
Sustainable Water Systems: Step 1 – Redefining the Nation’s Infrastructure Challenge



A report of the Aspen Institute’s
Dialogue on Sustainable Water
Infrastructure in the U.S.

The Aspen Institute



The Aspen Institute mission is two-fold:

- Foster values-based leadership, encouraging reflection on ideals/ideas that define a good society
- Provide a neutral and balanced venue for discussing and acting on critical issues

The goal of the Aspen Institute Energy and Environment Program is to provide the leadership and neutral forum for constructive dialogue on complex policy issues in the areas of energy and environmental policy

Dialogue on Sustainable Water Infrastructure in the US



Objectives include:

- Increase consensus and clarity on future investment in water and wastewater infrastructure
- Concept of sustainability is meeting existing needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs

Participants included representatives from:

- Public and private water companies
- Federal, State and local government regulators
- Private industry
- Non-profit environmental groups

Three Principles Emerged



- 1) The traditional definition of water infrastructure must evolve to embrace a broader, more holistic definition of sustainable water infrastructure that includes both traditional man-made water and wastewater infrastructure *and* natural watershed systems.

Three Principles Emerged



- 2) This new definition of sustainable water infrastructure should be embraced by all public and private entities involved in water management, and these same entities have a shared role in ensuring their decisions consider and integrate a set of criteria which we are calling “the Sustainable Path”

Three Principles Emerged



- 3) A watershed-based management approach is required for drinking water, wastewater and stormwater services to ensure integrated, sustainable management of water resources.



The Sustainable Path



The Sustainable Path includes a set of 20 elements that will support a financially and environmentally sustainable path to achieve a sustainable 21st century water infrastructure.

Sustainable Path Elements



Elements include:

- ❑ Good Governance
- ❑ Watershed Optimization
- ❑ Public Outreach
- ❑ Water Conservation
- ❑ Energy Management
- ❑ Utility Pricing



Observations



A sustainable water infrastructure will require a cooperative strategy among all the key stakeholders and regulators, including water, wastewater and stormwater service providers, as well as local, state and federal agencies.

Observations



The federal government can provide both incentives and disincentives for how utilities contribute to national goals for clean and safe water.



The federal government's role can and should be used to further the sustainability of water infrastructure.



Questions



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