For 75 years, Rhode Island has collaborated on clean water issues with other states in the region through its membership to NEIWPCC.

Established in 1947, NEIWPCC [Nū-E-PĬk] is a regional commission that helps the states of the Northeast preserve and advance water quality. We engage and convene water quality professionals and other interested parties from New England and New York to collaborate on water, wastewater and other environmental science challenges across shared regions, ecosystems and areas of expertise.

MONITORING RHODE ISLAND’S LAKES AND STREAMS

A NEIWPCC environmental analyst coordinates Rhode Island’s water monitoring programs, helping to protect and assess the health of the state’s lakes, rivers and streams.

The data collected assists the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RI DEM) in measuring progress on their water quality improvement goals and in prioritizing future efforts.

In collaboration with a team of employees and interns from RI DEM, the analyst coordinates activities including water quality sampling, macroinvertebrate and habitat assessments, and invasive species monitoring.

SOUTHEAST NEW ENGLAND PROGRAM (SNEP)

NEIWPCC has collaborated with RI DEM on several competitive proposals to SNEP. These have resulted in the development of an index of biotic integrity for macroinvertebrates in freshwater low-gradient wadable streams in Southeast New England (Rhode Island and Massachusetts). This index is useful in assessing stream health and allows for an ecoregional comparison of assessments.

Additionally, NEIWPCC and RI DEM were recently successful in a SNEP proposal to address invasive water chestnut in the Ten Mile and Blackstone River watersheds. This project will work collaboratively with local government and nonprofit organizations to better manage and educate the public about water chestnut.

RHODE ISLAND DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH (RI DOH) SUPPORT

NEIWPCC is currently collaborating with RI DOH to provide technical support for the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF) program. This includes providing staff support to manage state priorities and project funds under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL).

CLEAN WATER CHALLENGES

- PFAS (“forever chemicals”)
- Nitrogen pollution
- Climate change impacts
- Source water protection
- Wetlands protection
- Habitat restoration
- Harmful algal blooms
- Invasive species
- Leaking underground storage tanks
- Road salt/chloride contamination
- Outdated water infrastructure
- Barriers to fish passage
- Addressing environmental justice
- Modernizing the Clean Water Act
- Aging workforce

TRAINING WASTEWATER OPERATORS

For more than 50 years, NEIWPCC has offered 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.

This year, NEIWPCC offered 134 courses and 421 Training Contact Hours (TCH) to a total of 83 operators based in Rhode Island. All of these courses were offered virtually.
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 implementing temporary waivers for the Build America, Buy America Act, revising the definition of “Waters of the United States,” and regulating PFAS.

COLLABORATION ACROSS STATE LINES

In 2022, NEIWPCC celebrated its 75th year of clean water work in the Northeast, as well as the 50th anniversary of the Clean Water Act (CWA). In commemoration of these milestones, NEIWPCC produced a series of multimedia content including print publications, videos and a timeline that shared the reflections, experience and expertise of our leadership and commissioners. The series explores the many successes of NEIWPCC over the years and the need to modernize the CWA to meet the challenges of the present day.

In the spring, more than 100 people attended the annual Northeast Aquatic Biologists (NAB) Conference, which focused on aquatic invasive species, climate change and fish monitoring. At the 32nd Annual Nonpoint Source Conference, 110 attendees participated in sessions with themes ranging from environmental justice, modernizing water quality and adapting to climate change.

NEIWPCC held the National State Revolving Fund Workshop, where 75 attendees partook in sessions on nonpoint source pollution, environmental justice and source water protection. Participants also had the opportunity to visit the recently upgraded Peirce Island Wastewater Treatment Facility in Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

In September, 600 people from around the country gathered at NEIWPCC’s largest event of the year, the biannual National Tanks Conference in Pittsburgh. Panels were divided into four main categories: release prevention, release cleanup, funding and cross-program issues. The conference sparked discussion of how to transfer industry knowledge to younger staff as veteran employees begin to retire. Other topics included staffing shortages, aging infrastructure, supply chain shortages and natural disasters.

In partnership with the EPA, NEIWPCC established a Chloride Resources Clearinghouse. This searchable database, housed on the NEIWPCC website, compiles resources on related topics including water softening, chloride reduction, winter maintenance and residential salt usage guidelines.

NEIWPCC staff developed two biosolids surveys which collected data about the amount and disposal methods of sewage sludge produced annually from wastewater treatment plants in all member states. In total, 122 surveys were completed using data from 2018 and 2019 sludge reports. The findings were analyzed and presented at several conferences, as well as shared through our e-newsletter and on our website and social media channels.

Per-and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) continue to present critical environmental challenges. NEIWPCC staff have been monitoring 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 the fast-paced changes in regulations and public perspective.

0.3%

That’s how much of NEIWPCC’s funding comes from the annual dues paid by our member states: a combined $163,719 out of the total $53,457,955 directed to NEIWPCC in fiscal 2022.

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 Rhode Island a member of NEIWPCC’s commission.

RHODE ISLAND COMMISSIONERS

NEIWPCC is governed by 35 commissioners, consisting of five highly experienced environmental and health professionals from each of our seven member states. Our executive committee, a subset of that delegation, consists of the heads of our member states’ environmental agencies, or their representatives. Representing Rhode Island (as of Sept. 30, 2022):

Sue Kiernan, representing acting DEM Director
Terrance Gray

Amy Parmenter, representing acting DOH Director
Utpala Bandy

Janine Burke-Wells, North East Biosolids & Residuals Association

James Kelly, Narragansett Bay Commission

Angelo Liberti, city of Bristol

www.neiwpcc.org