

## CHAPTER 10: NANTICOKE WATERSHED ALLIANCE

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Nanticoke River watershed, Delaware and Maryland

*Prepared by Chrissy Coughlin*

*The Nanticoke Watershed Alliance provides an example of a rapidly growing collaborative partnership that crosses the state boundaries of Delaware and Maryland in the eastern region of the United States. Referring to itself as a consortium or organization of organizations, the Nanticoke Watershed Alliance convenes diverse stakeholders with different agendas to make decisions on the future of the rapidly growing Nanticoke River watershed.*

### Interviews:

**Charlie Cipolla**, former NWA Board of Directors, Professor of Sociology, (3/22/99)

**Judith Stribling**, Assistant Professor of Biology at Salisbury State, (3/10/99)

**Larry Walton**, President-Chesapeake Forest Products, (3/9/99)

**Lisa Jo Frech**, Executive Director-Nanticoke Watershed Alliance, (2/24/99)

**Mark Zankel**, The Nature Conservancy, Director-Science and Stewardship, (3/25/99)

**Mike Terry**, Environmental Engineer-DuPont, (3/5/99)

**Nancy Stewart**, Maryland DNR-Watershed Restoration Division, (3/4/99)

**Ralph Harcum**, Farmer and Wicomico County Farm Bureau Representative, (3/15/99)

**Steve Corbitt**, Sales Manager of Survival Products, (03/09/99)

## PART I: BACKGROUND

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### Origin and Issues

The Nanticoke River watershed, located in both Maryland and Delaware on the Eastern seaboard, covers 64,000-square miles and is home of the Nanticoke River--the most pristine of several tributaries feeding into the Chesapeake Bay (EPA, 1999). The Nanticoke River itself flows southwest from central Delaware through Maryland's Eastern Shore, where it divides Wicomico and Dorchester Counties to the Tangier Sound and eventually to the Chesapeake Bay (Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, 1995). It drains one-third of Delaware, approximately 250,000 acres, and more than 125,000 acres in the Maryland counties (Naughten, 1996). Roughly 43% of the watershed is agricultural and 56% or 300,000 acres are managed for forest products (Naughten, 1996). 38% of the watershed is forested including the largest contiguous pine forest on the Delmarva Peninsula. Freshwater wetlands border nearly all streams and wetlands account for 22% percent of the land surface (Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, 1995). The watershed is primarily rural with most growth and development occurring around existing towns.

The Nanticoke River watershed is also host to a diversity of plant and animal life with habitat ranging from estuarine marshes to upland forest. In addition to a wide variety of tree species such as loblolly pine, sweetgum, red maple, and seaside alder, it is not uncommon to observe endangered and threatened species such as bald eagles, peregrine falcons, and the Delmarva fox squirrel (Nanticoke Watershed Alliance webpage, 1999). Other watershed species include fox, deer, turtles, snakes, and beaver. The Nanticoke River watershed, together with the neighboring Blackwater River, also supports 35% of all wintering waterfowl and provides valuable and commercial recreational fisheries.

Although the level of biodiversity in the watershed is unparalleled in the region, the Nanticoke River watershed has not entirely escaped the pressures of people. Steady development, increasing levels of nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus, as well as boat traffic all affect its ecological richness. The water quality of the Nanticoke River reveals the most obvious signs of degradation where algae blooms block out light to the river and nutrients, many found in leaking septic systems as well as in the soil, mimic fertilizers. When these blooms die, they settle at the bottom of the river, and decompose taking with them much of the oxygen that aquatic species need to survive.

In response, local residents have directed their efforts towards the protection of the river. Several citizen groups have organized themselves as stewards of the river in an effort to maintain the ecological integrity of the watershed. The Nanticoke Watershed Alliance is one of these groups that decided to cross-state boundaries and to convene diverse interests in the watershed. They pledged to work together, to share information, and to find ways to protect the watershed in a manner that is acceptable to all residents. This is a far cry from just a few years ago, when distrust, hidden agendas, and opposition prevailed.

### *Early Stages*

NWA began by developing a vision of protection of the river and watershed. These tasks lead them to eventually seek input from farmers, foresters, watermen, industry, academia, private businesses, and other non-profits. Initially, the NWA was solely an attempt to bring together diverse stakeholders to see if they could reach some common ground. As former NWA member, Charlie Cipolla illustrates: “It was sort of to check your guns at the door, to cease hostility and to sit down with timber people and developers to see if there was anything to discuss.” This initial group evolved to its present day state of twenty member organizations attempting to expand on their knowledge base and projects.

Lisa Jo Frech, the Executive Director of the NWA summarizes the overall sentiment shared by those involved with the group in its initial stages: “We knew that to protect the river, it was going to take different parties coming together. We would have enjoyed or autonomy, have made decisions really quickly and have been radical but there would be real limits to what we could do without the technical and financial support of other organizations and without the recognition of a broad based consortium.”

## **Organization and Process**

In 1992, conservation organizations from Maryland and Delaware, Friends of the Nanticoke and the Nanticoke Watershed Preservation Committee, reached across state lines to form the Nanticoke Watershed Alliance. This agreement was also signed by the Maryland DNR and the National Park Service (NWA Fact Sheet, 1998). By 1995, the NWA established themselves as a nonprofit 501(c3) and became a consortium. This move ensured financial stability as well as an open door policy (Frech, 1999).

The group reached consensus on the following mission statement, goals and objectives: <sup>1</sup>

### ***Mission statement***

*“To conserve the natural culture and recreational resources of the Nanticoke River watershed for the benefit of present and future generations.”*

### ***Goals***

- Promote and support protection, conservation, and management of important watershed related natural resources;
- Recognize sites, structures, and activities that are important parts of the Eastern Shore heritage, history, and livelihood and work to achieve their preservation;
- Encourage educational and low impact recreation uses of the river.

### ***Objectives***

- ◆ Foster public support through education, outreach, and advocacy;
- ◆ Conduct forums and workshops to provide avenues for private, public, and government involvement in the process of preserving the watershed;
- ◆ Develop partnerships between landowners, private organizations, businesses, and all levels of government in Maryland and Delaware;
- ◆ Promote the protection of wildlife resources and their habitat;
- ◆ Promote the establishment of wildlife and recreational greenways on both sides of the river;
- ◆ Protect the river as an ecosystem to include rare, threatened and important plant and animal communities;
- ◆ Improve river water quality;

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<sup>1</sup> NWA's mission, goals, and objectives were taken from the NWA webpage.

