

**November 13, 2014**

## **SNECWRP Work Group Meeting DRAFT Summary**

The meeting was kicked off with a short recap of SNECWRP's evolution up to now and presentation of lessons learned from the first RFP in 2014 to consider in 2015. Throughout the meeting, additional lessons learned were addressed and recommendations made as to what we should do differently moving forward. Given SNECWRP's stated priorities of innovation, partnership building, and regional effectiveness, there was a general feeling that the projects that were submitted for FY14 funding did not align very well and the next RFP should be much clearer about the types of projects and outcomes expected.

Lessons learned from the 2014 RFP were to:

- Simplify the evaluation criteria
- Provide a longer time period for RFP development and applicant submission
- Ensure a common understanding of the program goals for both the reviewers and applicants
- Encourage strategic and cross-regional partnerships

Johanna Hunter (EPA) then gave a brief overview of the plan for 2015 which will place heavy emphasis on investing in partnership building and program development to provide a foundation for a sustainable program. With Regional Administrator Curt Spalding in the room, the group was given an opportunity to share their thoughts on lessons learned from FY2014 and feedback on the plan for FY15.

The group expressed excitement and positive feedback for the plan proposed for FY2015, but also raised the following points to keep in mind as we move forward with this program:

- Utilize a holistic perspective by focusing on ecological processes and how the ecosystem as a whole is functioning
- Identify priority issues that the whole region can rally around and figure out where we can put our limited resources to get the most valuable outcome
- Develop an RFP that ranks similar projects against each other
- Recognize that nutrients, stormwater and septic pollution are important to coastal water quality and are issues of concern for municipalities
- Encourage collaborations to meet the most pressing needs of the region
- Consider nutrients, green infrastructure and market based solutions when setting priorities
- Keep in mind that new technologies may fail and that we should not be afraid of failure.
- Recognize that towns aren't very familiar with innovative solutions and also don't have much time to apply for funding opportunities to implement these innovative solutions.
- Encourage a greater emphasis in cross-regional innovations and sharing of techniques; e.g., successful approaches on the Cape should be transferred, especially to municipalities.
- Include a higher level of engagement as this program evolves
- Find flexibility to give more feedback to applicants so that they can craft the best project
- Simplified criteria is important for reviewers and applicants
- Encourage better representation in the areas of sustainability, resilience and ecosystem services

After listening to the comments from members of the Work Group, Regional Administrator Curt Spalding thanked Senator Reed and his staff for championing this effort, fostering a bi-state delegation

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and shared his perspective with the group. The bi-state congressional delegation has been paying attention to this effort which represents another level of connection and collaboration for southeast New England in addition to the collaboration at the Work Group level. Massachusetts and Rhode Island both struggle with nutrients and those who are invested in this effort are hoping to get constructive discussion about potential management innovations and how to move forward with our available resources. They are also interested in exploring where new and available capital – such as venture capital -- can best add value to solutions and offer additional resources.

In addition to those currently involved, other assets and networks should be brought to the table as we move forward. This requires strong ties and communication among all of those involved and affected by the efforts of this program.

Deputy Regional Administrator Deb Szaro was introduced to the group and expressed her excitement for this innovative effort. With a strong background in citizen science, she hopes to add value to this effort.

There are challenges in this region where tools are available but these tools are currently in demonstration mode. By tapping into the brain power of the Working Group and experts throughout the country, we can move things from the demonstration phase to the business as usual approach. We can also tap into other networks and use other sources of funding to fill the gaps that remain. By showing that we can be entrepreneurial, we send a good message to the public and to our funders in Congress

EPA can enhance its institutional capacity to address the region's priority issues by leveraging other federal agencies, municipal and local groups, and also by engaging the private sector.

One of our priorities for 2015 should be to increase ecological resilience of this ecosystem and region; with one potential longer term outcome resulting in getting impaired waterbodies off of the 303(d) list. To do this, it is important to create the conditions for ecosystem success which is complimentary to traditional habitat restoration rather than address nutrient reductions at point sources.

The Cape Cod Commission volunteered to help EPA put together a map which would help to reveal where priority areas are.

### **DISCUSSION AFTER LUNCH**

The current authority that will be used is CWA 104(b)(3) which requires a direct or indirect improvement to water quality. Under this authority, direct implementation projects are not eligible for funding. Monitoring, analysis, design, convening, demonstration projects, planning, and education projects are eligible. Since implementation projects are not eligible under this authority, some money can be set aside for contracting these types of on-the-ground projects.

Using the 104(b)(3) template, it is important to fund projects that produce results in the most cost-effective manner. This helps to seed future projects and creates a demand for future investments. In

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addition, projects that emphasize transferability help municipalities that are capacity constrained because they are able to learn from experiences and techniques used elsewhere. Under a federal RFP process which uses 104(b)(3), the document cannot be shared with partners who could be applicants.

**AUTHORITY UPDATE:** We not only received \$5 million in the FY15 budget just passed by Congress but we also received authority to award implementation grants. The Omnibus Appropriations bill specifically references SNECWRP on page 739, line 10: “The Administrator is authorized to use the amounts appropriated under the heading “Environmental Programs and Management” for fiscal year 2015 to provide grants to implement the Southeastern New England Watershed Restoration Program.”

For the 2015 RFP, the group mentioned the following concerns:

- We have to be specific on the projects we are looking for in narrowing our request.
- A regional program has to be careful about its role in monitoring:
  - o There are plenty of ideas on what needs to be monitored but we don't just want to fund it in the short term
  - o We don't want to create another entity that coordinates monitoring
  - o Be wary of setting yourself up as a regional network. Instead coordinate efforts throughout the region
  - o Ecosystem characterization is already being done elsewhere
  - o Be mindful of issues regarding monitoring protocols and techniques (i.e. siting and maintaining devices, scale of collecting, etc.), O&M and data management issues, and performance specifications
  - o There are aspects that are more research driven that AED can help with – we can utilize the people who have already developed methods and techniques
- Make sure to align with other initiatives in order to weave them all together to tell the story of southeast New England
- A networking forum before the release of the RFP would be beneficial in order to introduce the program, highlight partnerships and types of projects we'd like to see, introduce concepts in the RFP, and give people a chance to start forming partnerships before the RFP comes out. (Becky Weidman and Ed Dewitt volunteered to help plan this forum).
- The geographic bounds are not clear and need to be clarified.

**The FY15 RFP could focus on nutrients, program and partnership building, and impaired or threatened waters; 3 themes could connect these: septics, stormwater and market-based innovations. As the program's focus and activities are clarified then the need for new partners will emerge.**