

CHAPTER

5



COMMUNITY-DRIVEN WATERSHED PROTECTION & MANAGEMENT



Community-Driven Watershed Protection & Management

IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL WATERSHED INVOLVEMENT

Water pollution can affect the quality of life of everyone in Alabama. Often no one takes responsibility for protecting water since it is a common resource. Regulations alone won't solve or prevent water quality problems in Alabama. Local watershed residents and landowners, through their personal actions, can help to ensure that their watershed, and the water resources it contains, are protected.

Citizen involvement is vitally important. So, how do we get there?

Community-driven watershed management is an approach that encourages citizens to get involved in identifying and addressing key issues within a watershed. Local stakeholders are critical because they actually live in or have an interest in the watershed, use the watershed's resources, and have the biggest stake in the future of that watershed.

Stakeholders at the watershed level include any individual or group of individuals that could be affected by water quality impairment or by activities implemented to protect water quality. These include regulatory management programs such as total maximum daily loads (TMDLs) and voluntary programs such as watershed management plans (WMPs). Local stakeholders include the following:

- watershed residents
- landowners and managers
- city/county officials
- citizen groups
- soil and water conservation districts
- business and industry representatives
- community service organizations
- universities, colleges, and schools
- environmental and conservation groups
- religious organizations

Stakeholders also can include individuals, groups, and organizations who are not directly affected by management activities but are interested in the watershed and/or the particular management activity that is being proposed or implemented in the watershed.¹ Some individuals and organizations may even be located outside of the watershed. Remember, watersheds are connected across landscapes, so the management decisions and activities occurring in one watershed also may positively, or negatively, affect conditions in neighboring watersheds.

With the commitment and engagement of all types of stakeholders, trust and support for the management processes and outcomes can be established, responsibility for decisions and actions can be shared, and communication and the coordination of resources can be enhanced. Locally developed solutions allow citizens to take into account unique social, economic, and environmental circumstances in their community. When citizens are involved, they feel a sense of ownership of the problems in the watershed and the solutions being applied to resolve those problems. This better prepares the community and ensures long-term support for future watershed management plans and activities.

Did You Know?

- Significant improvement in a watershed can take place only when local citizens realize that the local environment being at risk matters to them and they believe that doing something will improve their own lives and strengthen the community.

FORMING & SUSTAINING COMMUNITY WATERSHED ORGANIZATIONS & PARTNERSHIPS

One of the most effective ways for stakeholders to become actively involved and truly make a difference in their watershed is to form a community watershed group. Alabama Watershed Stewards can serve as the foundation for that process.

Watershed groups, also called watershed councils, action groups, associations, coalitions, and partnerships, are voluntary organizations made up of all types of stakeholders who share a common interest in protecting and helping their watershed. Consequently, a community watershed group helps the entire community create a common vision for their watershed and works to keep the community focused on the most important issues.

Watershed partnerships often begin when a water quality impairment in a local stream, lake, or other body of water results in the state-mandated development of a TMDL or the need for a WMP. In these situations, state and federal agencies typically are involved and lead the formation of the partnership. But in other cases, partnerships develop simply because local citizens recognize the need to be proactive in protecting their watershed. The driving force may be the desire to identify new threats to the watershed caused by changes in land use (such as increased urban development) or to address existing problems that have not been resolved. Sometimes, reports of problems in other watersheds stimulate local citizens to be proactive to protect their resources.

A watershed partnership may begin simply as a small gathering of citizens who share a common interest or concern and recognize the need to involve other citizens in taking action to get something done. These small groups can be very effective working within their communities. With time, small watershed groups can evolve into independent watershed organizations with their own budgets, staff, and board of directors, and with a common goal of improving water quality and overall watershed health.

Working together in an organized partnership has its advantages, especially when dealing with something as large and complex as an entire watershed. Watersheds sustain many different types of people, land uses, activities, and interests. Successful and effective watershed partnerships help to merge these differences into a common vision and increase a community's sense of responsibility, involvement, and commitment to

protecting the watershed. Watershed partnerships also can lead to more efficient use of financial resources, an increase in sharing and cooperation, and more creative and socially acceptable approaches to protecting and managing the natural resources in the watershed.