- ◆ Encourage appropriate development and land use patterns throughout the watershed;
- ◆ Develop activities that emphasize the river's cultural history;
- ◆ Develop opportunities for low impact recreational uses of the river.

### *Participants*

Twenty-nine organizations are now members of the NWA. The following members represent the overall membership body: Friends of the Nanticoke, the Wicomico County Farm Bureau, Chesapeake Forest Products, the Nature Conservancy, the DuPont Corporation, Connectiv, Survival Products, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the Salisbury Zoo, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, and the Nanticoke Watershed Preservation Committee (Frech, 1999).

### *Organizational Structure*

NWA is made up of a Board of Directors as well as its general membership and runs under its existing by-laws. NWA charges members an annual \$100 membership fee. Only organizations up to date in their dues are eligible for representation on the Board. The Board and general meetings are held the second Wednesday of every month at the Greater Salisbury Building in Salisbury. The President of the Board of Directors runs both meetings. A quorum for meetings is fifty percent of the members. Decisions are made by absolute majority (NWA By-laws, 1998). One nay cancels one yeah. Lisa Jo Frech talks about the power that this gives to one vote: “We are not going to have close calls. If something goes 5-4, it does not fly. We come back to the issue later on, and then do more consensus building. This allows us to be attractive enough and threatening. The vote has a lot of weight.”

The Board of Directors consists of twelve organizational members. A permanent seat is secured on the Board for three members of the founding grassroots organizations. Nine members are elected by the membership at large. At least three members of the Board must be from Delaware organizations, three from Maryland organizations, and three from public organizations such as government agencies and nonprofit organizations. Finally, there must be three members from proprietary organizations such as private for profit corporations. Members serve a three-year staggered term so that one-third of the Board is elected each year (NWA By-laws, 1998). Nominations may come from the floor as well as from the nominating committee. When a vacancy arises in the course of a Board member’s term, it the responsibility of the organization from where the Board member comes, to fill the vacant seat with another representative from the same organization.

NWA does not have specific committees. The Board, as it deems necessary, may create standing committees. The recommended standing committees include finance, nominating, and public relations. The President of the Board appoints standing committee members. Members of standing or special committees do not have to be Board members.

## ***Funding***

NWA is primarily grant driven. Most of their funds come from private foundations but the group also receives government grants from the EPA as well as from both the Maryland and Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Section 319. Although the group receives both restricted and unrestricted funds, the majority of the funds are restricted. Occasionally the group receives private donations and is planning on beginning to actively solicit funds from the public. The group has put on a few small fundraising events, which have been relatively successful, and is currently involved in workplace giving (Frech, 1999). Lisa Jo Frech mentions her concerns of being a grant driven organization: “Grants right now are easy to come by because the economy is healthy and they are easy for me to come by because I write and speak well...but it would put us in a precarious position if I were to leave the organization. We should have a steady source of revenue and a trust for funds, but we have not been able to think that out. We also have no financial advisor who could help us with this.”

## **Outcomes**<sup>2</sup>

The Nanticoke Watershed Alliance has resulted in a number of projects. These include a water quality-monitoring program, Shad festival and Shad restoration, boat traffic study, creation of Conservation Directory, a Quarterly newsletter, clean-ups, and classroom education:

- **Water Quality Monitoring:** The Nanticoke Watershed Water Quality Monitoring Program has established a baseline data from which to assess the efficacy of measures to reduce nutrient pollution entering the Chesapeake Bay. Using this data, trends in water quality and the biology of the Nanticoke will enable various agencies and organizations to provide better management for the preservation of this river ecosystem. Ongoing research on coliform bacteria and *Pfiesteria* has been part of these efforts.
- **Shad festival and Shad restoration:** The shad population in the Nanticoke River is currently quite low so the NWA created the Nanticoke Watershed Alliance's Shad Restoration Program to rebuild public awareness of this formerly great fish. The overall goal of the program is to revive public consciousness and to create a constituency for restoration. NWA has spent a great deal of time on the festival but now feels it has to spend its time and resources in other areas so it will now assist the Chesapeake Bay Foundation and / or the Town of Vienna with the festival.
- **Boat Traffic Study:** Completed in August 1997, NWA assisted with the design of the study working with the State of Maryland and the State of Delaware. The objective of the report was to study the effects of boat traffic on the Nanticoke River with regard to pollution, wake, and noise and the impact of such on wildlife, submerged aquatic vegetation,

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<sup>2</sup> Information in this section, unless otherwise indicated, was taken from the NWA webpage.

shoreline erosion, human population, and water and air quality. The report discusses the need for waterway regulation, the institutional framework, the history of waterway planning in both Delaware and Maryland, the unique aspects of the Nanticoke, analytical basis and findings, management recommendations, and maps. It also provides valuable information to the public and helps delineate regulations (or enforcement thereof) needed on the river. In 1998, NWA conducted a series of public meetings to disseminate highlights from this study. Participants at the meeting advocated the need for a repeat study in 2001 and for NWA to take a leading role in designing and distributing boater safety and environmental education information to boaters (NWA Progress Report, 1998).

- **Conservation Directory:** This directory is a reference guide for those interested in the conservation of the Nanticoke River watershed. It describes many of the public agencies and private organizations involved in conserving the Nanticoke, projects that are proposed or under way, and Nanticoke River publications. It also outlines some of the technical and financial conservation assistance programs available for use in the watershed. The directory includes a matrix of organizations and their activities as a quick reference, which also indicates where efforts have been overlapped or ignored.
- **Quarterly Newsletter:** The purpose of this free quarterly newsletter is to gain awareness and appreciation of the natural, historical, scenic, recreational, and cultural values of the Nanticoke River watershed. It reaches landowners, schools, libraries, civic associations, local and state officials, retirement homes, park and recreation departments, the Nanticoke Indian Museum, conservation organizations, and members of the non-profits groups affiliated with the Nanticoke Watershed Alliance.
- **Clean-ups:** Ongoing since 1994, NWA hosts two clean-ups annually that take place in both Maryland and Delaware. These clean-ups help bring together NWA members and the community at large. Salisbury State University sends students to help and High school and junior high school students get credit for community service hours (needed for graduation). Over 125 volunteers pulled an estimated six and a half tons of trash from three sites in the first year alone.
- **Classroom Education:** NWA hosts a two week educational program called Diary of a River for gifted students that covers issues that pertain to the watershed. NWA feels it is very important to bring watershed issues to the classroom as part of their curriculum.

