

INTRODUCTION

*You grasp the bark by a rugged pleat,
And look up small from the forest's feet.
The only leaf it drops goes wide,
Your name not written on either side.*

—Robert Frost



C. Franks

New England has a special identity for all of us in the United States. It is a distinct part of our sense of history, our sense of place on the continent. It is familiar to us even if we live in other parts of the country; its forests, rivers, and coasts were the first places the pilgrims settled; it is the place where our democracy began. It is filled with Native American history, with legends and traditions, with seasons.

Our mountains and forests are not part of a distant wilderness, they are where we live and work and play. The ocean, too, is just outside our door. All of New England's natural environment is within our reach. This proximity, this mixture of people and nature, makes our work here particularly meaningful. In New England, we are face to face with the challenges and consequences of managing both human needs and environmental protection.

At EPA's New England Office, we recognize that the work we do to protect the environment becomes a lesson for the larger world as well. What we learn, how well we work together, how creatively we approach a task, and how effectively we judge the results can serve as a model for environmental protection everywhere. To better meet these challenges, EPA's New England workforce has directed our organizational resources by using "place-based" approaches and "performance-based" results. We are developing innovative alternatives that go beyond ordinary "end of the pipe" treatments, enabling us to achieve higher environmental protection standards, and to measure our results and successes through tangible improvements in the environment around us.

This report is about the state of the environment in New England, but it also about the state of our ability to ask the right questions and to build an approach to environmental protection based on cooperation and collaboration among many diverse interests. Throughout this report, we highlight stories that illustrate results or innovative ideas put to work to benefit the environment and the people of this region, now and for future generations.

INDICATORS OF PROGRESS

Information about the state of New England's environment provides us with the means to assess our current situation and direct our efforts toward the future. How do we find information that paints an accurate picture of the health and quality of New England's environment and the people who reside here? Through cooperative efforts with our New England states, we have identified a set of key environmental indicators. These are used throughout this report to describe important information about environmental quality.

Indicators are chosen to give us measurable data about environmental conditions that can be compared over time. For example, we can measure ecological health by the percentage of our rivers, lakes, and estuaries that support healthy aquatic communities, or assess the impact on our health by the number of days with good air quality. Environmental indicators contribute to our understanding of the state of our environment, the progress we are making in protecting it, and the changes and challenges we are likely to face in the future.

The better the information we have about the environment, the better our management of the environment will be, the more accountable we will be in our protection of it, and the more accessible and participatory the process of environmental decision-making can be. Building an approach to environmental protection based on cooperation and collaboration among many diverse interests, and working together toward a common goal, are central to fulfilling our mission.