

What is Watershed Planning?

To determine the best locations for stream and wetlands projects that restore, enhance or protect water quality, the EEP Planning Group conducts two basic types of planning:

- *River Basin Restoration Priorities* are set periodically in each of the 17 river basins in North Carolina. EEP's basic purpose is to identify local watersheds (generally under 100 square miles in area) where ecological restoration or protection is most needed – for instance, streams with impaired water quality and degraded habitat, or areas with endangered aquatic species.
- *Local Watershed Planning* is undertaken once River Basin Restoration Priorities have been identified. Criteria include support from local communities and projected impacts from future development on watersheds.

What is Local Watershed Planning?

Local Watershed Planning is typically an 18- to 24-month process involving four major phases of work:

Preliminary Watershed Characterization – Identifying major watershed problems, their causes and severity; identifying watershed assets and potential future threats to watershed functions.

Detailed Assessment – Collecting field data related to water quality, habitat and stream stability; identifying areas where stream and wetlands restoration could be most helpful.

Preparation of Watershed Management Plan – Presentation of recommended solutions for the most critical watershed problems, including an “atlas” of the best sites for stream and wetlands projects.

Development of Watershed Restoration Opportunities – Matching sources of funding with potential projects, outreach to local governments and landowners to promote voluntary conservation easements and implementation of the highest-priority projects identified in the plan.

How are Local Watershed Plans used?

Once finished, a Local Watershed Plan can be put to good use in several ways:

- As a guide for specific actions local governments may take to improve or “repair” local watershed conditions;
- As an atlas of specific types of projects in the best locations for solving various watershed problems – including stream and wetlands restoration, buffer enhancement, habitat preservation, and urban or rural best management practices;
- As support for grant applications by groups seeking funding for watershed projects that may not be directly fundable by EEP.

In the bigger picture, a major goal of Local Watershed Planning by EEP is to identify and implement ecologically beneficial projects to address local watershed problems – specifically so that the state Department of Transportation and private developers will have mitigation projects in place to offset unavoidable environmental impacts associated with highway construction and other development activities in North Carolina.



Stakeholder Participation

A critical element of EEP's Local Watershed Planning is the participation of local *stakeholders* – that is, key individuals or groups interested in and affected by local watershed issues. Local input helps to determine the goals of the process, help identify priority areas for watershed solutions, and eventually help to put the plan into action. Local watershed stakeholders include staff from county and city resource agencies, local councils of government, local environmental groups and state and federal resource-agency representatives. These individuals often serve on technical advisory teams which meet periodically during the watershed planning process. Their participation is vital to the long-term success of the plan.

For more information

For information on EEP's Watershed Planning efforts, contact Deborah Amaral at (919) 715-3466 or visit our Web site at www.nceep.net/pages/lwplanning.htm.
