DEVELOPING A SERVICE-LEARNING PROGRAM FOR
WATERSHED MANAGEMENT
LESSONS FROM THE STROUBLES CREEK WATERSHED INITIATIVE

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Major Paper to be submitted to the Faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State
University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Urban and Regional Planning

April 22, 2002
Blacksburg, Virginia

Keywords:
Service-learning, Watershed Management, Stroubles Creek

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ABSTRACT

There has been a growing interest and support by many state and local programs to address aquatic resource protection and restoration at a watershed level. The desire by many programs to implement watershed management programs has become more than just a need, rather a necessity to ensure suitable water resources. However, many challenges arise when developing and sustaining watershed programs. One such challenge is that watershed programs are resource intensive. These programs require significant funds to support monitoring, research, effective management, and to provide public outreach. In addition, these programs require knowledgeable and skilled water resource professionals who can implement and manage these tasks.

Integrating university-knowledge and resources into the watershed effort can meet many of these challenges. Faculty, students, and in-kind university support can contribute knowledge, technical support, research funds, and personnel to aid and enhance watershed management activities. Furthermore, connecting watershed management activities with academic work can foster the development of future environmental planning, policy, and science professionals.

The overall goal of this paper is to explore the integration of service-learning in higher education within watershed management activities. The concepts and benefits of service-learning are explored in this paper. An example of a watershed-based, service-learning initiative in the Stroubles Creek watershed, Virginia is presented. In addition, perspectives gathered from the Initiative’s students and project coordinator (the author) on their work experience as service-learners are provided. The lessons and recommendations presented in this paper pave way to means of sustaining and enhancing service-learning program in watershed activities.