

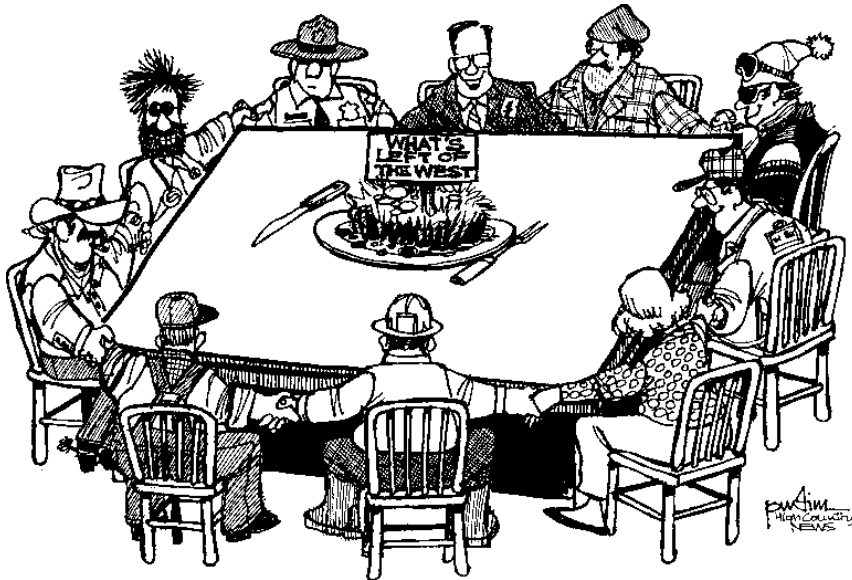
Chapter 3

Participants: Who's Invited

One of the key factors to consider in starting up a watershed council group is: who should be involved.

In most cases, there is already some informal or loosely knit group of people – activists, individual agency personnel, an elected official or two – who have been talking among themselves about the need for watershed assessment or planning or better management and coordination among jurisdictions. This is the core group you want to work with, since these people have already shown an interest in doing something to improve the watershed.

In figuring other potential participants to involve in the development of a watershed council, consider how the watershed is used by the people who live, work and play there. Look at the different land uses, resource uses and stakeholder uses. Pay attention to economic, employment and social or attitudinal trends, as well. These will tell you who the key players are in your watershed.



Rob Pudim & High Country News

STEERING COMMITTEE

Often there are one or two individuals who serve as the primary catalyst to move the process from informal discussions to the formation of an actual organization. These “catalysts,” along with the existing core group, usually evolve into a steering committee, of sorts. The steering committee - or project team, or coordinating committee, or whatever you

want to call them - takes the initiative to meet regularly, research other groups to see how they started and what organizational, membership and decision-making structure they use, and think about who else should be involved in the process.

A description of coordinating committees from the Rocky Mountain Institute's *Economic Renewal Guide* is quite useful related to watershed councils, as well.

Coordinating Committees

To be most effective, your coordinating committee should include key representatives from different interests within the watershed – such as agencies, utilities, business people, environmental activists, large employers, private landowners, etc.

A good size for a coordinating committee would be ten to fifteen members, but its size is less important than its composition. Enlist members who are well respected in the community. Some may be individuals you don't agree with, even people you regard as adversaries. Every group, faction, or "side" in local political issues must be pleased with at least one person on the committee -- otherwise members of those groups may wonder what you're up to and assume that, whatever it is, it must not be in their interest. If they do, you'll be compelled to spend a lot of time later correcting misimpressions and rebuilding trust. The [watershed council] process will fail if it's perceived as being one-sided. On the other hand, people will really take notice and respect your effort if they see former adversaries working together.

-- *The Economic Renewal Guide*, Rocky Mountain
Institute

When seeking people to serve with you on the steering or coordinating committee, try to find individuals who can represent more than one interest or organization. This helps keep the working group to a reasonable number. Later, once you have some of your organizational structure in place, you will want to get more people involved in the council.

There is always a big question about exactly WHO should be invited to participate in the group, and at what level of participation. This was true in the case of the Yuba Watershed Council and is echoed in a *River Voices* report highlighting the outcome of a Watershed Innovators Workshop sponsored by River Network back in 1995. In the Watershed Innovators Workshop highlights article, author Peter Lavigne reports that – of all the themes and

concepts discussed at the event – the role and selection of key players provoked the most disagreement and discussion.

