

Piscataqua Region Estuaries Partnership
Proposed Programmatic Work Priorities for 2025
DRAFT – March, 2024

Synopsis

A Quick Word on How This Year is Different from the Last

Last year was the second year of the additional Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) funding. In 2022, the first year of BIL, PREP was careful to work extensively with the Management Committee over several iterations of the budget to ensure that, as much as possible, we were all on the same page in terms of the general strategy for using new resources.

For 2024 and now, for 2025, there have been far less iterations because we are essentially carrying forward the strategy from 2022, with some minor adjustments. Below, we highlight the most salient differences between this budget and the previous budget.

- As in FY23, our “base” funding (320) remains at \$850K.
- The Community Engagement Program now has the full-time Watershed Resilience Manager position (partially supported by GB2030) and we are in the process of hiring a full-time Communications Coordinator; this person will most likely start in April.
- Funding for PREPA grants remains at \$100,000 for year 3.
- Direct financial support to the Hampton-Seabrook Estuary Collaborative (SHEA) continues as does PREP involvement in the Hampton-Seabrook Estuary Collaborative.
- We expect that CARE funds, from the Town of Durham will be fully spent by end of 2024.
- The Science Program continues with similar investments as the previous year, with an overall budget of 570K, higher than Year 1 (475K) but lower than last year (627K).
 - o Thanks to funds from Watershed municipalities for allowing us to request less money for estuarine water quality in 2025, which is what brought that total number down slightly.
- Additional important notes regarding the science budget:
 - o The McDowell lab at UNH continues its new tributary and nitrogen loading monitoring in Hampton-Seabrook as well as new research around freshwater/estuary connections throughout the watershed.
 - o We continue to support saltmarsh sparrow monitoring (predominantly in the Hampton-Seabrook Estuary) and horseshoe crabs in the Great Bay Estuary.
 - o Other changes in research and monitoring investments don’t reflect changes in priorities but rather changes in funding from other places, such as the Municipal Alliance for Adaptive Management, CArE and other sources.
- An FY23 Congressionally Designated Spending effort—co-sponsored with NERACOOS, GBNERR, Sea Grant and NH DES—allowed PREP to hire a full-time data scientist through the middle of 2025. We are looking to use EPA funds to continue that position through the end of 2025 and, it is hoped, even beyond that.
- The Habitat Program continues to benefit from the \$1 million grant through Congressionally Designated Spending focused on eelgrass and oyster restoration in Great Bay, put forward by the Municipal Alliance for Adaptive Management. Other investments include;
 - o Land Conservation Initiatives
 - o Eelgrass Restoration
 - o Salt Marsh Protection

PREP: A Reminder of Our Purpose and How We Do Our Work

Like the other 27 National Estuary Program sites, PREP is a non-regulatory organization created “to improve the waters, habitats, and living resources” (NEP website) of the Great Bay Estuary and the Hampton-Seabrook Estuary, two estuaries of national significance.

To achieve its mission, PREP’s small staff focuses on using science and consensus-based decision making to describe 1) the state of our estuaries (SOOE Reports), 2) the state of our management (PREPA Report) and restoration practices (Habitat Reports), and 3) a clear plan for continually improving the health of these estuaries (the Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan).

A helpful medical analogy...PREP’s job is to provide the patient diagnosis and patient treatment (prevention and restoration) plan for our estuaries.

Like all organizations, PREP must think hard about what activities to focus on. Our guiding principle is this: *PREP must be at the table for all activities that act at the scale of the watershed or the estuary. Moreover, if no one else is leading an initiative at the scale of the watershed or estuary, PREP will endeavor to do so.*

For activities at scales larger and smaller than the estuary, PREP will only be involved if there is a compelling reason to do so. Examples include if other partners cannot implement or facilitate an essential activity or if PREP has a unique capability to implement an essential activity.

Clarifying Grant Periods and Funding Sources

Funding for the 2025 work program will derive from two sources: 1) the base funding for the NEP program, also known as 320 Funds, and 2) the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), with the third of five years of funding available.

For the purpose of discussions with the PREP management committee, this narrative and the budget (in a separate file) focus on activities through December 2025.

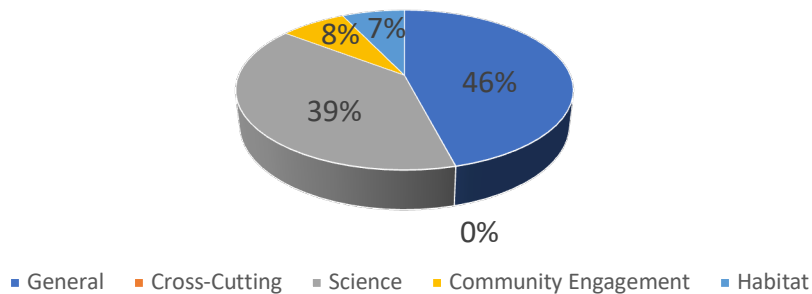
Overview of Plan and Expenditures

Over the next three years, PREP expects to receive over \$4.2 million: \$2.5m from NEP 320 funding and \$2.7m from the BIL. During this period, we continue to focus on the priorities listed below:

