

**Southeast New England Program (SNEP)
Policy Committee Meeting 10/20/2021 1:00-3:00PM
Focus: Fiscal Year 2022 Program Budget and Annual Priorities**

Agenda and Notes:

Roll Call:

- Association to Preserve Cape Cod – Andrew Gottlieb
- Buzzards Bay National Estuary Program – Joe Costa
- Cape Cod Commission – Kristy Senatori
- EPA Office of Research and Development – Tim Gleason
- EPA SNEP Team – MaryJo Feuerbach, Margherita Pryor, Adam Reilly, Ian Dombroski, David Morgan (ORISE), & Shasten Sherwell (ORISE)
- Massachusetts Division of Environmental Restoration – Hunt Durey
- Martha’s Vineyard Commission – Adam Turner
- Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection – Gerard Martin & Drew Osei
- Narragansett Bay National Estuary Program – Mike Gerel
- NEIWPC – Susan Sullivan
- Southeast Regional Planning & Economic Development District – Bill Napolitano
- Rhode Island Coastal Resource Management Council – Leah Feldman
- Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management – Sue Kiernan
- Restore America’s Estuaries (Non-Member) – Tom Ardito
- New England Environmental Finance Center (Non-Member) – Phaeng Southisombath & Martha Sheils

SNEP Fiscal Year 2021 Accomplishments & Fiscal Year 2022

Schedule:

- Fiscal Year 2021 Accomplishments:
 - Finalized SNEP 5-Year Strategic Plan
 - Submitted report to Congress on SNEP Network
 - Solicited/Selected entity to run the SNEP Watershed Implementation Grants for the next five years
 - Restore America’s Estuaries selected
 - Selected four pilot watersheds
 - Eight newsletters and four webinars
 - Ongoing work on Monitoring Synthesis Framework
 - Ongoing ORISE research



- Shasten Sherwell – Cyanomonitoring collaborative and Harmful Algal Blooms
 - David Morgan – Habitat buffer and climate refugia in the SNEP region
- US Geological Survey (USGS) collaborative projects
 - Maravista and Wickford post-sewer groundwater monitoring
 - Cape Cod river nitrogen hot spot study
 - Installing and monitoring I/A septic systems in Three Bays, Cape Cod
- Three day I/A septic system workshop focused on discussing how to get systems into more widespread use
- Nitrogen sensor challenge
 - Found a low-cost, accurate nitrogen sensor that was verified recently via a 6-month testing at the Massachusetts Alternative Septic System Test Center (MASSTC)
- Total Fiscal Year 2021 funding \$5.5 million
 - Majority for grants >80%
 - Remaining funding to Department of Energy (DOE) and USGS (interagency agreements) and contracts
- Fiscal Year 2022: Looking Ahead
 - SNEP Symposium (Potentially May 2022)
 - SNEP Workshops (Potentially February and July 2022)
 - Quarterly webinars
 - Newsletters
 - Subcommittee reinvigoration
 - Added several new members to each subcommittee
 - Plans to engage the Subcommittees with Monitoring Synthesis Framework
 - Federal partners coordination
 - Incorporation of Environmental Justice (EJ) into SNEP activities
 - Continued work with grantees and inter-agency partners
 - Developing contractor supported pilot watershed monitoring strategy
 - Continuing flow duration curve project- entering phase II
 - Four pilot watersheds
 - Barnstable Clean Water Coalition
 - Marstons Mills Bog Restoration
 - University of New Hampshire Stormwater Center
 - Distributed stormwater controls on Martha’s Vineyard
 - Charlestown, Rhode Island
 - Innovative/Alternative septic system upgrades and stormwater controls



- Buzzards Bay Coalition
 - Urban stream restoration
- 14 new SNEP Watershed Implementation Grants
- 9 new SNEP Network Assistance Projects (including two with Tribal Nations)

