

# CHAPTER TWO: LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR PLANNING

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Success in watershed planning comes about by involving people who have a strong interest in the future of your watershed. Developing strong partnerships and involving the community right at the start of your watershed planning process will lay the foundation for the successful implementation of your watershed plan. In this chapter, we will work through the following steps:

- Planning for community involvement
- Identifying the key stakeholders
- Organizing a watershed advisory committee
- Establishing partnerships
- Understanding the role of consultants
- Charting the course

## Planning for community involvement

Watershed planning can only be successful when those that live and work in the watershed realize that they are a crucial part of their watershed. It happens when they recognize that their actions impact the health of the watershed. It happens when they are determined to protect and restore their watershed for the benefit of the entire community and future generations.

Right from the beginning, as you seek to protect and restore your watershed, you must involve the public. You will need the support of the community at every stage of the process. From gaining an understanding of the watershed to developing a vision and goals for your watershed's future, to planning for and implementing improvements, success will depend upon building and sustaining local support for your watershed plan.

Community participation can take many forms, but it is generally designed to:

- foster an appreciation of your watershed
- introduce local leaders and community residents to the watershed planning process
- generate a community consensus about the vision for the future of the watershed
- develop a strategy to address the most critical watershed issues

Meaningful public participation doesn't just happen. It has to be carefully thought out and planned to embrace the public in the planning process and to keep them informed about progress. Now is the time to begin to develop ideas about how the community can participate in the planning process. To start, it is important to understand who should be involved.

## Identifying the key stakeholders

Stakeholders are critical. A stakeholder is a person or group who has something to gain or lose based upon the outcomes of your watershed plan. You will need to involve those individuals and groups - elected officials, business and civic leaders, neighborhood and environmental groups, and educational institutions - who have a direct stake in the future of the watershed. Make special note of the key leaders, and be sure to include those who may oppose your watershed planning efforts as well as those who are likely to support them.

From the beginning of your efforts to protect and restore your watershed, you will be seeking out stakeholders and trying to define their role in making your watershed vision a reality. In particular, you will want to seek out two groups with an interest in the watershed - the experts and the enthusiasts. Experts are people with useful knowledge. Enthusiasts are people who will bring energy to the effort from either a civic concern, or from a business interest. Both types of people can help you get the job done, and, as advocates, can help you achieve consensus in the community.

You will need to create a strategy to effectively involve these stakeholders. Identify how you will approach each contact and be clear what they can contribute. Is it to keep them informed and seek their support? Do you need their

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funding help? Do you want them to participate on a committee? Be prepared in advance to address important issues and provide information about your watershed, including how their involvement may benefit them. Once you have their involvement, keep in touch and make sure your plans are on their front burner. By bringing people together you can create a vision that captures the ideas and interests of those concerned with the future of your watershed.

As you work to fulfill your vision, you may involve stakeholders and other community members in a variety of ways. These might include creating a watershed advisory committee; creating specific, issue-oriented subcommittees; establishing partnerships; encouraging participation in visioning and planning workshops; or “hands-on” participation in volunteer work parties. You will also need to keep the entire community informed about what is going on, including people who are not directly involved but may have a real interest in the watershed planning efforts. It is important to provide them with regular progress reports and keep them informed about how they can participate.

## Organizing a watershed advisory committee

Early in the planning process most communities establish an advisory committee that will oversee all aspects of developing the watershed plan. In some communities this may be handled

by an existing group, such as a planning board or conservation advisory committee, but in most cases it is appropriate for a watershed advisory committee to be established. Having an advisory committee will help focus efforts, streamline the planning process, and see the plan through to implementation.

Responsibilities of this committee generally include:

- managing the watershed planning process or advising staff on managing the process
- providing input on watershed issues and conditions
- holding regular meetings related to watershed planning and project implementation
- informing the community about the watershed planning process and ways they can be involved
- organizing and participating in focus groups, visioning and project planning workshops, and public hearings
- reviewing reports, designs, and other documents
- keeping elected officials and municipal officials informed about the planning process

- working with municipal staff, consultants, state agency staff, and others to complete various tasks

It is important to find members who are likely to stay with the watershed planning process from initial planning through to implementation of improvements. Take a look at the stakeholders you have identified: who are the key players, and who among them would be best suited to sit on an advisory committee? It is important to recruit the “movers and shakers” to be on the committee - those who others listen to and recognize as having the ability to get things done. Local leaders can provide valuable experience, advice, guidance and resources, and will be able to persuade others to join and contribute to the watershed planning efforts.



