



**Engagement Strategy**  
*Partner Engagement,  
Education & Outreach,  
& Communications*

**Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership  
2018-2019**

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## II. Overview

This document outlines the Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership (APNEP) engagement strategy for 2018-2019. The strategy outlines a multi-pronged approach to engagement, including partner engagement, education and outreach, and communications. It expands upon and updates the previous Communications Strategy, last formally updated and approved by the Leadership Council in 2012.

### A. Summary

Engagement is one of the five core components of APNEP's Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP), which recognizes that engaging partners and collaboration are the overarching principles necessary for the achievement of suitable environmental outcomes. To accomplish program goals, the CCMP states that APNEP will work closely with its partners to ensure that activities and resources are focused on the most urgent and important problems. Many of the programs and laws now used to regulate or support activities in our watershed were established on a piecemeal basis to address significant individual problems. Improved coordination of planning for land use, water supply, ecosystem protection, transportation, and restoration will enable us to more effectively address problems at an ecosystem scale.

APNEP will engage its partnering organizations and the public to improve awareness and understanding of environmental issues facing the Albemarle-Pamlico region. Furthermore, APNEP will encourage individual and collective stewardship of the region's resources, including support for the planning, policies, and actions required to sustain the Albemarle-Pamlico ecosystem and its human communities.

### B. Goals

The goal(s) of this plan are:

- 1) To facilitate the implementation of APNEP's [Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan](#) (CCMP) in support of the Partnership's mission.
- 2) Increase the visibility of APNEP and its core partner's accomplishments towards implementing the mission and CCMP.
- 3) Raise awareness about the importance of the significant resources of the Albemarle-Pamlico estuarine system.
- 4) Identify opportunities to integrate and improve engagement efforts on a regional scale.
- 5) Increase support from decision and policy makers for present and future activities.

### C. Objectives

Specific objectives will be discussed in each section. The overarching objective of this strategy is to further define engagement efforts outlined in the CCMP, and to ensure engagement efforts are aligned with CCMP objectives, actions, and associated environmental outcomes through the multi-pronged (direct partner engagement, outreach and education, and communications) approach outlined in this plan.

### D. Target Audiences

APNEP's target audiences include both partners that can assist with CCMP implementation, and specific audiences identified throughout the CCMP, through actions tied to CCMP goals and associated ecosystem outcomes.

As a boundary organization, APNEP engages its partners throughout the region to achieve its mission and implementation of the CCMP. The program has identified several target audiences that are well positioned to assist with actions identified in the plan. This list is not exclusive. Instead, it indicates high priority constituencies that can most effectively support and implement the CCMP. These constituencies include:

- Decision and policy makers;
- Local government officials and community leaders;
- Resource managers;
- State and federal government officials;
- Universities and members of the science and research community;
- Educators, including K-12, adult/continuing, and non-formal/informal educators;
- Non-profit organizations, partners and funders;
- Landowners; and
- Citizens, members of the public, and visitors to the region.

## E. Mission, Message, Branding, and Talking Points

### 1. Mission Statement

The mission of Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership (APNEP) is to identify, protect, and restore the significant resources of the Albemarle-Pamlico estuarine system. APNEP pursues this mission with guidance and support from its overarching CCMP, advisory bodies and [regional partners](#).

### 2. Simplified Mission Statement for Communication Purposes

The Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership brings together citizens, government agencies, non-profits, universities, and businesses to protect and restore the Albemarle-Pamlico estuarine system.

### 3. Tagline

From stream to sound since 1987 / Identifying, protecting, and restoring the resources of the Albemarle-Pamlico region

### 4. Message:

#### Key Messages:

- The Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Program's mission is to identify, restore, and protect the natural resources of North Carolina and Virginia's Albemarle-Pamlico region, including North Carolina's major sounds.
- As an independent, science-based organization, APNEP brings together diverse groups to identify how we can act together to create a healthy Albemarle-Pamlico region.
- A healthy Albemarle-Pamlico region means vibrant local economies, healthy residents, and a flourishing natural environment.

APNEP's Approach [from web: [About Us](#)]

APNEP incorporates an ecosystem-based management approach to achieving its mission. More specifically, this approach includes consideration of both human and natural systems, an adaptive management framework, and meaningful engagement with partners to find environmental management and policy solutions. These themes are explored below.

### *A systems view*

APNEP's systems approach considers the hundreds of human and natural elements in the Albemarle-Pamlico ecosystem as well the relationships between them. APNEP's management plan is based on a model of these relationships, ensuring that management actions directly target improvements in ecosystem services and are linked to explicit conservation goals.

### *Managing adaptively*

Adaptive management requires setting environmental and management goals, then routinely evaluating progress toward achieving them. Adaptive management will ensure that management actions are routinely assessed, then continued, improved, or discontinued based on environmental evidence and community feedback. APNEP is committed to developing and applying information to support adaptive management practices, both internally and with its partners.

### *Watershed boundaries*

APNEP is active throughout the Albemarle-Pamlico watershed, with management efforts directed from river headwaters to the sea. For this reason, APNEP works in both North Carolina and Virginia, as water from both states ultimately drains into the sounds. By working within ecological rather than political boundaries, APNEP ensures that issues are addressed in an integrated and holistic way.

### *Engaging our partners*

APNEP has taken a partnership approach to achieve its mission. Protection of the Albemarle-Pamlico estuarine system is an enormous undertaking, and the resources directly allocated to APNEP are limited. APNEP seeks to overcome this hurdle by leveraging partnerships among governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academia, and the public to make significant improvements for the sounds. Because of its broad reach, APNEP is well positioned to fill gaps and identify synergies among its partners.

- APNEP facilitates communication and collaboration amongst different organizations and stakeholders throughout the region. APNEP facilitates relationships between groups, and sometimes within, particularly in larger governmental organizations that tend to operate in “silos”.
- APNEP is considered a boundary organization, as described by [Menquale et. al, 2013](#). [Boundary organizations](#) help bridge the divide between the information producers, such as scientists, and the information users, such as policy makers.
- Through this strategy, APNEP seeks to market these strengths and increase the visibility of the program through its partner engagement, outreach and education, and communications efforts described herein.

- APNEP provides a neutral platform / forum for multi-disciplinary partners representing diverse organizations to discuss issues and needs of the region.
- APNEP will strive to ensure our messages are aligned with and compliment the National Estuary Program and Association of National Estuary Programs. New fact sheets and templates developed for the ANEP website will be shared with partners to ensure consistent messaging at local, regional, and national levels.

