

Watershed Specialists: Promoting and Implementing Wide-spread Protection of Water Resources using Strategic Stakeholder Partnerships

The Situation

In 2020, the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) reported that Kansas has 1,235 impaired water body segments and 2,385 water body/pollutant combinations needing intervention. In response to these ongoing water quality concerns, the K-State Watershed Specialist program, in partnership with KDHE and other agricultural groups, works closely with local Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategy (WRAPS) groups to partner with local stakeholders. This team of specialists develops and implements watershed plans to improve surface water quality and to ensure streams and lakes meet state water quality standards. As an integral part of the Natural Resources PFT, watershed specialists educate the public about water-related issues, provide one-on-one technical assistance to crop and livestock producers, and offer innovations that protect our state's water resources.

What We Did

By using the Watershed Specialist program, the team promotes and helps implement Best Management Practices, which facilitates improved water quality in some of the state's most impacted areas. In 2019, the specialists participated in and/or facilitated 380 educational events reaching more than 11,000 Kansans. During the same year, Watershed Specialists completed 235 on-farm assessments and one-on-one consultations, many resulting in BMP implementation. This team reaches thousands of additional stakeholders through invited presentations, regional newsletters, media articles, and radio and televised interviews.

Outcomes

Because the Watershed Specialists team works in 45 counties (and takes referrals in others), they are able to provide a broad array of educational services across a wide geographic area. During the last reporting year, the watershed specialist team provided technical assistance in the implementation of 225 Best Management Practices (BMPs). This includes 25 livestock BMPs, such as waste management and storage systems, fencing projects, pond maintenance and alternative watering systems, among others. These livestock BMPs affected nearly 4,390 animals on 1,607 acres. The team worked with producers to implement 193 cropland BMPs as well, including atrazine-related BMPs, buffer strips, no-till/cover crops, streambank stabilization and more. These BMPs protected 6,060 linear feet of streambank and positively affected roughly 23,270 acres of cropland.

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