



## Schoharie Watershed Advisory Council Midterm Review Meeting June 29, 2011 Schoharie Watershed Program Office, Tannersville

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Attendance: Beverly Dezan (Town of Lexington Alt), Mike McCrary (Town of Jewett), Dennis Lucas (Town of Hunter Alt), Erik Allen (Highway Committee liaison), Steve Walker (Town of Windham), Liz LoGiudice (GCCCE Educator), Judd Weisberg (Fisheries Guide), Janet Orlando (Town of Gilboa), Jim Hitchcock (Greene Co. Legislator)

Municipalities not present: Village of Hunter, Village of Tannersville, Ashland, Roxbury, Conesville

Others: Michelle Yost, Robyn Worcester (GCSWCD); Beth Reichheld, Dave Burns (DEP); Paul Dibbell (Town of Hunter); Zachery Thompson (Schoharie Co. Planning); Walt Keller (former SWAC member); Stephanie Orlando (DEC intern)

### 1. Review and adopt March 2011 meeting minutes

- a. Motion to adopt October, 27 2010 SWAC meeting minutes by Dennis Lucas, seconded by Janet Orlando with all present in favor

### 2. Review Survey Results

- a. Michelle Yost gave an introduction to the purpose of this meeting: to review the Schoharie Watershed Advisory Committee and Stream Management Implementation Program organization, program goals, and accomplishments, and to determine areas to change or to improve.
- b. Michelle read through the survey results and led a discussion based on the responses
  - i. Question 1: How do you feel in general about the Stream Management Implementation Program? Consider make-up of the Advisory Committee, types of projects that have been approved, and overall effectiveness of stream management implementation.
    1. 100% responded "Effective, seems to be meeting intended goals"
  - ii. Question 2: The SWAC consists of 15 voting members: 11 municipal delegates, 3 subcommittee liaisons, and a county legislator. Do you feel there should be any changes to the make-up of the SWAC?
    1. 100% responded: "No, I think the SWAC is well-represented"
    2. A survey respondent commented: "I think there should be a review of participation and changes made for voting members that haven't been actively participating."
      - a. Michelle Y. stated that in general, there has been good participation from the various municipalities & subcommittees, with only a couple municipalities not participating regularly in the Committee
      - b. Steve Walker commented that it's the community's loss if they don't participate in the process; even though there aren't any impediments to project approval in a municipality due to non-participation on the Committee
      - c. Mike McCrary noted that municipal planning board members might be interested in participating and minutes of meetings should be shared with them.

- i. Michelle stated during annual MOU reviews with communities not represented, they are not as familiar or interested with the SWAC/SMIP as ones participating → Perhaps we need to augment our outreach strategy to increase general knowledge of the SWAC/SMIP
          - 1. Steve W. suggested perhaps paying for WRIP ads or doing a radio interview highlighting the SMIP, its purpose, and goals may generate more public awareness and with that participation
          - 2. Michelle suggested that municipal boards share meeting material with their council members and other boards as appropriate.
  - d. Dennis Lucas noted that participation is generally good; we're not at a critical juncture in terms of not enough communities participating, though the concern should be reflected that a couple core communities are not participating on regular basis.
3. Question 3: Do you feel the 6 funding categories (landowner stream assistance, education/outreach, recreation/habitat, stormwater, highway/infrastructure, planning & assessment) adequately address stream management implementation?
  - a. 92% responded: "Yes, all are fine"; In general, all Committee members feel good about the current funding categories
4. Question 4: Do you feel funding caps are adequate for these project categories: Landowner Stream Assistance (\$150,000), Highway/Infrastructure (\$75,000), Stormwater (\$50,000)?
  - a. 75% responded: "Yes, existing project caps are reasonable"
  - b. Survey response comments and meeting attendees agreed that the current caps are fine, but it is important to maintain flexibility if the project warrants additional funding
  - c. Erik Allen stated that with the current state of the economy, it could be seen as imprudent to increase the caps
5. Question 5a: How do you feel in general about the application process (agency staff conduct initial review to determine if within scope of SMIP, if acceptable assist applicant, make recommendations to SWAC)? (Note: this question is actually two distinct questions, should have been separated)
  - a. 58% responded: "I feel the initial screening process is adequate"
  - b. Meeting attendees agreed that the initial agency screening of applicants is good
6. Question 5b: How do you feel in general about the application information provided to SWAC (project and budget summaries)?
  - a. Survey respondents and meeting attendees agreed that the information provided to the Committee is adequate

