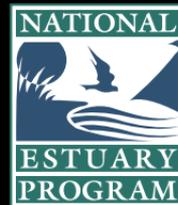




Photo Credit: Mark Lagrange



NATIONAL
ESTUARY
PROGRAM

THE NATIONAL ESTUARY PROGRAM

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

In their efforts to improve environmental conditions in their States, the 28 local NEPs across the country have demonstrated an impressive ability to secure and leverage funds, improve public education about estuaries, and engage citizens' participation by establishing key partnerships among Federal, State, and local agencies; non-profit organizations; industry; academia; environmental and business groups; and community residents.

The NEP works by providing practical avenues for communities to apply CWA programs at the local level. The NEP looks broadly across the watershed, recognizes the connection between upstream sources and downstream impacts. It offers an effective means of securing commitments necessary to achieving tangible environmental results—a unique, collaborative, problem-solving process that is fully supportive of local priorities.



THE NEP APPROACH

An Adaptable Model for Ecosystem Management

WHAT IS AN NEP?

Each NEP consists of a collection of stakeholders, organized in a decision-making framework that facilitates collaboration, consensus-building, and public input. NEP stakeholders typically include representatives from Federal, State and local governments, non-profit organizations, affected business and industries, academia, and the general public.

NEPs are guided by a director and staff that are housed in a program office located within the estuarine watershed. Collectively NEPs work to improve the health of their estuary – its waters, habitats and living resources within a particular geographic boundary encompassing the estuary and surrounding environments.

WHAT IS THE NEP APPROACH?

- Establish a governance structure
- Involve community stakeholders as equal partners
- Engage the public throughout the decision-making process
- Collaborate to identify problems and solutions
- Build on water quality control measures and tailor them to specific places
- Set measurable goals and objectives and monitor effectiveness of actions – adjust if necessary
- Develop and implement a Management Plan

WHAT MAKES THE NEP UNUSUAL?

- Environmental issues don't conform to political jurisdictions, so the NEPs are defined by watershed boundaries and ecosystems. This elevates the importance of the NEP governance structure to provide a forum to bring together diverse stakeholders. That unique structure provides a platform for collaborative decision making and guides NEPs in identifying issues, developing management actions and solutions.
- The use of sound science lends credibility to NEP management plans. They complete a technical characterization and a base program analysis to define their estuary and the issues facing it, and then explain it to stakeholders in plain English.
- Collaborative decision making gets everyone behind a shared vision and helps stakeholders overcome obstacles, exchange information, secure funds, pool resources, and coordinate program efforts. Working for a common goal keeps the goals of estuary restoration and protection in front of specific and potentially conflicting estuary needs and uses.
- Keeping everyone involved sustains the commitment. It's no easy task to sustain stakeholder interest over a long period of estuary study, restoration and protection, but the NEP approach guides the team in informing, involving and engaging stakeholders and the public for the long-term. The approach uses engagement tactics such as opinion surveys, small group meetings, citizen advisory committees, and environmental monitoring to keep the interest high.

IS THE NEP APPROACH TRANSFERABLE?

Yes! The NEP community watershed approach offers an easy-to-transfer model for environmental management. Its successful and innovative tactics—for science and management, collaborative decision-making, and public involvement—can readily be adapted to coastal and non-coastal watershed management initiatives.



Photo Credit: Coastal Conservation Association

A CREDIBLE BLUEPRINT

Integrating common EPA goals: a snapshot of the NEP approach

The National Estuary Program (NEP)—a credible process that works. With over 20 years experience implementing key provisions of the Clean Water Act, the NEP is the nation's principal watershed program—one that offers other organizations, including those within the EPA, a viable, effective method of protecting and managing all types of watershed environments, including non-coastal areas.

The success of the NEP is due to the Program's unique, collaborative problem-solving process, which enables its members to make sound, science-based management decisions, develop long-term sustainable finance strategies and implement on-the-ground actions that aim to support and strengthen local priorities.

The NEP has made exceptional gains in identifying environmental challenges and tackling complex water quality issues.



