Meeting and Q & A Summary
Sandy Creeks 9 Element Plan Stakeholder Meeting
3:00 p.m. 01/17/2023 - Sandy Creek NY Town Hall

Introduction

- Collaborating organizations in the Sandy Creeks 9 Element planning process - Finger Lakes Lake Ontario Watershed Protection Alliance (FLLOWPA), Jefferson, Oswego and Lewis County Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD), Upstate Freshwater Institute (UFI) and the NYS Tug Hill Commission (THC). NYSDEC is also offering technical assistance and will be approving the plan.
- Tug Hill Commission's primary role is to facilitate stakeholder outreach, including efforts to gather local knowledge, concerns, etc. to assist with ways to shape the project.
- The 2007 Sandy Creeks Ecosystem Based Management (EBM) Project was one of two such experimental projects in the state.
    - A variety of restoration and remediation activities were completed following through the project.
    - The 9 Element Plan focuses primarily on water quality, and will augment the EBM Project
- These video's provides a basic introduction to watersheds and their importance
    - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=69rg8N2s4Tw
    - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9STjoQM7ee0
- A 9 Element Plan is a nonregulatory plan that is meant to identify and address water quality concerns on a watershed scale.
- The Black River Watershed Management Plan and 9E Plan have helped to implement over 72 actions and leveraged 35 million in funding. The Black River 9E plan was approved in 2016, and is one of 5 approved in the state. The plan helped implement projects to benefit water quality, including wastewater treatment upgrades, septic replacements, and agricultural best practices.

Sandy Creeks 9 Element Plan Need and Process

- The Soil and Water Conservation Districts work with farmers, shoreline owners, municipalities, and other stakeholders.
- When writing for grants, a 9E plan is essential to provide data driven applications that are competitive on a statewide scale.
- The Sandy Creeks Watershed contains a wide variety of land uses and ownership including conserved parcels, town and small urban centers, agriculture, recreational second homes and large forest tracts. A wide variety of human actions can impact water quality in the watershed. Some examples include:
    - Poor timber harvesting, lack of seeding skid trails down, no water bars
    - Road maintenance: Many gravel dirt roads, high sediment and erosion.
    - Riparian development
    - Lack of/ non functioning septics
    - Poor agriculture practices
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- When registering for the meeting, 59 people completed a survey on the Sandy Creeks watershed, expressing a variety of opinions and concerns related to water quality.
    - The results are reflected in the powerpoint presentation
- The Sandy Creeks Watershed contains 12 subwatersheds. Although some water quality data is available from DEC, it is incomplete and sometimes outdated.
    - Data available through DEC info locator tool
- The Jefferson County SWCD has partnered with UFI who will train SWCD staff in sampling and modeling. This will be a multiyear process, with funding from FLLOWPA supporting the work.

UFI -Sampling and Modeling Process

- A downstream point at end of each Subwatershed was selected so samples are representative of the entire area
    - Additional sample points will be established as needed
    - Sampling will be done 2X per month for 12 months
    - Measuring phosphorus, nitrogen, suspended solids, fecal coliform, physical characteristics (flow, etc.), temperature, suspended solids, etc
- A Quality Assurance Project Plan (QAPP) will be developed. A QAPP is a sampling and data management plan required and approved by DEC to ensure data quality. In accordance with the QAPP, water samples will be analyzed through an ELAP certified lab. The sampling results will be used to develop a watershed model (Generalized Watershed Loading Function model is recommended by UFI, to capture multiple potential sources).

Question and Answer Session

Is there current sampling in the urban area of Sandy Creek?

Would have to check with DEC. Well monitoring has been done by USGS within the Northern Tug Hill Aquifer and a report is available on the THC website..

Is there any current data to use?

Sampling has been done in the past 10-20 years in urban areas. DEC would have that information. Tug Hill Aquifer study, runs along Route 81 through the middle of this watershed. Quick summary: Clean aquifer, deep, dug wells were tested in the past 5 years.

Is there monitoring for Forever Chemicals such as PFAS and PFOAs?

The 9E plan does not address those.

Consequences based on the sampling results?

Presenters explained regulatory Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) and how a 9E plan would avoid that, and help implement voluntary actions to improve water quality.

What watershed model will be used?

