



Choosing the Right Watershed Management Structure

Choosing the most effective watershed management structure to guide the development of the watershed and individual subwatershed plans is one of the more complex decisions a watershed manager confronts. Successful watershed planning requires a strong organization to focus the resources of a diverse group of stakeholders to implement the plan. A long-term management structure is not only critical to prepare and implement the plan in a rapid fashion, but also to revisit and update the plan as project goals are achieved or circumstances change.

Communities can create a single authority for an entire watershed or a series of smaller authorities at the subwatershed level. Whatever its size, a successful management structure should define inter-agency and governmental partnerships and agreements needed to support the organization over the long term.

Some of the typical functions of a watershed management organization are described in Table 1. As noted by Clements *et al.* (1996), a single champion agency or organization is often needed to build the watershed management structure, and coordinate and involve the many stakeholders needed for the plan.

However, not every management structure can or should incorporate all of the functions described in

Table 3. In the real world, where watersheds contain multiple jurisdictions, local governments lack certain management authority or funding is limited. The initial watershed management structure may take on a limited set of management functions.

Several different options are available to structure a watershed management organization. A watershed manager can choose between three broad models to organize the stakeholders for a management plan:

1. Government-Directed Model
2. Citizen-Directed Model
3. Hybrid Model

The primary difference among the three management options concerns the organization ultimately responsible for directing the watershed plan. In the government-directed model, local or regional agencies assume responsibility for making decisions about how the watershed is managed. Conversely, the citizen-directed model is driven by citizen activists or grass roots organizations. A hybrid organization combines the best of both models and is recommended for most watersheds. The basic elements of these models are presented in Table 2.

Table 1: Functions of a Typical Watershed Management Structure

Acts as an umbrella organization:

- Establishes links with existing groups and agencies.
- Coordinates watershed stewardship programs.
- Provides funding for watershed planning actions and explores funding options for plan implementation.
- Serves as a clearinghouse for watershed monitoring data and mapping.
- Reviews and prioritizes management strategies to achieve maximum watershed protection.
- Sets goals for the watershed as a whole and its component subwatersheds.
- Identifies gaps in monitoring data and takes steps to acquire the information.

Operates as a forum for stakeholder input:

- Encourages cooperative exchange of information.
- Provides an opportunity for early conflict resolution on contentious issues.
- Allows face-to-face discussion of management and implementation issues.

Advocates for greater funding and support of the watershed.

Ensures long-term implementation of the plan:

- Monitors progress of plan implementation.
- Review development projects for compliance with plan objectives.