

Geographic Response Strategy Testing – Blackstone River (MA/RI)

Initial Planning Meeting

Tuesday, October 31, 2023: 10:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Held via Zoom Video Conference

Purpose

This meeting served as an Initial Planning Meeting (IPM) for the EPA Region 1 2023-2024 Blackstone River (MA/RI) GRS Testing Series. Its purpose was to introduce the project and discuss its scope and objectives, review and identify the GRS and associated strategies to be tested, and, as time allows, discuss, and determine testing schedule and structure, establish logistical and resources needs, and determine the extent of stakeholder participation.

Participants

Karen Way, Ila White, Mike Cofsky, U.S.
Environmental Protection Agency

Sam Butler, Haley Griffin, Nuka Research

Cathy Kiley, Steve Mahoney, Anthony “Tony”
Kurpaska, Dino Dellechiaie, Massachusetts
Department of Environmental Conservation

James Ball, Sydney Clays, Andrew Palmer, Rhode Island
Department of Environmental Management

Introduction and Opening Comments

Sam Butler (Nuka Research) opened the discussion by thanking participants for attending the meeting. He then gave an overview of the project, exercise planning process, team/stakeholder participation, and the project’s objectives. He reviewed the meeting agenda and gave a brief overview of the project’s history and tasks to be accomplished throughout the planning stages.

Sam detailed the project’s history, reviewing the 16 GRS that have been developed for the Blackstone River; ten (10) in Massachusetts (MA) and six (6) in Rhode Island (RI). This project will test one in each state over two, single-day exercises. The GRS will then be validated or modified.

Intro of Exercise Planning Team (EPT)

Sam reviewed the structure of the EPT, highlighting participation from Massachusetts DEP, Rhode Island DEM, EPA R1, Nuka Research, and other potential local, state, Tribal, and federal organizations, then requested that MA DEP and RI DEM provide suggestions for any additional stakeholders and organizations to include in exercise planning and deployment.

Discussion of Individual Exercise Planning Elements

1. Project/HSEEP Overview

Sam began the discussion of the GRS overview and selection process by asking participants for their feedback on potential GRS sites/tactics to test within a two (2) day timeframe.

2. Determining GRS to Test

Massachusetts

Tony Kurpaska (MA DEP) and Dino Dellechiaie (MA DEP) concurred that MA DEP should choose the Blackstone Heritage Corridor Visitor Center in Worcester (BR-MA-01) as the site for the GRS testing exercise in MA. Both

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stated that this site has easy access to a nearby parking area for staging and would involve coordinating with other state entities, as it is located on land owned by the MA Department of Conservation & Recreation (DCR). Dino stated that due to the location of this GRS at the confluence of Middle River and Blackstone River, it would be ideal to test this tactic, as boom could be strategically deployed to prevent contaminants from traveling further down each river. Dino also highlighted the presence of Dennison Lubricants (with a tank field just north of this location) as a potential source of spill threats.

Dino suggested that the Worcester and Millbury Fire Departments could observe and/or participate in the exercise. He added that there are four (4) inland MassDEP oil spill response trailers located in central MA (with the Auburn trailer being the closest), and that one of these trailers could be used in the testing exercise. He suggested extending an invitation to these Fire Departments to participate.

Sam asked if this portion of the river was deep enough to operate boats in the area, and Dino replied that deployment would likely take place on-foot because a boat isn't likely to be able to reach this part of the river due to several nearby obstructions (i.e., dams and walking bridges). He also noted that there are approximately 20-foot walls surrounding the river at the BR-MA-01 site. He relayed Moran Environmental Recovery's (MER) suggestion to drape ropes over the wall to secure boom segments to the fencing along each side of Blackstone River.

Sam asked if participant funding and reimbursement would become an issue in this project. Karen Way stated that the EPA does not provide funding for participants during deployment and relies mostly on volunteer personnel from local departments to oversee and run the exercise.

Cathy Kiley (MA DEP) stated that the group should coordinate with DCR to ensure access to the site during testing operations and mentioned that it would be important to schedule the exercise on a day with no other DCR events taking place. Sam agreed that it will be helpful to include representation from DCR in the next two planning meetings. Cathy agreed to send DCR contact information to Sam for follow-up.

Tony added that other local organizations will be beneficial to include in planning and deployment as well, including the Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC). He offered to send Sam the contact info for individuals in this organization after coordinating with Dino.

Rhode Island

James Ball (RI DEM) began the conversation by stating that RI DEM discussed a few different sites for testing, but ultimately chose the Pawtucket GRS (BR-RI-06). Sydney Clays (RI DEM) added that RI DEM's resources are limited, however, there is a boom trailer staged close to this GRS location. She noted that there is a large parking lot off Roosevelt Ave and additional parking areas on both sides of the Blackstone River to stage equipment. She said that Alewife run down Blackstone River in the month of May, so exercise dates will need to be chosen around the fish migration.

Sam asked RI DEM personnel about other stakeholders to include in the project, and Sydney stated that it would be good to invite local fire departments, town representatives, and RI DEM contractors. James added that the group can also request assistance from the local Department of Public Works (DPW).

Sam then asked about resource capabilities, to which Sydney replied that RI DEM has a nearby response trailer with 350ft of boom. She also added that, in total, there is approximately 2,000 ft of boom available throughout the state if more resources are needed. Sydney mentioned that RI DEM has a small response boat that is currently being renovated, so another department may need to be involved to acquire additional vessel resources. Sydney mentioned that, if needed, the 350ft of boom can be deployed with a 20ft John boat. Karen Way added that both tactics can be deployed as time allows.

3. Exercise Objectives/Details

a. Equipment

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Sam reassured the group that personnel, boom resources and other equipment needs will be reviewed in greater detail in the future planning meetings. He added that Nuka Research can supply peat moss as an oil surrogate during the exercises to test the GRS tactics, if desired.

b. Schedule & Structure

Karen stated the goal of this project is to schedule the exercises on back-to-back days to avoid additional travel expenses and arrangements. Cathy cautioned against deploying during times of the year where critical species are most present. Dino added that he could speak to colleagues in the Worcester office to inquire about times of the year to avoid. James mentioned he would check with RI DEM to see if there are any additional sensitive species and times of the year to avoid in the Pawtucket area.

James asked whether pre-deployment training would be provided before the exercises. Sam stated that, if necessary, and dependent on local participant levels, pre-deployment GRS overview training can be provided by Nuka Research on the day of the exercise. This training could be beneficial for departments that don't have experience with marine oil spill response equipment and will help participants understand the core concepts of boom deployment. Karen added that the reason for conducting the GRS validation tests is to evaluate whether the tactics are effective or if they need modification.

c. Logistics for Exercise Days

The exercises will likely be held between April and June, or possibly later in the year depending on participant availability.

Schedule Midterm Planning Meeting/Final Planning Meeting (MPM/FPM)

Sam will reach out to schedule the MPM and FPM after coordinating with MA DEP and RI DEM to identify the appropriate stakeholders to add to the work group list. He will reach out to James and Sydney, and Dino and Tony separately.

Karen thanked everyone for taking the time to be on the call.

Tony asked if there was a maximum number of participants allowed at the exercises. Karen replied that there are no upper limits to the number of participants.

Action Items

1. Sam Butler will send out a Doodle Poll to the group to schedule an MPM for January or February.
2. Sam Butler will follow up with MA DEP and RI DEM separately to coordinate additional stakeholder involvement.

Project Website: <https://www.inlandgrpne.com/>

FOR ADDITIONAL PROJECT INFORMATION CONTACT:

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