

## **Land Stewardship Watershed Plan Development**

*A guide to cooperative voluntary natural resource protection, enhancement and management*

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System planning for natural resource protection is rapidly gaining in popularity as an efficient method of dealing with environmental protection and enhancement. Until recently, the typical resource management plan was developed based on the needs or requirements of a single agency, landowner, species or regulation. Watershed planning originated as a spatial extension of the same process, but soon began to expand in breadth as well as scope. The increased diversity of issues dealt with in whole system planning strongly emphasizes the necessity for more interaction and cooperation among those who hold a stake in the affected system. Effective long term planning addresses the needs of the system's natural resources as well as the interests and hopes of the human stakeholders who are a part of that system.

Land stewardship is an ethic that promotes extensive cooperation in the protection and enhancement of natural resources. Cooperation in developing interest based solutions to natural resource problems encourages voluntary commitment to protection of those natural resources. Cooperation requires a different approach to problems than that which has prevailed since the middle of this century. Adversarial relationships and regulation-based planning have not produced the long term results necessary to shepherd the nation's natural environment into a healthy 21st century. Land stewardship concepts allow development of long term planning and implementation that is based on the goals and interests of landowners, agencies and other stakeholders instead of on predetermined practices, programs or legal decisions. Planning is done more completely, with all aspects (including social, cultural, economic and "natural") of a watershed or other ecological system considered simultaneously. Technical resolutions to social problems are more likely, real solutions replace compromises, and the enhanced cooperation develops long term commitment to resource protection, instead of short term compliance with regulations or court edicts.

The following is an outline of a development process for a watershed enhancement plan. Although it is necessary to present the process sequentially, many of the parts are carried out simultaneously. The order of presentation is an organizational order, and not necessarily a chronological order. Each watershed will generate a different flow of events. The outline is intended as a guide to producing a plan, not as a hardened "recipe" for plan construction. The physical needs of the natural resources in a watershed; the economic and cultural realities of the community; the regulatory and political needs in the area; and the personal preferences of the plan facilitators must be addressed and included as plan construction progresses. Interest based analysis; consensus building; goal-focused conflict resolution; and above all, creativity, are all parts of the stewardship approach to watershed planning.

Watershed planning based on a stewardship ethic may include the following segments:

- Identify Stakeholder
- Identify Stakeholder Interests
- Develop Goals
- Define Objectives
- Describe Tasks
- Establish Monitoring System

- Implement Plan
- Reassess Plan

## **I. Identify Stakeholders**

Stakeholders in a watershed include a wide variety of interests. The biological natural resources of a watershed are included on the list by virtue of being included in the diverse human interests. Land owners and managers; government agencies at all levels; citizen interest groups; civic organizations; schools; churches; trade organizations; and many other interests are found in nearly every watershed. It is important to include the interests of every stakeholder from the beginning of plan development. Imagination is a valuable asset when identifying stakeholders. The following is a suggested approach to finding the many varied interests in the target watershed:

### **1. Local Research**

In most communities, there is a large store of unconsolidated information available. Collecting the information may require a good deal of time and legwork, but the time is usually much less than that necessary to regenerate the same data. General Plans, EIS/EIRs, publicly funded studies for various projects, and local government agency files can produce invaluable insights into finding watershed stakeholders. Frequently, a volunteer or team of volunteers can be helpful in gathering existing information about stakes and stakeholders in the community.

Some places to look include:

#### **a. Planning Departments**

county

city

special districts such as redevelopment districts and improvement districts

#### **b. Tax Assessor Offices**

county

city

special assessment districts

#### **c. Agency Offices**

federal

state

county

city

special districts such as mosquito abatement districts

#### **d. Interest Groups**

civic groups

church groups

national or statewide organizations

local citizen groups

political parties

#### **e. Local Elected Officials**

county

city

special districts

#### **f. Local Businesses**

- g. Libraries
- h. Trade Organizations

## **2. Mail or Telephone Surveys**

This type of information gathering is most effective if the organization doing the mailing has broad community acceptance and trust. Blind surveys by government agencies are not usually effective, in that it is difficult to clearly state the purpose of gathering the information. If the community has been included in the past, or if participation has been positive in other such efforts, the mail and telephone surveys can be a rapid and relatively inexpensive method of gathering a wide cross section of stakeholders. Some contact lists may be established by utilizing:

- a. Tax Assessor Rolls
- b. Club and Organization Membership Lists
- c. Homeowner Organizations
- d. Trade Association or Chamber of Commerce Lists

## **3. Interviews**

Individual or small group interviews are very useful. They allow an informal exchange of ideas and interests that are not possible in large group meetings or in public hearings. It also allows stakeholders to relate to one another on a more personal basis than is usually possible in formal hearings. It is far more likely that a participant will feel that his or her viewpoint has been heard and considered when the group consists of fewer than six or seven people.

- a. Conduct individual interviews with stakeholders
  - By determining the circle of contacts any given stakeholder must use to pursue their interests, other stakeholders can be identified. It is necessary that these interactions be open and non threatening. These primary contacts are the basis for building trust and cooperation from the beginning. The appearance or actual presence of a hidden agenda at this point will make productive long term relationships difficult or impossible to establish.
- b. Begin a list of other stakeholders using information from the original interviews
  - This list can form the beginnings of a mutual education effort to help all stakeholders, both public and private, to be aware of the often complex interaction of their interests with the functioning of the system itself. These effects are not always evident to stakeholders, and better knowledge of them can have a powerful impact on the actions of stakeholders as they work to better meet their individual interests.

## **II. Identify Stakeholder Interests**

Identifying and understanding basic interests is crucial to development of a cooperative, voluntary program. Patience and an open mind are the most valuable tools for determining stakeholder interests. Interests include the hopes and concerns of the stakeholders identified above, but not the options chosen to meet the interests. To this end, any stated "problems" for stakeholders are best restated to identify the interest that is not being met, and that causes a particular situation to be labeled as a problem (a "problem" of declining water quality, for instance, can be stated as an interest in having good water quality).

In reality, most of the interest identification will take place simultaneously with the identification of the stakeholders (it is hard to identify stakeholders without also identifying what the stake is!). This stage of the program involves the listing of the interests only. Judgment as to the appropriateness of any given interest is not related to whether the interest exists. Efforts at this point must be to identify interests and to attempt to understand the relative value of the interests to the respective stakeholder. Stewardship programs can break down at this early stage owing to lack of patience and an attempt to alter interests because they are judged by someone other than the stakeholder to be inappropriate or harmful. As interests are identified, they should be separated from specific ownership, since the effort is to satisfy interests, not alter individual entities.

## **1. Interviews**

### **a. Individual Interviews**

These interviews can be the same as those mentioned in "Identifying Stakeholders" above. In many cases, however, additional interviews may be necessary with some individuals to discuss interests in greater depth once trust (or at least a lack of distrust) has been established.

### **b. Small Group Interviews**

Frequently, neighbors will feel more comfortable when meeting with other neighbors than meeting one-on-one. The interaction in these meetings can be excellent, and may provide more insight into stakeholder interests than single person interviews. The decision should be left up to the individual stakeholders, in order to provide the least threatening atmosphere possible. It is important to remember that you are a stakeholder as well, and to describe your interests as fully as you would like the others to describe their interests to you. Church and neighborhood groups are often good places to hold these small group interviews.

## **2. Meetings**

Public meetings as a rule are the least effective means to discover stakeholder interests. Reluctance to publicly state personal interests frequently excludes or distorts large numbers of interests. Large meetings often become one of two types of interaction: an "informative" session which provides an outline of the program from a single perspective, or; a "complaint" session in which fears and past transgressions are described in great detail. Neither is truly effective in eliciting a comprehensive outline of real stakeholder interests in a watershed community. Public meetings are very productive later when communication and trust in the interest-based process have been developed and the mutual education process has begun.

### A. Clarify and Verify Interests

Many times interests may seem identical or very similar among the various stakeholders. It is important to articulate any subtle, but important variances among apparently similar interests. In many cases, it may also be possible to include several stated interests in a single simplified statement. They may be very general or very specific. Looking beyond the apparent in this area will often uncover supporting interests that were not obvious at first. (A farmer may want to remove portions of land from production, for instance, but cannot afford to give up the cash flow. An interested organization may wish to increase open, unused space and thus provide some compensation to the farmer to allow the land to be restored to wildlife habitat. Without communication, these common interests may not surface.)

