The Watershed Protection Approach on the Ground: Examining Participation and Environmental Justice Issues in EPA Region 4 Watershed Projects

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In recent years, the EPA has been promoting alternatives to top-down regulatory approaches to natural resource management. These approaches include Community-Based Environmental Protection (CBEP) and the Watershed Protection Approach (WPA), which is a form of CBEP. Both approaches emphasize the inclusion of diverse stakeholders in the development of management strategies. There has also been a movement in the EPA toward greater inclusion of minority and low-income groups, or environmental justice communities, in environmental issues. This project examines if and how stakeholder identification and outreach is being extended to environmental justice communities in watershed projects. More general participation issues concerning stakeholders in watershed projects are also discussed. Case studies of five EPA Region 4 watershed projects provide a detailed look at how participation issues are being handled in these projects, involving stakeholders, the public, and environmental justice communities.

A primary goal of this project is to examine how CBEP and the WPA are being implemented on the ground in order to allow current and future watershed projects to benefit from the knowledge gained by these earlier projects. Another major goal is to provide specific guidance for watershed projects on stakeholder identification and outreach to environmental justice communities. Based on the obstacles identified by the watershed projects analyzed here, an Outreach Resource Guide to aid in identifying and directing outreach toward environmental justice communities is currently being developed.

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INTRODUCTION AND PROJECT GOALS

In recent years, the EPA has been promoting alternatives to top-down regulatory approaches to natural resource management. These bottom-up alternatives (or top-down approaches with broader participation) include Community-Based Environmental Protection (CBEP), which involves the development of locally-focused and -generated strategies to supplement EPA's existing programs. While there is great diversity in CBEP projects, guiding principles of the approach include: 1. a definable geographic area, 2. collaborative partnerships with a full range of stakeholders, and 3. consideration of a community's environmental, economic and social objectives in order to promote sustainability or a focus on environmental results (EPA Region 4).

The Watershed Protection Approach (WPA) is one form of CBEP that the EPA has been promoting since 1991. Using hydrologic barriers to define the problem area, guiding principles of this approach include: 1. a high level of stakeholder involvement, 2. problem identification, 3. management techniques based on data and strong science, and 4. integrated solutions and management. Definitions of who should be involved vary and include relevant stakeholders, those most likely to be affected by management decisions, those most likely to be concerned, those interested in watershed management and project outcomes, or those most able to take action.

There has also been a movement in the EPA toward greater inclusion of minority and low-income groups, or environmental justice communities, in environmental issues. One question raised by this project is whether the broader message of environmental justice, beyond toxics and race is getting out beyond federal and state agencies to those leading and participating in natural resource management projects. In addition to examining the participation goals stated above, I believe it is important to examine if and how environmental justice concerns (under any name) are being addressed on the ground in watershed projects and what kinds of guidance and resources may be needed to better address these concerns.

This project is an examination of how five EPA Region 4 watershed projects using some form of the WPA are handling participation issues. These participation issues are diverse and include the composition of steering committees, who is responsible for stakeholder identification and outreach, how stakeholder identification and outreach methods are selected, and whether and how environmental justice communities are identified and targeted for outreach. While diverse topics are covered in the case studies, the primary focus of this analysis will be stakeholder identification and outreach to minority and low-income watershed groups.

These projects have formidable goals to manage large land areas with large populations with relatively small amounts of resources. As such, I believe it is important to examine these projects in detail, particularly in regard to whether and how these projects are meeting the goals of CBEP. In examining watershed project participation issues, specific questions one might ask include: How are stakeholders and the public being defined and identified? Is it important to include environmental justice communities in these projects? What might be obstacles to including stakeholders, the public, and environmental justice communities in these projects? This examination is also critical to the improvement of current and future watershed projects as CBEP.

One of the primary goals of this project is to allow current and future watershed projects to benefit from the lessons learned from these earlier projects. Some of the project participants interviewed stressed that when their projects began, the WPA was new and there was little guidance available on outreach issues ñ one interviewee noted that we had to make it up as we went along. Sharing information and building on accumulated knowledge are clearly important to the continuance and improvement of the WPA.

This project is also intended to provide specific guidance and information for watershed projects on participation issues involving minority and low-income groups, as several interviewees expressed the need for more specific ideas and resources than are currently available. Toward this end, I am developing an Outreach Resource Guide in consultation with individuals experienced in stakeholder identification and outreach to minority and low-income groups in a variety of contexts. Strategies developed by CBEP and WPA projects, including the five watershed projects analyzed here, will also be included. Some of these strategies and resources may also be useful for targeting the general public in watershed projects.

I believe that anthropological approaches have much to offer here in addressing the social aspects of environmental issues, which are increasingly being acknowledged by the EPA as being critical to conservation and protection efforts. While some interviewees concluded upon reviewing the case studies that they were mostly opinion (and hence somewhat deficient) others found it insightful to hear what people were really thinking, to take a closer look at participation issues at all levels of a project, and to see the diversity in viewpoints, the social dynamics and the decision-making processes involved.

In addition to foregrounding critical social interactions, anthropology has traditionally also emphasized communication across boundaries, including those presented by social and institutional obstacles. Questions to be asked of watershed projects in this regard include: Is coordination and cooperation among agencies (local, state and federal) being achieved? Is communication taking place between agencies and other entities, such as local governments? Is communication taking place between agencies and the public? Local governments and the public? Watershed projects and the public? Watershed projects and environmental justice communities?

In keeping with traditional anthropological emphases, context is also critical to the analysis of these projects. As such, a case study is provided for each of the five watershed projects analyzed here so that ideas and methods discussed can be seen as part of a larger picture. The case study format also highlights the diversity of these projects, including variation in size, geographic area, local history, rural/urban mixes, water quality and land use issues, participation issues, and intra- versus inter-state projects. Case studies also allow project participants to have their say. The bulk of this final report will be those case studies, as most of the information and issues are more effectively presented there than in a more general analysis.

Also in keeping with anthropological approaches, I felt it was important to get an insider's perspective on dealing with participation issues, as well as the outsider's view obtained by interviewing project participants. To gain this insider's view, outreach work was conducted for the Broad River Community Watershed Project (one of the cases presented here) to reach the public, as well as members of minority and low-income groups. The results of this separate sub-project are presented in Attachment 1. In addition to assisting the Broad River Project in their outreach efforts, the purpose here was to gain some insight into the challenges of outreach in these projects, particularly those presented by attempting outreach to low-income and minority groups in a watershed.

PROJECT METHODS

For this project, five watershed projects were selected from EPA Region 4, focusing particularly on the states of Georgia and Alabama. Projects selected utilized some form of the WPA and had some form of EPA support. Projects selected were: 1. the Savannah River Basin Project (on the Georgia/South Carolina border, including a portion of North Carolina), 2. the Flint Creek Watershed Project (north-central Alabama), 3. the Cahaba River Basin Project (central Alabama), 4. the Broad River Community Watershed Project (northeast Georgia), and 5. the Hiwassee River Watershed Project (southeastern Tennessee, northern Georgia, and western North Carolina).

After the projects were selected, initial contacts were made with EPA representatives for each project. Project directors and other participants involved in stakeholder identification and outreach for each project were then contacted. Attempts were made to include all the major players involved in stakeholder identification and outreach, and to provide balanced coverage, including agency representatives, community and environmental organizations, and other individuals, depending on the case. Simultaneously, background information on each project was collected and an interview protocol was developed (See Attachment 2).

Structured interviews were conducted by telephone with a total of 24 people, ranging from four to six per case. Supplemental short interviews and case study reviews were conducted with four additional individuals involved in the Cahaba River Basin Project in order to provide a balanced picture and to gain further insight into the participation issues involved in this case. A case study for each project was then constructed from these interviews. The appropriate interviewees then reviewed the case studies.

Interview contacts who indicated that they had experience with stakeholder identification and outreach, particularly to minority and low-income groups, were then consulted concerning the development of guidance on doing this kind of identification and outreach in a watershed project context. Other recommended contacts are now being consulted. This information will be incorporated into the Outreach Resource Guide discussed above.

PROJECT OUTCOMES

Some of the primary questions asked by this project concern how the word stakeholder was defined for these watershed projects, who were identified as stakeholders, and how this affected project participation. This is especially important as the word stakeholder has come to replace the public in natural resource management participation efforts. Despite the widespread use of the term stakeholder in environmental management, there have been few attempts to examine how this terminology may impact participation on the ground, in the implementation of these projects.

It appears that the definition of the term stakeholder in the initial stages of these watershed projects (or in the absence of a definition, the assumptions shared by project participants of who stakeholders were) was critical in determining who was targeted and ultimately involved in these projects (although the door was frequently left open for those who express interest). In addition, these groups of identified stakeholders were usually prioritized at some stage of the project, as some groups' involvement was seen as more critical than others (given limited resources), such as the involvement of landowners with riverfront property or representatives of local government.

