Fall 2025

NEIWPCC

Interstate Waters

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Maine Joint Environmental Training Coordinating Committee Marks Forty Years of Training Clean Water Operators

ALSO:

Navigating Towards the Future: NEIWPCC Announces New Five-Year Strategic Plan

NEIWPCC 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 environmental science challenges across shared regions, ecosystems, and areas of expertise.

Interstate Waters

Volume 9, Number 2, Fall 2025

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

This October marks the 40th anniversary of the Maine Joint Environmental Training Coordinating Committee (JETCC), providing high quality, affordable instruction for wastewater operators throughout the state. While the content and technology may have changed over the years, JETCC remains committed to meeting the needs of the utilities in educating staff on operations and maintenance fundamentals. In this issue, you can read about the founding of the program, development of the curriculum, and continued growth and expansion to serve the farthest reaches of the state.

NEIWPCC is releasing its new 2026-2030 strategic plan outlining our top priorities for advancing clean water in the Northeast. Developed by our commissioners and staff, the plan reflects our current regional and national activities in support of our mission and will guide our efforts over the next five years.

The Northeast has been experiencing extreme weather events over the last few years, several of which led to disastrous flooding in Vermont. The resulting damage revealed vulnerabilities and the unpreparedness of many wastewater plants to handle these storms. In response, NEIWPCC is investigating how to begin the process of integrating infrastructure resilience into emergency planning. By setting up a system of "mutual aid," utilities can build connections, request and receive assistance from both within and without their states quickly and efficiently, and improve their overall collective ability to respond to disasters.

As we move into the fall of 2025, we remain as committed as ever to our vision of clean and sustainable water throughout the Northeast as outlined in our new strategic plan, while taking on the new challenges brought by extreme weather events. Join me in appreciation for all of our dedicated staff and commissioners, who work hard to protect our public health, critical infrastructure, and environment.

Best regards,

NEIWPCC Executive Director

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Volume 9, Number 2

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Honoring 40 Years of Restoring the Long Island Sound

In June, NEIWPCC joined senior officials from the EPA, Connecticut and New York, along with many other partners, in Rye, New York to celebrate 40 years of progress in restoring and protecting the Long Island Sound. The Long Island Sound Partnership (formerly the Long Island Sound Study) presented a new Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP) that sets a 10-year roadmap to revitalize the Sound as an ecological, economic and recreational resource.

Since its founding, the Partnership has – through successful implementation of a CCMP – decreased the area of unhealthy levels of dissolved oxygen by half, restored 2,400 acres of coastal habitat, protected an additional 8,000 acres, and reconnected 448 miles of rivers and streams.

Celebrating the Long Island Sound Partnership. From left to right: Robert Burg, Hope Savercool, Alex DuMont, Susan Sullivan, James Ammerman, Julianna Stucki, Ian Dulin, Amy Magin and Anya Grondalski.

Annual Nonpoint Source Conference

The 35th Annual Nonpoint Source (NPS) Conference, held in Freeport, Maine, featured perspectives from the arts, sciences and humanities. Presentations focused on resilient shorelines and using nature-based solutions to prevent erosion, such as minimizing land use and overland flow contributions as well as installing native vegetation; how science and the arts can jointly inspire environmental stewardship; indigenous stories teaching environmental protection; and the role of art in addressing environmental challenges.

Concurrent sessions throughout the conference allowed attendees to delve into specific areas of interest. Topics included managing aquatic ecosystems using traditional ecological knowledge, empowering green infrastructure champions, building community support for watershed restoration, and communicating water pollution reduction successes through visual storytelling.

Rhode Island PFAS River Monitoring Project

In partnership with the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM), NEIWPCC launched a new project to assess baseline concentrations of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in rivers across the state. Establishing these baseline conditions is a key first step toward understanding the scope and scale of PFAS contamination in Rhode Island's freshwater systems.

Contractor GZA GeoEnvironmental Inc. will develop and implement an EPA-approved Quality Assurance Project Plan to ensure accurate and usable data. GZA staff will perform sampling and analysis at roughly 15 river sites. The project will produce a high-quality baseline dataset on PFAS concentrations in Rhode Island rivers, providing a foundation for future water quality monitoring and regulatory efforts. This data will help identify potential sources of contamination, support targeted response strategies, and inform long-term planning to protect aquatic ecosystems and public health.

Monitoring PFAS in Rhode Island rivers.

Budget Cuts on Clean Water Act Programs

In response to the President's fiscal year (FY) 2026 Discretionary Budget Request and the EPA's FY 2026 Budget in Brief, NEIWPCC sent a letter to all members of the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate voicing concern about potential impacts to state and interstate Clean Water Act (CWA) programs.

The proposed budgets contained significant cuts to the Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) and the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF), as well as several additional grants. In addition to funding drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater improvements, the SRF programs also provide states with flexibility to fund projects with direct water quality benefits including nonpoint source, estuary programs, and the implementation of watershed plans that will improve water quality.

Under the President and EPA's proposals, funding to all states for the combined CWSRF and DWSRF would be reduced by 87%. The proposed elimination of State and Tribal Assistance Grants (STAG), particularly CWA Sec. 106, 319, and 604(b), would also have profound effects on interstate, state, and other water programs across the country. These grants currently support essential water quality programs including permitting, compliance, enforcement, monitoring, nonpoint source pollution control, and watershed planning.

NEIWPCC's letter outlined the variety of ways in which the funds are used to implement the CWA, including training and licensing more than 2,800 wastewater treatment plant operators in FY 2024 alone. It also explained how the loss of these critical funds would detrimentally impact public health, the environment, and growing economies.

Reducing Phosphorus Through Floodplain Restoration

Lake Champlain waters have been impaired by excess phosphorus, largely due to the number of surrounding farmlands. Normally, floodplains can absorb and store excess nutrients carried in floodwater, while also mitigating flood risks to nearby areas. In many places, however, connectivity between streams and their floodplains has been disrupted by development and structures such as levees and floodwalls.

A recent LCBP project, in partnership with the Poultney Mettowee Natural Resources Conservation District and Fitzgerald Environmental, examined the suitability of floodplains in Vermont's Flower Brook watershed to be reconnected to the stream. Researchers performed a series of geomorphic assessments at different sites to determine each area's potential for habitat restoration work. The assessments collected data on stream channels and floodplains, recording flow levels, soil substrate, flora, channel constrictions like culverts and hydrologic characteristics.