Photo Credit: Tillamook Estuaries Partnership



Photo Credit: Sarasota Bay Estuary Program

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, or organized framework that fully involves the public in the decision-making process, and encourages strong partnerships and collaborative working relationships. For every NEP, that structure generates a blueprint for success that relies on a studied consensus-building process which balances the needs and interests of every stakeholder to achieve common goals.



Photo Credit: San Juan Bay Estuary Program



EFFECTIVE

NEPs have protected and restored over 1 million acres of habitat since 2000. The habitat efforts carried out by the NEPs, their partners, and many volunteers have yielded measurable environmental results. These projects not only improve the coastal habitats directly, but the water quality in these estuaries, rivers, streams and wetlands as well, thereby benefiting the living resources that are found in or use these vital places.

For example, NEPs work to enhance riparian areas thus reducing pollution entering rivers and streams that would adversely impact fish, and benthic organisms. NEPs also conduct projects to restore tidal flow to wetlands enabling them to better capture sediments and filter pollutants which in doing so improves the health of species such as birds, shellfish, and mammals that depend on wetlands for survival.

Photo Credit: Maryland Coastal Bays Program



Photo Credit: Bryon Chamberlin



EFFICIENT

NEPs around the country have become efficient at leveraging funds to increase their ability to restore and protect their coastal ecosystems. The NEPs have obtained nearly \$4 billion for on-the-ground efforts since 2003. Getting smart about funding means developing strategies, targeting programs to pursue funding that supports priorities, fostering alliances with public and private partners, and demonstrating results to donors. It also means crediting sponsors for their contributions and encouraging staff development of new and creative initiatives.

Photo Credit: Bryon Chamberlin



Photo Credit: Nancy Laurson



Photo Credit: Bill & Sharon Draker

ADAPTABLE

The NEP approach integrates sound science and decision making and adaptive management—a process of continuous monitoring—and sometimes adjusting—if goals and objectives are not being met. This is also what makes NEPs successful in their ability to adapt to emerging issues facing our coasts and estuaries, such as invasive species, persistent organic pollutants, and climate change. It's a method that can be readily adapted by and transferred to any watershed group in the country.

Photo Credit: Mobile Bay National Estuary Program





VISIT AN NERP NEAR YOU

Albemarle-Pamlico Sounds, NC
apnep.org

Barataria-Terrebonne Estuary, LA
btnep.org

Barnegat Bay, NJ
bbep.org

Buzzards Bay, MA
buzzardsbay.org

Casco Bay, ME
cascobay.usm.maine.edu

Charlotte Harbor, FL
chnep.org

Coastal Bend Bays and Estuaries, TX
cbbep.org

Delaware Estuary, DE
delawareestuary.org

Delaware Inland Bays, DE
inlandbays.org

Galveston Bay, TX
gbep.state.tx.us

Indian River Lagoon, FL
sjrwmd.com/programs/outreach/irlnep/index.html

Long Island Sound, CT
longislandsoundstudy.net

Lower Columbia River Estuary, WA
lcrep.org

Maryland Coastal Bays, MD
mdcoastalbays.org

Massachusetts Bays, MA
massbays.org

Mobile Bay, AL
mobilebaynep.com

Morro Bay, CA
mbnep.org

Narragansett Bay, RI
nbep.org

New Hampshire Estuaries, NH
nhnep.unh.edu

New York-New Jersey Harbor, NY
seagrant.sunysb.edu/hnep

Peconic Estuary, NY
peconicestuary.org

Puget Sound, WA
psp.wa.gov

San Francisco Estuary, CA
sfep.abag.ca.gov/sfep

San Juan Bay, Puerto Rico
estuario.org

Santa Monica Bay, CA
santamonicaabay.org

Sarasota Bay, FL
sarasotabay.org

Tampa Bay, FL
tbep.org

Tillamook Bay, OR
tbnep.org

COLLABORATIVE



EFFECTIVE



EFFICIENT



ADAPTABLE



Photo Credit: Tampa Bay Estuary Program



Photo Credit: Gerold Morrison



Photo Credit: Ann Birch



Photo Credit: New Hampshire Estuaries Project

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