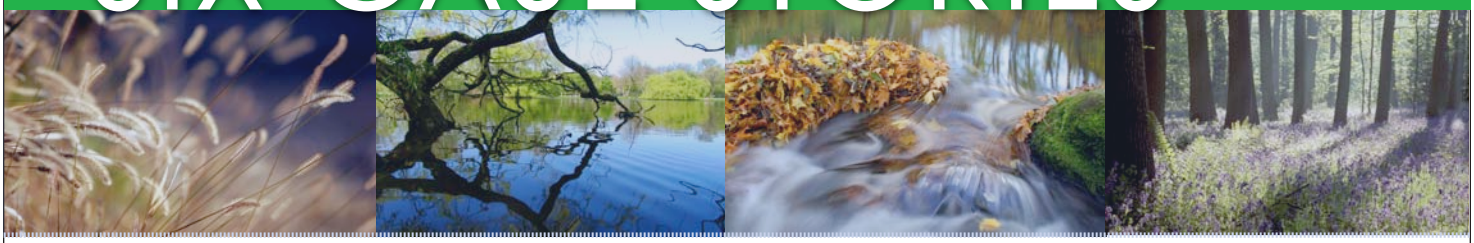
# Growing Successful Watershed Organizations:

## SIX CASE STORIES



Provided by the

**Environmental Finance Center, University of Maryland**

National Center for Smart Growth Research & Education

University of Maryland

Environmental Finance Center

Produced with grant funding from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation

**June 2007**

# Table of Contents

# Introduction

## Background

If, when meeting a stranger, you were asked, "Where do you live?" likely you would respond by naming a political jurisdiction – a major city perhaps, or, if your home town is small, the name of the town and its state. It is increasingly probable that by your actions, however, you are identifying with a particular drainage basin – your home watershed.

Americans are more frequently identifying with their watersheds – both with the human populations that live there and with the ecosystems situated within the watershed. Unlike political jurisdictions, which typically have boundaries that may not conform to natural divides, watersheds contain interdependent human and ecological communities that ignore political boundaries, but are linked by the natural water systems that drain into a common waterbody. Sensing that those communities provide cultural and natural assets worthy of protection, and problems worthy of solution, people are joining watershed organizations committed to taking action.[1]

Watershed organizations play a critical role implementing watershed protection and restoration activities. Whether a small volunteer-based organization or a larger organization with paid staff, these groups raise awareness about watershed protection, foster community-based stewardship, spearhead conservation and restoration activities, and serve as advocates for the environment and the community. Case studies included in this paper show strong leadership is the most critical component for groups that effectively gain influence and secure resources.

## Purpose

This paper contains the stories of six watershed organizations considered "successful."[2] Success was gauged by their demonstrated accomplishments and by their growth in members and annual budgets. The stories share approaches used by organizational leaders to grow outstanding watershed organizations. Although all of the groups began small, they are now significantly larger organizations with expanded annual budgets, membership, and staff. Their "lessons learned" can be instructive for groups who are active in their watersheds and who hope to achieve similar success.

## Key Findings

Five characteristics emerge as important attributes of organizations looking to increase impact on their watersheds and communities.

**We found successful watershed organizations have the ability to:**

### *Mobilize people*

Community members benefit from watershed protection efforts and are critical stakeholders that must be engaged. Only when there is adequate leadership to solicit public support for watershed protection, can local decisions be influenced and adequate protection measures taken. In the six cases, one person or a small group catalyzed local citizen's concerns, marshaled their energy, built alliances, and proposed a way to take action.

1 The growth of watershed organizations is part of a larger socio-political-environmental movement by Americans and people in other countries – especially Australians, Canadians, and New Zealanders – who are organizing themselves into bioregions or, as some have called them, "LifePlaces."

2 Pat Munoz, Program Manager, River Network, and Bill Matuszeski, former Director of the Chesapeake Bay Program, provided helpful suggestions for organizations to investigate; all of the organizations eventually chosen were mentioned by Munoz, Matuszeski, and the author appreciates their help. The author also conducted extensive searches for and within watershed organization websites to screen for successful organizations, located in scattered places, with well-documented activities and histories.

## *Create a compelling and broad vision*

A vision provides people with a common reference point toward which they can strive. The six organizations created compelling visions by making their vision statements broader than clean water alone. Their visions incorporate aspects of history and storytelling, opportunities for family recreation and ecotourism, a place of environmental justice, and the fascination of restored terrestrial and aquatic wildlife. The visions provide, in short, a watershed to which people of all ages and varied interests can relate and help to create. By employing compelling and broad visions, the organizations established large pools of potential members, a broad base of supporters, and a big picture to inspire action.

## *Define and redefine the mission as needed*

Although the organizations pictured their visions broadly, initially they focused their missions on "niches"– activities that needed to be done but that no one else was doing. As the organizations gained experience, they shifted and expanded their missions to reflect their deepening understanding of their situations, their strengthening relationships with stakeholders, and changing conditions. Watershed groups must adapt their community vision to define an effective role for the group. Organizations should be prepared to change their mission, if needed, to take advantage of changes in their watershed's needs and their organization's strengths.

## *Engage in politics*

Playing a political role is necessary to achieving greater impact in the community. All six of the organizations were engaged in politics, although in different ways and at different levels.

**Two questions provide the keys to deciding what political action is appropriate:**

- What challenges and opportunities does the local situation present?
- What skills and abilities does the organization possess? Can the organization hire help or will the organization develop skills that fit the needs of the situation?

## *Establish diverse financial sources to support programs*

Financial stability enables an organization to carry out their mission. Dependency on a single funding source can lead to quick gains and quick declines. As foundation programs change focus and competition for declining federal grant dollars increases, organizations need to be strategic with developing their financing plans. Developing partnerships and establishing a diverse funding base are critical to sustained financial stability capable of supporting watershed restoration and protection goals. All six organizations successfully expanded the number of funding sources since initial organization formation. And all continue to seek ways to diversify funding sources and expand the partnerships necessary to sustain their visions.

# Case Stories and Document Structure

In the following chapters you will find case stories of each of six watershed organizations. The case stories are based on interviews with organizational leaders, the contents of the organizations' websites, and other literature.[3] The six are geographically diverse – located in California, New Mexico, Montana, Minnesota, Virginia, and Massachusetts. Their stories contain common themes, told from the oldest established organization to the newest group, as follows:

- Charles River Watershed Association in Massachussettes
- South Yuba River's Citizen League in California
- Amigos Bravos in New Mexico
- Blackfoot Challenge in Montana
- Elizabeth River Project in Virginia
- Friends of the Mississippi River in Minnesota

Each case story contains background information on the organization, information on watershed characteristics, and key challenges. "Lessons learned" are highlighted within each case story. In the final chapter of this paper, we present overall "lessons for success," including resources for more information.

***Let's begin.***

3 The executive directors of the six organizations, all referenced by name in their stories, were generous with their time and information.

# The Charles River Watershed Association

*Bob Zimmerman wonders why other watershed groups have not defined their mission like his organization has to gain effectiveness and influence. That mission, he believes, is much needed in watersheds nationwide and, for the past 14 years, has been highly successful in his own region in southern Massachusetts.[4] Zimmerman, Executive Director of the Charles River Watershed Alliance (CRWA), his Board of Directors, and staff members have defined their mission to be scientific research and engineering about the urban water cycle. In so doing, they have created a valuable knowledge base for their area and, through shared findings and techniques, for other watersheds that contain urban places.*

## Charles River Watershed[5]

Fed by some 80 brooks and streams, the Charles River meanders north and east from its rural upper basin, through a suburban lakes region, to an urban lower basin, and ends in Boston Harbor. Called "Quinobequin" (Winding River) by Native American tribes, the Charles flows for 80 miles, but its origin is only 26 miles, as the crow flies, from its mouth, and the river drops only 350 feet from start to sea. The Charles Watershed is 308 square miles in area, encompasses all or part of 35 municipalities, and contains about 900,000 people.

Protection is provided for more than 8,000 acres of the watershed's wetlands. These protected resources, called "Natural Valley Storage Areas," play a critical role in flood protection and provide habitats for biodiverse communities of plants and animals, including both resident and anadromous fish. The lower basin of the Charles – which is lined with boathouses, performance facilities, and sports fields – attracts, on average, about 20,000 recreational users daily, more than any other river system in the country.

## History of the Alliance

CRWA began in 1965 in the political context of popular concerns about "dirty water" in the City of Newton, Massachusetts. Similarly at that time, citizens in the Boston area were concerned about the image of their harbor as little more than an open sewer. Uniting officials and citizens from 35 Massachusetts watershed towns around a common cause, the association became the vehicle for people's discontent about water quality. CRWA was particularly effective when it partnered with members of the League of Women Voters. The League of Women Voters, a recognized organization within the community, helped the CRWA convene meetings and planning sessions which lent credibility to the new organization and ultimately built popular support for CRWA and their work on water quality protection issues.

## Unfounded Assumption and New Direction[6]

Zimmerman joined CRWA in 1991 with an assumption that the key challenges were *inadequate will* and *insufficient funding* to

4 Personal interview with Robert Zimmerman, February 13, 2007.
5 This description of the watershed draws, primarily, from on-line publications: The Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Charles River Watershed (2007) www.mass.gov/envir/water/charles/charles.htm and the U.S Environmental Protection Agency, Charles River: Fact Sheet (May 2005) www.epa.gov/region1/charles/
6 Described by Robert Zimmerman, personal interview, February 13, 2007.

accomplish ends about which everyone agreed. Over the next two years he dropped that assumption as he realized there were deep divisions among public and private decision makers – developers and other advocates for economic growth, regulatory agencies, intergovernmental organizations, environmentalists, and elected officials – about the nature of the watershed's problems and options for their solution.

As he began to view the watershed as a living but not-well-understood organism, Zimmerman concluded that "the place that pays is the environment itself." CRWA, he decided, needed to shift direction from "being a mouthpiece to being a source of knowledge."

Aided in 1994 by a grant of $5 million from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, CRWA geared up to study "how water works" in the region. The ultimate goals were to find ways to improve water quality and increase in-stream flow. Existing law and regulatory statutes, the investigators observed, all favored large, centralized water systems. An early and significant conclusion of the research was that the key problem is in the way people design cities – "to get rid of water as quickly as possible." With that conclusion came the realization that all the things CRWA had been doing for almost thirty years would not make a significant difference in the long-term health of the watershed. Since that initial study, CRWA has increased its understanding of the problems of the watershed, created ways to solve those problems, and developed collaborative relationships with "smart regulators."

# Mission and Programs[7]

CRWA's current mission is "to use science, advocacy and the law to protect, preserve, and enhance the Charles River and its watershed." When possible, CRWA uses its knowledge base to inform policy choices and, when necessary, to oppose policies the alliance believes would harm the watershed.

CRWA uses a 25-year planning horizon. The association "develops a science-based understanding of interactions in the watershed, defines long-term, cutting-edge solutions to watershed problems, and promotes sustainable watershed management practices with government agencies and private entities." In an advocacy role, the association exerts influence for the "protection, revitalization, and expansion of public parklands on the Charles." The relative emphasis between science & engineering versus advocacy is illustrated by numbers of staff positions: currently, the association employs six scientists and engineers, and only one attorney, a staffing pattern that makes CRWA unusual, if not unique, among watershed groups.

**The organization implements its mission by using the following programs:**

## *Watershed Management*

Working with the U.S. Geological Survey, CRWA has, for the Charles River Watershed, studied hydrologic interactions among groundwater, surface water, and stormwater and evaluated management strategies for sustainable water resources. The association advises businesses, the public, and towns about site selection and building plans to increase water retention and aquifer recharge. Likewise, CRWA has developed "SmartStorm," a residential cistern-drywell system to capture and reuse or recharge roof runoff. During peak summer demand for water, the system enhances groundwater storage and instream flow and habitat, and reduces polluted stormwater runoff, combined sewer overflow activation, and flooding.

## *Land-Use Planning*

Using a land analysis methodology called "Resource, Environmental, and Land (REAL) Planning," geographical information systems (GIS) mapping, and hydrologic analysis, CRWA assists towns to: identify resources to be protected; map existing town infrastructure; develop a water budget; and assess water quality. The goals of this effort are to identify, protect, and acquire open space, retain a town's character, and sustain environmental resources.

