

## COMMISSIONER'S COLUMN

### Tropical Storm Irene 10 years later

Ten years ago, Tropical Storm Irene dropped five to seven inches of rain in parts of New Hampshire on August 28, 2011. Irene especially impacted New Hampshire's mountainous terrain areas. It is time to look at the progress NHDES has made since 2011 in working to prepare for, and respond to, these types of events in the future, which is particularly relevant considering the recent near miss by Hurricane Henri. The rains from Irene overwhelmed the state's rivers and streams, and the force of flows in the state's steeper terrain led to miles of streambank erosion, clogged and washed out culverts, and in some cases, homes left on the verge of falling into rivers. The effects were made worse by already saturated ground from earlier rains in July and August. For many in the North Country, the images of Irene will remain etched in memory for years to come. The need to address the aftermath of Irene led to a series of long-term changes in the business processes of NHDES as to how we address major flood events, and to keep those processes alive.

In addition to damage to bridges and homes, the raw streambanks were ripe for further erosion in higher flows, increasing the risks from flooding. The scouring of streambeds created habitat impacts. All of this created a stream stabilization permitting and restoration workload that had to be closely coordinated across multiple state and federal programs to ensure that stream recovery protected property and the environment, while also minimizing future flood risks. To achieve this, in the

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### The Colonial Theatre in Laconia: a Brownfields success story

The NHDES Brownfields Program celebrated a brownfields success story at the grand opening of the newly renovated Colonial Theatre in Laconia in late August, 2021.

In August, 2002, the theater closed after 87 years of operation. The building sat vacant and unused for over 10 years. In June 2015, the City of Laconia announced a partnership with the Belknap Economic Development Council (BEDC) to purchase, renovate and reopen the Colonial Theatre. The project was composed of three distinct mixed-use developments, which include reconstruction of the historic Colonial Theatre, and renovation of former apartment units into marketable, residential use, and four storefront commercial units. The total square footage of the property is approximately 51,000 square feet and it is located in Downtown Laconia.



*credit: Colonial Theater*

The NHDES Brownfields Program was contacted during the early stages of this redevelopment project with a request to assist in identifying potential environmental issues associated with the property. The Brownfields Program was able to provide a grant for technical assistance which included:

- The investigation of an abandoned-in-place underground storage tank.
- Inventorying of asbestos-containing materials, lead-based paint, PCBs in

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weeks after Irene, NHDES created the Post-Irene River Response Team. This team, incorporating multiple state agencies, coordinated river recovery activities, rolling up its sleeves to help communities and citizens recover, while working together to reduce future risk and restore the environment. This team lives on today as the New Hampshire Silver Jackets, led by NHDES.

Buoyed by the lessons learned from Irene, plus smaller, but no less impactful flood events in the mid-2010s involving programs across NHDES, the agency improved in a variety of areas. All were designed to enhance NHDES' service to New Hampshire during flooding. These have included:



- Creation of an internal Emergency and Flood Response Group to coordinate mission-critical staff response during and after a major flood.
- Increased emphasis on assessing road (i.e., culverts) and water (i.e., stormwater, drinking water facilities) infrastructure at greatest risk for impacts during future flooding, through increased partnerships with communities.
- Conducting agency-wide exercises, facilitated in partnership with New Hampshire Homeland Security and Emergency Management, to improve staff response, recovery and integration – one has been completed, with future potential for a second.
- Increased cross-agency communication and data sharing has supported greater knowledge of where highest flood risks are statewide.
- Increased collaboration with state and federal agencies responsible for flood-related concerns, and with communities, which has been greatly expanded through the efforts of the Silver Jackets.

This year, New Hampshire was reminded once again that our state's infrastructure remains vulnerable to the impacts from flood events. One example is road culverts. Areas of southwest New Hampshire received a staggering 19 inches of rain in total for the month of July. Instances where over seven inches occurred in a single evening washed away roads and caused numerous culverts to fail. Since 2009, multiple state agencies, led by NHDES, have been conducting culvert assessments in New Hampshire, with the goal to complete assessment of every culvert by 2026. The purpose of this work is to identify those culverts at risk for failure in the future to help prioritize replacing those that are at greatest risk for failure in a flood. Based on this work, of the 10,407 culverts that have been assessed to date, 23% are estimated to not be able to pass a two-year flow, while the same percentage are rated as either fully or mostly incompatible with stream processes; thus, posing failure risks. While NHDES has been working to adjust its practice to better accommodate flood mitigation, we strongly encourage communities to take a close look at their own infrastructure, such as culverts, to ensure they are as ready as can be to handle the next large storm that comes our way.

