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**EVERYDAY CHOICES:**

**OPPORTUNITIES FOR**

**ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP**

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***Report to Stephen L. Johnson***  
*Administrator, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency*

EPA Innovation Action Council  
November 2005

With Preface by the Administrator  
December 2005



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20460

November 9, 2005

To the Administrator:

Environmental stewardship is on the rise. Today, a growing number of people are making informed choices in their daily lives, work places, and communities that are good for the environment, for their finances, and for overall quality of life. These actions are inspiring – and evidence of an emerging societal commitment to environmental stewardship.

EPA, and its state and tribal partners, can play a strong leadership role in nurturing environmental stewardship. To do so, we need to unify our efforts, establish clear priorities, and encourage development of networks with other organizations to multiply our reach and impact.

Recognizing this important opportunity, you challenged us in May to help develop an environmental stewardship strategy for EPA. We sought input from both within EPA and from state environmental commissioners, tribes, environmental experts and other opinion leaders. The attached report, entitled "Everyday Choices: Opportunities for Environmental Stewardship," reflects that input and presents a vision for environmental stewardship. It also includes an assessment of EPA's current stewardship activities and a proposed strategy for encouraging stewardship by individuals, communities, businesses and governments. A longer technical report includes many details and additional ideas.

We believe environmental stewardship offers great potential for solving some of our most challenging environmental problems and that it can help galvanize collaborations with a broader range of stakeholders. We envision an ambitious agenda for the Agency, one that integrates existing stewardship initiatives, builds upon our past successes, and sets near-term and long-term priorities.

In the near term, EPA can advance stewardship by articulating a consistent and compelling message and by identifying two or three priorities for immediate action. We also need to improve access to our informational resources and increase public awareness about how to adopt stewardship practices. In the long term, EPA should mainstream stewardship throughout the Agency's programs and management systems, remove organizational barriers to stewardship approaches, and continue building the knowledge base that will improve the effectiveness of stewardship initiatives. These decisions should be guided by a careful analysis of where new work can be accommodated in existing programs and where additional resources would be needed.

Your leadership has been essential in helping us prepare this report, and it will be essential in implementing the vision for stewardship – *where all parts of society actively take responsibility to improve environmental quality and achieve sustainable results*. As we go forward, we

encourage you to make environmental stewardship central to every conversation: at Agency meetings, at the White House, on Capitol Hill, with States and Tribes, and with industry and citizens' groups. We urge you to emphasize the importance of this important concept in achieving EPA's mission, to insist on concrete environmental results from stewardship initiatives, and to routinely celebrate our successes.

We believe that environmental stewardship cannot be a one-time initiative. Rather, our aim is to see this collaborative, results-oriented approach influence how EPA goes about its mission for years to come. To that end, the path forward must be defined by bold implementation steps and with strong emphasis in the upcoming revision to EPA's strategic plan and regional plans.

Environmental stewardship offers a unifying theme for enhancing all of EPA's work, including our core regulatory programs. It also strongly supports the President's initiative on cooperative conservation. We look forward to working with you on an environmental stewardship strategy that harnesses the creativity and ingenuity of our staff and external partners to lead our nation to a cleaner, safer, more prosperous future.

EPA Innovation Action Council

## **PREFACE**

**by**  
**Stephen L. Johnson**  
**Administrator**  
**U.S. Environmental Protection Agency**

This report outlines what I believe is the next step in an ongoing evolution of policy goals from pollution control to pollution prevention and sustainability. It also reflects an important reality – that while the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and our state partners share responsibility for bringing about our nation’s environmental progress to date, we have not done so alone.

Environmental stewardship has always been part of our unique American experience – we have a proud history of individuals, organizations, and other parts of our society working independently and in cooperation to protect and improve environmental quality. If we are to accelerate the pace of our environmental progress while maintaining our nation’s economic competitiveness, environmental stewardship must become an even stronger part of the steps we take to ensure our air is safe to breathe, our water more pure, and our land better protected.

In fact, EPA is gaining substantial experience with stewardship approaches to addressing environmental challenges. We now have a growing number of programs that incorporate partnerships, market incentives, recognition and leadership awards, pollution prevention, environmental education, research, technical assistance, information, and collaborative problem solving. This report, done at my request by a task force of senior career staff and several state environmental officials, identifies many of these programs and suggests new ideas. I am grateful for the effort and careful thought that went into producing it and want to share it with you.

Over the coming months, we will discuss the report’s recommendations and expand our efforts to make stewardship an inherent part of how we achieve our mission. Environmental stewardship will help us build upon our nation’s existing environmental efforts and ensure we, as a nation, are able to provide our children a safer, healthier environment, and a more economically vibrant future.

Thank you for your interest.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. L. Johnson', written in a cursive style.

December 9, 2005

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## **A Proposed Vision for Environmental Stewardship**

As our population and economy continue to expand, the U.S. can accelerate environmental progress while simultaneously strengthening our global competitiveness. In short, we have exciting opportunities to create a more sustainable future in this country and with our partners around the world. However, this bold goal cannot be accomplished by government alone; rather it requires the active engagement of all people. To this end, we have a vision of environmental stewardship – where all parts of society actively take responsibility to improve environmental quality and achieve sustainable results.

### **PART 1:**

#### **Working Toward a More Sustainable Future**

*The president of a major U.S. manufacturing company announces plans to invest \$1.5 billion in the development of cleaner technologies and products over the next ten years, positioning the company for sales in key markets. “We plan to make money doing it,” he says.*

*The U.S. Business Roundtable announces an initiative that asks America’s leading companies to set challenging environmental and social improvement goals and to meet those goals in a manner that creates business value.*

*The mayors of 50 cities from around the world sign the United Nations Urban Environmental Accords, listing 21 actions to improve energy use, waste reduction, urban design, urban nature, transportation, environmental health and water use.*

*The U.S. Secretary of the Army issues a far-reaching sustainability strategy to strengthen its long-term military effectiveness.*

*The number of individuals placing orders for new hybrid-fueled automobiles creates months-long backlogs.*

These recent developments and many others just like them suggest that a new era of environmental opportunity is upon us. For more than three decades, our country has made steady environmental progress. We have put laws in place to protect our people and natural resources from many types of risks. We have developed environmental standards and held public and private institutions accountable for meeting them. Along the way, we have also learned a great deal about how to achieve our goals. We no longer focus solely on controlling pollution.

