

MCTF Policy Structure Subcommittee Meeting Minutes 10 28 21

Minutes for the Mosquito Control for the Twenty-First Century (MCTF) Task Force Meeting

Subcommittee Meeting: Policy Structure

October 28, 2021, 12:00 p.m. via Zoom

Meeting Topics:

- Meeting Opening, Welcome and Roll Call (chair)
- Housekeeping Notes (EEA representatives)
- Meeting Purpose, Agenda (chair and facilitator)
- Discuss strength of information in ERG report and existing data gaps in landscape of data
- Propose potential sources to fill data gaps and determine which sources are credible and essential
- Discuss goals of mosquito control for the Commonwealth
- Discuss definition of nuisance for mosquitoes and mosquito control
- Discuss and finalize subcommittee member action items prior to next meeting
- Wrap Up (Facilitator)
- Closing Remarks and Vote to Adjourn (chair)

Stephen Rich called the meeting to order at 12:03 pm. Heidi Ricci and Derek Brindisi were not available to attend the meeting. All other subcommittee members were present. Subcommittee members included: Stephen Rich (Chair), Julia Blatt, Brad Mitchell, Richard Pollack, and Heidi Porter.

Diana Pietri (ERG Facilitator) asked to run through some housekeeping notes. Diana shared her screen with agenda items listed. The content reviewed by the group looked at data gaps and broached the subject of mosquito control board framework. The agenda noted the need to hear about the strength of the ERG report, available data, and the desire to discuss sources to address data gaps. In addition, the agenda referenced a need to determine mosquito control goals for the state and discuss the definition of nuisance.

Diana asked Steve if there was anything to add and Steve agreed the information discussed was straightforward. Diana raised a discussion point around potential data gaps. The subcommittee has had a few weeks to dig into the report; however, there is an acknowledgement that some subcommittee members have more time to put in than others. The subcommittee group will be talking about goals and the definition of nuisance. The next meeting will be in less than two weeks due to the Veterans Day Holiday. The group will use the next two meetings to discuss goals and moving towards direction of next steps.

Diana then opened the floor to the subcommittee members to get feedback on the ERG report and data gaps. Russell expressed a desire to spend more time with report. Russell did not think there were gaps at this point. Russell mentioned that if we are thinking about replacing M.G.L. 252 then that may set the stage for us to look at it openly and take a step back. Russell did feel that defining nuisance was critical and poses the question of how does the process get remapped once we define nuisance?

Richard commented that the report fell into two main buckets regarding data gaps. First, scientifically there is a lot we don't know, and we have to make assumptions. Second, what we don't know as objectively as we would like, is what do the residents of each municipality want? We do know how many towns call into the mosquito control projects for help. Richard then noted that perhaps we are moving towards a recommendation that M.G.L. 252 is dated and needs to be reevaluated. Richard stated that we need to figure out what to recommend to legislators and what that final product will look like.

Steve thought the ERG report was comprehensive and he enjoyed the historical context. Also, he wanted to see more about how things are done in neighboring states and thought there was great value in how mosquito control is done in other states that have similar risk, for example, in states like NY and CT. Brad agreed with Richard that scientific data gaps are not the purview for this subcommittee. Brad noted that we don't have a lot of indication of what residents want regarding mosquito control. Most people don't know how mosquito control is done. Brad stated that he wants to see how much mosquito projects vary in what they do and how they do it. He feels that there is not a lot of consistency amongst projects in the work they do. Wants to structure mosquito control so it is science-based and sound. Brad posed the question if mosquito control projects are not operating consistently then why is that? Additionally, Brad noted that here needs to be a focus on nuisance. There is still a need for nuisance control – but what defines it?

Julia noted that she read the report a month ago and did not have time to re-review it. Julia took the time to review M.G.L. 252 and agrees that it is out of date. Julia was not convinced that the current way we address mosquito control is the only way to protect public health. Julia stated that she was struck by the number of communities that wanted to opt-out, but were denied, and did not think that was great.

Heidi Porter noted that she agreed with Brad's statement related to a science-based approach and wondered how we pull in the nuisance component because it is so broad and hard to define. Heidi posed the question of how do we quantify the impact to the nuisance question? There was a community reaction to mosquitos this year. The concept of the presence of mosquitos affecting mental health is important to include. Heidi Porter agreed that mosquito control should not be for one-off parties and struggles with the fact that so many communities are not receiving services and thinks it should be up to the community leaders to know how their constituents are feeling. Also, Heidi Porter feels as though there should be a baseline of mosquito control services and people can add services as they wish.

Diana moved the conversation to the proposal of potential sources to fill data gaps and to the determination of which sources are credible and essential, and the need for a framework for science-based mosquito control management – Julia, Russell, and Rich agreed this was a critical gap.

Richard agreed that we need a framework for scientifically based mosquito control and questions how critical the gap is. Many Mosquito Control Districts (MCD's) already use science, and he doesn't think there is a huge critical gap. The MCD's already have a framework and Brad agreed. Brad states that we need to make sure the framework is consistent across all MCD's and that the framework can change over time with the advent of new science or technology. Russell does not see this issue as a data gap. His gap is understanding - what do we mean by scientifically based process? What do we mean by a scientifically based process and how is that different than what is happening now? Russell noted that we need to define the gap to determine what the future recommendations will be. Julia stated that

there is a need of focusing on state mandated directives and assessing the composition of the State Reclamation Board (SRB).

