

**Watershed Stewardship Needs Assessment  
Policy Issues  
September 23, 1999**

*The following is a list of policy issues that were summarized from the comments of  $\pm 25$  watershed councils and  $\pm 10$  soil and water conservation districts in the Willamette Basin. Between June and August 1999 a survey of watershed councils, SWCDs, and friends groups was conducted in the upper, middle, and lower Willamette Basin. The survey was intended to assess the current needs and issues faced by these groups as they pursue watershed restoration activities in order to inform the development of a restoration strategy for the basin. As staff proceeded through the survey it became clear that watershed councils and SWCDs in the upper and lower Willamette Basin are unique, confirming the notion that basin-wide restoration will not be accomplished by a one-size-fits-all strategy. It is the hope that this summary informs Board development of the basin restoration strategy. As reflected in some of the policy points, many of the solutions that will be necessary to pursue a basin-wide restoration may require the type of support that only the state legislature can provide.*

*The Willamette Restoration Initiative would like to recognize the watershed councils, soil and water conservation districts, city bureaus, friends groups, and others who participated in the survey. Those organizations include:*

*North Santiam Watershed Council  
Pringle Creek Watershed Council  
Tryon Creek Watershed Council  
Sandy Watershed Council  
Lower Columbia Watershed Council  
Clackamas Watershed Council  
South Santiam Watershed Council  
Pudding River Watershed Council  
Lost Creek Watershed Council  
McKenzie River Watershed Council  
Mohawk River Watershed Council  
Glenn & Gibson Creeks Watershed Council*

*Scappoose Watershed Council  
Upper Nehalem Watershed Council  
Johnson Creek Watershed Council  
Tualatin River Watershed Council  
Yamhill Basin Council  
Columbia Slough Watershed Council  
Rickreall Basin Watershed Council  
Long Tom Watershed Council  
Mary's River Watershed Council  
Middle Fork Willamette River Watershed Council  
Callapooia River Watershed Council*

*Marion County SWCD  
Yamhill County SWCD  
East Multnomah SWCD  
Benton SWCD  
Polk SWCD*

*Washington County SWCD  
Clackamas County SWCD  
East Lane SWCD  
Land SWCD*

*Tryon Creek Resource Partnership  
Willamette River Stakeholders Task Force*

*City of Portland Bureau of Environmental Services  
Fairview Creek Watershed Conservation Group*

*The text included in bold Italics reports findings and makes recommendations to the WRI Board. The supplemental information included below this information is presented as background and has been derived from the survey data.*

## ***Clean Water/Healthy Native Habitats***

***Finding: Watershed councils, SWCDs, and others benefit from programmatic support.***

***Recommendation: The WRI should promote State funding to assist councils, SWCDs, and local organizations in developing program capacity and delivery.***

***Background:*** A consistent theme that was recorded throughout the basin is that watershed councils and SWCDs have benefited from programmatic instruction or training in consensus building, facilitation, dispute resolution, planning, project management, and administration. Examples of programs that contribute to overall skill development and ultimately to the success of councils, SWCDs, and others include:

- The State Department of Environmental Quality has donated equipment, staff time for training, and funding through the 319-grant program to support watershed council monitoring activities.
- For the Sake of the Salmon has sponsored workshops and hosted regional forums where discussions involved organizational capacity issues and needs. These limitations reduced the ability to implement restoration activities.
- The Lower Willamette Watershed Councils meet monthly to discuss issues and share innovations.
- OWEB offers instruction and training in grant writing, education, and outreach.
- The Oregon Department of Agriculture, Oregon Association of Conservation Districts and the Natural Resource Conservation Districts provide regular training in program administration, technical assistance to landowners and planning and implementation of best land management practices.

***“An annual workshop that reports on the state of the basin would be helpful in creating some understanding about how council activities fit within the larger context of the basin.” N. Sandberg, North Santiam Watershed Council***

## ***Strong Economy/High Quality of Life***

***Finding: It is agreed that a high quality of life includes a strong economy and resource sustainability. It is necessary to develop a consistent message regarding how the components that contribute to building a strong economy (e.g., agriculture, urban growth, and forestry) influence resource sustainability. Because watersheds are different in terms of the resources that contribute to the local economy, the way this message is conveyed and understood varies. Survey respondents consistently expressed the need for a “unified plan” to guide restoration efforts in the basin.***

