

## **APPENDIX E (1999)**

### **UTILIZATION OF WATERSHEDS TO ADDRESS NONPOINT SOURCE ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS IN PENNSYLVANIA**

#### **Problem**

Recent assessments and analyses reveal that many of Pennsylvania's waters are impaired and do not meet acceptable standards. The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Environment Commission's report has recommended that these water quality problems be addressed on a watershed basis. As a result, the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is firmly committed to addressing water resource management issues through a watershed approach. This approach appears logical. Watersheds are the boundaries of nature and the resources and problems of each watershed can best be addressed as a unit. Moreover, the vast majority of the water quality problems are caused by nonpoint sources and this type of pollution can often most effectively be addressed on a watershed basis.

#### **DEP's Watershed Initiatives**

As noted in the Draft Policy and Framework for Watershed Resource Management in Pennsylvania, DEP already has a number of environmental programs that directly and indirectly effect environmental management and the resources of a watershed. The Department is also effectively organized with the Water Management Deputate serving a major role in developing water management goals and programs for the Department. The Field Operations Deputate has prime responsibility for implementing watershed management and protection activities across the state.

The Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts (PACD) commends DEP and wholeheartedly endorses this watershed approach.

#### **Conservation Districts' Watershed Initiatives**

Conservation districts, watershed associations, and state and federal agencies have been long time proponents of addressing water quality and quantity issues on a watershed basis and have been working cooperatively and effectively on a watershed basis for years. Many districts have sponsored PL 566 projects, both structural and nonstructural. Other districts have conducted stream surveys to pinpoint major problems on a watershed and are working with local organizations and landowners in those watersheds. Many districts have concentrated their resources to address those watersheds that are most in need of attention and have worked to organize and support local watershed organizations.

In addition, district staff members in many districts are currently developing programs to achieve restoration goals based on stream quality, land use, and input from cooperating agencies, organizations and individuals. Districts are developing and implementing nonpoint education programs, providing technical assistance to municipalities and developers, preparing and submitting grant proposals for funding, while others have developed water-monitoring networks throughout their county.

Pennsylvania's conservation districts play a major role in the Pennsylvania Conservation Partnership. This initiative is dedicated to improving the working relationships and cooperation of federal, state and local agencies to conserve Pennsylvania's natural resources at the local level. Watershed improvement and nonpoint source abatement have been major goals since this cooperative effort was initiated.

Because of this current involvement of conservation districts and their partners in working at the watershed level, PACD is concerned that this progress not be interrupted and that there not be a duplication of effort. In addition, we firmly believe that any watershed management program, to be effective, must be locally driven by the residents in the watershed and cannot be truly effective if it is just one more program developed by state government. The nature of nonpoint source pollution, with its wide impact on local landowners and citizens, requires entirely different approaches than those previously used to address point source pollution.

State funding and assistance to conservation districts yields a high return for the investment. Because districts are part of the local community and district directors and staff are local residents, they are positioned to understand and influence local values. Community and individual values drive local watershed efforts. Success and local recognition encourage watershed organizations to greater and longer-lasting results. Another benefit is the ability to leverage local volunteers and resources to support watershed activities.

Since both the Department and conservation districts are working toward the same goals and utilizing somewhat similar approaches, it seems logical that they should work in tandem for the greatest efficiencies and results. PACD therefore makes the following proposal.

### **PACD Proposal**

PACD recognizes that both DEP and conservation districts have important yet different roles and resources. DEP has considerable financial and staffing resources and has state and federal mandates to address nonpoint source pollution more effectively. Conservation districts, have a history of developing and encouraging locally defined environmental programs and problem resolutions. Their association with watershed organizations and local residents, accompanied by local participation, encourages local creativity and the cooperation of local landowners, community leaders, and concerned individuals and organizations.

Watershed project needs will vary from watershed to watershed. Regional Office capabilities to meet these needs will also vary. Each conservation district has unique capabilities to support watershed projects. The capacity of districts to support watershed activities is directly related to funding levels. The roles of all partners will be unique for each watershed project. Regional Offices and districts need to work together to build on their strengths to provide the best possible support for each watershed project. There is unlimited potential for the demand that watershed projects will generate. The questions are not who will end up with the responsibility for watershed program support but rather what is the best blend of responsibilities to provide support to each project.

Examples of what Regional/Central Offices and conservation districts can provide to watershed projects with adequate funding and staff resources include:

## **DEP REGIONAL/CENTRAL OFFICES**

Training and materials – To help districts and communities organize and support watershed organizations. Provide technical and skills training to DEP staff and the general public to ensure that watershed efforts succeed and results are achieved.

Support resources – To provide technical and administrative support/resources to districts. To provide the technical and other support/resources not available through the districts to meet local organization needs.

