



## C H A P T E R   O N E

### WHAT IS WATERSHED PLANNING

#### WATERSHED PLANNING AND JAMAICA BAY

**W**atershed planning recognizes the interconnection between land and water, that much of what we do on a parcel of land makes its way to our waterways, bays, and ocean. It is complex because a watershed plan is not just a series of actions to be taken, but it is also a process. To be successful, it must involve the participation of people with different perspectives and priorities. It also requires ridding ourselves of age-old habits and creating a vision that motivates the community to change.

The *Jamaica Bay Watershed Protection Plan* strives to create awareness of the issues facing the Bay; develop comprehensive planning strategies to benefit the Bay and its watershed; and serve as a template for the future. It is intended to serve as a vision for what strategies could be used, and describes necessary implementation steps for a process to accomplish the vision for a sustainable Jamaica Bay.

Given the complexity of the issues facing Jamaica Bay, this *Jamaica Bay Watershed Protection Plan* does not provide solutions to all of the issues facing the Bay, but rather makes recommendations for certain actions and provides a guide for the next phase forward in this planning effort. Differing views on specific strategies and changes in priority or even approach are expected to occur as this is a living document that will need to be modified to adjust to the successes and new information and technologies that will undoubtedly arise over time, as well as ongoing dialogue. The highest priority of this *Jamaica Bay Watershed Protection Plan* is to guide the ongoing planning process.

#### ISSUES COMMON TO WATERSHED PLANNING PROCESSES

The preceding volume of this document provides context for the *Jamaica Bay Watershed Protection Plan*. It summarizes the history of Jamaica Bay to the present, identifies key issues and problems, and describes the programs that have occurred or are presently underway to improve water quality, ecological, and human use conditions in the watershed. Taking what is learned from Volume 1, there are several major themes that can be identified:

1. Environmental conditions in the Jamaica Bay are affected by the human population within the watershed. As population increases, so does the stress on natural resources.
2. There is a need to further improve water quality, ecology, and human uses.
3. Issues facing the Bay and its watershed are interrelated and call for a coordinated approach. Implementation of the *Jamaica Bay Watershed Protection Plan* requires coordination among public agencies, environmental organizations, residents, businesses, and stakeholders.



These themes are not unique to Jamaica Bay; indeed other estuaries throughout New York Harbor and the United States are grappling with similar problems. Fortunately, there are many success stories to guide the process.

## THE WATERSHED PLANNING APPROACH

This *Jamaica Bay Watershed Protection Plan* adopts a “watershed planning approach” towards management of environmental resources. Because watershed planning has become a buzz-word and can be understood in different ways, it is necessary to define it. An excellent definition has been provided by the Maine Department of Environmental Protection, which defines watershed planning as:

*“...[A]n approach to protecting water quality and quantity that focuses on a whole watershed. This is a departure from the traditional approach of managing individual wastewater discharges, and is necessary due to the nature of polluted runoff, which in most watersheds is the biggest contributor to water pollution. Polluted runoff is caused by a variety of land use activities, including development, transportation, agriculture and forestry, and may originate anywhere in the watershed. Due to its diffuse nature, polluted runoff has not been effectively managed through regulatory programs alone. Watershed planning and management involve a number of activities, including: targeting priority problems in a watershed; promoting a high level of involvement by interested and affected parties; developing solutions to problems through the use of the expertise and authority of multiple agencies and organizations; and measuring success through monitoring and other data gathering.” (MEDEP, 2006).*

The watershed planning approach has been implemented in dozens of estuaries in the United States that have become progressively more degraded from urban development. Chesapeake Bay, San Francisco Bay, and Galveston Bay are examples of this style of comprehensive water quality and ecosystem management planning. In fact, many of these watershed management planning documents were reviewed as the *Jamaica Bay Watershed Protection Plan* was being developed.

The *Jamaica Bay Watershed Protection Plan* adopts the watershed management planning framework that is intended to overcome the hurdles of a potentially disjointed planning process by:

1. Offering a process and a common vision (rooted in ecosystem function and sustainability) to coordinate relevant water quality improvement and ecosystem restoration efforts and allow input from all stakeholders in the watershed.
2. Providing detailed management strategies that specifically address the key issues affecting the Bay.
3. Ensuring that implementation strategies and frameworks are identified so the *Jamaica Bay Watershed Protection Plan* does not “sit on the shelf.”
4. Providing a framework to steer future land use planning decisions to ensure the long-term sustainability of environmental health in the watershed.
5. Building flexibility into the management actions and the prioritization process, allowing management strategies to respond to new information and changing conditions.

Let’s get started.



## REFERENCES

Maine Department of Environmental Protection (MEDEP), Bureau of Land and Water Quality. March 2006. <http://www.state.me.us/dep/blwq/watersh.htm>