

## **Managers Forum Summary** **3/25/04**

Chris Russo welcomed managers and outlined the format for the forum discussion. The topic of the forum was Strategic Direction of DENR and the focus was a dialog with the Secretary and Chief Deputy Secretary. Chris announced that at 11:30 time would be allotted for general discussion. The Strategic Plan had previously been distributed by e-mail.

A “Whine Cellar” was posted on the wall and managers were encouraged to write reactions, comments, anything they wanted.

Bill Laxton with EPA welcomed DENR managers and introduced Deputy Regional Administrator Stan Meiburg. Mr. Meiburg discussed relationships between federal and state agencies and the need to build on mutual and collaborative strengths.

Secretary Ross expressed appreciation for leadership roles in DENR and for the example of EPA’s green building as DENR looks to constructing a new building.

Secretary Ross began his comments with a question to managers:  
***How can you help the Department and your organization be successful?***

Secretary Ross proceeded by providing an overview of the Strategic Plan development.

Plans have been made previously on strategic directions and put on a shelf but the intent is to do our best to make sure that doesn’t happen to this plan. The plan should be a guide and compass through the year. Our job as leaders is to build skills in ourselves and others.

### 1) Starts with **mission**.

The DENR mission gets to the heart of the mission we’ve been given through the constitution and environmental statutes. The Secretary stated he is inspired and motivated by the sense of commitment to mission of DENR from Dept. managers.

2) From mission we begin to look at what are the hopes and dreams for the future, our **vision**. Innovation, partnership and teamwork are keys to the vision.

**Innovation** is crucial to finding ways to get mission accomplished. Ecosystem Enhancement Program of DENR is a current model of innovation.

**Partnerships** focus working with others outside the Department. For example, Air Quality just received the EPA Environmental Excellence Award for Clean Smokestacks. This was an effort that showed the power of partnerships.

**Teamwork** focuses on working together within in DENR such as the response to Hurricane Isabel.

3) **Values** are the things we live by; a standard of conduct. We need a set of values to accomplish our mission and vision. Values are our Honor Code or Core Values. The Secretary emphasized the importance of values and that he looks to all of us to live by these things.

The next question Secretary Ross posed to managers was:

***What external environment is your organization operating in?***

The Secretary discussed insight he had gained from a leadership course at UNC taught by Jerry Bell who stated the main reason a program dies is that it gets out of touch with its external environment. Managers need figure out what is happening and what changes are occurring in the external environment that impacts your program.

Once these things are figured out you can build a strategic plan. That is what the Department has done in developing the seven strategic directions that cut across division lines. This does not sum up all the Department must do but sets down in one place seven things the Department will focus on for this year. The Secretary encouraged each program to go through a similar process.

The next step is to be sure our programs, products, services, and outputs are meeting the strategic direction. Regulatory programs are challenged to make sure programs are aimed at meeting biggest problems today which has changed since 1970's when many regulations began. The problems have changed.

Is this getting done? Is work designed to meet strategic directions? What structure will achieve that work? Some divisions are currently working through this but it is not easy.

Who are the right people to get the work done in that structure? The challenge is finding the right fit based on technical knowledge, the right commitment, and the right personality and effectiveness skills. Different people have different strengths and weaknesses.

It is all about leadership in your program, creating and maintaining a focus on priorities and tasks. What has to get done to deliver the service? Programs must create and maintain a focus on priorities. The strategic plan should keep us focused on fundamentals.

Part of today is about feedback, so we can continue to improve. You need a feedback system to measure improvements. Continually check at various levels; how is it going, how can we improve.

The Secretary stressed that he is serious about this plan. He believes this is the way to build ourselves as leaders and accomplish the most.

Division Directors are being asked five questions during reviews:  
Are plans focused and specific enough? Are goals stretch goals?  
How does the Department Strategic Plan fit with division plans?  
How is each division and office working with other divisions?  
How does each division director plan to develop their skills and those reporting to them?

The Secretary ended his comments by inviting managers thoughts, comments and questions.

Chris stated that the Secretary had provided a roadmap of what the strategic plan is about. He asked managers to think about their connection to the plan and consider the question:

***What's the single biggest problem that you can fix that will move DENR forward to meet the strategic direction?***

Responses:

- Fix our attitudes; try to find the bright side.

*(Secretary Ross responded everyone faces 100 problems a day and as many are lined up to take their place. We each have a chance to set our attitude about each problem. You can take on the notion you are a victim or take ownership. The challenge is finding a way to get at the problem and build the skills to tackle them.)*

- Need to change behavior.

