

## CT NERR Site Selection Team Meeting Notes (CTDEEP HQ, Holcombe Rm. 1:30 – 3:30)

June 30, 2016

### Attendees:

Dave Kozak (CTDEEP), Kevin O’Brien (CTDEEP), Peter Auster (Mystic Aquarium), Roman Zajac (Univ New Haven), John Forbis (CT Audubon/RTP Estuary Center), Ivar Babb (UCONN), Juliana Barrett (CT Sea Grant), Jamie Vaudrey (UCONN), Scott Warren (Conn College), Ron Rozsa, David Simpson (CTDEEP), Sally McGee (TNC), Mike Whitney (UCONN), Mark Parker (CTDEEP/LISS)

Via Call-in: Patrick Comins (Audubon); Jim Ammerman (LISS)

### Goals:

- Firm up preliminary/detailed criteria (as needed);
- Discuss meeting schedules/sub-grouping;
- Begin review initial inventory data summaries

### Agenda:

Introductions	1:30 – 1:35
• Criteria Discussion: Suggested edits/rationale (recall, preference is for minor, not wholesale changes)	1:35 – 2:05
• Meeting schedules (frequency, calls vs meetings, locations) • Subgroup set-up: possible options include <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Typology Team: understand make-up of neighboring NERRs</li><li>○ Several CT Site Teams: become familiar with basic characteristics/opportunities of potential sites</li></ul>	2:05 – 2:25
• Potential Site Inventory Review/Discussion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ ID low hanging fruit to remove/add</li><li>○ Go over data summary document</li></ul>	2:25 – 3:25
• Wrap-up/Q&A	3:25 – 3:30**

\*\* Room is available beyond 3:30 for those willing/interested to stay longer

### ***Discussion Summary:***

Group requested a brief recap of previous meeting discussion re: preliminary and detailed screening as described in the CT Selection Process document.

- Clarification of how CT should demonstrate typological distinctions with existing SNE NERRS resulted in agreement that no new typology classes should be created to demonstrate such distinctions. Rather, CT can describe how LIS differ from other SNE NERRs within existing category definitions by providing LIS typology descriptions beyond the level described in the NERR typologies classes (e.g., hard bottom vs. soft bottom subtidal). For example, NB NERR provides detail about what constitutes “hard” or “soft bottom” typologies; CT can use this as an example of additional detail to describe/differentiate “bottom type” typology without creating nested-subtypologies.
- Potential approaches to deciding how/whether to aggregate/combine sites before application of the site selection criteria was discussed. It was decided that any aggregation of related/associated sites should be done before selecting the 3-5 sites to be subject to detailed site selection criteria, and

ideally before applying the preliminary criteria as well. The idea would be to commit to configurations early on rather than changing mid-stream and having to back-track and re-assess. That said, the preliminary phase has more leeway in its application, so during the process it would be an easier to lift to reconsider...if needed.

- Should the team consider using a geographic distribution scheme when selecting sites at either the preliminary or final site selection criteria (e.g., representative sites in east, central and west) as potential a site selection methodology. This suggestion was simply something to consider (by Peter Auster) rather than a suggested additional site selection criteria.
- Agreed that team needs to keep in mind when considering a multi-property site proposal the management (im)practicalities of managing such sites. Limited site management staffing and programming resources will make multi-property sites difficult to meet management objectives of a future CT NERR management.
  - It was highlighted that engaging Betsy Blair, Hudson River NERR manager, on this topic would be useful (HR NERR is a multi-site NERR.)

Team reviewed suggestions from previous meeting on the topic of changing/editing selection criteria (both in preliminary and detailed.) Ultimately, it was decided that no changes need to be made and the document will stand as-is.

Brief discussion re: strategies to move forward with preliminary site selection (i.e., setting up a series of teams to divide work and expertise.)

- Suggestions of having a typology-focused team to become familiar with the existing typologies at SNE NERRs and multiple teams designed to review and opine on sets of the initial inventory seemed to make sense.
- Discussion on feasibility of initial timeline (e.g., conclude prelim selection by late August/early Sept.) The proposed schedule for completing the preliminary screening of sites should be changed to concluding in the September to October range. This should be doable and not negatively impact the overall plan to wrap up site selection and nomination by Summer/Fall 2017.