Today, EPA and other organizations in the U.S. and around the world are thinking more holistically about how to achieve sustainability – widely defined as the ability to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations meet their own needs. Along with this evolution in thinking has come a realization that improving environmental quality can lead to a higher quality of life and to new products and markets that boost economic competitiveness. For many, sustainability is now the end goal, one that can assure a more secure future and that is naturally pursued through environmental stewardship.

## 1.1 WHAT IS ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP?

At the most basic level, stewardship means taking responsibility for our choices. The relevance to environmental protection is easy to see, and indeed, many organizations – from the World Business Council for Sustainable Development to the National Academy of Public Administration to the National Religious Partnership for the Environment – recognize the value of environmental stewardship in achieving sustainable results. This interest is also pervasive among Native Americans, who have long embraced environmental stewardship as part of their culture. Recognizing the growing interest in this important concept and its potential for improving environmental results, EPA is increasingly incorporating stewardship strategies into its programs and activities.

We define environmental stewardship as the responsibility for environmental quality shared by all those whose actions affect the environment. This sense of responsibility is a value that can be reflected through the choices of individuals, companies, communities, and government organizations, and shaped by unique environmental, social, and economic interests. It is also a behavior, one demonstrated through continuous improvement of environmental performance, and a commitment to efficient use of natural resources, protection of ecosystems, and, where applicable, ensuring a baseline of compliance with environmental requirements.

Environmental stewardship is not a new phenomenon. In fact, it has deep and diverse roots in our country. From farming to hunting, from conservation practices to spiritual beliefs, one can find an appreciation for natural resources and the valuable services they provide in many diverse settings.

As we explore how to become a more sustainable society, it is clear that environmental stewardship can help preserve natural resources and achieve sustainable outcomes. In this project, we focused on six natural resource systems and desired outcomes for each one. They are:

- Air: Sustain clean and healthy air
- Ecosystems: Protect and restore ecosystems functions, goods, and services
- Energy: Generate clean energy and use it efficiently
- Land: Support ecologically sensitive land management and development
- Materials: Use materials carefully and shift to environmentally preferable materials
- Water: Sustain water resources to ensure quality and availability for desired uses



Environmental stewardship also offers a powerful tool for governance, particularly at this point in time. While the U.S. has made tremendous progress in addressing the most visible and egregious forms of pollution – from smokestacks and wastewater pipes – we still face the challenge of dealing with countless small, diffuse sources of pollution, such as polluted runoff and individual vehicle emissions. We also face the loss of habitat and biodiversity within ecosystems, and emerging issues, such as the unknown environmental impacts of nanotechnology. For many of these problems, stewardship solutions seem to offer the best approach because they frequently address root causes.

Meanwhile, there are significant changes happening in society. New information systems allow us to process and share information faster than ever imagined. Cutting edge technologies enable us to understand and address problems that previously we did not even know existed. These and other developments underscore the importance of having an adaptive environmental protection system and of being ready to act upon opportunities that promise better environmental results.

As the opening of this report shows, change is clearly underway. Today, many Americans are making everyday choices with greater care to sustain a healthier life and cleaner environment for themselves and their families. Businesses are investing in environmental stewardship because it results in lower expenses, better products, a stronger corporate brand, and improved relationships with neighbors, suppliers, customers and government regulators. Communities are pursuing smart growth to improve quality of life. Government agencies are creating incentives that can lead people and organizations to voluntarily make environmentally-sound choices. These trends suggest that the time is right for a broad-based commitment to environmental stewardship.

## **1.2 ENCOURAGING AND ENABLING ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP**

As the leading environmental agency in the U.S., EPA has an important role to play in promoting environmental stewardship – within businesses, communities, non-governmental organizations, and with our partners throughout government. There is an especially great opportunity to support stewardship by individuals and households. More than 295 million Americans make countless choices every day, and yet the environmental impact of many of those decisions is often overlooked. The potential to reap benefits from individual action is great. For example, if every U.S. household replaced one incandescent light bulb at home with one that has earned the ENERGY STAR label, the country would save \$600 million in energy bills, conserve enough energy to light 7 million homes, and prevent greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to 1 million cars. The nation could expect similarly impressive gains through individual commitment to water conservation, recycling, and other environmentally-beneficial practices.

Although specific EPA initiatives, such as partnership programs and education initiatives, are designed to promote environmental stewardship, all of EPA's work contributes to this goal to some degree. And thus, our challenge is to determine how EPA's collective resources can be leveraged most effectively to achieve stewardship on the broadest possible scale. In addition, we must think strategically about the variety of roles stewardship may require the Agency to play. Depending on the circumstances, these may range from catalyst to leader to provider of information and other essential resources.

Looking ahead, EPA will maintain strong regulatory programs while also working toward a society that willingly makes environmentally responsible choices far superior to any that could be mandated by government. Living in a society where everyone takes responsibility to improve environmental quality for a more sustainable future – that is our vision and one that EPA should vigorously pursue with every willing and able partner.

## **PART 2:**

# **Taking Stock of EPA's Environmental Stewardship**

## **Activities and Opportunities**

In thinking about an improved strategy for environmental stewardship, EPA gathered background information from three important sources. First, we talked to a number of individuals and organizations outside of EPA who have long been involved in stewardship approaches, many of whom are true leaders in the field. Second, we looked at how well our existing stewardship programs are working. And third, we relied on the extensive experience and expertise of our own senior managers and staff. Together, these sources provide many valuable perspectives for informing the development of an environmental stewardship strategy.

