

# **National Estuary Program Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan Revision and Update Guidelines**

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## **Background**

The *National Estuary Program FY 15 -16 Clean Water Act Section 320 Funding Guidance for National Estuary Program (NEP) Directors* broadly communicates expectations for Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP) Revisions and Updates. The CCMP contains goals and objectives and provides a long-term framework for action. It also includes strategies to: monitor progress, finance CCMP implementation, and communicate with stakeholders. EPA's CCMP Content Checklist, provided below, is designed to help you navigate through the CCMP Revision and Update process, beginning with general definitions and principles.

In addition to the latest National Estuary Program Funding Guidance, it may be useful to refer to the *National Estuary Program Guidance, Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plans: Content and Approval Requirements (October 1992)*, as you revise or update your CCMP. These documents can be found on the NEP SharePoint site, or are available by contacting your HQ Coordinator.

Scope of CCMPs – All CCMP action plans must be consistent with and tie back to CWA Section 320. Action plans must identify the needed resources and sources of resources expected to be secured. It is especially important to distinguish between actions funded under Section 320 and those to be implemented with other sources.

CCMP Revisions versus Updates – The Funding Guidance describes when a CCMP Revision or an Update would apply. Revisions involve a significant change. For example, a CCMP Revision could be driven by: 1) new CCMP goals, as directed by the Management Conference, 2) new information obtained through monitoring that would require revisiting and changing the actions in a CCMP; or 3) an expansion of the study area. A Revision would also be necessary in cases where original CCMPs have not yet been revised. Minor changes to action plans or insertion of a few new actions would be considered an Update. Reformatting, streamlining or reorganizing core actions to reflect new ways of accomplishing original CCMP goals would also be considered an Update.

CCMP Formats – EPA is not prescribing any particular CCMP format as long as the CCMP meets the Content Checklist.

Review Process – The Region is in the lead with respect to CCMP Revisions and Updates. The Region will work in concert with HQ, using the CCMP Content Checklist and the NEP Funding Guidance as a basis for engaging in the concurrence process. Regional Coordinators will work with the NEP Director and Management Conference to follow the checklist so that the set of content requirements are reflected in the final CCMP and associated documents.

To ensure a common understanding and level of support for the final CCMP, this process assumes that the HQ and Regional Coordinators are regularly communicating and collaborating as needed throughout the process. The Regional Coordinator is responsible for timely communication and for managing the overall review schedule. EPA expects that the NEP will make the changes necessary to the CCMP and associated documents to reflect the Content Checklist. HQ Coordinators will need to honor the CCMP review schedule, while Regional Coordinators need to share documents to allow adequate time for review.

Program Evaluations – To ensure the seamless integration among key NEP products, EPA expects that the Program Evaluations will consider the need, if any, for revisions or updates to the CCMP. EPA also expects that State of the Bay Reports will inform any CCMP Revisions and Updates.

### **Content Checklist - Essential Components of a Revised CCMP** (major changes)

A Revised CCMP should:

1. \_\_\_\_ Identify clearly if there are any changes between the existing and draft CCMP so that reviewers and the public can easily determine what has changed and why. These changes include program priorities and goals; any new information that suggests more promising approaches or currently unaddressed issues, etc.
2. \_\_\_\_ Describe how the NEP has contributed to or supported activities that helped develop new information, if applicable, when highlighting major changes due to new information. Major changes could be informed by Status and Trends or State of the Estuary Reports, Indicator Reports, and associated monitoring programs where adequate monitoring data are available. This is where a discussion of climate change assessments and adaptation strategies should appear.
3. \_\_\_\_ Include a map of the study area. If there are any boundary changes, provide the reasons for those changes. Any NEP study area boundary changes should be based on sound science with the support and approval of the NEP's Management Conference in a transparent and open process.
4. \_\_\_\_ Describe the NEP's Management Conference and membership with any proposed changes and explain how the structure will support the NEP's ability to oversee and promote CCMP implementation. This would include a discussion about the NEP's approach to achieving financial sustainability and for involving the public and stakeholders in its programs.
5. \_\_\_\_ Discuss changes to existing CCMP action plans, and new action plans, including their relationship to previously stated goals and priority problems; the probable causes and sources they address; and measurable objectives, where appropriate, to attain the goal. Each CCMP Action must identify the key activities expected to be implemented to address the priority problem. It would be very helpful to include a table comparing the

old completed or deemed obsolete actions, and new, revised, or on-going actions in the CCMP. This could appear upfront in the document, or within each chapter.

