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River Voices

BUILDING STATE-LOCAL WATERSHED PARTNERSHIPS

Across the country, grass-roots conservationists, state and federal agency resource management staff, and various other interests are forming watershed-based partnerships — with each other — to address a host of important water resource issues. In many cases, these watershed partnerships are embracing collaborative approaches for tackling tough, long-standing, river-related problems — everything from reducing nonpoint source pollution throughout a watershed to enhancing in-stream habitat. The partnerships are prompted by federal and state environmental laws, new agency administrative directives, and strong local interest in leading sustainable efforts that work. Many partners find that working together can make a difference for their rivers and communities and can lay the groundwork for constructively addressing future resource management issues.

UNDERSTANDING WATERSHED PARTNERSHIPS

"Partnership" is a fuzzy term. When we talk about watershed partnerships, we are referring to groups that seek to include six key elements.[1]

1. They adopt watersheds and sub-watersheds as fundamental analytical and management units.
2. They address a broad scope of issues, exhibit a systems orientation (e.g., river system rather than river reach), and incorporate multiple approaches for environmental protection and management.
3. They use decision processes that are informed by a combination of biophysical science, social and economic information, and local knowledge.
4. They include interactions among multiple agencies and multiple levels of government (possibly local, county, state, and federal). Interactions can take the form of information exchange, resource sharing, and/or coordination and shared decision-making.
5. They emphasize influential participation of multiple local and non-governmental interests.
6. They demonstrate a collaborative problem-solving planning and management orientation.

The six elements in the sidebar clarify what is meant by "watershed partnerships." While that may seem like an idealized framework, there are already hundreds (perhaps thousands) of groups that meet all or most of those criteria. Watershed partnerships may be formal teams or councils, groups of nonprofit associations working

BY KENNETH D. GENSKOW AND DOUGLAS S. KENNEY

CONT. ON PAGE 4

River Voices

CONTENTS

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River Network is a national organization whose mission is to help people understand, protect and restore rivers and their watersheds.

FROM THE PRESIDENT

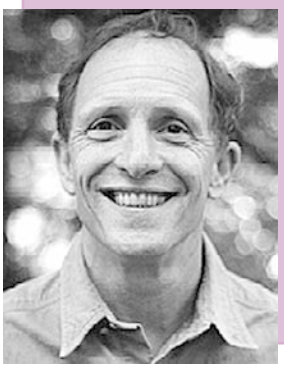


Photo: Linda Kliewer

The Politics of Cooperation

The United States was founded as the result of a heated discussion about the proper provenance and location of government authority. That discussion went beyond words into more percussive forms of debate. For the most part, we have gotten beyond the use of bombs and bullets to emphasize our positions, but the discussion is still going on, and it is still heated.

Some believe that government should get out of the way of market forces, others believe it should get out of the way of bottom-up community organizers. In fact, devolution of authority is now well established, with states taking on some functions that were formally federal, while sloughing off some of their responsibilities to more local jurisdictions.

But, despite predictions from left and right, government is not going to wither away. There are more of us living in this country every day, interacting in more complex ways than ever before.

As a society we are still developing concepts and practices to deal with the interweaving of private and public interests. Progress may come without government leadership through negotiation, protest, or good example, but in the end, it is only government that represents all interests; it is only government, which has the duty to reconcile all perspectives, and to codify and enforce our social agreements.

Of course, government agencies, like all human institutions, tend to calcify, to develop their own agendas, and sometimes to admit corruption. Most of us, as citizens, have experienced government agents who behave with infuriating arrogance. It is easy, following such an experience, to develop long-term enmity.

While there are certain kinds of satisfaction in having enemies — and Mark Twain warned us to never trust a person without any — the satisfactions of cooperation are deeper and more rewarding. This *River Voices* prompts us to think of governance as an evolving, inclusive process, and to remember that it is not only the government that is engaged in governance. We are all involved — and if we are not, sooner or later we will regret it.

As one of the partners in an ongoing dialogue about how we balance our interests, government can make some unique contributions: it can express the broad perspective at the community, state, and national levels. Government is not very good at taking the watershed perspective yet, but led by some visionary people at the Environmental Protection Agency, it is trying. Government cannot always reach the right decisions, but government can push the rest of us to go back to the discussion table over and over, until we do finally get it right.

One element of devolution has been the emergence of the private voluntary sector as a more important, influential player. Non-profit groups are now successfully fulfilling many functions which once were thought of as government functions. That trend is likely to continue in the foreseeable future, but those of us in the non-profit sector would be foolish to believe that we can solve problems on our own. To succeed, we need to work with communities, with the business sector, with schools and churches. It is probably not possible to build and maintain these broad partnerships without government participation. These articles — and the materials referenced in this issue — suggest how to go about it.

Kenneth Ralcgol

CONT. FROM PAGE 1

closely with partner agencies and informal groups, but they all include a variety of interests that focus together on a watershed. Most reflect a common purpose: " to protect, conserve, manage, and/or restore the land and water resources of ____ through participation/ cooperation of all stakeholders (or through public-private partnerships)…to meet the economic, natural environmental, and cultural needs for this and succeeding generations."[2]

Watershed partnerships provide citizens and governments the opportunity to pool their financial and technical resources, gather scientific and social data, chart a course for watershed conservation and restoration, and implement protection and restoration actions. As with any partnership, partners contribute to the effort in different ways. Much of the energy, ideas, and action might originate with local participants. State and federal agencies may support partnership-related financial, technical, regulatory/ permitting, and possibly administration and coordination needs.

Making Connections

One of the primary benefits of watershed partnerships is to improve coordination and promote integration among the various interests involved in resources management. The nature of this challenge varies from case to case, but often involves building bridges between:

- a variety of resource management agencies;
- different levels of government (federal, state, local, and occasionally tribal);
- the public and private sectors;
- different water-using sectors (e.g., between agriculture and environmental protection interests); and,
- technical experts and laypeople.

