

**National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
Delaware Estuary Grants
Application for Funds**

Project Name: Lower Delaware Regional Watershed Coordinating Council for Hunterdon County

PROPOSAL NARRATIVE

I. PROJECT ABSTRACT

The Lower Delaware Regional Watershed Coordinating Council for Hunterdon County will serve as a pilot project to develop intermunicipal (sub-regional) cooperation to promote community-based stewardship and enhance local watershed based resource management in the Lower Delaware Watershed. This initiative will strengthen the link between municipal planning and regional resource management and the enhanced protection of the Delaware River. This consistency will support effective implementation of the Delaware Estuary Program objectives and the Lower Delaware River Management Plan. By the end of the project year, six communities will have an established, ongoing, regional watershed coordinating council (see Figure 1 showing proposed project area). Working collaboratively, these communities will devise a preliminary watershed characterization and identify data resource needs and gaps necessary to complete the characterization. They will also identify the action steps to move forward in developing and implementing effective and coordinated watershed-based planning.

II. PROPOSAL

Project Need

Presently, there are numerous but disparate Federal, state and local plans, regulations, actions and entities advocating protection of the Lower Delaware watershed. Likewise, there is a plethora of new data resources and analytical tools available to help communities make informed planning decisions. Municipalities are among the most critical players that influence watershed protection through their legal responsibility to manage and regulate land use through master plans, zoning ordinances and land development regulations. Communities would welcome watershed based planning and technical support to improve their decision-making capacities. Improved municipal knowledge of the various public and private watershed-based initiatives underway and the relationship between these efforts and municipal plans and ordinances is critical. Improved dialogue and coordinated, intermunicipal planning efforts emanating from this dialogue would begin to more effectively address regional impacts to the Lower Delaware watershed.

Six municipalities in Hunterdon County have demonstrated a commitment to watershed protection of the Lower Delaware through resolutions supporting National Wild and Scenic River designation; Special Protection Waters designation by the Delaware River Basin Commission; and/or Special Resource Area designation consistent with the New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan. They also realize that a coordinated, regional approach is essential to achieving more effective watershed protection.

Project Objectives

- By the end of the project year, six municipalities in Hunterdon County will have joined together to create an intermunicipal Watershed Coordinating Council (WCC).
- By the end of the project year, the six municipalities will have increased their capacities to more effectively share and understand water resource information, the connection between land use and water resource management, and the importance of supporting and participating directly in regional planning initiatives to promote enhanced, watershed-based planning.
- By the end of the project year, the six municipalities will have identified municipal master plan consistencies and inconsistencies with each other and with regional, state and Federal plans as they relate to watershed protection goals
- By the end of the project year, the six municipalities will have identified critical, consistent policy actions that must be taken next to advance the long-term watershed-based protection that will become the basis for future efforts and likely the basis for seeking further funding support.

Overall Context

This project will develop the capacity of local governments to promote community-based stewardship and enhance local watershed-based resource management. It will accomplish this by building municipal capacity to make informed land use decisions that are coordinated with neighboring communities, nonprofits and higher levels of government in the watershed. In this way, the goals of the *Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan for the Delaware Estuary (CCMP)* and the *Water Resources Plan for the Delaware River Basin* will be significantly advanced by:

- Strengthening partnerships for the management of water resources among all levels of government, the private sector, and individuals sharing an interest in sustainable water resources management; and
- Providing opportunities to enhance appreciation of and commitment to the protection, improvement and restoration of the Basin's water resources.

The Watershed Coordinating Council (Council) will also serve as a pilot institutional structure within the broader framework of the Lower Delaware Wild and Scenic River Management Plan Committee. The Management Plan Committee, administered by the Delaware River Greenway Partnership, is a non-regulatory mechanism for advancing the goals of the *Lower Delaware River Management Plan*. The 32 municipalities from Pennsylvania and New Jersey are invited to serve on the Committee. However, the level of interest and participation is limited due to the size of the Committee and the distinctly different political and regulatory landscapes on either side of the River. The Council will be a model for the formation of smaller coalitions supportive of the Management Plan Committee that share common resources, political and regulatory structures, and resource management needs. Through a sub-regional system, municipalities will work cooperatively toward a common vision at a manageable scale.

