

Southwest Missouri and Northwest Arkansas Watershed Groups

Many Landcare-type community conservation projects have begun to protect the rivers, streams, and lakes in Southwest Missouri and Northwest Arkansas. The area is an important tourism and agriculture hub, and water quality is important to its residents. The following described organizations serve as an example of the many watershed groups in the USA that can be recognized, publicized, promoted/marketed, and replicated.

In 1995, three Coordinators representing the United States Department of Agriculture - Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Program visited Australia to study their Landcare program. Patterning after Landcare, Southwest Missouri RC&D, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Branson/Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce formed the **James River Basin Partnership**. The James River Basin Partnership, a grassroots, nonprofit organization, became an autonomous organization in August 1999, relying on funding from grants and donations from individuals, businesses, and governments across the watershed. Their primary concerns are septic systems, municipal waste, fertilizer and pesticides, sediment loss, stormwater runoff, livestock and poultry waste, and urban growth. The partnership currently has several education/outreach and implementation projects focusing on these issues—septic tank pump-out, urban lawn testing, nutrient management education, river cleanups, interactive cave exploration, and Clean Water Kids program.

The **Watershed Committee of the Ozarks** was formed in 1984 by the City of Springfield, Greene County, and City Utilities for the protection of surface and sub-surface watersheds which supply Springfield and the surrounding area with drinking water. The group became a nonprofit organization in 1989. Its six member board is comprised of three citizen appointees representing the respective sponsors and three at-large positions. The Watershed Committee of the Ozarks was the first watershed group formed in Southwest Missouri and has since completed many water quality improvement and education projects over the years.

The **Upper White River Basin Foundation** started in 2002 as the vision of an elderly retired successful banker who remembered boyhood adventures on the White River in the 1920s and dreamed of returning the river to a pristine condition. Ben Parnell managed to infect several of the most successful business people in Missouri and Arkansas with his vision. They in turn lent their names, influence, expertise, advice, and resources to the effort. In the three years since its inception, the Foundation has worked with the Arkansas Soil and Water Conservation Commission to eliminate the unregulated spreading of poultry litter for fertilizer in Northwest Arkansas, worked with leaders in the Missouri General Assembly to establish the Upper White River Basin Watershed Improvement District to provide low interest loans to landowners using advanced on-site treatment systems, partnered with the City of Bradleyville to eliminate conventional septic systems and monitor water quality, and conducted water quality summits in Missouri and Arkansas with business, civic, and environmental leaders.

Table Rock Lake Water Quality, Inc. is a nonprofit corporation dedicated to maintaining and improving the quality of water in the Table Rock Lake Watershed. The organization was originally formed in 1998 in response to the declining water clarity of Table Rock Lake, but quickly realized that water quality efforts must include creeks, rivers, and ground water. Their Board of Trustees decided their biggest impact would be achieved by focusing on failing septic systems and other wastewater pollution sources. In 2001, with the help of a grant from the US Environmental Protection Agency through the Missouri Department of Natural Resources, they showed that indeed untreated septic effluent is following the rock ledges and entering the lake below the water line. The group is currently administering a \$2 million grant to demonstrate which advanced onsite wastewater treatment systems can effectively replace the thousands of failing septic systems that now pollute the watershed. Another important aspect of the grant is to demonstrate how to provide for long term maintenance of these advanced systems.

The **Beaver Lake Watershed Partnership** began because of the efforts of Anne Miners who serves on Northwest Arkansas RC&D (Resource Conservation and Development)'s Board of Directors. Her love for Beaver Lake, and all the people who use it and benefit from it, led the way for the creation of the Beaver Lake Watershed Partnership. This was accomplished by involving and developing the support of the Northwest Arkansas RC&D Council and the many stakeholders within the watershed. They have obtained their non-profit/tax exempt status from the Internal Revenue Service. Along with several other informational, educational, and outreach events, they held a successful "Beaver Lake Awareness Day" in Springdale, Arkansas. The group continues to work with others, building its partnerships to serve Beaver Lake and all the people, both inside and out of its watershed boundaries who are impacted by Beaver Lake. Several other watershed groups have also formed in the state of Arkansas.

The **Elk River Watershed Improvement Association** is a nonprofit organization and has an interim 501(c)(3) designation by the Internal Revenue Service. The Missouri Department of Natural Resources established a Total Maximum Daily Load (due to excess nutrients) for the Elk River Watershed and sponsored public meetings in 2003. The Missouri Department of Natural Resources surveyed attendees to determine their perception of the Elk River Watershed's water resources, how the streams and rivers were used, what public issues and concerns existed, and what interest there was in forming a broad-based, voluntary, grassroots effort to improve and protect the water bodies in the Elk River Watershed. Organizational meetings were held and from these meetings an 11-member board was developed representing production agriculture, business and industry, outdoor recreation and tourism, local government; and at-large residents. The group focuses on increasing adult and student awareness of the importance of local streams and rivers; expanding partnerships with local, state, and federal agencies involved in watershed issues and water quality monitoring; and raising financial resources to implement programs to improve, protect, and conserve the waters of the Elk River Watershed.

