

BUILDING LOCAL-LEVEL IMPLEMENTATION

GOAL

Support and enhance cooperative watershed planning efforts to protect and improve water quality.

Village of Champlain



The Village of Champlain, New York received \$13,000 from an LCBP grant to relocate a phosphorus injection point, which will result in less phosphorus in the plant's discharge.

Chapters 2 through 4 identify specific actions for reducing various pollutants and enhancing cultural and recreational resources within the Basin. This section addresses the processes at the regional, municipal, and grassroots levels necessary to achieve many of these management goals. It focuses on watershed planning at the local scale, as this is the level at which most planning occurs in the Basin.

River and lake associations play a key role in organizing watershed protection efforts. These associations accomplish a great deal through education and outreach programs, democratic participation in the development review process, and participation in citizen monitoring activities. Watershed associations also act as catalysts for developing nonregulatory protection programs, and can effectively advocate for improved conservation-oriented land use practices. River and lake associations can encompass several local jurisdictions. Regional examples include the Boquet River and AuSable River Associations in New York; the Lewis Creek Association and the Friends of the Mad River in Vermont; and the Poultney-Mettowee Watershed Partnership in New York and Vermont. Watershed associations work closely with local government and respect a wide variety of interests, including property rights, environmental protection, and economic development.

Most land use planning in the Basin occurs at the municipal level. When watershed boundaries are contained within municipal boundaries, municipal watershed planning can be very effective. Municipalities may develop watershed districts that have special review criteria for new development based on a long-term water quality protection strategy. The designation of local riparian “buffer” zones along streams, lakes, and wetlands can be important water resources protection tools. Local capabilities for watershed planning vary greatly throughout the Basin in both New York and Vermont. In some areas (often near urban centers), municipalities have already developed watershed plans and instituted aggressive water quality protection measures—Lake George, New York provides a good example. Municipalities in these areas typically benefit from ongoing technical support from local staff, watershed associations, regional planning commissions, county planning offices, or conservation districts. In other parts of the Basin, municipalities have very limited local capacity for any type of planning or land use regulation. Working in partnership with willing landowners is especially productive as most land in the Basin is privately owned.

ISSUES

Insufficient Technical and Financial Assistance

One of the major impediments to developing and implementing watershed protection plans at the local and regional level is insufficient financial and technical support. Watershed groups may develop the necessary awareness and enthusiasm for a project, but may need technical and organizational assistance. Some assistance is currently provided to watershed associations in Vermont through the VTANR, and in New York through the NYSDEC, the Cornell Cooperative Extension, and county and regional planning commissions. However, municipalities need additional technical and financial assistance, and watershed associations need the resources to hire their own paid staff. Developing a local capacity grant program for watershed associations may be one effective way to address this shortage.

The Need for Better Communication

Often communication about watershed planning among communities and regions within the Basin is insufficient. An effective process for disseminating information on successful watershed planning approaches is needed. Likewise, the difficulties and problems encountered in less successful watershed planning efforts need to be documented and communicated to help others avoid these problems.

The Need for Innovative Partnerships

Experience in a number of communities and regions has pointed to the value of innovative partnerships in developing and implementing effective watershed plans. For example, the Mad River Valley Planning District in Vermont has developed a strong watershed planning capability through the formation of a three-way partnership among district towns, a private nonprofit environmental organization, and the state of Vermont. This arrangement provides for a funding base, extensive grassroots involvement, strong local political support through the district board membership, and technical assistance from the state. There often may be a role for state and federal governments, as well as county and regional planning commissions, in this process (e.g., funding and technical assistance).

OBJECTIVES

(not listed in priority order)

- 1) Support formal and informal local and regional partnerships to pursue watershed protection efforts.
- 2) Increase public participation in watershed protection efforts.
- 3) Encourage citizens, state and local governments, and formal and informal local and regional partnerships to adopt a proactive approach to watershed protection that considers the cumulative impacts on water resources.
- 4) Demonstrate new and emerging models for watershed planning within the Basin, especially those based on local and regional initiatives.
- 5) Ensure that nutrient and nonpoint source management efforts are coordinated with local and regional watershed planning initiatives throughout sub-basins.
- 6) Promote public education and informed discussion about regional land use patterns in the Basin.
- 7) Preserve the economic vitality of the region by capitalizing on the unique qualities of the Basin.

