

Environmental Roundtable Meeting Notes February 13, 2002

Present: Sheila Dormody, Darryl Paquette, Eugenia Marks, Harold Ward, Alicia Lehrer, Chris Modisette, Alicia Karpick, A. Gray, Jane Jellison, Ann Marie Ignasher, Kate Strouse, John Campanini, Bob Mendoza

DEM staff: Jan Reitsma, Tom Getz, Mal Grant, Elizabeth Stone, Fred Vincent, Dean Albro, Terry Gray, Terry Maguire, Fred Presley, Alicia Good, Janet Keller, Mickie Musselman

Old Business

Oct Minutes - accepted

Announcements

- **Eugenia Marks** – Said she has a report on the drought situation.
- **Janet Keller** – Greenhouse Gas Action Plan is in development and people can follow the progress on the web at <http://raabassociates.org>.

New Business

1. Legislation

Elizabeth Stone presented DEM's legislative initiatives for this session, which are listed in a handout. The Director said the Senate passed the Administrative Search Warrant bill last year and DEM is re-introducing it in 2002. Alicia Karpick asked about the anti-idling bill for diesel vehicles, which is not on the list, because the Sierra Club is interested in seeing it passed. The Sierra Club is also interested in bill H-7136, which would provide pedestrian and bikeways around schools as well as providing for swapping parking spaces for RIPTA passes. Kate Strouse said RIPRIG wants to see an energy bill (H-7237) passed that would require energy suppliers to provide 20% of energy from renewable sources. Darryl Paquette said Save The Bay is introducing a bill to fund habitat restoration for the fifth year, information on that and other bills (mercury reduction, cesspool phase-out, and stormwater management districts) is on the Save The Bay website.

The Director said \$9 million of the OSPAR funds will be re-directed to pay for part of the Providence River Dredging Project and that will affect the habitat restoration bill. Last year's mercury phase-out bill exempted some mercury use in automobiles and this will address that use. This will be the 10th year that a bill to fund the Housing and Conservation Trust Fund has been introduced, to provide a real estate transfer tax. He also said the fisheries management bill is important because the moratorium on commercial fishing licenses ends at the end of June and the licensing system proposed in the bill is essential to fisheries management. In response to a question about a bill to establish Marine Protected Areas, he said that issue needs further study and discussion with the Coastal Institute. We have to weigh biological management issues with economic considerations.

2. Budget Update

The Director said the budget shortfall is worse than anticipated and will be far worse next year. Agencies were asked to cut their budgets again since submitting their requests, so that the Supplemental Budget actually is less than the original budget request. There is a hiring and spending freeze and he expects real consequences for Department programs. Initiatives and programs that are important, such as pollution prevention or watersheds, but not statutorily mandated may suffer. DEM may have to postpone capital projects, including the development of Snake Den Park in Johnston to realize savings.

Fred Vincent said the budget is a half million dollars less than last year's and there are rent and staffing increases that cannot be postponed, so there will have to be cuts. The Director said there is no flexibility in the union contract to allow for transitions, or to give additional duties to existing staff. Terry Maguire said the "turnover rate," the time between when a staff member leaves the Department and when the vacancy is filled, is to be held at twenty-seven, for the next Fiscal Year, to realize some savings by delaying filling positions. DEM is proposing some fee increases, beach and camping, hunting and fishing, which have not been raised for ten to over twenty years, and is asking for some new fees, such as turkey and pheasant license fees. Forty percent of beach fees would go to host communities. Other proposed fee increases include UST, solid waste facilities, and generators of hazardous waste. Eugenia Marks suggested the UST and solid waste fees could be even higher as other states have higher fees. She and others would like to have a follow-up meeting focused on the budget.

The Director said DEM staff retirement is a problem in some parts of the agency. The Natural Resources Bureau has already had two staff retire this year, and Enforcement will lose two people this year. The hiring freeze may prevent some positions from being filled and this could cause some operational problems.

