



N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission

**An environmental index could track emissions of sulfur dioxide and other air pollutants from industries, autos, and other sources.**

## *Other States Move Forward with Environmental Index Reports*

**F**our states recently have produced reports that could serve as useful guides for North Carolina's long-awaited environmental index. Kentucky, Florida, Washington, and Oregon have published documents that focus on environmental indicators to varying degrees—although several of those reports resemble in part North Carolina's "State of Environment" report, a review of environmental policies and programs that the state has produced biennially since 1987. (Highlights of those reports are summarized in Table 1, p. 53, and Table 2, p. 56.)

### **Kentucky**

Kentucky probably has come the closest to producing an environmental index report as envisioned for North Carolina—and for good reason. The recommendations of Governor Martin's blue-

ribbon panel on environmental indicators were among the documents and information that Kentucky officials reviewed in preparing their report, "State of Kentucky's Environment: A Report of Progress and Problems."<sup>1</sup>

In essence, the Kentucky report combines management and policy information, as provided in North Carolina's "State of the Environment" report, with nearly 300 charts showing key environmental indicators and text interpreting that information. The indicators cover seven major categories: water resources, air quality, toxics, energy, coal mining, waste management (including hazardous, solid, special, medical, and low-level radioactive wastes), and natural resources (including land use, agriculture, forestry, natural areas, fish and wildlife, and threatened and endangered species). The report was prepared by the Kentucky Environmental Quality Commission, an in-

dependent citizen advisory board to the governor.

"In the report, we review both current conditions as well as trends and what they tell us," says Leslie Cole, executive director of the Kentucky commission. "We didn't require agencies to compile or collect new data. The data were all drawn from existing information. We started out with just the basics in our first report—to find out what information was out there. We plan to refine the environmental indicators in each subsequent report."

Like North Carolina's "State of the Environment" report, the Kentucky report was mandated by the state legislature. Unlike North Carolina, the Kentucky legislature appropriated \$5,000 to produce the report and provided the extra staff needed to complete the project. The project also was supported by \$45,000 in grants from a private foundation and two colleges. "We were provided two additional staff," Cole says. "So, we had four individuals working on it. It took about a year-and-a-half to put the first report together." In total, Cole estimates the report cost about \$80,000 to produce, including equipment, printing costs, and staff salaries and benefits.

Despite such costs, she says, Kentucky lawmakers see the project as a means to help the state spend money more efficiently on environmental problems. "We put a great deal of funding into our environmental programs," she says. "I think the legislature was interested in seeing if these investments were achieving results."

## Florida

Florida also has produced a detailed environmental indicators report, titled "Strategic Assessment of Florida's Environment." The thick document includes 124 indicators in nine major categories: land use, water quality, water quantity, air quality, wildlife, waste management, infrastructure, environmental investment, and public perception.<sup>2</sup> The report is perhaps the truest example among the states of an environmental index and contains in-depth and wide-ranging information over multi-year time spans. Yet the Florida report contains very little text to interpret data, explain trends, or discuss management options. It is essentially an in-house document prepared to assist government administrators, rather than to educate the public.

"Ours has been very much an internal effort, really designed much more as an internal planning document," says Gil Bergquist, planning and research administrator for the Florida Department of

Environmental Regulation. "There's absolutely no attempt to integrate that report into any type of narrative or discussion. If you want to get anything out of that report, you've got to sit down and study it."

The Florida agency produced the report on its own initiative over a three-year span. It compiled the report using existing staff—aided by a \$50,000 federal grant that funded an initial planning study at the University of South Florida. "There was very little out of that [planning study] which was of any particular use," Bergquist says. "Once we got past that original \$50,000, it was done without any state appropriation—whatsoever. I don't necessarily recommend that, because it takes a lot longer to do it. But we produced a good product."