***Recommendation: The WRI should develop educational materials that simplify the complex relationship between components, which contribute to a strong economy and resource sustainability. The message should be delivered within the context of a “unified plan” for restoration of the entire basin. Whether individuals are organized by watershed council, city***

*bureau, county commission, or neighborhood association, everyone has a part to play in sustaining the components of a high quality of life. Therefore the plan should clarify the roles and responsibilities of individuals with the basin and emphasize that restoration is everyone's responsibility.*

***Background:***

***Agriculture.*** In more urbanized areas of the basin, the interplay of economic and natural resource conditions is expressed in terms of a tension between urban and rural interests that must be balance as watershed councils, SWCDs, and others work together. In one case where the SWCD serves a more rural constituency, education about the inter-play of strong economics and resource sustainability, that would alleviate some of this tension, is not emphasized. Conversely, in other cases where the SWCDs and watershed councils are working together to bridge the gap in understanding between urban and rural interests, shared meaning about urban and rural needs and interests that contribute to a strong economy is beginning to develop.

***Forestry.*** In rural communities that are characterized by a forest economy, both public and private forest managers participate in the activities of watershed councils. However, inconsistent participation by public agencies has limited the opportunity for dialogue that will lend to development of a common language and shared understanding about what is required to obtain both economic and ecological sustainability. Although, these same public agencies make significant investments in the economy of these rural watersheds, there remains a disconnect in the discussion and thus the understanding about land management activities that contribute to a strong economy as well as resource sustainability. Conversely, a high degree of involvement by private forest managers on watershed council technical teams, has translated into a conversation and a strategy that attempting to contend with the complex issues relating to strong economic growth and resource sustainability.

***Urban growth.*** Currently, building codes, laws, and land use planning processes do not accommodate implementation of a restoration strategy that will contribute necessarily to both a strong economy and resource sustainability. Until a discussion regarding the interplay of economic and environmental sustainability is translated in revised building codes, laws, and revised land use planning processes it will be difficult to achieve a quality of life objective that accommodates continued economic growth as well as resource sustainability. In the Upper Basin, the RC&D, DEQ, and the DLCDC are developing a model code for rural communities that offers a pro-active approach to, and incentives for, addressing ESA/CWA issues in these areas. Similarly, in the Portland metropolitan area, strategies that provide financial incentives for avoiding or minimizing impacts to natural resources are currently being developed in order to reverse the negative affect that conditions of economic growth have on natural resource condition. Whether these efforts translate into regulations or inspire more pro-active approaches to sustaining economic growth as well as resource condition remains to be seen. No matter the consequences of these approaches, continued acceptance of mitigation as an acceptable means of reconciling the loss of natural resources as a consequence of development sends a mixed message about what is acceptable for sustaining a high quality of life that includes a strong

economy and resource sustainability.

***“Begin to look long range at how to accommodate growth. Use a David Hulse approach to future scenarios. Get ahead of the curve now, while there is still time to do something.” J. Spenser, Linn SWCD/Calapooia Watershed Council***

### ***Shared Community Stewardship***

***Finding: The role of SWCDs, public agencies, and other organizations in their work with watershed councils, influences how services are delivered. Whether watershed councils work with SWCDs or other organizations there is a high degree of sharing of staff, data, and equipment. In some cases, this has been a consequence of a lack of stable funding. In other cases, this has been a result of a high degree of cooperation and a well-developed working relationship between the councils and SWCDs or other organizations. In all cases, when funding has been available for watershed restoration and related activities, these cooperators have been forced in direct competition with one another for limited resources. This circumstance influences the type of relationships that become established, affects service delivery, and thus has implications for implementing a long-term restoration strategy.***

***Recommendation: The WRI should develop a strategy for building social, political, and economic capital/capacity that serves local groups. The WRI should work with the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, the Governor’s Office of Natural Resources, the Oregon State Legislature, and the Federal Government to secure stable funding for watershed councils, SWCDs, or like organizations.***

***Background:*** In the Upper Willamette Basin the SWCDs and RC&D provide administrative support, fiscal management, and technical support for watershed councils. In the urban centers the relationship of SWCDs to watershed councils is different. City bureaus and other organizations share staff and resources, functioning in much the same capacity as the SWCDs function in the Upper Basin. Where watershed councils derive their working capital has implications for collaboration based on “who” provides the incentives for partnership. For example, in the Portland metropolitan area, the Bureau of Environmental Services has funded a number of watershed assessments, which although they are complete in addressing aquatic and terrestrial resource condition, do not conform to the State’s OWEB protocol. Similarly, the City of Salem Public Works Department funds a variety of activities undertaken by the local watershed council. Here again, although the council has developed a wide variety of projects, the council activities do not necessarily attend to the specific objectives of a watershed assessment or action plan developed according to OWEB guidelines. Whether varied approaches to watershed assessment, planning, and restoration contributes to developing an understanding of “shared” stewardship is unclear. Whether this will hinder success at implementing a basin-wide restoration strategy remains to be seen.

