

**REVIEW OF USDA FOREST SERVICE
COMMUNITY-BASED WATERSHED
RESTORATION PARTNERSHIPS**

APPENDIX G

Reviews of Watershed Projects

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POTOMAC RIVER WATERSHED
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The Potomac Large-scale Watershed Program (Potomac Watershed Partnership--PWP) was created through a merger of LSWP proposals from three different entities: the George Washington/Jefferson National Forest, The Maryland DNR/Forest Service, and Ducks Unlimited. Initially, the three proposals were aimed at work in different areas on different types of projects. However, the Potomac was used as a common theme to link the three projects together under one roof. The PWP is now about two years old.

The PWP Has Achieved a Number of Successes Including:

- The partners have stayed together despite some major hills and valleys and now feel more committed than ever to the project. They are optimistic about the future.
- The process has developed better cohesion between public agencies, broadened the views about partnership-based watershed restoration, and led to increased understanding of the needs and roles of the individual partners.
- With one exception, the PWP has exceeded its project goals by 25%.
- Over \$170,000 has been leveraged from sources outside of the USFS for the project.
- The Forest Service has been able to develop model projects, educate its staff, generate good public relations, and create good-will ambassadors due to the project.
- A conscious effort is being made to identify "signature projects" (such as the "Growing Native" seed gathering project) which benefit all of the partners simultaneously.
- The project coordinator is highly respected.
- A non-profit organization, the Potomac Conservancy, was chosen as the lead organization and the partners are very pleased with the way this has worked.
- The PWP has developed its own identity and new partners such as the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection are now joining because they believe the PWP can add value to their work.
- In sum, despite the ups and downs, a great deal has been achieved and the partners are beginning to see added value by working together.

Although The Partners Are Optimistic About the Future, They Face Some Important Challenges Including:

- While improving, the way the project was initially organized created some hard feelings and misconceptions that have not been fully overcome.
- Although significantly improved, cultural and programmatic differences exist between some of the partners, which has led to misperceptions and strained relations.
- A number of important governance issues remain unresolved related to how decisions are made and enforced, how partners use and distribute power, and how funds and other resources are shared.
- A diversity of views exists over the long-term vision and goals of the PWP. Some partners believe the PWP will be just a short-term project and, therefore, are primarily interested in the money that can be obtained. Others believe the PWP can be a whole new way of doing business and want to see long-term commitments established.
- Balancing the need for public recognition and fundraising between the individual partners and the PWP remains a challenge.
- Due to the issues above, the PWP operates primarily in a tactical, not strategic manner, which may limit the partners understanding of the increased synergy that could develop and the increased funding that could result if a clear strategy were developed.
- Although ultimately helpful, the development of the business plan was inefficient and very time consuming.
- The budgeting process has been problematic. The current budget system promotes functional silos, the majority of funds have come through the National Forest System, State & Private Forestry dollars have been limited, and the funds have been released late in the year causing problems for the non-profit which pays the coordinator.
- Support from the Washington office has been uneven.

Our Analysis of These Issues Finds That:

- The presence of unresolved governance issues is a key constraint to future progress.
- The USFS is still struggling to let go and serve as an equal partner, a problem that has influenced the behaviors of many of the partners in ways that may not be beneficial to the long-term health of the PWP.

- Despite the hills and valleys, the increased level of mutual understanding and the sense of synergy that is growing have generated optimism about the future and commitment to continuing the project.
- At the same time, some partners fear that the time and energy given to the process will be wasted if the project ends due to the lack of commitment from headquarters and/or the lack of USFS funds.

Given the Issues Described Above, We Recommend That:

- Continued efforts should be made to build on recent progress and resolve the key governance issues.
- The project continue to employ a full-time coordinator to help steer the group through the governance issues and leverage the efforts of the individual partners into outcomes and benefits that are larger than what each partner alone could achieve.
- Time be spent clarifying the vision, goals and overall strategy of the project.
- Continued efforts be made to build landscape-level partnership-based planning into the culture of the Forest Service.
- Major efforts be made to resolve the budget problems to reduce the amount of time, energy, and stress that currently exist around this issue.

We Also Recommend That In the Future the Chief's Office Consider:

- Restructuring the business plans to focus more on strategic elements.
- Developing alternative methods to establish landscape-level partnership-based programs to avoid the types of problems the PWP experienced.
- Taking explicit steps to embed watershed-level partnership-based management into its policies, Washington office programs, and the core internal personnel and budgeting processes if it is to be a core agency value in the future.

Successes

- **The Partners Have Stayed Together Through Some Difficult Times**

The way in which the PWP came about created some hard feelings, which the partners are still in the process of overcoming. Even with the difficulties, the partners have stayed at the table. People continue to attend the meetings. Even DU, which initially did not attend many meetings, is now attending. The willingness to stay involved has generated a heightened sense of mutual understanding of the needs, attributes, and skills of the other partners. Every person we spoke with said the group had overcome some important hurdles in the past 3-6 months and voiced optimism that great things were possible in the future.

- **The Process Has Developed Better Cohesion Between Agencies and Broadened the Views of Many Partners**

All of the government agency staff we spoke with said enhanced working relationships and better alignment has resulted among the public agencies involved with the PWP. Almost everyone we spoke with said although a steep learning curve was required, one of the major hurdles that has been overcome is the belief that the pie is limited and that if one partner gets more another will get less. The group has now agreed to specific ground rules on how they will operate in public. Each of the partners has agreed to tell other partners which funder they plan to seek funding from so that the partners don't compete against each other. A priority list of needs is developed and the appropriate group is chosen to seek funds from each potential funder. One of the tools employed that helped to achieve this breakthrough was a "SPOT" analysis. The project coordinator facilitated a process whereby the mission, goals, needs, constituencies, opportunities, and threats faced by each partner were identified. This process generated much greater awareness and understanding among the partners of the issues each faces.

