

A Suggestion for “Watershed Approach” to an Effective Water Management System: Building up a “Watershed Union”

Yamada Mayumi

JIA-QA Center, Tokyo, Japan (Waseda University graduate student)

In 1998, Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport announced the 5th Comprehensive National Development Plan “Grand Design for the 21st Century”. In this development plan, “Watershed Approach” is introduced as one of effective methods to resolve the multiple problems on hydrological ecosystems, which consist of rivers, lakes, flood plains, wetlands and coastal waters, and lie across administrative boundaries. On the other hand, River Law and Seashore Law have been revised in 1997 and in 2000 respectively to realize an effective water management system through “Watershed Approach”. Further, the relevant six ministries and agencies have collectively set up the committees for coordination and cooperation to keep hydrological ecosystems sound and to integrate measures on basin areas. However, this approach has not been fully applied yet in Japan and consequently not been operated effectively as expected, because administrative system and strategy for application in Japan were much different from those of western countries. So it is helpful to learn from the experience of application in French of which administrative system is relatively similar to Japan and to modify the method to suit for Japanese situation of hydrological ecosystems and administrative organization. Triggered by the 1964 Law on Water, “Watershed Approach” was adopted by the French government for the water management system in order to maintain and restore the ecosystem and to cooperate with many stakeholders at regional level. The water management system has been operated effectively since then. French hydrological ecosystem has been divided into six hydrographic basins with major rivers and its tributaries. Each basin has a Water Agency, which is an Administrative Public Corporation, and a Basin Committee that is a consultative body consists of representatives of interested parties. The Water Agencies, which is financially independent, implement the policies formulated by their respective Basin Committees, taking actions such as management of water resources and water quality, conservation of aquatic environments, monitoring continental and coastal water quality, and so on. They offer not only technical advices but also financial supports to the interested parties in the basins and their financial resources come from charges levied on water pollution and water use.

By reviewing this approach, the new Japanese way of application of the method can be suggested. Local Autonomy Law in force defined Union of Local Public Bodies at chapter III and articles starting with article 291-2 made it possible under a certain condition that a Wide-Area Union (or a “Watershed Union”) be established to perform functions similar to that of Water Agencies in France. In this following wind, we have much chance to establish a “Watershed Union”, to enhance its administrative authority, and finally to build up a more effective and comprehensive water management system.