HOW DO WATERSHED PARTNERSHIPS START?

The formation and growth of successful watershed partnerships usually follow this sequence:

1. One or more individuals who are passionate about the watershed and willing to talk to others about it act as a catalyst. The actions of just one person (who could be an Alabama Watershed Steward, a school teacher, a natural resource professional, a student, etc.) can connect people and motivate others to care about local water issues.
2. As a result, a core planning group develops to organize a community-wide information meeting. Such meetings can occur whenever citizens want to get together to improve their watershed or when they see symptoms that could lead to water quality or quantity problems.
3. A community-wide meeting is held so that people can exchange information and ideas about their watershed and what might be done to improve things.
4. A group of volunteer citizens meets regularly around a growing vision for their watershed. This vision is created as they improve their knowledge of the watershed and reflect about its past, present, and future.
5. Experts, including state and federal agency personnel, can be invited to discuss the science of the ecological system and provide technical information and advice. This helps the watershed group and community at large to better evaluate problems and propose solutions to those problems.
6. The watershed group develops a clear mission statement with objectives to guide action and puts in place a leadership structure for guiding group activities.
7. Partners or citizens in the watershed group undertake activities that support the intent and mission of the group.
8. The group communicates often with the whole watershed community about what is being learned, planned, and done. It continually invites others to participate.
9. The group regularly reassesses its plan and works to strengthen relationships and knowledge about social, political, and environmental issues that affect the watershed and the community as a whole. The group negotiates, leverages, and cooperates with others to achieve the community watershed vision.

STAGES OF GROUP DEVELOPMENT

It takes many watershed groups a long time to progress to step 9, and some groups may never quite get there. Any successful group, including a watershed partnership, needs time to develop. In the development process, groups generally experience five different stages, each characterized by high points and low points. Mixed feelings and experiences are normal in the group development process. While each of the stages is unique, they are not mutually exclusive. Rather, the stages blend into one another as the group dynamic takes shape and as time progresses.

- 1. Forming stage:** When a watershed partnership first forms, there often are feelings of excitement and optimism, mixed with skepticism and anxiety. Group members are like hesitant swimmers, afraid to jump in the water with both feet. Despite these initial fears and hesitations, this particular stage is a critical one with regard to the group's formation and distinctiveness.

It is during this stage that the group begins to form and realize its identity and begins laying the groundwork for its future goals and expectations. In addition, the partnership begins establishing ground rules and working on group communication skills.

The expected outcome of this first stage is commitment to the group. Trust and communication among group members, and agreement to the basic rules of group participation, are essential for establishing and sustaining this commitment.

- 2. Storming stage:** This often is viewed as the most difficult stage for new watershed partnerships. Reasons are the possible lack of familiarity among group members, confusion over individual roles, group transformation, and the lack of a unified direction. What started out as polite conversations and meetings may degenerate into conflict as group members become more comfortable with each other and begin to feel the need to exert more control or dominance over group decisions. Members also might begin rethinking previously agreed upon objectives and activities for achieving the group's goals.

To get past this stage and to minimize group tension, it is important to recognize and address the conflict right away. Ignoring it will lead to distrust and possibly cause the group to collapse. How a group overcomes this particular stage will dictate its future success and progress. The expected outcome of the storming stage is clarification. Conflict and power issues must be resolved for the group to move forward.

- 3. Norming stage:** Groups that progress to this stage have made significant strides in the development process. At this point, group cohesion and action are prominent and help to set the stage for development of a solid group structure and sense of community.



Figure 5.1. Each stage of group development should involve open discussion between all group members. This could be in the form of in-person meetings, conference calls, webinars, etc.

Group identity is based upon the positive interpersonal relationships between members. Members are able to share their ideas and feelings, recognize each other's strengths, and give and receive feedback in a positive and constructive manner.

The expected outcome for the norming stage is clear commitment and cooperation. In achieving this, members begin to identify the overall responsibilities and roles of the group and establish agreement on the group's purpose and function in the community.

- 4. Performing stage:** This is the optimal stage of group development and performance. Members feel comfortable with each other and with the group's direction. They are aligned toward achieving goals and producing results, and a strong trust has been established among group members who share the decision-making responsibilities with less anxiety.