7 The following explanation of the organization's mission is based on Charles River Watershed Association, Making a Difference: The Charles and Beyond August, 29, 2006, as found at http://www.crwa.org

## *Stormwater Management*

Understanding stormwater runoff to be the largest source of water pollution in the Charles River Watershed and a major threat, therefore, to fisheries, aquatic flora, and recreational and aesthetic values, CRWA has tested the effectiveness of stormwater controls and best management practices to prevent or reduce stormwater pollution. The association draws on this knowledge to review stormwater management programs of towns in the watershed, analyzing their effectiveness in controlling stormwater pollution and providing recommendations for improvements.

## *Parklands and River Access*

CRWA links advocacy for the protection, revitalization, and expansion of river parklands with programs to engage people in caring for and enjoying the river. Included are an annual river-bank cleanup, which mobilizes more than 1,000 volunteers, and an annual canoe and kayak race, which draws 1,800 participants and volunteers for a day of competitive fun on the river.

## *Water Quality*

CRWA volunteers have been monitoring, since 1995, the health of the Charles River at 37 sites along its 80-mile length. The association is currently developing, for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, total maximum daily load (TMDL) recommendations, to determine the assimilative capacity of the river for phosphorus, dissolved oxygen, and bacteria and the most effective means for reducing those pollutants.

## *Watershed Permitting*

CRWA, in partnership with state and federal agencies, is developing a model of integrated watershed permitting. The effort involves research on current discharge and water withdrawal limits and recommendations for linking permits to offset environmental impacts. The partners will develop options for mitigation and restoration through trades involving wastewater discharges, stormwater treatment and recharge, water withdrawals and conservation, and, possibly, wetlands protection, open space acquisition, and land use controls.

## *Fisheries and Habitat*

CRWA assists the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in assessing fish communities and developing, for the river, a target community, which will drive flow recommendations, management decisions, and permitting policies. The association also works to improve the population and passage of river herring, which live in the sea, but spawn in freshwater bodies, including the Charles River.

## *Advocacy*

Aided by its river monitoring program, CRWA identifies and reports illegal discharges into the river, promotes reduction of sewer overflows and stormwater runoff, and supports appropriate watershed protection regulations.

## *Education, Outreach, and Technical Assistance*

CRWA extends its knowledge of the river by providing consultation, computer modeling, and mapping services to schools and to other watershed groups and sponsors workshops and community forums to address important public issues. The association publicizes news and current events through a printed newsletter – the *Streamer*, an electronic newsletter – *River Current*, and its website. During the summer the association displays flags along the Charles to signal water quality conditions for boaters.

# Finances

When, in 1991, Bob Zimmerman left his position as a school headmaster to become the Executive Director of CRWA, the association's annual budget was about $100,000. Currently it stands at about $1.5 million. Revenues come from grants, receipts for services, and unrestricted giving – in approximately equal amounts. Most of the unrestricted giving comes from major donors.

Despite budget growth, the association remains, according to Zimmerman, a "hand to mouth organization," i.e., an association without an endowment.

Realizing the importance of developing an endowment, Zimmerman seeks to create one over the next several years, primarily by increasing donations from major donors.

## Pragmatic Planning

Zimmerman has observed, "Science is not democratic." What he means is that the planning process in a science-oriented organization, which characterizes CRWA in large part, is driven by the results of prior investigations, not by a preponderance of votes. Research provides answers to questions, but it also provides new questions to be investigated.[8]

The grand strategy for CRWA was set fourteen years ago – to learn how water works in the Charles River Basin and to use that knowledge to leverage the organization's effectiveness and influence. Ongoing and evolving tactics within that strategy are framed by a series of pragmatic questions:

- What new research problems about how water works are being uncovered by scientists at the association and elsewhere?
- How well are engineering techniques working in the watershed and elsewhere, and what new techniques should be considered?
- What knowledge bases do collaborators or potential collaborators have that should be pursued?

As answers to these questions unfold, the Executive Director, Board, and Staff of CWRA consider how to reallocate the association's budget, time, and other resources.

8 For a description and analysis of the water cycle in a highly urbanized region, see Charles River Watershed Association, *Summary: Water Resource Conservation and Restoration in Massachusetts*, May 15, 2006.

## *Lesson Learned*

**1**

The CRWA changed their mission from "being a mouthpiece to being a source of knowledge" to address the gap in scientific understanding of the urban water cycle. In so doing, CRWA has become the "go-to organization" for scientific research and information about urban watershed management in the Charles River and beyond.

**2**

In an effort to further stabilize and diversify their funding sources, the organization seeks to create an endowment over the next several years, primarily by increasing donations from major donors.

**3**

CRWA practices ongoing strategic planning which enables them to ensure: resources are focused on latest research needs; new research is considered in ongoing work; and collaboration with relevant organization continues.

### Sources


Charles River Watershed Association. *Making a Difference: The Charles River and Beyond*, August 29, 2006, as found at www.crwa.org/

Charles River Watershed Association. *Summary: Water Resource Conservation and Restoration in Massachusetts*, May 15, 2006 as found at www.crwa.org/

Commonwealth of Massachusetts. *Charles River Watershed* (2007) www.mass.gov/envir/water/charles/charles.htm

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. *Charles River: Fact Sheet* (May 2005) www.epa.gov/region1/charles/

Zimmerman, Robert. Executive Director, Charles River Watershed Association. Personal communication on February 13, 2007.

# South Yuba River Citizens League

*The South Yuba River Citizens League (SYRCL) remembers its past: the organization is rooted in advocacy. In its early history, during the 1980s, the League fought against proposals to dam the river. Although its mission has broadened since its initial years, SYRCL retains a taste for advocacy and manages its affairs to preserve that option. According to the League's Executive Director, Jason Rainey, methods that preserve the advocacy option include the way the League approaches collaborative relationships and the manner in which the organization funds itself .[9] The SYRCL also exhibits an unusual knack for "having fun." This trait, an element of "bioregionalism," demonstrates a way of relating local nature and culture – an approach to community living that originated on the West Coast of North America but which has potential applications for watershed organizations elsewhere.*

## Landscape and Cultural History[10]

Located on the west side of the Sierra Nevada Mountains of northern California, the Yuba River Watershed drains about 1,300 square miles of land from an altitude of over 9,000 feet, at the highest point on its rim, to about 30 feet at the river's mouth. The Yuba's three main tributaries – the North, Middle, and South Forks – join the Feather, then the Sacramento Rivers, before heading for the San Francisco Bay and the Pacific Ocean. Beginning in the snowy high Sierras – an area characterized by exposed granite outcrops with pockets of red fir, lodgepole pine, and hemlock – the forks of the Yuba descend to 6,000 feet before plunging another 2,000 feet down a flat-topped ridge-and-canyon region, where Ponderosa and sugar pine, Douglas and white fir, and incense cedar thrive, where bald eagle soar and deer browse, and where bear and mountain lions prowl. Finally, the three forks wind their way down slowly, from 3,000 to 500 feet, through foothills where oaks, maples, grey pine, and various chaparral species mingle with newts, salamanders, and tree frogs, and, in the springtime, where a multicolored carpet of wildflowers frames wild runs of Chinook salmon and steelhead trout.

People of the Native American Martis tradition, living in the Yuba watershed more than 4,000 years ago, left stone tools as evidence of their presence. The Tsi-Akim Maidu (also known as the Nisenan), a group of Southern Maidu, arrived approximately 1,500 years ago. In the late fall, the Maidu harvested their primary food source for the winter, acorns; in the spring, they followed the fish runs and deer migration up into the canyons. Wagon trains bearing pioneers and, eventually, gold miners from the East used Native American trails; their passengers brought new diseases and a different sense about living with the land. Census data indicate there were 3,226 Tsi-Akim Maidu as the gold rush ramped up in 1852; by 1870, there were only 9.

With the gold rush, the Yuba became the most heavily mined watershed of the Sierra Nevada. Miners' camps lined the riverside, and the towns of Nevada City and Grass Valley became among the most populous of mid-nineteenth century California. Miners and their service providers constituted a diverse group, including Chileans and Mexicans early in the rush, followed by large numbers of Chinese. In 1870, 25 percent of California's population came from China.

9 Personal communication on February 13, 2007.
10 This section draws on South Yuba River Citizens League. Yuba River Facts, http://www.syrcl.org/

By 1870, the main technique for extracting gold had shifted from panning to hydraulic mining, with devastating results for the Yuba Watershed. Miners diverted water from high in the basin into cannons they used to blast at canyon walls, sending sediment through sluice boxes and back into the river. The Yuba ran thick with mud and debris as miners flushed mountains toward the sea. The total amount of materials that washed into the Yuba is estimated to be 700 million cubic yards, three times the volume of earth excavated for the construction of the Panama Canal. The Yuba's riverbed rose as much as 80 feet in some places, and flooding resulted. Hydraulic mining continued until 1884 when the practice was declared illegal.

The impacts of gold mining continue to this day. With 18 dams constructed to trap remaining sediment, the Yuba is among the most dammed and diverted rivers in California. Arsenic and mercury contamination reduce water quality. Flooding continues to threaten the lower portion of the watershed. And the salmon and steelhead runs, which once reached the upper watershed, are confined to the lower basin.

Agriculture and logging have grown in the region, however, and a hospitality industry has been developing rapidly.[11] By 1983, when new hydroelectric dams were proposed for the South Yuba, many residents in the watershed were determined to preserve, protect, and enhance the river's assets, so they formed the SYRCL to fight the proposals.

## SYRCL Begins and Grows[12]

The Nevada County government and a private developer proposed to construct the dams. In reaction, citizens formed a league, that same year and began to lobby, conduct letter-writing campaigns, circulate petitions, and provide educational programs, all of which were supported, initially, by local fundraising events. These efforts paid off when, first the county and then, in 1993, the developer gave up the fight.

During the fight against the dams, activist citizens formed the SYRCL into a non profit organization and, in 1989, hired a paid executive director. Moreover, in addition to fighting the dams, the League created a positive goal: to preserve 39 miles of the South Yuba in its free-flowing condition.

Working to build a coalition of public and private organizations, SYRCL framed the idea of land preservation as an economic development strategy. A challenge to the League occurred when floods on New Year's weekend of 1997 traumatized the lower Yuba area and led some people to renew efforts to further dam the river. Another challenge came in the form of opposition to preservation, which stemmed from a group of property-rights advocates. Through the 1990s, however, the League continued to build a coalition of groups in favor of preservation. By joining multi-organizational efforts to examine various issues – federal grazing rights, fisheries improvements, herbicide use in national forests, and timber-harvest plans – the League made allies for preservation. SYRCL also trained and deployed volunteers to monitor the spring-run of endangered salmon.

Early in 1999, when protection for the 39 miles of river seemed likely, opponents established a well-funded lobbying campaign in the California state legislature. In support of the League, however, the national long-distance phone company Working Assets and the outdoor-clothing company Patagonia provided funds for a counter campaign.[13] SYRCL's sixteen-year effort paid off in late 1999 when Governor Gray Davis signed a bill adding the 39-mile stretch of South Yuba River to California's Wild and Scenic River System.

## Collaboration without Compromise

Having stopped the dams and reached its preservation goal, SYRCL has found new causes. The League now views its mission as "a community-based educational nonprofit corporation committed to the protection, preservation and restoration of the entire Yuba Watershed" and "aggressively seeks environmental solutions through the tools of education, organization, collaboration, litigation, and legislation."[14]

---

11 More than 500,000 people currently visit the South Yuba each year.
12 This section draws on South Yuba River Citizens League. The History of SYRCL, http://www.syrcl.org/
13 Patagonia and SYRCLB have established an ongoing relationship. The company is one of several private firms with outdoor interests that are active in promoting environmental causes both as individual organizations and through The Conservation Alliance. See www.patagonia.com and www.conservationalliance.com.
14 South Yuba River Citizens League Board of Directors. South Yuba River Citizen League: Mission and Vision, (adopted 4/21/98) http://syrcl.org/

Collaborative efforts continue with like-minded organizations to solve flood-control problems, restore salmon and steelhead populations, and improve water quality. The League is also engaging in dialogue with traditional opponents, including organizations that had, in the past, proposed damming the river. The traditional foes discuss current issues such as irrigation for agriculture and fish populations.

