

MEETING MINUTES
Maine Association of Wetland Scientists
Vernal Pool Technical Committee Meeting

Date: Friday, February 26, 2010
Time: 2 p.m. EST
Location: Stantec's Topsham Maine Office
Call In: Conference Dial-in Number: 1-866-279-5424
Access Code: 729234

I. Call to Order

Dale Knapp called the February 25th meeting to order at approximately 2 p.m.

II. Roll Call

Present: Alex Finamore, Rich Jordan, Dale Knapp, Steve Knapp, Laura Lapierre, Jim Logan, Kathleen Miller, Roger St Amand

Via Phone: Brad Agius, Stacie Carpenter

III. Approval of Meeting Minutes

IV. Committee Representative Updates

V. New Business

1. Meeting Objectives

Objectives of the first VP technical committee (VPTC) meeting were summarized as: to begin exploring the creation of a vernal pool survey protocol, data sheets, and methodology for use by experienced biologists and consulting professionals.

2. Introductions and Appointment of Committee Positions

Attendees introduced themselves and their affiliations and discussions were held regarding the need for committee positions. It was decided that the Committee would start by electing a Chairman and Secretary. The Committee voted unanimously to elect Rich Jordan as Chairman and Kathleen Miller as Secretary.

3. Review of Existing Materials and Discussion of Regulatory Process

The Committee discussed materials currently available as guidance for vernal pool surveys and how these are being used by practicing professionals. There was consensus among the group that, while appropriate as a municipal planning tool, the vernal pool data forms and survey techniques created by the University of Maine/Audubon citizen scientists program are not adequate for use by practicing professionals. It was noted that a number of the larger consulting firms have prepared either project-specific or company-specific vernal pool survey protocols. Examples of two of these protocols were distributed at the meeting and reviewed by attendees. After much discussion it became apparent that, although all vernal pool surveys being performed in Maine are required by the same state and federal regulations, regulatory interpretations, methods of data collection, field documentation, and agency reporting are not consistent among practicing professionals. In addition, use of the

Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife's (IF&W's) *Significant Vernal Pool Data Collection Form* (SVPDCF) is not being used (or filed) consistently by practicing professionals.

4. Identify Key Areas that Need Improvement

After much discussion it was agreed that inconsistent understanding and application of the vernal pool regulations is likely to result in a dataset (filed with IF&W) that misrepresents the State's vernal pool resources. Standardization of the process of field evaluating resources to determine if data collection is warranted is a key area that needs improvement.

Once it is determined that the resource should be surveyed, the standardization of the data collection process and reporting is critical for both protection of the resources (i.e., decontamination to prevent the spread of chytrid fungus *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis*) and ensuring a meaningful dataset.

There was also a lengthy discussion about the current SVPDCF and how it could be improved to streamline the field data collection process. A discussion ensued regarding recommended modifications to the data form that would result in both comprehensive and more useful data collection (including providing space for field sketches and surveyor notes).

A lengthy discussion ensued about the handling of vernal pool anomalies or areas that don't fit well within the definition of vernal pool but that do function as amphibian breeding areas. It was clear from the conversation that practicing professionals are consistently encountering similar vernal pool anomalies (i.e. large forested wetlands with pit mound topography that inconsistently support pools that may or may not have egg masses depending on when you perform the survey). It was agreed that anomalies are to be expected with natural ecological systems, however, it's important that the protocols for documenting and reporting these anomalies be consistent among all practicing professionals.

5. Action Items, Roles and Responsibilities

Following much discussion the Committee decided to focus its time and attention on the following five (5) action items.

Action Item A: Compile meeting minutes from the MAWS February 9, 2010, vernal pool workshop and provide to agency stakeholders (and meeting attendees) for review and comment. Finalize for posting on the MAWS website and for use as guidance for documents prepared by the VP technical committee.

Responsible Party: Kathleen Miller will prepare the vernal pool workshop summary and distribute to the VPTC for review and comment prior to distribution to agencies.

Schedule: Distribution to VPTC prior to next meeting, March 5, 2010. Discussion at March 5th meeting and distribution to agencies by March 8, 2010.

Action Item B: Prepare Standard Operating Procedures for Conducting Vernal Pool Field Surveys

Responsible Parties:

-Rich Jordan
-Roger St Amand
-Steve Knapp

Schedule: SOP Outline to be completed and distributed to the VPTC prior to the next meeting, March 5, 2010.

Action Item C: Prepare Vernal Pool Field Assessment Decision Tree (flow chart)

Responsible Parties:

-Jim Logan
-Alex Finamore

Schedule: Draft to be completed and distributed to the VPTC prior to the next meeting, March 5, 2010.

