

Post Conference Report
ACES 2016 Town Hall
December 6, 2016 | 11:45am -12:50pm

Title: *Collaborative Processes to Advance Markets-based Solutions to Clean Water Goals*

Introduction

Networks as an organizational strategy have been gaining interest in various social, community, and environmental circles. The ability to connect a diversity of interests around a common goal is a key element of a network strategy and one that is well suited to ecosystem service programs. Water quality trading often involve a variety of stakeholder groups including regulatory and land management agencies, natural and working landowners, urban communities, non-profits organizations, and others.

The National Network on Water Quality Trading (National Network) was established in 2013 to improve consistency and integrity across water quality trading (WQT) programs by providing a community of practitioners a venue to articulate shared principles, core trading program design elements, recommendations for implementing and operating trading programs, and lessons learned. The National Network continues to use a facilitated dialogue structure to connect a variety of clean water stakeholders and practitioners to share lessons learned and work collaboratively on a variety of topics that can benefit the water quality community.

The goals of this town hall session were to 1) share deliverables that have been produced from the National Network dialogue series; 2) discuss the structure and successful elements of the collaborative process; and 3) identify future potential directions and topics for the Network.

Speakers and discussions

The town hall session was structured as a *World Café* providing attendees the opportunity to interact and discuss a number of elements of the National Network on Water Quality Trading. The session began with a short introduction to the National Network followed by dialogues in which the speakers rotated among four groups to talk and answer questions on each topic.

Kari Cohen – National Leader for Environmental Markets & Conservation Finance USDA-NRCS

The Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) is currently the major funder for the National Network on Water Quality Trading. Kari's discussions with attendees included describing the structure of the National Network and the advantages of using a network strategy to advance ecosystem service programs such as water quality trading. A key component of the network structure that was discussed is that rather than membership, the National Network relies on dialogue participants who agree to actively contribute while maintaining their own individual positions on a given issue or topic.

Christopher Hartley - Deputy Director and Senior Environmental Markets Analyst USDA Office of Environmental Market

Over a two year period the National Network focused on identifying common issues and the options, considerations, and examples important to building a trading program. The product of those discussions

is *Building a Water Quality Trading Program: Options and Considerations* guide. Chris discussed with attendees the strength of the guide is its comprehensive examination of a broad range of topics related to water quality trading to assist local stakeholders to develop trading frameworks. The guide has been used by a number of states who are developing policies and rules to facilitate water quality trading programs.

Jessica Fox – Program Manager Electric Power Research Institute

Bobby Cochran – Executive Director Willamette Partnership

Together Jessica and Bobby discussed program evaluation and performance measurement, which was the topic of the National Network's May 2016 Dialogue workshop. The speakers provided an overview of how the dialogue series, which is the main vehicle by which the National Network advances its work. As explained, each dialogue brings together technical experts or participants of a given topic to share experiences and lessons learned. Jessica and Bobby provided a summary of the May Dialogue which focused on how program evaluations can help trading programs improve processes and ultimately outcomes. As well, the dialogue discussed how performance measurement and reporting can build accountability and build stakeholder support.

Neil Crescenti – Clean Water Project Manager Willamette Partnership

This November the National Network met in Washington D.C. with 50+ practitioners to discuss the spectrum of financing mechanisms for alternative approaches to stormwater management, specifically green infrastructure. Neil discussed with town hall participants the outcomes of the dialogue, which included the need for consistent language in the context of alternative stormwater management financing. In addition the workshop highlighted the fact that water quality trading is likely one interconnected approach to stormwater management and that there is a much bigger discussion around stormwater management more generally and financing for green infrastructure that needs to be had before you can talk specifically about stormwater credit trading.

Session outcomes and take-aways

Each speaker noted the great conversations that were had with the town hall attendees who represented a range of groups including academic, public agencies, private consultants, and non-profits. Speakers noted several take-aways that they heard from attendees or that stood out to them from the discussions:

- The National Network is a resource to build capacity for water quality trading;
- Based on broader discussions about ecosystem services, there appears to be an opportunity to expand the scope beyond strictly trading markets;
- More examples of *proof of concept* could be highlighted as a way to encourage wider implementation of water quality trading; and
- The National Network and its organizers should look for opportunities to transfer benefits of network strategy to other areas of ecosystem services field.

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