

Endorsed Watershed Action Planning, Document Analysis

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In July 2004, a document analysis of four Watershed Action Plans (WAPs) with **conditionally endorsed (hyperlink to applicable term in definitions.html)** plans was conducted. The purpose of the review was to compile and analyze watershed planning and implementation data specific to three **core components (hyperlink to WAPcc.html)** of effective watershed action planning (critical to planning and implementation): 1) science based; 2) community led; and 3) and sustainable.

Key characteristics of the four WAPs are:

- 2 rural, 2 urban watershed areas;
- 2 from southeast Ohio, 2 from northeast Ohio;
- Number of key issues addressed: 3-8;
- Watershed size range from 190 to 437,438 acres;
- 2 SWCD sponsors; 2 NGO sponsors.

Items from the Appendix 8 Update¹ that were relevant to the above-mentioned core components were identified and used to develop a Rubric for Document Analysis (see Appendix 1). The rubric was then used to conduct the document analysis.

Findings

A. Science-Based

- Physical and biological data were not analyzed in this review, since they had received thorough attention through the plan endorsement process.
- Social sciences data have been presented in the plans, as part of their demographic, economic, and historic inventory components. This information came from different sources (e.g., past studies in the watershed, surveys with residents and census data).
- In some plans the data were more “linked” to the watershed. In other words, these data clearly helped explain impacts on the watershed.

Recommendation: It is suggested that science-based information be more explicit in explaining the current watershed situation, as well as predicting threats. These data also have the potential to detail what human resources are available for the plan. In other words, answer the question “what are the implications for the watershed and watershed planning?”

B. Community-led

- Three of the four plans present a diverse group of partners (e.g., businesses, agencies, and citizens).

¹ ∑ Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (2003). Appendix 8 update – Outline of a Watershed Plan from “A Guide to Developing Local Watershed Action Plans in Ohio”. Retrieved on July 1, 2004 from http://www.epa.state.oh.us/dsw/nps/NPS_WAP_APP8.pdf

- These stakeholders are potentially representative of key groups and were somewhat involved in the planning process.
- There were different types of involvement (e.g., working groups or committees, public meetings, and advisory boards that were less action-oriented than the working groups).
- Also different was the type of support provided to the plan (e.g., technical support, political support, and “stewardship” support).
- Their level of involvement varied. Most people who were involved were consulted about the issues and threats to the watershed. In some situations, these people were asked to prioritize the issues of concern. People who were part of committees and boards were involved in making decisions about actions and prioritizing them.
- The adoption and endorsement of the plans were not clear in the plans. There are stakeholders participating, but the question is “do they really endorse the plan?” and “how can one verify if they do?”

Recommendation: It is suggested that letters of support be included in the plan. One group had a “Plan Endorsement” signature page. In the copy analyzed, the multiple stakeholders in that page had not signed, but this may be an example of demonstrating endorsement.

- None of the plans mentioned partners’ roles and responsibilities. Determining roles and responsibilities is extremely important for plan implementation, especially in the first couple of years of implementation.

Recommendation: It is suggested that for at least the first two years, these roles be more explicitly determined (who is going to do what and by when).

- Most plans were compiled by a watershed group in partnership with other organizations and citizens. There seems to be stakeholder support for the plans, but it is not clear at what level.
- Group decision making for most plans was unclear. In two plans, a diverse group of stakeholders, representative of many constituencies, were involved in prioritizing concerns and issues to be addressed by the plan. Public meetings were held where those present (including citizens) participated in selecting the priority area of concern.
- The same level of public participation in decision-making was not present in the implementation. Stakeholders were not involved in brainstorming and prioritizing solutions. In the action plan, stakeholders, especially citizens, tend to be “recipients” of programs.

C. Sustainable

- In general, very little information was provided about the watershed group proposing the plan. Some groups briefly mentioned the organization lacking resources (human and financial). Information such as how and why group was created, number of members and composition, resources available (material and human) and so forth are important to assess the capacity of the organization in carrying out the plan.

Recommendation: It is suggested that the organizations present information about their assets and limitations.

- When stated, the missions and goals of the groups were aligned with the Clean Water Act.
- In general, plans present indicators for their goals in sufficient detail. These goals are often prioritized, but the process used is not usually clear.
- Plans tend not to present a strategy for evaluation and monitoring. In other words, there is not a clear plan for tracking their progress.

Some attempts are made: One watershed presented a plan with evaluation activities linking these activities to who is responsible to conduct it, how, and in what timeline. Another group will plan an evaluation system based on Bennett's hierarchy and ongoing management plan evaluation tool. These groups plan on sharing the results as State of the Watershed reports (yearly), information festivals (yearly), report cards, and quarterly reports.

- Almost no strategic planning for funding is available in the plans. Their funding strategy is limited to identifying potential sources of funding and potential partners. For example, plans identify partners that are important for implementation and link them to goals and activities. Plans also present lists of funding sources, with great level of detail (deadlines, types of funding, and so forth). However, there is no timeframe for fundraising built into the plans. One group mentioned not planning on having a non-profit status in the near future. Even though this is not necessarily a requirement, it may become detrimental to that organization when trying to obtain external funding needed for implementation.

