

Lower Susquehanna River Watershed Assessment Stakeholder Outreach Plan

Background

The Lower Susquehanna River Watershed Assessment (LSRWA) is a multi-agency effort to comprehensively forecast and evaluate sediment and associated nutrient loads to the system of hydroelectric dams located on the Susquehanna River above the Chesapeake Bay. The assessment will analyze hydrodynamic and sedimentation processes and interactions within the Lower Susquehanna River watershed, consider structural and non-structural strategies for sediment and nutrient management, and assess cumulative impacts of future conditions and sediment and nutrient management strategies on the Chesapeake Bay.

The LSRWA team includes:

- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Baltimore District (USACE) (federal sponsor);
- Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) (non-federal sponsor);
- Maryland Department of Natural Resources (MDNR, including the Maryland Geological Survey (MGS));
- U.S. Geological Survey (USGS);
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Engineer Research and Development Center (ERDC);
- Susquehanna River Basin Commission (SRBC);
- The Nature Conservancy (TNC); and
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency – Chesapeake Bay Program (EPA-CBP).

The LSRWA will not directly lead to implementation of specific actions to manage sediments and associated nutrients in the lower Susquehanna River; instead it will provide information to be further evaluated by stakeholders. Stakeholders are defined as all interested state and federal agencies, local governments, non-governmental organizations (NGO's), business groups, and the general public. Therefore no formal National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance is required. Consequently, stakeholders' involvement in the assessment can be more flexible and less formal. Though no formal NEPA compliance is required, the LSRWA team recognizes that it is imperative to involve the stakeholders and interested agencies in order for the LSRWA to be a useful tool to the Chesapeake Bay community. This involvement would include transferring knowledge gained during this assessment to all stakeholders, incorporating the management efforts and activities of others in the watershed, and receiving feedback on the sediment and nutrient management strategies that are developed.

In addition to the LSRWA team members identified above, the following stakeholders will most likely be interested in the contents and management recommendations of the LSRWA:

- U.S. Department of Interior – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service,
- U.S. Department of Agriculture – Natural Resources Conservation Service,

- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration – Restoration Center,
- National Marine Fisheries Service – Habitat Conservation Division,
- Maryland governor’s office,
- Pennsylvania governor’s office,
- New York governor’s office,
- MD local (state/county/city) governments,
- PA local (state/county/city) governments,
- NY local (state/county/city) governments,
- MD congressional representatives,
- PA congressional representatives,
- NY congressional representatives,
- Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection,
- Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources,
- Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission,
- Lower Susquehanna Riverkeeper,
- Coastal Conservation Association Maryland
- Exelon Corporation,
- University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science,
- Chesapeake Bay area universities, colleges, and research institutions,
- Chesapeake Bay Research Consortium,
- Maryland Waterman’s Association,
- Chesapeake Bay Commercial Fishermen's Association,
- Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF),
- Oyster Recovery Partnership, Inc.,
- Industry and trade groups,
- Media, both traditional and social media outlets, and
- Interested individuals.

This plan describes the approach for involving these stakeholders in the LSRWA.

Goal of This Plan

The goal of stakeholder involvement and coordination is to create, facilitate, and maintain open channels of communication with stakeholders to allow for full consideration of stakeholder views and information in the decision-making process. This outreach plan outlines procedures necessary to accomplish these goals. Activities under this plan will help to accomplish the following:

1. Make information about assessment findings and recommended management strategies readily available;
2. Provide forums for making stakeholders’ wishes, needs, and concerns known to decision-makers proactively as management strategies are being developed; and
3. Incorporate/acknowledge stakeholder views in the final watershed assessment.

Outreach Strategy

This stakeholder outreach plan provides an overall strategy to involve interested stakeholders in the LSRWA process. The LSRWA team will maintain coordination with federal, state, and local agencies as well as interest groups and Congressional staff during the development of the LSRWA plan. Stakeholder meetings and inter-agency workshops will be used to coordinate stakeholder involvement in the development of the assessment; it is expected that these will be held on the same day but with separately invited audiences. In addition, the appropriate members of the team will hold meetings with federal, state, and municipal officials, as needed. Team members will issue stakeholders notices, respond to media and stakeholder inquiries, and coordinate and communicate with various committees and organizations as necessary. LSRWA information will also be shared via email distribution lists and a website to be hosted by MDNR.

Stakeholder Concerns Previously Identified

During the development of the LSRWA scope of work (May 2009 - June 2011), a stakeholder meeting was held in October 2009. Based on comments at that meeting, follow-up discussions between the LSRWA team with stakeholders, and other outreach activities, many concerns were identified. Below is a compilation of those previously identified concerns regarding sediment and nutrient management strategies in the lower Susquehanna River:

1. Cost of implementation and any follow-on maintenance activities;
2. Responsibility for implementation;
3. Funding sources for implementation;
4. Technical soundness and accuracy of forecasting tools (i.e., models);
5. Environmental impacts of recommended strategies (dredging, by-passing sediments, watershed actions, etc);
6. Impacts to the Chesapeake Bay and EPA-designated total maximum daily load (TMDL) allocations if dams no longer trap sediments;
7. Feasibility of management strategies (e.g., large amount sediments to remove on a continual basis);
8. Risks of storm events scouring sediments from behind dams and associated impacts to the Bay; and
9. Risks of no action.