Hilary Solomon, manager of the Poultney Mettowee Natural Resources Conservation District, and NEIWPCC Environmental Analysts Mae Kate Campbell and Sonya Vogel, cross a stream channel during a quality assurance field assessment.

Bioextraction Projects Examine Potential Benefits

Nutrient pollution resulting from wastewater, fertilizer and stormwater runoff has long been problematic for the water quality of the Long Island Sound and its coastal bays, harbors, and tidal estuaries. Bioextraction counters the degradation by growing and harvesting shellfish and seaweed, which remove nitrogen and other nutrients from the waters. Two recent studies examined these benefits.

In one project, researchers evaluated sugar kelp, cultivated and harvested from the Sound, for its potential use as a fertilizer amendment for commercial-use opportunities. A nutrient analysis in tomatoes revealed that phosphorus, zinc, and sulfur levels were significantly higher with the sugar kelp treatment, improving flavor and taste.

A second study investigated the potential for a commercial bioextraction industry in Long Island Sound. The analysis identified the most effective seaweed and shellfish species based on their nitrogen uptake potential, growth rate, and habitat suitability; leading the researchers to conclude that they could be cultivated profitably. The reports are available on NEIWPCC's Resource Library webpage. Both research projects were funded by the EPA to NEIWPCC in partnership with the Long Island Sound Partnership.

Researcher sizes tomatoes in the sugar kelp fertilizer study.

Annual Report Details Scope of NEIWPCC's Work

NEIWPCC's 2024 annual report is now available, both online and in print, summarizing how the scope of work supports the mission of clean and sustainable water throughout the seven member states. The report details new and ongoing research on topics such as aquatic invasive species, habitat restoration and water quality testing. It also describes state-led drinking water programs in Maine, New York and Rhode Island, as well

as updates from the wastewater training team. Other efforts focused on implementing environmental restoration and educational programs throughout the region. Additionally, it highlights conferences and events; and workgroups collaborating on issues such as emerging contaminants, underground storage tanks and nonpoint source pollution. The report also provides a financial summary of NEIWPCC's operating revenues.

New Clean Water Pod Podcast Episodes

In the March episode of the "Clean Water Pod" podcast, listeners learn about reducing phosphorus loading to waterways in Green Bay and Madison, Wisconsin using adaptive management practices. Both utilities highlight the role of voluntary cover crop planting and no-till farming as part of the implementation of their respective Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs). They also emphasize the success of collaboration and community engagement in water quality improvement projects and the cost-effectiveness of adaptive management.

The June episode features Dillon Reservoir in Colorado, which serves as a drinking water source for Denver. Despite an increase in development and population in the watershed, the reservoir's water quality has remained consistent since the 1980s. Discussion focuses on the state's nutrient control regulations that proactively protect the reservoir's water quality, preventing more costly restoration. Guest speakers credit a strong stakeholder group that brings together a variety of perspectives and innovations, as well as effective wastewater treatment and a phosphorus trading program.

Assessing Habitat Connectivity in the Long Island Sound

The Long Island Sound Partnership (LIS Partnership) and its partners produced a new report, the "Assessment of Existing Coastal Habitat Connectivity Data and Models for Feasibility and Use in the Long Island Sound." The document identifies relevant habitat connectivity models and datasets and uses them to develop pilot connectivity models for tidal wetland and riverine corridor habitats. This helps to guide land protection decisions by highlighting areas with the greatest ecological value and potential for effective stewardship. The report supports the habitat connectivity ecosystem target under the 'Thriving Habitats and Abundant Wildlife' goal outlined in the LIS Partnership Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan. The report is available in NEIWPCC's Resource Library.

Long Island Sound.

Summer Internships Provided Training and Career Experience

This past summer, 31 interns and seasonal staff joined NEIWPCC to gain first-hand training and career experience in various aspects of environmental work. Based out of four states, these paid positions range from wastewater treatment and invasive species management to business operations and communications.

Two interns participated in a new Emerging Water Professionals Internship Program at the Nashua, New Hampshire Wastewater Treatment Facility. They were provided with training and resources to prepare for New Hampshire's Grade 1 Operator License exam. At Lake Champlain, 24 aquatic invasive species boat launch stewards in Vermont and New York educated visitors, collected data, and inspected and decontaminated watercraft for aquatic organisms.

Boat Launch Stewards with the Lake Champlain Basin Program collect aquatic invasive species via canoe and kayak.

Water Operators Convene in Northern Maine

NEIWPCC and Maine's Joint Environmental Training Coordinating Committee (JETCC) hosted the 2025 North Country Convention (NCC). More than 160 environmental professionals gathered in Presque Isle for technical sessions, presentations, to connect with vendors, network with their colleagues, and earn training contact hours. Attendees could also participate in a wastewater laboratory track, which provided instruction and hands-on learning on biological oxygen demand, solids analysis, and testing for basic wastewater characteristics like pH and dissolved oxygen. The convention was coordinated in partnership with Maine Water Environment Association and the Maine Water Utilities Association.

Video Describes Science Education on the Hudson River

Every spring, students in New York pull on waders and drag a seine net through the Hudson River in search of glass eels, participating in an annual community science effort for youth to connect and engage with their local watersheds. NEIWPCC Environmental Analyst and Hudson River Estuary Program Education Associate Rebecca Houser, who has more than 20 years of experience in the field, describes the impacts of this project in a new video, featured on NEIWPCC's website and social media.

Staff Advocate for Water Policy in Nation's Capitol

This past spring, Executive Director Susan Sullivan and Environmental Analysts Ryan Buckley and Daphne Short attended the National Water Policy Fly-In in Washington, D.C. The event is organized by a coalition of national water associations, including the Water Environment Federation and the National Association of Clean Water Agencies.

The NEIWPCC delegation met with members of Congress and/or their staff, including Representatives Katherine Clark, Richard Neal and Lori Trahan of Massachusetts, and Representative Jared Golden of Maine. During the meetings, NEIWPCC staff and their colleagues educated representatives on current legislation that was being voted on in Congress. One of those bills, which then passed, called for accurate labeling on packaging for flushable wipes, to prevent the destruction of wastewater pumps and collection system components.

Environmental Analysts Ryan Buckley, Daphne Short and Executive Director Susan Sullivan at the National Water Policy Fly-In in Washington, D.C.

