

SNEP Forum

Webinar Transcript

June 13, 2023

Adam: Alright, hello everyone my name is Adam Reilly, and I am the communications coordinator for the Southeast New England Program and on behalf of myself and the rest of the SNEP team I am thrilled to welcome you to our first in-person event since the beginning of COVID, our 2023S NEP public forum. Thank you all so much for being here but before we get started, I did just want to go over a few things. First, we already have our first lost and found item, if you are the owner of a blue fleece jacket that was somewhere in the vicinity of those stairs over there your jacket is now with Emily DiFranco at the registration desk. Second if you have not yet registered or received your name tag, after this session please feel free to go back to the registration desk and pick up your name tag there. And then the last thing is just if you require the use of elevators, the elevators are right by the room three breakout room so if you go out these doors, take a left straight down that way, the elevators are right there, right before that classroom. And then the bathrooms, if you haven't found them, are back in the poster presentation area right along the gray brick wall here. The next things that I just wanted to briefly chat about, everyone who received their program today on the back has a full map of the location or excuse me of our venue. We are here in building H, there are no refreshments provided directly in the breakout rooms but all refreshments and lunch and snacks are available for purchase in Building G so you go right out the main doors here, take a right and building G is located right there. Finally, I know many of you have already had the pleasure of visiting our poster presentations but if you haven't already I do encourage you to please check out our posters; we have I think almost 20 excellent poster presentations that will be available for the duration of the event so I highly encourage you to check those out during our transition and networking breaks. This just brings me to the agenda and we will start in about a minute with our opening remarks from regional administrator David Cash. We are thrilled to also have Dr. Christopher Obropta from Rutgers University here and then around 11:00 after a break we'll get directly into our breakout rooms to dig into the meat of today. So we have three breakout room sessions, each with about three or four concurrent discussion sessions that are led by our excellent facilitators. I do strongly encourage each of you to really bring your voices to these discussions because all of the material that will be shared with us and that comes out of the discussions today will be directly incorporated into the plan for the Southeastern New England Program over the next few years. WS exist because you're here and we want to make sure that we are doing right by the communities that we serve and part of that is by hearing your opinions and your thoughts on the direction of our program so that's why we're here today and again we thank you. So with that I am thrilled to hand it over to our regional administrator, Dr. David Cash. Dr. Cash, if you give me one moment, I will put you up on the screen.

David: Great.

[Music]

Adam: You're good to go.

David: Alright excellent. Thank you so much Adam and it's great to hear that there's so many people in person and it's the first time in many years doing this in person and I gotta say I love the ability to do the hybrid so that I can drop in for 10 or so minutes to make this introductory remarks and to be part of at least the remote community of all the work that's going on here with such a great mix of different partners from Academia and Municipal Partners, Federal and State, NGOs and Tribal Partners and it's just great to have everybody in the room both physically and virtually; so again thanks for having me and Adam thanks for pulling all this together and the whole team. So it's been 10 years since the founding of SNEP and in that time there's been an investment of 53 million dollars in federal funding that's also leveraged another 12 million to support clean and healthy waters, thriving watersheds, natural lands and sustainable communities. And none of this I think would have been possible without the incredible support from the

Massachusetts and Rhode Island Congressional Delegations and a special shout out to Senator Jack Reed whose years of service and dedication to the Narragansett Bay Region 1 supported the stewardship of our local coastal environment for now and for future generations. And I know that there are folks here, special shout out to folks from Senator Whitehouse's office, I think project director Nissa Pistachio is here and from Senator Markey's office policy fellow Alex Swanson; thanks for showing up today and of course the rest of the Congressional Delegation has always put SNEP funding as a high priority and there's been huge benefits from that. In addition to Adam, thanks so much to the EPA staff Mary Jo Feuerbach and Margarita Pryor, Ian Dombroski, Matt Stamis and Haley Miller a phenomenal team I know that you'll all be interacting with them throughout the day today.

This is a pretty incredible time to be in this program with the passage of bipartisan infrastructure law and since then our region has been working diligently to implement this huge step in investment in both environment and infrastructure throughout all of New England. SNEP itself is receiving 15 million dollars over five years from bill to target critical areas of infrastructure improvement, increased environmental stewardship, restoration and of course the reversal of environmental injustices throughout Southeast New England. SNEPs already received the first 6 million dollars of these funds and just to give a quick outline I know some of you are deep into the weeds of this but all of you might not know where some of the funding has gone so, 1.15 million of that funding has gone to Barnstable County Department of Health in Massachusetts alternative septic system test center to develop a management entity for reducing nitrogen pollution from septic systems in the Cape Cod Waters and I gotta say part of the Brilliance of the bipartisan infrastructure law is that it's allowed the regulatory side of the house to move forward aggressively knowing that there's infrastructure funding and so you know I think knowing the bipartisan infrastructure law allowed Massachusetts, the state to move forward with some of its regulatory program on the Cape and those two hand in hand are really going to make a huge difference. So in addition, 625,000 dollars went to USGS to research the impact of septic systems and sewerage on d nutrients and groundwater and will soon be announcing the recipients of 915,000 dollar funding to enhance decentralized wastewater in Rhode Island. In addition SNEP is actively accepting applications for 2.3 million dollars to fund stormwater and national infrastructure investment projects. And to date this amounts to nearly five million dollars investment from the bill funds into the SNEP region and this is just the beginning. SNEP is also really excited to announce the creation of a new program, the SNEP Opportunity to Advance Resilience, or otherwise known as SNEP SOAR fund and that fund will allocate 5 million dollars over the next four years to address climate resiliency in disadvantaged communities throughout Southeast New England and that first 1.25 million will be announced over the next few months.

