



RHODE ISLAND BAYS, RIVERS, & WATERSHEDS COORDINATION TEAM

Meeting of February 1, 2012

**Conference Room A
1-2:30 pm
The Department of Environmental Management
235 Promenade Street
Providence, RI**

DRAFT Minutes

Coordination Team Members in Attendance:

Kathy Crawley on behalf of Kenneth Burke
Mike Walker on behalf of Keith Stokes
Jared Rhodes on behalf of Kevin Flynn
Jeff Willis on behalf of Grover Fugate
Pam Reitsma on behalf of Ray Marshall
Sue Kiernan on behalf of Janet Coit
Guy Lefebvre, RI Rivers Council

BRWCT Staff: Ames Colt, Melissa Deciantis

Guests: Robert Ballou, Assistant to the Director, RIDEM

CT Administration

Meeting was called to order at 1:00 p.m.

Meeting minutes for the December 7 meeting were approved unanimously with amendments offered by Kathy Crawley

Review of DEM Division of Marine Fisheries' Lobster 'Vent-less Trap' Survey Revised Proposal

Ballou distributed a revised proposal to the BRWCT. The key differences between the revised proposal and the proposal submitted to the BRWCT in November 2011 were 1) the deletion of the line item requesting \$5,000 to retrofit the R/V Privateer, 2) reduction in the boat contracting costs from \$33,000 to \$30,000, and 3) deletion of \$12,497 originally intended to support a DEM marine biologist half-time for 3 months. Thus the total cost of the revised proposal was reduced to \$47,369.

Ballou emphasized the tremendous value of the vent-less trap survey in promoting deeper understanding and acceptance of the lobster monitoring efforts of the RIDEM Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) by the commercial lobster industry; and in providing critical data on the presence (and characteristics) of lobsters located in rocky and shallow water habitats which are impossible to survey via DMF's trawl survey. He also noted that the BRWCT was the only remaining funding source available to ensure that DMF will participate in the 2012 lobster ventless trap survey, an annual that has been performed regionally for several years in collaboration with Maine, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts.

Rhodes asked if the methodology of the survey is kept the same year to year. Ballou confirmed that survey methodology was kept strictly the same year to year and across states. and added that the sample sites were determined using a stratified random sampling design.

Rhodes asked what the approximate cost was for last year. Ballou replied that the overall costs in terms of contracted vessels and equipment were unchanged from previous years.

Willis asked Ballou why he felt the contracted boat costs were reasonable. Ballou explained that there are the vessels would be paid about \$1,200 a day. Their costs for fuel, bait, and other expenses totaled about \$900-1,000 per day at sea, with the balance of the payment for the vessel operator's time.

Lefebvre asked how much annual revenue in round numbers the state lobster fishery program receives from commercial fees. Ballou responded eight to nine hundred thousand dollars. Lefebvre asked what methods Connecticut and Massachusetts used to base their commercial lobster fees. Ballou responded that Rhode Island has not analyzed its commercial lobster fee structure in some time and he would look into how Connecticut and Massachusetts currently base their fees.

Colt asked if this data would be helpful with assessing the Block Island wind farm site. Ballou said yes, although that of course is not the primary purpose of the survey. But the data generated would be useful for the baseline assessments of lobster habitat preferences that will be essential to assessing the environmental and fisheries impacts of the Block Island Wind Farm site proposal.

Lefebvre asked if the state's lobster fisheries are managed via a total allowable catch quota. Ballou replied no, management of fishing effort is accomplished via limits on the number of traps utilized in the fishery.

Reitsma asked if there has been any collaboration with URI regarding the contractual labor required for the survey. Ballou said that is possible and that he is open to any approach to fisheries monitoring and management that draws in URI faculty and students.

Rhodes asked if the legal-sized lobsters are kept. Ballou said that all lobsters were thrown back.

Rhodes asked if industry was making any contributions to the survey. Ballou said that they are reluctant to contribute to the survey because they feel that the commercial license fees they pay to DEM should be all that is expected of them in terms of supporting state fisheries management programs.

Crawley wanted to know if the results are published. Ballou answered yes, all results are published.

Rhodes asked if Colt could say a little bit more about the BRWCT FY12 discretionary project budget. Colt affirmed that the FY12 budget was in good shape and the BRWCT could readily cover these costs. He noted however that he would likely have to shift some of the costs of this project into FY 13. Colt asked for a motion to approve the funding.

