

Regional Water Resources Committee Priorities

Delaware

Strengthen the link between land use and water resources management

Linking land use decisions and water resources management to sustain and enhance the quality of life in the Delaware River basin is a top priority of the committee. The development and distribution of water resource information and data will help strengthen the link between land use, soil, and water resources management among multiple stakeholders. These educational initiatives would improve how water resources management, soil and vegetation conservation, flood controls, stormwater management, and sewage management relate to land use decisions, infrastructure funding, construction decisions, and grant decisions. The goal of these efforts is to preserve, protect, restore, and enhance the quality, quantity, and availability of clean, sustainable water supplies for the people, businesses, and ecological needs of the Commonwealth.

Regional planning and land use coordination and collaboration

“Think regionally and act locally” is a priority for the committee. The committee’s solutions to the region’s water issues focus on developing regional coordination and planning to address stormwater management, climate change, water quality, water availability, water diversion, aquifers, healthy soils and vegetation, protecting fish and wildlife habitats, and protecting recreation areas. Solutions are developed through regional planning efforts, education and outreach with policy makers and the community, along with adequate funding. Water planning should be considered on a holistic watershed basis considering both droughts and floods. A One Water concept that can further educate the community and increase collaboration among stakeholders for integrated water resources planning. Growth in rural and suburban areas continues to place stress on water infrastructure; replacement and retrofitting of existing infrastructure and development of new infrastructure can be a challenge in both urban and suburban communities; larger scale coordination efforts between local, state, and federal entities can help ensure more of the region’s needs are being accounted for during the planning phase and available resources can be maximized.

Lower Susquehanna

Reduce or prevent point and nonpoint source pollution with a focus on currently impaired water resources

Reduce existing point and nonpoint source pollution in the region’s significant number of impaired water resources. Focus added attention on currently impaired water resources. Prevent new water pollution throughout the region for all sources. Implement active solutions to reduce pollution by forming public-private partnerships (P3), engaging willing land owners, targeting funding, and others. Broaden support and advocacy for our water resources through enlisting stakeholders, enhancing partnerships, and coordinating efforts.

Identify and target solutions for potential protection priority water resources

Identify protection priority water resources that may be trending towards impairment for any use, through the collection and analysis of data. Priorities may be determined by looking specifically at

emerging contaminants, declining water quality and/or quantity, evolving land use impacts, and flooding issues. Improve the Region's protection priority water resources through identified targeted solutions that may include education and outreach, asset management, resource improvement, and others.

Definition of "Protection Priority" - water resources prioritized for protection based on potential threats to water quality, for the purpose of setting long-term priorities for where focused efforts towards restoration, best management practices, and protection would provide the most benefit to the watershed.

Potomac (unofficial – no quorum)

Promote programs and practices that protect water quality and quantity and preserve the ecological integrity of groundwater and surface water

A major priority of the regional committee is to develop land use programs that protect water quality and quantity while preserving the ecological integrity of groundwater and surface water, including springs, streams, lakes, and wetlands. To ensure adequate water resources for present and future generations in the Potomac basin, the committee recommends an approach that encourages municipal programs to collaborate and plan regionally, address land use planning and growth, provide domestic water well construction standards, and implement best management practices to protect water quality and quantity. Completing Phase 3 Watershed Implementation Plans is also a high priority under this objective.

Climate change resiliency especially with regard to stormwater management, flooding, and drought

From a water resources perspective, climate change impacts stormwater management, flooding, and drought. Large intense precipitation events and longer duration storms are increasing stormwater runoff and creating or exacerbating erosion issues. Poor soils in this region have low infiltration rates, leading to less groundwater recharge and increased flooding. Varied storm frequencies may also lead to an increase in droughts. Promoting stormwater management with the use of riparian buffers, rain gardens, and stream restoration will improve erosion and groundwater recharge.

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Ohio

Inter-agency Water Resource Planning

The committee supports a holistic approach to water quality, quantity, and availability. They believe inter-agency water resources planning can address many water priorities. Organizations that should be involved in inter-agency water planning include federal and state agencies, local municipalities, conservation districts, watershed districts, watershed authorities, nonprofit environmental organizations, and the Army Corp of Engineers. Plans should identify water resources needed to promote and facilitate economic development while maintaining watershed integrity and recreation

benefits. They should also evaluate impacts of resource extraction from the Marcellus Shale on water quality, emerging contaminants in water systems, reclaiming of water resources impaired by abandoned mines, and inter-basin transfers of water. Act 167 stormwater planning at the county level is an initial step toward inter-agency water resource planning.