At this point, group members have learned to effectively listen to one another, engage in dialogue, challenge their own assumptions, and change their opinions. The expected outcome for the performing stage is high productivity, which is accomplished through collective decision-making and effective problem-solving.

- 5. Transforming stage:** This particular stage is often the celebration stage for groups that have accomplished many tasks, both internally and in the community. At this point, groups take time to consider their next steps, deciding either to reorganize themselves and move in a different direction or renew their commitment to their original goals and keep pressing onward.

Some groups may change members or develop new relationships with other groups. Still, other groups may transform into a network, coalition, or collaboration in order to tackle new challenges in the community. The expected outcome for the transforming stage is sustained interest for renewal and/or redirection.

Each watershed group proceeds through the development stages at a different speed, and sometimes in a different order. Some groups may start at the first stage and progress consecutively all the way through to the last stage. Other groups may progress initially but later find themselves back in one of the earlier stages. Some groups begin with a history of working together and may already have a well-defined task list and organizational structure. This will help them to move through the initial stages much more quickly.

It is important to remember that each group will develop and progress at its own pace. Group members should not be discouraged if they take a few steps back, especially if this helps them to refocus and sustain themselves in the long-term.

The basic foundation for sustaining local interest in a watershed group is a clearly defined vision, mission, and list of objectives. For a new group to successfully form, members must view the group as doing meaningful work and want to be a part of that effort. Once the intent and objectives of the group are evident, other organizational practices can be applied to support development and sustainability.

MAKING YOUR WATERSHED GROUP SUCCESSFUL

There are key strategies for forming and sustaining a watershed partnership or organization. Using these strategies during the group development process will pave the way for the group's success, visibility, and respect in the community.

Successful watershed organizations usually have certain characteristics that make them effective. Perhaps the most important are collective involvement/broad membership, a common vision, and measurable and attainable goals. It is important to remember, however, that each watershed group is different and certainly does not have to exhibit these characteristics to be successful and effective. Some of the most important characteristics of successful watershed partnerships are discussed below.

COLLECTIVE INVOLVEMENT/ BROAD MEMBERSHIP

A good mix of stakeholders, including individuals and community organizations, is very important to successful watershed partnerships. Watersheds can be very large and undoubtedly include a wide variety of stakeholders, all with individual interests, experiences, backgrounds, and concerns.

Including a broad array of members in a watershed partnership is the best way to ensure that all views and concerns are included in planning and management efforts. Each member of the partnership will play a different role in the group. Among these are leadership, technical, communication, educational, political, and policy roles. Broad group membership and collective involvement will ensure that each of these roles is filled with appropriate and knowledgeable individuals.

While all watershed stakeholders should be welcome, soliciting individuals with specific skills that will be beneficial to the group can be important. Typical partners in a watershed organization include state and local agencies, local governments, nonprofit organizations, local businesses, landowners, and local citizens.

COMMON MISSION

Watershed partnerships are more likely to be successful if all the members share in one common mission for the entire group. It is very difficult to make progress if group members do not all agree with the group's purpose, goals, and future direction. To help unite group members toward a common mission, it is important to establish a need and direction for the group and to make sure that all members know what is expected of them and the group from the very beginning. The group should ask itself key questions:

- What characteristics of this watershed do we want our children and future generations to be able to enjoy?
- How do we envision this watershed in the next 5, 10, or 20 years?

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

A well-defined organizational structure is critical for watershed groups, because it forms the basis for group leadership, management, and decision-making. With that said, there is no one structure that fits every watershed group or ensures group success. Each watershed group will be unique in the way it chooses to organize and manage itself.

General leadership responsibility is one of the first things to consider. Some groups choose to follow a leader/co-leader type of structure. In this case, the leader and co-leader (or chair/co-chair; president/vice-president) are elected or appointed by group members. Persons serving in these roles have primary leadership responsibility for the group that includes setting up and leading regular meetings and facilitating group decisions.

In other cases, groups may choose to share leadership responsibility among a larger portion of their members. Here, a steering committee comprised of several

members shares leadership roles and responsibilities. In both cases, subcommittees or work groups can be formed to focus on specific projects and/or to give recommendations to the steering committee.