- **The PWP Has Exceeded Its Project Goals By 25 Percent**

With the exception of riparian fencing on federal lands, the PWP has exceeded its project goals by 25%. So many projects have been completed with the dollars and staffing afforded by the PWP that staff is somewhat concerned about over-saturation. For example, 43 miles of road have been closed, 2000 feet of streams on federal lands have been fenced, 4 rain gardens have been installed, one 1400 foot greenway has been installed, 155 miles of riparian buffer have been planted, 71 acres of wetlands have been restored, 586.5 acres have been permanently protected on private lands through conservation easements and other tools, 29 riparian monitoring sites have been established, and the Growing Native program has become a flagship public outreach program. The large geographic scope of the project area means that various partners complete much of the work independently. However, more and more of the work is being done within the context of a full partnership. Field staff from the various partners are now sharing ideas and working together independent of the project coordinator.

- **A Significant Amount of Money Has Been Leveraged**

The PWP has generated over \$170,000 in additional funds and in-kind contributions. Some of this has come in the form of grants, about half in hard cash and the balance in in-kind contributions from government, private, and non-profit sources.

- **The Forest Service Has Been Able to Develop Model Projects, Educate Their Staff, Generate Good Public Relations, and Create Good-Will Ambassadors**

A number of Forest Service employees said the PWP has allowed the agency to do things it could not do under normal operations. For example, a watershed characterization assessment is now being completed for a few of the subbasins within the Potomac. The purpose is to be able to set priorities, explain why they are working in certain locations, and to develop common indicators. A number of model projects have also been completed. These projects provided greater awareness and education for local rangers on watershed issues. They also generated good relations with private parties. For example, steep slope alternative logging workshops have been held with good attendance. The agency has improved range allotments and completed wetland restoration projects in the Shenandoah watershed. The successful work with a private allotment permittee led this individual to become an ambassador for the USFS. The agency has also been able to work with the state partners to resolve some recreational access problems. In addition, the partnerships that have resulted from the PWP allowed the agency to expand their focus from the bottomlands to the uplands where arson and forest health problems have been addressed.

- **A Conscious Effort is Being Made to Identify "Signature Projects"**

The PWP partners are making a conscious effort to find projects that meet the needs of all of the partners simultaneously. Called "signature projects," the goal is to help all of the partners to feel good and shine the light on the added value that the PWP provides to each partner. The "Growing Native Program" (GNP) is an example of a very successful signature project. In 2001, the GNP mobilized almost 2,500 volunteers from 108 organizations (including day care centers, senior centers, universities, Department of Defense, and schools) who collected over 12,000 pounds of native hardwood seeds and delivered them to state nurseries which used them to grow seedlings for local reforestation programs. The GNP saved over \$40,000 in hard dollars and leveraged about \$102,000 in in-kind donations. They are shooting for 5,000 people to be involved with the GNP in 2002. The GNP also generated a significant amount of positive publicity for the PWP and its partners. It also highlighted the role of forestry and foresters in restoring the Potomac.

- **The Project Coordinator Is Highly Respected**

Every person we spoke with said the current project coordinator has done an excellent job. One person called her, "a breath of fresh air." Agency staff served as the coordinator before the current coordinator was hired but was part-time and had many other commitments on their plate. The hiring of a coordinator with no past history in the project and good group instincts and facilitation skills has apparently proven to be pivotal in helping the group to overcome some key obstacles.

- **A Non-Profit Was Chosen as the Lead Organization**

One of the most interesting aspects of the PWP is that the Potomac Conservancy, a non-profit organization, was chosen to serve as the lead organization. Although the US Forest Service provides much of the money for the project, and although most of the other partners are much larger in terms of budget and staff, the project coordinator actually works for the Potomac Conservancy and from this position coordinates the activities of numerous public agencies, private groups, and other non-profits. Although this arrangement has led to a few problems (see below), almost everyone we spoke with voiced a high degree of satisfaction with the arrangement. Having a non-profit with no vested interest in the process serve as the lead entity has opened up new options that were previously unthinkable. The PWP has been able to leverage substantial additional resources and been able to shift resources around to where they can achieve the most benefit. These activities have been much easier to accomplish within the context of a non-profit than they would have been in a government agency. For example, the Maryland Forest Service can hire monitoring staff for only eight months at a time, and then must let them go. The agency can rehire the people after six weeks. The six-week gap in employment can lead to the loss of staff and to consequent disruptions in the monitoring program. The PWP, acting through the non-profit Potomac Conservancy, plans to hire the employees for the six weeks that the state of Maryland cannot hire them, thus bridging the gap in employment. One federal government partner summarized the feelings of many by stating, "The best decision we made was to set up a system that provided non-profit leadership. This changed the whole dynamic."

- **The PWP Has Generated its Own Identity and New Partners Are Joining**

The on-the-ground successes of the project have given it an identity. People in the area now know a partnership is working to solve critical problems, and new organizations are asking to become involved. The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, for example, recently asked to join the PWP because they believe it can add value to their work. Other non-profits have also joined with the partners on a project-specific basis.

- **In Sum, Despite Some Hills and Valleys, a Great Deal Has Been Achieved and the Partners Are Beginning to See Added Value By Working Together**

Almost every person we spoke with said although there have been some hurdles to overcome, and although some problems still must be resolved, they were committed to the effort and are beginning to see increased advantages to working together. The partners now seem to be realizing that they can each achieve their individual goals and

more by working together. A growing sense of synergy and optimism exists about the future.