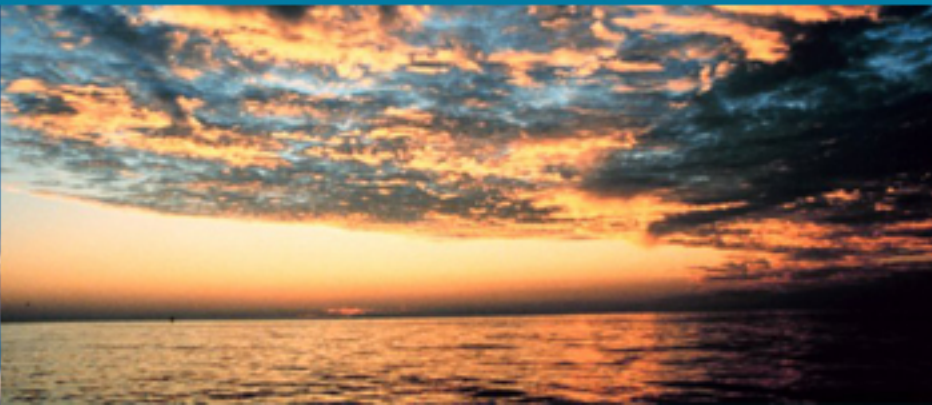




Water Quality Protection Division
EPA Region 6

Strategic Plan 2004-2008

May 18, 2004



Dear Water Resource Stakeholders:

I am proud to present you with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 6, Water Quality Protection Division's Strategic Plan (2004-2008). Our plan is the result of months of discussions, surveys, and planning about water programs and the employees who carry them out in Region 6. Those involved in the planning process included managers, supervisors and staff within the Division and managers of State water protection programs.

As an organization we value professionalism in all that we do, and promote excellence in an environment of open communication. We strive to ensure that environmental policies and decision-making are based on credible and publicly available science. We serve others to further environmental stewardship and are dedicated to continuous learning and process improvement so that we may achieve the highest ideals of public service.

Our mission is to protect human health and the environment. To that end we must constantly rededicate ourselves to work in partnership with all stakeholders to protect and restore water resources in Region 6. Our vision is to provide leadership and assistance to support protection and restoration efforts so that all waters in Region 6 meet all designated uses, and all citizens have access to safe drinking water. Working together, we can realize our vision.

I would like to personally thank each member of the Strategic Planning Team who worked so diligently to make this plan a reality. The Team members included:

Blake Atkins	Troy Hill
Russell Bowen	Claudia Hosch
Jim Brown	Paulette Johnsey
Joan Brown	Donna Miller
Shirley Bruce	Tom Nelson
Adele Cardenas-Mallot	Sharon Parrish
Phil Dellinger	Oscar Ramirez
Jack Ferguson	Jane Watson
Jayne Fontenot	Larry Wright
Jenaie Franke	Karen Young
Dina Granado	

I invite each and every Water Quality Protection Division employee to make a personal commitment to achieving the ideals and goals set forth in our Strategic Plan. I am confident that working together in partnership with our States and Tribes, we can make our water resources cleaner and safer for all Region 6 citizens.

Sincerely yours,

Miguel I. Flores, Director
Water Quality Protection Division

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Foreword	1
Introduction	1
Mission and Vision Statements	2
Guiding Principles	2
Core Competencies	3
Priorities	3
Goals	7
Accountability	9
People Plan	10
Future Revisions	10
State Teams	10

FOREWORD

The Water Quality Protection Division's Strategic Plan (Plan) is an outgrowth of several management retreats held during late 2002, and throughout 2003. The Plan reflects who we are as a Division and what we value. The plan also lays out our priorities and goals, and how we will measure our success during the period 2004 through 2008.

Our strategic planning began with significant dialogue about our organization—what we do now, our strengths and weaknesses, internal and external challenges, where we see ourselves headed and what makes us unique in our field. A written summary of those deliberations is incorporated in this plan. But the process has only begun. We must now, collectively, resolve to aggressively move forward in ways that reflect our emerging role in a rapidly changing environment. Some of what we do now will remain the same, some will evolve, and in other ways we may find ourselves needing to respond to situations that we cannot anticipate knowing what we know now. As an organization, however, we must position ourselves to be sufficiently strong and flexible to make any needed transitions smoothly.

