



This document is one section from the EPA “Community-Based Watershed Management: Lessons from the National Estuary Program” handbook, published in February 2005. The reference number is EPA 842-B-05-003. You can find the entire document at <http://www.epa.gov/owow/estuaries/neprimer>.

# COMMUNITY-BASED WATERSHED MANAGEMENT

## LESSONS FROM THE NATIONAL ESTUARY PROGRAM

FEBRUARY, 2005

## ***Appendix C: Components in Developing Action Plans for the Lower Columbia River Estuary Partnership***

**1. Public meetings.** Public meetings were held throughout the study area at key program junctures to present the priority issues, discuss the preliminary goals and objectives for each issue, ask what possible actions could be taken to address the issues, and discuss how implementation should occur. At each series of meetings, the Program did two things: asked for reaction to specific ideas and sought guidance for the next step. The first set of meetings encouraged a brainstorm of actions, the second conducted the comparative risk ranking, and the final set reviewed the draft Management Plan and discussed implementation ideas.

**2. Charrette.** A charrette—an interactive meeting between various groups of people in a community and experts designed to produce a tangible outcome—was held which involved management committee members, workgroup members, and scientific and technical experts in biology, ecology, land use planning, economics, and other disciplines. The day-long “From Issues to Action” charette explored possible actions, based on the participants’ technical expertise and input from the earlier public meetings. The experts’ input helped refine the overall goal, or vision, for each priority issue and helped identify objectives for each. A preliminary list of 180 actions was developed, providing a full range of options to consider.

**3. Comparative Risk Ranking.** The Lower Columbia River Estuary Partnership was the first NEP to utilize comparative risk ranking in the development of its Management Plan. The risk ranking allowed the estuary program to explore how citizens and technical experts perceive the relative risk posed by environmental problems in the estuary. Using the Program’s priority issues as a basis, the Management Committee identified 21 problems (such as loss of wetlands and habitat, contaminated sediment, stormwater runoff, and altered streamflow). Participants were asked to rank the problems against each other according to their perceived risk to public health, ecological health, and quality of life. A set of criteria was developed to assist the focus groups and technical group in their ranking. Criteria included questions, such as “How widespread is the problem?” “What are the consequences of delay?” “Is this a fundamental or underlying issue—one that is the cause of other problems on the list?” and “Does the problem result in lost jobs, increased health care costs, or lowered incomes?” Three separate rankings were completed:

- Public ranking – more than 1,100 citizens ranked risks by completing a survey published in 14 area newspapers or by attending one of eight public meetings.
- Constituent focus group ranking – 267 participants ranked risks at 27 focus group meetings hosted by individual management committee members for their constituents.
- Technical ranking – the 31-member management committee ranked risks with the help of the program’s science and technical workgroup experts.

The results of the rankings were used to identify actions to address the priority issues, define the role of the estuary program in implementing actions, and design objectives and components of the estuary program’s education efforts.

**4. Focus Groups.** Like public meetings, constituent focus group meetings were held at three junctures in developing the Management Plan. Each Management Committee member hosted a meeting with their constituents to get reaction to Committee ideas and to seek guidance on next steps. In one series of focus groups, 17 meetings were held to ask participants to help refine the list of 180 actions. Another series of meetings with constituents was held to complete the risk ranking. At the final series of meetings, participants reviewed and commented on the draft Management Plan and asked questions about implementation: “Of the long list, what are the top five or ten actions? Which ones should stay in the Management Plan? Which ones should be dropped?” “Which actions could citizens help implement?”

**5. Management Committee Action Selection.** Using the results of the public and technical input, the Management Committee used a three-step process to determine which actions to include in the Management Plan and how they would be implemented.

- **Determining SMART Actions.** The Management Committee screened each of the 180 actions to determine which actions were SMART: **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**esponsive, and **T**rackable.
- **Refining the List of Actions.** SMART actions were screened further, using a set of criteria that focused on factors such as social impact and impact on quality of life, technical basis for the action, linkage to estuary program goals, and effectiveness in protecting and restoring the river and estuary. The process involved considerable discussion of policy and consistency. This process narrowed the list of actions from 125 to 92 and resulted in well-defined, action-oriented, specific actions.
- **Developing an Implementation Plan for Each Action.** The last step was to develop an implementation plan to specify who would implement each action, how much it would cost, and how it would be funded. Several interdependent actions were combined, narrowing the list of actions down to 43. Criteria such as feasibility, probability of success, resulting impacts, and timeframe for implementation were applied to each action.

**6. Research Groups.** For the final series of public meetings reviewing the draft Management Plan, the Program conducted a series of research groups. The same questions were asked as in the public meetings; however, in the research groups, the participants were randomly selected and paid a small stipend to help ensure that they reflected a cross-section of the community.