

NATIONAL ESTUARY PROGRAM



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THE NEP IS COLLABORATIVE

Bringing people together to achieve a common goal helps NEPs generate long-term support for efforts to protect and restore the nation's estuaries. Key to their success is a governance structure that fully involves the public in the decision-making process, and encourages strong partnerships and collaborative working relationships.

For every NEP, the program generates a blueprint for success that relies on a consensus-building process which balances the needs and interests of every stakeholder to achieve common goals.

Here's a look at some of the most successful efforts NEPs have made in the last decade to address common environmental challenges facing U.S. coastal watersheds.

STORMWATER PHASE II

When the Federal Clean Water Act's Phase II stormwater regulations required small-and medium-sized communities to implement a stormwater management program, 28 municipalities in Maine were called on to act, including half of the towns in the Casco Bay watershed. Though the watershed comprises just a small portion of Maine, encompassing three percent of the State's land mass, Casco Bay's watershed hosts more than 25 percent of its population, including the city of Portland.

The pressure was on the Casco Bay region to address stormwater runoff from rapid suburban development and the subsequent construction of roads, parking lots, and rooftops. The increased runoff had stressed Casco Bay's water quality, aquatic habitat, and biological diversity. Federal regulations required that every Phase II municipality develop a stormwater management plan, but the time and resources required to undertake the effort left most feeling overwhelmed.

NEP IN ACTION

In 2002, the Casco Bay Estuary Partnership (CBEP) helped to bring the 14 municipalities in the Casco Bay watershed to the table by collaboratively initiating a regional approach to stormwater pollution management. This was a novel idea for a State composed of hundreds of local governments with a history of tackling problems independently. But the desire for local control was

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quickly replaced with a growing awareness that stormwater pollution has no boundaries and a regional approach might be the best solution.

CBEP invested significant funding and staff support toward this cooperative effort, known formally as the Interlocal Stormwater Working Group (ISWG), by helping participating municipalities develop a five-year plan to address stormwater regulations at a regional level. Formation of the ISWG saved individual municipalities substantial time and money by providing access to a cross-section of experts, pooling financial resources, sharing products, and establishing a key relationship with the Maine Department of Environmental Protection.

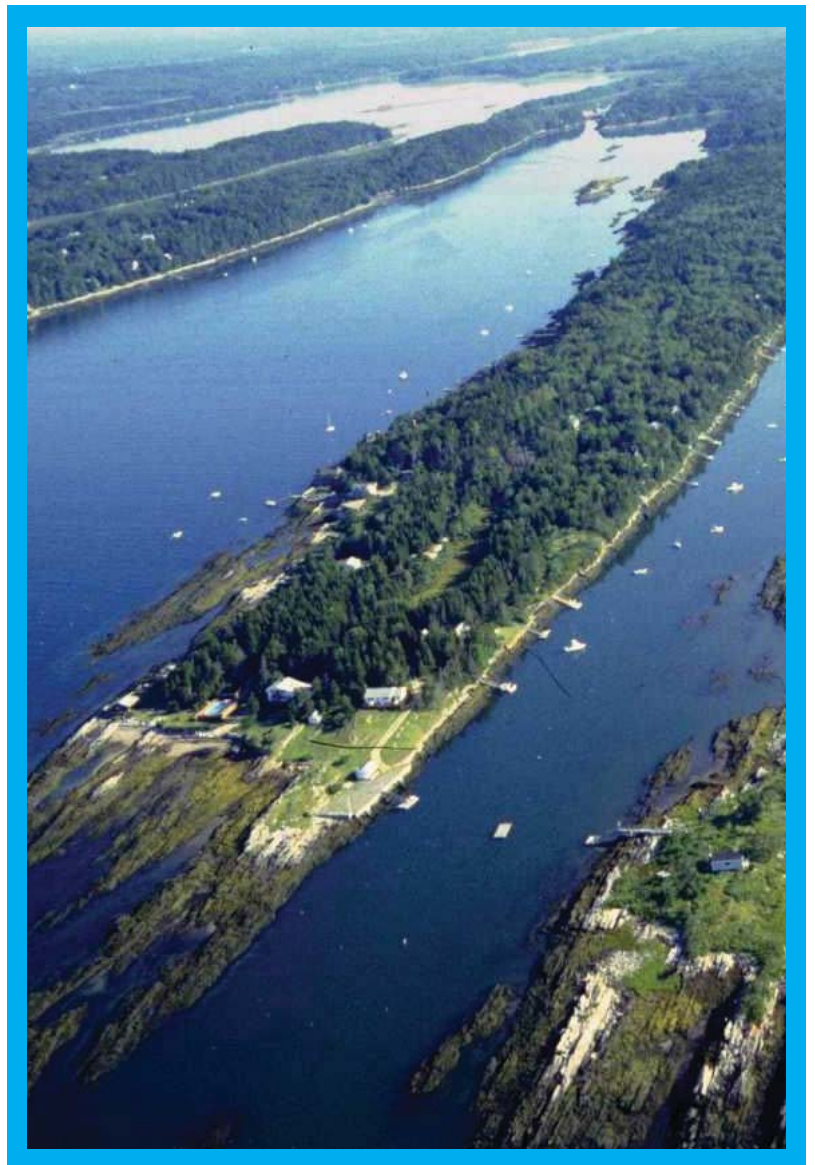
The ISWG member communities received invaluable assistance working through regulations and outreach, a required area in which many of the municipalities lacked experience. CBEP helped fund an outreach coordinator and helped leverage funding from the 28 Small Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4s) Statewide to launch the State's "Think Blue Maine: Clean Water Begins with You" media campaign—a successful water quality outreach effort that originated on the West Coast and is now being adopted across the East Coast.