Action Item D: Prepare suggested revisions to vernal pool data collection form (SVPDCF) for consideration by IF&W

Responsible Parties:

-Dale Knapp
-Laura Lapierre
-Brad Agius
-Kathleen Miller

Schedule: Outline of modifications to be completed for discussion at the next meeting, March 5, 2010.

Action Item E: Prepare summary of vernal pool anomalies/problem areas encountered by field scientists to obtain regulatory guidance so all professionals are handling these situations consistently

Responsible Parties:

-Rich Jordan

Schedule: Compile draft list of anomalies/problem areas for discussion at the next meeting, March 5, 2010.

VI. Game Plan Moving Forward

The game plan is to have working documents ready for pilot testing during the 2010 field survey season.

It was agreed that once all documents are prepared to the satisfaction of the VPTC, agency review and comment would be requested and, if appropriate, working sessions would be requested.

It was agreed that Agendas for upcoming meetings would be distributed (by Chairman Jordan) by Wednesday of that week.

VII. Debrief

- What's working well with the Committee?
- What Could Be Improved?

VIII. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 5:00 PM.

Schedule and Location for Upcoming VPTC Meetings: (meetings will be from 2:30pm to 5pm)

March 5, 2010	Augusta	TRC
March 12, 2010	Westbrook	Boyle Associates
March 19, 2010	Pittsfield	Kleinschmidt Associates
March 26, 2010	Augusta	TBD-After MAWS Annual Meeting
April 2, 2010	Topsham	Stantec

Note:

Questions or comments on these Minutes, or requests for additional copies, should be addressed to Kathleen Miller, Secretary, at kathleen.miller@tetrattech.com or 207.409.9738.



MAWS Technical Committee Agenda
Friday, Feb 26, 2010, 2:00 – 5:00 pm
30 Park Drive, Topsham, ME

Call-In Number: 1-866-279-5424 / Passcode: 729234

Meeting Objective: To begin exploring the creation of vernal pool survey protocol, data sheets, and methodology for use by experienced biologists and consulting professionals.

Some firms already have internal documents they have developed specifically for this purpose. Gil Paquette has generously offered to provide his documents for our use. Stantec also has similar materials. If your firm has an existing SOP, survey protocol, and/or data forms, please feel free to bring to the meeting.

Recognizing that a Friday afternoon is a tough time to meet, we will have snacks and beverages on-hand. Thanks for sacrificing...errr.. I mean, volunteering yourselves in this fast paced endeavor!

2:00-2:30	Introductions/Appoint Committee Chair
2:30-3:30	Review existing materials/Regulatory process/Identify key areas for improvement
3:30-4:30	Break out task/responsibilities for products/Action items due at the next meeting
4:30-5:00	Set dates/times for remaining Committee meetings through April 1.

Existing materials for review in advance of the meeting can be found below.

<http://www.maine.gov/dep/blwq/docstand/nrpapage.htm>

<http://www.umaine.edu/vernalpools/>

<http://www.umaine.edu/vernalpools/Publications.html>

<http://www.maine.gov/dep/blwq/wetlands/vernal.htm>

http://www.mass.gov/dfwele/dfw/nhesp/vernal_pools/vernal_pools.htm

Other Citations and Useful References:

Calhoun, A. 2003. Maine Citizen's Guide to Locating and Documenting Vernal Pools. Maine Audubon Society.

Calhoun, A. and deMaynadier, P. 2004. Forestry Habitat Management Guidelines for Vernal Pool Wildlife. Appendix B Using Aerial Photography to Locate Vernal Pools.

Calhoun, A.J.K. and P.G. deMaynadier (Editors). 2008. Science and Conservation of Vernal Pools in Northeastern North America. CRC Press, Boca Raton, FL. 363 pp.

Crouch, W.B., and P.W.C. Paton. 2000. Using egg-mass counts to monitor wood frog populations. Wildlife Society Bulletin 28:895-901.

Hunter, M. L., Jr., A. J. K. Calhoun, and M. McCollough. 1999. Maine Amphibians and Reptiles. The University of Maine Press, Orono, Maine.

Kenney, L.P. 1995. Wicked big puddles: A guide to the study and certification of vernal pools. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C.

Kenney, L.P., and M.R. Burne. 2000. A field guide to the animals of vernal pools. Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program and Vernal Pool Association. Westborough, MA.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. 2005. Department of the Army Programmatic General Permit – State of Maine: NAE-2005-2164. 25 pp.