### **2.1 VIEWS FROM ENVIRONMENTAL EXPERTS AND STAKEHOLDERS**

Recognizing that many outside parties are actively engaged in environmental stewardship issues, we conducted interviews with a number of environmental experts and stakeholders. The interviews with experts from academia, policy and research institutions, and conservation and sustainability organizations occurred early and helped shape the organization of this project. Stakeholders included representatives from corporations and business, non-profit environmental groups, state and local governments, and tribal nations. Together, these conversations provided EPA with a number of insights, which are summarized below:

#### **What motivates stewardship behaviors?**

- Information and scientific evidence about the status of natural resources
- Increasing awareness of the risks and opportunities associated with business supply chains
- Growing public interest in environmentally responsible purchasing and investing

#### **What hinders people and organizations from adopting stewardship behaviors?**

- The perception that small actions do not really make a difference
- Difficulty in making green products competitive in the marketplace
- Lack of attention to environmental performance by investment and financial institutions
- Difficulty in measuring stewardship behavior and performance

#### **What steps could EPA take to promote environmental stewardship?**

- Improve coordination of partnership programs and adopt more customer-oriented features

- Increase technical assistance for small and medium-sized businesses
- Conduct marketing research to better understand the attitudes that routinely influence people's behaviors and choices
- Use EPA's position and authority to lead a national dialogue about environmental stewardship and showcase successful examples
- Work with the education community to make stewardship principles part of the minimum educational standards for U.S. students
- Demonstrate a commitment to environmental stewardship through EPA's own operations and purchasing decisions

## **2.2 AN ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT EPA STEWARDSHIP INITIATIVES**

Recognizing that an improved strategy for environmental stewardship must begin with a thorough understanding of how well current stewardship activities are working, we were interesting in learning:

- How well do current activities motivate environmental stewardship and with what results?
- Has EPA targeted the best opportunities for stewardship approaches, both in terms of environmental challenges and key audiences?
- Are stewardship efforts successfully shifting toward "upstream" solutions based on prevention and sustainability?

These are important questions. However, they are difficult to answer fully at this time. This is true for a number of reasons, starting with the difficulty of drawing a bright line between what does and does not promote environmental stewardship. When we began this assessment, we recognized the need for some criteria to focus the scope of our analysis. One fact we could not overlook was that while enforcement and regulatory programs have a number of activities that indirectly promote environmental stewardship, those programs command the overwhelming majority of EPA's personnel and budget. Hence, including them in the assessment would make it difficult, if not impossible, to see the contributions of non-regulatory initiatives. Thus, we restructured our analysis to focus on non-regulatory programs that are explicitly designed to promote environmentally sound action by stakeholders.

We initially identified more than 400 activities for this assessment. Generally, they fell into one of three categories: partnership programs that engage others in environmentally-meaningful actions for reasons other than regulatory compliance, funding programs, and programs that provide information and education resources. While these three categories may share the same goal (improving protection of the environment and public health), they go about it in very different ways. As a result, there was not a common set of performance measures that could be readily aggregated. Moreover, the amount and quality of performance data on individual activities varied widely. In some cases, the data were simply not available – either because

performance measures were still under development or because the data were unavailable during the assessment timeframe.

These and other realities posed enormous challenges to a full and rigorous analysis of current environmental stewardship activities. As a result, we focused on a subset of programs that, collectively, offered the most robust and consistent forms of information – EPA’s partnership programs (often referred to as “voluntary” programs). The findings from this assessment of EPA’s 133 partnership programs are summarized below and presented in more detail in the Technical Report. While they do not address research, compliance assistance, and many other activities that indirectly promote environmental stewardship, they do provide a number of important insights that should guide EPA in deciding how to best advance environmental stewardship in the future.

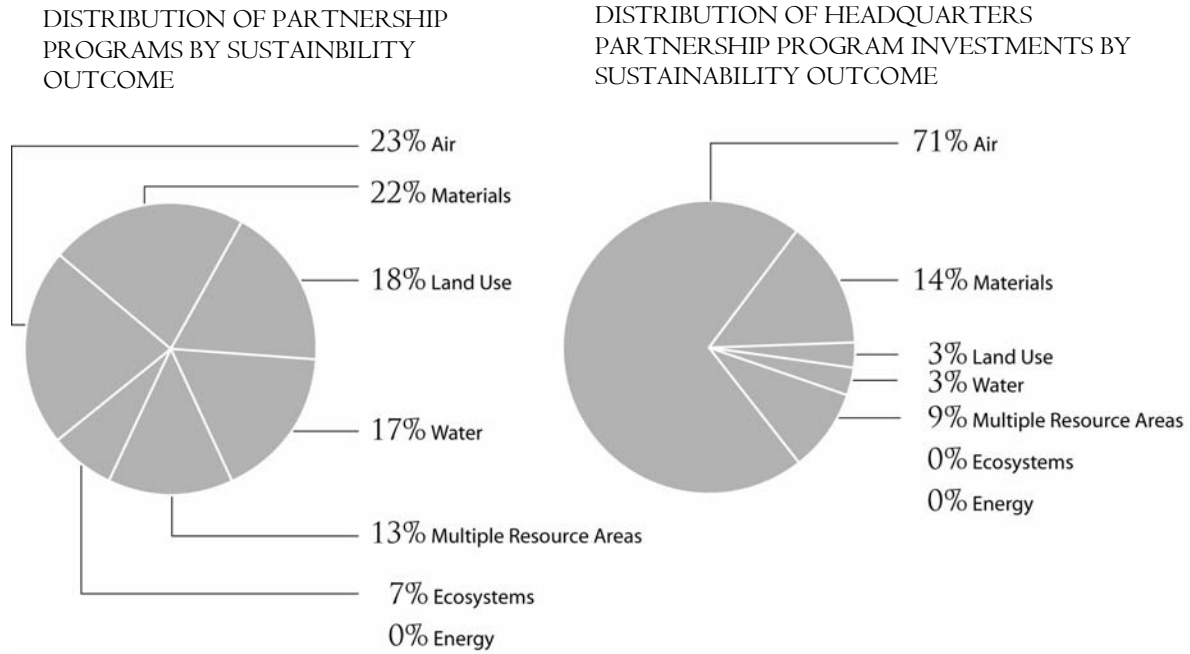
### **2.2.1 What resources does EPA allocate to partnership programs?**

