



10/21/2020

SNEP Policy Committee Meeting Summary Notes

The purpose of this document is to summarize feedback during the Policy Committee meeting held on 10/21/2020. The member organizations and their representative in attendance were as follows: Association to Preserve Cape Cod - Andrew Gottlieb, Cape Cod Commission – Kristy Senatori, EPA Office of Research and Development (ORD) – Tim Gleason, MassDEP – Drew Osei, Narragansett Bay National Estuary Program – Mike Gerel, New England Environmental Finance Center (NE-EFC) – Martha Shiels, Restore America’s Estuaries (RAE) – Tom Ardito, RIDEM – Sue Kiernan, The Nature Conservancy – Alison Bowden, MassDER – Hunt Durey.

The meeting adhered to the following schedule with the exception of those areas highlighted in red:

- Introductions/Roll Call (10:00-10:05)
- Partner Updates (10:05-11:00)
- Lessons Learned and How to Improve: Upcoming Watershed Grants (11:00-11:45)
- Updates from RAE and NE-EFC
- Lessons Learned and How to Improve
- **Webinar Workshop topics priorities for the coming year (11:45-12:00)**
- Lunch (12:00-12:30)
- 5-Year Strategic Plan Discussion (12:30-1:15)
- Upcoming Watersheds Grant Request for Proposals Discussion (1:15-2:00)
- Funding Priorities for FY21 Discussion (2:00-2:55)
- Re-Cap and Next Steps (2:55-3:00)

Partner Updates

- EPA
 - Adam Reilly joined the SNEP team as the incoming Communications Coordinator and Shasten Sherwell as our new ORISE Fellow
 - Upcoming year’s outreach plans include: 4 webinars, 2 workshops, 6 newsletters
 - 3 new contracts have started as of 10/1/20
 - SNEP Technical Assistance to help SNEP administer outreach, update grants database, and evaluate impacts of funded projects
 - SNEP Monitoring Strategy to guide future monitoring of the program and to create a cohesive framework of new and old data. This data will be used to inform future “State of the Region” reports.
 - Flow Duration Curve, phase 1 – to develop a methodology to use flow duration curves to predict the impacts of watershed development on stormwater.

- U.S. Geological Survey
 - Three active projects on Cape
 - Falmouth – continuing to monitor ground water (GW) quality after sewer installation. Monitoring before/during/after – seeing significant changes in water quality
 - Another looking at N loading into rivers on Western Cape. Longitudinal surveys across 10 rivers on western cape to measure stream flow and nutrient profiles. Will use modeling to relate hot spots to the landscape to prioritize mitigation strategies. Data interpretation in process.
 - Three Bays (with SNEP and ORD) – hydrologic support for Innovative/Alternative septic. Handling site characterization and GW monitoring aspects of study
 - There is an ongoing project in Wickford, RI in collaboration with EPA ORD. The project is focusing on monitoring of groundwater and stormwater, acquiring data on nitrogen loading, which hopefully will augment future ORD work in the Cove as well. Funding for the project is now in place. COVID has slowed project but work ongoing.
 - USGS anticipates future involvement with MassDER’s ongoing cranberry bog work. Currently working to identify where USGS can play a future role in the project. Anticipated focus is on bogs throughout Cape Cod and Nantucket given that a field lab is already in place and groundwater models for the region have already been completed. USGS is also involved with the SNEP flow duration curve project in Taunton, MA, which is utilizing the USGS HSPF model.
 - There are ongoing discussions with the RI water resources board to determine water use trends. Water availability and climate change studies in RI are also being considered.
 - Marine and freshwater HABs work continues. There are further opportunities for future collaboration between SNEP and USGS on this topic with small focus studies currently ongoing in Acadia and Cape Cod.
- Association to Preserve Cape Cod
 - Remote work continuing
 - Releasing updated State of the Waters report
 - General findings – no meaningful improvement in water quality on the marine side.
 - Overall percentage of impaired waters increased – on the lakefront, increasing number of cyanobacterial blooms – 35% rate of concern. 30% of sampled ponds are showing levels that would warrant a use restriction
 - The ability to evaluate and speak meaningfully is substantially limited by poor quality and data.
 - Evaluation has been limited to 29 ponds due to lack of meaningful data
 - Drinking water supply is rated “quite well” though this rating is expected to go down with new Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substance (PFAS) regulations – expected to become an issue.



