

In the Northeast, watersheds, ecology, and environmental challenges cross state lines. For 65 years, Maine has collaborated on clean water issues with other states in the region through its membership to NEIWPC.

Established in 1947, NEIWPC [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. NEIWPC 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; NEIWPC 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 NEIWPC served Maine and the region during the 2020 fiscal year (Oct. 2019 to Sept. 2020).



DRINKING WATER PROTECTION

Five NEIWPC environmental analysts in Augusta support the Maine Department of Health and Human Services' Drinking Water Program. They help implement the federal Safe Drinking Water Act and other source water protection regulations in the state.

Much of their work involves updating and assessing data, such as water sampling results or permit records, to ensure compliance throughout the state with drinking water regulations.

One analyst serves as a rules specialist, checking that drinking water samples are meeting standards, ensuring that systems are monitoring for contaminants frequently enough, issuing any necessary violations, and communicating regulatory requirements to other health department staff and public water systems through trainings and outreach. The analyst guides and supports Maine schools and daycares that must test their drinking water for lead and copper contamination.

ENVIRONMENTAL TRAINING

Wastewater and Drinking Water Operators

For more than 50 years, NEIWPC has offered in-person trainings to wastewater operators in the region. Our staff in South Portland run the Joint Environmental Training Coordinating Committee (JETCC), which offers training for Maine wastewater and drinking water operators. The Maine JETCC training program includes single day classes, a six-month, 12-session operator school conducted in conjunction with the Portland Water District, and an 11-month Management Candidate School. 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.

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

NEIWPC launched live, remote trainings in May with an introductory wastewater pumps class, followed by a collection systems 101 training. Operators attended from Rangeley, Maine, Vermont's Stratton Mountain, and municipalities representing Connecticut and Massachusetts. We offered two dozen additional live, online classes in spring and summer. JETCC introduced remote, live training in August, offering three before the end of the fiscal year.

Topics included laboratory, math, and chemistry basics; brewery wastewater fundamentals; regulatory and treatment plant overviews; activated sludge process control; and instrumentation control. Through our programs, NEIWPC awarded a total of 4,247 training contact hours to Maine operators.

Twenty-three wastewater and drinking water professionals enrolled in the eleventh JETCC Management Candidate School (MCS) that began in November 2019. A total of 194 environmental professionals from across the state have graduated from the MCS since its inception.

Students of MCS typically meet monthly from November to October, covering advanced treatment topics, management, and skills. The program was interrupted in March due to COVID-19. Due to the value derived from the in-person learning and networking that occurs, the program remains on hiatus and is expected to resume in 2021.

In August, 19 environmental professionals graduated from the Maine Wastewater Operator School, which ran with a combination of live, remote, and self-paced, online courses.

Wastewater Operator Certification

Since 2006, NEIWPCC's South Portland staff has served the Maine Department of Environmental Protection by coordinating certification and renewals for Maine's wastewater operators.

The licensing and renewal process occurs every two years, fiscal 2020 being one of them. Maine state wastewater operators must complete 18 training contact hours as part of the renewal process. This year, NEIWPCC staff renewed 306 certifications, issued 38 new licenses, and granted three state reciprocities. There are 650 active wastewater operators and 154 inactive operators in the state.

Webinars

NEIWPCC also held 14 training webinars for environmental professionals regionally and nationwide.

Topics included PPE safe practices for wastewater operators, wetlands, underground storage tanks, 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.

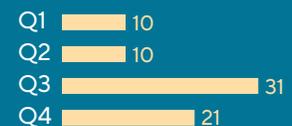
FY2020 BY THE NUMBERS

- 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
- 4,247** training contact hours awarded to water professionals in Maine
- 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 Maine a member of NEIWPCC's commission, allowing us to do work in Maine and for Maine 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.