

# Local Communities: Equal Partners or Ignored Bystanders?

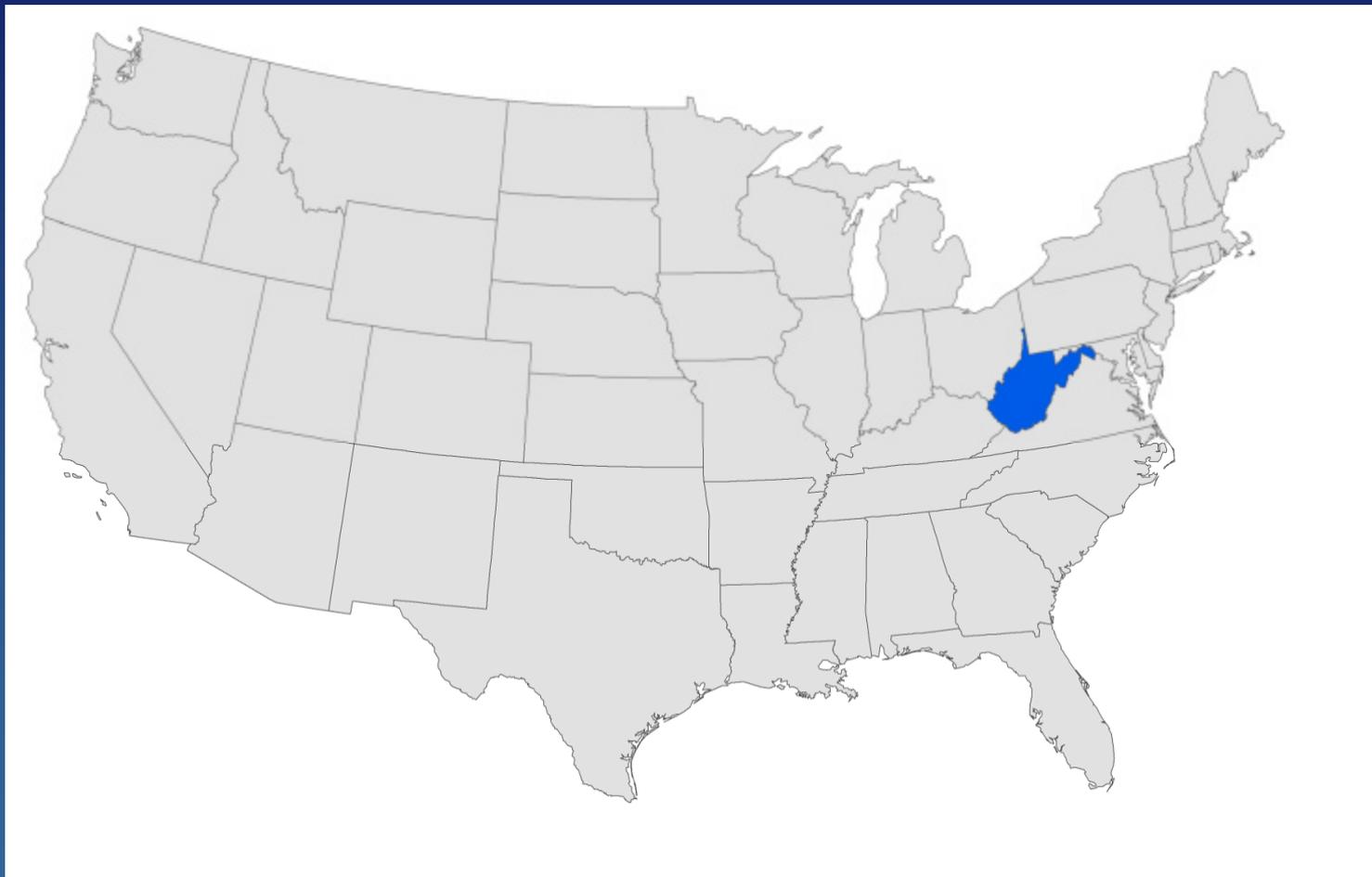
A Case Study from Rural West Virginia

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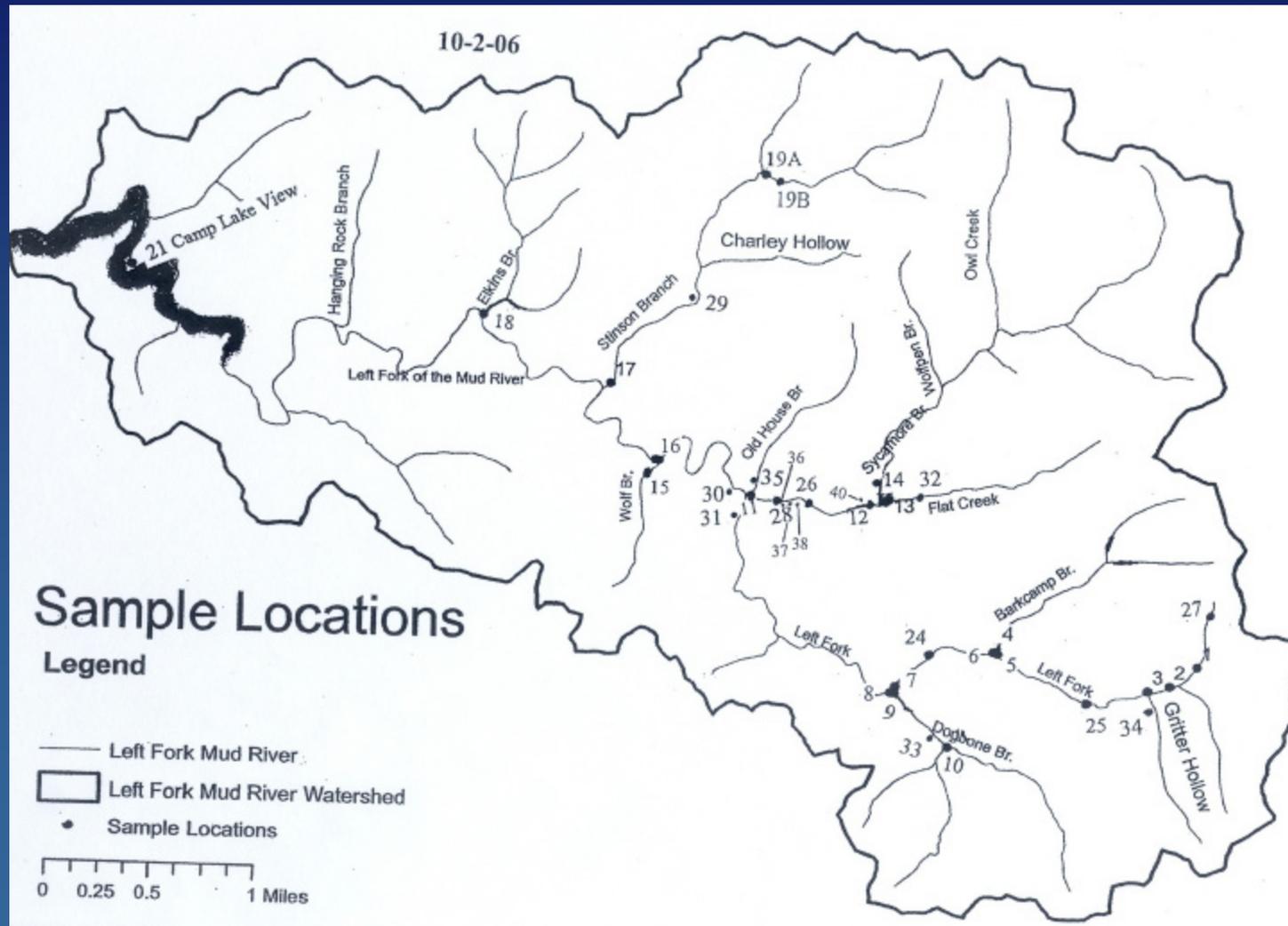
# West Virginia ~ Region 3



# Lincoln County, West Virginia



# Left Fork Mud River Watershed



# EPA National Decentralized Wastewater Demonstration Project

- \$964,000 Award
- 2005 to 2008
- Recipient: Lincoln  
County Commission
- WVU Sub-recipient



# Project Objectives



- Reduce bacterial contamination of surface waters
- Install alternative home and cluster wastewater treatment systems and assess their effectiveness
- Empower local community as equal decision makers

# Project Accomplishments



- 195 periodic water samples taken over 12 month period
- 61% over acceptable e. coli limit of 200 parts per 100 milliliters
- Bacterial Source Tracking Component
- 35 community meetings within the watershed

# Project Accomplishments



- Community developed home ranking criteria for locating alternative treatment systems
- \$150,000 in-kind and cash raised toward required \$321,000 match
- Involvement of state agencies, local high school environmental science classes

# Structural Project Challenges



- Soils typically heavy, often unsuited to conventional septic systems
- Seasonal high water tables
- Homes located in flood plains
- Small lot sizes restrict type and placement of systems
- Economic restraints prevent installation and proper maintenance of alternative treatment systems
- Some alternative systems cost more than homes are worth

# Human Project Challenges



- Lack of state or national models for affordable, effective systems in rural, low income communities
- Distrust by local communities of academics and government
- Lack of knowledge concerning the relationship between ineffective wastewater disposal and human health
- Mutual misunderstandings between university researchers and local communities
- County Agent dropped into PI position with limited experience as project manager

# Strategies to Promote University / Community Partnerships



- **Respect and value the inherent knowledge of low-income, high school dropouts**
- **Don't withhold information from people because you think they can't understand it**
- **Share information in plain language, and answer people's questions about what you share**

