

2.6 Nine Minimum Elements to Be Included in a Watershed Plan for Impaired Waters Funded Using Incremental Section 319 Funds

Although many different components may be included in a watershed plan, EPA has identified nine key elements that are critical for achieving improvements in water quality. (👉 Go to www.epa.gov/owow/nps/cwact.html for a copy of the FY 2004 *Guidelines for the Award of Section 319 Nonpoint Source Grants to States and Territories*).

What Does This Mean?

 Shows you where one or more of the nine minimum elements are specifically discussed.

EPA requires that these nine elements be addressed in watershed plans funded with incremental Clean Water Act section 319 funds and strongly recommends that they be

included in all other watershed plans intended to address water quality impairments. In general, state water quality or natural resource agencies and EPA will review watershed plans that provide the basis for section 319-funded projects. Although there is no formal requirement for EPA to approve watershed plans, the plans must address the nine elements discussed below if they are developed in support of a section 319-funded project.

In many cases, state and local groups have already developed watershed plans for their rivers, lakes, streams, wetlands, estuaries, and coastal waters. If these existing plans contain the nine key elements listed below, they can be used to support section 319 work plans that contain projects extracted from the plan. If the existing plans do not address the nine elements, they can still provide a valuable framework for producing updated plans. For example, some watershed management plans contain information on hydrology, topography, soils, climate, land uses, water quality problems, and management practices needed to address water quality problems but have no quantitative analysis of current pollutant loads or load reductions that could be achieved by implementing targeted management practices. In this case, the plan could be amended by adding this information and other key elements not contained in the original plan. If separate documents support the plan and the nine elements listed below but are too lengthy to be included in the watershed plan, they can be summarized and referenced in the appropriate sections of the plan. EPA supports this overall approach—building on prior efforts and incorporating related information—as an efficient, effective response to the need for comprehensive watershed plans that address impaired and threatened waters.

Figure 2-3 highlights where the nine key elements fit into the overall watershed planning process. Once the plan has been developed, plan sponsors can select specific management actions included in the plan to develop work plans for nonpoint source section 319 support and to apply for funding to implement those actions (👉 chapter 12).

The nine elements are provided below, listed in the order in which they appear in the guidelines. Although they are listed as *a* through *i*, they do not necessarily take place sequentially. For example, element *d* asks for a description of the technical and financial assistance that will be needed to implement the watershed plan, but this can be done only after you have addressed elements *e* and *i*.

Explanations are provided with each element to show you what to include in your watershed plan. In addition, chapters where the specific element is discussed in detail are referenced.

Nine Elements of Watershed Plans

a. Identification of causes of impairment and pollutant sources or groups of similar sources that need to be controlled to achieve needed load reductions, and any other goals identified in the watershed plan. Sources that need to be controlled should be identified at the significant subcategory level along with estimates of the extent to which they are present in the watershed (e.g., X number of dairy cattle feedlots needing upgrading, including a rough estimate of the number of cattle per facility; Y acres of row crops needing improved nutrient management or sediment control; or Z linear miles of eroded streambank needing remediation). (Chapters 5, 6, and 7.)

What does this mean?

Your watershed plan should include a map of the watershed that locates the major causes and sources of impairment. To address these impairments, you will set goals that will include (at a minimum) meeting the appropriate water quality standards for pollutants that threaten or impair the physical, chemical, or biological integrity of the watershed covered in the plan.

This element will usually include an accounting of the significant point and nonpoint sources in addition to the natural background levels that make up the pollutant loads causing problems in the watershed. If a TMDL exists, this element may be adequately addressed. If not, you will need to conduct a similar analysis to do this. The analytical methods may include mapping, modeling, monitoring, and field assessments to make the link between the sources of pollution and the extent to which they cause the water to exceed relevant water quality standards.

b. An estimate of the load reductions expected from management measures.

What does this mean?

On the basis of the existing source loads estimated for element *a*, you will similarly determine the reductions needed to meet the water quality standards. You will then identify various management measures (see element *c* below) that will help to reduce the pollutant loads and estimate the load reductions expected as a result of these management measures to be implemented, recognizing the difficulty in precisely predicting the performance of management measures over time.

