

# Intergovernmental Challenges of Watershed Management: Strategies for Improving Watershed Governance

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# Watershed Governance in the U.S.

- **Wide variety of programs at different scales**
  - Interstate Compacts (e.g., Lake Tahoe, Delaware River)
  - 1965 Federal River Basin Planning Program
  - Great Lakes Program
  - Chesapeake Bay Program
  - Section 208 of the CWA
  - National Estuary Program (NEP)
  - Special Area Management (SAM) Plans under CZMA
  - State Watershed Programs (e.g., Oregon)
  - South Florida Ecosystem Restoration (Everglades)
  - Gulf of Mexico/Gulf of Maine Programs



# What is Watershed Management?

- **Many assume that no watershed is “managed” without some form of centralized government program**
  - Programs often emphasize science and participatory planning
- **But all watersheds are “managed” in various ways**
  - Complex set of government programs at the federal, state, and local level whose decisions and actions influence the health and integrity of watersheds
  - Watershed management is as much a governance problem as it is one of science or policy design



# Watershed Governance

- **Governance**
  - Achieving direction, control, and coordination of organizations with varying degrees of autonomy in order to advance the objectives to which they jointly contribute
- **Challenge for practitioners is to:**
  - Finding ways to improve governance in a world of shared power where the capacity for solving problems is widely dispersed and few organizations accomplish their missions alone



# Paper's Objective

- **Identify strategies used to improve watershed governance**
  - Draws on literature from intergovernmental relations (IGR), intergovernmental management (IGM), and watershed management
  - Draws on research on a variety of watershed management programs
  - Draws on experience as a practitioner and a consultant



# Intergovernmental Relations (IGR)

- **Several important features**
  - *Federalism*: while IGR occurs within our federal system, it encompasses more than is conveyed by the term
  - *Human dimension*: activities and attitudes of persons occupying official positions in units of government
  - *Relations among officials*: are not occasional occurrences fixed by statutes or court decision but result from continuous day-to-day patterns of contact
  - *Participation*: all public officials participate but research often focuses on administrators
  - *Policy component*: policy consists of the intentions and actions (or inactions) of public officials and the consequences of those actions. Interactions among public officials generates policy.



# Intergovernmental Management (IGM)

- **Has a more limited focus than IGR**
  - *Problem-solving*: activities often focus more on joint problem-solving than policy making (coordination)
  - *Coping capabilities*: Managing ongoing relationships and coping with systems as they are
  - *Broader mix of actors*: activities often include relationships between public/private/nonprofit sector
  - *Lead actors*: policy/management professionals (mid- or low level) rather than administrative generalists (high-level)
  - *Networks*: Non-hierarchical communication networks & collaboration
  - *Conflict resolution*: bargaining, negotiation, cooperation, dispute settlement, coping



# Both Concepts Suggest Challenges

- **Legal**
  - Federalism, separation of powers, due process, etc.
  - Division of legislative responsibility
  - Divisions of jurisdictional authority (federal, state, local)
- **Bureaucratic**
  - Organizations often promote stability rather than change
  - Turf guarding by individuals, agencies, level of government
  - Managing external relationships
  - Differing professional training and staff norms in organizations
- **Financial**
  - Reliance on categorical grants - distribution of “green pork”
- **Accountability**
  - Multiple constituencies





# Both Concepts Suggest Opportunities

- **Institutional system creates opportunities to**
  - Get things done (project-level) and solve joint problems
  - Share knowledge, resources, funding
  - Develop shared policies, norms, and expectations (coordination)
  - Create new organizations
- **Generate public value**
  - Improve government service delivery (efficiency, effectiveness, accountability, customer satisfaction, etc.)
  - Accomplish things that cannot be done by working alone
  - Improve problem-solving capacity
  - Stimulate learning and the diffusion of innovations
  - Improve social capital/civil society (trust)



# Why Organizations Participate in IGM?

- **Participants are autonomous and retain independent decision-making powers**
  - Cannot be forced to participate in IGM
  - Social mechanisms such as communication, relationships (trust), mutual interests, and reputation govern these activities rather than formal authority
- **Reasons why organizations participate include:**
  - *Rational*: Self-interest, acquire resources, reduce transaction costs, political pressure
  - *Institutional*: participants come to view as collaboration as being a preferred course of action for solving joint problems



**What are some strategies  
that can be used to improve  
watershed governance?**



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# Techniques for Managing IGR

- **Grants management**
  - Intergovernmental grants system creates a wide range of opportunities to manage intergovernmental relationships
- **Mandates**
  - Different types of mandates are frequently used to manage IGR
- **Regulations**
  - Regulations and other legal requirements are often used to manage IGRs (e.g., GPRA)
- **Actions of political and governmental leaders**
- **Create coordinating institutions (e.g., council of governments)**