So we're here today to ensure that our program continues to meet the needs of our regional partners, the three federally recognized tribes, the Narragansett tribe, the Wampanoag tribe of Gay Head Aquinnah, and the Mashpee Wampanoag tribe and Rhode Island, Massachusetts Regional NGO partners and the 33 municipalities from the SNEP region. So it's wonderful to have representatives from all these different partners here to talk about the future in moving forward and that just leads me to the closing of what are the fundamental themes that we're focusing on? And it's collaboration, innovation and growth and each of those voices that I mentioned and others in the room hold the power that we need to continue this important work. So it's phenomenal to again to have this meeting where everybody can be primarily in person and those who are able to remotely engage and now it's my pleasure to introduce our next speaker, Dr. Christopher Obropta. Dr. Obropta has a background in watershed management, water quality modeling, hydrologic and hydraulic modeling, and Coastal Engineering. He teaches bio resource engineering design at Rutgers University where he directs student design teams to develop solutions for complex real-life engineering problems just like the ones I highlighted above and you'll be talking about at this meeting. With his impressive background Dr. Obropta leads a highly specialized team of professional staff creating innovative solutions for water quality issues in New Jersey, so looking forward to hearing what he has to say that can be lessons learned for Southern New England. So with that I will turn it over to Dr. Obropta, thank you so much everybody and have a great series of discussions.

Adam: Thank you so much Dr. Cash.

Christopher: Dr. Cash, what a cool name Cash huh? Guy gives out all the money from EPA, name's Cash, that's great- I love that. Well thanks for having me here, I drove from New Jersey yesterday, I truly appreciate all the things that stuff going on New England with 95 and Connecticut, makes me understand New Jersey isn't the only state with traffic, it's wonderful. So my name is Christopher Obropta with the Rutgers Cooperative Extension Service. Cooperative Extension's been around for about 100 years, Rutgers University's land grant college for the state of New Jersey just like UMass is up in Massachusetts and University of Rhode Island is for Rhode Island, part of our job is to extend the knowledge university out to the states and help people solve their problems so I created the Water Resources program at Rutgers and this is our mission statement; like all mission statements, it has all appropriate buzzwords in it, what it really means is my job is really to empower and engage communities, deliver science-based solutions, economical solutions and help them implement them. So I do that throughout New Jersey and I work in some very urban areas and that's what I'm going to talk a lot about today.

So we've created a community-based green infrastructure program at Rutgers and we started in a city called Camden. Now Camden it's not just the poorest city in New Jersey it's often labeled the poorest city in the country. It's always in the top ten with crime, it has combined Source systems so when you flush your toilet and it rains it goes in the same pipe, and whenever we get about a quarter inch to a half inch of rain that system overflows a slurry of human waste and rainwater into the streets, the basements, into local waterways in Camden. I know it sounds medieval but it's happening today, not just in Camden but in 21 other communities in New Jersey. It's Not unusual in Canada for them to have to pick up toilet paper off the athletic fields before the kids go out and play so that's kind of what we're talking about so lots of flooding issues.

So we went into Camden and we started doing these green infrastructure plans for the communities and the idea was that we're going to go in and try to help fix Camden. Now when we went to Camden and started talking to people they said, yeah we know Rutgers, you're the State University, you come here all the time- you study us, you do these great design charrettes, you design great green street projects and then the first week of May. you're gone. You guys get your grades, nothing ever gets built and we're stuck here in Camden being your test subjects. So we said, well we're not that Rutgers, we're The Cooperative Extension Service, we're actually going to build stuff, I'm going to fix problems and it's okay, we'll believe it when we see it. So we started having local meetings first and we have Community meetings in Camden, there's about 20 discreet neighborhoods in Camden so the idea is going to have five community meetings throughout the city. So the first community meeting we have is in the evening, we have lots of food and we bring Tupperware. We have a place for the kids to play and we have people to watch the kids, you have toys and coloring books and stuff and at the end of the night people take all the leftovers home with them, the kids take the toys home with them. At the second meeting, we had double, triple the turnout because people heard what was going on at the first couple meetings. We asked the people what they want, what they need? Not telling them what they need like the universities always think they can do. We went in and we said we know flooding's an issue, we helped educate them, they had no idea that when they're wading through water in the rain that's a mixture of human waste and rainwater, they had no idea about this. This became a serious problem for them so the idea was, what are your problems? Where's the flood? Tell us where floods are, tell us what your issues are and that's what we kind of did.

So we went to these different meetings, we had these 20 neighborhoods, we identified different features of neighborhoods. Churches are really big in urban areas, it's really where a lot of people gather so churches, schools, parks and trying to understand where we can actually go in and make some fixes.

We did neighborhood maps and then we actually went out and walked around the neighborhood with the people. Now, Camden is a focus of a lot of different groups. EPA Region 2 was giving out money so they gave money out to a consulting company out in Oregon and they're going to come and do green infrastructure, identification of projects in Camden and so we talked to them on the phone, you know, as part of this Camden collaborative group and they said well we're going to just do it remotely from our desk

in Oregon. We said okay, that's not going to work; you have to go out and talk to the people, walk around the site and see the site and that's exactly what we did.

So out of this we came up with 40 different green infrastructure projects, 20 in each neighborhood and as we're doing the plans we're building the projects okay, so people are actually seeing things go in the ground. It takes a long time to gain trust of an urban community, but if you tell them you're going to do something and you actually deliver on it, that's a great way to build trust.

So we had all these projects going in and then we actually built a bunch of rain gardens, we did a lot of rainwater harvesting projects, we gave out rain barrels, planted a lot of trees and the whole thing was about building these relationships so we had local people there. We have in the bottom left-hand slide here you can see, that's the local priest and with him is the Mayor. So we do clean up days and the Mayor shows up, she brings her gloves she brings her clippers and she's helping out. The priest is there with all his patrons from his church. In the right-hand corner is the New Jersey Tree Foundation woman, Jessica. She's planting a lot of trees throughout the city. So let me actually go ahead and we have these local Champions, so this fella right here is Andy Cricken, he runs the Camden County Municipal Utility Authority which is actually located in Camden so that's the wastewater treatment plant for about 40 different municipalities all drained down to Camden and Camden has a plant in its city so Andy decided that he was going to use some money to actually fix some of Camden, put in some green infrastructure practices, not just to deal with stormwater issues but to help beautify the city, so he became a leader in this.

And then we have a lot of other people very committed to this and then the important thing is getting the kids involved. Once again you have the mayor in the center picture there and this was her elementary school that she went to and the kids were there and they were painting rain barrels, they were singing songs about the rain which was just really pretty phenomenal and this becomes what we're trying to accomplish.

