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7-20-2005

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Recommended Citation

Kellam, Dave, "University of New Hampshire Welcomes the New Hampshire Estuaries Project" (2005). *UNH Today*. 1300.

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Date: July 20, 2005

DURHAM, N.H. – The Environmental Protection Agency-funded New Hampshire Estuaries Project (NHEP) has moved to the Marine Program at the University of New Hampshire from the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services, a move considered an important step in the development of the program whose mission is to protect and enhance the environmental quality of the state’s coastal bays and rivers.

“This is an exciting time for the program. The administrative support from the university and better coordination with research and technical assistance programs will enhance our ability to focus resources on protecting our estuaries,” NHEP Director Jennifer Hunter said.

In 2005, NHEP is expected to award nearly \$700,000 in funds to support up to 25 different projects in the state’s coastal watershed. From 2001-2004, NHEP awarded more than \$2.2 million to fund projects to improve, protect or monitor the health of New Hampshire’s estuaries. Projects have included habitat inventories, shellfish restoration activities, water quality sampling, and land conservation projects.

The collaborative program partners with organizations to identify and initiate priority activities from the NHEP Management Plan. Staff undertake many projects; however, the majority of the activities are implemented through grants to communities, conservation organizations, researchers, watershed groups, and government agencies.

NHEP is a natural fit with other programs at the university. John Aber, vice-president for research and public service, is looking forward to seeing results from the new collaborative arrangement. “Our partnership with the New Hampshire Estuaries Project offers a perfect opportunity to put into practice much of the knowledge gained through the wide array of basic and applied research programs here at UNH.”

NHEP supports activities of the Natural Resources Outreach Coalition to help communities understand and address the impacts of growth on natural resources. NHEP funds have assisted more than a dozen communities in mapping storm sewer systems and eliminating bacteria and other pollutants from storm water discharges. The program also provides support to the N.H. Department of Environmental Services Shellfish Program to conduct pollution surveys and water quality testing to open additional areas for recreational shellfish harvesting.

The NHEP Management Plan, project reports and other resources are available at <http://www.nhep.unh.edu>.