For these projects, stakeholders were generally defined as anyone in the watershed, those impacting or being impacted by water quality issues, those expressing an interest in watershed issues, and those with the ability to act. Focusing on those that identify themselves, express interest, and are able to act does allow projects to maximize available resources, but may have implications for watershed groups that one project participant described as falling below the horizon of agencies and project leaders, as well as those who are unable to act due to cultural differences, a lack of political power or institutional factors. One project interviewee noted that they were primarily targeting those with the power to influence natural resource management, and minority and low-income groups have little to offer in this regard. The question raised by this statement is whether it is enough that the powers that be and some additional stakeholders develop better ways to communicate and address water quality issues through these projects. Even where anyone in the watershed is considered a stakeholder, there may be obstacles to involvement. Is there a need or obligation for these projects to seek out traditionally excluded or under-represented groups?

A few interviewees felt that there is a need to have information upfront for project directors on the differential costs and benefits of water quality issues by ethnic group or socioeconomic class, and that once this differential impact is established, watershed projects can then begin to take these issues into consideration. Others expressed the view that no proof of differential impact was necessary, as these groups should be included if resources allow. While several project participants felt that it was not practical in terms of resources to target these groups, most felt that some inclusion was appropriate, with subsistence fishing mentioned as a primary reason in more than one case. A few individuals expressed the view that differentiation of these groups for identification and outreach purposes may in itself be discriminatory, as they are all human beings, and outreach should be put out there for everyone. Other individuals felt that some accommodation is necessary to compensate for political, cultural, and institutional barriers.

In addition to these more general issues of participation, interviewees were asked to identify obstacles to the identification of and outreach to minority and low-income watershed groups, as well as the general public. Some individuals felt that the scale of watershed projects inherently creates barriers to looking at the smaller units and the human interactions. These interviewees stated that their focus was larger ecological issues and their impact on society as a whole, rather than how larger ecological issues are filtered down to social groups. These individuals noted that they were not sure how a connection could be made between these levels.

Another identified obstacle to identification and outreach was the communication gap that exists between the larger natural resource agencies (such as EPA and TVA) and the public. In particular, one project participant noted that some agency representatives were not used to acknowledging other perspectives and working with common citizens, or recognizing that citizens and their feelings are important. As such, local institutions, which were described as being more in touch with local people, had to mediate between the two to close this gap. On another project, one interviewee felt that some agency representatives on one project had already extended their comfort levels to some extent, and that there was an implicit fear of losing even more power to citizens. This participant felt that case studies might be important here in forming the process and seeing the kinds of results achieved by other projects, and in the process increasing the comfort levels of the agencies involved with the idea of broader participation.

A similar set of obstacles had to do with cultural and institutional barriers, both between major agencies and the public and watershed projects and the public. As several interviewees noted, these projects do not usually have project directors who are members of minority and low-income groups, resulting in a lack of contacts and perspectives from these communities. Some interviewees also felt that it was critical for the right people, or fellow community members, to talk to minority and low-income groups, rather than outsiders or professionals. Many interviewees felt that some stakeholders would be intimidated by the technical aspects of these projects, as well as the major agency representatives, even though they are nice people. Other participants interviewed noted suspicion of outsiders based on previous experience as a major barrier, especially between people of different ethnic and racial groups, as well as suspicion on the part of long-time community residents of newer community members who are more likely to be involved in these projects. Others noted that people generally do not trust the government. Building trust, improving communication, and building relationships were mentioned here as being critical to reaching these groups. A few interviewees noted that there is a critical need for long-term commitment to these communities in order to build these relationships and affect real change.

Several interviewees stressed that the methods of outreach used in watershed projects might be inappropriate for certain groups, especially the use of written materials in communities that emphasize the oral tradition. Several participants also noted that literacy rates in some areas need to be taken into account, as well as appealing to issues of concern to a wide range of people (although outsiders might not be able to guess at what these communities' concerns might be). Some interviewees noted that community members may not have the resources to be involved, or may find the meeting locations and times to be obstacles to participation. One participant felt that larger agencies are looking to deal with organized, educated people who understand bureaucracy, and hence are unable to reach beyond these groups. Others felt that members of minority and low-income groups were unlikely to attend meetings or workshops of any kind, and as a result, projects need to go out to creek banks and church groups, as well as door-to-door, to reach members of these communities.

In considering alternative strategies for reaching minority and low-income groups and other members of the general public, several project participants felt that the need to use resources efficiently and the lack of readily-identifiable groups in these communities were serious barriers to involving these groups in watershed projects. While this is a problem for any watershed project, due to the area involved and the size of the resident population, this situation was seen as being even more difficult due to the small numbers of minority group members in some areas. As such, a lack of resources (in the form of money, time and people) was seen as being a major obstacle to identification and outreach, and pragmatic decisions had to be made to use available resources as efficiently and effectively as possible. This frequently resulted in the targeting of certain priority groups of stakeholders and falling back on more general strategies in hopes of reaching some members of minority and low-income groups. One goal in developing the Outreach Resource Guide is to provide some more efficient and doable ways of reaching these groups given limited resources.

Another frequently-mentioned barrier was apathy on the part of these groups, as well as the general public, especially concerning environmental issues. Several noted that without a crisis, people will not understand the need to protect watersheds. Another common statement was that it was likely that minority and low-income groups would have other priorities besides watershed protection. While most participants interviewed speculated as to what these higher priorities might be for the communities in question (which can be problematic), one interviewee noted that in one community in which he had worked, a strong focus on improving education, while justified, diverted people's energy away from water quality and other environmental issues.

Another major obstacle noted was the top-down approach used by some projects in identifying watershed problems and developing solutions, rather than bottom-up approaches. Several individuals felt that there is a need for local groups to identify problems, with agencies then providing support to solve these problems. Several interviewees felt that there is also a need to tap into the knowledge of community members, as the people living [in the watershed] have a much better grasp of what's going on. More than one interviewee noted that project participants (even those who were watershed residents) had learned a great deal from community members.

CONCLUSIONS

This project and its results highlight the need to look at the terms currently in use, such as stakeholder, and examine how these terms may shape participation in the implementation of these projects. In addition, it is important to look at how projects labeled as CBEP or WPA are putting into practice the more abstract principles on which they are based. Simultaneously, it is critical to look at social and institutional factors and how they affect participation on the ground.

It is also extremely important to take a closer look at how environmental justice concerns are or are not being addressed in natural resource management projects. This raises an important question: Is the message getting out beyond the EPA and other federal and state agencies that environmental justice issues cover more than toxics and race issues? Based on most of the responses I received from interviewees (asking what environmental justice had to do with watershed projects), the answer in this case would be no. However, despite this response to the term environmental justice, many of those interviewed were discussing project issues that would be considered environmental justice issues.

Another important question is: Are specific guidelines and resources available to help projects such as these address environmental justice concerns in project implementation? Based on interviewees' responses, the answer to this question would also be negative. The need was expressed throughout the project for more specific guidance and resources to deal with the obstacles outlined above. The overall message received was that most project directors and participants wanted to include these groups and felt it was appropriate that they be involved, but projects lacked the resources and guidance to do so. Hopefully, the Outreach Resource Guide I am preparing will begin to address these needs.

SAVANNAH RIVER BASIN PROJECT CASE STUDY

The Savannah River Basin is a 10,000-square-mile watershed that forms the border between Georgia and South Carolina, with a smaller portion in North Carolina. The river is formed by the Seneca and Tugaloo Rivers at Hartwell Reservoir, and flows southeast to Savannah, Georgia, and the Atlantic. The basin was selected by EPA as a Watershed Protection Approach (WPA) project, as well as the Flint Creek watershed in Alabama. EPA initiated this project in 1992 with water quality agencies in Georgia and South Carolina. The major goal of the project is to conserve, restore, enhance and protect its ecosystems, especially aquatic ecosystems, in a way that allows the balancing of multiple uses.

Specific problems in the watershed to be addressed by the project include low levels of dissolved oxygen in the river and its estuary, impaired fisheries, non-point source inputs from agriculture, forestry and urban areas, discharges and releases from the Savannah River Site (listed as a Superfund site in 1989), sedimentation, point source discharges, and development impacts. At the first stakeholder meetings, which mostly involved natural resource agencies, 80 basin-wide issues were identified by stakeholders. These 80 issues were then grouped into six priority topics: water quality; fish and wildlife; land use and wetlands; water quantity, navigation and hydropower; industrial and economic development; and recreation and cultural resources. Resource Committees were formed around these categories and were charged with developing Baseline Assessments for each category in the basin. These six Baseline Assessments were merged into the Initial Assessment and Prioritization Report for the Savannah River Basin. The Management Committee, composed of mid-level agency folks, then met to prioritize the recommendations from the Baseline Assessments. The Policy Committee, which primarily consists of upper-level representatives of federal, state, and local agencies, local planning organizations, industry, environmental groups and citizens, is developing and implementing a watershed strategy using the Initial Assessment Report. Action Groups have also been formed.

The Watershed Protection Approach in the Savannah River Basin is based on three main principles: 1. the identification of the primary threats to the ecosystem, 2. the involvement of the people, or stakeholders, most likely to be concerned or affected or most able to take action, and 3. the development and implementation of actions in a comprehensive and integrated manner.

How was the word stakeholder defined for this project?

According to one informant, the word stakeholder was initially defined using the EPA Office of Water recommendations in the WPA. They were defined here as those within the basin with an interest in an issue or the ability to make things happen. Other definitions offered by interviewees included a member of an agency or group with an interest, and all parties impacting the river and impacted by river regulation. One informant felt that it was just assumed that everyone knew what stakeholder meant.

