

In the Northeast, watersheds, ecology, and environmental challenges cross state lines. For 73 years, Connecticut has collaborated on clean water issues with other states in the region through its membership to NEIWPCC.

Established in 1947, NEIWPCC [NŪ-Ē-PĪK] is a regional commission that helps the states of the Northeast preserve and advance water quality.

This past year brought new challenges to the country and the entire world—from the impacts of COVID-19, the protests against racial injustice, a contentious election season, to new and growing environmental concerns. But our work did not slow. NEIWPCC doubled down on our commitment to serving our member states, helping them adapt and respond to these challenges.

Whether we are convening water quality professionals or providing them with trainings; supporting research, water resource protection, or education and outreach projects; or representing our states' interests to other regional and national parties; NEIWPCC is dedicated to advancing clean water in the Northeast in collaboration with, and service to, our member states.

Here, we share some of the ways NEIWPCC served Connecticut and the region during the 2020 fiscal year (Oct. 2019 to Sept. 2020).



LONG ISLAND SOUND WATERSHED

Most of Connecticut lies within the Long Island Sound watershed. About nine million people across six states are connected through the rivers, lakes, and streams that drain into the Long Island Sound estuary; but their activity generates nutrient pollution, habitat loss, plastic trash, and other toxins that impair the health of the Sound.

The Long Island Sound Study (LISS) is a cooperative effort involving researchers, regulators, user groups and other concerned organizations and individuals, who work together to protect and improve the health of the Sound.

LISS is a program partner of NEIWPCC. We provide staff and administrative support for the program, and connect LISS to others working for clean water in the Northeast. We're helping LISS update their comprehensive conservation and management plan for the estuary.

One of the biggest concerns for the watershed is nitrogen. Wastewater treatment systems and runoff from lawns, farms, roads, and cities all contribute nitrogen pollution to the watershed, leading to fish die-offs in the Sound.

NEIWPCC is helping to reduce nitrogen pollution in the watershed. We facilitate a workgroup for the states in the Long Island Sound watershed to coordinate nitrogen regulations and water quality improvement projects.

A NEIWPCC environmental analyst at LISS coordinates programs that support bioextraction—the practice of farming kelp and shellfish to remove excess nutrients from the water. In May, the analyst developed a mapping tool that can help shellfish and seaweed farmers find the best sites to practice aquaculture while also improving water quality in the Sound.

NEIWPCC is also funding a study of macroinvertebrates living on the ocean floor of Long Island Sound's Connecticut embayment, which will help scientists evaluate water quality in the Sound.

THE CLEAN WATER ISSUES

- Surveillance for COVID-19 in wastewater
- PFAS “forever” chemicals in drinking water and wastewater residuals
- Definition of Waters of the United States and wetlands protections
- Protection for wastewater workers against COVID-19
- Habitat restoration and green infrastructure projects
- Water and wastewater infrastructure improvements
- Water quality monitoring
- Nitrogen and other nutrient pollution
- Underground storage tanks inspections and regulations
- Lead and copper contamination in drinking water
- Environmental justice
- Droughts, flooding, sea level rise, and other climate change impacts

ENVIRONMENTAL TRAINING

Wastewater Operators

For more than 50 years, NEIWPCC has offered in-person trainings to wastewater operators in the region. Attendees earn training credits to maintain their operator licenses.

In March, when COVID-19 necessitated that we cancel the remainder of our in-person classes, we revolutionized our program, quickly pivoting to offer a slate of virtual trainings.

NEIWPCC launched its first week of live, remote trainings at the end of May with a two-hour introductory wastewater pumps class, followed by a collection systems 101 training.

Operators from Rangeley, Maine, Vermont's Stratton Mountain, and multiple municipalities representing Connecticut and Massachusetts attended these inaugural trainings.

We offered two dozen additional live, online classes in spring and summer of 2020. Topics included basic laboratory and math skills, beginner's wastewater operations, brewery wastewater fundamentals, and water quality requirements for treatment plant permits.

NEIWPCC awarded 2,584 training contact hours to Connecticut operators.

Water Quality Standards

At the beginning of the fiscal year, NEIWPCC hosted a regional, state-led training on water quality standards at our headquarters in Lowell, Massachusetts. More than 20 personnel from state environmental agencies and EPA Region 1 attended the training in person, with others joining remotely.

