DNR Watershed Improvement Program: Changes and New Opportunities Workshops
Feb 2, 3 & 4, 2010

Frequently Asked Questions

Water Monitoring

Q: What is the best option for local watershed groups to start monitoring a stream?
A: IOWATER is a great way to get the community involved through volunteer water quality monitoring. You can also contact the DNR Watershed Improvement staff (http://www.iowadnr.gov/water/watershed/coord.html#staff) or Watershed and Assessment Staff (http://www.igsb.uiowa.edu/wqm/staff.htm) for more options available to you.

Q: Would you consider IOWATER a tool to help a local watershed group get people involved?
A: Participating in IOWATER is an excellent method to help generate local awareness and interest in a watershed and its water quality challenges.

Q: How does the funding work for water monitoring? How do you apply for it?
A: The DSC Watershed Development and Planning Assistance Grant includes a supplemental application form for water monitoring which, if the underlying grant is approved, would be considered for funding by DNR (319) funds. Funds for water monitoring can also be requested as part of a DNR Watershed Planning Grant application. In addition, DNR Watershed Implementation Grant recipients automatically receive supplemental funding assistance to support monitoring to track project effectiveness.

Q: Is there a possibility to use IBI studies to assess "before and after" conditions resulting from an implementation project?
A: Yes, the IBI (Index of biological Integrity) should be measured periodically before, during, and after BMP implementation has been completed. This is the only quantitative way to determine if biologically impaired streams are improving.

Q: Can biological monitoring be a component of a monitoring plan?
A; Yes, if the impairment is a biological impairment.

Q: What if my watershed straddles the border of Iowa and another state? Can we share information? Can we share water quality data?
A: Yes you can share water monitoring data and collaborate over the border.

Impaired Waters

Q: What if I have a good project but the waterbody is not impaired?

A: Due to EPA funding rules, DNR (319) funds are restricted to supporting projects addressing impaired waters. Please contact DNR Watershed Improvement Program staff for a further explanation and to explore your options.

Q: What if I have a waterbody that is not impaired but it drains to an impaired waterbody? Should I get it impaired? Can I still get DNR (319) funds for my project?
A: A waterbody that is not impaired but drains to an impaired waterbody must be determined to be a contributing source to the impairment. There must be data that shows the waterbody is significantly contributing to the impairment. If so, the DNR will consider funding the project.

Q: What if my current project (waterbody) is proposed to be delisted? What should I do if I am currently working on it? What am I to do at the time of delisting?
A: You should continue to focus on your current project goals. Once it is delisted you should consider making plans to promote your success.

Q: How is an impairment removed? What is the process?
A: It depends on the impairment, but generally there must be sufficient credible data compiled and analyzed by DNR, and reviewed and approved by EPA, prior to the impairment being removed. The process of delisting waterbodies from the Impaired Waters List is done on a biennial basis (once every two years) on even numbered years. The DNR Watershed Monitoring and Assessment Section staff is in charge of this process.

Watershed Improvement Program Related Questions

Q: Previously in the DNR/DSC joint application the applicant would request a lump-sum of money from both agencies. Now there are separate columns for DNR funds (319 funds) and DSC (WPF, WSPF funds). How do we know the amount to ask and from which agency?
A: DNR funds (Section 319) are to be used for practices that will reduce the impairing pollutants. For example, if bacteria is the pollutant "impairing" the waterbody, practices such as basins and public outreach efforts focused on septic systems—since these efforts focus on reducing bacteria—are likely to be approved for funding. DNR funds can also be used to support staff, travel and training, and public outreach (I/E). If appropriate, DNR and DSC will also try to work together to swap line item requests to provide appropriate levels of funding from each program source consistent with each program's funding rules.

Q: Who do I contact if I need GIS support?
A: Please contact your Basin Coordinator for GIS support. The Basin Coordinator will then forward the request to the appropriate IA DNR - GIS support staff.

