despite budget uncertainties, noting that federal awards are always subject to available appropriations. She emphasized that uncertainty should not prevent action and that adjustments can be made later if needed.

Esther Nelson asked for clarification, confirming that part of the plan was to award or reserve funds for states, even if they were not immediately assigned to specific projects. Regina and Bob confirmed that committing the funds to a state award is an option. Regina Lyons explained that FY25 funds would be awarded, with time to define specific projects for FY26.

Paul Stacey strongly urged using all available funding now, emphasizing the urgent need for real, measurable outcomes—like nitrogen reduction and green infrastructure—rather than just tracking spending. He stressed better marketing of successes and warned that without clear results, future funding could be at risk.

Regina Lyons summarized that there was support for all green proposals and many yellow proposals, but some decisions on the yellow proposals still need to be made. She mentioned that the committee could reconvene in May if needed. Jim Hagy suggested that each member identify their top three proposals and explain their reasoning in an offline submission to get clearer, more honest input. Bob Nyman clarified that the committee was not asked to rank proposals but to discuss and prioritize them.

The group agreed they will likely need a follow-up discussion, especially once Leah is available again. Regina emphasized that the process is consensus-based and appreciated all the feedback provided. The EPA LIS team will regroup internally and communicate next steps. Bessie noted that if yellow projects are to be redirected into competitive programs like the Futures Fund, decisions should be made soon due to upcoming deadlines. Bob and Regina encouraged members to send additional feedback privately over the next few days before finalizing recommendations.

Updates to the CCMP:

Nikki Tachiki provided updates on the 2025 Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP). She highlighted that there was a March 20 Policy Committee meeting, where members—including EPA regional administrators and state commissioners from Connecticut and New York—voiced strong support for the plan. While New York's acting commissioner noted disappointment that climate change was not mentioned by name, she otherwise endorsed the plan's goals and structure. Verbal approval was given, and a formal memo documenting the approval is in the final signature phase. The Management Committee approved the plan in

January 2024, with subsequent revisions made to comply with new executive orders. The full plan, with EPA Headquarters concurrence, is slated for formal release at the June 20 LIS 40th anniversary event. In terms of public-facing materials, a one-page summary matrix—referred to as the “four-pager” booklet—is being prioritized for printing by June, while development of a more detailed public summary will begin after the event. The full-length CCMP and an interactive story map will be published online on June 20. A major challenge has been the summary matrix’s dense, text-heavy format, which is not public-friendly, and, due to contract limitations, cannot be redesigned. Alternatives are being explored, though time and resources are limited. The team remains on a tight schedule, with the second galley review concluding today, a near-final version expected by May 27, and all final materials due June 9 for web publication.

Updates on Public Facing Events: Robert Burg provided an update on the upcoming signing ceremony that will celebrate the completion of the CCMP, the 40th anniversary of the Long Island Sound program, and the launch of its new name, the Long Island Sound Partnership. A planning committee is coordinating the event, and invitations are being prepared, with a save-the-date reminder expected around mid-May. Efforts are underway to secure attendance from EPA Administrator Zeldin and the governors of Connecticut and New York. The event will be held at the historic Jay Heritage Center in Rye, Westchester County. EPA press offices for Regions 1 and 2 are involved in the event planning. Additionally, a site visit to the Jay Heritage Center by the New York team and others is scheduled to finalize arrangements.

Updates from the Long Island Sound Community Impact Fund (LISCIF): Shahela Begum provided updates for the LISCIF program. LISCIF is currently in its second round of funding, with \$1.5 million available for distribution. The program received 27 letters of interest requesting a total of over \$2.4 million, and 20 full proposals were submitted, totaling \$1.86 million. The review team is currently evaluating these proposals and plans to notify applicants of decisions by the end of April or early May. Additionally, the program received a funding extension of \$5.9 million, which will allow for three more rounds of funding, with the next Request for Applications (RFA) to be released in September. With this expansion, a program associate has been hired to boost community engagement. Upcoming events include a GIS mapping training on May 13, the second annual Learning Exchange on June 30, and program management training for the new cohort starting in July. There will also be two regional exchanges (one in Connecticut and one in New York) in the fall. For more details and registration, visit the program's website.

Update to Tracking and Reporting: Cayla provided an update on tracking and reporting. The team is transitioning to a new tracking and reporting tool for the CCMP. This tool includes interconnected tables to track implementation actions, grantee progress, and project outcomes. The semiannual reporting cycle will be postponed until October, where progress will be reported for the period from October 1, 2024, to September 30, 2025. EPA is working on updating project lists and transitioning them to the new actions, with a crosswalk to translate old implementation

actions into new ones. Grantees should work with their project officers to identify relevant actions, especially for staffing changes related to old science and management actions.

Updates on Stewardship Strategy: Cayla provided updates on the stewardship strategy that is in development to guide the management of 33 stewardship areas in Connecticut and New York. A series of meetings are being held to gather feedback on the strategy, with public comments currently being accepted. The strategy aims to improve communication and collaboration between site managers, agencies, and partners. The next meeting will be on April 24, and the final meeting will take place on June 4, where the strategy will be finalized and discussed.

Update on Bioextraction Initiative: Kimarie announced that the Bioextraction Initiative is creating an email list to share program updates and achievements. Anyone interested in being added to the list can email her for inclusion.

Closing Remarks: Susan Van Patten requested a presentation on the bioextraction program for a future meeting. Rick, Regina, and Bob expressed gratitude for everyone's efforts in progressing with the budget and project execution. Regina reminded everyone to provide feedback or suggestions for future meetings, particularly regarding the budget.