Rewarding Residents for Reducing Stormwater Runoff

The annual Garden Rewards Program gives Long Island property owners financial incentive to reduce stormwater runoff, a primary contributor to nitrogen pollution in local waterways. This initiative offers a reimbursement of up to $500 for implementing eco-friendly solutions such as rain barrels, native plantings, and rain gardens. Now in its third year, the program is a collaborative effort between NEIWPCC, the Long Island Sound Partnership the Long Island Regional Planning Council, and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. Capturing rainwater with rain barrels and rain gardens, or by slowing down runoff with native plant gardens, reduces the amount of water flowing across a yard. These actions decrease the level of nitrogen pollution entering local waterways and help conserve water.

Floating Classroom on Lake George

In New York's Adirondack Mountains, more than 2,000 students and adults participated in the Floating Classroom and Stream Education programs, run by the Lake George Association. Activities ranged from conducting stream water quality monitoring to collecting zooplankton from a 40' custom-built catamaran, while learning about the larger Lake Champlain watershed.

The programs primarily engage students in grades 3-12, along with their teachers and chaperones, in field trips during the spring and fall. The first part is spent aboard the floating classroom to learn about the lake ecosystem, and the second half of the program explores stream water quality. Summer Floating Classroom trips were also offered to camps and the public as well as a new adult-focused program.

The project was funded by an agreement awarded by the U.S. EPA, to NEIWPCC in partnership with the Lake Champlain Basin Program.

For more information about these stories, visit NEIWPCC's website at www.neiwpcc.org to view the "News" page. Sign up for NEIWPCC's monthly e-newsletter, Streamlined, at the bottom of the homepage.

Maine Joint Environmental Training Coordinating Committee Marks Forty Years of Training Clean Water Operators

JETCC Mission

To help protect the environment, public health, and quality of life in Maine by coordinating affordable, high-quality training that meets the needs of environmental professionals throughout the state.

By Peter Zaykoski

It's just after 8 a.m. on a beautiful Maine fall morning and the training room at Portland Water District is slowly filling with students who are about to start the first of three days of instruction on basic wastewater treatment. Their class is focused on the purpose and history of wastewater treatment, professional certification, and wastewater basics including sampling.

Water professionals such as these students have been attending classes held by Maine's Joint Environmental Training Coordinating Committee (JETCC) for forty years. While the details in the content and the teaching technology have certainly changed since the 1980s, many of the fundamentals have not and would be recognizable to the student's peers of the past.

Establishment of JETCC

In the years following the enactment of the Clean Water Act in 1972, utilities across the country built wastewater treatment plants, and the first cohort of water professionals entered the field, making major progress in cleaning up the nation's waterways.

In 1983, the Maine Water Environment Association (MEWEA, previously called the Maine Wastewater Control Association), the Maine Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), and the New England Regional Wastewater Institute (NERWI), a NEIWPCC program, began discussions about the availability and adequacy of training for clean water professionals in the state. Out of this collaboration, a bill (LD 1837) to create JETCC was taken up in the legislature and ultimately signed by Governor Joseph Brennan in 1984. The Maine Joint Environmental Training Coordinating Committee (JETCC) was born.

Henry Warren, the Maine DEP commissioner, appointed a committee composed of agency officials, utility managers, and professional association representatives who developed the initial plans for the training curriculum. The committee completed surveys of utilities in the state and developed a training approach to meet the needs of the professionals in the state. The committee selected NEIWPCC as the entity to implement the program through NERWI.

JETCC's training calendar was launched in the fall of 1985, and the first class offered was "Wastewater Treatment: Your Number One Investment," held in Portland. From the very beginning, JETCC's approach focused on recruiting volunteers from the clean water industry as instructors and relying on partners throughout the state to donate training spaces.

Peter Zaykoski is the program manager of NEIWPCC's South Portland office.

Workforce Development

Throughout JETCC's history, it has focused on advancing the careers of clean water professionals and helping to educate new staff on operations and maintenance fundamentals to be successful at their facilities. Every year, JETCC offers two dozen or more regular training opportunities focused on wastewater treatment processes and troubleshooting, collection system topics, and current issues, such as biosolids management. Many operators are required by the state to be certified. JETCC frequently provides preparation classes for certification exams.

In recognition of an impending wave of retirements of the first cohort of water professionals, JETCC established a Management Candidate School in 2009 to prepare the next generation of mid-career professionals for management roles in their utilities. A year later, the program scope was expanded to serve both clean water and drinking water staff. Classes cover topics ranging from personnel management to budgeting and rate setting.

The program also offers instruction related to technical topics such as geographic information systems, blueprint reading, and supervisory control and data acquisition (SCADA) systems. The in-person format and additional elements, such as conference attendance, provide an additional opportunity for the students to form connections with their colleagues and practice skills, like interacting with vendors that are important in management roles. The current class graduates at the 2025 MEWEA Fall Convention in September and joins the more than 230 water professionals who have completed the program before them.

The need for new operators in the industry has been strong as mid-career professionals move up in their organizations. Throughout JETCC's history, it has offered introductory programming for new operators. Multiday training series concepts coalesced in 2017 into the most recent of JETCC's flagship programs: Wastewater Operator School, initially developed largely by the Maine DEP and the Portland Water District. The program is composed of 12 sessions over six months, focused on fundamentals in wastewater treatment and operations. The next iteration will be offered again based out of Portland Water District in early 2026.

Serving All of Maine

Maine's unique geography and demography present challenges for JETCC to achieve the element of its mission to serve professionals throughout the state. North of Bangor, the population density drops and travel distance for services increases. Aroostook County, Maine's largest, caps the state and is characterized by vast forests with a swath of agricultural land that follows the eastern border with Canada.

In order to serve the northern reaches of the state, JETCC began one of its first flagship programs in 1990: the North Country Convention. Since then, this training conference has been held nearly every other year in Presque Isle, Maine, most recently this past April. Many utilities in Aroostook County provide both drinking water and wastewater services. As such, the convention's focus has grown to ensure training opportunities for operators who work on both sides of the industry.

Community Support

In the last decade alone, JETCC programs have had more than 6,100 attendees and awarded more than 48,000 hours of continuing education credits. This success would not be possible without the support and efforts of the clean water and drinking water community in the state of Maine and the Northeast region more broadly. The original collaborative relationships among Maine DEP, MEWEA, and NEIWPCC continue to this day and are critical in the success of the program. Relationships with other organizations in the state, including the Maine Water Utilities Association, have blossomed and led to a broader scope of services for JETCC programming and advanced the connection among water professionals. Ultimately, JETCC's success is due to the innumerable volunteers who have provided instruction, input on curricula, provided training spaces, and monetary support over the last 40 years.

