

INTERIM Executive Summary of Lessons Learned from Five GE-Funded Watershed Studies

General Lessons to all 5:

1. **Collaboration is working!** There are substantive benefits to establishing a **forum** and bringing stakeholder groups together: improved communication, sharing of information, learning each other's capabilities, leveraging resources, better coordination, etc.
2. Most parties are **happy w/ the Corps' leadership role in facilitating collaborative efforts**. This role should not end with current studies, but should continue in the future.
3. In order to keep the collaborative momentum going, there is a **need for some level of continued funding** to support a federal liaison position (and for travel, maintaining tools, facilitate workshops) to continue collaborative effort after 5 studies are completed. Not just Corps PDT's saying this: state agencies cite the need for Federal resources to enhance liaison activities between states & Federal agencies. States want assurances that we are committed to staying in this effort – that their participation in watershed study has been worth their time.
4. The **common tools** developed during the watershed studies – for example, the program & project databases, the GIS databases, the lexicon of project attributes – **are important products in and of themselves**. As opposed to reports (that are completed), they live on, & can continue to be used. They help the stakeholders speak a common language, their visualization makes it easier for participants to see the connection of their programs and projects within a region, their development helps translate agency program metrics into region-wide measurements of success, and they can help avoid costly duplication. They are already being used – not just by the Corps, but by other agencies! But, they must be maintained – so that this exercise isn't just "populating another database".
5. All the studies cited a need to establish an **organizational/ institutional structure w/ a hierarchy** – a working group level, a steering committee (that makes recommendations to leadership), and a leadership committee (decision-makers).
6. All the studies see a benefit in **developing overall watershed visions/ objectives/ goals** – as a step towards developing potential watershed implementation plans. While there **may never be consensus in developing/ agreeing to an overall watershed implementation plan** (agencies don't want to surrender their autonomy or have their projects marginalized in a coordinated plan), developing the vision/ set of objectives helps agencies see how their

programs/ projects fit into the larger scheme of the watershed and can help guide their own agency priorities or implementation plans.

7. All 5 GE studies **involve a partnership w/ a multi-agency, multi-jurisdictional group**, which has greatly facilitated coordinating and collaborating with the state and local governments in the watershed: Virgin River Conservation Partnership, Middle Mississippi River Partnership, Western States Water Council, Great Lakes Regional Collaboration, and the Delaware River Basin Commission.

Lessons from Great Lakes Habitat Initiative

1. Measurements of project attributes (e.g., sustainability, connectivity, output units, etc.) are not available or consistent.
2. Collaborative planning can be complicated by agency/organization missions and priorities.
3. Collaborative planning & management requires **tools, institutions (e.g., steering committee), and leadership**.
4. **Visualization** of the project database makes it easier for participants to see the connection of their programs and projects – which encourages them to manage collaboratively.
5. Rigorous prioritization of projects across agencies/ organizations in a collaborative manner is not possible due to: diverse priorities & missions, potential divisiveness of this competition, and autonomy of agencies/ entities (no one wants their projects marginalized in a coordinated plan).
6. GLHI has improved coordination among agencies in addressing environmental issues facing the Great Lakes. **GLHI tools are already being used!** (Examples: Corps' Estuary Restoration Program, Coastal America, Cooperative Wetlands Restoration Program, Remedial Action Plan for EPA's Great Lakes National Program Office.)
7. GLHI tools are incomplete – only partial responses. This is partly due to concern database won't be used after April 2008.
8. Corps will prioritize/ categorize and develop an implementation plan for its 50 projects in the database. Other agencies invited to do the same.
9. Corps implementation plan illustrates how a multi-agency implementation plan could be pursued if so desired.

10. Recurring theme from state agencies is the **need for Federal resources to enhance liaison activities between states & Federal agencies**. States want assurances that project inventory/ database will be used by multiple Federal agencies in coordinating funding decisions.

11. Recurring comment related to the lifespan of the GLHI and its project database. There is little interest in investing effort in populating “yet another database” if this is a one-time effort.

12. **A clear product of the GLHI is that a forum for collaboration has been established!** Organizations have formed a community that understands each other. The Corps has facilitated meetings & provided communication tools. This community could continue to function in the future! These communities are ephemeral without a small but continual amount of funding for travel, maintenance of databases, facilitation of workshops, etc. **How to maintain the level of collaborative support? Additional funds will be required.**

13. Important tools include a **database of programs** (91 programs that indicate appropriate partners & funding sources for restoration efforts), a **visualization of projects**, a **lexicon of project attributes** (ecological: area, scarcity, connectivity, special status species, hydro character, geomorphic condition, invasive species, output measurement); social: national/ regional recognition, recreation, environmental equity, subsistence harvest, sacred sites, cultural resources); and economic criteria: cost, self-sustaining, cost per unit, employment), and an **implementation plan**.

