DELAWARE CENTER FOR THE INLAND BAYS
Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee

SCIENTIFIC & TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

NOTES OF MEETING

DATE & TIME: *October 23, 2026 -- 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.*

LOCATION: **Hybrid**

In Person: DNREC Lewes Field Facility (901 Pilottown Rd, Lewes, DE)

Zoom: https://udel.zoom.us/j/97089727665, Passcode = science

Phone: 1-646-876-9923; Meeting ID: 94562636341

Call to order, Welcome, Introductions - Andrew Wozniak, Chair

Announcements - Meghan Noe Fellows, Center

There were no recent staffing changes. The "Decked Out" fundraiser at the Big Chill drew over 160 guests despite a nor'easter.

She announced the upcoming Horseshoe Hustle event on November 15, hosted by Bethany Brewing, featuring a 10K run and 1.5-mile walk.

She reminded even-cycle STAC members that updated CVs are due at year-end; emphasized this is an administrative requirement and an opportunity to reassess STAC involvement.

Old Business

2026 State of the Bays Report – Meghan Noe Fellows, Center

Meghan Noe Fellows provided a detailed update on the State of the Bays 2021–2025 technical review process, document status, publishing plan, and outstanding questions for STAC feedback. She thanked contributors for the technical review, noting double-digit reviewers provided valuable feedback. The data cutoff was October 16; new data submissions are no longer accepted unless pre-approved. She clarified that figures in the reviewed document were placeholder/working figures, not final. They are finalizing and formatting figures using an accessible, unified color palette. She noted that there was an intentional "Easter egg" — number of trees was misplaced in the Working Estuary chapter; some reviewers caught it.

She discussed the reference approach: data contributed by partners is cited with links; general literature summaries are not individually cited in the public-facing document, but a bibliography/ appendix will be maintained internally. It was recommended maintaining an internal bibliography/ appendix to show all sources, even if not published in the public-facing document, for quality assurance purposes.

She confirmed that a Quality Assurance Project Plan for secondary data is in place and will be referenced in a "how to read the report" section. She discussed what to call the feature sidebar boxes (previously "Beside the Bays"). Suggestions from the group included "Beyond the Bays," "Field Notes," "Drifting Thoughts from the Wrack Line," "Did You Know," "Sandbar" (as a sidebar pun), and using an icon (e.g., a light bulb) without a formal title. Clare Magargal, the Center's communications expert will make the final call on naming/design of the sidebar feature.

Meghan presented six base layer map options for the watershed map, noting the center's updated branding colors require new map backgrounds. The group discussed the importance of simplicity, contrast, and adding only contextually relevant labels. Mike Bott suggested considering Iron Branch as a distinct sub-watershed on maps where tributary-specific data is presented. Meghan confirmed that HUC-12 hydrologic units are used, and additional tributary watershed boundaries can be layered where relevant. Ashley Norton asked about accessibility compliance (508 compliance, color blindness) and Meghan confirmed color schemes are being selected for accessibility, and the GIS tool allows hex code customization

Meghan stated that the layout target is December 15; the document will be published as a magazine-style document with embedded videos, web links, and zoomable figures. A social media rollout is planned for mid-January, with a press event targeting World Wetlands Day (February 2). She described the flashcard/scorecard product as the one printed output, showing status and trends for all metrics including those not updated since 2021.

Meghan also introduced the new horseshoe crab icon system: a single icon whose color reflects both status (good/bad/better) and trend (5 options), replacing the previous two-icon system. Ashley Norton raised concern that some indicators (e.g., pH boundary) had no content in the reviewed document and requested a review opportunity before formatting. Meghan acknowledged the issue; noted Richard Watson and Andrew Homsey have been helping write missing indicators. Committed to sharing incomplete sections with approximately 30 days for review before the December 15 deadline. Ben Coverdale raised the point source indicator gap. Noted that while point sources have not changed significantly in 5 years, they are likely to change before the next report and a baseline would be valuable. Mike Bott suggested tabling the point source metric for deeper development in the next State of the Bays cycle, given complexity and time constraints. Meghan agreed to include a callout box in the nonpoint source section explaining the difference between point and nonpoint sources, and noting the metric exists but was not updated in this cycle. Mike Bott highlighted the TMDL high and low reduction zones for the Inland Bays as a fundamental but underexplained concept that could be addressed in a future STAC meeting or educational resource. Meghan also showed a video example of the short video glossaries embedded in the report.

