

# STATE OF CONNECTICUT



GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE  
LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING, ROOM 3200  
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## Tuesday, January 19, 2024

EELGRASS WORKING GROUP MEETING AGENDA  
January 19, 2024  
3:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.  
Zoom Remote Meeting

Attendance: Dr. Jamie Vaudrey (Chair), Tessa Getchis, Larry Dunn, Zach Gordon, Kelly Streich, Bill Lucey, Senator Heather Somers, Lukas Houle (administrator), Brad Towson (LCO), David Carey

1. (2 min) Welcoming Remarks
  - a. Link to this document:  
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/16a5ocRvraUrMIYGPFJT2xOcUzx4flt-TCJnmLzkl8co/edit?usp=sharing>
  2. (1 min) Outline of document is now available: [2024-Feb CGA Eelgrass WG Report](#)
2. (1 min) Future Meeting Times.
  - a. 3pm-4:30pm. For 2024:
    - i. Wednesday, Jan 24, 2024
3. (2 min) Review Topics of Discussion:
  - a. Jan 19 (Fri) - THIS MEETING: Engaging the Community

### BACKGROUND

Types of Community Engagement:

|                           |                           |                               |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Informative participation | Preparatory participation | Decision-making participation |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|

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| <u>Goal:</u> To increase awareness about what is happening | <u>Goal:</u> To get ideas and feedback; understand needs, concerns and motivations of a broader audience | <u>Goal:</u> To empower the community to make informed decisions                                 |
| <u>Benefit:</u> credibility, buy-in and transparency       | <u>Benefit:</u> open communication; collaborative environment  | <u>Benefit:</u> People make informed decisions, take meaningful actions in real world situations |

(adapted from UConn's Office of Outreach and Engagement)

### EXERCISE

Let's complete the table below.

Considerations:

1. Are there stakeholder groups missing?
2. Are these unique stakeholder groups or can any be combined?
3. Do we know the concerns of these groups, and if so, what are they?
4. What are their motivations, if any, with respect to protecting eelgrass?
5. What are the key messages we want these groups to hear?
6. How would we describe our relationships with these groups? Weak, strong, or otherwise?
7. What are the challenges or opportunities to working with these groups?

| Stakeholder Type                 | (Their) Concerns   Motivations   | (Our) Key Messages  | Relationship   Challenges   Opportunities                |
|----------------------------------|--|---|--|
| Researchers (Larry)              | Understand the factors influencing eelgrass decline  | Develop monitoring programs and evaluate best habitat restoration techniques for Ct coastline   | Weak ○ ○ ● ○<br>○ Strong Easy to get them into a meeting |
| state/federal regulators (Jamie) | Protection of existing eelgrass, encouraging expansion of eelgrass, all with consideration of existing regulations around shoreline development, navigation, shellfish, etc.   mandate to protect the environment while allowing sustainable | Current knowledge of restoration science, keeping people up-to-date; sharing concerns of the various communities and stakeholders defined in this table (may have existing connections with these groups) | Weak ○ ○ ○<br>○ ● Strong Easy to get them into a meeting |

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|  | development and industry  |  |  |
| eNGOs (Zach)                           | Environmental sustainability, education and outreach, restoring ecosystems, can depend on what the focus of the NGO is                              | Best practices /techniques when restoring eelgrass, how to get involved, what else is going on in the state  | Weak ○ ○ ○ ●<br>○ Strong Easy to get into a meeting, but not always aware of their efforts/existence<br>Encourage them to include outreach messages and materials and activities at events |
| Community WQ monitoring groups (Kelly) | Clean water for public recreation use. Use of upland areas that contribute pollutants.  | Eelgrass as an indicator of good water quality. Engagement - can they observe eelgrass in their area of interest. Best land use practices that promote clean water and eelgrass health.              | Weak ○ ○ ● ○<br>○ Strong Possible to get into a meeting; few paid positions  |
| Shell-Fishermen (David)                | Present regulatory policy prohibits shellfish activity within 50 feet Eelgrass (clump,bunch,patch)  | Dense Eelgrass stands could potentially enhance the ability of oyster spawn to stay within a specific area rather than be pulled/pushed on tide exchanges enhancing recruitment in the greater area. | Weak ○ ○ ● ○<br>○ Strong Difficult to get into a meeting   |
| Aquaculturists (Larry)                 | Identifying sustainable practices to minimize negative impacts to eelgrass  | Develop educational material to inform the public on the ecological significance of eelgrass and restoration efforts   | Weak ○ ○ ● ○<br>○ Strong Difficult to get into a meeting   |
| Recreational boaters (Jamie)           | Limitations or restrictions on their access to areas of LIS, limitations on their ability to anchor   most want a healthy LIS to support recreation | Fishers Island has a “look before you drop” campaign - encouraging boaters to not anchor in eelgrass. This seems like a key message for LIS. Also - informing people as to the benefits of eelgrass  | Weak ● ○ ○ ○<br>○ Strong Difficult to get into a meeting   |