### **Additional outcomes** <sup>3</sup>

- Creation of a NWA web-site;

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<sup>3</sup> Information in this section, unless otherwise indicated, was provided by Lisa Jo Frech through personal communication.

- Lawn care education pamphlet distributed by realtors to new homeowners highlighting environmentally friendly lawn care practices;
- NWA involvement in the Rural Legacy Program where the state gives county money to preserve land in targeted areas through conservation easements;
- Ongoing research on ways to enhance proper fish passage on the Nanticoke River. NWA is currently applying for a grant to install fish ladders on two tributary sites of the Nanticoke River (NWA Progress Report, 1998);
- Native planting at residential areas;
- Pond reclamation;
- Monitoring the county's comprehensive plan to support adoption of rural development standards.

## **PART II: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

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### **Why Collaboration?**

Members of the Nanticoke Watershed Alliance offered the following reasons for why they chose to collaborate: <sup>4</sup>

- To get things done and to develop trust
- To be involved in their communities
- To watch over others
- To continue the work of founding environmental organizations

Lisa Jo Frech speaks to the issue of trust: “You can accomplish a lot through litigation but at what cost? I think that what we were able to accomplish in the long run is far greater because we have trust. There is not player in this watershed that I do not trust. There is not anybody that I would not call at the drop of a hat work or at home and say ‘I heard a rumor would you verify this for me?’ I would not want it any other way. I would not want to be second guessing people’s agendas.”

Nancy Stewart talks about the level of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) involvement and why MDNR sees the virtues of collaborating in a group like NWA. She states: "DNR wants to be involved in watershed groups as much as possible and have a role in things that are happening in the community and be able to provide support and input wherever it is applicable. I am not voting on policy issues but I provide input and assistance wherever I can.”

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<sup>4</sup> Members are involved in the NWA to varying levels of degree. Some are more concerned about supporting the group financially and do not attend meetings on a regular basis whereas others rarely miss a meeting.

Judith Stribling, assistant professor at Salisbury State and former Board President, states: "What drew me to it was that it was a real consensus building group that took diverse interests and tried to bring them together. I was impressed that these people were trying to do that and appeared to be relatively successful at it. They were successful to at least committing themselves to it."

Mark Zankel offers his reasons for becoming involved in the NWA as a member of a major conservation organization: "TNC is heavily involved in the Nanticoke Watershed. We are one of conservation players in the watershed and felt that it was important for us to have at least some kind of presence in the Alliance and to keep our pulse on what the Alliance is doing. This way we can provide input where we think that it is appropriate based on our understanding and areas of expertise and to look for opportunities to work together with the Alliance on various projects."

There are other members who participate because they have a great deal at stake in the watershed and want to make sure that others understand that they do. In the words of Larry Walton, President of Chesapeake Forest Products: "Initially it was probably an adversarial kind of thing never having met Lisa Jo before. But we had a lot at stake and we certainly have a lot to contribute and do contribute to the health of the watershed. We go to these kinds of things to tell them what we do. If these watersheds are in good shape on the Eastern Shore, it is because of the forest products industry and not in spite of them."

Mike Terry of DuPont gives his reasons for choosing to collaborate: "We do not have the right to work in the community, it is just a privilege so unless we meet the requirements of the community, we lose that privilege. We utilize the river to bring raw materials in primarily for fuel oil. We also utilize lots of water for cooling and we have a wastewater treatment facility. We treat the water, and then, of course, it is discharged back into the river. We are concerned with quality of water in the river and what impact we have and we are also concerned about the other entities are doing to the river and what they think that we are doing with it."

Lisa Jo Frech also highlights the incentives for participation of two other NWA members. Both are clearly interested in the health of the watershed. One participant drives two hours each way to get to the meetings. This participant runs the Oyster Recovery Project based in Annapolis and is interested in the recovery of oysters and wants to create sanctuaries in the rivers all over the Chesapeake Bay. He seeks the input of local people to determine where those sanctuaries should be built and would like local volunteers to build, publicize, and protect the sanctuaries. Another participant, a local Realtor, is concerned about the cost of housing, development, and the effects of development on the economy and the watershed. Lisa Jo Frech comments: "He takes his livelihood seriously but also cares deeply about the river."

Finally in the words of Ralph Harcum of the Wicomico County Farm Bureau: "I go to keep a finger on what is going on. I am a watchdog and make sure that things are not done that would



be a detriment to the farming community. I also go to try to educate them. They have no concept of farming yet they want to dispute me. If you can't beat them join them."

### *Alternatives*

Those interviewed offered a range of different thoughts about what would have likely happened in the Nanticoke River watershed if the Nanticoke Watershed Alliance had not formed:

- Distorted information
- Less public involvement/education
- More difficult to protect the watershed
- Litigation

#### *Distorted information*

Steve Corbitt feels that the public would have regularly seen local interests in the watershed colliding. He states: "In a rural area, the only means for people to acquire information is often by what they hear by word of mouth or on the local TV station or newspaper. Farmers, for instance, have felt attacked and felt forced to take the blame on the effects on water quality of run-off of poultry manure. It can't be proven beyond a shadow of a doubt by the effects that have had on water quality. We have been able to work with the farm bureau and at least talk about it and look into it. This is what people tuning into come away with rather than going by local TV stations where the public just sees us yelling at each other."

#### *Less Public Involvement/Education*

Nancy Stewart speaks of the ability for the public to receive information from a different angle. "The Nanticoke Watershed Alliance serves to bring things to people's attention that might not have gotten there as readily otherwise. Because it is so diverse, they are getting input and drawing lots of minds together. The public would have been less informed and involved. NWA has also provided a forum for issues that may not have been there otherwise."

Mark Zankel indicates that the level of watershed education would not have been of the caliber that it is today with the NWA. He explains: "NWA has done a good job of raising the profile of the watershed both for the communities that live in the watershed and in terms of getting it on the radar screen of agencies and others that fund a lot of work that goes on. I do not think that if they had not been there, it would have happened as well."

