



A National Dialogue on an Integrated Water Policy: Urban Water Sustainability

The Clean Water America Alliance (Alliance) believes that a critical ingredient in the vitality of America's future is assuring we have the capacity to meet the long-term demands on our limited water resources. For many years, the relative abundance of water in most areas of the country has allowed us to look at water policy through individual and independent lenses. But as population pressures increase, and new challenges such as climate change and the development of clean energy become more evident, this approach has lost its relevance and no longer works.

It is clear to the Alliance that only through a deliberate shift to an integrated water policy that focuses on sustainability will this nation be able to meet its responsibilities to future generations. To achieve this goal, the Alliance is beginning a series of national dialogues to identify the impediments to, and determine the practical steps needed to ensure, a sustainable water policy.

This first National Dialogue, to be held September 14-15 in Washington, D.C., will focus on achieving sustainability in the urban setting. It will bring together key thought leaders and subject matter experts in the water sector for a facilitated session examining what challenges stand in the way of a sustainable urban water policy, and the practical steps needed to achieve such a policy.

Much of today's water policy is the result of statutes and rules that continue to regard water as though it were composed only of component parts, such as wastewater, drinking water, stormwater, and groundwater, to name a few. Thus, there is little recognition of other real-world considerations, such as the interactions between water availability and water quality, the role of reuse and conservation, the need to balance upgrading an aging national infrastructure with newer 'green' alternatives and low-impact development, and the nexus between energy usage and water needs. Furthermore, climate change has begun to alter water resource management in both coastal and inland areas and its vast impacts, from drought to altered flow patterns and flooding, are only starting to be understood.

To start the dialogue among the affected interests on how best to achieve a sustainable water policy, the Alliance is organizing this National Dialogue to focus on the urban/suburban setting, where land use planning and development needs are often most out of step with sustainable water policy. Some answers may lie in what a number of cities are already doing. Many cities across the country are implementing innovative programs and making significant investments in sustainable approaches to water that are ahead-of-the-curve. Many of the Nation's urban centers are seeking to become "green" cities and by exploring their success stories a broader, national approach would likely become clearer.

By centering this first national dialogue on the urban setting, the Alliance hopes to encourage not only a sharing of knowledge and practical solutions, but a cooperative approach among not only government interests, but also private, non-profit and other interests to break down the barriers – technological, legal, institutional, and financial -- to making this a reality.

Format of the National Dialogue

Attendance at the session will be by 'invitation only' and will include a mix of not more than 30 professionals and practitioners with unique insight into the issue of water sustainability. The facilitated session will be conducted off-the-record so that individuals will be able to provide their expertise and best personal/professional views unconstrained by institutional affiliations.

Several of the participants will be asked to serve as issue leaders for key discussion topics based on their expertise. These issue leaders will frame the discussion for all participants in order to ensure a more targeted and productive session. The Dialogue will focus on two overarching issue areas: 1) Sustainability, and 2) Intergovernmental/Legislative Cooperation. Under the "Sustainability" umbrella discussion is expected to examine key areas, such as: a) Water availability and quality; b) Climate change; c) The energy/water nexus; d) Green infrastructure/green cities; and e) The air/water interface. Under the "Intergovernmental/Legislative" issue umbrella, discussion is expected to explore: a) Watersheds and political boundaries; b) Local, state, regional and federal cooperation; and c) Integrating federal and state environmental statutes.

Outcome of the National Dialogue

While identifying the policy limitations of the existing statutory, regulatory and financial structures is important, it is equally, if not more, vital to define the hurdles and to offer some practical steps to overcome them and begin reshaping the approach to water sustainability. The National Dialogue is the first step in shedding light on how to implement a sustainable approach to urban water management.

The National Dialogue will produce several discussion papers on the critical issues that must be addressed in order to achieve an integrated national water policy. These discussion papers will be distributed widely and will form the basis for more in-depth discussions both with thought-leaders and policymakers to create a 21st century water policy a reality. This goal includes bringing this issue to the highest level of government. Future dialogues will be scheduled to address additional critical issues that are, in part, identified during this first session.

Clearly, the overall objective of the Alliance is to ensure the vitality of America's future by assuring we have the capacity to meet the long-term demands on our limited water resources. Bringing together 20-30 of the Nation's thought leaders and putting their best ideas forward will create a strong foundation. With this foundation in place, the Alliance will help generate the momentum the Nation needs to make a 21st century integrated water approach a reality.

The Clean Water America Alliance (CWAA) is non-profit organization working to explore the complex issue of water sustainability and plan for the future by improving public awareness that advances holistic, watershed-based approaches to water quality and quantity challenges. A broad cross-section of interests have come together through the Alliance to begin an important dialogue on the future – focusing on exploring and analyzing issues of critical importance to the nation's ability to provide clean and safe waters to future generations, offering information and education to citizens and policy-makers on key issues, and recognizing organizations and individuals for innovation and outstanding achievements in the water quality and quantity arena.

To learn more about the CWAA visit: www.cleanwateramericaalliance.org