

## **List of Attendees**

### **In Person:**

- APNEP:
  - Dr. Bill Crowell, Dr. Tim Ellis, Stacey Feken, Dr. Dean Carpenter, Sean McDevitt, Natalie Ivey, Riley Ragain, Heather Jennings, and Mallory Alman.
- LC:
  - Dr. Kirk Havens, Eric Walberg, Wade Lehmann, Braxton Davis, Dr. Wilson Laney, Susan White, Jeffrey Michaels and Sara Ward.

### **Online:**

- APNEP:
  - Giancarlo Richardson.
- LC:
  - Dr. Tom Allen, Karen Forget, Dr. Jud Kenworthy, and Carl Hershner.
- EPA + ICF:
  - Angela Padeletti, Sara Schwartz, Jessica Balukas, Zoe, Michael, Tanya.

### **11:00 Welcome** Dr. Kirk Havens

- Introductions
  - John Nicholson unable not make it. He is out west for travel. Kathie Dello, new Assistant Secretary for Resilience will participate on his behalf.
  - Karen Forget is the new rep of CAC.
  - Jeff Michaels is set to arrive at 1 PM with Sara Ward.
  - Natalie Ivey is new staff member.
  - Kathy new and introduced to LC.
- Agenda Review
  - Asked if anyone from public who wants to comment on something not on the agenda.
- Public Comments
  - Carl Hershner said goodbye, good luck, and thank you to the LC.
    - His position will be replaced starting with the next meeting since he retired.
      - He is not yet part of the public but spoke during this portion of the meeting. There were no members of the public present.

### **11:10 Director's Briefing** Dr. Bill Crowell

- Bill addressed new member that is in-person. Everyone in the LC went around and did introductions.
  - In-person introductions: Dr. Kirk Havens, Eric Walberg, Wade Lehmann, Braxton Davis, and Dr. Wilson Laney.
  - Online: Dr. Tom Allen, Karen Forget, and Carl Hershner.
  - APNEP staff present in-person: Dr. Bill Crowell, Dr. Tim Ellis, Stacey Feken, Dr. Dean Carpenter, Sean McDevitt, Natalie Ivey, Riley Ragain, Heather Jennings, and Mallory Alman.
    - Giancarlo Richardson was present online.
- Expressed appreciation of APNEP staff as part of employee appreciation week.
- Staff currently busy with work plan.
- Bill missed the spring NEP meeting.
  - NEPs will be celebrating 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary next year. Wants people to look through workplan highlights to see what APNEP has been involved in.
- The Scuppernong Project just got NFWF grant of \$165,000 to help with outreach.
  - Stacey Feken played a large role in this.
  - Celebrated the NC DEQ Distinguished Employee Award for Stacey Feken, Whitney Jenkins, and Woody Webster, which had been awarded days prior in relation to the Scuppernong Project.
- Subcontract signed between APNEP and VADCR-NHP in Virginia for 1900 Acre Tribal Project.
  - VANHP hired tribal liaison Casey Thornbrugh to facilitate between Virginia government agencies and tribes. First meeting last week
- Mallory Alman introduced as she started this week. She is to facilitate development of field survey protocols this summer. Will work with Dean and the Wetlands Team.
- It is confirmed that APNEP will get another NC Stem Policy Fellow with Sea Grant for wetland policy review - Restoration and protection plan.
  - Nate Marsh selected as candidate, will start in August.
- Executive Order 29 from Governor Stein sent out via email. Everyone present will receive official appointment/invitation letters to line up with the new order
- Stein included APNEP in the budget, and it will go to the General Assembly.
  - Matching EPA 320 funds (\$850k for 2 years).
- Agenda overview - Angela will update on EPA, talk about fellowships later with sea grant, go over workplan, etc.
- Discussed plan to make a plaque for Carl for commitment, service, excellence for LC and mail it out.