#### *More difficult to protect the watershed*

Judith Stribling feels that accomplishments by other groups would have been made but that it would have been more difficult and not achieved as much due to a lack of credibility on the part of the group. "The hope was that NWA would have a great deal more credibility by getting together and being diverse. It would carry more weight and have a bit more of an impact on the local scene than any one organization and all of its associated baggage."

### *Litigation*

Lisa Jo speaks to a common alternative of collaboration: "We would have gone through litigation. Some people would have stepped up to the plate and accomplished a thing or two and then would have burnt out. They would have been bitter and resentful but would still be in the watershed. It would be hard to find replacements for them. We would win a couple of battles and lose a couple of battles but overall it would just be bloody."

### *Advice*

Those interviewed offered several suggestions for others considering whether and how to initiate a collaborative process. These included the need for good leadership, tight goals and objectives, interagency coordination, energetic participants, and coming up with a good name:

- Lisa Jo Frech provides advice for others who are in leadership roles in a collaborative group: "You have to work with everyone. You have to get to know everyone individually. I get to know people personally so that when opportunities arise for a project, I know who cares about that project and I know who I want to get involved in that project."
- Mark Zankel speaks to the mission and participants of NWA:
  - ♦ "Develop a fairly tight mission statement, goals, and objectives. The NWA had kind of a murky mission statement originally but they have since refined it. It is now a lot clearer what they are trying to accomplish."
  - ♦ "Have one or a couple of people who have a lot of energy to round up people. You need a cheerleader in a sense, who has the right personality and energy level and composure to say 'come and join this party because there are going to be long term benefits of doing so.' Those people are out there but are hard to find. In rural areas it helps to have someone local who is doing that. People in Southern Delaware people are fairly insular and skeptical of outsiders."
  - ♦ "Get local leaders to champion your cause. You have to connect with the people who live there and have them understand that you are trying to make this place more livable for everyone."
- Steve Corbitt talks about the benefit interagency coordination can have on maintaining a watershed: "I think the best thing is to let the left hand talk to the right hand and let the other hand know what it is doing. Groups like the NWA can facilitate the process in a situation where two agencies are spending money on the same things."
- Nancy Stewart highlights the benefits of agency involvement: "The most important thing that the group can do is to bring in agencies and give them a chance to speak on issues that are important then turn around and disseminate the information to the general public. Because

they are bringing so much expertise they can have an influence in the watershed by actively accomplishing things on the ground-education as well as implementing projects.”

- Judith Stribling illustrates the negative impact a name can have on a watershed group: "Watch out what you name yourself! The NWA and the Friends of the Nanticoke River get confused by everybody. You can't get over that. You go to meetings and spell it out, you spend time explaining, and nobody hears you. I have been very frustrated by that. People just hear Nanticoke.”

Finally, Ralph Harcum advises to, “Get the right people involved. Get knowledgeable people. I wonder about the people they put in charge at meetings. They do not understand what it is all about.”

### **Ensuring Sufficient Representation**

Participants, overall, felt that the NWA has done a good job getting many diverse representatives to the table to share information and to educate each other. Lisa Jo Frech points out, “In the formative stages, lack of representation was an issue, but it is better now. But I never let myself think for one minute that absolutely everyone is at the table because there are new organizations and businesses and there is always someone who should be there who is not on your list.” Nonetheless, several participants voiced their concerns about two aspects of ensuring sufficient representation:

#### **Challenges**

- Getting certain groups to the table
- Working towards more active involvement from the state of Delaware
- Giving participants a clear role

#### *Getting certain groups to the table*

The primary challenge of ensuring sufficient representation is to get three different groups in the watershed to play an active role in NWA and help determine how to manage for the watershed’s future. These groups are a local Native American tribe, the poultry industry and the farming industry. Indeed, both the poultry industry and farming groups are one of the biggest landowners in the Nanticoke River watershed. At the time the interviews were conducted, they were not at the table and have shown no sign to join NWA despite numerous attempts to bring them on board.

Judith Stribling illustrates her concern over the inability of NWA to bring the poultry industry to the table: “We have had a hard time getting anybody from the poultry industry to the participate. They are an enormous player on the local environmental scene so I think that it is a real failure on our part that we have not managed to get them in there.”

Larry Walton also speaks to the efforts he has personally made to get the poultry industry involved. “I called them myself and asked them to participate and they got kind of nasty. I said: ‘They hit on you guys every meeting. You can sit back there in your office and let them stuff up or you can talk to them face to face.’ They have not done it yet.”

Mike Terry discusses the concerns of the group to get the farming community on board but also recognizes that efforts are being made to do so: “We have tried to look at farming interests and we often look around and ask whom have we forgotten. We do have diverse people, though. NWA, for instance, is not full of industry. We do realize that the more input you have the better your end result.”

The local Native American tribe is currently consumed with trying to retrieve land from the government but Executive Director, Lisa Jo Frech, feels that NWA could be helping them if the two worked together. She states: “I don’t think that they see it that way, however. I don’t know how they see us really, but I do know that without their participation, our view of the watershed and its needs, issues, and resources, are not a total vision.”

#### *Working towards more active involvement from the state of Delaware*

Although not viewed as a major challenge of NWA right now, one participant brought up the fact, although NWA lines work across state lines, there is more representation from Maryland than there is from Delaware. Although he does not know exactly why this is the case, it is a concern of his. He felt that if more emphasis were placed on the Delaware side then interests like DENREC (Delaware Department of Environmental Control) might participate. Given that the watershed crosses state lines, NWA is interested in encouraging membership from both states. This imbalance could certainly have negative consequences when trying to encourage organizations from Delaware to join.

#### *Giving participants a clear role*

Although NWA encourages active participation, some participants addressed their concern that they often felt they lacked a purpose for being at meetings. These were people with very busy schedules who may choose not to attend meetings with as much frequency if they are not given a clear role in the meetings. Nancy Stewart of the Maryland DNR was often unaware of her purpose in attending meetings because she often did nothing more than sit in the back and listen. She states: “Sometimes I have wondered what I was doing there. I was not really contributing all that much except for a little bit here and there. Then I spoke to someone and they told me that they just appreciated my showing up.” For busy participants, however, this uncertain role can certainly prove a disincentive for attending future meetings.