NHDES and New Hampshire itself have both come a long way in how we address flooding since Tropical Storm Irene. However, much work remains to be done. NHDES stands ready to continue to improve upon its work on flooding, and to work together with communities through continued provision of technical assistance to do so, and protect public safety and the environment. ■

## ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS

*Environmental News* is published six times a year by the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services.

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*Printed on recycled paper.*

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building materials and electrical equipment, and universal waste.

- Delineation of a PCB release from a transformer in the basement of the building.

This initial environmental work was an important component to evaluating risk associated with the redevelopment and safely remediating aging infrastructure without causing additional harm to the environment or users of the building.

The restoration of the Colonial Theatre began in March, 2016 and much care was taken to return it to its original 1914 Venetian beauty. With 750 seats in an intimate and ornate room, the Colonial is poised to become a destination for national touring artists, and will be home to a nonprofit resident theater company as well as various civic events. The project is one of the largest historic preservation projects in state history, while its design, performance and technical capacity will make it one of the most advanced civic auditoriums in New Hampshire. The theater reopened in early 2021 and, despite the challenging times of COVID-19, the first summer season has hosted a variety of entertainers.

The Colonial Theatre Redevelopment Project was led by BEDC and the City of Laconia. The redevelopment is a key economic development initiative that will increase cultural arts opportunities and community development in the City. While the theater is the heart of the redevelopment, it also boasts an adjoining storefront including a craft beer lounge and retail space, which surround the main entrance. These spaces provide additional economic opportunity to downtown Laconia. ■

## New Hampshire Salt Symposium

There will be a specific Municipal Track at the New Hampshire Salt Symposium on September 14, 2021 at Pats Peak Ski Area in Henniker. Once again, the event is a partnership with the Snow and Ice Management Association (SIMA).

In addition to announcing the return of a Municipal Green SnowPro Program, this year's focus will be on liquids. We know and appreciate that many municipalities have already taken this step or are considering it as a component of your winter operations arsenal. This is a chance to share your knowledge and learn from others.

## New NHDES Assistant Commissioner

The Governor and Executive Council approved the appointment of Mark Sanborn on August 18, as NHDES' next Assistant Commissioner. Mark brings to NHDES a wide range of experience in public service at both the federal and state level, most recently serving as an Energy Advisor at the newly-established New Hampshire Department of Energy (previously, the New Hampshire Office of Strategic Initiatives). Prior to that time, and over the last 20-plus years, Mark has held a number of leadership positions at the federal level, including as a Senior Advisor at the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, Chief of Staff at the US Department of Agriculture-Rural Development, and as Director of Governmental and Public Affairs at the US Department of Transportation. ■



The special session for municipalities will give them the opportunity to help shape the Green SnowPro Municipal Certification process, now that legislation has been passed to allow municipalities back into the program or into it for the first time. Come and lend your experience, expertise, and voices to create the Municipal Green SnowPro Certification Program for New Hampshire!

Learn more about the Salt Symposium's [Liquids Workshop](#) and [Register today!](#) ■



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# Publicly available EV charging stations on Green Street, Concord

Next time you are in downtown Concord, you may see some exciting new technology available to drivers of electric vehicles (EVs): battery charging stations! These Level 2 charging stations, which can provide up to 35 miles of range per hour of charge, are now available to the public at the State-owned parking lot at 33 Green Street.

Investments in EV charging infrastructure by states, utilities, EV charging equipment providers and others continue to grow, with companies like Electrify America leading the charge with a \$1.2 billion investment. Per the Alternative Fuel Data Center's Station Locator Tool, there are currently 114 publicly accessible, non-proprietary EV charging sites in New Hampshire.

Automakers are making major electrification commitments and announcing many exciting new models, including electric pick-up trucks and SUVs. According to the Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy, the median range of all of the EVs offered for sale or lease in the U.S. in 2020 was more than 250 miles per charge. More than 40 different EV models are available in the Northeast alone, and consumer interest is growing.

