



NBEP Quarterly Report March 2009

From the Director

On May 1, 2009, the NBEP and partners will hold an invited stakeholder workshop entitled *Currents of Change: Collaborative Action toward Sustainable Management of the Narragansett Bay Region*. The workshop is designed to communicate the findings of NBEP's status and trends report; identify critical challenges to sustainable management of the ecosystem; facilitate creative dialog among stakeholders and professionals regarding challenges and solutions; and support networks for collaborative action to address our shared challenges. It will also provide a basis for revision of the 1992 Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan for Narragansett Bay. We anticipate attendance of about 100 stakeholders from across the watershed region with representatives of state, federal and local governments, nongovernmental organizations, universities and watershed groups. The event will be held at the Roger Williams University School of Law.

The workshop is part of the NBEP's overall work on an environmental status and trends report that has been in development over the last year. With input from a wide variety of reviewers and two technical workshops, the NBEP has produced an indicator-based public summary currently being reviewed by the NBEP Management Committee and key technical stakeholders. Comments will be incorporated and the report will be made available to the stakeholders who will be attending the *Currents of Change* workshop. The results of the workshop will be incorporated into the report and a limited distribution of hard copies is expected to take place in July. The report and background materials, data and links will also reside and be available to all watershed residents and interested parties on the NBEP's website. The NBEP will work with its Management Committee and report users to determine how best to update the report as time goes on. Information on the event is available at <http://currentsofchange.wikispaces.com/>.

~Richard Ribb, Director

Science

Chris Deacutis

Dissolved Oxygen Surveys – The NBEP is planning on participating in the monthly D.O. surveys this summer 2009. The NBEP reaches a ten-year milestone, having organized this initial volunteer monitoring project to characterize the dissolved oxygen levels in the upper half of Narragansett Bay. Surveying has become more efficient both through experience and through upgrades to improved sampling equipment purchased through the Bay Window grant. Brown University, the NBEP, and URI still participate, and now complete the 75-station water column profiles with 3 small (20-22') boats which once took ten boats and many volunteers. Survey results have clearly delineated the "problem" areas for dissolved oxygen and have shown that June river flows foreshadow bad hypoxia years. High volume flows in wet Junes seem to help "seal off" the Bay and increase stratification, which extends duration as well as severity of hypoxia. All areas with significant hypoxia have monthly mapping cruises to help delineate the impacted zones of this globally increasing problem. Survey results are available at: <http://www.geo.brown.edu/georesearch/insomniacs/data.html>

Macroalgae Surveys - NBEP science staff anticipate continuing the macroalgae surveys this summer to continue strengthening the baseline information. The NBEP is discussing a possible collaboration with the NBNERR science research coordinator to extend the macroalgae surveys to the intertidal zone around Prudence Island in summer 2009 if feasible. Results to-date indicate that green algae are common throughout the Bay, but carpets of *Ulva* sp. (sea lettuce) are most common north of the Jamestown Bridge in quiet poorly flushed shallow coves and on the windward side of points in the Providence River. NBEP science staff completed preliminary categorization of all digital photography from all four macroalgae helicopter overflight surveys completed in summer 2008. GIS Maps will be prepared from this data in late Spring 2009.

Biological Condition Gradient pilot project - NBEP continued to actively participate as a member of the USEPA Biological Condition Gradient technical workgroup (formerly Tiered Aquatic Life Uses) in response to the proceedings of the November, 2008 2-day workshop held at the USEPA Atlantic Ecology Division Lab in Narragansett, RI. Work and discussions continue on the development of meaningful bay and watershed indicators based on ecosystem-based responses and knowledge of impacts along estuarine pollution gradients. Narragansett Bay continues to be one of several candidates for this group to develop a multi-estuary pilot project to apply the chosen indicators and test results of their use for management needs.

Nutrients Cycling Research Workshop - NBEP science staff helped develop and participated in a 2-day nitrogen research workshop at Brown University led by Dr. Warren Prell of Brown under the auspices of the Environmental Change Initiative. Participants included nationally recognized leaders in research on nitrogen recycling and isotope research from Woods Hole and Univ. MA. Dartmouth. As a result of the workshop, the Brown researchers have submitted a R.I. Sea Grant research project application to assess historic organic content of Bay sediments which will provide information on past Bay oxygen trends.

