LOCAL GOVERNMENT INTERVIEW RESULTS

BACKGROUND

During the initial phase of the Upper Neuse Basin management plan process in 1999, UNRBA staff interviewed local elected officials and staff to assess the perception of each local government regarding water quality within their jurisdiction and within the entire Neuse River Basin. The questions asked and a summary of the responses are presented below.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

What are the most important or critical water bodies within your jurisdiction's portion of the Upper Neuse River Basin? Why are they important or critical?

The local government officials interviewed are very aware of the water bodies within their respective jurisdictions and the issues associated with them. In naming the critical water bodies within their jurisdiction, the focus is on drinking water supply, either protecting their own supply (quantity and quality) or protecting downstream water supplies of other communities (Falls Lake, Little River Reservoir, Lake Michie, etc.) from degradation due to development within their jurisdictions.

In both Raleigh and Wake County, the importance of hazardous materials spills and emergency management ranked high. In the Raleigh interview, it was stated that the public was more concerned with the effect of runoff than with the potential for hazardous materials spills. City staff considers the potential for spills more important; however, it was stated that Raleigh's E.M. Johnson Water Plant could adequately treat a wide range of water quality conditions.

Durham City and County and Orange and Wake Counties stated the importance of keeping upland watershed areas within their jurisdictions sparsely developed to protect water quality. All have established policies and ordinances to accomplish this. Granville County, Franklin County and Butner stated the importance of limiting residential development in certain areas of their jurisdictions in order to help maintain adequate water supply for the future.

The following table summarizes the local government responses:

Jurisdiction	Critical Water Body	Why?
Butner	1. Lake Holt 2. Knap of Reeds Creek	1. primary water supply 2. receives Butner's WWTP effluent and flows into Falls Lake

Creedmoor	Lake Rogers	Primary water supply. Creedmoor only controls 20% of the lake's watershed. Granville County controls the rest.
Durham	1. Lake Michie and Little River 2. Ellerbe Creek and Lick Creek	1. water supply and least developed areas - more decisions regarding protection can be made 2. ranked as non-supporting in basinwide plan
Hillsborough	1. Eno River from Lake Ben Johnson to intake 2. Lake Orange 3. New reservoir (under construction)	Drinking water quality
Raleigh	Falls Lake	1. water supply 2. water quality 3. consequences of runoff 4. industrial spills and emergency management
Roxboro	No Neuse creeks w/in jurisdiction	
Stem	Ledge Rock Creek and Holman Creek	Carry runoff into Lake Rogers. Failing septic systems in Stem could contaminate water supply.

Wake Forest	Horse Creek	Only major water body w/in the upper Neuse in jurisdiction.
Durham County	1. Lake Michie 2. Little River 3. Eno River 4. Ellerbe Creek 5. Falls Lake	1. Water supply and recreation 2. Water supply and recreation 3. Recreation 4. Water quality 5. Water quality and recreation
Franklin County	Horse Creek	Classified as a WS-IV.
Granville County	Lake Holt, Lake Rogers and Falls Lake	Drinking water supplies. More concerned with upstream development above Lakes Holt and Rogers since the county uses those.
Orange County	1. Lake Orange 2. Eno River 3. Corporation Lake 4. Lake Ben Johnson	1. County owned reservoir 2. 3. Intake for Orange/Alamance System 4. Town of Hillsborough intake
Person County	North and South Flat River	Drinking water supplies.
Wake County	Lower Barton and Honeycut Creeks	1. Secondary impacts associated with development 2. Hazardous materials spills and emergency management 3. Use of temporary

		sediment basins as permanent sediment control structures.
Soil & Water Conservation Districts	All Upper Neuse Reservoirs	Population growth means more demand for water.

What are the most critical water resource challenges facing your jurisdiction? From your perspective, what are the most critical water resource challenges facing the Upper Neuse River Basin?

In answering this question, all local governments stated that at least one of the critical challenges facing their jurisdictions and the Upper Neuse Basin in general is ensuring adequate water supply in the future. In particular, Butner and Creedmoor stated the need for major distribution system upgrades. Butner's system was built in 1942 and Creedmoor's in 1939. Butner is in the process of looking for alternatives, but has not made a decision yet.

Current and expected growth in the southern part of Granville County will pose a challenge in terms of adequate supply and the county is looking to Butner to serve as a regional water system. Butner does not think they have the capacity to assume that role.

