

CAC/STAC Joint Meeting

Hybrid Meeting: UConn Avery Point and ZOOM Online

Thursday, Sept. 11, 2025 – Meeting Summary

Welcome and Introductions

- Penny Vlahos (STAC CT co-chair) kicked off the meeting at 10:15 am with about 100 participants (60 in-person and 40 online) in the largest joint CAC/STAC meeting to date.
- Penny introduced Nikki Tachiki as the Long Island Sound Partnership’s acting director (round of applause from attendees).
- Penny introduced CAC co-chairs, Nancy Seligson (NY) and Holly Drinkuth (CT), for CAC business.
- Holly announced a vacancy for a CT vice-chair of the CAC. A motion to elect nominee Andrew Ely (Project Oceanology, director) for CT vice-chair was made by David Miller (NY League of Conservation Voters) and seconded by Maggie Favretti (Mystic River Alliance). The vote carried unanimously.
- David Miller moved to approve the CAC’s June 2025 meeting summary with an amendment; Alicea Charamut (Rivers Alliance) seconded. Dave amended the meeting summary to include a note that he asked if the EPA could provide a written rationale for the closing of the EPA/LISO Stamford, CT office; EPA responded in June that his request was reasonable. Motion to accept the amended minutes passed unanimously.
 - **Action item: David requested EPA provide a written rationale for the closing of the EPA/LISO office.**
- Nikki Tachiki introduced two new members of the EPA LIS Partnership team: Kathy Bell and Kristina Heinemann, both in EPA Region 2.
- Nancy shared the objective of the meeting, which was to discuss priorities for implementing the CCMP this year to be shared in a joint letter to the Management Committee. She noted that CAC and STAC input has historically been appreciated and that CAC and STAC co-chairs will distill the discussion and include the highest priority topics in the letter to the management committee.

CAC Updates from the Policy Subcommittee

- Adrienne Esposito (CCE) gave an update on the two-day July trip to Washington, DC, which she categorized as substantive and successful. On day 1 the group held a roundtable discussion with many congressional reps, including Congressman George Latimer (D-NY), Congressman Nick LaLota (R-NY), Congressman Tom

Suozzi (D-NY), Congressman Jim Himes (D-CT), Congressman Joe Courtney (D-CT), and Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro (D-CT). Discussion focused on maintaining LIS Partnership FY26 funding of \$40 million, reauthorizing the LIS Restoration and Stewardship Act, conserving Plum Island, and restoring funding for the National Estuary Program and the State Revolving Fund clean water program. Later that day the team met with Senator Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) and staff from Senator Chris Murphy's (D-CT) office (with a quick visit from Murphy). On day 2, the group met with Senator Charles Schumer (D-NY) and then staff in Senator Kirsten Gillibrand's (D-NY) office, followed by a productive meeting with EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin and his staff. Nancy noted that Zeldin expressed personal interest in Plum Island and pride in the LIS program appropriations.

- Denise Stranko gave an update on FY26 appropriations. The September 30 deadline seemed likely to set up a continuing resolution, meaning level funding for LIS Partnership and the National Estuary Program. If a FY 26 full-year appropriations package goes forward, LISP should be flat-funded at \$40 million. The administration reduced the NEP budget to \$32 million, and the Senate restored it to \$40 million. State revolving funds: Trump's budget proposal cut the federal program by \$2.46 billion. The House put back \$2.1 billion (for a cut of just \$662 million), but the Senate restored it to the full amount of \$2.9 billion. Denise thought that the final amount will be between \$2.1 and 2.9 billion.
- Nancy thanked Adrienne and Denise for their roles as co-chairs of the policy subcommittee and Adrienne for planning the DC trip.
- Jim O'Donnell said the NOAA buoy programs should also be prioritized. Nancy clarified that they did mention that in all conversations, and how defunding it would hurt Long Island Sound. Adrienne noted that they describe specific examples of LIS projects for Congress to illustrate the impacts of the program.