SYRCL enters collaborative efforts and dialogue without forgetting its advocacy roots. According to Jason Rainey, the League converses with foes on issues of common concern for four primary reasons: (1) to obtain and share information; (2) to agree on the facts about issues; (3) to distinguish between groups' public positions about the issues and their underlying interests; and (4) to clarify those interests and determine which of them, if any, the groups have in common. According to literature on the subject, these are classic methods for conducting win-win negotiations.[15]

# River Programs

**SYRCL conducts five major programs:**

## *River People*[16]

River people – provides opportunities that connect inhabitants to the place where they live, work and play. The League counts as its members over 4,500 businesses, property owners, and citizens with diverse interests but with a common love for the river. Over 500 people are active volunteers in the organization. The League publishes a quarterly newspaper, *The Sierra Citizen*, and offers "hundreds of educational and community-building programs and events." Examples include: an annual auction; dances and concerts; summer and winter membership parties; annual river clean-ups; "Quiz Night"; lobbying at the state capital; educational slide shows and presentations; and raft trips during the fall salmon run.

## *River Monitors*

River Monitors – involves about 70 volunteers, ranging in age from high school students to senior citizens, who volunteer one Sunday per month to gather scientifically-credible, water-quality data at one of 27 field sites.

## *River Science*

River Science – employs water-quality monitoring data, analysis, research, education, advocacy, and collaboration. Included are a "State of the Yuba" annual report, an education program about mercury and arsenic pollution for citizens and public officials, a "Watershed Academy" for high school science teachers, and facilitation of the "Adapt-A-Watershed Program" and other science-based programs for schools.

## *River Law*

River Law – provides assistance in litigation, policy development, and general counseling services to grassroots environmental organizations across California. The League's attorneys have expertise in water quality, water rights, endangered species, land use, and non-profit corporation law. Issues about which the League has provided assistance include, for example, protecting and restoring instream flow and water quality, preventing inappropriate land uses and resource extraction activities – e.g., mining, grazing, and timber harvesting – that threaten river resources, and preserving and enhancing opportunities for river recreation and access. Since its beginning in 1998, River Law counts many successes: protecting salmon in the Yuba River; preventing illegal logging in the Tahoe National Forest; and limiting an effort to triple the size of a landfill in Yuba County, to name several.

## *River Advocate*

River Advocate – brings together diverse interest groups to discuss and attempt to resolve important issues in the Yuba Watershed. In this program the League negotiates for causes such as restoration of wild fish, development alternative flood control management solutions, and formation of a Yuba River Parkway.

# Financing to Preserve the Advocacy Option[17]

As a matter of principle, for its first 15 years, SYRCL took no grants from the state or federal governments.

15 See, for example: Fisher, Roger, William Ury, and Bruce Patton. Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In. New York: Penguin Books, 1981.
16 South Yuba River Citizens League. What We Do, http://syrcl.org/
17 This section is based on personal communication with Jason Rainey, Executive Director, South Yuba Citizens League, on February 13, 2007.

Instead, the League used membership dues, proceeds from events, and private donations to fund its organization and projects. The principle reflected a League decision to avoid any constraints that public monies might create in order to maintain the organization's option to play a public advocacy role. In recent years, the League has relaxed, to a degree, the practice of eschewing public monies, but it has not abandoned its advocacy role. Currently, about half of the SYRCL budget derives from public grants, but grant opportunities are scrutinized to avoid accepting any constraints that would limit how the League could advocate for public measures. According to Executive Director Rainey, the League continues a policy of not requesting any public monies that would limit its advocacy option, even if that means reducing the organization's ability to do projects.

## Having Fun the Bioregional Way

When interviewed about the SYRCL, Rainey said with a chuckle, "We do have fun." With SYRCL, fun happens in ways that connect nature and culture to enhance the sense of place.

**Two examples serve to illustrate such connections:**

- As it has for several years, the League will provide Salmon Raft Tours for the autumn run of wild salmon. In October and November of this year, rafts will, on nine occasions, transport people to float amidst the swimming salmon. In 2007 the League will also host an autumn event that has not occurred for 150 years: at a sunrise ceremony, Tsi-Akim Elders will conduct their traditional "Calling Back the Salmon" ritual to celebrate the return of the magnificent fish.[18]

- Early in 2007, the League hosted the fifth annual "Wild and Scenic Environmental Film Festival." With financial support from Patagonia, the League organized a review of 250 films, 80 of which were included in the festival. Film makers, speakers, celebrities, and 3,000 others enjoyed film screenings, wine tasting, parties, and café talks during the three day event.[19]

18 South Yuba River Citizens League. News and Events, http://syrcl.org/
19 South Yuba River Citizens League. Film Festival, http://syrcl.org/

## *Lesson Learned*

**1**

SYRCL has maintained a clear mission and a focus on its prime interest – advocacy for the watershed;

**2**

The League has willingly restricted its financial base from grant sources that might pose constraints on advocacy activities to maintain that focus;

**3**

SYRCL has created partnerships with private sector companies illustrated most notably by its ongoing partnership with Patagonia.

### Sources


Fisher, Roger, William Ury, and Bruce Patton. *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In*, New York: Penguin Books, 1981.

Rainey, Jason, Executive Director, South Yuba River Citizens League. Personal communication on February 13, 2007.

South Yuba River Citizens League. *Film Festival*, http://syrcl.org/

South Yuba River Citizens League. *The History of SYRCL*, http://www.syrcl.org/

South Yuba River Citizens League. *News and Events*, http://syrcl.org/

South Yuba River Citizens League Board of Directors. *South Yuba River Citizen League: Mission and Vision*, (adopted 4/21/98) http://syrcl.org/

South Yuba River Citizens League. *What We Do*, http://syrcl.org/

South Yuba River Citizens League. *Yuba River Facts*, http://www.syrcl.org/

# Amigos Bravos

*Amigos Bravos – Friends of Wild Rivers – has a vision. Rivers across the State of New Mexico are so clear and clean that people bend their knees, cup their hands, and drink directly from the waters without fear. This vision was a reality in Northern New Mexico one lifetime ago. Contemporary Pueblo Indian and native Hispanic elders gifted Amigos Bravos with the vision at a strategic planning session, shortly after the organization formed.*

*Begun in 1988 when a handful of people volunteered to care for a 40-mile stretch of the Rio Grande River, Amigos Bravos has become an organization devoted to watershed restoration, advocacy, and organizational development across the state of New Mexico. Presently, Amigos Bravos has a paid staff of seven people and an annual budget of about $600,000. At several points in its history, the organization has shifted its mission and reallocated resources to meet new challenges. Themes of the organization's success are:*

- *Creating a mindset and methods to understand emerging issues and to adjust to those issue by adopting new programs and projects;*
- *Building on success to move into related projects.*
- *Developing strong, long-term relationships with grassroots communities;*
- *Designing a board of trustees that is actively engaged with those communities and that functions in clear and symbiotic ways with the organization's staff.*

## New Mexico: Nature and Culture[20]

With a total area of more than 121,000 square miles, New Mexico is the fifth largest state in the United States but has a relatively low population density – 15.0 persons per square mile, versus 79.6 persons per square mile across the whole country. Nonetheless, New Mexico's population of slightly less than two million people is highly diverse. It contains large numbers of two indigenous groups – American Indians and persons of Hispanic origin.[21] Approximately 45 percent of the population are of Hispanic origin, another 45 percent are white persons who are not Hispanic, and 10 percent is American Indian persons. New Mexico's people are also relatively poor: in 2003, the portion of inhabitants living below the poverty level was 17.7 percent in the state, as compared to 12.5 percent across the nation.

New Mexico's topography consists primarily of mesas, mountain ranges, canyons, valleys, and normally dry arroyos. The range in elevation is from a low of 2,817 feet above sea level, where the Pecos River flows into Texas, to 13,161 feet above sea level atop Wheeler Peak in the Sangre De Cristo Mountains. The climate of the state is characterized by light precipitation

20 Source materials for this section include: Horticulture Research International, New Mexico: General Information http://hridir.org/countries/united_states_of_america/new_mexico/index.htm; US Census Bureau, New Mexico Quick Facts http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/35000.html ; and Western Regional Climate Center, Desert Research Institute Climate of New Mexico http://www.wrcc.dri.edu/narratives/NEWMEXICO.htm. William deBuys' book, Enchantment and Explitation: The Life and Hard Times of a New Mexico Mountain Range, provides an excellent study of the linkage between natural and human history in northern New Mexico's Sangre de Cristo Mountains.

21 The U.S. Census Bureau uses the terms "American Indians" and "persons of Hispanic origin" in its demographic reports.

totals, abundant sunshine, low relative humidities, and relatively large annual swings of temperature. Principal sources of moisture for the scant rains and snow that fall on the state are the Pacific Ocean, located 500 miles to the west, and the Gulf of Mexico, 500 miles to the southeast. Major rivers are the Rio Grande, which traverses the state from north to south, and the Pecos, Canadian, San Juan, and Gila Rivers. New Mexico's arid to semiarid climate puts a value premium on water. Brian Shields, Executive Director of Amigos Bravos, says, "We are aware of the value of rivers and water in New Mexico. There is a very finite amount of water here."[22]

Although water is scarce, it adds significant value to the state's economy. Lumbering, recreation, and in, particular, agriculture, are all water-dependent sectors. More than half of the state's area is pastureland and another 28 percent is woodland. While only four percent of the state is under cultivation, one third of that area is intensively farmed by irrigation. Beginning with the state's native Hispanics, New Mexico's farmers have irrigated crops for more than 400 years. The traditional irrigation source, stored surface water, depends on adequate winter snowfalls in Northern New Mexico and Colorado. Half of all irrigation waters are from the surface, and half are from groundwater, drawn from the Ogallala Aquifer. Cotton, fruit, feed crops, and truck farm produce are the most significant irrigated products.

## Mission Turning Points

In 1988, after assisting the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) with the provision of services on a 40-mile stretch on the Rio Grande, the small group of volunteers that was to become Amigos Bravos learned BLM was expected to approve a permit for a massive mineral waste disposal facility for Molycorp's molybdenum mine, located near the Red River in Northern New Mexico. Amigos Bravos formed itself as an official organization, filed a lawsuit against BLM to block the permit, and began a long-term effort to restrict Molycorp's waste-disposal practices. Financed with $12,000 from the sale of t-shirts and posters, Amigos Bravos partnered with the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund and eventually prevailed in its legal action.[23]

Executive Director Shields recalls the struggle to prevent the waste disposal facility as an excellent learning experience. "We learned about advocacy tools – how to work with the media, engage public agencies, organize communities, and build a team of hydrologists, mining engineers, and lawyers to develop legal evidence," Shields says. In 1993, Amigos Bravos and other groups successfully advocated for the passage of the New Mexico Mine Act, which required Molycorp to post a bond of $157 million to cover possible environmental impacts from its molybdenum mine.

While it celebrated successes in its advocacy role and growth in its membership, which increased to 250 members by 1990, Amigos Bravos became increasingly aware of and concerned about a split that had emerged, in the early 1990s, between environmental groups and indigenous peoples in New Mexico. The conflict stemmed from an initiative to protect the spotted owl, a cause advanced by environmentalists and opposed by people involved in the state's forest economy, Native Americans and Hispanics included. Indigenous peoples were tending to view environmentalists as "evil newcomers," according to Shields. At that same time, a second issue, which had the potential to drive a wedge even deeper between environmentalists and indigenous communities, emerged around an opinion issued by New Mexico's Attorney General. The opinion, which granted protective rights to the state's rivers, was applauded by environmental groups, but viewed by Native American and Hispanic groups who were dependent on stream flows for irrigated agriculture as a threat to their financial viability.

