



Putting Your WATERSHED

How Watershed Groups Can Maintain

Getting Started • Assessing Your Watershed • Crafting a Plan • **Putting Your Plan to Work**



Editor's Note: Many experts see watershed planning and management as being an effective way to deal with water and wastewater issues. In *On Tap* during 2007, we are presenting a four-part series about watersheds that provides an overview about how to start a watershed initiative, how to assess problems, how to develop a workable plan, and how to implement these watershed efforts. This article is the fourth and final part of the series; all four installments are available on the National Environmental Services Center Web site at www.nesc.wvu.edu/ndwc/ndwc_watershed.htm. The site also provides additional information about watersheds.



D PLAN to Work

By Mark Kemp-Rye, On Tap Editor

Momentum

Photo by Scott Bauer, www.ars.usda.gov

Almost any time a person starts a new endeavor, there's a palpable sense of enthusiasm and energy. However, we all know that the initial excitement tends to fade and it's usually harder to keep the ball rolling than it is to get the ball rolling in the first place. Watershed groups are no exception to this fact of life.

If you've followed the watershed plan we've laid out in the previous three installments of this series, you have a core group of people who are committed to the project or projects in the watershed, you have compiled some information about water quality, you've involved community stakeholders in your project, and you've developed a plan about how to tackle the problems that confront you. How, then, can you sustain the level of interest necessary to see that vision becomes reality?

Many watershed groups have found that they can maintain momentum through a combination of (1) regular communication, (2) more organizational structure, and (3) securing funding. This article examines these three components, as well as ways to measure progress toward the goals defined in the group's plan.

Publicize Your Group's Activities

Even the best project will have trouble if people don't know about it. Getting the word out about your project can be accomplished in a number of different ways:

- **Newsletters**—If there's enough interest in a watershed project, a newsletter can be invaluable. These range from multi-page, commercially printed productions to two-sided photocopies (remember to leave room for the mailing address).
- **Web site**—More and more, communities are turning to the Internet to post information. Setting up a Web site has never been easier. Once it's up and running, updates can be made and there are no printing or mailing costs.
- **Cable**—Most cable television companies have a channel devoted to community events. This is typically a free service and a great way to publicize things like public meetings.
- **TV and Radio**—Radio and television stations make public service announcements about public events.
- **Local Media**—Local talk shows are often willing to host a show about the project being suggested. Similarly, the local newspaper will be interested in running a story about the project.
- **Mailings**—You may wish to reach stakeholders via direct mail. Watershed groups should develop their own mailing lists and can sometimes use kindred groups for outreach of this kind.



Photo courtesy of www.unsp.edu/stuorg/sal/

KEEP THE BALL ROLLING

Veteran watershed groups have learned that there are several key ways to maintain enthusiasm for their activities.

- 1 Communicate with your members and with the community.
- 2 Celebrate your successes, no matter how minor they may seem.
- 3 Craft a logical structure for your organization.
- 4 Find money to pay for projects.
- 5 Measure progress toward your goals.

One of the keys to effective communication is to get the message out in as many formats as possible and to repeat the message as often as possible. You never know where or when someone will hear what you're saying.

On Tap

Online

For more information about publicizing your work, see the article "Communicating Your Message: Good Public Relations Makes the Job Easier" on the National Environmental Services Center Web site at www.nesc.wvu.edu

According to Evan Hansen, president of the Friends of Deckers Creek watershed group, a good technique is to "publicize each successful step along the way, using the local media, your newsletter, e-mail lists, or public meetings. It's especially important to get coverage when, for example, you receive a grant, design a remediation project, or start a construction."

Celebration should play an important part of building support. After all, undertaking a community project doesn't have to be all drudgery. The Friends of Deckers Creek realized this early on and started an annual party called CarpFest, named for that hardy fish that can survive even the most polluted water.

"We use CarpFest to celebrate the creek and as an educational tool," Hansen says. "Some people are interested in water issues because they like to have fun and to learn and celebrate with like-minded people in the community. At CarpFest we always have music and kids' activities but we also have educational activities like a stream walk to find bugs, tanks with fish caught from Deckers Creek, and booths from local nonprofits and agencies." (See the sidebar on page 23 for more information about the Friends of Deckers Creek.)

