

# ILLINOIS ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY REVIEW

INFORMATION FOR PEOPLE CONCERNED ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT IN ILLINOIS

Volume 1, Number 2, 1999



## Creating partnership for environmental policy making

By Maggie Alario

Often what keeps environmental issues from being resolved is not a lack of economic or scientific data, but an ineffective policy making process. Successful environmental policy making often depends upon a partnership between policy makers, concerned citizens, and the scientific community from the outset.

Though this may seem obvious, it can be overlooked when we face immediate and long-term environmental challenges. For example, negotiations only recently ended on regulations addressing the large-scale livestock farms that have resulted from the concentration of Illinois' agricultural production. At the same time, it's important to note that simply bringing all concerned parties to the table does not guarantee that environmental progress will be made.

The 200,000-acre native ecosystem restoration project by the 69 organizations working together as the Chicago Wilderness, and the efforts by The Nature Conservancy and its partners to revitalize the Mackinaw River Watershed represent Illinois' success stories in environmental policy making. Reviewing them, there emerges a pattern of policy making that illustrates what researchers call the analytic deliberative process or ADP. This process involves creating a master organizational framework, action planning, and explicit goal setting.

As its name suggests, the ADP occurs in two phases. The analytic phase consists of preliminary and exploratory meetings, as well as social, historical, and natural data collection. In the Mackinaw River Watershed, scientists had already identified a declining trend in aquatic life dating back to the 1950s. Some species had already disappeared and the composition of the remaining species was being altered by agricultural land use practices and ineffective municipal sewage treatment. As for social and historical data, sociological and anthropological studies soon showed the Mackinaw area to be a community with a deep land ethos. Residents believed they had an obligation to care for and preserve the land for future generations. In the ADP, this type of data is integrated throughout the process, not solely at the beginning. The idea is to map competing interests and value preferences.

The ADP recognizes that environmental plans cannot be pursued without regard to money and political power struggles, including citizens demanding their right to a good environment. In addition to financial viability, the analytic phase includes technical viability and deadline setting to keep the process on track.

In the deliberative phase, the myriad of data comes together and is synthesized in a comprehensive plan. For example, in attempting to design a sound

conservation project for the Mackinaw, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) joined forces to obtain a clear picture of both biotic indicators, and community interests and involvement. TNC organized a project core council, of which local landowners comprised 80 percent of the members. In turn, they created planning teams which included hydrologists, aquatic ecologists, and community leaders. TNC also appointed one of the community's own residents, Diane Rudin, to be the outreach coordinator for the entire project.

Working together, these groups developed and eventually formalized the initial watershed plan in 1997. Its development represents the intertwining of scientific argument and public scrutiny characteristic of the decision making process of the deliberative phase. In this phase, participants explore choices for organizational structure, form steering committees and teams, and assign tasks and roles. This ensures that the work will be carried out in a meaningful and effective way.

Granted, the ADP may not be appropriate for every situation, nor is it the only social and political theory for addressing environmental change. However, it is an established concept owing to its roots in the Toxic Release Inventory

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



and the 1969 National Environmental Policy Act—both of which legally require public participation.

The ADP cannot prevent all conflicts as evidenced by the ongoing negotiations

between conservationists and restorationists in the Chicago Wilderness projects. Yet, it does provide a tool for dialogue and empowering citizens. With such tools we will be better equipped to work together to reach our

state's environmental goals in the face of the forces of globalization and more local problems like urban sprawl.

*Maggie Alario is an assistant professor of Environmental Sociology at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.*

