



## **Peconic Estuary Program 2013 Annual Report DRAFT: October 2013**

### **Abbreviations:**

EPA – Environmental Protection Agency

DEC – Department of Environmental Conservation

NEIWPCC – New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission

SC – Suffolk County

DHS – Department of Health Services

NEP – National Estuary Program (does not include match)

WQIP – Water Quality Improvement Program (NY State)

WQPRP – Water Quality Protection and Restoration Program (a.k.a. ¼% sales tax fund, Suffolk County)

CCMP – Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan

MS4 – Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System

QAPP – Quality Assurance Project Plan

NADP – National Atmospheric Deposition Program

### **CCMP Implementation**

- The following summarizes implementation work that has taken place from Sept. 2012 to Sept. 2013.
  - A robust long-term monitoring program was supported and continued using NEP and non-NEP funds:
    - Water quality has been monitored periodically at 38 marine stations (approximately monthly, bi-weekly in summer) and 26 stream and point source locations (approximately quarterly with additional sampling during summer). During this year, the SC Bureau of Marine Resources collected over 4000 samples for analysis within the estuary, adding to a consistent 40-year-old record (SC and NEP funds).
    - Continuous monitoring equipment was maintained by the US Geological Survey (USGS) in two locations in the Estuary, collecting water quality data every 15 minutes and available in real-time on the USGS website (SC WQPRP and NEP funds).

- Seagrass was measured at 8 long-term monitoring locations within the Estuary, with continuous temperature measurements during the growing season at 6 of those locations (NEP funds).
  - Atmospheric deposition of major cations, including ammonium, was measured continuously at Cedar Beach in Southold (NEP funds).
  - New equipment was installed to measure atmospheric deposition of mercury at the same station (NEP and NYSERDA funds)
- Conceptual designs for 5 habitat restoration projects (one in each of the 5 towns within the PE watershed) were finalized. A stakeholder meeting was held to disseminate the results. , and PEP staff continue to work with partners to seek funding for the feasible projects. The Natural Resources Subcommittee will meet to recommend how PEP should direct implementation funds set aside to implement one or more of these projects. PEP staff and partners are currently working to secure additional implementation funding. (NEP funds)
- Six (6) new sub-watershed management plans have been finalized, focusing on stormwater controls, for Town/Jockey Creek, Goose Creek, Richmond Creek, Dering Harbor, Accabonac Harbor, and the Sebonac Creek complex (SC Capital funds). Two (2) additional plans, for Tanbark Creek and North Sea Harbor are underway and should be completed in summer 2014 (SC Capital funds).
- Excellent progress has been made toward the creation of an inter-municipal coalition to manage stormwater, comply with MS4 permit requirements, and tackle other water quality issues in a cost effective and coordinated manner. As of September 2013, all six towns and one village had passed resolutions committing to participate in year one of the coalition, and the NYS DOT has verbally committed. It is expected that the other 3 villages and Suffolk County will agree to sign on in 2014. The draft agreement will likely be signed and the coalition initiated in January 2014. The contractor has completed or nearly completed most contract tasks (as of September 2013), and that contract will be completed at the end of the calendar year 2013. (NEP funds)
- Research has been completed on the utilization of SAV as habitat for juvenile Bay Scallops (NEP funds). A presentation of these results will be scheduled for a TAC meeting in 2014.
- Volunteer monitoring was conducted at the Grangebelle Park fish passage, on the Peconic River, showing successful use of the fish ladder for the fourth year in a row (Seatuck and volunteer effort). NYS DEC continues to seek cooperation from dam owners to transfer funds to pursue an RFP for design of a fish passage at the Upper Mills dam (NEP funds).
- In cooperation with NYS DEC freshwater fisheries division, four Ludwigia pull events were held on the Peconic River, engaging 86

volunteers (563 volunteer hours) and removing approximately 24.5 cubic yards of *Ludwigia* (345.5 staff hours including NEP funded and NYS DEC funded staff).

- A scallop restoration project has led to dramatic increases in scallop populations in the Peconic Estuary (SC WQPRP funds).
- Shellfish restoration work has continued at the shellfish hatchery in East Hampton (NEP funds).
- Seagrass has been planted in many areas of the Peconic Estuary, in some cases engaging volunteers to assist in preparing plants for transplant (SC WQPRP funds).
- The agricultural stewardship program educated East End farmers about sustainable agriculture, recruited farms to participate in pilot efforts and conducted side-by-side trials of innovative products and methods that limit nitrogen and pesticides leaching to groundwater from farms, helped farms to optimize equipment performance to minimize fertilizer waste and excess nitrogen application, facilitated integrated pest management on farms, and brought farmers and scientists together to facilitate collaboration and technical transfer (SC WQPRP funds).
- PEP's Public Education and Outreach program conducted events with schools, represented PEP at numerous events, supported the citizens advisory committee, and held one outreach event for the public (NEP funds).
- A social media presence has been created for PEP, including a facebook page and twitter account. These are frequently updated and are helping to expand the breadth of stakeholders reached. (NEP funds)
- PEP's newsletter has been modernized and made digital, two editions of the newsletter were published between April and September. (NEP funds)
- The Suffolk County Executive hosted a press event in honor of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Peconic Estuary Program. (NEP funds)
- The PEP Citizens Advisory Committee met 9 times, the Technical Advisory Committee met 4 times, the Management Committee met 4 times, the Policy Committee met once, and the PEP Director attended one meeting of the East End Mayors and Supervisors Association in lieu of holding a Local Government Committee meeting.

