

OVERVIEW: WATERSHED PLANNING



Department
of State

Protecting and restoring New York's coastal waterbodies and inland waterways

What is a Watershed Management Plan?

A Watershed Management Plan is a plan to restore and protect water quality. Watershed planning focuses on the relationship between land use and land cover, the movement and storage of water, and water quality.

Many water quality problems are best addressed on a watershed basis, especially where watersheds cross political boundaries and involve more than one community. Planning on a watershed scale allows communities to integrate water resource protection and restoration with growth management at the local and regional level, balancing environmental and economic factors.

The Department of State (DOS) assisted in the development and implementation of 49 watershed management plans covering nearly 600 municipalities and over 16,000 square miles that represents nearly 30% of New York's land mass.



Program Goals & the Planning Process

DOS's watershed planning and protection approach recognizes the need to address not only the individual water resources within any given watershed, but all the land from which the water drains to these waterbodies. Goals of the program include:

- Establish long-term watershed management through the creation of a watershed organization
- Describe and understand existing water quality and watershed conditions, current impairments and anticipated threats to water quality, and recognize the key problems and opportunities in the watershed
- Identify and describe priority actions and best management practices needed to address water quality impairments or threats
- Create an implementation strategy with stakeholder roles and the resources needed, including financial and technical assistance
- Develop a means to measure success, track implementation, and monitor performance
- Network with other communities, agencies and organizations with experience in the successful preparation and implementation of watershed management plans

Watershed planning provides an opportunity for the community to reach out to its residents and businesses, building support for water quality improvements while planning for economic and community growth.

The watershed management planning process is comprehensive, action oriented, and emphasizes broad environmental goals and objectives that cover all aspects of water quality. Success in watershed planning requires partnerships with the right blend of stakeholders, including those that live and work in the watershed. Assessing the water quality in a community is necessary to be able to select and implement the best practices to reduce impacts on the water resources. DOS provides technical and financial assistance for developing watershed management plans, including the development of EPA 9-Element Watershed Plans.

Watershed Management Planning Components

Watershed plans generally include six main sections:

- Executive Summary
- Introduction
- Characterization
- Watershed Management Recommendations
- Implementation Strategy
- Monitoring and Tracking

The plan should include prioritized recommendations such as capital improvements to correct existing impairments and the revision of local controls to prevent future impacts to water quality. The watershed plan should provide specific examples of problem areas and threats and potential areas for protection and restoration. Specific best management practices (BMPs) should also be identified.



Volunteer sampling of water at Lake George during the development of the Lake George Watershed Plan

Planning Partners

The Department of State works with many partners throughout the State to promote watershed planning.

- NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, Division of Water
- New York City Watershed Protection and Partnership Council
- Environmental Facilities Corporation (EFC)
- NYS Department of Transportation
- NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets
- United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)

Additional Information

DOS Water Resources Management Program

Information on the Department of State website about watershed planning and case studies

Watershed Plans: Protecting and Restoring Water Quality Guidebook.

DOS publication that provides a step-by-step watershed planning process for communities to create a watershed plan that will protect and improve water quality.

Protecting Water Resources Through Local Controls and Practices: A Manual for Communities.

Walks the reader through the process of a municipal nonpoint assessment and gap analysis and provides sample local laws adopted by New York communities. Prepared by the Genesee/Finger Lakes Regional Planning Council with funding from NYS DOS and NOAA.

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Wappinger Creek lies within the Lower Hudson Watershed and is one of the five major tributaries to the lower Hudson River Estuary.