More than one informant noted that there had been a broadening of the definition in each phase of the project. In the first phase, a stakeholder was any federal or state agency with a policy or resource interest in the basin. In Phase Two, this definition was expanded to include business interests and environmental groups. In Phase Three, the current phase, the definition has been expanded to include any group impacted by the river or its tributaries, including local government and citizens. One informant noted that there were necessary limits to participation on the Policy and Management Committees, with membership set at about 25 individuals each for manageability. However, because there are two primary states involved, Georgia and South Carolina, this doubling quickly drove up the numbers. The Resource Committees were noted by one interviewee as having the broadest membership of any of the committees. According to one interviewee, the Policy Committee is expanding to include other industries, associations, and individuals on a continuous basis. In addition, as new issues are addressed, the Policy Committee encourages the Management Committee and the appropriate Action Groups to reach out and be inclusive of stakeholders who may be affected by the issue.

How were stakeholders originally identified?

There was no one group in charge of stakeholder identification and outreach, although the EPA initially played a major role. The EPA identified the major natural resource agencies in the basin and sent letters inviting them to the organizational meeting. Then environmental interests, business interests, and local planning commissions were approached. One participant who was involved from the start described the process as the group asking at each stage, Who else should be here? and then reaching consensus on who else should be included. Another participant noted that at the initial meetings, there were good debates over who should be involved at the Resource and Policy Committee levels.

One interviewee felt that for the most part, the Policy Committee was in charge of seeing that all impacted groups were represented at the table. At the meeting held to determine which business and environmental interests would be included in the process, one individual pushed for more of an open process, but the Policy Committee wanted to keep it balanced. However, the committee did agree to expand business and environmental representation to two slots per state.

Two participants interviewed noted that another committee member had raised the issue of including indigenous groups and other under-represented groups in the process, but this matter was not brought up again and the person left the process for unrelated reasons. One interviewee noted that a reference to the involvement and inclusion of traditional cultures in basin-wide watershed planning was included in the Goals and Objectives Section of the project by-laws due to these discussions. One interviewee noted that some different stakeholders were included on the Resource Committees, such as representatives from Resource Conservation and Development and the Association of Conservation Districts for both Georgia and South Carolina, formal groups representing local agricultural landowners. These kinds of stakeholders are also represented on the Policy Committee. Several interviewees felt that more stakeholders will be identified in Phase Three of the project (taking place now), as there will be a full-time person in charge of stakeholder identification and outreach.

Several participants noted that stakeholders not originally identified became apparent as the process went on, particularly as local stakeholders heard about the process and wanted to come express their concerns. Other stakeholders have been identified through conversations with committee members, resulting in new contacts or interested parties. In addition, the Action Groups are continuing to identify new stakeholders.

In terms of guidance used in the stakeholder identification process, one interviewee stressed the fact that the WPA was very new when the project began, both for EPA and others, and as a result there was not much guidance available on stakeholder identification except for the definition. Other participants agreed that other watershed projects could not be used as models because there were really no good models available at the time. As such, they had to make it up as they went along. One interviewee noted that while most of this identification process was based on personal knowledge, we are building on this now.

Were special efforts made to identify minority and low-income groups in the watershed?

All interviewees agreed that to this point, no special efforts had been made. One interviewee noted that while the Management Committee had a discussion about working some of this into the process, it was felt that these groups would be handled through the cities and environmental and citizen groups. The project was focusing on aquatic health as it applied to everybody, on a societal basis, not really looking at smaller groups. Another participant noted that while none of the major committees had focused on these groups, the third phase of the project would definitely do that.

How were outreach methods selected for each group of stakeholders?

The initial stakeholders identified were contacted largely through e-mails and word of mouth - there was no formal process. Another participant noted that after types of stakeholders were identified, the project then worked through associations or groups to spread the word, for example, using the County Commissioners Association to contact County Commissioners. Another interviewee described the outreach process after the formation of the Policy Committee as haphazard, really ñ people were contacted by many different means.

Several interviewees noted that in the current phase of the project, the Communications Committee is developing ideas for getting the message out to various groups, including a newsletter and invitations to meetings. However, participants also noted that while this committee has been meeting for over a year, they have not had the resources to do much. The project is now trying to make resources available in the form of a grant.

Were special efforts made to tailor outreach methods toward minority and low-income groups in the watershed?

According to one participant, the committees had not talked about these groups in particular, just larger citizen participation. Another noted that the Communications Committee is developing some outreach strategies now. One potential strategy, used successfully in other projects by one participant with previous outreach experience, begins by identifying groups in each community to work with, as well as leaders to help generate interest in environmental issues. The next step is to work on environmental interests in these communities, especially water issues on tributaries, and do some smaller, positive things to get people excited and involved, and then extend those programs.

What were or might be obstacles to identifying minority and low-income stakeholders in a watershed?

For this particular project, one major obstacle noted was a lack of resources, including money, time and people, as all project efforts to this point had been voluntary. At another level, one interviewee felt that the scale of the project was an obstacle, as the project has been looking at larger ecological issues, such as ësurface water recreation,’ rather than social ones. Another participant felt there might be some difficulty in identifying and classifying groups and impacts. Other obstacles mentioned were the invisibility of these groups to the larger community. Another participant felt that even if there were some representation, token acknowledgment may be a problem.

Within the communities themselves, there may be other obstacles. One participant who had outreach experience noted that there are traditional leaders in every community, but there are very often others that are hidden or kept hidden by those in power, who are the grassroots leaders. The view was expressed that it is critical to identify these grassroots leaders in order to reach the general public in these communities. An example used from another project was a traditional leader that did not want to cooperate in identifying resources and people in the community, because this person did not want to acknowledge these grassroots leaders. There may also be problems with infighting in communities if money is rumored to be available, as people come out of the woodwork that wouldn’t otherwise. This interviewee felt that this is particularly true in low-income communities, but can happen in any community, and is a reality most people won’t mention.

What kinds of guidance and assistance would be useful in identifying minority and low-income stakeholders in a watershed?

One interviewee stressed that any tools would be helpful, as this is not an area of expertise for many people working on the project. Another participant felt that a person designated specifically to work on these issues for the project would be helpful. Another observation was that the project needs tools and resources in order to understand how larger ecological issues are filtered down to social groups, as the basin-wide scale of the project keeps the participants from looking at the smaller units and the human interactions. However, this may not be possible, as this is a function of the size of the watershed in some ways.

Suggested strategies for identifying these groups included going door-to-door to talk to watershed residents, especially in communities where the oral tradition is emphasized.

What were or might be obstacles to directing outreach toward minority and low-income communities in a watershed?

One interviewee again stressed the need for more resources in the form of money, time and people and a lack of tools, including consultants and case studies. At the community level, one participant felt that obstacles to outreach include lethargy on the part of people who are beat-down and tired and whose attention may be focused on topics other than the environment. This individual also noted that there may be suspicion of those outside the community based on prior experience, especially between people of different racial or ethnic groups. The trust factor was noted as being critical here, and one way of building this trust is to do small things for a community and then build on these small successes. However, this individual also noted that you can never totally overcome the lethargy and survival mode of some people. Another obstacle noted was that to be effective, you have to work with the community for the long haul. This interviewee felt that without this long-term commitment, projects might initially be a success, but over time things would close back in. Another obstacle mentioned to reaching these communities is the top-down agency approach, as a bottom-up approach working with the community first and then providing agency assistance to empower the community would be preferable.

What kinds of guidance and assistance would be useful in directing outreach toward minority and low-income stakeholders in a watershed?

Several participants stressed that more resources were critical for the Communications Committee to implement the strategies being developed. One interviewee noted that among the committees there has been some hesitancy to go beyond the comfort level of the natural resource agencies involved. (This interviewee noted that this was implicit and never stated by committee members.) While they did extend the comfort level to some business and other groups, taking it another step might mean losing even more power to citizens. According to this participant, extending participation here is a question of raising comfort levels. Case studies may be helpful here in forming the process and seeing the kinds of results that have been achieved by other projects. This would aid in educating other members and helping them feel more comfortable in taking that step toward broader participation.

Concluding comments

One participant felt that there are two levels of watershed planning ñ the first having to do with larger basin-wide issues such as water quality, fisheries, and water use and storage - broad issues and their ecological and social impact. These issues tend to be fought out at the agency level, and involve federal, state and city/county /community representatives. The second has to do with by-square-mile watershed studies or the neighborhood level, moving down to smaller areas and individuals. Primary actors noted on this level may include organizations such as the former Broad River Action Group or the Chatooga Watershed Action Committee, which bring the local, communicative perspective into better focus. This interviewee was not sure where the linkage is between these two levels, and felt that the challenge is in developing links between these levels when they exist in the same overall basin.

FLINT CREEK WATERSHED PROJECT CASE STUDY

The Flint Creek watershed is a 290,000-acre area located in Cullman, Lawrence and Morgan Counties in north-central Alabama, which drains into Wheeler Reservoir and the Tennessee River. The area was described by one informant as being about 50% urban and 50% rural in character. The watershed was selected by the EPA as one of two pilot projects of the Watershed Protection Approach in the Southeast (the other was the Savannah River Basin). The project was developed by EPA with the Alabama Department of Environmental Management, the US Department of Agriculture-Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) as a multi-year cooperative effort among federal, state and local agencies to improve and protect the water quality of Flint Creek. Another major goal of the project is to document improvements in water quality that result from the implementation of Best Management Practices (BMP).