### **Leveraging of Stakeholder Resources**

- PEP leveraged approximately \$35 million in stakeholder resources during the 2012-13 fiscal year to restore or protect over 309 acres. PEP influences land acquisition decision making through the *Critical Lands Protection Strategy*, and describes and prioritizes habitat restoration projects in the *Habitat Restoration Plan*.

- This has been a difficult year, financially, for New York State and Suffolk County. New projects beyond the required match have not been secured. The PEP will continue to push for a dedicated “match” or leveraged funding mechanism from the main partners (Suffolk County and New York State).
- New mechanisms (such as support letters, project screening, and dissemination of grant opportunity information to partners) are helping to encourage increased Peconic-related applications for non-NEP funds (e.g. WQIP, WQPRP, NOAA, etc.).
- The PEP continues to assist local governments in planning and conceptual design in order to encourage additional spending to further PEPs mission of protecting and restoring the Peconic Estuary (e.g. habitat restoration conceptual designs, model code for vegetation preservation, inter-municipal agreement planning and coordination, subwatershed management plans).

### **Top Priorities, Desired funding, and Strategic Planning**

- PEP held a strategic planning workshop in January 2013. The Desired Funding lists was updated. A nitrogen reduction strategy was identified as a top priority for PEP for 2013 – 2015, to be re-evaluated at that time. This strategy will be reflected in all resource allocation decisions. It was determined that a new Nitrogen workgroup will be created.

### **Programmatic Reporting**

- NEPORT (EPA’s required reporting about habitat restoration, including land acquisition, and leveraging) was completed on-time by the State Coordinator, with assistance/information provided as part of the Marine Conservation Planner contract. The grand total for habitat restoration (including land acquisition) was 309 acres restored for a total of approximately \$35 million. PEP’s role was “significant” (according to EPA definitions) in \$516,000.00
- Current contract drafting ensures that Quality Assurance Project Plans (QAPPs) are developed and in place prior to initiating projects that collect or use environmental data as a requirement of the contract. New PEP policies ensure that this is a topic of discussion during the initial project kick-off meeting for all projects and the importance of this step is emphasized by PEP staff. PEP staff members have ensured that previously awarded projects are caught up to new QAPP requirements. Project delays due to QAPP review continue to be an issue for project timelines, but review times have improved.
- The PEP was represented by both the program director at the EPA HQ-hosted *National Meeting of NEPs* in Washington DC in February 2013 and by the program director at the *Association of National Estuary Programs* joint meeting with *Restore America’s Estuaries* in Tampa in October 2012. The program director and state coordinator have also worked collaboratively with staff from other NEPs in the region as opportunities have presented themselves. The PEP program director and state coordinator have also ensured PEP representation at

numerous local conferences and workshops (e.g. Pine Barrens Forum, NY Ocean Action Plan, Long Island Agricultural Conference, Long Island Natural History Conference). Travel restrictions at NYSDEC are preventing the state coordinator from participating in out of state meetings and slow reimbursement at Suffolk County remains a deterrent to travel.

- The Policy Committee was convened in May, and included active participation by representatives from the Technical Advisory Committee, Local Government Committee, and Suffolk County's new administration.
- The Management Committee met regularly (quarterly) and actively participated in program planning and decision-making.
- PEP did not publish an environmental indicators report as planned. An Environmental Indicators workgroup was formed and initial planning has occurred. We expect to publish this technical report in 2015, and to initiate a new companion report summarizing that information for a lay audience.
- The Stormwater Workgroup and Natural Resource Subcommittee continue to meet approximately three times per year. Topics presented and discussed include amending the CCMP to address climate change, subwatershed management plans, Pathogen Load Assessment, and habitat restoration.

### **Program Administration (Contracts and Grants)**

- FFY2005 grant is closed out and nearly all funds were expended.
- All salary funds from FFY 2006 - 2010 have been expended. All contractual funds for awards prior to 2012 are encumbered in contracts. Re-budgeting of some NADP funds is underway to supplement monitoring costs.
- The contract writing process is inhibiting timely grant expenditures but good communication has been established between PEP and the SCDHS contracts unit. Contract drafting causes delay with new projects. The contract approval and signature process has increased to the order of two to six months.
- The FFY2013 grant application and workplan were submitted on time.
- The goal of awarding contracts associated with that new grant within one year is still a goal for the FFY 2013 award but has been impossible with only two program staff members and significant delays at Suffolk County.