



# Arkansas Natural Resources Commission



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## **Summary of Ash Flat Public Meeting held on December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2015, regarding the Strawberry 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 Strawberry River watershed. The meeting was in Ash Flat on December 10, and there were 17 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 most 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:

- The question was asked, what is the incentive for the watershed-based management plan? K. Thornton, FTN, responded that when the plan is complete, ANRC will be able to request additional US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) funding to support work in the Strawberry River watershed.
- Concerns and questions were raised about the recommended subwatersheds. It was asked why some subwatersheds, where there are stakeholders currently active and interested in projects to improve water quality, were penalized in the ranking. K. Thornton assured attendees that there is no intention for ANRC funding opportunities to be restricted to the recommended subwatersheds. ANRC will consider any proposals within the watershed that have an impaired stream reach, no matter which subwatersheds are the focus. The purpose of the recommended subwatersheds is to suggest other areas in the Strawberry River where projects would be expected to have a significant effect on sediment and/or pathogen loads to impaired stream segments.
- The question was asked if soils were considered in the ranking? Stakeholders know that soils in the upper Strawberry River watershed, including Little Strawberry River and Greasy Creek, are sandier and more prone to erosion, which is why management practices have been focused in these subwatersheds. The Lave Creek recommended subwatershed does not have sandy soils. K. Thornton responded that soil types were considered as part of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) resources assessment. It was also asked if field observations of streambank erosion were utilized in the assessment. K. Thornton responded that the NRCS resources assessment of streambank erosion did include field observations.
- The question was asked if future threats to water quality were considered? There are a lot of new animal operations being started in Fulton County by several companies. These operations have the potential to

degrade water quality. K. Thornton responded that the potential for future water quality issues was not part of the ranking of the subwatersheds.

- The US Fish and Wildlife Service is also concerned about the increase in animal production operations (e.g., poultry houses) in the Strawberry River watershed and throughout northern Arkansas. The concern was raised that these operations are not required to develop and implement nutrient management plans to reduce their water quality impact. It was stated that some companies require their production contractors to have nutrient management plans. The IZARD County Conservation District representative stated that all producers in IZARD County have nutrient management plans. The possibility of the Strawberry River Watershed and other areas in northern Arkansas being declared a nutrient surplus area was raised. Northwest Arkansas has received a lot of support dealing with poultry litter and water quality impacts. Other areas of the state have similar problems, but are not getting a similar level of assistance in dealing with them.
- The observation was made that the nutrient management plans generally focus on surface water. However, with the sandy soils in the upper Strawberry River watershed, there is the potential for groundwater contamination, which is probably not being addressed.
- Representatives of NRCS provided information to the attendees about management practice projects ongoing in the Strawberry River watershed. Two subwatersheds in the upper Strawberry River, Little Strawberry River and Philadelphia Creek, are the focus of an NRCS Mississippi River Basin Initiative (MRBI) program that was initiated in 2015. This project runs through 2018, with \$500K available per year. The sign up for 2016 is going on through December 18. When asked if these subwatersheds are eligible for the MRBI edge of field monitoring program, the response was yes. The difficulty with the edge-of-field monitoring program is that, while NRCS pays for the monitoring equipment and personnel, the landowner has to pay taxes on the equipment.
- Fulton County also has an active 319 project for implementing management practices that is focused on the portion of the Strawberry River Watershed within the county.
- Monitoring water quality before and after BMPs was also discussed. Past projects have attempted to utilize Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality water quality data, but have found the water quality stations to be inactive. The Arkansas Game and Fish Commission is interested in assessing fisheries and mussel communities before and after projects implementing management practices.

### **The Next Phase of Watershed Planning**

Based on the information gathered at the Ash Flat meeting the final draft plan will be revised and then submitted to ANRC. Another meeting will be held in February to go over the final draft plan. Participants were encouraged to contact Terry Horton of FTN or Allen Brown of the ANRC with any further questions or information.

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