

WORKING FOR THE REGION

October 2022 – September 2023

For 72 years, Vermont has collaborated on clean water issues with other states in the region through its membership with NEIWPC. Established in 1947, NEIWPC [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.



LAKE CHAMPLAIN BASIN PROGRAM

The Patrick Leahy Lake Champlain Basin Program (LCBP), which recently underwent an official name change, is an initiative designed to restore and protect Lake Champlain and its surrounding watershed. The 120-mile lake has a drainage basin more than 19 times the size of the waterbody and in total, around 600,000 residents of Vermont, New York and Québec reside within the watershed.

Lake Champlain is currently experiencing serious environmental threats including nutrient pollution, increased flooding and climate change. As a program partner, NEIWPC helps LCBP address these challenges by managing its personnel, contracts, grants and budgets; and by providing input on the program's activities through the LCBP Steering and Executive Committees. This past fiscal year, NEIWPC executed contracts for 107 LCBP projects and 17 non-LCBP projects, amounting to more than \$7.8 million distributed to on-the-ground organizations in the basin.

The LCBP updated its diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) strategic plan in order to improve related aspects of their work over the next few years. In the summer, the DEI work group supported four free workshops that provided immigrants and low-income community members with supplies and instruction for learning to fish. The LCBP also hosted a Youth Clean Water Summit on the Burlington waterfront, which allowed nearly 200 students from across the region to come together and learn about the significance of clean water in the community.

An additional environmental analyst role was added using funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, which helps support aquatic organism passage restoration throughout the basin. The analyst helps improve native species habitat and water quality by developing and supporting high-priority restoration projects.

AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES MANAGEMENT

Lake Champlain is currently home to 51 known aquatic invasive species (AIS) – non-native plants and animals

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

introduced either intentionally or accidentally – with the constant threat of more entering through nearby waterways. Some of these species pose serious threats to the health of the lake and its inhabitants by outcompeting and overcrowding native species.

Seven species have been identified as a high priority by LCBP: alewife, Asian clam, Eurasian watermilfoil, Japanese knotweed, purple loosestrife, water chestnut and zebra mussel. The round goby also remains a topic of concern as it was detected in the Hudson and Mohawk Rivers and is approaching Lake Champlain.

To help protect against invasive species, LCBP hired 18 boat launch stewards who were positioned at public access locations across Lake Champlain. In total, the stewards were able to survey and conduct hot water decontaminations on more than 12,000 boats, trailers and equipment.

FLOOD RELIEF FOR COMMUNITIES

In July, a slow-moving storm brought more than seven inches of rain and historic flooding to Vermont. The high waters caused widespread property damage and infrastructure failure. During the storm, the Lake Champlain Long-Term Monitoring Program operated three lake-based meteorological stations, which were able

VERMONT



to collect essential data on flood levels. To aid in recovery efforts, the LCBP offered up to \$100,000 in grant awards to support organizations that were affected by the flood events.

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.

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

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. They are leaders in the states' environmental and health agencies and experts from the private sector. This year, NEIWPCC and the full Commission held three multi-day meetings and an

additional four with the Executive Committee, with representatives from the EPA Region I and II in attendance.

The meetings provided a forum for the commissioners to identify and discuss water quality-related concerns; guide NEIWPCC 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.

In the fall of 2022, NEIWPCC hosted the **11th U.S. Symposium on Harmful Algae**. More than 450 participants 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 in Plymouth, Massachusetts and 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 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 examined nonpoint source pollution, green infrastructure, environmental justice and technical assistance.

NEIWPCC issued an **updated source water protection toolkit**, for municipal and regulatory officials throughout the region. The document provides information and resources on how to better protect drinking water sources in their communities, covering 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.

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. One webinar 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.

0.13%

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 Vermont a member of NEIWPCC's commission.

VERMONT COMMISSIONERS

(as of Sept. 30, 2022):

Peter LaFlamme (chair), representing DEC Commissioner Jason Bachelder

Lori Cragin, representing DOH Commissioner Mark Levine

Dennis Lutz, South Burlington

Two vacancies

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