

Policy Implementation in collaborative watershed management:  
A multi-case study of collaborative efforts under Washington's Watershed Planning Act

**Project Overview:**

This research project will explore the implementation of locally-based watershed management plans prepared under Washington's *Watershed Planning Act* (codified at RCW 90.82). The lead researcher will be studying the management plans from four of the state's Water Resource Inventory Areas (WRIAs) in order to answer questions relating to choice of management strategies, factors that have affected plan implementation, and the role of collaboration in watershed management. The four study WRIAs represent a diversity of populations, climates, and water management histories, but each area has completed its plan according to the Watershed Planning Act's requirements and support structures. The project's lead researcher is a UW graduate student, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master's degree.

**Background:**

The Watershed Planning Act created a voluntary framework for encouraging local governments to take an active role in the management of water resources at the WRIA scale. The Act prescribes a four-phase process for (1) organizing a locally-based collaborative Planning Unit, (2) conducting resource assessments, (3) developing a watershed management plan, and (4) implementing the plan. State funding and assistance from state agencies is attached to each phase, and participants have the opportunity to address a variety of water management topics in their local process. To date, about 40 WRIAs throughout the state have completed the four phases laid out by the Act; for this research project, the researcher has selected the four study WRIAs (and associated plans) from this group of mature planning efforts.

**Study Objectives and Questions:**

This project seeks to add to the academic literature at the intersection of collaborative natural resource governance and public policy implementation. The researcher also hopes to provide useful information for local practitioners and state-level policymakers. Specific research questions include:

1. What types of actions or strategies are most commonly recommended in the plans?
2. What factors have helped or hindered the implementation of these plans?
3. How has the collaborative nature of the effort influenced the implementation progress to date?
4. What program sustainability issues have emerged, and what coping strategies are available?

**Methods and Key Dates:**

The lead researcher will be employing qualitative research methods, primarily *document review* and *interviews*. For the document review, the researcher will examine a variety of plans, reports, and news releases for each study WRIA, as available. The lead researcher will also conduct 3-5 interviews (per WRIA) with individuals who are knowledgeable about their area's planning and implementation work. Interviews will occur from late summer through fall 2016. Project completion is expected in June 2017.

**Research Personnel & Contact Information:**

The Lead Researcher is UW graduate student **Trevor Robinson**, presently enrolled in a concurrent M.S./M.P.A. program at the University of Washington. Please contact Mr. Robinson at [trob1701@uw.edu](mailto:trob1701@uw.edu) or at (206)-919-4732 with any questions or concerns about this project.

Additionally, **Dr. Clare Ryan** is acting as the graduate committee chair and is providing faculty supervision and advising for this project. Dr. Ryan be reached at [cmryan@uw.edu](mailto:cmryan@uw.edu).