Our strategic plan summarizes:

- Who we are as an organization;
- What we do;
- Why we do it;
- What we are trying to accomplish; and
- How we will align our resources to meet our goals.

The strategic planning process requires that we look at all aspects of our organization—to identify our mission, vision, guiding principles, competencies, and resources, and to develop our goals and accountability procedures. In addition, the process frequently identifies important organizational changes needed to efficiently allocate resources to the identified priorities—such was the case in our efforts.

Many benefits stem from strategic planning. For example, the process helps us identify the products and the services we currently provide now and those we would like to provide in the future to better serve our customers. Strategic planning also helps us more clearly focus our energy and resources on top priorities, so that our entire organization is working together to achieve the same goals. And clearly, strategic planning helps us to identify and prepare for meeting challenges created by changing circumstances over time.

INTRODUCTION

The Water Quality Protection Division's (WQPD) key environmental and public health goals, including the expected improvements in key indicators of environmental and public health conditions that we commit to achieving by 2008, are outlined in this Plan. The Plan also describes the programs and tools that WQPD, in collaboration with States, Tribes, local governments, and others will use to accomplish these goals. In composite, the goals presented here define what is required for us to be successful.

The strategic planning team determined that the goals defined for the planning horizon would be difficult to achieve under the current organizational structure, so a new structure was conceived to include “State Teams.” These Teams are discussed in general on pages 10-11. The new structure should make working in partnership with States and Tribes much more effective by providing for far more joint planning and budgeting than before. In addition, the new structure supports an emphasis on mutual accountability processes to monitor improved environmental results. Frequent monitoring of the progress in achieving the goals in this Plan, as well as those in the Regional Strategic Plan, the Management Agreement with the Office of Water, and the National Water Program Guidance, serve as our primary accountability systems. Branch and Section Work Plans will provide a more detailed framework for setting priorities, determining annual commitments, and providing the basis for performance accountability for the environmental and public health programs entrusted to us.

The long-term goals presented in this Plan are very ambitious and achieving success will be challenging. But our dedicated staff works hard to provide clean and safe water for all Region 6 citizens. Because in the WQPD we hold ourselves to a high standard of performance and accountability—we are confident we can successfully rise to meet the challenges.

MISSION AND VISION STATEMENTS

EPA's mission is to protect human health and to safeguard the natural environment--air, water, and land--upon which life depends. Working in partnership with States, Tribes, and other stakeholders, EPA implements numerous statutory programs established by Congress to protect and preserve our natural ecosystems and the life they sustain. In particular, the Water Quality Protection Division of EPA Region 6 focuses its resources on protecting and preserving the aquatic ecosystems and water resources of Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas, as well as the Tribal lands located within our region. Our vision is to provide leadership and assistance to support protection and restoration efforts so that all waters in Region 6 meet all designated uses, and all citizens have access to safe drinking water. Working together, we will aggressively pursue our vision.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Guiding principles define our commitment to how we, as an organization, approach our work and interact with each other and our stakeholders. They serve as our rules of conduct, and are based on treating others fairly, professionally and with respect. We conduct ourselves in a courteous, conscientious, and businesslike manner, and are dedicated to high ethical standards. For the Water Quality Protection Division to be successful, these guiding principles must be modeled by the Division and become part of who we are. To achieve excellence, we must recognize and develop the full potential of every employee within the Division.

The following guiding principles define our commitment:

Environmental Stewardship-We recognize and act on our role in protecting and preserving water quality for current and future generations.

Service to Others—As public servants we assist others in achieving environmental goals. We strive for increased consistency, public confidence, and certainty in addressing water quality issues.

Open Communication—We seek to understand others' viewpoints. We convey our viewpoints to improve mutual understanding and strengthen partnerships. We make information available to all so they understand our decisions.

