

SNEP Policy Committee Meeting, April 9, 2018
Middleboro, MA

Agenda

- 10:00 Meeting Convenes
- Welcome/Introductions
 - Review Agenda/additions from group
 - Public Comments

Partner updates
EPA updates
RAE updates

- 11:00 Subcommittee Reports
- Monitoring subcommittee
 - Ecosystem Services subcommittee

- 11:30 EPA/Partner FFY18 annual budget and program priorities
- Review submitted FY18 budget priorities

Action Item: Recommendation of FFY18 budget priorities to SNEP Steering Committee

12:30 Lunch

- 1:15 Review Role and Organization of Policy Committee*
- Identify missing members
 - Confirm meeting schedule for rest of year and locations
 - Discuss process to complete 5-year action plan

Action Item: Finalize role of Policy Committee and its meeting timeline/locations for 2018

2:00 Adjourn

Attendees

Affiliation	Name	EPA
EPA Atlantic Ecology Division (ORD)	Tim Gleason	MaryJo Feuerbach
APCC	Andrew Gottlieb	Karen Simpson
MA DEP	Dave Johnston	Ian Dombroski
MA DER	Nick Wildman	Bryan Dore
NEIWPC	Susan Sullivan	Margherita Pryor
TNC	Alison Bowden	Caitlyn Whittle
Cape Cod Commission	Erin Perry	
NBEP	Heather Radcliffe	
BBNEP	Joe Costa	
MVC	Adam Turner	
RIDEM	Sue Kiernan	
RAE	Tom Ardito	

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Meeting Summary

Partner Updates

EPA AED: Working with the Barnstable Clean Water Coalition (BCWC) and USGS, ORD is piloting a “translational” science project to help address Cape Cod’s nitrogen problem in a green affordable manner, including novel funding approaches to accelerate the pace of installation of various nitrogen interventions. ORD will specifically focus on needs in the areas of social science (decision support), monitoring (groundwater), restoration, and modeling (groundwater interception).

MA DEP: Also working with BCWC to test approaches for nitrogen attenuation, including dredging Mill Pond.

Buzzards Bay NEP: Following up on the successful outcomes of previous SNEP-funded projects, including nitrogen reductions achieved under new technologies tested at the Fairhaven and Wareham wastewater treatment plants. Towns are exploring whether to move outfall to Cape Cod Canal, but there are questions if ocean sanctuaries act will allow a new discharge. Initial collaborations by the Buzzards Bay Stormwater Collaborative also have been very successful, resulting in requests by other communities to join and expand their membership. Projects are examples of where SNEP funding has served as a forceful catalyst for action, and a member urged EPA to highlight its ability to provide the resources for such catalytic action.

Narragansett Bay NEP: Expecting new director to start on May 7.

RI DEM: Breaking in a new bond account established to align flood mitigation with ecologically beneficial restoration. These could potentially leverage 319 funds in riparian areas. Demand for project funds was not as high as anticipated due to municipalities’ lack of planning capacity and lack of an organizational framework at the state level to address habitat restoration.

APCC: Working on establishing a trust fund for water quality projects on the Cape that would be funded by tax increase on B&Bs, hotels, other tourism related dwellings that would go towards forgiveness of debt service. Islands might be included in eligibility if they adopt a 208-type plan.

Cape Cod Commission: Kristy Senatori taking over as Acting Director after the departure of long-time Executive Director Paul Niedzwiecki. Under new regulations, the Commission will be reviewing watershed plans for consistency with the Cape 208 plan rather conducting full regulatory reviews. Over the next couple of years the focus for planning and implementation will be on 11 priority watersheds, including Three Bays, Pleasant Bay, and Popponesset Bay.

TNC: Finalizing report on Taunton watershed adaptation of 208 process developed by Cape Cod Commission and working with BCWC to develop a comprehensive watershed project focused on incentives for financing and getting acceptance for innovative septic technology.

EPA: Preparing funding plan for \$5M allocated in the FY18 Omnibus appropriations bill, asking Policy Committee members to provide input on desired distribution/uses. Also asking for member input over the next several months on a SNEP communications strategy and 5-year workplan.

Restore America’s Estuaries (RAE): Received 57 pre-proposals with a total request of more than \$20M, spanning wide geographic area and demonstrating strong demand for funding/resources. Most proposals were in the \$300K - \$500K range. After review by panel of state/federal agencies, invited full proposals will be due June 8.

