

Texas Watershed Coordinator Roundtable
January 27, 2010
9:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.

Williamson County AgriLife Extension Office
3151 Inner Loop Rd, Suite A
Georgetown, Texas

Meeting Summary

Welcome & Introductions

Kevin Wagner, TWRI

- 80 attendees present
- For attendee list visit: <http://watershedplanning.tamu.edu/watershed-coordinator-roundtable>)

EPA Region 6 Guide for Review of Watershed-Based Plans

Brad Lamb, EPA

- Watershed-Based Plans (WBP) should include stakeholder participation; careful planning; watershed characterization; scientifically-sound data collection/analysis.
- EPA is looking for:
 - A plan that is designed to restore water quality from nonpoint source impairments
 - A plan that utilizes a stakeholder process to engage all that are affected by the impairments
 - A plan that clearly articulates the problems, where they are and what will be done to fix them
 - A plan that describes what needs to be done to achieve Water Quality standards
- WBP Process: consultation prior to submitting; R6 NPS Team; 2008 Handbook for Developing Watershed Plans to Restore and Protect Our Waters
- Nine Elements:
 - Element A: Identification of causes & sources
 - Element B: Estimate of load reductions needed
 - Element C: Description of mgt measures needed
 - Element D: Technical & financial assistance needed
 - Element E: Information & education strategy
 - Element F: Implementation schedule
 - Element G: Interim milestones
 - Element H: Criteria to determine load reductions
 - Element I: Effectiveness monitoring

Brad Lamb, Watersheds/Nonpoint Source Program Coordinator, lamb.brad@epa.gov

Discussion of EPA Expectations and Review Guide

Roundtable

- Is the focus just on developing WPPs for impaired watersheds or can you develop one as a preventative action?
 - a. Focus of incremental funds is restoration of impaired watersheds
 - b. Base funds could be used for preventative actions
 - c. There are plenty of impaired waterbodies that need attention; so most funds will likely be directed to impaired waters; up to the funding agency though (TCEQ/TSSWCB)

- What about developing WPPs for unimpaired watersheds that drain to a TMDL watershed?
 - a. Case by case basis decided by funding agency
- How does this program fit in with the EPA healthy watershed initiative?
 - a. The healthy watershed initiative is unfunded and not tied to a program
- What about new bacterial standards? How do you account for that in WPPs?
 - a. Design WPP based on today's criteria
 - b. Incorporate adaptive management (i.e. factor in water quality standards changes)
 - c. Show what it takes to achieve both existing and proposed standards
 - d. Engage EPA early in the process
- How do you pinpoint NPS and at what resolution?
 - a. EPA wants as much detail as possible; but be as detailed as possible through the use of increased water quality monitoring and modeling

Facilitated Discussion

Nikki Dictson & Lucas Gregory

- Discussion Topics:
 - Strategies & Expectations for Demonstrating Successful Implementation
 - Tracking and Reporting Success
 - WPPs in lieu of Total Maximum Daily Loads (Category 4b Process)
 - Adaptive Management
- As we all move forward with our projects in Texas, we are all faced with the need to demonstrate successful implementation through monitoring efforts to show load reductions are achieved and to track and report the progress and success of the project. If our monitoring and tracking show that the project is not meeting its milestones or goals than this should lead to an adaptive management strategy for the project. If your project is a WPP in lieu of a TMDL than evaluating, tracking progress and reporting are even more critical to be able to enter into 4b status. How often should we evaluate if we are meeting the milestones and goals? When should the adaptive management strategies begin? How often and how should progress be reported as a state and for each project? These are some of the issues that we would like to try to discuss today.
- **Adaptive Management:** A type of natural resource management in which decisions are made as part of an ongoing science-based process. Adaptive management involves testing, monitoring, and evaluating applied strategies, and incorporating new knowledge into management approaches that are based on scientific findings and the needs of society. Results are used to modify management policy, strategies, and practices.

Adaptive management is the process by which new information about the health of the watershed is incorporated into the watershed management plan. Adaptive management is a challenging blend of scientific research, monitoring, and practical management that allows for experimentation and provides the opportunity to "learn by doing."

