



2008 USDA-CSREES National Water Conference Sparks, NV

Watershed Groups for Better Watershed Leadership: Mississippi Case Studies

Mary Love Tagert, Jeff Ballweber, and Jonathan Pote

Abstract Text:

Watershed groups can be an effective way to promote comprehensive watershed management, improve stakeholder communication, provide a forum to collect and exchange geospatial and other types of data, and establish and accomplish comprehensive watershed goals. However, it is often difficult to develop relationships with stakeholders that have diverse and often divergent objectives and get them to actively participate in a formal or semi-formal watershed group. Building relationships and trust are inherent in Land Grant universities, so a multi-disciplinary team from Mississippi State University (MSU) took a leadership role in establishing three watershed groups – two in Mississippi and one bi-state group covering Mississippi and Alabama – that meet the aforementioned objectives.

The Upper Pearl River – Watershed Advisory Group (UPR-WAG) is the oldest and most formal of the three groups. Its mission is “working to protect, sustain, restore, and enhance the natural resources in the Upper Pearl River Watershed.” The UPR-WAG was established in March of 2004 with a Memorandum of Understanding between all voting members. The UPR-WAG was formed to help integrate Safe Drinking Water Act and Clean Water Act (CWA) regulations and reduce duplication of data collection efforts in the watershed. More recently, the Luxapallila Creek Watershed Alliance (LCWA) was established to improve stakeholder communication, prioritize watershed concerns, and develop an implementation plan for those concerns. The UPR-WAG and LCWA were both established with CWA §319 funding. Finally, a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) grant was obtained to expand the LCWA effort to improve communication and provide opportunities for data exchange and leveraging, particularly for geospatial data and tools, between stakeholders in the Tennessee-Tombigbee and Mobile Bay Watersheds. The University’s facilitation was critical to the creation of each of these groups.

Impact Statement:

These watershed groups have helped to eliminate duplication of data efforts, and they have helped agencies to leverage funding for data collection opportunities. These watershed groups have greatly helped to improve stakeholder communication within all of the watersheds, and they have helped to expedite the implementation of projects addressing watershed concerns. Finally, they have helped implement more comprehensive watershed management.