

## WORKING FOR THE REGION

October 2022 – September 2023

For 76 years, Rhode Island has collaborated on clean water issues with other states in the region through its membership with NEIWPCC. Established in 1947, NEIWPCC [NŪ-Ē-PĪK] 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.



# RHODE ISLAND

## 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 and macroinvertebrate and habitat assessments.

## INVASIVE SPECIES MANAGEMENT

A grant from the Southeast New England Program (SNEP) funded the planning and organizing of 10 events last June and July in which volunteers hand-pulled invasive water chestnut from Rhode Island waterways. NEIWPCC and the RI DEM collaborated to oversee the work, located in the Ten Mile and Blackstone River watersheds. In total, 133 community members removed more than forty-six cubic yards of the plants, totaling 463 volunteer hours. NEIWPCC also developed water chestnut management materials to support local government and nonprofit organizations in better educating the public about the invasive plant.

## 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. In 2022, NEIWPCC also developed a new online self-paced course on Wet Weather Operations, which allows operators to earn six training contact hours (TCHs) on their own schedules.

## 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

This year, NEIWPCC offered 127 courses and 660 TCHs to a total of 2,758 operators.

## UNDERGROUND STORAGE TANKS

NEIWPCC hired two environmental analysts to support the RI DEM Underground Storage Tank Program, which protects human health and the environment from leaking tanks. The staff conduct compliance reviews and inspections, review reimbursement applications, maintain quality assurance plans, and collaborate with research and government partners.

## ADVANCING STATE INTERESTS

Working closely with our member states, NEIWPCC represents a regional perspective on proposed water policies to the U.S. EPA or Congress. We provided comments on regulatory issues such as the unintended consequences of directed spending on state revolving funds, revisions to water quality standards to protect tribal reserved rights, and the EPA's proposed maximum contaminant levels for six PFAS compounds.



## COLLABORATION ACROSS STATE LINES

NEIWPCC is governed by its **Executive Committee and Commission**, consisting of five highly experienced water quality professionals from each of its seven member states, who collaborate across state lines to guide our agenda and identify new priorities. These 35 commissioners are leaders in the states' environmental and health agencies, complemented by experts from the private sector. This year, NEIWPCC held three multi-day meetings with the full Commission and an additional four with the Executive Committee alone. Representatives from the EPA's Regions I and II also attended.

The meetings provided a forum for the commissioners to identify and discuss water quality-related concerns; offer guidance to NEIWPCC in implementing strategies, projects and programs; and formulate a regional response to environmental policy initiatives. In particular, the commissioners focused on numerous challenges common to all of their states, including: chloride impairment, PFAS and biosolids, cyanobacteria, staffing shortages, permit programs, climate change and flooding, and invasive species in water bodies. By sharing their perspectives and expertise, the commissioners positioned NEIWPCC to better serve the states in addressing these issues and administering solutions.

In the fall of 2022, NEIWPCC hosted the **11th U.S. Symposium on Harmful Algae**. More than 450 participants attended the 150 presentations focused on the impacts that harmful algal blooms have on a variety of ecosystems. Attendees engaged in conversation around topics such as bloom control and mitigation strategies, public health concerns, and public outreach and communication.

NEIWPCC held the **Northeast Aquatic Biologists Conference**

in February. The event was held in Plymouth, Massachusetts and attended by individuals from all of NEIWPCC's member states' environmental departments, the U.S. EPA, the United States Geological Survey (USGS), academic institutions, and the private sector. The conference focused on topics such as the aging Clean Water Act, river and stream monitoring, nutrient and sediment-loading, and environmental justice.

During the spring, the **33rd Annual Nonpoint Source Conference** was held in Saratoga Springs, New York and drew more than 120 attendees from across the country. The conference addressed environmental justice concerns, with specific panels on topics such as harmful algal blooms, dam removal and nature-based solutions.

In July, NEIWPCC hosted the **National State Revolving Fund Workshop** in Raleigh, North Carolina. Panel discussions and case studies from across the country examined nonpoint source pollution, green infrastructure, environmental justice and technical assistance.

NEIWPCC issued an **updated source water protection toolkit** on the website which is now available for use on its website for municipal and regulatory officials throughout the region. The document provides information and resources to stakeholders on how to better protect drinking water sources in their communities. The toolkit covers issues such as climate change, PFAS, stormwater, septic systems, land use and funding resources.

**Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS)**, often called "forever chemicals," continue to present critical environmental challenges. NEIWPCC hosted meetings with stakeholders to brainstorm a path forward for establishing a regional BioHub facility that would provide testing of new residual destruction technologies. Much of the effort this year has focused on regulations and removal of PFAS in wastewater residuals, as states work to respond to the fast-paced changes in regulations and public perspective.

NEIWPCC continued to take a lead role in working to reduce the number of underground storage tank (UST) releases, hosting **two UST workgroups**, meeting three times to share updates and collaborate on issues, including environmental justice, brownfields program collaboration and regulatory revisions. NEIWPCC also published **two issues of LUSTLine**, which is the publication of record for UST matters nationwide. The issues were made available digitally in PDF form and as individual articles on our website.

NEIWPCC coordinates a national webinar series on **total maximum daily loads (TMDLs)**, or pollution budgets for water bodies, to help states regulate and monitor water quality. Two webinars were held over the last year; one focused on working collaboratively across sectors and political boundaries to develop TMDL implementation plans, and the second presented a watershed prioritization tool. NEIWPCC also held two webinars focused on treatment options for leaking underground storage tank sites and an overview of certification programs for UST service providers.



## .13%

That's how much of NEIWPCC's funding comes from the annual dues paid by our member states: a combined \$151,381 out of the total \$117,277,377 directed to NEIWPCC in fiscal 2023. 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

(as of Sept. 30, 2023):

**Sue Kiernan**, (acting), representing acting DEM Director Terrance Gray

**Amy Parmenter**, representing acting DOH Director Utpala Bandy

**Janine Burke-Wells**, West Warwick

**James Kelly**, Warwick

**Angelo Liberti**, Bristol

NEIWPCC would like to thank Peter LaFlamme for his year of service as the chairperson of the Executive Committee and Commission.