In New Hampshire, EV registrations increased from about 1,300 in 2016 to over 4,800 in 2020. As the number of EVs on New Hampshire roads increases, the buildout of charging infrastructure will be essential to support travel in and around our great state. As you may know, New Hampshire received approximately \$31 million from the Volkswagen (VW) Settlement and New Hampshire's VW Beneficiary Mitigation Plan committed 15% of that allocation, the maximum allowed, to the buildout of EV charging infrastructure.

A competitive solicitation seeking the installation, maintenance and operation of Level 2 EV charging stations at the Green Street lot was released in April of last year. A New



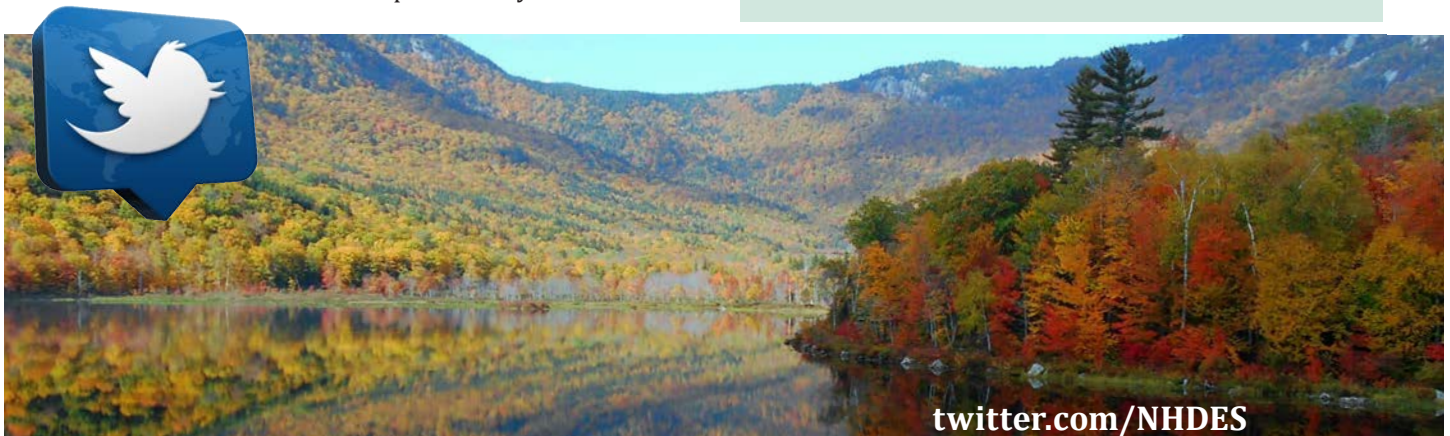
England renewable energy company, Revision Energy, was selected to complete the installation, maintenance and operation of two dual-port Level 2 charging stations. What's more, their project proposal comes at no cost to the State, which leaves these funds available for future charging projects. The project was recently completed and the charging stations are now available for use by visitors, residents and employees in downtown Concord. ■

## Environmental News is going electronic



Starting January 1, 2022, Environmental News will only be offered as an e-newsletter. Don't miss an issue! [Sign up to receive it via email.](#)

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## NH celebrates EPA's SepticSmart Week, September 20-24

NHDES is participating in EPA's SepticSmart Week, September 20-24. The week is designed to encourage homeowners and communities to care for and maintain their septic systems. The EPA has a website dedicated to [SepticSmart Week](#).

About six out of every 10 households in New Hampshire depend on septic systems or other types of onsite systems to treat their wastewater. These systems are critical in protecting the state's water resources. These water resources are enjoyed by everyone whether you are swimming in Lake Winnepesaukee, kayaking on the Piscataqua River, fishing on the Merrimack or Connecticut Rivers or taking a drink of water out of your own kitchen faucet.

Failure to maintain a septic system can lead to backups and overflows, which can result in costly repairs and can cause health and water quality problems. An improperly maintained system can even be a significant source of groundwater contamination and cause issues with your drinking water well.