So what we decided was there's a driving force to this, so we formed what we call Municipal Action Teams and the idea was we're going to form a collaborative group of state and local regulators, right, bring them into the meeting, local government officials, utility authorities, people, community groups and of course residents and a university. And the whole idea is to come up with a kind of collective vision and work together to achieve this division, so how do we get these folks to kind of advocate for green infrastructure? And that's what we're trying to accomplish here.

So this Collective approach has kind of five pieces to it right, so this first piece here we're talking about common agenda. So what's the common agenda? Now every group at the table has their own mission statement, has their own vision of what they need to do, so what we need to do is come up with a common agenda that we can all work together to achieve that common agenda and at the same time while they're achieving that agenda they can also achieve their own group's mission and goals, right, together we're stronger. In this case our common agenda was to use green infrastructure as the first line of defense for stormwater management and that's what we came up with, everybody agreed upon it and then we started thinking about okay well we need some backbone support for this organization, no collaborative works unless you have back some bone support. So this group here, I can tell Adam's one of these guys who is kind of helping run this, and there's a whole bunch of names up there I saw, so there's people behind this kind of making sure things happen. So in this case we had a local organization Cooper's Ferry and they provide some backbone support and then we had of course the Camden County Social facilities Authority and then we had Rutgers Cooperative Extension and the idea was you get people together and they begin trusting each other, okay, so then we actually think about shared measurement. We're all doing different things but we want to measure it using the same metrics. How many gallons of water are managed? How many acres of impervious cover are being treated? How many people are being educated? So we can aggregate all the impact that we have and we can use that and leverage that to get additional grant funding.

And then we have these mutual reinforcing activities so we're in a place and we're building the rain garden library, Cooper's Ferry comes in or Center for Environmental Transformation comes in and they're doing rain barrel workshops at the library, right, we get the kids from the school nearby to come and plant, now we're educating kids so how do we build upon things and keep joining things, building and building and working together and building off of each other? And then finally continuous communications. Now you think about the urban areas, you know, some people have internet, a lot of people don't. A lot of times we're putting flyers up on telephone poles to get people to come to meetings, you know, we're doing door hangers, going around we have individuals from the community knocking on doors and we're paying these folks to do that to get people to come out and kind of join us.

So out of this we formed this Municipal Action Team in Camden, we call the Camden SMART, Stormwater Management Resource Training, one of our staff came up with that witty idea. So then we formed other groups, Newark DIG, Doing Infrastructure Green, and another group in Patterson and Perth Amboy, Jersey City; all these urban areas have combined so where all these are environmental justice communities.

So in Camden we only had six partners when we started out and these were the partners and the city wasn't really at the table but Cooper's Ferry was, so if we needed the mayor to be at something we would tell Cooper's Ferry and they had the mayor's ear and she would come out and she'd do what they needed to do but they weren't there every day but we had access to them and they believed in what was going on. So we had this group here, now there are other groups in Camden, you show up to Camden and say hey we want to do this and they say well we want to be part of it and you have 150 non-profit groups with their hands out, where's our money? How do we get involved? So how do you whittle it down to a few groups and then bring those other groups in as you need them and that's what we started to do.

We started educating folks, telling them about stormwater infrastructure, telling them about combine overflows, we started talking a lot about green infrastructure but not neglecting gray infrastructure because the Camden County starts getting a ton of money to replace piping and things like that but we wanted people to know that we're not just focusing on building these beautiful landscape features to manage stormwater but we're also dealing with some serious infrastructure issues right. And then we did some education, some workforce development training. There's a group called Camden The Power Corp. and they're like re-entry folks, just got out of county lockup and we're training them on how to do green infrastructure, how to maintain it, how to take care of it.

Okay so here's a project that we had done in the South Ward this was an abandoned gas station we made it into a rain garden park, now it's a gateway to the South Ward. We do a lot of rainwater harvesting for community gardens. They won't put a spigot on a vacant lot in Camden because the water companies worried about losing money so we harvest rain water from nearby rooftops and we use that water. We do a lot of projects in schools, not just because you educate kids, but kids are free labor and they're small and they're closer to the ground, it's easier for them to plant so it's a great way to get them involved.

The MUA was getting money there's an environmental infrastructure trust in New Jersey and that trust says well if you're in a combined sewer community you could borrow money and you don't have to pay half of it back so 50% principal forgiveness. So Camden starts borrowing millions of dollars to do gray infrastructure so they kept adding one or two million green infrastructure and they only had to pay half of that back. So then you have these stormwater planters with pervious concrete behind it, you see it being built here. You have the poorest asphalt parking lots at schools and then what wound up happening was something interesting, they took the Camden SMART initiative. This is working out really well so let's expand it, let's go bigger and they added other things to it so now they have all these other working groups. They still have the water working group which is Camden SMART but now they have a Waste Management Group which is dealing with dumping in the city, a lot of people go and dump in the city, air quality issues, there's huge air quality issues in urban areas and open space in brownfields; so these are now working groups that are going in Camden.

So a few years later we went to Newark and we started working in Newark, way different dynamic. Instead of 6 groups we have 160 groups involved right so all these groups are at the table, there's no one backbone group but we have several: New York, New Jersey. Baykeeper a non-profit, local non-profit the South Ward Environmental Associations were there at Rutgers, cities at the table, Passaic Valley Sewage Commissions at the table so you do have the utility storage cities there but they're not the main player. The main player with the people in this. This group actually was able to get in the city, doing this work, we've identified over 200 sites for green infrastructure and they just got a million and a half dollars to begin building some projects this year just through this group, just through their work so it's been really exciting.

So we think about engaging your community and this is kind of what we're trying to promote throughout New Jersey and throughout the country is how do we do this right. So we think about this and we want to really kind of create this opportunity where, you know, we do have these well actually teams we're building, we're identifying the problems. Once again, you can't tell people what their problems are, you have to go in and ask them, you have to be part of the identification of the problem they have to understand that because that's where they're brought in at the very beginning and doing the strategy about how to address that problem and developing a common agenda. What are you going to try to do? What are you going to try to accomplish? And of course communication like I said before is key. You really need to be able to get information out to people in a timely fashion. The worst that could happen is whether the non-profits get blindsided that you're working in their neighborhood and you didn't tell them. Oh my God it's horrible so you have to be careful about that. They're actually building things right so building relationships not just projects but relationships.