Many of the training sessions were led by Tracy Iott of the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, who is an active member of several NEIWPCC workgroups.

The idea for the training came out of NEIWPCC's water quality standards workgroup. It acted as a regional supplement to the EPA's national Water Quality Standards Academy, diving into the nuances of how different states in the Northeast codify, promulgate, and implement standards for water quality.

Webinars

Throughout the year, NEIWPCC also held 14 training webinars for environmental professionals regionally and nationwide.

Topics included PPE safe practices for wastewater operators, underground storage tanks, wetlands, pollutant load limits, and climate change resilience and adaptation for water infrastructure.

REPRESENTING STATE INTERESTS

As a commission serving our member states, NEIWPCC represents a regional perspective on proposed water policies to federal parties such as the EPA or Congress.

This past year, we provided comments on regulatory issues such as wetlands protections, harmful algal blooms, water reuse, lead and copper in drinking water, funding for water and wastewater infrastructure, water quality criteria in lakes, and PPE for wastewater workers.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

As a regional commission, one of NEIWPCC's most important roles combines that of facilitator and coordinator, serving the network of water quality professionals working in the Northeast.

We engage and convene these professionals and other stakeholders to collaborate on clean water and environmental science challenges across shared regions, ecosystems, and areas of expertise—through conferences, webinars, meetings of our 19 workgroups, and meetings of our executive committee and commissioners. We also coordinate trainings for state environmental officials, wastewater operators, and others.

As our staff and those of our member states adapted to working remotely and with other COVID-19 restrictions, we also grappled with new clean water issues.

Wastewater treatment plants needed personal protective equipment for their operators, and emergency response plans for staffing shortfalls. As the toilet paper shortage peaked, sewers were clogging with non-flushables. Scientists weren't sure how to safely conduct their spring and summer water quality monitoring, and faced equipment shortages and lab delays. Many state agencies were still conducting environmental permitting on paper, and weren't prepared to continue business electronically. Decades-old citizen science and outreach programs had to be adapted. States started working with universities and private companies to track COVID-19 in wastewater.

NEIWPCC responded to the needs of the states by doing what we do best—helping environmental officials share their experiences and coordinate across state lines.

Our executive committee, comprised of the heads of the water divisions in each of our states' environmental agencies, met every week remotely, responding quickly to new problems.

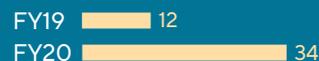
Some of our workgroups met more frequently. For example, our wastewater residuals workgroup increased their meetings from a few times a year to every other week. In April, more than 40 scientists across the region joined in a call to discuss how they could continue field monitoring that spring and summer.

While NEIWPCC had to cancel, postpone, or make virtual the rest of the conferences and meetings we had planned for the year, we ended up holding more opportunities for the states to meet and collaborate than ever before. In April and May alone, we held 34 conference calls and virtual meetings for the states to work on environmental and public health challenges in the face of COVID-19.

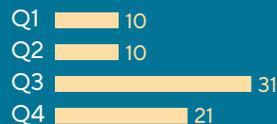
FY2020 BY THE NUMBERS

- 7 member states
- 1, 2 the EPA Regions we work with
- 50 years of the EPA, Earth Day
- 73 years of NEIWPCC
- 72 workgroup meetings for state environmental officials and other water professionals
- 13 comment letters to the EPA, other federal agencies, or Congress
- 2,584 training contact hours awarded to water professionals in Connecticut
- 14 training webinars for state environmental officials
- 140 attendees, Northeast Aquatic Biologists conference
- 49 attendees, Northeast Water Quality Standards Training

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETINGS



WORKGROUP MEETINGS:



0.3%

That's how much of NEIWPCC's funding comes from the annual dues paid by our member states: a combined \$160,345 out of the total \$55,472,276 directed to NEIWPCC in fiscal 2020.

Most of our funding comes from Clean Water Act appropriations or through grants and contracts with federal, state, and other entities. But this small contribution makes Connecticut a member of NEIWPCC's commission, allowing us to do work in Connecticut and for Connecticut to collaborate on clean water issues with the other states in the Northeast.

In September, our executive committee and commissioners voted to keep these dues level for the next five years, in anticipation of the burden that COVID-19 will put on state budgets.