- Angela providing update on Jennifer DiMaio behalf of Region 4 since she is absent, in partnership with Wade Lehman of R4
- Bill was thanked for trying to get to the national meeting. He is one of the longest-sitting directors of an NEP, so he is helpful for the newer people.
- Administration called to make nomination Pensacola and Perdido Bay NEP.
  - No additional NEPs yet so the EPA is working on guidelines for this.
    - No answer on funding for additional NEPs yet.
    - It was stated that Wade would answer questions.
- EPA Region 4's Jennifer Dimaio got last year's IJA funding to APNEP.
- Large things happening nationally:
  - New program evaluation guidelines being worked on internally.
    - 5-year review:
      - APNEP did well on this 3 years ago; receiving the highest ranking, will be in Group B 2028.
    - New guidance:
      - Internal review of language is underway and hopefully will be rolled out by HQ roughly September 2026.
      - It is not open for public comment yet.
    - Asked about the "gist" of the new guidance:
      - Discussion over previous guidance.
      - The existing NEPs are mature programs so rankings like "doing fine" should be removed. There will be a failing grade with consequences after failing twice in a row.
        - The EPA wants everyone to follow guidance and to never have to use this, but it will potentially be included.
    - Program guidance tells NEPs how to run their program and what to spend money on. Will receive updates with leadership directive clarifications.
      - Trying to fix unclear language from EPA HQ.
      - Probably will be released by the end of the year.
    - Governor's nomination package
      - Goes back to new NEP in Florida. There is no formal nomination process. In June this may change.
  - Wade added that EPA Region 4 is working hard on regular 320 appropriations. Hope for quarter 1 this year – same timeframe.
- Bill asked if there will be a revision to the CCMP update checklist criteria.

- Hot topic between regions and HQ because the writing is not clear. What is an update vs. Revision? Discussion on unclear timelines. Concluded that more clarity is desired moving forward.
- Heather said that an EPA-approved QAPP is something to discuss. It will likely not be included in NEP guidance. It is EPA guidance. Will probably come soon. The EPA has stringent requirements, even if a 3<sup>rd</sup> party is used for research, Angela Padeletti from Region 3 is happy to help.
- Bill asked about the IJA funding that APNEP received (had effective date October 1 2025). APNEP did not get notice and the official grant award until April 2026.
  - Wade touched on IJA funds, talked about extension time, and general awareness.

**11:20 Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) Update** Ms. Holly White, Dr. Tom Allen

- Tom led because Holly White was unavailable. Holly can no longer serve as Co-Chair of the CAC since the State Resilience Office now in NCDEQ per bylaws.
- Welcomed Karen Forget as new Co-Chair and talked about Virginia representation.
- The CAC RFP released in early March serves to implement CCMP actions that align with the 5 focus areas. Set to meet next week and review applications. Decisions should go out in the near future.
- Tom described the Wetlands Watch Catch the King Blue/Green line project. Very adjacent to the AP watershed. He will share his project with those present at the meeting.
  - Green Line Project is led by ODU graduate students. They mapped future sea level rise and wetland migration using VIMS and other models.
    - <https://arcg.is/1WzrCn1>
  - It is mapped on the ground with flags, tape, and signs.
    - Chose a vulnerable watershed in Portsmouth, vulnerable to sea level rise and inland wetland migration, developed areas that are flood prone, homeowners worried about areas being an eyesore, would like to work with communities to develop grants to restore wetlands to help with flood protection, help understand the value of wetlands.
  - He wants to take this South to the APNEP region and develop collaborations with groups such as Wetlands Watch leading Catch the King and similar groups in NC.

**11:35 Science & Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) Update** Dr. Jud Kenworthy, Dr. Wilson Laney

- Wilson led this.
- STAC has been extremely busy. It has been 8 months since the last LC meeting so there are a lot of updates.
- The first cycle of sub-regional surveys in high-salinity SAV has been completed.
- The Executive Board held their last meeting in November to plan for the STAC fall.
- Webinars have been posted on APNEP's YouTube channel.
- Fall meeting November:
  - Topics: CCMP understand, protect & restore, engage, and monitor actions.
  - Had some CAC participation.
- Focus Groups
  - Targeted restoration / protection focus team kickoff.
    - Many STAC members are on the team:
      - Donna Bilkovic, Pete Kalla, etc.
- Discussion of candidates for integrated monitoring:
  - Currituck Sound / Back Bay and Core Sound to be focused on because both have potential significant human impacts.
    - Get baseline data before impacts occur.
    - Mid-Currituck Bridge impacts concern with Currituck.
    - Core Sound might become more developed with the highway so would bring in more people.
      - Core Sound 1.5% of APNEP area and Currituck 10%
- Showed upcoming schedule with Spring meeting, exec board workshop, STAC workshop, focus team near-term implementation plans, monitoring and strategy plans by end of year.
- Shared Natural Academy of Sciences recordings of major events, including a symposium he thinks will be useful education for our monitoring and assessment plan.
- Braxton asked about Core Sound plan.
  - Looked at indicators all 7 teams had considered historically and had an initial meeting with a few people to look at those and come up with a tentative list to figure out what is currently being monitored and would be good for a baseline before the development and I-42.
  - Dean added that the unique part of this is the integration and we want the socio-ecological system to be shown and how it changes. All in one place with coordinated monitoring. As Wilson expressed, this is a test. These are not necessarily the most stressed parts of our region at this moment. Will

expand out if there is interest later, but would rather start at a manageable scale and do a proof of concept. It includes both high and low salinity areas.