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|  |   | and why it is a good thing - perhaps encourage people to snorkel or fish in these areas, to highlight the benefits and encourage familiarity? <i>How is the effectiveness of these outreach messages measured</i> |   |
| Kayakers, paddleboarders, swimmers etc. Scuba Divers/Snorklers | Like to get out into nature and sometimes haul out (potential to contact/impact eelgrass). Contact with eelgrass (seaweed) when swimming. |   | With training help with monitoring, flowering studies, restoration  |
| Recreational anglers/shellfish harvesters (Bill)               | Ability to fish/clam from shore(access) and boats and to have a high quality experience - eel grass is good fishing?                      | Catching stripers over eelgrass meadows in clear water is a goal of restoring these meadows-healthy habitat means more fish   | Weak ○ ○ ● ○<br>○ Strong Difficult to get into a meeting CT<br>Surfcasters/CTDEEP Fish Advisory Committee   |
| Commercial anglers/party boats (Bill)                          | Ability to have enough fish (& quality fishing) to attract clients.   | Eelgrass habitat provides fluke habitat as well as nursery function for other species and structure for forage fish   | Weak ○ ○ ● ○<br>○ Strong Difficult to get into a meeting<br>Work through DEEP meetings w/ charter boat captains? DEEP Marine Resource Advisory Group (MRAG) |
| shoreline restoration practitioners; coastal engineers (Zach)  | Similar to eNGOs (maybe combine), goal is usually restoration of specific areas; in the future these could be independent businesses      | Similar to eNGOs (maybe combine), best practices, current knowledge of restoration science; training in carbon credit trading, grant opps, networking etc.  | Weak ○ ○ ○ ●<br>○ Strong Easy to get into a meeting, but not always aware of their efforts/existence  |
| Conservation, Shellfish, Harbor Management Commissions         | Clean water for shellfish harvest (rec and comm). Abundant harvest. They may be   | Once eelgrass are established, it continues to absorb nutrients. Potential for  | Weak ○ ○ ● ○<br>○ Strong Possible to  |

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| (Kelly)   | concerned with competing uptake of nutrients. Competition for space.  | beneficial relationship between scallops and eelgrass.  | get into a meeting; most are volunteers   |
| coastal property owners (Tessa)   | How will this affect my ability to construct a dock or seawall; access to water from home; property values? Want to be involved in decisions that may affect their property | Eelgrass is an important and federally-protected habitat; riparian rights are protected; WQ improvements may be benefit; tax abatement? Storm surge absorption/property protection  | Weak ? ● ○ ○ ○<br>○ Strong<br>May be tough to get contact information to access large numbers; work through home-owners associations  |
| marina operators / yacht clubs / public boat ramps and launches (Tessa)         | How will this affect my ability to expand my dock/facility? Property values<br>Want to be involved in decisions that may affect their property                              | Eelgrass is an important and federally-protected habitat; must consider the potential for impacts??<br>? Storm surge absorption/property protection Proof that marinas can be productive marine habitats ? (Outreach to CT Marine Trades Association) | Weak ○ ○ ● ○<br>○ Strong<br>These sites could be great places to communicate messages about eelgrass habitat via signage or outreach presentations; Heather Somers is willing to be a point of contact for Yacht Clubs some NGOs hold a lot of talks at Yacht Clubs |
| general public (David)<br>Youth families<br>State parks,<br>nature center<br>4H |   |   | Weak ○ ○ ● ○<br>○ Strong<br>Demonstration tank; signage<br>Educational materials for outreach<br>Coloring books; videos;  |

## EXERCISE 2)

What has worked elsewhere in terms of large public participation processes?

Leading questions:

1. Brief overview and goal of public engagement process
2. What you like/don't like about their process?
3. What public engagement tools might be relevant to our work?

## Examples of Public Outreach/Engagement Processes and Tools

- Long Island Eelgrass outreach (Jamie)
  - <http://www.seagrassli.org/>
  - Marine Meadows workshop program <https://ccesuffolk.org/marine/citizen-science/marine-meadows>
  - The first is a website which documents past projects & ongoing work, as well as informational pages - very comprehensive and has some videos, photo galleries, images/drawings, and interactive maps - seems an approachable resource. We (meaning CT) could potentially partner with CCE on a joint website, versus replicating it.
  - The Marine Meadows workshop brings community members together to assist with prepping adult eelgrass for transplant - comes with educations for attendees - great way to reach smaller groups (<40 people typically) and engage them directly in restoration work
  
- NY Eelgrass Outreach (Bill)
  - Fishers Island Seagrass Management Coalition: <https://www.fiseagrass.org/>
  
- Nova Scotia (Larry) - <https://eelgrass.ca/>
  - Program is new with minimum actual eelgrass restoration. To date records 1800 plants and that manual planting is not a good option
  - Of interest is the 'Blue Carbon' program.
    - Establish estimates of blue carbon storage in eelgrass beds
    - Understand factors influencing the storage of blue carbon in eelgrass
    - Understand the geospatial patterns of blue carbon storage in eelgrass beds
    - Track changes in blue carbon storage before/after restoration initiatives
  
- LISS Eelgrass storymap (Kelly):  
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/232ad1570c3f4f2cabbb6a8ea8440f55>  
Nice storymap! Starts with a video "swim" through a meadow and moves through multiple aspects of eelgrass and focus on LIS (background, impacts, climate change, LISS ecosystem targets, monitoring, restoration). Lots of pictures, graphics, and tool to compare changes. Opportunities to get deeper into more information with links to pdfs. Provides a clickable spotlight on 3 focus areas. Leaves off with what you can do but I would say that this part is not well developed. Directly relevant to LIS.
  
