

Coastal Development and Watershed Planning: Collaborative Problem Solving to Protect Water Resources

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Center for Marine and Wetland Studies, Atlantic Center
Coastal Carolina University, Conway, SC

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Panel Discussion

The panelists were asked to comment about what they perceived to be the main barriers to effective protection of our local water resources:

Tom Garigen, Horry County Stormwater Management Department:

- We have a long way to go from the regulatory standpoint
- We should be encouraged by Liz (Gilland)'s support
- Consulting engineers need more technical information about innovative stormwater treatment practices and Better Site Design strategies so that they can convince their clients to use these new technologies
- Unfortunately, no one wants to be the first to try these things
- Engineers need to take courses to build up their knowledge base
- In reality, it won't cost much more to adopt new stormwater management technologies, and, in most cases, will save money in the long run

Mike Wooten, DDC Engineers, Inc.:

- Serving on the Council for Coastal Futures has provided an opportunity to address these issues on a state level; now we need to figure out how to implement these planning strategies on the local level
- Socioeconomic changes in this country over the past several decades have created both opportunities and challenges: for example, larger discretionary incomes and higher divorce rates have resulted in more second homes and more expansion in the coastal zone
- Horry County is the largest county east of the Mississippi, so the strategic planning process is a challenge; the county's last comprehensive plan was a cookie cutter product that was not customized to Horry County
- On the county level, it is a challenge to coordinate with the state's regulatory requirements from a water quality standpoint
- We need to develop local regulations that are consistent with our resource protection goals, such as:
 1. Ordinances that define maximum rather than minimum sizes for parking lots in retail settings
 2. Ordinances that permit gravel parking lots and subdivision roads (like those that exist in Georgetown County)

3. Ordinances that require redevelopment to return to pre-development runoff conditions (like those that exist in the city of Myrtle Beach)

Ray Funnye, Georgetown Public Services:

- NPDES Phase II program is an opportunity to strengthen local stormwater ordinances
- As Jeff Allen told us this morning, Georgetown County has a low sprawl index but still needs to address stormwater issues
- Sacrifices must be made to make a difference
- Education is a critical part of the process
- We need to work together as a team

Marion Sadler, SC DHEC:

- From the NPDES Phase II program perspective, we need to:
 1. Change attitudes towards stormwater control: people need to view this program as a win-win opportunity, not a one-way mandate from the federal government
 2. Remember that water does not know political boundaries; local governments need to work together and pool resources, especially small municipalities in the Waccamaw region; the NPDES program has a lot of flexibility in it and doesn't require each municipality to recreate the wheel
 3. Change our growth policies so as to minimize water quality impacts

Jimmy Chandler, SC Environmental Law Project:

- Inefficiency, related to the tyranny of small decisions, is our biggest obstacle
- Each permit applicant thinks their small project will have no significant impact, and this is probably true, but the cumulative impact of these project is significant
- We measure cumulative impacts to our water resources on the watershed level, but permitting is done on a case by case, project by project level
- Conferences like this are the only chance we have to focus on larger issues rather than lot-by-lot decisions
- Our planning process has not been effective because we haven't invested enough money in the process (e.g. Georgetown County's Comprehensive Land Use Plan)
- We can create long-term value in our area only by maintaining general environmental quality
- Need an architectural overlay to preserve long-term value
- If our long-term goal for this community is to build long-term value rather than long-term degradation for the community, then we can't all expect maximal use of our property
- Need to prioritize long term value in the community over the individual's right to develop

Doug Wendel, Burroughs and Chapin Realty, Inc.:

- Our biggest challenge is creating a new mind set: press, media and extreme groups have pitted public against developers, 98-99% of whom are good

- Need to appreciate that developers take great risks; development is what our private enterprise system is based on; we have to overcome the notion that developers are “bad”
- Need to develop incentives to make it in the developer's best interest to adopt these new technologies. For example, allow increased density in exchange for the use of innovative stormwater treatment practices
- Need to make these new technologies more affordable
- Need more research on impacts of what we're doing and on the actual value of the alternatives in order to get development community on board
- Education is key; need to get community to embrace this approach and rally behind it
- Communities need to pay a little more to do the right thing, and we need to do things right now to ensure a bright future

Question and Answer Session

1. *Fred Holland, SC Department of Natural Resources:*

Q. Jimmy, as a triage ecologist, I would like to know if you would prioritize enforcement over guidance. Given our finite resources, should we be doing more guidance?

A. *Jimmy Chandler:* I don't think we spend a lot of money on enforcement right now; the size of our operating budget is declining as case load is increasing. We need a plan that everyone buys into so we can work together, cut down on the need for enforcement, and get away from tyranny of small decisions and having to re-track over decisions again and again.

A. *Marion Sadler:* Permitting is an important component of regulatory programs. Ideally, we'd have voluntary compliance, but we're always going to need enforcement for those that don't buy into the spirit of the regulations. I agree with Jimmy that there is low level of funding for enforcement; we spend a lot of time and effort on permitting and use enforcement sparingly and only when necessary.

2. *Joyce Rowley, Planner, City of North Myrtle Beach:*

Q. Please comment on need for/ value of local wetlands regulation

A. *Marion Sadler:* From the state regulatory perspective, any program that helps protect wetlands from being destroyed is good for the state

A. *Jimmy Chandler:* Local regulations leave room for local favors, but it's inefficient to have inspectors running up here from Charleston or Columbia. We need to capitalize on local efforts and self-policing based on neighborhood ethic; it's the less expensive approach

A. *Doug Wendel:* Can't imagine that developers could be inspected any more than we already are. Inspection is an important component but we really need to understand the science better. Are all wetlands equally valuable? We need to be able to focus on important wetlands. The developer is trying to interpret the regulations to best of his ability but things are unclear; we need to all agree on what is a valuable wetland and then agree to conserve it; we can't maintain and preserve every rural pothole.

3. *Fred Holland, SC Department of Natural Resources:*

Q. Mike, Do we have enough science about the utility of BMPs for developers to begin implementing them?

A. *Mike Wooten:* We implement BMPs based on data published from studies all over the US. The only way to know if a project really works is to do pre-construction monitoring for 5 to 10 yrs and then monitor after construction, which is impossible. Instead, we use Fred (Holland)'s monitoring data as a baseline.

In general, large projects that are master planned with a full regulatory review (which requires nine groups outside the local community) are done extremely well. The problem is that small projects (<2 acres), like the corner gas station, slip below the radar. Horry County has changed to pick this up and Georgetown is working on this. (The problem becomes) how do we put BMPs on a 1 acre site?

Professional engineers have done a poor job in policing themselves. To answer your question, we have enough data to get started but we definitely need to collect more as we go. We can't regulate our way out of this; local enforcement needs to be based on a neighborhood ethic, and we need to encourage self-policing.