## **5. Branding and Program Image**

APNEP will maintain a current and professional look across various media including its logo, website, newsletter, apparel, signage, and business cards. This objective cuts across all other aspects of this engagement strategy by increasing program awareness and encouraging positive impressions of the program and its mission. Initiatives led or funded by APNEP will include the APNEP logo on appropriate documents, signage, and other materials.

## **6. Talking Points**

The following messages and talking points are divided into subject areas that supplement APNEP's key messages. Use of these talking points can be used to tailor communication towards a specific audience.

### **Subject: What is the Albemarle-Pamlico region?**

- The Albemarle-Pamlico region encompasses northeastern North Carolina and southeastern Virginia. This region includes the creeks, streams, and rivers that flow into North Carolina's major estuaries and sounds.
  - Alternate version for scientific/technical audiences: APNEP works within the Albemarle-Pamlico region, which encompasses northeastern North Carolina and southeastern Virginia. This region includes the watershed that flows into North Carolina's major sounds.
- An estuary is a place where a river meets the sea, and fresh and salt water mix, forming unique and productive ecosystems. In North Carolina, we usually refer to our estuaries as "sounds."
- North Carolina's major sounds collectively comprise the second largest estuary on the east coast of the U.S., behind the Chesapeake Bay.
- The Albemarle-Pamlico estuarine system is the largest semi-lagoonal estuary complex in the world.
- At approximately 28,000 square miles in area, the entire area draining into these sounds (watershed) is almost as large as the state of West Virginia.
- The Albemarle-Pamlico region contains six rivers, eight sounds, and 3,000 square miles of open water.
- APNEP covers the Neuse, Tar-Pamlico, Pasquotank, Chowan, lower Roanoke, and parts of the White Oak river basins.

### **Subject: What is APNEP?**

- APNEP is funded by the EPA's National Estuary Program and is one of 28 National Estuary Programs located throughout the country.
- The Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership's mission is to identify, restore, and protect the natural resources of North Carolina and Virginia's Albemarle-Pamlico region, including North Carolina's major sounds.

- APNEP excels as a science-based cooperative among the State of North Carolina, the Commonwealth of Virginia, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and many other federal state, and local agencies and organizations.
- APNEP is non-regulatory, meaning that it works with stakeholders to accomplish common goals, and will not directly create rules or regulations.
- APNEP is hosted by the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality, but maintains independence within its host agency since it receives advice, support and guidance from its Management Conference.
- APNEP is a stakeholder-driven organization, meaning that we rely on input and feedback from our partners to inform the direction and priorities of our organization. Anyone working or living in the Albemarle-Pamlico region can be an APNEP partner.
- APNEP supports a science-based foundation for all rules, regulations, and policies that impact the significant resources of the Albemarle-Pamlico Estuarine System.
- Our Management Conference, including the Leadership Council and Science and Technical Advisory Committee, provide direction and oversight for APNEP. Action Teams tackle the topics listed in APNEP's CCMP, deciding on how APNEP will spend its funds to address pressing issues related to each Team's area of expertise. Monitoring and Assessment Teams, also topic-based, work to develop ecological indicators that will help us assess the "health" of the Albemarle-Pamlico region, and then continue to monitor that health on an ongoing basis.
- APNEP achieves results by collaborating with partners to accomplish our shared goals of protecting and restoring the estuary and watershed.

## **Subject: What does APNEP do?**

- APNEP works to identify, protect, restore, and monitor the natural resources of the Albemarle-Pamlico region, and to engage/educate people about how they can help keep the Albemarle-Pamlico estuarine system healthy.
- As an independent, science-based organization, APNEP brings together diverse groups to identify how we can act together to create a healthy Albemarle-Pamlico region.
- APNEP's approach is designed to improve the ecosystems supporting the sounds with special emphasis on improving water quality.
- APNEP's work is guided by its Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan, also known as a CCMP. This document guides how APNEP utilizes its funding and other resources by directing it to accomplish 50-odd "Actions" that cover topics such as outdoor education, water quality, invasive species, oysters, habitat restoration, and water flow. APNEP's current CCMP was published in 2012 and was the result of a group of diverse stakeholders working together for three years.
- APNEP seeks to leverage (use) its resources and those of its partners to accomplish things neither could on their own. APNEP works through partnerships. Our work is driven by a holistic ecosystem approach, which includes human communities as part of the environment.
- APNEP incorporates an ecosystem-based management approach to achieving its mission. More specifically, this approach includes consideration of both human and natural systems, an adaptive management framework, and meaningful engagement with the public to find environmental management and policy solutions.
- Adaptive management requires setting environmental and management goals, then routinely evaluating progress toward achieving them. Adaptive management will ensure that management actions are routinely assessed, then continued, improved, or discontinued based on environmental evidence and community feedback. APNEP is

committed to developing and applying information to support adaptive management practices, both internally and with its partners.

- *Identify*
  - Science conducted by APNEP staff and partners helps determine how different human and natural factors affect the health of the Albemarle-Pamlico estuarine system.
  - In 2011, APNEP published an initial baseline map of SAV extent during 2006-2008, documenting over 138,000 acres of aquatic grasses in the sounds. A second map depicting extent during 2012-2014 is forthcoming in late 2017. APNEP and its partners will use this information to develop protection and restoration strategies for SAV and fish species in the region.
  - Since 1987, APES/APNEP has funded or supported over 100 applied research initiatives designed to improve our working knowledge of the Albemarle-Pamlico system.
- *Protect*
- *Restore*
- *Engage*
  - Since 2002, APNEP has supported over 40 outdoor education-conservation initiatives as schools and non-formal education centers throughout the region. Many of these projects incorporate restoration of on-site wetlands, stormwater retention projects, or other habitat restoration, as well as utilizing those projects as educational tools alongside outdoor classrooms and nature trails.
  - Since 2002, APNEP has supported over 90 education and outreach projects, including 15 years of support for an annual teacher professional development institute.
  - Messages about events, projects, research, meetings, and other information are provided through social media, monthly email newsletters, informational handouts, news releases, and our website: [www.apnep.org](http://www.apnep.org). Currently, over 600 people follow APNEP on Facebook, over 450 people follow APNEP on Twitter, and over 300 people subscribe to the newsletter.
- *Monitor*
  - Government agencies rely on estuary program data to determine potential regulatory and non-regulatory options for improving water quality and protecting wildlife and habitats.

