

ASWM State Wetland Program Integration Case Study: Missouri

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Cross-Program Wetland Coordination in Missouri



State Wetland Program Information

This case study¹ explores the integration efforts undertaken by the Missouri Department of Natural Resources (MO DNR) to promote coordination and collaboration of wetlands programs across the state. Created in 1974 under the Omnibus State Reorganization Act the MO DNR works to protect the state's land, air and water resources². It's \$401 program currently has a dedicated FTE of 1.5 with an additional 3 – 4 FTE representing department staff who have some wetlands and water quality standards-related responsibilities. The State Wetland Program has been active since the mid-1980s.

Type of Integration Effort

Recognizing that efforts to protect and preserve Missouri's aquatic resources are undertaken by several programs across the state, MO DNR began to host quarterly interagency meetings in an effort to reduce silos and increase collective impact. These quarterly meetings are an opportunity for wetland program staff from various stakeholder agencies to share knowledge and expertise, discuss upcoming projects and arising issues, and identify opportunities to collaborate. Rather than creating a new program or formal

¹ Project Case Study Criteria: The Association of State Wetland Managers (ASWM) conducted interviews with representatives from state wetland programs actively integrating with one or more additional resource management programs operating within their state. Criteria for case study inclusion required eligible programs to demonstrate direct or indirect impacts of integration on watershed-level planning, implementation and/or outcomes documented using formal or informal performance measures. Further consideration was given to integrated programs with the ability to provide cost-benefit insights.

² MO DNR. (n.d.). About Us. Retrieved from <https://dnr.mo.gov/aboutus.htm>

initiative which would likely require additional funding and staff, these quarterly meetings are a simple way to strengthen interagency networks with minimal expense and effort.

The state has also been working to engage citizens through “Our Missouri Waters,” which aims to educate residents about the various programs that manage water resources and promote a watershed perspective. The project coordinates with 319 program projects, allowing for more wetland implementation work on the ground. NRCS funds are used to cost-shared on projects where work is being done or riparian areas.

Scale of Integration Effort

MO DNR’s quarterly meetings are intended to promote a coordinated statewide perspective for protecting and preserving the state’s aquatic resources. In addition to representatives from MO DNR and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), current partners include MO’s Land Reclamation Commission, State Park System, Water Resources Center, Natural Resources Damages Fund, 401 Water Quality Certification program staff and the Soil and Water Conservation District’s (SWCD) 319 program.

Project Leadership

While these quarterly interagency meetings are an informal partnership opportunity for all stakeholder agencies working to protect wetlands and aquatic resources within the state, the DNR has played an essential leadership role in this integration effort. DNR Environmental Supervisor Stacia Bax devised the program in 2012 in response to the volume of inquiries she was receiving from other programs and agencies. Mrs. Bax continues to oversee the ongoing coordination of the quarterly interagency meetings to date.

Integration Goals

MO DNR’s goal in establishing quarterly interagency meetings was to increase coordination and collaboration of wetland and aquatic focused programs across Missouri. This is particularly important as many programs face restricted or reduced staff and funding capacity. Collaboration represents an opportunity to work together to meet ongoing programmatic needs, share knowledge and expertise, and pool funding for joint projects when appropriate. Strengthening Missouri’s interagency network can increase both efficiency and effectiveness by providing a statewide perspective for protecting Missouri’s aquatic resources. Through ongoing coordination MO DNR hopes to increase the collective impact of the programs participating in the quarterly interagency meetings.

INTEGRATED NETWORK IN ACTION

Missouri DNR is currently revising its Wetland Program Plan. During this process, MODNR is using its contacts made through these meetings to help it address WPP questions and get input on plans.

Integration Process Timeline

Prior to launching the DNR's quarterly interagency meetings, Environmental Supervisor Stacia Bax noticed an increasing volume of inquiries from both internal and external program staff from across the state. Given the siloed nature of their work many of these colleagues needed information regarding project details, regulations, and permitting issues. She recognized a need for greater information sharing and coordination among the many aquatic focused programs in Missouri. With the backing of DNR leadership, Bax began to host informal quarterly meetings in September 2012 bringing program staff together to share knowledge and expertise, discuss upcoming projects and issues, and identify opportunities to collaborate. In the seven years since its inception partner programs have participated in trainings, implemented joint projects, and pooled financial resources when appropriate to increase their collective capacity to protect and preserve Missouri's aquatic resources.