New Business

State strategies for land use - Jason Vogl, OSPC Josh Thomas Coordinator Land Use Planning
Jason Vogl and Josh Thomas from the Delaware Office of State Planning Coordination (OSPC) presented the 2025 update to the State Strategies, covering the data methodology, investment levels, new map overlays, and future enhancement plans. It was noted that Sussex County does not have the protections that other counties have.

Josh explained that OSPC's mission of communication, coordination, and collaboration on land use decisions across state, county, and municipal governments. State strategies are required by Title 29, Chapter 21 of Delaware code and must be updated every 5 years.

Josh described the 2025 update drivers: updated local comprehensive plans, new state agency data layers, and new data not available in 2020. The update was implemented via Executive Order 16 by Governor Meyer on January 30, 2025.

Jason Vogl described the three analysis categories: Promoting Growth (infrastructure-supported areas), Promoting Preservation (environmental/risk areas), and Out of Play (legally protected or highly restricted areas). Approximately 40–200 data items were incorporated. He highlighted the shift from a rasterized to a vectorized GIS approach, improving spatial precision and enabling point-and-click transparency in the interactive map. Jason described the story map developed with the University of Delaware, which provides transparency on what data went into each designation, including acreage by county per data layer.

Josh presented the four investment levels: Level 1 (urban centers), Level 2 (high-growth suburban areas), Level 3 (transitional urban-to-rural), Level 4 (rural/agricultural), and Out of Play. He also introduced two new map overlays: the Ecological Lens of Significance (showing key environmental data in relation to investment levels) and Key Planning Areas (areas needing focused master planning, including Route 9 and Route 113 corridors in Sussex County). He also noted that Sussex County lacks the flood projection data layers that New Castle and Kent counties have, which affects the analysis.

Jordana Cutajar asked how flood risk is balanced with infrastructure in the investment level calculation. Jason Vogl explained the binary +1/-1 scoring system and noted that flood risk data (coastal inundation model, DEN, wetland buffers) is incorporated as negative scores. Josh clarified that a Level 1 or 2 designation means the state would support growth with infrastructure investment, not that development must occur; local governments retain decision-making authority.

Allison Rogerson asked about incorporating freshwater wetland protection changes and marsh migration suitability data into future updates. Jason confirmed marsh migration data was not yet ready for this cycle but is noted for future inclusion.

Josh described the 2027–2030 State Strategies Enhancement Plan, including renaming investment levels from numerical to text categories, implementing annual map amendments, updating vision and goals, and improving data collection (particularly infrastructure capacity data).

Andrew Homsey confirmed OSPC's collaboration with the University of Delaware on the interactive map. Bob Collins commended the effort, noting 30 years of experience in Sussex County and the long-overdue need for coordinated planning.

Climate Action Plan - Climate Change and Land Use - Jordana Cutajar, Coastal Programs Section, DNREC

Jordana Cutajar presented Delaware's Climate Action Plan (CAP), focusing on land use, mitigation, resilience/adaptation, and recent legislative progress. She described the CAP as a 300+ page document published in January 2025, divided into mitigation and resilience/adaptation sections, with land use as a unifying theme. The plan requires updates every 5 years with implementation reports every 2 years.

She discussed emissions modeling showing reductions from 2005 to 2021, largely driven by renewable energy. Natural and working lands (wetlands, agricultural lands) are carbon sinks shown below zero on the emissions chart. She also highlighted three land use focus areas in the CAP: development patterns, preservation of natural/working lands, and avoiding development in high-risk areas.