Science Based—We ensure environmental policy and decision-making will be based on credible and publicly available science.

Excellence—We dedicate ourselves to lifelong learning and continuous improvement so that we may achieve the highest ideals of public service.

CORE COMPETENCIES

Core competencies reflect what we do better than anyone else. They represent a bundling of intellectual skills or knowledge sets that create the unique value of our organization.

In the Water Quality Protection Division, our core competencies have, for many years, been:

Knowledge and effective application of Federal water statutes, regulations, guidance and policies to address water quality issues.

Knowledge and effective application of Federal financial mechanisms to address water quality issues.

Application of science and technology to water quality issues.

These 3 core competencies will continue to be important. However, to successfully strengthen our partnerships with States and Tribes, we need for all WQPD employees to master an additional core competency—specifically:

Knowledge and effective application of communication, negotiation, mediation, facilitation, and conflict resolution skills to foster and maintain robust stakeholder relationships.

Because the elements of this core competency are so critical, they have also been identified as training priorities in the Division's People Plan. Some of these core competencies will become increasingly important over time, and some will evolve over time as our stakeholder partnerships mature. But as an organization committed to continuous learning, we dedicate ourselves to enhance all of these competencies.

PRIORITIES

A strong commitment to strengthening State and Tribal partnerships serves as the foundation for all of the WQPD priorities. Because States play such a significant

role in implementing the Clean Water Act (CWA), the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA), and other water programs, building such partnerships must be our highest priority for at least the next five years. Only through collaborative relationships with our States and Tribes can we effectively implement programs that will ensure our water is cleaner and safer to drink.

The WQPD will focus significant efforts on several geographic, sector, and program priorities to achieve the greatest success. We will also strive to maintain the gains we've made over the past three decades by continuing to run effective water quality protection and restoration programs, including all aspects of permitting, rule development, and compliance assistance to preserve and build on the environmental gains we have made. Our priorities are:

Geographic Priorities

Illinois River Watershed: Northeast Oklahoma is home to the State's scenic rivers, an important natural resource and recreational tourism area. Adjacent to this scenic river area lies the heart of Northeast Arkansas' chicken farming industry. The over-application of chicken litter to agricultural fields and the resulting runoff, coupled with discharges from municipalities, creates a nutrient loading problem (especially phosphorus) in the Illinois River, causing it not to meet the phosphorus standard at the Arkansas-Oklahoma border. In December 2003, EPA Region 6 negotiated an agreement between the two States to reduce nutrient loading in the Illinois River watershed. We must work together with all stakeholders to address the phosphorus issue to achieve Oklahoma's designated use for the Illinois River as a scenic river, while maintaining the agricultural and economic viability of Northeast Arkansas.

Coastal Louisiana Wetlands: Coastal Louisiana wetlands, covering about 3.5 million acres, make up 30% of the coastal wetlands in the continental U.S. The latest U.S. Geological Survey estimates the annual coastal wetland loss in Louisiana to be about 23 square miles per year, which constitutes about 90% of the annual coastal wetlands loss in the United States. Working together with multi-agency task forces, and through the Coastal Wetlands, Planning, Protection and Restoration Act (CWPPRA) authorities, Region 6 will create, restore, protect, and enhance Louisiana's coastal wetland ecosystems.

Gulf of Mexico Hypoxic Zone: The Gulf of Mexico serves as one of Region 6's major ecosystems. Scientific evidence indicates that excess nutrients from 31-State Mississippi and Atchafalaya River drainage basins deplete dissolved oxygen levels in the Gulf of Mexico. This "hypoxic" zone, which measured 3,300 square miles in 2003, fluctuates in size from year to year and threatens the health of the Gulf's aquatic ecosystem. We must work in partnership with other Federal and State agencies to develop nutrient management strategies to reduce nutrient discharges into the Mississippi and Atchafalaya Rivers, and the Gulf of Mexico.