Problems in the watershed to be addressed by the project included impairments from both point and nonpoint sources, including excessive nutrients, low dissolved oxygen levels, and sedimentation. Sources include municipal sewage treatment plant discharges, urban runoff, failing septic systems, widespread littering and dumping of garbage, and intensive poultry and livestock operations.

The project began in 1992 with an organizational meeting with stakeholders. Coordination of the project is under the direction of the Flint Creek Watershed Project Steering Committee, which serves as an advisor to the Flint Creek Watershed Conservancy District Board, which was formed by the Soil and Water Conservation Districts of the three counties in 1994. The Board is also the local representative for the project and decides what water quality initiatives are implemented.

Steering Committee recommendations to the Board found in the Mission Statement include: 1. limiting point source pollution, 2. reducing nonpoint source pollution through voluntary implementation of BMPs and pollution prevention measures, 3. developing strong local advocacy for the enforcement of existing environmental regulations, 4. implementing a strong environmental education program throughout the watershed, and 5. implementing a water quality monitoring program. Another goal is to improve water quality so that the segment of Flint Creek designated as Agricultural and Industrial use can be upgraded to Fish and Wildlife use classification year-round.

How was the word stakeholder defined for this project?

Most interviewees agreed that stakeholders were defined as people who live in the watershed. Another interviewee noted that the word stakeholder was never defined - it was left open-ended to include anyone who was interested in the watershed and anyone in a position to be managing issues in the watershed and communicating with the public.

Was there any one group in charge of stakeholder identification and outreach?

According to one interviewee, at the start of the process, there was a TVA representative who was in charge of stakeholder identification for the first citizen action groups. This person also contacted state agencies in order to identify environmental activists. However, after this initial phase, most interviewees agreed that the Education Committee was more focused on stakeholder identification and outreach than anyone else, although one participant noted that most of these issues were handled by the Steering Committee.

How were stakeholders originally identified?

The three major groups of stakeholders originally identified were farmers (because agriculture is so prominent in the area), rural landowners (especially those with substantial amounts of acreage), and urban dwellers. Schoolchildren have also become a major focus of outreach, with the secondary aim of reaching adults through their children. According to one interviewee, the project director was the one who had initially decided to focus on farmers and schoolchildren. One participant noted that it was never an issue discussed or much time spent on, as they were trying to blanket the area and generate diverse involvement. Another participant described outreach for the project as being directed more toward John Q. Public than any particular groups of people.

Guidance in the stakeholder identification process largely consisted of personal knowledge, ideas generated through brainstorming, agency information (particularly from TVA) and ideas from other watershed projects. In addition, a survey on people's attitudes toward the environment was conducted for the project by Auburn University.

Stakeholders not originally identified did become apparent as the process went on. One participant described it as being a continuous process. Most of these people were local residents concerned about flooding and members of the farming community, as well as those who had found out about the project through committee meetings.

Were any special efforts made to identify minority and low-income groups in the watershed?

Most interviewees agreed that no special efforts had been made to identify these groups. According to one participant, the area is not highly represented by minority groups. Also, the area has TVA and there is lots of technical help in the area. Another participant expressed the concern that there are lots of low-income families in the area that fish for food, and that certain parts of the river should be posted by the Department of Health when the fish return. Two of the participants stressed that minority and low-income groups had not been singled out because the project is putting educational programs out there for everybody, black or white. Also, they are targeting schoolchildren and through them, their parents, and the schools are totally integrated.

How were outreach methods selected for each group of stakeholders?

To target farmers, the project went through the Farmer's Federation to organize meetings, which included using advertisements in farm-related newsletters. They also used newspaper and radio advertisements to target the rural population. These outreach decisions were made by the Education Committee and the Board, which also approved the Auburn University survey and the efforts directed at schoolchildren. In addition, one interviewee noted that there had been a great deal of publicity associated with the project ñ the project director has a relationship with the local newspaper, which was helpful, and the word was also being spread through radio advertisements and the Cooperative Extension Service. According to one interviewee, they were working to increase awareness and participation across the board, and the project has probably gotten the most publicity of any watershed project in Alabama. Other outreach is being done through the annual meeting (which is open to the public), a newsletter, and an annual canoe trip to get the recreation people.

To target schoolchildren, the project sponsors a Wet and Wild festival every year, which consists of about three days of intensive environmental education for fifth graders. The festival is in its fifth year and has been very successful. On the last day of the festival, parents and the general public are invited. One of the tools used at the festival is the Enviro-scape, which models surface and groundwater pollution. One participant noted that these models really seemed to get kids' attention, and they have gotten good feedback on this ñ they are now encountering children who remember them. The project is also providing materials for teachers to use as study guides and mini-grants for teachers to develop environmental projects.

Guidance in selecting outreach methods came mostly in the form of ideas from the Education Committee and ideas generated through brainstorming. According to one participant, each activity has identified new people and they have been dealt with as necessary. Another interviewee noted that there was some modeling after other watershed projects, as Board members looked at other projects and brought back ideas. Using the surveys done by Auburn, the project has gotten information on pre- and post-project public awareness, providing feedback on the project's efforts. One interviewee noted that through the survey, they knew that the project had reached the agricultural areas more effectively than the urban ones. The survey found that apartment dwellers in the watershed were the least aware, and that there were big gaps in segments of the urban population. In part to remedy this situation, as well as to reach more of the general public, some project members (with help from TVA) are now hoping to mount an exhibit in a local Wal-Mart store, to take advantage of it being a high-traffic area as well as a green or environmentally-friendly company.

Were special efforts made to tailor outreach methods toward minority and low-income groups in the watershed?

All those interviewed agreed that these groups had not specifically been targeted. In targeting schoolchildren, one participant noted that they were getting to parents through kids of all kinds. Another noted that minority groups were not targeted because they made up less than 2% of the population in the watershed.

What were or might be obstacles to identifying minority and low-income stakeholders in a watershed?

One participant felt that for most agencies, these groups fall below the horizon, as the agencies look to deal with organized, educated people who understand bureaucracy. Also, some of these stakeholders would be intimidated by the technical aspects of the project and the representatives from the major agencies, such as EPA and TVA, even though they're nice people. This interviewee felt that this was an unfortunate situation, as the people living there have a much better grasp of what's going on. Another participant did not see any obstacles to identifying these groups and did not believe these kind of distinctions should be made, as they are all human beings.

What kinds of guidance and assistance might be useful in identifying minority and low-income stakeholders in a watershed?

One interviewee felt that to identify members of these groups, one would need to go out to church groups and creek banks to reach them ñ you have to go to them, they won't come to meetings. This person also felt that you have to do it all, you have to do 110% to get to people, and you can't go about it in an organized way. Another participant felt that the information is there to identify these stakeholders, but the real problems are in outreach.

What were or might be obstacles to directing outreach toward minority and low-income communities in a watershed?

One project participant noted that some meetings had been held with minority groups over a six to eight month period, and water quality was not one of the problems the groups had identified. This person felt that education might be needed here, to help people understand water quality issues and why they are important.

What kinds of guidance and assistance might be useful in directing outreach toward minority and low-income stakeholders in a watershed?

One interviewee felt that cases of successful watershed projects would be helpful. Another felt that getting people's involvement is not just a problem with minority and low-income groups, but with any public group, as it's especially hard to get participation on environmental issues. More than one interviewee cited apathy as a problem, while other potential stakeholders don't trust the government.

One interviewee noted, however, that the project had a very good feedback mechanism, in the form of the initial and follow-up surveys done by Auburn, to help determine whether the project's messages were getting across concerning water quality issues and why the project was taking place. This participant felt that the information the surveys provided opened up avenues for educating people and changing attitudes.

Concluding comments

One interviewee stressed that stakeholder identification and outreach is extremely important and is the most challenging and difficult part of a project. However, if you don't do it, you won't succeed. This individual also felt that watershed projects are absolutely necessary as urbanization continues and the problems get more complicated. While those interviewed strongly agreed that the project has been a success, several interviewees raised concerns about continued funding, as it would be a shame if the project ceased.

Another participant felt that if he did it again from day one, he would have used a process of public meetings with specific groups in the watershed to let them identify problems from the start. In addition to identifying problems, this would also have helped to increase awareness. Another interviewee felt that every project is going to be different and have a different mix of minority and low-income groups, and that some guidance upfront on how outreach to these groups is beneficial to the project would be helpful.

CAHABA RIVER BASIN PROJECT CASE STUDY

The Cahaba River watershed, located in the central Alabama counties of St. Clair, Jefferson, Shelby, Bibb, Perry, and Dallas, drains an area of approximately 1,825 square miles. The river itself, which is less heavily dammed than most other rivers in the state, extends approximately 190 miles from St. Clair County to its confluence with the Alabama River in Dallas County. The upper basin area includes portions of the metropolitan Birmingham area, major portions of which are drained by the Black Warrior watershed. Several surrounding municipalities in the metropolitan Birmingham area are in the Cahaba River watershed. The lower basin is more rural in character.