Amigos Bravos held a strategic planning session, as it does every four years, in 1991, just weeks after the Attorney General's opinion was issued. Strategic planning for Amigos Bravos means convening about 40 people, who represent all of New Mexico's grassroots groups with interests in water resources, to a three-day retreat at Ghost Ranch, north of Albuquerque. The focus of the 1991 session quickly turned to the Attorney General's opinion. In thinking through the issue, participants eventually reached a consensus. Amigos Bravos, they decided, should initiate a series of conversations, called "Somos Vecinos," or "We are Neighbors." With a two-year grant from the Ford Foundation, Amigos Bravos organized conversations across the state. At a less intense level, but with no less significance, Somos Vecinos conversations continue to this day. The result has been, according to Shields, a deeper, more

22 American Rivers website at www.americanrivers.org
23 For a detailed description of the case and subsequent legal and political actions by Amigos Bravos against Molycorp , see the New Mexico Environmental Law Center at http://www.nmenvirolaw.org/cases/molycorp.htm

broadly-shared understanding of common interests and values between environmental groups and indigenous communities. "Our shared interests for rivers are health, well being, and sustainability," says Shields. "We value social justice and environmental justice;" he says. "Moreover," Shields continues, "we believe the two go hand-in-hand."[24]

At the subsequent strategic planning session, in 1995, participants grappled with another issue: how to implement the responsibility that Amigos Bravos had assumed when it became a state-wide advocate for river protection and restoration. "We clarified the challenge," says Shields, as an issue of "how to build strong community-level groups that would be energized by local issues." Participants in the session also provided an answer for that issue: create a circuit-rider position, witin Amigos Bravos, to provide start-up and capacity-building assistance to individuals and groups wanting to protect their local watersheds. Most groups begin with concerns about a single issue, according to Shields. "When a group is concerned about more than one issue," he says, "we generally suggest the group form a board of directors to represent various stakeholder groups."

At the subsequent strategic planning session, in 1995, participants grappled with another issue: how to implement the responsibility that Amigos Bravos had assumed when it became a state-wide advocate for river protection and restoration. "We clarified the challenge," says Shields, as an issue of "how to build strong community-level groups that would be energized by local issues." Participants in the session also provided an answer for that issue: create a circuit-rider position, within Amigos Bravos, to provide start-up and capacity-building assistance to individuals and groups wanting to protect their local watersheds. Most groups begin with concerns about a single issue, according to Shields. "When a group is concerned about more than one issue," he says, "we generally suggest the group form a board of directors to represent various stakeholder groups."

In the 1999 strategic planning session, according to Shields, participants decided to "export the knowledge we had gained in fighting to protect rivers from mining" to the next big public issue: challenging Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) to recognize seepage of toxic waste. This effort continues. In its *2006 LANL Discharge Report*, Amigos Bravos discussed historic and current toxic discharges from the laboratory. Those discharges include "a wide range of radionuclide, metal, and chemical pollutants," including: "hexavalent chromium in the regional drinking water aquifer; PCBs in soils on LANL property, in surrounding canyons and streams, and in fish tissue samples taken from the Middle Rio Grande watershed; and perchlorate detected in the regional aquifer." In addition, according to the report, "There are significant concerns regarding the terms and conditions of all three permits under which LANL has coverage…" Finally, the report "makes general and specific recommendations for addressing both on-going and historic discharges at LANL."[25] This is a difficult fight, notes Shields, who says, "Not only are we challenging a public organization, but also an agency that has a security mission during a time of national security concerns."

At the most recent strategic planning retreat, in 2003, participants further clarified the mission and goals of the organization. Amigos Bravos currently has three goals – "Restoring Watershed Health, Holding Polluters Accountable, and Building a River Protection Movement." *Restoring Watershed Health* includes multiple efforts to influence local, regional, national, and, particularly, state water policies. Methods involve "educational and outreach activities, legislative and policy reviews, and research and on-the-ground restoration initiatives."

*Holding Polluters Accountable*, includes, as a cornerstone, the ongoing struggle to hold Molycorp accountable for damages to the Red River, to monitor threats to people living near the firm's molybdenum mine, and to reclaim the mine-site itself. This focus also includes the initiative to examine toxic discharges from the Los Alamos National Laboratory, and the defense of the New Mexico Mining Act, which holds mining companies accountable for clean-up of their environmental impacts.

*Building a River Protection Movement* includes outreach and educational efforts, technical assistance to communities, and membership development. Purposes of these efforts are to "reach, teach, empower, and grow" the organization's constituency. Initiatives include, for example: the circuit-rider program; an "Environmental Justice, Diversity, and Youth Initiative," which targets diverse communities, especially indigenous groups, and for which Amigos Bravos received Peace Action New Mexico's *Peace Activist Award of 2004*; and partner activities with the national organization American Rivers as well as with numerous state and local organizations.

24 Personal communication with Brian Shields, March 14, 2007.
25 Amigos Bravos. 2006 LANL Discharge Report, http://www.amigosbravos.org/main-publications.html

# Finances

New Mexico's people, who are relatively poor and mostly indigenous, are generous nonetheless. Mostly, however, they donate to their churches and to organizations that support social needs, rather than to environmental organizations such as Amigos Bravos. While the organization is very grateful for what local people do contribute, the limited potential for significant membership revenue has motivated Amigos Bravos to seek funds from foundations, an effort at which it has been highly successful. The current annual budget of about $600,000 is derived from three primary sources: 65 percent from foundations; 25 percent from member donations and special appeals for funds concerning particular issues; and 10 percent from events, such as an annual raffle. While this split of sources reveals a heavy reliance on foundation grants, it is more balanced than the split was several years ago. In Fiscal Year 2004, when the budget totaled about $480,000, 83 percent of support and revenue came from foundation grants and 17 percent from memberships and events.[26]

There is a risk in being "foundation dependent," recognizes Executive Director Shields, but he adds that Amigos Bravos has diversified is sources of funding. Early in the history of Amigos Bravos, only two foundations supported the organization; typically there are now more than five.

Today, there is increasing competition for foundation dollars, observes Shields. The number of watershed groups is growing, he notes, and in his opinion their number and needs are exceeding the capacity of foundations to provide support. Moreover, he has observed that when the executive branch of the federal government is "hostile to environmental interests," foundations tend to direct more of their resources toward advocacy efforts Washington, DC and less to local groups. His strategy in this situation, he says, is to focus on building capacity within grassroots watershed groups in New Mexico, so that when the situation at the national level changes, those groups will be well-positioned to take advantage of increased opportunities for obtaining resources via foundation grants.

Amigos Bravos is not large enough, according to Shields, to hire a person to do development work only. Instead, the organization employs a person with "excellent writing skills" who handles both grant writing and communications duties. Additionally, the Executive Director and an Assistant to the Director are actively involved in development efforts.

# A Last Big Lesson Learned

In providing information for this case story, Executive Director Shields ended his remarks by offering one "last big lesson learned." Speaking with conviction, Shields stated, "The role of our Board of Directors has been critical to our success." The current Board is small, totaling only seven members, and is, according to Shields, carefully chosen to represent grassroots communities and knowledge about subjects that are highly valued in the organization.

The Board President is an attorney who specializes in water law, was a founding member of Amigos Bravos, and represents acequias (community-operated waterways) and communities across Northern New Mexico in contentious water and land use issues. Other members include: an architect/contractor; a biologist; an attorney specializing in employment and labor law; a farmer; a retired district court judge; and an artist who founded Artesanos de Questa, a traditional arts cooperative aimed at providing economic alternatives to mining. All board members perform significant leadership roles in other organizations.

According to Shields, the Board "anchors" his thinking to "keep the Executive Director from getting carried away by unwise ideas." The role of the Board is clearly understood, by all concerned, he says, and it does not include raising funds. Fund-raising is the role of the staff, says Shields. Instead, he believes, the Board's role should be to:

- Advise the staff honestly about what strategies would be good to follow;
- Keep Amigos Bravos closely connected with grass roots communities;
- Assist with projects, as volunteers, when time and opportunities allow.

Shields, who has served as both a Board member and on the staff – including service as Executive Director since 1996 – says: "The Board sets polices and the staff implements them. The Executive Director interfaces with both board and staff and has the authority to move forward to lead implementation efforts."

26 Amigos Bravos. Restoring Waters, Sustaining Communities: Annual Report 2004. http://www.amigosbravos.org/

# *Lesson Learned*

**1**

Amigos Bravos employs an strategic planning process that periodically involves many stakeholders in identifying common interests; the process has shifted the organization's mission on several occasions;

**2**

The organization has diversified its funding sources. Previously at risk for begin a "foundation dependent" organization, Amigos Bravos has increased funding from membership donations and events, and expanded funding sources which now include monies from special appeals;

**3**

An opportunity exists, in New Mexico and likely other in states, for a statewide organization to assist in the formation and development of local watershed groups;

**4**

The role of the Amigos Bravos Board of Directors is clearly defined, which allows it to play an important role in setting the organization's direction.

## Sources


American Rivers.
Website www.americanrivers.org

Amigos Bravos. *2006 LANL Discharge Report*
http://www.amigosbravos.org/main-publications.html

Amigos Bravos. *Restoring Waters, Sustaining Communities: Annual Report 2004*.
http://www.amigosbravos.org/

DeBuys, William. *Enchantment and Exploitation: The Life and Hard Times of a New Mexico Mountain Range*. Albuquerque, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 1985.

Horticulture Research International.
*New Mexico: General Information*
http://hridir.org/countries/united_states_of_america/new_mexico/index.htm

New Mexico Environmental Law Center.
Website.
http://www.nmenvirolaw.org/cases/molycorp.htm

Shields, Brian. Personal communication on March 14, 2007.

U.S. Census Bureau. *New Mexico Quick Facts*.
http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/35000.html

Western Regional Climate Center, Desert Research Institute. Climate of New Mexico.
http://www.wrcc.dri.edu/narratives/NEWMEXICO.htm
http://syrcl.org/

# Blackfoot Challenge

*Like the river after which it is named, the watershed group known as the Blackfoot Challenge progresses forward – turning as it meets obstacles and cascading opportunistically when it finds a welcoming slope. The past history and current situation of Blackfoot Challenge, a non-profit organization serving residents of Western Montana's Blackfoot River Valley, is the story of how a group of diverse stakeholders discovers common interests, builds trust, and collaborates on increasingly complex and long-term projects, forming a watershed organization that has maintained, through time, its collaborative values and methods. Blackfoot Challenge has grown its project portfolio and its management sophistication, while maintaining a single, overarching vision for the future.*

## The Watershed[27]

The Blackfoot Valley, with a 1.5 million acre watershed, is more than twice the size of the State of Rhode Island. Coursing through the valley are fifteen tributaries of the Blackfoot River. They run from the top of the Continental Divide in the Bob Marshall Wilderness, merge with increasing volume to form a single stream, and flow westward for some 132 miles. From 10,000 foot peaks in the wilderness area, the river courses through timbered slopes, by prairie grasslands, past sagebrush steppe, and into wetland areas that contain 600 species of vascular plants, including the Howell's gumweed, a threatened species found nowhere else on earth. Seventy percent of the region is forested. Elk, wolf, bald eagles, bull trout, Canadian Lynx, and grizzly bears, twenty-one species of waterfowl, and other birds including peregrine falcons, inhabit the valley.

The movie "A River Runs Through It" depicted the pristine beauty of the Blackfoot River, but overlooked a history of environmental degradation – the result of gold mining, livestock grazing, and logging to support mining and construction of the Transcontinental Railroad. Those practices increased sedimentation of the stream, causing declines in fisheries and angling opportunities. New land uses – particularly fragmentation of the landscape into summer homesites, golf courses, and other commercial developments – threaten the region's natural resources and rural quality of life.

Two historic trails cross Blackfoot Valley. Nez Pierce, Flathead, and Blackfeet Indians followed the Lolo Trail, as did Captain Meriwether Lewis and his men. The US Army later constructed the Mullan Road and used it to move supplies and men between Fort Benton, Montana and Walla Walla, Washington. Remains of Indian culture such as tipi rings, artifacts, and ceremonial sites, in addition to mining-related structures, provide other historic sites.

Ownership of the Valley is in multiple hands. About 50 percent is federally owned, seven percent is state owned, 20 percent is in corporate timber holdings, and the remaining 23 percent is privately held, mostly as ranches. Twenty-five hundred households live in the Valley, some in the seven separate communities that dot the landscape. Local governance is provided by three county jurisdictions.

## Threats, Common Interests, and a Bioregional Approach

Stakeholder groups perceived threats, clarified interests, found common ground, and formed an alliance in the late 1980s and early 1990s. For their part, cattle ranchers viewed noxious weeds, property damage from elk migration, and water-rights conflicts as threats to their way of life. They were also concerned about declines in profitability,

27 The following descriptions of the Blackfoot Valley and the beginning of Blackfoot Challenge draw on Sullivan (1997), Coughlin (1999), and McDonald (2003) and on the Blackfoot Challenge Strategic Plan (2000).

seen as resulting in large part from deteriorating grazing conditions. Reduced profitability, they believed, increased the probability that ranches would be sold and subdivided into recreational homesites and non-traditional commercial enterprises. Two additional stakeholder groups, public land managers – in the beginning, the US Fish and Wildlife Service and Bureau of Land Management, primarily – and private wildlife-interest groups, such as Trout Unlimited, Ducks Unlimited, and Pheasants Forever, shared concerns about the subdivision of ranches, which they viewed as a threat to wildlife habitat.

