

AN ANSWER TO MULTIPLE DATA SOURCES

Nancy Lawler and Danielle Donkersloot
NJ Department of Environmental Protection
Water Monitoring & Standards,
Bureau of Freshwater and Biological Monitoring
NJ Watershed Watch Network
35 Arctic Parkway
PO Box 427
Trenton, NJ 08865

ABSTRACT

The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) continuously looks to manage New Jersey's water resources more holistically. Volunteer collected data is recognized as part of the State's monitoring matrix and is viewed as a viable data source for the NJDEP. However, it has been difficult for the State to access and standardize the data of the many organizations throughout the state.

The Watershed Watch Network, NJDEP's volunteer monitoring program, has learned through its work with volunteer coordinators around the state, that many organizations have difficulty managing the data they collect. In order to manage data, it must be put into a data spreadsheet and then retrieved to be used in reports or for comparisons.

The reports are designed to tell the story. For example, is the water quality improving? Is it being degraded? Are there unexplainable changes in the data from one year to the next?

Running the statistics, defining the changes in water quality and graphing results can be a challenge to any organization. In addition, there are also the challenges of storing and protecting data. For example, what happens if the data is only stored on one computer and that computer crashes?

Currently, the Watershed Watch Network is working to develop a user-friendly data management system with DEP data experts, consultants, and the volunteer program coordinators. This system will allow for data to flow into the DEP as well as allow for the data to flow out of the system for public use. This online data management system will help alleviate the burden of data management for organizations and allow for volunteer collected data to be used at the DEP. The system will be a powerful tool for the volunteer community because it will allow volunteers to run simple statistics and create graphs for visual comparisons.

KEYWORDS:

Volunteer Monitoring, data management, data systems, data standardization, service provider services