*Watershed planning workshop*

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Look for an effective chairperson - someone who will be able to create consensus and move the plan forward - as leadership will be extremely important. The size of an advisory group is also important to ensure productive group discussion. Ten to fifteen members are best, although there are circumstances when a smaller or larger group is warranted. While your advisory committee should be representative of a number of diverse interest groups, avoid forming a group that is so large it becomes unwieldy. You may want to get more people involved through their participation on sub-committees. Members of the advisory committee should include representation from the following groups:

- local governments, including elected officials, staff, and members of planning, zoning, and other boards of all municipalities within the watershed
- neighborhood and community organizations
- local and regional nonprofit organizations
- property owners
- representatives from the business community, particularly those whose livelihood depends on water resources
- water suppliers
- the academic community

## Establishing partnerships

The establishment of a watershed advisory committee is just one element of a broader strategy to bring together all of the stakeholders in your watershed. Now is the time to assess the role of the various stakeholders and to establish partnerships with these stakeholders.

A partnership is an agreement between two or more entities to work together for a particular purpose. You will need to form a partnership if:

- you are pursuing goals that will affect other people and organizations
- you need more resources, whether financial, political, or human, to accomplish your goals
- you want a strong coalition that shows how interests are in agreement

As you begin to develop partnerships, you will need to identify the key issues that watershed planning may raise with the community, for example, improving water quality for shellfishing or controlling the siltation of a lake that impacts recreational use. Make sure that the partners you identify represent the divergent viewpoints on these issues and can relate to how the watershed plan and improving water quality will improve the community as a whole. Recognizing the varying degrees of watershed awareness, concern, and/or expertise and how stakeholders want to be involved in the process

will allow you to structure the planning process to provide multiple options and opportunities for involvement and to make the most of partnerships.

Success in watershed planning requires partnerships with the right blend of stakeholders. These will come from the private sector, all levels of government, and from the community to form a partnership with the common goal of achieving your shared vision. Important potential partners include:

- local and county government - elected officials, local boards, and staff
- adjacent municipalities
- regional planning or resource conservation organizations
- state and federal government partners
- academic institutions - colleges and universities, local schools
- representatives of businesses and industries in the surrounding area
- property owners in the surrounding area
- residents in the surrounding area
- community and neighborhood groups
- nonprofit organizations with a stake in the community and the watershed



*Restored wetland*



*Orient, Long Island*

The Appendix provides details of the many partners that could be involved in your efforts to protect and restore your watershed. Remember, partnerships can be formed at any time as needs arise and as common interests are identified.

Partnering with these stakeholders can provide technical assistance, bring in more resources, help with site acquisition, improve infrastructure, assist with funding and marketing, generate extra publicity, and create the framework for watershed protection and restoration. For instance, partnerships with:

- state and federal agencies can often provide technical, staffing, or financial support to watershed efforts
- Soil and Water Conservation Districts and local universities may bring in expertise in writing watershed plans or provide detailed information on watershed conditions that can help in the preparation of your plan
- County Water Quality Coordinating Committees can assist in developing strategies that guide water quality improvement efforts and prioritize water quality problems and concerns
- local or county public works or highway departments may have the necessary skills to implement specific recommended projects that result from your completed plan

- non-profit organizations or community members can provide volunteer labor, assistance setting goals, support for recommendations, and feedback on project priorities
- County Health Departments can provide technical assistance regarding the protection of water supply and health concerns related to water quality.

While you are likely aware of potential local partners available to help you through the watershed planning process, you should make the best use of regional, state, and federal assistance as well. Many New York State agencies provide technical and financial assistance that can support your watershed plan. The New York State Departments of State, Environmental Conservation, Health, Transportation, and Agriculture and Markets are just a few state agencies that can provide assistance with funding, data collection, and general watershed planning guidance. Figure 2.1 describes some federal and state regulatory and advisory programs advancing watershed planning in New York.

While establishing partnerships may seem challenging or time-consuming, watershed planning and management will be more successful as a result. Particular attention should be paid to maintaining a strong relationship with neighborhood leaders and community stakeholders. These individuals and

groups have a vested interest in the watershed. Together, you are partners in the watershed planning process. Having public support and community involvement can only strengthen your plan, and the investment of their energy and resources in the community has a powerful impact on your efforts.

