

# INTEGRATING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT THROUGHOUT THE CORPS WATER RESOURCES PROGRAM

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## ABSTRACT

Recently, the concept of sustainable development has surfaced as an important local and state political issue around the country in the form of “smart growth”. Smart growth promotes, as its central theme, that communities know best the path to their vision of the future. Conceptually, that vision includes the three fundamental principals of sustainable development - economic prosperity, social well being and environmental quality. The challenge for Federal agencies, including the Corps, will be to determine how to integrate our programs in a manner that most effectively helps stakeholders achieve their individual visions.

The Department of Defense defines sustainability as, "...responsible stewardship of our natural, cultural, built and financial resources through a practical and balanced approach." In terms of the Corps water resources program and missions, a potential definition of sustainable development is **“that which allows stakeholders to meet their current water and related land resources needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their water and related land resources needs in all our planning, design, construction, operation and maintenance activities by effectively balancing environmental, economic, and social outcomes.”**

Sustainable development has been described as the integration of the three E’s — Environment health, Economic robustness, and social and cultural Equity. In addition to these principles, a variety of themes, developed into criteria, have become closely associated with the concept of sustainable development. Thus, for water resources development to be sustainable, it must integrate all three principles and satisfy five criteria.

- Consider Long-Term Impacts and Consequences
- Recognize Interdependence of the Three “E’s”
- Encourage Participation and Transparency
- Demonstrate Equity
- Encourage Proactive Prevention

The Corps today has an opportunity to help stakeholders across the Nation achieve their visions of sustainable development by delivering improved water resources services to make America more competitive in world trade; fulfilling the promise of modern, integrated water resources management; designing Federal investments that create long-term opportunities for communities that are struggling; and, providing an improved quality of life through the provision of clean water and restored and conserved environmental resources. The Corps has the capability to serve

the Nation by helping stakeholders optimize their visions and goals through education and by better managing and coordinating its own Federal water resources programs and authorities with those of others. Implementation of sustainable development practices would build upon our technical and process capabilities to carry out traditional water resources missions in a more comprehensive, collaborative, and coordinated manner. This would help stakeholders cope with the diversity of economic, environmental, and quality-of-life issues facing them. The Corps possesses the experience, capability, and technical expertise to perform the role as a Federal integrator – “one door to the Federal Community”- to serve by helping communities achieve their sustainable development visions.

To be an enduring public agency, the Corps needs to adapt to changing customer needs. Where appropriate, the Corps has the standing to lead collaborative river basin and watershed management partnership efforts. We have felt constrained by our own reluctance to look beyond older, more traditional ways of thinking, rather than accepting alternative methods as viable solutions to contemporary water resources problems. Our role as a strategic headquarters needs to be one of encouraging and supporting regional, field, and international offices to be more innovative, more creative, and more willing to take technical, institutional, and political risks in our approach to public service.

A proposed process for successfully linking sustainable development to the water resources programs of the Corps of Engineers consists of nine key items:

- Educate ourselves
- Adopt holistic thinking
- Emphasize aggregate consequences
- Demand better economic tools
- Search for sustainable alternatives
- Develop and apply technology
- Listen to those we serve
- Cultivate a multidisciplinary teamwork approach
- Educate those we serve

As an executive agency of the United States, a member of national and international communities, and a family of professionals, the Corps of Engineers is currently experiencing the consequences of unsustainable decisions, insufficient consideration of tradeoffs and risk aversion, and an unwillingness to consider non-traditional alternatives to the water resources problems. Although these decisions were usually made in well-intentioned ignorance, our expanded awareness of the consequences of an unsustainable path is an imperative to change. Our children and their children deserve a future of security, stability, and sustainable and perpetual prosperity. We all share in the responsibility to see that they receive their heritage.