

# Policy Committee Meeting Summary



December 20, 2019  
9:30am – 2:30pm  
RIDEM (Providence, RI)

Attendees	
Alison Bowden	TNC
Dave Johnston	MassDEP
David Morgan	USEPA
Joe Costa	BBNEP
Jonathan Stone	Save the Bay
Karen Simpson	USEPA
Margherita Pryor	USEPA
Martha Sheils	New England EFC
MaryJo Feuerbach	USEPA
Mike Gerel	NBEP
Simi Harrison	USEPA
Sue Kiernan	RIDEM
Susan Sullivan	NEIWPC
Tim Gleason	USEPA ORD
Tom Ardito	Restore America's Estuaries

## Partner Updates:

- RI DEM Office of Water Resources Assistant Director has retired, a new Rhode Island bond will fund \$5 million in work, likely mostly dam removal, and the Narragansett Bay fixed site monitoring network is showing reduced hypoxic events in dryer years
- Watershed Grants Program is hoping to release 2020 RFP in February
- Restore America's Estuaries 2020 Coastal Summit Call for Proposals is now open
- Save the Bay will be releasing in March/April a retrospective look at the history of the improvements in Narragansett Bay and the role of Save the Bay and other advocacy groups in that success
- Rhode Island voters approved \$5 million for environmental grants to improve resiliency
- Narragansett Bay NEP has awarded all its funds and is gearing up for a revised Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP)
- Buzzards Bay NEP is closing out a past technical support grant to Massachusetts Maritime Academy (MMA) that supported the Buzzards Bay Stormwater Collaborative, and the NEP will continue to support MMA and municipalities in the new SNEP grant to expand the Stormwater Collaborative that commences in 2020.
- Buzzards Bay Coalition will hold a workshop in March on the use of runnels as a technique to lessen saltmarsh loss
- MA TNC announced it is providing Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Action Grants for towns to address nature-based solutions

Southeast New England Program

[www.epa.gov/snecwrp](http://www.epa.gov/snecwrp)



# Policy Committee Meeting Summary



- NEIWPCC is assessing the impact of Title 5 regulations over the last 30 years
- TNC is working to address low stream flows to restore wetlands, including for Hockomock Swamp
- Barnstable Clean Water hosted a recent workshop in cranberry bog nutrient restoration (~40 people in attendance); ORD also discussed innovative alternative septic systems research in Three Bays. TNC is looking at piloting in Three-Bays to potentially combine environmental bonds and public-private partnership and is first such attempt in New England.

## **Meeting Summary:**

The group was informed about the status of current SNEP activities in 2019 including the launch of the SNEP Technical Assistance Network, the SNEP subaward program through RAE, and several inter-agency projects underway with USGS. The group was also briefed on efforts planned for 2020 which include the development of an Integrated Ecosystem Services Framework and a list of recommended metrics and indicators for the program, an approach for tracking and communicating results through the annual accomplishments report and the State of the SNEP Region report, and planning efforts underway including a meeting schedule for all SNEP committees and the draft SNEP 2020-2024 Strategic Plan. EPA shared its plans to allocate a portion of its FY2020 budget of \$5.4 million to:

- establish a monitoring program capable of determining the effectiveness of SNEP-funded projects throughout the SNEP region,
- continue to support our current ORISE participants through an Interagency Agreement with Department of Energy,
- continue to provide technical assistance to monitor the performance of the two stormwater BMPs that were constructed on Cape Cod,
- provide technical assistance to our subcommittees for metrics development and ecosystem service valuation,
- support the SNEP Grants Program through the Restore America's Estuaries subaward, and
- provide support to both National Estuary Programs for efforts outlined in their CCMPs.

Technical Assistance Network Discussion: Martha Sheils, director of the Environmental Finance Center at the University of Southern Maine, and program director for the SNEP-funded Technical Assistance Network, described the program's activities during its start-up phase, including financing workshops for municipalities soon. Key suggestions to Martha included

- Establishing a library of vetted, standardized BMPs and going beyond focus on stormwater utilities to provide case studies of those communities that were able to successfully overcome resistance to more comprehensive stormwater management
- Finding a way to streamline permits and make grant opportunities more available
- Address the imbalance in municipal capacities

EPA also proposed new activities for FY2020 funding to committee members to gain their feedback. These activities include:



# Policy Committee Meeting Summary



- Enhanced Coordination of external communications
- Allocation of funding for applied research
- Allocation of funding to encourage more habitat projects
- Establishment of a SNEP priority watersheds grant program

Enhanced Communication: The group supported the idea of enhanced communication for the program. Martha offered to develop a SNEP Facebook page to share news about the program. EPA, Martha and Tom will discuss this further. A suggestion was also made to partner more with existing groups like NEWEA to communicate our needs.

Applied Research: Several members supported the development of an ‘applied research’ fund, and suggested it be called ‘investigations’ which would allow for the research of new and novel approaches or technologies and to determine the effectiveness of innovative technologies or approaches. It would be important to be very clear on research needs to ensure we get proposals for investigations that are truly needed by SNEP. Members suggested we focus on development of the key management questions that require further research, prior to initiating this opportunity.

Habitat Projects: Discussed the relatively low number of habitat project proposals submitted through the RAE RFP process. Members suggested stronger outreach to let groups know these projects are eligible, as many think of these funds as being solely for water quality improvement. The group agreed that leveraging resources for habitat projects is a good idea and could be something that the federal partners could collaborate on. At a minimum, the group felt that SNEP could assist with coordinating of funds that are available for habitat projects and share those opportunities with partners. We’d want to get a sense of where additional SNEP funds would be most useful.

SNEP Priority Watersheds RFP: Joe mentioned that this approach was used to kickoff work many years ago in Buzzards Bay and was very successful. Dave thought this could help to support MassDEP’s watershed permitting process. Sue was concerned that Rhode Island communities may not apply for funds under this opportunity due to capacity concerns—we’d need to consider how to get these communities to apply.

Monitoring: The group agreed that SNEP should devote additional resources for monitoring in the region to enhance coordination of current monitoring. A big question is how to pay for long-term monitoring—perhaps SNEP would investigate options for this. Most monitoring is now done by the state or its partners. Joe mentioned the need for more stream monitoring, and the group agreed that we need to evaluate the benefits of more real-time monitoring, and visualization of water quality data. Can we use data to visualize how water quality has changed over time in our area? The group agreed a first step is to develop a consistent QAPP for the region for different types of projects that would at a minimum be used for all SNEP funded monitoring.

## **Next Steps:**

- EPA will convene a meeting with Martha Sheils (New England EFC) and Tom Ardito (RAE) to discuss a mechanism for external communication through the SNEP newsletter and a SNEP Facebook page.



# Policy Committee Meeting Summary



- The Policy Committee will focus their next agenda on development of management questions for the region and begin to identify the information needed to address the questions through investigations, monitoring and evaluation of ecosystem services—in part based on the research underway regarding recommended metrics and indicators to measure success of the program.
- EPA will further explore development of a priority watersheds grant program, and support to address monitoring needs.
- EPA will investigate ways to share information on all the funding available throughout the SNEP region
- EPA will discuss a potential habitat project resource pool with federal partners
- With the help of partners, the EPA SNEP team will identify opportunities to tune into existing efforts whose focus is on innovation

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