



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Understanding Priorities, Activities, and Needs of Watershed Organizations in Tennessee

Part 1 of a Statewide Watershed Management Needs Assessment

Lead Organization	Center for Watershed Solutions
Project Participants	University of Tennessee-Institute for a Secure and Sustainable Environment (UT-ISSE) and Cumberland River Compact
Sponsors	US Environmental Protection Agency, UT-ISSE
Survey Objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) To understand the general characteristics and spatial distribution of watershed organizations in Tennessee 2) To assess the priority level of key watershed issues, policy areas, and activities across groups 3) To determine what activities watershed organizations are conducting related to monitoring and assessment; planning; conservation and restoration actions; education and outreach; policy issues; and organizational development 4) To assess the organizational resources watershed groups have to pursue their goals 5) To determine the agencies and stakeholder groups with whom watershed organizations are currently working or would like to work 6) To identify the top needs for assistance expressed by watershed organizations
Sample	44 community-based organizations that play a role in watershed protection, restoration, and/or management
Techniques	Conducted on-line in May 2008 using the SPSS Dimensions™ Web survey tool mrInterview™
Pretest	Evaluation of draft on-line survey by peer reviewers and key stakeholders and a pretest with pilot group in April 2008
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Introduction

There is a growing understanding that many environmental challenges facing communities are best addressed at the watershed scale through the collaborative effort of public, private, and civic entities. Since the 1990s, watershed organizations have proliferated in the United States to answer the need for community-based engagement and cooperation in tackling watershed problems. The purpose of this survey is to better understand the *who, where, what, and how* of local watershed organizations in Tennessee. That is, *who* are the active groups in Tennessee, *where* are they working, on *what* priority issues, and through which types of activities (*how*)? Furthermore, the survey aims to capture the organizational resources and needs of watershed groups in the state, identifying crucial areas toward which to direct capacity-building efforts. The results will be used with other information gathered in our statewide watershed management needs assessment to inform the scope and services of the newly established Center for Watershed Solutions initiative of the University of Tennessee's Institute for a Secure and Sustainable Environment and the Cumberland River Compact. We look forward to working together with watershed groups, agencies, universities, and other partners across the state to address the priorities and needs expressed.

What are the general characteristics of Tennessee watershed organizations?

The 1990s marked the beginning of rapid growth in the number of newly formed watershed organizations in Tennessee. Of the surveyed groups, 30% formed in 1990-1999 and 61% formed after 1999. The vast majority of the groups characterize their watershed as mixed urban and rural (54%) or mostly rural (39%), with only 7% serving predominately urban or suburban areas. Three-quarters of the organizations identify themselves as a citizen group or nonprofit, with the remainder identified primarily as interagency or mixed stakeholder (public/private/nonprofit) partnerships.

What are the high-priority issues, policy areas, and activities of the watershed organizations?

The three interrelated issues of urban runoff, development/sprawl, and stormwater management were considered to be of high

priority to most of the surveyed organizations. Roughly one-third considered urban runoff to be the highest priority. When prioritizing policy areas, respondents overwhelmingly rated watershed protection/restoration to be a high priority, followed by drinking water protection and land conservation. Of the common watershed group activities, such as monitoring, planning, and influencing policy, the most frequently cited high priorities were collaboration, education/outreach, and clean-ups/restoration.

What activities are groups conducting to address these watershed priorities?

The surveyed organizations are engaged in a wide variety of strategies to address watershed issues, including monitoring and assessment, planning, conservation and restoration actions, education and outreach, and policy-related activities. Across these categories, watershed organizations have the most experience with a variety of education and outreach



strategies, including hosting public meetings and events, and communicating through public media, newsletters, brochures, and websites. Of the policy-related activities, many watershed groups serve as community “watchdogs,” reporting pollution problems. Many are also focused on working for local policies and promoting them through education. Over half the groups contribute to monitoring and assessment efforts by conducting visual assessments (e.g., pollutant source identification) and biological water-quality monitoring. Many watershed organizations are instrumental in implementing on-the-ground conservation and restoration actions, such as site clean-ups (77%), riparian enhancement (52%), and stream restoration (41%). Of the various types of planning activities, groups have the most experience with developing watershed-based plans (43%). Finally, most of the watershed groups engage in ongoing organizational development activities, such as creating a structure (board, policies, bylaws), financial management, grant-writing, and marketing/public relations to support their work.

What organizational resources do watershed groups have to pursue their goals?

Many of the groups surveyed have very limited resources to devote to their watershed protection and restoration efforts. Half of the participants in this survey reported annual budgets less than \$10,000 and over half have no paid part-time or full-time staff. At the other end of the spectrum, 20% of the groups have budgets over \$100,000, which includes several groups with a regional, multi-watershed scope. Almost 25% of the surveyed groups have full-time staff and 36% employ part-time staff. Volunteer coordinators play an important leadership role in 68% of the groups, with an average of four volunteer coordinators per group. Over three-quarters of the groups are incorporated and 59% have 501(c)3 status. Just over half the groups (52%) reported a group size of 50 members or fewer.

What agencies and stakeholders are groups working with to address watershed priorities?

The surveyed watershed organizations most frequently work with citizens, local government, the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC), the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA), private landowners, and environmental groups. They are most interested in developing future relationships with the Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT), Tennessee Division of Forestry, US Geological Survey, US Environmental Protection Agency, and developers.

What are the top needs expressed by watershed organizations?

When asked to identify the top three needs for assistance over the next two years, 40% of the surveyed organizations said that they could use assistance with growing membership. Over half of the open-ended comments indicated a need for assistance in organizational development, especially with membership development, fundraising implementation, and strategic planning. Among education and outreach activities, the surveyed organizations said that they could use the most help in developing websites and web-based forums, as well as in using education and outreach to reach developers. Almost a third of the surveyed groups indicated that they could use technical assistance with sustainable community development and smart growth strategies through visioning sessions and developing and/or revising codes and ordinances. Another 30% of the respondents said they could use help tracking bacterial and sediment sources and implementing a watershed-based plan.