**Subject: Why is APNEP’s work important?**

- Estuaries are complex natural systems that provide a wealth of benefits to the environment and human communities. Yet they face unique challenges, and must be monitored, studied, and protected if we hope to preserve them for generations to come.
- Clean water means quality seafood, healthy produce, and thriving local businesses. A clean Albemarle-Pamlico estuarine system brings visitors and their money to the region.
- Estuaries are more productive than farmland, supporting 75% of America’s commercial fisheries and 80-90% of recreational fishing catch.
- In North Carolina, the sounds support billions of dollars of economic activity each year through industries such as fisheries, tourism, real estate, and shipping.
- In addition, estuaries provide “ecosystem services” which benefit North Carolinians. Healthy estuaries help to protect landowners from flood waters and increase water quality by filtering stormwater runoff that may contain pollutants.



- APNEP is unique in that we are able to work according to the ecological boundaries of river basins, instead of stopping our work at state lines. This allows APNEP to work with both North Carolina and Virginia on interstate issues to identify, protect, and restore the region's natural resources.

### **Subject: How can you get involved?**

- Through all our work, we involve citizens as one of our most vital partners in protecting this ecosystem on which we all depend.

### **Subject: What is the National Estuary Program?**

- In 1987, Congress created the National Estuary Program to “identify, restore, and protect nationally significant estuaries of the United States.”
- The 28 estuaries in the National Estuary Program host locally-based, stakeholder driven programs which are non-regulatory.
- National Estuary Programs work collaboratively within their community to craft and implement action plans to solve environmental problems at the local level. (Use “watershed” if term is clearly understood by audience or say “local watershed.”)
- NEPs take action to improve the water quality, habitat, and health of estuary-dependent animals and plants.
- NEPs employ a collaborative approach by involving community stakeholders as equal partners to reflect local environmental and economic priorities.
- NEPs ensure that decisions are based on the best science available and integrate findings into management decisions.
- Collectively, the 28 NEP's have:
  - Restored and protected more than 1.1 million acres of estuarine and watershed habitat, providing critical food and shelter to many estuarine-dependent animals living in our County's estuaries.
  - Reduced bacteria contamination by opening thousands of acres of formerly closed shellfish beds.
  - Taken hundreds of thousands of schoolchildren through environmental programs and experiences, many of whom have never been to an estuary.

## **7. FAQ's**

### **How is APNEP organized?**

APNEP is managed by a small, full-time staff with oversight from committees, whose members are composed of diverse stakeholders including citizens, local business leaders, environmental organizations, and local, state, and federal agencies. APNEP engages citizens and organizations through its committees to ensure a cohesive and coordinated approach to managing the Albemarle-Pamlico estuarine system.

- Our advising committees, including the Leadership Council and Science and Technical Advisory Committee, provide direction and oversight for APNEP. Action Teams tackle the topics listed in APNEP's CCMP, deciding on how APNEP will spend its funds to address pressing issues related to each Team's area of expertise. Monitoring and Assessment Teams, also topic-based, work to develop ecological indicators that will help us assess the “health” of the Albemarle-Pamlico region, and then continue to monitor that health on an ongoing basis.

### **Can APNEP apply for and/or give out grants?**

APNEP can partner with organizations to apply for grants. We can be a government partner applicant for many types of projects. However, we prefer to have some involvement rather than just serving as a “pass-through” or grant administrator.

### **What does it mean to be an APNEP partner?**

Anyone who lives or works in the Albemarle-Pamlico region of North Carolina and Virginia can be an APNEP partner. Our partners serve on APNEP teams and committees, collaborate with us on initiatives and projects, and help to communicate the importance of the Albemarle-Pamlico region.

### **How does APNEP work in both North Carolina and Virginia?**

Because rivers and streams don't flow according to political boundaries, the success of APNEP initiatives depends on cooperation between government agencies in North Carolina and Virginia. In 2001, officials from North Carolina and Virginia's state governments first signed a Memorandum of Agreement to work together to monitor, protect, and restore water quality in the shared Pasquotank, Chowan, and Roanoke river basins. In 2017, officials from both states signed an updated Memorandum of Understanding, reaffirming their commitment to tackling shared issues in the region.

### **What is the difference between APES and APNEP?**

When a National Estuary Program was established for the Albemarle-Pamlico region in 1987, it was called the Albemarle-Pamlico Estuarine Study, or APES, and focused on sponsoring research studies to give scientists and managers a better understanding of the ecosystem's health and function. These research initiatives culminated in a series of research papers as well as the development of the Albemarle-Pamlico region's first Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP). Upon adoption of its first CCMP in 1994, the program became known as the Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Program as it broadened its mission to include applied conservation, management, and engagement initiatives. In 2012, the program was formally renamed as a partnership, reflecting the importance of coordinated and integrated efforts for protecting and restoring the estuarine ecosystem.

### **What is an estuary?**

An estuary is a partially enclosed body of water along the coast where freshwater from rivers, streams, or groundwater meets and mixes with salt water from the sea. Estuarine environments are among the most productive on earth, creating more living matter each year than comparably sized areas of forest, grassland, or agricultural land. The tidal, sheltered waters of estuaries also support unique communities of plants and animals especially adapted for life at the margin of the sea. – <http://water.epa.gov/type/oceb/nep/about.cfm>

### **What is a sound? How is it different from an estuary or bay?**

In geography, a sound is a large sea or ocean inlet larger than a bay, deeper than a bight, and wider than a fjord; or a narrow sea or ocean channel between two bodies of land (see also strait). There is little consistency in the use of "sound" in English-language place names. Pamlico Sound is a lagoon that lies between North Carolina and its barrier beaches, the Outer Banks.

### **What is a watershed, and how is it different from a river basin?**

A watershed is the area of land that drains rainfall and groundwater into the estuary (or ocean) through a series of creeks and rivers, delivering either clean water or land-based pollution to our waterways.

### **III. Partner Engagement**

As noted in the CCMP, APNEP is well positioned to coordinate stewardship, environmental education, and management efforts across state lines, between all levels of government, and with a broad array of stakeholder groups in the region. APNEP's advisory committee structure ensures strong community ties throughout the region, and APNEP's partners consistently undertake engagement activities throughout the region. With its mission to protect the entire estuarine ecosystem, APNEP can identify opportunities to integrate and improve engagement efforts on a regional scale.

APNEP will primarily implement this strategy through engagement with our broad network of [partners](#) throughout the region. Over 150 partners from multi-disciplinary organizations are currently listed, however not all are active partners at any given point in time.

APNEP engages with partners directly through

- Its Management Conference;
- Collaboration on projects and research;
- Providing financial and logistical support for projects;
- Sponsorship of initiatives that support CCMP implementation;
- Participation in external workgroups and committees;
- Facilitating collaborations between partners, and;
- Providing support for partner's work that is complimentary to APNEP's mission.

#### **A. Assessment of Partnership Priorities**

APNEP conducted a Needs Assessment in 2016, which included a number of questions related to partner engagement and communications. Consideration of the results has been incorporated into the development of this plan.

