

Long Island Sound Eelgrass Collaborative Meeting – Virtual November 24th, 2025 (12:00-2:00)

Participants: Juliana Barrett – CT Sea Grant; Lauren Barrett – CTNERR; Mike Bradley – University of Rhode Island; Jennifer Burton – NYSDEC; Della Campbell – NYSDEC; David Carey – CT Department Agriculture; Jill Carr – UM Boston; Chris Clapp – Ocean Sewage Alliance; Emma Coffey – CT DEEP; Phil Colarusso – US EPA; Melissa DeFrancesco – Connecticut; Gabriella DiPreta – NOAA/NMFS; Devin Domeyer – Maine Coastal Program; Alexander DuMont – NEIWPC; Barley Dunne – East Hampton Shellfish Education and Enhancement Directive (EHSEED); Thais Fournier – RI DEM Division of Marine Fisheries; Eve Frankin Lynes – SAVE Environmental; Tessa Getchis – CT Sea Grant; Janelle Goeke – Casco Bay Partnership NEP; Sarah Healy – NYSDEC; Stephen Heck – Stony Brook University; Athena Hermann – Millstone - Dominion Energy; Emily Herz – CT DEEP; David Hudson – Remote Ecologist; Gavin Jackson – CT DEEP; Simen Kaalstad – Atlantic Coastal Fish Habitat Partnership; Shauna Kamath – NYSDEC; Jennifer Lafayette – USGS; DeAva Lambert – CT DEEP; Matthew Leason – University of Connecticut; Xiaoshu Lin – Remote Ecologist Inc.; Bill Lucey – Save the Sound; Katie Lund – UConn & CTNERR; Sabrina Lyall – CT DEEP; Carl Persson – Ocean Solutions, Inc.; Maeve Rourke – CT DEEP; Forest Schenck – MA Division of Marine Fisheries; Eric Schneider – RI DMF; Steve Schott – Cornell Cooperative Extension; Evelyn Spencer – US EPA; Isabelle Stinnette – NY-NJ Harbor & Estuary Program; Kelly Streich – CT DEEP; Cayla Sullivan – EPA Region 2 Long Island Sound Office; Hannah Vagts – Fishers Island Seagrass Management Coalition; Robert Vasiluth – Save Environmental; Jamie Vaudrey – CTNERR & UConn; Emily Watling – UConn & CTNERR; Abbie Winter – CT DEEP; Harry Yamalis – CT DEEP

I. Welcome and Overview

II. Atlantic Coast Fish Habitat Partnership's (ACFHP) Eelgrass Seed-Transfer Workshop & Guidance Document – Simen Kaalstad, ACFHP & Eric Schneider, RI DEM

Simen Kaalstad introduced the [Atlantic Coast Fish Habitat Partnership \(ACGHP\)](#), which identifies specific priority habitats, notes threats, and builds local and regional partnerships to develop and implement conservation strategies. The [presentation outlined](#) their support of on-ground restoration through funding and project endorsements, as well as gave examples of many ongoing and past projects that they have participated in.

Eric Schneider then [presented on the ACFHP's efforts to host a workshop](#) aimed at developing guidance on seed transfer policies for SAV restoration. Their goal is to develop a guidance document that will compile and synthesize the latest science and Best Management Practices (BMPs) to support seed-based research, restoration, and management. This multi-step process includes the incorporation of local, state, and regional seed transfer methods and BMPs. They will be sending out an RFP seeking contractors to conduct a literature review and produce a report that summarizes and synthesizes pertinent SAV seed transfer information.

Q&A

The LIS Eelgrass Collaborative has put together a [CT-NY focused seed transport guidance document](#) that focuses less on the science and is more of a review of existing guidance from an agency perspective. Are there plans to look at the existing policy framework outside of LIS through similar methods of meetings with agency staff?

- While it is important to know the regulatory information, science and BMPs will come first in the document's development, representing key next steps.
- This will be a living document, with the ability for constant updates and changes as new knowledge is acquired.

III. LIS Seed Tracking Database Discussion – Jamie Vaudrey, CTNERR & UConn, Lauren Barrett, CTNERR, & Della Campbell, NYSDEC

A discussion was held to address the need for a unified approach to LIS eelgrass seed tracking. Updates were provided related to seed storage plans at the CTNERR and Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE), with a focus on the development of infrastructure that can store 7-8 million seeds per year. To support this effort the CTNERR, in collaboration with the CCE and NYDEC, is looking to develop a LIS-wide database that draws upon and integrates with the NYS seed-based restoration and collection required reporting. Through this database, restoration practitioners will be encouraged to voluntarily submit information about the collection and dispersal of seeds and plants. The project aims to prevent overlap and ensure that efforts are in collaboration with other ongoing tracking initiatives.

A poll was launched to gather information regarding practitioner preferences for the LIS Seed Tracking Database, including the ability to share information, the types of data practitioners would find most useful, and preferred methods to collect information. Discussion was encouraged, and participants shared perspectives on seed tracking priorities.

Highlights from the Discussion and Poll:

General Input & Feedback

- There is a strong correlation between desired aspects of the LIS Seed Tracking Database and what is already being collected in NY through their required reporting.
- A general comment section for practitioners to import pertinent information should be provided (i.e. Sand Tiger Shark presence, wasting disease, epiphytic growth).
- There is a need for tracking the efforts it takes to collect seeds, including hours involved in the collections. This could be linked to the specific cohort of seeds to get an estimate of the hours logged per million seeds.

