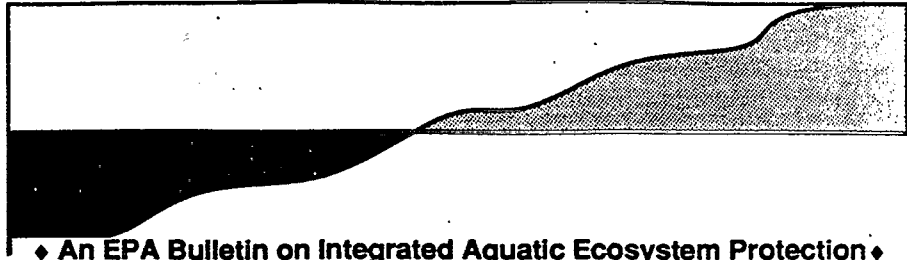


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WATERSHED EVENTS



◆ An EPA Bulletin on Integrated Aquatic Ecosystem Protection ◆

■ EPA GUIDANCE PROMOTES THE WATERSHED PROTECTION APPROACH

EPA's 1992 Agency Operating Guidance (AOG), issued in April 1991, promises significant activity within watersheds chosen for attention by EPA Regions. The AOG states:

In FY92, (EPA) will focus actual protection and restoration activities in specific watersheds that were identified in 1991. The criteria for evaluating and selecting watersheds will include: human health and ecological risk; possibility of additional environmental

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Watershed Events is intended to update interested parties on the development and use of watershed protection approaches for improving the environmental quality of aquatic eco-systems.

Watershed protection approaches are integrated and holistic. That is, they consider the primary threats to human and ecosystem health within the watershed, involve those people most concerned or able to take actions to solve those problems, and then take corrective actions in a comprehensive manner.

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■ EPA AND OTHER WATERSHED PROTECTION PARTNERS DISCUSS NEEDS AND CONCERNS

In mid-February, Bob Wayland, Director of the Office of Wetlands, Oceans and Watersheds, along with Dave Davis, Deputy Director, and Louise Wise, Director of Policy and Communications staff met with several representatives of state and local government associations to discuss EPA's work to support watershed protection efforts around the country. Here are some of the questions raised along with OWOW's response.

What is the relationship of EPA watershed protection projects to multi-jurisdictional, multipurpose agencies, e.g. regional councils, across the country?

A key element of the watershed protection approach as envisioned by EPA is stakeholder involvement. We define stakeholders broadly as those people and organizations with an interest in the watershed and some capacity to take action. The complement of "stakeholders" involved may vary from watershed to watershed, but is likely to include representatives of the regulated community, local, state, regional, and federal governments, public and private institutions, and environ-

mental and other special interest groups. Particularly in watersheds that cross state boundaries, we would hope that regional authorities would be involved in watershed protection projects.

What do we really mean by "integrated, holistic approach?" Are we focusing on results, or, rather, concentrating on how we deliver program management?

The primary thrust of EPA's watershed protection approach is to align existing water quality management programs, for which we have major responsibilities, so that they support integrated watershed-based planning, implementation, and monitoring to complement state, local, and citizen efforts, and take advantage of the strengths of each participating entity. At the same time, our efforts to date have shown that problems and opportunities that may have been obscured by our focus on particular pollutants or pollution sources become obvious when we begin by asking, "What is affecting this watershed? Can the resource and stressors be managed differently?" More simply put, the approach attempts to honor the interconnectedness of aquatic systems by managing human impact on those systems in an integrated, holistic fashion.

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■ CLARION CALL FOR WATERSHED PROTECTION FROM NATIONAL LEADERS

Water Quality 2000, a consortium of more than 80 public, private, and nonprofit organizations dedicated to improving our nation's water quality programs, found that narrowly focused policies have impeded our progress. Recent Water Quality 2000 reports challenge us to adopt a watershed approach broadly, stating that it "provides the framework to evaluate a natural resource problem using a natural systems approach. It is well suited to track holistic cause-and-effect water quality relationships since it can link upstream uses with downstream effects. Without understanding these relationships, it is difficult to assess current or potential conditions or to remediate cumulative environmental degradation."

In addition, at the winter meeting of the National Governors' Association, the nation's governors adopted a new policy for a systematic approach to water resource management. They state:

Historically this nation has approached water resources as isolated and categorical, with programs designed specifically for certain waters depending upon where they are found. Now we know that our water resources are part of an interrelated hydrologic and environmental system that demands systematic management. The Governors believe the future demands a new model for managing water resources, based on well-defined geographic units such as basins or watersheds, that recognizes all the interconnections within the watershed that define the hydrologic cycle in that area, including surface and

groundwaters as well as wetlands. The management of any watershed should reflect all of the things that make it unique, including specific precipitation patterns, topography, soil and geological characteristics, and land use...