These groups, driven by threats to their core personal, professional and organizational values, increased communications across the Valley community and in so doing learned how many interests they had in common. Initial meetings were often small, trust-building gatherings "across the kitchen table." Many discussions took place at the social hub for regional landowners – Trixi's Restaurant and Bar in Ovando, Montana – a venue that continues to host stakeholder dialogues.[28] The vision that emerged from these discussions looked to a future Blackfoot Valley in which land managers would be preserving, protecting, and enhancing the Valley's natural and cultural assets: an intact Northern Rockies ecosystem; financially-viable working landscapes; and a traditional rural lifestyle based on cattle ranching. That vision became the basis for the Blackfoot Challenge, and it remains unchanged after twenty years.

## Creating the Blackfoot Challenge

Formed in 1991 and chartered in 1993, the Blackfoot Challenge became the primary vehicle to achieve the stakeholder groups' common vision. Prior to formally organizing themselves, however, constituent groups initiated a series of small and simple projects with a high probability of success, such as installing artificial nesting structures for Canada geese.[29] Success with simple ventures created a momentum, fueled by increasing mutual trust, which led to more complex projects, such as restoring wetlands, streams, and riparian areas, and developing alternative grazing systems. Eventually, successes with short-term efforts opened the door to long-term projects such as protecting important wildlife habitat through the purchase of perpetual conservation easements on private land. When the projects became sufficiently complex and long-term to exceed the management capacity of separate groups, the stakeholders decided to establish a single organization to manage the processes. They formed the Blackfoot Challenge and, to recognize their multiple interests and collaborative relationships, created a steering committee for the organization that represented both diverse interests and the institutional memory of how to work collaboratively.

Two stakeholder groups were critical to the creation of the Challenge. In addition to their efforts in the Valley, private landowners worked at the state level to obtain enabling legislation for conservation easements, recreation tourism, and wildlife corridor management.[30] And, leaders in public natural resource agencies saw the importance of working as partners with private landowners on issues of mutual concern.

## Mission and Methods

Steering committee members coupled nature with culture, river with land, and present with future when they wrote their mission statement, which strives "to coordinate efforts that will enhance, conserve and protect the natural resources and rural lifestyles of Montana's Blackfoot River Valley for present and future generations" (Strategic Plan, 2000). The mission recognizes that natural resources and rural lifestyles are interdependent in the working landscape of the Blackfoot Valley. It implies that a healthy river requires appropriate land-use practices on the surrounding watershed. And it speaks for the sake of future generations, whose welfare depends on the extent to which people, now living, behave in sustainable ways.

**Preferred methods in the Blackfoot Challenge are stated as follows:[31]**

- ***Be Inclusive*** – Recognize and work with diverse interests in the Blackfoot Valley.
- ***Avoid Confrontation*** – Bring together public and private resources to help resolve issues and avoid conflicts.

28 See http://www.ovando.net/ and http://www.blackfootchallenge.org .
29 The discussion of the early formation of the organization draws on Sullivan (2003).
30 Personal communication with Tina Bernd-Cohen, Executive Director of the Blackfoot Challenge, October 31, 2006.
31 These are shown in the Blackfoot Challenge Strategic Plan (2000), p.1, where they are called "Goals and Objectives."

- ***Work Together & Partner*** – Promote a coordinated approach to problem solving and project implementation. Forge partnerships among the members to achieve Blackfoot Challenge objectives.

- ***Share Information*** – Provide for the exchange and distribution of technical and topical information. Foster communication between public agencies and private landowners to avoid duplication of efforts and to capitalize on potential opportunities for responsible land management. Serve as a clearing house for information among agencies, conservation groups, and land owners in the Blackfoot Valley.

- ***Achieve Resource Stewardship*** – Examine cumulative impacts of land management decisions and promote actions to lessen adverse impacts in the Blackfoot Valley. Undertake activities and projects to coordinate protection of the natural resources and maintenance of the rural lifestyle in the Blackfoot watershed. Advocate resource protection and rural lifestyle.

- ***Serve*** – Be of service to a wide variety of individuals and organizations with interest in the Blackfoot River, its tributaries, and adjacent lands.

# Structure

The Blackfoot Challenge Board of Directors, a sequel to the steering committee, numbers "ten to sixteen members representing the various businesses, farms and ranches, communities and residents, as well the county, state and federal agencies residing and/or operating within the Blackfoot Valley."[32] Diversity on the board is illustrated by the fact that its members frequently serve on the boards of "partner organizations," such as Trout Unlimited, The Nature Conservancy, Bureau of Land Management Resource Advisory Committee, planning boards, weed districts, and school boards. To conduct its work, the Blackfoot Challenge Board utilizes committees, such as those for conservation strategies, education, native fisheries, weed management, and wildlife management. The committee structure is flexible; as priority issues for the organization emerge, committees are formed.

The more than 400 public agencies, businesses, organizations, and individuals on the Blackfoot Challenge mailing list do not pay dues, but they can donate money to support the organization. The Challenge employs an Executive Director who oversees the organization's one additional employee, carries out the strategic plan, implements a fund-raising strategy, and administers contracts, project activities, and services. The Executive Director also oversees contracted services for the Challenge, which include administrative assistance, bookkeeping, tax preparation, and programs and projects.

# Concerns and Projects

According to the *Blackfoot Challenge Strategic Plan* (2000), resource management issues generally involve balancing resource protection with human activities. Natural resource concerns include: water quality and availability; fisheries resources and wildlife habitat; threatened and endangered species; fire hazard reduction; and grazing and noxious weed management. Economic and landscape concerns related to maintaining the rural lifestyle of the watershed include: the loss of agricultural lands to other uses, such as ranchettes and second homes; pressure on natural resources created by increased recreational activities; and the need to create a stable, sustainable local economy in the context of the growing global economy.

**Examples of individual projects to meet these concerns follow:**

## *Weed Management*

A committee on weed management has been active since 1995. The Challenge – in partnership with private, county, state, and federal interests – formed eight Weed Management Areas, which plan and manage noxious weeds and which also provide education and biological/grazing control. Although the committee continues to coordinate efforts, counties in the watershed have hired Weed Management Coordinators, and each of the areas has developed local leaders.

32 Blackfoot Challenge Strategic Plan (2000), p.2.

## Conservation Strategies

Beginning in 2000, a committee has met to exchange information, pool resources, identify priorities, and explore/utilize appropriate strategies. Its 20 members include all organizations with conservation easements on 70,000 acres of private lands, a timber company with 20 percent of the holdings in the watershed, state and federal agencies with 60 percent of the holdings, and local land conservation interests.

## Drought Response

In response to stakeholder group requests in the context of a severe drought in 2000 that threatened native fisheries, the Challenge formed a committee to facilitate dialogue among Trout Unlimited, wildlife agencies, and water users. The result was the Challenge's Drought Response Committee, which coordinated a successful watershed-wide emergency effort. The committee has since shifted efforts to address long-term water conservation and recreation issues.

## Education

Activities include: group tours on subjects such as weed management, grazing practices, native fisheries, threatened and endangered species, habitat protection and restoration, and alternative ranch income; a summer Water Education for Teachers (WET) program; public speaking, awareness, marketing and outreach about the purposes and activities of Blackfoot Challenge; and an annual award to an individual, organization, or agency that has provided an outstanding contribution to "enhance, conserve, and protect the natural resources and rural lifestyle of the Blackfoot River Valley."

## Habitat & Water Conservation

At the request of the State of Montana, the Challenge formed a committee, in 2000, which consists of landowners, public agency representatives, technical staff, and consultants to create water quality restoration plans for four Total Maximum Daily Load Areas. The committee also works with the Big Blackfoot Chapter of Trout Unlimited to plan stream restoration projects and to obtain funding for their implementation.

## Wildlife Management

In 2002, largely in response to concerns about increased grizzly bear activity, the Challenge formed a committee of landowners and managers. Because life in the Valley involves ongoing challenges of coexistence between people and elk and wolves, as well as grizzly bears, the committee's role has since been expanded to consider human-wildlife interactions, exchange information, and coordinate wildlife management and conservation efforts in the Blackfoot Valley.

# Finances[33]

When the Challenge was formed, in the early 1990s, its financial resources came, almost exclusively, from public agencies. Public resources have continued to flow to the organization, but all other support groups – businesses, clients, foundations and other nonprofit organizations, landowners, and ordinary citizens – have become more important sources of funds. For example, the number of unrestricted, private annual donations has grown from five to 140. During the past six years, the annual budget has increased from $40,000 to $1.5 million. The Executive Director and Board of the organization are sensing, however, that the current budget is too large to be sustainable and are considering an annual budget of about $700,000 to be ideal for the long term.

The Challenge has also developed an operating reserve fund, which currently totals about $140,000. That fund provides the organization with significant "matching resources" for grants. Although restrictions in requests-for-proposals sometimes constrain what may be requested in a grant application, the Challenge always tries to make the strongest possible case for receiving operating funds.

Significant flexibility is achieved by using contract employees, whose work is tied to specific grants. Currently, the Challenge employs 30 contract workers, in addition to the usual two staff members. The organization also strives for flexibility by "institutionalizing" programs that are ongoing; the best example of that strategy, according Executive Director Bernd-Cohen, is how weed control programs, which are ongoing efforts, have been shifted from the Challenge to the county weed districts.

33 The following section draws on a personal communication with Tina Bernd-Cohen, Executive Director, Blackfoot Challenge.

In seeking grants, the Challenge began by targeting relatively easy sources. "We went for the low-hanging fruit," said Bernd-Cohen. She says success in getting grants is a "two-edged sword," however. Balanced against the growing reputation for success is the attitude, among some granters, that their resources should be directed to organizations that "need lots of help." According to Bernd-Cohen, this attitude "makes for stress" within her organization.

Watershed organizations need individuals with leadership skills, says Bernd-Cohen. Particularly important, she said, are people with skills in inter-group facilitation, organizational development in general, and grant writing in particular. "We also need foundations that support watershed organizations and provide them with leadership-capacity building," noted Bernd-Cohen, "as well as with funds to do the project work that people are asking us to do."

## Sources


Bernd-Cohen, Executive Director, Blackfoot Challenge. Personal communication on October 31, 2006.

Blackfoot Challenge. *Blackfoot Challenge Strategic Plan: 2000-2005,* www.blackfootchallenge.org/

Blackfoot Challenge. *The Blackfoot Watershed: State of the Basin Report, 2005: Understanding Our Natural Resources and Lifestyle,* www.blackfootchallenge.org/

Coughlin, Chrissy. *Blackfoot Challenge*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan. Part of a Master's Degree project in the School of Natural Resources & Environment at the University of Michigan.

McDonald, Brian. *The Blackfoot Watershed* (May 2003), www.blackfootchallenge.org/

Sullivan, Gary L. *Challenge History and Evolution of the Blackfoot* (Excerpts from "Partners in Practice: The Fine Line Between Success and Failure," Transactions of the 62nd North American Wildlife and Natural Resource Conference, 1997)


# *Lesson Learned*

**1**

Blackfoot Challenge started with small, simple projects and, as those succeeded, built momentum for an expanded mission;

**2**

The Challenge employs a board and committee structure that clarifies direction and effectively accomplishes projects and goals;

**3**

The organization has developed an operating reserve fund for grant-matching purposes;

**4**

Also related to financing, the Challenge uses contractors to avoid long-term commitments for personnel salaries;

**5**

The Challenge has successfully assumed the role of a neutral facilitator in helping to solve public issues in the watershed.

**6**

The organization develops partnerships, such as for the Weed Program, to sustain program efforts over time.

