

Environmental Windows Workshop Discussion

Environmental Windows Workshop Session Summary: Remarks by Mr. Dominic Izzo, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works)

MR. IZZO: Actually I didn't have any formal comments, but I was so inspired by the presentations this morning, I just wanted a few words.

First of all, it's absolutely delightful to be here and see a bunch of engineers and scientists talking instead of trying to go through these concepts in the rarefied political atmosphere of Washington, where it really does get very difficult and people get very, very emotional. So, I really commend you for getting together and trying to discuss these things in a factual way. It's really a pleasure to be here.

And I have to make a confession to you all. Not only am I a coastal engineer who has actually studied hydrodynamics and sediment transport, which probably makes me really out on the fringe, but I'm also a dedicated hook and bullet conservationist. I used to think I was an environmentalist, but after going into the Everglades and meeting the true environmentalists, I know that I am really a hook and bullet conservationist.

So, I'm delighted to see presentations on the Pacific Northwest's salmon and flounder. I share your frustration with New York Harbor because I grew up on the banks of the beautiful Passaic River, which as you may or may not know is just north of that area where they're doing all the dredging, and is I believe the super fund site because of the chemicals and so forth that have been put in there over the years.

But I didn't want to get into all that. While I was sitting there, I was just thinking that this reinforces my feeling that the Corps is on the right track. And the Corps is really, for a military organization, very, very open. And they are pushing the collaborative planning process and partnering with all different types of folks. I was fascinated to find out that of the 35,000 corps employees, 1,251 are now biologists. And I submit to you that shows an organization that has changed quite a bit since we started dredging back in the late 19th century.

But we're really moving on this collaborative track. And the Army and the bureaucracy that is the Corps of Engineers is going to a watershed based planning methodology that is also collaborative and brings in all these other Federal agencies as well as concerned groups and industries and so forth.

That's what we've done down in the Everglades to produce a comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan. And it really is amazing. It was very painful I'm sure. They've been working on it for over ten years, but it brought together the diverse groups in southern Florida, and it actually reached a consensus on how to go forward and save

the Everglades and oh, by the way, still provide flood protection and water supply for future growth.

And I personally think it's a triumph of policy down there in Florida. And what we would like to do is to see that expand into other areas such as San Francisco Bay, the Pacific Northwest and so forth.

And what it requires is for folks to invest a lot of time to exchange information, to find out where the truth is, and then you can actually come up with a plan that not only saves the flounder and the salmon, but also saves the navigation industry and our prosperity.

Because I will tell you, having worked overseas for about ten years in some very desperate places, that if you want to see true environmental wellbeing, you come to prosperous countries, and we're the most prosperous country. And I guarantee you you'll not find a better environmental climate anywhere, nor will you find better fish and wildlife.

So, I think we're on the right track, and I wanted to say that to y'all. I'll have more remarks this afternoon. I did want to also point out, because if you listen to all these discussions too long, you'll think we haven't made a lot of progress.

Like I said, I grew up on the banks of the Passaic River. And I remember driving from south Jersey crossing the Perth Amboy Bridge and coughing because the pollution from the refineries was so bad that it choked you. That's all gone now. It's pretty good. Much as L.A. has improved dramatically since I went to grad school there in 1980.

And I can tell you if you don't know that in the 1990's we saw wonderful growth in waterfowl in this country, nice rebound in populations. And if you think about it, I don't believe there is an endangered species of waterfowl in the lower 48 states, even though there are something like half a million of dedicated hunters who go out every year and try to kill them. So, that tells you that we can be very successful.

I also note that this year we had our first fishing season for salmon species on the Columbia in many years. So, when you're listening to all these discussions, and you get very frustrated and you think that maybe the world is going to be over tomorrow or your kid will never be able to go fishing or that the navigation industry is going to crash, I don't think that's going to happen. I'm an optimist. I think the economy will continue to grow, and I think we'll have fish and wildlife there for our children and our children's children as long as we keep working together.

And you really did a lot for me this morning, just listening to all this discussion. Please keep up the good work. Thank you.

MR. WAKEMAN: Do members of our panel want to say anything? Jerry.