There are few, if any, significant scientific barriers to the transition from our current collection of categorical programs to this kind of comprehensive, systems-based approach to water resource management. However, the Governors recognize that there are significant institutional obstacles, and that the new model needs to be developed in an evolutionary fashion. It will require unprecedented cooperation among many state and local entities, among state and federal agencies, and between states in the case of watersheds crossing state lines.

■ INTERNATIONAL INTEREST IN WATERSHED PROTECTION

Plans for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), to be held this June in Brazil, are taking shape. At this conference, representatives from around the world will consider "Agenda 21," perhaps best described as a worldwide strategic plan for environmental protection. Recent drafts of Agenda 21 recognize water as both a natural resource and economic good and call for "dynamic, interactive, iterative, and multisectoral approaches" to water resource management.

In January 1992, experts from 113 countries attended the International Conference on Water and the Environment in Dublin, Ireland. Lajuana Wilcher, Assistant Administrator for Water at EPA, represented

the United States and served as rapporteur for the subgroup considering protection of water resources, water quality and aquatic ecosystems. The group concluded that, due to their interconnected nature, fresh water systems require management approaches that are "holistic rather than piece-meal, systematically based rather than micro-managed, and based on a balanced consideration of the total needs of people and the environment." The group's recommendations will be put forward at the UNCED meeting in June.

■ TMDL—RESOURCES FOR WATERSHED PLANNING

The Watershed Branch, Office of Wetlands, Oceans and Watersheds, has established a "TMDL SWAT team" to provide expert advice on Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) analyses in watersheds. Limited financial support also is available for TMDL development.

Section 303(d) of the Clean Water Act establishes the TMDL process to provide for more stringent water-quality based controls when technology-based controls are inadequate to meet State water quality standards. In April 1991, EPA issued Guidance for Water Quality-based Decisions: The TMDL Process. The guidance suggests mechanisms for integrating the management of point and nonpoint pollution, and considering multiple sources, habitat, and other watershed issues. Workshops on the TMDL process, with State and Regional water quality managers in attendance, were recently completed in all ten EPA regions. For more information contact the Regional TMDL coordinator, Bruce Newton (202 260-7074) or Don Brady (202-260-5368).

■ EPA HEADQUARTERS NEWS

Watershed Protection Headquarters Support Team

A team with representatives from all four EPA Office of Water offices has been convened to serve the Regions, states, local, and nongovernmental entities pursuing watershed protection approaches. Four subgroups will tackle different aspects of the work ahead. The subgroups are:

Operational Program Integration Subgroup—to eliminate barriers and identify actions to be taken to promote and support watershed programs within EPA, State, and interstate agencies. For more information, contact Jim Horne (202 260-5802)

Partnership Development and Outreach Subgroup—to open, improve, and maintain communication with potential stakeholders, including other Federal agencies, State and local governments, and nongovernmental organizations. For more information, contact Glenn Eugster (202 260-6045) or Janet Pawlukiewicz (202 260-9194)

Regional Implementation Subgroup—To maintain communication with EPA Regions, to support development of Regional frameworks and projects; to analyze individual projects in terms of what actions HQ needs to take to support projects. For more information contact John Pai (202 260-8076)

Technical Support Subgroup—to develop tools and provide training and support on existing tools to Regions, States, and other interested organizations. For more information contact Elizabeth Jester (202 260-7074) or Bruce Newton (202 260-7074)

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Is EPA advocating a "bottom up" or "top down" approach to watershed protection?

We're pursuing both. For example, the National Estuary Program (NEP) works to protect estuaries of national significance. Although dependent on grass roots support, leading to a Governor's nomination of an estuary, an official designation by the EPA administrator is required to convene a NEP management conference. On the other hand, many of the EPA Regional offices have become more and more involved with grass roots efforts that aim to protect small, local watersheds. In different watershed projects, EPA's role may vary considerably from convenor or coordinator to approver, promoter, supporter, or implementor. Put another way, in some cases EPA may be a very active participant—in others EPA may have no direct role at all.

Watersheds can vary in size from a small, local creek and environs to a major portion of the "lower forty-eight" (the Mississippi River watershed). On what scale is EPA promoting this approach?