- Cyanobacteria program continues, no volunteers being used due to COVID. More blooms found this year than last year. Warm temperatures and lack of rain seemed to push major cyanobacterial blooms into mid-September and early October. Upper Cape is seeing fairly high levels across multiple types of ponds.
- Buzzard's Bay National Estuary Program
 - Several projects going on – announcement coming on municipal grant program (SNEP funding) \$125k, 6 grants to 5 towns announced in November.
 - Two additional projects – stormwater collaborative will continue, Mass Maritime program continues to build a utility trailer to identify illicit discharges, which was completed in the Spring – demonstrations performed in the summer. MassDEP provided additional funding to continue illicit detection training and outreach. 4 new full-time co-op students, monitoring/sampling continues. Westport was brought into the collaborative as well as the town of Marion.
 - Salt marsh studies – two studies, one is long-term evaluation of salt marsh loss in Buzzard's Bay (in collaboration with Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution and Buzzards Bay Coalition) – primary support that they are providing is the installation of elevation monuments for surveys installed in Dartmouth to provide study support. Providing GPS and training.
- Cape Cod Commission
 - Continuing work remotely
 - 208 report/update issued this summer
 - Continuing to finalize compliance reports
 - Network work continues – bylaw review and continuing to support project in Bourne
 - User interface work continues
 - Monitoring database continues to automate trend analyses
 - Climate action plan continues – assembling Green House Gas emissions inventory to measure/track performance
 - Adding mitigation components into future work
- EPA Office of Research and Development
 - Some progress with Three Bays work
 - Wood chip-based bioreactor in the works
 - Neighborhood-scale septic system
 - Working with USGS to evaluate innovative septic system and monitor their impact on groundwater
 - Additional wells intended for next month
 - Barnstable Clean Water Coalition has funding for 10-15 (Nitro) systems
 - Working with Massachusetts Alternative Septic System Test Center (MASSTC) – installing 2-3 “layer cake in a box” systems, which has shown reduction to 5 mg/L of effluent



- Looking for additional funding to bring total to 15 so that both systems can be evaluated side by side to evaluate performance in addition to groundwater monitoring systems to track Nitrogen
- Nate Merrill working with cellphone data to look at beach visitation against water quality data

- MassDEP
 - Continuing to work with communities as they develop plans for nutrient reduction
 - Internally, improving how wetlands group and wastewater group work together to increase cobenefits of nutrient reduction projects and improving knowledge sharing when they're flagged for MEPA.
 - Completed a year of project evaluation performance review via round table, average number of applications received compared to other years.
 - Within the next few months, assessing grading system of clean water projects.
 - Working remotely but compliance evaluations continuing
- MassDER
 - Working on habitat restoration projects in the SNEP regions all at various stages of development (in MA). A major push of theirs over the last 2 years is to significantly increase capacity to support restoration.
 - They have been fortunate over the past year to be able to hire 5 new project managers to focus on dam removal, stream continuity via culvert upgrades, restoring retired cranberry bogs, and coastal wetland restoration.
 - These new staff members should boost MassDER's ability to work with and support others with habitat restoration
 - Recent partnership award with NRCS for retired cranberry bog restoration, important connections with SNEP -- \$20 million/5-year partnership to advance and support the restoration of cranberry farmland for land protection of upland buffers and ecological restoration of former wetlands and streams within these bogs. Will get up and running within this next calendar year.
 - Externally, SNEP advocacy continues to bolster regional capacity building. Excited by progress with SNEP Network. Goal to help local entities to bolster their capacity.
 - Hired an ecological restoration specialist to help with those partnerships. They will be establishing a new partnerships program within DER by 2021. That program will be providing support for 2-3 regional partnership projects in MA. The goals are to engage in formal partnerships with 2-3 regional organizations (watershed, regional planning entities, or others) to build their capacity to help local entities identify, prioritize, and advance high-value ecological restoration projects. Strong ties to capacity building goals of SNEP.
 - MassDER will be reaching out to the SNEP Network to establish future opportunities of future collaboration

