

SNEP Steering Committee Meeting March 10, 2021, 9:30-12:00

Welcome and Roll Call

- Association to Preserve Cape Cod (APCC): Andrew Gottlieb
- Buzzards Bay National Estuary Program: Joe Costa
- Cape Cod Commission: Erin Perry and Kristy Senatori
- EPA Office of Research and Development: Walter Berry and Laura Erban
- Massachusetts Coastal Zone Management (MassCZM): Adrienne Pappal
- Marthas Vineyard Commission: Adam Turner
- Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP): Andrew Osei and Matt Reardon
- Narragansett Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve: Caitlin Chaffee
- NEIWPPC: Sue Sullivan and Emma Gildesgame
- New England Environmental Finance Center: Martha Sheils
- Natural Resources Conservation Service Massachusetts: Tom Akin
- Restore America's Estuaries: Tom Ardito
- Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management: Sue Kiernan
- US Army Corps of Engineers: Larry Oliver
- US Fish and Wildlife Service: Suzanne Paton
- US Geological Survey: Jeff Barbaro
- Waquoit Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve: Tonna-Marie Surgeon-Rogers
- EPA Region 1: Mel Coté, MaryJo Feuerbach, Margherita Pryor, Adam Reilly, Ian Dombroski
- EPA SNEP ORISE: David Morgan, Shasten Sherwell

Announcement of New Steering Committee Members

- Waquoit Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, Tonna-Marie Surgeon-Rogers
- School for the Environment at UMass Boston, Bob Bowen
- Narragansett Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, Caitlin Chaffee
- MA CZM, Adrienne Pappal
- Mashpee Wampanoag Natural Resources Department: Dale Oakley (replacing Chuckie Green who has retired)
- MassDEP: Matt Reardon
- RI Coastal Resources Management Council: Leah Feldman

Congressional Update: Upcoming Infrastructure Bills and Other News

- EPA's SNEP team would like to include congressional staff updates as a regular part of our Steering Committee meetings.
- A member of the Steering Committee felt it would be best to begin tailoring certain communications (newsletters, one pagers, etc.) to inform congressional staff.
- Several members felt it would be best to invite both the RI and Mass delegations to each meeting, include both state and federal representatives, and to keep a standing time slot for congressional updates.

ORISE Research Project Update: Harmful Algal Blooms

- Speaker: Shasten Sherwell, ORISE Fellow
- Research focus and current actions:
 - o Evaluate the impact and extent of Harmful Algal Blooms in the SNEP Region, beginning by focusing on cyanobacteria.
 - o Compile information about the current monitoring programs in the region. Looking at methods/protocols they use, the common problems, and common needs.
 - o Currently working with the Cyanobacteria Monitoring Collaborative to connect with more entities in the SNEP region. Helping by developing and organizing the Collaborative Mini-Conference, making training videos, and connecting other cyanobacteria research and monitoring efforts in the region
 - o Will be working with ORD Narragansett Lab in developing buoys with low-cost sensors to track exponential growth and predict algal blooms
 - o Plans to do an evaluation on the economic impact of cyanobacteria blooms in the region
- New Funding Opportunity: National competition, 15% of funding to NEPs is set aside for competitive grant program towards a specific list of emergent issues to include HABs. Eligible to state, inter-state, public and non-profit, institutions, individuals. Opportunities for bi-state collaboration.
- What Role Should SNEP Have in Addressing Harmful Algal Blooms?
 - o Funding capacity building, paying attention to fresh water sources, especially spatial distribution and severity of HABs. Information is currently too limited to capture the public's attention and build momentum toward addressing the problem.
 - o Information exchange within the region, boosting the Collaborative's role within SNEP. SNEP can play a convener role but we need to be careful not to duplicate existing efforts. We should amplify instead.
 - Specifically, what communications vehicles should SNEP use?
 - More than how we communicate, what we communicate matters. We should focus in on a set of well-refined and convincing arguments, especially to legislators. A conference call involving the state labs could help develop capacity within the public sector, perhaps to expand their services (especially so in RI).
 - Concern that resources are too limited currently, especially in MA
 - o Health was not mentioned as a common theme in Shasten's interviews, which is surprising. Shared focus on health would be a useful frame for the region. Also, attention to causes of estuarine blooms.
 - o It was felt Shasten should consider Newport, RI due to their extensive algal bloom issues Newport has issues with cyanobacteria in their water supply. The sources are coastal ponds that are eutrophic or near-eutrophic and heavily treated.
 - Shasten will connect with the city.
 - o Innovative approaches to monitoring/testing might offer a way around budgetary gridlock
 - o SNEP should consider investing in a searchable database that would provide a standardized data format to capture novel interventions and their success.

