

In the Northeast, watersheds, ecology, and environmental challenges cross state lines. For 71 years, New York 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 New York and the region during the 2020 fiscal year (Oct. 2019 to Sept. 2020).



PROTECTING NEW YORK'S WATER RESOURCES

NEIWPCC employs more than 50 environmental professionals working to restore and protect New York's water resources. Some of our staff support water resource protection programs for New York City and for the state's health and environmental agencies. But many of our employees work at programs that protect New York's watersheds, from Lake Champlain down to the Peconic Estuary. We also serve as a program partner to these organizations, providing fiscal and administrative support, and connecting them to others protecting clean water in the Northeast.

Lake Champlain

In April, NEIWPCC helped the Lake Champlain Basin Program distribute more than \$50,000 in emergency support grants to 14 partner organizations in Vermont and New York. The groups, many of which rely on field-based outreach work for annual revenue, faced operating shortfalls due to COVID-19.

Hudson River Estuary

Many of our staff at the Hudson River Estuary Program and the Hudson River National Estuarine Research Reserve work on education and outreach efforts that engage community members in researching and protecting their watershed. This year, many of those programs had to change due to COVID-19.

In lieu of visiting classrooms around the region, NEIWPCC staff developed virtual lesson plans and videos that teachers could use to educate their students about the Hudson.

In the spring, our staff and others who work for the Hudson programs had to count the migration of juvenile American eels in the watershed, without their usual team of citizen scientists. They live-streamed the eel count on the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's Facebook page. The staff caught more than 400,000 eels

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
- Harmful algal blooms
- 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

this year, more than any other since the program began in 2008.

Long Island Sound

The Sound's watershed—the rivers, lakes and streams that all drain into the Sound—stretches across six states. NEIWPCC facilitates a workgroup for those states to coordinate nitrogen regulations and water quality improvement projects.

NEIWPCC also supports the Long Island Sound Study (LISS) to restore and protect the Sound and its estuary. In May, one of our environmental analysts who works at LISS developed a mapping tool that can help seaweed and

shellfish farmers find the best sites to practice aquaculture, while also removing excess nutrients from the Sound's waters.

Peconic Estuary

NEIWPCCC serves as host organization for the Peconic Estuary Partnership (PEP). This year, PEP finished updating their comprehensive conservation and management plan, which will serve as a road map for restoring and protecting the Peconic over the next decade. NEIWPCCC supported PEP over the two-year process to update that plan.

ENVIRONMENTAL TRAINING

For more than 50 years, NEIWPCCC 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.

NEIWPCCC 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.

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.

NEIWPCCC awarded 240 training contact hours to operators in New York.

Throughout the year, NEIWPCCC 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, NEIWPCCC 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 NEIWPCCC'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.

NEIWPCCC 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.

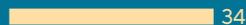
Some of our workgroups met more frequently. For example, our wastewater residuals workgroup increased their meetings from a few times a year to every other week. In April, more than 40 scientists across the region joined in a call to discuss how they could continue field monitoring that spring and summer.

While NEIWPCCC 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, NYSDEC
- 73** years of NEIWPCCC
- 72** workgroup meetings for state environmental officials and other water professionals
- 13** comment letters to the EPA, other federal agencies, or Congress
- 240** training contact hours awarded to water professionals in New York
- 14** training webinars for state environmental officials
- 140** attendees, Northeast Aquatic Biologists conference
- 49** attendees, Northeast Water Quality Standards Training

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETINGS

FY19  12
FY20  34

WORKGROUP MEETINGS:

Q1  10
Q2  10
Q3  31
Q4  21

0.3%

That's how much of NEIWPCCC'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 NEIWPCCC 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 York a member of NEIWPCCC's commission, allowing us to do work in New York and for New York 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.