Back at the Portland Water District, the students are finishing their first day of training. The students may not know it, but they may have just started relationships that will support them over the next several decades of their careers. Peers that they meet in their class, that they will meet again in a couple of weeks, may show up once again in a decade in Management Candidate School. Five years later, they may be calling those same individuals seeking guidance on a tough situation or help when something goes wrong. And perhaps, after seeing the power of sharing knowledge through training, they find themselves in front of a classroom, providing instruction to the next generation of water professionals.

Navigating Towards the Future: NEIWPCC Announces New Five-Year Strategic Plan

By Michele Levy and Beth MacBlane

Five years ago, as the nation was under the veil of the COVID-19 pandemic, NEIWPCC released a new strategic plan along with the rollout of a full rebranding effort. A lot has changed since then – from moving on from COVID, to incorporating online virtual trainings and meetings alongside in-person events. In those five years, NEIWPCC's successes included installing resilient shorelines along the Hudson River, conducting bioextraction research in the Long Island Sound, helping the region evaluate biosolids management and address flooding.

NEIWPCC's work continues to evolve as the challenges facing our member states shift. These new issues are incorporated with ongoing topics in NEIWPCC's new strategic plan that outlines the top priorities for advancing clean water in the Northeast for 2026-2030. This updated roadmap centers on four strategic priorities designed to help protect and enhance ecological and public health amid rapid environmental and economic change.

"This strategic plan puts into focus our priority impact areas that protect and improve water quality and the well-being of people who live in the Northeast," said Susan J. Sullivan, NEIWPCC executive director.

Building off the strategic priorities and goals from the 2020 plan, the new version goes a step further by incorporating detailed tactics that clarify how NEIWPCC will continue to strive towards clean and sustainable water throughout the region. It builds awareness for the breadth and depth of NEIWPCC's work and impact, aligning the entire team around that work, regardless of how and where they support it.

Michele Levy is the president and brand strategist of Caravan Brand Partners.

Beth MacBlane is an information officer with NEIWPCC's Division of Communications and Outreach.

2026-2030 Strategic Priorities

- Inspire and inform collective action for clean, sustainable water.
- Advance scientific monitoring and data collection to drive effective strategies for responding to water quality conditions.
- Ensure that we and our partners have sufficient, sustained financial resources to advance our collective work.
- Strengthen the clean water workforce.

As Sullivan explains, "We are so spread out across the region, it can be challenging for members of our team to understand how their role is woven into the bigger picture. This strategic plan has been designed to help everyone — whether they support business operations in our headquarters office or they're collecting data out in the field — understand how the work they do every day ensures access to clean water for all."

The plan was voted upon and unanimously approved by the organization's Executive Committee and Commission – governor-appointed representatives from each of the seven member states – during their September meeting.

Charting the Course

A steering committee comprised of NEIWPCC commissioners and staff developed the new guiding document, bringing together diverse experience and expertise from various states, sectors and NEIWPCC divisions. The five commissioners serving on the committee represent a combined 42 years of experience with NEIWPCC.

The group included Fred McNeill, retired chief engineer for Manchester, New Hampshire's Environmental Protection Division; Mike Bisi, former superintendent of the Sanitation Department for Glastonbury, Connecticut; Jane Stahl, environmental policymaker, regulator and consultant, and previous deputy commissioner of Connecticut's Department of Energy and Environmental Protection; Patricia Cerro-Reehil,

former executive director of the New York Water Environment Association (NYWEA); and Rich Lyons, retired executive director and project manager for the Albany (New York) County Water Purification District and a past president of NYWEA.

Working in tandem with NEIWPCC staff and a strategic planning consultant, the committee conducted group input sessions and individual conversations to engage division directors, project managers, and employees in the planning process. They also fielded a survey to ensure that the final priorities, goals, and tactics included in the plan reflected current projects and programs as well as those anticipated in the next five years.

Director of Business Operations Samantha Thompson, who led the committee for the 2020 strategic update, said, "For this plan, we not only wanted to include new priority work we should begin to focus on but also weave in the essential program work that we should continue to focus on, which added a new level of detail about specific projects and grants throughout the document."

That new perspective is reflected in a number of ways across the strategic plan. For instance, NEIWPCC's Water Program Priorities, traditionally reported in a separate operational document articulating the programmatic goals of the organization, have been incorporated into the plan. There was significant overlap between the two documents; this approach allows NEIWPCC to present a more comprehensive picture of its efforts.

Stahl reflected, "In true NEIWPCC fashion, the staff's thoughtful leadership, inclusive approach, and depth of knowledge resulted in an effective process and a high-quality product."

Inspiring Action for Clean Water

Ensuring clean water requires that everyone — from policymakers to wastewater operators to consumers — understand the impact of their decisions and actions. NEIWPCC plays a meaningful role in that work through its ongoing community engagement and outreach strategies that educate stakeholders.

Central to this priority — "Inspire and inform collective action for clean, sustainable water" — is NEIWPCC's core work with the states, local, regional and national partners, and with the more than 20 workgroups NEIWPCC hosts on water-related topics. The associated goals and tactics outline how the organization will apply and disseminate scientific knowledge, address emerging environmental issues, and deliver on their commitment to education and collaboration.

For example, every spring since 2008, students, teachers and community volunteers wade into the Hudson River and its tributaries to count migrating juvenile American eels as part of the Hudson River Eel Project. Not only do the participants learn about the unique life cycle of eels, but they also learn about how these small fish connect and support ecosystems, and actions they can take to improve water quality. This community science and outreach program is supported by NEIWPCC staff with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's Hudson River Estuary Program and the Hudson River National Estuarine Research Reserve.

Work under this priority also encompasses regional efforts that protect public health, such as drinking water and wastewater treatment facility upgrades, and collaborating with partners to prepare for updates to the federal Clean Water Act. This 1972 landmark law has driven much of NEIWPCC's work over the past five decades.

Advancing Science

The priority, "advance scientific monitoring and data collection to drive effective strategies for responding to water quality conditions," is at the heart of why NEIWPCC was established by an Act of Congress in 1947. By understanding the scope and scale of interstate environmental conditions, NEIWPCC is poised to implement restoration projects, address contaminants of emerging concern, and prepare for and manage the impacts of shifting weather patterns. The work under this priority demonstrates NEIWPCC's leadership in the industry and dedication to science-driven solutions.