EPA Updates

- Written Updates Provided in Advance (included below)

Upcoming Innovative/ Alternative (I/A) Septic System Workshop Series

- EPA is working with the Office of Research and Development ACESD in Narragansett, RI to plan an upcoming workshop series on the state of I/A septic systems and to demonstrate how I/A septic can help to address nutrient pollution throughout and beyond the SNEP region.
- The workshop series will take place sometime in May or June (likely June) and is geared toward local stakeholders and decision-makers (municipal departments of environment, health, public works, state representatives, local/regional experts)
- SNEP and ORD are envisioning a 3-session workshop that allows audience members to hear from the lessons-learned of past I/A pilots, learn about the current state of I/A septic systems, begin thinking about strategic implementation plans; and start to identify and address perceived barriers to I/A implementation and creating definitive action steps toward addressing them.
- We are hoping that this workshop will serve as a launch pad for attendees to continue addressing barriers and opportunities for their use. We will be encouraging them to stay connected with their breakout groups and to learn from/support one another through these processes.
- We are also hoping to identify areas/ways in which EPA can best support these efforts. Members voiced a range of comments on the workshop plans:
 - o Concern about advocating for systems that are not yet proven for general use in Mass and that no system currently permitted can reach the nitrogen reduction levels needed by TMDLs.
 - o Concern about the amount of money needed to install I/A systems that are unproven and were worried that eventually there would be a need to replace them with centralized wastewater treatment.
 - o The Steering Committee should be involved in the planning of the workshop.
 - o The community perspective on I/A systems must be considered in the workshop series and educating people on the new, more advanced, systems was a must.
 - o I/A systems are the only way to treat wastewater in their area and there is a system with provisional status in MA that reaches nitrogen levels below 5 mg/L-N most of the time
 - o The Cape Cod Commission recently started a work group on Responsible Management Entities for the management of septic systems on the Cape. They would like to lend expertise to the workshop if they can.

Update on SNEP Watershed Grants Program

- Tom Ardito, Restore America's Estuaries (RAE): Review Request for Proposals (RFP) Priorities and Timeframe
- RAE Approach to SNEPWG- try to listen to you all and listen to EPA, take feedback and evolve the program. Focus heavily in capacity building, anything from funding: sustainable partnerships, innovative projects, coordination to share the knowledge and lessons learned.
- Recap: 3 Rounds of grants – 100 + grantees
 - o COVID has affected a lot of our grants, and extensions have been granted to those grantees

- EPA was originally managing the grants program directly, and RAE has been able to provide a degree of continuity. The RFPs are coming out at the same time every year. We can provide funding to prior grantees, or if an application was not accepted one year it can be accepted next year. We try to provide a lot of support to the grantees.
- New for 2021:
 - \$1.75 million available. Funding continues to be tight and there will be high demand, but that speaks of the need for a program like this.
 - Direct link to the SNEP Strategic Plan in RFP– the vision, goals and priorities of SNEP are the core of this program
 - Letter of intent as first application step - to streamline the process
 - On-line portal for applications and administration – make it easier for everyone
 - Broadening review committee
 - Increasing the transparency of the review process
 - Coordination with the SNEP Network - to share communications to get the word out of this program
 - More emphasis on underrepresented communities – geographical and in terms of environmental justice communities
 - More emphasis on habitat and coastal resilience – working to reach and get more applications in this area in addition to water quality work
 - More support for applicants and grantees – will have 3 workshops
 - Made the decision of not funding research and monitoring projects, since SNEP will be funding a lot of that and funding is very tight and those tend to be expensive projects
- Q&A
 - A member stated that not funding monitoring and research programs does not follow the recommendations of our previous HABs discussion. Projects on HABs are all about research and monitoring. Where was that decision made?
 - Funding is limited this year. There is other funding available for HABs, so it was a strategic move about where we can invest in on the ground solutions where we know what the sources of the nutrients are that are fueling HABs in the ponds, while we use other sources of funding to address the other research questions. There are so many research questions about HABs that this program cannot fund. What we need is to standardize the way we do it, like standardizing the protocols and streamlining the analyses, and promote more communication.
 - A member asked about further defining increased transparency.
 - Implementing this new on-line system that will allow us to release (on request) scores and feedback from the reviewers
 - A member commented on the focus on habitat and resilience. In MA for innovative restoration strategies they would caution that permits are a real issue. Projects that are coming in for implementation, permit need should be looked at to determine feasibility
 - Evaluating the applications permitting and implementation will be a big part of the scoring process for grants.

