

WORKING FOR THE REGION

October 2023 – September 2024

For 73 years, Vermont 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.



LAKE CHAMPLAIN BASIN PROGRAM

LCBP is an initiative designed to restore and protect Lake Champlain and its surrounding watershed. The lake faces serious environmental threats including nutrient pollution, harmful algal blooms, aquatic invasive species, increased flooding and climate change. This year, 23 NEIWPCC staff worked on the LCBP initiative, including executing contracts for 159 projects, amounting to more than \$11.3 million which was distributed to on the ground organizations in the basin.

LCBP also publishes the State of the Lake Report every few years to inform citizens and resource managers about the health of the lake. The most recent report was published in June and documents the impacts of climate change and nutrient pollution. The report also includes positive findings such as decreased mercury levels in all monitored sport fish.

Research to understand the impact of emerging contaminants including PFAS, pesticides, microplastics, and pharmaceuticals is progressing. PFAS monitoring in drinking water, surface water and fish from the lake is being conducted to assess the potential health impacts and develop recommendations to protect human health and aquatic life.

AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES MANAGEMENT

Lake Champlain currently has 51 known aquatic invasive species (AIS), with the constant threat of more entering through nearby waterways. Some pose serious threats by outcompeting native species for resources and overcrowding certain areas.

Seven invasive plants and animals have been identified as a high priority by the Lake Champlain AIS Rapid Response Task Force. The round goby remains a concern as it was detected in the nearby Hudson and Mohawk Rivers.

Twenty-one Lake Champlain Basin Program boat launch stewards greeted and delivered AIS spread prevention messages to more than 40,000 people launching and retrieving boats from Lake Champlain. Stewards conducted more than 20,000 watercraft inspections at 14 sites around

CLEAN WATER CHALLENGES

- PFAS/emerging contaminants
- Nutrient pollution
- Climate change impacts
- Source water protection
- Harmful algal blooms
- Invasive species
- Leaking underground storage tanks
- Wetlands protection
- Road salt/chloride contamination
- Habitat restoration
- Outdated water infrastructure
- Barriers to fish passage
- Stormwater runoff

Lake Champlain in Vermont, Quebec and New York. AIS were intercepted more than 900 times during watercraft inspections.

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 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 launched a virtual management training series, designed to help operators develop advanced skills to grow in their positions. And, a new self-paced course, "Wastewater Ethics," allows operators to earn six training contact hours.

NEIWPCC offered 134 courses to a total of 22 operators based in Vermont.

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

NEIWPCC staff operate the Resource Room at the ECHO, Leahy Center for Lake Champlain in Burlington, offering programs, exhibits, hands-on activities and a library of materials for visitors to learn about the lake and the surrounding area.

VERMONT



LCBP also held several events for the public, including a celebration of World Water Day; and a “Love the Lake” speaker series, which focused on topics including fisheries, aquatic invasive species, archeological history and recent flooding events.

The Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Workgroup supported four free workshops that provided instructions to immigrants and low-income communities on fishing safety and regulations. LCBP also awarded three grants to liaisons who will build relationships between the program and disadvantaged communities.

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 and Congress. We provided comments on regulatory issues, including the unintended consequences of directed spending on state revolving funds, the need for increased funding of state and tribal wetland protection programs, proposed Lead and Copper Rule improvements and the budget for water-related state revolving funds.

COLLABORATION ACROSS STATE LINES

NEIWPCC is governed by its **Executive Committee and Commission**, consisting of five 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. 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 commissioners 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 common challenges, including PFAS and biosolids, cyanobacteria, permit programs, climate change and

flooding, and invasive species in water bodies. With this expertise, NEIWPCC is positioned to better serve the states in addressing these issues and administering solutions.

In November, NEIWPCC hosted the **National Nonpoint Source Training Workshop** in Minneapolis. The event brought together more than 300 federal, state, tribal and territorial professionals from across the country. Sessions focused on environmental justice, coastal management, climate change and updates to current guidance.

NEIWPCC held the **Northeast Aquatic Biologists Conference** in Vermont, in February. Topics covered the impacts of climate change, macroinvertebrate indices and monitoring efforts. The event also offered two pre-conference meetings on coding with R programs and streamgage data.

The **34th Annual Nonpoint Source (NPS) Conference** took place in April, with the theme of “Climate Resiliency Through NPS Outreach and Implementation.” Presentations included dam removal, classroom engagement and cranberry bog restoration, and local town engineers provided a hands-on look at innovative stormwater management practices such as permeable parking lots and catch basins.

Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) continue to present critical environmental challenges. NEIWPCC and partners established a Biosolids Technology Hub, an information clearinghouse providing published literature, technology vendors and project summaries for regulators and clean water practitioners to find solutions for PFAS in municipal biosolids or sludge. Our staff also planned and moderated sessions at the Northeast Conference on the Science of PFAS.

The **Clean Water Success Stories Project** shared the accomplishments of total maximum daily loads (TMDLs), or pollution budgets, from across the country. NEIWPCC produced three TMDL case studies, infographics, a StoryMap and a social media campaign. In addition, the second season of the Clean Water Pod podcast explored successes of TMDLs for nutrients.

NEIWPCC coordinated a **national webinar series** which delved into developing and implementing a TMDL, and incorporating climate change impacts.

NEIWPCC hosts more than 20 **workgroups and collaboratives** to improve regional communication and state-federal engagement on critical water-related topics. The meetings, held virtually and in-person, gave participants a forum to discuss numerous issues including emerging contaminants, harmful algal blooms, stormwater, onsite wastewater and wetlands.

Two workgroups specifically focus on **underground storage tanks (UST)**, which store fuel at gas stations and marinas, and the challenges of leaks contaminating soil and groundwater. NEIWPCC also produced two issues of LUSTLine, the international UST industry publication.

In the summer, NEIWPCC hired 30 **interns and seasonal staff** across four states. The majority served as aquatic invasives species boat launch stewards with the Lake Champlain Basin Program. Others worked on education and outreach, the Long Island Garden Rewards Program, water chestnut removal, communications, data collection and contract processing. These paid positions provided relevant training and career experience for college students.

0.12%

That is how much of NEIWPCC’s funding comes from the annual dues paid by our member states: a combined \$160,608 out of the total \$129,095,545 directed to NEIWPCC in fiscal 2024. 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, 2024):

Peter LaFlamme (chair), representing DEC Commissioner Jason Batchelder

Lori Cragin, representing DOH Commissioner Mark Levine

Dennis Lutz, South Burlington

Two vacancies