



Management Committee Meeting Summary  
March 24, 2026, 9:30 am – 12:30 pm

## Attendees

### ***Management Committee***

Kate Bentsen (Division of Ecological Restoration [DER])  
Dani Boudreau (National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration [NOAA])  
Trevor Burns (MA Department of Transportation [MassDOT])  
Todd Callaghan (MA Office of Coastal Zone Management [CZM])  
Rebecca Dupont-Coutu (Salem Sound Coastwatch [SSCW])  
Denise Ellis-Hibbett, Vice-Chair (Massachusetts Water Resources Authority [MWRA])  
Andrew Gottlieb (Association to Preserve Cape Cod [APCC])  
Jon Grabowski (Northeastern University [NU])  
Marissa Grenon-Gutierrez (Andersen Krieger)  
Regina Lyons (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency [EPA])  
Julie Simpson, Chair (MIT Sea Grant)  
Tyler Soleau (Office of Coastal Zone Management [CZM])  
Carol Thornber (UMass Boston, School for the Environment [SFE])  
Kristin Uiterwyk (Urban Harbors Institute [UHI])  
Samantha Woods (North & South Rivers Watershed Association [NSRWA])

### ***Coordinators and Staff***

Prassede Vella (MassBays, Executive Director)  
Jill Carr (MassBays, Habitat Program Manager)  
Diana Chin (Northeastern University, Metro Boston Regional Coordinator)  
Alex Mansfield (NSRWA, South Shore Regional Coordinator)  
Hanna Mogensen (MVPC, Upper North Shore Regional Coordinator)  
April Wobst (APCC, Cape Cod Regional Coordinator)  
Dorria Marsh (APCC, Communications)

### ***Guest speakers***

Joyce Novak, Chair Association of National Estuaries Program (ANEP), Director of the Peconic Bay Estuary Program  
Sara Dawson, Ipswich River Watershed Association

*Disclaimer: Meeting summary was generated by Co-pilot from transcript and reviewed for accuracy.*

## Welcome

Committee Chair Denise Ellis-Hibbett opened the meeting. Following introductions, the Chair recognized and thanked Kristin Uiterwyk for her many years of service on the Management Committee. She welcomed Shannon Hogan as the new Urban Harbors Institute representative. The Chair also recognized Prassede Vella as the new Executive Director for MassBays.

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## Annual Program Review (Denise Ellis-Hibbett, Management Committee Chair)

Chair Ellis-Hibbett provided an overview of the Annual Program Review required under the 2024 MassBays Standard Operating Procedures.

- First year implementing the Annual Program Review required under updated SOPs.
  - Review intended to be streamlined and mostly program-focused this year.
  - Review Committee = Executive Committee + EPA.
  - Timeline:
    - Executive Director self-evaluation and host organization input (UMass Boston) due early April.
    - Review Committee meets April 9.
    - Findings shared with full committee by end of April.
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## Pam DiBona Memorial Fund (Joyce Novak, ANEP Chair)

Joyce provided an update on the establishment of a UMass Boston–based fund honoring Pam DiBona. All NEPs have committed \$25,000 total to establish the fund.

- UMass Boston will provide a 50% matching contribution (\$12,500).
- Fund intent:
  - To support student fellowships, internships, and educational activities associated with MassBays.
  - Principal will be invested; earnings will be used programmatically.
- Fund language and structure to be:
  - Developed locally,
  - Reviewed by Management Committee,
  - Approved by Pam DiBona’s family.

- Individual and organizational donations will be allowed.
- Strong agreement that launching timing and messaging are critical, especially for individual giving.
- Announcement will be made at a later date; confer with family if possible.

Further discussion and approval of fund language will occur at a future meeting.

**Actions:** Prassede will connect with UA to get the process moving in setting up the account. Joyce will fill paperwork from UA. Consider option of inviting Matt McBride (UA) to provide a quick update on the process and answer any MC questions, at a near-future meeting.

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## Strategic Communications & Engagement Plan (Kristin Uiterwyck, Communications Subcommittee)

The updated Strategic Communications & Engagement Plan, developed pursuant to the 2023 CCMP, was presented by Kristin. Plan development was led by the Urban Harbors Institute (UHI).

