

# Sharing Our Story: The Communication, Outreach, and Engagement Plan for the Peconic Estuary Partnership



*Photo by Jenna Schwerzmann*

*Protecting & Restoring Long Island's Peconic Bays*



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## Introduction

The Peconic Estuary Partnership (PEP) is looking to develop and tell their story—of their mission, their activities, and their priorities with partners and the public. This Communication, Outreach, and Engagement Plan (the “Plan”) (in concert with a separate Communication Strategy) will help PEP guide a public relations campaign to educate communities on the East End of Long Island, NY about water quality and habitat issues within the watershed and how those individuals can be a part of those efforts. Along with providing PEP’s narrative, this Plan will detail the execution of PEP’s separate but interconnected Communication Strategy. Generally speaking, strategies are more flexible, capable of evolving to respond to changing conditions; and broader in scope, outlining larger, long-term goals. Plans, however, include the finer details—the actions and tools needed for execution.



## Plan Purpose

This Plan identifies the means to enhance existing and develop new communication, outreach, and engagement (COE) efforts for PEP and its partners in support of the Estuary’s Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan (CCMP). The purpose of this Plan is to detail PEP’s narrative and the execution of the separate Communication Strategy. This Plan includes detailed actions, steps, goals, and timeframes for executing PEP’s overall and long-term COE efforts.

## Desired Outcomes

To achieve that purpose, this Plan outlines the following overall objectives:

1. Use this Plan (and the associated Strategy) to execute the goals of the CCMP.
2. Improve communication and coordination among partner organizations so that messaging going out to external stakeholders is clear, consistent, and purposeful.
3. Better engage with individuals, communities, and organizations across the Estuary so they become active participants in PEP stewardship and restoration actions.
4. Paint a clearer picture of who PEP is, what it does, and why people in the Estuary should be a part of the organization’s efforts.

These objectives fit within a series of six elements, listed below and described in more detail in the associated Communication Strategy that was developed concurrently to this Plan. These elements lay out a clear, long-term, direction for PEP and its many partners. They define the desired results and outcomes for PEP’s COE efforts.

Figure 1: Communication Plan Elements

**Element 1:** Develop a **shared narrative and related tools** to help PEP and its partners effectively tell the story of why water quality and aquatic habitats are important and worth protecting.

**Element 2:** Shape a **clear public-facing identity for PEP** so that more communities and individuals on the East End want to participate in PEP's efforts.

**Element 3:** Work with Suffolk County to broaden and increase **participation in its Septic Improvement Program (SIP)** to inspire pro-estuary behaviors and have a measurable positive impact on the Estuary's water quality.

**Element 4:** Build **connections with agriculture and aquaculture communities on the East End** to showcase responsible practices that expand their use across the Estuary.

**Element 5:** Design meaningful approaches that invigorate **community engagement with special interest groups** that are not currently as involved with PEP as others within the Estuary.

**Element 6:** Sustain **long-term COE efforts** by tracking successes and challenges, addressing new opportunities and potential partners, and adapting activities to what may arise in the future.

## Current Communication Activities

As part of the overall COE Plan development, Marstel-Day completed a series of research tasks to complete a comprehensive assessment of PEP's current COE activities and CCMP goals, along with comparisons to a few other National Estuary Programs (NEPs), and input from public stakeholders and members of the Citizens Advisory Council (CAC). The findings from this assessment have been used to craft a clear and compelling public-facing identity, through the development of new messaging, stories, and tools (detailed later in this Plan) that will be used to boost engagement over the next 10 years. The background research findings and methodology can be found in Appendix A of this Plan. Below is a summary of current COE activities, a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis, and high-level, organization-wide COE recommendations.

### Summary of Current COE Activities

**Staffing:** Currently, the Outreach and Communication Manager is the primary staff member responsible for PEP's COE activities. PEP's Coastal Resilience & Communities Coordinator and Water Quality Outreach Specialist are two other staff members that assist with COE activities. However, they also perform additional tasks outside of the traditional COE realm. PEP, therefore, has less than three full-time equivalent (FTE) staff dedicated to COE efforts. PEP's COE work is periodically supplemented through contracts with a web developer and graphic designer/videographer.

**COE Activities:** PEP uses a variety of tools to share information about their work and ways for people to become engaged. This includes an email newsletter, factsheets, a website, several social media accounts (Facebook, Instagram, and X/Twitter), an online progress tracker for meeting CCMP goals, tabling at

community events, and annual symposia. These materials showcase water quality monitoring and restoration projects, work with partners, grant recipient projects, and best management practices. Some materials have been translated into Spanish.

## SWOT Analysis

Table 1 below shows the SWOT Analysis for PEP. A SWOT analysis helps an organization assess and understand the internal and external forces that may create opportunities or risks. Strengths and weaknesses are internal factors that can give an organization an advantage or disadvantage over its “competition.” Opportunities and threats are external factors that can be used to improve an organization’s performance (i.e., grant growth or better government funding) or may endanger an organization’s ability to operate (i.e., regulatory issues or technical difficulties). This SWOT analysis can help PEP visualize some of the organization’s primary advantages and disadvantages to better understand where and how PEP should allocate COE resources moving forward.

*Table 1: PEP COE SWOT Analysis*

<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PEP’s work can be visually appealing and charismatic, telling important stories that resonate with people</li> <li>• PEP’s history in the East End means that many people know who they are, what they do, and why the work is important</li> <li>• While having a small number of staff, they are dedicated to the mission, are engaged in numerous projects, and are hard working</li> </ul>	<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capitalize on the many committee members, as well as partner organizations, to generate and share content</li> <li>• Use the PEP website and social media channels to create the go-to place in the East End for up-to-date, compelling information about the Estuary and how people can protect this valuable resource</li> <li>• People who live in the East End are connected to the unique character and history of the Estuary. That sense of belonging can be used to boost their involvement in PEP’s work</li> </ul>
<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PEP is involved in a wide variety of projects and activities, so finding ways to share them all, and to develop messaging that covers it all, can be difficult</li> <li>• Staff time is limited when it comes to content development, particularly as it pertains to social media and online engagement</li> <li>• The number of staff can be limiting for the number of topics and efforts PEP seeks to undertake</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are many organizations doing work similar to PEP so there is competition for volunteers and the potential for confusion about who does what and why</li> <li>• Shifting priorities at the federal and state government levels add a level of uncertainty to the messaging PEP can put out and how it will be received</li> <li>• Funding uncertainties can make it difficult to focus staff time and effort on things like social media and in-person engagement, which can be seen as less important or</li> </ul>

	<p>impactful than on-the-ground restoration and protection work</p>
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### High-Level PEP COE Recommendations

1. Refine the Focus of PEP and its COE Efforts

Protecting the Peconic Estuary is not a small job. It involves coordination and partnerships with many organizations, engaging with a wide swath of stakeholders, and prioritizing actions that make the biggest impact. Given PEP’s small staff size, it would be beneficial to examine the organization’s desired future direction—what are the top goals for the next five to ten years—to help narrow and refine what is communicated about and to whom. This refinement will increase positive outcomes while being cognizant of time, monetary resources, and PEP’s small staff size. In addition, messaging regarding PEP’s mission differs depending on where one looks. For instance, under the “About” and “Mission” pages of the website it states that PEP’s mission is “Protecting and restoring the Peconic Estuary and its watershed” but on the homepage it states, “Protecting & Restoring Long Island’s Peconic Bays.” Consistent, persistent, and simplified messaging will stick better with the public. See Objective 2.3 in Table 3 for actions PEP can take to better define the organization’s focus and mission, including a proposed new mission statement.

2. Make COE a Part of Everyone’s Responsibilities

PEP’s staff are dedicated to protecting and preserving the Peconic Estuary through various on-the-ground projects and partnerships. However, sharing information about this work and how it relates to PEP’s mission and the goals of the CCMP could be better integrated into day-to-day tasks to improve the organizations’ overall COE efforts. Every staff member, in addition to volunteers on the CAC and other committees, should be involved in COE activities related to their specific roles as well as to support the organization as a whole. That way, even with a small staff PEP can accomplish significant COE gains. See Objective 2.1 in Table 3 for actions PEP can take to enhance staff and volunteer capabilities related to COE endeavors.

3. Hire and/or Contract Additional Staff

To enhance the organization’s current COE efforts and more effectively reach each audience PEP would like to engage, additional capacity and expertise is needed. This could be through new full- or part-time hires, contractors, and/or shared resources with partner organizations like Stony Brook University. Ideally, two FTEs would be hired over the next one to two years to enhance overall COE capacity. One recommended staff person would fill the role of Online Media Coordinator, working to either revise the PEP website or create a new one and be the primary social media manager. The second hire would be a Community Engagement Specialist who would work closely with the Coastal Resilience & Communities Coordinator to engage with a wide variety of stakeholders such as the agriculture and aquaculture communities, tourists, faith-based organizations, and others. This additional capacity would provide new expertise and additional PEP presence in the community and digitally.

#### 4. Create a New Website that Can Be Maintained Internally

One of the most significant gaps identified through background research is PEP staff's inability to update the existing website in a timely and inexpensive manner. Currently, PEP must contract with the web designer who created the website for any changes because the site was created using code that only a skilled developer can modify. This contractor is expensive, so minor changes must wait until there are enough changes to warrant the expense. Because of this, items such as committee notes, calendar of event postings, and more news-worthy content are not uploaded as frequently as is needed.

Therefore, it is recommended that PEP develop a new, more simplified website using an online website creator like WordPress. WordPress can be used by staff without a background in web design and coding, requiring minimal upfront training. Initial set-up costs and monthly maintenance fees can vary but are generally reasonable and will not require recurring website designer contract fees. The Online Media Coordinator hire suggested above would be the recommended person to create and maintain the new site, with additional content generation ideas from other PEP staff. See Objective 2.4 in Table 3 for other actions to support a refreshed web presence.

## Stakeholders

The stakeholder engagement matrix, which can be found in in the [Communications folder here](#), includes tabs for each of the primary stakeholders groups that PEP would like to engage with:

- Businesses (including Baymen and tourism bureaus)
- Civic groups (including homeowners associations)
- Environmental groups
- Parks and recreation organizations
- Agriculture and aquaculture organizations
- Local governments

For each specific stakeholder, contact information for one or more representatives is included in the matrix. In addition, each stakeholder can be marked in the matrix as fitting into one of five categories of awareness and engagement:

- *Unaware* – The stakeholder does not seem to know what PEP is or does or that it even exists.
- *Resistant* – The stakeholder has been asked to participate in PEP efforts in the past but has declined and may even be actively working against PEP's mission.
- *Neutral* – The stakeholder is aware of PEP and its work, but it does not engage, either positively or negatively.
- *Supportive* – The stakeholder knows and likes PEP and its work, and occasionally participates in PEP activities, shares content on social media, and/or otherwise encourages PEP's continued existence.
- *Leading* – The stakeholder is part of one or more of PEP's committees, routinely participates in PEP activities and events, shares content via social media and other outlets, and is a champion for the organization.

PEP is encouraged to use this matrix to track where stakeholders currently stand in their awareness of and engagement with PEP by marking them with a “C” for current and a “D” for desired level of engagement. The matrix should be updated on a regular basis, ideally quarterly but annually or twice a year to start will work, moving the “C” hopefully closer to the “D” as the stakeholder becomes more aware and engaged. Not every organization within the matrix will become more engaged. Some may always remain unaware or neutral. The key is to focus on those organizations that can have a large beneficial impact and are at least receptive to PEP’s mission and the CCMP’s goals, which is particularly important given PEP’s small staff size and modest budget for COE efforts.

## Key Messages & Tools

One main purpose of this planning effort was to develop recommended tools that PEP can use to help their partners tell the story of how they support PEP’s mission. Before tool development could begin, key messaging was developed, based on the many layers of background research and discussions with PEP and its partners. The following are a set of proposed messages and recommended COE tool descriptions and examples that PEP can use and expand upon to improve message delivery and inspire pro-estuary behaviors.

### Tool 1: Proposed Messaging

Having a set of clear, concise, and consistent messaging will help PEP build its identity and credibility, attract and motivate new volunteers and partners, and better meet the CCMP goals by clearly articulating PEP’s mission and benefits across the many diverse stakeholders in the East End. Some talking point examples can be found in the Communication Strategy, while a more comprehensive messaging matrix that highlights which messages would resonate with the various stakeholder groups can be found in the [Communications folder here](#).

### Tool 2: Messaging Triangles

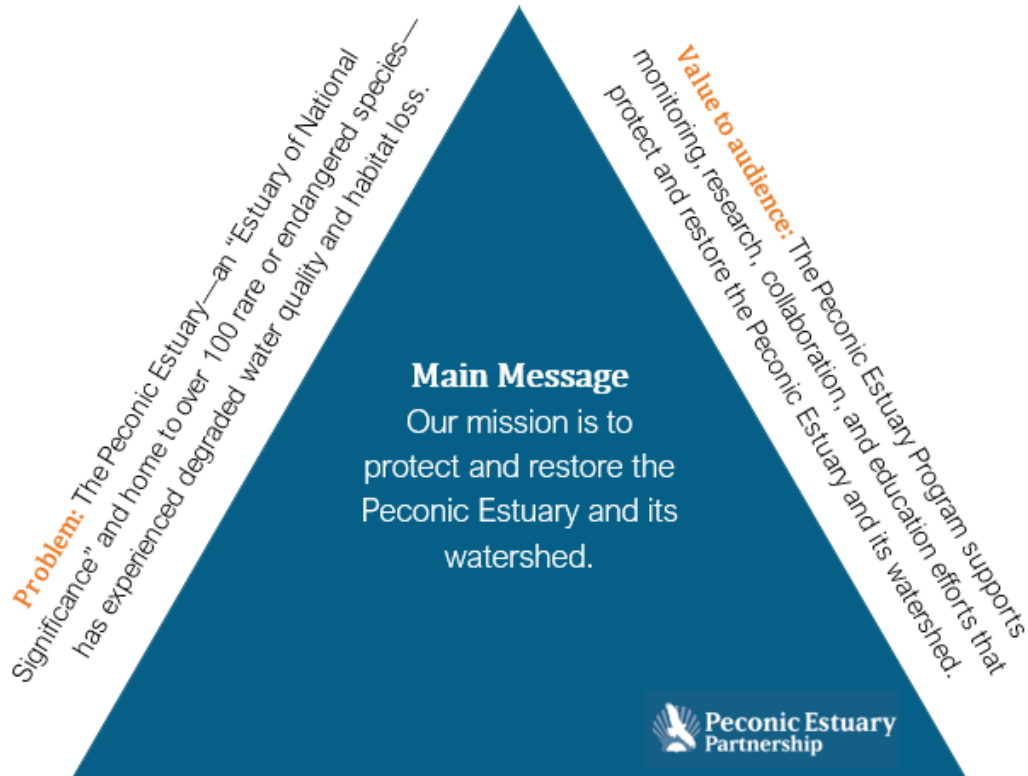
A messaging triangle is a tool used to communicate to an audience using key messaging in a compelling, concise, and credible manner. These triangles are used to convey subject matter in a visual manner, recognizing that it is typically easier for people to visualize an image than it is to memorize a lot of words. Rather than trying to remember a string of talking points, a messaging triangle can help to focus the content into three broad messages, one on each side of the triangle.

Several suggested messaging triangles are included on the next few pages. Should PEP wish to develop additional messaging triangles based on the messaging and talking points included in this Plan, here are some general rules to keep in mind:

1. Begin by brainstorming the main topic you want to convey, the objective or “why” reason for talking about the topic, and to whom will you be speaking (i.e., how knowledgeable and receptive to the topic are they?). Write your answers down as a place to begin.
2. Next, develop the three key messages. These three messages should act as a path for taking your audience from its current state of knowledge and awareness to where you want them to be. For receptive audiences, focus on their core values as a motivator. For potentially resistant audiences, stick to specific examples, personal experiences, and brief quotes.

- Next comes practice time. Speak to the three key messages, but also practice what you would do if someone asks a question that is off topic. Learn to redirect the conversation back to the contents of the messaging triangle.