CCMP Actions encompass environmental goals, metrics, and milestones that the NEP strives to achieve over time as implemented through annual workplans. They need to be clear, understandable, and plainly link to CWA § 320 (See 4<sup>th</sup> bullet *under Purpose of Conference*). They should:

- a) describe each action and what is proposed;
- b) identify key activities to implement the action, including affected habitat types, or resource(s) if appropriate; some activities may take place system-wide or involve policy changes rather than in-the-ground projects.
- c) identify proposed action plan responsibilities, including likely lead parties if known, along with any implementing partners;
- d) include a timeframe, and where appropriate, key milestones for completion (or indicate on-going);
- e) estimate the range of potential costs of the overall action and identify the possible sources of funding; and
- f) include performance measures (quantitative measures and intended environmental results wherever possible).

Those CCMP Actions eligible for CWA §320 funding (and as stated in your EPA Assistance Agreement) will be spelled out and included in the NEP workplan submitted to EPA. CCMP Actions not funded by Section 320 should be clearly identified along with the other potential funding source.

CCMPs are living documents and as such should be re-examined and revised on a regular basis. EPA recognizes that CCMPs are also critical components of the NEP model of adaptive management as it facilitates a continual process of integrating new data and results. EPA expects that revised CCMPs will discuss the relevance and applicability of the: 1) monitoring, 2) habitat, 3) finance, and 4) outreach component strategies, including any needed substantive changes. If such changes are not discussed in the revised CCMP as language within a chapter or as a separate Action Plan, they should be described in a separate document and completed within 3 years of the final Revised CCMP.

1. \_\_\_\_ Include a Monitoring approach to track and detect changes and/or improvements within the study area (so change in environmental indicators can be detected over time), and effectiveness of CCMP Actions. This can be described in a separate, brief, higher level document, or chapter or action in the CCMP. The Monitoring approach should identify: a) objectives, b) data the NEP and partners are collecting for which parameters; c) the party/parties responsible for collecting the data; d) frequency of collecting and reporting the monitoring data; e) how the data are shared, reported, and used; f) data gaps; and g) additional funding needed for monitoring activities and filling data gaps. This section

should explain how monitoring has/will change as a result of new/modified actions and priorities, and any new environmental indicators. Monitoring should be tied to the State of the Bay Report which has similar components. **Please note:** A Quality Management Plan or Quality Assurance Project Plan can supplement the Monitoring Plan, but does not in and of itself meet this requirement.

- 2.\_\_\_\_\_ Include a Finance strategy that will establish long-term financial sustainability to implement the CCMP through diverse resources and partners. The strategy can be a separate document or chapter or action in the CCMP. The strategy should discuss: a) priorities for funding; b) current funding and other support such as staff assignments, or in-kind partnering; c) short- and long-term resource needs; and d) proposed actions or strategies to maintain or garner new resources for CCMP implementation and their timeframe.
- 3.\_\_\_\_\_ Include a Habitat Protection/Restoration strategy. The strategy should clearly tie back to habitat or ecosystem issues addressed in the CCMP, including those habitats and species prioritized for protection and or restoration efforts. Strategies can be addressed in a separate document or as an action in the CCMP and should discuss: a) relevant habitat types and key species in the study area; b) goals and measurable objectives to address them; and c) actions that reflect a climate change vulnerability assessment. The Strategy can make it easier for NEPs to plan and report on their habitat protection results under GPRA.
- 4.\_\_\_\_\_ Include a Communication/Outreach Strategy to ensure community involvement and ownership in CCMP implementation that can be represented as a stand-alone document, chapter, or a series of actions in the CCMP that includes: a) guiding principles, or goals and objectives; b) a target audience(s); c) a narrative description of activities, including any tool used such as branding and messaging, behavior change campaigns, or social media; d) implementers for those activities; e) any key deliverables, and f) a budget and timeframe for implementing the activities.

**NOTE:** Make sure to include a public review process that extends beyond the Management Conference members. Responses to comments should be summarized and be made publically available.