Information and Data Systems – Provide environmental and needs data and systems for management of this data to districts and organizations.

Opportunities and Experience Sharing – Inventorying and managing information on opportunities to assist watershed efforts. Sharing information on the experiences of watershed efforts so that others can learn.

Access and Coordination - Helping districts and organizations gain access to resources that can assist their efforts. Providing coordination with conservation districts and among agencies and organizations to reduce inefficiency and improve results. Provide policy and program coordination for efficient delivery of services to districts and watershed efforts.

General and Targeted Marketing Efforts - To help communities understand watershed efforts, needs and opportunities. To generate interest and encourage involvement.

Compliance Assistance – Assist watershed efforts with appropriate compliance assistance.

## **CONSERVATION DISTRICTS**

Promoting and Encouraging Watershed Organizations – Organizing, encouraging and motivating local watershed efforts.

Education – Providing education and information to the public, local officials and watershed organizations about watersheds and how local efforts can impact them.

Assisting and Supporting Watershed Organizations – Providing technical help (as needed and available) to watershed organizations. Identifying needs and problems and determining how to address them. Funds management and administrative assistance for watershed organizations.

Funding and Resource Coordination – Helping watershed organizations to identify objectives and plan activities to meet them. Coaching organizations and their leadership to successful results.

Information Management and Sharing – Helping watershed organizations to understand data and how to manage and use it. Customizing data for efficient use.

Networking – Expanding resources and opportunities through community and regional outreach.

Conflict Management – Helping local watershed efforts to assess and manage conflict within and outside their organizations. Anticipating and avoiding problems and building local partnerships.

### **PACD's specific recommendations are as follows:**

1. PACD concurs that because of the staff resources and goals of the Department, the Regional Offices should take the lead in the developing of watershed resource management programs as proposed in the Department's Policy and Framework for Watershed Resource Management in Pennsylvania.

2. DEP should continue and expedite, if possible, its program of watershed evaluations and should divert additional staff resources to this task.
3. The Regional Office should include districts and local conservation partners in the prioritizing of watershed management/remediation work. The regional watershed coordinator should convene regularly scheduled meetings of a team comprised of conservation districts, appropriate state and federal natural resource agencies, representatives of existing watershed associations and key local persons to prioritize watersheds. Regional Office input and associated studies and evaluations should be major factors in prioritizing; however, to ensure the effectiveness of this grass roots effort, local input must be the driving force and any and all priorities should be determined by this coordinating group and not mandated by the Regional Office.
4. Once regional watershed priorities and water quality objectives have been established, the Department should again assume a role of coordination/assistance, not direction. PACD recognizes that there are federal and state regulatory programs and mandates; however, to have local creditability and citizen ownership, local government and community leaders must be the decision makers in developing goals and plans, not mere advisors or sounding boards.
5. DEP should provide adequate funding to conservation districts for Watershed Project Coordinators as requested in the “PACD Consolidated Request for Funding.”
6. DEP should contact county conservation districts for input on proposed watershed projects and the role that these projects may have in the overall watershed program. Conservation districts should provide comments on watershed projects and be notified of actions taken on them by DEP.

In priority watersheds, the priority party (watershed organization, conservation district or DEP) may convene a management team of the local watershed association if there is one, the conservation district, DEP, representatives of the Conservation Partnership, local leaders and decision makers and that this watershed management team assume responsibility for developing the Restoration and Protection Plan. It may not be necessary or appropriate to develop a management team where there is an established functioning watershed organization that can assume the leadership role. In these cases the watershed organization needs to be consulted on the appropriate course of action and empowered to take the leadership in developing a team. This approach will ensure local creativity and problem resolution and the individual ownership so important in the ultimate implementation of the plan.

Where a team is to be formed, the appropriate party for convening the team is first, the watershed organization if it is able and willing, then the district, if it is able and willing, and finally DEP. The watershed management team should select an appropriate chair, its rules-of-order, and assign coordination responsibilities. DEP should define applicable legal requirements and criteria and funding/assistance opportunities for the watershed project. The district could identify additional opportunities and support services. The team should develop, manage and implement the watershed action plan.

## Summary

These proposals will give the Department ample opportunity to utilize its analyses and studies in the prioritization and plan developmental processes and will make new and/or expended information available to the Conservation Partnership. This approach would offer great opportunities for the Department of Environmental Protection. Local participation in both the prioritization of watersheds and in developing restoration and protection plans will give local ownership to the project. Local watershed associations, conservation districts, the Conservation Partnership and concerned individuals will be empowered and will benefit from a concerted effort of all parties.

Again, PACD commends the Department of Environmental Protection and wishes to reiterate its general support of this watershed management initiative. PACD wholeheartedly endorses the initiative's goals of the local community's leadership in developing goals and initiatives and being the driving force in plan implementation.