## 1. Interviews

### a. Individual Interviews

Frequently the same interviews and follow-up meetings as mentioned above.

### b. Small Group Interviews

Small groups sometimes work well for describing interests, if the participants are the ones who request it. Large meetings do not work well for interest determination.

## 2. Creative Investigation

### a. Historical Analysis

Environmental Impact Statements are often an excellent aid in finding interests. Local libraries also may hold government assessments, proposals and reports that can have great value in determining interests. Occasionally local newspapers and local service clubs have historical archives that yield information with relatively little effort.

### b. "Perspective" Analysis

As interests and stakes are determined, relative impacts should be determined that relate to the perspective of an entire watershed. Impacts which seem severe on any given site may not be as significant from the watershed perspective as other, seemingly less severe impacts. Bank erosion on a small parcel, for instance, may not be as immediately detrimental to the watershed as a larger area that contributes pollutants from a wide zone. Additional perspective analysis may consider the relative benefits of suggested options in any given area to the health of the watershed. Small, disconnected enhancement projects may do less to stabilize a watershed than a connected series of enhancements that individually may not be as thorough, but cumulatively add greater habitat or soil protection value.

## B. Clearly List the Identified Interests For All to See

Often, as the process begins to develop, interests which at first seem not to be related or very similar, connect in ways which allow them to co-exist with or even enhance one another. (For instance, one interest may be in flood prevention, and another in riparian corridor protection. By restoring the natural functions of the stream, both interests may be addressed and solutions found. Thus, the two interests can be seen as compatible interests.)

### 1. Develop a Group Memory

a. Mailed or hand distributed lists of identified interests

b. Electronic bulletin boards or web pages

### 2. Creative Investigation to Fill Gaps in the Interest List

a. Individual suggestions sent to a central collection point for redistribution

b. Group sessions to tap into creative group energy

## C. Recognize existing conflicts ("elephants in the room")

Apparently conflicting "interests" frequently consume the majority of time and effort in watershed programs. Careful investigation and open communication, however, often finds that these conflicting "interests" are actually conflicting solutions, or options chosen to pursue the underlying interests. The stewardship approach to watershed planning is an

excellent system for dealing with these conflicts. Technical solutions to political or social conflicts are very often possible, if basic interests (as opposed to options) are well described, and communication amongst the involved stakeholders is open and available. (Finding technical instead of social alternatives to satisfy interests is preferable. For instance, demonstrating alternate methods of farming with assistance from government technical personnel is preferable to barring or mandating specific practices without development of alternatives.)

1. Interviews

- a. Individual interviews
- b. Small group interviews

2. Creative Investigation

- a. Historical analysis
- b. "Perspective" analysis, an investigation into the degree of entrenchment that may exist for a given option or proposal

### **III. Develop Goals ("Vision", Mission Statement, etc.)**

The goal or goals for the watershed program should be clear but non-specific, and should describe a desired condition, rather than a closely defined product. It should be as inclusive as possible. A stewardship management plan goal should address the following criteria:

it should promote consistency of perspective among the many different stakeholders and constituencies involved in the watershed plan;

it should be compatible with the values of the stakeholders establishing the goal;

it should be unaffected by political change;

it must be a positive goal, without proscription or restriction;

it must be flexible enough to persist over time (adaptability);

and it must include the interests of all segments of the community or organization involved in the plan.

A goal in this sense is by nature not empirically defined. It should describe the desired state or condition of the community in general, easily understood terms. The goal of any given group may be implicit or explicit, and may be developed in the beginning of the process, or it may evolve as the stewardship evolves. A goal statement should only be developed if and when the energy of the community group desires. Some communities find an implicit goal easier to work with, while others may feel a need for a more formal, explicit description.

### **IV. Define Objectives to Measure Progress Toward Goal Attainment**

Combining a creative look at available technology and the information about interests discovered above will develop a list of concepts and practices (options) to meet the system needs (interests).