### ***Strategies***

Participants in the Nanticoke Watershed Alliance try a variety of strategies for dealing with the challenges of representation including:

- Active recruitment
- Locate meetings in a convenient location

#### *Active recruitment*

The Executive Director, Lisa Jo Frech, is constantly working towards identifying stakeholders in the watershed and actively trying to bring them on board. This often entails hours spent on the phone with certain individuals, promoting community efforts such as clean-ups, and hosting/attending workshops to get the NWA name and mission out to the public and to differentiate it from other organizations within the watershed. Indeed, NWA feels that as a coalition, they are able to take on greater issues that affect more people.

#### *Locate meetings in a convenient location*

NWA has also made a conscious effort to make the meetings as convenient as possible. To do so, meetings are currently held outside of the watershed to best accommodate all representatives. Moreover, the general meeting and the Board of Directors meetings take place back to back so that those who must be at both do not have to make two trips.

#### *Advice*

Those interviewed offered several suggestions for others considering the issue of ensuring sufficient representation. Advice and reflections include having clear goals, giving people a voice, and having solid leadership:

- Nancy Stewart speaks to the need for NWA to have a clear idea of who they are: “You have to have a clear cut idea of what the goals are for the group. When the NWA started out they were more oriented towards environmental groups. Since that time, they have changed and have become much broader spectrums. If you are going to have a group like this all groups must be involved. Everyone has a right to voice his or her own opinions. If you want to have credibility, the public needs to know that as many interests as possible are present and that it is not a one-sided issue so to speak.”
- Related to defining the group, Judith Stribling talks about the reputation of NWA: “A lot depends on the reputation that you set out. It involves a very good PR effort to make sure that you are understood and that the first people who do sign on have a broad base. If we had just been three non-profits then it would have been hard to get anyone to sign on because it would have been viewed as this environmental organization. So! Don’t proceed until you have a certain amount of representation from different angles.”
- In the words of Mark Zankel: “Have a clear agenda. Defining what kind of commitment you want from people is very helpful. Everyone in our field is way over busy so if you are being asked to go and get involved in something else you have to know what you are going to get out of it. Secondly, accomplish things and show people what you have done. People

are hesitant to get involved but once something is up and running they do not want to miss the boat and seem like they are out of the loop. Success really sells.”

- Steve Corbitt speaks to the issue of open dialogue and suggests: “Make sure everyone is entitled to an opinion. Nurture a sense of stewardship for everyone who is concerned about the river. Figure out a way to attach their needs and goals to that of NWA in some way shape or form.”
- Finally, Charlie Cipolla offers the following advice concerning the importance of having solid leadership: “You need leadership that is politically astute enough to grapple with the tough thorny issues. Make sure that people who are at the table are the right ones. I know that watershed management is not the creation of trails and bikepaths. I am no deep ecologist by any stretch but I know that.”

### **Accommodating Diverse Interests**

The main intent of the Nanticoke Watershed Alliance is to bring together different interests in the watershed to make decisions about its future. How to accomplish that is where there is some group dissension. As highlighted above, some feel that this effort has been successful whereas others feel the group has fallen short. As Mark Zankel points out, however, “NWA has not functioned so much as a solution generating group where they are looking at some issue and having to figure it out. I have seen them in more of an educational information, capacity with some monitoring and research being done so you do not have this lowest common denominator problem.”

Judith Stribling speaks to the reality of diverse representation. “I think that it is the basic dilemma that you face. I think it works both ways. I have seen things that we have done that could not have possibly been done without the diverse interests and I have seen us fail to do things because of them.”

Overall NWA members feel that having diverse interests at the table has increased awareness and encouraged respect. Indeed, NWA has worked hard to accommodate diverse interests at the table. Challenges, however, still exist and fall into the following categories:

### ***Challenges***

- Defining the role of the group while dealing with contentious issues
- Inappropriate representatives from organizations
- Developing and maintaining trust

### *Defining the role of the group while dealing with contentious issues*

Indeed, NWA has struggled with complex and often controversial issues and has been hesitant to take a stance on certain issues for fear of losing key players. Lisa Jo Frech, NWA Executive Director, explains: “We are always potential victims of the lowest common denominator. At any given moment we are definitely falling into that category for LCD. It is a risk that we have to guard against. We might not necessarily be conscious of falling into that trap. Pfiesteria is an example. We have no position. Is that because we are chicken? We are saying right now that there is not enough evidence to point conclusively in any one direction. CBF (Chesapeake Bay Foundation) has pointed their finger at farmers. People expected us to do the same thing. If we pointed at farmers, we are going to lose them at the table, put them on the defensive and lose this open working relationship we have. We are keeping busy and doing good things, but are we do have to ask if we are necessarily doing the right things.”

Steve Corbitt adds his insight: “There are some issues that we have not hit hard enough for fear of alienating constituent members. I guess that it has not come up enough to be more of a problem than it has, although the Pfiesteria issue has been around here for a long time.”

Judith Stribling talks specifically about the issue of Pfiesteria and the effect that diverse representation has had on finding solutions to tackle this concern: “Pfiesteria was something that was talked about a lot but we never came up with a policy position for where we stood on waste. We did write letters urging change in regulation and enforcement in regulations. We were able to agree on some things on that but we did not agree on the overriding idea of whether nutrient management needed to be changed.”

### *Inappropriate representation from organizations*

Another challenge that NWA faces is that by having to recruit organizations, they may not be getting the best representatives from that organization to attend the meetings. In fact, in some instances, representatives not only show little concern of the future of the watershed but also do not properly represent their organization. Larry Walton voices his concerns about the representation of the group and what that means for decisions made by NWA. “A lot of people have left because they see those compromises being made and they do not feel comfortable with that. I have seen them [NWA] really compromise their principles in some cases to reach consensus on some things. If nothing else, this concerned the diverse membership to the Board of Directors let us say. Someone may not be that interested or environmentally inclined but just because he works for an organization that they would like to have in the group, they [NWA] just tell him that they want him on the Board. This may be a person that even I myself would say would not be a good choice-Somebody that they would not even talk to five years ago.”

### *Developing and maintaining trust*

Some participants represent large industries like DuPont and Chesapeake Forest Products, companies and carry the stigma of being environmentally unfriendly. For this reason, particularly in the initial stages, others in the group have questioned their motives. In fact, Farm Bureau

representative, Ralph Harcum, feels little trust for anyone who threatens his traditional way of farming his land. In his words: “I am a watchdog and make sure that things are not done that would be a detriment to the farming community... They have no concept of farming yet they dispute me.”

