

The Virginia Watersheds Alliance – The Time is Now for a Comprehensive Water Policy

The Virginia Watersheds Alliance (VaWA) is a collaborative effort of the thirteen watershed roundtables in Virginia working to provide a forum to discuss common water issues. The primary objective of a roundtable is to develop relationships between diverse stakeholders so that they may collaborate with, learn from, and inform each other while effectively acting to address local water issues.

Each roundtable serves its local watershed through a combination of meetings, projects, and actions that best suit its circumstances. Each roundtable agrees to operate in a manner that allows it to remain welcoming, inclusive, and representative in order to encourage relationships and collaboration. Roundtables strive to enroll the most diverse stakeholder group as is possible and reasonable for a specific meeting, project, or activity.

For more information please visit our website: <http://www.vawatersheds.org/>

Some background on water policy in the Commonwealth...

Relative to the role of government:

Virginia has long been thought of as “water rich.” With unprecedented population and economic growth over the last three decades and the droughts of the past 10 years, it is important that water use and management decisions reflect changing conditions and the mounting pressures on limited water resources. The perception of an abundance of water resources encouraged wasteful use of an essential natural resource. We are therefore looking to the General Assembly to ensure the Commonwealth of Virginia’s constitutional obligation to the people as established in Article XI of the Constitution “...to protect its... waters from pollution, impairment, or destruction, for the benefit, enjoyment, and general welfare of the people...”

Relative to the role of business:

Techniques for wise use of water have advanced dramatically in recent years and, due to the increasing cost to ensure adequate amounts of clean water for all beneficial uses, efficiencies will continue to be found. The energy-water nexus is becoming more recognized by business: it takes energy to supply and manage water and it takes water to supply energy. Water use and management techniques that can dramatically reduce overall consumption are becoming accepted in the development and operation of privately-owned buildings (high-performance buildings). The Agricultural and Forestry industries have recognized the importance of Best Management Practices and would benefit from a clear, comprehensive water policy by the Commonwealth.

Relative to the role of citizens:

We all depend on clean water for our daily life pursuits associated with home, work and recreation. We also have the responsibility to be good stewards of our water resources. Information and education on the proper use and management of that resource is critical to being empowered to make the decisions associated with good stewardship.

Times of economic downturn such as these present opportunities as well as challenges. Along with the challenge of generally more limited economic resources, there is the opportunity to take stock and prepare for better economic times. In order to prepare Virginia for future economic growth, we have an opportunity to examine and update our water policies to ensure that the Commonwealth -- its localities, its regions, its businesses and its citizens -- is empowered and positioned to promote an economy that includes sustainable use of water resources.

The Virginia Watershed Alliance encourages the Governor and the General Assembly to take this opportunity to develop a comprehensive water policy for the Commonwealth. A comprehensive water resource management policy should foster proactive planning, sustainability, regional cooperation, public education and involvement, and ecological integrity. **A comprehensive water policy statement creates an effective and efficient way for the Commonwealth to manage diverse issues that may arise in various regions.**

Building on Virginia's existing water supply planning and water quality programs, the overarching goals of a statewide comprehensive water policy should include:

- Consensus building to identify common goals for managing water resources and develop strategies for achieving them;
- Consideration of both human and natural environment needs in water resource planning that balances local and regional needs in a manner that limits impact upon the environment while sustaining economic and social quality of life.;
- Protection and enhancement of natural systems that are integral to water resource protection in all areas of the Commonwealth;
- Watershed awareness outreach and education for citizens and public officials;
- Education for citizens on the use and management of water resources in the home;
- Education and advocacy for wise water use in the practice of business and industry; and
- Establishment and protection of public recreational access to the waters of the Commonwealth while respecting private property rights and the protection of water quality.