Anticipated FY22 Budget, Proposed Spending and Applied Research

- Congressional budget is not yet passed for FY22, but there are a few potential scenarios based on proposed budgets
 - Continuing Resolution (FY21 funding level): \$5.5M
 - White House Budget: \$6.252M
 - House of Representatives Budget: \$7.5 million
 - Infrastructure Bill may add an additional \$3M per year for 5 years (some of that funding would be earmarked for specific project types)
- Anticipating increase in SNEP funding.
- Additional attention to Environmental Justice and Climate Change
- Looking into additional staffing with additional funding.
- New Project Ideas presented to the Committee for comment:
 - Harmful Algal Bloom CyanoScope for Community Groups
 - Increase HAB monitoring throughout the region at a relatively low cost.
 - Some members felt that any equipment grants should be paired with the development of better results/ health alert communications. Generally, boards of health are under-staffed and/or don't have a good way to communicate health risks with their constituents once HABs are detected. Increasing this capacity is just as important as monitoring.
 - Additional RI pilot watershed initiative
 - Three of four pilot watersheds are in MA. RAE is offering to help with the solicitation.
 - RI organizations submit numerous proposals, but only one could be selected due to geographic stipulations in the grant solicitation.
 - New grant solicitation may add aspects of Environmental Justice
 - Contractor-supported subcommittee projects
 - Subcommittees would be able to have contractor support and be able to pursue their own project ideas.
 - Responsible Management Entity (RME) Septic Grant
 - Funding the framework or pilot RME for an organization to set up an RME. This would be the direct result of the needs identified in the I/A workshop.
 - Some members felt this opportunity should be scaled up since RMEs are a region-wide need. Potentially at a county level with a larger regional entity as the lead. This would lead to better transferability of results once completed.



- Since RI and MA have different regulations, some members felt that a pilot in each state might be the best solution.
- Some members felt that an RME should be paired with focusing on getting more I/A systems in the ground.
- Some members brought up potential regulatory barriers to an RME, but others felt that these barriers could be overcome under such a grant.
- Generally, the members felt this was a priority project for the coming year.
- I/A Septic Contaminants of Emerging Concern (CEC) Removal Study
 - Initial idea led by EPA Cincinnati Office of Research and Development, to examine CEC removal in I/A systems and where in sand/woodchips CECs are being captured.
- Addition Capacity Building Efforts
 - Some members felt that building small organization's ability to receive funds is as important as building other forms of their capacity.
 - Some members stated that true capacity building in terms of project management is a challenge because funds need to be sustained to keep personnel and not lose institutional knowledge built through projects.
 - Some members felt that with the potential for a large amount of infrastructure funding a focus on building capacity to receive these funds and having projects ready would be important.
 - Some members felt that because there will be an EJ focus on some of the potential future funds, building capacity in groups with EJ focus or in EJ communities would be important.
- AquaQAPP Expansion
 - Would expand the AquaQAPP (Quality Assurance Project Plan) from MA to RI
 - Some members felt this shouldn't be a top action item
 - Some members felt that streamlining QAPP development in general is important.
- Small EJ Grants
 - Small-scale funding, spending to be directed by Justice40 and other earmarks.
- SNEP Research Program
 - SNEP plays a unique role and should be encouraged to pursue additional research
 - There's an advantage to separating research and implementation as RAE decided to do in the past grant round; the amount of funding required for research is much higher
 - Applied research only, not fundamental research, guided by committee member input



- SNEP Network would like to expand on tracking and accounting for stormwater BMPs, could move that under-funded project into SNEP research

Annual SNEP Watershed Implementation Grant Priorities

- Discussion Led by Tom Ardito (Restore America's Estuaries)
 - How can the program be improved? - This year really kicks off the next phase of the Watershed Implementation Grants so now is the time to think about what worked and what needs to change. In past discussions the topic of having a narrower set of priorities, which would rotate every year, would be beneficial. Looking for feedback to either make changes to the program to continue with the current structure.
- Summary of projects – In 2021 14 projects were selected for award under the watershed implementation grants program, totaling 1.75 million dollars.
 - First year where we received more proposals from RI than from MA.
 - First year funding for a project aimed on reducing fishery impacts
 - 6 projects EJ focused
 - 6 projects have significant habitat components
 - 6 projects have significant coastal resilience or flood plain resilience components
 - 6 projects are in urban communities
 - 3 projects have significant economic development components
- New improvements to grants process
 - More transparent and inclusive
 - Expanded review committee
 - New online grant application and management system
 - Additional QAPP assistance for grantees
 - Working to improve characterization and tracking of new SNEP metrics and link them to future State of the Region Report.
 - Will have Annual EPA program review and annual public report.
- The Policy Committee then provided comments of program priorities for the coming year
 - Many members felt that keeping the request for proposals broad (rather than having a narrow topic focus each year) would lead to better projects and more opportunity for project continuations and re-applications. It also allows for partial project funding, with full funding in a later year.
 - Members felt it was better to fund the best projects, rather than restrict by topic or funding amount.
 - A member felt that since topics will not be narrowed, grant scoring sheets need to be flexible/inclusive to cover multiple project types.
 - Some members felt that regarding SNEP metrics, being able to measure planning/organizing that leads to future projects is important too.



- Members felt that in the near future, an emphasis on funding the early stages of larger projects would be beneficial to the region because those projects could then use expected larger funding sources (i.e., infrastructure bill) to complete the more expensive aspects of projects.
- Some members mentioned that the proposed funding range seemed acceptable given that infrastructure needs far outweigh available resources and suggested that the RFP be general enough to choose the best projects