The Cahaba River Basin Project was initiated by EPA and the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM) in 1994. The two agencies had been discussing ADEM’s implementation of a statewide Watershed Protection Approach. Major potential environmental concerns in the watershed include sediment and nutrient loading, low dissolved oxygen levels, eutrophication, increased chemical concentrations caused by low streamflow, habitat degradation, high bacteria levels, toxics, fisheries degradation, and the impacts of hydromodification on water quality. Possible non-point pollution sources to be targeted by the project include: storm sewers; industrial sources; highway, road and bridge construction; land development; surface run-off; removal of riparian vegetation; and streambank modification. The primary goals of the project are to identify water quality problems, explore solutions to these problems, and make recommendations for the management of the basin while maintaining the balance between protecting the environment and promoting the economy.

A few interviewees initially described the project as being a response to a lawsuit brought against Jefferson County (which includes part of the City of Birmingham) concerning sewer overflow and bypass problems in parts of the County. However, several other interviewees very strongly emphasized that the project is not connected with the lawsuit, which Jefferson County settled with citizen plaintiffs, the Cahaba River Society, EPA, and the Department of Justice, and that the initiation of the watershed project after the lawsuit was coincidental, not causative. According to one interviewee, a consent agreement between the County and the plaintiffs does not address or require any particular activities regarding watershed projects." One participant noted that while the project was voluntary, EPA offered the carrot of limited funding to support the project. This individual also noted that the sewer overflow lawsuit was a factor in increased public awareness and interest in the Cahaba River and its watershed.

This project has encountered some participation issues that differ from the other watershed projects examined here, with the major issue being representation of the lower-basin counties on the project’s Steering Committee. According to interviewees from the upper basin, at the start of the project, information was sent to the three lower-basin County Commissioners (of Bibb, Perry and Dallas Counties), but there was no response, and they went ahead and started the project. Lower county representatives stress that it is highly unlikely that all three counties would have ignored these letters and question whether they were ever sent or received.

A couple of general stakeholder meetings were then held in the Birmingham area by EPA and ADEM to discuss river issues. At about the same time, a Steering Committee of 17 members was formed of business, environmental, and government representatives, with most of these representatives being from the upper basin. The

Steering Committee decided to work on a consensus basis, where any voting representative can table or reject an idea or decision. One interviewee described the consensus process more generally as everyone being able to live with a decision.

According to one interviewee, after the process had started, the lower counties became more aware and requested involvement. According to a lower basin representative, the lower counties formally petitioned the Steering Committee for representation for the three counties on the Committee. Some Steering Committee members then went to the lower basin to give a presentation to the lower counties about the project. Representatives from the lower counties then attended several Steering Committee meetings to ask for representation for each of the three lower counties. The Steering Committee then decided to allow one voting representative for the three counties.

According to one interviewee, there was no intentional effort to exclude the lower counties. Reasons given for the Steering Committee imbalance included that there was fairly minor participation in the early meetings from lower basin people, and that most of the major water quality problems, including sediment and nutrient loading as a result of urbanization and development, originate in the upper basin and require action there. One participant also noted that once the Steering Committee was aware of the perceived Steering Committee imbalance, a concerted effort was made to remedy this.

Another participant expressed the view that communication with the lower basin was minimal at first, due mostly to a lack of interest or a lack of awareness of the importance of the project to residents of the lower basin (most probably a lack of interest among lower basin politicians). Lower basin representatives strongly object to this explanation and assert that statements such as these, which reflect on the abilities and attitudes of lower basin politicians, help explain the degree of mistrust that exists between the lower and upper basins. An upper basin representative also noted that it was felt that the Cahaba River Society and The Nature Conservancy could represent the environmental interests of the lower basin. Lower basin representatives respond by emphasizing that the lower basin does not need a big brother looking after its interests.

Lower basin interviewees still question the decision to allow only one voting representative for the three lower counties, as there are four urban votes, as well as votes given to business groups that some feel should not have their own voting member. In addition, several interviewees noted that the lower basin counties constitute between 60% and 70% of the watershed and each county will likely differ in terms of management needs, requiring separate representation. Other interviewees stressed that while the lower basin does constitute a large percentage of the watershed area, the upper basin contains a large percentage of the population as well as the largest potential for providing resources to address watershed issues.

Other interviewees noted that because the Steering Committee operates by consensus, one vote is just as effective as three, as any one member can cause a proposal to be tabled. Therefore, representation on the Steering Committee for one viewpoint can achieve the same result that would take majority support in a majority-minority voting committee. Lower basin representatives counter that there needs to be as much geographical and ecological representation as possible, to go along with the population and resources. According to one interviewee, the issue has been turned into a political one, when it should be an ecological issue.

While several interviewees mentioned that there may have been consideration at some point of filing a lawsuit against the Steering Committee over these participation issues, the only actual legal action identified involved representatives of at least one lower basin county trying to enter the sewer overflow lawsuit in order to receive some of the $20 million dollars spent in Jefferson County in lieu of a fine. According to one interviewee, some of this money should have been used in the lower basin to remedy damages there.

This general situation was described by interviewees as a continuation of a historical relationship of distrust between the upper and lower basin in which all the water problems end up down here with us, and the lower basin is not taken seriously. As such, the lower counties remain suspicious of any actions taken in the upper basin that seem unfair to the lower basin's interests. One interviewee described the process of allowing the upper basin to control the process as leaving the fox tending the hen house. All interviewees agreed that there are perceptions of injustice and distrust, based in fact or not, that exist between the two areas and that these perceptions may ultimately hinder the development of a comprehensive and successful watershed project.

While the Cahaba River Basin Project has been characterized by some individuals as two separate projects ñ with one for the upper and one for the lower basin ñ all upper basin participants interviewed stressed that this is not the preferred situation. One interviewee also emphasized that two projects is not the desire of the Steering Committee. While there are some separate sub-projects being proposed for the upper and lower areas, such as a demonstration project in the lower basin, the project is intended to be comprehensive. Lower-basin representatives strongly agree with their upper basin counterparts that it should be one project and that they want to build a bridge between the two sides. However, equitable representation is still an issue and feelings of distrust between the upper and lower basin persist. Currently, the Steering Committee has established bylaws and formed subcommittees to collect data in five areas: water quality, water quantity, natural resources/conservation, economic development, and education/outreach. The Steering Committee is now taking subcommittee information and sharing it with local politicians and the public. A new full-time project coordinator has also recently been hired.

How was the word stakeholder defined for this project?

According to one interviewee, there were two different meanings of the word stakeholder, one being anyone interested in the project, and the other being the members of the Steering Committee, who were assumed to be representatives of the major stakeholder interests. Another participant felt that stakeholders were any group concerned about protecting and enhancing the river, from power companies to individuals. One interviewee noted that the semi-annual stakeholder meetings will help to inform the general public about the project and solicit greater public participation, making the term stakeholder a broad one.

How were stakeholders originally identified?

Initially, mailing lists were developed by EPA and ADEM, and a large number of people were sent invitations to the stakeholder meetings. After this initial effort, one participant noted that some stakeholders got together and self-defined themselves. More than one participant noted that with a full-time project coordinator, the project would now be able to do more stakeholder identification and outreach.

While EPA and ADEM were originally in charge of stakeholder identification and outreach, these duties were then transferred to the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee then formed the Education and Outreach Subcommittee. In the lower basin, the Alabama Cahaba River Coalition (ACRC) has assumed responsibility for these tasks, and will likely form an advisory council or steering committee once funds are secured for the demonstration project. According to one upper basin participant, the ACRC has not approached the Steering Committee to provide stakeholder identification for the lower basin. According to this individual, anyone providing additional information that would broaden the current list of interested stakeholders would be welcomed and the stakeholder mailing list would be updated accordingly.

Were special efforts made to identify minority and low-income groups in the watershed?

One interviewee noted that the Project Coordinator is currently working with EPA and other sources of information to identify minority and low-income groups within the watershed. Others were not aware of such efforts, although the Cahaba River Society (which is represented on the Steering Committee) has been involved in identification of and outreach to these groups in the Birmingham area concerning water quality issues.

How were outreach methods selected for each group of stakeholders?

One interviewee described the outreach process as a formal one, directed by the Project Coordinator and the Chairperson for the Education and Outreach Subcommittee. The Project Coordinator is engaged in a very organized effort to reach stakeholders, with an extensive mailing list and a webpage that is frequently updated. However, this individual also noted that the outreach process is in its formative stages, as are the activities of the other subcommittees of the Steering Committee.

One participant felt that the only real outreach effort to date was that directed toward the lower counties, and that the subcommittees are now supposed to be soliciting information from any interested party. Another interviewee described it as not a formal process to this point, and anyone represented on the Steering Committee could notify and communicate with constituents and other stakeholders.

Semi-annual stakeholder meetings are held which are open to the public, as are the monthly Steering Committee meetings. Other outreach efforts include publicity through a local newspaper and the creation of the website. Public service announcements are also being planned.

In terms of guidance, one participant noted that the Steering Committee developed these outreach strategies using several sources, including personal knowledge, ideas generated through brainstorming, and information from other watershed projects. More recently, the new Project Coordinator has been compiling a library of watershed project information from all over the US, which will be helpful in developing outreach strategies.

Were special efforts made to tailor outreach methods toward minority and low-income groups in the watershed?

One participant noted that there had been no particular activities initiated by the Steering Committee in this regard, except outreach to the lower counties, which were described as being more low income than the upper basin counties.