In addition to a general leadership structure, it is important for groups to establish a set of ground rules or bylaws. These rules can be used to formalize the mission and goals of the group and to define various desires or expectations the group has, such as meeting-attendance requirements, voting guidelines, and other important items.

MEASURABLE/ATTAINABLE GOALS

Establishing realistic goals and objectives makes it easier to measure the group's progress toward them. Articulating a common mission sets the stage for developing the group's goals and objectives.

While there is one mission for the group, there can be several different goals and objectives. Likewise, there are many tasks necessary to complete before achieving those goals and objectives.

Goals should be both measurable and attainable to keep the group focused, on task, and in a positive frame of mind. While failure to achieve some goals might actually make a group stronger, too many failures can lower morale and produce negativity among group members.

LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

The expertise of individual citizens residing within communities and watersheds is critical to effective watershed partnerships. Local citizens usually have in-depth knowledge of the resource base and the local economy. Additionally, locals often share a desire to protect their watershed. Drawing on this localized knowledge of the community will strengthen a watershed partnership and add vital insight to various watershed processes.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Because a watershed partnership is made up of many types of members, the potential for conflict and discord can be rather high. Many watershed partnerships fail because they are unable to overcome differences among members and unite with a common purpose. Using effective communication skills can help to prevent conflict.

ESTABLISHED GROUND RULES

Ground rules can be established for anything related to your watershed partnership, including meeting participation, discussion, confidentiality, constructive feedback, decision-making, and more. Having well-established guidelines and adhering to those guidelines will minimize any controversy within the group and help it to function more effectively.

COLLABORATIVE DECISION-MAKING

Decision-making is an important function of group members. Decisions can be as simple as setting a future meeting date or as complicated as establishing budgets for various projects. With every decision, an effort should be made to use a collaborative process so that difficulties caused by different ideas and opinions can be avoided.

Collaborative decision-making uses consensus to ensure that each member's needs and concerns are addressed before a final decision is agreed upon. Collaborative decision-making involves the following five steps:⁴

1. Determine the parameters and constraints of the decision. When does the decision have to be made? How much time is needed to make the decision? Are there budget constraints, legal requirements, or other things that need to be considered?
2. Identify the needs of stakeholders and the potential effects of the decision on stakeholders. What does each party need out of the decision? Who will be affected negatively and positively? What must be satisfied in order to achieve an effective decision?
3. Gather information. What information is needed to make an informed decision? Have all the needs of the stakeholders been determined?
4. Identify alternative options. Are there additional options, beyond the most favored ones, that should be considered? How well does each alternative meet the needs of the stakeholders?
5. Make a decision and follow through. How will the decision be implemented? Do you need to let other parties know about the final decision? How will you determine if the decision was a good one?

STEADY PROGRESS

Some groups can fall victim to periods of inactivity during which members' motivation and energy levels are not as high as when the group first formed. To overcome this, it is a good idea to constantly challenge the group with new information, facts, and ideas to spur involvement and action among the group.



Figure 5.2. Hands-on educational sessions can be helpful in teaching students and residents about water quality.

Begin by planning small projects or outlining a few small tasks (e.g., write a series of newspaper articles, organize a stream walk/cleanup, etc.) that have a good chance for success. Recognize and reward group members for their participation and ideas, and use the power of positive feedback to motivate and encourage. This might help the group to realize its potential and stimulate additional tasks, projects, and action in the watershed. Ways to encourage and maintain participation in a watershed partnership are discussed later in this section.

SHARED RESOURCES

Pooling resources from industries, organizations, individuals, and other stakeholders within a watershed can significantly increase the efficiency, effectiveness, and visibility of a watershed organization. Examples of available resources might include an existing educational display created for a local school, water-testing kits from an environmental nonprofit, or access to an individual who specializes in grant writing.

Finding and using all available resources within the watershed will help you to avoid unnecessary duplication of efforts and expenditures of time and money, while improving the actual on-the-ground progress made by the partnership. Group members should learn about the mission and activities of other local and regional groups, organizations, and agencies that might be able to help with different tasks and projects.