ACTIONS

(not listed in priority order)

1) Expand Technical and Financial Assistance for Watershed Planning at the Local Level

Elements of this action include:

a) Provide technical assistance to communities for addressing issues such as shoreline protection, soil erosion, sediment control, wetland conservation, and on-site septic system troubleshooting; emphasize nonregulatory approaches and make available model standards appropriate for adoption by local communities.

b) Provide state and federal financial support to watershed associations to enable them to hire staff and pursue specific identified needs in each watershed. Both start-up and ongoing support funds are needed.

c) Assist local and regional planning commissions in evaluating and responding to development trends and estimating future impacts of these trends on water quality.

d) Provide technical assistance via data sharing, Internet use, and public relations.

Potential key LCBP partners: USDA-NRCS, NYSDEC, VTDEC, USFWS, county and regional planning commissions, NRCDS, SWCDs, nonprofit/private organizations, municipalities, businesses

Cost estimate: \$350,000 per year

Potential funding sources: Federal and state appropriations

Timeframe: Ongoing

Benchmark: Improved technical and financial assistance to communities as described

2) Develop a Program to Facilitate Information Exchange among Local Watershed Associations

This action would develop a program to continue the type of information exchange initiated by the successful LCBP Mad River Watershed Planning Demonstration Project. The Mad River Project included a series of meetings to share lessons learned from watershed planning efforts throughout the Basin. Existing and emerging local watershed organizations were invited in the hope that the insights of older, experienced organizations could aid newer organizations in their development. Based on the success of these meetings, this action is to establish a program to continue this information exchange.

a) Initiate forums for river and lake associations to share experiences and information.

b) Use newsletters, the Internet, and list-serves to help groups share information.

Potential key LCBP partners: Watershed associations, NYSDEC, VTDEC, regional planning commissions, county planning offices

Cost estimate: \$25,000 per year

Potential funding sources: Federal and state appropriations

Timeframe: Ongoing

Benchmark: Establishment of a forum for information exchange among watershed organizations

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

LOCAL WATERSHED GROUPS

The LCBP has begun providing additional technical and financial assistance for local watershed groups. The LCBP assists these groups via grants, training programs, professional development funds, and assistance with public relations and website development. Twice per year, the groups gather to exchange information. As local watershed groups expand, volunteers from local communities will have a stronger voice in protecting the water resources throughout the Basin. Since 1992, more than \$736,000 of LCBP funds has been provided to local watershed projects.



The Vermont Youth Conservation Corps helps many local watershed groups stabilize streambanks.

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ACCOMPLISHMENTS

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LOCAL TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Many groups within the Basin are providing local technical assistance to municipalities on planning, zoning, and land conservation efforts. For example, the town of Essex, NY, received financial assistance from the LCBP for shoreline planning. Lake Champlain Sea Grant also provided technical assistance. In another example, Highgate, VT, is working with LCBP and the Northwest Regional Planning Commission to develop a lakeshore erosion guide for municipalities. The Vermont Better Backroads Program, Cooperative Extension, and Soil and Water Conservation Districts also provide technical assistance to Basin communities.



MRBA

Education programs and river cleanups exemplify the type of work accomplished by local watershed groups.

3) Conduct Watershed Planning Demonstration Projects

Undertake demonstration projects to illustrate local/regional watershed approaches to planning and water quality protection, restoration, and improvement. These demonstration projects should identify the full range of local water quality concerns along with recommended solutions. Additionally, local watershed projects should contribute to the attainment of water quality goals in downstream waters such as Lake Champlain.

Potential key LCBP partners: USDA-NRCS, NYSDEC, VTDEC, watershed associations, universities, extension service, municipalities and nonprofit/private organizations, landowners

Cost estimate: \$50,000-\$100,000 per year

Potential funding source: State and federal appropriations

Time frame: Ongoing

Benchmark: Completion of one or more watershed planning demonstration projects per year