Methodology

The Municipal Land Use Center at The College of New Jersey (MLUC@TCNJ) will serve as the project management organization and will coordinate all aspects of the project. This will entail preparation and distribution of meeting notices; meeting facilitation; preparation and dissemination of a report detailing consistencies and inconsistencies among municipal, regional, state and Federal watershed management

programs; preparation and distribution of natural resource and land use analyses; and consultant hiring and oversight.

Two additional subcontractors/partners will support the implementation of this project. Delaware River Basin Commission staff will take a leadership role in supporting the Technical Advisory Committee and assisting with programmatic review and preparation of reports. In addition, a geographic information systems (GIS) subcontractor will be hired by MLUC@TCNJ to complete data analysis and compilation and metadata development, along with the appropriate GIS displays (preliminary watershed characterization).

Project start up activities will occur during the first two months of the project. During that time, a project Steering Committee will be formed, consisting of representatives from six communities including Alexandria, Milford, Frenchtown, Kingwood, Delaware and Stockton; Delaware River Greenway Partnership; Delaware River Basin Commission; and MLUC@TCNJ. The Steering Committee will oversee the project from start to completion. Other start up tasks will include consultant hiring, webpage development, and development of a municipal survey to assess relative knowledge about existing data, plans and studies related to watershed-based planning.

The Steering Committee will meet at least four but no more than six times during the project year. Meetings are intended to accomplish the following:

- Review project goals, expectations, process, and time table, along with refinement of logistical details and issues as needed.
- Identify data needs and reach agreement on the method(s) of data analysis and evaluation
- Provide feedback on the subcontractor's proposed data analysis work. Anticipated new data analysis will include the development of a riparian corridor assessment. The assessment will evaluate land use and ecological systems impacts and informs riparian protection strategies. It will also include a build out analysis. The build out analysis will estimate future impervious cover and its impacts on water quality when the sub-region is fully developed according to existing zoning.
- Review data analysis and findings to identify data gaps and future data needs.
- Identify and prioritize locally-based strategies to achieve water resource protection and enhancement.
- Identify consistencies/inconsistencies of existing local, regional, state and Federal programs that serve to support or hinder desired watershed planning and management actions
- Identify gaps in planning capacities among the communities.
- Support formation of and action by the Coordinating Council
- Identify critical next steps toward achieving long-term watershed protection including the value and feasibility of pursuing Special Resource Area designation pursuant to the New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan; and seeking financial and political support to implement next steps/action agenda
- Evaluate overall project success in achieving its objectives

A technical advisory committee (TAC) will be formed starting in the second month of the project. The TAC will include engineers, planners, and water resource specialists from the New Jersey Water Supply Authority, Delaware River Basin Commission, MLUC@TCNJ, American Water Resources Association – New Jersey Section and Delaware and Raritan Canal Commission. The TAC will oversee natural resource and land use data analysis. The TAC will meet twice during the project year. TAC meetings are intended to accomplish the following:

- Facilitate and advise on new/updated data resources and sub-regional watershed study data
- Recommend data needs and necessary analyses
- Review data compilation and analyses

During the last two months of the project period the Steering Committee, working through the project coordinators, will distribute data, findings and reports to each municipality and to each TAC member for review and comment. Project Steering Committee members will work with their representative communities to build broader community knowledge of the project data and reports. At this stage, efforts will be placed on building municipal consensus on the critical next steps necessary to support long-term, watershed-based planning and management. The goal will be to gain municipal support for creating an intermunicipal Watershed Coordinating Council to sustain the expanded development and implementation of water resource and land use planning initiatives over time.

At the conclusion of the project, MLUC@TCNJ and DRBC will collaborate to develop a succinct project case study and lessons learned document. All project materials, reports and data analysis information will be posted on MLUC@TCNJ's website and distributed to the partner municipalities and interested organizations. A final public forum will be held in partnership with the Lower Delaware Wild and Scenic River Management Plan Committee. The Project Manager will present the project findings and lessons learned for the broader region and additional estuary and watershed communities.

Organization's experience in conducting similar types of projects

MLUC@TCNJ officially opened its doors in 2004. Since that time, its staff has grown to include an Executive Director, two professional planners, a geographic information systems (GIS) specialist and an administrator. Together, the Executive Director and two planners bring over five decades of State, county and municipal planning experience. Caroline Armstrong will serve as the project manager. In her prior staff positions at the Hunterdon County Planning Board – most recently serving as Director - Caroline oversaw a two-year grant working with communities to promote and implement woodland conservation practices. This project included assistance to three municipalities on developing master plan and ordinance language addressing woodland conservation, five workshops, and the completion of an award-winning planning handbook. Her Hunterdon County work on the Cross-Acceptance process during which communities review and comment on the New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan allowed her to develop close professional working relationships with the proposed project municipalities. Out of that process emerged an interest among several river communities, to advance regional coordination in support of protecting the Lower Delaware. The project manager also completed a natural resource inventory for the County which is intended to become a part of a new County Growth Management Plan.