## PEP Mission and Purpose Messaging Triangle



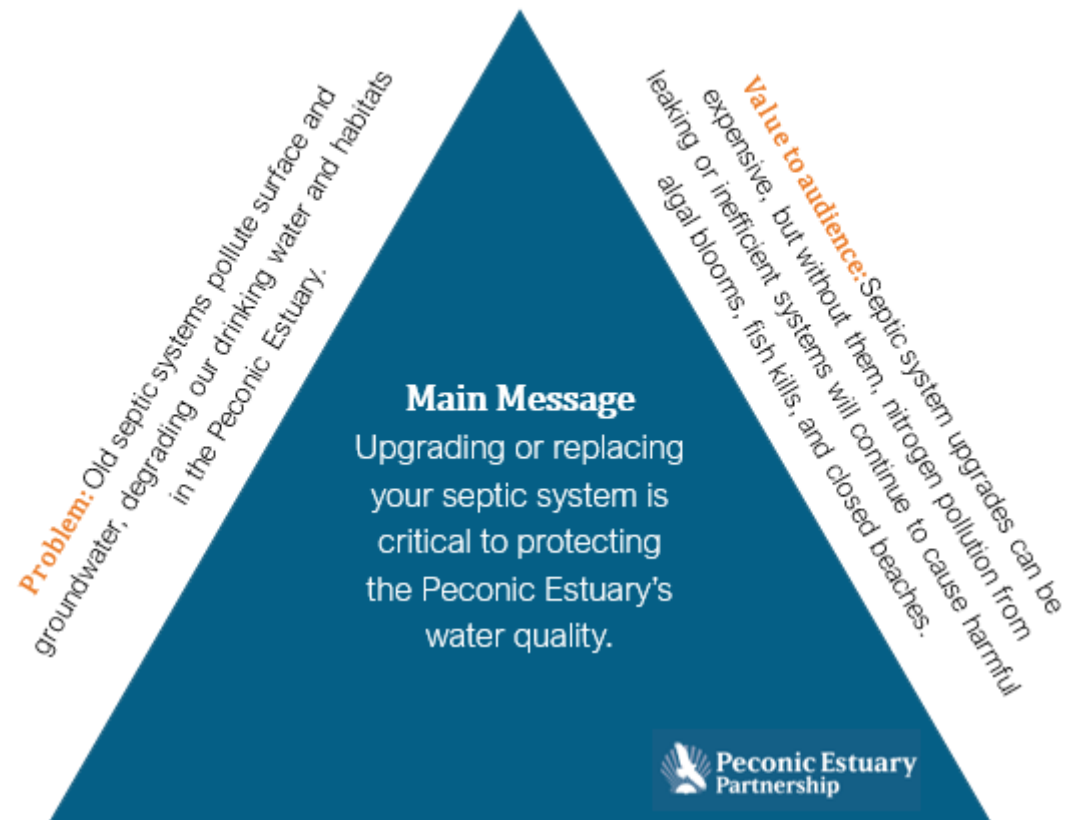
**Supporting text:** PEP’s monitoring of the Peconic Estuary’s water quality and habitats are an integral part of fulfilling our mission because it allows us to understand what the estuary needs, to inform restoration efforts, and to evaluate the impacts of our management actions.

**Supporting text:** PEP supports research projects that aim to help us better understand the estuary’s problems, thus informing better management actions.

**Supporting text:** PEP collaborates and communicates with numerous stakeholders such as regulatory entities, non-profit organizations, academia, and community representatives. We believe that bringing knowledgeable stakeholders together is crucial to solving the complex issues of the Peconic Estuary.

**Supporting text:** PEP conducts education and outreach efforts aimed at key stakeholders and the public. We offer educational events, volunteer opportunities, and encourage participation in our Citizen’s Advisory Committee.

## Suffolk County Septic Improvement Program Messaging Triangle



**Call to action:** The Suffolk County Septic Improvement program can cover most of the out-of-pocket costs for eligible homeowners to replace their existing septic systems.

**Supporting text:** *These effects negatively impact your drinking water quality and the habitat that makes the Peconic Estuary unique and beautiful.*

**Supporting text:** *This helps protect our water quality, boosts the value of your property, and reduces the risk of incurring sudden, unexpected costs in the event of catastrophic septic system failure.*

**Supporting fact:** *Long Island's drinking water comes from a sole source aquifer, which is fed by groundwater. Nitrogen pollution in the groundwater eventually contaminates the aquifer where our drinking water comes from.*

**Supporting fact:** *Upgrading to an onsite wastewater treatment system can remove over 70% of the total nitrogen from each wastewater discharge.*

## Estuary-friendly Yard Care Practices Messaging Triangle



**Call to action:** Homeowners can reduce pollutants from entering the estuary by reducing or eliminating synthetic fertilizer and pesticide use; planting rain or native plant gardens; installing rain barrels; picking up animal waste; and properly using and disposing of household chemicals.

**Supporting text:** Our Homeowner Rewards Program provides up to \$500 to homeowners for installing rain barrels, rain gardens, and native plant gardens.

**Supporting fact:** Stormwater is rain that flows over pavement and lawns—picking up pollutants like oil, fertilizers, pesticides, and waste—which then enters storm drains, waterways, or groundwater. Rain gardens and rain barrels reduce the amount of polluted stormwater from entering waterways and groundwater.

**Supporting fact:** Our drinking water comes from a sole source aquifer, which is fed by groundwater. Nitrogen pollution in the groundwater eventually contaminates the aquifer where our drinking water comes from.

**Supporting fact:** Planting native plants that are naturally adapted to the Peconic Estuary environment can reduce synthetic fertilizer use since these low-maintenance plants typically do not require fertilizers.

## Tool 3: Short Stories

Short stories are versatile tools for connecting people to causes in a meaningful way. They distill complex issues into relatable, human-centered narratives that spark emotion and understanding. Short stories can be used to raise awareness, personalize abstract challenges, celebrate progress, and inspire action. Whether shared through newsletters, online blog posts linked to the PEP website, or community events, they provide an accessible entry point that helps audiences see themselves in the story—and motivates them to care, support, and get involved. Here are some general recommendations for developing short stories:

1. Start with a Clear and Simple Purpose  
Decide what the story should achieve—whether it is raising awareness, showcasing a positive impact, or inspiring direct action. Having a focused and simple purpose—along with clear, concise content—will create a compelling story.
2. Center on People and Place  
Highlight the voices of individuals or communities affected by environmental issues or benefitting from conservation and restoration actions. Grounding the story in a specific place or experience makes it relatable and memorable.
3. Use Emotion and Sensory Detail  
Move beyond facts by describing how something looks, feels, or changes lives. Emotional resonance helps audiences connect and remember. Visuals such as photographs and graphics can support those connections as well.
4. Keep the Structure Simple  
Follow a straightforward arc:
  - Problem (the environmental issue or challenge)
  - Response (how people, communities, and/or PEP is addressing the problem)
  - Outcome (the positive change or call to action).
5. Balance Urgency with Hope  
Present the seriousness of the issue, but also show solutions, progress, or opportunities to contribute. Hope sustains engagement and avoids audience fatigue.
6. Tailor to the Audience and Medium  
Adapt tone, language complexity, length, and visuals to the audience—brief and visual for social media, slightly longer and more detailed for blogs, newsletters, or presentations. Note that most audiences will respond best to the use of plain (i.e., non-technical/scientific) language, whenever possible.
7. End with a Call to Action  
Encourage the reader to take a step—donating, volunteering, advocating, or sharing the story. Clear direction turns emotion into impact.

Below are a few examples of short stories developed for PEP, followed by some additional suggestions.

## Water Quality Monitoring Short Story

### Watching the Water: Protecting the Peconic Estuary

On a calm day, the Peconic Estuary looks picture-perfect. But what we see on the surface doesn't always reflect what is happening beneath. Subtle shifts in oxygen, nutrients, or temperature can tip the balance of the Estuary's health—and that is why the Peconic Estuary Partnership (PEP) and its partners keep a constant watch.

Since the 1970s, Suffolk County scientists have been taking samples monthly at dozens of locations across the Peconic Estuary, measuring everything from oxygen to clarity to nutrient levels. Their work shows how the Estuary changes from season to season and helps track long-term trends. To complement this work, PEP and Suffolk County teamed up with the U.S. Geological Survey to place high-tech sensors in key stations. These stations measure conditions every six minutes, catching changes too sudden to be seen in monthly sampling. Together, these programs provide one of the most complete pictures of the Peconic Estuary's health.

This monitoring isn't just for scientists—it benefits species and people too. When a massive fish kill struck the Peconic River in 2015, killing thousands of “bunker” or Atlantic menhaden, PEP's continuous monitoring data helped pinpoint the cause: dangerously low oxygen levels. That real-time information guided response efforts and led Suffolk County to issue a recreation advisory warning the public to avoid swimming or wading in affected areas until conditions improved.

Beyond emergency response, continuous and long-term monitoring data help local agencies decide when to close or reopen shellfish areas, design pollution-reduction programs, and protect the livelihoods that depend on clean water. In short, monitoring translates science into action that safeguards both ecosystems and communities.

*[Insert quote here, e.g., “Monitoring gives us the early warnings we need to protect public health and the health of the estuary—and the confidence to act before it's too late,” said [Name], [Local Partner/Resident].]*

**Why it matters:** The Peconic Estuary is our shared backyard. By supporting water quality monitoring—through volunteering, advocacy, or simply staying informed—we can all play a role in keeping the Estuary healthy for future generations.

## Habitat Restoration Short Story

### Meadows of the Sea: Restoring Eelgrass in the Peconic Estuary

Beneath the surface of the Peconic Estuary lies an unsung hero: eelgrass. These underwater meadows sway gently with the tide, providing food, shelter, and nursery grounds for fish, shellfish, and even iconic bay scallops. Eelgrass also improves water quality, stores carbon, and buffers shorelines against erosion.

But the story of eelgrass in the Peconic Estuary is also one of loss. Since the 1930s, eelgrass beds have steadily declined, with surveys showing continued habitat loss—including a 7.5% decline over just the past decade. Rising water temperatures, excess nutrients, and coastal development have all taken their toll.

Recognizing the urgency, the Peconic Estuary Partnership (PEP) and its partners—Cornell Cooperative Extension, Stony Brook University, and the University of Maryland—have dedicated decades of work to monitoring and restoring eelgrass in the Estuary. *[Insert sentence detailing what PEP’s restoration of eelgrass has included, e.g., “Since YEAR, PEP and its partners have planted X acres of eelgrass shoots across SITE NAMES in the Peconic Estuary.”]* Long-term data collection tracks light, temperature, and sediment conditions, while annual reports document the status of eelgrass beds. New approaches, like aerial flyovers and advanced mapping, give scientists and communities a chance to see the changes over time.

PEP has also joined forces with the international SeagrassNet network, ensuring that local monitoring contributes to global understanding of seagrass health. Cutting-edge projects are exploring how groundwater may help create cooler “refuges” for eelgrass and how combining kelp, oysters, and seagrass can strengthen coastal resilience.

The most recent assessment shows about 800 acres of eelgrass remain in the Estuary—a number that underscores both the fragility of the resource and the importance of continued action.

*[Insert community/partner quote here, e.g., “When you see fish darting through eelgrass beds, you realize how much life depends on these underwater meadows,” said [Name], [Community Member].]*

**Why it matters:** Protecting eelgrass isn’t just about saving plants—it’s about safeguarding the entire Peconic Estuary. Healthy eelgrass beds mean thriving fisheries, cleaner water, and stronger coastlines. By supporting restoration projects or joining community science initiatives, residents can help bring back the Estuary’s meadows of the sea.

### Wetland Restoration Short Story

#### Where the Tides Return—Restoring Indian Island’s Wetlands

At the heart of Riverhead’s Indian Island County Park, where Terry’s Creek once meandered freely into the Peconic Estuary, the tides are finally coming back home. For years, the wetlands here were cut off from the natural rhythms of the estuary—marshes dried, tidal channels filled in, and the ecosystem lost its balance.

Now, thanks to a partnership led by Suffolk County and supported by the Peconic Estuary Partnership (PEP), those tides—and the life they sustain—are returning. The Indian Island Tidal Wetland Restoration Project, a \$1.28 million effort that includes \$65,000 in *Environmental Protection Agency Section 320 funds contributed through PEP*, is restoring seven acres of vibrant tidal wetlands along Terry’s Creek.

Using a mix of engineering and ecology, the project team is reestablishing tidal connections by dredging existing channels, installing a new culvert, and creating a network of intertidal channels that allow the creek to breathe again. Silt fences and turbidity curtains keep sediments in check while native marsh plants are being reintroduced to anchor the soil and rebuild a living shoreline.

Once complete, the site will once again absorb nitrogen and pollutants, provide habitat for fish and migratory birds, buffer nearby communities from storm surge, and help improve water quality throughout the western Peconic Estuary. Over time, continuous monitoring through the regional Surface Elevation Table network—managed by PEP, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, and The Nature Conservancy—will track the marsh’s recovery and resilience.

*[Insert quote here, e.g., “When the tide moves through again, it’s not just water—it’s life returning,” said [Name], [Suffolk County Parks or PEP representative].]*

For the 74,000 visitors who hike, camp, and picnic in Indian Island County Park each year, this project means more than a view—it’s a living example of how people and nature can thrive together.

**Why it matters:** Restoring wetlands restores balance. Projects like this strengthen coastlines, clean the water we depend on, and ensure that the Peconic Estuary remains a place where both people and wildlife can flourish.

### *Other Potential Short Story Topics*

**The Future of the Peconic Estuary Partnership**—This short story could focus on PEP’s vision and future goals. This story could answer questions such as: What are PEP’s short- and long-term goals? Where does PEP see itself in five years? The story could end with PEP’s vision for how the community will be engaged with the organization in the future.

**Birdwatching in the Peconic Estuary**—On PEP’s questionnaire, 57 percent of respondents choose bird/wildlife watching as their primary activity or interest in the Peconic Estuary. Building upon this interest, this short story could focus on the main bird species found within the Estuary and could mention several good birdwatching locations for people to check out. PEP could consider offering a birdwatching event/tour and providing the event information in this story.

**Fishing, Swimming, and Boating in the Peconic Estuary**—Next to bird/wildlife watching, the three next highest primary interests of questionnaire respondents included fishing, swimming, and boating in the Estuary. This short story could build upon this interest and provide information on some of the best locations in the Estuary to fish, swim, and boat. PEP could link these recreational activities back to the importance of a clean, healthy Estuary, and end with what PEP and the community can do to ensure a healthy Estuary.

**The Eastern Tiger Salamander in the Peconic Estuary**—The Peconic Estuary provides breeding ponds for the state-endangered eastern tiger salamander, which is one of the largest terrestrial salamanders in the United States. This short story could focus on this salamander’s habitat; its conservation status; its threats including its sensitivity to pesticides and contamination; and how PEP and the community can help this salamander by reducing polluted-runoff and protecting wetlands.

**Come Meet the Deep Water Zone**—Not only does the Peconic Estuary include shallow waters and wetlands, but it also includes a deep water zone. This story could focus on what a deep water zone is, the creatures of this deep water zone, including sea turtles, cetaceans, and pinnipeds. The story could provide the best times of year for viewing these generally popular creatures in the Estuary and could end with what PEP and the community can do to ensure food supplies for these creatures remain healthy.

**Life on the Beach**—For people, beaches can be relaxing places to enjoy the sun. But for animals, beaches are an unstable and harsh environment. This story could explore these creatures who have adapted to life on the Peconic Estuary’s beaches, such as the rare plant, the seabeach knotweed and two endangered shorebirds, the piping plover and roseate tern. This story could end with how these creatures depend on a clean and protected beach and how the community can help by adhering to shorebird nesting seasons. PEP could consider organizing a beach clean-up event and providing information here.

**Upcoming Events in the Peconic Estuary**—This short story for PEP’s newsletter could focus on all upcoming PEP events, how these events serve the Estuary, and why people should attend one or more of them.

## Other Proposed COE Tools

The Communication Strategy that was developed concurrently with this Plan contains other proposed COE tools and materials that PEP can use to enhance its overall engagement with stakeholders across the East End. The following is a brief summary of those proposed COE tools.

1. Social Media Strategy

The Social Media Strategy assesses the strengths of PEP’s current social media efforts and identifies opportunities to enhance PEP’s reach through the implementation of best practices that will boost engagement and tell a cohesive and compelling story about the Estuary. A few of these best practices include post length and content recommendations, metrics for tracking effectiveness, sample posts and templates, and a content calendar.

2. Suffolk County’s SIP Draft Questionnaire

This sample questionnaire, made up of eight multiple choice and short answer questions, could be used by PEP and/or Suffolk County to gauge people’s awareness of the SIP and discern any hesitations or concerns they might have in participating in the program.

3. Suffolk County’s SIP Factsheet, Infographic, and Sample Social Media Post

These materials can be used alone or in combination to help encourage greater participation in SIP. PEP can work with Suffolk County to disseminate the information to homeowners across the East End.

4. General Guidance and Video Interview Post Suggestions for Engaging with Agriculture and Aquaculture Communities

PEP is interested in enhancing its outreach to and engagement with the agriculture and aquaculture communities across the Estuary. To achieve this, general guidance is included in the Communication Strategy. This includes how PEP can build personal relationships with farmers. Guidance is also provided on how to create video interview posts with farmers that can be posted on the PEP website and social media channels.

5. Infographics for Engaging with Agriculture and Aquaculture Communities  
PEP can use these materials to promote the best management practices currently used on farms and aquaculture sites across the Estuary, encouraging others in the industries to implement one or more of those practices to protect and enhance water quality and habitats.
  
6. StoryMap and Social Media Content to Reach Broader Community Audiences  
PEP is interested in better reaching and engaging with all communities across the Estuary to expand the number of organizations and individuals partnering on their efforts to protect and enhance water quality and habitats. These communities include tourists, part-time/seasonal homeowners, faith-based groups, youth groups, English as a Second Language (ESL) communities, and others that might arise in the future. Various proposed resources were developed and/or described within the Communication Strategy, including a [StoryMap](#) that was developed to highlight the current work of PEP and its partners. Sample social media posts were also developed to highlight some signature PEP projects including the rain garden program, monofilament recycling, and water quality monitoring program.
  