The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the US Department of Agriculture - Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) have created several documents that will help you strengthen public involvement in natural resource planning. EPA's *Getting in Step: A Guide to Conducting Watershed Outreach Campaigns and Community Culture and the Environment: A Guide to Understanding a Sense of Place* ([www.epa.gov/owow/watershed/outreach/documents](http://www.epa.gov/owow/watershed/outreach/documents)) may help you create public support by understanding community attitudes, values, and behaviors that affect environmental protection solutions. The NRCS documents *Conducting Rapid Resource Appraisals of Watershed* and *Strengthening Public Involvement* ([www.ssi.nrcs.usda.gov/publications](http://www.ssi.nrcs.usda.gov/publications)) provide information on how to "jump start" your planning process.

The format and formality of a partnership can vary widely. Whether it is simple or complex, everyone benefits if an agreement is reached beforehand about each entity's role and responsibilities. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA), which define each party's role, may be a good step

in order to gain consensus on responsibilities. The process of writing an MOU or MOA provides an opportunity for give and take to arrive at an agreement that all parties support. These documents, once signed by all involved parties, can also provide an opportunity to gain commitment on goals and objectives.

If you have a number of municipalities involved in your watershed plan, an Intermunicipal Agreement may be appropriate. This will formalize the municipalities' agreement to

support the watershed planning effort through funding, staff, or other resources. These intermunicipal arrangements are a good way to establish a long-term management structure to support the plan through implementation.

Successful examples of intermunicipal agreements include the Lake George Watershed Coalition, the Cayuga Lake Watershed Intermunicipal Organization, the Long Island Sound Watershed Intermunicipal Council, and the Wappinger Creek Watershed Intermunicipal Council.

## Fishkill Creek Watershed Committee

The Fishkill Creek watershed drains approximately 190 square miles, or 123,000 acres, and includes 14 municipalities in the Hudson River Basin. The Fishkill Creek Watershed Committee is a grassroots organization dedicated to the protection of the Fishkill Creek. The Committee includes members of the general public and is dedicated to a policy of non advocacy, non partisan, science based work. Its stated mission is "to encourage individuals and entities, both public and private, to work for the protection of the natural environment within the Fishkill Creek Watershed." In meeting its mission, the Committee has been integral in developing and implementing a watershed plan, *Natural Resources Management Plan for the Fishkill Creek Watershed*. The Fishkill Creek Watershed Committee has benefitted from the technical and organizational support of Cornell Cooperative Extension and the Dutchess County Environmental Management Council, who assisted them in identifying and conducting specific assessment approaches and restoration projects, as well as hosting a website for the organization ([www.fishkillcreekwatershed.org](http://www.fishkillcreekwatershed.org)).



## Figure 2.1 Federal and State Regulatory and Advisory Programs Advancing Watershed Planning in New York

- **NYS Coastal Management Program** ([www.nyswaterfronts.com](http://www.nyswaterfronts.com)). The federal Coastal Zone Management Act and the New York State Waterfront Revitalization of Coastal Areas and Inland Waterways Act established direction for the appropriate use and protection of the nation's and the State's coasts and waterways. The State's coastal policies guide efforts to create and maintain clean, accessible, and prosperous coastal and inland waterways for present and future generations. These policies address development, fish and wildlife, flooding and erosion, general safeguards, public access, recreation, historic and scenic resources, agricultural lands, energy and ice management, air and water resources, and wetlands.
- **Local Waterfront Revitalization Program** ([www.nyswaterfronts.com](http://www.nyswaterfronts.com)). The NYS DOS Division of Coastal Resources assists communities in preparing a comprehensive land and water use program for a community's natural, public, and working waterfront, and developed coastal area. It provides a comprehensive structure within which critical coastal issues can be addressed.
- **State Implementation of the Clean Water Act** ([www.dec.ny.gov](http://www.dec.ny.gov)). Section 319 of the Clean Water Act requires states to prepare assessments and management programs for the identification and control of nonpoint pollution. This section of the Clean Water Act also makes grant money available to states for nonpoint source management. Sections 305(b) and 303(d) also require states to perform a unified assessment and restoration strategy for HUC-8 watersheds and prepare a list of impaired waterbodies. For impaired waterbodies, the state is required to develop and implement Total Maximum Daily Loads, which regulate the point and nonpoint sources of pollution in the watershed.
- **SPDES Stormwater Phase II** ([www.dec.ny.gov](http://www.dec.ny.gov)). Under federal regulation, discharges of stormwater from municipal separate storm sewer systems, construction sites 1 acre and larger, and certain industrial sites require a permit. NYS DEC provides assistance in managing and treating point pollution, as well as holding workshops, training sessions, and conferences to help regulated communities meet permit requirements.
- **Nonpoint Source Management Program** ([www.dec.ny.gov](http://www.dec.ny.gov)). The primary mission of the Nonpoint Source Management Program is to control, reduce or treat polluted runoff through the implementation of structural, operational or vegetative management practices; to administratively coordinate various state agencies and other interested partners having regulatory, outreach, incentive-based, or funding programs that foster installation of management practices for any of the identified sources of nonpoint pollution threatening or impairing the waters of New York; and to conduct local implementation and statewide coordination and evaluation on a watershed basis.
- **NY Surface Water and Groundwater Standards** ([www.dec.ny.gov](http://www.dec.ny.gov)). This sets the ambient water quality standards for the various classifications of waterbodies and uses.
- **NYS DEC Antidegradation Policy** ([www.dec.ny.gov](http://www.dec.ny.gov)). In accordance with the Clean Water Act, this policy sets forth the actions of the State to prevent degradation of water quality.
- **Wild, Scenic and Recreational Rivers System Act** ([www.dec.ny.gov](http://www.dec.ny.gov)). This provides for the designation of certain qualifying segments of rivers and streams as wild, scenic or recreational. This designation affords these waters special protection through use guidelines and special consideration during project review when projects are proposed in their vicinity.