Because budget information was not available for regional partnership programs at the time of this assessment, we focused exclusively on national partnership initiatives. Of those 87 programs, 73 had sufficient budget data. Collectively, they account for \$125 million in 2005 spending or the equivalent of 1.6% of EPA’s total budget (\$8 billion for 2005). It is important to recall this relatively modest percentage does not reflect all of EPA’s partnership programs, but rather spending for three-quarters of its national partnership programs. The assessment also showed that EPA has a few large partnership programs and many small ones – seven programs account for two-thirds of the spending on national partnership programs while 66 programs account for the other one third.

### **2.2.2 What environmental sustainability goals and stakeholder groups are addressed by EPA’s partnership programs?**

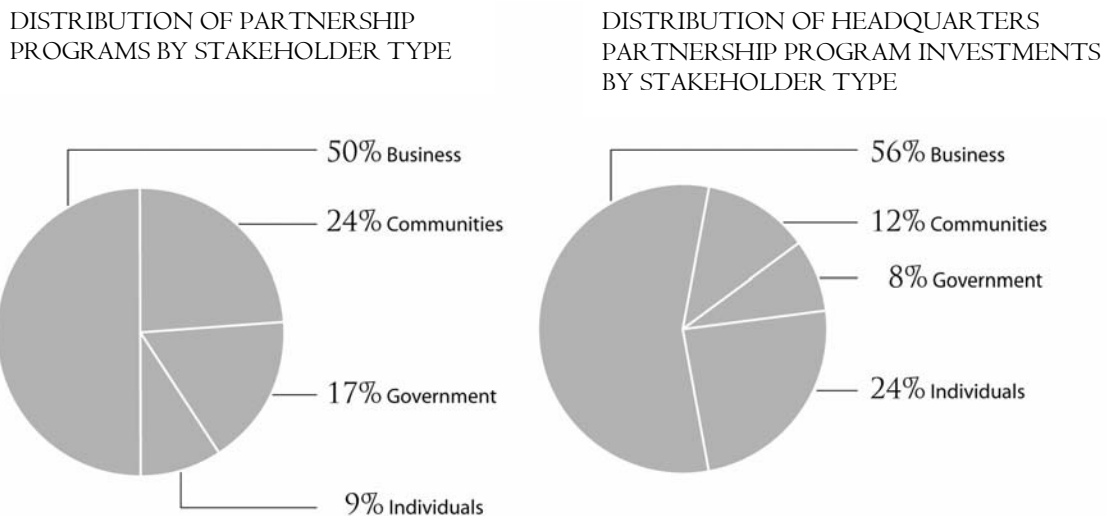
In undertaking this assessment, we identified the primary sustainability outcome each program is designed to achieve, and we also accounted for the fact that some programs are explicitly designed with multiple outcomes in mind. As Figure 1 shows, the majority of EPA’s partnership programs are directed, in a roughly equal distribution, towards air, materials, land, and water issues. Only a small number address ecosystems, and there are no programs designed primarily to achieve sustainable energy. (While EPA does have programs that focus on energy, most notably ENERGY STAR, their primary purpose is to achieve the air quality benefits that come from efficient energy use. Hence, in this analysis, they are characterized as sustainable air programs). Eighteen programs address more than one resource type. Budget data show that the majority of EPA’s national partnership program dollars – nearly three-quarters – are invested in air-related programs.

**Figure 1**



In terms of target audiences, about half of EPA’s partnership programs engage the business sector (Figure 2). About another quarter are designed with community partners in mind. The remaining programs are split between those that promote stewardship with governments and with individuals. Business-focused programs also take the largest share of EPA’s national partnership program budgets, accounting for slightly more than half of the total. Note, however, that programs targeting individuals receive a larger share of the budgetary pie than the number of programs would suggest, while the opposite is true of programs directed at governmental stakeholders.

**Figure 2**

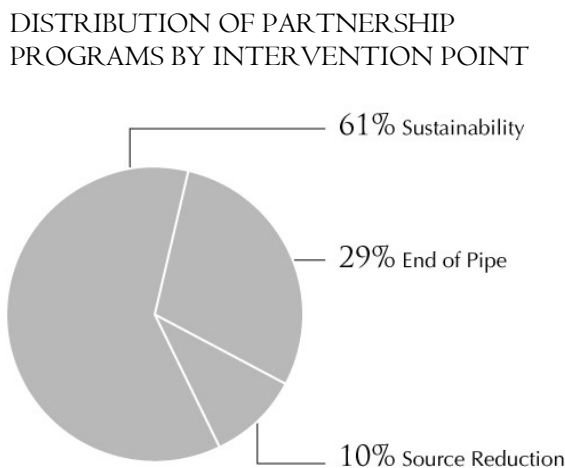


### 2.2.3 Do EPA’s partnership programs promote prevention and sustainability strategies?

The assessment suggests EPA’s partnership programs do promote prevention and sustainability. Over time, EPA has looked to complement traditional regulatory programs with approaches that consider environmental problems and risks earlier and often even before they are created. As the name implies, source reduction programs focus on reducing or eliminating the pollution source. Sustainability programs involve working with businesses and individuals to re-envision production and consumption approaches in ways that reduce life-cycle environmental impacts while also addressing social and economic issues.

Of the 133 partnership programs, we were able to assign 118 to one of these specific categories. Of that subset, 72 can be classified as sustainability programs, 12 as source reduction programs, and 34 as “end-of-pipe” programs. It appears that about two-thirds of the air programs are sustainability programs, and more than half of the materials and water programs are as well.

