

Notes from Project NEMO introductory meeting  
August 15, 2000 - DNR Region 6 office  
Notes by Julie Westerlund, MN DNR (651.772.7938)

**Background:** This was the first meeting of a metro area group to explore the use of a program called project NEMO (Nonpoint source Education for Municipal Officials). Project NEMO was started by the University of Connecticut's Extension Service, who promotes the use of their concepts and materials nationwide and helps local groups who wish to implement a coordinated NEMO program in their area or state.

The meeting was originally set up as a follow-up to a discussion of Metro area attendees to a NEMO scoping session in Duluth-Superior, intended to include a few other folks who were interested in the program. Word of the project and this meeting spread rapidly, indicating strong interest and resulting in a large number of **attendees:**

Kevin Bigalke	Lower MN River Watershed District
Jon Michels	Washington County - Public Health and Environment
Jay Michels	MN PCA
Louise Watson	Ramsey-Washington Metro Watershed District
Roman Rowan	Fortin Consulting, Inc.
Carolyn Dindorf	Hennepin Conservation District
Tom Wegner	U of M Extension Service
Tori Dupre	Met Council Environmental Services
Michele Hanson	Rice Creek Watershed District
Tracy Fallon	Center for Global Environmental Protection
Kristina Smitten	Met Council Community Development
Duane Shodeen	MN DNR - Division of Fisheries
Dale Homuth	MN DNR - Division of Waters
Paul Haik	Krebsbach and Haik
Judy Sventek	Met Council Environmental Services
Bob Olson	U of M Extension Service
Pam Davis	St. Croix Watershed (NPS)
Doug Snyder	Board of Water and Soil Resources
Jack Frost	Met Council Environmental Services
Jerry Spetzman	MN Dept. of Agriculture
Ron Struss	U of M Extension Service/BWSR
Gene Soderbeck	MN PCA
Julie Westerlund	MN DNR - Metro Trout Stream Watershed Protection Initiative

**Meeting Notes:** The meeting started out with a brief presentation by Julie Westerlund, outlining the structure and philosophy of project NEMO, and showing a sample of the Basic NEMO presentation, which can be found on the NEMO website: <http://nemo.uconn.edu>. Essentially, this is a program aimed to empower local decision-makers to make environmentally sound land use decisions by helping them understand the connection between land use and water quality. A major goal of the program is to get communities (especially developing communities) to use natural resources -based planning, along with regional and site based management tools (such as land protection and site design) which will lead to improved natural resource stewardship, and ultimately protect water quality.

Next, several questions were posed to the group as points for discussion (responses listed here

are 'brainstorm style' not necessarily our 'final answer'):

1) Is there a **need** for such a program in the metro area?

YES! (unanimous and resounding - short discussion).

2) Who should our **target audience** be?

- city/township/county officials, including:
  - < city councils
  - < planning commissions / environment and natural resources comms
  - < county boards
  - < town boards
  - < watershed managers
- city/township/county staff (engineers, planners, and public works)
- state and regional agency decision makers (top level)
- developers

Regarding target audience, a *constant presence* needs to be maintained - we should not expect to present this program once and walk away. We need *continuous contact* and *good relationships* with our target audience groups.

3) Which **issues** should be addressed by a NEMO program?

- depends on the community and the extent to which it is developed: we deal with a range of development stages in the metro area and beyond
- depends on the natural resources present in the community
- agriculture preservation and management?

4) What **geographic area** should be covered?

- {short term} we should *focus* on areas that are developing the most rapidly - some of these communities even have Natural Resources Inventories in place, but do not want to do anything with the information (or they do not know what to do with it?)
- {long term} we should *invest now* in communities outside the current growth boundaries where development will go in the future: these communities often are the worst equipped to deal with what's coming -they have very small budgets, virtually no staff, and a lack of information, resulting in poor planning when development comes in quickly
- starting out, select someone who is interested and will be a good 'guinea pig' - a forgiving crowd that will go through the learning curve with us and help make a pilot project into a success that others will want to be associated with (this is also a suggestion from the national NEMO coordinators)
- go where the timing is opportune (Corcoran and Dakota County were suggested, but there are many others)

The next part of the meeting focused on implementation: who's going to do it and how?

**Who's going to do it** (potential partners)?

- we should start by getting the basic message out there....
- Note: National NEMO suggests that teams implementing the program consist of individuals with expertise in the following areas: 1) water quality; 2) planning; 3) GIS; 4) education
- a *few watershed districts* have expertise on staff and could get the message out (but do they have good relationships with the cities?)

- a 'hosting organization' could tap into others' expertise in a partnership framework
- in the fringe areas, *consultants* could carry the message (they are currently the main source of information for many of those communities with virtually no staff people (the staff is the guy who administers the cities' affairs...he also sweeps the fire hall and paints the stripes on the ball fields...))
- remember - often, the *messenger* is just as important (if not more) than the message itself - we don't want to send out someone who carries a lot of regulatory agency baggage or a professor-type who will put everyone to sleep!
- the *League of Minnesota Cities* or other similar organizations (county or watershed associations/leagues) could be major 'sponsors' of the programs - if they think it's a good thing and support it, more likelihood their members will buy into it
- *Soil and Water Conservation Districts* (could help where others may be challenged by putting together GIS information)

more later on who will do it...

