

EVOLUTION OF A WATERSHED COMMITTEE – Smithville Lake Community

In 1996 University Outreach & Extension receive a grant from the Environmental Protection Agency, administered through the Missouri Department of Natural Resources for the purpose of encouraging the establishment of locally lead watershed management groups. To date some 20 - 30 communities throughout the state have established working groups functioning at various levels. These working groups have included local land owners, “city residents” as consumers, municipal personnel, MDC, NRCS, SWCD, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and other agency personnel. The key issues from one watershed to the next may vary but they all come back to one key issue, surface drainage from primarily privately owned property.

One of the communities that is addressing this issue is the Smithville Lake Community. Smithville Lake is located mid-way between Kansas City and St. Joseph. It has a watershed of approximately 126,000 acres including part of three counties, a surface area of approximately 7,430 acres, and currently serves as the drinking water source for an estimated 15,000 - 20,000 people.

The Smithville Lake Watershed Coalition began during the winter of 1997 with a citizens working group pulled together primarily by UOE, the SWCDs, and NRCS. The group received endorsement of their purpose in the form of a resolution from each of the county commissions. Key organizations were identified in each community. Representation in the coalition was solicited from each of these organizations. Organizations approached for representation included:

- *The Clay, Clinton, and Dekalb County SWCD
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- *The Cities of Plattsburg, Smithville, and Trimble
- *Local sporting groups that utilize the lake
- *At large positions including local row crop, livestock producers, and other concerned citizens
- *Local representatives of state and federal agencies

During the spring and summer of 1997 the group began meeting regularly to clarify their purpose and develop a mission statement. Over the next two years the group developed, printed and distributed a watershed management plan, co-sponsored field days, hosted educational meetings, and conducted watershed tours. As an example of the growing awareness of the group, in September of 2000 the chairman of the group, John Woods (a local farmer/businessman) was tapped to introduce the program for the Missouri Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program signing ceremony featuring then Missouri Governor, Mel Carnahan and United States, Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman

The group continues to rejuvenate itself with new members and new thrusts. Most recently the group has received their state tax exempt status, and is expecting to receive their federal tax exempt status. This was felt necessary in order for the group to become their own, independent, self contained entity allowing them to directly pursue funding in support of their efforts.

Future plans of the group include continue emphasis on educational programming, pursuing sustainable funding, and voluntary adoption of practices to protect Smithville Lake.