Since its inception the MLUC@TCNJ has conducted forums and conferences for municipal and county officials on topics relating to stormwater management (attended by over 100 local officials), farmland preservation and impervious cover, and a regional community based sharing and learning conference on the Delaware and Raritan Canal (attended by over 175 governmental and nongovernmental representatives). MLUC@TCNJ also provides technical assistance to municipalities and counties, encouraging them to adopt innovative land use planning and transportation practices.

Evaluation

A lessons-learned document will be developed as part of a case study write-up. This two part evaluation process will document the programs effectiveness in meeting the objectives as well as provide a roadmap for other communities and organizations hoping to learn from the successes and challenges of this initiative. Feedback and input from the municipal participants, Steering Committee and TAC members

and observations of the Project Manager and DRBC staff will facilitate the development of these documents. Steering Committee members will be formally asked to complete a program evaluation form. Measures of success will include:

The degree to which municipalities have attained a heightened level of awareness of planning activities, and relative consistency among local plans and between local plans and plans of higher levels of government

- Consensus within the Steering Committee of data gaps, needs, and direction.
- A determination by all of the municipalities to pursue the action steps they develop and to continue convening the environmental coordinating council.

Dissemination

Findings, analysis, reports and data will be distributed to all Steering Committee members and Technical Advisory Committee members. In addition, a final public presentation will be made for all interested parties. The appropriate forum for this may be through the Delaware River Greenway Partnership as administrator of the Lower Delaware Wild and Scenic River Management Plan Committee.

A project summary will be posted on MLUC@TCNJ website for all interested parties through a case study write up and lessons learned document. Part of this will include a powerpoint presentation of mapped data and a plan comparison summary. Interested parties will be directed to contact MLUC@TCNJ if interested in obtaining the complete set of data and the plan comparison report.

Partner Justification and Community Involvement

The MLUC@TCNJ mission is to support municipal governments in the Central New Jersey area in meeting local and regional land use challenges to create more livable communities. MLUC@TCNJ works with communities in Hunterdon, Somerset, Middlesex, Mercer and Monmouth Counties to identify and address opportunities for improved development and redevelopment, open space acquisition, transportation planning, environmental protection, and farmland preservation through the provision of education and training, essential tools, technical assistance and referrals.

MLUC@TCNJ brings the skills and experience of its professional planning staff to manage the proposed project. The project manager is a licensed, professional planner with 16 years of experience working with New Jersey municipalities on environmental, growth management and land use issues.

The Delaware River Basin Commission (DRBC) is a federal-interstate compact commission formed in 1961 to manage the water resources of the Delaware River Basin on a watershed basis without regard for political boundaries. Its members are the governors of the four basin states – Delaware, New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania -- and a federal representative appointed by the President. The Commission has broad regulatory, planning and coordinating powers. The Commission participated in the Lower Delaware Wild and Scenic River Study Task Force that developed the *Lower Delaware River Management Plan* (LDMP). It has endorsed that plan and is in the process of implementing its Special Protection Waters (SPW) program in the Lower Delaware to help achieve the number one goal of the LDMP – maintaining the existing high water quality in the Lower Delaware River. Linking the management of land and water resources at the local level is also a primary goal of *The Water Resources Plan for the Delaware River Basin* (Basin Plan) (DRBC, Sept 2004).

Through the provision of in-kind and compensated services for this grant, the DRBC offers the technical expertise of staff, as well as the collaborative capacity of its networks, to aid the municipalities in developing a locally relevant strategy for protecting the unique resources of this portion of the river corridor. DRBC's participation will help to make this project a model for achieving the close coordination

among municipalities and between local, state and regional levels of government that is essential to effective planning for the protection of water resources.

The proposed project will engage representatives from each of six municipalities along the Lower Delaware in Hunterdon County via a Steering Committee and, ultimately, the formation of a Lower Delaware Regional Watershed Coordinating Council for Hunterdon County. Letters of support from said municipalities and other key entities are forth coming and will be provided.