Subcommittee Updates

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Ecosystem Subcommittee: Has met twice via conference call, with several members providing early comments on the technical assistance projects presented today. Those comments strongly recommended a role for the subcommittee in communicating and translating the concept of ecosystem services for the public. It was noted that the inventory of current ecosystem service-type projects throughout the SNEP region has yet to begin because of concerns regarding OMB survey rules. It was also noted that EPA is still seeking a chair for the subcommittee.

Monitoring subcommittee: Subcommittee members have recognized the need for long-term funding but have not yet framed and prioritized the questions that monitoring would be able to answer. This subcommittee also still needs a chair.

EPA Proposed FY18 Funding Plan

Policy Chair MaryJo Feuerbach provided more detailed information on the FY18 budget, including a presentation on proposed funding allocations among grants and technical assistance contracts. Discussion on the proposed allocations focused on:

- **Distribution of funds:** Members commented on the need to ensure relative parity in funding across the SNEP region, even while also recommending against disinvesting in the Cape where a number of projects are underway. Members noted that partnerships between NGOs and state/local governments are key to successful projects, and there was a suggestion that proposed technical assistance funds support those areas that don't have such partnerships in place.
- **Funding for EPA contractual needs:** There were suggestions that all SNEP funding be allocated to RAE for this year's projects, as well as a concern expressed that funding should not be used for "EPA needs." Other members mentioned that allocating all SNEP funding for RAE subawards would hinder the program's ability to support coordinated efforts like those being initiated by the SNEP subcommittees. It was noted that EPA's technical assistance vehicle is a good vehicle to address broad regional needs that are not well-captured through RFPs.
- **Concerns about the timing of funding;** Members expressed pros and cons for maintaining a steady flow over several years versus fully disbursing each annual allocation in one year so as to generate immediate results. Several members commented that having a sustainable program with a pipeline of funding is important for learning from results and allowing projects to be phased over time.
- **Definition of "capacity-building"** EPA proposed a focus on capacity-building for the next round of RAE sub-awards. Municipalities have been under-represented in previous broadly scoped RFPs, including RAE's current RFP. Discussion focused on what is needed to improve their ability to compete for funding, including a suggestion that universities applying for funding be required to team up with municipalities. It was noted that universities can use portions of their typically high indirect rates as match, which provides incentives for them to apply. Members commented that although capacity development is needed, our goals related to it must be further refined before solutions can be chosen.

Proposed Technical Assistance Project Concept Ideas

1. **Cape Cod Nitrogen BMP Retrofit and Monitoring Update:** There was concern about funding retrofit of a poorly functioning BMP. Some advocated for just monitoring the BMP that was working and not retrofitting the other. Others felt that a small expenditure to retrofit would be worthwhile not only to improve the system so it functions well, but also to provide tech transfer on how to ensure proper siting and installation in similar conditions.
2. **Site Characterization Protocol for IC Disconnection:** There was disagreement on the value of another technical guidance for disconnecting impervious surfaces. The need for guidance would be clearer if the project scope could be narrowed to address scale and other issues directly relevant to urban sites or the SNEP region. Members urged this work to build on available guidance. One member strongly supported this project due to its potential to help coastal communities mitigate the impact of recent flooding.