Becoming More Structured

It's okay for a group to start out without much structure. In fact, most watershed groups start with hardly any structure at all. Once things get rolling, though, the need for a more defined structure becomes apparent. For many groups, this means becoming a registered non-profit organization, often referred to as a "501(c)(3) group" because of the Internal Revenue Service designation for such organizations.

"You'll want to get 501(c)(3) status if you begin to apply for grants, because most grants can only go to nonprofits," Hansen says. "An alternative is to use an existing nonprofit as your fiscal agent. If your organization is raising and spending any significant amount of funds, you should strongly consider incorporating and having a board of directors."

"A corporation, whether for-profit or nonprofit, is required to have a governing board of directors," says Carter McNamara who teaches at St. Thomas University and helped found the Management Assistance Program for Nonprofits in Minnesota. "A corporation can operate as a separate legal entity, much like a person in that it can own bank accounts, enter into contracts, and so forth. However, the laws governing corporations require that a corporation ultimately is accountable to its owners (stockholders in the case of for-profits and the public with nonprofits). That accountability is accomplished by requiring that each corporation have a board of directors that represents the stockholders or the public."



WHAT'S YOUR GROUP DOING?

Are you involved in a successful watershed group?

Would you like to share your ideas with fellow *On Tap* readers?

If so, drop Editor Mark Kemp-Rye a note at:
mkemp@mail.wvu.edu

Or by writing to:
National Environmental Services Center
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Board members typically oversee various activities, including financial oversight, developing and enacting bylaws and other policies, recruiting board members and staff, organizing committees, conducting board meetings, and performing evaluations. Boards can have a broad range of personalities. Some examples include:

- working boards (where board members might be fixing the fax one day and strategic planning the next),
- collective boards (where board members and others in the organization usually do the same types of work and it's often difficult to discern who the board members actually are),
- policy (where board members attend mostly to top-level policies), and
- policy governance (where there are very clear lines between the board and the CEO).

“Boards play a very important role in overseeing the organization, fund raising, and for most organizations, also providing volunteer labor,” Hansen observes.

While adopting more and more structure, remember that boards, like people, usually change over time. According to McNamara, “Some people believe in life stages of boards, including that they start out as working boards, where members focus on day-to-day matters in addition to strategic matters, evolve to policy boards, where members focus mostly on strategic matters, and eventually become large, institutionalized boards with small executive committees and a larger group of directors, some of whom are ‘big names’ to gain credibility with funders or investors.”



To learn more about working with boards, see the article “Water Boards” on the National Environmental Services Center Web site at www.nesc.wvu.edu

Working With Volunteers

Regardless of the particular structure your group adopts, people donating their time and talent form an integral part of every watershed group. But having volunteers also means work for the group's leaders. Without direction and purpose, people will lose their focus and gravitate away from the project.

"You should be clear about what you expect from each of your volunteers," McNamara says. "Volunteers deserve to know what you expect from them, as well. To recruit volunteers for a specific role or job, you will need a clear job description from which to develop the advertisements and to show to any potential candidates."

Volunteers are often found through the networks of the people who started the watershed group. More volunteers will appear when news of the project hits the media and through word of mouth. If you have an especially large task or are undertaking a new project, you may wish to advertise for volunteers in the local newspaper and online.

After 10 years, the Friends of Deckers Creek had grown to the point that they were able to hire a director. Many other groups evolve in a similar fashion. There are, of course, both pros and cons to having employees. "[Having] paid staff is usually the last piece of the puzzle, and should only be considered if necessary," Hansen says. "You'll get more labor to devote to your projects, but at the same time the board will have to take on extra responsibilities to hire and manage the staff."



For ideas about finding and keeping good staff, see the article "How do we keep the employees?" on the National Environmental Services Center Web site at www.nesc.wvu.edu

Finding Money and Measuring Success

Once a watershed group has identified the work that needs to be done and has recruited a cadre of volunteers, the question of funding usually comes up. There's only so much work that can be done on a budget of zero.

