



## Summary of the Sustainable Raritan Conference Panel 2017

*By: AmeriCorps Watershed Ambassadors Anna Marshall, Carmela Buono and Katee Meckeler*

### Panelists:

- Michael Catania, Duke Farms Foundation (Moderator)
- Cindy Ehrenclou, Raritan Headwaters
- Jeanne Herb, Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy and Sustainable Raritan River Initiative, Rutgers
- Annie Hindenlang, Topology
- Debbie Mans, NY/NJ Baykeeper
- Dan Van Abs, Department of Human Ecology, School of Environmental and Biological Sciences, Rutgers

### Questions to Panel by Moderator Michael Catania

1. What are the principal challenges and opportunities we have in the Raritan Watershed?
  - Jeanne Herb
    - Though we come from different groups, there are challenges to use funding for individual projects in the same direction of a shared vision
    - We need to be able to move together in a cohesive strategy
  - Annie Hindenlang
    - Start green teams in the municipalities
    - Collaboration fed by education is important for us to move forward, e.g., education on water quality in the area, put it in simple terms for general public - make it more accessible
    - Empowering different groups to do something with their knowledge, e.g., Perth Amboy Green Team
  - Cindy Ehrenclou
    - We need to work together on projects, and collaborate on ideas. With urbanization increasing, we need to have more livable and walk-able communities
    - Collaboration is key, specifically better systems to collect data and share protocol that is quality assured, science based data to support what we will need moving forward, budget, a plan

- Dan Van Abs
    - With our current resources, we see many local successes. However, the funding is not enough to repair the entire Raritan Watershed Basin
    - What are ways in which we can use our already built foundation and move together toward a cohesive measurable outcome?
    - We need to determine what success looks like, what it will take, and what resources we will need to achieve that
    - How do we create a complete Raritan Basin that will sustain for decades?
    - We can try to look at the Delaware Basin to figure out how to think basin-wide
    - Science based management implementation is key
  - Debbie Mans
    - We need to keep the larger vision in mind, and when we get a new administration we can encourage the DEP to take leadership in bring these issues to politicians
    - Help push non-profit organizations
    - Overall biggest issues are funding and leadership opportunities
2. How do we turn funding and leadership issues into opportunities?
- Dan Van Abs
    - There is a need to get people to understand the basin and its issues/impacts on all peoples -- in a language that they understand so they don't get lost in the terminology
    - We need to communicate the cost of NOT acting and the benefits of acting so that people naturally say yes
    - We need a way where we can communicate the cost of a project, and be able to prove the benefits to the community of it
3. How do we get some *more* from state level funding? And if not, how do we make the pivot to alternative funding so that the environment is the priority
- Debbie Mans
    - League of Conservation Voters -- something to get more people to understand politics of the environment
    - Separate voting poll including environmental issues, more people could be aware
    - E.g., people care about clean water and clean air because there is more information and federal regulations involved
    - The value of the people needs to be reflected in their leaders
  - Cindy Ehrenclou
    - There has to be a better way of translating scientific information into a language that politicians can understand.
      - Coupling stories with economic benefit
      - Talk about larger restoration stories
    - Arm ourselves with data and science and the people will be able to understand our goals
    - Take the opportunity to inform people making the land use changes
    - It's all about messaging the information, we need to digest it for them

- Jeanne Herb
    - Opportunity to build a diversity of voices!
    - We can interact and include other sectors (e.g., public health)
4. What are the successes of restoration investment?
- Annie Hindenlang
    - The environmentally and sustainable way can benefit the bottom-line leading to an economic benefit
    - Can lead to more support from larger nonprofits.
  - Dan Van Abs
    - Must apply some responsibility and regulation on stormwater, nonpoint source pollution,
    - Similar to how point source pollution from factories is regulated
    - Municipalities need to become responsible
5. Do we have a focus or lead organization? How do we best use citizens and groups?
- Jeanne Herb
    - We don't have an equivalent William Penn Foundation yet, but we should start to move in that direction
    - Citizens have solved many environmental problems in the past
      - Addressed through an integrative approach and a shared vision of what we want success to be
    - They may be the solution in the future
    - Citizen science and bottom-up approaches
    - We need good, sound standards in order to get a uniform vision of success
  - Dan Van Abs
    - We need to make caring for the environment acceptable, opinions need to change so that we are a focus for all groups, peoples, and tribes
    - Cast arguments so it becomes socially acceptable to say "yes, this is what we want." We may differ over methods but saying yes to the general direction of how we make ourselves part of everybody's tribe