Step 1: Develop adaptive management plan

Step 2: Monitor

Step 3: Evaluate monitoring results

Step 4: Adjust watershed management plan

- Panelists:
 - **EPA** **Phil Crocker & Sylvia Ritzky**
 - Take full advantage of what has been done/used before
 - Consult with TCEQ on Water Quality Standards
 - Leverage resources – do everything you can to find available resources
 - Think small – make sure scale is not too large
 - Focus on critical areas
 - Walk stream or utilize tools (models); narrow down critical area
 - 4b examples in Texas: Legacy Pesticides in Houston ship channel; selenium concentrates in stream; Lavaca Bay
 - **TCEQ** **Bill Carter & Kerry Niemann**
 - Taking a more proactive initiative to get out there and spread the word
 - Create a form for leveraged funding
 - Identify opportunities to where we can all come together – setting ourselves up for success
 - **TSSWCB** **Aaron Wendt & TJ Helton**
 - How will you track success?
 - Report what was done well and how much more is needed to be done
 - EPA has performance measures they have to provide answers to
 - TCEQ and TSSWCB experimenting with 4b process with Plum Creek
 - Not all impaired water bodies are applicable for 4b
 - Don't contemplate 4 B to avoid a TMDL
 - Primary focus is to gain everyone's input and how we move forward
 - Why a watershed plan might not be adequate for 4b:
 1. Plan for salinity impairment when actually dissolved oxygen impairment – didn't adequately deal with impairment
 2. Sold WPPs to stakeholders as a locally driven process; sold them on the fact that 3 agencies do not adopt/approve. If plan moves to 4b, state and federal government would be approving/acting on watershed.

Continue Open Discussion **EPA, TCEQ, TSSWCB & Roundtable**

- Why shouldn't every WPP result in a 4b listing (as expected by stakeholders)?
 - There is an issue of assurances of implementation – TMDL or WPP voluntary
- Does the TCEQ legal department have checklist for 4b as succinct as have for TMDL review?
 - Most are programmatic decisions; more responding to the nine elements in a watershed-based plan.
 - EPA document calls for plan itself and determining if plan meets stipulations
- Any more refinements to TCEQ 4b process?
 - Working with TCEQ on Plum Creek – point by point justification documentation letter
 - Plum Creek is the only WPP that passed EPA's review of nine elements
 - It's a watershed by watershed decision
- Need to develop a 4b document but there is a problem with that request; in Oklahoma there is a problem with turning a TMDL into a WPP because problem with sufficient data to support TMDL (primarily agricultural watersheds)
 - Watershed process to adopt 4b process – would that work?

- In coordination with headquarters and state agencies – merge the two and satisfy 303(d) requirements
 - This would not be a quick process
 - Subject to evaluation and progress over time
 - Need to be really thoughtful of all of this
- 4b process not really that applicable when you have a lot of point sources
 - TMDL process more critical
 - Can have hybrid plans
 - Can incorporate tools
 - What works best for your people and your watershed?
- What mechanism is in place for tracking and reporting for WPPs and TMDLs to ensure implementation?
 - TCEQ responded that there is no suitable mechanism in place at this time and recognize that they need system to ensure everything will be done. A system is in the developmental stage.
- NPS Annual report:
 - Chapter focused on progress and development and implementation of WPPs
 - 4b in reporting – report specifically on that WPP every two years
- What is the trend analysis among water quality data?
 - All very new: plans in place – implementation started – looking for:
 - Funding in place; BMPs selected; ingredients coming together
 - Plum Creek example: anticipated number of years before we see potential for obtaining standards
 - The backbone is a strong watershed-based plan
- Do plans that move to 4b level becoming ineligible for 319 funding?
 - They would still be eligible, and eligibility would probably be higher
 - Prioritize funding
 - Having a TMDL plan in lieu of a WPP does not mean you will get 319 funding – WPP is a requirement for 319 funding
 - 319 measured by success stories
- Can you use re-run modeling data as a success story since there is no way to monitor every BMP in the watershed?
 - Modeling would include other data as well but it could potentially work
 - On that, that is TCEQ's call
 - EPA would be happy with 5 success stories out of Texas each year
 - Good PR for Texas and help to maintain future Congressional funding
 - Strive for success in implementing your plan and finding existing data – but also look to the future
 - A success is a delisting – partial restoration – provide short write up with some data (2 page narrative)
 - Work with Brad Lamb (lamb.brad@epa.gov) or Randy Rush (rush.randall@epamail.epa.gov) for any questions
- Do you track delistings and 319 funds?