State governments can be valuable, and often essential, allies in the pursuit of improved coordination and more holistic resource management. More so than federal agencies, states can be expected to understand how regulatory and administrative programs interact with the unique socioeconomic and cultural context of each local watershed, and can often be convinced to strategically allocate technical and financial resources to the cause of watershed management. In many cases, this is done by utilizing and supporting watershed partnerships. Some states have taken steps to encourage watershed partnerships by re-aligning staff and programs, providing funding for existing partnerships, promoting formation of new partnerships, and supporting partnership events and actions.

State Initiatives for Partnership Building: Massachusetts and Oregon

Most states, in one form or another, recognize the potential role of watershed partnerships in addressing resource management concerns. However, state programs for watershed management vary widely in structure and philosophy. Two of the most elaborate (and thus atypical) programs for promoting and assisting watershed partnerships are found in Massachusetts and Oregon.

In Massachusetts, a series of events in the early 1990s led to a structure and process of watershed management known as the Massachusetts Watershed Initiative. In each of the state's 27 watersheds, a "watershed team" has been established, comprised of members from the relevant state agencies, and to a lesser extent, federal and local/ municipal agencies, citizen-based watershed associations, business interests, and other non-governmental organizations. Each team is led by a state-funded and locally based "team leader," responsible for promoting interagency coordination and for increasing the capacity of the several hundred watershed partnerships already active in the state — some of which have been active for many decades.

The roots of the Oregon program can be traced to 1987, when the state legislature established the Governor's Watershed Enhancement Board (GWEB) to "restore, maintain and enhance" the integrity of the state's riparian zones and associated upland areas. Now an independent (and renamed) state agency, the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) features a network of over 150 watershed councils "officially recognized" by local governments. Recognized councils can receive OWEB funding for both administrative and project purposes. These funds — now about $8 million annually — come from a variety of sources, including legislative appropriations and state lottery revenues.

Emerging watershed management programs in Idaho, Wisconsin, and many other states, also promise improved regional integration and enhanced stakeholder involvement. In most cases, innovations at the state level are aimed at improving interagency coordination at physically-relevant scales (such as watersheds), or are concerned with better encouraging and targeting the local enthusiasm of voluntary watershed partnerships. These two points of emphasis are aptly illustrated by the Massachusetts and Oregon programs, respectively, and suggest that reasonable state roles in watershed protection include acting as an "intergovernmental lubricant" and as a "watershed partnership catalyst."

Local Initiatives

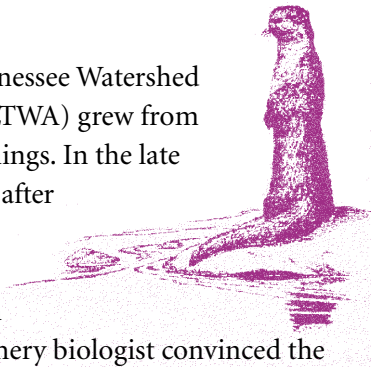
While states may provide the lubricant, local citizens often play key roles in assembling the parts and keeping the process moving for their rivers and watersheds. A typical scenario might begin with a local citizen (or group) concerned about a perceived threat to their highly valued river. That citizen (group) might contact others, and then either contact a local official, university faculty or extension agent, or resource management agency staff at the local-field, regional or central level. Someone, probably local, will convene an initial meeting to discuss the issues, and a new partnership may begin to incubate.

MORE. . .

CONT. FROM PAGE 5

That is exactly what happened in the Tomorrow/Waupaca River watershed in east-central Wisconsin. A riparian property owner became interested in coordinating restoration efforts with others along the river after working with a local chapter of Trout Unlimited to improve in-stream habitat at her farm on the Tomorrow River. To her dismay, she discovered that no single group or agency coordinated management actions for the river, so she took it upon herself to organize and host a coordination meeting at her farm. Seventy-five people showed up for the meeting, including county and state agency staff, university researchers, recreational river users, and other citizens interested in the river. By the end of that afternoon in 1991, the assembled participants realized the full scope of the issues and of their shared interests in the river, and the citizen-led Tomorrow/Waupaca Watershed Association grew roots.

TWWA had a broad base of agency and university advisors, and after hosting a series of projects and events, was instrumental in the watershed's selection as part of the state priority watershed program. That program brought substantial state funding and technical support. TWWA greatly influenced the project's planning efforts and through the planning process, evolved into an expanded partnership involving broad stakeholder oversight of local and state agency education and management actions.



The Little Tennessee Watershed Association (LTWA) grew from similar beginnings. In the late 1980s, shortly after moving to the mountains of western North Carolina, a fishery biologist convinced the Tennessee Valley Authority to provide him a grant to perform biological monitoring on the Upper Little Tennessee River. He soon realized a number of potential threats to the river and the need to improve coordination among resource managers and river interests. He also found a number of other very enthusiastic community members and locally-based agency field staff. Together they raised contributions from nearly 30 organizations (including churches, local businesses, recreation interests, resource management agencies, and environmental groups) to organize and convene the "Little Tennessee River Watershed Conference" in Franklin, North Carolina in 1993. The conference generated sufficient additional enthusiasm to provoke a core group of conference participants to continue meeting. Within a year, that group had formed a citizen-based watershed organization structured to work in close partnership with an advisory board of local, state, and federal agency staff. LTWA now coordinates management actions in the watershed, promotes river awareness, works closely with watershed landowners and agencies, and receives funding from numerous public and private sources. The conference and new association also helped spark development of a land trust for the watershed, and both groups collaborated

with a number of other local partners to win a nearly $4 million grant from the state for various riparian and watershed conservation initiatives.

In both of these examples, someone assumed local leadership, used the watershed as a basis for organization, and reached out to others — private and public — to address their issues jointly. Together they reassessed their problems, pooled resources, captured additional grant funding for their efforts, and took action on the ground. State agencies provided critical support in both.

Facing Hard Realities

Partnerships face a variety of practical challenges, and as the role of states in promoting and financially supporting watershed partnerships increases, a variety of difficult issues arise regarding the vitality, democracy, and effectiveness of these efforts.