- Narragansett Bay Estuary Program
 - Working on Blackstone assessment projects
 - Mailing list of 120
 - Good attendance so far
 - Collected and prioritized needs/assessment –looking to have that work done by Sept 2021
 - 12 SNEP-funded projects being managed
 - Looking to do RFP early next year to distribute FY20 SNEP dollars to fund and focus on preplanning study/assessment/feasibility work
 - Updating website, new data hub that has 2017 state of watershed report and archived data is now available in detailed GIS layer format with metadata
 - New focus, 10-year plan – goal is to make this plan useful for everyone and to get everyone involved (and compliant with paperwork reduction act).
 - Vision 2032
- RI Department of Environmental Management
 - River monitoring suspended due to COVID, but Bay monitoring continues
 - Currently in a public review process of 2020 assessment cycle, state of the waters reports ongoing, comments on updated impaired waters list in the works
 - Public review ongoing for state of the state waters reporting, taking comments through end of October. RI proposing to de-list parts of Blackstone and fishery in Mount Hope Bay, including some improvements for shellfishing in upper bay.
 - Resiliency grants awards (small infrastructure projects to allow systems to adapt to changing conditions in sea level, flooding frequency, and storms)
 - July of 2020 department awards \$4.3 million to nonprofit groups for resiliency, GI projects
 - Wrapping up work in Narrow river watershed
 - Concerned about drought and dealing with complaints about water management.
- The Nature Conservancy
 - Federal policy updates
 - Last week FEMA announced new BRIC (Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities) funding opportunities for pre-disaster mitigation funding
 - FEMA has dropped requirement to meet a minimum requirement to include environmental benefits which opens up more opportunity for nature-based solutions
 - USDA, NOAA, Pew Charitable Trust, TNC – Supporting Oyster Aquaculture and Restoration (SOAR) initiative, to pay oyster farmers (~100) to rebuild reefs across 20 sites, half a dozen in MA
 - Working with 6 growers to take oversupplied oysters to deploy them on restoration projects throughout Narragansett bay – registering growers currently
 - Tomorrow morning, there will be a piece on the Today Show about the program
 - Mass EEA awarded \$16M for climate resilience,



- \$100k in municipal vulnerability preparedness program to 6 towns that share Assawompset waters
 - SNEP has provided funding, TNC provided matching funding
 - Growing interest in communities with significant flood risk, drought risk – no flow out of the lakes currently, and water supply for quarter million people
 - Exciting to explore feasibility for nature-based solutions that address systemic problems
 - Barnstable – continue to work with ORD and Barnstable Clean Water
 - TNC works mainly on the financing through cooperation with Bane for market-based solutions to drive wastewater alternatives
 - Brussels office providing support. In line with case team (3-5 analysts) to start or build financial investment in the technology
- Restore America's Estuaries
 - SNEP watershed grants program
 - RAE just completed its 2020 coastal habitat restoration summit – challenging to adapt to virtual summit but it went really well with over 1000 participants
 - SNEP had a high profile in the summit, nice to get a national conversation about SNEP on specific projects and at the programmatic level as well.

[Presentation by Martha Sheils of the SNEP Network on “Partnering to Build Local Capacity”]

The SNEP Network is focused on cohesion, training, and technical assistance for municipalities throughout the SNEP region. In the past year, the Network has established a solid framework through the creation of a mission statement, boosting engagement with regional partners, building a website, and assembling a curated contact list for various program target areas. There are 14 subawards for partners currently in place, which have been extended into year 2.