A motion was passed to approve funding for the ventless trap lobster survey. Kiernan abstained.

“Water Words that Work” Workshop Proposal from the Narragansett Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve

The BRWCT took up consideration of a proposal to provide \$2,000 in funds for a communications training workshop from the Narragansett Bay Estuarine Research Reserve’s Coastal Training Program Coordinator Jennifer West. Colt stated that even if the proposal is approved for funding, it will have to be approved as an acceptable use of state funds by the Department of Administration, a process that Ms. West would be asked to undertake in partnership with Melissa Deciantis. Colt noted that training in strategic communications for government officials is not identified directly as a priority in the BRW SLP.

Reitsma asked what the funds being requested would be used for specifically. Colt replied that it would be used to purchase the consulting services necessary to convene and conduct the workshop.

Kiernan added that this particular workshop offering has been well received previously and that DEM staff is cognizant of the importance of improving their public communications skills.

Rhodes asked if this proposal could be funded with the remaining balance of \$2,937 in the BRWCT’s discretionary project budget for FY 2012. Colt said it could, but there are also funds available in the CT office budget.

Walker expressed concern that the proposal indicated that the communications workshop would be designed for local, state, and federal employees, yet he thought that the proposal primarily discusses the value of the workshop for professional scientists. Willis stated that he read the proposal a little differently. He thought the proposal was targeting the workshop toward agency staff that must communicate to the public regarding difficult technical and scientific issues.

Walker asked Rhodes whether the convening of the workshop could be incorporated into Statewide Planning’s challenge grant to Grow Smart RI, which is intended to support local decision making regarding land-use management. Rhodes replied that this funding request could possibly be run through this program in partnership with Grow Smart RI if the BRWCT chose not to fund it.

Walker asked if some of the communications strategies to be introduced by the workshop could also be shared with others long term by making training materials available on-line.

Crawley wanted to know if there is some way to confirm if the expenditure would be allowed by Department of Administration if they defer it until the next Coordination Team meeting. Colt said he would look into that further, but had already been informed by Division of Purchases that all the required paperwork would have to be completed before DoA would review the proposal.

Kiernan noted how the Department of Administration had made the decision to discourage the expenditure of state funds on any form of training across the executive branch as a cost-savings measure.

Lefebvre noted his consternation that NBNERR's proposal text repeatedly referred incorrectly to the proposal's own title.

The BRWCT asked that J. West provide additional information on how the proposed workshop would fit into the overall mission of the Coastal Training Program and its effort to improve the communication skills of the decision makers the CTP is targeting. It also requested a complete budget for the workshop assuming that additional funds and support beyond what was being asked of the BRWCT.

BRWCT Chair Update

Colt reported that he met on January 9 with CRMC Chair Anne Livingston regarding promulgation by CRMC of the trans-Atlantic cable fee. She expressed strong interest in pursuing the matter. Willis stated that CRMC staff has contacted the attorney who previously represented AT&T [*AT&T is the owner of the three such cables that make landfall in RI. The attorney is Edward D. Pare, Jr., of Brown Rudnick, 121 S. Main St., Providence, RI.*—Colt]. Pare has been talking with AT&T on how they wish to handle the matter and has promised he will get back to CRMC. A meeting possibly will be set up between CRMC staff, Ms. Livingston, and AT&T and its representatives.

Colt attended an organizing meeting in Wells, ME on January 12, 2012, for the Northeast Great Waters Initiative. He stated that he felt it important that CRMC, DEM, and Habitat Restoration Team review this initiative and how they may wish to involve the state of Rhode Island in it. The Coordination Team has been in the lead in terms of Rhode Island's participation in the region's Great Waters Initiative.

Colt reported that Tasha O'Hare is working for the BRWCT as an unpaid intern. She will be working on developing an outline for a report by the Natural Resources and Habitats Working Group of the RI Climate Change Commission. Without the agencies contributing their support and insights, The Climate Change Commission, and its working groups, will not be able to accomplish its full mission. He proposed to develop a list of questions to be circulated to the BRWCT agencies and key stakeholders to solicit more feedback on BRWCT mission and current responsibilities.

Colt cited the continuing imperative of pulling together a summary of the work accomplished and projects funded to date that will serve as a basis for an in-depth review of the purpose and functions of the BRWCT. He also noted an interest being expressed by the Chafee Administration to take a look at the respective responsibilities of the Narragansett Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, the BRWCT, and the Narragansett Bay Estuary Program. Ultimately he would like to try to convene an executive meeting of the BRWCT to discuss these issues, as well as possibly an open stakeholders forum to review the same.

