



Arkansas Natural Resources Commission



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Summary of Ashdown Public Meeting held on December 9th, 2015, regarding the Lower Little River Watershed-based Management Plan Project

The Arkansas Natural Resources Commission (ANRC) recently sponsored a public meeting as part of the watershed-based management plan project and process in the Lower Little River. The meeting was in Ashdown on December 9, and there were 12 attendees, including farmers, landowners, political representatives, and employees from state and federal agencies. The meeting was facilitated by FTN Associates, Ltd. (FTN) an engineering and environmental consulting firm headquartered in Little Rock. FTN is the consulting firm that is developing the draft watershed-based management plan for the ANRC.

Information on watershed water quality issues, the method used to rank 12-digit Hydrologic Unit Code (HUC12) subwatersheds in terms of pollutant load, the potential load reduction of recommended management practices, and potential cost of implementing the practices needed to achieve the target load reduction was discussed. Attendees were asked to provide feedback and input on the highly recommended HUC12 subwatersheds, the recommended management practices, and other concerns or activities in the watershed.

The following items were discussed during the feedback period:

- A US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) representative described the CALF (Cattle and Livestock Fencing) program which can provide up to 100% of the cost of installing stream fencing and alternate water supplies. The program will pay for nearly all the costs for stream exclusion except pumps or drilling wells. The work can be done by the landowner/farmer, or contracted out. Proposals where the landowner does the installation work (i.e., provides “sweat equity”) rank higher than those where the installation is contracted out. The program has contracted with Southern Arkansas University to conduct before and after water quality monitoring/sampling to document the effects of the management practices. They have had a lot of difficulty getting producers in the Lower Little River watershed, which is where the program was initiated and originally targeted, interested in the program. They have been presenting the use of stream exclusion as a way to improve cattle health, by preventing them from drinking unhealthy water (the USFWS offers to sample the water so the producer knows the quality of the water the cattle are drinking) and providing good clean water as an alternative. There is no minimum requirement for how far from the stream the fence needs to be. It was noted that some landowners lack the equipment to install fencing, so they can’t provide the sweat equity.
- Jim Stanton of the Millwood Lake Focus Group noted that there has been difficulty getting landowners and producers in the watershed interested in the nonpoint source program. Others also stated that there is strong anti-government sentiment throughout the watershed, which hinders implementation of management practices.
- A Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) representative stated that they have the most interest in cross-fencing, rather than stream fencing. They do get requests for water troughs and pipe.
- A stakeholder noted that when a fence is installed along a stream, it usually is damaged during flood events, which means that maintaining stream fence is expensive. In response to this comment it was

suggested that the fence be installed far enough away from the stream that it would create a buffer large enough to be in the Conservation Reserve Program, with annual payments.

- The comment was made that the information presented on practices and sources was not detailed enough. K. Thornton responded that additional information is in the management plan. Much more detail would be included in implementation plans for the HUC12 subwatersheds.
- There was also some discussion of the Arkansas Unpaved Roads Program. There is \$90K available through the program with a 50% cost share. The Arkansas program is modeled off a successful program in Pennsylvania. The comment was made that it still takes a lot of money to maintain unpaved roads. The response was made that, while installing the erosion reducing management practices on unpaved roads is expensive, it reduces the maintenance needs of the road, thus saving money over time.
- The suggestion was made that the Lower Little River watershed should be designated a nutrient surplus area. There are poultry houses close enough to Millwood Lake that they flood when the water is high, contributing nutrient and pathogens to the lake. Nutrients in the lake are contributing to problems with vegetation in the lake.
- A stakeholder described a study in Louisiana that found that applying around 8 tons of poultry litter per acre actually reduced erosion, because it promoted grass production to hold the soils.
- The NRCS is getting lots of applications for poultry litter stacking sheds – more than they can fund. Funding is always a problem. Reallocation of county NRCS resources has, in some cases, resulted in additional shortages and backlogs.

The Next Phase of Watershed Planning

Based on the information gathered at the Ashdown meeting, the final draft plan will be revised. Another meeting will be held in February to go over the final draft plan.

Participants were encouraged to contact Allen Brown of the ANRC or Terry Horton of FTN with any further questions or information.

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