U.S./Mexico Border: A unique part of Region 6 is the 1,200 mile border that the States of Texas and New Mexico share with four Mexican States. The rapid population growth in this area has resulted in unplanned development, greater demand for land and energy, traffic congestion, increased waste generation, overburdened or unavailable waste treatment and disposal facilities and increased frequency of chemical emergencies. Water is the most limited resource in this region. Surface and groundwater resources are threatened by contamination, including agricultural run-off,

industrial discharge, and untreated sewage. As a result, some border residents suffer from environmental health problems, including waterborne and respiratory diseases. Working with State, local and Mexican partners, as identified in the Border 2012 program, we will provide available funding, work toward reducing water contamination, and promote an increase in the number of homes connected to potable water supply and wastewater collection and treatment systems.

North Bosque Watershed: The North Bosque watershed is impaired due to nutrient and pathogen contamination. A large concentration of dairy farms exists in the watershed, and a substantial amount of cow manure and related dairy wastes threaten the watershed. Pollution is primarily due to concentrated animal feeding operation lagoon overflows and runoff from waste application fields. Lake Waco, a prominent water body in the North Bosque watershed, serves as the source of the city of Waco's drinking water supply. We must work together with State and Federal agencies, producers, and producer groups so that impaired segments in the watershed meet water quality standards while ensuring a viable dairy industry.

Tribal Lands: Region 6 is home to some 66 sovereign Indian Nations. At many of these tribes, there are insufficient program and infrastructure resources to meet the needs of the tribal communities. To address these shortfalls, we must increase our capacity building efforts so that Tribes can administer all aspects of water quality programs and ensure the protection of human health and the environment. We must also leverage additional resources from Federal Agencies who share our public health and environmental protection mission.

Tribal Drinking Water Compliance: Tribal drinking water system compliance lags well behind State compliance rates in Region 6. In 2002, about 62% of the Tribal population received drinking water that met all health-based standards established by the Safe Drinking Water Act, whereas Region 6 States achieved 93% compliance. Generally, many Tribes lack adequate infrastructure and operator skills needed to comply with the drinking water standards. New drinking water rules (e.g., arsenic and radionuclides) will pose even greater drinking water compliance challenges for the Region 6 Tribes. We must target funding and capacity building efforts to improve Tribal drinking water compliance to levels on par with the levels achieved by our States.

Sector Priorities

Agriculture Sector: More than 232 million acres of the 900 million acres devoted to agriculture in the United States are in Region 6. Region 6 produces more than 27 billion dollars worth of food and fiber each year. Agriculture in Region 6 contributes significantly to local, State and national economies, but environmental harm can and does result in certain circumstances. Surface and ground water quality is deteriorating as a result of sediment, pesticide, fertilizer, animal waste, and agricultural chemical loading. The regional impacts to the environment and in particular, to water quality in areas such as the Illinois River watershed, the North Bosque watershed, and the Gulf of Mexico have been described above. Working in partnership with State and Federal agencies and the agricultural community, we must promote environmental awareness, alternative production and waste management practices, and support for water resource and environmental restoration and protection.

Energy Sector: A growing economy, expanding population, and a rising standard of living challenges America's energy policy. To ensure our energy resources meet our current and future needs, the U.S. must use energy more wisely, modernize our

infrastructure, and increase energy supplies while protecting the environment. Potential conflicts between the CWA, SDWA, and the National Energy Policy require efficient and streamlined approaches to facilitate compliance by the energy sector. We must work collaboratively with other agencies, the energy sector, non-government organizations, and the public when regulating deepwater ports, oil and gas exploration and development activities, power plants, underground injection control waste disposal and enhanced recovery operations, and waste-to-energy projects to ensure CWA and SDWA requirements are met without impeding the National Energy Policy.

Local Governments: The growth and expansion of urban areas usually results in an increase in point and non-point sources of water pollution and habitat loss. Outdated and failing water and wastewater treatment facilities can add to the problem of deteriorating water quality. Economic impacts of new environmental regulations, which pose difficult compliance issues for small communities, often put local governments in a situation of choosing between growth and development or environmental preservation. We must work with local governments to ensure that urbanized growth minimizes any impact to water quality. Implementing innovative strategies such as smart growth and green infrastructure concepts, water quality trading programs, and asset management to deal with aging infrastructure will assist local governments in managing growth and preserving aquatic resources.

