

WS Coordinator Panel Discussion on Improving Implementation- Summary Notes

Thursday, January 22, 2015

10:36 AM

Watershed Coordinator Panel on Improving Implementation

Lucas Gregory - Moderator

Panel:

Kenny Banks - City of Denton

- With city for about 14 years and have been working on watershed protection program that has received a couple 319 grants and believe to have put together a unique program. Currently unimpaired water body and is primarily rural with fast growing urban area. Interest is evaluating the impacts of urbanization. Trying to finalize how to do the tracking components as well as deciding what to set the targets at since currently unimpaired.

Justin Bower - HGAC

- HGAC is COG for 13 surrounding counties. Some outer counties are rural but large urban area. HGAC role grew out of role from CRP 604b program. Currently have several watershed plans developed, eg. San Bernard, cedar bayou, etc. Major challenge is trying to figure out how to best implement planning documents in a cost effective manner.

Nikki Dictson - TWRI

- Involved in Plum Creek watershed protection plan and Geronimo and Alligator creek WPP. One of the greatest challenges is engaging key stakeholders and gaining buy-in to come up with creative methods of funding implementation. Also, what do you do with those multimillion dollar projects and how do you identify the funding (eg. WWTF)? Other challenge is education and moving into ways to quantify its benefits to the watershed. Further, how do we take those ecosystem services and translate into dollars saved.

Jaime Flores - TWRI

- Is currently ACWC and is rapidly urbanizing with 18 cities. Large challenge has been coordinating all cities and gaining involvement. Outreach and education is very important. Challenges have been city turnover as well as various sizes of cities with varying storm systems. When first started, there were 2 major events related to environmental education and now there are many more within the Valley. Also, there is a tidal segment and non-tidal segment that have different hydrological characteristics and respond differently to pollution as well.

Lucas

One key point was dealing with a moving target and changing watersheds and tying economics back to the stakeholders through education. Comment on what the biggest issue is and why it is a big issue

Jaime - *colonias* is one of the biggest challenges because they don't have any infrastructure. Also getting the WWTFs modernized was a challenge.

Kenny - real challenge is finding the right balance between ecosystem protection and the development pressure. This issue can get political and there are various councils to deal with. Because of it, this is why they focus on the cost standpoint and what some of the cost savings can be. Also the education component of the local council is key so they can be informed and make good decisions in regards to code. Most have come through their master plan communities and there are good examples of how BMPs were put into place that achieve stormwater quality. What found was that traditional designs are not always the most effective ways to dealing with water quality and it is important to find the most effective way to deal with water quality. One requirement is a detention facility for developers. In some cases, more land can be provided in a distributed stormwater management approach than a simple detention facility because they were able to take credit for the stormwater activities and use the land for other purposes.

Justin - one of the issues discussed internally is getting to and maintaining the implementation process as well as keeping stakeholders engaged. Through the process, there is a lot of stakeholder fatigue so people begin to slow their attendance. In some cases, there is not as much organic connection with their stakeholders because of all other activities ongoing. A lot of effort goes into making sure coordination happens between events because there are similar people involved in both. Once document goes for approval, the gap in time and funding has caused some issues in the stakeholder process.

Nikki - many things come back to economics and scale of cities where funding and staff capacity were issues. Also, helping cities come up with match can be difficult, especially in economically difficult times.

Luas

Good key points made but what else can help facilitate the step from planning to implementation and help speed up the process

Justin - one things is alternative measures to success and helping people know that this makes sense for y our community because.... People tend to respond to that because here's your incentive. For ag proceeds, approach is now to come in and talk about here's why I makes sense for you and here are what your economic benefits can be.

Kenny - same issue and as a municipality, policy is shaped by a city council and they can be gone at any point. At any point, can deal with less than half of the individuals so there is a need for a consistent message. What was done before was to educate council on hard science of what was going on but for the majority it didn't work and they needed an explanation of why it was ongoing and something they can provide to their constituents. Example is a tree preservation program and how it is not just about aesthetics but also about energy savings etc that can be tied back to a dollar amount. This is something council members can take back to their communities.

Jaime - agree with all points and impact to ecotourism could be huge for the area. Individuals need a better understanding of the economic benefits to water quality. Educating elected officials is difficult because of inconsistent members. Having the numbers and what the impacts could be is extremely important.

Lucas

Sounds like money talks and that's what people respond to and gains the most buy-in. Open floor to questions for the panel.

Q - In economic calculations, what ways did you analyze opportunity costs and how did you handle it?

Kenny - analysis are primarily done through watershed protection department working with master plan communities and help to identify what developers need and what key concerns to the area are especially as it applies to a particular development. Also done on a sub-watershed approach. Always looked at the unit-cost basis as well as from the literature. Must have a program that is flexible and able to accommodate changes.

Q - manage 40 NRCS retainer - unfunded mandate - how do you deal with developers to contain -

Kenny - had a recent developer wanting to put in a structure and he wanted to use the NRCS structure as stormwater. The city is extremely protective when it comes to these issues and said they would not allow that to happen. The developer would have had to come up with an alternative plan and present it to council.....

Comment - City of McKinney also experienced similar issues trying to figure out a way to allow current structures to be incorporated properly. Went through elaborate process and not sure of the outcomes but they refocused their energy because the process was long.

Comment - sedimentation has impacted capacity and urbanization has increased runoff so the system is not designed to handle the amount of water

Comment - ponds were not designed for build out and are 30-40 years old so they are not fit to handle some of the issues

Comment - there are no funding mechanisms to repair the dams even though there is a threat to downstream

Comment - funding is available through TSSWCB and NRCS has around 18 million for rehab. This changes the classification of the dam.

Comment - Through current farm bill got 12 million nationwide so much less and uncertain of the future of the program

Closing Comments

Justin - great conversation and there are so many jurisdictions involved so it is very important to get everyone involved