**Saco Watershed Collaborative Steering Committee Meeting**

Saco River Corridor Commission Office

Minutes

September 5, 2019

**Attendees**

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Chris Feurt cfeurt@une.edu

Dalyn Houser dalyn@srcc-me.org

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Wayne Munroe wayne.munroe@usda.gov

**Accomplishments in 2019 by Organizations**

* Ted Lavery: EPA – Merging NH and ME water quality data. I’ve been there for a while. My role here is to get the water quality data together and to ask what are good water quality indicators that we should rely on to do the marketing for the whole Collaborative. Once we get the data in a form that is usable, we can do data analysis and put it in a form that all people have access to.
* DEP did reclassification for portions of the Saco River.
* Dalyn Houser: SRCC – LR2204 downtown Saco and Biddeford development projects, SRCC was looking at scale backs to the act, essentially getting rid of language in the SRCC Act. Rule making changes at SRCC level instead; existing nonconforming structure, you can tear it down and rebuild with the 30% expansion. This promotes inland projects instead of urban sprawl.
* Wayne Munroe: NRCS – Edwin Martinez-Martinez is with us today, acting state conservationist with ME NRCS. We have our state leadership committed to the SWC. Carry out Farm Bill conservation title program. Active in the Saco Watershed (SW) with the Environmental Quality Incentive Program(EQIP). Agricultural management system is also active, low crop insurance sign up. Mitigates natural disasters in Maine. New cropland irrigation systems. Target those funds for other activities. Anywhere from $10 to 12 million annually in the state to work with private lands to address concerns. Looking at priority areas to purchase environmental benefits. Soil, water, air, plants, animals, human plus energy concerns. These plans target natural resource concerns in private land units. We just finished a round of contracting in my area, and these contracts obligated $1.2 million and forty-two new contracts. This land is in the SW. Been to livestock farms that have a need for nutrient management plans. Many contracts with the objective for water conservation, through farms that irrigate. Irrigation system reversions. Upgrade pumps. ME Chapter 587 regulates all surface water for farms, micro irrigation or center pivot systems. Lots of water and energy savings. It makes it a reliable quality crop.
* MJ Dillingham: Maine Water Company – Rick Knowlton will be speaking at the water symposium on October 30th in Mass with MWC and the SWC. Data; transfer of ownership between Biddeford/Saco to MWC, there are rules that require data for so long, some of that data may have been cleaned out. I have ears on it, but hopefully we can find it somewhere. After 2000, we have SCATA information. Extracting that information is costly. We have paper copies of data that includes raw data, but it will take someone to work on that as a separate project. Data that went back toward the 1800’s is probably gone. Marketing what is NOT in the Saco River. We look at data to see what is in it, but we should think about marketing the fact that our river is in good shape. Combine it with avoided costs of keeping that stuff out of the river.
* Chris Feurt: WNERR – develop the grants for the SWC the past two years. Still involved with the grant until December 31. I hope to be involved with the SWC after December through the WNERR.
* Edwin Martinez: NRCS – acting state conservationist in ME. Be here until mid-October. Great Lakes (worked in MI) Restoration Initiative Coordinator in DC. We do a lot of work in the Great Lakes region. We recognize the importance of partnerships and collaboration. Today I’ll be a listener, but we recognize the good work that you all do. We are focused on outcomes and impact now, where it used to be focused more on numbers. As an agency, we are working to monitoring the effects that our practices have. Practicing effectiveness in the landscape as well. A lot of these activities are happening at the state, local, national levels. When we look at the big picture, we have a huge impact. I appreciate the work that you are all doing on a local and state level. It’s good to be here to be able to sit here in this meeting from DC. If there are any questions, just let me know.
* Martha Sheils: New England Office of Finance – One of the projects that we work on is provide technical assistance to small water systems. I have a subaward that can help bring more collaboration between utilities and land trusts. I need a deliverable to fulfill my subaward. I’m looking for opportunities to do something in this watershed. There is a lot going on, and I think that there is a need. I am here at your service to figure out how to do something between utilities and land trusts. If we can line something up in the next year or so that I can work with, that would be great thank you.
* Anna Biddle: NRCS Oxford County – implementation, 9 new fish passage projects that will all be done at the end of the month. That will open up a lot of habitat. Only one of the is in the SWC, it’s in Crooked River. We have been contracting these a lot state-wide. That is when the RCPP program happened. There is another small project in Oxford, Somerset and Franklin (Maine Mountain Collaborative) for fish passage and forest management plans. Those have a wildlife focus for birds specifically.
* Andy Tolman: Watershed Resident/former head of Drinking Water Program – we manage 1,000 forested acres in the headwaters where our property is. I have been doing a lot of work with Susan Breau and have been trying to get her to work on a project in the SW.
* Mitchell Brown: UNE Office of Advancement – I manage corporate relationships and funding with UNE. I like to be helpful where I can. The biggest thing that we did was putting together the Woodard and Curran proposal where we will hopefully hear from in October.
* Robyn Saunders: Contractor and Project Manager of SWC –
* Kira Jacobs: EPA – We had our quarterly call with our people here, so we had to divide and conquer so that’s why Ted is there with you. I’ve been working on is getting the SWC to the attention of Juan Hernandez. NRCS is a critical partner in the SWC. Karl Honkonen, Sophie Scott and I briefed Juan on the SWC. Juan showed up to the March Steering Committee Meeting and was very impressed with the work that you are doing. My job is to get the right people to the table to get the work done. Karl and I have been working behind the scenes on forestry. Importance of land conservation in water quality. I met with Emily in July, was we may apply for the LSR grant that Karl mentioned. If there is any time for later, I’d like to mention updates.