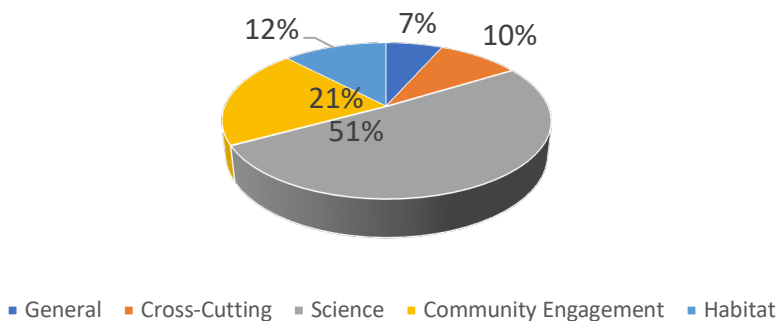
- Science Program
 - Data Management, Accessibility, and Security
 - Research and Monitoring
 - Science Interpretation/Translation, including development of clear recommendations and formation of strategies
- Habitat Program
 - Habitat Restoration Coordination, at watershed scale in conjunction with program partners
 - Eelgrass Restoration
 - Land Conservation
 - Hampton-Seabrook Initiative
 - Oyster Restoration
- Community Engagement Program (CEP)

- PREPA Implementation Grants
- Board Empowerment Series
- Coastal Watershed Conservation Plan
- Citizen Engagement
- NH Coastal Adaptation Workgroup
- Cross-Cutting Initiatives
 - Increasing the efficiency and reach of our collaborative efforts with partners
 - Great Bay 2030
- Program Administration
 - General Administration
 - (New) Full-Time Communications Coordinator
 - (New) Watershed Resilience Manager
 - (New) Data Scientist
 - Communication & Coordination

2025 Budget - Original



2025 Budget - Salaries Allocated to Categories



The pie charts above illustrate our recommended budget allocations for 2025. The second chart attempts to estimate how much of salary time goes into the other categories, rather than simply putting salaries into “General.”

Overall, the proposed budget reflects the following strategies:

- Prioritizes filling research, monitoring, data and synthesis gaps (continuing and leveraging work started with CArE), since this money can be spent on non-permanent contractors and puts the entire community in a better position when the money is spent down.
- Recognizes that monitoring expansion is warranted during this time of augmented budgets. Monitoring technical leads know that they will need to use this data to then design a more constricted program when the BIL funding is gone.
- Prioritizes moving money to communities that are trying to implement pollution prevention and restoration activities.

Program Administration

Vision: PREP administers its work in accordance with the mission of the National Estuary Program, the requirements set forth by EPA, and the mission of the host institution, UNH. Work activities conducted to further PREP's priorities are developed in partnership with the Management Committee and interested parties from the region with attention to transparency and a focus on efficient production of the highest quality products that address the most critical needs in the watershed.

Program Administration Priorities for 2025: (These goals correspond to the rows in the Budget.)

- Provide general administration of program
- Maintain PREP web site

Primary Personnel:

Kalle Matso, all PREP staff

Program Administration Priority Details for 2025:

- A1. Provide general administration of the program, including project and grants management and reporting, implementation of EPA Program Evaluation recommendations, Management Committee coordination, and Technical Advisory Committee oversight.
- A2. Provide staff with resources to travel to relevant conferences, update websites and print necessary materials.

Cross-Cutting Initiatives

Vision: PREP continues to work with partner organizations on critical priorities that address our mission and cut across multiple programmatic categories.

Cross-Cutting Initiatives Priorities for 2025:

- Provide oversight and fiscal management of the Piscataqua Region Monitoring Collaborative (PRMC)
- Participate on Great Bay 2030

Primary Personnel:

Kalle Matso, all PREP staff

Cross-Cutting Initiatives Details for 2025:

- I1. Continue the development and fiscal management of the Piscataqua Region Monitoring Collaborative (PRMC). Due to the new Total Nitrogen General Permit, the PRMC will become a bigger coordination and administrative lift, so additional focus and evaluation of processes will be required to maintain transparency and best practices.

Timing: Ongoing

- I2. Participate on Great Bay 2030.

Timing: Ongoing

Science Program

Vision: The PREP Science program is a highly credible and transparent foundation for enabling communities to understand changes in the health of our estuaries and what management actions are most likely to improve, protect and restore estuarine ecosystems.

