VOLUNTEERS AND WETLAND BIOMONITORING

ANNA L. HICKS

Massachusetts Coastal Zone Management

and Mass Bays Program

CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT

SUSTAINABLE CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT REQUIRES:

SCIENTISTS : TO GET THE FACTS STRAIGHT

MANAGERS : TO MAKE DECISIONS AND IMPLEMENT ACTION

CITIZENS : TO PROVIDE LOCAL KNOWLEDGE, DEDICATED TIME, LABOR AND SKILLS AND TO PRACTICE STEWARDSHIP

WHY WORK WITH VOLUNTEERS?

- Participate in public education and citizen environmental stewardship
- Overcome public opposition
- Win local cooperation and participate in positive public relations
- Capture and use local knowledge
- Divert dedicated energy into scientifically sound implementation
- Save $, time and energy

THREE LEVELS OF VOLUNTEER PARTICIPATION

- General public participation that increases awareness and wins support
- Participation with assessment and management at the township or watershed level (Watershed Associations)
- Intensive monitoring for federal and state wetland regulatory programs

LEVEL ONE

- Education Days
- Rapid assessments for screening general wetland condition
- Applications: surrounding land uses, habitat assessment, storm drain stenciling, quick bioassessments that provide taxa richness, relative abundance, presence of introduced species, etc.

LEVEL TWO

- Under the leadership of a well trained and experienced volunteer coordinator, teams of trained volunteers collect field data, assist with laboratory procedures, and may even do data analysis and report preparation.
- Findings typically submitted to state agencies, town councils, non profit conservation organizations
- QA/QC rigor is introduced with QAAPs submitted to authorities for approval

LEVEL THREE

- Participation in state and federal programs
- Rigor of QA/QC increases, agencies responsible
- Training and selection of protocols become important issues
- Agency control and supervision is mandatory
- Typical application is monitoring success over time of mitigation efforts

AGENCY CONCERNS

- Volunteers will replace paid staff
- Distrust of volunteer collected data
- Safety and liability issues
- Recruitment, training, supervision and maintaining volunteers
- Volunteers are not “free”
- So, is it all worth the effort?

RESOURCES

- Current volunteer infrastructure for streams and rivers is wide based, and regional networks are working with EPA, state agencies
- EPA's *Volunteer Monitor* quarterly journal
- EPA's volunteer guidelines series
- Training protocols for wetlands and volunteers are available, pool is increasing
- Workshops becoming more numerous - usually funded by state agencies and EPA for standardization

RESOURCES

- Volunteer management guidance manuals, eg. Izaak Walton League of America and Adopt a Beach, Seattle
- State University Extension Education programs
- Agency public education and outreach divisions and their resources

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Decide how volunteers can best help you (not necessarily involved with data)
- Select volunteers suitable for the tasks
- Respect volunteers as equals
- Communicate all aspects of your program, especially goals and objectives
- Set realistic expectations and schedules
- Clarify safety and legal liability

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Ensure quality training for selected tasks, using peer reviewed manuals and protocols
- Provide supervision and support
- If data is involved, validate volunteer data through quality control and parallel tests
- Reward volunteer effort whenever possible, provide feedback, and up dates

SUMMARY

Investment in volunteer participation can provide you with:

- More time for the “bigger picture”
- More wetland sites being monitored or assessed
- A knowledge of which wetlands need the most attention (prioritizing your efforts)
- Public cooperation and sympathetic understanding of your goals

CONCLUSION

Volunteers and agencies are working for the same overall goal

BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF WETLAND SCIENCE, ISSUES AND MANAGEMENT THAT WILL RESULT IN IMPROVED WETLAND CONSERVATION