At the same time, it's important to remember that funding for environmental projects is extremely tight at the moment. Investigating local, state, and federal sources of money can be worthwhile. Another good idea is to seek support in the community. Banks, local companies, and community foundations often participate in these sorts of activities.

Hansen suggests researching the conventional wisdom about funding nonprofit organizations. "It's important to diversify your funding between your membership, special events, and grants," he says. "These feed on each other too. For example, if you have a strong membership, your grant applications will be taken more seriously. If you have grants for remediation projects and are reducing pollution, it's easier to ask for membership contributions from the local community."

If you get money, whether it's from a local business or a government grant, you'll need to report how the funds were spent and what the outcomes were. Even if you aren't required to do this, a regular assessment of your work is a worthwhile activity.

"Program evaluation is carefully collecting information about a program or some aspect of a program in order to make necessary decisions about the program," McNamara says. "The type of evaluation you undertake to improve your programs depends on what you want to learn about the program. Don't worry about what type of evaluation you need or are doing—worry about what you need to know to make the program decisions you need to make, and worry about how you can accurately collect and understand that information."

Only the Beginning

Undertaking a watershed project can be overwhelming. There are so many things to consider and numerous tasks that must be performed for the work to proceed. The items discussed in this article—good communication and funding in particular—are essential for your project to move forward.

While the path will be difficult at times, it will not be without satisfaction. Celebrate your victories, no matter how small, and learn from your mistakes, no matter how big they may be. Your diligence and hard work will be rewarded, in no small part, with the knowledge that you've helped make your community a better place.

For More Information

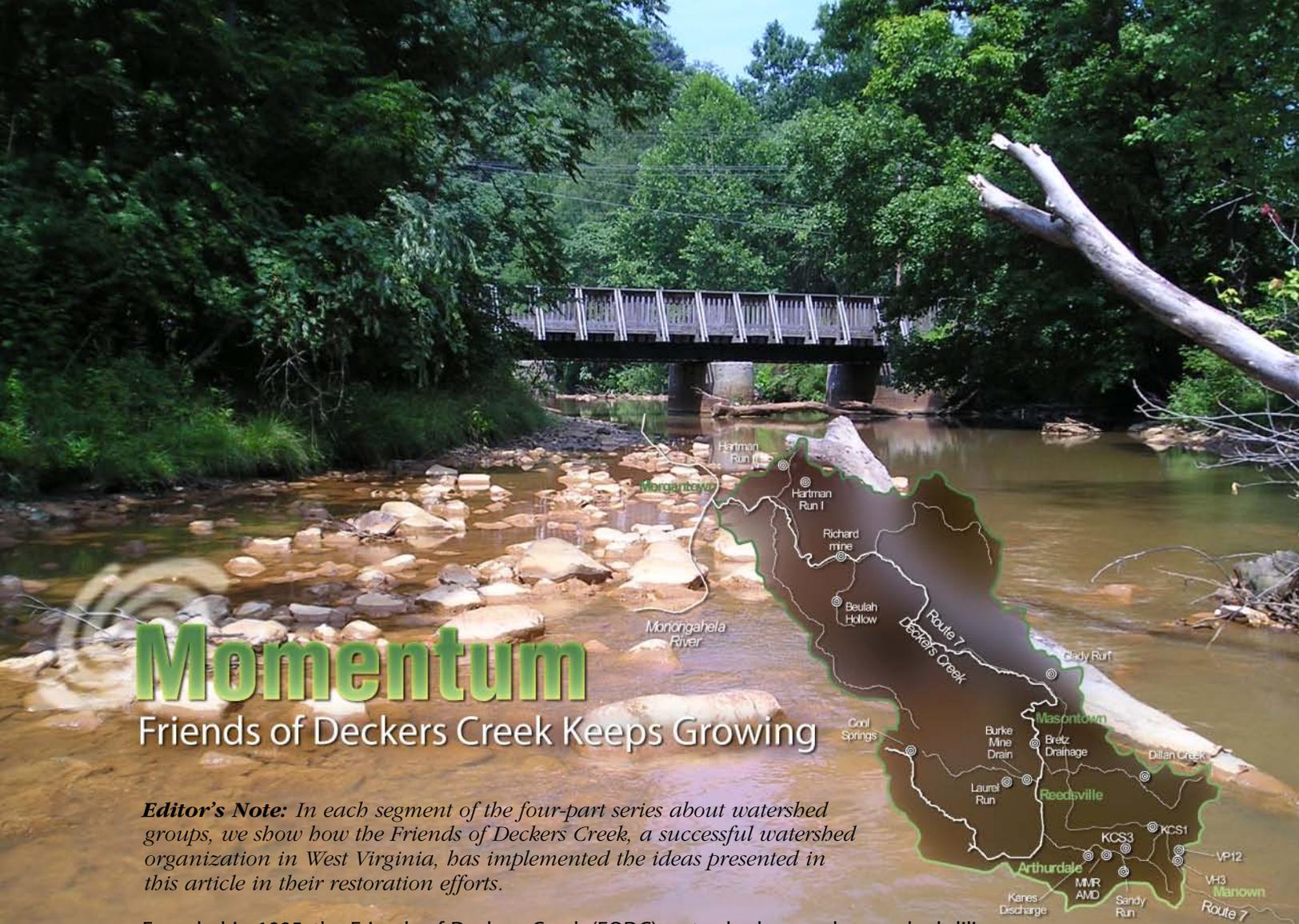
The National Environmental Services Center has a section of its Web site devoted to watershed issues. Go to www.nesc.wvu.edu/ndwc/ndwc_watershed.htm for a listing of watershed resources and articles. NESC Training Specialist Craig Mains may be reached at (800) 624-8301 ext. 5583 to discuss watershed planning and restoration efforts. Mains has been involved in several watershed groups and is especially knowledgeable about water quality measurement and analysis.