7. In-person Events, Sample Talking Points, and Signage  
PEP's participation in tabling at community events and the posting of eye-catching and informative signs/posters at frequently visited locations are effective ways to promote awareness of PEP's mission, build connections with potential supporters, educate the community about the Peconic Estuary, and collect direct community feedback on the issues and opportunities they care about. The Communication Strategy provides guidance, a list of some suggested tabling events, sample talking points for each element, and a few sample posters.

## Measurements of Success

### Suggested Actions

PEP's Communication Strategy discusses more broadly the objectives of each of the six key elements. However, Tables 2-7, which start on the next page of this Plan, provide specific recommended actions per objective that provides a plan for PEP to achieve their desired outcomes. Tables 2-7 are organized by element, then the specific objective, followed by the proposed person to lead the effort and suggested staff support. This is followed by the actions, the target audience(s), the suggested metrics for evaluating progress toward meeting the objectives, and the likely timeframe for completion, where Short (S) is 1-2 years, Medium (M) is up to 5 years, and Long (L) is up to 10 years. Objectives and actions flagged with an \* are considered to be the highest priority items for PEP to implement. When those items have been completed, meeting the other objectives and completing the other actions will likely be much easier.

*Table 2: COE Plan Actions for Element 1—Provide a shared narrative and related tools to help PEP and its partners effectively tell the story of why water quality and aquatic habitats are important and worth protecting.*

<b>Objective 1.1 Continue to refine key messaging for PEP’s various audiences and COE methods.</b>			
<b>Lead:</b> Outreach and Communication Manager <sup>1</sup>		<b>Support:</b> Other PEP staff	
<b>Actions</b>	<b>Target Audience</b>	<b>Possible Progress Metrics<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
1.1.a. Ensure PEP’s messaging is tied to and/or relates back to one or more of the CCMP goals and objectives. Focus particularly on water quality and habitat/wildlife monitoring work as that resonates more with the public. 1.1.b. Develop, use, and share with partners tools like messaging triangles (some of which are included in this Plan) to tell a clear and concise story in an easy to remember manner. 1.1.c. Tell human interest stories that enhance people’s sense of belonging and ownership. Developing strong regional narratives can boost personal responsibility and stewardship.	Public Government Policymakers Non-profits Academia Businesses Residents	# of new messages developed quarterly and annually  # of new human-interest stories developed quarterly and annually  # of new organizations partnering with PEP on its work  % increase in engagement from last year (overall and/or among certain stakeholder groups)	S
<b>Objective 1.2 Create a broad set of engaging materials based on messaging from Objective 1.1 above.</b>			
<b>Lead:</b> Outreach and Communication Manager		<b>Support:</b> Other PEP staff	
<b>Actions</b>	<b>Target Audience</b>	<b>Possible Progress Metrics</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
1.2.a. Some sample engagement materials were developed as part of this Plan and Communication Strategy, such as social media post templates, a StoryMap, infographics, newsletter articles, and factsheets. PEP should use those materials and create new ones based on those templates.	Public Government Non-profits Academia Businesses	# of new COE materials developed quarterly and annually  % increase in awareness of PEP and its work among those on the East End	S – M

<sup>1</sup> While many of these actions are a group effort, one or more suggested parties have been identified here to manage the action and evaluate progress over time, bringing in others as needed.

<sup>2</sup> This is not a list that PEP should implement in its entirety. These are suggested metrics from which PEP can choose to use or not, and this can evolve over time.

<p>1.2.b. Establish PEP’s signature initiative and think about how that can be leveraged to improve PEP’s overall image. This “Cornerstone” effort should capture all the CCMP goals and embody the mission of the organization to use as a means of boosting involvement.</p> <p>1.2.c. Share these materials with partner organizations through committee meetings, stand-alone meetings, via email, and through other means, such as placing them in an online repository where staff and partners can easily access them, as needed. Developing a short set of guidelines on the use of those materials (along with PEP’s branding and style guide) will ensure consistent use.</p>	Residents	# of new partners working with PEP on its work and using the COE tools developed	
<p><b>Objective 1.3 Work with traditional and social media outlets.</b></p>			
<p><b>Lead:</b> Water Quality Outreach Specialist (short-term) or Proposed Online Media Coordinator (longer-term)  <b>Support:</b> Outreach and Communication Manager</p>			
Actions	Target Audience	Possible Progress Metrics	Timeframe
<p>1.3.a. Identify key media contacts and social media influencers and begin to build relationships with them.</p> <p>1.3.b. Develop a tab on the stakeholder engagement matrix specific to media contacts and update regularly.</p> <p>1.3.c. Develop a media toolkit that contains factsheets, press release templates, social media post templates, and other content that can easily be used and adapted by media contacts to tell the PEP story.</p> <p>1.3.d. For high priority messages, use paid ads to boost engagement.</p>	<p>Journalists and editors</p> <p>Social media influencers</p> <p>Public</p>	<p># of new media contacts added to the engagement matrix</p> <p># of positive interactions with traditional media contacts and social media influences that lead to new articles/posts</p> <p># of new items developed for the media toolkit</p> <p># of click-ons/click-throughs from paid social media ads</p>	S – M

Table 3: COE Plan Actions for Element 2—Shape a clear public-facing identity for PEP so that more communities and individuals on the East End want to participate in PEP’s efforts.

<b>Objective 2.1 Make COE a routine part of all staff’s roles.<sup>3*</sup></b>			
<b>Lead:</b> Outreach and Communication Manager		<b>Support:</b> Executive Director and other PEP staff	
<b>Actions</b>	<b>Target Audience</b>	<b>Possible Progress Metrics</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
2.1.a. Conduct COE-related skills trainings to increase the level of understanding and confidence among all PEP staff to incorporate COE into their daily work. 2.1.b. Develop an annual COE Work Plan that prioritizes the specific COE actions to take that year, identify who is responsible, and provide means for tracking progress. 2.1.c. Hold periodic staff meetings focused on progress toward COE objectives to discuss what is working, where improvements could be made, and opportunities to work as a team to meet COE objectives.	PEP staff  All stakeholder groups would ultimately benefit	# of COE-related trainings conducted annually  # of staff (and volunteers) completing those trainings  % increase in number and frequency of COE materials being developed and disseminated from each staff member	S – M
<b>Objective 2.2 Increase committee member participation in COE efforts.</b>			
<b>Lead:</b> Executive Director		<b>Support:</b> Outreach and Communication Manager	
<b>Actions</b>	<b>Target Audience</b>	<b>Possible Progress Metrics</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
2.2.a. Schedule time during an upcoming meeting for each committee to share an overview of the strategic COE planning process and outline how they can support COE efforts moving forward. 2.2.b. Provide COE-related skills training to increase their level of understanding and confidence. 2.2.c. Include volunteer efforts from committee members into the annual COE Work Plan to assist in PEP’s overall efforts. 2.2.d. Consider creating a COE Advisory Committee (or similar) whose sole focus is supporting PEP in its COE efforts. Have this group report out to PEP staff, the CAC, and other committees to coordinate on tasks, as needed.	PEP committees	# of committee members participating in COE efforts  # of PEP COE materials shared by members  # of hours contributed by members to COE efforts per month/year	S

<sup>3</sup> Those objectives marked with an \* are considered “High Priority” and would be best implemented ahead of other objectives and related actions.

<b>Objective 2.3 Narrow and better define the organization’s focus.*</b>			
<b>Lead:</b> Executive Director <b>Support:</b> All PEP staff and committee members			
<b>Actions</b>	<b>Target Audience</b>	<b>Possible Progress Metrics</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
<p>2.3.a. Use the stakeholder engagement matrix to examine which groups could become more engaged with a lower level of effort, versus those that would require a significant amount of resources to move the needle and focus efforts on those first.</p> <p>2.3.b. Review the CCMP goal tracker to see where positive progress could be translated into stories and messaging that inspire more people to action.</p> <p>2.3.c. Ensure that revised messaging is consistent across all PEP platforms (i.e., website, social media accounts, etc.). This includes simplifying the organization’s mission to “Protecting and restoring the Peconic Estuary” and updating COE materials accordingly.</p>	All	<p>Difference between staff hours spent on COE efforts and engagement rates now, one year, and 3 years later</p> <p>% increase in public understanding of what PEP does one year and 3 years later</p>	S – M
<b>Objective 2.4 Refine PEP’s website.*</b>			
<b>Lead:</b> Water Quality Outreach Specialist (short-term) or New Online Media Coordinator/Manager (longer-term)			
<b>Support:</b> Website contractor and other PEP staff			
<b>Actions</b>	<b>Target Audience</b>	<b>Possible Progress Metrics</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
<p>2.4.a. Consider starting a new website in WordPress or another online platform that anyone without coding experience can use to create and modify content.</p> <p>2.4.b. This website should be updated on at least a quarterly basis, but monthly or even weekly would be ideal, to bring fresh content that attracts repeat visitors.</p> <p>2.4.c. An alternative to a new website is to seek a grant or other funding source to cover the costs of website updates, to be done on at least a quarterly basis, but more frequently is better.</p> <p>2.4.d. Regardless of how the website is updated, it should be used as the central location for disseminating information about PEP and its work, including the updated messaging and mission statement, linking to social media channels as much as possible to improve engagement.</p>	All, with particular emphasis on younger audiences	<p>% increase in website visitation</p> <p># of click-throughs per month</p>	S

<p>2.4.e. While not directly related to the PEP website, the Suffolk County website has a page dedicated to PEP, but the information is very outdated (i.e., it mentions the previous version of the CCMP). Work with their staff to have that content updated, providing desired materials, if possible.</p>			
<p><b>Objective 2.5 Enhance PEP’s social media content.</b></p>			
<p><b>Lead:</b> Water Quality Outreach Specialist (short-term) or New Online Media Coordinator/Manager (longer-term)</p>			
<p><b>Support:</b> All PEP staff and committee members</p>			
<p><b>Actions</b></p>	<p><b>Target Audience</b></p>	<p><b>Possible Progress Metrics</b></p>	<p><b>Timeframe</b></p>
<p>2.5.a. Review the purpose and goals of PEP’s social media presence and make refinements as necessary, using the recommendations in the social media strategy developed as part of this planning process, where possible.</p> <p>2.5.b. Use a social media content calendar and scheduling platform to plan posts a week to months ahead of time to reduce the time needed for more frequent posting. Track posting successes with online analytics tools.</p> <p>2.5.c. Contract with a local videographer or student from Stony Brook University to help develop engaging short video content that builds followers and drives traffic to the PEP website.</p> <p>2.5.d. If funding can be found, hire a PT of FTE to fill the role of online media coordinator/ manager. This person’s job will be to develop and post content on a more regular basis (to both social media channels and the PEP website), incorporating content from all PEP staff’s project, as possible. They will also be responsible for building an online community by liking, sharing, and commenting on the posts of other pertinent groups and individuals. If funding cannot be found right away, consider leveraging resources from Stony Brook University to fill some of these gaps.</p> <p>2.5.e. Review as needed, and update at least annually, the social media strategy that was developed as part of this planning process.</p>	<p>All, with particular emphasis on younger audiences</p>	<p>% increase in social media channel followers</p> <p>% increase in likes, shares, and other engagement on social media channels</p> <p>% increase in click-throughs to website</p> <p># of posts per week, month, and year per channel</p> <p># of likes, shares, and comments done by PEP for others’ content</p> <p># of videos created per year</p>	<p>S – M</p>

Table 4: COE Plan Actions for Element 3—Work with Suffolk County to broaden and increase participation in its Septic Improvement Program (SIP) to inspire pro-estuary behaviors and have a measurable positive impact on the Estuary’s water quality.

<b>Objective 3.1 Enhance coordination with Suffolk County.</b>			
<b>Lead:</b> Water Quality Outreach Specialist		<b>Support:</b> Outreach and Communication Manager	
<b>Actions</b>	<b>Target Audience</b>	<b>Possible Progress Metrics</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
3.1.a. Plan for regular (e.g., quarterly or twice-yearly) meetings with the Suffolk County SIP point of contact to discuss participation levels, review messaging and engagement tools, and strategize outreach to priority areas. 3.1.b. Share final messaging materials with the County for their use. 3.1.c. Consider working with the County to host SIP application workshops in priority neighborhoods, where attendees can ask questions and receive support when completing the online application. 3.1.d. See 2.4.e. above for another action tied to Suffolk County.	Suffolk County staff  Full-time homeowners  Part-time and/or second homeowners  Rental property owners	# of SIP applications/participants in priority areas and/or % increase in participation from one year to the next  # of meetings with the Suffolk County SIP point of contact quarterly and annually  # of action items (determined during recurring meetings) completed by PEP and/or Suffolk County	S
<b>Objective 3.2 Work with homeowners’ associations, civic associations, and other organizations to disseminate SIP information.</b>			
<b>Lead:</b> Water Quality Outreach Specialist		<b>Support:</b> Outreach and Communication Manager	
<b>Actions</b>	<b>Target Audience</b>	<b>Possible Progress Metrics</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
3.2.a. Work with homeowner/civic associations (and County staff, if relevant) to facilitate recurring (e.g., annual or twice-yearly) presentations or workshops about the SIP to priority neighborhoods or communities. 3.2.b. Provide SIP content to homeowners’ and civic associations for dissemination to their members via email or mail. 3.2.c. Coordinate with water quality and wildlife habitat-focused partner organizations to provide SIP information/handouts during their events. 3.2.d. Explore opportunities to distribute mailed flyers or door hangers about SIP to homeowners and/or recent homebuyers in priority communities. 3.2.e. Explore opportunities with local homeowner-focused businesses (e.g., hardware/home improvement stores, landscaping	Full-time homeowners  Part-time and/or second homeowners  Rental property owners  HOAs  Civic associations	# of SIP applicants/participants from a specific community and/or % increase in participation from one year to the next  # of workshops or presentations given to homeowners’ or civic associations annually  # of other events (e.g. tabling) annually where PEP attended to provide SIP-related information	S – M

plant nurseries, etc.) to display a SIP flyer or share copies of an informational handout.			
<b>Objective 3.3 Refine the PEP website’s content related to SIP to provide an easy-to-use resource for homeowners.</b>			
<b>Lead:</b> Water Quality Outreach Specialist (short-term) or New Online Media Coordinator (longer-term)			
<b>Support:</b> Outreach and Communication Manager			
<b>Actions</b>	<b>Target Audience</b>	<b>Possible Progress Metrics</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
<p>3.3.a. Reorganize the content on the SIP webpage to highlight the potential cost-savings to homeowners near the beginning/top of the page.</p> <p>3.3.b. Structure the page so that readers can easily pick out the information they are looking for (e.g., what is it, why is it important, am I eligible, etc.).</p> <p>3.3.c. Consider highlighting or linking to one or more success stories/testimonials from a past SIP participant(s).</p> <p>3.3.d. Share recurring (e.g., quarterly or twice yearly) reminders on social media about the SIP and provide links to PEP’s and Suffolk County’s SIP webpages.</p> <p>3.3.e. Add a filter to the PEP website search page for “septic system.”</p> <p>3.3.f. Add a link to SIP information on the “Peconic Friendly Yard” webpage.</p> <p>3.3.g. Add a tab for Septic Improvement under the “What You Can Do” dropdown menu.</p>	<p>Full-time homeowners</p> <p>Part-time and/or second homeowners</p> <p>Rental property owners</p>	<p>% increase in visitation to/clicks on PEP’s SIP webpage quarterly and annually</p> <p>% increase in the number of searches on PEP’s website containing the word “septic” or “SIP” quarterly and annually</p> <p>% increase in the number of views/likes/comments on social media posts sharing PEP’s SIP webpage or related messaging quarterly and annually</p>	<p>S</p>

Table 5: COE Plan Actions for Element 4—Build connections with agriculture and aquaculture communities on the East End to showcase responsible practices that expand their use across the Estuary.

