



11/4/2020

## SNEP Federal Partners Meeting Summary Notes

The purpose of this document is to summarize the Federal Partners meeting held on 11/4/2020. The member organizations and their representative in attendance were as follows: U.S. Geological Survey – Jeff Barbaro, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration – Becky Love, Natural Resources Conservation Service RI – Eric Boettger, EPA Office of Research and Development – Tim Gleason, Army Corps of Engineers – Larry Oliver, Federal Emergency Management Agency – Brigitte Ndikum-Nvada, EPA SNEP Team, Fish and Wildlife Service – Suzanne Paton.

The meeting adhered to the following schedule:

### Agenda:

- Introduction and Roll Call
- Partner Updates
- SNEP 5-Year Plan Presentation
- SNEP Pilot Watersheds Presentation
- Discussion

### SNEP Updates

- Staff changes
  - Karen Simpson has moved on to EPA Region 8 in Denver, CO. We wish her the best.
  - Ian Dombroski is the new SNEP Program Coordinator
  - Adam Reilly is the new Communications Coordinator
  - Shasten Sherwell is a new ORISE fellow who will focus on harmful algal blooms (HABs)
- SNEP plans to solicit a request for proposals for an entity to administer its Watershed Implementation Grant program. Restore America's Estuaries currently administers the program, but the term of their agreement will soon end.
- SNEP Technical assistance network is entering their 2<sup>nd</sup> year of a 5- year agreement. The Network is operated by the New England Environmental Finance Center. The Network is designed to build local capacity through direct technical assistance. SNEP is interested in encouraging all partners to collaborate further.
- SNEP FY21 -FY25 strategic plan is being drafted and will be released to the public shortly.
- SNEP is planning two upcoming workshops for FY21. Topics are still TBD at this time.
- SNEP Regional Monitoring Strategy is currently in development by contractors to create a cohesive framework with which data can be collected (both new and old data) to evaluate SNEP projects and contribute towards understanding the state of the SNEP region.



- Flow duration Curve contract (phase 1). The goal of the project is to estimate the impact of development on changes to regional water quality, channel stability, and hydrogeomorphology.

### **Army Corps of Engineers**

- There are several projects ongoing in the region:
  - o Chatham project focused on beneficial use of dredged material for shoreline protection. Projects on Santuit pond in Mashpee, which aims to dredge organic matter in the ponds to restore depths/improve water quality, restore local fish habitat
  - o Narragansett Bay: erosion shoreline protection project
  - o Continuing RI coastal storm risk management throughout Narragansett Bay to reduce flood damage
  - o Flood gates on the Warren and Narrow Rivers being considered
  - o Moving forward with design/implementation phase of the Pawcatuck to elevate homes
  - o Point Judith navigation/dredging project in the design phase

### **EPA Office of Research and Development**

- A nutrient-focused, solution-driven pilot ongoing in Three Bays, Barnstable with the aim to bring social science and environmental science together.
  - o ORD aims to partner with local organizations to address nutrient pollution in the Three Bays via projects addressing source control through the testing of woodchip-based septic tanks to test efficacy; cranberry bog bioreactors; and the continued installation of innovative and alternative septic systems in Shubael pond.

### **Federal Emergency Management Agency**

- Risk analysis branch has set up a few discovery meetings with Region 1 communities.
- FEMA is in the process of receiving input from communities with respect to watershed areas (25 communities within the same watershed). These communities provide information on the history of their town and how that history interacts with the watershed. FEMA takes this information into account before engineers come into the area to perform assessments.
- With respect to the National flood insurance program, new FEMA regulation laws/policy discussions are ongoing. The state of MA has used this time to submit several hazard-mitigation plans. Within Cape Cod, communities that did not previously have plans have taken advantage of these programs to develop and create/update their mitigation plans.

### **Fish and Wildlife Service**

- The FWS is working on a planning document for salt marsh bird species that were considered at risk such as the Black Rail and Salt Marsh sparrow, which are being considered for federal listing (decision by 2023).
- Prioritization tools developed to determine locations for restoration efforts to help advance salt marsh restoration, specifically.



- Recently, the FWS has merged the coastal program and partners program; and has several projects ongoing to include the Parkers river restoration project, a local bridge replacement, and a cranberry bog restoration along the Childs river
- Additionally, the FWS is working with Save the Bay to fund small restoration projects throughout RI.

### RI Natural Resources Conservation Service

- There are three new watersheds for the National Water Quality Initiative. The RI NRCS has selected a firm to provide watershed plans, but the process is still ongoing.