The **Shoal Creek Watershed Improvement Group** was formed in 2003 after meetings were sponsored by the Missouri Department of Natural Resources to establish a Total Daily Maximum Load (due to excess fecal coliform bacteria) for the Upper Shoal Creek Watershed. Sources of the bacteria include livestock, poultry, humans, wild animals/fowl, and domestic animals. The Shoal Creek Watershed Improvement Group's Board of Directors consists of nine members representing agriculture, business, and residents. The group's current priority is to demonstrate water quality improvements that address fecal coliform from human sources caused by failing on-site sewage systems. One hundred septic tanks will be cleaned out with a grant from the Missouri Department of Conservation to improve water quality, protect the Ozark Cavefish (an endangered species), and educate residents. Additional grants are being pursued to replace, repair, and cleanout septic systems in the watershed.

The **Environmental Resources Coalition** was formed in 2001 as a nonprofit organization, and is dedicated to "maintaining, improving, and enhancing land and water resources through the use of sound management and science, technology and effective public outreach". Putting that more succinctly, the Environmental Resources Coalition strives to develop or influence public policy based on sound science. While still young, the group has been the recipient of grants from the Environmental Protection Agency and the Missouri Department of Natural Resources for technical assistance with water quality standards, with measuring the water quality impacts of agricultural practices, and with organizing and implementing a major water quality improvement project in Southwest Missouri. The organization has been instrumental in the completion of a major agricultural watershed project greatly reducing atrazine contamination of a drinking water lake. The project implemented best management practices for atrazine use in the watershed, monitored actual field runoff, and changed practices to reduce lake atrazine contamination below levels requiring treatment for drinking water.

Contact these organizations for more information:

James River Basin Partnership

Holly Neill, Executive Director, hdn924t@smsu.edu
901 South National, Monroe Hall, Springfield, Missouri 65804, phone 417-836-8878, fax 417-836-8879
www.jrbp.smsu.edu

Watershed Committee of the Ozarks, Inc.

Loring Bullard, Director
320 North Main Avenue, Springfield, MO 65806-1208, phone 417-866-1127, fax 417-866-1918
www.watershedcommittee.org

Upper White River Basin Foundation

Floyd Gilzow, Executive Director, floyd@whiteriverbasin.org
215 S Second Street, Suite 1B, PO Box 6218 Branson, MO 65615, phone 417-334-7644, fax 417-334-7645
PO Box 1493 Lowell, AR 72745
www.whiteriverbasin.org

Table Rock Lake Water Quality, Inc.

David Casaletto, Executive Director, dcasaletto@centurytel.net
P.O. Box 606, 2 Kissee Avenue, Kimberling City, Missouri 65686, phone 417-739-4100, fax 417-739-9889
www.trlwq.org.

Beaver Lake Watershed Partnership

Anne Miners, Board Member, jack_anne@sbcglobal.net
18838 Coppermine Road, Rogers, Arkansas 72756, phone 501-925-2214
www.awag.org (Arkansas Watershed Advisory Group – many watershed groups in Arkansas)

Northwest Arkansas RC&D (Resource Conservation and Development)

Richard Drewry, RC&D Coordinator, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, richard.drewry@ar.usda.gov
402 North Walnut Street, Suite 109, Harrison, Arkansas 72601-3621, phone 870 741-7475, fax 870 741-9332
http://www.ar.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/councils_projects.html
www.rcdnet.org

University of Missouri Extension

Drew Holt, HoltDM@missouri.edu
833 Boonville Avenue, Springfield, Missouri 65802, phone 417-862-9284 ext. 28, fax 417-862-1809

Elk River Watershed Improvement Association

Joseph Pease, President (also Environmental Manager, Tyson Foods, Noel, Missouri)
Anderson, MO 64831, phone 417-845-6617

Shoal Creek Watershed Improvement Group

Eugene Miekley, President
1201 Old Highway 37, Cassville, MO 65625-9421, phone 417-847-2677

Environmental Protection Agency

Betty Wyse, Project Manager, betty@erc-env.org
3118 Emerald Lane, Jefferson City, Missouri 65109, phone 573-634-7078, fax 573-634-7829
www.erc-env.org

Southwest Missouri RC&D (Resource Conservation and Development)

Rita Mueller, RC&D Coordinator, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Rita.Mueller@mo.usda.gov
283 US Highway 60 West, Republic, Missouri 65738, phone 417-732-6485, fax 417-732-9101
www.rcdnet.org