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In-The-Ditch - Impacts and Outcomes of Collaborative Efforts

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Abstract Text:

Research and education at the university level produces valuable data, statistics, facts and figures but sometimes that information doesn't get to the people who could benefit from it most. Multi-agency partnering can lead to positive extension outcomes and help bridge the gap between "scientists" and "non-scientists". Montana State University Extension Water Quality Program (MSUEWQ) and the Bureau of Reclamation – Great Plains Office (Reclamation) have joined forces and are working with four federal irrigation districts to positively influence behavior and promote changes in project wide irrigation practices. Over the years, cooperative work between MSUEWQ, Reclamation, irrigation districts and water user groups has resulted in changes in management practices leading to water conservation, improved water quality and enhanced agriculture. In these partnerships, MSUEWQ plays the role of technical service provider – conducting research, collecting data, and providing technical information for several on-going debates/discussions related to the management of water resources. Data compiled by MSUEWQ is used to identify the best course of action, prioritize the actions and find resources to get the project off the ground. Often, the perception of issues changes and pre-conceived notions are altered when technical information is provided. Ultimately, data generated by MSUEWQ is used by Reclamation and irrigation districts to craft community-based solutions to issues and concerns.

Impact Statement:

Projects helped identify problem areas and sources of water quality impairments leading to greater irrigation project efficiencies, and improved in-stream flows to satisfy recreational uses. Allan Rollo, coordinator of the Sun River Watershed Group says "MSU is helping us work from facts versus guesses and rumors" and says prioritizing efforts has resulted in improved water quality and quantity while enhancing agriculture. Data is placed in the hands of local stakeholders, resulting in community-based solutions, changes in awareness and management practices. In Montana, collaborative partnerships have been a positive venture, bringing landowners, agency people and scientists together "in the ditch".