Recommendations: It is suggested that one goal be included in each plan regarding "Sustaining the Watershed Plan." In this goal, groups would include how they plan on building capacity and building assets. Groups could include a situational analysis of the plan (e.g., a SWOT__strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats__analysis) that would help optimize what they already have and become aware of what they need in order to implement the plan. It is also suggested that plans include an overall implementation timeframe. This is helpful in verifying the feasibility of the plan.

D. Plan format

- Some plans followed the Appendix 8 Update outline more closely than others. This is especially helpful for those reviewing the plan.
- Some plans did a very good job at “translating” technical information, making it understandable for a non-technical audience. This is something that should be pursued by most plans, given that plans should be accessible to the public.

E. Summary

Watershed plans are the result of an amazing effort by hundreds of people, who become involved in prioritizing issues, developing solutions, making all this information available in a document, and reviewing and revising this document. It is very important to make sure all this incredible work is implemented.

When looking to four of the currently conditionally endorsed plans from a sustainability perspective, the key questions seem to be: “What characteristics have been identified in the existing plan that may be helpful and detrimental to its implementation?” and once identified, “What can be done to minimize the detrimental characteristics and maximize the helpful characteristics?”

Tools that might be helpful in addressing these questions include:

- Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) analysis of the plan
- Analysis of the capacity/ assets available to implement the plan
- Strategic plan for funding
- Analysis of plan feasibility
- Organizational effectiveness

Appendix 1, Rubric for Document Analysis of Watershed Plans

Watershed Group Name: _____

Status of the plan: Fully Approved _____ Conditionally Approved _____

Science-based/ Sustainable

Amount of Evidence			
None	Enough		
1	2	3	Goals are specific and clearly stated
1	2	3	Goals will ultimately lead to non-attaining segments moving into attainment as results of implementation efforts
1	2	3	Criteria has been set to determine whether loading reductions are being achieved over time
1	2	3	Criteria has been set to determine whether substantial progress is being made towards attaining water quality standards
1	2	3	Criteria has been set to determine whether the watershed-base plan or incorporated TMDL needs to be revised
1	2	3	Plan allow for easy tracking of progress: Who will monitor progress; How progress will be monitored; How progress will be publicized to officials and to public; Time frame before progress is discernible; Surrogates of water quality progress will be tracked and reported (What are they; Reported to whom by whom; Formative program evaluation (Highlights successful activities, Show activities that need change)
1	2	3	Evaluation contributes to substantive and/or methodological knowledge of processes and programs
1	2	3	Monitoring component to evaluate effectiveness of the implementation efforts over time, measured against the sets of criteria
1	2	3	There is a strategy in place to keep the plan available to general public and responsible officials
1	2	3	An agency has been designated to assess how conditions have changed over time

Science-based/ Community-led

Is the plan's overall goal to "restore and maintain the chemical, physical and biological integrity of waterbodies within the watershed stated? (from the Clean Water Act, 1972). No _____ Yes _____

Is the main purpose of the plan...
 ... to reduce impairment where the waterbodies do not meet the standards No _____ Yes _____

... to protect areas where the waterbodies meet the standards No _____ Yes _____

... to build public support No _____ Yes _____

Sustainable

Amount of Evidence			
None	Enough		
1	2	3	Objectives are prioritized (Timeline: Task, Solutions, Resources, Methods, Timeframe, Performance indicators)
1	2	3	Education/ information/ marketing strategy is presented
1	2	3	Funding strategy is presented

Sustainable/ Community-led

Mission No _____ Yes _____
 Legal status (e.g. non profit, board of directors) No _____ Yes _____
 Operational procedures/ bylaws No _____ Yes _____

Amount of Evidence			
None	Enough		
1	2	3	Partners' endorsement of the plan
1	2	3	Local units of government's adoption of the plan
1	2	3	Partner roles and responsibilities

Community-led

Stakeholder diversity: who are the watershed partners?
 Watershed residents No _____ Yes _____
 Businesses No _____ Yes _____
 Landowners No _____ Yes _____
 Community organizations No _____ Yes _____
 Local government No _____ Yes _____
 State government No _____ Yes _____
 Educational institutions or educators No _____ Yes _____
 Non-governmental organizations No _____ Yes _____
 Regulated community No _____ Yes _____
 Other No _____ Yes _____

Amount of Evidence			
None	Enough		
1	2	3	The plan is compiled by a watershed group
1	2	3	The plan includes partners to allow implementation to happen
1	2	3	The plan has stakeholder support

Science-based/ Sustainable/ Community-led

Amount of Evidence			
None	Enough		
1	2	3	Group decision making processes – Representative?
1	2	3	Group decision making processes – Participatory?
1	2	3	An information/ education component to enhance public understanding of the plan
1	2	3	An information/ education component to encourage early and continued public participation in selecting, designing, and implementing the NPS management measures to be implemented

Overall Comments

Information not presented (not requested by Appendix 8)