Once again, we are interested in variety—large and small watersheds and everything in between. Currently, EPA coordinates several programs to protect huge water bodies—the Chesapeake Bay Program, the Great Lakes program and the Gulf of Mexico program. At the same time, the Puget Sound NEP has targeted six sub-watershed projects within its scope, each of which is dealing with specific problems most relevant to those parts of the larger system. Clearly in some cases, an individual small creek, lake, or wetland may be the focus—the critical criterion is not size but the

ability to coalesce interest and resources around a particular aquatic system.

Many areas have initiated river corridor management planning processes under a variety of names. How does the Watershed Protection Approach relate to these activities?

River corridor management plans are an excellent example of the approach that EPA is promoting. These plans combine all the key elements of the watershed approach—a landscape focus at the watershed level, an integrated "holistic" approach to natural resources and water quality management, and strong stakeholder involvement.

Organizations Met with to Discuss the Watershed Protection Approach

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- Association of State and Interstate Water Pollution Control Administrators
- Association of Metropolitan Sewerage Agencies
- Association of State Floodplain Managers
- Association of State Wetland Managers
- Coastal States Organization
- International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
- Interstate Council on Water Policy
- National Association of Attorneys General
- National Association of Regional Councils
- National Association of State Conservation Agencies
- National Association of State Departments of Agriculture
- National Association of State Foresters
- National Association of Towns and Townships
- National Conference of State Legislatures
- National Governor's Association

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degradation; likelihood of achieving demonstrable environmental results; implementability; extent of alliances with other Federal agencies and States to coordinate resources and actions; value of the watershed to the public; resource needs; and use of existing or development of new assessment information...Programs in these targeted areas will emphasize integrating traditional control technologies such as water quality standards, permits, and enforcement actions with a broader use of nonpoint source control and prevention programs, the technology information network, education, and public outreach. We will also encourage States to consider geographically targeted high priority watersheds in their SRF goals and objectives. Our approach will increasingly be tailored for individual watersheds to ensure that maximum risk reductions and critical habitat protection occurs.

This commitment to promote integrated activity within targeted watersheds is already reflected in several of the more program-specific guidance documents issued recently.

NPDES Permit Issuance

Optimally, the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) program has a permit in effect on the date the prior permit expires. In cases where States are targeting watersheds for comprehensive protection efforts, EPA is now offering permit reissuance flexibility. The Agency Operating Guidance allows States that consider adopting a five-year

strategy to reissue no less than 20% of all permits within the State (unless the State has a year in which there are less than 20% of all permits expired or expiring). This allows States, and EPA Regions, to align NPDES permits within targeted watersheds on a five-year cycle.

Wetlands Program FY92 Grants

Watershed protection projects will receive preferential treatment in funding decisions for the FY92 State Wetlands Grants Program. The guidance specifies that these projects "... should have a geographic or ecosystem focus, should have a substantial wetland component, should involve various levels of government and the private sector...(and) should consider all possible environmental protection techniques or approaches to identify and address the problems." The guidance further suggests that, "A watershed protection plan or strategy can provide a blueprint for effectively managing wetlands resources in a geographic area" and requires that, "These projects should include a definitive implementation strategy or action plan which outlines a specific implementation schedule, assigns lead agency or office responsibility, assigns responsibility for carrying out tasks, and criteria for measuring success."

Award and Management of Nonpoint Source Program Implementation Grants

Watershed projects that are designed to directly protect or restore specific surface or ground waters are seen as essential to the success of the national nonpoint source program. This guidance emphasizes that comprehensive water-

shed projects should be given a central role in State program implementation efforts. It also stipulates that funded watershed protection activities should form part of a comprehensive approach designed to control all of the major nonpoint sources affecting water quality throughout the watersheds or ground water areas being protected.

Near Coastal Waters Program(NCW)

"The NCW program is intended to implement the Watershed Protection Approach in coastal watersheds." This statement from the recent near coastal waters guidance emphasizes the close relationship between EPA's ongoing coastal programs and watershed protection. The NCW program views the watershed approach as a simple, yet powerful framework for integrating Agency programs, focusing management attention, and allocating resources. Within the framework of watershed protection, the goals of the Near Coastal Waters Program are to direct and focus EPA's coastal activities within priority geographic areas, promote linkages among programs, encourage a comprehensive approach to problem assessment and management, and maximize environmental results. These goals are achieved chiefly through Regional NCW Strategies and are carried out through activities described in annual work plans.

For more information on the Watershed Protection Approach, contact:

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