Update from SNEP Network

- Martha Sheils, NE-EFC: Review Upcoming Call for Participants, Priorities, Events
- Update on community projects:
 - Most will conclude by the end of July, a few got extensions
 - 2 projects already wrapped up. The reports of the projects and findings will be posted on the website soon.
 - The new call for participants process will go out sometime this summer, to get the communities to start in October
 - Updating consultant pool to include consultants that can help with EJ issues
 - Survey Feedback – consensus to do some reflection to know how effective we were on these community projects.
 - Network will re-evaluate the type and range of services we offer to build on the experiences from the first round. Our focus is going to encourage regional solutions, use of available tools to improve stormwater management, identify opportunities for more nature-based solutions
 - Working on bringing new ideas – hosting east coast finance forum that will capture case studies found in somewhere else in the east coast and bring those new ideas to the southeast region
 - Work more closely with RI on financing – climate financing for the next round of projects
 - Always promoting partnerships – one idea is having communities mentor others with less capacity
 - Constantly re-evaluating what we do and how we can be more helpful to the communities we work with.
 - Increased coordination with SNEP Watersheds grant program:
 - if a community reaches out or applies for Network assistance, but the scope is more in line with a RAE grant, we can send them to RAE, and RAE can do the same if the need is more in line with what the Network provides.
 - Our N partners will post RAE grant on their own websites, to send to their base.
 - The Stew Map email base includes many EJ communities in the SNEP area that we would not otherwise have access to
 - Tom Ardito asked us if two of our partners, Kim Groff And Eliz Scott could serve on the RAE review committee of the current grant applications. We are working that out right now.

EPA Updates

SNEP Steering Committee Meeting

March 10, 2021

1. **The SNEP Steering Committee is Expanding.** Several new members have been invited to join us at our March meeting. As part of our SNEP Strategic Plan development, EPA committed to broadening representation in the Steering Committee by including a wider range of environmental organizations, and welcoming business, academic and municipal representation. We are also exploring new ways to engage with disadvantaged communities in the region. *Please share your suggestions for new committee members!*
2. **EPA SNEP Budget Allocation for FY21:** Congress appropriated \$5.5 million for SNEP, which is an increase of \$100K from our FY20 appropriations. During our last meeting, EPA reviewed our funding priorities for FY21 and obtained committee feedback and as funding remains relatively consistent, no significant changes are proposed. With the addition of \$100K, we plan to allocate those funds to provide pre- and post-monitoring to allow evaluation of results achieved through the upcoming selection of pilot watersheds this year.
3. **SNEP Congressional Report:** The 2021 Appropriations Act included a request for information about the program's local capacity building program. The EPA SNEP Team prepared and submitted their report to Headquarters in February for its transmittal to Congress. The report provides background information about SNEP, including our Strategic Plan, our rationale for establishing a SNEP Network to provide a local capacity building program, the Network's structure and assistance capabilities, the scope of the investment, current capacity building efforts, program metrics that will be used to assess its success, and the future direction of the Network and SNEP. EPA will post the report on its SNEP website when we have confirmation it has been submitted.
4. **SNEP 2021-2025 Strategic Plan:** ["Getting to Resilience: Restoration and Adaptation in Southeast Coastal New England"](#) is final and is available on our website. The purpose of this Strategic Plan is to build a framework for the Southeast New England Program that achieves our programmatic goals to ensure 1) a resilient ecosystem of safe and healthy waters, 2) thriving watersheds and natural lands, and 3) sustainable communities by 2050. The Plan sets priority actions for the coming five years. We thank the many members of our SNEP Policy and Steering Committee for their input, review and comments on the plan.

