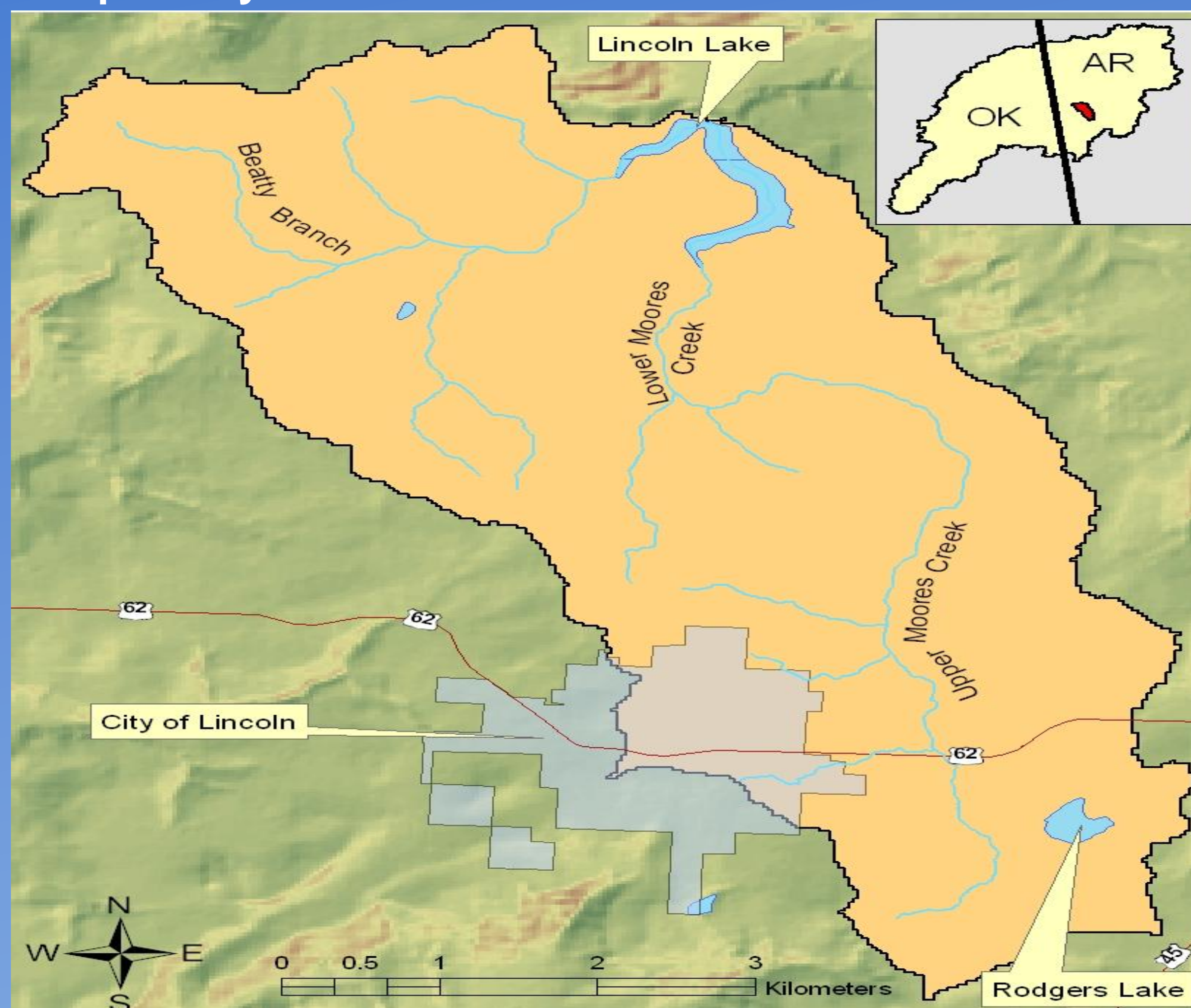


Cooperative Stakeholder Engagement for Fostering Participation and Gaining Effective Results

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Introduction

- The cooperation and participation of stakeholders is crucial in maintaining and enhancing water quality.
- This Conservation Enhancement Assessment Project (CEAP) utilized methods of the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service (UACES) to successfully engage stakeholders, gain their participation, and achieve and surpass all project goals – including water quality improvements through best management practice (BMP) adoption by stakeholders.



The Lincoln Lake Watershed is a sub-watershed of the Illinois River Basin.

Methods

- A bottom up program implementation paradigm beginning with individual stakeholders and ending with government officials was used.
- Key and informed stakeholders from the project area were invited to serve as a focus group.
- Stakeholder focus group input was highly valued and used early and often to develop surveys, interpret survey results, create educational programs, and to make key contacts.
- A variety of contact methods, meeting places and times were used to gain the most effective program appeal and to make everything as easy as possible for stakeholder.
- A collaborative approach between the Washington County UACES, Conservation District, NRCS, and Watershed Stakeholders was used to plan and deliver the most effective programming.
- All participation was voluntary.

Special Methods for Individual Contacts

- It is important to accommodate stakeholders' ideas and preferences regarding meeting place and time.
- When meeting with a stakeholder for the first time try to determine if technical assistance or a free service can be provided before soliciting them for participation – especially one that you've never met. This often prompts participation.
- Keep away from small talk, unless the stakeholder initiates it in conversation. In such cases the topic should be discussed only if both parties are in agreement on the particular issue in order to avoid unintentionally upsetting one stakeholder by disagreements resulting from passing conversation.
- Don't leave immediately after gaining cooperation unless time restrictions demand so. It is often in the post acquisition of cooperation that teachable moments occur or that stakeholders decide to participate in other aspects of the project.
- Be congenial at all times and expect people to tease or joke around a little bit – especially if the government is involved.
- It is very important to respect the stakeholders' decision whether or not to participate. Often respecting a persons wish not to participate can actually garner their trust and gain their participation at a later time.

Objectives

- In three years time this study evaluated the effects of BMPs on water quality and the farmers pocket book. Additionally, this project identified factors that influence the adoption of BMPs by farmers, better educated farmers about BMPs, and encouraged BMP implementation.



Results



- 82.7% (62 of 75) of farmers participated in a personal seven page survey.
- 26 % (78 of 300) of urban individuals participated in the same mail out survey.
- 22 Farmers within the watershed signed up for and received nutrient management plans (NMPs).
- 25 Farmers outside of the watershed signed up for NMPs.
- 5,150 ha were soil sampled as a result of this project.
- 37 pre-existing NMPs were given to the project team for use in creating a precise watershed model.
- 25 articles written for watershed farmers in 6 different papers with a readership of 24,000.
- An Environmental Stewardship Recognition Program was developed.
- 7 scientific papers published.
- 16 scientific presentations made at annual conferences.
- Increased understanding of BMP implementation barriers among farmers has been gained.
- A Farm Economic Calculator Tool was developed.
- 2 Fact Sheets Developed.
- 2 Statewide In-Service Trainings conducted.
- Water quality improvements have been made.

Conclusions

- Stakeholder involvement from program conception to delivery is essential for successful outreach programs and projects.
- Collaborative efforts garner more trust, resources and results.

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