Estimates should be provided at the same level as that required in the scale and scope component in paragraph *a* (e.g., the total load reduction expected for dairy cattle feedlots, row crops, or eroded streambanks). For waters for which EPA has approved or established

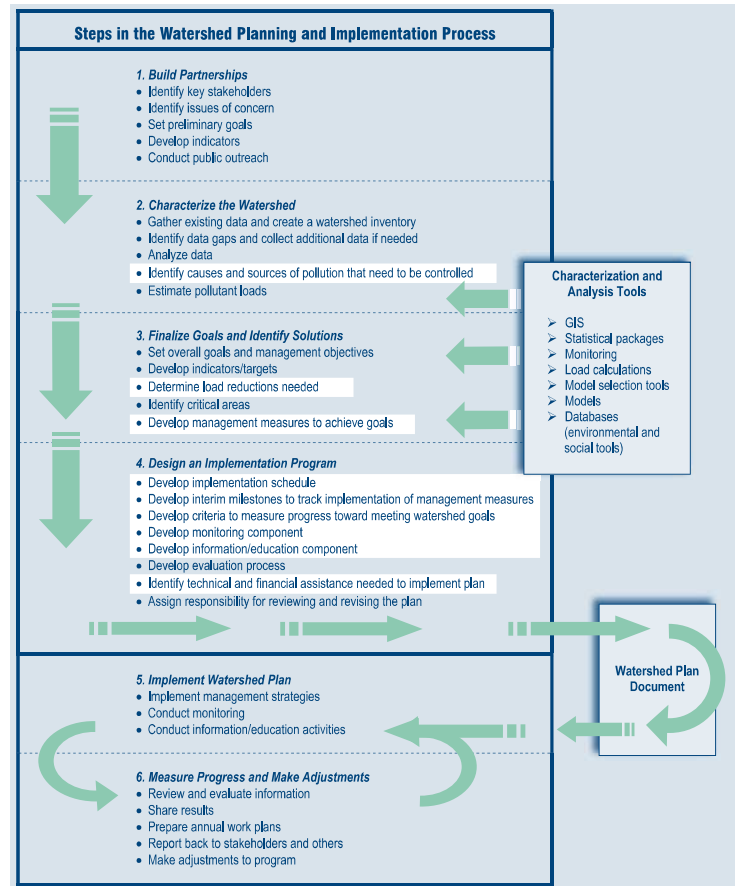


Figure 2-3. Incorporating the Nine Minimum Elements into Your Watershed Plan

TMDLs, the plan should identify and incorporate the TMDLs. Applicable loads for downstream waters should be included so that water delivered to a downstream or adjacent segment does not exceed the water quality standards for the pollutant of concern at the water segment boundary. The estimate should account for reductions in pollutant loads from point and nonpoint sources identified in the TMDL as necessary to attain the applicable water quality standards. (↪ Chapters 8 and 9.)

c. A description of the nonpoint source management measures that will need to be implemented to achieve load reductions in paragraph 2, and a description of the critical areas in which those measures will be needed to implement this plan.

What does this mean?

The plan should describe the management measures that need to be implemented to achieve the load reductions estimated under element *b*, as well as to achieve any additional pollution prevention goals called out in the watershed plan (e.g., habitat conservation and protection). Pollutant loads will vary even within land use types, so the plan should also identify the critical areas in which those measures will be needed to implement the plan. This description should be detailed enough to guide implementation activities and can be greatly enhanced by identifying on a map priority areas and practices. (↪ Chapters 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11.)

d. Estimate of the amounts of technical and financial assistance needed, associated costs, and/or the sources and authorities that will be relied upon to implement this plan.

What does this mean?

You should estimate the financial and technical assistance needed to implement the entire plan. This includes implementation and long-term operation and maintenance of management measures, I/E activities, monitoring, and evaluation activities. You should also document which relevant authorities might play a role in implementing the plan. Plan sponsors should consider the use of federal, state, local, and private funds or resources that might be available to assist in implementing the plan. Shortfalls between needs and available resources should be identified and addressed in the plan. (↪ Chapter 12.)

e. An information and education component used to enhance public understanding of the project and encourage their early and continued participation in selecting, designing, and implementing the nonpoint source management measures that will be implemented.

What does this mean?

The plan should include an I/E component that identifies the education and outreach activities or actions that will be used to implement the plan. These I/E activities may support the adoption and long-term operation and maintenance of management practices and support stakeholder involvement efforts. (↪ Chapters 3 and 12.)

f. Schedule for implementing the nonpoint source management measures identified in this plan that is reasonably expeditious.

What does this mean?

