



# Improving EPA's Performance with Program Evaluation

## A Review of Statewide Watershed Management Approaches

Series No. 1

By continuously evaluating its programs, EPA is able to capitalize on lessons learned and incorporate that experience into other programs. This enables the Agency to streamline and modernize its operations while promoting continuous improvement and supporting innovation. This series of short sheets on program evaluation is intended to share both the results and benefits of evaluations conducted across the Agency, and share lessons learned about evaluation methodologies in this evolving discipline. For more information contact EPA's Evaluation Support Division at [www.epa.gov/evaluate](http://www.epa.gov/evaluate).

### At a Glance

#### Evaluation Purpose

To identify, characterize, and document state experiences and models of statewide watershed management approaches.

#### Evaluation Type

Process Evaluation

#### Publication Date

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#### Partners

Office of Wastewater Management and Office of Wetlands, Oceans and Watersheds

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#### Web Links

[http://www.epa.gov/owow/watershed/approaches\\_fr.pdf](http://www.epa.gov/owow/watershed/approaches_fr.pdf)

### Background: Why was an evaluation performed?

During the past ten years, EPA headquarters and regional offices have provided technical assistance, outreach materials, guidance documents, and facilitation and training to assist states in adopting statewide watershed management approaches. The watershed management approach involves the coordination and integration of existing programs as well as building new partnerships to achieve shared management goals and objectives. Within the past decade, more than 20 states have adopted a watershed approach to managing statewide water programs. In an effort to learn from states' experiences in implementing the approach, EPA's Office of Water (OW) conducted a review/evaluation of selected states that have adopted a Statewide watershed management approach. The objectives of the evaluation were to: (1) identify different models of statewide watershed management, (2) characterize and assess the experiences of selected states; and (3) develop recommendations to improve EPA support and state implementation of this approach.

## Basic Evaluation Approach: How did they do it?

The evaluation was conducted by a team of contractors managed by Michael Mason, a program analyst in OW. The evaluation consisted of five steps, described below.

- Step I:** During the planning or project scoping phase, the evaluation team analyzed selected EPA and state documents and conducted interviews with EPA headquarters and regional managers to identify key issues and questions regarding statewide watershed management approaches.
- Step II:** Based on information gathered in the scoping phase, eight states (Kentucky, Massachusetts, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Texas, and Washington) were selected as the focus for the evaluation.
- Step III:** The data collection phase included facilitated discussions and phone and in-person interviews with state water quality and water resource managers and staff. These discussions were then distilled into individual summaries characterizing each state's experience with the watershed management approach.
- Step IV:** The evaluation team analyzed the summaries and developed a series of findings and recommendations.
- Step V:** These findings were then communicated in a number of venues, including staff meetings and briefings to senior and mid-level managers, and by posting the final report on EPA's Web site.

## Evaluation Results: What was learned?

The evaluation found that 80 percent of the state managers included in the study felt that their experience with the watershed approach was positive. The evaluation results indicated that the statewide watershed approach has resulted in numerous program management benefits, such as dramatic improvement

in the quantity and quality of water quality monitoring data, greater planning and assessment capabilities, and more efficient and equitable permitting programs. Despite these benefits, the study found that states face significant internal and external barriers to effectively implementing the approach. Key barriers include tensions between federal and state water quality programmatic requirements and team-based watershed management; fragmented and output-oriented oversight of state programs by federal agencies; and incomplete integration of core water quality program elements around the watershed approach. The evaluation also found that an essential component to a successful statewide watershed approach is inter-agency and state-local partnerships that are supported by an adequate coordination infrastructure. States also believe that EPA should focus more resources and attention on building state watershed management capacity and documenting the resource and environmental gains attributed to the statewide watershed management approach.

A total of 12 recommendations—six for EPA and six for states—were made. These include, but are not limited to, EPA encouraging senior management to promote key elements of statewide watershed management approaches; providing information, training, and incentives to assist states in adopting statewide watershed management approaches; and working with states to investigate and develop solutions to Statewide watershed management. States were encouraged to consider evaluating whether their

### Approach for this Evaluation

#### Step I

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Project Scoping

#### Step II

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Selecting States for Evaluation

#### Step III

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Collecting Data through Discussion Sessions with States

#### Step IV

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Analyzing Data and Developing Findings and Recommendations

#### Step V

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Communicating Findings

watershed management frameworks have the necessary components to facilitate resource leveraging, program integration and accountability; building greater support for the watershed approach at the senior management level and with state legislatures; and improving the integration of more state programs into statewide watershed approaches.

## **Evaluation Outcome: What happened as a result?**

OW's management is planning to adopt the report's findings and recommendations in future decisions regarding the watershed management approach. The final report was well publicized both internally and externally; it is accessible on EPA's Web site at [http://www.epa.gov/owow/watershed/approaches\\_fr.pdf](http://www.epa.gov/owow/watershed/approaches_fr.pdf), and has been distributed to all 50 states.