To question the democracy of a watershed partnership seems particularly odd to many people, given that the purpose of these efforts is to more aggressively involve local citizens in directing and assisting resource managers. However, many skeptics — mostly environmentalists and political scientists — have raised valid concerns regarding the adequacy, or inadequacy, of the interests represented in some watershed partnerships. In particular, many parties are fearful that local groups can be dominated by commodity interests, and that the needs of the environment and other public goods may not be adequately represented. Only 53 percent (63 of 118) of western watershed partnerships recently surveyed by the Natural Resources Law Center, for example, claimed to have a participant from an "environmental organization." Additionally, in watersheds containing a high concentration of federal public lands or involving the implementation of federal environmental statutes, many skeptics question the merits of decision-making forums that feature local, rather than national, stakeholder groups.

An even more fundamental criticism of watershed partnerships is that they may not work. To appreciate the challenge of measuring success, it is necessary to make the distinction between achieving a long-range environmental goal, such as water quality

PRACTICAL CHALLENGES

Practically, developing and sustaining partnerships involves a lot of work and a number of organizational challenges. In many cases, this includes a period of building trust and resolving disputes over facts, values, and priorities. While many partnerships survive this process and celebrate accomplishments, others bog-down in frustration and inaction. Coordination, information-sharing, and joint decision-making consume time and resources. Groups may have a relatively easy time getting funds for projects, but funds that support organizational needs and coordination are more difficult to find. To cover those costs, groups may pursue grants that shift them off-purpose. While agency field staff may help with some of these issues, individual staff simply don't have the capacity to serve that role in multiple settings. Over time, some partnerships also face challenges sustaining volunteer participation and local leadership.

MORE. . .

CONT. FROM PAGE 7

improvements, and short-term goals and actions that may be defined in terms of holding meetings or drafting plans. While most watershed partnerships can point to one or more "products" or accomplishments, relatively few can convincingly demonstrate that they have truly solved the resource management problems of primary concern.

These are sensitive issues to many proponents of watershed partnerships. Challenges to the democracy and fairness of such efforts are countered by the observation that most partnerships actively encourage diverse participation, and that these efforts are not empowered to impose penalties or other burdens on non-participating parties. Additionally, it is argued that these "missing" stakeholders — including national environmental interests — have many opportunities to participate in other forums of resources management decision-making. Concerns about the effectiveness of these groups generally yield a more tempered and thoughtful response, as it is admittedly difficult to document progress toward long-term goals, and to definitively attribute that progress to the work of watershed partnerships. Nonetheless, proponents observe that many of the older partnerships can point to at least some tangible successes, and suggest that a certain amount of patience and "good faith" is warranted for the youngest efforts. It is also suggested that the goals of many watershed partnerships are broad and continuous, and that actions such as public education and involvement yield many long-term benefits that defy precise measurement or quantification.

These issues are important for several reasons, especially as governmental support for, and reliance on, watershed partnerships increases. The democracy and fairness issues, for example, are probably not of great concern for partnerships that do not receive governmental funding or are not formally "recognized" in some way in official planning and management schemes. Similarly, if the only resources ventured in watershed partnerships were the time of the volunteers, then questions of effectiveness need not be a public concern. But the reality is that public money is fueling the explosive growth in watershed partnerships, and that many federal and state agencies are looking to watershed partnerships as a core element of new management regimes. For this public money to continue, partnerships will eventually need to find ways to demonstrate their accomplishments.

LOOKING FOR MORE INFORMATION ON BUILDING WATERSHED PARTNERSHIPS?

For a Free Guide, Visit Know Your Watershed at:

www.ctic.purdue.edu/KYW/Brochures/BuildingLocal.html

Final Points

Times are good for watershed partnerships. Federal and state resource management agencies are increasing their commitments, collaborative approaches are gaining acceptance among local interests across the country, and resources available to partnership efforts are growing. These partnerships show great promise. Nonetheless, conservationists and state agency personnel would be wise to pay careful attention to concerns raised by skeptics, and should be cautious of fueling unrealistic expectations as they work to develop and sustain watershed partnerships.

In most locales, state agencies are already key players in watershed partnerships, and this level of state involvement and encouragement is expected to grow. Conservationists can help shape this process

in many ways, ranging from participating in ongoing efforts to design state and national programs for watershed protection (e.g,. the Clean Water Action Plan), to initiating new partnerships at the ground level. As shown by the TWWA and LTWA cases, concerned citizens can play a key role in the initial bridge-building activities associated with forming partnerships. University faculty and cooperative extension programs can also be a powerful force for innovation, as can federal and state agencies. Because watershed partnerships, at least in theory, promise benefits for all participants, it is often relatively simple to generate initial interest in forming new arrangements for addressing resource management concerns. Finding resources (time and money) and creating improved coordination networks are much more formidable challenges. Overcoming these challenges is significantly easier when states make watershed protection a priority. THE END

Ken Genskow is involved with watershed education and evaluation efforts at the University of Wisconsin-Cooperative Extension. He has researched watershed management across the United States and is completing doctoral work in environmental planning at UW-Madison. Doug Kenney is a senior research associate at the Natural Resources Law Center, University of Colorado School of Law (www.colorado.edu/Law/NRLC/). He has written extensively on watershed management issues in the western United States.

[1] This list grew out of a July 2000 watershed workshop in Madison, Wisconsin, sponsored by the Henry P. Kendall Foundation and Trout Unlimited.
[2] From Born, Stephen M. and Kenneth D. Genskow. "Exploring the Watershed Approach: Critical Dimensions of State-Local Partnerships" Published by River Network. 1999. (page 36)

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

If you can't judge a book by its cover, you certainly can't judge a watershed group by its name. What one person may refer to as a watershed partnership, another may call a watershed council…or cooperative forum…or any combination from an extensive list. And since there is no governing authority regulating the naming of groups, merely having "partnership" in the name does not make it an inclusive collaborative effort. If you truly wish to understand the organization, scope and purpose of a specific group, you'll need to look beyond their name. Below is just a sampling of different, interchangeable words used to describe resource conservation organizations.

