

# E.P.A.'S WATERSHED MANAGEMENT OFFICE: ORGANIZING FOR RESULTS

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## INTRODUCTION

The Water Management Division of the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Region 4 has recently (January 2005) undertaken organizational and management changes to improve the organization's ability to support State and local efforts to achieve environmental results at a watershed scale. The intent of these changes is to improve our ability to achieve the annual performance targets and environmental outcomes articulated in the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's 2003 Strategic Plan pertaining to water quality improvements on a watershed basis. A Watershed Management Office has been created within the Water Management Division to facilitate cross-program integration to address water quality problems and maintain focus on issues at a watershed scale. The Watershed Management Office is responsible for ensuring that EPA Region 4 actively manages its resources and activities toward supporting and implementing watershed approaches that achieve measurable results.

## BACKGROUND

Several programmatic and environmental considerations indicated a need to modify the Water Management Division's approach to water quality management. The Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) of 1993, requires EPA to demonstrate program integrity and performance as well as environmental outcomes. Furthermore, the ability to demonstrate results with respect to water quality improvement is being linked to future EPA budgets. In addition to these programmatic considerations, many of the remaining water quality problems require integrated solutions and an organization capable of approaching problems in this manner. The Water Management Division reorganization is intended: 1) to create a forum for cross-program integration to address issues on a watershed-scale; and 2) increase EPA's emphasis on supporting and implementing watershed approaches to achieve measurable results.

## WATERSHED MANAGEMENT OFFICE AND STATE WORKGROUPS

The Watershed Management Office within the EPA Region 4 Water Management Division was created to specifically assist with improving water quality on a watershed basis. The Watershed Management Office has consolidated Geographic Information System (GIS) support, database management and analysis, communications and capacity building efforts, watershed project management, and state workgroup leadership.

In order to achieve measurable environmental improvements through this process, it is critical that EPA and State strategic plans be in alignment. The state workgroups will be the foundation for understanding and aligning mutual EPA and State goals. In moving beyond the strategic planning elements to implementation activities, the state workgroups will inventory existing watershed efforts, identify priority watersheds, engage partners at all levels, and direct EPA implementation resources towards priority watersheds.

The state workgroups are led by senior staff members dedicated to the workgroup's mission of identifying opportunities for cross program integration to restore and protect watersheds. The workgroups are charged with identifying program linkages and opportunities (internally and externally), brokering solutions for needed water quality improvements, fostering innovative approaches to water quality restoration and improvement, identifying water quality improvements associated with potential environmental justice opportunities, working to build effective linkages with coastal programs, and integrating wetland program activities with watershed restoration and protection.

## WATERSHED INVESTMENTS

Ultimately, each state workgroup will have a portfolio of watershed investments. These investments will include: watersheds where restoration, protection, and improvement measures can potentially be met; watersheds where the state or tribe has requested EPA involvement to

accomplish measurable results; and watersheds where there is already a significant EPA investments. EPA has resources associated with programmatic support, technical support and direct (financial) support to invest in watershed activities. Programmatic tools may include: training and education such as the online Watershed Academy and Nonpoint Education for Municipal Officials (NEMO); building financial sustainability through Clean Water Act Section 319 funding, State Revolving Fund, and other Clean Water Act funding mechanisms; regulatory analysis; and Clean Water Act and Safe Drinking Water Act enforcement and compliance assistance. Technical tools may include: restoration project management (wetlands, streams, lakes); technical assistance related to watershed-based permitting and effluent trading; landscape level assessments, mapping and analysis; watershed assessment and characterization; technical information transfer and problem solving; specific technical assistance related to the development of watershed plans and Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) implementation plans. Direct involvement may include: engaging federal, state, and/or local governments and citizen stakeholders, leveraging funds and assistance, overseeing and providing guidance for the watershed process.

water quality problems typically require an integrated approach. In combination, these drivers resulted in the reorganization of the EPA Region 4 Water Management Division to focus internal and external efforts at the watershed-scale. Internal functions have been realigned to support the focus on watersheds and roles of the Watershed Management Office and state workgroups have been established to facilitate a methodical approach to water quality improvements. The roles and specific activities will be adapted as specific challenges to meet the overall objective of water quality improvement at the watershed scale arise.

## DIRECTION AND DESIRED RESULTS

The realignment EPA Region 4 Water Management Division priorities and approaches to water quality improvement and restoration and efforts of the Watershed Management Office are still in their infancy. Current efforts relate to the identification and evaluation of opportunities for investment where there are opportunities for water quality improvement. As progress continues, the Watershed Management Office will identify steps to build capacity in targeted watersheds and river basins. Efforts to coordinate activities internally and externally are underway and will focus on priority watersheds as they emerge. In addition to watershed-specific efforts to improve water quality, the Watershed Management Office will work to build infrastructure to support local watershed efforts. These local watershed efforts are the best opportunity to recognize on-the-ground, measurable environmental results.

## CONCLUSIONS

In addition to government requirements (Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 and the EPA Strategic Plan) that focus on results associated with the activities of the Water Management Division, current