Following up on Richard's point, Steve agreed there is good scientific practice in MCD's. Steve thinks it needs to be more centralized. NY and CT have top quality scientist doing mosquito control in the departments and there is a benefit to having science housed in the same department with mosquito control. Building on what Steve said, Richard noted that research is critical to understand what is going on out there. Specifically, is what we are doing working? The SRB including members of the past were adamant there should not be research – funding should relate to control of mosquitos, and the former SRB position was we could not kill mosquitos with research. There has been a good sea change in the past few years with changeover in the SRB. Richard reiterates that it may make sense to look at the directive: updating the composition of the SRB. Does it make sense to include DPH in a future composition of the SRB? What should the SRB look like in the future? Is that something we want to pursue and take up that challenge? Brad agreed that research should be part of this process. Brad noted without central control and oversight he would have concerns with MCD's doing their own research. In addition, the framework of the SRB needs to be thought out, as there would be concerns with projects doing research independently without oversight.

Seeing no further commentary, Diana recapped the overall conversation. Diana noted, based on what was being discussed, it sounded as though there was a desire to have a science-based framework and to think about how the SRB should be structured. These were discussion topics that fit well into this directive. The subcommittee group agreed with Diana. It is the role of the group to make recommendations as to how the state can ensure this is addressed moving forward.

Diana then suggested that conversation pivot to best policy practices from neighboring states. Diana posed the question: how critical do others feel this is for recommendations? Is this a critical data gap? Brad, Steve, Heidi Porter, Julia, and Russell all agreed that this is a critical topic for moving forward. This is a topic that requires further discussion. Russell stated this is a best practice we are asking for and if we think there is a better process in another state we should look at it, but it feels like this conversation belongs on the best practice subcommittee. Diana noted this may be helpful when we look at policy structures from other states. Rich thought it was critical we know what other states are doing. It ranges from NJ's coordinated program as compared to NY's spottier program (although Suffolk County and Syracuse have good programs because those areas are hotspots). CT has good surveillance but not a lot of mosquito control. Overall, think that MA is better off than most states. How can we set up a policy structure that chooses the best of what we find elsewhere? Brad noted that we should not limit ourselves to neighboring states. No one has a perfect program, but we can take the best from each state. Russell noted the need to look for how we want to structure MA. There is a need for public participation, transparency, policy, and procedural stakeholder input. Two areas of focus that were noted are:

- Communication
- Surveillance

Diana opened the discussion about municipal resident desires and wants. Is this a critical gap? Brad stated that we need to know more about what they want, but they need to know what is happening. This needs to be a nuanced discussion that should be based on sound knowledge. We need to educate

public and then listen to what they want. Julia noted that this was an interesting topic, and we need to figure out who are the stakeholders and what data we need. Perhaps via a survey, but who would a survey go to - boards of health, selectmen? Julia understood the point that most people don't understand what type of mosquito control is happening now.

Rich raised the point regarding cost barriers. One gap that could be calculated is what is that actually per capita cost for mosquito control? The per capita cost could be minimal. Rich did an exercise like this years ago and encouraged the group to look at this. For some areas, when Rich did the calculation, the cost was less than a single bottle of repellent. Need to dig into the cost and understand if it really is cost-prohibitive. Julia said people responding to a survey may benefit from understanding the risk of EEE and maybe understand that in the context of other health hazards as well. Heidi Porter noted cost could be an issue, but once you are a member of a MCD you get what you get. No opportunity for picking from a menu of services.

Diana broached the subject of variations in MCD's in what and how they are doing things. Diana asks the group if this is worth exploring. The majority of the subcommittee feels that this is a critical gap. Brad noted that we don't need to know every difference but if we took top line items (such as salt marsh mosquito control, adulticiding) these are key things we would want to examine as case studies. Rich stated that it is not in the purview of this subcommittee to determine what trap to use, or which insecticide to use. What is deemed best for that locality, or ecological problem that is happening is what should be chosen regarding process for addressing the issue. Rich agreed some group or the SRB should be centralized to help guide that decision making to determine the preferred method to use, but you still need to have some flexibility.

Russell asked a question regarding, how do these districts operate? He is interested in seeing something around consistency in decision making and what services are offered. Russell has experience in working with many different MCD's and they have many different approaches to doing things. Russell agrees, consistency within the MCD's as much as possible would be good. Steve noted that the group should consider which of the things should vary between MCD's and which should not. Steve proposes that there should be a list of things that we think all MCD's should consider, and then additional things districts could do (similar to menu discussion) Brad states that a lot of decision making in MCDs is subjective; we do need variation, but also need to consider whether or not the differences are objective or subjective, are they verified.