So I've got folks that I've worked with in Newark who I've been working with for about 10 years now and part of this was educating people, so we do a lot of education. These two women, Nicole and Kim, two lovely black ladies who lived in Newark, Kim's a fourth-generation worker so they're promoting green infrastructure, working together on this so they asked me, would you go with us to the city council meeting? And we do this presentation at the city council meeting and Nicole gets up and starts talking, now Nicole didn't know anything about green infrastructure until she met me and she's up there, she's speaking and the words are coming out of her mouth as if they're my words coming out of her mouth. I'm watching her and she's speaking, I'm like holy crap that's what I say and she's going on like she invented green infrastructure and then Kim gets up and she does the same thing, enormous amount of passion talking about you know her children and the water problems and the combined storm problems and how green infrastructure is going to save it. They went through the whole presentation, I was supposed to get up and do the last three slides and I get up and said listen I got nothing to say they said it all you know and it was just so amazing, so impressive. Kim and I and Nicole and I are great friends now and we've been friends for a long time. They're the people who call me on Sunday after church to ask me questions about stormwater management which is interesting, so involve the community from the beginning; like I said you got to get them involved in the beginning and then implement things. There's a million plans on shelves you guys EPA knows this right how many plans has EPA done, those Watershed restoration protection plans I must have 30 on my shelf, I never use anything in that plane except the last chapter that identifies all the projects. I take that chapter out and I start building in those projects that's what we're meant to do is fix the problems right. And finally we have to measure the impact, we have to analyze what we're doing, why? Because that's how we get more money. EPA says hey we've got, I don't know, five million dollars I think I saw up there. Well how are you going to get that? Well our group did this this and this and here was our impact and if you give us more money we could have even more impact right, so you have to measure that impact, it becomes very important.

So one thing that we talk a lot about is creating local leaders, we've realized that we need more Kim's and Nicole's, so we created a program called Green infrastructure Champions right and we realized in New Jersey and we got 565 municipalities in our state and I'm the one guy, the Water Resources Extension Specialist who covers the whole state. I can be at a nighttime meeting every night for the rest of my life if I wanted to do that so we need more people, we need more reach so we've started training these

champions and the idea was that we bring these people together, we have 10 classes they start the middle of January, it's a Friday morning from 10 to noon, we have virtual classes and then we have lots of time for question and answer. We get on a half hour before stay a half hour after, answer a lot of questions, a lot of people get engaged we do this every other week for about a 10 week period and then everybody who takes one of five classes becomes certified and then we provide them some support. We help them write grants, we help them design projects, we help them get things in the ground. Here's some examples of some of the classes that we have. We have a class where we teach people how to go in their community, identify where green infrastructure can go, and how to take those plans and move them into action; how do we go from playing to implementation and maintenance? Oh God, maintenance is a horrible thing. We need to know how to do, we need to make sure it gets done. And then finally one of the classes the first year I taught is, we just finished our fifth year, first year I taught this they said we need something on stormwater regulations. So once again listening to the client, what do you need? We want something on regulations. So they wanted to know what new development was supposed to be doing right so they can make sure and ensure that it was happening so we did a class in regulations. We do a class on sustainable Jersey, trying to do green infrastructure sustainable Jersey in New Jersey. We have a program called Sustainable Jersey, municipalities do different things to get different points, once they get certain amount of points to be bronze, silver, and gold certified. Right about 80 percent of our towns are part of that program, so it's a way to get people involved, get people engaged so we know they're already captured audience, let's figure out how we can bring them to this. Then we have other classes, we've got a class in schools like I said before, kids are great, we build projects at schools, we educate the next generation so I don't have to keep doing this rest of my life, maybe they'll learn how to do this and do this on their own. Rain garden designs, you build a lot of rain Gardens in New Jersey, trying to get people to design them and build them take care of them. We have a lot of traditionally tension basins on New Jersey that we want to retrofit and naturalize turn them into bioretention basins, we can, we've got a whole class on that. We've got a whole class on how to do Master plans for a site, for a school, for a neighborhood, for a town. And finally you have a class on climate change and green infrastructure. How are the two linked together, how can green infrastructure help us make a town more resilient? So a few weeks ago we actually had our first conference. We've had five years of this class it starts on January 12, 2024, it's free, you're all willing to sign up if you want, I'll get you information if you like that. actually talked to the Massachusetts DEP folks and they're very excited about this and promoting this in Mass this January to offer this class up here. We've got a lot of people from all over the country take this class, a lot of people from Maine actually take this class. My son is actually a civil engineer for the Maine DEP and he actually helps teach some of the class and a bunch of people from the Maine DEP took the course which is really nice. A couple guys from Puerto Rico took the course, they're certified, I'm dying to go down there and help them build rain gardens. I'm not sure what's going to happen in Colorado, Ohio so it's a great opportunity. But we had a conference I guess about a month ago now and we brought the Champions together. We called the R&D conference so for extension one of our big things is R&D and it's not research and development it's ripoff and duplication right, so how do we go and steal things from other people and use it? One of the best things I could find out is that someone's taken my program from New Jersey and they're using it in Massachusetts or Rhode Island or Connecticut, that's a great thing and I'm glad I helped them do that, anything to get that moving forward, why reinvent the wheel.

So we bring these people together and this is a group of them that we have and we bring them together and they share ideas, what works in their town, what hasn't worked in their town. A lot of times what hasn't worked is more important than what has worked because these people spent three, four or five months trying to do something that just doesn't work so the next town is going to do the same thing. Well tell them hey we tried that, didn't work but here is what worked, you know, here's how you can move forward. So these are folks that we deal with and they're just a great opportunity so that's it good sure. Any questions? No? Excellent, thank you, no questions. Yes. I'm sorry, you're gonna have to speak up a little. So who takes a championship program? Why do they sign up?

