

Outline

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Introduction

Understanding water quality conditions and having a tool box of potential action steps are important but not the sole factors in protecting and improving our waters. A third piece is the involvement of the citizens who live, work and recreate in the watershed. We can have an excellent understanding of the problems and solutions but without the buy-in and actions by local people real change cannot occur. This buy-in and action is called civic engagement.

Civic engagement interventions involve communication, collaborative planning, and collective action to integrate civic and scientific knowledge, establish cultural goals alongside ecological protection/restoration goals, and achieve desired cultural and ecological outcome. Outreach, education and capacity building Interventions are aimed at increasing awareness, promoting conservation behaviors and building community capacity for active participation and leadership in water quality and watershed restoration and protection.

Actions Needed

Actions that will be needed if meaningful civic engagement is to happen in the Cannon River watershed include:

- Community Capacity Monitoring and Assessment
- Leadership Development / Local Capacity Building
- Civic Engagement Interventions (includes education, outreach, communication and capacity building strategies)
- Performance Tracking for purposes of Adaptive Management

Community Capacity

Strategies for watershed restoration and protection will be developed using data and information that characterize the condition of water quality and habitat as well as the capacity for the impacted communities to respond to watershed management issues. The first step is to collect and analyze data regarding community capacity in order to begin to identify, design and, as time and resources permit, execute appropriate interventions that utilize and strengthen that capacity. This work is intended to set the stage for sustained involvement of an active, diverse and expanded public throughout the 10-year watershed monitoring and management cycle and beyond.

Dr. Mae Davenport (2011), University of Minnesota, Department of Forest Resources, explains community capital and capacity in the following way:

Community capacity is the interaction of human capital, organizational resources, and social capital existing within a given community that can be leveraged to solve collective problems and improve or maintain the well-being of that community. It may operate through informal social processes and/or organized efforts by individuals, organizations, and social networks that exist among them and between them and the larger systems of which the community is a part (Chaskin, R., Brown, P., Venkatesh, S. & Vidal, A., 2001, p. 7).

While *community capital* encompasses a variety of resources or assets (e.g., physical, financial, human) upon which a community can draw in times of need, *community capacity* refers to the activation or mobilization of these assets toward social or institutional change. Put differently, a community may possess a broad range of capitals needed to cope with problems but lack the capacity to realize common goals, make decisions collaboratively, and act collectively.

The four levels of capacities listed below inform ecosystem- and watershed-based projects and are mutually supporting. For instance, a high level of programmatic capacity is likely to contribute to member capacity by increasing awareness of and concern for water resources.

- *Member capacity* refers to community members' awareness of, concern about, and sense of responsibility for consequences that altogether contribute to pro-environmental behaviors.
- *Relational capacity* encompasses interpersonal relationships and social networks within communities that promote information and idea exchange. Fostering a sense of community and common understanding of consequences is important.
- *Organizational capacity* includes non-government and government organizations as well as institutional arrangements that support collaborative decision-making, leadership development, adaptive learning, resource pooling and coordination within and across communities.
- *Programmatic capacity* relates to conservation, education, and civic engagement programs created to sustainably manage watersheds. For these programs to be effective they should be coordinated across political boundaries, include effective communication and collaborative decision-making, facilitate resource sharing and innovation, encompass integrated systems monitoring, and promote adaptive learning and flexibility.

Leadership Development / Local Capacity Building

Providing informal or formal training for local professionals and civic leaders who are interested in learning techniques used in community capacity assessment and civic engagement effort should be undertaken. These people would play ongoing roles in sustaining local civic engagement in partnership with agencies and organizations involved in watershed assessment and restoration/protection planning and implementation.

Civic Engagement Events, Outreach, Education and Capacity Building Interventions

Customary public involvement relies heavily on education, communication and outreach. We are proposing to go beyond this approach, placing special emphasis on connecting people to the idea of water quality impacts, restoration and protection; then creating the space or climate through different civic engagement interventions that help them become oriented to and frame the issues in their own terms; gain direct experience with the watershed management monitoring, assessment and planning as well as restoration, protection and community capacity building actions; and then master the information and processes involved in addressing watershed concerns locally. In the course of this process, when all these pieces are able to fall into place sequentially, members of the community and their affiliated organizations are more likely to be transformed to active participants and civic leaders.

Performance Tracking and Adaptive Management

By assessing the effectiveness of social science monitoring, civic engagement, outreach, education and capacity building interventions, project staff and citizen partners are better able to adapt the projects to changing conditions and document their accomplishments. Records of lessons learned from the more experimental approaches to civic engagement together with these assessments will help improve the civic engagement process.

References

Davenport, M. (2011). *A multilevel community capacity model for sustainable watershed management*. Manuscript submitted for publication.