5. **[2021 SNEP Watershed Grants Request for Proposals \(RFP\) is out!](#)** Restore America's Estuaries (RAE), in partnership with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, will award \$1.79 million in competitive grants to organizations and partnerships working to restore clean water, healthy coastal ecosystems, and sustainable communities in Rhode Island and Southeastern Massachusetts. RAE will begin accepting on-line Letters of Intent (LOIs) on March 15, 2021. The website for more information is www.snepgrants.org.
6. **[SNEP Pilot Watersheds Initiative Request for Applications \(RFA\) will](#)** be released soon (March-April). Our goal is to demonstrate ways to address common regional challenges and show the value of collaborative investments to achieve results. EPA plans to competitively select up to four pilot watersheds that are representative of the differing challenges and characteristics in the region. Each pilot watershed location will serve as a demonstration for communities across the region on how holistic approaches offer a cost-effective way to get results. The RFA will be posted on our website and grants.gov.
7. **[SNEP Watershed Implementation Grants \(SWIG\) RFA](#)** will be released soon (likely April). EPA's current grant to Restore America's Estuaries has reached the grant budget limit and must be re-competed. EPA will release a solicitation for a pass-through entity to serve as our partner to continue management of the SNEP competitive local watershed grants. The RFA will be posted on our website and www.grants.gov.
8. **[SNEP 2020 Year in Review](#)** is now posted on [our website](#). Learn about our partnerships with the U.S. Geological Survey, Buzzards Bay National Estuary Program, Narragansett Bay Estuary Program, SNEP Watershed Grants Program (Restore America's Estuaries) and the SNEP Network (New England Environmental Finance Center). In addition, hear from our partners directly by watching our latest [SNEP Chat](#) featured in our [January-February SNEP Newsletter](#).
9. **[Upcoming I/A Septic System Workshop Series](#)**. EPA Region 1 and EPA's Office of Research and Development laboratory in Narragansett, RI are working with regional partners to plan a workshop series kicking off this Spring (likely May-June 2021) focusing on recent experiences piloting IA systems, current developments in their design and effectiveness, and barriers and opportunities for their use to address nitrogen pollution. We hope you will join us during these workshops! *Please let us know about important conflicts that we should avoid in May and June when scheduling the workshops.*

10. **Help SNEP Share its Project Results.** Congress has appropriated \$32.4 million between 2014 and 2020 to carry out SNEP. In that time, a total of 119 projects have been initiated aimed at restoring and protecting the region's water-based environment, building strong partnerships, and piloting new technologies and approaches. EPA is exploring ways to better share the results and lessons learned from our projects. Potential options include inviting local project teams to participate in webinars and/or future Steering Committee and subcommittee meetings to share their results and gain feedback from our partners. *Please let us know your thoughts on this and any other suggestions to improve our ability to learn from the efforts taking place.*

11. **New EJ Funding Opportunities Available:** EPA has recently announced availability of up to \$6 million in annual environmental justice grants. [The Environmental Justice Collaborative Problem-Solving \(EJCPS\) Cooperative Agreement Program's](#) total estimated funding for this opportunity is approximately \$3,200,000. EPA anticipates awarding two cooperative agreements of \$160,000 within each of the 10 EPA Regions. To learn more about pre-application assistance calls and how to apply for funding, [click for more information](#). The EJSJ Program estimates approximately \$2,800,000 will be awarded to approximately five applications per EPA region in amounts of up to \$50,000 per award. This includes the EPA's Ports Initiative program which anticipates funding up to six additional projects that address clean air issues at coastal and inland ports or rail yards. To learn more about pre-application assistance calls and how to apply for funding, [click for more information](#). Applicants interested in either opportunity must submit proposal packages on or before May 7, 2021 to be considered for the available funding. Applicants should plan for projects to begin on October 1, 2021.

12. **Cyanobacteria Monitoring Collective Mini-Conference** will occur on March 23 and 24. The Harmful Algal Bloom monitoring work being done on the Cape will be a highlighted during the second day of the conference. Find our more [here](#).

13. **SNEP has updated their website.** Newsletter articles, project highlights, and SNEP Chat interviews are now housed in HTML format online [here](#).

Request for Peer Reviewers:

EPA is seeking peer reviewers for a report on the relevance of climate refugia to habitat restoration strategies in the region. Climate refugia are habitats whose unique features buffer against changing conditions in the wider climate. They are important for species persistence and maintaining ecosystem function in a changing climate. Large changes in species presence in the SNEP region are projected to result from climate change. Refugia across the region will provide stepping-stones that facilitate species' movements to newly suitable habitats. The report identifies and prioritizes such locations for restoration to assist the region's habitats, and the species they support, in adapting to climate change. Written by ORISE Research Fellow David Morgan, the report includes three findings relevant to SNEP partners:

1. locations of select habitats that will persist despite changes in the wider climate,
2. the direction and magnitude of climate-forced range changes for ten bird species of conservation concern,
3. restoration candidate sites that are expected to provide refuge for migrating species, also known as stepping-stone refugia.

Familiarity with climate refugia or species range change is not required; the report is written as an introduction to those topics. Reviewers should have a working knowledge of the SNEP region's habitat and species composition and an understanding of projected ecosystem-scale climate change impacts. Some reviewers should have technical proficiency in ArcGIS, especially using ModelBuilder, and basic statistical analysis. Other beneficial skillsets include knowledge of state environmental policy related to species of conservation concern and climate adaptation focused ecological management and restoration.

Please contact David Morgan via email (Morgan.David@epa.gov) with questions or to join the peer review committee.