Well the first year we did it we didn't think anybody would take it. We offered it, we made it free and we were hoping oh maybe eight or ten people take five or more classes we had 35 people who took five or

more classes, 85 people signed up. I've been going all over the state for about 20 years talking about green infrastructure and things like that, a lot of people know me but it's a lot of environmental Commissioners, it's a lot of planning officers, zoning officers from towns, I'd get engineers who take it because they want continuing education credits and actually they get sucked in by that, we have folks from New Jersey DEP were taking it, New Jersey DPS and Americorps program where they have people, ambassadors or watershed ambassadors, a lot of those folks took it. And then I had a lot of people like Rutgers extension officer program called Master Gardeners and we have another one called environmental stewards and those people heard about it through Rutgers and they all took it, so it's enormous amount of interest in it. The first year like I said we had about 75 sign up and we certified about half of them because they took five or more classes, some people just came and took one class, I just want to learn about rain gardens, they just took that class, it was fine. The second year we did it covid hit and in middle of it we went virtual. We were very nervous about it but as soon as we went virtual other people started attending, you know we had 285 sign up this year to take it, my Zoom maxes out at 500 so that's the limit we can have but it's just crazy because I run it to people all the time and they say oh my God it's you. I'm like what do you mean? It's me, yeah. It's yeah, this is me yeah. And they said well I I'm in your class, oh yeah I remember you! There's people all in a little box like this, I really don't remember you but yeah okay sure you know. But it's interesting because people are very excited about, they feel like they're part of a community which is really cool and I like that a lot and they always contacted me they do projects they send me information about stuff they're doing which is great. So yeah, it's grown over time, like I said we didn't know it was going to work we just tried it and it worked so and now everybody wants to be part of it so it's great. Anything else? Yes, in the back if I can hear you.

Bringing people together for a common agenda, you know, really sitting people around the table and explaining to them that, you know, you're there to help them and you're not there for any other reason. I used to be a consultant, I was an environmental consultant for years and I would sit at a table and somebody would say we got this big problem and I would say well here's how you have to solve it and they look at me see yeah you're a consultant you just want to make money. About a year later after I came to Rutgers I went to that same table and people were there and talked about the same problem nothing had happened and they said what should we do and I said the same thing I said when I was a consultant I said oh my God thank God you're here from Rutgers you know it's great The University's at the table. I said well I was here last year when I was sitting in that seat over there and I was wearing a different hat and they said yeah but then you were trying to make money and now you're trying to help us so I think being genuine is really what's important and listening to people. I mean not going there and just talking at them but listening to what they really want what they really need and I think that's what really makes that common agenda come together. We've had people walk away from the table though too this common agenda really achieving that common agenda doesn't help my group achieve their mission so they walk away which is fine. You know we are respectful of everybody's time, anybody who comes to the table if they're doing something for the project we get a grant from EPA we divide the money up. You get you get resources, you get funding for your participation. We never ask a non-profit group to participate and do things unless we're going to give them a part of the piece of the pie and I think that's another thing that we see a lot of a lot of times universities will suck up all the money and ask all the people to volunteer their time, we don't do that you know. If you're working on the project you should be compensated for your contribution and that's a big reason that people come to the table and trust us. I'll be around all day if you have any more questions, thank you.

Adam: Thank you so much Dr. Obrupta and we're thrilled to have you for the rest of the event today. You know what I'm hoping that we took away from Dr. Obrupta's presentation is the importance of collaboration and you know, it's really one of the core tenants of the Southeast New England Program and, you know, sometimes it's just really helpful to hear, you know, what folks are doing and how they're addressing these same issues that we're facing in our region outside of the region, in New Jersey or elsewhere. So what we're going to go to in our next segment is to just provide a brief overview of what our program has been up to across the many, the multiple facets that exist within it. So first I'd like to

introduce our community or excuse me our coordinator, Ian Dombroski, to provide a brief overview of the EPA portion of the Southeast New England Program.

Ian: Hey everybody, walking across the stage felt like I was going to get my diploma or something like that but thanks everybody for coming to this year's SNEP Community Forum, I'm super excited by the turnout and to meet people and like meet space for the first time in like three years, very cool. So I'm Ian Dombroski, EPA Region One. I'm going to quickly go over the program. So way back in 2012 congress charged EPA with the development of a program to bring together the disparate environmental organizations in Rhode Island and Southeastern Massachusetts. And a big thank you to our Congressional delegations from Massachusetts and Rhode Island for having the vision to create this program but they specifically charged us with focusing on water quality and habitat restoration with an eye for innovation and especially collaboration with the various stakeholders in our region. As Dr Cash alluded to federal, state, NGO, tribal Municipal, you name it, academic, businesses as well but all that in order to try to focus our efforts on environmental protection and restoration in our unique and well-loved coastal ecosystem.

So out of a few years of pretty intensive stakeholder collaboration the Southeast New England program was born, what's called a geographic program were run out of EPA Region One with quite a bit of stakeholder input from the various partners that I mentioned previously. We've been funded since 2014 and we covered the Buzzards and Narragansett Bay Watershed as well as the southern facing portion of Cape Cod and the offshore Islands. As charged by Congress we do focus on water quality, funding and technical assistance for water quality habitat and climate resilience for the most part, but we also have an eye for Innovation collaboration transferable projects and we also try to focus on environmental justice in all aspects of our program.

More recently we've developed a strategic plan which you can find on our website. The plan lays out among other things our hopeful vision for the region for 2050 and how SNEP plans to help achieve that vision. That all sort of boils down to, you know, healthy waters, healthy habitat, and resilient communities and chances are if you're here today you're probably working towards that same goal.

Some of the ways that we hope to help achieve that vision are through five key actions. First, we want to increase local capacity to execute and plan projects. Second, we want to invest in promising new technologies and techniques to sort of add more errors to our quiver if you will. Third, we are trying to ensure diverse representation in our decision making and also in our funding processes. We also try to fund projects that address common challenges with the hope that you know lessons learned will be transferable to other areas in the region and beyond. And finally we hope that by funding lots of projects and advertising the results of said projects local community leaders will have you know more knowledge and empowerment to take on projects and you know use new techniques.

So here's an overall snapshot of our structure just to orient you for the other talks that are going to be after me today. We try to meet with our federal partners a few times a year just to discuss what everybody has going on. We meet with our steering committee about quarterly, that's made up of federal, state, tribal, NGO, partners, Academia and they really help us determine funding priorities and project priorities each year. We also tap into a pool of experts in our monitoring and ecosystem subcommittees who will be the chair people of those committees you'll be hearing from momentarily.