▪ Eat an elephant “one bite at a time.”

- Jud added that it will establish stations, some of which we already have substantial information about, like SAV in Core Sound. Co-locate water quality measuring with the program. An effort to gather data that is not disparaged in space and time.
  - Core Sound is already well-advanced in SAV but this will add new sampling connected to the surrounding landscape.
  - Currituck is way behind the curve on mapping and monitoring SAV there. This is an opportunity to involve more partners and get a program going.
- Wilson mentioned historical monitoring. It could possibly be referenced, with the project re-sampling to build on old time series. The same could be done with birds as indicators.
  - There are concerns about being difficult to merge data. EBird suggested as a potential tool.
- Karen Forget offered assistance on monitoring Back Bay and North Landing River. She has done some SAV restoration there and would help with monitoring if there is a need.
  - Wilson agreed and said he wants citizen science there.
- Wilson has spoken with other groups about collaborating using geospatial data. He gave an example with Nashville using a database to come up with projects. Too small for NCWRC but smaller groups could take it on.
- As STAC looks at monitoring activities, this is more about building partnerships with those already doing this; facilitating engagement. Dean added that it is the monitoring / assessment compatibility. Gap analysis.
- Spatial tool question: not planning to dictate where restoration is done. Staff will have a more extensive conversation on this soon.
  - How far does APNEP go considering its scale? How can it help partners?
  - Anyone who wants to do a wetlands measurement should use our standard so it is compatible.
  - Where is our best quality habitat that could use protection? Where is degraded habitat that we could improve?
- Angela reminded all about upcoming CCMP guidance and EPA funding that has this. A monitoring plan is included as a CCMP supplemental document.
  - Part of NEP funding.
- Asked how many attend webinars:
  - Majority of STAC members.

- Uploaded on YouTube.
- Bill says there needs to be a plan on spreading the information.
- Recruiting new STAC members:
  - Doug Newcomb volunteered himself. He has an IT background and knows LIDAR well. He met with Don Field to automate things. He is also in the monitoring and assessment group.
- Bill mentioned Currituck Sound Coalition and DERN as other projects this lines up with.

**11:50 IJA (BIL) Implementation Update** Ms. Stacey Feken

- The next meeting is dedicated to reviewing annual IJA Workplan.
  - Has been on different cycles from 320.
- Trying to streamline the two workplans info but keeping separate for now, did combine the annual report due at the end of federal FY last fall.
  - Now on normal cycle with 5<sup>th</sup> year of funding awarded April.
- 5<sup>th</sup> year of funding came in as a separate grant agreement.
  - Difficult to track and report on, creates challenges tracking both internally and setting up and tracking through the DEQ financial services division.
- 15 projects contracted in the workplan and a few more in the works.
- Bill mentioned that the new CCMP was approved last year last year, and it was accepted. Additional components like communications plan are still under work.

**12:00 Communication and Engagement Strategy** Ms. Natalie Ivey

- Deliverable with the CCMP. She defined its purpose.
- 5 goals:
  - Facilitate implementation, promote environmental stewardship, improve public awareness, EBM capacity, strengthen partnerships
- Target audiences are various organizations (private, tribal, government).
- Management Conference: STAC, CAC, LC, MATs, etc. Want better feedback from them and keeping track of member participation.
- Host/sponsor conferences and activities that support what we do and ensure visibility of our contributions.
  - NC Outdoor Classroom Symposiums and AERS/SEERS.
- Grants and contracts *e.g. engagement and stewardship RFP with 29 applications now.*
- Print and digital materials. Mentioned blog, website, etc.