Robyn: 2019 accomplishments, it’s important to set the stage in terms of budget for 2020. We couldn’t do all the work that we did with such little time, but we have accomplished a lot. I found it important to foster long-term sustainability. On the conference call in February, we did a SWOT analysis of the SWC. Chris and I were seeing if there was another backbone org that would support the SWC. We looked at county organizations and other folks, but we were told us to do a SWOT analysis. We discovered that we wanted to build more partnerships with other organizations. But when we engage more stakeholders, we avoid that threat of burning out the same main folks that lead the efforts. Other opportunities that we looked at is building upon existing relationships and ID champions in committees. I proposed that we do a lot of work on the committee level which has taken the place of a lot of meetings and conference calls. I think that it is working well. I proposed that we celebrate our accomplishments in 2019 at the annual meeting in December.

In March, we had the first SC meeting. And we had some meetings with other committees. We needed to move forward parallel efforts and messages. We established some outreach goals, but we really got the committees up and running. Then we looked at the action plan to ID orphaned activities. The only thing that we did not do was develop a report card for the SWC. That will probably be the next grant opportunity that we do. So, because this action plan that Chris and Emily developed over the last 3 years, it is now on national and federal priorities in region one. As Kira mentioned, she, Karl and Sophie have been doing a great job getting Juan and Edwin involved. The next week was the Maine Sustainability and Water Conference, we were able to highlight a lot of the work that we did. Going to this conference, gave Emily and I an opportunity to network with others and raise the visibility of the SWC compared to the Androscoggin and Penobscot Watersheds. Juan and Wayne sat with us and talked about the NRCS effort that could be done on behalf of the SWC.

With that, here we are. Emily presented at the NH Water and Watersheds Conference and presented on what we were doing in the SWC. We attended the Androscoggin Watershed Conference as well with an external grant from Poland Spring. We also attended the NH Source Water Protection Conference. Susan Breau gave a great presentation about emergency response preparedness on rivers. That brings us to the June 25th meeting and Rick Ellsmore (NH state conservationist) presented at the SC Meeting.

Robyn: This gives us a Segway into talking about the realistic budget for 2020. We have a budget here, but we also have a la carte items that are not being tasked because we need additional funding, but are doing with limited time and funding. We also need funding to develop a marketing plan and then implement it. We have a marketing specialist that is working with us now and we want to add that to our EOC. So take a look at the data merger that Ted is putting together with our data.

Ted: We are putting together the data that EPA has in addition to DEP and DES. DES had all the data stations downloaded. I added those files and added other sampling files that were a portion of the river which are direct stream segments. We have been linking the data stations and I have MPDS data. We have a lot of minor discharges, there are about one or two major ones. We can also go into the database that I worked on and pull the discharge data. This data we will put into Access, then we can upload it to the old database system that was built in the 90’s. Then we can put it into Sequel, another database. We are going to meet with the DEP folks and do the conversion.

Dalyn: We are moving to use WRDB at the SRCC office when we heard about Rob Mohlar and how he uses WRDB.