Jordana noted that Delaware is a home rule state with 57 municipalities and 3 counties making land use decisions, leading to inconsistencies in building codes, density standards, and floodplain regulations. Sussex County ranked third nationally for new homes built in risky coastal locations (per a 2018 report). She described opportunities including promoting denser infill development, removing barriers to vacant lot utilization, adding green space, and making better development decisions.

She highlighted CAP actions including riparian buffers, marsh suitability analysis and land acquisition, incorporating future climate conditions into planning documents, developing county drought indicators, and monitoring coastal acidification. She identified recent legislative wins: the Wetlands Protection Act RAP implementation, Sussex County's forest preservation ordinance (30% in growth areas, 50% in rural areas, effective December), Delaware Ag Land Preservation Program (30% of farmable land preserved), the TEDI tree-planting initiative (goal: 1 million trees, over halfway achieved), SB 237 (requiring climate change consideration in comprehensive plans), zoning and land use reform for housing diversity, and the Disaster Recovery Fund. She described the DSHA free workshops for municipalities on hazard identification and interim housing planning, and the Resilient Communities Partnership for small-scale resilience funding.

A STAC member raised the issue of rebuilding in repeatedly flooded areas and NFIP/FEMA incentive structures that may encourage maladaptation. Jordana acknowledged the challenge, noting it requires systemic change at a larger policy level. The STAC member further asked about alignment of Sussex County's forest preservation ordinance with state growth zones. Jordana confirmed the 30/50% thresholds align with designated growth zones

Sussex County's Freshwater Future: The Role of Land Use and Changing Landscapes -
Christophe Tulou - Executive Director, Delaware Center for the Inland Bays

Christophe Tulou presented on Sussex County's land use reform process, the Land Use Reform Working Group's 20 recommendations, and proposed STAC engagement on water-related land use issues. He explained that the Land Use Reform Working Group was formed after three incumbent county council members lost their seats due to public frustration with development patterns. The group of 10 participants (including Christophe Tulou and the head of OSPC) produced 20 recommendations delivered to Sussex County Council.

Christophe highlighted key recommendations: defining clear growth and non-growth zones; forest preservation (30% in growth areas, 50% in non-growth areas — now enacted as an ordinance); encouraging naturalized landscaping and permeable space in HOAs; and focusing subdivision design around conservation priorities. He noted that 25% of recent Sussex County building permits were approved outside designated growth zones, creating state infrastructure costs for roads, sewer, water, emergency services, and education. He also pointed out that Sussex County does not pay for county roads — the state does — making state taxpayers subsidize poorly located development.

Christophe described the upcoming Sussex County comprehensive plan (due 2028) as the key opportunity for public input on water quality, water availability, resilience, and natural resource protection. He noted the tension between OSPC investment level maps (which may designate coastal areas as Level 1 or 2) and flood/inundation risk in those same areas.

Christophe referenced the "Rethinking Delaware" group of former cabinet secretaries examining whether the state should reclaim more land use authority from counties under home rule. He proposed that STAC provide CIB with science-based input on key water-related issues (flooding vulnerability,

water quality, saltwater intrusion, habitat protection) to support advocacy in the Sussex County comprehensive planning process, similar to STAC's prior work on offshore wind development comments.

Christophe highlighted osprey recruitment in the watershed as below 50% of replacement rate, illustrating broader habitat concerns. Allison Rogerson added that Sussex County will need to revisit its buffer ordinances once freshwater wetland regulations are finalized, as current buffers are based on state wetland maps that will no longer be the regulatory standard.

Introduction the DE Coastal & Ocean Acidification Community of Practice - Mollie Yacano,
Research Coordinator, Delaware Coastal Programs & Delaware National Estuarine Research Reserve

Mollie Yacano provided an update on the kickoff meeting of the Delaware Coastal and Ocean Acidification Community of Practice, held the previous Wednesday. She described the Community of Practice as stemming from a CAP strategy to increase acidification research and planning. Organized with colleagues Kristi Lieske and Lynn Pusey at Delaware Coastal Programs.

