

**The Court Creek Pilot Watershed Project
Knox County, Illinois.**

An Abstract of

A Thesis

Presented to the

Department of Geography

Western Illinois University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

Terrance Alan Hall

June 2001

ABSTRACT

Agricultural pollution (runoff of manure, fertilizer, pesticides and sediment from farmlands) remains the nation's largest source of water quality problems. It is only recently that a comprehensive watershed approach, which involves state and federal agencies in partnership with local planning groups has developed to deal with nonpoint source pollution. Flooding, upland soil and streambank erosion, sedimentation, and contamination of drinking water supplies from agricultural chemicals are critical environmental problems in Illinois.

In order to address the water quality problems associated with agriculture, the state of Illinois with the assistance of local staff from state and federal agencies, as well as key stakeholders selected Court Creek, a tributary of the Spoon River in west central Illinois as one of four pilot watershed projects in 1997. Funding for this project was provided through a \$20,000 grant from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. In addition, the IDNR will provide up to \$250,000 under the "Conservation 2000-Natural Resource Cost-Share Program" to support implementation of practices that restore natural resources within the pilot watershed that have been developed as part of an approved watershed plan. The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, under Section 104(b) of the Clean Water Act, also contributed \$15,000 over two years to establish and facilitate an active watershed planning committee.

The techniques used to evaluate the planning process involved comparing the recommended steps found within the USDA Resource Planning Guidebook to the actions taken by the planning committee to develop the Court Creek Restoration and Protection

Plan. The guidebook is structured as a three phase, nine-step planning process that assists landowners in developing resource plans at the local level.

The recommended tasks to complete each step were compared to the local plan and if the majority of them were completed, that step was considered successful. If a majority of the steps are successful, then that phase is also considered successful. For those steps and phases that are not successful I have explained why they were incomplete. This procedure was repeated for phase two and phase three. The three phases have been examined and were compared to one another and reasons provided for differences in the degree of success.

Phase I was the most successful of the three phases because of the high level of technical support from state and federal partnerships in gathering and analyzing data. This commitment was vital for the Court Creek committee in making sound decisions throughout the planning process. Allowing the public to voice their concerns early in the projects development was also an important aspect in that it gave individual residents a sense of ownership in the plan, which was crucial in the later stages when landowners were encouraged to implement conservation measures. I consider Phase III to be the next successful stage of the planning process. A guarantee of financial support at the beginning of the project enabled the planning process to move forward at an accelerated rate. Phase II of the planning process was the least successful. Even though the planning committee adopted the recommended Best Management Practices (BMPs) of the Natural Resource Conservation Service as a means of achieving their goals and objectives, no effort prior to plan approval was made to inform and educate the public in relation to the various practices available.

This applied thesis was the result of an eleven-month internship. My position as *Watershed Coordinator* was created through a collaborative effort between the Peace Corps Fellows program within the Illinois Institute of Rural Affairs at Western Illinois University, and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Watershed Management Section.