NESC also has hundreds of free and low-cost products on watersheds and related topics. Check the NESC Web site at www.nesc.wvu.edu to review. A Web site related to watersheds may be found on page 11 in this *On Tap*, as well as on the watershed section of the Web site listed above. 💧



On Tap Editor **Mark Kemp-Rye** lives in the Deckers Creek watershed, part of the Monongahela

River sub-basin, in turn, part of the Ohio River basin.



Momentum

Friends of Deckers Creek Keeps Growing

Editor's Note: In each segment of the four-part series about watershed groups, we show how the Friends of Deckers Creek, a successful watershed organization in West Virginia, has implemented the ideas presented in this article in their restoration efforts.

Founded in 1995, the Friends of Deckers Creek (FODC) watershed group has worked diligently to restore an impaired waterway in northern West Virginia. Originally formed by a group of kayakers, rock climbers, and other environmentalists, the FODC now has a board of directors representing a cross-section of the community, including a fisheries professor, professional writer, high school teacher, lawyer, environmental consultant, and small business owner.

The FODC has grown steadily over the past decade. Among the milestones are: obtaining 501(c)(3) status, receiving state and federal funding for stream restoration, undertaking a substantial membership drive, and hiring their first staff member.

"There is probably no right way to grow a watershed organization," says Martin Christ, FODC executive director and the first paid staff member hired by the group. "But there are many crucial things to keep in mind:

- Gather as much information as you can. State workers often know quite a bit about individual watersheds. Make sure you know all that they know, and then start learning more.
- Find a way to pay people. By paying people, you can hold them accountable for what needs to get done.
- Look for easy successes. They may be reports, events or ad campaigns rather than remediation projects, but a track record of small successes can often lead to larger projects.
- Get a diverse board of directors to represent many different parts of the community.
- Spend time being a good organization, including keeping good, clear accounting and meeting minutes."

This summer, the FODC started a three-week camp for area teens. Dubbed the "All Hands on Deckers Creek Camp," the new program involved different community groups and featured both work in the creek and more light-hearted activities such as sculptures made from discarded materials found in the waterway and tie-dyed shirts. On the final day of camp, the participants made a presentation to Morgantown City Council.

To learn more about the Friends of Deckers Creek, visit their Web site at www.deckerscreek.org.