As an example of these efforts, when it comes to measuring and managing nitrogen inputs, the Long Island Sound Partnership (LIS Partnership) – a NEIWPCC program partner – is one of a limited number of large-scale water quality success stories nationwide. The success at the LIS Partnership illustrates how NEIWPCC's regional focus and recognized ability to effectively collaborate across state lines helps achieve the related goal of "supporting integrated planning, adaptive

Volunteers pull invasive water chestnut.

NEIWPCC intern Sara Piehler at Tivoli Bays, Hudson River National Estuarine Research Reserve.

management, and monitoring to protect and restore watersheds and waterbodies."

Richard Friesner, NEIWPCC director of Water Quality Programs explains the complexity of this effort. "Most of the Long Island Sound watershed by land is north of Connecticut, but the majority of the nitrogen inputs come from point sources in Massachusetts and locations south of Connecticut. NEIWPCC was one of many partners that came together as a regional clean water community to regulate these geographically diverse point sources, and ultimately, the Partnership was able to meet its goals for reducing the nitrogen load to the Sound."

Meanwhile, NEIWPCC staff at the Lake Champlain Basin Program (LCBP) collect samples for the long-term monitoring program that documents water quality across the lake and its tributaries. This data is used by the LCBP, state agencies, universities, and others to measure ecosystem health, assess trends, and document the effects of management actions aimed at reducing pollution to the lake.

Strategic Planning Committee

Staff:

- Maryann Dugan
- Ian Dulin
- Richard Friesner
- Beth MacBlane
- Amy Magin
- Samantha Thompson

Commissioners:

- Mike Bisi
- Patricia Cerro-Reehil
- Rich Lyons
- Fred McNeill
- Jane Stahl

Building the Workforce

Currently, NEIWPCC hosts essential wastewater operator training regionally and administers the training programs in Massachusetts and Maine. Over the course of the next five years, the organization will continue to create training programs while also expanding its support of initiatives and partnerships that promote technical proficiency.

In the American Water Works Association "State of the Water Industry 2024" survey, workforce development ranked in the top 10 challenges due to industry retirements and the need for digital skills. Given the urgent need to attract and retain skilled workers to both NEIWPCC and the field, the strategic plan outlines priorities and goals for strengthening the clean water workforce.

Through a new training and technical assistance grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), NEIWPCC is developing online trainings to help operators run an effective facility. NEIWPCC is also expanding technical assistance focused on collection systems, especially for rural, small, and tribal wastewater treatment facilities.

"The self-paced trainings are being created specifically for Northeast operators," explained Christina Stringer, NEIWPCC's director of Wastewater and Onsite Programs. "They are geared towards smaller systems prevalent throughout the region, and include examples these operators can relate to, especially when it comes to responding to extreme weather and other natural hazards."

Participants in a soil evaluator course.

Sustained Financial Resources

To achieve the goals and tactics outlined in this plan, NEIWPCC and its partners must have sufficient, sustained financial resources. Activities under this priority include working with state and federal partners to ensure resources are used wisely, leveraging new funding streams, and coordinating with member states to implement funded activities.

For example, in June 2025 the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management contracted with NEIWPCC to manage a new project to assess baseline concentrations of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in rivers across the state. Establishing these baseline conditions is a key first step toward understanding the scope and scale of PFAS contamination in Rhode Island's freshwater systems, aligning with both organizations' goals.

A Powerful NorthStar

"NEIWPCC's strategic plan clearly demonstrates the commitment and clear direction of the organization's future-focused priorities," said Cerro-Reehil. "This document sets the course for long-term objectives and guides our entire team, regionwide, on the organization's long-term goals."

Friesner adds, "The mission and strategic plan are our NorthStar, guiding us along."

During the development of NEIWPCC's plan, EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin announced a new initiative to achieve the agency's mission, through the guidance of five "pillars." NEIWPCC's strategic priorities clearly are in line with and seek to fulfill the vision for "clean air, land, and water for every American," as well as an emphasis on "permitting reform, cooperative federalism, and cross-agency partnership."

Sullivan, who has worked at NEIWPCC for more than 35 years, said, "I am confident that NEIWPCC will be able to face the challenges ahead, as it has done for 78 years. We have an incredible team of smart, dedicated professionals to get the job done. The new strategic plan sets out our course for advancing the region's top environmental priorities for the next five years and beyond."

Visit NEIWPCC's website to read the 2026-2030 strategic plan.

Mutual Aid: Preparing Wastewater Treatment Plants for Emergency Response

By Sarita Croce, David Aucoin, Gary Marino and Thomas Guthlein

In July of 2023, a flood event in Vermont impacted the operational capabilities of 28 wastewater facilities and rendered one treatment plant irreparably damaged. Flood events like these often reveal vulnerabilities within water and wastewater infrastructure. While emergency response plans exist, many facilities are ill-equipped to handle such disasters effectively. Several factors contribute to this unpreparedness: priorities, resource allocation, and systemic oversight.

In response, NEIWPCC's Executive Committee and Commissioners directed NEIWPCC to investigate why the plants were unprepared to contend with severe flooding. An initial evaluation revealed that it stemmed from a combination of systemic neglect, underfunding, inadequate planning, and the focus on immediate human needs during a disaster. Addressing water utility issues requires a paradigm shift towards integrating infrastructure resilience into emergency planning, ensuring that water and wastewater systems are as ready in advance as the electric utilities, fire, and police.

Per the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) National Centers for Environmental Information, in 2023 there were 28 individual weather and climate disasters (hurricanes, tornados, winter storms, etc.) with at least $1 billion in damages, and 27 such events in 2024. Back in Vermont, the Department of Environmental Conservation recorded another nine wastewater treatment facilities breakdowns in 2024, due to flooding or high flows, leading to raw sewage discharges. These continuous and growing challenges emphasize the need for significant and sustained investment in disaster preparedness.

In addition to the effect on water and wastewater infrastructure, heavy precipitation can significantly impact the water quality of surface waters. With high flow and powerful downpours during an event, sediments and atmospheric air pollutants can enter waterways, altering the physical and chemical conditions of the water. According to NOAA, more than $200 billion in damage was caused nationally by extreme rain and flooding from 2000 to 2019. And "due to more intense and more frequent severe storms and flooding, it has been estimated that the annual costs of these events in the U.S. will rise from $32 billion [in damages] in 2020 to $41 billion by 2050."