General Program Priorities

New Drinking Water Rule Implementation: The 1996 Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) Amendments created an unprecedented level of regulatory activity for the program, and States face an enormous workload in adopting and implementing these new rules. Since 1998, more than 10 new regulations have been promulgated and States must now implement the new regulations. Faced with shrinking budgets, States will be hard-pressed to provide the same level of compliance assistance that they have in the past. Small drinking water systems that often lack the needed infrastructure and operator skill level to comply with drinking water rules will be especially challenged by the new requirements. We must work innovatively and in partnership with our States to ensure that public drinking water remains safe for all Region 6 residents.

Implement Watershed Approach to Permitting, WQS, TMDLs, and NPS controls: Today's water quality problems are often caused by many different and diffuse sources and individual practices. Addressing these complex pollution problems demands an approach grounded in sound science, innovative solutions, broad public involvement, and adaptive management. A watershed approach is a better way to address water quality problems. This approach focuses multi-stakeholder and multi-program efforts within hydrologically defined boundaries to protect and restore our aquatic resources and ecosystems. To protect and improve water quality on a watershed basis, Region 6 will work in partnership with the States to focus their efforts on integrating the six core water program areas that form the foundation of the Clean Water Act. Specifically we will collaborate on:

- 1) strengthening the water quality standards program;
- 2) improving water quality monitoring and assessment;
- 3) developing Total Maximum Daily Loads and related plans;
- 4) implementing effective non-point source practices on a watershed basis;
- 5) strengthening the NPDES permit program; and

6) supporting sustainable wastewater infrastructure.

Drinking Water and Waste Water Security: Under Presidential Decision Directive 63, EPA was given responsibility for the security of the nation's drinking water and wastewater systems. To ensure the safety of the water infrastructure in the event of terrorist and other intentional attacks, we are working with drinking water and wastewater utilities to assess their vulnerabilities and to develop effective emergency response plans. For community drinking water systems serving more than 3,300 people, these activities must be completed before December 31, 2004, as required by the Bioterrorism Act of 2002. We will work with drinking water utilities to ensure that all systems comply with the Bioterrorism Act to help safeguard our water infrastructure.

Effective Grants Management: Each year EPA awards approximately \$4 billion in grants, which constitutes over half of the Agency's budget. This funding is a critical mechanism through which EPA works with States, local governments, Tribes, educational institutions, and non-profit organizations toward achieving environmental and public health protection goals. Within EPA, the Office of Water manages the most grants and the most types of grants. As of October 2003, 87.5% of the EPA Region 6 grant funding was managed by the WQPD. The WQPD currently manages almost 600 assistance agreements (including Interagency Agreements) representing over \$2.4 billion. EPA's grant management has been increasingly recognized as an Agency priority over the past ten years, and is now very thoroughly scrutinized by EPA's Inspector General, the General Accounting Office, the Office of Management and Budget, and Congress. Effective management of this crucial workload is an essential part of the Division's mission. Project Officers in the Assistance Programs Branch are responsible for providing guidance and direction to assistance recipients. They are also responsible for coordination of oversight activities. However, almost every employee in the Division works in partnership with the project officers by either providing scientific, technical, and financial advice, or assisting in organizing training and outreach opportunities, or participating in project evaluations. Effective grants management is a fundamental part of the framework the WQPD needs to maintain in order to achieve its goals.

GOALS

Our goals, in composite, define what we must do to be a successful organization. The WQPD commits to achieving the measures under the following goals during the period, 2004-2008:

GOAL 1 ***Ensure that all waters in Region 6 meet all designated uses, and that all citizens in Region 6 have safe drinking water.***

Measures

80% of assessed river/stream miles, lake acres, and estuary square miles will meet water quality standards.

95% of Region 6's population will receive water from community water systems that meets all health-based standards established by the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA).