### *Strategies*

Participants in the Nanticoke Watershed Alliance try a variety of strategies for dealing with the issue of accommodating diverse interests:

- Develop forums for information sharing, education, and addressing concerns
- Conduct field trips

#### *Develop forums for information sharing, education, and addressing concerns*

NWA was created as a forum for information sharing, education, and addressing concerns. Although often challenging, members are constantly reminded to voice their opinions. NWA places great emphasis on the importance of listening to everyone interests so that everyone at the meetings are aware of all perspectives that need to be considered.

#### *Conduct field trips*

Field trips such as clean-ups are a way for participants to get to know each other better with the hope of transferring this new found respect to more formal settings such as NWA meetings. With reference to one of the first clean-ups in the watershed, Executive Director, Lisa Jo Frech, points out: “We got to know people personally and I realized that it was important to find out what made someone really tick and to find out where their passion for issues really lived. One of the people who came happened to be someone we were fighting... I got to know him personally... when he came to meetings from then on and looked across the table, he saw a different person.”

### *Advice*

Those interviewed offered the following advice to best accommodate diverse interests. Advice and reflections encourage participants to be open to suggestions, to be dedicated, and to demand solid leadership:

- Steve Corbitt offers the following advice: “Encourage membership to vocalize everything positive and negative that they can about the ongoing process. There is a right way and a wrong way of doing this and if you can't play nice then get out of the sandbox. You have to know how to talk to people and have basic respect for human beings. See what about them makes them tick.”



- He adds: “You are constantly confronted with obstacles. All of the issues have become compounded because we have diversity. You have to work through it so that you can make progress.”
- Larry Walton suggests that dedication is key to a positive outcome when a group is comprised of diverse stakeholders: “It takes the right kind of people. It takes time and patience and a lot of one on one stuff. And on the ground stuff--not just sitting in on a meeting, but going out and looking at something. If they have an impression that something is not right, well then let’s go and look at it. Let’s go walk a mile in that person’s shoes before you make that decision. We all seem too busy to take the time but it is very important that all of our people take the time to do it. We have got four foresters and myself here and between the five of us, we do it full-time. Nobody does it solely but it adds up.”
- Charlie Cipolla offers this poignant advice in reference to leadership: “Make sure that the leadership of the organization has a degree of political sophistication and understanding of larger issues. Planting trees is a wonderful thing but that alone is not going to cut it.”
- Judith Stribling offers advice that relates to the challenge posed by Charlie Cipolla: “The most important thing is to know that you have a good representative--someone who clearly does speak for others and is not in there with a personal. I have run across a situation where a representative was speaking his own mind and was not representing the group that he was supposed to be representing or the group that his group is supposed to be representing. You need to watch who you take on as your stakeholder for a particular segment and make sure there are truly representative of that segment. Sometimes that is very hard because there are some groups like the watermen because there is really nobody who speaks for them that we can bring to the table.”

### **Dealing with Scientific Issues**

#### *Issues*

The issues with scientific dimensions that fall under NWA’s umbrella of information sharing and education include river restoration and clean-ups, water quality monitoring, fish recovery, run-off, and the occurrence of pfiesteria and coliform bacteria.

Although, NWA clearly does not have the staff power or resources to be a foundation of scientific expertise, with robust scientific resources both inside and outside of the group, NWA has had little trouble dealing with scientific dimensions of issues. Moreover, most group members, with the exception of one or two people, are open to clear concrete scientific ideas (Stribling, 1999). Water quality monitoring and research are two areas where NWA has achieved expertise.

While the Nanticoke Watershed Alliance possesses the scientific resources it needs in order to incorporate sound science into its decision-making structure, two challenges remain that are of concern to some participants:

### *Challenges*

- Taking a stance
- Keeping participants up to speed

#### *Taking a stance*

NWA has been criticized by some for not taking a stance on certain scientific issues. Many claim that it is because the group is afraid of losing key players at the table. Ironically, by not taking a stance on these issues, other key players are choosing to back down. The issue of *pfisteria* is one such example.

#### *Keeping participants up to speed*

Some participants also have less education or experience needed to keep up with the science. The group recognizes the importance of having, for instance, the farmer's expertise at the table, but although they know how to farm, they hesitate to heed advice from the group. As a result, the group will tend to move away from the topic at hand with incomplete information. Judith Stribling remarks: "They [the farmers] are nutrient experts in one respect but in another respect, they are not getting the good science so they do not know what they need to know. They know enough of what they are doing but they often do not understand the implications. There are too many people in our group to be in a situation where they are feeding off of each other's ignorance."

### *Strategies*

Participants of the Nanticoke Watershed Alliance implement a variety of strategies for dealing with scientific issues, including:

- Utilize external expertise
- Utilize internal expertise
- Attend / conduct workshops
- Develop community planning forums

#### *Utilize external expertise*

When the group talks about an issue with scientific implications or has heard of an industry in the watershed that may be doing something that could be detrimental to the watershed, they bring in experts. This is part of their effort to educate members. Often the experts will make a presentation to the group. From there, the group decides whether or not to pursue the issue

further. Lisa Jo Frech explains: “We are always asking people to come and to make presentations or to critique other presentations. It is like a spider web that is always growing, we are always evolving-we are always looking to catch somebody else in our net. We ask, here is what we are handling now, who should we attract to handle this. Or here is an issue that we were not planning on having to handle who do we need to work on that issue. It is my job to know who is out there doing what and whom we can call on. We are not working in a vacuum here. If we do not have the people we need, then we go get them. If I do not know who they are, I know somebody who does.”

When industry practices are of concern, the group will take information in and then decide as a group whether or not to make a statement. One instance was a dual presentation by Power Company and NWA Board member, Connectiv, and the Maryland state permitting agency, Maryland Department of the Environment. The issue concerned copper lining in one of Connectiv’s cooling towers and its effect on water quality. According to Lisa Jo Frech, “NWA wants to know is what they are doing, whether they will be able to remedy this problem before their permit runs out, what happens if they do not remedy it, what are the alternatives that they are considering, what should we be concerned about, what are the assurances that we have. In most cases, it turns out that we do not need to make a statement, we do not need to pressure them, we don’t need to fight them, but at least we know what is going on.” Finally, in the words of Larry Walton, “The group does a very good job of bringing in the people that they need to get the information they need. They have a good way of seeking out the information and the people they need to get that information.”