Science Program Priorities for 2025:

- Produce a strong, integrated monitoring and research plan, based on clear goals and conceptual models of how our systems work
- Collaborate with DES on activities related to data, maps and other technical support
- Facilitate the Piscataqua Region Monitoring Collaborative (PRMC), including ensuring QAPPs are updated as needed and field season monitoring efforts are in place
- Improve statistical analysis and interpretation for SOOE and interim reports
- Improve data management practices
- Develop and maintain both ongoing monitoring and discrete research projects to support goals of program

Primary Personnel:

Kalle Matso, with assistance from Trevor Mattera, Chris Whitney, and part-time data scientists Miguel Leon, Michelle Shattuck and Florencia Fahnestock.

Science Program Priority Details for 2025:

S1. Continue 2023 SOOE Report rollout.

Timing: Discrete, starting in 2023 and ending in 2024 (included for 2025, since FY25 funds can begin in the fall of 2024).

S2. Continue to develop the Integrated Research and Monitoring Plan, adding details related to methods, data analysis and prioritization.

Timing: Periodic/ongoing, progressing in phases and then re-visited and updated

S3. Collaborate with DES on data, maps and other technical products.

Timing: Annual and ongoing

S4. Oversee Piscataqua Region Monitoring Collaborative (PRMC), working with various partners to select, develop and supervise completion of monitoring work.

Timing: Annual and ongoing

S5. Improve statistical analyses of existing data for interim reports as well as future State of Our Estuaries Reports.

Timing: Annual and ongoing (proposed)

S6. Develop discrete monitoring and research projects to support goals of program (Base).

Timing: Ongoing with specifics to be driven by discussions with the TAC and PRMC

NEP 320 Funding Implementation:

- a. Horseshoe Crab Monitoring (building on past program funded by other partners)
- b. Oyster Disease Testing (funded in previous year with BIL funds).
- c. PFAS Analysis

S7. Develop discrete monitoring and research projects to support goals of program (BIL).

BIL Funding Implementation:

- a. Seagrass Monitoring
- b. Wiswall Dam Sensor Array (continued from previous year)
- c. Estuarine Water Quality Monitoring (continued from previous years)
- d. Salt Marsh Sparrow Monitoring (augmenting existing program)
- e. Tributary Water Quality Monitoring (continued from previous years)
- f. Phytoplankton size and species monitoring (new)
- g. Research on Freshwater/Estuarine connections (expanding on previous year investment)
- h. Bacteria monitoring
- i. MusselWatch (continued from previous years)

Community Engagement Program (CEP)

Vision: The PREP CEP will be a resource to support and empower communities in the Piscataqua Region Watershed to strengthen and enforce local regulations and promote the protection and stewardship of our shared resources for improved water quality, ecological health, coastal adaptation, and climate resilience.

CEP Priorities for 2025:

- Update the Piscataqua Region Environmental Planning Assessment (2023) and complete grants program to assist communities in adopting PREPA recommendations (previously funded at \$100,000 in 2024); funding may be used to support additional project team meetings, public hearings, outreach materials, or other
- Deliver Board Empowerment Series workshops and outreach materials to communities
- Engage communities, share latest research/management opportunities with community members and an interested citizenry; explore an increasing role in engagement with general citizenry
- Continue to assist communities in NH's coastal watershed to address stormwater pollutant reductions

Primary Personnel:

Abigail Lyon

CEP Priority Details for 2025:

- C1. Review and update the Piscataqua Region Environmental Planning Assessment (PREPA) and with additional funding, implement another round of PREPA grants.

Timing: Ongoing with specific updates to PREPA data as appropriate

C2. Develop and deliver the Board Empowerment Series program that meets the needs of resource managers to improve protections for water quality and natural resources.

Timing: Ongoing with discrete timing for workshops

C3. Engage communities, share latest research/management opportunities with community members, and foster an interested citizenry. Explore an increasing role in engagement with general citizenry.

Timing: Ongoing

C4. NH Coastal Adaptation Workgroup

Timing: Ongoing

C5. PREPA Implementation Grants

Timing: Ongoing

Habitat Program

Vision: The PREP Habitat Program better prioritizes, strategizes, and coordinates habitat management and restoration in the region in order to secure additional resources and capacity for the implementation of projects, and to make progress towards our goals of key habitat restoration and conservation as identified in the Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP).

Habitat Program Priorities for 2025:

- Develop and coordinate a regional habitat restoration workgroup to align regional efforts and funding opportunities with CCMP priorities
- Develop and implement an eelgrass restoration plan for the Great Bay Estuary
- Sustain conservation-focused efforts in alignment with the CCMP and SOOE
- Provide leadership and support for implementing the Hampton-Seabrook Estuary Initiative

Primary Personnel:

Trevor Mattera

Habitat Program Priority Details for 2025:

H1. Maintain support for land conservation initiatives.

Timing: Annual and ongoing

H2. In collaboration with key partners, implement and support oyster restoration in Great Bay and Clam Resource monitoring/research in Hampton-Seabrook Estuary

H3. In collaboration with key partners, implement an eelgrass restoration plan for Great Bay.

Timing: Annual and ongoing

H4. Support partner-led initiatives focused on salt marsh protection, adaptation, management, restoration, and monitoring.

Timing: Ongoing