- **Hudson River Estuary Program** ([www.dec.ny.gov](http://www.dec.ny.gov)). In order to protect, conserve, and enhance the Hudson River Estuary, and in response to the Hudson River Estuary Management Act, the NYS DEC established the Hudson River Estuary Program in 1987. Management of the estuary calls for a cooperative effort and supports watershed planning, community-based habitat conservation and stewardship, open space planning, and outreach and education.

- **Long Island South Shore Estuary Reserve** ([www.estuary.cog.ny.us](http://www.estuary.cog.ny.us)). Under the Long Island South Shore Estuary Reserve Act, a comprehensive management plan was created to improve water quality and living resources, provide public access, and preserve open space, the Reserve's maritime heritage, its economy, and foster education and outreach. Recommendations incorporate an ecosystem perspective into the management of the Reserve and recommend watershed planning.

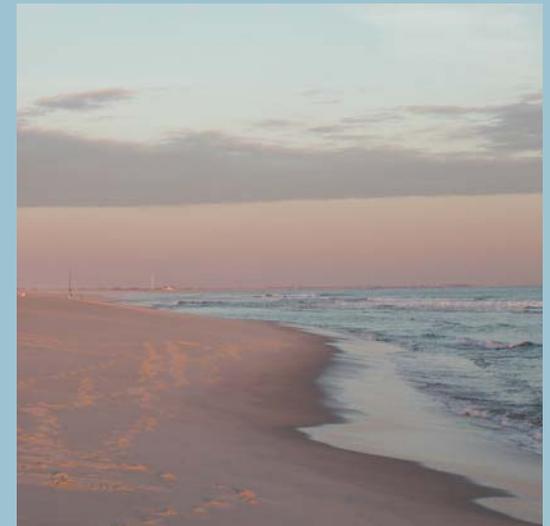
- **Great Lakes Programs** ([www.dec.ny.gov](http://www.dec.ny.gov)). Using a watershed based approach, NYS DEC works to restore and protect water quality and quantity in the Great Lakes. Management includes addressing drinking water supplies, flood protection,

navigation, power generation, agriculture, and recreation, as well as elements of the ecosystem, including wetlands and other habitats. Through the Great Lakes Protection Fund, regional and statewide assistance is given for research and field assessment.

- **Source Water Assessment Program** ([www.health.state.ny.us/nysdoh/water/swap.htm](http://www.health.state.ny.us/nysdoh/water/swap.htm)). In response to the 1996 Amendments to the Safe Drinking Water Act, the NYS Department of Health (DOH) developed a Source Water Assessment Program (SWAP) to complete assessments of sources of public drinking water and make the assessments available to the public. In order to complete these assessments, the DOH focuses on watershed-based assessments and protection strategies for drinking water supplies throughout the State.



