

Poultney Mettowee Watershed
Public Process used to develop the Basin Plan
Assessing Problems and Utilizing People as a Resource

This plan is developed under the premise of Principle # 4 of the *Guidelines for Watershed Planning – Draft November* which states, “**The process should be inclusive – maximize public participation and involvement in the local decision-making and action.**”

In general, the planning process follows the steps of issue identification, issue prioritization, development of strategies and solutions, allocation of resources and funding, and implementation. The planning process will occur for each watershed every planning year and interim 5 years, with the interim years designated for implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. In reality, the latter three activities will occur concurrently with the planning process., with the renewed plan steering a continually evolving course of watershed improvement activities for the watershed.

Watershed Council – The *Basin Planning Guidelines* propose that a local “Watershed Council or Watershed Team” be formed in each basin to assist in the creation of a basin plan. In some basins an existing local organization may serve this role without having to create a new planning entity. The Poultney Mettowee Watershed Partnership is serving as the Watershed Council for the Poultney Mettowee Watershed, and is helping to facilitate the basin planning process. The Partnership is providing recommendations and strategies for implementing goals and objectives of the Watershed Plan.

In order for public participation to be meaningful, an ongoing and evolving collaborative process should be emphasized throughout the planning process. While difficult to arrive at a consensus on all decisions, efforts made to promote a shared-learning environment on most issues will help to ensure ownership of the problem-solving approach and its outcomes by Watershed Council members and residents of the watershed. Perhaps the most effective means by which to accomplish this is to engage the public early on and often throughout the decision-making process. In addition, by ensuring that the Council is inclusive and representative of constituents in the watershed, a meaningful planning process can take place.

Public Meetings – All meetings convened by the Watershed Partnership and/or the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation are open to the public. Any issue determined through these meetings will be advisory to the Commissioners of the Department of Environmental Conservation and the Department of Agriculture, Food, and Markets.

A series of public forums have and will continue throughout the watershed to generate basin plan strategies and project ideas. On going input is being sought from all interested community members during the year. A draft plan will be available for public comment. Focus group meetings and kitchen meetings continue to be held throughout the watershed on an informal basis.

Website – The Poultney Mettowee Watershed Partnership website, located at <http://www.vacd.org/pmnrcd/index.html> disseminates information about the Partnership

and associated projects and on-going efforts. Public meetings are noticed, as well as previous meeting summaries. The prioritization process used to rank issues and concerns is also accessible at this site. Articles that have appeared in local and regional newspapers are also included here. An index of these articles appears at <http://www.vacd.org/pmnrcd/press.html>. This website provides dates, times, and locations of Partnership meetings, as well as projects associated with the Partnership that the public can participate with. The Rutland Regional Planning Commission's website has additional minutes of meetings convened by the Regional Issues Committee regarding basin planning accessible at: <http://www.rutlandrpc.org>

The Agency of Natural Resources website provides several different means to locating information. Particularly helpful is the Natural Resource monthly page, available at: <http://www.anr.state.vt.us/NRMonthly.htm>, which provides information on public meetings in each watershed. Also helpful is Department of Environmental Conservation - Water Quality Division website that lists public meetings and meeting summaries at: <http://www.anr.state.vt.us/dec/waterq/calendar.htm>. There are links about other related programs within the Water Quality Division including information about the Basin Planning Initiative, located at: <http://www.anr.state.vt.us/dec/waterq/planningplan.htm>.

Finally, the Lake Champlain Basin Program serves as a clearinghouse for most watershed associations and partnerships in the Lake Champlain Basin. To learn more information about the Program in general, or to find links to a specific watershed organization, go to: <http://www.lcbp.org/watersheds/assoc.htm>.

Newspaper – All public forums held in the Poultney Mettowee Watershed are publicly noticed in both *The Rutland Herald* and *The Lakes Region Free Press*. *The Lakes Region Free Press* ran fifteen weekly articles throughout the summer of 2001 to promote water quality efforts and opportunities underway in the basin. An excerpt from the September 7th, 2001 issue sums up the purpose of the articles:

“This is the tenth in a fifteen part series of weekly articles about the work of the Poultney Mettowee Watershed Partnership. The Partnership is a joint initiative of the Poultney-Mettowee Natural Resources Conservation District in Vermont, and New York's Washington County Soil and Water Conservation District, with funding for coordination by the Lake Champlain Basin Program. The mission of the Partnership is to bring together the efforts of citizens and organizations that share the common vision of conserving, protecting, and enhancing the natural and cultural resources of the watershed. To get involved, come to the **1st Annual Watershed Festival September 8**, attend the next meeting of the **Partnership Steering Committee September 19**, or contact the Partnership office 802-287-4284 - email pmwater@gwriters.com. Learn more on the Partnership website: www.vacd.org/pmnrcd.”

Television and Radio – Both television and radio serve an additional resource in disseminating information to residents in the watershed. Two television programs that have been particularly useful in promoting watershed planning efforts have been the *Champlain 2000* Program (WPTZ) and the *Across the Fence* Program (WCAX). The *Champlain 2000* segment focused on the thermal impairment issue on the Mettowee River and the project underway to identify sources and possible

solutions to this problem. *Across the Fence* ran a segment on the formation of the Poultney Mettowee Watershed partnership and a recent progress report on the activities and projects of the Partnership, specifically the Poultney Education Trail. The radio program, "Coffee Break" (WVNR, Poultney) has provided the opportunity for on-air discussions regarding basin planning.