One of the workshop participants, Steve Born of the Black Earth Creek Watershed Association in Wisconsin, presented a useful summary of principles discussed:

- Know that you have to have a variety of people involved: both those who live in the watershed and are directly affected and those who are indirectly affected or can affect the watershed;
- Understand that watershed projects involve a wide variety of socio-economic issues;
- Identify roles and functions: Who speaks? Who represents? How do you get in?;
- Effect behavioral change in target populations through regulation, signal pricing, technical change, education and information sharing;
- Identify what we are concerned about in terms of influencing behavioral change.

Another participant, Ted Smith of the Kendall Foundation, summarized the discussion with guidelines on several points:

- Some players should represent the interests of future generations;
- There should be enough representatives in the process to make the outcome stick;
- Ways must be found to balance power at the table using money, technical help, and voting and veto structure.

The initial make-up of the steering committee is usually pretty easy. That starts almost of its own accord based on the individuals who have an interest in making something happen. But to be successful, that initial group has to broaden out at some point to include other key players.

In general, you want to be sure that all major interests in your watershed are represented. As the Rocky Mountain Institute’s *Economic Renewal Guide* warns, your effort is likely to fail if it is perceived to be one-sided and not fully representative. This is true both in the organizational phase and in the longer life of the group after start-up.

A strategy employed by the Chagrin River Watershed Partners of Ohio to generate interest in the fledgling organization was to make an impressive “What the Coalition Could Do” list and let it be known that organizations or entities that joined the group would have the opportunity to pick and choose and shape the policies, programs and actions for the group. They convinced a small number of key participants to sign on; once these respected entities became a formal part of the group, other important players started taking the group more seriously and agreed to join, if for no other reason than they didn’t want to miss anything done by the existing players.

The Sierra Nevada Alliance, in cooperation with the Regional Council of Rural Counties (RCRC), developed a set of principles of watershed community involvement which gives helpful recommendations for how to work together with other members of your community, especially on watershed-oriented issues.

Principles of Watershed Community Involvement

- Watershed strategic, annual, and project planning must be open, public, and involve communities in the watershed.
- Community involvement must include a comprehensive and inclusive community public education component.
- Watershed restoration and stewardship should reflect a strong component of sustainable local economics and/or revitalization of local communities implementing projects.
- Advisory and/or oversight committees must include members residing in the watershed.
- Watershed groups/JPAs administering restoration projects must deposit restoration funds in institutions that actively invest in local communities and economic revitalization within the group's jurisdiction.
- Watershed groups must adopt restoration strategies, and plans of action that enhance and create local job and contracting opportunities.
- Watershed policy, restoration and stewardship plans and projects must be consistent with principles and standards established by this [watershed] act.

In states like Oregon, Massachusetts, New York, Texas, and Maryland that have watershed management legislation and state-funded programs, setting up membership in the steering committee and the council is relatively easy. Oregon, for example, has adopted a Watershed Management Strategy that outlines suggested council membership and responsibilities. Groups that follow the framework provided in the legislation are then eligible for state funding.

But for the rest of us, who lack specific legislative guidelines, there are about as many possibilities and configurations as

there are groups. In general, though, watershed councils involve the people who live, work and play in the watershed. Depending on the watershed, this could include homeowners, farmers and ranchers, fishermen, community leaders, members of environmental and other community groups, water and utility managers, business and government representatives, and other watershed residents.

CATEGORY-BASED

Some groups choose to organize participants or members into categories, such as local/state/federal agencies, business/commercial, environmental, and others. The idea here is to somehow balance the membership so all categories have more or less equal “power” or authority in decision-making

The Henry’s Fork Watershed Council in Idaho is one example of a category-based group. The Council is comprised of members falling into three distinct categories: citizens, technical and agency.

The citizen’s group is made up of members of the public with commodity, conservation and/or community development interests. They are charged with reviewing proposals and plans for their relevance to local needs and determining whether all interests are being met in the plans. The citizens group participates on equal footing with the agency and technical groups.

The technical team involves scientists and technicians from government, academia and the private sector who serve as resource specialists for the Council. They coordinate and monitor research projects, launch needed studies, and review any ongoing work in the watershed.

