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POLICIES AND GUIDELINES ENSURING EDUCATION, PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND OUTREACH IN THE DEVELOPMENT OR AMENDMENT OF THE STATE WATER PLAN

Successful public acceptance of the State Water Plan depends on early education, public participation and outreach efforts. Key goals for this effort include:

- Achieving awareness of water resource issues among the Commonwealth's population;
- Educating identified target groups on water resources issues; and,
- Leveraging educational efforts undertaken by other agencies and organizations that address identified issues and priorities.

Within Act 220 there are six sections specifying education and public participation with which DEP, the Statewide Committee and the Regional Committees must comply. These sections are:

- Section 3113 (C)(5): "Each Regional Committee must conduct at least one combined public meeting and hearing to solicit comments from interested persons on water resources planning issues related to the preparation of the regional component of the State Water Plan."
- Section 3114(C)(2): "The Statewide Water Resources Committee shall assist the Department, in cooperation with regional committees, with the development of a public participation process to encourage the input from persons interested in water resources issues throughout the process of developing and formulating regional plan components and the State Water Plan."
- Section 3115 (B)(3): "The Department, in conjunction with the statewide and regional committees, shall hold at least one combined public meeting and hearing in each region to solicit input to the drafts of the initial regional plan components to be used in the development or amendment of the State Water Plan."
- Section 3115 (B)(5): "The Department, in conjunction with the statewide committee, shall make the draft of the State Water Plan available for public review to solicit input on the draft of the State Water Plan or amendments to the State Water Plan."
- Section 3115 (C)(6): "Upon adoption of the State Water Plan, the Department shall publish notice of the adoption or amendment of the State Water Plan in the Pennsylvania Bulletin and on the Department's World Wide Web site."
- All meetings, hearings and public review shall be in accordance with the provisions of 65 PA. C. S. Ch. 7.

In addition, two key areas of Section 3116 (B), "Specific Uses of the Plan" guide the efforts relating to education and public participation:

- “Provide information to public and private decision makers regarding water availability to help guide efficient investment and economic development”
- “Educate public officials and the public at large regarding the sources and uses of water in this Commonwealth”

To comply with the Act and to ensure that a strategy for public outreach is achieved, an Ad Hoc Outreach Workgroup will be created which will consist of members of each regional committee, members of the Statewide Committee and DEP staff.

This Workgroup is charged with developing a Public Participation and Education Framework that will provide a consistent approach and outreach strategy across the regions. The Framework will direct public outreach efforts that will inform, educate, and engage partners, regional constituents, and the general public about the goals and objectives of the State Water Plan. It will also be used to receive input from DEP program staff, other agency representatives, stakeholders, and community interests regarding structure and implementation of the regional plans, in accordance with the Guidelines and Procedures set forth by the Statewide Water Resources Committee.

The Workgroup will also provide a means of information sharing between the regional committees, and serve as liaison to the statewide committee on the regional public participation process. Although regional issues differ from each other and individual approaches may vary, an overall framework for the regional committees to follow will ultimately result in a more useful, understandable component in the final statewide Plan.

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Public Participation and Education Framework for State Water Plan Outreach Strategy

1. Develop a three-stage outreach approach for educating the public at large that is correlated with the overall State Water Plan Development Process. This approach will include the following:

Stage One: Educate the public about Act 220 water resources planning and the importance of the State Water Plan through speaking engagements, distribution of informational materials and organizational newsletters and publications.

Target dates: May – Dec. 2004

Potential Partners: State agencies, professional associations and other organizations holding public events throughout the state, and media

Stage Two: Focus meetings on regional issues; creation of regional forums to obtain public input on regional issues and priorities; hold public meetings/hearings in regions.

Target dates: Jan. 2005 – Dec. 2006

Potential Partners: State agencies, regional planning commissions, county governments, county conservation districts, and media

Stage Three: Feedback and Reaction to the Plan, specifically the Critical Water Resource Planning Areas; hold public meetings/hearings

Target dates: Jan. – June 2007

Potential Partners: State agencies, municipal governments and authorities, watershed associations, and media

2. Identify at least three target audiences¹ for each stage of the process:

Level One: Statewide Level (include associations, statewide policy and advocacy groups and general public)

Level Two: Regional Level (include focus groups, general public, and local grassroots organizations)

Level Three: Local level, related to Critical Water Planning Process (include local governments and local grassroots organizations)

¹ These could include focus groups directly impacted by Plan changes, programs, policies (regulated community), as well as a legislative outreach approach.