This team anticipates that these as well as other concerns, yet to be communicated, will arise during stakeholder outreach activities and will be addressed in the LSRWA as comprehensively as possible.

Stakeholder Outreach Mechanisms

USACE and MDE/MDNR will lead a coordinated effort to actively communicate with the media, stakeholders, and elected officials.

a. Press Releases

In general, news releases will be made jointly by USACE, MDE, and MDNR; however, if issued individually, they will be pre-coordinated with the other lead agencies (USACE, MDE, and

MDNR). News releases will be distributed to applicable local and national media outlets, including newspapers, journals, television, and pertinent social media outlets.

b. Website, Fact Sheets, and Stakeholder Outreach Documents

The team will develop and maintain a website to inform stakeholders regarding progress on the assessment. MDNR will host the website. All material on the website will be previewed and approved by the lead agencies (MDE, MDNR, and USACE) before being posted on the website. Other agencies may be asked to review materials, depending on the content. Materials expected to go on the website include:

- Statement of the assessment goals and objectives,
- List of team members and roles,
- Minutes from the quarterly team meetings,
- Pertinent PowerPoint presentations,
- Approved technical reports,
- Stakeholder outreach plan.
- Project management plan,
- Assessment's legal cost-sharing agreement, and
- Calendar of events.

c. Quarterly Team Meetings

The LSRWA team will meet quarterly to discuss, coordinate, and review technical and non-technical components of the assessment as well as management activities. These meetings will be open to stakeholders.

d. Inter-Agency Workshops and Stakeholders Meetings

The LSRWA team will set up stakeholder meetings/workshops at appropriate times during the assessment. LSRWA team members will make presentations and assist in workshops to generate information for stakeholder and inter-agency meetings. It is anticipated that there will be two meetings, one when modeling findings are completed and preliminary strategies are developed (fall 2013), and a second meeting when the LSRWA plan is released for stakeholder review (summer 2014).

Prior to each meeting, USACE will develop a detailed work plan, including roles and responsibilities, location(s), coordinated messages, handouts, meeting materials and displays, timeline sequence, and points of contact. This work plan will be coordinated with MDE and MDNR, as well as pertinent LSRWA team members. The purpose of the stakeholder meetings will be to provide information about the LSRWA plan and obtain stakeholder input regarding its content.

The team will provide the draft report on CD to interested stakeholders and libraries. The report will also be made available on the project's website to download.

e. Other Chesapeake Bay Meetings

Throughout the duration of the assessment, the LSRWA team will coordinate with other pertinent Chesapeake Bay groups that meet regularly to be included on their agendas to provide updates and get feedback on the LSRWA. Depending on the type of meeting, the most appropriate assessment team member (i.e., the assessment team member who is already attending or a part of that particular Chesapeake Bay group) could provide the update. The LSRWA team member will report feedback received from these other Chesapeake Bay groups to the rest of the LSRWA team so that this feedback can be incorporated into LSRWA report. PowerPoint slides will be updated after each quarterly team meeting (USACE lead) so that they can be utilized by LSRWA team members for this purpose.

f. Email Updates

Throughout the duration of the assessment, email updates will be sent out, periodically, to interested stakeholders. An email distribution list was started by the original Sediment Task Force (included interested stakeholders) that SRBC headed up in 1999 and 2000. USACE has been updating this list since 2009 with people requesting to be updated on the sedimentation issue. USACE will continue to have the lead on keeping this email distribution list up to date and sending out email updates of study progress and news.

g. Agency Coordination

As stated earlier, no formal NEPA compliance is required of this assessment. However, the LSRWA is being conducted under Section 729 of the Water Resources Development Act of 1986, as amended. This law requires USACE to coordinate the development of the assessment with certain federal agencies. USACE will send out cooperating agency letters in February 2012; these letters will ask these federal agencies to identify the level of involvement they would like to have in the assessment. This involvement could include (but is not limited too) participation in inter-agency workshops, provision of background data and technical expertise, and other reviews as necessary. MDE and MDNR will review the cooperating agency letters prior to the formal transmittal.

Documentation

The LSRWA report will include a compilation of efforts made to acquire stakeholder input and the information and opinions expressed prior to arriving at a final document with recommended management strategies. The stakeholder involvement section of the report will show how stakeholder input was used in the planning and decision-making process.

At this time, a 45-day review period is anticipated for the draft document. A comment-response document will be developed and included as an appendix to the final report.