MR. SCHUBEL: I want to reinforce something that a number of people have said, and Sye simply reminded me at the break. In all of this adaptive management, while it's been implicit, we need to make it explicit.

Because if we have this kind of a process, it really ought to be adaptive management. Every time you set a window, it ought to be an experiment. An experiment that you revisit at the end of the season, and you ask yourself whether it should be expanded or compressed.

The other thing we're talking about is books to read. John King, a political scientist at the University of Michigan years ago, wrote a wonderful book. It was about decisionmaking. In that book he described the governance model that he felt characterized the government at all levels. And it was called, "The Garbage Can Model of Governance".

And it's perfect because in the garbage can you have three streams that flow independently: problems, policies, and politics. And the trick is, because they each have their own watershed, they each have their own channel, the trick is to see if you can orchestrate them to come together.

Because it's only when those streams intersect that you can make changes in the way we do business. And again, it's getting people to the table, keeping them there, having them listen to the discussions. That's our only hope to orchestrate getting these streams to intersect. And then in that window when they come together, that's when you make changes in how we do business. And I think you're on the right track.

MR. WAKEMAN: Anybody in the audience would like to say something, burning to say something?

TODD BRIDGES: I've seen the academy process a couple of times in presentations only. I've not read the book yet. And I've made this comment before. There is a lot of parallel between what's being proposed here, and what I understand as environmental risk assessment, from the standpoint of how chemical contamination and impacts associated with that are evaluated.

And I'd like to strongly encourage that if there is another go round with the national academy or there's a reiteration for building on that process, that a close look be given to what has been done in developing an analysis framework for environmental risk assessment. I think it has a lot to offer, particularly when you're trying to infuse this with what people have been calling sound science.

Because in my mind it's not sound science until you generate tests for hypotheses. And that's going to require developing detailed conceptual models regarding what you think is going on, what the resources concerned are, how they come in contact with the

stress, what mechanism is involved that Neville mentioned, by which these resources are actually affected by that stress.

And really I think from the standpoint of engineering, it's more than just defining how you can modify the project to reduce turbidity. It's really looking to our engineers to help us to find what this exposure level is like.

So, it's not just how can you modify your project. Tell me what the concentration of this stress is in the environment. And so then if you have both of those, you're actually in a position to actually do the analysis.

And it's as parallel as anything can be to what has been done in this country for more than 20 years now, using environmental risk assessments to make decisions. I mean you also have to have all these stakeholders and everything.

So, I'm really talking about something that's really an analysis framework more than maybe a decision making framework, but I think they're complimentary.

MR. WAKEMAN: Thank you, Todd. An analysis framework is something we probably can tackle. Decision making framework almost requires you know who the people are at the table and where they're coming from at the time.

Joedy Cambridge happens to be here from the National Academy. And Joedy has shepherded a lot of projects through and is familiar with this one. Would you say a few words about where you think the academy might be at this point with respect to a follow-up to the earlier workshop that they hosted?

MS. CAMBRIDGE: Well, let me just say we have the documents. The second is Phase II of this, looking at the implementation. We had some preliminary discussions with people at the Corps of Engineers' headquarters as well as folks down here.

Tom and Ellen and I met with the head of our policy division just a few weeks ago to talk about this. And there are different approaches that we feel could be taken on this. One might be to do some sort of a larger national-type symposium to put some of these issues out on the table. We could convene a full NRC study committee and do a formal Phase II like what Jerry did.

There are a lot of different approaches, but obviously we need some support to go about this. I think we've had a couple of volunteers in terms of doing some case studies on this.

I'd also like to say that anybody who's interested in seeing the report who hasn't already gotten a copy, give me a card and I will send you a hard copy of it. Otherwise, it is accessible from our web site. If you go to TRB.org and click on marine board, you'll get direct access to the report from there. But we're certainly here standing ready and are certainly prepared to go on with another phase on this.

And I have to say just from experience in the last few months, the NRC has speeded up some of its processes. And by doing the phase II doesn't necessarily mean that we're going to be two years farther out on this whole thing before we look at how this could be implemented. We've got strategies and approaches that we can take to some of these things that could certainly shorten that time frame considerably and hopefully we can consider that.