STAC Updates

- Penny reported that the first STAC newsletter is scheduled for October. She asked members to share any publications, meetings, or workshops that you'd like the community to know about with her, Kamazima, Nicole, or Jim in the next few weeks. These updates will eventually be integrated into the YIR report shared with local legislators.
- Kamazima Lwiza (STAC NY co-chair) introduced four new members of the STAC: Dr. Danielle Perry, Dr. Elizabeth Suter (Malloy College), Giovanna McClanahan (SBU), and Luis Medina (SBU). The STAC currently has 38 members: 17 NY, 14 CT, 2 Massachusetts, and 1 Rhode Island (others from upland states?) The co-chairs will try to balance out membership among the states and are looking to add additional members.

- Suzanne asked if there is still a USGS rep? Yes, Baumgardner. Penny noted they'll be looking over the list soon. Please let Penny and Kamazima know if you know anyone who should be represented and isn't.

LIS Partnership Updates (Nikki Tachiki)

The 2025 CCMP was officially approved by the Policy Committee in March and released publicly on June 20. Available materials include: 2025 CCMP as a PDF and flipbook, CCMP StoryMap, a Plan at a Glance 4-page overview, and public comments and responses.

- **Action item: David Miller requested a copy of the ceremonial CCMP signing document be sent to the CAC.**

Key changes and updates to the 2025 CCMP and program structure:

- Plan structure: Goals, objectives (measures of success), actions
- Reduced from 136 IAs to 47 Actions
- New goal: Informed and Engaged Public
- Work Groups have been realigned to match the CCMP goals. There are a couple of teams that will focus on specific topics including water quality modelling and tracking and reporting. The implementation team will cover cross-coordination topics, like climate vulnerability, data management, open science, etc.

Tracking Environmental Outcomes:

- Work groups are aligning their workplans with objectives and actions
- Indicator Review Team is updating objective webpages and working with co-chairs to draft narratives, expected to be done by the end of the calendar year.

MC October Meeting:

- Topics will cover:
 - FY25 reflections, accomplishments, transitions,
 - LIS CAC/STAC perspectives,
 - FY26 planning and priorities and WG work plans,
 - Science and Research Support for 2025 CCMP,
 - Reports and Communication Products for 2026
- Bill Lucey commended Nikki on a great, seamless job taking over from Mark!
- Holly asked if there have been any challenges with the new CCMP reporting structure. Nikki noted it's too soon to tell, and Cayla Sullivan added that old targets are closing and the new indicators will roll out soon.
 - The contract with the web developer is in place, and new indicators webpages are expected by year's end.
 - Discussions about how to best communicate data to the public are ongoing.
- Dave Miller asked how Bipartisan Infrastructure Legislation (BIL) investments are going. Nikki reported no disruptions, and funding was proceeding through normal budget and planning cycles. Craig Tobias noted that some of the BIL

funding from other federal agencies targeting LIS were not moving forward, and the future is uncertain.

2026 Priority Discussion Session:

- Holly shared results of a limited CAC/STAC survey and instructions for breakout group discussions. Breakout groups met during lunch and reported out to the full group (see attachment).
- Penny's recap cited the need to prioritize early wins by focusing on achievable, high-impact actions and low-hanging fruit in the first year. An emphasis on celebrating progress, recognizing accomplishments, and improving coordination and communication will help stakeholders clearly understand available tools and information.

Presentation: LIS BioExtraction Initiative, Kimarie Yap

- Nitrogen pollution remains a major issue in Long Island Sound, mainly from nonpoint sources like septic, stormwater, and fertilizer. The BioExtraction Initiative aims to build a sustainable shellfish and seaweed industry that improves water quality, supports local economies, and creates non-food products. Pilot projects are showing strong potential that complements land-based nutrient reduction practices.

Presentation: Hypoxia Forecast Tool (Cayla Sullivan and Nicole Hammond)

- Despite significant nitrogen reductions improving Long Island Sound's oxygen levels, hypoxia still occurs each summer and remains a concern. A new forecasting model explains 90% of the variability (1991–2023) and predicted a 2024 low-oxygen area of 79 km². The new toolkit webpage and outreach materials help explain progress and challenges and highlights successes (nitrogen reductions, return of dolphins/whales) and ongoing work. Contact Nicole Hammond for questions or more information: Hammond.Nicole@epa.gov

Announcements:

- Robert Burg shared a communications update, including the [2024 Long Island Sound Public Perception Survey Report](#).
- Kelly Marty announced: [LISCommunity Impact Fund RFA](#) is out.
- Nancy Seligson announced she is stepping down as CAC co-chair in December after 20 years of service. "It's been one of the most important roles of my life." The room replied with a standing ovation for Nancy!