Each proposed solution and/or enhancement should be represented by some measurable result, which is identified as an objective. The goal selected earlier will be indirectly defined by the objectives listed here. While the goal may not be empirically measurable, its attainment will be assumed once these listed objectives have been reached. The management monitoring program will enable the group to reflect on the chosen options and success criteria, and to make adjustments as necessary as the management program continues.

### **V. Describe Tasks Necessary to Achieve the Listed Objectives**

Once a list of objectives is completed, a cooperative plan of action should be established with a level of detail that suits the watershed group and its funders. The following is a suggested content list of items to be included. This format is often useful if grant requests are to be a part of the watershed management program, or if multiple funding sources are involved.

A. What is to be done

This section should be as complete and detailed as possible as regards the purpose of the particular task. The more description included here, the easier the plan is to implement. Details allow clear understanding of the task, which in turn means less confusion regarding its accomplishment. Clear description of the purposes of the task will allow field adjustments to enable the task to better deliver its intended product.

B. How it is to be done

To the extent possible, construction and/or procedural details should be clearly stated, with diagrams and illustrations wherever possible. Many technical drawings are available from various government agencies that can be of great use. Complete details also allow more accurate cost projections or development of bid sheets for distribution to possible sub-contractors. Details lessen the likelihood of misunderstandings that can get in the way of smooth plan implementation, when they are accompanied by explanations of the purpose of the task.

C. Who is responsible for getting it done

Role descriptions regarding the various tasks should include the name of the person responsible for completion of the task, or designation of a group, agency or other entity if specific individuals cannot be named. Make certain that the candidate task executor has the necessary tools and expertise to accomplish the task. If appropriate, specifically designate accompanying roles such as supervision, procedural oversight, and technical review. Specify where and to whom the task product should be delivered, and in what format.

D. When it is to be completed

Preparation of a chart to demonstrate the interdependence of task completions is a very valuable exercise. Participants in plan implementation should be made aware if their product is a necessary complement to a succeeding task, and the time line established needs to be kept to protect the integrity of the plan.

E. Clear statement of success criteria

In order that each participant know when their task is successfully finished, a statement of success criteria for each should be established. In many cases, delivery of the listed product is sufficient to assume successful completion. For the overall plan, however, some listing of success criteria must be done in order to create a monitoring program that will track the long term success relative to the stated or implied goal. These need not be complex, but must be clear and measurable.

It is in the construction and execution of the task list that creative cooperation delivers the most benefit. Sharing assets, interests and resources while developing task lists will make implementation of the plan less expensive and more efficient. Preparation of the list,

therefore, should include as much cooperative effort as possible, while keeping compartmentalization to a minimum.

#### **VI. Establish a Monitoring Program**

Once the statement of success criteria is established for the tasks and the objectives, a monitoring program to track attainment and maintenance of the criteria is necessary. The best monitoring programs will involve the inclusion and training of a wide range of stakeholders in the watershed. Volunteer citizen monitoring plans work well when proper training and technical support are included. The intrinsic self interest of a stakeholder will nearly always ensure timely and accurate monitoring results.

#### **VII. Implement the Plan**

In a stewardship environment, plan implementation is frequently underway even before the plan is complete. Because the plan is based on stakeholder interests, rather than the desires of a single agency or group of agencies, implementation of many parts of the plan will occur immediately after the solution or system is defined for a particular problem. Opportunities for enhancement are usually realized and work begun before a formal plan is written and issued. This dynamic planning and implementation coincidence makes the community response more favorable, as results are evident much more quickly than in more typical planning processes.

#### **VIII. Reassess the Plan Based on Monitoring Data and Adjust as Necessary**

This is perhaps the single most important part of community based stewardship watershed management. A consistent and regular reassessment of assumptions and progress will allow the community to adapt to changes and remain focused on the desired outcome condition. With the opportunity to reassess and adjust the stewardship assumptions comes a greater degree of cooperation and inclusiveness. It is also the only way to assure that changes in the community and watershed are recognized and included as time passes. It gives an opportunity to all to communicate successes and share the knowledge gained by error to maintain a creative and open approach to community management of its watershed.