Objective 4.1 Strengthen outreach efforts with local farming organizations and farmers.			
Lead: Outreach and Communication Manager			
Support: Water Quality Outreach Specialist and/or new hire (Community Engagement Specialist)			
Actions	Target Audience	Possible Progress Metrics	Timeframe
<p>4.1.a. Connect with local farming organizations to forge connections with farmers (e.g., East End Food Institute’s Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training [CRAFT] program). Invite these organizations to PEP meetings and events and include them on email newsletters. Consider hosting small group meetings with points of contact at these organizations to introduce them to PEP’s goals related to agriculture.</p> <p>4.1.b. Maintain a simple set of communication materials regarding agriculture best practices that can be emailed, posted on digital platforms, or printed for events. Ensure that these materials clarify how and why PEP is involved.</p> <p>4.1.c. Set up information tables at farmers markets, wine festivals, fall festivals, and other agriculture-related events to provide information on PEP to visitors and farmers.</p> <p>4.1.d. Attend events hosted by agriculture associations to share information about best practices and PEP’s role.</p> <p>4.1.e. Compile and disseminate information on local funding for conservation and agricultural stewardship (such as the Suffolk County Soil &amp; Water Conservation District grant funds, USDA NRCS assistance programs, etc.).</p> <p>4.1.f. Work with partner organizations to expand the reach of these efforts.</p>	<p>Farm and vineyard owners or points of contact</p> <p>Agriculture-related organizations</p>	<p># of agriculture festivals/tabling events attended quarterly and annually</p> <p># of attendees engaged during these events</p> <p># of small group introductory meetings hosted with agriculture organizations quarterly and annually</p>	<p>S</p>

<b>Objective 4.2 Strengthen outreach efforts with local aquaculturists (and Baymen, fisherman, etc.).</b>			
<b>Lead:</b> Outreach and Communication Manager			
<b>Support:</b> Water Quality Outreach Specialist and/or new hire (Community Engagement Specialist)			
<b>Actions</b>	<b>Target Audience</b>	<b>Possible Progress Metrics</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
<p>4.2.a. Connect with local aquaculture organizations and shellfish growers (e.g., Long Island Oyster Growers Association). Invite these organizations to PEP meetings and events and include them on email newsletters. Consider hosting small group meetings with points of contact at these organizations to introduce them to PEP’s goals related to aquaculture and water quality.</p> <p>4.2.b. Maintain a simple set of communication materials regarding aquaculture best practices that can be emailed, posted on digital platforms, or printed for events.</p> <p>4.2.c. Set up information tables at oyster or seafood festivals, seafood markets, and similar venues to connect with attendees, growers, and fishermen.</p> <p>4.2.d. Attend events hosted by aquaculture and fishing associations and invite them to attend annual PEP symposia.</p> <p>4.2.e. Explore opportunities to display flyers or handout cards with links/QR codes to aquaculture best practices at boat repair shops, marinas, and similar locations.</p> <p>4.2.f. Work with partner organizations to expand the reach of these efforts.</p>	<p>Aquaculture and commercial fishing/shellfishing company owners and points of contact</p> <p>Aquaculture and commercial fishing/shellfishing organizations</p>	<p># of aquaculture or seafood festivals/tabling events attended quarterly and annually</p> <p># of attendees engaged during these events</p> <p># of small group introductory meetings hosted with aquaculture/fishing industry organizations quarterly and annually</p> <p># of visits to the aquaculture best practices webpage quarterly and annually</p>	S – M
<b>Objective 4.3 Raise awareness of agriculture and aquaculture best practices.</b>			
<b>Lead:</b> Outreach and Communication Manager			
<b>Support:</b> Water Quality Outreach Specialist and/or new hire (Community Engagement Specialist)			
<b>Actions</b>	<b>Target Audience</b>	<b>Possible Progress Metrics</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
<p>4.3.a. Highlight a local agriculture or aquaculture farms in each newsletter as a “Farm Star” with the organization’s BMPs and how it supports the Peconic Estuary. Consider getting a positive testimony from the organization to emphasize how the change benefited their operations. The highlight can also be included on</p>	<p>Agriculture/aquaculture/commercial fishing company owners or points of contact</p>	<p># of “Farm Star” highlights shared quarterly and annually</p> <p># of individuals engaging with Farm Star-related social media or website posts quarterly and annually</p>	S – M

<p>the PEP website and social media with links to farms (and potentially videos of the farms for social media).</p> <p>4.3.b. Consider creating a tiered list or chart of best practices, ranging from simple changes (i.e., quick wins or “low hanging fruit”) to more complex processes or practices that agriculture and aquaculture farms can use to support the estuary.</p> <p>4.3.c. Emphasize benefits to farmers/aquaculturists who adopt estuary-friendly practices (e.g., cost savings, eligibility for certain grants, more efficient production, etc.).</p> <p>4.3.d. Recognize Peconic Friendly Farms with a badge or other recognition program (see objective 4.4).</p>	<p>Agriculture/aquaculture/ commercial fishing- related organizations</p> <p>Public</p>		
<p><b>Objective 4.4 Explore a “Peconic Estuary Friendly Farm” badge program for agriculture and aquaculture farms/companies to display on their website/signage.</b></p>			
<p><b>Lead:</b> Outreach and Communication Manager</p>			
<p><b>Support:</b> Water Quality Outreach Specialist and/or new hire (Community Engagement Specialist)</p>			
Actions	Target Audience	Possible Progress Metrics	Timeframe
<p>4.4.a. Work with key stakeholders (e.g., Cornell Cooperative Extension or agriculture/aquaculture coalitions) to determine the scoring metrics (e.g., types of best practices that are eligible, minimum number to receive badge, etc.) and program parameters.</p> <p>4.4.b. Create an application or other documented review process and publish the information on PEP and partner websites and social media accounts. Provide information about the application when attending local events.</p> <p>4.4.c. Develop a dedicated webpage to host information about the program, the application process, and a recipient list.</p> <p>4.4.d. Ensure transparency in the development of the scoring metrics and the applicant review process on the webpage.</p> <p>4.4.e. Highlight recent recipients and maintain a running list of programs with the badge.</p> <p>4.4.f. Determine whether periodic check-ins or re-reviews are necessary to confirm the status of the program’s BMPs.</p> <p>4.4.g. Explore opportunities to recognize restaurants who source ingredients from recipient agriculture and aquaculture companies.</p>	<p>Agriculture/aquaculture/ commercial fishing company owners or points of contact</p> <p>Agriculture/aquaculture/ commercial fishing- related organizations</p> <p>Public</p> <p>Restaurant owners and chefs</p>	<p># of applications and awarded badges quarterly and annually</p> <p># of views/clicks/visits to the Peconic Estuary Friendly Farm webpage quarterly and annually</p>	<p>M - L</p>

Table 6: COE Plan Actions for Element 5—Design meaningful approaches that invigorate community engagement with special interest groups who are not currently as involved with PEP as others within the Estuary.

<b>Objective 5.1 Find ways to reach and engage with part-time homeowners and seasonal residents.</b>			
<b>Lead:</b> Coastal Resilience & Communities Coordinator and/or new hire (Community Engagement Specialist)			
<b>Support:</b> Outreach and Communication Manager			
<b>Actions</b>	<b>Target Audience</b>	<b>Possible Progress Metrics</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
<p>5.1.a. Meet with seasonal resident homeowner associations to share information about PEP’s work that ties to homeowners (SIP, estuary- friendly yard, etc.). Encourage them to disseminate materials to their member homeowners and consider changes to HOA bylaws to promote septic system upgrades, the use of native landscape plants, and other BMPs.</p> <p>5.1.b. Expand outreach regarding the estuary-friendly yard and Homeowner Rewards programs to local nurseries, landscape companies, and hardware/garden stores.</p> <p>5.1.c. Develop engagement materials specifically focused on these part-time homeowners (newspaper ads, factsheets, infographics, etc.) that highlight cost and time savings and building a sense of pride and belonging.</p>	<p>Individual homeowners</p> <p>Homeowner associations</p> <p>Civic associations</p> <p>Tourism bureaus</p> <p>Landscape companies</p>	<p># of estuary-friendly HOA bylaws changes enacted quarterly and annually</p> <p># of new part-time (i.e., 2nd homeowners) homeowners participating in the SIP quarterly and annually</p> <p># of new part-time homeowners participating in the Homeowner Rewards Program quarterly and annually</p> <p># of landscape companies newly incorporating lawncare BMPs quarterly and annually</p>	M
<b>Objective 5.2 Enhance youth programs and opportunities for engagement.</b>			
<b>Lead:</b> Coastal Resilience & Communities Coordinator and/or new hire (Community Engagement Specialist)			
<b>Support:</b> Outreach and Communication Manager			
<b>Actions</b>	<b>Target Audience</b>	<b>Possible Progress Metrics</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
<p>5.2.a. Expand opportunities for students and young people to participate in hands-on learning opportunities in schools and at community events.</p> <p>5.2.b. Build or partner with a youth volunteerism program like AmeriCorps or the Student Conservation Association (SCA) to create youth ambassadors for the Estuary.</p>	<p>Youth groups</p> <p>Schools</p> <p>Homeschool children</p> <p>Educators</p>	<p># of students/youth participating in PEP activities quarterly and annually</p> <p># of schools, youth, groups and home schoolers engaged quarterly and annually</p> <p># of education projects, programs, and events held quarterly and annually</p>	M – L

<b>Objective 5.3 Expand representation across all East End communities.</b>			
<b>Lead:</b> Coastal Resilience & Communities Coordinator and/or new hire (Community Engagement Specialist)			
<b>Support:</b> Outreach and Communication Manager			
<b>Actions</b>	<b>Target Audience</b>	<b>Possible Progress Metrics</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
<p>5.3.a. Participate in at least one community-organized event (i.e., church meetings and picnics, festivals, block parties, etc.) per month to add new partners to PEP’s efforts and begin to change individual behaviors incrementally.</p> <p>5.3.b. Invite new partner organizations (including those identified on the stakeholder engagement matrix) to attend PEP-organized events like the annual symposium and CAC meetings to learn more about PEP and share information about their organization.</p> <p>5.3.c. Develop new COE materials that build a sense of belonging and pride in the Estuary based on the communities PEP would like to target. This includes content in languages other than English.</p> <p>5.3.d. Hang posters at key locations across the Estuary (i.e., libraries, boat launches, grocery stores, churches, etc.) to inform and educate stakeholder groups about topics of importance to PEP and interest to those groups. See the Communication Strategy for examples and more details.</p> <p>5.3.e. Track changes in engagement levels on the stakeholder engagement tracker matrix that was developed as part of this planning effort. Track at least quarterly, if not more regularly.</p> <p>5.3.f. Expand on the Mini Grant program to help small organizations with limited staff and budgets participate in the work of PEP.</p>	<p>Faith based groups</p> <p>Youth groups</p> <p>Part-time / seasonal residents</p>	<p># of community events PEP participates in quarterly and annually</p> <p># of new community organizations that participate in PEP-organized events quarterly and annually</p> <p>% of invited community organizations that participate in PEP-organized events quarterly and annually</p> <p># of new tailored COE materials developed quarterly and annually</p> <p># of posters printed and distributed at various locations quarterly and annually</p> <p># of organizations on the stakeholder engagement matrix that move up one or more spots, signifying improved engagement % increase in the number of views/likes/comments on social media posts sharing PEP’s SIP webpage or related messaging quarterly and annually</p>	<p>S – L</p>

Table 7: COE Plan Actions for Element 6—Sustain long-term COE efforts by tracking successes and challenges, addressing new opportunities and potential partners, and adapting activities to what may arise in the future.

<b>Objective 6.1 Prioritize COE in the annual budget.</b>			
<b>Lead:</b> Executive Director		<b>Support:</b> Grants Coordinator and other PEP staff	
<b>Actions</b>	<b>Target Audience</b>	<b>Possible Progress Metrics</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
6.1.a. Implement recommendations from the Communication Strategy regarding the hiring or contracting of additional COE staff/contractors. 6.1.b. Seek out new grants and other funding sources to be able to make those hires/contracts. 6.1.c. Build additional volunteer capacity and/or use of partner organization resources (like Stony Brook University students) to fill COE gaps until hires can be made. 6.1.d. Ensure adequate budget for the creation, printing, and dissemination of new COE materials and activities.	PEP staff  PEP volunteers  Grantors and other funders	New FTEs (staff or contractors added to meet COE needs)  Amount of new grant funding for capacity building efforts  \$ amount spent on COE efforts quarterly and annually	S – M
<b>Objective 6.2 Review and adapt the COE Plan (and Communication Strategy).</b>			
<b>Lead:</b> Outreach and Communication Manager		<b>Support:</b> Other PEP staff	
<b>Actions</b>	<b>Target Audience</b>	<b>Possible Progress Metrics</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
6.2.a. Conduct regular (at least annual but ideally quarterly) reviews of the Plan’s performance. 6.2.b. Update relevant committees on Plan progress, as relevant. 6.2.c. Modify content to keep up with changes trends and needs in the Estuary and track with CCMP goals. This includes a full, new version completed ideally by 2030 or when a new CCMP has been developed.	PEP staff  PEP volunteers  PEP committee members  PEP partners	# of Strategy and Plan reviews done quarterly and annually  # of Strategy and Plan adjustments made quarterly and annually  New Strategy and Plan developed by 2030	S – M
<b>Objective 6.3 Perform periodic research.</b>			
<b>Lead:</b> Outreach and Communication Manager		<b>Support:</b> Other PEP staff and volunteers	
<b>Actions</b>	<b>Target Audience</b>	<b>Possible Progress Metrics</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
6.3.a. Convene or be part of a National Estuary Program (NEP) discussion group to exchange best practices and lessons learned.	General public	% change in public perception on PEP and its work now and in the future	S – M

<p>6.3.b. Hire an intern or use volunteers to stay informed on what others in the Estuary are doing for COE efforts that could be used or adapted by PEP for its work.</p> <p>6.3.c. Use knowledge gained through the implementation of this Plan (and associated Communication Strategy) to continue to adapt PEP’s COE efforts into the future.</p>	<p>Other NEPs</p> <p>PEP staff and volunteers</p> <p>PEP partners</p>	<p># of COE campaigns developed or adapted based on this research</p> <p>% increase in PEP brand recognition in years 3 and 5 of this Strategy</p> <p># of calls/meetings with other NEPs quarterly and annually</p>	
<p><b>Objective 6.4 Maintain and build upon stakeholder contacts.</b></p>			
<p><b>Lead:</b> Outreach and Communication Manager</p>			
<p><b>Support:</b> Water Quality Outreach Specialist and/or new hire (Community Engagement Specialist)</p>			
<p><b>Actions</b></p>	<p><b>Target Audience</b></p>	<p><b>Possible Progress Metrics</b></p>	<p><b>Timeframe</b></p>
<p>6.4.a. Use the stakeholder engagement matrix developed as part of this Strategy to outreach to new individuals and organizations.</p> <p>6.4.b. Continue to identify potential new stakeholders across all sectors of the media, government, education, faith-based groups, civic groups, tourism bureaus, etc. and add their information to the matrix.</p> <p>6.4.c. Establish a process for maintaining and updating the matrix, at least quarterly, to ensure the most accurate information is included.</p>	<p>PEP staff</p>	<p># of times the matrix is updated quarterly and annually</p> <p># of new stakeholders added to the matrix quarterly and annually</p> <p># of media contacts added to the matrix quarterly and annually</p> <p>% of all listed stakeholders actively engaged</p> <p>% increase in PEP stories shared among listed stakeholders</p>	<p>S – M</p>

## Tools for Tracking Metrics

There are several tools that PEP could use to track the progress metrics for the objectives and actions listed in the tables on the previous pages. While this is not an exhaustive list, it provides a few simple and low-cost ways to check progress on a recommended quarterly (or at least annually) basis, allowing PEP to make changes to their COE efforts, as needed.

1. Spreadsheets and Dashboards  
Excel or Google Sheets can be set up with formulas and pivot tables, or linked to live data sources, to track quantitative metrics. Tools like Google Data Studio or Microsoft Power BI can also create visual dashboards. These tools can be used to track general progress or for efforts like the number of new COE materials developed, number of event attendees, or the number of workshops, meetings, and trainings held.
2. Social Media Analytics Tools  
Built-in social media platform analytics (Facebook Insights, Twitter/X Analytics, Instagram Insights) or third-party platforms (Hootsuite, Sprout Social, Buffer) can be used to track engagement across sites. These can be used to measure an increase in followers, likes, shares, comments, and other engagement.
3. Google Analytics and Web Tools  
Google Analytics tracks web traffic, sources, user behavior, and conversions. Heat-mapping tools like Hotjar or Crazy Egg can show how visitors interact with specific pages. These can be used to track website visitation, measure engagement with specific webpages, and track click-through rates for social media ads.
4. Questionnaires  
Questionnaires developed via Google Forms, Qualtrics, SurveyMonkey, or other platforms can be used to assess knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions. They can be distributed pre/post engagement or at set intervals. Examples include measuring the increase in awareness of PEP's work; tracking the understanding of PEP's mission now, in one year, and in three years; and collecting feedback from community event attendees.
5. Stakeholder Engagement Matrix  
The stakeholder engagement matrix can be used to track stakeholders' engagement level. Stakeholders "move right" as they increase involvement.

## Adaptive Management of this Plan

Adaptive management is a structured yet flexible approach to planning that treats plans such as this one as a living document, requiring adjustments to them over time based on staff and stakeholder feedback, learning from experience, and changing conditions for the organization, its partners, and the world around them. Adaptive management of this Plan is important because COE efforts are undergoing frequent shifts depending on the audience, PEP's overall goals, and external conditions such as funding and governmental oversight. While the objectives and actions outlined in Tables 4-9 were valid as this Plan was being written, there is no guarantee that each will still be relevant five to ten years from now.

Therefore, as was described under the COE Plan Actions for Element 6 (Table 7), this Plan and the associated Communication Strategy will need to be monitored and updated as needed to stay relevant to the issues, opportunities, concerns, and available resources. Adaptive management ensures this Plan will be aligned with PEP’s long-term organizational goals while accommodating as many short-term shifts as possible, keeping the Plan both strategic and practical over time.

