

## Franklin County Clean Water Plan Narrative



*Examples of the Franklin County agricultural and stream & floodplain restoration projects that contribute to our Clean Water Plan.*

### **Introduction:**

The Franklin County Clean Water Plan (referred to in this document as “Plan”) identifies several priority initiatives to enable reductions in nutrient loads and improve water quality to the standard of countywide goals (reduce nitrogen loading (N) by approximately 1.3 million lbs. and phosphorus loading (P) by approximately 70,000 lbs.) Each initiative identifies steps that will need to be implemented in order to meet the aforementioned goals of reducing N and P in Franklin County. The entity leading the efforts of accomplishing these goals is the Franklin County Conservation District (FCCD). FCCD has established the initiative “Clean Water for Franklin County,” or CWFC for short, to unite all water-related efforts from all parts of the county.

Currently, the county has significant capacity limitations within our agencies and a limited number of existing environmental or conservation organizations that handle water issues on a regular basis. There are a number of partners that can be engaged in this process, with missions focusing on environmental education, stewardship, and citizen water monitoring in our waterways. While there are a few of these organizations in the county, their focus tends to be community-based, and there is no countywide organization focused on protecting water resources. CWFC has become that countywide initiative which brings together communities and resources, countywide, to accomplish mutually beneficial projects and meet common goals.

Plan implementation and success are dependent on availability of needed funds, trained staff and resources identified in the Plan, as well as recommended regulatory changes and landowners’ willingness to participate in the CWFC initiative.

### **Opportunities:**

CWFC will not only strive to meet the established goals, but will engage the neighbors of Franklin County in awareness of the value of our water resources. Communications strategies regarding the initiative emphasize that the quality of local streams and waterways, on which all community members rely, improve with implementation of the Plan. County residents will experience a greater quality of life with cleaner water, which is an important goal of the County’s Comprehensive Plan. To reach our county goals, we must increase awareness of the role that all parties play in improving water quality and how the results benefit all members of the county.

CWFC provides the opportunity to reinvigorate the local watershed organizations and help them to coordinate efforts around a common mission. An opportunity exists to grow the initiative and establish a countywide organization to focus on conservation initiatives around water resources.

Over the last few years, CWFC has built trust and relationships with local stakeholders and agencies. These partnerships fueled the Conococheague Creek Priority Projects Plan (CP3) which will be used to guide project prioritization as well as funding applications and decisions. Please [click this link](#) to read more about this plan. This plan is different from many others due to its dynamic and actionable nature. And this plan outlines specific project opportunities with the benefit of existing landowner participation. Any and all projects outlined in this plan involved some level of landowner communication and willingness to participate, which is vital for moving forward with funding, design, and implementation. Additionally, since the CP3 is in StoryMap format, it is editable and can change as more priority projects are discovered, thus assisting these projects in their future funding needs.

Additionally, these new partnerships have led to other initiative momentum. FCCD has begun working with local partners on pilots involving topics like Best Management Plan (BMP) Verification, BMP Effectiveness, Water Quality Monitoring, Increasing Capacity, and other resource restoration needs.

To ensure long-term success and maximum impact, it is vital to learn from the other counties as they also develop successful strategies and BMPs. Emphasis should be placed on physical implementation and seeing real results in the goal reductions by landowner adoption of conservation practices. The opportunity exists to incorporate other strategies or planning practices into the implementation process through other planning efforts such as comprehensive planning, open space and greenway planning, long range transportation planning, and model ordinance development. Stormwater management should be evaluated from a more holistic perspective through guidance from the state.

#### **Challenges:**

Several factors have been examined, but still need additional attention to reach our county goals, including, but not limited to:

- technical assistance;
- workforce capacity;
- funding capacity; and
- reliable, continuous data collection.

During the updating of the Plan there was much discussion on:

- how much more has been done;
- what still needs to be done; and
- how to get it done in order to measure success.

Through implementation of the Plan thus far, there has been much discussion emphasis on the “how” as noted above, including, but not limited to:

- increasing capacity of both workforce and funding;
- data collection, management, reporting, and verification; and
- increasing reach of audience, participants, and contributors.

While great strides have been made over the last five years, we have so much more to do.

One of the greatest challenges is uncertainty with regard to baseline conditions - and which practices and facilities are currently in place - but are not included in the data used to formulate our planning goalposts. We have proposed measures to account for some currently unreported practices, and lack of data management structure for BMPs from agricultural and urban sectors, but these are costly and will continue to take significant time and coordination to establish.

As the time comes to a close on the original goal of reducing Nitrogen and Phosphorus entering local waterways, it has been realized that this was an overly ambitious goal. Despite great progress, there is still much more work to be done at multiple agency levels before additional practices can be implemented on the ground at the local level at the needed pace. Legislation may be needed which can be a cumbersome and slow process with an uncertain outcome. Significant funding increases have been made, but are still a limitation of progress, despite identification of the most-cost-effective strategies to make the most significant impacts. Finally, a large enough structure will need to be established at the state level to oversee the implementation of all the plans by the many counties impacted. While these items are in motion, we have much more work to do.

With an amended agreement extending through 2040, this will allow time to hire, train, and retain the necessary staff to carry out the Plan. The process to actually meet the goals may take a longer time period and the initiative itself will be an ongoing process. While capacity has grown, we have seen a great amount of turnover in partnering organizations and agencies, thus slowing down progress. Additionally, BMPs put in place today may not be fully activated/effective for a number of years, and others will age out of the program, needing replacement or re-verification. It is difficult to prescribe formulaic practices for farmers who must respond quickly to changing weather and soil conditions and seasonal fluctuations to meet their optimal agricultural production goals, and for many, keep their living.

#### **Summary:**

The following is a summary of the three primary initiatives as outlined in the Franklin County Clean Water Plan. The initiatives include: 1. Programmatic, Policy, and Regulatory Initiatives, 2. Nutrient Reduction Goals & BMP Implementation, and 3. Communication, Education, and Outreach.

- Streamline permitting, funding, and reporting processes;
- Establish regular, consistent, and continuous monitoring for local water quality (and progress);
- Assess existing conditions through data collection for effective & efficient BMP implementation;
- Increase workforce and funding capacity to achieve increased implementation rate;
- Enhance BMP reporting for accurate picture of current conditions and progress of new BMP implementation;
- Develop a communication strategy to reflect parallel goals and benefits of improved water quality;
- Utilize existing resources to engage educational objectives; and
- Develop a focused effort to promote BMPs in different sectors throughout the county.

#### **Conclusion:**

Franklin County anticipates working closely with many agencies and partners as we strive to meet the established water quality goals. The CWFC initiative provides an opportunity to bring stakeholders and partners together not only to focus on water quality but also to embrace and incorporate other environmental and planning matters more inclusively. For this initiative to be successful it will take the involvement of the many partners: local, state, and federal government, the agriculture community, private businesses, and non-profit organizations. An extensive outreach and educational campaign is needed to create an awareness and understanding of the importance of

issues related to water quality and soil health and the role that we all play in meeting these goals. We need change in the regulatory process, program development at the state and local level, staff hired and trained, and consistent, flexible funding and incentive programs created for the increased rate of BMP installation. By all appropriate parties working together in a cohesive manner, these goals become achievable, so does an improved quality of life for all of us who live, work, and play in Franklin County.