During SepticSmart Week, NHDES will be distributing education and outreach resources to help educate residents about their septic systems. The EPA provides homeowners with easy to remember maintenance tips, including:

- **Protect It and Inspect It:** Homeowners should generally have their system inspected every three years by a licensed contractor. Tanks should be pumped when necessary, typically every three to five years. Don't forget to check out [www.getpumpedNH.com](http://www.getpumpedNH.com) for more education and a rebate form for your next tank service.
- **Think at the Sink:** Avoid pouring fats, grease and solids down the drain. These substances can clog a system's

pipes and drainfield.

- **Don't Overload the Commode:** Only put things in the drain or toilet that belong there. For example, coffee grounds, paint, dental floss, disposable diapers, and wipes, hygiene products, cigarette butts and cat litter can all clog and potentially damage septic systems.
- **Don't Strain Your Drain:** Be water efficient and spread out water use. Fix plumbing leaks and install faucet aerators and water-efficient products. Spread out laundry and dishwasher loads throughout the day — too much water at once can overload a system that hasn't been pumped recently.
- **Shield Your Field:** Remind guests not to park or drive on a system's drainfield, where the vehicle's weight could damage buried pipes or disrupt underground flow.



For more SepticSmart information including a homeowner's guide go to [www.epa.gov/septicmart](http://www.epa.gov/septicmart). If you work for a municipality and would like outreach material on septic smart practices, please reach out to Wade Pelham with NHDES at [wade.pelham@des.nh.gov](mailto:wade.pelham@des.nh.gov). ■

## New Hampshire Pollution Prevention Program celebrates 30 years

Pollution Prevention (P2) Week is September 20-24, 2021 and the New Hampshire Pollution Prevention Program is celebrating its 30th anniversary.

In 1990, Congress passed the Pollution Prevention Act, which charged EPA with establishing a national source reduction program to address the millions of tons of pollution the U.S. was producing. The following year, NHDES formed a state source reduction program and the New Hampshire Pollution Prevention Program (NHPPP) was born.

At its core, P2 is the act of reducing or eliminating waste at the source instead of treating the waste after it is generated. Reducing waste not only protects the environment and public health, it saves money.

Over 30 years, New Hampshire has seen a lot of changes, but one thing has remained the same: the P2 Program still offers free, confidential, non-regulatory assistance to New Hampshire businesses, municipalities, public agencies, organizations and residents. The program has worked with hundreds of New Hampshire's citizens, helping them save millions of

dollars on everything from materials purchased to water and energy savings, and from hazardous and solid waste management to disposal costs. NHPPP provides assistance in the form of educational outreach, site assessments, technical research and compliance assistance.

Initially the program focused on helping companies and organizations manage solid and hazardous waste that is created as a result of their business processes, ensuring these wastes do not pollute the environment, but quickly the program evolved to a multimedia approach considering water, energy and air impacts. NHPPP has worked with many different types of businesses during its 30 years, such as dentist offices and schools, and is currently working with craft breweries and distilleries.

If you have questions or would like pollution prevention assistance, please email [nhppp@des.nh.gov](mailto:nhppp@des.nh.gov) or call (603) 271-6460. For more information, visit the [Pollution Prevention Program webpage](#). ■



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## Proposed protected instream flows drafted for the Designated Cold River

NHDES has completed a study of the designated Cold River to determine the flows needed to protect the river's biological integrity and its instream uses. Gomez and Sullivan Engineers conducted the field investigations and compiled a report that proposes the protected instream flows. NHDES is now asking for public comments on the establishment of these flows as water quality criteria for the river.

The study evaluated the timing, duration, frequency and magnitude of flows that will support aquatic habitat for fish and support vegetation and wildlife on the rivers banks. Flows that will support recreational uses of the river were also evaluated. The [report](#) is available on the NHDES website. A [video describing the Instream Flow Program](#) provides background information on the overall purpose and goals of the Program.

NHDES will hold an informational meeting to describe the study results on Monday, September 27, 2021. The meeting will be held at the Alstead, NH town hall from 7-8:30 PM.



Any interested parties are invited to attend. NHDES will also hold a formal public hearing on October 18, 2021 at the Alstead Town Hall from 7-8:30 PM to receive comments. A public comment period will remain open until Wednesday, November 17, 2021 at 4 PM. Contact Wayne Ives, Instream Flow Specialist, at [wayne.ives@des.nh.gov](mailto:wayne.ives@des.nh.gov) with any questions. ■