



Resident-led Watershed Management

Resident-led watersheds

When the health of our streams, rivers, and lakes is threatened, each of us is threatened. Resident-led watershed management initiatives offer the opportunity for people to voluntarily get involved in their watershed and make a difference.

Resident-led watershed groups consist of people bound together by the physical flow of their common streams, rivers, or lakes. They are people who live and work in the same watershed and are willing to work together to develop local policies and practices that protect their waters.

What resident-led groups can do

Resident-led watershed groups can work with Soil and Water Conservation District

Commissioners, environmental groups, farmers, business, and natural resource technicians to:

1. offer innovative solutions for controlling potential water pollution.
2. set local water quality goals.
3. plan strategies for achieving goals.
4. help establish communication networks with other watershed residents and groups.
5. motivate others to get involved.
6. initiate demonstrations and field trials of best management practices.
7. collect local water quality data.
8. identify priorities for allocating limited financial resources.
9. identify and seek additional funds to support local efforts to solve water quality problems.



Watershed residents gather water quality data through the IOWATER program. Photo by Charles Wittman.

More than advisory committees

Resident-led watershed councils have an expanded role beyond an advisory committee. Council members educate themselves about land use and water quality issues in their watershed. They continuously gather and share information and seek local partners in solving the problems of their watershed. Councils are action-oriented and have personal stakes in how their watershed resources are managed. For these reasons, resident-led councils are prepared to evaluate technical options and appropriate solutions, and are motivated to apply those solutions to their watershed.

“Watershed management planning is not the work of superheroes or soloists.”¹ When residents and natural resource experts work as a team, they can make sustainable changes in farm management and land use practices.

¹ Cohn, Naomi J., *Voices of the Watershed, A Guide to Urban Watershed Management Planning*. Illinois Environmental Protection Agency. Page 23.



Demonstration project in the Maquoketa Headwaters.

Photo by Charles Wittman.



Community volunteers head downstream to pick up trash.

Photo by Jim Colbert.



The Maquoketa Headwaters Watershed Council holds its meetings at the Starmont School media center, located within the watershed.

Photo by Charles Wittman.



An eighth-grade science class at a monitoring station learns about stream flow, contaminant concentrations, and related management issues.

Photo by Charles Wittman.

Determining community readiness

How can you tell if the people in your watershed are ready to work together?

1. Is water quality a topic of informal discussions when residents get together?
2. Do people talk about swimming, boating, and fishing in local waters?
3. In the last year or so, has your watershed been in the news? Have there been newspaper, radio or TV stories, and/or letters to the editor and opinion pieces about local water quality problems?
4. Do you have one or more local groups that feel passionate about the environment and are involved in activities to improve it?
5. Are residents “showing up” at planning board, town council, or county supervisor meetings and expressing concern about the impact of development on the environment?
6. Are commissioners and staff in your Soil and Water Conservation District frustrated that residents aren’t adopting recommended land use practices that support water quality?

If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, your community may indeed be ready to tackle some watershed management initiatives.



Informal small group discussions occur following a presentation at a riparian and stream stabilization site.

Photo by Charles Wittman.



Noretia Kramer, water quality specialist for the Arlington Division, Associated Milk Producers, Inc., represents the urban-industry partnership of water management in citizen-led projects. Photo by Charles Wittman.

Getting started

What can you do to help people in your community take a hand in watershed management?

1. Learn more about water quality issues yourself.
2. Talk about the importance of water quality and encourage neighbors to talk to each other about problems and solutions.
3. Identify existing groups that care about water quality and ask to be a part of their meeting agenda. Help them cooperate and coordinate their efforts to seek solutions.
4. Support emerging groups whose goals include water quality or start your own group.
5. Invite groups outside your watershed to share their experiences in solving water quality problems.

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Prepared by Lois Wright Morton, extension sociologist, Iowa State University Extension to Communities, Department of Sociology, Ames, Iowa.

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6. Find other leaders in neighboring political jurisdictions that share your concerns about water quality and make plans to collaborate. Watersheds seldom have political boundaries.

Non point source pollution is the cumulative result of everyone's daily practices. A big part of the solution is to get everyone involved in caring about water quality . . . and willing to do something about it. Watershed management is a process that needs the cooperation, expertise, and commitment of lots of people and organizations. The payoff is clean, clear waters that we and our children can enjoy today and tomorrow.

Iowa has a number of public and private programs and services designed to protect water quality and other natural resources. For more information about local programs, contact your county Iowa State University Cooperative Extension (<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/COUNTIES/state.html>) and county Soil and Water Conservation District Office (<http://www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov/officedir.html>).

For guidance in starting a local watershed group, contact ISU community development specialists (<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/communities>). For information about water quality programs and projects, contact Iowa Conservation Partners (<http://www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov/>), Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (<http://www2.state.ia.us/agriculture/index.html>), Iowa Department of Natural Resources-Environmental Protection Division (<http://www.state.ia.us/dnr/organiza/epd>), USDA Natural Resources Conservation Services (<http://www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov/nrcs.html>), IOWATER (<http://www.iowater.net>).

File: Environmental Quality 1, Communities 2

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