The Network as established a consultant pool of 17 pre-approved consultants; and a Call For Proposals was distributed prior to COVID with 16 SNEP communities having applied and 12 receiving funding. The Network continues to offer on-call technical assistance, which has been well-received.

There are two projects currently in process: the creation of a Stormwater retrofit manual, led by University of New Hampshire stormwater center and Stewardship mapping (STEWMAP) throughout the region. There are also two pilot projects in progress in the Maiford River, and the Taunton, which is ready for implementation.

Community outreach efforts have yielded 12 Memorandums of Agreement, ten webinars in year 1, and two in-person trainings prior to COVID. Further outreach efforts are planned for year 2 with specific attention on increasing Environmental Justice community representation throughout



future projects. The planned Canoe River project has been determined to be an excellent opportunity for this type of outreach as well as the inclusion of local grassroots organizations.

[Presentation by Tom Ardito of RAE on the RAE/EPA Cooperative Agreement]

As SNEP's passthrough organization, Restore America's Estuaries (RAE) has issued 38 grants throughout the SNEP region since 2018, the majority in the \$100-\$400K range. Altogether, RAE has so far awarded \$8.6 million in EPA grants to 100+ organizations, matched by \$3.9 million in grantee funds for a total of \$12.5 million. In 2020, work on these projects continued despite the impact of COVID, and RAE was able to fund 11 new projects.

For FY20, RAE received \$10.6 million in requests and awarded \$1.8 million. There is a 33% match requirement, but many organizations provide more than that. The leveraging component of the watershed grants program is significant. RAE also provides the opportunity for grantees to communicate with one another to share information.

General Feedback for Tom, RAE on Cooperative Agreement Going Forward

It was suggested that future RFPs rotate between different project-type focuses. It was also suggested that the subgrant decision-making process be more transparent. Potential areas for improvement to be considered such as: the standardization of applicant scoring, the inclusion of pre-proposals, and increased feedback to applicants who were not funded. These suggestions will be taken into consideration by the SNEP team.

[Due to time, Webinar topics will be addressed in a follow-up email]

---- BREAK FOR LUNCH ----

Discussion on the Five Actions of SNEP 2021-2025 Strategic Plan

First action – to Increase Local Capacity

More detail on this topic was suggested, though the group acknowledged that a more detailed plan would be developed from the strategic plan and not necessarily included within it. Additionally, it was felt that the word “regional” has multiple connotations within the sphere of EPA – this was intended to infer a holistic context but could generate confusion with other regional programs. This section will be revisited with individual comments from committee members.

Second action – to Increase Available Solutions for Holistic Approaches

The goal of this action was to highlight the types of innovative techniques that we would like to focus on – the SNEP team asked for feedback on whether or not the highlighted technologies were an adequate mix. Overall, it was felt that the technologies included were adequate; but the committee recommended the addition of retired cranberry bog restoration, which has shown to be a very promising technology (in MA) though still in the research phase. It was also recommended that the language be adjusted to include “increase available solutions and *opportunities* for holistic approaches” For further clarification, references to “aquaculture” were directed at both bioextraction and commercial viability.



Third action – Demonstrate Ways to Address Common Challenges

No further comments.

Fourth action – Increase Community Leaders’ Understanding of the Benefits of Restoration Projects

It was suggested that the term “*full* methods” be removed given its ambiguity. The Committee stressed the need for deliberate thoughtfulness about when/how this is done to allow SNEP to demonstrate a pathway toward achieving these broader goals. A long, written document isn’t necessarily the best method to communicate intent. SNEP should also consider the creation of a story map or other methods of communication with the public. SNEP should reach out to these communities to see what works for them and what can most help them going forward.