Alicia Karpick asked if the Department would fund a litter initiative this year. Fred Vincent said there is no money for the Youth Litter Corps grants and there was no advocacy from the cities and towns for reviving the program. The Director said DEM does not have the staff to do this and RIRRC is doing an outstanding job with residential recycling and may take over the Youth Litter Corps if they had the money.

3. Watershed Update

Fred Presley provided handouts describing the next steps for the watershed groups, and said a newsletter will be on the web. DEM has expanded the watershed approach into the Blackstone and the Blackstone River Watershed Action Plan is $\frac{3}{4}$ complete. DEM is looking for funding for a Pawtuxet River Watershed Coordinator. The Kickemuit River is the first watershed to have a coordinator who is not funded by DEM.

The Director suggested the Water Supply Board as an appropriate source of funds for a watershed coordinator for the Scituate Reservoir watershed and that DEM is working with numerous partners on a statewide monitoring strategy.

Harold Ward asked Eugenia to give the drought report at this point. She said the Drought Emergency Advisory Committee had met that morning and voted to move from a drought advisory to a drought watch. Stream flows are now at their August lows and some residential

wells are dry now. They will increase public outreach to encourage conservation by institutions and residents and will push for water use audits for large water users.

Harold Ward said we need a long-term reduction in water demand. This year is similar to 1999, and in that year we started being concerned about water early, but relaxed when there was rain in the spring.

The Director said the Water Resources Board should be more involved in the process and needs to go beyond demand management. Water is being treated as a commodity that is sold. We need to start to plan on how the state will address the issue of insufficient supplies of water. The Pascoag problem shows how little excess capacity there is in the system when a water supply is tainted, or perhaps is not available for use. A lot of communities' back-up plans entail using the Scituate Reservoir. In a drought will there be enough supply to meet the demand?

Eugenia Marks suggested the 30th anniversary year of the Clean Water Act could be a good time to direct attention to water, perhaps through a photography show.

4. Brownfields Legislation Update

Terry Gray said President Bush signed the new Brownfields bill into law on January 11. There is a summary of the bill in the handouts. DEM is working with RI Environmental Professionals on a joint training effort concerning the DEM Marginal Risk Policy. This policy streamlines the process to clean up sites that do not pose a significant environmental problem.

5. Enforcement Update

Dean Albro gave the status of DEM's enforcement efforts. The Moniz farm cleanup is complete. Fifty-three thousand cubic yards of construction and demolition debris was removed from the Recchia site. Global Waste Recycling is under a court order to remove solid waste. Tires have been removed from three sites, two in Johnston (175,000 tires), and one in Scituate (58,000). DEM has enforced the removal of ten large tire piles since the last tires were removed from the Davis Tire Pile. The Stanley Fastening case was resolved. The company paid a fine of \$260,000 for turning off its afterburners that controlled air pollution.

6. Supplemental Environmental Projects

DEM negotiated 7 SEPs with a total of \$791,302. Terry Gray is completing the SEP policy and the department will be in a position to open a SEP bank that can be used by people to offset some of the cost of penalties and be used to fund approved environmental projects.

7. Anti-litter Initiatives

Fred Vincent said Federal Fish and Wildlife representatives came to DEM and Audubon for advice on new signage at sites in RI. They have two main messages to convey: anti-littering and "carry-in, carry-out." Part of the sign will be universal and part will be specific to the agency. The signs will be multi-lingual. DEM mentioned that \$10,000 is available for an anti-litter campaign that will focus on Earth Day Events in the spring. Grants will be small, in the neighborhood of \$250 and will be used by community and watershed groups to coordinate anti-litter activities.

8. Quonset Point

Alicia Karpick asked what DEM's involvement will be with the Quonset/Davisville port project? The Director said if a water quality certificate is needed the Department will review the project, and the agency is neutral on the project. She also asked if DEM is working with EPA on the scoping process. The director said DEM is not involved in this process.

9. Open Forum

Kate Strouse asked if the agency has a position on EPA's New Source Review regulation revision? The rule will limit control of older coal-fired power plants. The Director said the New England states are composing a letter to Governor Whitman objecting to the proposed changes to the existing New Source Review Regulations.