Resource Investment

This integration effort requires minimal investment of both financial and staff resources. The primary investment is that of staff time, with each participating program sending a representative to attend the quarterly meetings. Additional investments beyond meeting attendance may be made should partner programs decide to initiate joint projects at their own discretion. The DNR, as the leadership organization for this initiative also has the nominal cost of coordinating these meetings including hosting the meeting, developing the agenda, printing materials and communicating with all partner programs. The EPA, in addition to serving as a partner program, may also serve as a potential funding source for proposed projects in which case their financial investment would increase. Funding from 319 grants has become more available to partner projects that include riparian restoration activities as well.

How Success Has Been Measured

Integration Outputs:

- Maximized staff time
- Greater quantity and quality of wetland restoration projects undertaken
- Increased educational opportunities – especially shared training and informational sessions (e.g. soil scientist and botanist led a training for partner agency representatives)

Integration Outcomes:

- Expanded focus on wetlands by the §319 Program.
- Heightened familiarity with different programs and staff members across the state.
- Development of relationships and networks that enable staff to have contact between the quarterly meetings (social capital)
- Ability to coordinate more effectively with the Conservation Department

- Changes in decision-making based on non-wetland staff knowledge of wetland issues (e.g. if a federal declaration in a flood area, can put spans instead of low water crossings and F&W partners to replace them).

Impact on Watershed-level Planning, Implementation or Outcomes

While the watershed-level impact of this integration effort has been slow and incremental developing a coordinated statewide perspective for managing Missouri's aquatic resources clearly has far reaching implications. To date cross-program coordination has increased alignment of project goals and interagency collaboration throughout the state. The sharing of knowledge and expertise has expanded understanding of regulation issues and permitting processes. And awareness of the important role of wetlands has helped prioritize restoration and mitigation efforts. Given these advancements and the growing interest in collaboration it is anticipated that this integration effort will have long term impacts on watershed-level outcomes.

Cost Benefit Insights

No formal cost benefit analysis has been conducted for this project. However, it's minimal implementation expenses and requisite staff time indicate the MO DNR's quarterly interagency meetings are a cost-effective integration effort. By investing a few hours of staff time every three months participating programs gain access to the knowledge and expertise of colleagues, identify potential funding sources for restoration, and develop joint projects. An additional benefit of the MO DNR's quarterly meetings has been an increased awareness and understanding of regulations and permitting processes throughout state programs leading to more compliance particularly with land reclamation and 404 applicants.

Information about Policy-related Issues

This integration effort was an initiative developed by the technical staff. While the state is working on wetland water quality standards (WQS) and investigating §404 Assumption, they are not critical to the success or future of the integration effort. However, these efforts may be strengthened by access to the integrated expertise and connections, should they move forward.

Challenges & Lessons Learned

When establishing an interagency network, it is important to:

- Start small, drawing on the founding members' existing social capital and gaining buy-in from key influencers within the state.
- Expand membership slowly and methodically, adding new members as needs and interest grow.
- Consider how each organization can contribute to the collective conversation and find ways to incorporate nonregulatory agencies whose programs impact the state's aquatic resources.
- Keep meetings concise and adhere to an established agenda.

- Provide opportunities for all program representatives to be heard while ensuring order, timeliness, and mutual respect for all attendees.
- Ensure a diverse cross-section of aquatic program involvement. Some flexibility on subject matter may be required (for example MO DNR interagency meetings are exclusively focused on wetlands but include other issues pertaining to the protection of Missouri's aquatic resources).

Next Steps

Given current budgetary restraints and staff capacity the MO DNR's quarterly interagency meetings will likely continue at the current scale for the foreseeable future. Ongoing efforts will be made to recruit additional programs and increase the groups focus on wetlands. Future topics of interest may include examination of the science and technology behind agency decision making and the implementation of a state programmatic multi-media e-permitting system.

Transferability

Given the minimal expense and implementation effort required, MO DNR's cross-program integration effort is highly transferable to other states where resource agencies have been siloed. With buy-in from management and a commitment from frontline staff to attend regular meetings states who launch similar efforts are likely to strengthen interagency networks promoting collaboration and coordination of wetland projects across the state. One essential component for success is to have a designated staff member from a leading agency to coordinate the meetings.

Contact Information

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Additional Resources

Partner Programs

- [Missouri Department of Natural Resources](#)
- [EPA in Missouri](#)
- [MO Land Reclamation Commission](#)
- [MO State Park System](#)
- [MO Water Resources Center](#)
- [MO Natural Resources Damages Fund](#)

- [MO 401 Water Quality Certification Program](#)
- [MO Soil & Water Conservation Districts](#)