

## Executive Summary

Since the founding of America, there have been many dramatic changes to the country's landscape. Land acquisitions, manifest destiny, land rushes, gold rushes, homesteading and war changed our geographic and demographic characteristics for the first 150 years of our existence. During the last 50 years or so however, we have experienced deeper, more fundamental changes to our society. Many people no longer live and work in the same place, the automobile shapes all aspects of our lives and shifting social and personal preferences have giving us a new landscape. All the aspects of this landscape share a common thread, they all require a larger footprint on the land.

As our influence and activities continue to spread, so too should our efforts in conservation, mitigation and remediation. We cannot ignore the fact that we are responsible for environmental stewardship. In New York State most of our environmental decision-making and activities are managed at the local level. Community Environmental Management or CEM is a non-regulatory statewide initiative designed to help local communities better summarize and understand the impacts of their environmental decisions, coordinate their efforts with existing Federal and State agencies/programs and use their authority and vision to create desired environmental outcomes.

CEM is a collaborative process requiring the commitment, expertise, support and guidance of local community members. CEM provides the framework, analysis, recommendations and justifications for creating environmental change, but local communities are responsible for making the change happen. Without a community's support, CEM becomes another planning exercise, addressing, but never attaining, it's goals and objectives.

The implementation of CEM's goals and objectives offers benefits for both the State and local communities. The State establishes a consistent environmental message for communities and can also steer them toward existing sources of assistance. Local communities may no longer need to rely on outside sources of assistance for establishing their environmental goals and can make better use of their existing resources through CEM. It is also a chance to address environmental concerns with preventative measures (typically much more cost effective) rather than react to problems as they arise.

CEM's goals and objectives are designed to be flexible and to work with a community's existing structure and social capital. CEM also complements other statewide initiatives, such as Agricultural Environmental Management (AEM). Both of these initiatives have multi-phased approaches that are designed to address environmental issues at both the macro and micro scale.

Environmental issues relating to nonpoint source pollution, natural resource conservation and drinking water supply protection form the core of CEM's structure. Through the use of various educational, assessment, technical and planning tools, CEM assists communities by finding specific (yet realistic) solutions relating to these issues.

The following steps describe the CEM process:

- Meet with local officials and community representatives. Is CEM needed and will it be supported?
- Use existing materials and CEM assessments to identify a community's current situation, perception and strategy for managing their water quality and natural resource issues.
- Identify areas of concern and evaluate CEM proposed strategies and management options for addressing them.
- Summarize the CEM strategies and management options the community identifies for addressing these concerns and incorporate them into individual plans or an overall natural resources plan.
- Incorporate these CEM derived plans into the community's master plan when and where applicable.
- Implement Plan(s).
- As the overall objective, establish effective local programs for addressing specific community concerns.

Much of the time and effort currently spent by planners, environmentalists, and governments is dedicated to finding solutions to the problems associated with our activities. When problems arise, they directly impact our ability to enjoy and protect our natural resources and water quality. Since most of our environmental management takes place at the local level, it is extremely important to establish effective local programs. These programs should be sustainable, mirror the community's vision, remember past history and take advantage of the resources and agencies that exist to help. The CEM process works within this framework to help guide community actions.

The goal of CEM is to assist efforts that will help prevent or remediate our impact on the environment while enhancing opportunities for future development.