The ISWG also developed a standard operating procedures manual with funding and staff support from CBEP, which is currently being used to train hundreds of local Department of Public Works employees and other municipal staff while serving as a regional and national model. CBEP provided funding for several half-and full-day classes to train employees from each of the 14 municipalities on stormwater prevention measures. Formation of the ISWG also led to joint mapping of stormwater

infrastructure and illicit discharge detection and elimination inspection procedures, while enlisting the help of Ameri-corps volunteers to save on operational costs.

CBEP has also funded a series of demonstration projects within ISWG communities to showcase low-impact development (LID) strategies for mitigating stormwater, including the installation of a "green" roof atop Portland's East End School and a porous pavement parking lot at the new Freeport Community Center. These projects are appearing in newspaper headlines and attracting the attention of developers seeking to implement LID design into State buildings.

With implementation of their regional, five-year plan well under way, the ISWG has been lauded by Maine's Governor and is now viewed as a model for municipal collaboration across New England.



OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION

When the privately-owned Babcock Ranch, a critical landscape connection between Charlotte Harbor and Lake Okeechobee and the Everglades, became vulnerable to commercial development in 2004, the community's concern increased. The 91,361-acre property provides essential wildlife habitat, houses one of the area's largest natural water storage tracts and includes one of south-west Florida's few water bodies listed without impairment. Naturally, concerns were voiced about the need to preserve the integrity of this important stretch of coastal land—so the Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program (CHNEP) stepped in to facilitate a solution.

NEP IN ACTION

The CHNEP presented \$5,000 in seed money and a staff member to establish the Babcock Preservation Partnership, a grassroots initiative that raised funds and organized a coalition of stakeholders that could influence the acquisition and management of the property. The effort was a remarkable success that eventually led the State and Lee County to purchase and preserve 80 percent of the Ranch with ambitious efforts still in progress to ensure the remaining acreage remains intact.

To make it happen, a core group of stakeholders—including local hunting, sporting and environmental groups, realtors, the water management district, private businesses, educators, citizens, and students—stepped in to donate time and resources to the effort. Chico's, the women's clothing retailer headquartered in Florida, got on board with a donation that enabled the group to hire another staff member to run the partnership and launched an advertising campaign that used the Ranch as its model-shoot location.

The newspaper in Lee County underwrote the design and production of 5,000 educational pamphlets for use during outreach events and direct mailings. Reporters, editors and an editorial cartoonist also worked to keep the story alive. A local resident also contacted family friend Jim Fowler, the well-known naturalist and TV host, who donated his time as spokesman for the effort. Lee County

offered its helicopter and pilot to capture Fowler on video flying over the Ranch and explaining the importance of preserving the property. The messages aired regularly on local cable and radio stations—free of charge.

In addition, Lee County and local restaurant, the Blue Pepper, underwrote the costs of two bus loads of activists to travel to the State capital to testify at the State's conservation lands committee hearing in support of purchasing the Ranch. Elected State officials were called, sent letters, e-mailed, and visited to demonstrate the broad-based support for legislation to authorize the expenditure of State dollars to purchase the Ranch.