***“Our major barrier at the local level is lack of stable funding and technical assistance to get the job done.” S. Gries, South Santiam Watershed Council***

***Finding: In urban areas, SWCDs, watershed councils, and others are involved in activities that have not been considered within the scope of a watershed council's agenda. These activities include providing input to local and regional land use planning processes, administration of urban conservation programs, and participation in the state legislative process. To date, councils, SWCDs, and others have not received funding from OWEB for such activities; thus there is a perception that such activities are not legitimate or do not contribute to the statewide watershed restoration agenda.***

***Recommendation: The WRI should promote the acceptance of the idea that watershed councils, SWCDs, and others will continue to adapt in their role as they try to meet the changing needs of watershed stewardship. These new roles and responsibilities need to be recognized as legitimate activities to be eligible for funding support through the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board funding program.***

***Background:*** In the Portland metropolitan area watershed councils serve in an advisory capacity to local and regional land use planning processes (e.g., Goal 5, 2040 Plan). These activities are not and have not been funded in the past by the State OWEB grants; therefore, the conclusion is that the role or function of councils in this capacity is not legitimate in the eyes of the State. As a consequence of the lack of funding, councils, whose main function is to serve in an advisory capacity to the local planning process, have sought alternative means to assemble political and fiscal capital. As a consequence watershed councils in urban areas only partially embrace State plans, processes, and protocols. Ultimately, this circumstance may contribute to inconsistencies in planning, assessment, and implementation of basin-wide restoration strategy.

***Finding: Watershed councils are not necessarily the central delivery mechanism for education and outreach programs, and other organizations should be considered for their capacity to engage diverse publics in outreach campaigns.***

***Recommendation: The WRI needs to develop and promote an integrated basin restoration plan. For this plan to be effective there must be a public outreach strategy that accounts for the diversity of stakeholders in the basin. The strategy should utilize multiple delivery mechanisms to reach this diverse group.***

***Background:*** Several examples provide the basis for the conclusion that a one-size-fits-all approach to outreach must be reconsidered.

- The Washington County SWCD funds a “stream walker”. This person makes door to door contact with (both agricultural and nonagricultural) private landowners along rural streams. The stream walker works with the landowner to inform them about corrective actions to prevent erosion and runoff to improve water quality.
- The Marion SWCD is bridging the gap between urban and rural interests in their watershed and district with an active and engaging SWCD board.
- The East Multnomah SWCD targets outreach through backyard conservation and naturescaping programs. They utilize staff expertise and combined funds of the SWCD and the Natural Resource Conservation Service.

The efforts of the SWCD in each of the examples are coordinated (not necessarily with a watershed council) to ensure that the message delivery mechanism will result in the greatest overall success.

***“Our major struggle will be public apathy and lack of adequate education.”  
S. Daily, Pudding River Watershed Council.***

### ***Accountable Institutions***

***Finding: OWEB has developed guidelines for watershed assessment and planning. Like the OWEB, the Federal government has also developed guidelines for watershed assessment (e.g., Federal Guide for Watershed Assessment; EPA's Guide to Rapid Planning for Urban Watersheds). Although each of these protocols is standardized, the fact that there are multiple methodologies (and companion financial incentives for using these) for developing watershed assessments and action plans, raises questions relating to consistency and accountability of institutions involved in implementing a long-term, basin-scale restoration plan.***

***Recommendation: WRI should work with the Federal PIEC and the State OWEB, to facilitate the integration and coordination of alternate protocols for watershed assessment and planning methodologies. The WRI should seek support for a state service center or like facility, to create a central repository for GIS information and technical support.***

***Background:*** OWEB has developed watershed assessment and action planning protocols to establish some consistency in how resource condition is assessed and how restoration action plans are assembled. In fact, conformance with these protocols becomes a contingency of receiving OWEB funding. However, because alternative methodologies exist and there are financial incentives for using these other methods only a percentage of watershed councils in the basin have developed action plans or watershed assessments according to the OWEB protocols.