APNEP proposes to work through the Action Teams, Leadership Council, and STAC annually to identify priority CCMP Actions that include engagement and outreach components, then develop targeted engagement strategies that will be incorporated into the team's Action Plan and APNEP's workplan as appropriate. Budgetary needs and resources will be assessed and incorporated into the annual APNEP workplan. The methods of partner engagement described below will be prioritized as determined by the Management Conference.

#### **B. Methods of Partner Engagement**

1. **Constituent Relations.** All program staff members will work to develop and maintain relationships with its constituents throughout the region, particularly as those constituencies relate to specific job descriptions.
2. **Management Conference:** Overarching partner engagement occurs through the underlying set up and structure of the Management Conference, which consists of the Leadership Council, Science and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC), Implementation Action Teams, Monitoring and Assessment Teams.
  - i. **Full Participation by Committee Members.** APNEP will encourage active participation by Leadership Council and advisory committee members in APNEP outreach activities as they are scheduled.

- ii. **Full Membership.** APNEP staff and committees will seek to maintain full membership on APNEP boards and committees as defined by the appropriate bylaws. Ad hoc committees will be created as needed and provide board members with opportunities and responsibilities to support the Program.
  - iii. **Committee Role in Engagement.** APNEP will encourage Leadership Council and advisory committee members to serve as ambassadors for APNEP in their other professional roles, including their primary employment and professional organizations. APNEP staff will share program materials that facilitate this role.
3. **Action Teams:** Partner engagement largely occurs through the Implementation Action Teams, who will identify needs, priorities, and ideas to implement CCMP actions assigned to each team. Some of this will occur by sponsoring relevant partner initiatives, discussed below.
4. **Participation in external workgroups in committees.** APNEP staff regularly participate in external workgroups and committees to expand our reach, facilitate regional collaboration, and reciprocate volunteer involvement [see “Non-APNEP Workgroups” in the partner engagement workbook]. Some workgroups align with core responsibilities and are outlined in position descriptions.

Examples include the Atlantic Coast Fish Habitat Partnership, the ASMFC’s Habitat Committee, Saltwater Connections, Albemarle Chowan Watershed Roundtable, Watershed Stewardship Network, Water Resources Improvement Team, Balancing Nature and Commerce, Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership, Sentinel Sites Cooperative, Sentinel Landscapes Partnership, and Virginia Alosa Task Force.

Where possible, APNEP will prioritize projects that align with the complimentary missions of these external workgroups. Staff will actively seek opportunities to integrate external workgroup projects with APNEP Action Teams projects.

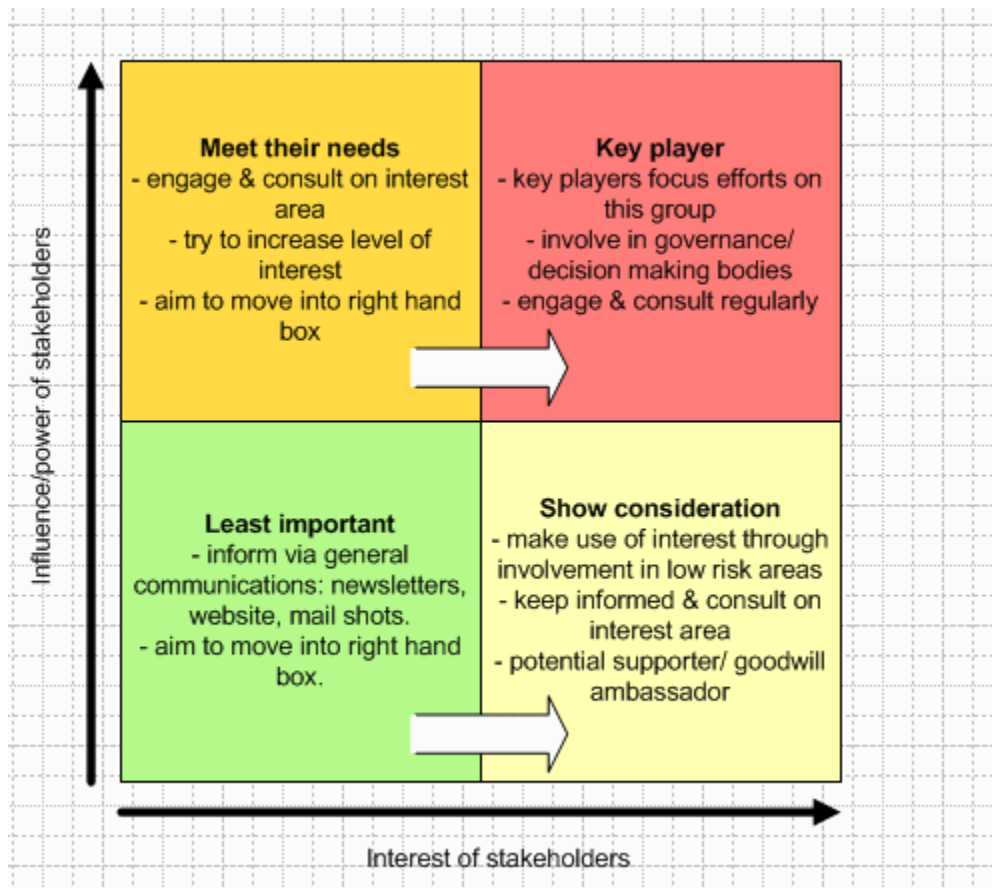
5. **Collaboration on projects and research.** technical support, in-kind services, logistics.
6. **Cooperation.** APNEP will facilitate inter- and intra-agency cooperation to achieve CCMP goals.
7. **Engagement with targeted audiences.** Certain CCMP actions are geared towards the public or specifically identify targeted audiences (e.g. landowners, teachers, decision and policy makers). This form of engagement will be identified through the relevant action team and are identified in the Implementation Action Team Matrix.
8. **Direct engagement / collaborations with specific partners.** These interactions occur as requested or identified as a need by staff. These are tracked in the “Partner Meetings” worksheet in the partner engagement workbook, which includes follow up items from each meeting. An annual workplan will be developed to identify potential new partners, list of possible projects, and if applicable, identify relevant grants to

pursue. Some insight will be gleaned by further exploring the next section, assessment of levels of partner involvement.

