

Bourne Turns To Feds For Help With Cleanup Of Estuaries

By MICHAEL J. RAUSCH Aug 7, 2020 0

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The Back River is among Bourne's polluted estuaries.
GENE M. MARCHAND/ENTERPRISE

Efforts at improving the water quality in the Town of Bourne have taken a big step forward.

The town has partnered with the federal government to identify financing sources that will help pay for cleaning up the town's numerous impaired waterways.

The Southeast New England Program (SNEP) was created in 2012 by the US Environmental Protection Agency. According to the organization's website, the program is "a collaborative network of partners with expertise in stormwater management, financing, water quality and habitat restoration, green infrastructure, low impact development, and watershed-scale conservation and restoration."

The program further seeks to "restore and protect the region's coastal waters and watersheds."

The SNEP website noted that the group works with stakeholders, such as Bourne, "to promote a resilient ecosystem of clean water, healthy diverse habitats, and sustainable communities in Southeast New England."

The Town of Bourne submitted an application to SNEP, asking for assistance in half a dozen improved water quality initiatives, including an assessment of potential Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI) projects, and restoration of salt marshes and barrier beaches. The application included learning about sustainable financing mechanisms to pay for the projects.

The town's application stated that Bourne's Local Comprehensive Plan (LCP) addresses the importance of the Blue Economy—that is, businesses that are dependent upon proximity to water or involvement in water—to the town. The LCP also points out the town's dedication to addressing sea level rise and coastal resiliency.

"The LCP has laid out water quality as a priority and our Stormwater Team has branched out to address other issues that can be described as being under the umbrella of water quality improvement," the application said.

The board of selectmen addressed Bourne's SNEP application during its Zoom meeting on Tuesday, August 4.

Joanne M. Throwe, president of Throwe Environmental, LLC of Rhode Island and Maryland, represented SNEP.

Ms. Throwe pointed out that a number of analyses and reports related to the town's impaired waterways have already been done. She said that her team from SNEP will work closely with the town's team on how to move forward with information collected in the reports and studies that have already been done.

The town's application pointed out efforts already undertaken by the town to pinpoint water quality issues within Bourne's waterways. In 2017, AECOM was hired to consult on stormwater and Municipal Stormwater (MS4)—specific issues. In 2018, the company completed a stormwater management plan for Bourne.

The town is now working with the US Department of Agriculture on the design of stormwater upgrades at several of the town's impaired water bodies. Also, the Cape Cod Conservation District has agreed in principle to award full funding for design of two medium-scale stormwater improvement projects. The town will be responsible for a 25 percent match on construction funds.

The town is also working with the Buzzards Bay National Estuary Program (BBNEP) on mapping Bourne's watershed. During the summer of 2018, the town worked with the Cape Cod Commission to use AmeriCorps personnel to map Bourne's stormwater inlets and outfalls.

"Data collection of discharges and catch basins formed the foundation of our stormwater asset management program," the application noted.

Ms. Throwe said that she and her SNEP team have taken the initial steps to identify the things they need to see, if Bourne wants to achieve coastal resilience and climate resilience. Having identified those items, she said, projects will be chosen based on priority, and funding and financing opportunities will be explored.

The town's team working with SNEP includes Assistant Town Engineer Timothy P. Lydon, Conservation Agent Samuel O. Haines, town Health Agent Terri A. Guarino, department of public works Director George M. Sala, Town Planner Coreen V. Moore and department of natural resources Director Christopher M. Southwood.

Mr. Lydon prepared and submitted the town's application to SNEP. He said that Bourne's acceptance by the organization will result in the town "finally having some centralized narrative and centralized plan to go forward" with strategies for improving water quality, as well as financial avenues to achieve those goals.

In his application Mr. Lydon pointed out that, like most coastal communities, Bourne faces numerous challenges to its waterways. Impairment to water quality, he said, comes from a variety of sources, including storm runoff, sea level rise, and nitrogen loading in wastewater from outdated home septic systems.

Nearly 50 bodies of water in Bourne have been identified as impaired by the Environmental Protection Agency, the application stated. They include the Back River, Buttermilk Bay, Onset Bay, the Pocasset River, Phinney's Harbor, Red Brook Harbor and Squeteague Harbor.

With 66 miles of coastline from Buttermilk Bay to Megansett Harbor, 83 percent of Bourne is located within the Buzzards Bay watershed. There are nine coastal waterways in Bourne, according to Mr. Lydon's application, and 30 major harbors, coves and tidal rivers in Buzzards Bay. Of that 30, only three have assigned Total Maximum Daily Loads (TDML).

TDML is the maximum amount of a pollutant that a body of water can receive while still meeting water quality standards. Some waterways are close to getting a number assigned while others have not even begun the process, the application said.

Pollution has impaired Bourne shellfish habitats. The state Division of Marine Fisheries is closing beds in every major coastal waterway in town. Most closures around Buzzards Bay are the result of land-based sources, such as animal feces, often conveyed by stormwater runoff, Mr. Lydon noted.

Other issues the town wishes to address through its work with SNEP include salt marsh degradation, erosion of barrier beaches and the loss of wetlands. Mr. Lydon pointed out that the Buzzards Bay National Estuary Program produced atlases showing impaired wetlands in the Buzzards Bay watershed that need restoration. Sixteen were identified in Bourne, he said.

"I think Joanne's team coming in at this time is a really critical time for us," he said.

Mr. Haines noted that town staff, as well as residents, often have "big ideas" about what should be done when it comes to the town's water bodies. Funding, he said, often gets in the way of moving ahead with any initiative.

"You always hit that roadblock of how do you pay for the big ideas and the big changes," he said, adding that he was looking forward to Ms. Throwe's guidance relative to securing financing.

SNEP's acceptance of Bourne's application did not include a specific dollar amount. The group does give out monetary awards, but only for specific projects.

In 2019 the organization granted the Buzzards Bay Coalition \$223,533 to promote salt marsh resilience, and another \$27,695 to assist in the reduction of nutrient pollution from new composting facilities in the Town of Dartmouth.

Last year, SNEP also awarded Massachusetts Maritime Academy \$176,581 to support a Buzzards Bay Stormwater Collaborative. Through the collaborative, MMA cadets support eight Buzzards Bay communities, including Bourne, in stormwater compliance.

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