Preparedness

In order to continue to provide the water treatment and wastewater services communities depend on, water utility infrastructure needs to be ready and protected from the impact of severe weather events. This means developing scenarios and procedures which allow utilities to respond to various

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disasters, and building connections between utilities, states, and communities to get help.

Developing the scenarios and procedures for a water utility's response to a weather emergency involves a multifaceted approach centered around preparedness, response, and recovery. Examples of the key preparedness components of the approach include the following:

- An Emergency Response Plan is a crucial component of preparedness. It outlines strategies, resources available, roles and responsibilities, and all the procedures for preparing and responding to incidents including weather emergencies.
- Risk identification, which includes categorizing potential weather-related hazards and their potential impact on the utility's infrastructure and operations. This includes evaluating previous emergencies and applying any areas for improvement into the procedures.
- As an output to the risk identification, incident action checklists can be developed for different types of weather events. These checklists provide step-by-step guidance for emergency personnel during an event.
- Contingency plans should also be developed to address various scenarios such as extended power outages, fuel shortages, or disruption to chemical supply chains.
- Communications protocols should be established to ensure that the required information is relayed to the public and key stakeholders.
- Ensure that the facility has redundancy and back-up power for all critical equipment and systems. This includes evaluating fuel reserves and for wastewater facilities storage capacity.
- Identify alternate water sources for drinking water facilities. This includes looking at bulk water haulers, bottled water supplies, and interconnections with neighboring utilities in the event of service disruption.
- Training exercises/drills so that personnel understand and can implement the procedures.
- Establish mutual aid agreements to ensure access to resources and personnel during an emergency.

Mutual aid is an extremely important component of the preparedness approach, because in times of crisis, collaboration and swift action are paramount. Since no single state or utility has the capacity to handle every possible disaster scenario on its own, mutual aid fills gaps in capabilities and ensures that none are left to face a crisis alone. Utilities are able to request and receive assistance from both within and outside their state quickly and efficiently.

These systems include:

- The Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) is a federal framework that enables states to help each other by providing mutual aid during emergencies and disasters. EMAC was established in 1996 and ratified by Congress.
- Water and Wastewater Agency Response Networks

(WARNs) are voluntary, state-level mutual aid networks that connect water and wastewater utilities. These networks enable utilities within a state to share resources, expertise, and personnel during emergencies. By responding swiftly and effectively to crises, disruptions to water services utilities can be minimized.

The Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC)

"EMAC is the first national disaster-relief compact since the Civil Defense and Disaster Compact of 1950 to be ratified by the U.S. Congress. Since ratification and signing into law in 1996 (Public Law 104-321), 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, U.S. Virgin Islands and the Northern Mariana Islands have enacted legislation to become EMAC members."

EMAC helps states and their utilities during governor-declared states of emergency or disaster. The National Emergency Management Association (NEMA) administers the Emergency Management Assistance Compact. Water and wastewater agencies do not directly activate EMAC. All EMAC requests and offers of assistance must go through their respective State Emergency Management Agency (EMA). It is crucial for utilities to establish relationships with their local and state EMAs before an emergency to streamline this process.

The EMAC process is divided into the following categories:

- **Types of resources shared:** Under EMAC, water and wastewater agencies can share a wide range of resources, including:
- **Personnel:** skilled operators, engineers, lab technicians, maintenance crews and administrative support.
- **Equipment:** pumps, generators, water treatment units, lab testing equipment, vehicles, heavy machinery and specialized tools.
- **Materials:** pipes, fittings, chemicals, spare parts and potable water.
- **Technical expertise:** knowledge and experience in areas such as system assessment, repair and restoration.
- **Pre-event preparation:** EMAC has training courses which assist utilities with the development of emergency response plans and Mission Ready Packages (MRP). An MRP outlines the mission and resource description, resource type as defined by the National Incident Management System (NIMS), NIMS job position/qualifications, space/size needed, limiting factors, logistical support needs, personnel rotation requirements, equipment requirements, maintenance needs, commodities, travel, lodging, meals and all associated costs. Finally, EMAC in each state has regularly scheduled training exercises to build connections and improve collective ability to respond to disasters.
- **Activation:** To receive resources through EMAC, a state's governor must declare an emergency or disaster which authorizes funds to be expended for response and recovery efforts and activating EMAC. Prior to the declaration, the affected state opens an event in the online EMAC Operations System (EOS), alerting both the National Coordinating State (NCS) and National Emergency Management Association (NEMA).
- **Request and Offer:** Once resource requests are sourced to EMAC, the request and offer process is initiated. States will evaluate their ability to help. If the utility has MRPs this process takes less than a minute. The requesting and assisting state emergency management agencies complete the EMAC Resource Support Agreement (RSA) for accepted offers of assistance. The complete RSA constitutes a legally binding agreement between the two states.
- **Response:** Once the RSA is complete, staff/resources can be deployed to the state requesting assistance. Deploying personnel receive a briefing and an EMAC Mission Order Authorization Form (Mission Order), and are taught how to track expenses and maintain documentation. During the response, deployed personnel are required to maintain contact with their home state emergency management agency.
- **Reimbursement:** After returning to their home state, deployed personnel (and any other resource providers) submit a reimbursement package to the assisting state. The packages are reviewed/audited and then reimbursement

Photos are of different locations in Vermont following some of the worst flooding in the state's history.

is processed. However, a state's obligation to pay EMAC reimbursements is not contingent upon the receipt of federal funds.

- **Post Event Evaluation:** This comprehensive process helps all participants to learn from their experiences. As a result, they can continuously improve best practices and improve future disaster response efforts.

The strength of EMAC and the quality that distinguishes it from other plans and compacts lay in its governance structure; its relationship with federal agencies, national organizations, states, counties, territories, and regions; the willingness of state and response and recovery personnel to deploy; and the ability to move any resource from one state to assist another state.

One of EMAC's most significant advantages is the legal and financial framework it provides. When states assist one another under EMAC, they are protected from liability issues, and reimbursement processes are clearly defined. This ensures that states can focus on providing aid without worrying about legal or financial complications. The compact also allows the licenses from states to be easily transferred, which allows operators to fully engage in the response.

Water and Wastewater Agency Response Networks (WARN)

In February 2006, eight major water organizations signed the Joint Policy Statement on Mutual Aid and Assistance Networks, encouraging utilities and local/state governments to establish intrastate systems. This led to the creation of WARN, which are state organizations. When disasters strike, the WARN framework is uniquely set up to immediately provide assistance. This can include equipment, technical expertise, or even personnel to help restore operations. WARN membership can include both public and private utilities. Similar to EMAC, WARN agreements have liability protections and allow for reimbursement.