### **Content Checklist - Essential Components of an Updated CCMP** (minor changes)

An Updated CCMP can take the form of: 1) an Addendum to the Current CCMP, 2) a Strategic Plan or updated Implementation Plan that serves as a companion piece to the CCMP, or 3) changes to select Action Plans in the current CCMP. An updated CCMP should:

- 1.\_\_\_\_\_ Describe clearly the priorities, goals, measurable objectives (where possible), and Action Plans. Changes made from the previous CCMP should be described in the document. This could include a summary table listing the prior CCMP's actions as either: completed, revised, new, ongoing, or those deemed obsolete.

2. \_\_\_\_ Clarify whether Action Plans are replacements for or enhancements of former/previous Action Plans. Clearly articulate how CCMP and Actions relate to the previous CCMP. (This enables the reader to understand: what changed and why, which actions are new, what was completed, and why actions were not implemented, etc.). The discussion of changes may be contained in the Introduction or an Appendix that might include a comparative table of original and revised actions.
3. \_\_\_\_ Be clear, understandable, and consistent with and linked to CWA § 320 (See 4<sup>th</sup> bullet under *Purpose of Conference*). Action plans should:
  - a) describe the activity/what is proposed;
  - b) articulate where the action will take place or location and/or resource (s) it will affect;
  - c) identify the entities responsible for implementing the action if known, including likely lead parties if known, along with any implementing partners;
  - d) include a timeframe, and where appropriate, key milestones for completion;
  - e) provide the potential cost of the action (can be a range) and potential sources of funding; and
  - f) address performance measures (quantitative/environmental results measures where possible).Those CCMP Actions eligible for CWA §320 funding (and as stated in your EPA Assistance Agreement) should be fleshed out and contained in the NEP Workplan submitted to EPA. CCMP Actions not funded by Section 320 should be clearly identified along with the potential funding source.
4. \_\_\_\_ Describe any other changes to your existing CCMP and identify those changes. This may be done in an Appendix.
5. \_\_\_\_ Depending on the extent and magnitude of the changes, stakeholder involvement could simply involve an internal Management Conference member discussion. If the NEP decides to send the Updated CCMP out more broadly for public comment, response to comments should be summarized and be made available.

## **Process for CCMP Revisions and Updates**

Regional and Headquarters Coordinators will collaboratively review updated and revised CCMPs so that EPA can respond with one voice to the proposed changes. A key element of this cooperation is early communication between Coordinators as the process unfolds. The Regional Coordinator will take the lead in identifying potential issues in a timely manner and securing the endorsement of Regional management in providing the final CCMP for Headquarters review. The checklist is a means to ensure common review and comment criteria. Note that delivery and review of CCMP documents will be through email or other digital means.

- Regional Coordinator shares early draft versions of the CCMP and associated documents with the HQ Coordinator. Coordinators confer and discuss initial feedback on documents. Regional Coordinator shares feedback with NEP Director and may invite the Headquarters Coordinator to participate in discussions.
- Regional Coordinator sends final draft CCMP and associated documents to HQ Coordinator for comment. Region works with HQ to develop and provide integrated EPA comments to the NEP Director.
- The NEP addresses EPA comments. If any issues remain, the Regional Coordinator will work with the NEP Director, Management Conference and Regional Managers to resolve as necessary. The Regional Coordinator may invite the HQ Coordinator in these discussions, as necessary.
- Regional Coordinator shares the revised final draft CCMP and associated documents with the HQ Coordinator to ensure that the documents reflect and address: 1) elements identified in the NEP Funding Guidance, 2) CCMP Checklist components, and 3) HQ comments, upon which review, the HQ and Regional Coordinators jointly agree that the draft CCMP is ready for submission as final.
- HQ Coordinator confirms with the appropriate HQ Manager\* that the document addresses all comments and requirements, and will be submitted as final by the Regional Manager.
- The Regional Coordinator formally requests the Regional Manager to send a concurrence email to the appropriate HQ Manager\* certifying that the final CCMP submission meets the CCMP Guidelines with a copy to the HQ and Regional Coordinators.
- The appropriate HQ Manager\* acknowledges the Regional Manager's certification that the CCMP meets the Guidelines. The CCMP, any associated documents, and the HQ email acknowledgement (with copy to the HQ and Regional Coordinators), serves as the final and official record of the CCMP Revision or Update."

\*Division Director for CCMP Revisions and Branch Chief for CCMP Updates