*(Chris stated that in leadership we must deal with behavior and performance. Secretary Ross added that he wants to promote divisions working together to fix problems without raising them to the Secretaries Office. When a problem is brought to him he will ask if you have tried to get together to solve problem first.)*

- Bringing new technologies into BMP's and evaluating new research.
- Increasing knowledge of other programs. More knowledge will help everyone understand and make better decisions.
- Be bold and be willing to stick your neck out.
- Developing leaders to take our place. Demographics in the Department are shifting and many experienced people getting ready to retire.

*(Chris noted that the responses were focusing on behaviors and communications, not process improvements.)*

- Have to recognize many aspects of problems may be out of your control. Process improvements occur as people get involved and have a stake in it. If each person focuses on things they control, other things will evolve.

Chris asked managers to look at the organization, not individuals. What are the elements we can fix as a team?

- Need to work on morale, professional development opportunities, and allow employees to go out in the field to work with the people they serve.
- Managers can empower the people they manage but they also need the support of their managers.
- Look at how others solving problems, don't reinvent solutions.
- We need to think about how our division staff can help others, rather than how others can help us.

Chris: ***What are the things we can do more of or start doing to improve our performance to accomplish the mission?***

- We can do more to communicate. Most problems seem to be caused by a breakdown of communication. What are people in your section doing and why? We also need to improve communication externally with the regulated community and sister agencies.
- Need to hear the success stories, case studies of what divisions are doing to improve the environment. For example press releases, newsletters, case studies, etc.
- Need to communicate DENR successes more publicly. From the standpoint of a state employee, it shows we are working for the public. Just having a web site is not enough.
- Try to get public buy-in. Consumers do not understand the environmental impact of their choices.
- Trust managers to do their jobs, not just technically but also administratively. Administrative divisions too often 2<sup>nd</sup> guess manager's decisions rather than trying to help. Make managers more accountable.
- Managers need to understand the context of some administrative decisions. Better communication on all ends would help.

Chris asked managers to think about during the break:

**How do managers assure accountability? How do you fit into the strategic directions?**

BREAK

After the break Chris briefly reviewed the morning and introduced Chief Deputy Secretary Benton.

Chief Deputy Secretary Benton expressed his appreciation for the feeling we sometimes get when strategic planning is mentioned. He stated that the Strategic Plan of DENR is a way to share and communicate what the Department is trying to do in the near term and is not a long-range plan. The Plan is a way to tell others what is important to DENR and back it up with results. It is a way to communicate and hold ourselves accountable.

Chief Deputy Secretary Benton stated the plan focused on 2 guiding principles:

- 1) our role in helping achieve a stronger economy;
- 2) and customers.

Both of these could be controversial but he believes they have a place in way we conduct our business. How well we work with partners and customers helps the state and economy now and in years to come.

Secretary Ross added that the notion of sustainability has programs working together to accomplish environmental, economic and social issues at the same time. For example DENR's river basin focus crosses many division boundaries. It is not just a water quality effort, but needs to be embraced to see how other programs can compliment the effort. In drought management, we need to see how river basins interact.

Secretary Ross stated that people are thinking more and more about river basins. Senator Dole's Chief of Staff stated that Senator Dole wanted to focus on river basin management. Federal Oceans Commission will probably focus on upstream impacts of ocean waters and present opportunities. We must be smart about connecting the dots, looking at resource opportunities, new concepts and expand beyond the good work already done.

Chief Deputy Secretary Benton asked **how do we take our efforts to next level?** A key he mentioned is communications, an area we need to continue to work on. Part of communication is listening to different perspectives then adjusting and responding to try and find common ground.

A challenge is to understand the different levels of accountability. Some are accountable to the state auditor, while grants administration may be accountable to the budget office. We need to try and figure out how to handle respective

responsibilities. Communicate, listen and try to understand the various levels of accountability. The Secretary's office strongly encourages lateral communications to solve problems.

Chief Deputy Secretary Benton then responded to specific questions received submitted prior to the forum.

*Is there a problem in IBEAM process and budget review?*

There have been some problems with contracted services and the process that needs to be followed got a little off-track. Had to regroup to follow all budget and purchasing procedures.

IBEAM is an integrated information network, built with a common framework so we can all share information coming from programs and is to be web based.

[Added note: The Managers' Forum is hosting an event dedicated to these issues with Mark Hughes, DENR Information Technology Services Director, on June 16, 2004]

*What is happening with Environmental Health?*

A Public Health task force was given the mission to look at the structure of the state's health services. There have been some proposals made concerning where Environmental Health should be in state government. The Department feels strongly that public health is a key part of what DENR is about and Environmental Health is part of the team. We don't know what the end will be but the Secretary's Office is trying to monitor closely and is engaged.

