



National Estuary Program Fact Sheet Celebrating 20 Years of Protecting, Restoring and Reviving

History

- In 1987, the Clean Water Act Amendments provided for the establishment of the National Estuary Program. The program is charged with protecting and restoring 28 estuaries classified as nationally significant.
- The US EPA National Estuary Program (NEP) is a unique and voluntary community-based program.
- The program's lauded blueprint to save and replenish America's coastlines serves as a model for community-based organizations nationwide.

Mission

- NEP's primary focus is to implement measures that adhere to the Clean Water Act while working to restore and maintain the water quality and ecological integrity of estuaries of national significance.
- The NEP program is aggressive in reclaiming areas of critical habitat, eliminating aquatic invasive species, preserving wetland acres and protecting coastlines.

Structure

- There are 28 NEPs, located in 18 U.S. coastal states and Puerto Rico.
- Individual NEP programs receive federal funding, but largely work to secure funding through grants.
- Since environmental issues don't fall into the restrictions of political jurisdictions, NEPs are defined by watershed boundaries and ecosystems.
- The 28 NEPs are:
 - Albemarle-Pamlico Sounds
 - Barataria-Terrebonne
 - Barnegat Bay
 - Buzzards Bay
 - Casco Bay
 - Charlotte Harbor
 - Lower Columbia River Estuary Partnership
 - Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program
 - Delaware Estuary
 - Delaware Inland Bays
 - Galveston Bay
 - Indian River Lagoon
 - Long Island Sound

- Maryland Coastal Bays
- Massachusetts Bays
- Mobile Bay
- Morro Bay
- Narragansett Bay
- New Hampshire Estuaries
- New York-New Jersey Harbor
- Peconic Bay
- Puget Sound Partnership
- San Francisco Estuary
- San Juan Bay
- Santa Monica Bay
- Sarasota Bay
- Tampa Bay
- Tillamook Estuaries Partnership

Method

- The NEP program and its partners employ a blended approach of sound science and research to craft solutions for environmental challenges.
- The National Estuary Program is a collection of stakeholders that guides local programs through the NEP approach to augment the health of their estuaries---their waters, habitats and living resources.
- The unique framework of NEP utilizes a foundation of governance that remains cognizant of the concerns of individual NEPs.
- NEP and its partners actively engage their publics to ensure the gains of the program and solidify its credibility.
- Soliciting opinions from the population helps to build on water-quality control measures and tailor them to specific areas.
- Adaptability, Collaboration, Effectiveness, and Efficiency are benchmarks of the NEP approach and ones which facilitate problem identification and resolution.

Program Highlights

- Since 2000 alone, it has sustained or renewed more than 1 million acres of critical habitat.
- NEP and its partners have leveraged more than \$3 billion since 2003.
- Partners have endeavored to protect thousands of acres by using conservation easements and land acquisitions.
- NEP has succeeded in recovering habitats and creating wetlands.
- Restorative actions such as removing or replacing culverts, constructing artificial reefs, installing fish ladders and repairing or replacing tidegates have bolstered the

reintroduction of near-extinct species, the elimination of aquatic invasive species and a significant improvement in water quality.

Partner Achievements

- Indian River Lagoon Estuary in Palm Bay, Florida, has rehabilitated 34,943 acres of wetlands;
- Casco Bay Estuary in Maine, which is home to the largest oil port on the East Coast, is enjoying a rebound in its lobster industry, essential to the local economy;
- Florida's Sarasota Bay Estuary is seeing a resurgence of more than 25 species such as gray snapper, sheepshead and stone crab thanks to its Artificial Reef Program;
- 81,000 students have learned about stormwater management through the Lower Columbia River Estuary Partnership's Schoolyard Stormwater Project;
- The Massachusetts Bays program has restored 13 shellfish beds;
- The Barnegat Bay Program in New Jersey has saved more than 32,000 acres of critical habitat;
- Coastal Bend Bays Estuary in Corpus Christi, Texas, secured \$6 million to protect more than 1,000 acres of wetlands;
- Rhode Island's Narragansett Bay program helped to acquire a "No Discharge" designation for the bay and state's coastal waters ---- the first large estuary to receive that label; and
- The Charlotte Harbor NEP restored 700 acres of Florida habitat by eliminating exotic plant species. It also founded the Babcock Preservation Partnership to save 91,361 acres from development.

Credible Environmental Steward

- The US EPA NEP program and its partners strive to achieve on-the-ground environmental results.
- NEP labors to tackle complex water-quality issues as it Implements the Clean Water Act.
- Program partners keep their local communities abreast and fully-engaged in problem-solving.
- Individual programs obtain significant funding by strategically leveraging resources.
- Managers and staff invest extensive energies in public education programs.
- NEPs work to identify national emerging contaminants, issues and trends.

- The program has tremendously improved coastal science by blending research findings into management decisions.
- NEP presents a state-of-the-art national coastal watershed model.

Estuary Health

- A June 2007 National Estuary Program Coastal Condition Report indicates 23 percent of the fish and shellfish monitored showed signs of contamination, a clear indication that there is more work ahead.
- The overall condition of the nation's NEPs is fair.
- The rating of NEP health is based on four key signals of environmental health: water quality, sediment quality, benthic community condition and fish tissue contaminants.
- The increasing concentration of people living along coastal areas places stress on estuaries and their surrounding areas, and often results in a loss in the quantity and quality of those habitats.

Forging Ahead

- Despite these findings, many estuaries are on the path to recovery and the NEP's approach to addressing these failing areas is forging the way to secure more funding and restore and protect more habitat areas.
- Because of the efforts of watershed managers, experts, volunteers and the public, ecosystems are being restored and public outreach efforts are ensuring that populations are educated about estuaries and understand why these efforts are essential.
- Through its innovative studies and research, NEP has redeemed wetlands, built artificial reefs, installed fish ladders, restored beach nesting areas and eliminated invasive vegetation.