**NC Watershed Stewardship Network Workshop Summary**

May 29, 2013

NC Botanical Gardens, Chapel Hill

**Background and purpose of workshop:**

A partnership that organized under the NC Center of Excellence for Watershed Management formed with the goal to: *ensure that local stakeholders in North Carolina committed to protecting and restoring watersheds can achieve measureable improvements by accessing a network of watershed experts, peer support and training resources.*

This nascent partnership included – NC Water Resources Research Institute, NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources, UNC – Chapel Hill Institute for the Environment, NC Cooperative Extension Watershed Education for Communities and Officials, and Triangle J Council of Governments. The NC Center for Excellence for Watershed Management is a collaboration established through an MOU with WRRI, USEPA and NCDENR with the purpose of training and providing technical assistance to build capacity of local stakeholders committed to improving and maintaining the natural and economic resources of their watersheds.

The partners identified the following objectives to move towards their goal:

1. Identify local watershed stakeholders across the state
2. Identify and assess local watershed stakeholder needs
3. Identify existing resources, programs, organizations, and expertise
4. Facilitate communication and networking among watershed stakeholders
5. Support and enhance a professional watershed training network

The partners completed tasks 1-3 through statewide surveys and focus groups. They convened the May 29, 2013 workshop to bring the results to representatives of local, regional, and statewide watershed organizations, to ask their feedback on the results, and to engage them in brainstorming how to move forward based on the results. Most importantly, the partners sought to expand the network by inviting these groups to become involved.

**Results of the workshop**

Sixty people participated representing local watershed groups, regional councils of government, municipalities and counties, non-profits, consulting firms, universities, and state and federal agencies. Participants traveled from Charlotte, Asheville, Raleigh, Fayetteville, Manteo, and several locations in between.

This summary includes a brief overview of workshop activities and results. The agenda, presentations, flip chart notes, and complete evaluation results from the workshop are posted here: <http://ncsu.edu/wrri/code/events/pastevents/wsm052013.html>

Participants suggested the following ideas for how to develop a collaborative network, increase watershed stewards’ access to skills and expertise, and to leverage limited resources:

* Define the mission, goals and organizational structure of the network, building on existing organizations
* Develop online tools to connect people with each other, to share skills and resources, and provide training
* Provide networking and educational events
* Market the effort by sharing successes, building support among a broad partnership (including businesses), and framing it for broad appeal
* Fund and hire a coordinator of the effort

Of those participants who completed workshop evaluations, 66% believed there was significant interest and that the network effort should definitely move forward, while 42% believed there is some interest, but were unsure if it was enough for moving forward. Fourteen respondents said they would help to develop a strategic action plan for moving forward. We are very pleased with the energetic participation at the workshop, and the strong expressed interest in moving forward with a network. We will move forward by engaging those interested parties in strategic planning in the fall. Thank you to all who gave their time and energy to this workshop!

**Action steps following the workshop:**

* *The core planning group has scheduled a strategic planning workshop for fall 2013*
* *A NC Watershed Stewardship Network Listserve was created, with an initial purpose of helping to facilitate planning efforts.*
* *The results of the workshop (summary and raw data) is being distributed to participants and interested parties*

**Workshop Summary:**

1. **Introductions**

Participants were asked to pair up with another, and interview each other asking the following questions:

* Talk about a time when you or your organization collaborated successfully with others in your local watershed efforts and it really energized you.
* What was the main element that contributed to that energy?

The “energizing themes” that were heard were shared with the whole room during introductions that followed the interviews. Some themes that were repeated included:

Collaboration- far and away the most oft repeated energizing theme! These were some terms used to describe it: non-conventional or broad based partners, sacrifice, willingness of partners to engage, transparency, open and honest idea exchange, shared purpose/goals, mutual understanding, building bridges, and trust.

Practical/concrete results-seeing results on the ground energized many, in particular seeing ideas become reality, problem solving, seeing a domino effect, getting a feeling of accomplishment, and seeing specific progress such as dam removal, policy changes, and rain gardens installed.

Community participation, enthusiasm, and excitement was also widely described, with some specific terms such as “aha” moments, and building awareness.

Clarity of vision, mission, goals, or objectivesenergized some participants.