What were or might be obstacles to identifying minority and low-income stakeholders in a watershed?

One interviewee noted that members of these groups would not be as likely as others to attend stakeholder meetings, especially as some of these meetings have been held during business hours and most have been held in the Birmingham area. One interviewee noted that there have been some efforts to arrange for some of the Steering Committee meetings to be held in the lower basin. According to one participant, the next stakeholder meeting in February will be in the lower basin.

What were or might be obstacles to directing outreach toward minority and low-income groups in a watershed?

One interviewee with outreach experience to minority and low-income groups noted that some African-American groups in the watershed are strongly focused on improving education, which, while critical, directs energy away from projects like this and people’s participation in them.

What kinds of guidance and assistance might be helpful in identifying and directing outreach toward minority and low-income groups in a watershed?

Suggestions included traveling to them, or holding meetings or activities in these communities, although there would be some expense associated with this strategy. Another participant felt that it is important for the project to tap the stakeholder identification and outreach experience of available agencies and organizations.

One interviewee with experience in doing outreach to minority and low-income communities stressed the importance of improving communications and forming relationships with these groups.

Concluding comments

One interviewee felt that the biggest problem with the project so far has been a lack of communication among all the groups involved, which has resulted in an inability to identify objectives and develop cohesion. Possible reasons given for this situation include the use of alternates on the Steering Committee, the inclusion of business interests that don't care about the river, and the fact that this project was not completely voluntary, although several participants strongly disagreed with this last statement, stressing that the project has always been completely voluntary. One participant also stressed that there has been very good communication among Steering Committee members, although this was not the case initially with representatives of the lower basin.

Another participant expressed the fear that because stakeholder identification and outreach have been weak to this point, the goals of the project might suffer, because they failed to be inclusive enough. However, several interviewees noted that the new Project Coordinator should help to move the stakeholder identification and outreach process forward. While one interviewee expressed the view that the size and diversity of the Steering Committee, along with the consensus process, may make it extremely difficult to achieve the project's goals, another participant expressed the view that the diversity on the Steering Committee will ultimately make for a more productive and balanced management plan.

While distrust and perceptions of injustice between the upper and lower basin still persist, all interviewees emphasized strongly that a unified project was their goal and was critical to the success of the project.

BROAD RIVER COMMUNITY WATERSHED PROJECT

The Broad River watershed covers a 944,000-acre area in 13 northeast Georgia counties. The headwaters of the river form in the Appalachian foothills of Stephens County, and the river then flows southeast into Clark's Hill Reservoir in Wilkes County. The watershed is a sub-basin of the Savannah River basin, and merges with the Savannah River in Elbert County at the Georgia/South Carolina border. The watershed is primarily rural in character and the river itself is relatively unaltered.

The project was initiated by an individual working on another EPA-funded Watershed Protection Demonstration Project and a Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) Regionally Important Resources Initiative. This individual suggested to the EPA that the Broad River be funded as a Watershed Protection Approach demonstration project. The project was developed in partnership with the University of Georgia's Institute for Community and Area Development (now the Fanning Institute), DCA, the Georgia Environmental Policy Institute, and the Broad River Watershed Association (BRWA), a local land trust. These project partners, according to one participant, wanted the BRWA to spearhead the project, as the project participants felt that having a local group in a leadership position would encourage more participation and ownership among watershed communities, versus having the state or other outsiders leading the project.

A major goal of the project is to identify potential land use conflicts between future development and water-based natural resources and to assist local governments in adopting complementary watershed protection strategies to avoid or mitigate these conflicts. Another primary goal is to help the community develop and articulate a vision for the development and protection of the Broad River and to develop a set of policies to implement that vision.

The project is also hoping to provide a successful model of community-developed watershed protection for use throughout the state. The project is now at the end of the first phase of education and outreach, with community drop-in meetings set to take place. These drop-ins will use a science-fair format to present resource inventories and public comments and communicate with community residents about the project's ideas and progress. Also, a Citizens Advisory Committee is being formed to assist the project in formulating alternative development scenarios and management tools to address potential land use conflicts.

How was the word stakeholder defined for this project?

While some interviewees felt there was no set definition, one interviewee noted that this topic was talked about at length, and while the definition took many forms, it eventually came down to several broad categories, including landowners/farmers, government, business interests, and residents. It was noted that this process took place mainly through the BRWA Board (hereafter known as the Board) and a committee of both BRWA and Board members. Several participants noted that they felt stakeholders included everybody in the watershed, or anyone who lived or worked in the watershed. A few interviewees described stakeholders as anyone who had an interest in land-use planning in the area.

How were stakeholders originally identified for this project?

The Outreach Committee, which included the Project Manager, BRWA members, Board members, and a UGA graduate student, primarily dealt with stakeholder identification. To reach business and civic groups, Chambers of Commerce in each county were contacted for member lists and other contact numbers. Telephone books were then used to identify other county groups such as churches and conservation organizations. Committee members also looked for contacts through the local Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) groups. One participant noted that some Census data was used, and that the Project Manager contacted

Boards of Health and other similar organizations to identify other potential stakeholders.

A master list was created from these sources, which the Committee then refined (some additional stakeholders may also have been added at this time). The list was described by interviewees as being inclusive (including, for example, volunteer fire departments), and the only names removed were those that the group felt were covered better by other groups. One participant noted that they asked about 60 people for feedback on this list, and that there was a great deal of actively soliciting BRWA members, Board members, staff, and community members for ideas. One interviewee noted that there was some debate over which stakeholders should be involved, and some people were only interested in stakeholders with 500 acres of land or more.

Guidance in the stakeholder identification process was mostly provided by ideas generated through brainstorming, although one interviewee noted that having a watershed resident on the Outreach Committee was also helpful in generating ideas. Personal knowledge was also important, as several of those involved on the Committee had experience with similar projects. Information from other watershed projects was also used, as one interviewee noted that many of those involved had read previous case studies. (One Committee member used a case study publication from the River Network.)

Some stakeholders not originally identified became apparent as the process went on. One participant noted that several Board members and BRWA members suggested their own church groups as targets for outreach. Other stakeholders identified later included neighborhood organizations and poultry farmers.

Were special efforts made to identify minority and low-income groups in the watershed?

Looking at Census data for the watershed, the Committee found that minority groups were not that well represented in the watershed. However, several interviewees noted that the issue of identifying minority and low-income groups was discussed, and identification strategies such as going to Department of Social Services offices or lower-income housing projects were debated. Several educational institutions were also consulted about these issues. In the end, the project made a pragmatic decision to go with organized community groups regardless of race or socioeconomic status, as the project had not identified any efficient strategies to identify and direct outreach toward these groups.

One remaining strategy considered was going through churches to reach minority communities in the watershed. One interviewee noted that this idea had not really been followed through. Another participant met with a white ministerial organization from one county and felt that approaching churches on a non-religious issue was an ineffective strategy. In addition, most churches being contacted through the project were middle class white churches. One participant noted that there was also some uncertainty concerning how to identify predominantly African-American churches in the watershed.

In the early stages of the project, one Committee member went to a meeting at a housing project to talk to people. At that meeting this person spoke to individuals about men who fished in the river and ate what they caught, but she was unable to follow up on this information due to the decision to focus resources on other strategies. The Committee then decided to pursue a more general strategy, such as putting information in local libraries, in hopes of reaching some members of these communities.

How were outreach methods selected for each group of stakeholders?

Outreach in the form of short presentations was first directed toward local governments to inform them about the project upfront. (In the final stages of the project, recommendations based on stakeholder preferences will be presented to these same officials.) After compiling the master list of stakeholders, the Outreach Committee sent out between 800 and 1,200 letters notifying groups about the project.

The main method of outreach after these preliminary stages was to do presentations for community groups, or what one participant described as a one method fits all approach, although there was some flexibility in the model. Presentations were largely in the form of slide shows, as it was decided that pictures would be preferable to abstract concepts. Also, the slide shows were adapted to each county, as the group agreed it was important to talk about places people knew and hopefully loved. While organized groups were targeted, individual stakeholders could form a group and request a presentation.

One interviewee noted that one very effective part of this strategy was to use local BRWA members as presenters of the slide show, rather than relying on the Project Manager or other professionals to do the presentations. This individual felt that the result was better presentations because the presenters and the audience were fellow community members. This same strategy is now being used in the Etowah River Watershed Project, also in Georgia.

Other forms of outreach included six newspaper articles written on different river topics (including natural history, cultural history, and economics) which provided a contact number for more information. According to one participant, the project received several responses through this strategy. Also, posters and surveys were put in public libraries and courthouses, and a brochure and handout were developed. Written materials were sent out to some interested individuals.

Guidance in the outreach process came largely from personal knowledge and ideas drawn from other watershed projects. Participants also noted that in developing outreach strategies, it was very helpful to have access to Board members and BRWA members who knew the community. In terms of the origin of the slide show/presentation format, one participant noted that the strategy had been used successfully by a Committee member on a similar project.

Were special efforts made to tailor outreach methods toward minority and low-income groups in the watershed?