You should include a schedule for implementing the management measures outlined in your watershed plan. The schedule should reflect the milestones you develop in *g*. (↪ Chapter 12.)

g. A description of interim measurable milestones for determining whether nonpoint source management measures or other control actions are being implemented. (↪ Chapter 12.)

What does this mean?

You'll develop interim, measurable milestones to measure progress in implementing the management measures for your watershed plan. These milestones will measure the implementation of the management measures, such as whether they are being implemented on schedule, whereas element *h* (see below) will measure the effectiveness of the management measures, for example, by documenting improvements in water quality.

h. A set of criteria that can be used to determine whether loading reductions are being achieved over time and substantial progress is being made toward attaining water quality standards.

What does this mean?

As projects are implemented in the watershed, you will need water quality benchmarks to track progress. The *criteria* in element *h* (not to be confused with *water quality criteria* in state regulations) are the benchmarks or waypoints to measure against through monitoring. These interim targets can be direct measurements (e.g., fecal coliform concentrations) or indirect indicators of load reduction (e.g., number of beach closings). You should also indicate how you'll determine whether the watershed plan needs to be revised if interim targets are not met. These revisions could involve changing management practices, updating the loading analyses, and reassessing the time it takes for pollution concentrations to respond to treatment. (↪ Chapters 12 and 13.)

*i. A monitoring component to evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation efforts over time, measured against the criteria established under item *h* immediately above.*

What does this mean?

The watershed plan should include a monitoring component to determine whether progress is being made toward attaining or maintaining the applicable water quality standards. The monitoring program should be fully integrated with the established schedule and interim milestone criteria identified above. The monitoring component should be designed to determine whether loading reductions are being achieved over time and substantial progress in meeting water quality standards is being made. Watershed-scale monitoring can be used to measure the effects of multiple programs, projects, and trends over time. Instream monitoring does not have to be conducted for individual BMPs unless that type of monitoring is particularly relevant to the project. (↪ Chapters 6, 12, and 13.)

The remainder of this handbook proceeds through the watershed planning process, addressing these elements in detail to show you how to develop and implement watershed plans that will achieve water quality and other environmental goals.

The level of detail (figure 2-4) needed to address the nine key elements of watershed management plans listed above will vary in proportion to the homogeneity or similarity of land use types and variety and complexity of pollution sources. Urban and suburban watersheds will therefore generally be planned and implemented at a smaller scale than watersheds with large areas of a similar rural character. Similarly, existing watershed plans and strategies for larger river basins often focus on flood control, navigation, recreation, and water supply but contain only summary information on existing pollutant loads. They often generally identify only source areas and types of management practices. In such cases, smaller subbasin and

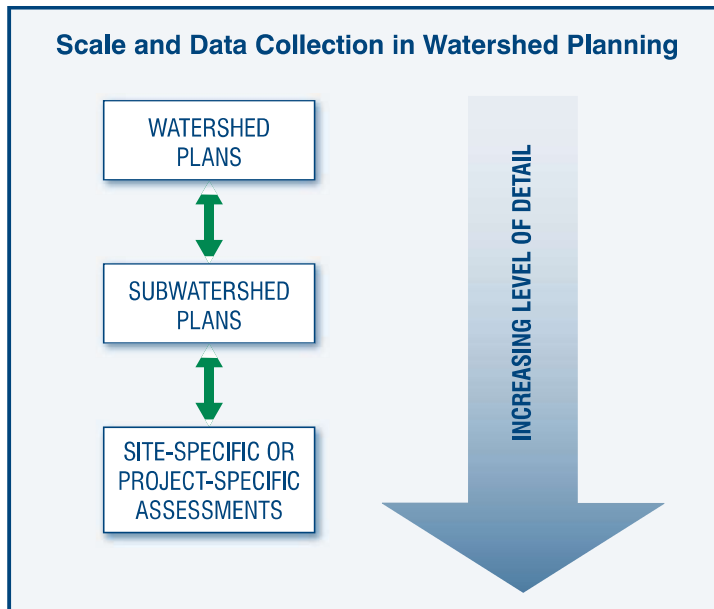


Figure 2-4. Level of Detail for Watershed Management Plans

watershed plans and work plans developed for nonpoint source management grants, point sources, and other stormwater management can be the vehicles for providing the necessary management details. A major purpose of this manual is to help watershed managers find planning tools and data for managing watersheds at an appropriate scale so that problems and solutions can be targeted effectively.