



## Nonpoint Source Watershed-Based Plan Review Guide

### Brief Description:

A cornerstone of the national guidelines is the requirement to develop and implement WBPs as a condition for eligibility of a large portion of Clean Water Act (CWA) Section 319 funding. WBPs require nine elements, including sufficient understanding of the water quality conditions, causes of NPS impairments, load reduction measures, funding sources, and implementation and monitoring to determine improvements to or restoration of water quality.

Region 6 reviews approximately 10 WBPs annually. The technical quality of these WBPs and the degree to which they meet national guidelines has differed because they are developed by many organizations with varying capacities. In addition, the states expressed a concern that different regional reviewers did not review WBPs in a consistent fashion (some being more critical than others). To clarify regional expectations for WBP acceptance and to improve the consistency of WBP reviews, a WBP review guide was developed. The review guide briefly explains the nine elements in the national guidelines and incorporates questions under each element on the types of data and information that may be appropriate. Reviewers can insert their comments and feedback into the guide itself. The resulting Word file can then be emailed to the originator. The Region 6 team worked together on the guide, allowed states the opportunity for input, and completed it in early 2010. To check reviewer consistency, the region conducted an exercise in which five program managers reviewed the same WBP and, afterwards, compared and discussed all written reviews. All participants felt this was enlightening and would likely help with review consistency in the future.

The WBP review guide is available at <http://www.epa.gov/region6/water/ecopro/watershd/nonpoint/watershed-plan-review.pdf>.

### *Subobjective:*

#### Water Quality

### *Type:*

#### Planning/Assessment

### *Highlights:*

- **What:** EPA Region 6 developed a watershed-based plan (WBP) review guide to encourage consistency in its reviews of WBP, improve the quality of the plans, and increase the restoration of impaired waters.
- **Who:** EPA Region 6
- **Why:** Protecting America's waters and building strong state and tribal partnerships are two of the Administrator's priorities. At a biannual region/states nonpoint source (NPS) workshop in FY 2010, states indicated that the region needed to be more consistent in its reviews of submitted WBPs. The need for consistency was also pointed out in the General Accountability Office's review of EPA's NPS Program in 2011. The region developed the review guide to ensure that WBPs are in harmony with national nonpoint source program guidelines, to strengthen partnerships with states, and to better protect America's waters.

### Current Status:

Currently, the WBP review guide is used routinely by Region 6 NPS program managers. Written comments embedded in the review guide are shared with the state or watershed group to aid in further developing or revising WBPs.

### Outcomes:

As a result of the application of the WBP review guide, Region 6 is better equipped to achieve one of the Administrator's priorities: protecting America's waters. Staff reviews of WBPs have been more consistent. States are developing better WBPs as well. One state, New Mexico, now uses the

review guide for its own use prior to submitting their WBP to the region for acceptance. Arkansas uses the information provided from the region's review to improve in-house staff capacity on WBP reviews and shares the information with their own watershed partners.

### **Lessons Learned/Recommendations:**

EPA Region 6 has learned that through the use of the review guide, the region's relationships with state and tribes can be improved if the evaluation of plans is conducted fairly and

consistently. Having a follow up review exercise for staff is valuable. The review guide can be used by other regions and/or states. It is already being utilized by some Region 6 state partners.

### **Contact Information:**

Brad Lamb, 214-665-6683

Tina Hendon 214-665-6619