Some participants noted that efforts were made to make all outreach materials understandable to an average adult, or someone with at least a 7th-grade education. Also, one participant noted that the emphasis of the slide show was issues of concern to a wide array of people, including drinking water, quality of life issues, recreation, and public access to the river. Putting posters and surveys in local libraries was another effort to reach these groups. One participant had some experience in public health outreach to minority groups, and noted that this experience was kept in mind when implementing the various outreach strategies.

What were or might be obstacles to identifying minority and low-income groups in a watershed?

One interviewee noted that finding out who they are using current avenues is a major obstacle to identification. Another participant felt that identification is not really the problem, as it just involves expanding existing approaches. However, due to resource constraints, Committee members were not able expand these approaches in efforts to identify these less visible groups.

In terms of reaching minority groups through churches, a participant noted that one obstacle to this approach was that not many BRWA members go to African-American churches, and you can get a foot in the door that way. In general, it was noted that not having minority and low-income people working on the project was a hindrance to identifying these groups, as the methods used were based on what the project directors knew, and none of them were from minority or low-income groups.

Also, one participant noted that the project was trying to get in touch with people in power, and those who can make things happen ñ minority and low-income groups are not in a good position in this regard. However, one interviewee expressed concern that there are groups of people fishing in the river and consuming what they catch, and that it is appropriate that these people be identified and involved.

Other obstacles included time and money, both ours and theirs. One interviewee felt that the project would need more financial support to identify these groups. However, this person also recognized that additional financial support was unlikely as, as usual with environmental issues, you have big problems and limited money. This individual would have liked to have been able to go out with brochures and blanket communities, although this strategy was not deemed to be practical by the project. Because of the need to best utilize limited resources, the project had to work with elected officials first, then landowners, and then use the remaining resources to reach the rest of the watershed. Several interviewees noted that the size of the watershed and of the resident population was an obstacle in identification efforts. As African-Americans only represented a small portion of the total population and were not organized in easy-to-contact groups, identification of these communities was made even more difficult.

What kinds of guidance and assistance might be useful in identifying minority and low-income groups in a watershed?

One interviewee thought that the local RC&Ds might have someone dealing with minority issues, and that such a contact could potentially be very helpful. Another participant suggested that the Cooperative Extension Service and researchers at institutions (such as the University of Georgia) may have already identified some of these groups in the watershed. One interviewee also felt that there are local people in every community who know who these people are, such as local agencies and health professionals. Other suggestions included talking to people who work on the river or to those who own hunting and fishing clubs. Visiting sites on the river to contact people was also suggested as a potentially useful approach.

One participant noted that even with more money, targeting individuals or going to housing projects would not have been recommended for the project, as the most important thing was to get the involvement of minority and low-income people with land by the river, and all river landowners will get a letter inviting them to the County Forums.

What were or might be obstacles to directing outreach toward minority and low-income groups in a watershed?

As project outreach is tailored toward groups, the major obstacle to outreach was the lack of recognizable target groups in these communities. Other mentioned obstacles included that these groups might not have the resources to participate in the project, or that they might not be able to attend meetings due to a lack of child care or transportation. In addition, some interviewees thought that members of minority and low-income groups might have other priorities besides water quality that would prevent participation.

Another obstacle mentioned by several participants was the low literacy rates in some of the counties, which would make most of the written materials unsuitable, although the presentations might still be appropriate. At one point in the process, a Committee member suggested going to trailor parks, but those involved felt that they would get a negative reaction, with so many of the project members being outsiders from the University of Georgia. This is one of the reasons that BRWA members were asked to do presentations, as they would be more familiar and approachable to local people, and often they were fellow community members or neighbors. Along the same lines, several interviewees noted that the project would need the right people to talk to minority and low-income groups, preferably members of those communities. One participant stressed that the need to have people present [information] to their own communities is something every project should be aware of.

Another obstacle mentioned was that BRWA is largely a voluntary group, and except for the Project Manager, many of those involved in the project would not have the time to do labor-intensive outreach projects. Looking at the bigger picture, one interviewee felt that a major obstacle to outreach in all watershed projects and among all stakeholder groups is apathy. This person felt that if there wasn't a crisis, people would not see the importance of managing watersheds.

What kinds of guidance and assistance would be useful in directing outreach toward minority and low-income groups in a watershed?

One participant felt that having a resource to identify minority landowners would have been helpful. Another individual noted that the local Cooperative Extension Service may be developing a new program to try to reach minority and low-income farmers in the Southeast, which may be very helpful to watershed projects.

According to another individual you need to provide tools for these people to participate. Several interviewees agreed that a personal approach, rather than written materials, would be preferable in directing outreach toward these groups. Outreach at fairs was suggested as a potentially effective way to reach lower-income communities. A display at a fair for another project in the watershed was well-received, and even non-readers could participate.

One participant suggested that case studies on what different watershed projects have done to reach people who are not organized in easily-identifiable groups would be helpful.

Concluding comments

The Broad River watershed project was described by one interviewee as being different from other watershed projects because most watershed projects have public meetings at the start of the project and get little response. To remedy this situation, the project went out to the community first and then held public meetings. However, another interviewee noted that even if a project reaches stakeholders in a community, the whole process can be undermined by one or two vocal officials, so stakeholders need to connect with local politicians.

One participant felt that senior citizens and young people are an underutilized resource in many watershed projects, including this one. Another interviewee noted that in all the watershed projects she has worked on, the public response has been overwhelming ñ people like to be asked what they think. Also, in this individual's experience, stakeholder knowledge is very important, as every project has learned a lot from stakeholders. In this case, even Board members and BRWA members who live in the watershed learned things about the river and about issues around it that they were not aware of before.

HIWASSEE RIVER WATERSHED PROJECT CASE STUDY

The Hiwassee River watershed drains approximately 3,163 square miles and covers eleven counties in three states: five in Tennessee, four in Georgia, and two in North Carolina. The major land uses in the watershed are forest (70%), cropland (23%), pasture (2%), and urban (0.6%). Water quality problems being addressed in the area include agricultural runoff and erosion, nutrients, stream degradation due to practices related to copper mining, aquatic habitat and native species losses, and residential and commercial development.

In 1994, the Southeastern Natural Resources Leaders Group, which consists of high-ranking officials from federal environmental agencies, was looking to select a watershed that might benefit from collaborative planning. The Hiwassee River watershed was selected, as the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) had a River Action Team (RAT) there and assessment information was abundant. The Hiwassee Interagency Team (HIT) was then formed, which includes representatives from several federal agencies (including TVA, EPA, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service), as well as several Tennessee state agencies.

The goal of the project is to maximize resources and avoid organizational roadblocks in providing assistance to local communities on water quality and non-point source pollution problems. HIT meets on a quarterly basis to look at the watershed and talk about needed activities. The project is now in the implementation phase, although some sub-projects are still in the planning phase.

How was the word stakeholder defined for this project?

Several interviewees noted that the term wasn't explicitly defined, it was just understood as being users of the resource or those who live in the watershed. One participant noted that nailing down the definition of the word stakeholder is as difficult as defining the word sustainable.

Was there any one group in charge of stakeholder identification and outreach?

HIT was initially in charge of these tasks, although about a year ago an Outreach Committee was formed, which includes representatives of several user groups, including the Hiwassee Watershed Coalition (HWC) and the curator of a local museum.

How were stakeholders in the watershed originally identified?

According to one interviewee, stakeholders were initially identified through the agencies involved, using contacts already established. In addition, the Hiwassee RAT had a good network of contacts, and through these avenues, people were invited to participate.

The agencies also provided guidance in the stakeholder identification process. However, according to one participant, some of the agencies involved didn't see landowners as stakeholders. However, this individual noted that over the course of the project, significant strides had been made toward focusing more on relationships with people, reflected in the relatively recent development of the Outreach

Committee.

In terms of stakeholders not originally identified, one participant noted that there is now some discussion of getting the states of Georgia and North Carolina more involved in the project, including state agencies and the general public of both states.

Were special efforts made to identify minority and low-income groups in the watershed?

One interviewee noted that while some areas of the watershed had been identified as primarily consisting of minority inhabitants, the project was focused more on bigger problems and general solutions to those problems. Others noted that there are very few minorities in the area, with some counties having none. One individual stressed that HIT will work with any community if their services are needed, minority or not.

In terms of low-income groups, one participant stated that there is little difference in the watershed between high and low-income folks, with no real affluent segment of the population, allowing them to target folks across the board. There are some low-income Appalachian communities, but they don't have much impact on water quality.

How were outreach methods selected for each group of stakeholders?

Contact with identified stakeholders was usually made through telephone calls and letters. A mailing list was also developed and meetings were held with specific groups of people. Currently, the Outreach Committee is developing informational flyers for possible mass mailing. Other outreach efforts being developed include a kiosk for the local museum, as well as place mats for local restaurants to reach people who live in the area but do not go to the museum.

One individual described the outreach process as largely the scratch and sniff method, whereby local government officials in a community, as well as representatives of state and local agencies, were contacted for suggestions of local groups that might have concerns about the river. In terms of outreach to other organizations and agencies, the Liaison Committee is now developing a questionnaire to find out about products and services available in the watershed in order to build on available resources and avoid duplication of efforts.

Guidance largely consisted of ideas generated through brainstorming, as well as personal knowledge and the experience of agency representatives on the Outreach Committee. One participant noted that it was also important to have stakeholder leaders" on the Committee for guidance.