TEAM BUILDING

This is particularly important in the forming stage when group members are just getting to know one another and might be hesitant to initiate communication with members they don't know. Team building can be accomplished in several different ways. Encourage group members to discuss their interest(s) in the watershed and why they want to be involved in the partnership. Also work together on common activities and small projects that can be easily accomplished. A quick victory in a group just starting out will help to build trust and commitment among group members.

MUTUAL RESPECT

We've already established that watersheds are comprised of many diverse interests and groups of people. As a result, controversy is likely, and overt conflicts may break out from time to time. While some conflict can be healthy for a watershed group to experience, conflict that stems from a lack of mutual respect and involves personal attacks will quickly diminish the organization's effectiveness.

Mutual respect means that all group members have the opportunity to participate in group meetings and discussions and that no one person is allowed to dominate discussions. In addition, group members must be open to new ideas, listen actively and carefully to what others have to say, and be constructive in their criticisms of decisions and ideas. Group members should focus on ideas rather than on the personalities of those offering the ideas when providing constructive feedback.



Figure 5.3. Local watershed groups organize events such as storm drain marking events (left) and environmental fairs (right). (Photo credit: John Harris, Opelika Engineering).

BEING AN EFFECTIVE WATERSHED GROUP MEMBER

There are specific roles and responsibilities for individual group members that help to ensure a successful group dynamic. Each member should try to act according to these guidelines:

- Be an advocate for the group's vision, mission, goals, and objectives.
- Serve as a liaison between interested community citizens and other group members.
- Actively assist in creating innovative solutions to water quality issues in the watershed.
- Listen to the ideas of other group members and provide constructive feedback.
- Follow the rules of the group, actively participate in group discussions, and be involved in group decision-making.
- Be willing to serve on committees and work groups when necessary.

WHAT KINDS OF ACTIVITIES DO LOCAL WATERSHED GROUPS DO?

Community watershed groups can partner with federal, state, and local organizations to improve their watershed. Among these are city and county governments, state agencies (such as the Alabama Department of Environmental Management), federal agencies (such as the Environmental Protection Agency and US Department of Agriculture), soil and water conservation districts, environmental groups, farmers, businesses, and nonprofits.

Watershed groups often organize and participate in many different types of activities and projects in their watershed to help increase visibility for their cause, get other members of the community involved, and improve overall watershed health. Refer to Appendix B to find a more detailed list of activities that watershed groups can organize and participate in.

ACTIVITIES & PROJECTS TO CONSIDER

- Organize or sponsor special activities in your watershed (listed below).
- Help to establish communication networks with other watershed residents and groups.
- Educate others and motivate them to get involved.
- Conduct demonstration and field trials of best management practices.
- Collect local data from water quality monitoring, wildlife inventories, resource inventories, and surveys of farmer and resident land-use practices.
- Identify priorities for allocating limited public financial resources.
- Set local water quality and quantity goals and plan strategies for achieving those goals.
- Offer innovative solutions for controlling potential runoff pollution.
- Identify and seek funding sources to support local efforts to solve water quality problems.



Figure 5.4. Stakeholder surveys can be facilitated during organized stakeholder and public meetings. (Photo credit: John Harris, Opelika Engineering)

SPECIAL ACTIVITIES TO CONSIDER

Stakeholder Surveys

A watershed partnership should always function with the best interests of all community members in mind. A good way to find out what the community wants for the watershed, and any concerns they might have, is to conduct a brief stakeholder or community survey. Ask residents how much they know about their watershed, what issues they might have, and if they want to get involved to help improve the health of the watershed. Survey results will help the partnership to decide which management activities might be most successful.

Civic Involvement

Watershed groups can greatly influence local decisions about water quality-management, but they must actively participate in the community to make these positive changes happen. Involvement could include being on the mailing list for new wastewater permit applications received by the Alabama Department of Environmental

Management (ADEM) and monitoring city council agendas for new development plans or water/wastewater issues. Individuals can become members of local planning and zoning commissions and economic development boards to ensure that environmental considerations are included in long-term planning for their communities. As a watershed steward, or as part of an organized watershed group, you should seek opportunities to work constructively with local and state entities to improve and protect your watershed and its resources.

