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In response to the proposed *Unified Federal Policy for Ensuring a Watershed Approach to Federal Land and Resource Management:*

I am a student of environmental science/conservation at the University of Wisconsin - River Falls. Upon browsing the Bureau of Land Management's website, I came across the Clean Water Action Plan / Proposed Unified Federal Policy regarding Federal Watershed management. What caught my eye was the request for public comment. Immediately, I read more, wondering if public comment would actually be a factor in the process at hand, or if it was more for show. I was glad to conclude that the call for public comment seemed, in fact, a genuine request for feedback.

I am not a private landowner who might find herself directly affected or involved in policy advancements such as this. However, I am greatly interested in our country's water quality. I agree that, even in light of the progress we've seen in water quality and watershed management in the last 20 years, there is more that we can do.

First, I would like to commend the Departments of Agriculture and Interior for the extent and quality of information (about the proposed policy) made available on the Web. If public response is lacking, it is my opinion that the fault lies with the public, as the Federal Agencies involved have gone out of their way to make the information available.

Overall, I approved of the policy and the Agencies' intentions. It is a very proactive plan which has the potential to significantly improve efficiency and effectiveness of watershed management practices. In essence, the policy draft is very specific in what it hopes to accomplish. However, it remains somewhat vague in expressing any indication of *how* they plan to meet their goals. For example, one of the guiding principles of the policy, intended to help meet the goals, states using a "consistent and scientific approach to managing Federal lands and resources and to assess, protect, and restore watersheds". I, too, feel this is an important step in the process, but there is nothing presented to indicate that they have a plan for developing, agreeing upon, and making known their "consistent and scientific approach" toward watershed management. Are there any ideas yet among the Agencies as to what exactly the approach will be? I understand it takes a phenomenal amount of time and effort to try to cover all these small details, but what better time than now, before the proposed policy is put in place.

Another concern I had was in regards to the agency objectives. As a precursor to the objectives themselves, the proposal states: "All agencies will implement this policy as individual agency laws, missions, and fiscal and budgetary authorities and resources permit." From the information I gathered, it appeared that the agencies involved were optimistic about the plan and willing to give it their best efforts. In this case, the above statement is enough as it stands. "All agencies will implement...*AS* agency *laws, missions*,...and fiscal/budgetary *authorities and resources PERMIT*". From one perspective, it is only fair that an agency be asked to implement to a degree that their agency laws, budgets, and resources can handle. However, does this statement not allow for an agency to "determine" that their laws, budgets and/or resources only allow for minimal implementation, when the reality may be that they have the ways and means to implement at a much higher level but perhaps lost the initial drive-to-make-it-work that led to their decision to sign the policy in the first place. Has there been any discussion along these lines at either the policy planning or the agency level? Like I said, the mood at

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this time appears to be nothing *but* optimistic and proactive. But if this were to change, would the policy still have the same extraordinary potential?

I hope I have in no way offended anyone by my comments. I understand this is a draft of a proposed policy, and I hope that some of my comments were in some small way helpful to those involved in getting it established. I truly believe that this is a plan that our country should be enthusiastic about trying, not to mention excited about the water quality improvements that could result. As a side, I also think we should be very excited about the policy's goal to increase cooperation and enhance collaboration both among the individual agencies as well as between the agencies and the state/local/tribal governments & private stakeholders. I feel this is the aspect of the policy that will make the most difference in the level of success achieved. It is now a realization that Federal, state, local, tribal or private parties can only do so much as individuals, especially when dealing with water quality management issues. I believe the increased sharing of information & ideas and the cooperation of the separate groups involved is the best approach, since each has an impact on the others' water resources.

It was a pleasure to read through the proposal and was great to see such a desire for public feedback. I wish the planning agencies the best of luck in the revisal and establishment of this proposed policy. I look forward to seeing the final draft and hopefully, if established, seeing the advancements towards the policy goals in the years to come.

Sincerely yours,

Margaret M. Albers

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