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Organizational Structure of State Level Natural Resource  
Management: Impacts on Coastal Protection.

Preliminary Assumptions:

Sat 19: 8:00-10:00 am (19)

1. Organizational structure and administration of regulatory functions are key to governmental protection of the environment.
2. The strongest assurance citizens have of protection of the Public Trust is through "good" governance.

What assurances do citizens have that they are receiving "good" government? One measure that is regularly cited is the oldest and the simplest: is the mission (job) that drives the agency being fulfilled (done)? In administrative structures, that question should be fairly easily answered. Each agency or department in a bureaucracy should have a mission statement identifying the key goals and objectives of the unit. If the agency has too many separate missions and too large a set of responsibilities, a traditional response has been to fraction or fragment that unit into agencies of more appropriate size. There have been many examples as well where this division has been followed by a recombination or realignment of functions into new agencies. Thus, there are examples of both fragmentation and integration for the purpose improving the efficiency of environmental administration.

The State of Florida and some other States have recently considered changes in their organization of administrative structures for environmental management. States such as Florida are considering consolidating natural resource and environmental management functions under a central state agency, or at minimum a more centralized structure.

Florida has separate Departments for Natural Resources, Environmental Regulation, Fish and Game Conservation, Agriculture and Community Affairs (Growth Management and Coastal Zone Management); plus semi-autonomous regional Water Management Districts. Under one proposed schema, the majority of the natural resource and environmental management functions would be merged under a new Department. The rationale for streamlining put forward by governors and legislatures in States considering such action generally revolves around concepts of efficiency, simplicity and accessibility in a centralized operation.

In contrast, other States, such as Michigan, have considered fragmenting centralized agencies into more specialized units; e.g. splitting a Department of Natural Resources into a state Conservation agency and a state Environmental Protection agency. The underlying philosophy here is that smaller agencies with distinct directives make fewer compromises in their mission. Also, theoretically the public would have greater opportunity for access

and services if the agencies' missions were narrower, i.e. the public(s) would more easily be able to determine where they should seek service and assistance.

When a state government chooses to undertake either type of transition, considerable amounts of time, effort and funding are expended to establish the new institutional structure(s). It is important for states to carefully examine the underlying reasons for centralization/decentralization of resource management in the political, social and physical environment of their State. In these times of increasing demands upon decreasing state revenues, there is a continuing temptation to consolidate to decrease administrative cost. This "common sense" assumption can be proven wrong by the creation of bureaucracies of scale inappropriate to goals of environmental protection.

States can err in the opposite direction. Authority can become so fragmented that citizens can find themselves traversing bureaucratic mazes of permits and applications costing excess time, money and potentially creating harm to the resources that are to be preserved and conserved. All of this being done at escalating cost to the taxpaying public.

What then is necessary? Before initiating such changes in administrative structure, it is important for states to establish potential measures of success/failure in organizational change. States at a minimum should establish criteria to measure:

- (1) impact on the resources or resource systems that the state wishes to preserve or conserve;
- (2) the fiscal impact of administrative changes on state;
- (3) impacts on service to clients or communities;
- (4) impact upon the provision of allied and separate services of state government;
- (5) what alternatives are available to accomplish the same goals; and
- (6) internal and external receptiveness to the proposed changes.

Insufficient consideration any of these impact areas can produce difficulty or even failure in institutional change.