7. Question 6: Do you think the application should require more detailed budget proposals? If so, what would you like to see in them that would give you more information to make an informed decision?
- a. Survey results showed that there is consensus that proposed budgets should be more detailed.
  - b. Mike M. said that with some projects (like H/I), you can't be that sure of the overall budget until the project is started; there should be some flexibility in proposed budgets
  - c. Erik A. said that highway estimates should be able to get close to actual costs and basic costs are easy to figure out
  - d. Dave B. stated that often final costs can't be determined until survey and engineering is completed, and can often be hard to predict
  - e. James Hitchcock added that often things come up after a project is started that can increase project costs, such as the road failure on CR 6 in Spruceton
  - f. Dave B. said that minor overages consisting of change orders due to unforeseen issues during construction can be covered by the general funding category with SWAC approval, but often extreme skyrocketing costs following completed assessments and design often can't be completely covered by the SMIP
  - g. Walt Keller said that the SWAC should be provided as much information as possible by the applicant (e.g. documenting sources/rejections of additional funding) in order to accurately review applications and make the project better. Applications should be submitted as early as possible so staff can contact applicants, if necessary, to narrow costs down
  - h. Judd Weisberg stated every effort should be made to make costs firm upfront, to be as accurate as possible but that there should be an option for applicants to access additional funding if project costs unexpectedly exceed the proposed budget
    - i. The SMIP does have a General category for smaller project change orders; and GCSWCD and DEP have contributed additional funding from other sources to complete a few of the projects (Vista Ridge and Holden), but the additional sources may not always be available.
  - i. Liz LoGiudice inquired if there is an established process for amending project budgets.
    - i. Dave & Michelle responded that really the only project that has had its SMIP funding increase has been the Vista Ridge project (originally funded in Round 1). This project's scope changed drastically after the survey and design stages, which greatly increased the project's costs. The project was brought

back to the SWAC with a request to increase the amount of funding to the category cap (\$150,000).

The request was approved on March 30, 2011.

- j. Michelle asked the attendees if they would appreciate a project debriefing meeting to review applications and proposals prior to having to vote on them so they wouldn't have to make their decision the same evening they were introduced to a project
  - i. Mike M. responded that yes, he would appreciate that, especially in the case of the Vista Ridge project
- k. Dennis L. stated that if a project is good and has a water quality and community benefit (e.g. CR 6 Slop Failure), the SWAC/SMIP should do all that it can to make the project happen, and that we should not be tied by internal procedures that impede our flexibility.
  - i. The full cost of this project is beyond the scope of SMIP but because it straddles Highway/Infrastructure and Streamside Assistance, there may be some additional leveraging to assist the highway department because the stream instability is severe and is a major water quality and community safety concern. Staff will review the Cty Rte 6 project and report back at the next SWAC meeting.
- l. Beth Reichheld asked the attendees if they would entertain multiple, adjacent landowners each applying for a landowner stream assistance grant at the category cap to fund larger stream restoration projects
  - i. Dave indicated that he's not sure that we should actively promote that: one landowner could have more work done on their property than another, why should they both receive the same funding amount? Additionally, the landowner assistance category only had 800K total, so the number of projects could be limited.
  - ii. Michelle said she felt this idea is worth entertaining; it could be integrated into the agency's technical review to determine the appropriate funding amount for each applicant, and the SWAC could also increase the cap based on the project's water quality and community value
  - iii. There is currently nothing stopping adjacent landowners from applying
- 8. Question 7: Do you feel the annual Memorandum of Understanding reviews for participation in the SMIP are effective and informative (mainly for town and village boards)? Consider the information provided (project summaries) and frequency of reviews (annually).

