



Summary

Wading In: Watershed Management in Nova Scotia Workshop

March 26 and 27, 2009, Wolfville

The province of Nova Scotia is currently standing on the edge of what could potentially be a very significant opportunity to make drastic changes to the way water is managed in the province and the ecological foundations on which we all depend for a healthy society, economy and environment. With the passing of the Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act (EGSPA) in 2007, the province set itself on a brave course to improving the environment while ensuring a prosperous economy. Of the 21 concrete and time-sensitive environmental commitments in this act, four of them pertain to water, including improvements to drinking water treatment, upgrades to wastewater treatment facilities, a policy for no net loss of wetlands and a comprehensive water resource management strategy. The development of a comprehensive water resource management strategy is anticipated to be approved by cabinet by 2010 and it is this initiative that sparked the watershed management workshop in Wolfville, NS on March 26th and 27th 2009 called "*Wading In: Watershed Management in Nova Scotia*".

During the course of this workshop 45 participants from three levels of government, Aboriginal people, hydro electric generation, forestry, agriculture, NGO's and other sectors related to water attended presentations on water issues as seen by each sector. They were then guided through facilitated breakout sessions in order to come to a better understanding of what the barriers and opportunities for watershed management are in Nova Scotia and what will be required to help us achieve better water management.

There was consensus among the participants that integrated management of water is necessary to safeguard the future economic prosperity of Nova Scotia. Thoughtful and planned management of water resources will make Nova Scotia a better place to invest in and do business, and a better place to live, study and raise a family.

A number of key themes emerged from the workshop upon which there was consensus.

1. Watershed Planning in Nova Scotia

Surface and ground water resources in Nova Scotia need to be managed in an integrated manner, based on the watershed scale. Watershed management should occur at a number of levels: (a) a provincial body responsible for coordinating watershed efforts in the province, (b) regional bodies responsible for watershed units (clustered watersheds i.e. Cape Breton,

Valley, South Shore) (b) local organizations working at the scale of individual catchments and river systems.

2. Delineation of the province into manageable watershed units

The province currently has approximately 45 to 50 watersheds – a number that is arguably too many for systematic management. There is a need to consolidate these catchments into larger, more manageable units. This consolidation could be based on geographic regions of the province (e.g. the Annapolis Valley) and the major river basins (e.g. the Mersey River), taking into account the scope of existing watershed groups. Within these management units, a nested catchment approach could be used to facilitate local action and engagement. This is a task that must be addressed in coordination with the design of the organizational structures to oversee watershed management in the province.

3. Provincial leadership – Joint responsibility

Under law and in practice, the Province has primary responsibility for the management of Nova Scotia's water resources. The provincial government must take on a leadership role in the implementation of integrated watershed management, providing support and guidance on its structure and implementation. The province, with all segments of society, shares in the responsibility for the sound management of water resources. Aboriginal peoples, industries (e.g. agriculture, forestry), municipalities and community watershed groups all have key roles to play.

Watershed groups are ready to support watershed management in the province, however leadership from the provincial government is needed to chart the overall direction and provide the framework. Watershed groups have spent years building relationships with communities, businesses and individual citizens and know the needs, wants and values of the communities they work in.

4. Sustainable support through alternate funding models

Currently, funding mechanisms to support water management activities are sparse, fragmented and inconsistent, resulting in organizations dedicating considerable staff resources to grant writing. The irregular funding pattern results in high turnover rates among staff, precluding the retention of those with experience and expertise in Nova Scotia.

Integrated management of Nova Scotia's water resources will require dedicated, sustained resources for coordination. However, the province does not need to be the sole entity supporting watershed management. As the benefits of well-managed water resources will flow to all levels of government, industries and society as a whole, it is logical that support for this be shared. Numerous opportunities exist for alternative funding and cost-sharing mechanisms. Many of these are based on the notion that individuals, agencies and businesses that benefit from water quality and quantity should contribute to the maintenance and management of these water resources.

This document represents a summary of the Report of Workshop Outcomes (May 2009), based on the contributions by following participants at the workshop.

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