With over a quarter-million of local fundraising dollars and the support of the Governor and other elected officials in securing State and Federal funding, 73,000 acres were purchased by the State of Florida and Lee County in 2006. This acquisition permanently protects water quality and quantity, provides habitat and preserves open space for generations to come, and demonstrates the strength of the NEP approach to facilitating cooperation among diverse stakeholders in order to protect and preserve the watershed.





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SMART GROWTH

The rapid development that has taken place in Ocean City, Maryland, over the last several decades has made Worcester County one of the State's most densely-populated coastal regions. With more people expected and demands for development on the horizon, the County was faced with two major issues: how should the county prepare for growth, and where should that growth occur?

NEP IN ACTION

Beginning in 2004, using EPA grant funding, the Maryland Coastal Bays Program (MCBP) brought scores of builders, county planners, architects, engineers and other stakeholders to the table, a collaboration that enabled the MCBP to create a viable plan that would replace years-old planning and zoning laws with ones that mandate low impact development (LID) elements into any future building projects.

Officially adopted by the Worcester County Commissioners in March 2006, the County's new Comprehensive Plan for smart growth will introduce greener development processes across 3,300 acres over the next 20 years—it will also help preserve 20,000 acres by pushing growth away from the forests, wetlands, and flood-prone areas and into and around existing infrastructure absent of hazardous and sensitive areas.

During the initial planning stages, all municipalities within Worcester County played an integral role in developing the new design with concerted efforts to stay focused on what would be best for the County as a whole in order to meet smart growth objectives. Numerous speakers groups, public meetings and workshops kept everyone on the same page and MCBP also developed a course to teach real estate professionals about the environmental impacts of various types of development.

In the field, individual analyses of each of the eight watersheds in the County were conducted to help determine how growth should be directed away from sensitive areas and toward marginal agricultural land adjacent to existing towns. Nutrient reduction efforts and Total Maximum Daily

Load implementation were also incorporated into the plan and information was shared with State officials during presentations—an effort that has expanded and enabled MCBP to work with neighboring counties in Delaware and Virginia to examine their watershed planning.

Soon, Worcester's outmoded zoning ordinances — now attached to eState-zoned properties and found inconsistent with the Plan's eye toward greener development—will return to agriculturally-zoned land, allowing just enough growth (2,700 acres per parcel) to accommodate the estimated 18,000 people who are expected to move into the County over the next decade.

To help residents understand the importance of changing zoning laws and the benefit they have toward preserving the region's character and environmental integrity, the MCBP launched a \$20,000 public education campaign.

Divisiveness in communities is often the unfortunate result of discussions about growth and development. Maryland Coastal Bays, however, successfully brought opposing views to the table through the NEP governance plan in order to protect the bays and waters where fresh-water meets the sea in coastal Maryland. The product of this collaborative effort, the Worcester County Comprehensive Plan, is now being hailed as an important model for watersheds across the country.

POLLUTION REDUCTION

As many as 32 bacteria-related, impaired water bodies exist in the Houston-Galveston area, making it one of the highest priority problems facing the Galveston Bay ecosystem. Non-point source pollution within the watershed has infected hundreds of miles of bayous and streams that flow to Galveston Bay. With 4 million people living in the Galveston Bay area and another 3.5 million expected by 2035, dozens of waste-water treatment plants (WWTPs)—many of them small and aging—are struggling to optimally manage costs and meet performance standards.

With the help of many private, public and community partners, the Galveston Bay Estuary Partnership (GBEP) is responding to the issues by combining watershed-based management and targeted source-reduction efforts to address the pollution and other estuary threats.



NEP IN ACTION

The GBEP recently galvanized an effort to bring watershed managers together to determine the best way to regionalize some of Galveston's WWTPs and address some 1,000 permitted discharges. Many small WWTPs were identified and included in GBEP's 10-year strategic action plan, "Charting the Course to 2015." The GBEP also identified 17,800 failing systems in an underserved area by conducting a series of septic system surveys and sponsoring a community risk assessment study on the potential health impacts of failing septic systems. The work moved county officials and the community toward finding replacement options. In helping local governments

implement large-scale water quality improvement projects in targeted watershed areas, the GBEP and Texas Commission on Environmental Quality have pooled Federal Clean Water Act Section 320, 319 and 106 program funding, which enabled municipalities to receive \$4 million in partnership grants.

Another notable success is a six-year 3.5 acre stormwater demonstration project spearheaded by the GBEP and partners in 2001. With plans to widen the Brays Bayou at Mason Park already under way by the Harris County Flood Control District, the GBEP saw an opportunity. Aware that the project would require the excavation of large portions of earth in order for streamside shelves to be installed, the GBEP approached the county with the idea of creating wetland areas that could provide a wet bottom detention to catch floatable litter, fertilizers, pesticides, and other pollutants.

