Musconetcong River Management Council

Minutes of a Member Meeting, October 18. 2022

The October, 2022 meeting of the Council was called to order at 7:04 on Zoom under the direction of Charley Fineran. Notice of this meeting was published in the Star Ledger and the Express Times in accordance with the NJ Open Public Meetings Act.

Attendance:

1.     Alan Hunt- MWA

2.     Charlie Fineran- Allamuchy

3.     Bill Leavens- Washington Twp, Morris

4.     Nancy Roberts-Lawler- PEACE NJ, Lebanon Twp

5.     Casey Ezyske- NJ Highlands Council

6.     Albert Krouse- Warren County

7.     Beth Styler Barry- Franklin Twp

8.     Carla Rodrigo NJ PEACE

9.     Albert Krouse- Warren county

10.   Christa Reeves- MWA

11.   Cliff Lundin, Lake Hopatcong

12.   Dwight Pederson- Holland Twp

13.   Frank Pinto- Greenwich Twp

14.  John Wetzel

15.  K Cenno- NJDEP

16.  Laura Tessieri- North Jersey RC&D

17.  Marsha Benovengo- NJ State Council of TU

18.  Mike- Pohatcong Twp

19.  Ryan Anderson- NJDEP

20.  Steve Rattner- Morris County

21.  Tom Dallessio- MWA

22.  William McQuaide- Hampton alternate

23.  Al Ivany- Washington Twp, Warren

24.  Katie Parrish- Byram Twp

25.  Cynthia Reyes

26.  Paul Tarlowe- Mansfield Twp

27.  George Jetson

28.  Paul Kenney- NPS

29.  Pam Bailey

Guests included Cliff Lundin and John Wetzel

The first order of business was approval of the August 16 minutes. Beth Barry noted that she was municipal representative for Franklin Twp. Motion was made by Nancy Lawler to approve the corrected minutes, Charlie Fineran gave second and they were unanimously approved on a voice vote.

Nancy Lawler then gave a report on her project, Real Hackettstown that has been engaging the community in Outdoor recreation. Peace NJ and Trout Unlimited are partnering to provide public outdoor recreation activity including programming. Hackettstown has a 25% Hispanic population. She has been investigating what are the barriers to the latino community to participate in outdoor recreation? Fishing is a means to draw people outside. Programs have not been directed to the unique perspectives and experience of the latino community. As the demographics of the region have changed, this program was developed to address that.

Questions were addressed to local leaders to resolve problems. Their answers have provided answers to creating community-inclusion activities. Key people were identified in the community to identify areas of concern. These are health concerns and a lack of youth activities. A survey was developed and distributed on the street and at places where people congregate. An English and Spanish language survey was created and individuals were enlisted to read those questions to respondents. 172 responses were generated including those received via social media links.

General demographic data was collected. Respondents come from all over latin America - including virtually all countries. 75 respondents reported they did not belong to any organization. People do not get much information from regular broadcast media. The population is diverse and complex. Some cannot read and write. Some have a feeling of dis-association. Churches are important to support the population. We have to think away from newspapers and print media. Engage people through media and graphics.

How do people engage with the outdoors? Most people have less than five hours for relaxation. Being outside is important. Weekend recreation times were generally best. Spending time with family and friends was important. People currently just go walk outside. Fishing and boating is not an activity that is generally enjoyed, although there is interest in those and in environmental activities.

Barriers were identified, but there are solutions. Many households include children who participate in unstructured activity. There are opportunities to work with youth. Mentoring programs were a possibility. There is a general lack of knowledge about how to get into activities. One goal is to build comfort for participating in outdoor experiences. A feeling of welcome should be encouraged.

Health considerations were examined. Nancy focused on concern about mental health among children. However, few respondents thought that they would benefit from outdoor activity. Family and friend activity should be considered in getting people outside. Cost was also a factor. ‘Welcoming’ people to the outdoors should also be a consideration. Peace NJ is now looking for community members for her organization’s board. What it would look like to incorporate mental health considerations in engaging in outdoor activity? Where is a centralized location to provide activities and education? A newsletter might be good outreach. Multicultural children’s activities should be considered. Survey respondents were most interested in helping to preserve the environment.

Charlie Fineran asked if organized sports might be an alternative. Is that tie strong in the latino community? Nancy: it depends, but a considerable percentage do not feel comfortable with organized sports activity. Nancy’s information will be started with the municipal recreational leaders. Sunday after church might be the best time to address community needs. Marcia Benovengo agreed. Her Trout Unlimited chapter in Dunellen has a large latino population, but few of the TU community speak Spanish. How can she find those leaders? Nancy: engage bilingual teenagers.

