

In the Northeast, watersheds, ecology, and environmental challenges cross state lines. For 66 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.

Whether we are engaging and 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; our staff is dedicated to advancing clean water in New England and New York in collaboration with, and service to, our member states.

Here we share some of the ways NEIWPC is serving Maine and the region.



## 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 water systems are meeting drinking water standards, ensuring that systems are monitoring for contaminants frequently enough, and issuing any necessary violations.

The analyst also conducts training and outreach to ensure other health department employees and public water systems understand new regulations for contaminants like PFAS, lead, and copper. In addition, she guides and supports Maine schools and daycare centers that test their drinking water for lead and copper contamination.

## WASTEWATER AND DRINKING WATER OPERATORS

For more than 50 years, NEIWPC has offered essential training for some of our nation's most essential workers: wastewater operators. We offer basic, intermediate, and advanced courses to train all levels of operators and prepare them for certification exams. Classes cover all aspects of the job, from wastewater treatment chemistry and microbiology, to equipment safety and lab procedures, to more specialized options like brewery treatment or environmental surveillance for COVID-19.

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 wastewater operator school conducted in conjunction with the Maine Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the Portland Water District, and an 11-month Management Candidate School.

## CLEAN WATER CHALLENGES

- Tracing COVID-19 in wastewater
- PFAS "forever" chemicals in drinking water and wastewater residuals
- Water and wastewater infrastructure funding
- Wetlands protections and "Waters of the United States"
- Nitrogen and other nutrient pollution
- Road salt/chloride contamination in surface waters
- Habitat restoration and green infrastructure projects
- Incorporating environmental justice into water resource protection
- Preparing for climate change impacts: droughts, flooding, sea level rise, and other impacts
- Water quality monitoring
- Underground storage tanks
- Lead, copper, and arsenic in drinking water
- Fish hatchery infrastructure
- Streamgauge networks

In 2020, our dedicated training staff quickly pivoted our in-person course offerings to a virtual format so operators could continue to receive training during the pandemic. Last year, we continued to offer mainly virtual courses, with some in-person classes around the region.

MAINE

## WASTEWATER OPERATOR CERTIFICATION

NEIWPCC's South Portland staff is also responsible for certifying and renewing certification for Maine's wastewater workforce, on behalf of the Maine DEP. Operators must earn 18 training credits every two years as part of the renewal process. This year, we renewed certification for 271 operators, issued 30 new certificates, and granted 7 state reciprocities. There are 648 active wastewater operators and 106 inactive operators in the state.

## ADVANCING STATE INTERESTS

Working closely with our member states, NEIWPCC represents a regional perspective on proposed water policies to federal parties such as the U.S. EPA or Congress. This past year, we provided comments on regulatory issues such as wetlands protections, streamgauge monitoring, and water and wastewater infrastructure, including fish hatcheries.

### 0.3%

That's how much of NEIWPCC's funding comes from the annual dues paid by our member states: a combined \$164,172 out of the total \$51,587,481 directed to NEIWPCC in fiscal 2021.

Most of our funding comes from Clean Water Act appropriations or through grants and contracts with federal, state, and other entities. But this small dues 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 other states in the Northeast.

## MAINE COMMISSIONERS

NEIWPCC is governed by 35 commissioners, consisting of five highly experienced environmental professionals from each of our seven member states. Our executive committee, a subset of that delegation, is comprised of water quality professionals from each of our states' environmental agencies. Representing Maine (as of January 2022):

**Brian Kavanah**, representing DEP Commissioner Melanie Loyzim

**Michael Abbott**, representing DHHS Commissioner Jeanne Lambrew

**David Van Slyke**, Preti Flaherty

**Brian Tarbuck**, Greater Augusta Utility District

**Stacy Thompson**, Saco Water Resource Recovery Department

## COLLABORATION ACROSS STATE LINES

Our staff are monitoring efforts in the country to use **wastewater-based epidemiology to trace COVID-19**, also known as **environmental surveillance**, with the goal of helping our states explore how to use this public health tool for pandemic preparation and response. Staff have been attending webinars and conducting research on technical aspects of this tool and held several discussions with our commissioners throughout the year. NEIWPCC's director of Wastewater and Onsite Systems also served as a preceptor for two public health graduate students from Tufts University, who conducted statistical analyses comparing wastewater data to COVID-19 case rates in three communities in Connecticut, Maine, and Massachusetts.

**Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS)** continue to be one of the most critical and quickly developing environmental challenges of today. Our staff has been following the latest research on PFAS pollution and holding regular discussions with our states, helping them coordinate efforts to monitor, regulate, and remove these "forever chemicals" that persist in our waterbodies, wastewater, and drinking water. Much of the effort this year has focused on PFAS in wastewater residuals, as states are working quickly to respond to, and deal with the ramifications of, the fast-paced changes in regulations and public perspective.

The annual **Northeast Aquatic Biologists (NAB) Conference**, our first virtual conference, drew more attendees from in and outside of the region than ever before. More than 230 environmental professionals participated. Topics included biomonitoring, chloride, cyanobacteria, lake monitoring, and restoration.

About 160 people attended our first virtual **Nonpoint Source Conference** this spring. For more than 30 years, this event has provided an opportunity for environmental practitioners in our region to discuss strategies for managing sources of pollution without a single point of discharge – like agricultural runoff, streambank and shoreline erosion, and stormwater.

NEIWPCC coordinates a national webinar series on **total maximum daily loads, or pollution budgets for water bodies**, to help states regulate and monitor water quality. This year, webinars focused on incorporating environmental justice into water quality management, reducing impervious cover and implementing green infrastructure practices, and meaningful state-tribe communication. Similarly, we coordinate two **underground storage tanks (UST)** webinar series and produce a news bulletin to educate the UST professional community across the country.

