



Applying knowledge to improve water quality

Pacific Northwest

Regional Water Program

A Partnership of USDA NIFA
& Land Grant Colleges and Universities

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PNWWATER 179

Regional Survey:

Meeting Watershed Group Needs

Watershed groups have gained a strong presence in the Pacific Northwest (PNW) through a mixture of state legislation, agency support, and citizen involvement. Each group serves a unique geographic space and is bound by unique financial and logistical circumstances. However, all PNW watershed groups are similar in their overall purpose to successfully plan for and protect the future of a specific watershed. As part of his M.S. research in Environmental Science, University of Idaho graduate student Brian Chaffin developed a survey instrument to assess the status of watershed groups in the PNW. (see PNWWATER 172 for detail on survey instrument and procedures)

In addition to defining Pacific Northwest watershed group structure and function, the survey was also designed to measure PNW watershed group needs. Group needs were defined in two ways within the survey: 1) by watershed group's access to and use of technical watershed information, and 2) through an open-ended question, specifically asking survey respondents to list group needs.

Unbiased, technical watershed information is necessary to understand water quantity and quality issues within a watershed. Without adequate amounts of trusted information, watershed groups would lack the necessary tools to plan wisely for watershed improvements or water resource allocation. Over two-thirds of PNW survey respondents affirmed that their watershed group had access to adequate amounts of technical watershed information (Table 1). Additionally, respondents indicated that the availability of technical watershed information helped groups accomplish missions and goals. These findings reinforce the perceived relevance of unbiased, technical information in the watershed group process. Of the 30 percent of respondents citing a lack of access to technical watershed information, almost half indicated that the lack of this information hindered their group's accomplishment of goals and objectives.

Table 1. The effects of access to technical watershed information on the accomplishments of watershed group missions.

Percentage of watershed group participants <i>with</i> access to adequate amounts of technical watershed information	70.2%
Percentage of the above participants who felt access to adequate amounts of technical info helped accomplish missions and goals	90.9%
Percentage of the above participants who felt access to adequate amounts of technical info did not help accomplish missions and goals	9.1%
Percentage of watershed group participants <i>without</i> access to adequate amounts of technical watershed information	29.8%
Percentage of the above participants who felt the lack of technical information hindered the achievement of group missions and goals	45.3%
Percentage of the above participants who felt the lack of technical information did not hinder the achievement of group missions and goals	54.7%



Pacific Northwest Regional Water Quality Coordination Project Partners

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Water Resource Research Institutes

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Idaho Water Resources
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Institute for Water and
Watersheds (Oregon)

<http://water.oregonstate.edu/>

State of Washington
Water Research Center

<http://www.swwrc.wsu.edu/>

Environmental Protection Agency

EPA, Region 10

The Pacific Northwest

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Based on the survey data, most technical watershed information is distributed to PNW watershed groups through local agency representatives. Agency representatives who provide technical information include local personnel representing federal, state, county, municipal, or tribal interests. When asked how they would prefer to receive additional technical information, respondents most frequently chose “presentation by unbiased official/scientist responsible for the technical information.”

Survey respondents were provided with five lines (with the back of the survey available for additional writing) to answer the question, “What is your Watershed Group’s major unmet need?” Over 86 percent of respondents took the time to hand write a response to this question. This may indicate either a high level of respondent engagement in the survey itself, or that the specific question was very important to respondents. Due to the nature of the question and the space provided, answers to the question were generally short and provided either a single, major point or one-to-three equally weighted points. A simple content analysis of the written responses revealed four major thematic categories with several subthemes further defining each category (Table 2). As expected, funding constituted the largest theme of major unmet watershed group needs. Respondents consistently expressed the need for funding specific projects and activities related to watershed group plans, missions, or objectives. Respondents also articulated a fear that current funding would soon diminish, and it is therefore essential to find a sustained, secure form of base funding for watershed group administration.

Table 2. Identified watershed group needs based on coded themes and subthemes.

Theme	Subtheme	% of Total
Watershed Group Funding (47.6%)	Funding for watershed projects	10.9
	Sustained, secure, or consistent base funding	10.9
	Funding for administration, organization, or staff	8.2
Watershed Group Support and Participation (22.4%)	General increase in watershed group interest & participation	5.5
	Increase in volunteer participation or community involvement	4.9
	Additional paid staff person(s)	3.3
Physical or Information Needs (17.4%)	Access to technical, baseline data specific to watershed	8.7
	The creation of a watershed plan	2.2
	Additional outreach and education efforts	2.2
Watershed Group Need Specific to Individual Groups (12.6%)	Completion of projects specific to a group’s circumstances	7.7
	Group focus	1.6

Conclusions based on the watershed group survey include the following:

- ◆ The majority of PNW watershed groups had access to adequate amounts of technical watershed information and they willingly utilized this information in watershed planning and to accomplish watershed group missions and goals.
- ◆ Watershed groups rely on agency personnel to provide necessary technical information and prefer to receive information in this manner.
- ◆ The major, unmet needs of PNW watershed groups are sustainable, base funding, increased and varied participation, and specific baseline data for watersheds in which they work.
- ◆ The clarification of specific agency support roles may foster an increase in agency watershed group partnerships providing further opportunity to satisfy group funding, participation, and information needs.

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