# Techniques for IGM

- **IGM strategies in watersheds focus at two levels**
  - Building, managing, and reconfiguring networks
  - Collaboration among a subset of network members (action set)
- **Building, managing, and reconfiguring networks**
  - Interorganizational planning
  - Developing shared priorities and policies
  - Creating watershed management organizations (WMOs)
  - Performance management systems
- **Collaborating to get things done**
  - Coping and adjusting arrangements
  - Leveraging resources & capacity building



# Building and Managing IONs

- **Interorganizational networks (IONs)**
  - Set of organizations bounded by a common orientation such as a policy area, problem, type of service delivery, or geographic area
  - Governance networks include both governmental and nongovernmental organizations
- **Networks are defined in terms of watershed scale**
  - As scale increases so do the range of problems and potential organizations involved - this can increase transaction costs
- **Using multiple, overlapping networks can be a useful strategy**



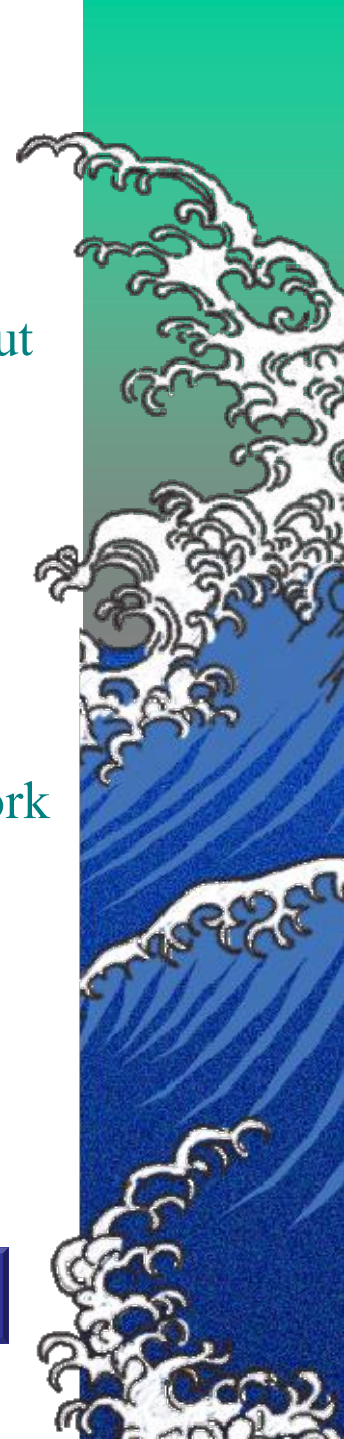
# Interorganizational Planning

- **Common strategy associated with many formal, government funded watershed programs**
  - Emphasize planning and scientific research to identify problems and recommend actions
  - Incentives like planning/implementation funding or authority often used to encourage participation
- **Watersheds cross jurisdictional boundaries and problems are often complex and involve a wide range of competing values**
  - Use task forces, work groups, committees, or other mechanisms to plan at the network level
  - Decisions are made collectively rather than individually
  - Broad participation by governmental, NGOs, and the public is common



# Shared Priorities and Policies

- **Developing shared priorities and policies**
  - There are many legitimate objectives and competing views about how watersheds should be managed
- **Provides a steering function that**
  - Improves communication between actors
  - Coordinates actions in the absence of a centralized coordinator
  - Integrates policies across different organizations
  - Improves decision making and resource allocation by the network
  - Improves accountability
- **Should focus on defining problems and developing shared priorities and policies**
  - Formal or informal shared norms





# Creating WMOs

- **Watershed management organizations (WMOs) come in a variety of forms and go by different names**
  - Informal citizen-based structures that function as a special interest group
  - Agency-based organizations whose membership consists of other organizations
  - Partnerships, coalitions, alliances/strategic alliances, consortiums, network brokers, collaborative organizations, and network administrative organizations
- **Perform a variety of functions such as**
  - Convener, catalyst for action, conduit for information, advocate, organizer, funder, technical assistance provider, capacity builder, partner, dispute resolver, facilitator



# Performance Management Systems

- **Performance management systems combine**
  - Performance measures
  - Monitoring of environment and program performance
  - Reporting processes
- **Used for many purposes at the network level**
  - Evaluation or accountability of programs
  - Steering, coordinating, and setting priorities for networks
  - Motivating network members to take actions that advance shared goals, objectives, or policies
  - Promoting and celebrating progress by network participants
  - Encouraging learning
  - Raises questions of competing interests and values



# Collaboration

- **Any joint activity by two or more organizations intended to increase public value by working together rather than separately**
  - Interactive process involving an autonomous group of actors who use shared rules, norms, or organizational structures
- **Collaboration is a particular type of network relationship frequently used to**
  - Solve problems, reach agreement, undertake joint actions, share resources, improve service delivery, etc.
  - Occurs at the operational, policy making, or institutional levels
- **Watershed problems create numerous opportunities for collaboration**