MR. WAKEMAN: Thank you.

MR. CALLAGERY: My name is Bob Callagery. I worked in the Corps for many years and retired recently, and I worked in the Philadelphia district. And now I work with Cohagen and Bryan. And I just want to go back to a point that the gentleman from England brought up. Whenever you bring people in the room, it's very, very critical. And I'm an economist, so I'm going to talk the way an economist talks.

People have different objective functions, and it's very, very critical that you figure out a way to get everyone to recognize they're going to have to suboptimize. People are going to have to give up something in order for everyone in the room to go forward together. And until we can get people to acknowledge the need to go forward on all fronts, not just to protect the environment or not just to dredge, it's very, very difficult to get these processes to lead you to a conclusion.

And you may run into "there's never enough science." When I was in Philadelphia, we had more dredging windows probably than this building. We had windows for anadromous fish and for oysters. We had windows for turtles. We had windows for sturgeon. We had windows for winter flounder. They were all there.

And every time we attempted to convene people and work, we might be able to get a specific window adjusted, a window for sturgeon or a window for this. But in the overall context of dredging, we could never get everyone together and say all right, we all acknowledge that dredging has to go forward. How can we now sit down and look at our mandate, which is to protect the environment and figure out a way to compromise that? And that's a very, very difficult thing.

I'm hopeful that these processes might help, but I think you've got to get back to making need a critical part and acknowledgment of everybody in the process.

MR. WAKEMAN: Peg is very familiar with the Columbia River and the things that are occurring on the Columbia River. Would you make a few comments, please? Introduce yourself and make a few comments about how a template as Todd described might be useful to you or not.

MS. JOHNSON: I'm Peg Johnson. Well, I really agree with Mr. Schubel about this being a social process. I think it's long overdue that we recognize that. And I kind of like the whole social process thing better than the political process.

I am concerned as I sit here about pilot programs, with all due respect, Ellen. Ellen is my esteemed colleague because of what we saw at the very beginning today. And I don't remember if it was Doug or it might have been Sye who talked about the infinite variables in a system and the different parts of the estuary, and I think Sye said he's going to represent the fish.

And I thought well, you know, what if the mackerel decided it was going to represent all the tall 50 year old women with brown hair, you know. I wouldn't want that either.

So, I guess I'm just worried we keep looking for definitive answers in science that we can take to the public and say well, this is what happens. But all we can do, even with the best models and the best science is make some half good guess at what a fish or dredge sediment or anything might do at any given time. I do believe it's a process, the success of which is going to hinge more on consensus and social interaction, political interaction, and giving. We've got to understand that it's really important to build those estuaries back, you know. Those are really important, and we're all environmentalists.

MR. WAKEMAN: Thank you, Peg. Anybody else? Well, I'm not one to sit and look at one another. If there's nothing else to be said, I'll give our president the last shot.

MR. EEDE: I'm presently the President of PIANC. Of course, I fully back Neville. I want to say, those windows, they look like a pretty simple idea, but in my opinion simple ideas often result in difficult situations, and this is what is going on here in the U.S.

From my perspective in my country in Belgium, the only windows we have nowadays are windows that are now installed due to environmental facts, and due to the fact that recreational navigation should go undisturbed by dredging. So, I hope we can keep it this way and even look back from that. So, thank you.

MR. WAKEMAN: I'd like to thank all the panelists and thank you for sitting with us and sharing your time. This dialogue will continue. And it's been a pleasure this morning to find a group of people that are willing to sit and talk when it's not a crisis at the moment.

It seems too much of our decision making is done under those circumstances. I am a supporter of a new wave of NRC work. And the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, as long as they don't take the money that's currently earmarked for that and ship it to lower Manhattan, would be willing to support another round.

And I think more along the lines that Todd was talking, of a template, an analysis template that allows us to organize the data and identify where the data gaps are and allow people to see how the decision making, the process works.

Right now, too much of it is very ephemeral. And if you don't know what happened that day in the room, you don't know how you got the decision. And then when

we try to replicate that later on, we have to start all over again, and it takes months. So with that, thank you for being another iteration in this ongoing dialogue. And thank you, Mr. Izzo, for joining us as well.

