

Decision Summary

Source Water Stewardship Implementation Meeting

July 24, 2003

The following decision summary outlines key next steps identified by committee members at the implementation meeting held July 24, 2003. It should be noted that the committee reviewed and discussed all of the team's recommendations at this meeting and, in general, agreed that they were important and implementable. There was not an attempt to prioritize or rank all of the team's recommendations. Instead, the committee outlined three types of strategies from the report and prioritized next steps for each: (1) regulatory land protections, (2) voluntary land protections, and (3) land stewardship. Because the NRWA already has a grant to begin implementation of the team's stewardship recommendations, the committee did not discuss this in great detail. The following decision-summary focuses on high priority next steps to move forward on regulatory and voluntary land protection strategies.

Create a regional entity to coordinate drinking water focused land protection and stewardship activities in the Squannacook-Nissitissit.

In order to facilitate collaboration on land protection and stewardship activities in the Squannacook and Nissitissit, the Nashua River Watershed Association agreed to coordinate a coalition of organizations to plan, prioritize and implement strategies to protect drinking water resources through zoning, land acquisition and stewardship.

The purpose of the coalition would be to improve the coordination of existing activities to accomplish shared goals and to initiate new activities, where necessary, through partnerships to address high priority gaps in water resource protection.

The coalition's first action item would be to review existing maps and watershed analyses and develop an agreed upon set of prioritization criteria for protection and stewardship activities. This is a critical first step, as land trusts and conservation commissions need the information in order to prioritize their own protection efforts. Some of the prioritization issues that the coalition needs to address are:

1. What criteria should be used to identify the highest priority areas for voluntary acquisition, i.e. Zone I source protection areas, tracts of forest adjacent to protected areas, etc.,
2. What are the towns current protection priorities for cultural, historic or recreational purposes and where do they overlap with water resource protection needs,
3. Where is funding for conservation most likely, as this will affect where acquisition is most feasible, and
4. Where can regulatory protections be most effective.

The coalition's second action item would be to identify an appropriate structure for the coalition, given its varied purposes, and which organizations and individuals need to be involved. Some of the key issues that need to be addressed include:

1. Whether there should be separate groups dealing with regulatory strategies and voluntary strategies, as conflicts of interest can arise when organizations are involved in promoting both, and
2. Whether the group will advocate or only educate on zoning and other regulatory issues.

It was recommended that outreach be conducted to solicit involvement from:

- Water suppliers,
- RPA and planning commissions
- State agencies

- Local land trusts
- Members of town Conservation Commissions, Open Space Committees, Planning Boards,
- Landowners.

NRWA agreed to set up an initial meeting in the Fall of 2003 as a next step, either with a core steering committee to begin planning or with the broader coalition members.

Provide towns with the tools and resources they need to implement land use controls that protect source areas.

In order to implement sound and effective land use protections, town staff and selectmen need:

- The scientific justification for land protection to protect drinking water, including a concise explanation of the threats to source water, the implications of land use change, and the efficacy of protection.
- Maps identifying where regulatory protections are most needed and will be most effective.
- Build-out analysis for their town (completed by MA)
- Location of potential future water supplies
- Model ordinances that have been successfully implemented in other jurisdictions.

Model by-laws need to be identified for aquifer protection districts, buffer zones and management of septic systems, road salt and stormwater runoff. There are multiple sources for model ordinances including: (1) EPA model ordinance website, (2) Center for Watershed Protection website, (3) MA and NH state models, and (4) Townsend's aquifer protection district.

A set of model ordinances needs to be agreed upon by the coalition and those ordinances must then be promoted to towns within the watershed for implementation. The NRWA is currently putting together a model by-law CD that could be the foundation for this effort. The Northeast Rural Water Association will be implementing source protection plans with communities throughout the watershed and, through that effort, will be able to identify communities most ready for and in-need of additional regulatory protections of water resources.

The University of Massachusetts has produced accurate and scientifically justifiable maps that show clearly where protection of forests, wetlands and recharge areas is critical to drinking water protection. These maps need to be made accessible to local towns in a format that will be most useful for their decision-making processes. In some cases, towns have existing zoning overlays to protect water resources, the boundaries of which may need to be altered to reflect the most current knowledge of recharge and contributing areas.

The Source Water Issues Report, the Stewardship Exchange Team Report and the Source Water Assessments being completed for each source area in the watershed summarize the key threats to the protection of drinking water. This information must be summarized in a brief and compelling format that makes the case for protection.

Strategies then need to be developed to provide these resources to both town staff and selectmen in the most effective way possible. One suggestion was that a presentation be developed that could be used at selectmen's meetings in all of the towns in the watershed and outreach be conducted to selectmen to arrange an invitation to present.