



PLANNING FRAMEWORK
KENTUCKY STREAMS AND WETLANDS
CONSERVATION and RESTORATION PLAN



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In accord with contract obligation between Eastern Kentucky University
And the Kentucky Division of Water,
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In consultation with:
the Streams and Wetland Conservation Planning (SWCP)
Steering Committee

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Over 800 persons statewide, with knowledge and investment in Kentucky's streams and wetlands, were asked to provide input into the State's Streams and Wetlands Conservation Plan. In gathering this input, formal interview methods were used in soliciting the perspectives and position of steering committee members (42 persons) and other key stakeholders (44 persons). In addition, standard survey methods were used to collect the responses from a broad range of other stakeholders statewide (723 persons surveyed). Steering committee members, other stakeholders and survey respondents provided their views and insights across the following items:

- 1) Their views on "no net loss of Kentucky's streams and wetlands:
- 2) Their views on current regulatory and mitigation efforts:
- 3) Their views on the most "serious impacts" to Kentucky's stream and wetland resources:
- 4) Their views on current education, outreach and research efforts:

With regard to "no net loss," many believed that Kentucky was "losing streams and wetlands all the time" and that our state regulatory programs, "cannot get around to all of them at a quick enough rate to prevent their losses." Yet, many recognized the trade-off and conflicts between economic activity and environmental protection and as one person put it, "until the positive impacts of the environment are calculated, I do not think that we ever will see *no net loss* in Kentucky." Here, several spoke of the need to begin to more appropriately "value" the "eco-system services" that the state's streams and wetland resources provide.

On current regulatory efforts, many stakeholders acknowledged the role of the Federal 404 and State 401 Permit Programs as well as the *In-lieu Fee* Mitigation Program as the cornerstone behind the state's efforts at stream and wetland restoration. Stakeholders also remarked on many of the challenges facing these three programs: Several noted the challenges in enticing investors into stream and wetland banking while others spoke about the on-the-ground challenges of securing easements and permissions from landowners to carry-out mitigation and restoration projects. Others mentioned funding for not only securing easements but for staffing. For one Steering Committee member, it was not only a question of securing additional funds but also protecting current pools of funding and staying vigilant as there are "many external forces" out there that are pushing for mitigation funds to be spent in "certain areas such as in sewage treatment." They warned that "people want to use the money on projects it was not intended for...."

On the most serious impacts or threats, Steering Committee members, as well as other stakeholders from across the state, made reference to either the impacts of development or resource extraction. Both were consistently cited as two of the greatest challenges in protecting Kentucky's water resources from further degradation and decline. This was also mirrored in online survey results (n=723) insofar as the effects of development (sewage, residential growth and storm water) as well as the effects of coal and energy development were rated as the most serious ("very serious") impacts to Kentucky's streams and wetlands by the most number of persons.

With respect to education, outreach and research, many spoke about a "knowledge problem" in stream and wetland conservation and restoration. For many, the general public and certain other stakeholder groups (landowners and local officials, for example) lacked accurate knowledge, scientific understanding and technical information to make informed land-use and water resource planning decisions. To narrow these gaps in knowledge and understanding, many participants spoke or wrote about the need to expand educational and training opportunities as well as outreach and research programs.

In addition, many who participated in this initial planning process expressed some frustration over the political and economic barriers facing streams and wetlands protection within the state. But other states face similar concerns and constraints, but many of them have developed strategic plans and have organized statewide taskforces and networks of interested citizens in order to increase their capacity to tackle these challenges. The same organizational and planning strategies are recommended for Kentucky. Through planning and organization, the State should be better poised to conserve and restore its vital stream and wetland resources.