Meeting adjourned at 2:43pm. The next CAC meeting is scheduled to take place virtually on December 11; the next STAC meeting will be held virtually on November 21.

Attachment

Breakout Group Reports:

- Vicki O'Neill (THAW): Better communication with the upper watershed, particularly when it comes to riparian buffers; quality of the metrics, and where the data exist. Open space, understanding infrastructure needs, and funding challenges. Eelgrass monitoring. Seed database for inventory and sharing. The top priority that emerged was riparian buffers. The second top was communication with upper watershed. Third was the eelgrass database/seed collection.
- Deb Abibou (THAW): Two main themes emerged: completing existing work around habitat characterization (esp. seafloor) and completing suitability modeling of offshore habitats. This can help prioritize what goes in LISFF RFP. Expanding the outreach and accessibility of data products and tools. Advocate for advancing habitat restoration projects that are in the queue. Form a group with key parties to help?
- Sarah Deonaire (THAW): Top priority for the group was wildlife; develop or update priority wildlife lists, need mechanism to record how wildlife populations are changing. Related to that, when restoring habitats, make sure wildlife are coming back. Second priority: coastal habitat. Determine if areas are suitable for long-term restoration; how do we get the most bang for our buck.
- Sarah Deonaire (CWHW): Top priority: implement projects now, not just in CT and NY, to make sure they happen before losing big funding sources from the federal government. Priority 2: work with local partners to capitalize on plans that are already in place locally. Other priorities: define specific goals and a healthy watershed. Give awards to homeowners who meet the criteria/incentive programs. Change behaviors to reduce marine debris.
- Abby Winter (CWHW): four main priorities emerged: marine debris and how upper watershed is involved, focus on microplastics because it's a big buzzword right now; nutrient reduction: understand the type, not just the quantity of nutrients; pathogens: overlap between pathogens and nutrients; toxic contaminants: shellfish restoration, it's another buzzword so has public interest right now, need to understand toxins better before acting on them. Conversations about coordination and bringing in partners.
- Cayla (CWHW): Data applicability: partners need funds to support monitoring; how do we use what we already have to support unfunded projects? Make connections/open science. Focus on consistent messaging and communication: how to distill everything we have for the public to understand and participate. Priority 2: push for more funding to agriculture partners and get more staff support to work with ag partners. Establish a baseline for riparian buffers; connect stewardship areas to the upper watershed, land conservation outreach in the upper

watershed; marine debris: how to capitalize on the public knowing litter is bad and that it's a problem?

- Lilli Genovesi (IEP): New IEP Goal has 3 objectives: public access, education, and stewardship. Priority 1: education, starting young and developing a bottom-up approach, starting with younger kids who can inspire/influence their families; longer-term investment. Priority 2: public access: what is it, and public access and sense of belonging are two different things; maybe people are allowed, but don't feel welcome, sometimes people don't know what's available/accessible to them. Priority 3: celebrations. Great way to help people feel welcome and get people engaged. Other ideas: integrate stewardship network into work groups (IEP and THAW), children's books for storytelling.
- Christina Lizzo (IEP): 2 overarching themes: education and training, and celebrating our wins/storytelling. Can foster a sense of curiosity and empowerment. Citizen science studies, teacher workshops, work advocacy workshops, and youth opportunities. Campaigns and topics on social media for a month, combining STEM and arts. Awards programs for municipalities.
- Elizabeth Hornstein (SRC): Top 3: making sure municipalities have access to codes to address resilience, helping communities understand the new normal of rainfall/stormwater management/flooding, and cross-coordination between communities, and prioritizing engagement with youth for resilience planning.
- Sarah Schechter (SRC): Implementation of projects that are going to benefit communities, case-studies to showcase results, and awards. Increasing buy-in from communities on resilience – identify problems and solutions from the communities rather than telling them what to do.
- Recap (Penny): Want to plan for early wins, so focus on low-hanging fruit/things we can accomplish in first year. Celebrating wins, recognizing progress, prioritizing coordination so people understand what tools and info we have.