Diana turned the subcommittee conversation over to determining additional needs and information, specifically related to the definition of nuisance versus disease vector mosquitos. Rich noted that a lot of this is in the ERG report. There are other regulations that speak to nuisances. This is a central argument. Everyone has their own threshold for pain and irritation. Not sure how to settle that issue. Brad does not feel this is a data gap. It is not all that clear between nuisance and public health. We need to have more conversation and open discussion to determine what our goals are. Brad noted that the open discussion should first determine goals. What is the intention of what triggered the application to address the nuisance? Diana agreed this topic should be an on-going conversation and relevant to other sub committees. Russell noted the data gap and asked if mosquitoes were the only nuisance in MA, we would set up a control for, or are there other animals in MA that this would be

applied to? Russell mentioned there is no parallel program to other animals. How does mosquito control fit into a standard for this type of control?

Rich noted that many other states don't have mosquito control, but they do have vector control. For example, CA's vector program includes ticks, rats, bedbugs. Some MCDs do greenhead fly control. There are some parallels, but again thinking about what's a nuisance; when does it rise from a minor annoyance to something that everyone wants mitigated in some way. Jennifer Forman-Orth mentioned to the group about greenhead fly control and provided a link from the Cape MCD with more details: <https://www.ccmcp.net/greenhead-fly-control>. Brad agreed that Rich noted an important point; when does it go from a nuisance to something larger? Brad noted this needs to be explored. If it is a small group being impacted it would be a nuisance, but when there are a lot of people impacted perhaps that is a level for mitigation.

Diana noted the following three areas as potential data gaps and asked if this was something we should discuss as a subcommittee.

1. General need for definition of public nuisance
2. Menu of mosquito control items/opt outs
3. Efficacy of pesticides for mosquito control/vector control

Brad noted efficacy would fit best within the Pesticides Selection subcommittee. Brad thought this was something that this subcommittee should look at through policy structure and where pesticides can be evaluated and implemented. Steve questioned the efficacy of pesticides for mosquito control or disease control because they are two different topics. Julia noted this as an overarching question for this taskforce. Steve noted that these are different questions. Rich noted that DPH will be presenting on another subcommittee related to the topic of the efficacy of pesticides.

Diana discussed the potential sources to fill the gaps we mentioned, particularly related to best practices from neighboring states, public participation and transparency, and variation between MCDs. Steve noted that he is thinking about it through the lens of DPH's role regarding arbovirus surveillance. There is participation in other states. For example, peer review science coming out of other states, versus DPH in MA which seems like a closed box. Diana reminded the subcommittee members that they will be doing this research, ERG is not exploring other sources. Heidi Porter commented that taking a look at existing arbovirus plans in MA and comparing those with other states would be curious to see the differences. In response, Julia offered staff members to do some research regarding what other states are doing. Rich noted that there is value in research. He suggested focusing on the NJ & CT mosquito control programs. What are the interactions of state departments and their involvement with mosquito control? Also, what is their involvement with other institutions. Steve commented that other states have close ties with academic institutions, and we don't have a similar tie here in MA.

Heidi Porter agreed with the group regarding research on other states and the involvement of other agencies and institution. Heidi Porter expressed a need to review sources for menu-based system of options. We should be able to share the menu of options that we have in our district that every community chooses from. There would be a baseline for administrative costs and then you could choose based on knowledge and feedback of the services you want, and you can also get feedback from town and wetland managers if you need the services or not. Brad noted that review of other states would be worthwhile. Brad commented that there were wide variations in projects that did salt marsh mosquito

control and how they did it – there was a lot of subjectivity. On the topic of adulticiding, the Cape Cod MCD doesn't do adulticiding. Other MCD's have differences in adulticiding, and it seems subjective. Brad added, having a one-page of info of the triggers for adulticiding and that kind of thing from each project could be helpful.

Diana mentioned there is a summary of MCD activities in the ERG report. Diana noted we could point folks to where in the report, and the belief was that the MCD reports are publicly available. Brad noted that the reports don't reflect the why of the decisions, equally as important as the what, but seems like maybe something the SRB could get. Dianna mentioned the if the subcommittee wants someone from the SRB to speak, it could be arranged.

Russell noted that it would be interesting to know how practices have an impact on salt marshes. How does that get picked up if it gets implemented without the research component and how those practices are evaluated long term? Heidi Porter suggested that in addition to salt marshes, we need to look at the rivers and dams and look at the MCD's and if they have larger river systems within their districts – do the MCD's interact with fish and wildlife? Rich noted that several of the MCD's do get involved with water, rivers, culverts, and they have specialist that deal with state and municipal members to ensure they are not trying to create mosquito habitat that they are ultimately trying to eliminate.

Diana commented that we did not have the time to talk about our goals and that the next meeting will focus on the goals of the task force. It was communicated that the next meeting would be on 11/9 and there would be discussion about nuisance in that future meeting and there was an agreement that the subcommittee members would return to data gaps and move into goals of mosquito control for the state. Julia asked Diana to send her the list of people from other states so that her team could reach out for information. Diana agreed to circle back to Julia regarding that ask. Seeing no other questions or comments from the subcommittee, Steve entertained a vote to adjourn the meeting and the motion to adjourn was seconded by Rich and Brad at 2:00 pm.