- Nature Conservancy outreach video and articles (David)

- <https://www.nature.org/en-us/about-us/where-we-work/united-states/new-york/stories-in-new-york/eelgrass-adapt-climate-change/>
- <https://www.nature.org/en-us/about-us/where-we-work/united-states/virginia/stories-in-virginia/vcr-marine-eelgrass-collection/>
- MA Seagrass restoration (Zach) :
  - Storymap Database  
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/d65a1f83ff904893801fc804aea54438>
    - Database of existing eelgrass restoration activities and locations. Needs more info, contact information of efforts, how often is it updated
    - Great descriptions of different methods of planting eelgrass
  - MV restoration - <https://www.mvshellfishgroup.org/eelgrass-restoration>
    - Goal is to educate on what MVSG does for eelgrass restoration, lessons learned and progress
    - Good format with scrolling pictures and clear contact information.
- California restoration efforts <https://www.coastkeeper.org/restoration/eelgrass-restoration-upper-newport-bay/> (Tessa):
  - Website begins with the statement: *“Without strong public support for seagrasses and the uncharismatic but highly productive animals they shelter, conservation efforts will continue to lag behind those of other key coastal ecosystems”* (Orth et al. 2006).
  - Big “get involved” link
  - Orange County Coastkeeper and partner effort to restore eelgrass in Newport Bay to improve water quality; first focused on restoration but then received grant
    - a) hands-on education to increase awareness about importance of eelgrass and to engage people about other important environmental issues;
    - b) testing three restoration methods: (i) bundling; (ii) transplanting eelgrass remotely with frames, and (iii) buoy deployed seeding
  - As a result over 3000 community members and students involved
  - Planted 0.3 acre and now has expanded to 1.0 acre
  - They have hands-on activities at nature center, community volunteers helping with restoration, created outreach videos and key messages for public
  -

### Stakeholder driven plans:

- Long Island Sound Blue Plan Public Participation (Jamie)  
<https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Coastal-Resources/LIS-Blue-Plan/Blue-Plan-Public-Participation>
- Public meetings were well-attended, because looking at marine spatial planning, which gets people out so they can share their priorities. Also has a Map Viewer which I (Jamie)

use often - but my impression is that the casual user does not think to use that viewer – tends to be someone already interested in the topic and looking for more detailed information. But this may be an appropriate use of the viewer.

- Perhaps outreach efforts could highlight that MapViewer as a resource...
  - The MapViewer data layers are from the time the LIS Blue Plan was released - updating of the layers may be sporadic (I do not know if this is true, would need to check if it is not being updated, being updated sporadically, or updated on a regular basis)
  - Bill mentioned he is on the steering committee - meet a few times a year and do try to update layers on the go
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- CT Shellfish Initiative (Tessa) <https://shellfish.uconn.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/62/2016/10/execsumm.pdf>
  - Series of public meetings to identify concerns and opportunities; followed by workshops with different sectors, commercial, recreational interests and natural resource interests.
  - Narrowed a list of 100 issues to about 30 priorities which were later implemented. There were many outreach materials and presentations about CT aquaculture, shellfisheries and natural resources created as a result of this. The CT Shellfish Restoration Guidance resulted from the CST. Map viewers for both commercial/recreational shellfisheries and natural shellfish resources.
  - Could have written plan without involving stakeholders, but would not have had buy-in and help with implementation of recommended actions

**Other notes:**

Tell success stories!

**EXERCISE 3)**

Can you think of a time that you were involved in a major state/regional initiative in which public engagement efforts went wrong (or were non-existent) and tell us about that.

- Ignoring certain stakeholders - make sure we don't overlook anyone or groups
- Avoid last minute notice or requests for information or participation- make sure to have lead time
- Sometimes with so many stakeholders it can get heated - see if separating into groups to address issues
- Put a time limit (use light system?) on peoples ability to talk; be open to following up with people or offering a way to solicit input beyond meeting time
- Allow for "silence" before moving on; may allow for people to think before responding
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4. Jan 24 (Wed) - FUTURE MEETING

1. discuss final draft of recommendations

5. (60 min) *Engaging the Community* - presentation & discussion (Zach/Tessa)

6. (25 min) Review: *Working Group Recommendations*

a. What do we need to review? Is anything not currently in our plan?



