

In the Northeast, watersheds, ecology, and environmental challenges cross state lines. For 69 years, New Hampshire 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 New Hampshire and the region during the 2020 fiscal year (Oct. 2019 to Sept. 2020).



NEW HAMPSHIRE

MERRIMACK RIVER WATERSHED

Spanning more than 5,000 square miles, from Franconia, New Hampshire down to Newburyport, Massachusetts, the Merrimack River watershed is one of the largest in New England. It is home to more than 2.5 million people, and is the drinking water source for half a million of them.

The watershed once powered the economies of industrial cities such as Manchester. Today, combined sewer overflows during heavy rain events; flooding; nutrient pollution from agricultural runoff, stormwater, and wastewater treatment plants; and other pollutants continue to impair water quality in the Merrimack.

The Merrimack River has seen a resurgence in attention over the last few years, from the public and policymakers alike. Throughout the year, NEIWPC held meetings with the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, and the EPA, establishing a small committee of environmental regulators to discuss problems in the bi-state watershed.

The committee decided on three key issues to address: chloride (road salt) pollution, nutrient loading, and combined sewer overflows.

NEIWPC also weighed in during meetings of Massachusetts' newly formed Merrimack River District Commission, which is developing an integrated decision framework for managing the watershed, as well as a pilot program for a bacteria alert system in Newburyport.

Meanwhile, Manchester, the largest contributor of combined sewer overflows in the Merrimack, will be spending more than \$230 million over the next 20 years to upgrade its wastewater treatment system. Fred McNeill, chief engineer for the city's environmental protection

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
- Arsenic in wells
- Dam removals and maintenance
- 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

division, will oversee that work. He has served as one of NEIWPC's commissioners since 2008.

In September of 2020, at the request of our NH DES and MassDEP commissioners, NEIWPC included work on the Merrimack River in our official priorities for the next five years.

ENVIRONMENTAL TRAINING

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 live, remote trainings in May with an introductory wastewater pumps class, followed by a collection systems 101 training.

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 a total of 145 training contact hours to operators in New Hampshire.

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

In August, we launched a new national training webinar series on the Clean Water State Revolving Fund, a program that helps states finance water infrastructure improvement projects. The first webinar focused on climate resiliency and adaptation for water infrastructure. One of the presenters, Sharon Nall from NH DES, described some of the sustainability programs, funding partnerships, and incentives New Hampshire has used for these kinds of projects.

Other topics from our training webinars this year included PPE safe practices for wastewater operators, underground storage tanks, wetlands, and pollutant load limits.

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.

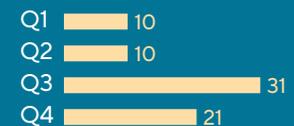
FY2020 BY THE NUMBERS

- 7** member states
- 1, 2** the EPA Regions we work with
- 50** years of the EPA, Earth Day, NH DES
- 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
- 145** training contact hours awarded to water professionals in New Hampshire
- 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 New Hampshire a member of NEIWPCC's commission, allowing us to do work in New Hampshire and for New Hampshire 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.