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A CEAP Assessment of the Long Term Impacts of Water Quality Outreach and Education Efforts on Landowners

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Abstract Text:

In the late 1980s the Little Bear River in northern Utah was identified as having significant water quality impairments due to phosphorus runoff from agricultural operations in the area. In response, a comprehensive, multi-agency water quality project was initiated in 1992 to educate local producers and landowners, and to promote the use of best management practices (BMPs) throughout the watershed. The purpose of this paper is 1) to review the project's outreach/education activities completed by NRCS staff and 2) to assess to what extent these outreach/education efforts influenced landowners' perception of the water quality problem and involvement in the conservation project. Data for this assessment were gathered in several ways. Initially, we reviewed NRCS annual reports and interviewed staff to clarify details about the project's outreach/education efforts. Second, we conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with over 50 farmers and ranchers who participated in the project. Participants were asked how they heard about the project, how they got involved, what motivated them to participate, if they attended any NRCS-sponsored workshops or fieldtrips and if they believed there was a water quality problem on the Little Bear River in 1990. The results will compare the impacts of formal water quality outreach/education efforts (e.g. demonstrations and workshops) with more indirect social and institutional mechanisms used to invite participation in the project. These findings should be informative to agency staff working in outreach/education programs in the future.

Impact Statement:

This assessment of outreach/education efforts is useful for understanding how and why landowners become involved in conservation programs and the role that agency staff can play in shaping the public's perception of water quality problems. It also suggests how agency staff can improve their outreach/education efforts to be more effective.