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Cooperative Stakeholder Engagement and Participation for Gaining Effective Results

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Abstract:

Nutrient and sediment loading of Lake Talequah in Oklahoma has been a water quality concern since the 1980s. Agricultural practices within the Illinois River watershed have been one of the major focuses of nutrient and sediment loading concerns now for almost three decades. Because of the potential of nonpoint source nutrient and sediment transport from agricultural lands within the watershed to the Illinois River, other surface waters of Arkansas, and the waters of downstream states, outreach and education regarding water quality has been provided to farmers in the watershed for over 15 years. The history of conflict, research, and outreach within the Illinois River watershed has not only provided an excellent opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of best management practices (BMPs) at improving water quality and economically impact farmers, but has allowed us to understand more about what farmers know about BMPs, why they use them, and how to reach more producers to better educate them about BMPs. We will present the techniques used to successfully engage stakeholders in order to obtain their participation as well as the impacts of outreach methods, of further education, and impacts of a stakeholder-driven collaborative approach. We have used the county extension council model and concepts from Rogers diffusion of innovations to increase BMP awareness and implementation. Additionally, the implementation of BMPs and an increase of general water quality awareness has been spread over a much larger area than our 12 mi² Conservation Effectiveness Assessment Project Watershed.

Impact Statement:

The outreach methods developed in this project has resulted in adoption of BMPs in the surrounding watershed. It is expected that similar benefits will be derived in all agricultural watersheds in Arkansas and will result in water quality benefits beyond the study watershed.

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