*Hudson River, Ossining*



*Jones Beach, Long Island*



*Marina, Finger Lakes*



*Satellite photo of New York City area*

## Understanding the role of consultants

Communities often hire consultants to supplement their own staff and volunteer resources or to gain use of special skills. This is particularly true for watershed planning where specific expertise may be needed. Consultants can help in conducting watershed assessments, collecting data, and designing and constructing projects. At various stages in the project you will likely need expertise in land use planning, biology, water quality, hydrology, Geographic Information Systems (GIS), and engineering available to help you. When considering whether to hire a consultant, it is helpful to answer some key questions, including:

- What do you want your consultant to do?
- What skills, expertise, and experience must the consultant have to develop and implement the watershed plan?
- When do you want it done?
- How will you relate to the consultant? Can you provide staff support, citizen participation, review, or other input into the plan?
- Is the consultant familiar with the local institutional framework, the watershed area, and common watershed issues (e.g., source water protection, special habitat protection, floodplain management), and have they worked on similar projects?

If you decide to hire a consultant, you will need to prepare a Request for Proposals (RFP). Your RFP must meet all applicable procurement rules and be designed so that responses from consultants will provide all the information that you will need to select and hire a consultant. Make sure you fully describe your needs and your watershed planning proposal and a schedule for implementation. Make sure to request details of the consultant's experience on similar efforts. To ensure a comprehensive response, the RFP itself should be advertised as extensively as possible and mailed to a wide range of consultants. The Division of Coastal Resources can provide sample RFPs as well as guidance on what to look for when you seek a consultant to help prepare and implement watershed plans.

After you receive the responses and review them carefully, set up interviews with potential consultants and talk with references. Prior to setting up interviews, prepare a set of questions to ask each consultant team. Find out more about them and their proposal, and try to determine how well they can achieve your vision. Find out why they are interested in your project and explore what they see as the main issues and challenges as they develop the plan. Fully explore the financial requirements of each consultant's proposal. Interviews are a great opportunity to develop an understanding of everyone's expectations and to set the stage for a strong partnership. Once you have selected your consultant and have executed a contract, it is time to begin planning for the future of your watershed.

## Case Study: Cayuga Lake Watershed Intermunicipal Organization

The Cayuga Lake Watershed Intermunicipal Organization (IO) is an example of a successful watershed group in the Finger Lakes Region. The group has brought together representatives from 44 municipalities and 6 counties, State agencies, and non-governmental organizations, to address the preservation and restoration of the Cayuga Lake watershed.

Key to the success of the IO was the collaboration of municipalities and community-based organizations in the planning process. Community involvement in the form of the Cayuga Lake Watershed Network, a nonprofit citizen network interested in protecting and improving the lake's water quality, was a source of important information on the watershed and also an important source of volunteers for implementing the resulting watershed plan.

The *Cayuga Lake Watershed Restoration and Protection Plan* provides a framework for collaborating and implementing on-the-ground projects. The restoration of Six Mile Creek, a large tributary to Cayuga Lake, is one example of a successful effort involving the Cayuga Lake IO. Each member has played an integral role in one or more project components, including funding, coordination, site assessment, construction, vegetation planting, and outreach.

The Cayuga Lake IO has shown how intermunicipal organizations serve as a forum for local governments, state agencies, non-governmental organizations, and the public to address complex watershed issues in a coordinated manner and gain consensus on actions needed to protect and restore a watershed. With these partnerships, the IO has been able to restore and protect the water quality and natural resources of Cayuga Lake. ([www.cayugawatershed.org](http://www.cayugawatershed.org))



*Cayuga Lake within the Finger Lakes Drainage Basin*



*Six Mile Creek, streambank stabilization*

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## Charting the course

Once you have laid the foundation for planning, it is essential to chart the course for the protection and restoration of your watershed by developing a step-by-step strategy to guide you through plan preparation and project implementation. Ask yourself what tasks need to be performed to develop and implement your plan, who will be responsible for completing these tasks, and how you will handle them. Take the time to discuss and plan your approach to watershed planning with your partners. This will strengthen consensus and support for your project.

Develop a concise, action-oriented agenda that describes the steps you will follow to complete and implement your watershed plan. View it as a scope of work for moving forward - one step at a time. To chart your course, you will specify the following:

- the tasks to be performed
- the techniques to be used
- the roles of the people involved and their areas of responsibility
- the time frame for action

This should be documented in writing, but there is no need to go overboard with detail. Keep it short and simple.



*Carpenter Falls, Skaneateles Lake*