# Elizabeth River Project

*In 1991 Marjorie Mayfield Jackson and three friends began meeting around a kitchen table to discuss the Elizabeth River and its environmental issues.[34] At that time, the waterway was the subject of an urban legend: if someone fell into and was pulled out the river, legend had it, the survivor required seven vaccination shots; otherwise, unfortunately, the individual would die.*

*Jackson, who eventually became Executive Director of the Elizabeth River Project (ERP), recalls how busy and poor she and her friends were when they started meeting. "We didn't have time to write minutes nor money enough to hire someone to do that," she recalls. "So every time we met, we first tried to remember what we had decided at the previous meeting." Eventually, though, the group obtained a $1,300 grant from the Commonwealth of Virginia – funds enough for Jackson to resign from a part-time waitressing job to devote more attention to the project, and resources sufficient to conduct a mail survey. "In the survey, we asked 60 community leaders in the watershed what the problems of the Elizabeth River were and what actions they would support to reduce the problems," Jackson says.*

## The Watershed and Its Issues[35]

Named by Jamestown colonists in the early 17th Century for Princess Elizabeth Stuart, the daughter of King James I of England, the Elizabeth River is a short tidal estuary that drains a highly urbanized and industrialized basin of Southeastern Virginia into the lower Chesapeake Bay. The main stem of the river is only five miles long, is two miles wide at its mouth, and provides important military and commercial port facilities. Located on the southern side of the mouth of the James River, the Elizabeth River Watershed covers about 300 square miles within the cities of Chesapeake, Norfolk, Portsmouth, and Virginia Beach.

By 1991, the Elizabeth had long been known as a heavily-polluted waterway. Many local people assumed at the time that its reduced quality was "the price of progress" and had given up on restoring its natural qualities. Building on the survey results, the group of four decided to involve others and, in 1993, formed ERP as a non-profit organization. The organization set its initial vision and mission: an Elizabeth River restored to the highest practical level of environmental quality and accomplished through partnerships among government, business, and community groups.

## Getting Organized

At its beginning, ERP developed three strategies for restoring the river, strategies that have served the organization well to this day:

1. Bring scientists together with business, citizen, and government leaders to develop plans that reflect real problems and realistic actions to solve them;
2. Educate residents of the watershed to create individual behavioral changes and popular pressure for actions by public and private organizations;
3. Conduct Elizabeth River Project affairs in ways

34 Personal interview with Marjorie Mayfield Jackson on February 5, 2007.
35 This section draws on National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, *Elizabeth River Watershed Contaminant Conceptual Model Project*, http://mapping.orr.noaa.gov/website/portal/elizriver/ and Wikipedia, *Elizabeth River (Virginia)*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wik/Elizabeth_River_(Virginia)

that will have the organization be known as trustwor thy – trusted, that is, to be a catalyst for collaborative restoration efforts across diverse stakeholder groups and worthy to receive the financial resources necessary to plan, organize, and implement restoration efforts.

## Action Plans, Endorsements, and Implementations

Non-profit status made ERP eligible for grants and the organization obtained one, for $20,000, from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; it also secured support from the Commonwealth of Virginia and the Virginia Environmental Endowment. With these resources, ERP convened, in 1993, a 120-member team of scientists and community leaders to develop an action plan for restoring the river. The grant from EPA was to conduct a "comparative-risk process," whereby diverse stakeholders of the watershed were brought together to reach a consensus about which environmental problems posed the greatest risks to human and ecosystem health and to the quality of life in the Elizabeth River Watershed.[36] The effort resulted in a set of 18 planned-for actions, which were published in 1996. Public reaction to the publication of the plan, according to ERP, was one of euphoria sweeping the community. In ERP's words, "Banner headlines and 11 news articles appeared in the local press in one week. The late Charles Kuralt of CBS, keynote speaker at the debut of the plan, reflected on the research and political support behind the document when he said, "You have the resources and the people, and I am convinced too, the will to give the river a rebirth."[37]

**Implementation highlights, over the six years that the plan was operational, included the following:**

- A multi-million dollar effort by The US Army Corps of Engineers to clean the river's toxic sediments;
- ERP's educational efforts to improve public under standing of bottom-life ecology, which included teacher training, adult workshops, and "Princess Elizabeth," an actor in historic attire who advocated in the watershed's elementary schools, and still does, for a "clean bottom for the Elizabeth";
- Cost-share partnerships among local, state, and federal governments to restore wetlands across four cities in the watershed; additionally, work by the City of Virginia Beach, initiating a $50 million effort for land acquisition and conservation and for the beginning of a greenway area;
- The "River Stars" program, whereby local businesses, industries, schools, and organizations partner with ERP on individual restoration projects such as land conservation and pollution prevention efforts;
- An Elizabeth River Watershed exhibit at Nauticus, the National Maritime Center;
- Removal from the river of more than 40 abandoned vessels that posed threats to navigation;
- The most comprehensive river monitoring effort in the history of Virginia, initiated by the state's Department of Environmental Quality.

In 2001-02 another diverse group of stakeholders, 45 in number and called the "Stakeholder Review Team," met to review the initial action plan and recommend revisions to it.[38] The team's revised plan, which streamlined the original 18 actions into a "succinct Clean 14," is now the river restoration roadmap for efforts by ERP and its partners.[39] As the new action plan was being prepared, ERP obtained pledges of "support for key goals of the plan" from a noteworthy set of 30 people, including local, state, and national elected and appointed officials and leaders of prominent businesses and non-profit organizations in

36 For further explanations of "comparative risk" and of its application to the Elizabeth River Watershed see Gutenson, Debra. "Comparative Risk: What makes a successful project?" in *Duke Environmental Law & Policy*, as found at http://www.law.duke.edu/journals/delpf/articles/deplf8p69.htm, and Randolph, John and Richard C. Rich. "Collaborative Environmental Management: An Emerging Approach and Experience in *Virginia" in Virginia Issues & Answers* 5:1 (August 1998).
37 The Elizabeth River Project, *Elizabeth River Restoration and Conservation: A Watershed Action Plan* (Revised Second Edition), p.2. www.elizabethriver.org/
38 The Virginia Department of Environmental Quality and the Chesapeake Bay Program provided funds for the effort. The US Army Corps of Engineers, Norfolk District, provided in-kind support.
39 The 2002 Plan is now being review for update and will, in the near future, be revised to create a third action plan.

the watershed.[40] A brief summary of the current action plan follows:[41]

**Highest Priority Actions**

1. Clean up Elizabeth River sediments, an action item popularly known as "The goo must go!"
2. Restore and conserve vegetated buffers, wetlands, and forests.
3. Engage River Star industrial partners to establish pollution prevention as the industrial ethic for the Elisabeth River Watershed.
4. Reduce toxics and nutrients in stormwater runoff.
5. Monitor river trends to guide effective restoration and conservation.
6. Restore contaminated uplands where the payoff is high for enhancing marketability as well as enhancing the environment.
7. Ensure that a proposed expansion of Craney Island and other proposed port expansions are both eco logically and economically responsible.
8. Educate schoolchildren and the public on river ecology and the Elizabeth River's key challenges.

**Other Priority Actions**

9. Reduce litter in the Elizabeth River to the maximum extent practical.
10. Support local, state, national, and international efforts to reduce levels of the toxic TBT in marine paint.
11. Promote mass transit and alternate transportation, based on recognition of automotive usage as a major source of pollution in the river.
12. Remove abandoned vessels and pilings.
13. Support efforts to implement a "load allocation approach," defining maximum total levels of pollutants the Elizabeth River ecosystem can tolerate and allocating portions of the total among the watershed's industries.
14. Support efforts to improve insufficient sanitary collection systems.

**By early 2007, implementation highlights of the plan included the following successes:**

- Initiated river-bottom cleanup projects at three sites – Scuffletown Creek, Money Point, a $15 million project, and Paradise Creek, an effort that will also include a 40-acre creek side nature park with restored wetlands, "a tidal garden, tree walks, and an earth-works sculpture." The Paradise Creek project is also noteworthy because it involves a restoration plan for the whole of the subwatershed; virtually every major landowner along the Creek has participated in efforts such as wetland restoration, construction of oyster reefs, and development of the public park.

- Pioneered voluntary wetland restoration efforts with partner projects at more than a dozen sites in the watershed;

- Reduced pollution, with River Star partners, by 165 million pounds and with the same partners restored or conserved 649 acres of wildlife and recycled or reused 167 million lbs. of additional materials. Visitors from the U.S. and from China, Mexico, Bosnia, the Philippines, and Thailand have studied River Stars as a model for voluntary stewardship.

- Built a new River Information Center on the Ports mouth City waterfront, created a river camp, and reached more than 20,000 school children in the watershed with creative educational programs such as "Look at Lizzy's Bottom," which provides instruction on the meaning of a healthy river bottom.

## Educational and Public-Relations Programs

The prominent role of "Princess Elizabeth" and her much-discussed bottom in ERP's educational programming and public relations is great fun but also reflects a considered response to the challenge of helping residents of the watershed understand something as complex and unobservable as toxics on a river bottom. Likewise, the phrase, "The goo must go" is a phrase designed to galvanize public support for removal of toxic substances. A large investment in education, done in novel and memorable ways, is behind ERP's success in motivating grassroots involvement in restoration of the river, in creating good will for private investments in clean-up efforts, and in applying public pressure for governmental actions and expenditures.

40 Included in the set were, for example, a US Congressman, the Administrator of the USEPA, the Commander of the US Navy, Region Mid-Atlantic, several Virginia State Delegates and a State Senator, several city mayors, a leader from the NAACP, and the Plant Manager, Ford Motor Company Norfolk Assembly Plant.
41 *Elizabeth River Restoration and Conservation*, op.cit.

## The Significance of Trust

The underlying philosophy of ERP is to build trustworthy relationships with stakeholder groups – across the political spectrum, public and private, within the watershed, and external to it. Trust is needed, says Jackson, to obtain funds and to position the organization as an effective player for progressive action. A set of "guiding principles" found in the *Watershed Action Plan* illustrates how this philosophy is applied in practice. The following principles guide the implementation of ERP's plan:

- Build strong partnerships through a collaborative approach.
- Sustain the balance of a healthy economy and a healthy ecology.
- Raise awareness and appreciation for the Elizabeth River and its tributaries.
- Safeguard human health.
- Promote environmental justice for all stakeholders.
- Enhance compliance with existing regulations.
- Strengthen the Elizabeth River Project as the organization coordinating community-side implementation of the plan.

## *Lesson Learned*

**1**

The Elizabeth River Project conducted, at its outset, a survey about issues, needs, and problems, then used that information to create an informed vision, mission, and programs;

**2**

By creating a reputation for trustworthiness, the Project has galvanized support for programs by diverse stakeholder groups;

**3**

ERP uses innovative partnerships – e.g., cost-sharing relationships with private organizations and local, state, and federal governments to restore wetlands across four cities in the watershed – to fund watershed protection and restoration efforts;

**4**

The organization employs creative, attention-getting public relations and marketing techniques, such as "Look at Lizzy's Bottom" and "the goo must go" to educate the public about the watershed and strengthen political support for its programs.

### Sources


The Elizabeth River Project. *Elizabeth River Restoration and Conservation: A Watershed Action Plan* (rev. 2nd ed.), www.elizabethriver.org/

The Elizabeth River Project. *What We Do, The Clean Fourteen, How to Become Involved, and Superfund Sites*, http://www.elizabethriver.org/

Gutenson, Debra. "Comparative Risk: What Makes a Successful Project?" in *Duke Environmental Law & Policy*, http://www.law.duke.edu/journals/delpf/articles/deplf8p69.htm

Hoyer, Meghan. *The Virginia Pilot.* "Elizabeth River Project is Helping to Shape Portsmouth's Waterfront," April 4, 2006.

Jackson, Marjorie Mayfield, Executive Director, Elizabeth River Project. Personal communication on February 5, 2007.

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. *Elizabeth River Watershed Contaminant Conceptual Model Project*, as found at http://mapping.orr.noaa.gov/website/portal/elizriver/

Randolph, John and Richard C. Rich. "Collaborative Environmental Management: An Emerging Approach and Experience in Virginia" in *Virginia Issues & Answers* 5:1 (August 1998).

