

FY 2020



Year in Review: 2020

This year has been unlike any other; but for all of its challenges, our Program and partners have continued to serve the southeast New England region. This document highlights a few of those accomplishments and links out to more in-depth interviews with our partners in each title.

Our Program

Staff Changes. Though we were sad to see her go, we are happy to report that Karen Simpson is doing well in her new position in EPA Region 8. Since her departure, Ian Dombroski has stepped into her formal role as our new Program Coordinator. This year, we were also happy to welcome Adam Reilly into our Program as the new SNEP Communications Coordinator, and Shasten Sherwell as our new ORISE Fellow.

Community Outreach. 2020 gave rise to our bi-monthly programmatic digital newsletter, which we use to share information about what's happening in the SNEP region, not only with us at EPA, but among our partners and other stakeholders too. Every other month we have highlighted new environmental advancements, introduced you to one of our partner organizations, spotlighted SNEP projects taking place in the region, and shared news about upcoming events. Last year, we also kicked off quarterly webinars focusing on compelling regional topics, which we plan to continue into the new year. We also launched the SNEP Network to bring expert technical assistance to municipalities, tribes and other organizations to help them with environmental restoration financing, stormwater mitigation, smart growth planning, watershed planning, and site design. Together with our SNEP Watershed Implementation Grants (SWIG) program, the SNEP Network provides unique, coordinated access to help meet community and environmental needs across the region.

Planning for the Future. We have recently completed our [strategic plan](#), which is now posted on our website. The Program has set the following priority actions for the next five years: 1) increase local capacity, 2) increase available solutions toward water quality restoration, 3) ensure diverse representation in programmatic decision-making, 4) demonstrate ways to address common challenges at a watershed level, and 5) increase local buy-in by working with community leaders to demonstrate and quantify the direct and indirect benefits of restoration efforts.

SNEP Partnerships:

U.S. Geological Survey

Buzzards Bay NEP

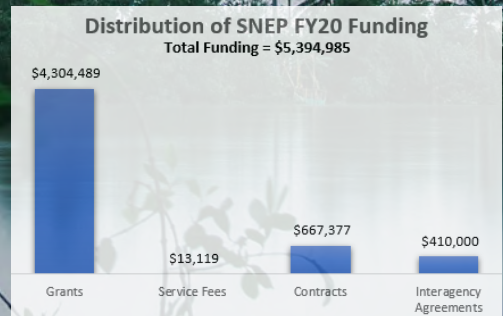
Narragansett Bay

Estuary Program

SNEP Watershed Grants

New England Environmental

Finance Center



SNEP TEAM:

MaryJo Feuerbach, SNEP Manager

Ian Dombroski, Program Coordinator

Adam Reilly, Communications Coordinator

Margherita Pryor, Watershed Implementation
Grants and Policy Coordinator

ORISE Fellows:

David Morgan

Shasten Sherwell

The EPA, in collaboration with the USGS, has performed critical work in the SNEP region throughout fiscal year 2020 (FY20), tackling nitrogen pollution in ground and surface water with a range of new and exciting tools. The collaborative effort is continuing an ongoing study of water quality changes in shallow groundwater before and after a local neighborhood is switched from reliance on septic systems to a public wastewater system on Cape Cod, and is beginning a similar project in Wickford, RI where a sewerage project is underway. The team is also working to identify high-priority targets for nitrogen abatement to more effectively address nutrients discharging to rivers throughout Cape Cod; and is continuing their monitoring efforts in the Three Bays watershed to support nutrient management activities.



Buzzards Bay National Estuary Program *Joe Costa, Director*

Established in 1985 as the Buzzards Bay Project, the mission of the Buzzards Bay National Estuary Program (BBNEP) is to protect and restore water quality and living resources in Buzzards Bay and its surrounding watershed through the implementation of the Buzzards Bay Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP). Even with the added challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, FY20 has been a productive time for the BBNEP. With the support of the SNEP, the BBNEP has funded engineering plans for a series of stormwater treatment projects; administered a mini-grant program for local municipalities that awarded six grants across five towns; initiated four new projects in nitrogen pollution monitoring, treatment, and abatement in stormwater and wastewater; and continued their partnership with the Mass Maritime Academy and the Buzzards Bay Stormwater Collaborative to map and monitor discharges from stormwater networks, particularly those contributing to the closure of shellfish beds. The BBNEP also continued their work with regional partners to better understand and halt salt marsh degradation in an ongoing watershed-wide salt marsh study. The results from this study will help town officials, state, and federal managers develop possible mitigation strategies to protect and restore salt marshes.

