

WATERSHED ASSESSMENT AND PROTECTION PLAN GUIDANCE: Introduction



Georgia Department of Natural Resources
Environmental Protection Division
Watershed Protection Branch

A watershed approach has been proposed as a means of examining the factors that affect water quality. These factors include point and nonpoint sources of pollution. In addition, historical activities, ongoing land uses, and future growth all impact Georgia's water quality. These effects can be characterized through chemical, physical, and biological monitoring.

Watershed Monitoring Plans, Watershed Assessments, and Watershed Protection Plans are all related, but each has a specific purpose. Together they provide a basis for a watershed approach to protecting our State's waters. The Watershed Protection Branch has developed three guidance documents to outline the purpose and contents of each.

Some elements of each report will overlap. These documents should be consistent and fit together to achieve the primary goal, which is to address the effects that urbanization, growth and development, and associated land use changes have on watersheds. These documents are intended to give general guidance in addition to specific requirements. They are not meant to limit the scope of how to evaluate and improve water quality throughout Georgia.

The first step to the watershed approach is to develop a Watershed Monitoring Plan (WMP), which must be submitted to EPD for approval prior to monitoring and assessing. The WMP should describe the watershed in detail and identify environmental influences contained in and around the service areas. It should present these on maps, as well as provide a narrative description of each. The proposed monitoring sites and methodologies should be outlined in detail. The site locations should provide an optimum representation of the current conditions and the future effects of growth. At least one site should be downstream of the proposed growth and development area(s), if applicable.

Once the WMP has been approved, it can be implemented. The Watershed Assessment (WA) includes much of the background from the WMP, as well as the results of the WMP. As the name "Assessment" indicates, there should be much discussion in addition to the presentation of the results. The WA should identify sources of current water quality problems and identify the potential effects growth and development will have on water quality in the future. These effects must be provided in a narrative format, and in some cases, modeling may be used to support these findings. Initial ideas for managing and protecting the watershed may be included in the WA. The WA will be submitted to EPD for concurrence.

Once EPD has concurred with the WA, a Watershed Protection Plan (WPP) can be developed as an extension of the assessment. The key elements of the WPP include strategies for continued management, monitoring, and protection of the watershed. A thorough WPP may fulfill an NPDES permit requirement for a wastewater treatment plant, and/or may be used during TMDL implementation for a 303(d) listed segment. If there is a TMDL or a TMDL Implementation Plan has been developed for a water segment within the study area, the WPP should be consistent with these documents. The final WPP will provide a useful resource for stakeholders and regulators alike.