

Making Assessment Work for Watershed Groups

The Science and Social Needs of Assessment

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What Assessments Are Needed for WQ Protection

- Assessments for:
 - the current situation
 - Practices that are in place
 - Concerns that have been identified
 - Management Practices that would work
 - Demographic data
 - Show Impact
 - other



Why are We Assessing?

- To help us understand what we are achieving and what information is most important. - sounds simple enough
 - Different agencies have different mandates which may drive the process
 - Use of different tools and understanding the data they produce may vary between groups
 - Is the assessment done to show water quality concerns or to determine something else
 - How important is science based data and is it useable to the local people
 - What are the local citizens willing to do and why

Are all those questions necessary?

- We need science/researched based information to help establish several aspects of assessment
- Producers want to know how this information will be used
- Questions that really frost most producers:
 - Why do they need to know
 - income information
 - What race I am
 - My age
 - My education level

What Do We Need to Know When Assessing Local Watershed Communities

- Make sure they understand the difference between a survey and an assessment.
- Helpful to establish some "standard" criteria that all agencies can use for the watersheds
- What types of assessment will show us impact
 - Baseline/background data, Water Quality data, BMP implementation, Attitude or behavior change, other
- Need to keep in mind how this assessment will impact and benefit to the citizens of the watershed
- Will the assessment help us measure something that is needed or something we can do?

Assessment Tools

- Watershed assessment tools for decision making
- Technical
 - GPS data layers - land use, livestock numbers, soil type, slope, weather, etc
 - Stream Assessment Tool - Stream-A-Syst, others (IA has developed a computerized tool)
 - Land Assessment Tool - NRCS, BERM, (IA has developed a computerized tool)
- Financial -
 - Economic data layers/land values, etc - may help determine cost-share, willingness to participate, etc.
- Social and Demographic-
 - Age, income, education, background, attitude, etc

Why Assessments Work

- When they show impact or respond to a need
- Provides an explanation of a situation
- If the assessment provides us a starting place
 - Take it to the local landowners and ask them to review and provide assistance and verification
 - Determine what the ultimate goal is for agency, landowner and producer and how they can come together
 - Get producers involved in understanding what they do affects water quality what the assessment has shown us

Assessments for the Sake of Assessing

- Will the assessment provide a short or long term value
- The form of assessment to use may be dictated by what we want to get from it.
- Does the assessment provide something useable, feasible or doable for researchers, educators or local people
- Written so it can be statistically valid
- Guide us in future decision making

Getting Landowner Participation

- Once we determined the assessment information needed and what it will tell us, we need to explain to local people how it is valuable to them.
 - Explain how this will benefit the local landowner
 - Be willing to provide them with information about the results as you complete the assessment
 - Explain how this can assist with future decision making to meet WQ criteria.
 - Explain how it should not be used.

What we need to understand about landowners

- They are intelligent
- They have long-term memory of what works and what doesn't work - institutional knowledge
- They want to have input in developing or identifying ways of improving their situation
- What they are doing may not be wrong but there might be a better way they haven't tried.
- They generally don't care about surveys and assessments because they are more interested in getting the work done and done right

What to do when approaching the Landowner about Surveys and Assessments

- Explain why you are there to see them
- What data you want to collect and how it will be used (lay person terms)
- Explain the importance of participating in the assessment
- Be prepared to respond to questions about the assessment.

What to do when Approaching the Landowner

- Build on their experience to help them understand the concepts.
- They want to know what is going on, how it affects them and why it is important.
- Get them involved in the decision making process and how to draw conclusions from the assessment data
- Explain how this is helpful in providing future decisions about their operation.

Reporting Outcomes and Impacts of the Assessment to Local Producers

- If producers and agencies have same ultimate goals, determining success will be easier
- Show where the data came from and what led to the conclusion you are presenting.
- How can this data be used and how it can't be used.
- Can the assessment data help provide us with direction for watershed planning or improving water quality

Can We Identify Changes we Need to Make



Will Assessment Help Everyone?

- Ask yourself the question
 - How will local people benefit from the information gathered and from the different assessments done of their watershed.
 - If I were the producer what would I want to know or what would persuade me to do something that I haven't done before?
 - Is there a clear connection between what the assessment data shows and how it impacts a situation.

So why change what I do?



Will Assessment Help Everyone?

- What is important
 - Producers want to feel that they are making an important contribution
 - Producers want to do what is right and they want to make a living.
 - We need to figure how to make it all work together
 - We as agency personnel want to be able to document changes and improvements in water quality and in peoples attitudes - producers generally don't.

Summary

- Assessments Must have Meaning for Local watershed groups if they are going to follow through on recommendations or to make the assessments valid.
- Make the groups aware of the findings.
- Explain how the assessment data is interpreted to the information can be used.
- What direction or decisions can be determined from the assessment data.