

# Chapter 2

## Now We Know Why -- But How?

So you're beginning to think that getting involved in a watershed council sounds like an interesting idea. But how do they start? What should you look for? What's next?

### ***HOW DO WATERSHED COUNCILS COME TOGETHER?***

Different situations serve as the catalyst for development of watershed councils in different places.

#### **Watershed Disasters**

In some cases, people with different interests come together as a result of some “disaster” - either natural or human-caused. The Henry’s Fork Watershed Council in Idaho, for example, came together after two separate incidents – one during construction of a hydroelectric project on the river and the other during a planned emptying of a reservoir – dumped tons of silt and sediment into the river. Not wanting to see anything like that happen again, the Idaho legislature passed a plan restricting new development on portions of the river and calling for water quality improvements, habitat protection and water conservation measures to improve watershed health.



Up to this point, conflict and polarization had characterized management of the different resources within the Henry’s Fork Basin. But with the basin plan legislation on the books, the opposing factions came together to develop a consensus-based process for reconciling their conflicts and coordinating among the more than 25 local, state and federal agencies with regulatory jurisdiction in the basin.

An independent evaluation of the Henry’s Fork Watershed Council, conducted in 1995 by the Northwest Policy Center at the University of Washington’s Graduate School of Public Affairs, stated that the group’s greatest accomplishment has been to encourage once-bitter adversaries to work together in a non-hostile setting to develop common goals and objectives for the

Henry’s Fork basin. Through the process of group education and consensus-building, the Council provides participants a broader understanding of problems - and possible solutions - than any one individual or group could generate.

**Stalemate**

Other groups come together because they can’t stand the inaction caused by continued disagreement and conflict. This describes the Nanticoke Watershed Alliance in Delaware and Maryland. Individual citizen groups formed in each state to address specific development pressures in different parts of the watershed. At the same time, inherently disparate river interests were polarized on almost all issues. The timber companies and farmers were at odds with the environmental groups; and everyone was at odds with the state’s natural resource departments.

After three years, the Nanticoke Watershed Alliance had grown to more than 20 members representing a broad base of interests including the local energy utility, realtors, a local state university, large employers such as DuPont, a county Farm Bureau, a national wildlife refuge, and various state agencies and citizen groups.

But in 1992, at the request of one of the citizen groups and the state of Delaware’s natural resources agency, a facilitated planning program started bringing the players to the table. With assistance from the National Park Service’s Rivers, Trail and Conservation Assistance Program, the states of Maryland and Delaware -- along with the citizen groups and the Park Service -- expanded the project into a bi-state planning effort to promote the river and watershed as a treasured resource. The groups signed a memorandum of understanding to form the Nanticoke Watershed Alliance.

**Funding**

In other cases, different interests come together to access funding that is only available for multi-stakeholder, community-based groups. This was the impetus for what is now called the Yuba Watershed Council. A group of 16 mostly agency representatives first started meeting in 1997, shortly after California voters passed Proposition 204, the Safe, Clean, Drinking Water Act. Proposition 204 included \$15 million for watershed restoration in the upper watersheds of the Sierra, thanks to lobbying efforts by the Sierra Nevada Alliance. To be eligible for this restoration funding, applicants had to demonstrate widespread community

support for and multi-stakeholder participation in any proposed projects. That's what originally brought the group of 16 agencies and other organizations together.

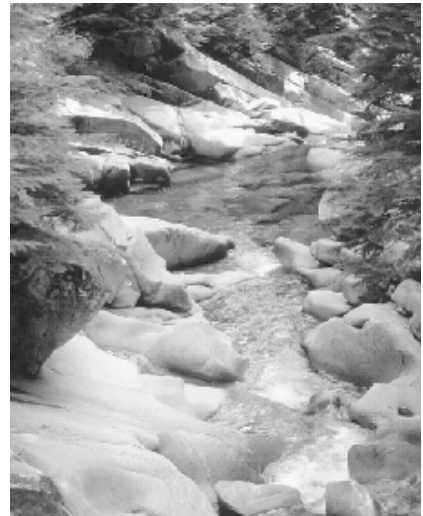
The group was unsuccessful in its first bid for upper watershed restoration funding under Proposition 204. But when the state announced a second round of funding, the same 16 agencies and organizations came back to the table to put together a new project proposal. Only this time, they invited more people to participate and agreed to formalize their long-term commitment to watershed health by establishing a watershed council -- the Yuba Watershed Council. The new group has been awarded more than \$1 million to date for a variety of planning, assessment and restoration projects in the watershed.

