



Arkansas Natural Resources Commission



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Summary of Jonesboro Public Meeting held on December 8th, 2015, regarding the Upper Cache River Watershed-based Management Plan Project

The Arkansas Natural Resources Commission recently sponsored a public meeting to discuss the draft watershed-based management plan for the Upper Cache River watershed (meaning the Cache River and Bayou DeView watersheds upstream of Highways 18/214) as part of the watershed-based management plan project and process. The meeting was in Jonesboro on December 8, and there were 17 attendees, including farmers, landowners, 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 Arkansas Natural Resources Commission (ANRC).

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

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 of the meeting:

- Erosion within ditches – Initially the question was asked if there had been any studies of erosion in the ditches of the upper Cache River watershed. K. Thornton answered that the NRCS resource assessment includes that information. It was stated that erosion within the ditches is a serious problem. Drainage districts are continually having to dredge the ditches to maintain their capacity. Jason Milks from The Nature Conservancy (TNC) stated that two-stage ditches experience less erosion, and are designed so that they clear excess sediment during baseflow conditions, essentially self-cleaning. He also noted that TNC can provide funding and technical assistance to drainage districts and individuals.
- It was suggested that structures could be constructed on the streams that would stabilize them.
- The Willow Slough drainage district has been targeted for an NRCS Mississippi River Basin Initiative project. The drainage district representative noted that the district has been very active in the project. The question was asked about recommended widths for filter strips and riparian buffers. The ideal width depends on soil type and slope, but filter strips generally range from 10 ft to 100 ft wide, and forested riparian buffers from 30 ft to 100 ft wide. An NRCS representative noted that the minimum buffer width accepted by the Farm Service Agency (FSA) for Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) payments is 30 ft and can be up to 120 ft. If buffers at least 30 ft wide are installed, they could be eligible for annual payments from FSA through CRP or the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP). Another stakeholder noted

that the application process for CRP is cumbersome and could stand to be streamlined. It was also mentioned that the money paid by FSA for easements is less than current land values. An NRCS employee stated that current FSA payments are \$2,900/acre for irrigated cropland and \$2,100/acre for non-irrigated cropland, which is more than is paid to landowners in Mississippi and Louisiana.

- There was considerable discussion of the sedimentation and blockages on the Cache River near Grubbs. The most recent project to clear the sediment and blockage involved the Craighead, and Willow drainage districts. The siltation issue at Grubbs is a long-time problem. A number of methods have been tried to reduce or eliminate the problem, including ditches and impoundments. So far, there has been no solution. The drainage districts need funding to keep clearing this area. Unfortunately, the ANRC nonpoint source program cannot fund maintenance. Overall, the sediment/erosion issues in the upper Cache River watershed are too large for one drainage district, individual, or group to deal with. Coordination among drainage districts was suggested. Some drainage districts do cooperate, as in clearing the Grubbs area. Stakeholders feel that a larger scale perspective would be beneficial, and that erosion needs to be stopped upstream to improve conditions downstream, e.g., at Grubbs and below.
- The question was asked, how do we know the management practices are making a difference? K. Thornton replied that there are a number of success stories on the ANRC website, Arkansaswater.org, and the EPA website for nonpoint sources.
- Jackson County Conservation District intends to propose a nonpoint source project for 319 funding.

The Next Phase of Watershed Planning

A meeting is planned for February to review the final draft watershed-based management plan with stakeholders. Participants were encouraged to contact Terry Horton of FTN Associates, Ltd. or Allen Brown of Arkansas Natural Resources Commission with any further questions or information.

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