

## **EAC WATERSHED MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS**

**ISSUE:** The Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) implements multiple programs on a watershed basis and several that could be implemented on a watershed basis. The Environmental Advisory Council (EAC) believes the DEQ could do a better job coordinating watershed management programs and facilitating local efforts in watershed management.

**SUGGESTED DEQ ACTIONS:** The EAC recommends that the DEQ consider establishing an interdivisional team to address four primary areas of interest to the EAC: program integration; tools development; new requirements or program direction; and information sharing. It is recommended that the DEQ identify actions to-date, short term actions and a longer term strategy for improving watershed management in these four areas.

It may be desirable or even necessary to seek input from external stakeholders who are involved in watershed management to fully explore these areas. The EAC recommends that the interdivisional team assess approaches for obtaining the needed advice from external stakeholders, and that the DEQ implement one or more of these approaches in an effort to improve delivery of services to local watershed groups and to facilitate coordination between state and local program implementation.

The EAC requests that the DEQ report back at the April 2005 EAC meeting regarding whether this action will be implemented, and, if so, a timeframe for its implementation, including interim reports back to the EAC.

### **DISCUSSION:**

The EAC Watershed Management Work Group (Work Group) identified many actions that could lead to improved watershed management planning, protection and restoration. These actions fall generally into four major categories: program integration; tools development; new requirements or program direction; and information sharing. Not every action fits neatly into one of these categories. Some actions fall into multiple categories, a few actions are not suitable for DEQ involvement, and a few actions were not well enough defined in the short discussion time available to fully characterize them. Nonetheless, the proposed actions fit reasonably well into these four categories so as to organize future work and discussion. The DEQ should use the proposed actions identified by the Work Group, which are identified below, as a starting point. However, a full evaluation by the DEQ should include other needs/actions as identified staff and/or external stakeholders.

Based on the EAC's limited review, it appears that there is limited coordination among the programs that the DEQ implements on a watershed basis, and that this may render them less efficient than they could be in terms of resource utilization, and for local participation. The Work Group identified several proposed actions that speak to the general need for improved program integration on a watershed basis, either literally or through increased awareness of other programs by watershed management program staff. Although the Work Group and full EAC did not have an opportunity to fully analyze these ideas, the EAC believes they merit further consideration. These include: promoting development of cross division and management teams to manage watershed; appointing a watershed coordinator/czar; conducting self

assessments of programs that would benefit from a watershed approach; integrating regulatory programs; increasing DEQ/DNR programs in NPDES permitting cycle; requiring true watershed boundaries in permits; linking watershed management to EPA Lakewide Management Plans; mandating integration of requirements for nonpoint and storm water plans; improving data management, coordination and communication; reviewing regulations to identify what impinges on watershed management; emphasizing water resource protection as well as restoration; having DEQ staff involved with local watershed groups; considering broader land use issues; and reviewing the 1995 watershed committee report.

The DEQ has developed several useful tools to facilitate watershed management internally and for local involvement in watershed management. However, it appears that additional tools are needed to more effectively conduct watershed management activities. The Work Group proposed several actions that would lead to new tool development for use by the DEQ or local participants. These tools, which also should be analyzed further, include: developing measures of success and integrating them into watershed management plans; completing the wetlands inventory and developing education approach based on watershed wetlands; re-examining infiltration basins for onsite storm water management; providing support to local watershed organizations; identifying sources of funding and types of watershed organizations; improving data management, coordination and communication; researching best management practices; strengthening relations with EPA to tap into their resources; creating a network of watershed groups; networking with foundations; and developing a dispute resolution team.

A third category of actions identified by the Work Group is information sharing. A great deal of information is available from the DEQ in printed and electronic format, and from other organizations engaged in watershed management. However, the EAC identified several areas where it appears that additional information or enhanced availability is needed. These include: appointing a watershed management "czar" responsible for providing all information in one place; broadening pollution prevention messages to watersheds; cataloguing all watershed initiatives; increasing technology transfer, developing a clearing house for information; conducting periodic training on changes that affect watershed management; and conducting regular watershed management training. These proposals should be reviewed further.

Several proposed actions identified by the Work Group suggest that new requirements or program direction may facilitate watershed management. The DEQ should evaluate the benefits and feasibility of implementing some of these changes, particularly in light of enhanced program integration and/or eliminating conflicts that hinder effective and efficient watershed management. The actions in this category identified by the EAC include: developing measures of success and integrating them into watershed plans; mandating integration of nonpoint and storm water plans; requiring updates on the status of implementing watershed plans in applications/proposals; reviewing regulations to identify what impinges on watershed management; increasing DEQ/DNR programs in NPDES permitting cycle; redirecting resources to neglected watersheds; and obtaining adequate timeframes to implement EPA mandates.