Spring Creek Watershed One Water Plan – Frequently Asked Questions

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What is a One Water Plan?

A One Water Plan develops partnerships among local governments and other stakeholders in developing a prioritized, targeted and measurable implementation plan. Key principles are planning at the watershed scale and aligning local and state plans and strategies. One Water Plans are designed to foster collaboration between upstream and downstream neighbors to work where it's most important in the watershed, not limited to the county or other jurisdictional boundaries. Plans identify and prioritize resources and issues and set measurable goals. A targeted implementation schedule describes planned actions. Plans also describe programs and the future partnership that will implement the plan. Plans are comprehensive: they address water quality and quantity, groundwater, drinking water, habitat, recreation, and other issues. Collaboration between local, state, and federal agencies creates opportunities for dialogue about water management goals and activities, and **coordinates the work of various regulatory bodies and agencies, not regulate their work. A One Water Plan is not an effort to change local governance but to integrate management and leadership.**

Why a "One Water" plan?

One Water believes that all water – drinking water, groundwater, wastewater, stormwater, and greywater – is a precious resource with enormous value. The world's fresh water is limited, but must sustain all life. Water grows our food and powers our economies, especially those that are dependent on water-centered tourism such as fly-fishing. One Water wants to unite diverse water-concerned entities precisely because they share a closed system – the watershed – and will help address watershed-wide challenges such as aging infrastructure and climate change. With a holistic- and sustainability-oriented philosophy, One Water seeks to protect the value of our water for us and our children.

What are the goals of the plan that benefit all municipalities and the environment?

- Improve and maintain a high quality of life
- Increase community engagement
- Advance thriving local economy
- Develop innovative solutions to meet water needs
- Improve and maintain healthy ecosystems
- Conserve ecosystem flows

- Improve water quality
- Ensure that a reliable water supply is available
- Promote outdoor and water-based recreation
- Enhance emergency preparedness
- Prevent erosion and soil transport into surface water systems
- Restore, protect, and preserve natural surface water and groundwater storage and retention systems
- Minimize public capital expenditures needed to correct flooding and water quality problems
- Enhance, restore, and establish wetlands
- Identify priority areas for riparian zone management and buffers
- Conserve and enhance fish and wildlife habitat

What is "Environmental Infrastructure"?

When we think of infrastructure, we usually think of large, expensive projects to support human activity such as roads, bridges, public transportation systems, drinking water supply systems (wells, reservoirs, pipes, pumps, etc.), sewer systems (sewers, pumps, treatment systems, etc.), airports, railroads, etc. Similarly, Environmental Infrastructure is the system of environmental resources that supports human activity. For the purposes of a One Water Plan, the ecological infrastructure is the managed system of streams, wetlands, riparian zones, springs, groundwater, sinks, surface flow, etc. It interacts with the water-related infrastructure built by human action. Just like other infrastructure, environmental infrastructure can be improved to increase its capacity by restoring and enhancing natural systems. For example, flood plains can be restored, expanded and enhanced to manage downstream flooding better. Storage projects can ensure that there is adequate drinking water supply and flow in streams, even during periods of prolonged drought.

Why aren't mandatory, enforceable standards a priority of a One Water Plan?

Over the past year, the framework for a "Spring Creek Watershed One Water Plan" has been developed under the direction of the Spring Creek Watershed Commission. This proactive framework includes goals and objectives that clearly describe what the One Water Plan needs to accomplish in the next phase of its development. Development of the framework and objectives comprises the Phase II Report; It was guided by input from local municipalities, businesses and industry, state and federal agencies, non-profits, and the public.

Until recently, watershed planning has often been an attempt to reduce the impacts of growth and development on the environment. It is viewed as a zero-sum game, where the environment is slowly degraded to allow for more human activity, with limited or no investments made to conserve, improve, and increase the resiliency of the environment. Most

Federal, State and Local regulations are reactive and assume that it is a zero-sum game. That assumption is incorrect and is why the One Water approach provides a more beneficial solution by taking a proactive approach to water management. Significant investment is made to water-related projects to increase the environmental resiliency so that as growth happens, the watershed gets healthier. The growth produces enough funding to pay for the projects.

Incentives are a key component of successful One Water Plans. Rather than passing ordinances to restrict property owners from taking actions on their property that might be a water supply area, or a riparian area, or a flood plain, the plan identifies ways to provide incentives to make them want to do it voluntarily. If the plan determines that a collection of parcels is vital to the drinking water supply, then the land could ultimately be purchased and conserved for this purpose. With a great One Water Plan, it will be easy for each municipality, municipal authority, business, and private citizen to decide to participate, without being mandated by regulations. **A One Water Plan minimizes the need for mandatory enforceable standards, which makes a One Water Plan easier to adopt.**

What will be included in the Phase III Plan?

The Phase III Plan will develop the roadmap with specific actions and milestones to achieve objectives identified in Phase II and will provide a picture of the future environmental infrastructure and the other water-related infrastructure. It will project at least 50 years into the future and will provide a list of projects needed to advance from the existing to the future system of infrastructure that supports the goals and objectives from the Phase II Report. It will also include an estimate of the cost of each project, how it will be funded, and which entity or entities are responsible for the project. The plan may also include recommendations about changes in organizational structure to facilitate the implementation of the projects.