The agency group includes representatives from all local, state and federal entities, including Native American tribes, with rights or responsibilities in the watershed. The agencies use this roundtable to align their management policies toward overall watershed resource concerns and needs. Discussions in this group seek to ensure close coordination and problem-solving among agencies, as well as clarifying legal mandates within each agency.

Decisions are made by vetting every proposal for endorse-

In general, the kinds of people or interests you want represented on your watershed council include:

- landowners
- homeowners
- local businesses
- water districts/utilities
- developers
- recreational users
- government agencies
- elected officials
- media
- teachers
- civic groups
- conservation groups
- environmental activists
- youth groups

ment or other action through a set of agreed-upon criteria, called the Watershed Integrity Review & Evaluation, or WIRE, criteria. To develop the criteria, more than 80 suggestions were brought forward by Council participants. These were distilled into 10 major categories, such as overall watershed perspective, credible research/science, addressing of water supply issues, and others, which now are used in critiquing proposed projects. The review process consists of a summary presentation of any project or idea to the full group, followed by individual discussion of the project, based on the WIRE criteria, by each of the three category groups. The groups come back and share the results of their individual evaluations and then use those results to make a full group decision on the project.



The Yakima River Watershed Council has a Board of Directors consisting of 47 individuals representing interests in the following 11 categories: Indian Nations, Irrigators/Growers, Processors, Electric/Utilities, Community Organizations, Business, Financial, Environmental, Growers/Shippers, Government, and Forestry. The board does have a smaller executive committee made up of 12 members of the board, including two Indian Nations, three irrigators, one general business, one financial, two environmental, one grower/shipper, one county government and one forestry.

Some of the general models floating around for partnership groups also recommend some kind of equitable distribution of decision-makers among different categories. The Alliance's own suggested model, developed in conjunction with the Regional Council of Rural Counties, uses four categories, including: county supervisors, citizens-at-large, economic sector representatives, and environmental representatives, each with an equal number of seats. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's watershed project model also includes categories, such as state officials, planning organizations, city/county officials, soil and water conservation districts, citizens-at-large, and industry representatives. This model assumes a separate technical team will be made up of federal and state agency people, along with researchers, teachers and industry experts.

AGENCY-DRIVEN

The role of the agencies in watershed councils also varies quite a bit. In some cases, representatives of local, state, tribal and/or federal agencies play more of a support role, providing information, financial assistance, staffing support and technical expertise, as needed. In other cases, the governmental representatives are active partners, serving as individuals who bring the agency needs and perspective to the table. In still other cases, the agencies are really the catalyst for bringing a group together, as in the example of the Yuba Watershed Council where the agencies first came together among themselves to access state funding for watershed restoration activities. While it was the agency representatives who formed the original core group, once the decision was made to establish a larger, more representative council, the government representatives were equal partners with everyone else.

The American River Watershed Group is another example of a largely agency-driven collaborative group. As the name suggests, this group came together to help coordinate management activities in the American River watershed. It actually originated as an effort to deal specifically with fire danger in the watershed, but then broadened its scope to look at other management issues, as well. Since the group came together over fire and fuels issues, the membership is still quite heavy on the side of state and federal agencies, including the Forest Service, CDF, BLM, NRCS, and individual fire districts in the area. The group is led by the local Placer County Resource Conservation District, which lends staffing and meeting facilitation support to the Watershed Group.

When the group decided to broaden its perspectives beyond just fire issues, additional groups such as environmental advocacy groups, local cities, parks districts and others began getting involved. At the time, there was no real effort to balance the different interests at the table. But more recently the group has put some thought to developing a more balanced membership. Lack of funding has made it difficult to reach out to new groups or members of the general public; but such outreach is planned in the near future.

The American River Watershed Group, like the Yuba Watershed Council, applied for and received funding through Proposition 204 to undertake various watershed restoration projects ranging from fuel load reduction to water quality monitoring and meadow re-watering. As long as participants are working together on these issues that have full group agreement, the organization seems to function well. Introduction of a contentious issue, like possible construction of a dam at Auburn, would likely bring the group to a standstill.

Not all watershed groups are so agency-centered. Each one seems to have a slightly different focus, depending on the needs of the watershed (or on who had the idea first...).