- Internships – APNEP wants to do better evaluations at end and highlight them on social media.
- Research - Good scientific partners. Need better comms and to collect analytics online.
- Networking and development. Many working groups, committees, etc. These serve to maintain relationships. The last network analysis was done in 2013. Could do again or re-focus on results.
- Next steps for the communications plan: LC review, EPA review, publish to website, implement.
- Eric asked how the results of the network analysis were used. Natalie was not sure because she is largely unfamiliar with it; was not an employee at APNEP at that time. It was carried out by a Duke student. Suggested a report card on a yearly basis for APNEP. Spoke with Kirk about a ChatGPT version of this.
- Bill said we need a comms tool for state of the sounds for the EPA. Dashboard rather than publication is ideal in his opinion.
- Natalie asked how much she is working with SRO.
  - Not much yet with the new plan, though she attends DEQ PIO meetings with Nicole. She thinks connections there could help leverage work. Invite legislators, secretaries could be helpful.
- Need motion to approve plan. Susan made the motion and all were in favor.

**12:20 Climate Vulnerability Assessment Overview** Ms. Sara Schwartz, EPA HQ Ms. Jessica Balukas, ICF

- The speakers attended the meeting virtually. Sara Schwartz led.
- Jessica, Zoe, Michael, Tanya mentioned
  - Jessica is the project lead for ICF (consultant).
  - Zoe is also with ICF under Jessica.
  - Michael is at EPA HQ with Sara.
- Section 320 of CWA authorizes the NEP program. It was amended in 2021 to include a section on requiring climate change assessment and an adaptation plan for vulnerabilities.
- APNEP has removed infeasible actions but there is no documentation of this analysis; this will be accomplished at a later date.
  - APNEP previously assessed vulnerabilities and risks but it was not recorded properly.
- Risk analysis: likelihood, consequence, spatial extent, time horizon all low-high
  - Colored coded matrix created to present the results of the analysis.

- Once the assessment is complete, the adaptation plan will be developed.
  - She gave a simple example.
- Passed it off to Jessica and Zoe:
  - Regular check in meetings since December with ICF, EPA, and APNEP.
  - Focus on developing required pieces for vulnerability assessments. A few meetings related to the table for the assessment. APNEP has worked on initial drafts and discussed with them.
  - Working on matrix to send to us soon (meeting next Friday).
  - Used EPA guidebook and reference climate vulnerability assessments done in NC and VA to develop a draft of climate risks that could affect the CCMP objectives.
  - APNEP will use this as it sees fit. Maybe update CCMP with interim release or can wait.
- Susan asked if it is bound by time frame and how that impacts the risk assessment:
  - CCMP is on a 5-year timeframe but this analysis was describing 30-year outlook.
  - Jessica answered about the 30 vs 5-year issue. Objectives are stable over time rather (as opposed to specific actions) so said to look at that level.
  - Bill said there is contention over this.
- Susan asked if there are any surprising pieces?
  - Bill said not yet.
  - Mentioned some things should be considered with issues in meetings.
- Coming out in October. Have asked NCSU for updated climate science report so that would need to be aligned with this. Will update risk and resilience plan for NC pulling from EPA,
- Jud asked if at any point STAC will engage in this process.
  - May send out drafts to some.
- Karen asked if it would be useful to review a copy of the (?) resilience study done in Virginia Beach. They did 12 individual studies in different areas related to resilience. Sea level rise plan summarized it. One done on the AP watershed.
- Wilson mentioned that is part of team that did a climate vulnerability analysis using the national fishery something. 150 species in SE. Published as technical memorandum and could be useful
- Susan asked if we can talk about policy risks. Things the state or region that could be risky to do or not do. Insurance, WOTUS challenges, etc.
  - Not sure if this can be addressed.

- Bill said this is a vulnerability assessment of the implementation of our plan, not the estuary .
  - Michael, Bill, and Sara all agreed on this point.

**12:45 Working lunch (1:00 Atlantic Conservation Coalition)** Ms. Sara Ward, Director

- To see slides from this presentation, click [here](#).

**1:45 Draft Work Plan Review** Dr. Bill Crowell

- On page 11 it lays out the requirements given to APNEP by the EPA based on guidance from last March. Trying to check all of those boxes to get funds.
  - Expressed that it is a heavy, repetitive, and not easily digestible document. Condensing for this iteration but still meeting requirements
  - Wants to put more information in table form and provide basics in narrative in the future.
- Friday found out new indirect rate with DEQ. This means the budget proposal had to be changed. DWR has 32%, APNEP had 10%. APNEP is getting 10.9% as 3-year low.
  - Likely to go up next year.
  - Change of \$3791 dollars with 0.9% less. He handed out printouts of where it was cut.
- Would like to host another APNEP conference but did not put it in the budget.
  - Probably not happening this year.
- Asked if interns fall under this:
  - Interns pull from estimated employee salaries in projected budgets.
- Michael was going to make a motion, but Susan had him withdraw it so that it can be adjusted. Susan moved to approve workplan with new budget and wording updates.
  - All said aye.