Site Inventory Review/Discussion:

- Enhance the efficiency of the SST time by eliminating, early in the review process, those sites that clearly do not provide a new/under-represented SNE NERR typology, or that do not represent sites that represent very good options – in other words, are there low hanging fruit that can reasonably be eliminated before considering them in the preliminary evaluation? Also, are any sites missing that need to be considered?
- At least two sites, as currently defined, fail the requirement of being less than 50% federally owned (Great Meadows/LongBeach & Menunketesuck) If these are to continue, they will need to be added to other sites.
- Relatedly, how do water areas affect site areas? (They can; for the purposes of this initial look we've defaulted to land areas as they're easier to define. Sites should however include some waterward boundary, and that can be somewhat flexibly defined as we go through the process.

There are no standards to do this, and it might be difficult to set absolute limits in the early stages as issues of use conflicts will come into play. However, having a sense of a range of waterward areas for sites will be needed.)

- Mike Whitney recommended that the 'Data Summaries for CTNERR Initial Inventory of Potential Sites: June, 2016', recently shared with the SST, be made an editable document that reviewers with special knowledge of a site could amend.
- Some discussion on the make-up of the sites as presented in the Data Summaries, particularly with regard to property ownership. Some key takeaways:
  - The configurations as presented do NOT imply a preferred set-up; they merely identify possible properties in the general areas of interest so we can take an early, broad-based look and hopefully not miss anything and/or identify added areas if information. It's often easier to remove early than to add later.
  - Ron reminded all that sites involving multiple/many land owners are inherently more complicated. We need to consider whether property outside of State ownership is either critical to the needs of the NERR, or just a desirable outcome (e.g., contiguous area, creates a corridor, makes a larger site, etc.) Simpler is often as good or better.
  - Brief reminder on "NERR Management" as it relates to ownership configuration – as it currently stands, there is no assumption on WHO may ultimately be responsible for management/operations of a NERR. Currently, DEEP-OLISP is in charge of conducting site selection. Beyond that there is nothing established as the site(s) itself may lend something towards this. For now, the Steering Committee, once informed of the finalists, can use that knowledge to begin considering what or how management strategies might best be approached. (Also, there are a multiple models of NERR operations involving one to several entities both public and private, so it really comes down to what makes the most sense given CT's situation.)
  - Facility based sites (e.g., Avery Point, DEEP Marine HQ, Fort Trumbull, or other options) are not currently included, but could be. This goes to
- John F noted research done on the CT River denotes it is significantly different from other riverine systems (worldwide) wrt to tidal mixing/circulation (a NOAA NERR typology element.)
- Meeting wrap-up with suggested next steps of reviewing data summary document, individual considerations for teaming approach.

Additional comments from folks not able to join in person:

From Patrick Comins via e-mail (NOTE: Google earth KMZ files have been copied into the shared Google drive folder.)

*I had a few thoughts.*

1. *With regard to Stratford great meadow, the important bird area there goes quite a ways out into the water. This is because one of the species that makes it a globally significant Important bird area is Long-tailed Duck (the other is Semipalmated Sandpiper). It is a major concentration area in some years. We also include the undeveloped portions of the airport and a connection to Frash Pond. I wonder if in this configuration it would still exceed the 50% threshold. Another thing to consider is also grouping it with the Mouth of the Housatonic, which is also a globally significant IBA (for Semipalmated Sandpipers). Other areas that it might make sense to include*

*in this complex might be Silver Sands/Charles Island and also perhaps Seaside Park. I have attached our boundaries of both of those IBAs it is in Google Earth Format. As you can see, the two IBAs nearly touch each other.*

- 2. Re the mouth of the Housatonic. We have a much larger area within our IBA boundary. It includes much of the aquatic and intertidal habitat at the mouth of the river, Short Beach and also Stratford Point. There is a lot of synergy between the marshes, beaches, uplands and waters in this area with birds and other things using all of the habitats as a complex. Boundary attached*
- 3. I also think there could be some configuration of the Salt Meadow/Menunketesuck that could come under that threshold. There is a lot of nice coastal forest to the north of the Refuge, including the state-owned Chapman Millpond properties, plus a lot of really important intertidal flats between Menunketesuck Island and the Westbrook town beach, much of the salt marsh is not owned by the Refuge and also the waters between Menunketesuck and Duck area quite productive. Salt Island is also included in the IBA Boundary...attached, with a very quickly drawn potential addition to capture more of the coastal forest and millpond properties.*
- 4. A few other thoughts, perhaps Menunketesuck could also be combined into a complex with Hammonasset and the Hammock. All of those spots are important for Saltmarsh Sparrow. Any Menunketesuck site should include all of that marsh and the tidal flats and the 'contiguous' area of forest around the river.*
- 5. One site that comes to mind that wasn't included was the Norwalk Islands and Cockenone. Important heron nesting area, globally important IBA for Long-tailed Ducks, Red Knot stopover, nesting terns, key oystercatcher nesting area.*