9. **Sponsorship of partner initiatives** [also see more detail in outreach and education section and communications sections below]
  - i. **Disbursing implementation funds for projects through grants and contracts.** APNEP directly provides financial support to partners for various initiatives and projects through its funding from EPA. The funds are disbursed through contracts or direct payment methods through APNEP. Moving forward, it is preferable that these be vetted through the Action Teams and Implementation Committee.
  - ii. **Grant collaboration.** APNEP can also collaborate with partners to apply for external funding sources. APNEP is eligible to be a government partner applicant, and can administer funds to its partners. However, we prefer some involvement in the funded project, rather than just serve as “pass-through” or grant administrator. (e.g., NFWF grant for SAV monitoring; partner with ECU).
  - iii. **Letters of Support:** APNEP provides letters of support to partners applying for grants. Starting in 2017, these letters will be tracked and staff will follow up to see if assistance is needed, help promote the effort, and include results towards evaluating progress towards CCMP implementation as appropriate.
  - iv. **Promotion of partner sponsored initiatives** [as requested].

#### C. Assessment of Levels of Partner Involvement:

At the February 2017 Joint Leadership Council / STAC meeting, the topics of partners came up during discussion of the results of the Needs Assessment. APNEP lists a large number of partners of its website, however, a great deal of variation exists amongst the level of involvement. The graphic below illustrates engagement strategies depending upon the influence and level of interest. APNEP will assess this approach in implementing this engagement strategy and prioritizing engagement and communications with partners.



1. **Active partners:** APNEP has many current active partners who volunteer their time by participating in the Management Conference through the Leadership Council, STAC, Implementation Action Teams, Monitoring and Assessment Teams and other efforts described above. Every effort will be made to foster, cultivate, and sustain these relationships and active involvement.

However, not all “active” partners are engaged at the same level, as outlined below.

- i. **Highly engaged:** Some are highly engaged, regularly participate, actively engaged in discussions, respond to requests, and actively seek opportunities to collaborate with and promote APNEP outside of meetings.
- ii. **Moderate Participant:** participate and attend meetings, not regularly engaged in discussions, little to no outside participation or interest.
- iii. **On the roster:** infrequent meeting participant, little to no participation outside of meetings, rarely attend meetings, little feedback during discussion.

APNEP seeks to better understand these levels of involvement and adjust its engagement and communications efforts accordingly.

- Key messages will be crafted to emphasize the importance of attaining mutual goals, leveraging limited financial resources, and ensuring APNEP mission and CCMP actions are relevant to partner agency missions and objectives.

Staff and active partners will continue to have discussions with team members to understand their level of engagement and to see what APNEP program can do to increase participation levels and better engage partners.

2. **Historical partners:** Some partners have not been recently active in the Management Conference, but are still engaged in the region. APNEP will seek to identify these groups and reach out to them to discuss partnership opportunities. In general, these discussions should be tied to needs identified through the Management Conference or APNEP staff due to programmatic needs/considerations.
3. **New/Potential partners:** this category includes partners / topics where APNEP staff have initiated discussions or been invited to participate in an external team, had a meet and greet, are active in external working groups, but have not yet identified specific partnership opportunities, although there is interest from both parties (see worksheet titled “Partner Meetings in the Partner Engagement workbook”).

#### 4. New Partners / Partners to Seek Out:

These will be identified as needed via the Action Teams or to support initiatives identified in the workplan.

#### D. Evaluation of Partner Engagement Efforts

APNEP will track its partner engagement efforts in the Partner Engagement workbook. It will assess the effectiveness of these efforts and develop metrics to determine whether or not engagement efforts are successful (e.g., increased participation from moderately active partners, participation from new partners, coordination results in collaboration on a specific project, etc.). APNEP will evaluate its engagement efforts and associated strategies annually to identify areas of strength and weakness.

#### E. Use of Tools to Assess Partner Engagement

1. **Social Network Analysis.** Pending available resources, APNEP will incorporate social network analysis tools into its ecosystem-based management toolkit to provide information on the structure and function of the conservation community in the Albemarle-Pamlico region. In 2013 a study was conducted by K.A. Brogan, titled “Using Social Network Analysis to Identify Communication Patterns among Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership Partners.” Staff will evaluate this study and incorporate the results into this strategy as appropriate.

### IV. Outreach, Education, and Community Engagement

Outreach, education, and community engagement initiatives that APNEP participates in to effectively engage its target audiences and other program constituencies generally fall into the following categories. In 2016, APNEP developed evaluation criteria which serve as the basis for

APNEP's policy regarding participation or sponsorship of events. The APNEP Outreach Schedule lists events that APNEP participates in or has in the past.

## A. Types of Outreach, Education, and Community Engagement.

Events that APNEP has historically participated in are listed below. See the APNEP Schedule for specific examples.

1. **Participation in education and outreach events.** APNEP has historically participated in outreach and education events throughout the watershed. These range from festivals to targeted outreach events such as SciREN, Day at the Docks, etc. APNEP sets up a table or booth and has educational materials about the partnership, and activities for the public at select events (e.g. Wetlands Race Activity, lesson plans for SciREN).
2. **Sponsorship of conferences and workshops.** APNEP is routinely asked to provide financial support for conferences and workshops. As resources allow, APNEP will host or sponsor conferences that promote its general mission or specific initiatives. In addition to meeting CCMP objectives, sponsorship provides opportunities to directly support partners, raises awareness about the program and current initiatives, and provides networking opportunities with existing and potential partners.
3. **Attendance to promote sponsored activities.** When possible, APNEP will attempt to attend sponsored activities to have a presence at the event, take pictures and network with partners, and assist as needed in addition to promoting the event via social media.
4. **Logistical support for sponsored activities or collaborations.** Some partners may request logistical support for events, ranging from providing and driving vehicles, assistance with set up / break down, or assistance running the event (serving as an educator, manning tables, etc).
5. **Incentivizing public involvement.** APNEP will incentivize the incorporation of an outreach component into each APNEP funded project. These outreach activities should emphasize APNEP as a *sponsor or partner*. This is addressed in the new Scope of Work created in 2017.
6. **Targeted outreach and education via Action Teams and associated action plans for CCMP implementation:** TBD for each team in accordance with relevant CCMP actions and the action plan developed by each team [See Sentinel Landscapes and Puget Sound for example communications plan for campaigns.] Activities may require assistance from the Engagement & Stewardship Action Team, which has its own targeted set of actions, but is also available to provide overarching support for the other teams. **See Implementation Action Team Matrix for list of relevant actions.**

## B. Assessment of APNEP Participation in Outreach and Education Events.

Staff will use the following questions as a guideline to determine the value or benefit of participating in or providing financial support for an event. Every question may not be relevant to each request. Flexibility is inherent, as new opportunities and activities present themselves from time to time, and as we engage new partners throughout the region.



