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Improving Water Quality through Stewardship: Development and Implementation of the Texas Watershed Steward Program

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Abstract:

Federal and state water resource management agencies have adopted a watershed-scale approach for managing water quality. One vital component of this approach involves engaging and educating local stakeholders to become actively involved in planning and implementing water resource management and protection programs in their watershed. To support this need for stakeholder involvement and education, the Texas Watershed Steward (TWS) program was initiated by the Texas AgriLife Extension Service and the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board, in cooperation with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, State River Authorities, and local governments, groups, and organizations. Primary goals of the program include educating citizens about water quality and potential sources of water pollution, and facilitating local involvement in watershed management and protection efforts. The presentation will detail the development of the TWS program and curriculum, successes and challenges experienced during implementation, preliminary results from pre/post-test participant evaluations, and future directions.

Impact Statement:

Project outputs include development of a PowerPoint/face-to-face version and web-based version of the Texas Watershed Steward Program. Curriculum components include an overview of watershed systems and potential impairments, best management practices for improving water quality and watershed function, and methods for establishing community-driven watershed protection and management efforts. All components of the curriculum are designed to be adaptable to individual state's unique water quality issues and concerns.

Project outcomes include greater access and enhanced delivery of land grant university water resource education information and increased awareness and understanding of watersheds and water quality. As a result, participants will become more engaged in local watershed management activities and will adopt new practices in their daily lives that serve to protect and improve water quality. Preliminary pre/post evaluation results show that overall knowledge increased by 34%. Following the workshop, 80% indicated they more closely monitor individual actions that can impair water quality; 80% have adopted/maintained BMPs on their property; 65% have encouraged others in their community to attend a Texas Watershed Steward workshop; and 50% have communicated water issues with elected officials.

The Texas Watershed Steward program is implemented through partnerships between Extension, the state soil and water conservation board, the state environmental agency, state river authorities, and local governments, groups, and organizations.

This project has the potential to leverage additional funds across states and other regions, especially due to its relevance to Section 319 of the Clean Water Act.

Lessons continue to be learned everyday with this program. But, some important ones include giving people a reason to attend the workshop and leaving them with enough information to be dangerous, making the information personal to workshop attendees, and realizing that improving water quality is easier said than done. But with continued and sustained effort, baby steps can be taken.

Category: Human Dimensions

Type of Presentation: Oral Presentation