

Environmental Planning for Coastal Decision-Makers

WORKSHOP REPORT



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Workshop Description

The increasing number of people living in coastal areas and their associated use of resources has a tremendous effect on coastal areas. In New Jersey, the most densely populated state in the United States, local planning and land use decisions are being made by 567 “home rule” municipalities. Decisions made by coastal communities can have profound, long-term consequences for estuarine and coastal environments. In New Jersey, most municipalities have not adequately incorporated water quality concerns into the local planning and site review process. This is unfortunate because local planning and land use decisions being made by municipalities result in more impervious surface and the improper siting of development on soils that can lead to increased stormwater runoff and reduced groundwater recharge.

Land use planners, regulatory personnel, and elected officials are key decision makers who often do not have adequate access to relevant science-based information, training and available technology to promote informed decisions affecting the coast. With significant development pressures on coastal communities and the resulting impacts to coastal resources, it is imperative that these community leaders have sound information on which to base decisions. In response to this need, the Jacques Cousteau National Estuarine Research Reserve (JC NERR) developed a workshop entitled, *Environmental Planning for Coastal Decision-Makers*. This program combined research and training materials put together by the Nonpoint Education for Municipal Officials program at the University of Connecticut Cooperative Extension System and the Center for Watershed Protection. Since 1999 this program has been conducted for 7 coastal communities in the area surrounding the boundary of the JCNERR. These programs have consistently brought together appointed and elected officials to look at nonpoint source pollution and impacts of land use to coastal watersheds. One outcome of the workshops is a productive dialog among coastal local governments on ways to collaborate and develop solutions to growth-related problems.

This workshop focuses on the importance of watersheds, the use of imperviousness as an indicator of water quality and the impacts of development on water resources. A range of management strategies are given that can be implemented at three key levels of municipal planning: master plan development, site design and best management practices. During the master planning phase it is recommended that municipalities develop a detailed environmental resource inventory including watershed mapping. An overview of geographical information systems and remote sensing as important tools for mapping and analysis is provided. A major focus of the presentation is better site design – ways that imperviousness can be minimized at the site level while maintaining the key attributes of attractive and profitable development. Lastly, best management practices to mitigate for unavoidable development impacts are described.

Stafford Township in Ocean County, New Jersey serves as a model for environmental initiatives and John Spodofora, Councilman and Chairman of the Environmental Commission, has participated in each of the Environmental Planning workshops. Stafford Township has a long history of environmental stewardship, having

successfully established a stormwater recharge ordinance, tree protection ordinance, watershed and wellhead protection zoning, and undertaken numerous other community-based environmental projects.

Over ten years ago, Stafford undertook an ambitious lake restoration program, successfully opening Manahawkin Lake's beaches. Building on this successful experience, Stafford began to address other watershed issues. Water quality protection has long been a priority for Stafford Township. In 1998, Stafford received approval from the New Jersey Site Improvement Advisory Board for its tough stormwater management ordinance which prohibits the off-site discharge of stormwater for new developments. The recharging of rainfall back into the groundwater table is critical in the coastal zone as all of the Township's potable water comes from wells. This ordinance protects the township's water supply from saltwater intrusion and reduces the threat of flooding from increased runoff. The Township has recognized that reducing flooding is synonymous with reducing nonpoint source pollution and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has awarded 10% discounts on flood insurance premium to Stafford residents as a result of this and other efforts. Stafford Township has also implemented a number of programs aimed at the protection of groundwater resources. Wellhead protection overlay zones have been established around all existing and future public wells, that restricts certain potentially harmful activities within a 1,000-foot radius of each wellhead. Through its comprehensive approach towards resource protection, Stafford Township is an outstanding example of municipal-level water resource management.

The *Environmental Planning for Coastal Decision-Makers* workshops have provided an important introduction to water resource planning for local elected and appointed officials. The JCNERR will continue to work with this audience through the development and implementation of similar programs to provide the most accurate and current information on the management of water resources, natural habitats and growth management.

Sample Workshop Agenda

Environmental Planning for Coastal Decision-Makers Stafford, Barnegat and Ocean Townships

August 31, 1999

- 6:30 Welcome (Mayor Carl Block)
- 6:40 Information and Support for Municipalities in the Barnegat Bay Watershed
- 6:50 Presentation: *Land Use Strategies for Municipal Officials* (Tina Bologna)
Impacts of Development on Waterways
Using Watersheds as a Framework for Planning
Impervious Surfaces as an Indicator of Water Quality
What You Can Do – Master Planning, Site Design, BMP's
Better Site Design – A New Way of Doing Things
- 7:45 Presentation: *Stafford Township Programs* (John Spodofora)
Stormwater Recharge Ordinance
Watershed Protection
Ratables Study
Adopt-a-Storm Drain
- 8:15 Open Discussion
Discussion Questions:
- How do you define a livable community?
 - How is growth changing our communities?
 - Why are our communities experiencing these changes?
 - What options do we have for addressing growth issues
 - What problems do we share with our neighboring communities?
 - What opportunities do we have to work together in solving these problems?
 - Next steps
- 8:45 Wrap-Up and Adjourn

Resources

Center for Watershed Protection

(<http://www.cwp.org>)

Nonpoint Education for Municipal Officials – NEMO

(<http://www.canr.uconn.edu/ces/nemo>)

EPA Office of Sustainable Ecosystems and Communities

(<http://www.epa.gov/oppeinet/oppe/osec/osecgak/index.htm>)

The Stormwater Center

(<http://www.stormwatercenter.net>)

National Association of Counties

(<http://www.naco.org>)

Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions

(<http://www.anjec.org>)