



## **USDA-CSREES 2006 National Water Quality Conference**

### **Grassroots Blueprints**

Watershed groups throughout Alabama are looking for solutions to water quality issues that will serve to improve their local water quality while also educating the general public. The Alabama Cooperative Extension System (ACES) and Auburn University Department of Landscape Architecture (AU LA) have partnered to offer rural communities facing growth pressures ideas for how to manage their watersheds in a manner that respects existing conditions and economic growth without forgoing protection of local streams, rivers, and bays. Working through established relationships between the ACES and local watershed groups, communities are identified that are writing watershed management plans, revising their comprehensive land use plans, or display an interest in natural resource based planning. As watershed plans are completed, community members are eager to jump into implementing management practices. However, lack of low-cost technical assistance and limited project funding are barriers to the implementation of on-the-ground projects. At the same time, AU LA graduate students are ready to tackle real world issues and generate experience for inclusion in their portfolios. By marrying the communities' needs with the AU LA students' needs, great benefits have been realized. Students design management 'concepts' that are presented to communities as a menu of watershed management options. The communities may implement projects that best meet their priorities and funding situations. One direct statewide result of this project has been a stronger association with the Master Gardener program. Master Gardener trainings have been designed and conducted on landscaping techniques such as rain gardens and native plants. As a hands-on local component to this project, 6 rain gardens have been installed in 3 communities and a stream restoration project has been undertaken. Five communities have participated in this USDA grant funded activity and several more are eager to participate.

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