## Evaluation Criteria: Questions for participating in education and outreach events and/or sponsoring conferences & workshops:

### Top 3 questions for quick evaluation:

- 1) Does the event or sponsorship address CCMP actions, and which one(s)?
- 2) Does the event support more than one CCMP action, or an action not recently or previously addressed?
- 3) Does the person/organization making the request participate in the Management Conference via Leadership Council, STAC, Action Teams, or by volunteering time in other ways?

### Follow up questions:

- 1) Have we participated previously? Was there a positive outcome?
- 2) If the event or sponsorship does not directly address CCMP actions, does it meet the overall goals and objectives, or is there some other value added in participating?
- 3) How far along are we with implementing the relevant CCMP action (s)?
- 4) Who are the target audience(s) for the event?
  - a. Does the event reach an under-targeted or underserved population?
  - b. Does the event reach groups across regional, watershed, or geopolitical boundaries? (Virginia partners, bringing new groups together for collaboration)
  - c. Does the event reach groups on an ecosystem/regional scale?
- 5) How much leverage can be obtained from participating?
- 6) Does the event cross-cut or cover other core responsibilities (e.g., GPRA, CHPP)?
- 7) How much of a time commitment / staff logistics is needed?
- 8) Does our participation...
  - a. Provide opportunities to build on the activity through grant or other partnership opportunities?
  - b. Strengthen existing partnerships?
  - c. Present networking opportunities for engaging new partners?

## V. Communications

### A. Communications Objectives:

APNEP's communication strategy centers around engaging with partners to implement the CCMP and reporting on the progress of CCMP implementation.

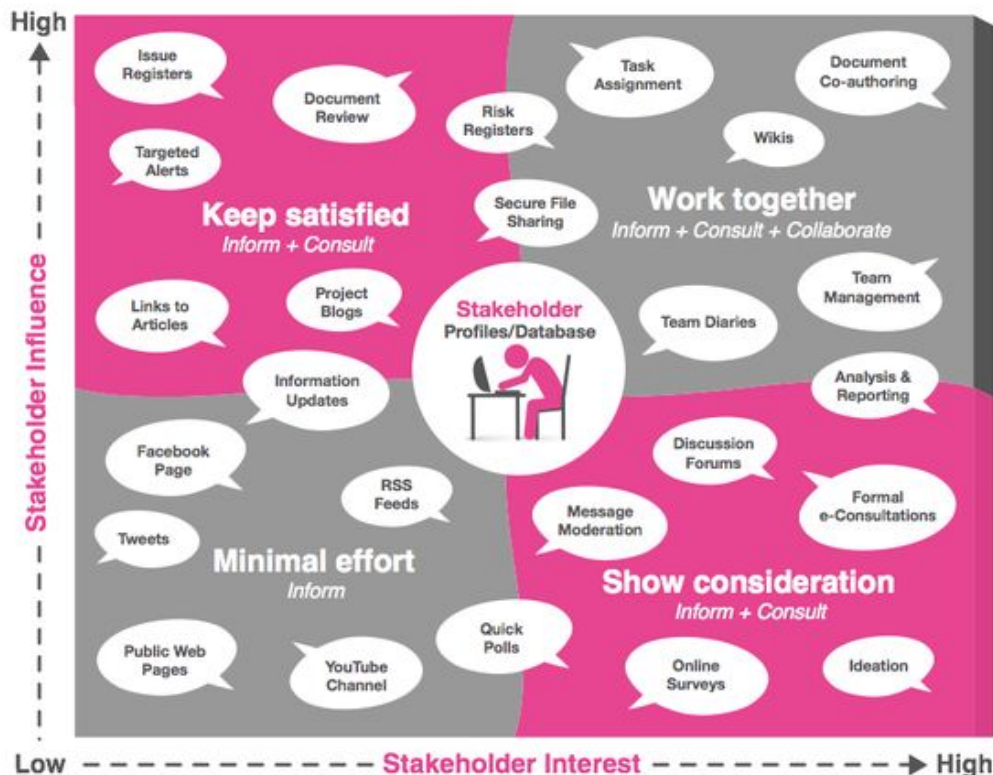
The primary goal is to keep partners and other groups informed of what we are doing and have accomplished, so people understand the value of our organization, are motivated to participate in it, and to aid in the implementation of CCMP actions.

The secondary goal is to connect partner groups – keep diverse partners informed to an extent of important things others are doing (through social media, newsletter, blog, etc.). For specific CCMP actions, communications objectives may with targeted groups (teachers, policy makers, etc.) rather than partner groups.

A tertiary goal is to keep the public and interested citizens informed about our efforts in the region.

APNEP’s communications efforts are and will continue to be specifically tailored to support specific CCMP actions and objectives. All CCMP actions will be generally supported using the tools and approaches described in this strategy. Effective implementation of many CCMP actions will heavily rely upon effective communications efforts. As necessary, more detailed communications approaches will be developed for the implementation of specific CCMP actions.

APNEP’s communications strategy will vary by audience and project or specific purpose and are tied to the levels of partner engagement described above. An example graphic is listed below; a graphic will be created that reflects APNEP audiences:



**B. Communications Strategies:**

Efforts to create new materials or update existing materials will be tied to priorities identified by the Action Teams and other Management Conference members, in addition to needs evaluated by program staff.

APNEP will employ targeted communications strategies using the various tools described below. Annually in December, a workplan will be prepared for the upcoming year which centers around the core strategies below, but also includes special items such as the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, APNEP Symposium, and State of the Estuaries report, depending on the priorities identified for that year.

1. Highlight APNEP-sponsored projects and programs.
2. Feature the work and progress of the Implementation Action Teams.

3. Feature the work of partners that supports CCMP implementation, even if APNEP is not directly involved. Share information regarding STAC and action team members.
4. Developed targeted materials and outputs as outlined in the CCMP. Needs and details will be identified by the action teams, Leadership Council, and STAC. TBD for each team in accordance with relevant CCMP actions and the action plan developed by each team. Once these are developed they will be incorporated into this plan or by reference.

**See Implementation Action Team Matrix for list of relevant actions.** Examples include: (Outreach materials for landowners regarding land conservation strategies, materials for policy and decision makers regarding the economic value of the region.

5. Emphasize the importance of the partnership and value of participation.
6. Share information regarding the progress of CCMP implementation.
7. Ensure our communications and message are aligned with and compliment the National Estuary Program and Association of National Estuary Programs. APNEP will share the new fact sheets and information and other content from the ANEP website and Facebook pages as needed.
8. Continue to participate in national coordinated campaigns to promote the work of the NEP and federally funded programs, including National Estuaries Week, I heart Estuaries, and other social media campaigns.

Activities may require assistance from the Engagement & Stewardship Action Team, which has its own targeted set of actions, but is also available to provide overarching support and serve as a consultant for the other teams.