## Conclusion

Effectively reaching out to, communicating with, and engaging with the diverse populations of the East End can be challenging but the effort is well worth the time. This Plan provides PEP with recommendations and tools to build upon its proven and respected work, enhancing and expanding their efforts. This Plan is grounded in the understanding that influencing individual behaviors and encouraging communities to support and prioritize the protection and restoration of the Peconic Estuary’s health and resilience will require a more targeted approach. As these tools are used and shared across all PEP partners, PEP will see more individuals and organizations contributing to the advancement of the CCMP goals and PEP’s mission of “Protecting & Restoring Long Island’s Peconic Bays.”

Please see the Communication Strategy for the Peconic Estuary Partnership for additional content that will help the organization shape a more robust and effective COE effort.

## APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

The following content summarizes the steps and findings from the series of research tasks completed as part of this Plan development to assess PEP’s current COE activities, gain a sense of what other NEPs across the country do for COE activities, and gather input from public stakeholders and members of the CAC. These findings were used to develop the content outlined in this Plan, as well as in the associated Communication Strategy. This methodology is provided below to support PEP staff should they wish to perform similar research tasks in the future. The content outlined within also provides more detailed information on the recommendations contained within this Plan.

### Part 1: Internet Research

Marstel-Day performed a review of five online sources of messaging from or related to PEP to identify common themes and potential inconsistencies and develop a list of recommendations for improving PEP’s overall messaging strategy. The sources reviewed included:

1. [PEP’s 2020 Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan \(CCMP\)](#)
2. [PEP’s website](#)
3. [PEP’s Facebook page](#)
4. [PEP’s Instagram page](#)
5. [The Suffolk County Government PEP webpage](#)

These sources were selected based on where members of the public may find information produced by or about the Partnership, as well as the top results for the phrase “Peconic Estuary Partnership” when using Google.

*Table A1: Information Sources and Key Takeaways*

Sources	Takeaways
2020 CCMP	The CCMP covers many of the common themes/topics found in other PEP messaging, but it does not strongly emphasize educational content or monitoring work aside from the action items. This contradicts the strong monitoring and community involvement components found on the website and social media pages.
PEP’s website	
PEP’s Facebook page	
PEP’s Instagram page	
Suffolk County Government PEP webpage	The Suffolk County PEP webpage is out of date and still refers to PEP as the “Peconic Estuary Program.” It states that the CCMP was developed in 2001, and it emphasizes priorities that are no longer well-aligned with PEP’s other messaging.

**Common topics and themes of the messages include:**

Protection/restoration  
 Water quality  
 Ecosystems  
 Wildlife/habitat  
 Science  
 Monitoring

Partnerships  
 Community involvement  
 Resilience  
 Climate change  
 Recreation

Of these topics above, the most common topics and themes in the sources included water quality, ecosystems, partnerships, and community involvement.

While agriculture and wastewater were noted as key topics to be addressed, these topics generally occurred infrequently in the reviewed sources. In the CCMP, agriculture and wastewater are mentioned as action items but are not highlighted in the goals or objectives. These terms are searchable keywords on PEP’s website. When searched, they return related articles and blog posts, but these topics are not a significant part of the main pages that visitors to the webpage may view (e.g., the landing page, the mission page, etc.). These topics are mentioned occasionally on social media pages, particularly in relation to nitrogen, fertilizer/nutrient pollution, and water quality.

*Table A2: Frequently Used Messaging Across Sources*

Common Messages	CCMP	PEP Website	Facebook page	Instagram page	Suffolk County PEP webpage
To protect and restore the Peconic Estuary and its watershed. (PEP’s mission statement)	X	X	X	X	
Fostering collaborative relationships across sectors/stakeholders/ regulatory entities	X	X	X		X
Expand scientific understanding to support ecosystem-based management.	X	X			X
Monitoring is an integral part of the Peconic Estuary Partnership.		X	X	X	X
Education is key to balancing the needs of the estuary and the region’s populace.		X	X	X	

Overall, PEP’s website and social media pages could be more closely aligned with content within the CCMP. The connections between the CCMP and the projects and outreach that are highlighted on the various online platforms should be strengthened to promote a consistent understanding of what PEP is and does.

*Table A3: Messaging Research Findings and Recommendations*

Findings	Recommendations
<p>PEP’s mission statement is not consistently used across PEP’s webpages and social media platforms. In addition, some external websites included outdated content about PEP and its work.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Simplify PEP’s mission to “Protecting and restoring the Peconic Estuary”</li> <li>• Ensure consistency of this mission on PEP’s webpages, such as the homepage and on the “Mission” page.</li> <li>• Continue to use the revised mission statement on PEP’s social media pages and website.</li> <li>• Ensure external organization websites (such as Suffolk County, New York State, etc.) use the revised mission statement when discussing PEP.</li> </ul>
<p>The CCMP vision and goals were not as widely used as expected given the importance of the CCMP to the overall work of PEP.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tie the CCMP’s vision and goals into messaging provided on other platforms, such as the website and social media pages.</li> <li>• Make it clear to the reader when a particular piece of content supports the mission, vision, and/or goals of the CCMP.</li> </ul>
<p>PEP’s vision statement emphasizes ecosystems, science, and planning, but it does not highlight the importance of partnerships or community.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Convey how partnerships and community are central to achieving the CCMP mission, vision, and goals using informational posts or pages.</li> </ul>
<p>Public-facing materials (such as PEP’s website and social media pages) emphasize monitoring, education, and activities for public engagement, but these roles are only represented in the CCMP as action items. Monitoring and education are not as strongly emphasized in the CCMP compared to the website and social media pages.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include messaging on the website and social media pages that reinforce the overall vision and goals of the CCMP.</li> <li>• When sharing monitoring or educational content, highlight how these activities may support specific goals or action items from the CCMP.</li> <li>• For future versions of the CCMP, consider more content related to the importance of education and citizen science (i.e., monitoring, etc.) to enhance the work of PEP.</li> </ul>
<p>The messaging on PEP’s website and social media pages is better aligned with each other than they are with the content of the CCMP.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When sharing content on social media or the website, describe how the content relates to the CCMP, whenever possible.</li> </ul>

<p>PEP’s website has a “projects” tab, some of which are directly tied to CCMP goals, while others are not. Goal 1 is also not represented within the projects shown on the website. The content of these pages does not indicate to the reader that they are related to the CCMP goals, which is a missed opportunity to reinforce the CCMP’s messages.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use the “projects” tab to highlight how PEP’s work directly ties back to the CCMP through text or graphics.</li> <li>• Consider using common symbols or colors to match the CCMP content to content on the website and social media.</li> <li>• Provide a link to view the CCMP and its progress tracker page when it is mentioned on other pages.</li> </ul>
<p>PEP’s social media pages strongly convey how PEP can engage residents, but they do not clearly communicate what PEP is.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider using the bio features, a pinned post, a “welcome” page, or other highly visible feature to give an overview of what PEP is and what PEP does for the watershed. Make sure this links to the PEP website also.</li> <li>• Ensure this introductory information is consistent across platforms and updated as needed.</li> <li>• Link to the newly created StoryMap as another way to get information about PEP out to a broad audience.</li> </ul>
<p>Because agriculture and wastewater are main topics that PEP wants to highlight in their communication, the prominence of these two themes will need to be strengthened on the website and social media pages.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agriculture and wastewater topics are usually presented as part of a larger discussion regarding water quality and pollution. In targeted outreach efforts to key audiences (e.g., farmers and homeowners), consider highlighting the importance of agriculture and wastewater more specifically (rather than a general discussion of water quality), and emphasize their roles in supporting the Estuary’s water quality.</li> <li>• The “Create a Peconic Friendly Yard” page on the PEP website, with links to the Suffolk County septic improvement program page and the newly created infographic, provides an opportunity to talk about septic system upgrades.</li> </ul>
<p>The most frequent topics mentioned across all the sources included water quality, community involvement, ecosystems, and partnerships.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If these topics continue to be an important focus on PEP’s role in the watershed, continue emphasizing these topics in messaging across the various platforms.</li> <li>• However, given the identified areas where messaging and other themes could be strengthened, use the newly developed talking points and other content to enhance under-represented themes and highlight them consistently across the platforms.</li> </ul>

<p>PEP’s work is complex, which means there are many facets to its messaging. As a reader, it can be difficult to distill the main points of the messaging and how it relates to them personally.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use the newly developed messaging and the other recommendations within this plan to help stakeholders better understand the key takeaways from engaging with PEP content.</li> <li>• This messaging will vary across the different stakeholders groups in the watershed and may need to be modified accordingly.</li> <li>• Then use these messages and themes consistently across all PEP-managed platforms and encourage partners to do the same.</li> </ul>
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## Part 2: National Estuary Program (NEP) Research

Based on the research gathered from other NEPs (especially the Long Island Sound Partnership, Barnegat Bay Partnership, Narragansett Bay Estuary Program, and Tillamook Estuaries Partnership) via websites and interviews, the following are recommendations to enhance COE effectiveness, grounded in strengths, gaps, and best practices.

### 1. Expand Staff Capacity and Volunteer Coordination

Findings: Several NEPs have grown their COE capacity by leveraging AmeriCorps, interns, dedicated volunteer coordinators, and positions funded by outside entities like SeaGrant.

Recommendations:

- Pursue AmeriCorps or other similar programs to support education, outreach, and stewardship activities.
- Develop a formal volunteer management structure (e.g., using platforms like VolunteerLocal or SignUpGenius), and consider hiring a part-time volunteer/intern coordinator to enhance event support and community engagement in partnership with existing PEP staff.
- Partner with local colleges and universities (e.g., Stony Brook, Long Island University) to develop internship programs aligned with outreach and restoration needs.
- If additional staffing becomes possible, prioritize hiring a dedicated Online Media Coordinator and a Community Engagement Specialist to enhance existing social media and outreach and expand community engagement to newer potential partner groups.

### 2. Once Finalized, Make All or Pieces of the COE Plan Public

Findings: Other NEPs have published comprehensive, public-facing communication plans. In addition, one is in the process of merging its COE and Informed & Engaged Workgroup plans into a unified document to improve internal coordination and communication.

Recommendations:

- Continue to ensure PEP’s Plan is closely aligned with CCMP objectives, leverages existing partner networks, and includes a robust evaluation framework to track success over time.

- Continue to incorporate means to effectively reach all audiences, including the agricultural sector, marine industries, tourists, municipal leaders, and youth.
- Weave in themes of accessibility and place-based identity to deepen local engagement and foster a strong regional narrative.
- Consider including goals that explicitly reflect belonging, environmental literacy, and pre-estuary behavior change.

### 3. Adopt Clear, Trackable Metrics for COE Progress

Findings: Some NEPs use detailed metrics to assess outreach, while others have only informal feedback loops. Metrics should be clear, and there should not be too many—as overly ambitious plans can hinder implementation.

Recommendations:

- Use the initial metrics developed in this Plan to establish a more detailed metrics framework in future years that could include:
  - Number of public engagement events, volunteers, and participants
  - Distribution and uptake of educational materials
  - Website and social media analytics
  - Survey-based changes in awareness or behavior (e.g., interest in native landscaping or stormwater practices)
- Present progress in meeting communication objectives in an engaging, visual format accessible to all stakeholders (e.g., via a dashboard or StoryMap).
- Communication Strategy metrics have not been prioritized, so over time PEP could discover that there are too many to effectively manage. Should this occur, undergoing a prioritization process for the metrics can help determine which are best aligned with outreach objectives and CCMP goals, warranting more focus than less pressing ones.

### 4. Elevate and Evolve Signature Outreach Products

Findings: NEP-run efforts like Jersey Friendly Yards and Explore Nature are flagship educational initiatives with broad reach. In addition, the use of focus groups and public perception studies have helped some groups to guide messaging, branding, and organizational name changes.

Recommendations:

- Identify and brand a flagship initiative—existing or new—that can anchor PEP’s identity and promote long-term pro-estuary behavior within the community.
- Enhance existing educational tools with interactive elements such as:
  - Jersey Friendly Yard’s interactive yard tool: <https://www.jerseyyards.org/create-a-jersey-friendly-yard/the-interactive-yard>
  - Virtual and in-person Peconic Estuary tours

- StoryMaps for specific audiences or topics, such as the one developed as part of PEP’s Communication Strategy
- Use focus groups or public perception surveys to refine branding and messaging strategies. (e.g., one partnership used Steve Raabe at Opinion Works (Maryland) for this type of research).
- Consider hosting an annual Peconic Estuary Summit or Festival to showcase community projects, research, and volunteer opportunities, and promote sustainable behaviors. This could be an adaptation of the existing annual symposium or a new event that is more geared toward the general public.

## 5. Strengthen Partnerships and Broaden Audience Reach

Findings: Many NEPs maintain extensive partner networks and serve diverse audiences, including Tribes, Spanish-speaking communities, educators, and decision-makers. For example, one group leverages partnerships through its Sustainable and Resilient Communities Workgroup to help groups access grant writing support and funding.

Recommendations:

- Map and expand PEP’s partner network to include additional local civic groups, conservation nonprofits, faith-based groups, and cultural institutions (e.g., East End Arts Council, local libraries, afterschool programs, etc.).
- Continue to develop multilingual resources (especially Spanish) to improve access for those East End communities.
- Continue to co-host educational events and develop materials with local government, watershed alliances, and restoration groups to leverage existing trust and infrastructure.
- Explore models like the Community Impact Fund to support community-led projects across all communities in the Estuary.
- Participate in existing events held by faith-based groups, tourism bureaus, agricultural umbrella organizations, and others to expand PEP’s reach.

## 6. Modernize Digital Engagement and Content Strategy

Findings: NEPs differ in the breadth and accessibility of their online tools. Some offer diverse digital content including StoryMaps, interactive indicators, and educator resources. One NEP noted strong growth in Instagram and LinkedIn performance, driven by improved staffing and use of social media analytics.

Recommendations:

- Redesign or expand the PEP website to function as a public-facing educational and action hub, with:
  - Clear navigation for students, teachers, volunteers, and residents
  - Interactive data (e.g., water quality trends, virtual Peconic Estuary tours, StoryMaps, etc.)

- Recent newsletters that spotlight project/partner success stories and updates, events, stewardship opportunities, etc.
- Improve use of social media analytics to refine outreach strategies and boost engagement with targeted campaigns.
- If resources allow, ensure that social media is treated as a dedicated function, not a side task (e.g., one program emphasized this should be a full-time responsibility).
- Follow the additional recommendations in PEP’s Social Media Strategy that is included within the Communication Strategy.

## 7. Foster Cross-NEP Learning and Collaborative Campaigns

Findings: While some NEPs share templates and best practices, collaboration is often informal.

Recommendations:

- Consider participating in or initiating a regional COE working group (e.g., among NEPs in the Northeast) to co-develop shared messaging, metrics, or events. Those we spoke to would be open to something like that, if not already involved in one.
- Collaborate on joint campaigns or toolkits (e.g., water conservation, climate adaptation, youth engagement) with other NEPs to share resources and lessons learned.
- Consider cross-promoting success stories across estuary program platforms to build a unified identity for Northeast estuaries and beyond.
- As one group is doing with its Informed & Engaged Workgroup, ensure PEP’s working group structure supports internal coordination and shared tracking of COE outcomes.

### *NEP Research Conclusions*

PEP is well-positioned to build on the strengths of peer NEPs by:

- Establishing and publicizing a clear COE strategy,
- Expanding staffing and partnerships,
- Measuring outreach outcomes,
- And fostering inclusive, place-based stewardship.

Incorporating these best practices and lessons learned will help PEP align more fully with overall NEP goals and deepen its impact across East End communities.

For additional information, a comparison matrix of all NEPs studied and/or interviewed can be found in Appendix C of this Plan.

## Part 3: Public Meeting Findings Summary

To gain key insights from a wide variety of stakeholders living, working, and recreating across the Estuary, Marstel-Day worked with PEP to schedule and hold a series of four public meetings: June 17 in Southold, June 18 in Riverhead, July 21 in East Hampton, and July 22 in Hampton Bays. A copy of the public meeting program can be found in Appendix D.

The purpose of these meetings was to provide an informal setting where people could talk about what matters to them and how they and PEP can work together to protect the Estuary. Each meeting began with introductions, followed by a brief PEP presentation introducing the Peconic Estuary and PEP’s mission, goals, organizational structure, staff, achievements, and projects. Marstel-Day then explained the meeting purpose and objectives and provided links to the online questionnaire (as well as a QR code) and PEP’s website. A copy of the presentation, along with attendees lists, some photos from the meetings, and other materials, can be found in the [Communications Plan folder here](#). Then participants broke into small group discussions— facilitated by PEP, CAC, Peconic Bay Keepers, and/or Marstel-Day— guided by a series of questions, listed below.

1. Why is the Peconic Estuary important to you? Describe how you interact with the Estuary. (e.g., Work? Recreation? Nature connection?)
2. What efforts/projects do you think PEP should prioritize? Why?
3. What do you want people to know about the Peconic Estuary?
4. Based on your understanding of PEP, how would you like to stay involved?
5. Who else should be invited to participate in these discussions that are not here today?

A summary of the findings from the public meetings is included below.