### U.S. Geological Survey

- Three active projects on Cape
  - Falmouth – continuing to monitor ground water (GW) quality following sewer installation. Monitoring before/during/after – seeing significant changes in water quality
  - Another looking at N loading into rivers on Western Cape. Longitudinal surveys across 10 rivers on western cape to measure stream flow and nutrient profiles. Will use modeling to relate hot spots to the landscape to prioritize mitigation strategies. Data interpretation in process.
  - Three Bays (with SNEP and ORD) – hydrologic support for Innovative/Alternative septic. Handling site characterization and GW monitoring aspects of study
- There is an ongoing project in Wickford, RI in collaboration with EPA ORD. The project is focusing on monitoring of groundwater and stormwater, acquiring data on nitrogen loading, which hopefully will augment future ORD work in the Cove as well. Funding for the project is now in place. COVID has slowed project but work ongoing.
- USGS anticipates future involvement with MassDER's ongoing cranberry bog work. Currently working to identify where USGS can play a future role in the project. Anticipated focus is on bogs throughout Cape Cod and Nantucket given that a field lab is already in place and groundwater models for the region have already been completed. USGS is also involved with the SNEP flow duration curve project in Taunton, MA, which is utilizing the USGS HSPF model.
  - There are ongoing discussions with the RI water resources board to determine water use trends. Water availability and climate change studies in RI are also being considered.
- Marine and freshwater HABs work continues. There are further opportunities for future collaboration between SNEP and USGS on this topic with small focus studies currently ongoing in Acadia and Cape Cod.

### SNEP 5-year Plan

In this iteration of the SNEP strategic plan for FY21 – FY25, the Program has streamlined our five previous program goals into three in order to recognize overlap in the goals and simplify our vision. These three goals include: Healthy Water, Healthy Habitat, and Sustainability throughout the region. The development of regional metrics and indicators is ongoing. We will use these metrics to measure our progress in achieving these goals. From these goals, we have identified specific priority actions for the next five years:

- Capacity building
  - Provide the majority of funds to local communities and support innovative techniques, increase local capacity, work toward environmental justice, and continue information sharing efforts.
- Increase the suite of solutions available to address environmental problems and broadly communicate and apply those solutions once identified.
  - Increased emphasis on nature-based solutions
  - Regional and watershed-wide solutions
    - Emphasis on HABs
  - Identify barriers involved with getting new/innovative projects in the ground, and how we can work with partners to overcome those barriers.
- Demonstrate ways to address common challenges
  - Develop pilot watersheds grant project
  - Study socioeconomic impact of projects and to create communications material for local leaders
    - Study and quantify Ecosystem service and benefit evaluation
- Ensure diverse representation in program decision-making
  - Reach out to overburdened/overly impacted communities
  - Increase representation of those communities within the Program
  - Increase representation from businesses, academics, and local community members

### Research priority proposals

SNEP has identified the following areas as research priorities for the next five years:

- Innovative Technologies and approaches
- Evaluation of Ecosystem Services
  - Site scale, regional scale, watershed scale
  - Determine broad impact of our projects
- Monitoring
  - Understanding of the various characteristics of the SNEP region impact the movement of pollutants.
- Tracking Program Effectiveness
  - How to track watershed-/system-scale changes in water qualities
- Harmful Algal Blooms
  - How to track and announce occurrence of HABs
  - Nutrient reduction effort: source reduction or in situ
  - How to communicate these occurrences and their socioeconomic impacts.
- Effective Communication
  - Help local communities plan/finance restoration activities
  - What motivates communities to support restoration efforts
  - How can we best disseminate this information

### Priority watersheds

SNEP is planning to introduce a new Priority Watersheds program at the start of the new year, which will fund up to four watersheds throughout SNEP region for five year (HUC-14 scale). The aim of this initiative is to address common regional environmental problems at the watershed-scale



and in a manner that encourages local capacity-building and the leveraging of multi-agency partnerships at the local, state, and federal levels. Ideally, each watershed will represent one of the four SNEP regions: Narragansett Bay, Buzzards Bay, Cape, and Islands.

SNEP will identify these watersheds through self-nomination. We are looking for groups that are already active in the region to nominate these programs. Recipients will receive funding annually over 5 years with preference to groups that are able to engage with state, federal, municipal governments and NGOs who can match funds and collaborate effectively. Independent monitoring will be offered by SNEP to track progress of each project. Funding for monitoring is separate. All of this is contingent upon appropriations and receiving adequate proposals.

Overall, the feedback on this proposal from the Federal Partners was positive. The Partners felt that SNEP will generate a significant amount of interest in this proposal but encouraged SNEP to give recipients as much time as possible to prepare a high-quality response to an RFP once one is made public. There are also opportunities for further collaboration with our federal partners, especially with respect to monitoring, though these partnerships are still being discussed. Partners' expertise is as important as funding.

### **What kind of technology should SNEP be focusing on?**

With respect to non-traditional technologies and innovative approaches that SNEP should evaluate over the next five years, SNEP is interested in establishing a working group to take stock of new technologies in use throughout the region. Certain considerations that were suggested included consideration of salt marsh and wetlands monitoring given their vulnerability to climate change. The promotion of salt marsh migration was also suggested.