

## NEMO to show officials how local decisions affect regional resources

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Lara Lutz | December 01, 2005

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A new network designed to help local officials with natural resource planning will get a test flight in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, thanks to a grant from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association Chesapeake Bay Office.

NOAA awarded the Center for Watershed Protection a grant of \$99,500 to launch a regional component of the federal program, NEMO—Nonpoint Education for Municipal Officials.

“NEMO sets up an opportunity to do something we must do, and haven’t done successfully yet: relate land use decisions to the things people really identify with,” said Peyton Robertson, deputy director at the NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office.

The pilot stage of the Chesapeake NEMO will focus on fast-growing communities in the Bay’s coastal regions.

NEMO was developed in 1991 by the University of Connecticut and has since spread to 30 states. The original goal was to help three Connecticut coastal towns address problems with nonpoint source pollution and contribute to improved water quality in Long Island Sound.

The hallmark of the program is its focus on local officials and their key support staff who make land use decisions in local settings.

“The goal of NEMO is to help municipal officials understand the natural resources they have and encourage them to consider those resources in their ongoing planning,” Robertson said.

NEMO also emphasizes education rather than technical tools, which is a niche that Robertson said has yet to be filled in the Bay watershed.

“We have excellent technical resources for practitioners, we’ve had watershed dialogues with stakeholders, but we’ve never focused on education specifically targeted at local elected officials. It’s an area that hasn’t been fully addressed,” he said.

The NEMO network will draw on many partnerships with nonprofit organizations and government agencies to offer a slate of workshops on the issues that most concern local officials. NEMO has demonstrated in other areas of the country that local officials respond with interest when regional resources are made accessible in a way that is both organized and responsive to their immediate needs.

“Tributary strategies, TMDLs (total maximum daily loads) and load reduction allocations are just not in the vernacular of local elected officials. Strip shopping malls, affordable housing, stormwater permitting—those are the things these people are held accountable for day in, day out,” Robertson said.

He said that the Chesapeake NEMO can be highly responsive to local needs because of the many organizations and agencies poised to provide a variety of specific services, backed by sophisticated technology.

The Center for Watershed Protection will create the network and match service providers with interested local governments.

In the process, NEMO partners hope to demonstrate that better planning delivers a variety of benefits, such as less traffic, greater safety, attractive neighborhoods—and better protection for the natural resources that sustain them.



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Lara Lutz is the Bay Journal managing editor and writer who specializes in the environment, heritage, and outdoors enjoyment of the Chesapeake region. [Send Lara an e-mail](#).

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