Field Trips

Take a field trip to a local park, ranch, lake, etc. Field trips help group members get to know each other and feel comfortable with each other, especially if the group is just forming. Field trips also help to build group participation by getting other members of the community involved, and they can be a lot of fun. In addition, field trips can help community members to discover all the different ways the watershed is used and how those different uses are connected.

Figure 5.5. Some groups like to organize team or community field days that include picnics, team-building exercises, or trips to enjoy areas in the watershed that brought them together.





Figure 5.6. Watershed bus tours are organized for members to explore a local watershed. This helps them to become familiar with and identify issues in the area that should be addressed.

Watershed Tours

There is no better way to learn about your watershed than by taking a tour of the watershed itself. A watershed tour is a great way to bring together a wide variety of people to learn about the watershed, visit different areas in the watershed (urban, agricultural, industrial, etc.), and have an open dialogue about issues that should be addressed. Invite technical experts along to share their knowledge and facilitate discussions.

Canoe/Float Trips

This is a great way to help community members get an up-close look at streams, rivers, and lakes in the watershed. A float trip can help people to understand how bodies of water are connected to the watershed, learn more about water and watersheds in general, and just have fun. This might be an effective way to bring group members closer together, especially if the group is just starting out. It also could attract different members of the community to your group's cause—people who otherwise wouldn't have known about or gotten involved with the group.



Figure 5.7. University students engage in a water chemistry testing educational program led by an Alabama Water Watch certified instructor.

Volunteer Water Quality Monitoring

Volunteer water quality monitoring is a great way for people to be actively involved in gauging the health of their watershed. To find a group, contact Alabama Water Watch (AWW), a program in the Auburn University Water Resources Center. AWW supports a network of volunteers and partners who are trained to collect water quality data.

You also can contact your local Riverkeepers through the nonprofit Waterkeeper Alliance, which connects and supports local Waterkeeper organizations. These entities will help you to select safe, easily accessible sites along a stream, river, lake, or other body of water to test the quality of the water. Keep track of your data and monitor how it changes over time. If problems are identified, the partnership could encourage action to protect or restore watershed health.

Stream Cleanups

Stream cleanups can be very successful, because participants can see a visible effect afterward and know they are making a difference to the land and water resources in their community. There are many federal, state, and local entities that have experience in organizing and conducting litter cleanups around streams. Among these groups are Keep Alabama Beautiful, Alabama People Against a Littered State, and Riverkeepers. They often sponsor the event and provide trash bags and other supplies at no cost.





Figure 5.8. Hosting trash pickups can be a great way to bring community members together.

Educational Programs and Exhibits

These are great tools for increasing community awareness about the watershed and informing people of steps they can take to help improve watershed health. A short presentation to a school class or community group can really make a difference in garnering more support for watershed improvement.

Posters and other visuals can be created to display at local libraries, shopping centers, coffee shops, and other popular places around town. An exhibit that showcases your group's mission and goals and describes concerns the group has about the community watershed is a great place to start.

Media Campaign

An effective way to get the word out about water quality issues in your watershed is to advertise. Options include mass mailings, flyers, public service announcements, watershed fact sheets, newsletters, and newspaper articles (figure 5.10). These efforts help to raise awareness



Figure 5.9. Educational outreach can occur in a variety of ways, including community environmental fairs (left) or local stream tours (right).

in the community, get more individuals to join your watershed group, and encourage people to take personal action to protect your water resources.

Watershed Festival

Watershed festivals are fun community events that increase the awareness and motivation of community residents and other stakeholders. Invite people from state and local environmental organizations as well as other local entities and businesses to celebrate in protecting and caring for the watershed.

Figure 5.10. This flyer was created to advertise upcoming community creek cleanup events in Chambers County, Alabama.

The Moores Creek Project is partially funded by a Clean Water Act Section 319(h) grant from Alabama Department of Environmental Management through Environmental Protection Agency Region 6.

WATERSHED CLEANUP
Civic Groups, Businesses, Churches, and other Friends of Moores Creek
Help us clean up the Moores Creek Watershed in Lanett and Valley
and
KEEP TRASH OUT OF OUR WATER SUPPLY

Saturday, April 6th
10:00 – 2:00 EDT
Meet at Valley City Hall to pick up supplies and cleanup site

- Each group will be assigned a street or creek location to clean up
- Must have transportation
- Gloves, trash bags, and safety vests provided

Participants in the Moores Creek Watershed Cleanup will receive a \$2.00 discount on Saturday ticket price for the Chambers County Sheriff's 23rd Annual Rodeo.

