

Chapter 8

Watershed Planning Approaches in Mahoning and Trumbull Counties

This chapter discusses current voluntary approaches to watershed planning in Mahoning and Trumbull Counties and makes recommendations for enhancing the role of voluntary watershed planning efforts within the region.

8.1 Introduction

There are a few groups in Mahoning and Trumbull Counties that have taken the initiative to approach various aspects of watershed planning. The Alliance for Watershed Action and Resource Education (AWARE) has focused primarily on education regarding water quality issues by working with local schools to conduct classroom demonstrations of watershed education, apply for grants to accomplish small scale projects with an educational focus, and partner with the local agricultural community to enhance the understanding of soil testing to reduce fertilizer use. The Friends of the Mahoning River are a volunteer run group that has focused on collecting water quality data along the Mahoning River and improving recreation opportunities by actively working to install boat docks and hold cleanup days along the river corridor. These two groups provide a significant and valuable planning resource for advancing approaches to watershed issues by public management agencies and other stakeholder groups, and for building public awareness and responsibility for water quality.

This AWTMP recognizes the importance of volunteer watershed groups and recommends actions to sustain and enhance their varying roles.

8.2 Recommendations

Recommendation 8-1: Local, county and state water quality management agencies are encouraged to participate in and support the major watershed 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:

- watershed planning groups should foster broad stakeholder involvement including local, county, regional, state and federal jurisdictions, and businesses and community

organizations with a stake in the river; and utilize stakeholders in goal-setting for the watershed.

- watershed planning groups should pursue a community-based approach that relies on the leadership and technical support of local public management agencies;
- watershed planning groups should emphasize voluntary coordination of management strategies to complement the regulatory programs of local and state agencies;
- watershed planning groups should emphasize public education, awareness and involvement programs to more fully engage the public in an understanding of watershed issues; and
- watershed planning groups should facilitate voluntary technical collaboration among local and state agencies in efforts 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.

8.3 Discussion

Water quality problems transcend the boundaries of political jurisdictions. Management responsibilities of water quality agencies are often functionally compartmentalized with sewer agencies 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 critical to an adequate assessment of water quality issues leading to greater awareness of the priority problems to be addressed. The implementation of management solutions through watershed cooperation holds the promise of much more

effective, efficient solutions as well. It can be a catalyst for better coordination and innovative strategies by existing management agencies.

Nonpoint source problems can only be understood and effectively addressed on a watershed basis. A watershed focus is indispensable to identifying the nonpoint factors impacting streams. Nonpoint solutions must also take into consideration actions at the landowner and household level. A watershed planning group provides a focal point for mobilizing action at this level. It can facilitate the substantial cooperation 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.