

I would like to see a formal, focused, structured approach to environmental restoration in the Highlands. It would bring together local, state, and federal government agencies, as well as non-government groups like Canaan Valley Institute...It would lead to a 'Highlands Action Plan,' driven by sound science and solid partnerships—and delivering real results.”

—Alan Mollohan, US Representative (D)

THE HIGHLANDS ACTION PROGRAM

In July 2001, Congress took the first step toward establishing the Mid-Atlantic Highlands Action Program. It recognized the need to establish a federal program for collaborative monitoring, research, management, and restoration activities within the Mid-Atlantic Highlands. Congress expressed an expectation that EPA would partner with local communities, state and local governments, other federal agencies, nongovernmental organizations, research institutions, and the private sector to carry out the goals of the Mid-Atlantic Highlands Program. Congress also recommended these program goals:

- Improve water quality, living resources, and habitat of the Mid-Atlantic Highlands, and
- Foster stewardship of resources through an outreach program for public information and education in the Mid-Atlantic Highlands.

Within the Congressional language, the Canaan Valley Institute (CVI) is referenced as a logical partner for EPA. It was the intent of Congress to blend the strengths and experiences of both EPA and non-government organizations (NGO's) to establish a new model for geographic-based partnerships: a model based upon government service to locally embraced, scientifically informed socioeconomic and environmental goals.

Indeed, the goals and objectives of government agencies such as EPA and nongovernmental institutions are similar. An examination of those goals reveals that both entities are pursuing watershed protection and restoration, sound science, pollution prevention, environmental stewardship, and partnerships. These goals reflect the needs and desires of people and communities in the Mid-Atlantic Highlands.

EPA's goals, formally expressed through the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA), reflect the

Agency's commitment to partnerships, science, and solutions to real water quality, habitat, and quality of life issues. Similarly, the strategic goals and guiding principles of CVI and other NGO's place a premium on stakeholder participation, science and information, and action to resolve known water quality, habitat, and quality of life issues. All these goals reinforce each other and highlight the need for collaborative partnerships.

The ability to address the goals and objectives of all stakeholders within the region can be improved and enhanced collaboratively through the Highlands Action Program. This is not just conjecture—the examples in this report show that improvements are already occurring in local communities across the Mid-Atlantic Highlands.

With these common goals in mind, CVI recommends that the Highlands Action Program be a joint effort between EPA, NGO's, local communities, state and local governments, other federal

agencies, research institutions, and the private sector (Figure 21). EPA should implement the program with independent funding, leadership, and resources comparable to the Chesapeake Bay Program, including additional support for select federal agencies to enhance their participation in the program.

Two steps seem apparent to progress towards a long-term program. Initial funding should be considered to enhance Highlands-wide participation in the program and to improve the quantity, quality, and utility of data and information across the region. It should also be used to encourage actions to resolve

on-the-ground Highlands issues as described in this report.

As part of this initial effort, EPA and CVI should organize three work groups with representatives from all cooperating partners to oversee and review Program implementation. Based upon initial but thorough understanding of the region, three work groups should be established to carry out the following activities:

1. Revitalizing damaged places;
2. Protecting special places;
3. Promoting environmental stewardship.

The program, however, should maintain flexibility to change focus as information and experience dictates. The work groups should be chaired by regional and local stakeholders and should provide feedback to the Highlands Action Program leadership on program goals, objectives, and activities.

Secondly, EPA and CVI should be responsible for a report to Congress from the Highlands Action Program on

Sustainable environmental stewardship must be intertwined with the economy and local communities.

Highlands Action Program Formed

Figure 21. EPA and CVI should take the lead to bring together local communities, government agencies, NGOs, research institutions, and the private sector to form an effective management structure for the Highlands Action Program.



long-term strategies, resource needs, and plans for each focus area. Recommendations should focus on how existing resources could be more efficiently used to address these needs, as well as detailing estimates for additional initiatives and resources.

Recommendations

Over the last decade, a growing list of federal agencies such as EPA, NOAA, and NRCS and nongovernmental organizations such as Canaan Valley Institute have recognized the need for addressing the region's economic and environmental problems. It makes sense for these organizations and others to pull to-

gether and work toward common goals. The Institute recommends using the approach described above for implementing a Highlands Action Program as set forth by Congress. This Highlands Action Program should

- Take action on the problems identified in this report;
- Use environmental indicators, good science, and partnerships to identify the causes of these problems;
- Develop solutions and management actions to resolve these problems;
- Develop a management governance for the Program that includes states,

nongovernmental organizations, local communities, and the private sector in partnership;

- Periodically assess its status, emerging issues and trends, and report to Congress and local stakeholders on its findings and successes.

This proposed Highlands Action Program captures the Congressional vision — a locally driven partnership, where all levels of stakeholders work to creatively and effectively manage the very special resources and socioeconomic opportunities within this special place — the Mid-Atlantic Highlands.



Photo: Dave Clark



Photo: Todd Schroeder



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