



2009 CSREES National Water Conference; St. Louis, MO

Building an Evaluation Framework for Assessing the Impact of Watershed Interventions and Programs in Kansas.

Linda P. Thurston *, Christa Smith, William Hargrove, Kansas State University; *
lpt@ksu.edu

Abstract:

State and Federal governments invest significantly in programs related to water quality. Watershed programs, especially, are an important investment in preserving and improving the quality of the Nation's surface water and groundwater resources in agricultural, rural, and urbanizing watersheds. Biophysical and social/behavioral impacts of these watershed projects must be understood to replicate successful practices and to provide accountability to all stakeholders in watershed districts. Evaluation questions that form the basis for assessing watershed programs are:

• What are the biophysical and social outcomes of watershed program activities?

• What is the impact of watershed programs on short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes?

• How can stakeholders judge the value of watershed program investments?

There is a strong need to design and test an evaluation framework that will enable agencies, organizations, and community stakeholders to document, learn from, and report on the contributions of watershed programs to achieving long-term sustainable improvements water quality.

To approach this task, a partnership between the Kansas Center for Agricultural Resources and the Environment (KCARE) and the Office of Educational Innovation and Evaluation (OEIE) at Kansas State University and the Bureau of Water of the Kansas Department of Health and the Environment has been working on the development of a comprehensive watershed evaluation framework. The framework is designed to address the critical knowledge gap in understanding the combined biophysical and behavioral impacts of watershed programs through development and refinement of a novel evaluation framework that:

• utilizes a comprehensive approach,

• includes assessment of both physical and behavioral impacts,

• is participatory and involves all stakeholders,

• builds capacity at the local, state, and national level, and

• provides data for science-based decision-making and management practices.

The first stage of this project has been completed. The framework has been designed and field tested. This presentation will present the evaluation framework and describe the process of its development by a team of water quality researchers, watershed specialists and program evaluators. The next stage of the project will be briefly discussed.

Impact Statement:

The development of the Watershed Program Evaluation Framework will allow funders, program managers, and other stakeholders to evaluate the impacts of watershed program activities as well as provide information for program improvement. Howell and Yemane (2006) in their analysis of twelve large multi-site federal evaluations found that one of the greatest flaws in such programs is lack of impact assessment. Impact assessment is used to determine whether the program is responsible for assessed outcomes by comparing results for participants in similar groups. In addition, this project builds the capacity of stakeholders in water quality and conservation efforts to

evaluate and improve their practices. We also anticipate that the study results will contribute to the development of novel social and behavioral sciences principles and practices associated with improvement of effectiveness of conservation practices and programs and protecting or improving resources to achieve water resource goals.

Category: Human Dimensions

Type of Presentation: Oral Presentation