#### *Utilize internal expertise*

NWA’s success in obtaining scientifically sound and credible scientific data can be also be attributed to inside agency, university, and environmental organization expertise at both the Board and general membership level. In addition to receiving assistance from members who are scientific experts at Salisbury State University such as Judith Stribling, and from TNC representatives like Bill Bostion and Mark Zankel, agency representatives are always working hard to help the group handle scientific issues. In the words of Nancy Stewart of the MDNR, “You [inside scientific experts] are providing insight that you might not have had otherwise.” Inside experts tend to prioritize and reinforce the importance of taking on projects that enhance the quality of the watershed.

#### *Attend/conduct workshops*

Another strategy is for members to take part in workshops, seminars, and meetings both within and outside the framework of NWA. Overall NWA has experienced a willingness of members to attend these events. They have helped the group keep up to speed with the scientific issues in the Nanticoke River watershed.

#### *Develop community-planning forums*

NWA is currently developing a forum to work with realtors, builders, developers, planners, architects, farmers, foresters, and environmentalists to forge environmentally sensitive design

standards for rural development as a tool for implementation of the Wicomico County Comprehensive Plan. If all goes well, the process will provide a model for other counties in the watershed (NWA Progress Report, 1998).

### *Advice*

Those interviewed offered the following advice to best handle the scientific dimensions of collaborative decision-making. Suggestions include using outside expertise, remaining flexible, and keeping active in the process:

- Charlie Cipolla speaks of the benefits that academic institutions can provide: “Having access to a State University or private institution and involving them in your endeavors is a good idea. State agency involvement like Maryland DNR and DENREC have also proven helpful.”
- Mark Zankel also talks about the role of watershed groups and the benefits of bringing in outside technical expertise: “It is not reasonable to expect watershed groups staff to be science experts in every area that you need it so the key is to get people with expertise to be technical resources for the group. Whether that is regular involvement or collaborative research projects or just being able to come when there is an issue being discussed and they can provide some technical expertise and be a backboard for people to ask questions. Bring those people into process. Anytime that anybody can bring people into the applied conservation environment, there is a lot of benefit.”
- Nancy Stewart indicates the importance of utilizing regional expertise and of being proactive. “Go to the scientific community. Go to the experts and talk to them. Go to several individuals. Attend workshops.”
- In addition to recognizing the benefits of both agency and university expertise, Judith Stribling highlights the importance of active and thorough participation: “Get that good mix of people in there that are working for different agencies and make sure that they are there. But also make sure the end group is there. Farmers for example. They are talking about their own concerns and bringing their own expertise on scientific issues to the table.”
- Larry Walton speaks on a personal note: “Do not be confrontational. If you want to get cooperation and get all of the people to the table who can give you some good input, bringing law enforcement down on their hands is not the way to get good cooperation.”
- Finally, Mike Terry offers the following advice: “It depends what your objective is. If it were to analyze and critique you would need another layer to our group. But my advice would be to make sure that you have some talents from a scientific background. It must be balanced though, because a group of all Ph.D.'s would just be a think tank.”

## Accommodating Diverse Capabilities

Although there is a range of skills, resources, and power at the table, most of this dichotomy was noticeable in the formative stages of the group. Lisa Jo Frech illustrates this challenge as reality for the group primarily early on: “In the early days a number of people who were in the leadership position at the time were very worried about being co-opted. Comments such as ‘we do not want the DNR to be a formal member of this group because they will co-opt us’ abounded.” She adds: “My personal and professional fear of being co-opted is usually if not always loose fear. Fear with for the sake of fear. Fear feeding on itself. I do not think that most agencies, foundations, businesses, organizations, industry has the time to co-opt another one.”

She also speaks to the current dynamic of the group and why co-optation is not much of an issue. “Let’s say in our coalition state, we decide we are not going to fight a particular issue. That does not mean that one of our member groups can’t go out and fight. They still have autonomy. Friends of the Nanticoke is an example. If they disagree with a position that we take, they have autonomy and are more than free and they always will be to fight that issue as the Friends of the Nanticoke.”

While Lisa Jo Frech’s perception of this issue is somewhat optimistic, she does not share it with other members of the group who are more skeptical of the reality of a level playing field. They feel the following challenges of accommodating diverse capabilities still exist:

### *Challenges*

- Prevalence of power interests
- Confusion over the definition of consensus

### *Prevalence of power interests*

Certainly, balancing influence in the process is difficult with varying levels of knowledge, skills, resources, and power at the table. Many feel that these dominant interests have attempted to use their influence to push their agendas through the collaborative process. In fact, Larry Walton, President of Chesapeake Forest Products, feels that Chesapeake Forest Products has contributed to this an imbalance of skills, resources, and power at the table and has disturbed the flow of decision-making within the group. He refers specifically to a former colleague who worked with him before he passed away with a powerful and overbearing personality. Walton states: “I am sure that there are people in the varying organizations parent organizations that think that Chesapeake Forest Products with their power and clout has unduly influenced the group to get them off their back which I guess we have but through good will and time and effort. But, I could see how people could think that. I am Vice-President of the Board and although I was asked to be President, I would not be because I think that too many members would resign if I were to become President.”

Charlie Cipolla is perhaps the most vociferous regarding this issue. He states: “As far as I am concerned the big money private interests prevail. Part of the problem is that private non-profit green groups are created and run by people who do other things and have other jobs. It is hard to maintain as active degree of involvement as people from the timber industries who as it is part of their job description is to become involved in these groups and I think to effectively neutralize efforts to really get anything done.”

He also adds: “The interests that have some to the table and who have really set the agenda have been the large economic interests. The timber people made darn sure that they got in there and defined the situation.” He went on to speak about an incident roughly three years ago when a timber company cut an illegal road that pushed dirt into streams, and continued down to river’s edge in clear violation of the buffer zone. The Timber Company was upset because NWA went ahead and contacted the appropriate people in Annapolis. “There was a cooling off period and since then they have returned to the table. There were some not so thinly veiled threats leveled that if that were ever to happen again, the person involved might find himself at great risk. The idea really is that they will play ball, throw around a little money, and be nice neighbors but don’t mess them.”