Key elements:

- The plan is an update to the 2018 Communications Strategy and aligned with the 2023 CCMP.
- Major themes:
  - Consistent messaging and program visibility.
  - Coordination across regions and partners.
  - Communications tied to fundraising and development.
- Key action item:
  - Creation of a full-time Communications & Development Specialist.
- Minor wording correction requested by UMass Boston (Marketing & Engagement Division).
- Plan approved unanimously by the Committee.

**Motion:** Approve the Strategic Communications & Engagement Plan with the noted revision.

**Moved by:** Andrew Gottlieb

**Seconded by:** Rebecca Dupont-Coutu; Samantha Woods

**Vote:** Passed unanimously.

**Action:** Executive Director transmits the plan to EPA for approval as part of the CCMP.

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## Governance & Nominations (Samantha Woods, G&N Subcommittee Chair)

- Samantha introduced Trevor Burns (MassDOT) who was approved by consensus as a new Management Committee member.
- MassDOT participation emphasized as critical due to infrastructure–watershed linkages.
- Proposed Army Corps representative (Christine San Antonio) unable to serve due to federal restrictions. EPA offered to follow up internally.
- Committee terms need cleanup and clarification; will be addressed in future meeting.

**Action:** Samantha will develop and share updated terms for MC members before next meeting.

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## Science & Technology Advisory Committee (Todd Callaghan, STAC Chair)

Todd Callaghan provided an update:

- SOPs updated to align with the MC SOPs; STAC will meet at least three times per year. Additional meetings may be held if needed.
  - Topics discussed in recent meetings included:
    - Declining blue mussel abundance.
    - Eelgrass restoration and seed-bank work.
    - Long-term water-quality monitoring.
    - Marine carbon dioxide removal (with strong caution expressed).
  - Todd reiterated its role as advisory support to Management Committee and staff. Todd urged the Management Committee to advise on information and studies needed that STAC can address, provide expertise, and support.
  - STAC remains available to support Healthy Estuaries grant review and technical input.
  - Next meeting will be in May/June, in person.
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## Executive Director Update (Prassede Vella)

Prassede provided a program status update.

### Staffing

- Communications & Development Specialist position advanced to full-time, two-year appointment.
- Job description with HR; posting forthcoming.

- Water Quality Coordinator position planned and will be drafted to post in April/May.
- Management Committee and/or STAC members will be invited to be part of the interviews.
- Seasonal and graduate student support planned for the summer to help with field work and monitoring.

### **Program Planning and Funding**

- Finance Strategy (CCMP companion document) in development; target June (preferably).
  - FY26 work plans and budgets under development (320 + final year of BIL funds).
  - Goal to get draft work plans in front of the Management Committee for review and approval at the June 17 meeting.
  - EPA Program Evaluation anticipated for Spring 2027; internal preparation to begin in Fall 2026. An ad hoc committee will be convened. EPA is drafting new guidelines on aspects of the PE.
  - Plan to formalize the annual MassBays accomplishments report going forward. This annual report is one of EPA's requirements and it is anticipated that the Communications position will help lead this effort.
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## **Featured Presentation – Castle Neck River Restoration**

**Presenter:** Sarah Dawson (Ipswich River Watershed Association)

- Project removes undersized culverts and portions of roadways to restore tidal flow.
  - Healthy Estuaries funding supported pre-restoration monitoring: Water quality, marsh vegetation, forage fish.
- Findings:
  - Water quality similar upstream/downstream of culvert.
  - Low fish diversity (mostly mummichog).
  - Significant *Phragmites* presence.
- Construction underway; road closed.
- Expected completion by June, weather permitting.
- Interest expressed in funding post-restoration monitoring.

**Action:** Presentation slides will be shared with the Management Committee; final report will be made available upon request.

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## Regional Coordinator Highlights

- **Salem Sound:** New Executive Director hired; Regional Coordinator on parental leave.
- **North & South Rivers:** Dam removals progressing; herring counts starting; regional summit held.
- **Metro Boston:** Diana Chin returned from leave; salt-marsh nursery pilot wrapped; Manila clam work submitted for publication.
- **Merrimack Valley:** UAV monitoring pilot completed; green crab work advancing.
- **Cape Cod/APCC:** Expanded pond monitoring; large *Spartina* planting planned; river herring monitoring ongoing.

More detailed quarterly updates are provided in a separate document.

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## Closing

- Committee materials to be centralized in a shared folder. Materials will also be shared by email.
  - Members encouraged to join subcommittees – let Prassede know ASAP.
  - Next meeting is planned in person on June 17, 2026 (location TBD).
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