

Regional Watershed Funding Initiative

Issue

Local watershed councils need professional coordinators to prepare plans and oversee projects, and to assist with obtaining financial resources to help local landowners pay for implementation of projects on their land.

Background

The Federal Clean Water Act requires the State to produce a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) for all impaired water bodies. Once the TMDL is completed, the local watershed council's and local soil conservation districts are asked to provide technical and financial resources to assist local land owners to restore impaired water quality conditions identified in the TMDL. Collaborative efforts have become a successful way to manage increasingly complex and controversial problems at a local watershed level that involves multiple stakeholders.

Utah currently receives limited funding for watershed restoration from EPA and USDA. Recipients of federal grants provide cost-share ranging from 25 to 40 percent. Funding for technical assistance is very limited and very competitive. There is not enough to keep up with the TMDL expectations. As a result, more and more of the Utah land owners are being asked to pay for restoration costs or face the possibility of an enforcement action.

Problem

There is insufficient federal, state, and local funding for the basic administrative and project coordination necessary to keep local watershed groups functioning and people engaged. Utah has identified 144 water bodies (streams and lakes) that require a TMDL be written and implemented. The local watershed councils in Utah set up to deal with these TMDLs are comprised mostly of local volunteers who have no professional background, but have an interest in protecting and restoring water quality. Without a local professional employed as the watershed coordinator it is difficult for these committees to truly be effective and show the progress expected by EPA and the State of Utah Division of Water Quality.

How this would affect your constituents

Everyone lives in a watershed. Water quality impairments identified in the TMDL include culinary use, fishery impacts, recreation, and irrigation. The reason for impairment varies, but the predominate sources are erosion and excessive nutrients (phosphorus and nitrogen). Sources of pollution come from recreational use, urbanization, agriculture, and even from natural sources. Often times the impacts are caused by circumstances that have no regard to land ownership, and yet local landowner's bear the burden of restoration. The watershed initiative will support the efforts of local watershed organizations to bring all stakeholders together to address water quality and safeguard our limited water resources.

What can you do about this issue

Support the Western States Regional Watershed Initiative to seek financial support for local watershed council's. The Utah share of the proposal is set at \$1.2 Million, based on identified needs of each local council. The funding will support technical assistance and project implementation.

The money would come from a line item appropriations budget request from EPA. The EPA has funded successful regional watershed projects throughout the U.S., and a similar effort is essential to protect important water resources in the headwaters of the western U.S. The Utah Department of Environmental Quality, with the Utah Watershed Coordinator's Council providing input, would administer the funds.

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