

NEAEB NEXUS CAFÉ

“Our Desired Aquatic Environments”, March 15, 2007 Thursday, 3:30 to 6 PM

Table 8 Discussion Topic

Successful Management Strategies at the Local Level - How can we better engage municipalities and private landowners to manage for water resource quality and protection?

Moderator Introduction

Water is a public asset. While state government provides policy, partial regulatory and technical assistance, towns remain passive when it comes to protecting water quality/quantity and equilibrium conditions of rivers and streams.

What steps can local government and private sectors undertake to strengthen local control and long-term stewardship of water as a public asset?

Discussion Summary

Local vs state purviews and roles are unclear, Regulatory vs non regulatory management strategies are also little discussed at both the state and local level. Water resources threats are increasing and management requirements are feeling increasingly daunting at the local AND state level. There is wide agreement that fundamental social and behavioral change is needed at both state and local levels. While we need local government to “get on board”, we realize that the state must take the lead and maintain passionate leadership. A mindset or paradigm shift is needed.

We must grow public involvement, improve data management and accessibility, increase outreach of technical expertise from state government, improve planning techniques/conservation strategies/municipal incentives, and build a clear, conscious and seamless partnership network that makes *everyone* accountable and with well defined roles that are linked to each other.

While town government is charged with residents’ health/safety/welfare, towns perceive that water resources are managed by the state. Both the state and local governments are timid about undertaking active discussions to remedy our collective lack of strategic planning in the governance and long-term stewardship of water resources. There is a sense of general paralysis and denial. DEC remarks that data is complex and that towns are afraid of government advice, while towns are generally unaware of the “known” condition of public waters and how to engage in water quality management activities. As well, laws are typically written with action/remediation thresholds that are triggered only after the damage has been done (e.g TMDL-water, LOS- transportation). It was agreed that using the “Straw that Broke the Camels Back” management strategy is wasting dollars and natural resources since it requires avoidable and massive clean up expenses that interrupt economic and community development plans.

In Vermont, a growing trust in public private partnerships is just beginning to help the state to afford and achieve its well-stated overarching goals. This should be continued. At the state level,

we are good at visioning and identifying broad goals and policies, but we are not skilled at identifying strategic implementation plans that are affordable and will ensure that high quality water resources will be here for our grandkids.

Ideas to improve our *collective* ability to care for natural resources over time:

- develop a statewide strategic land use plan with high biodiversity protection areas and watershed based land areas
- eliminate property tax on biodiversity protection areas
- accelerate interstate learning to avoid known pitfalls and utilize proven planning models
- reduce reliance on excessive public meetings. If necessary- make them “worth it”
- DEC employees should all join local conservation commissions, selectboards, planning commissions, land trusts, watershed groups to accelerate interaction between state and local government
- provide state/federal economic incentives that leverage long term public private partnerships that assist local government (not state employees)
- make local government more accountable, and give more oversight and information, and then support them with readily available and up to date technical expertise and tools
- broaden utility and function of town plans, ensure town vision process is informed by the towns statutory mandate (better define “health safety, welfare”)
- upgrade Title 10, Chapter 41 to include equilibrium conditions for river systems and other means to clarify and enable our clean up strategies –housekeeping, housekeeping
- upgrade settlement/buildout laws to ensure numerous strategies for water resources protection and urban quality of life.
- strengthen towns’ ability to electronically access state data and technical advice- pronto
- coordinate a partnership plan between state and local government- make flow diagram with no voids, show regulatory and non regulatory pathways and how they overlap
- fund only management and protection strategies that are lowest LONG TERM cost, eg, avoidance, conservation easements, regulation, passive fixes
- at a predetermined agreed upon and highly celebrated turning point in our social history, make each polluter pay for their incremental impacts- use user fee strategy

Table Attendees

Moderator: Marty Illick, Lewis Creek Watershed Association

Round 1

Sue Flint

Guy Hoffman

Jared Carrano

Miranda Lescaze

Jen Stamp

Heather Pembroke

Leon Tsomides

Kerry Strout

Round 2

Evan Fitzgerald

Lauren Moore

Chris Durring

Paul Piszczek

Bill Hoadley

Tom Faber