Beth Barry: Where are the bilingual bridges? She has posted on Spanish speaking social media pages, but she needs to identify Spanish speakers. Mike from Pohatcong spent a lot of time fishing in Hackettstown and has observed a large amount of participation by the latino community. Offer fishing instruction. Nancy reported that they have been doing that in Alumni Park. The river is not great to for fishing, but the area is good to teach casting.

Under old business, Mr. Hunt said that DEP will be holding meetings to address the increase of rainfall to better map floodplains in the state. Ryan Anderson of DEP is sitting in from DEP. These meetings invite public interaction around currently proposed rulemaking. New flood hazard areas are being considered where new construction might be impacted by flooding.

Travel America discharge permit: DEP is considering renewal of the Travel America discharge permit. There is concern about oil and grease capture from the site. There is a history of violations. DEP is releasing a new draft permit that is adding in the remediation of oil discharge. Individual monitoring points are permitted separately and new rules will enable tightened regulation of those sites. That was a key outcome. The old permit pre-dates both the Wild and Scenic and Category One designations. They will monitor locations upstream and downstream of the discharge point and that may affect future permitting. Paul Kenney noted that changes were made that included better data collection and that should lead to a good outcome. The MRMC comments on the permit renewal were well received by DEP.

Charlie noted that having DEP as an active member of the Council has been mutually beneficial. Paul Kenney noted that NPS has no jurisdiction under the law, but DEP did evaluate the NPS comments favorably. Dwight Pederson asked how often the sites were monitored. These are ‘grab’ samples - sometimes weekly and sometimes monthly.

Mr. Hunt then discussed the NPS brochure. The latest draft was submitted for evaluation and has been given to the graphic designer. We are on track to complete this before the end of the year. There has been a greater emphasis on the current day Native-American association with the river. Marcia Benovengo: did we have input from the native American community? This is being shared with the Ramapo tribe for their evaluation and input. We are one more draft away from a pre-publication proof. The content is representative of the final product. It will not be printed in Spanish and we don’t know what the Park Service policy is for smaller park areas. No Partnership river has bi-lingual brochures for large parks that have much greater visitor numbers. There is no handicap brochure for sight impaired people.

Mr. Hunt then gave his report as River Administrator. There was an oil leak that was found by Dwight Pederson from a Facebook post on Cyphers Road. Note was made on Facebook of a smell and a sheen on the river. Hunterdon County HazMat was engaged. The sheen went down to the Delaware. The leak was traced to the Warren Glen paper mill. The transformers at the plant powerhouse were leaking due to copper being stripped out by vandals. It was noted to be mineral oil. IPP’s remediation contractor was called out to work on it. In the end, there was a responsible site owner and competent professionals dealing with it. Christa looked at sites down river and didn’t notice any impairment to the fish population. Charlie said that we should be sending a thank you to the County and NJDEP personnel who addressed that by setting booms out and containing it. Nancy Lawyer made a motion and Marcia Benovengo gave second to sending a letter commending the responding parties. Paul Kenney volunteered to send a letter from NPS

The next presentation was made by on HABS in recreation lakes in the watershed by Christa Reeves. A mini grant from the Watershed Institute funded a study along the length of the watershed. There is ongoing support from NPS. Data was collected by volunteer river watchers and it is comparable with DEP standards. We are leveraging the power of the public. The River Watcher program is sixteen years old. 20 sites are now being monitored for HABS. Due to climate change, the water is warming and conditions for HABS are more favorable. The issue is to keep people from becoming sick. The interface with DEP has encouraged consistent messaging to the public on the threat. There is an interactive map that identifies areas with a warning on river sites. This map includes an interactive reporting site.

There are look-alike impairments that can confuse public members. If something suspicious is observed, river watchers report it to DEP. There was no evidence of HABS found below the Bloomsbury dam, so that area will be removed from future study. The concern is in the lakes north of Hackettstown. There are 16 sites on Lake Hopatcong and they are noted to have high water temperatures and significant impairment. Further downstream, river water temperatures were well above the trout-friendly conditions. That encourages HABS blooming. There are three monitoring stations on Lake Musconetcong and also on Lake Tilcon. Again, there were HABS violations on Lake Musconetcong but none on Lake Tilcon despite high water temperatures. Over the entirety of the free running water, the river was generally without violations. Warmer water leads to more violations. A Hydrogen Peroxide application in Lake Hopatcongt did not yield positive results on a trial run at one of the cove areas.

How are the HABS now with rain and cooler weather? There are still advisories in both Lake Hopatcong and Lake Musconetcong. Results are published regularly on a Rutgers site. How did the data compare with last year? There was a significant increase in frequency and duration due to higher average water temperatures. Uneven precipitation patterns have contributed to this.