**Figure 3**



### 2.2.4. Are partnership programs effectively delivering environmental results?

While we have considerable anecdotal and intuitive evidence that suggests partnership programs are making a difference – and even stakeholders telling us so – for reasons described earlier, it is difficult to assess the collective environmental results from partnership programs at this point in time. We do, however, have performance data on specific programs. EPA’s Performance Track, for example, a leadership program that recognizes top environmental performance, reports that, since inception, members have collectively reduced water use by 1.3 billion gallons, cut solid waste by 600,000 tons, and conserved more than 8.4 trillion BTUs of energy.

## 2.3 OBSERVATIONS FROM EPA SENIOR MANAGERS AND STAFF

The observations presented below reflect the significant experience and expertise of EPA’s managers and staff. Together with the views of external experts and stakeholders and the quantitative assessment, they provide the base of knowledge that has informed the development of the proposed stewardship strategy described in Part 3.

**Clarify what we mean by stewardship and why it's important** – Recognizing that the term stewardship can mean different things to different people, we need to clarify what the term means in the context of our work and why it matters to the country. Doing so is critical to having a meaningful dialogue about stewardship with our own staff and with the many external organizations we aim to partner with.

**Recognize that stewardship can reframe the environmental agenda** – The concept of stewardship creates an opportunity to reframe the way environmental problems are viewed and addressed. Rather than discussing them in conventional and often overly technical terms, we can view them as opportunities for improving efficiency, engaging in problem-solving, and sustaining clean water, clean air and other natural resources. These are objectives that are likely to resonate with a much broader audience and set of interests.

**Explain how stewardship fits with regulatory programs** – In some ways, EPA's role in stewardship differs from its regulatory responsibilities – it is more to encourage and enable desired behaviors than to require them. Specifically, EPA has an important role to play in providing information, particularly at the “wholesale” level, in delivering technical and financial assistance, in building knowledge, and in recognizing and sharing best practices. EPA's regulatory programs should assist in these roles; at a minimum, they should not discourage environmental stewardship.

**Model the stewardship we hope to see in others** – EPA cannot ask others to do what it is not willing to do itself. As the leading U.S. environmental agency, EPA has a responsibility to set the bar high with regard to its own environmental stewardship and to publicly report on results.

**Fully engage EPA's work force** – EPA is fortunate to have a workforce that is highly committed to its mission. As our numerous stewardship initiatives show, the staff has shown impressive creativity and imagination in finding innovative approaches for achieving environmental results. EPA should actively encourage this entrepreneurial spirit that is so important for solving today's environmental challenges, and support employee interests in environmental stewardship on and off the job.

**Improve our internal management and accountability systems** – While EPA has taken important steps over the past 18 months to improve the management of its partnership programs, there is no systematic process for managing the full set of stewardship activities. Nor is there an agency-wide process for making strategic choices about stewardship investments. EPA needs a better understanding of how our programs and initiatives promote environmental stewardship and of their efficacy in achieving environmental results.

**Improve methods for measuring results** – EPA needs to devote more attention to measuring the environmental results of its stewardship activities. Specifically EPA needs outcome-oriented measures that are both sensitive and adaptive to different programs and initiatives. The Agency should build on the current Indicators Initiative, the draft Report on the Environment, and other domestic and international efforts to improve measurement of environmental results.

**Continue to build networks and partnerships** – By definition, stewardship means taking responsibility for individual action. However, the real value of stewardship comes when the



benefits of those individual actions are magnified many times over. Consistent with the recent Executive Order on Cooperative Conservation, EPA should seek to extend its reach by working with the many other organizations that share stewardship interests. By leveraging resources, EPA and its partners can significantly increase their collective impact and achieve greater environmental gains than would be expected through individual effort. EPA should seek similar benefits and efficiencies by building stronger connections internally among its own programs.

**Help stakeholders access EPA stewardship programs and activities** – While EPA offers many resources for promoting environmental stewardship, information and other tools can be hard to find and sort through for those outside the Agency. If EPA wants to support and engage external partners, we must do a better job of packaging information in forms that are easy for them to access and understand.

**Engage States and Tribes in developing new initiatives** – Many State and Tribal officials are interested in pursuing environmental stewardship and sustainability strategies, and many already have stewardship activities underway. States and Tribes appear willing to work with EPA to ensure that activities at all levels of government are mutually reinforcing.

## PART 3:

### A Proposed Environmental Stewardship Strategy

EPA has a wide range of opportunities for promoting environmental stewardship. Indeed, defining our path forward requires making some strategic choices – starting with careful consideration of EPA's unique role and mission, the most effective leverage points for change, and how we can best combine our efforts with others to support environmental stewardship on the broadest possible scale. Our approach will be to build upon and integrate the many existing stewardship activities while pursuing new ideas that can improve results in the future.

To set overall direction and goals, EPA needs a comprehensive environmental stewardship strategy. This strategy should unify EPA's stewardship initiatives, maximize the effectiveness of existing stewardship efforts, include a process for setting priorities for additional activity, and foster development of networks with other organizations to multiply EPA's reach and impact. The strategy should challenge everyone – within EPA, as well as all external partners – to play an active role in using environmental stewardship to achieve measurable environmental results. We propose five key elements:

**Focus on priority environmental problems where stewardship has greatest potential** – initiate a small number of activities in cross-cutting areas where stewardship approaches can contribute to more sustainable solutions.

**Engage individuals in environmental stewardship** – communicate the “power of one” so people understand their everyday actions do matter, and provide incentives that motivate them to make sound environmental stewardship choices.

**Showcase best practices and accomplishments** – enhance the use of recognition and challenge programs to address priority environmental problems, with a goal of stimulating innovative stewardship approaches and increasing adoption of sound practices by both individuals and organizations.

**Lead by example** – demonstrate environmental stewardship in all aspects of EPA's operations (facility management, purchasing decisions, and human resources) and work with other federal agencies to promote environmental stewardship across the government.

**Mainstream stewardship in EPA decision processes** – build capacity for environmental stewardship by integrating it into EPA's planning, management and accountability systems.