So with the help of our committees, we direct funding throughout the region. We started off back in 2014 with 2 million dollars and have been slowly creeping up to seven million dollars per year. As Dr. Cash alluded to for the years of 2022 through 2026 we'll be getting an additional 3 million dollars through the per year through the historic bipartisan infrastructure law for a total of 15 million dollars there.

We fund projects through a couple of different avenues, the biggest of which and you'll be hearing from all these folks shortly, but the biggest of which is the SNEP Watershed implementation grants program or SWIG which is restored by, is administered by Restore America's Estuaries. Our other big arm is the

SNEP Network, this is a network of experts that provides no-cost technical assistance to communities as well as trainings and various other services. They're run by the New England environmental Finance Center out of the University of Southern Maine. EPA also provides funding for our two national Estuary programs in the region being the Buzzards Bay and Narragansett Estuary Programs. And we also made quite a few direct grants contracts and interagency agreements for projects of special interest to the region.

Finally just wanted to highlight the scope of all the great work that our partners have been doing over the 10 last years and these numbers are just up through the end of fiscal year 2022 but we're closing in this year on 150 total projects and sub projects funded with a lot more coming this coming year. The projects have brought 45 million dollars through fiscal year 22 closer to 55 through fiscal year 23 with another 12 million dollars in matching funds. Together we've touched so many communities, I'm forgetting the exact number, but it's close to 100 communities throughout the region I think we've some way impacted, you know, we've contributed to the enhancement and protection of our environment and I just want to say let's keep up the good work and I think we're all looking forward to hearing your feedback today so thank you.

Adam: Thank you Ian, next up I'd love to welcome to the stage Tom Ardito who's the director of our SNEP Watershed Implementation Grants Program and is also representing Restore America's Estuaries.

Tom: Hey everybody, can you hear me okay? I'll be brief. I mean, I see so many familiar faces, it's so great that so many of our grantees are here and members of our grants review committee and it's just great to get everybody together in person and not on a zoom screen. I think many, if not most of you certainly are familiar with our program. So again I'll be brief, I'm Tom Arduino I work for Restore America's Estuaries. We're a non-profit that through a Cooperative agreement with EPA manages the SNEP Watershed Grants Program or Watershed Implementation Grants we now call it.

Here we go, yeah so just to give you an overview, Ray has been managing the program since 2018 and over that time we've awarded about 60 grants and since we really emphasize partnerships so there's probably I haven't counted but probably 150, 180 different organizations that have been funded through this program. 12 million dollars in awards total and well you can see the numbers here. Most of our grants are in the 100 to 400 thousand range.

We're in the middle of a grant cycle now as some of you know because you're working on proposals for us and you know the program as a whole is a sort of the funding mechanism to support the strategic plan goal vision and goals that Ian mentioned so really we see the program is really trying to support that strategic plan and the vision of healthy ecosystem and communities throughout the SNEP region. But specifically for this year you know we looked at some aspects of our region and programmatic aspects to support that and it includes looking at small cities and urban environments because here in Southern New England these small coastal cities are such a big, such an important part of our region both culturally, environmentally and economically we also looked at the need or emphasized the need to restore and conserve Urban, I mean sorry, rural and natural landscapes because that's another great thing about Southeast New England is we do have so many relatively pristine areas as well. Innovating to improve water quality, promoting environmental justice and equity, several of the speakers have mentioned how important that is to us and yeah I mean to the region I should say. And again, everything we do we try to support partnerships, we try to Foster Partnerships through these grants and we also try to foster regional learning so we really hope that through events like this that they'll be the opportunity of grantees to interact with one another to interact with the SNEP program and we're really looking forward to your input today and in those sessions later today to really hear from you guys.

I'm not going to read this point by point but I think the important part is that we really try to fund a real diversity of programs, they're all ultimately aimed at restoring ecosystems, clean water and sustainable communities in our region but there are so many different ways of getting to that goal and I personally feel really privileged to be able to support and help support such a diversity of projects and I'm endlessly amazed and humbled by just the quality of work that so many of you are doing and you know just these

such great grassroots community oriented groups and I think the beauty of this program to me is that and it kind of echoes what Dr. Abrupto was saying that we're not telling you what to do, we're really asking you for what you see as solutions and then we're trying to support those solutions. I always think of our projects as trying to support that intersection of community goals and community needs and sort of the broader regional environmental needs and that's really our goal is to support that through this program.

And with that I'll pass it along to Adam and the next speaker but I will say that our contact information is here and I welcome, suggest you jump on our website SNEPgrants.org and you can see all the different projects that we've funded and are currently funding.

[Applause]

Adam: Excellent thank you Tom. Our next speaker is Martha Shiels. Martha, I believe are you joining us virtually if you could just unmute yourself and I'll just Advance your slides for you.

Martha: Okay, can you hear me now? Are you able to hear me now? Adam, are you able to hear me?

Adam: Yes we can hear you, you can go right ahead

Martha: I'm so sorry about that I don't know what was happening. I'm sorry I can't be there in person I really wish I could but thanks for having me virtually and can you see my slides as well? I think you can. Great okay so I'm Martha Shiels, I direct the SNEP Network and through the New England Environmental Finance Center the SNEP network is one of New England environmental Finance Center's premier projects and we're so proud to be part of part of the SNEP team. We are located at the University of Maine which is a land grant university and our mission at the New England EFC is to provide capacity and to build the community capacity and tribal capacity to fund and finance environmental projects. The SNEP Network's mission is to empower communities within the region to achieve healthy watersheds, sustainable financing, long-term climate resilience through management of storm water and restoration projects. We do this three ways, at the organizational level the network be brings together technical assistance providers in the SNEP area to collaborate on projects where their expertise is needed. For example we might do a storm water retrofit project in a community but we'll also bring in a partner who is an expert in ordinance reviews to make sure that there are no barriers to building that storm water infrastructure. These Network partners then work with the SNEP communities hand in hand to increase their own local community capacity, to address their challenges and then this collaboration with communities and across technical assistance providers enables the network to bring together peers from different communities to build regional capacity.

