

## **Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation Organizational and Operational Changes to Increase Efficiencies Utilizing Existing Staff**

### **Watershed Management Division-Level Organizational and Operational Efforts to Garner Efficiencies**

- In 2012, the Watershed Management Division (WSMD) assimilated the Clean Water Act Direct Discharge Permit Program (that was formerly housed in the Drinking Water & Wastewater Program) so that it would be within the same division as the Stormwater Clean Water Act Permit Program. This has resulted in the sharing of regulatory information, and increased efficiency in permit processing due to the cross-training and sharing of admin staff.
- The WSMD Business and Operational Support Services (BOSS) Program was recently reorganized, using Lean tools, to garner efficiencies, and better align admin services to increase permit review and processing efforts. This process examined work flow and resulted in the restructuring of the program, moving to subject matter and not media specific support, identification and prioritization of IT solutions to streamline processes, and implementing cross training so that absences or retirements would not disrupt admin functions.
- WSMD's monitoring and planning programs were merged into a single Monitoring, Assessment and Planning Program (MAPP) in order to better integrate the monitoring, assessment and planning activities of the Division. This has resulted in coordinated monitoring efforts across WSMD, sharing of resources, and a more integrated approach to rivers and lakes monitoring. In addition, monitoring is more closely tied to the development of tactical basin plans, and the identification of priority projects for enhancement and restoration of Vermont's surface waters.
- In 2014, WSMD re-described a position to create a 401 Program Coordinator. This new 401 Program coordinates the technical and administrative work necessary to issue Section 401 water quality certifications for major projects impacting Vermont's aquatic resources. This work involves coordinating technical and legal input from staff in WSMD's Wetlands, Stormwater, Rivers, and Lakes Programs and the Dept. of Fish & Wildlife.
- The former Clean & Clear program that was formerly housed in the Agency Secretary's office was transferred to the WSMD in order to promote synergy between the technical aspects of project identification and funding. The program was renamed the Ecosystem Restoration Program (ERP) and was created from existing positions within the Division.

This program actively works with MAPP and other WSMD programs to assist in identifying and funding priority projects.

- WSMD utilizes student interns from UVM's Rubenstein School to assist the Division. WSMD will have five UVM interns this summer. We hope to increase the number of interns moving forward in recognition of the fact that WSMD needs help during field season while providing educational and recruitment benefits. WSMD is also working with Vermont Technical College to hopefully build a similar internship program with the hope of increasing intern capacity.
- WSMD created the Vermont Surface Water Management Strategy to describe the management of pollutants and stressors that affect the uses and values of Vermont's surface waters. The Strategy presents the Division's goals, objectives and approaches for the protection and management of Vermont's surface waters, and helps to guide the Division's future decision-making to ensure efficient, predictable, consistent and coordinated management actions. This cross-pollination and coordination among WSMD's permitting and resource programs has significantly increased efficiencies within the Division.

## **Lean Events and Outcomes**

### **Completed Lean Events**

- WSMD participated in the recent Lean Event that evaluated the public notice and comment process across all DEC permits to identify commonalities, enhance transparency and streamline these processes as much as possible. WSMD proposed ways to streamline the public notice and comment process across WSMD permit programs.
- WSMD admin staff in the Business and Operational Support Services (BOSS) Program participated in a recent Lean event to evaluate how over \$11 million in receipts is handled within DEC. The event identified ways to reduce errors, processing time, data entry, and move from paper to paperless processing. Identified efficiencies are being implemented by WSMD admin staff and others across DEC.
- WSMD's Ecosystem Restoration Program participated in a Lean event examining ways to more efficiently and effectively process grants and contracts. Many opportunities were identified by the Lean event related to standardization (including application, distribution, submittal & data entry), training, evaluation, tracking, and streamlining the overall process including invoice payments and amendments. A major component of this new process involved shifting an existing ERP staff member into the DEC Grants Management Specialist role to serve as the "hub" for administering all DEC grant/contract activity.
- WSMD's Stormwater Program undertook a Lean event to explore its existing stormwater permitting business processes. The Stormwater General Permit applies to all new, expanded and redeveloped projects with over one acre of impervious surface. This

permitting program is high-volume, including a mix of relatively simple and highly complex projects. As a result of this event, in November 2014, the Program updated general permit application materials with the goal of increasing the percentage of complete applications. Program staff completed the first stage of “tiered review” guidelines, which will utilize designer certification versus in-depth application review for simpler projects. Those projects will move through the process more quickly, allowing staff to focus on higher value work. Testing and development of the Program’s new database continues, which will be central to several process improvements, including automated billing and notification of reporting and renewal requirements.