The plan of collaboration with NJDEP, training and monitoring will continue in the interest of public safety. Charlie asked if Nancy and Christa’s reports could be combined and shared with the public. He requested a motion to acknowledge and commend the reports. Marcia Benovengo made that motion and Steve Rather gave second. That was unanimously passed on a voice vote.

Cliff Lundin from Lake Hopatcong noted that the HABS results were at the ‘Watch’ level all during the summer. He measured the presence of HABS through last winter and identified samples under the ice. There was much lower vegetation on the lake wherever HABS were present. The HABS watch state is chronic. Christa and Mr. Fineran recognized and thanked Mr. Lundin for his participation.

Paul Kenney asked whether the closest temperature gauge outside of the lake yielded the same result? Christa reported that temperature levels below the lake were much higher.

Marcia Benovengo asked is Christa would share her program with the NJ State Council of TU. Christa is always happy to find more river watchers.

Mike from Pohatcong noted the HABS problem is bad and getting worse. How to fix it? Additional water edge buffers will slow down stormwater runoff. Stop fertilizing lawns. Maintain septic systems. All common sense remedies that are difficult to adopt.

Dwight Pederson: what is the economic impact of HABS impairment? Christa: there has been an economic study performed. She will talk with the Lake Hopatcong Foundation that has made a study of that.

Frank Pinto reported that he is working on a trail network with Lake Hopatcong Foundation around the lake. He noted that Jefferson Township is developing a sewering program. He thought that runoff was limited into the Lake. Ecotourism around the lake is being encouraged.

Paul Kenney then gave the NPS report: He has been working on a study of the Brandywine River near Philadelphia. Many of the examples he is using there are from the Musconetcong. He has a PDF of that presentation that he can distribute. He is also working on a cell tower application in Bethlehem Township. The Cooperative Agreement with the MWA has about a year to run.

Ryan Anderson from NJDEP provided information on the proposed aquatic invasive species initiative. Funding has been allocated for a plan to address the condition. The intent is for the state to receive annual funding to address invasive water species. He noted that Green Acres has begun an ‘Outside Together’ program to initiate outreach for public engagement. Lastly, he asked if there was any update to the Wild and Scenic inclusion in the Flood Hazard rules. It will not be included in the current proposed rule, but it is being considered when the rule opens up again and would be similar to the Fresh Water rules. Paul Kenney asked if there was any Federal rule? No this is a state-only rule. Mr. Kenney wanted to see it tied into the Federal Clean Water Act regulations.

Under Municipal reports, Mr. Fineran noted that Allamuchy has been working on a certified wildlife habitat upgrade to a detention basement that has been turned into a recreational wildlife area. The project was 1 of 5 recognized and given an award by ANJEC in 2022.

Mike from Pohatcong reported that their Environmental Commission heard a presentation from Jared Rosenbaum on planting native meadows.

Marcia Benovengo: NJ TU state Council is partnering with MWA on the planting program for the Beatty’s Mill dam removal site. That is planned for the Spring. Their members will be volunteering for that work.

Tom Dallessio reported that MWA Board has just approved a new Strategic Plan that will be distributed to the Council at the December meeting. There will be a municipal open house at the Asbury Mill on Open Waters at the Asbury Mill on Saturday, October 22. This will be a casual conversation. There was a conversation about ‘vibrant places’. An successful application has been made to the North Jersey Transportation Authority to put together a circulation plan for Asbury and Bethlehem Township. The annual Mill dinner will be held on December 1. We want to move our funding requests to Warren County and Franklin Township to make the first floor a Convening Canter. Mike from Pohatcong made a motion that was given second Steve Rattner to congratulate MWA for their work in securing the grant. That passed unanimously.

Christa Reeves announced that she will be conducting a work group on Nov. 16 to discuss road salt round table on 2020-21 report. Information is here: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSduNqgKbXbAEy8iJmcb-VyYP2_1tSS-aR-3_mrLYiyA20xn_w/viewform?usp=sf_link> She will also be doing River Watcher training later in November. A sensor station will be put in downstream of the Beatty’s Mill site and another in Pohatcong Township near the Delaware confluence. She wants volunteers to help monitor these locations.

Cynthia Reyes from Hackettstown introduced herself as a volunteer with Nancy and Carla Rodrigo with the Peace NJ program.

Frank Pinto noted there will be a RC&D Regenerative Agriculture meeting on December 1. <https://www.northjerseyrcd.org/rfn-nj> He also noted that a 65 acre farm near Merrill Creek in Greenwich Township had been accepted in the agricultural preservation program.

On numerous motions, the meeting was adjourned at 9:03

Respectfully submitted,

Bill Leavens