Slide two, thank you. The network is comprised of 16 technical assistance Partners throughout the SNEP area and we build capacity through offering free technical assistance training and webinars and developing tools and resources to help advance climate resilience in the SNEP area. The ultimate goal of every assistance that we give is to move projects forward to the funding and financing stage so that these projects can actually be built.

Next slide please, next slide, great. The SNEP Network provides support to communities and tribes throughout all Phases of the project and how can municipalities access these phases, this technical assistance. Step one is that tribes and communities can put in a request through the SNEP network portal for on-demand technical assistance or they can apply for assistance through the network's solicitation for community projects each year or they can build upon existing network projects through working with a known, trusted partner or to bring forth project needs on their own. The request then comes in through the network and together with our partners we determine the level of support that is needed and based on the nature of the request we match our technical assistance partners expertise and bring them together on a project or we use our pre-approved consultant pool or we use both. The pre-approved consultant pool is kind of unique to New England EFC we pre-vetted some local consultants and we can provide free consultant services to municipalities and tribes as needed to advance their projects and these grants are not big, they're from like 10 thousand to 50 thousand dollar range but they really do advance the project

because sometimes all a community really needs is a design so that they can put in an application for a grant or state revolving fund. We are in our fourth year of our five-year project with EPA Region One and we have many case studies, webinars, recorded trainings and story maps and tools that anyone within or beyond the SNEP region can access so please visit our website and get in touch with us if you have any questions. I also want to add I really appreciated Dr. Obropta your talk about Camden because I knew Camden back in the 80's and it was not a place where you'd want to go visit I'm a Jersey girl my alma mater is Rutgers and I really appreciate you bringing the resources that you have down there to us and we'll check out your classes for sure and try to bring them to the SNEP municipalities that we work with so thank you very much for your attention I'm going to now hand it over to Adam.

Adam: Excellent, thank you so much Martha. Moving to our next speaker I would like to welcome Tim Pasakarnis. Tim is with the Cape Cod Commission and he's also the chair of our monitoring subcommittee.

Tim: Right, thanks Adam. Again, Tim Pasakarnis. I'm a water resources analyst at the Cape Cod Commission, chair of the monitoring subcommittee, I've been part of the monitoring subcommittee basically since I started at the commission so for the past five years more or less.

I'll just give you a really brief introduction to the role of the monitoring subcommittee and what its makeup is. So we have membership from a variety of sort of SNEP partners and affiliates at a number of levels, federal levels, state levels, regulatory agencies, you know sort of sub-regional governments like ourselves, the estuaries program, etc. and we really all come together periodically to try and wrestle with the question of what does Regional monitoring mean for the SNEP region which is kind of large and diverse in terms of both the landscapes and the communities and as you've seen already in the types of projects and needs and monitoring is a really critical component of sort of understanding where we are relative to all of those strategic goals that Ian ran us through and understanding the impacts of the projects that, you know, all of the money and time that SNEP has put into the region to understanding what the impacts of those projects are. So a lot of big complicated questions that have taken, you know, years to work through and we're continuing to work through them but I will cover a lot of that work further in the first breakout session on regional data so if this peaks your interest feel free to join for a lot more in-depth discussion of that but I'll basically leave it there and then I'm going to turn it over to our other subcommittee chair in a minute.

Adam: Thanks Tim. I'd now like to welcome Bryce DuBois of the College of Holy Cross and who's also the chair of our ecosystem services subcommittee.

Bryce: Great to see y'all, yeah nice to be in person. Yeah so I'm Bryce Dubois, I'm an environmental psychologist and assistant professor in the environmental studies department, new this year at the College of Holy Cross and pleased to be an acting member and first subcommittee chair, similar to Tim of the ecosystem services subcommittee.

We've got 23 individuals, again similar to Tim, covering a range of distinct tribal, federal, state and local regional entities, so you can see those folks named there. And I'll just say before going any farther if you'd like to join us please do so. One of the things that I think is really wonderful similar to Tim's monitoring subcommittee is that each of us comes with different interests and strengths. My particular interest in ecosystem services is around cultural ecosystem services and the efforts to sustain and enhance those in the region and so each of us brings those sorts of strengths to the to the debates and the conversations that we have. So as a subcommittee we're broadly focused on the evaluation of the ecological value of the SNEP region and potential impacts of restoration and we do this primarily through the three areas listed here efforts to define and quantify important ecosystem services to inform communities and in order to increase Community engagement and capacity we strive to steer SNEP to support ecosystem restoration and climate adaptation decisions and finally we are interested in supporting the provision of a common language, I think perhaps similar to Dr. Obropta, that promotes better understanding of the benefits of protection and restoration of the community ecosystem or Watershed scales. And I'll just give

you a sense of the work that we've been up to more recently, so to accomplish these goals we've been focused on establishing high priority research needs and high yield representative habitats as well as efforts that are just beginning to co-produce science communication to learn both from communities and in turn to sort of turn the numbers from the monitoring subcommittee and other data resources into stories so again I'm delighted to be here today and please approach me if you have any questions about our subcommittee or if you're interested in joining us.

Adam: Thanks so much Bryce. So next in this segment I'd love to highlight the strong partnerships that we have with both of the NEPs located within our region. So first I'd like to welcome Darcy Young of the Narragansett Bay Estuary program to provide a brief overview.

Darcy: Good morning everybody, my name is Darcy Young and I'm the Watershed Outreach manager with the Narragansett Bay estuary program. I'm sorry I don't have any slides for you this morning so you're just going to have to look directly at me. The Narragansett Bay Estuary program is a stakeholder-led non-profit that aims to catalyze scientific inquiry and collective action to enhance water quality, wildlife habitat and quality of life in the greater Narragansett Bay Region. And by that we mean that we work from Little Narragansett Bay in Southeastern Connecticut to the Rhode Island Coastal ponds to the Blackstone and Taunton rivers and mass and of course Narragansett Bay Proper. We have a small but mighty four-member staff and we offer services like convening and facilitation responsive project funding and science communication. We focus on supporting and funding early project development steps like engagement and design that help prepare communities to take advantage of implementation funding. We have also a member steering committee including many of you in this room that ensures buy-in from state and federal agencies, local nonprofits, municipalities and some carefully selected ravel rousers too. We strive to be useful and listen to our people's needs by building authentic partnerships so if you haven't engaged with us before we'd love to meet you so please come find me today or my colleague Courtney Schmidt who's sitting over there. We deeply appreciate the partnership that we have with SNEP from the support and funding that we receive and we really look forward to the rest of the agenda today, thanks so much.