The BBNEP has also invested considerable time and effort into providing high-quality technical assistance to communities throughout the watershed. Over the past year, the BBNEP has provided more than 675 map and GIS products to the Buzzards Bay Coalition, area land trusts, and municipalities in their efforts to protect important habitat and open space in Buzzards Bay; and continued to assist municipalities and other partners with GIS analysis, proposal development, technical support to SNEP studies, review of local projects, and training and support for municipal stormwater permits (MS4) compliance. For the coming year, the BBNEP will be developing and implementing a work plan for \$1 million in federal funding, which includes \$250,000 from SNEP, which will be applied toward new targeted awards and municipal grants. The BBNEP will continue its core mission to support municipalities and their partners throughout the Buzzards Bay watershed in implementing activities that support the goals of the Buzzards Bay CCMP. For more information, please visit <https://buzzardsbay.org/>



Salt Marsh Study in Westport, MA
Buzzards Bay National Estuary Program
Photo credit: BBNEP

The Narragansett Bay Estuary Program

Mike Gerel, Director

Established in 1985, the Narragansett Bay Estuary Program (NBEP) catalyzes scientific inquiry and collective action to restore and protect the water quality, wildlife, and quality of life in Narragansett Bay, Rhode Island's Coastal Salt Ponds, and Little Narragansett Bay and their watersheds. The NBEP fulfills its mission through implementation of its CCMP. Currently under revision, the progress made during 2020 has also helped NBEP expand partnerships and assess actions to implement in the future.

NBEP has accomplished quite a lot during 2020 despite setbacks and challenges presented with COVID-19. SNEP funds were used to support a variety of shovel-ready and planning projects throughout the watershed. The shovel-ready projects include improving hydrology in Rhode Island salt marshes and retaining and treating stormwater along the banks of the Providence River Estuary. The planning grants allow organizations to prepare for shovel-ready projects by funding important site assessments, design plans for projects, and provide information needed for the permitting process. These planning projects include designs to return natural hydrology coupled with improvements to create open space for locals to enjoy at Broad Meadow Brook and Mill Brook Bogs in Massachusetts to design fish passage, create a restoration plan, and implement stormwater plans and upgrades in Rhode Island. All projects will wrap up in 2021, providing the region with improved hydrology of salt marshes, stormwater abatement, and plans ready to be used for the next round of shovel-ready project grants.

SNEP is currently supporting a Blackstone Needs Assessment, which will develop a comprehensive assessment to identify priority needs for advancing the health of the Blackstone River watershed (in both Massachusetts and Rhode Island). In 2020, the NBEP continued to add to the list of potential participants, existing regional planning documents to consider, and the results of compiled priority needs across different issues. NBEP gathered information for a framework needs assessment, developed a website, and gathered more interest (140+ people on the mailing list). Additionally, small grants were competitively awarded to Blackstone River Watershed groups to increase capacity in advancing needs identified during the assessment process.

For more information, please visit [.https://www.nbep.org/](https://www.nbep.org/)



Before



After



6 helical anchors installed

Town of North Kingstown, RI: This series of photos showing the improving hydrology and footbridge pilings being installed for the Mill Cove Causeway Channel, Bank, and Footbridge Project. Photo taken by Gidget Loomis.