Ted: We are trying to come up with common parameters that you want so that we can include them and measure watershed health. Even though you have lost some data like Maine Water Company, maybe we can rectify the data and include it. We may be able to do that at our office. I am working with a few people that are working with other people to come up with the best database in the end rather than keep moving. The folks at the PIN came to a workshop that we hosted in Augusta last year. When you are meeting with the businesses, breweries, organizations, they will want to know what the parameters are as well. Maybe also looking at what it NOT in the water is a good parameter to add when looking at PFAS. Then we can blend in the data that we get for the report card that we want to include. Looking at where water quality is exceeding standards in the watershed.

Robyn: I’d like to ask the DAC about our next steps. If it makes sense for our group to meet before or after Dalyn and Ted go to meet with DEP.

Ted: When I finish this, I say that we have a call with the DAC. Then meet with DEP. I’d rather create a database that even USDA can use. I want to do it once rather than moving the data to many other databases and reformatting the data.

Wayne: NRCS outreach campaign. Essentially we know that there is so much outreach happening right now. What was presented on today was excellent on partner involvement, funding opportunities and outreach to partners. Even with Ted’s presentation on water quality data. I’m thinking of metrics and 12 digit HUOCS. We know that we want to bring this out to the communities, to municipalities. That is the biggest potential to engage in water quality and conservation. We want to do this through community partnership through conservation to make real achievements through the SWC mission. Some of this is also business related. Marybeth Richardson with DEP was really drawn to the Maine Brewsheds Alliance. Kira and I through the Salmon Falls Watershed Collaborative, we spoke with a brewer who wanted to know what are some of those targets or parameters that we are measuring for. We also have easements and we talk with Nina Young from the Maine Farmland Trust. We also talked with Juan Hernandez where the discretionary funds are.

We did outreach through our partners at the SWCD’s. York, Cumberland, and Oxford counties were where we did outreach. We were looking for a lead district that would be interested in submitting a grant proposal specific to the SWC. The Oxford SWCD, the manager said that they would take the lead on the grant submission. Then we brought it back to the timeline of the radar that would be on the state conservationists objectives. This lead to making this a priority commitment for the 2020 budget of the state of Maine. This happens sometimes in January or March. Depends on where the different federal commitments are at the moment. Hopefully the districts will still coordinate together. Anna and I have talked about where we would take the outreach to. Possibly 5 events that would happen in different areas of the Saco River Watershed in Saco/Dayton area, Buxton/Hollis, Cornish, Brownfield/Hiram, Fryeburg. That is the general plan that we have come up with. The planning will be the location, the target of the participants, the marketing to get participants to come to the meetings. It’s about the marketing to get the people here at these meetings. We could build upon the branding efforts with the SWC. Try to be creative to advance this into the communities. We want to get the RFP out in early winter/late spring. That would be phase one. If things roll, then we can build on it. Magnify the opportunities through all of the avenues of outreach.

To move this forward, I think we should have a meeting before the annual meeting. Mark Dubois is the chair, I’m stepping up in leadership. The committee really needs to have communication to make this fly.

Robyn: How about if the Education and Outreach Committee have a meeting before the annual meeting?

Wayne: That would be awesome. I also want to get the Stewardship Committee soon as well. That first meeting with them would hopefully be before the annual meeting. My view would be a multi-land use effort. Karl Honkonen and Kira Jacobs might want to join this committee.

Kira: Wayne is describing the SFWC in 2011 where we did an event where NRCS came together with land owners on how to use NRCS funds. They were really focused on land conservation. Then we had another one with YCSWCD that had two meetings. These meetings were with the land owners/producers. Our theme was “your land, your water, your legacy.” We got the interest of land owners and citizens on how important it was to conserve land and water. Investing NRCS dollars in the watershed is a strong resource.

Wayne: The SWC is multi-land use where we have such a diverse set of farms. The demographics of the SWC and the customer base is at least 20% small farm producers. They are coming to Maine because land is cheap.

Robyn: Emily and I work together, we will work in Scarborough next week. Wayne, we can work together to get an email out to the group to get everyone together in October. Maybe we can even have a call in November so that you can hit the ground running with the Stewardship Committee before December. We can meet September 19th at 10am at our NRCS Scarborough Office. Technical assistance (TA) and financial assistance (FA) programs are different. We have limited discretionary funding because Congress sets our priorities in…. We have FA for the SWC.

Kira: With the new farm bill, the RCPP has changed a lot. The one thing to talk about, is should we consider perusing a Saco River Watershed RCPP this year?

Wayne: These RCPP projects target FA delivery. They are 5-year blocks of money. The host partner who submits the proposal, must commit a major block of money. We have this young forest RCPP. These opportunities are large and available.