NAME THAT COOPERATIVE RESOURCE GROUP • PROVIDED BY SARI SOMMARSTROM
(Mix and match within and between the columns)

LOCATION	DESCRIPTOR	ADJECTIVE	TYPE
XXXXX	Watershed	Advisory	Group
XXXX	Bioregional	CRMP	Task Force
XXXXXX	Restoration	Management	Council
XXX	Biodiversity	Planning	Project
XXXX	Ecosystem	Cooperative	Committee
XXXX	Habitat	Conservation	Forum
XXXXX	Multiple Species	Working	Trust
XXX	Landscape	Consensus	Alliance
XXXX	River	Economic	Association
	Resource	Coordinated	Partnership
	Creek	Communities	Coalition
	Fish, Farms & Forests	Sustainable	Friends
	Mountains		Team
	Estuary		Program
	Riparian		Federation
	Natural		Conservancy

How to Get State Support for Your River Group

BY TODD AMBS
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
RIVER ALLIANCE OF WISCONSIN

The old adage says that all politics is local. If that is the case, then certainly all river protection and restoration work is ultimately local. This challenge to effectively advocate for your river or watershed is a task well known to the thousands of local river and watershed organizations across the country. Largely volunteer based, under-funded and over-worked, these groups toil against great odds to provide a voice for their local river or watershed. This article offers some tips about how to get a tool funded by the state to help you to protect the stream near you.

Last year the River Alliance of Wisconsin led a successful effort to get a *Rivers and Streams Protection Grants Program* in the budget for the state of Wisconsin. The program is a landmark piece of legislation because, for the first time, state funds are available as matching grants to fund work to build the capacity of organizations to protect their river or watershed. A total of $300,000 is available each year in matching grants to local groups. In addition, the River Alliance was selected through a competitive process to provide technical and educational assistance to the local river and watershed organizations.

Like any campaign, passing legislation requires planning, timing and organization. The first step to determining if a legislative idea is more than a pipe dream is to know the process and the players. The best idea in the world will go nowhere if the timing is wrong or one key legislator doesn't like it.

Know the Process

In our case, we knew that the state budget process was a convoluted and confusing maze that begins with the agency budgets that are submitted to the Governor. We worked to encourage the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to include the Rivers and Streams Grants Program in their budget submission. The idea was not new (a smaller version had made it all the way to the Governor's desk in the previous budget only to be vetoed) and offered an inexpensive way for the agency to show a commitment to rivers. The DNR submitted a request for $1.2 million dollars for the two-year budget. Then the real work began.

We assembled a legislative team from our organization's board and began to map out a strategy based on the budget process. We knew the budget submission from the DNR went to the Governor and the next hurdle would be to keep the proposal in the Governor's budget to the legislature. This preliminary stamp of approval from the Governor was critical to the success of the measure.

Point to a Model Program

Legislators like to invest in proven programs, especially ones that already exist in-state. We capitalized on this bias by patterning the River Grants Program after two model programs here in Wisconsin and a couple of examples from other states. In 1997, the state budget included funding to create *Gathering Waters*, a statewide land trust that works to aid local land trusts across Wisconsin. In addition, the state also provides funds to local lake associations for work to protect the still waters of Badger land. Both of these programs are well-liked by legislators and exemplify the public/private partnership model that is currently in favor.

We also pointed to state-supported programs for local river and watershed groups in Massachusetts, Oregon and West Virginia. We highlighted the West Virginia Program because we have found that here in the Midwest, citing the success of a program on either coast doesn't carry a lot of weight. On the other hand, telling legislators that they are "behind" can spur people to action in a state that prides itself in being ahead of the pack.

Organize Support Early To Build Momentum

Nothing speaks louder to legislators, though, than voices from their districts. As soon as the River Grants idea appeared in the DNR budget, we began to promote it and organize constituencies to support the concept. River Alliance members were notified via our E-mail newsletter, a special mailing went out to all of the local river and watershed groups in the state, and other state organizations were recruited to endorse the concept. We began to assemble a rapid response system to be able to quickly react when the key legislative votes took place. All of this organization was developed months before the key votes. This effort began to build momentum and send a message to lawmakers that this relatively small legislative item was important to a broad range of constituents.

Keep in Close Contact With Key Players

During this entire process we kept in close contact with the secretary of the DNR, the Governor's staff person for environmental issues and with our legislators that would champion the cause through the budget process. We also sent a packet of information to editorial page editors and environmental reporters. The first set of material did not produce a single story, but served to educate the media and laid the groundwork for favorable stories in subsequent months.

Have a Legislative Champion

All of this effort could well have been wasted if we had not found legislators willing to champion our cause. Whatever the legislative process, it is critical to identify key legislators and not only convince them to vote your way but also to take a leadership role in getting the legislation passed. In our case this process was pretty easy. Two State Senators, a Democrat and a Republican, were already sold on the idea of a River Grants program. We met with them early in the process to determine what they could add to the program to make it an initiative for which they could take ownership.

Have The Troops Ready to Rally

Once you get a coalition of groups and individuals supportive of a proposal, it is important to keep the momentum going. We sent periodic action alert updates, circulated favorable news stories as they appeared and told everyone who would listen (and some who wouldn't) that the River Grants program was our number one priority. This was critical to being prepared for the key vote.

Ready, Aim, Fire

Votes on legislative issues, especially budget items, are very unpredictable. It is not unusual to get less than 48 hours notice that a vote is coming. True to form, after weeks of waiting, the vote on the River Grants program was announced late on a Friday for

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CONT. FROM PAGE 11

the following Tuesday. Staff and volunteers had to work through the weekend calling supporters and urging them to send letters and phone calls to the sixteen members of the legislative budget committee that would cast the crucial vote.

Have a Secret Weapon

Often when a key vote is about to occur, you need to have something planned to draw attention to the issue and generate a sense that everyone is behind a proposal. Our secret weapon was one of our board members. Tony Kubek was a shortstop with the New York Yankees and a national sports TV announcer. Born and raised in Wisconsin, he still lives here. Kubek is also an avid paddler. Tony came to the Capitol to make a series of last minute visits to the sixteen legislators that would vote later that day on the River Grants proposal.

Sweet Success

We knew things were looking good when the budget committee meeting started and the chair of the committee introduced Tony as "a celebrity who has come here to speak on behalf of the rivers of our state." By the time the vote was called, one of our co-sponsors introduced the measure saying, "This initiative needs little introduction. It is the one you have been getting inundated about by E-mails, calls and letters."