# Strategies to Promote University / Community Partnerships

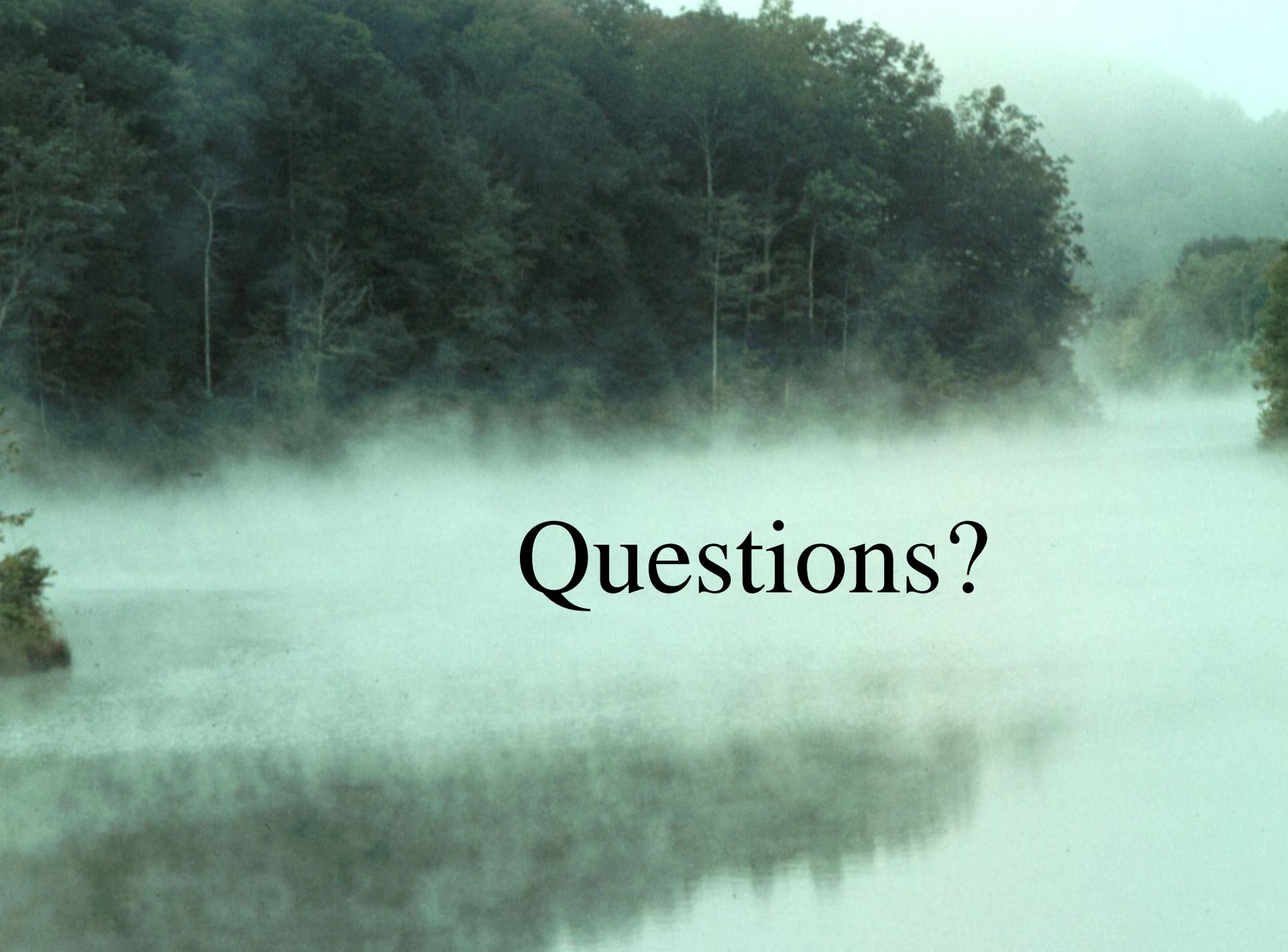


- **Share all financial information including salaries paid by the project**
- **Familiarize yourself with the community**
- **Listen more than you talk**
- **Write handouts and announcements at a 5th grade reading level**

# Long Range Potential Outcomes

- **Model cost effective systems for low income communities to handle sewage**
- **Increase awareness of relationship of human health and water quality**
- **Develop local community leadership which can tackle other problems and needs**
- **Increase peoples' perception that government can help improve their lives**
- **Left Fork becomes training area for alternative wastewater technologies**



A photograph of a calm lake or river with a thick layer of mist or fog rising from the water. The background is a dense forest of tall, thin trees, likely pines or cypresses, under a hazy sky. The water reflects the surrounding greenery and the mist. The overall mood is serene and quiet.

Questions?