It took little persuading for the county to agree to the add-on and soon numerous local, State, and Federal agencies and organizations, including the US EPA, Harris County Flood Control District, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, the City of Houston Parks and Recreation Department, Texas Master Naturalists, NRG Energy Inc., and students from local high schools, came together to provide project funding, expertise and volunteer labor.

Having laid the path for future collaborative work, the award-winning project is already reaping environmental benefits, including signs of decreased bacteria levels in the water, and has provided a new habitat for fish and wildlife. A recreational trail with a kiosk and interpretive signs are educating the public about the function and benefits of the 3.2-acre project. And the best part of all? The flood control district is now taking what it has learned and is applying it to other Harris County watersheds.

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

The Lower Columbia River Estuary Partnership (LCREP) has found that the key to educating people about the importance of protecting and restoring the watershed is to personally involve them in the effort, which is reflected in most of LCREP's water quality outreach and education projects—especially in the classroom.

The work of the LCREP centers on protecting and restoring the lower 146 miles of the Columbia River—but they don't do it alone. Having already established itself as a credible organization with a cadre of experts and supporters to draw from, the Estuary Partnership is able to rely on these numerous public and private entities to help build stewardship initiatives that succeed.

NEP IN ACTION

With a team of educators, the LCREP has developed 50 classroom curricula and reached 81,000 students from all grade levels. Working closely with teachers to tailor and deliver classroom lessons, field trips and service learning projects, the work is constantly evolving as it spreads across the region, catching the attention of educators—mostly through word of mouth.

In 2006, the LCREP introduced the Schoolyard Stormwater Project, a new initiative that gives Portland students from elementary, middle and high schools motivating, hands-on education about sustainable stormwater management, and to help implement stormwater infiltration projects right on the school property—projects that have the added benefit of reducing the schools' stormwater fees.

Funded in part by the EPA, the LCREP received additional funding for the projects from the Spirit Mountain Community Fund, the philanthropic arm of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, which supports a variety of environmental protection and education projects. The LCREP also enlisted the help of three landscape and architectural designers who created the plans free of charge. Artistic, educational elements were weaved into the designs to appeal to young minds and outdoor classroom space was integrated for added learning opportunities. A series of

classroom discussions and lessons, focused on stormwater, watershed health, and water quality, also prepared students for field trips that allowed them to view innovative stormwater approaches outside the school yard. The LCREP collaborated with local businesses, including a local health food store, which have integrated sustainable stormwater infiltration elements on the premises and are willing to host the students for an hour of learning and exploration.

Later in the year, the LCREP collaborated with the outreach and education staff at Lewis and Clark National Historic Park in Astoria, Oregon, to offer an affordable summer camp experience to 35 students in grades three to six. The joint venture has set the stage for future camp programs that provide unique and memorable summers infused with educational elements that aim to positively influence young minds as they make choices that impact the environment.

The LCREP is also an inspiration to adults. A recent initiative engaged river paddling enthusiasts in a clean up project to clear an island site of thousands of pounds of river-polluting debris—an effort made possible with the help of local and State agencies. Members from a neighboring yacht club were also approached by an Estuary Partnership board member who succeeded in getting two yacht club members to donate a boat and barge to carry away the 4,100 pounds of car batteries, propane tanks, gas cans, abandoned boat parts, bicycles and other trash left behind by squatters on the Hump Island shoreline. Volunteers have also mowed grass, removed trash and assisted in various repairs at another site along Reed Island's water trail campsite.

With public and private partners, the LCREP is well on the way to building stewardship programs that will last a lifetime.

BUILDING TRUST AND EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

The US EPA National Estuary Program (NEP), a unique and voluntary community-based program established in 1987 under the Clean Water Act (CWA) Amendments, works to restore and maintain the water quality and ecological integrity of estuaries of national significance.

To achieve long-term protection of water quality and living resources—goals of CWA, collaboration and inclusive decision-making are essential. The NEP uses a collaborative decision-making process where solutions developed reflect all stakeholders' input and fully respect local priorities. This collaboration builds strong trust and effective partnerships. In turn, this fosters a high likelihood of success.

There are 28 NEPs, located in 18 U.S. coastal States and Puerto Rico, which are designated estuaries of national significance for their distinct economic, ecological, recreational, and aesthetic values.

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The NEP: Applying the Clean Water Act in ways that are Effective, Efficient, Adaptable, and Collaborative.