

# CASE

## Water Quality 2000

### Challenge:

In the late 1980s, the country had reached a turning point in achieving the goals of the Clean Water Act. Permitting and effluent controls for industrial point sources and grants to improve municipal sewage treatment had accomplished major reductions in conventional sources since the law was passed in 1972. Amendments in 1987 focused on issues such as toxics that had not been fully addressed, but many felt a holistic approach also was needed and wanted to do so in a less adversarial manner before the Act was due for reauthorization again.

### Result:

Water Quality 2000 was a cooperative effort of more than 80 public, private and nonprofit groups, brought together by the Water Environment Federation. Their consensus report, "A National Water Agenda for the 21st Century," published in 1992, took an integrated approach to identifying the causes of water quality problems and impediments to solutions. Its recommendations were grounded on three guiding principles of pollution prevention, individual and collective responsibility for water resources, and watershed planning and management, which remain central to national water quality policy today.

## Participants

### CONVENOR

Water Environment Federation

### STEERING COMMITTEE

Academy of Natural Sciences  
American Academy of Environmental Engineers  
American Planning Association  
Association of Metropolitan Sewerage Agencies  
Chemical Manufacturers Association (now American Chemistry Council)  
Chesapeake Bay Foundation  
Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection  
DuPont Company (and Conoco)  
Environment and Energy Study Institute  
Environmental Defense Fund

Kansas Water Office  
Lake Superior Center  
National Association of Conservation Districts  
National Association of Water Companies  
Natural Resources Defense Council  
NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service  
Occidental Petroleum Company  
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers  
U.S.D.A. Soil Conservation Service  
Water Environment Federation

### FACILITATORS

John A.S. McGlennon, ERM  
Gail Bingham, RESOLVE

## Issues

The late 1980s marked a turning point in achieving the goals of the Clean Water Act. Implementation of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act Amendments of 1972 emphasized reducing effluent from industrial sources and sewage treatment plants and resulted in major improvements in the nation's water quality. Reauthorization of the Clean Water Act in 1987 added important considerations, such as toxic substances, but the fundamental causes of most water quality problems come from the way people live day to day.

Many stakeholders emerged from the battles over that legislation looking both for a more holistic approach to protecting the nation's water quality and for a less adversarial atmosphere to engage in the kind of dialogue needed. Key priorities, most particularly non-point sources of pollution, were not being addressed adequately.

## Process

Water Quality 2000 was convened in 1988 by the Water Environment Federation "to develop and implement an integrated policy for the nation to protect and enhance water quality that supports society living in harmony with healthy natural systems." The mission adopted by more than 80 public, private and non-profit organizations was to:

- achieve broad representation,
- take a long-range, visionary and holistic perspective,
- seek maximum consensus on national principles,
- focus on water quality, taking a balanced view of surface, ground and atmospheric waters, and
- set a specific agenda for action.

The 80 participants in Water Quality 2000 included representatives of federal, state and local government; indus-

try; municipal sewage treatment facilities; agricultural interests; environmental groups; planners, and others.

The process was conducted as a four-phase effort. Phase I involved planning the process and concluded with adoption of a vision and goal statement. Phase II focused on problem identification and resulted in the publication of an interim report, Challenges for the Future. Phase III relied on a series of work groups involving over 100 volunteer experts who provided reports to a steering committee. The steering committee reached consensus on recommendations presented as a National Water Agenda in November 1992. Members agreed that their work would not be completed without an explicit commitment to implementation, which constituted Phase IV.

# Results

The recommendations of Water Quality 2000 were grounded on three central principles or strategies: pollution prevention, individual and collective responsibility for water resources, and watershed planning and management. The participants in Water Quality 2000 went on to articulate 85 specific recommendations based on their analysis that “impediments to progress stem from policies, programs, and institutions that fail to recognize the interconnectedness of water, land, and living resources. Still other impediments arise out of a failure to recognize in broader societal policies and practices that robust environmental systems are inextricably linked to economic health, and vice versa.”

The recommendations took an integrated approach, and encompassed:

- securing public commitment to clean water goals through education and training;
- preventing pollution caused by all sources;
- promoting wise use of resources;
- managing growth and development;
- increasing scientific understanding and improving technologies;
- eliminating, resolving, and filling regulatory and legislative overlaps, conflicts and gaps;
- implementing, strengthening, and fully funding existing programs; and
- providing incentives for clean water.

The participants in Water Quality 2000 continued to be involved in developing and implementing water policy at all levels of government and in the private sector and took

their wide-ranging ideas with them. Today, local, state and national policies and programs integrate watershed concepts routinely. Everyone assumes that agricultural interests are part of water quality policy conversations now, but it was not conventional wisdom in 1989 when they joined Water Quality 2000. The recommendations of Water Quality 2000 elevated attention to non-point sources such as farm runoff while noting that policy approaches needed to differ and that resources needed to be increased if the problems were to be solved.

Participants in Water Quality 2000 also took their successful experience with consensus building with them into specific water quality policy decisions. For example, EPA convened a series of formal policy dialogues under the Federal Advisory Committee Act, one of the most successful of which was the policy dialogue on Combined Sewer Overflow facilitated by RESOLVE.

Wide-spread consensus remains that much more remains to be done to address non-point sources of pollution, but disputes continue about the best policies and approaches for action. EPA’s regulations concerning the Total Maximum Daily Load program (TMDLs) under Section 303 of the Clean Water Act have been a specific focus of controversy. In 2001 and 2002, RESOLVE facilitated a series of TMDL Listening Sessions across the country for EPA, at which hundreds of people were able to share their views about how to revise these regulations and what other actions might achieve effective reductions in non-point sources of pollution in a practical manner.

Scientific/Technical Obstacles and Actions	
OBSTACLE	ACTION
Lack of agreement on what the problems were	The process was divided into two phases: problem identification and solutions
Highly interrelated issues, required diverse expertise to address them	WEF formed working groups based on desired outcomes rather than specific issues and involved multi-disciplinary teams of volunteer experts to address them
Previous adversarial relationships	Membership on working groups was open to any who wished to participate