

State of Connecticut



GENERAL ASSEMBLY
ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE
LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING, ROOM 3200
HARTFORD, CT 06106-1591
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EELGRASS WORKING GROUP MEETING MINUTES

November 9, 2023
3:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.
Zoom Remote Meeting

Attendance: Larry Dunn, Griffin Harris, Craig Tobias, Jamie Vaudrey (Chair), Tessa Getchis, Kelly Streich, Bill Lucey, Alan Banister, Hillary Desideraggio

1. (3 min) Welcoming Remarks (Vaudrey, Lucey)
 - a. Link to this document:
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/16a5ocRvraUrMIYGPFJT2xOcUzx4f1t-TCJnmLzkl8co/edit?usp=sharing>
2. (5 min) Introductions
3. (3 min) Follow up on Establishing a Recurring Meeting Time.
 - a. Poll: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdiIfUYIdkrf6Hw1WO-ZS-4tRjtwXmaxVuZEiw1_ZUS2_t6w/viewform
 - b. Meet every 2 weeks; 3pm-4:30pm. For 2023/2024:
 - i. Dec 6 (Wed), Dec 7 (Thu)
 - ii. ~~Dec 18 (Mon), Dec 19 (Tue)~~, Dec 21 (Thu)??
 - iii. Jan 10 (Wed), Jan 11 (Thu)
 - iv. Jan 24 (Wed), Jan 26 (Fri) - review of final draft
4. (2 min) Outline of document is now available - please sign up for sections by adding your name as a comment: [2024-Feb CGA Eelgrass WG Report](#)
5. (10 min) Review Topics of Discussion and assign Leads:
 - a. Nov 9 (today)

- i. Discussion - identifying barriers to restoration
 - 1. Permitting, siting
 - 2. Funding
 - 3. Capacity of infrastructure & workforce
 - b. Nov 21 (Tue), Nov 22 (Wed)
 - i. *Stressors to Connecticut Eelgrass* - presentation & discussion (lead Jamie)
 - ii. *Eelgrass Habitat Restoration* - presentation & discussion (lead Craig)
 - iii. Continue discussion of barriers & pathways to success (specific topic will be refined based on results of previous meeting)
 - c. Dec 6 (Wed), Dec 7 (Thu)
 - i. *Preservation and Expansion of Eelgrass - Policy, Legislation, and Recommendations in Neighboring Regions and Programs* - presentation & discussion (lead people?)
 - ii. Continue discussion of barriers & pathways to success; start to develop policy/ruling recommendations informed by activities in neighboring regions
 - d. ~~Dec 18 (Mon), Dec 19 (Tue)~~ Dec 21?
 - i. *Monitoring and Change Analysis of Eelgrass in Southern New England, Long Island Sound, and Long Island* - presentation & discussion (lead person/people - Jamie, Bill(?))
 - ii. *Engaging the Community* - presentation & discussion (lead person/people?)
 - iii. Discuss *Working Group Recommendations* - funding, policy and legislative rulings
 - e. Jan 10 (Wed), Jan 11 (Thu)
 - i. Discuss *Working Group Recommendations*
 - f. Jan 24 (Wed), Jan 26 (Fri)
 - i. discuss final draft of recommendations
- 6. (60 min) Discussion - identifying barriers to restoration

Barriers to restoration discussion notes:

- Maps for suitable locations (EHSI), and publicly served - can't see it; should overlay with historical data
- EHSI is being updated
- % coverage of eelgrass - newer ones have overall coverage, and previous maps have % coverage. Inconsistent
- LISS Offices has a few story maps & resources - may be a potential location of host this information
- Competing uses are well-defined
- More granularity - example, if there are shellfish leases where oyster dredging is occurring, those areas are not options. As well as areas where pocket trawlers are going in.
- Fixed gear is in the aquaculture atlas; not an easy way to tell if someone is dredging in the area - some are actively leased, but not actively used
- 75000 acres of leased areas or natural beds - much more acreage outside of that. But not all suitable for eelgrass
- In a land property - you may develop land, but have a set-aside for forest – can you do that with eelgrass; in a lease, have a set-aside for eelgrass, as way around this. Could potentially get a carbon credit or some other kickback for allowing eelgrass in a section.
- Right now - growers are restricted, they cannot work in eelgrass. So if eelgrass comes in, then have to move the gear around.
- Could use eelgrass that encroaches into a lease as a source that gets harvested and sold for restoration elsewhere, cleaning out the lease
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- Can we change the Army Corps 5-year permit - which prohibits aquaculture work within 25 feet of eelgrass
- Dave thinks the restriction of gear in eelgrass is in statute
- Both DEEP and Army Corps have the restriction of gear in eelgrass. Can make allowances to “not take action” when the 25 foot buffer is encroached upon (some eastern LIS have such exceptions)
- Would need to be changed at the state level first, then Army Corps New England/CT permit would be changed -
<https://www.nae.usace.army.mil/Portals/74/docs/regulatory/StateGeneralPermits/CT/Connecticut-General-Permit-2021.pdf>
- We have a New ENgland Army COrps permit (not the nation-wide permit)
- Eelgrass policy referenced on page 5 of Aquaculture Permitting Guide:
<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DOAG/Aquaculture/Aquaculture-permitting-and-guidance/2019-Guide-to-Marine-Aquaculture-Permitting-in-CT.pdf>
- If there is a specific statute, then there is a rule that comes after it. Then both would need to be changed.
- When Army COrps renews the general permit, it comes out a year in advance for public comment
- Sec. 26-316. Eelgrass beds. The Commissioner of Energy and Environmental Protection shall adopt regulations, in accordance with chapter 54, to protect and restore eelgrass, including the protection of existing eelgrass beds from degradation, the development of a restoration plan to restore eelgrass and the periodic monitoring of the effectiveness of such measures to protect and restore eelgrass.

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- HOW do we support the restoration - Need funding on a steady scale, need to understand timing of flowering and when to gather seeds
- Need to have workforce ready to harvest and plant on time
- Need some systematic control over how seeds are gathered - who oversees the harvesting of the seeds, to make sure not too much is harvested
- This group could identify potential infrastructure locations - we can identify what is available, the capacity, and identify the scarcity - then the recommendation comes out of that
- Similarly with volunteer divers - they want to help, but it needs to be coordinated
- Have divers who go out and collect seeds, then wholesaler
- Could lease a bed to harvest seeds - then you have control of the harvest, and a way to manage it
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- Some metric of efficacy - if we make a huge investment, we should have some measure of how successful we are
- Develop in-state capacity (versus building our Cornell Cooperative)
- Where could we host our own version of CCE? - UConn is a possibility, and in the East. private - shellfish growers (there are 2 hatcheries, one in Stonington, not operational); Fishers Island, Norm Blum has a large hatchery; the Sound School,
- Tessa - working on an aquaculture workforce development with the Sound School & SCSU - possibility of hosting