The final vote was unanimous, 16-0.

Thank Everybody, Then Thank Them Again

One of the most important lessons about legislative campaigns is to give credit to people when the vote is over, win or lose. In our case, we made a point of thanking the budget committee, the Governor, the DNR, key constituent groups, our members and most of all, the two legislators who carried the issue for us. In fact, those legislators were given "Legislator of the Year" awards at our annual dinner.

River Grants - A Program that Works

Today, a year later, the first set of grants has been awarded and well over a dozen local groups are building their capacity, drafting strategic plans, expanding their member base and creating and implementing new river protection programs - all thanks to the River Grants program. In addition, the River Alliance has hired a full time Local Group Assistance Manager who is working fulltime to help groups do even more to protect and improve the rivers and streams of Wisconsin.

THE END

Todd Ambs, executive director of the River Alliance of Wisconsin, has 20 years of experience working for non-profit and governmental agencies. Mr. Ambs has coordinated public policy issues development for two state attorneys general and also was executive director of Rivers Unlimited, the statewide river protection organization in Ohio.

AT A GLANCE

A brief look at what several states are doing to support Collaborative Watershed Efforts….

MASSACHUSETTS

For more information on the **Massachusetts Watershed Initiative**, (highlighted on page 5), visit http://www.magnet.state.ma.us/envir/watersheds.htm.

OREGON

For more information on the **Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board**, (highlighted on page 5), visit http://www.oweb.state.or.us/; or contact OWEB at 775 Summer Street NE #360, Salem, OR 97301-1290; phone: 503/986-0178.

PENNSYLVANIA

"Growing Greener: Environmental Stewardship and Watershed Protection Act" is the largest single investment of state funds in Pennsylvania's history to address critical environmental concerns of the 21st century. Signed into law by Gov. Ridge on December 15, 1999, Growing Greener will, over the next five years, spend $649.9 million — with the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) allocating nearly $240 million in grants for: 1) watershed restoration and protection; 2) abandoned mine reclamation; and 3) abandoned oil and gas well plugging projects. Counties, local governments, authorities, conservation districts, watershed associations and other nonprofit groups involved in watershed restoration and protection may apply.

For more information, visit DEP's website at www.dep.state.pa.us, call toll-free 877/PAGREEN or E-mail GrowingGreener@dep.state.pa.us.

WEST VIRGINIA

The **West Virginia Stream Partners Program** is a cooperative effort of West Virginia's Division of Environmental Protection, Division of Forestry, Division of Natural Resources and the State Soil Conservation Agency.

Through the distribution of seed grants of up to $5,000 the Stream Partners Program has helped establish and support 65 community-based organizations throughout the state since its inception in 1996. These organizations have removed thousands of tons of trash, monitored the water quality of hundreds of streams, improved fish and wildlife habitat, restored streambanks to alleviate flooding, created recreational opportunities, improved flood control, and educated themselves, their neighbors and their children on the importance of healthy streams and rivers.

For more information, contact Jennifer Pauer, 10 McJunkin Road, Nitro, WV 25143; 800/556-8181; E-mail: jpauer@mail.dep.state.wv.us.

WISCONSIN

For learn more about **Wisconsin's River Protection Grant Program** (highlighted on pages 10-12), visit: www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/water/fhp/rivers/index.htm.

THE KENAI WATERSHED FORUM EXPERIENCE: GOING SLOW TO MOVE FAST

BY ROBERT RUFFNER
KENAI WATERSHED FORUM'S PROGRAM COORDINATOR

The work of local collaborative efforts often can appear to progress as slowly as the glaciers responsible for the color of our beloved Kenai River water. However, in our experience, a phrase that rings true time and time again is sometimes one must go slow to go fast. For four years, the Kenai Watershed Forum (KWF), a citizen-based group addressing the watershed's conservation needs, has been slowly helping to change the landscape of river conservation in South-Central Alaska by making an honest effort to include everyone who works, lives or visits our watershed.

The Kenai watershed community contains two towns of roughly 5,000 people each and a significant rural population of 15,000. The Kenai River proper is about 80 miles in length largely accessible by roads. The river is world famous for the number and size of its salmon as well as its excellent sportfishing opportunities. Concerns over habitat loss, tourism, proximity to a large population base (Anchorage, population 300,000, is only a few hours away), roads, land-use and planning are similar to most other watersheds.

In The Beginning

A consensus existed among private and public "stakeholders" that immediate actions were needed to avoid long-term and irreversible damage to the watershed. In 1996, a half-a-dozen, long-time residents committed to protecting the river and holding a diversity of interests — commercial, environmental, property ownership, natural resource-use and governmental — wanted to create a neutral forum in which the average resident might become engaged in conservation. In 1997, the Kenai Watershed Forum incorporated as a private, non-profit community organization.

With generous support from The Nature Conservancy of Alaska, KWF secured two years of financial support enabling them to hire a project coordinator, recruit a diverse 10-member board of directors and hold monthly meetings. These meetings conduct organizational business followed by a 1 to 2 hour public meeting with experts and open dialog from the public on some "hot topic". The forums often draw a crowd of 30 to 50 — sometimes, as many as 100 — and seek to better inform the public and decision-makers.

Facing the Challenges

Prior to the formation of KWF, there were several special interest groups that could be loosely associated with river conservation, but it was not their primary mission. Those same groups also had real or perceived ulterior motives that often alienated large segments of the population. In Alaska, most alienation occurs over the allocation of our abundant salmon. Because these salmon battles are deeply entrenched, KWF's five-year plan made every effort to avoid the issue and focus instead on the common-ground issues that everyone in our community agreed upon.

Today, even after 3 years, KWF struggles to be outspoken advocates for the river and strives to keep attention focused on the health of the entire watershed. The challenge of taking strong positions on controversial, complex issues can lead to the loss of credibility among those that are in the best position to help us make a difference. Thus,

our philosophy is to work to better inform people about all aspects of the existing issues through the press and through open public forums. We must trust that those who learn about the issues will be in a better position to positively influence the policy-makers. KWF is very selective when taking a formal position on issues; in the past few years, we have only taken a stand on 4 or 5 issues. Support to specific issues is given only after much research and consideration, so when we do take a position, it is taken seriously by decision-makers — an unforeseen benefit.

