



STORMWATER PHASE II



When the Clean Water Act's Phase II stormwater regulations required small and medium-sized communities to implement a stormwater management program, 14 towns in the Casco Bay watershed had daunting challenges to meet. Suburban development and related construction of roads, parking lots, and rooftops had increased runoff and stressed Casco Bay's water quality, aquatic habitat, and biological diversity.

But a collective management plan, championed by the Casco Bay Estuary Partnership (CBEP), proved so effective that participating municipalities quickly came to fund it themselves. Along the way, it also became a foundation for other work by CBEP and its partners, as well as a regional and national model for collaborative approaches to the problems of urban watersheds.

THE NATIONAL ESTUARY PROGRAM IN ACTION

Casco Bay Estuary Partnership

Though the Casco Bay watershed comprises just three percent of Maine's land mass, it is home to more than 25 percent of its population, including Portland, the largest city in the state, and 13 smaller communities. To assist those municipalities to respond to new Federal regulations, the Casco Bay Estuary Partnership helped initiate a collaborative, regional approach to stormwater pollution management in 2002. The payoff from that effort has been more significant than anyone could have imagined at the time.

Because Maine has a strong tradition of local control, most towns prefer to address their problems independently of state efforts—or those of surrounding communities. Faced with extensive new regulatory requirements, however, along with limited municipal budgets, some communities agreed that a regional collaboration, no matter how novel, might be the best solution.

CBEP invested considerable funding and staff support to build the Interlocal Stormwater Work-



Workshop participants learn about stormwater pollution prevention. Photo Credit: Casco Bay Estuary Partnership

ing Group (ISWG), which shared experiences and developed a common vision for stormwater management. As a result, municipalities saved money by gaining access to experts and by pooling their resources. Indeed, the program proved so cost-effective that local communities

quickly agreed to fund the group out of their own budgets. And savings have extended beyond the towns themselves. When the original five-year permits expired, the Maine Department of Environmental Protection worked through ISWG to develop the structure of the revised 2008 permits. Only specific details had to be negotiated by individual towns, which saved the state agency time and money.

ISWG, CBEP, Cumberland County Soil and Water Conservation Dis-

trict staff, and subcontractors worked together to complete an operations manual, *Guidelines and Standard Operating Procedures for Stormwater Phase II Communities in Maine*. In addition, CBEP provided funding for workshops and classes to train employees from each of the ISWG municipalities on stormwater prevention measures. Interest in the manual and the associated training has been strong: requests for information have come from across New England and from as far away as Hawaii. Its educational programs are one of ISWG's greatest suc-



cesses. Permit requirements obligated municipalities to teach residents and businesses about stormwater, and specifically to promote educational activities to change behaviors that contribute to stormwater pollution. The communities did not have the resources to tackle that requirement individually, so CBEP helped to fund an outreach coordinator and also leveraged funding from Maine's 28 Small Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems to launch "Think Blue," a media campaign managed by the Cumberland County Soil and Water Conservation District. Additional CBEP and ISWG funding has supported efforts to educate homeowners about environmentally friendly lawn and garden care practices.

But ISWG's most significant impact may have been indirect. Over the past seven years, its

members developed personal and professional relationships among and between themselves, their towns, and with the Maine Department of Environmental Protection. Links to potential partners and funders have also grown. What started as a collaboration to address short-term regulatory imperatives has evolved into a regional network for sharing information, ideas, and opportunities.

The importance of cooperation that rests on a foundation of existing relationships is hard to overstate. Nowhere was that more evident than in the 2007 effort to address water quality issues in the Long Creek watershed—a 3.5-square-mile watershed located within four ISWG municipalities. It contains one of the largest commercial centers in Maine, and largely as a consequence, Long Creek fails to meet

state water quality standards. In an 18-month planning process, the municipalities, state transportation agencies, local businesses, and many other partners (including CBEP) developed an ambitious 10-year plan to restore Long Creek: a locally administered public-private partnership to fund some \$5 to \$6 million in watershed protection. Long-time members of ISWG were key to developing that model, and their existing relationships and trust greatly facilitated the search for solutions for Long Creek.

Municipalities still prefer to maintain local control of issues but they now understand the many values of collaboration. They have also learned to balance local control with a regional approach when local priorities diverge from the general requirements of meeting

a stormwater permit.

ISWG's successes have greatly exceeded CBEP's expectations and hold significant national promise. Municipalities and regions across the country can learn valuable lessons from the collaborative structure of the Casco Bay Interlocal Stormwater Working Group.

Visit www.cascobay.usm.maine.edu to learn more about this and other CBEP efforts.

EPA's National Estuary Program (NEP) is a unique and successful coastal watershed-based program established in 1987 under the Clean Water Act Amendments. The NEP involves the public and collaborates with partners to protect, restore, and maintain the water quality and ecological integrity of 28 estuaries of national significance located in 18

coastal states and Puerto Rico.

For more information about the NEP go to www.epa.gov/owow/estuaries.