GOAL 2 ***Work in partnership with Tribes and States to develop and strengthen their capacity to administer the nation's best water quality programs.***

Measures

75% of lake acres, 20% of river/stream miles, and 75% of estuarine square miles will be monitored and assessed for chemical/physical parameters and where appropriate, biological parameters.

75% of Water Quality Standards triennial revisions will be completed and submitted to Region 6 for approval.

TMDLs, watershed plans or other regulatory actions will be completed for 25% of waters identified as impaired on state 303(d) lists.

All Region 6 States will have an approved Continuing Planning Process.

Complete at least 6 projects that will protect and/or restore 1,406 acres of Louisiana's coastal wetlands.

15,000 additional acres of habitat within Region 6's three estuaries that are part of the National Estuary Program will be protected, enhanced, or restored.

All ocean disposal sites located in Region 6 will have approved site management and monitoring plans.

Under the Wetlands Enforcement Program, Region 6 will complete 20 formal actions and 40 site investigations to maintain compliance with CWA Section 404 program requirements.

95% of community water systems in Region 6 will be in compliance with all SDWA health-based standards promulgated prior to December 2001; and 80% of community water systems in Region 6 will be in compliance with all SDWA health-based standards promulgated after January 2002.

Region 6 States will have adopted and approved primacy applications for 90% of all Drinking Water rules promulgated since 1998.

80% of community water systems, serving a population of more than 3,300 will have vulnerability assessments and emergency response plans for Homeland Security.

All Region 6 States will achieve and maintain a 90% overall NPDES permit issuance rate.

All Region 6 NPDES permitting authorities having an overall NPDES permit issuance rate (for majors and minors) below 70% over the previous six months will develop a "Permit Issuance Plan," focusing on environmentally significant permits and ensuring the integrity of core NPDES permit program implementation.

Region 6 and the States will identify environmentally significant priority permits, establish the expectations for permit issuance, and issue 95% of those priority NPDES permits scheduled for each year.

GOAL 3 ***Maintain credibility and high customer satisfaction among our States, Tribes and other stakeholders by providing prompt service and accurate information to all of our stakeholders.***

Measures

95% of time, the Water Quality Protection Division will meet established deadlines for the following key activities:

- Water Quality Standard Revisions
- TMDL Approvals
- Wetland Enforcement Response
- 303(d) list
- Award and management of Grant Funds
- Issuance and review of State NPDES permits
- Approval of State primacy revision applications for Drinking Water and Underground Injection Control programs

GOAL 4 ***Establish and maintain a high quality, well organized and diverse workforce.***

Measures

Develop and implement a People Plan that addresses staff hiring, training and development, and retention.

Align human resources with priorities by completing a workforce analysis every 3 years.

Maintain the lowest employee turnover rate of any Division in Region 6.

Conduct a semiannual, voluntary and anonymous assessment of employee satisfaction, and achieve a satisfaction rating of 8 or above on a 10-point scale.

Establish a Division Advisory Work Group to address employee issues and concerns.

ACCOUNTABILITY

For the work we do in the WQPD, accountability ultimately boils down to whether or not our actions, in collaboration with our partners, are having the environmental response we seek. Does our collective energy produce the environmental improvements intended by the legislation and rules under which we operate? Unfortunately, with current technology and methodologies, we are not always able to

measure the impact of our programs. Regardless, we need to do the very best we can, recognizing and being forthright about what we are able to measure. While definitive measures of our success may not always be possible at this time, we should, nonetheless continue to devote considerable effort to developing such measures. Being able to quantify the impact of our programs will be significantly more rewarding than simply assuming we are improving the environment because we are successfully implementing regulations. While such environmental measures of success are being developed, careful monitoring of program implementation and partner relationships will help ensure we are on the right track. We will work with our financial assistance recipients to develop sound work plans that clearly identify the anticipated environmental and human health benefits while demonstrating fiscal accountability and sound stewardship of Federal funds. Ultimately, our accountability must be seen in the environmental responses we are able to measure. Accountability will remain a work in progress.

