

Let's Coordinate Volunteer Monitoring October 29, 2005 Organizing Meeting

Attendees – Grace Terry (Roanoke River Monitors), Wes Jargowski (Roanoke River Monitors), Peggy Sleevi (Trinity Episcopal School), Wendy Richards (Maury SOS), Steve Richards (Maury SOS), Mary Dunbar (Goose Creek Association), Hazle Edens (Goose Creek Association), Nicole Sandberg (Department of Conservation and Recreation), Joanna Cornell (Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District), Jules Marron, Dick Clark (Lake Anna Civic Association), Wayne Kirkpatrick (Dan River Basin Commission), Stan Smith (Smith Mountain Lake Association), Katie Register (Clean VA Waterways), Jay Gilliam (Virginia Watershed Alliance), John Holmes (Environmental Alliance for Senior Involvement), Roger Stewart (Department of Environmental Quality), Brad Belo (Chickahominy Watershed Alliance), David Buckalew (Clean VA Waterways – Longwood University), Krista Sharp (Friends of the Rappahannock), Darryl Glover (Department of Environmental Quality), James Beckley (Department of Environmental Quality), Stacey Brown (Virginia Save Our Streams), Stacey Moulds (Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay), Jen Sidleck (Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay), JP Candler (Candler Communications), Robin Patton (South Anna Monitoring Project), George Price (Upper Tennessee Roundtable).

Summary of Meeting

I. *Where have we been?* We spent the majority of the morning discussing the current status of volunteer monitoring in Virginia and some of the issues for volunteer monitors.

Discussion

How can a potential volunteer learn more about volunteer monitoring?

- The internet (e.g., www.volunteermatch.org)
- Soil & Water Conservation Districts
- Through the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)
- Through local conservation venues (e.g., Roanoke's Explore Park)

What are some issues currently facing volunteer monitoring groups?

- Limited (or no) capacity/ability to train new volunteers
- Need for expanded training programs (e.g., "train-the-trainer" programs)
- The administration/coordination required to sustain a volunteer monitoring group is difficult/time consuming
- There are multiple users of the data collected, each with their own interfaces and requirements; many organizations only have the time and resources to get their data in to the DEQ
- One of the biggest potential users of volunteer monitoring data – the general public – isn't aware of the data's existence and/or how to access the data

II. *Where do we want to go?* Just before lunch we briefly discussed the idea of coordinating volunteer monitoring activities in Virginia. Stacey Brown and Stacey Moulds presented information (listed below) on a poster from which our discussion was focused.

POSTER: Can a coordinated approach help volunteer monitoring programs in Virginia?

- Can we create a menu of methods?
- Can we develop a menu of appropriate uses for volunteer generated data?
- Can this approach help fill data gaps?
- Can we coordinate efforts to provide new sources of funding?
- Can we create a place for dialogue and support?
- Can we harness the capacity of volunteers to become resources in their communities?
- Can we create centralized training venues for volunteers?
- Can we be advocates for volunteer monitoring throughout Virginia?
- Can we work on a watershed basis/using the existing watershed framework to deliver programs?
- Can we coordinate efforts without stepping on toes – work together while respecting the needs and place of existing volunteer monitoring organizations?

Discussion

- Should be using an existing statewide organization or is there a group in the wings?
- What are we trying to address – have we defined the problem?
- Strengths in a Coordinated Approach -- Power through coordination
- Statewide (Citizen) Organizations
 - Virginia Save Our Streams
 - Citizens for Water Quality
 - Virginia Water Monitoring Council
 - VA Watershed's Alliance
 - Clean VA Waterways
 - VA Lake Management Association
- Statewide Organization Development
- Making data actionable
- Include groups at all levels
- Make monitoring and becoming a monitor easier
- Fundraising
- Private and public sources
- Why are we here – what is the problem?
 1. Make it easier – funding and dialogue
 2. Data constancy and coordination
 3. Here to fix problem

III. *How do we get there?* Just after lunch, Stacey Brown and Stacey Moulds presented the framework for Kentucky's Watershed Watch – which may serve as a model. See attached presentation for KY Model

Kentucky Watershed Watch Model

- Statewide coordinated body
- Regional Watershed organizations
- Tiered approach
- Identified protocols
- Coordinated training events on a watershed basis
- Centralized fundraising
- Centralized data management

Discussion

- If a statewide volunteer monitoring organization was created, what should it look like?
- It should make monitoring and becoming a monitor easier
 - Easy/intuitive access to information
 - Consistent/regularly scheduled training
- It could institute a “train-the-trainer” program
- It should make the data that is collected accessible and actionable
 - “centralized data management”
 - Web-enabled data input and management
- It should ensure the proper interpretation and dissemination of the data collected
- It should ensure that the data collected reflect measurable results
- It should advocate/encourage the local use of the data collected
- It should ensure that the data be used as a teaching tool
- It should be a source of information/assistance for individual monitoring groups interested in learning more about potential funding opportunities
- It should be a fundraising entity unto itself, able to apply for larger grants that smaller, individual groups might not be eligible for; these grants, if awarded, would then be distributed to the individual member groups
- It should take advantage of/leverage the collective knowledge base and skill set of its members – avoid having individual member groups “re-invent the wheel”
- It should in no way dampen the enthusiasm that exists today among the individual groups
- It should be a “one-stop-shopping” resource for individuals and groups that want to learn more about:
 - General information on what volunteer monitoring is
 - How one becomes trained to be a volunteer monitor
 - The different methods for collecting data and the different levels of data (protocols) that exist
 - Contact information for local volunteer monitoring groups

- It could feature an annual event to present the past year's data as well as plan for the coming year (similar to the Citizen's for Water Quality event)
- It could be an information resource for ALL water-related issues (even those that the organization does not actively monitor)
- It should be a political presence and legislative advocate for water related issues
- It should be a technical resource for new/smaller groups interested in becoming volunteer monitors
- It should be structured as a "bottom up" organization, taking its direction and garnering its strength from the individual member groups it was formed to represent

WE REACHED CONSENSUS FOR A COORDINATED APPROACH!!

IV. *Summary and Next Steps...* At this point we attempted to outline some next steps towards coordinating volunteer monitoring.

Create an Organizational Committee

- Determine how the organization is structured and how it will function
- Rely heavily on the list above when structuring the Organization and defining its various functions and objectives
- Inventory of its current assets and partnerships, public and private, when structuring the organization. This inventory will also ask:
 - What's currently being done well?
 - What could be done better?
 - What's not being done at all that should be?
- Define how the organization will benefit its individual member groups
- Create awareness of the organization and its objectives with the next administration
- Solicit folks to meet with the next Secretary of Natural Resources to apprise them of our activities

Create a Technical Committee

A Technical Committee will also need to be created - no specifics were mentioned at this time

Discussion

- Organizational Structure – Committee Structure
 - Organizational Committee
 - Technical Committee
 - Fundraising Committee
 - Inventory Committee
- Staffing is the first priority
- Outline what this potential resource can do for volunteer monitoring groups. Doesn't cost anything to talk about this.

- Contact Alice Mayo from the EPA
- Jay offered to be liaison between the organizational group and roundtables
- Send e-mail soliciting participation from volunteer monitoring organizations
- Perhaps calling our group Citizens for Water Quality