The McKenzie Watershed Council in Oregon started through a largely agency-driven process, as well, in which the Lane County commissioners along with the Eugene Water and Electric Board (EWEB) funded a scoping study to look at developing an integrated watershed management program for the McKenzie River basin. The study found a broad range of interests in the watershed, which were later incorporated into the watershed council as equal partners.

The organizing committee of the County and EWEB commissioners proposed the original council membership, which consisted of 17 representatives of public and private interests within the watershed. That group was divided into private interests (business, community and environmental organizations), elected officials (city, county, utility boards, and special districts), and agencies (state and federal). Three more members were added later, bringing the total to 20, with 8 private interest, 7 elected officials and 5 agency representatives.

STATE ROLE

But not all watershed groups are so agency-centered. Each one seems to have a slightly different focus, depending on the needs of the watershed (or on who had the idea first...). For the Nanticoke Watershed Alliance in Delaware and Maryland, for example, the states' roles are very important, so the Board of Directors is divided up into an equal number of representatives from each state, along with the same number each for public organizations and proprietary, or founding organizations. Each of these categories has three seats, for a total of 12 voting board

members. Any vacancy in a position on the board is filled by the organization that originally chose the member being replaced. *All of the organizational functions for the Nanticoke Watershed Alliance were designed to create and maintain an open forum with an evenhanded agenda.*

LOCAL PUBLIC PARTNERS FIRST

In contrast, the Chagrin River Watershed Partners in Ohio focused first on getting the local public partners on board, including the municipalities, counties and district parks. Their rationale was that without these local agencies, who are the ones responsible for most land use decisions in the watershed, the partnership would not work. After the majority of the affected local partners had joined, attention turned to recruiting private and other governmental members, such as the five local land trusts, the Audubon Society chapter, the arboretum, and others.

MOVING FROM RIVER ADVOCACY TO A WATERSHED APPROACH

In the case of the Lamprey River in Massachusetts, a local advocacy group eventually grew into a multi-stakeholder watershed group. A small group of committed river activists originally organized the Lamprey River Watershed Association to protect the scenic, ecological and recreational values of the lower watershed through local land use policies and eventually through state and federal designation under the Wild & Scenic Rivers Act. As the Association became more successful in protecting the lower river (which was included in the state Wild & Scenic rivers system in 1991 and the federal system in 1996), leaders became increasingly aware of upstream issues and opportunities. The Association received funding from the National Park Service and a regional foundation to identify and involve interested individuals and organizations in the upper watershed. The group started calling town selectmen (the East Coast equivalent of California's "city council" members), planning personnel and zoning board members, recreation departments, conservation commissioners and individual citizens in the upper watershed to drum up interest.

All of the organizational functions for the Nanticoke Watershed Alliance were designed to create and maintain an open forum with an evenhanded agenda.

CTIC recommends involving a good mix of people and organizations from the very beginning of the partnership in order to develop and implement a successful watershed management plan.

The San Miguel Watershed Coalition in Colorado followed a similar path. The coalition evolved as the result of concern over piecemeal management of the watershed by resource managers in different jurisdictions. The fate of the San Miguel River basin was being decided one project at a time without consideration of cumulative impacts.

The Telluride Institute, an environmental nonprofit, convened a group of individuals to discuss and share information about sustainable river management. This group was composed primarily of federal resource managers, elected officials, developers and others engaged in activities affecting the watershed. The work of this group set the stage for the creation of the larger watershed coalition. Another workshop in Telluride brought together decision-makers, opinion leaders and other key people with a stake in river management. As a result of the workshop, the group decided it needed to involve the whole watershed, not just those in charge of managing recreation in the upper watershed.

The new group called itself the San Miguel Watershed Coalition and proceeded to launch a community-based watershed planning effort for the whole watershed.

Regardless of the form your watershed council takes, it is helpful to engage individuals, organizations and agencies who can provide specific areas of expertise. In its *Building Local Partnerships* publication, the Conservation Technology Information Center (CTIC) offers the chart at right outlining different potential partners and the contributions they can make to a watershed council group.

Like other groups, CTIC recommends involving a good mix of people and organizations from the very beginning of the partnership in order to develop and implement a successful watershed management plan.