NBEP Assistance with Permits - NBEP science staff are helping to coordinate a technical group of scientists providing advice to RIDEM concerning assessment of thermal impacts from the Manchester Street Power Plant under the ongoing permit renewal review process. A multi-party workgroup is focusing on a preliminary list of species of concern to be considered in this process. Meetings were held between RIDEM permit staff and NBEP technical staff to discuss how to proceed on this issue. NBEP science staff also presented an overview of water quality issues in Narragansett Bay for the RIDEM at their Wastewater Operator Boot Camp program January 29, 2009. This program is being recognized by the EPA as a model for federal, state, local and professional cooperation of public, quasi-public and private sectors joining forces to benefit the common good.

Long Island Sound Study NEP Water Quality Workshop - NBEP's chief scientist was invited to present an overview of the application of science to water quality issues in Narragansett Bay by the NBEP at a meeting of the Long Island Sound NEP (LISS) Science and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) in February 2009 in Stamford CT. Lively and enthusiastic discussion ensued between our staff and research scientists from Stonybrook and Wesleyan University. The LIS researchers were very interested in the June flow link to severe hypoxia in Narragansett Bay.

Watershed & Community Outreach

Meg Kerr

Water Management/Coalition for Water Security - NBEP's Status and Trends report describes flow management as an issue of concern throughout the watershed. NBEP is a member of the Coalition for Water Security which has been working since 2005 to improve RI's management of freshwater resources. Recent work includes:

- Water management legislation developed by the Coalition has been introduced in the House (H5828). Senate legislation on water management (S0732) has also been introduced. The Coalition will develop a response to this bill.
- RIDEM's Alisa Richardson presented her most recent work on withdrawal standards to the Coalition and will present again at the Land & Water Summit.
- The CWS is a member of the Water Resource Boards HAP Pilot Committee. The HAP (Hunt-Annaquatucket-Pettaquamscutt) watershed is over-subscribed by current withdrawals and the pilot will explore management solutions.
- Upcoming initiatives: Water Forum (March 30), organized in partnership with the RI Water Works Association to explore demand management strategies (Jane Austin, lead)

CWS Lessons Learned Workshop - With funding from Third Sector New England, the Coalition for Water Security is documenting lessons learned and exploring new topics of concern. A workshop at the RI Foundation on March 13 will bring together a wide spectrum of environmental and quality of life organizations to consider future collaboration.

The following initiatives are led by NBEP and RI Land Trust Council, working together as the RI Land & Water Partnership (www.landandwaterpartnership.org)

Land and Water Summit – March 21, 2009.

The Land & Water Summit is one of Rhode Island's premier conferences bringing together 300 environmental leaders from grassroots organizations, state and local agencies and the private sector. This year is the 6th annual conference and features Tom Wessells as the keynote speaker with 31 excellent workshops on watershed management, land protection and stewardship and organizational development. Planning is complete and early registration has closed.

Trail Design Workshop – Saturday May 30 (raindate May 31)

This hands-on trail construction and maintenance workshop is provided by John Monroe with the National Park Service Rivers and Trails program. It follows the trail design workshop offered in 2007 and John's introductory workshop at the Land & Water Summit. The workshop will be held at TNC's Tillinghast Pond Management Area.

Donor/Member Software Implementation: Salesforce - With funding from Third Sector New England and the RI Foundation, the Land & Water Partnership has helped two watershed organizations (Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council, Taunton River Watershed Alliance) and three Land Trusts (Barrington Land Conservation Trust, South Kingstown Land Trust, Tiverton Land Trust) set up the LWP Salesforce template. These groups are beginning to use the system for membership and donor tracking. During the next 6 months, we will work with these organizations to analyze their membership data and use the information to increase the effectiveness of their next membership campaign. We also plan an evaluation workshop for late spring 2009.

Volunteer Management – Through the Land and Water Partnership, the NBEP is participating in Serve Rhode Island's campaign to build volunteerism in RI, serving on the environmental and management committee. We will explore the challenge of volunteer management, especially in small all-volunteer organizations.

Other projects

RI Blueways Alliance (www.exploreRI.org) - NBEP is a founding member of the Blueways Alliance and sees the project as a way to build public awareness and conservation of freshwater resources and strengthen watershed organizations. The mission of the Rhode Island Blueways Alliance is to develop a water trail network linking Rhode Island's rivers, lakes and ponds to

Narragansett Bay and to use the trail to promote safety, conservation, recreation and economic development. Recent accomplishments:

- Feature release showcasing the RI Blueway came out in February.
- ExploreRI expanded to include 184 published sites. An additional 14 sites are inactive and 68 sites are being processed. Many of the in-process sites are in the Taunton River watershed.
- NBEP represents RI Blueways on the RI Trails Advisory Council.