Water quality and the need for monitoring the river was one of the first issues addressed. Interest in water quality was very high among both commercial and sports fishing interests as well as river and creekside property owners and teachers and not overly contentious. Partnering with the Cook InletKeeper, we initiated a water quality-monitoring program. Working with existing groups was critical to our early successes. This program did a great deal to help elevate our profile in the community and help us reach a broad and diverse segment of the population. In turn, this helped support our general operating costs by enabling us to grow our membership and financial support. The water quality-monitoring program also helped us gain access to the local schools. Supplementing the school curriculum with guided field trips and hands-on educational material has since become another one of our major projects.

Learning From Experience

Over the years, KWF has learned valuable lessons — the most important of which is always to approach those responsible for your concern before you take any other action. Groups will too often point fingers and lay blame on an individual, business or corporation without first attempting to engage in meaningful dialog. It is often easier to put together a press release or fire off a series of letters painting someone as the villain than it is to sit down face to face and discuss the concern. Sometimes, strong actions are warranted, but more often better solutions can obtained when the cards are on the table with the "opposition" present. Many times, once the complexities of the issue are revealed to both sides, creative problem-solving begin.

In one instance, KWF took a stand against a proposed oil and gas lease that would permit drilling within a quarter of a mile of the river. By opening meaningful dialog with all involved parties, we were able to come to compromises in a cordial manner. It is critical to consider whom you want to influence over the long haul and make decisions accordingly. In our case, a significant percentage of our local population made their living from oil development; a campaign that blasted the companies and the state for even proposing such a plan would have made it very difficult for us to gain a seat at the negotiations. Such a campaign would have no doubt earned us the label of just another radical greenie group that wants to stop all "progress". Since we are very interested in influencing the behavior of those that would be quick to label us as greenies, our selected course of action seemed appropriate. Though still able to influence the population, it will take time — but in the long-run KWF will be more effective.

THE END

The Kenai Watershed Forum –Citizens Working Together For Community Vitality In A Healthy Watershed.

To learn more about KWF, visit: www.kenaiwatershed.org/

THE STATE ROLE IN LOCAL WATERSHED COUNCILS

BY SARI SOMMARSTROM
SARI SOMMARSTROM ASSOCIATES

In 1999, Sari Sommarstrom was hired by Pacific Rivers Council and Trout Unlimited to help conduct a three-part study to analyze the relationships between the conservation effectiveness and organizational attributes of watershed councils in the Northwest, and to develop conclusions about these councils' abilities to address regional restoration needs. "Print-friendly" versions of the report — An Evaluation of Selected Watershed Councils in the Pacific Northwest and Northern California *— are available at www.pacrivers.org/Publications/council.html. For a hard copy of the complete report, including charts and graphs, contact PRC's publication office in Eugene, Oregon, at 541/345-0119.*

While proudly independent in their decision-making abilities, local watershed councils are usually quite dependent on the state for many of their other abilities. In our recent study of 14 watershed councils in the Pacific Northwest and Northern California, my colleague and I found the state role to be a significant factor in the success of many community-based, collaborative watershed groups. A mutually beneficial relationship is also developing where the local efforts are becoming an important — even essential — ingredient in the state's success in watershed restoration.

The term "Watershed Council" has many different meanings to different people. For the purpose of this study, Watershed Councils are collaborative, watershed-based groups rapidly becoming an important part of efforts in the Pacific Northwest and elsewhere to improve land stewardship, restore water quality, and recover at-risk populations of native salmon.

State Expectations

First of all, the role of the state-local relationship can be explicit or implicit in state policy. Official state expectations of the councils vary considerably across the four northwestern states yet one implicit expectation appears to be fairly similar: help the state implement voluntary watershed restoration on private lands where the state does not have direct authority. As a result, state programs and agencies attempt to provide some level of financial and technical assistance to local efforts, although the coordination and consistency of the states' efforts range from poor to very good.

Political expectations often imply that local councils should also resolve most/all of the local natural resource conflicts in the watershed — a goal easier to strive for than to accomplish, and which perhaps provides a convenient postponement of conflict resolution at other levels of decision-making. As a caution, hidden expectations of the state (and others) can be an obstacle to achieving a common definition of "success" for local watershed councils.

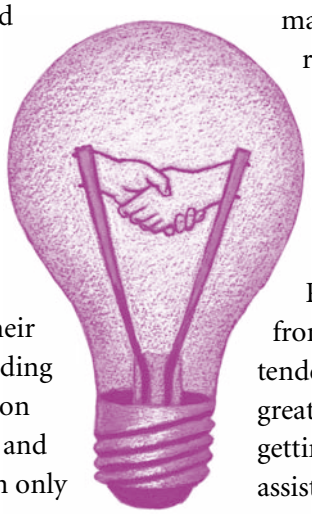
State Representation

State government was officially represented as a decision-making stakeholder in 9 of the 14 councils of our study, with state membership ranging from 1 to 6 individuals on these councils. Several groups explicitly excluded state (and federal) involvement in order to avoid being influenced or controlled by government. State involvement with a technical advisory committee was considered

sufficient representation by some. It was unclear in the study whether state membership was more helpful in obtaining state financial or technical assistance; none of the councils appeared to perceive that representatives of agencies with such capabilities had any more "clout" in their decision-making.

Financial Support

Although some councils have functioned for a few years on minimal funding with volunteer or underpaid staffing and free office space, the long-term efforts have all demanded consistent funding support for staff and organizational needs. At least half of the 14 councils studied received their primary organizational funding from the state; 3 depended on the federal level, 1 on local, and 2 on private foundations. In only one case was the local coordinator a state employee, a dual role that is not politically accepted in many areas. Project funding sources were more diverse but the state continued to play a major role through specific state programs (new and traditional) focusing on watershed restoration, water quality, fish and wildlife, forestry, or coastal resources. Overall, nine councils felt that the state's funding was critical to their survival, especially to sustain matching funds.



