

## **Regional Water Management Task Force**

### ***Possible Models for Enhanced Collaboration in Water Resource Decision Making***

Numerous institutional alternatives could be proposed as means of improving water-related planning and operations activities in southwestern Pennsylvania. By way of illustration, several models are presented below. **These models are offered simply to give stakeholders a clearer sense of the possibilities and should not be interpreted as recommendations.**

#### ***Model A – Regional Planning:***

This option would create a Southwestern Pennsylvania Regional Water District. The district would be empowered to do regional water planning and to levy a per-capita tax to support its planning functions (Atlanta is doing its planning work for 15 cents to \$1 per-capita depending on the year's workload). The district would make recommendations regarding such issues as where new infrastructure should or should not be constructed, how capacity limitations or combined sewer overflows will be eliminated, how to remedy failing septic systems in particular areas, and which streams in the region warrant immediate remediation attention. The district would not have enforcement power over local governments, but its work would carry implicit authority due to the likelihood that state and federal regulatory and financing agencies would not approve local plans that deviate from the regional plan.

#### ***Model B – Regional Planning and Financing:***

This option would also create a Southwestern Pennsylvania Regional Water District. The district would be empowered not only to do regional water planning and to levy a per capita tax to support its planning functions, but also to select and fund water and sewage projects throughout the region. It would function similarly to the Allegheny Regional Asset District, collecting funds regionally and then allocating those funds to selected projects. The district could have the responsibility for attracting, pooling, managing and allocating all PENNVEST, RUS, DEP, EPA, and DCNR funds for water related activities within the region. It would also participate in regulatory proceedings involving DEP, EPA, and local governments. Local governments would be compelled to complete water management plans in cooperation with the district, and consistency with regional plans would be a prerequisite for local plans seeking state or federal funding.

*Additional features that could be included with models A or B:*

- Operation of the individual systems would continue on a local level, but regional funding mechanisms could provide incentives for multi-municipal collaboration.
- Mechanisms for the expansion of the district into contiguous counties within the Ohio River Basin (at their request) could be built into the proposal.

#### ***Model C – Watershed or County Operations and Planning:***

This alternative would create multiple authorities for the purpose of water resource planning on a watershed/county basis. Each authority would be empowered to do integrated water resource planning for its entire watershed/county and to levy per-capita taxes to support its planning functions. These authorities may also be empowered to collect funds for infrastructure investment in their respective watersheds/counties. Each authority would have the responsibility for attracting, pooling, managing and allocating all PENNVEST, RUS, DEP, EPA and DCNR water-related funds within its watershed/county. These authorities' plans would be

developed in cooperation with local governments and would be binding once adopted. Local, state, and federal regulators would agree to issue permits only to governments complying with these authorities' plans. Operation of the individual systems would continue on a local level; however, transfer of system ownership or operation responsibilities to the watershed/county authority would be permissible. Financial incentives could be offered to encourage this. Governance of these authorities could be established in any number of ways. A regional coordinating committee would be created, consisting of representation from the watershed/county authorities and charged with the responsibility to create regional water plans.

***Model D – Incentives for decentralized collaboration:***

In view of the locally based collaboration already taking place in the region and the challenges involved in creating a regional entity, some may feel that the most productive approach to regional water management is to assist the implementation of best management practices within the existing governance structure. This approach could entail the establishment and promotion of a Southwestern Pennsylvania Water Management Advisory Committee. The committee would include participation from DEP, DCED, PENNVEST, DCNR, and conservation organizations, plus county appointees with legal, managerial, environmental, land development, and engineering expertise. The committee would collect examples of best practices in water resource planning and management and would publicize them through presentations and conferences throughout the region. It would also meet to review specific situations or problems that call for attention, either at the request of the entities involved or because it believes the situation should not be allowed to continue. The committee would make specific recommendations for each situation it analyzes. These recommendations might include changes in staffing or management; development of new facilities; closure of existing facilities; establishment of new connections between water or sewage management entities; new forms of collaboration between entities; or dissolution or consolidation of entities. Committee recommendations would have no legally binding force.

*Additional features that could be included with any of the models above:*

- Technical assistance to municipalities/authorities and individual homeowners.
  - Education about water management issues on a regional level.
  - Data collection and analysis of the region's waters.
  - Advocacy and communication with all levels of government to attract additional resources to the region.
- Any of the presented models could be gradually brought into full existence over a period of years, with interim institutional steps. Powers and functions could be added to the regional entities over a number of years.