While Wake Forest is not experiencing water shortages at this time, the Town mentioned that the most critical challenge in the future will be maintaining an adequate water supply. The Town is currently buying water from Raleigh and uses water from Smith Creek, however, Town officials said that the difficult and delayed process of getting approval of interbasin transfers is an obstacle they face in planning for their future needs.

Orange County stated that water quantity is a critical issue in the northern portion of the county. In this area, water is purchased from outside of the Neuse Basin. In addition, since the county is located in the headwaters of the basin, there are no viable reservoir sites to meet future needs.

Maintaining good water quality is important to all of the jurisdictions. Runoff from agricultural uses and development were mentioned repeatedly as the cause of water quality problems. Each local government differed in how they address those issues, but all agreed that non-point source pollution and how to equitably regulate it is the biggest challenge facing the Upper Neuse Basin. Managing growth, in terms of wastewater treatment and impervious surface coverage is also a concern for all the Upper Neuse local governments.

Person County, Granville County, Creedmoor, Stem and Roxboro stated that septic tank failures and the resulting danger to water quality were a critical issue facing their jurisdictions. By far, the most affected is the Town of Stem. Town officials estimate that the majority of the septic systems are failing. Since the Town residents use wells, the possibility

of an epidemic is a cause of concern. The Town is attempting to get approval for a package treatment plant, but has faced administrative delays from the Division of Water Quality.

Orange County stated that 40 percent of the county's residents use groundwater and at least one quarter of those systems experience "nuisance" problems (e.g. taste and odor problems) that could be caused by agricultural operations and pesticide use. The county estimates that possibly 2000-3000 homes do not have waste treatment systems. The county enforces 100-foot wellhead protection zone requirements; however, there is still a threat in some areas of contamination from inadequate or non-existent wastewater treatment systems.

Orange County was the only local government to mention the importance of maintaining recreational opportunities within their jurisdiction. Particularly noted was the Eno River State Park and the concern over potential adverse effects from Hillsborough's wastewater discharge.

The most critical challenge stated by the Soil and Water Conservation Districts is urban stormwater and, in particular, the challenge of adequately and equitably funding the requirements that address stormwater.

What are the most critical water resource challenges facing the entire Neuse River Basin?

While there was a range of responses to this question, the focus of those responses was non-point sources of pollution and nutrients. The local government officials agreed that most problems facing the Upper Neuse Basin were also problems in the entire basin. Particularly, how to allow growth and protect water quality. Nutrients from agricultural runoff, sedimentation and stormwater runoff were stated as challenges in the entire basin.

Failing septic tanks were also mentioned as a basinwide concern, as was assimilative capacity. Wake County stated that there were still flooding and streambank erosion problems basinwide due to damage incurred during Hurricane Fran.

Other responses dealt with the politics of water management and included:

- A lack of "ownership" of the problems. Lower basin people blame the upper basin people and visa versa.
- Little use of planning and land use controls east of I-95.
- Political manipulation of environmental issues. Politics has overridden science in some instances.
- Lack of good information. Specifically mentioned was the lack of information regarding the contribution from atmospheric nitrogen.
- Degradation of the estuary and discerning the cause of and remedies for the degradation.
- Need for long-term land protection and open space acquisition programs.
- Need for balance between water quality protection and the financial burden on local governments.
- Need for regulatory balance. Water quality problems exist in the estuary; however, run-of-the-river water quality is improving.

What are the other issues or objectives you must weigh when dealing with water quality issues?

The local governments had a variety of answers to this question. Land use policies and ordinances are always examined when new regulatory programs are put into place either by state mandate or local policies. Many of the local governments noted that they usually evaluate the effect on economic development or tax base when dealing with water quality issues. Durham is the exception. The City has separate funding for water, sewer and stormwater utility operations, so there is not a trade-off between water quality protection and increasing the tax base.

The remaining answers related to how each local government deals with new water quality mandates or programs. Most look at the effect on both public works and land use policies. It was noted by at least one local government that mandates at the state level cause delays in local permitting and, in some cases, cause the cost of development to increase. The Soil and Water Conservation Districts stated the effect of budgets and intergovernmental relations, in particular, how programs are managed when various levels of government carry out the implementation.