Technical Support

Almost all councils used their technical advisory committees — composed of agency professionals, and sometimes university scientists — to assist in at least some way with watershed assessments, project prioritization, or monitoring programs. "Joint fact-finding" between members, technical advisors, and the community is one key to successful decision-making and conflict resolution so the availability of state advisors can be critical to a successful plan and its implementation. Rural watersheds far from agency offices tended to have the greatest difficulty in getting technical assistance. In a role reversal, several councils issued their databases and maps on CD-ROMs to the agencies and public, providing the state a technical benefit.

State-Local Relations

Almost all watershed councils reported that definite progress had occurred in improving state (and federal) agency communication and support at the local level. Some even rated their

SOUTH COAST WATERSHED COUNCIL

Relationships between local watershed councils and state agencies are often strong. One example is the relationship between the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board and the South Coast Watershed Council (SCWC).

Addressing issues covering one-fourth of the Oregon coastline, the South Coast Watershed Council's job is massive. Restoring riparian buffer zones, reducing sediment runoff, and creating in-stream refuge areas for fish habitat takes up the bulk of their time. Add community outreach to their list, and many people would throw up their hands, but Harry Hoogesteger, SCWC's coordinator, takes it all in stride.

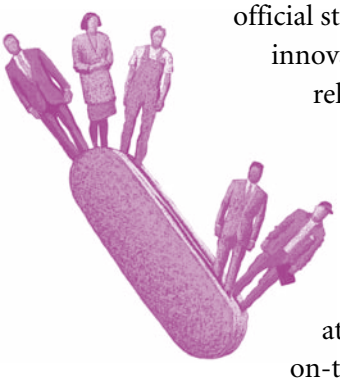
Coordinators are a vital part of a watershed council's organization. Since 1994, Oregon has funded two watershed coordinators who divide their time among eight watershed councils on the Oregon coast — including SCWC.

"The state funding is vital to planning projects," says Hoogesteger. "Community outreach is crucial to our development of relationships with people in the private sector like ranchers and farmers, as well as schools and government agencies involved in watershed protection. The state funding makes it possible to develop and maintain these relationships, and ultimately achieve our goals."

MORE. . .

CONT. FROM PAGE 17

present agency relationships as "fairly rich" or "A+". Ten councils credited the state's official recognition of their council as being critical to their success, while one group opposed any official state "sanction" of particular groups due to concern over the potential stifling of innovation. Both the state and the local community benefit from these improved relationships.



Achieving Success

We found that better council planning processes tended to be associated with technically stronger conservation plans. In addition, councils with better planning processes were better at avoiding projects with low restoration value and at implementing projects with higher restoration value. If the state wants success on-the-ground and in-the-stream, then it needs to provide the tools and resources to ensure that councils can develop strong planning processes.

THE END

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE STATE ON MAKING THE COUNCILS MORE EFFECTIVE:

1. Help provide organizational training assistance to the councils in order to:
   a. improve their decision-making process, particularly in the use of consensus and their ability to resolve conflict;
   b. develop successful watershed planning processes and quality plans that address all of the stressors (artificial and natural) in the watershed.
2. Ensure that state agencies and staff are participating as requested in council efforts. Evaluate staff performance in council involvement and reward exceptional personal efforts. Train staff in organizational and conflict resolution skills.
3. Provide sufficient funding for council organizational and planning support as well as for project support.
4. Ensure ready access for councils to needed expertise, especially in rural (& often least impaired) watersheds that are having difficulty attracting researchers and technical advisors to their areas.
5. Promote stronger incentives to increase the number of landowners who are willing to implement high priority restoration projects so that councils are less likely to turn toward lower priority activities in the watershed.

Huntington, C. and S. Sommarstrom. 2000. "An Evaluation of Selected Watershed Councils in the Pacific Northwest and Northern California". Parts II & III. Prepared for Trout Unlimited and Pacific Rivers Council.

WATERSHED ASSISTANCE GRANTS: BUILDING CAPACITY OF WATERSHED PARTNERSHIPS

BY ABBY FEINSTEIN,
RIVER NETWORK'S WATERSHED ASSISTANCE GRANTS PROGRAM INTERN, AND
KATHY LUSCHER,
RIVER NETWORK'S WATERSHED ASSISTANCE GRANTS PROGRAM COORDINATOR.

In 1998, River Network teamed up with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to institute a pilot Watershed Assistance Grants (WAG) program. The purpose of the WAG program is to support innovative efforts that build the capacity of community-based partnerships to conserve and restore watersheds. When River Network announced the first grants under the program, EPA Administrator Carol M. Browner applauded the program, stating: "Watershed Assistance Grants are designed to give communities the resources they need to make their own decisions about how best to protect their watersheds, protect their health and protect their local environment."

In 1999, River Network received more 778 proposals totaling over $13.5 million from 49 states and Puerto Rico. Along with traditional watershed organizations, tribes and local governments, private businesses, universities, museums, health-care establishments, and utility companies also expressed interest in the program. With $643,000 to distribute, River Network was able to fund only 6% of submitted proposals.

For more information on the Watershed Assistance Grants program, visit www.rivernetwork.org/wag.htm

Lessons Learned

River Network and EPA are committed to learning from the Watershed Assistance Grants program and transmitting those lessons to a wider audience. Most projects are not slated to be complete until Fall 2000, but River Network can begin to evaluate the progress and effectiveness of the program based upon numerous mid-year and a few final reports received thus far. A comprehensive final evaluation will be made available in early 2001, but lessons from the WAG experience are already being learned and shared among the watershed protection community. These lessons are:

- *With a minimal amount of funding, a driven and focused group can make impressive strides.*

Many partnerships exist with little or no budget. Groups operating with limited resources grow accustomed to finding creative financial solutions, such as donations or in-kind services, in order to carry out their program work. Sometimes, the addition of a relatively small sum of money to support staff time is all that is needed to carry the group into a higher level of sophistication.

- *A viable organization with a realistic plan of action is positioned to carry-out successful watershed restoration efforts.*

Because the restoration and protection of our watersheds depends so strongly on the organizational capacity of groups taking on these challenges, the WAG grants are intended to build and strengthen the grantees' ability to create and sustain partnerships. Behind the majority of conservation victories is a strong, viable organization. It may be

MORE. . .

CONT. FROM PAGE 19

With $6,500 of grant funding, the *Ruidoso River Association* (RRA), led by Executive Director Dick Wisner, organized the first-ever Annual Rio Ruidoso Watershed Coalition Conference with the goal of forming a co-operative watershed-wide coalition. This conference brought together all major stakeholders in the watershed to address and reverse the degradation of the Ruidoso River, a high-quality, coldwater fishery in New Mexico. With the grant money, RRA hired Lee Chavez, a nationally known river morphologist, to assess the watershed. She presented her findings at the conference to clearly illustrate the challenges at hand in the watershed. This conference served as a major catalyst to initiate conservation efforts in a watershed that before had no stakeholder coalition. Three follow-up meetings with major stakeholders have since been held and on December 15, 1999, a new coalition comprised of targeted stakeholders formed to write a Clean Water Action Strategy Plan, pursuant of EPA 319 funding to restore the watershed.

staffed by one visionary, by 25, or have no paid staff at all, but the common thread is the existence of a sustainable organizational structure.

- *Community groups and organizations often experience unpredictable organizational changes.*

Turnover among staff and volunteers is common among many nonprofits. While conservation work can be rewarding, the work tends to focus on what is wrong and how to fix it. Whether it is removing a dam to give fish access to spawning grounds or stopping a development to protect critical riparian habitat, watershed conservationists are faced with serious challenges. In time, if incremental successes are not celebrated, the negative working environment can lead to burn-out. Low pay, recruitment of staff to other positions with more stability, and the lack of needed funding or resources are other reasons why turnover is prevalent. Turnover, however, does not always necessitate the collapse of an organization; in fact, in some cases, the new energy and perspectives are just what is needed to accomplish necessary tasks.

- *Building trust and relationships among various interests in the watershed takes time.*

Creating and strengthening new partnerships and relationships in order to further watershed protection and restoration is a crucial component within the overall goals of the Watershed Assistance Grants. In communities where locally-led watershed processes had not yet been established, grant recipients worked to garner support and quell suspicions about the intent of their efforts.

These lessons serve to reinforce what many watershed practitioners already know, but there is value in demonstrating recurrent trends among watershed partnerships. For even as watershed science and technology advances, certain characteristics of inclusive organizations endure the test of time and varying environments. Working with watershed partnerships, more than anything else, means working with people–people with varying values, interests and political perspectives. And, as science and

technology provide us with new tools to address complex problems, the lessons learned from WAG remind us that sometimes, the most impressive accomplishments are due not to a new theorem or calculation, but to the perseverance and adaptability of the human spirit.

THE END

Photo: Alliance of Partnerships for Parks

Canoeing the Bronx River

The *Alabama Rivers Alliance* supported the efforts of area residents and landowners to establish watershed forums for Hatchet Creek and Hurricane Creek. These groups dispelled fears about the uses of biological monitoring data and promoted understanding of the TMDL process. With the assistance of the Alabama Surface Mining Commission, they are developing a GIS database to support their continued efforts.

Oregon's *Crook County Watershed Council* quickly realized the challenge of reaching out to a rural community in a 2.9 million square acre basin. Through four community forums, the Council learned that a neutral facilitator served as a diplomat when gathering watershed concerns from the community and helped to create a healthier relationship between the Council and the community.

New York City's *Bronx River Initiative* project, sponsored by the City Parks Foundation/ Partnership for Parks (CPF/PFP), learned that hands-on events and constant outreach are needed to engage the urban community surrounding the Bronx River. CPF/PFP's community coordinator and the Bronx River coordinator worked with community groups along the river to conduct 17 river clean-ups and one large event that spanned 10 river miles, drawing over 1,000 people to a river celebration. In a new partnership with Waterways and Trailways, the CFP/PFP gained 675 contacts for their database through a spring and fall community newsletter and 14 bi-weekly Bronx River update briefings.

Exploring the Watershed Approach: Critical Dimensions of State-Local Partnerships

Participants of the Initiative gather in Florida for the first of four meetings.

The logic of the watershed focus is compelling and is not going to go away. But the challenge of making it work, from the governance standpoint and from the agency/citizen perspective, is going to demand some of our best thinking, ingenuity, and innovations — along with a great deal of patience. The most significant advances in watershed management will not arise full blown from agency planning meetings, from town meetings, nor from conferences...They will, in my judgment, come from the on-the-ground experiences where new things have been tried and lessons have been learned. In my view, the main value of gatherings of watershed leaders...is to cross-communicate the lessons of field innovations. The watersheds themselves are our laboratories for experimentation and discovery.

Theodore M. Smith, Executive Director, Henry P. Kendall Foundation (July, 1997)

For two years, beginning in 1997, River Network, with funding from the Henry P. Kendall Foundation, undertook the Four Corners Watershed Innovators Initiative. This Initiative built on two earlier workshops which examined issues, strategies and prospects for the fledgling watershed approach, with emphasis on the role of citizen-led efforts. The project was based on the premise that some of the most important environmental innovations in future years will take place at the state and watershed levels and will involve the collaboration of state agencies and a wide variety of nongovernmental organizations and stakeholders.

To insure a project grounded in reality, a comparative case study approach of watershed initiatives was conducted in four "leading" states. Because there are really no "representative" states, and because there is great contextual variability among watershed initiatives, the selection of states near the four corners of the mainland United States — California, Florida Massachusetts and Washington — is somewhat arbitrary. However, we sought to examine a highly diverse set of circumstances reflective of the range of watershed experience in the U.S. and exhibiting some dimensions of innovation and experimentation in their watershed management efforts.

THE END

The final report, entitled *Exploring the Watershed Approach; Critical Dimensions of State-Local Partnerships* and available at www.rivernetwork.org/fourcorn.htm, anticipates the questions many watershed practitioners ask and suggests good ways to go about answering them, watershed-by-watershed.

The report can also be purchased from River Network's national office for $20.

For more information, contact River Network at 503/241-3506; or E-mail: info@rivernetwork.org.

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