- Not sure if it is analyzed fully each time and it should be. Do not take credit for not having an influence
- When writing a plan, I can assure you that we are not trying to convince stakeholders of the importance of a plan. You have measures of success driven by your agencies – we have to figure out how to help stakeholders understand how spatial and temporal measures differ.
 - In the Arroyo, stakeholder involvement dwindled – we need to sell story to stakeholders
- Office of Management and Budget – what is the money getting for us? Had to come up with accountability measures:
 - How many water bodies did you restore?
 - We've got to come up with measure for Congress based on restoration which leads to delisting
- What is an appropriate timeframe for implementing a WPP?
 - Would like 10 years
 - Existing WPPs range from 10-35 years (actually one 50 year WPP)
 - Dickinson Bayou WPP = 20 year implementation schedule
- Is there a mechanism in place that would inhibit multiple WPPs on one watershed?
 - We are not aware of one; cannot foresee that happening, but can't say it would not happen
 - Maybe you are referring to a TMDL in a watershed and then an implementation plan; WPP within a larger impaired watershed
 - There is a lot of confusion and many guidance's and different kinds of watershed planning
 - There are many resources but agencies coordinate closely
- With the Review Guide, will EPA play a more active role in the public stakeholder process?
 - Yes, EPA will if travel funds allow
- Do you have resources for 2010 and 2011 to travel to 30 plus watersheds?
 - No, probably not – but we do not have a set budget
- Modeling is expensive – but how much is enough? Is SELECT enough or do we need to use SWAT?
 - We have a provision: 20% limitation on funds for planning; assessment
 - 20% geared more toward general monitoring activities (degree of monitoring may be outside 20 %)
 - Maybe more sampling is necessary
 - Keep it within the context of the need
- How do you reconcile the Review Guide's focus on achieving Water Quality Standards?
 - Improvements and way to measure implementation; has to be a way to show trends
 - Nine Elements make up design to achieve Water Quality Standards
 - The Review Guide is to emphasize what we are looking for element by element

Local Work Groups, EQIP, and other federal Farm Bill funding programs Mark Habiger, NRCS

- Locally led conservation is based on the principle that community stakeholders are best suited to identify and resolve local natural resource problems.

- Community stakeholders are keys to successfully managing and protecting their natural resources.
- The Locally Led Principle is basically defined as those at the local level are the best sources for identifying, prioritizing and mobilizing to address resource concerns. NRCS, who once was the Soil Conservation Service, who once was the Soil Erosion Service, was founded on this principle. It has been interesting to watch the same concept being called different things, but being the same thing.
- Local can include: county (or portion of); a watershed; multi-county region; other area with interested stakeholders
- What is the primary focus or objective of gathering input from the Local Work Group?
 - Natural resource concerns
 - Associated socio-economic concerns
 - Program identification
 - Stakeholder commitment
- Local Soil and Water Conservation Districts and NRCS officials lead the locally led effort that culminates in the Local Work Group meeting
- Local Work Group meetings are listed on the Texas NRCS programs Website when field offices send them to us: http://www.tx.nrcs.usda.gov/meetings/lwg_eqip_10.html
- Objectives of local work group meetings:
 - Identify priority resource concerns and methods/programs to address concerns
 - Conservation needs assessment development
- Outcomes of local work group meetings:
 - Hopefully we get to tailor our conservation programs to address the locally identified resource concerns and gain participation and commitment to correct the problems.
 - NRCS evaluates stakeholder input
 - Implements programs to address mutually identified resource concerns
- EQIP Program:
 - Funds roughly 30% of those who actually apply
 - Starts over October of every year (can change by county each year)
 - Always open for sign up (EQIP is fluid and can change); keep backlog of applications in case of additional funding received at the end of the FY.
 - Budget for Texas: \$60 million
 - \$3 million for air quality
 - \$4 million for organic issues
 - \$5 million for historically under-utilized
 - 70% to counties
 - 30% to state office

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Wrap-Up

Kevin Wagner, TWRI

- Next Roundtable tentatively set for July 2010 in Dallas
 - Potential dates include: July 20 or 21; or July 27 or 28
- Next Roundtable will be paired with an EPA Key Internet Tools Workshop
- Anticipated topic includes reviewing the finance directory being developed for Texas
- Anticipated speaker: Executive Director of the Illinois River Watershed Partnership to cover corporate and local funding to support sustainability
- Development of a group list-serve