

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



ENVIRONMENTAL TRAINING

Water Quality Standards

At the beginning of the fiscal year, NEIWPC 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.

The idea for the training came out of NEIWPC'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.

Pete LaFlamme, the head of the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation's Watershed Management Division, led a training session. He serves as a member of NEIWPC's executive committee and current vice chair.

Wastewater Operators

For more than 50 years, NEIWPC 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 our in-person classes, we revolutionized our program, quickly pivoting to offer a slate of virtual trainings.

NEIWPC launched live, remote trainings in May with an 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

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
- Aquatic invasive species
- Agricultural and stormwater runoff
- 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

quality requirements for treatment plant permits.

NEIWPC awarded 12 training contact hours to Vermont operators.

Webinars

Throughout the year, NEIWPC 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.

LAKE CHAMPLAIN BASIN

The Lake Champlain Basin is home to about 600,000 people, approximately 70 percent of whom live in Vermont. Millions more visit the region each year to enjoy its natural resources, beauty, and history. But nutrient pollution, harmful algal blooms, other toxins and pathogens, and aquatic invasive species threaten the watershed—problems that are all exacerbated by climate change.

The Lake Champlain Basin Program (LCBP) partners with organizations in New York, Vermont, and Québec to restore and protect Lake Champlain and its surrounding watershed. The program also administers the Champlain Valley National Heritage Partnership, which builds appreciation and improves stewardship of the region's rich cultural resources.

The LCBP is a program partner of NEIWPCC. We staff the LCBP, handle contracts, grants, and other fiscal and administrative responsibilities for the program, and connect the LCBP to others working for clean water across the Northeast.

In April, NEIWPCC helped the LCBP 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.

Also in April, NEIWPCC, the LCBP, and a partner organization in Québec finalized a binational report on nutrient pollution in Missisquoi Bay, the Northern-most sub-basin of the Lake Champlain watershed. The bay is chronically afflicted by phosphorus pollution and algal blooms. Our staff contributed to recommendations made to the United States and Canadian governments for improving water quality in the bay.

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.

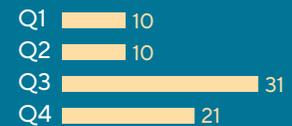
FY2020 BY THE NUMBERS

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