## C. Communication Tools

### 1. Print Materials

APNEP maintains a core set of printed materials that provide an overview of APNEP, its mission, and the Albemarle-Pamlico estuary that are made available to stakeholders and used at outreach and education events including conferences. These materials include case statements, tabletop displays, banners, program presentations, and other program documents. These materials are available both online and in paper form.

APNEP is in the process of revising existing print materials to see what needs updating, with plans to complete needed revisions by the end of 2018. Plans include creating a display for a portable retractable banner and updating APNEP's one-page case statements.

Many of the outputs listed in the CCMP are tied to communications materials. APNEP regularly supports partners by providing financial support for educational resources such as the River Basin Booklets, NC Catch Placemats, and informational brochures. The Engagement and Stewardship Team is considering current needs and priorities, and may incorporate development of new materials, or assisting partners with updating existing materials, into its action plan.

Of all the communications tools listed in this strategy, it is anticipated that print materials, and signs (discussed below), will incur the most costs. Given the need for both programmatic and CCMP action materials, APNEP will evaluate its budget annually to ensure adequate funding has been allocated for materials.

## 2. Signs

Where feasible, restoration and demonstration projects that APNEP supports will include the APNEP logo on signs. APNEP has also participated in the development of educational signage and supported partners by providing financial support for signs. The Engagement and Stewardship Team is considering current needs and priorities, and may incorporate development of new signs, or assisting partners with updating existing signs, into its action plan.

## 3. Media

### i. Traditional media

APNEP will coordinate with traditional print, television, and radio outlets to further program strategies contained within its CCMP. Traditional media offers the opportunity to enhance public awareness of regional conservation efforts and the program.

- a. **Press releases.** Press releases will publicize APNEP activities, initiatives and news. This may include but is not limited to publicizing requests for proposals, completion of joint initiatives between APNEP and its partners, and other newsworthy items. Press releases will be coordinated with designated NCDEQ and NCDCCR staff and staff of partner organizations when appropriate.
- b. **Media relations.** APNEP's staff will develop and maintain relationships with news reporters in the region that cover environmental issues. APNEP will also work through DEQ's Communications Office to achieve this aim. As the opportunity arises, local media outlets will be invited to cover newsworthy events.
- c. **Opinion pieces.** APNEP staff will offer program support for Leadership Council or advisory committee members who wish to publish opinion pieces regarding environmental issues substantially related to APNEP's mission. All opinion pieces must conform to Leadership Council or advisory committee bylaws regarding representation of APNEP its Board or Committees.
- d. **Other print and online media outlets.** When feasible, APNEP staff will work to publicize impactful and relevant APNEP initiatives through media outlets such as online/print magazines, news sites, and blogs. Publicizing APNEP's work through these channels will help increase local/regional recognition and understanding of the work APNEP does.

### ii. Digital media

Digital media offers an excellent opportunity for APNEP to directly and inexpensively connect with interested members of the public. APNEP engages its audiences by providing a variety of online media content. Trends, services, and capabilities within this medium change at a rapid rate, and APNEP will remain abreast of changing trends and best practices.

- a. **Website.** APNEP retains the capability to instantaneously update content. Where feasible, all program materials should be accessible or viewable at this source. The site should provide an overview of the estuarine system, provide information about the program, detail APNEP's current initiatives, and offer resources of interest to APNEP's target audiences. While current and accurate information must be available, the website must also be curated in a way that ensures navigability and relevant content for the target audience of the program. The website also serves as a clearinghouse for important APNEP documents such as the annual work plan and budget.

In 2015, NCDENR split into DEQ and DCR, and is migrating programs to a new web platform in phases. APNEP is scheduled to move in a later phase, and currently remains on the old portal. Any major changes to the style and content of the webpage are on hold until the migration is complete. However, staff continue to update and create new content. A workplan is used and continuously updated to log and prioritize changes and additions to the website

- b. **AGOL / Storymaps:** In 2016, APNEP initiated efforts to make greater use of AGOL and online mapping tools and integrate with ongoing DEQ efforts to share and synthesize data and information. In summer 2018, an intern will be hired to assist with the development of an APNEP storymap, which will include an interactive map of past and current APNEP projects.
- c. **Social Media.** APNEP will maintain a social media presence on platforms that effectively reach its target audiences. APNEP will maintain an engaging and intelligent tone in its online communications. Currently the program maintains an active presence on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, but other forms of social media will continually be evaluated for inclusion in APNEP's communication strategy. Generally, content that highlights APNEP or partner sponsored initiatives will be shared on all three sites.

All social media relations will be conducted according to "Best Practices for Social Media Usage in North Carolina." Content on the sites should be posted in grammatically correct English. To ensure discipline and a consistent presence, this strategy recommends providing thematic content in a regular manner according to the medium and its target audience. Other program announcements and developments will also be shared as they occur.

While social media will be used primarily to promote projects and initiatives that APNEP is directly involved in, it will also be utilized to share information about the region and used to highlight accomplishments of partners that are relevant to the APNEP region. The intent of content posted or shared on social media should be to inform, rather than to advocate. APNEP should not, directly or indirectly, ask followers to advocate for specific outcomes on its behalf or on the behalf of another organization.

Social media sites should be regularly monitored for spam or negative commentary. Entries including spam or profane commentary may be deleted, but a record of the entry should be kept in accordance with NC's open records act. Negative but non-profane commentary is uncommon but should remain posted. Comments of this nature should be addressed in concert with the program director, with consultation from NCDEQ's Communications Office if necessary.

- i. **Twitter.** Twitter users are among the most digitally sophisticated of APNEP's audience. Many of these users are young, comfortable with technology, and/or use the service professionally. All of APNEP's content should be posted to Twitter, but the service's 280 character limit requires brevity. APNEP staff will provide regular program updates and communicate directly with other Twitter users. If there are no project or program specific updates, suggested tweet themes and hashtags are below:
  - Offer facts about the Albemarle-Pamlico ecosystem (#soundfacts)
  - Highlight people, organizations, and research in our region (#apnepspotlight)
  - Post a photo from our region (#sightsofthesounds)
  - Note interactions through "Ask an ecologist" (#askanecologist) or refer to specific APNEP web content.
  - News story of the week (#apnepechoes)
  - #nced -> good hashtag to reach NC educators
  - #ncadmin -> hashtag to reach NC school administrators

- ii. **Facebook.** Most Facebook users that subscribe to APNEP's content are members of the public with an interest in conservation issues, and they view content on their personal time. Posts should consider this audience and provide content that is regular but carefully curated. Posts that contain information appropriate for a Twitter post can be expanded to provide more detail for Facebook posts.