Other Events
April 1st – 5th Electronic Recycling, Chambers County Highway Department
April 6th Clean Up Lanett, Clean Up Valley Day,
April 6th Valley Farmer's Market Pavilion – Recycling and Shredder Truck,
April 4th Chambers County Sheriff's 5th Annual Special Needs Rodeo
April 5th and 6th Chambers County Sheriff's 23rd Annual Rodeo

HOW TO OBTAIN FUNDING FOR YOUR WATERSHED GROUP OR PARTNERSHIP

Water quality improvement projects and activities don't just happen. All watershed groups need funding to support their operational costs.

Some activities can be carried out at very little cost by using the expertise of group members. For example, if a member of the watershed group works in marketing, that person could develop marketing tools for the partnership. Other types of in-kind contributions that can be provided by group members are accounting skills, planning, public relations, social media outreach, technical expertise, office equipment donations, and more.

Regularly encourage members of the media to participate in the group and to publicize group meetings and activities. This undoubtedly will increase visibility for the group and may increase your funding opportunities.

One of the biggest frustrations for watershed groups can be funding the activities and operations of the group as a whole. Locating and securing funding from external sources can be challenging. Most watershed groups acquire funding from a number of sources, often tied to specific tasks or projects. Examples of funding sources include the following:

Membership dues. Most groups do not require direct financial support from members. Their contribution is in the form of their time and energy in serving on the partnership team. Some watershed groups, however, collect annual membership dues that can range from a few dollars to a few hundred dollars depending on the circumstances. These funds, even if nominal, can go a long way in paying for operating costs and supporting watershed activities.

External funding. Groups that don't require membership fees generally rely more on government funding, private foundation funding, special event revenue, general donations, and in-kind contributions in the form of time, talents, and goods.

Grants can be obtained from a number of different sources, including government-sponsored funding programs that are specific to watershed-related projects, community/philanthropic foundations with specific interest in the group's mission and objectives, eco-friendly corporations and businesses, and even local banks. Some examples of funding sources include the Environmental Protection Agency, ADEM 319 funding, and more.

A written grant proposal is usually required to obtain these funds. Although the requirements of each proposal will vary, most granting agencies expect a project summary, problem statement, project description, and detailed budget description. The Internet is a great tool to use when researching potential funding sources. Use your group members and stakeholders who might have connections within the community and who might specialize in grant writing.

- **Special event revenue.** Your watershed group may decide to sponsor a special event, such as a dinner, some type of sports tournament (golf, baseball, etc.), or a concert, to generate revenue. Such events are fun for the community and also productive for the watershed partnership, especially if they generate enough funds to help cover some operational and project costs.

Regardless of how the group initially obtains funds, it is important to always be on the lookout for the next funding opportunity. Simply relying on one or two funding sources to support the full work of the organization can be risky. It is important to diversify the group's funding base to ensure that its work will be sustainable. See Appendix C to learn where to find funding opportunities for your watershed group.

CHARACTERISTICS OF UNSUCCESSFUL WATERSHED GROUPS

While there are many benefits associated with watershed partnerships, creating them and making them successful can be challenging. New groups just starting out often want to see positive results right away. This is not realistic. Maintaining the motivation, enthusiasm, and leadership of a group is perhaps the single greatest challenge. Securing funding to accomplish some of the major goals of a group also can be difficult.

All groups encounter challenges. The way in which they tackle and overcome these challenges is the deciding factor in their long-term success. Always remember that the overall benefits of watershed partnerships far outweigh the challenges associated with them.