#### *Confusion over the definition of consensus*

With such varying levels of knowledge, skills, resources, and power at the table, it has become difficult to determine when the group has actually reached consensus. Judith Stribling articulates this reality while indicating, however, that the group is, indeed, evolving: “There have been situations where the group will have a sense that there is a consensus when there are people there who do not really agree and find it difficult to express that because they are felling somewhat overwhelmed. Now people are becoming more sensitive. We remind people that everyone has to have a point and explain where they stand and not being concerned that they may not be on the same bus. It *is* a little difficult, however.”

#### *Strategy*

The one strategy used by NWA to accommodate diverse capabilities is to ensure that, if need be, each participant feels as though they are able to maintain their independence when it comes to decision-making:

- Retain autonomy to act outside of the group

#### *Retain autonomy to act outside of the group*

One strategy to deal with the issue of varying “capabilities,” although it runs the risk of compromising the integrity of the group, was to ensure that every member retained his or her right to act in the way that he or she saw fit. Lisa Jo Frech explains this strategy in greater detail: “Let’s say in our coalition state, we decide we are not going to fight a particular issue. That does not mean that one of our member groups can’t go out and fight. They still have autonomy. Friends of the Nanticoke, for instance. If they disagree with a position that we have taken, they

are more than free and they always will be to fight that issue as the Friends of the Nanticoke. That is the beauty of the way that we are organized. If there is an issue where we are divided, they can go their own way and they know that.”

### *Advice*

Participants offered the following advice as to best accommodate diverse capabilities such as sticking to the agenda, looking towards the leadership, questioning your assumptions, listening to each other, and taking it slowly:

- Ralph Harcum suggests the following so as better balance diverse capabilities at the table: “Only promote discussion that is constructive and sticks to the agenda originally called for.”
- Adding to Ralph Harcum’s words, Mark Zankel’s advice centers on group process: “Forums must be run well. Everyone there has to feel that they will be listened to and are going to be taken as seriously as everyone else. It is also incumbent upon group to have a good facilitator. That is something that has improved at the Alliance recently versus the first couple of meetings I went to a couple of years ago. Someone who can move the discussion around to people who are raising their hands or whatever. Keep things on track and make people feel like their points are worthwhile.”
- Charles Cipolla advises to look towards your leadership for guidance. “As long as your leadership is strong and the group has a good set of bylaws it seems like to me you can cope with differentials such as power and wealth. I have faith in the ability to sit and discuss and debate. But often if you do not maintain your focus, and if the leadership is not strong you end up holding hands and playing pitty-pat.”
- Mike Terry also speaks to the role the leader of the group has to accommodating diverse capabilities: “Whoever is the President or leader of the group, has to control the group and create an atmosphere where everyone’s opinions are valued. Part of the challenge of the board members is to ensure that so the group does not fall apart. It is also important to set groundrules and to document them.”
- Finally, Nancy Stewart also advises the leadership to work to: “Get to the crux of what someone is trying to say. Speak up and assist the person if the person is struggling. That takes expertise you need to have an individual who knows how to draw that out of someone. If someone does have a particular issue, it has to be thoroughly discussed. Nothing can be scrapped because the group has not come to consensus.”
- Judith Stribling speaks to the issue of co-optation: “It is important for everyone to be aware of that potential (co-optation). I also think it is important to always question our assumptions stopping and considering the alternatives whether or not someone brings it up or not.”

- Nancy Stewart feels that co-optation, although present, is a challenge to the group because it is not explicit. She sees it directly linked to the varying levels of education and personalities of participants. In her words: “For example, although people may listen, individual concerns and ideas might not be to various participants. Possibly. Some individuals are more educated than others are and some are better speakers, are more forward. Different personalities. I sometime wonder if some individuals and tend to rant and rave a little, I hesitate to say that they are not given credibility. There are, but I think it is more of a strain to get to the crux of the matter some towns. I think that efforts are given to give people representation and to respect people's opinions and to take into consideration their concerns. It is just difficult to filter out what its trying to be said sometimes.”
- And Steve Corbitt has several words of advice: “Take it slow. Be respectful. Encourage people to speak up. Don't be judgmental. Put a positive spin on everything that is said and try to see everything in best light as possible. Keep hammering away on making progress. Get to know each other. Do meetings in different places once in a while. Share a pizza.”

### **Insights Particular to this case**

#### ***Unclear direction of the NWA***

While many participants feel relatively satisfied with the direction of the NWA, others are less convinced that the NWA knows which direction it wants to go as an organization and that NWA has lost its focus and avoids contentious issues all in the spirit of friendly relations and compromise. Some participants have decreased their involvement or have terminated their membership altogether. Another complaint that has been levied against the group is that in their efforts to diversify they have compromised their beliefs. As mentioned earlier, they have asked certain individuals to serve on the Board who might not be the best fit or have recruited organizations onto NWA who have in the past have shown little to no interest in NWA all in the name of increasing diverse membership. Some feel, however, that these efforts are now coming with a cost and that it is time to re-evaluate where NWA would like to go in the future.

#### ***NWA's evolving image***

NWA has created a balance sheet that tracks its development (NWA Balance sheet, 1998). NWA as a by-product of three environmentally focused groups, has certainly had to overcome an image of an elitist and narrowly focused group to one based on among other characteristics, credibility and diversity. They tracked three stages and highlighted both the pros and cons of these stages. From this exercise the group was reminded that although it takes years to build a coalition like this that coalitions allow tremendous flexibility and that they focus energy and resources on critical issues. These stages are:

#### **Stage 1**



## Formative

### Pros

Easy to manage  
Quick turnaround time on projects  
Local Flavor/Action  
Vision/Mission Easy to Agree upon  
Free Reign

### Cons

Considered Elitist  
Considered Radical  
Limited Resources/Support  
Limited Scope  
Monoculture  
Inability to influence land use decisions

## **Stage 2** Transitional

### Pros

Greater Recognition  
Greater Resources/Support  
Greater Scope  
Slightly more Diversified

Fear of Government  
Still considered elitist  
Inability to influence land use decisions  
Mission/Vision Becomes a Struggle

## **Stage 3** Coalition

Statewide/National Recognition  
Statewide/National Resources/Support  
Very Diversified  
Broad Focus  
Sustainable/Credible Organization  
with a voice in land use Decisions

Decision-making/Consensus  
Building Time Consuming  
Broad Focus  
Political in Nature  
Less Risk Taking

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