



**Water Table Branding Subcommittee Meeting
Tuesday, July 11, 2023**

Meeting Summary

Recap of Water Table Phase 1

The Water Table project began with a goal of bringing together representatives from nonprofit conservation organizations, the water-user community, and government to build relationships and identify collaborative initiatives, new projects, and new funding sources to work toward improved water quality. With funding from the William Penn Foundation, Phase 1 kicked off several years ago under the leadership of the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC). In addition to DVRPC, other members of the leadership are Partnership for the Delaware Estuary (PDE), Philadelphia Water Department, and the Water Resources Association of the Delaware River Basin. Through interviews and stakeholder conversations, participants expressed a shared interest for stronger cross-sectoral relationships and a diverse, resourceful collaborative initiative. Together stakeholders identified ten shared priorities, which ultimately were narrowed down to the top 4: Branding, Climate Change, Funding, and Workforce Development.

Phase 2 of the Water Table project is being led by PDE and is again funded by the William Penn Foundation, with additional support through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL). After reaffirming the top 4 priorities earlier this year, subcommittees were established for each of these to leverage the multi-sectoral approach and create work plans with actionable items to help move the needle in these priority areas.

Introduction to the Delaware Estuary Program (DELEP)/Connection to the CCMP

Congress authorized the National Estuary Program (NEP) under the Clean Water Act, and in 1988 the Delaware Estuary was nominated for and accepted to the NEP. Of 28 National Estuary Programs, DELEP is the only tristate estuary, covering ground in 25 counties across PA, NJ, and DE. All NEPs receive the same amount of federal funding regardless of factors like the geographic footprint of the estuary.

Like all other NEPs, DELEP has a [Comprehensive Conservation & Management Plan](#) (CCMP). PDE was created through an action item in DELEP's original CCMP, and became host of DELEP in 2004. DELEP's 2019 revised CCMP is divided into three main themes: Clean Waters, Healthy Habitats, and Strong Communities, though the overarching priorities of climate change and environmental justice are driving the work in each of these areas. All activities within the Water Table Project can be found under one or more of the CCMP themes, and branding falls under the strong communities section. Many of PDE's biggest challenges are similar to those facing others engaged in the Water Table Project: funding, limited capacity, a complex political and stakeholder landscape across a large geography with varying priorities, and a general lack of branding for the Delaware River and Bay.

Subcommittee Purpose & Discussion

The overall goal of the Branding Subcommittee is to design a shared regional identity/story around the Delaware Watershed and unifying our message for bigger impact. To design a shared vision it is important to take into consideration the watershed's rich history, and to understand that people interact with the watershed in many different ways. The Delaware River Basin doesn't have a "brand" like the Chesapeake does, but a unifying message could be helpful for fundraising purposes and play into the other Water Table priority areas as well. Ideally, this will also lead to more opportunities for connectivity and access, and to more people having a vested interest in the watershed and an understanding of how their actions impact water quality. (See slide deck for more background information.)

The subcommittee had a discussion around some of the guiding questions sent out in advance of the meeting, particularly around geography and examples of existing branding efforts, both in our watershed and in other regions. Cases were made for looking at the whole basin as well as for taking a more narrow approach, such as focusing in on the urban corridor.

- The Chesapeake Bay's brand was named as an example, but it was noted that they likely missed an opportunity to showcase any kind of diversity – what sets us apart is how different we are.
- Video will be an important tool.
- There should be some common theme that is addressed/highlighted even if a more broad approach is utilized.
- It is important to be realistic rather than aspirational, and to find balance with thoughtful messaging to make sure we do not exclude uses – such as the maritime industry - that will always be present in the Estuary but that might be seen as incompatible with some branding. There is a desire to get someone from the maritime community engaged in this effort.
- There are many uses, not just recreation – economic, career opportunities, etc.

Next Steps

A follow-up email will be sent out with meeting notes, copies of presentations, and a link to the [JamBoard](#) for committee members to review and add to. We will gather the shared information and do some deeper research into the items and examples discussed today. We will look into holding the September Branding Subcommittee meeting in person, possibly for a longer amount of time, and will send out an updated calendar invitation as necessary.

Attachments

- Slides from Water Table Overview Presentation
- Slides from DELEP Presentation
- Ecotourism brochures for the Cohanesy and Lower DE Tribs' Watersheds