### **Audience Participation**

- Michael Catania
  - What do we do when there are many small organizations fighting over the same money?
- Panel
  - We need a "how to book" on how to ensure that small groups contribute to whole picture
  - We need to determine what success looks like and who is going to focus us
  - RFPs need to be directed and clear
  - Small groups can work with funders to set goals
  - Money goes to multiple groups and we need more collaboration

- The Raritan is poised to collaborate, we need to go into it knowing money, time, and processes are limited
- Rick Lathrop
  - What would success look like? Do we need thresholds defined or should we just move forward?
- Panel
  - Our success needs to be beyond the current thresholds
- Audience Member
  - Need to recognize that the Lower Raritan is suffering the most and the people who are responsible are left out of the conversation. We need more data
- Panel
  - Those that collect data need to be transparent and available for shared use
  - Need to focus on the gaps
  - Data needs to be repurposed in order to be used collaboratively so data sets are connected
- Jim Waltman
  - Recently went to Grand Rapids, MI for National River Rally
  - They have linkages between permitting and water-quality standards
  - NJ has many regulations, the problem is that we aren't yet integrated together
- Panel
  - NJ has many regulations and programs, but we need to work together and become more integrated
  - Need a big push towards connecting regulation with data
  - The frame focusing on the whole basin is needed, in addition to subwatershed level focus
- Michael Catania
  - When focused on large scale frame how do we act at small scales?
- Heather Fenyk
  - Challenge the culture around environmental protection
  - Language is key
  - Bring attention to issues at the Lower Raritan, there is little data which is an issue
  - Restoration ultimately needs the data
  - Pipelines demonstrate a need for a conversation about renewable energy
- Panel
  - There is a difference between people saying they like conservation and actually regulating people
  - We need to build constituency to move towards support for action
  - Stormwater utilities need to be considered in areas in the basin (e.g., Perth Amboy)
- Michael Catania
  - There is an opportunity for counties to have a role, what needs to be done differently?
- Walter Lane
  - Counties fill the gap between local government and state

- They need to provide resources so all restoration plans connect with each other, nesting all of the plans so all resources/investments reinforce one another
  - They can provide leadership and help facilitate basin-wide work
- Chris Obropta
  - How to take action?
  - Excited about planning but want to DO something
  - You do this by finding a leader and taking action
  - WE will provide the leadership
  - When planning is occurring, things need to be done at the same time and we need to ACT while we plan
  - Building a rain garden at an event like this for example
- Panel
  - Need to engage citizens and connect the people to the land
  - There needs to be a Vision for the basin
  - Usually people don't know they are doing something wrong
- Michael Catania
  - What do we do when there is lack of support for what is being done in the basin?
- Panel
  - Our difficulty is bandwidth because groups (e.g., nonprofits) do not have extra time
  - Information needs to be simplified
  - Other sources of money need to be considered
  - Local powerhouse leaders and supporters are critical
- Audience
  - What can Environmental Stewards do?
- Panel
  - We need more on the ground projects to get the public excited
  - Sustainable Jersey → a two year effort for gold star certification
  - Something like this needs actions to be done at the local level
  - Take away -- there is no excuse and no one is to blame for not taking action, except ourselves
- Audience
  - Are there any transformational changes we can make?
- Panel
  - Monitoring data is not always linked, can we use modeling to solve this?
  - Need to crosswalk and reconnect our programs. Were collecting a lot of data, enthusiasm for regulation throughout the state, but it's just not connected
  - Example: we hear how good riparian buffers are but there is a law that is rolling back requirements for riparian buffers
  - Disconnect
  - Example: We were on our way to making one plan for the Raritan Basin but then administration changed and the frame was changed. We need to reconstitute doing things at a larger scale but acting smart and organized on a small scale
  - We need the national concept of "One Water"

- Water supply, stormwater, wastewater, natural water = one system
- They are ALL resources
- This is a fundamental change in thinking
- Is it time for a water equivalent of an open space regulation?
- We can learn from other sectors to find multifaceted benefits and felt everyday
- People that will be most affected by damage in the basin need to be able to feel policy changes benefit them
- Our goals are to change the numbers, but capacity can be an issue
  - Need to use academics to get the data and people on the ground to get things done
- Partnership with academia
- Who are the people that are most affected by environmental issues such as, flooding, storm water runoff, wetlands...
  - Urban communities