

ECO AmeriCorps

2024-2025



Watershed Planning Communications Specialist

Watershed Planning Program - Water Investment Division, Davis Building - 3rd Floor One National Life Drive Montpelier, VT 05620-3510

Our mission is to steward and sustain public investment in water resources and infrastructure by securing and targeting financial and technical assistance while ensuring transparency and accountability to the public and stakeholders.

Position Supervisor: Angie Allen, Environmental Analyst VI

As a Watershed Planner (WP) for four Vermont basins, my primary responsibility is to develop and implement Tactical Basin Plans (TBP). These plans outline water quality improvement strategies to protect and restore lakes, ponds, rivers, and wetlands. Through the TBP process, I engage with governmental agencies, non-profit organizations, academics, and the general public. I provide partners the technical support needed to advance projects from project identification, design, and implementation and assist in identifying applicable funding sources. This collaborative approach helps to develop a common vision and coordinate robust actions for more resilient ecosystems.

The Role:

The core element of this service position is to improve watershed planning communication and outreach as part of VT DEC's Tactical Basin Planning process with special attention to incorporating Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice (DEIJ) principles. All elements of the basin planning process include public communication and involvement. When stakeholders understand the issues and how to address them, they are empowered to take action. The Watershed Planning Communications Specialist will partner with Watershed Planners to improve effective communication through our ongoing Tactical Basin Plans, Story Maps, public meetings and promotional communications, website updates, the WPP Newsletter, and social media posts. The Specialist will solicit input from the public and statutory watershed partners to update the WPP Newsletter, website communications, and public

meeting materials. The Specialist will also help the Watershed Planners host public meetings, and participate in field days, trainings, and collaborative meetings with watershed partners throughout the state as time allows.

The Specialist will also have the opportunity to research how other states successfully incorporate JEDI best practices in their watershed planning communications. The outcome of this effort would ideally result in 3-5 concrete recommendations to improve our team's incorporation of JEDI into our communications. These recommendations would be added to our WPP Communications Plan and implemented in the next round of TBPs.

The Specialist will also collaborate with WPP staff to grow the WP engagement and training resource digital library (<https://dec.vermont.gov/content/engagement-training-0>). The member will help create 2-3 online trainings focused on clean water projects that support the work of watershed partners, clean water practitioners, and landowners. The outreach is intended to: increase partners' ability to implement clean water projects, increase landowner willingness to adopt best management practices, and support stakeholders as they plan and secure resources to implement clean water projects.

Five Watershed Planners produce 15 Tactical Basin Plans (TBPs) every 5 years. Recently our team evaluated the results of TBP-focused surveys and identified opportunities to improve communication with the public about TBPs, to engage a broader, more diverse audience earlier in the TBP process, and to provide more information about local water quality issues. With the support of 2 previous ECO service members, we developed a WPP Communications Plan and SOP to guide our TBP communications. Through these efforts, we've pinpointed gaps in our team's capacity to implement several aspects of the communications plan. One gap is our team needs more support to ensure the promotion of public meetings reaches a more diverse audience including historically underserved and/or flood-prone geographic locations (identified using available environmental justice mapping tools

(https://dec.vermont.gov/sites/dec/files/documents/Environmental_Justice_Mapping_Tools%20.pdf)).

To address this capacity gap, our ECO member could be directly involved in activities such as the notification of meetings through press releases, email distribution, webpage changes, electronic calendars to include Vermont Department of Libraries announcements, and creating and sharing social media posts targeted to specific towns/areas.

The AmeriCorps member will track and document their service activities by reporting public meetings attended (e.g., meeting purpose, location, date, #), WPP Newsletters published, social media posts, press releases, site visits attended, 2-3 clean water trainings created, 3-5 recommendations to incorporate JEDI best practices into our WP communications.