WARNs reduce the cost of response by enabling utilities to share resources rather than purchasing or renting expensive equipment. This is key for municipal utilities which may not have deep pockets and can be strained financially by emergencies. The goal is to quickly access the tools they need to respond effectively.

WARNs operate similar to the EMAC process, but on a more localized scale:

- **Pre-event Preparation:** Since WARN member utilities do not have to wait for a state-declared emergency, this allows for early preparation and increased resilience.
- **Activation:** When a utility requests assistance from its state WARN and another member utility is able to assist, the entire duration of the responding utility's deployment is known as the "period of assistance." During this time, all aspects of the WARN Mutual Aid Agreement are adhered to by both parties. This includes valuable aspects such as worker's compensation insurance coverage and indemnification of potential equipment damage.
- **Request and Offer:** Utilities that are part of their state WARN programs have the unique ability to request assistance prior to, during, and after an emergency. Fellow WARN member utilities are never obligated to provide assistance. If the WARN program is unable to fulfill the request, it is routed directly to the EMAC level of support.
- **Response:** Once a request for assistance is made through the WARN network, a utility that is able to respond may do so during the period of assistance. During this time,

the responding utility may retract all assistance if needed, without being held liable for any reason.

- **Reimbursement:** Following a WARN mutual aid event, reimbursement for personnel and equipment costs may be requested by the responding utility. However, seeking reimbursement in most state WARNs is optional.

Infrastructure Replacements

Critical infrastructure located in flood-prone areas should undergo comprehensive evaluation and modeling to identify and prioritize capital projects that best provide hazard mitigation and ensure protection against 100-year and 500-year storm events. Integration of replacement strategies into disaster preparedness is not just about resilience but also operational integrity and public health.

To achieve comprehensive disaster preparedness, water and wastewater utilities should extend beyond immediate response protocols and include strategic, long-term investments to systematically rehabilitate or replace aging infrastructure which is fundamental to achieving flood resilience. The deterioration of existing water infrastructure compounds the risks posed by flooding. Integrating the replacement of aging assets into disaster preparedness strategies is essential to mitigate the risk and establish flood resilience and accelerate recovery during emergencies.

In addition, flood mitigation measures requiring major capital and infrastructure investments should be fully incorporated into the utility's overall asset management planning and scheduling processes. While physical infrastructure is vital, effective flood resilience also depends on policy framework, updated emergency response protocols, and inter-agency coordination.

Conclusion

Both WARN and EMAC have regularly scheduled training exercises that help build connections and improve collective ability to respond to disasters. These networks embody the spirit of collaboration, ensuring that utilities can overcome challenges together. By joining and engaging with these organizations, utilities can protect public health, safeguard critical infrastructure, and build stronger, more resilient communities.

NEIWPCC also developed a video with information on both EMAC and WARN. To view the video, visit NEIWPCC's YouTube channel at www.youtube.com/c/neiwpcc, or www.youtube.com/watch?v=TKQCxe1VG_E.

Joining EMAC and WARN

Below are the contact details and websites to join EMAC and WARN for the New England states and New York.

WARN Contacts

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CTWARN

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https://health.ri.gov/drinking-water-quality/information/emergency-information-public-water-systems/rhode-island

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www.dhses.ny.gov/federal-guidance-and-resources

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vem.vermont.gov/

Ryan Bell, program manager, and **Colleen Bradley**, environmental analyst, represented the New York State Department of Health at the Chautauqua Institution Lake Conference to discuss drinking water source protection.

Ryan Bell

Alyssa Bement, environmental analyst and New York State Department of Health drinking water specialist, was quoted in the WAMC/Northeast Public Radio article, "After challenges, Albany County Town of Bethlehem approves water protection plan."

Colleen Bradley

Commissioner **Janine Burke-Wells** presented about navigating PFAS challenges in biosolids management as part of a Water Environment Federation (WEF) webcast.

Alyssa Bement

Ann-Marie Caprioli, environmental analyst and Hudson River National Estuary Research Reserve program coordinator, received NEIWPCC's Annual Achievement Award at the 2025 All Staff Meeting. Caprioli received nominations for her dedication, collaboration and professionalism leading grants administration and operations at the Reserve.

Janine Burke-Wells

Colleen Hickey, information officer and Lake Champlain Basin Program education and outreach coordinator, presented a jeopardy style event as part of the "Love the Lake" speaker series.

Aidan Mabey, environmental analyst, moderated several sessions during the North Country Convention in Maine.

Sarah Mount, environmental analyst and Hudson River National Estuarine Research Reserve science educator, co-authored the journal article, "The Hudson River Eel Project: A community science framework for management and education," published in the Fisheries magazine.

Sarah Mount

Maude Salinger, information officer and Hudson River Estuary Program communications and citizen participation, was a co-producer of the film, "Connected – The Hudson River Estuary Program."

Commissioner **Stacy Thompson** was featured in a New England Water Environment Association (NEWEA) Water Champions video.

Matthew Vaughan, environmental analyst and Lake Champlain Basin Program chief scientist, delivered a presentation on de-icing salt to the Vermont Senate Natural Resources and Energy Committee. He also presented at the Federation of Vermont Lakes and Ponds 2025 Lake Seminar about the water quality impacts of de-icing salt in Lake Champlain and its tributaries.

Matthew Vaughan

Peter Zaykoski, South Portland program manager, testified in front of the Maine State Legislature's Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources. He spoke about the funding included in the Maine biennial budget bill that NEIWPCC receives to support the Maine Joint Environmental Training Coordinating Committee.

Peter Zaykoski

Commissioner **David Van Slyke** provided welcome remarks at the Annual Nonpoint Source Conference, and Commissioner **Thomas Ballestero** presented at the event. **Jim Brangan**, information officer and Champlain Valley National Heritage Partnership coordinator, presented "Art and Residency." **Lauren Jenness Kneen**, environmental analyst at LCBP, gave a presentation, and Environmental Analysts with the New York State Department of Health **Madeline Silecchia** and **Colleen Bradley** presented a poster.

David Van Slyke

Thomas Ballestero

After 32 years of service to the Patrick Leahy Lake Champlain Basin Program and NEIWPCC, Education and Outreach Coordinator **Colleen Hickey** recently retired from her position at the Lake Champlain Resource Room, located in the ECHO Leahy Center. In recognition of her accomplishments in engaging the public with the lake throughout her career, it has been renamed the **Colleen Hickey Lake Champlain Resource Room**.

