

MEMORANDUM FOR COMMANDERS, MAJOR SUBORDINATE COMMANDS

SUBJECT: Policy Guidance Letter #61- Application of Watershed Perspective to Corps of Engineers Civil Works Programs and Activities

1. **Purpose:** This guidance letter provides the policy for applying the watershed perspective to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Civil Works water resources management programs and initiatives.
2. **Background:** The concept of “watershed” is not new to the Corps of Engineers. Throughout the history of the Corps, a watershed approach has been, at varying levels, integrated into the process by which water resource systems have been investigated. The geographic “basin” organization of the Corps Civil Works programs support the Corps historic understanding of the necessity of managing water resource activities within a watershed context.

There is a growing recognition that “locally perceived water resources problems” have regional dimensions and are of concern to numerous, diverse interest groups. Many activities occurring in a watershed are inter-related and, therefore, managing water resources has evolved to more of a holistic, collaborative effort. The Corps has developed its own watershed perspective to guide water resources development, protection, and management within the Civil Works program. This watershed perspective accommodates the multi-objective, multi-purpose planning and investigations necessary for exploring these concerns. It is being adopted to help improve performance, customer satisfaction, and overall program efficiency and effectiveness and to assure use of the water resources in a sustainable manner, taking into account environmental protection, economic development, and social well-being.

3. **Applicability:** The watershed perspective applies to all Civil Works programs through planning, design, construction, operation, maintenance, restoration, rehabilitation, and regulatory activities. The application of this perspective into the Civil Works program encourages opportunities for enhancing the operations and maintenance of existing projects, especially the management of the natural resources. In addition, this perspective facilitates the integration of the nine Civil Works business programs into the identification and development of new Corps initiatives. The perspective recognizes the responsibility of the Corps as a major stakeholder in many of the Nation’s watersheds.
4. **Definitions:** Federal, tribal, State, and local agencies and organizations have varying interpretations of the definition of a watershed, the identification of the range of water resources

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issues, and the methods of evaluation. They also have differing views on the anticipated purposes and goals of watershed initiatives. These interpretations are based on defining manageable units and specific issues that a particular agency or organization have determined to be appropriate for their individual mission areas and identifying ways to meet their program goals. For the purpose of Corps Civil Works initiatives, the following definitions apply:

a. Watershed perspective is the viewpoint which requires that all activities be accomplished within the context of an understanding and appreciation of the impacts of those activities on other resources in the watershed. The watershed perspective encourages the active participation of all interested groups and requires the use of the full spectrum of technical disciplines in activities and decision making. This viewpoint takes into account (1) the interconnectedness of water and land resources, (2) the dynamic nature of the economy and environment, and (3) the variability of social interests over time. It recognizes that watershed activities are not static, and that the strategy for managing the resources of the watershed needs to be adaptive.

b. A watershed is an area of land within which all surface waters flow to a single point. It encompasses the area necessary to adequately scope, analyze, and manage related water and land resources.

c. Watershed management is the administration of and potential adjustments to the level and type of interaction among various human activities and natural processes occurring in the watershed through the application of the watershed perspective. Watershed management includes the planning, development, use, monitoring, regulation and preservation of the water and land resources. It should achieve a desirable balance among multiple, and often competing, watershed goals and objectives.

d. Watershed studies are planning initiatives that have a multi-purpose and multi-objective scope and that accommodate flexibility in the formulation and evaluation process. The outcome of a watershed study will generally be a watershed management plan, which identifies the combination of recommended actions to be undertaken by various partners and stakeholders in order to achieve the needs and opportunities identified in the study and may or may not identify further Corps studies or implementation projects. However, budgetary priority will be given to those studies likely to result in further Corps activities or which will provide benefits to an existing Corps project whose uses are being impaired by activities or conditions within the watershed. Further consideration for funding will be given to Corps involvement in watershed studies of national importance which do not necessarily lead to a Corps project.

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5. **Policy:** The Corps will integrate the watershed perspective into opportunities within, and among, Civil Works elements. Opportunities should be explored and identified where joint watershed resource management efforts can be pursued to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Civil Works Programs. The Corps will solicit participation from Federal, tribal, state, and local agencies, organizations, and the local community to ensure that their interests are considered in the formulation and implementation of the effort. Due to the complexity and interrelation of systems within a watershed, an array of technical experts, stakeholders, and decision-makers should be involved in the process. This involvement will provide a better understanding of the consequences of actions and activities and provide a mechanism for sound decision making when addressing the watershed resource needs, opportunities, conflicts, and trade-offs.

The watershed perspective encourages collaborative efforts which advocate the integration of interests in the watershed by identifying, scoping, and developing comprehensive water resources management goals. This approach improves opportunities for public and private groups to identify and achieve common goals by unifying on-going efforts and leveraging resources. The specific roles and amount of involvement by the Corps and other parties will vary depending on the initiative, and the level of involvement may also vary throughout the process. The analytical framework will be founded on factual scientific, social, and economic information, allowing for the assessment, evaluation, and comparison of alternative plans, including positive and negative effects on economic development, the environment, and social well-being.

The Corps Civil Works watershed perspective includes:

- use of the water resources in a manner that is sustainable, taking into account environmental protection, economic development, and social well-being;
- coordinated planning and management of water and related land resources by the responsible Federal, tribal, state or local government;
- interagency cooperation, including cost-shared collaboration on initiatives that incorporate local, tribal, regional, and national water resources management goals;
- consideration of adaptive management of resources in the watershed;
- leveraging resources and integrating programs and activities within and among Civil Works programs, and with other Federal, tribal state and non-governmental organizations, to improve consistency and cost effectiveness;
- identification of future water resource use demands, including local, tribal, regional, and national goals;

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- use of interdisciplinary teams to include a wide range of engineering and scientific expertise, as well as skills in public involvement, geographic information systems, alternative dispute resolution and other skills;
- public input to watershed resources development and management; and
- evaluation of the monetary and non-monetary trade-offs to be considered.

6. **Implementation:** The watershed perspective and principles will be incorporated into the existing guidance for the affected Civil Works programs. Guidelines are being developed to integrate the Corps watershed perspective into each Civil Works mission area. These guidelines will provide a useful tool for developing approaches, ranges of involvement, applications of process, and potential outcomes of Civil Works initiatives using the watershed perspective. The first guidelines will focus on the Corps Civil Works Planning mission. Additional guidelines will focus on the Regulatory Program, Natural Resources Management, Emergency Management, and Water Control Management.

FOR THE COMMANDER:

/s/

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