Upcoming work:

- Trip leading workshop at the Land & Water Summit (by Denise Poyer)
- Spring Trail Mix newsletter will feature Blueways events and information
- Paddle09 (June/July) and paddle safety training (May 14 by taught by Eastern Mountain Sports)
- Roger Williams Trail opening (July 10/11, Keith Gonsalves lead with support from the National Park Service and NBEP)
- Land and Water Convergence at Governor's Bay Day (Keith Gonsalves, lead with support from the Blueways Alliance)

Restoration

Tom Ardito and Lesley Lambert

Pawtuxet River Fish Passage – At a recent State House event to celebrate the awarding of R.I. bond funds for conservation projects, state grant of \$300,000 was awarded for partial dam removal project on the Pawtuxet River. NBEP director Richard Ribb accepted the award on behalf of the partnership that has been engaged in the Pawtuxet project including the Pawtuxet River Water Authority Water shed Council, the cities of Warwick and Cranston, Save The Bay, NBEP, USDA NRCS, RIDEM, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and citizen volunteers. An additional \$50,000 was recently secured for the project through the R.I. Coastal and Estuarine Habitat Restoration Trust Fund, administered by RI CRMC. The project team is working with EA Engineering on permitting and design; a permit application to RIDEM is being prepared. The NBEP has volunteered to facilitate the creation of a technical advisory committee to state permitting agencies in order address regulatory rule changes that would more consistently address river restoration projects.

Organizing for Economic Stimulus Funding for Habitat Restoration – The NBEP is working with state, local and federal partners to develop a state application for economic stimulus funding for habitat restoration that will be made available through NOAA. Approximately \$150 million will be available nationwide and will be allocated based on a competitive grant process; no nonfederal match is required for this funding. This application will be submitted through CRMC which would administer the grant if awarded; working with partners on a series of projects targeting construction of fish passage structures on major rivers. Under the accelerated stimulus funding process, the application to NOAA is due April 6, 2009.

Blackstone River Fish Passage – Fish passage work on the Blackstone River will benefit by the award of \$750,000 in state bond funding for conservation projects. Blackstone River advocates have worked tirelessly to secure funding to make fish passage over the first four dams on the Blackstone a reality. This funding will be combined with USDA NRCS, state, local and NGO dollars to design and construct the project.

Ten Mile River Fish Passage – Construction of at least one of the 3 fish passages needed on the Ten Mile River is likely to take place this year. Turner Reservoir was targeted for initial stages of the project but there also may be construction of passage on the Omega and Hunt's Mills dams depending on how soon work can be initiated and on USACE schedules this year.

Communication

Tom Ardito and Lesley Lambert

Online Communications – The NBEP is using the online newsletter service, Constant Contact, to both engage stakeholders in the Bay and watershed status and trends process and to distribute an electronic version of the Narragansett Bay Journal (NBJ). Constant Contact will be used in the stakeholder invitation process and to connect with stakeholders before and after the workshop. The production of the first electronic NBJ has been delayed to need to focus staff resources on the completion of the Currents of Change document and workshop; the issue is under development at this time and it is anticipated that it will be distributed in April 2009.

Outreach Events – The NBEP will have a program display at the upcoming Land & Water Conservation Summit and at the R.I. Salt Water Anglers Fishing Show at the R.I. Convention Center.

NBEP Management Committee Meeting

The next NBEP MC meeting of 2009 will take place on March 18, 2008. In 2009, Management Committee meetings are scheduled for the third Wednesdays of the months of March, June, September and December.

NBEP Management Committee representation (March 2009):

Susan Kiernan, RIDEM

Peter August, URI Coastal Institute

James Boyd, RI CRMC

Rachel Calabro, Save The Bay Watershed Coordinator

Donna Williams, Blackstone River Coalition

Eric Scherer, RI NRCS

Jane Austin, Save The Bay (chair)

Mel Cote, USEPA Region 1

David Gregg, R.I. Natural History Survey

Robert Stankelis, Narragansett Bay NERR

Ames Colt, RI Bays, Rivers & Watersheds Coordination Team

Carolyn LaMarre, Taunton River Watershed Alliance

Bryant Firmin, Mass. Dept. of Environmental Protection

The Narragansett Bay Estuary Program is one of the 28 programs in the National Estuary Program (NEP). The NEP is funded under Section 320 of the Clean Water Act. The NBEP is administered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency with state host agencies University of R.I. and RIDEM. For more information on the NEP, visit www.nationalestuaries.org and www.epa.gov/owow/estuaries. All NBEP meetings are open to the public. To contact the NBEP, call (401) 874-6233 or visit www.nbep.org