Fifth action – Ensure Diverse Representation in Program Decision-making

SNEP needs to think deliberately and creatively early-on (in a manner that is in compliance with or consideration of the paperwork compliance act); and should be considering multiple types of outreach methods: surveys, social media outreach, etc. The Program must be considerate of the fact that many of these local environmental justice groups are being inundated at this time. Any outreach efforts must be considerate of their time and establish a real and meaningful working relationship – we are not just looking to check a box.

SNEP needs to ensure that the Program establish a way for these local groups to meaningfully participate. Consultants are also swamped and overwhelmed and so the Program to ask early for their participation and get engaged early. Feasibly, the Program should be starting to plan now to get someone by next summer.

SNEP should consider expanding membership of our committees to accommodate local groups’ perspectives/input. To that end, the Program is currently in the process of exploring how best to expand membership of our steering committee to include business reps, academic reps, and representatives of overburdened communities. We would also like to expand input from the municipalities themselves. SNEP needs to reach out more to the communities in our region to share information about what we’re learning but we also need to involve communities more directly with our program. We would like to get community reps from the four segments of our region (Narragansett Bay, Buzzards Bay, the Cape, and the Islands)

General Feedback on Key Actions and Themes

SNEP has done well in the selection of major themes. The actions seem appropriate and seem to hit the right notes. There is good potential partnership for SNEP in the Social Enterprise Greenhouse, in Providence, RI, which captures local social and environmental justice initiatives as well as local business representatives. The Program is continuing to think about how these broad set of actions can be turned into quantifiable targets over the next five years in order to demonstrate that the Program has effected meaningful change.

Given that Goal 1 is referencing water and goal 2 is watersheds and lands – it’s all coastal. SNEP should consider being more direct in our language to include fresh water systems that contribute to coastal waters. Adjusting the language of the first goal to include freshwater ecosystem health would allow the Program to focus solely on healthy waters in the first goal.

RFP for Watershed Grants



SNEP is proposing the creation of a pilot watershed RFP that would fund 4 projects over 5 years at the sub-watershed (HUC 14) level that would include monitoring pre-/post-implementation. We are looking to fund one project from each of the SNEP regions. The selected watershed should have an environmental problem that they are looking to solve that is also common throughout the SNEP region. Using SNEP funding, these solutions will demonstrate implementation on a watershed scale that is transferrable. We plan to find these watersheds via a self-nomination process. There will be heavy emphasis on collaboration. The RFP will give preference to groups that can bring in multiple funding sources in order to ensure that they can leverage SNEP funds.

The Policy Committee was very supportive of this idea but expressed concern with timeline, considering the challenges that COVID presents. To accommodate for these challenges, it was recommended that the Program: 1) Start with an introductory message that explains the coming RFP and what the goals of the RFP are. 2) Follow-up with a video call to answer any relevant questions and to further explain the RFP requirements and expectations and 3) roll out the RFP and provide upwards of 60-90 days for groups to prepare a solid proposal and leverage their connections to generate partnerships and procure matching funding.

The Committee felt that this RFP will generate a lot of interest, even with consideration of COVID, that state budgets have more or less adjusted/allocated funding at this time and that solid proposals can be prepared so long as the roll-out allows for adequate time to respond.

Proportional Funding Feedback

Past experience with trying to engage municipal officials has been mixed. Recommended that SNEP focus on the outreach components of the program and to make people uniformly aware of the program and to share the success of the program to meet people where they're at.

There is a hybrid approach to be considered, with respect to funding, where technical assistance is offered alongside a monetary award such that the program isn't just offering funds to solve a problem, but offers a moderate amount of handholding to walk a recipient through the implementation of a solution that has already been validated by previous SNEP work. There are so many different funding opportunities that are rapidly changing, SNEP should consider establishing a "hub" of all different funding sources (state, federal, and otherwise) that are on target for the types of work that SNEP is looking to advance; and also include the timelines associated with each funding requirement. It's too confusing for people these days to navigate the plethora of fiscal requirements across a multitude of funding opportunities.