

## A Team-Based Approach to Watershed Management Plan Implementation

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The Georgia Environmental Protection Division (GA EPD) requires watershed management plans of all local jurisdictions expanding water and/or wastewater treatment capacity. The watershed management plan must demonstrate that current water quality conditions will be maintained under future development pressure. Watershed Management Plan implementation then becomes a condition of water and wastewater NPDES permits. Due to rapid growth in the metro Atlanta area, most municipalities are completing watershed management plans to protect water quality.

Clayton County is a rapidly growing area immediately south of downtown Atlanta and faces water quality challenges and increasing demand for water and wastewater services as a result of metropolitan sprawl. Watersheds do not follow political boundaries and the Clayton County Watershed Management Plan involved fifteen governmental agencies (1 quasi-government, 4 Clayton County Departments, 2 neighboring counties, and 8 cities within the County). These political entities collaborated during the Watershed Management planning process to collect water quality data. The collaboration provided consistent sampling results and allowed for cost sharing.



The Watershed Management Plan implementation also required collaboration because different components involved Clayton County Water Authority (CCWA), Clayton County, and the cities within Clayton County. In Clayton County, CCWA is responsible for implementation of the watershed management plan, Clayton County is responsible for stormwater management, development review and zoning, and several cities are responsible for development review

within their city limits. A Watershed Team, composed of CCWA, Clayton County, and the cities within Clayton County was formed to facilitate coordination. The Watershed Team meets quarterly to discuss the progress and upcoming projects of interest to the group.

Implementation of the new development requirements included in the Watershed Management Plan provides an example of teamwork. To minimize post-development pollutant loading from future development, Clayton County created an incentive-based program that encourages developers to preserve large stream buffers and limit the amount of impervious surface. The program responsibilities are divided between Clayton County, CCWA, and the development community.

Minimizing pollutant loads from new developments is an important component of the Watershed Management Plan since the NPDES permit requires protection of current water quality conditions. The new development requirements include a performance standard of 65-pounds/acre/year of Total Suspended Solids (TSS). Developers use a simple spreadsheet model, the WISE model, to demonstrate compliance the TSS performance standard. The spreadsheet model calculates the TSS load based on the land cover information and BMP information entered by the developer. The tool offers flexibility and encourages better site design through reduced TSS loads for undisturbed stream buffers and undisturbed upland areas. This flexibility reduces the threat of “takings” lawsuits and minimizes administrative time by eliminating variance requests.

The new development program is managed by the Clayton County Transportation and Development Department, although CCWA provides technical assistance and training classes for developers. This new development program is also coordinated with the Clayton County Greenspace Program, encouraging developers to place conservation easements on undisturbed stream buffers. While this new development program was only a requirement for the unincorporated areas of the county, the City of Morrow has adopted the WISE model and TSS performance standard and several other cities plan to adopt these standards.

The new development program has been well received by the development community and has successfully protected water quality. Since ratification in September 2001, the WISE model has reduced TSS loads from 4,901 lb/ac/yr to 1,342 lb/ac/yr or a 27% reduction in TSS loads for the 961 acres of new developments. The WISE model has also encouraged wider stream buffers (184 acres) and preservation of undisturbed land area (227 acres). Clayton County and CCWA feel that the WISE model will protect water quality in Clayton County from new development pressures.

The Clayton County Watershed Management Plan success is attributed to a flexible approach and the focus on coordinating all related programs into the Watershed Management Framework. The Watershed Team has improved coordination of programs and has benefited other programs such as public education efforts and the Stormwater Phase I program.