

Geographic Response Strategy Testing- Lake Champlain, VT

Initial Planning Meeting

Monday, October 30, 2023: 1:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.

Held via Zoom Video Conference

Purpose

This meeting served as an Initial Planning Meeting (IPM) for the EPA Region 1 2023-2024 Lake Champlain 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, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency	Mike Popovich, Sam Butler, Haley Griffin, Nuka Research
James Donaldson, Tim Cropley, Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation	

Introduction and Opening Comments

Sam Butler (Nuka Research) opened the meeting by thanking participants for their attendance. 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.

Intro of Exercise Planning Team (EPT)

Sam reviewed the structure of the EPT, highlighting participation from Vermont DEC, EPA R1, Nuka Research and other potential Local, State, Tribal, and Federal organizations, and requested that VT DEC 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 three (3) day timeframe. James Donaldson (VT DEC) stated that it would be ideal to consider testing GRS located on/around the riverine systems surrounding Lake Champlain.

2. Determining GRS to Test

James stated that if the Missisquoi GRS (LC-VT01) is chosen to test, it will need to involve considerable booming resources and significant travel requirements to access the location and accomplish the booming strategy. Participants agreed that the Missisquoi GRS (LC-VT01) would not be tested.

James also stated that the Shelburne Fire Department successfully tested the Shelburne GRS (LC-VT11) earlier in the year. James said he will follow up with exercise participants to identify any modifications made because of the test.

Tim Cropley (VT DEC) added that the Chimney Point GRS (LC-VT14) is easily accessible, but that the site has also been tested previously.

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Tim agreed with James in that it would make sense to test tactics located in both a still water and a riverine environment, and that this could be accomplished by testing GRS's LC-VT09 and LC-VT10 (Winooski and Burlington). James also suggested potentially testing a site to the South of these locations.

Tim suggested testing GRS that include multiple types of tactics (i.e., diversion, deflection, and exclusion). James and Tim pointed out that the Lewis Little Otter Creek GRS (LC-VT12) would be good to test since it includes several types of tactics to deploy.

James stated that testing Burlington GRS (LC-VT10) may be challenging due to local vessel traffic in and out of the area. He also added that there may be benefits to choosing GRS that allow for working with local municipalities.

Tim talked about the presence of a deflection (DF) booming tactic in the Winooski GRS (LC-VT09B). James added that this GRS could be partially accessible to boats traveling upriver, with the remaining participants meeting at the staging location closest to DV01c. He also mentioned that there was significant flooding the last time VT DEC was at the Otter Creek GRS site (LC-VT13A), and that it might be good to evaluate potential locations to secure the shoreline anchoring systems in this area.

Mike Popovich asked Tim and James what the deployment of the Lewis Little Otter Creek GRS (LC-VT12) would require (i.e., boats or responders on foot) and James replied that boats could be launched at the mouth of Little Otter Creek and travel some distance from there, but access to the EX02a and EX02b tactics may require a response on foot. At the end of the discussion, the following GRS were identified to be tested, with the Burlington GRS (LC-VT10), as a backup option:

- Winooski (LC-VT09)
- Lewis Little Otter Creek (LC-VT12)
- Otter Creek (LC-VT13)

3. Exercise Objectives/Details

a. Equipment

Sam stated that Nuka Research and EPA R1 do not have the capabilities to provide personnel and equipment, and asked VT DEC if they had access to sufficient response and deployment resources. James stated that VT DEC planned on coordinating with the three (3) available Oil Spill Recovery Organizations (OSRO) in their region (Environmental Restoration LLC, NRC/U.S. Ecology, and Absolute Spill Response) to obtain 600-800 feet of boom, response personnel, and at least two vessels. VT DEC relied heavily on these OSROs during the flooding events in July. It isn't yet clear whether all three OSROs would be present on all three days of exercises. James will follow up with each OSRO and provide Sam with an update soon.

It was determined that there will need to be pre-planning to position the boom in certain places before the exercises. Tim suggested that Shelburne Fire could be involved to assist with these efforts, and James added that Burlington Fire and Ferrisburgh Fire might want to be involved as well.

b. Participation

Karen asked if VT DEC has the funds to compensate local participating departments. James stated that they could potentially compensate participants using their spill contracts, but available funds may be limited.

Karen also asked whether U.S. Coast Guard Station Burlington had resources or personnel to assist in deployment. James replied that they do not have the capabilities for spill response, and that Station Burlington is unlikely to respond unless the incident is deemed a significant event. Karen asked whether it was common for Fire Departments near Lake Champlain to have vessels available for deployment. Tim replied that, to his knowledge, Shelburne is the only FD with on-water marine spill response capabilities.

Sam reiterated that at least two (2) boats and five to six (5-6) personnel are needed for successful boom deployment.

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Tim offered to reach out to the Watershed Management Division for vessels and vessel crews to observe and monitor the deployments, and/or act as a safety vessel.

Sam stated that Nuka Research has access to peat moss as an oil surrogate and can provide it for the deployments if desired.

c. Schedule & Structure

Sam offered to include members from the OSROs, local departments, and the Watershed Management Division in future planning meetings and exercises. He stated the next planning meeting will likely be held in January/February and the testing exercises will likely be held in the April/May timeframe. Tim and James said that mid-late May will be the best timeframe for the three-testing exercises because ice could impede the ability to deploy boom in April. James pointed out that May 13 - 30 could be a good time frame to conduct the deployment, because the Lake will get busy post-Memorial Day.

Sam also stated that Nuka Research can provide GRS overview training prior to the on-water deployment. Mike Popovich (Nuka Research) added that the list of deployment participants available on the day of the GRS test will ultimately help to determine whether this training element is needed. Karen stated that while working on the Penobscot River GRS project, the training was very helpful in teaching responders the best practices for deploying oil spill response boom and equipment.

d. Logistics for Exercise Days

Sam reviewed the schedule of what will take place on the exercise day. He also stated that an After-Action Report will be created and disseminated to the group in the weeks following the exercise.

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

Sam stated that he will reach out to the group with a Doodle Poll to schedule an MPM once he receives a list of additional stakeholders from James.

Action Items

1. James Donaldson will contact the OSROs, Watershed Management Division, and local departments and ask if they would like to participate in planning meetings and exercises.
2. James Donaldson/Sam Butler will coordinate to update the Work Group list with contacts from local fire departments and other stakeholders.
3. After finalizing the Exercise Planning Team (EPT), Sam Butler will send out a Doodle Poll to schedule an MPM for January or February.

Project Website: <https://www.inlandgrpne.com/vermont-grs>

FOR ADDITIONAL PROJECT INFORMATION CONTACT:

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