

Southeast Watershed Alliance
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November 1, 2010

To: Senate President
Speaker of the House of Representatives
Senate Energy, Environment and Economic Development Committee
House Resources, Recreation and Development Committee

From: Southeast Watershed Alliance

Re: Report pursuant to RSA 485-E:12

Establishment of the Alliance

The Department of Environmental Services(DES) in keeping with RSA 485-E:5 notified the municipalities and applicable regional planning commissions of the establishment of the Southeast Watershed Alliance, as well as the need for their participation in its activities. The DES Coastal Program section diligently pursued educational briefings and organized meetings of the municipalities at several locations within the region of the Alliance. As a result of this diligence, on December 14, 2009 a meeting of the actively participating municipalities was held and a planning committee was formed by the representatives from those communities to accomplish the tasks set forth in RSA 485-E:5 II of developing the Alliance's operating procedures and organizational structure.

Subsequent to eight formal meetings of the planning committee, consultations with staff attorneys of the Attorney General and DES, and then obtaining the unanimous concurrence of the representatives of the participating municipalities and their governing bodies, the final version of the operating procedures and organizational structure was submitted on May 11, 2010 to the Attorney General and the department for their review and approval in accordance with RSA 485-E:7 II (b). No disapprovals or recommendations were forthcoming and consequently the operating procedures and organizational structure came into effect in mid June 2010. On June 15, 2010 the Alliance met and elected a board of directors which now meets at least monthly. Committees and working groups meet on their own schedules.

Alliance Activities to Date

The Alliance created and maintains a web site dedicated exclusively to its purposes. All meeting notices, agendas, minutes and other general information are posted there. The URL for the web site is: *SoutheastWatershedAlliance.org*. The web site is currently being expanded to include a wiki which will provide a reasonably comprehensive

reference source and convenient description of the purpose of the Alliance and the watershed, activities, relevant science, data, regulation, etc. A wiki will provide a mechanism for updating information, displaying a diversity of data, interpretations and will allow experts in any given areas to make contributions in an orderly manner.

At the June 15, 2010 meeting of the Alliance several priority tasks were identified. Subsequent meetings of the board of directors and the advisory committee refined this listing to set forth certain short term tasks that need to be given priority in improving water quality. Emphasis was given to tasks that are both practicable and capable of implementation in the near term without new large capital or infrastructure outlays.

These currently include:

- develop consistent storm water regulations and best management practices
- identifying “hot spots”, i.e. sources and land practices that degrade water quality along with locating funding resources to enable prerequisite research and corrective actions to be undertaken
- land owner outreach and municipal involvement in addressing the water quality benefits of routine septic system maintenance, proper use of fertilizers and low impact landscaping

Implicit in the priority tasks identified above is the recognition by the Alliance of the current economic stress faced by local, state and federal governments. Accordingly, the Alliance focused its immediate efforts on those activities that can be implemented at low cost while yielding the maximum impact in terms of improving water quality. Coupled with this approach is the need to ensure that decision making is solidly science-based and will produce quantifiable results rather than simply arising from unsupported opinion, conjecture or popular false belief. Education and outreach to effected segments of the populace in the communities as well as governing and land use boards is an essential constituent in achieving the goals of the Alliance. This outreach is an extensive undertaking and will require more resources than currently available to the Alliance. Thus far, the DES Coastal Program section, Piscataqua Region Estuaries Partnership (PREP), and the regional planning commissions have been generous with technical advice within the scope of their respective expertise. These organizations have been the primary resources available to the Alliance other than that available from the respective members of the municipalities. .

Traditional and innovative solutions are being explored. By way of illustration, extractive technologies (viz., bivalve mollusk aquaculture and micro algal production) are being investigated as possible means of meeting nutrient criteria goals for estuarine waters. These studies will require active participation of state and federal agencies in conjunction with local communities and potential business operators/investors. Regional economic benefit could be a useful byproduct if this approach can be shown to be successful.

Cooperation and collaboration with the municipalities and all interested parties is a core tenet of the Alliance operating policy. Communication is a significant part of the prerequisite groundwork in securing a consensus among the communities as to any given

action plan. The education and outreach efforts will require resources not yet available either in terms of the amount of labor and other needs to adapt information and present it in an effective manner to the array of audiences with their differing needs for information.

The Alliance has met and established communication links with relevant federal agencies (Army Corps of Engineers, Environmental Protection Agency, Agriculture and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) and US congressional staffs. It is hoped that these links will engender collaboration of mutual benefit in pursuing improved water quality, communicating local requirements and current needs to enable optimal drafting of future legislation. The pending renewal of the MS4 storm water general permit for NH communities and the renewal of wastewater treatment permits will be major factors in determining future actions and their relative priorities.

Any undertaking by the Alliance municipalities has been on a volunteer basis without compensation (in fact, cash outlays required for Alliance expenses have been donated by representatives to the Alliance). It has reached the point where funding is necessary to even modestly accomplish the goals and purpose. Proposals for grants have been submitted but only a small amount may become available in the near term. In the current time of economic stress, direct contribution by participating communities is neither feasible nor practical in terms of timing given both appropriation lead times and voter choice without extensive education (available through the Alliance). Planning to undertake the many tasks to achieve the purposes of the enabling legislation are severely inhibited by the lack of available funds and the likelihood of any significant change in those prospects. While related efforts in the past were funded (e.g., SB-70), no such funding has been made available to the Alliance.

Actions currently planned for 2011

- further develop and implement the initial priority activities
- actively pursue funding resources, including public and private grants, in-kind services and municipal contributions
- identify and develop additional priority activities, including long term planning and implementation actions
- host a science symposium to better define the state of scientific understanding of problems and focus additional research for the use of limited financial resources

Future legislation

Other than the need for funding, it is premature for the Alliance to offer any clear recommendations for future legislation.

Respectfully submitted,

Walter G. Fries

Chairman, Board of Directors
Southeast Watershed Alliance