He encouraged the BRWCT members to send him their ideas as he proceeds forward with this review.

Meeting adjourned at 2:30.

Appendix I: Revised proposal for funding lobster survey submitted for consideration at 2/1/12 BRWCT meeting by DEM's Div. of Marine Fisheries.

Rhode Island Lobster Pot Ventless Survey for 2012

Principal Investigator: Mark Gibson, Deputy Chief for Marine Fisheries, Division of Fish & Wildlife, DEM, 3 Ft. Wetherill Rd., Jamestown, RI 02835 ph: 423-1935

The commercial lobster fishery is the most valuable commercial fishery in Rhode Island, with a total value of \$12.4 million in 2010. Yet it is also a fishery in peril, given increasing evidence that the southern New England lobster population is experiencing recruitment failure.

In 2006, a cooperative, random-stratified ventless trap survey was initiated to establish estimates of relative abundance and recruitment for lobsters throughout the heart of their range in U.S. waters, from Maine – New York. Although trawl surveys provide an important source of fishery-independent information for assessing lobster stocks, trawls only capture lobsters outside of their rocky habitats. Ventless traps, which can be set anywhere, offer a critical complement to trawl surveys and thereby contribute to more robust stock assessments. The ventless surveys are undertaken via collaboration with commercial lobster fishermen, making them both cost-efficient and an effective means for building trust among industry vis-a-vis the science governing stock assessments. Various “soft” funding sources supported the Rhode Island component of the ventless survey from 2006-2010. By 2011, those sources had been extinguished, and DEM had to tap into commercial license receipts to maintain the program. There are no funds currently available to continue the survey in 2012 and beyond. (The license-receipt account cannot sustain the survey without jeopardizing other core science and management programs conducted by DEM.). From the perspective of both industry and DEM, it is critically important to maintain the time series of data that characterizes the health and status of the lobster resource in Rhode Island waters. Accordingly, through this proposal, DEM, with strong backing from industry, seeks the funding needed to continue the ventless survey in 2012. The results of the survey will be used for the next benchmark lobster stock assessment, scheduled for 2013.

To date, the RI ventless surveys have covered three regions, via contractual arrangements with industry: Narragansett Bay, RI Sound East, and RI Sound West. It behooves DEM to continue surveying these three regions and to continue the contractual arrangements with industry. Accordingly, this proposal seeks funding to cover the three survey legs, using contracted commercial lobster vessels (with DEM staff aboard). The RI ventless survey work will complement ongoing ventless survey work being conducted by the State of Massachusetts in neighboring Massachusetts state waters.

Survey Objectives:

- Develop more precise estimates of relative abundance of legal-sized and sub legal-sized lobsters in Narragansett Bay and the Rhode Island portion of Lobster Conservation Management Area (LCMA) 2, off southern New England.
- Document the relative importance of depth as it pertains to lobster abundance and distribution.
- Monitor the status of the chronic shell disease epidemic affecting lobsters in LCMA 2.
- Maintain and build upon the strong working relationship between the commercial lobster industry, fishery scientists, and fishery managers with regard to understanding and responding to changes in lobster stock status.

Project Location:

The survey will be conducted out of the ports of Point Judith, Sakonnet, and Newport, with traps set in the RI state waters (0-3 miles) portion of NMFS Statistical Area 539 in LCMA 2.

Methods:

With a view to remaining consistent with the ventless trap survey program conducted during previous years (2006-2011), the 2012 survey will be conducted during the three-month period, June – August. The same modified (ventless) experimental lobster traps will be used. They will be set in accordance with a random-stratified survey design, taking into account depth configuration as a key variable.

Budget:

1. Salaries (**\$12,369**)
 - One contractual employee – full-time for 3 months
3. Contracted Vessels (**\$30,000**)
 - 3 vessels x 3 days/month x 3 months = \$10,000/vessel
4. Replacement Gear (lobster pots, buoys, groundlines) (**\$5,000**)

Total Request = \$47,369

Notes: vessel contractual expenses may vary, depending on the distance traveled to station locations; staff salaries are estimated and are intended to cover both at-sea work as well as survey preparation, gear work, data entry and analysis, and reporting. There may be an opportunity to defray some of the contractual costs by allowing for sale of the catch; that opportunity will be explored by the Department if the project is funded.