\$8.3 Million in Project Funding since 2018

Since 2018, SNEP Watershed Grants has provided more than \$8.3 million in grants to fund high-impact projects, programs and technology at local, watershed and regional scales, including:

- *Greening the Greenway – Grants to several organizations working along the Woonasquatucket River in Providence, restoring clean water, developing outdoor recreation access, providing job training and enhancing food security for disadvantaged communities.*
- *Pleasant Bay Alliance – Supporting a partnership among four municipalities working together to restore Cape Cod’s largest estuary.*
- *Stormwater Innovation Center – Establishing a regional center for innovative water quality solutions and training at Roger Williams Park in Providence*
- *Cranberry Bog Restoration – Restoring clean water, wetland and trout stream habitat on Cape Cod by converting abandoned cranberry bogs back to the type of natural wetland systems that existed there prior to agricultural development.*
- *Permeable Reactive Barriers – An innovative technology being tested on Martha’s Vineyard and Cape Cod, in which a biodegradable carbon source is injected into the ground to remove nutrients from groundwater, reducing pollution of coastal waters.*

SNEP Watershed Grants

Tom Ardito, Program Director

SNEP supports community-based solutions to regional challenges through SNEP Watershed Grants, which is managed by Restore America's Estuaries. This is an annual, competitive program that funds projects, programs and partnerships among municipalities, non-profit organizations, universities and others working to restore clean water and healthy coastal ecosystems. SNEP Watershed Grants is managed as a collaboration between EPA and Restore America’s Estuaries, a non-profit network dedicated to restoration and protection of the nation’s coastal environment.

All of the grants contribute toward building capacity – improving our region’s ability to respond to environmental challenges such as water pollution and climate change – by ensuring that lessons learned from each project are available to stakeholders throughout the SNEP region and beyond.

In 2021, SNEP Watershed Grants expects to award about \$1.7 million to continue supporting innovative, effective partnerships, programs and projects that restore clean water and healthy coastal ecosystems. For more information, including the 2021

Request for Proposals – available early in the New Year – see www.snepgrants.org.



*Stormwater catchment BMPs at the Providence Stormwater Innovation Center
Photo credit: Will Helt*

The mission of the SNEP Network is to empower communities to achieve healthy watersheds, sustainable financing and long-term climate resilience through management of stormwater and watershed restoration projects. The SNEP Network kicked off in 2020 and provides training and technical assistance to municipalities, organizations, and tribes in Rhode Island and southeastern Massachusetts to advance the capacity for these communities to develop sustainable financing systems and plan for stormwater and watershed management, ecological restoration, and climate resilience.

During its first year, the SNEP Network established its organizational foundation to promote communication and collaboration among its 16 diverse technical assistance partners. The New England Environmental Finance Center coordinates program cohesion, provides programmatic direction and technical support, and oversees budgets and fiscal resources for the entire Network. The majority of Network funds from EPA are allocated to technical assistance partners to work with local towns, tribes and other organizations. These partners are the key to on-the-ground implementation that directly benefit environmental, social and economic needs of communities. In addition, the Network Advisory Committee provides strategic input that enhances the Network's reach to communities throughout the SNEP Region, and coordination with agencies and organizations having management responsibilities for the region's water and coastal resources.

The Network is implementing 12 distinct community projects that were solicited through a call-for-participants process, and that is augmented with free consulting services when needed to advance project needs. There are also two pilot watershed projects, one in Rhode Island to restore the Maidford River on Aquidneck Island, and one in Massachusetts to restore water quality and quantity in the Canoe River Watershed. In addition, two projects that will result in regional capacity building products are the Stewardship Mapping project that is designed to help map activities and networks with the goal of strengthening community capacity in the SNEP area, and a stormwater retrofit manual that will aid green infrastructure practice in the area and beyond.

In its first year alone, the Network has:

- Begun working one-on-one with twelve communities to provide expertise in financing, mapping, planning, stormwater siting and design, and other project needs;
- Offered "on-call" technical assistance to five communities in the SNEP region;
- Completed two in-person trainings and ten webinars reaching over 600 people;
- Helped launch the Providence Stormwater Innovation Center to provide stormwater management training; and
- Begun two large-scale pilot projects to highlight restoration techniques, one on Aquidneck Island (Rhode Island) and the other in the Taunton River watershed (Massachusetts).

For more information, please visit <https://www.snepnetwork.org>.



Virtual meetings have become the new normal for the SNEP Network quarterly meetings. The upside is that the Network's trainings and webinars have reached a wider SNEP audience than live events could have.