WORKING FOR THE REGION

October 2024 – September 2025

RHODE ISLAND

For 78 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-PĬK] is a regional commission that helps the states of the Northeast preserve and advance water quality. We engage and convene water quality professionals and other interested parties from New England and New York to collaborate on water, wastewater, and other environmental science challenges across shared regions, ecosystems, and areas of expertise.

MONITORING LAKES AND STREAMS

NEIWPCC supports the state's water monitoring programs, protecting and assessing the health of lakes, rivers, and streams. The data collected assists the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM) in measuring progress on their water quality improvement goals and in prioritizing future efforts. We also coordinate activities including water quality sampling, and macroinvertebrate and habitat assessments, in collaboration with RIDEM.

LEAD TESTING IN CHILDCARE AND SCHOOL FACILITIES

The Rhode Island Department of Health offers a voluntary, statewide program that tests the drinking water in facilities used by children. Lead exposure can cause lifelong health problems that are particularly serious for infants and young children. NEIWPCC assisted with finalizing and publishing a remediation policy that allows grant funds to be used to replace qualifying fixtures at no cost to the facility. We also develop and implement policies, provide guidance on grant activities, create contracts, and assist in communication efforts.

UNDERGROUND STORAGE TANKS

NEIWPCC supports the RIDEM Underground Storage Tank Program's Financial Responsibility Fund. This reimbursement program that provides assistance to owners of regulated tanks that experience a petroleum release with eligible cleanup costs. Our work involves reviewing quarterly claim submissions, as well as drafting internal policies and procedures, proposing legislative changes, and developing project agreements to improve the efficiency and accessibility of the fund.

INVASIVE SPECIES REMOVAL

A grant awarded to NEIWPCC by the Southeast New England Program funded the planning and management of 16 events from May through August, in which volunteers hand-pulled invasive water chestnut from waterways. NEIWPCC and RIDEM collaborated to oversee the work, located in the Ten Mile and Blackstone River watersheds. In total, 256 community members removed an estimated 23 cubic yards, totaling approximately 6,500 pounds of plant material. NEIWPCC also developed water chestnut management materials to support local government and nonprofit organizations in better educating the public about the invasive plant.

CLEAN WATER CHALLENGES

- PFAS/emerging contaminants
- Nutrient pollution
- Extreme weather events
- 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

TRAINING WASTEWATER OPERATORS

NEIWPCC provides 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, which are available in-person, online, or in a self-paced format, cover all aspects of the job, from chemistry and microbiology to equipment safety and lab procedures. This year, 25 operators based in Rhode Island participated in a total of 21 courses throughout the region.

Additionally, we offer training and technical assistance for rural, small, and tribal wastewater treatment plants to help them achieve and maintain regulatory compliance. Our staff provided tailored assistance to help communities identify and prioritize solutions to challenges within their collection systems. NEIWPCC also began developing six comprehensive self-paced online training courses that will provide nationwide access to much-needed education and training resources.

NE IW PCC

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 Clean Water Act Section 401 certification process, federal budget requests, water-related state revolving fund programs, PFAS human health water quality criteria, and the definition of Waters of the United States.

COLLABORATION ACROSS STATE LINES

NEIWPCC is governed by its **Executive Committee and Commission**, who collaborate to guide our agenda and identify new priorities. They are leaders in the states' environmental and health agencies, complemented by experts from the private sector. NEIWPCC held three meetings with the full Commission and representatives from the EPA's Regions I and II.

The commissioners discussed water quality-related concerns; advised NEIWPCC in implementing strategies, projects, and programs; and formulated a regional response to environmental policy initiatives. In particular, the commissioners focused on challenges including PFAS and biosolids, cyanobacteria, permit programs, and invasive species in water bodies.

A committee of staff and commissioners developed a new **Strategic Plan** for fiscal years 2026-2030. It outlines four priorities focused on inspiring action, scientific monitoring and data collection, workforce development, and ensuring financial resources. Supporting goals and tactics provide a roadmap for achieving NEIWPCC's mission to advance clean water in the Northeast.

In October, NEIWPCC hosted the **12th U.S. Symposium on Harmful Algae** in Portland, Maine with the theme of "One Bloom: Unifying Harmful Algal Bloom (HAB) Science in Aquatic Ecosystems." More than 500 participants discussed HAB management and mitigation, emerging toxins, predictive modeling, and public health threats.

The annual **Northeast Aquatic Biologists Conference** took place in February, with more than 170 aquatic and environmental biologists in attendance. The event, which was held in Bartlett, New Hampshire, covered topics such as chloride impacts on streams, cyanobacteria, HABs, and long-term monitoring networks.

NEIWPCC held the **35th Annual Nonpoint Source Conference** in Freeport, Maine during April, with the theme "Nonpoint Source Pollution and Clean Water: Perspectives from the Arts, Sciences and Humanities." More than 120 watershed professionals attended sessions focused on water pollution reduction success stories, watershed restoration, and aquatic ecosystem management.

The **28th National Tanks Conference** brought nearly 700 professionals to Spokane, Washington to collaborate on timely issues facing the underground storage tanks (UST) industry. NEIWPCC also manages **two workgroups** focused on preventing leaking underground storage tanks and **publishes LUSTLine**, a newsletter that promotes the exchange of information in the UST community.

The third season of the **Clean Water Pod** podcast highlighted stories from across the country that showcased innovative approaches with the Clean Water Act 303(d) program. NEIWPCC also coordinated a **national webinar series on total maximum daily loads** for professionals who regulate and monitor water quality.

NEIWPCC revised the **Technical Report 16: Guides for the Design of Wastewater Treatment Works** manual, which includes sections on procurement of services, sanitary sewers and collection systems, wastewater pumping stations, and treated effluent resource recovery. The revisions include updates to align with current industry technology and practices, eliminate out-of-date materials, and add new concepts such as alternative forms of procurement and contaminants of emerging concern. The guide is written for engineers who design wastewater treatment plants, state regulators who review and approve designs, and municipalities that are soliciting professional design services for wastewater treatment facilities.

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. Wastewater staff were also involved in several working groups.

In response to the Vermont 2023 floods, NEIWPCC was asked to investigate mechanisms to assist wastewater and drinking water facilities in responding to severe weather events. NEIWPCC has been working with our partners in the Water and Wastewater Agency Response Networks (WARN) and Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) to increase awareness about these **state and federal mutual aid response networks** and help utilities fill the gaps in their capabilities.

NEIWPCC hosts virtual and in-person meetings for more than 20 different **workgroups and collaboratives** to improve regional communication and state-federal engagement on critical topics related to water.

.12%

That is how much of NEIWPCC's funding comes from the annual dues paid by our member states: a combined $151,561 out of the total available funding to NEIWPCC during fiscal year 2025 in the amount of $128,975,971. 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, 2025):

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

Amy Parmenter, representing acting DOH Director Jerome Larkin

Janine Burke-Wells

James Kelly

Angelo Liberti