Almost all of the local governments mentioned the difficulty in "keeping up" with the state's requirements. Three of the local governments stated that it was difficult to deal with "unfunded mandates". Some have changed the way they evaluate projects during the development process. Hillsborough is trying to develop ways to track the amount of water used by new developments. Granville County used the water supply watershed protection program requirements as a growth management tool. Franklin County, Granville County, Butner and Creedmoor, at least to some extent, evaluate land development based on the amount of water and wastewater treatment that will be needed.

What is the relationship between water quality and the other issues faced by your city/county?

For this question, the local governments were asked to rank the importance of water quality compared to all the issues dealt with on a regular basis. The answers ranked from water quality being the "trump card" in both the City and County of Durham (any development that would have a negative effect on water quality would not be approved) to, in three local governments, not having an effect at all. Eight of the local governments rated water quality as one of the top five issues of importance.

In the three local governments where water quality was not ranked as important, water quantity was. In fact, in those local governments, quantity is the number one issue.

In Orange County, where water quantity was noted as an issue for the northern part of the county, it was also noted that the County has a strong desire to restrict residential development. There is a strong "growth is bad" sentiment within the county. Making water available may bring development, which is not desirable to some residents.

In Granville County the number one issue with the Board of Commissioners is water and sewer, particularly where the infrastructure will be located. In a recent study of county

residents, however, housing was the number one issue. In Wake County, water quality is the basis for land use regulation within water supply watershed areas. The focus of the recently developed open space plan in the county is water supply watersheds.

Due primarily to the proximity of drinking water reservoirs within the county, Durham's Soil and Water Conservation District was the first to use a water quality checklist for distribution of cost share money.

Due to the limited time and funds available to prepare the management plan, we will be unable to address every issue and concern in the Upper Neuse River Basin. In your opinion, what are the top two or three things that you hope the management plan will address or answer for your jurisdiction?

The following is a list of the responses categorized by general subject. These responses are not listed in any specific order.

Regional/Cooperative Efforts

- Regional approach to meeting the Neuse NSW stormwater requirements.
- Sharing the benefits of protecting downstream water supply sources.
- Coordination and mediation between local governments and the state.
- Effective means of intergovernmental cooperation.
- A cooperative approach to appropriating additional water capacity.

Local Land Use/Regulatory Approaches

- Suggestions of land uses appropriate for water supply watershed areas.
- Standardized, reasonable regulations that could be used in areas within other river basins.
- Coordinated planning and zoning within the Upper Neuse Basin.
- Discussion of standard engineering practices and their effect on water quality.

Information Management and Watershed Assessment Tools

- Prediction of what changes in water quality will occur based upon development
  trends.
- Identification of all the issues in the Upper Neuse Basin, even if they can not all be addressed.
- Information regarding non-point pollution sources, characteristics and loadings.
- Better science to assess whether current programs are effective.
- Better information and recommendations on appropriate buffers.
- Information that can be easily understood and communicated to the public.
- Better interpretation and analysis of technical information.
- Better models at the watershed scale, sub-basin scale and development site scale to assess impacts of potential development.

Funding

- Alternatives to septic systems and funding resources.
- Funding sources for meeting state mandates.

Specific Water Body Issues and Concerns

- Suggestions for dealing with water quality impairment from existing development.
- Recommendations for addressing restoration of impaired water bodies, such as
  Ellerbe Creek, in a cost-effective and equitable manner.

Other

- Equitable balance between point and non-point regulations based upon actual contribution of pollutants at the estuary.

Is there any water resource related technical information that you do not currently have that you would like to see developed and made available in the future?

The following were suggested:

- A model that can evaluate development impacts on watersheds.
- Better information on development impacts on water quality.
- Updates on the latest technology in development, capital facilities, stormwater management, etc.
- Update on recent state mandated environmental programs.
- Knowledgeable state staff to answer questions and give advice on water issues.
- Technical information needs to be easier to interpret.
- Source data on rivers.
- Validation of the existing assumptions regarding non-point source pollution.

CONCLUSION

As noted in the report, Upper Neuse local governments are very aware of the water bodies within their jurisdiction and are also aware of the water resource issues and challenges throughout the basin. Growth and the associated stress to water supply, as well as the stress on water quality, in the Upper Neuse are the overriding concerns for all the local governments. Also of concern is the challenge of equitably and efficiently addressing the issues of growth throughout the Basin. The perceptions and suggestions stated by the local government officials will guide the information of management plan recommendations for the Upper Neuse River Basin.