# Coping and Adjusting Arrangements

- **Common IGM activity is personal contacts that**
  - Seek advice, information, or approval from other agencies
  - Understand administrative interpretations of rules and procedures
- **Bargaining and negotiations**
  - Seek waivers or exceptions to program requirements or regulations on a temporary or permanent basis
  - Resolve differences or reach agreement on courses of action
  - Establish acceptable norms of agency behavior
- **Setting up model or pilot programs to diffuse innovations**
  - May operate outside existing standards, rules, or regulations



# Direct Action to Address Problems

- Coping and adjustment is often used to plan, organize, and implement collaborative activities
- Collaboration can take actions that *directly* improve environmental conditions
  - Install, upgrade, or replace BMPs or other environmental infrastructure (e.g., sewers, stormwater detention ponds, drinking water, etc.)
- Collaboration can take actions that *indirectly* improve environmental conditions
  - Environmental education, permitting, enforcement, etc.



# Leveraging Resources

- **Using direct grants, loans, bonds, tax exemptions, and other financial instruments in creative ways**
  - Combining funding to accomplish more than can be accomplished by working alone
- **Combining and deploying other resources**
  - Information, legal authority, staff, equipment, office space, etc.
  - Utilize economies of scale to take advantage of technical specialization
- **Relying on nongovernmental organizations for service delivery**
  - Nonprofits increasing are government service providers



# Capacity Building

- **Organizations often leverage resources to build capacity to**
  - Solve problems
  - Improve decision making
  - Allocate resources
  - Implement programs
- **Capacity can be built at different levels**
  - Staff
  - Organization
  - Network (e.g., WMOs)



**What are some challenges  
associated with these  
intergovernmental strategies?**



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# Constraints Beyond the Control of Watershed Actors

- **Intergovernmental grant system**
  - *Lack of local control*: The one who controls resources sets priorities – this occurs at the federal/state level rather than the watershed
  - *Need to be systematic*: Hard to systematically solve problems when priorities change frequently and there is no budgetary stability over long time periods
  - *Distributional problems*: implementation funding is often treated as “green pork”
  - *Administrative Costs*: Grants management can be complicated for collaborative projects
  - *Flexibility in using grants*: need slack resources to participate in collaborative activities but legislatures/agencies provide limited discretion in how resources are used



# Context Matters

- **Watershed governance is influenced by:**
  - *Physical environment:* size, location, relative isolation, visible boundaries, proximity of organizations
  - *Political environment:* trends include performance measures, reinvention, resource shortages, shifting local politics, etc.
  - *Socioeconomic environment:* are there local resources to support implementation?
  - *Institutional environment:* institutional ecosystem creates opportunities and constraints on joint action
  - *Local culture:* rural vs. urban, nature of the problems, local preference for specific policy solutions
  - *Situational histories:* particularly previous governance efforts, history of organizational conflicts



# Human Dimensions of IGM

- **Disposition and skills of implementors**
  - Staff/organizations may not like working together
  - Staff/organizations may lack skills to participate effectively or manage network processes
- **Turf guarding as a result of perceived**
  - Threats to job security/career enhancement
  - Challenges to professional expertise
  - Loss of policy direction or undermining agency priorities
  - Anxiety over accountability
  - Conversely, IGM can create and expand turf



# Human Dimensions of IGM

- **Importance of trust and social norms**
  - Trust is an important governance mechanism that lowers transaction costs and promotes efficient resource exchanges
  - Trust occurs at the individual, organizational, and network level
  - Produced by an interactive, on-going process that builds trust and personal relationships through repeated interactions
  - While it builds slowly, it is destroyed quickly
  - Needs to be maintained over time or it will erode



# Human Dimensions of IGM

- **Leadership is critical to initiate, maintain, and expand IGM processes**
  - **Entrepreneurs:** View programs as a way to attract new resources or elevate problems on federal/state agendas
  - **Coordinators:** Someone has to call meetings, provide a central point of contact, and keep the effort going as interest ebbs and flows
  - **Facilitators:** Unclear if outside facilitators are necessary but someone has to help resolve disputes
  - **Fixer, broker, or devil's advocate:** find opportunities for joint action, keeps participant's "eye on the ball", keeps the group grounded in practical and political realities
  - **Champions:** Strong advocate for particular courses of action who gets others to follow



# Accountability

- **Accountability is a fundamental principle of public administration**
  - For what? To whom?
  - Internal vs. external, formal vs. informal mechanisms
- **Accountability can be a “two-edged” sword**
  - There is a constant tension between autonomy and accountability
  - IGM activities can create peer pressure at the political, professional, and individual level that stimulates action
  - Too much accountability creates disincentives for organizations to participate in joint action



# Summary & Conclusions

- **Watershed management is clearly advanced governance**
  - Governance challenges are as formidable as the scientific
  - May work best in watersheds which already have strong institutional systems
  - Management matters – no substitute for well managed programs
  - Wide range of additional skills required to manage network processes
- **If watershed/ecosystem management is the new paradigm, are we properly training tomorrow's future watershed managers with the skills they need to practice IGM?**



# Questions?



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