

**CALIFORNIA WATER AND LAND USE PARTNERSHIP:  
LESSONS LEARNED FROM EARLY STAGE OF STAKEHOLDER  
COLLABORATION**

Susan F. Zaleski, University of Southern California Sea Grant Program

**Introduction**

The development of the California Water and Land Use Partnership has been a process of team building and facilitating discussions around a similar interest: the link between land use and water. Through this process the group collaborated across multiple disciplines and large geographic areas to establish a vision, mission, goals and objectives. Presented here are lessons learned about creating a collaborative partnership of diverse organizations and disciplines and initial accomplishments through this joint effort.

**Background**

The California Coastal Commission originally brought the National NEMO (Non-point Education for Municipal Officials) Network to California for a scoping session on developing a NEMO program in California to educate land use decision makers and aid in minimizing non-point source pollution impacts in coastal areas. The California NEMO Partnership was established and work began to grow and form this education effort. The California Coastal Commission, University of Southern California Sea Grant Program, and the Center for Water and Land Use, UC Davis have acted as the lead coordinators for the California Water and Land Use Partnership (CA WaLUP) in close partnership with the CAL EPA's Water Board and Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment, the Local Government Commission, University of California at Davis, Extension, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Coastal Services Center. Through a series of face to face stakeholder meetings the partnership name was changed to CA WaLUP to better describe the group's focus, while remaining a member of the National NEMO Network.

CA WaLUP is an informal partnership among state and federal agencies, non-governmental organizations, and Universities that have a mandate related to improving water quality in the state of California. The mission of CA WaLUP is to protect watershed integrity with the goal of improving water quality and supply. We seek to accomplish this mission by providing technical information and practical tools to support informed land use decision-making at the local level. We support a balanced approach of protecting natural resources while at the same time accommodating growth. To this end, our program addresses land use issues and promotes the use of integrated land use planning, community design, and site design strategies that serve to prevent or reduce the impacts of

development on water resources. We also seek to advance dialogue regarding the alignment of water quality management, watershed protection, and land use planning goals.

### **Lessons Learned**

1. Face to face meetings are essential: Resources are needed to bring interested parties together to build strong relationships; phone calls and emails are not enough to maintain a partnership. The group began with initial emails and conference calls that led to a core of interested organizations that were committed to building a partnership. After the first in person meeting we realized those types of interactions are critical to moving forward. We continued with monthly in person meetings that lead to the Partnership Strategic Visioning (March 2006). This was through a collaborative effort with NOAA Coastal Services Center to bring out the course Project Design and Evaluation. The course provided a stakeholder process that created a logic model with specific goals and objectives of the partnership. This offered the group a framework and path for moving forward with activities that meet the goals and objectives. When integrating multiple organizations and people from various disciplines that approach issues from different angles, it is essential to have everyone in the room to come to a consensus.
2. Different rates of engagement: Time and resources are limiting factors when creating large collaborative processes and can hinder the ability of organizations to contribute. There are also different levels of comfort with the collaborative process as well as needed consent to participate by the structure of each organization. Although everyone is not involved at the same level, the process still moves forward as long as no entity is blocking the progress.
3. Memorandums of Understanding and agreements will not be automatic because each partner comes from a distinct discipline and organization with a unique mission, so everyone will be at a different level of agreement. The process needs to address concerns of each partner and present the benefit of collaboration. No one entity takes ownership of the partnership; the strength is in the members and their contribution.
4. It is a continuous process to facilitate discussions and bring existing and new partners together. There must be dedication and open communication to maintain the collaboration.

### **Early Accomplishments**

Early collaboration can lead to significant resources. With secured funding from the State Water Resources Control Board, CA WaLUP established the Center for Water and Land Use at UC Davis (December 2006) and hired Dr. Timothy Lawrence to lead the center. Dr. Lawrence brings to California 15 years of experience running the Ohio NEMO program. There is a benefit to collaboration, even at the early stages when the group is still determining their identity and focus area.

Partners were asked to testify on Low Impact Development at the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board Workshop for the Ventura County NPDES Permit (September 2007). Partnering across disciplines enabled a direct link to bring science to policy decisions. Not all partners will be in agreement when moving forward on comments of a policy decision. The question still remains if the group should be able to make policy statements and how do you get all the partners to agree on a statement?

Through this partnership we are able to combine resources and provide education workshops to local communities on one tool in the tool box for informed land use decisions: Low Impact Development: Implementation of Techniques (2008). These workshops will provide technical information for on the ground implementation.

### **Conclusion**

USC Sea Grant and the Center for Water and Land Use, UC Davis will continue to coordinate the partnership to foster sharing of ideas across disciplines and advance the dialog on minimizing impacts to our watersheds while accommodating for growth. Individual partners continue to make progress within their own organizations as well as collaborating to increase technical knowledge and education on the link between land use and water.

Susan Frisch Zaleski  
University of Southern California Sea Grant Program  
3616 Trousdale Parkway, AHF 209  
Los Angeles, CA 90089-0373, USA  
Ph (213) 740-8602  
Fax (213) 740-5936  
szaleski@usc.edu