Water Quality and Quantity

The committee believes it is critical to think of water as a single entity which requires an approach that considers both water quality and quantity simultaneously. Stormwater is significantly impacted by climate change and aging infrastructure. Excessive amounts of storm water runoff can damage the quality of the waterways they're entering. Storage, infrastructure upgrades, and treatment are potential solutions but planting additional trees along the banks of tributaries can help as well. Trees mitigate long-term impacts of stormwater and improve water quality. Stormwater is a potential problem for both water quantity and quality and its potential solutions can have impacts on both as well.

Other concerns in the Ohio basin include legacy issues encompassing acid mine drainage and orphaned wells, inter-basin transfers, agricultural activities, and the introduction of larger-scale industry water users in the region have implications on both quantity and quality.

Great Lakes

Protect Water Quality and Quantity in the Basin

Lake Erie is vitally important to the prosperity of northwestern Pennsylvania, serving regional domestic, commercial, and industrial needs. The Great Lakes supplies power generation, offers world-class recreational opportunities, and provides transportation and trade access to the entire Great Lakes – St. Lawrence Seaway. As a result, the committee believes that Pennsylvania should have a larger voice in federal legislation and other measures that may impact Lake Erie and Lake Ontario with continued support by the Commonwealth and federal agencies.

Additionally, the committee recognizes that the region is not composed solely of Lake Erie and Lake Ontario, so efforts must be made to protect water quality throughout the larger region's watersheds. This can be accomplished by analyzing contaminants, evaluating the impacts of storm water management, and agricultural best management practices throughout the region. This will also allow for a better understanding of the impact of climate change on this unique watershed.

Coordinate with Partners

The best way to achieve the larger goals of the committee is to actively engage with partners along multiple political strata. This includes other states, provinces, and other stakeholders including governmental and non-governmental. Coordination should begin with education and outreach to better understand land use impacts and implement best management practices to better maintain the hydrologic integrity of the region. On a local level, municipalities should collaborate toward a regional approach with support from the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), whose role would be to encourage open and continual communication and incentivize cooperation through grant funding.

Upper/Middle Susquehanna

Protect important headwater habitats, enhance recharge areas, and minimize stormwater runoff of the Upper/Middle Susquehanna basin

To care for the water resources in the Upper/Middle Susquehanna basin and ensure a sustainable supply of quality water, important headwater habitats and groundwater recharge areas must be protected. Because much of the basin is forested, the approach should focus on forested land use practices and their effect on area water supplies. Minimizing large scale forest cutting is a priority to mitigate downstream flooding, preserve forested ecosystem services, and reduce sedimentation. Addressing legacy infrastructure in acid mine drainage areas is also critical to protecting important headwaters and streams. We strongly encourage reuse of degraded/abandoned land such as available industrial or commercial lands. Committee members recognize a different approach must be taken to address water quantity and quality issues between rural and urban/suburban areas within the region. Rural areas strive to protect forest lands, preserve recreation areas and greenways, and protect critical habitat areas. Stormwater quality and quantity concerns in suburban and urban areas may be addressed with green infrastructure through zoning ordinance changes for underutilized and/or vacant commercial property, as well as their associated parking and paved areas.

Working collaboratively with stakeholders including state, county, and municipal government, conservation districts, and watershed associations through education and outreach efforts is essential to advancing sound land use practices that are protective of these headwater areas. As part of a strategy to accomplish this, local governments can promote appropriate municipal ordinances in public water supply recharge areas, which is particularly important in areas with limited availability of quality water. The committee also recommends that statewide water well construction standards be implemented, particularly related to residential well drilling and geothermal bore holes, which will protect and sustain groundwater quality and availability.

Multi-municipal planning and coordination

Land use planning and development are critical to protect headwater habitats, enhance recharge areas, and minimize stormwater runoff. Planning needs to expand with county wide action plans and integrated water resources management throughout a watershed. A regional approach of education and outreach to water resource stakeholders, emphasizing the value of coordinated water quality and quantity planning among municipalities, is critical to protecting all communities. Continue to prioritize upgrading existing aging water infrastructure to maintain water quality, recognizing that parts of the region have experienced a decline in population and as a result many communities are challenged economically. Multi-municipal planning coordination enhances success in preserving water quality and optimizes the use of funding dollars.