## Oregon

Oregon has produced perhaps the most intriguing and unique report, titled "Oregon Benchmarks."<sup>3</sup> The Oregon Legislature mandated the report in 1989, while establishing the Oregon Progress Board to produce the document every two years. Essentially, "Benchmarks" is a report card that sets standards for measuring statewide progress and government performance.

As Oregon Governor Barbara Roberts describes it, "In state government the benchmarks have already been adopted as a tool for stating concrete objectives, setting program and budget priorities, and measuring performance. They are helping our agencies to focus differently, work more closely together, and make better use of existing resources."<sup>4</sup>

Unlike the other state index reports, "Benchmarks" cuts across all branches of state govern-

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ment, including 272 indicators (or benchmarks) for measuring progress in three broad areas: people, quality of life, and the economy. The environment falls within the "quality of life" category, which includes about 20 indicators under the broader topics of air, water, land, and plants, fish and wildlife.

For each benchmark, the report shows trends for preceding years (where available) and sets goals for future years. For example, one of the benchmarks for air quality is the "percentage of Oregonians living where the air meets government ambient air quality standards." The benchmark shows a mixed trend: the number increased from 33 percent in 1970 to 89 percent in 1990, but dropped to 50 percent in 1992. The report also sets a goal of 100 percent for the years 1995, 2000, and 2010.

Although the report's environmental indicators are not as detailed as in other state reports, Oregon officials say the report has had an impact on the administration of environmental programs. "These benchmarks have been really important with regards to setting priorities," says Elana Stampfer, a special assistant to the director of the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality in Portland. "If a program is designed to help us meet a benchmark, it gets special attention from the legislature—and, in the current budget process, it stands a better chance of being funded." The department could not provide an estimate of the cost for compiling environmental indicators for the "Benchmarks" report.

## Washington

Washington produces a report that is more like North Carolina's "State of the Environment" report than an environmental index. In fact, the Washington document is titled "The 1991 State of the Environment Report," and it largely focuses on management and regulation of resources.<sup>5</sup> Like "Oregon Benchmarks," the Washington report sets goals for the future—but those goals focus on management actions rather than setting specific measures of environmental quality to be achieved.

Nevertheless, the Washington report does contain some elements of an environmental index. The report has narrative discussions of trends for resource categories and charts for selected environmental indicators, such as commercial fish landings, amounts of timber harvested, and energy use per capita. Categories covered in the report include: air quality, water, land use (agriculture, rangelands, forests, urban, shorelands, recreation,

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and wetlands), fish and wildlife, and "cross issues" (energy, global climate change, recycling, litter, hazardous substances and waste, pesticides, underground storage tanks, spills, toxic waste sites, contaminated sediments, and radioactive waste).

Washington's 1993 "State of the Environment" report, to be published later this year, will include 10 to 20 key environmental indicators and trends, says Philip Miller, comprehensive planning manager for the state Department of Ecology. "We want a succinct list, a selected list of indicators," he says. Miller estimates that it costs his agency between \$75,000 and \$100,000 to produce the report every two years, including staff time, materials, and printing costs.

—Tom Mather

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> "State of Kentucky's Environment: A Report of Progress and Problems," Kentucky Environmental Quality Commission, Frankfort, Ky., 1992, 332 pages.

<sup>2</sup> Gilbert Bergquist and Peter Goren, "Strategic Assessment of Florida's Environment: Final Review Indicator Manual," Florida Department of Environmental Regulation, Office of Planning and Research, Tallahassee, Fla., March 1993 (pages not numbered).

<sup>3</sup> "Oregon Benchmarks," Report to the 1991 Oregon Legislature, Oregon Progress Board, Salem, Ore., January 1991, 36 pp., plus appendix.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted from a letter of introduction in "Oregon Benchmarks," Report to the 1993 Legislature, Oregon Progress Board, Salem, Ore., Dec. 1992 (no page number).

<sup>5</sup> "The 1991 State of the Environment Report," Washington Department of Ecology, Olympia, Wash., July 1992, 139 pp.