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3. **Water Quality Monitoring Gap Analysis:** As in previous discussions of monitoring, members stressed the need for focus and identifying the questions that need answering, especially on water quality issues of nutrients and eutrophication. There was also a concern about the ability to sustain monitoring over time, with a suggestion to identify the most critical efforts that are vulnerable to loss of funding. Suggestions also included funding a graduate student rather a contractor to support a monitoring gap analysis, building on monitoring infrastructure covered by NERACOOS, and asking the NEPs to work more on monitoring. Members suggested working sessions over the coming year to better define our program monitoring goals.
4. **Regional Ecosystem Services and Functions Gap Analysis, Review of Methodologies to Value Ecosystem Services in the SNEP Region:** Members saw both project concept ideas as complementary and noted that the field of ecosystem services is an active research area that might be better suited to a workshop or other tech transfer venue to convey the state of the science. Some questioned how the effort would affect policy or management. Others highlighted the need to communicate ecosystem services in ways that inform how people and communities prioritize and make decisions. There was a suggestion to put the ecosystem services subcommittee to work on merging the two projects and ascertaining what we care about, what we have data for, and what we want to do. Members recommended a series of working sessions to discuss these topics over the coming year.
6. **Palmer River Source Tracking, Water Quality Trends Summary, and Watershed Planning:** This is a bi-state Palmer River project in the Taunton watershed. Members from MA and RI expressed support for the project and mentioned this work remains a priority for both states, provides an opportunity to refine the use of an innovative monitoring technology (PhyloChip), and will result in a watershed plan for both states.
7. **Identifying High Priority Nitrogen Reduction Areas Through Assessment of In-Stream Groundwater Discharge:** EPA proposed to proceed with this project because of its game-changing potential for targeting and intercepting nutrient hot spots in groundwater sources. The project would explore the feasibility of using a new method to identify subwatershed areas contributing the highest nitrogen loads, allowing communities to better focus their restoration efforts into the most critical source areas. The methodology could potentially lower the cost of restoration for impaired watersheds. If the approach works, it can be a critical component for the state/Cape to meet its commitments under the 208 plan as well as demonstrate SNEP's focus on innovation and learning by doing. It was noted that results on the Cape may not be readily transferable to other areas such as Rhode Island due to their differing geology.
8. **Exploration of Sustainable Financing Mechanisms for the SNEP Region:** Members felt that the finance mechanism discussion would be more appropriate for a seminar or workshop series, although a parallel need was raised regarding how to convince communities to incorporate restoration/protection projects in their budgets because of the value they provide in areas such as avoided costs, resilience to hazards, and multiple co-benefits.
9. **SNEP Capacity Building Grants Program:** Augmenting SNEP's existing grant to support a specific focus on municipal capacity-building again raised questions about what is meant under that term. Is it to address constraints caused by lack of staff and money in general, or can the group define discrete needs such as GIS, engineering expertise, or outreach that could be addressed with specific tools. The group noted that it does not make sense to fund staff for a limited period so there needs to be an outcome articulated for the support. This issue and solutions need further refinement.
10. **Implementation of Narragansett and Buzzards Bay CCMP Priority Actions:** Supplementing the NEP grants was generally well-received with the caveat that they should focus on implementation of CCMP priority action plans.
11. **Development of Biological Index of Water Quality for Coastal Southern New England:** There was some concern over potential duplication between this proposal and another proposal submitted under the RAE RFP to develop IBIs for wadeable and for non-wadeable coastal streams.

EPA explained it will consider the views discussed as it develops its draft funding allocation for the coming year.

General Discussion

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A need not met in the proposed projects is gaining a better understanding of how people make decisions or change their behavior, including the monitoring or other communication needed to document that SNEP projects and results are valuable. Some members also voiced concern that good projects submitted under RAE's RFP might be lost if all the tech assistance projects were funded. Augmenting RAE's current award to enable it to fund more projects is one of the options the members discussed, but as of now RAE expects to invite \$5-7M worth of proposals from the current applicants, with final selection considering regional, project, and applicant diversity in addition to proposal quality.

While the majority of members continue to support allocating the majority of funding for subawards provided by the RAE process, they also expressed diverse views about the project ideas. Many supported going forward on contractual projects that address innovative technologies or approaches such as the PhyloChip and nutrient targeting; analyses of ecosystem services, monitoring compatibility, and finance were deemed not yet ripe as projects and in need of more information. It was felt these topics would benefit from workshops or other opportunities to get expert input. Researching and supporting subcommittee needs for information exchange in these areas would be a good fit for an ORISE fellow to flesh out working with the Region and the SNEP committees. Some members again expressed support for allocating a portion of the funds to our two NEPs as long as they are available to fund CCMP priorities and aren't limited to watershed planning activities.

Policy Committee Role

EPA clarified that the Policy Committee is intended to provide a way to get *individual* input from a variety of stakeholders, ideally during a fall and a spring meeting. In response to EPA's question on whether other organizations or interests should be represented on the committee, it appeared that most members felt the current membership is acceptable. EPA would like to work with committee members on program planning and policy. For example, EPA asked for members to help in developing a 5-year action plan and a communication plan. Members also agreed it is important to focus effort on sharing program successes with regional organizations, towns, states and other stakeholders. RAE volunteered to assist with the communications plan, which TNC noted should help our Congressional delegation understand what SNEP is doing, and reflect the endorsement and support of our state and NGO partners.