Essential Functions:

- Develop a personal service plan with the Watershed Planner
- Research opportunities for improving DEIJ aspects of WP communications, devise recommendations based on research from other states
- Evaluate current WPP social media and contribute education and outreach posts to watershed planning social media platforms (i.e., Instagram and Facebook).
- Evaluate and update website pages (as time allows) for the watershed planning program (training will be provided)
- Write and publish the WPP Newsletter

- Collaborate with staff to develop and share online trainings

Secondary Functions:

- Participate in field day activities and water quality monitoring (hiking in the forest, walking in stream channels, planting trees, driving state vehicles, taking notes and organizing into field day summaries),
- Help Watershed Planners and Act 76 staff to host public meetings
- Attend staff meetings

Desired Qualifications:

- Academic background in natural resources, environmental planning and/or communications (background in water quality is a plus!)
- Experience developing communications materials, social media and surveys for environmental outreach
- Understanding of Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) principles and ability to apply these principles to develop materials that serve the VT community more fully
- Experience using Microsoft Word, Microsoft Forms, Microsoft Teams, and ArcGIS Story Maps
- Additional experience with Adobe Design or other software is a plus - Passion for conveying scientific information in a digestible format for the general public
- Genuine curiosity of people and behaviors related to environmental issues
- Willingness and interest in learning new techniques for communication
- High level of comfort reaching out to and collaborating with watershed stakeholders and general public
- Strong communication skills and attention to detail
- Self-motivated individual who enjoys problem solving

DEIJ:

Our Agency has an environmental justice committee, and DEIJ committee, and a Title VI committee that are each focused on developing and implementing relevant policies and procedures related to equity, inclusion, and diversity. Furthermore, the Watershed Planning Program, recently participated in a months-long training on Equity, Inclusion and Diversity offered by a nationally recognized consultant. Our Department has two representatives on the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources Diversity and Equity Committee which was established in January 2020. The mission of the committee is to promote DEIJ for marginalized groups among our coworkers and stakeholders, the public, and Vermont's ecosystems through dialogue, collaboration, community building, and education. One of the outcomes of this project is to identify how tactical basin planning can do a better job of integrating DEIJ principles into our communications approach. To-date, our team worked with 2 previous ECO AmeriCorps service members to create the WPP Communications Plan, which includes a high-level Environmental Justice section and also publishes the WPP Newsletter to local water quality partners. Our WPP team is currently participating in strategic planning, which will help identify gaps in incorporating DEIJ principles into our portfolio of work.

Climate Resiliency:

TBPs incorporate sections focused on flood resiliency and climate change resiliency. This means proactively reducing vulnerabilities to flooding and flood damage and improving response and recovery efforts when flood events do occur to minimize long-term economic, social, and natural

resource impacts. Our plans and WP work provide resources and assistance to make flood resiliency an integral part of town planning by offering river corridor maps and model language for town and regional plans and local zoning ordinances. TBPs also identify financial incentives for the adoption and implementation of municipal zoning bylaws that protect and preserve river corridors, shorelands, and buffers.

Networking:

With a focus on communications with the Watershed Planning Program, the Specialist will have access and exposure to a wide variety of professionals across the state of Vermont. The networking opportunities for this position are extensive and significant. Working with Watershed Planners will mostly likely provide the member with one of the best opportunities for networking in the state. Planners work with all Departments in the Agency of Natural Resources, Regional Planning Commissions, Natural Resource Conservation Districts, local and statewide watershed groups, sister Agencies (AOT, AAFM), federal partners (USFWS, USFS, NRCS), and municipalities on a regular basis. The member will have the opportunity to interact with and solicit feedback from these groups during field work, coordination meetings, and while supporting the basin planning process. The member will also participate in the DEC Social Media Team, which is a great way to network with DEC staff.