14. **Blueprint forward:** Great Lakes Regional Collaboration should take a leadership role in maintaining GLHI program & project databases. Further develop the lexicon to translate agency program metrics into region-wide measures. This will help measure progress towards goals. **The Corps would provide the forum, lead & facilitate, and maintain the tools to make coordination easier.**

Lessons from Virgin River Watershed Analysis

Benefits from the Watershed Study:

1. Agencies are seeing a benefit to collaboration and have seen “watershed thinking” improve. They want to see this communication and collaboration continue and improve.
2. The desire to collaborate and be involved in watershed studies exists, but the collaboration needs leadership.

3. One of things that has worked well to assist in collaboration is the Virgin River Conservation Partnership. This group facilitates communication and collaboration. They provide: Clearinghouse of info, share knowledge and expertise, forum for discussion and for recommendations of strategies for moving forward, and help support and coordinate funding efforts.

Barriers experienced during Watershed Study:

1. Agency boundaries/missions are barriers to collaboration and to moving towards integrated solutions. Crossing political boundaries and going beyond agency/institutional areas of jurisdiction is challenging, but collaboration is helping to minimize those lines. Good collaboration throughout government organizations (e.g., the Federal 'family') and with the states is needed so that jurisdictional and agency boundaries don't severely limit a watershed planning approach.
2. There are different perceptions of what constitutes a watershed. EPA's thinks on a large-scale that includes uplands. Others have a more limited view of a watershed.
3. Corps ability to participate in non-project funded efforts.
4. Stakeholders are looking for useful tools or information, not just another report that sits on a shelf.

Lessons from Middle Mississippi River Regional Corridor

Benefits from the Watershed Study:

1. Stakeholder and agency involvement has been improving with this collaborative study. Communication has improved and there is a better understanding of one another's capabilities.
2. The Corps' involvement helped bring focus, energy and action to the study. Instead of the Corps providing a product we are providing a service of leadership and coordination. We are helping the communication amongst agencies and stakeholders.
3. The Middle Mississippi River Partnership is a regional collaborative working group similar to the Virgin River Conservation Partnership.

Barriers experienced during Watershed Study:

1. Need for collecting and sharing GIS data even after the study ends. Is this something the Corps can do? Can we maintain and share the data with stakeholders? Or is this something the USGS is better suited to do?
2. An issue is having the funds to pay for longer term coordinators for watersheds. Team members think that the Corps could excel in that role, because the Corps possesses the right mix of skill sets.
3. Cost sharing large studies in the future might be difficult.

Lessons from Western States Watershed Study

1. Putting together a Shared Vision Partnership Agreement with the WSWC was essential to help establish priorities and focus the study efforts.
2. Meaningful collaboration is difficult, but is improving in the study and has been very effective. This study has motivated others into action with minimal Federal funding.
3. Found support and resources from ERDC , IWR, MSC and HQUSACE. This benefited the customer and helped leverage study funds.
4. Regional Watershed Studies are an excellent learning experience for Corps planners. Watershed study teams need to be adaptive and prepared for shifts in team members' roles.
5. Support the concept of a multi-agency federal liaison position and a Western States Federal Support Team. Fed support team: what tasks capabilities are aligned amongst the various agencies?

Lessons from Multi-Jurisdictional Use & Management of Water Resources for the Delaware River Basin

1. The team's greatest lesson learned has been the need for collaborative efforts with FEMA, USGS, NWS and other Federal agencies. Through this study the PDT learned that a great deal of work is being done within the Basin and would have been unaware of these efforts until it was too late if not for the Watershed Study. The PDT has realized that the Corps' communications with other Federal agencies must improve if the Corps is to reduce or eliminate the duplication of efforts that this Watershed Study has been able to accomplish.
2. The PDT also recognizes the good fortune of being partnered with an organization such as Delaware River Basin Commission, which is in charge of

getting the States to come together to develop Basin-wide approaches to water resources issues. Hopefully through this Watershed Study it has become easier for the DRBC to bring the many Federal agencies together as well. This Watershed Study has made a tremendous impact on how the Federal agencies will work together in the future.