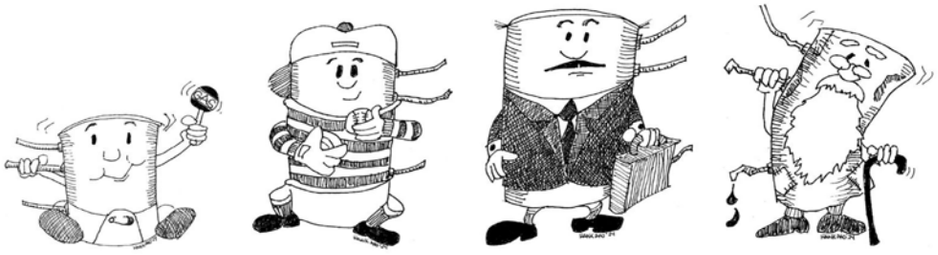
During her tenure, Hickey focused on coordinating media outreach, school programs, educator trainings, and public outreach programs that improved understanding of the Lake Champlain watershed. Between the programs she created and implemented, the staff she supervised, and partner initiatives she supported, Hickey's work has reached tens of thousands of individuals.

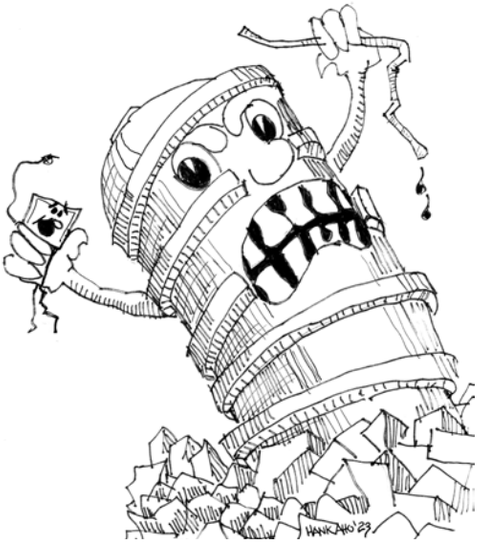
Meeting the Man Behind the Drawings: L.U.S.T.Line Cartoonist Hank Aho

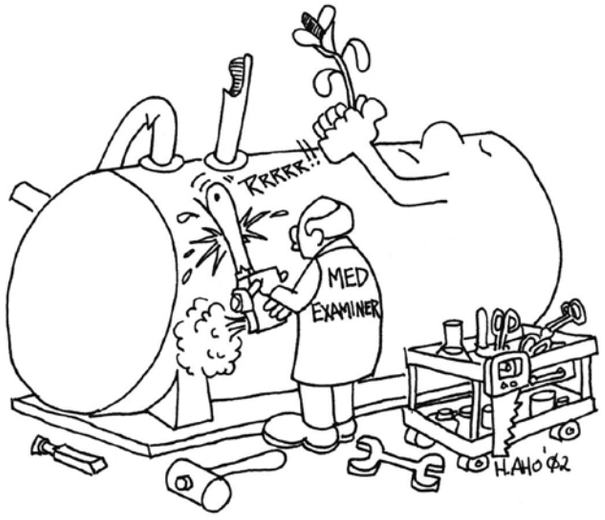
For more than 30 years, LUSTLine — the publication of record for the (leaking) underground storage tank (LUST and UST) community — has been dotted with cartoons poking fun at the complexities and intricacies of the world of underground storage tanks.

The latest issue introduces readers to longtime cartoonist Hank Aho, his passion for drawing, and his career in hazardous waste remediation with the Maine Department of Environmental Protection. From artistic renderings of tank workers grappling with on-the-job struggles to personifications of tanks reacting to the changing industry, Aho's work has brought a recognizable and humorous flair to an otherwise dense and technical publication.

To read the entire profile of Aho, view a gallery of his cartoons, or read the latest issue of LUSTLine, go to the publications section of www.neiwpcc.org.







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EVENTS

2025

Sept. 22-25, **National Tanks Conference**, Spokane, Wash., www.neiwpcc.org

Sept. 27-Oct. 1, **WEFTEC Annual Technical Exhibition and Conference**, Chicago, Ill., www.weftec.org

Oct. 6, **New England Water Environment Association Joint Asset Management and IT Workshop**, Holliston, Mass., www.newea.org

Oct. 19-22, **National Onsite Wastewater Recycling Association Onsite Wastewater Mega-Conference**, Sandusky, Ohio, www.nowra.org

Oct. 20-22, **Association of State Drinking Water Administrators Annual Conference**, Long Beach, Calif., www.asdwa.org

Oct. 27-30, **National Nonpoint Source Training Workshop**, Baton Rouge, La., www.neiwpcc.org

Oct. 29-30, **Restore America's Estuaries Living Shorelines Tech Transfer Workshop,** New Haven, Conn., www.estuaries.org

Nov. 4-7, **North American Lake Management Society Conference**, Myrtle Beach, S.C., www.nalms.org

Nov. 6, **Green Mountain Water Environment Association Fall Tradeshow**, South Burlington, Vt., www.gmwea.org

Nov. 9-13, **American Water Works Association Water Quality Technology Conference and Exposition**, Tacoma, Wash., www.awwa.org

Nov. 18-19, **Northeast Residuals and Biosolids Conference, Exhibit and Tour,** Worcester, Mass., www.newea.org

Nov. 19-21, **NACWA Clean Water Law and Enforcement Seminar**, Nashville, Tenn., www.nacwa.org

2026

Jan. 25-28, **New England Water Environment Association Annual Conference**, Boston, Mass., www.newea.org

Jan. 26-27, **Lake Champlain Research Conference**, Burlington, Vt., www.uvm.edu/seagrant

Feb. 4-5, **Maine Water Utilities Annual Tradeshow and Conference**, Augusta, Maine, www.mwua.org

Feb. 4-6, **Northeast Aquatic Biologists Conference**, Westbrook, Conn., www.neiwpcc.org

March 8-11, **Annual WateReuse Symposium,** Los Angeles, Calif., www.watereuse.org

March 24-27, **WEF/AWWA Utility Management Conference,** Charlotte, N.C., www.wef.org

April 7-9, **Annual Nonpoint Source Conference**, Plymouth, Mass., www.neiwpcc.org

April 14-16, **The Science of PFAS: Public Health and the Environment,** Worcester, Mass., www.newmoa.org