

Ripple Effect # 73

Fields and Streams of Dreams

We may assume that productive fields and healthy streams can't happen at the same time. However, a recent article in *The Corn and Soybean Digest* tells us that we can have our “field of dreams” and “stream of dreams” right alongside each other.

The article tells of a group of Iowa farmers whose farmlands bordered on the same troubled stream, Hewitt Creek. Like many segments of our streams and rivers in the Red River Basin, Hewitt Creek suffered from high levels of nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P) and sediment, resulting in low populations of aquatic invertebrates and fish.

The story has lots of “chapters” or efforts, all functioning to bring about a happy ending. These efforts included, among others, available personnel to analyze each farm's unique needs, extension programs offering scientific documentation for what works, technical information communicated to those who could make the difference, the farm operators themselves, and, of course, the farmers' own willingness to get involved. The happy ending included farmers finding more efficient and cost-saving methods of managing soil and fertilizer practices, together with one happy Hewitt Creek.* In just the third year of the combined efforts, the creek has less N, P and silt entering its waters and is already attracting more abundant life to its waters and shores.

The successes of this effort help us see how a lose-lose situation between rivers and fields can be changed to win-win. After all, silt damaging streams and rivers is soil from fields that has slid off into ditches and rivers and is no longer contributing to production. And excess N or P in streams is typically expensive fertilizer that is doing nothing for the crop yield.

Some of the things helping this project, and the Hewitt Creek farmers, to achieve success included getting everyone on board by contacting each farmer whose farmlands bordered the creek; getting the necessary, relevant science and technical information to the farmers; offering a variety of practices, all determined locally and applied to individual circumstances of each farm; offering incentives for participation; and, very importantly, giving farmers opportunities to learn from one another.

This is one story of one place and stream. Here in the Red River Basin, each watershed or county or community needs to write its own story, develop its own efforts or “chapters” to achieve ongoing healthy relationships between its river and the land area it drains. What will be the first—or next—chapter in the story of your community's efforts?

*For a detailed list of actual practices covered by the program, see Susan Winsor, “Stream of Dreams,” *The Corn and Soybean Digest*, October 2007, pp. 28-30.

Until the next Ripple Effect,

The Red River Basin Commission (RRBC)

The RRBC is a grassroots organization that is a chartered not-for-profit corporation under the provisions of Manitoba, North Dakota, Minnesota, and South Dakota law. Our offices in Moorhead, MN and Winnipeg, MB can be reached at 218-291-0422 and 204-982-7254, or you can check out our website at www.redriverbasincommission.org