- a. 84% responded: “I feel the summary format and annual review are adequate” and meeting attendees were in agreement with this sentiment
9. Question 8: Do you feel the underlying message behind the SMIP, watershed protections and planning, is adequately being transferred back to local municipal boards and constituents?
- a. Survey responses were almost evenly split:
    - i. 54% responded: “Yes, through my municipality’s/agency’s involvement, I feel we are getting the message out there”
    - ii. 46% responded: “Yes and no. The foundation of the program is strong but it could use strengthening”
    - iii. A survey respondent commented: “Greater focus on streams”
      - 1. Most of the SMIP categories have a heavy (almost exclusive) emphasis on streams, with Education & Outreach having more long term benefits in terms of educating vs. immediate restoration.
      - 2. Meeting attendees were unsure how to respond to the comment
10. Question 9: Are there additional supports that the GCSWCD can provide in administering the SWAC that would build the Committee’s capacity?
- a. Perhaps landowners can be shown what they can do on their own regarding invasive species, streambank protection, etc.
  - b. Stream processes
  - c. Coordinated flood response
  - d. Erosion & Sediment Control training
  - e. Added during meeting discussion:
    - i. Organize another USGS presentation (rainfall data relevant for Highway subcommittee)
    - ii. Judd W. suggested Rosgen training regarding streams, water quality, and habitat restoration and improvement, referencing a very successful project near his home that met multiple objectives
    - iii. Walt K. suggested topics on climate change, what that means locally (e.g., culvert blowouts), and how we can anticipate and respond to some of the problems. Also present on results of the thermal refuge study when completed
    - iv. Dave B. suggested that all SWAC members view Barbara Kendall’s better site design presentation (available as a pdf on [www.gcswcd.com/swp/wap/mbsd](http://www.gcswcd.com/swp/wap/mbsd)) and invite her to present before the committee on results
  - f. Beth R. stated that in order to give SWAC members the opportunity to become better informed about the watershed

and the impacts of their funds, it would be useful for groups that have received SMIP funding to come back to the SWAC and present on their project/program/findings

**3. Committee make-up, feedback, impressions of general organization and meeting structure**

- a. Covered in survey review section

**4. Summary on grant progress; refer to AP Executive Summary, Accomplishments**

- a. SWAC and meeting attendees provided with “Grant-Tracking.xls” spreadsheet that shows current status of all funded projects – this is available at <http://www.catskillstreams.org/SWAC.html>

**5. Budget Status**

- a. SWAC and meeting attendees provided with “Budget summary After Round 4.xls” document that shows allocated and remaining funds in all categories
  - i. Mike M. noted that the budget summary shows the amount allocated, not what’s actually been spent (reimbursed). Would like to see a list of what’s actually been spent so far. Will the SWAC eventually have the opportunity to reallocate the funding from grants that have not been completed?
    - 1. Dave B. responded that yes, if there is no movement on a project or the grant is not completed in 2 years (written in contract), the SWAC can review and pull the funding

**6. Future Direction for SMIP/SWAC**

- a. Walt K. suggested that it would be a good idea for DEP/SWCD staff to attend other basins’ SMIP/Advisory Committee meetings
  - i. Beth R. agreed that this would be a good idea, and she would encourage interbasin Advisory Committee member meetings, or for some SWAC members to attend other basins’ AC meetings
- b. Michelle Y. introduced the idea to reduce the current amount of grant rounds to 1 (eliminate the Aug 1<sup>st</sup> grant round which conflicts with construction/field season), and initiate a rolling application for the Highway & Infrastructure, Stormwater, and Education & Outreach categories. This was mentioned at an earlier meeting and can be discussed further at the October meeting since any changes would be in effect until 2012.
- c. Tentative date for review of August 1, 2011 SMIP applications, October 19, 2011.