

ANNUAL REPORT OF PROGRESS AND ACTIVITIES IN THE LOWER LITTLE RIVER WATERSHED RESTORATION ACTION STRATEGY

For the Period January through September 2001, with notes on special concerns through December 2001.

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Summary:

The Lower Little River Watershed Restoration Strategy has not started as strongly and smoothly as NRCS and the Coalition would like. Multiple demands on agency and Coalition member staff has resulted in frequent loss of focus and slippage in deadlines. The technical expertise needed to efficiently conduct some of the subtasks is not as readily available to NRCS as it would prefer. As a result, there has not been enough sustained attention by NRCS staff (or Coalition members and their employees) to keep all tasks on track. Preparation for and follow-up to meetings has been less than adequate.

Key gaps are in:

- Project management has suffered due to staff shortages and unexpectedly high demands from larger projects; also, water quality technical expertise is not present on his staff. The importance of having such expertise was not anticipated.
- Day to day WRAS activities at the local level need someone whose primary responsibility is to ensure the project is staying on course without lapses in progress on key subtasks.

Accomplishments to date:

Task 1 - Watershed Coalition Formation

Coalition has formally organized and adopted by-laws. The Coalition members signed MOU's with the Arkansas Soil and Water Conservation Commission. Quarterly meetings have been held regularly with good attendance by Coalition member directors and staff.

Coalition members and cooperating agencies discussed potential partner organizations at early meetings. Several technical agencies were invited to provide input to the process. These agencies contributed to other subtasks. See notes for task 2. The need for input to the WRAS process by other organizations including industries, agricultural and forestry groups, sportsmen's and environmental groups and others was also discussed at early meetings. Specific groups were identified and will be invited to participate in investigative meetings.

Coalition members are interested in achieving the goals of the WRAS, but are frustrated with the slow progress. Coalition members are working out the administrative processes. Partner state and federal agencies have provided good support and information. Initial progress in collaborating with Cooperative Extension Service faltered.

Task 2 - Data Compilation and Presentation

Agencies and Coalition members have experienced problems in completing some elements of the subtasks. Deadlines have slipped. Cooperating agencies have provided good support.

Cooperating agencies include:

Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ)

Arkansas Department of Health (ADOH)

Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission (ANHC)

US Army Corps of Engineers (COE)

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others?

NRCS coordinated several meetings of technical agencies and Coalition representatives to determine what data is available. NRCS staff reviewed and compiled key findings from a wide array of reports. A summary of the findings was presented to the Coalition in June 2001. Additional work is ongoing to better distill the information to assist the Coalition in setting priorities in conducting any additional resource assessments or inventories. Overall, however, the available data indicate that the resources of watershed are generally in good to very good condition. There are a number of indicators that specific parts of sub-watersheds may need attention. The ADOH is concerned about levels of total organic carbon (TOC) in Millwood Lake. Elevated TOC levels are likely due in part to the shallow depth of the lake, but the WRAS may need to include steps to prevent higher TOC levels in the future, or even to reduce them.

One challenge for the Coalition will be to motivate citizens to action in the absence of clear and widespread problems.

The data compilation process has been difficult for NRCS and the Coalition. The sources of data are diverse. Many studies and assessments have been conducted over many years. Studies and monitoring were conducted with varying objectives and methodologies. Some studies were of short duration which limits the ability to draw conclusions about current conditions with confidence. The result is that it can be difficult to compare results and draw conclusions.

In September 2001, ADOH presented GIS information from its source water protection program. The graphical representation of potential sources of contamination suggested

ways to analyze the resource information for greater clarity. Analyses will be completed in conjunction with the investigative meetings in March 2002.

Task 3

Task 4

Task 5

Opportunities to improve:

Actions needed to fully succeed:

Proposed Schedule of Tasks and Products Revision:

Conclusions: and Recommendations: