

Chapter 8

Watershed Planning Approaches in the Ohio River Basin

This chapter discusses current voluntary approaches to watershed planning in the Ohio River Basin and makes recommendations for enhancing the role of voluntary watershed planning efforts within the region. The chapter profiles a few watershed planning organizations.

Introduction

A number of organized watershed groups have emerged in the NEFCO CWP Ohio River Basin planning area. These groups include the Earth Action Partnership (EAP), the Enviro-Outreach Organization (EOO), the Nimishillen Creek Watershed Partners, and the North Fork Task Force. These groups have been organized under different auspices, for different purposes, and approach watershed planning and management issues differently. These groups constitute a significant and valuable regional planning resource for advancing coordinated approaches to watershed issues by public management agencies and other stakeholder groups, and for building public awareness and responsibility for water quality.

The Clean Water Plan recognizes the importance of regional watershed groups, and recommends actions to sustain and enhance their varying roles.

Recommendation 8-1: Local, county and state water quality management agencies are encouraged to participate in and support the major watershed and subwatershed planning groups currently existing in the area.

Recommendation 8-2: While no specific organizational model is endorsed, the following principles are encouraged for organizing watershed planning groups:

- a) Watershed planning groups should foster broad stakeholder involvement including local, county, regional, state and federal jurisdictions, and businesses and community organizations; and utilize stakeholders in goal-setting for the watershed.
- b) Watershed planning groups should pursue a community-based approach that relies on the leadership and technical support of local public management agencies;
- c) Watershed planning groups should emphasize voluntary coordination of management strategies to complement the regulatory programs of local and state agencies;
- d) Watershed planning groups should emphasize public education, awareness and involvement programs to more fully engage the public in an understanding of watershed issues; and
- e) Watershed planning groups should facilitate voluntary technical collaboration among local and state agencies to address watershed issues and support implementation of water quality measures by local management agencies.

Recommendation 8-3: Ohio EPA and ODNR are encouraged to actively consult with watershed groups on the design, funding and implementation of watershed and nonpoint source projects proposed for a watershed.

Recommendation 8-4: The State of Ohio should provide base funding to support watershed planning groups that satisfy the criteria of public accountability, local government/agency involvement, technical competence, sustainability, and adequate public involvement.

Discussion

Water quality problems transcend political boundaries. Management responsibilities of water quality agencies are often functionally compartmentalized with local governments focusing on sewers and point source discharge issues, health departments focusing on on-site systems and associated water quality and public health problems, municipalities and counties are concerned with storm water issues and other nonpoint source problems, and so on.

A watershed approach is imperative for adequately assessing water quality problems and identifying priority areas. Cooperative, watershed-wide strategies provide more efficient and effective management solutions.

Nonpoint source problems can only be understood and successfully managed on a watershed basis. A watershed focus is essential for identifying the nonpoint factors impacting streams. Nonpoint solutions must also consider actions at the landowner and household level. A watershed planning group can facilitate cooperative efforts needed to implement solutions.

Watershed approaches are not mandated in the State of Ohio and would seem to be complicated by the State Constitution's allocation of primary land management responsibility to local units of government. In the near term new legislation to establish watershed management authorities is unlikely. However, as the Northeast Ohio example illustrates, much can be accomplished with voluntary watershed and subwatershed associations, and these should be encouraged.

APPENDIX 8-1 EXAMPLES OF WATERSHED GROUPS IN THE OHIO RIVER BASIN

The following is a sample of watershed groups in Northeast Ohio for the Ohio River Basin. Please contact NEFCO for additional details and new groups.

A. Earth Action Partnership, Inc.

Watershed area: Nimishillen Creek, Tuscarawas River

Legal authority or basis: Established as a non-profit organization under Section 501 (c)3 of the IRS Code and registered as a charity with the Ohio Attorney General.

Charge or mission: “To form partnerships to restore land to its original purpose by educating and involving the community, planting trees, and protecting water to sustain the cycle of life”

Resources-staff and funding base: a non-profit organization, the Earth Action Partnership (EAP) is funded entirely by private contributions. One staff employee is responsible for all projects and administrative duties.

Organization or operating procedures: EAP is governed by a volunteered Board of Directors. The Board ensures that adequate funding resources are obtained.

Watershed Planning Functions:

Planning or planning coordination	No
Regulatory or implementation responsibility	No
Technical assistance	Yes
Research or implementation demonstrations	Yes
Public involvement	Yes
Government advisory role	No
Monitoring	No

Major accomplishments include the participation in the Reifsnnyder Storm Water Wetland project, annual participation in the Litter Elimination, Awareness, and Prevention (LEAP) stream cleanup, and coordination of numerous community education programs and tree planting activities.

Key contact: Executive Director
Earth Action Partnership
P.O. Box 646
Zoar, OH 44697

B. Enviro-Outreach Organization

Watershed Area: Tuscarawas River in Medina, Stark, and Summit Counties.

Legal authority or basis: This is a non-profit, nonpartisan agency.

Charge or mission: The organization is dedicated to protecting the environment through the promotion of sustainable development, energy conservation, and environmental preservation.

Constituent members: The EOO is affiliated with the Summit Soil and Water Conservation District, the River Network, Springfield Township, and New Franklin.

Resources-staff and funding base: None

Organization or operating procedures:

Watershed Planning Functions:

Planning or planning coordination	No
Regulatory or implementation responsibility	No
Technical assistance	Yes
Research or implementation demonstrations	Yes
Public involvement	Yes
Advisory	Yes
Monitoring	No

Major accomplishments: Enviro Outreach Expo, stream cleanups, tree plantings

Key contact: President
Enviro Outreach Organization
P.O. Box 352
Lakemore, OH 44250-0352

C. Nimishillen Creek Watershed Partners

Watershed Area: Nimishillen Creek

Legal authority or basis: voluntary group of stakeholders within the Nimishillen Creek watershed.

Charge or mission: The mission of this group is “to promote the restoration of water quality to fishable, swimmable standards and to protect the Creek corridor.”

Constituent members: Stakeholders include state and local agencies, citizens, businesses, soil and water conservation districts, conservation groups, and local elected officials.

Resources-staff and funding base: None

Organization or operating procedures: This group meets twice a year.

Watershed Planning Functions:

Planning or planning coordination	Yes
Regulatory or implementation responsibility	No
Technical assistance	Yes
Research or implementation demonstrations	No
Public involvement	Yes
Advisory	Yes
Monitoring	No

Major accomplishments: Annual coordination of the Nimishillen Creek Litter Elimination, Awareness, and Prevention (LEAP) cleanup, participation in the Reifsnyder Storm Water Wetland project, and assistance in the completion of macroinvertebrate studies for the City of Canton.

Key contact: NEFCO
180 East South Street
Akron, OH 44311

D. North Fork Task Force

Watershed Area: North Fork of Sugar Creek

Legal authority or basis: voluntary group of stakeholders within the North Fork of the Sugar Creek watershed.

Charge or mission: The mission of this group is “to promote the restoration and rehabilitation of the North Fork of the Sugar Creek through coordinated volunteer efforts and by encouraging the use of Best Management Practices in the watershed.”

Constituent members: All stakeholders within the North Fork watershed.

Resources-staff and funding base: None

Organization or operating procedures: This group meets once a month.

Watershed Planning Functions:

Planning or planning coordination	Yes
Regulatory or implementation responsibility	No
Technical assistance	Yes
Research or implementation demonstrations	No
Public involvement	Yes
Advisory	Yes
Monitoring	No

Major accomplishments: Education of landowners, assistance with exclusion fencing, and riparian corridor protection.

Key contact: Wayne SWCD
428 W. Liberty St.
Wooster, OH 44691

E. Upper Sugar Creek Farmers Group

Watershed area: Upper Sugar Creek

Legal authority or basis: This is a volunteer assemblage of local farmers in the Upper Sugar Creek Watershed. The group is sponsored by the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center.

Charge or mission: The group seeks to balance economic and environmental pressures on its land and improve water quality.

Organizational information: The Upper Sugar Creek Farmer Partners are located in the Smithville area. The group contains conventional farmers of mixed operations and sees itself as for and by farmers in a learning circle with Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center (OARDC) researchers on the Agroecosystems Management Team and the Wayne Soil and Water Conservation District. (SWCD).

Watershed Planning Functions:

Planning or planning coordination	Yes
Regulatory or implementation responsibility	No
Technical assistance	Yes
Research or implementation demonstrations	Yes
Public involvement	Yes
Government advisory role	No
Monitoring	Yes

Major accomplishments: The Upper Sugar Creek Farmers Partners has received numerous federal grants to support a wide range of projects. The group maintains several miles of buffered streams through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). With the assistance of OARDC staff, the group conducts NRCS Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans and Conservation Plans. With the collaboration of local farmers, the OARDC performs an on-going comprehensive chemical and biological monitoring program and various other research analyses.

Key contact: Richard Moore
Sugar Creek Project
Agroecosystem Management Program
OARDC/OSU
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