



# Beyond the Snappy Acronym

## The Real Definition of NEMO

Some of you might find the tone of this brief piece to be hauntingly familiar. And then it hits you—*it's just like one of those little blurbs from the company president on the inside cover of a mail order catalog!* Well, as a famous Stooge (Curly?) once said, we resemble that remark!

Hopefully, we'll never attain the level of smug self-satisfaction suffusing those little "messages." This piece is actually in response to the growing national network of projects patterned after ours. As our colleagues around the country embark on their own efforts, it seems like a good idea to enumerate the basic elements of NEMO that define what we're all about. We may not take ourselves too seriously, but we *are* seriously concerned about what we see going on out there: the elevation of the BMP over comprehensive planning; the substitution of voluminous map-making for "value-added" education; and, the reticence of otherwise forward-thinking organizations to confront the challenges of assisting our communities to do a better job of land use planning. So, here is NEMO boiled down to its three basic elements. (Hint: they ain't rocket science!).

### NEMO is Education

Cooperative Extension is an educational organization, and NEMO is an educational approach to addressing the issues of nonpoint source pollution and watershed management. There are obviously many other approaches—regulation, technical assistance, incentive programs—none of them mutually exclusive. We feel that in the "new era" of natural resource protection, defined largely by land use-generated problems like nonpoint source pollution and habitat fragmentation, education is the most important and effective weapon that we have. However (this is the SOAPBOX section, remember?), natural resource agencies and organizations of all types need to recognize that education is not: (a) a supplement to regulation and/or engineering; (b) a "nice" afterthought to satisfy the warm-and-fuzzy types; (c) a safe money-maker with low overhead; or (d) all of the above. Education takes as much time, money and professionalism as any other major endeavor.

### NEMO Addresses Land Use

The bottom line might be water resource protection, but the *modus operandi* is land use education. And land use is overwhelmingly determined at the local level, which is why NEMO targets local land use decision-makers. This includes our primary audience of local land use officials (professional, elected, and appointed), but can also include individual landowners like farmers, forest owners, and riparian property owners.

To be honest, we feel that very few programs out there can stare local land use in the face without fainting, blanching, flinching or at least blinking. This is because local land use can be messy, frustrating, controversial, time-consuming, hard to track or evaluate, and [*add your favorite epithet here...*]. Also, most organizations are just not set up (yet)

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to deal with this issue. Decades of environmental regulation have left residual mindsets in both the regulators and the regulated that often make agency/community dialogues on local land use issues difficult. Many nonprofit and civic organizations have tremendous experience working with individuals, and with politicians on the greater public policy stage, but relatively little experience working directly with local land use officials.

This brings us back to the first item on this list, education. A good research-based, non-advocacy educational program, in our biased opinion, is the best way to assist communities to make better land use decisions. It also brings us back to our first Soapbox piece, *The Only BMP that Really Works: Better and More Planning*. NEMO's philosophy is that good natural resource-based planning is the most effective, and most cost-effective, method of protecting natural resources. A key added benefit is that through good planning, natural resource protection can be tied in with other important, interwoven community issues like economic growth and preserving community character in the face of the sprawl.

## NEMO Makes Use of Modern Technology, but is Not About Technology

NEMO uses geographic information system (GIS), remote sensing (RS), and world wide web (WWW) technologies to craft and enhance our educational messages. We fully believe in the power of maps, but all our methods, from the strictly visual to the analytical, must meet the acid test of being useful for educating and assisting local land use decision makers. This is less obvious than it sounds. As one sage GIS expert noted at a workshop we helped to run: "...*with GIS, any idiot can make a map!*"

The thing that makes NEMO work is the "value-added" approach of working with the target audience on the meaning and uses of the maps. Dumping a hefty load of spectacular GIS maps on someone's desk is the modern equivalent of the dreaded, to-be-avoided-at-all-costs "report that gathers dust on the shelf"—and believe us, it's happening out there each and every day. Education is the thing that makes the technology useful, and ensures the incorporation of high-tech (and low-tech) information into the solving of real world problems.

Which conveniently brings us full circle us back to Item #1. A good place to end.



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