

Salmon Falls Watershed Collaborative

Brief Description:

This best practice was implemented as part of a pilot project selected by the national Source Water Collaborative (SWC) (http://www.sourcewatercollaborative.org/) Spearheaded by EPA and other key partners, the SWC was originally formed in 2006 with the goal of combining the strengths and tools of a diverse set of member organizations to act now and protect drinking water sources for generations to come. Currently consisting of 24 federal, state, and local partners, the SWC has come together to further the goals of protecting sources of drinking water—recognizing that resources are extremely limited, authorities are split, and the actors who can actually protect source waters are diffuse.

In October 2010, more than 80 stakeholders from Maine and New Hampshire collaborated to identify priority action areas for the SFWC. As a result, an action plan was developed covering five key principles: 1) conserving undeveloped lands; 2) employing low impact development and stormwater management practices; 3) applying state and local source water protection rules; 4) identifying and cleaning up potential sources of contamination; and 5) engaging and inspiring governments, organizations, and citizens in collaborative actions to sustain the Salmon Falls watershed. Each strategy in the action plan includes detailed information about 1) issues addressed, 2) lead organizations, 3) cooperators, 4) funding sources, and 5) metrics. This level of detail establishes expectations for task completion and incorporates accountability for all project partners. The action plan is available at http:// www.prep.unh.edu/sfwc.htm.

Current Status:

The implementation of the project's action plan is ongoing and continues to produce results. The efforts include conserving forested lands; implementing low impact development ordinances and stormwater management practices; and targeting underground storage tanks, RCRA, and SPCC inspections in drinking water protection areas. The core group, consisting of EPA and state drinking water staff, a project manager from

Subobjective:

Water Safe to Drink

Type:

Source Water Planning

Highlights:

- What: The Salmon Falls Watershed Collaborative (SFWC) demonstrates how to improve water quality in a river that is a source of drinking water for 47,000 people and serves as the headwaters of the Great Bay Estuary, an ecosystem of national importance.
- Who: EPA Region 1 Drinking Water staff; Maine and New Hampshire Drinking Water and Nonpoint Source Programs; New Hampshire and Maine Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) state programs; Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve; Piscataqua Region Estuaries Partnership (PREP); Granite State and Maine Rural Water Associations; Acton Wakefield Watersheds Alliance; Berwick (Maine) Water Department; the City of Somersworth, NH; local land trusts; and County Soil and Water Conservation Districts.
- Why: Conceived by the Maine and New Hampshire drinking water protection programs, the SFWC brought together regional, state, and local stakeholders and experts to develop and implement an action plan to protect clean drinking water for current and future generations. The watershed is threatened by an increase in polluted stormwater runoff resulting from rapid population growth and conversion of forested land to developed areas.

PREP (NH), and a facilitator from the Wells (Maine) Research Reserve programs, participates in monthly conference calls to update each other on action plan implementation. Other collaborative members stay informed via "Basecamp," an interactive tool that allows the group to communicate and post documents.

Outcomes:

Through the partnership with Maine and New Hampshire NRCS, the project has leveraged more than \$300,000 in Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), through funding of Forestry Conservation Activity Plans for private landowners, and Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP). In FY 2012, Maine and New Hampshire NRCS staff targeted projects in this watershed and funded 22 EQIP applications for Forest Management Plans on 3,976 acres of private forest lands. In FY 2013, NRCS will fund more plans as well as conservation practices, including BMPs for riparian areas, logging roads, and stream crossings.

In 2012, key elements of the project were replicated by New Hampshire NRCS in the Merrimack River watershed, which provides drinking water to 500,000 people. This project could be replicated in other watersheds that are experiencing rapid population growth and development pressures. In particular, the 2009 U.S. Forest Service report, Private Forests, Public Benefits, provides a roadmap for prioritizing best practices

in other watersheds. EPA also worked closely with NRCS to develop a toolkit for USDA/EPA collaboration: http://www.sourcewatercollaborative.org/swp-usda/.

Lessons Learned/Recommendations:

It is important to identify and include all partners, including EPA and state colleagues in the Drinking Water, Nonpoint Source, and National Estuary Programs, who have a stake in achieving project goals. EPA's regional office was instrumental in coordinating water quality data management between the two states and providing GIS support to ensure that the bi-state watershed data was consistent. The successful partnership with NRCS was also critical. Lastly, the timing of the project coincided with USDA's High Priority Performance Goal for Water (to improve water quality on 6 million acres nationwide), further incentivizing NRCS participation.

Contact Information:

Kira Jacobs, 617-918-1817 http://www.prep.unh.edu/sfwc.htm