1. **Overview of Needs Assessment Results**

The assessment team briefly presented highlights of the needs assessment results. These included results from the watershed professional survey, watershed volunteer focus groups, and watershed volunteer online survey. The report on watershed professional survey results and presentations summarizing focus group and watershed volunteer survey are posted at the following link: <http://ncsu.edu/wrri/code/events/pastevents/wsm052013.html>

The results were presented within the following framework of emerging themes:

* 1. *Statewide Collaboration*

There are many watershed efforts in the state, but there is no established, systematic method or resource for groups or efforts to interact with, learn from, or contact each other. However, there is a stated need and interest for a network to help do this.

* 1. *Sharing and Building Skills*

Watershed professionals and volunteers in NC are highly skilled, those skills can be shared, leveraged, transferred through partnerships and cross- training.

* 1. *Taking Action*

Whereas watershed groups take different actions to address specific issues, access to expertise, resources, support, and training can increase effectiveness.

* 1. *Finding Resources*

Lack of resources is consistently identified as one of the most pressing barriers to improving impaired waters across NC and to successful local watershed stewardship. So statewide collaboration can help build local leadership, increase awareness, leverage limited resources, develop new funding and support.

1. **The Way I See it Worksheets**

Before participants left for lunch, they were provided with worksheets that prompted them to reflect on what they’ve heard, and consider how it is important to them. The worksheets were intended to help prepare them for small group discussion planned for the afternoon.

1. **Brainstorm results- how to develop a collaborative network, increase access to skills and expertise, and leverage limited resources**

Participants worked with others at their tables to answer the following questions, and then prioritized the answers to highlight what they thought were the most promising ideas to arise from their brainstorming. The top 1-2 ideas from each table are listed below each question (two were included if two ideas tied for top idea at a table).

*How can the NC watershed community develop a collaborative statewide network? What does it look like? How should it be structured?*

* Building on existing structure
* Ensure mission, goals are clear, achievable and agreed upon, focus on results
* Develop the organizational structure with regional collaboration, use examples of other statewide networks, steering committee representing sectors and regions, operate as a program of an existing center or institute, capture more stakeholder groups, existing networks and individuals?
* Define Purpose and organizational structure
* Funded statewide Coordinator needed - Set up networking opportunities and educational events,
* connect those with skills and resources to those who need them
* Networking and education events- Semi-annual or quarterly workshops/networking, host annual workshop
* Provide online resources
* Organizational Structure -Regular meetings, large group with smaller work groups, Community events (social)

*How can the NC watershed community transfer watershed skills and increase access to expertise?*

* Skills Transfer- develop network to share skills, develop trainings for needed skills, host annual meeting for skills and capacity building
* Develop Online Tools that meet needs, can be a sharing location, interactive maps, online forum
* Face-face training in-person workshops, Statewide annual conference
* Conduct Workshops using cross training and info sharing, regionally distributed for needed skills, hands-on
* Provide links to data and Skills -online registry of skills, expertise, experience, experts volunteer hours, forum for questions @ data/info needs, online interactive map
* Access to resources- match start-up watershed groups/volunteers with professional resources
* Web based resources

*How can the NC watershed community leverage limited resources and develop new funding and support?*

* Leverage existing resources and staffing (Universities, COGs, govt, collaborate to reduce redundancies, get a dedicated position(s)
* Market the effort by share successes, frame issue for broad appeal, provide place to advertise projects seeking collaborators, promote partnerships, work with NCACC, NCLM, NCARC and existing orgs, tap into business and other strategic partnerships with non-traditional partners
* Central website with map (resource sharing including training resources)
* Research what had already been developed by others for info sharing
* Conduct a planning process-Define the need (from surveys), create need statements and outline what resources are available, what’s missing, get the word out.

1. **Final Group Discussion: Ideas to Action**

The group reconvened as a large group, shared the top ideas, then brainstormed some action steps to help implement the ideas. These are summarized:

* **Engage a steering committee that represents existing organizations statewide**
  + **Include local watershed groups, Association of Regional Councils**
* **Develop a strategic plan**
  + **Include mission, goals, objectives, organizational structure**
  + **Clearly identify needs found during the needs assessment activities**
  + **Reference/include EPA online resources, NC Office of Environmental Education, NC Source Water Collaborative, Western NC Partnership**
* **Design online component of network**
  + **Include avenue for data and resource sharing**
  + **Focus on communication and networking tools for groups/individuals to identify each other and meet mutual needs**
* **Develop a broad base of support and endorsement from various organizations**
* **Acquire sustainable funding so objectives can be met**
* **Hire a coordinator**

**Appendix:** Workshop participants, organizers, and facilitators