GWLF is recommended by UFI based on watershed conditions and considerations, which is acceptable to DEC, as well as a Soil and Water Assessment Tool (SWAT) model. JCSWCD and UFI would like to use the data to develop both models at various scales, and compare the two models to better address all watershed issues.

Zoom: Will extraordinarily low water in Sandy Pond impact water quality?

UFI was on Sandy Pond's monitoring program last summer. Will be monitoring Sandy Pond again next summer. Separately, there will be a pond management plan developed. Findings and recommendations will be available related to the Pond. Can't speculate (impacts of low water levels to water quality) at this point without analyzing data.

Many current sample points are on the West side of Route 3. What would be the benefit of Route 11 corridor, main streams sampling to identify anything upstream and midstream?

At first, due to the costs involved, sampling will occur in the lower reaches of tributaries to assess conditions, which will tell us if something is impacting the waterway. Additional upstream monitoring will be conducted if needed where there are downstream impacts. If we do that monitoring in between, we have spent a lot of money. UFI; plan is to be adaptable, make changes that fit the need. Maps – we are going to ask you to let us know where to look.

Previous monitoring, what is the value for the fecal coliform sampling? Are there things showing up in the water coming up from higher up?

Have not seen this. DEC explained that this is not part of DEC's regular monitoring. State Parks and Department of Health monitor beaches for bacteria and we can coordinate with them to consider this data.

Are there indicators of how septic systems are working?

Coliform is monitored on Lake Ontario by DEC. There have been closures at Southwicks and Sandy Island beach relating to fecal coliform.

Can you tell the difference between bovine and human waste in water samples?

We are not going to go that far until we identify there is a problem. We can go one step at a time. Rigorously controlled samples, lab is in Syracuse. First attempt to get the data.

Are septic systems in this watershed under regulation or inspected?

Audience member/code enforcement officer explained that after 2000 all designs must be approved by a registered professional engineer. He explained that changes to hard piping from house to tank or to distribution does not need a stamp, but any change to the leach field itself, has to be engineered. More information on septic regulation is available from NYS Department of Health at: https://regs.health.ny.gov/content/appendix-75-wastewater-treatment-standards-residential-onsite-systems and from NYSDEC at https://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/water_pdf/onsitewastewater.pdf

When will the 9E Planning process commence, how is it paid for?

Finger Lakes Lake Ontario Watershed Protection Alliance will pay for the monitoring and lab work. Further, once the plan is complete and BMPs, are identified it will pay a portion of that as well. Plan to begin in February 2023 for sampling.

How can private landowners be involved in the assessment of their watershed?

Come to the meetings and provide input. Next set of stakeholder meetings will be more involved. We can have the greatest plan, but if we identify a need for riparian forest buffers, skidder bridges, and other best management practices (BMP's) and landowners won't implement these practices, we won't be able to implement the plan. Get involved at stakeholder meetings. Great watershed video, Chesapeake Bay, 45 minutes provides great tips about restoring watersheds.

Is Landowner permission required?

Yes, we may need permission to allow us to take samples.

Zoom: South Sandy Pond, low water question and will South Sandy Pond will be looked at?

Yes, it is part of the watershed. UFI is not currently doing monitoring in that area.

ANCA – Climate Smart Communities Coordinator, introduced to the group. WQ and climate actions, contact her. Free resources cleary@adirondack.org

Comment: Several other studies already in conjunction with UFI. Sandy Creek, studies of nutrient load on Sandy Pond. Oswego county received funding of 5 tributaries, study of what is happening there. Valuable information, separate studies.

Is participating worth any ongoing continuing education credits?

Planning board, documented here for a number of hours. It would be up to your planning board. We could document attendance.

Watershed Mapping Activity

Attendees were asked to either post a sticky note on large paper maps, or use the annotation tool on zoom to post questions or concerns about the watershed. This input is meant to inform the 9E planning and sampling process.

Prompt: Where are there water quality issues, where is water quality good, and other thoughts about the watershed.

Some comments were received in the paper maps, and many more comments were received on the Zoom map. These comments and locations will be shared and further discussed with focus groups.

Meeting Close

The meeting closed with an invitation to the stakeholder focus groups on 1/31/23, and the final stakeholder meeting on 2/16/23.