Q: What is the 10% advance cited in the RFAs? How is that different from current practices?
A: This is a funding mechanism allowed for in the DNR contract to provide sufficient cash flow, up front, to a grantee to ensure the local watershed group has sufficient funds to

initiate its planning process or implementation project. It only applies if DNR contracts directly with groups rather than through DSC.

Q: How are locals going to come up with the local cash match for the planning grant?
A: How the locals raise funds for the match requirement is a local decision and will vary from one watershed to another. Watershed groups may want to contact local outdoors groups, chambers of commerce, service organizations, businesses, cities, counties, or other groups in the watershed to raise the local cash match. The Watershed Improvement Program believes local watershed groups that are committed to improving water quality can raise the required funds. Planning Grants only require a local cash match of 20 percent of the overall local match. This translates to a local cash match of only $1,000 to $5,000, depending on the size of the grant award. (Awards range from $10,000 to $50,000.)

Q: Once a WMP is approved are you indicating there is a continuous supply of watershed improvement dollars to support implementation? How does that square with accountability? How do you make sure a watershed project is performing?
A: Watersheds that have an approved WMP are eligible for ongoing watershed improvement dollars. The Watershed Improvement Program historically awards implementation funding on a competitive basis. However, since one of the EPA elements is monitoring and measureables, the Watershed Improvement Program uses monitoring data and performance measures to gauge if a project is making sufficient progress to warrant additional funding.

Q: What if I have a project that will be in its 6th year and would like to request a 2 year extension?
A: It will depend on the project and your justification for additional funding. Since EPA 319 program grants to DNR must be spent within 7 years, you would have to make a case for why the extension is needed, such as that the additional time and additional funding (if needed) would enable the project to meet its goals. Contact your respective DNR Project Officer for further clarification and to explore available options.

Q: What EPA region is Iowa in? As far as Iowa, where is our standing for EPA 319 funding relative to other states? Is it based on population?
A; Iowa is located in EPA Region 7. Other states in Region 7 include, Missouri, Nebraska, and Kansas. Currently the amount of Section 319 funds a state receives is based on a formula that is tied to the state's population.

Watershed Planning

Q: How long does it take to prepare a WMP?
A: It depends on several factors, including the size of the watershed, the complexity of the problem(s) and solutions, the resources available locally to devote to the planning process, and local commitment to move forward in a timely manner. DNR Watershed Planning Grants are typically awarded for up to 24 months, which generally should be sufficient time to complete most plans at the HUC-12 watershed scale.

Q: How often should the Watershed Management Plan (WMP) be updated?
A: As often as needed to ensure it remains timely and relevant. The Watershed Improvement Program suggests you consider reviewing it once a year and make revisions or updates if needed. This can be done in conjunction with the preparation of your annual workplan or when new information is available.

Q: Once you have a WMP that has been written and approved, as implementation progresses, how often and what type of adjustments would you need to make to the plan?
A; WMPs should be updated as needed. Some WMPs may be updated yearly, while others may only need updating every few years.

Q: How long does the WMP approval process take? Will there be a significant delay since EPA has to review and approve the WMP?
A: It depends on whether the local watershed group has fully addressed EPA's 9-element Watershed Management Planning Criteria (http://www.iowadnr.gov/water/watershed/files/wmp_guide.pdf). Assuming these criteria have been met, the process of reviewing and approving the draft WMP should take approximately 45 days. The Watershed Improvement Program will work closely with EPA to minimize delays in the approval process.

Q: How often will DNR solicit for Watershed Planning Grant applications?
A: It depends on how much money the Watershed Improvement Program has available for this purpose, how many applications are funded through each solicitation, and how much money is awarded. Currently, there are tentative plans to offer another Watershed Planning Grants RFA in the summer of 2010.

Q: How do DSC development grants work with DNR planning grants?
A: DSC Watershed Development and Planning Assistance Grants typically focus on assessment activities. DNR Watershed Planning Grants can help fund assessments, the community-based planning process, water monitoring, public outreach, and the actual writing of the WMP.

