



Association of State Wetland Managers Wetland Regulatory Capacity Building Series

Partnering with State/Local Associations to Build State Wetland Regulatory Capacity

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Partnering with state/local wetland or environmental associations can enhance state and tribal wetland program capacity. These associations can serve as valuable partners to state and tribal wetland programs in efforts to protect and manage wetlands. State/local associations often engage in extensive education and outreach work with landowners and decision makers. They can convey important conservation and management lessons and share research about wetland ecosystem services and value. They also often take on advocacy roles and work with community leaders in ways that are not possible for states and tribes.

Wetland related associations may already be working on the ground to achieve goals that align with your agency. By networking with them, you can ensure that the work of each entity is complementary instead of duplicative. Once a partnership is established, some agencies incorporate wetland associations into Wetland Program Plans, delegating community outreach and education tasks – work that wetland associations are well equipped to do – to partnered nonprofits. These partnerships can increase the capacity for both entities and will benefit wetland conservation in the long term.

Recommendations for Partnering with State/Local Associations

- **Identify whether your region has one or more state wetland associations or similar organization:** Examples of state associations include Wisconsin Wetlands Association, Carolinas Wetland Association, and the Michigan Wetlands Association. Sometimes state/local associations that focus other water or wildlife resources, but include an interest in wetlands, can also be valuable partners.
- **Ask for an opportunity to jointly review strategic plans and identify areas of common interest or complementary activities:** Providing wetland association staff with agency goals and priorities will help to give them a good sense of how they fit into the broader landscape of wetland conservation efforts in your state. Strategic meetings will also help to determine if there are shared goals and will give the association the opportunity to fill any gaps in research, outreach, or education.

- **Develop strategic partnerships:** While working informally is often how partnerships begin, over time it may be useful to develop more strategic and formal relationships. By developing close working relationships and understanding how the two organizations complement each other, the two entities will be better able to identify collaborative opportunities, apply for grants as partners, and achieve greater reach. Developing a relationship with the wetland association will also give you the opportunity to network with wetland professionals outside of state government.
- **Share Information with State/Local Wetland Association Members:** Wetland Associations are generally membership organizations. Their members are often engaged in issues that are important to state wetland programs. Sharing timely information, outreach and training opportunities with association members may help your state agency reach a broader, more engaged audience than it could independently.
- **Participate in Joint Grant Projects:** While state wetland agencies have access to several streams of funding, some sources are more accessible to nonprofits. State agencies can play an important role in grant applications submitted by state or local wetland associations, as training resources, expert input to projects, or tying efforts into broader state agency programs.
- **Develop Complementary Communications Strategies:** While the missions and goals of state wetland agencies and state/local wetland associations are by their very nature different, for specific projects or programs, it may be beneficial to reinforce each other's messages or share similar information to different audiences that can be reached by the different entities. Additionally, there may be opportunities for economies of scale for larger communications initiatives where both parties are partners, such as hiring communications consultants, making a media buy, or advertising an event that both parties are participating in.
- **Develop Complementary Programing:** State/local wetland associations are well equipped for education, outreach, and research programing and projects. Communicating with the public and educating them on complicated, nuanced science and policy is an area where many state agencies struggle and it can be helpful to have an outside organization take that on. It is important for the agency to have clear goals that are in-line with the association's mission and a clear need for assistance with a specific project. There are instances where there is funding available for this kind of work by state/local associations either through the state agency or the EPA.
- **Develop Joint Wetland Program Plans:** State agencies can collaborate with state/local wetland associations to develop EPA Wetland Program Plans. This gives you the opportunity to identify key areas where your conservation goals overlap and put that into a formalized plan.
- **Divide and Conquer:** Close coordination and open communication between agency staff and wetland associations will allow the groups to identify areas of mutual interest and avoid duplicating efforts. Many state agencies are understaffed, and most wetland associations

are small, underfunded nonprofits. By eliminating or reducing duplication, both entities can direct their dollars and staff time to programs that complement each other's efforts.

- **Understand when differences arise:** By simple fact that state/local wetland associations are nonprofits and state agencies are branches of government, disagreements will arise. It is important to remember that you do not have to agree on everything. When disagreements come up, it is important to remember that you are still working toward the same goals.
- **Learn from Other Associations:** State/local wetland associations learn many lessons along their development journeys. One of the best ways to learn about tips and lessons learned is to reach out and connect with existing associations. A list of many of the state wetland associations in the United States can be found [here](#).

To learn more about state wetland associations, check out ASWM's webinar, [Building Capacity to Protect and Manage Wetlands through the Development of State Wetland Associations](#).

For more information, contact:

Association of State Wetland Managers

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