# Friends of the Mississippi River

*"We are a place-based organization," says Whitney Clark. "Our aim is to affect private and public decisions by helping people understand, fall in love with, and become advocates for this place."[42] Clark is the Executive Director of the Friends of the Mississippi River (FMR), and the place he advocates for is the Mississippi River Watershed in the Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota metropolitan region. Beginning in 1993 with one staff person – Whitney Clark – FMR now has a staff of 14, a board of 18, and a membership of more than 1,400. FMR's three major programs – protecting and improving water quality, conserving riverfront land, and enhancing stewardship of the river corridor – all fit within the broader strategy of strengthening people's sense of place.*

## Region and Mission

FMR is active in the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (MNRRA), a "partner park" created by Congress in 1988.[43] Partner parks are places where the National Park Service coordinates with other agencies and groups to preserve, enhance, and make special places available to the public. MNRRA stretches for 72 miles along the Mississippi, links numerous regional parks, visitor centers, and places of interest, and serves residents of and visitors to the Minneapolis/St. Paul (Twin Cities) metropolitan region. Of 54,000 acres protected in MNRRA, the National Park Service owns only 35. Regional parks in the Twin Cities area include, for example, Minnehaha Regional Park and Fort Snelling State Park. Visitor centers include the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge and the Banfill-Locke Center for the Arts. Among the many places of interest are Indian Mounds Park and the Vermillion River Bottoms. Although the Friends of the Mississippi River is designed to work with the National Park Service and other agencies in the MNRRA, the organization is not a typical *"Friends of…"* group, which would have a singular mission to provide volunteer services to an agency. Instead, the mission of FMR is much broader: "to preserve and restore the river's fish and wildlife, its vital floodplains and scenic bluffs, its natural and cultural treasures, it beauty and its romance."[44]

## Protecting and Improving Water Quality[45]

Water quality is of great concern in the Twin Cities region. The Mississippi River provides drinking water for people who live in the area, but the entire stretch of the river located in the region fails to meet federal water-quality standards. Contamination has also made it dangerous to eat fish taken from the mainstem of the river and to swim in its waters. FMR and other advocates for clean water focus on harmful land-use policies and practices, particularly as they relate to industrial waste disposal, run-off from farms and urban areas, and the disposal of contaminants into storm-sewer systems. Currently, the organization is working to involve citizens, educate people, and advocate for public policies to improve water quality.

42 Personal communication with Whitney Clark on March 16, 2007.
43 See National Park Service. *Mississippi National River and Recreation Area* at http://www.nps.gov/miss/planyourvisit/placestogo.htm
44 Friends of the Mississippi River. *Home: About Us* as found at http://www.fmr.org/about.html
45 This section draws on Friends of the Mississippi River. *Many Hands in Stewardship of the Great River: 2004 Annual Report, Program Overview,* and *Protecting Water Quality* all from the organization's website http://fmr.org/index.html

Citizen volunteers become involved in the effort through stream-monitoring, which is co-sponsored by state and local government agencies, educational institutions, and non-profit organizations in the Twin cities metropolitan area. FMR serves on the steering committee for the partnership and is assisting in the development of a collaborative vision.

To educate people living in the area, FMR developed and provides a workshop on actions that residential-property owners can take around their homes to protect water quality in the Mississippi Watershed. Actions range from simple landscape fixes to major projects, such as reshaping entire backyards. Called "Gardening for a Rainy Day: Native Plants, Rain Gardens, & Lawncare for Water Quality," the workshop involves master gardeners and native plant specialists.

As for its work in advocacy for public policies, in the fall of 2003 FMR created the "Watershed Initiative," an effort which combines grassroots advocacy, land conservation, and public education in the Vermillion River a pristine tributary of the Mississippi located on the outer edge of the Twin Cities metropolitan area. The Vermillion Watershed has an area of 372 square miles and covers several counties, portions of six small cities, and numerous rural townships southeast of Minneapolis/St. Paul. The Vermillion, which contains 45.5 miles of designated trout stream, is considered to be the last remaining world-class trophy trout fishery in a metropolitan region of the United States. A regional authority – the Vermillion Joint Powers Organization (JPO) – is designing a watershed management plan to govern the watershed. The JPO Board has approved a watershed management plan and standards for stormwater runoff, wastewater controls, and stream buffers, and is establishing enforcement and monitoring efforts. FMR, as part of a coalition of recreation, habitat, and environmental groups, joined forces with local residents to ask for strong standards, particularly concerning stream buffers, which the coalition initially considered inadequate. FMR's Watershed Initiative also includes advocacy in the Rice Creek Watershed, home of another high-quality tributary on the region's urban fringe.

## Conserving Riverfront Land

The challenge is known: less than four percent of the Twin Cities' native landscape remains – much of it along the Mississippi River. FMR's vision for the landscape is also clear: the Mississippi will be serving as the backbone of an interconnected system of natural areas and green corridors that provide habitat for fish, birds, and mammals, that protect water quality, and that preserve a natural amenity for residents of the region. Working with landowners, local governments, and partner organizations, FMR is currently engaged in about a dozen efforts, including the following:

- A campaign, called "Embrace Open Space," to raise public awareness about threats to woodlands, wetlands, farmlands, and urban greenways in the Twin Cities' region and to urge citizen involvement in decisions that will determine the future of those spaces;

- Assistance to private landowners about a wide range of options, including planning and implementing ecological restoration projects and protecting their property permanently;

- A project, called "The Big Rivers Partnership," whereby FMR is teaming with government and nonprofit groups to coordinate revitalization and improvements on critical river valley lands, to inspire local citizens to action, and to leverage new resources for habitat restoration.

- "Mississippi River Greenway Strategic Planning," a multi-community project looking at ways to establish permanent greenways for communities along the Mississippi River in Dakota County.

- The "Farmland and Natural Areas Project," another Dakota County effort, this one involving a partnership of public and nonprofit agencies to save natural areas and farmland through public participation and local decision making.

## Enhancing Stewardship of the River Corridor[47]

FMR, often in partnership with other groups, sponsors various hands-on, citizen-engagement projects for a healthy Mississippi River. Examples include cleanups, storm drain stenciling, and neighborhood stewardship

47 This section draws on Friends of the Mississippi River. *Stewardship & Volunteering* and *Culture and Recreation* as found at http://www.fmr.org

efforts. The organization also creates education and recreation events, such as the "Mississippi River Challenge" – a pledge-based, two-day paddling event – and "Special Places Tours" – a series of programs that include spring bird hikes, interpretive paddles, and snowshoe hikes, all designed to explore urban wilderness areas, history, and the ecology of the river.

The Mississippi River, not surprisingly, plays a major role in the history of the Twin Cities' area, and FMR is engaged in helping people understand and appreciate that role. A current example involves FMR in an effort to make the Meeker Island Lock and Dam more accessible to the public. Meeker Island is the site of the first dam built on the Mississippi. Completed in 1907, the lock and dam were demolished only five years later to allow for construction of a hydroelectric dam. Meeker Island today is scenic, rich in wildlife, and a unique place to teach a colorful chapter of Minnesota and river navigation history. Placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2003, the Meeker Island Historic Site is, however, not easily accessible to the public. To increase public access, FMR is lobbying for funds to restore an old wagon road that serviced the lock and dam 100 years ago.

About history, the author of place, Wallace Stegner, wrote: "History was part of the baggage we threw overboard when we launched ourselves into the New World. We threw it away because it repealed old tyrannies, old limitations, galling obligations, bloody memories. Plunging into the future through a landscape that had no history, we did both the country and ourselves some harm along with some good. Neither the country nor the society we built out of it can be healthy until we stop raiding and running, and learn to be quiet, part of the time, and acquire the sense not of ownership but of belonging."[48] Stegner also wrote that, "…no place is a place until it has had a poet."[49] FMS is fortunate to have, as one of its founding board members, the historian John Anfinson, who wrote about Meeker Island in an article titled, "The Secret History of the Mississippi's Earliest Locks and Dams."[50] Anfinson also wrote a document for the *FMR Newsletter*, Winter 2003, titled, "Finding Our Sense of Place…And Connecting with Today's Mississippi River."[51] In his *Newsletter* article, Anfinson wrote: "The Mississippi has become a place more in the mind than in reality…" and "Without a deep, specific sense of place, we have nothing tangible to fight for, and the river's natural and historic places are taken apart piecemeal." To deepen and make people's sense of the Mississippi specific, Anfinson promotes events – FMR's canoe trips, tours, and stewardship projects, for example – and also stories. Stories, he writes when referencing the author Terry Tempest Williams, are needed for people to feel responsible for places. "This sense of responsibility is the bedrock of stewardship," notes Anfinson, and then he adds, "We tell stories about places to get people interested enough to care about them. You do not allow places for which you are accountable to perish or be diminished. You fight for them because they are a part of you – they are part of your story."

## Financing a Vision

On its website, FMR states the following: "We envision a river on which small boats are safe and welcome, to which we have clear and easy access and in which we can safely swim and fish. We envision a river that is cleaner, healthier, more alive and more inviting, a river no one can ignore or take for granted."[52] To reach such a lofty vision, practical and pragmatic steps are necessary.

FMR currently has an annual budget of slightly over $1 million. About one third of its revenues are provided by foundations and another third by government contracts. Individuals contribute about 16 percent of revenues and corporations another 10 percent. Executive Director Clark says the board's role is primarily to shape programs, rather than to make major contributions to the organization. He advises that building a budget, over time, is primarily a function of establishing a reputation for trustworthiness and for acting on principle. "Take a long view," he says, "and don't try to do it in one bite." Clark further suggests that watershed organizations should employ "intentionality." "Do what you do well," he argues, "to build a good reputation among stakeholders and potential supporters." Finally, he adds, "Be collaborative, but realize there will be times when you will need to stand up for the resource in opposition to someone, perhaps even a collaborator, who would harm it."

48 Stegner, Wallace. "Sense of Place" from *Where the Bluebird Sings to the Lemonade Springs* at http://www.colorado.edu/Sewall/sense.htm
49 Stegner, Wallace. Ibid.
50 Anfinson, John. Published originally in *Minnesota History* 54 (Summer 1995). The article may also be accessed, in PDF form, at http://www.fmr.org/place.html
51 This article may be found at http://www.fmr.org/103cover.html
52 Friends of the Mississippi River. See at http://fmr.org

# *Lesson Learned*

**1**

The Friends of the Mississippi River is consciously creating and deepening a "sense of place" among residents living in the Twin Cities region of the Mississippi Watershed;

**2**

FMR has created a diverse set of funding sources;

**3**

The organization keeps its eye on its mission even when collaborating with other groups.

## Sources


Anfinson, John. "Finding Our Sense of Place… And Connecting with Today's Mississippi River," *FMR Newsletter*, Winter 2003. See at http://www.fmr.org/103cover.html

Anfinson, John. "The Secret History of the Mississippi's Earliest Locks and Dams," *Minnesota History* 54 (Summer 1995). The article may be accessed also at http://www.fmr.org/place.html

Clark, Whitney. Personal Communication on March 16, 2007.

Friends of the Mississippi River. Home: *About Us*, http://www.fmr.org/about.html

Friends of the Mississippi River. *Many Hands in Stewardship of the Great River: 2004 Annual Report*, http://www.fmr.org/about.html

Friends of the Mississippi River. *Program Overview*, http://www.fmr.org/about.html

Friends of the Mississippi River, *Protecting Water Quality*, http://fmr.org/index.html

National Park Service. *Mississippi National River and Recreation Area*, http://www.nps.gov/miss/planyourvisit/placestogo.htm

Stegner, Wallace. "Sense of Place" from *Where the Bluebird Sings to the Lemonade Springs: Living and Writing in the West*, New York: Random House, 1992. See also at http://www.colorado.edu/Sewall/sense.htm

# Lessons for Growing Sucessful Watershed Organizations

*The case stories of the Charles River Watershed Association, South Yuba River Citizens League, Amigos Bravos, Blackfoot Challenge, Elizabeth River Project, and Friends of the Mississippi River provide insights about what can and should be done by watershed groups bent on achieving success. Admittedly, each of these watersheds differs from the other five: the types and qualities of natural resources vary; local history and cultures differ; and each watershed has a unique combination of public and private residents, organizations, and institutions through which people relate.*

*The watershed organizations themselves also differ somewhat. Nevertheless, when viewed together, the cases offer several lessons that can be applied to any watershed, in particular, lessons about mobilizing people, creating a vision, defining a mission, and engaging in politics. All are worth examining, drawing from, and applying elsewhere.*

## Mobilizing People

***Lesson for Success #1***

Mobilizing people is the essence of leadership. A good general introduction to leadership theory and practice is *The Leader's Companion: Insights on Leadership Through the Ages*, edited by J. Thomas Wren and published by The Free Press (New York: 1995). One way to frame the subject of leadership is to divide it into three parts - personal, group-process, and community leadership. **Personal leadership** involves self knowledge, self-confidence, and ongoing self-improvement. Personal leadership has an emerging branch of study called "emotional intelligence"; see books by Daniel Goleman such as, *Primal Leadership: Learning to Lead with Emotional Intelligence* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2002). **Group-process leadership** involves group techniques such as brainstorming, managing meetings, and resolving conflict. A comprehensive catalogue of techniques is provided by Murray Hiebert and Bruce Klatt in *The Encyclopedia of Leadership* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2001). **Community leadership** involves mobilizing people to solve public policy issues. A particularly insightful book on the subject is Ronald Heifetz' *Leadership Without Easy Answers* (Cambridge: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 1994).