A major concern of many users is that programmatic content might become overwhelming, and APNEP will aim to post no more than 3 Facebook updates per week, except unless extraordinary developments occur.

APNEP staff will provide regular program updates and communicate directly with other Facebook users. If there are no program or partner updates, suggested content for Facebook posts is as follows:

- Offer information about the Albemarle-Pamlico ecosystem
- Sights of the sounds: post a photo from our region
- Post news story of the week

- iii. **LinkedIn.** LinkedIn users are mostly professionals working or seeking work in the field of conservation. APNEP utilizes a company page to reach a professional audience, communicate directly with other LinkedIn users, and potentially reach its targeted partner audience. As with Facebook or Twitter, anyone can follow a company page.

If there are no program updates, a suggested schedule for LinkedIn Company posts should sync with what is posted on Facebook, with the caveat that content on LinkedIn should be professional in tone and content.

- iv. **Flickr.** Although APNEP is no longer actively maintaining its Flickr page, it is still online and available to the public.
- v. **YouTube.** APNEP hosts program videos on its YouTube channel. Most content was created by former interns. The videos will be shared and distributed as appropriate, but there is not a need to update content regularly on You Tube.

- vi. **Instagram.** APNEP suspended use of its Instagram account in 2016 due to recommendations from former staff.
  - vii. **Pinterest.** In 2016, APNEP created an account on Pinterest, an online platform that allows users to share and save content to virtual collections called pinboards (also referred to as simply "boards"). Currently, the APNEP Pinterest page is only being updated as it assists with staff projects and needs.
  - viii. **iNaturalist.** APNEP maintains an iNaturalist account, an online social network that allows users to share photos of plants and animals they find in the natural world. iNaturalist is a crowdsourced species identification system and organism occurrence recording tool. Currently, APNEP does not actively maintain this account.
- c. **Mailing list.** APNEP maintains a mailing list currently hosted by Mailchimp. Only APNEP staff can send email through this service, but the service gives subscribers the option to instantly subscribe, unsubscribe, or have emails sent in digest form without the investment of staff resources. Because most environmental professionals communicate primarily through email, this medium enables consistent contact with that target audience. Emails will be sent as needed, to share newsletters, feature a Soundings post, share announcements (e.g., RFP for grants, workshops sponsored by APNEP), or provide other information of relevance.
- c. **Newsletter.** APNEP publishes a monthly email newsletter called "Sound Stories." The newsletter contains content on subjects including APNEP projects, partner projects, upcoming events of interest to stakeholders in the region, grant opportunities and relevant news. The newsletter is sent via email to the mailing list. Occasional announcements/grant opportunities are also distributed to the mailing list in between newsletters.
- c. **Soundings Blog.** APNEP's Soundings Blog is used to highlight current projects and partners. Blog posts may be written by APNEP staff, solicited from outside groups, or republished from other publications with permission. The blog is distributed online via our various social media outlets and the newsletter, and is highly visible on APNEP's home page. The Soundings posts may be featured in the newsletter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, etc., but are separate methods of communication and outreach.
- a. **News.** APNEP leverages the resources of the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality, N.C. Department of Cultural Resources, the N.C. Department of Agriculture, the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, and the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality to select and post news stories online that are relevant to the program's mission. These clips provide updated daily content for APNEP's home page and are also published via RSS feed and Delicious, a social bookmarking website. This service was suspended in 2016 due to issues with ads on the host site and will be reevaluated in the future as the need arises.

**D. Communication Strategy Objectives by Audience {see case statements/update}:**

APNEP seeks to provide information that is relevant to all audiences using the following guidelines. Targeted communications strategies for each audience will be developed as needed and identified by staff, the Action Teams, Leadership Council, and STAC.

A list of APNEP partners can be found in the file \apnep\APNEP Strategic Issues\2016-2017\Engagement\PartnerEngagment.xls.

- Provide information about the resources APNEP can provide to its partners, the value of being involved in a regional partnership.
- Facilitate collaboration amongst partners, bring partners together that may not normally work with one another.
- Highlight and share partner achievements, feature STAC member's research, Leadership Council member's contributions to the region, etc. Information sharing.

APNEP audiences are listed below:

**1. Decision and policy makers**

\*Economic value of the region

\*Value of investing in environmental protection and research;

**2. Local government officials and community leaders;**

\*Resources APNEP and its partners can provide;

**3. State and federal government officials;**

**4. Universities and members of the science and research community;**

Information sharing, both within the research community and between researchers, managers, government officials, and the general public;

Highlight partner research and achievements;

Feature STAC member research;

Portal/clearinghouse for information?

Decision Support tools.

**5. Educators, including K-12, adult/continuing, and non-formal/informal educators;**

\*Resources for teachers and educators in the region, provided by APNEP and its partners.

\* Share current information from the scientific community that can be incorporated into the classroom.

\*Regional partnership and collaboration opportunities (non-formal).

\*Environmental Stewardship

\* Opportunities for volunteerism, outdoor experiences, public access to waterways

**6. Non-profit organizations, partners and funders;**

**7. Landowners; and**

**8. General public, citizens, and visitors to the region.**

In general, it is less important that the public is aware that APNEP exists, but rather more important to promote stewardship of the region by promoting initiatives that APNEP and its partners undertake. In general, most communication with the public occurs through social media, participation in outreach events, and through targeted campaigns that will be developed by the Action Teams for actions in the CCMP that have a communications component. Example topics are listed below.



## All ages:

- \*Environmental Stewardship
- \*Opportunities for volunteerism, outdoor experiences, public access to waterways

## Adults vs. K-12

- \*Watershed Issues
- \*Water Quality
- \*Ecosystem Services
- \*Economic Value
- \* Environmental Stewardship
- \*Coastal Resilience & Sea Level Rise
- \*Submerged Aquatic Vegetation Protection
- \*Invasive Species Awareness

## E. Evaluation of Communications Efforts

APNEP will periodically evaluate its communications plan and associated strategies to identify areas of strength and weakness.

1. **Performance Metrics.** APNEP has developed and will continue monitoring metrics of communications performance, such as social media followers/reach, website traffic, and newsletter subscriptions/opens. These metrics are available through Google Analytics and integrated social media monitoring tools. Results will be reported annually to staff during strategic planning meeting and to the Management Conference as requested.
2. **Needs Assessment and other Feedback.** APNEP will periodically solicit feedback from its Management Conference regarding its communication efforts. In 2016, APNEP reached out to partners and stakeholders to solicit feedback regarding current communication strategies. A future strategy may be to conduct a survey to determine how stakeholders and the public in the region perceive the efforts of APNEP and partners or receive information.