PEOPLE PLAN

The Water Quality Protection Division's People Plan presents the Division's roadmap to prepare its workforce to meet the water resource challenges of the 21st century. It is an integral part of the Division's Strategic Plan, and was presented to the Division employees for review on January 8, 2004. The People Plan looks at the skills and competencies that will be lost due to retirements and attrition over the next five years, and sets in motion a plan that assures EPA Region 6 will have the skills and competencies required to maintain its leadership in water quality protection efforts. The People Plan also addresses the development and training needs for Division staff, including incentives, accountability strategies, and supervision practices that impact employee morale, well-being, and performance.

The Division will work to create an organizational culture where all employees are valued and respected, and where each employee recognizes his/her contribution to the Division's and Agency's mission. The Division will clearly communicate its strategic goals and desired outcomes to staff. As staff work collaboratively to achieve desired outcomes, they will be recognized and rewarded for their performance. Additionally, staff are encouraged to obtain necessary training and development to improve their performance and develop new competencies. Supervisors will be expected to create a learning and challenging environment to achieve excellence.

FUTURE REVISIONS

Periodic adjustments to the Plan will surely be needed over the next 5 years to accommodate emerging, revised or new priorities, budget issues, or newly enacted legislation. Strategic plans must be flexible, so priorities and goals should not be viewed as "written in stone." Our ability to adapt to change is crucial to our success. Flexibility, however, still requires that we carefully include and monitor accountability measures to ensure we are on pace.

STATE TEAMS

The WQPD views the establishment of strong collaborative partnerships with our

States and Tribes as critical to our success because States and Tribes clearly play a pivotal role in implementing the Clean Water Act, Safe Drinking Water Act, and other water programs.

In the past, Federal, State and Tribal priorities have not always been aligned or consistent, the result being that we have sometimes worked at cross purposes rather than working for mutual benefit. We believe that now is the time to boldly enter a new level of relationship with partner agencies so that all will have a greater likelihood of improving the water resources of our respective jurisdictions. Choosing to build collaborative relationships means that we are committed to doing everything in our power to find common ground, build on that commonality, and whenever possible be willing to aggressively try new ways to help each other. We understand and acknowledge, up front, that full agreement among partners may not always be possible. However, we are committed to a vibrant, new level of open-mindedness in all of our relationships with States and Tribes.

So that we will be more flexible internally for the purpose of enhancing partner relationships, the WQPD will restructure its water programs into State teams. While the current branch and section organizational structure will remain unchanged, State teams will be formed to build and strengthen State partnerships, promote program integration, enhance communications, and to ensure program resource alignment with National and Regional priorities. The State teams will also result in staff developing a more holistic understanding of the various water programs we administer.

Each State team will consist of representatives from the water programs that involve high levels of interaction with the States. The teams will work together with their respective State agency colleagues and may use guidelines established in the draft EPA Region 6 "Getting to Partnership" white-paper, the draft "State/EPA Elevation Protocol," or other mutually agreed upon protocols. Teams will be responsible, along with their State colleagues for identifying joint priorities to ensure that State and Federal water programs meet the targets identified in the EPA Region 6 Strategic Plan and the National Water Program Guidance, and to ensure that all water program activities are efficiently and effectively integrated and coordinated. The joint priorities will outline the goals and objectives that the teams will strive to achieve during the year. Individually and collectively these work plans must track with the Regional Strategic Plan and the National Water Program Guidance. The State teams will have the responsibility to keep WQPD managers fully informed of their activities and progress.

In addition, the teams will strive to ensure consistency among EPA programs, and be fully attentive to and accountable for timely decision-making. Effective working relationships among team members and between the EPA State team and State partners will require a strong commitment to our Guiding Principles.

The exact structure of the State teams and how they will operate is currently being developed by Division management. Because State teams represent a new way of doing business for us, much of the process will unfold as we gain experience in how teams most effectively work. Learning from other Regions who are undertaking this same approach, and learning from what we do right and from our mistakes will be crucial during the early development of the State teams.