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?
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)**

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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 or 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?
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?