

Protection Learning Exchange – Session Recaps

Day 1

The Many Meanings of “Protection”

There are various approaches for defining protection, including:

- Water Quality
 - Assessment status (e.g., unimpaired)
 - Designation (e.g., High Quality)
- Management strategy
 - Reducing existing pollutant loads (e.g., stormwater mgmt.)
 - Preventing future pollutant loads (e.g., land conservation, local regs)
- Watershed Condition
 - E.g., based on landscape, water quality, and other factors
 - Can be helpful in identifying priority areas for focused investment (e.g., MN, MT)

Watershed Planning with Protection in Mind, Part 1

- Within 303(d) and 319 programs, there are many planning types:
 - **TMDLs**
 - Including load reduction (prevention?) targets to maintain unimpaired waters
 - Can help plan for anticipated growth/new dischargers (KS)
 - Potential challenge: parameter-specific
 - **303d Protection Plans**
 - **9 element watershed-based plans**
 - *Complexity of plan should match local conditions and partner needs
 - Identify protection priority areas (e.g., MI plan examples)
 - **Protection-based alternative watershed plans**
 - *Keep it simple, where possible
 - May be a good fit for certain waterbody types (e.g., inland lakes – ME, MI)

Watershed Planning with Protection in Mind, Part 1

- Where are there opportunities to integrate 303(d) and 319 planning with one another, and with other planning efforts?
 - Landscape/regional-level planning efforts (e.g., Ches Bay, HW assessments)
 - Local land use planning
 - Climate change (e.g., NC)
 - Equity, inclusive community engagement
- Key consideration: \$ and capacity to implement plans

Day 2

Day 2: Big-Picture Takeaways

- There's rarely black & white in water quality program work
- Protection work can be advanced by:
 - Proactively investing State/Tribal program resources to specific waters (e.g., WI)
 - Embedding protection in meaningful ways alongside restoration (e.g., NC)

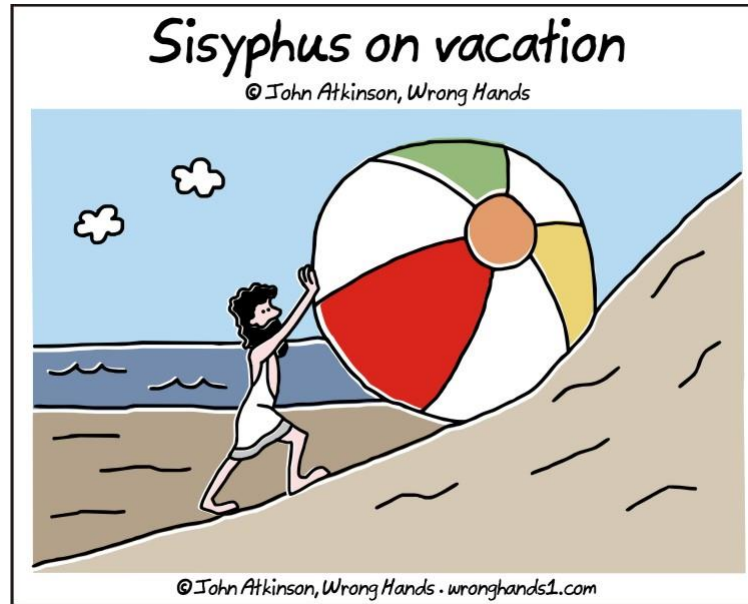
Watershed Planning with Protection in Mind, Part 2

- Joint priority-setting can bring multiple program resources to build and sustain watershed work
 - e.g., FEMA hazard mitigation plans
 - Priority areas for equity work
 - Potential building blocks: statewide HW assessments, landscape-scale functional assessments
- Early community engagement is key in protection work
 - E.g., NMED Tribal Liaison and TMDLs that are protective of community uses
- Need: EPA leadership to create program connections and integrate to address cross-cutting issues (protection, hazard mitigation, equity),

Protection Management Strategies

- Waterbody and watershed conditions aren't black and white
 - Assessment units
 - Varying conditions in same watershed (impaired tribs, unimpaired mainstem)
- Management Strategies
 - Mgmt strategies could be 'protection', depending on intervention point
 - E.g., WQ designations
 - Preventing further impairments: "protecting the opportunity to do restoration work"
- Community involvement
 - Protection-specific challenges (e.g., land conservation)
 - Top-down vs. Bottom-up
 - Capacity-building (e.g., watershed & community surveys, mini-grants)
 - Sustaining momentum after a plan is developed

Day 3 Recap



When are water quality endpoints?

“...no endpoint, unless humans go extinct.”

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Program Goals

Milestones

Program Objectives

**Monitoring/
Assessment**

Planning

Technical Assistance

\$ for Watershed Projects

**Education/
Outreach**

Water Quality Outcomes

Day 3: Big-Picture Takeaways

- Semantics is important (What are you *protecting*?)
 - Key to establishing goals, communicating with partners
- Context is important
 - Surrounding watershed condition – informs mgmt goals/strategies (e.g., MI conservation planning tool), can help quantify relative vulnerability (e.g., MN)
 - Messaging to external audiences – “As a result of this protection work, _____”
- Protection isn’t new, but 303d/319 program infrastructure to advance it may be.

Protection Program Goals

Protection can be advanced by...

- Proactively investing program resources to specific water(sheds). E.g.,
 - Priority watersheds ID'd through statewide/regional healthy watersheds assessments (CA, WI, Ches Bay)
 - High quality waters (IR cat, specific class waters)
- Embedding protection in meaningful ways alongside restoration
 - Ensure that TMDLs are holistic – e.g., accounting for threats

In either case, progress may hinge on achieving better alignment...

- Between the level of investment in restoration and protection
- With key program partners (e.g., 319, 303d, Source Water, NRCS, and communities)

Protection-based Water Quality Outcomes

- When has water quality been protected?
 - **Integrate protection from the start.** 100% implementation of watershed plan, which should = work required to achieve WQ protection goals
 - No degradation for target metric(s)
 - Waters continue to meet designated uses
 - “Where **sufficient data** show that **actions** have **contributed** to a **stable or improving** water quality condition”
- The Many Meanings of Protection
 - Consider assimilative capacity: may remain unimpaired, but become more degraded
 - ‘Protected’ waters are still susceptible to impact (e.g., wildfires, forestry activities)
- Who’s Asking?
 - Water quality is one of many co-benefits of protection work