Newsletters and Mailings – The primary method of contact with residents in the watershed who have expressed interest in the Watershed Partnership and water quality issues in general continues to be through newsletters and direct mailings. Approximately two hundred families and individuals receive regular correspondence and updates through this medium. In addition, quarterly newsletters from the Watershed Partnership, the Poultney Mettowee Natural Resource Conservation District, and the Rutland Regional Planning Commission reach thousands more in the Poultney Mettowee Basin, as well as other parts of Rutland County. Recent issues of all three listed have focused on watershed planning.

Public Attitudes Survey – The Watershed Partnership conducted a public attitudes survey with assistance from Green Mountain College students. According to the Partnership's coordinator, Mary Jeanne Packer, "Green Mountain College students called nearly 1200 households in a five week period." About 300 residents "from all seventeen towns within the watershed in Vermont and New York participated," Packer said. Funding for the research came from the Vermont Community Fund and the Lake Champlain Basin Program with in-kind contributions from UVM Sea Grant Program and Syracuse University.

Issue Prioritization Process – An effort to prioritize all issues and concerns, visions and priorities that have resulted from the numerous focus group and public forums held in the watershed. Following compilation, these were sent out to all attendees, watershed council (steering committee) members, and PMNRCD Board members to review and rank. These were also sent out in survey format to mailing list of 400 households maintained by the Partnership. The survey was also available as a download from the PMWP website. A press release was sent out informing watershed residents of this effort. A meeting was convened in February to review responses and rank. The goals of the Partnership have been revisited in anticipation of ranking priorities in the basin plan.

2001 Public Meetings in the Poultney Mettowee Watershed

- **March 28th**, a **TMDL public meeting** was held at the Mettowee Community School.
- **April 11th** – **PM Watershed Partnership** steering committee/watershed council.
- **June 6th** - **issue-specific Partnership Steering Committee**. This meeting provided an overview of the impaired waters in the basin as well as a brief discussion of TMDLs and the thermal impairment on the Mettowee River.
- **June 26th** – Focus group meeting focused on **Lake Associations'** perception of lake issues and developing project areas on 6/26 in Castleton from 3 to 5 on a steamy afternoon. Other focus group meetings included:
- **July 23rd** – **Working Landscapes**; with representatives invited from the following stakeholders – Slate Quarry Association, VT Forest Products Association, Mettowee Lumber Mill, Poultney Snowmobilers Club, Merck Forest, Smokeyhouse, The Nature Conservancy, and the following “technical” rep’s – Nate Fice (County Forester), George Tucker (Conservation Forester), and Chris Olson (Consulting Forester).
- **July 25th** – **Water-Based Recreation**; with representatives invited from Woodard Marine on Bomoseen, Southwest Chapter of Trout Unlimited, The Audubon Society, Vermont Rivers Conservancy (Rebecca Purdhum), Lake St. Catherine Canoe & Kayak Rentals, Lake Association members (one from each invited), and the following “technical” rep’s – Bruce Brown (State Parks), Chris Alexopoulos (US Forest Service re: fisheries), Chet McKenzie (VT Fish & Wildlife), and Scott MacLachlan (Wildlife Biologist, Friends of the Poultney River).
- **September 8th** – **Watershed Festival** – To focus on and celebrate the watershed with highlights from the work of the Poultney Mettowee Watershed Partnership (PMWP) and other groups as well. Geared towards the community.
- **September 5th** – **Poultney Mettowee Watershed Council Meeting (open to the public)** – Overview of the PM Watershed Partnership and ANR Basin Planning Initiative – Who we are, what we’ve done so far since the original public forums 2 years ago. Are we still on track? Focus on breakout sessions to revisit priorities and developing project areas. This will be an opportunity to further develop strategies into basin plan.
- **Sept 10th** – Basin Planning Presentation **PMNRCD Board Meeting**
- **Sept. 18th** – Basin Planning Presentation at **Rutland RPC Board Meeting**
- **Sept. 19th** – **Poultney Mettowee Watershed Council meeting (core)**
- **October 4th** - **Watershed Planning Public Forum** - Watershed Coordinator and collaborators (The Nature Conservancy, The Poultney Mettowee Watershed Partnership, Poultney Mettowee Natural Resource Conservation District, Friends of the Poultney River, The Poultney Garden Club, Green Mountain College, and others) conducted joint public forum on water quality issues in the Poultney and Mettowee Rivers. Attendance numbered approximately 50 for the event, including State Senator Hull Maynard and Poultney Representative Fred Maslack.
- **October 9th** – **Agricultural Focus Group Meetings** for Basin Planning - Conducted focus group for agricultural producers in the watershed. An overview of the basin planning process provided discussion on agriculture in the basin with legal implication of Classification & Typing as well as (remedial work) the

impaired waters in the basin, such as the thermal impairment of the Mettowee River.

- **October 25th – Agricultural tour of the Poultney Mettowee Watershed** with Leon Graves, Phil Benedict, Jon Anderson, and District managers of the Rutland and Poultney Mettowee NRCs and other members of both boards and the invited public. The Stone Brook Farm (along the mainstem of the Mettowee) was visited and Eileen Greber, the Nutrient Management Consultant for the PMNRC, presented the Nutrient Management Plan. Afterwards a good discussion regarding the agricultural component of the Basin Plan took place over lunch.
- **November 2nd – Basin planning presentation to the annual Farm Bureau** gathering. The emphasis of this meeting is the agricultural component of the Poultney Mettowee Basin Plan.
- **December 5th Public Forum in Poultney.** The emphasis for this meeting was to review the past and ongoing work of the Watershed Partnership and to re-prioritize the direction that the Partnership is headed. Specific areas addressed by the attendees continue to be areas of concern, areas for restoration and protection, and the management vision for the future in the watershed. Efforts to include more folks in this process are an ongoing priority of the basin planning process.

‘2002 events?