Q: How have people been prioritizing BMPs in their area? How do you prioritize in a WMP?
A: When prioritizing BMPs, be sure to consider the following:

- Funds available
- Return on funds to be invested
- Time and other non-financial resource limitations
- Ability to get the action done
- Early successes motivate more action
- Some actions rely on other actions for success

Q: Why are some watershed groups preparing WMPs without funding from DNR? Was it a timing issue?
A: Some groups have sufficient funds and resources from other sources to complete the plan without outside help.

Q: After a WMP has been completed and an implementation project has been approved and accepted, can we adjust practices? Can we adjust funds?
A: Yes, watershed management plans and project implementation plans are meant to be flexible and adapted, as needed, to meet water quality goals.

TMDL Process

Q: How does DNR select waterbodies to prioritize for TMDL development? Is there a waiting list for impaired waters to have a TMDL?
A: TMDL development priorities are determined by a number of factors, but one of the most important factors is the degree of local interest in improving water quality in the watershed. The TMDL program has a five year schedule posted on the Watershed Improvement Program website (http://www.iowadnr.gov/water/watershed/tmdl/schedule.html) which is updated yearly. Local watershed groups may contact the DNR TMDL Coordinator (http://www.iowadnr.gov/water/watershed/staff.html) to request that their waterbody be added or moved up on the TMDL schedule. It is also important to remember that there are over 400 impaired waters needing a TMDL, but the TMDL Program can only complete about 10 to 12 TMDLs per year.

Q: What if I have a current project and a TMDL is completed during the project that includes additional pollutants? What if there are additional impairments not addressed by the TMDL? Do I incorporate those into my WMP? How?
A: WMPs are meant to be dynamic and new information and strategies to address additional impairments should be included when it is available. Please contact DNR Watershed Improvement staff or your Basin Coordinator further information (http://www.iowadnr.gov/water/watershed/coord.html#staff).

Q: If indicator bacteria were to change from *E. coli* to something else how will that change existing or future TMDLs?
A: Even if the metric for measuring bacterial impairments changes, the TMDL process will remain the same. Existing data will still be useful. EPA will provide a method to convert the *E. coli* data to the new indicator parameter.

Stressor Identification/Biological Impairments

Q: What are the usual underlying causes (pollutants) of a biological impairment?
A: Each biological impairment is unique and it is usually a combination of stressors that are

causing the impairment. Therefore, it is impossible to make generalizations about causes without completing a stressor identification for the waterbody.

Q: Is it ok for Project Coordinators to contact DNR Stressor Identification (SI) staff to get a better understanding of a biological impairment?
A: Yes, you are encouraged to contact them whenever you have questions (http://www.iowadnr.gov/water/watershed/staff.html). It is also a good idea to contact them as early as possible since the SI process can take several years to complete.

Q: How could IOWATER be integrated into the SI process?
A: IOWATER monitoring methods are not as detailed as the professional monitoring methods used by DNR, and generally do not meet the criteria for "credible data" but the data can be used to get a fuller picture of what is happening in the watershed.

Q: Do you run IBI assessments prior to impairing all waters?
A: No, the IBI (Index of biological Integrity) is only used on biologically impaired streams on which biological monitoring has occurred. There is currently no IBI for lake systems.

Q: Do bacteria impairments need to have an SI completed? How do we calculate loads and load reductions for bacteria impairments?
A: The Stressor Identification (SI) process only deals with biological impairments so an SI is not completed if it is a bacteria impairment. If a waterbody is impaired for bacteria, a TMDL will be a valuable tool to help determine existing loads and calculate load reductions needed. Also, the Watershed Improvement Program is currently trying to develop a tool to help watershed projects calculate predicted load reductions for various BMPs designed to reduce bacteria.

Q: Are we supposed to meander every stream in order to address a biological impairment?
A: The WMP would identify needed BMPs to address the biological impairment. If fixing the impairment requires a BMP such as restoring a stream meander, then the WMP should identify potential funding sources for accomplishing this objective.