Robyn: Let’s get some budget discussion going. I was able to get in touch with MWC and PS to confirm that we will have flat funding for base-funding for the SWC. I feel it’s time to start recognizing the partners that are contributing in-kind and cash like NRCS. All the work that Emily and I do to keep these meetings running, committee meetings, that comes out of base funding. Some of the projects that we want to do, we have to throttle it back, like website development and data inventory. Data inventory is on page 3, section 2a. We need a sponsor so that if I can’t do it, maybe someone else can do it. That is what these a la carte tasks are. These are tasks ID’s that need to get done, but we don’t have the funding and time. These are not even on the minimum number of hours. But let’s talk about how to get things moving forward. Let’s go through this budget for 2020. What you see here is $60K for base funding. Everything that we did this year, we will do again with base funding. We have putting a lot of effort into meeting with NRCM and the Maine Brewshed Alliance to work with them. But, we need dedicated funding to do targeted outreach. We are looking for a sponsor for that. We also need marketing materials that we want to use and give as part of our outreach.

Martha: I have a brewery project that I need match on. Maybe we can give you some labor. I need to find out if this qualifies at match. I will find out if we can use our students at USM to do some of this work.

Robyn: Targeted outreach to LT’s and municipalities, but again we need a sponsor or dedicated funding. Another thing, PS has been interested in developing a poster or some type of screen that represents the SWC, who we are, what we do, etc. We could tap MWC database and see the businesses that use a lot of water.

Kira: Us connecting with Sebago Clean Waters people. I’ll volunteer to reach out to Karen Young.

Robyn: The proposal to Woodard and Curran that we submitted is called UNE as a Living Laboratory for Stormwater Innovation is also on here. If we get that, it will be $100k over three years. I am trying to convene with the Sustainability Committee before the annual meeting. We are trying to inventory all the data available for the SWC. The data inventory that was done last year, was only a few parameters. We are also looking for socioeconomic demographics. We want to know the realm of data available for us.

Martha: Colby, Bates and Bowdoin are paid by the colleges to 300 hours of work in the summer that need experience to learn how to do something practical. You need to contact the colleges at the end of the fall semester towards December.

Robyn: Expansion of GIS work, this is something that Wayne needs, PS and MWC needs. Expanding the SMPDC resiliency study. We will add that to our list to talk about public ad private partnership.

Wayne: I’d like to get that metric reporting data.

Robyn: Emily and I are meeting with Mark Dubois to see what we can do with him.

Kira: Maybe for Martha’s deliverables, use money to see potential impacts within a mile or whatever distance from the intake in the event of a disaster and convening businesses and stakeholders in that area. I thought that would be a good use of Martha’s deliverables.

Chris: Adding onto what Kira said, the data that we already have from the resiliency study, I would do something with the data that we have. It sounds like the ideas that we have, it’s a complete database of all the sources of pollution. I wonder if we can have deliverables match up for Martha? But the difficulty is getting people to these workshops.

Martha: I would need permission to change the scope, but I can’t promise that I can.

Andy: On the other side, it would be great to engage the land trusts. But a lot of the constituency is against PS. They have 80% confluence, it’s just getting over that last 20%.

Robyn: Who else would like to be a mini subcommittee about what happens with Martha’s situation? Chris, Robyn, Emily, Martha, Kira, Ted, Andy.

Robyn: Moving to administrative support? We assume that it will be UNE. The indirect that we pay to UNE is a significant portion of the funding that they receive. Chris and I have been in touch with someone at the financial office to sort of get a waiver for this indirect. The paperwork should be started now. What is the cost of being the physical agent for this? UNE does bring a critical convening contribution with academics.

MJ: Is there any way to have a conversation with them to absorbing the indirect through something else?

Robyn: Yes, and we did have conversations with Mitchell about corporate sponsorship. So we need to formalize our budget/agreements with funders. Last but not least, annual meeting discussion. We are looking for input on what you want to hear on from presentations? We are going to have lunch, then have a reception, then remarks from UNE, PS or MWC as our hosts and sponsors. Keynote speakers are desired, but it doesn’t have to be someone from water.

Kira: I nominate Spencer Meyer from Sebago Clean Waters as a keynote speaker.

Chris: I’m concerned about the shortening of the time. I like everything between the 3pm-5pm slot, but this is the only event during the whole year that people are hearing what is happening from throughout the year. Bump the time back to 10am at least. Let everyone know next week that the annual meeting is December 6th.

Dalyn: Bring in another collaborative partner that can talk about their successes and what they improved on.