



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 ecosystem-based management program, it works to restore and maintain the water quality and ecological integrity of estuaries of national significance.

To achieve these goals, NEPs involve community members and other key partners to develop and implement a management plan. Citizens are fully engaged throughout this process to ensure that local needs are addressed in this Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP). The CCMP contains specific actions to apply CWA programs in a way that fully supports these local priorities.

The 28 NEPs across the country have demonstrated an impressive ability to secure and leverage funds, protect and restore coastal habitats, and broaden public understanding of estuaries. NEPs have also made substantial gains in identifying environmental challenges and tackling complex water quality and ecosystem issues.

The NEP looks broadly across the watershed and recognizes the connection between upstream sources of pollution and downstream impacts. It offers an effective means of securing commitments necessary to achieve tangible environmental results.

Photo Credit: Stephan Gersh



THE NEP APPROACH

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, nonprofit organizations, affected business and industries, academia, and the general public. EPA is a participant and provides management guidance, along with financial and technical assistance. Together the group works to articulate common goals and take action to address a wide range of issues in their CCMP.

NEPs are guided by a director and staff that are housed in a program office located within the estuarine watershed. 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 Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan (CCMP)

WHAT MAKES THE NEP SUCCESSFUL?

- Environmental issues transcend political jurisdictions so NEPs are defined by watershed or ecosystem boundaries.
- The NEP governance structure provides a neutral forum to bring together a diverse set of stakeholders and create a level decision-making process.
- NEPs seek to fully engage citizens throughout the decision-making and problem-solving process.
- NEP stakeholders work through a consensus-building process to identify CCMP goals, objectives, and actions that reflect their local priorities and interests.
- NEPs seek to ensure that decisions are based on sound science and actions are implemented using adaptive management strategies.
- NEPs produce periodic assessments of conditions in their estuarine ecosystems that are shared with policy makers and the public.
- NEPs have developed and applied innovative and adaptive approaches that effectively address habitat and water quality-related challenges.
- NEP stakeholders' actions and long-term commitment have produced tangible environmental results.
- NEPs share their lessons learned through effective outreach and education efforts.



Photo Credit: Coastal Conservation Association

A CREDIBLE BLUEPRINT

Integrating common EPA goals: a snapshot of the NEP approach

The National Estuary Program (NEP) is a collaborative, effective, efficient, and adaptable coastal ecosystem-based network. 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 a viable, effective method of protecting and managing all types of watershed environments, including non-coastal areas.

The NEP decision-making structure and long-term approach build cooperative relationships that facilitate trust among participants. This creates ownership of CCMP actions developed by those community members who play a role in implementing them.



Photo Credit: Tillamook Estuaries Partnership



Photo Credit: Sarasota Bay Estuary Program

COLLABORATIVE

NEPs are a catalyst to bring together citizens, affected businesses and industry, nonprofit groups, different levels of government, and varied government agencies that may not have worked together cooperatively in the past. A consensus-building process is used by NEP participants to collectively design and create a CCMP that represents their diverse perspectives and interests. This close collaboration generates long-term support and commitment on their part to then implement actions in the CCMP. The participation and involvement of all NEP stakeholders throughout the CCMP development and implementation process is critical to the program's success.



Photo Credit: San Juan Bay Estuary Program



EFFECTIVE

NEPs and their partners 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 other aquatic life. NEPs also conduct projects to restore tidal flow to wetlands, enabling them to better capture sediments and filter pollutants. To protect shorelines and minimize coastal erosion, some NEPs construct "living shorelines" by placing native plants and biodegradable organic materials near the water's edge. This creates a natural buffer or breakwater to absorb waves and trap sediments.

Photo Credit: Bryon Chamberlin



Photo Credit: Amie Howell



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 over \$10 for every \$1 provided by EPA, generating 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: Maryland Coastal Bays Program



Photo Credit: Nancy Laurson



Photo Credit: Bill & Sharon Draker

ADAPTABLE

NEPs set measurable goals and objectives and use ecosystem-based indicators to assess progress. This is done through a process of adaptive management – continuously monitoring and sometimes adjusting efforts if necessary – 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 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





The NEP—A Collaborative,
Effective, Efficient, and
Adaptable Coastal
Ecosystem-Based 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
sjwmd.com/indianriverlagoon/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 York-New Jersey Harbor, NY
harborestuary.org
Peconic Estuary, NY

peconicestuary.org

Piscataqua Region Estuaries, NH
nhnep.unh.edu

Puget Sound, WA
psp.wa.gov/

San Francisco Estuary, CA
sfestuary.org

San Juan Bay, Puerto Rico
estuario.org

Santa Monica Bay, CA
santamonocabay.org

Sarasota Bay, FL
sarasotabay.org

Tampa Bay, FL
tbep.org

Tillamook Bay, OR
tbnep.org