EPA's commitment to stewardship must be reflected in near-term and long-term priorities. In the near term, EPA should place priority on developing an outreach campaign that engages and connects with individuals; creating tools that enable specific stakeholder groups to practice sound environmental stewardship; and, designing a few new initiatives to spur progress on priority environmental challenges. Additionally, EPA should expand and publicize its commitment to environmental stewardship in its operations, and encourage each employee to get involved in environmental stewardship initiatives in his or her community.

In the longer-term, EPA should commit to continuously integrating environmental stewardship into EPA's programs and management systems. This will require taking on the oftentimes difficult challenge of working across organizational (and media-specific) boundaries. EPA must also conduct a more complete assessment of existing stewardship activities, and invest in research and the development of performance measures that provide us with essential information for advancing environmental stewardship initiatives.

The following sections provide a number of options that could shape the specific details of an EPA environmental stewardship strategy. EPA will undertake more detailed planning, including joint planning by regional offices and States, once senior management priorities are determined. We should also commit to reporting on progress after the first year.

### **3.1 FOCUS ON PRIORITY ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS WHERE STEWARDSHIP HAS THE GREATEST POTENTIAL**

This strategy presents EPA with an opportunity to target problems that are priorities at the national level, such as sustainable water infrastructure, and in our regions and the States, such as storm water and agricultural impacts. In deciding which problems are most amenable to a stewardship approach, EPA should consider where the success of a stewardship approach has already been demonstrated on a smaller scale and whether the issue is likely to garner the interest and support of other stakeholders.

3.1.1 Design stewardship strategies for a small set of cross-cutting priority issues. Some environmental challenges are best defined and solved with a multi-media perspective that cuts across traditional organizational boundaries. Through Hospitals for a Healthy Environment, for example, States and several EPA offices have united around a goal of reducing mercury in medical waste streams and improving overall environmental performance. Environmental stewardship provides EPA with an excellent opportunity to achieve similar progress on other issues and to demonstrate how a collaborative approach can foster sustainability of natural resources. EPA could provide leadership in a number of areas, including:

- *Sustainable products* – Drawing upon lessons learned from recent work on electronics, as well as the Green Suppliers Network, Design for the Environment and other initiatives, use a product focus to unite the appropriate media programs around the development of more sustainable goods. An agency-wide initiative could focus on the key decision-makers (e.g., manufacturers, technology developers, retailers, consumers) and the critical decision points that exist within product life cycles – from design, through manufacture and use, to end of life disposal or reuse. It should be applied to both existing products and to emerging products, like nanotechnologies.
- *Clean transportation* – Expand the EPA and State focus on innovative solutions to air quality, energy and other environmental impacts of transportation. Build on successes in Smart Way Transport, Best Workplaces for Commuters, and the Diesel Retrofit Program, and look for new opportunities presented by the Energy Policy Act.
- *Ecosystem protection* – Working with Federal, State, Tribal and local partners, initiate new projects that use a mix of regulatory and non-regulatory measures to protect and restore

ecosystem functions, and fully utilize authorities provided under the National Environmental Policy Act. Also, encourage use of market mechanisms to reflect the immense value that a wide range of ecosystems services provide, and that stimulate entrepreneurial action, investment and market innovation.

- *Community stewardship* – Support local institutions that can design environmental stewardship strategies with community involvement. Using the Community Action for a Renewed Environment (or CARE) program as a model, consider other ways to engage a variety of partners, including neighborhoods, schools, religious congregations, and environmental organizations, in collaborative environmental problem solving.
- *Resource conservation* – Pursue opportunities to conserve water, energy, materials, and other natural resources to achieve multiple benefits. Start by finding ways to leverage and better coordinate existing programs, such as the Resource Conservation Challenge, WasteWise, ENERGY STAR, and water conservation.

3.1.2 Strategic use of challenge programs. Challenge programs offer a cost-effective way to raise the profile of an important environmental issue and galvanize participation in the development of solutions. EPA has used challenge programs successfully before; examples include reducing use of toxics (the former 33/50 program), accelerating testing of priority chemicals (High Production Volume Challenge), spurring environmental improvement on a facility-wide basis (Performance Track), and more recently, conserving natural resources and increasing reuse and recycling (Resource Conservation Challenge). EPA would work closely with its government partners to identify suitable challenge areas, and specific incentives, informational tools, and other resources that could be used in an effective challenge program. We should also engage non-governmental organizations, key trade associations, and other stakeholder groups to leverage their existing networks and reach a wider audience.

3.1.3 Leverage market opportunities. Harness the increasing interest in environmental performance information by investment, insurance, and other financial institutions to focus attention on priority risks. Research, develop, and support market-based incentives that can drive stewardship approaches.

## **3.2 ENGAGE INDIVIDUALS IN ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP**

An effective environmental stewardship strategy must address choices made by individuals, and harness the “power of one” to make a difference. EPA has activities aimed in this direction, such as labeling of energy efficient products under ENERGY STAR, environmental education and recognition programs, and practical information on its website. But these efforts do not work in a fully coordinated way to raise our nation’s environmental literacy. Together with many partners, EPA must focus on increasing public understanding of environmental issues and of the aggregate impact that can result from individual choices.

3.2.1 Invest in market research to understand public views and behaviors. As the leading federal environmental agency, EPA can be an influential agent in encouraging people to take responsible action. However, to be most effective, EPA needs information on public understanding and perception of environmental issues, on what kind of issues are most likely to spur interest and

action, and the best media for reaching the largest possible audience. To this end, EPA should enlist marketing expertise to better understand its target audiences and to develop an outreach campaign for effectively reaching them. Obtaining market research should be more than a one-time endeavor; it should become a routine way of gleaning the public's understanding of environmental issues and interest in initiatives for addressing them.