- WSMD’s Wetlands Program held a Lean event to explore how to shift staff time from inefficient processes to higher value work. Because of a lack of standardization, the Program has been consumed with recreating correspondence, permitting feedback loops, and re-entering data in multiple locations, resulting in frustrated applicants and less public awareness of the importance of wetlands. Wetlands staff time is better spent on more proactive work, such as training, education, restoration, mapping, and on-the-ground technical assistance. Since the Lean event, the Program has made many significant changes to the Wetlands website and databases. Today the public can easily find online answers to commonly asked questions. A new database with much improved functionality has greatly reduced staff search and data entry time. Tablet phones are now used in the field, which can generate standard correspondence letters to landowners

## **Upcoming Lean Events**

- In March 2015, WSMD’s Rivers Program will participate in a week-long joint Lean event with VTrans in order to explore ways to streamline the Title 19 approval process for VTrans’ projects.
- In March 2015, WSMD’s MAPP Program and ERP Program will participate in a week-long Lean event to explore ways to better integrate the tactical basin planning priority project identification process with the ERP funding process to ensure that priority projects are best identified and scoped, and to structure the grant issuance process so as to facilitate successful remediation projects

## **Additional Program-specific Efforts to Garner Efficiencies**

### **Monitoring, Assessment and Planning Program**

- During 2011, MAPP realigned its planning functions to accommodate the 2009 reduction of two basin planner positions, while tightening the plan issuance cycle, and increasing the precision of Plan implementation actions. MAPP also consolidated data management functions for water monitoring to ensure cohesive data access and availability, Department-wide and publicly.

- During 2012, MAPP re-aligned its monitoring functions to support permitting functions of other Division programs. The Program also revised the duties of one staff to directly support the permitting functions.
- During 2012, MAPP consolidated two technician positions into one single permanent position, at reduced cost to Federal funding sources, and at no cost to the general fund, to support state and federal water monitoring requirements. During 2013, MAPP assisted the Lakes Program to accomplish the same.
- During 2013, MAPP collaborated with other Division programs to redefine the duties of the Division Hydrologist, to improve optimize the work of that position and ensure that all Division needs were met.
- Starting in 2012, MAPP began partnering with the Ecosystem Restoration Program (ERP) to improve the process by which restoration funds are targeted to the highest priority projects. This has significantly reduced the burden on staff to champion the development of project proposals. Additional efficiencies are expected to result from an upcoming Lean event involving these two programs in March.
- In 2014, MAPP streamlined required federal Clean Water Act reporting, reducing staff time spent on these activities. The capacity freed-up by this was reallocated to improved support for tactical basin planning.

## **Business & Operational Support Services (BOSS) Program**

- As described above, the Program recently reorganized to more efficiently use its existing staff to provide admin and compliance services to WSMD.
- The Program is actively working with ANR IT staff to develop electronic application and reporting forms to cut down on admin processing and duplicative data entry. These electronic forms are used by the public to apply for permits, make payments, submit monitoring data required under permits, etc.
- The Program recently created an administrative “dashboard” to automate much of the Stormwater and Wetlands Programs public noticing and permit issuance processes to cut down on administrative processing and duplicative data entry. The plan is to expand this dashboard to include the Wastewater Program in the near future.

## **Wetlands Program**

- The Wetlands Program has recently undertaken the following to increase Program efficiency:
  - Redistricting wetland ecologists to reduce travel times to sites and moving staff to district offices.
  - Using Go-To-Meetings to reduce travel time for meetings
  - Implementing revisions to Program website to allow public to find answers to their questions online

- Creating inquiry forms and checklists so users get the most out of staff site visits and submitted applications
- Redistributing administrative-type tasks to the BOSS Program
- Creating and implementing in-field data collection by phone
- Creating a new database for tracking projects more efficiently.
- Creation of allowed use guidance documents and standard operating procedures to provide clarity within the program and streamline work.

#### Lake Encroachment and Shoreland Permitting

- In 2014, Lake Encroachment and Shoreland Permitting duties were regionalized across the state. The legislature had established three new positions for implementation of the Shoreland Protection Act. The Program hired only 2 of the 3 based on permit fee revenue and projections for the coming year, and combined Shoreland Permitting duties with Lake Encroachment, which only had one existing position for implementation of Lake Encroachment for the entire state. The three positions in total now manage both Lake Encroachment and Shoreland Permitting within three regions of the state, which is a more efficient use of staff time and division resources to more effectively implement both regulations statewide.
- 2014/2015: In cooperation with IT, the Program developed a new Shoreland permit database for effectively managing the processing of Shoreland applications. The database is planned (2015) to be expanded to include Encroachment Permitting to replace the existing outdated database, which will save staff time, and allow for more effective management of both Shoreland and Encroachment Permitting.
- In 2014, the Program established the [ANR.WSMDShoreland@state.vt.us](mailto:ANR.WSMDShoreland@state.vt.us) email account that all regional permit analysts, amongst a few other staff have access to, to allow for efficient and timely response to the public. The shared email creates a central portal for email concerning both Lake Encroachment and Shoreland Permitting and allows staff to be more efficient, thus allowing staff to operate with less.