While there are many characteristics that help to make a watershed partnership or organization successful, there are many more that can spell the end for a new or even veteran watershed group. Look for these characteristics of unsuccessful watershed groups:¹

- Conflict among key interests remains unresolved.
- The size and complexity of the watershed is too overwhelming and the group flounders.
- The group has no clear purpose.
- The group is unable to overcome past failures.
- Goals or deadlines are unrealistic.
- Covert agendas exist.
- Key interests or decision makers are not included or refuse to participate.
- Not all participants stand to benefit from the partnership.
- Some members stand to benefit considerably more than others do.
- Some members have more power than others do.
- The partnership isn't needed because one entity could achieve the goals alone.
- "Experts" are unwilling to give up their roles and share authority with laypeople.
- Financial and time commitments outweigh potential benefits; funding runs out.
- Members are uncomfortable with the commitments required.

If your group has any of these characteristics, it isn't necessarily destined for failure. It might mean that there are issues among members or with the watershed partnership itself that need to be addressed and resolved right away.

To help overcome potential stumbling blocks, it is important to clearly identify problems and address them directly. If at all possible, however, try to anticipate and prevent problems from occurring in the first place. One way to do this is to spend a lot of time at the beginning getting to know each other, establishing ground rules, and agreeing to individual roles and responsibilities. When a conflict occurs, the group then knows right away how to resolve the issue and move on.

Another way to approach conflict among members is to have the group think of the issue as

a group challenge rather than a problem of individuals. It is human nature to blame an individual when, in fact, many conflicts occur because the group lets them happen.

One of the best ways to overcome obstacles is to build consensus among group members. Confronting and overcoming conflict as a group will unite group members toward a common vision and strengthen the group's resolve.

When a group member is being difficult and seems to be a constant cause of conflict, it is especially important to handle the situation carefully and not over-react. The entire group should speak with the person, hear his or her thoughts and concerns, and work toward a group resolution.

A common stumbling block many groups face is waning participation of group members in community watershed activities and projects. Even if a group has members, a mission statement, an organizational structure, a planned project, and even a little project funding, it may not know how to maintain its longevity in the community and keep its members interested. It isn't enough to simply announce meetings and activities and assume people will show up because they should. To encourage participation from stakeholders and partners, communication and education are critical:

- Use the media to announce ongoing events and meetings and to publicize special activities, such as a watershed festival or stream cleanup.
- Use peer-to-peer networking by having group members talk to neighbors, colleagues, and others who may have an interest in learning more about the group's activities.
- Use field or site visits to make the issues more tangible and to build enthusiasm.
- Use newsletters and brochures to advertise the partnership's efforts.
- Work through local schools to educate the public about partnership goals and activities.
- Consider innovative outreach methods, such as photography and fun displays, to publicize the partnership.
- Appeal to people's sense of stewardship, citizenship, and service. Let them know that the problems being addressed by the partnership affect all citizens in the watershed and that each person can contribute to the solution.



Figure 5.11. Keep group members interested and enthusiastic by having interactive meetings when the team can participate in hands-on activities, such as group outreach service events (left) or team creek walks (right). (Photo credit: John Harris, Opelika Engineering)

To maintain participation among group members, it is necessary to constantly motivate them and keep them enthusiastic:

- Start with small, manageable projects that are likely to be successful.
- Document and celebrate success.
- Use on-the-ground projects to give participants a sense that they are making a difference (stream cleanups, tree planting, etc.).
- Use positive feedback, recognition, and rewards as incentives for continued participation.
- Maintain a stable structure to reassure members that the partnership is accountable to them and that something will get done.
- Offer opportunities to participate at different levels (regularly, occasionally, professionally, etc.).
- Build on sources of community pride.
- Make explicit what member organizations and individuals stand to gain and specifically identify these benefits.
- Continually revisit and stress successes and achievements.
- Make group meetings and activities fun (plan social events, provide refreshments at group meetings, etc.).

SUMMARY

As an Alabama Watershed Steward, you have a wonderful opportunity to help protect your community's water resources and your entire watershed. Becoming educated about the issues that affect your watershed is only the first step. The next step is committing just a little of your time and energy to apply this knowledge and create solutions that will improve the water quality and overall health of your watershed.

Get your friends, neighbors, family, and colleagues involved as well to start a watershed organization and make a difference. Only you and other citizens like you can protect water quality in your community. Working together, you can help to ensure that future generations of Alabamians are able to enjoy the state's valuable water resources.



Figure 5.12. Pepperell Branch in Opelika, Alabama, is a beautiful water resource. (Photo Source: Creekline Trails of Opelika)

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