The June 17 meeting in Southold had 12 attendees, including residents and representatives from organizations such as the Cutchogue Civic Association, Southold Peconic Civic Association, Southold CAC and Water Advisory, The Nature Conservancy, Citizen Science Learning Center, Peconic Land Trust, and Town of Southold.

The June 18 meeting in Riverhead had 23 attendees, including residents and representatives from the NYDEC DOW/NEIRC, Peconic Bay Keeper, Cornell, Citizen Science Learning Center, LI Farm Bureau, Peconic Pathfinders, PEP CAC, AMSEAS, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Frank, Moleaer, the Legislature, Riverhead Environmental Center, and Franca.

The July 21 meeting in East Hampton had 33 attendees, including residents and representatives from the Menantic Creek Keepers Inc., APC, Express News, Greater Ettcoc, Lion Head Beach Association East Hampton, Friends of the Long Pond Greenbelt, Rewild Change Hampton, Seacoast Enterprises Associates AMI, SCAC, ADC, Surfrider, and Suffolk County.

The July 22 meeting in Hampton Bays had three attendees, including one resident and representatives from the TOS Planning Board and Conscience Point Shellfish Hatchery.

In total, 71 attendees signed into the four meetings, though the actual number was higher as some did not sign in. PEP and Marstel-Day facilitated the meetings but were not included in the attendance count.

## Key Themes

From the small group discussions, five overarching themes emerged:

- **Deep Community Connection:** The Peconic Estuary is central to residents’ identity, livelihood, and quality of life. It supports recreation (fishing, kayaking, boating, scalloping, birding), provides peace and reflection, and connects families through culture, traditions, and generational ties.

- **Environmental Concerns:** Participants expressed strong concern about declining water quality, habitat loss (especially salt marshes and shellfish beds), species decline, and the visible impacts of development. They cited outdated septic systems, fertilizers, lawn irrigation, and boater discharge as key contributors to the Estuary’s decline.
- **Priority Actions:** Residents called for upgrading nitrogen-reducing septic systems, restoring salt marshes and shellfish habitats, improving stormwater management, dredging stagnant areas, promoting sustainable landscaping, conserving critical lands, and enhancing coastal resilience. Enforcement of environmental laws and better coordination of fragmented projects were also emphasized.
- **Education and Stewardship:** There was a strong desire for practical homeowner guidance (on septic upgrades, lawn diversity, fertilizer reduction, and pet waste), as well as youth-focused and bilingual outreach. Participants encouraged “education with action,” ensuring awareness translates into pro-estuary behavior change.
- **Inclusive Engagement:** Residents want more opportunities for hands-on involvement (restoration events, volunteer workdays, youth programs) and broader outreach to seasonal residents, fishermen, Spanish-speaking communities, civic associations, local businesses, and underserved groups. Creative outreach strategies, from signage to real estate education at point-of-sale, were also recommended.

## Conclusion

Overall, residents expressed a deep attachment to the Estuary and serious concerns over its decline. They urged PEP to lead with visible, practical actions, inclusive outreach, and education that empowers the community to be active stewards.

## Part 4: Online Questionnaire

A questionnaire was conducted over a roughly three-month period to understand how respondents connect to the Peconic Estuary and to identify how PEP’s communication with communities can be improved. The questionnaire was hosted on a free Qualtrics platform. Paper copies were available, but no paper responses were received. The questionnaire included 12 feedback-related questions and one optional question for respondents to provide contact information.

The questionnaire was initially open from May 29 to August 1, 2025 and received 26 responses. To increase engagement, the questionnaire was re-opened for two more weeks, starting on August 11, 2025. Nine additional responses were received, for a total of 35 responses.

The questionnaire included two types of questions. The first type, which included four questions, asked respondents about their relationship with the Estuary. In these responses, wildlife habitat and natural resources were consistently prioritized. The respondents saw land development and water quality as major concerns, further reinforcing the theme of valuing habitat and natural resources.

The second type of questions, which included eight questions, asked about respondents’ perceptions of PEP’s communication materials. The responses indicated that clearer and simpler messaging is desired. A majority of respondents indicated that they would like to learn more about what PEP does, indicating a need for improved communication about this topic.

Given that PEP is already highly involved in water quality and wildlife monitoring activities, but respondents feel unaware of what PEP does, there is a clear opportunity to strengthen this messaging. Improving awareness of PEP's work will help communities understand how PEP is already working to address some of their greatest concerns.

### *Key Takeaways*

The questionnaire included four questions related to respondents' experiences within the Peconic Estuary, and eight questions addressing respondents' interactions with PEP specifically.

In the four questions regarding their relationship to the Estuary, respondents tended to value or prioritize wildlife habitat and natural resources. The respondents highlighted land development/ loss of open space and water quality as major concerns. Land development and water quality are related to the Estuary's natural resources and habitat because, without open space or clean water, the Estuary's iconic wildlife cannot thrive. **The consistency in these themes among the responses highlights an important theme to address in PEP's messaging.**

Regarding respondents' interactions with PEP, the questionnaire highlighted the need for clearer communication materials from PEP. A majority of respondents felt that PEP's communication efforts regarding the CCMP and their work were somewhat effective, and clear graphics and statements were identified as key components of improving PEP's communication materials. **More than any other option, respondents indicated that they would like to learn more about what PEP does. Simply understanding what an organization does is a cornerstone to initiating and maintaining engagement with the community and other organizations, so addressing this feedback should be a high priority.**

There is a clear opportunity to improve messaging about PEP's current efforts to address the respondents' feedback: (1) respondents indicated a strong interest in habitat and water quality; (2) PEP is already highly involved in water quality and wildlife monitoring efforts; and (3) respondents noted that they want to learn more about what PEP does. Together, these results suggest that respondents may not be aware of how PEP's work addresses their greatest concerns and interests.

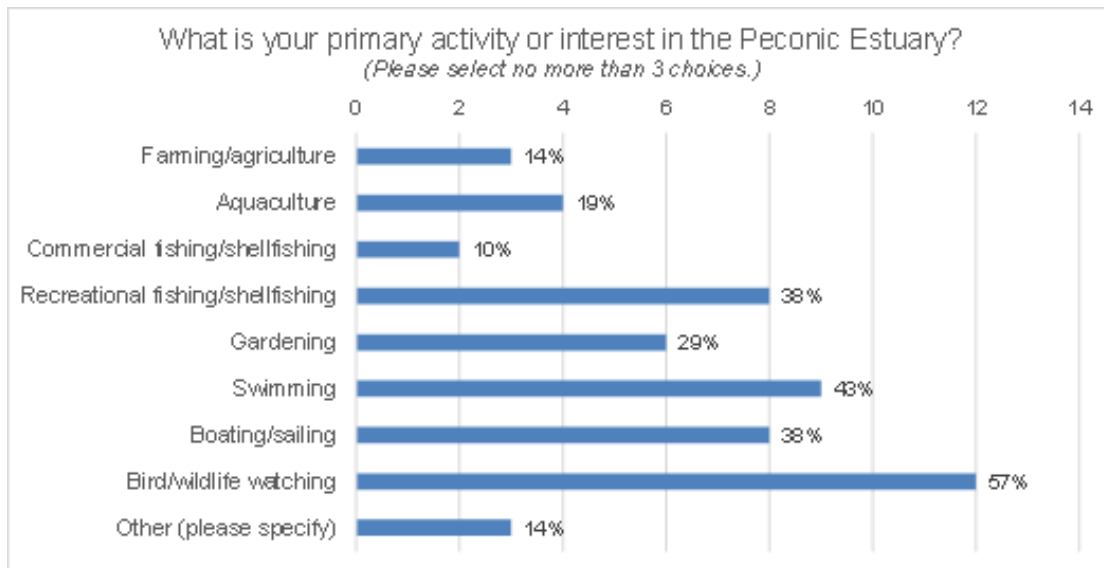
### *Recommendations*

- Develop and consistently use several main points about PEP's work in the Estuary to:
  - Strengthen messaging about what PEP does, particularly related to water quality and habitat/wildlife monitoring. (This was clear on PEP's social media but is less clear on the website and in the CCMP.)
  - Improve communication about the importance of PEP's work and the CCMP.
- Prioritize the use of clear, simple statements and graphics when posting information on all PEP platforms.
- Continue to use email newsletters for sharing information.
- Explore infographics, videos, other visual media, and podcasts for sharing information, particularly as a long-term COE growth opportunity as more staff capacity is added.
- Consider establishing a working group to strategize and align communication efforts.
- Explore ways to position the PEP website as a central location for information and updates.
- Ensure consistent communication materials are available for use at workshops and conferences where information about PEP will be shared.

- Because time is a barrier to respondents engaging with PEP, explore ways to involve communities and stakeholders with quick, easy to read materials (such as social media posts), or materials that can be enjoyed asynchronously (such as recorded workshops/conferences or podcasts).

A more detailed analysis of the questionnaire results is provided below.

1. **Results to the question: What is your primary activity or interest in the Peconic Estuary? (Please select no more than 3 choices.)**

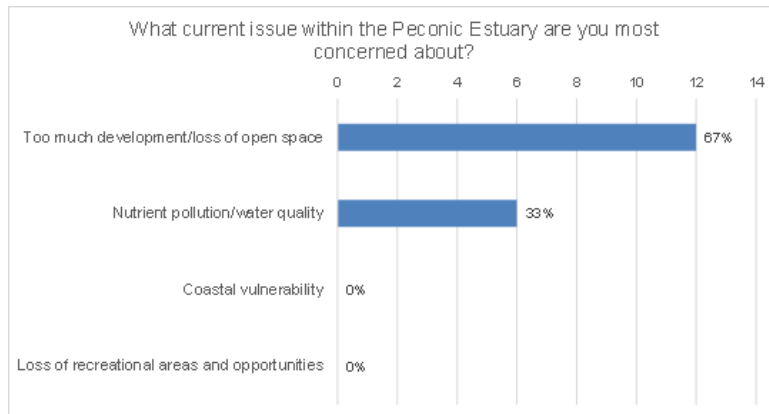


As shown above, bird/wildlife watching scored the highest, followed by swimming, then a tie between boating/sailing and recreational fishing/shellfishing. The “other” response indicated that their primary activities were “all of the above,” public access in the Clearwater and Lionhead areas, and an environmental nonprofit organization. Although farming/agriculture and commercial fishing/shellfishing received relatively few responses, the results for this question indicate that members of the farming and commercial fishing stakeholder groups were reached by the survey.

2. **Results to the question: What makes the Peconic Estuary unique or special to you? (open ended)**

This question received 18 written responses. The main themes in these responses included the beauty of the Estuary; living, growing up, or having family history in the Estuary; recreation opportunities; and the value of the Estuary’s natural resources, including its wildlife and habitats. Of these themes, the natural resources and habitats were mentioned most frequently, followed by living or having family history in the Estuary.

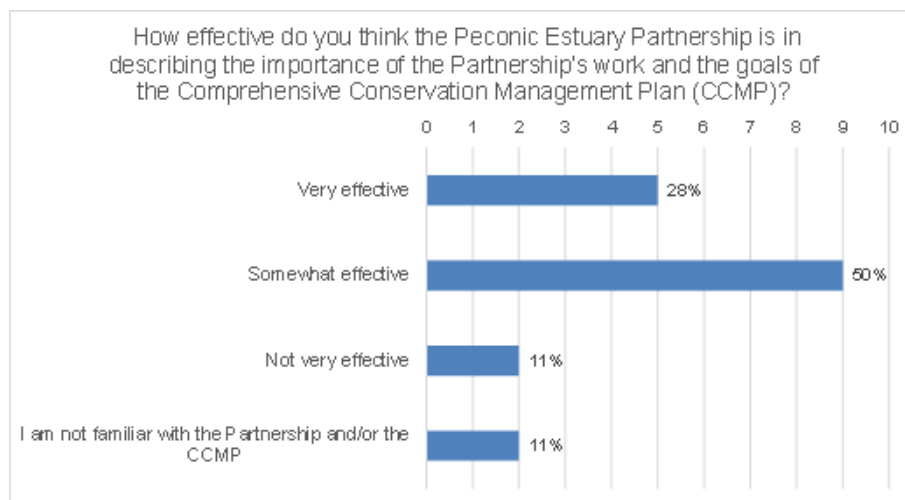
**3. Results to the question: What current issue within the Peconic Estuary are you most concerned about?**



As shown above, despite four answer choices being available, only two of the options received all the votes. Too much development/loss of open space received two-thirds of the votes, followed by nutrient pollution and water quality with a third of the votes. PEP’s work to improve water quality and address nutrient pollution directly responds to the respondents’ concerns and creates an opportunity for PEP’s communication to illustrate the importance of PEP’s work. Based on these results, it is likely that the respondents would value PEP’s work.

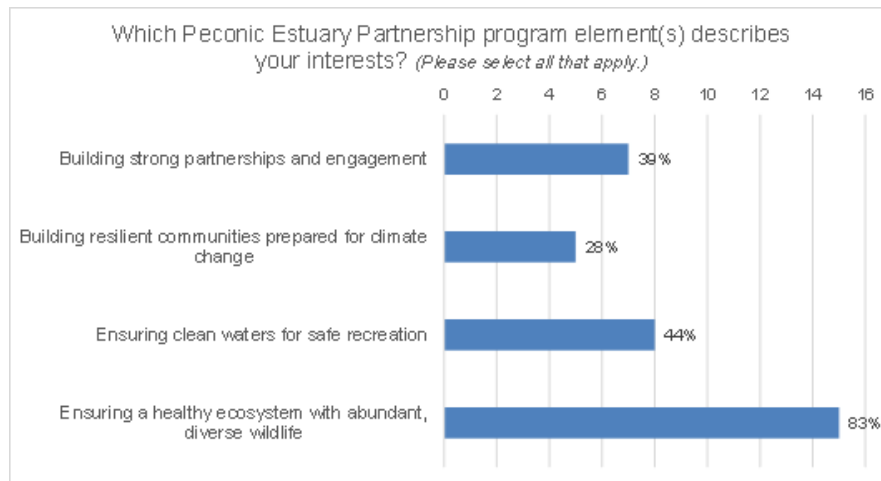
By comparison, respondents do not see coastal vulnerability or loss of recreational opportunities as their top concern. It will be important to consider how PEP’s messaging and goals can address these top concerns, while educating the community about other threats, such as coastal vulnerability.

**4. Results to the question: How effective do you think the Peconic Estuary Partnership is in describing the importance of the Partnership’s work and the goals of the Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan (CCMP)?**



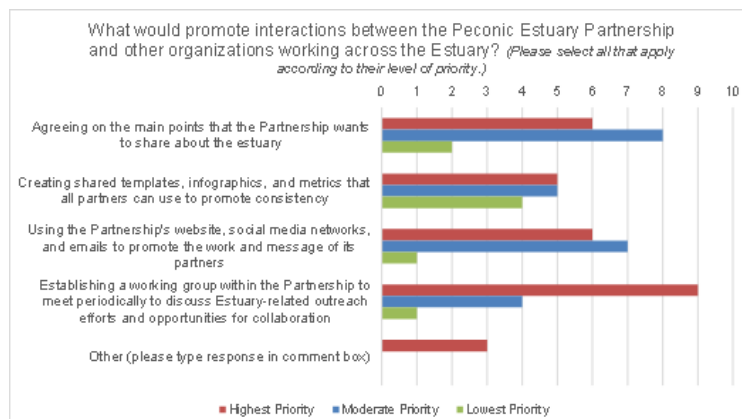
As shown above, the majority of respondents found that PEP’s communication about the importance of its work and its CCMP goals to be somewhat effective. Nearly a quarter of respondents found that PEP’s communication was not very effective or were not familiar with PEP or the CCMP. These responses align with the Marstel-Day’s analysis related to PEP’s web-based and social media content, which found that some themes were clear but PEP’s key messages could be strengthened. Combined with the findings of question #3, the results in question #4 suggest that there is an opportunity to more directly communicate PEP’s work related to respondents’ top interests for the Estuary.

**5. Results to the question: Which Peconic Estuary Partnership program element(s) describes your interests? (Select all that apply)**



As shown above, ensuring a healthy ecosystem with diverse wildlife received the most votes for question 5. This is consistent with the written responses to question 2, in which respondents indicated that wildlife and natural resources in the Estuary were a significant reason why the Estuary is special to them. Similarly, climate change resilience was the least popular choice, which was also reflected in the results to question 3. Clean water continues to be a priority, although wildlife habitat still outpaces this answer choice. Water quality and wildlife habitat are major themes throughout the responses to the questionnaire.