Seed Cohort Tracking

- Separating out populations of seeds verses keeping all collected seeds together should be considered.
 - Use other organizations' storage methods as examples for the CCE and CTNERR site planning.

Donor Bed Tracking & Seed Potential Calculations

- It is important to collect information on what percentage of the bed is being harvested and how often and to estimate the seed potential of a bed before collections, as well as identifying the percentage of total seeds taken.
- Dropping points and creating polygons around a section to portray range of collection could be utilized.
- Consider increasing the accuracy of GPS points so that:
 - Collections within individual beds can be tracked.
 - The same points are not collected from multiple times.
- There should be an opportunity for collecting and sharing multiple GPS points, such as the start and stop of a transect.
 - Concern with diver tracking difficulty during collections.
 - Divers can use a waterproof GPS or marker buoys to know the beginning and end of a transect and where to collect a GPS point.
 - The "Follow-Me" option could be included in the chosen application to track movements and use of the meadow.

Donor Bed Size & Health Estimates

- A visual analysis of the size and health of the donor meadow should be included in the database.
- The size of the donor meadow is not an absolute proxy of reproductive capacity, though it is easy for practitioners to estimate in-field quickly during harvesting.

Seed Quality & Viability

- Include the quality and viability of the seed in the tracking database, especially prior to them being used in a restoration project.

Protecting Donor Meadows with concern of overharvesting

- Consider ways to “close-off” collection points for a meadow after a certain percentage or number of harvestings to protect a meadow and ensure that it is not taken from too often in a season.
 - Rotational bed harvesting
 - “Leasing” out meadows for harvesting
- There is a need to understand how a donor bed is impacted over time and what the “breaking point” might be.

NYSDEC Survey Insights & Next Steps

- Reproductive output of a donor meadow would be the most difficult requirement to report on based on time constraints, lack of standardized methodology, and annual meadow variabilities.
 - As a result of this feedback, NYSDEC made this an optional reporting requirement in tracking.
- NY is trying to implement annual assessments of the most harvested areas and do a multi-year analysis of the beds to see how health and reproductive outputs change with harvesting.
- Geolocation and the ability to upload comments is vital in a tracking database.
- The main barriers are potential resistance from reporters and a lack of consistency in reporting.
- NYSDEC timeline for next steps:
 - Continue the pilot reporting program.
 - Collaborate with UConn and Fishers Island Seagrass Management Coalition to ensure that there is not duplication of tracking efforts.
 - Data sharing with practitioners.
 - The development of a software or platform that has all these features ready for summer 2026.

Standardizing a Reporting Platform

- Potential for a standardized LIS app that brings all data together rather than breaking up into state-specific platforms.
 - One option is to create templates using the *Epicollect* app that has individual projects organized into borders within LIS.

IV. Agency/Partner Updates

Zosterapalooza, Phil Colarusso

- The 35th annual Zosterapalooza will be held this year in Boston, Massachusetts on March 25th - 26th in a hybrid format.
- March 25th will feature a variety of topics, while March 26th will focus on the broader challenges of large-scale seed restoration.
- Swag will be available for attendees who arrive early.

Large-Scale Seed Collections, Dave Hudson, Maria Rosa & Phil Colarusso

- Around 40,000 seeds were collected and processed from meadows at Pine Island and Stratford Point, with planting conducted at the Duck Island and Connecticut College restoration sites.
- Best day at the height of the reproductive time was 100,000 seeds, with one day of processing and a 30% viability rate.
- Presenting this work at meetings like Zosterapalooza and the LIS Eelgrass Collaborative can help explain to practitioners the amount of effort it take to collect these viable seeds.
 - It is important to know the number of hours and divers/waders that will be required for similar approaches and sites.

Beverly Massachusetts Seed Collections, Jill Carr

- It is important to know the initial conditions and seed quality before going into a collection project.
- In a meadow where the reproductive capacity is well-known, a diver team collected around 10,000 shoots, which is estimated to equal 1 million seeds at 100 seeds/shoot.
- After harvesting, waiting for the seeds to drop, and running viability tests, only about ¼ million seeds were usable, with only 60% rated as high or medium-high viability.
- A combined mixture of medium high and high viability seeds was used for planting, with an estimated 85% viability rate.

Call for Divers & Seed Operations at VIMS, Dave Hudson

- Dave Hudson is looking to assemble a group of divers that could help with ongoing seed collections, as well as projects searching for lost and/or abandoned lobster traps
- The Benthic Ecology Meeting is being hosted by Virginia Institute of Marine Sciences (VIMS) this year. If participants from the LIS Eelgrass Collaborative Group attend the meeting, they could visit and learn from their local operations.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) Lab and Rob Vasiluth's restoration work

- Collecting seeds and testing seed storage methods at a TNC lab. Found that seeds should be kept in optimal saltwater conditions in a well-oxygenated environment to improve viability.

[Fishers Island Seagrass Management Coalition Eco-Moorings \(article link\)](#)

- The FISMC eco-mooring project has made the news, and there is a focus on seagrass management in the article.
- The focus of the LIS Eelgrass Collaborative over the next few years is to increase boater education and outreach, including picking pilot boat launch sites for testing methods in CT and NY. The work that is already done by the FISMC is a great foundation to work from.