

# Basin Plan Development Moves Ahead

## A Common Vision for a Common Resource

*“Good plans shape good decisions. That’s why good planning helps to make elusive dreams come true.”*

– Lester R. Bittel, American author.

As directed by the “Resolution on the Protection of the Delaware River Basin” signed by the four basin state governors in September 1999, the DRBC continued to move ahead with the challenge of developing a water resources plan for the basin (basin plan) during 2002 and 2003.

The basin plan will be a 30-year, goal-based framework that will serve as a guide for all stakeholders – government and non-governmental alike – whose actions affect water resources in the basin.

A Watershed Advisory Council, whose members represent a broad spectrum of basin interests ranging from business and industry to environmental advocacy groups, has been working closely with DRBC staff, the commission’s standing advisory committees, and ad hoc committees in the facilitated, consensus-building process to forge a unifying vision for the basin. Council members have participated in nine meetings and three workshops since January 2001, and five draft plans evolved during 2002-2003.

Important elements of the goal-based plan to guide policy and action include:

- Maintaining and improving the quantity and quality of the basin’s water supply;
- Reducing flood losses, improving recreational experiences, and restoring the basin’s essential riparian and aquatic ecosystems;
- Improving the integration of the basin’s water resources with land use and development;
- Strengthening partnerships among all levels of government, the private sector and individuals, and enhancing the commitment to the protection, improvement, appreciation and restoration of the basin’s water resources; and
- Providing new opportunities for learning how to protect and restore our river basin.

The plan is prefaced by a set of twelve guiding principles against which all policy decisions and actions affecting water resource management should be measured. It also suggests a set of goals and objectives with milestones and indicators to measure progress towards achieving the plan’s desired results. The basin plan emphasizes integration and collaboration, and is not prescriptive or regulatory.

The commissioners in October 2003 directed DRBC staff to solicit public comment on the *Draft Water Resources Plan for the Delaware River Basin* as a means of broadening awareness of the plan beyond the valued group of stakeholders who have participated in its development over the past three years. A series of meetings will be held in all four basin states in early 2004. It is hoped that this outreach also will help to develop management strategies to implement the plan and identify potential implementation partners. Comments received through the public process will be incorporated into the plan as appropriate, and the revised plan will be submitted to the council members and the states for their review.

Support for enhancing public participation and regional cooperation in the development of the basin plan was generously provided by a grant from the William Penn Foundation.

After the final basin plan is officially adopted in 2004, the next step for the DRBC will be to carefully examine its current comprehensive plan (CP) in light of the broader, direction-setting basin plan. The CP is now basically a loosely organized collection of DRBC policies, rules, and projects. It is driven by the Delaware River Basin Compact and provides the commission with the basis for setting standards and promulgating regulations. The CP will be restructured to include forward-looking components of the basin plan so that the new CP becomes a true planning document rather than simply a compilation of the DRBC’s past decisions.

The commission’s looming financial crisis resulting from the loss of federal funding to support its annual budget may impact its ability to move ahead with the implementation of some of the areas in the basin plan to be led by the DRBC. Fiscal year 2005 funding from the commission was intended to support prioritized actions to be accomplished through contracts with federal partners, but if the DRBC cannot pay the local match, these cost-sharing opportunities with the U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will be lost.

To learn more about the development of the basin plan, please visit the DRBC web site at <http://www.nj.gov/drbc/basinplan.htm>.