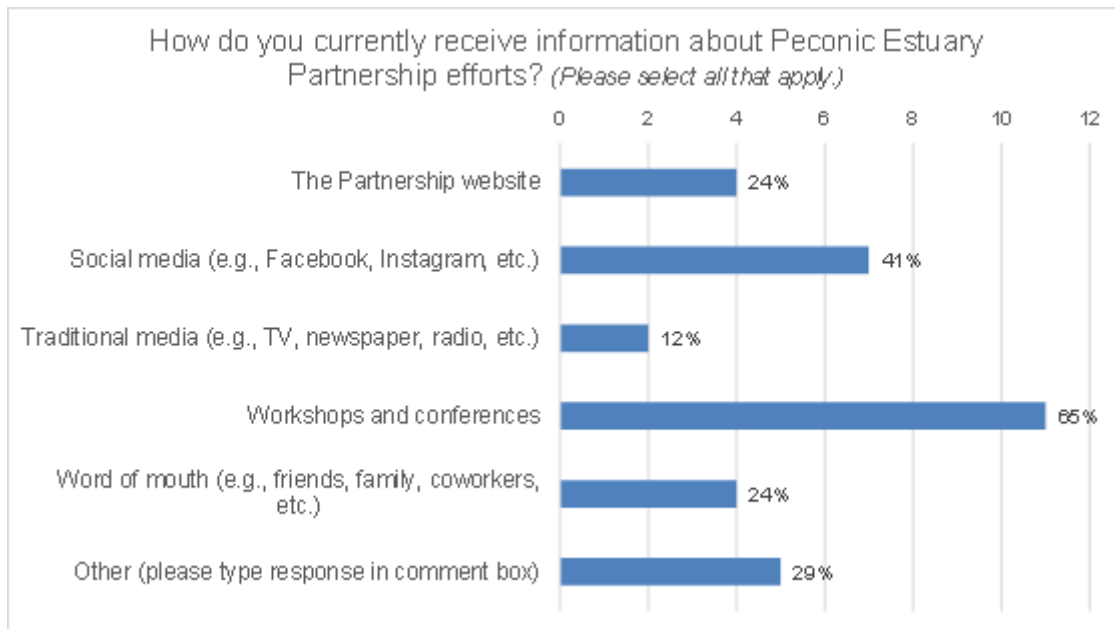
**6. Results to the question: What would promote interactions between the Peconic Estuary Partnership and other organizations working across the Estuary? (Select all that apply and rank your choices in order of priority, with #1 being the highest.)**



As shown above, establishing a working group to discuss outreach efforts and collaboration opportunities received the most votes as the highest-priority action, followed by a tie between agreeing on the main communication points and using PEP’s website, social media, and emails to promote its work. According to these responses, establishing a working group is a strong, high priority action. Agreeing on the main communication points received the most total votes across all of the priority options (16 total votes, compared to 14 total votes each for creating shared templates, using the online platforms, and establishing a working group). This suggests that respondents generally agree that determining main points regarding Estuary-related communication would help promote interactions with other organizations, although the level of priority for this is less distinct than establishing a working group.

The responses for the “other” option indicated that it would be helpful for PEP to partner with organizations on specific restoration and preservation projects. One comment noted that there should be more opportunities to engage with PEP to better understand who they are and what they do. (This is echoed in the results to question 10 as well.) Improved communication could help address this type of comment. Finally, one response recommended that PEP should reach out to local governments directly.

7. **Results to the question: How do you currently receive information about Peconic Estuary Partnership efforts? (Select all that apply.)**

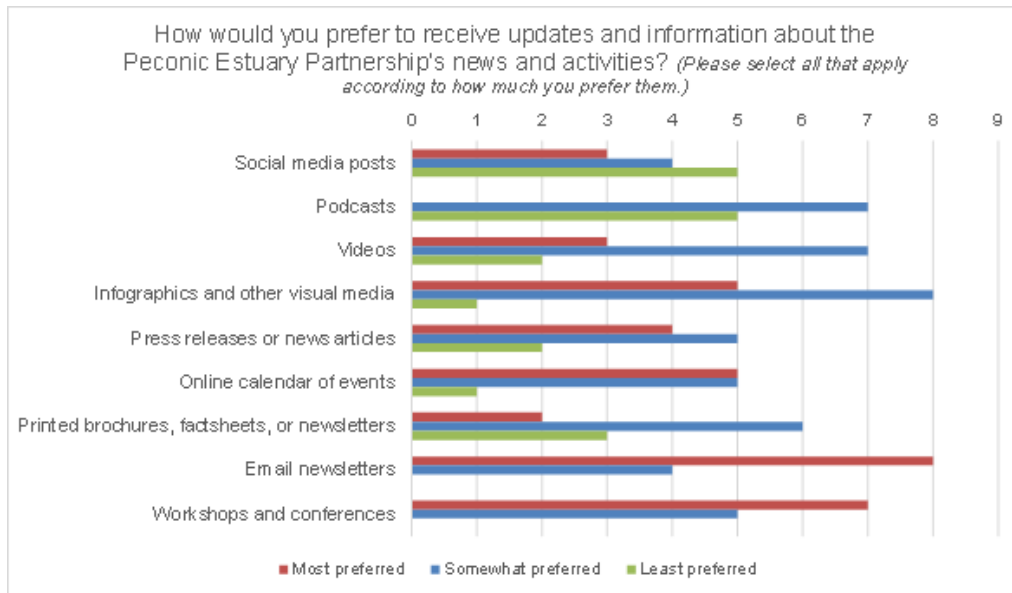


As shown above, respondents primarily receive information about PEP from workshops and conferences. With this in mind, it is important that workshops and conferences promote consistent messages about PEP, so that this information positively contributes to the community’s understanding of PEP’s work. This is especially important if the workshop or conference is hosted by a partner organization that would be sharing information about PEP, rather than PEP presenting the information itself.

Social media was the next major source of information for respondents. PEP’s website and word of mouth are tied. Given the wealth of information on PEP’s website, ways to increase engagement with the website should be explored. In the “other” category, respondents indicated that they receive information via emails.

These responses indicate that increasing awareness of the website could be beneficial and that materials for social media and conferences could likely reach the biggest audience. On the other hand, traditional media sources such as television, newspapers, and radio ads may be less effective.

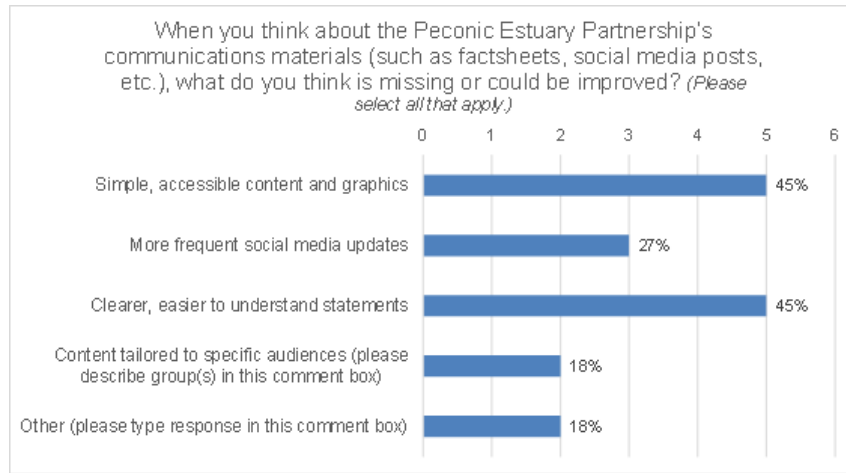
**8. Results to the question: How would you prefer to receive updates and information about the Peconic Estuary Partnership’s news and activities? (Select all that apply and rank your choices in order of priority, with #1 being the most important.)**



As shown above, mail newsletters and workshops and conferences received the greatest amounts of votes as the most-preferred outlets for information about PEP. Infographics/visual media, podcasts, videos, and printed media received the most votes as somewhat preferred outlets. Infographics received the most total votes at 14, suggesting that this option was widely agreed-upon, but respondents varied in their level of preference for this option. Press releases, an online event calendar, and printed materials received the least total votes at 11 each. The other options all received 12 total votes.

Email newsletters and workshops should continue to be prioritized as outlets for PEP’s updates and information. Infographics, podcasts, and videos should be explored as potential content to be distributed through the website, social media, and other platforms.

9. **Results to the question: When you think about the Peconic Estuary Partnership’s communication materials (like factsheets, social media posts, etc.), what do you think is missing or could be improved?**

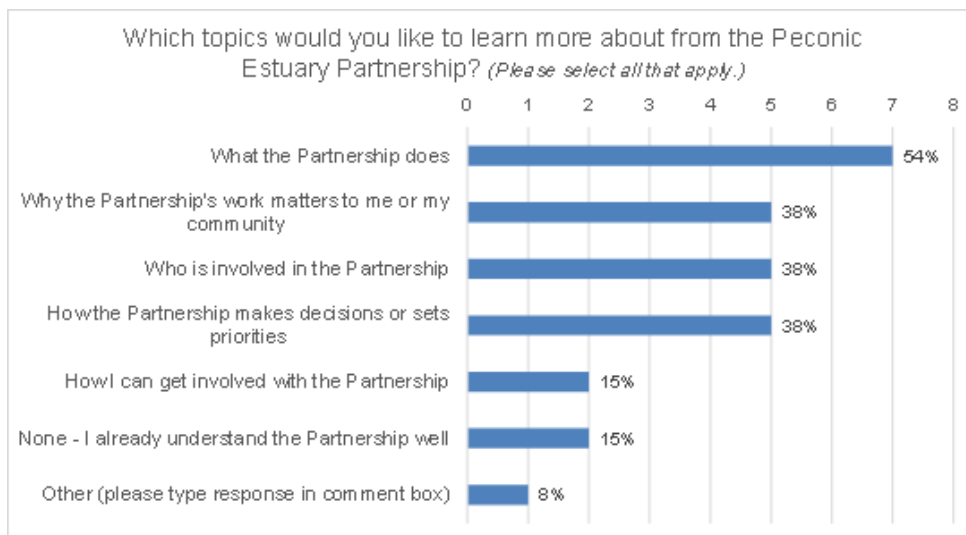


As shown above, of the response options, accessible graphics and clear statements were tied. The respondents’ desire for clarity and accessibility of PEP’s communication materials aligns with Marstel-Day’s review of PEP’s current messaging, which found a wide breadth of information and topics requiring a more focused and unified messaging strategy.

Social media posts were slightly more preferred than content tailored to specific audiences. For the content tailored to specific audiences, only one of the two responses included text. The respondent indicated that PEP’s projects with specific partners should be highlighted.

For the “other” option, one respondent indicated that they are not familiar with PEP’s materials, and the other respondent asked how PEP measures its impacts.

10. **Results to the question: Which topics would you like to learn more about from the Peconic Estuary Partnership? (Please select all that apply.)**



As shown above, the majority of respondents would like to learn more about what PEP does. The responses were tied for learning about why PEP's work matters, who is involved, and how PEP makes decisions and sets priorities. The "other" response asks what PEP has done to improve conditions in the Estuary. These responses indicate that clear communication about PEP's work is needed across the board. Improving communication about what PEP does should be a priority, because this is a basic understanding of the organization, and it is an essential point for the community to understand.

11. **Results to the question: *Optional*: What influences your decision to engage or not engage with the Peconic Estuary Partnership's resources and/or activities? (*Open-ended*)**

There were nine written responses to this question. A majority of the responses indicated that time is a barrier to engaging with PEP. Two responses noted that knowing whether PEP can provide any benefits influences their decision to engage with PEP. One response indicated that PEP brings valuable skills to support community organizations, which supports their decision to engage with them.

The simple content and graphics preferred in question 9 could help address the barrier of time by making PEP's messaging quick and easy to read. Web-based media (such as social media posts), podcasts, or recorded events (in addition to live conferences/workshops) may also help address this issue.

12. **Results to the question: *Optional*: Is there anything else you would like us to know about related to your Peconic Estuary interests or interactions? (*Open-ended*)**

Six respondents answered this question, but two did not contain any information. One respondent asked how money paid to the Peconic Trust at real estate closing is used. Two respondents were interested in partnership opportunities, such as with the Shinnecock, and what PEP is already doing to engage with partners such as the Cornell Cooperative Back to the Bays and SPAT programs.

13. **Results to the question: *Optional*: Provide your name, organization, and email address if you would like to stay informed on the Peconic Estuary Partnership efforts. We will not share your contact information outside of the Partnership.**

Ten respondents provided contact information, eight of which were associated with organizations or government agencies.

## APPENDIX B: REFERENCE MATERIALS

The following summarizes all the handouts, websites, and other materials that were examined during the research phase of this project.

Document Name	Author/ Organization	Short Description
Bay Scallops: An Iconic Long Island Species	27 East	Article in May 2025 about a lecture on the importance of the bay scallop fishery on Long Island.
Alliance for the (Chesapeake) Bay website	Alliance for the Bay	<a href="https://www.allianceforthebay.org">https://www.allianceforthebay.org</a>
Letter: Serious Issues Face Southold’s Marine Ecosystems	Nathan Andruski, East End Beacon	Opinion piece on 6/18/25 from the President of the Southold Baymen’s Association about harmful algal blooms.
Barnegat Bay Partnership Draft Communication Plan	Barnegat Bay Partnership	Draft from 2025 that outlines goals and actions to improve their COE and public involvement efforts to support their CCMP.
Barnegat Bay Partnership webpage	Barnegat Bay Partnership	<a href="https://barnegatbaypartnership.org">https://barnegatbaypartnership.org</a>
Public hearing set to determine SCWA pipeline zoning exemptions	Ana Borruto, Riverhead News-Review	Article on 8/13/25 about whether the Suffolk County Water Authority’s proposed pipeline project in Riverhead and Southold may be exempt from local zoning and land use regulations.
Riverhead considers zoning change to boost affordable housing	Ana Borruto, Riverhead News-Review	Article on 7/18 about revisions to a Riverhead Town zoning code that could authorize more affordable housing projects in the area.
Buzzards Bay NEP website	Buzzards Bay NEP	<a href="https://buzzardsbay.org">https://buzzardsbay.org</a>
Buzzards Bay NEP Action Plan 21: Public Education and Participation	Buzzards Bay NEP	Outlines proposed updates to their Action Plan in the CCMP 2024 Update.
Suffolk backs Long Island fishing, oyster industry	Martin Cantor, Long Island Business News	Article on 8/21/25 about Suffolk County considering waterfront preservation legislation that would allow waterfront property owners to sell future development rights to the county through a conservation easement.
Project Aims to Enhance Clubhouse Facilities and Stormwater Management at Long Island Sound	AI, Citizen Portal	Article on 7/25 about a clubhouse area near Long Island Sound that is expected to significantly improve water quality by preventing untreated runoff from entering the coastal waters.
Sen. Gillibrand, environmental advocates urge full funding for National Estuaries Program	Denise Civiletti, Riverhead Local	Article on 7/21/25 about U.S. Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand’s visit to Riverhead to warn of proposed cuts to the National Estuary Program and impacts to the Peconic Estuary.
Flooding threatens over 80,000 homes in NYC and suburbs by 2024: Report	Arthur Chi’en, Fox 5 NY	Article on 4/7/25 about the number of housing units that could be lost across New York City, Long Island, and

		Westchester by 2040 due to sea-level rise and storm-related flooding.
On the Water: Bad News for Scallops	Jon Diat, The East Hampton Star	Article on 10/1/25 about the sixth year in a row for extreme die-offs of bay scallops.
National Estuary Program Study Areas map	Environmental Protection Agency	Shows all 28 NEPs on a map of the United States.
San Francisco Bay Program	Environmental Protection Agency	<a href="https://www.epa.gov/sfbay-program">https://www.epa.gov/sfbay-program</a>
From Vacancy to Vibrancy: Empire State Development's Vision for Long Island Housing	Laura Fallick at Farrell Fritz, P.C., JD Supra	Article on 5/19/25 about the launch of the Long Island Forward Housing Program to accelerate the development of affordable multifamily housing across Nassau and Suffolk Counties.
Town Ponders Updated Rules for Nature Preserves	Christopher Gangemi, The East Hampton Star	Article on 5/8/25 about a community preservation fund acquisition that might require changes to the East Hampton town code regarding nature preserves.
Learn how to fight invasive species through the Community Science LI series	Greater Long Island.com	Article about the Community Science Long Island series and its focus on invasive species.
Suffolk County Legislature Unanimously Passes "Working Waterfronts" Conservation Bill	Karl Grossman, Fire Island & Great South Bay News	Article on 10/24/25 about the County passing the bill, also known as Chapter 25, to enhance and protect the working waterfront.
A 3-Step Guide to Message Triangles	Pat Heffernan	Shows an example of a messaging triangle and outlines the purposes of them.
Arbor Day Marked With Dozens of Tree Plantings Along Long Island Preservation Area	Peggy Hoey, Patch News	Article on 4/25/25 about tree plantings to help preserve environmentally sensitive properties along the North Shore of Long Island.
Lake Champlain Basin Program website	Lake Champlain Basin Program	<a href="https://www.lcbp.org">https://www.lcbp.org</a>
Information on Grants for Nitrogen-Reducing Septic System	Jule Lane, Shelter Island Reporter	Article on 9/13/25 about a presentation PEP gave about the Suffolk County SIP and how it helps improve water quality.
Shelter Island Town Board Acts to Allow Piercing Tax Cap	Julie Lane, Shelter Island Reporter	Article on 10/24/25 about two approved payments to PEP from the Shelter Island Town Board.
Long Island Sound Partnership website	Long Island Sound Partnership	<a href="https://lispartnership.org">https://lispartnership.org</a>
The Hudson Estuary: A River That Flows Two Ways website	NY Department of Environmental Conservation	<a href="https://dec.ny.gov/nature/waterbodies/oceans-estuaries/hudson-estuary">https://dec.ny.gov/nature/waterbodies/oceans-estuaries/hudson-estuary</a>
New York State Department of State Announces \$2.4M in Grants	NY Department of State	Article on 9/24 about eight community projects on Long Island through the South Shore Estuary Reserve grant program.