Misc:

Recently our team evaluated the results of Tactical Basin Plan-focused surveys and identified opportunities to improve communication with the public about TBPs, to engage a broader, more diverse audience earlier in the TBP process, and to provide more information about local water quality issues. The basin plans are used by Regional Planning Commissions, Natural Resources Conservation Districts, municipalities, local and statewide watershed groups, and the Agency of Natural Resources to identify and implement high priority clean water projects to protect and restore surface waters. In general, our basin plans are well known to our statutory partners, but not as well known to the public and when the public hears about them, they are not clear on how they should be interacting with them. Our public meetings to collect public comments on the plans are not well attended (on average 8-12 people per meeting) and don't generate much feedback. These plans direct funding for the highest priority projects while also highlighting the state's most important water resources. We'd like to ensure that all Vermonter's know about these opportunities and how to pursue them. The more people know about these plans the more likely we are to be successful in achieving clean water goals. Through implementation of Act 76 (with Clean Water Service Providers, Basin Water Quality Councils, and watershed partners), our team has become aware of the need for more trainings related to various clean water project types. The member would support the creation and dissemination of 2-3 online trainings.

Most service will be in an office environment, although, some meetings could take place at a project site, which would require appropriate gear (hiking boots, appropriate clothing for the weather). A reliable vehicle would be needed when traveling to the main office in Montpelier. Clothing and gear for the days out in the field - backpack, waterproof boots that are comfortable to walk in, waders (we may be able to provide these when needed), rain coat and pants, hiking boots, backpack to carry food, water, and note taking materials, sun screen, and bug spray. *If the candidate is unable to provide this equipment, we will do the best we can to accommodate them. This should not affect their ability to

carry out the essential functions of this job. None of this equipment is required for the primary in-office service. A reliable vehicle is expected.

I am actively brainstorming housing opportunities to share with potential ECO members. To-date these include Front Porch Forum posts to desired towns, searching VRBO/Airbnb for available rentals and reaching out directly to ask if they'd consider a long-term option (*Katherine King on our WPP team said this worked for her!). The member will also participate in our weekly staff meetings and can ask/receive ideas from our team members. They will also participate in the DEC Social Media Team where they can learn about fun places, local events, etc.

Goals for the Position:

Goal 1- Partner with Watershed Planners to improve effective communication through our ongoing Tactical Basin Plans, Story Maps, public meetings and promotional communications, website updates, the WPP Newsletter, and social media posts.

Goal 2- Help the Watershed Planners host public meetings, and participate in field days, trainings, and collaborative meetings with watershed partners throughout the state as time allows.

Goal 3- Research how other states successfully incorporate JEDI best practices in their watershed planning communications and make 3-5 concrete recommendations to improve our team's incorporation of JEDI into our communications.

Goal 4- Collaborate with WPP staff to create 2-3 online trainings focused on clean water projects that support the efforts of watershed partners, clean water practitioners, and landowners.

Minimum Qualifications:

- Be a US citizen, a national, or legal permanent resident alien of the U.S.;
- Be at least 18 years of age upon entering the Pre-Service Orientation (there is no upper age limit);
- Be a high school graduate or have a GED certificate or be willing to work towards their GED as part of their service-year successful completion requirement. A member cannot have dropped out of high school to join AmeriCorps. If a member has a documented medical reason/professional opinion why they cannot finish high school, they might be eligible; call in this case;
- Has not been convicted of murder or sexual assault and is willing to undergo a National Service Criminal History Check;
- Must submit to Agency of Human Services checks, i.e. Adult Abuse and Child Abuse Prevention;
- Be committed to the ECO AmeriCorps program, and its ethic of service and personal and professional development of its participants;
- Have the ability and enthusiasm to drive to, attend, and participate in required trainings and events, and be prepared to drive up to 2-3 hours each way

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Position begins September 17th, 2024 and ends August 15th, 2025

The State of Vermont is an Equal Opportunity Employer. Positions are open to all applicants without regard to race, color, national origin, ethnicity, disability, age, gender, gender identity, sexual

orientation, political affiliation, veteran's status, religion or creed.



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