Mollie identified goals included establishing a baseline definition of coastal and ocean acidification, reviewing current research and monitoring, identifying community of practice goals, and beginning discussion of a state acidification strategy. Attendees included representatives from four DNREC divisions, University of Delaware, Delaware State University, Sea Grant, Delaware Geological Survey, Delaware Cultured Seafood, MARCO/MACAN, and others. Mollie indicated that presentations were given by Dr. Wei Jun Cai (UD, overview of acidification), Dr. Janet Reimer (MACAN co-lead, monitoring approaches), and Dr. Liz Whitney (NOAA/Linker, Davidson Fellow research on Blackbird Creek and St. Jones watershed acidification). She indicated state strategy discussion covered intended end users, sectors to include, primary/secondary stakeholders, and what to learn from New Jersey and Maryland acidification plans.

The networking session ran over 2 hours beyond the scheduled time, indicating strong engagement. The next steps include compiling notes, determining meeting frequency (2–4 times per year), and identifying future speakers (Ocean Acidification Alliance, Maryland Department of the Environment, New Jersey DEP).

Meghan Noe Fellows asked how STAC can help. Mollie noted that the CIB Science and Technical Advisory Committee and Citizens Advisory Committee were specifically identified by workshop participants as important collaborators, particularly as state strategy products are developed.

A STAC member asked whether the Department of Agriculture is involved. Mollie confirmed they were invited but unable to attend the kickoff; they participated in the earlier screening and are considered relevant stakeholders. Claire Simmers expressed interest in participating, and Mollie offered to follow up directly.

Workshop 2027 / STAC Work Plan Discussion

Andrew Wozniak opened a discussion on whether to hold a standalone workshop in 2027 and/or adapt STAC meeting formats to include work-planning sessions. He presented two options — a standalone workshop (similar to Coast Forward 2025 or the saltwater intrusion workshop) or adapting at least one STAC meeting to a goal-oriented workshop format. Meghan Noe Fellows expressed support for a work-planning format, noting that presentations are valuable but the group's expertise could be better

utilized in problem-solving sessions. Most attendees agreed that a work plan with defined topics and deliverables would help focus STAC's advisory role.

Andrew Wozniak: Suggested the next meeting agenda include at least half the time dedicated to developing a STAC work plan, identifying priority topics (e.g., TMDL update, coastal resilience, saltwater intrusion, point sources), and determining whether a larger standalone workshop is warranted. Christophe Tulou suggested STAC could produce white papers or advisory documents on specific topics to support CIB's engagement with Sussex County's comprehensive planning process.

Comments from the Committee Members

Josh Barth announced that EPA approved the DNREC 2026 Integrated Report; it will be posted online the following week.

Kelly Somers noted that EPA released its new strategic plan earlier that week, built around the administrator's 5 pillars; relevant for organizations receiving federal funding. Andrew Wozniak confirmed that no members of the general public were present for the public comment period; no public comments were received. A movement to adjourn was made by Claire Simmers and seconded by ? There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned by Chair Andrew Wozniak.

Attendees

STAC Committee Members

Leslie Baggett
Bott, Michael
Zina Hense
Andrew Homsey
Holly Michael
Ashley Norton
Claire Simmers
Kelly Somers
Jennifer Volk
Richard Watson
Andrew Wozniak
Mollie Yacano
Ed Hale
Brooke Walls

Center Inland Bays

Christophe Tulou
Bob Collins
Meghan Noe Fellows, Organizer
Ally Szabo
Clare Magargal

Guests

Jordana Cutajar
Valerie Thompson Sussex County Engineering
Josh Barth

Daniel Warner
Rachel McQuiggan
Ben Coverdale
Jessica McIntosh