In the six cases, one person or a small group catalyzed local people's concerns, marshaled their energy, built alliances, and proposed a way to move forward. Marjory Mayfield Jackson, of the Elizabeth River Project, started with $1,300 from the Commonwealth of Virginia to get organized and conduct a

survey; the way forward for ERP was to convene a group of scientists and other experts to investigate the River's problems and suggest solutions for them. In the Blackfoot Valley, a group of ranchers, public agency officials, and wildlife advocates talked through their common interests and saw their way to initiating small and simple projects, the success of which built mutual trust and led to bigger efforts. In the South Yuba and Amigos Bravos cases, the sale of T-shirts, posters, and other fund-raising methods provided the resources necessary to initiate legal actions and learn the methods of advocacy – methods that remain as principles in both groups. In the Charles River region and Twin Cities' area of the Mississippi, watershed leaders built initial alliances with established groups – the League of Women Voters for the Charles organization and the National Park Service for the Mississippi organization. These experiences in mobilizing people bring to mind the quote attributed to the anthropologist Margaret Mead: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

# Creating a Vision

***Lesson for Success #2***

The common element among the visions provided by these cases is "bioregional thinking." A bioregion may take many forms – a mountain range, coastal region, or peninsula, for example, as well as a watershed. Bioregions are defined as geographic areas characterized by unique natural and cultural features. They are self-defined around a common sense of place by the people who inhabit them. The bioregional movement values healthy local ecosystems and active local cultural practices such as eating the foods, reading the literature, and producing the arts of the region. Two seminal books that examine the emerging bioregional phenomena are: *Bioregionalism*, edited by Michael V. McGinnis (London: Routledge, 1999); and *LifePlace: Bioregional Thought and Practice*, written by Robert L. Thayer, Jr. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003). The Internet also contains a large amount of information about individual bioregional efforts and about the movement in general. For entry points to the Internet, see "Planet Drum" at www.planetdrum.org/ and "Bioregionalism" at www.bioregionalism.org. See also a paper by John T. Woolley and Michael V. McGinnis with Julie Kellner, which is titled *A Geography with a Heart: The California Watershed Movement*, Santa Barbara, California: University of California, Ocean and Coastal Policy Center, www.msi.ucsb.edu/msilinks/OCPC/PDFs/WTPap7/WP7.pdf.

An effective vision is a "big, bold picture of a future possibility that inspires people to make it happen."[53] Five of the six case organizations provide a vision on their websites. A vision has value in that it provides people with a common point, beyond the challenges of the day, toward which they can strive.

These six organizations have created compelling visions by making their preferred futures broader than clean water alone. Their visions incorporate aspects of history and storytelling, opportunities for family recreation and ecotourism, a place of environmental justice, and the fascination of restored terrestrial and aquatic wildlife. The visions provide, in short, a preferred watershed place of the future to which many people of all ages and of varied interests can relate and help to create. By employing such broad visions, the organizations have defined large pools of potential members, a wide array of possible supporters, and a big picture to inspire action.

53 This definition of "vision" is by Joanie Yanusas-Maughmer.

# Defining a Mission

***Lesson for Success #3***

While the organizations pictured their visions broadly, initially they focused their missions on "niches" – activities that needed to be done but that no one else was doing. As the organizations gained experience, they shifted and expanded their missions to reflect their deepening understanding of their situations, their strengthening relationships with others, and changing conditions. The most relevant organizational management concept is "strategic thinking," which assumes the future is unpredictable, in significant ways, and which emphasizes intuition and creativity in designing methods to achieve a vision. A comprehensive overview of strategic thinking and planning in non-profit organizations, especially as it involves a board of trustees, can be found at the following website: www.createthefuture.com/strategic_thinking.htm. Lara Lutz, writing for the *Chesapeake Bay Journal* in March of 2006, reported on research that found watershed organizations in Pennsylvania successfully employed strategic thinking in their relations with local authorities. See www.bayjournal.com/article.cfm?article.

The lessons provided by the cases about defining a mission are pragmatic. Do what works to solve problems and to move toward your vision, they teach. Assess the situation in your watershed to find an effective role for your group. Change your mission, if needed, to adjust to and to take advantage of changes in your situation. Finally, however, as the executive directors of the South Yuba Citizens League and the Friends of the Mississippi River argued, don't sell your soul in the process.

# Engaging in Politics

***Lesson for Success #4***

Efforts to influence public policy can take many forms. Key to deciding what to do is finding answers to two questions: What challenges and opportunities does the local situation present? What skills and abilities does the organization possess, can the organization hire, or will the organization develop that fit the needs of the situation? Sources of information about how watershed organizations are engaging the community include the *River Network* www.rivernetwork.org, *Center for Watershed Protection* www.cwp.org, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's *Wetland, Oceans, & Watersheds* www.epa.gov/owow/, and Purdue University's Conservation Technology Information Center www.ctic.purdue.edu.

All six organizations engage in the political arena, but they do so in different ways. The Charles River Watershed Organization does scientific research and engineering, conducts outreach programs, and advocates for "appropriate watershed regulations" that are supported by science. The Blackfoot Challenge and Elizabeth River Project emphasize watershed-wide collaboration and consensus-building, but the Challenge lobbies for legislation to enable its activities and the Project uses creative marketing methods to raise public issues and to educate citizens about The Elizabeth River's funding needs. Similarly, the Friends of

the Mississippi River works to convince citizens and public officials about the payoffs to funding watershed priorities. The South Yuba River Citizens League and Amigos Bravos emerged in legal controversy and both retain their taste for advocacy; yet also, both have added additional, less controversial political methods by building bridges of communication with old foes and new allies. A common thread among all six organizations is they emphasize the idea that having a reputation for trustworthiness is a valuable political asset.

# Developing a Financial Plan

***Lesson for Success #5***

Financial stability sustains and enables an organization to carry out their mission. Dependency on a single funding source can lead to quick gains and quick declines. As foundation programs change focus and competition for declining federal grant dollars increases, organizations need to be strategic in developing their financing plans. Developing and drawing on partnerships and establishing a diverse funding base are critical to developing a financial plan that will support watershed restoration and protection goals.

Available resources on watershed financing and fundraising include: the River Networks River Advocates Fundraising Guide viewable at http://www2.rivernetwork.org/fundraising guide/; fundraising and other leadership training and resources offered by the Institute for Conservation Leadership, see http://www.icl.org/; the EPA's Environmental Finance Network composed of nine regional Environmental Finance Centers (EFCs) offering financial expertise on a range of environmental issues, see http://www.epa.gov/efinpage/efc.htm; Plan2Fund, a web-based tool to assist organizations in prioritizing projects for funding see http://beta.nssg.com/bsuefc; and EPA's watershed funding web-page that has links to these and other resources, see http://www.epa.gov/owow/funding/sustainable.html.

All six organizations have successfully expanded the number funding sources since initial organization formation. And all *continue* to seek ways to diversify funding sources and expand partnerships that will support them in realizing their respective missions. For example: the Charles River Watershed Association has plans to create an endowment, primarily by increasing donations from major donates and drawing on existing relationships and the Friends of the Mississippi River has successfully developed corporate partnerships that cover 10% of their more than $1 million annual budget. Other approaches to fundraising and financial planning include the Amigos Bravos strategy to build capacity of grassroots watershed groups within the region so that they can collectively tap opportunities as they arise, and collectively make a difference.

Taking steps to maximize use of all resources is also an important aspect of an organization's financing plan. Several noteworthy approaches to maximizing fiscal and other resources are demonstrated by the Blackfoot Challenge. These include the Challenge's development of an operating reserve fund for grant-matching purposes; use of contractors to avoid long-term commitments for personnel salaries; and "institutionalizing" programs so that they continue without the Challenge's involvement as was done with the weed control programs where responsibilities were transferred from the Challenge to the county weed district.

Overall, developing partnerships and collaborating with others are at the conerstone of accomplishing goals for all organizations and an important aspect of the financing plan.

# Conclusion

The watershed movement provides new and promising ways for people to become involved in preserving, protecting, and enhancing their local environmental and cultural assets. Sharing experiences about what has worked is essential for the movement to continue to grow and achieve its promises. People intrigued with or involved in the movement can relate to and draw energy, inspiration, and ideas from each other through conversations, websites, research publications, presentations at conferences and workshops, and case stories such as those provided here.

# The EFC Team

## Swati Thomas, Program Manager, Environmental Finance Center

Ms. Thomas recently joined the EFC in November 2006 to manage a project evaluating financing options to support low-income residents in meeting upcoming septic system inspection and performance requirements in the Delaware Inlands Bays Watershed. Prior to joining EFC, Ms. Thomas worked as an environmental specialist for the Rural Community Assistance Corporation where she provided training and technical assistance to rural communities throughout Oregon and Washington on financial management of their water and wastewater systems. She has also had experience with watershed planning and restoration, as a consultant assisting watershed organizations and local governments in western Pennsylvania and as technical assistance staff with the National Association of Counties. She received a M.P.A. in Natural Resources Management and Environmental Policy and M.S. in Environmental Science from Indiana University and a B.S. in Environmental Systems Technology from Cornell University.

## Joanne Throwe, Assistant Director, Environmental Finance Center

Ms. Throwe joined the EFC in as the Agriculture Program Leader in 2005 and was made Assistant Director in early 2007. She is also currently working with USDA/CSREES as part of a shared faculty arrangement to assist in the coordination of special agriculture projects, such as the recent "Women in Agriculture" symposium at the University of Maryland as well a national conference for USDA on "Water Reuse Applications in Agriculture." Ms. Throwe currently resides on several committees including USDA Ecosystem Services Group; USDA/CSREES Renewable Energy Work Group; and the Shenandoah Valley Waste Solutions Forum. Prior to joining the EFC, Ms. Throwe spent several years as a Development Resource Specialist at USDA's Foreign Agriculture Service and two years as an Agriculture Extension Agent for Peace Corps in the South Pacific. She holds a M.A. in Public Policy and Private Enterprise from the University of Maryland and received intensive agriculture training from the Hawaii Loa College and the East West Center in Hawaii.

## Phil Favero, Consultant and Author

Formerly with the University of Maryland's Institute for Governmental Service, Mr. Favero has more than 30 years of experience in working with local public officials and community leaders on complex, sometimes controversial, public policy issues. He has conducted extension teaching at the University of Maryland, where he developed the Water Resources Leadership Initiative (WRLI) and other educational outreach programs. In addition, he has worked at Washington College designing and teaching courses, facilitating leadership development programs, and learning about sustainable community visioning, working landscapes, bioregionalism, forces for change, and other ideas to help rural communities on Maryland's Eastern Shore shape their own future. In Caroline County Mr. Favero facilitated the development of: (1) a strategic plan for growth management (2) a series of six Growth Summit Meetings between municipal and county elected officials; (3) and the creation of a Caroline County Council of Governments. He received his Ph.D. in Agricultural Economics from Michigan State University and is the author of approximately 100 publications for the use of public and private community leaders.

# The Environmental Finance Center, University of Maryland

This project was managed and implemented by the Environmental Finance Center at the University of Maryland. The Environmental Finance Center (EFC) is an independent non-academic center located at the National Center for Smart Growth Research and Education at the University of Maryland. The EFC has worked with communities in EPA Region 3 for more than 13 years. One of the EFC's core strengths is its ability to bring together organizations and individuals necessary to help communities develop solutions for a wide variety of problems. Through workshops, charrettes, and trainings the EFC has assisted communities with source water protection, stormwater management, green space and green infrastructure planning, low impact development, rate setting for drinking water and wastewater, septic system management, aquatic restoration, and community outreach and education.