A One Water Plan avoids one of the biggest pitfalls of entities acting alone looking for the "low hanging fruit" projects that give a sizable environmental return for a small cost. Sometimes, these projects get in the way of a project or series of projects that can have even more significant long term benefits. For example, a riparian tree planting project or streambank stabilization project may provide significant benefit for low cost, but would then be in the way of a flood plain restoration project that would have even greater long term impact. A One Water Plan will help ensure that the projects proceed in the correct order.

$500,000 plus administrative costs is a lot for the Phase III Plan. How can the entities in the Spring Creek Watershed afford this?

Typical costs for a One Water Plan are $300,000 to $500,000 for consultants that specialize in water resources planning. There are also administrative costs for whatever entity is selected to handle the administration of the contract with the consultants. Finally, the organizations that are routinely involved with water resources management within the watershed will also have costs, because the consultants will need information from each body to complete the plan.

Over the next 20 years, it is likely that the entities in the watershed, acting independently without the Phase III Plan, will spend more than $200 Million on the water-related infrastructure projects. Those projects are being developed independently, without consideration of how they fit into the entire watershed, and without consideration of any cooperative solutions. For less than one percent of that cost, the entities could work together on a One Water Plan. Working together will ensure that the millions being spent would be in the best interest of the watershed, and thus be the most effective projects to meet the needs. It is likely that the One Water Plan will identify solutions that result in less money being spent. Additionally, the investment in developing a One Water Plan will also benefit the local economy by maintaining and improving outdoor recreation including wild trout fishing, kayaking, etc. which contributes millions of dollars annually. It is estimated that wild trout fishing in the Spring Creek Watershed alone contributes $10-15 million to the local economy each year.

Who Pays for the implementation of the Phase III Plan?

There will be projects that are specific to one entity. In that case, it is likely that a single entity contributes towards that project. Some project will have multiple beneficiaries so that the project cost would be shared. Some projects may benefit a State or Federal agency so that they may contribute as well. Participation is all voluntary, so no entity is forced to pay for something from which they don't see any benefit. The Phase III Plan will identify funding sources and any impacts it may have on individual entities. Note that it is a 50-year plan. There will be plenty of opportunities to explore additional funding sources, or even legislate funding sources at the State or Federal level for distant future projects. Quality One Water Plans have resulted in measurable savings over what was going to be spent. If that happens, the plan will suggest alternatives for applying the savings.

How do you get all these entities to cooperate?

There are many entities in the watershed, as listed in the Phase II Report. Currently, each of those entities does what is best for them, or in the case of a public body (municipal authorities and municipalities), they do what they believe is in the best interest of their served communities. During the development of the Phase III Plan, those individual interests are respected and become part of the plan. As innovative solutions are developed to address

water-related challenges, how those interests are served may change to meet their customer's needs better. For example, the Plan will look at how each entity meets those needs now, and how they will meet them in the future if they continue their current path of working independently. The plan will identify potential alternatives to the current method of service, and the entity can compare their current and future path with the other options in the Plan. If the body is going to act in the best interest of their served community, they will accept the choice that most benefits their served community. It is possible that the result of the study will be that we already have accidentally discovered the best mix of projects for the benefit of each entity and the watershed as a whole. However, it is much more likely that there is room for improvement.

Who is involved?

Developing a plan involves a technical committee (which includes local, state, and federal agencies and other interested or affected parties), who make recommendations to the Spring Creek Watershed Commission, who then makes the decisions on the plan, including the selection of consultants. A steering team facilitates the process and works with the consultants to help with technical analyses and plan writing. Local governments work together to leverage each other's strengths to develop the watershed-based plan. Planning partnerships establish:

- agreement on the expectations, benefits, and outcomes for implementing the plan;
- implementation activities that address the most significant threats to water resources and that provide the greatest environmental benefit;
- an understanding of the procedures for substituting or replacing all or portions of existing water plans; and
- an understanding of the next steps for coordinated funding and implementation.

What goes into the One Water Plan?

Comprehensive One Water Plans contain:

- A narrative describing the watershed's land and water resources;
- A summary of the priority issues and resource concerns;
- Measurable goals for addressing each priority issue;
- A targeted implementation schedule outlining actions, including infrastructure projects;
- A description of the program(s) that will be used to implement the actions in the schedule;
- A description of the partnership that will work together to implement the plan; and
- Ultimately, the One Water Plan program encourages planners to look beyond individual water management projects – plans include programs that address education, recreation, soil health, monitoring, and more. The program also encourages local

governments to move beyond jurisdictional boundaries to build regional partnerships and to seek out diverse funding sources.

Where can I find more information?

Program information is available at *http://springcreekwatershedcommission.org.*

Key documents:

Phase I report: identified environmental challenges and solutions

Phase II report: developed the framework, vision, and objectives of the One Water Plan