Other outreach is being done by HWC, which primarily targets farmers and schoolchildren for education. One HWC member has been going to elementary schools to talk about the river dressed in a rainbow trout costume, a strategy that has been popular with the children. Other efforts include helping to train Enviro-thon members at local schools, as well as doing presentations for adult groups. Most of these ideas were self-generated, although some educational materials were used. Plans are now underway to do stream monitoring through school science clubs.

Were special efforts made to tailor outreach methods toward minority and low-income groups in the watershed?

None of the interviewees was aware of any special efforts to target minority groups. However, regarding low-income groups, one interviewee noted that as the majority of the area is median to low-income, the general population in the watershed is that audience, and as such, all outreach is being targeted toward these groups. One participant noted that there are programs going on in the watershed involving Native Americans in North Carolina and some low-income groups in the Polk County, Tennessee, area.

What were or might be obstacles to identifying and directing outreach toward minority and low-income stakeholders in a watershed?

According to one interviewee, one obstacle might be that many of the programs require a match fund, and some stakeholders might not be able to work with you to come up with a match. Also, these groups tend to be less proactive and are not often involved in these kinds of projects. Another individual noted that in working with subsistence farmers who are impactors of water quality, many of them cannot afford the needed changes, and while North Carolina has a cost-share program, Georgia does not. Another potential obstacle is that most of the project meetings are held in Tennessee, and so the project gets better participation there.

Awareness on the part of project leaders was noted as another potential obstacle, as one interviewee stated that some people don’t really think of water quality as an ethnic problem. Another participant felt that obstacles include a general distrust of government agencies by the public and the resistance of long-time residents to being told by other people how to be good stewards.

Cultural differences were also identified as obstacles, as workshops and other similar methods may not work in these settings. In these communities, educational outreach may be necessary.

What kinds of guidance and assistance would be useful in identifying and directing outreach toward minority and low-income stakeholders in a watershed?

According to one participant, watershed projects need good information on programs that might be available in those situations were matching funds are needed. Another participant noted that one of the most effective ways to reach farming communities is to go through the local Soil and Water Conservation Districts, as they have a long-time relationship and credibility with local farmers here. In addressing distrust, one participant felt that if people are listened to, some of this distrust fades. Another participant felt that these projects really don’t need more workbooks and guidelines, but rather concerted long-term commitment to these communities.

One interviewee expressed the view that there are no easy answers to these obstacles. According to this individual, the ideal strategy would be to divide up an area and canvas from door-to-door, to make sure people are informed and can express their concerns and needs. However, all projects have limited resources and must resort to other strategies to reach everybody, such as mass mailings.

Concluding comments

One interviewee felt that where awareness on the part of project leaders is a problem, work needs to be done to document disparities by social group in water quality impacts. This individual stressed that while people are open to expanding outreach to include minority and low-income groups, you need to show how valid this is, how it could be used, and how it could benefit people.

Having worked with major state and federal agencies on several similar projects, one interviewee noted that frequently there is a gulf between agencies and the public, with agencies failing to realize that there are other perspectives and that citizens and their feelings are important. This individual felt that this is because some agency people are used to dealing with a captive audience rather than the public. However, through the mediation of organizations and lower-level agencies that are used to working with common citizens, this project has remedied the situation to some extent through the creation of the Outreach Committee.

Another interviewee noted that this project differs from other watershed projects in taking a top-down, agency-driven strategy rather than a community-generated one.

ATTACHMENT 1 - BROAD RIVER OUTREACH REPORT

The primary goal of this sub-project was to get input from river users, particularly minority and low-income users, that might not otherwise be contacted in Broad River Community Watershed Project outreach efforts. Another major goal was to provide those interviewed with the opportunity to provide further information or to become involved with the project. In addition to providing support for the Broad River watershed project, this effort was also meant to provide the author with some personal outreach experience, in order to better understand the stakeholder identification and outreach process, as well as the challenges of identification and outreach to minority and low-income communities, as described in case studies on selected EPA Region 4 watershed projects (the other portion of this internship), which include the Broad River project.

I began this effort by examining demographic information on the eleven counties in the Broad River watershed. Having gained some understanding of the demographic mix in each county, I identified game wardens in each county (or members of the Broad River Watershed Association [BRWA] if the game warden was unavailable) who were familiar with the places on the stem and major tributaries of the river frequented by low-income and minority groups and/or the general public. After acquiring information on the location of these areas on both public and private land (frequented by the public with the permission of the owner), I went to many of these river areas, which included bridges, private land and state parks, to familiarize myself with these watershed sites.

A short interview protocol was developed, with questions about river use and whether interviewees had noticed changes in the river over time (See Appendix A). Simultaneously, a handout was developed, which was intended to be graphic and simple enough to be understandable to a wide range of reading levels and which would provide a local telephone number in each county for the interviewee to call if they had more information or wanted to become involved with the project (See Appendix B). BRWA members in each county were then contacted to provide these local contact numbers. This portion of the project took longer than expected, due to the need to identify calling areas, identify BRWA members in each calling area, and then get consent from each of these members to use their phone numbers. Another complicating factor was that members knowledgeable enough about the project to serve as a contact were largely confined to certain counties, leaving other counties uncovered. In these cases, the Project Manager's long distance number had to be used, noting that she would call back anyone who called her, making the expense minimal.

Unfortunately, by the time all these preliminary tasks had been completed, river use had dropped off dramatically due to seasonal changes. While I could have spoken to those river users I encountered while familiarizing myself with the various frequented river areas, I chose not to do so without having a handout and contact number available for each county. While going to river areas to talk to river users was the optimal strategy, being the most efficient way to identify and approach river users and providing the perfect context in which to talk about river use, an alternative strategy had to be developed. This alternative was to attend any county fairs or festivals that were still being held in the watershed to reach some quantity of the river-using public. This did prove to be much less efficient than the original strategy, for although I was able to make contact with a wide variety of people in fairly short periods of time, not all those contacted were river users.

I attended the Madison County Fair in Comer on October 2, 1998, and the Elberton 12-County Fair on October 17 and 18. In talking to organizers for both fairs, I was told that both fairs drew a diverse group of people from several different counties. However, the majority of those spoken to were from the county in which the fair was held. At both fairs, it was decided that the best strategy was to walk around the fairgrounds (including the midway) and talk to people rather than setting up a booth. Persons were approached and asked if they ever went to the Broad River (or the Hudson River, a main tributary) or if they lived near it. If the response was negative, the person was not interviewed. If the response was affirmative, the person was told that there was a project going on to protect the Broad (and Hudson) River, and asked if they would answer a few questions.

At both fairs I spoke to a total of ninety individuals. Of those ninety people, twenty-five had spent time on or near the river or lived near it (highlighting the inefficiency of this strategy in identifying river users, although it may have been more efficient than other alternatives). While socioeconomic status could not be determined (any available subject was approached), a total of eleven African-Americans and one individual of Hispanic descent were approached. The results will be separated according to the county in which the fair was held.

Of the thirty individuals approached at the Madison County Fair, twelve identified themselves as river users. Of these twelve, ten were from Madison County. Eight out of the twelve identified themselves as long-time users of the river. Activities engaged in on or near the river included fishing, swimming, relaxing, hunting, canoeing and tubing, or some combination of the above activities. Two of those interviewed lived on the river. Of the twelve interviewed, eleven commented on aspects of the river they thought had gotten worse over the time they had been river users. Six commented on positive aspects.

Negative trends mentioned were:

not catching the catfish they used to

development (three informants noted this)

more trash (three informants noted this)

not as deep as it used to be

more people

more drunks

more pollution

too many canoes

Positive comments included:

it's still nice

not many changes

there are more canoes, but that's good

it's pretty good (this informant noted that living near a state park helped, and that she had only been there for a year)

Of the sixty people approached at the Elberton 12-County Fair, thirteen identified themselves as river users. Of the thirteen, twelve were from Elbert County (the other individual was from Hart County). Nine out of the thirteen described themselves as long-time users of the river. (The one individual from Hart County had heard of the project through a friend involved in the BRWA.) Activities engaged in included fishing, playing, walking dogs, boating, having picnics and family gatherings, swimming, and canoeing, or some combination of the above activities. Of the thirteen interviewed, seven commented on aspects of the river they thought had gotten worse over the time they had been river users. Nine commented on positive aspects.

Negative trends mentioned were:

a lack of public access areas (two informants noted this - one of these informants noted that she used to go on private land the public was allowed to use, but that this area was closed because of trash and people shooting bottles in the river)

dead fish

more trash (two people noted this)

development

more people

changing water levels (two informants noted this)

changes in the types of fish and an overall decline

silting in of some areas, restricting boat access

Positive comments included:

some land was going to be purchased or had been purchased for public use (informant stressed that this area, when purchased, needed to be marked)

not many changes or the river had basically stayed the same (six informants noted this)

fishing had stayed the same (two informants noted this)

still nice

Several informants, particularly the long-time users, responded very positively to the handout and the option of becoming involved, as well as to the idea of the project itself.

APPENDIX A - Broad River Outreach Short Interview Protocol

M or F Y M or O W B H or O Where:

Do you go to the Broad River (or Hudson) or live near it?

What do you do there? (Fishing, boating, having family gatherings)

How long have you been going there?

Have you noticed any changes in or around the river over time?

What county are you from?

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