### **Small Group, Big Vision**

In the Chagrin River watershed of northeastern Ohio, flooding, pollution, development pressures, loss of habitat and other problems were causing a decline in watershed health. The local land trust, the Chagrin River Land Conservancy, realized that to truly protect the river, they had to address issues throughout the watershed. With 30 municipalities, four counties, plus various state and federal jurisdictions to deal with, you can imagine the difficulties associated with trying to coordinate land and water management in the watershed.

Although the Land Conservancy had the vision for forming a larger watershed group, they had their hands full just doing what they knew best -- using acquisition programs and conservation easements to protect the land within the watershed. They knew that introducing a more comprehensive watershed approach would be more than they could handle. So they temporarily turned their attention to spearheading the creation of a new and separate organization to fulfill that function.

Using their expertise in networking and fundraising, the Land Conservancy raised enough money to hire a fulltime executive director to guide the new Chagrin River Watershed Partners through the start-up phase, allowing the Land Conservancy to return to its mission of protecting land. The steering committee



invited experts from other watershed councils throughout the country to share their experiences with the growing Chagrin River group. Within two years the Chagrin River Watershed Partners had 90% of the key municipal partners on board as dues-paying members.

### **Sheer Enthusiasm and Exuberance**

And finally, some groups, like the Truckee River Habitat Restoration Group, come together simply out of sheer exuberance and enthusiasm for doing good work in the watershed. An ad hoc group of local citizens concerned about the Truckee River came together a couple of years in a row to organize annual river clean-up events on the Truckee. Given the growing level of interest and participation in the clean-ups, the event organizers decided to float the idea of starting a more formal watershed group.

The citizen leaders inadvertently scheduled their introductory organizational meeting for Superbowl Sunday - a notoriously popular ski day in Truckee and the surrounding area. But with all the publicity already released, the leaders were loath to change the date. They crossed their fingers and hoped at least a few people would show up. When some 80 or so people arrived for the meeting, the organizers were flabbergasted. "I guess people really do care," said one group leader.

But no matter how a group comes together, there are several key organizational components that will help the group be effective and useful and not just become another exercise in meeting management. These include participants, organizational structure, decision-making process and scope of activity, which are discussed in the following chapters.



## CHAPTER 2 - KEY CONTACTS/REFERENCES/RESOURCES

The Henry's Fork Watershed Council. Contact: Jan Brown. PO Box 852, 604 Main St., Ashton, ID 83420. Tel: 208-652-3567. Fax: 208-652-3568. <http://www.henrysfork.com>.

***An Evaluation of the Henry's Fork Watershed Council***, prepared by Northwest Policy Center, Graduate School of Public Affairs, University of Washington. Final Report, October 9, 1995.

Nanticoke Watershed Alliance. Contact: Lisa Jo Frech, Executive Director, PO Box 709, Tyaskin, MD 21865. Tel: 410-873-2102. Website: <http://www.esrl.lib.md/nwa>.

National Park Service's Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program. Contacts: Chris Brown, NPS, PO Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127. Tel: 202-565-1200. Peg Henderson, NPS 600 Harrison St., Suite 600, San Francisco, CA 94107-1372. Tel: 415-427-1446.

Yuba Watershed Council. Contact: Ron Zinke, NRCS, 113 Presley Way Suite 1, Grass Valley, CA 95945. Tel: 530-272-3417. Fax: 530-477-8055.

Chagrin River Land Conservancy. Contact: Rich Cochran, Executive Director. PO Box 148, Chagrin Falls, OH 44022. Tel: 440-247-0880. Fax: 440-247-0881.

Chagrin Watershed Partners. Contact: Greg Studen, Chair, PO Box 148, Chagrin Falls, OH 44022. Tel: 216-338-1718. Fax: 216-247-0881.

Truckee River Habitat Restoration Group. Contact: Kathleen Eagan. PO Box 8428, Truckee, CA 96162. Tel: 530-587-4509. Fax: 530-587-5003. Email: [eagan@jps.net](mailto:eagan@jps.net).

***Resource Management at the Watershed Level: An Assessment of the Changing Federal Role in the Emerging Era of Community-Based Watershed Management.*** Natural Resources Law Center, University of Colorado School of Law: Research Report Series, including ***The Watershed Source Book*** (with 76 case studies in western watershed management and an ongoing update expected to identify as many as 400 active case studies).