

TOWARD A REGIONAL WATERSHED MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK



LOUISIANA
WATERSHED
INITIATIVE

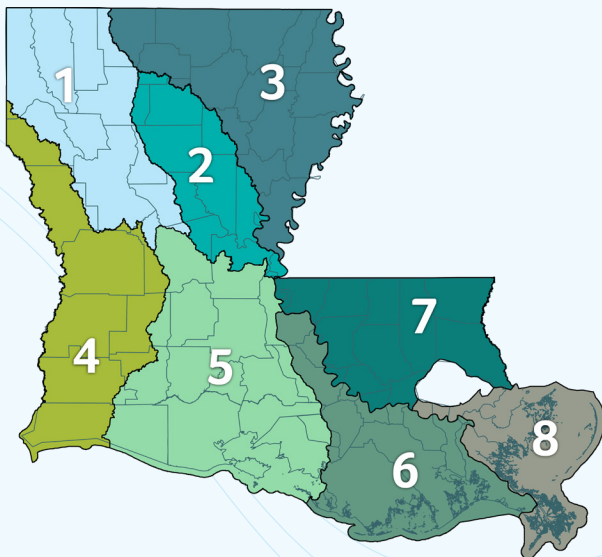
Regional Steering Committee Recommendations

A NEW APPROACH TO MANAGING FLOOD RISK

The Louisiana Watershed Initiative's eight regional steering committees have submitted provisional recommendations to guide long-term regional watershed management in the state, marking a significant milestone in LWI's efforts to create a statewide framework for comprehensive flood risk reduction.

Supported by the LWI Regional Capacity Grant Program, the RSCs held regular, virtual meetings throughout 2020 to discuss and prioritize flood risk concerns, assess research on existing conditions and identify best practices and solutions to reduce flood risk through improved regional watershed management. The RSCs proposed roles and responsibilities for long-term regional watershed management entities and coalitions, which will be organized around regional watershed boundaries. They also established goals and next steps in instituting regional watershed management activities in coordination with state and local efforts.

RSCs reflect the demographics and professionals in each region. Committee members include a mix of watershed professionals, such as floodplain managers and engineers, as well as community representatives from diverse backgrounds or with strong ties to local institutions. Each committee's primary objective is to provide recommendations on the establishment of a long-term regional entity—or watershed coalition—in its respective region that is responsible for regional watershed management activities aligned with LWI's long-term resilience goals. RSCs held more than 75 meetings throughout eight regions throughout 2020 and early 2021, often meeting virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



Recommendation Highlights

COALITION ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The regional steering committees' provisional recommendations for watershed region roles and responsibilities include:

- Engaging in regional planning with specific objectives to include land use planning, watershed project prioritization, operations and maintenance of river systems and developing hazard mitigation policies and projects directed toward traditionally disadvantaged or underserved populations.
- Warehousing, funding and operating regional watershed models and serving as a clearinghouse for sharing watershed-related data.
- Conducting outreach and education to local leaders and residents promoting best practices in community development and watershed management.
- Creating new opportunities for engagement, providing access to resources and improving coordination between local jurisdictions.

Several steering committees made additional recommendations specific to their region, including:

- Supporting local jurisdictions with National Flood Insurance Program compliance and participation in the Community Rating System.
- Providing technical assistance to local communities for watershed project and policy development.
- Establishing a role in project funding, such as providing matching funds to local entities or generating a pool of local funds for implementation of regional water management projects.
- Reviewing major projects for upstream and downstream impacts.
- Incentivizing the development of certain types of projects and/or facilitating capital improvement planning throughout the watershed.

COALITION AUTHORITY

RSCs provisionally recommended creation of the following authorities for their regional watershed entities and implementing the following proposed roles and responsibilities, including establishing the authority to enter into contracts with other governmental agencies and private and non-profit entities.

Seven RSCs recommended establishing the authority to generate revenue. Recommendations include issuing bonds, levying taxes or special assessments, borrowing money, accepting grant funds or collecting permitting, stormwater or user fees. Several RSCs recommended establishing the authority to conduct or oversee regional watershed planning processes. Other special authority recommendations included providing these entities with the ability to fund infrastructure projects, acquire property, issue permits, adopt and enforce development codes and house and manage watershed-related data, such as hydrologic and hydraulic models.

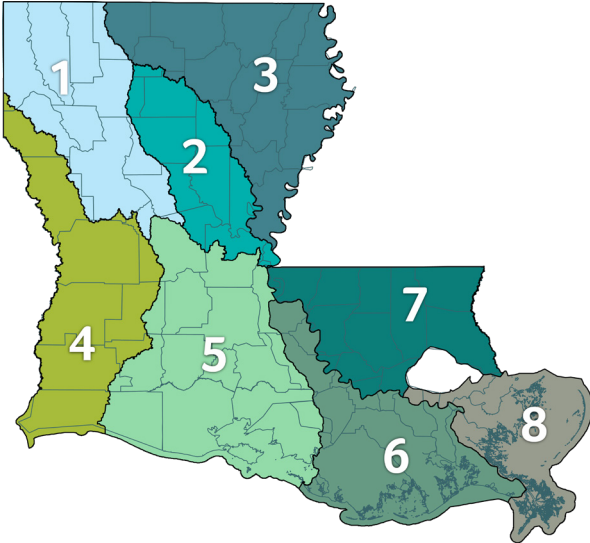
COALITION COMPOSITION

Recommendations for each watershed region's membership composition reflect the diversity, unique considerations and varied regional characteristics found throughout the state. Four RSCs recommended ensuring membership is composed of public representatives (elected officials or their appointees) and private representatives (residents, businesses and organizations outside of government).



WORKING WITH EXISTING AGENCIES

RSCs recommended the following agencies serve as coalition staff to facilitate meetings and perform administrative functions:



- 1 Coordinating and Development Corporation and Northwest Louisiana Council of Governments
- 2 Kisatchie-Delta Regional Planning & Development District and Rapides Area Planning Commission
- 3 Ouachita Parish Police Jury, with North Delta Regional Planning & Development District providing technical assistance
- 4 Imperial Calcasieu Regional Planning and Development Commission
- 5 Acadiana Planning Commission, with the University of Louisiana at Lafayette's Louisiana Watershed Flood Center assisting with data management, modeling and general support with water science; and with the Teche-Vermilion Fresh Water District assisting with gauge network and general water quality efforts
- 6 South Central Planning and Development Commission
- 7 Capital Region Planning Commission
- 8 Public-private partnership consisting of public, private and non-profit entities

Implementation and Next Steps

RECOMMENDED PROCESS

The RSCs recommended taking the following actions to build and support long-term regional coalitions:

- Enabling the coalitions by legislation through a state agency, board or commission
- Forming each coalition under a single charter
- Providing appropriate state agency oversight to promote consistency between regions and state-level management

Most regions recommended the boundaries of each watershed be approved by a state agency, board or program through a public process.

NEXT STEPS

The state and its watershed regions will conduct outreach through the LWI Regional Capacity Building Grant program to gather feedback from public officials and regional stakeholders on the provisional recommendations and next steps. LWI will present final recommendations to the Council on Watershed Management in summer 2021.

For more information, visit watershed.la.gov/rcbg-program or email watershed@la.gov.

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