Some river advocates have questioned the value of working in watershed councils or other consensus-based, multi-stakeholder partnerships. Some have expressed the concern that complicated issues and solutions will be reduced to the “lowest common denominator” in order to reach consensus among the many adversarial groups at the table. Others fear that the multi-stake-

Partners	Contributions
Mass Media	coverage of watershed events human interest stories understanding of local information needs ability to get information out quickly
Landowners & managers	trustworthy information role models peer pressure
Financial institutions	influence over management decisions linkage with landowners prestige for partnership funding for programs
Agri-business & industries	distribute information and influence decisions sponsor field days and demonstrations donate equipment and services funding for programs
Farm organizations	credibility and visibility for programs existing communication channels
Environmental & conservation groups	knowledge of environmental constituencies awareness of problems and issues committed and knowledgeable memberships
Local elected officials	political leadership and credibility land use and resource management decisions financial support for projects
Local government	financial and technical support policies and decisions that affect the watershed logistics, equipment and related support data collection and analysis expertise
Chambers of Commerce	compatible, broader goals for local economy concerns and interests of businesses
Students	influence over efforts in the future time and energy for “repetitive” tasks
Teachers	influence over values and beliefs ability to shape future generations source of information
Women’s groups	influence over family decisions interest and concern for health issues ability to mobilize and motivate members
Religious leaders	commitment to stewardship ability to appeal to higher values credibility and legitimacy
Retired persons	time and talent for teamwork understanding of local conditions credibility in community
Civic organizations	ongoing program activities interest in and concern for community fund-raising skills

holder format will lead to environmentalists and their concerns being outweighed by industrial, commercial or business stakeholders who may have different priorities for the watershed.

“Building personal relationships among historic adversaries, it can be argued, may cause difficult issues to be ignored (as they might threaten newfound friendships), or worse yet, to be addressed through inappropriate compromises. Reed Benson of Oregon Waterwatch and Michael McCloskey of the Sierra Club warn of the perils of ‘least common denominator’ decision making that can result from consensus-based processes. They also warn that these processes, in providing mechanisms for greater local input in decision making, reduce the influence of the national environmental organizations in the policy arena – and where would watershed restoration be without federal hammers such as the Endangered Species Act and the Clean Water Act?

— Douglas S. Kenney, Ph.D., “Are Community-Based Watershed Groups Really Effective,” *Chronicle of Community*, Winter 1999.

These are valid concerns. None of us has time to devote to dead-end or counterproductive efforts in our never-ending struggle to achieve the best results we can for our watersheds. ***But, the advantages to working in collaboration with other stakeholders are pretty compelling, especially if individual river advocacy groups have enough wherewithal to be a part of multi-stakeholder councils while still continuing to pursue their more specific advocacy work.***

CTIC points out that partnerships can often result in:

- More efficient use of financial resources;
- A spirit of sharing and cooperation;
- Fairness which minimizes the potential for negative social and economic impacts;

- More creative and acceptable ways to protect natural resources.

If the council partnership is formulated with sensitivity and a goal of inclusiveness, the benefits usually far outweigh the challenges.

For more information on characteristics of successful partnerships, see Chapter 10.

Benefits of multi-stakeholder councils:

- √ Tapping reservoirs of energy, talent and inspiration from the new and different participants;
- √ Generating new ideas and information;
- √ Helping defuse polarization within a community; and
- √ Promoting more efficient use of limited financial and human resources, to name a few.



Chapter 3 - Key Contacts/References/Resources

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The McKenzie Watershed Council. Contact: John Runyon, Watershed Coordinator, PO Box 1025, Corvallis, OR 97333. Tel: 541-758-0947. Fax: 541-766-8336. Email: runyon@poraxis.com. OR c/o Lane Council of Governments, 125 E. 8th Avenue, Eugene, OR 97401. Tel: 541-687-4430. Fax: 541-687-4099. Contact: Kathi Wiederhold.

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>.

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

Lamprey River Watershed Association, New Hampshire.
 Contact: Jamie Fosburgh, resource planner with
 National Park Service's Rivers, Trails and Conserva-
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 MA 02109. Tel: 617-223-5123.

San Miguel Watershed Coalition, southwest Colorado.
 Contact: Gary Weiner, resource planner with Na-
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 Assistance Program in Denver, CO. PO Box 25287,
 Denver, CO 80225-0287. Tel: 303-969-2855.

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