3.2.2. Provide practical information and tools that make stewardship easy and rewarding. A key component of any public outreach campaign should be information on how to reduce environmental impacts in daily life – as consumers, in our households and in small decisions at work and in our communities. EPA should look for ways to capitalize on the information management and delivery capabilities offered through new technologies. Recognizing the increasing reliance on the internet, in particular, EPA should focus on improving the information available on its website. One option would be to specifically highlight the need for individual action on the homepage (e.g. by creating a site that could be known as [www.epa.gov/actnow](http://www.epa.gov/actnow)). Links could be created that give people customized information on how to calculate and lessen the cumulative impact of their lifestyle choices, such as choosing to recycle.

3.2.3 Challenge individuals to achieve measurable results. Although some programs (e.g., Presidential Environmental Education Awards) recognize individual stewardship action, for the most part, EPA is not connecting with the public in a way that challenges them to understand their environmental impacts and set goals for improvement. Using results from market research, EPA should launch a creative new challenge that would capture the interest of a large and diverse audience. For example, EPA could challenge individuals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (similar to the Canadian One Tonne Challenge) or to reduce their vehicle miles traveled.

3.2.4 Set clear environmental education goals that will engage people in addressing priority problems. EPA's environmental education program can raise stakeholders' awareness of their environmental impacts, and enable them to identify and analyze their options for becoming more effective environmental stewards. The existing environmental education program should be more explicitly focused to achieve progress on priority problems.

### **3.3 SHOWCASE BEST PRACTICES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

EPA has enormous potential to capture the public's attention and influence their thinking about issues. We should use our name – and the expertise behind it – to recognize environmental stewardship activities that would benefit from greater attention and application. In essence, we should become more adept at attaining the full value of the "EPA brand," and the branding guidelines under development for EPA's partnership programs represent a good start toward developing this kind of capacity.

Strategic use of EPA recognition and spotlighting of successful stewardship models is a primary way to broaden adoption of stewardship values and practices beyond the pioneers and "first-adopters," to a larger group. Today, most companies value their environmental reputation with consumers, communities, investors, and employees, and communities compete to be "the most livable." This competitive spirit can be harnessed by EPA to promote environmental stewardship. Using its name and reputation, the Agency has an opportunity to increase awareness

about stewardship practices, to identify organizations that are environmental leaders, and to motivate businesses, communities and others to strive for continuous improvement in environmental performance.

3.3.1 Create portfolios of opportunities for specific users. EPA should package examples of strong environmental stewardship, along with tools and information, to help specific audiences put their stewardship interests to work. We have many resources to offer, but need to do a better job of increasing awareness of our programs and establishing links between them. For example, EPA could create new customer-oriented features on our website. This could include a stewardship portal organized according to key audiences (similar to the tool proposed for individuals in Section 3.2).

3.3.2. Recognize accomplishments by participants in EPA stewardship programs. EPA should become more systematic about recognizing the environmental achievements of participants in EPA's partnership programs, as well as those of communities and individuals. EPA should ensure that its numerous awards and recognition are coherent and consistent, and designed with the fundamental objective of motivating others to adopt environmental stewardship practices.

3.3.3 Use the visibility of the Administrator's "bully pulpit" to highlight and promote environmental leadership. The EPA Administrator should use the attention this position commands to continuously spotlight exemplary environmental stewardship, and to challenge all people and organizations to improve their environmental performance. This can be done in meetings, in speeches, through award ceremonies, and through site visits to organizations that merit special attention and recognition. Other opportunities include convening top opinion leaders to discuss critical environmental issues and cost-effective stewardship strategies for addressing them, and launching an Administrator's awards program that recognizes the best-of-the-best from EPA stewardship programs and activities.

3.3.4. Create a prestigious National awards program for environmental excellence. EPA should consider a nationally-recognized program to focus attention on exceptional environmental stewardship. Options include working with the Council for Environmental Quality (CEQ) and other federal agencies to propose a President's Environmental Stewardship Awards program. Alternatively, we could work with external parties to develop a special honor – similar to the Malcolm Baldrige Award in terms of prestige – that would focus on the best practices in improving all aspects of environmental performance. A more limited, but valuable approach would be to work with the Federal Environmental Executive on stewardship and sustainability awards for federal agencies.

### **3.4 LEAD BY EXAMPLE – DEMONSTRATE ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP IN EPA'S OPERATIONS AND IN ITS WORK WITH OTHER FEDERAL AGENCIES**

EPA should be a model in the federal government and the nation for environmental stewardship. Today the dedicated and creative EPA staff are doing a great deal to demonstrate this stewardship ethic that we are encouraging others to adopt. We are greening purchasing decisions, putting Environmental Management Systems (EMS) in place, constructing green buildings, and joining other federal agencies in achieving environmental goals. But we can do even more. While we know such actions can deliver important environmental benefits, the real

value comes from the multiplier effect—when our employees take newly learned information back to their homes and communities; when our purchasing decisions start to influence markets; and when our choices for our own facilities lead other organizations to rethink the design and operation of their own. In these and other ways, we have important opportunities to lead by example.

3.4.1 Set measurable goals for EPA environmental performance improvement. One of EPA’s most important opportunities to demonstrate leadership is through its own operations. We should set and publicly report on our own environmental performance. All of our facilities have recently completed (or updated) EMS. While these are important for managing performance at specific facilities, they can also help inform the development of an even bolder set of agency-wide environmental performance goals. These goals might include upgrading energy systems over time to achieve one carbon neutral facility each year or committing to purchase enough green power to meet 100% of our electricity needs. EPA should undertake an analysis of its EMS to determine the most meaningful opportunities that can be pursued agency-wide. In addition to seeking environmental gains, EPA should also recognize the human resource benefits that can come from engaging employees in EMS development and implementation.

3.4.2 Support sustainability efforts across the federal government. EPA can offer a variety of resources to other federal agencies that are pursuing their own environmental stewardship activities and environmental sustainability goals. These include technical assistance, information, and in some cases, contract mechanisms that have been established to provide certain stewardship-related services. Meanwhile, we can also learn from other agencies that have their own expertise to share. The Departments of Interior and Agriculture, for example, have long had a strong connection to conservation, and more recently, the Army has demonstrated its commitment with a comprehensive sustainability strategy that links environmental concerns with the future viability of base operations. A number of executive orders, including the recent one on Cooperative Conservation, create additional opportunities to work with the other federal agencies as well as CEQ and the Office of the Federal Environmental Executive on environmental stewardship. The National Environmental Policy Act provides yet another opportunity to collaborate with other agencies on projects that can advance environmental stewardship.

