

Shared Concerns

The Alliance will address a host of shared environmental and non-environmental issues, including:

- disconnecting networks of impervious surface cover,
- improving road salt application,
- managing wastewater discharges,
- installing porous pavement,
- building rain gardens and bio-retention basins,
- protecting stream corridors and wildlife habitat,
- managing deer,
- preserving forests,
- managing lakes and ponds,
- protecting and stewarding land,
- reducing flood damage and improving flood resiliency,
- managing soil erosion and preserving steep slopes, and
- aligning municipal planning and zoning strategies with current best practices.



Flooding

In light of recent severe weather events, flooding is an issue of shared concern in all municipalities. One of the Alliance's early campaigns will work to demystify the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP).

Through NFIP, towns can provide individual property owners with a pathway to lowering flood insurance premiums. They also receive assistance improving their overall flood resilience and reduce their own flood risk. The process includes voluntary enrollment in the program's Community Rating System (CRS).

The CRS provides an established mechanism for developing municipal action plans centered around flooding, and serves as an important repository of information on floodplain management, preserving and managing open space in floodplains, and educating citizens about flood preparation and mitigation.

Of New Jersey's 565 towns, only 61 have taken advantage of the CRS. This means that about 90% of municipal governments in the state are going it alone when it comes to the often-unfamiliar and highly technical issues involved in effective flood planning.

The proposed alliance will provide members with the information and guidance necessary to begin successfully navigating the CRS enrollment process and bringing NFIP benefits to all residents. This opportunity to save money, improve community, and please constituents should provide considerable incentive for our target municipalities to join.

Great Swamp Upper Passaic Municipal Alliance

The Great Swamp Watershed Association is establishing a new regional municipal alliance. Drawn from towns within the Great Swamp Watershed and along the Upper Passaic River, members of this new alliance will be encouraged to work together to develop municipal policies and ordinances that focus on protecting open space, reducing stormwater runoff, curbing pollution, and protecting local water supplies. Voluntary membership in the alliance will afford participating municipalities with a no-cost way to access expert assistance from well-known consulting firms—including Princeton Hydro and Banisch Associates—as well as an opportunity to maximize municipal investment in local environmental, planning, and zoning improvements by coordinating efforts on a regional scale.



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Extending A Helping Hand

The Alliance will work to keep municipal officials informed and motivated as they address specific environmental, planning, or zoning issues that are of shared concern. Where appropriate, we will encourage members to adopt model ordinances that effectively address local needs AND effectively contribute to broader, mutually beneficial solutions to environmental and zoning and planning issues.

Effective deer herd management provides a good case for such a model. Not only do deer represent an issue of shared concern for our target municipalities, but because the animals routinely fail to observe political boundaries, establishing a more regional approach to herd management would provide a better return on investment for all involved.

Open space asset management demonstrates another area of shared concern. Some specific examples might include the development of open space corridors, the creation of greenways, the establishment of hiking and walking paths, or other projects where municipal cooperation necessarily strengthens the effectiveness of a particular initiative, and offers a better overall rate of return for a larger number of residents.

Other issues of shared concern that the Alliance will be able to address will include (but will not necessarily be limited to) septic and stormwater management, soil and tree management, flood control and mitigation, and, where appropriate, municipal planning and zoning strategies.

Facilitators & Experts

As a founding member of the Alliance, the Great Swamp Watershed Association (GSWA) will (1) facilitate sharing of information and best management practices, (2) bring relevant topics to the attention of other members, and (3) encourage members to collaborate in the creation of complimentary solutions that stretch across municipal boundaries.

GSWA has the staff, experience, and other resources required to coordinate meetings, facilitate timely communication between members, and secure the participation of issue experts.

Among our initial pool of experts we include Dr. Stephen Souza and Mr. Frank Banisch. Dr. Souza is a principal at the Ringoes-based environmental consulting firm Princeton Hydro. Princeton Hydro maintains an impressive portfolio of environmental work in New Jersey and recently provided technical support for GSWA's collaborative pollution remediation project at Seaton Hackney Stables in Morris Township. Mr. Banisch is a widely respected municipal planner whose depth of experience with cooperative efforts like this one is exceptional. He is particularly knowledgeable about the development of the Sourlands Mountains Comprehensive Management Plan, an agreement that coordinates the environmental policies of seven communities in Somerset County, Hunterdon County, and Mercer County.

We hope that no-cost access to these experts and others like them will encourage municipalities to participate in the Alliance.

The Challenges & Goals

A successful alliance like the one proposed here will face many challenges. Time and resource commitments will always hinder or delay participation. And, unfamiliar strategies and solutions will always require research, conversation, and time before they are widely accepted. Our response to those concerns is straightforward.

- The Alliance hopes to provide a forum where members can engage in free and open dialogue; where they can actively explore shared interests and shared issues of concern.
- The Alliance hopes to recommend practical, feasible, and cost-effective actions that each member may own and implement; actions that derive from a common sense of purpose.
- Above all else, the Alliance hopes to improve the quality of the land under our feet, the quality of the water in our streams, and the quality of life in our towns; to protect that national treasure we call the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge, along with the waters and land of the larger Passaic River Watershed located downstream.