**2:30 NC Sea Grant – APNEP Joint Fellowships** Dr. Tim Ellis, Ms. Riley Ragain

- Decade in review (2015-2025) led by Tim.
- Gave kind remarks to Sea Grant and them aiding graduate researchers.
- 12-month award of 10k for graduate fellows.
  - Split evenly between Sea Grant and APNEP.
  - Has to do their work in the NC portion of the APES.
  - Average of 6 applicants per cycle.
- Expanded in 2025 to 2-year award at \$10k per year.
  - Also allowed Virginia students.

- Mary Kate Rinderle (UNC) selected.
- Some interest in 2 interns, one half funded by VA Sea Grant:
  - Bill liked that.
  - Susan thinks it's a great partnership and that student investment is always a priority.
- Interest in promoting NCSU and UNCW students. UNC and ECU seem overrepresented in the selections.
- Could make an alumni network of former fellows.
- Interns have to be in-state for one of the internships.
- Riley NC STEM Policy Fellowship:
  - Recent grads, full-time, one year.
  - First time APNEP did this. This is also with Sea Grant. Fellows are sent to offices that propose a project that they would like done.
  - Sea Grant reviews and applicants are chosen and ranked by preference.
  - Policy and regulatory review of SAV in AP region:
    - Compiled all federal and state regulations and policies related to SAV.
    - Identified threats and reviewed policies and strategies.
    - Identify and report regulatory inconsistencies and inefficiencies to develop a set of recommendations.
  - Went over topics she covered.
- Has she made contacts with regulatory agencies on how they implement this?
  - She works with Tim and made an SAV advisory team for her in DCM, DMF, etc.
- Jud asked about why she didn't include water quality as a topic.
  - She talks about it in her paper but it is just too extensive to fully go into. Tim weighed in that it had been discussed but it would be a huge topic itself, and there are more direct issues and time restrictions.

**2:50 Strategic Planning Meeting**      Dr. Kirk Havens, Dr. Bill Crowell

- Want to do a retreat to discuss revamping the next CCMP.
- Probably will happen in the fall.
  - Sending out google poll for this.
  - 2-day, facilitated meeting.
- Christy Perrin/ continue to work with us/ reach out do work prior to meeting/ prepare / focus.
- Homework done beforehand, so not start from scratch.

- Prob after Labor Day based on hotel rates at the coast. Kirk offered up the CSI in Manteo, which is a nice place to go.

## **2:55 Leadership Council Member Updates** Dr. Kirk Havens

- Wilson
  - Team funded to look at how future climate change scenarios could affect the discharge of the Roanoke River and how that would affect the fish and the forest
    - Julie Demeester, TNC's Simeon Yurek of USGS/ Susan Staff / Aaron Bunch TNC/ Wilson/hydrologist, Charlie Stillwelel USGS/ /funded / sustainable rivers program.
    - Primarily anadromous fish and forest in the lower Roanoke
    - Have gotten several extensions but finally approaching the end. 6-8 publications anticipated
    - Indirect involvement with Virginians. Interest in this project around East Coast and particularly Virginia due to Dominion Energy factor. TNC VA well aware of the project.
      - Virginia input is welcome
- Appointment of new director of NC Zoo
  - 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of NC aquariums celebrated at Roanoke Island soon
- Braxton said almost done with new campus between Morehead City and Swansboro. Staff should be there soon.
  - Funding came in from Restore America's Estuaries (RAE) NEP Watershed Grant for restoration work on reserve and removing causeway blocking migration.
  - Closing in on 3k acre in Newport River by Morehead.
- Chapel Hill NC Coastal Conference coming up.
  - ~400 people
- Sea Grant going under strategic revisions, NOAA lite. Should be done this fall or worked on this fall.
- Kathy has DEQ resilience under her:
  - Stein wants DEQ to lead this under him.
- Carl stepping off and VA Deputy Secretary of Natural Resources will replace him. Adrienne Kotula was VA director of Chesapeake Bay commission.
  - Improve relationship with VA ideal and maybe update the MOU.
- Bill mentioned \$13.74 in leverage for every \$1 put into the program in the workplan.

- Heritage program did a pocosins vegetation report which should come out soon.
- Jud stepping down as co-chair after 3 years but he is staying on STAC.
- Sending out meeting survey for feedback at the end of this.

**3:15** Other Business

**3:30** Adjourn