3.4.3. Help create new markets for sustainable products and services. EPA has a substantial opportunity to leverage its purchasing power to spur the market for environmentally-preferable products and services. Specific opportunities include choosing renewable energy, increasing EPA’s fleet of hybrid vehicles, and promoting adoption of our own environmentally preferable purchasing guidelines. EPA should undertake a supply chain study to identify its best opportunities for influencing priority markets, and work with the Office of the Federal Environmental Executive to promote use of sustainable products and services throughout the federal government. In relation to services, EPA should model its own green meeting guidelines when sponsoring meetings, conferences, and other events.

3.4.4 Encourage all EPA employees to play a stewardship role. Of all the resources EPA has to promote environmental stewardship, our most important is our people. EPA employees have a long history of providing leadership on environmental issues, as is evidenced by the many innovative initiatives they have created to address environmental concerns. By providing staff with opportunities to continue learning about environmental issues and by sharing information

about the Agency's environmental performance, EPA increases the likelihood that staff will pursue environmental stewardship on the job and in their homes and communities. EPA should also consider the benefits of enabling employees to dedicate some amount of time to local environmental stewardship projects. Doing so would be consistent with the Agency's mission, and help build stronger environmental stewardship capacity and partnerships at the local level.

### **3.5 MAINSTREAM STEWARDSHIP IN EPA DECISION PROCESSES**

In order for this environmental stewardship strategy to have real value, it cannot be a short-term commitment. Rather we must aim to have environmental stewardship become an enduring priority and pervasive ethic in all parts of the organization. This will require removing organizational barriers that can sometimes hinder our people from pursuing promising ideas that could advance environmental stewardship. It will also require a commitment to fully integrate stewardship activities into EPA's core regulatory programs and to improving overall management of the larger environmental stewardship portfolio.

**3.5.1 Clear and consistent communication.** EPA needs a clear communication strategy for environmental stewardship. We must have an easy-to-understand and consistent message about the definition of environmental stewardship, and what we hope to achieve through its practice. Similarly, we need clear messages to help people understand their role in stewardship and how they can make a difference. Clarity will enable EPA to maintain our focus on the desired outcomes from stewardship and engage our staff and partners outside the agency more effectively.

**3.5.2 Set priorities and leverage existing resources.** EPA should incorporate environmental stewardship principles into all its activities, including regulatory programs. Supplemental Environmental Projects, for example, provide an opportunity to promote stewardship through enforcement initiatives. In addition, EPA must make environmental stewardship a priority in its long-term planning, budgeting, and accountability systems –starting with the upcoming revision to EPA's strategic plan and regional plans and extending to management systems used by national programs and regions. EPA's stewardship strategy must also inform the annual budget and planning process, and negotiations between regions and States. Some of the tough management choices include whether to invest in a large number of small programs or try to concentrate resources in fewer areas; whether any existing programs and activities should be combined; how to organize and fund multi-media initiatives that require contributions from different parts of the Agency; and where the best investments lie for long term environmental results.

**3.5.3 Align EPA efforts with State and Tribal priorities.** State and Tribal officials offered a number of specific suggestions for how EPA might better work with them to further environmental stewardship goals – and many of these suggestions have been included in this report. In particular, States and Tribes expressed interest in:

- Sufficient flexibility at the regional office level for States and Tribes to explore stewardship approaches.



- Receiving support for State stewardship approaches, such as financial assistance and credit during program performance reviews.
- Obtaining full value from existing stewardship activities before launching new ones.
- Working with regional offices on joint priorities, and collaborating with a wide variety of partners to achieve common goals.

3.5.4 Improve performance measurement and reporting of results. Being able to show results will be critical to the success of environmental stewardship initiatives. EPA must commit to improving measurement methods and capabilities, starting with the completion and full utilization of the measurement guidelines under development for our partnership programs. We should collect and analyze data that help us understand whether stewardship activities are achieving results and contributing to natural resource sustainability. And in the spirit of being accountable, setting an example, and inspiring others, EPA should commit to reporting publicly on results.

3.5.5 Offer training and support to develop stewardship skills and expertise. Partnership programs, pollution prevention, environmental education, and other environmental stewardship activities often require different skills than those needed for regulatory and enforcement programs. EPA should build its capabilities to design and implement a broader mix of programs, recognizing this may require a more diverse set of core competencies. Over time, EPA has attracted a diverse staff with skills in technical, management, and policy fields, many of whom have expertise in specific environment management areas. However, as a recent workforce evaluation showed, we need to build greater competency in a number of areas that are essential for environmental stewardship approaches, such as communication and collaboration skills. EPA should determine how environmental stewardship can be advanced through its Human Capital Strategy, and how to fill the gap in expertise that will be left as a result of the upcoming retirement of many of EPA's most experienced personnel. Other options for boosting staff skills and expertise include creating a comprehensive environmental training curriculum and increasing opportunities for staff to get multi-media experience in stewardship programs and activities.

3.5.6 Align partnership programs to fully support EPA's environmental stewardship strategy. Many external stakeholders who provided EPA with input on environmental stewardship opportunities cited a need to improve coordination among partnership programs. To this end, EPA should complete the initial set of management reforms undertaken 18 months ago, and continue looking for additional opportunities to maximize the value of partnership programs. For example, there are likely opportunities to co-market programs that share a common target audience or have closely related benefits. There are also opportunities to present partnership program options in customized portfolios that are organized for target audiences and made easily accessible on our website. And recognizing that partnership programs are often the most vulnerable during budget shortfalls, EPA must find ways to assure more consistent levels of funding so that the value promised to our partners is sustained.