*What is happening with the Water Quality reorganization?*

This reorganization reflects several things we are trying to articulate in strategic plan (Strategic Direction 2). In Water Quality additional assignments had resulted in an organization where the balance in supervisors, staffing, and workload had gotten out of whack. This didn't impact quality but the organization needed better balancing and workload distribution. The reorganization was to address these issues, reduce frustration, address how some sections needed to work closer together, and provides more of a division level focus for IT.

*Impaired waters and TMDL, what about trading in that area?*

EPA requires a strategy to get impaired waters back to their designated classification. This affects permits, the total watershed and total water load from areas such as point sources, agriculture, non-point sources and urban runoff. The thinking is evolving that you can trade if it is contributing to the overall goal of improvements.

DWQ staff added that EPA was kind of split on this issue. There is a challenge of how to address non-point sources.

Chris then focused the discussion on looking at fit and accountability. He stated we are talking about getting away from the thinking that "I can't do anything about this". Many things we can't control but we can influence.

Chris asked managers to respond to the question:

***How are you going to deal with accountability related to strategic goals?***

For example, there is a goal to increase grant funding, but managers don't want to do it because of the process involved.

Chief Deputy Secretary Benton pointed out that this was a good example of paying attention to our external environment. The exercise required to create new positions includes taking the request to Government Operation. One of the dynamics we are seeing is a big push-back from Gov. Ops. on adding positions. This is an example of checking and dealing with external environment.

Secretary Ross said he is amazed by the innovative opportunities that exist to get funding. Congress is looking for ways to earmark funds for good state projects. We shouldn't assume there are no money and miss opportunities.

Comments from managers:

- Match is often a problem. A solution may be to work with other divisions for match.
- Some grant applications require an enormous speculative time investment. Divisions need someone with time and skills to devote to grant applications.

The Museum has recently applied for a \$25 million, 5 years grant for "The Science of Learning Science". Partnering with NCSU and UNC, this project would create learning centers and have a huge impact on how science is taught. Secretary Ross commented that this proposal has a direct connection with Strategic Direction 4. If the grant comes through it will be a great innovative approach. Many of the barriers we experience come back to education.

- CGIA has some IT expertise in grant writing.
- We need to look for expertise in Department on grant writing and get people together. Diane Zinkl, DENR liaison with federal agencies, located in Washington, DC can help find federal funding, can get information on what they are looking for in a grant proposal, and help identify the buzz words.
- In the Departments New Employee Orientation, new employees are challenged to learn more about the Department overall, not just their divisions. Managers need to challenge their folks to learn more about other agencies.

Chris asked managers:

***How are you going to fit in with the Strategic Plan's seven directions? What are the steps you need to take? How are you going to be accountable?***

Comments from manager:

- Improve communication. What I have in front of me? Who else do I need to involve?
- Examine the investment you make; realize each thing you do can take time. We as managers can thank and acknowledge the things staff are doing and support them.
- Human Resources will be leading the Workplace Enhancement Program (focusing on making DENR the employer of choice) forums across the state asking how do we get there, what does that mean?

Chris stated the key is to look at your strengths and map your environment. It is about communications and relationships. The change is we are going to make these things happen and gage our success.

- Communication is a loop, and involves sender, receiver and feedback. Is a personal responsibility to make sure we are all sending and receiving. Start thinking about what makes effective communication.

Steve Vozzo thanked participants for coming and invited interested managers to join the Managers' Forum.

A suggestion was made to use the Strategic Plan as a way to communicate with our external environment. It is a way to counter negative impression. How can we get the General Assembly, local governments, business groups, environmental groups, etc., to understand and support Strategic Plan. The Strategic Plan could be reedited for public consumption.

Secretary Ross agreed that was a great idea.

Chris opened the discussion to any issues or questions.

***How do we plan to accomplish Objective 2.1? (Retain 50% workforce for 10 years of service using 2003 as the baseline year).***

Harlan Frye, Human Resources Division Director responded that there are two 2 goals in Human Resources. One is to make DENR the "Employer of Choice". They will ask employees what will keep you in DENR. They are also looking at the hiring process and training. Changes to the hiring process would allow managers to have more input. OSP is looking at revising compensation through banding. The goal is to have 50% of all classifications done by end of this year.

A suggestion was made to have a Leadership Managers Forum that would focus on elements of leadership.

Final words from Secretary Ross:

Remember from Tennyson's The Charge of the Light Brigade, "Boldly they rode and well".

- 1) The Honor code is not to be dismissed. The Secretary stated he expects to measure his conduct and hopes all will measure their conduct by these standards. They are crucial to success.
- 2) The communication of how to be effective leaders is important.
- 3) Your roles are key in whether these directions are achieved and if Department as a whole is successful.

Evaluations were distributed.

The next Managers' Forum will be on June 16 on IT.