Community Engagement: Goals, Objectives, and Priority Actions	NY/NJ Harbor & Estuary Program	Summarizes the program's goals and objectives as they pertain to communication and engagement.
Proposals for Aquatic Habitat Restoration & Community Engagement at Wagner Park and Pier A Cove	NY-NJ Harbor & Estuary Program	Outlines proposals for aquatic habitat restoration and community engagement at this park and cove.
Working Together to Improve the NY-NJ Harbor Estuary: Contributions by Partners of the NY-NJ Harbor & Estuary Program	NY-NJ Harbor & Estuary Program	Factsheet about the efforts of the Program and its partners from FY2014 to protect the estuary.
Partnership for the Delaware Estuary Program website	Partnership for the Delaware Estuary	<a href="https://delawareestuary.org">https://delawareestuary.org</a>
Project R.I.S.E. factsheet	Peconic Baykeeper	Two-page factsheet about the project.
2023 State of the Peconic Estuary	PEP	Provides updates since the 2020 CCMP on the health of the estuary.
Accabonac Harbor Marsh Restoration Project factsheet	PEP	One-page factsheet about the project.
Broad Cover Preserve Water Access and Education Project factsheet	PEP	One-page factsheet about the project and how it ties to the CCMP.
C.H.A.N.G.E.S Shoreline Protection Project factsheet	PEP	Two-page factsheet about the program to protect ecological resilience.
Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP)	PEP	Management document for the organization, broken into four overarching goals.
Eelgrass in the Peconics factsheet	PEP	Two-page factsheet about eelgrass and monitoring projects.
Goose Creek Sub-Catchment Discharge Elimination factsheet	PEP	Two-page factsheet about this project to eliminate stormwater discharges into the creek.
Innovative/Alternative Onsite Wastewater Treatment System Maintenance factsheet	PEP	Two-page factsheet about the project, funding, and partners.
Meetinghouse Creek Stormwater and Flood Management factsheet	PEP	Two-page factsheet about the project to reduce stormwater runoff and flooding.
Peconic Estuary Partnership Newsletter Summer 2025	PEP	Example of PEP's newsletter.

Peconic Estuary Partnership website	PEP	<a href="https://www.peconicestuary.org">https://www.peconicestuary.org</a>
Peconic Estuary Shoreline Adaptation Initiative factsheet	PEP	One-page factsheet about the project.
Sag Harbor (Bay Street) Stormwater Control Project factsheet	PEP	One-page factsheet about the project and funding partners.
Sag Harbor (Havens Beach) Stormwater Control Project factsheet	PEP	One-page factsheet about the project and funding partners.
Shoreline Adaptation Summitt Fact Sheet	PEP	Two-page factsheet about shoreline management practices.
Southampton Riverside Safe and Healthy Recreation factsheet	PEP	Two-page factsheet about the project, funding, and partners.
PEP Facebook page	PEP	Social media page sharing information about PEP's work and events in the watershed.
PEP Instagram Page	PEP	Social media page sharing information about PEP's work and events in the watershed.
Puget Sound NEP website	Puget Sound Partnership	<a href="https://www.psp.wa.gov/nep-overview.php">https://www.psp.wa.gov/nep-overview.php</a>
Legislature Unanimously Approves Working Waterfronts Program	Hank Russell, Long Island Life & Politics	Article on 9/5/25 about the creation of the Working Waterfront Program via IR1520.
Pol Cosponsors Estuary and Waterway Protection Bill	Hank Russell, Long Island Life & Politics	Article on 7/21/25 about the Estuaries Saving Through Efficient and Responsible Appropriations for Your Shoreline Act to reauthorize the National Estuary Program.
Hurricane Erin: NY, NJ, to see flooding, strong winds, dangerous surf	Isabel Soisson and Alex Meier, Fox5 New York	Article on 8/20/25 about coastal advisories for eastern bays of Long Island and elsewhere.
Tillamook Estuaries Partnership Communication Goals and Marketing Guide 2024	Tillamook Estuaries Partnership	Outlines their tactics and strategies to enhancing their COE and marketing efforts.
Tillamook Estuaries Partnership website	Tillamook Estuaries Partnership	<a href="https://www.tbnep.org">https://www.tbnep.org</a>
Peconic Community students to test the waters at Laurel Lake	Nicole Wagner, The Suffolk Times	Article on 4/9/25 about Peconic Community School being the first school to adopt a pond as part of the Adopt-a-Pond program, which is funded by the Peconic Estuary Partnership 2025 Mini Grant program.
Court Dismisses Riverhead's Lawsuit Over Riverside Sewer District	Beth Young, East End Beacon	Article on 10/12/25 about a dismissed lawsuit against Southampton Town to create a new sewer district in the hamlet of Riverside.

East Enders to Take Part in International Coastal Cleanup Day Saturday	Beth Young, East End Beacon	Article on 9/17/25 about PEP and partners organizing a coastal cleanup day.
This Morning's Bulletin—6.18.25	Beth Young, East End Beacon	Article on 6/18/25 about meetings hosted by PEP for the community to share their perspectives on the future of the estuary.
A Voice for Long Island's Ponds	Beth Young, East End Beacon	Article on 6/4/25 about hydrogeologist Bob Mozer's project, funded through PEP's mini-grant program, to send the water samples to a laboratory at the Upstate Freshwater Institute for testing.
Peconic Estuary Program webpage	Suffolk County Government	<a href="https://www.suffolkcountyny.gov/Departments/Health-Services/Environmental-Quality/Ecology/Peconic-Estuary-Program">https://www.suffolkcountyny.gov/Departments/Health-Services/Environmental-Quality/Ecology/Peconic-Estuary-Program</a> County website with out-of-date information regarding PEP.
Suffolk County Government website	Suffolk County Government	Peconic River Recreation Advisory after the 2015 fish kill. <a href="#">Link</a>
PEP 2015 Ecosystem Status Report	PEP	2015 ecosystem status report including details about 2015 fish kill.
Indian Island Tidal Wetland Restoration factsheet	PEP	Two-page factsheet about the project, funding, and partners.
NOAA website	NOAA Fisheries	News article titled, "Aquaculture Supports a Sustainable Earth." <a href="#">Link</a>
NOAA website	NOAA Fisheries	Information about seaweed aquaculture. <a href="#">Link</a>
Suffolk County Government website	Suffolk County	Website on farmland preservation. <a href="#">Link</a>
A Profile of Agriculture in New York State	New York State Comptroller	Report from November 2024. <a href="#">Link</a>
Cornell Cooperative Extension website	Cornell Cooperative Extension	Information on their Agricultural Stewardship Program. <a href="#">Link</a>
New York Soil Health Policy Brief	Cornell University College of Agriculture and Life Sciences	Article titled, "Managing for Better Soil Health on Long Island Farms." <a href="#">Link</a>

## APPENDIX C: NATIONAL ESTUARY PROGRAM COMPARISON MATRIX

Below is a matrix that compares three NEPs. The names of the NEPs and other identifying information have been removed from this version of the matrix, in case this document is shared publicly. However, PEP was provided with an unredacted version on the Communication Plan Google Drive site so that they can reach out to the NEP contacts, as needed, for additional information.

	Estuary 1	Estuary 2	Estuary 3	Estuary 4
<b>Size</b>	50,000+ acres	96,000 acres	425,117 acres of land; 53,529 acres of water	8,400 acres
<b># of COE staff</b>	5-6, split among 3 partner organizations	1 FTE with support from a few others as needed	2 FTE dedicated to COE, with ~18 others who do outreach and education work as part of their job, plus AmeriCorps ambassador and many interns and volunteers	3 FTE plus a contractor for graphic design needs and another staff who does community education and building local partnerships
<b>% of budget for COE</b>	Exact figure unknown, but referred to as "very healthy"	~15-20% of overall budget	Estimated to be ~20% of overall budget	Secured Bipartisan Infrastructure Law grant to grow the staff from one to 3 over the past few years.
<b>COE work group / committee?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Policy Committee</li> <li>Executive Steering Committee</li> <li>Management Committee</li> <li>Citizens Advisory Committee</li> <li>Science and Technical Advisory Committee</li> <li>Habitat Restoration and Stewardship Work Group</li> <li>Nitrogen Coordination Work Group</li> <li>Communication, Outreach, and Engagement Work Group</li> <li>Sustainable and Resilient Communities Work Group</li> <li>Water Quality Monitoring Work Group</li> <li>Watersheds and Embayments Work Group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Steering Committee</li> <li>Executive Committee</li> <li>Science Advisory</li> <li>Vision 2034 Meetings</li> <li>Lower Blackstone Fish Passage</li> <li>Working Groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advisory Committee</li> <li>Policy Committee</li> <li>Science and Technical Advisory Committee</li> <li>Communication and Education Committee</li> </ul>	Unknown

	Estuary 1	Estuary 2	Estuary 3	Estuary 4
<b>Strategic communication plan?</b>	Yes, completed in 2021 and available online	Working on it right now, with hope it is done by the end of 2025 (willing to share at that time)	Yes, it is in draft form as of early 2025 and available online	Communication Strategy, Community Education and Engagement Action Plan, and Communication and Outreach Strategy are all available online
<b>Types of COE products</b>	Website includes org information, CCMP and overview, indicators for ecosystem targets (information and charts that show progress), newsletters, news releases, factsheets, blog, reports, research, volunteer opportunities, educational resources, links to social media accounts. Teacher and student StoryMaps describe the Sound habitats. Another StoryMap describes the revision of the CCMP. **StoryMaps are very well-received. A calendar provides a list/dates of events.	Website includes org information, a factsheet, annual workplans, StoryMaps for various topics (ex: Into the Woods: Solar in the Forest), maps and figures, reports, news archive, photos.	Website includes org information, news releases, information on research projects, educational resources, and community initiatives.	Website includes org information, videos, list of current projects, reports and publications, news, events, and accomplishments.

	Estuary 1	Estuary 2	Estuary 3	Estuary 4
<b>Most useful COE tool(s)</b>	<p>Indicator tables on their website showing progress toward CCMP goals</p> <p>StoryMaps are very well received</p>	<p>Their network of partners. They have great relationships with many local nonprofits, decision makers, community members, researchers, and institutions. They are willing to share their updates among their circles and help to bring new ideas and feedback to the table. Maintaining and expanding their partnerships is a major goal for their communication plan.</p>	<p>"State" Friendly Yards is their flagship program, started 10+ years ago. The program addresses all components of their mission and engages municipalities, schools, and community members to participate.</p> <p>The program has several levels of certification, and there is a native plant database. Also have Going Native guides, Low Maintenance Landscaping Guides, and other materials published in both English and Spanish, and are working to create more resources specifically for professional landscapers.</p>	<p>The organization relies on Metrical for managing their website and social media, valuing it for its user-friendly format compared to platforms like Meta or Google Analytics.</p> <p>They also use VolunteerLocal to manage volunteer engagement. While helpful for check-ins, VolunteerLocal's backend interface can be confusing.</p>

	Estuary 1	Estuary 2	Estuary 3	Estuary 4
<b>Audiences and focus of COE efforts</b>	General public, underserved communities, educators and students, local governments and municipal leaders, environmental professionals and policymakers, scientific community, stakeholder and advocacy groups	Historically underserved communities; tribal nations and indigenous knowledge holders; local and regional decision makers; educators and youth; scientists and technical experts; civic, nonprofit, and faith based orgs; general public	Homeowners, students, teachers, Spanish language audiences, municipalities, others	K–12 students and educators (formal and informal); college and university students; adult learners and senior citizens; local residents and visitors; partner organizations, including watershed councils and nonprofits; community volunteers; decision-makers and scientists; stakeholders in tourism and agriculture sectors
<b>Key COE partners</b>	Federal: EPA National Estuary Program, USFWS, Natural Resources Conservation Service, NOAA Fisheries, USGS State agencies and SeaGrants Interstate: NEIWPC, Interstate Environmental Commission	Partners list can be found on their website	Partners list can be found on their website	EPA; Association of National Estuary Programs (logos shown at the bottom of the website; cannot locate a partners list)
<b>Metrics to measure COE progress?</b>	Yes, specific and broad goals (i.e., # of public engagement events held, distribution and reach of outreach materials, participation rates in environmental stewardship and education programs, increased environmental literacy, community behavior changes, etc.)  Recommended fewer metrics, as the number in their COE plan has been too many to manage and track effectively.	Yes, specific and broad goals (i.e., number of educational tools produced; public events and meetings held; new or updated communication channels; increased public awareness of environmental justice, climate impacts, and estuary health; improved understanding among decision-makers and community members due to clearer, science-based messaging; greater inclusion of historically underserved communities in decision-making processes, etc.)	Don't have exact metrics but generally use informal feedback from programs, interest in their newsletter, social media and web engagement, and partner engagement	Yes, specific and broad goals (i.e., # of students, # of hours, and increase in educational goals. Year deadlines and increased STEM-related career opportunities. % increase, # engaged, and deadlines for fostering environmental awareness, etc.)  Also assess impact through surveys at public events, track event attendance through Eventbrite, use paid ads sparingly on social media.

	Estuary 1	Estuary 2	Estuary 3	Estuary 4
<b>Biggest challenges</b>	<p>Too many metrics to track</p> <p>Need to work more closely with their working groups</p> <p>Federal changes to agencies could impact their partners like SeaGrant. While their funding seems secure, secure funding for their partners is unknown.</p>	<p>One challenge for executing effective COE is capacity. They are a small NEP with 4 (soon to be 5) full-time staff. Because of this they have to be strategic with their staff time and capacity to have the most impact.</p>	<p>Respecting the guidelines and structure from EPA.</p> <p>Engagement is limited in some ways due to strict rules (i.e. only doing work outlined in the work plan, not being able to conduct widespread surveys, among others).</p> <p>Also, funding and the physical space they have been given by their host agency. They are at capacity with their resources (electricity, etc.) and generally inaccessible for visitors and the public. They would love to grow their education/outreach team but are unable to do that due to funding constraints.</p>	<p>One major challenge is engaging with tourists, especially when encouraging donations from wealthier, non-local visitors. To address this, they collaborate with local tourist bureaus, who help feature the organization in video campaigns and similar initiatives when possible.</p> <p>Another challenge lies in strengthening brand identity and consistent messaging as the organization grows.</p>
<b>Key messages</b>	<p>A Clean, Thriving "Estuary" Benefits Everyone</p> <p>People and Nature Are Interconnected</p> <p>Science and Collaboration Drive Progress</p> <p>Everyone Has a Role in Stewardship</p>	<p>People Power Restoration</p> <p>Science Must be Open, Accessible, and Actionable</p> <p>Collaboration Builds Regional Strength</p> <p>Equity and Resilience are Non-Negotiable</p>	<p>Low maintenance landscapes</p> <p>Going native</p>	<p>Healthy Estuaries Start with Healthy Watersheds</p> <p>Community Engagement is a Cornerstone of Success</p> <p>Science and Adaptation Guide Every Action</p> <p>Collaboration is Essential</p>

## APPENDIX D: PUBLIC MEETING PROGRAM



# Stories of the Peconic: A Community Conversation

The Peconic Estuary Partnership (PEP) is pleased that you have joined us for a relaxed evening of connection, conversation, and collaboration.

## Sharing Stories of the People of the Peconic

The Peconic Estuary is a treasure we all share. PEP is launching a new effort to tell meaningful stories about the people, places, and work that help the Peconic Bays thrive... and we need your help. This evening is about hearing your stories, your priorities, and your vision for how we can work together to care for the estuary.

**This evening, we will have an opportunity to talk about what matters to you and how we can work together to protect our estuary.**

## Our Focus is Your Connection to the Estuary

- Mingle with community members and explore interactive stations to learn about PEP's current projects.
- Learn about PEP activities and accomplishments.
- Join in on community conversations with similar interests to share your connections to the estuary – shaping our future storytelling.
- Share highlights of community conversations.
- Fill out a short community survey, provide contact information to stay informed of PEP activities, and add your thoughts to the story wall.

*The Peconic Estuary Partnership staff appreciate your participation. Please visit our website to learn more about PEP activities and how you can be involved.*



## Let's Stay Connected and Keep the Conversation Going!

Your insights are important to us! The Peconic Estuary Partnership is seeking your feedback to better understand how we can serve and connect with our community. We want to understand what you know about the Partnership, how you stay informed, and ways we can improve our interactions with people across the Estuary.

- Before you leave tonight, drop a thought on our **"What Matters Most"** comment wall.
- Add your name and contact information to our distribution list to stay connected to PEP.
- Tell a friend about tonight and help grow the movement to protect our estuary!

## Your Input Helps Guide Our Efforts and Strengthen Our Community Relationships

Please complete the questionnaire, accessible via <https://dub.sh/PeconicEstuary2025> or access it through the QR code provided here. The questionnaire will be available through **August 1, 2025**.

Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts!