The group got back into a general discussion of the program and how it applies to what we do...

- the key is getting the message out!
- we want decision-makers to *use plans as tools* (rather than something they are required to do)
- the *will to learn* is there, but the decision-makers don't know how to get the info (they need someone to *bring* it to them)
- what *motivations* do communities have for wanting this information?
  - < water law (new phase II requirements)?
  - < planning requirements should be realigned so that watershed district and comprehensive plans (as well as stormwater plans) are better coordinated and complement each other
- need to know how what it takes to 'load' the program (how do we interface with what's provided by the national folks) - what are the outputs/end products? (e.g., are the GIS maps available or do we need to start from scratch??) {answer is that we need to make the maps, but GIS resources and most data layers are available}
- do we want to establish this program in the **metro area, or cover the whole state?**
  - < there are real needs for this information outstate
  - < the metro area is a good place to start - we need to pilot the program on a very small scale - just covering the metro will be a giant challenge!

How can we **coordinate**? There are two major needs: **LEADERSHIP** and **FUNDING**. Below is a brain-stormed list of potential sources...

## LEADERSHIP

- < leagues/associations (city/county/watershed)
- < Minnesota Erosion Control Association (MECA) and the 'E-team' or PCA

- < U of M Extension (no \$)
- < WaterShed Partners (an established but informal metro area collaborative - over 40 organizations represented - with no real leadership body, but functions very well...NEMO fits right into their main mission of water quality education) the education committee could provide good leadership. This is a group of people who do a lot of this stuff in slightly different ways, and NEMO is another good tool for all of them {check out <http://cgee.hamline.edu/watershed/index.htm> if you are not familiar with this group }
- < We need a *champion* on a *permanent* basis (WaterShed partners would not really give us that) - a big agency would be better suited to 'house' the program
- < The problem with agencies is that they are not set up to do education
- < **If** agencies are going to get involved in a partnership and if one is going to take the lead:
  - # other agencies need to support the lead (leave the turf wars at the door)
  - # upper management (vertical) needs to be on board
  - # each group's roles/responsibilities need to be clearly defined
- < Met Council seems like a logical choice

## FUNDING

- < Office of Environmental Assistance grant program
- < Watershed Assistance Grant program (RiverNetwork)
- < EPA 319 funds
- < Met Council's Metro Environmental Partnership grant program (MEP)
- < other sources are out there...
- < we need to remember that funding will be a constant need (let's not do this as a flash-in-the-pan 'new program of the month')

*Note: At the beginning of the meeting the question as to the need for the program was asked...everyone in the room raised their hand to say YES! Somewhere in this discussion, the group was asked who was willing to take the lead or provide money to start a NEMO program...the room became silent and no one raised their hand. Someone pointed out that all the people at this meeting are staff/field people and do not have the authority to delegate dollars to the program or to relinquish their responsibilities so they can take on NEMO. This highlights the need to get support from the 'vertical' management so that resources are built into biennial budgets, work plans, etc.*

*However, there is a lot of motivation to do NEMO in Minnesota. In fact, Kevin Bigalke (LMRWD) and Nelson French (Friends of the MNValley) have submitted a Watershed Assistance Grant proposal to fund a potential NEMO pilot program in Scott County - contact Kevin at [kevin.bigalke@lowermn.com](mailto:kevin.bigalke@lowermn.com) or 952.496.8842 for more information!*

## Where to Start?

- One idea: state agencies (PCA, DNR, and BWSR) should get together and do this, and should target the 'hot spot' communities (fringe cities) which will be required to do NPDES Phase II plans in the next 18 months - many of them have few resources and we could essentially do it for them for free!
- 3<sup>rd</sup> generation plans {editor's note: the notes are sketchy and my memory is bad - I'm assuming this refers to WDs/WMOs? are 3<sup>rd</sup> generation plans being required of anyone now or did this just refer to an opportunity to use NEMO in the future}

## NEXT STEPS?

- We will form a core **working group** made up of one staff each from the main state/regional agencies and watershed partners:
  - MPCA - Jay Michels**
  - DNR - Julie Westerlund (Duane Shodeen alternate)**
  - BWSR and Extension - Ron Struss**
  - Met Council - Kristina\***
  - WaterShed Partners - Michele Hanson**

*\*lead {? I can't remember exactly what the \* means - JW}*

  - < The work group will meet regularly to continue the discussion and take the necessary steps to get NEMO going - there are a lot of committed people that want to see this happen!
  - < Announcements of and minutes from work group meetings will be sent to all of this meeting's attendees and anyone else who wishes to get them. Anyone is welcome to attend the work group meetings. Tracy Fallon will distribute meeting notes and announcements via email - contact her if you are not on the list and want to be: [tfallon@gw.hamline.edu](mailto:tfallon@gw.hamline.edu) Tracy also has contact information for the work group members.

Next meeting: **Wednesday, September 13 at 11:00** (following the WaterShed Partners meeting), Department of Agriculture, 90 West Plato Blvd, St. Paul. Michele Hanson will coordinate and facilitate this meeting.