Adam: Thank you Darcy and our last speaker, unfortunately we weren't able to have any anyone from the Buzzards Bay National story program to attend today, but instead we are really happy to have Alicia Grimaldi online to present a bit about the NEP. Alicia give me one second and then I will advance the slides for you and oh excuse me Alicia is the project officer at EPA for the Buzzards Bay NEP.

Alicia: Adam can you hear me?

Adam: Yep, we can hear you, you're good. Alicia you can start whenever you're ready.

Alicia: Okay I don't see my slides, do you have them? Perfect, okay great. I'm sorry I can't be there in person, I know Joe Costa who's the director of the Buzzards Bay National Estuary program is also sorry that he cannot be there in person but I wanted to give a brief overview of the Buzzards Bay National Estuary program quickly the National Estuary Program is an EPA Place based program to protect and restore the water quality and ecological integrity of estuaries of national significance there's NEPs nationwide and 2 within the SNEP region as you just heard Narragansett and buzzards the Buzzards Bay NEP was established in the mid-80s and you can see on the screen this is the geographic extent of the NEP study area. One of the highlights and strengths of the Buzzards Bay NEP is their strong Partnerships not only with SNEP but other local organizations namely the Buzzards Bay Coalition and the Buzzards Bay action committee. I'm not going to dig too much in the history of the NEP I want to focus on their current priorities which change based on the needs of the communities in Buzzards Bay.

So next slide. The buzzards-based stormwater collaborative has been going on for a few years, it started with SNEP funding and it's been ongoing it's currently being funded by the bipartisan infrastructure law the bill funds. It was launched in 2016, it's a partnership between the NEP and Mass Maritime Academy students go out and map stormwater infrastructure monitor discharges and identify failing structures throughout Buzzards Bay in communities that have opted into this program. They recently received a

grant to outfit a field to get investigation trailer to find illicit connections that they begin using in 2021. You can actually see the trailer in that bottom right picture and these two pictures are training. There's an interactive map of everything that's been done by the stormwater collaborative on the Buzzards Bay website so if you want to find out more information, background in this map it's all available.

Next slide. There's also a long history of salt marsh studies in Buzzards Bay, that's one of their big priorities. Their current studies are partnership between the NEP, the Woodwell Climate Research Center and Buzzards Bay Coalition. They monitor and track changes over many years within a dozen selected salt marshes and they study vegetation and elevation and again this map is from the website you can go in and find all the information historical data and everything you need to know about this project.

Next slide. So as I mentioned besides NEP funds, Buzzards Bay NEP also receives funds from the bipartisan infrastructure law or bill. It's a priority to get these funds to the communities so Buzzards Bay offers a variety of grant programs to the communities in Buzzards Bay. As part of the bill funding they recently completed an equity strategy to reach disadvantaged communities in Buzzards Bay and they've also recently completed a climate vulnerability assessment for their watershed. And then I'm just going to give one quick plug for the Buzzards Bay website buzzardsbay.org or if you just Google Buzzards Bay NEP you'll find it. It is a wealth of information all the historical research that has happened in Buzzards Bay you can basically find anything that's ever happened in Buzzards Bay on this page it's a great resource that Joe Costa, the director of the NEP has put together and maintains so it's you know it's a great resource for the for the region so that's all I have for the NEP and any questions you can contact me or the director Joe Costa.

Adam: Excellent, thank you so much Alicia and to the rest of our speakers. We felt that it was better to start this way just to provide everyone, make sure everyone was starting off on the same foot understanding the multiple facets of our program and how we're organized and how we're supported throughout the region and finally this kind of gets us to why we're here today. Why we're here today is to seek your input; we only exist because of the partners and communities that we serve and every so often through forums like these we want to make sure that, you know, we're doing a good job and areas where we're maybe not doing a good job or could do better we want to know about it so that we continue to meet the needs of the 133 communities throughout our region. And as a reminder, all of the results of the discussions throughout the day will be incorporated into our funding and policy strategies for the next several years so there's really nothing off limits, please bring everything to our attention that you feel we should be aware of. All of the sessions today will have notetakers within them who are focused on receiving and recording your feedback. We're not ascribing any feedback to anyone's name so don't worry about it but we really are just here to make sure that we're continuing to meet your needs as our community members. Some probing questions to keep in mind, we want to make sure that any of the responses, any of the feedback that we receive today are provided in a way that are actionable. So it's okay to point out problem areas but make sure that you're tying those problem areas to ways that our program can address them. We don't want to leave anything open-ended just because we're really curious as to what you think our program should do. We are interested in hearing what you think our program is doing well, what we need to improve upon, and even better how we can improve upon it. So with that we are actually a little ahead of schedule which is excellent. We are now going to have a transition and networking break, the first session starts at 11:00 so if you need to please make use of the bathrooms or the cafeteria and especially make use of our poster presentations. We are going to start our first session again at 11:00 but please do try to be in your in the first breakout room by about 10:55. This room that we're in right now is breakout room one. Breakout room 3 is a classroom style; if you go out this door on this side and walk straight that's breakout room 3. And then break out room 2 and 4 are actually up stairs and you can get to them using either the stairs on either side or you can make use of the elevator that is right next to breakout room 3. All of the rooms are numbered, there's a big poster in front of each door that explains which sessions are located in each room. If you have any questions please feel free to flag me down or any of our wonderful organizers from CEI today. Lastly, I would like to just give a big shout out to our hosts at Bristol Community College and all of the fantastic support that we have in the

back here who are making this as seamless of an experience as I could have possibly imagined so a big round of applause for them. Thank you very much and thank you to all of you for participating and we very much look forward to your feedback throughout the day. And for the folks joining us online please do navigate back to the forum website and make sure that you are signed into the appropriate teams meeting that corresponds with the session that you want to take part in. That's all that I have for right now and I will see you all starting at around in the room of your choice. Thank you again!