

ACTION PLAN TO IMPLEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

EXPANDING EXISTING EFFORTS

Continue to Work with Nonprofits to Undertake Technical Work

Expand nonprofit environmental organizations' work with municipalities to undertake technical work, such as sewer outfall mapping, monitoring effectiveness of Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) Minimum Control Measures (e.g., rain gardens), or maintaining improvements made by the municipality.

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Introduction

A theme frequently encountered through interviews with municipalities and technical assistance providers in the Delaware River Watershed is that municipalities often do not have the capacity to protect their water quality. Communities regulated under a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) or MS4 permit, however, face several requirements, including: specific tasks to reduce the volume of pollutants entering local streams; and undertaking "Minimum Control Measures," which may involve community education and outreach, pollution reduction at construction and municipal public works sites, and the elimination of illicit discharges of waste into streams. Some of this work requires specialized education and, as a whole, takes time to do well—time that is often a challenge for municipal staff, volunteers, or elected officials to commit, given the rest of their duties. Such work may include monitoring water quality to determine the presence of chemical or biological indicators of stream health, developing educational materials on water quality for businesses and residents, conducting tree plantings, maintaining green stormwater infrastructure on public properties, and modeling sediment or nutrient loading in watersheds. Many municipal leaders and staff who were interviewed for the purpose of developing this recommendation were particularly frustrated with the additional tasks required of the state's new water quality permitting processes, especially the time required to learn about and undertake these tasks effectively.

Environmentally focused entities, both public and private, are well positioned to help municipalities with their water quality projects, whether mandated or voluntary. Fortunately, the Delaware River Watershed is home to numerous watershed and other environmental organizations, land trusts, county and regional governments, and higher-education institutions that have the expertise to provide technical assistance to municipalities in these topics. The Perkiomen Watershed Conservancy and the South Jersey Land and Water Trust, as discussed below, are two organizations that have already developed programs to address the need to provide municipalities with technical assistance on water quality issues. The Perkiomen Watershed Conservancy focuses on helping municipalities with their MS4 permits, while the South Jersey Land and Water Trust provides more general resources.

Perkiomen Watershed Conservancy

The Perkiomen Watershed Conservancy, located in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, has run an MS4 membership program for municipalities for 10 years. The program helps municipalities with MS4s achieve the Minimum Control Measures required to comply with the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection's MS4 permit. In 2017, a total of 25 municipalities participated in this program.

The Conservancy offers four fee-based membership levels to municipalities. The lowest membership level includes access to educational resources for municipalities to distribute to residents, at a \$250 per-year cost for each municipality. The distribution of these resources helps municipalities fulfill their MS4 "Public Education and Outreach of Stormwater Impact" requirement. Each subsequent level of membership includes the assistance included in the previous levels, as well as an additional type of assistance. The highest level, at \$2,500 per year, includes the baseline educational materials, as well as: an online survey to collect information from residents regarding stormwater, a public workshop for residents on water quality, training for municipal staff on good "housekeeping" techniques for reducing water pollution in their own operations, and support for tree plantings and volunteer recruitment.

South Jersey Land and Water Trust

The South Jersey Land and Water Trust, which operates out of Gloucester County, New Jersey, places an emphasis on assisting groups and individuals in building water quality management skills. The land trust conducts a variety of experiential skill-building "classes" outdoors. It runs regular cleanups in waterways in southern New Jersey, which are followed by an additional activity; participants may go on a guided "Nature Walk" to better understand the environmental characteristics of that place, or they might help conduct a macroinvertebrate assessment to gauge the health of a waterway. South Jersey Land and Water Trust also runs vernal pool surveys that involve a training component, enabling volunteers to identify seasonal wetlands in their own communities. The land trust staff facilitates construction projects, including stream bank restoration and rain garden construction. Staff have organized volunteers to label storm drains with reminders to avoid dumping and distribute information about watershed health.

The South Jersey Land and Water Trust also runs more conventional lectures indoors. Staff members give presentations to workplaces on such topics as watershed education, vernal pool identification, habitat protection, threatened species conservation, and overall environmental stewardship.

Funding

Many technical assistance providers in the Delaware River Watershed are already undertaking work similar to that of the Perkiomen Watershed Conservancy and the South Jersey Land and Water Trust. Their main limitation, in helping more municipalities protect their water quality and comply with their TMDL and MS4 permits, is money. Dedicated granting programs to technical assistance providers from state governments, regional governments, county governments, or private companies or foundations would help grow a technical assistance program.

Funding Sources

Potential funding sources to expand technical assistance providers' ongoing work include:

- state governments;
- regional governments;
- counties;
- private companies; and
- foundations.

Anticipated Outcomes

Short-term outcomes include reduced pressure on municipalities to comply with their water quality regulations, and potentially higher-quality permit applications.

Long-term outcomes include higher-quality water protection efforts to improve local water quality, and the sustainment of the technical assistance providers who receive support to help municipalities with their water quality efforts.

Anticipated Outcome

An expansion of the technical assistance programs that environmental entities have already developed to help municipalities with water quality issues has benefits for the participating municipalities, the technical assistance providers helping them, and the health of the municipalities' local waterways. Technical assistance would reduce the pressure on municipalities to comply with state permits and reduce the possibility of being penalized by the state for inaccurate or late permit applications. It would enable municipalities to work faster and at a lower cost, freeing them to attend to their other duties and allocate funding to other initiatives. Oversight from technical assistance providers would increase the quality of the municipalities' water quality protection efforts and contribute toward better water quality in the municipality overall. Technical assistance providers would gain more expertise through working with municipalities, developing stronger connections, helping to lay the foundation for more conservation projects in the future, and better ensuring their longevity as local and regional advocates.

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